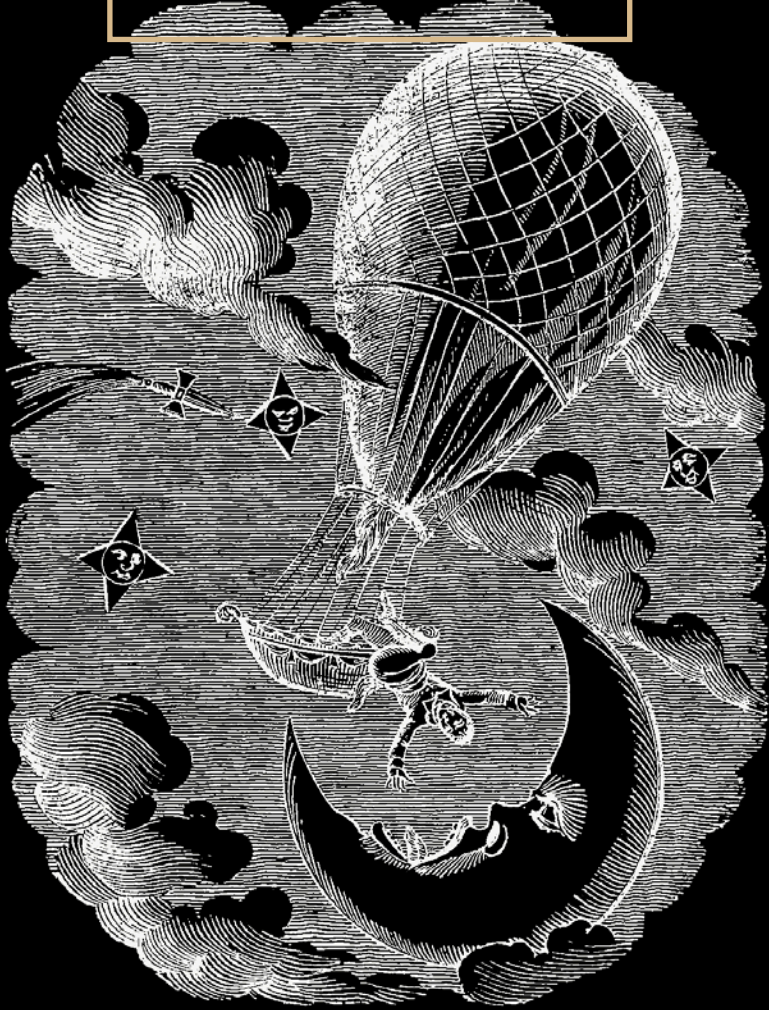


SUGAR  
HOUSE  
REVIEW



#21



FALL/WINTER 2020  
POETRY

# SUGAR HOUSE REVIEW

AN INDEPENDENT POETRY MAGAZINE

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## PATCH

I know how the bats get  
in the house and I know

catharsis is not the ideal.  
Before this I only knew

the city, so poor in iron  
and trains but was called

flat-faced by a stranger  
and I was planting yes

I was panting. I wanted  
to be the close of desire,

to be an object of some  
verb. Heard the instant

of a punch's bloom and  
it was soundless. Then

refused to learn dances  
with names. The canal

I walked past mornings  
on an all-ledge bridge

(must have in evenings,  
then, too) held the milky

swans who seemed to be  
sleeping as they tended

to the soft bellies of their  
wings. Swanhood is not

greedy, once apart from  
the herd they do grieve.

Bats can yell, too, eyes  
narrowing, yellowing—

it ends when they can  
explain the beginning.

I know how the bats get  
and how I feel I know

about birds and before  
this only I knew the city.



## TALLY OF WHAT NAMES

Better than safety  
is the idea of safety  
(the long noodles'  
solid egg grazing  
liquid yolk). I am  
not in a field: what maims  
the house maims me.

This is the least far I  
have been, so far  
from far, not a crown  
nor memory of the circus,  
its crowd. Sitting broad,  
rationing dresses, I see  
rumors now steep against  
the board like the balmed  
violence of summer. I  
am not a field: you  
carve and I'm unintended,  
hospitable to the minor  
chords I crave, and you say  
the yolk's unintended.

## THE MISSING PAGES

He inscribed my copy, *The missing pages*  
*as well*—no explanations, no regrets,  
and yet I felt betrayed, by man or fate.

A familiar April sunset, dark-blue  
fragments of cloud crowding an orange sky—  
is the vast past really dead or acting out

in our absentminded present? When I opened  
his diary: so many pages half-empty. Play of light,  
frustrations of weather. Not *think* and *love*,

or *know*, *meet*, *face*. He wrote that my short  
haircut haloed my face like zinnia petals,  
but his poem seems now to mock skin

loosening from bone, age longer  
than drought or rain in his entry log.  
I count crows flying overhead,  
a row of scrambled black piano keys.

## A FEW NOTES, THEN, ON ABSENCE

I churn through cities to arrive  
at my parent's funeral aflame.  
Enormous bristles surround  
the nubs of events. I was best  
contained in snow, untucking  
the stiff crane of my legs  
to pick a way through frost.

## HUNGRY MUSEUM

*I am fed daily by grateful strangers:  
Figs, cashews, this uncle's prosecco,  
the long death of your grandfather—  
night tastes like water in my mouth.*

A man under a streetlight  
in a green wool hat, holding a bottle  
in the rain, and gesturing for you  
to come closer—that's what I meant.

The smell of bacon as we lay  
between gritty sheets and  
the taste of a stale cigarette  
on your lips and the white curtain  
lifted by a breeze smelling of trimmed lawn.

Finding you again, a yellow sail  
on a boat, like a curtain, and a shore  
of the dream of boats.

In the schoolyard  
a mulberry tree growing through asphalt.  
In smocked pinafore and tights  
I hung berries on a chain-link fence  
and chalked lines in cooling shadows.

A world of uncomfortable chairs and unbreakable distance—

You could see who I used to be.

## PACKING UP THE HOUSE,

swear to see only what is there  
and not the child  
running up and down the stairs,

the stranger caught in photos on the wall.  
Even so, there are these wraiths  
to contend with: to hear her phantom fingers fall

on the out-of-tune piano, a hint  
of dry leaves burning on the lawn,  
a fingerprint

on canvas the color of density, of fog,  
is to believe she might be here, impossibly.  
Draw a tree, and then another. Days, a travelogue.

The weeks have wings, the birches pale and husk.  
Under the shingles, cracks where the house has shed  
its white teeth. The sidewalk, leaf-littered at dusk,

cracks where a tree's root arches, lifting  
page after page. Farther down, on the beach,  
sandstorms clutching at debris. The bay, shifting.

## SEAWAY

i.

*Constant* the movement away  
or going toward watery self  
laps at the door the engineered  
lock snaps shut leveled adjustment

*(what is created by humans  
is almost always alien)*

floating cumulus snags  
in the upper branches  
of an invisible tree  
and ribbons the sky

[how  
last night I descended the ladder  
in my socks, thin rungs cutting  
the arches of my feet, I try not to  
slip

while, a hundred yards below,  
students wait, expectant, for my  
lecture

When I arrive at the bottom,  
all my knowledge is suddenly  
awash

formless as the earth  
on that first day]

A clear jar of water anchors the tablecloth  
its glass a solidish liquid of sand + heat

its water trembles as I write registers  
the quake of my words



I don't know if this is how I am loved  
and how I love

it's what gives life and what takes it away

v.

[when I reach the bottom of the ladder  
I have no idea  
what to tell my students

all I have ever known has become shapeless  
inaccessible to me

I find myself going  
back to the beginning—

*A phoneme I tell them is the smallest  
piece of meaning  
the building block of language*

my students show no interest

what I say  
has no apparent relevance]

surely tributaries feel this too

vi.

Every day methadone mile is there  
corrupt sidewalk corrugated cardboard  
cushions the cracks

here a child mother within without  
what it is to become self uncontained

I don't live here my mind does



that of me that worries witness

I am a watcher in a watching world  
my eyes extend outside me  
extend me into a world that enters me  
where I live inside me and in what I see

[two men sidle up, one at each elbow  
*you are being watched* they tell me]

observer witness voyeur  
what is human curiosity?

[*your watching will be curtailed* they tell me]

and it's true: two-thirds of my vision masked;  
my one-third godself intact

how vision is: one-third inside  
one-third out, one-third brackish

yet the eye is owned and resides

vii.

My neighbor has an eye  
that never shuts  
trained on her porch  
limited peripheral vision  
it sees without agency

I didn't know I was  
watched when I hid  
her packages from  
the street view arranging  
her pots of flowers  
to hide the goods  
from those who  
roam the streets  
on bikes

my worry caught  
in the motion of me  
in her digital eye

(Who is looking  
in the seaway?)

ocean of vision  
flotsam & jetsam  
that someone let go  
into the stream

(What was that dream?)

viii.

The limits of foresight—

I scramble in the shadowlands  
what could have been paid attention to  
(some did see and say) was too inconvenient

the prophets raise their heads  
and lose them

I scurry I scuttle  
the fire it sees me

ix.

The birds know the currents  
wear them inside like intestines  
a magnetized stone between the eyes  
tells them where to go

They ride waves they feel  
and catch seeing with the body  
and change with their wings  
what those who follow  
will feel streaming upstream

x.

The sculpture in my city square  
orbits eyeless in the air

three spinning metal boats  
of wind invite me to see  
in circles the ocean-sky  
the swift-current streets

xi.

[Outside on a platform  
we are naked together  
I raise my body over him  
my perfect breast in  
his perfect mouth—

then we pause, he has to  
fill a work order

as I wait, I count his remotes,  
six lined up on the railing—

my manager of light]

xii.

Once I recorded the light  
and ran out of words

I was flying over the earth  
in a 737

the airy geography  
a broken glass sky  
netted in clouds—

I tried to write what I saw  
*it was like (something)* I wrote

but already that was wrong  
the light is like nothing

(the essence of change)

its gift: it doesn't stay

xiii.

I dreamt we motored along  
in our boat we were a whole family  
carefree and joyful as an island nation

the ocean a deeper blue  
the sky had begun to deepen too  
when we realized we'd lost track  
of the continent cloud-lands  
darkened the horizon we tried  
to decipher them

then boats  
big as houses appeared white  
with lit wood-frame windows

were they heading out or in?  
we attached ourselves to them  
if only not to be lost alone

xiv.

My friend said she was  
lying in bed with mortality  
beside her

she was curious  
let mortality touch her  
she too reached out  
ran her fingers  
along its skin  
mortality rippled

like water  
    then grew  
    tender  
    as a ripened fruit

xv.

In the *fulness of time*:

    the stacking of stones  
in a rivulet  
    recruitment  
of sticks and mud

what small hands  
can find

    for whole  
moments  
    the water  
seems baffled  
    halting

as it builds up  
    steady  
    against the pieced-  
together dam

/ 'æb səns / AS IN "AN ABSENCE OF CLOUDS"

the nothing that suggests            something in the way hunger  
manifests a gut;                        shaped like a bowl with neither  
sides nor bottom;                      often echoes like a howl, or  
rings like tinnitus;                    the end of a concert; the gap  
between the pickets                    of a fence that renders a fence  
picket; the                                four a.m. street; the moment in which  
an *I* worries;  
    already, in what has left shore, the new wave  
begins; sometimes perfect

/ 'tm səl ri /AS IN "A *TINSELRY* OF CLOUDS"

girlfriend gloss; rhinestone finery; spangled mirror of  
soul; polished spit; crow's nest jewel; sun tart; tawdry  
tic-toc; butterfly wing; heart flutter;  
incomplete asana;  
shaped like a doorknob; turns for the sake of turning;  
river, rock-bombed & noon-blazed;  
wished for & reviled; alpine snow;  
too often underestimated;  
fool's gold; gold

## THE BACKGROUND PHOTO OF MY FRIEND'S FRIEND'S FACEBOOK PROFILE

Based on the lower half of the picture, it looked like a small lifeboat: a thick grey plastic floor, handles of the same material woven (one unevenly) into blown-up sides that curved into each other like the tied ends of a kielbasa. I'm not sure where he was. It doesn't matter—he was so far out, and not just for the picture. You don't go that far unless you do this often, so far all you could see is water and sky, white threads of wave;

and the sun's light was shedding more from one side of the image, a halo of hot pink swelling through the right perimeter; the sky around it softening in peaches and yellows, then a pale blue in the middle of my screen crescendoing to bright navy, the first allusion to night (though it appeared darker or lighter depending on how I tilted the screen and I'm not sure its truest version). Either way,

it was something, all those colors together, all that life. I was there with him, but better, because I was there again when he wasn't; the faint trace of an island barely lifting its blurry head above the farthest edge of water; the water so dark it was almost black, blue layered over itself so many times you forget the blue, so deep if you fell in you would just keep falling.

TARA KIPNEES



## LET THE LOOMING IN

I'm telling you I can't hold anything:  
Cup your hands, let the edges touch,  
and when it rains, hold them out—  
water will still falter from the makeshift  
catcher—do you understand now?

See, over there, that apparition: the low humming  
of track and train, that hushed fold  
in the obedient skyline, the hesitation  
of spring or the stuttering dandelions.

Here, you are green and grass. Feel  
the sift of rain. This. This is what I am trying  
to say. Suppose that sometimes when I'm driving,  
I let my hand skip wind suspended out of the car window,

that there is this crack in my curtains where light goes  
to play, sometimes I can see the rumble  
of branches—I was always right about.

Suppose you were only a ghost—  
the tendrils of smoke let out in gasps  
above concrete cylinders.

I'd rather weave this. I mean: I'd rather  
let the looming in. See there is light under  
the door. Some streetlight or moon or lamp  
Or. Has origin ever really mattered?

I'm telling you I can't hold anything  
anymore. This is just the derivative  
of the day I leapt from a cliff.  
Still, there is this: I can feel the empty  
swing grating the thick gusts.

## FORMICARIUM

You will remember the mountain by hollowing it out.  
Your past is arranged as if it belongs to a child—

those too-precious overalls, hair gleaming as the sun  
streams out from behind a jagged peak. Even now

you cannot decide if you desire or despise a smooth  
horizon. With a little yellow shovel one mound of dirt

is flattened to form another. The child is unaware  
of the ants troubling the ruffled boundary of her socks,

but you see them dotting up her leg like instructions  
to cut. You swear you can recall in a vivisected slice

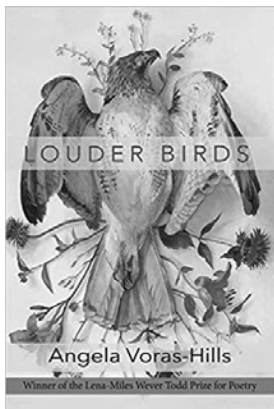
the ants' meandering galleries below. You are arranging.  
Some tool held in your hands. You remember the general

shape, but the skin on fire is no longer yours. Instead  
here are some flowers, their prickly stems, flowers

covering the mountain you've riddled through with holes.

*LOUDER BIRDS*  
BY ANGELA VORAS-HILLS  
(LSU Press, 2020)

REVIEW BY KATHERINE HOLLANDER



In Angela Voras-Hills's exciting first book, *Louder Birds*, we encounter a world of wonder and unease, an acutely yet fantastically midwestern landscape teeming with life and seething with quiet danger. The poems that construct this world are sharp and exact, tart and rigorous. Admirably strict and spare formally, they are also self-critical, featuring an innocent and sometimes bewildered "I" who is never overindulged by the speaker. In this humorous and sometimes brutal book, there is ice fishing, there is Jell-O, there is a pair of wild foxes charmingly named Conclusion and Prudence. There are cornfields and barns, an "I" and a "you," a grandmother and a baby (sometimes yet unborn), a cat

that stalks from poem to poem. There is the threat and actuality of bodily harm, and what feels like an entire *Peterson Field Guide's* worth of animals, the majority of them dead. Most importantly, there is a very sure hand, a very confident voice directing the flight and shape of these excellent poems.

The best in the collection—wonders that include "Never Eat a Polar Bear's Liver," "Krakow," "Chateaubriand," "When We Were Prey to Nothing," and "In the Beginning"—posit a strange and tender relationship between a sometimes-befuddled subject and her sometimes-broken environment. The speaker is affectionate towards, and alienated from, both the natural and the human (although these poems rightly look askance at that artificial divide). They both confess and celebrate: "we brought guns to the firehouse bake sale," the speaker in "Bake Sales" tells us, "we caught the carpet-mouse, left him / asleep in a box with crayoned windows." In this poem, as in a number of others, childhood is charged with relish and menace. In winter, "We raced to the front porch to lick / the icicle hanging from gutter to ground," and in summer, children are given "five dollars for a Dixie cup full" of lemonade by men who, perhaps friendly, perhaps sinister, then "[drive] away waving, their lips wet."

In "On Earth as It Is in Heaven," a jubilant mother rides her motorcycle to Las Vegas and drinks "cocktails in the sun" just days after cancer treatment, but this triumph is placed next to a childhood memory of a grandfather whose "friend

learned he had brain cancer and shot himself.” His widow is unconsolated by floral arrangements, prayer, or “ham and potato casserole” in a church basement, but still, and in the face of all this, the family stocks its freezer with abundant fish from the same lake “my grandpa landed his plane on.” In the wonderful “Maps of Places Drawn to Scale,” “a van flips on an exit ramp” and provides the occasion for a meditation on how birth, death, and community are different in small towns and large cities:

[ ... ] *At a Chinese buffet,  
Death is stuffing her cheeks  
with crab rangoons, while a family  
stands behind her with empty plates. Nobody stuck  
to the vinyl booth finds ‘You will suffer’  
inside their cookie, but it’s implied*

These poems—funny, sad, unflinching—are typical of the collection in the way they productively commingle ordinary but authentic pleasure, flawed human connection, and the threats of death and harm.

This threat of harm runs through the collection like barbed wire through a field. When it works, it is part of the rigor that infuses the book, giving it a powerful shrewdness and frugality—though the images of violence, particularly that visited upon animals, can sometimes feel grotesque. We encounter a drain full of dead eels fed upon by flies, a dying worm consumed by millipedes, a field of crow parts crunching underfoot, two separate bleeding rabbits, and a doe that “flipped / over our hood and dragged her back legs / across the highway into the woods.” This violence is often effective. For example, the car-struck doe appears in the beautiful “Controlled Burn,” along with a dead but still-speaking vole and a “chorus” of living frogs, who advocate on opposite sides of a debate about heaven. In this poem, the question of violence and death is a real question, complex and nuanced, and the contradictory answers are inflected with humility and forbearance.

Similarly, “Preserving” (one of my favorite poems in the book) moves from luscious plenty and human care to bleak humor or worry and back again several times, tracing the preservation of a summer’s worth of lemons to a tumble on winter ice:

[ ... ] *When I fall,  
I catch myself with my face.  
When I fall, I go  
to the hospital, to make sure*

*the baby is still alive.*  
*There are so many small things*

*to worry about in a large way.*

Here, injury and the very real threat of personal loss are tempered by an understanding of the haplessness of human destruction—of the environment and climate, of animals, and of other humans, including a botched death row execution. Toads thrown into a pond by children in the mistaken belief that they are frogs will still drown, regardless of the children's good intentions, but nevertheless "we can't blame them for not knowing / what swims, what sinks, what floats."

At other times the proliferation of physical harm approaches gratuitousness, what it represents or portends unclear. Instances of mundane or believable injury (the pregnant woman's fall or the doe struck by the car) are joined by more fantastical ones (a speaker who paints the mouths of strangers shut with glue, or one who spontaneously "slit[s] the skin" of ermines "to warm my neck"). These two sorts of violence—fantastical and mundane—are both adroitly conjured, but they sometimes seem to undermine one another, making it harder to take either variety with the seriousness it demands. Instructions toward an ethics of violence—how should we understand this? Should we stop it? Can we, and how?—are not forthcoming. This perhaps weakens the collection, but it is also part of its spell. It feels of a piece with the half-imaginary midwestern world Voras-Hills conjures so well; like the real Midwest, it feels plain, clear, and very, very confusing, intolerant of obfuscation and mysticism but also profoundly obscure, profoundly mysterious in its total refusal to offer explanations—if you belonged, the poems both demonstrate and lament, fondly concede and stubbornly protest, you'd already know. This is itself an incantation (assisted by the poems' consistently oracular titles, like "Wait in the Bathtub and It Will Carry You"), and the spell works. But there are moments, too, when we might wish for a little more mercy, a little more clarity.

Yet it is clear that Voras-Hills is a poet of seriousness and talent, one whose vision is attentive, unsparing, and, in the end, compassionate. In the very first poem in the book, she presents us with a girl "holding a plywood sign that reads: / zucchini / and God / in red paint," tells us that "her hair snarls in the wind / and rain, but she doesn't notice. Like any sign," Voras-Hills reminds us, "it's difficult to know how seriously to take it." This difficulty, this question of seriousness, these signs—these are the worthy subjects of her poetic scrutiny. And there are no easy answers. But the poet's precision, the beauty of her language, and her comfort with the obscure and the unknowable offer, if not a rescue, a reprieve. "For now, the puddle remains / unnamed," she tells us, "so it is not yet a disaster."

## AUDIOLOGY TEST DIFFERENT KIND | THE OTHER HEARING TEST

*in American Sign Language (ASL) gloss and English<sup>1</sup>*

Yourself deaf child happen what every-year	This happens to you, a deaf child, every year:
Sit-there headphones	you sit on a chair and wear headphones.
B-e-e-p flick-ear hand-raise	Raise your hand if you hear a beep or a tone.
Audiologist write-write	You watch the audiologist write down notes
Yourself see clear can't why	through double-paned windows.
Window glass double	You wonder why your mother is nodding,
Mother nod	as if she agrees with the audiologist.
Two-them talk-talk-talk	They are talking and talking and <i>talking</i>
Feel like two-them forget	while you await the sound of a tone's hello.
You-sitting-there-forever	It's almost as if they've forgotten about you.
Wait-wait sound-flick-ear next	

Every-year happen what	This also happens every year: you dream
You-dream sit where	of sitting on her side of the windows,
Audiologist before sit	watching the audiologist raise her hand
Now sit where	the second she hears a pitch-perfect silence.
Face-you headphones-fitted-on	Constantly drive her crazy with miniscule
You-watch hand-raise	sounds from so far away she has to wonder
You-turn-knobs sounds none	if she's imagining those silences
But herself listen silence must	as she searches your impassive face for clues
Sometime you-do-do	until you haunt the deepest echoes of her dreams,
Turn-knob-a-wee-bit sound little	lines zigzagging X's and O's all over the chart.
Look-like from where far	
Herself watch-watch face yours	
Help hand-raise yes no what	
Test continue-nonstop	
Night herself dream nonstop what	
Life paper X O up down up	

*'ASL gloss is simply using English words and ASL idioms in the ASL sign order. Just to be clear: there is no standardized ASL gloss system at all. It is impossible to convey even a fraction of all the rich nuances of an ASL sentence on paper. For instance, there are no mentions of facial expressions (i.e., emotional inflections), the location for each person (or animal) referenced in the signing space, the spatial relationships between these people, the sign dialects, and so on.*

RAYMOND LUCZAK

## ABRACADABRA

*(I create as I speak)*

The water is full of path  
and the path, of him.  
He is the plough and froth  
in the reflecting pool,  
the nib and thrash  
the butterfly, hey-presto  
man made real estate  
typhoon, this quill and last  
blunt blade of grass  
on the scorched, flat  
earth. Borders never  
mediate with the cartographic  
art the day they burn.  
Did that sound strange?  
Some believe the box bridge  
by the mill pond paints  
a sense of other / self  
and you can cure the spread  
of disbelief by application  
of snake oil Sundays.  
Sometimes the hive gives  
way to hot collapse  
and sometimes a misread  
sounds clearer than the bell  
tolled by the enunciating  
rope. In the small hours  
you can hear bleak tweets  
from the shallows, where  
he defines the tumble turn.



## DIFFICULTY WITH MOONLIGHT

I was looking  
for a noun for / a gathering  
of silhouettes: white

skin of / Trembling  
Aspen on a brilliant spring  
evening, *bruise* of blue

lilacs  
intoxicating  
the air

as my head fell / back  
and my eyes turned to drinking  
wells

swallowing  
the pale moon  
whole in my throat.

Quake / aspens  
Quake Aspens forest of clones  
*choir* of syllables.

## HOMESICK PASTORAL

We've been outside and cannot go back in  
I do not think there is an "in" at all  
The moonlight spares what little light it can

When we came out, we came out into green  
Brindled as the body of an eel  
We went outside and never came back in

We sat beneath the fairy-lights and fans  
I heard, among them: markets, futures fall  
The moonlight shored and spared us, then.

Beyond us were green acres, peerless, thin.  
Long pastures we would work but couldn't cull.  
We've been outside and came back with bad tans.

Threadbare aprons made our working warm  
Such hands were deeply green with chlorophyll.  
When I say "such" I mean myself, alone,

Whose been out, after curfew, on the lawns  
And is himself a world but isn't al-  
Ways, so hardly home who often feels  
The full sparing moonlight at his heels.

“PLAYBOY,” LETTER IX

Say grace

o, king of Greece

and bless

this

bench

before mass

or

Sunday

Brunch

It's where our

warmest parts

are kept

And also,

Dearest,

where I, art-

less, slept.

## DESPERADO ABROAD

I found my way to France, between Antibes  
and Cannes, where the film festival was on  
and hundreds of actors plied the telephone  
to line up interviews and hit on babes.  
One night, smug in black tie, I walked the street  
from the underground garage to my hotel,  
a slight buzz on, pleased to have done so well.  
Then, up the sidewalk maybe sixty feet,  
a dog emerged from a small alleyway  
and turned toward where I'd been. We met. He sniffed.  
In that half-step, each cast a doubtful look.  
A few strides on, I heard the aging stray  
throw up. I turned. He gagged again and left.  
One glance at me, I guess, was all it took.

## DONUT SHOP PANTOUM

“It’s a sad day,” the counter girl says, “we’re all out.”  
But even on National Donut Day it don’t matter to me; sticky  
sweet goes down like a jagged pill without water. The orange  
of this place—Golden Gate Bridge, persimmon—a pigment  
of anguish. A national holiday? I’m here only to rhyme *dough*  
with *Rimbaud*, to be alone with Mrs. Butterworth & styrofoam.  
The cash-only sign’s color is that of Carrot Top, Mario Batali’s Crocs.  
I never read *The Odyssey*, but I think I get the gist

as I swim alone in a sea of styrofoam & high-fructose corn syrup.  
In this Indiana trash town, I watch coffee drip from delicate  
instruments, thinking of Homer Simpson with a fluorescent lyre  
& deep-fried, glazed hole of *doh!* yelling *O small*,

*tortured town, you are the apricot-stuff of poetry*—machinery-gunk  
color like circus peanuts, bad spray tans, prescription bottles.  
Empty trays of glazed O’s behind her, she goes for the jugular:  
“It’s a sad day,” the counter girl says to a regular, “we’re all out.”

## HACHE &amp; CHER HOROWITZ SPLIT A CONEY

as if  
as if

Jeanine & Norma Jean & Angelyne didn't seal their histories with a glossy top coat.  
Rachel Dolezal wasn't allowed to slink off into obscurity

& with a  
book deal.  
Let's not  
pretend it's  
something  
else, Hache  
shot first,  
why not?

as if  
as if

the audacity to select for yourself is anything less than totally American!  
Ronnie & Donnie & Andrew Johnson didn't powder their noses and check hemlines,  
once upon a time.

America,  
clutching  
pearls that a  
black man  
would deny  
her the  
pleasure of  
first blood.

as if  
as if  
as if

she doesn't sing along to "Ignition" when she's tipsy.  
she didn't used to say "I don't see color."  
every freshman english class doesn't ram Jay Gatsby's ashy aspirations down our throats

—right!  
Show me the  
difference  
between a  
curated  
garden in  
perpetual  
bloom and a  
green light at  
the end of the  
pier?

as if there's such a big difference between having flowers every day and that flashing green light at the end of the pier anyway.

JENI DE LA O

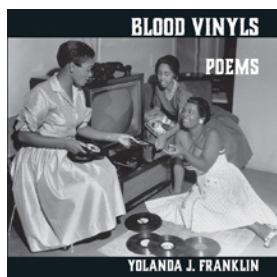
## A RECIPE FOR IMPERIAL RICE

One cup of ocean water —sink the rice, and on the third day (or hour, if you're hungry) wash it clean—set aside. Get your grandpa to kill a chicken. You can catch it for him, if you're hungry. Remember all the bits of food you didn't want this week: the ham you skipped at breakfast, the peas you scooped into a ziplock, those bell peppers you snacked on Monday and Tuesday but were sick of by Wednesday and ignored on Thursday and forgot by Friday— set them on the counter while you weep over onions and smash garlic. In a skillet with no handle, make the eating oil hot, add the garlic and onions and lick your fingers clean or let a lover do that for you. All your cousins live in the margins of this recipe. Add the chicken, then your scraps. Season the way you should. Do you know what the bible says about Saaaaaaffron? or that there are 5,348 miles between Benin and the place my grandpa first killed a chicken? and 90 miles between that spot and the apartment where my mother divined a way to hold all this together? Do the same, after mixing in the cooked rice. Figure out how. Top with shredded cheese, that's the Imperial part, and bake until you are willing to singe your eyebrows just to scoop out a taste.



*BLOOD VINYLS*  
BY YOLANDA J. FRANKLIN  
(Anhinga Press, 2018)

REVIEW BY SARAH GIRAGOSIAN



In African American traditions, where there is abjection, there is also music. From slave music to hip-hop, African American music has offered a blueprint for survival. For poet Yolanda J. Franklin, music can be a joy as poignant as a raised fist against the face of atrocity. Her debut collection, *Blood Vinyls*, suggests that writing about Black music entails confronting the bloody legacy of American history and its politics of Black representation, as well as contending with the violence and abuse in one's own family history. While the white appropriation of African American traditions and the misrepresentation or erasure of the Black voice haunt the collection, *Blood Vinyls* is both fiercely intelligent and alchemic in its capacity to take the violated and appropriated Black voice and reclaim her as an agent of meaning.

African American music, as Franklin figures it in *Blood Vinyls*, is both bond and crossed boundary. It's both salve and a salvo, as well as a foreground and a background. It resurrects past communities, and serves as memory, memorial, and mnemonic. A life force, Franklin's music is also a counterforce, a turntable or a revolutionary terrain in which the poet remixes and undermines the voices of white supremacists, past and present. In *Blood Vinyls*, a square-shaped book that mimics and pays homage to a vinyl cover, Franklin embraces all these musical resonances and more throughout.

Franklin is a Cave Canem and Callaloo Fellow, a recipient of a both 2016–17 McKnight Dissertation Fellowship and a Kingsbury writing award. A third-generation Florida native, she's deeply invested in a poetics of place and the buoying, communal impulses of African American womanist traditions. Under the threats of annihilation and cultural erasure, many Black artists like Franklin have had to not just radically reimagine racist clichés, but also be historians to their community, literate in all the ways the dominant white culture obscures and misrepresents those who live on the margins.

In her poem "Black Writer," a wry remix of Tony Hoagland's "White Writer," she writes, "I know that Black readers too need to see their lives reflected on the page— / (re) memory and vinyl; the fear of vanishing." However, while the

poet-speaker recognizes the political exigency of representing Black history in a country marked by amnesia about the rape, murder, and enslavement of Black people, she expresses ambivalence about the role of the poet-activist as well in the same poem:

[ ... ] *you will start to feel like the rite of blanket cliches  
are all you'll ever right in this world.*

*And gradually,  
throughout the picketing for*

*contentions coloring who you are*

*you deflect it, it adumbrates you to write whiter, I mean righter and  
righter*

These final lines act as a reprisal of the last lines in Hoagland's "White Writer," in which the white speaker addresses the apparent futility of writing in a world that recognizes one merely as a racialized writer, one who is essentialized and marketed according to their racial designation. Of course, a white writer is not racialized in the violent ways of a Black writer, nor is he subject to the methods through which the gatekeepers of publishing industries exclude or tokenize Black writers. For Franklin, as a Black writer, to "right" a cliché involves rebuffing the psychic violence of misrepresentation and erasure, but it also involves engaging—perhaps at her own expense—a white audience. The speaker's slippage of "whiter" and "righter" in the poem suggests that whiteness is the stumbling block that the Black writer must contend with, whether it be in the form of white exclusion, erasure, or stereotyping before one can write "righter and righter"—implying a form of writing that earnestly embraces accurate and ethical representation.

In "White Room Syndrome," Franklin imagines Kenneth Goldsmith's racist representation of Michael Brown, in which he read the murdered victim's autopsy report and closes his poem with the image of Brown's genitals. White American culture has long been obsessed with the consumption of the dead Black body, a fixation that spectacularizes while also normalizing the violent underpinnings of a tradition that includes lynching, slavery, and murder. As Elizabeth Alexander writes in her collection of essays entitled *The Black Interior*, "Black bodies in pain for public consumption have been an American spectacle for centuries. This history moves from public rapes, beatings, and lynchings to the gladiatorial arenas of basketball and boxing." Goldsmith's double violation is another kind of murder. In the last section of Franklin's prose poem entitled "Eating the Other," referring to the white consumption of the Black body dead or in pain, she

writes, “call it poetry, work, avant-garde, uncreative neo-racism or necromancy. They will take the body again and again and again.” Poetry, slyly slipped into the same catalogue that includes neo-racism and necromancy, is un-innocent, another grammar of psychic and linguistic violence. But in the right hands, it can be redemptive.

Schooled in the traditions of a western market that white-washes the unique experiences of people of color, as well as the mythopoetics of Black poetry and music, Franklin imagines art as transportive and transformative in the face of racism and generational trauma: “the job of the artist is not to leave you where she found you / this art requires gentrification.” Dynamic, textured with blues rhythms, jazz, bop, and found poems, her work is lively, demotic, and deeply political; as well as idiosyncratic in its highly imaginative formal permutations (think of Gwendolyn Brooks’ formal genius mixed with Claudia Rankine’s capacity to cast found material and the experiences of daily life into prose poems that offer visceral and temporal impacts and insights). One can also detect the influence of Frank O’Hara’s capacious eclecticism in these poems.

Indeed, there is astonishing vocal and formal range in *Blood Vinyls*, as well as high-powered energy from one poem to the next. “Double Dutch Bust,” “Manual for Still Hunting White Tailed Deer in a Gated Community,” and “White Room Syndrome” are just a sampling of the poems that continue to haunt me long after reading them. A poetics of polyvocality, snappy American idioms, and a discursive versatility, Franklin makes visible “the [m]iracle of the [b]lack [f]emale[p]oet”. Channeling the voices of her literary forebearers Phillis Wheatley, Lucille Clifton, and June Jordan, Franklin writes in her found poem:

*Oh, come and do marvel at how could she  
sing & know of a lyrical life.  
How did she know & see to be except herself?  
Come celebrate with me that I am—  
Perhaps, you will because  
each day something has tried to kill  
me & failed.*

Forging literary sociality out of mutual resilience, *Blood Vinyls* is an other-oriented text that finds recourse from the psychic violence of white supremacy in an intersubjective poetics, one that hearkens back to major African American musicians and poets of the twentieth century. One will find that the most oft-repeated verb of the collection is “to know.” Franklin’s emphasis on knowing as an epistemological currency may be read as an investment in the communal, where knowing is based in collaboration and in reimagining, rewriting, and testing out one’s knowledge in tandem with the other.

## HOUSE SONG WITH WONDER WOMAN

Wonder Woman came to my house to further the cause. *But you're not even Asian*, I said, at the front door. She tapped her shield and asked if I wanted to borrow her lasso. To wear it. To help with my poems. To further the cause. *No thanks*. She turned and strutted through my yard, glowing with strength, rippling with majesty. *Can you teach me to be like you?* I said. She sliced earth with her sword, planted some strawberries. *Now you know*, she said, before flying away. I sank my knees into irradiated boot prints, as if remnants of her invincibility could suffuse me. I hadn't told her my superpower yet. That I can parallel park. That I'm scared of masks, wearing them, not wearing them. The truth. That I'm no good with plants.

## JOHN CARTER OF MARS VERSUS THE VOID

No, I said to my two friends  
who begged me to come out, the front door  
open to the rare wonder of snow  
where we lived then. I'd been reading all morning  
the latest book in a sci-fi series

I couldn't imagine living without.  
They tried and tried to change my mind.  
Just as I found my place in that other land,  
snowballs slammed into the door. Slushy,  
hard-thrown missiles, they pounded

until I thought the wood would crack.  
The way they sounded they could have been rocks,  
and still they did not stop. This  
is my response to one of those boys,

friend I've known longest on this planet  
who wakes me thirty-eight winters later  
with a letter about a family and career and a great lack  
that has plunged into his—, and I see the knife  
of his cursive *f* in "life." He says he barely has the will  
to change a light bulb. I tell him that I know  
it's not a reddish speck

glimmering in the night sky that would take him,  
not a beautiful princess abducted  
by green, many-armed, tusk-faced Martians  
wielding bejeweled swords, but simply  
and utterly, the nothing all around it.  
I wept long after the last blow.  
When I opened the door, no one,

no marks above bits of scattered melt.  
I tell him I know now it wasn't him. It was  
the need to accept the gift of the bodied world  
knocking that day. Each impact's freezing starburst

was not cruelty, I say, but the hammered truth  
that I would have to live  
my earthbound life and love and suffer  
my own series of crystalline moments and what  
was I going to do about that?

## HER CALLING

“Have to call someone,”  
she says, and dials a bright song  
on the fat buttons of her plastic mermaid phone  
as we cross the parking lot of the school  
that has just taken her pinching, kicking,  
hugging, sorry-saying sister  
for the next nine months, the one  
she loves best in the world  
and hasn’t been without  
since she was out of her mother.

It’s not her sister, though,  
she talks to as I buckle her, but Echo,  
that black Lab our neighbors  
were always calling back across the road  
until a screech one night made silence  
repeat itself across the valley. “Echo!”  
she says. “We’ve been looking for you!”  
And she goes on catching up with that shadow  
of a dog until we pass a tree full of crows  
and wants to know if I know  
what they’re saying.

Last week her phone started ringing  
all by itself, right after she sat on it.  
“Oh, no! It’s Mia!” she said.  
I’ve never seen Mia, of course, or any of the others,  
but knowing her through reports  
that begin, “You won’t believe what Mia said!”  
I said don’t answer, but it’s a good thing she did—  
turned out to be Curly wearing a Mia mask  
and calling from Luna’s house.

This happened  
not long after she saw her baby self  
on the computer and she called that bald dribbler  
to say she didn’t talk good. Now she’s tapping  
the back of my seat. We’re almost home,

and it's my turn, so I steer  
with one hand and dial with the other  
an operetta of *bonk*, *ding*, and *boing*  
into the future, to a time that may come for her  
as it did for me, when her days turn up  
empty as the eyes of a doll  
left behind, her heart a tangle  
of crow cries.

“Here,” I say,  
and hand her the phone, for who  
better to recall that possible future self  
to the inexhaustible dream that is her calling?  
May she keep herself  
the way a shell cupped to an ear, no matter  
how far or broken, never lets go  
of ocean. “For you.”



## HER PRESENT

*beginning with a line from Dennis Held*

*Implacable, impeccably bereft of even the trace*  
of wrap and ribbon, Icicle River  
glitters in the sun. In our swimsuits,  
my daughter and I stand on a gray slope

of bankside granite as she counts—three,  
two—until we leap as one, feeling our skin  
warm through this June day's air  
before the slap of snowmelt zero

sends us thrashing and gasping up  
to hug ourselves half out of water,  
the bare cold down to our core.  
Fifty, I think, and might keep thinking

and shaking myself but for her glance  
toward a cottonwood snag on the opposite bank  
where, under a blue, cloud-hung sky,  
an osprey perches by its talons clenched

on a dead branch, calmly watching us shiver.  
When those first strange breaths filled her,  
I saw the gangling animal she was, wonder  
lighting her tilted face. Now, a drop

sparks from her earlobe as it falls to  
the slow shatter of passing water  
and our shapes swirl into the other.

## GOOD GIRL

*In 1957, Laika, a mongrel dog from the streets of Moscow, became the first living animal in orbit when the Soviets launched Sputnik 2.*

Horoshaya devochka, they said,  
leading her down bright halls  
to bowls of food and water.  
Little Bug, they said, patting her head.  
Little Lemon gazing up at them,  
turning her belly to the smooth, clean hands  
taking her measurements.  
Little Curly's numbers, of course,  
counting down from the second they found her  
to the seconds her respirations and heart  
went blazing up a blue sky.  
From her body

harnessed at the center  
of that long forceful roar,  
from each place they'd shaved her,  
colored wires shivered with data,  
but nothing could show  
how they became we and she ours,  
the fur and love and living breath  
we sent away.  
Into that mute black,

whistles and kiss sounds  
turning, each whiff of a white coat's  
swish, all our kind  
and beautiful faces drifting closer  
in the floating moments

her eyes went blank.

## THE SPELL

Even though I fly  
3,000 miles to drive him  
to Atlantic City and file

his taxes and fix  
the leak from his Buick  
I'm a disappointment.

He's still expecting her  
to come back.  
So I call him, *Bubbala*,

like she did, while coupon  
by coupon he cross-  
examines the paper. I scramble

his eggs, runny, like  
he demanded she do, call out,  
*What's the weather Bobby, boy?*

*Any new news?*  
I get the same no answer  
he gave mom for 65 years

minus two months. From her  
closet, overstuffed as ever,  
I pull on her shoddy house dress,

unzipped over my Mets T-shirt  
and boxers, shuffle behind him  
over the worn wood floor

in her backless slippers. Sometime  
in the night, he looks up  
from his Rusty Nail—our second—

*You two were so alike. Like Sisters.*  
I cackle her cackle, but  
he cancels Atlantic City anyway.

Feels wrong, he says,  
going to her  
favorite place alone.

IF I SAY, THE BUTTERFLY IS BEAUTIFUL, DAD,

he'll say, it's a bug.

If I say it likes him,  
he'll say, who needs friends?

If I say, once it was a caterpillar,  
he'll say, next it'll be dead.

If I say, it's a symbol of change,  
he'll inch his butt to the bench's edge,

rock back and forth, back and forth,  
like the physical therapists taught him

to get momentum, to stand safely,  
then after three settling breaths

he'll turn and start shuffling  
towards the car.

If he's feeling steady enough, if  
the breeze isn't too hard, he might

spread wide those bony elbows  
look back at me

and flap them.

## RIGHT HAND MAN

Sells his left hand  
to buy a gun,  
pocketing the change  
with his other one.

## ONCOLOGY

Given weeks, she carried off from the waiting room  
some coat or other, dark like hers,

wore it for months, knowing better.

# HEART ATTACK

bonsai artist  
crushed  
by bonsai tree



## THE ZELIG GOES MISSING IN THE SCRAPYARD

and nobody among the plastics can agree on his description. On the milk cartons, a giant question mark—meant to signify the zelig. It had been said by the warehouse workers and the metal shredders that the zelig only swims if naked. As if to enter water he must remove any barrier. As if to commune with nature—or to impress the passersby. The town is unsure. It had been said, by members of the search party, that the zelig, when crossing the river, would morph into a school of fish. The zelig purportedly a frequent visitor to the scrap heaps, tearing himself into a thousand jagged strips of corroded aluminum and cardboard. The bartender saying the zelig would come in, stinking of sadness, candlelit if noticed; the famous zelig, skinny-dipping into the glass.

## YESTERDAY KEYS TODAY'S CAR

This is its residue. The child asking you if you ever got your car back. Assuming *keyed* means *stolen*. Letting you know that you are of completely different economic strati. It pains you deeply to explain to the child that your car being keyed means that it is still in your possession. This is because you'd rather it not be in your possession, as it is more affordable, due to *some* recoupment, for your car to be stolen than to be keyed, ravined like a missing person. Weeks after your friend's mother died, back when he returned to middle school, he was spotted running a Sharpie across the side of an apartment building, the police officer acknowledging the mother while detaining him.

## THE MOON IS TWO HALF-MOONS JOINED TOGETHER

Her body still // yoked to histories retold // so often even her great-grandmother, who lived it, cannot // remember the river's name she // crossed to get here. *Tigris. Rio Grande. Euphrates.* How the men & more // men & when the men were done, they'd touch finger to forehead to chest to shoulder & zip up their flies. How sometimes the world // works like that. The bullet passes right // through & on the other side another // language to learn, another god to // feed, & a child that wears half your face. *Try not to take it // as a sign, how they see // you,* momma says. The books the kids don't read don't mention it. *This* name. That *first* name. The constellations it takes to turn // sky into map. How boys still // rock-paper-scissor their way to cruelty, which hurts // less than their taking her // as white, which at least means they love // what they see. & a red clay stain that once was a river.

## ZOO ANIMALS

Plume: as in that bright precious  
feathered thing my children once

loved from behind its wiry fence,  
the lack to touch equating over time

to intimacy; as in the intimacy of distant  
factories staining the clouds yellow

like cigarette smoke or prayers, either  
really, once the room's become a vessel for

ghosts; as in preening myself before  
the mirror of my son's eyes, demanding

so much more than I can even pretend  
to offer, how we play at goodbyeing

the world every kiss, every finger-lock,  
every song, elegy, orison—borrowed or

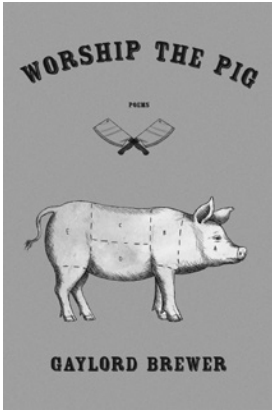
stolen; as in covering the whole house  
with a tarp of brilliantly serrated light

& saying the rest is darkness, is cage,  
saying I'm a different animal than the one

they once loved, zealously, from afar.

*WORSHIP THE PIG*  
BY GAYLORD BREWER  
(Red Hen Press, 2020)

REVIEW BY STAR COULBROOKE



This could be called a book of odes, of praise songs, of quests punctuated with wry asides. Of poems saying not what the poet starts out to say, but what the poems say instead. Take the introductory poem, “When It’s Done Right,” the play on Mary Oliver’s dictum that “happiness, // when it’s done right, / is a kind of holiness.” This poet of worship has “enraged / with joy” the “flies and chiggers” that leave “welts on ankles.” He tames the “lunging dragon” of snowmelt on the mountain to “a kitten in a necktie.” He compares the “cough of a tractor engine” to the “plaintive caw of raven,” and proclaims the “dull day ahead / free of usefulness,” all to get at something important, something portentous. Which, when he gets down to it, has been “happily forgotten.” Instead, the poem has already said what it needed to say. This kind of happiness, the giving-up of poetry to its own holiness (salted with a little blasphemy) is what keeps us reading.

“Worship the Pig,” as title poem, lends itself succulently to praise, singing of the “Holy loin, blessed shoulder,” “Sacrament / of rib, ham, jowl, and hock,” the “sweet white fat, well salted.” Even the slaughter and burning succumb to such human longing that the process from pasture to table becomes a state of grace. At the end of it all, “we” (granted, not everyone, but those who’ve read on, appreciating the wit and wonder of the words even if they don’t eat pork), “eat in thanks, pig hallelujah.”

The praiseworthy pig appears in one other poem, “Solution to a Morning of Little Possibility: Frying Bacon.” As an ode, it begins by setting a scene, moves into a sort of prayer, imagines/imparts value on the object of desire, and ends with a sense of one’s life having been altered.

The scene begins with the object of desire being prepared by characters akin to altar boys:

*Get the big skillet from its hook,  
peel off one unguent strip at a time,  
butchered and cured  
down the road by some old boys  
who worship the pig,  
and load that thing up  
over medium-high heat.*

Moving into the prayer, hands and mouths forming the supplication:

*Get your hands greasy, deep  
in the pores, stand over it  
working the rhythms until  
your glasses steam,  
your tongue's wagging in a wet mouth.*

Now the desired object, adored, deified:

*Bacon takes care of bacon,  
the unctuous agency of pork,  
the holy salt-flesh and sweet-fat  
better than Jesus  
and Elvis rolled together.*

Finally, an alteration, a transformation, an urgency that decries the normal state of being, that transcends the ordinary:

*Get the whole house smelling good,  
the dog on high alert.  
Damn it, son. This may be  
the best day of your wasted life.*

Need we say, in the spirit of James Wright "Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota," that the poet has drawn from the best of his forebears to craft this ode for all of us who love a good meal? It doesn't matter that our tastes are worlds apart; whatever we prepare with our own hands and partake of with relish and gratefulness is worthy of such an ode.

Robert Hass, in his 446-page *A Little Book on Form: An Exploration into the Formal Imagination of Poetry*, devotes nearly a hundred of those pages to the ode. "The word in ancient Greek," says Hass, "meant 'song.'" The form evolved from

“longish” lyric poems with complex emotional thoughts to less formal free-verse poems and praise poems, pausing for the romantic odes of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Hass quotes M.H. Abrams describing the ode as “an inward journey,” which involves the eventual transformation or alteration referred to in the bacon poem above.

Here is a praise song not about food or pork (though it does mention breakfast at one point), but about parents, and the poet’s take on their aging process. The poem starts with a scene, which is nearly fully described in the title, “On a Clear, Hot morning in Brazil, Balcony Overlooking Mountain and Sea, I Think of My Parents in Kentucky.”

The title scene continues with the parents waking in their home after not enough sleep, going to the bathroom, making coffee and “their first adjustments to the day’s pain,” as they talk about “their youngest son’s unending restlessness.” The description continues with his father’s “twisted wrists,” “deafness,” and “shuffling frailty,” and his mother’s “swollen ankles” and “cold that won’t leave.” The poem has now turned to the inward journey of the poet’s song, in which he questions his intentions and transfers the anger-stage of his own grief to the reader at the same time:

*Why am I telling you all of this, these intimacies  
that break my heart and have broken theirs,  
this sadness shading every gesture, that turns  
paradise into a senseless rebuke? Listen, this poem  
is none of your goddamn business. Nor the paltry  
options of the day ahead. Forget joy. How about  
any distraction to kill an hour, to hold back the walls?*

Hass writes that the praise poem comes out of “litany and prayer” (the litany of parental ills and broken hearts), with the beginning “initiated by desire or dissent” (the poet’s desire to share his parent’s intimacies with readers while dismissing them at the same time). The middle section can be variable, according to Hass, but might name the object of desire, imagination, or value. In this case, is it the parents? Or the poem? Or perhaps the audience the poet pretends to dismiss?

The final section points toward asking a favor from the object or power the poem has elaborated on. This poem seems to do the opposite, as readers are told, “I don’t want you knowing any of it, or your opinion.” He doesn’t want “your sympathy” for this “unbearable cocktail of helplessness.” After all, he asks, isn’t this “the oldest story in the world, and the most banal?”

*Sure. Until it's yours, these two you love dearly,  
sixty-five years together with hardly a night apart,  
whom you miss already as they leave you step by step.  
We'll see how tough you are, when the time comes.*

In the end, as the poet is transformed, so too are his readers. He's speaking to them through his experience, but he is also speaking to himself through them. The ode has shaped itself into what it needs to say and be through the craft of a canny poet.

The poet's craft extends throughout the book, in every poem, from the confessions of a self-remonstrating animal lover to the comedic delight of life in a foreign country, to the sweet and sorrowful admonishments of humanity as it revels in the sheer joy of paradox "in this big-ass world," "full of romp and circumstance." This book of odes, "Done Right," spans continents and topics in its journey to a holy kind of happiness, though certain readers may at times be advised to apply a grain of salt. For anyone invested in the succulent nature of poetry, this is praiseworthy work.



## RELAPSE

Just when things look spit-shined,  
hyacinth in the glass jar about to purple,

a door held lethal decides to open  
in the mind, my daughter glimpsed,

hand on jamb, the other holds  
a stemmed glass. Will she fall soft?

Will she fall long? Detach say  
the experts, you know it could

(badly) end. And me acting  
like I've got this.

When all I've got is seasick and  
an appetite for light rain.

Bring me please, succor  
or else a heap of jam to butter over.

I'm sorry if it feels like doomsday,  
the tulips are collapsing here

on my nightstand. All my begging  
useless beside their unopened.

## THE PERFORMANCE (ARCHITECTURE 28)

Mother. Noun. My mother died piece by piece. It took a decade. And now I get a replacement, going through adoption records. “Better not fuck this up,” I tell myself, because I think I’m funny, which means I’m always apologizing and realizing I’m not so funny, like how I walked into the dance studio just now to say hi to Robin and Natalie before the high school football game, and without taking the temperature of the room, which only occurred to me later to imagine, I made some comment about Natalie’s dance makeup, which turns out to be just the thing she and Robin had been stressing over an hour, because makeup, for halftime dancers, is  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the world, and I just blundered in with “Ew” or “Ugh,” funny dad, look how funny I am, and so Natalie leaves saying “I hate you” and Robin won’t talk to me. And I know this. And what the fuck is wrong with you, in this town, in this world, saying “ew” about this makeup that she didn’t want to wear in the first place, but the dancers have to wear the makeup the theme committee comes up with, and *The Incredibles* is stupid, of course it is, yes, everyone knows that, but to say so is—*we must not say so*—and why didn’t I already know that, why do I continually not know that? I’m trying to think here. Let me think.

I’m sitting in the stands with Robin. It’s halftime. The dance team takes the field, performs. Natalie has a trick where she stiff-arm rolls forward and then flips over the backs of two other dancers who lean forward. After, she comes up to where we’re sitting to say hi, and she’s all smiles. “I usually slip the first time I do that trick,” she says. “And I didn’t slip in practice, so I thought for sure I would then. But I didn’t.” And so everything is fine. Ha. Funny joke, this shape we take, as water takes shape, that we rise to and fill. As all the years there ever were are right now.

## THE POOR FARM (ARCHITECTURE 30)

70,000 years ago the human population fell to about 1,000. There's some debate on this, but the lack of diversity in human DNA encourages one to this conclusion, as there's more genetic diversity in chimpanzees who live 20 miles from each other, than there is in humans anywhere on the planet, travelers A and Z. It starts to feel like faith, and how maybe my agnostic perch is simply a color, that the chart's what's important, the forms we fill in with our lives. That it's well and good to stand and sing, "I believe," not the words nor the notes, but the singing that is us. Hello to 1946 glazed with rainwater. Hello to 1971 which you were probably saving for breakfast. Hello to 1965 is a rose is a rose is a rose. How long can we keep this up?

It doesn't matter if we keep this up or not, we're still keeping this up, as the commercial is on again where this person walks through doors, each one a portal to another decade, another life moment, to school, work, off to love, and back a little slower, to this 3D slideshow of Shakespeare's London or Pompeii Reconstructed. To each their dark night of the soul, as I just caught myself believing this is important in the arc of things, little shell game, model airplane, woodworking experiment, yard mowing strategy. Hello to 1968 in a haze of lost connections. Hello to 1893, to 1904, rainbow rainbow rainbow. The hills are breathing, listen. Hello to 2001. 2006. Hello from this room I'm in at the Edgefield hotel, where my grandfather died, brain tumor, 1951, when it was the Multnomah Poor Farm. In the only picture of him that survives, he's holding his daughter, my birth mother. He's 54, my age. He died when she was 6. There's a breeze on the porch and I'm rocking in a replica of Chris Boyd's rocker, the unofficial greeter from 1931 to 63, trying to meditate into time travel, to have the focus be the name.

## FRIENDLY GHOST (ARCHITECTURE 38)

Yesterday, I was running down Munn, which leads north and south,  
from the university to the high school, wide road,  
and an ambulance drives past quickly, lights and sirens blazing,  
and then later I'm circling back toward home, and at the stop sign  
on Munn and South, the ambulance pulls up next to me all quiet now,  
and stops. We make eye contact, me and the driver. That's how I feel  
most days: at some point you and the driver make eye contact;  
until then, we're filling the time as best we can. Step one,  
the Impact of Adoption list: "Struggles with Low Self-esteem."  
Step two, here are the people, we say, gesturing to the family album,  
and here's what they sang at the campfire.  
It's like asking a glass of water what it thinks of the ocean.  
So I fill in the crossword puzzle with sage and sandalwood. I move  
through 101 levels of word scramble with an offering of fruit  
and dead bees. The stories awaken. I tell my adoptive father  
that I found my birth mother, keeping it general, light,  
because people say things like "real father," "real mother,"  
and "real" slips on the ice. How we think or don't think what we're saying.  
He says he's thrilled for my adventure. "Let everything happen to you. Beauty  
and terror. Just keep going. No feeling is final," Rilke says. My first son,  
Ryan, takes a DNA test, and we share 3,465 cM across 69 segments.  
He says hi after a year of silence. And now I'm hopeful,  
as he's driving through Philadelphia, taking pictures of buildings.

In my earliest memory after the adoption, it's Halloween '68,  
I'm standing on the balcony dressed as Casper, the Friendly Ghost,  
the Ghost Boy, who inhabits a haunted house  
along with a community of ghosts who delight in scaring the living.  
Casper, however, is a nonconformist among ghosts, preferring to make friends  
with people. He packs up his belongings and goes out into the world.  
Takes up running. You write the book of yourself, it's called  
*The Book of Other People*. It's a theory of mercy, as life shifts you.  
Let's pretend we're in a novel, we're characters, how it shifted  
my great-great-grandfather, by birth, James O'Gorman.  
He attempted suicide with a straight razor in August 1880  
on the tracks outside Careyville, Tennessee. Found by the railroad bulls,  
he lived, made the local paper, and then disappeared.

## THE LAW OF LARGE NUMBERS (ARCHITECTURE 39)

Today, we went to St. Joseph and watched a movie  
in which the dead pile up, because it's a superhero movie  
and they work in broad strokes, the way people  
just crumble at times, visually stunning, like bleeding candy.  
And what does this mean for the family back home?  
The swell of song, popcorn, etc.

Friday, the Maryville high school girls soccer team played Excelsior Springs,  
and with 28 minutes to go in the second half, one of the Spoofohounds,  
which is what the Maryville high school calls itself,  
one of the Spoofohounds trips into the back  
of an Excelsior Springs midfielder, two dominoes who weren't prepared  
or expecting to fall, and the Excelsior Springs midfielder goes flat forward,  
stays down, and begins screaming that she can't feel her feet.  
She doesn't move. It takes a long time  
for the emergency services to arrive. Fifteen, twenty minutes  
as she's lying there. Her parents didn't come to the game,  
a nearly meaningless tournament third place playoff on an unremarkable Friday.

For a while the teams aren't allowed to leave the field,  
as that's a soccer rule, and they're dotted around in ones and twos,  
until the ref sends them to their benches. But the benches are still  
only ten or so yards from where the player is down and motionless.  
At some point the fire department gets there, but they're in a pickup  
without any gear, so they wait with everyone else  
for the ambulance, when the midfielder is scooped up on a board, placed  
on a stretcher, and disappears from our lives. They call the game.  
The teams join hands in a circle, then we watch them  
get on their busses. The evening sun is catching them  
as they leave the field, and this one crying girl  
is looking down at just the right angle for the light to catch her face  
and make it shine, some vagrant moment that draws our attention,  
as in the parking lot behind the bleachers the siren starts up,  
anyone now, anywhere, you don't know or love.

## BETWEEN JOBS

Last spring, I barreled across the cascades  
hungry for snow  
and the slight weight of stream on my back.

Bullying my way upriver, the rocks carving blister  
over bruise, I cut my palm  
on a small cliff's edge and pulled in wet skin

trying to pall the fact that after all these years  
I still don't know who to call  
when the bills aren't paid and the salmon turn up

open mouthed at my door.

## ANY MOONWALKER CAN TELL YOU

of the silences in static, its wintery flakes and the time it takes a breath to freeze  
and float  
away. When you are almost afraid to make the shapes of sound, the mouth a  
blinding sun in blackness that is all night  
all day (or is it the other way around?). How everyone is waiting and everything  
a countdown  
as a boy who struck the hammer on his thumb waits for the pain to dissipate  
but it takes so long from 100  
to 1 and father saying *you can get through anything if you take it a second at a time*,  
lowering the little hand into the bowl  
of ice. When hope is circling miles up and a million millions things must go  
right to even make it to the next beat  
of the heart. So many times I've watched myself go down, slipping on a sheen  
of ice under snow, felt the crunch  
and shift of bone. And how I'd listen to Elvis singing on the little yellow  
Walkman I'd bought at K-mart with the money from my paper route,  
his voice  
like a whistle down a tunnel or a loon-cry over water—that distant, soaking wet  
and close as I peddled my ten speed through December and all the way  
to June when the moon hung low in the sky just looming there too close and  
much too far  
to touch like every girl I'd already fallen in love with, dreamed about  
and father telling me how *the whole world stopped but not like it did for Bobby or Martin  
or John it was all of us watching at once and we were  
scared for them and for ourselves but also proud and kind of brave like we were, for the first  
time, emerging from something, some long sleep and I mean it was  
the moon and I remember the liftoff and the touchdown and then, they were walking around  
on the surface and how it looked like a beach and how we  
cheered over beer in the basement. We had this cheap set, black and white with a monster  
antenna and a big dial on it that never seemed to do very much but I  
couldn't keep my hands off it and your mother and I were living in California and it was  
a bright sunny day but we kept looking at the TV then looking out the window to the sky.  
There's no way  
to tell you about it. I mean, it was the moon far and close, big as tomorrow.*

## ODYSSEY II

On the thin skin of the Mediterranean, far from home,  
far from Rome, you prayed. A prayer, yours or  
someone else's, inoculated the dry bones you  
carried over Saharan burial mounds. Parched,  
starving, you did not die. Bled, weeping.  
A prayer for the dead, disappeared on so and so  
day, damaged; you prayed. And nights cold with  
waiting; an angel or a sign.

(You prayed).



## IF I DON'T DIE.

News reaches us of men burning  
at home. The police disperse  
the crowd with tear gas and bullets.  
We have all seen the footage. I can  
still smell the fear, that Saturday afternoon  
when the air crackled as the rifles chorused.  
My father told me that during the war  
the children were told to dive into the  
gutters if the ground tremored or planes  
roared overhead. I imagine my father  
in a ditch somewhere, his skinny arms  
flat in front of him, his nose in the dust,  
as I hold my own breath under the bed,  
in the dimming light of the guestroom.

*Father Lord, If I don't die*

*I promise to tell daddy about the TV stand I broke.*

*Amen.*

## WEST

The cowboy poets march through the single-leaf  
pine but they don't stay. Nobody stays—  
not the gold-diggers or the foodies,  
the rock collectors or the bird watchers.

This is a town of people hiding indoors,  
sneaking outside only to mow the dead lawn,  
or roll the recycling to the curb.  
This is valley painted with drought.

This suburb (within a suburb)  
was once consumed by color—  
if I ever lie, it will not be about this.  
Live without water long enough—you'll see.

Barefoot on the cool deck  
of a drained swimming pool,  
I watch two albino lizards  
crawl up and down stucco,

disappearing into a crevice  
beneath a bed of plastic flowers.  
If there was water,  
I wouldn't advise drinking.

This place is a dried-out washcloth—  
twisted and frozen into misshape.  
The great untapped West  
has been tapped—

every evening,  
underneath a sky too bright  
for stars; every day, the sun  
takes you by the hand and says *hold on*.

## PHILADELPHIA 2003: YASMIN, FALL-OUT ZONE

Still flaming, the fireworks nicked  
our bent and distant elbows, whispered

in the grass. Like pieces of a singed  
and shattered coconut shell, we held

the dull casings, passed them back  
and forth. I could have wiped the soot

from her face, but her bed was  
big enough for both of us to keep

our separate sides. I traveled miles  
south to see her, kept on afterwards.

Deeper in, the trees grew thinner.  
Their names began with *l-m-n-o-p*.

## THE STORY

they never thought it would happen. that it would ever leave its house, free and wandering. that it would visit other people's homes, drink coffee with them, read a poem aloud to their lover. the white people thought it came in bouquets, like wrapped flowers with uneven edges. the white people thought it would have a bow that you can unwrap gently. the white people dreamed of the anticipation—how it would be like to watch it flutter with ease, increasing volume with air. the white people thought it would have sounded different, like something more formulaic, like notes to hymns, or the way one reads how to put together a table. the white people thought it was dead and that language doesn't come from dead things. the white people thought it was a ghost. the white people thought it would have warned them before arriving. the white people ran to church. the white people thought it wouldn't have taken up so much space. the white people thought it would have stayed in her office. the white people thought they were free. the white people thought that it would have sounded different. the white people thought it would have behaved. the white people thought it would sound like them. the white people thought it could be softened into baby's breath and lilies. the white people thought there wouldn't be smoke. the white people thought that thunder only came from earth. and then, one day the white people said, "*Did you hear that?*"

## PIONEER GIRL

on saturday  
mother braids my hair

on wednesday  
she lets it down

puts her small bone  
comb against my head

pulls me through  
her white teeth

she braids her own hair  
looking in the bit of tin

her white parts  
straight as her seams

she lets me darn his socks  
then eyes my thread

unpicks the black hole  
and cleans

the mouth shut

## HAVE MERCY ON DAUGHTERS

I can only imagine his disappointment,  
the incredulous blow that fall  
my father returned home late from hunting  
with Bambi's mother folded neatly  
in the trunk of his company car.  
Its stricken eyes peering  
as if it still had some place to look to  
from the edge of the garbage bag  
he'd wrapped like a shroud to keep  
the blood from staining.  
In another life we might have been  
thankful, relieved even,  
calculating the number of meals in our heads,  
the bony winter ahead, the wax  
and wane of hunger. But my sister and I,  
roused from our MTV and bottles of Pepsi,  
the chip of the 80s on our shoulders,  
looked at him with our own doe eyes  
and cried, how could he do this.  
I don't recall how the rest of the story went—  
what lasts in us is the mark that does  
the bruising. I want to think  
my mother made him park in the street,  
blocks away, that night—  
somewhere in the anointment of lamp light,  
a rogue owl, the drip of stars—  
a kind of unveiling in the hardened heart  
of the dark, before our own  
wildness formed its sharp edges.

UPON THE REALIZATION THAT THE WORLD  
HAS UNFOLDED

you will no longer be afraid. you'll rip apart the forest because you deserve to have something more than the gnash of wet paper towels in your mouth. you will howl at the wild dogs & they will sit as wolves at your feet. moths will cling to your skin in flutterwing shadows. there's always someone to take control in the apocalypse & by god this time it will be you. you've learned that to change is to survive. you'll find your own path in this sanguineous forest, wearing the gloomdark as a cloak. strange birds rise above you, scatter into the clouds when you shiver your fishscales.

## AN EMPTY HOUSE IN THE FOREST

when you find the house in the woods with the unlocked door, it feels fairy tale—chimney smoking, warm cinnamon smell. you know it's a place for the dying. your ashen mother shivers, her eyes glazed with honeyfilm. the home is little more than hollow, clean as sin with a lingering taste of hickory. your sister crumples in the living room & sleeps, her cheek flat against hardwood floor. you're surprised when the stove lights on the first try, a tiny flick of fire that promises something good. water runs clear from the tap. your mother stands on the porch & whispers that there's something wrong with this place. deserted rooms shouldn't pulse so loudly.



## CLOUDS ON SNAKE RIVER

I made a shrine to the bear hit on the icy highway,  
its dying breath a pool of blood and fur on the roadside,  
a reminder of everyone I ever cared about. The cemetery  
is filled with them. They sit on lawn chairs and beckon me.  
I lit candles, gathered willow branches, and river stones.  
I slept alone in heavy blankets beneath winter stars.  
My father came to me in a dream again. Helped me  
with my grade school science project: a working telephone—  
palm-sized speaker, ear piece, a bundle of colored wires  
wrapped around strong magnets. I heard faint static  
in his voice, like heavy snow falling in the darkness.

## CAIRN: NEW AND SELECTED

BY PEGGY SHUMAKER

(Red Hen Press, 2018)

REVIEW BY MARY ELLEN TALLEY



The title of Peggy Shumaker's *Cairn: New and Selected* suggests a book that will offer direction and reflection and perhaps homage. This is only fitting, since cairns are manmade stacks of stones used since prehistoric times as navigational aids on land and sea as well as for monuments, burial sites, and prayer. In this, her eighth book, Shumaker stacks words to serve as messenger and guidepost for our reading while she explores topics including nature, myth, friendship, parents, growing up in Arizona, and landing in Alaska as an adult, where among other honors, she served as Poet Laureate 2010–2012.

Shumaker's latest collection begins with "New Poems" where "Parenthood Unplanned" tells in blunt poetic lines of parents who were "mismatched // spectacularly" for marriage. Without sentimentality, these poems poignantly describe several colorful, flawed characters who populated a woman's youth. Shumaker pays homage to women starting out in challenging circumstances, such as a mother described in her youth as "that brilliant // ragged girl." The poem closes with a feminist plea, particularly for women like the girl who became the mother, "let women live. // Let women be." Because of the lyrical prose memoir at the end of the book, these poems that come earlier in the collection seem personal and striking.

The first large section, "Placing Our Feet with Care on This Earth," is full of poems regarding another poet who suffered a severe stroke that impacted her communication skills. I was fascinated with these poems because of my own training as a speech-language pathologist. In "Shape-Shifters," Shumaker expands from personal concern and observation of the patient's disability to a more abstract question, one of grief:

*word-parts tongue whipped  
till she's giving voice to shards,*

*shattered sounds not yet  
nor ever connected.*

*Why? The best guesses  
still guesses, microscopic.  
Who are we without sounds  
someone we love can translate*

*into us,  
into what we know*

*of ourselves?*

These poems honor recovery as the fellow poet works to regain her life after the stroke. In “A Meditation,” Shumaker writes of the woman as she regains mobility, “come closer. Ask your foot to widen / as it meets the floor.” As the woman relearns communication skills, the poet writes, “touch your tongue / to your teeth” and finally, “Relax / until language remembers you.”

Recovery and resilience are recurring themes in the book as the poems describe a complicated childhood, filled with, at the least, neglect. This section speaks to a woman’s effort, strength, and healing. “Commonplace Miracles” begins “thanks for impatience / married to dogged will, // gratitude for grit.”

The next section, “Sparks,” represents an ekphrastic collaboration between Shumaker and Alaskan artist Kesler Woodward, who created their respective poetry and paintings in response to one another’s work. The partnership culminated in a 2015 exhibition at the Alaska Humanities Forum in Anchorage. Woodward’s boreal forest paintings are rendered in crisp color in the pages of *Cairn*.

In “Geology of Wonder,” Shumaker celebrates forces of nature as well as a relationship forged by a friendship with Eva Saulitis, a poet and marine biologist who died of cancer in 2016. The first verse begins, “shaped by forces way underneath,” and ends “this mountain changes each breath.” Such lines equate attributes of nature with characteristics of those she loves in a kind of elegiac magic. Shumaker pays homage to long relationships with short poetic lines, finding solace in repetition, and the mountain, where:

*When we’re on it,  
our focus shifts  
to scree underfoot,*

*to a shady cornice  
overhanging our steps,  
to a patch of lichen*

*breaking  
down  
stone.*

In a later section, “Impossible Grace,” the poem “Eva’s Cairn” speaks about a basket of blossoms, how “orange yellow fuchsia white, gather / beside the cairn stacked up / to honor our friend.” This poem refers to a Valentine’s Day trek on the big island of Hawaii to create a memorial cairn in Eva’s honor. Once again, stones act as monument, messenger, and guidepost.

Various poems throughout the book lead a reader to ask how a person develops resilience. One answer is suggested in “The Story of Light.” We read about a woman “who first touched fire / to a hollow stone filled with seal oil,” how in her youth, the elders let the woman raise an orphaned seal pup. The poem ends with a taste of Shumaker’s use of rhyme, assonance, and repetition, all enveloped within metaphor:

*The pup lifted her nose, licked  
salt from seven stars, and slipped  
light back among silvers and chum  
light among ghostly belugas  
swimming far north to offer themselves.*

Many of Shumaker’s poems are entrenched in place, such as “The Run of Silvers,” set in Alaska’s Resurrection Bay. We watch salmon, “their potent ballet—muscular / dazzling leaps in the blinding / sparkle of an air they can’t breathe.” Indeed, these poems pack a descriptive and metaphorical punch.

Shumaker uses anaphora well. A perfect example is the beginning of verses in “Each Rise, Each Hollow,” in which she infuses a loving relationship with a healing cadence:

*You have taken me  
fifty feet under, swimming  
with eagle rays, while  
humpbacks above us*

*sang their way south*

*You have shown me the ancient madrona  
healed over barbed wire  
nailed decades ago to red bark*

Weaving human story within and beside nature poems, Shumaker uses naming of people and birds as blessings. We read of swallows, tanagers, toucans, and macaws; as well as trees, mountains, and other wildlife. One poem, “Genesis, Quetzal,” resonates with earlier poems of loved ones transitioning to death. It ends:

*When you push off,  
earth gasps and sighs.  
Your wings stir*

*root aromas tangled  
underfoot. When you push off,  
cloud and sky*

*reshape around you.  
When you push off,  
a new world spins.*

Shumaker’s book ends with prose—short memoir pieces from her book *Just Breathe Normally*. Some harrowing, many sad, the memoirs form a cohesive, engaging narrative of her youth. The memoir affirms that much of the prior poetry was biographical, that the speaker survived, thrived, and has contributed much to the world.

The book begins with poems about friends who deal with major medical setbacks. The surprise bookend comes toward the conclusion of the prose memoir when Shumaker tells of experiencing severe injuries from a bicycle/ATV accident. Symbolically, in “Día de los Muertos, Whidbey Island,” Shumaker and her husband “choose Day of the Dead for our first post-wreck ride.”

They take deep breaths attempting to regain balance on two wheels, a moment that makes the reader hold their breath until the book ends joyfully, “we push off, wobbly, into the rest of our lives.” In that moment, all the themes of *Cairn* resonate: resiliency and recovery along with the nourishment of language and relationship. Shumaker’s collection is a cairn of a book worthy of a slow, celebratory read.

## BLINK JUST RIGHT AND IT IS ALWAYS DARK

If I reach you, blue-ribbed and pushed-through, wearing  
strangers' sweat, I will perch my cleanest hand  
on your shoulder. I will not fight the forest of swaying

bodies. I will not try to boom past the bassline. I will only  
hope you turn enough to read  
my lips. Or I'll call in the thinning afternoon before

evening's grey strands ripple the roads and hope  
you answer. Voice, after all, is what our throats,  
our mouths, can do with air. Voice, the only of our finger-

prints people really know. Show me  
the way the tide of years has carved you, if the old  
pavers leading from your door to the pavement,

just left of that one flickering streetlamp no one  
ever fixed, remain. Do you still know how to sign  
my name? Or I will write to each of the thirty-one

yous I find on the screen one Saturday morning. Maybe  
all of them delete unread. Maybe none are you, or one  
is but doesn't ever reply and I assume the quiet will

keep its place next to your name like that broken  
light: sometimes revealing in flashes the shapes  
of things that weren't there.

## ON PESSIMISM

They aren't phantoms. There are always  
new things to lose on the way down  
the stairs, in cars, in the person closest  
to you. During a thunderstorm in 1994,

one of our friends slid off the road and out  
of everything else. The losing isn't always that  
dramatic though. Earlier that same day, you  
had called your girlfriend who had misplaced

her pager. So when the news came and you  
couldn't reach her, I heard you wonder if she  
had been riding with him. I heard you try  
to fit her invisibly onto the motorcycle.

I understand it is natural to think the worst. In 2001,  
I lost your working number. I asked friends. No  
one knew how to get a hold of you. It happened  
slowly—by 2003, I was sure you were dead. This

is to say, I, too, am guilty of this morbid inclusion. I,  
too, put you in too early a grave it made no sense  
for you to be in. In 2005, visiting my parents, I saw  
you on the sidewalk. Our eyes met and we nodded.

After all that, this. You were so whole. I called  
your old number and asked for you even though  
I knew the lady on the other end would tell me  
I had dialed incorrectly. I nodded at a picture

of the four of us in Atlanta after a show—everyone  
still who we thought they were and right where  
we left them. I knew no one  
could nod back.

## I CAN'T STOP

Being a person who looks for the dark side.  
Looking up crime statistics at Disneyland.  
Looking for monsters under the bed.  
Also, I can't stop taking pictures of flowers  
even though mostly we have nine months of rain.  
I can't stop wondering if the hummingbirds here  
are doomed, if the snow geese will be poisoned  
at an abandoned copper mine lake in Montana,  
if that virus will reach us before we develop a vaccine.  
So, I can't stop writing the apocalypse story over and over.  
I've imagined the end before I'd even begun—  
I wrote a nuclear winter poem when I was seven.  
There was a boy in a symbolic green raincoat.  
I watch football thinking of the boys with broken bones.  
I watch wars thinking about people brought home  
with missing limbs, nightmares, tremors.  
I can't stop thinking about the jellyfish massing  
in our warming ocean coast, the orca carrying her dead calf.  
When I'm in the MRI tube, I can't help but think  
of all the episodes of *X-Files* or *House* where people  
had seizures within the MRI tube, for unexplained reasons.  
Tonight I wonder if twenty-four years of marriage  
are too many. I look at the picture of me at nineteen,  
my eyes still hopeful but also afraid. I wonder when  
someone I love will die. I wonder how many more holidays  
I will celebrate. I told you, I can't stop introducing you  
to so many clouds on my horizon. I'd rather tell you  
about my nonstop love of Rainier cherries  
or kissing in the rain. My nonstop love of even  
old arcade games, the sound of them. I can't stop  
thinking of the Doomsday Clock, how close we are  
to spinning out, our planet into the full blast of the sun.



## SUPPLICATION, WITH RAIN

I am tired of rage, but here it comes anyway, barreling toward me in a muddy pickup. It hides in the yellow chrysanthemum withering on my porch in its black plastic pot. The grasses in the field surrender in dull wet waves to the wind. Yesterday, on every channel, the woman on the radio answered question after question by first saying, *Sir*.

This morning, I walked a long time without a flashlight, my shoes and pants soaked through, my pulse beating hard in my fingertips. I kept telling myself it was only an owl I heard calling invisibly, insistently, from up there on high in the trees.

## NEAR THE PLUM TREE

The stars did not shine. It was a horrible evening, it was October. The meeting took place in an open field. Since we had no leader, all we could do was fail. We forgot our houses, the smoke, the red candles, even our grandmothers peeling green apples. The future reeled us in, dragged us like trout through the moonlit night toward the line of oaks and beyond that, the horizon. Behind that darkness, the mute stars clamored and showered us with daffodil bulbs and tiny lamps of wild onions.

## ORPHANAGE

1

I live in a large building  
with many children

Our beds in rows  
soggy paper boats

We have teachers and wardens  
and a cook who throws food to us

We wash our own night pots  
and boil our own clothes

When a new child arrives  
we play tricks on her

place thorns into her sleeves  
dust her seat with chalk

There's a term for children like us  
children of war

2

I tell the other kids  
that I ran away

My parents will come looking for me  
any day now

I sit by the window  
press my mouth to the windowpane

My whole body  
positioned to say *I won't stay long*

The other children  
tell such stories, too

Over time it gets harder  
to tell us apart

3

We take off our clothes  
and stand in a single file  
along a windowless corridor

Women in white  
probe our bodies with gloved hands  
check our hair for lice

Armed with razors and metal combs  
they shave our heads

Hair tufts clinging to our toes  
we march to a musty room  
covered with yellowed stone

The showers turn on, there's squealing  
and laughter

We slide a brown bar of soap  
across the wet floors

We sing in unison the songs  
we've brought from home

## BARLEY

Tournedos of barley  
    crammed into thick honey  
laced with thyme, stubborn

    in the roof of your mouth  
    and how it grows on you,  
after penitent flows of salad

    of cucumber and olive oil.  
    And how its crumble like sand  
reminds you of the

    arid blanched cliffs  
    of the Cyclades of your parents—  
A few slippery kernels

    drop back to the paper plate.  
    And it's always the barley,  
nimble as beads

    from a snapped necklace,  
    whose misgivings you scoop  
in your hand under the sermon

    for the dead at mass,  
    a palmful of religion  
you raise to your wanting mouth,

    the barley graced  
    with powdered sugar  
to soften the blow

    she was dead  
    while we ate in the pew  
together, children again,

    crying and swallowing  
    at the same time,  
while the altar boys

presided over a parade  
of more tins of barley  
from chapel turned kitchen

stirring this mixture—  
the sugar binding the barley  
brown to white, dirt

to dreams, consuming it down  
with red wine slipping  
from the gold spoon

along the cheek, worse  
than tears, whose trails  
you still follow.

## CIRCLE OF TEETH

*who shall measure the heat and violence of the poet's heart when  
caught and tangled in a woman's body?*

—Virginia Woolf, “A Room of One’s Own”

come summer, mama’s home  
and all shoes are off  
she sets our roving borders  
according to risk  
and then she sets us free—  
west to the tracks and east  
to deep creek, no crossing blind  
highway of course and *no one  
goes past jubilee’s*.

i’m too skinny, but i’m fast  
and hate to be asked  
where i’m going, escaping  
on my spider’s legs across  
the blistering blacktop  
cutting my un-calloused soles  
on the rocks to the woods—  
dense sentries of loblolly pines  
with a thousand thin fingers to point.

summer-heated resin sings  
my hair—its hot scent hangs  
in the piney lunes i squeeze  
through, lugging smuggled  
volumes of saved-up-for sonnets  
and a column of crispy saltines,  
into the shaded, quiet, clicking  
of insects unseen—private  
orchestra of the understory, invisible  
witness to my hidden weather.

alone in the family  
of the fallen cones, i lay  
my circle of their dark blunt  
teeth, their emptied skin  
paused on my palm—  
let them keep their lion's share  
of light, these are my scattered  
shards, falling all around me  
like spells—my thin skin cools  
and encircled unseen, i read  
until the twilight echo of mama's  
car horn calls us home.  
the tiny flare of her lit cigarette draws  
its slow arc in the darkening driveway.



## MOTHERHOOD

“Who by fire? ... Who by barbiturate?”

—Leonard Cohen

I’m keeping a list of all the bad things that can happen to the people I love. There are, for example, 67 ways my children might die in a house fire,

even though we play *stop, drop, and roll* each night before bed. Remember the Arizona twins who drowned in the canal when their mom lost control

of the stroller while swatting a bee? See what I mean? It’s like a tragedy cornucopia, each fruit its own sweet horror. Pick dismemberment. Pick

poison. Pick sexual assault. And we haven’t even begun to explore the medical options. Leukemia is a big one. That Jewish disease

that makes your pee like maple syrup. Don’t forget measles, though I, too had forgotten that one, until I learned our neighbors are anti-vaxxers.

And then there’s the gun-owners on the corner, and I don’t even need to write that one down, since the entire world is a list of ways to die

by bullet. I’m a teacher. I keep umbrellas in my classroom to use as weapons, sit the rugby players by the door *just in case*, and every so often I wonder

which doorway the shooter (shooters?) will enter from and will it be while we are talking about metaphors? Will I have the guts to do

what the police officer advised at the training—(*Pull his motherfucking arm off*)—which didn’t make me feel empowered or in control of my destiny at all?

In Lexington, I heard their police shoot blanks during active shooter drills at the high school. Teachers must decide to shelter in place with their class

or run based on how close they think they are to death. If you make the wrong choice, a cop will leap from the hallway corner and say *bang. You didn’t make it.*

This is the stuff I’m talking about. When Jamie Closs was found after being kidnapped and held captive by the man who murdered her parents,

my first thought was, *this is quaint*. He had a single weapon: one lonely, innocent rifle. It was a comfortable, old-school crime. A back-of-the-milk-carton

crime. When we were mugged and the baby was 2 months old, my body and mind detached and everything happened in slow motion,

like they say it does. The pockmarked man drew his knife, hours later held it above my head, and it was an eternity or two before that blade

swept the air above the stroller. I remember it glimmered in the early morning sun like a jewel. Perhaps I was thinking,

*You don't have a gun?* Remember when the JCC's had all those bomb threats, and the preschoolers, who were swimming, had to carry the babies outside?

They didn't have time to get their towels. I picture my daughter in her pink flamingo one-piece, frog goggles, wrinkled toes, those drops

of chlorinated water that gather on her upper lip. Then her thin, shivering arms wrapped around someone's baby, four feet dragging across the snow-dusted ground.

My Bubbie believes terrorists are building underground tunnels leading into elementary schools. She honestly believes this is happening as we speak.

*What terrorists?* I ask. *You know who I mean*, she says. In my mind, my daughter blows a bubble and someone bursts it with the tip

of an AK-47. I feel a little better writing this all down. My kids are asleep. I just checked, and they are still breathing. The default, I know, is to live.

## BIRTHDAY

Mom made the most wonderful cake, bright  
maraschino cherries crowning caramelized  
rings of pineapple, then sat down at the table  
both her arms            vein side up.

## CHRISTMAS EVE

A borealis of snow gusts across a mat of frozen grassland, whitens the crannies. A mouse scales the treads of a sedan's tire, props herself with almost-opposable thumbs into the car's warm carriage. As the cold collects in the metal, she moves inward, at last squeezes her tawny body through the tines of an air vent and plops onto the rough upholstery. She finds heat lingering in the furred seat cover and sleeps. In the morning, the driver screams herself hoarse.

## WHAT SHE TELLS US

It's Memorial Day. We are standing  
in the backyard, kicking a soccer ball,  
and Matty hooks one to me, like old times.  
Mom waves us down, and we're just kids again.  
We assume she needs our help with dinner.  
No, she has to tell us something, she says.  
She tells us she has cancer, lung, stage four.  
While malignant cells divide, the right words  
float, are caught, die in my throat. I forget  
where I am for a minute, then resume breath.  
I notice our bare feet covered with grass.  
Dad's inside watching Guerrero at bat.  
There are pitching decisions being made.

## IN CLOSING

Sometimes I see the mating doves  
Sometimes they make it look easy.

*LISTEN*  
BY STEVEN CRAMER  
(MadHat Press, 2020)

REVIEW BY CLARISSA ADKINS



In Steven Cramer's sixth poetry book, his namesake poem, "Listen," directs the reader to be a present observer of the speaker's mindful relationship with the world: "how // resonant—the bones of our middle ears." This same poem introduces us to a family history that expresses two lineages: one of personal experience and the other the ideal of poetic craftsmanship. These interwoven paths act as a gentle blueprint for the overall theme of the collection in which *Listen* equally embraces the reader in intimate and analytical ways. Cramer guides us through emotional and metaphysical pathways regarding the theme of listening. He accomplishes this intricacy by using the word "listen" variously as subject, object, action, philosophy, or as noun. The result is a clear demonstration of Cramer's sincere and masterful poetic craft: a collection of poems that is wonderfully accessible, yet masterfully subtle.

This personal lure into the poet's mind feels a little like receiving two invitations in the mail on the same day—one to a casual, close-friend get-together, and the other to a bowtie wedding. "It got bad; pretty bad" in the poem "Bad" as the book begins, and then proceeds to grow even more straightforward in later lines, "Christ, let's let things not get even worse." This juxtaposes with the strikingly romantic couplet from the very next poem, "South Belknap": "and sparrows fly into and out from the azaleas, / and roses flicker, fire from a magician's fingertips." Cramer carries the reader seamlessly in and out of these unceremonious or tender voices. Earlier in "South Belknap" we learn about the speaker's moroseness in a starkly matter-of-fact way: "first time I recall wanting to die I was eight. / When I tried and nearly did I really wanted to live."

These oppositional pairings of dreaminess and severity occurring in the space of one poem reveal an oxymoron of strong vulnerability in the poet. Cramer lets the reader see, feel, hear, taste, and touch his speakers' experiences. Lines like, "but first, love, help me stop playing dead" in "Zuni Fetishes, Santa Fe" take away the reader's breath. And again, in "The World," the reader cannot help but

feel alongside the speaker, “I saw two futures—one a / moonlit shoreline; one a diagnosis.”

Cramer divides *Listen* into four numbered sections. Like the first, the second section conveys an unabashed intimacy and includes several poems about marriage and relationships. The first poem in this section, “Self-Portrait with Insomnia, Rocks, and Fireflies,” again delivers romantic, nature imagery:

[. . .] *Mystic Lake*  
*wets me a fourth time,*  
*then settles me bottomward,*  
*one among millions*  
*cast into the snail’s pace of underwater time.*

Later in the poem the intimacy marries the nature:

*and beside you now I’d swear to anything:*  
*I’m that tired in this sleepless daydream*  
*as a deeply appreciated pebble, while a ring*  
*of rocks circles the August lakefront fire—*

The section continues the theme of relationships and the brutally honest tone with “A Habit” where the speaker announces in the first line, “If she’s unhappy, she stays upstairs.” And, as it appears throughout the book, the many meanings intrinsic in the title of the book weave in and out of the poems. We see this again in the last four lines of “A Habit”:

*Now, after sex, they press their palms, hard,*  
*against each other’s ears—inducing*  
*for that moment before they disengage*  
*the feeling of being both deafening and deaf.*

These lines express yet another dichotomy with the double-play of “deaf” being an oxymoron similar to deafening silence. The idea of listening grows deeper in meaning, as if the poet means to express how one has to listen, must listen, needs to listen, yet has to suffer the emotional consequences of doing or not doing so when called to.

Cramer ends the second section with “Elegy to My Family,” which lands the reader in the speaker’s dreaming, then awakening, as once again we heed the call to listen: “[. . .] poplars circle / the duck pond. New Jersey church spires blacker



// than the black sky. What I tell her wakes me up.”

The third section turns and twists, in places, into a different call. “American Freedom” grapples with the recent political climate: “he writes an email quoting Naomi Klein— / ‘for the men who rule this world, / rules are for the other people.’” This ars poetica piece shows Cramer’s personal call to address the new, gloomy connotations creeping upon the word freedom and how bleak it is to feel that one can no longer fail to address it, “Never / write a poem about anything that needs a poem / about it,” wrote Richard Hugo. Dick, he thinks, / times change.” Still, the tone of the section returns to the vulnerability of the speaker, where the band plays in his memory, in “Born to Be Wild”:

*Ken, Tom, Fred, and I preferred to be the band,  
since bands stood taller by virtue of standing  
on wobbly lunchroom tables we made a stage.  
Bands might play “Born to Be Wild” six times  
a night and still not have the song by heart.*

We listen with the speaker, and share the youthful awkwardness alongside him as an adult who is now grown with children of his own.

Other poems in the third section echo the voices of American staples such as “Independence Day,” and “Frontier,” albeit without any stereotypes the reader may expect. But, “A Burn So Bad It Requires Ice” picks up the call to action in a less understated manner than “American Freedom” with the lines, “now there’s a carrot ruining history, don’t / we need more words whose melodies can’t / mean their meanings—pulchritude, for one?” It’s not that the openness dissipates, however. In “Time Out” the speaker takes respite from the intensity and noise of the world in a yoga class. As we find in his other works, Cramer highlights a vulnerable irony, which allows the reader to listen to what he will not share with the yoga class: “in my head: I feel in touch with others when afraid / my kids will die before me. Some shared. Not me.”

Though the themes seem to move away from political climate in America, Cramer continues the call to the reader to listen with the first poem of section four, “An Invitation.” “Look through this hole in a stone wall / at the man in his bloated overcoat,” laying bare a malaise of existence, and then deepening this self-deprecation by calling out the self for its lies, like in the couplets of “The Benevolence of the Butcher”:

*Two witches, catty-corner, run*

*a crystal shop. Self is the artful*

*lies it tells itself, Mind is no more  
than neural chuck [. . .]*

Cramer titles several poems in section four in such a way as to conjure and announce their speakers, such as “Sewage Has Its Say” and “Orphic,” which calls to mind Orpheus with his musical prowess and entrancing voice. “Tinnitus Song” lightly echoes the haunting voices of Cramer’s previous collection from 2012, *Clangings*, with the line “no remedies. Strategies only.” Like *Clangings*, where the speaker must grapple with mental themes, in “Tinnitus Song” the speaker admits there is no cure for the sounds he must endure again and again: “but this needling / sticks in the groove of Psycho’s soundtrack: // mind turned brain; brain, skull.”

This blend of distant speaker and personal speaker juxtaposes in section four with “Two Poems in Memory of Wayne Brown,” the Jamaican poet, professor, and chief editor of *Jamaica Observer’s Literary Supplement*, among many other accolades; and then with “Bohemia Lies by the Sea,” which adapts Ingeborg Bachmann’s poem, “Böhmen liegt am Meer.” In this last poem of the collection, the speaker becomes energetically overcome by the sea with a final two lines culminating with what moves towards, not what should be listened to, but perhaps, should be rhetorically questioned: “holding and held by nothing, allowed only to watch // the shore of my choice, from the questionable sea.”

Steven Cramer’s *Listen* serves as command, pleading, response, and vulnerable receptor of his speakers’ observations. Sometimes these roles of the speaker are deeply personal, and at other times they inspire the reader to become an analytical onlooker. We seem to be past and present with the poet, experiencing private moments and disparaging self-commentary with such a relatable tone, one feels compelled to smile, sometimes even laugh, with understanding. Cramer mixes these with political commentary and an artistic investigation of listening in all its forms. *Listen* calls us to be aware, and in the questioning that occurs from attentiveness, asks us to listen more fully.

- Ankur, *The Four Colors*, Hawakal Publishers, 2020
- Jacqueline Balderrama, *Now in Color*, Perugia Press, 2020
- Madeleine Barnes, *You Do Not Have to Be Good*, Trio House Press, 2020
- Dan Beachy-Quick, *Stone-Garland: Six Poets from the Greek Lyric Tradition*, Milkweed Editions, 2020
- John Belk, *The Weathering of Igneous Rockforms in High-Altitude Riparian Environments*, Cathexis Northwest Press, 2020
- Christopher Bernard, *The Socialist's Garden of Verses*, Regent Press, 2020
- Robert Campbell, *Monster Colloquia*, Hellbox Publications, 2020
- Julie Danho, *Those Who Keep Arriving*, Silverfish Review Press, 2020
- Darren C. Demaree, *Unfinished Murder Ballads*, Backlash Press, 2020
- Justin Evans, *All the Brilliant Ideas I've Ever Had*, Kelsay Books, 2020
- Benjamin Garcia, *Thrown in the Throat*, Milkweed Editions, 2020
- torrin a. greathouse, *Wound from the Mouth of a Wound*, Milkweed Editions, 2020
- Marlon Hacla (translated by Kristine Ong Muslin), *Melismas*, OOMPH! Press, 2020
- Bernard Horn, *Love's Fingerprints*, Circling Rivers, 2020
- Alexis Ivy, *Taking the Homeless Census*, Saturnalia Books, 2020
- Fady Joudah, *Tethered to Stars*, Milkweed Editions, 2021
- Susanna Lang, Jennifer Grant, Christina Lovin; *Delphi Series Vol IX: Self-Portraits, Year of Convergence, God of Sparrows*; Blue Lyra Press, 2020
- Éireann Lorusung, *The Century*, Milkweed Editions, 2020
- Wayne Miller, *We the Jury*, Milkweed Editions, 2021
- Kendra Preston Leonard, *Protectress*, Unsolicited Press, 2022
- Carrie Shippers, *Grief Land*, University of New Mexico Press, 2020
- Kathryn Smith, *Self-Portrait with Cephalopod*, Milkweed Editions, 2021
- Christine Sloan Stoddard, *Heaven is a Photograph*, CLASH Books 2020
- stinne storm, *Loss*, series books | kbh, 2020
- Janet Sylvester, *And Not to Break*, Bordighera Press, 2020

If you are interested in reviewing a poetry book for *Sugar House Review*, email our review editor, Michael McLane, at [reviews@sugarhoureview.com](mailto:reviews@sugarhoureview.com).

# SUGAR ASTROLOGY

BY SHARI ZOLLINGER  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY HOLLI ZOLLINGER

ERASURE POEMS FOR EVERY ZODIAC SIGN

—*Erasure original text: The Astrological Houses by Dan Rudhyar (Doubleday, 1972)*



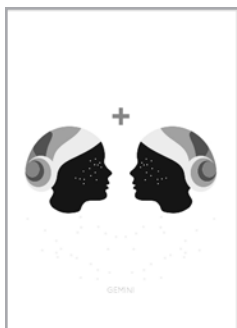
ARIES:  
*March 21 to April 19*

The first moment  
heart, light, vibration—rhythm.  
Symbol-sunrise, all beginnings.  
Ocean-capable, the number 28, revelatory  
in touch.



TAURUS:  
*April 20 to May 20*

Possessions.  
Material-means-reservoir.  
We call instincts radical. Intimate  
ancestral body.  
Value, second form, scope—love.



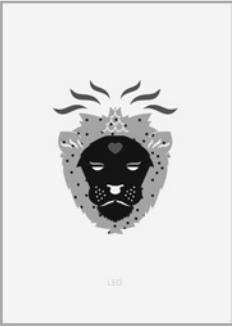
GEMINI:  
*May 21 to June 21*

Kinship's basic influence,  
its skin, necessary.  
Attention undoubtedly rooted.  
Intelligence a complex game.  
Language in third things.



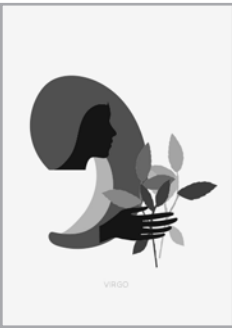
CANCER:  
*June 22 to July 22*

Conception subsoil.  
Body, psyche— graves  
of the center. Fourth primary cusp.  
Matrix taproot resides fundamental,  
blooms vertical.



LEO:  
*July 23 to August 22*

Intercellular heat, fifth  
vision. Creative act attempts play.  
Encounter chemical. Gambling hunches.  
Loves root-sustainment.  
Actor act.



VIRGO:  
*August 23 to September 23*

Transition from sharp  
nerves, a greater work.  
Communion.  
Vitality-threshold essential.  
Sixth refraining custodian.



LIBRA:

*September 23 to October 22*

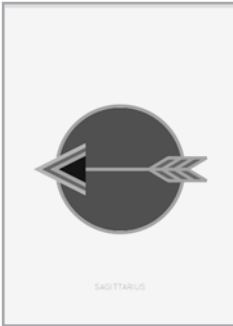
We are no longer selves.  
Devotees to relation, seventh wedded  
cooperation.  
Sublime partnership transmits  
shape-cycle, value— spell.



SCORPIO:

*October 23 to November 21*

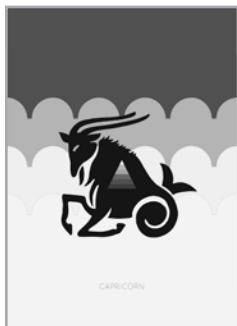
Mid-autumn leaves, cyclic mythos—  
basic world. What is order?  
Taboos. Transformation. Eighth light.  
Collective bodies' rhythms, incantations.  
Fruits of karma.



SAGITTARIUS:

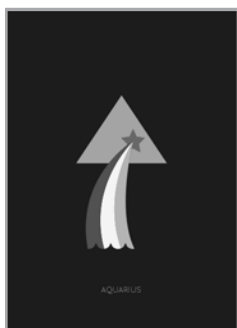
*November 22 to December 21*

Expansion.  
Ninth great existence.  
Focus necessarily represents maximum  
perception. Devotee waxes, wanes.  
Harmonic knowledge rooted, effective.



CAPRICORN:  
*December 22 to January 19*

Tenth  
complement, combination, consummation.  
Vocation-slaked. Responsibility more body politic.  
Mountain zenith  
blends with human heart.



AQUARIUS:  
*January 20 to February 18*

Vital openness.  
Eleventh signature.  
Banding friends, iconoclasts.  
Inertia earthquaked.  
Spiral future.



PISCES:  
*February 19 to March 20*

Conscious, unconscious.  
Light threshold through dark.  
Ultraviolet fantasies.  
Twelfth rebirth presses upon incarnation, tone  
radiant.  
Climax, anticlimax.

CLARISSA ADKINS has poems in *Poems2Go*, *The Pinch*, *Whurk Magazine*, *Passengers Journal*, and River City Poets' anthology *Lingering in the Margins*, among others. She has a full-length book being published by Lily Poetry Review Books in April 2021. Clarissa earned a Best of the Net nomination for her work in *Parentheses International Literary Arts Journal*. She enjoys reading for *Sugar House Review* and received her MFA in poetry from Lesley University in 2018. When she's not writing, you can usually find her teaching yoga and high school English.

DEBORAH ALLBRITAIN is a poet living in San Diego, CA. Her poem "Sorrow I Will Lead You Out Somewhere," was chosen for the Patricia Dobler Poetry Prize in 2017. Her poems have been nominated for both the Pushcart Prize and Best of The Net and have regularly appeared in many journals, and anthologies. Her book manuscripts have been semi-finalists and individual poems have been chosen as finalists for the Wabash Poetry Prize, Bellingham Prize for Poetry, Florida Review Editors' Award, and the Comstock Review Poetry Contest. Her poems have been published in *The Dunes Review*, *The Nashville Review*, *Greesboro Review*, *Verse Daily*, *Spoon River*, and others.

ALECIA BEYMER is a doctoral student in English education at Michigan State University. Her poems have been published in *Bellevue Literary Review* and *The Minor Bird*. Her research is focused on literacies formed by space and place, considerations of the inter-connected resonances of teachers and students, and the poetics of education.

MARY BUCHINGER is the author of four collections of poetry: *Navigating the Reach* (forthcoming), *e i n f ü h l u n g/in feeling* (2018), *Aerialist* (2015), and *Roomful of Sparrows* (2008). She is president of the New England Poetry Club and Professor of English and communication studies at MCPHS University in Boston. Her work has appeared in *AGNI*, *Diagram*, *Gargoyle*, *Nimrod*, *PANK*, *Salamander*, *Slice Magazine*, *The Massachusetts Review*, and elsewhere. [MaryBuchinger.com](http://MaryBuchinger.com).

IAN CAPPELLI is the author of the chapbook *Suburban Hermeneutics* from Cathexis Northwest Press and is an MFA candidate at George Mason University. His work's been twice nominated for the Pushcart and Best of the Net; has appeared (or is forthcoming) in *Lunch Ticket*, *Roanoke Review*, and *The American Journal of Poetry*, among others; and is included in Eyewear Publishing's *Best New British and Irish Poets 2019–2020* anthology.

STAR COULBROOKE is the Inaugural Poet Laureate of Logan City, Utah. Her most recent poetry collections are *Thin Spines of Memory*, *Both Sides from the Middle*, and *City of Poetry*.



MARY CROW'S poems have been published in *American Poetry Review*, *New Madrid*, *Hotel Amerika*, *A Public Space*, *Interim*, *Poet Lore*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Illuminations*, *Cimarron Review*, and *Indianola Review*. She has published three chapbooks of poetry and three full-length books, plus five volumes of poetry translation. Her awards include poetry fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Colorado Council on the Arts as well as three Fulbrights. For 14 years she served as Poet Laureate of Colorado. She is retired from Colorado State University's creative writing faculty.

JENI DE LA O is an Afro-Cuban poet and storyteller living in Detroit. Her work has appeared in *Obsidian*, *Columbia Journal*, *Glass*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, and others. Jeni edits poetry for *Kissing Dynamite* and organizes The Dream Project at WeKeepDreaming.com.

LIZA KATZ DUNCAN is a poet and teacher in New Jersey. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Poetry Northwest*, *Poet Lore*, *The Cortland Review*, *Vinyl Poetry*, *Phoebe*, *The Journal of New Jersey Poets*, and elsewhere. She is an MFA candidate at Warren Wilson College.

KATHERINE FALLON'S poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *AGNI*, *Colorado Review*, *Juked*, *Meridian*, *Foundry*, and *Best New Poets 2019*, among others. Her chapbook, *The Toothmakers' Daughters*, is available through Finishing Line Press. She shares domestic space with two cats and her favorite human, who helps her zip her dresses.

NEIL FLATMAN is an alum of the Tin House summer workshop and The Community of Writers at Squaw Valley. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Bombay Gin*, *Ithaca Lit*, *Palette Poetry*, *Cathexis Northwest*, and *The Paragon Press*, among others. His poem "Objectify" was included in the anthology *Written Here*.

JEANNINE HALL GAILEY served as the second Poet Laureate of Redmond, WA. She's the author of five books of poetry, including her most recent, *Field Guide to the End of the World* (Moon City Press). Her work appeared in journals such as *Ploughshares* and *Poetry*. Her web site is [Webbish6.com](http://Webbish6.com). Twitter and Instagram: @webbish6.

JOHN GALLAHER'S most recent collection of poetry is *Brand New Spacesuit* (BOA, 2020). Recent poems appear in *American Poetry Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Pleiades*, and elsewhere. He lives in rural Missouri and co-edits *The Laurel Review*.

JENNIFER GARFIELD'S work has been published or is forthcoming in journals including *Salamander*, *Frontier*, and *Threepenny Review*. She is the

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SARAH GIRAGOSIAN is the author of the poetry collection *Queer Fish*, a winner of the American Poetry Journal Book Prize (Dream Horse Press, 2017) and *The Death Spiral* (Black Lawrence Press, 2020). The craft anthology, *Marbles on the Floor: How to Assemble a Book of Poems*, which is co-edited by Sarah and Virginia Konchan, is forthcoming from The University of Akron Press. Sarah's writing has appeared in such journals as *Orion*, *Ecotone*, *Tin House*, and *Prairie Schooner*, among others. She teaches at the University at Albany-SUNY.

LILIAN HA is from Ha Noi, Seattle, and New York City. Her work is featured or forthcoming in *Vinyl Poetry*, *Sweet Tree Review*, *Rogue Agent*, *Berkeley Poetry Review*, and *Prelude*, among others. She currently reads for Columbia University's undergraduate literary magazine, *Quarto*.

JALEAH HEDRICK is a midwestern writer, originally from Indiana. Her poems have appeared in *Columbia Poetry Review*, *F(r)iction Online*, and the *Manifest West Anthology*. She currently lives in Nebraska with her partner and their cats.

SIEW DAVID HII lives in Hattiesburg, MS. His work appears or is forthcoming at *Salt Hill* and *Hobart*.

KATHERINE HOLLANDER is a poet, critic, and historian. Her first collection of poems, *My German Dictionary* (Waywiser Press), won the Anthony Hecht Poetry Prize in 2019. Her poetry, criticism, and scholarship have been published in *Literary Imagination*, *Hunger Mountain*, *New German Critique*, and elsewhere. Hollander is a reader for *Sugar House Review* and the editor of a new edition of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, forthcoming from Bloomsbury/Methuen.

SPENCER HUPP is a poet and critic from Little Rock, AR. His recent work has been housed with *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, *Measure*, *The New Criterion*, and *The Hopkins Review*. He lives in Baltimore where he is an MFA candidate and instructor in the Johns Hopkins Writing Seminars.

BETHANY SCHULTZ HURST is the author of *Miss Lost Nation*, winner of the Anhinga-Robert Dana Poetry Prize and finalist for the 2016 Kate Tufts Discovery Award. Her work has appeared in *Best American Poetry 2015* and in journals such as *Ecotone*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Narrative*, *New Ohio Review*, and *Ploughshares*. A recent recipient of a literary arts fellowship from the Idaho

Commission on the Arts, she is an associate professor in creative writing at Idaho State University.

TARA KIPNEES is a writer and poet who lives in New Jersey with her husband and two kids. Her work has been published in *decomp magazinE*, *Moon City Review*, *Serving House Literary Journal*, and *Salon*, among others.

CASEY KNOTT is the author of *Ground Work* (Main Street Rag, 2018). She works in education, mentors students, tends to her urban farm, and helps edit *The Wax Paper* literary journal. Her poetry has appeared in a number of journals, including, *Harpur Palate*, *Red Rock Review*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *The Meadow*, *Rumble Fish Quarterly*, and *Poetry City, USA*.

KATHLEEN LOE is a poet and visual artist living in Hudson, NY. She teaches poetry at the The Writers Studio, Hudson Branch. Having grown up in one house, in one small town in the deep South, a desire for change has been a big feature of her life: she has moved 32 times, and the resulting discoveries, chaos, and longing for home are at the center of her work.

RAYMOND LUCZAK is the author and editor of 22 books, including *Flannelwood* (Red Hen Press). His work has appeared in *Poetry*, *South Carolina Review*, and elsewhere. He lives in Minneapolis, MN.

FRANCIS LUNNEY'S poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Salamander*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Appalachia*, *The Southern Review*, and *Blueline*. He had a poem aired on WCAI's (Cape Cod's NPR station) Poetry Sunday program. He works as an elementary school reading specialist in Manchester-by-the-Sea, MA.

OKSANA MAKSYMCHUK'S poetry has appeared in *Blackbird*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Salamander*, *Tar River Poetry*, *The Common*, and other venues. She won first place in the 2004 Richmond Lattimore and in 2014 Joseph Brodsky-Stephen Spender translation competitions. Her translations were featured in *Words Without Borders*, *Poetry International*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, and elsewhere. With Max Rosochinsky, she co-edited *Words for War: New Poems from Ukraine* (Academic Studies Press, 2017). Her work has been supported by the National Endowment of the Humanities and the National Endowment of the Arts. Maksymchuk holds a PhD in philosophy from Northwestern University. She has taught at Northwestern University and University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. [OksanaMaksymchuk.com](http://OksanaMaksymchuk.com)

MICHAEL MARK'S poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *The Arkansas International*, *Copper Nickel*, *Michigan*

*Quarterly Review, Pleiades, The Southern Review, The New York Times, The Sun, Poetry Daily, Verse Daily, Waxwing, The Poetry Foundation's American Life in Poetry* series, and other lovely places. MichaelJMark.com

KATHLEEN MCGOOKEY'S most recent books are *Instructions for My Imposter* (Press 53) and *Nineteen Letters* (BatCat Press). Her work has recently appeared in *Copper Nickel, Crazyhorse, December, Field, Glassworks, Miramar, Ploughshares, Prairie Schooner, Quiddity*, and *Sweet*.

Native of Boston and Martha's Vineyard, MA, STELIOS MORMORIS has been a marketing executive in the beauty industry, working with L'Oréal, Yves Rocher, and COTY. He is currently the CEO of a new company, EDGE BEAUTY, Inc. A dual citizen of Greece and the United States, and raised in New York, Stelios has spent most of his adult life living in Paris. He has published work in *Gargoyle, Humana Obscura, Midwest Poetry Review, The Nassau Literary Review, Press, South Road, Spillway, Verse, The Whelk Walk Review*, and other literary journals. Stelios is a contemporary artist, and specializes in abstract oil painting. SteliosMormoris.com

JOHN A. NIEVES has poems forthcoming or recently published in journals such as: *North American Review, Crazyhorse, Southern Review, Harvard Review, and Massachusetts Review*. He won the Indiana Review Poetry Contest and his first book, *Curio*, won the Elixir Press Annual Poetry Award Judge's Prize. He is associate professor of English at Salisbury University and an editor of *The Shore Poetry*. He received his MA from University of South Florida and his PhD from the University of Missouri.

CINDY JUYOUNG OK was a high school physics teacher for many years, and eating contest winner for longer. Poems can be found in journals like *jubilat, Michigan Quarterly Review, and Conjunctions*, and writing has recently been supported by the James Merrill Poetry Fellowship from the Vermont Studio Center and the Truman Capote Fellowship from the Iowa Writers' Workshop.

JASON OLSEN teaches writing and literature at Utah State University. He has one book of poetry, *Parakeet*, published by BatCat Press in 2017. His book *Mark Gruenwald and the Star Spangled Patriotism of Captain America* is forthcoming from McFarland Books. He lives in Price, UT with his wife and two children.

OMOTUNDE OREDIPE was born and raised in Lagos and studied at South Carolina State University, where he served as the Poet Laureate (2016–2017) and founded the Poetry & Ideas Organization. His poems have been published or are forthcoming in *Obsidian: Literature & Arts in the African Diaspora, The Southampton Review, and The Carolina Quarterly*.

JOEL PECKHAM has published seven collections of poetry and prose, most recently *God's Bicycle* (futurecycle) and *Body Memory* (New Rivers). Forthcoming books include the full-length poetry collection *Bone Music* (SFU Press), and the chapbook *Much* (Uncollected Press). He is also co-editor of the forthcoming anthology, *Wild Gods: The Ecstatic in Contemporary Poetry and Prose* (New Rivers). His poems and essays have appeared in many journals, including *Brevity*, *Cave Wall*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Rattle*, *River Teeth*, *The Southern Review*, and *The Sun*.

Journeying from the womb of the Bronx, New York, MARY ANNE ROJAS (she/her/ella) is a woman of the African diaspora, a poet for justice, and a cultural mediator. She is the founder of The Gift Foundation, Inc. and *The Protest Review* since 2020. Her undergraduate work is in English and Africana & Latino Studies from SUNY New York College at Oneonta, and her graduate work is in transnational studies, concentrating in Caribbean and Latin America studies from the University at Buffalo. Currently a graduate student of Global Public Health at New York University, Mary Anne spends her time understanding how social and cultural factors can contribute to the health of a community through the intersection of joy and resistance. When she is not reading, she is navigating multiple worlds, drawing thinking-system maps for radical social change, engaging in community protest, and writing poetry as a tool for breaking silence(s).

JENNIFER RUBY is a poet and teacher who lives in the Santa Cruz Mountains. A graduate of the MFA program at San Diego State, her work has appeared in the *Porter Gulch Review*, and the PEN Center USA anthology of post-election poems, *Only Light Can Do That*, among others. She enjoys long walks in the woods and listening to baseball on the radio.

DEREK SHEFFIELD'S collection *Not for Luck* was selected by Mark Doty for the 2019 Wheelbarrow Books Poetry Prize. His other books include *Through the Second Skin* (Orchises, 2013), runner-up for the Emily Dickinson First Book Award, and *Dear America: Letters of Hope, Habitat, Defiance, and Democracy* (Trinity, 2020), which he co-edited. Sheffield is the recipient of the James Hearst Poetry Prize judged by Li-Young Lee. He lives on the eastern slopes of the Cascades in Washington and is the poetry editor of *Terrain.org*. [DerekSheffield.com](http://DerekSheffield.com)

SAMN STOCKWELL has been widely published, and her two books, *Theater of Animals* and *Recital*, won the National Poetry Series and the Editor's Prize at Elixir, respectively. Recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Gargoyle*, *Plume*, *Smartish Pace*, and others.

MARY ELLEN TALLEY'S book reviews appear online and in print journals such as *Compulsive Reader*, *Crab Creek Review*, and *Empty Mirror*. Her poems have appeared widely in publications including *Raven Chronicles*, *Gyroscope*, and *Banshee*, as well as in multiple anthologies. Her chapbook *Postcards from the Lilac City* was recently published by Finishing Line Press.

HENRY TAYLOR is professor emeritus of literature at American University, where he taught from 1971 until 2003. Before that he taught at Roanoke College (1966–1968), and the University of Utah (1968–1971). His eight books of poems, most of them published by LSU Press, include *The Flying Change* (1985; received 1986 Pulitzer Prize), and *This Tilted World Is Where I Live: New and Selected Poems, 1962–2020*. He has received Fellowships in Creative Writing from the National Endowment for the Arts, awards from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and the Aiken Taylor Award in Modern American Poetry. He and his wife, fiber artist Mooshe Taylor, now live in Santa Fe, NM.

NATALIE LOUISE TOMBASCO is pursuing a PhD in creative writing at Florida State University and serves as the assistant interviews editor of the *Southeast Review*. She holds an MFA in creative writing from Butler University and grew up in Staten Island, NY. Her poems have appeared in *The Minnesota Review*, *Antioch Review*, *Southwest Review*, *Sonora Review*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Meridian*, *Salt Hill*, *Third Coast*, *The Rumpus*, and *The Boiler*, among others. She was a runner-up in The 2019 Pinch Literary Awards in Poetry.

MILLIE TULLIS is an MFA poetry candidate at George Mason University. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Ninth Letter*, *Juked*, *Pembroke Magazine*, and *Gingerbread House Lit Mag*. She reads for *Phoebe* as assistant poetry editor and lives in Fairfax, VA with her partner and two large cats.

HANNAH V WARREN is a PhD student at the University of Georgia where she studies poetry and speculative narratives. Her chapbook *[re]construction of the necromancer* won Sundress Publications' 2019 chapbook contest, and her works have haunted or will soon appear in *Mid-American Review*, *Moon City Review*, and *Redivider*.

MIKE WHITE is the author of the collections *How to Make a Bird with Two Hands* (Word Works, 2012) and *Addendum to a Miracle* (Waywiser, 2017). His work has appeared in *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *The New Republic*, *The Kenyon Review*, *The Threepenny Review*, and *The Yale Review*. He lives in Salt Lake City and teaches at the University of Utah.

JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS is the author of *As One Fire Consumes Another* (Orison Poetry Prize), *Skin Memory* (Backwaters Prize), and *Summon* (JuxtaProse Chapbook Prize). A twenty-three-time Pushcart nominee and winner of various awards, John serves as editor of *The Inflectionist Review*, teaches for Literary Arts, and is a poetry agent. [JohnSibleyWilliams.com](http://JohnSibleyWilliams.com)

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

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

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*Sugar House Review* promotes an eclectic range of poets through publishing and live events to build nationally connected literary communities and foster the literary arts in Utah.

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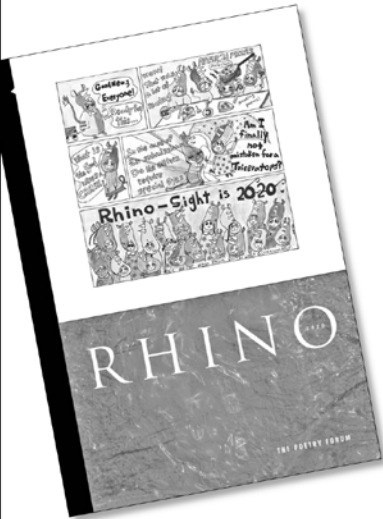
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