



SUGAR HOUSE REVIEW

#10

5-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

\$12

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AN INDEPENDENT POETRY MAGAZINE

# 5 YEARS OF SUGAR

Five years and ten issues later, we decided that *Sugar House Review* has earned the right to talk about itself. When this project began, in early 2009, our beautiful state of Utah didn't have an independent, print literary magazine, nor did it have a magazine dedicated to poetry. We thought we would try and fill those gaps. Honestly, we had no idea what we were getting ourselves into.

It's been amazing and rewarding, but there have been challenges: funding, friendships, and free time have been stressed. That being said, every time it seems we are running on fumes, something amazing happens: accolades (such as four Pushcart Prizes) and friendships have consistently developed when we've most needed them. We don't mean to suggest we subscribe to the grand kismet, but we have noticed a pattern.

*Sugar House Review* grew from a conversation among friends to a responsibility when Roberta "Bobbie" Stearman granted *Sugar* first rights to some of her late husband's (Utah's second poet laureate, and a hero to us all, Kenneth W. Brewer) unpublished "Fat Boy" poems. Ken passed away in 2006, after a battle with pancreatic cancer, but the final months of his life may have been his most inspired. With superb poems by one of our heroes in-hand, it was time to make a magazine worthy of his work.

Several other heroes and keystone contributors have also departed, including Rane Arroyo, William Kloefkorn, and Hillary Gravendyk. Arroyo sent us work to "make peace with the Utah of his past." Kloefkorn was a stalwart of the Midwest writing scene and helped connect us to a community that's been essential to *Sugar's* success.

We solicited Gravendyk's work after reading her incredible full-length collection, *Harm* (Omnidawn, 2012). We received word in mid-May that she passed away after a long illness, the same illness *Harm* chronicles. Within two weeks, we received a letter from Bill Henderson—dated eight days before her death—informing us that her poem "Your Ghost" (published in our ninth issue) was selected for a 2015 Pushcart Prize. It still stings that we weren't able to share this news with Hillary.

These last five years have filled us with too much gratitude to express herein. This span has also helped us flesh out a mission, or, an aesthetic, if you prefer: it's our goal for *Sugar House Review* to be a magazine of breadth, one that represents poetry's happenings now. We promise to do our best to honor the work of each generous poet that graces our pages. If you like what you see, please subscribe and spread the word. We intend to stick around, and your support will help.

Sincerely,

SUGAR EDITORS

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## CONVERSATION ABOUT WATER

Because you are afraid of whales  
and tell me as if it weren't ridiculous,  
I can tell you about my fear of open water,  
which extends to the deep-end of pools.  
I imagine you floating in the enormous ocean,  
treading above a Great Blue Whale,  
as the world's largest mammal approaches,  
the filter teeth lined up like barcodes  
breathing you in with the krill.  
I laugh because it's ridiculous.  
The Portuguese man-of-war on the other hand,  
will kill you with effortless grace, wrapping  
its delicate tentacle around your ankle,  
stinging, numbing, paralyzing as you sink.  
You can hear the deadly seriousness in my voice,  
I've thought about this like you've thought  
about the three inch height of an Orca's tooth,  
forty-five in each mouth, at least four whales to a pod,  
that's a hundred and eighty, three-inch teeth.  
You tell me there's a lot to be said about being afraid  
of what's beneath you.

OUR PORNOGRAPHY WILL BE FAMOUS,  
DIFFICULT

The Jesuits are expelled, replaced by wine.  
A house cat paces a cleared table, impatient

for the predicted rain—the little yawn  
of a scale model mtn. lion.

If approached: 1. Loud noises.  
2. Appear larger than you are.  
3. Fight back if attacked.  
4. Enjoy the sudden richness  
of air. 5. Threaten to name names

if it comes to it. Unseal the envelope.  
Remove Japanese death poem.

If ignored, implore Mother: 1. Tongue  
2. Land  
3. Ship

and the distance entoddlering her,  
the burgundy drapes & siren.

Apologizing in advance for what my body will be  
in ten years,  
I watch the sun sputter out.

The sky outside could look like anything  
at this point. The Spring, so far,

has been obscene. I could smell the rain  
before I heard it, but I hear it now too.

## HORIZON

From the box office, back, movie-goers  
curve through hot night. In pools,  
lit humidity turns to gauze  
optic-white shirts on men's hard tans.  
The red dazzle of a lithe girl's dress  
softens to rose above her sandals.  
Rusty palms creak, tubbed in concrete.

Whether the naked, dollied-in-on corpse  
of an Argentine school teacher, half on  
bed/half on floor, or Swedish actors,  
large-pored in a subway's fluorescent  
crime-light, or Mussolini's future  
wife in black and white, crushed  
like Abyssinia beneath his kiss,

we're fixed on the image. In the Gulf  
and five miles down, a vessel's burst,  
oil flamed, earth's cerebro hemorrhage,  
gassy black in its nerves. A dolphin pod's  
stained sonar turns vertigo's circle.  
Distinguishable beak in a bowl of tar, a nested  
pelican blinks. Defects in the visual field:

sea creatures float into dribbling  
particulates of dispersant. Red snapper  
and cobia blanche. The line,  
like arm-drift, can't bend to attention,  
our dollars pushed fast into a slot  
cold airs escapes from. In the lobby,  
popcorn slicks with butter from a tap.  
The state's locked in, conscious,  
paralyzed but for its eyes. Whale sharks  
starve in the dark.

## AFTER-IMAGE: THE RAINBOW

A bloody trail of Cs wheeled across her calendar's white blocks,  
one for each time she cried. Ash of summer fires above the Arboretum  
whitened her hair, mine, her ribs jutting under cotton as I climb  
hindsight like a fogbow's tricky replica, around our shadows circles  
of light called 'the glory.'

Afternoons before her hand fixed cold around a music box's key,  
its melancholic kitsch in a plush horse that cantered with her  
on its back out of the world, I sat with madness, its child's voice,  
childish gestures, rain-sheets sporadic behind her eyes.  
The Avenues back-scattered with smoke.

What she did, months later, drew hunters to a perfect place,  
aspens fret-worked with frost stenciled on the windows of her car,  
which she'd taped. At her piano, she'd played the milk and ice  
of Schumann, a final mind. I couldn't read  
in her exultant face the method of her plan.

That's how, she said, Westerners do it—at midnight in a canyon—  
though we had fed the sickness ice cream, any flavor  
it wanted. Though it ate scrambled eggs, an only meal for days,  
and last, I can say now, sugar cookies. She grew  
to thirteen, arms skinny in a pink A-line, purity diluted to a smear.

I opened her apartment door to perfect order: a small lamp  
lit, fresh box of tissues beside it. Every surface polished with fury.  
Her note a crypto-grammar, no words in it to misconstrue  
taped to a no-door in the no-place that opens before me,  
still, grief, constant as a waterfall in air.

## AFTER-HOURS AT THE MUSEUM OF TOLERANCE

*Where you kin from*, Ruby C. Williams asks the miles of fields, black-shrouded around her ministry of produce. She grows seed important as painting, she says, broadcasting winter berries in red acrylic and industrial green collards onto plywood at her fruit stand.

On NPR, Maziar Bahari, journalist, quotes his jailer, member of the Revolutionary Guard, who joked, *We can put you in a bag, no matter where you're living. We control every aspect of your life, no matter where you are*, as he squeezed Maziar's ear while talking to his own wife nicely on the telephone.

In Cambridge I pick a new book about Anne Frank from a shelf. In LA, same day, Caerthan and Mary visit Anne's facsimiles and artifacts before walking into sun that flattens the surface of what happens in Florida, or Tehran, or Westerbork, always happening.

Surviving selection, Anne's imagination is assigned a number between A-25060 and A-25271. Wrapped in nothing but a blanket and Bergen-Belsen's ashes, she kneels for the last time beside a straw-bale wall to whisper to Hanneli. The season's final obliterating snow has yet to fall.

Like the torturer's horse that leaves, in this audio tour, only a hoof print as it plods away, back sagging under a feather, the interrogator conflates New Jersey—where Ruby labored for twenty-five long years before the slave her great-grand mother was bequeathed

her acres I'll not ever get to—with Paradise. We can change little but I want us to change a little. Understand? Bedelu and his friend giggle, hiding in a closet, as Caerthan, frantic, rings his name up and down the streets' anguished hour. Then, he lets himself be found, a planet entire returning to life in her smile.

## SHANK'S PONIES

After the twist in his guts that nearly killed him,  
my grandfather walked to work each day,  
his constitutional, on Market Street to the *Vindicator*.  
How often did what remain of his father's face  
hallucinate him, in jaunty fedora and shined shoes,  
as he raised his determination onto the  
bridge across the mill-polluted Mahoning?

Because my car's blocked into the garage,  
I'm walking two January miles to the doctor's.  
Aristotle I'm not, but for thought's thrawn 't—  
for all that, in spite of, nevertheless, however—  
complicating 'though,' its rationality cross  
grained. The sidewalks are meringues of ice.  
Snow rosettes adhere to branches then, bursting,  
drift to air. Clouds, amethyst and gray, stir.

Warmed by a necessity not to need  
anything, past blue recycling bins and sacks propped  
on curbs rinsed by dishwater sun, I'm  
the four-year-old in another winter, slipping  
in bad mood and half-buttoned sweater out  
of the napping house, one means of being in time,  
I suppose, as my great-grandfather, astride  
the quarter horse he's breaking for his son,  
and thinking god-knows-what in 1909,

doesn't comprehend that, at the crossing,  
the engineer will grasp the chain-pull of the train's  
whistle, its shrill fingers opening in air one version  
of this narrative, word-for-word, as he's thrown,  
then dragged down a Kansas road, his occipital  
bone a map of cracks, his foot still caught in the stirrup  
a mile later, where we find one another, in his blue eyes  
the dust a world's descripta will be made of.

## HAVE YOU HEARD THE ONE ABOUT

the madwoman who gave birth without screaming  
till she held her child? She wailed:

*He's going to die. He's going to die.* And he did

eighty-four years later in a fishing village where he retired  
with his wife and their latest Shih Tzu, Dreamy.

I know there's no satisfying punch line, no

little joke about mom's prediction, and nothing  
to barb with the sanity of a mother's pain—  
nothing, that is, till you examine

your satisfied sigh when you heard that the baby  
lived. Distracted, you pranced past the little truth—  
every joke's companion—the madwoman

was right: The boy died. The crazy mother  
mourned the death to come, the death  
of the old man in the infant, the death we forget

in favor of what we call sanity, that flimsy gift  
of some other madwoman who birthed  
the rest of us and the jokes we bear.

## THEOLOGIANS

They heard a man made a boat with holes  
on the waterline, seven in the bow, three  
in the port, and one in the stern. When  
she sailed, she took on water but never  
sank. They came for the ride, laughed,  
and looked for the trick of how she soaked  
in the waves but sailed true. For a season,  
they didn't complain about her shoddy sail  
or the holes. Then, as men do, they voted,  
in grand landside committees, to patch  
the open spaces with good wood,  
insisting on the sanctity of a dry deck  
and hull. The boat sank,  
so they built a better boat, no holes,  
to lift the dead from the depths, to drag her  
to shore to anchor their stories of sailing  
with holes. She's sideways now, half-buried  
in sand and weeds. A few of them remember  
their wet feet with a sea-sick nostalgia  
that brings them, late in the star-plagued night,  
to remove their shoes as they sift themselves  
through the sand and approach the starboard  
of their grounded, still-sunken ship.  
The good ones come here to die.

## BACALL

*To Have and Have Not, 1944*

Betty Joan Perske, age 19, gives that look,  
the one that shifts tectonic plates, to Bogie,  
and that's it: Germany surrenders,  
Japan bows its apologies, and that sailor  
smooches the nurse in Times Square. The world,  
no longer black and white, makes love  
as D-Day shrinks to just a time for planting  
daffodils, and Hiroshima grows Toyotas.  
Harry T. has lunch with Stalin; General  
Patton takes up nursing Bonsai trees.  
"You know how to whistle, don't you,"  
says Bacall, as the moon sighs and the earth  
sighs back. "Just put your lips together,  
and blow."

## MATINS WITH A DREAM OF HORSES

Called from the stall of morning,  
light gallops toward the gate — no,

it doesn't. It arrives in the regular  
way, the earth spinning oblivious

in its own rhythm. If light could be  
a horse, it would not gallop, anyway.

From what I know of light, a gallop  
would be much too bold. And though

we have manufactured light, captured  
it in wires and filaments, we cannot

hold the sun, cannot rein its burning,  
lasso or tackle it into submission.

Let me start again: called from the stall  
of morning, I rise and stumble to the gate.

I am not light. I do not gallop. I am ash  
and shadow, huddled in the hay,

waiting to be saddled, waiting for  
the bit to copper my soft tongue.

## THE SEA, THE FOREST

Like an argument against keeping the more unshakeable varieties of woundedness inside, where such things maybe best belong, he opened his eyes in the dark. *Did you hear that*, he asked...I became, all over again, briefly silver, as in what the leaves mean, beneath, I could hear what sounded like waves at first, then like mistakes when, having gathered momentum, they crash wave-like against the shore of everything that a life has stood for. — *What*, I said.



## THE EVACUATION SHADOW

If every disaster is a target, radial circles  
drawn from its center form  
the evacuation shadow—  
city streets, industrial parks, and not far,

farmland surrounding  
the spun pots of Three Mile Island.  
I never got to see melted uranium,  
how it seeps into water and slips

into sky, just yards and fields  
watered by heavy clouds,  
my grandmother's tomatoes sliced thick,  
sullen fish hooked from the river.

A few miles from it, surely,  
surely somebody pulled my infant body  
close, as the countryside emptied  
around us. In the still, standing

block apartments of Ukraine,  
pictures tilt on the wall, a shower curtain  
pulls free from its hooks, a man  
tries to bounce a basketball, decades flat.

Are those deserted badlands  
so different from the weedy hills  
where we remained? I remember playing  
in the backyard at dusk, the press

of mating insects so loud I could disappear  
if they wanted me enough. I began  
to leave the place I lived before  
I understood the question *what kind of lives*

*do we want for our children*, the food  
toxic, the air toxic, my own body  
a souring sheath, my only  
wish to stay as long as I could.

## LIVESTOCK

“Sweet Caroline” was years away  
when my mother saw Neil Diamond  
play the Farm Show in ‘66, when  
in the autograph line, someone shoved  
her forward. She must have regretted  
her teenage body, flinching as she landed  
hard on Neil’s foot, his *get this fat girl offa me*  
slicing the moist air. I’ve never been close  
to anyone like that. My boyfriend  
stopped sleeping with me when I was 15  
because he said it felt too much like  
worship, and I agreed, unsure if my skin  
was still my own or just the memory  
of his handprints. Since then, I have been  
elsewhere—the warm smell of cream  
farm girls pour into churns, condensation  
on the nose of this year’s butter sculpture,  
refrigerated behind glass. Walking  
the aisles of that arena with its stolid,  
bas relief cows, I’ve wondered  
how to judge a pig without cutting into it,  
a goat without the milk, but I guess  
it’s about anatomy: the level hip,  
foot alignment, the smooth pattern  
of muscle. You don’t have to kill a thing,  
or even touch it, but we’re always looking  
for the pain in love: *When I hurt,*  
*hurtin’ runs off my shoulders,*  
*how can I hurt when holding you?*  
Would it be better to stand outside  
the pen littered with grassy shit  
and look and look, instead of asking—  
though it can’t be helped—what the animal  
tastes like, how to slit its fat throat  
carefully, with our loving hands?

## GRASS WIDOWING

The train calls out  
like a night bird,  
a low strange pipe of daylight  
flung into the darkness  
white and timid, clean as a gown  
that hangs as it waits to be worn.  
For a while I pretended to sleep  
and listened to the quiet room slant.  
An exhale beside me is my breath in,  
that liquor-fast pulse beating  
like rhythm to sway to  
when you don't mean it  
but can't help it.  
The house hums about its night business,  
room temperatures and refrigerators,  
the white noise of a honeymoon  
that goes on buried and spoiling.  
The darkness lies to know if I am lying.  
I don't think there is really sleep  
anywhere in this room.  
Every night at the same time  
with him heavy on the other side  
I listen for a weight that rushes  
to some stop up ahead,  
the train that is on the same track  
that lumbered through the whiskey,  
women, and blood to open up the West  
and cut the prairie to chunks of ground.  
A necessary evil, one might say.  
The kind with a reason.  
In the daylight I look ahead until I can't  
so I know how things should appear.  
Sometimes the rails  
meet a horizon far enough away  
to cause them to look like a curve,  
the lines touching as they disappear  
from view—  
a false joining, like the marriages  
that make us tell stories to our mothers  
who hoped we would never be  
their kind of wrong.

## BABY BRIAN AND CHILDREN FAJITAS

Think of the tune to Michael Jackson's *Someone's Always Cryin'*...I tell my son, who knows who Michael Jackson is, but not as most of us know who Michael Jackson is, but he does not know that song, so I sing it, and then I add the lyrics "it must be Baby Brian." This is in order to explain that to kids, the stupidest things can be used as tools for humiliation, your name, for example, rhyming with the word *cryin'* and your misfortune of having a history on earth that is six months shorter than the person doing the teasing. The girl in school he told me about was reading the menu aloud (I have no idea why) in homeroom and pronounced *chicken fajitas* as *children fajitas*. The initial eruption of laughter was not as bad as the ongoing retelling of the mispronunciation to anyone who would listen. Even the teacher, who took most of science class to come up with the idea that tomorrow they should serve adult ham wraps, inadvertently ridiculed the girl until she was crying by sixth period. I would like to say it was my son who defended her, but that would be a lie. He came up with baby burritos and teacher tacos. He had an entire menu developed before the end of the day, but couldn't understand why the girl wasn't laughing like everyone else.

## SALT

She picks one from the basket, not yet moldy, but already pockmarked, tender, its skin molded to my grandmother's grip, as she slices this tomato down the middle, calm and slowly; the seedy juice gushing out along the counter, the salt poured around the open top, spread from the shaker with her finger, each granule pressed deeper, as if trying to heal the wound she just created. I am midway through my lunch, and she is starting on her snack, dessert, whatever she calls this habit of scraping tomato against her gums, sucking out all the salt, then pouring more, as I know she isn't really hungry, but attempting to revive her dead nerve endings; the black and jagged teeth spread like a broken window inside her mouth, where I imagine her speech gets caught, where the words try to crawl out like children escaping an abandoned house, this vitiligo flesh of her aging body. Even if she's forgotten how conversations once tasted, the way her Spanish felt without dentures, the way she used to call my name when I could not yet understand it, she hands me the unsalted half, leans over, slides the shaker on the table; the kitchen knife gripped in her other hand, as she stands watching me lift the tomato, waiting to see if I'll put salt, if I can chew the silence her tongue can no longer savor.

WHAT CANNOT POSSIBLY END WELL,  
NEVERTHELESS, COMES TO AN END

When flood waters surged from the sea  
last year and overtook the island,

when trees splintered and concrete  
buckled and paved roads crumbled like chalk,

when what could fly away did and everything below  
watched them go as if they were gods,

when even the church steeple succumbed  
and seeing it tumble was both believing and not-believing,

a man lashed himself to a padded sea-rail  
and apologized to every lost thing in the whirlwind

for not having loved it  
before it was gone for good,

for the decent health he had known  
and all the suffering he hadn't wanted to know.

He was far away — that one in the dark, that  
stranger hung in the storm —

singing songs I'd known once by heart.  
Then came a halting recitation

of the periodic table of elements.  
Then nothing but wind and rain,

the elements out there in the dark  
singing their own song,

a song which was  
neither holy nor profane.

## AND THOUGH GOD'S EYE

is on the sparrow, this one  
nevertheless falls today to earth  
having dashed itself head-long against  
the windowed wall of my study, a pane  
it did not see in time to save itself.

The unbroken wing folds.  
The blank black bead of an eye stares skyward.

By the time a trowel can be found  
in the musty shed with which to bury  
the small, newly-dead, first stars shine  
overhead along the edges of space.  
The mute rooster of my neighbor's

weathervane swings mournfully on the spine  
of his roof, quivering *north, northwest.*

Trees begin to shiver in a storm-wind  
and pink roses balance on their tall stems  
dropping pale petals over the final  
resting-place. The evening tide  
shushes in and out

along the Atlantic side of the island.  
In the God-blink of an eye, he fell.

## THERE ARE NO PITS IN THE FRUIT OF PARADISE

A fire sweeps through the new year  
like a broom  
from the attic to the stoop.

It's midnight.  
This is the only way to make anything new.  
I mistranslate myself.

It's hard to learn a mother tongue in a fatherland.  
I water fig leaves with wine.  
I let the black cat rest.

I plant a spine at the side of the road.  
Everything I know grows from it in stalks,  
with petals fresh and salty.

I dip my finger in perfume.  
I eat a herring whole.  
Am I doing it right?

Am I doing it fine?  
I'm thinking of you.  
— watch me swim through this air

## VOWELS OF RUST, CONSONANTS OF PAPER

Previous night's dream recurs: your sister sinking  
down past what is salvageable, how she turns

away yet still returns, blurriest of polaroids.  
Transposed upon her are faces of children. You wonder

(though the forest remains a smug, silent green)  
which plants are edible and which are poison, whether

the parcel of rust bobbing on the water waits for  
a christening, its movement a disturbance

to fish, scaring them to the lake floor. Beneath  
your sister's bed: algae-ridden water and paper

that tears itself and two small beds, unmade.  
In the interim she folds more paper boats

too garish. Doctors say, *Parcel of rust*. You wince—  
knuckles calloused from grit—and while crossing

the cattle guard, you spot two wooden boxes, nested,  
one slightly smaller than the other. Up close

they pixelate less and less. You ask your sister,  
a bird hanging from her beak: *How do you return yet still*

*walk away?* The light moving across  
her faces creates the narrative of you both, as if

running in reverse, your laughter mistaken for gasping.

## PLAYING THE TELEPHONE GAME

For instance, you might have said:

*When he was leaving  
the store, it was starting to rain.*

Or:

*Winnie was a sleeve torn,  
it was darting derange.*

You might have taken (one can  
play detective endlessly),  
a ream of paper and traced  
intricate scalloped designs  
of the livingroom's  
silver radiator, or the young man,  
towns away, his face blind-  
embossed beneath the narrative  
we won't let go of.

Was it:

*The grass nodded  
beneath the dance.*

Or:

*The grass snotted  
bereaved of ants.*

Or, perhaps:

*The wrists knotted  
bee's knees and pants.*

No, knocking on wood won't  
change what happens next.

Little yellow flags marking  
their dancing footsteps—

1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 is where  
his body was found.

Nevermind the headphones,  
can of iced tea, a lighter,  
scratched cell phone,  
or a three-leaf clover  
wanting to turn four.

You might have thought:

*To be honest, I don't  
even remember that day.*

You might have said:

*He was wearing a red sweater.  
He's swearing ahead weather.  
He is airing a head feather.  
His hearing a hard father.  
He erring hat fodder.  
A herring half over.  
Earring October.  
Rigged clover.*

## MAGPIE ECONOMIES

Among the corn, hair, and dung we peck.  
This is the world reel, this is the world real—

She, a magpie in her treatment of everyone,  
stealing eggs and whatnot, texted,  
or rather, her phone chirped:

*This message was sent from  
a mobile device. Please forgive  
misspellings and abruptness.*

Eegads.

Going through my pockets, she teaches  
you a lesson. A little fishing wire  
holds together what little did we know.

Pointing at the running dots along  
the side of the building, she ventriloquized:

You've got screw holes  
showing—it's going to split,  
it's going to crack, patchwork!

Belching she disassembled.  
She canceled:

How are you?  
I am goods.  
And whatnot.

Her so-called hazards of  
readymade plumage and a banjo,  
its out-of-tune croon migratory  
in a way that birds never are.

EPHEMERIS (AFTER THE FLIGHT PATH OF BEES)

*for Moey*

as a girl protesting : night scissors

“are you in love?” : “are you in low

[        ]?” : narratives perforated by white

space : wet ink

on our fingertips : *god*,

*why do this* : driving through the snowstorm she misheard

“returning to where you came from” : electrically

dancers who orient themselves : sons rubbing her feet

& : blonde curl

if the dance floor moves : swear “are you in love?”

cue pianos : *whatever, whatever—*

composition :

maple tree dancing : ice cubes

of habits (both nouns) : sparest change

tailored by experience : flying with the sun to your left

wind data : knotted rag on her bed

FEVVERS  
(AUTHENTICATING THE COCKNEY VENUS)

*“For, in order to earn a living, might not a genuine bird-woman—in the implausible event that such a thing existed—have to pretend she was an artificial one?”*

—Angela Carter, *Nights at the Circus*

We cut her to the marrow,  
this gutter-fly, some river  
trout with a parachute.

Take samples of her rouge  
and sequins and swansdown.

Consider the hinge between  
shoulder blade and wing-bone:  
how fast is the braid there?

Count how often she pauses to preen  
her fingernails and semiplumes.

An albatross of a woman  
circling wide as a Ferris wheel  
round some mast of a smokestack.

She’ll see us safely there  
and back.

## FRÜHLINGSTRAUM

### *dream of Spring*

Barefoot in the yard, I tingle like a nape when touched.  
All around, bees drag their dead from glittering hives.

Here my mind knows its hold as a softness  
of matter like a lake, and its thoughts as indentations  
on the lake, a near infinite rain.

I think of nothing. Then I think of coming days

I will spend with my knees in the grass,  
or making love with the window open.

My hands feel weightless, upturned bodies in a deepening  
lake of sunlight.

What should I do with them?

I kneel and push them into the ground,  
dig a hole for a bulb. I scrape my palm on a rock  
and it bleeds into the soil

(which will bring tomatoes, strawberries). It is good  
to be alive. Inside the house, I've fallen asleep sad  
at the table again. I step through the backdoor  
and go to wake myself. With my hand unwashed of dirt  
and blood, I reach to touch the back of my neck.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR WINTERING ON THE ICE FIELD

Work your hands often  
or they will blacken  
and turn feral  
and flee from your wrists.  
Unhook your body  
from its fear of this vastness,  
this dream of the sea  
where clouds shift  
their bone map,  
erase your footsteps  
again and again.  
Here, where the land  
is a form of water,  
all freezes to light.  
Even you.  
But you will thaw.  
You will part  
for a single, black tendril.  
It will grow  
as if through stone  
in the ruins  
of your beloved city,  
centuries after it has fallen.

## LETTER FROM THE ICE FIELD, OCTOBER

The dream was bright, but small.  
My body was inside out,  
a sick elegy to its beauty.  
I walked until I found a single tree.  
You were picking its apples  
in the straw-light in a straw hat,  
handed me one without spots.  
*Put this where your heart rots*, you said  
and I did, I was happy.  
When I woke, the ice  
was rocking, unaware, a cold  
breathing cast from a body—  
You gave much.  
Thank you for  
the last good thing.

## SCHNAPPS DISTILLED FROM THE FLIGHT OF DOVES

I can no longer descend lampless  
through the circles in the ice,

or wear this look of defeat like a beating  
of wings that won't lift the bird whole.

I throw off a mantle of snow, crushed  
long enough under the cold's rough muscle,

thaw trickling through hours  
that never rise above a single digit.

Bring me my kit of wax, flame and wick,  
light to fuel  
innumerable unfoldings —

clouds that yield their frost  
clouds tinged like luminous cloth

drawn over trees, where  
these white leaves  
are falling.

## CLINIC LILIES

At the reception desk, two lilies tilt in a glass. Like peeled-back stars their petals curl and carve forward, a textbook photo of acute elegance.

Needlepoints of pink dot the petals distinctly, as if after so much arching their capillaries had snapped.

When the receptionist turns to fetch your file, you breathe in to reach the lissome, near-illicit fragrance, a gesture of petrol and caramel. The lungs fill with lilies, and it's a reflex to hold your breath.

*Inhale*, the doctor says, and you inhale. He is a gardener of sorts, poking a cold spade across your back. *Exhale*, he says, and you relive your dizziness.

At the reception desk, two lilies tilt in a glass. *Bend back*, they say, and you bend back, your steep heart beating.

## SHIT

into the puddle under what's left  
of you. *clean him. he can't.*

you are half my size, a quarter your own.  
can't control your bowels, your hands,

your eyes. *don't look a man in the eye  
when he's messed himself. Turn your head.*

*don't stare.* through a mirror  
I see you leak. *don't look a man in the eye*

*while he cries.* I know you'd rather me watch you  
make waste than shed tears. pride is a wicked mistress

for a man made of kindling  
&, often, too many fist. it's come to this:

a night gown, the door wide open  
for what you used to click the lock for,

used to sit a while for, still as death,  
until the mess was clean.

now, a hand on what remains  
of your back, a hand

in what you wouldn't even let a woman touch.  
I can't say a word. what would I say?

who could even think of saying? maybe  
if I knew you less, or if I wasn't so sure

this silence was prayed for, I'd whisper, 'go ahead.  
let your body do its work. let me do mine.'

*for James Smith, My Grandfather*

## ODE TO SHROH'S

bargain basement god of piss  
my liver's cheap mistress

my tongue's favorite  
excuse for sore in the morning.

we been in this for so long,  
cue picture of me, black & 4

papa banishing me from his lap  
& your cold grip my ticket back.

later, I'd learn to make the balance  
of brandy & sweet cola,

but you were an easy love,  
a tab & pop & sneak

a sip between the fridge & the porch  
full of full men, overstuffed

with pork & budget gold & reasons  
they left Mississippi. oh, Shroh's,

thank you for my papa's lap  
& belly in my back, his sweet breath,

how he said my name after 3 cans  
too quick & how'd we'd sit

until he could stand, until sky  
was old & black as him & my one day.

& today I don't want to talk about his fist  
or mine, I don't want to talk about red

everywhere & never not, I don't want to  
talk about cancer & its slow, relentless mouth.

I only want to talk about my granddaddy,  
his belly full, my heart a mirror.

## EXCERPTS FROM *THE MINDBREAKER'S MANUAL*

### Charge

Insist that wrong food will wreck  
the body of the loved. Metals in dust  
will poison the brain. Also toxic: unhappiness,  
medicine, the sun, every lotion. Introduce  
equals signs between happy and  
perfect, between perfect and good.

### An Unbearable Sound

Compose the arpeggio  
of the pain of the loved.  
Make the cadence  
faster than breath. Not loud  
at first, but urgent, and near  
the ear.

### Interrupt Sleep

With the sound. With touch. Scatter  
the wakings, like mines in grass. Never offer  
a pattern. For sixteen months do not allow dreams.

### Something to Hold

Light enough to lift with one arm  
but larger every day. Say  
setting it down will ruin the loved. Enforce  
with the sound. Invent packs  
with straps and bands of cloth.  
Call these gifts; the weight  
will still be felt.

### Answer Complaint

Say *you wanted*. Say *enjoy*  
and *grateful*. Say *while you can*.

### Injure

When you cause a cry, say  
*think of the loved*. Make blood  
familiar. Call the wound  
a tear, as though flesh  
were paper.

### At Stake

Say every day how the loved  
might be lost: crushed  
under the lover while sleeping, choked  
on a bite of apple, drowned  
in an inch of water. How in sleep  
the loved might stop breathing  
for no reason. Write notes of warning  
on every chair, on the tags  
of nightclothes, on the bathtub rim,  
the mattress edge, the handle  
of a spoon.

### Touch

Choose a circle of skin  
that is thin and tender. Practice  
a light, rhythmic rub—the texture  
of wet cotton—five times a day. Night  
and day, clutch handfuls  
of hair. Lean onto chest,  
shoulder, face. Insist.

## A THING THAT HAPPENED

“Oh, we had an intruder alert,”  
said my fourth grade daughter  
when I asked how school was.

She said this  
after the usual shoulder shrug and mumble.  
My kindergarten daughter sang in, “Yeah,  
we did.”

And I keep the car moving forward.  
Even though it feels like a bird  
just thwapped against a window in my chest  
and it feels like this car should stop  
right now.

Over the intercom, the same silver strainers in the ceilings as at the school I went  
to long ago,  
a voice will say, “Mr. Snow, please come to the office,”  
and what is expected

is that the teacher will sharply walk to the door  
and lock it, that every student in the room  
will hide, be unseeable from the block of glass targeted above the doorknob.

My fourth grader  
says everyone tried to fit  
in the prairie schooner the teacher and her husband built between the two bookcases,  
but there wasn't room so she tried to squeeze herself alone behind the filing cabinet.

They tell me this  
as no big thing.  
They tell me this

as if it's line up, single file, quiet down,  
hands to yourself, march outside.

They can't say it  
like I do now. They don't think about it  
like it's a heartbreak  
poem,  
have no inclination to tell the NRA to just shut up already,  
no inclination to know the name of the school secretary in Atlanta who talked  
    an AK-47 and a gym bag full of bullets  
onto the floor, no inclination to think of grade school teachers  
laying their bodies over students,  
arms out,  
lungs pulling in so hard  
they could make their backs  
as wide  
as wings.

It's my fourth grader.  
It's my kindergartener.

It's another thing  
that happened  
today.

## A PIECE OF THE CONTINENT

“Therefore, send not to know  
For whom the bell tolls,  
It tolls for thee.”

*from “No Man Is An Island” by John Donne*

In the photo, he has his head  
on the hangman’s shoulder, leaned there  
while the hangman drapes a black arm around his shoulder.  
The executioner’s eyes, you can see through the holes in his hood,  
are shut. How much  
does he earn to hang men from cranes in the city square,  
we all see him in today’s paper, on the internet,  
we read the article with a little shake of shock,  
are brought back  
to high school,  
some poem  
that was kind of dull,  
makes sense now,  
you feel  
what it was  
trying  
to say  
to you.

## FLUX

*after Bradbury*

the world must be asleep  
we watch ourselves stare  
inside the television no  
sign to wait for yesterday  
is lime sherbet to us melted  
to nothing tomorrow we'll  
know when we see it when  
it happens when we make  
it happen go forth! intuition  
about necks lovely elevator  
lovely concussion plummet  
toward miraculous there's  
no easy lie in the tide no no  
the drowning clutch anything

ANOTHER POEM WHERE WINTER HAS COME

the snow does not fall  
it shifts in the alley  
like sand  
I hope a tiger appears  
to pace the fire  
escape  
its claws curve over  
the iron lip  
perhaps this is not  
the slow erosion  
time has  
in store for us

## SMALL WARS

Ants made inroads on my porch, busy caravans.  
I dusted cinnamon across the threshold,  
encouraged the spiders *spin faster, my allies*.  
I've been reading about the Borgias,  
the Pope's unholy children, sex in the castle  
of angels, days of wine and arsenic in the mouth  
of God. I baited the ants—boric acid and honey, waited  
for a sweet death. I wanted to vanquish something.  
Loneliness means when the three-inch roach lands  
on the bedroom ceiling at midnight  
you'll be the one swinging the tennis racket.  
I can't walk barefoot through the house, the Junebugs  
keep blundering into the kitchen and dying  
horribly, twitching on their backs. I haven't spoken  
aloud in three days. This is how things escalate:  
I tracked the ants to their source, poured  
the powdered acid straight into the crack.  
I miss them, a little. It's easier when you know  
your enemy, when it's right there in front of you.

## MATTER TO THE END

To wake up just before or after  
midnight, and see across the room  
on black screen framed black,  
a cool yet radiant revue of earth  
endings. Asteroid slingshotted  
past half-averted eyes. Gamma  
burst from overwrought star.  
Creeping smother of begrudging ice.  
But then physicist's pet, *strangelets*  
dandled in the lab, grown unstable  
or listless (either would be dire)  
and by flagrant animation,  
we watch all matter made  
contingently too dear now  
prone to self-revision—  
like a flesh-colored cosmic  
paste believed fully dubious  
on questions of adherence.  
So record-breaking skyscraper topped  
by presumptuous telescoping  
wand reverts to a wavery  
dim outline as it slides fast  
down to pudding. Beloved  
scarlet bridge arcing cobalt  
waters one second more, still  
connecting the blessed lands—  
until *poof* (unheard gasp)—  
a seamless plain spreads  
innocent of clever design.  
Overtired now, one might  
be prone to misinterpret,  
read too much into lavish  
undoings, so let this show  
run on, rip into a fresh  
dimension: an ad pumping  
the loveliness of precise lines  
drawn with a device extruding  
pure white goop that lays

determined boundaries  
between dingy bathroom tiles.  
Consider buying a tube  
of this stuff right away,  
on credit, quick, before  
other people catch on—  
how absurdly easy it all is,  
how priced insanely low.

## DEATH AS SISTER CITY

When my friend said, apropos of my breathlessness  
At the top of the winding stairs, “You’ll be dead or demented  
Within a dozen years,” I said, donut in my left hand,  
“I’m hoping for a baker’s dozen, bro,” then began to live—  
Scared—as if death were real, and time so condensed and narrowed  
That every timeline gave me pause, and I vowed to live  
With abandon in my abandonment, worked steadily  
On my torero veronicas with my well-vaccinated dog,  
Began to drink more heavily so I would have the courage  
To rob Peter to pay Paul, moving my on-line accounts  
From short-term bonds to long-range dreamy equities,  
Even made plans to vacation in a state park outside  
Our lush county, its river bottom made of crushed glass  
That became sand again. Remember glass that thou  
Art sand and unto sand thou shalt return I said into  
The mirror, trying not to speak to myself but the mirror only.  
I determined to learn a second language and learned Japanese:  
Hi-bachi, fire bowl, kami-kaze, divine wind, Hiro-shima,  
(Our sister city), wide island. I loved the rootedness  
Of Japanese and learned a new word each month—kara-te,  
Empty hand. I worked out on the treadmill at the Y  
Watching the videos of real athletes on treadmills to push me.  
My body, as it became defined, became divine in my eyes  
And perhaps the nurse’s who monitored my pulse, touching  
The inside of my arm as if it were my scrotums,  
I said to her. Scrotum, she corrected, from the Latin for quiver,  
The case for holding arrows, not the tremulous motion.  
I dined on modern TV dinners made of sashi-mi, stabbing body,  
And began to explore like a foodie international fare:  
Courgette, little gourd, feta, slice, fettuccini, little ribbon,  
I said the words and roots as I ate the world’s offerings,  
Chalupa, small boat, sloop. I decided to take a bath  
Every day to return to the womb, go back into that past  
I had forgotten most of, remembering only the cord  
I’d thrum my fingers on, making a music only I could hear,  
And sit there, lowering my head for longer and longer  
Each night, my knees like great white icebergs that rose

As my head sank, and think, as I lie there buried in water—  
Shima—*island*—that to die would be sort of ok, from  
The German to die, *Tod*, and the Norse before that, farther back  
Than imagination can go, *deyja*, to die. Thousands of words,  
Even languages, how about *Dalmatian*, have died out,  
And the world's no more quiet that it once was, so relax,  
A sound is a sound. Other bodies are just around the corner!

## HELEN OF TROY GIVES UP COUNTERTOP DANCING

Greek language proffers no  
distinction between house and home.

σπίτι. σπίτι.

*spíti. spíti.*

Spitty, spitty,  
all the same unless a drought.

I offer  
insistent tap of key on wood

learn the perfect pitch of voice.

*Housekeeping—*

Shine the mirror. Tamp your flames with bare feet

Forget everything

I never see.

I take the job to learn how sheets untangle.

*Title refers to Margaret Atwood's "Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing"*

HELEN OF TROY WRITES A LETTER AFTER READING  
“NO SECOND TROY”

My Good Man Yeats,

Why blame me? She that filled your restless days  
With anguished scorch inherently born  
Through one conceived in force. Zeus never pays?  
His legacy intact, it's me you scorn.  
Feign false naiveté, yet you did know  
The wound my hand might sear upon your breast.  
You! not my mark, but keeper of the bow.  
This beauty that disturbs your nights can't rest,  
It wears me, the one eternal face I own.  
Vain hubris wed your fate – You're not the first.  
Against a pyre of lovers' hopes I hone  
My scourge: That all who burn for me will thirst.

(N)ever Yours,  
H

THIS STATE HAS NO COASTLINE BUT AREN'T  
THOSE LEGS STICKING OUT OF THE SAND?

*If you want out of this worthless dump, he said, I'll help.*  
But he didn't even own a car. You'd see him on the curb,

knocking the cherry off his Newport and shaking  
his jacket to cut the stink before he climbed in

for you to drive him to the airport again. Nobody  
was getting rich. Nobody had much to do

on Thursday evenings but dodge the frat boys  
and the poor boys and the girls who wanted to pass

for boys and the girls who had boldly taken on names  
of men, not old-fashioned last names but the first

bestowed upon their cribs when their mothers  
and fathers agreed for once that yoga poses worked

to start a new tradition and the little hopeful  
soon performed his first cobra where the plastic

mattress cover crinkled loudest. Everyone was rescuing  
cats, nobody was growing old but me, and I was making

the most of it badmouthing the other deterioratees  
and watching my young friends quiver in delicious self-pity.

*Don't break a nail, sister, I sneered so she couldn't hear.*  
She was raking her black hair to make it look real.

The caption said she bought her skirt at such and such  
boutique. I used to draw on my clothes with markers,

matching stripes with dots, and if you heard it said  
I hated men, the usual gripe was toothsome blowjobs.

He's going to prove his point, right there in the grocery aisle  
under the "Hispanic Food" sign. It must be something

about the light, bulldozers on the beach, and the faithful  
who still can't figure out why the shells are smithereens.

Get a load of that. I'm pointing to the wide tread tracks,  
that gat-toothed grin baked into the sand, and everybody else

is so drunk they don't know I'm explaining something  
important. My car's slumped dead in the gravel like his classic

'Vette you'd be a fool to believe in even if he throws down  
that old coat across your worst nightmare, and the bucket

of roses unsigned on the porch blooms fresh as words  
you can't pronounce without lispng unless you sing.

## CURE

A rock crashes a window, sole  
intention of the boy who threw it  
echoing by the skull of a pigeon

pecking grain. The bird's  
gross pitcher of airy bone,  
lifting, whistles like fingers to teeth.

I never learned the trick.  
My face grew towards the sun,  
under glass. But my friend

says he's dying. Each conversation  
he's drawn the line closer. Five years, two,  
he's tearing a gauze of sky, and if

we described the effort between us  
he'd meet my eyes, formal,  
quick in the way of shame.

Once my gaze dusted sand  
leaking back to sea. I heard talk, glanced  
sideways. Singer on a hill, spotted

heifer stretching neck to browse  
leaves across pipe fence,  
lizard sunning spotted spine—

I waited to know before I spoke.  
I waited not to be wrong.  
A man whose stiff back

I whispered behind surprised me,  
bending to pick a thorned rose,  
scooping it to his chest: no, it was

a cat. Grotesque legs like a woman's  
curved thumbs, obese in limp chinchilla,  
voice on tongue like a slice of cheese.

*I love her*, he said. *I hope she lives forever*. I was sure he'd done it:  
say and it shall be. Simple blessing

for a tabby: eternal life. Now I know  
to say it to whomever's due to fail,  
and hope's a rope to tug a body free.

It's a symptom like signals  
flashing stop, taillights shorted  
in the shirttail night on a mud road,

rodeo, nip and tuck, hammered nail.  
I hope we live forever. I hope  
you do, and may it be no worse

than you're used to:  
the usual, not the beautiful, slow  
as a broken back, healing

without hands laid on.  
My hope's a fact. My hope's a rowboat  
shearing a path in lake's chill

center where the graph reflects  
star, planet, all the same  
from cure's distance, vein that bursts

from the brain, stumbling beat-up  
saddle horn, hatstain, to the absolute,  
unconfounded, ordinary heart.



## PHOTO OPS: WHERE EMPATHY BEGINS

My daughter rode the camel but refused to ride the elephant.  
In Qatar at fifteen, she lobbied hard for the camel  
till I drove miles into the desert to find her one. A man under  
an umbrella took my ryals and joined us in the hot sand  
to slowly lead her up and back the short track  
others tourists had stomped flat. She posed and I clicked  
and all was well, the large world smoothed and shrunken  
into cliché. We hurried back to the AC of the Land Rover.

In Sri Lanka with the State Department, she was taken  
by her leader to a slop pit where a man took their rupees  
then beat the elephant till it rose, then beat it some more  
while the group took their turns, one by one, on top  
of the thin, sickly creature, and her own leader cursed  
my daughter when she refused to climb up,  
but she had seen into the elephant's eyes, the dark moons  
of ancient understanding, and at eighteen, she felt  
its enormous shame. Her leader cursed her, for she had paid  
in advance for them all. Empathy does not lend itself  
to photos. I just have the currency of her words.

It cost so much, her leader yelled,  
and you're ruining it for everyone, but she could not beat  
my daughter into rising.

## UPDATE ON ELEGY FOR THE HERE AND NOW

For those of you keeping score at home,  
that's four marriages of twenty-plus years  
ground up, compacted, composted,  
abandoned in the last three months of school.  
Yet the ninth grade exams go on.

The auditorium shrinks into a swollen mob  
for Honors Day. Our daughter in it some  
where, checking the parents of her best friends  
off the list as they sit on separate sides of discretion.

The referees toss their weepy  
tear-soaked flags, late and inconsequential,  
then pick them up from the empty field,  
walking off to the special room under the stands  
where you don't have to take sides.  
But that door's always locked.

They remain prisoners, exposed.  
Does that merit a red card? Can I now  
quit the game? Whatever you call it,  
it's blood sport. Their ninth graders are layering  
on mascara, disappearing in the park,  
stealing what they can while losing everything

in the gap between the new locations  
where it's never a home game. Don't you love  
the inadequacy of sports metaphors?  
We lock our doors, program in new numbers  
to track our own kids down. The vaccine is scarce,  
out of stock, invisible, with side effects,

but we're taking multiple doses in lieu  
of renewing our vows—which is like—I'm sorry  
for going there again—the vote of confidence  
from the owner just before the manager gets fired.  
How about a tune-up, new spark plugs, how about  
if we kick each other's tires for luck? But first

what do we do with this girl weeping on our steps,  
stoned out of her young mind, wanting, just  
wanting a ride back to her impossible home?

## WATER DAMAGE/HEAT LIGHTNING

Has the world ended yet? Has the scorched grass  
revealed the sting of our true dying? Inhale  
and sing your favorite obscene hymn.

Oh Lord, when the sky rumbles and crackles,  
when its lies sting with the fervor of bees,  
I briefly want to believe. Believe or take shelter.

When the insurance company shreds its paper  
for parade confetti, maybe it's time to stop counting  
your chickens and run naked through the henhouse.

The asshole leaning on your doorbell keels over  
for Jesus or the burglar alarms he's peddling.  
The progeny of Fire and Ice walk out of the mutant factory.

Somebody said it's the Rapture, but I just left the Rapture  
asleep in my bed, breathing so hard the walls sweat.

## SINCE A DEER MADE OF LIGHT

### I

There is an art form to  
approaching a deer.

You must take one half  
step backwards for

every full step forward.  
If executed with some

finesse this should look  
like a video cassette of

Michael Jackson doing  
the moonwalk in reverse.

### II

Once upon a time  
there was a deer

which was really  
a bolt of lightning.

Another deer saw  
him running right

for her and since  
she had never seen

a deer made of light  
she stood very still

watching him burn  
all the trees to ash.

### III

Since a deer made of light—

Since being always hurt softly—

w a v e a f t e r w a v e a f t e r w a v e

after my house burnt down

I walked out into the woods

where deer once slept I found

a w a k e o f a w a k e o f a w a k e o f

### IV

In reality...

when my house burnt down

every one escaped but my mom

r a n b a c k i n  
t o s a v e o u r c a t  
a n d g r a b t h e c a r k e y s

h e r w e d d i n g r i n g a n d e x p e n s i v e  
b o t t l e o f p e r f u m e a s w e l l a s h e r  
c r e d i t c a r d a n d h e r g l a s s e s a n d  
w h a t e v e r e l s e w a s o n t h e t a b l e

### V

Once I saw a deer and I

squinted to see if it was

a deer made of light.

## BIRD WATCH

A hunting kestrel  
falls dead like a fighter jet.  
So I reach out for

my pen. It's a shame.  
When I start writing there is  
already a wedge

between *the wind* and  
*the winding* path down after.  
I mean a word is

a word is just a  
a word, but I think there is  
no reason to rhyme

if we're pushed to pair  
wind with the skinned scalp of a  
native, red head noosed

blue in the vineyard.  
It's a shame. Because of a  
history like ours

Bob Dylan was half  
as profound when he found his  
answer blowing 'round.

As was dear Margaret  
Mitchell's wave goodbye. The corpse  
(exquisite or ex

ulted) may only  
rot and hollow out in shrouds  
now, for we can't wind

it in windsheet when  
the wind has gone out of it.  
The kestrel, lovely

as she was, cannot  
windfuck on invisible  
coils over my

mother's house, sun light  
halos tightly spun over and  
knotting each feather.

No. Watson & Crick  
didn't find our genetic  
code uncracked in the

wind in our cells. I  
mean they did, but only half  
as much as they once

might have. It's a shame  
to find a word cut in half  
and feeling lonely.

Wined and spirited  
to the gut like it always  
wanted. I mean if

it weren't lost I would  
never have started looking.  
If the kestrel's neck

were not broken, I  
still could not fix what killed  
it in the first place.

## OXYCONTIN

At the sluice gate            of the deep  
mouthed Schuylkill river

we listen to                the O

pen mouthed carp  
edidem and relax.

There is nothing left to be found.

So go and find the loom        (heir or haunt)  
of shouldered  
river gloss                (tongue or light)

Find the coffee we dropped sugar  
cubes into. Walk with a trajectory

to your fear, though first  
be sure that you are fearless.

Believe that light  
is everywhere

so there is nothing  
for you to fear. Believe light  
is packed like groins and asses  
between warehouse  
party walls.    Light

in mountain veins. In a coffin  
on a conveyor belt. Light

in the gallature of machines.  
If nothing else

it is easy to imagine

the river flowing  
from a factory south of here  
well wired as we are  
to the molecules  
of its inhabitants

bodies in the current  
who swim beneath star spangled  
lights and blue buildings.

Believe that light is everywhere.  
Believe there is nowhere left to find.

You were the last to find this out  
and now that you have

there is nothing left.

## HOW TO MAKE A ZINE (AGE 14)

Get into a fight with your mother who knows and unknowns you like a tide. Skateboard to school the long way, past your first kiss, all mohawk and busy hands and beer breath. The wall clock ticks the same minute restlessly, the permanent sub in Homeroom has been knitting for months something that's never manifested past a knot in her lap — untie the knot with your eyes, stuff it into your throat. Sneak out during Resource Room, take the subway into town to the punk club basement, The Casualties are playing again, use your miniskirt and fishnets as a fake ID. Take your notebook and drown it, piece out your body like scattered beads of a broken rosary bouncing. On the train home sew the patches with band logos onto your sweatshirt and don't turn down the Chinese woman who teaches you the easy stitch. At home, sneak in through the bulk head, your insomniac mother is in her halfsleep lull on the upstairs couch just begging for a latchclick to wake her. In the basement, scrawl in a horny teenage fever the date who would have stood you up, the soliloquy to abandonment. Take your scissors, cut out the white space of paper, the thin slices between lines and don't stop there, cut the white space of unwanted skin, the places you wish you weren't, all your excess. Cut off your hair, slice your nostrils into wisps like contact tags on guitar lesson flyers. Glue yourself back together. In the morning, sneak into the faculty lab, use the code your English teacher gave you and photocopy, collate, staple before the day begins and you're caught. Present yourself to your peers and watch them read you like an obituary.

THIS IS THE BRAIN STUCK ON A LINE  
FROM A MOVIE

Like the unbreakable that breaks, the unsinkable that sinks,  
the beautiful brain dithers, doesn't invent a thing,

won't synthesize "soar" with "crash," just says  
*Every time a bell rings an angel gets his wings,*

repeats it like an LP with an imperfection  
in a groove intended to be smooth,

like a highway in need of repair,  
and the brain holds a universe of roads.

We hardly ever think of all the good work done by the DOT.

We forget the lines we were memorizing  
when we find a twenty on the sidewalk.

Because of nice weather and an open window,  
a parakeet riffs off of a cardinal on a wire.

The parakeet is in a cage. The cage is in a house.  
The cardinal is channeling sounds trapped in the wire.

The intercepting brain sends flowers to our ears.  
It would invent the telegraph, or wireless communication,  
or the lyrics to "We Shall Overcome,"

if we didn't already have them.

It orders up a daydream in which the parakeet shows the cardinal  
a world without it, a world stuck with sad-sacks,

hecklers at chamber performances, loud talkers at the cinema,  
chirpers chirping in November same as they chirped in June, like

earnest vote after earnest vote  
against one's own

socio-economic interests,  
the kind of chirp that blows the show for the rest of us

unless the brain makes the hand reach  
into the pocket that isn't there

to pull out neither the petals of a rose, nor a rabbit from a hat,

but silence, which it brings to the onlooking  
and thus far overlooked sparrow, silence

being a world without it, which for the sparrow is despair,  
and in the daydream this all happens while it's snowing,

and after despair witnessed by the empathetic  
but not currently despairing,

each snowflake is the soul of a sparrow, or can be.

## ANOTHER ATTEMPT AT AN ODE TO THE CARDINAL

After sunset it sings how sunset would sing if sunset had a syrinx,  
if it could control points along its own trachea independently,

but sunset can't do that, and because it can't, because it's like a child  
blind since birth

whose overly compensatory sense of hearing is as keen as a deer's,

sunset plays the bird's throat

with long candy fingers  
you wouldn't believe

are made only of refracted light,

like the cardinal is hopped-up, is electric,  
is backfeed-infused panpipes,

and I almost say *play it again*, almost call the sunset Sam,

but before I can do that  
I get sidetracked trying to figure out

where my Paris was and who I'll always have it with,

then darkness—always darkness—grows over the song, the uneventful day,  
a beard over the seeable,

until I can't tell the difference between the bird's red feathers and tree's green leaves,  
so to pass the time while my eyes grow accustomed, which may take until morning,

tell me what day was ever uneventful? is there any such thing as radio silence?  
tomorrow, will you sing or listen best?

TO TEACH ME, YOU BROUGHT ME INTO THE  
LIVING ROOM, GAVE ME SOLVENT AND RAGS,  
TOLD ME TO DO GOOD WORK, & I TRIED TO

The table and chairs were uncovered.  
My chore was to polish.

The chairs with their slatted backs  
threw shadows. The floor looked like a row of prison cells.

Like mine own had thrown me into a shadowy cage.

It was the beginning of a string of unearthings.

You found me sitting in the mudroom  
drinking a Coke.

You found me with my head bowed.

I was the lazy grandson.

I had already jailed so much inside of me.

You didn't see that the shadow my head made  
was screaming.

Didn't tell me that screaming  
can lead to singing.

Didn't play me any Indian songs.

Didn't pay me for the work  
I didn't do.

## MARIPOSAS

When I saw the documentary on tv of the miraculous  
migration of the monarch butterflies  
I remembered waking with a fever in a room  
full of butterflies,  
orange and black patterned butterflies oddly translucent  
covering the four walls,  
the ceiling, the bed-covers and hovering wherever I looked.  
My own body  
was cloaked with them, like a tree in the Mexican highlands.  
Mariposas they are called there.

I must have been crying when my grandmother came in,  
and when I told her  
there were so many she shooed them away. Still they  
landed in her hair  
and on her shoulders and followed us out into the bright  
kitchen. *Mercy mercy*  
she shook her head and whistled through her teeth  
as she concocted  
a potion of bourbon, honey and lemon warmed in a pan  
over stove flames.  
It burned my throat as I swallowed. She held a cold rag  
to my forehead  
and shooed the butterflies toward the window. *Mercy mercy*  
she sang and waved them away with her hand.

## PEACHES

Those mornings, rising from sleep before dawn  
in Fresno to drive down Highway 99  
in that old yellow pickup, my Palomino,  
to work in the peach orchards outside Kingsburg,  
were briefly cool and glorious as the sun began to rise  
and I sang lines and phrases of songs  
burning through the static on AM radio—  
*ride, Sally, ride . . . and the wind cried Mary . . .*  
*I love you Suzy Q . . . and Go ask Alice* dissolved  
into *I can't get no Satisfaction . . .*  
The morning was a woman who might have loved me,  
if I didn't have to go to work.  
Even the dark-eyed beauty with the sunny cleavage  
and basket of grapes on the Sun Maid Raisin sign  
outside the packing houses at Selma  
seemed to look longingly right into my eyes.

But when I pulled into the dirt road beside the ditch  
and parked my truck next to the other trucks  
all the men smoked and stared at their boots  
as Ruben, the foreman, explained the workings  
of the new mechanical peach harvester and his plan  
for the day. We would grip the limbs  
with hydraulic arms, throw a switch, and shake  
those sweet feminine peaches out of their trees.

By nine the sun was hot and the air was thick  
with dust and peach fuzz. The hydraulic shakers  
made the peaches fall like softballs on the padded bleachers  
that fit around the base of each tree, then the peaches  
rolled onto a conveyor that dumped them into a bin.  
Sometimes the shakers broke a limb or snapped off  
a branch that whacked one of us in the head. We tied  
our straw hats on with twine and wore bandanas  
over our faces like train robbers. When, mercifully,  
the machine broke down, we knew why.  
It rattled its own bolts loose, just as it rattled  
our teeth and jarred our bones.  
We would lie down on the ground exhausted,  
hoping Ruben would have to go to town for parts.

And there in the sudden quiet of the orchard,  
looking up through the leaves and voluptuous  
slightly swaying peaches touched by glints  
and filtering rays of sun, I heard the voice of T'ao Ch'ien—  
*how I long to rise in thin air*  
*and ride the wind in search of my own kind.*

Then the engine started up again  
and drowned out the voice of T'ao Ch'ien.  
Then I heard the voice of Ruben.

## WAR SUITE

*for my brother*

### I. The Family of Skeletons

Wouldn't we have families, too?  
Mother, father, three  
little ones, all sexless and white  
in our home under the hillside  
with its many stone doors.  
We used to wear flesh, fat, and veins,  
we wore our hearts in our breasts like red purses.  
We used to wear parkas and aprons  
and frocks, burnooses, burqas and trousers,  
tallit and shawls. We used to eat blackberries  
and bouillabaisse, falafel and cherries,  
cheeseburgers with bouquets of hot  
yellow fries all shaken with salt.

Now we wear nothing, drink bowlfuls  
of air. We live in our cave.  
Sit in our green chairs. Roll the dice.  
A bright light went off in our life  
like the flash of an enormous camera.  
Smile, little ones. Say cheese.

## II. The Recruiter

He does not speak. A mask speaks.  
His hat and chest are starched.  
His heart cramps like a fist,  
his tall legs ache, not running.  
His mind becomes a net of barbs.  
The pimp who lures the beautiful boys  
in alleys and in waterbeds:  
no worse than he.  
Unholy shepherd. Fisher of men.

### III. The Parents

Every time we thought to shield  
him we wondered out loud, Why  
someone else's son and not ours?  
So our hands fell to our sides.  
We let the devil in through the front door,  
gave him tea in his own white cup.  
The cats in their luscious coats  
milled around his legs as if he were human.  
Our son's face looked into his face  
like a bird charmed by a serpent,  
a flower mesmerized by sun.  
I know now I should have  
let loose the unfriendly dogs.  
I should have barred the door  
with my own body.

#### IV. The Widow

Where has he gone,  
who moved through me like a river.  
Has he broken into a cloud of birds?  
A busted fruit, a skein of red pulp?  
My mouth is sealed and small  
as a sugared rosette.  
It no longer opens,  
this stopper holding in check  
the salt torrent of our bodies.

## V. The Objector

It seemed my own hands got larger and larger,  
and there was nothing to do with them.  
The palms grew plateau-like,  
plain-like, each a prairie soft with grasses  
and little running, flying creatures.  
Little creeks. My hair grew long,  
as if reaching for the earth  
with its roots. My hands were empty  
and my life so still. My eyes filled up with time,  
with sky. And so what if they judged me,  
sitting there empty? Sitting there empty,  
with my hands full of birds.

## VI. The Sister

I was asleep a long time, dreaming  
of dark sheep with drenched fleeces.  
How cool was the grass at my cheek.  
And he was only a boy, the littlest goatherd.  
Suddenly I awoke. Get away  
from my brother, you kings of war.  
I am a tuning fork, split-legged, vibrating ions,  
a tree, charged and electric,  
just struck by lightning, poised  
any moment to go up in flame.

ENDPAPER EPIGRAMS (GRAFFITI FROM A  
CULTURAL NERVOUS BREAKDOWN)

cell —  
poetry's rain  
check

\*

*each in our own  
different ray...*

\*

the well spent  
in the desert

\*

(the general larger  
than the field)

\*

*the time  
beings*

\*

the drunk looking  
for the key to the light

## POEM ON PLACARD FOR PLACARD FOR STATUE

*The Spencer Museum of Art (Lawrence, Kansas)*

Never mind the Winslow Homer, the Albrecht Dürer, the Georgia O'Keeffe.  
Forget the Chihuly, the Rossetti, the Grant Wood.  
What captured my attention — though it failed  
at first to even catch my eye — was the placard  
to the left of the placard  
to the left of the statue  
of Saint Damian.

*Circle of Ignaz Günther*  
*Germany, 1725-1775*  
*Saint Damian, circa 1770-1775*  
*painted and gilt lindenwood*  
*museum purchase, 1950.0091*

reads the placard for the saint.

*Label for Saint Damian, 2008*  
*toner on cardstock*  
*museum purchase, 2008.1072*

reads the placard for the placard for the saint.

*'Remake Your Museum' project, Spring 2008...challenged students to  
create labels for objects in the museum not traditionally considered to be  
art objects*

reads the placard explaining the placard  
for the placard  
for the saint.

*'Label for Saint Damian' reflects the mores of late 20th to early 21st  
century museum labeling. Starkly minimalist in its physical construction,  
the label diverges from a purely utilitarian form only through the addition  
of a discreet beveled edge*

reads the sign containing Daniel Hogan's  
artist statement for his winning entry, the placard  
for the placard for Saint Damian.  
Hogan then goes on to say that

*such simplicity, the antithesis of a rococo picture frame, reinforces the  
label's subservience to the artwork it describes*

before continuing at even greater length  
his explication of the newfound piece,  
causing one to think  
more about a label  
than one has presumably ever thought before — more  
about the placard and its placard, perhaps, than about  
the statue  
of poor Saint Damian.

Good old  
Damian — the original  
work of art; the one  
the placards  
were meant to serve:  
Damian, who guards the gallery's gateway,  
a post he's manned for half a century;  
who looms with towering dignity  
as soon as one enters the room;  
who stands in his ancient robe,  
cracked and gray yet trimmed in gold;  
whose hand curls to a claw,  
as if to clutch some missing thing  
or grasp a distant thought;  
whose other hand holds a gilded chalice;  
whose bearded face bears a visage  
somewhere between anguish and bliss —

he of the upturned eyes, he  
of the unchanged gaze:  
what must he think of this shift  
in focus?

## FUNERAL STAGING

### Scene 2.

Your grave turned out to be just another one of your hotel rooms paid for by company credit cards. The click and swipe, the plastic feeling of not alright. What you called my Madame Alexander doll face, expressionless. Land Rovers of New Hampshire circled like ravens, your people were there to see you lowered into the hole in my chest. My brand new baby tried to suckle me on the little metal mourner's chair. A sky-deep silence pushed you too far. You fell in. My ears would not pop. Instead of roses, I threw in thirteen cities. The Holiday Inn. Parts of I-95 North. Providence. Boston. Northampton. Brattleboro and Bangor. Concord and Waterbury. I threw in my compunction, lies, truths, rants, hangovers, my good-girl attempts, a Pan Am 747, your horn rimmed glasses, passport, square boar bristle hairbrush, your blood pressure pills, a travel alarm clock, your genetic loneliness, your Tinker-Tailor-Soldier-Spy, your red and white Chinese take out menus, Michelin guides, Marx Brothers screen saver, your palm pilot, mustache trimmer, shoe horns, suit press, weariness.

### Scene 1.

Frost heaves forming under the subconscious of the road home, not far off from this little lane to cemetery-land, where once on the cold, cold shoulder you stopped the car and yelled at me to *get the fuck out*. Mother had slammed the door on the Western world for good, and I was the prodigal doll returning to our cold, cold doll house. Always returning. Another long trip into it, our arguments following us like cops. The thumping sounds of the road beneath us seemed like the sound of your aggravation or heartbeat. You were the smell of the car's heated steering fluid. Sometimes a premonition of what is to come is just staging, I tried to jump out the moving car as you downshifted, then an overturned Audi ahead, the driver on the other side of window, peering out, helpless, into our reflections. You tried to break the glass. *Get back*, you shouted, banging the window, useless, everything about to ignite. We didn't speak of it, but each silently imagined the deaths of everyone we loved. How to live? That was the question.

## LOW IN SPIRITS

Ice on the river, like unworked chert,  
slides in fractures of fine grains,  
bright as her own name  
that she gives to her first child,  
born in February. The sky  
keeps close as a grooved axe.

She hears tales of the outlaw  
who lived in this garrison before,  
how he dove fingers first  
into a man's eyes  
and would have put them out.

The baby stirs in sleep, eyes  
shut but looking side to side.

Below them, tribes cross  
the river from time to time.  
Her husband writes  
that she should *cheer up*  
*and try to be lively.*

Snow like heavy feathers is falling again  
over the hundred men in the regiment,  
over she the officer's wife. Clarissa, Clara—the bright  
wakes, suddenly more  
hungry than anyone can bear.

## CERULEAN

Warblers pull on full  
thistles, swaying over  
black hickory nuts busted  
to dust on the ground.  
The male and female  
fasten parts of blue,  
green, gold on the bluff  
above the river.

Belly down in the grass  
in the earthworks  
of Fort Kaskaskia, a child  
waits in hide and seek. You won't find her.  
Here comes the surge  
of a train along the river. Here burns the thrum  
of a barge between the shores.  
She knows each curve  
of moat and ramparts,  
each step down to the river,  
the roots of the hickory  
uncurled.

The threatened  
birds feed in morning,  
in the open eyes of crushed  
sky. Born of bark  
and grass bound  
in webs, the warblers  
eat, faces in thistles  
to the eyes.

## JUNGLE BOOK 1

A long trip can suddenly become enormous.

The monkeys start up early, howling certainty

that you are a visitor and trees will out

in the kingdom of green father.

*time into space  
the great device*

*squirrel monkey  
Capuchin  
howler  
Geoffroy's spider*

Sweat is the great reminder that you

are not a dreamer, something in my eye

just now, I am awake, and sweating.

To go on like this, something abrading something

in the distance, each day, the jumping register

of bugs sawing the foliage. Machinery,

the smallest ants with the biggest bite.

*enzymes, the great  
chain of being*

The shadow of a sand particle making its way

from the beach, onset, as in tides, each wave

exploding differently from the last.

We are hungry at night and deify the darkness.

Remember me when I am gone.

## JUNGLE BOOK 2

Kidnapped is not a question  
though we have chosen this.  
Through the dense screen of what  
can only be described as palm  
is a beyond, Pleistocene rapture  
of something moves to engulf us.

*"Everyone, soon or late  
sits down to a banquet  
of consequences."  
R.L. Stevenson*

There is no Jimmy Buffet, the boat  
has left, the raft of self-preservation  
is dangling in the trees, a sign  
that there was once water, there  
will be water.

*"The end of all  
flesh has come  
before Me"*

To walk among the living  
fully exposed, a welt  
that wells to sorrow.

I cannot reconcile abundance  
with such paucity of spirit.  
For spirit must sleep and there is  
too much sun. Kidnapped,  
this is the terror of taken.

DEAD FLEAS IN A DISH READ AS TEA LEAVES  
IN A CUP

Purpling my nails, I pluck fleas from cats,  
sit this way and that upon my lone couch,  
feasting the future from August air. Fog  
does not swerve, but shifts and pools its

settling into crevices, and in this way it is  
like memory. Like memory is like the cats  
scratching at themselves bad, till rust hues  
and spots papers they've lain on, and I pain

at the last drops from the glass. Idiot aunts  
foretell my future, those stupid twins aged,  
zombied with their doctors' prescriptions:  
one with dead spots in the brain (coupling

booze, Vicodin), the other cruising a methadone valley  
somewhere along Sioux City, IA's flat: a delirious  
recluse! My blood relations. Are not my chosen  
love relations significant? What hatches such

growth, a grossly minute movement in carpet?  
Humidity spawns the larval, announcing itself  
with welts on ankles and, thus, this bulwark of  
depression (I don't want to wake up), reminding

one of one's decisions, one's once-lover, till that  
great dream finally arrives mid-morning, the one  
one never had a right to, and in its eye I am liking  
making my mistake all over again, and will not

admit it that, because love is love, and one must  
hope beyond genetics: yet blond was my lover,  
and blond is my daughter, this spawn mine alone:  
eyes haunted by blue's hues, lit gray with hazard.

A flea touches down on her baby-belly, the spot  
at which I press pressing on a diaper. She's crying.  
House rife with vermin, you've been brewing me  
up again in an old dream's cup, scalding my hands

with the steam lifting cruelly off a delicious tale  
that's for years lain dormant. But back when walls  
were dominant, must-eyed, moss-hued, for hours  
unmoving my love sat before a trap he'd fashioned

for the feral cat a-hiss beneath my bathtub, still as  
the glass of wine hung from his hand, tuna can  
cracked, set before the cage's door he'd hooked ajar  
with a taut length of twine. I love to think about that.

It makes me laugh when no one's around. It's years  
since he tipped himself off a cliff, got smashed. Hands  
crawl a body to scratch. A ruinous dream is back,  
swash-buckling its path from back out my past.

## MONOLOGUE OF FISH BONE

The salt so quiet, I mimic it.  
Once swimming, I rely on the shape  
of water, though water I swim  
relies itself on return, not now, not  
sand seasoned with salt, seasoned  
with does not make the reeds grow.  
When inside comes out, you have to know  
the hidden, see ribs like parentheses—  
What between, what elided, left to gulls? —  
and the spine like little pills dispels  
heartache though they only work  
when you think they do, when you believe  
something that heartache resembles,  
mouth of a fish, for instance, opening  
a hinge for three years and showing  
no real sign of change on its own, crystals  
of halite adhering where muscles had,  
to pull against current now wind, the eye  
socket clotting with sand, dorsal fin  
the lost feather from the fossil bird. Fear stillness,  
if you must, but it is just still, a breath  
caught and sustained in exhale, shining  
music for whomever looks down, same world.

## THE SWANS RETURN

*for Roxanne*

I heard them everywhere, trumpeting—  
we call it—coins stirred, girls chirping.  
I heard them through marsh ice, through  
rushes, cold and dry, their rusted tassels  
imitating birds flown. We had reason  
to believe they would never return, winter  
settled good, but swans lifted the warmer sheet  
of weather pulled its ends north toward us both,  
toward the borders where we live, and now,  
swans spook when I round the corner, spook  
when I open the car door, walk toward them.  
They rise from water like Chinese acrobats  
sudden, graceful in air, longer than the world  
below; their necks stretch toward something new,  
disappearing beyond sight, where they will  
bend bodies above water, silk arabesques, down  
and call. Which voice is theirs, I do not know,  
but this one, this joy, ours wrapped around it,  
singing the earth whole, gives back when we wait,  
when winter falls away and tundra swans return.  
Spring lies down canal waters all afternoon.  
Ice pops. The sun wipes gauze from the clouds  
lights the field of reeds gold that belongs to you,  
swans with their sibilants gliding thaw, and me.

## LET THE LIVING RETURN TO THE SEA

Last night we watched a baby octopus  
on video with a child. It had washed  
ashore the border of tide, white water  
the water's distance from air. Living thing  
moved a line of coral foam, undulating  
tentacled legs, water retreating to its mouth,  
gliding its spectral torso over glazed sand.

We come to this town to bury the dead,  
but dinner, we hear two births will come,  
and the dead take turns at quiet instead.  
There are photos, printouts from ultrasounds—  
mothers and mothers to be for the first  
pass images around the table. One niece  
has a baby inside that could be an octopus,  
bulge of light rounding like a head—it is a head—  
a shadow that will be eyes, but the hands  
wave flippers in ink and legs like a tail  
in the gray sea, the precise hope for fingers,  
toes, and bones. The miracle brain inside  
space the size of a pearl begins to steam,  
begins the vision.

The other niece is showing,  
stomach swelling beneath her blue dress,  
the child inside her with limbs, hands already  
brought to its mouth, a face becoming its face,  
one of us. In the photo, we see ribs, translucent  
skin over ribs, hips hiding—we will know  
in weeks, she, he, sex blooming the waters.

Another child has been watching the octopus,  
has put on the mask of a monster, climbs the back  
of Auntie's chair, his red hair no brighter than fire  
he puts into space. He knows the small thing  
in the darkness comes for him, sister, brother,  
love, this self coming, sacred book illustrated  
by the monk who studies shells and moth wings,  
saints and all their signs, angel, bird, ox, and lion,

and *we* know the cells find their way to hair,  
fingernails, eyes that change the muted world  
into forests inside the brain, octopus pulled  
back into the entire sea by wave, pulsing heart  
of all water, drawing it inside, pushing against it,  
propelling its body through distance that lasts,

the bright coral, clown fish, eels, above water,  
sky wrapped around the globe and the mind  
that writes it all down in grief, in joy, Being  
itself, brief and infinite, raspberry, sparrow.

THE AMOROUS VISTA

*to Kathie*

Discomfort is a door  
to someone else's  
sadness, full of south  
and broken compasses.  
Regard that nearly killed.  
Ache that carved a hole  
in the door you walk through now  
to find her beneath  
a single leaf so tall  
it shadows sand  
and, as the sun  
changes, will shadow  
the rooms she thought  
to move to. A bell  
sounds. The sea cymbals.  
Then everything is quiet.  
Then you find her  
head in hands  
and do not move  
till she lifts her face  
toward what  
you both begin to say is  
the vista that is very tired  
which, again, could be

## BURNING AND GETTING BURNT

A type of exhaustion  
overtook me in my dream.

And when I woke, it was still there.  
A mild dark was still dissipating  
through the blinds.

It's the way it begins to burn  
away in rose or violet hue,  
the uniformity of it,

that tells me  
darkness is one thing  
and not a multitude.

I've seen wildfires  
smoke away a sky in Utah—

I can't get any closer  
to what happened than that.

This New Year's,  
I vowed not to work  
for less than what a job is worth.

Then I never asked how much  
the Christian college  
wanted to pay me,

and no one told me  
until the three hundred dollars  
appeared in my account the first month.

Still bedroom,  
I am angry at you  
every morning,

with your dog sounds  
and mellow warmth.

No, not you,  
but what I must do  
to keep you.

At the bathmat deadpan  
in the shower.  
Angry at the many faces

of darkness  
and the lilies  
threatening to emerge.

Early in the season,  
  
they must break  
the weighty earth around them,  
then crack the shell.

I want to be alive and present  
when they do.

I want to go back to Utah  
with the river  
emptying its anger

over and over,  
rowing against something,

toward something:  
a splintered precipice, a shore.

## FIRST COURSE IN DEMONOLOGY

And when you finally lived alone,

even the curtain  
printed with subway stops  
loomed.

It was the eerie way  
the tracks  
circled back—

Queensbury transferred  
toward Wembley

only to link back

to Mudchute,  
Queensbury again.

The first night  
you counted  
drafts  
pulsing the vent,

then the morning  
songs of mimids  
and aphids.

If you spy the *baberek*,  
beat a spice platter with a knife,  
the book said.

If the specter huntsman  
finds you,  
sing, “Bring us

their hearts,” because  
ghouls starve  
for admiration.

And for everything,  
a rule—

grimoires and icons  
not to be crossed,

edicts even devils  
dared not defy.

A summer spun out

in half-gestures—  
the indifference

of twilight,

her hands kneading,  
passionate  
and sure

enough gone by September.

Should it have surprised you  
certainty could feel so good?

Name what binds  
one body to another.

Not iron bands  
forged to ward off,  
not devil's traps,  
brick dust,

even that pull  
which attracts hands  
to the heat

of the back

where she'd inked birds  
of paradise

bright  
as souls.

She loved your digits  
as you traced  
each crown  
and scapulae,  
  
rounding curves like rosaries,  
and she gasped your name,  
  
your common name.

## DOUBLE DOG DARE

Here's how I avoided beauty for so long.  
When I needed beauty more than heat.  
If you think about it, we're all pretty gutsy.  
What I mean by that is, Don't ever die, lover.

I wasn't one of those kids who would take  
or give a dare or a double dog dare.  
We all have our gifts. Even a crooked grin is one.  
So here I go, lying across the train track.

It's like a show that ends at 9:59 PM on a Tuesday.  
You said I wouldn't do it, but here I am.  
And what happened along the way to your  
browneyed boy, Mr. Death, you son of a bitch,

you fucking asshole, whom I picture  
same as my friend's dad, drunk and home now  
looking for a fight. How embarrassing.  
The whole neighborhood is listening.

## THE MAN WHO KNOWS HIMSELF

We found him, the man who knows himself  
and what he wants, lying in the shade  
of the palm trees in the hammock,  
and we followed him, first with the compact binoculars  
we brought to look at the birds  
(when I saw some, and tried to focus,  
they moved, and when I tried again, they flew away),  
and then each day as he made the rounds,  
breakfast then a stroll on the hotel grounds,  
then to the pool, two towels and a daiquiri.  
Sometimes, his lady would join him,  
elegant, tan, soft spoken—we could barely hear her—  
and sometimes he arrived alone. My wife  
desired him openly. I know that look.  
Depositing all the accumulated shame in me,  
regret in us, on him, on them. When you  
get to our age, it's even more important, fantasy.  
So is restraint. So for a week or so  
after the trip we called him the man  
who knows who he is and what he wants  
out of life—and we laughed, clicking at the TV—  
though how were we, accustomed as we are  
to this house, these cabinets, this food, our dirty dishes,  
to ever really know or say or even venture a guess?

FROM *VISITATIONS*

This country has no lamps for its alleys,  
but I know the streets like the body  
of a whore, those wounded stones, valleys  
of dark water. There is sorrow  
in wet nights, and the yields will not give.  
I don't know what is worse, to burn or to drown,  
but either way there is famine. The dog will howl  
in the limping city, the wasp will burrow  
deep in the unforgiving plum, and tonight,  
I will learn the bend of a girl, the give  
and take, the way to turn her hard dirt  
so I won't starve on my own instinct,  
so I won't bite through my own foul tongue.  
That flesh is ripe. It will bleed and run.

FROM *VISITATIONS*

That flesh is ripe. It will bleed and run  
if I'm not careful, but I am a patient man,  
and your body is a map I can read  
with my hands. Be a compass, a candle.  
I am desperate for a course, and your body  
is the way back. I miss a woman in my bed,  
but I am too old for rules, for routes.  
You, though, you can be my true North,  
be a heave of iron, the sad, round  
spinning Earth, and I will be the glass face,  
the grid, the bearings. A man doesn't need  
directions, his heart is a magnet, it pulls,  
his hands steady the steep pitch and roll.

FROM *VISITATIONS*

My hands steady your steep pitch and roll,  
but these hills are on fire and I  
haven't seen the sky in years. Direction?  
I am your geography. I am your  
book of maps. I am your sun. And you,  
tiny planet, you insignificant  
collection of stars, will spin and spin  
until you burst into flame. Your black lakes  
will boil, your fields sear, your safe little houses  
of mothers will blaze, and I will rattle  
your paper walls, my hot mouth at the door.  
I will break the bones of this town. I will  
burn down every tree, scald every girl I touch.  
And you? You will blister. You will scorch.

FROM *VISITATIONS*

You will blister, you will scorch, you  
will burn you wicked little crow.  
This is how it happens. This is how you die.  
Don't believe any of this. My hands are liars.  
The way they touch you, the way  
they fall on your body like moonlight, like rain.  
Maybe it's like this: maybe you drown.  
Let's say there is a black lake. Let's say  
there are hands, many hands, hands in your hair,  
hands in your mouth, hands covering your mouth,  
holding your mouth underwater. No, let's say  
the hands are stars, falling in the water  
like hot stones. Open your mouth. Catch one.  
This will keep you from drowning. This will save us both.

FROM *VISITATIONS*

I tried to save you, to keep you from drowning.  
How was I to know you were made of glass?  
This whole city is a boneyard of broken girls,  
slight wrists and stony kneecaps like landmines  
under the sand. There is nothing left of you,  
just threads of hair on a pillow, a damp dress,  
be careful where you walk, girl. Every night  
a new burning, every night I melt you down.  
Tinder bound and boxed, you will love me.  
My body can be the house you hide in,  
and I will say, this is how you love,  
and I will say, this is how you pray.  
You were built for my kneeling, your mouth,  
my own collection of trembling boughs.

## KNOCK

Imagine a queen, hasty in motion, making her way down the corridor  
and forcing open the lock with an approximate knife. We don't know her,

except that we know queens like we know pastoral landscapes populated  
by grass. When I think of the planet melting, it is not as if we all funnel down

to a big pot of poorly-blended soup. I want to be lower to the earth, tucked  
closer to others. I use a knife made by a friend to slice stalks of thick asparagus

and my hand. What I admire about blood is its reluctance to stay inside  
on a nice day when the window is open. The only psychic I want to visit is the one

whose house near my own burned down. Because, what of the clarity in defeat?  
But here comes the queen to our door. Here comes her voice, backlit.

BLUE-SCAPE 1  
PORTRAIT OF A PHANTOM FIGURE

*The past is a different country. They do things differently there.*

—LP Hartley

but what I'm really picturing are thatched roofs  
leaking cats and dogs.  
Stunned rivers, ceased vistas,  
soaring shades of blue  
and the fine tuning of merged grays;  
but forty's made me stop counting  
especially in log factors.  
For amoeba, one is a functional number.

The blue-black silhouette in text highlights  
is a phantom, a promise  
of contrasting contexts; choosing to stay  
rained on rather than in.  
Skies roll over the mountain, plains under the buffalo,  
like the problem with no name  
and the type of suffering we're not told about;  
have no delusions, I will be the exception—

beyond  
the reach of bell curves.  
Prison panes can sometimes shatter,  
shimmering  
and spider prodigal pathways.  
The Minotaur bellows because he knows,  
he's not really the master of his maze.  
Raise the roof, bring down the house—

I've done it before, my kind will do it again  
in karmic sequence and Fibonacci blue bliss.

## RED 2

*Too many people now climb on to the cross merely to be seen from a greater distance, even if they have to trample somewhat on the one who has been there so long.*

—Albert Camus

a bed of tall poppies,  
all funeral and pyre,

sit on the sill gathering perspective.  
We want to believe in Blake, fate and epic stories.

The troop commiserates still, the breath of looming air,  
suckling nitrates—exponential and expanding, circling nutrients

like westward bound wagons  
and marshaling T-cells to wounded tissues;

yet baring enticingly leafy legs,  
clinging to hope like spiraling DNA, verdant vines.

Just one wears red, right.  
Just one holds tall, its pomegranate parts.

Not the porridge, none of the spoons  
satiated eating air, crusts of dependency.

You would serve up a federal sentence  
for breaking and entering—give Goldilocks time.

I'd be happy to find her free—  
in any one of my beds.

## ABLUTION

A stone in my pocket, rough-edged—  
I haven't been worrying enough.

More evidence—someone's scrawled *WASH ME*  
on the rear window of the car.

Small vandal—his finger accomplishing  
what the idols of guilt and virtue could not.

Here I am at Jiffy Wash—  
the car's being dragged by a chain through the cloths.

I'm in it to the sopping end—  
this drain too narrow for gods, for rocks.

## MARRIAGE THERAPIST

I worked with the wife alone at first, typical problems with her mother, defining herself in opposition to her mother while becoming more like her every day, and then she asked if they could both come in, and since things seemed to be going well with her I thought, “Why not?” but he never seemed to want to get with the program, even though I asked him the first day, “Don’t you want your wife to be happy?” and when he tried to say something about her drinking problem, I pulled him back to the topic of the moment, how can we see more happiness in the relationship, because you know especially with these academic couples it’s all about perception and perspective, and they just need to learn to see things differently, especially him because the stories he tells about the relationship are not helpful and empowering, he sees nothing but issues and conflict, and if he keeps showing up, I’m not sure we’ll get anywhere, because some people want to be unhappy no matter what.

## YOU OUGHTTA KNOW

*for my daughter*

Addiction fools  
the best of us:  
you smell the bait,  
acknowledge the hook,  
sniff it, flick it,  
tongue the steel point,  
but can't guess  
how sharp the barb,  
how stealth its set.

## ANGRY

Because ice sheens from the floor now, I'm not calling this a he just finished sieging the kitchen kind of angry. I'm not even calling this a I'm on my knees palming the wreckage of snow kind of angry, though I'm on my knees.

I'm telling you, it's not the door slamming afterward that's holding me here, like I'm stunned by linoleum. It's his boots, too scarred to become arbiters, mapping the breach of dirt and sole.

Tell me you don't understand this wipe up the floor with his shirt kind of angry, this bury it in the yard afterwards kind of angry.

I can't help thinking about my grandmother riding her Schwinn four miles to the liquor store to buy my grandfather's booze, the way she believed him when he told her she was too stupid to drive.

I can't stop thinking about the line the tires must have made in winter—snow grafted to rubber, bits of asphalt smiting the bevel, even the dark stripe always left in the wake. She never talked about the trash bag poncho thrown over her coat, throb of leather seat between her legs, or a whole afternoon of pedaling through slurries of salt. I learned to imagine her leaning harshly on the turn radius, perfecting the gyroscopic procession, to correct for the bottles obscuring the wind.

Imagine yourself removing your shoes in the garage, so he'll never see how salt can stain. Go ahead, toss the poncho onto a hook, cosset the shoes with cloth and vinegar, know the salt's there for good.

Anything can happen when you fall too far into the arms of a hard winter. Anything.

So, this lattice-work kind of angry, this needle moving between your heart and your bones kind of angry, tell me you've felt this, too.

My hands are grasping the shirt's worn cotton. I'm touching the door, there's dirt stung into the linoleum's fleur-de-lis. Dark's now fouling the heraldry of jade and barley.

Can't you see he's turned me into his river? Can't you see I've become a part of his flood? There's transgressions that didn't leave with his body.

Tell me it's like salt worn into linen, the man in him like an ice floe, a fast moving impasse over water.

## FEAST OF ST. MARK

You were dragged by your neck,  
held quick in a noose, through the streets.

The dirt clung to your clothes, stones  
flung up, split your skin so it peeled

back over your arms, shoulders, knee caps—  
blood mixed into the sand, and you,

eyes open, watched clouds straddle rooftops.  
When your body was stolen 800 years later,

merchants hid it under pig carcasses,  
rolled it onto their ship, and sent it home.

Now you lie in pieces around Venice, traded  
away for thousands of years, you are scattered.

On that day of your feast men lined up—  
their heads, helmets down, along the Elbe

to shake hands in armistice, liberated side  
by side, dry, sore fingers grasped each other.

And now when they gather to remember,  
St. Mark, you are a lost book, you are a lion.

## I THOUGHT OF YOU CROSSING

Pennsylvania Avenue  
Monday June 16, 2008  
towards the neon signs  
in the window  
of the liquor store  
in the first clear hour  
of dusk  
and passing with my beard  
two pretty women  
smoking in the privacy afforded  
by a boarded-over vestibule  
between the bookstore  
and the bar  
cradling my twisted  
paper package glumly  
I mouthed the words  
Leopold Bloom ate with  
relish the inner organs  
of beasts and fowls  
crossing back across  
Pennsylvania Avenue  
darker now and didn't  
turn to see the dome  
shining there beyond  
the trees  
and considered the sad  
irrelevant acts  
my friend's father  
put in motion  
bursting into bars  
book in hand  
Roger as afraid as shamed  
proclaiming passages  
from your book of hours  
in the forlorn  
Gibraltar of Deseret.  
I went home  
turned on the radio

washed the piled  
stinking dishes  
poured a whiskey  
past the ice  
and nobody  
mentioned your name.

## HALLOWEEN

The sky tonight begs the black boughs  
with its silentest entreaty—still  
the leaves shag in the branches  
and votives gleam in the park's lights:  
tiny, saintly desires longing for benches.  
The grotto is a mess.  
Leaves clog the octagonal pool.  
Spacemen and batteries and princesses shuffle  
where no Klieg lights tonight evict solitude  
with their homicidal renditions of October.  
The motel is far away. Watching from the car  
the C-130s turn like birds, circle again,  
and come down lazily. Fathers watch warily.  
The green canoe beneath its tarpaulin  
points to the raucous make-believe and strings  
of the littlest lights glow in the school's street.

## MY OLD DOMINION, BLOOD + BONE

I have been going by way of mars to avoid the broken [...]

Apocalypse rides in on ashen horse she is desperado, sirocco — aurorean. This is not an aubade

for the dead. They have long since risen [...] The young cholla die in the light like crosses

the nameless once had names & touch our faces: you Brutus, you poison sucker, you baptizer,

you bullet in the back of her [...] throat. She counted 40 pesos before the horse fell out from under her, beak

of vulted vultures waiting for our wake. The dust will know no settling. I left for you the remains of my fingers

in casks of vodka. [...] Brothers, will you bleed us to bleach in the loam? This death the severed head of a rattlesnake:

watch us bane. Call us ghost town. Boondock. Pine straw — antelucan. Do not leave us here.

Leave us [...] Take the silver in our teeth, take the merl from our mouths. Ferment what little remains remain.

The carrion carries the bone orchard of us on you of us in you. Brothers remember us

as one. As sunrise sarabande Apocalypse-I [...] consumes the way you silhouette your skin from kin. You

like the look of us on our knees? So linger, we want you — only the living will understand venom. The dusk

will retire our souls [...] at the nape of our necks the hole you've made — see us fall to rise to fall. Remember a severed

head still bites. Tell us you mistook our hands for pistols, brothers — that this is the last pain we will have together

— & raise your glass, someday it will taste of me [...]

## GRANDMOTHER SEES WOLF IN THE GARDEN

Through the window  
a shadow,  
open-mouthed,  
darkens my poppies  
with its violet  
fur, its blood-slick fang.

Oh, grave  
and disastrous animal  
marking my garden—

how would it feel to have  
such a fine nose,  
    wet-sensitive to the rush of scents:  
    musty wings,  
fine fur musk,  
    sweet spray of urine  
on willow—

    how would it feel to have such ears,  
triangles pricked  
    to the slightest tick—  
rabbits passing in tall grasses—

    to have such eyes,  
pupils dilated to drink  
    rodents pouring  
from hole to hole—

    how would it feel  
to be driven by hunger,  
    to never question your needs?  
how would it feel  
to know nothing of god  
    and to eat—oh, to feast!  
in blue moonlight to strike

such delicious innocence  
and fleece—  
to scrape tooth against  
bone, drink  
the white leak of marrow,  
all its salty stars

## RED RIDING HOOD AND HER MOTHER: THE CITY

Inside my mother's mind thrives  
a glittering city. There my mother lives,  
dressed in pearls and high red heels.  
Sometimes her eyes shine and in them I see

a million glimmering windows, streets roaring  
electric traffic, tall men with fat wallets  
offering their arms, their delicious dark secrets.  
And now I know she no longer needs me,

having lived so long in her lovely city.  
I see the way she gazes out the window,  
always startled and disappointed by my voice.  
But I can hear a strange river rustling

under the house. At night, with the old shovel,  
I dig around the foundation. Last night  
I saw the water's dark blink. One more day  
of digging and I can slip through the crack

and into the river, which seems to know  
exactly where it's going. I will pack  
a basket, build a raft, use my red cape  
as a sail, let it slide me away.

## RED RIDING HOOD'S PRAYER

I want that tingle of tongue  
on nipple, I need that nip,  
that stinging nibble  
on my neck, oh,

I want wolf paws to paw me,  
heft me naked against  
naked body—  
Animal taste me:  
wrist finger throat  
Animal eat me:  
nipple thigh knee—

Yes! I know all about sin.  
In her darling house  
Grandmother teaches me  
everything, in her darling house

with pink carpet, portraits  
of geese and sunflowers  
sunning sinless necks,  
feather and flesh stretched bare

for the harvest—  
before bed we kneel,  
Grandmother and I, and she bids me  
close my eyes, absorb the holy

Lord—  
she whispers:  
*we know the weakness  
of people to temptation.*

Each night through slit eyes I peek,  
try to catch a glimpse:  
glowing robes, white hair?  
And does he have wings? A tail?

He is never there,  
and grandmother whispers

*we will strive, Lord,  
for moral and ethical perfection.*

And in the mornings my body  
scrubbed holy in the porcelain basin,  
my body rinsed wholly  
by the water

and my skin yearns for sun,  
my curves yearn for some  
hot touch, but I must remain  
modest, hide beneath yards  
of heavy cloth.

Alone, in the forest, I think—why not?—  
I'll tear it off, and I'll wait  
like a tender nectarine,  
wait for someone to sink

teeth into me, my skin buzzing  
like moonlight, like a glittering hive,  
wings whirring silver  
in silver spring, and, sensing

his musk rushing through  
lupine, alarmingly blue,  
what will I sacrifice?  
Here is my thigh—  
Oh, Animal, will you taste it?  
How will I explain it?  
Will I be forgiven if I only *think* about sin?

*Forgive me, grandmother,  
for imagining  
this tear in my cloak,  
these leaves in my hair,  
this bite on my hip,  
this kiss dripping  
honey from my lips.*

COUNTRY PRAYER: *PATER NOSTER*

Our Father, who art in Heaven,  
hallowed be this twang, thy crook of vowels  
like curves the road through Appalachia takes,  
thy pedal steel that hooks the minor notes  
so sad and hallowed, too.

Our Father, king of men, bless the use  
our bodies make daily for this music—bless us quick  
so we can move to flip the record, listen eager  
to the whole thing all over once again.

Our Father, who lives and reigns  
above us, though your grace takes a thousand  
forms, your voice as many choruses as dead stars  
crowding heaven, allow us only the saddest of them all—  
it's all that we deserve, we who forgot for so long  
the holy glory of our forebears.

Our Father, who art in Heaven, play it all  
over once again, same side of that same dusty country  
record, same Carter Family shoutalong—let the minor key  
of this hymn echo through the low and hard-luck  
world below, let our teeth rattle with the stiff  
and desperate way we hum all day against them.

Let us cry out, rejoice, and be forever glad in it.  
O Father, let the holler swallow us whole.

## IN THE DRAMATIZED WORLD

Here it's easy to say  
I love you  
make a murder of me.  
Also: you are darkness  
if you do not shine.  
The first law: emptiness  
expands.  
The second: the known universe  
isn't known at all.  
If the body is an argument  
it is ours  
to lose. And love  
losing.  
Beneath the lighthouse  
orcas yin and yang  
and something older  
yins and yangs.  
Places in Beirut  
look like Beirut.  
The samurai, Tomas said,  
looks insignificant  
next to his armor  
of black dragon skin.

## IN THE DISMANTLED WORLD

*Isn't this your life?*

—Dick Hugo

### 1. A Town

is not some lake-sunk bird.  
It goes to sleep in wild thistle.  
It keeps the hour by the moon.  
Leaning granaries, lipless men  
who wait for years  
hoping. Who love even  
that broken pepper shaker  
they call their life.  
Who, when young, glued  
quarters to the floor  
of Lorrie's Little Shack  
and peppered rats  
with bullets and air.

This, after all, is a world.  
See the gestures we make—  
salted ground signaling  
O behind a football field,  
gymnasium walls yellow  
with victories, a story  
of boys written  
in banners. Like them, some moons  
stay lost and are sweeter.  
Some had no luck  
and never did.  
Soon it will be time to lift  
the timber pile  
and scorch the black  
spider, who is clever  
and moves in many bodies.  
Not unlike a town.  
Not unlike slow  
death, there are facts

that visit again,  
at unwelcome hours,  
when the filigree is heavy  
and everything bloats  
with memory. Then trees  
bend to touch  
in the center of streets.

## 2. A City

It's no secret that a city is basic sadness growing.  
Nothing a person can do, really, besides grow light and drift.  
If there are griefs worth repeating  
there are more worth letting go.  
Best to keep the hands clean.  
Hold love in a pocket like a stone.

Some horses never find bodies.  
You can see them in fields  
next to the horses with bodies.  
They look a lot like empty air.

Air of the coffin man, air of an afterworld...  
You know this lesson.  
Where there is water there is bending.  
What isn't empty will be.

## IN THE BEATIFIC WORLD

This morning, amid the sound  
of trains, I think on what she wrote:  
*Grief is one way*  
...but there are others.

I stir eggs in a pan and  
watch them curl around  
in their own off-yellow way.

We move a little like this.  
We were once the children  
we read about in stories.

The blue pot I left out  
in the rain was full of rain.

DOES MY DOG KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO DIE?  
SHE IS A STOLID BELL

against the thrush grass —  
ears perked

she sits steady  
when the hawk's shadow  
cloaks her body.

All is relevant today;  
    wild mustard flowers,  
tufts of sorrel weed,  
a red feather from a prairie black bird.

Somewhere in the field  
    a dead raccoon  
has curled up like a leathery fetus.  
We smell it together

but she cannot know  
    I have already seen it.

A noisy Jay family cracks her  
    from her haunches  
so she, tolling for all she is worth,  
rips through the plain.

## THIS IS THE STUFF I AM SELLING

Clear morning grays  
to threaten rain, clouds  
a storm of geese  
and across the river  
more new homes.

For sale: sterling silver we used  
at Thanksgiving the year  
Marshall decided against  
the cranberry sauce.

A puppet theatre—no, I'm sorry,  
the children kept the puppets.

This camera I used  
to take her picture,  
nude and laughing,  
in the creek-lit shine  
of a morning like this,  
and there's the book I wrote  
on how to love her, called,  
*Hold Fast*.

The geese have turned to bees,  
and the new homes have sprouted  
wings. They buzz.

You're just driving by, but  
let me tempt you  
with this BBQ spatula, or this dryer.  
It needs a new belt.

For sale: one oak table,  
only made love upon twice. Sturdy.

Please, no charge for the Coleman stove,  
the toasting glasses we bought in Austria.

Her clothes hung on those hangers—  
take them, and this picture of bees.  
The chair and the toys,  
suitcases, one hard-shelled, one  
with a broken wheel. Take the shoes  
I am wearing, and my glasses.

Even the lawn is flying away.  
I'll make you a bargain  
on the earth that remains.

## NOR'EASTER

It's no wonder  
    people leave. Thirty inches  
in less than a day, more  
    on its way. No wonder

few come back: grown men  
    scolded for tracking mud  
in the house, slush  
    and gutter-muck. Even if

it's pure, untouched  
    by trucks and stomping boots,  
everyone knows it'll stop  
    and the weather warm to show

the same gray streets  
    and spring a long way off—  
winter in Lowell,  
    hardly a hill to sled.

A plow rumbles down  
    the block, wipes out an hour  
of hard labor. Still  
    a blade of yellow grass

works its way  
    through slush beneath my feet  
and a broken back  
    can't get more broke. I listen:

after the echo  
    of shovel scraping sidewalk,  
my heartbeat.  
    My breath rises up.

I'm clearing  
    a path so I can  
get out, a trail  
    I can follow back in.

THE ENTANGLEMENT OF CLASS AND CARE:  
A CONVERSATION BETWEEN  
SARA HENNING AND LAURA MADELINE WISEMAN

**Laura Madeline Wiseman:** Both you and I have recently had books released from Lavender Ink that focus on the body, love, and relationships that turn violent. My book *Some Fatal Effects of Curiosity and Disobedience* (Lavender Ink, 2014), addresses a contemporary recasting of the Bluebeard myth, focusing on the romantic encounters of three sisters who marry the man who will murder them. Rather than centering on Bluebeard's bloody travails, my retelling meditates on love and its exhibitions. Your debut collection, *A Sweeter Water* (2013), is really an examination of elegy, as it traces a father's suicide and its devastating complications on a speaker aching to find her voice among loss. Through the book's development, loss becomes its own lyric predicated by the chimerical dahlia—one part talisman, one part anchor, and one part taboo.

Thinking about our books together, I'm curious about the brutality of loss. For example, the loss of a parent is brutal in all its many guises because it's also the loss of support, including financial. This is especially so for women and mothers. How do poets negotiate issues of class and privilege in their work?

**Sara Henning:** Oh yes, the loss of a loved one is ruthless. Yet, I agree that loss has far reaching socioeconomic repercussions, especially for women left to suffer with children in the quagmire of patriarchal hegemony. Loss is a rhizomatic conception, an issue important to contemporary poetry because it is as much a psychological issue as it is a class issue.

As a white woman, I will never argue against the fact that I come from a privileged subject position. I have never been watched closely at Walgreens by a female clerk who feared me, due to the color of my skin or my gender. I have never had a well-to-do couple cross the street out of fear that I might stab or hustle them. If anything, the clerk is always friendly and the woman in the couple often smiles or makes pleasantries. To these women, I am simply a sister, a member of their tribe. But I am also the product of an impoverished background, which is an intimidating psychosocial space to incorporate when standing at the staircase of academia's often lush and exclusionary ivory towers. Without my father, my mother couldn't make it on her own, and in turn, she was forced to solicit the support of her parents, and as a package deal, an environment of multigenerational abuse. As a motivated child, I often "passed" as part of my general cohort, middle and upper middle class families with a two-parent income, though I felt like a paradox: a member of the underprivileged privileged who belonged in neither world.

**LMW:** You say this so beautifully. It reminds me of Audre Lorde's words: "For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence." Poetry collections like *A Sweeter Water* are not luxury, they are vital, because if I might quote Lorde again, "Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought."

**SH:** If we are not taking Lorde's advice, as women, we are failing the institution of poetry and each other. Perhaps by saying this, I can be criticized as essentializing the role of the female poet or confining poetry to an act of agenda. Let me clarify: in a space where we have supposedly transcended race, gender, and sexuality as functional sociocultural definitions, I simply hope that literature that addresses reclamation, resistance, and witness will continue to garner respect. As I was writing *A Sweeter Water*, I addressed the loss of a father through notions of physical and emotional absence, but I also felt the need to examine next door prostitutes, physically abusive lovers, wild girls who fall by the wayside—our contemporary culture's very real broken birds.

Since we are thinking about ways that gender and privilege inform art, would you talk about your work with the *Women Write Resistance: Poets Resist Gender Violence*, which directly confronts gender violence?

**LMW:** My new book *Some Fatal Effects of Curiosity and Disobedience* grew out of my work with *WWR*. By the time I started researching what would become *WWR*—a task that took seven years to complete—I already had intimate experience working with survivors and resisters of gender violence. As an undergrad at Iowa State University, I first volunteered in a women's crisis shelter and participated in events like Take Back the Night. I continued this volunteer work as I completed an MA in women's studies and a PhD in English. Because I had a small part in the vital force that seeks to help women resist gender violence and because I was now in a privileged place—a doctoral student with an assistantship and fellowships—I wanted to see what else I might be able to do. That what else was the anthology. Since its release we've been able to raise money for organizations that support women, donate copies of the anthology to their libraries, and participate in events such as Week Without Violence, One Billion Rising, and Women's History Month. There have also been readings at AWP, Split this Rock: Poetry of Provocation and Witness, Omaha Lit Fest, and the Indiana Writers' Consortium. It's a privilege and honor to do this work. It is my hope that such events resist gender violence by raising awareness and initiating action.

**SH:** I am amazed by how your focus on resistance surpasses the page. Literary work that engenders transformation (personal and/or cultural) does so much

more than simply being an exercise in mastering metaphor, and this is the timeless literature that demands re-reading. Our mother of resistance, Muriel Rukeyser, would be so proud of you.

**LMW:** Thank you for that. I've always admired Muriel Rukeyser's work. In the critical introduction to *WWR*, I quote her words: "If there was no poetry on any day in the world, poetry would be invented that day. For there would be an intolerable hunger." She's right. We hunger for poetry, for what work poetry can do.

In *ASW* there is this unexpected violence, a disregard for self and place, another kind of class violence. In "Psalm" there are "soda cans floating down river" and a "father shot-gunning beer," and this is contrasted with a girl trying to save a chicken being hollowed out by maggots in "Three Themes on Rescue." Can you talk about how care and class are intertwined in offering full portraits of survival and love?

**SH:** Love and survival are fraught subjects in *ASW*. In the work, the self is often forsaken for the more immediate goal of subsistence. One could argue that taking the burden upon oneself to alleviate the struggle of others is a way that the collection's characters often demonstrate love. Your mention of "Psalm," the fact that soda cans are as conspicuous a part of the natural landscape, as say, oak roots, reveals how far the speaker has internalized an ecological disregard that informs her emotional experience. In this particular poem, a father driven by addiction and self-indifference is similarly normalized, a sentiment that resurrects itself in different incarnations throughout the work.

As you noted, the collection contains poems that, I think, validate an attempt to surpass these attitudes and enact salvation. In "Three Themes on Rescue," the speaker attempts to rescue an already dead hen in order to preserve her body's integrity. When she finds the animal already debilitated by maggots, she recognizes that the animal's steadfast spirit bests any violence inflicted upon her, and that notions of survival and endurance are not necessarily interdependent.

So to answer your question of how care and class are entangled in the book, I would argue that the speaker's experience is as paradoxical as the hen's. Through the book, an attempt to champion integrity while normalizing disregard makes for poems that modulate between these extremes, often to subversive ends.

Do you think that violence against women still confounds and surpasses class

hierarchy in our contemporary moment? *Fatal Effects* seems to confront these issues, so could you focus your discussion here?

**LMW:** *Fatal Effects* is a campy, contemporary retelling of the Bluebeard myth that charts the love of three sisters who each marry the same man upon the demise of the sister who preceded her. Bluebeard is usually framed as a story of blood and gore, but this retelling focuses on the love each of his unfortunate wives felt. As a kid, I was drawn to fairy tales and myth in literature, even though the life presented there was not a life I knew. I've never lived in a castle (okay, full disclosure: when I studied abroad as an undergrad at Swansea University, one of the dorms I lived in was a castle, but I'm not sure the co-ed residence halls count as full-castle life). I've never kissed a former lover of my siblings—that would be weird. I've never experienced the kind of wealth an estate like Bluebeard owned, though I've watched each season of *Downton Abby*. I've never married a murderer.

*Fatal Effects* is not my life, but you are correct to point out that the violence the book outlines is a violence experienced by women across class. My poem "Inquisitive Faces" explores the ways a woman can be trapped in such a marriage permeated by domestic violence, and despite the privileges class may make available to some, the most dangerous time for any woman is when she leaves her husband. About one third of women murdered are murdered by their intimate partners. The poem "Widower's Insomnia" seeks to capture what has been called the rising action in the cycle of violence, the time between the honeymoon phase and the violent outburst, when the threat of violence lingers, when the thrum of it vibrates even as he sleeps.

Though I've written more on gender violence, I am invested in issues of class and the ways in which such depictions are represented in literature and popular culture. In 2012, the Guerilla Girls performed at the local art museum on campus in the city where I live. I was particularly provoked by their skit on what things have changed since the second wave of the feminist movement and what things have not. For example, they demonstrated how despite forty years of feminist work, still today: "Women make less than men."

Much as I don't know what it's like to live in a world of castles and multiple murdered wives of which the current wife is seemingly unaware, I can imagine a world of equitable pay. I can imagine a world where women are not the victims of violence. Part of why I wrote *Fatal Effects* is that I sought to imagine that world. In my book, violence is the threat that is the unsaid and the undescribed. It lingers. It is not front and center, blood and gore. I wanted to know the life these women lived, not their demise.

I think one of our jobs as poets is to bring texts into our classroom that challenge assumptions about privilege, gender, and oppression. I've taught Natasha Trethewey's *Bellocq's Ophelia*, Joy Castro's *The Truth Book*, Anne Sexton's *Transformations*, as well as books by Dorothy Allison, Naomi Shihab Nye, and Marjane Satrapi, texts that have provided rich opportunities for discussions. I'm wondering if you can talk about important texts in your own teaching and why those texts have helped you be a better writer.

**SH:** Of course. But first, I just want to say, I've had a wonderful time discussing these issues with you, Madeline. Your work speaks for itself, and I have enjoyed, and grown from, the candor and rigor that informs your stunning answers.

I'd like to focus my response on texts for a graduate class that I cannot wait to teach: Contemporary Women's Trauma Literature. In the course, I'm envisioning teaching works such as Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*; Nancy Venable Raine's *After Silence: Rape & My Journey Back*; Jo Ann Beard's *The Boys of My Youth*; Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*; the list goes on—works that directly confront loss, violence, and suffering as it enters and antagonizes a woman's body, and what is left in those traumatic wakes. One cannot be an effective writer without being an effective reader, and the converse application is true—these things necessarily inform each other. The cycle of reading, writing, and teaching should beautifully intermingle. My goal is to honor these texts by writing passionately in their wake and teaching others to grow from their words.

**LMW:** It sounds like a wonderful class. Your students will be lucky to have such a smart, talented teacher among them. By the way, I know that you are working on a manuscript that involves the themes we have discussed today, and that a chapbook manuscript from the effort has been circulating. Can you talk about it?

**SH:** Of course, and thank you so much for your kind words. In 2011, I lost my grandfather to implications related to Korsakoff's Dementia, a condition onset by chronic alcohol abuse. Because he was as close to a father as I had growing up, his loss got me thinking about how drinking affected my familial relationships at microscopic and macroscopic levels. My grandfather was an accomplished professor, but a heartless man. He would often put my grandmother on bare-bones grocery allowances so he could buy top-shelf gin. When inebriated, he would go into rages that would take a physical toll on his daughters. Yet his behavior, and its intergenerational manifestations, are

systemic of the larger negotiation placed on families plagued by shame, addiction and the secrets that inform them. Like many with his condition, he had a secret that none of us learned until his death that I am exploring in my current collection. Many of the women in our family, myself included, spent years drawn to addicted men who would be cruel to us, and many of my aunts and cousins never escaped this tendency. My manuscript concerns memory and addiction as embodied processes, and explores the aftermath of their liaison.

I also know you have a chapbook of prose poems forthcoming. Would you talk about it?

**LMW:** Sure! While I was a fellow at a residency program in Taos, I started a new series on death personified and gendered female. My interests in violence against women (done by men) are evident in what we've discussed here. I'm also interested in the ways women are violent. While visiting museums in New Mexico, I discovered art and history exhibits from the nineteenth century on *la muerta*. For years, I've been fascinated with stories of female death such as Demeter and Persephone from Greek mythology, and Inanna from Sumerian mythology. A concurrent interest has been the culture and traditions of the Southwest. I studied Spanish in school and I lived in Arizona during graduate work. Suddenly, all these interests coalesced, sparking the new series and forthcoming chapbook *Threnody*. The lady of death walked into my poetry, a series about finding and inviting those that needed to climb into her cart.

*A SWEETER WATER*  
BY SARA HENNING  
(Lavender Ink, 2013)

REVIEWED BY KATE SAVAGE

A sweet title introduces poetry that is also all-at-once deliciously sour, bitter, salty. Sara Henning's debut collection speaks out of hard-bit scars, a secular stigmata of suicidal fathers, brutal lovers, animals rescued or left for dead, a cruel mother, and the motherly 'bad girl' next door. There are dahlias and peonies in these pages, but they grow on spit and sulfur. Her words heft the weight of those trash bags from her gut-wrenching piece "Dead Reckoning":

*so full of his things and her sorrow  
they could have held dead bodies.*

This is a confessional text, heartfelt and autobiographical—and yet it skips away from the traps of naivety and self-indulgence. Henning explains in her opening poem:

*My father taught me how an artist disappears behind the walls of his work,  
that the dismantling of composure is cutting cobalt from a rattle, soft  
ochre  
from a tabby's fur, a father from removal's intense red.*

Henning knows how to cut herself out of the whole cloth of her craft. She disappears behind the walls of her work but never manages to hide.

The resulting pieces reveal a peculiar kind of snipping and stitching, a demon handicraft of domesticity. In "Self-Portrait as Stitching a Summer Body, Philomela," she begins: "The striking thread carries so many portals, occlusions." Thread, which would bind us in homey togetherness, operates through striking, tearing, cutting—making an opening and a break. We are brought together by all the ways we are separated from each other. Any moment of apparent nostalgia for togetherness and home is always revealed as more "occlusions."

It's worth noting the allusion to Philomela in the title. In Greek mythology, Philomela was raped by her sister's husband, who then cut her tongue out to silence her. Mute, she weaves a tapestry to tell her sister the story, stitching to reveal a wound. When the sister reads what happened in the tapestry, she kills

her son and feeds him to her husband in an act of revenge. Finally, the sisters are turned into birds (Philomela to a nightingale) to escape the cycle of vengeance. Henning's quiet sign-post to this brutal story tells us something of the weight of weaving and cutting in this volume—and also the weight of “family,” with both its unspeakable violence and its fierce solidarity.

Another stitching poem explores the inevitability of brokenness. “Twine and Needle” is an attempt to compose a face—specifically the face of childhood:

*Shortly after my birth, my face shattered to pieces.  
When surgeons attempted to construct a new one, each attempt fell to the  
floor like exhausted porcelain.*

The shattering that splits us off from others is shown in this poem to creep internally as well. Our only face is a failure to construct one; our identity grows out of the dissolution of a self. As with Philomela, Henning's poetic voice seems to grow out of the scar of a tongue's removal.

Her more fundamental similarity with Philomela, however, is her need to communicate an actual narrative. These poems aren't primarily 'about' ideas or moods: Henning is a story-teller. The events that happen in these lines are described with clarity, as in this scene from “Requiem with Dog, Dead Sparrow, and Wisteria”:

*I too wouldn't turn  
against the piston syllable of love holding  
me down. Once, I slept with my leg wrapped  
in a towel, the other wrapped around  
a lover who cut me, blood like snuff mouthed  
loosely, spit in the rust of a can.  
In the morning, he threw the towel's  
wet elegy of fever in the trash.*

The solidity of events in her poetry allows a nuance—and even a muddling—of its attendant emotional responses. Like the bees in “How She Loved Me,” Henning is constantly dovetailing “to where soft and terrible is the same pithy center.” Her second piece, “Home,” seems to offer in its first line an uncomplicated, nostalgic metaphor for returning homeward:

*Like listening  
to a river that heads toward the sea [. . .]*

Which she then troubles with a clarification: “Fresh to salt.” Going home isn’t a return to freshness; it’s salty, with the sting in a wound. “I let hole replace wholesome,” she writes in “Zuihitsu Beginning and Ending with Wildflowers.” If you want to find something wholesome in the title *A Sweeter Water*, you may; or you may read it as a longing to fight one’s way upstream and get the hell away from home.

As with the nightingale’s singing, Henning is capable of loveliness in these lines. But when the speaker in “Philomela” describes herself knitting and stitching, the reader can’t quite decipher if she’s cross-stitching Home Sweet Home for the mantlepiece or cutting herself. Henning looks deep into the emptiness of home’s clichés, and fishes out the unsettling.

Henning’s poetic creation is always a double-movement; here nothing can escape either its own shadow or its own luminescence. She writes in “First Striptease”:

[. . .] *sometimes we kiss deeply  
just to turn away, so one day we won’t feel the holes  
in our bodies so desperately, so one day they  
can’t help but startle us.*

She strikes a distance from her poetic subjects, but finds this space only serves to magnify. It’s as though Henning is capable of binding together lack, in one solid mass, and simultaneously breaking apart all possessions with a claustrophobic gasp. This paradox is the seat of her versatility. Compare the dense paragraph-poem “Lost Things” with the structural dissolution of “When You Ask if I Ever Really Loved You.”

From “Lost Things”:

*I begin my list: tomcat with feet flexed in a seizure of pleasure, belly chasing sun; hen rescued from a truck jumping against the heft of her body for a crust of bread; brother plucking sorrow from my lap like peonies. No one wants stories about fits of nostalgia, mothers, birds that call with the sun in their mouths. No one gives a shit about your brother even if he’s blitzing through the binding of the same lost father. [. . .] The tom was cold when I touched my face to his fur; my brother is marrying a woman I have never spoken to, and yet this urge is here to name things which I am not: hen’s wing ripped off by a dog, mother burning my childhood on a pyre, childhood expunged from my body like a struggling sack of sugar.*

From "When You Ask":

*When you love  
another woman,*

*you'll plant in her  
the same brutal*

*seed that won't stop  
pulsing, and I'll*

*forgive her [ . . . ]*

Henning rides the ridge between escape-from and longing-after, marrying an overflowing brain with an animal whimper. All of this makes her a new artist of that very old subject: Love. What is *A Sweeter Water* but a particularly fresh, nuanced, and troubled love song? The honesty, novelty, and grace which Henning brings to this task makes her a poet who deserves to be read and reread.

*HISTORY OF GREY*  
BY KATE KINGSTON  
(Main Street Rag Publishing Co., 2014)

REVIEWED BY DIANA ANHALT

Kate Kingston's latest collection, *History of Grey*, explores lives that lie in-between—in that area beyond judgment, which is neither black nor white. In addition to the grey in the title, colors vibrate in these poems. They are exhilarating and full of life. Fusing history and legend, they cover a region encompassing Colorado, Kansas, Montana, New Mexico, and Wyoming. Traveling from past to present and back again, they imply that the past informs the present; the present the past. Time flows like the river, *El Rio de Animas Perdidas en Purgatorio* (The River of Souls Lost in Purgatory), introduced in the book's opening and its voyage speaks of struggles and perseverance.

The first of the book's three sections introduce two figures, Umaña and Bonilla, roughly translated from Spanish as *Human* and *Beautiful*. Part history, part legend, the two are reputed to have set out in search of Quivira, a utopia noted for its great wealth. They meet their fate on the banks of the Colorado river, El Rio de Animas Perdidas en Purgatorio. According to legend, when Bonilla and Umaña die, their souls end up in that grey area, located midway between heaven and hell. In the poem "Flood,"

*Bonilla laughs. His mouth fills with water,  
a traveler of mirrors toward sea  
with a voice like bees in the crabapple.  
The opaque world of indigo rapids splashes  
his rugged lips. He cares about sound,  
how the river evolves its own name,  
Purgatorio, Purgatoire, Picketwire.*

More recent history—the 19th and 20th centuries—is depicted in the second section of the book with a series of highly lyrical poems, many in the first person from the points of view of women. Often they portray their lives on the frontier, their struggles and yearnings. The personas speak for themselves and are never idealized, never self-pitying. They inhabit that middle ground marked by uncertainty—a grey area undefined by right and wrong, a place not unlike purgatory, where suffering is the norm. This is their history. Like most women of the time, they exist on the margins of society, and here

Kingston captures their voices, the reality of their day-to-day lives. Catherine German, a girl held captive by the Cheyenne in Kansas in the second half of the 19th century, wonders whether she has been stolen and sold again. A laundress at Fort Kearney, Wyoming, writes in a journal of her night visitors and the pleasures she takes in her simple life. Among the most compelling is a Colorado miner's wife who studies her daughter's hands "as she lifts chunks into wheelbarrows"; a woman whose own mother told her "it would be this way / child after child, the sky without pelicans"; a woman who finds solace in her own voice, "whispers the color blue / just before snow releases down feathers, / eclipses the sun."

Because of their honesty and simple, straightforward tone, "Unwritten Letters from Josefa Carson to Kit" are particularly moving. In this poem, Josefa's words are punctuated throughout with the refrain, "I remember your fingers," evoking their intimacy. She writes:

*I am waiting for you, dear husband,  
to return with your company of Ute,  
your tobacco pouch sweetened with candy,  
pockets teeming with buffalo nickels,  
to return with your feet blistered,  
your hair sullen, your skin tinged to rosa.*

Characteristic of Kingston's writing is her ability to individualize her subjects and avoid stereotypes in order to capture their sense of reality. This is evident in a poem like "Stampede," where the speaker remains anonymous:

*In my wilderness warriors  
rise up like hornets, women like spiders.  
Flutes serenade wheatgrass. Water  
lifts its voice. I see blue windows,  
yellow willows, red clouds. I see  
turquoise, drums, corn dances.  
In my wilderness I hear pick axes,  
chisels. I hear horses.*

To a great extent, her ability to use vivid, evocative language makes her work so memorable. In "Relocation of Old Sopris Cemetery" she writes:

*[...]When I leave,  
names trail me like children, sun*

*spilling down their backs  
into their shoes. Sunshine  
flicks celadon through poplars,  
bleaches tombstones, turns  
white pickets to grey. Erases.*

Although grey may figure in Kingston's title and much of her work here deals with life's grey areas, color—though sometimes muted (white, black, rust)—appears throughout. Her work is insistently visual and often references works of art. They appear in such poems as “Bonilla's Portrait,” “Bonilla as Artist,” “History of Grey” and “River Canvas,” where she writes:

*I have been thinking about your painting all weekend,  
the breast dissected into angles, the coffin floating  
like a barge through the faces of the living, a woman's neck  
in layers of white. And what is that color, the one  
that resembles a vein of rust in candlelight?*

This last example from the third section of the book is one of thirteen poems that take place in the present. Here Kingston alludes to her work as a teacher, drawing from her students, her youth, and to scenes from everyday life.

In an attempt, perhaps, to illustrate the flow of time, how history repeats itself, she terminates where she began, in the past. In her final poem, Bonilla gives Umaña directions:

*If you want to get to the heart, study the underbelly  
of clouds just after daylight, learn their vaporous language  
before it dissipates. The bone sky knows marrow,  
knows sorrow.*

While Kingston possesses the skill to create gorgeous imagery and give life to voices that are singular, what sets her apart from other merely competent poets is her ability to summon complexity of meaning. She transforms the “in-between,” the gray, into more than just a place or situation. In her words, these become a frame of mind. To that she adds language of depth and dimension. Long-legged and bold, these poems travel through centuries. They cross many lives and bring her full circle, starting the collection and ending it with a river called Purgatorio.

*THE ROYAL NONESUCH*  
BY STEVEN SCHROEDER  
(Spark Wheel Press, 2013)

REVIEWED BY WILLIAM NEUMIRE

If a pun, a limerick, and a sonnet got together to drink and impugn America for its dehumanizing free market economy and idiosyncratic stupidities, and things got a little sloppy, and they had a one-night stand, this would be their child. Steven Schroeder's second book of poetry, *The Royal Nonesuch*, is silly-thick with sound like a braid of tongue twisters and mad gabs.

A nonesuch is a person or thing without an equal, but in Schroeder's collection, it alludes to the scam run by the duke and the king in *Huckleberry Finn* in which the audience, expecting a drama, gets instead...nothing. Bitter over the philistine sensibilities of the townsfolk, the con artists scam two different audiences like this, and before the third can pummel them with rotten food, the pair make a run for it. How does this translate into Schroeder's poems? In "Better Consider My National Resources," the reader gets a microcosm of the whole collection's bent attitude, as the speaker riffs on "The National Anthem," "This Land is My Land," and other chants of Americana: "Oh say can you see my cheese fries...I only regret that I have but one life to give for my third job at / 7-Eleven." It's a joke bitter with debt, the failed promise of the American dream, and most of all, a joke bitter about loneliness amidst plenty.

The book moves forward in four thirteen-poem sections, each poem a little 13-line sonnet (a scam in itself) with sporadic stanza breaks; it is reminiscent of Ben Lerner's *Lichtenberg Figures* in form. The poems are accusations documenting the collapsing expectations of this myopic, conned speaker:

*In that last dusty library book,  
the vocation least likely to become obsolete  
  
remains bookmaker.*

There's an underlying and absurd desire manufactured by an even more absurd, amoral free market economics at work in poems such as "Imbecile, Donkey, Flax-Head, Dope, Glump, Ninny and Fool," whose speaker begs, "please oh please / may they name this disease after me." In half-rhymes, iambs, and homophones, the book regularly details money's Marxist role in devaluing people and engendering loneliness:

*Cash makes you fun. A check can stop  
without your help and when it wants  
Credit cards only hurt themselves...*

*To save  
your country pay until you're spent.*

Schroeder also plays this game of homophones throughout the collection, as in “Where the Bank Fails”: “Lenders weigh debtors down with pounds / Of Krugerrands and launder their hands / Tender in the green-eyed current, see?” Note the sly slipping of *currency* into *current*, *see* and *legal tender* into “tender in the green-eyed current.” It’s smart and funny and acrimonious all in one grand blur.

With titles clipped from pop culture (such as “I do not think it means what you think it means,” lifted from *The Princess Bride*, itself a grand mock), this is an indictment of whatever vestige of “the American dream” remains, as the reader can see in a jaded take on Whitman’s “Song of Myself”: “America, your song was too big to fail / Your song cost more than itself.” The poems slip like this from funny into somber, like a tough guy deflecting pain with humor, and then finally cracking.

Chained to each other and cleverly phrased in this language as tongue-in-cheek game, Schroeder’s poems constantly set up and break from expectations: “After a break // on whatever levels of the word, we can make up / reasons to repeat these moves we make, Love.” Here, in “Each One Goes Alone,” we get that comforting, euphemistic cliché, “make love,” broken by that direct address comma in such a way that both meanings come through, though—as is usual in this book—the conventional meaning is tainted and fraught with contempt, or at least strong critique. But cynicism gives way to internal collapse soon enough in most of these poems, as in “Code Name Is The Only One,” where Schroeder writes “your password is passive-aggressive... // Why can’t you guess this picture I encrypted / in invisible ink? It’s obvious it’s loneliness.” And loneliness here gets the last echoic silence after the laugh.

On *Poetry’s* podcast a while back, Don Share declared, “language makes lying possible.” These poems, as much as they accuse and complain, are odes to that language of lies, and to the greatest lie: that all of this belittling madness is not ephemeral,

*When we closed your eyes for good, you looked  
like you were checking the lids for pinpricks.*

*When we closed ours, we could deny everything.*

It's always there, that hollow sense at the end of the joke, that hangover after the party:

*Add in bed after any of my statements (in bed).  
We're Pete and Repeat sitting in a boat.*

*If I complement you, will you compliment me?  
When I'm with you, don't whisper implications.  
When I'm incognito, tell everyone I'm cute.  
When I'm gone, say I was beautiful.*

A reveler in oxymorons and ironies, Schroeder rolls through *The Royal None-such* with his cheeky, stinging mojo on full-tilt: "This bunker-buster bomb is user friendly, idiot proof and child safe for the entire family to enjoy, eight to 88 / This gun wants to tuck your kids into bed / This one would fuck anybody." He's a gamer and a scam artist to the very end, where he offers his "Transgressions" index, a sort of categorizing of the sins his poems illustrate, everything from "bad advice" to "substance abuse." And though this collection can feel, at intervals, like it strikes the same note too many times, it's fast-paced, double entendre, witty jabs and word games make it too much fun to put down. It's a good laugh (itself difficult to pull off so intelligently in contemporary poetry) that also gradually builds a poignant sense of pathos for its conned and broken speaker.

*LITTLE OBLIVION*  
BY SUSAN ALLSPAW  
(Elixir Press, 2013)

REVIEWED BY ANDREW C. GOTTLIEB

Antarctica, the expanse of ice, the blues and whites, the temperatures with their sustained lows, the wilderness and wild that is there—seals, petrels, terns—and the humans who wrap themselves in layers of down to work and study in an unforgiving environment, a place of surprising life and obvious death: this is what Susan Allspaw's first book of poetry, *Little Oblivion*, would have us consider.

Allspaw tells us, in her poem, "Burial," that "the ice is trying / to tell me a secret it's been keeping // for years." That's a clue to these poems, free verse poems that exhibit moments of narrative, though the real story is Allspaw's examination of ice as "other," of place as mystery, of landscape as the storyteller and mirror for what haunts and intrigues her. For Allspaw, this ice and landscape is father, mirror, and companion. We're not just reading a poetry of place, of ecology, but a navigation of map and meaning, a reflection of "our nakedness as wonderful as icebergs."

That nakedness is how we get to the overarching feeling—longing, for both meaning and connectedness—that dominates these poems. A poem early in the book, "Heading into Dion Island, Antarctica," starts us on our journey to the ice—though to enter this challenging landscape, we must also recognize what we're leaving—on a mission to count penguins and eggs.

*Twenty centimeters of ice below the bow,  
seven knots, and the barometer falls on us like bad news.*

Yes, the good news is behind us. Yet, this adventure is a letter to her father, a man no longer with her. "Writing the dead is not easy," she says, cleverly writing both to and about "the dead" in this case. "Pity dead fathers / can't see us trawling for science, wanting to write home," and we're in Allspaw's landscape, the place of craft and examination where she tells us about so many delicate things at once, recounting the science, her concrete mission, but linking to longing, to the human grasp of what's already gone and can't be regained, no matter how intelligent the writer or scientist.

*[...] Dad, the sun rises in the north here, and the Southern Cross  
is pointing with us, south, where we will census*

*what hasn't been born yet. I can't reach him through the salt water.  
Sea smoke, my father. Brash churned with tide.*

We experience the place, the past, an address to a father, but then the first-person brings us back to reality, to the more abrupt present. The voice of the letter, this story-teller attempting to send mail, faces the constraints, the reality, of this unforgiving place, of life. The tide and ice and water become both her father and the barricade that prevents her from reaching him. Allspaw has guided us to this lonely and poignant ambiguity.

Allspaw, who serves as support for the US Antarctic Program, is in the grip of that paradox. In the poem, "Weightlessness in a Red Parka," she writes: "I walked on water / for hours. I lay in a seal's old cradle, ready to curl up / for my own hibernation." There is an almost religious attachment conveyed; we're close to transcendence, something out of body, closer to animal than human. In other poems, this attachment is conveyed using remembrance and comparison, frequent tools in these poems used to bring in other worlds. In "The Body of Ice Remembered," a male diver, one of a young crew who's "excited about everything they see—smoking Erebus, / distant splashes of seals making holes, even the slush / forming on top of the dive hole," also remembers his girl in Colorado.

*His body will sink in the water  
because when he isn't in it, he is loving that girl  
in Colorado, swimming through her,  
all her parts.*

Colorado is an alien word here, a collection of syllables that stand out as foreign because we're so far from the vocabulary and vision of that kind of landscape. The western girl may as well be on the moon, and the divers and scientists feel this, too, according to Allspaw,

*[...] if only that girl  
in Colorado could grow like a glacier, if only  
she could move with the freedom of icebergs.  
If only he could stay down, below the surface,  
his breath forming a body on its underside, then hands  
wouldn't matter, then deep water would be enough.*

So we are again merging with the landscape, wishing what was distant could merge with the rich experience of the ice, the deep water, an experience that can make the “other” world seem superfluous.

The lessons of Antarctica continue through this volume, reflected facets of human learning from what is essentially a desert landscape. “Even ice over ice creates heat,” she teaches us. This heat and longing is what Allspaw shows us about her Antarctic life. It’s how a vast plain of snow and ice can become her father, her obsession, her life. In this book we are down-clad and trekking, we are naked and groping. We are deep in the sticky dryness of this vast southern-most continent. This long meditation gives us a gorgeous understanding of compulsion: “When we leave, / it clings, the damn child, / the obsessor, the stalker. / The ice never learned to let go.”

- Guadalupe Nettel, *Natural Histories* (Seven Stories Press, 2014)
- Justin Evans, *Sailing This Nameless Ship* (BlazeVox [books], 2013)
- Justin Evans, *Hobble Creek Almanac* (Aldrich Press, 2013)
- Ruth Bavetta, *Embers on the Stairs* (Moon Tide Press, 2014)
- Karen Skolfield, *Frost in the Low Areas* (Zone 3 Press, 2013)
- Cat Dixon, *Too Heavy To Carry* (Stephen F. Austin University Press, 2014)
- Stefanie Wortman, *In the Permanent Collection* (University of North Texas Press, 2014)
- Joan Colby, *Selected Poems* (Future Cycle Press, 2013)
- Kara Candito, *Spectator* (University of Utah Press, 2014)
- William Trowbridge, *Put This On, Please* (Red Hen Press, 2014)
- Douglas Kearney, *Patter* (Red Hen Press, 2014)
- Justin Hamm, *Lessons in Ruin* (Aldrich Press, 2014)
- Fanny Howe, *Second Childhood* (Graywolf Press, 2014)
- Meg Day, *Last Psalm at Sea Level* (Barrow Street Press, 2014)
- Aby Kaupang, *Little "g" God Grows Tired of Me* (Springgun Press, 2013)
- Eric Greinke, *For the Living Dead: New and Selected Poems* (Presa Press, 2014)
- Joy Gaines-Friedler, *Dutiful Heart* (Broadkill River Press, 2013)

## BIOGRAPHIES

DIANA ANHALT is the author of articles, book reviews, and short stories published in both English and Spanish, as was her book, *A Gathering of Fugitives: American Political Expatriates in Mexico 1948-1965* (Archer Books). More recently, two of her chapbooks—*Second Skin* (Future Cycle Press) and *Lives of Straw* (Finishing Line Press)—have been released. *Sin Fronteras*, *Comstock Review*, *The Atlanta Review*, *Nimrod*, and *Poem* are among the many publications where her poetry has appeared.

SHANAN BALLAM earned an MFA in poetry writing from the University of Nebraska, Omaha in 2007. She teaches poetry writing and fiction writing at Utah State University and was named the 2014 Lecturer of the Year for the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. She is the author of the chapbook *The Red Riding Hood Papers* (Finishing Line Press, 2010) and the full-length poetry collection *Pretty Marrow* (Negative Capability Press, 2013); which received first place in the 2012 Utah Division of Arts and Museums Original Writing Contest, judged by Sue Walker, Poet Laureate of Alabama. In 2013, she was appointed to serve as the Literary Arts Representative on the Utah Arts Council Board of Directors.

JENNY MARY BROWN'S work is featured or forthcoming in *Berkeley Poetry Review*, *Signal to Noise Magazine*, *Relix*, *Pale Horse*, among others. She is a PhD candidate in English for creative writing in poetry at Georgia State University. She received her MA in creative writing from University College in Dublin, Ireland in 2009 and her BA in English and studio art from University of Vermont in 2005. She is currently the art director at *District* and the editor-in-chief of *New South*.

KEVIN BOYLE'S poems have appeared or are forthcoming in a number of other journals, including *Alaska Quarterly*, *Colorado Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *The Greensboro Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *North American Review*, *Poetry East*, and *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Hollins Critic*, *The Fourth Bridge*, and *Pleiades*. His book, *A Home for Wayward Girls*, won the New Issues Poetry Prize, judged by Rodney Jones; and his chapbook, *Lullaby of History*, was selected by David Rivard. Boyle teaches writing and literature at Elon University in North Carolina.

GORDON BUCHAN currently resides in Philadelphia where he navigates through books on etymology and writes poetry about his findings. He likes to shop at the Asian market down the street from his house, and every time he looks at the food he prepared, he imagines himself as the food looking back.

THOM CARAWAY lost three aracauna hens to a raccoon this winter. He's unhappy about this. Raccoons are clever, folks. Be mindful. Those hens laid beautiful eggs.

ANNE CASTON is a writer, teacher, former nurse, and the author of *Prodigal* (Aldrich Press, 2014), *Judah's Lion* (The Word Words, 2009), and *Flying Out With the Wounded* (NYU Press, 1997). She lives in Kill Devil Hills, NC, and teaches in the Low-Residency MFA Program in Creative Writing at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

BRAD CLOMPUS' poetry has appeared in such places as *West Branch*, *Willow Springs*, *The Journal*, *Fifth Wednesday Journal*, and *Iron Horse Literary Review*. In between bouts of poetry, he collect rocks—and more or less regrets that he once found and left behind an actual gem in a southwestern desert.

CHRISTOPHER COKINOS is the author, most recently, of a poetry chapbook, *Held as Earth*, and a lyric essay collection, *Bodies, of the Holocene*. Poems from a circulating manuscript, *Sweet Lesion*, are out in *Saranac Review*, *New Delta Review*, *Western Humanities Review*, *december*, and *Berkeley Poetry Review*. He has nonfiction and criticism out in *High Country News*, *Orion*, *Mudlark*, and *Extrapolation*. Cokinos divides his time between nonfiction and poetry and between Tucson and Logan Canyon, UT. Currently a Udall Environmental Policy Fellow, he directs the MFA program at the University of Arizona. He wants you to watch *Interkosmos* and will buy you a beer if you have read J.G. Ballard.

MATTHEW COOPERMAN is the author of the text and image collaboration *Imago for the Fallen World*, with Marius Lehene (Jaded Ibis Press, 2013), *Still: of the Earth as the Ark which Does Not Move* (Counterpath Press, 2011), *DaZE* (Salt Publishing Ltd, 2006), and *A Sacrificial Zinc* (Pleiades/LSU, 2001), winner of the Lena-Miles Wever Todd Prize, as well as three chapbooks. A founding editor of *Quarter After Eight*, and co-poetry editor of *Colorado Review*, he teaches in the creative writing program at Colorado State University. He lives in Fort Collins with his wife, the poet Aby Kaupang, and their two children. More information at: [MatthewCooperman.com](http://MatthewCooperman.com)

KELLY CORINDA is a poet who likes lemonade, basil, and dresses. In 2012, she won the Julia Carley and Edna J. Herzberg prizes for poetry. Her poems can be found in *The Mayo Review*, *2015 Texas Poetry Calendar*, *Written Wardrobe by Modcloth*, *Similar:Peaks::*, and elsewhere. She thinks you should write poetry too.

EMILY J. COUSINS' work has appeared in *PANK*, *The Old Town China Town Crier*, *The Lewis & Clark College Literary Review*, and elsewhere. She

received her BA in English from Lewis & Clark College in Portland, OR. Now (in Denver, CO) she works as a special education instructor and enjoys hiking, writing, theatre, and peanut butter.

JIM DANIELS' latest book of poems, *Birth Marks*, was published by BOA Editions in 2013 and was selected as a Michigan Notable Book. His next book of short fiction, *Eight Mile High*, will be published by Michigan State University Press in 2014. A native of Detroit, Daniels teaches at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

BROCK DETHIER runs the composition program at Utah State University. His collection of poems, *Reclamation*, is due out soon from Popcorn Press ("Snacks for your brain"). His most recent book is *21 Genres and How to Write Them* (USU Press). If you want to incorporate music into your teaching plans, check out his *From Dylan to Donne: Bridging English and Music*.

GARY DOP teaches writing at Randolph College on the edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains. His essays have aired on *All Things Considered*, and his poems have appeared recently in *Prairie Schooner*, *Agni*, *Rattle*, *New Letters*, among others. His first collection of poems, *Father, Child, Water*, is forthcoming from Red Hen Press.

BRAD EFFORD was a finalist for Shenandoah's Graybeal-Gowen Prize for Virginia Poets in 2012, and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2013. His work can be found or is forthcoming in *Puerto del Sol*, *jmww*, *Oxford Magazine*, *Juked*, *The Fiddleback*, *Moneybicycle*, and elsewhere. He holds an MFA from Hollins University and lives in Richmond, VA.

THEA ROBIN ENGST received her MFA in writing poetry from Emerson College. She was the assistant editor of poetry for *Redivider: A Journal of New Literature and Art* and was awarded The Graduate Award for Writing Poetry in 2011 from Emerson. She is most recently published in *Gutter Eloquence Magazine*, is a contributor for *Runaway Parade* and has seven poems published in their online magazine.

KAT FINCH is a second-year poet at The University of Michigan and an editor for *Cloud Rodeo*. Her work has appeared in *Bird Feast*, *Sixth Finch*, *Swine*, *Quaint Magazine*, and others. Her first chapbook, *Birds with Teeth*, is forthcoming from Alice Blue.

LAUREN GORDON holds an MFA in poetry from New England College with a BA in English from University of Iowa. Her work has appeared in *Inlandia Institute*, *Scapegoat Review*, *Midwest Literary Review*, *Verse WI*, *SP Quill*, *Poetry Crush*, *Southern Hum*, and has been anthologized in *Knocking*

*at the Door* (Birch Bench Press 2010). Her chapbook, *Little House, Little Song*, was a runner up in Concrete Wolf's chapbook contest in 2012 and a recent interview with Lauren appears in *Women's Quarterly Conversation 2013*.

ANDREW GOTTLIEB lives and writes in Irvine, CA, and is the reviews editor for the journal *Terrain.org*. His work has appeared in many journals including the *American Literary Review*, *American Fiction*, *Best New Poets*, *Beloit Fiction Journal*, *Ecotone*, *The Fly Fish Journal*, *Poets & Writers*, and *Salon.com*. In June of 2015, he'll be writer-in-residence at Everglades National Park in southern Florida. Say hello at: [AndrewCGottlieb.com](http://AndrewCGottlieb.com).

ANDREW HALEY'S first book of poems, *Good Eurydice*, was published by Otis Nebula in 2011. Other poems have appeared in *Kill Author*, *BlazeVOX*, *Girls With Insurance*, and previously in *Sugar House Review*. His poem "Rauschenberg's Prints" was published in Spanish translation as a broadside by Color Pastel Poesía in Buenos Aires last year. He lives in Portland, OR.

CHERA HAMMONS lives in Amarillo, TX with her husband Daniel, two cats, a couple of ponies, a bunny, and an unnamed guinea pig. Dark beer, Star Trek, and horses that don't buck are on her list of favorite things. She has always suspected that Dave Matthews might enjoy hanging out with her. If you can make that happen, please contact her immediately. Her manuscript *Amaranthine Hour* was the winner of the 2012 Jacar Press Poetry Chapbook Competition, judged by John Hoppenthaler. Her work has most recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Rattle*, *Connotation Press*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, and *Tar River Poetry*. She is currently completing the MFA in Creative Writing Program at Goddard College in Vermont.

SARA HENNING is the author of *A Sweeter Water* (Lavender Ink, 2013), as well as a chapbook, *To Speak of Dahlias* (Finishing Line Press, 2012). Her poetry, fiction, interviews, and book reviews have appeared or are forthcoming in such journals as *Verse*, *Willow Springs*, and *Crab Orchard Review*. Currently a doctoral student in English and creative writing at the University of South Dakota, she serves as managing editor for *South Dakota Review*.

KATHERINE HOLLANDER'S poems have appeared in *Slate*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, among others. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize in poetry and is a doctoral student in modern European history.

Originally from Pennsylvania, ERIN HOOVER lives in Tallahassee, FL, where she serves as editor-in-chief of *The Southeast Review* and public relations advisor for VIDA: Women in Literary Arts. Her poems were recently published in *Prairie Schooner*, *Gargoyle*, *Harpur Palate*, and *Redivider*, and anthologized in *Best New Poets*.

SEAN HOWARD is the author of *Local Calls* (Cape Breton University Press, 2009) and *Incitements* (Gaspereau Press, 2011). His poetry has been widely published in Canada and elsewhere, nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and anthologized in *The Best Canadian Poetry in English 2011* (Tightrope Books).

SARA ELIZA JOHNSON has appeared or is forthcoming in the *New England Review*, *Best New Poets 2009*, *Boston Review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Memorious*, and elsewhere. She is the recipient of a Rona Jaffe Foundation Writers' Award, a Winter Fellowship from the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, and a work-study scholarship to the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. Her first book, *Bone Map*, was selected for the 2013 National Poetry Series and will be published by Milkweed Editions.

CATHERINE KEEFE is a California poet and essayist, and the founding editor of *dirtcakes journal*. Her poetry and creative nonfiction have recently appeared in *Superstition Review*, *Minerva Rising*, and *ArtPrize Anthology*. She has also been a poetry editor at *Narrative* and spent time as a manuscript reviewer for Copper Canyon Press. These days she teaches writing at Chapman University where she earned an MFA in creative writing and an MA in English literature.

JEN LAMBERT is a founding editor of *burntdistrict* and Spark Wheel Press, and her work has been published in a variety of journals and anthologies including *PANK*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Raleigh Review*, and *Boxcar Poetry Review*. A fellow at the Virginia Center for Creative Arts, Jen lives in Omaha with her husband and three wildly beautiful children. [JenLambert.net](http://JenLambert.net)

STEVE LANGAN is the author of *Freezing* (New Issues, 2001), *Notes on Exile and Other Poems* (Backwaters, 2005), and *Meet Me at the Happy Bar* (BlazeVOX [books], 2009).

ESTHER LEE wrote *Spit*, winner of the Elixir Press Poetry Prize (2011) and her chapbook, *Blank Missives* (Trafficker Press, 2007). Her poems and articles have appeared or are forthcoming in *Ploughshares*, *Lantern Review*, *Verse Daily*, *Salt Hill*, *Good Foot*, *Swink*, *Hyphen*, *Born Magazine*, and elsewhere. A Kundiman fellow, she received her MFA in creative writing from Indiana University where she served as editor-in-chief for *Indiana Review*. She was awarded the Elinor Benedict Poetry Prize, the Utah Writer's Contest Award for Poetry (selected by Brenda Shaughnessy), Snowcroft Prize (selected by Susan Steinberg), as well as being twice-nominated for the Pushcart Prize. She recently received her PhD in creative writing and literature from the University of Utah. She is an assistant professor at Agnes Scott College.

LISA LEWIS' books include *The Unbeliever* (Brittingham Prize), *Silent Treatment* (National Poetry Series), *Vivisect* (New Issues Press), and *Burned House with Swimming Pool* (American Poetry Journal Prize).

JOEL LONG'S book *Lessons in Disappearance* was published in 2012. *Knowing Time by Light* was published by Blaine Creek Press in 2010. His book *Winged Insects* won the White Pine Press Poetry Prize and was published in 1999. His chapbooks, *Chopin's Preludes* and *Saffron Beneath Every Frost* were published from Elik Press. His poems have appeared in *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Ocean State Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Gulf Coast*, *Rhino*, *Bitter Oleander*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Bellingham Review*, *Sou'wester*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Willow Springs*, *Poems and Plays*, and *Seattle Review*, and anthologized in *American Poetry: the Next Generation*, *Essential Love*, *Fresh Water*, and *I Go to the Ruined Place*. He received the Mayor's Artist Award for Literary Arts at the Utah Arts Festival and the Writers Advocate Award from Writers at Work.

LINDSAY LUSBY is the assistant director of The Rose O'Neill Literary House at Washington College in Chestertown, MD. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *decomp*, *The Doctor T.J. Eckleburg Review*, *The Coachella Review*, *The Lumberyard*, and *Midway Journal*. In the sixth grade, she won the class spelling bee with supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.

ANGIE MACRI'S recent work is forthcoming in *Alaska Quarterly Review* and *The Cincinnati Review*, and she has been awarded an individual artist fellowship from the Arkansas Arts Council. Her poem "Low in Spirits" takes its title and quote from the letters of Zebulon Pike.

CATE MARVIN'S third book of poems, *Oracle*, is forthcoming from Norton in March 2015. She is a professor at the College of Staten Island, City University of New York.

MATT MASON has won a Pushcart Prize, two Nebraska Book Awards (for Poetry in 2007 and Anthology in 2006), and was a finalist for the position of Nebraska State Poet. He's organized and run poetry programming with the U.S. Department of State in Botswana, Nepal, and Belarus; and been on five teams at the National Poetry Slam. He is executive director of the Nebraska Writers Collective, has served as board president of the Nebraska Center for the Book, and is the Nebraska State Coordinator for Poetry Out Loud, a Poetry Foundation/NEA program. His second full-length poetry book, *The Baby That Ate Cincinnati*, was released by Stephen F. Austin University Press in 2013. Matt lives in Omaha with his wife, the poet Sarah McKinstry-Brown, and daughters Sophia and Lucia.

MATT MAUCH is the author of *If You're Lucky Is a Theory of Mine* and *Prayer Book*, and the chapbook *The Brilliance of the Sparrow*. He hosts the annual Great Twin Cities Poetry Read, cohosts (with Paula Cisewski) the Maeve's Sessions readings, and edits the anthology *Poetry City, USA*, an annual collection of poetry and prose on poetry. Mauch teaches in the AFA program at Normandale Community College, and lives in Minneapolis.

KYLE MCCORD is the author of four books of poetry including *You Are Indeed an Elk, But This is Not the Forest You Were Born to Graze* (Gold Wake 2015). He has work featured in *Boston Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Gulf Coast*, *Ploughshares*, *TriQuarterly*, and elsewhere. He's received grants from the Academy of American Poets, the Vermont Studio Center, and the Baltic Writing Residency. He co-edits *iO: A Journal of New American Poetry*. He teaches at the University of North Texas in Denton where he runs the Kraken Reading Series.

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GREG PAPE is the author of ten books of poetry, including *Four Swans* (2013, Lynx House Press), *American Flamingo* (winner of the Crab Orchard Open Competition Award), *Sunflower Facing the Sun* (winner of the Edwin Ford Piper Prize), *Storm Pattern*, *Black Branches*, and *Border Crossings*. He has received two NEA Fellowships, a Pushcart Prize, the Richard Hugo memorial award for poetry, the Vachel Lindsey poetry award, and others. His poems have appeared widely in magazines, anthologies, and text books, including *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Viking Western Reader*, and *Writing Poems*. Greg Pape was Montana's second poet laureate.

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RKR is a geo-microbiologist and poet. Through her PhD research, she analyzed interactions between microbes and minerals, life in extreme environments; and human-rock, geo-spatial relationships. She has published in the fields of acid mine drainage, microbial ecology, sedimentology, and paleontology. Her poetry and work in literary fiction reflect her training, travels and experiences living in Asia, Europe, and all over the U.S., especially New England. RKR's poetry, freelance articles, and biography have been featured internationally. She published her first book of poetry in 2011, *Coming Full Circle*, and is currently working on a second. Rama also produces a TV show promoting women, is currently a K-5 science enrichment instructor, and is developing her blog voice.

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KATE SAVAGE grew up in St. George, UT. After a BA at Brigham Young University (English and philosophy) and MA in environmental humanities at the University of Utah, she suffered from a delayed-onset teenage rebellion which pushed her into a downwardly-mobile life of community organizing and human rights work. She lives in an intentional community in Nashville, TN, where she writes memoir and creative non-fiction.

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SARAH SLOAT works in news. Descended from a sad-faced people, she dreamed as a child of being a farmer. Blue eyes with lashes. 28 teeth. Hair, flesh, and bones.

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WILLIAM TROWBRIDGE’S poetry collections are *Ship of Fool, The Complete Book of Kong, Flickers, O Paradise,* and *Enter Dark Stranger.* His poems have also appeared in over 30 anthologies and textbooks, and in such peri-

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DONNA VORREYER writes in the Chicago area where she's lived all her life, and always roots for the White Sox. When she's not writing poems, she teaches middle school, spends time with her husband and two dogs, and nerds out about Shakespeare and Star Wars. (There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, but Han shot first.)

CAROLYNE WHELAN lives and writes in Pittsburgh, PA with her husband and their complicated dog, Major Tom, but loves to travel whenever and wherever she can. Jane of no trades, she plays bass in Reign Check, vrooms with Riff Raff Girls scooter gang, and pedals through the mud with Scurvy Dogs Racing. She received a BA from the College of Santa Fe and an MFA from Chatham University.

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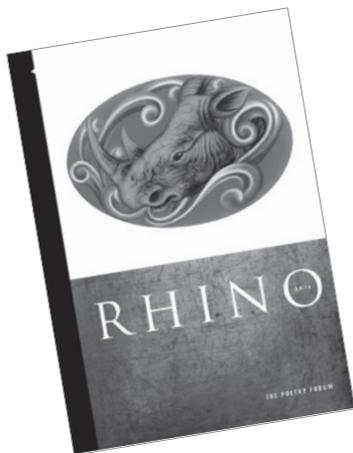


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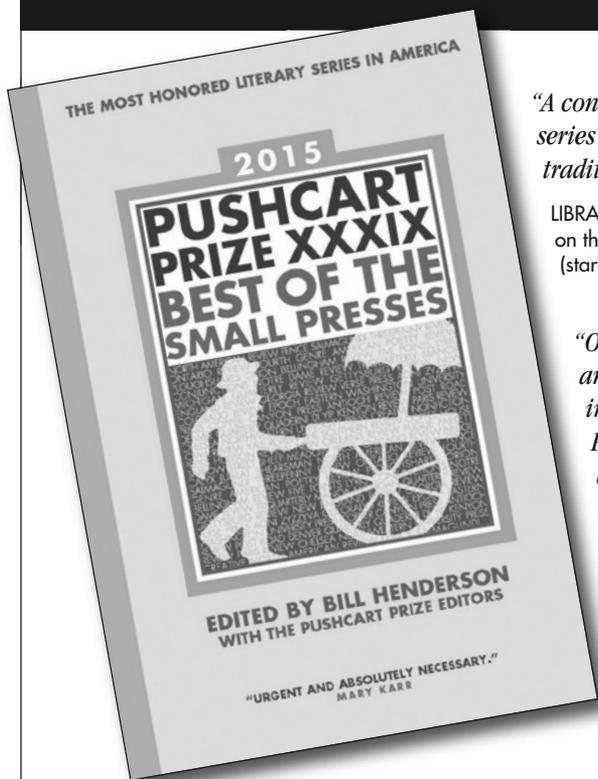
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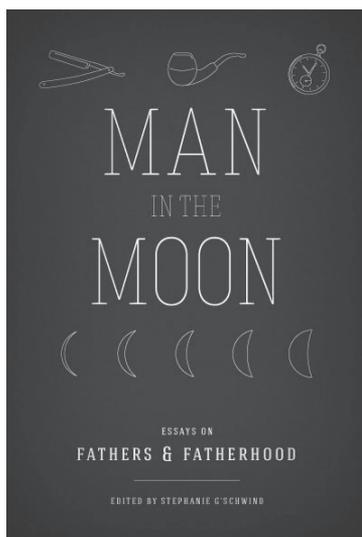
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