

# The AMERICAN POETRY REVIEW

"Poetry strikes me, then, as that huge privilege, the site of many conversations between reader and a speaker there to pivot, keep track, question, give context. . . . I sometimes think of that as 'peace,' the reverse of war offered up as a break in violence, a solace, an urgent private—if very dark—reconsidering before the next public assault."

—BORUCH, p. 7

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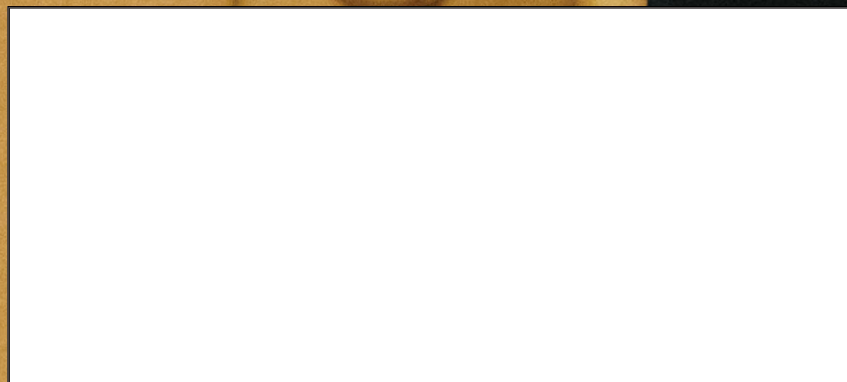
ALEX  
DIMITROV

LOVE

MARIANNE BORUCH  
IN THE MIDDLE  
OF EVEN THIS

PHILIP METRES  
FUTURE ANTERIOR  
& OTHER POEMS

AND  
ADRIAN BLEVINS  
PAUL GUEST  
francine j. harris  
JANE HIRSHFIELD



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# The AMERICAN POETRY REVIEW

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# LOVE

## ALEX DIMITROV

---

I love you early in the morning and it's difficult to love you.

I love the January sky and knowing it will change although unlike us.

I love watching people read.

I love photo booths.

I love midnight.

I love writing letters and this is my letter. To the world that never wrote to me.

I love snow and briefly.

I love the first minutes in a warm room after stepping out of the cold.

I love my twenties and want them back every day.

I love time.

I love people.

I love people and my time away from them the most.

I love the part of my desk that's darkened by my elbows.

I love feeling nothing but relief during the chorus of a song.

I love space.

I love every planet.

I love the big unknowns but need to know who called or wrote, who's coming—if they want the same things I do, if they want much less.

I love not loving Valentine's Day.

I love how February is the shortest month.

I love that Barack Obama was president.

I love the quick, charged time between two people smoking a cigarette outside a bar.

I love everyone on Friday night.

I love New York City.

I love New York City a lot.

I love that day in childhood when I thought I was someone else.

I love wondering how animals perceive our daily failures.

I love the lines in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* when Brick's father says "Life is important. There's nothing else to hold onto."

I love Brick.

I love that we can fail at love and continue to live.

I love writing this and not knowing what I'll love next.

I love looking at paintings and being reminded I am alive.

I love Turner's paintings and the sublime.

I love the coming of spring even in the most withholding March.

I love skipping anything casual—"hi, how are you, it's been forever"—and getting straight to the center of pain. Or happiness.

I love opening a window in a room.

I love the feeling of possibility by the end of the first cup of coffee.

I love hearing anyone listen to Nina Simone.

I love Nina Simone.

I love how we can choose our own families.

I love when no one knows where I am but feel terrified to be forgotten.

I love Saturdays.

I love that despite our mistakes this will end.

I love how people get on planes to New York and California.

I love the hour after rain and the beginning of the cruelest month.

I love imagining Weldon Kees on a secret island.

I love the beach on a cloudy day.

I love never being disappointed by chocolate.

I love that morning when I was twenty and had just met someone very important (though I didn't know it) and I walked down an almost empty State Street because it was still early and not at all late—and of course I could change everything (though I also didn't know it)—I could find anyone, go anywhere, I wasn't sorry for who I was.

I love the impulse to change.

I love seeing what we do with what we can't change.

I love the moon's independent indifference.

I love walking the same streets as Warhol.

I love what losing something does but I don't love losing it.

I love how the past shifts when there's more.

I love kissing.

I love hailing a cab and going home alone.

I love being surprised by May although it happens every year.

I love closing down anything—a bar, restaurant, party—and that time between late night and dawn when one lamp goes on wherever you are and you know. You know what you know even if it's hard to know it.

I love being a poet.

I love all poets.

I love Jim Morrison for saying, "I'd like to do a song or a piece of music that's just a pure expression of joy, like a celebration of existence, like the coming of spring or the sun rising, just pure unbounded joy. I don't think we've really done that yet."

I love everything I haven't done.

I love looking at someone without need or panic.

I love the quiet of the trees in a new city.

I love how the sky is connected to a part of us that understands something big and knows nothing about it too.

I love the minutes before you're about to see someone you love.

I love any film that delays resolution.

I love being in a cemetery because judgment can't live there.

I love being on a highway in June or anytime at all.

I love magic.

I love the zodiac.

I love all of my past lives.

I love that hour of the party when everyone's settled into their discomfort and someone tells you something really important—in passing—because it's too painful any other way.

I love the last moments before sleep.

I love the promise of summer.

I love going to the theater and seeing who we are.

I love glamour—shamelessly—and all glamour. Which is not needed to live but shows people love life. What else is it there for? Why not ask for more?

I love red shoes.

I love black leather.

I love the grotesque ways in which people eat ice cream—on sidewalks, alone—however they need it, whenever they feel free enough.

I love being in the middle of a novel.

I love how mostly everyone in Jane Austen is looking for love.

I love July and its slowness.

I love the idea of liberation and think about it all the time.

I love imagining a world without money.

I love imagining a life with enough money to write when I want.

I love standing in front of the ocean.

I love that sooner or later we forget even “the important things.”

I love how people write in the sand, on buildings, on paper. Their own bodies. Fogged mirrors. Texts they'll draft but never send.

I love silence.

I love owning a velvet cape and not knowing how to cook.

I love that instant when an arc of light passes through a room and I'm reminded that everything really is moving.

I love August and its sadness.

I love Sunday for that too.

I love jumping in a pool and how somewhere on the way up your body relaxes and accepts the shock of the water.

I love Paris for being Paris.

I love Godard's films.

I love anyplace that makes room for loneliness.

I love how the Universe is 95% dark matter and energy and somewhere in the rest of it there is us.

I love bookstores and the autonomy when I'm in one.

I love that despite my distrust in politics I am able to vote.

I love wherever my friends are.

I love voting though know art and not power is what changes human character.

I love what seems to me the discerning indifference of cats.

I love the often uncomplicated joy of dogs.

I love Robert Lax for living alone.

I love the extra glass of wine happening somewhere, right now.

I love schools and teachers.

I love September and how we see it as a way to begin.

I love knowledge. Even the fatal kind. Even the one without “use value.”

I love getting dressed more than getting undressed.

I love mystery.

I love lighting candles.

I love religious spaces though I'm sometimes lost there.

I love the sun for worshipping no one.

I love the sun for showing up every day.

I love the felt order after a morning of errands.

I love walking toward nowhere in particular and the short-lived chance of finding something new.

I love people who smile only when moved to.

I love that a day on Venus lasts longer than a year.

I love Whitman for writing, “the fever of doubtful news, the fitful events; / These come to me days and nights and go from me again, / But they are not the Me myself.”

I love October when the veil between worlds is thinnest.

I love how at any moment I could forgive someone from the past.

I love the wind and how we never see it.

I love the performed sincerity in pornography and wonder if its embarrassing transparency is worth adopting in other parts of life.

I love how magnified emotions are at airports.

I love dreams. Conscious and unconscious. Lived and not yet.

I love anyone who risks their life for their ideal one.

I love Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera.

I love how people make art even in times of impossible pain.

I love all animals.

I love ghosts.

I love that we continue to invent meaning.

I love the blue hours between three and five when Plath wrote *Ariel*.

I love that despite having one body there are many ways to live.

I love November because I was born there.

I love people who teach children that most holidays are a product of capitalism and have little to do with love—which would never celebrate massacre—which would never care about money or greed.

I love people who've quit their jobs to be artists.

I love you for reading this as opposed to anything else.

I love the nostalgia of the future.

I love that the tallest mountain in our solar system is safe and on Mars.

I love dancing.

I love being in love with the wrong people.

I love that on November 23, 1920, Virginia Woolf wrote, “We have bitten off a large piece of life—but why not? Did I not make out a philosophy some time ago which comes to this—that one must always be on the move?”

I love how athletes believe in the body and know it will fail them.

I love dessert for breakfast.

I love all of the dead.

I love gardens.

I love holding my breath under water.

I love whoever it is untying our shoes.

I love that December is summer in Australia.

I love statues in a downpour.

I love how no matter where on the island, at any hour, there's at least one lit square at the top or bottom of a building in Manhattan.

I love diners.

I love that the stars can't be touched.

I love getting in a car and turning the keys just to hear music.

I love ritual.

I love chance too.

I love people who have quietly survived being misunderstood yet remain kids.

And yes, I love that Marilyn Monroe requested Judy Garland's "Over the Rainbow" to be played at her funeral. And her casket was lined in champagne satin. And Lee Strasberg ended his eulogy by saying, "I cannot say goodbye. Marilyn never liked goodbyes, but in the peculiar way she had of turning things around so that they faced reality, I will say au revoir."

I love the different ways we have of saying the same thing.

I love anyone who cannot say goodbye.

*Alex Dimitrov is the author of Love and Other Poems, which will be published by Copper Canyon Press this fall, as well as Together and by Ourselves and Begging for It. He is the co-author, with Dorothea Lasky, of Astro Poets: Your Guides to the Zodiac. He lives in New York.*

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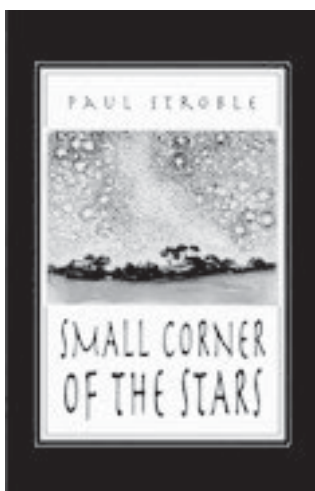
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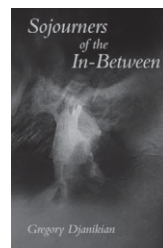
# ONLY CHILD

KERRIN McCADDEN

I wake to the train whistle saying, *what you don't know might hurt you*—with nowhere to ship the stories  
I keep to myself. Somewhere in the middle of me  
they link end-to-end, blowing their whistle into steam  
in the cold air of things I know that I wish I didn't.  
My mother is the engine, pulling the cargo down the line.  
Secrets hop from one car to the other—and some losses  
—a brother and a sister in the graveyard up the road  
from my house, both named *Baby*, and two others  
never buried. I have a brother on his way there, made of ash.  
I know more about him than he ever did. *Don't tell*,  
we often said, *keep this to yourself*. I go back in time  
to quiet my brothers and sisters. I sing apologies to them.  
I hold them close. Forklifts can barely lift what's left.

Kerrin McCadden is the author of *Keep This to Yourself*, winner of the Button Poetry Prize, and *Landscape with Plywood Silhouettes*, winner of the New Issues Poetry Prize and the Vermont Book Award. She is the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship and the Sustainable Arts Writing Award. She lives in South Burlington, Vermont.

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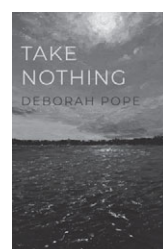
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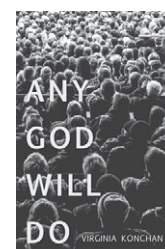
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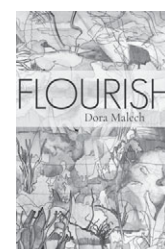
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# IN THE MIDDLE OF EVEN THIS: POETRY

MARIANNE BORUCH

*To be brought from the bright schoolyard into the house:  
to stand by her bed like an animal stunned in the pen:  
against the grid of the quilt, her hand seems  
stitched to the cuff of its sleeve—although he wants  
most urgently the hand to stroke his head,  
although he thinks he could kneel down  
that it would need to travel only inches  
to brush like a breath his flushed cheek,  
he doesn't stir: all his resolve  
all his resources go to watching her,  
her mouth, her hair a pillow of blackened ferns—  
he means to match her stillness bone for bone.  
Nearby he hears the younger children cry  
and his aunts, like careless thieves, out in the kitchen.*

*Kyrie*

We've passed the 100th anniversary of the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic now, and mostly it was scientists and medical historians who noticed at all. But it raises crucial questions for those of us who write, like *how can poets take on the large and worldly-terrible without forsaking a singular human connection?* Or more to the point, *how do poets make major impersonal events matter at the flesh and bone level?* Of course what we face now in this thoroughly stained era of Trump smoke and fog makes these questions more urgent. Like most writers, I think toward examples.

*Kyrie*, I'd blurt out. Ellen Bryant Voigt's rich, varied sequence of poems published in 1995 about that epidemic is one of the crucial books written in my lifetime—moving, unnerving, clear-eyed brilliant, and I fear prophetic. Far away big, and as close as *right this minute*.

Plus it's my favorite. For a long time now, I've been claiming this. The collection darkly charms and disturbs. And was a vast surprise, how it came to be. I learned this in an airport once, the early 90s, walking with this poet before we went separate ways to catch our flights, my hearing for the first time of her honest-to-god *research*. (She finger-quoted that word, but not to shrug it off.) Did I know the flu epidemic of those years killed off a third of the population in some towns? In America. In Europe. And hit the trenches of WWI hard? I had to start thinking "like a novelist," she said later. I'd add to that—an historian, a witness, a soothsayer, a broken shattered citizen of the world though not without some hope. Which is lyric by the way, as everlasting as lament.

Case closed. Cause and effect. But not only.

I mean, what to do with a chain of real events, with *narrative*, that impulse that seems to make so many poets queasy now, open to the charge of (god-forbid) *really old-fashioned*. But poetry isn't a fashion. I do recall a remark of Voigt's in a discussion at Warren Wilson's MFA Program years ago, her trademark reasonable passion flaring up: *my friends, we are all lyric poets!* I imagine by that she mostly meant what she calls the "dramatic lyric," that "dramatic" drawn from a profound sense of *story*, the treacherous human on-and-on, its shards and leaps of synapse and wrong turns via a grounded, steely feel for concrete imagery that I've called the "beloved particulars" for years, all to keep the lyric impulse from drifting off into la-la land, the never-never-land abstract and ultra-cryptic or way too precious. And then there's poetry's infamous self-absorption, which can give it a very bad name indeed.

None of that nonsense for Ellen Voigt. But "our lives for it," as Frost wrote more than a half century ago. Dream as unsentimental dream. Detail that *means* beyond clever stage setting and props. "Have you heard a dead man sigh? / A privilege, that conversation," she says in the middle of the carnage the flu epidemic left behind, bodies so altered that no gravedigger could tell who was black and who was white.

Poetry strikes me, then, as that huge privilege, the site of many conversations between reader and a speaker there to pivot, keep track, question, give context. In *Kyrie* we see a method that borrows from the playwright; overheard voices rage or cast their asides so poignantly we can hardly bear it. Which is to say, the *persona* poem lives in this book—the doctor, the soldier, the teacher holding forth to themselves or others or to the world—as if asked: *say your piece then*. I sometimes think of that as "peace," the reverse of war offered up as a break in violence, a solace, an urgent private—if very dark—reconsidering before the next public assault.

Peace then, because in this book of global distress and formal battle what its characters say of their dreams and their days carries a kind of luck regardless, little pools of luck, no matter *what* comes at them. We hear those voices in a kind of eternal zone outside of time where poetry does live as austere, torn, stubbornly mortal. As befits someone first trained as a pianist, Voigt is a poet with an uncanny ear. "I always need a line, a snatch of music, to start a poem," she has said, "and with the fixed circumstance (of that book), I started hearing more and more lines—'Oh yes, I used to pray'—and then would figure out who might have said that." Given the dire context, it doesn't take much to catch the ominous, ironic edge in that *Oh yes*—

I've brought *Kyrie* several times before my students. I couldn't help it. Once in the middle of the term with an undergraduate class, I emailed Voigt about method. My charges had questions: why the war *and* the flu, an unthinkable double whammy, how did those particular characters (teacher, doctor, soldier, and others) get in there in the first place, what about the use of the letters that soldier writes from the trenches? I wondered the obvious: her riveting of narrative and lyric, the collection's overall order, and her reason—what with her Protestant upbringing—for the book's title drawn from the phrase *kyrie eleison* chanted right before the offertory, the only moment of Greek in the old Latin Mass of my Catholic childhood, a plea meaning *Lord*, as in *Lord, have mercy*, an ache for sense and forgiveness against *how fast and crazy-far can I run from the world's and my own nightmares?*

Voigt wrote that she wanted something different after her book *The Lotus Flowers* and that wish triggered "some sort of anti-narrative fit," fragments that would, in part, become her fourth book, *Two Trees*. "I told myself to think as a painter would—," she said in that email. "Monet painted the same haystacks over and over, each time in a different light. For a poet, what's the equivalent of light? Tone, I think." After that particular collection, she realized which tone was missing: irony. And "being such an earnest person," as she put it, she chose a country doctor as her first speaker, similar to the one who had practiced in the rural Virginia of her childhood, "someone," she said, "whose life circumstances were such that irony was imperative to survival, to coping, to staying sane."

Can I repeat that? Let it land again, slowly? In the face of dire "life circumstances" there's an irony "*imperative to survival, to coping, to staying sane.*" (So it is we watch Colbert every night, I suddenly realize, just to hang on . . .)

The notion of sanity involved—how rare is that any day but especially these days? How *Ellen Voigt* is that, one might say. Though an autobiographical thread triggers this work (the boy beside the bed in the poem quoted initially here, based on the experience of her own orphaned father), the poems move beyond their imagined time and place because, conversely, they honor actual experience. The doctor in *Kyrie*, for instance, reliably turns up on horseback in the fevered duration of this national calamity, house to house. And his small soliloquies pin down a near-unbearable run through sickness and loss. His exhaustion mirrors the state of mind of so many in the hard lockjaw of this book, the national and world tragedy it evokes, the various speakers in whom we see our current night and day terrors not even in the shadows anymore.

The doctor supplies a tireless grace as well. We might survive. We *might*, though as readers or writers, what to do with our own desperation beyond picturing the worst? One option: do that.

*. . . deep in the lungs a cloudiness not clearing;  
vertigo, nausea, slowed heart, thick green catarrh,  
nosebleeds spewing blood across the room—  
as if it had conscripted all disease.  
Once, finding a jug of homemade corn  
beneath the bed where a whole fevered family  
lay head to foot in their own and others' filth,  
I took a draught and split the rest among them,  
even the children—these very children named for me,  
who had pulled them into this world—  
it was the fourth day and my bag was empty,  
small black bag I carried like a Bible.*

Still, how much can we endure and what's the dosage? In a book-length sequence particularly, architecture clarifies. Voigt considers *Kyrie* one long poem though she has called its staggered build a series of "loose sonnets,"

choosing that form for its “necessary pathos” and to give each speaker “equal time at the mic.” Her small town characters who bar the house against the flu, and—lacking a lamb—streak the door with the blood of a cat to ward off pestilence—or her soldiers in the trenches of WWI who lose limbs, have nicknames, eat chess pie, wear hand-woven scarves made by a beloved—are burdened by despair and appalling premonitions but shreds of desire and possibility too, though not many. Poetry needs realists.

*Sweet are the songs of bitterness and blame  
against strangers spitting in the street,  
the neighbor’s contaminated meal,  
the rusted nail, the doctor come too late. . . .*

In an essay somewhere, Tony Hoagland said that shifts in tone are the real narrative of a poem. I’d add that such angling makes it feel true, taking whatever’s happening on the surface *underground* to the deepest human interior, the only place that’s trustworthy; tone itself shades progression in the poem, a factual and emotive advance and retreat, a circling that nevertheless ends, the light on

Monet’s haystacks that tells us time’s been there: summer fall winter spring. *It must change*, and with that, Wallace Stevens advised us how the architecture of memorable poetry works.

One formal word for that change, that rupture, is *volta*, which can be anywhere in a sonnet’s small-page geography. (“Why not, I figured, put the couplet in the middle?” Voigt asked in a parenthetical, in that email.) As for her thinking “like a novelist,” it’s not one but two stories always to register and balance, what’s *out there* and *in here*. For *Kyrie*, it’s the war at home, so to speak (via village and school, barnyard and sickroom), against the one in Europe, taking many thousands of lives with it including those in the trenches struck first by flu. And the poet makes it immediate for those of us in the future who can only imagine how this happened. But it’s complex. And takes a while. “I had to think back, up to *before* the crisis and *extend past* the crisis.”

The fact is we’re drawn to poetry because its great subjects really *are* great—knowledge, time, beauty, death, love. *Kyrie* is one book that taps narrative design and energy to bring these to lyric

life. Yet how often are we as writers and readers haunted—that is, outright *gifted* from some dark—and lifted into a communal *shared* idea and image, then as individuals we’re reinvented and write what we write. It’s dangerous. Thrilling. Terrible.

And our own grossly ignoble era requires that. Am I pitching a greater ambition here? I hope not. We begin in silence. It’s just that a voice comes and one picks it up like tuning in shortwave, an alert or a warning that’s otherwise lost under the static.

Pleasure’s there in the making too. That’s the survival guide, the hope part. “I was writing the *Kyrie* poems in my sleep,” Ellen Voigt told me in that long ago email. “And isn’t that the *best*?” she said. “Isn’t that what we live for?—not the finished poems, but right at the living heart of their unfolding.”

*Marianne Boruch’s tenth book of poems, The Anti-Grief, came out from Copper Canyon this past fall. She was a Fulbright Senior Scholar at the International Poetry Studies Institute at Australia’s University of Canberra last year.*

# TWO POEMS

## WAYNE MILLER

### Little Domestic Elegies

1

When the backyard  
light turned on

I was surprised  
to discover the air

filled with snow  
so downy and silent

it never quite  
reached the ground.

When the light went out,  
all I could see  
was the solid dark

still full of that snow.

2

On our first cold day  
in the new house

the clear world beyond us  
became fogged

by the handprints  
of whoever

had installed our windows.

3

The wind poured through  
the framed-up house  
they were building next door.

An emptiness  
like photographic paper

waiting for some not-yet-  
installed light

to turn on  
and imprint it

with the room  
it has now become.

### Love Poem

The purpose of the eye is to narrow  
The world beyond the body  
To a receptive point inside the body

At the center of the retina  
The tiny fovea centralis clusters half  
The fibers of the optic nerve

Whatever light gets aimed to touch there  
Comes from what the mind  
Has focused on while the rest

Of the retina holds in periphery  
Every other thing the mind can see  
For this reason

When I found your glasses on the shelf  
Where one of the kids could grab them  
I picked them up

And put them out of reach

*Wayne Miller’s fourth book, Post- (Milkweed, 2016), won the Rilke Prize and the Colorado Book Award. His recent poems appear in Boulevard, Field, The Literary Review, New England Review, and The Southern Review. He teaches at CU Denver and edits Copper Nickel.*

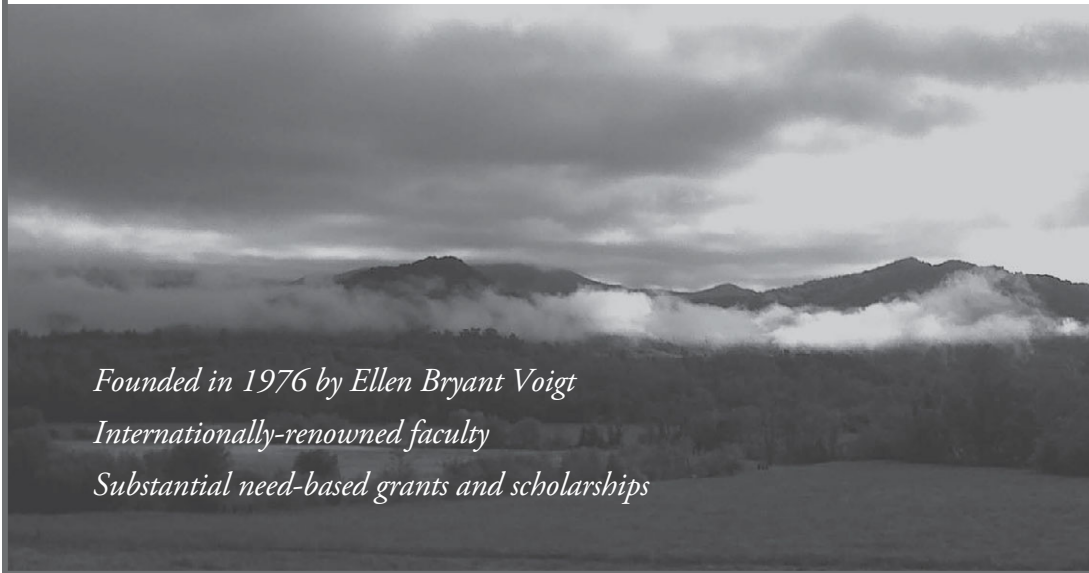
# THREE POEMS

## PHILIP METRES

### Three Books (A Simultaneity)

1.	2.	3.
May you be written	once was a book so large	we lived in those leaves
we say, inscribed	you couldn't behold it—	before we were torn
into the Book of Life	you'd have to march	
According to Talmud	for miles just to read a line,	scissored from branch
there is another book	the ink so richly black	
for the wicked: inscribed	it felt like falling just to look	shorn from the spine
	and each stanza was not a room	again, every day
	but a state, and each poem	
and sealed for death,	a country of its own . . .	we won't give up
and a third for those	Some days we could not tell	this binding
in between the books	what was the poem	
	and what was the world	again, every day
where most of us live	When we felt the breeze,	probing its book
suspended, trying	we wondered whether	
	it was someone turning a leaf	seeking the binding
not to be swallowed	or a new season's weather	again, every day
	We could spend our life	the yet-unscribed
by the past,	like this, walking the page,	where we are
dismembered by future,	waking each new line,	the leaves
praying to be written	and never be the same	writing ourselves back
	Yes, the sky was the sky,	
	and the land was the land,	
	but we had to find	
	where the book ended	
	and where we begin	

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# Future Anterior

(after Jeff Halper, David Shutkin, Eyal Weizman, and Fazal Sheikh)

## 1. WHAT IS A SETTLEMENT?

Here’s another olive tree.  
As the walls rise, these trees,

which have been in families  
for centuries, are taken,

uprooted, then replanted  
in settlements, in fashion

among the nouveau riche.  
Here is a shopping center:

Ace Hardware, Burger Ranch.  
Another ancient olive tree.

This is the Library of Peace.  
This is the music conservatory.

Look at the water  
flowing from this fountain.

## 2. WHAT IS A RUIN?

They said it was a ruin so they expelled the families who lived there, mostly in the caves. Who’s to say what’s a ruin, and what’s a home? On the day of a prominent Bar Mitzvah, which occupied the new members of the town, the Center for Jewish Nonviolence bought tickets for the families expelled from Susiya, hundreds of people and their children. They toured their town, entering the mosque (now a synagogue), and we brought chairs and tables and had a big feast together. When everyone was full, and tired, they slowly climbed back onto the buses and left. I was the last one, cleaning up. Suddenly, an IDF bus pulled up, and soldiers came streaming out, all at the ready. But everyone was gone except me. A man with a JNF nameplate came up, put his arm around my shoulder, and said, “you win this round.”

## 3. WHAT’S THE OPPOSITE OF GUARDED?

But where did the people go? Where do they go now?

## 4. WHAT IS A RUIN?

When Issa was sentenced & buried  
in parentheses / & his mother saw her house

slowly becoming debris / she slid  
into a comma / she was driven

by ambulance / dashes to ashes /  
pupils to colons / the new revised standard

replacing the old revised standard  
replacing the King’s version & so on

outside the house not-yet not-house  
a nightingale offered quotation marks

around the bulldozer’s boring  
exclamations of / instant ancient ruins

footnote to a lengthy dissertation  
on subject-object relations

## 5. WHAT’S THE OPPOSITE OF RUIN?

Between the border of land and sea, the waves crest and purl, knitting and unknitting the shore.

## 6. WHAT KNOWS NO BORDER?

Each year, half a billion birds fly across this land, this country of migration.

## 7. WHAT KNOWS NO WALLS?

85% of West Bank water is funneled into the settlements or into Israel. That’s why you always see water tanks on Palestinian roofs. To say nothing about Gaza.

## 8. WHAT KNOWS NO WALLS?

The lower the bullet hole in the water tank,  
the less the family can drink.

## 9. WHAT IS A SETTLEMENT AGAIN?

“When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”

## 10. WHAT IS A SETTLEMENT AGAIN?

Before the wall, the village  
sidled up to the *wadi*, as if in love

with the *wadi*, people streaming  
from dream into olive leaves, rising

before the light, before the bulldozers,  
before the red-roofed buildings rose

atop the neighboring hill, before  
the hill grew barbed wire perimeters,

before the cell tower lifted itself, before  
the trailers encircled to protect it,

before there was a man driving the road  
who lost his signal, and reported it

to the cell phone provider, who,  
to comply with the law and serve

the customers, to ensure consistent  
service, thus fulfilling the divine plan

of total cellular connectivity, before  
the nations that come and go like seasons,

there was an olive sapling pulling itself  
by its own internal music, composed

of breakable earth, occasional rains,  
the rhythmic shifts of dark and light.

## 11. WHAT IS THE ORIGIN OF “MAP”?

*Carta* is Latin for paper.

Everything written  
will have been  
a map of the future anterior.

## 12. WHAT DO PEOPLE SHARE?

At midday in summer, the sun hammers you flat as tin.  
You look for any shadow to hide in.

13. WHAT DO YOU WANT OTHERS TO KNOW?

Tell them that we exist.  
That we exist,  
even between the words of their text.

14. WHAT KNOWS NO STATE, NO NATION?

From a certain height, in a certain light,  
stretching across a plain  
the land resembles warm skin  
If you live long enough,  
you can almost see it  
breathing

Mixtape for My Twenties

(in memory of David Berman)

I am too much with myself,  
I want to be someone else.  
Where is my mind? Going up  
the street like a leaf, high above

the busy little one-way, in my stupid  
hat and gloves I lie awake,  
wonder if I'll sleep  
like a poker in someone's fireplace.

I feel stupid & contagious, out  
till 3 a.m., pillaging the drinks  
of friends. When you have no one,  
no one can hurt you. Language keeps me

locked and repeating. Never tell them  
where it hurts. Keep the bullet  
safe inside. Someday the stone  
will roll away, & soon you'll see

that year, something I never knew  
I had. Staple my lips shut, pour the milk  
& I'll say when. I want to go  
back, but I'm halfway to the place

that we will meet. America  
is just a word but I use it.  
In the morning light, I'll hold  
that ashtray tight, waiting for

something to break. Here comes  
a smile on her face. I've never been  
too good with names.  
Let forever be delayed.

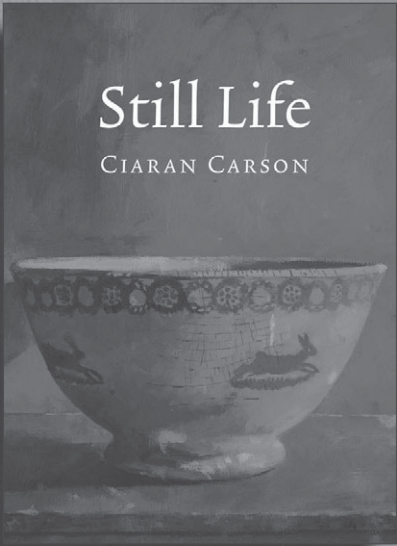
Note: This poem is a cento with lyrics from Richard Buckner, Buffalo Tom, Fugazi, Husker Du, Lemonheads, Minutemen, Miracle Legion, Nirvana, Palace Brothers, Pavement, Pixies, Replacements, Silver Jews, Spinanes, Superchunk, and Uncle Tupelo.

Philip Metres has written ten books, including Shrapnel Maps (Copper Canyon, 2020), Sand Opera (Alice James, 2015), Pictures at an Exhibition (2016), and The Sound of Listening: Poetry as Refuge and Resistance (2018), among others. Awarded the Lannan Fellowship, three Arab American Book Awards, two NEAs, and the Adrienne Rich Award, he is professor of English and director of the Peace, Justice, and Human Rights program at John Carroll University.



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# FIVE POEMS

JANE HIRSHFIELD

---

## Chance darkened me.

Chance darkened me

as a morning darkens,  
preparing to rain.

It goes against its arc,  
betrays its clock-hands.

The day was a dark-eyed giraffe,  
its unfathomable legs  
kept walking.

A person is not a day,  
not rain,  
no gentle eater of high leaves.

I did not keep walking.  
The day inside me,  
legs and lungs, kept walking.

## My Glasses

Glasses can be taken off.  
The world instantly softens, blurs.  
The pattern of carpet  
or leaves out a window,  
words on a page,  
the face in a mirror.  
Blurs,  
even the war that is coming,  
pushing its iron boat-shape  
onto the sand of a beach not far  
but not seen;  
even the silences coming,  
following the boat  
as a swimming dog follows its master.  
Lu Chi, poet and scholar,  
born into a family of generals,  
was executed  
in the 35th year of the Xi Jin Dynasty,  
after his soldiers' bodies  
blocked the Great Yangtze.  
The Yangtze went elsewhere,  
blurring the nearby fields.  
Merciful blurring, merciful forgetting.  
Meeting Lu Chi's name.  
I think of his image of culture  
as one axe handle shaping another,  
I think of his thought about unpainted silk.  
Each of the Yangtze dead  
had a mother, a father, wife, children,  
a well, some chickens.  
No, the largesse of glasses is not seeing.

## My Dignity

My dignity drinks with me  
a cup of coffee, with sugar and milk,  
in a bathrobe.

My dignity, this day,  
neither adds to nor subtracts from  
the dignity of any other.

My dignity, this one day,  
closes its ledgers.

Its luxury, this day, is coffee, sugar, and milk.  
Is having enough to want nothing.

Soon my dignity,  
unwitnessed, unwitnessing,  
will dress  
in clothes no one will judge for their wrinkles,  
in skin no one will judge for its fit.

My dignity, I know,  
could be taken from me easily,  
invisibly, in a single pickpocketed instant.  
An errant driver. An errant rock. An errant anger.

My own heart could take it—  
one moment, drinking coffee,  
the next—

My own breast or marrow could take it.

But my dignity and I do not apologize  
to one another,  
this day,  
nor, this day, profess to more than we can.

I know I will someday say to my dignity:  
It's all right, I know it is time,  
leave if you must, live elsewhere.

Take with you, like a good sous-chef,  
your towel-wrapped knife and whetstone,  
your luck-bringing ladle.

## Like Others

In the end,  
I was like others.  
A person.

Sometimes embarrassed,  
sometimes afraid.

When "Fire!" was shouted,  
some ran toward it,  
some away—

I neck-deep among them.

Corals, Coho, Coelenterates

I keep a white page before me,  
Each time one  
is marred with effort, striving, effect, I turn to another.

Corals, coho, coelenterates  
inside the waving arms of your branches  
that give off a scent intoxicant only to certain fish—

lichens, burdocks, mycelial mats between trees—  
forgive this hubris.

Some hope is in it.  
Your companions are new here.

A child who crayons does not know  
her drawing leaves behind absence on forest, on ocean.

She falls into the colors.

Jane Hirshfield's ninth poetry book, *Ledger*, will appear in March 2020 from Knopf. Previous books include *The Beauty* (Knopf), long-listed for the National Book Award, and *Given Sugar*, *Given Salt* (HarperCollins), a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. She is also the author of two essay collections, *Nine Gates and Ten Windows*, and four books collecting the work of world poets of the past. A former chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, she was elected in 2019 to the American Academy of Arts & Sciences.



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# FIVE POEMS

## JAI HAMID BASHIR

---

### Nocturna

How slow is all of this dying? Across the county line  
a fossil in the making, off-road exhaling last light  
in nightmud. A small cat in a steel trap. Pendulous  
sparrows preen. Holding on for the last blue dark night  
we ate fruited scabs off each other's mouths. Howling  
calls out its own name. Who could it be for? A pale stray  
soul wandered into me as it wandered into you; we warmed  
it by ourselves. We could not undo the latches of  
what had come before. So, we made it another day rot,  
refracting what was once life. Now with a clenched heart,  
from whose curl we understand fists: we know the dead  
are actually yellow sere of stars. What does it take  
to remove them from sky? All disorder is above, sightless.  
The planets mimic eyes. Or, so we say in the center of human  
selfishness or just limit. Either way, lavishes of water—  
bead on. Does dawn await ascension? Does its existence pivot  
on the ability for it to drape each morning's window? Where  
is the absent divine that doesn't care? We, too, move  
on; a girl cries for days calling on a name we can only speculate.

### In Dead Horse Point, We Are Alone

and you are telling me your new father  
is being deported. Riding past  
rivers unrushed by summer. Stopping to drink  
vodka and orange juice. There, sober and brilliant  
crayfish once swallowed starving as a *futbal* boy in Mazatlán.  
Break open pinchers: tender parenthesis. Let out  
how our world has been this fragile,  
how we are all cut from the navel and scattered. Desert water  
evaporates before it ever wets *Lahori* lines  
of orange trees. The fruit that taught how to slice  
our world. *Naranja* is a tart tautology. Rhyming with  
nothing in America. Vibrating echo  
in both Spanish and Hindi. *Naranga*  
travels to Spain, gets handed in ravished fists  
like the Earth itself  
to hungry monarchs. Crystallized and jeweled  
*arancia* in Sicily. Carried in sweetened braids  
of a small bride, or dead-eyed  
glint of guns, as tangy *naranja*  
into the New World. Silently  
“j” is left out there hanging  
from its hook. It was half-night. Whispering  
midnight is *aadhi-raat*. We leaned again on  
silverbeams of motorcycle sweetly christened,

*El Burro*. Circling darkened eyes, tying  
hammocks from Aspen trees, sewn out and in  
air eddies of hummingbirds.

Covered in pine needles, we pointed  
singing names back in English. In Spanish.  
In Hindi. *How can we say Father? Walls?*

*Together? Escape?* Sloughed skin  
of a rattlesnake breaks through  
and under darkchains. So bleached

white in silverhurry of moon's  
reflection. A spiral worn soft as the handme-  
downs of our starving brown

grandmothers: *Abuela* and *Nani* across  
latitudes who once ate orange  
out of oranges, down to smiles

of slithering pulp and rind.  
Rinsing my hands under metallic tips  
of common stars—

I once knew how to catch your life  
from the boughs of nightclouds;  
I only knew your rind.

If we were to do it again, ride and die again  
with you, *El Burro* out there at half-night, this time  
ride and die again, in the warm breath

of our tent,  
I'd hold you so  
with the American movement

of a pigskin flying  
to be caught  
by a son, whose real father,

like yours, rode and died  
and only returned  
once.

### The Waiters

Blue rags in my hands. We eat  
shooed seconds of half-gods—  
under each plate, quarter moons  
hide before glow. In the parking lot

after tables are bleached, we stare over  
rainbows: in oil-plume, swimming

upstream from the gas station. Holding small fires  
to purple mouth—a strike of momentary beauty.  
And with tired hands, generous still  
to rub heads—we hold each other's

tangled black hair. An embrace  
of no embers, no control over light.

He undoes my unlovely ponytail caught together  
by pins, unleashing me into directions of unfastened air—  
where there are no boundaries, and an exit  
visa in my body is stamped only by his name.

# Feral, Untold Grace

Vultures clean the coast,  
what we couldn't sing underwater,  
we brought back in the throat  
of our afternoon. The shore shaped  
by the constant carol of waves,  
like a mammal's heart. Beached,  
the baby Great White, a belly  
gray as a singing knife,  
kisses each of her hissing fins  
to the sand. Recovering some altitude,  
flashing her wings of cheek. Worn out  
eyes gelled with kindness.  
Hurt as a cavity, stalactites  
of her teeth, some still moonset,  
let out their dark light:  
I've done enough, it is over.  
Cupping my hands  
in the geometry of a prayer,  
a bedouin by a desert spring,  
holding all of the ocean I can  
to wet her breath as you find  
a bucket abandoned by a fallen castle.  
You get behind and carve the sand, too.  
The back fin fanning, your feet  
coiled with the same energy  
as a birth. The waves open  
and the mossy slip of her tucks  
bravely into your arms, the only way  
I know you know how to hold.  
Fins start to coast into  
swim and she bursts into  
a glide: so common and sweet as air.

# In Brave Slowness of Life

A skeleton swings—  
from a tree like laundry on fishing line, false horizon  
so invisible, it can only belong to phantoms. I've held out  
for the dead each year to become less dead. What axis  
would the earth have if love was an unkillable  
art? I've never wanted fortune or its friends. Just time  
to not be a woman dressed in a copper cage searching  
for perfect swans. It never does last. I find  
wasps disguised as angels—no one is making honey.  
It was a clefted apple with worms' cursive into  
fruit soft as sky. Unavailing and alluring  
as holding a child that is not yours,  
imagining an alternative name—a deliberate process  
for nothing. Still, I check the rearview mirror. I do  
idle choreography around yard sales. I hold relics  
as if they are hands, yet hesitate because they might have been  
warmed between someone else's thighs. What we find in love  
we write in yellow. In a dream I had your hands; I knew  
carpentry. I understood how to whittle the sun into a pastel. Line by line  
I composed color theory as admissions of love  
I've never possessed. In another dream about birth—  
I wasn't an agile Venus. All of earth was without  
virtue. Softened to dustbloom from rising  
sea tides and sour experimentations; I've told no one.

Born to Pakistani-American immigrant artists, Jai Hamid Bashir was raised under the Southwest sun. She is currently an MFA candidate at Columbia University in New York. The recipient of the Linda Corrente Memorial Prize at Columbia University and an Academy of American Poets' University Prize, she recently was the writer-in-residence with HesseFlatow in Amagansett, NY.

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telephone number and email; titles of poems; bio optional. Multiple  
and simultaneous submissions welcome. There is a reading fee of  
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The Prize winner will be announced by May 15. Include an SASE  
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MIDDLEBURY BREAD LOAF WRITERS' CONFERENCES

# FIVE POEMS

## ADRIAN BLEVINS

---

### Low Status

Was Low Status schizoid? Diabetic? Scaly? Obese? Did she drive some kind of truck? A scooter? A horse? Was Low Status just ignorant? Had she no sense? Did she drink brandy? Did she eat okra? Was she from Germany? Puerto Rico? Charleston? Iraq? Was her hair too puffy? Was it too flat? Did Low Status not shop? Where were her shoes? Why were they white? Was that her at McDonald's drinking a Coke? Is Low Status Delta Dawn? Is her heart broke? Is Low Status the short manager of a low rent hotel? Is she a whore? Is that a paper clip in her ear? Is it a staple? Does Low Status pierce herself too much? Too visibly? Too wide? Is that *dye* in her hair? Does Low Status not travel overseas? Has she never seen a Renoir? A windbreaker? A pear?

### Old Boyfriend Prison Status

Something about a small child and an inserted object, the mother saying she and God know he's innocent. Another slumped against a log

in a side yard in Burnt Chimney, a real Virginia place I stir up for the sound of it and because people should know Southerners can be funny

as the comic does distract and who can bear to remember the trillion catastrophes of imprudence floating like apples to bob for

in a tin pan of pale water? The prison one and I would skip school and drink beer in his car in the parking lot of the Church of the God of Prophecy

and fuck up front at dawn. Then we'd talk about how dumb America was for holding our scorn for math against us, since math in Virginia

in the backwoods when I was a kid was like gagging on cocks dipped in rot dipped in harder, tougher, poorer, sicker, sicker, sicker,

sicker. And anyway at other points in history and in other wasteland places kids like us would be charging the village invaders with our spears

or standing on rocks pounding makeshift drums. But now the prison one is a person I have to think of as "the prison one" and there are others too

I don't want to mention—alcoholics drying out in Burnt Chimney which they also call Reverie and madmen hoarding trash in Troutville

and a journalist on his fourth marriage working the football games while collecting quarters in a can to pay off a funeral or a Trans Am.

And still even others—schizophrenics downing ludes in honky-tonks or speeding past the neon to get to the hospital for dialysis or a

heart transplant—broken men I mean delinquents I mean punks and shits as in actual caged rapists who held me when I was myself a fugitive

en route to these vowel sounds like one can call a downed thing a reverie though last I heard there are bricks in Burnt Chimney lying in puddles of ash,

is how I want to put it, though *cinder* would also work. *Cinder* and *tinder* and *slag*, I want to say. *Dross* and *slurry* and *scum*. *Rat* yeah *yob* yeah *beast* yeah *lout*.

### Panty Status

1.

One Panty Status was too poor for underpants.

2.

Two Panty Status would want *lingerie* or *thong* here so certain expectant scouts would do the equivalent of clap.

3.

Certain heterosexuals, anyway, with a certain amount of verbal knack.

4.

That's because Two Panty Status wanted this brief account to be for the people in their barns overlooking the pasture or the meadow if not the grassland per se.

5.

Even *bra* would do it. Even *underthing*.

6.

But *knickers*?

7.

*Britches*?

8.

*Skivvies*?

9.

Two Panty Status didn't think so. She sat in her armchair by the window and thought *latex*, *really*, *people*? *Sock*?

10.

Three Panty Status wanted to find a way to totally upend the American system of going to college to learn how to write PDFs and do PowerPoints and then and thereafter putting on a baseball cap or maybe a big straw garden hat until here's a lawn chair in a backyard of the suburbs outside Baltimore and here's a Honda or an Audi and therefore not a *casserole* so much as a *pot* to put gruel in and Goldilocks unfortunately therefore in her jammies and her muumuus.

11.

Goldilocks in her onesies!

12.

Her jammies!

13.

Her muumuus!

however hot I was                  and I was a little hot  
hot as flapjacks        & a Bic in Atlanta              in the crotch of August  
in a graveyard                  under Spanish moss                          in a sundress  
straddling goneness                  dripping lip-gloss  
with a cunt like fish sauce                  & oh &  
with the ghost of a noose                  hanging in the mugginess  
like the tendril of a thing                  like a feeling  
  
stuck  
my croneness is a lot better                  it doesn't seal my mouth shut  
it wakes me up        & pisses me off                  but it doesn't  
put a pacifier in me                  a rampart                  a Sippy cup

I am going to Boca Raton. And then it'll be off  
to the Caribbean. Yes for a little rest and to selfie myself  
reading Derrida but not Erasmus and not Ford Maddox Ford  
but just because I want God to eye me being me  
as this is the hot-but-photographable 21st century  
and because there's no islander Jesuit to stop me  
plus no kerchief-wearing anti-liptard menace of a nimrod  
oaf-picketing me either for being the queen of a rogue sham  
straddling traveling like traveling's the dodge  
I mean the uptick I mean the scheme the plot the ploy  
and not the very best 1 percent way to dent  
not so much the sad vagaries of what people call Being  
as the pitiful yellow whatsits of the X of my Yankee lack of zeal  
for living upfront I guess and fervent and nervy and still.

*Adrian Blevins is the author of Appalachians Run Amok, winner of Two Sylvia Press's Wilder Prize; Live from the Homesick Jamboree; The Brass Girl Brouhaha; the chapbooks Bloodline and The Man Who Went Out for Cigarettes; and a co-edited collection of essays, Walk Till the Dogs Get Mean: Meditations on the Forbidden from Contemporary Appalachia. She is the recipient of many awards and honors including a Kate Tufts Discovery Award and a Rona Jaffe Writer's Foundation Award, among others. She teaches at Colby College in Waterville, Maine.*

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## MIDDLEBURY BREAD LOAF WRITERS' CONFERENCES

# from PORTRAIT BEFORE DARK

*A dialogue between Edward James and Tilly Losch*

LIANA SAKELLIOU

*Translated from the Greek by Alik Barnstone*

I am the boy in a sailor suit.  
I amble magically  
in the sea forest,  
exotic birds  
in my leafy hair,  
holding a tuba  
to stave off feeling scared.  
The freighter is white,  
its smokestack tall.

★

Time was distilled  
in a gold goblet etched with my name  
given by my king.  
Father, is my mother his daughter?  
Am I his son?  
I began collecting shapes,  
colors on a black coat of arms.

★

I don't need black,  
colorless design, the secret  
divided from humanity.  
I'd like to rebuild from scratch,  
explore with my needle  
to the point of danger.

I don't need things to ward off fear—  
nettles, splinters, carnivores,  
or a vast vestment against the devil.  
I wave my fingers toward the beyond,  
make the forest come to me.

This, too, is a kind of quest,  
a sensual adventure.  
Shall I change course?  
Shall ghosts enter the garden  
and lay themselves out like fabric  
for the embroidery needle?

★

Raw refusal blows between us  
like temptation,  
like condemned castles.

The anticipation of place  
is struggle.  
The forest refuses nothing,

not even this.

★

The scene needs nymphs,  
stiff horsemen  
wearing chain-mail gauntlets,  
and the frenzy of the hunt.  
You have a deer's head  
and I hang in green chaos  
like a downy insect,  
my intruding eye  
seeing it all.

★

You can tell sundry stories  
about the same ways of making a life—  
the natural charm of the king, the mother,  
and their hunter friends in photos along the corridors' walls.

They sink behind the grove,  
committed to the dark earth.

I can't discern the woods  
from the animals passing by,  
the bloodied ferns,  
the thudding in the foliage.

★

Black boots, cotton batiste camisoles,  
feathered hats.  
My mother wore silk  
the color of oysters  
and pearl necklaces  
looped around her throat.

I gave her absence  
to metaphysics.  
I said to her,  
Let's not talk about faces.  
Let's talk about the face.

★

Your eyes scanned me.  
Ripples spread on foliage  
in the gorge.

A light rain.

Nothing compares  
with woodlands, you said—  
Were you ever there beyond the leaves?

★

You touched me and I began to grow  
rich brown roots,  
unforeseen.

Something like a jungle  
encircled my leaves,  
snakelike.

★

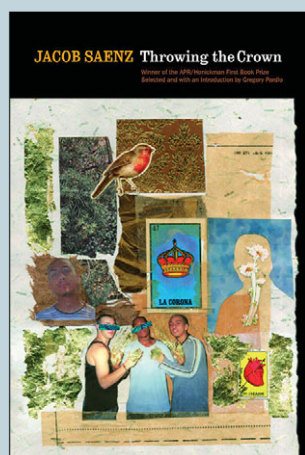
Petals sprinkle everywhere—  
tangle in my hair,  
stick on my dress  
until I, too, flower  
like her touched  
by who knows what.

A horse groomer asks,  
What happened to you?  
I answer, a bizarre tree  
electrified me.

Liana Sakelliou is a Greek poet, translator, critic, and editor. She is the author of eighteen books, including *Where the Wind Blows Softly* (*Typothito*, 2017), *Prends-moi comme une photo* (*L'Harmattan*, 2012), and *Portrait before Dark* (*Typothito*, 2010). She is Professor of English and Creative Writing at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and serves as Member of the Board of the Hellenic Authors' Society.

Aliki Barnstone is a poet, translator, critic, editor, and visual artist. She is the author of eight books of poetry, the most recent of which include *Dear God*, *Dear Dr. Heartbreak: New and Selected Poems* (*Sheep Meadow*, 2009), *Bright Body* (*White Pine*, 2011), and *Dwelling* (*Sheep Meadow*, 2016). She translated of *The Collected Poems of C.P. Cavafy* (*W.W. Norton*, 2006). She is Professor of English at the University of Missouri and serves as poet laureate of Missouri.

## Jacob Saenz *Throwing the Crown*

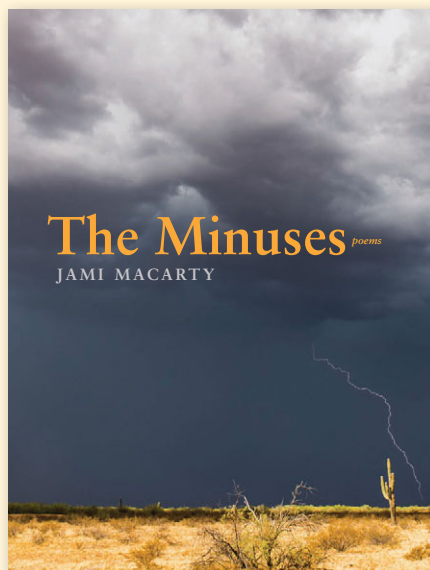


*Throwing the Crown* by Jacob Saenz, winner of the 2018 APR/Honickman First Book Prize, is available in APR's online store at [www.aprweb.org](http://www.aprweb.org) and at other outlets. *Throwing the Crown* was chosen by guest judge Gregory Pardlo.

JACOB SAENZ is a CantoMundo fellow whose work has appeared in numerous journals. He has been the recipient of a Letras Latinas Residency Fellowship as well as a Ruth Lilly Poetry Fellowship. He serves as an associate editor for *RHINO*.

## New from the Center for Literary Publishing at Colorado State University

### *The Minuses* by Jami Macarty



*The Mountain West Poetry Series*

"In these quiet, careful, though searing and poignant poems, Jami Macarty turns her considerable powers toward the dissolution of a romantic relationship in a desert landscape that is at once sustaining and doomed. Here, a body is at one with earthly extinction and failed romance: 'I am your time to go now.' These poems are as full of heart as they are of a keen intellect. Exquisitely honed and crafted, *The Minuses* provides testament to poetry's ability to speak the unspeakable, to not only survive but to carry on: 'she's off-trail but knows her direction.' This is a beautiful book of courage and the power to live fully, and on this planet, through heartbreak and hard-won joy. — GILLIAN CONOLEY

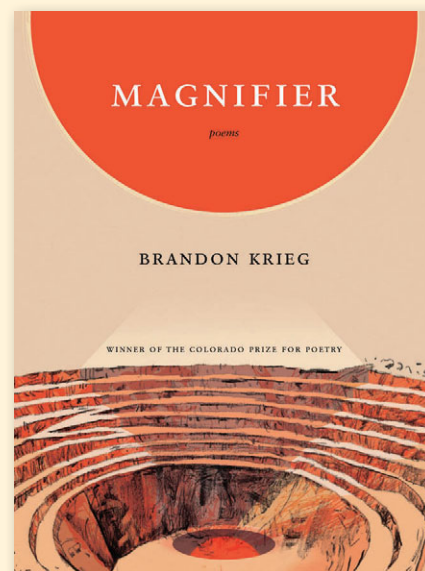
"Jami Macarty's poems draw us into the vagaries of human love, just as they implicate us in the 'menagerie of the surviving world.' These marvellously immersive poems of the Sonoran Desert and of our human deserts of the heart insist on each step taken, each present moment's opening perception. Macarty's lines nudge us toward non-dual Buddhist emptiness in each gap, each leap beyond wording. A must-read." — DAPHNE MARLATT

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### *Magnifier* by Brandon Krieg



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### Monday Poets

The Free Library is pleased to present Monday Poets on a Monday evening every month, year round. Now in its 24th year, the Monday Poets Reading Series showcases a variety of talented poets with local and national reputations. Readings take place from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. in the Heim Center of the Parkway Central Library, 1901 Vine Street, Philadelphia. Copies of the featured poets' books may be available for cash purchase. This year we also will have two open-mic readings for those interested in presenting their work. For additional information, please call the Free Library of Philadelphia's Literature Department at 215-686-5402. <http://www.freelibrary.org/>

### Upcoming Events (All events are free.)

Mon, February 10, 2020, 6:30 P.M. — Octavia McBride-Ahebee & Sekai'afua Zankel  
Mon, March 2, 2020, 6:30 P.M. — David Ebenbach & Shane McCrae  
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Mon, May 4, 2020, 6:30 P.M. — Eleanor Wilner & Ellen Bass

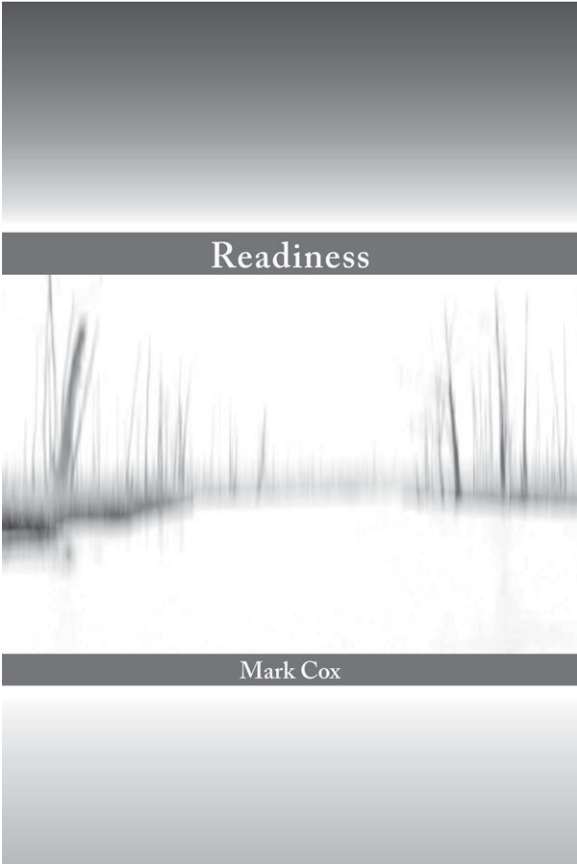
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# TWO POEMS

## ANNE MARIE MACARI

### Boats Can Take You

Now I know that nothing is closed—  
boats can take you  
through a ravine then out  
where oily weeds and plastic bags,  
cast-offs            I sit in the sun  
I don't know why this earth,  
why my body, why daylight,  
why bridge and its shadow over water,  
a shore where bird prints  
get lost in the slap of river,  
they repeat but they're not the same  
I know less than when I  
was young, when the net, rippled  
and wet held me, now  
my self, less, my mouth and eyes, less—  
This time of year, trees bud out  
abundantly brief, pink and white wafers  
raining down, they're boats sinking  
into earth, dissolving, conducting  
the black vein of cosmos, black vein  
that repeats but is never  
the same            I hear sounds the petals  
make in dirt, the dogwood's hard  
birthing, watery vortexes, I hear myself  
breathing behind a far off door



### I Feel the Need of a Deeper Baptism

I want to return to heat, to storm-  
scarred trees whitened  
by salt and wind, to find again,  
perched between palm fronds,  
the barred owl, feathers swirled  
around its large eyes—  
I feel a need, a need,  
my mind awkward, unmoored,  
my mind without a roof  
and green fronds like curtains  
across my chest—  
Along the seed floor, inside  
the humus, carcasses  
of small creatures decay, microbes  
dine—I want to return  
to the vault of wilderness  
we stumbled upon, how  
it blinked back at us  
where we stood at the border  
of the trees, beneath  
the bright, beating sun

**On *Readiness*, by Mark Cox**

Thrilling prose poems from a cherished writer . . . Cox gives lie to the common notion that prose poetry is too formless to count as real verse. . . This collection proves that this suspicion has no basis in reality, as Cox is as careful with diction, rhythm, and even rhyme as one might be if they were writing strict alexandrines—and yet, his poems are as fluid and readable as Jack Kerouac's novels. —*Kirkus Reviews*

**Praise for Mark Cox (On *Sorrow Bread* (2017))**

Cox essays a huge terrain of subject and feeling, from dark wit to astringent violence to lamentation, from guarded hopefulness to quiet, intensely stirring affirmation. A lesser poet might see all this fly apart; Cox establishes supple coherence through richly consistent artistic command and scrupulous honesty of vision and voice. Tony Hoagland has said Mark Cox is “a veteran of the deep water; there’s no one like him,” and Thomas Lux identified him as “one of the finest poets of his generation.” No one speaks more effectively of the vital and enduring syntaxes of common, even communal, life. —Richard Simpson

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Anne Marie Macari is the author of five books of poetry including the forthcoming *Heaven Beneath* (Persea, 2020) and most recently *Red Deer* (Persea, 2015). Macari's first book, *Ivory Cradle*, won the Honickman/APR First Book Prize in 2000, chosen by Robert Creeley. Her poetry and essays have been widely published in magazines such as *The Iowa Review* and *Field*.



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# A POET’S CRAFT

## Constraints and definitions

### ANNIE FINCH

To begin with a definition: A poem is a text structurally constrained by the repetition of any language element(s). The continuum of poetic constraint is extensive, stretching from operations that a reader will find completely imperceptible to overwhelmingly obvious ones. When we think of poetic constraint, we usually think first of discernible language operations. Depending on our aesthetic bent, we might think of an Oulipo poem by Harry Mathews, a poem using a nonce procedure by Joan Retallack, or a poem such as Harryette Mullen’s “Dim Lady,” which constrains itself to sentences that hew to those in Shakespeare’s sonnet 130:

#### Dim Lady

*My honeybunch’s peepers are nothing like neon. Today’s special at Red Lobster is redder than her kisser. If Liquid Paper is white, her racks are institutional beige. If her mop were Slinkys, dishwater Slinkys would grow on her noggin. I have seen tablecloths in Shakey’s Pizza Parlors, red and white, but no such picnic colors do I see in her mug. And in some minty-fresh mouthwashes there is more sweetness than in the garlic breeze my main squeeze wheezes. I love to hear her rap, yet I’m aware that Muzak has a hipper beat. I don’t know any Marilyn Monroes. My ball and chain is plain from head to toe. And yet, by gosh, my scrumptious Twinkie has as much sex appeal for me as any lanky model or platinum movie idol who’s hyped beyond belief. (Harryette Mullen, from Sleeping With the Dictionary)*

At the fully obvious end of the constraint continuum, we find poems structured by numerous overlapping and highly perceptible constraints, such as those of an ancient, oral-based Celtic form called the Rionnard Tri-nard, which has these rules:

- The poem has four hexasyllabic lines ending in disyllabic words.
- Line 2 rhymes with line 4.
- Line 3 consonates with both of them.
- There are two cross-rhymes [in which the end of one line rhymes with the beginning of the other line] in the second couplet, but none in the first.
- There is alliteration in each line.
- The last syllable of line 1 alliterates with the first accented syllable of line 2.
- The poem ends with the same first syllable, line, or word with which it begins.

Years ago, I was asked to compose a Rionnard Tri-nard—the first ever written in English—to demonstrate the form for Lewis Turco’s *The Book of Forms: A Handbook of Poetics, Including Odd and Invented Forms*. It soon became clear that the only way I could focus enough to write such a challenging form would be to isolate myself. I went hiking with my daughter on the Appalachian Trail, with the poem in my back pocket and nothing else to think about. Even so, the four lines took me three and a half days to write.

Creating a Rionnard Tri-nard taught me some surprising things about poetic form. For one thing, although formalism is often regarded nowadays as a sterile, academic, left-brained approach to poetry, I found that my left brain wasn’t much use when there were so many different rules, some of which narrowly missed precluding others. It felt almost as if the rules were designed to *stop* me from thinking, forcing me to count on my intuitive self to produce the poem. Also, though my first instinct was to use paper and pen to keep track of the restrictions, I soon discovered that the Rionnard Tri-nard is not a good form for paper; I did better when I simply gazed at the earth or the trees as I hiked or meditated on the poem in the darkness of the tent.

As my mind wandered in and out of the edges of the form, I began to wonder about the poets who had invented it: Celtic bards—and the still higher-ranking poets, the “filid” and “ollam”—like those described in poet Patricia Monaghan’s essays on Celtic culture. Monaghan claims that the Celts respected poets even more than they did priests; poets were the only people allowed to wear a certain rainbow-colored robe, the only ones allowed to criticize a king. Wrestling with my four lines, I began to sense the intense mental focus and power these bards must have developed in

the course of memorizing hundreds of meters and their other poetic labors (one can’t say “literary” labors, because letters had nothing to do with it; this form was developed by the poets of an oral tradition, long before written poetry). These oral compositional technologies were not only used by the Celts, of course; the skills of crafting language in repeating forms were central in cultures across the globe before the invention of writing, as evidenced by, for example, the techniques of the *griots* of the Mandinka culture in West Africa, the Anglo-Saxon *skalds*, and the Norse *volurs*; the *payada* tradition in Latin America and the *ghana* of Malta; the Homeric epics, the Vedas in India, and the rhyming structure of the *Qur’an* in Arabic.

But what is the role of such techniques in a contemporary W.E.I.R.D. (Western, Educated, Industrial, Rich, Democratic) culture, to use the acronym coined by anthropologist Joseph Henrich? In an age of digital cameras, is there any reason for poets still to rely on poetic constraints originally devised to aid in memorizing a culture’s myths, legends, and rituals?

At a reading last fall at Bridge Street Books in Washington, D.C., Lorraine Graham recounted the process she used to compose a poetic series: “I realized I needed to use constraints to put me into the space of the poem. I was riding the bus every day, and I tended to get motion sickness. So the first constraint I developed was that I had to sit next to someone else to write. Even if there was only one other person on the bus, I’d sit next to them. The second constraint was that I would have to keep writing until I felt nauseous.”

Graham’s compositional tools would fall on the far other end of the continuum from those that structure the Rionnard Tri-nard, but they worked perfectly to bring her into the space of poetic process by performing the work that poetic constraints do. Poetic constraints bridge the left brain/conscious/mental process of thinking/using language and the right brain/unconscious/physical process of doing/repeating/enacting. No wonder poets were treated with reverence in ancient times, and no wonder poetry holds a revered place in our culture still. Like the structures of ceremonies, spells, prayers, and charms, poetic constraints limit the inhibiting power of our logical minds and can open us to a creative energy that feels larger than ourselves.

After the Rionnard Tri-nard was finished and I wrote it down, I lay in the darkness and moved my mind into and out of its turns and patterns, feeling as if I were fingering a Celtic brooch. A completeness grew inside my consciousness, like the peace that can come from a challenging meditation. Then I imagined the ancient bards (in Celtic culture, bards were women and men both, like the *griots* of West Africa), following these same twisting journeys through the long quiet nights, turning these same interlinking poetic patterns over and over:

#### Rune

*Ring of words, each woken*

*By craft, felt past fearing,*

*Set to sing clear among*

*Us here, hung in hearing.*

One of the most important recent developments in contemporary poetry is the ingenious and energetic reclamation of poetic form among poets of color. A new resurgence of formal energy has birthed work by poets from a range of aesthetics including Terrance Hayes, Reginald Dwayne Betts, Tina Chang, Amanda Johnston, Jessica Piazza, Victoria Chang, Solmaz Sharif, and many others. They join poets who have made form a concern for some time, including Amit Majmudar, Rafael Campo, Alexandra Oliver, Tim Seibles, Alberto Ríos, Moira Egan, Rick Barot, Tara Betts, Pat Mora, and Afaa Michael Weaver. Influential books such as Natasha Trethewey’s *Native Guard* (Pulitzer Prize, 2007), Patricia Smith’s *Blood Dazzler* (National Poetry Series, 2008), Tyehimba Jess’s *Olio* (Pulitzer Prize, 2017), and Jericho Brown’s *The Tradition* (National Book Award Finalist, 2019) have taken on formal concerns with vigor and made new approaches to form a central part of their poetic goal. As Chen Chen recently tweeted, “writers of color are inventing, subverting, expanding forms all the time. any critic/commentator who thinks formal experimentation—or poetry!—is dead is not reading, is in fact refusing to read. willful, obstinate ignorance. and yes, racist.” Case in point, this villanelle by Duriel E. Harris from my anthology *Villanelles*, coedited with Marie-Elizabeth Mali:

#### Villanelle for the Dead White Fathers

*Backwater, yeah, but I ain’t wet, so misters, I ain’t studin’ you:*

*Don’t need your blessed doctrine to tell me what to write and when.*

*Behold, God made me funky. There ain’t nothin’ I ain’t do.*

*I can write frontpocket Beale Street make you sweat and crave the blues,*

*Dice a hymnal ’til you shout Glory! The Holy Ghost done sent me sin!*

*Backwater, yeah, but I ain’t wet, so misters, I ain’t studin’ you:*

Signify a sonnet—to the boil of “Bitches Brew.”  
Rhyme royal a triolet, weave sestina’s thick through thin.  
I said God made me funky. There ain’t nothin’ I cain’t do.

Eeshabbabba a subway station from damnation to upper room.  
Lift-swing-hunh chain gang hammer like Alabama’s nigga men.  
Backwater, yeah, but I ain’t wet, so misters, I ain’t studin’ you.

Shish kebab heroic couplets and serve ‘em dipped in barbecue,  
Slap-bass blank-verse-lines, tunin’ fork tines ‘til you think I’m Milton’s kin.  
Indeed, God made me funky. There ain’t nothin’ I cain’t do.

You’re poets dead; I’m poet live. Darky choruses belt: Hallelu’.  
While you were steppin’ out, someone else was steppin’ in.  
Backwater, yeah, but I ain’t wet, so misters, I ain’t studin’ you:  
God sho-nuff sho-nuff made me funky. There ain’t nan thing I cain’t do.

This new formal excitement seems to emerge out of the charred battlefield of the “poetry wars” (free verse vs. form, narrative vs. exploratory, page vs. stage) that dominated U.S. poetics over the past few decades. It does so with the refreshing force of a healing development. Form, with roots in both craft and performance, both accessibility and experimentation, can bring many different kinds of poetics and poets together.

The politicization of poetic form is perhaps inevitable. How could large changes in how poets manifest poems into the world not reflect major social, political, and technological shifts? Milton’s austere use of blank verse elevated *Paradise Lost* above the rhyming verse of the *hoi polloi* and helped establish Christianity as a dominant cultural force. The struggle to birth Germanic-influenced, more accentual meters from the French-influenced syllabic regularity of the heroic couplet embodied the triumph of Romanticism and individuality. The free verse “revolution” of a hundred years ago foreshadowed an unprecedented era of industrial capitalism. At some point in the future, how will we view the current resurgence of poetic form? Will we understand it as a reactionary reversion, or as a liberatory development presaging a new level of mutual understanding across borders and backgrounds?

If the idea of poetic form as liberatory seems like a surprising possibility, the likely reason is the assumption that meter and form are unnatural and elitist. This stubborn notion is, to say the least, counterintuitive, given that oral-based and populist forms of poetry (ballad, décima, tanka, ghazal, pantoum, and yes, rap, to name just a few) are formal. And yet the conception that form is academic and bodiless persists as a commonplace in university writing programs and among poets and teachers of poetry.

How did the repeating patterns of verse, the root and basis of the peoples’ poetics around the globe, come to be seen as arcane and oppressive? The process began with the narrowing of metrical diversity in English during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as ballads, triple meters, and other folk and oral-based forms practiced among women and people of color were firmly displaced by the hegemonic meter of college-educated white males: iambic pentameter. When Ezra Pound vowed to “break the pentameter” by means of free verse, he was taking on a meter that had already become culturally monolithic.

The ascendancy of free verse was completed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through two new inventions: the typewriter and the English Department. The line-break, the defining feature of free verse, is not audible (unlike meter, rhyme, or refrain); free verse needs to be seen on the page to be appreciated. So the typewriter, which allowed poets to control the layout of a poem on the page, led the way for the line-break to develop into a central poetic tool in the early twentieth century. As the century went on, free verse both helped to establish and benefited from the professionalization of poetry in the classroom, since it lends itself to detailed, lengthy, page-based analysis and discussion.

As the overwhelming commitment to free verse gathered strength with the growth first of English departments and then of Creative Writing programs, most poets and scholars stopped teaching the skills of listening to and reading aloud in, let alone writing in, meter. By the 1970s, only a tiny handful of poets in universities taught meter at all. Writing in meter is one of those skills that is best passed on in person, like yoga or playing a musical instrument. Without poets equipped to teach it, the lineage of metrical transmission was, essentially, broken. Since meter is the foundation of formal poetry, form in general was largely abandoned as well, and meter and form came to be regarded as irrelevant knowledge. The stage was set for today, when most MFA programs in poetry don’t offer classes in meter or employ faculty who write in it regularly.

Recently, however, as the poetry slam and YouTube video have become preferred arenas for poetry, poetry is moving back into the body. A new energy has been emerging around the return to traditional, oral-based, populist forms. At the same time, exploratory techniques are gaining wider influence, and free verse remains a powerful poetic idiom. As we absorb these varying influences as writers, readers, and listeners of poetry, the lan-

guage of constraint may help us to reach below the surface differences between poetic schools.

Encompassing compositional tools, the operations of procedural poetry, “traditional” forms and meters, the beat of slam and hip-hop, and the structuring of free verse with repeating line-breaks, the continuum of constraint offers a way of thinking about poetry that may help us to appreciate how and why poets, even after a century of complete freedom from traditional types of formal expectation, are continually called to invent, reclaim, or rediscover new types of restrictions to structure our words.

Annie Finch’s most recent books of poetry are *Spells: New and Selected Poems* and *The Poetry Witch Little Book of Spells*, both from Wesleyan University Press. She has written numerous books on poetics, including *The Body of Poetry* and *A Poet’s Craft* (University of Michigan Press). Her anthologies include *Villanelles* and *Measure for Measure: An Anthology of Poetic Meters* (Everyman’s). More information about her work, performances, workshops, and *Poet’s Craft* podcast can be found at [anniefinch.com](http://anniefinch.com).

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# MEDITATIONS ON A PHOTOGRAPH OF HISTORIC RAIL WOMEN

WARREN LONGMIRE

---

Number two from the right was an angry drunk.  
Number one from the left always held the face of a dead cousin in her left pocket.  
The third woman placed fourth in a seed spitting contest at age six.  
The first one knew she was the prettiest.  
The fifth didn't need to know.

The child belonging to the one on the far right worked at the general store as a bagboy.  
The first's daughter was too rough looking. She lived to be sixty-one.

The second woman had no children. She spent five minutes picking the right shovel. It was as black  
as her hands. This was not the first time she swung metal things from the waist.

The first woman's head-wrap was a dishrag she grabbed just before leaving.  
The second woman's head-wrap was a gift from a long-dead suitor.  
The center woman's head-wrap was a prop.

The second from the left quit two days in.  
The first preferred to use a wrench.  
The center woman got the second to do her work.  
The first wouldn't stop for all the money in the world.

Right from the center's brother was a saint who shot himself last year.  
The fourth girl from the right gave up on God long ago.  
The fifth girl was a woman by the time she was thirteen.  
The fifth from the other side decided she would never grow up as soon as the papers were signed.

I think the second had money saved but had something to prove.  
The fourth looks like a Virgo.  
The second woman was raped.  
The first woman was raped.  
At least three were raped and, during the interview, four said they once knew true love.  
A white woman slapped two for being insolent.  
The middle lady shot a nigga.  
The last woman fondled her cousin when she was young. Is that the same cousin who died?  
Is the last woman dead?

My grandmother is eighty-six.  
I have no pictures of her, but I do know her name.  
Her name is Ruth.  
She loves God more than life.  
She calls young black men monsters each time I visit. She never leaves the house.  
She grew up on a Virginian farm.  
She is separated from but on good terms with my granddad.

My granddad's name is Sonny.  
My granddad can't read.  
He would look hard at the caption for this photo of nameless women and say,  
*I'm sorry, Warren.*  
*I don't have my glasses on me.*  
*Why don't you just tell me what it says?*

---

*Warren Longmire is a poet, programmer, and educator. He is the author of Ripped Winters (Seventh Tangent, 2006) and Do.Until.True. (Two Pens and Lint, 2012).*

# THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH

## NOELLE KOCOT

---

### HUMBABA

My friends, who can reach heaven?

The monster bellows like a river swollen with flood.  
Many are consumed in his fiery breath.

My friends, who can reach heaven?

Let us ask the mountain for a sign.  
Let us cut the spirits from the cedars.

My friends, who can reach heaven?

To be remembered a man must undergo  
The ravages of the eight winds.

My friends, who can reach heaven?

No matter how tall he is, a mortal can never reach heaven;  
No matter how wide he is, a mortal cannot stretch over the earth.  
Therefore, may Shamash open before my feet the closed road.

### EKINDU

We climbed the mountain.  
It was enough.  
We chased wild creatures over the grassy plain.  
It was enough.  
We planted grain.  
It was enough.  
We drew water from the river.  
It was enough.  
We dreamed the same dream.  
It was enough.  
We left our tracks in the forest.  
It was enough.  
You were the shield that protected me.  
It was enough.  
You were the sword and axe at my side.  
It was enough.  
You were the ceremonial coat that warmed me.  
It was enough.  
May the mountains weep for you.  
Both night and day.  
May the wild creatures of the plain weep for you.  
Both night and day.  
May the fields overflowing with grain weep for you.  
Both night and day.  
May the pure Euphrates where we drew water weep for you.  
Both night and day.  
May our tracks left in the forest weep for you.  
Both night and day.  
May the dreams that now grieve weep for you.  
Both night and day.  
You were the shield that protected me.  
Both night and day.  
You were the sword and axe at my side.

Both night and day.  
You were the ceremonial coat that warmed me.  
Both night and day.

### UTANPISHIM

I can see nothing ahead or behind me.  
The darkness is so thick, and there is no light.  
I go like a murderer, ravaged by the heat and cold.  
Why should my heart not be torn apart by grief?

The darkness is so thick and there is no light.  
My friend has returned to clay.  
Why should my heart not be torn apart by grief?  
I do not want to sleep the endless sleep.

My friend has returned to clay.  
There are no stars or sun where he is now.  
I do not want to sleep the endless sleep.  
Neither my sorrow, nor my pleas, nor the tearing of my hair could rouse him.

I go like a murderer, ravaged by heat and cold.  
I can see nothing ahead or behind me.  
Teach me how to build a house that will last forever.  
I can see nothing ahead or behind me.

### GILGAMESH

I am no longer interested in the sword and the bow.  
The Faraway has taught me that I am weak.  
For whom have my hands labored?  
For whom does my blood beat?  
My days will soon be washed away like a face drawn in sand.  
I have neither friend nor brother by me.  
To speak of my despairing mind,  
The icy-feathered gulls shriek overhead.  
No blithe heart can know what unhappiness I suffer.  
  
Yet I am resigned to all my losses,  
And I ask you, my people, to let them touch you.  
Let me brand my searing path across the shadows before your eyes.  
Look at the fine temple I have built!  
Search the world locked within its stones with a smooth hand!  
Throw off the ceremonial coats that warm you,  
And shroud yourselves instead  
In the raging fire of the answers that never come,  
In the raging fire of the answers that never come.

### EKINDU

What violence has been done to the atmosphere?  
See how the stars scurry through the thickets,  
Nature's balance broken, and the voices of the creatures  
Rise like a spell toward a heaven cast in human fire.  
I feel him drawing near; he is anxious to search the world  
Buried in me with a smooth hand. I can almost touch his features,  
The sun-burnt hair curled

Around his toes whispering against my own. And yet what ire  
 Flames within me when I look upon him in his heart. I who have speared  
 The worst of beasts, who have braved pale seas  
 As they rose and fell beneath me,  
 I who have pinned the demons of the night until the haunted song of the stricken  
 Drew its curtains over waves of my pure fury.  
 Perhaps in this roaring silence, I will embrace the meaning of my dream.

#### GILGAMESH

I am tired of the light that dribbles from my voice  
 So washed in certainty that the days  
 Will blink like lashes over rich fields of wheat.  
 I want a place older than the leaves,  
 Older than these strong walls where the story of the earth is carved.  
 Give me a radiance that broods beyond this temple,  
 Where the hidden mysteries of life and death rejoice  
 Wildly together, where man, like a dying animal, does not grieve  
 After the storms have wrecked his simple  
 House. I want these things, and yet I will not serve  
 These idols fashioned out of the same clay  
 Of which I, myself, was pinched by my mother's rapacious need.  
 The very god of storms has wreaked into my first breath the secret  
 That erosion takes patience, not unlike the willingness to bleed.

*Noelle Kocot is the author of eight full-length collections of poetry, including God's Green Earth, forthcoming from Wave Books in 2020. She has received numerous awards for her work, and she is the Poet Laureate of Pemberton Borough, New Jersey. She teaches at The New School.*



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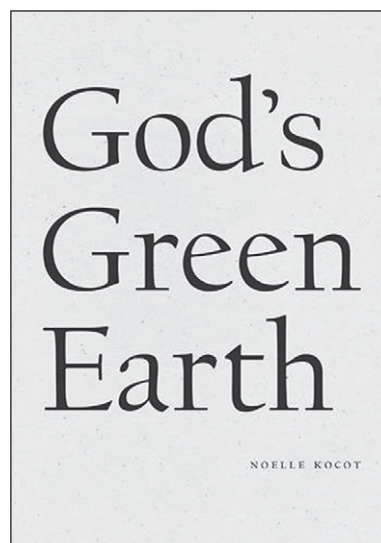
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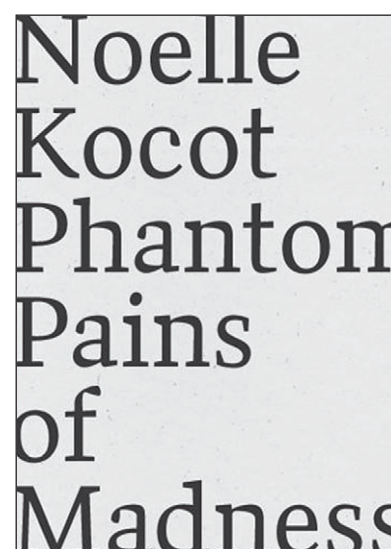
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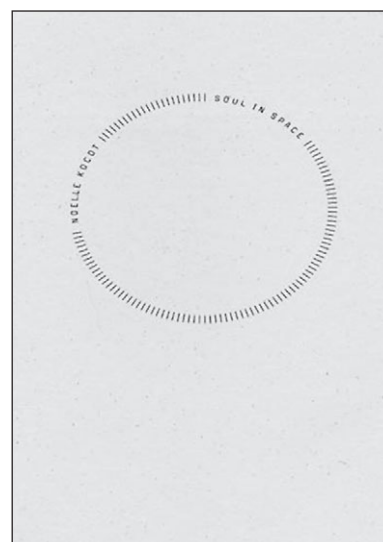
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# PARENT-CHILD FENCING CLASS

ROBYN SCHIFF

---

Because I was too mean to make him a brother,  
my son has had to learn of hate alone.  
I told my friend I'd only ever wanted  
one child for reasons to do with the shape  
of an arrow. But in truth I'm so disgusted  
by what I know of brothers,

having given birth to a son of Adam, I  
said "enough." One son is not a brother;  
he's just a person. I thought this could mean he  
would be free to indulge small pleasures like  
rubbing patterns in carpet  
under a piano and whistling without

being followed, but it appears  
you can only turn cursive R's with your finger  
in the window alone in the backseat  
for so long before you need to stab  
someone in the hand with a real pencil.  
If you have no brother, that hand is yours. I'm talking

here about the spirit, not  
the body. When I said "hand," I meant  
your own soul will betray you. I meant by "real pencil,"  
earth's the right place for revenge  
because there's nothing in heaven  
like gravity or spit. And here I am suiting up to duel

my brotherless child  
because it's time to drive  
the rage out of him  
into the tip of a sword he will try as pointlessly  
as war or poetry to touch my heart with. Given a brother  
this struggle would be settled by wrestling near the sharp edge of

something expensive. By withholding  
a brother from him I have wrongly made  
this only a person believe  
the artifice of our house is the real love of him  
by the world and now it's my duty to drag him  
backstage where any brother already

would have pushed his face against the grill  
of a churning fan and forced him  
to tell the blades his name  
to hear its syllables severed by the throbbing wind  
which itself will be unplugged and rolled away  
at the end of the disappointing short run of a new play

that will never be mounted again.  
I just strapped on a plastic chest plate that already has  
an impression of a pair of breasts in it. My sister  
was once a salesgirl  
at Victoria's Secret. There she was issued  
a pink tape measure and tilted

the three-way mirror  
to bring shoppers to understand  
quantum optics and Borges, adjusting the panels such  
that self-reflection could be monetized  
according to the proprietary  
algorithm that is the Secret itself sending

American girls back out into the mall  
swinging their pink bags as if no one wants  
to shoot them. Next comes the one-armed coat,  
the plastron, enclosure that shares its name, from chainmail,  
with the under-shell of a turtle  
into which I have seen oracular,

indecipherable curses as if into  
the final desk desperately stabbed  
in response to such dull questions  
like How many sheaves of wheat  
will my brother-in-law's upper field yield?,  
even the pyromancer must have grown to resent the court he served,

and like the fire, unfulfilled,  
anxious to get on to something of more substance  
and drama, which is how boys get tricked out for war in epics,  
not by passion, but boredom. You've seen them  
standing around with nothing to do  
so burning for action they'll throw

anything at anyone, can  
at squirrel, snake at  
girl, their restlessness can be harnessed, suited up, and marched away.

Beautiful,  
beautiful chainmail, like a coat of suicidal bubbles,  
unsheathed by freelance squires headfirst off the war-dead  
along the bottom

margin of the Bayeux Tapestry  
exposing each just a twisting line drawn  
in faded thread naked under the hooves of his own horse. Doesn't that  
chainmail,  
sold to someone else, and someone else  
again, ring the dread  
of receiving one in a chain of so

many letters it is your fate to copy by hand ten times  
in the fevered scriptorium of late girlhood for further ongoing  
distribution everlasting to ten more girls  
all of whom will receive good luck  
if they just proceed themselves  
to copy it—

if they just proceed to fold and envelope,  
stamp and will themselves to drop it  
in the blue mailbox, but the difficulty  
of making an initial list of ten true friends  
on whom the luck of the rest could depend  
is the first step of many toward an emptiness

that frees us. Parent-child  
fencing class meets in a converted warehouse. Shares with  
stage and statecraft its  
elemental vernacular.  
Obsessed like all of us  
with distance divided by speed compelled to death by need and desire,  
the *L.A. Times* reports this

morning It took eleven hours to hand-embroider  
the cotton poplin plastron  
also called a dickey  
the President of France wore  
to the American President's first state dinner.  
A false front. Chainmail re:  
oblivion, symbolism akin

to the reconfiguration  
of the ribs of the spring lamb  
they ate together into

an interlocking saber arch position  
called by chefs  
a *guard of honor*. A grand dismantlement  
and reassembly of the ribcage around the hollow  
where the heart was into a diorama of predation  
named for how the ribs resemble

now a double rack of upraised ceremonial swords  
into a long archway I once  
saw a bride and bridegroom walk out the chapel through, into their  
marriage. It excited me  
to see the bride  
enter a tunnel  
of punishment and wonder like a

romantic grownup paddywhack  
machine. We were tailgating at West Point with  
family friends. Not guests of the groom  
or bride, but of the public grass.  
When the last pair of the groom's brothers-  
in-arms crossed swords to block her path and  
another of the guard of honor

swatted her ass before they freed her, according to an old  
military tradition I did not  
anticipate,  
but internalized  
immediately, humiliation  
did its job on me by proxy, and I was  
a woman. The air was

so dense with wasps my mother placed a  
decoy plate of our store-bought chicken nearby  
under a tree. I held a dishonorable  
family secret. No one knows how long  
I kept it. No one could shake it out of me.  
Now I have been fitted for something

like a straitjacket  
and stepped into

it. What a different confidence

I am trussed in.

Someone from behind

up comes to zip me

lifting my hair, so intimately. I can  
bend my foil into  
a steel rainbow. Such  
promise the world

has! But now we must salute  
the apparent enemy and lower our masks. Am  
I satisfied? I'm not. Therefore I advance  
up the strip indifferently mythic  
outfitted like a gentleman to teach  
my child the atrocity of etiquette.

---

*Robyn Schiff is the author of the poetry collections A Woman of Property (2016), Revolver (2008), a finalist for the PEN Award, and Worth (2002). Her work has been featured in several anthologies, including Women Poets on Mentorship: Efforts and Affections (2007) and Legitimate Dangers: American Poets of the New Century (2006).*



## STANLEY KUNITZ MEMORIAL PRIZE

**APR announces the Eleventh Annual Stanley Kunitz Memorial Prize for poets under 40 years of age.**

- **A prize of \$1,000**
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- **May 15, 2020 deadline**

A prize of \$1,000 and publication of the winning poem in *The American Poetry Review* will be awarded to a poet under 40 years of age in honor of the late Stanley Kunitz's dedication to mentoring poets. The winning work will appear on the feature page (back cover) of the September/October 2020 issue of *The American Poetry Review*. All entrants will receive a copy of the September/October 2020 issue.

**Poets may submit one to three poems per entry (totaling no more than three pages) with a \$15 entry fee by May 15, 2020. The editors of *The American Poetry Review* will judge. Winner will be notified by July 1, 2020.**

**See our website for complete guidelines: [www.aprweb.org](http://www.aprweb.org)**

**Send entries to: The American Poetry Review, Stanley Kunitz Memorial Prize, 1906 Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, PA 19103**

# FOUR POEMS

PAUL GUEST

---

## 1999

Pallets of bottled water on the back porch  
were one evidence of apocalypse  
or the demise of the way of things  
or lazily written computer code back  
in the 80s, when I was a boy  
and the nightly news was just about all the doom  
we had stomachs for, when  
were there even ATMs, I don't recall,  
I had no money, allowance was three dollars a week,  
and the future, when the world  
was supposed to end, in fire, in glory,  
in judgment and vague prophecy  
and Jesus and dominion  
and I don't know what else  
except that it was easy to imagine  
ashes and blood and choirs that sang like a storm.  
That was easy. Still is, looking  
up at the mottled evening  
when my phone buzzes with warnings  
and kids on scooters go past  
so sure of bones that will never, never break.  
Betray. Bend. Bruise.  
I should go back in and lock up  
whatever can be  
and put on music that will blanket all the thunder.  
The devil is bowling.  
The devil is beating his wife.  
Those were stories  
my mother told me  
when I was scared  
and talked too much  
in the candlelit darkness of storm-outages.  
My mother, whom I laughed at when she hoarded water  
at the end of the millennium,  
convinced that midnight, New Year's,  
the year 2000  
would bring everything down: power grids and plumbing  
and society when just behind or beyond it was wild murder.  
It was easy to imagine:  
the gutter that stank  
and the blade that was edged with red rust.  
Easy: that thirst, which would be endless, you knew it, like fear.

## 2000

By cartoons I was promised flight  
in cars that weren't really cars,  
were they, aloft in the smog-brown air  
of the future. I'm thinking  
of apocalypse when I shouldn't be.  
Everything is soaked, is flooded,  
the Earth is about used up.  
Let me tell you about my Republican life:  
mostly, it is perfect and  
kind of amazing how

unconcerned I am  
with you. Stay out of my bathroom.  
Stay out of my green  
state, which looks like a cross  
between Missouri and Afghanistan.  
I am not sure what you  
just said, in the rain,  
to this cosmology armed by wealth.  
Once, I was filled up  
with longing. With broken bones.  
With a song in my fat heart  
that has no words.  
Once, I waited in the yard beneath  
a blood-colored moon  
and in the darkness  
there was shrieking.  
I love animals. I love this place.  
Whatever it is, that is  
already dead,  
I love it.


## 2020

Maybe you need to embrace disappointment.  
The way you don't sleep at night,  
dreaming of dry dust on furniture  
and the pleasant odor of plywood  
and what it feels like to peel skin off  
of your thumb. Maybe you should begin  
that perfect novel which will  
save you. Pluck you from the ruddy jaws  
of a monster that is right there  
beyond your failing sight. Not today,  
Satan, or Ronald Reagan—  
you learn that often enough evil is not about  
nuance. It was raining  
the day I was born  
and years later I haven't learned much more  
about the stars: fire  
and cold light afloat in the murk of the cosmos.  
Last night I read about  
the doctors who removed 526 teeth  
from a boy's dying jaw:  
hours in they feared there was no end to it.  
That his pain was infinite.  
Their hands trapped.  
Bits of white bone arrayed in a spiral  
beside his sleeping face  
and it was lovely and an evidence of the divine.  
Well, not really. Maybe you  
aren't real, aren't listening to the wind  
as it goes through the night  
like a sad prayer beneath the stippled sky.  
Maybe. Just maybe things will get better.  
Give it a year.

Existential Crisis 7

That man isn't my life lugging a giant pizza  
box the size of a car's hood but  
I am impressed. Lord help me  
but I am. All summer long  
I've been walking around in this dumb orbit  
attempting to imagine what else  
I can be. Not much, I fear.  
Not much. I was never good  
within my body, not in control of it at all,  
even when I thrilled at going  
fast. A simple pleasure, it.  
Now, watching movies, I wince  
when a young man skates  
downhill and the world around him  
is just blur because I know  
what must come next. Blood and brokenness  
and rolling and suddenness  
and I hate it. Hate  
my teeth that ache in sympathy.  
This is intolerable, isn't it,  
this air which a long time has been called  
summer but I think  
we will be calling it  
something else before long,  
this dystopian season that is coming up.  
What should I say  
to my other lives  
which are blindingly wealthy  
and so agile  
it is probably illegal in Oklahoma,  
right this minute?  
What to say that can be understood  
above the noise of ruin  
and the whispers of flame?  
I love you. I owe you  
fifteen dollars and it is in the mail  
and I will be there, soon,  
being in no way lost.  
Or a little bit. Help me,  
why not, help me back  
the way I meant to go  
and here is a piece of bone that I have been  
carrying  
all my life, all of it,  
my pockets, my mouth, full of what is dead.

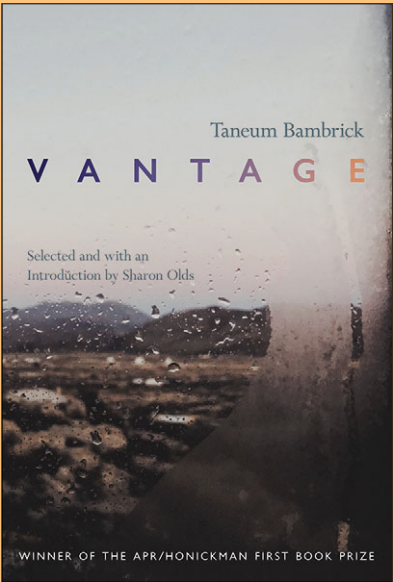
Paul Guest is the author of *The Resurrection of the Body and the Ruin of the World* (2003), which won the *New Issues Poetry Prize*; *Notes for My Body Double* (2006), winner of the *Prairie Schooner Book Prize*; and *My Index of Slightly Horrifying Knowledge* (2008). His memoir, *One More Theory About Happiness* (2010), recounts the bike accident that left him paralyzed from the neck down when he was 12 and charts his life since. Guest's honors and awards include a *Whiting Award* and a *Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship*.



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The prize is made possible by the partnership between The Honickman Foundation and *The American Poetry Review*.

# BLESSING THE RIVER, BLESSING FOR BOUNTY

CAREY SALERNO

---

Let me remember the river, its sickcalm rock sliding beneath the foot,  
its years having wandered in this wood I keep to myself,  
fixing flies on its bank within a bellow of mosquitos—  
I work the thread through the eye of a hook, I work the bobber, xxx I call them xxx.

In the water, my reflection, my signature on the line of a document I cannot read,  
like the one of me leaning  
over the side of our aluminum boat made swift with its motor affixed to the hull.  
Looking in I wondered how deep the water then, how secret

the muck beneath it, how deep the water now  
and everything in between is what is foreign to me, what I'm waiting for to catch the line. Us together  
in the boat, something to start a conversation in this quiet.  
You pray be still to encourage the fish to draw nearer  
I pray to whip the lash on the river and cast them out

Our bobbers white and cherry on either side of the boat—  
Starboard, the other one less interesting than starboard.  
Who says *starboard* for little thing such as ours? The formality. Let's just be together on the water,  
while it laps at the basin, carrying our weight and will,

this water we call *still* but which cannot be anything but, where my open mouth  
appears just as black as it is in the mirror, a cave of words I didn't say  
and now cannot say to you, my father, of the same planet, same state  
even, of the same interest, who taught me how to pluck these fish

from the water. I wander this wood seeking you. A dad and a father's child.  
Something simple as that in the bedrock, on the riverbank, here  
where I hold the caught fish to the light, raising him to my eye, tilting  
its belly toward the bright white and illuming its greens and pinks,

its *ancient wallpaper*, slipping from its mouth the lures he had the most grace not to swallow.  
I hold him up and then sink him back to the stream, hands submerged.  
I watch his tail flit and twitter. He, too, wants away.  
Let us leave this place.

---

*Carey Salerno is the author of Shelter (2009) and the forthcoming collection of poems, Tributary, with Persea Books in 2021. She is the executive editor & director of Alice James Books.*



# THE BALANCING ACTS OF VIJAY SESHADRI

VIPLAV SAINI

*Arriving early at the limit of understanding,  
I managed to find a good seat  
—“The Day of the Sun”  
in The Long Meadow (Vijay Seshadri)*

When asked in an interview about humor in his work, Seshadri acknowledges that satire is an element in his poetry, although not a major one, but that it is “also a technical issue,” suggesting a certain hard-wired necessity:

*Technical issues are actually just masks for things that are fundamental to one’s own psyche. It is in my nature that if I make a large statement such as “Arriving early at the limit of understanding” . . . I’m going to find a way to undercut it rather than go any farther into it and try to do what, say, Rilke did. Rilke would start there, and he would move directly to the sublime. But I could never, ever, in a million years, not feel tremendous irony, and a certain shyness, and a feeling of being abashed, if I continued in that way.<sup>1</sup>*

Consider an instance of this *undercutting* in the poem “This Morning,” from Seshadri’s third collection, *3 Sections*, written in the vein of Frank O’Hara’s *Lunch Poems*, which begins:

*First I had three  
apocalyptic visions, each more terrible than the last.  
The graves open, and the sea rises to kill us all.  
Then the doorbell rang, and I went downstairs and signed for two packages.*

If a poem is like a recipe (to produce a particular sensory experience in the reader), then the apocalyptic vision is a piece of fatty meat, and the having to answer the door to sign for, as it turns out, his neighbor Gus’s packages, is an acidic dressing that cuts the fat to make the dish balanced and palatable. Balance is an important word when considering Seshadri’s poetics, an idea that I explore below.

Returning to Seshadri vs. Rilke, I need to read more Rilke; but from Seshadri’s description of him, Rilke seems like the proverbial dog who relentlessly chases the car (of, in this case, the sublime) and is completely engrossed in the act; Seshadri, on the other hand, like a cat, never quite commits to a single curiosity. A cat’s focus seems to shift easily, from a mouse it’s hunting to a noise in the background, the goal of the hunt itself shifting from finding food to play and back. This split, roving consciousness reminds me of the widely panning camera of Elizabeth Bishop, never giving too much centrality to any one thing in the poem, no ingredient of it feeling outsize in proportion.<sup>2</sup>

The humor in “This Morning” serves Seshadri’s desire to balance the image of the graves opening and the sea devouring the humans. After signing for the packages, the poem’s homebody speaker (“you’re never not at home, the FedEx guy said appreciatively”) watches a fuel oil truck replenish a subsurface tank on his street (“with black draughts / wrung from the rock, blood of the rock”), and then sees his aging neighbors, Frank and Louise, who step over the truck’s hose and slowly walk by, on their way to their cardiologist. The poem is a catalogue of things that the speaker is aware of this particular morning. This speaker, like many of Seshadri’s personae, is aware of things that are opposites, or on different scales: the mundane and the apocalyptic, the humorous and the horrifying, a heating oil truck on a summer day outside and the air-conditioners roaring inside, an old couple with clogged arteries and a hose pulsing with the “blood of the rock.”

For humor in poems to work, to not overwhelm the other elements, or to not serve as a kind of defense, the writer needs to be acutely aware of their “technical issues.” Seshadri appears to be very much in control of his wit; his use of humor does not stray into the territory of being a tic. Thinking back to my experience in poetry workshops, my own use of humor in poems has often been treated with suspicion: perhaps as a certain kind of writerly incontinence (a wit run amok), or as a kind of distancing device

from emotional vulnerability. It is possible that both are true. It is also possible, though, that humor solves for me, too, a “technical issue”: it may be the mask that allows me to approach “heavy” topics, like the ending of a very long relationship, or a mother’s passing. As Zadie Smith commands, “tell the truth through whichever veil comes to hand—but tell it.”

Helen Vendler has described the terms “confessional” and “intellectual” as “often thought to represent two camps in the life of poetry.”<sup>3</sup> Which camp does Seshadri belong to? There is a temptation to think the latter; Seshadri has said of confessionalism:<sup>4</sup>

*It was still new then [in the late 60s] to think that the central material of the poet was what happened to the poet in his or her or their life, directly apprehended and addressed autobiographically in some way. That was newly understood to be the source of drama and interest—the byproduct of a therapeutic, self-help ethos. There was a more traditional idea of poetry that was strong then, an idea of poetry that would lead to the kind of poem Wallace Stevens wrote, or a poem that would give a picture of the world. . . . Poetry changed from that earlier idea, and I guess for the better, overall, though a lot has been lost.*

Major Jackson comes down harshly on this trend:<sup>5</sup>

*Most serious readers agree: The direction of American poetry has, on the whole, remained stagnant since the widespread adoption of psychotherapy and counseling . . . therapeutic insights have birthed many lines of poetry and in some cases entire careers. (I’m looking at you, Anne Sexton.) The resulting volumes are largely complacent in their embrace of fabricated valor and self-disclosure that in other circumstances, away from bookshelves, might produce fits of embarrassment and shame.*

As an admirer of Seshadri, these critiques of confessional poetry produce an anxiety in me. Have I, a writer of what appear to be confessional poems, fallen for the work of an intellectual poet? Am I signing up for another unrequited and withholding relationship with a (poetry) father-figure? But let’s first ask: does Seshadri really fall into the intellectual camp, if indeed any single camp at all?

The poem “Memoir” in *3 Sections* begins on a confessional note: “Orwell says somewhere that no one ever writes the real story of their life. / The real story of a life is the story of its humiliations.” A list of humiliations follows: “weeping in my room,” “boring the tall blonde to death,” caught in the act of being “seized by joy” under the falling pods of a locust tree. However, Seshadri distances himself from that speaker in an interview:<sup>6</sup> “the poem is ironic, and I want to emphasize its irony. I’m not revealing anything. . . . None of those things happened to me. I would never tell anyone what really happened to me.” Or so he says.

While it is true that autobiographical material from Seshadri’s life is absent from his verse—for instance, Seshadri’s Indian descent and his immigration to America (at age five) make no explicit appearance in *Wild Kingdom*<sup>7</sup>—his second collection, *The Long Meadow*, contains a 10-page prose essay, “The Nature of the Chemical Bond,” about Seshadri and his parents’ early years in America (the 1960s), centered on accounts of his father’s obsession with the American Civil War. The piece is intensely confessional, haunted by the Oedipal struggle of the teenage Seshadri who rejects his father’s interest, followed by an early, guilt-tinged epiphany:

*I understood something about him that a son should probably not understand about a father, at least not at that age. The passage to America had, happily for him, thrown him free, but it had also stripped him down to his naked soul. Almost to this day, like the sons of Noah, I have longed to walk backward and cover up the nakedness, the drunkenness of his intellectual obsessions, his naked, unheard-of obsessions, irritably reaching after fact and reason to fold him back into motives less uncanny and more reminiscent.*

Seshadri’s confession here of his negative *incapability* when it comes to his father perhaps resolves the contradiction between this confessional essay—that appears to tell the “real” story of his life—and his earlier claim; maybe he meant to say “I ~~would~~ could never tell anyone what really happened to me.” Perhaps, then, the dichotomy between intellectual and confessional poetry is a false one (no one can tell the true story, every voice is invented). At any rate, this piece serves to provide a solid confessional balance to the poetic personae invented by Seshadri in *The Long Meadow*—including Superman, an Art History lecturer, and a TV interviewer—in order, perhaps, to solve particular intellectual problems.

Seshadri repeats this balancing trick (an undercutting?) in *3 Sections*. Amidst “intellectual” poems—that investigate the nature and limits of consciousness, the impossibility of having a soul, and the lives of various invented personae—sits a mammoth 6000-word prose piece, titled “Pacific Fishes of Canada,” that is similar to “The Nature of the Chemical Bond” in its length and confessional feel. It begins with an account of Seshadri as a young man, gravitating in the late seventies and early eighties towards the salmon fishing industry in the Pacific Northwest, eventually accompany-

ing for several months a crew of thirty-three Japanese sailors, as an observer for the US Fisheries Service, on the *Akebono Maru No. 11*, a small 140-foot fishing boat sailing in the forbidding Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea.

When I read *3 Sections* for the first time, I was not quite sure what to make of this 13-page essay, distracted perhaps by its size and how unlike the other pieces in the collection (which are clearly poems) it was. Upon rereading, however, I noticed that the tone in “Pacific Fishes” feels the most autobiographical of all the work in the collection, certainly the most unadorned by the trappings of an invented voice. The biographical details of the speaker in the essay are consistent with what is known of Seshadri’s life, and many hallmarks of a typical Seshadri poem are missing. There are none of the obscure words—scrofulous, consanguine, coruscating, integuments, cicatrix, bivouac—that dot his poems. While physical detail is often scarce in the poems—although almost always carefully selected in order to achieve a balance of scale, between, say, the minute and the cosmic—the essay is richly detailed. Consider the following, almost hysterical (or Whitmanian) list of sundry fishing catch:

*[T]he sample baskets were filled with odd, fascinating specimens: sand-lances; prow-fish; quillfish; thorny, great, sailfin, grunt, and ribbed sculpins; various members of the tasty Scorpaenidae family—darkblotched rockfish, dusky, silvery-gray, roughey, and redbanded rockfish, blues, tigers, ocean perch; the eelpout, the clingfish, the viperfish; dolly vardens (named after a character in Barnaby Rudge); spine eels, gunnels, pricklebacks; starry skates and black skates; dogfish; greenlings; lingcod; rattails; capelins; flathead sole and arrowtooth flounder.*

It is as if, freed from having to decide on where to break the line, he no longer needs to select details, and decides to include *all* of them.

“Pacific Fishes” is also remarkable in the apparently unlimited view, offered to the reader, of the poet’s inner life. Early in the piece:

*Salmon fishermen of the mid-to-late seventies and early eighties were a variety of human being whose habits, behaviors, adaptations, and patterns of mind were interesting to me, both to emulate and to observe. . . . The shift in perspective that comes from looking at the land from the water made them worldly and detached.*

“Worldly and detached” is a reasonable description of the voices Seshadri himself inhabits in his poems (although not the voice in this essay, which feels more intimate and vulnerable), and he has talked in interviews of the “shift in perspective” that the other journey from India to Canada—through air presumably—caused in him. The young Seshadri discovers in the salmon fishermen, people he identifies with:

*The transformation in the motion under their feet, from liquid to solid and back again, altered their minds in expansive ways; so did interchanging, week in and week out, solitude and sociability. Metaphysically alert and double-visioned because they negotiated between two fundamental, antagonistic elements[.]*

The desire to travel, in a “metaphysically alert and double-visioned” manner, the unstable liminal spaces bridging “antagonistic elements,” while searching for an elusive balance (or equilibrium), seems to be one of the goals of Seshadri’s poetic project. His sojourn on the Japanese boat in the Bering Sea allowed Seshadri to inhabit a similar space, and not just in terms of land versus water, but also between cultures and countries. His journey begins with a literal unbalancing: he gets violently seasick for days. Later, after a few months, he realizes that, depending on the weather, he is cycling between two kinds of mental states on the boat, one of them a kind of balanced equilibrium in the world:

*When the weather was good, I moved through the day feeling my destiny fulfilled. . . . The globe we live on, its lands and creatures, rolled below me as an extension of myself. I’d found my balance on the rolling floor, and it was as if I had my balance for the first time, and as if that balance were absolute, were itself a kind of perception comprising all the senses, and unifying them at this pinpoint of being. . . . [I] had arrived at a mysterious and cosmic inner intersection.*

Seshadri’s passage on the Bering Sea reminds me of the episode of *sagar manthan* (churning of the ocean) narrated in the *Mahabharata*. The universe is in a political turmoil: the gods and the demons are trying to wrest control from each other. Nevertheless, these fundamentally antagonistic forces decide to churn the ocean together. A snake is tied around a mountain, with the demons and the gods pulling at either end, in a tug-of-war, using the mountain as a fulcrum for the churning. They dredge up all manner of things: celestial objects (a moon), a number of goddesses, precious stones, supernatural animals (a divine elephant, a seven-headed horse, a wish-granting cow), a powerful bow, rare and potent trees, the milk of immortality, a potent poison, and so on. Seshadri’s exhaustive list from earlier, of the “odd, fascinating specimens” pulled by the fishing boat, seems to mirror the output of the *sagar manthan*’s celestial upheaval. Indeed, his finding of balance on the rolling floor, and the cosmic unification of his senses, hints

at a certain generative nature of his psychic churn (and his churning stomach) while at sea.

There are days on the boat that flood our narrator with existential anxieties about his identity (the other state he finds himself in). In the throes of one such episode, we learn for the first time that he is a child of immigrants—but not until the second-to-last paragraph of the essay:

*When the weather was bad, though—and the weather was mostly bad . . . the word misgivings couldn’t begin to comprehend the mortification I felt at being on a boat on the Bering Sea in this kind of weather. The crew might have been morose, but they knew where they came from and where they belonged. I, obviously, knew neither. I was pathetic, living someone else’s life because I didn’t have one of my own. . . . What would become of my poor immigrant parents if I drowned out here?*

Ping-ponging between balmy skies and cataclysmic storms, struggling to find a balance between the good days and the mostly bad days, from feeling at one with the world to having no sense of who he is, our narrator is adrift. One evening, he sees a small fishing boat—the first sighting of another boat their size in several months—toiling by itself in heavy waves, struggling. Struck to his core by the loneliness and despair of this image, the narrator withdraws to his cabin and emerges a day later on the boat’s deck in the middle of a full-blown gale, the sight of the far-off land (the Pribilof Islands) repeatedly washed out by water as the boat plunges from the crest to the trough of huge waves. The scene calls to mind the iconic crashing waves from *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* by Katsushika Hokusai.

In the midst of this chaos, the word Indian appears for the first time in the book, and Seshadri’s essay ends with the following lines (emphases mine):

*I said to myself, “I am an Indian. What am I doing here?” I said it over and over. It wasn’t **exactly** what I meant to say to myself. Despair tends to cloud insight, and makes thought **imprecise**. But, in fact, what I meant to say **exactly** I have yet to find words for.*

Perhaps Seshadri is reminding us here that no one can tell the true (*exact*) story of their lives, that there are experiences that leave us at a loss for words, leaving us unable to see things for what they are.<sup>8</sup>

As an Indian immigrant in Cleveland, balanced between the east and west coasts of America, I have often asked myself Seshadri’s question: I am an Indian! What am I doing here? In a sense, I am also like his father from the other essay, having felt, at times, that my migration has stripped me, “down to [my] naked soul.” What propelled the young Seshadri to embark on a journey in the Bering Sea with Japanese sailors who barely spoke any English? Was it an attempt to reenact his father’s dislocation? By immersing himself in the literal and psychic churn of the Bering Sea, Seshadri may have found the engine of his creativity. Maybe I too have discovered this engine by repeating my father’s dislocation—from his village to Delhi—by coming to America.

Interestingly, “Pacific Fishes” is followed by a 17-page single-stanza free verse poem, titled “Personal Essay,” that declares its preoccupation to be

*the difference  
between the experience I find compelling enough  
to imagine sitting at a screen writing about it  
and the experience that is its polar opposite  
(which is compelling, too,  
though in a way that leaves me disinclined to express myself in words,  
that tends to annihilate words).*

When he is at a loss for words at the end of his confessional essay—arriving, perhaps, at the limit of understanding—Seshadri turns to poetry in “Personal Essay,” the word essay in the title alerting us to the liminal space between prose and poems, and even “confessional” and “intellectual.”

The motif of the crest and trough of the waves from “Pacific Fishes” is present in “Personal Essay.” In the poem, as he is falling asleep, we find the speaker trying to inhabit the in-between space, a balance, between consciousness and the unconscious:

*On the great ball rolling back and forth between waking and sleeping,  
I am balancing,  
backpedaling when it rolls forward, running in place when it rolls back.  
This is the moment, if I’m lucky, if I can  
keep my balance, neither wake up or fall asleep, that the waters part  
and I see the faces.*

The rolling floor of the boat from “Pacific Fishes” is now transformed to the surface of the ball between sleep and wakefulness.<sup>9</sup> In “Divination in the Park” from *Wild Kingdom* there is a balancing act on a different kind of ball: “I lie over the earth, to feel it swim / inside my posture, and sleep, / . . . / I cling to the earth as it banks and glides.”

The metaphor of travel as a liminal state is reinforced in the “Personal Essay” when we learn that the speaker is writing from a car on Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn, headed to JFK for an international flight. He tells us:

from where I'm writing this just a small, manageable interval  
of leisurely, meditative travel in an automobile  
will bring you to a cliff side overlooking the eastern ocean

where, behind a veil of water particles,

the sun appears  
not blinding and burning to the eyes, but as  
a pure white disk  
...  
into which you can stare and stare.  
To look straight into the sun risen behind the mist  
is the point of the exercise.

Traveling the liminal space between opposing forces, writing the poem by walking a tightrope over fire,<sup>10</sup> has its satisfactions: it can allow you to see what would have blinded you; you might be able to, if you have the right veil, say something about an experience “that tends to annihilate words.”

Seshadri is back at the edge of the world in his recently published poem “Cliffhanging.”<sup>11</sup> Adrift in a world where “[t]he forces out to kill us with their benevolence / are more crazed now than they were,” he wishes to see *less*, but those personae he invented to stare at the sun are coming for him: “our phantom selves are coming after us, / crawling out of the poems we made.” By the end of the poem, he is barely hanging on, but is also, strangely, unwilling to do anything about it:

The great wave that breaks through the crust of the world  
is rising and rising and lifting me far inland,  
only to suck me back and drop me dangling by one arm  
on the edge of the half-eaten cliff.  
I won't let myself fall, but I don't want to pull myself up.  
I'm ambivalent. I'm ambivalent forever now.

We are living through a time when phrases like “an annihilation of words,” “a great wave,” and “on the brink” are not unreasonable descriptors of many people’s experience of the world. Seshadri’s ambivalent, double-visioned speakers, performing their feats of balancing inside cosmic churnings, chasing precarious equilibriums, trying to survive the great waves, are maybe exactly the voices we should be listening to right now.

Viplav Saini is a native of Delhi, India; his work has been previously published, or is forthcoming, in Ploughshares, The Southern Review, and The Massachusetts Review. A Kundiman fellow, he teaches economics at New York University.

Notes

1. “A Poet of Belief: Interview with Alice Quinn,” *The New Yorker*, June 14, 2004.
2. Ibid. Seshadri on hesitation and Bishop: “[T]he turns in my poems are often ironic, and in certain cases dismissive. But those are just rhetorical strategies. It’s not that I don’t trust big statements, or that I’m unwilling to pursue them any farther than I do, or seem to, but if you tend to be an ironic poet (and person), like I am, and filled with all these refractions and hesitations, you have to employ those things. They’re crucial to your psyche. I think Elizabeth Bishop is very, very good for poets who are a little shy. They should always read her, because she makes her shyness, her naturalness, her ‘modesty,’ into this tremendous metaphysical force.”
3. Helen Vendler, “Flower Power: Louise Glück’s *The Wild Iris*,” *The New Republic*, May 24, 1993, 35.
4. Interview with Kaveh Akbar, Divedapper.com <<https://www.divedapper.com/interview/vijay-seshadri/>> Sep. 26, 2016.
5. *New York Times*, Oct. 4, 2017.
6. “Before and After the Pulitzer: An Interview with Vijay Seshadri,” by Kalpna Singh-Chitnis <<http://lifeandlegends.com/pulitzer-interview-vijay-seshadri-kalpna-singh-chitnis/>>.
7. Seshadri on this: “India in my poetry serves the same function as God does in Pascal’s universe. It is everywhere present, but nowhere apparent.” “The Gulley” in *Wild Kingdom*, for instance, subtly employs the vocabulary of cricket (shot, slip, gulley) throughout.
8. Perhaps this is what he sees as the nature of confessionalism, but then are insight and precision virtues to be pursued at all costs?
9. This is also reminiscent of the beginning of Marcel Proust’s *Swann’s Way*:  
For a long time, I went to bed early. Sometimes, my candle scarcely out, my eyes would close so quickly that I did not have time to say to myself: “I’m falling asleep.” And, half an hour later, the thought that it was time to try to sleep would wake me; I wanted to put down the book I thought I still had in my hands and blow out my light; I had not ceased while sleeping to form reflections on what I had just read, but these reflections had taken a rather peculiar turn; it seemed to me that I myself was what the book was talking about: a church, a quartet, the rivalry between François I and Charles V.
10. This image due to April Bernard.
11. *The New Yorker*, January 21, 2019.

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# ALESSANDRA LYNCH

Here is my mind                      Violence requires  
    agency of a different kind                      No responsibility  
 Something more mechanical                      Numb forgetful hands  
    forgetful feet                      numb                      My violence                      The violent daughter  
 of myself                      my voice                      strangled                      now become  
    my daughter                      one of the children  
 lying dead on the mind-field                      bright pollen heavy on their eyelids

The closet door's open                  See the green glassy sea tilting beyond it  
A figure rowing away              her bronze back  
muscle                                  incandescent as ironwood                  at dusk  
beribboned hat on her head  
but I know she has no face  
  
I am sure of things like that  
sure as a snake     parting the salt                  like a loose tongue

★ ★ ★

I feel this lonesome.

*Alessandra Lynch is the author of three books, most recently Daylily Called It a Dangerous Moment (chosen as one of The New York Times' ten best books of poetry in 2017, winner of the Balcones Prize, and finalist for the UNT Rilke Prize and the LA Times Book Award). She has received residencies at Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony. Currently she is Poet-in-Residence at Butler University in Indianapolis.*

# NARRATIVE

## STEVIE EDWARDS

Saint Agatha holds her breasts  
two jiggly vanilla pudding cups  
with red berry nipples plopped  
upon a silver platter. What I can't see  
is the blood, the knife marks. This gory waitressing,  
her task for not consenting  
to open for Quintianus. *Oh purr yes*  
he begged, but she was a closed clam.

This is supposed to be a better ending:  
to be a carved Christmas turkey  
but pure in the eyes of God. Once, I believed  
I could save a woman, called  
campus police when I heard screaming  
in the dorm next door, listened  
to a lamp crash, a desk thrust over, thuds  
of a body becoming pocked

with night sky's worst ink. The door unlocked  
to a stranger in her underwear,  
her lip split, meat showing. Her assailant  
was a bear, a college linebacker. She asked me  
to stay near her while she dressed  
not wanting to be alone with the cop  
who turned his back dutifully. I held her  
while he asked scripted questions:

*did she know the man, did he penetrate, did she say  
no, had she been drinking, had he  
been drinking.* Agatha, this woman was so  
small, barely five-foot, small arms, small  
legs, small breasts. I thought she was brave to banshee  
scream to wake the neighbors  
but it didn't stop the bulldozing  
beast, his rabid want. Agatha, I want  
a painting of you with your breasts  
as mangled cutlets on a cutting board  
a man with a white apron drowned  
in red. I want someone to tell the truth.

Stevie Edwards is the author of two poetry collections, *Good Grief (Write Bloody, 2012)* and *Humanly (Small Doggies, 2015)*, as well as a recent chapbook, *Sadness Workshop (Button Poetry, 2018)*. She is founder/editor-in-chief of *Muzzle Magazine* and a senior editor at *YesYes Books*. She works as a lecturer in the English Department at *Clemson University*.



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# THREE POEMS

francine j. harris

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## *Limulus Polyphemus*

“Who you looking at?” —Fred Moten

In class, I stared because of the blood going blue.  
The chalk that coated our fingerly teeth.  
The way we lapped each other (on the shore  
where the flowering). I gave away

our location. Smacked my lips in the coat closet.  
Sucked at her teeth. We, on all eights, we had magical  
innards. Coagulated ground germ. We stood in the torture lights.

Sandy liked to say in those moments: *What the fuck  
you looking at*, in a rasp. Her smooth neck of coal coast.  
In the shells they brought in. Her, whose voice I can still hear.  
We sat still at that. In carapace, in book gill. The UV light  
of her face in my face. We dodge at first, then the stainless plunge.

I am overhear. Wanting you sense in me.  
The medicinal leak. The thick abating. If they  
are bacteria, so coalesce. The beginning  
world is in you. The old story. Did I ever get  
the pleasure of your fist. Did you kick at me  
custodially. Knock around a bean in my skull.  
So rattle, Rattler. Mimic the scorpion. Head  
caved in. Rolling to a crab-hard squint.

Or was it mouthspray. Cover story. Whatever we bled out  
was given to white men for research before they kicked us  
back to sea. Half faint, half apocalypse. Beauty, Blue—  
it was hideous what we gnarled into house, under our hard shell.  
Stabbed at and raked over. I was nothing but eyes. A million  
*ommatidia*, plus a pair of median desires to sense out, to sea.  
If we could fuck in the open, on the wide-open shore, black  
sand. Would I be the dead woman whose back she clung to.

## Ablate the Suncups, not the Ice: an Incantation

for I.

O god of the desublime, allay the vertical penitentes  
their limbs, rest them back cold, not in precipitate  
but in seed, in potential of hydrogen. Spoon in density

to be sung of their winter’s seed and soak. Sip pond  
to suncups, over sunrise. Far from the flat dispatch  
of heat, its stench, its wayward ever summer barge

and fallout. Jesus be a river. Be a untainted float  
of deliquescent surge. Be saltless and cold.  
O pose of hope, allay the waterfall, hear their prayer,

O bed of oxygen, divine surge. Be also brackish sea. Be  
seed of the frost, and supercooled. Be shade soup.  
Sweet hail of beloved drench and mitochondrial belly,

be flint for the watery flame. Douse out the eventual  
crunch, the big scorch, the rip of our primordial anus  
and mouth, suckling at the place of eco abundance. O sweet bio teet,

O hygroscopic lordess. Were we to sit still and let ourselves be cold  
for hours, wiped of web crack frost, mild sud of the slow glacier,  
rimed vat at the edge of rash season, our legs from twitching.

O known keep of tomorrow, might we skill our motor by, pedal  
from the crib of our await. O stable evolver, an alms for safe passage,  
your earthen cooling, forgive us our erosion. Heal the demanding snows.

## Self Portrait as Good Samaritan

It’s been long enough ago hasn’t it, wherein we used to call  
cops on a woman gathering her too skinny boy by the coat collar let  
the system work it out, tell the cops come get this woman before I put  
my hands on her all the while her boy just moaning so soft what it could

mean if I did or what else to do the same as it always meant truth be told I  
am in a warm café and reading Zora by near candlelight and earth  
wind and fire on the speakers and the sound is mellow and I am just happy how  
smart she is it took us so long to know how much Oluale Kossola takes

the Affica route and she hears it all and writes it all down and if I was a film  
maker I’d make that script for Tiffany Haddish I don’t know who would play  
Cudjo Lewis, but I know Zora was funny and wild and big voiced and didn’t  
stay too long on any given point she was already done with and there is a photo of

Cudjo and his two precious grandbabies that he picked those perfect  
peaches for from a bin of fresh picked peaches and gave them to the grandbabies so  
they could run and go play and Jericho is right in saying now if I put a perfect  
peach in a poem it somehow mean I am thinking of Ross Gay and I try to think

if I would be a patient mother or if I would be the woman whose boy other  
people want to take away or at least get him out my house for a while I don’t keep  
people too close for long before they figure out I can be cold not cruel but I can  
snap and my moods I guess I get from my mother that I don’t much like it when

people evaluate my personality like they would know for me it’s easier if when my  
roommate tells me the story of a woman on the train who was cussing out her baby  
boy and when she went to put her hands on him her friend said *fight me instead* and she  
did she tried but evidently that didn’t work out because her friend put that woman in

a hospital and still it seem like that’s better than calling the cops on her nowadays but  
it’s always been that way ain’t it Zora Neale Hurston asked Cudjo to tell her about  
being the last living man who knew and so Kossola told her stories about the village  
in which his grandfather led the path of a king only for the king to order the head

of a man who took a whisker from a lion’s jowl meant for the king to be taken off after  
the love is gone is off then it’s billy jean and fine but then it’s thriller and then the way  
you make me feel and I don’t understand but I’m shaking and no one is saying any  
thing so I do go up to the counter and ask *what’s with the run* it’s kind of tone  
deaf and she says I can change it and I do. do that and she does. change it.

---

francine j. harris is the author of play dead, winner of the Lambda Literary and Audre Lorde Awards and finalist for the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award. Her third collection, Here Is the Sweet Hand, is forthcoming from Farrar, Straus & Giroux in 2020. Originally from Detroit, she has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, Cave Canem, and MacDowell Colony. She was the 2018/2019 Rona Jaffe Foundation Fellow at the Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library and is Associate Professor of English at University of Houston.

# TWO POEMS

## PAGE HILL STARZINGER

### Galaxy Filament

Of time evaporating, of my mother’s finger  
running down my nose during the uncording  
ceremony, after she died, the vast sky,  
the Milky Way neighborhood,  
and me, and David, and the black cat growing tumors,  
rain falling, drops left over, puddles gathering,  
reflecting the baby birds, black millipedes dropping  
off branches, white blossoms floating below cedar,  
sunrays bleaching shells, stop signs fading,  
a family of wild donkeys milling around  
an outdoor basketball court at noon in high heat,  
sargassum mats drifting from the horse latitudes  
into Drunk Bay, flush with plastic waste and  
eel nests, washing onto sandstone rocks,  
a lost rubber raft cast ashore with a long towline dragging in the surf,  
chickens jump-flapping off trash heaps filled with twisted stair railings  
and corrugated roofs blown off by 30 tornados  
of two Cat 5 hurricanes, red dust from the Sahara Desert  
sifting toward us, nutrients feeding the phytoplankton  
but also pathogenic bacteria of the genus *Vibrio*,  
iguanas digging nests into the ground and burying their eggs  
until hatchlings crack the shells, wait underground  
until each emerges, then one after the other, in a line,  
scratch their way out. A lone heron soars across the bay.

### My Unborn Child Says to Me

*You are a mouse in a dove’s coat.*

An apron with hands:  
that’s what I didn’t want to be, I replied.

*It’s taken you a long time to catch on.*

But is it a race?

*Time grew tired waiting.*

He’s sexist.

*You’re binary.*

I don’t think I was strategic.

*No, you wanted to be free of the past.*

*Untethered.*

*To step into a stream like your mother,  
walk one narrow slice  
of water after another.  
Mayflies rising.*

*A world—constantly changing,  
shimmering.  
You felt this was New York.*

That sounds right.

*See, I knew you before you saw the stream.  
I lay inside you  
when you curled within your mother.*

*I was one of your last two eggs—  
you saw me on the sonogram: remember?*

I look at my right thumbnail—  
misshapen from picking at cuticles. I can’t  
see this child now,  
but for the voice.

*We come accidentally and try to find our place.*

I have been hungry before: in the south of France,  
the cypress, the picnics, the boy’s lips. Simply too animal.  
Unprotected, we were. But everything else receded,  
a blaze of heat pushing outward, filling  
me. Probably a late period, so I went to his doctor  
and he recommended a wash,  
just from the pharmacie,  
nothing much.

*Yes, I recall: Aix comes from Latin for water.  
You  
have never been ready.*

I was  
pursuing the boy.

*And then you didn’t trust  
your body again.*

I think it scared me.

*You worry too much about the past.  
Stop dwelling  
there.*

Where did you get so bossy? I mean, so  
definitive.

*I got it from you, dear.*

Page Hill Starzinger’s second poetry collection, *Vortex Street*, is coming from Barrow Street Press in spring 2020. Her first book, *Vestigial*, selected by Lynn Emanuel to win the Barrow Street Book Prize, was published in 2013. Her chapbook *Unshelter*, chosen by Mary Jo Bang as winner of the Noemi contest, was published in 2009. Starzinger was Copy Director at *Aveda* for almost twenty years, and she co-authored *A Bouquet* from the Met (Abrams, 1998). She lives in New York City.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

*Letters should be sent to:*

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1906 Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, PA 19103-5735.

# FIVE POEMS

## JARED HARÉL

---

### Overnight

Your daughter returns to you  
with three new freckles,  
the purple stain  
of a popsicle on her tongue.  
She gives nothing but what you glean  
from slimmed features,  
sneakers gone old, the black hole  
of a backpack she shrugs  
off her shoulders  
to race, unencumbered,  
towards her friends  
down the street.

Just yesterday, she clung  
to the nape of your t-shirt,  
begging to stay.

Just yesterday,  
she was yours, and you

gave her away.

### As Plagues Go

*(after Natalie Shapero)*

As plagues go, ten seems excessive.  
Consider how the first darkened water

to blood; the mighty Nile gushing  
like a giant slit throat. That Pharaoh refused

to relinquish his slaves, and continued  
to refuse, says all you need to know

about men + power. But you know what  
gets me? That after each plague, when Moses

demanded that the Israelites be released,  
God *hardened Pharaoh's heart* to ensure

he wouldn't relent. A divine rigging,  
and a pretty dick move. I want to believe

God had His reasons. But I've seen  
His kind. All His miracles are crimes.

### Starfish

aren't fish, in fact,  
but marine invertebrates  
otherwise called sea stars.  
These ancient,  
opportunistic creatures  
fill oceans with little  
personality, no  
discernible features  
but a famed shape.  
Still, there is something  
to say for resilience  
in this world.

Lop off a spoke,  
and not only will the sea star  
sprout one back,  
but the very limb severed  
may grow a whole self,  
its own orbiting star,  
an entity entirely  
autonomous  
and new. And if  
this is true, then perhaps  
each starfish  
is the same starfish,  
and to eliminate one,  
you'd have to  
flush out the sea.

### On Suffering

Pity it insists on visiting the innocent,  
the absent-minded and ill-prepared.  
It greets an old tailor as he tucks away  
his tape-measure. Drops in on a woman  
jogging near the park. With no regard  
for timing or grace, it crashes a prayer circle,  
the classroom, the dance. To be clear,  
I'm no expert. I know only that suffering  
simmers in every heart, singes in plain sight  
like an expensive electric stove, and though  
my grandfather told me over and over,  
I don't know how he made it through bone  
and mud in some shithole Polish village  
in 1941, or how he lost everything—  
brutally—and kept shuffling into light.

### Name It

*(National Museum of the U.S. Air Force, Dayton, OH)*

That the military felt it necessary to write BOMB  
on its thermonuclear, hydrogen bomb  
might be the greatest argument for never  
building one. There it is: tidy print on a giant green pill  
the way I write my son's name inside the collar  
of his winter coat, or how my daughter  
pilots a pencil between parallel lines. *Takeaways,*

she calls them, the act of subtraction. I've learned  
this country starts us young. Were they nervous  
some cadet, fresh from a jog, might think it  
a large scuba tank? Their long-promised refrigerator  
due any day? Behind the bomb is a banner  
of that famed fireball billowing in the distance,  
multiplied by the sea. Crimson detonation. Breath-  
taking, really. Still today I made pancakes

while my son laid waste to our Tupperware cabinet,  
and my daughter dragged graphite through  
farmhouse cows, X-ing out swing-sets and dolphins  
and clowns. *There are this many left*, she told me,  
beaming. Dear Bomb, I can't pretend you aren't  
impressive: the science behind you. Your simplicity  
of design. This impulse to eliminate, name it, say *Mine*.

---

*Jared Har l is the author of Go Because I Love You (Diode Editions, 2018). He's been awarded the Stanley Kunitz Memorial Prize from The American Poetry Review and the William Matthews Poetry Prize from Asheville Poetry Review. Har l lives in Queens, New York, with his wife and kids.*

# INNOVATION

## CATRIONA WRIGHT

---

In the classroom students are imagining screens  
that feel like silk, like silt, fiery as kilns, off kilter.  
They discuss a future with stone walls that dissolve  
into fog and reconstitute as universal organs, pulsing,  
a future with robot spouses who know when to cuddle  
and when coffee and when cancer ceases being  
hypochondria. Cantilevered bridges swarming with living  
concrete that can heal itself before collapse. Algorithms  
to predict crime and epidemics. In the classroom students  
are imagining a future so immaculate they omit  
turnips, dirt, tantrums, long aimless walks, lust.  
They trust the relentless process, don't pause to mourn  
the prototypes twitching in their mass graves,  
last words a slur of diminishing whirs and forlorn  
bleeps. Onward! They forget to eat, and when the tears splash  
onto control, delete, they try goggles until the plastic cups  
fill with lacrimal fluid. Then they try bigger goggles.  
Perhaps two sponges tamping ducts? Tiny flying robots  
to slurp up obsolete secretions? It's a simple matter  
of separating mass: keyboard from human weakness.  
Can they imagine doubting this new disposition? Losing faith?  
To stall, stop, step back. Imagine watching a chameleon turn  
magenta then chartreuse without itching to optimize its magic,  
augment its pigments. To be content having changed nothing  
in the world except the way they and their kin stumble through it.

*Catriona Wright is the author of the poetry collection Table Manners (Véhicule Press, 2017) and the short story collection Difficult People (Nightwood Editions, 2018). Her poems have been anthologized in The Next Wave: An Anthology of 21st Century Canadian Poetry and in The Best Canadian Poetry 2015 & 2018.*