

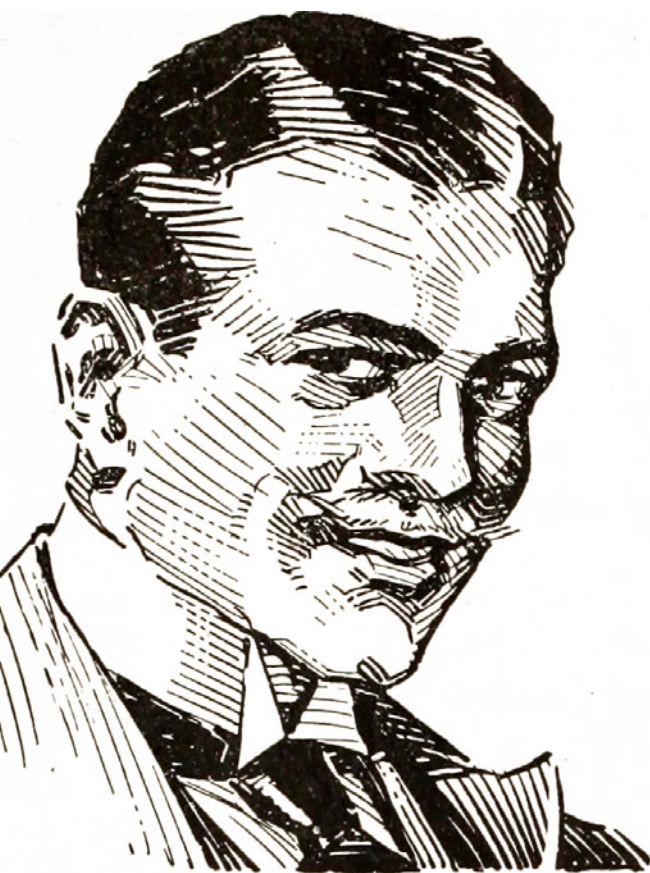


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SUGAR HOUSE REVIEW

POETRY



SUGAR HOUSE REVIEW

AN INDEPENDENT POETRY MAGAZINE

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DETONATE

There were always things to tell you.

The way it would be if we buttoned
any particular button. How I would
spend the year holding back a sneeze.
How the orange puckered
in the drawer, a shriveled bomb.

We wanted everything:
bodies gabled or bent over with joy.

It was easy to forget the wires
geometried through the house.
The dark powder along the baseboards.
I looked ahead and
saw only

you: a bright suture in a lined palm.

THOSE DAYS & THESE & ALL THE OTHERS

Primedia put the TV in the classroom
so I, per my contract, would tune in
for *Channel One*, a twelve-minute newscast

Trojan Horsing spots for zit cream
and deodorant. This was the year
you could fling the break room small talk wide

and still it would wrap like a tetherball
back to war. All fall, halftimes, the patriotic
brass notes *umfed* off the gridiron

to swagger into town. And that morning
when the anchor said *Fallujah*,
and Tony said *my dad's there*,

my homeroom couldn't get over it:
the Fallujah, the one on TV, and they all
leaned in to what the journalist was saying

about *Operation Phantom Fury*
and the dead. Ten years on, I understand
that this was what the manual termed

a *Teachable Moment*, by which it meant
that I was on my own
as everyone looked to me, and to Tony,

and back to me, at the front of the room,
for what I would have to say.

DINNER AT NONNA'S

Her sons won't translate at the table
so my Nonna says *I love you*, has to use it

for everything—a heaping bowl of ragù,
a smudged glass of wine & Sprite on ice.

She'll use it to request her favorite
satin scarf, her eggplant lipstick kissed down

to its nub. She'll use it to show me
what's still good, what's gone bad,

how to shoo flies with a hiss & twitch,
our fingers purple from digging

to the armored hearts of artichokes
she'll soften in oil. & always,

she'll use it to keep me longer
when I have to go, to give me things

she thinks I'll use—this time, her shoes
decades old without a scuff or crease, except

the rubber on the heel-tips is gone, the tiny nails
exposed & worn down. My father mutters

something about repair as we wave from the car
& *I love you* is *Thank you* & *Goodbye*.

BARRED FALCON

Trees glow after rain.
As if cued the falcon
arrives suddenly above me,

folds fan of gray wing.
As if, expecting answers.
It is not yet 9:00 a.m.

I've hardly had time to
draw curtains, sweep the floor,
or consider what shape

to assign the morning's pain.
The bird turns implacable
head, fluffs itself with a shiver,

cleans black tip of
short, down-turned beak
with a talon, in no hurry.

Giving me time to consider.
Tentatively, I study
magnified chest feathers

in the breeze, unwavering
yellow eye. At last, failed
and patience spent, it

leans forward and opens silently
into the sky. What can I do,
with my blurry vision,

my foolish slippers slickly
clomping over the grass,
but hurry after this inquisitor

who has arrested my day
and found me wanting?
As if to cry, *Wait! Or,*

Dark One, give me another chance.

OVERNIGHT AT MANUEL ANTONIO

1.

There is a price to pay
for a beach paradise,
not merely cramped hours
on bus or the cost
of entry. The price
of everything
outside the boundary,
every huckster and
very special deal, amigo.
Price of sleep, of security.
But as 12 years ago,
floating naked at 7:10 a.m.,
sharing sky only
with brown pelicans
and sand with hermit crabs,
warmth swaying
and holding me, I can
afford this and more.

2.

There is a price to pay
for a balcony seat
over orchestra of sea.
In wallet, tired legs.
I've it all to myself—
except a family of parrots;
one pair of aracaris
perched, considering;
a single shy agouti
sniffing out a snack of fruit.
Flamed horizon,
coast, cloud, sun
demand full attention.
For brief, infinite hour
I breathe each moment
without want or
complaint, until the world's
edge is dark again.

WHERE THE HOPE OF YESTERDAY?

Now, rough fists
of wind can't bruise
enough victims.

This is that day when,
if you know
what's good for you,

you pull drapes,
kill the lights,
deadbolt the door.

When sirens won't stop.
When solace of warm bath,
book of escape,

mug of mom's soup
are laughable
misjudgments.

Don't watch the news.
Don't answer the phone.
Unplug the clock.

When that trouble
that's tailed you all year,
with its scorpion tat

and scar across
the cheek,
waiting with friends

just around
the corner,
can't wait to say hello.

AMAZON REVIEWS OF A BOOK SHE ALWAYS
READ TO US: FOUND LINES

*I believe that this book contributed
to my early anxiety about death.*

*

*The book starts out sweet,
but becomes very odd
as the characters age.*

*

Is this author insane?

*

*The images
more so than the words
imply some sort of unhealthy
parent-child relationship.*

*

*My 3rd grade teacher read this to me on the first day of 3rd grade.
I hated 3rd grade.*

*

*In short,
it is a \$20,000 therapy bill waiting to happen.*

*

*I love my mother very much,
but at no point do I want her to believe (even metaphorically)
that she should climb into my window
in order to show me how much she loves me.*

*

*This one is disturbing because it suggests
that there is an obligation for the child
to take care of his mother when she gets older,
that the unconditional love should be for the mother,
regardless of how the child has been treated in real life.*

✱

*Considering the author is a man,
I worry for his mother to son relationship growing up.
It's amazing what one can think is normal
if it's all they ever knew.*

✱

*Just read all the other 1-star reviews.
I second all of them.*

IN BATHROOM SINK W CHRISTOPHER WALKEN

Listen it's not like you have to
live your life based on what I said
at the salad bar.

Because when I said go to space
what I meant was

put a Matlock suit on, a helmet
have a moonwalking agenda
then just knock on the door of the NASA
and you asked for it. The alarms
were flailing and rad, were they?
Go stand in the corner.

And kid, one more thing. Add olives.
Lots and lots of what you don't wanna.

IN BATHROOM SINK W MILES DAVIS

But no! no! no! someone got
scribbled on receipts we kept
unrolling them those lace
like a trance. I miss him (when)
like this my eyelash gets batted
at a grocery list: a present
once visited a space jammed in
where we runned away from
for oh some minutes.

IN BATHROOM SINK W FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

You gotta be enough. What w your
black eye and your white luck
ain't nothing. Like sequins.
Are you crying again? because
you got lost just hanging your fat lip
over the horizon's rim muttering
Oh how yellow. You are not
the missing cufflink and this planet
ain't no more. Got sucker punched
when dress shirt's pearl button popped off
to Locket Land. SHUTUP! SHUTUP!
SHUTUP! You don't sound right (like jazz).
What is that an opal strung around
your head like a wedding?

KIDD'S ARS POETICA

The only thing Kidd knows about poetry is the same thing he knows about joke telling. Consider the particular: the foolish young man, probably of a distasteful ethnicity, or economic status, rubs his new wife's belly tenderly and says, "I love you," to which she responds "Lower;" he continues to rub her belly and says, "I love you," only this time in a deep voice. They were, Kidd's been told, on their honeymoon. Timing, that is, is key.

The only thing he knows moo about joke telling is the same thing he knows about diplomacy. Moo. At the private school where Kidd tutored, a kindergarten boy named Abdullah was Arab, he told Kidd, moo; then he told Kidd his father was in Las Vegas this week-moo-end buying machine guns; then, "Knock knock," the boy asked, "Who's there?" Kidd responded. "Interrupting cow." "Inter-," "moo," says the beautiful boy, cheeks as chubby as Kidd's own at that age, eyes as enduring as the sun: *we're a simple species, it seems, who wants to be complicated.*

The only thing he knows about diplomacy is everything he knows about the world. Everything he knows about the world could fit in a medium-sized packing box and get stowed beneath the disused fishing pools and mismatched nuts and bolts in a small white tool shed beside a small white house a hundred yards from the Allegheny River. Namely this: a scarred yellow hardhat, still covered in scale; an eleventh grade *MacBeth* paper, arguing MacBeth was a light switch, rather than a hand; a palm-sized piece of concrete pried from Three Rivers Stadium; a panda bear wearing thirty-year old, little-boy-size-six Fruit of the Looms, named Pandey, of course; a thermometer that never measured temperature shaped like the Washington Monument; other trinkets and loose-leaved dreams that shock him in how little they recall his self today.

The only thing he knows about the world is the same thing he knows about America.
The only thing he knows about America is the same thing he knows about good health.
The only thing he knows about good health is the same thing he knows about laundry.
The only thing he knows about laundry is the only thing he knows about being human:
that we must choose between scents and sizes, chemicals and spices, medium large
small and extra. That we must separate and distinguish or prepare ourselves for ridicule
as if a beige shirt gone pink could get us hanged. That we must continue the cycle,
because we don't know what might happen if we pull our finger from the dyke
but we don't know what will happen if we pull our finger from the dyke. That the buzzer
means we're done, and that is half dreadful, half liberating. That the lint trap
is no joke. That it takes a week's pay to remove two bolts and a sock from the vent pipe,
but it's almost worth it to meet a guy who used to play saxophone for B.B. King's
daughter, or to learn that we'll believe anything that might convince us
it's almost worth it to spend a week's pay etcetera. To recap: the only thing he knows
is that life is complicated and poetry is simple. Or that life is a systolic motion
and poetry is a designed thunderclap sparked by a hungover God, praying for attention.

JACKSON CONNOR

HOW TO DO THINGS WITH RATS

The day Tessa's favorite rat died, she cried like a six-year-old widow—sky turned to blood, ashes drifting through the tall hours like snow. It didn't help that January held us hostage or that I was forced to stash poor ratty in the freezer, waiting for the world to thaw. Six hours later, I was still trying to distract my daughter. Okay, I said, everyone kneel. Oldest to youngest was the rule, which put me by the light switch, Tessa next to the window, her two bored siblings between. Arms out, I said, and I placed Shasta on the back of my hand. Shasta: surviving sister rat, slow and mostly blind, endured more than beloved. Still she could walk a straight line. We must have looked like scarecrows touching arms, or rogue addition signs (+ + + +) hoping to convert a story problem in combine and carry into a rat trick. Finally, Shasta started down my arm, more snail than rodent, towards my elbow. Pink eyed and albino, she made a manifesto of unhurry, stopping to lick my ear then sniff the tinctures of grief flavoring the wrist. But she managed the transitions seamlessly from one outstretched arm to the next. What fat balance, what wobbly interrogations. We were ragtag and ridiculous, the four of us kneeling, like one of those Andean foot bridges on PBS, woven in one day of grass and llama spit and creation myths, with just enough old men chewing coca leaves for wisdom to stain our chins. Finally, Shasta arrived, stepping from palm to sill and stretching against the glassy dark. Not journey exactly, though we counted steps, not escape or fire, though our bare arms burned. And still we touched, forgetting to drop hands and slide back into our mortgaged bodies.

YOUR GENTLE GHOST

can sit quietly on a weed stalk or fencepost and then, curving air
bend wings down
to rise obliquely at a similar angle
and perch again.

Soft across lawns, drenched by sprinklers,
to observe cock-eyed the hoopla
and formula of dim flirting in buildings
where there is not enough basic sky
or real dancing.

All superhero, sees whatever
it is we can't touch but want to,
is not cut off from heaven like the piss ant of yesteryear,
swine behind the pearl. With its parched
beak, taps out a 2/4 on the closed door
and serves a field of rapture.

Your gentle ghost comes up lumping,
all vehicle, mind, and body uncoiling
light births in the biological night.
A dumb pollination of stars and love's loose body uncoils
a wide and loamy heart.

Morning falls down on the houses, stirs our bread
for dying. Rocks speak, bugs lift up
their roar, an automatic opera, a rock opera
for and about red geraniums in red bowls,
for and about a little spoon in a small kitchen.

CASSIDY IN THE FUTURE

I was going to be beheaded because *fill in the blank*.

Doctors said it was Isadora Duncan Syndrome.

In the future, music and fine textiles would be my only two husbands.

I would live inside a stereopticon of intimately positioned shadows
and the repeating image of one eye twitching.

Life without a head would be pretty much ok, said the internet.

Anything this gradual is not difficult. I wouldn't even know

I was deaf and blind due to "lack of brain." I'd be all heart
with questing hands and a hunger I could never feed.

It didn't sound like much of a change, actually.

DELIVERY

When I was born I thanked the cord and
the woman most interested in me. I'm still
unsettled, a self-cleaning acreage, mostly.
I thought we were going to do this together.
It's not surprising how similar every life is.
You would have despised me for all the
little things. The big things are so much easier
to forgive and you could have congratulated
yourself on being so forgiving. I don't feel bad
about using staples to try and keep us together.
More than half of all that's destroyed comes in
the saving. Like running from a bee and getting
killed by a delivery truck. I think we both might
agree in the sadness of that story.

TEE SHIRT WEATHER

When the big man spoke to me I was scared
but what he said was *you hungry brother*
and I said *yes real hungry* and he said
how about a slice of pie

and then I was in the heat of summer like it was
when I was a boy—a kind of unbroken heat,
feeling the grass turn brown under my feet,
feeling the stick of the air on my skin,
the way the old pond fell little by little
and every day we found a new can
in the mud, a new tire, a new license plate
and each one was a treasure, like the end
of a bottle worn smooth by water coming
over and over it—I held it to the sun and it put
a few rainbows on my feet and made me think
of rain, and from then on if I looked up I looked
through the thick broken glass and I thought
each time I did it might be the last thing I ever saw

and maybe it was. Then the man was handing
me food and I said before he left *is it tee shirt weather*
and he said *no not today but soon*
even though it was only December
and I think he must have felt it too
for just a second: the summer, the heat.

WHAT I KNOW OF KILLING

What there is to be heard—
usually in rattles, gasps, rasps
or of a body in slowing motion
on whatever ground there is;

for me usually the tall, dead grass
and brown leaves and snow and each
having held one sound in particular
for just this moment, a sudden harsh rustle,
and then quite a lot of nothing—

is heard all at once and sticks with you
imperfectly, in such a way as you might
question if you had heard it at all,
was that a gurgle you might say
or had I stepped in mud or breathed
once from a deep place and forgotten,

or played the sound over again until
it had become something else,
the way the sound of children playing
becomes geese flying overhead, or
the passing of cars might become
the low murmur of conversation

in the next room. Nothing ever
forgives you for killing it, not even
things in great pain, as when I came
upon the deer which had lived more
than a day with a bullet in its belly
and without front legs, I saw only
fear and felt only pity, but a hard pity

of resignation, of knowledge and action
and I had to forgive myself for not
finding it sooner, or finding the man
who had done this to force a reckoning.
The deer did not thank me. In the last
seconds it tried to pull itself from the bloodied
pine needle floor and hump away.

JUNE – AUGUST

six red chairs around a black fire pit
four young girls sweat pearls back to sand
the wave pulls back like an archer's bow

THE *WHAT FOR*

Stingrays bat-fly from the ocean
flapping themselves back to blue,

 this is all on the television.
 I watch and vacuum—
 no crumbs or Mom
 will give me the *what for*.

She is mixing cement in the garage,
the aluminum smell crinkles
through the vents into the house.

I know the cement is for more than
just fixing the mailbox—it will stop
the arms of the boy who charts great,
yellow maps on our shoveled snowbanks.
That same boy who rides pirate-like
down starless roads, oars extended
to make jetsam of our mailbox.

 I watch the rays fly
 in silent, acrobatic motion.
 The brushbar
 sweeps up the morsels
 our dog couldn't lick
 from the carpet.

 I'm going to give him the *what for*,
 she'd said, in the sawdust halls
 of the hardware store,
 miming a swing-stopped arm gone limp,
 broken, showing exactly what she meant.
 My sisters and I never really understood
 what the *what for* was. We just knew we didn't want it.

I know my mother is finished when I only smell
the hot rotation of hair around the vacuum motor.

The last I see of the rays are their tails,
defensive, barbed,
disappearing
into the water.

[GNATS WHIRL A CARNIVAL OF AIR...]

Gnats whirl a carnival of air,
then sweatstick to paper.

I remember hearing,
 when the tape is full,
 it's ready. It's done.

My aunts can jam upstairs
from wet strawberries.

The pressure covers the jars
like brass on a full-fisted man.

He is ready.
The fruit is done.

This man halves melons
with his thumbs, wipes

knives on jeans, restones
the retaining wall.

Inside, the labels read *sugar fruit*,
the cans line the winter shelves.

I take the paper down
in strips as flat chainlink,

one wing beats out,
it is not ready,
but it is done.

ON RURAL MARRIAGE

On my parents' anniversary, my mother circled
the glass cases of the gun counter at Walmart,
asked which bullets flew the fastest
from the barrel, which would shatter
bone. She selected a box of shotgun shells
and a gun-cleaning kit, and she wrapped them up
with a card that said, "I still love you." She lay
half-awake that night, wondering when he would join her,
fill the empty half of the bed, now as cold
as a steel muzzle before a shot. She turned,
and through the cracked bedroom door she saw him
in the dimly lit kitchen, slowly polishing the stock.

HULK SMASH

because it was afternoon
and I was at the carnation farm
when the earthquake struck

because by the time I arrived
back home to help my family
traffic jams had clogged shut
the main arterial roads leading
inland from Futaba-machi

because when the tsunami
breached the sea wall,
and concrete disintegrated like
strewn chunks of soggy plywood,
we had to leave our car
and flee for higher ground

because the elevated hill
marked as the evacuation point
for an elementary school
seemed like it should be safe,
until the tsunami rose like
a thundering wall of water
and blotted out the sky

because there wasn't time
for us to climb all the way
up the hill, so I held my wife
and daughter in my arms,
and we clung together tightly
wrapped around a tree

because the icy water
uprooted the tree so easily,
like plucking up a blade
of grass, and tore my wife
Mayumi away from me

because I could see Natsu
was crying for her mother,
though I couldn't hear her
above the roar of the water,
and I was scared I'd hurt her
from holding on so tight

because when I regained
consciousness again with
a concussion and a broken leg
after having blacked out,
my arms were empty

because she was only three

because I was taken against
my will to a hospital in Iitate,
where I was promised that
rescue workers would search
the coast for any survivors
and bring them to safety

because the meltdowns
and hydrogen explosions
at Fukushima Daiichi began
the next day and everyone
within a 20-kilometer radius
was evacuated, so that
no one was able to look for
my wife or my daughter

because the nuclear accident
at Fukushima Daiichi was,
as it turns out, preventable

because what if my wife
and daughter were injured,
but still alive, and what if
someone had only searched
for them during those early
days after the tsunami?

because it was over a month
before I was allowed back
into the exclusion zone,
where I found Mayumi's
body in a nearby rice field

because my wife's remains
were so terribly decomposed
after having been left out
to weather the elements, insects,
birds, and vermin, she was
no longer recognizable,
and the Buddhist burial rites
could not be followed
before her body was burned

because over four years
have passed with my life still
in limbo, unable to return
to what's left of my home,
to my work breeding carnations,
unable to lay Mayumi's ashes
to rest on ancestral grounds

because my daughter Natsu
is still missing, even though
I search for her every month
in the five-hour increments
allowed by radiation guidelines

because I am by nature
a quiet and scientific man,
a botanist by trade, but
I work so ferociously at
clearing debris and digging
along the shoreline in search
of my daughter's remains—
tearing off my hazmat gear
when it gets in the way,
or when it becomes too hot—

that volunteer search teams
have nicknamed me The Hulk

because so what, I no longer
care about being exposed
to radiation, and maybe
it'll make me stronger anyway,
like the weird profusion
of too-bright and hardy flowers
blooming in the irradiated wake
of Hiroshima and Nagasaki . . .
maybe even strong enough
to hold on to what matters

because plans are underway
to build a containment facility
in Futaba City for the bags
upon bags of contaminated topsoil
and radioactive debris gathered
by the cleanup workers that
no one knows what to do with

because if this happens
Futaba will become just
a permanent trash site
for nuclear waste, a toxic
garbage dump, where
my daughter's remains
will be abandoned forever

because how can I let this be?

because my arms are empty

because she was only three
because now, every month

when I spend my five hours
searching the no go zone,
and I see one of the many
rusted TEPCO signs reading
*Nuclear Power: Bright Future
of Energy*, I feel such a huge
surge of adrenaline and rage,
that I have to tear it down

HISAKO'S TESTIMONY (AS X-MEN'S ARMOR)

evacuees go home!
reads the graffiti in Iwaki,
but there's still no home
to go to in the no go zone

it's not like I ever asked
to come here and live
in this drafty prefab box
of corrugated metal
with my silent old granny

they call it temporary
but it's been two years

they call it housing
but it seems like a camp

both my parents died
in the tsunami, and granny
hasn't been the same
since we were evacuated

she lets me run wild
as the mangy starving cats,
as the feral rapeseed
and knotweed that weave
through the debris where
our house used to stand
on our property in Namie

I quit going to school

I dyed my hair bright blue
like a Harajuku girl
and got a secret tattoo
of the rabbit in the moon

my parents used to tell me
only second-class citizens
and gangsters had tattoos,
but everything's different now
and what can they say to me?

I think I wouldn't mind being
a moon rabbit gangster

or maybe a mutant superhero
like in the X-men anime

my favorite X-man is Armor
(a.k.a. Hisako Ichiki) because
(1) we are both named Hisako,
and (2) we are both fourteen

sometimes at night I used to
take a bus down to Iwaki's
entertainment district to see
the pretty bar hostesses
plying red-faced *sararimen*
amid the glittering arcades,
soba stalls, and pachinko parlors

there'd been rumors that
the transient population
of TEPCO cleanup workers
were turning Iwaki into
a rough and tumble man camp

at first, I thought this meant
there'd be more loud, gruff men
with unshaven faces than usual

but what surprised me most
was how young they were

some looked like country boys
starved for any work, away
from home for the first time

there were stories of thefts
and drunken street fights,
of people getting beaten
in dark alleyways at night

but I was a gangster moon rabbit!

faster than the tsunami

faster than any trouble I could find

he called to me from across
the street in a Kyushu dialect:
little blue-haired girl, he said,
can you show me the way
to the train station?

I hesitated, and he called out
to me again: *yes, I mean you,*
little blue-haired girl

something about the held-back
laughter in his voice almost
made me think of my father,
but up close I saw the flatness
in his eyes, smelled the stench
of whiskey and sweat, realizing
I'd made a terrible mistake

now I know why the feral cats
by the prefabs that I always try
to coax close enough to pet
run away from me instead

he punched me so hard
it set off a fizzle of sparks,
like a cascade of shaken
ginger ale behind my eyes
he dragged me into an alley
where he bound my wrists
with twine, stuffed a grubby
bandana into my mouth

in the X-men anime, after
Armor's been kidnapped
by the U-men, who try to steal
her organs, the X-men come
to Japan and rescue her

he raped and beat me behind
a dumpster, then showed me
his knife, said if I told anyone
he would find me and kill me

then he slit the twine
and ran away, and though
I was bruised and bleeding,
when I went to the police
to report it, the officer said
I shouldn't have been out
by myself so late at night

then he told me to go home

I don't know what granny
thought when she woke up
and came into the bathroom,
where I was trying to cry
as silently as possible, or if—
when she saw my black eyes,
my split lip, my torn clothes—
she believed the clumsy lie
I told her about falling down
the train station stairs

but she pried open my fingers,
quietly took the washrag away
and wrung it out in the basin
of cold water, then gently
dabbed my swollen face clean,
clucking her tongue each time
I winced from the sting

I wanted to tell her everything,
but felt too much shame

she's been so empty, vague,
and sad, how could I possibly
bear to upset her in this way?

I worry about granny so much,
because there've been suicides
among the elderly evacuees

sometimes the men hang
themselves, and sometimes
the women just stop eating

I always try to buy granny
sacks of oranges because
I know they're her favorite,
and I make sure to get
the safe-to-eat kind
from Hiroshima, even though
they're more expensive

oftentimes, I find she's lit
incense, and set the fruit out
on the altar that's centered
with my parents' pictures

Armor's superpower is a red,
impenetrable psionic exoskeleton

It gives her superhuman strength
and makes her invulnerable

even the Muramasa blade
can't penetrate her armor

and if she feels fragile or upset,
her armor can expand to the size
of a giant space alien lizard

bigger than a city building . . .

bigger than the tsunami, even . . .

because her armor's smelted
from her ancestors' ghosts

because it's forged in memory

DAUGHTER

I am holding my hardened daughter at the campfire,
at dawn. The first to pass.

Her father a hornet bumping against a window.
My speech, practiced then scattered to the bank.

I am bending now, watching my father at the pond—
a spoon bent over a bowl.

Now a clothesline spinning.
A mouse begging.

I sit by the fire. My father stands,
and a shovel.

I am prostrate. Roadside
the fields wave, flat, endless.

I am waving, also. My hat on the horizon
as it leaves.

She is now a soft mudbank,
little pebble.

We move along,
another powerline,
another bridge.

ONCE OVER, LAS VEGAS

Nobody looked back at the terminal where planes
had left and were rumored
to leave again, like that airstrip
was the final road for us
too, by a bad hand or a loaded
deck or even the congenital malformation
of the good sense to avoid cities of air
pollution and bad decisions. Your grandfather,
somebody once said to me, built
machines to dispense beverages
to dehydrated travelers who could not
take the measure of conversation, who needed
nicotine more than the strange
hand offering them a light or even a song
for a sad place, or the sadness
in it, or the ending of something that once
over, is again regarded, top
to bottom, a glance to take in
like drowning and then said of
that it wasn't so quick or anyway
not so long, that life, to begin with.

DYNAMITE

What dry things would burn
in the far desert, we wondered
from the edges of the gathering
road that collected plastic
bags and the crushed
bodies of day flying
moths? From the long
trip coming through the basin
to the edge of the unincorporated
line, I knew somewhere there was a body
of water, alkaline or arsenic
laden from the upcountry
mine, thick with the wavy smell
of salt and the scent of slipping
under and known only
now by tiger beetles and tinder
dry ceanothus that in still air waits
for lightning, as if water still
would not smother fire, as if fire
could never start again.

VESSEL

Blood drowns the pupil, then swallows
the white—roses blooming from the dark

heart of a top hat. You're told it will
resorb into the mucus membrane, which

you prod gingerly, veins skirting your gaze.
Remember how your father opened *Gray's*

Anatomy on your lap after a scraped knee,
traced the circuit pounding from core

back to core, and pity this lone smudge,
marooned far from port, a clue that below

our blubbery surface, we pulse with gore.
You grow fond of it, wish you could

bear it as envoy of the grave's stagger,
for mouths to gasp open with concern,

hands lift to ward it away, as if you'd already
begun to rot, which, of course, you have.

NOTHING HAPPENED

One afternoon you batter geodes
open under the swing set, the next
stare at mud-splashed saddle shoes

as you scramble out of the woods.
After shapes *before*, carves the meat
off an hour, severs muscle from bone.

It's not the daily churn that compresses
ribs, shapes us like the vessel raised
from a clump of clay. No, it's the sort

that shatters the glacier into floes.
How easy if it marked, horror-movie
style, streaked white down your braid;

but you look identical, though you're
a shadow, a double. So they ask—*Did*
we overreact? Do you even remember?

AT MILL CREEK

A ribcage crests ferns, slips down
the bank, is polished by spawning
salmon, unbuckled in the stream's
grasp. Its vertebra are masked by
conifer needles and mud. Brick
to the body's cathedral, they don't
hint at what vigor—doe, ewe, girl—
tugged tendons to motion, but prick—
the spindle in a fairytale. Next week,
the tabby's hit by a mail truck; by fall,
your grandfather enters the hospital
for a persistent cough. Evermore
rot-filled fissures are gouged into
the world's limestone. But, for now,
white catches light like a needle's tip
as minnows nip, clean unseen bones.

TELL

In the end, his daughter stepped
forward, nestled the apple in her
braids, just as Joan steadied a flask,

stared down the barrel of Burroughs's
gun. Women always handle snakes
(not at the revival, but after); heart

rates lowered, adders twist up wrists.
That's how mother seared the flesh
off her forearm, didn't notice until

the roast was repositioned, why we
just make sure that uncle isn't alone
with the little ones. Of course, we

take up arms, carve into cellulite,
inject wrinkles with poison, climb
atop pyres like that other, saintly

Joan—as coal, we'll scratch down
what we'd always meant to say.

SPEECH RECOGNITION SOFTWARE POEM

translated from the English by Microsoft Corporation

This powdery languish
Calls from my lips unrecognized
By your coyly mechanisms.
What the canary do you think
My kitchen might come from?
I said, what *dictionary* do you
Think my *diction* might come from?

Just goes to show
How her to miss you are,
To eat only things together
Based whatever your of familiar.
No poetry that you felt us, only
Traders the blank sheet of blue sky.
But I keep telling you, filling out to page
Keep rattling hill lumps of black

No longer a fool can compose
The physical what I have to say;
It just come out a way and mean it.
But even sore, a few other lips
Move the way to fight
To hear myself correctly
What they expect to understand,
Despite what words I hear my head
Coming out no.

HONG KONG

I don't like this new poetry, threading lines through thoughts and trying to sew them to the page. I sliced up an earthworm in Biology once, but it wasn't art. If I want to watch my brain in action and hot pursuit equally, I go stand in front of the ad for the new Chicken Zinger Sandwich splayed across the bus shelter—that girl in her spiny red supercut supersuit and big brown eyes at the edge of the wall, that optical illusive leap onto pupils that need periphery and public transport boredom. Her gloved hand points at my brain and I think, *Go get it, girl. Get that chicken.*

OXBOW LAKE

Front page of the paper, penciled-
in eyebrows in pixilated grain, collapsed
on the sidewalk in a paper jumpsuit,
gangbraids tight to her head.

"I was asleep," she said.

No girl, you were cooking meth
in a Victorian with turrets
and deep summer porches.

Neighbors applaud your arrest,
mutter words like *deserve*. That boy
next to you, crumples
in vindication, mouth like a scar.

Upstairs: a little girl barely four
in an Old Navy sweatshirt
and pink Keds.

*Grudges held in the body
are held in the body now.*

Focus: this river is trapped
by that levee and here
is where the world stops being round.
You can drop off, a knife edge,
you can disappear.

ROSE MALLOWS

He guessed her tattoo was rose mallow, though suspected
when beneath the needle, she'd requested
hibiscus from the skin calligrapher

above her. This afforded him the chance
To trace the flower's figure across her shoulder
blade, to tell her about the mallows by the pond

back home. How, as a boy, he grazed their petals
with two fingers, watched the bees work nearby.
She said, "It's a hibiscus. I love how it looks

on my back." He told her how he lay in the reeds
by the bank, cane pole beside him, chose the brightest
bunch to carry back up the path for the vase

on his mother's table. Such a coincidence
how much it favored the rose mallows, he said.
Her husband picked roses, but she was happy

She'd gone with something transparent, gauzy, rare.
Roses are a snooze, she thought. He set her wine glass
On the hotel sink, stepped into her smile.

Eyes closed, he could clearly see the mallows mowed
By his father's edger; not by the pretend pond,
the concocted bees or vase, but in the ditch.

BUTTERFLY DREAM

By catmint and its rudder against spine bone elm bark he was reminded
of people-drawn people, eyes seeking eyes, breath echoing voice below the ears;

feeling that the world was a place, felt in a tickle under the lowest point
of the breath, very significant this feeling of a body below the breath.

Tongue then, and loosestrife, each dusting and unfolding, recalled a jealousy
of wings, how strange the feeling of without wings, and feeling not in socket pin arm

or thick backward curling fingers ghostly absence of the abdomen's blade,
of wings, instead in low boiling mind and meated heart thick and pumping feeling.

Then on lilac a return to the dawning dismay that the breath was the beginning
of a search for something absent, that between the flowers needed names.

QUAIL DREAM

After stone the echoing stretch of legs beneath the belly,
long swinging feet that kicked rocks, sent them

skipping across the flat dust with no seed, remembering
pride over plans for a thick long tongue that swallowed—

feeling as the dusk approached the swallow—not just food
but tangled, sour feeling amid the ghosts of other faces.

Most of all the flatness of the head—the skull a weight
that ended tottering in denseness, never reaching the expected

curve of wind up over beak and back down the neck,
never quivering comfort in its balance above the crown.

THE WIND APPLES

The orchard, ghosted
in fog, rises in ranks
toward Orion.

The last scrimped
fruit thuds to ground
like footsteps

working downhill,
shuffling through dry
leaves. I meet

myself coming back
when I can't sleep
and the trees—

heads bowed, branches
clawed with age—
rattle my nights

with remembered harvests.
When the smell of
cider on caught

breath and the spill of
light ripening on
moon-washed skin

drags me uphill again.
One leg stiff with
cold and wear,

my blood thick as
winter sap, I find
our old spot

and eat myself sick
on wind apples,
lug after lug

carried in unforgiving
gusts down from
the gray crest.

THE LIES

You don't turn away from the screen
until you have finished teasing out the lies.

I see dirt on the backs of your arms and I know
your whole day in a glance—
The fields, the strawberries, the many baskets filled,
the hour under a bridge.

When it's time we dream about the lies,
I wake with your fingers in my hair, pulling out more,
hitching them into cloves,
the physics of waves and traffic
less complicated than these movements.

Wrapped in hotel robes we'll steal
we lean over plates of fatty meat and old berries. I'm ready
for anything but hunger—
ready for armed robbery, ready for electro-shock therapy.

You say from the bathroom,
one jaw bleeding shaving cream into the sink,
that you are almost done with the lies.
I ask what you can get for them this time:

You say much, but too calmly,
and I know they are truths again, unlikely to sell.
I beef myself up for the crimes.

MEDITATION IN POVERTY

Go off and find me the space after my words,
so regular, so folded-in.

I have tumbled it
until it is the smallest bone in an expanding body.

I carry the blank like a washed receipt, dense white nib
smooth in the flat of my fist that is blooming,

It fills the pocket with its yawn.
You would have found me there, growing

large where I walked endless, licked the huisache,
where I chewed the creosote branch, its taste big so like your hands.

Do I love your body,
unbuilt for the work mine is doing, ranged?

Don't I love your physics and villains? I've left again.
This place is unfamiliar; noone here has your name.

You with your hard, cleaned skin,
your questions and your memory.

Milk light washes on the stop bath, tenfold the notions photographed
when we two were completely apart,

dizzied by a catch of skipjack, embarrassments of
snow on the rails. That was where I loved you,

safely away. If the knock clapped round me
loud I returned again farther, changed.

I wonder from this fat distant future
at your dedication to my company

even as I spread desperate away, irreverent mass
to your trim shadow. So much has been jettisoned off

from this planet to the blackwaters of space: mice,
metal, men. I picture the Earth slipping off her robe,

turning in front of a mirror. Her last lover
beat her so hard it left a scar, and still her baby

hasn't come home, doesn't call.
Circles her, cries out in the night. My father,

how you stored your bacon grease under the sink,
in Planter's peanut cans.

I never saw you eat a peanut.
The cans were in endless supply.

REDCAP

When the family all were seated
and the fowl was dead, a woman crept up to it
and said, I know you are only sleeping.

Two men with their bright silver knives
leaned into the bird and divided it, thigh
from breast from bone and wing from skin.

The family was seated and the fowl was dead
but the woman crept inside it and called,
I know I am only sleeping, from behind the ribs.

Soon the whole family was eating the fowl,
twenty of them around the table seated.
They were sad like the first two stars at dusk

who cannot see each other across the sky.
So many chewed the bird that before long
the woman leapt out of the corpse! And sad,

the bird did nothing but when the sky was quiet
and the family gone the woman cracked it open
under the stars where it used to lie awake and gray

in the chicken yard. I know you are only sleeping,
whispered the woman to the dogs, who pushed
their watery noses at the fence and whined under the stars.

In the dark their eyes began to see what had been
hidden from them before, and that was the fowl
and the woman, awake and sleeping, two gray stars.

THIRTEEN MOONS

The girl found a tree house hidden in the woods,
and inside, thirteen moons:

two to fashion into cat's eyes,
a pair to pin in her ears,

four to crack in a pan and season with salt
somebody combed from the ocean,

but the girl just said, "Too catty,
too shiny, too full."

One she threw at a blackbird, watching from the doorway.
Another one gave up its moon dust—

she brushed sparkle on her cheeks.
Three seemed just right for juggling,

but the sound of their shatter
echoed 'round the forest.

Then she grabbed a blanket for a parachute
and floated home...

The bear cub who lived there was grief-struck, of course,
his favorite moon

broken on the floor. And the father bear saw
his son's future arriving *Too soon, too soon, too soon.*

THE DREAM TALKS

In its sleep we're the beached boat
with the hole in its hull or you are
the wooden wheel in the dirt hole I am
trying to fill or the leak just born
of the faucet is somehow holy & we are
the forgotten prayer I keep yelling
stitch my stars again to the top of your hat
then turn away just as rain begins
to clap through the trees echoed voice
miles crying don't don't don't
make a fool of me to the birds you can't
stand this steady drip this man
with half a tongue playing the smooth flesh
of his cheek so I am the cheek
so you are the gentle hand so we remember
just as we are the dream sinking
the prayer him clucking his song his singing
means nothing if nobody listens.

ASTRONAUT SEES UPHEAVAL DOME

Love—from here you're just a question
mark now. Star wound. Misnamed shape

through space where moons are christened
with myth & basins with men. Little crater

of mistaken origin, lonesome ring in the Island
in the Sky made straight by stream-cut canyons,

your shocked quartz rises like bone broken
& holding tight the lightning behind the skin.

You were never the violence inside the tender
center of rock. Target, terminus, welt I know

my mouth could never predict, nothing led us
here but collisions I trace through such dark

floating hours. I hope you can know impact
as a random route through space & time,

that nothing can stop the rock dropping
to its water. Even the fist that rips earth

from earth cannot stay & cannot go without
pressing close against something just once.

TO THE ASTRONAUT: ON IMPACT

I understand. I do. I used to lie back
flat against asphalt & take our moon

through binoculars—hands steady
as the dead's. I understand a planet is

its history of impact, what gets ripped
away & what gets left. The moon struck

from here flickers one brilliant sigh, one
small mouth stunned in the night, saying

nothing of two bodies about to collide.
Remember the way your legs dangled

over volcanic rock, the sun pressing
so heavy against the water we were

forced to bow? There's no prayer now.
Just histories that can only be told

given distance & time. Can't you see
from there—how a target arches

to meet the body cast into its moment
of shared light? I understand the evidence

is the catastrophe. To be defined. You
chortled. You snored. You chewed this sky.

WAKEFULNESS

(an Ashbery erasure poem)

A little white wine
recollections of the Fall—tell me,
has anyone chased
demons out of the
parking lot
of the
spotless little house of desire

A dust-mote
happens
by itself
with a peculiar sapphire intensity

The day
condenses like
a shoe
or
a cabbage

I stopper
my intentions but only grow
lighter with each passing hour

from *Wakefulness*

MORE FEEDBACK

(an Ashbery erasure poem)

The passionate are
case-hardened
more or less expressive,
posing, not knowing
whether or not to put the car
in the little alley

Sorrow gives us little
gives and says it gives,
ostracized
by the pure joy
of the blood
The man
waits in the past.

We are waiting now. That's what
 happens.

from *Where Shall I Wander*

IN NEW ORLEANS

The river bends
Against you

Bracing you for
The distant squall:
Car alarm, fog horn,
A train across a lightning flash

Against the gray afternoon,
The sodden weight
Of some collapsed
Front porch,

The violet paint flecking
Into a tuft of creeping moss
Between the paving stones
In places worn flush

Against you,
That silent river bends

WESTERN WYOMING, 1997

At 20
Remember
Crumbled cloud-
Breaks over
Rangeland

Godforsaken
Erosion scarred
Windswept
Road signs tottering over

Blue-tipped spring growth
Pressed low upon the rises
Torn from the washes

Another 15 years
And that same sky,
All along I-80
Pronghorns split the gaps in
Fourteen-foot snow fence

Land billows with prefabs,
Bottom-of-the-line vinyl
Leaning into the wind;
Into the broad-backed
Dusk lit with
Silver haloes on fresh gravel

An over-logoed off-ramp,
Like Sioux Falls slopped
Over a spot-lit canyon wall,
Its hotel takes my points,
From the fourth story
This boomtown frays
Into darkling range

We spot more from here,
Raw eventide, fevered by
The mercurial fire of
Fracking well,
After fracking well,
After fracking well

GRANDMOTHER IN THE HOSPITAL, 1945

I. American Landscape, 19th Century

Let hill rise and oak sprawl, let the sky
shoulder in. Light still finds her,
four strokes on a wood bench. Her dress
is blue; her head is bent. Surely
she hasn't noticed the three small girls
in wide-brim hats. Or, trailing behind,
the man with a box, his outline
revealed through the cracks.

II. Abstract Expressionism

Half green, half black, a thin white stripe
between. Don't resist the story.
Green for money he took to the track.
Black for her long-dead parents, perhaps
the diagnosis. Anyone would be lost
with three young mouths, empty cupboards,
and a husband who'd sold tales of sugar
and featherbeds. The white is quiet,
a zipper that holds them together.

III. American Portrait, 18th Century

Hair in a tower, she rests one hand
on a weathered table, its feet
in sand. Beyond, the grey Atlantic is
luminous, as is her print housedress,
lead yellow lavished on cotton
roses. Let's call her eyes dull
in comparison, as if worn smooth
by the alien sea. At left, in the corner,
a swag of red curtain hangs,
its tassel an arm's reach away.

IV. Cubism

Shattering brings an awkward
beauty. Leg and neck, both there
and here. A prow juts
from a foot. Find the horse's
mane, the fallen cedar branch,
the oud behind her ear. Your mind
will attempt repair. They say
she eloped, abandoned
her country. Find that girl
in this woman, from whom time
slipped off like a dress.

V. Pointillism

Approach and watch her
disappear. Step back to make her
whole again. War is in the air,
on her hospital gown, in the blanket
at her feet. It is both master
and molecule. His letters beside her
speak only of weather, so she
fills in fields covered with
men. Soon, she will lie next
to him again, and your eyes
will blend them as one.

THE BETTA FISH, CHRISTMAS

We have three choices,
he said: kill it, let it die slowly
in the small, cold bowl,
or fork over for a tank
with a heater and filter. The store
had said the half-gallon size
was fine, but not according
to the hours he spent online
after buying this last-minute gift.
Head in his hands, he vowed
not to bring it back in the cup
it had been kept and sold in,
said he'd rather crush it
than watch it suffer, than let
our daughter see it float
dead in days or weeks.
It had been a long hard year.
Our axis had moved enough
that we could expect land
and step on water instead.
This fish was a tiny red
problem. It barely moved.
We placed the bowl on the desk
as we decided the worth
of its life. Bred for beauty,
the betta would fight another
male to the death. But this fish
would not. It would be
only as we said. We looked
at him like a painting until
it came time for bed.

NORTHSIDE SUITE 6, 7, 8

6. Like infancy, it begins launched against its own will. Then the eyes brightening, I could see the flurry of dust that landed in umbrella-shaped spores to brown my legs. One stripe a surprise, a purebred vision I do not know to repel, or hold. Around every corner the epiphanic blows toot the horns: muscle cars peel away the rags from the mouth like unwinding a mummy. What is the difference between me and the ash kicking up against new snow, is it a question of a turn of the wheel or of the form of a woman?

Who could get over the blatant radiance of / Who could fail to see the doom in / Who could not guiltily take into his arms a name like / Ofelia, / sorry from the start, bald-born, hair already pulled out / so at the rivot mirrer throwing my features into relief, a last ditch sorting of eye, mouth, / teat, though what does it matter to sustain appearances / while out the door we're trading in shadows to a young rich dream:

Around the sockets you will find the bones black and soft, but I don't know what that means. No one sounded the pistol for the race to start, told me I had a chance, they just pinned a number to my breast and said, stay home.

7. Pages make sounds from their ink, there's no telling what screeching mine will make, a sudden halt on Federal, or worse—dreaming that unsuccessful dynamite night, the grinding of parallel metals, spray of paint flakes swirling on 470. *I always end up staring at this painting*, knife-blue made red cubist, you say. Am I writing to your face, your hand, your throat? Color is color; and when the phone rings I think it'll be your thoughts on the other end, soft and edgeless, reprieve coat of oil for the wheels and brakes. Whether the jangling is agitation or refried beans, guide me like you're on your way.

8. Bodega broken badly into a spiral of shards, bricks every which way and rafters like tangled hair, *that girl is a grid*, and here we are all standing in dee-light as we bend our eyes to the ruin, magnetic force so strong it shines, lacquered. Among the lower classes there is nothing like seeing things crashed up to get a thrill / kids across the street were bred on monster truck rally lemonade and junkyards. But it will take months for them to realize that where yesterday they were playing basketball there are now drops of blood; that crunch at the foot of their stare is a gleam ruinous: *hide tears from view with a well-placed decoration*. Their mama calls from inside. Fold up your lawn chairs, there's rice on the stove. I find one of the saved newspapers with the headline I dread. Try to anagram the ink away while the baby screams. Who has not run the other way lest they catch my delirium, themselves go mad like me, nothing to point to but this crumbling paper / Baby still belting itself to sleep / frayed into fibers; everything rubbed between a thumb, forefinger, no use affixing or propping up when in a minute we'll all be dust.

The sights and sounds of these poems owe a debt to a period of obsessive reading of Elizabeth Willis's Meteoric Flowers. The line, "that girl is a grid" is lifted from the poem "A Description of the Poison Tree," from that collection.

CLAY FINDS A JOB.

Stir-fried / no hair trim /
I am scratching my beard /
in front of you / dial soap /
dries me out /
shit /
I feel like it /
stir-fried / crazy /
I feel distilled / in this /
unemployed / line /
how the fuck / you find /
work / standing round?

I ain't know that /
11:05 was /
too late / old Jack hired /
that other boy /
to stack apples /
I came in dress pants / you don't know /
my life is fall-out /
surprising / like /
snow underwater / or /
summer rains in winter /
when I / go home /
I almost expect /
the locks to be / changed /
i can't trust / my key /
my landlord /
is the lover /
I pissed off...

Dem eyes / red brown /
russet potatoes /
she said she wants /
the shrimp /
ramen /
for some reason /
those packs are /
20cent more /
i take the oriental / she
takes her panties / and

mismatched socks /
off the floor /
of the room /
at my grandma's place /
tells me I can't /
deal /
with real /
life

I kept the beard /
cut the hair / my natty
fuzz at my feet /
clipper oil / at this point
smell like surrender /
show up /
9 am sharp /
i ain't never painted /
but they need houses /
colored /
protests about /
the dream act /
got them hiring /
niggas again

the cough / on
my ear /
he smells like / whiskey
spilled in /
Friday's garbage /
I clench my ass /
hoping he ain't gon' ask /
for more than / what
I got /
the drunk foreman /
jus' wanna know /
if I want direct deposit /
he don't know / i
got a month and a half's /
worth of potato chip bags /
on my studio / floor

how many beds /
in one room / places /
with / toilets in /
the living room / feel
safe / up at 4am /
home by 8pm / don't
matter / can't
see it /
my life is the /
music of /
fucking and running /
how long before /
livin' jus' enough /
is too much?

Granny said /
come by for dinner /
i can smell cinnamon /
honey / carrots /
three floors below /
i cant from the window /
will the wind / hold me /
up / if i /
put the weight /
of my pistol / over

my nigga said / you
lucky / the
text said / she got rid
of it /
the click of the .22 /
tasted clean / and
white / i imagined /
crashing into old Jack's /
fruit stand /
thanks /
for not / hiring /
i forgot the /
bullet

I OWE YOU MONEY.

I sprinkled bleach
like snow that
stained, but did not
melt,
over those sneakers,
precious sneakers,
and shirts I bought you,
stitched by those women in
Indonesia.
When I tried to read
that article aloud to you—you
turned up the volume,

gas stoves are friendly things—warm,
they heat your food, not so costly,
they cook things evenly,
not like electric, but
every now and again,
a building comes down—a
granny or child dies because,
that warm—not so costly, stove,
just became poisonous,

the fire from it, took your clothes
with a rumble, and
I cried later,
scrubbing the flame shaped
black from the wall, you
said I was crazy
so much
that I thought you liked it,

You joked to your co-workers
“She learned so fast...” You,
told that story about coming home
drunk to find
different locks
with so
much pride,

Then we went to the firing range
in Woodstock, I felt you
pause when you saw my control,
the bullet dripped off the tongue
of that barrel so sweet,

you never did anything wrong, per se,
loved your mother too much,
smoked a little too much bud.

Too much stupid shit like,
when you drank half that bottle of
laxative or,
emptied the can of Raid in one spot cause
you’re scared of roaches, but
things add up,

me telling you about
my girlfriend with the curls like mine,
and how my breath
is now minted with her,
was the last straw,

you call—you want to know—
why
your bank account is empty—
that’s right I say,
I owe you money,
for that and the clothes.

GONE MISSING.

Calling again,
searching for a black body
rubbery with rain,
he has been missing so long,
we cannot imagine him
alive
anymore,

Our auntie gasps,
As soon as we think we have him; he
slips away, she cries,

I think of salamanders
under the front porch,
how we reached for them,
in the neat dark;
a game,

I imagine a red phone ringing,
down a hall white like
sour teeth,
the coroner answers,

how tall?
he is six-two
race?
black, his skin—is purple,
Nope. We don't have any of those today,

You are summed up
like a strange, rare, fruit.

RE-PLACED

I looked hard
for the Atlantic.

I'm at the edge
of myself

in Nebraska
and so found

the Missouri
river. It pales.

It interrupts
and is edged
by fields.

I am like that
in that

I am like
the field,

lost to lists.

Whatever
the field is

is replaced
with fog.

ADORABLE AIRPORT (LET ME NOT)

In true emergency the body's
an impediment married as it is
to life

this body not that body
that disappears
 when it disappearance finds

that gulps why air
holds its why why breath
turns how pale
remembering better whens
no need to pack an in case

flings these arms
in the direction of
what unknown star what shaken or bent

where hours errors remove
then remover removed
and writes—admits—“never” or “what have I got to lose”

ADORABLE (AIRPORT) SNOW

(walk out in to)
cushioning snow
(if you want to in)
light-absorbing snow
reflecting snow
(if you want to feel good about this town walk through)
encouraging snow, enlarging snow
(honestly)
(liking December Thanksgiving better than the first)
(blue moon in a long time in)
twice snow
(feel)
sudden snow
(oh)
(along with)
(a wish for—different) snow
persuasive snow
don't-bother-me snow
fabulous snow
(never wanting)
deeply compromised snow
(or even)
alright then sure I guess snow
(maybe attraction to)
ambiguous snow
(not wanting the usual)
snow
(or being told what to hold dear)
(gesturing to indicate)
once-deep snow
(has now changed into)
rain
(then)
thousand petal lotus opening snow
(soft morning and night hands mmm)
all over me snow
(having more fun than ever)
going out snow

sometimes having to learn (about) snow a second or third time
 (wasn't that)
 (yeah but this is)
 (new)

snow

galloping snow

immortal snow

adorable snow

 (boy did I ever kill)

the old year (with vodka) snow

 (around midnight)

wishing to be no one in particular snow

 (instead of)

 (whatever)

 (turned out differently in (the end))

dune-like hills of snow

 (wishing every like the first and therefore pure)

snow

happy for someone else's happiness snow

 (everything closed but you can walk home touched by)

intimate snow

 (might have gone inside and wished that you had stayed (out) (in) the

numerous, numinous)

snow(s).

ADORABLE AIRPORT (SEPTEMBER FOREVER)

Seven days of September have me in their sites
raucous magpies draw a bead—good-bye

September counts me off ten things
I miss eleven things I wish has me in its dozen
sorts and cleans me—this is what you get

Halfway through I try to like September get it
to like me & for a while it seems—but then
wild plums out of reach in an early freeze

Three-quarters through the half-days
bleeding light September mixes me up—sends me
October magazines & from the downtown mural

begun in summer all sea horses & sea turtles

emerges a Main Street *Weddings Inc.*
between *Diamond Jim's* & *Drive-Thru Divorce*
giant hand-saw for a sign—that's how it feels.

FORENSIC FIELD NOTES ON THE JACKALOPE

after a painting by El Moises

Light from the nearest star
takes lifetimes to disappear
in the blink of a Jackalope's eye.

The Jackalope is cursed with a minotaur's
sense of direction
crossed with a mermaid's thirst.

The Jackalope is big for a varmint
but small for a sky.

An inch of grass can produce
more oxygen than a forest of trees.
In a matter of moments, the Jackalope
can eat its weight in air.

The Jackalope's heart beats fastest
during the chase.

Descending hawks expect easy prey
before getting impaled
on the antlers that are rumored
to be tumors caused by the Shope
Papilloma virus.

Nostalgia is following your own
pawprints left in the snow
once they have melted away.

Science is the Jackalope's natural predator.

Jackalopes gather in a flaggerdoot.
Less than one Jackalope is a void.
But a solitary Jackalope
is a sign.

Learn to fly or dig.
Barbed wire fences
only confine the herd.

Desert Jackalopes emigrated from the plains.
There are two borders between
Arizona and Wyoming.
There are no borders
between the Jackalope
and you.

The Jackalope never looks
a dark horse in the odds.

Antlers blend into the thicket
which blends into the world which blends
into the Jackalope.

The Jackalope has wandered
generations of wilderness
without being spotted
by Sasquatch or God.

YOU GET TO MISSING

In Baltimore for example, the black
tar and the blacktop.
The gulls fly in from
the Inner Harbor, and
me, I'm dirt-broke and drunk
from the raunchy odor of all of us
baking in our skins,
potato people. Me, I'm all sundress
and beehive, but hon, stop
making fun of the Mid-Atlantic
states. Bands of adolescents
jump on a mattress left in the
middle of the road; me, I waggle
my hips everywhere
I strut. Me, I verge and swizzle in
a place where anybody could go so far
as to say hello just because your boots
look fine. Someone convinces me
to try crack, which I don't
end up liking, and it's not possible to
get the shell out of crab
cakes, but me, I enjoy
the good crunch. A classmate
from art school is mortified. Mugged
by children, he says. Just kids.
Just kids. Me, I leave
in a car driven by a friend
of a friend of a friend
who curates a collection of
bright Hawaiian shirts and
has perfect teeth and
now I live in exile.

THE TASTE OF SALT ON THE TONGUE

Maybe drowning is your breath
called suddenly back
by the trees
from which it came.

§

The drowned, floating on their backs,
look like two lovers
on an unmade bed.

§

Our beds make the most inadequate graves.

§

What leaves us
when we die—a copperhead
crawling out of itself,
leaving behind something white
and lighter than its own body?

§

I've seen the casket
oceans make for men;
I've lifted its water
to my lips and, one by one,
watched my fingers
blacken at the tips
like a row of blown out candles.

§

Like the dead, I have floated
between the tree's limbs,
made its leaves rustle with my breath.

§

The ghost in me
has had its chance to leave.

§

The salt dried to my uniform smells
like semen.

§

Maybe, beneath a bandage,
wounds open
like human mouths
to say that even gauze is the sky to something.

A LETTER TO MY UNBORN SON
CONCERNING THE OCEAN

Your mother will tell you
stories about me—
believe her when she says
I've never killed
another man, but I've tried;
I've never pointed
a weapon at anything
I did not intend to destroy.
Your mother will warn you
to keep quiet, not to
make too much noise;
she might cover your mouth
with her fingers
when your voice sounds
like someone screaming
underwater. She'll tell you
the men I speak to in the dark
once wore white uniforms,
had sons of their own, before
the ocean met their mouths
and blessed their lungs.

THE NEONATAL UNIT

Dusk breaks like a dinner plate.

Bilateral rupture.

 The transform fault
strikes the expiration dates,
slips the blue-black basalt.

At the sheared margins of an onion field,
a child's stroller flickers into pockets
of could have been.

 Epicenter beheld.
Rust by sun.

 Tremor by proxy.

Somewhere a table waits for us to tire
and return the knives.

Somewhere a moon is bound by baling wire.

Somewhere a furrow cradles and divides.

We bear the tension as long as we're able.

Without the darkness.

 There is no fable.

FAMILY

The kettle that whistles
until it burns dry.

The rusted faucet. The creek.
When it rains. When it rises.

The house unhinged. The years
like an ax.

A rope thrown into the water.
The pull. The reeling.

The place I lie down
but can never sleep.

Rereading my face in yours.

FAMILY II

The persistence of a sound
after its source has stopped.

My grandfather's pistol. Chain
on the rusted swing set.
Rice in the salt shaker. Linoleum
beginning to crack.

The past, making racket. Un-aged
like stainless steel, like glass.

Straw breaks from the broom.

The machines in the kitchen. Washboard
from my grandmother's farm.
A hatchet in the stump.

Rake lying in the grass.
When I asked how many
was a million he said
count the blades.

The echo, reverberation.
The hole it left.

FAMILY III

When each one went
none followed. Yet no matter how far away

the tangled root of who we are lies
in the silt and clay of Allegheny County.

Great grandfather was a sailor.
Great great grandmother
stayed locked up for sadness.

We chafe and bind without comprehension.
Love needs no fondness.
No face to face.

We are all sailors.

There's a single gesture
we have in common. Runs
right down the bloodline.

You might not notice
until you see us from a distance—

How we wave goodbye.

BLUE PATINA
BY NANCY TAKACS
(Blue Begonia Press, 2015)

REVIEWED BY KATE KINGSTON

The poems in *Blue Patina* weave through varied subject matter, some relating to childhood, others to wilderness, and still others to the concept of worry. Each of the four sections has its unique theme, but the unifying threads are in Nancy Takacs' attention to voice and imagery, her relationship to the natural world, and her intuitive perception.

In the opening section, "The Voices," Takacs journeys back through her childhood in the cityscape of Bayonne, NJ. Her opening poem of the same title begins with a lyrical description of voice which serves as a springboard for the poems that follow:

*My bee and blossom voice
hums in my wrist each morning, flies out
over the field, bumbles through dust
in the April wind, flies low to the apple trees
to lose myself whole in each center.*

Takacs immediately focuses on the act of writing, the physical activity of the wrist, the ability to go beyond the self, drawing on nature and its images, to become lost in the centering—an intuition that gyrates with wisdom. This poem serves as an introduction to the collection as a whole. The determination and grit that drives these poems is expressed further in the poem:

*The bicycle voice
is a wise voice, tells me
to keep moving, get back on
and turn my thin beige tires*

This first section reaches back to a time of *I Love Lucy*, garter belts, and childhood secrets, defined by Takacs in her poem "Hurt" as a time when "writing was penmanship, / and we were in love with letters / as if they were tears, and we were / the ones who had cried them." These poems lend a renewed perspective to growing up—Sunday Mass followed by donuts from the deli, a stolen kiss, and intimate relationships that form family—the brother's distance, the father and his buddies at Campbell's Tavern, and the mother's voice of prayers and

songs. From the poem, “Sunday, My Brother,” we hear an example of Takacs’ haunting voice:

*No one knew back then
what you and I know now:
personality disorders, AA.
No one thought anyone
was crazy or needy.
We just expected our neighbor
to lay all night smashed,
bloody, in the alleyway.
Even our own father
coming home from the tavern,
speaking nonsense, might
have a gash or two.*

Her subject matter is unflinching and grasps the core of what it is to be human, to transcend our surroundings and make sense of the world we inhabit.

The poems in the section “Utah Map” use nature as a catalyst for rediscovery, opening into a life much different than her childhood in New Jersey. From her experience as a Wilderness Studies Guide, landscapes surface—mountains, deserts, rivers, and slick rock. Seamless language appears to grow effortlessly from the sandy soil, rugged canyons, and juniper-laden ridges where “the exotic is nature.” Takacs luxuriates in images of flora, fauna, and weather that compose wilderness and shares this adventure of spirit in her “jeep / clawing its way over slick rock.” She writes of avalanches and quicksand, arches and petroglyphs, flash floods and crabapples in her desert yard. Her sensitivity to inner landscape likewise flourishes as in the poem “Escalante” where she invites the reader to discover “ghost-shaped / petroglyphs in the dark blue patina.”

Takacs is also a water color artist, and her intimate knowledge of hues, tones and textures is evident in her images of desert landscape infused with light as in the poem “Balance Rock, October”:

*We never tell where we jeep for lunch
between nearby canyon walls whose dark
patina sheens to indigo, sapphire, a swarm of blues;
petroglyphs float under alcoves
near Swasey’s Leap; silent orange vistas
accordion at The Wedge.*

As if her notebook were a canvas, she sketches images through idiolect and responds to other artists' paintings as well, infusing the page with a rich verbal palette. Her ekphrastic response to a painting by David Dornan in the poem "Process' at the Balance Rock Café" highlights her ability to process color and texture through language:

*Now I know I need the sudden turquoise car
inside the lemon-yellow house,
lavender anemones over corrugated
ribs, the tin ribs, the bare ribs,
a whiteness more like a rose-cream,
orange a true orange into fluorescent-orange into red,
lipped over undercoats of lime, violet, battleship;*

In the section entitled "The Worrier," her voice takes on the previously promised maturity of wisdom from the "bicycle voice." Each poem in this section is structured as a dialogue between two inner voices that create a philosophical template based on our human capacity for worry. The question/answer format revolves around fear, relationships, and nature's fragility. The two voices remain true to themselves, never bordering on the sentimental, never hesitating, but rather speaking with a clarity based on experience. The juxtapositions parallel the turmoil of mid-life, but they also resonate with an inner intuition that dictates the wildly juxtaposed answers as in the "Worrier" poem subtitled "the body."

What are the crimes of the lake?

Silence.
Not giving up the dead.
Grief.

And what does the lake heal?

Elbows of crawdads,
splintered oak,
edges of washed glass,
the plan of silver.

What does that silver do?

It allows the body
to surface.

The litany here is not only dependent on the words but also on white space. Concrete and abstract meld to create a resonance rooted in the sparse toughness of language. Her word choice, “Not giving up the dead,” ignites the concept of fear and diffuses later in the “plan of silver” that “allows the body / to surface,” leaving an intuitive truth growing like wisdom in the rib cage. Through sparse language, white space, and dialogue, Takacs scaffolds an emotional and intellectual core in each of these “Worrier” poems.

Thematically, childhood poems, wilderness poems, and “Worrier” poems lead us to the fourth section, “Still,” with its attention to the all-encompassing fragility of nature reflected in the fragility of the self. Takacs’ images and their appeal to the senses keep us grounded while her intuitive grasp of what is beyond the mundane culminates in this last section. Here we discover meditative, quiet poems that subtly resonate back through the manuscript. The poems in this final section are embedded in a sense of reflection that acknowledges tension as portrayed in the poem “Yoga Class”:

*I like it when the moments
fall gently into one another,
end up on some island
with no human footprints
and many bear.*

Takacs’ poems leap from unexpected places, yet they always land in the still pond of the self that sends ripples, not unlike a stone tossed into still water. Takacs’ poems migrate out from the center through imagery, and discover, then embrace, the shifting self.

THE STUNTMAN
BY BRIAN LAIDLAW
(Milkweed Editions, 2014)

REVIEW BY JOSH COOK

Stuntmen are surrogates. They willingly put themselves in harm's way, give a glossy sheen to danger, stage art in the name of preserving "the pretty." Brian Laidlaw, the yarn-spinning musician and lyric poet, takes a scalpel to the heart of the stuntman in his first full-length collection. Does the stuntman elevate the art? Or is he an underpaid instrument? Where does real creation happen? In the poet or the poem? The song or the singer? The sense or the sound? The book begs these questions but also interrogates lost time, individual responsibility, communal apocalypse, the role of art, the absurdity of art business, and the precariousness of the body/shell of things. These strains manifest in mysterious missives, rants, fragments, and confessions.

The speakers in *The Stuntman* are restless souls full of folk wisdom. They yearn for home, casting about genuine modes of expression. "THE EARTH BROKE OPEN BECAUSE WE BROKE IT OPEN," the speaker of "Telegram," the book's opening poem, says. Ingenuity comes at a cost, and humans, though agents of destruction, are also agents capable of manifold change. Even beauty is susceptible to violence, as in "Notes for a Song Called 'All it Takes'" where "The day doesn't just break, it outright shatters."

The first section teaches the reader how to read the collection. Repeated images of home abound, and a remarkable associative logic rides on jaunty rhythms and wordplay. The speaker of "Upstate Mother's Refrain" comprises a list, repeating "I know," but then her voice is shot through with italicized commentary. She says:

I know the tart iron water is reaming the well-poles
I know freshwater sharks
I know haters & orphans
I know patriot atheists [...]

Where are we, exactly? Some distant land, perhaps. In section two, we get references to the Washburn A Flour Mill in Minneapolis, torn-down cities, Trotskyites, outer space, the Cold War, and cannibals. The collection's eight "Terrarium Letters" and five "Telegrams" also throw the poems into

dislocation. Is the sender from a far-off place? Or are we? Either way, they conjure a sense of lost home, alienation, and a vacant space between that which is and that which is desired. “Terrarium Letter #2,” a twangy ramble, strains toward the connectivity and complexity of objects:

the record needle has dust, is an eyelet, a stinger, isn't stingy, the coronets on the record are dumber than ever, the daughter falls in love with her own hands [...]

The swerves in action and the clever line breaks jolt you into and out of frenetic narratives, the effect somewhere between be-bop and ballad. “Narcissus the Debutante” begins:

*newcomer grows in, killing familiarity
the wealthy scramble to incorporate*

*he attends their dinners
like demons they need new bodies.*

Laidlaw’s not giving anything away explicitly, though. We’re left to guess where we are located, and it often turns out to be a cold, mythic mystery landscape where “here were trappers,” where the “Voyeurs Cum Voyageurs” collectively assert, “we lowdown our hearts in the tundra / we lowdown the spades.” “A List of Scenarios” unravels in non sequiturs, what could be a stoner’s brainstorm for song-titles, including, “a bird with a broken wing” and “the randomizer stalks the spreadsheet.” The inclusion of objects like “spreadsheets” destabilizes the landscape, something Laidlaw—the Stuntman—is adept at. Hold on to your reins, cowboys, Laidlaw seems to say, don’t get too comfortable. If you do, you might miss something ingenious, like this from “The Cartographer Cries into His Knapsack”:

I want to hear my elegy for everywhere, over the radio in the off-road limousine, wrenching up to a place I have no business, a sing-along

to myself weeping with joy.

Laidlaw is aware of his tricks, thus a constant reckoning of the commercialization of art. “Terrarium Letter #5” begins, “So-and-so is the next So-and-so, I wonder if that’s enough or if I care at all [...]” Here, Laidlaw succeeds at parsing the paradoxes that lie between making art and “making it.”

It helps to know that Laidlaw is working from, riffing off of, and deconstructing the myth of Narcissus and Echo, the central image, of course, being Narcissus peering down into his own image. It's also based on Bob Dylan's relationship with Echo Helstrom, his high school girlfriend and "The Girl from the North Country." Dylan's cryptic references to Echo throughout his career—at different times referring to her as Hazel, Becky Thatcher, and the girl who looked like Brigitte Bardot—baffled critics, and no one really knows how important she is or was to Dylan. In many ways, Laidlaw's "Stuntman" pivots with the same reluctant frenzy of Dylan's amorphous career—that is, seamlessly, and not without blithe provocation. The book also comes with a companion album for download. The songs are easy, Sunday-afternoon tunes, and Laidlaw's voice pours like rich molasses. He's less confrontational in his songs, freer, more narrative. Perhaps this is the echo, the stuntman's double, the safer, prettier side. He saves danger for his page, and we're all the better for it.

THE LOGAN NOTEBOOKS
BY REBECCA LINDENBERG
(Center for Literary Publishing, 2014)

REVIEWED BY STEFANIE WORTMAN

In *The Logan Notebooks*, Rebecca Lindenberg offers poems of careful observation, colored by the particular beauties and idiosyncrasies of the town in Utah where the book is set. This is an elemental poetry, characterized in part by multiple attempts to address subjects like “Birds” and “Trees” and “Mountains.” Lindenberg attends to what is strange about the “usual stuff,” as in “Things Found in a Local Grocery Store”: “pink tomatoes, bagged salad darkening in the corners, pale gelatinous salmon or flaccid little gray shrimp.” Her poems also approach the sublime as in “On a Visit to Nancy Holt’s Sun Tunnels,” in which the winter solstice offers a sight “Worth the pain in your hand-joints you can only feel in this kind of cold.” In either case, the poems are sensitive to beauty wherever it might be found.

The notebook structure of the collection gives rise to a tension between the forward-movement of narrative—centrally, the story of a relationship growing, failing, and ending—and the constancy of elements like clouds and wind, which Lindenberg names in many varieties, some factual and some imaginative. The book moves from “September” through “A December Wedding” and “One Week in April” to “The End of August.” The cycle of the year and the seasons partakes of both movement and stasis, joining the forward momentum of time with the constants of nature.

In their attention to both the ordinary and the extraordinary, these poems display a classifying impulse, and they often take the form of lists. Lindenberg’s catalogs have a force different from the accumulative poetry that comes out of Whitman. His poems, and others inspired by them, take a view of the world that Elizabeth Bishop might have characterized as everything connected by “and” and “and.” By contrast, Lindenberg’s lists often feel like they’re implicitly connected by “or” and “or.” She seems to search for the best or most representative member of a category. In these prose poems, often modeled on work from the 17th century Japanese text *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon*, each item in the list comprises a distinct paragraph, a technique that contributes to the feeling that their speaker is holding up and carefully considering each possibility.

Even as she makes these lists, Lindenberg acknowledges that the project of cataloging contains the seeds of its own failure. The entirety of the poem

“Impossible Things” is the admission, “It is impossible to be comprehensive.” She also wonders about the judgment implied in putting things into categories. In “Beautiful Things,” she begins with confidence that a certain tree is beautiful, but stumbles when she tries to explain why:

The Tree of Life in our backyard is beautiful because it holds up a swing. No, because it conceals the pheasants. No, because it drops its leaves in the creek. No, because you love it. No, because everyone loves it. No, because its origins are a mystery. No, because it is ours.

She wants to find some justification for including the tree in the list, but ends back at simple assertion: “No, it is not beautiful? O, it is beautiful. It is beautiful.” As she tries to pin down her criteria, Lindenberg also explores the correctness and effectiveness of language itself. These questions are most immediately apparent in “Different Ways of Speaking”: “Our neighbor across the cul-de-sac says something about gays in the military. Only he does not say ‘gays.’ / Our neighbor says something about alcoholism in the Native American community. Only he does not say ‘alcoholism’ or ‘Native American.’” In a book that makes many things parallel, Lindenberg also has to question whether language should be sorted into better and worse, acceptable and unacceptable, as she corrects the neighbor’s discriminatory speech. She holds out the hope that by writing a poem she can get beyond misunderstanding and miscommunication: “Poetry is nobody’s / native language. Or the only one.”

The Logan Notebooks is also a book about place—or about the idea of a place. What makes Logan a part of the West? What makes the West the West? Among Lindenberg’s quiet observations, there is an undercurrent of conflict and violence, and it is telling that her first attempt to define the West looks back to the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake: “That was the first time I felt the strange elation of utter rupture, when something happens that is so scary, it is too much to feel” In one of the poems titled “Mountains,” the landscape rings with gunshot, and though it is likely just some kids shooting for sport

[...] it’s still the sound of a heavy-haunched creature being put down. Or it’s the sound of a great rural indignation. Or of some dread teenager’s heart backfiring. Or a hundred schoolchildren turning to see what clicked open the door.

Lindenberg’s is not a poetry of epiphany or clever wordplay. This is not to say there aren’t clever moments—one of her “Things that Lose by Being Written

About” is “Being a woman, which is fairly easy as long as no one’s around.” She is just not particularly interested in flash. Instead, she aims to look deeply into what is most familiar. As she writes in another of the variations on “Mountains,” “[...] all I want is to see the same landscape a thousand times and never repeat myself.”

- Lisa Bickmore, *Flicker*, Elixir Press, 2015
- Laura Bylenok, *warp*, Truman State University Press, 2015
- Rob Carney, *88 Maps*, Lost Horse Press, 2015
- Brock Dethier, *Reclamation*, Popcorn Press, 2015
- Michael Faber, *Poems for Eva*, Hogarth, 2015
- Theodore Ficklestein, *This Book Needs a Title*, Volume 2, 2015
- Marc Frazier, *Each Thing Touches*, Glass Lyre Press, 2015
- Robert Krut, *This is the Ocean*, Bona Fide Books, 2013
- Kevin McLellan, *Tributary*, Barrow Street Press, 2015
- C.R. Resetarits, *Brood*, Mongrel Empire Press, 2015
- Dan Rosenberg, *Thigh's Hollow*, Omnidawn, 2015
- Ravi Shankar, *What Else Could It Be: Ekphrastics and Collaborations*, Carolina Wren Press Poetry Series 17, 2015
- Charles Wyatt, *Goldberg-Variations*, Carolina Wren Press Poetry Series 18, 2015

MARY ANGELINO'S poetry has appeared in *Best New Poets 2010* and *2015*, *Meridian*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Nimrod*, *The Journal*, among others. Originally from Los Angeles, she now lives in Fayetteville and teaches English at the University of Arkansas, where she earned her MFA.

CAITLIN BAILEY holds an MFA from Hamline University, where she served as an assistant poetry editor for *Water~Stone Review*. Her poems have appeared in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Bateau*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Paper Darts*, and elsewhere.

KARIN WRALEY BARBEE'S work has appeared in *Natural Bridge*, *Swerve*, *Fjords Review*, *Found Poetry Review*, *Columbia Review*, *DIAGRAM*, and *Whiskey Island*.

GAYLORD BREWER is a professor at Middle Tennessee State University, where he founded, and for more than 20 years edited, the journal *Poems & Plays*. His most recent books are a ninth collection of poetry, *Country of Ghost* (Red Hen Press), and the cookbook-memoir *The Poet's Guide to Food, Drink, & Desire* (Stephen F. Austin State UP), both in 2015.

ELIJAH BURRELL'S first book of poems, *The Skin of the River*, was published by Aldrich Press in 2014. His writing has appeared or is forthcoming in publications such as *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Measure*, *Sugar House Review*, *Structo*, and many others. He received the 2009 Cecil A. Blue Award in Poetry and the 2010 Jane Kenyon Scholarship at Bennington College. He was honored to contribute at the Sewanee Writers' Conference in 2012. Elijah resides in Jefferson City, MO, with his wife and two little girls, and teaches creative writing and literature at Lincoln University.

On the Wednesday prior to post position draw for the Belmont Stakes, ROB CARNEY predicted American Pharoah would be the first Triple Crown winner since he was nine years old. If that didn't happen, then he's still not quite over it. His newest collection, *88 Maps* (Lost Horse Press), came out in September.

ANDREW CLEARY is a writer living in St. Paul.

JACKSON CONNOR lives and writes in southeast Ohio with his spouse and four kids. He earned an MFA from the University of Utah and a PhD from Ohio University.

JOSH COOK'S writing has appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *The Rumpus*, *The Millions*, the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*, among others. He works as a freelance editor, teaches at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis, and lives in St. Paul with his wife and daughter.

BRANDON COURTNEY was born and raised in Iowa. He is a veteran of the United States Navy, and a graduate of the MFA program at Hollins University. His poetry is forthcoming or appears in *Best New Poets*, *The Boston Review*, *American Literary Review*, and *The Progressive*. His first book, *The Grief Muscles* (2014), was published by Sheep Meadow Press. His second collection, *Rooms for Rent in the Burning City* (2015), was published by Spark Wheel Press. YesYes Books will publish a chapbook of poems, as well as his third full-length collection in 2016 and 2017, respectively.

LISA FAY COUTLEY is the author of *Errata* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2015), winner of the Crab Orchard Series in Poetry Open Competition Award, and *In the Carnival of Breathing* (Black Lawrence Press, 2011), winner of the Black River Chapbook Competition. Her poems have been awarded a fellowship from the NEA, scholarships to the Bread Loaf and Sewanee Writers' Conferences, and an Academy of American Poets Levis Prize. Recent publications include *Kenyon Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Gulf Coast*, *Sou'wester*, *Seneca Review*, *Ninth Letter*, and *Poets & Writers*. She holds a PhD from the University of Utah and is Assistant Professor of Creative Writing—Poetry at Snow College.

JULIE DANHO'S chapbook, *Six Portraits*, was recently published by Slapering Hol Press, and her poetry has appeared in *Barrow Street*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *West Branch*, *Blackbird*, *The National Poetry Review*, among others. She has received fellowships in poetry from the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts.

JEFF EWING'S writing has appeared in *ZYZZYVA*, *Crazyhorse*, *Harpur Palate*, *Natural Bridge*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Barrow Street*, and elsewhere.

LUIZA FLYNN-GOODLETT migrated to the Bay Area after completion of her MFA at The New School. She was awarded the Andrea Klein Willison Prize for Poetry upon graduation from Sarah Lawrence College. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in numerous literary journals, including *Meridian*, *Prism Review*, *Carve*, *ZYZZYVA*, and *The Greensboro Review*. Her chapbook, *Congress of Mud*, was recently published by Finishing Line Press.

CHRISTINE GOSNAY lives in California, and founded *The Cossack Review* three years ago. She comes from Maryland and attended Barnard College, where she spent most of her time reading The Penguin Book of French Poetry in alleys. For the past couple of years she has been working on a translation of the poetry of Belgian symbolist poet Maurice Maeterlinck, and before that she worked in an office for a long time, where attention to Maurice's flights

of description was not welcome. Her poetry appears or will appear in *Poetry*, *Linebreak*, *DIAGRAM*, *Beecher's Magazine*, *THRUSH*, *PANK*, and elsewhere, along with essays in *Vol. 1 Brooklyn*, *The Morning News*, and *The Rumpus*.

BRANDYN JOHNSON is an adjunct English instructor at Black Hills State University. His poetry has appeared in *The Green Bowl Review*, *Blue Pepper*, *Counter Culture*, *Dunes Review*, *Vine Leaves Literary Journal*, *Pasque Petals*, *The Dandelion Farm Review*, *The Puritan*, *The American Aesthetic*, *The Bitchin Kitsch*, and *Sharkpack Poetry Review*.

KATE KINGSTON has published two books of poetry, *History of Grey*, a runner-up in the 2013 Main Street Rag Poetry Book Award and *Shaking the Kaleidoscope*, a finalist in the 2011 Idaho Prize for Poetry. Kingston is the recipient of the W. D. Snodgrass Award for Poetic Endeavor and Excellence, the Ruth Stone Prize, and the Atlanta Review International Publication Prize. She received her MFA from Vermont College and has served as Language Department Chairperson at the College of Eastern Utah and Professor of Spanish and Writing at Trinidad State, Colorado.

JESSICA LANAY is a poet and short story writer from Macon, GA (just like Little Richard and Nancy Grace). In her poetry she seeks to reconstruct personal and given memories of broken intimacy and broken sense of self, especially in the experience of black and brown women. In 2007 and 2008, she was a finalist in the Georgia Writers Festival at Agnes Scott College. Her most recent publications are currently in *Blackberry: a magazine* and a personal essay is forthcoming in *Kweli Journal*. Jessica currently lives in the Bronx and works in Manhattan.

LANCE LARSEN, poet laureate of Utah, has published four poetry collections, most recently *Genius Loci* (University of Tampa, 2013). He has received a Pushcart Prize and a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. A professor at BYU, he's married to mixed-media artist Jacqui Larsen, with whom he's collaborating on an upcoming show titled *Three Mile Radius*.

DAVID DODD LEE has published eight previous full-length books of poems, including his most recent, *Animalities*, which came out in October of 2014 from Four Way Books. Recent poetry is forthcoming or has appeared in *The Nation*, *Guernica*, *Chattahoochee Review*, *diode*, *Pleiades*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Court Green*, *Gulf Coast*, *Quarterly West*, *Field*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *West Branch*, *Verse*, *Mississippi Review*, *Blackbird*, *Sixth Finch*, and many others. He is Editor in Chief of IUSB's 42 Miles Press and teaches creative writing, visual art, literature, and publishing at Indiana University South Bend, Indiana.

JACQUELINE LYONS has published the poetry collection *The Way They Say Yes Here* (Hanging Loose Press) which won the Peace Corps Writers Best Poetry Book Award, and the chapbook *Lost Colony* (Dancing Girl Press). She received a NEA poetry fellowship, the Indiana Review Poetry Prize, Utah Arts Council awards, and a Nevada Arts Council fellowship. Jacqueline teaches creative writing at California Lutheran University, teaches Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga on the side, and is happily preoccupied writing new poems on earthquakes.

LAURIE MALEY earned an MFA in Poetry from the University of Nebraska, Omaha. Her work has recently appeared in *LA Review* and *Forklift, Ohio*. Maley is currently working on her first manuscript entitled *Birdshit*.

KELLY MORSE'S work has appeared in *Gulf Coast*, *Mid American Review*, *Linebreak*, and elsewhere; her chapbook, *Heavy Light*, is forthcoming from Two of Cups Press. She must be a sucker for extremes, because after living for two years in Hanoi she now endures lake-effect snow on the shores of Lake Superior.

DAVID O'CONNELL'S chapbook, *A Better Way to Fall*, was awarded the 2013 Philbrick Poetry Award from the Providence Athenaeum. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Southern Poetry Review*, *Rattle*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, and *North American Review*, among other journals. The title of the poem in this issue is taken from John Repp's "Another Bourbon Poem."

SHAWNTE ORION attended Paradise Valley Community College for one day. His first book of poetry, *The Existentialist Cookbook*, was published by NYQBooks. He is influenced by night, chocolate, and tea. He has been invited to read at bookstores, bars, universities, hair salons, museums, and laundromats. BatteredHive.blogspot.com

REISER PERKINS lives with a husband and some goats on a volcanic island in the Pacific. It is from this rocky outcropping that she runs the independent publishing operation known only as Otis Nebula. A collection of her poems, *How I Learned To Dance While Dying*, is forthcoming from Dancing Girl Press. Other ephemera have appeared in print and online. More information at ReiserPerkins.com.

RICHARD KING PERKINS II is a state-sponsored advocate for residents in long-term care facilities. He has a wife, Vickie and a daughter, Sage. He is a three-time Pushcart nominee, a Best of the Net nominee, and his work has appeared in hundreds of publications.

ALISON PRINE'S poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Harvard Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, among others. Her first collection of poems, *Steel*, was chosen for this year's Cider Press Review Book Award and will be published in January, 2016. She lives in Burlington, VT, where she works as a psychotherapist.

NATHAN RENIE is a father, husband, hobby beekeeper, amateur poet, and professional produce inspector. He has been a finalist for several prestigious poetry awards, which he would definitely have mentioned here, if he had won. His most recent poetry appears in *Bellingham Review*, *Frogpond*, and *North American Review*. He attends the graduate writing program at Northwestern University and lives in Chicago with his family.

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LISA ROBERTSON'S work has been published in *Barrelhouse Magazine*, *The Apple Valley Review*, and *Babble*. Her full-length book of poetry was published by Sixteen Rivers Press. She lives in Northern California, where she works in epidemiology and is completing her LCSW certification.

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WILLIAM STRATTON currently lives and writes in Winooski, VT, and teaches poetry and creative writing at Franklin Pierce University. His first full-length collection of poetry, *Under The Water Was Stone* (2014), has been nominated for the Kate Tufts Discovery award and the Eugene Paul Nassar Award. His previous publishing credits include: *The Cortland Review*, *2River*, *Pif Magazine*, *Best of Pif Magazine*, *Untitled Country Review*, *Spillway*, *North*

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ELISE M. TOBIN'S poetry appears in *Stepping Stones Magazine* and *Southern Humanities Review*. She teaches AP seniors and repeating freshmen at an urban high school in Connecticut.

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CADY VISHNIAC is a former human statue and copy editor earning her MFA at The Ohio State University. She has work out in *CutBank* and *Rust + Moth*, and placed second in the Winter 2015 Fiction Contest at *Wag's Revue*.

AMANDA WILLIAMS is an MFA creative writing candidate at Hollins University in Roanoke, VA. Her poetry is heavily influenced by her attempts to define femininity; she navigates the conflicts caused by both craving, and rebelling against, the domestic roles that are implied by "womanhood." Her poems have been published or are forthcoming in *Artemis: A Journal for Artists and Writers from the Blue Ridge Region and Beyond*, *Jam Tarts Magazine*, *Red Truck Review*, and *Cactus Heart Magazine*. Her non-fiction has appeared in *The Morning News*.

MATTHEW WOODMAN teaches writing at California State University, Bakersfield. "Neonatal Unit" is from a manuscript titled *Moon Songs*, inspired by the moon in all its scientific, mythological, and literary glory. Other poems from this collection have appeared in recent issues of *Unsplendid*, *Fourteen Hills*, *Pilgrimage*, *Santa Clara Review*, *Gris-Gris*, and *The Brasilia Review* [Brazil].

STEFANIE WORTMAN is the author of *In the Permanent Collection*, which was selected for the Vassar Miller Prize. Her poems and essays have appeared in the *American Poetry Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Boston Review*, *Grist*, and other journals. In 2014 she was a Walter E. Dakin Fellow at the Sewanee Writers' Conference. She lives in Rhode Island.

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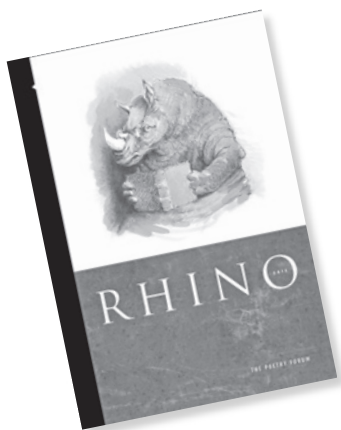
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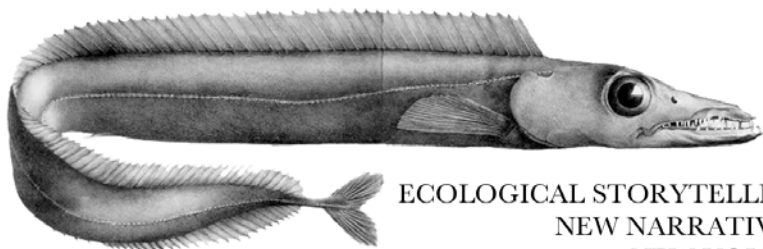
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