

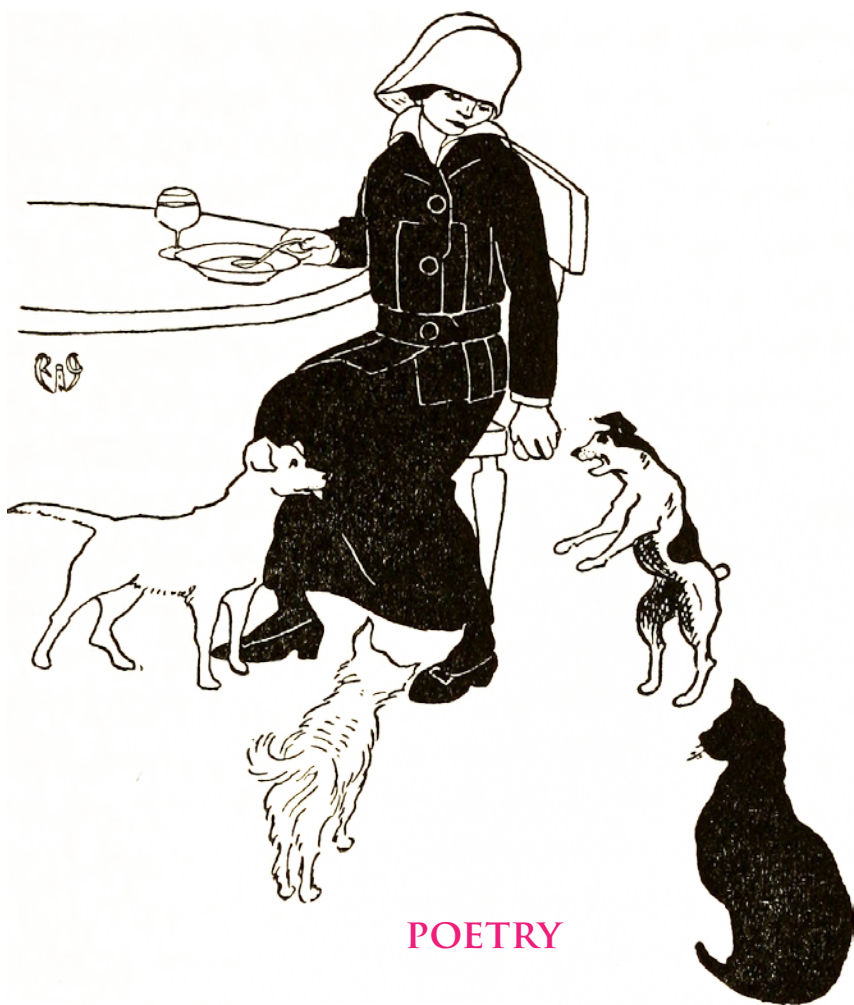
SUGAR HOUSE

REVIEW



#15

SPRING/SUMMER 2017



POETRY

SUGAR HOUSE REVIEW

AN INDEPENDENT POETRY MAGAZINE

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QUANTUM JUMP

I am false bravado
more than I am whatever
regular bravado is,
whatever creature
could rise from its sleep
each day unchanged
by the Earth's tilt,
and if I say I'm not
suicidal, then maybe
I am fooling nobody.
There's something
to be learned from
watching a fly slam
itself into a screen-
catcher over and over,
the little grid
a net it just found
itself caught behind,
even if the net's been there
the whole time.
If there's a way in
then there must be
a way out, and if
there's a way to catalog
the small bits of joy
of each day, a little
note here about catching
the fly in a cup
and letting it live
for a while longer, a note
there on how to fold
those moments
into my palms the way
children catch fireflies
and tell the little doubters
in the pews of their bodies
that the bugs will light their nights
forever, this faith, this

understanding that the flickering
tails are so much bigger
than the stars
that come out every night
when you hold them
close to your face, this
perspective a kind of science
children will believe
until they are old
enough to face
the night at their tallest
height, when the distance
separating the foot
and the sky is the smallest
it will ever be. I understand
someone invented the plane.
I understand there are many
ways to leave the ground.
I have jumped. I have hung
from a tree branch.
I have never landed
in the same spot.

DAKAR

Give me back my country
wound around your finger,
a golden ring that tumbles
beneath tables, twirling
in dust among stones
and coins and bones.

On the other side of the fence,
a man waits to go to Dakar.
He does not know about rain
or about overshooting the airport
in darkness, confusing its lights
for stars. It can happen.

Stars are hung on tree limbs
that swing. Their hollows
store water. Countries return,
clamp around your finger
and everything purples
at the edges. You and I could map

this heat forever. Borders do not matter.
Stars do not matter. Rain
matters. Nose first, screaming and
undeterred, it pelts the earth. It roots
and wends westward. It hurts
good, this wet and violent birth.

TOPOGRAPHY OF A BIRD

The bird begins with a crown
and ends with a start, which really
is his tail. The bird has a whisker,
a shoulder, an ear patch, a neck.
The lore is not a story, but the face
between eye and beak.

Within
the body is almost a mirror image:
left side as right side, spare
lung and lobe. In his throat,
a crop; in the crop, food.
In his throat, a box; in the box,
a song.

ON MY WAY HOME

A great horned owl sits in the window
of a silo along the highway. The foundation

of the barn is now rubble, its boards salvaged.
My mother has scraped and painted the wood

into plant stands. On the other side
of the highway, flames chew clean

to the steel skeleton of a sedan, its body
barely identifiable. Firemen stand close

with the hose, but no water comes through.
There's no ambulance. The lake

has recently frozen over. Yesterday,
firemen gathered on it, jumped hard

to collapse the shell, and fell through.
Each body tall in a black dry-suit, then,

only a watery hole where they'd stood.
The mother of one of the men watched

in the snow beside me. Just then,
my son was in Biology class.

But what he was learning about the body,
I don't know.

[AS IF YOUR DEATH IS NOT YET...]

As if your death is not yet the same weight
traps count on though you are leaning back
putting dirt in your mouth while to the last

pebbles come by to shelter you, lie down
—you will have to die some more, brought
this far by what moonlight has to say

about holding on—you have to eat from a hand
that's opened till your grave is too heavy, fills
broken into for each goodbye hidden away

as the breath clinging to footstones that wander
past, throwing a cloud over you, boarded up
as mountainside and so many deaths at once

—here even rain is comforted to keep you dry
—whole families sitting down, waiting for you
to walk in, forget something somewhere else.

[A LONE WHISTLE CUT SHORT...]

A lone whistle cut short and this chair alongside
waits till its wheels, half iron, half the way trains
are calmed on gravel beds, let you push

till everything you gather smells from steam
from a mouth that is not yours—doze off! the rails
will carry you between Spring and this blanket

filled with shoreline that no longer moves closer
and yes, the shadow is yours, bit by bit the station
you'll need, built from homelessness and no one

to sit near your heart, hear how weak its breathing is
windswept and the sky unstoppable, taking on water
and not sure why it's going down inside you.

[AND THOUGH IT'S YOUR HANDS...]

And though it's your hands that are cold you sleep
with slippers on, weighed down the way shadows
change places to show what death will be like

before it gets dark—even in bed you limp, the blanket
backing away and you hang on, want to be there
still standing yet you can't remember if it's more rain

or just that your fingers are wet from falling in love
and every time they pass your lips it's these slippers
that save you from drowning, let you go on, caress

something that is not dressed in white, disguised
as the warm breath thrown over the headboard
smelling from cemeteries without moving your feet.

IMPERFECT ISOLATION EXPERIMENT

This is a terrible room.
Sure, you can float,
but the air is loud
and scratchy from
all the sadness
filtering in from
outside, and sadness
is contagious. You
feel like ridding
yourself of your
eardrums and your
skin, but that is no
solution. The problem
isn't you. This is
what happens when
no incumbent is
running for office
and also what happens
when incumbents
run for office. Call it
what you will—
disaffection, exhaustion—
it's all the same.
Even if the room
were hermetically
sealed, you couldn't
love it deprived of
the scent of ozone
and of petrichor,
the spark and green
bookending a rainstorm.
They're what make
lightning worth
worshipping, a faith
that yokes earth and
sky and makes
synesthetes of us all.

CANNOT AND NEED NOT

How do I tell you what I'm thinking?
How I chose which dress to wear
today, or the precise color
of the blackberries I ate with breakfast?
You can't know how I see colors,
and neither can I. When I try
to explain how it was for me, why
I chose the viscose dress I shrunk
in the wash and tried to unshrink
in a bath of Suave conditioner, I write
that I love its crepe-feel and feel
good about my thighs, but I don't
know how well I know my own mind.
A poem is not a body, just as my
thoughts are not a brain.

How do I communicate my fear?
There are bears in the woods and blood
running from the trees, to say nothing
of the surveilling eyes. Each morning
I choose clothes to wear and breakfast
to eat, and we look at each other
with the same expression: the one
I wear when telling my mother
there's nothing new, no news
to report, as though I were the world
and everything outside these walls
an illusion, a fiction, a harmless
image. We all know that's not true,
and you don't need to understand
consciousness to know what it feels
like for all your fears of the world
to consume you at once at the prospect
of making children and letting them outside.

ODE TO AFTERMATHS

In the end, if there's a difference
 between lightning-struck timber

igniting the undergrowth and you
 and I fumbling with matches to test

how well the world can get to know
 us, we haven't learned it yet.

Ruthlessly touching body to body,
 flint to spark, flame to dry earth,

even now, as if praying
 for someone to stop us.

But they just go about tending to aftermaths.
 Echoes. As the voice, unhampered,

intensifies. Forget about the how, why;
 such stunning sirens in the distance.

We can't put out the need
 that calls them here. To burn

and burn so damn brilliantly towns
 five miles away will have to save us.

HEROIC CROWN: QUEER SONNETS

after Beyoncé's Lemonade

1.

In a winter dream, months ago
she came. The queen, braided and
furred, promising a betrayal song when
the time was most right, promising
your betrothal would only bend a season
for me. This train town has a howling
in the night. It is a beehive alive with
honeysuckle whispers, sweet stinging.
Your maps don't stray like I do,
but we were both drawn to scale,
traced by your fingers for a path,
we both fold small for safekeeping.
Her prophesy said, run from your want—
whatever *most right* was, it waited.

2.

Whatever *most right* was, it waited
until I skipped town south to sink in,
to get me sprung on spring-heavy air
like breath against neck, like my long
white girl hair sticking to your sweat.
Daytime bathroom belt buckle betrayal.
Bodies inside bodies love, your hands.
Now all I have here is Virginia, weeks
and weeks of alone, in breathy Virginia.
When we were in love, men would ask
if we were sisters. What a wicked way
to deny what was already buried and plain.
How I set a snare for the life they saw
between us, held tight like too much hope.

3.

Between us, held tight like too much hope,
and thunder sounds spanking the hills,
all year was a racket. House party borrowed
bass beats and cheap tequila with no chaser,
jumping in aqueducts, down on my knees
in the locker room shower, shoved up against
locked office doors with you. Landlock
that wouldn't hold. Drive me to the stolen
land, lake big enough to be an ocean. He can
come—he who's in here too, to whom you
are promised, the smoke dozing in your
rafters. He can sleep in the backseat if you
give me directions. Some rough-faced boy
I would never try to steal you from.

4.

I would never try to steal you from
the hills so steep I lose my breath,
where I breathe you to keep going.
The queen tells me not to drink the
tidal push and pull from some mug
left on your bedside. Who mouthed it
last? What solemnity and grace did
they avow? To what am I entitled?
Did you name your book *volcano*?
The queen promises an overripe
rupture, full-court press. The most
I can say is no one's too old for
high tops, the high-water mark,
the shore I couldn't start to see.

5.

The shore I couldn't start to see.
The storm I couldn't feel until it had
soaked me through, wrung me out.
Let my pink water-wrinkled hands lift you
onto the countertop. I write to you
from the counter at the Waffle House
closest to the Jefferson Plantation.
I watch myself on a security monitor
swiveling, my hat turned backwards.
I think I will always look like a child
when I am alone. The nearest train,
whose tracks I can't find, stops sinister at
Lynchburg—named after a man. Hard to
believe the less terrible, even when it's true.

6.

Believe the less terrible. Even when it's true
that I have been sweating everyday,
shrinking a little, drinking a little less.
Even then, I wonder if my body is more
possessive of you than of itself. At the
gym I drink watered-down lemonade.
To start the stair master's churning,
I choose a setting called Life Quest and
level 5 because what am I trying to win?
The queen in my ear doesn't need me to bow
my head to her. The stairs collapse and
collapse beneath me. Does he build rough
hills to climb for you? Do you recognize
this book is a monument to touch?

7.

This book is a monument to touch
even with its hands in its pockets.
Even with your hair in your eyes as
disguise, there is no making public
how we push and pull in dark corners.
The beehive whispers when it sees our
hands touch, the train town howls and
howls. The rough face smiles beside yours.
Lick my teeth in the daylight. Still no
chaser. Still no closer to extinguishing
the bolt of my lightning you hold captive.
I have held the bright storm of you
hot in my hands. I would do it again,
however quick, however long it lasts.

8.

However quick, however long it lasts,
this hot breath season is for growing.
Have you cut your hair at all? Have you
turned his rough jeans into cutoffs you wear
on weekends? Is any day not a weekend
for you when the high desert burns off
its chill by lunchtime? I offer to trade you
a poem for the story of the place we pressed
our bodies together. We'll write twin books
to outlast this. We'll press them cover to cover.
I will tell my book that it was once in love,
even if it doesn't remember fitting against
you as it slept. I don't think many people
remember my body, the folded map of it.

9.

Remember my body. The folded map of it
spread out on the floor at your mother's
house. Remember the winding road to
the rose garden and just going slow together,
stopping to smell sunscreen on my neck.
The queen says in these breathy weeks away
my panting for you has been forgotten.
But you started wearing my deodorant and,
at some rough point, he probably started
wearing it, too. In Virginia I have run out.
I am grocery store, I am shampoo as soap,
I am very little toothpaste. If I ever return
to our train town, I'll smell like him—
whoever you love. He belongs beside you.

10.

Whoever you love, he belongs beside you.
The rupture is a slow roiling, the moan
let go by a falling tree. My volcano seeps
fire blood love up to the surface so it can
cool and dissipate, so it can run downhill.
The queen in my ear breathes heavy that I am
alone at a desk, taking what doesn't belong
to me. I come from a long line of betrayers
who have worn many rings and read prophesy
into desire. I pretend I am good. I would
get you lost in the hot forest, I would bring
lemonade, speak thief songs to you, panting.
The queen says enough, puts me to bed
lying in your honest kind of shade.

11.

Lying in your honest kind of shade
under moaning trees older than I'll live
to be, I roll onto my belly in a final try
to say, come with me to the high desert
where our breath will be our breath and not
the springtime breathing for us. Pack a car
with most of what you need, rough-faced
trust, hands in pockets, body inside body,
toothpaste, tequila, map worn along its
creases, smoke in rafters. Come with me.
I try to say all this by getting to my feet,
by saying very little, saying I am not lost,
I swear. The queen says *lost* is a sort of
somewhere. Inside me there is a swarm.

12.

Somewhere inside me there is a swarm
that wants out. If this storm is electric,
if the power goes out, wait. What has
flashed across every spring-static sky
will come again. I have paid my leap year
debts and with what's left, cook breakfast
hot in a kitchen, kneading something
and letting it rise. If I'm being honest
I don't know that I ever saw your eyes.
I don't know if you put your mouth
to my neck without looking over my
shoulder. Who is more dispossessed
than the thief? How long have I been
keeping quiet when I want to howl?

13.

Keeping quiet when I want to howl
is old work, the day labor that never
breaks me even. In some accounting,
this was worth every minute of leisure,
of lemonade, of cool, sugared wanting.
The horizon puts her feet up, stretched
out across hills that bloom, even while
they burn. There is no other queen above
her. This is no return ticket between us.
I took my body with me, took my book.
I am not trying to be good. Double knot
your high tops, turn backwards your hat.
Walk the highest hill until you see that
what you buried can't be driven out of me.

14.

What you buried can't be driven out of me.
The train town grasses have grown tall and
mowing sounds put me back in the secret
in your mother's house, where I would tell you
over again how I have broken many things
in my thirst. I would lie on the floor and
give you my hands, give you my mouth,
try to hear you through your hair. Because
I am going to the desert, because you are not,
I am trying to remember your breath. I am told
we still look alike. I am told that every train town
has the same smoke in its rafters, the same
monuments, the same stairs collapsing and
collapsing, the same tide pulling at my belt.

15.

In a winter dream, months ago,
whatever *most right* was, it waited
between us, held tight like too much hope.
I would never try to steal you from
the shore I couldn't start to see.
Believe the less terrible, even when it's true:
this book is a monument to touch,
however quick, however long it lasts.
Remember my body, the folded map of it.
Whoever you love, he belongs beside you,
lying in your honest kind of shade.
Somewhere inside me, there is a swarm
keeping quiet when I want to howl.
What you buried can't be driven out of me.

CITRINE ASH #4 (WEATHERED BOXES)

Orange traffic cones under
An egg moon, transients &
Babies break time, terrified

Or zealous—but never both.
You get to a gate
& the leaf cuts your throat.

Alarm the alarms,
Because both apple-fangs hang
From the Saturn sky.

I smell how it should be.
A fragrance perforates the senses—
Powerful, unknown & unmeasured.

A globe unmerciful, making houses
On the heads & feet we navigate
Through the failure,

Calling each other out of our bones
To bounce off a hollering shine
& cultivate green fire

& forage trash murmuring
Life asleep in the ladle
On sparkling magnetic trees.

We have lost our faces
& found windows, flower-boats
& nightmare crows

I saw too directly. The ground
Weathered to a disposable bruise.
A phrase of your breeze & the sun

Arrives at twenty to seven.
Eleven insane days was quite less
Than my typical turn,

& even after turning off
Its dark-sight, a silent shattering
Was still more twisted light.

LETTER TO A NEANDERTHAL NAMED FRANK #2

Dear Frank,

My allergist told me he and his wife read *Anna Karenina* out loud to each other during their honeymoon. That sentence means nothing to you, I know, but I wanted to tell you anyway. They read it on a train crossing Europe, and he claims they alternated every two pages, start to finish. Frank, a lot of people think *Anna Karenina* is the greatest love story written by a Sapien. But it's not really a love story, Frank. I'm not sure why Sapiens don't see that. No one's in love in that book, even if she does throw herself in front of a train. But Sapiens are sentimental. We have this thing we call a heart. You have one, too. It's really just a hot mess of valves and tubing. It's disgusting, but it keeps us alive, so we call it love and when we draw its symbol it looks like a round ass with an extended point at the bottom. We color it red. We like to swear by our hearts, and when we do, we place our right hand over the left side of our chests. This is where the heart lives. But not really, it's more in the center. You'll know this if you ever have a heart attack, which is what we call it when a heart stops working. You'll know this because you'll feel something grab hold of it and squeeze—right behind your sternum—right in the center. If you're lucky, whatever it is will let go, and your heart will go on beating, just like it did before.

SECRET WRITTEN FROM INSIDE A COYOTE'S MOUTH

I would sit a full lunch hour in the park waiting.¹
Every day.
My shadow sagged her despicable shoulders.
Sunglasses hid my idiot eyes.
I skulked behind the pages of a book
as if my body could render so easily invisible.
There, I waited.
Predictable. Ordinary.
I waited days. Then weeks.
He did not come.
No, I didn't know what I was doing. Or, not doing.
Not exactly.
I only knew *escape* and its furious heat.
Each night, I'd arrive home,
rejection's dirty smear across my face.
A sin my husband could never kiss away.
Each night, I'd spice his soup with extra peppers.
More and more, each time.
Trying, however small, to burn us to the ground.²

¹ Coyotes are known for being devious.

² Coyotes are also known for being monogamous.

SECRET WRITTEN FROM INSIDE A
FALCON'S MOUTH

I'm wearing whiskey's
 loose-fitted blouse,
 slamming shots & jokes,

& running mouth
 hard as the boys, louder
 even, & I shoot

my laughing mouth
 at a dare, & beneath it, shoot
 my whiplash hand—pounce¹

in & down his pants,
 & they howl & applaud,
 & he does, too,

this brash & fast chick, me,
 a dare, perhaps, but the doing
 is mine, & laughter

balloons across the room,
 & we toast more shots
 under night's slick shame:

we claim men are cursed
 always with want, & so he laughs,
 & so I prey, his soft

& most delicate self
 in my renegade hand.
 His violation, all mine.

¹ pounce | /pouns/ | *verb*

(of an animal or bird of prey) spring or swoop suddenly so as to catch prey.

SECRET WRITTEN FROM INSIDE A
GRIZZLY'S MOUTH*

I adorn myself in wine

because I am afraid

of me.

The eye of my own tornado:

mouthshot and bucking.

Skin coated in gunpowder

and teeth made of flint.

Every few years I start a bonfire,

incinerate a mattress or a man

or a city, then dust off the rubble

and begin from the nothing

I built with my own hands.

* Originally named by American explorers Lewis and Clark, the Grizzly Bear was formally classified in 1815 by naturalist George Ord as *Ursus arctos horribilis* (brown bear + horrible), not for its grizzled fur but for its grisly character.

AFTERNOON

He says he thinks I want to see his cock.
He says *I promise it won't hurt you.*
Outside a car crash claps. It's 4 o'clock,
the cat has peed behind the fridge, and through
the pane the streets unleash the day's long heat,
the ants draw dark cartography around
a squirrel, her red insides. The curtains beat
against the reeling fan. All over town
young boys walk home with clarinets, the bus
sighs and brakes; it kneels like a girl. The bricks
loose as children's teeth. The chickadees fuss
over bread mixed with earth. He lifts his dick
like a candle, a bird. It does not light
the growing dark, does not lift its wings in flight.

AS IF FROM A FAULTY BEER TAP,

suds, catch and float along the river.
Deer tear grass shoots where brown-tinged foam
collects—smell of marsh loam, tannins, cracked teeth.

clock hands row around and around the days

Frothy swirl caught in an eddy
behind fallen pine. Torn roots reach in futile gesture,
silvered needles comb stream water to fine curls.

*miniature oars moving us
through morning shoals, midnight waters*

In the drought, floorboards cracked,
curled—pulled themselves up by their own nails.
The last of the gin evaporated faster than spit. Then

*Mamma barricades herself
in the boat house, old oars jammed into clay*

rain, first hard drops pinging the windmill paddles.
Rain rattled the current. Someone stood
with someone else in the night-lit downpour.

*In the hours of flood we know
the joke is in the undertow.*

Pop said the water might only rise
far enough to clean the cluttered beach. But
we knew moderation's not a lesson rivers often teach.

THE ORCHARD ON THE RIVER

the oats swell
to edibility in the boils
of river water that your mother
promises is clean, so clean you could die
in the cold brushes of silt and they would call it
pretty. we have breakfast like we know how to, swallowing
grains with brown sugar bedded between them blushed
to maple, taken over taste, clasped, slow, warm,
and clouded with puddles of river-coffin.
we fill up with the flame that filled
the oats like luggage, packing up
the rooms of crayfish
to take abroad and spill into a pot.
stomachs descend, full moons, your mother
looks on, saying that it's light good enough to die by
and we plan to, real slow, real careful, with water rushed
blue-grey against worn stones that scatter across the forest's
veins like heartbeats. we look on and kiss at the pupil, black wells,
ink wells, these are places to write from as we go on breathing in
and out again, the labors of riverbed sheets tucked tight
with nurse's corners, into our mouths; tines scrape
the bowl and all its empty. this: the bright
morning, trips across our lips, crossed
with shore-line pink, clay-pink,
the carotin pink of salmon conversing
towards dawn. the oatmeal has grown cold
and tough and long, as afternoons are expected to.
it slips past us, through us, the bubbled calories wrecked
on teeth. we do this three times, morning, mid-day, night,
re-heating the stove with triangle flicks of fire every time our bodies
cry ocean. we salt the still pool, wait for the simmer, pour in
the discs that go round in the hum, and sit while it all
unfolds from the streaming. the planet furls out
from blue-green to a round sugar that should
be bitten into. pretty enough, I agree
with your mother, pretty.

SOMEWHERE, A YOUNG GIRL'S BODY IS TAKEN

Sweet thing, I say, *cling to me forever*—would you rather kill or
be killed—it really is that simple. In school there are young
girls reading stories of siren's sweet song and shimmery skin.

Climb inside me, I say, *believe me*. For every mariner lured there
is a maiden who never learned to swim. This happens all the
time: the scarred flesh, the sinking beneath the graveyard. Even

under the water your skin can burn. The women who read
to us told us this: how in certain lighting everything looks like
blood—how finned bodies with shimmery skin attract wet eyes.

Sweet thing, let me tell you how you make space in the body
without emptying yourself of sound. Because somewhere, a young
girl doesn't know where her body is, doesn't know the voice that visits

her skin. I can't say this is a dream—all the nameless bodies
beneath the ocean floor and bones smoothed out on the shore.
Tell me, what's prettier? The opened bottle of wine bleeding into

the water or its broken pieces, the faded sea glass—all softened
and consumed. Held in someone's palm and reflecting in even
the deepest part of the ocean. *Sweet thing*, let me tell you of the sweet

smell of wet skin and songs you never learned. *Believe me*—you will
like singing until someone drowns, the slight shimmer in your skin, the
sharp edges of your body: your fingernails scratching the side of the ship.

CLEANSE

Remember to recite a proverb to the body: because our skin dreams of being beautiful: but our bones are always sinking: Remember how Noah led animals onto a ship two by two: because one body never seems to be enough: somewhere I'm awake in someone else's dreams: I follow a cobblestone path until I reach the ocean: a place where the water meets the fog: Remember to say to the body: *be good to me*: then my bones sweep down the stars until they hit the ocean: Remember to cause a ripple: because a body can never be unmade: the feel of bones never unlearned: I look for my reflection in the waters: Remember to listen to the song of sirens: Remember a woman's voice is always worth hearing: each animal boarded the ship: leaving the day's sins behind: Noah's wife was never named: yet her bones led beating hearts to safety: this is the work of women: some called her *Naamah*: meaning *beautiful*: her skin found more important than the work of her bones: grandmother to us all: she said: I miss the way my reflection looks back at me: her hollowed cheekbones: say to the body: *confide in me*: Remember what my mother said: leave behind dead skin: our bones are always living: never drowning.

FOR I WAS THIRSTY, AND YE GAVE ME MEAT

“Suicide Now Leading Cause of Death for Utahns Ages 10–17”

—Fox13 News Headline

Their souls carve red
rock tombstones. Planted
two-feet down and a world apart, they died
in this valley. The wells all dried up; you turned
the sprinklers off. The desert came out of hiding. Looking
to the mountains, they saw snow and ice. The promise of life wrested
like heaven—out of reach. They grasped handfuls of earth and bored deeper
than you could imagine possible, then I could imagine possible, praying for fresh water
to wash the sand from their covered bodies. Instead, they gorged on sagebrush,
chokecherry, and unripe figs. You were quick to embalm them, to finish them,
to rub them in sweet oils and cover the scars with cinnamon
and myrrh. You left your vessel unwashed. When they did
thirst, you demanded: leave the valley or survive on salt.
They worked until blood ran down their hands,
until the closet walls became coffin lining.
Their sandstone lips prayed for rain,
but you still leave this valley dry.

GYRED TO THE BOREAL

Simultaneous, this existence in cusp of February crocus
leaves protruding in miniature fronds

and walking March's perimeter in a yard still
steeped in shallow snowdrift of the north country.

Childhood puddles along straw-gray country lanes
in thin veneer of late winter, and the crisp crackle

of a boot tip pressed light enough to variegate ice
without opening the mudripe melt pooled in the lows

of undulated gravel. My youngest, face to window,
minding snowflakes so frail in their day of windflit

in grass powdered like King Cole's wig. Small boots
upended on registers; my mittens stiff with snow.

Here, socks, hats, scarves draped to warm and dry
into an autumn's afternoon darkening. And here.

I am a child in my child. Mother of midlands gyred
to the boreal. A wavering face impressed in glass,

white petals of the early flower sunned in their center,
tight heart drawn from root to brisk air fallen in spring.

BREATH

*When you die—well, you go with your
Last breath and find the others.*

—William Stafford

Between bough and crown
Where the last breath

Meets up with all the others
Under leaf and needle moisture

Hangs on the fibers of a web
Birds darn the canopy skim

From bush to loom a sky made
Entirely of dip and dance

Crows gather strands of thread
Moon skates across the coming night

Trailing that last exhalation
That floss of air

HIGGS BOSON

When scientists discovered the particle
that gives us mass I thought of the Brooklyn Inn,
faint light above its congregation of packed
torsos, grateful for weight and the excuse of touching.
Tonight on our way to the Inn so much can be said
about the deepening snow now that this particle
proves we're more than shadows yawning in a dream.
But I say nothing. Knee-deep in the white silence
you cannot breathe, and take my arm until we arrive.
What I would do to make your particles linger
in an earthly form. Almost transparent, unbearably
thin, you knife with ease through the hardwoods
of our favorite bar and through your friends,
who sense a space—not a yawning yet—
between you and their touching of you.

CESCA EXPLAINS THE FLOWERS
SHE HAS POTTED FOR MY BALCONY

By the second rapid-fire
insistence, brushing jagged
leaves with fingertips,
that this one, that has no name,

lives forever, I realize the phrase
is not a mythic reference,
but that this nameless one,
which will throw out

the tentacles of its blooms,
is a perennial. The thick knot
of small pink petals,
clavell, which I recognize as dianthus,

too lives forever. And there,
humble beneath, the one you find,
always, in cemeteries.
And *thees one*—caressing

the willowy fronds—this one will
rise up strong in a single
beautiful flower. Blue,
we think. And here, the last—

sanguine trumpets
drooped and shivering,
She die in the winter in the mountains.
What, I ask?, startled again

by the force of the narrative.
Who died? We struggle together
for a moment to resurrect
a name. Petunia! Ah!

Who dies in the winter
in the mountains. Of course.
Who does not live forever.

THE ROUTE OF SANTA MAGDALENA

Come from Andorra in the east,
or south across the *coll*—the throat—
del Grau where it opens. Come
from the north, between the *bordes*
of la Plana and de Llosar,
where neither cattle nor grass remain.

Come by the punishing west road,
through stand of oak, fir,
pine and ash, the small rare juniper,
from Burg, Farrera, Alendo.
Come from the south, over Castellarnau,
said to be impassable, across

the river Lot, via the Pass of Sound.
Arrive by foot, or as you will,
the gliding wings of a lone vulture,
muscled and wide, as compass.
Arrive with the clothes on your back,
a blade for rending, package of salt

for wounds. As offering,
a kerchief stained of tears and sweat.
If the chapel door opens, know
that your audience is now, that she waits
here as she has for twelve hundred
years, patient in her sorrow.

Crucifix extended in one delicate
grasp, a skull the other—you may
touch either. Approach her in this place
of shadows. She hears all languages.
On the altar, a chaos of needs,
hundreds from as many hands,

the sheets torn, creased,
faded and bled. From your own
pocket bring the words you penned—
a prayer for who remains, a prayer
for release from the dark thing
that holds you—to shuffle with the rest.

Too soon, the impossible return
to wherever you left. If you believed,
she might give you strength.

LATE IN THE NARRATIVE

The houses risen
from rubble a generation
gone, solid stone
and good roofs. The road

widened and paved.
The war ended a lifetime ago,
villain vanquished
in body, if not memory.

Ages since, lovers met
and parted, or met
and remained.
The old man's dead,

slumped over his plow,
and the cattle auctioned.
The children gone,
too, grown now

and happily escaped
to the city and its sequels.
The view's still nice,
but you're thirty years

too late, or maybe a thousand,
depending on the edit.
Anyway, face history—
you're a bit part,

on the end of the couch,
in the shade of the chapel,
a clever, irrelevant
remark here or there,

a minor scene or two
unlikely to survive revision.

SPACE STRUCK

Ann Hodges—The first and only confirmed meteorite victim

I remember the doctor lifting my nightgown
to see how high the bruise climbed. He seemed

disappointed, *A thinner woman would've died*. I was
small when I was young. Didn't take up much space.

In fact, I could fit all of me in a suitcase until I
was sixteen, and maybe I was dreaming of this

when the stone hit and I woke to light streaming
through the ceiling. I thought it was God

since I'd been told it's painful to bear witness.
At any rate, it was a blessing to my husband,

who pretends the bruise is still there. At night,
he lifts my nightgown and kneads my thigh.

He says, *How deep*, like he's reaching into a galaxy.
He says, *How full*, and looks up to see if I wince.

GOD

The body
of things we don't know,
inching along
in the slug darkness
between where you left
your keys and astrophysics.
No fingers to point
to truth or stars
or cream cheese on your cheek.

•

A word
to salt the driveway with.
Or something to call
the love you once felt, still feel.
Peace and unease living
under the same sunbaked roof.
The dog's dream kicking you.
Or the snowing static of a knob TV
as it makes an old woman glow.

IN CINDERS

& to believe in combustion we must believe in embers; to acknowledge where *fire* once burned; what smolders, what still lives, although, only a piece of; how you hold her hand; her flesh in wear of the weight; time turns all things vellum; she barely speaks; beyond her eyes, stories roam; what gathers in us, if not spark; how we all begot in someone else's story; to find our way in; cells of mothers before, *before* before; the way out finds us; how you don't remember her teeth; how she smiles with only lips; how she wears pearls with sweat pants; how the stove boils down cabbage into the evening; how unable, she, to hold her head anywhere but to her chest; how the story of you caught in her throat; how she caught in yours; how silent & storied & flame & heap.

GESTURE

She keeps them in a tackle box; sections in all their pretty modes; she fondles them, the way a fisherman selects bait before the line; *see this; now see this*; her eyes the story before story; a pebble: a gift; a bright orange lure: a gift; an earring bottom in shape of a pearl heart: a gift; the humanity of things; she points to branches to powerlines overhead where sleek black heads all in rows, in watch; a show of crows; the murder surrounds the girl; *they bring me things*, her exactness a story; what brings a crow to gift? How in the very nature of name, gloats & exults; how little we know about the nature of a thing; how we *behave* tells a story & that story turns toward us with rewards, or perhaps disenchantments; how we all little girls, thumbing our tackle boxes, full.

FISTULA

What fracture what

altar what throat.

Tendon mine, I fever

you down. No weight but

the white kind. Look how
eaten the sky, kaleidoscope.

Come void or flood,

come veil. I look
in your mouth for stars.

They disappear.

LUSH

In viridian, map
scrawl synapses avalanche.

In cluster, collapse.
In a city like seizures,

distance wakes up a
storm and what
gutters, gutters thick. In

ventricle or in
vernal, orchids unravel

into ribcage into
chasm into thrush.

LUNG

I am no twin but the water
pulls. Guttural, shallow. How

little my hands

look when swollen. Come
phantom, eclipse. Lullaby,

fish. I luminesce, I
synapse. Slip or
spill. For every stone,

a star. They fall.
I throw them back.

FIRST DAYS AT THE EDGE OF MIDDLE AGE

I hoofed it across the gilded miles:
worn out shirts sprouting a garbled cult,

riverbeds in ribbons, the knife of road
and its jackshit tellings and retellings

eroding. Nuclear moths found me, hummed

with such vague news, my minor demons
questioned their fictions for days:

the sea tintured by submerged cables,
the statesmen and tormenters in khaki,

the sharp, sane nomads believing the voices
within walls and devices unnatural.

I'd turn back toward the groves and sloughs
but no valorous horses here for years.

So I skin a healthy ram, stretch the hide

into a tent and stake it down with his bones.
This will be my border with grief, loss—

a soft, nearly catastrophic light blooming
within that country's late-falling dusk.

MANDALA

monks wear sensible shoes
and why wouldn't they
chained to dying animals
just like the rest of us
charioteers
under meth-white skies
while channelized waters
brood under a bridge
named after bob kerrey
whom I happen to admire
very much though
when we met in a bland
kitchen he didn't seem
so magnetic

the bridge bobs us a bit
monks in sandals
and socks or beat-up
tennies chant and shake
bells the color of henna
over an effluviated
waterway with concrete
banks in september

dozens snap selfies
as these men
who have nothing
release it all
in the form
of a sachet
of colored sand
which ashes
its way down
to join the river
on the way to kansas city
and holy points beyond

they are fat or short
or mustachioed
like so many
spiritual beings
smiling then
waving goodbye
wait I ask one please
bless my friend
he is very sad

they can't know
how much he hates himself
but he gets a blessing
and pep-talk

*when you are sad
everyone around
you is sad*

*people who live
in desert
see beauty*

*women in war
cut their breasts
to feed babies blood*

they climb into a van
and float on radial tires
to cincinnati or somewhere
equally enlightened

while we are left
to roll back to
uncomfortable homes
in a comfortable car
with silence and memory

for once letting hope
do the talking
our sins sensibly forgiven
nothing in the mirror
but a river
of road unspooling
the future a bell
that won't stop ringing

THIS IS A GOOD DAY TO GET BAKED

I say to the blue clouds over the grocery store
where I just stocked my trunk with ice cream,

no booze. My sponsor believes in me,
but I have broken so many vows. Yesterday

I ticked past twenty-five months and thought,
you old fool you've done it or have you?

Now you push your knee into my back and sleep
just fine but how can I when I'm hanging on

that soft escarpment over piles of empty
notebooks? You've got to give me some space,

I say so low only ghosts can hear, and the lace
drapes glow like a veiled saint against the night

with its same old moon and memories, the garden
listing into November. You look so tense, my love,

a furrow of concentration bothering rest though
your little body is warm and kind, susurrating

next to my no-sleep. You once sought God in the hills
of Dominica, danced the merengue at twenty-one

with a skull full of rum and the romance of the young
but that lecherous priest pushed his pelvis into you,

and grief was ground in. I think of this more
than is helpful. My desire is the frozen crater

lake of an asteroid, it threads an invisible line
between galaxies. I watch it from the telescope

you gave me, the expensive one with constellation
finding software I am too hectic to understand.

All I see is the bend of darkness over the house.
We turn in bed like synchronized swimmers,

suspire somewhere in middle age. You will
dream of me, and I will dream of me.

PORTRAIT OF LEUCIPPUS

He senses somewhere the gathering
of crows, the failing of candles, the fresh
black tracks of a grim, mythic wolf.
Beneath his feet floors rot, the door
hangs unhinged. The pump is rusted stuck.

He works, hunched over an oiled block,
disassembling things—failed engines, watches
from a distant century, the chest of a limbless
motorized doll. He catalogues the gears, hangs
pistons from hooks, degreases miles of chain.

Nothing is assembled, nothing ever built.
Our machines are wrong, but the parts, he feels,
are right. And so in a thousand labeled drawers
he stores the innocent innards of things—atoms,
it seems, for the fashioner of the world to come.

AFTER AFGHANISTAN

your catalogue of war photos
contains the image
of a vehicle in flame—

plumes of smoke
 black as the fires of kuwait

that flared on the bigscreen

when you were seven.
the sky is purple,

colour of ash.

two soldiers in sand
uniforms carry
a wounded third outside

the frame.

you do not know how
you acquired this photo.
you do not know these men.
you were not by those rocks

at that time.

EMERGENT

somewhere high over the hindu
kush the soldier across from you reaches
into a pocket,
pulls out a strip of bacon
borrowed from that morning's breakfast.
he places it into
his mouth with a smile,
receives laughter in exchange.
and after: the return to silence,
the primordial hum of the plane's belly
like leviathan pulsing in
dark underwater cosmologies
or marduk showering the earth
with his seed. now the soldiers thinking
of blow jobs or the return
to safe domestic spaces. now the ramp
opens with a whine like a pack of bush
dogs now the light hits your eyes— you
see land.

NEUROLOGIC CHTHONIC

Snow lightning: pretty, but where do we go from here?
Maybe down to that place where glass
is sold and looking back is
inevitable. We threw the bottles
into the fire so they could go back
to sand while my eyes rolled back
like a slot machine full of water,
full of old skin cells in a body
not functioning, like a blizzard. We keep
inching down marble stairs
overgrown with moss and dotted
with tiny glass flowers. It's one more
hot day for the memory to cultivate
and interpret, yet another
food allergy and deficit. Electricity
through crystals and cold: I put on
my purple scarf and wait for
the old silver coins on your eyes
to reflect the nerve endings, starts
and stops and cellar doors.

LANGUOR

draped in snow
the belching plant
sags like a shamed dog
my belly sags most similarly
folding over my atrophied pieces
here
in this advanced, civilized world
there is little that separates
the organic from the unnatural
i do not wonder which is which

ABANDONED CARBONATE MINE: TRESPASSING FOR ARTIFACTS

Friends have failed to shame away from this:
souvenirs I bag and haul off like war trophies.
I leave my Jeep along Yermo cutoff,
take to Mojave foothills with the ardor
of a penitent, till I'm deep into nameless roads,
switchbacks sifted-over by dust devils, fences
I ignore that warn-off my chance ending
on jagged rust inside the mine's winding tower
— rising and canted like a gravestone deserted
by the dead, its roof crumbling, the hoistroom
a tenement of nightjars and rattlers, some acid's
echoing drip I fear will eat my skin off.

Outside, the desert's a sea of light. The north
is lifted on jagged cordillera. Rail tracks corset
the south. Cutbanks cleave the ground
with vanished rivers, lengths of castoff cable,
busted ore cars. Silence itself is depleted,
all sound gone fugitive. The wind sifts
what it may, brushing me like locust wings.

In late daylight's descent, bats flutter
out of mineshafts, singing in the key of sonar.
Artifacts in tow, I turn back toward the Jeep —
toward the Bombay Gin I saved at home
for my return, for my undetected trespass.

THE SON I DIDN'T GET TO HAVE

In one version of this story
 you are ten weeks,
in the other thirty-six.
 I press my palm to plastic walls, warm
 like the eggs in first grade.
I tapped each one when no one was looking
 too impatient for them to hatch.

 Your tiny body
 cries a golden halo
it glows and glows and glows.

 For three hours, we are allowed
 to kangaroo.
Your chest wrapped skin to skin
against mine.
 They measure your weight in grams
 and ounces.
 I shiver each time they wheel you away.

 My sister says
it's like Hansel and Gretel,
 a literal oven coaxing the bun to rise,
 sweeten to crust.

Back home, an alarm
 shrieks through the night
 each time you feed.
My breasts swell, release.
 I pump and freeze for you, but you
 are not there.

 Months later,
I imagine the janitor
 sneaking into your room at night,
 letting his broom clap
against the tile floor,
 and shaking the babies one by one
 like music class maracas.

This is what happens when walk
escalates to jog and a thread
unbraids inside me.
You're some fragile tooth I can't stop touching.

My sister says I can just have another one.
Fat molar or twin cuspids
shearing through skeletons loosing stubborn knots.

When it is time for your circumcision,
the nurses throw rice. Surgery is a sign
how close you are
to home. I ready myself for snipping
tiny parts—
the elegy and afterbirth
we've been waiting so long to grow.

ACTS

Arrival is an act of violence.
Apparently the dimension has reached some kind of saturation point.
Everywhere rivers are throwing up bodies
and wandering off. "Of all of my mistakes
you were my favorite" says god in the infomercial.
And for my next trick I'll cancel your debt
and tell you where to find the remains.
Sometimes at night I get brave and full of disaster dreams.
I can taste the neon soul of all the stores
that soldier our city.
Sometimes I feel the ground ask for you by name.
You told me that genesis was mostly a story about walking away from things.
You told me that a burning house welcomes your family with open mouths
in every dream about everything went down.
Because historically, we're probably just a series of interrupted phone calls
made to the light-tender. Historically the pageants and the parades
and the glitter of glass that follows acts of terror.
I deserve all the wreckage in the DNA, what else has to be negotiated.
Tell the future that sometimes the entire sky
refused to appear on film.
I'm afraid of a thousand different imaginations of nothingness.
I'm afraid I can't take this with me.
In the revision all oceans abbreviated to an unfinished language,
and we walk through telephones into unfinished rooms.
To make it here you must always expect creatures.
Expect strange, alien voices coming from the distance.

Expect to recognize these voices.

LINES FOR RAE ARMANTROUT

For instance, an old oak grove
disassembled.

And to you, Rae, because what appears
like campfires
is always the cosmic cascading bodies,
torched and tumbling,
and someone screaming evacuate—
meaning rebuild, re-haunt.

Reading about the experiment,
it became evident—
the traffic of moans,
crowds of shadows standing
in the peripheral,
a sense of expectation and dread.

This is how death comes in poems:
The last campfire in the distance
goes dark.

IN THE OXBOW GARDEN OF LATIN NAMES

At night, the bear shed her skin
in the hunter's hands.
She had walked so far in vain:
her oil filled the jars.

The mansion is set to face the bearskin lake,
cypress against hammered tin.
Each room is unlike a cave
with right angles and columns.

Abandoned gardens
line the way, forsythia, plum,
and quince, the old kind with thorns,
where the war was
and is barely marked.

At night, another bride took her vows,
her shoes having been
arranged like flowers,
her dress having been hung

in the cypress above its breathing knees
like a single flower.
Her guests admire the fireplace,
its marble from across the sea,

the mansion's tended garden,
the bright miles of cotton,
all reflected in the bearskin lake,
shed when the river changed
its course.

SELF-PORTRAIT AS CORDELIA,
MORMON POLYGAMOUS WIFE

*And I say if Plurel Marriage or Celestial Marriage is not true
then Mormonasim is all a [word illegible].*

—Charles Ramsden Bailey,
my great-great-great-great grandfather

*Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.
... Know that we have divided
in three our kingdom.*

—King Lear

I.

Delia, he calls me,
as if his mouth were too full of names
to twine the full of mine around his tongue.

We are trefoil clover, latched to the same
stem, fixing nitrogen, converting it to the stuff of life,
but now I've become the tear-away leaf.

Far from my husband's affection—
Third, the put-away wife,
distant as rooster from roasted hen.

He used to hold me close, proud
of my lace, my waves of lavender-scented hair,
the crisp of my bun and starched linens,

the way I can make a meal of a willow branch,
boiled pigweed and thistle greens, corn cake,
or a skillet of sego lily bulbs,

the way I churn out son after son
like pads of stamped butter
with his milky impression.

II.

Then, my niggling questions surfaced—
Why Father Son Spirit, a male-only guild
for a godhead? And is Father the Great Polygamist

with many goddess-wives? And
why not prophetesses in Zion, Miriams
and Deborahs and Annas?

I let slip from the pantry
the mouse of my doubts, let its warm brown body
scurry into the open, and find myself

shelved, long-languishing in a rough valley.
Chicory and bitter herbs in my garden grow
parched under desert sun.

Come harvest, I'll glean grain enough to sell,
sew a dress of linsey-woolsey,
dye the cloth with rabbit brush for yellow,

then indigo for a summer green to reap
again his gaze. Or maybe I'll begin
with madder and a mordant, less likely to fade.

III.

He frequents First Wife now,
enlarged her log house
with an upstairs room.

I who care for him know
she's low-burning coal
in a brazier about to spill,

a hearth flame without a screen,
embers and ash wafting in the updraft.
What she touches, she incinerates.

Second Wife's a cowhide copy
branded with First Wife's spite.
I didn't swallow in marrying him, I'd sister-wife

them. Both have that *glib and oily art*
of Pharisees, all whited sepulchres
with rotting bones beneath.

I may as well be in another country,
far from his favor and broken faith.
Love, and be silent.

I expect we'll still—all of us—share a grave.

THE BOOK'S SECRET

Every sentence can be read in an almost infinite number of ways!

—David Hawkes on the I Ching

Earth. Plumes of smoke, bedrock, the planet ball gone astray in expanding words. You stumble from winter to summer, a country humming with voices, engines, brighter accents. Before a mother is buried, the fight for succession unhinges marvelous frames.

Heaven. It lifts shadow-air above clouds. A rare synchronicity—the sky does not fall on the tops of buildings, an earnest darkness encircles the stars. Through eye-cracks, you search there, beaming a light low and high. The way small birds know where to turn to.

Mountain. To find your bearings, stay with the ground. Light lingers, then trembles beyond the ridge. Beware—some hold out with guns, some are never heard of again. A crevice may be as deep as ice. The wise person measures beyond a rock-strewn path.

Water. Look for it in cracks and brackish inlets. You are wishful with yarrow sticks—coins sprinkle like droplets on your face. A shadow-fish darts sideways. The dead sea floats you home—arms out, head loose, almost submerged. Gone wild, it will gather.

Wind. Streams of flotsam brush your skin—monsoon, föhn, trade winds. Breezes of longing push a stroller up the hill. Your umbrella turns into a black little dragon, your daughter journeys to see outposts, the ten wings—let go. A meadow arranges itself.

Thunder. Peasant's loss, a shepherd's warning. In and out the barn door, spoken in tongues. Gather your marbles—streaks of light befall the palace, the hut. When the leader rages against another's fear, count your neighbors. The spine listens, shudders.

Fire. Not so fast—it is breath unbridled. Waiting for the bus, you burn a little trash, steep a cup of tea for the ride. Morning smoke hangs over the rice paddies of your childhood. Coals in the courtyard—no harm. Invite a stranger to warm her hands.

Lake. Open up—a lake is an eye, unforgiving, like the dream of a great fish. A lake does not lilt, but it takes courage. If it dries up, the dock juts into toxic dust. When a dam breaks—but now you think harm into the picture. Let one lake rest on another.

ELEGY

Brett Foster (1973–2015)

All morning I read the poems you wrote in your dying,
Friend, the day-
By-ever-grimmer-day

Account of chemo-sick and porta-pump,
A spareless self-
Elegy against the bumptious,

Boorish bone-guest of your cancer. The fierce,
Exact attention
Of your record—I must confess—

Shames me, its stamina as you tender
Take your leave
In stages (bitter, wry, enraged, and grieved)

From your children and beloved more than mine
In merely reading.
I feel bound to this reading

As if I were a witness, the transistor
Proving in remote
The radio transmission,

Like a woodshed filled with waltzes from the coast.
But at its spryest
Your music treads too heavy

For one sitting. I am getting on
My running shoes
And pounding down

The street, my each stride a defiance, a hymn.
The scorch of sun
Is a miracle, the catch

Of my breath, the stitch in my side, the blood
Blushing muscle
And fevering skin. It's your hustle

That spurs me, your urgent and urgenter love
For this life
And for all us, defenseless

And precious, that it fosters and snuffs.

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

i'm willing to admit the world is not a rectangle
 (i believe it to be
 but i am willing to admit otherwise)

the suspension of truth is a very flat constraint
it's not the glazed space of things i don't understand that
causes me to roll
these stupid frail bones of words

i had a philosophy teacher
he had wife & kid in philly
another with two kids in the city

after mid terms
we found out
the smartest girl in the class was pregnant
this guy cut his own hair
couldn't tie a tie or buy clothes that fit
but he told me he & berryman had been drinking buddies

why can't i just explain everything
by my damaged cortex gray eye
or just leave things unexplained?

our trash is picked up at the end of the driveway
every tuesday
could that kinda thing ever happen
in a world that wasn't
set carefully in a box?

AN AGENDA EVEN WHEN THEY DON'T
HAVE A BODY

Assume the ghost's
distinctive feature—i.e.
insubstantiality—to be
a function of death.

Not so.
Translucence is more
enmeshed with fate—
i.e. we feel

and too much.
Hamlet, mind, is about
a ghost's feelings.
As tragedies are.

We're ventriloquists.
We require quick exits.

THE STREETLAMP

In the days of thrown butter

or gallons of milk

(a strange choice of weaponry,
but she never shot to kill, and the dishes were her mother's)
when mother left for unknown quarters
and father climbed
up and
 down
 the stairs
as if in pursuit
 of a burglar or
 a reason to speak

she left for
the one useless streetlamp on Heritage & Pine
and looked towards the stars.
She'd been told of their size by books
and men in the fronts of rooms,
but, barely visible in the suburban sky,
they seem so small.

She can

- conceal them in the palm of her hand
- see them all at once in a grand perspective
- map them out on a sheet of paper in a way she can't
map out her own hometown

Back on earth, her focus shifts
to the only streetlamp in the whole development,
where it's easy to get lost if you forget
the color of your shutters.

She wonders what the point was

(to provide runaway kids a spot to read Borges
[or Kafka—some days it was Kafka]
without wasting precious battery life?),

but she'd never find the right person to ask
in the mass of phone numbers, dial tones, smooth jazz played for those on hold,
other such components,

fitting together like the remains
of a porcelain bowl, milky white shards
spread across the floor, welcoming her back.
Best sweep it all up,
collect the larger pieces,
some large enough to cover half the sky and all its stars—

they are so impossibly small.

SYCAMORE
BY KATHY FAGAN
(Milkweed Editions, 2017)

REVIEWED BY CASSANDRA CLEGHORN

Kathy Fagan's poems have lent their talismanic power to readers for over thirty years: in *The Raft*; *Moving & St Rage*; *The Charm*; *Lip*; and now, blessedly, *Sycamore*. In book after book, Fagan teases, bringing to light what we thought we knew, what we want to learn, what she has come to know, and what she will tell so as to include us in her wild unknowing.

As a volume, *Sycamore* displays extraordinary coherence. In a recent interview, Fagan admits that it's something of a "project book" insofar as its subjects "consumed my days and nights and bled over into my artistic life, and as such... entered the poems, shaped the poems, and my vision of what the poems could be." The book's title, its stunning design (cover by Michael Kellner), and more than half the poems put trees front and center. *Plantanaceae* is the prominent family: the American sycamore or buttonwood, and its cousin, the London plane, trees distinguished by their stature, their hardiness in cities, and by the pale, mottled camouflage of their bark.

The opening, wildly inventive poem, "Plantanaceae Family Tree," contains seeds of myths from Egypt and beyond, of the poems that will follow, and of poems as yet unwritten. In "Letter to What's Mostly Missing," Fagan plants some tree knowledge: "That's all for now, except to say that, unlike other trees, / the sycamore's bark can't expand, so it just breaks off, / which accounts for its Bernini-like sheen." She builds "Inscription" around the story of the 42,000 plane trees that have lined the Canal du Midi since the 1830s. Over the past decade, the old trees have succumbed to a fungus, and are being felled and burned by the thousands. But Fagan never sentimentalizes, "So what / if we are replaceable? Mostly I love how / we burst the prisons of our skins and shine."

Contemporary philosopher Michael Marder might place Fagan's tree poems in the tradition of what he calls "plant thinking," "a way of thinking that is not only about plants, but with them," a form of "intimacy grounded in difference." When Fagan sees herself in or as a tree and vice-versa, or when she converses with trees and has them converse among themselves, she tries out strange and wonderful strategies of cross-species identification. In "Santa Caterina's Tomb" and "Inscription," she calls the sycamore her "emblem," evoking the Catholic tradition according to which the sycamore represents clear vision of Christ. But

tree is never reduced to symbol. In “Inscription,” she admits, “Mostly I love the light / they hold inside, the all-too-much and aged *toujours* / of them, their airborne electricities. Who’s to explain / affinities like these?”

“I may look smooth—” she tells the reader at the beginning of “Self-Portrait as Sycamore in Copper and Pearl,” and complicates the analogy right away:

*but take a long hard
look. Take a biopsy.*

*Interrogate my juices
under your scope &
you’ll survive as I have
the sylvan hallelujah*

*moments, bullion bars
fanning through the showy
oaks & maples & the sweet
sweet gums. When blue is*

*dominant all over
the earth, atmosphere is king,
the air so hammers-on-
strings-perfect it steals*

*the voices right off
the birds.*

Fagan’s lines move through human and tree bodies with what feels at times like laparoscopic zeal. Language is a calibrated instrument that pushes into the blight that must be discovered. At other times, Fagan’s lines exert a no less visceral, but infinitely more tender pressure on the surface. In “Sycamore in Jericho,” a poem about the diminutive tax collector, Zaccheus, who climbed the sycamore so he could see Christ, the speaker employs her reiki touch (on herself, on her reader):

*And after that, I felt, for a long time after, a weight on me then,
a heated impression, hotter than the sun’s,
like a word can leave or the memory of a child
in one’s arms.*

Losses of every kind also reverberate through the book's bright air and are absorbed into its tissues. In "Letter to What's Mostly Missing," she writes, "In any case, one can only ask how many / names for the past there are. I am one." We recognize the stage of life from which these poems issue. As she writes in "Black Walnuts," "It is the season of separation & falling / Away." What trees and humans share, Fagan might say, lifting a phrase from "Sycamore Envis the Cottonwoods Behind Your Place," is "the one altricial need," a species-wide certainty that each of us begins and ends in a state of fragility and perfect dependence.

In the extraordinary final poem, "Eleven-Sided Poem," eleven tree species accost the poet after her death. "[O]ne of the whiter / sycamores who live on the river said, / Kathy, why didn't you live in your body more?" The poet defends herself, "So, I said. Listen, you trees / (though I could not speak), / I remember dying to grow up. Standing / on tiptoe to pull my own baby / teeth."

"Nervure" (the hollow veins in a leaf, or an insect's wing) is one of the many poems in which the poet reaches her full lyric span and height—consistently and swervingly true, never portentous in that way poets of lesser skill can adopt as their default move: "I will die knowing less than I know now: That I bartered / my children for words and my words for love. That all my debts / were paid in full. And that when I was finally a child again myself, / scared, hungry, and cold, I was aware of none of this." "Convent of Santa Chiara and the Poor Clares" is set in Assisi. When I read this poem, I began to think of *Sycamore* as providing a kind of hospice care in the archaic sense, a way station where one finds basic sustenance, but also comfort and the quiet chance for a reckoning. Such reckonings happen every few pages. In "Choral Sycamores: A Valediction," Fagan builds an *ars poetica* around the figure of Daphne: "Like her / We are beheld unheld; we will not leave / The earth alive."

Fagan's way station, if at times primitive in the elemental sense of the word, is never austere. The book is full of the poet's characteristic humor and the delight she has always taken in intricate wordplay, but is more indulgent in its pleasures than the previous books. Every pun pays unexpected dividends, windfalls of meaning. Most importantly, above *Sycamore* shines a sky of evident joy. At the end of "Letter to What's Mostly Missing," is a double gesture of tenderness offered and received: "The oak says, Let me spread / this mantle of blue over your cold marble shoulders, / Sycamore. And what can she say but yes." We join this poet and her trees in affirmation. *Sycamore* warns and warms us, and deserves in return every show of love we can offer.

SPOOL
BY MATTHEW COOPERMAN
(Parlor Press, 2016)

REVIEW BY CASSANDRA CLEGHORN

Matthew Cooperman's fifth full-length book, *Spool*, is—to borrow from his own ample word-hoard—ampulacious. This generous collection of spare and insistent poems both contains itself and spills over in ways the reader comes to crave: book as amphora, as sealed barrel of hypodermic needle, or even as bomb, which, according to an earlier work of the poet, “is ampulacious, fully round, goes off remaining a spread object and a startling awareness.” (Jars, barrels, hoops—the cooper who bends and mends them. Under the spell of this cooper-man's language, I'm newly attuned to roots.) The thread thrives.

From its opening lines, Cooperman's book reels the reader into a space that is recognizably lyric, yet also—and on principle—opposed to what Anne Waldman calls the “identity kit” we poets drag around with us. Through an extraordinarily sure touch, Cooperman mixes pastoral and “post pastoral,” love poem and elegy, abstraction and intimate detail drawn from a life, wherever it may be. The opening stanza reads:

*time is honey
and honey pain
we earn it
confusing the whip
with the watch
how it passes
year after year
a wrist with
handcuffs all alone*

Like a musician who works with implied overtones, Cooperman tricks the reader's ear trained by ad-speak. Not money, but honey; not gain, but pain; not all along, but all alone. Elsewhere the “author was hard / of herding he,” and meaning becomes moaning. The unsounded syllables resonate. By the end of the first page, we hear the click of the cuffs lock, we feel this poet's drive

*to ask questions
to want answers
a red balloon*

*caught in elms
how many times
in this life
in this life
will we stop
the honey clock*

This clock recurs through the book, as does the red balloon, time as viscous as the substance in the (breakable) beaker, as buoyant as the gas in the (puncturable) bag. We watch the words morph in the last lines of this first section, “this is the / wrist to save / risk of hive.” We factor danger and pain into the sweet industry before us.

Without exception, every poem in the book is composed of three-word lines; variations play out through layout and, occasionally, typography. This supple form recalls Williams, Olson, and Creeley, and yet Cooperman’s verse is constrained beyond even these models at their most rigorously experimental. In respect to form, Olson’s presence is palpable. I can easily imagine teaching Cooperman’s book as an exploration of Olson’s “composition by field,” whereby energy is built up and discharged as each line trips the next:

*I know I’ve
met you some
where or wearing
space and days*

*rhyme you say
a true blue
next life think.*

Behind or around or through the buzz and spark of the lines are further layers: at bottom, a drone or sustain or what in jazz is called the pedal tone, and the overlay of a steady thrum—heart, heat, hearth.

There are many ways into the book: Milton, Shakespeare, Hopkins, Dickinson, Marvell, Bly, Duncan, Revell are named in the notes. But in my most recent reading, Williams and Creeley (not named, but everywhere present) are importantly and, as Creeley and Cooperman might say, complexly felt. The reverberations happen around particular words and

situations, snatches of dialogue (“‘drive,’ she said / ‘drive it fast. . .”), and in the relation of poet to his subject. The opening lines of *Paterson*, Book II hover:

Outside
 outside myself
 there is a world,
he rumbled, subject to my incursions
a—a world
 (to me) at rest,
 which I approach
concretely—

Cooperman’s incursions, too, bring us along with him into and up hard against “the dredge of / city rivers,” mountains, and “vanishing woods”:

more and more
the day makes
clear the day’s
a separate mass
I must enter
at all costs
the very thorn
like locust moved
a tree for
all my wandering

Most often, however, Cooperman is after something smaller—that basic human unit, “the family bin,” in its “wild domesticity”: “a family is / a thing a / made thing almost / a true wall / we made this / thing true wall.” We watch the mind at work on “blood and cradle.” “Spool 7” begins: “some more new / thinking about about / and while I’m / at it on / and through the / time of conflicting,” doing a metacognitive dance that descends into body: “the body thirsts / the pupil dilates.”

But embodiment is hardly a solution to the problems of self that are hatched in this “family linkage nest.” This poet is tender with his intimates and harsh on himself, admitting he’s “a man unplumbed” (48), “placeless / among empty loans” (47): “how I am / this difficult man / a gnarled me” (28). Again and again, the poet finds his limits, the silences without and within. The word “autism” drops once in the book, and reverberates, bone by bone, in association with “Daughter.” We witness the toil of being the father who “know[s] not / where

she goes / or how to / go to her / with articulate grace”:

*receiving I long
to fly and
can't stitch ends
such so and
so my tongue
responds its ruth
a savage silence*

The wonder of the invariable, three-word rule is that at times it propels the poem forward, feeding off resistance; while, elsewhere, the effect is a stall or heart-rending stutter: “it’s confronting what / I don’t know / what I do.” The radiant “Spool 25” contains a prayer: “patience please please / dark dark understanding.”

Then there are, of course, the spools themselves—in the names of the individual poems (numbered randomly, nonconsecutively) and in the web of countless related figures: “lathe of time / lave of shine” and “world’s quick spindle / turns coriolis hairwise.” While the three-word lines give a transverse rhythm to the eye’s movement from left to right, and back again to left margin, this work is less about warp and weft than edge and fray. *Spool* catches the thread of its forebears: “If you could just ravel out into time. That would be nice. It would be nice if you could just ravel out into time,” says Darl in *As I Lay Dying*; “What common language to unravel,” asks Williams parenthetically in *Paterson*; and Cooperman follows with “she and me / a raveling spore / in every darkness.” While Faulkner and Williams cast their taut lines for the biggest fish, Cooperman favors coil, tangle, that which both binds and severs. The possibilities that open out from his title immeasurably extend Olson’s crude use of “kinetics” to illustrate the “machinery” of projective verse. We are ushered by Cooperman via modernist forms into new relations to time and space where “years go by / not as catches / but as drones.” He asks elsewhere, “is it we’re / free from the / surveillance when we / made the surveillance.” The effect of Cooperman’s anachronism is at once as familiar as a quilt, and vertiginous.

And yet, Cooperman rows us steadily with his “vacant oar,” paying out the tilting arcs of language that lash us to our objects, and cut between us and everything we aim at or converse with. Richard Serra presides over the book perhaps more than even the most influential poet. Cooperman offers the sculptor “a string of gratitudes,” calling him the “hovering ‘architect’

of the *Spool* design.” Cooperman’s book confirms my sense that poetry and sculpture are the closest cousins of the expressive arts, sharing our obsessions with objects and their making; with substance, medium, and material; with the primitive relations between nouns and verbs. Perhaps in a moment of overstatement, Serra traces all of his work to a single detail from an outing he took with his father when he was four years old. Serra recalls the “tremendous anxiety” he felt as he watched an oiler launched in the San Francisco Bay: “as the ship went through a transformation from an enormous obdurate weight to a buoyant structure, free, afloat, and adrift.” Cooperman spins a parallel moment, speaking as father rather than son, and supplementing memory with what he observes and what he hopes for:

*becoming a past
to reflect upon
is to see
a pond not
time but distance
of transport known
a toy drags
my son years
discretely shapes of
blocks he builds
a ship so
wanting to transform*

An aching joy seeps through every line of this hard-won book. Cooperman ends “Spool 20” with a sigh, “so hard to / make real objects.” For my honey, the heft and breath of this book is as real as it gets.

WOO
BY RENEE ANGLE
(Letter Machine Editions, 2016)

REVIEW BY MICHAEL MCLANE

Renee Angle wastes no time in laying out the premise of her first collection, *Woo*. Its preface opens with the declaration “I am the bastard great-great-grandchild of Joseph Smith, in search of a textline, not a bloodline. I affirm the manner in which durability and transience are imposed upon the world of objects.” This is a far cry from the traditional Mormon testimonial of “I know The Church is true; I know *The Book of Mormon* is true; I know _____ is a prophet of God.” Nonetheless, it serves a similar purpose, a means of delineating one’s place within, or in this case without, a tradition that is at once familial, cultural, and literary. For followers of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, this triangulation of identity, particularly for those of its early, pioneer stock, is every bit as crucial as the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. After all, it is *The Book of Mormon*, with its companion texts *The Doctrine and Covenants* and *The Pearl of Great Price*, that differentiates Mormonism from other Christian faiths.

Needless to say, any prophet who brings forth a work subtitled “Another Testament of Jesus Christ” is bound to stir a little controversy. Smith’s book, along with his political and sexual proclivities, cost him dearly. It is within this context that Angle adds her own contribution to the literary tradition started by Smith, a book she calls “a hagiography written under the spiritual guide of a heretic.” Ostensibly, *Woo* is a translation of the missing 116 pages of *The Book of Mormon*, pages Smith translated from gold plates provided by an angel and which he then allowed his scribe, Martin Harris, to borrow to show his wife and friends in order to legitimate his plans to finance Smith’s publication. For Angle, it is clear that her interest in these pages is an exploration of creation, not divination. The pages are

Archeological syntax. Real estate hides behind Moroni’s etymology. I want to tell you what it means. Want to know what it means? But language is a skin, a mouth for wearing. Language is a kin to kinder flophouses [...]

Angle’s lines are slippery and charismatic. It is easy to read right through the syntactic shifts and play and difficult to forget their idiosyncrasies once they are observed. Smith, though not especially literate, understood this character-

istic of language. When the missing pages did not resurface, he understood the scrutiny he would face if he and Harris were to recreate them and the two sets of revelations were not identical. After the rest of the book was finished Smith provided a condensed version of the 116 pages, also via revelation. Such fears of scrutiny resound throughout Angle's work, perhaps most strongly with the question, "What happens when you hand your relics over to science, and, what if science doesn't want your saints?" Or, perhaps more pointedly,

*A crater muffled in the ruse. How ruseful to believe your
own ruse. Bake it up, chamber desert [...]*

WoO is a textline made by one alienated by Smith's legacy, ostracized by its patriarchy and made a bastard both in the literal sense—as a product of an implied sexual encounter between her ancestor and Joseph Smith that was outside of traditional marriage or the spiritual marriage (polygamy) that was integral to Smith's church—and figuratively in that Angle writes as a non-believer outside the LDS Church's sanctioned, faith-promoting works. Her speaker is:

*[...] too organized to wander.
Too practical to pray in a way that wants answers.
Perhaps this want from answers is in fact a pheromone.
Perhaps this wonk of answers is indeed a pheromone.
I want answers.*

While much of the book takes places in domestic settings, women are never named and rarely characterized beyond mothers, wives, a means to kin.

*In any given story, who is the fake? Is it the mother
That does not protest enough and therefore fails to
Protect her daughter from the lies of the father? Is it
her father who we are not sure is lying in the first place?
Is it the daughter herself, who could never know what
Her real interests are, or what is set before her each
morning?*

There is a looming acquiescence and timidity to the women that speak to both their place within this tradition and the power inherent to Angle appropriating the keystone creative achievements of its founder. That said, it seems clear she counted herself among the LDS numbers at one time:

*I was happy to flip shadows on hinges. Now I can't
look at a shadow without him. I erase a set of out-of-tune*

church bells, parking lot full of police cars.

Angle confronts both the history the LDS church extols for the public and its membership, as well as the complexity that constitutes its much larger historical record. There is an idiolect at work in *WoO* that does double duty. For readers unfamiliar with Mormonism, it operates as playful lyricism, a litany of images, alliteration, and oddities such as salamanders, Egyptian objects, and words such as Urim and Thummim (names of seer stones used by Smith for translation) that seem more prosodic than thematic. But for those who share Angle's background, such as this author, these phrases and images are the lynchpins of the "heretical" work in which she is engaged. They are a catalog of references to canonical Mormon doctrine, cultural mores and mythology, as well as mystical origins of Smith's theology, which was built on a series of encounters with American spiritualism and other traditions that ranged from water witching and Freemasonry, to seer stones, treasure hunting, and Swedenborgian philosophy. Early in the translation portion of the book, Angle writes:

*[...] mummies curl in a pouch. Moon is itself inhabitant of
marshmallow. Permanent charms pioneer the pavement
mud of wheel ruts. It is the human form pinched to
death with cold. Partly peeled from the element, radiate
in red, one suspicious bowl. A ringside seat to Rosetta
Stone, make hinge-friend. If we believe that the tongue
Is a kind of tattoo. Primitive member, missing link.
Between their piss and peace no mudpuppy, hellbender,
or red elf crest. Salamandra salamandra, sugar up leaves [...]*

In one short section, Angle upends *The Book of Abraham* (a later text by Smith), seer stones, the hallowed ground of the pioneer myth, the translation of *The Book of Mormon*, and the White Salamander letter, a document forged by Mark Hofmann, a disgruntled member of the church eager to both discredit its current leadership and place Mormonism within the legacy of its mystical beginnings.

In its hagiography, *WoO* is much more akin to Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History*, with its in-depth look into the spiritualist history of the Smith family and other questions of Smith's legitimacy, than to Richard Bushman's *Rough Stone Rolling*, both of which are titles referred to as source material for the book. *WoO* is every bit as much a historiography and bibliography of legitimacy and fraud as it is ecclesiastical biography or tribute. Scattered throughout the text, and acting as a transition between the preface and Angle's translation are repro-

ductions of images from Egyptian funerary papyri that Smith purchased from a traveling expedition of mummies and “translated” into *The Book of Abraham*, a scriptural text that would later be integrated into *The Pearl of Great Price* and which laid the foundation for a number of Mormonism’s more unique doctrines including the plurality of gods, the pre-mortal existence, and the planet Kolob—the star closest God’s home. These papyri and Smith’s translations remain deeply problematic for many members and Mormon scholars, yet they remain crucial to the “textline” from which Angle descends and they are only one of many such examples tied to Smith’s work. There was the supposed Solomon Spalding novel, long lost but written a decade or so before *The Book of Mormon*, that outlines the lives of the Nephites and Lamanites, lost tribes of Israel who washed ashore in North America. There were also the Kinderhook plates, further translations of ancient tablets found in an Indian burial mound near Nauvoo, IL, that turned out to be a hoax played on Smith by locals. References to these works and others weave themselves into *WoO*, tracing a literary lineage as remarkable from a creative standpoint as it is troubling from one of faith. Early in the book, she outlines the perils of the textline’s faith and artistry:

Who would hang a fake?

*

*A way to teach is to say faction is truer than nonfiction.
We see the thought progressed in Plato’s “god must be
represented as he really is.”*

*

Who do you take sympathy with?

*

Which mind do you choose?

*

Whose style did you assume you might say?

Of course, it is almost impossible to invoke the word “fake” within context of Mormon literary history without simultaneously invoking the name Mark Hofmann, who in the midst of a crisis of faith and ongoing financial troubles, honed his skills as a forger to a nearly unprecedented level and would later turn to murder via mail bombs to try and cover his crimes, nearly killing himself when one exploded in his car. He forged founding American documents, Emily Dickinson poems, and much more. But his specialty was Mormon history. He loved provoking Mormon leadership and fomenting doubt and disagreement in their followers. One document, the White Salamander letter, was supposedly penned

by Martin Harris and outlines how it was not the angel Moroni, but a white salamander (the salamander being a potent symbol in various mystical traditions) who led Smith to the gold plates.

Salamanders make repeated appearances in Angle's work, as does Hofmann, "Krill bashed her squash / blossom necklace, but enter Hofmann's & 'Thou may'est see the burn marks yet.' 'Thou may'est' papyri-sty / climb." Later in the same piece, she writes, "Polygamy is not interested but it wants / his sperm count catered. 'Mercury, or quicksilver, that most volatile of metals and a central alchemical emblem.'" It is worth noting here that Hofmann used mercury switches for his bombs, triggers that are particularly volatile. In these two short passages, Angle draws a direct line between the practiced alchemy of Smith's spiritualism and mysticism and "alchemy" of creation, even for less-than-savory reasons, such as the creation of scripture or history wholly from the imagination or the making of paper and iron gall ink that can fool an appraiser.

In one interview Angle refers to Smith's book as a "mongrel." It was almost certainly pastiche. "Ready-made" may be a more appropriate word. Like Duchamp, who also makes an appearance or two in *WoO*, Smith had a keen eye for repurposing otherwise overlooked artifacts and texts and putting his own flourish on them. Angle takes up her place in this tradition beautifully, and with a humor and lyricism that Smith could only dream of. She is participating in other literary traditions as well, as she makes clear in her notes about source material for the book. Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let me be Lonely* is named specifically, as is Harold Bloom, but it seems that Charles Olson is here in spirit as well. Like the aforementioned writers, Angle does not merely trace the violence and indiscretions of her topic, though they are numerous, especially if the legacy of his creation is considered. Instead, she builds a network of histories that spans nearly two centuries and at least one continent while encapsulating an enormous spectrum of motives behind the creative act. As a translator, she complicates her source material in a myriad of satisfying ways, understanding, as one passage in the book's final pages notes,

*Eventually writers understand they must turn their backs
on the original
There is almost not an interval*

*Objects are outside the soul, of course; and yet, they are
Also ballast in our heads*

- Gary Beck, *Fault Lines*, Winter Goose Publishing, 2016
- Shim Bo-Seon, *Fifteen Seconds Without Sorrow*, Parlor Press, 2016
Translated by Chung Eun-Gwi and Brother Anthony of Taizé
- William Brewer, *I Know Your Kind*, Milkweed Editions, 2017
- Ray Buckley, *Magnesium*, Independent Publishing Resource Center, 2016
- Ann Cefola, *Free Ferry*, Upper Hand Press, 2017
- Jeffrey Conway, Gillian McCain, and David Trinidad, *Descent of the Dolls*, BlazeVOX, 2017
- Hannah Craig, *This History That Just Happened*, Parlor Press, 2017
- Joseph Di Prisco, *Sight Lines from The Cheap Seats*, Rare Bird Books, 2017
- Rebecca Dunham, *Cold Pastoral*, Milkweed Editions, 2017
- Charmaine Glass, *All She Wrote*, Enaz SOUL, 2016
- Derek Gromadzki, *Pilgrimage Suites*, Parlor Press, 2017
- Gerry Grubbs, *The Palace of Flowers*, Dos Madres Press, 2016
- Domenica Iannaco, *The Death of Galahad*, Mica Press, 2016
- Julie Hungville Lemay, *The Echo of Ice Letting Go*, University of Alaska Press, 2017
- Kathleen McGookey, *Heart in a Jar*, White Pine Press, 2017
- Geraldine Monk, *They Who Saw the Deep*, Parlor Press, 2016
- Jennifer Moore, *The Veronica Maneuver*, University of Akron Press, 2015
- Kristine Ong Muslim, *Meditations of a Beast*, Cornerstone Press, 2016
- Nicolas Pesquès, *Overyellow*, Parlor Press, 2017
Translated by Cole Swensen
- Sasha Pimentel, *For Want of Water*, Beacon Press, 2017
- Ethel Rackin, *Go On*, Parlor Press, 2017
- Natalie Safir, *Eyewitness*, Dos Madres Press, 2016
- Red Shuttlesworth, *Loneliest Road; The Visit; Sideswipe; and Roadside Attractions*, Bunchgrass Press, 2017
- Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *This Accident of Being Lost*, House of Anansi Press, 2017
- William Trowbridge, *Vanishing Point*, Red Hen Press, 2017
- Panagiotis A. Tsonis, *An Autobiography*, Dos Madres Press, 2016
- Mai Der Vang, *Afterland*, Graywolf, 2017
- Amie Whittlemore, *glass harvest*, Autumn House Press, 2017
- Kelsey Wilder, *Amp the Airy Void*, CSM Press, 2016

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