The AMERICAN POETRY REVIEW

"There are a thousand things to catch the eye—the hue of morning light laid up against a tree trunk, a flock of sparrows rising suddenly out of the bracken at the edge of the woods . . . We can notice these things, and we notice our kids noticing them. We can then take this understanding of the peripatetic eye back in the house and be a little less judgmental when things shift suddenly, when interest moves our kids' minds (and our own minds) away from the moment."

(PERRY, p. 26)

JULY/AUGUST 2019 VOL. 48/NO. 4 $5 US/$6 CA

KELLE GROOM

WHEN WENDY ASKED WHAT WE DREAM

ROSA ALCALÁ
YOU, ESCAPE ARTIST
& OTHER POEMS

NOOR HINDI
ON LANGUAGE & MOURNING

NEW WORK BY
KAZIM ALI
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PENNSYLVANIA COUNCIL ON THE ARTS

OLD CITY PUBLISHING

The AMERICAN POETRY REVIEW

JULY/AUGUST 2019 VOL. 48/NO. 4

IN THIS ISSUE

ANNUAL PRIZES

The Editors of APR award these annual prizes:

THE STANLEY KUNITZ MEMORIAL PRIZE: A prize of $1,000 and publication of the winning poem in *The American Poetry Review*, awarded to a poet under 40 years of age in honor of the late Stanley Kunitz's dedication to mentoring poets.

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.

WHEN WENDY ASKED WHAT WE DREAM

KELLE GROOM

1. When Wendy Asked What We Dream

When Wendy asked what we dream, I wanted to say war and drowning. Not drowning exactly, but the moment when the choice is made to drown or not drown, before the mouth opens. Instead I said I never dream of cats. But that night I remembered the cats I dreamed in New York:

I'd been in a dark room sleeping, and a black cat appeared. I had wanted the cat to like me, feeling that if I were liked, chosen by children or animals, it made me popular and good in an invisible way. I had called to the cat, a male, in a soothing way.

A man who had stood in the doorway imitated the cat, the way the cat would talk to me, in a very slow manner, nothing like the comfort of speech. The man spoke in excruciatingly slow motion speech, like a caricature: he opened his mouth like a cavern, and said "Howwwwwww Aaaaaaaaar Yooooouuuu" behind the cat's back. Just as he finished, the black cat (who hadn't heard the man) got very close to my face, opened his black cavern mouth, and spoke exactly as the man had, but with sincerity. Like a play. The cat had a companion, another cat or an insect, and both lay down to rest beside me. The companion cat or insect was making plans for the rest of their lives with me. The man in the doorway said it was obsession, and tried to shoo the cats/insect away with a round bamboo net and a loud "Yaaaaahhh." The cats/insect were unmoved. I feared they'd be with me forever.

The buildings across the street turned blue. Linda said, "You're a different person now." She took out her camera phone, and pointed it at me, clicked. In the tiny screen, I saw that I was underwater, almost part of the wall, the corner booth, even the sun that came in through the glass beside me, everything else in between. Linda said, "We should go." She was keeping the time.

Passing the bar, the Hanging Man hung from one foot, upside down. The Traitor in older tarot decks. The Star showed a naked woman, hair blown back. Headband. Her skin enough of clothing. The woman emptied two water jars into the room, more green swim. I was dizzy from blood loss.

And I hadn't gotten pregnant, like I'd told my doctor I would. At my twelve-week check-up, my doctor said, "Okay, you're all set to get pregnant, so go get married." Cocky in all my meetings with him—the man with the knife. In my initial consultation, he'd touched the forefinger of each hand to his own hips to show me where my ovaries were. As if I didn't know, didn't feel them tug and pinch every month, releasing. His fingers held there delicately, as if he were a dancer holding a pose. But now, after he'd had his hands inside me, seen what I would never see, after he'd stapled me back together, and was making a little joke, his round eyes wobbled, looked uncertain. His nurse had laughed, said, "She doesn't have to get married." I didn't get pregnant or married. Walking down the street, all the stairs led up to the sky. A landing in between each flight.

2. Dark Green Water

Dark green water/almost black
I'm under the surface
There's nothing but dark green/almost black water
        & my mouth is open
        my throat a door still closed
        if I take a breath
                I can feel it the need to take
                a breath
                my body the verge
                of automatic action—
                        taking a gulp
                        & if the water comes in
                        & I begin to choke,
                                I'll be choking underwater,
                                how will I find
                                        up?
                                        air?
                        I have to find it now
                                before the door of my throat
                                        opens, I have to
                        rise, now.
        It's the water of sleep
                that takes me there—
I could be screaming when I wake up, I could be
holding my breath—there is a lot of noise
                (water in my ears
                        blood in my brain?)
but when I wake, I hadn't yet made it
to the surface unless the surface is waking
                up.

In a high ceilinged room,
a man tried to tell me how I could try to repay
the damage.
        But it was out of the question. Walls
a dirty white.
        Another man pushed me to have
sex with him & 3 other men. There was a beach ball.
The man described an act to be performed which I did
not consider sexual, but he/they did. I had a feeling
of knowing a way a person could die. I left the
room, but then there was the broken item,
the harangue, wondering how to get out of these rooms.
& then I woke—the waking again an escape.
        I'm careful swimming in the dark green/
almost black lake where I now swim alone
every day. Careful to stay near the lake edge
where the water isn't over my head.
        At night, there were 3 men who wanted to

kill me slowly, there was a dark water in my
mouth. As if the men would first take one
of my arms, & when that was off, take a
foot, a fingernail, last ovary, dismantling
me, my ribs in a neat pile.
& then they would be pleased.

In the morning, I ate corn flakes with small
red grapes, & read in the paper that a
man confessed to killing a boy 20 years ago
& carrying his body to a lake, let the boy's
body sink.
He was a serial killer & confessed
on condition of immunity from this crime, in
exchange for confessing to other crimes as well—a
little girl was mentioned. Now they are searching the
lake for the boy's body. His mother's head is bowed
& she is wiping her face with her hand.
A father says the killer left the boy,
unintentionally,
in the mountains the boy loved. The pond
is in the Berkshires.
Or this is another dead boy.
They are searching the lake for him today.

3. Raoult Somewhere Neutral, Accidental

Driving down Fairbanks and on the right side

(the side of Frank's shop) there's a sleazy place with J's and O's in it

Raoult is out front like an angel handing out paper

pamphlets like he's trying

like he's trying to help the people that go to the J & O place

I wave think I should go on change my mind and turn around

Frank Ingoglia is in the turning (not Frank of the shop) and a girl

with purple fingernails who is going to work at the health food store

and I tell her she can have all my hours and write them down for her

When I turn again to go back it's dark is my brother there

It's around where he ran out of gas once and I'd gone to help him

is it Cory who tells me

Cory who tells me about the accident

People/friends ask me Why did you leave your car in the middle of the road it's a big mistake

I want to get back to Raoult

My parents are on the side of the road

We walk a bit and see cars in a line smashed up it's my fault

But then I don't care as long as I don't get caught by the police

I think maybe this is an attitude to cultivate so the police won't see guilt

My car was hit from the front

the skirt of my blue jumper is lying over the roof and windshield

suitcases all over

I ask my parents Can we tell the police it was hit and run

My father sits on the side of the road says Let me think head in his hands

My mom sits on the front of the car and it sort of straightens out my dress out of sight

A billboard flashes overhead huge on the right and my name Kelle is interspersed in weird ways

It's Raoult calling me but for how long is he still waiting

Celebrity info appears on the screen

and another message for me

I have to get back to that place down the road where he is

but how do I get away from my parents NOW

I'm talking to them (or imagining it)

grabbing suitcases clothes falling out (do they go with me)

I'm running down the road carrying bags and I get to the place

I stand across the road and look

Raoult's gone the place his place is dark and empty

In daylight I try to tell him by the freezers in the health food store but he's human again or something

and it seems like he's pretending as if we can't talk about that world in this one

Raoult had been looking for umeboshi

plums the first time I saw him, and I'd

said I'd find him some though he hadn't

wanted that but I wanted any reason

Even when I think of him now dark birds fly briefly

in my vision then out

Once the Quakers gave us their house

and a teacher came across the country

I was too nervous to attend without a task so I helped in the kitchen

though I didn't understand how to cut—there went

another bird here and up faster—the energy

I should bring

The leaders sat at a table with the teacher

I was trying to find a place very nervous

when Raoult motioned to the empty

place he'd saved for me beside him

at that table

When almost everyone

was gone except Harriet who had been my teacher first on Michigan with the dark artifacts on the wall from other countries

brown rice in the kitchen inviting me into

her house the calm of it

but after this dinner

Raoult stayed at the table with me

sometimes when I spoke with someone I couldn't unglue

myself from their eyes

When he'd appeared to me by the glass freezer door

he'd said that if someone has tried

to heal you they can appear while you sleep

But I wonder

if he didn't want to say that he'd seen me on

a busy road past the stained glass store

where he held a sign for me, or in the hospital

—oh, there went another bird up—when he undressed me slowly.

4. Katrina the Ballerina

I tell a girl with purple fingernails she can have all my hours at work, and I write them down for her. Do you believe there is a circle of people circling you life after life? Someone tells me to press my back into a bed, to go back the other way. Katrina the ballerina is in the doorway, she's smaller, younger even, saying, "I don't want to be here, I don't want to help you"—but she is here. People crowd the door—they each speak to me while I'm lying on the white horizontal bed (a light window over my head), daylight-dark, like lights aren't on inside. I am in a sort of hospital, and in the doorway are all these people I know—one is dressed as a monster. After I've given up my clothes in a big, sepia room—Raoult paints very long, sheer rose-colored shawls over my hair and shoulders. I'll wish I had known, wish I hadn't missed the other part, Raoult saying, "It's all right." I'll ask, "What was it?" and he'll say, "Your soul speaking." Beyond the couches is somewhere neutral, accidental where I lean back, listen, try to understand so hard it will seem like personal sculpture for my life and after my life.

5. A Thread or Rule, from a Word That Means to Sew

I was drowning the other night. I jumped when the man jumped—just after, the others on another raft or rock. I forgot that our weight would sink us far down into the water. I kept sinking—how would I get back up to the surface? Hold my breath that long? I saw the falling man far away—thought he'd help if I needed, but he was far. Had his own falling to tend to. So I tried to stop sinking, began to rise or on the verge. Readying, taking little sips into my lungs. How can this be air coming in? I'm underwater. To breathe is to drown. I'm not a fish. I keep taking little sips to hold me until I get closer to the surface. Stop stop, that's not air. It feels cool like air, like a straw I'm drinking through. That's how you die, breathing underwater. Hold your breath. Swim as hard as you can. Try. Rise rise rise.

6. Pool

The dancers filled a children's pool
with water and powdered milk.
In a way, it made me hungry.

Two men emerge and are submerged
in the cloudy water, one by the other.
Sometimes they embrace, one

caressing the face of the other.
One had a gap between his front teeth.
They'd come from a cold place
with coats, and I hadn't been in a mood
for greeting beauty.
It wasn't clear if the men were lovers,

and/or if one was dying.
The pool small so the men
were very close, eyes closed.

Empty, the pool hardly seemed
big enough for the dancers to fit one
on top of another.

Alan and I were going to travel.
I could see the airport in the place of our arrival:
bleak concrete, yellow fluorescent light.

But to get there, we had to do
what the dancers did, be submerged.
Though the pool was now a deep river,

and a body floated to the right, a jean leg
riding the surface.
The tilted floating indicated the body's

emptiness. I don't know if the floating
person had been unsuccessful,
or if every try meant dying.

It seemed not, seemed I had seen
the airport terminal on the other side.
Someone guessed it was the River Styx,

but don't you normally cross that in a boat?
What happens if you go underneath,
if you're submerged?

Someone said Orpheus entered the world
of the dead by stepping into mirrors.
But why would Alan and I want to travel
to the underworld?
Does the underworld have an airport?
And if it wasn't the world of the dead,

what world was it? Iowa?
I heard the news of someone's death today.
I'd seen him at a table this winter,

but once my letter had been returned,
and I wasn't sure I was welcome
the way I keep doing something

stupid, so stayed away,
but met his eyes once or twice
when the dancers touch each other's faces.

7. Driver

Screwdriver, with key attached small, moving car metal plate

Or a kind of ignition, but not for starting the car When the driver

Couldn't find it, she screamed a black rope that tangled in her son's lap

& sent his legs & feet kicking wildly toward the windshield I took

The screwdriver/key from her, blocking out her distracting screams

As best I could We were still moving down the road

& leaned down below the dash to look for the metal plate or a kind

Of ignition *How will I recognize it?*

It fits the driver, I think

she said though screaming.

Instead, I was assisting two policemen who suspected evidence

Of a horrific crime(s) beneath a metal plate on top of a wall
Of unknown material out in the countryside. Woods to our left,
Wall to the right, beyond that a little field. The plate's existence
Seemingly enough for them. Don't you want to see if
The driver fits? If there's something here?
The police shrugged, but gave the okay.
The screws—there must be two but I only see one—orange
Old, though the metal plate still silvery. The driver worked,
Screw unscrewed, plate lifted.
OHHH, the police said, backing off, okay okay
Inside in cellophane wrap, body parts like finger sandwiches,
Like fingers, wrap thick, so one would have to look closely
To identify what had been cut from bodies & wrapped up
So neatly, & stored here. I backed into the little field
And rounded the wall about the length of 5 men
Lying head to foot, police already on their way back
To the squad car. It lay to me to return to the missing
Body parts, replace the plate, secure the evidence
For later, when they had someone to convict.
The wind blew strong enough to enter
My blue blouse unseen cool hands.

8. Double Triangles of Execution

Before the sun came up, I saw a white door, open, in the dark green
outside my window, but by dawn it disappeared. Hours earlier
I'd been on a road in another country. From the direction I was walking,
people came toward me running for their lives. How bad could it
be, I thought, going forward. The soldiers turned me around.
I hid in an abandoned house, but they entered with many
women prisoners. All my papers were in the bathtub. A soldier
in charge almost saw me watching him on an old couch while he
hurt a girl. It was hard to see in the dark.
But afterwards, he told the girl she was free.
When his eyes lifted toward the room where I stood, I fell
to the floor, hidden somewhat among the crinkled papers of others.
I was in darkness until I stood in the light, outside, in a backyard.
Three people stood before me, and a woman who was like a photographer,
someone who set a scene. The people had their backs
to me and the man far to my right who had a gun. He sprayed
the three people with a garden hose, as if marking where the bullet
would go. The woman's chest was wet, but she laughed. I thought maybe
I was safe, forgotten. But then he kept telling me to turn around,
my back toward him. I think our hands were over our heads, making
the double triangles of execution, hands clasped. I kept looking at the sky
thinking, will this be the last thing I see? And then looked at another
part of the sky, clouds, blue. My legs and feet had been moving
while I looked up, terrified. Now closer to a white door, so I kept
moving a little at a time until I could reach out, open the door. I did,
afraid of a shot in my back, afraid of death, of being tortured
for disobedience. The man with the gun had been so casual,
I'd hoped he hadn't planned on killing, but then it seemed
that maybe we didn't really matter to him, that killing us
was casual, like turning the channel. I opened the door,
and went through quickly like a ghost. On the other side, I stood
for a moment, free. Wondering if the gunshot would come, thinking
I have this moment.

9. White Dress

I slept the night in a farmhouse, white
down bed, waking once
in a room of stone, not

remembering how I'd arrived,
or undressed in this castle
wall, as if I'd woken centuries ago.

That day I'd stood within the stone
of my family's old
home above the harbor, the slope

of field that came inside
roofless walls, field
the home where one child burned

after leaning in to the cooking
flame, a girl on fire running
in grass who lived five days,

so I stood beside her stone,
Mary. Eventually,
in the farmhouse dark I saw

something modern, a clock's
red numbers,
though the stones didn't go

for a long time, and on my first night
home, I woke again
surrounded by stones in a room

on a harbor across the sea, each gray
stone placed on top
of another when a spiral was the writing,

when the people who left
without a word lifted stones,
and when it's built, the house I long for,

the one I cannot buy, moving
among the rented rooms,
afraid of papers taped to the door, the poor

sent to live underground like the dead,
the stones appeared
and let me see the house always around.

Fog covering
this mountain, lower and lower
a white dress falling down my body.

10. Tornado

I was in a windowed room at night with a desperate housewife and a soap opera star. The star went outside, and out the window to the left, planes came. Electrical, a dull yellow, metallic green like a fly's eyes, fast as flies, as bees, they bombed into the ground, each other. The housewife said oh no oh no oh no, and clung to me. The distance of the star from inside was a drop in my stomach. I let go of hope for her. Dragged the housewife with me to a room to the right, windowed as well, planes buzzing and crashing there too. We couldn't get away from the windows. I dug down, tried to keep us safe.

In the morning, tornados had landed, one funnel cloud after another touched down. A man was found in a tree, a parent and child in a neighbor's yard. All dead. 52 people all dead.

11. Your Hands

I saw you near a small table, said your name, and you turned looking a little different, but more like you than anyone else, a little confused, as if you had been looking into something, and you said it was hard to recognize other people sometimes, but as we stood there talking, our bodies became more defined, and I carried glasses, water for each of us, in either hand, yours a little smaller, both actual glass, beveled like windows we could drink from, and I was going to get more, to fill up our glasses, though they weren't empty, and you walked behind me to help me not spill what was already in them. I can still feel your hands as they reached on either side of me to be a steadying of the glass, your hands, the heels of your palms, and the lightness, in our walk, as if we were originally from the same place trying to see through a slight disguise.

12. Like the Lopper on *Seinfeld*

He was after me, & I was in my room by the locked

door, & the killer guy just opened it like the lock

was nothing, pulled me out. I don't know how I got

away. My protector was a cop who looked like Lorenzo

Lamas, & we hugged, but he didn't seem to take the danger

seriously enough. I was in a new room with slatted doors,

three of them, that I was trying to lock though they

seemed kind of flimsy, beach-side locks, someone

outside saying a storm was coming. I thought if that

guy could get in a locked room, these doors are no

protection, and wanted to stay with the Lorenzo-like

cop, but he'd forgotten to tell me that they'd

found the killer, arrested him. I had a feeling it

was like the Lopper on *Seinfeld*, when they arrested

Kramer but the real Lopper got away. I wasn't feeling

that safe yet, but the dogs in this apartment that is now

a dog hotel barked me awake.

13. What the Fish Said

Michael said, *maybe the fish*

are calling you, maybe you could listen.

But the fish I found were left on the beach

gutted for some small triangular part

often near the tail. One I saw caught,

still alive and silver.

Some I'd eaten, I admit, at Oceans,

some of them inside me.

When I touched my knee

to remember what it's like

to be touched, something was left

open like a window

in a calendar made for a religious holiday,

with a cardboard square for every day

the size of a postage stamp already cut

on three sides so all you have to do

is lift it up to see inside.

When I looked up, I saw the fish, dozens

at my feet swimming in the blue

cloudy water at the foot of my futon,

green heads and brown, bodies flipping,

curled in the waves, pillowed one

on top of another, and every mouth

was open, calling.

14. Help Save Your Life as Well as the Lives of Others

It was like that dream of driving a runaway car

on a George Jetson highway,

the loopy high highways of Miami,

except this was slower. On Bradford

in Provincetown, turning on Shankpainter,

stepped on the brake, and it went to the floor.

The jeep kept going. As did the jogger

in a bright shiny green and white tracksuit, oblivious

to me, sure I'll stop. We almost met at the edge

of the crosswalk, crush of flesh and nylon

under my 4,000 pound green jeep. But I pulled

the emergency brake, he jogged to safety.

My notes for heaven are just grass.

It was so quiet in my jeep

when I tried to stop and couldn't just kept

going forward whether I wanted to or not.

15. Just Pow

We see many headless statues. Many ruined noses on heads. I spoke to Bill Clinton. A man with a short-handled long gun had kidnapped me, kept me in a mall. Winged insects died and dried out, then fell, raspy, in my hair. *I need to wash my hair*, I said repeatedly. Shook my head. Another woman had already been kidnapped, and we walked the mall together. There were many guns in the MacArthur Memorial: a German luger, a machine gun, and a tiny pistol among them. Also a saber for cutting off the heads of American soldiers who fell or slowed in the Bataan Death March.

When we stopped by Walmart, a man passed us in the main horizontal aisle with an unconcealed gun on his body. I didn't quite see it, though when my brother mentioned it, the image flashed, held somewhere. Where are we? Who wears a gun on their hip to shop, except the law? What if he tripped, or flipped out? What if someone gave him the evil eye or took the last box of his favorite cereal, lawn chair, lantern? Death seemed more accessible in the Virginia Walmart. Just pow.

What if I wanted to juggle hand grenades in the Walmart or carry a bow and quiver of arrows? What if I walked the detergent aisle with a spiked mace twirled like a baton? Wore coral snakes in my hair?

When I was kidnapped, the man with the gun had been calm. But I knew not to run. I was sent into the street where others of the kidnapper's ilk watched me. *Where am I to go?* I asked. The men stood in front of storefronts that looked framed-in but without substance, as in a play or at the opera. One had to imagine the rest. The men all pointed and/or nodded down the street. *You'll see*.

I walked and to the left I saw a wooden chair built on a pedestal, lifeguard-high. I ascended without climbing, and in the chair beside me is Bill Clinton. *I need to tell you something*, I said. The chance to ask for help was wide and open like a blue swimming pool beneath us. Something loosened in my ribs. He leaned toward me as he'd leaned toward Jean MacArthur in her wheelchair.

I stopped. What would set the kidnapper off? If I spoke of my abduction, would he shoot me then? Could he hear me speak? Ask for help? Was it better to be imprisoned and alive than to risk the kidnapper's anger, risk the raised gun and bullet? I was hesitating when I woke. Though I'd decided, for that moment, not to speak. Worried I'd never feel safe enough to ask for help, reveal my state. Even on the street, I'd thought, can't I just run out of here? And instead, walked in my calm zombie way.

16. The Night at Sea

A blue bird kept hopping
toward me on the grass unafraid
like he knew me and my sea
colored gown hanging in the tree.
My bank account was frozen,
Janean hosting an emergency
yard sale because she had a yard,
my opera dresses on wires,
clothes spread on the lawn, the hoods.
Nobody bought a thing;
though one car slowed, and a woman leaned
her head out the window, looked down.
Janean and her two boys kept me company.
She thought her baby had a little
cut on his forehead but it was where
his forehead touched my lipsticked mouth
when he kept looking up
at me from my lap. I gave Dylan
my orthopedic foot because he liked it—
a removable cast with instructions.
Janean bought a shirt for two dollars.
All day Dylan had talked to me,
his lawn chair beside mine.
I didn't even know what he was saying
(my head heavy).
Worn out driving away
but out the window
Dylan ran after me waving
and waving, liking me anyway.

I liked Evan because when he talked
I had to look up at his unsmiling
smile, the sides of his face
like suitcases,
his house one big room.
Our conversation felt like something
I remembered from childhood,
a dream of being older,
the serious way he looked.

Kelle Groom is the author of four poetry collections, Spill, Five Kingdoms, *and* Luckily *(Anhinga Press), and* Underwater City *(University Press of Florida). Her poems have appeared in* AGNI, Best American Poetry, The New Yorker, New York Times, Ploughshares, *and* Poetry. *Her memoir,* I Wore the Ocean in the Shape of a Girl *(Simon & Schuster), was a Barnes & Noble Discover selection and New York Times Book Review Editor's Choice. She is on the faculty of the low-residency MFA Program at Sierra Nevada College, Lake Tahoe, and director of education programs at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts. "When Wendy Asked What We Dream" is from her poetry manuscript,* Far Land.

FIVE POEMS

ROSA ALCALÁ

You in Palazzo Pants

You agreed to meet him in one of those cafés you imagined yourself writing in if you could afford to live in that city. He was also a writer, but older, and you wanted to know how to get published. *Slip a picture of yourself in with your poems*, he advised, as in toss your shiny coin into the fountain—heads or tails—before it tarnishes. You didn't tell him of the internship you once had, in which the only thing that stood between the slush pile and the top editor was you in palazzo pants. And that the top editor, your boss, was a tall, ash-blonde woman who thought your post-it notes on manuscripts hilarious. You didn't tell him this because you have only thought of it now, because at the time you probably flirted like a knee that responds to a little hammer. When you told your therapist about a hand that slid down your back as you fixed sentences, she said, well, were you at least flattered? And in both cases, yes. But like a bouquet of flowers, it's hard to know what to say when it arrives on your desk without a card. The other secretaries expect you to be excited. They hover around your desk clucking: we never get anything, we're so jealous. Still, the water will soon turn murky and the flowers stink, and you are left with the burden of taking the whole thing out of the building. Now when you imagine your own poems arriving with a picture of yourself back then, you want to write a note in curvy pink, tell them how beautiful they are, how worthy of an audience.

You & Your Mother's Advice

Run into a school if a man is chasing you. Run into a church. Fall in love with art and mess up your dress. Dream all you want but baste before you sew. Ring someone's doorbell, ask to use their phone. Priests are men, too. Better yet, stay home. If you skimp, you soak. If you boil, skim the foam. In war, as in love, every hole is a trench. Devil you know or end up alone. Even the prettiest mole can sprout a whisker. Tell me who you walk with I'll tell who you are. Run into a store. Shop until you're safe. Run into a hospital, any public place. Do not take rides. Do not lead him to your car or door. Key him in the eye, knee him in the balls. Do not tell your brothers, they'll kill him. If you must, tell the killer you love him. Then run toward headlights, never the woods. A man will tell you he loves you to keep you from books. Tell a nurse. Dissimulate. Have the sense not to get caught shoplifting. Keep your mouth shut when you laugh. Keep your business off the curb. It's all in the sofrito (just watch & learn). Do not tell your friend her man tried to kiss you, as you slept on their couch after the engagement party. Everyone will blame you. They'll call you mosquita muerta. They'll call you fake. Keep a plant on your desk, straighten up before you leave. A good dancer isn't always the best husband. Steer clear of white jeans. Dispose properly of sanitary napkins. Get pregnant and your father will kill you. Never say no to a party, las malas lenguas can wag all they want once the music's over.

You, Escape Artist

The night she told you, you dreamt he stood in the room watching you sleep next to her. What she had locked in her diary became a key to dark foyers, held beneath the tongue. One mother said it never happened, the other, no more sleepovers. Why should another be sacrificed, you ask your therapist, and not you? Why didn't he mistake your body for hers? You no longer hold the key, but the impression it left. After another near miss, you slept for months with the light on and threw off the covers to find nothing there except the shadow you call Could Have Been Worse. Is a shadow worth a story? If not, how do you cast it off? Your daughter has just learned about Houdini, how he escaped from a milk can submerged in water, and she begs you all evening to tie her up beneath her desk and time her as she loosens the red rope from her ankles and wrists. She wants increasingly elaborate configurations and to beat her own record. What are you preparing her for? When you pour a cup of water over her head and say, your body is yours—meaning hers? Houdini practiced for hours all his techniques, which weren't just tricks, your daughter insists, but the ability to hold his breath for several minutes or tighten his stomach to take any blow. Yet nothing could have prepared him for the brute who slipped into his dressing room and without warning punched the air out of him. Houdini would go on to perform that night and ignoring for days the pain, die in bed of a burst appendix. Your daughter eventually gets bored of the game and wants a snack, and you try to tell her you'll always undo the knots if she gets trapped, and she says, ok, mama, ok, tell me the story of the girl who can't stop vomiting.

You Glistening in the Meadow

When were you taught a woman's body is a trap that chews through the foot of a decent man on his way to good deeds? To his mother's house, where something always needs fixing? How did you learn to sharpen the teeth and test the spring before hiding in a tuft of grass? The dog's slobber wets your metal as he vaults easily over, and there, glistening in the meadow, you wait to hear the happy whistle of its owner. They'll say, that day he didn't return with a beautiful partridge in his leather satchel, but with one less foot. And somewhere a woman's body that is a trap wears it proudly like an amulet.

You & "The Breast"

By now everyone knows the story: an English professor awakens to find, like Kafka's Gregor, that he has turned into something unthinkable, something so unlike who he was. In this case not a beetle but a breast. Young, perfectly round, its nipple erect. What if he had woken to find himself a breast at ease in middle age, its nipple sure of its opinion but not in constant need to give it? In this room with a turret, the inspiration for the story, you are not turned on, but troubled by the memory of your mother in her last years pushed around in a wheelchair entirely braless. Did it feel like freedom or resignation to no longer have to roust the girls up and about, or make them unwilling interlocutors? You think for the nursing home this was mainly convenience. With so much to do, why harness old women who've wandered off a darkened stage? Your mother who would never answer the door without a girdle, much less a bra. What if the breast had been delicate and shallow, a bead of water trembling on the paddle of a thirsty cactus? Flat as a mesa, scarred like an arroyo? Or why not two breasts, one a full cup larger than the other from having nursed too long in the same position while writing recommendation letters? Above the desk the concentric circles of a white domed ceiling punctuated in the center by a round light that tear drops into a nipple, and around the nipple an areola of desiccated insects drawn to its luminous glands. One understands when entering a room that others have been there before you. But this room is never just itself, it is always a story that hovers over your own. What if the nipple had sprouted a hair, and given the professor's lack of hands, remained forever unplucked? What if the nipple had been inverted, and not, as the story goes, phallic? A breast leaking milk, its infected ducts hard and throbbing under a cabbage leaf? The domed ceiling has two cracks like veins under pale skin. On the roof, where the turret lives, is another breast whose nipple pulls energy from the center of the desk to its weathervane. It's hard to get a signal beneath it, you have to sit on the bed to text a friend whose father died yesterday. I didn't get a chance to say goodbye, she writes.

And, fuck capitalism. Perfectly framed by the window to your left is a long thin tree among a thicket, that pushes proudly from its trunk what looks like a breast, because now everything does, but is actually a scar over a wound called a burl, the result of some type of stress: injury, virus, fungus. Valued for its beauty, this type of scar is often poached, destroying the tree it was trying to protect. A Redwood can sprout another Redwood from its burl if it thinks it might die. The women in your family, their breasts at any age fall sideward. They never point to future or sky, but each, after sex, are waterfalls into canyons.

Rosa Alcalá is the author of three books of poetry, most recently MyOTHER TONGUE *(Futurepoem, 2017). She is also a translator of poetry from the Spanish, and was awarded an NEA in Translation Fellowship to complete* Cecilia Vicuña: New & Selected Poems *(Kelsey Street Press, 2018).*

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TWO POEMS

TANEUM BAMBRICK

Unreported Incidents

Ray spit in my hand. Motor oil
leafed on still water and he spoke over me
saying I waver when I issue commands.

He kicked the drowned cat to shower me
with its pocket of brown lake.
Said I wasn't worth the fuss I made

showing the boys their loneliness in the country
where trucks sink to bone
under the blue sound of electricity.

Ray invented the game *chop stick snake*
with two branches he tossed
a rattler at the back of my legs.

Eventually he decided it wasn't his job to help me.
A circle of drunk men, burning
illegally. Their faces sockets of cracked light.

He laughed, *go on. Tell them*
to call it a night. My hands were behind
my back when I asked, *could you please.*

I turned to Ray. He smiled, reversed away
as one man crushed a can
another draped his wet arm over me.

Elk Tooth Necklace

The first time Ray lost a wife he didn't know why.
At work he thumbed a scar on his forehead
to show us where she'd split skin with a water glass—
the bitch—he said the kids, by moving
to Alaska, took her side. The baseboard lined
with spent whiskey bottles. He'd walk barefoot
in the snow. He sheeted the porch in plastic
so that the house resembled itself,
a stonefly rising from its molt. Around
that time, elk took to staring through living
room windows. Their yellow eyes pulsed in sports light,
hanging, ghostly, among hollow trees.
Once, he dove at them hollering like you would spook
a gathering of crows. *That's the gist of it*,
he explained on lunch break. He didn't know how
he stumbled into the Teanaway
Wilderness or what became of his clothes. He woke
facing an elk's bullet-torn throat. Smiling
while eating in a circle around his truck, we found
the story hard to believe. He'd only
caved and offered up that much after months of us
calling him gay, a handful of women's
names for the necklace he kept under his work polo:
a wooden corn nut latched to a silver
chain. Ray claimed he'd gone back, sober, the next day
and worked the tooth from the elk's hard mouth.
You should've seen the rack. He held out his hands.
Two saplings. *I could've froze to death*,
he said, *just think, drunk off my ass, I killed that thing.*
The second time he came home to find Darla
cold at the TV. It was embarrassing.
We didn't know him when he sobbed his face
into a crust and kicked out the door screen.
A neighbor cooked apple pie and roast beef. We fed
him, took turns lifting the fork, letting him
drink. Nobody else called or knocked. We, the garbage
crew, were his only company. That morning
he asked us to leave. Lifted the chain from his neck
and handed it to me. When he said
I want you all to have it, but it's got magic
you can't understand, I thought he meant
how it feels to save your own life by taking warmth
from another body. The strength of having
felt yourself bend. For the rest of the season,
none of us spoke of his absence. We never
went again. I hung the chain from the rearview mirror
where it swung between our heads. We imagined
Ray would die, and every day we waited
we felt we made it happen.

On the last shift we passed a cigar between us,
a ceremony for the final bag of trash.
We shut our doors, drove off in the same moment.
Dirt shrouded the boxcar where we'd kept
our things. While turning I saw the necklace, its chain
catching light in the cab of truck 43.
I dug through my pockets and remembered
that we'd surrendered our keys. If they hadn't
yet the guys would soon realize. Five cars taking
the highway through the canyon. Their blocked
music. I pictured them silently weighing
the consequences of going back for
the necklace, breaking in. Crossing the bridge
over the gate where the river opens
at 5:00pm. Heading home, we used to stop there,
above the water, and though the fall is too slow
to see, we'd squint long enough to convince ourselves
we were the reason the reservoir emptied.

Taneum Bambrick is the winner of the 2019 APR/Honickman First Book Prize for her collection Vantage. *Her chapbook* Reservoir *was selected by Ocean Vuong for the 2017 Yemassee Chapbook Prize. A graduate of the University of Arizona's MFA program, she is the winner of an Academy of American Poets University Prize, a Susanna Colloredo Environmental Writing Fellowship from the Vermont Studio Arts Center, and the 2018 BOOTH Nonfiction Contest. Her poems and essays appear or are forthcoming in* The Missouri Review, Blackbird, Passages North, The Southeast Review, Hayden's Ferry Review, *and elsewhere. She has received support from the Sewanee Writers' Conference, and the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference.*

ON LANGUAGE AND MOURNING

NOOR HINDI

I don't remember how to say home*/in my first language, or* lonely*, or* light *—Kaveh Akbar*

Two months before my grandfather died, he asked me to read him a poem of mine. We were at Summa Hospital. In some room. I did not want to read him a poem—because my grandfather was well read. Because he loved poetry. Because, as a child, he did not like me all the time. Because I would interrupt his reading with my play. Because my Arabic was clumsy—Americanized—and I wanted to communicate with him, I did, but felt that I couldn't because he insisted that I speak Arabic. Because trying to speak to him in Arabic was difficult—I'd forget words I needed to convey a certain meaning and when I'd reach for those words, they wouldn't land on my tongue the way I needed them to land, or as urgently as I wanted them to. Because eventually, we only spoke in formalities, never reaching below the surface of conversation.

Because he was dying.
And I did not want to disappoint him with my words, again.

There was a poem he'd always recite: "My Dear and Only Love" by James Graham. In a whisper, he'd say the poem to me, all 40 lines of it, and then crack a smile. My grandfather never knew the title or author of that poem. For a while, I thought he had written it. After he died, I remembered the poem, but not the words, and felt a deep sense of loss for not remembering. I asked family members if they knew the poem, but none of them could recall ever hearing him recite it. I wondered if I'd dreamed the poem, if those intimate moments I'd spent listening to my grandfather's voice had ever happened.

At night, I could hear his voice, the meter of the poem, its rhythm and sway, but I could not get past the first two words: "My dear."

Finally, one night, the words "My dear and only Love, I pray" were whispered in my ears, like a secret. A quick Google search yielded the poem on Poetry Foundation. I am not a religious person, but I do believe in love, and finding that poem felt like an act of love.

There is a video on YouTube of someone reading the poem. If I search "my dear and only love," it's the first result. I have always avoided listening to that recording of the poem for fear of forgetting my grandfather's voice.

At the hospital, I read my grandfather my poem "As Gaza Exploded." It was the first poem I'd ever written about Palestine, a place that does not exist on the map, but is nevertheless my home and where my father and grandfather grew up.

It's also the first and only poem I'd ever published at that point in my career as a writer. I'd written it hours after meeting Palestinian poet Naomi Shihab Nye at Kent State University. She was the first poet, aside from my poetry instructor, that I'd ever met.

At the reading, she was beautiful and eloquent. I was dazzled. Her poems were compassionate and urgent reminders that the world can be kind. I saw myself in her words. I saw Palestine. I felt like I was home. When I met her, I let her sign my book, and then I asked her for permission to write about Palestine. The question jumped out of my mouth before I could stop it. She gave me my book back, and said, "I hope you will find a spark of something in these pages." I have never forgotten her words.

That night, I went home dancing. I decided I wanted to be a poet. I wrote "As Gaza Exploded" in a plunge.

My parents named me *Noor* (نور), which means *light*, in Arabic. During my undergrad, I took three Arabic classes to learn how to write and read in Arabic. Although I was (fairly) fluent in Arabic, I was illiterate. In class, I learned the alphabet for the first time, how each letter connects with another, how there are sounds foreign to the English tongue, like the letter ق, which makes قهوة (coffee), or the letter ع, which makes نعناع (mint).

It's been two and a half years since my last class. Sometimes, when I'm driving or showering or making food, I'll realize I have forgotten how to write a letter. I try to picture it in my head—the twist of the letter و, the way ن looks like a plate with a dot, the swoop of the letter س—but I'll realize it's vanished from my memory, at least for now.

At the hospital, the closer I got to the end of reading "As Gaza Exploded" to my grandpa, the redder my face became. I struggled through the poem, often tripping over my own words, stumbling over basic lines I'd read over and over again.

Halfway through, a feeling of anger overtook me. Later, I'd recognize that feeling as not exactly anger, but shame. I wondered if he could understand my words. I wanted him to connect with the poem, the way I was describing my father and Palestine, but I felt I had failed because the poem was in English, not Arabic, and I knew he would have preferred it in Arabic.

When I finished, he nodded his head, then fell asleep.

Months later, he died. I did not know him the way I wished I'd known him. In the months leading up to his death, he said "I love you" in English a lot. Once, while walking him around his nursing home, we sat next to a small waterfall. He loved the water. I wanted to talk to him, but he was tired, and I knew I wouldn't be able to convey my thoughts in Arabic the way I wanted, but I could also feel the urgency of his life, how close his death was, how very soon I wouldn't be able to talk to him at all.

We sat in silence. If we had spoken the same language, if my tongue wasn't colonized, if I'd grown up in Palestine, maybe I'd have known him better. In that moment, it's the language I mourned.

The most beautiful words to write in Arabic are السلام عليكم, which means hello; يقبرني, which is said to those we love so much we hope we'll die before them; يا روحي, which means "my soul"; حرية, which means "freedom"; and عيوني, which means "my eyes."

In "Poem to Be Read from Right to Left," poet Marwa Helal writes, "language first my learned i / second / see see." In this poem, Helal creates a form of her own called The Arabic. In *Winter Tangerine* magazine, where the poem was published, Helal writes that the poem "vehemently rejects you if you try to read it left to right."

I love this poem for its beauty and protest, how it interrogates language and puts readers in a place of discomfort. I like that it forces readers to reconcile with the other. It asks readers to actively resist the way their eyes inevitably dart to the left side of the page. I like that it asks us to correct how we read, to dismantle what we see as superior.

For Arabic readers, especially, this form provides a place of comfort and grounding. A place where both languages exist, albeit haphazardly.

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language exists. and am I more. than this language
and who am I. without it and what does it mean
to occupy. a language to speak. in the language
of your oppressor. to exist. in a country. where a
white boy once asked me do you speak islam???
I am trying to occupy a space. where I can exist.
where I can connect. to my ancestors what is the
thing beyond language
    is it silence or perhaps the sound of Omayma
El Khalil singing عصفور I am searching. for a language beyond language. if I keep saying the word
language. language language. language it will
eventually mean. nothing and every.thing. what is
it. anyway and can we move beyond it

In *Transfer*, Naomi Shihab Nye writes, "We were born to wander, to grieve / lost lineage . . ." I am Palestinian by blood, Jordanian by birth, and American by fate. But mostly, I am lost. I am grieving. My grandfather. Which is to say I am grieving for Palestine, for "lost lineage," for a man who would have wanted to be buried in Palestine, but was instead buried at Crown Hill Cemetery in Twinsburg, Ohio.

When people ask, "Where are you from?" I want to say Palestine, but Israel has erased my country from the map. I want to say Jordan, but I only spent my infancy there. I want to say America, but does this country want me? The news says otherwise.

In *Silver Road*, Kazim Ali writes, "To walk in the world is to find oneself in a body without papers, not a citizen of anything but breath."

I am trying to wander more. I am trying to breathe more, to love my lostness, to reject the

notion that home is one place. The world is infinite. I think? So is space. So am I. So are we.

My grandfather was afraid of dying in America:
A country that denied his existence.

My grandfather was afraid of dying ~~in America:~~
~~A country that denied his existence~~.

My grandfather was afraid of ~~dying in America:~~
A country that denied his existence.

My grandfather ~~was afraid of dying in America:~~
~~A country that denied~~ his existence.

My grandfather was afraid of ~~dying in~~ America~~:~~
~~A country that denied his existence.~~

~~My grandfather was afraid of dying in~~ America:
A country that denied his existence.

My grandfather's library was his most cherished possession. He once fought with my mother because he let her borrow a book, something he seldom did, and she never gave it back.

My grandfather was only educated through the 5th grade. He is the smartest person I have ever known. He read voraciously. He loved literature. He did not like to talk to people.

Before he died, we discussed Pablo Neruda. My grandfather lived in Nicaragua for 12 years. He read Neruda in Spanish. He did not like the English translations of Neruda's work.

In hospice, when everything in his body started to shut down, doctors said he was "actively dying." I imagined the lights in the little rooms inside of his body going off. off. off.

A month after he died, I took a compass he'd left. I don't know how to use it. I keep it on my writing desk. It has a tiny magnifying glass and an arrow. I follow.

When I dream of him, we are silent. What does this say about love and loss and the beyond? There is no language for grief. I miss him. These words are not enough.

Before he died, I told him I wanted to be a poet. He considered my statement for a moment. Eventually, he said "good" in Arabic. I would like to think he is proud.

Noor Hindi (she/her) is a Palestinian-American poet who is currently pursuing her MFA in poetry through the NEOMFA program. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in The Rumpus, Winter Tangerine, Tinderbox Poetry, Glass Poetry, Jet Fuel Review, Diode Poetry Journal, *and* Foundry Journal. *Hindi is a Senior Reporter for* The Devil Strip Magazine. *Follow her on Twitter @MyNrhindi, or visit her website at noorhindi.com.*

THREE POEMS

ELLEN BASS

Grizzly

She grazes in a meadow, sulphur blossoms spilling
from her jaw.

At this moment she seems so calm, she could be holy
if what that means is something like being

wholly unaware of the good she gives,
how even her rooting tills the soil

and even her shitting ferries the seeds
and even her bathing is a joy to behold

as I am beholding her this morning
as she leans over a water hole, her shadow first

and then her reflection on the skin of the water,
and then the splash as she enters, the pond opening,

rippling, and the scritch as she scrubs
her head with her paw, the great planet

of her head that she dunks and raises, shaking
the water in wide arcs, droplets spraying

the lens of the hidden camera. And now
she climbs out, water rivering off her fur.

And now she is drying that huge head
in the long grasses.

And here she hunkers
over a bison carcass, slowly ripping free

the shoulder. Those precision instruments
that work with an ease that seems—yes—delicate.

Blood stains the river and stains
the snowbank and stains the rock.

Vessel carrying the chemicals of life—
hair and bone, flagella and bloom.

She carries them, lumbering forward
as she sinks her teeth and feeds. And feeds.

Pushing

This morning before we're even out of bed, she's
wading thigh deep in some kind of existential dread. She's been living
in a grotto of fear. Not suicidal—
her grandparents didn't escape the pogroms
just so she could down a handful of confetti-colored pills.
But she's asking why she is living
when every step she takes is a slog through this murky water.
Terrible as it is to admit, the first response I think of is
for a great cappuccino.
I'm remembering waking up in southern Italy
outside Alberobello. It was December and every day
we'd bundle up and walk into town to drink that creamy brew
with fresh baked bread and slabs of butter.
But of course I don't say that.
I don't say anything.
I've already said every hopeful thing I can think of.
But she says, *I have to look at my fear with curiosity.*
Like when we were watching the larvae hatch.
A few weeks ago she found a cluster of eggs on a blackberry leaf.
When we got it under the hand lens,
they were glued together in a perfect symmetry.
And at that exact moment the first larvae were cracking
through their casings, white, soft-bodied babies pushing and pushing,
working to get through the tiny opening.
They'd swallowed the amniotic water and were swollen with it.
As I stared, scale shifted and the head of the one that was first
to be born began to seem huge as it labored toward release.
Like a human head trying to squeeze through the cervix.
We watched the slippery larva reach
the threshold and slide into the open,
bearing the command of its body to be born
and then start eating the green flesh of the earth.
I remember how light she was, how almost happy,
and how, for a moment, I wasn't afraid.

On My Father's Illness

My mother told me sometimes
she wished she could be like the other
wives, sit in the passenger seat,
pull down the little mirror in the visor
and put on her lipstick.

Ellen Bass is a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. Her most recent book, Like a Beggar *(Copper Canyon Press, 2014), was a finalist for The Paterson Poetry Prize, The Publishers Triangle Award, The Milt Kessler Poetry Award, The Lambda Literary Award, and the Northern California Book Award. Previous books include* The Human Line *(Copper Canyon Press, 2007) and* Mules of Love *(BOA Editions, 2002), which won The Lambda Literary Award. She co-edited (with Florence Howe) the first major anthology of women's poetry,* No More Masks! *(Doubleday, 1973).*

TWO POEMS

MATTHEW YEAGER

To the Chicken Truck

"So what do you do?"
For the years I drove you,
I liked that question; I was 23;
the lives of the poets I liked
contained things like automotive
plants, box factories, donuts,
pet crematoria, national forest
outposts. Kenneth Koch, alumnus
of Walnut Hills High School
in Cincinnati, OH—fought in WWII.
You were not quite WWII
as far as an experience
but I put you in my first bio
like a tooth under a pillow
you and the city in which I drove you
positive you'd be replaced
before too long with books.
An Isuzu LCF (Low Cab Forward)
with a 20-foot box
and a reefer, the first time
I saw you it was on Barrow St.
at Washington you were white
as a whiteboard you were glossy
and inviting and because you slept
on the streets of Manhattan
two blocks from the Hudson
hooligans welcomed you
to the big city (it was 2003)
with spray-painted penises
like swan-necks twisted together.
But it was ok. You were covered
in a purple vinyl vehicle wrap
the next week. On you there was
now a ruffly blue exotic hen,
other fowl, and the company logo,
tastefully smallish,
featuring an egg.
You were a mobile billboard and
a working catering truck.
That'd been the plan for you all along.
We dubbed you "The Chicken Truck."
By a 20th century miracle
totally normalized I pressed
my foot to one small
piece of you, and all of you roared,
all of you went! All the food
all the mixers and booze, all that went
into guests' bodies each party
lunged and bounced and slid and shook.
Your windshield was New York City
in every shifting view;
in the beginning getting anywhere
in you took all the confidence
I could fake. After three years
backing you into docks
parallel parking you on side streets
steering you into truck elevators
it was real enough that I could love you.
And I did love you, loved your
turning radius your exact width
as if my nerves flowed through you.
Chicken Truck, you were my whip!
And I admit, some others' too.
And what we all loved, we who
truly knew you? You were tough.
God were you. Never a garage
above you not one day in your life.
Starting, stopping, bouncing,
turning, revving, braking, wake up,
do it again, any day, time, weather.
When a man leapt in the night
from the roof of the Archive Building
and landed on you, he left a man-
sized dent. The police left a note.
Kory "Pimp Juice" Moore, first in,
cleaned the blood. We packed
you full and off I drove
because that's New York.
Funny, I always thought I'd be
out of catering before you;
I was right. I thought you'd be
done in a decade or less.
I was in it 15 years.
Kory is dead. Even Falk is dead.
Last I heard, you're still on the road.

To Ear Plugs

24 hours a day our ears
are open. Our amazing
ode-deserving bodies
ingest and jump and
regulate and excrete.
Our most sensitive
orbs dilate with dying light
and yet somehow there
is no eyelid-like flap
or sphincter-like ring
of muscle in the ear
to pinch off the noise!
We go to sleep; any big sound
can just waltz the hell on in
and clomp or whang or meow
and cause a disturbance
in the whole body.
Then it's a full hour later
we've had two pisses
rambled through the fridge
and now must shake
out a pill. This is where
you come in, Ear Plugs,
or ideally somewhat before.
Nature or God said,
in the shape of the ear,
"People, I will not
allow you not to listen,
it is too important!"
Ear Plugs, you are in theory
a way to reject that
a way to translate
that command
into a world of man-made
cacophony. Except you are
no good at what you do.
I mean, do you think you
do a good job? Do you?
The shorter of you I allow
are somewhat better
but none of you are good.
Bright colored foam cylinder
pinched, twisted
you expand to fill
a small canal lined with
sensitive hairs,
but still I hear the flaps
of airplane wings opening
bass from passing cars
screams of arriving subways
the howls of romantically jilted 3 am males
You are capable of erasing
so little
a clicking computer keyboard
in another room
the breathing of my beautiful
sleeping wife
the repetitive tinkle of the chain
on a ceiling fan
capable of hypnotizing a mind to sleep

Matthew Yeager's poems have appeared in Sixth Finch, Bennington Review, Academy of American Poets Poem-A-Day, *and elsewhere, as well as several anthologies, including* Best American Poetry 2005 *and* 2010. *His short film "A Big Ball of Foil in a Small NY Apartment" was an official selection at eleven film festivals in 2009–2010, picking up three awards. His first book,* Like That *(Forklift Books, 2016), received a starred review from* Publisher's Weekly. *He is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Cincinnati, where he lives with his wife Chelsea Whitton and cats Puck and Merle.*

TWO POEMS

HEATHER CHRISTLE

Paper Crown

Outside, the cold is a kingdom
sitting for a portrait, preening

its pale blue snow on its black branches.
Weeks ago my child began a story

Once upon a time there was
a Queen Mama and a Princess Papa.

They lived in a big monarchy on a hill.
A monarchy is an imaginary house

with real toads in it, they say,
by which I mean someone

said Marianne Moore borrowed the idea
from something William Carlos Williams

said in a letter. *Marianne the magpie*
I think, *she of the glittering eye*.

In a draft of his autobiography
WCW wrote that if we were looking

for an account of the women (or men)
he had slept with, we wouldn't find it there

and then he crossed out the parenthetical.
Somewhere there is a party full of crossed-out guests,

invitation-only. I have this other idea
of a service that would deliver, each morning,

a report of all you did in the night
in other people's dreams. I understand

it would be at first embarrassing
and even dangerous, but I like to believe

over time it would change us for the better.
I have fucked so many people in my sleep!

A Venn diagram I will never draw: the circle
of physical lovers and its slim overlap

with the circle of lovers in dreams.
But nor will I cross it out. The rising sun

has vanished the blue from the snow;
no kingdom lasts forever. *We will pick up*

where we left off tomorrow, says the painter,
who packs up real paint with imaginary hands.

We Know It's a Spell But We Don't Know What For

Even if your hand is a light you can hold up
to see your way in the dark, at some point
your arm will get tired. You will know
real magic by its edges, the way it is here
and here it is not. *I do believe in fairies*
insists the child actor in green tights
who makes the theatre fill with applause.
In some worlds Tinkerbell is a flashlight—
we should refuse to say *only*, refuse
to say *just*. You never know what magic
such words might erase. Things as they are
could be enough. A film played at maximum
speed shows plants scurry too, have done so
all along. And if I were to layer every letter
I'd ever written on top of one another,
I'd make a nice inky hole to lie down in,
so far down no flashlight could reach

Heather Christle is the author of four poetry collections, most recently Heliopause. *Her first work of nonfiction,* The Crying Book*, will be published this November. She teaches creative writing at Emory University in Atlanta.*

TWO POEMS

KAZIM ALI

Submission

Then the blue screech the lake bellowing my name over a crowd but I never felt found never knew that sharp peal of a bell

To be greeted hello by a warm group of friends who all look like me but for long years I have been litigating Hell

Only to win any cold fellowship governed by the thinnest laws of bondage every angel peering at the one who fell

Hit the ground and didn't move just lay there pillowing his head with his arm refusing to get up there's no pill

To lead him back through decades of shame no yellow prayer to undo his losses so when the lake rises up and yells

For him why would he not answer the cello's note vibrating in vapor filling his pockets with rocks planning to leave the cell

Of his own making summoned by the willow on the riverbank I will be the first person in the history of my shame to break

The old pattern and default my debt to depth and though from the dreadful sentence of uncounted sins I shine I shine

No voice from heaven rains down to meet mine though all the angry angels and prophets levy every ancient fine

Two Boys Ago

After Lucie Brock-Broido

No tired queens.

No ghosts coming back to replay their shredded remnants of old failures.

No more wishing for death. No more answering death's letters.

No thousand and second night.

No curse for the only President I ever truly loathed.

No breathing into the fire, no digging down into earth.

No merciful caress of the cat fatally wounded in the street last June.

No ear or voice.

No tough zippered stride, no declaration of independence.

No more searching my skin with my own palms, searching for rib-bones' or hip-bones' protrusions.

No horizontal desperation, no seeking the sun.

No flounce of my hair, that old gesture, every time I open my mouth to begin.

No beginning.

No making love in the evening light on the hotel balcony.

No poem to explain myself.

No promise. No more ghosting death. In the index of the planet's history of god and literature and the human spirit I decline any entry.

Kazim Ali's books include several volumes of poetry, including Inquisition*;* Sky Ward*, winner of the Ohioana Book Award in Poetry;* The Far Mosque*, winner of Alice James Books' New England/New York Award;* The Fortieth Day*;* All One's Blue*; and the cross-genre text* Bright Felon*. He is currently a professor of Literature and Writing at the University of California, San Diego.*

"THE DEAD WILL THINK THE LIVING ARE WORTH IT"

Rereadng W.S. Merwin's The Lice

PIOTR GWIAZDA

The things that made me feel pessimistic then are certainly still with us and more so: the destruction of the natural world, the really insane exploitation of the whole environment, the pollution of the elements, and an economy that's really based on war and greed—we just seem to be heading straight for complete physical destruction.
—W.S. Merwin, interview with Michael Clifton, The American Poetry Review *(1980)*

1.

In 2017 Copper Canyon Press reissued W.S. Merwin's book of poems *The Lice* to mark the fiftieth anniversary of its original publication. The news caught my attention because I have a personal attachment to this collection. I bought it at a garage sale in New Haven in the summer of 1991, probably for a dollar or two—not a high price to pay for a volume of poems, especially one of such importance (as I later discovered) to the history of American poetry. I had just emigrated from Poland to the United States, bringing with me few possessions and few books, all of them in Polish. What I was holding in my hands on that summer day was a well-worn copy of a later printing, its stark cover featuring only the title and the words "POEMS BY W.S. MERWIN" placed against a brown-and-sepia background. I had never read any of Merwin's poetry before. Most likely, I had never even heard of him. But I was excited to have found this book—the first book of poems I acquired in America.

Of course I'm not the only person with a special connection to *The Lice*. Matthew Zapruder, who first encountered Merwin's poetry at a bookshop in Amherst in 1995, states in his introduction to the new edition: "no book I read during my beginning years of poetry had more of a direct influence on me stylistically. *The Lice* also showed me, as has no other book, that true poetry could be reconciled with political engagement without descending into propaganda or rant." I suspect that hundreds of other poets (of several generations by now) would acknowledge their debt to Merwin in similarly enthusiastic terms. And the description seems fitting for the poet who, even by the time I or Zapruder discovered him, had shown as much commitment to his art as to society at large.

Merwin, who died earlier this year at the age of 91, believed that if poets have strong feelings about their government they should be able to express them through their writings and actions. In his early thirties, having already published several volumes of poetry and translation, he took part in mass protests against nuclear testing and proliferation in the U.S. and the U.K., including the legendary fifty-two mile march from the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment in Aldermaston to Trafalgar Square in London on the Easter weekend in 1960. He later wrote an account of the protest, part of a series of trenchant essays published in *The Nation* in the early 1960s that signal his preoccupations with ecology, history, and politics; among those, his commentary on nonviolence and civil disobedience, "Act of Conscience," especially stands out today. In 1971, he refused to accept the Pulitzer Prize for his book of poems *The Carrier of Ladders*. As he explained in a statement published in *The New York Times*, he did so to express his shame of being an American citizen in light of the U.S. military operations in Southeast Asia. For this gesture, as well as for his intention to donate the prize money to draft resisters, he was publicly castigated by none other than W.H. Auden. Later in the 1970s Merwin moved to Hawaii and dedicated himself to the work of environmental preservation in the region. Still, as he published more volumes of poems, prose, and translation, he continued to oppose militarism and played a prominent role in Sam Hamill's "Poets Against the War" movement before the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. In "Ogres," a poem he wrote during that period, he speaks of "the frauds in office / at this instant devising / their massacres in my name."

The Lice, his sixth book of poems, also held a place of special importance to Merwin himself. He composed most of the poems between 1964 and 1966, while living at a farmhouse in southern France. As he would later recall, during that period he was experiencing a kind of creative crisis, fearing "there was no point in writing anything at all" due to the continuing nuclear arms race and the escalating war in Vietnam. The apocalyptic mood certainly shows in the poems, their overwhelming pessimism best captured by the line "Today belongs to few and tomorrow to no one" (from "Whenever I Go There"). Many of them seem permeated by dread—the paralyzing dread of an imminent catastrophe. Many of them have an almost hallucinatory quality, with spectral figures and desolate landscapes. Merwin's vision is bleak, his voice faltering, his attitude one of despair. And yet the poems kept coming. As he later said: "the poems kind of pushed their way upon me when I wasn't thinking of writing. I would be out growing vegetables and walking around the countryside when all of a sudden I'd find myself writing a poem."

2.

My first attempts at reading *The Lice* were frustrating. This was partly due to the fact that in 1991 English was a foreign language to me. As I leaf through the volume today, I notice my penciled translations of certain words (like "resemblances" and "lightning")—reminders of how I patiently worked my way through the poems. But the chief source of difficulty was their sheer strangeness or what Zapruder calls "ghostiness." Many first readers of *The Lice* found the poems similarly frustrating: elusive, seemingly unfinished, almost incoherent. Others, however, interpreted their obscurity as a proof of the author's creative hesitations. William H. Rueckert, perhaps Merwin's most dedicated reader, later defended them in this way:

> *I think Merwin deliberately created poems which lack the kinds of coherence we expect. Indeed, there is no law that says everything in a poem has to make sense. That is a deception perpetrated by the logical centers of the mind, but the mind has other centers, and reason cannot encompass the world. In fact, many of the poems in this book are about the failures of reason.*

History has been kind to *The Lice*, in the sense that many poems included in the volume—especially "For the Anniversary of My Death," "The Asians Dying," "For a Coming Extinction"—would later become identified as classics of Merwin's oeuvre, reprinted in anthologies, debated by scholars. In 1987 Charles Molesworth simply declared it Merwin's best book of poetry. Still, the question of "making sense" remains. If we assume that poetry at least partly appeals to our irrational side, how does a poem fail the test of reason? In terms of style and technique, structure and devices, how does it *succeed* through lack of coherence?

As an example, here is "When the War Is Over"—incidentally often regarded as one of the most accessible poems in the collection:

> *When the war is over*
> *We will be proud of course the air will be*
> *Good for breathing at last*
> *The water will have been improved the salmon*
> *And the silence of heaven will migrate more perfectly*
> *The dead will think the living are worth it we will know*
> *Who we are*
> *And we will all enlist again*

This was Merwin's recently found "bare" style, his own take on the concept of "open form" then taking root in American poetics. This poem, like almost all others in *The Lice*, is relatively simple in its vocabulary. Composed in free verse, it features subtle parallelism and few sound effects, of which the alliteration of *l*'s in the closing line is the most noticeable. It has no punctuation, which Merwin at the time was beginning to view as too constraining ("I had come to feel it stapled the poems to the page"). The obscurity is due partly to the abstractness of thought, as the poem tries to reconcile two concepts: the absence of war and the inevitability of war. But it is also due to the tension between the syntactical units and the line arrangement so that, as Cary Nelson puts it, "syntactical progression is often deliberately subverted by line breaks at awkward points within clauses." The resulting incongruity strains the eye and the mind, demanding a greater than usual effort of concentration. Indeed, until we arrive at the final line, we are not sure how we should interpret the passages that come before it. Are they part of an environmentalist manifesto, a fantasy of global peace, or just a cluster of utopian musings? The poem thrives on this ambiguity.

"Stable instability" is how Adrienne Raphel describes the effect in her recent appreciation of Merwin's volume in *Poetry*. But there is a larger paradox at the heart of *The Lice*. At the time these

poems were pushing their way upon Merwin, he was beginning to think of poetry primarily as a form of oral rather than written expression. He was beginning to think of it as being situated in the voice rather than on the page (hence his gradual abandonment of the conventions of punctuation). This is why the term "reader" makes only so much sense when we refer to these poems. Even though they are printed in a book, they are meant to be read aloud; they require a listener or a group of listeners.

I realize that after all these years, and despite the fact that English is no longer a foreign language to me, Merwin's book continues to challenge me in profound ways. It challenges my general approach to poetry, which I usually encounter on the page and treat as a form of written expression. And so I still struggle with it—much like its initial readers in 1967 and like those who came to it later. The following excerpt from Laurence Lieberman's review of *The Lice*, reprinted on the back cover of my edition, seems all the more pertinent: "To read any major poet correctly, we must train the ear to listen for nuances of language and line movement that may be as unfamiliar and inaccessible, at first reading, as those of a foreign language."

3.

In the spring of 2018 I taught "When the War Is Over" in my undergraduate seminar "Peace Writing/Writing Peace" at the University of Pittsburgh. The seminar considered the role of literature (and more broadly language and rhetoric) in shaping the theory and practice of peace. Most of our texts—Aristophanes' peace-themed plays *The Acharnians*, *Peace*, and *Lysistrata*, Henry David Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience," Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*, Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *War Primer*, Denise Levertov's *Making Peace*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Fifth Book of Peace*—inevitably focused on war. Still, throughout our conversations we kept at the forefront Giorgio Mariani's argument that "beneath war there is a peace waiting to be uncovered and critically understood." Echoing William James and Kenneth Burke, Mariani suggests that language, especially literary language, can be used to reverse the binary of war and peace; in the hands of skilled writers, "the rhetoric of war may be turned *against* war." Thus, very quickly in the semester that binary was replaced by terms like violence (personal, structural, symbolic), nonviolence, complicity, conflict resolution, sustainability, social and economic justice. (Yes, we were reading Galtung also.)

I said "I taught" Merwin's poem, but I should have said "my students and I taught one another." Some of us immediately observed the poem's irony. Some noted its circular construction, recalling a version of the old English proverb we had encountered at the beginning of the semester: "Peace breeds plenty, plenty breeds pride, pride breeds ambition, ambition breeds war, war breeds poverty, poverty breeds peace." Others were struck by the seemingly nonsensical statement "The dead will think the living are worth it"—and we all reflected on its implications to the concept of peace. One student mentioned the similarity to "The Unknown Soldier," the 1968 song by The Doors, which also makes a point about the brutal cyclicality of war ("Wait until the war is over / and we're both a little older"). Later—unfortunately too late—I came across Robert Scholes's brilliant essay "Reading Merwin Semiotically," in which he offers a key piece of information. Merwin's poem is actually an adaptation of a folk ditty sung by soldiers and sailors in different theaters of war (to use a misleading phrase) during the twentieth century:

> *It is sung to the stirring tune of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," its words beginning with "When the war is over we will all enlist again" repeated several times, and concluding with a variety of expletivious lines, ranging from "We will, like hell we will" to "In a pig's ass hole we will." The folk song is based on a simple ironic reversal—we will enlist again is maintained until the last line, where that sentiment is firmly rejected.*

Scholes recalls singing the song himself during the Korean War. Other accounts link the opening verse to another Civil War era song, "When Johnny Comes Marching Home." Whatever the source, as Scholes argues, "Merwin has made his poem by re-reversing the sentiment of the folk song, saying, in effect, we think we won't enlist again, but, fatally, we will, we will."

What I offered at the end of the session was the broadside version of "When the War Is Over" reproduced in Lawrence Rosenwald's Library of America anthology *War No More: Three Centuries of American Antiwar and Peace Writing*. As Rosenwald argues, this version, with its striking image of blood dripping from the bottom line of the text, and taking up the remainder of the page, treats the subject with no ambiguity, providing "a vivid and powerfully negative image of the war the poem refers to." The anonymously created broadside is also the subject of an extensive analysis in James D. Sullivan's *On the Walls and in the Streets: American Poetry Broadsides from the 1960s*. Sullivan sheds some light on the historical context of the broadside, explaining that it was most likely distributed at a peace rally or poetry reading in 1967. He also notes that while the broadside sharpens the poem's irony (it was originally printed in red on white paper), it forecloses other ways of reading it: "the voice that speaks of pride and tranquility to come is already blood-spattered, already complicit in the violence before the audience begins to attend to the words themselves." Indeed, the broadside seems to remove any hint of environmental and political justice that can be found in the middle part of the poem, before that heavily alliterated, heavily ironic final line. For all its raw emotional impact, the image that accompanies the text takes all the strangeness out of

the poem, so that the poem no longer refuses to "make sense"; nothing is left out, wished for, half-articulated. There is frankly no hope remaining in the broadside version.

The comparison of the two versions taught us something simple yet important about the role of literature (not just irony but ambiguity as well) in attempting to critically understand peace. The way the poem ends suggests that all ideals eventually lead to violence; sharing an ecological and political sensibility with Thoreau, Merwin concludes that we are always at some level complicit in war. But this is not what we think while we are reading the poem in real time, as it were, following the contrapuntal movement of syntax and versification, attuning ourselves to its unfolding meanings. This is not what we think while we are tracing its progressive figures of hope (hardly corrupt in themselves) or reflecting on the memorable line "the dead will think the living are worth it" (another surprising reversal). The middle parts of the poem clarify the relationship between the destruction of nature and the cycle of organized violence. In doing so, they make the irony of the final line all the more incriminating—but also potentially more productive. The deliberately vague style of "When the War Is Over" inscribes the idea of peace within the rhetoric of war.

4.

Lieberman, in his review published in 1968, notes that *The Lice* captures "the peculiar spiritual agony of our time, the agony of a generation which knows itself to be the last." That may have been true for the first American readers of Merwin's poems who encountered them in magazines like *The New Yorker* and *Poetry* or on the pages of the first edition published by Atheneum. To be sure, to many of those readers the drama of extinction and the horror of war would have been relatively abstract, not based on documentary evidence or direct experience—just as they would have been relatively abstract to Merwin himself. Still, we must acknowledge two circumstances in which these poems came into being: the recognition that, for the first time in history, society could completely destroy itself (some of the poems date back to the Cuban missile crisis of 1962) and the existence of compulsory military service in the United States (which is why the word "enlist" in the final line of "When the War Is Over" seems so apt).

In light of Lieberman's comment, I wonder if the anniversary release of *The Lice* could be seen almost as a kind of translation. Though the language remains the same, and of course there is no translator, the process involves taking a literary work out of one context and placing it in another, with inevitable losses and gains. Equivalence may be sought but never achieved, as different generations of readers come to the volume with different frames of reference, as was made clear in my undergraduate seminar. What matters, in any case, is the movement of the literary work across space and time—a kind of transposition. So what does it mean to read (or even listen to) *The Lice* today? What does it mean to call Merwin's book, as Zapruder does in his introduction, "timely and necessary"?

Half a century later, the "spiritual agony" seems to have deepened, and so has the sense of helplessness. Each year produces more data to show that Merwin's "historical pessimism" (as he expressed it on the pages of this magazine in 1980) was justified; if he is a poet of witness, he is a witness to a disappearing world. As *The Guardian* recently reported, in the last fifty years about half of the Earth's wild animals have been lost due to human activity. This unsettling fact brings to mind another line from *The Lice*: "If I were not human I would not be ashamed of anything." As much as it is "a planetary elegy," as Hank Lazer called it in 1982, Merwin's haunted and haunting book appears even more clearly now as one of the most incisive poetic treatments of the Anthropocene.

As for the topic of war, whatever statement "When the War Is Over" makes, it is intensified by the current geopolitical situation. The scale of war may not be the same as it was in the twentieth century, especially its first half, and by all measurements today's military conflicts are less violent, less frequent, and less widespread. Still, while America continues to reassert its role as a global superpower, its (mainly noncombatant) citizens "enlist" again and again by contributing their tax dollars to the grotesquely bloated military budget. War has become even more abstract because, as Daniel May notes in his article "How to Revive the Peace Movement in the Trump Era," the U.S. military policy "has shielded itself from the public" through misguided budget priorities and spending allocations, secret bombings and drone strikes, lack of congressional oversight for military operations, hiring of private contractors, and a volunteer military. As May concludes, "our wars feel so distant because they've been made more distant by design." Whether we call it "pure" or "permanent" war, this new kind of war is always underway. And it can never really be over.

Raphel comments: "We need *The Lice* now not because it is a record of a specific time and place but because it gives us a mode to experience a dysfunctional world." It is precisely against this dysfunction, this indifference, that Merwin's book, transposed from 1967 to our time, should be read.

Note: A version of this essay was presented at the conference on "Living, Reading, Teaching and Translating in a World Dominated by the Culture of War and War of Cultures" at the University of Sarajevo in September 2018.

Piotr Gwiazda is a literary scholar, translator, and poet. He is the author of two critical studies, US Poetry in the Age of Empire, 1979–2012 *(Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) and* James Merrill and W.H. Auden: Homosexuality and Poetic Influence *(Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). He is the translator of two books by Polish writer Grzegorz Wróblewski,* Zero Visibility *(Phoneme Media, 2017) and* Kopenhaga *(Zephyr Press, 2013). Gwiazda has also published three volumes of poetry:* Aspects of Strangers *(Moria Books, 2015),* Messages: Poems & Interview *(Pond Road Press, 2012), and* Gagarin Street *(winner of the Washington Writers' Publishing House Poetry Contest, 2005).*

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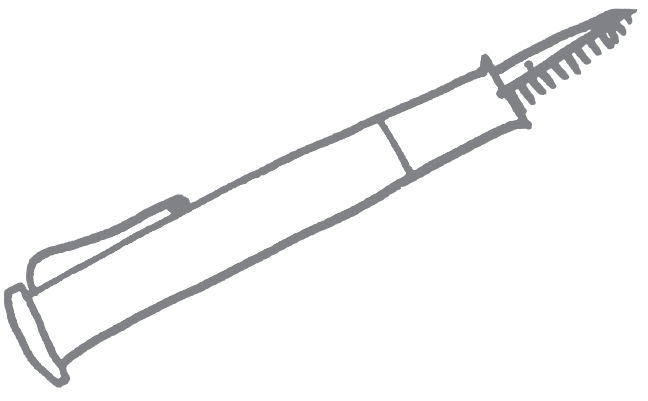
TWO POEMS

RAFAEL CAMPO

Surgery

After they handed out our new white coats,
which during the solemn ceremony
in the wood-paneled auditorium
made me feel less innocent as I pulled
on mine, they took us down to the basement.
They called it the anatomy lab, but
to me it seemed more like just a morgue, white
floor tiles, white fluorescent lights, white bodies
wrapped in plastic sheets. I thought briefly of
Casper the Friendly Ghost, but I knew
this was medical school now and they were
cadavers, not people, and certainly
not benevolent spirits. On the walls
huge prints of those famous Vesalius
drawings writhed, dissected human bodies.
Back then, I thought I'd become a surgeon,
eager to wound others to make healing
possible. I gaped up at them blankly,
saw they weren't all drawn from the same body,
and yet they were in the profoundest sense
the same body. They all wore their muscles
like rags, yet their poses suggested
not poverty, but aspiration. My
white coat became a disguise, hanging on
me like loose skin. They were criminals and
beggars, dead for centuries, yet how they
lived, how they must have suffered but were
deprived of rest—and still, how they opened
themselves to us, to our disgusted awe.
One in particular beguiled me,
unnamed except for the designation
DUODECIMA Musculo, his back
to us, caught in the act of putting his
hands up, as if he wished to demonstrate
not the flayed fibers of his existence,
through which we could see the guilty white day,
but instead cooperation, the pain of
the impossibility of escape.



Shining Down on You

Remember after class, we couldn't undress
fast enough, you leaning over me, shorts
tented out by your hard-on, Flock of Seagulls
haunting the dormitory hallway. It hurt,
but I wanted to do it again, crying out.

Or after we could marry, when you carried me
across the threshold, though it had been years
since the first time; your eyes rolled back as you
came, and I shed the same unbidden tears.
I wanted to do it again, couldn't stop crying out.

After the doctor's visit, you said it didn't matter;
she was blunt about what we could and couldn't
do. I dream about a light shining down on you,
and when we try, maybe for the last time, we shouldn't.
You say you love me anyway. I cry my heart out.

Rafael Campo teaches and practices medicine at Harvard Medical School and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston. Author of eight highly acclaimed books, he is the recipient of many honors and awards, including a Guggenheim fellowship, an honorary Doctor of Literature degree from Amherst College, a National Poetry Series award, and a Lambda Literary Award for his poetry; his third collection of poetry, Diva *(Duke University Press, 2000), was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award.*

THREE POEMS

MINNIE BRUCE PRATT

Clothed

The treading, the treadle of work, the going back
and forth between what-is and what-could-be. Me
trying to keep up. Before dawn, but warmer today,
and rainy, so this poem's coat is mottled and splotched
as first light shows through its thin cover. Pulling that
over you, as you say from your sleep, *Go out and live.*

I go, I leave you inside your pain-brocaded skin,
the skin draped in sweat. Every morning you wake up
clothed in pain. At night there's no taking that off
to put on a sleeve of poetry, no buttoning you up safe
with one more murmured word. That won't work.

Sleeve

Tonight, I lie in the dark, listening to a pulse of sound,
letters in an unknown alphabet spelling out words
that come and go through a sorrowful labyrinth.

And out of the corner of my eye, I glimpse you
passing down the dim-lit hallway, the edge of you.
Your sleeve, perhaps.

The Relation Between Words and People: After K. R. Rilke

Locked inside, the maintenance guy says. Squirrels
destroyed eight, ten, windows trying to get out.

I walk around the school in the grey, up to the grand
façade of learning, like a real estate photo, slick,
until I get up close. Then borders run to dandelions,
clover, mustard and pasture grass, and the hawk
that lives on the tower roof whimpers and mews
and dives through the awards party, the punch
cups, the cupcakes. She flies into a tree with claw
empty, and tongue still outraged. The poem as prey,
as blood luscious, elusive. The poem as the locked room.

Minnie Bruce Pratt's most recent book of poetry is Inside the Money Machine *(Carolina Wren Press/Blair). Look for her poems posted every Thursday on Facebook.*

TWO POEMS

RYO YAMAGUCHI

The Recluse

The surrogate nothing incorporates inside this is a letter an outsideness symbology
impish dark snarled at say years the weight look now the before and after
clipped onto the table night and a sense for clouds can imagine the feeling
keep thinking the sickness but it evades what part is visible or I am thinking of
prone to no answer say never sussed it out thinking damage waiting for it
the TV full of bloat bloated look at that man night my shirts in the closet
the feeling open up imagine being pulled into the sky the loneliness
wriggle itch rub ice letting the legs all the way out talk to me the dwelling
crush it it is sweet and fat the I am is clipped it's a way of speaking every second
not too fast just enough like the inside of the body being moved imagine the sky
imagine talk to me tell me about its daylight what it's like the able the ableness.

The Letter

It's a desperate satisfaction a cleanse (no hope in getting at this) paramount
as if in record glowing or the abandonment or else being followed
doneness habit and guilt another decade wiling outward a song mislaid
misremembered so then I try again and find myself in the atrium
letter unfolded through a tiling near the fountain in the airport I think
being uninfluenced but reacting categorical bracketedness inflection
hello it read and then went on the grasses swaying it has been long here it read
like sickness like ringing like shallows like blue like fabulism like confession
balance of intention no wait yes wait specks of dust on the image what everybody
en route the sound of it better distance to describe let be gone in nearness
claimed indicated inked binding no question or no question considered
see this is like a joke it is something to understand as funny
the there here the never always a bird inside the atrium caught in the letter
and toward me qua thereness it is there along with alongside
watch always always watch listen I was telling it how it is how it came to be.

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BREATHING AND INTERESTED

The bequests of Edward Thomas

NATHANIEL PERRY

I want to tell you a story about my daughter Jane Bell. Not long ago, she was nearly five at the time, we were walking to get the mail. Our driveway is long—about two-fifths of a mile from the house to the mailbox—so it is a substantial hike for someone with short legs. But the kids are always game for it. Well, the time I'm referring to now it was just me and Rache (our oldest) and Jane Bell headed down to the mail on a chilly windy day. The clouds hung overhead like a fixture with a bulb out, not looming or menacing, but something still to notice. What JB had noticed, though, was beneath the clouds: a crow and a vulture sort of circling one another. Now, I know these birds don't really interact, unless they are bickering over the same carcass, but to Jane Bell, they were engaged in some sort of skydance.

I asked her what she was looking at and she replied, "I'm watching the crows. They're interesting."

I didn't really know how to respond—by telling her they weren't both crows? By pointing out that most people don't look twice at crows or vultures? In the end I think I let her just have her moment. I would give a lot to know exactly what was passing through her head then, exactly what was 'interesting.'

After we made it to the mailbox (in it was some fabric for my wife's sewing business, clippings and stickers from a grandmother, a poetry journal, and ads), Janey immediately turned and started running back towards home with Rache on her heels. She didn't stop, and I saw her next in the house under a blanket eating a roll and waiting for me.

What I kept thinking about, as I walked the dogs back up the driveway in the cold wake of my kids who had disappeared back up over the hill, were all the times I have showed her, or any of them, something I thought was 'interesting,' or something I thought they would think was 'interesting.' Lots of times, I've been right, and they've marveled for a few respectful seconds and then run back to whatever they had been doing. Other times, they haven't even cared that much. But this crow thing, it was an 'interest' of her own making and discovering. No one had told her to find it interesting; it wasn't a big sensation on YouTube or a science video at school. It was her eye composing the world. This is exactly what Emerson was talking about nearly two hundred years ago, and something a lot of us still easily can forget how to do.

I want to turn now to a poem, and to what anyone would consider a very unusual poem to think about in the context of parenting and intuition and the world. But in the context of the 'interest' that Jane Bell suggested on our walk to the mailbox, I think it makes plenty of sense. This is a war poem by Edward Thomas and, I think, one of the most emotionally intense poems in English. It is certainly the best homefront poem I know of. And Thomas, as Matthew Hollis' wonderful recent biography reminds us, was not only a great friend of Robert Frost's, but he was a dedicated father. He was in many ways a miserable man—constantly tortured by indecision (Frost's "The Road Not Taken" has Thomas mockingly in mind), tortured by the ways his life did not match up to what he'd imagined, and tortured by his difficulties in providing for his family. But in all Thomas' poems, the knowledge of a father of young children is not far below the surface. I'm not trying to make a cloying biographical reading here, it wouldn't be there. But what is here is the same concept Jane Bell was getting at, and what her crows are getting at, of course. Let's look at the poem:

Blenheim Oranges

Gone, gone again,
May, June, July,
And August gone,
Again gone by,

Not memorable
Save that I saw them go,
As past the empty quays
The rivers flow.

And now again,
In the harvest rain,
The Blenheim oranges
Fall grubby from the trees,

As when I was young—
And when the lost one was here—
And when the war began
To turn young men to dung.

Look at the old house,
Outmoded, dignified,
Dark and untenanted,
With grass growing instead

Of the footsteps of life,
The friendliness, the strife;
In its beds have lain
Youth, love, age, and pain:

I am something like that;
Only I am not dead,
Still breathing and interested
In the house that is not dark:—

I am something like that:
Not one pane to reflect the sun,
For the schoolboys to throw at—
They have broken every one.

I think we can read the first two stanzas here as describing the speaker's own early life; so in our reading, a father's remembrance (or lack thereof) of his own childhood. What he remembers, or claims to remember, is nothing but the passage of time—months. Except, of course, this is an adult's memory; children rarely think about the months in the way we do. And he belies this adult perspective with the simile that ends the second stanza (the familiar river of time). He then brings the poem back to the present with a natural image.

In the harvest rain,
The Blenheim Oranges
Fall grubby from the trees,

These 'oranges' (Blenheim Oranges are really a cultivar of apple, used mostly in cooking), which should have been harvested by men, but are instead being harvested by rain, arrest the speaker into 'interest.' Just like Jane Bell on our walk down the driveway, we feel the poem pause and turn as the speaker looks up to consider this image. It takes him right back to memory, which he now sees with slightly more detail: "As when I was young —/ And when the lost one was here—" Notice, too, as the 'interest' takes hold, the rhyme scheme becomes less predictable as well. But what he remembers (the 'lost one,' a friend perhaps? someone not much older than a child?) brings him back to the more recent past—the beginning of the First World War.

As were all Edward Thomas' poems, this poem was written in the last few years of his life, before he was killed in the war, at Arras. So there is often something elegaic in the way we hear his voice (it was a time of vast cultural elegy as well), but this poem feels full too of the difficulty of preserving what little the world still seems to offer (those good apples gone grubby and untaken). With such a tone well-established, the poem moves to its main image, the deserted and broken-eyed house.

Look at the old house,
Outmoded, dignified,
Dark and untenanted,

As is often the case with images in a poem, this one seems to have double meaning. After having described his somewhat empty memory of childhood in the early stanzas, the reader immediately connects the empty house to the speaker of the poem—'outmoded, dignified.' This poem in its seemingly neatly rhymed quatrains is definitely dignified, and already, in the swirl of art in the early 20th century, maybe a little outmoded too. It is a poem that is no longer a child (carefree, new), but it has been, at points, full of "Youth, love, age, and pain." But then, not content with the simple metaphor, Thomas draws the connection himself with his lucid and chilling refrain—"I am something like that":

Only I am not dead,
Still breathing and interested
In the house that is not dark:—

And this is it—the moment where the poem explodes out of its historical moment and into the realm of universal human experience. The word 'interested' would be the most noticeable word in the stanza even without its connection to the anecdote with which I began this essay. With its amazing ear-boggling rhyme with 'dead,' the word almost resurrects the dead in its offness. But it is also off in diction; it is a word that seems scientific, observational, uncommitted. We expect, in this elegiac mode, on the heels of the 19th century, something more like 'I pine' for the undarkened house, or I am 'griefstricken,' or who knows what. But 'interested' throws the reader back on her heels. We are 'breathing and interested' and that is a pretty solid definition of what it means to be alive. When Jane Bell looked up at those birds, she did not see a cold excluding sky, she did not complain immediately about the wintry wind puffing her wispy hair out around the rim of her pulled-down homemade hat, but she saw two black birds who, to her, were not dark. The world

was enlightened by their presence—and she, though she may not have been able to put it into words, wanted to know how they did it. Or perhaps she just wanted to watch them do it. She was, suddenly, interested.

Now, I'll finish looking at the poem in a minute (I know we can't leave it off there without some fussing), but let's keep thinking about that word 'interested.' How do we cultivate this kind of interest? Both in our kids and in ourselves? Is it an interest that we can share? It is, I think, an awareness of paradox, an awareness of suddenly shifting expectations, an awareness, of course, of beauty, but also an awareness of the beauty of experience. I think, too, it is something we can practice. Here's an example from outside the parenting or poetry world. We keep a small group of chickens, whose numbers fluctuate based on the availability of laying hens in our area and the hunger and tenacity of our local hawks and owls. At the moment, we are down to only three hens and one rooster. Though we have so few, the hens are young and have audaciously laid eggs all through the winter, so they've been a real surprise. The rooster, as are many of his tribe, is a renowned jerk in our family, though he does admittedly do his job. He has of late been picking on the smaller of the hens—chasing her around, dominating her endlessly in the various ways that happens (. . .), and basically making me wonder if he knows something I didn't know, like if she was sick or hurt or something along those lines. Now you can't take a chicken to the vet, so there's not really anything I'd do if she were sick, but you still worry about any creature under your direct care, so I've been worrying.

When I went out to shut the coop last night, I noticed she wasn't in with the others, and I found her hunkered down in the leaves up by the edge of the fenceline. She saw me coming to check on her and hightailed it—as only a hen can do, with wild squawking and windmilling feet—into the coop. As I bent to look in the little grated window on the back of the coop to see if I could get a better look at her, she popped her head up into the window, just inches from my nose. It so startled me, and the look on her face (if chickens compose their looks) was one of such wide-eyed surprise to see me there, that I fell back laughing and laughing. Seconds after that I noticed from her rear feathers that she may indeed be a little sick, so I stopped my laughing and resumed my mild state of concern. However, it is that moment of laughter that gives me pause. What is that part of the mind that reacts to things how they ought to be reacted to, instead of always filtering observations through the context of the moment, or through what the mind has been engaged in prior to the moment? The hen's face was funny, even though her being sick was certainly not funny, and for a brief moment of relief, I found it funny.

It is easy to get mad at our kids when they lose focus, or stop paying attention ten seconds after they promised they would give us their full attention. But it seems imperative to find a way to differentiate between lapses in focus and the sudden onset of 'interest.' Kids are, of course, interested in 'the house that is not dark,' because most of them (thankfully) have not had much experience with the dark kind. And even when they have, the light tends to dominate. But parents are often on the other side of that slide. We forget about the house with light; we have to remind ourselves, as Thomas reminds himself, that we are indeed 'breathing' and still 'interested.' Thomas in fact, in the last stanza of the poem (which we *will* look at), tries to pull back from the power of that breathing self, but he doesn't fully leave it. The reader leaves the poem if not with hope, then with the awareness of awareness, which is certainly more than darkness. And we can keep this in mind with our kids. We have to be aware that they are aware of the world in flux, with all its sudden changes and paradoxes and moods.

The human world often seems, to us and to them, somehow controllable and predictable (though it really isn't of course). The natural world, or non-human world, or whatever you want to call it, though, is often the essence of interest. There are a thousand things to catch the eye—the hue of morning light laid up against a tree trunk, a flock of sparrows rising suddenly out of the bracken at the edge of the woods, a cardinal hopping and hunting in a patch of muddy winter cover-grass, the surprising green of the pine, the bamboo someone improbably planted twenty years ago. We can notice these things, and we notice our kids noticing them. We can then take this understanding of the peripatetic eye back in the house and be a little less judgmental when things shift suddenly, when interest moves our kids' minds (and our own minds) away from the moment.

And, weirdly, this can lead us to the end of the poem. Thomas repeats his refrain, now darkly considered:

> *I am something like that:*
> *Not one pane to reflect the sun,*
> *For the schoolboys to throw at—*
> *They have broken every one.*

Though this seems to pull us away from the hopefulness, or awareness at least, of being 'breathing and interested,' it doesn't quite. The observation seems almost sort of a denouement in the poem, or a deflation of what it had previously given the reader. We are not surprised to see Thomas return to grief and the adult awareness of loss, but it does not undo the 'interest' from the previous stanza. In my reading, in fact, it throws it into greater relief. The speaker is both 'breathing and interested,' *and* terrifically fractured and sad. I intimated in the last paragraph that this ending has something to do with being outside, and it seems significant that the poem stays *out* of the house. The speaker is indeed standing in the non-human world (or at least not under a roof) when he makes this final observation. His being interested, and outside, has allowed him to understand his contradictory but very human position—he is both alive and like the dead he is mourning. Maybe Jane Bell, though not thinking about death, was having a similar awareness of contradiction; the birds were not the same but were acting the same. The sky was grey, perhaps, but not the grey she'd expected. Who knows? She realized something almost unnamable, saw herself as part of a much larger thing, and was interested, breathing and alive.

Let's turn our discussion of Thomas to a poem he wrote for one of his daughters. I think it gets at this interest in the context of parenting a bit differently, and in perhaps a more direct way. It is the third poem in a suite of four 'Household Poems,' one written for each of his three children and one for his wife. This is the one is for his youngest daughter:

Myfanwy

What shall I give my daughter the younger
More than will keep her from cold and hunger?
I shall not give her anything.
If she shared South Weald and Havering,
Their acres, the two brooks running between,
Paine's Brook and Weald Brook,
With pewit, woodpecker, swan and rook,
She would be no richer than the queen
Who once on a time sat in Havering Bower
Alone, with the shadows, pleasure and power.
She could do no more with Samarcand,
Or the mountains of a mountain land
And its far white house above cottages
Like Venus above the Pleiades.
Her small hands I would not cumber
With so many acres and their lumber,
But leave her Steep and her own world
And her spectacled self with hair uncurled,
Wanting a thousand little things
That time without contentment brings.

I love this kind of poem—the sort that shatters all expectations from the very beginning. That third line—"I shall not give her anything"—is just so arresting and surprising, the reader reads on newly centered on what the poem has to say. This is a poem that doesn't focus on the 'interest' of the first poem with as much clarity, but it is there beneath the surface of the poem's conclusions. Let's look at how Thomas gets there. After claiming he won't give his daughter anything, Thomas moves along to suggest all the things she might have had from him (and, since this is a poem, he, in a sense, is giving her anyway), which in this poem are mostly places and their non-human inhabitants. Thomas was a great walker and bicyclist—he knew enormous swaths of countryside and their country lanes by heart—and for him, there maybe were no greater things than small sights like "Paine's Brook and Weald Brook, / with pewit, woodpecker, swan and rook." The pair of proper nouns gives the little girl all at once both pain and wellness ('weald' being a forest, but 'weal' meaning something like 'well' or 'good'), and the animals suggest the presence of life beyond and behind our human ones.

Thomas was a great walker and bicyclist—he knew enormous swaths of countryside and their country lanes by heart—and for him, there maybe were no greater things than small sights. . . .

Now Thomas clearly loves these things. We can tell by the way he sets these named places and things in the context of the meter and rhyme of this poem[1]—so why not 'give' them to his little daughter? Perhaps by withholding the names and places, Thomas hopes to keep awake in his daughter her native awareness of the world, to let her own original imagination name and dictate and become interested in the world around her. She will one day have these things and others like them, but perhaps she does not yet need them. He continues the poem by suggesting that these names, the beauty in these places, are indeed riches—the little girl becomes a kind of queen in the subsequent lines—but she is not a happy queen. She, with her future speculative human riches, is "Alone, with the shadows, pleasure and power." How different from the bird-encrusted brooks we just passed over . . . The poem then

imagines as Myfanwy's gift the universe entire; it moves from England out to the Near East (all the exotic sand and silk and glitter of the place are captured by the single name of Samarcand) and then further out to some imagined kingdom of mountains and cottages with its lonely ruling 'white house' and up to the stars, where Venus rules in the image above the seven sisters of the darkened sky.

So he has both given her and not given her these things. They are given in language by being present in the poem, but are withheld as true gifts. They are gifts he has imagined giving her but has decided against. Why? Because he has a better gift for her. He will

> *. . . leave her Steep and her own world*
> *And her spectacled self with hair uncurled,*
> *Wanting a thousand little things*
> *That time without contentment brings.*

The image of home returns the girl to her innocence first off. She is no longer the sad stately queen from the earlier lines, but is again a quiet disheveled curious little girl (we read the curiosity in the metonym of those glasses perhaps). But in that innocence is also crucial knowledge—the knowledge of 'her own world.' Thomas was fully in love with his own world. As I said before, he knew the countryside and the country lanes and his country neighbors and probably individual trees better than most people know their friends. So this, for Thomas, was the ultimate gift, the thing you already have. It is important to notice that he does give that local world its name—Steep—reminding us again that language is important in shaping the world, but now it is a word that belongs too to his daughter and her imagination, which is, we presume, the true ruler of 'her own world.'

Thoreau and Emerson, of course, go on at great length about our need to travel in our own worlds, to locate the marvelous and wonderful in the grounds we find around us. In fact the American nature writing tradition is full of this kind of exploration of what the poet George Scarbrough calls 'the county world'—the near world, the personal world. But these writers almost exclusively talk about this kind of understanding of the world in the context of solitude, a single man or woman out exploring, understanding and composing the world. Edward Thomas, though, in this poem and in others may be one of the few writers I can think of to link this kind of understanding of beauty and knowledge also to the role of the father or mother. Certainly the young Myfanwy here is a picture of semi-content solitude—but, like the house at the end of "Blenheim Oranges," she is being watched. So Thomas takes up the classic stance of the parent—full of knowledge, and unsure how to give it to his child or not even sure if he wants or needs to give it to her.

Consider for a moment how the poem ends, again on a seemingly down note. The little girl sits uncontented and destined to remain in a world without contentment. But these lines, as in the first poem we looked at, make for more of a paradoxical ending than one might at first think. Haven't we just learned in the first half of the poem that the contentment of desires is either impossible or unwise? Little Myfanwy has already been the queen of the universe in this poem, and that contentment, that ultimate fulfillment, did nothing to make her future-self less inquisitive or less needy for more knowledge, more names for the things she finds. So I think the parent has to read those last lines as not so much an indictment of his or her inability to find happiness for their children or to give it to them, but instead as a realization that somewhere in being unfulfilled *is* the chance at happiness. To always be needing to know more, to be always wondering what a bird is saying or where the pewit nests, is to be always trying to understand the world (never caring, Thomas suggests, if we own it or not). These 'thousand little things' are not, in my reading, the smartphones and hair-bows and half-mocha caramel iced soy venti lattes of our contemporary world, but instead are more akin to the ten thousand things of Taoism, the (seemingly) little things that literally make the world—woodpeckers, rooks, pain and Paine's brook.

So Thomas, at the end of the poem, knows what all of us know—that the world is difficult and sad, and that we can never have enough of it. But he also knows that contained within that fact is also all the joy of being in the world. We cannot prepare our children for what the world won't give them, but we can let them take what it will give them without getting in the way. I hope that is what I did for Jane Bell that day on the driveway. She hasn't mentioned the two birds since then—they did not bring her contentment I suppose, but they did bring her the knowledge of it. She was 'interested,' as Myfanwy clearly is at the end of Thomas' poem, and that in itself is enough. When you are 'interested' in something, that interest almost assumes at its start that you won't find out all that you want or need to know. When in the fall I kneel to inspect a flowering roadside weed, I learn nothing other than what my hands and eyes can tell me. But that is OK, or more than OK. I may even forget to look up the name later, but it is the interest in the moment that keeps me breathing, that keeps us moving through the world with our eyes open. I hope, beyond anything else I can give her, that I can give that to Jane Bell, or leave her to it, more accurately. I hope she will not go to war like Thomas and so many of his friends, and I hope she will not become ensnared in the glittering constellations of things she thinks she wants to have. But I can't stop her. I can instead, like Thomas in his beautiful poems, give her the want, the desire, to see those thousand good little things, and always be interested in them. And, god willing, I'll be breathing for a good long while beside her as she goes.

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Note

1. Note, for instance, how for this poem written in iambic tetrameter, the sixth line makes for an unusual metrical gesture indeed. One must read the names of those two creeks as containing two full stresses each to make metrical sense of the line. Thomas intends the reader to linger over these names and savor them.

FOUR POEMS

for Lucie Brock-Broido

GABRIEL FRIED

Correspondence from Madam Rachel, Purveyor of Eternal Youth, to Mister Walter Potter, Anthropomorphic Dioramist, ca. 1880

Most Splendid Immortalist: Herewith you have a letter sent by my solicitor, written
in my final leapt year, my sliver of pound cake—the one meant to even off *everything*.

I have chosen my undergarments for the first epoch of bloodlessness:
the whalebone crinoline will reach you shortly. (I would never

eat a creature but am eager to be lowered indefinitely *in*.) The rest
of my costume I leave to your discretion; I have seen the perfection

of your kitten-wedding, the toms in their breeks, the kates in their mantuas—
though I trust you'll leave the Aquitaine hunting cloak for the feast of St. Hubert.

I find I am concerned more so with pose: how should I *be* in perpetuity?
What everlasting gesture of impulsiveness, epiphany, or wonderment?

And to remain unwrinkled, must I be upright? If so, I fear the chopines
impractical with no servants to support me; opera slippers, then, with tights.

Meanwhile, a final posthumous concern from my divan of ice: what word will you use?
It shan't be stuffed! Perhaps you will inspire one: it can be your *Leotard*, *Hazard*, or *Shrapnel*,

your namesake's transliteration to *Cyrillic*. O! I'll be the eponym
of any stasis you decree, in whatever circus or garden party. Until then

I remain hopeful, however stiffly phrased and awkward, that you'll agree
to my request—to Taxiderm Me.

"Man's Emotional Support Marmoset Disrupts Las Vegas Flight"
—*Travel & Leisure*

I was a Buffy-tufted child,
fourteen centimeters high,
southernmost explorer of my kind
in the forests outside Saquerma.
I perched atop the fronds
of the tallest jelly palm,
refusing to bury my snout in sap
like some moral in a colonial story.
My auricular quiffs were handsome
as they sound, blown back,
filmic, by the airstream
skimming off the Atlantic.
May I say *hematopoietic chimera*
now? It's what the sonneteers
are waiting for. (See their pencils
already floreting like balsa trees
in a storm.) My cells
are congenial; my marrow
could save you, second cousin
thrice removed. Let me stay here,
snug & private as a pocket
watch, far above the driest
forests beneath us. No one
will notice; I promise to be
as silent as a Pampas fawn
or the girl asleep in 17A,
ringlets like soursop petals
pressed against the glass.
I promise to do what
the overheard, overhead
voices ask.

Origin Story

I will stagger from the forest, a boy
transformed into a different boy,
dragging his leg like a story he's heard
of woundedness. When they see me, they will
drop their tools (their chalk and their jackhammers)
and rush to me, all of them at once now more
than men: champions and protectors.
They'll want to know everything, want to tell
their wives they asked the right questions.
Who am I? Where do I come from? What has—
what is the word—*befallen me?* I'll tell them
nothing of the nothing there is to tell;
that is no longer my biography,
and a silent child is also wise.
But after twenty-seven minutes I'll reveal
the one true lie about myself I know.
Then they'll take me to the stables for fitting.

Hagiography

It is tempting to make mothers out of art these days.
We've left the Rust Belt; it's art that mothers us.
With no one to tell us our birth stories,
we invent them. For instance, I was born in a painting
of a tent. From inside I saw a triquetra of the world
through the ripples of parted canvas. In the distance,
the chimney smoke of Lebanon, Pennsylvania.
Closer, the tallow-scented light, the right wing
of an angel of the antepenultimate order.
I emerged immaculate and high-collared
as a frescoed duke, a Jewess at communion
before a ragged congregation of miners.
Within the caravansary, I greeted every weary
traveler with a nod and gift: a minute horse encased
by a clear rubber ball, for instance. It was the Age of Embroidery,
the horse's saddle stitched with the tartan
of my stepsister's clan, an ancient band
of highway robbers stealing the King's English
to mete among the milliners, mutes, and foremen.
You see how this story goes? Is it not exactly as I told you?
Italianate and poorly framed, the painting I am born in
hangs in a diner by the jukebox, waiting for an urchin
to start the hymnal with a quarter. Although I am no patron
saint, no tomboy; I am no son of god. God is a verb
in this painting. Use it wisely and wildly.

Gabriel Fried is the author of two collections of poetry, The Children Are Reading *(Four Way Books, 2017) and* Making the New Lamb Take *(Sarabande Books, 2007), named a Best Book of 2007 by the* St. Louis Post-Dispatch. *He is the longtime Poetry Editor at Persea Books.*

YOU'VE HEARD THIS BEFORE, THE ONLY WAY OUT IS THROUGH.

KAYLEB RAE CANDRILLI

When my family burnt it all, we
even burnt the dolls. I write
about this all the time, but have you
ever seen anything like it? A pit
of ashes and dozens of porcelain
hands, sprouting up like girlish
weeds. So far in this life, I have
heard a number of unacceptable
apologies and they have all begun
with "I'm sorry" and ended with
OxyContin. It's a shame
the Pennsylvanian landscape
is just waterfalls, coal, and
pharmaceutical drugs. I wish
there were more libraries and less
violence, but I have always been so
painfully hopeful. On Facebook
yesterday, my sister's boyfriend
messages, "she's abandoned me
at the airport, I don't know what
to do" and I resist the urge
to tell him: that's what she does
to all of us. Instead I write back,
"Oh no!" There are so many ways
to be angry at just one thing.
I haven't seen my sister in 9 years
and sometimes I have a temper
with my hand-fruit, bite it, a little
too hard, because chewing
is such a frustrated act
to being with. At 7 years old
my father said he was going
to push me all the way around
on the swing-set; I leapt off
at the peak, airborne and so
sure of his strength. Centripetal
or centrifugal, neither
matter if your face meets
the ground, alive with blood and
mulch. At 11 my father told me
the legend of Pope Joan, and I loved
how she hid her her-ness in plain
sight. So invisibly woman. When she
gave birth, and was put to death,
I imagined she must have been raped.
She must have. I believe strongly
that had I known one trans person
as a child, I'd have half as many scars
as an adult. I could have come
around to this body so much sooner
and without as many cigarette burns,
my whole body a cratered and earth-
bound moon. Often, when I am drunk
and alone, white men ask me
what I have against white men
if I want to look like one, and then
they follow me all the way home.
It seems every man in America
has been taught to stalk real quiet
in a forest of dry leaves. Myself included.
I am not a man, nor do I desire to be,
but I suppose I have always been
a hunter, armed and unwilling
to consider my own shortcomings.
After I woke from my double
mastectomy, I thought about the day
my father killed two doe with one bullet
and we butchered them both, right
there and then. There is two
of everything worth having two of.
Now I am so visibly trans, I am being
photographed in white light, my scars
lit like dogwood crowns. It's hard
to know what to make of this, when
all I have ever known is blood
red and a wilderness. Recently
a new cloud was introduced
to the atlas, known for its apocalypse
lip color, its mouth opening dark-deep—
like a sinkhole, or your trans lover's eager
and previously abused mouth. Nobody
wants to be lonely, least of all me.
Maybe I am interested in clouds
because I am one, stratus sliced post
surgery, or maybe it's because I'm an air
sign and have been missing my family
for years, despite all their lava,
all their hot angry fuel. My mother
is a better whistler than me, but
I think we both understand air,
and our mouths, and the best
ways to call for help. Listen,
there is a razor in the apple
and the apple is the earth. Listen,
my nightmares are dreams in which
everyone walks the same direction—
that rhythmic lockstep. Both of my
grandmothers considered abortion.
And can you imagine?
Being so close to nothing.

Kayleb Rae Candrilli is a 2019 Whiting Award Winner in Poetry, the author of What Runs Over *(YesYes Books, 2017), and the author of* All the Gay Saints *(Saturnalia Books, 2020). They live in Philadelphia with their partner.*

TRIPLE SONNET FOR SAD ASIAN GIRLS

DOROTHY CHAN

I'm watching a video about sad Asian girls
who reenact scenes from their Asian families:
one girl plays the other girl's mother,
saying to her, "Why are you eating so much?"
the bowl of rice and kimchi dish
on the dinner table, and "I want to go back
to Korea next year, so lose some weight,"
and I want to cry, because sometimes,
I too, am a sad Asian girl with demanding
parents who want to go back to Hong Kong
every year, and sure, everyone's got
family drama, but my mother ran off
with my father in her twenties—marriage,
coming to America, away from her parents.

And I know my mother misses her sisters
every day, separated by an ocean,
or a flashback to when I was born:
snowy Albany, my mother crying,
begging my father to move back to Hong Kong,
she missed her pajama stalls and medicine shops
and taro desserts and family celebrations
gathered around a mango cake—she didn't understand
America, and I don't understand Hong Kong—
her Hong Kong, the way she grew up
with two sisters, giggling after dinner,
running down to buy shrimp crackers and British
chocolates once the meal was over,
and I'm watching a video about sad Asian girls,

thinking about my mother and I fighting
at one of those cheap cafes by my grandparents',
tasting my own tears as I swallowed my toast
with condensed milk, and I never cry,
but deep down I *am* a sad Asian girl
watching her parents fight in their homeland,
and I think about my mother at nineteen
falling in love with my father at thirty-three
and moving to America at twenty-five,
and I won't ever understand her Hong Kong
or her America, and I think back to me
at five, my mother telling me a story
about her favorite doll, how she held it like a daughter.
A daughter was all she ever wanted.

Dorothy Chan is the author of Revenge of the Asian Woman *(Diode Editions, March 2019),* Attack of the Fifty-Foot Centerfold *(Spork Press, 2018) and the chapbook* Chinatown Sonnets *(New Delta Review, 2017). She was a 2014 finalist for the Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Fellowship, and her work has appeared or is forthcoming in* The Academy of American Poets, The Cincinnati Review, The Common, Diode Poetry Journal, Quarterly West, *and elsewhere. Chan is the Poetry Editor of* Hobart *and the former Editor of* The Southeast Review. *Starting in Fall 2019, she will be an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Visit her website at dorothypoetry.com.*

FIVE POEMS

TOMAŽ ŠALAMUN

Translated from the Slovenian by Brian Henry

Totems on Bank Roofs

There is no difference between a murderer
and a sip of wine. Delight is stopping
the flow of blood. Let life
wilt on the hand. Let crystals
evaporate. Everyone finds his position,
dead or alive. The poet is a craftsman
who makes social balance possible
for an intangible presence. Souls kneel
in front of a calf first. It also feels
an itching and yearning,
but the calf is placed in warm
soapy water. Every animal has
its bunker. Only we are cathedrals
in which memory doesn't get lost.

Gay Bar

A black vulture crushes my bones.
A white vulture in a photograph.
Houses open their mouths, swallow
flowers. Lightning doesn't choose. I brushed
the spruces by hand. A car has a tire, a farmhand
a whip, trash cans are falling. We have
two natures. The vulture circles the belfry
at Ptujska Gora. Gingerbread hearts, red
blood, something awaits! Dawn bangs into
the bricks of Brooklyn. I'm still asleep
in silvery milk. When the wind strokes the grass,
I'll be in front of the house. Crickets will burn the air.
The sound will be like in the hall where
there's plush lining in Christ's tomb.

Christ

If I swallowed mother, fish would rip her apart
in my throat. That's why I'd prefer nailing her
to a gun. Let her flutter like a flag with wet paws,
is what the boy with the bundle thought before
falling asleep. For a long time he dreamed of nothing,
then suddenly of Christ eating kohlrabi.
Why are you doing that? he asked him. Why
don't you leave the kohlrabi alone? Christ didn't know
what to do because no one had ever reproached him
with greenery before. What should I eat, he said.
Hey, said the boy with the bundle, let's go hunting,
you'll catch a rabbit. And they went.
And the light that streamed from Christ's stomach
grew much weaker, so they started
to stumble over stones. I'm not skilled,
the Lord said, I've never caught
a rabbit. Leave that to me, said the boy
with the bundle, but there's no light. And Christ
ate another kohlrabi and immediately
lit up again. You're swindling me, said the boy.
The light would need to shine anyway.
The rabbit will be just for me if you don't
straighten up. And it was so bright
that the rabbits were like festivals. And one
gave them an eye and another a nose and this
was enough and no one died.

Boiling Point and Reclined Cleopatra

Perfume, pillows' perfume, again
perfume. He hangs conical photos.
His internship is subordinate.
Make sure, profiteer, Melisa isn't cracked
against the trunk. Boards play outside
at midnight. This means nothing. Everything
happens between the third and fourth hour
of the morning. I entered the room.
Pylons, submerged. Who is responsible
for the pressure? Here, in Dolina, we are under
a wet mountain. The mountain is not wet.
He puts its whiskered feet on green food.
Maybe he will loot the fresco. Meteors
are on the wrapped field. The silver is parallel.

Pythagoras' Porters

The clones are made of carrara
marble. It's hard

for them to survive. Tufts of feathers
rise out of houses. In vain.

With longing for this, which
rhymes. My bed

twists buildings. They bring bread.
They jump from the car.

They listen to the radio. To an engine
and a door closing.

If I want to, may I put
bigo on the celery?

From five boys
one thick beam will grow.

Slovenian poet Tomaž Šalamun (1941–2014) published more than 50 books of poetry. His most recent books in English are Andes *(Black Ocean, 2016) and* Druids *(Black Ocean, 2019). His many honors include the Prešeren Prize, the Jenko Prize, the Poetry and People Prize, the Njegoš Prize, and the Europäsche Prize.*

Brian Henry is the author of eleven books of poetry, most recently Permanent State *(Ahsahta, 2019). His translation of Aleš Šteger's* The Book of Things *(BOA, 2010) won the Best Translated Book Award. He also has translated Tomaž Šalamun's* Woods and Chalices *(Harcourt, 2008) and Aleš Debeljak's* Smugglers *(BOA, 2015).*

FOUR POEMS

RYAN VAN WINKLE

The Street Lights Flick On

We know the rain must come
but it holds its wet tongue
in the sky. We aren't children

so mom doesn't call and we don't
out stay the night playing in halos
of streetlights. We lock ourselves indoors

with screens. The air electric.
We don't even corner a bottle,
talk of loss or luck. I miss

the way I could talk. I don't talk
like that anymore. There's too many words
racing in wires, that damned rain hovering

voluptuous as peaches. Words so tangible
you could eat them, like any hungry human.
Of course, the street lights flick on,

and tonight becomes just another
overripe, almost vanished thing.
And my boys, their mother calls

each syllable
of their names
into gloam.

Sphinx

I send you the quiet wait of the Sphinx
guarding ghosts beneath the sand while
the desert heats then cools again
in case you forgot they were here
and once we knew how to be patient.

After Glenday

The Butterfly

Today an election and yesterday
the fall of Rome, Troy and then

flags on fire, arctic freeze, then
butterfly wings, the jar, the lid
we forgot to poke holes in
and my sister cried
as I held her, promised
to find more tomorrow,
even in the sooted rain.

Two Shells

I.

MOSES

I place the shell
on a shelf above our toilet
and the next day, I move it a little
to the left and weeks later
you move it to the right.
You find a twin in the sand
and when I am almost asleep
when I think there can be no more
to the belittled day or silent night,
you place it in my open hand, as if
it were the sea itself
parting between us.

II.

MOLLUSK

She says the color purple was squeezed
from thousands of mollusks crushed

for the pigment of a royal dress.
The bus goes on, hush but full.
Everybody with purple
rushing inside them, listening—

that robot voice saying
Seven Sisters again

She says, "Don't get off."
But I do.

Her eyes slip down
a shade, coloured blue.

A couple more small things squashed
for no princely reason.

Ryan Van Winkle is an American poet living in Edinburgh. His second collection, The Good Dark*, won the Saltire Society's 2015 Poetry Book of the Year award. As a member of Highlight Arts he has organized festivals and translation workshops in Syria, Pakistan and Iraq. He was awarded a Robert Louis Stevenson fellowship in 2012 and the Jessie Kesson fellowship at Moniack Mhor in 2018.*

ALTERNATE MYTHOLOGIES OF RAGE & EXILE, IN FRAGMENTS

GEORGE ABRAHAM

The video game Assassin's Creed: Origins *follows an ancient Egyptian assassin named Bayak, and his wife Aya, who work to protect the people under Ptolemy XIII's rule. Their son was martyred by the Ptolemic police state, and so the game follows Bayak & Aya's quest to dismantle the entire state via a chain of assassinations.*

or was i the wind that sang the river -bed into gentle
quiet & not the doe whose stone -soft tongue could trust
that water? or was i

the parted flesh which lies, nerveless
between cartilage & skin beneath the nose's wide bridge
& not the steel that pierced it? that i could altar
the body's topology

& not forget its former
shell— that i could unbecome with nail & steel without
perishing in the crucifixion— when i bleed i bleed soft
as stone's ripple & it is tame, unrevolutionary
in leak—that i could even witness myself outside of my self—

a stranger calls me *militant*, says *smile for the picture, you look like you could kill someone* like she forgot our gods razed temples before we
wrote them into patient—for what is a god if not
a mxn in the sky we crafted into our own image? a white
woman says *you were tender once* & that is her imagined
holy: my aunt sees steel in my nostril & asks if i've forgotten
my roots & that is a holy she clings to: i set fire
in another stranger's mouth & that is a holy i can
run from

suppose the stranger's mouth was instead a country
who birthed me in swaddling ash & dared call me ungrateful—

suppose, instead, i run— & split
cities in my graceless path like it was instinct: i saw a man
who set fire to me before in the reflection of a glass window
& my body wasn't & i fled before even processing the ghost
i witnessed:

in another reality, i would smile like i smile
at weddings while burning history or—
i would quench my fists who wanted
to wear him crimson & the truth is both realities scared me
in that i saw too much of myself in every reflection & so i fled—
& so i soft— my own defense mechanism—

⋆

in the video game,
a man with skin-thick beard scales the Alexandria skyline
in search of blood & i find him beautiful: i find him funeral
laughter—or middle finger to israeli security camera—for what is
an ancestor if not a mxn in the sky with a wound
for a heart? if not tantrum of stone & ricochet: a hunt
for false gods in a dark we can bleed into & become—
here is a heart: screaming: a blade: a blade:
a puncture: here he is anything but sacrifice until:
that knife: the work being his own: this wound being his

blood: say that knife was
instead, a police state: say his boy with that knife in his heart
was a wound: no— his boy was a wound in his heart
like a knife & so he flies & so
he softens bloodshed: slices
the air & 3 bodies— night pooling onto
pavement in a winded dance of silent feet & bless
those hands who pulverize the skulls of man with remnants
of their crumbling
citadels: the hands who hunt not
the men who martyred but the state who birthed them
crimson: for god so loved that boy, He took him onto cliff's edge
& dared him to jump—

& is that not the holiest
love? a love you have to survive for—a love that dissolves
countries—i'd like to think i too was descendent of a kind
of softness that could shatter bones—

⋆

how history tells us most suicide bombers
during the second intifada were victims of home demolitions:

how history tells me all i know of resistance
is a flight of stubborn blood:

⋆

how history tells me my teita fled,
on foot, to Egypt while pregnant so her son didn't have to be
born in exile—i want to call this an act of resistance
but i can only know it as softness: when the skies birthed their blood
-ied sandstorms— when the IDF held a machine gun
to her womb— the kind of love you'd betray
a country for:
my sido's golden tear-ducts, the night his son was born
in swaddling cloth in a country he did not belong to—
my father his fists like crumbling
walls, the night i first left
home—
a doe leaps out into my brother's headlights
& he swerves wrecks himself to avoid
the bloodshed—
i hug the woman who married
the first boy i ever loved & smile, say *i'm happy for you* because i couldn't set fire to another man,
not tonight— so i dance like i mean it: i dance
& my feet pass over the ghosts of a thousand
embers: i inhale the smoke:
his trembling wedding vow: the unhinged
door frame: a hand: a hand: a quenching light—
a window: a man his night: or was it
mine:
the parking lot: a mouth: i unzip: set fire:
i do not stay: i am already mid -flight: a TSA officer's hand
to my groin: much like a wedding vow: i swear i saw him
trembling: yes: a love like stolen countries: no: a dance i
dance: i dance: i was just dancing: i was just:
[*i don't think we're looking for the same thing you: & i— i mean*] i was just: dancing:

George Abraham (they/he) is a Palestinian-American poet and Bioengineering PhD candidate at Harvard University. They are the author of Birthright *(Button Poetry, 2020) and two chapbooks,* the specimen's apology *(Sibling Rivalry Press, 2019) and* al youm *(TAR, 2017). They are a Kundiman fellow, and a recipient of the Best Poet award from the 2017 College Union Poetry Slam International. Their work can be found online at gabrahampoet.com or on Twitter: @IntifadaBatata.*

WHY NOT ME

ALICE BOLIN

When I clog my ears with cotton balls
all I hear is my weird brain rustling.
It's a knock-kneed diorama, flimsy shore
with tape and wisps the wrong texture,
perspective lines all unscrewed,
sea scene rustling inside my head.
O crap existence. Fake landlocked,
warm and weepy in the trade winds,
in our lean-to. With you, my boyfriends.
I'll hug you half to death on
my parents' sorry Scandinavian couch.
I'll construct you each a heartthrob shrine
with rosehip candles and lip slick
and the most velvet of paper.
I give and give. Sorry I'm not sorry.
You can say one thing for me,
I wear my jean vest wrong side out
and make bitchy faces at the thunder,
I strut out in the glare of this
expensive hangover and the
orange juice place embraces me,
so why do I remain so unchosen?
The wax ocean on the sick hot sand.
It's all in your head. My fingers worry
over a ridge growing between my hair,
Jesus my face is tissue paper. I'm
coming untraced. I'm rubbing off.

Alice Bolin's first book, Dead Girls: Essays on Surviving an American Obsession, *was published by Morrow/HarperCollins in 2018, and was a* New York Times *Notable Book. Her poems have been published by* Guernica, Blackbird, Washington Square, *and many other journals. Her essays have recently been in* The New York Times Book Review, Vulture, Longreads, *and* Tin House.

NO ONE HAS TO CONVINCE US

An appreciation of the work of Jericho Brown

APR Books

SPENCER REECE

What is required to be an authentically original artist is an inability to think conventionally.
—Carl Phillips

Jericho Brown, *The Tradition*
Paperback, 110 pages
Copper Canyon Press, 2019

The world is not fair. Ta-Nehisi Coates in *We Were Eight Years in Power* writes: "Nothing in the record of human history argues for divine morality, and a great deal argues against it. What we know is that good people often suffer terribly, while the perpetrators of horrific evil backstroke through all the pleasures of the world." Jericho Brown's astonishing third book of poems, *The Tradition*, is composed of wild music examining the world's unfairness, the horrific way humans are complicit in evil. Somehow he surprises us with a lush lyric; given his theme, the work is hardly dour or bleak. Throughout the book, Brown strikes two notes repeatedly on his poetic piano scale: the evil of men who are not aware of when their masculinity harms and white people in America not aware of the consequences of their whiteness. "Ganymede," the poem that opens the collection to this modern poetic symphony, grabs our attention like a cymbal smash.

Jericho Brown cannot think conventionally. The logic of his poems shakes his reader upside down. Swerves and detours happen as the lines swivel down the page. You do not end where you begin. You stop yourself. You say: Who is speaking here? You say: Do I think this? You leave the poem a little unnerved. Something awkward has taken place. Maybe you even blanch.

A twenty-two-line poem, "Ganymede" is in rough tetrameter, a beat Brown favors:

Ganymede

A man trades his son for horses.
That's the version I prefer. I like
The safety of it, no one at fault,
Everyone rewarded. God gets
The boy. The boy becomes
Immortal. His father rides until
Grief sounds as good as the gallop
Of an animal born to carry those
Who patrol our inherited
Kingdom. When we look at myth
This way, nobody bothers saying
Rape. I mean, don't you want God
To want you? Don't you dream
Of someone with wings taking you
Up? And when the master comes
For our children, he smells
Like the men who own stables
In Heaven, that far terrain
Between Promise and Apology.
No one has to convince us.
The people of my country believe
We can't be hurt if we can be bought.

The poem starts out quietly. By the end of the page, a stampede of sentiment and allusions. Or, to put it another way, the poem becomes a crazy signpost with several signs pointing in all different directions: This way to hell; This way to reparations; This way to the church; This way to a political rally. The poem conjures the boy in the arms of a god and a parent who's accepted the bargain to lose his son. We go from Greek gods to a slave on an auction block. Gods raping boys. People buying people. Some kind of heaven that involves saying sorry.

This poem provoked me. Does it not provoke you? Or is "yank" a better word here? This seems to be one of the sleights of hand of Brown with this passive art of poetry: his lines provoke with their deceptively unassuming presentation. Another poem, "Riddle," uses a similar approach:

We do not recognize the body
Of Emmett Till. We do not know
The boy's name nor the sound
Of the mother wailing. We have
Never heard a mother wailing.
We do not know the history
Of this nation in ourselves.

Won't most come to these lines with umbrage? And so it goes with "Ganymede." How is it for centuries we've accepted sexual coercion as Godly? The question mark at the end of that sentence is flexed like a bicep in a big gay gym throughout this book. Let me place this particular poem under the poetic microscope as representative of what Brown does in this book, and has been doing in his work since he appeared in print. The book reaches wide into the micro-aggressions of whiteness and tall in the direction of masculinity run amok, and all of that spins out from this opening poem, reverberating in tour-de-force poems called, "Shovel," "Bullet Points" and "Good White People." Lines like: "I know / The value of sweet music when we need to pass / The time without wondering what rots beneath our feet." Or: "Greater than the settlement / A city can pay a mother to stop crying, / And more beautiful than the new bullet / Fished from the folds of my brain." Or: "I'm ugly. You're ugly too. / No such thing as good white people." Brutal and brilliant, public and private, there's no going around these poems. I worked as a chaplain one summer in a Trauma 1 hospital where I saw more young black men die than I ever hope to see again. Reading these poems, I felt, more than the Episcopal prayer books I had with me, these poems gave voice and dignity to what I saw.

Adrienne Rich wrote: "In a history of spiritual rupture, a social compact built on fantasy and collective secrets, poetry becomes more necessary than ever: it keeps the underground aquifers flowing; it is the liquid voice that can wear through stone." In the time of a Donald Trump presidency, the poetic voices of those who have been undervalued or silenced have flooded the aquifers. Poetry has grown more multivalent. Is it wearing down the stones of injustice? I don't know. I hope.

W.H. Auden said in his famous or infamous poem for W.B. Yeats that "poetry makes nothing happen." Contrarian Auden, he'd devoted his life to poetry and his poetry, if nothing else, had made his living happen. Yeats had been a senator for the Free Irish State juxtaposed to his productive poetic life. His senator job made things happen in a practical way that the poetry books didn't. Or did they? Auden perhaps was saying poetry *seems* to be useless. But perhaps there is a sense in which poetry prepares us to act. Brown said, "a poem can do something to a person . . . but I'm not under the impression that poems are gonna get out there and suddenly everyone's gonna vote right."

Somewhere, in each poet's heart who picks up their pen and attempts to climb the oddest art of all, one that is at times the most unseen, there lies the belief that this art can be mighty. There's some hope in it, as odd as poetry is. If it can't change a nation, maybe it might change one soul.

In "Ganymede," we might imagine some of these lines coming right out of a political speech; there's a sense of a large address. Brown's first job was as a speech writer for the mayor of New Orleans before he went on to earn a PhD at the University of Houston, and his poems own the stage they are put upon and embrace multitudes, faceting themselves to a present moment much as Frank O'Hara did, although O'Hara's tune was more rambling and effusive whereas Brown so far is more condensed, lyrical and sharp.

The first six lines introduce us matter-of-factly to the story. The first line couldn't be more plain. "A man trades his son for horses." What is weird, of course, is imagining who would do that. Introduced to us as acceptable fact, there's not much room to question it. The next line introduces us to the speaker of this poem: "That's the version I prefer." This syntax, stressing that first "that" and ending the line with "prefer," lets us know that there are other versions out there, but this is the one the speaker chooses. What does our speaker like about it? "The safety of it, no one at fault, / Everyone rewarded." Introducing the word "safe" immediately suggests that there is something unsafe going on. The themes of using violence to get "living done," as he writes elsewhere, preoccupied this poet in early works where he positions speakers in coliseums. Indeed, in the first poem in his first collection, he wrote: "You can't tell / The difference between a leather belt and a lover's tongue."

Then there is a swerve in the language and the movement of the poem, one of its first *voltas*. Brown writes:

His father rides until
Grief sounds as good as the gallop
Of an animal born to carry those
Who patrol our inherited
Kingdom.

The now childless father accepts the gift of the horses. Then comes the strange phrase: "good as the gallop / Of an animal born to carry those / Who patrol our inherited / Kingdom." The grief of the loss of the child is "good"? In what sense? "The animal" seems now more than a horse, seems to be anything not Godly, including humans. And then we have "patrol our inherited / Kingdom." "Kingdom" feels Biblical. And what has the human father inherited? Loss.

What comes next is a stack of dictions. This is the opposite of a poet like George Herbert,

who frequently has poems with one diction which you might call grateful Christian obedience. James Longenbach writes on tone in *How Poems Get Made*: "ancient Greek rhetoricians used the word *tonos* (meaning, literally, a tightening or stretching, as a string on a lute might be stretched) to characterize the quality of an orator's performance of a speech." Here our speaker's throat tightens and stretches as each diction piles up. "When we look at myth / This way, nobody bothers saying / Rape." A professor could speak this line. Then: "I mean, don't you want God / To want you?" Here a teenager. Then: "And when the master comes / For our children, he smells / Like the men who own stables." Here a slave. Then "In Heaven, that far terrain / Between Promise and Apology" looks typographically like something we find in George Herbert, the language completely Christian. Academic, slang, slave, religious. Brown is using a collage effect to make sense of his world.

Poems are close to paintings. I'm not the first or last to think this. Ellen Bryant Voigt in *The Flexible Lyric* wrote that painting was actually "the sister art" to poetry. Not prose. There's a quality to poems that, like paintings in a gallery, you need to visit and revisit, and it is the revisiting that makes the work rich. But there's more to this. Longenbach, in *How Poems Get Made*, picks up the idea again: "It's understandably seductive to think of poems being made of images, just as it's seductive to think of a poem as having a voice; but like what we call the poetic voice, the poetic image is constructed from the more fundamental aspects of the medium—diction, syntax, figure, rhythm, echo." Longenbach concludes: "But even a Van Gogh painting is not made of images; it is made of minerals ground and mixed with linseed oil, then smeared on canvas and allowed to cure." Just so, Brown uses all the materials and colors on his palette to create what Auden dubbed "memorable speech." Note "God" used here twice. Note "kingdom" and "Heaven" (capitalized). Brown lays down bold strokes. "Poets, like lovers, must continually reanimate ways of doing the same thing over again no matter how enduring the achievement of previous poems," Longenbach continues: "Every poet is a beginner." Throughout Brown's work you feel this struggle to hold violence and love in the same sentence; it makes a kind of clicking sound like a Rubik's cube looking for its patterns, much as in this poem about Ganymede.

The opening poem in Brown's first book, *Please*, ended with the closing line: "Call me your bitch, and I'll sing the whole night long." The second book's opening poem closed:

. . . I cannot locate the origin
of slaughter, but I know
How my own feels, that I live with it
And sometimes use it
To get the living done,
Because I am what gladiators call
A man in love . . . love
Being any reminder we survived

In each book, in each opening poem, words play with direct address: the reader's head swivels to try to orient who is "you" and "we" and "I." All the time Brown lays down bold strokes. One horizontal stroke might stand in for love, one vertical for violence. It's a kind of genuflection the poet is doing, a kind of sign of his personal cross: it's neither overly religious nor sacrilegious, it's human.

Brown said in an interview with the *Yale Literary Magazine* in 2016:

> *a Southern black gay poet who's lived on both coasts and is several years younger than the members of the Dark Room Collective but too old to call a Millennial, with a PhD in poetry where my teachers were both Tony Hoagland and Claudia Rankine—I think some readers have a difficult time with a poet having complexities that make that poet hard to categorize, classify, and taxonomize. My goal has always been to create that difficult time with and through my poems.*

Brown's reference to Hoagland and Rankine flags the fact that the two colleagues taught together and it was partly from racial tensions between the two that Rankine created *Citizen*, a book that came out in 2014 which subtly laid out what she called "micro-aggressions" in the racially tense American world as her speaker experienced it. The book flipped poetry on its head before Trump's election, creating aftershocks with its unsuspecting lyrics that looked like newspaper reports and yet tickled the reader with provocative sublimity. Brown's "Ganymede" absorbs some of Rankine in its flat declaratives.

There's a quality to poems that, like paintings in a gallery, you need to visit and revisit, and it is the revisiting that makes the work rich.

But Hoagland? Marie Howe recently said of Hoagland, he "tore into subjects that are not comfortable." Brown takes that harp up. Brown wrote: "I hope I say something that makes people uncomfortable. If people aren't uncomfortable, I don't know why I wrote the poem, you know what I mean? I want people moved, or I want people itching." Of Hoagland Brown says: "What I know he taught me is that my poems are lyric poems, which was very useful in a time when knowing the dramatic situation of a poem meant people would call it narrative. Understanding genre and my place in it helped me write the poems that could only be mine." Before his recent death, Hoagland wrote: "Though fantasy has often been described as an escapist impulse in literature and life, in fact it also had a corrective relationship to the god of realism; it can discover pathways that can be examined, and invested in. Like free-flowing water, sometimes fantasy can find a way through and around seemingly immoveable obstructions." Could that include the fantastical Ganymede helping a poet, who is an admitted rape survivor, see a way into loving men in affirming ways, forgiving perpetrators? There's an itch.

The final turn of this deceptively simple and now complex poem comes in the last three lines, which feel like they surprise not only the reader but the maker:

No one has to convince us.
The people of my country believe
We can't be hurt if we can be bought.

Who are "us"? Who is being "bought"? This appears to be a critique of Americans' faith in consumer capitalism. Now it might be construed more narrowly as white people's belief and the "we" as a history of black people in America. It could. And why not? Has America gone amok as a god raping a kidnapped beautiful boy? Shane McCrae, in his new collection *The Gilded Auction Block*, writes more audaciously in a poem entitled "Everything I Know About Blackness I Learned from Donald Trump": "America I was driving when I heard you / Had died." Are the "us" Trump supporters? The poem swivels on its axis: it's a strategy to keep a poem alive, isn't it, to not keep the politics too specific? Trump will come and go, but a well-built poem will hopefully outlast the politics that forged it.

The quarrels in this poem do not die down once the poet closes the door with the word "bought." "No one has to convince us" remains curious as the "us" is malleable and not specific. No one has to convince us—of what? I hear James Baldwin between these lines. James Baldwin in *The Fire Next Time* writes:

> *I am called Baldwin because I was either sold by my African tribe or kidnapped out of it into the hands of a white Christian named Baldwin, who forced me to kneel at the foot of the cross. I am, then, both visibly and legally the descendant of slaves in a white Protestant country, and this is what it means to be an American Negro, this is who he is—a kidnapped pagan, who was sold like an animal and treated like one.*

Does Brown feel like a kidnapped pagan? Is that the reason for the draw to the Greek myth? Yet, isn't that final emphasis of this poem calling into question a materialistic world slightly close, at least to my ear, to the apostle Paul, in 2 Corinthians, asking his followers to be united in the things of the spirit and forget the materialistic world? It's in the neighborhood. Brown says of his work:

> *I became very interested in poems that do not return to their beginnings, in an individual way. So that a poem can sort of open up, and become more and more open as you reward the poem, and somehow you feel that you are inside the poem. You feel like you are inside a single poem and yet it had a different kind of leap or different kinds of transformations within the poem where you see you are talking about different things.*

Aren't this poem's abstractions expanding the sound to include possibilities? The poem begins by holding our hand with clear and frank statements, but by those final lines the poem has completely let us go. The entire book does much the same.

Is McCrae right that America is dead? Or is Brown's poem a defibrillator to bring America's heart back? Clear! My synthesizing these poems clashes with my images of the young black men that died in that ER where I worked. Could it be Yeats' poems stirred him to political action? Carl Phillips responded to Auden's counter-intuitive dictum this way: "It's interior, but it's a big change because it changes how I then continue to see the world, but slightly revised, as I move through it. A poem should provoke, however quietly. In provoking our thoughts, in challenging our assumptions, it can make us more reflective human beings."

I went back to that Auden poem. I forgot. Just a few lines down from his famous aphorism there is this: "it survives, / A way of happening, a mouth." Maybe Brown's magical fierce poems can make many things happen. His new testament and new tradition are a kind of mouth rendering a vision cinematically as sweet as the film *Moonlight*. His poems are aquifers. In moments one feels Brown acting like a person who believes in an actual God, at other times not. Negative capability sparks the poems, including "Ganymede."

Throughout the collection Brown breaks traditions, reworks themes and myths. The title poem, "The Tradition," is a sonnet with a *volta* that is more like a whiplash (that swerve Brown often takes in his poems), as we move from pretty flower names to dead young black men murdered. Brown is an Adam in this book, renaming his queer black Southern world in a manner that could be fruitful. If a sonnet is to contain love, this is a love writ large, as Brown places himself in the tradition of sonnets. Brown said: "I want us to rethink what we call tradition and what we call traditional. It is, for instance, a tradition in black American families to have long, deep, and scary talks with black children about how they should go about interacting with the police. This talk is not a tradition in the same way at all among white folks. Black people walk around our nation knowing they could be killed by a cop for nothing and that the cop will not be held accountable for it. I want us to get rid of all of that foolishness." But Brown is ambitious. It's not only the history of his people he is recasting, he goes after the game of poetic tradition as well.

Inventing a new form Brown calls "the duplex," our poet combines elements of the sonnet, the ghazal and the blues. To call this form a "duplex" implies in its very title two strange elements being yoked together under one roof, separated by a wall. These poems, in their new forms, are dwellings divided, much like the America which Brown is addressing in this collection. Blacks and whites divided. But implicit here also is a gay man who grew up in a black church. No end to the duplexes.

Brown said in a recent interview in *The Bennington Review*: "Poems have changed my life and changed my mind, and that sounds like the same kind of thing people would say about Jesus when I was a kid growing up in the church. The way I practice poetry is religious." Poetry as religion then. A place where God is found when people stay home on Sunday. When the country has betrayed its poets, poets are kneeling before poetry, holding up new forms as icons to see through. Poetry is doing the work of the church. For if this poem does nothing else, as it certainly does, can you not sense it is saving the soul of the maker who is rewriting the history of the world?

Brown grew up, as he said, "in the Black church and having one of the best pastors ever, the Reverend Harry Blake, and watching him every Sunday and being in awe of his delivery." Yet, Brown says of that church today and his family and community from that world: "We just stay out of each other's business enough to stay calm. I don't feel estranged from the Christian church, but I would only go there to hear or see someone sing or for a special day with my frat brothers or for a funeral, etc. There are exceptions, but generally, it's not a safe place for me as a queer person or as a thinking person of integrity."

So perhaps it is no surprise a Greek myth opens his book? Certainly the lines "God gets / the boy. The boy becomes / Immortal" are close to Christian myth, but of course, not strictly that. Brown goes back in time to Greece and then leapfrogs over Christianity to arrive at the conclusion God is gay. There's a new tradition. The poem isn't ending in suffering. The poem wonders what can we learn from this suffering, ancient or modern. Ethicist James Cone's last book, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, insisted on the correlation between the crucifixion of Jesus by the Romans and the lynching of black people by white mobs in the United States. Perhaps as Brown wants to place himself inside the sonnet tradition he is placing his voice inside the cross. Isn't the speaker of this poem open to the world's violence and love? And who knew that crossroads better than Christ? Do I sound too religious? Is that a problem?

Of late, Marie Howe's recent *Magdalene* showed us a woman through the thin veneer of the voice of Magdalene, showing us the consequences of sexual coercion and renegade masculinity. In *Revelations*, Ruben Quesada circled the sky and the ground for the spiritual in a time of the bullying politics of Trump where Latino children were put into cages. Those books expanded and enlightened my faith. This book too.

It's Good Friday in Madrid as I finish these thoughts, as I lay *The Tradition* down next to my Spanish bible. I work for one of the poorest cathedrals in the Anglican Communion (only the church in Navajoland comes close to our humbleness, I've been told by church officials). We labor away in one of the most Catholic countries. We're a curious minority. Many consider priests and nuns to be the butt of jokes, but Oh, an Episcopal priest in Catholic Spain, now that's even more of a joke. I find value in my work nonetheless, and am proud of what my colleagues do. No one can take that from me. I do wonder if race and male dominance are confronted more effectively this Good Friday in Jericho Brown than in my church.

Reader, open *The Tradition*, to this music, sweet and explicit and implicit and complicit and exquisite. Appreciate the colorful cover of a young black youth wearing a garland of flowers. Bend the book's spine once and then bend it again. Smell the ink of the poems. Let it adorn your dwelling. The whole thing shimmers with an audacious astonishing acceptance that feels a lot like what I feel when I meditate on my Christ and wonder what it is I am doing half the time. Love pierces violence between his titles and that gives me hope. The book stays with me.

Brown wrote in *The New Testament*: "To believe in God is to love / what none can see." That precisely is poetry's realm. I can talk about the virtue of this work to the end of my word count for *APR* but do you see what I see? What I see that cannot be seen? "Ganymede" is a modern crucifix. A black man rises. A raped man sings. The submissive triumphs. A gay man does not apologize for his existence. It's an astonishing resurrection. Listen.

Spencer Reece is the author of The Clerk's Tale *(2004) and* The Road to Emmaus *(2014), a long-list nominee for the National Book Award and finalist for the Griffin Prize. In 2017 he edited an anthology of poems,* Counting Time Like People Count Stars, *by the girls of Our Little Roses in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. He founded the Unamuno Author Series, which will celebrate its first-ever historic anglophone literary festival in Madrid, May 27 to June 1, 2019. He serves as the canon to the ordinary for the Bishop of Spain in Madrid.*

THREE POEMS

JANA PRIKRYL

Ambitious,

i.m. Ellen Willis (1941–2006)

yes, likely story
again takes me in, full ride
comically uninformed

though I got St. Mark's had long
performed itself, that little tea shop
named after a Stones song (a guy

explained it to me) I'd frequent
and pour my calories into making
rent but never really talk with Ellen

before she died—her silence, absolute
thrust my polite papering over my
silence into choking high altitude—

but when I went to work for Bob she said
distinctly there are things on earth
besides, what was her term

policy papers, that might not have been
her term—cut short, the city's gone
simulacrum

Little York, every great
city leaves a little city in its wake,
even Troy had it done to it

and the hero as he passed
through most complimentary,
his way of nodding to

solidarity, that's how he'd press
renewal out of those migrants of his
and something like this too

was her philosophy, but I am forced
to pour it out, her half of tea
would be to sit in silence, undaunted

words for paragraphs although I hear
she had friends too, friends she spoke to
well knowing it's no use telling

some things, they need situation
so much situation
the slant of land, tiny far-off crenellations

the need's so great they build a Little Troy
like I keep trying to tell you
I moved here because he meant to

it tumbles out, slope or no, as when
no telling what you'd be
without the one born before you

Fox

Kitchen narrow
as a New York

kitchen, shape still
with me thanks to the

plate she threw, it nicked
his cheek, a mark

I tracked beyond
the crayon years

in Ostrava, never
forgetting *ostrá* means

sharp when the noun
is feminine,

and who will now
dig up why she

took up edges, smartest
in school, never topped

on lists surveyed
of boys of the

beautifulest, night
kitchen where she fought

his plan for getting out,
she lost, who loved

to love me most, they'd not
expect a little spy, they had one

time of day to have it out
though I would throw

a plate to make you talk
when baby naps, that's

prime time to write
these fragments out

and then he won
they freed us, bought

a house a Dodge a house
a Buick, I start driving

the Dodge they bought
a Civic, a forest

that was some time
ago, you and I

take trains to this
we rent, I get

to keep that night
kitchen thanks to that

one plate and her ongoing
appetite for seeing

people cut, her news
show is her need

to hurt someone
quite far away,

she's glued to it

Vertical

One night the B took a turn
my ears popped

People in the orange loveseats facing forward
had to hang on

to something,
looking up I see

that man yawning at a pole
is uncle who never had a hard word

for us, who prospered
under every regime

He's young again and trying like everybody else
to find upright against the angle of the floor,

each car articulated
at a distinct angle, producing different pitches

of screams, no telling
how near the schism in the schist will bring us

to the core
Each person strobing past

on their own line
strains to hear the faint blurred station names

Jana Prikryl is the author of The After Party *(2016), which was one of* The New York Times*'s Best Poetry Books of the Year, and* No Matter *(2019). Her poems have appeared in* The New Yorker, The London Review of Books, The Paris Review, *and* The New York Review of Books, *where she is a senior editor.*

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HOW TO ABANDON SHIP

SASHA WEST

Cows calve, horses foal, goats kid, but women do not child.
Another verb separates us from the noun of it, a distance between
cells that split in my body, my body, and her wet fur on my stomach.

I spent all morning as an animal, all afternoon covering
that knowledge up with dirt and sticks. I scratched
out a hole to bury my shame in. Someday my bones

would be gnawed at by something with fur. I tasted
bitter adrenaline down my throat. I lay with you
haunch to haunch and rolled back my reason. Once our species

could cooperate, we could drop bombs, invent plastic, extract
fossil fuels, burn and burn. Books showed species that could
decimate a herd. Our forward-facing eyes made us predator, but

it all seemed long ago: before we'd transcended to these
insulated rooms and screens. We studied bodies we'd made
extinct as a hobby. It seemed impossible we were still

roaming the countryside, still on the ships with such large
holds. The animals my daughter loves best she distorts with love:
bear's fur matted under an arm, skunk's head misshapen

with sleep. I watch her menagerie fray, try to rethread
the monkey's arm to its body, brush out the horse's tangle
of plastic mane. In her room, I can repair a species. When she

gets older someone will tell her how to groom the animal off
of herself. My body took calcium from my body to make her
milk, I nursed her with my bones. The verb nurse means to care

for in illness, to drink too long a single drink, to keep
a grudge too closely. Her cells and mine changed places,
I extracted my elements to feed her. What could be

wilder than the body of a mother? Believe in my bones the risk
I feel. Weather the new war our culture tells us not to speak
of. But my body knows to go outside in an earthquake, to huddle

down when the wind blows. To bite. To keen. To howl.

Sasha West's first book, Failure and I Bury the Body *(Harper Perennial), was a winner of the National Poetry Series and the Texas Institute of Letters First Book of Poetry Award. She is an Associate Professor of Creative Writing at St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas.*