

SUGAR HOUSE

REVIEW



#20

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POETRY

SUGAR HOUSE REVIEW

AN INDEPENDENT POETRY MAGAZINE

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AFTER THE FUNERAL, AT YOUR FAVORITE GALLERY

Outside the gallery
the squirrels clean
their faces with their
precise hands.
I feel each tooth
distinctly in my mouth,
hope the pipes
will burst themselves
just so something
will have happened
while I sat here. Tomorrow
I'll read an article
and discover things
that seem pertinent
but aren't—bright spots
on a dwarf planet,
mice who don't
respond to positive
reinforcement,
a rat who keeps
hitting a button
no matter how high up
the pain is tuned.
The moon is lidless
and wilted in the sky.
The nice forks are forgotten,
nestled in the back
of a drawer somewhere.
Outside the gallery
I watch a girl
ask her mother
for change for the payphone.
She'll say *hello*
to the chipper buzz
of static on the other
side. I would like
to bring you forth now
please, I would like

the corridors in the center
of myself to switch on
their low-lights
so I can place
my feet more carefully.
I'm here in person
to find the imperfect
places where the artist's
hand quivered. To see
the non-facsimile
version of paintings
I still can't touch.
The girl is pacing
back and forth
in my mind inside
her payphone booth.
Her pennies
are like fancy moths.
The streetlight peeks in
but from an odd
angle, and so she has
to turn backwards,
forwards, to locate
the source of the light.

THE LIGATURE

Your kiss pulls trumpet vine from smart bones.
I remember sunlight like duck
butter toppling spelt toast
tonging sausages fat as wild Virginia
rye. Our arguments (on why
paintings are better in person, on why
horror seduces, on whether it's safe
to eat lettuce again) were long gone. I'd spelt
'punctilious' backwards (slowly, slowly, slowly),
pictured myself as Sisyphus, rolling & stripping
evergreens. You knew it was chasing stars
with an oak spoon—stars bright as otaku flowers,
bright as the painted hills of Oregon,
of power?—I knew I'd break.

BLUE EARTH

The sky has gotten so low
this township feels like a cave.
A shard falls, the tired spectators
turn without rising.

Lonely skaters follow cracks in the whistling ice.
A shard falls; we have waited the winter for spring.
They assemble, the hummingbirds, lilacs,
dancing spots of light beneath the trees.

Summer finely rains and softly
a memory passes, the Ho-Chunk leaving west.
Low brush in the gully, low wind from high wind,
we have emptied the past and are now alone.

The shard falls and the sickle bar clicks in the alfalfa.
It is good land, black and moist,
now there are immigrants here.
Something has happened and we are all pushing at the sky.

THE TURTLE MAN

You might hear me on the water at night,
breathing in the dark,
the dull twist of the oarlock.
My boot pressing against the clank
shuffle of anchor chain,
leaning over the gunnels with the hand line,
my thick hook baited with chicken livers.
The crude smell of butchering reptiles
must have drifted across your calm nights of
dreaming the nighthawk.

Farmers see me at dawn; creaking along the cow lane,
my old black Chevrolet on suicide tires,
pulling a wooden boat with chalk-red trim.
I have oil and blood smeared in my hair,
my face mute behind the dirty window.
The sight reminds them to tell their children
they are not old enough
to go down to the lake alone.

In daylight I am another kind,
the sound of sea waves, for instance,
the cries of long-winged birds,
a car passing in the rain,
chrysanthemums.
The list goes on and on.

WE WEAR ALL BLACK AT GRADUATION

We only smoke when drinking
so we drink all the time.

I want to lose a little more
Shannon says in the dorm room
pinching an inch above her jeans.
Some god listens, and takes.

The things that break us
are never surprising and yet
we act surprised.

Outside boys drink bourbon
play Kentucky derby in nice pastel
hats on the grass by the chapel.
One will become a banker.
Two lawyers in gray suits. One
will build his own blue house
by a river. They will all be sad
some days. One won't live

past twenty-two. The man who
finds the body in the room
below Sharon's will hang
himself the next summer.

For now we climb bell towers, lean
over white railings, spill whiskey, shout—
when I'm up I'm way up—

Go ahead, roll the lawn out green
again. Paint the sky real nice,
pink, some orange, it's spring. Give
the kids something to smile about.

WISH

I wished my brother cured of his disorder.
Then every time he saw my face, he grinned
like that one happy photo—only broader,

so that his tar-stained teeth almost spilled over
into the stories he told, which didn't end
now with my brother curing his disorder

by hail of pills or wayward bucket loader,
but with a quetzal whose shimmer left him ginned,
like that one happy photo, at the border,

and lifted him almost beyond the clutter
of traffic's glitch and jerk and dying friends
who'd wished my brother cured of his disorder

before they stole his stuff or stood for murder.
He met his children's mothers to make amends
like that one happy photo, only older.

He got his job back; the truck rolled straighter
toward a horizon that left us all behind.
I wished my brother cured of his disorder
like that one happy photo of my brother.

MEATSPACE

Tomorrow we wake into meatspace. If you get past
how inane you feel choosing Vivaldi,
it feels freaking fantastic to hear Vivaldi. You sparkle
like a waxed Camaro. The quick
muffled stops like leaping on tiptoe, like your first
mimosa, heart on a trapeze. In Vivaldi's Venice,
a wrong word about church might earn
hot pincers on your nipples. Or not—
I mix up my dates in meatspace,
which is space, which has been for millions of years
without needing another name until this upstart
cyberarrived. Think what other alternatives
technology will let us know we've been living in
all along. I want you to know I believe in you.
I'm convinced you exist. Out here in meatspace
we sweat and rot which persuades us we're earthy
and alive but lift the piano's lid and it's all wires—
that taut array holds every run and chord that makes
Chopin's F-sharp minor polonaise, and there's talk
such vibrating potentials are what compose
all the mesons and quarks you need to make a grain
of sugar. And not one molecule of Vivaldi's meat
is humming in our contemporary heat
just as there's no speck of wood or horsehair
in the contraption on my lap but the violin
leaps nonetheless, it tosses
my heart through crests and troughs.
I believe in your face like a coin
in a pocket of the coat I wake up zipped in.

IN WHICH A CHIHUAHUA VISITS MY DREAM
THIRTY YEARS AFTER THE NIGHT BEFORE MY
ANTHROPOLOGY FINAL

*"they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink
deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all..."*

—Mark 16:18

One day I'm standing at the intersection
telling the sky everything the moon forgot.
Death isn't on fire, and I've got a ten page

paper on the Holy Ghost People, due tomorrow
and I haven't been to class all semester.
Night before finals I'm dancing, next morning

I'm lying on the pine floor, speaking
to the ceiling, bargaining with heaven above
that I won't have drunken sex anymore,

any time soon. The universe is one enormous
prayer book I haven't read yet. To calm myself
I think of the grim reaper as teacup

chihuahua, snake-shaped Christmas ornament
I step on on my way to class. Night before finals
I'm grateful that in twenty-four hours

none of this will be reversible. One day
I'm the teacup of strychnine and the chihuahua
murmurs to the grim reaper, something about faith,

something about failure, and I know I need to study,
but I can no longer argue with the cold hard
floor nor the roof over my head. I'm not even sure

if I passed the intersection already, passed
my classroom, my class, my test, and who needs
snake salvation anyway? I like it right

here, the loose boards groaning beneath
my spine, tiny nail heads like fangs searching
my bones for a way in.

TWO THOUGHTS

In the space between two thoughts
it has grown dark. I see you

coiled in the wicker chair,
cat on your lap, your hair
haloing in the lamplight.

In the space between two thoughts
it has grown dark. I see you

uncoil from the wicker chair,
unsettle the cat, tame the halo
of your hair with my favourite hat

and close the door.

CHILD WARD OF THE COMMONWEALTH
BY EILEEN CLEARY
(Main Street Rag, 2019)

REVIEW BY CHRISTINE JONES

How to tell the truth when the truth hurts? How to open a wound that's been scabbed over? Eileen Cleary, author of *Child Ward of the Commonwealth*, knows. In her debut, autobiographical collection of poetry, she tears at the wounds and traumas of being a child ward of the state.

It is important, as humans, to feel another's pain so we may understand the universal connection we share. But it's also necessary, like a good cry, to share in the relief. *Child Ward of the Commonwealth* is this poet's relief.

She shares with her readers some of her bleakest moments, such as when she recalls hiding under a table in "On What to Forget" while her sister was caught in flames:

*Start out four years old
under a table.*

*A silent movie,
your brother's legs*

*rushing past and then,
the afghan he uses to smother*

*your sister's flames.
Melting skin in sheets hangs*

....

*Grow older, grow smaller
because you did nothing, you*

did nothing but hide, [...]

While doubt and guilt resonate throughout, Cleary thankfully trusts her readers enough to include these devastating times, allowing us to help carry her pain like a dead baby. The clarity with which Cleary writes tells us she understands the

sacredness of sorrow and fear. Her stark cinematic imagery forces the reader's attention to see, really see, what it must be like to feel such loss. She brings us to the scene of when she was taken away in "When the Social Worker Took Me":

*Mom wears a sundress in December,
rocks herself to sleep. I watch...
...poke holes in my tights, pull snarls
from my hair, toss and catch
a puppy on the stairs—*

We hear the confusion further on in the poem with the question, "are they scared / by the poor?" and her wondering why the neighbors stay "shut behind their doors," call her "feral."

In other poems, we're able to walk with her to school, following the "cloud-breaths" to feel the chill through the "double thin shirts," to slurp noodles "straight from the pan," leaving the reader, too, hungry for more.

Fortunately, Cleary continues to feed her reader extraordinary images throughout the book. "A sack dress, its jute thread emptied of potatoes," or five kids stuffed in the backseat of the car "like boots / into bulging luggage." In "Foster Child" we see her left to "stuff liverwurst through porch slats." In this poem, we also learn the author lived in multiple homes, shared multiple names. Now, as an adult, it's obvious she's found her home in poetry. Steadfast in her writing, she is concise, careful not to take up too much room—an economy it seems she learned being a ward of the state.

As a reader, it's difficult not to become attached to the little girl, especially when you read of her yearning in "First Germantown Summer Without My Mother":

*Crisscross applesauce at the lawn's edge
I want to feel her core, to hold her
soft dough of her. Bring her.
Dear God, let her recognize
me, her littlest one, [...]*

Yet, this girl, while timid and insecure, is anything but weak, as illustrated in this excerpt from "Sea Wings":

My shoulder

*flint melts to feathers,
myself into myself.*

Despite the sadness that's present throughout, there's a confidence in Cleary's craft that is admirable. This is evident in her trilogy of "Child Ward of the Commonwealth" poems—"The Removal," "The Living Through," and "The After"—which serve to provide subtle section breaks to the collection's chronology and illustrate the dynamic voice that Cleary sustains. This is also observed in her series of "Jane Doe" poems, taking on the persona of a girl without an identity. The repetitiveness of these titles anchors the reader and provides safeholds amidst the disturbing content that follows. Her use of the persona poem is apt, as in "Come Back Jane Doe," where the desire to forgive is clear:

*into that sky in which some small plane has written Marry Me
above Missing Child posters plastering the Equinox.
Jane, forgive us. Come home.*

There's comfort, too, in her lyricism, often because of her prosody and rhythm. They are, however, so subtle you might miss them, hiding within the disturbing scenes, such as this one from "Jane Doe Becomes That Which Surrounds Her":

*If found in the grasslands or the wild,
her given name's as blameless as the skies.
She's the bluest iris if she dies with child.
If no family claims or tries to find*

*her afterwards, the cypress names her kin.
If she'll never grow to woman, she stems
from scented pine and soft wood resin.
No matter her address, no wren condemns*

her or the carefree yarrow where she lies.

Or in the mused sounds of "Hurricane Provisions" that create a sense of togetherness:

*Me and my little sister
out in a flood,*

to buy food with nickels Dad

missed in his rummage

through the couch to buy his gin.

Or here, in “Leenie’s Ginny Doll Speaks,” where her choice of mixing hard with soft vowels allows space to feel both the heaviness of despair and the lightness of hope.

God calls me by name

Just under my paint-brushed hair.

A refugee from the state of empty air.

Though quiet in voice, this verse calls attention to the forlorn, the neglected, and the abused, but also to the survivor. This voice has been silent for too long and is ready to be heard. Resilience resonates on every page. The reader is taken from that scared child hiding under a table, to the hopeful little girl in “Dear Mummy” asking her mother to come get her, to the woman who has become a hospice nurse helping others process loss in “Rounds.”

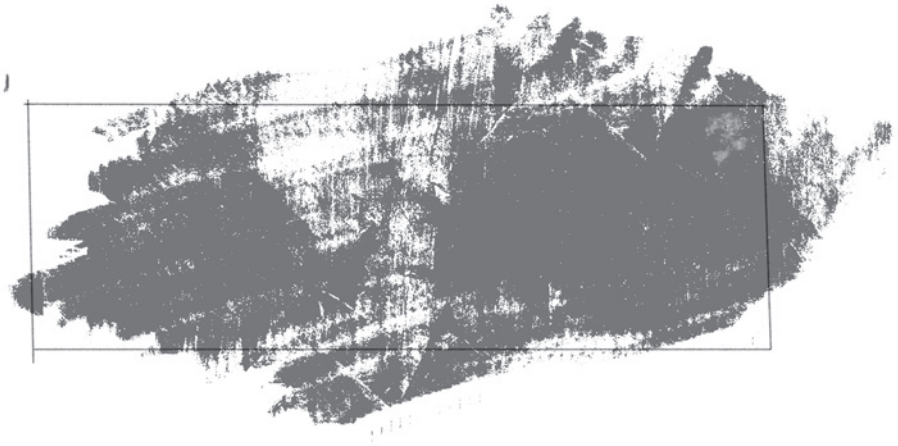
Child Ward of the Commonwealth will haunt the reader with its composed and graceful spirit. Cleary had no control over being taken away as a child and placed in foster care, but these poems, now, are hers and no one can take them away. Fortunately for us, this poet is here to stay.

LINGUISTICS

after Still life by Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps

Even now, I try to be generous with language[!]
like bats with blood, who turn out their stomachs'
larders for hungry drifters. I tender my bluntness

and barber my temper. My hands dance
open with speech. Tell me again how
wings and tongues make consequences out of air.



LARDED ALL WITH SWEET FLOWERS

after Ophelia and Laertes by Benjamin West

It was the only way he could paint her—

turpentine, stripped

down to her canvas

bones, then softened

voluptuously, toned gold and

gowned.

Oil slick, she drips

flowers, robe held open, seams

braided with opium and morning glory,

folds holding fibrous stalks, feathered green heads.

It's oregano, she claims as Laertes finds her arm, then her hips.

He turns towards a king who stutters,

To each his own poison. And I—

who once knew how to

unscrew the cap from a mushroom—I know

she scatters rosemary and rue, a patient

prick of blood where trembling fennel

bites her fingers, but I only recall

pansies—relics of my grandmother's garden

and hospital rooms where a gold thread

trickled and hardened in her veins,

her lips sewn with spit. In hospice,

she made roses from clay,

cluttered couches with bouquets that dried
yellow, tickled cotton air as,
bile rising, she slurred a prayer for death
ending in her husband's name.

A boy I knew once claimed:²
Every girl has a favorite flower.



LAURA GROTHAUS

HOME AGAIN

after Still Life with Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber by Juan Sánchez Cotán

molasses March idling like a car
 latch unhooked, lock parched
 my mother¹ home from college— the first to go

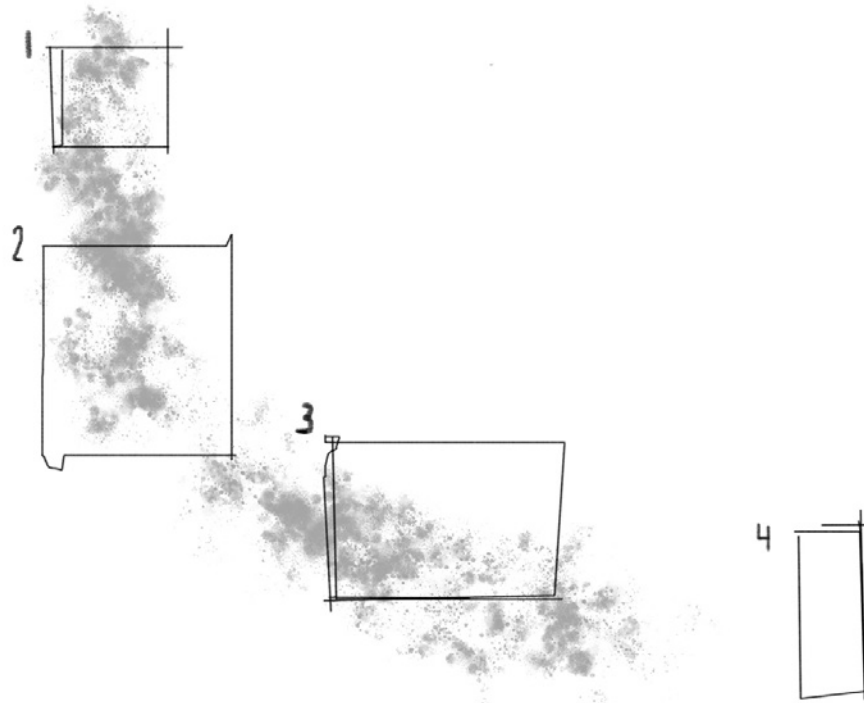
palmed kolache from
 thick syrup months on the farm
 bee-stung fruit, the bites found under arms

her mother² saying, Your eyelids have been flying
 at half mast a year now.
 saving it up for later, this season's excess

home now with the tin siding blues
 mulberry mouthed, hinges crack
 my mother³ taught me

earthquakes felt like nausea
 and a woman could eat her way
 through a cellar of unlabeled cans

my mother⁴ taught me
 doors with rusted rims
 and the hush they shut behind you



LAURA GROTHAUS

BUY THE KNIVES

All the girls at recess are a gaggle
of little mothers. They're being horrible
to each other. Imagine them as parents,

punishing their adorable future horrors.
This whole set-up is a set-up: being born
to folks who must betray us to keep us

alive. We end up first-in-line to shovel
soil over their breathless bodies. It's like,
I DIDN'T ASK TO BE BORN!

is valid critique. Think about it: what's not
coercion? Yesterday, I resented the sunset
in my eyes and squinted. Today, I ate splinters

of cold butter and sunflower sprouts on toast. Still
dark outside: this is breakfast in winter.
This is the life I was amputated

into. My mom sighs, *Don't have children. I can't
love anyone else.* Love is an exhausting business
model. A pyramid scheme. We get so far in,

instinct forces us to buy the knives, find stuff
to mince. As a kid, I learned, distraught,
my death will happen on a normal day.

It's not fair. Life is so full of shit
we love, any blade is too dull to carve us
cleanly out of it. This is the thing

I can't remember: what my mother said
when I couldn't stop crying about dying.
Whatever it was— her hands held my face.

She followed it with a question, *You wanna go
take your bath?* I didn't have a choice. I nodded.
Yes, I felt myself choose it. I stayed in the tub

until my tiny hands puckered, suddenly ancient.

AMBIGRAM

I want always to say what you say,
so well do you say it.
backward everything speak I
and mumble silence or worse:
I silence mumbles.

clumsy. for instance—

dreams tether monkeys.
love the monuments dream the
prophets then and poets come first,
or to put it more succinctly:
last are the poets, first

come the prophets, but the last
shall be first, and for this
I could be cursed, for if you recall
the scene that day at the altar,
that eternal, mirrored penetralium.
I wanted to halloo our tiny, timeless selves,
white clad and looking so deathless.

THE ZENITH

My father won a color TV
from a radio station in '74.
Maybe he chased the station's van
or it found him with his bumper sticker;
maybe he was the thirteenth caller
who had the answer to their trivia question—

I don't know.
He brought it home
the way a hunter brings in game:
proud, possessive, delighted—

relieved

that he had been given something to offer,
that he could be the bringer of abundance.

It hissed and incandesced before us
as if it contained a piece of the sun
that spat out dangerous blues and reds
so ominous our mother warned us

*sit back you kids, or
you'll ruin your eyes.*

Late at night my father leaned
into the sun dogs shining around
the turban of Carnac the Magnificent,
who guessed unerringly the questions
to answers kept in a mayonnaise jar.

We hid at the end of the couch
as my father rocked and howled like a hyena,
crazed by the light of a descending sun.
After that, things got darker:
After that, we kept our distance.

T A X O N O M Y

Dolphins chase gulls away from their calf's carcass and I pick at my grandmother's handbag, she who once was begged to stay in Cairo as a wife. Take a woman for a herd of camels. Fair trade? Top pouch: a bottle of Sahara, a bookmark of hieroglyphs. A vulture for an A. A camel for a bride. Impossible to splice man from animal; both rot into collagen pebbles, both smile with fangs bared; same enamel, different mandible. I searched my grandmother's jaw, her canines behind the lip gloss at the wake. Fitting, the mortician picked earth tones for her specimen—ground into powder, I can't tell vertebra from wishbone from chalk. While she lives in every patch of flesh and feather and field, I translate my name into the creatures I harbor: a set of vipers, a hatched quail. Given a chance, consonants would swallow vowels as grief consumes control in every domain. For nine days, a killer whale hoists her decomposed daughter. An ant marches his brother into the driveway. I know displays of power lost. I grieve human, imagining the vial of sand I will fit into.

SONATA COMPOSED FOR THE STOLEN CELL PHONE IN D MINOR

A true guitarist is the least tender
where steel irons skin. As in,
no skill is birthed from comfort,
whether navigating a fretboard's
razor wires, or the thorny carpet
in the living room, sharp bristles
against cheek, stray dog hair stitched
to a lip. In other words, I'm searching
under an ottoman, a rugged chest
of drawers, any fruitless darkness
because I'm still mastering blame

and where to put it. These are still
days I think innocent whoever enters
my house invited. Days absences
mount, whether the highest volume off
a shelf, or a phone charging against
a baseboard. I won't always be so
bad at finding the truth. Even *discover*
I will learn. How it was plucked
from Latin's royal tomb, meaning
to uncover, or remove from burial,
an inspector's shovel in its phonemes.
However, until I know better,

I am too naïve to believe anyone else
guiltier. That all along, a friend steals
away on the train—my cell unlocking
on his command after the six, the eight,
the three, backspace, the six, the six,
the world equal parts motion and
friction. Instead of chasing, I run
frantic hands where the vacuum never
inhales. Box springs. Crooked legs
of jeans in a drawer. Every softness
stinging softness, nothing hard,
the callus yet to form.

APOLOGY ENDING WITH MY HAND ON YOUR HIP

Forgive me for stealing your flats & waddling

away when the music sounded loudly enough
& I would forget my body into moving. Dragged me

by the palm & I wanted to humiliate all of your knuckles,
my fists the size of tangerines. Didn't want my hips
to swing. Didn't want my cluttered legs to work

but you still saw my foot tapping. & an *I mean it! I'll comet
into you no matter if these be weak, good-for
-nothing hands*. No-rhythm hands. I've seen violent hands

reign in mist from a shore & never thought myself
soft enough to hold even your hips. Feet too clunky,

but what else would I do but mock your heels

& stumble to a wooden floor? Maybe, we should dance
together, even though we've never danced before?

[IN MY MOTHER'S DREAM, MY BROTHER
TRIES ON THE DRESS]

In my mother's dream, my brother tries on the dress
she found in my closet. I can speak Latin but have never

prayed in the language. I kiss the cashiers at the bookstore
regularly, I'm sure. In my mother's dream, I am toothless

(I haven't smiled in years) & my brother safeguards my incisors
in the flowers he found imprinted on her summer blouse.

Reading under a poem I show him on the internet, he asks
What's queer? I take his hand & gargle—*what isn't*. Of course

she knew. Of course I am following a man into the back
alley lit rudely by volunteering fluorescents. In my mother's

dream, I insert his feathers carefully into my gums. Our hands,
when clasped together, resemble hands that have been clasped

together. My mother negotiates with flight. Awakens. Should my brother
learn, he'd say something silly, something like *I don't know what to do*

*with this new & strange data or I dreamt my brother prayed
for us last night!* She'd remember the summer we thumb-wrestled

on a paddleboat. She'd say *I didn't know he prayed* & he'd say
something silly, something stupid, something like *you never asked*.

BAKED POTATOES LATE AT NIGHT

Which aren't really because I did them
6 minutes in the nuke which is what
everyone in the west calls the microwave
because so many of us live at
ground zero or as close as not to
matter, there are silos everywhere
(the missile kind) you can see them
from the house or the alfalfa field
or the highway and they have
"communication lines" which go
underground and their paths are
marked with reflective orange tape
around the tops of fence posts,
the oversize ones you use in corners
or for a gate, easements on your deed
just like for a phone line or the
electricity, and by "communication
lines" they mean that a computer
somewhere will send a signal to
launch because in tests they found
that even with a gun to his head one
of the two people required to push
the button would just say no, would
refuse, would say not on my soul so
kill me, if I help you we'll all be dead
anyway, 68% of the time, no, just
shoot, so they decided humans are
unreliable and passed the job off
to some computer programmed by,
probably, one of the humans who was
willing to pull the trigger—anyway, the
potatoes, my father was Irish, came
over on the boat with Johnny
Fitzgerald and a leprechaun in a
shoebox, but that's another story
for another time, my father loved
baked potatoes with too much butter
and pepper and too much salt, and he

was an electrician, and when I was a little girl they sent him away to Wichita Falls, Texas, to learn how to wire missile silos, and he did, all over Wyoming, climbing down deep in the dark of the earth to make sure the buttons would work, mutually assured destruction, even though he had us, my sister and me, had children, us who would die first because we lived in Cheyenne, Wyoming, with F. E. Warren Air Force Base and the silos were everywhere around us, you could see one from Crystal Lake where he took us fishing, and from north of town where we would take drives to watch huge thunderstorms and tornadoes spinning across the prairie, raising dust, they built rich people's houses out there as the time passed and every few years those corkscrew winds blow a few apart, it's just north of the Base, silos practically in their back yards, and it's ironic, how I moved to get away and you can't, here I am with fields of alfalfa and barley and lentils and missiles and rapeseed and dill, just crops—food, fodder, hatred, fear—(everyone grows their own potatoes, even though by fall you can buy hundredweight bags from the Hutterites for under twenty dollars, some of those spuds as big as your head, Red Pontiacs, Russets, Purples, Yukon Golds)

BAD SHOT

Darl said it wasn't wind or sun in the eyes or a sudden movement, not one of those end-of-the-day-too-tired-too-far shots no one should take. He was downwind and calm, mid-afternoon, and the 'lope just hopped up out of the coulee and stood like he was posing for some postcard. It was a perfect shot, and then it wasn't. The buck dropped like a stone, and then rose up like Christ Almighty running, as if nothing had happened. At first Darl thought maybe nothing did, that it was a miss, but there was the blood in a pool at the top of the little rise, and more a little farther on, and more. Darl was no Christian, but there were rules, like offices of prayer, and one was finish what you start, and if you start a killing you got to end it too. Meat was already ruined but that made no difference. You didn't leave no living thing to suffer. The scent of sage was as thick in his nostrils as smoke, and above the Pumpkin Buttes heat lightning was flickering on and off like neon. Wind had picked itself up and was rearranging the air—over towards Buffalo, great snakes of dust already swallowing the gravel roads. Darl reloaded, started walking, the lowering sun picking out wet pools of red as if they were liquid fire. Down into the dry crick bed, up the broken scoria on the other side, and then it leveled out. He expected to see that pronghorn, fallen in its tracks, but—nothing. Soon the blood spoor petered out, no scat, no broken brush, no smells of anything but dust and sage and his own sweat, no sound but the meadowlarks and the wind. Backtracked himself to the last clots he'd noticed in the yellow blooms of rabbit brush, hunkered down in a squat and did a slow turn, took in every horizon. Nothing higher than a prairie dog standing. So he realigned himself, slung the rifle over his back, and he crawled. Darl'd swore never to bend knee to God nor man, but he bent both to that buck for more than a mile, and even then he almost missed it. Tiny hoof prints threading the needlegrass, blue grama, fescue; crushed stems where it fell, dragging its spent body into the susurrant of the long grasses, giving out its last breath. Darl was glad there was no need to break that silence with gunfire. He was dead tired his own self. Laid the rifle down, slept all night dreamless, pillowed on its flank.

SPIDER PLANT

The noiseless filament, the sailors and whalers
I've never seen. The silver chain. You're in the doorway

again and it's a cool night without wind. Eagle
Creek fire jumps across Columbia River.

Wild horses. It's a soap-film pattern, dynamic
tension. It's a reticulation, a latticelike division.

What I wouldn't give. What I wouldn't say.

MY BACK STORY

begins as a fissure
unruly tectonic shifts
an underground spine.

I was sixteen, the car
almost as old. The asphalt;
an aggregate of eons.

When I think of our wreck
I think of the moment
we smacked down.

Past the black top,
up and over the field
the sleeping tumbleweed,

then sage-skid, yucca-
spiked fall, cactus grind
my friend Dove beside me

her slow-motion nod
against halo of sheepskin
one moment, eyes animal-wide

then supine on the rocks
me star-stunned, staring up
her eyes closed, lungs filling.

How that instant seized my life
tapped and crazed it,
scored it with lightning.

Her exhale into death
was my escort, my pinched gait
navigated blind thru its alleys.

Velvet moss now spreads
soft and green like mortar
where I used to be airtight—

where nothing was spoken
or heard— like the great valleys
before canyon fracture

only an invisible calligraphy
of root and rhizome.
The tunnel-chatter of ants.

AT THE INSIGHT ULTRASOUND LAB FOR A BREAST
CANCER SCREENING AFTER THE MAMMOGRAM
FINDS IRREGULARITIES

Imagine this:
white petals spilling from the walls.

The breast over the heart, exposed.
What can enter the heart, what cannot.

A family history without cancer.
Where I'll be in a year. Where I won't be.

The sound of the ultrasound machine, ticking
over each bombed-out cell. This room,
the calm gray-scale of a spa treatment center.

How technology breaks the body
into pixels. Into patterns. Into dim light.

My husband, not allowed in, waiting outside.
The hand that writes this. The wait & weight & wait.

The quiet before our lives change forever like the seconds
before a car crash.

The body's wreckage. The beauty of it.

This record as archive as testimony as trivial.
How we'll tell our children. How we'll be remembered. How?

It was once thought possible for people to fly.
Heaven is a place I can't imagine.

All the years I hated my body. The mirrors. The life it gives me.
A reason not to mourn. Any reason.

Five of us, together in future photos,
our bodies silhouetted by the sun.

DOPPELGÄNGER

If a saint & a liar are two sides
 of the same obols
we will place over your eyes
 come time. If the drunk
& the boy go home
 hand in hand, one
a shadow stitched to the back
 of the other. If silence rises
like bile in one throat
 as the other chokes.
If the organs only fail
 in the drunk, not the brother
unsewn from himself in the quiet
 of his own burning.
If he isn't your only brother,
 but half of a problem
no math can solve. If one integer survives
 subtracting the other.
If one looks healthy, keeps his job
 & wife & kids, pays
the mortgage as penance, puts food
 in his mouth, will the other
make fools of us as hope so often does?
 If there is hope. If at all
we have ten different doors inside us.
 What waits on the other
side of any moment? What threshold
 threads light through
our bones? Twining: the moon & trees
 through the windows.
The light with the living world.

WHILE MY BROTHER SPENDS YEARS
DRINKING HIMSELF TO DEATH

The future splits
into atoms in a nuclear facility

we don't mention
anymore. The hares arrive

in winter as windows.
They come, but they don't

leave, becoming
landscape as we

sleep. What truth is worth
bearing? People appear as angels

in the distance of the mind.
Perhaps, in the dark,

we leave ourselves in order
to begin. What dark

do we need in order to continue?
The roof shakes

with any weather.
The dead pretend to stay

dead. A body wrests the dark
from the bottom of a lake

so the cold need not be
alone, or unwanted.

CALIFORNIA DEATH INDEX

How are we to grade your headlong fall
against her quiet surrender, plot the two
indulgent ends against the middle?

So many points for pathos, a cumulative
tally of troubles traversed? Extra credit
for complexity or ingenuity, maybe...

Far from the celebrated coast, blind-stitched
fog hauls its net across the valley; voices
disembody, water scrapes against rock—

then August's withering sun, unrelenting
on asphalt. We die in our cars with our pets,
breathless, as lost towns—Lazarusville,

Fort Phoenix—rise from the beds of dry
reservoirs. The mettle in us pivots to north,
but west was always the cardinal—

the sun a red stain spilled from smudged
brown hills falling like empty bottles into
the evening. Should our names be spoken

under a sky that casts no shadows, scratched
into ground that feeds no roots? Our lives
are a dog-eared book left open, its painstaking

print fine as webbing strung across an open
gate first thing before anyone's stirred or
departed. An almanac of indifference undone

by caring at the last—oh we'll slip up, we
always do, find ourselves cradling a friend
against the friendless sprawl of a summer night.

WHAT THE HEREFORDS KNOW

The Herefords know nothing about hostages.
They know silage and field-grass, the press
of hands against udders. Those seeking redress
for slights of history pass with no vestige
far overhead. Cow-panic comes
after calving, their young spirited away
on trucks. That elsewhere this day
human beings will suffer and succumb
doesn't disturb the slow grind of molars,
the plod of hooves toward the stream edge.
They understand their limits, which outrage
won't alter. Jeweled flies bother
rough hides as the roar of engines fades.
The contrail dissipates as they move toward shade.

IF MOTHER BRAIDS A WATERFALL

BY DAYNA PATTERSON

(Signature Books, 2020)

REVIEW BY STAR COULBROOKE

A poet's vocabulary is more than a tool, more than personality. Its origin and culmination are familial and cultural. Dayna Patterson grew up in a bookstore, a devout reader, a Mormon girl of polygamous ancestry who served a mission for her church and who was thirty years old when her mother came out to her.

*It slips from your mouth, Mom,
hits, finally, in the clothing store,
one seismic word—*

bisexual.

Although her mother's truth is vital to this collection because it leads, as Dayna says in her virtual book launch on May 23, 2020, to her own "de-conversion from Mormonism," only two poems of 52 in the book are for and about her mother. They are enough. The plain speech of "Revision" (above and below) lays out a daughter's confusion and sorrow:

*Thirty years of Sunday lessons learned,
rules for heaven, hell,
made me a person you couldn't tell.*

"Revision" describes the coming out as an "earthquake," with "whole mountains / made low." In the next poem, "Dear Mom," vocabulary builds and the mountain metaphor contracts to a musty cave, wherein a clawed beast avoids the bleak, white season of not yet knowing.

*December lady, the day you came out to me I was in my
hibernacle, so comfortable in the warm smell of my own
pelt and the cave's dry envelope where I slept in a ball.*

Teeth and claws bared, the "startled" daughter-beast does not want to hear the "news," but her mother "took me by the paw," taught her daughter "to forage / for winterberry," taught her about pain and compassion and forgiveness. "I took off my thick coat, felt cold's blow, what you'd borne these / hush-mouth years," and knew "no need to devour your heart."

“Hibernacle” seems to be a melding of the words “hibernate” and “tabernacle,” both steeped in cultural meaning. Many words in this volume seem as though they might be coined from the author’s trove of words and concepts, but look them up. The most interesting and mysterious are real artifacts from early Mormon history, such as the architectural terms, “hunky-punks,” “oubliette,” “claire-voie,” or terms from *Star Trek*, such as “Betazoid empathic powers” or “Pon Farr,” the Vulcan time of mating, veiled in mystery and secrecy, much like Mormon temple rituals.

Ritual is a recurring element in the collection, as are the earthly elements of Mormon culture. Precious metals and everyday minerals are as varied as diamonds to motes of dust or golden nuggets to salt crystals. In the first poem of the book, “The Mormons are coming,” ancestors “donated their / china for crushing to make the temple’s stucco sparkle.” They “pass silver plates of torn / Wonder Bread.” Or “they arrange a / room of plinths with the bronze busts of their prophets.”

Ancestors are as prevalent in the poems as minerals, some of them recurring in a series of letters from the author, others appearing only once, but with lasting impressions. In “Contrails,” a deceased grandfather causes Dayna (the author is the speaker in many of these poems) to ask “What is the truth?” She speculates on the idea of a “gentle, pearlescent heaven” that pretends to “soften thoughts of oblivion.” She wonders if elements of her grandfather might somehow remain, “leave / pieces in our memories like glowing stones?”

The “glowing stones” call to mind the Urim and Thummim, said to be ancient seer stones through which Joseph Smith translated the *Book of Mormon*. They recur later in the book, in the culturally and historically expansive poem, “Former Mormons Catechize Their Kids,” with “Joseph Smith peering into a dark hat at the / peep stone, words floating up to his eyes in / phosphorescing light.”

Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum Smith get death masks in the book, and Brigham Young, another early prophet of the church, is named only in reference to a chronological list of his 55 wives. The real punch in the collection is not its rightful dressing-down of a strong religious patriarchy, but its rebellious matriarchal revelry in regard to the “Heavenly Mother,” of whom Mormon prophets say their members must not speak because she is “too sacred.” This rebellion begins with poems of reverence toward her pioneer grandmother, “first kin to convert.”

In “Dear Ellen, 1852,” Dayna imagines trying on her four-great grandmother’s essence by trying on her clothes.

*my feet wouldn't fit your winter
shoes, my waist would burst
your laces. Still,*

I know

*I slip on your secondhand cotton,
whalebone,*

shoehorn into your leather.

Imagining her grandmother's life means imagining why she would convert to a church that asked her to travel far from her home country. With "better marriage prospects" and the promise of no more "whiskey prints on your wrist," along with "golden plates," "and the spillway of heaven," Dayna asks, "what part of you could resist?"

In "Dear Ellen, 1855," the impact of pioneer life leads to more questions about Grandmother Ellen from Dayna, whose middle name is Ellen.

*On the clipper ship Charles Buck
I wonder if you carried a spider
in a walnut shell for luck, or if your new faith

was enough.*

...

*Did you keep your children
close, below deck, sewing tents
and wagon covers for the trek?*

*At least you and yours were whole—
until Mary Ann tumbled from the wagon.
The oxen pulled the first wheel*

*over her chest, puncturing lung,
the hind wheel over her jaw, shattering bone.
Did her disfigured face make you ask,*

*What are you up to, God
Almighty?*

Questioning the faith in which Dayna Ellen spent the first three decades of her

life, has given rise to a book rich with doubt, resolve, and praise. The Heavenly Mother, of whom Dayna was forbidden to speak, is now named “Eloher,” a feminine god. She is “Mother,” who “has a Degree in Exterior Design,” and she is “a shrine,” “a book,” “the One and Only,” who

Braids a Waterfall

in a country where no one speaks

Her language.

Except for Dayna, whose extensive vocabulary and lyrical narrative dares the mystery and secrecy of a religion she has cast off while it embraces the quirky, sexy, comforting, and exasperating culture in which she still quite happily belongs.

As she told attendees at the book launch, she began writing poetry in earnest as a young Mormon wife, when she and her husband could not conceive a child. But she did not write as therapy (and they did eventually have children), even when they left the church together. Through it all, she says, she hoped her writing was “elevated to the moment of art.” Oh, yes. Every page, every line.

BIRTHRIGHT

It took me two decades to step into the sun.
I wasn't actually wearing weeds, but I was
mourning losses all the same. Again and
again, disasters cropped up and hawked
their crepey shadows on the corner. Grieving
came naturally: I'd been born into a line
of women who would wear their ash all day,
missing the virgin like they missed a toddler
who had left an empty pair of sneakers
velcroed by the stairs. They tasted cardboard
on their tongues and sighed, singing, the poor
thing, may she find eternal peace. I wanted
to be restless, courting risk and light unlike
them in their kitchens and their dens, but
every place I went the matrons' darkness
followed like I was meant to be their heiress
and not just their kin. Crying over a lover,
I saw Nonna from the fourth floor window
cross Third Avenue in a handmade dress,
or wave a handkerchief edged on the basement
machine like a banner of resignation. Down
the unfinished steps to the cellar she went while
I wished her likeness into being in the bright
city summer, finding myself in her small face.

MEANWHILE, IN ANOTHER PART OF THE STUDIO

the other side of the family gathers
round. There is the woman

no one would allow to speak except
her father, who understood the strange

half-language she seemed to use, stiltedly,
to get the words out about supper

and breaking plates. Soon she'll reach
the part of her memory where he'll die

and she'll be alone so completely that
she'll start to wail and never stop,

not when they bring her to the edge
of the sanitarium grounds, where

the green grass will be hysterically bright
and threaten to swallow her. She hates

her brothers and her cousins now.
What they want is to spin a story

of triumphant conquest, of bending
to their will all kinds of metals and beads,

of catching birds in their bare, waiting
hands. She will not let them. Their

nonchalance disgusts her like the day
they all descended from boats into

the shallows at the lip of the coast,
throwing out their shovels and

their trawls, as though they expected
to be stopping for a very long time.

LEAVING MADDIE

You asked if we'd left Maddie
and we'd left Maddie
because Maddie is who we always left
twisted in mixed lighting,
relearning to work her fingers.

All night,
the leaving Maddie
and the asking about it.

We left Maddie at first without knowing but then faster.
We left Maddie like it was something we'd want to remember;
we took note of mailboxes,
spoke less in the dark spaces between light poles
pouring orange to remind us who we walked with:
that we had, in fact,
left Maddie.

We kept on leaving Maddie for the rest of that night,
and eventually her name stopped coming up.
We'd left Maddie, and it seemed there was little more to say.

On the dark walk
one of us said how Maddie was like a bracelet.
We decided to remember Maddie as a bracelet,
leaving her
like the tiny sound losing makes.

We'd left Maddie, now she shimmered on some curb.

Closer to home, and Maddie's porchlight.
It was sad for us to see, having come so far.
We cried walking.

We had each other,
which made it easier.

MITTEN TIED TO A BALLOON

When your mother
went about explaining
how it works
to the youngest, a niece,
she held her hand to hers
like building a prayer
and slid her fingers down
each of their fingers

and said the body
is a puppet and then
tried again and said
the body is a puppet
which is a kind
of glove, and Maddie

Maddie lost her glove,
she must have lost it
somewhere in town,
somewhere outside
the shop you know
the one she liked
and now her hand
is cold and with one
cold hand she's going
somewhere warm
so she doesn't need gloves
where she's going anyway
so she will have an extra
she can share
with someone else.

And though they couldn't tell
whether it was rising,
somewhere across town,
someone below wasn't sure
they saw what they saw,
looked and looked again, looked

and thought is it waving and looked
and thought maybe this
maybe this maybe this
is that one last thing
that will teach
the old grief
to drift away.

SICK OF PEOPLE'S GRIEF—

especially mine. Look outside,
Look in: our Henri whistles up
His flock across a jungle

And I answer. One will
Outlive the other and song
Continue. We love where we are
Loved. We don't nest in treetops

Of course: ceilings and floors
Divide us, staircases and doors
Open up and through, you know
What I mean. If not, imagine

A small bird in the window,
Fanning open green and yellow
Wings for me to admire, green leaves
Dazzling, yellow sun come on.

THINK,

*goddamit, Father said, Don't
Horse about, and Time to get*

*Serious, but never
Don't sleep around,*

*As if he meant, Don't
Fritter your life*

*Anywhere. He didn't
Want me to die without*

*What he wanted or
Not to have made myself*

*Into—what? He worried
I might become, who*

*Knows, haunted by stuff
Nobody could see. Wave*

*Goodbye, goodbye
Best chance. I wonder if he*

*Found what he wanted, looked
It in the eye, and chose.*

*Poor horse. It was leap and die or live and be haunted by
the ability to choose.*

—Peter Heller

MORNING, WITH REGRETS

Why give them names? A flock of something arguing,
the silver maple dying in the lawn. Even the tough street
trees are losing their leaves, joining the ash and chestnut.
Sorrow. And then the sure thing—ashamed. Always so much
left undone. I dream I am explaining a lost civilization
to people not much interested. I'm everyone in that dream.
My husband makes the coffee today, empties the dishwasher.
It's a Sunday treat, but I'm finding no Sunday here. Lying
with my bad humors in a sweaty bed, I don't want to go, don't
want to stay. Dull. My mother is dying down in Houston, badly.
It will be a week until I get this peace again. This is what I've done
with it. Complain of my own bad conscience. Bad pages. Where's
my light? The birds are still insisting, one to the other. Enough.

[ANXIETY, LITTLE SISTER]

Anxiety, little sister, look at us, our grips unsteady on the child-proof lids meant to keep us from what we need. We stand still & race at the same time, like there's a rabbit on the chest thumping lucky feet against the clover of our clavicles. How can we comfort each other over the distance? We tried to save daylight for another time & it left us in the dark, waiting for sleep to come. I lie awake waiting for rest as the ceiling erupts, thighs clenched against the cotton night. Look at us, all grown up & nothing to spend it on. It was easy, once, to sand our edges, watching the football hit Marcia Brady in the nose over & over & over again. Little sister, if anxiety were to leave us, where would that leave us? Sometimes I wish I could just relax & learn to love corn mazes. Soon the crickets will die for the season & I'll be left counting my breaths, or the tiny white pills that glare at me like lice. No going back to a home we don't remember losing.

[BELIEF, LITTLE SISTER]

Belief, little sister, sometimes it's as simple as a walk alone at night along a river that asks nothing of you. So many acorns this year; I skid across their abundance. Someone on the block is sautéing onions, in a bit more olive oil than is necessary, testing frequently for salt as they progress from translucent to amber to russet. A train passes in a white snake of light. Steam breathes from a go-cup of mediocre coffee, as more & more & more acorns fall. To think, it's been centuries since our grandmothers leached tannins to unlock the sweetness under each kernel's stern coating. Think, too, how many times the word *god* sang through those women; how it rose as a guttural urge, opened into a wide arch, then closed with a nod of tongue against palate. So many names for the divine require making a cavern of the mouth. Though you & I do not call upon those names, little sister, still, I react with that same vowel of the uncontainable as (*ow!*) continuing along the river path, the occasional nut hits me in the head.

SWEAT

I miss it, sleeping with the saucepan of ice at my feet
and the greasy black on my fingers
when I touched the stair rail, and Fred with his club
foot and acne-scarred face, giving me a tin box
of shortbread through the police door.
Not operatic exactly, but Junior and his furious
passion for Iris, and the dog-eared poster beside the
boiler of Dominica. He had left when he was four,
but the emerald paper curling in the New York
July, and the season they dismantled the organ
from the church up the street. And for days
we picked up the curved wood pieces—old ladies
and kids carrying them, not sure what they
would ever be useful for—but they were beautiful.
And free. Black-of-the-mouth taste of lemon ice
or illicit powders, lights bleeding, and the year
the kids fired guns every night after 11 p.m. so all
of us leaned back from our windows, our boom boxes
vibrating, the soundtrack of feet and trains.
This was before the screens, the ubiquitous blue,
not quite like any sky, before we stopped having
to move or plan our \$20 bills; when we might
have whatever we wanted with a plastic chip,
and then molder in the queer landscape of debt.
We used to speak I mean—not only to those like
us, but to whoever was there—on the train platform
the stoop, that stone worn in by feet and buttocks
until it appeared a living thing, sweaty in the
summers, slick with it, the tenements about to
break into lace or fire, and we lived there; we knew
that life was an engine, we knew what it took
to make the gears turn, and how terrible the blue
of cold and still, of white noise, of the oven mouth,
even though we warmed ourselves at it, always
open, the bodegas, the bars, Junior preaching
with a microphone at the corner, and he told me
how Jesus walked in bare feet, and his feet bled.

BLUE DRESS WITH STRIPES

1.

A can of Diet Coke to cure a vicious hangover.
Or Star—her face in my mind,

superimposed over her later face,

the same face but how time moves across it.

The boy I loved that year who told me “You would be pretty
if only you didn’t move so much.”

A dress with blue stripes that didn’t suit.

A blue dress with stripes that made me look fat.

A blue dress with stripes that made me look small.

A blue dress with stripes that made me look as though I came from New Jersey.

A blue dress with stripes that gave me big hair.

2.

1985 and our bodies terrified us—

Star and I, Michele and I, Lisa and I,

drinking egg creams and riding the subway to our dull jobs,

drinking vodka-and-tonics and roaming the night-streets in high heels
that cracked against jagged curbs or black oil on our bare feet.

3.

1985 and the accessories escape me:

Leopard vinyl strapped purses, flat plastic earrings in bold primary colors—
mustard yellow,
fire-engine red, the royal blue of bleach. Black tubing braceleted around
our wrists, a tattoo of a purple flower.

A blue dress with stripes.

The F train to Coney Island where
we roamed the ruined Tunnel of Love, scrambling under police tape to pick our
way through red-cap, blue-cap crack bottles, and the surprise of the oily ocean.

4.

A blue dress that didn't suit.

Our bodies that terrified us.

We covered them with glossy primary colors.

We used Eternity and Dove Extra Dry. We used Secret and
Patchouli. We used Vanilla Oil and Clorox. We used
Noxema and cider vinegar.

I left the boy who didn't
want me to move. Michele got married. Lisa disappeared to
Los Angeles.

Star fell in love and moved in with
Stephen who did cocaine, Chris, who beat her when it was
himself he hated. Drugs, bad guys, more drugs. What she called

“having an oil burner habit.” Her roommate
Laura, who died in a tunnel under a bridge out in Marcy Avenue
in Brooklyn. Strangled. Put in plastic.

5.

A blue dress

with stripes

A blue dress with stripes

A blue ____ with ____.

6.

1985: Our bodies terrified us, but we had it the wrong way around:

Our bodies which placed us in simple danger
simply by being the bodies they were.

A dress with blue stripes.

The kind of dress that has shoulder pads,
and ruffles around the hips

The kind of dress that is made of some kind of woven plastic.

The kind of dress that would not disintegrate even in a landfill.

7.

Laura's history

is not in any history books. She was missing for ten years and by
the time they found her, the guy who did it had been killed over
some other crime. My friend Star reported her missing to everyone
she could think of, but everyone in 1985 was not very interested.

8.

“He picked on girls who did drugs.”

“He killed three women and put them in a locked room inside the tunnel.”

“He had the key because he had worked for the MTA.”

“His job was maintenance & other things.”

9.

A blue dress

A blue

A dress

Stripes on the pavement. Stripes on a dress.

A blue dress with stripes abandoned in a closet.

10.

Star in a picture yesterday. Her
cheeks slightly hollow from missing teeth. A bird battered
on a window. You can blame the bird or you can blame the window,
but the grief is in the arrangement of these elements—how can the
bird not wish to fly onward, how can the window not exist?

11.

Who was there to tell us we would grow in the violet shade,
sunlight striped with shadow, stubbled with blue, with a violence underneath,

the drug of the blue dress with stripes

the drug of ruffles & ruffles.

And love, the drug of the wrong-headed stories

we told each other in 1985 when our bodies terrified us.

FIRE ESCAPE

We were trying to sleep on the sixth floor while the party pounded below, when they started climbing the fire escape outside our window up to the roof to smoke, drink, flirt, gazing across the sequins of the city to the Hudson. Such entitlement. After a while we couldn't take it anymore, and with the next paroxysm of squealing and clanging I sprang from bed and banged on the window as he passed. He yelped—his glass toppling into the courtyard below and shattering. “Shit!” he cried, clinging to the fire escape as it shook... Then laughter from his friends above. The glass of our window had been sealed with some kind of insulating plastic by a previous tenant, so I'm sure I was as blurry to him as he was to me. But fearing retaliation I did what any city dweller does and ranted in a gibberish. To scare him off. He climbed higher, giggling, *Shit... Shit...* “What would have happened if he fell?” my fiancée asked as I slipped back into bed. Little had gone wrong for us yet—family disowning me; cancers. I shrugged. My hands trembling. “Our lives would have changed forever,” I said. But things stayed quiet for the rest of the night.

AFTER THE SCAN

On the bench the discarded gown the unwound shroud in the hollow
tomb

THE FUTURE

Stopped paying my bills. Stopped filling my cavities, writing my poems and plays, etc. No more prizes. No more mortifying myself with drinking, running, porn. The sexual experiences I'd never experience now. Reading made me sick; I watched the screen. Unable to encounter my own daughter deeply. Instead I set my mind against the whetstone and limped around the ward, wheeling my blinking beeping luggage of dangling fluids. Living in the minutes between thumb-pumps of Dilaudid. Injections of Ativan. Visitations from the 3 a.m. vampire-phlebotomists. Blowing into the plastic flute to levitate the magic ball that forestalls pneumonia. My wife came and went. Through windows the desert khaki all but blinding. The arterial freeways ferrying masses into the mountains. When was my first real step after? When will be my first word?

SCAR

Tonight my daughter notices my scar. Or the wound that will become a scar, in time. God willing. From the port that for nine months delivered the medicinal vitriol that may have saved my life. It has been a week. This morning I removed the bandage and saw the stitches had dissolved. She says, "Amma has a scar there too." I say, "Yes." She asks, "How did you get yours?" I reply, "I was running and fell against a wall." She thinks about this hard. "When I'm older I will have a scar there too," she seeks to comfort me. "Not there," I suggest, "elsewhere." She bends and kisses it.

NEW HAMPSHIRE 2

It was here in the summer I loved her first: white asters at roadside, inchworms suspended from fir trees like our libidos, the immature weddings of friends, her father with his cigars assailing my unsullied egoism. "What have you got against capitalism?" her mother pressed me at the country club. They threw us an engagement party in the August of my first career failure, the only time my family ever met her family. They brought a Riesling from Virginia; my mother and sister huddled while my father aggressively, as if refutingly, chitchatted with bankers from Boston. The next summer we had to confess: my family was a hoax and as such could not attend our wedding. Then the years I stayed away too. Then last summer, the first visit after both our cancers, astonished and timorous and afraid. And now another time. Yet it is also somehow the first time, again, today as I watch our daughter suddenly learn how to swim.

MYSTERY FLAVOR

I know the Dum-Dum's Mystery Flavor is
just a matter of profit and ease—that instead
of shutting down the line to clean, they keep it running
so the end of butterscotch(?) melds with the beginning
of cream soda(?), then cream soda blends with tangerine(?),
and then these concoctions are cooled into tiny
candy heads wrapped in question marks. It's how
they woo us into putting the trash of lollipops
in our mouths, my daughter and I on the couch
playing detective, though neither of us loves
Dum-Dums beyond the satisfaction of shattering them,
their bright shards paving our molars, their dyes
coating our tongues and lips as we guess, never sure
of the answer or even if our mysteries are the same.

ODE TO THE SECURITY BOLLARDS OF CONSTITUTION AVENUE

*"Each bollard is a highly engineered piece of steel meant to withstand
an eight-ton truck barreling at it at 50 miles an hour."*

—*Metro Connection* newsmagazine

My daughter runs up like you are soldiers
returning from war, flinging her arms around
your poles, swinging down your single file,
head thrown back to the sky, inciting others
to drop their parents' hands and follow her lead.
We drove four hundred miles so she could
tour the halls of the Capitol, climb the steps
of Lincoln's temple. Yet it's you she loves best.
All along the mall, she finds your variations
in silver, in copper, even preening in green
Greek columns with the Congressional seal,
and never questions why it is you're here.
When I lived in this city, I'd visit rockets
and Pollocks without emptying the metal
from my pockets, but that was years before
she was even an idea, before they planted you
in neat rows around everything worth ruining.
Now my child treats you like her playground,
and I keep quiet about what you're waiting for,
how deep you're driven into the ground.

THE PICTURE ON THE CEILING ABOVE MY UNCLE'S HOSPITAL BED

I should be happy that if he ever wakes up
he'll see this photo of a beach at sunrise,
roses in bloom on the dunes, and not just

those white ceiling tiles you can take down
one at a time to check the wiring or pipes
as if opening a chest to get at the heart,

only simpler. But I know roses that grow
on beaches are loose and open-petaled,
casual as tourists in Hawaiian shirts,

while these are their distant, prim relations,
tightly whorled as the one my aunt pinned
on his lapel before prom, or those he grew

on trellises by his pool where I spent
summer after summer, and first he removed
the slide, then unbolted the diving board,

and, when I was twelve, replaced every
drain cover so my hair wouldn't lock
in their grip. There's not anywhere

that looks like the beach in this picture,
layered together blandly as a sandwich,
sky/flowers/sand, each beloved element

pushing us to praise this faint effort,
to agree anything is better than nothing.
For days, a machine has worked his lungs,

keeping carbon dioxide from building
in his blood, turning it so acidic that again
he hallucinates the living and dead, as when

he said he saw my grandmother, gone
twenty years, across the room, reading
the paper, and I didn't know if it was her

when her hair was long and black, or if
her ankles were already swollen. Today,
there was a moment his whole body

jerked off this hospital bed as if touched
by a live wire, and I lay my hand on his
bony, blued shoulder until he settled,

then sunk back in this chair to consider
if this red- and yellow-soaked sky is truly
a sunrise, knowing how, in movies, they're

often sunsets run backwards—evening
being easier to film and identical enough
to fool anyone not closely watching.

BAKING COOKIES DURING THE PANDEMIC

First, molasses, the sticky jar dug from the back of the cupboard, its sweet tar pausing, then falling on sugar. Ellie's careful not to overfill the cup since there's no more flour at the store, and when she drags the knife across, the extra is dust, not her usual avalanche. She's not tall or strong enough to thoroughly mix, so I take over spoon and spatula until the batter looks like wet sand on the beaches where people still gather. We roll them small so it feels like more, and so we can freeze some for the weeks ahead. Out of the oven, I taste something amiss, add salt right from the shaker, and the grains come down almost as invisibly as what keeps us home. Today, on the radio, the Governor said they didn't have everything to make the tests, compared it to baking without butter or eggs. Are we allowed to be this happy? We eat so many our bodies are heavy to carry.

THE MARRIAGE OF THE MOON AND THE FIELD
BY SUNNI BROWN WILKINSON
(Black Lawrence Press, 2019)

REVIEW BY NANCY TAKACS

In this superb debut collection, Sunni Brown Wilkinson offers poems of compassion and wonder. This is an accessible, yet wonderfully complex book. In many of the poems, Wilkinson focuses on family and the acts that bind hers together, such as her children finding a plastic turtle on a beach, naming it Crawley, and carrying it with them in the car to “all the lakes we know.” Likewise, while burying a dead bird her son finds in their yard, she writes, “We cradle its head a moment before / the darkness comes.” She remembers an unselfish act of her husband: “[We] are close and you are quiet / and more than ever that man who lifted / my dying friend last summer / into the sunlight and carried her in your arms.” Wilkinson is present too, cooking soup for its goodness, smell, and fairy-tale history. “Maybe I’m a witch,” she says, at night stealing out “onto the wet grass / and danc[ing] wildly under the stars / still smelling of soup.” While family and marriage are a polestar, the poet is also drawn to the lives of others, to myth, and to nature’s convergences.

The word “marriage” in the book’s title also implies her strong affinity for others around the world, from various cultural and religious backgrounds, from Chiapas, Vienna, Juarez, and Mozambique. Wilkinson shows much empathy for those who are ill, murdered, abused, or displaced. She weaves religious mythology throughout the book in some poems that spring from and value the stories, and in others revealing the hypocrisy in organized religion. It appears Wilkinson deepens her spiritual philosophy, which is that all life including nature’s, is braided, wedded, far beyond a cinching to our own families, religions, and beyond selfish concerns.

Many of those she writes about are female. “The Body Carries Its Own Light” is about an eight-year-old girl in Chiapas, who hails from a large polygamist family. Young Mary is eating unattended and chokes on walnuts, blacks out, and stops breathing temporarily. She suffers serious brain damage as a result. The poet tenderly brushes her hair much later on, when she meets Mary, as if she is brushing out the memory of the event: “Dark horses, Mary. Dark shoulders in the dusk of your long hair.”

Throughout the poem, Wilkinson nimbly weaves images of horses bred on the farm, alternating metaphors of death, birth, and strength. As the poet addresses

Mary and unfolds her story, there are “Black horses in the darkness that covered the farm where your mother found you / slumped and breathless,” while a mare in the barn “lay back wearily” with a “strange sac / between her legs / torn and white / once encasing her foal.” The breathless foal appears reminiscent of Mary’s near-death state.

Although the sister-wives call a doctor who comes on foot to help, he cannot, and somehow Mary is brought to another country, to a care facility, where she meets Cecey, a woman recently having escaped her country in a truck under a tarp. Cecey lovingly tends to the girl, and believes Mary will walk “through the gates of Paradise / before us all, not contrite / but like a terrible horse, trampling the last embers of the dark/with your tiny hooves.” This reiterates what the poet believes—that Mary will be strong in her next life, embodying the fury of a horse, and carrying her own light, as the poem’s title states. The poem suggests compassion is a force in this life, not just a chore performed to lead us to the next.

The light in the book’s title carries many meanings. Although moonlight is associated with lovers, and is how one finds one’s way in the dark, it also creates shadows and hidden turns, like the dark turns in Wilkinson’s other poems about women’s lives. The poems stir these lives, these images, into a concentrate that is archetypal, illuminating the connections between myth and reality.

For example, in “Approaching the Threshold,” Wilkinson’s young son has questions as he reads myths about women, while she unfolds the story of a Juarez doctor, who places cut-up body pieces of murdered women in a chemical solution that restores them, so DNA can help identify them and possibly their killers. The doctor is paradoxically a savior and a Victor Frankenstein, one with misogynistic tendencies as he plays:

[. . .] *ballads, love songs,
woos and comforts dead women in a den
of puce liquids and glycerin. “I take many girls
to bed,” he jokes, holding their bodies at night, “but not
the way you think.” He carries them to the bath
the way a man carries his bride
over the threshold.*

In an alternate section, Wilkinson’s son asks how Persephone, “trapped in the underworld,” got out. “Did she climb / underground volcanoes, swim up / the whole ocean, dodge the sea beast and pull / herself fingernail by shoulder onto shore? Or was there a door?” This poem’s collection of lives in myth and moder-

nity make the irony clear: women have always been vulnerable to entrapment, or reduced to their body parts. Beyond the cruelty to women that has happened and is still happening, what is so striking about the poem is that the poet realizes her son, in his innocence, does not yet know some women will never find their door.

Wilkinson also channels female voices in “My Possible Pasts,” in which she imagines herself as women from other countries. In section one, she is a Roma girl:

*I am two steps away from the sleep that turns me gray.
Each nightfall, mother's lanterns
hang in a neat row: faery lights,
she says, trailing
to the end of the earth.*

In section two, the speaker is a Northern European woman:

*My unborn children lost,
my mother far away.
In the longest of summer days
I hear the fir tree seeding,
the reaching of each upright needle.
The planets sing their silence.
Earth is a coin
cast for luck.*

Reaching and reseeding like the fir trees, under the distant cosmos, or looking at her mother's lanterns, each of these women looks to mothers or nature for comfort, amidst lives that appear to be unsatisfying. These themes of mothering, the unborn, and birth are crucial and recur throughout the book.

Two poems reveal Wilkinson's own emotional state while pregnant. “Nesting Dolls” begins with Russian Matryoshka dolls that nest inside one another, and how “the biggest one carries all that weight / inside her it's a wonder / she doesn't fall over.” This is a humorous start to a poem while her baby is in utero, and the poet's protection of her family during a storm. She feels a “tap” from her unborn child, and hears another son whisper as he hears the train whistle, “Someone is calling your name.” As a mother, her nurturing is automatic, yet there is always that longing for self-definition.

In “My Son Says He Has an Owl Inside Him,” the poet is pregnant, and sees her

baby in utero as a vulnerable orchid slowly unfolding during an exam, and she wonders about her unborn child, asking, “What will he find when he comes?” and “[...] all day I wonder / if the world is enough.”

The last line in the book, “The owls inside us open their wide eyes,” suggests that she is also pregnant with a need for awareness, as an owl is aware, for the baby, and for her as his watchful mother. I am reminded of a line in Sylvia Plath’s poem “You’re,” that addresses her unborn baby: “Wrapped up in yourself like a spool, / Trawling your dark as owls do.” The inhuman owl-baby in both poems is depicted as very much alive and strong, yet there is a loneliness projected by each poet on life in the darkness of the womb.

Wilkinson’s love of domestic life is set against her own hunger, as in “Honey on the Bread, Bread on the Honey.” She delights in the natural while breastfeeding: “Flanked by his cries / I shift the T-shirt, everything in the way of the breast / that opens itself like a flower.” The poem’s wonderful tension comes as she sees herself rising like bread, like milk in her body, foods of this world associated with women and domestic tethering. She questions what happens to appetite, in religious myth, after one rises from the dead:

*I’m practiced in the art
of rising. Like my son, I’m hungry
for what I don’t have.
Jesus called death the sting
and we understand. After he raised the dead,
what would they eat
the body
and the spirit fresh with empty?*

.....

*In the end
of the mouth it’s the tongue
searching, the tongue
that finds what’s sweet.*

Wilkinson looks for how to live her life with kindness, a sweeping ethic, and her own continual search for manna in the language of poetry. I am taken by her honest depiction of women’s lives.

Arundhathi Subramaniam, a contemporary Indian poet, says in her description of good poetry:

Of course the poet has to be sensitive and alert to the world around her—its history, its politics, its ecology, its culture, you name it. But poetry is born when all that she has absorbed has been so deeply internalised that it is an utterance that arises from her marrow, her bloodstream. Poetry is verbal magma. That's why it's so explosive, so magical, so incredibly alive, and has to be handled with such care. It's language that's subtle and dangerous all at once.

This verbal magma is in Sunni Brown Wilkinson's poems; her readers will be both shaken and lifted by her luminous rendering of humanity and left with a hope for the spirit to have peace in some type of rebirth.

LECTURE WITH SLIDES

after Jon Anderson

Happiness is not important. See
how Bruegel's farmhand rams his head
into the wall? The blade he bears
castrated three bulls by noon.
They stared while a vulture pecked
their scrotums smeared in onion grass.
The proverb of tarts never found its way
into English. You know people are clumsy
when they have the same word
for pastries and flirts. Inside each suit
of armor you'll find two arms aching
to squeeze a cat. Its cage of course
is clean. We marvel at the jester
who sprays a deck of cards and shits
out his window on a globe. The world
was misshapen as a testicle
even in 1559. I sense this bores you.
Know the exam will be a lump
of clay. You'll have to mold the serf
who flees Holland on a dinghy
blowing his own sail. He's escaping
a country where one white goose
flies into a burning hovel. He'll drown
like a worm in blood. I'm talking about
the vulture. The village thoroughfare
clogs with swine disguised as nuns.
It is not important the archer shoots
the sky. Beyond his roof is forest.
He's bound to wound some trees.

BOMB THREATS

1998

After the first three, I dillydallied
and spun my locker open for a jacket
before rejoining the cattle drive
beyond diamonds to the clay-clod field
where the girls' field hockey team
sprained ankles. On game days
they sat at lunch taking turns
sketching trapezoids and sickle moons
of eye-black on each other's cheeks.
Crouching, I'd drift into the galaxy
of cleat divots their last game left
while copying another stoner's algebra.
The allure of sneaking off to spark
a joint wore off. Fire trucks arrived
without sirens. In thigh-high socks
the warriors we called girls ran plays
with imaginary sticks, their breaths
like smoke risen from yearbooks
a killer burns before he loads his gun.

PRESERVATION

After they buried the man, the villagers returned
for the crocodiles. They did not care which one
killed the man. Some were longer than the dead man;

some were small as children. They were housed in cement boxes,
slick green, squared water beneath, not mangrove swamps
or deltas, estuaries or river mouths. The villagers did not

care they were safe for now, did not care it was only one.
They brought ropes and tied serrated snouts of crocodiles
that, with a leap, could catch, swallow whole bats, leaping fish,

birds out of air. They dragged 300 bewildered beasts
from ponds into the open where the villagers wailed
the death of one of their own, lifted knives for every animal,

hammers, clubs, beat down the long heads, inscrutable eyes
hooded by scales that not one villager could see far enough
inside to make him hold back once since all knew the spark

they needed extinguished inside the heart of the one animal
before them, inside that brain that they intended to crush
until there was nothing more worth crushing, some groan

we cannot translate seeping from the roped mouths. The man,
they say, was picking grass when the crocodile attacked. Now hundreds
of crocodiles, each perfect in its skeleton, in the way the stomach

worked and tongue, that heart stilled in artisan chambers whose
electric pulse sent blood from nostril to tail, each animal its own
size, colored like agates and jade, every scale a worry stone, round,

one for every hand, now hundreds of crocodiles are dead, and we cannot
make one of them, make even one come back, a pile of limp weeds
shaped like crocodiles swimming in crocodiles stilled: one dead man

cannot say a thing about what he thinks about the body
and what was undone and the darkness he left behind, smoke,
rising from perfect bodies of crocodiles into the flame of sky.

VESPERS

Another blushed linen dusk
robins trilling the end of days
crows silent and scarce
for a change
the hymn of the passing train
long since died away
the air warm as breath
animate with clouds
of black flies
moth dust
and you're still
gone

THE FALL

The days are getting warmer
and greener, the air alive with bugs.
The teenager who flew down winter mountains
shrieks when a hornet lands on his arm's bare skin.

He was stung in the fall
while clambering on the roof cleaning
leaves out of gutters. Angry wasps dived at him—
Caterwaul of pain and panic—that's what he remembers.

But he nearly fell.
That I remember. Only some miracle
of luck and instinct prevented it. It's been days
since his friend fell

into a coma—friend of his
first kiss, friend who plays ukelele
and ultimate frisbee, gamine girl who loves tie
dye and flowered dresses and marching in Pride—

He asks every day
if there's news, writes her
a note *I'm worried about you, worried*
that you might die and I wonder if I should send that message,

think of the mother
who'll do the reading, the hospital
room festooned with prayer flags and sprigs
of bleeding hearts—

Scattered hornets buzz
and bump against the skylights,
their nest hidden deep in the chimney.
I sweep winged bodies from the floor when they fall.

TO PROVE THAT I AM NOT A ROBOT

I check off three mountains.

I check off three crosswalks painted gold.

I check off fourteen images of tsunami waves.

I check off all eleven federal holidays
in reverse calendar order.

I check off five glaciers that are receding,
in order of their diminishment.

I check off the habitat corridors
of the Australian alpine grasshopper,
the glossy black cockatoo,
the long-footed portoroo.

I check off twenty-five states
with new voting restrictions.

I check off the last known addresses
of six million unfixed lead service lines.

I check off fifty-seven pairs of socks
from children who have been
separated from their parents

to prove that I am a human.

LIKE HELL

Unbearable, the minutes or seconds
that seemed like hours
watching the man falling
from the South Tower. Imagined him
falling, myself falling, falling like a stone,
unbearably, giving himself up
in pinstriped abandon. Not hitting
the ground. Not that. But the over
and over and the never over.
And wanting to change the end
of the video, Walter Scott stopped
by a cop for a bad brake light, unarmed,
shot eight times in the back. I don't
want to watch but I keep replaying the loop
of his t-shirt, green as grass, the long
and leggy slope of him pitched forward,
and running, running like hell.

THAT GOLDEN GODDAMN LIGHT

Summer. David Berman died by his own hand, & that golden goddamn light was everywhere.

My life the margin of its own margin: footnote in charcoal or chalk.

And I no longer knew myrrh from uncombusted diesel.

And the asphalt was soft and stinking in the sun.

Beetles, purposeful pickers, saunter
the sidewalk edge, pushing into
leaf litter, dandelion seeds, foxtails.

This is about misunderstanding. Let sureness melt
between the floorboards. Discarded coffee cans rust across
a decade, dutifully hold hex bolts under worn-through roof.
Rattled by right notes sung at right pitch, but whose voice?

Into a lake of fire & what's terrible are the
memories, bright panes of lantern-glass
beveled & tongued clean until lit; etched with
alchemical symbols for Mercury, Salt, Sulfur

In darkness the sun is diminished. & what
do you remember of light? Anything
may be useful. May unravel.

Breath & the pain of skin pinched
kept in silence. No sudden movement
calls for casual gaze. The deer's eye is still,
freed from blinking by the breakage of time.

Grief: not the giving of it, but its collection
in clay amphorae containing seawater. No
one keeps track of what's put in brine.

MICHAEL MERCURIO

PREScribed BURNS AND OTHER METHODS OF UNdRESSING

We are mostly ash-cloaked and made
to pile. This is how I learn trees are built
to stand, how I stop shoveling. We are mostly the distance

from sky to field, mostly you teaching me tragedy
is never tragedy when you ash it well. Call me phoenix, call me
the first sprout in succession—don't tell me we'll burn

through. Call me your cataclysm and I'll teach you *falling*
is like this, as if we are built for accidents. Strip me down
to disaster instead.

HOW TO PREDICT WEATHER

with lyrics from "Indian Summer" by Beat Happening

And this is how to write each version
of you I've lost into the same
elegy: *boy playing possum*
as if he doesn't know he'll cloud and shower
her skin; girl wrapped in

plastic as if she doesn't know
she'd still *drink from his drain*. Girl closing
her eyes to his flashflood kiss and swallow
the petrichor. Girl writing the elegy,
a search for signs of rain.

UPON SEEING A BILLBOARD OFFERING
A \$1,500 DIVORCE

You have endured the stinging locusts.
You've endured harmonies and second cousins,
Gravity's Rainbow and the wet corners
bleached in the sun hoping for a jolt of epinephrine.
One can make confession without being wrong
and this is not speaking in tongues, this is not
V-2 rockets launching the space age,
this is barely even wartime. Even so,
you signed the rider—your days are all addenda.
Somewhere a detachment conspires against the union.
Maybe the cipher will be broken by a bunker
full of astronauts and abolitionists. Float
under my diary, you'll see what I mean.
Once when I was romantic I knew the code.
The translators all had their own opinions
and therapy was as much art as fiction
so every excuse won a plush toy.
This was what we made of space.
This is what we knew of marriage—
a bed on the ocean turning into an ocean.

GOODBYE, BOBBY MCGEE

After the divorce, who cares what I put on,
and shit, I've missed a spot, an oily smudge
of peanut butter on sweatpants with a hole
I didn't see until now. I never know how

to sit in public anymore. Too close
tells everyone I'm still a little drunk.
Too far, and people think I'm just insane.
A man with swollen hands asks me to move—

I've taken his seat. He dresses just like me,
except for his Sunday shoes. His eyes are red
as mine—red of loving whatever kills
us best, red of what have we done to ourselves,

red of quietly drowning. Every night I'm free,
there's always something left to lose.

THE PROSODY OF FUCK

In poetry you should never leave fuck
outside a framework, your fucks should
be placed in rows, a garden of fucks
if you will. To be harvested sparingly.
One can't throw a fuck pell-mell into
the wind because an ill-aimed fuck
shuts down any argument, leaves
the god-fearing belligerent.

Your poetry should flow, words over mossy
stones, never to be made jagged with sharp
consonance. Fuck can startle—break the warm
bubble of nostalgia. Poetry should be like in grade
school, when odes were to unknown waterfowl
and not fucking ducks, never ducks, twisted
and cut in half by a gun blast, but a flock
of lovely mallards just before they are turned
to bobbing water-stains.

Fuck makes any poem tattered and obscene
and one must never be fucking obscene
no matter what they do to you. If they call
you a moocher, well not you, but everyone
like you, you mustn't take it personal. You
they have vetted and found somewhat worthy.
Unless you complain, then all bets are off. You
should be taken out behind the barn and shot.
You know, murdered in a folksy fucking way.

You must never lose your fucking cool. When leaving
the library into the teeth of an ice storm, you must
keep your head down and mouth shut. But if you have to
look up and ask the bearded man smoking
a cigarette, sheltered behind a column,
ask politely, "Sir, do you know the time?" Note
how his beard reminds you of your favorite professor,
wonder if he's a grad student. And when he flips
his cigarette butt into you face, don't startle. Or when
he hisses, "If I were you, I'd eat a barrel!" Watch
how the butt spirals down to land on the seat of your
wheelchair, burning a small hole. Don't scream,
"Go fuck yourself!" but stare dumbstruck, collecting
snow as he walks away.

CENTAUR IN SUBURBIA

You can use duct tape. What's left after the smoke clears
resembles Greek sculpture. There are steps to chainsaw

maintenance as
there are to doing one's taxes. You wrap the tape around

the branches you want to remove. You might go far away
only to come back at night, ride the bright, bright wind.

The trees
are then ready, colonnades of people trying not to breathe

after 2 a.m. It's not so bad. Even in bed they are dampened
by the open windows. The next morning you oil

the cutting
chain. Birds sing. Dew's on the daisy. You fire that fucker up.

THE GOOD EARTH

after April Bernard

What does the cry of the veery have to
do with anything? The tablet is scored for

ease of
breakage. But I'm supposed to follow

label instructions. Thoughts and prayers,
thoughts and prayers. As if in a meeting a

CEO might
offer as a solution for his company's fiscal

problems that his employees go home for
the afternoon and pray about the problem.

In Chicago
they lit the railroad tracks on fire last night

because it got so cold. Friday it's supposed
to be 60. The cry of the veery means everything.

KLEK SHOP

Here in Sofia, where the great *Now What?*
of the '90s conscripted
downtown sidewalks into checkout counters,

klek shops peer out of basement windows, selling
cigarettes, coffee, vodka from old
cabbage cellars and fallout shelters. *The Bulgarian*

food pyramid, Lyuba laughs, kneeling on the concrete
to the sliding glass, as if praying
for a coke. Here in Sofia, klek shops were never

not against the law but law is too much word
for something no one bothers
to enforce, so every morning Sofia stands upright

on their scofflaw foundations, which have been here
since even before tobacco companies
from Virginia showed up to sell the things Americans

stopped buying and they'll be here all night, while
the ochre glow of soviet sodium
streetlights gilds us into knockoff icons, the ones

for sale down the street in Nevsky Cathedral. All night,
clerks pass Camels through the eye-
level window to us saints squatting outside, counting

each lev in our hands careful as palm readers. Here
in Sofia, getting into heaven
isn't against the law anymore, any more than getting

rich is, any more than getting both is. Still, here in Sofia,
the klek shops are dwindling.
Customers kill what laws never could. People complain,

of course, but not enough. Not enough to change things.
After so much time in a crouch
it gets harder. It gets harder to ask people to kneel.

A PANGRAM FOR THE POST-MODERN TYPEFACES

Because the schoolchildren
 who worshiped dinosaurs and gazed wide-eyed
 into that night sky

became quantum physicists,
 and spent whole lifetimes proving exactly how
 much we can't know,

the rest of this poem
 shrugged itself from the page and slid carefully
 into the flowerbeds,

leaving jettisoned
 black cocoons barely clinging to the white
 paper pulp.

I WANTED TO BE A NEW YORK LOVE POEM

To the woman getting off the train who offered to throw
away my browning banana peel. To these men posing

for photos with their cat on the beach. To Nancy screaming
at Coney's seagulls: *Today I am twenty-four and you don't care.*

To the seagulls who don't care staring religious into January
winds. To the strangers and strangers and strangers still

catching Jillian as she passes out on the 77th Street station stairs.
Or again on the Brooklyn Bridge. Again in that forever hallway

connecting the 7 to the G in Queens. To the woman having trouble
modulating her voice on the Staten Island Ferry when she sees

the backlit statue: *This is my America, Randall. I'm not going
back to Atlanta.* Even to the person whispering *I'm sorry*

I'm sorry I'm sorry so softly to the rest of us as he jerks himself
off in the corner of this subway car. To the grace of his embarrassed

turning away. To everyone. I wanted to be a love poem to everyone
but I couldn't. There was all this hardness. There were cops breaking

broomsticks in Abner Louima. They wanted us to forget. Hoped
we'd move away. Forget if Eric Garner sold loose cigarettes

or played center for the Nets. I spent the morning visiting a friend
in Rikers Island. Visited mostly its indifferent way of turning a day

into early evening with nothing to show for it but the waiting.
They broke his leg before they put him here. They already forgot.

They thought we'd be happy being love poems. We still might be
if we hold space for the way this love sharpens like a bottle

in a bar fight. I hold it firmly but gently like a cat on a beach.
The way you would a stranger falling back into you on the stairs.

None of us are going back, Randall. You hear me. None of us.

DEADHEAD THE RHODODENDRONS

says my brother absently rubbing
his carpenter hands, *always cold now*.
He'll die before the month is out.

For hours, I'm tending, touching
not my brother in the house asleep, not
my brother too busy dying to let me visit,

but scores of bushes, by the patio, the barn,
around every shingled corner of his old house.
I missed their lavender, fuchsia, white
when he was still up and about.

The bloom, this afternoon, sucked into brown splotches
huddled in the crotch of a branch. I stoop and stretch,
down to the ground, deep into the center.
No petals, only the sprong of filaments

empty as fingers that just let go.
Snap them at their source. What's left,
a cream-colored indent, round as a cervix.
Baby green lurks, new sepals.
How dare they sprout?

SELF PORTRAIT AS GUSTAVE COURBET

after The Desperate Man, 1843

Just outside the frame Courbet observes a child
unconscious in a cage along the border—
like a zoo animal badly neglected; he watches a man
left to bleed out on a St. Louis downtown street;
witnesses a woman at home killed by Seattle police.
Iridescent terror singed with a bent tuning fork
of truth is how the world enters him: he paints
with sable brush and silvered mirror. The forehead
lit from the inside like a postmodern mind on fire.
His skin, a color not found in nature—except
in the aftermath of gunshot wounds or off a smoked prism
from a chandelier. His eyes: two screams in a sky
of whipped egg whites—beyond open, beyond woke—
as if he's locked to the horizon of this decade and dare not look away.

IMMORTAL FOOL

Death has to admit it's impossible
to kill Fool—not unless the killer

rubs out all humanity, a task that makes
even him too tired to think about.

It's playing whack-a-mole: kill him
in Athens, and he surfaces in Dresden.

Bump him off there, and he's sighted
in East Chicago, South Philly, and all

points west. Even if Death could
get him to kill himself, he'd pop up

again, tripping over his feet,
stumbling off the nearest curb,

dropping another wrench into
decorum's fragile gearbox. Too bad

there's not some secret weapon,
thinks Death: a Fool-piercing .44

magnum, double load. "Blam,"
says Death, air-firing from the hip,

"blam! You're dead, Fool," he tells
his shadow, holstering a bony finger.

MY LIFE IN OZ

I paid so much attention
to that man behind the curtain,

his furrowed brow,
the inscrutable gaze,

that I missed altogether
the curtain itself—

its emerald silk,
those tiny, embroidered roses.

ELEMENTARY

At the end of the day, a young teacher stands
by the light switch waiting, while seven children
roam rows of their fellow classmates
trying to decide. The psychology is interesting.
How the prettiest oftentimes choose their opposite,
how ugly chooses quickly, and the shy
are always last to a decision, then touching one
most of all like them. To win, it's understood
you don't pick somebody that you know. Then
there's the girl or boy who always guesses right.
Do you accuse them of playing unfair, of peeking?
Do you label them like a jar to view, specimen
of cheat? Or keep the information for another time?
The seven have returned to the whiteboard standing
like a police lineup of little criminals. Beside
the open door, the teacher isn't paying attention,
occupied by sentences heard last night over margaritas
at a favorite restaurant after a favorite meal:
*I want three children, three, by the time I'm thirty,
and, if you do not, then I need a divorce.* The teacher
sees the shadowy children fidgeting at the board.
“Heads up,” the teacher says, flips on the lights
and watches as small, hidden faces begin to rise
like animals out of hibernation. Blinking, looking
around, hungry to find out who, if anyone, knows
the name of the stranger who has touched them.

RESCUE PORPOISES

patrol the coastline,
grey rubber bodies

bobbing boat-side—*just*
in case. On the pier,

I feel I'm the one
overboard, watch me

flounder: blush-red heels,
yellow pinstripe sun-

dress—promised May
I'd wear this, here, today.

I wasn't prepared
for her porous bone

chips, their rushing sea-
ward and silent slip

to waves. Or the way
she sticks to me, sand

between my fingers.
Always imagined

something cleaner like
the porpoises' break

for air, heads tilted
toward a lilac sky.

GUN SMOKE AND JACK-O-LANTERNS

The day Kennedy was shot, I was in art class
brushing oil from a palette of *Celestial Blue*
onto a canvas of unripe pumpkins. Jackie
in her pillbox hat, waved from the backseat
as the warehouse window opened
and a rifle barrel protruded. Years later I rode
the Dallas Red Line to the warehouse
museum. The tram clicked to the rhythm of Jack,
Jackie, Jack-be-quick, jack-o-lanterns,
a chant bringing to mind the butcher knife
I used to create hollow eyes, a jagged grin,
like that summer my sister dared me
to raid Peterson's field, and I poached
those golden spheres in the crease of night.

A shot rang out and we sprinted at a dead-run
back to the pickup, nervous leaps heaving
our bodies over the tailgate where we landed
on the hard corrugated flesh of orange
and more orange. Hank, my sister's boyfriend,
power-shifted into first, third, fourth
and sped down County Road K, laughter
trailing over potato fields while Mr. Peterson
re-cocked his rifle, took aim at the North Star.

Back in town I climbed the white pickets,
smashed the neighbor's candlelit grins,
climbed up backstairs that creaked
like tattletales. I pulled the maroon sheet
over my eyes and faked sleep.
My mother's flashlight fueled the hallway
with orange-red splinters, and I thought
of Jackie, her dress smeared with blood
as the agent used his own body as a shield.
I didn't go back to art class that week,
didn't paint anything blue or purple,
because those oily pigments lurk in the body,
surface through a wound, turn crimson.

FIRST-GENERATION COMING-OUT POEM

For four months, the moon was full, the
moon was waxing, the moon was waning.

I could hear seals outside my window,
but I still couldn't sleep. My feet went numb

from payphone liaisons in the cold. I didn't
cut anymore, but I still went through the

motions, crimped fingers against my sleeved
arm I wanted to empty my skin so that God

would take me back. Once I went to a climbing
gym with a boy who wanted to just be friends

as if I had another choice. I wore my heart
on my sleeve back then, a jagged crack in

advance of requited love. My sister lived
in another country. We didn't talk until she

came home and then we still didn't talk. Once
a boy called me devious while another boy

fell in love with me. I imagine he imagined the
side-to-side swing of my ponytail in rhythm

with his daydream stride. I broke off a piece of his
fragile heart when I stopped calling. I couldn't

be both things so I was neither. Once a girl didn't
mean it when she invited me to go surfing and

another girl broke off a piece of my heart when
she stopped calling. Driving away from home

at midnight I almost hit a bear, its fluid mass
inky against the blackness of the unlit road.

IN RED LOBSTER

my father talks
in covert tones
of the girl
he caught
watching
his office fish.
He found her
on her knees,
her eyes swimmy,
one fist clinched.
Where was
her mother,
he asked. She
swayed and
followed
a cichlid with her
finger. He saw
his small
water mill
on the carpet,
bubbles rising
from its broken
hoses. She
only nodded
and stood
and picked
coral rocks
off her shorts
and crushed
his three limp
guppies into
her pocket.
Then left,
he says, and
he did nothing.
Because
he says he knows;
he's felt that
kind of love
before
too.

HE HAS ARRIVED

She waits in the doorway
her fists like two stones
on her hips

while the garage
groans itself open
it's needed attention
for more than awhile

Her mouth draws down
a bow aimed skyward
ready to let fly
the latest volley
of outrageous complaints

but he's thinking about Hamlet
and that gravedigger again
wondering about Yorick
and how it might have felt
to be held like that
and praised

TO WIN AT TELEPHONE

Eventually I will witness a perfect crime and so,
not recognize it as my very own life.
I leave the house and smell barbeque,
find out later it was forest fire.
The TV keeps telling me to freeze my eggs
but not my anxieties, so I am uninterested.
These days the poems are more like
scions of misunderstandings. You said PLANET.
I heard LANTERN. And so it spins off from there.
My next move calling out to me in a game of telephone.
Whether or not to listen, to gather out on the cliffs
with my swarm of swine, wearing the hurried curls
of my grandmother. There's the rub.
You must be born with a taste for this kind of life.
Picking baby names off tombstones, laughing
only to bring on hysteria. Ordering cured meats,
grateful for the knowledge received
from eating something older than myself.
I doubt I will grow out of fancies such as these,
and thank god for my liminal self. The one who
panthers into the party wearing only satin panties,
telling everyone about the time I read in a big book
that women bruise easier than men because
unlike crates of peaches in the back of a truck
women are peaches in pudding in the back of a truck,
or something scientific like that.

THEY TELL ME IT WILL ARRIVE SOON

but at twenty-five I will not recognize it.
Apparently I have no choice in this because I will probably
be drunk, or taking a photo of myself, or because I will only
ever be so far away from the nearest exit

out of my own self-awareness, I might as well
find a nearby bench. Wait for the park to close.
Wait for the rent-a-cop to

“Ma’am, you can’t stay.”
Wait for the rent-a-cop to take me to said exit on his tiny
golf cart. This is the future these thrice my age tell me.
Not even a souvenir shop or always a souvenir shop.

Can I take any of it back? It wouldn’t matter.
Someone will always be hanging these swans by their necks.
Still, I would have liked to have said

“yes, oh yes”
to anyone listening. I would have liked to have bowed my head
at the unbelievably blue carousel, given my ticket
to the man in the pants, and taken

one more go around only this time unconcerned
enough to lean back into the spin. Smiling because
so much is going. Smiling because so much is coming.

SUGAR ASTROLOGY

BY SHARI ZOLLINGER
ILLUSTRATIONS BY HOLLI ZOLLINGER

HOROSCOPES FOR A BRAVE NEW WORLD

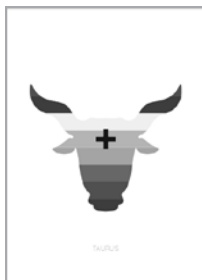


ARIES OR ARIES RISING: *March 21 to April 19*

“It was a pleasure to burn.”

—Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*

The Promethean focus on fire, even on stealing fire as a gift to humanity is, although mythic in its proportions, very much in your wheelhouse, Aries. Ever the fire starter, you exist at the beginning of things—where spark becomes motion. What do you want to ignite? Where would you like to express your color and passion? You feel fire’s ever-shifting intensity from full, fierce flame to quiet, dying ember. No matter the range, you were born to play with that heat—even bear it. Aries, you are creative in your intentions and strong in your convictions. You will the world to begin.



TAURUS OR TAURUS RISING: *April 20 to May 20*

“Bring it.”

—Naomi Alderman, *The Power*

Taurus, you offer the world gifts, made by hand, in exchange for your place in the world. Gratitude is currency. We know that you spend many hours thinking about the earth’s resources, survival, food, shelter, and the role of money and wealth. We know that you take the role of stewardship far more seriously than others. Thank you for making things with great care, engaging sensually with your surroundings, cultivating beauty for the sake of beauty, and building intimacy with the earth’s cycles. With a farm-to-table kind of thinking, you take great pleasure in procuring your daily bread and even greater satisfaction in breaking this bread with those you love.



GEMINI OR GEMINI RISING: *May 21 to June 20*

“You don’t tell a story only to yourself. There’s always someone else.”

—Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*

Above all, Gemini, we know that for you, it is connection that matters. Whether through story, conversation, or the written word, there is pure joy in the sinew of connectivity. Bright spirit that you are, where can you cast your words that will most matter? What does connection mean to you?

Listen to the words you tell yourself and others. You were meant for dialogue, not monologue, as you are a most curious being with many questions and many inquiries. It is in the middle of this volley with other humans that you find the sweet place—a kind and warm feeling of having listened and been listened to. Use your voice to create more connection rather than less, my friend. It is your clarion, your gift.



CANCER OR CANCER RISING: *June 21 to July 22*

“The first time, I was very much afraid. Then I was not. And never have been after.”

—Lidia Yuknavitch, *The Book of Joan*

Stereotypes for the Cancerian often center on homebound activities like cooking or fluffing nests. I have always been perplexed by this, even though our Cancers do love the feeling of safety a home provides. Yet, to be clear, Cancer my

love, you carry that home very much on your back, wherever you go. As we are in a time where being at home is necessary, I think about you balancing home life with your rich inner imagination and an internal desire to move about, hit the road, change the scenery. How can you move without moving far? How do you turn home life into an adventure? Have you planted a garden? Redecorated? Movement is the key to cabin fever, even if you don’t move too far from the cabin itself.

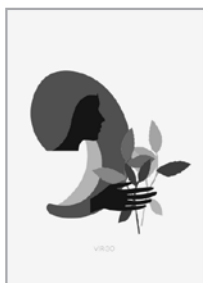


LEO OR LEO RISING: *July 23 to August 22*

“Nice socks.”

—Neal Shusterman, *Unwind*

What will you wear to the revolution, dear Leo? Is it such a trivial thought? In all seriousness I have been thinking about my Leos and their propensity to shine brightly and bear that brightness well. Often the first to emote in a given situation, you are the embodiment of the sun with its heat, warmth, and passion. The very real question for you is how you might make art or use your fierce creativity to enhance the world in a myriad of gorgeous and dynamic ways. We need art like we need food. Find ways to wrap your soulful ingenuity around the world. This will make us glad. You have the ability to open our hearts, make us smile, reanimate our eyes.



VIRGO OR VIRGO RISING: *August 23 to September 22*

“Face this world. Learn its ways, watch it, be careful of too hasty guesses at its meaning. In the end you will find clues to it all.”

—H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*

The Virgo mind is a beauty to behold. It is vast, organized with thought patterns that jump fully formed onto the page. Efficiency might be the goal, or perfection. How shall our Virgos find where they are most needed? This is a true question as the will toward humble service emerges as the path. With your well-oiled noggin and a keen interest in mechanisms, the world awaits your analysis. Please don't dally in the realm of self-criticism when you can use your skills to help the world function in a more efficient manner. You often know what to let go of and what to keep, the true editor of the Zodiac. Keep a cool head, find extraordinary comrades, and serve your community.



LIBRA OR LIBRA RISING: *September 23 to October 22*

“This is my soul and the world unwinding, this is my heart in the still winter air.”

—Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven*

We need our mediators, those we can rely on to help us relate to others and bring peace and love into any situation. See, lovely Libra, you have the gifts of symmetry, harmony, and relatability. You may do this work professionally or find

yourself helping close friends and family. Brush up on these skills as the world is in need of these in-between humans who can help us see more clearly. We will look for your transcendent light. We will be grateful when you give us a set of tools you've learned over time for how to move through difficult situations. You are attuned to the beauty of this world, and it is because you value this beauty that we will seek your help.



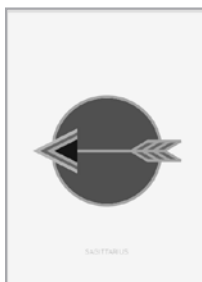
SCORPIO OR SCORPIO RISING: *October 23 to November 21*

“You have my whole heart. You always did.”

—Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

I think it's true that when you meet a Scorpio, you don't often forget the encounter. Like a tattoo there is something utterly indelible about the way they linger on the skin. Conversely,

I know my Scorpions never forget what the heart of another feels like, even when they have been away from that heart for years. Loving and relating is your adventure and risk in this lifetime, and yes, it will always be worth your time and effort. I challenge you to reveal more vulnerability, not less; extend your gifts with pure intent; know when to turn for home when you've stayed too long; and build bravery into all your connections. You crave the intimacy of a well-seen soul and heart. Give of your deep and intense gifts wisely.



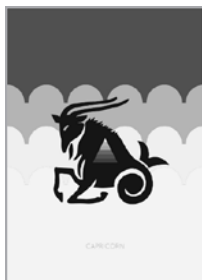
SAGITTARIUS OR SAGITTARIUS RISING: *November 22 to December 21*

“I don't judge, not even myself.”

— Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

There will be righteous indignation. There will be standing on the right side of a history. There will be the desire to find the truth, to enact faith. Dear Sagittarius, you are a firebrand, rabble-rouser, and systematic thinker. You may feel the call

to help the world find new ways of doing things or offer a whole array of solution-based ideas. You have the gift of looking well out beyond the horizon as you always take the long view. Do you have a tendency to judge harshly? I challenge you to build bridges with your stellar knowledge and to suspend judgment toward self and others on the adventurous path toward true connectivity.

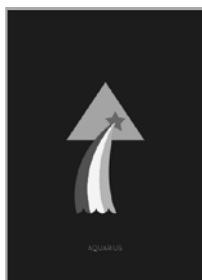


CAPRICORN OR CAPRICORN RISING: *December 22 to January 19*

“But that was what made things so exciting—nothing was ever how you expected it to be.”

—Jeanne DuPrau, *The City of Ember*

Given your propensity to build a thing one brick at a time, it is no wonder you feel the weight of the world, even the weight of the earth itself, sitting on your shoulders. There is no other in the Zodiac that bears weight better than you. It might be time to check your foundation for cracks, holes, fissures. Where do you feel you belong? I know you know what it feels like to be ungrounded, uprooted, out of bounds. I challenge you to find your soulful taproot and pull in the nutrients you need. Thank you for your keen interest in ecology and protecting the earth. Stand where you feel strongest up there amongst the trees. Don't be surprised when you change your mind about something or question an old belief.



AQUARIUS OR AQUARIUS RISING: *January 20 to February 18*

“All that you touch you change. All that you change changes you. The only lasting truth is change.”

—Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*

I've been thinking a lot about your sign, Aquarius. Mostly because of the words we associate with you, words like change, chaos, the collective, individuality, liberation, and innovation. It's true that you honor the path of the individual inside yourself, but out of all the Zodiac it is you who understands how to think about humanity as a whole, how to honor the collective. As the world advances technologically, keep up with these trends so that you know better how to connect with humanity on a large scale. In facing change and the unknown, keep that sparkle in your eye and teach us how to stay resilient. Bright weathervane, we look to you for help in times of uncertainty.



PISCES OR PISCES RISING: *February 19 to March 20*

“The wave that recedes will come back.”

—N. K. Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*

What sits on your bed stand, Pisces? Do you give yourself plenty of time to transition between dreamtime and daytime? It is in this toggle between the liminal and waking consciousness that you find your most essential groove. Images from subconscious waters dance through your eyes and you often wonder how to communicate or interpret such extraordinary visuals into words. You may find that some visions get lost in translation, yet others rally your chemistry as you pour out like the water onto the world. We look to you for radical compassion, fierce empathy, and untamed vision. Help us reanimate the world.

- Allison Adair, *The Clearing*, Milkweed Editions, 2020
- Dan Beachy-Quick, *Stone-Garland*, Milkweed Editions, 2020
- Gaylord Brewer, *Worship the Pig*, Red Hen Press, 2020
- Robert Campbell, *Monster Colloquia*, Hellbox Publications, 2020
- Adam Clay, *To Make Room for the Sea*, Milkweed Editions, 2020
- Kathryn Cowles, *Maps and Transcripts of the Ordinary World*, Milkweed Editions, 2020
- Sean Thomas Dougherty, *Not All Saints*, The Bitter Oleander Press, 2020
- H. L. Hix, *Demonstrategy*, Etruscan Press, 2019
- Patrick Johnson, *Gatekeeper*, Milkweed Editions, 2019
- David Lee, *Mine Tailings*, 5 Sisters Press, 2019
- Éireann Lorus, *The Century*, Milkweed Editions, 2020
- Brooke Matson, *In Accelerated Silence*, Milkweed Editions, 2020
- Rainie Oet, *inside ball lightning*, Southeast Missouri State University Press, 2020
- Dayna Patterson, *If Mother Braids a Waterfall*, Signature Books, 2020
- Dayna Patterson, *Titania in Yellow*, Porkbelly Press, 2019
- Michael Torres, *An Incomplete List of Names*, Beacon Press, 2020
- Claire Wahmanholm, *Redmouth*, Tinderbox Editions, 2019
- Angela Voras-Hills, *Louder Birds*, Pleiades Press, 2020
- John Sibley Williams, *As One Fire Consumes Another*, Orison Books, 2019
- Janet Sylvester, *And Not to Break*, Bordighera Press, 2020

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SCOTT BEAL'S first book, *Wait 'Til You Have Real Problems*, was published by Dzanc Books in 2014. His chapbook, *The Octopus*, won the Gertrude Press 2015 Poetry Chapbook Contest and was published in 2016. His poems have recently appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Rattle*, *Opossum*, *Diode*, *Pleiades*, and other journals, and have won awards including a Pushcart Prize. He teaches writing at the University of Michigan, serves as Dzanc writer-in-residence at Ann Arbor Open School, and cohosts the monthly Skazat! reading series in Ann Arbor.

ELLERY BECK has poems published or forthcoming in *Potomac Review*, *Arkana*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *Thin Air Magazine*, *The Broadkill Review*, *Prairie Margins*, and *The Susquehanna Review*. She was a winner of the 2019 AWP Portland Review flash contest. She is the interview editor for *The Shore Poetry*.

SHEILA BLACK is the author of four poetry collections, most recently *Iron, Ardent* (Educe Press, 2017). She is a coeditor of *Beauty Is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability* (Cinco Puntos Press, 2011). Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The Spectacle*, *The Nation*, *The New York Times*, and other places. She currently divides her time between San Antonio, TX and Washington, DC, where she works at AWP.

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Poet and photographer RONDA PISZK BROATCH is the author of *Lake of Fallen Constellations* (MoonPath Press, 2015). Ronda was a finalist for the Four Way Books Prize, and her poems have been nominated several times for the Pushcart Prize. Her publishing credits include *Blackbird*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Sycamore Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, Public Radio KUOW's *All Things Considered*, among others.

B.J. BUCKLEY is a Montana poet and writer. Her most recent horticultural experiments involve growing tomatoes and peppers upside down.

BAILEY COHEN is the author of *Self-Portraits as Yurico* (Glass Poetry Press, 2020). An undergraduate student at New York University, Bailey studies English literature and politics. His work has appeared in publications such as *Southern Indiana Review*, *Boulevard*, *PANK*, *Raleigh Review*, *Boiler Journal*, *Longleaf Review*, a part of *Poached Hare's* monthly special, and elsewhere. Bailey edits *Alegrarse*, an online publication of poetry and interviews, and serves as associate editor for *Frontier Poetry*. He can be found online across most social media platforms @BaileyC213.

KATHARINE COLES' latest collection of poems is *Wayward* (Red Hen Press, 2019); her collection of essays, *The Stranger I Become: Essays in Reckless Poetics*, will be out from Turtle Point Press in 2021.

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JULIE DANHO'S first full-length collection, *Those Who Keep Arriving*, won the 2018 Gerald Cable Book Award from Silverfish Review Press, and her chapbook, *Six Portraits*, received the 2013 Slapering Hol Press Chapbook Award. Her poems have appeared in *Pleiades*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Blackbird*, and *New Ohio Review*, among others. She has received fellowships from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts and the MacColl Johnson Fund.

CHELSEA DINGMAN'S first book, *Thaw*, was chosen by Allison Joseph to win the National Poetry Series (University of Georgia Press, 2017). Her second book, *Through a Small Ghost*, won the Georgia Poetry Prize and was published in February 2020. Her recent work can be found in *The Southern Review*, *The New England Review*, and *The Kenyon Review*, among others.

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WENDY DREXLER'S poetry collection, *Before There Was Before*, was published by Iris Press in 2017. Her poems have been, or will soon be in *The Atlanta Review*, *Barrow Street*, *J Journal*, *Nimrod*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Salamander*, *Mid-American Review*, *The Hudson Review*, *The Threepenny Review*, *The Worcester Review*, and *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, among others; featured on *Verse Daily* and WBUR's *Cognoscenti*; and in numerous anthologies. She's the poet in residence at New Mission High School in Hyde Park, MA, and a programming co-chair for the New England Poetry Club.

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KIM GARCIA is the author of *The Brighter House* (White Pine Press), *DRONE* (The Backwaters Press), *Madonna Magdalene* (Turning Point Books), and a chapbook, *Tales of the Sisters*. Her poems have appeared in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Crazyhorse*, and *Mississippi Review*. Newer poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *IMAGE*, *Tupelo Quarterly* (winner of the 2019 Broadside Prize), *New Ohio Review*, *The Summerset Review*, and *Colorado Review*. Garcia teaches creative writing at Boston College.

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CAROLINE GOODWIN'S poem in this issue is from a manuscript about the death of her husband in 2016 entitled *The Trades*. She is a former Wallace Stegner Fellow in poetry; she lives and teaches in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her books are *Trapline*, *Peregrine*, *The Paper Tree*, and *Custody of the Eyes*.

LAURA GROTHAUS is a Baltimore-based poet and visual artist. Her work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and garnered awards internationally, from Poetry in Pubs in Bath, England to the Nazim Hikmet Poetry Competition in Cary, NC. Galleries in New York and San Diego have shown her drawings, and she's partnered with musicians, activists, and visual artists on workshops and performance projects in Chicago, Cincinnati, and Baltimore. When she was five years old, she lit her hair on fire with her own birthday candles.

SHELBY HANDLER is a writer, organizer, and educator living on Duwamish territory/Seattle. A 2019 Richard Hugo House fellow, their recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Gigantic Sequins*, *Pacifica Literary Review*, *Homology Lit*, *3Elements Review*, and the Write Bloody anthology *We Will Be Shelter: Poems for Survival*. Follow them: @shelbeleh

JESSICA HINCAPIE is a writer and teacher raised in south Florida. She received her MFA in poetry from the University of Texas and is currently the program director at the Writing Barn, a workshop and retreat space in south Austin. She teaches creative writing to children, young adults, adults, and senior citizens with onset memory loss. She is the recipient of numerous poetry awards including winner of the Michael Adams Thesis Prize in Poetry judged by Camille Rankine, honorable mention for Gulf Coast's Poetry Prize 2017, finalist for Frontier Poetry's 2018 Industry Prize, and more. You can find her work in *The Indiana Review*, *Meridian*, *Ruminate Magazine*, *New Ohio Review*, and elsewhere.

MICHAEL HURLEY is from Pittsburgh. His work has appeared in or is forthcoming from *The Cincinnati Review*, *Sycamore Review*, *New Delta Review*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *Mid-American Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *North American Review*, *FIELD*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Blackbird*, *Washington Square Review*, and elsewhere. His chapbook, *Wooden Boys*, is available from Seven Kitchens Press.

CHRISTINE JONES is author of the full-length poetry book *Girl Without a Shirt* (Finishing Line Press, 2020). She's also the founder/editor-in-chief of *Poems2go*, an international public poetry project, and an associate editor of *Lily Poetry Review*. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals and online, including *SWWIM*, *32 Poems*, *Cagibi*, *Passager Books*, *Blue Mountain Review*, *Ruminate*, *Mom Egg Review*, *Literary Mama*, and *Salamander*. Her poems have also been broadcasted on WOMR's Poet's Corner, and WCAI's Poetry Sunday. She lives in Cape Cod, MA.

KATE KINGSTON has published two books of poetry, *History of Grey*, a runner-up in the Main Street Rag Award and *Shaking the Kaleidoscope*, a finalist in the Idaho Prize. She has also published three chapbooks and is the recipient of numerous awards including the W.D. Snodgrass Award for Poetic Endeavor and Excellence, the Ruth Stone Prize, and the Atlanta Review International Publication Prize. Kingston is currently working on a series of memoir poems titled "The Future Wears Camouflage."

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JOEL LONG'S book *Winged Insects* won the White Pine Press Poetry Prize. *Lessons in Disappearance* (2012) and *Knowing Time by Light* (2010) were published by Blaine Creek Press. His chapbooks, *Chopin's Preludes* and *Saffron Beneath Every Frost* were published by Elik Press. His poems and essays have appeared in *Gettysburg Review*, *Sports Literate*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Bellingham Review*, *Rhino*, *Bitter Oleander*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Terrain.org*, and *Water-Stone Review*, among others. He lives in Salt Lake City.

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When not hiding in the fifteenth century, and sometimes even then, JENNIFER A. MCGOWAN has published poetry and prose in many magazines and anthologies on both sides of the Atlantic, including *PANK* and *The Rialto*. Her latest collection, *With Paper for Feet*, a series of dramatic monologues and folk tales, is available from Arachne Press (UK).

OWEN MCLEOD'S poems have found homes in *Copper Nickel*, *Massachusetts Review*, *New England Review*, *Ploughshares*, *The Southern Review*, *The Sun*, and

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WILL REGER is the inaugural Poet Laureate for the city of Urbana, IL. He is a founding member of the CU (Champaign-Urbana) Poetry Group (cupoetry.com) and teaches at Illinois State University in Normal. His work appears in *Zingara Poetry Review*, *Passager Journal*, *Eclectica Magazine*, *The Blue Nib Literary Magazine*, *Broadkill Review*, *Cagibi*, and *Innesfree Poetry Journal*. His first chapbook is *Cruel with Eagles*.

Seattle poet SUSAN RICH is the author of four books of poetry, most recently, *Cloud Pharmacy* (Julie Suk Prize shortlist) and *The Alchemist's Kitchen* (Washington State Book Award finalist). She has been granted a Fulbright Fellowship, the PEN USA Award for Poetry, Times (of London) Literary Supplement Award, and an Artists Trust Fellowship. Rich's poems appear in *Harvard Review*, *Image Journal*, *New England Review*, and *World Literature Today*, among many other publications. She has two collections forthcoming: *A Gallery of Postcards and Maps: New and Selected Poems* (Salmon Press) and *Blue Atlas* (Red Hen Press).

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D.R. SHIPP, originally from Texas, is an observer finding his way. His work can be found in *JuxtaProse*, *Chaleur*, *Cleaver Magazine*, *HCE Review*, *Silver Needle Press*, and *Waxing & Waning*. He splits his time between now and then, traveling. He has a curious online following, Instagram @shippwreckage.

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ADAM TAVEL'S third poetry collection, *Catafalque*, won the 2017 Richard Wilbur Award (University of Evansville Press, 2018). He is also the author of *The Fawn Abyss* (Salmon Poetry, 2017) and *Plash & Levitation* (University of Alaska Press, 2015), winner of the Permafrost Book Prize in Poetry. His recent poems appear, or will soon appear, in *Verse Daily*, *The Georgia Review*, *Puerto del Sol*,

New Ohio Review, *Sixth Finch*, *Salamander*, *Potomac Review*, and *American Literary Review*, among others. You can find him online at AdamTavel.com.

ISAAC TIMM graduated from Utah State University in 2014; he holds bachelor's degrees in history and English creative writing. His poems have been published in *The Helicon West Anthology* (2016). He lives in Logan, UT with his wife, Aaron.

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HOLLI ZOLLINGER is a self-taught artist who has made a career of her talents: drawing, painting, and surface design. She is continually inspired by her surroundings living in the desert town of Moab, UT. She is highly motivated by the art of creativity and incorporates the color, texture, and pattern she sees in the world around her. Holli's work has been published and featured worldwide. HolliZollinger.com

A native of Utah, SHARI ZOLLINGER divides her time between her work as a professional astrologer and independent bookseller. She has been known to write a poetic verse or two with published work in *Sugar House Review* and *Redactions*. She recently published *Carrying Her Stone*, a collection of poems based on the work of Auguste Rodin.

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