

# THE LAUREL REVIEW

Volume 52

2019

Issue 2

**Editors:** John Gallaher, Luke Rolfes

**Associate Editor:** Daniel Biegelson

**Contributing Editor:** Kristina Marie Darling

**Editorial Assistants:** Kohl Moutray, Mason D. Arnold, Nicole Kerwin, Anna Bagoly, Melanie A. Wilson, Brandon Hallock, Sarah Jennings, Maranda Deplanty, Alison Burski

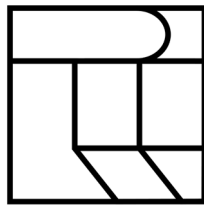
**Cover Design:** Mason D. Arnold

**Typesetting:** Mason D. Arnold, Luke Rolfes

*The Laurel Review* publishes two issues each calendar year. Online submissions accepted via Submittable. No manuscript can be returned nor query answered unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. U.S. subscription rates are \$10 for one year, \$18 for two years, and \$24 for three years. International rates are \$14 for one year, \$23 for two years, and \$30 for three years. Available back issues are \$5. Check or money order accepted. Address all correspondence to *The Laurel Review*, GreenTower Press, Department of English & Modern Languages, Northwest Missouri State University, 800 University Drive, Maryville, MO 64468-6001.

*The Laurel Review* is indexed in *The Index of American Periodical Verse*, *The Annual Index to Poetry in Periodicals*, *Humanities International Complete*, and *The Index to Periodical Fiction*.

The views expressed in *The Laurel Review* do not necessarily correspond to those of Northwest Missouri State University, and the university's support of this magazine should not be seen as an endorsement of any philosophy other than faith in free expression.



# CONTENTS

## FICTION

<b>Reggie Mills</b>	Recipe in Time Half-Learned	20
<b>William Lychack</b>	Father's Day	51
<b>Aimee Parkison</b>	The Mushroom Suit	73
<b>Ace Boggess</b>	Double-Edged Blade	116
<b>Daniel Uncapher</b>	Construction Paper	122

## NONFICTION

<b>Laurie Blauner</b>	The Adventures of Small Animals	94
-----------------------	---------------------------------	----

## POETRY

<b>Bruce Bond</b>	From Narcissus in the Underworld	1
<b>Michael Robins</b>	National Historic Battlefields	4
	Poem for Koji Uehara	5
<b>Dana Roeser</b>	Seed	7
<b>Jeffrey Hanson</b>	Body Language	12
<b>E. Laura Golberg</b>	Girls' School Uniform Hats	17
<b>Lisa Lewis</b>	Streak	18
<b>Caroline Plasket</b>	Exceptions	21
<b>Mathieu Caceres</b>	Sonnet	22
	Old, Old Men	24
<b>David Swerdlow</b>	Sunday Drive	30
<b>Rachael Gay</b>	A Conducted 206 Piece Orchestra of My Bones	34
<b>Troy Jollimore</b>	American Beauty	35
<b>Page Hill Starzinger</b>	Frauen Auf Bäumen	48
<b>Anthony Robinson</b>	A Byronic Yearning for A to Equal B	54
	Bereavement	55
<b>Sean Thomas Dougherty</b>	A House in Late Winter	56
<b>David Gullette and</b>		
<b>Mark Halliday</b>	Pickup Styx	58
<b>John Sibley Williams</b>	Origin of Topography	60
<b>Miguel Murphy</b>	The Museum	61
<b>Campbell McGrath</b>	The Parking Lot	62
<b>Albert Goldbarth</b>	The Manageable Song	66
	70: Late May	67
<b>Charlie Clark</b>	Devil Rises in a Hotel Called the Rhône	71
	Devil's Spring Fever	72
<b>Felicia Zamora</b>	Veins & Ghosts & Other	
	Circulatory Systems	85
	Six Functions of Bone	86
<b>Gary McDowell</b>	It's Like This	90
	Missing Man Unwittingly Joins Search	
	Party Looking For Himself	91

<b>Mary Lou Buschi</b>	Spring II.	92
	Tension	93
<b>Wes Civilz</b>	<<Billie Holiday from Wikipedia>>	99
<b>Maari Carter</b>	Sleepwalker [Sphragis]	100
	Sleepwalker Speaks to Bakhtin's Amputated Leg	101
<b>Martin Ott</b>	It's Time to do Nothing About Guns	102
	Can Poetry Save Your Life?	103
<b>Kristina Marie Darling and Chris Campanioni</b>	A Collaborative Poem	106
<b>Adam Clay</b>	Form of Love	112
	Confluence of Objects	113
<b>George Looney</b>	Anything but Classical	115
<b>Hadara Bar-Nadav</b>	[Before Difficulty]	127
<b>Jenny Molberg</b>	Ending the Affair at the Garden of Earthly Delights	129
<b>Oliver de la Paz</b>	Diaspora Sonnet 35	131
REVIEWS		
<b>Micah Zevin</b>	Review of <i>My Stunt Double</i> by Travis Denton	13
<b>Marie Hanna Curran</b>	Review of <i>We Might as Well Light Something on Fire</i> by Ron MacLean	16
<b>Janyce Stefan-Cole</b>	Review of <i>An Imperfect Rapture</i> by Kelly J. Beard	31
<b>Jake Levine</b>	Making Midrash: A Review of <i>Deaf Republic</i> by Ilya Kaminsky	45
<b>Kim Loomis-Bennett</b>	Review of <i>On Being Mistaken</i> by Laura Bucciari	63
<b>Lisa Morrow</b>	Review of <i>If the Ice Had Held</i> by Wendy J. Fox	88
<b>Glen A. Mazis</b>	Review of <i>Songs of the Sun Amor</i> by Wade Stevenson	104
<b>Leonard A. Temme</b>	A Review of Travis Denton's <i>My Stunt Double</i>	124
TRANSLATIONS		
<b>Gemma Gorga</b>	Ens vam oblidar	26
Translated by Sharon Dolin	We Forgot	27
<b>Gemma Gorga</b>	El llibre d'hores: gener	28
Translated by Sharon Dolin	The Book of Hours: January	29

CHAPBOOK FINALISTS

<b>Jake Bauer</b>	Today is my Birthday	134
	The Conscious Universe	135
<b>Sarah Carson</b>	It's May in Flint, Michigan, and We Skip Work to Watch Air Force One Descend Over the City	136
<b>Jeffrey Hecker</b>	Bull & Possum	141
	Leopard & Cheetah	142
	Buffalo & Rooster	143
<b>Allison Joseph</b>	Magic Bag	144
<b>Erin Lyndal Martin</b>	From <i>Book of Shadows</i>	146
<b>Sheila Packa</b>	From <i>Surface Displacements</i>	148
<b>Kimberly Ann Priest</b>	From <i>Parrot Flower</i>	153
<b>Shenandoah Sowash</b>	Questions for a Lover	158
	Some People	159
	Blinds	160
	Cheerio	161
<b>Alex Stolis</b>	July 4 Brainerd, MN	162
	July 6 Marquette, MI	163
	July 26 Truro, N.S.	164



BRUCE BOND

---

## FROM NARCISSUS IN THE UNDERWORLD

I was two boys then, and one, the older,  
loved the monsters in fatality pictures.  
Evil in the movies made sense in ways  
history did not. Psychopathic criminals  
looked away from the eyes of judges.  
The rumored hand or handbag washed ashore.  
Where once there was a character,  
now there would be fate. Nothing more.  
Where once there was trepidation, wonder.  
Where once a beneficent god, a movie  
called The Crawling Eye. And I pitied  
that eye, shuffling slowly through the Alps.  
I felt the cold against the iris, the sting  
of heaven without shelter, blood, or tear.

\*

A friend taught me, conviction is a nail.  
When it meets its mark, it drags its  
shadow in. Then he died, my friend.  
Fuck-it, he says in the bar that I have  
prepared for him, in the late-night talk  
where I say, yes, fuck-it, and hate him  
for it. If you search online, you can  
find his home page still. His bio, his face.  
His lamp is on, always burning. You  
can look up My Death Space Dot Com  
and read a cruel anatomy of failure.  
If you are there, I want to ask. Is hell  
a place where all your blunders follow you  
into a hell where none of it matters.

\*

Why is it gods always talk in echoes,  
if at all, their words buried in words.  
Does it make them more important  
than they are. Do they long to fill  
an emptiness that must be empty still.

One day I will look for a friend's face  
and see the words *this site does not exist*.  
My double in this bar does not ask  
about me. Who am I to blame him.  
He cares less about the big picture  
because he is one. He will tell you.  
Hold an empty tumbler to your mouth.  
See. It makes your voice a little larger.  
Drink another. It makes you larger still.

\*

I am looking for a friend among us  
in line for coffee, reading our phones,  
and we bump bodies, and no one minds,  
no one speaks to anybody here,  
and still the more particular the death,  
the more I see it in a stranger. I lay  
a friend inside the chalk at the crime scene,  
the way one lays a fire in the woods  
or a child more deeply in the dream  
she's in. One day I will turn a corner  
and see no one, no song, no poem, no hat  
to throw a dollar. Only Earth on fire,  
and I will say I knew you, stranger, I will  
ring your phone, weightless as an angel.

\*

When I was young, my teacher left the room,  
and when she returned, she was not  
my teacher, but a child. I did not know  
enough to grieve, or to go wherever  
a better child goes. I felt what I felt,  
and mostly later, in the light of TV  
faces that lined the streets of the republic.  
I thought, so this is what a nation is.  
What I felt, I heard in the soft drum  
and the hooves of the cortege caisson



that bore the casket of our president.  
My mother too watched. Perfectly still.  
Until she called me and wiped something  
from my cheek. A thing she never did.

\*

Blade after blade falls for a cause like heads  
in a basket, and the spectacle leaves you  
helpless, for the internet is no heaven,  
no hell, no ethos. The guns have been printed.  
The lonely are loaded. No one is alone.  
The internet has no body to fuck or bury  
or examine, no angel to bind your eyes.  
It has no earth, no cancer, no rising sea.  
Let me begin again. Long ago my teacher  
left the room, and when she returned,  
I saw no nation. I saw a woman in shock  
do the best she could. Fragments, silence,  
tears. I saw her struggle, her arms wrapped  
around her chest, where once there was a phantom.

\*

Long ago I died, and when I woke, deep  
in the woods, dawn rose, and white noise  
in the radio clock with no clear station.  
I was broken, like no other, into many  
strangers then, and none of them was you.  
Chaos has no face, and faces rise and fall  
from it, like sunlight from a face we lose.  
Long ago I was torn from my younger,  
older body, and a phantom pain poured  
through. I was a radio. And it took years,  
but then, one morning, the pain had faded.  
Strength returned. I woke, resolved, and tuned  
to one clear song. And in the song, a tree,  
bare and wingless, and capable of listening.

MICHAEL ROBINS

---

NATIONAL HISTORIC BATTLEFIELDS

—for Jim Tate

The fumes from all kinds of valley & scrub, these  
timeworn chirps off the block to the parade ground  
bygone, marched. Wilted pond, frogs, peccadillos  
that, when I sink stone, dim. Leisure not exactly,  
was a damn bayonet, my ditty of birdbrain hatchet  
leveling hickory, the hard & soft pine, the moon I say  
passing evenings with the mind lodged as in a glass  
wet & cold & slid forward. Windows like musings  
fall routinely dark, the schoolhouse closed & forever  
another olive please, martinis particular, tomfoolery  
dropping my scarf in the middle of the night, retrieving  
one afternoon when my friend pegged the truth, said,  
Well, it gets easier. I couldn't mend the life of me,  
my marriage salient, ill-strung before it played &  
plainly, this bushel of the people I knew now dead,  
teachers gone, pupils mulling days & soon undressing  
leaves to the ground where the squirrels dig & bury  
& forget. Without, I'm fine to sit long & think, to think  
of sitting & long, conjure the stoplight, the cemetery  
turning & the bare house on the left. Someone meets  
its garden need, charges the feeders, lightens the drink  
before the ice melts clear. Well, I miss my friend  
steady again at the fence, town line to the tree line  
willowly & yet imagined. I make believe toy soldiers,  
lead uniforms, carefully painted rifles. I'll know him  
among that crowd, pinky swear, should our lamps  
cross the same air. He shadows for now the ants,  
the mosquitoes, the mice that move the vast woods.

MICHAEL ROBINS

---

POEM FOR KOJI UEHARA

—for Roshan & Rebecca

Sometimes we stood in rooms & the other fled  
as in dreaming. It was home & not our home,  
almost you in an airplane folded down stairwells  
of a city on the sound. Paper market & moon,  
its glint asks, Who braces your tall ladder,  
which side of the coin as it spins across the sole  
of a wayward ship? Unbatten, say, Here I am

looking to hatch. You repeat To the life ring,  
see what's next &, yes, let's buy a house  
together on a small hill, its park scattered there  
with letters decades in the making, later  
illegible with rain. If elephants land our yard  
name them Little Party Girls, then remember  
when you were an age & the next year you  
(bunked in a capsule of days) were the new age.

Let's stop talking here of old hammocks, praise  
rain when its hold, primitive as ever, passes.  
First it is April, then May. You welcome  
pike rising nearly to song yet turn restless,  
it's true, as sometimes we forget that color  
& fragment flutter shade, no little advice  
whatsoever bestowed. If elephants land the yard  
hold the periscope, the glass to our wall  
for we are better trained in this awkwardness:

we say the right thing at the wrong time & call  
this distance & groove. You flip on the light  
to speak or argue the difference between ogre  
& hunchback, startle from the line the crow  
who returns with the moon & by no accident  
shines on the couple. Now we're an item,

she's new in town, I met him at the Laundromat.  
We flood the days by the hydrant & wrench,

beneath which chair did we feed the evening  
its clothes, telling the truth for good? True love's  
never easy, a good-for-everything turtle  
swims & the house in dreaming is small, is grey,  
is nestled between an ocean & lake. You spy  
something big & blue with white fluffy things.  
We call it day. We call it love & it's magnificence.

**SEED**

You can either go to the dermatologist  
or try to pick at it, I tell Lucy.  
I actually succeeded in picking out

the seed one time.  
Robin Eskey—it was eighth  
grade—had a marble tile floor

in her ante room, foyer, big  
two-storey front hall,  
and the plantar's wart on the

bottom of my bare foot kept  
getting caught in the cracks. It was  
a scary, pleasant

sensation. And then there  
was my direct picking,  
at home, with implements, can't remember

what—pointy things,  
maybe even a nut pick I took  
from the dining room. Or

a needle. Damn if I didn't eventually  
pick out the "seed." Is  
there such a thing? Did I see

it? Fixed in my mind  
is a black speck—the wart disappeared  
soon thereafter. A seed is

an irritant around which something  
else grows. *Tell me*  
*about it.* The deep inexplicable.

The woman on the internet  
link yesterday. I was  
parked outside of

Starbucks, where I hang  
when I want to be alone, and  
I linked from some codependency

site on Facebook (was it  
"ReachOut Recovery"?) to  
"The Time My Boyfriend

Shot Me in the Face."  
I read it avidly—  
I who am never

far from fantasizing  
about my love, my muse,  
my Tall, Dark &

Handsome Unattainable—  
wearing the button-down shirts  
and tassel loafers

of my blue-blooded  
Republican uncles—  
and often

wondering if he is the  
sociopath he sometimes  
seems to be,

or maybe "just" an  
"emotional predator," and so  
grateful really

that his interest in me  
has been spur-of-the-moment  
desultory at most. Holy

Mother of God  
and All the Saints. Don't  
make me guess.

He shot through her  
    jaw (\$750,000  
worth of hospital bills,

    thirteen reconstructive  
surgeries), her arm. She gives  
    us the blow by blow

from when they met.  
    The little warning  
bells she heard at each

    "milestone." The time  
he lovingly  
    cradled his gun

and said, "This will keep  
    us safer." Should I  
mention now the pearl? No

    good explanation really  
for why I sat on a noisy rickety tour  
    bus to Willie Creek Pearl

Farm outside of Broome, Western  
    Australia, with a nonstop  
talker on the microphone

    filling us in on the sublime  
and the trivial, the pearling  
    and bush tucker lore.

Speeding (he said it was  
    safer to speed!) down the  
hard-packed pindan road,

    straight down the center  
in case it was flooded on the edges  
    (an oddity in the dry

season), ignoring the rise ahead  
beyond which he could  
not see, for what seemed

like at least an hour. Because,  
unlike the other tourist hot spots  
my cousin dragged me to,

this was one I had a craving to see—  
how the oysters  
were seeded, how they made

the pearls. What did the  
seeds look like—not the black  
specks I'd hoped for, like

lettuce seeds or tiny bits of flint. No,  
round plastic miniatures  
of what the pearlers hoped

would be the final product.  
Irritate the shit out of the inner shell  
to activate the nacre. Get

it young enough, do it carefully  
enough, you could  
get four pearls out of the lifespan

(ugh—talk about  
indentured) of one oyster. The cultivators  
had little black rubber wedges

for keeping the shells  
pried open when they  
were messing with them, implanting

or extracting. The guide actually  
sliced an oyster open  
with a knife



in front of us. Remarking  
casually he'd killed it—  
lo and behold there

was the perfect  
oversized pearl—lacking  
a little on "complexion" though,

he would tell us. (Remember these:  
"shape, size, color, complexion,  
lustre.") All from being

irritated and cranking out  
the mucus, the nacre  
the white man

decided he craved a hundred  
and fifty years ago  
when he saw the iridescent mother of pearl

*Pinctada maxima* shells  
hanging from strings around the  
waists of young *Aboriginals*.

She says, "I felt shame  
because secretly I still  
struggled with my romantic

feelings—they didn't just  
vanish after he left me for  
dead." Is it the seed someone

put in there and cultivated  
or one that was there  
already, deep, like a splinter,

wanting to be reached,  
found, seen,  
touched?

JEFFREY HANSON

---

## BODY LANGUAGE

To acknowledge loss is good, a sort of painful ownership  
that comes with maturity. But to do so means  
I must take a moment to be quiet, out of respect,  
to stop talking, to let the charge of my pulse speak for me.

I can see how the clouds are always *saying*, without words,  
dark on gray for rain or wind scrubbed white, blown over blue  
like sea foam skipping airborne over sand.  
A fit sign for how we lose the present now to the future ahead.

Perhaps you might want to join me. I see you there, off a little way,  
standing still while looking toward the waves, pretending, I think,  
not to notice how lonely I appear to be at my end of this deserted place.  
I can't know if you want to walk down my way for a word,

but I gather from your body language that I must appear  
lonely to you and that maybe you understand how my heart  
is the nuisance I own that needs a little quiet to settle down  
before good company stops to say, "Hello."

## REVIEW OF *MY STUNT DOUBLE* BY TRAVIS DENTON

Are we Gods/gods and comic book heroes or are we merely playing them on the page and in movies, only imagining our real life prowess? Should we be fascinated and full of ecstatic joy about what we see and encounter on our journey? Are we our bodies? Who and what is a man? Does he have doppelgangers or merely wish that he did so that he could play many parts? In Travis Denton's *My Stunt Double*, descriptive lush sometimes-humorous poems are like a painter's canvas that has very little use for lingering too long in darkness, melancholy and apocalypse. All of his characters, but especially the male ones, are fascinated by all sites and sounds real and imagined.

“What Beauty Gives Us,” sets the tone of inquisitiveness whether the narrative is about life or death: “A head, I think of its dying,/Of all their dyings—how they could have died/One by one, generations—fathers, sons,/Idiots and bastards—until the very last/Stand looking out on a greeny-blue dot/Out of reach, yet he reaches, grabs for it.” The speaker is on a quest of discovery and understanding, and whether or not he ultimately succeeds, he keeps striving. In the title poem, “My Stunt Double,” we are transported to a cinematic world that reminds one of scenes from Robert Altman or Coen brothers' movies:

In my rock-n-roll days, my stunt double  
Was called in to sweet talk girls  
After a show. I watched  
The tangle of hair and hands knit  
Into a good story. My job was to blast  
The plaster from the art,  
While the smell of my own breath and sweat  
Made me sick, balancing on two feet  
Of shifting sand as tablesful of work  
Stared me down.

Denton plays with the notion of knowing one's self and then conjures attributes and actions onto this other version of an actual self who is more successful than its double, who is perpetually in trouble but in

certain situations is helpful.

“What the Satellites Saw” is a double sonnet that utilizes word play, humor, classic mythological characters and even a few modern references to comment on dark subject matters. “And the storm surge in all of us//In all its holy ghostiness pronounces us alive/As we Google what to make with the hail/The storm left—ice cream? Or if it’s enough/ We’ll pack our wounds with it.” Even when the apocalypse is mentioned at the end it is delivered with a wink like comedic song lyrics. In the “The Body Next Door,” a husband and wife morbidly wonder what has happened to their elderly neighbor, inventing theoretical scenarios to explain it: “My wife suspects he’s in there,/In the threshold to the kitchen, arms stretched/Out for the phone inches from his fingers,/ Face and eyes caught in that look of wonder/That only the dead have perfected.” As they decide what action to take, the husband starts to make up a narrative of his own: “I’ve begun to imagine him, not facedown on checkered linoleum,/But having wandered off toward the woods/One evening, losing a slipper on a tree stump,/ Limping into that forest, his ex-wives asleep/Elsewhere.” The characters inhabiting these and other poems in this collection are consistently curious regarding all aspects of human existence whether they are light, dark or somewhere in between.

The work is remarkable in that a majority of its stories takes place in the mind whether the dreams and images are conscious or unconscious. In “The Rooms We’ve Never Left or Entered” figures in conversation speak to what they wish they had seen: “We watch a squirrel on the landing, a workman/Filching a beer from his fridge. My friend laughs in absentia, and later/We turn on the mic and take turns speaking into that space, ‘Mayday, mayday,’ filling it like a megaphone that distorts.” There is music in Denton’s lists and descriptions. “Post Apocalypse” even brings wonder although death, disease and bombs that once robbed him of sleep is omnipresent: “Now his chest was paper-mache,/His back, a canvas. In years to come, He’d yellow like newsprint,/ Crack spot with mold,” and “his lawn/Like gift wrap, his street—

cardboard, and the sky/Endless reams of high cotton—planes twisting.” Everything is valued in this world even if it is a world that seems doomed or that must recover from its erosion.

Rounding out this collection and sprinkled throughout are a series I will call the ‘man’ poems. Several of these pseudo-memoirs are from the point of view of an anonymous man recounting his life make-believe or real. “Man one night sitting out with a drink,” is a lyrical soundtrack homage to stereotypical male hero figures in the movies and their romantic encounters, specifically the *Magnificent Seven*: “They lay there/In her twin bed, and he did not think/of one back South who’d leave all/She thought he owned on the porch one day/In years to come, leave him to a friends couch.” In “Man once thought to himself,” there is a beautiful recounting of a day in the life of a ‘normal’ man in all his existential frustrations: “The street was silent, and his wife/Was not snoring her usual snore. It was quiet/And he cursed the silence,/Wished he could take it up in his hands,/Wrap his hands around that soft body. He’d pitch that shadow from the moving train/Of his bed and be thought hero by all.” There is a deluge of sensory reactions by the characters in this poem and a focus on the body and its role in his life as well as an ominous violence and anger possibly beneath the surface. These morbid and now spiritual themes come full circle in “Man, one day, started believing”: “Sometimes he’d want tea, and he’d walk to the kitchen/And there was his cup steaming on the counter./What a life, he thought, to be haunted by a butler God/Or housewife God who brought his slippers/To his bedside during the night.” This poem in the ‘man’ series is one where he reckons with his journey from belief to non-belief and comes back again.

At the conclusion of most of these stories, the characters learn something about themselves and seem better for it, not just that the darkness is inescapable. The intoxicating and inventive music, stories and characters that inhabit Travis Denton’s *My Stunt Double* are treated with sensitivity towards the body, the mind and our aging with a joy and curiosity that insists on honesty in all of its specific and poignant details.

MARIE HANNA CURRAN

---

## **REVIEW OF *WE MIGHT AS WELL LIGHT SOMETHING ON FIRE* BY RON MacLEAN**

As if finger pinching the senses, Ron MacLean's collection of short stories, *We Might as well light something on Fire (Braddock Avenue Books)*, stirs an aching sense of bewilderment, a necessary want and insatiable desire to read on.

Whether appearing in a traditional format or postmodernism uncertainty, each story reveals its tale as it must. Stirring up a kaleidoscope of emotions along the way while leaving just enough room for humour to seep in, when the suit is right.

Stories like "Lesser Escape Artists" tug at logic and imagination at once, dragging each in opposite directions and yet managing to just about keep you one footed from the knife edge of reality. From prostate Frank, to Finland and the removal of a cat named Egg, each crafted piece acts like a giant coffee stirrer, foaming bubbled language to its top. Language that captivates and throws a once familiar centre off point – just enough to enter briefly into another world.

This collection is an acute balance between the wondrous art of storytelling and life lessons of love, loss and those ever aching questions of identity, belonging and truth. If you wish to read one invigorating short story today, pick any one from this collection and you'll feel a bolt of life as you begin to question everything you know. Forget the Art museum. This collection of short stories is a museum you will want to revisit time and time again.

E. LAURA GOLBERG

---

## GIRLS' SCHOOL UNIFORM HATS

In winter, the soft navy blue round crown had a curved brim and sported a slender blue and white ribbon. What an invitation to all those Barbara Hepworths to sculpt the pliable body, a tuck in the top, the brim all standing, adding a jaunty air that telegraphed to those from the boys' school: this girl is a rebel.

The summer hat, rigid straw English boater, only permitted a change of angle. According to the teachers, it should sit on top of the head, parallel to the ground. But it had so much more style pulled firmly over one ear. Or, if perched on the back of the head, it would form a perfect halo, just like that of the Virgin Mary.

## STREAK

I had known all along I would live an alone life.  
The twisted oak guarding panicles of oats,  
gargoyle stone staring above chronic winds  
that pass unseen except for dust.  
My mother was forty when I was born  
and there were no others I would hear of  
until too late and dishonestly. Even what I've said  
of them is false. The old people who raised me  
held out long as they could, dotty, threatening,  
deathbed silent post-stroke. Their remaining days  
wound the bedpost spools in skeins unskeining,  
embroidery to touch like braille for meaning.  
Nobody was good at much and no one could trust  
the good. My mother's hands dropped to her lap  
after one missed key in "Anything You Can Do  
I Can Do Better," the song I begged her  
to play so I could alto the triumphant woman.  
She had good reasons for staying away five days  
a week. I don't blame her especially now I know  
who I most resembled. She had to earn  
our living in her car. Oh, so stern when I tied  
her to a kitchen chair with twine to keep her home.  
Children are know-nothings, trouble them  
stupid. Their mouths natter like windowshades  
or the kettle that whimpers from the stove.  
If you want to keep a secret don't tell the girl  
with the tear-stained face who refuses  
church on Sunday, it takes away time  
from nagging mother. Trying to steal her talk.

Thumb through the photo box in the closet,  
don't get anything out of order or she'll know.  
No photos of him, nothing spelling his name  
but the birth certificate, no signature. Is that how  
a man loves a woman? Songs on the radio,  
chintz curtains, carpets, old spool beds, and yarns.  
If you're smart and unwelcome, you don't  
ask for anything back. You throw it back.



Throw back the small fry, the cold fish you  
were born to and become for the sake of saying no.  
I like it like this. No I like it. Like it like this.  
This is the best way I can live and I'm good at living  
like this alone let me love my own business.  
Love the hard pollution of lying. Love  
the future fear of alone. Love the nonexistent  
scrolls of memory and the tins of backwards  
orchestral arrangements, fluffed notes, piano  
benches ajar with old music, what song did you play  
the night he invited you, mother? Maybe I made you  
play it again. Same voice, where did it go?

I was bound to live an alone life, I knew it  
because I could count the highest numbers.  
Ring the chime of unwantedness. Same  
unwelcome as no I like it like this and the back yard  
grass on my back after planting tulips, no matter  
how old I was I knew how to say no. Pristine  
and papery as bulbs that don't come up, buried  
too late and too cold. Refusing children,  
the sounds they make, like pasture birds,  
their sudden ignorant dancing. None decent  
and I like it like this. Because I'm right to like it.  
My winning streak, my giving streak, my charity,  
my chair, high chair, anointed chair, chair of mean  
and meridian, and the alone life reckons  
in the shanty woods like woodpeckers, church  
singers, call and response, one closer, one ranting  
from the wells beyond the dead, the dead tree, bole,  
the bolus, swallowing down the gifts to me,  
and mother's ashes in a painted box where I can't  
look and I can't get rid and she's not going  
anywhere and it's all right like this I like it like this  
in red scrolls of rancid lipstick and she can't grow  
like an elder tree and she still can't play and neither  
can I and my promise to the future alone is I will  
when I'm ready, I remember how she held her hands.

REGGIE MILLS

---

## RECIPE IN TIME HALF-LEARNED

Because it's two full helpings of Pine-Sol pesto and the floor becomes the side, the apartment so tight that it's a quick riff between half-kilt and tilt. Since after a length of time which makes the hunger for two, the recipe says *xy* which you have in ample supply. Your boy Joaquin is hanging with eyes creepy and there, most of the eats beside him peanuts for cause of time. On the shelf the containers of things unlabelled, dark and unknown and compact with organization, and you reach and pour ample, then relying on heat and time. Which comes when you wait. The sensation becoming thick and unbearable, but then things arrive. The place full and stuffy, the hearty helping goes down fat with notes like Sanka and lemon. And then you look and you see. See out of the dark. Since label is key. Because then it's the floor freshly surfaced with notes of wood and thick grease. Your boy Joaquin up on the wall looking down with fresh eyes, his a face that says, Hi.

## EXCEPTIONS

A high-school boyfriend once spat while we were walking at the park and a bit of the spray hit my arm. His response at my indignation: *you accept my tongue in your mouth, but that was something worth mention?* And he had a point, but all of these years later I think about his choice of words: *accept*. I accept the mail each morning. I accept my dog's curved body as it moves to greet me upon my arrival home. I accept the longer days in the summer. And, yes, I have accepted the soft entrance of others' tongues blooming into my mouth more than I accept that machinations continue behind doors I have never seen, and that my daughter will be driving, soon, among the beasts of the highway, the rush-hour stampedes, and I will remind her to keep her distance from the other cars—I accept those times I only know how to be a broken record. I accept that my husband feels too self-conscience to take his shirt off at the pool because there are tubes going into his body. Always connected, always reminding us of its insufficiencies. I accept that addiction doesn't have a seven-day forecast for me to pull up on my phone: *Today will be clouded with lies, but don't worry Tuesday is clear-eyed enough to keep you hoping for some kind of normal*. I accept that at one point my mother held me against her body and I knew the meaning of stasis without accepting the impending division. At this point I've reached *advanced maternal age*. If I had a baby now, they would name me high-risk—but the joke's on them, because there was always contingency; as soon as we know breath—anything could go wrong.

SONNET

I haven't found  
your memories here:  
*Corpus Christi*—  
corpus corpus corpus  
there is no psychology  
without the body  
I thought I could  
collect my family  
here—hearing  
they would all come  
down for me;—  
to rescue me, finally.  
I have spent my whole  
life waiting for men. Words  
I have learned Spanish:  
Yo había sonreído, mijo.  
*Do you need help with that?*  
No more incorrect grammar  
of Tex-Mex—I know something  
and I want to show you:  
show you the new books and  
the new pride that comes with  
these new mythologies—  
I can hold up your head  
in front of you.  
I can show you the  
cockroaches because  
you don't have to be  
scared of their whiskers.

I think I tried to poison my mother.  
Say Elizabeth... say Elizabeth:—  
I can sing your name. I can sing it well.  
I poisoned you with my pride because I  
thought it was the right thing to do. Tell me:  
the house isn't burning...I don't want to

know you anymore...How many drugs did  
you do when you were younger;—Did you sleep  
with women? Did you think about your future  
sons and daughters you wanted and draw their  
burnt bodies in your terrible sketches.

My pride in not speaking to you has turned  
to hatred I use to justify an... unacknowledgment—  
I don't want to see your face during sex.

I have filled up journals  
with new stories I want  
to tell you. I don't want you  
to read them but rather I  
want to read them to you.  
I know it has been long since  
you heard my voice. Your  
brothers often talk about  
you to me, saying you are  
okay, not okay, pleased and  
displeased with my lying: no,  
the house is not burning and  
I don't wish you were dead.  
Because I know you cannot  
say what that is yet. I know  
you will call out my name  
when you do, like they always  
do. And I have your telescope:  
this thing that made you  
stop believing in God. And  
I will never return it. I pawned  
it. I don't think I got half of  
it's worth. But I tried. And  
when you finally speak to me  
to ask for it, I'll say I needed  
to—for groceries. I had to eat.

## OLD, OLD MEN

I was born a bird's throat. I thought about a racial slur. I think about them all the time. For a while now I thought I could forgive my mother for that, but it's all me at this point. I'm cradling Judy Garland in blackface—she won an Oscar for that. And what if Hunter S. Thompson became sheriff? When do things exist to me? I can teach rodents theater, back of an alley or something. No fags. Nothing but fags now. I can breathe now. I can learn now. I thought I could be forgiven for all this. *I believe in white supremacy until the blacks are educated.* That much I can't part with. I know the definitions of colors.

My name is John Wayne and I have a temper: and I ain't give a shit about *Stagecoach* I ain't give a shit about my name I ain't give a shit and never think about them again. They twice my blood, then some. For a while now I've loved those films. I'm dying in a deathbed. There's music in my body. All this wasn't to be heard by someone else. Does that digest paramount? My mouth fights for me every day. I take saliva for granted. I hear, "One side of her face was bashed in," and all I can see is the light light light—flash of light that pokes fun, pokes hurt. It's unusual to want to live passed seventy—I have to have someone teach me to use my lungs again. Youve ain't seen nothin' yet. Some bees in my stomach, others walking, sitting, mmurmming like Hopper's figures. Some stranger pulling a wagon. I breathe out and out and out some notes flicker like two souls latching and it somehow makes a sound. A sound that reverbs through it all, making nothing but pleasure.

No way have I read all of Steinbeck and Twain but get to know something from me too, ya know. Flashing honey and sweets, which is what I did for a while, I have a temper, but it's clean. It's somehow possible to gauge whether it is, as my mother taught me that: say now, it's clean, it's fine to sword it around once in a while. It's okay to love confidence—don't ever look at it misplaced.

For more than a decade acting is somewhat lost. I'm aware of it now, like a singer dreaming in a past voice, it no longer seems appropriate for motivation or symphony. No more of anything, including this temper, including these miles. I can't translate it anymore.

*Josephine:* I don't love you. She said that to my father's grave, who is

telling me now.

What color is my hair now? No use in saying what it's not: no use in saying I've lived for it—lived for the lice and fleas I've encountered. If I were a beetle, I'll hide in this corner. And I'll stuff tobacco in hollow birdbone: I shake when I use pencils but not when I smoke.

All I can say is no no no,—for now,—no more fear. No more uncertainty. I'm dying for a whisper of reassurance. I can't remember my Spanish now. And keep that damned door shut!: white blanket, no face. I'll take another one. They can have it. You can have it. Show me the muscles, as I never believed in them anyway: there's a discovery of this time. There's a discovery of that time. I don't want to feel tragic.

GEMMA GORGA

---

## ENS VAM OBLIDAR

Ens vam oblidar de donar corda  
al rellotge de les nostres nits.  
I ara mira els cossos, encallats  
com rodes dentades que no saben  
acoblar-se, provant de reprendre  
el constant moviment giratori  
que tenen la terra, l'huracà,  
la dansa i la serp. La vida volta  
sobre si mateixa al ritme cec  
de l'esfera. I ara tu assenyales  
les dotze de la nit, jo les dotze  
del migdia, aturats ja per sempre  
com dues agulles rovellades  
que mai no tornaran a creuar-se  
camí de l'amor, camí de l'odi.  
Era senzill. I vam oblidar-ho.



SHARON DOLIN

---

## WE FORGOT

We forgot to wind  
the clock ruling our nights.  
And now, look at our bodies, stuck  
like cogwheels unable  
to mesh, trying to resume  
the constant, gyrating motion  
of earth, hurricane, dance,  
snake. Life turns  
with the same blind rhythm  
of the spheres. Now you point  
to twelve midnight, and I  
to twelve noon—stopped forever  
like two rusty needles that will never  
again cross paths in love, in hatred.  
It was simple. And we forgot.

## EL LLIBRE D'HORES: GENER

El fred ens fa més íntims i vulnerables.  
Som antigues ferides a la intempèrie  
d'uns dies que caminen amb peus petits  
pels pendants fràgils del cor i les teulades.  
Moment propici per recloure's a casa  
–com els secrets es reclouen a la boca  
càlida que els calla–, sentir el borbolleig  
espès de les hores que couen a foc  
lent, parar atenció a la fusta del llapis  
que creix, als ossos de les lleixes que cruixen,  
donar corda al mecanisme rovellat  
dels records, passar el plomall aquí i allà,  
abaixar el contrast cridaner dels colors  
que pengen torts a la paret, ocupar  
el mínim espai possible –un simple punt  
enmig de les coordenades de l'aire  
i la sang–, ficar-se sota l'edredó,  
arrupir-se, gairebé desaparèixer.

SHARON DOLIN

---

## THE BOOK OF HOURS: JANUARY

The cold makes us more intimate and vulnerable.  
We are ancient wounds out in the open  
from a few days walking on small feet  
along the fragile slopes and rooftops of the heart.  
A propitious moment for secluding ourselves at home—  
like secrets secluded in the warm, silent  
mouth—hearing the thick gurgling  
of hours cooked by slow fire,  
paying attention to pencil wood  
growing, to the shelves' creaky bones,  
winding the rusty mechanism of  
memory, passing the duster here and there,  
lowering the striking contrast of colors  
that hang crooked on the wall, occupying  
the least space possible—a simple point  
in the midst of the coordinates of air  
and blood—getting under the comforter,  
curling up, almost disappearing.

DAVID SWERDLOW

---

## SUNDAY DRIVE

Failure in the clouds, blasé  
and fatigued, repeating themselves across the sky. One remedy  
  
is to hold your breath (better than faith). Our car, full of trouble,  
ambles over the uneven roads, everyone with a grip  
  
on a door latch, everyone with a grip  
on some huge despair. Watch us fling open the car doors and scramble  
  
into the cold, our bodies unfolding  
like lawn chairs, the clouds holding their breath  
  
when the door makes its noise, swinging back into its own complacent  
and systematic violence. Watch us  
  
scuffing the earth, volunteers for this forsaken stretch  
of infinity.

## REVIEW OF *AN IMPERFECT RAPTURE* BY KELLY J. BEARD

Kelly J. Beard, known to her family as KJ, is a person exceptional to her circumstances, the one that got away. Escaped might be a better word. This fast-paced memoir reads like fiction as Beard tells the story of finding her path out of a twofold trap, going on to practice employment discrimination law, founding the Professional Women's Information Network, and winning awards for her legal and community service.

The Beards were a lower middle class family from Palm Springs, California. Herschel Beard, a traveling salesman touting farm equipment in the southwest, brought in regular pay checks, providing enough for the eventual purchase of a modest home until bad luck, and some phenomenally poor decisions sent the family of six spiraling downward to the ranks of the working poor, uprooting them to chase jobs in Colorado and Montana.

Herschel Beard didn't believe in sparing the rod, or rather, the belt. It didn't take much to trigger—spilling milk would do—its use on his three girls and eldest, Herschel, who still wet his bed at seventeen. The punishment for that was to wash his yellow-stained sheets before school, and hang them on the line for all to see. Humiliation coupled with corporal punishment enjoys a long history. *Poil de Carotte*, Jules Renard's 1894 autobiographical novella, tells of Madame Lepic serving her son a soup concocted of his accidental nighttime excrement. The boy survives by outwitting the adults. Herschel doesn't do as well; he repeats history, eventually taking the belt to his own son.

After one final whipping, fifteen year old Kelly runs away. She returns to a repentant father, but an unrepentant mother, Edie, who employs her own brand of face slapping. Uncultured and sparsely educated, the Beards barely lift their heads above the daily grind. Kelly shows every sign of more of the same. By high school she's a consistent class cutter, tooling around with friends, smoking pot in a used car she calls the pink panther. Planning a future doesn't occur. As the family serially changes dwellings, Kelly repeatedly changes schools, resulting in a disrupted social continuity. No one seems to care if she does her schoolwork or not, certainly not her teachers; they've seen hundreds of Kelly Beards pass through the system.

The information that Kelly was an avid reader comes a little late in the book, taking me a bit by surprise. She's drawn to poetry, at one

point winning a five dollar prize. Her father reads the poem and says, “‘They gave you five dollars for this?’ He tossed it to the plywood floor, pulled the pliers out of his belt, and turned back to work. ‘I wouldn’t give you fifty cents for that garbage.’”

Kelly joins drama classes, wins every contest she enters, but is still adrift. The principal of one of her Montana high schools takes an unexpected interest. “Mr. Prestbo didn’t know me. I was exactly what my transcript revealed: the kid at the bottom of my class’s undistinguished heap, a disengaged, undirected student, who, through a combination of my own and the larger culture’s myopia, had failed to prepare for anything beyond the crabbed confines of that small school.” Not put off, Mr. Prestbo dares her to do better. She takes the dare, crams and ends up at the College of Great Falls-Montana State University, where Sister Marguerite offers a guiding hand. Beard wonders how her life might have been had teachers earlier on taken an interest. More universally, she wonders if educational indifference is precisely what keeps generations of the working poor stuck in place with no imagination to see any different.

The other chokehold Beard escaped was the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, a fundamentalist, hell-and-brimstone fearing sect founded by the charismatic Aimee Semple McPherson. Evangelical soul-capturing is the church mission. Foursquare doctrine aims to direct everyone in the world toward Jesus the King in time for the immanent second coming, and subsequent rapture: *The dead in Christ shall rise, the redeemed that are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.* That’s a tough creed for any child to swallow. Satan was everywhere lurking and had to be vigilantly countered. Individuals were encouraged to seek connection with God; glossolalia a preferred method: talking in tongues. Beard’s mother was particularly on the lookout for demonic possession.

Sister Dietz, of the Palm Springs Foursquare Desert Chapel, took sixth grader Kelly to Los Angeles, to the first Foursquare Church, Angelus Temple. Built by McPherson and her followers in the nineteen-twenties, Angelus is a circular mega church that holds five thousand worshippers. McPherson had claimed to have healing powers. Sister Dietz brought Kelly to the next generation of healers in hopes of curing her nearsightedness. Kelly was unable to go forward as she watched from the balcony those that approached to be healed. She logically concluded

if there was real healing going on science would know about it; the whole world would know. She returned home, nearsightedness intact, glasses still helping her to see.

The worst part of the Foursquare Church was the tithing: ten percent of congregant's yearly earnings so the ministry (now a corporation) could sustain its worldwide ambitions. Tithing was especially hard on struggling families like the Beards, with Herschel often working three jobs. Kelly's Grandmother—Grandma Alice (a powerful character in her own right)—disavowed her daughter's religion that put church ahead of putting food on the table for children, decent clothing on their backs.

Beard establishes the texture of time with a clever inventory of product placement: Jean Nate cologne, waxy Nik-L-Nips candy, Flipper on TV, Kodak cameras. And by current events: Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong planting the flag on the moon, sneaking to a Led Zeppelin concert, watching the Nixon Watergate scandal; smatterings of history-making events keeping time with Beard's personal progress. Eventually, there were boys and then men and what sounds like a flirtation with bisexuality.

By the time her father has their finances under control and builds a small house on his own land in Montana, Kelly is fully alert, engaged and very ready to move on. She wanted to pursue music. In hours of solitary piano practice she found concentration and centering. Spending her senior college year at a conservatory in Strasbourg, France, completed the break with her roots. She would never be good enough to compete with pianists who'd started playing as small children, or the privilege they came from, but her journey was hers. I would have liked to have learned how she turned to law. Perhaps a sequel will reveal how Kelly Beard moved from poetry, drama and music to the nearly polar opposite.

In this engaging read, Beard gets right under the skin of familial conflict, ill-fitting bonds wobbling loose as each child breaks away. But there is uplift among the dysfunction. Perhaps it hints at an Electra wish, but KJ, the youngest, and her father formed a caring bond before she left the family once and for all—on her own terms.

RACHAEL GAY

---

## A CONDUCTED 206 PIECE ORCHESTRA OF MY BONES

Jackdaw atop stolen nest of hubcaps and foil  
the interlocking of fish scales,  
chain mail tight in one sliding direction  
and flaking tattoo in the other.

To strip the salmon clean of tinsel  
I wield a scaling knife made  
from my ankle bone  
the part that never healed quite right  
that still aches like myth  
as the heavy clouds roll in.

Your voice, a permission to break down  
the first spark of friction.  
The thunder-rumble of your vocal cords  
spiderweb crack in the dam.

Hearty fullness,  
a stomach bursting with near boiling broth.  
Red at the gum line mirrors the flames licking the horizon  
beyond twin canines dulled to plateaus.

I snap twig thick carrots between my teeth and imagine  
that it is my finger instead.  
This righteous prayer feels better biting down.  
I scorch the earth and force my mind from the survivors.



TROY JOLLIMORE

---

## AMERICAN BEAUTY

*If there were dreams to sell  
what would you buy?*

Thomas Lovell Beddoes

*For this is all a dream we dreamed*

The Grateful Dead, “Box of Rain”

When the Senator Theatre closed in 1999 in Chico, California, the last film to be shown was *American Beauty*, and so I went, for the last screening.

I went to take in the last images, to feel the last light, to be a part of the end of something, to be, I suppose, a kind of witness, and to be a part of that crowd of others who also felt that they wanted or needed to go, to go to the movies for whatever reason it is that humans go to the movies—because we are all scopophiliacs, perhaps; because we all get lonely; because we think that the only way we can touch the people around us is to share some spectacle with them, to feel the same feeling, to see the same sight,

to think the same thought, to be moved all in the same direction like a school of fish

or a flock of sparrows shot like a host of arrows from some unearthly bow, swooping and twisting in unison, pouring through itself like a waterfall, to be moved by an unforgettable image or a perfectly delivered line of dialogue,

or the music, some melody that seems to embody sadness itself, that teeters and balances on the edge of being manipulative and then somehow

stops exactly on its mark and dances there. So that, when Lester Burnham dies (oh, *spoiler alert*, by the way—but not really, since, after all, he himself tells us in the first few minutes of the film that he’s going to die at the end) it is a death we can share, a loss we can call our own, each of us imagining our own body in that spot, in that shot, the shot that shows his slumped corpse, the one that follows

the shot that kills him, imagining our own head on the table, our own blood freshly freed and flowing, as that creepy, fascinated kid looks on, finding beauty

in everything, even the horrible, as he has been trained, as an American, to do.

(For even the corpse, as Emerson says, possesses its own beauty.)

We lost Lester Burnham that night, and ourselves, and then we lost the  
Senator.  
No more movies. No more projected light. No more sitting with strangers in  
the dark.

\*

What I'm trying to say is, over ninety percent of American films that were  
made  
prior to 1929, and half of American sound films made before 1950,  
no longer exist. The original ending of Orson Welles's *The Magnificent  
Ambersons*,  
which some have said was, in its original form, better than *Citizen Kane*,  
no longer exists. Some studio executive dumped it while Welles was out of  
the country.  
Into the ocean with all that footage, sunk like a trireme, to be silently  
corroded by salt water over the decades to come. What I'm trying to do is  
sing  
the song of all the screens we will never sit in front of, all the images  
that once composed themselves before human eyes and that might have  
moved us, you  
and I, together, in the same direction, dancing together without moving,  
"wandering together," perhaps, as Scottie says to Madeleine in *Vertigo*,  
but will never have the chance to do that, because time, as it does—it is, after  
all,  
the very nature of time—got to them first and has taken them away.

\*

Mothers of America,  
I second Frank O'Hara's sentiment.  
Let your kids go to the goddamn movies!  
In fact, don't just let them go,  
*make* them go.  
Otherwise they will develop relationships  
with their parents  
(that is to say, you)  
that are far too close  
to not be unhealthy,  
and they will stay indoors  
and watch movies on their iPhones,  
and they will never understand,  
because you never made them go

to the theater to be awed and overwhelmed,  
that watching a movie on an iPhone  
is like licking a picture of a cake,  
it's like making love through a telescope,  
because it is in the nature of things  
that the movies should be larger  
than us,  
not we larger than them.

Let them see the images  
that are going to disappear,  
the ones that time will take away.  
The images those  
who are yet to come  
will speculate about  
and try to imagine  
but will never get to see.

Also, theater attendance  
is at its lowest level  
since 1992,  
and you aren't helping.

\*

“The growth of a large business is merely survival of the fittest. The American Beauty rose can be produced in the splendor and fragrance which brings cheer to its beholder only by sacrificing the early buds which grow around it. This is not an evil tendency in business. It is merely the working out of a law of nature and a law of God.”

John D. Rockefeller Jr.

\*

Or else we think it's the people up on the screen that we are touching,  
those vast figures made of light, who seem not only more vibrant but  
somehow  
more real than these small poorly-lit three-dimensional bodies, these  
shuffling shambles that carry,  
buried deep inside them, the seeds of death; delusional thinking, it goes,  
perhaps, without saying, as there is after all nothing to touch up there, you  
might

as well try to touch a sunset or a rainbow. No, if we are going to touch,  
to take comfort in each other, to feel the warmth of the spirit as it manifests  
in the flesh, it must be the flesh of the person sitting in the seat beside you  
in the darkened theater, or perhaps the person sitting two rows back,  
who you have yet to meet, but who you noticed, perhaps, on the way inside,  
in the ticket line, or who, perhaps, noticed you, and whom you will, it's  
possible,  
bump serendipitously into out in the lobby after the show,  
and go on to strike up a conversation about what you have just seen,  
a conversation that might go who knows where? or perhaps you came  
tonight with someone who you met, in just this way, years ago? There is a  
bond  
that forms between two people when they see, in one moment, as if they  
shared  
a single pair of eyes, and saw the world as one, the same beauty.

\*

I myself feel a little hesitant about the idea of appealing to,  
or of stating, in anything that might seem to resemble precise or concrete  
terms,  
the laws of nature, let alone, for heaven's sake, the laws of God.

But then, I'm no Rockefeller.

And it is hard to think that Alan Ball, when he wrote *American Beauty*,  
did not have this precise passage of Rockefeller's in mind.  
For isn't this what Lester Burnham is doing, precisely, indeed, what he is  
doing,  
trying to bring himself cheer, attempting to explode, in midlife, into  
splendor  
(*American Splendor* – now there's an interesting film—but that's another  
story)  
at the cost of sacrificing the early buds that are growing around him?

And if one of those early buds, the one that happens to have captured his  
attention,  
should happen to be, not a flower, literally, but rather, a teenaged girl,  
some young person, only just now discovering for herself her own body's  
capacity for joy—

must he hold himself back, on that account?  
Does that really make a difference?

It is not an evil tendency, many say.  
It is only a law of nature.

\*

“The ancient Greeks called the world κόσμος beauty. Such is the constitution of all things, or such the plastic power of the human eye, that the primary forms, as the sky, the mountain, the tree, the animal, give us a delight in and for themselves; a pleasure arising from outline, color, motion, and grouping. This seems partly owing to the eye itself. The eye is the best of artists. By the mutual action of its structure and of the laws of light, perspective is produced, which integrates every mass of objects, of what character soever, into a well colored and shaded globe, so that where the particular objects are mean and unaffecting, the landscape which they compose, is round and symmetrical. And as the eye is the best composer, so light is the first of painters. There is no object so foul that intense light will not make beautiful. And the stimulus it affords to the sense, and a sort of infinitude which it hath, like space and time, make all matter gay. Even the corpse has its own beauty.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*

\*

And must we clutter this verse  
with the news  
of what the star of the film has been up to

lately? O muse,  
the gnarled, stunted forms you sing through  
are not what you deserve.

\*

There are, it should be mentioned, two other films called *American Beauty*, both lost.  
One from 1916, a drama directed by William Desmond Taylor, starring Myrtle Stedman and Elliott Dexter. The screenplay is by Julia Crawford Ivers, whose other credits include *The White Flower* (she had a thing for flowers, perhaps), *Sacred and Profane Love*,

and *Married Flirts*. The plot, according to the Internet Movie Database, concerns the daughter of a wealthy couple who is believed to be lost at sea, who somehow comes into the care, and is raised by, a poverty-stricken family.

I wonder what John D. Rockefeller Jr. would have made of that.

The other lost *American Beauty*, which dates from 1927, was directed by Richard Wallace, was based on a story by Wallace Irwin and starred Billie Dove as Millicent Howard, a beautiful young woman who makes it appear, through a variety of creative ruses, that she comes from money though in fact she has none, as a way of trying to attract, or, as people used to say, to “land,” a wealthy husband. One begins to sense a theme, class mobility, success in the classic American mode, the question of how one gets to the top from the bottom, and how a quick sudden fall can take you back down.

The question of how much of it concerns appearance, how one is perceived, speaking right and dressing correctly, dining on the proper things. The question of chance, the role it plays in lifting and lowering us. The question of whether there isn't some better arrangement we might have made of things.

The name of the man that Millicent Howard sets her sights on, by the way, is Archibald Claverhouse. People don't have names like that anymore.

\*

I'm not saying, incidentally, that we should tell the kids the movies are *good* for them.

Like kale,  
or flu shots,  
or retirement accounts.

Good god no.

Let's tell them, in fact, that the movies are positively *bad* for them.

Because, first of all,  
there's some truth to that.

And because, secondly,  
they understand better  
than the rest of us, sometimes,  
that getting too much of what's good for you  
is not always good for you.

\*

There is, too, the El Rey, a few streets away from the Senator, on Second Street, which opened in 1906. Its first show, a set of films titled "Whitney's Celebrated Life Motion Pictures," included "The Fire Bug," "Great Mine Disaster," and "Scenes of the Russian Revolution." Advertisements for the show promised that attendees would experience "Positively No Flicker or Vibration." At that time it was known as The Majestic, later rechristened The National, then The American, and finally, the El Rey.

It was mostly shut down in 2005. I saw "The Man Who Wasn't There" in that theater, and "Sideways," which was the last first-run film shown in that place before it closed, and I have, at least twice, dreamed about being inside, with its beautiful art deco mural of yellow fairies and flowers set against a deep blue background.

If there were dreams to sell, what would you buy?  
*I'll let you be in my dream, Dylan sings, if I can be in yours.*  
*What did you dream?* asks Pink Floyd. *It's alright, we told you what to dream.*

\*

In 1908, on Christmas Eve, George McLellan, Mayor of New York City, ordered that hundreds of motion picture theaters in that city be closed. He had, he told the public, witnessed for himself the unsafe conditions the theaters manifested, not to speak (though speak he did, with relish) of the outrageous, immoral behavior the picture shows encouraged. He had found, he said, emergency exits that did not open, exits that led to forty-foot drops, exits that led the unwary directly into turkish baths. *Turkish baths!* Supporting his decision, the Reverend Evers, chaplain of City Prison, told reporters, "I was amazed

by the exhibitions I saw for the benefit of the little boys  
and girls of our city. The most suggestive, the most enticing actions  
which appeal only to the lower and most evil passions in men and women  
were thrown upon the screen for small boys and girls to look upon.  
I was indeed saddened by this open exhibition of depravity.”

Picking up the charge, Vincent Pizarro, the chief investigator for  
the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, identified movie  
theaters  
as locations where young boys were enticed into criminal lives—trained as  
pickpockets—  
and where young girls sold their innocence. “The darkness of the  
auditorium during  
the exhibitions,” he opined, encouraged seduction, providing ample  
opportunity for “puppy love’ affairs.” And as if that weren’t damning  
enough,  
other clergy observed that the movie industry was, in actuality,  
“a Jewish syndicate furnishing indecencies for the city.”

\*

The eye is the best of artists,  
though the hand, the hand does what it can.

The Invisible Hand called in sick today.  
It’s getting a manicure.

The Invisible Hand is in the corner  
giving us all the finger.

An invisible finger. Huh.  
Well would you look at that.

Doesn’t look like much from here.  
Not even the most intense light in

the universe would make *that* look like  
anything at all.

\*

What I’m trying to say is that beautiful things have a way of making us  
anxious.



What I'm trying to say is that no one knows what we might get up to in the  
dark,  
which is perhaps why we've tried so hard to blanket our planet in light,

as if that would make it beautiful. As if the planet were foul.  
What I'm trying to say is that caring for things, taking care of them,  
preserving them,  
is, perhaps, not our forte. By 'our,' I mean to refer to us, this race

of rampant overdeveloped monkeys that has spread all over the planet, and  
that you and I, my friend, are card-carrying members of.  
What I'm trying to say is, eighteen of Euripides' plays have come down to us

(he wrote over ninety), a mere seven by Aeschylus (sources say he too wrote  
ninety),  
and seven, again, by Sophocles (he wrote a hundred and twenty-three).  
It was Aeschylus, if Aristotle is to be believed, who came up with the  
innovation

of allowing the characters on stage to interact with one another, and not just  
with the chorus.  
Somehow it seems so obvious in retrospect.

\*

Is it too much to draw a connection with Lindsay Weir, the teenaged  
protagonist  
of the wonderful *Freaks and Geeks*, cancelled after a single season,  
though it's one of the best things you've ever seen or will ever see on TV,  
who, in the final episode, is loaned a copy of the Grateful Dead's nineteen-  
seventy  
album, *American Beauty*, by a couple of Deadheads and who, after sixteen  
and one half episodes of the stress and perplexity and perpetual dis-  
arrangement of being a teenager, finds, at last, true beauty,  
and maybe, in just the same moment, finds also herself, dancing alone in her  
room  
to the album's opening cut, the gorgeous and shimmering "Box of Rain"?

Middle-aged fathers of America, let your daughters, let everyone's  
daughters, dance  
alone in their rooms. Let them listen, if they want to listen, to the Grateful  
Dead.  
Let them go secretly out onto the road, if they want, and follow the Grateful  
Dead,

or rather, whatever band it is now that moves teenagers to pile into vans with their friends and hit the road after having lied to their blissfully gullible parents and told them they were going off to “Math Camp” or to an “academic summit.” Let them get up to whatever it is they’re going to get up to in the dark, as the band plays its endless set, while they are still young enough to feel, and even believe, that they will never die. Surely whatever the laws of nature might be, among them must be the law that young people be allowed, because they need to be allowed, and because they’re going to do it anyway, the freedom to do such things.

\*

Did ancient Greek audiences sit in the dark? Did they get up to mischief? Plato worried about the effects of drama on the Athenians, though I don’t think premature sexual activity among children was what he had in mind.

His famous image for human existence, and human delusion, was of a cave in which we are chained, so that we can see only the shadows on the wall, with the real world, the light that cast the shadows,

existing elsewhere, out of sight.  
This, Plato said,  
is our life.

\*

This, Plato said, is our life. A shared dream of a life, an illusory life, with reality taking place elsewhere. Hard not to notice how much the whole setup resembles a movie theater, with us all facing in one direction, enjoying the illusion,

and somewhere behind us, the projector,  
and somewhere beyond that,  
the world.

JAKE LEVINE

---

## MAKING MIDRASH: A REVIEW OF *DEAF REPUBLIC* BY ILYA KAMINSKY

When I was a junior at the University of Arizona, my teacher Jane Miller introduced me to the work of Ilya Kaminsky. It was 2006, so we were just then gaining an appreciation for how great the books were that came out in 2004. At that time irony was the force majeure in American verse culture. As a student it felt impossible to talk about feelings, politics, and spirituality with sincerity. I am sure I am not the only one who feels that much of today's poetry that deals with identity and social issues would have been nigh impossible to publish back then. For me there were three books that came out in 2004 were pivotal to opening up the field. They were Richard Siken's *Crush*, Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* and Ilya Kaminsky's debut collection *Dancing in Odessa*. Through his use of rhetoric and myth delivered in those sprawling lines he calls "steps," Siken talked directly about feelings and the self. Through formal hybridity Rankine created space to directly engage in class and racial politics. And through the lyric Ilya Kaminsky taught us that it was possible to have a conversation with G-d.

In one of the less loud moments in Kaminsky's *Dancing in Odessa* we are introduced to a man who drops two watermelons as he attempts to gesticulate through a conversation about "the country where everyone was deaf." Fifteen years later we are given the story of that country in *Deaf Republic*.

Set in the fictional city of Vasenka, this two act fable is book-ended by the political poems "We Lived Happily during the War" and "In a Time of Peace." These poems introduce ideas about culpability, guilt, inaction, and the helplessness of individuals in times of emergency. The first poem, "We Lived Happily during the War" sets up that schism of scale between the individual and the nation. "I was / in my bed, around my bed America // was falling." "And when they bombed other people's houses, we // protested / but not enough, we opposed them but not // enough." If Kaminsky's first book is about the refugee experience, this second book is a specific kind of exile. Exile at home. This is when home suddenly becomes a prison. When people lose control over the direction of their homes, they become mere spectators in the phantasmagoric reality of their lives. "Ours is a country in which a boy shot by police lies

on the pavement for hours. // We see in his open mouth the nakedness of the whole nation. // We watch. Watch / others watch.”

*Deaf Republic* reads as an allegory that mirrors much of Kaminsky’s family history in the Soviet Union. However, the book also strikes tones that are eerily familiar to America’s present. In the fictional Vasenka, death and silence are experienced and used in different ways. When soldiers speaking a foreign language invade the country and kill the deaf boy Petya, “Our country woke up next morning and refused to hear soldiers.” Deafness becomes a tool of insurgency and solidarity. “Our hearing doesn’t weaken, but something silent in us strengthens.” Deafness is a form of empowerment. It awakens silence and allows the silence to speak. “What we don’t say / we carry in our suitcases, coat pockets our nostrils.... // each of us / a witness stand: // They take Alfonso / and no one stands up. Our silence stands up for us.” As deafness is empowering, common language becomes distorted and often ceases to communicate. “Alfonso Barabinski, a child in his arms, spray-paints on the sea wall: // PEOPLE LIVE HERE— // like an illiterate / signing a document // he does not understand.” These gaps illuminates meaning that exists beyond words. However, this doesn’t negate language. Rather, by making it “other,” the word is elevated into something that can stand independently for what it stands in for. This kind of silence gives words a life independent of their communicative function. It reveals the contours of something that exists beyond language, something that lives through silence. And, paradoxically, we learn that it is this “silence” that “moves us to speak.”

\*\*\*

Like reading Edmond Jabès, Kaminsky’s work is spiritually akin to the Jewish act of making midrash. Dennis Fischman writes that midrash is a response to exile, one which Jews find ways to “alleviate the conflict between what is real and what matters and the moral boundaries that prevail in the polity.” When the diaspora deprived the Jews of their ability to hallow the world, it did not relieve the responsibility for them to do so. However, in exile every act is disjointed and fragmented. “It has begun: neighbors climb the trolleys / at the fish market, breaking all / their moments in half. Trolleys burst like intestines in the sun.” In

this homage to Denis Johnson, Kaminsky reveals the emergency state. However, he reminds us how we must turn toward making holy the small acts of living. We must go “To the dentist, / to pick up the kids from school, / to buy shampoo” and execute (happily) the everyday tasks of living. In the chaos, these acts can be small prayers. As Denis Johnson wrote, “The world will burst like an intestine in the sun, / the dark turn to granite and the granite to a name, / but there will always be somebody riding the bus.” That is making midrash. To make the smallest act a ritual. To ride the bus.

\*\*\*

America is lost in the desert. It is searching for its soul, searching the skies, making words to look for words to make conversation. Has G-d abandoned us? If G-d exists, how could G-d have let this happened?

“At the trial of God, we will ask: why did you allow all this?”

And the answer will be an echo: why did you allow all this?”

Like Jabès, Kaminsky’s poems are filled with aphorism. These aphorisms are not statements or truths. They are secular, open ended, paradoxical. They are questions which raise questions. They show an intention without stating what is known. They are like signs which point to the existence of something without revealing or proving what that thing is. This is a spiritual quest. There is no proof for G-d. The search is the proof.

## FRAUEN AUF BÄUMEN

There's a lesson here I don't see, in addition to the ones I realize  
but don't pursue, and those I glimpse yet hardly register. As in

the way a wind bends boughs of a white poplar, flipping leaves—  
chalk-pale undersides, pileous twigs, silver bark: you'd think

snowfall.

There are so few things to  
reveal because most everything is so far down the well—

piled on top of each other,  
like wet clothes

intertwined, thrown around in a washing machine;  
some pieces aren't recognizable

but you know them anyway—  
my brother's worn red flannel shirt he never took off,

my mother's long white hair, always down when  
my father's fist hit the table,

bleached pine,  
ghostly. Oil portraits—a pair—

from the South  
hanging on by their

nails.

Barbet—her angular nose like  
mine but dark hair. You can't help but

compare—all refractions, our scaffolding of  
similes and metaphors. You fit in where you can, your half basement

becomes a slap or crawl space. Fissured trunks sucker  
the roots of extensive clonal colonies. I

take heart from discarded  
photos at flea markets of women in trees—

from the '20s to '50's it was a German pastime:  
men taking snapshots of girlfriends

laughing while lying in flowered  
dresses and heels on a branch over a sun-struck river,

leaning back in an icy fork with a hot toddy.  
Arboreal escape, a

vanishing.

    But they  
always had to come down—that's the other

thing. Maybe no one now  
knows who they were, but they are visible in the blank pages

I turn. And in the commanding  
sideways-stare of Barbet Weil,

inhabiting her commissioned painting  
with a half-smile, like an ancient sibyl—

gauntlet-cuffed black corset-laced dress—  
an augury of ravens and crows, this emigrant from Baden

where white poplar isn't popular. Eight children, four husbands,  
two businesses plus running blockades

during the Civil War: Barbet was not  
going to

disappear.

What would she make of me: putting an  
end

to her: that's how it feels, but her DNA  
must spiral

in some of the 1,061 relatives  
my genetic testing discovered. Snowdrops

bloom, white-out the landscape,  
then disappear:

they vanish twice. In looking at endings,  
aren't I living within an imaginary world—magical

my friend says to me—constructed  
of recovered ceiling beams,

repaired tapestries, trompe l'oeil doors:  
well, I must like this—

cupping

memory, fiction, and fact: obfuscating everything of the immediate: now.  
Lasting isn't really the point anyway, is it. Tell that to the white poplar,

wind-resistant but short-lived. Waterside genus, at home in poetry of one  
Emily Dickinson, you remember #260, where Nobody becomes a form of

resistance—



## FATHER'S DAY

I.

I once gave Brownie's father a Father's Day card. How, I wonder, did that go over in their house? Little Billy Buck, eleven years old—can see it now—sweet and awkward, delivering his little valentine to the man. What kind of kid would think that *that* was a good idea? Did they laugh after I was gone? Was there a sense of quiet embarrassment?

Who knows, but it's little wonder that I ceded things like baseball and hockey and fathers to Brownie, just as it was no wonder Brownie let me have things like Earth Sciences and American History. We divvied up the world between us. I took the things he didn't need. I was the one who had to do well in Social Studies and Algebra. He was smarter, but I was the one who did his homework at night. What else did I have? What else was an only child going to do when he got home but to get ready to go back to school in the morning.

Just me and my mother and the television at night. You could go through and circle every *NO* on a page— *NO* father, *NO* siblings, *NO* garage, *NO* go-karts, *NO* cottage by the lake, *NO* grandparents in nearby Worcester to visit, *NO* sly smile, *NO* easy laugh—I had none of the list of things that Brownie had. In my own little mousehood way, it was all about the presence of a father or the absence of a father, this had to be the theme bubbling under the surface of everything for me. The finished basement, the woodstove, the Mustang half-restored in the garage. Even the easy charm, the way Brownie could talk in class, the way he could take charge of a ballgame, it all had to come from somewhere. Or, more to the point, it all had to come from someone.

His father would have to stand as the most obvious difference that I could name between us. It'd be the only aspect I would have deliberately changed in my life, if I could. I'm sure I'd have traded this fact with Brownie without an iota of hesitation. Even if a father completely erased all that I was at the time, and even if that father was no good to me at all, I'm positive I'd have traded everything for the idea of a father. It wouldn't have even been a question. The bristle of chin, the errands in town, even those chores in the yard that Brownie complained about, how could I not feel that low-heat envy? How could everything not circle back to that presence of a father (for someone like Brownie), or that absence

of a father (for kids like me and Crawford)?

### II.

These were the things one thought about in exile, apparently. These were the moments that passed through a boy standing outside in the cold. He—this kid down there—I am daydreaming all of this as the clouds moved low and solid against the trees.

Funny I'm not aware of the Monitor I seek in my labyrinth.

Still, if you added up all the negative, you'd have thought that Crawf and I should be the best of friends. You'd have thought some extra bond should have existed between us, though maybe the truth was that we matched up too perfectly. Maybe we cancelled each other out somehow. Maybe it was all too subtle for us to understand, the list too tiresome to talk about with anyone, but it seemed that Crawford and I had nowhere to go with one another, as if the presence of someone with the same sort of story somehow diminished you, making your own deprivations more common, less valuable.

### III.

Here's another sad story: once, in Cub Scouts, our den leaders gave us each a Pinewood Derby kit to take home. A block of wood, four wheels, four nails, and my mother and I hammered it together on the kitchen table. We wrapped the car in tinfoil and painted lightning bolts on the side in red nail polish. It never passed our minds to do anything more. It didn't once occur to us to round the edges or oil the wheels or glue pennies underneath for weight.

Downstairs in the church hall, that first glimpse of the other racecars, a kind of beauty contest for fathers and sons. Brownie with a thin wedge of a car with retractable wings, cockpit carved for his hornet-helmet figurine. My car sat on the table, and I heard someone ask whose dinner was defrosting over there. People laughed, and the hall went hot and crowded and airless, everyone talking at the same time.

Later, it would seem that everything a person would need to know about these boys could be found in that small tableau of pine-wood cars. That'd be what a memory was worth, each accident becoming necessary, each weakness turning into a secret kind of strength. Even if this crude block of foil won the entire Derby that day—awkward thing starting slow and heavy down the track, but then ploughing long and stubborn with momentum—who could blame a kid for taking the exact wrong lesson from this? Even with a trophy to bring home, who would expect him to keep coming back to the Cub Scouts after that?

There was also that time his mother arrived from work with a present for him. Her kid should have something nice every now and then, she said. Her kid deserved something special at least once in a while. She had even taken the trouble to wrap the gift, saying it had arrived in the store brand-new that morning. He held the shirt to his chest. It was bright burnt orange, long-sleeved and silky, rayon with a motocross biker tearing life-sized across the front.

She thought for sure he'd like it, she said.

He lifted the shirt up and told her he did not like it at all.

He waited a moment.

He laughed and said he *loved* the shirt!

He danced with it around the kitchen. He wore it to bed that night. He was young and happy. He was a little boy again. He had it on as he went to school that next morning. He tied his jacket around his waist so that everyone could appreciate the orange sheen, that motocross guy ripping through mud. He waltzed into homeroom only to find Crawford wearing the exact same shirt.

Orange, motocross, silky, and the two of them could have laughed or tried to joke it off. They could have paraded around as mirror images of each other, as if they meant all along to match, as if they coordinated their wardrobe the night before, blood brothers. Instead they kept away from each other. Instead they seemed to feel threatened, afraid, neither of them ever wearing the shirts to school again.

ANTHONY ROBINSON

---

## A BYRONIC YEARNING FOR A TO EQUAL B

There is a lot of saying going on and a lot of wondering  
how beginning begins. A flat note comes into being  
and sing, sing! “whither this insect or that stone?”  
What are instincts if not signposts to the “real”?

As if making a show of things. Painting, keep painting to attain  
A tepid thorniness.

Praise is too basic a charge for a smooth criminality disguised as wisdom.  
Joy and beautiful, curt language are good like apples and pie tins. When I read  
About a poetics of joy or forgiveness or new ways of looking,  
I feel like lying on the bottom of a deep ravine through which runs  
A gravelly creek, dead coyotes and thatches of wildflowers and somewhere  
Art has made everything tragic and ugly, tragic and beautiful instead.  
If that’s all man can offer, I guess it’s fine, but it’s super-dumb and inadequate  
And I’m going home. After a refreshing pause,

One might reconsider. Since everyone else is in a special  
Kind of crisis, I might as well be too.

Don’t live like that! Don’t put your finger in your nose! Don’t fall  
Asleep in the middle of the century in which you’ll raise half  
A dozen children, some of them not your own.  
It’s like a cloud is flying cleanly through it and the crispy bits  
Are more than enough. Such a deluge.

Today my baby turned forty, and I told her that the years ahead  
Are probably going to be worse. In our moments most crass  
We are perhaps dishonest, or just crushing things up  
In the bottom of paper cup. The art is not part of life.

It is living. So do not praise a thing. Just be nervous and attuned.  
Enjoy a landscape. Fear a whole lot of stuff. Move over.  
All the yellow stinging things and all the blooms of the yard

Don’t give a whit.

## ANTHONY ROBINSON

---

### BEREAVEMENT

The mosquitoes have gone to bed because summer is dying. Most bathrooms are busy; my father sighs and heaves upstairs. I feel as if babies are in the walls.

All of this is just for show: crickets and coffee and rivers. You are the oldest thing in your house. Think about that.

\*

There are too many ways of inspecting suffering. Too many paths to discovering what your mother, Your cousins, already found. In that garden, there, Raccoons have toppled a birdbath. My metal detector Has found a vast field of keys and keychains, Canadian currency. All lost things remain lost.

\*

My dead friend's widow is sending me a parcel Which will probably bring both memories And flowers, neither of which is necessarily a sure thing. Yet I can't help but send it back out to you.

To spread our sorrow is to reach until it breaks your back. It's good work if you can get it.

To be self-solipsized. To be underground. After all, it's still just water, extending its mirror for miles.

SEAN THOMAS DOUGHERTY

---

## A HOUSE IN LATE WINTER

The voices of my children  
meander like a fistful of notes,  
one is practicing annoying  
the world on a plastic recorder,

the other is trying to steal it from her,  
and that is what they do. Pushing  
and pulling against one another  
and the walls of this house,

so thin I worry about the neighbors  
when they are yelling, or their mother drifts,  
snow across a field, she is leaving us,  
and it is their voices that pull her back

into the voice of this harshening world,  
opening her. Even this, a moment  
of violence, feet running to scold  
is something more than the silence

she too often weaves,  
slim ghost wandering through the halls  
in pain. It is more a game to them anyways.  
She never catches them

and if she did, her arms raised  
as if to hit always fall,  
veil-like in the dim hall air.  
What is one to do but spin the globe?

I could go on like this for many lifetimes,  
always it will be their voices, calling to her,  
pulling her back from the silence.  
There is a music to this world

I am writing down. It drifts  
like the wake from a ferry  
crossing the dark waters  
of requiem. My wife opens

her mouth and shines a luminous  
anger. Our daughters scatter  
to the far corners of the house  
and she turns before me, almost laughing

in her rage. For now it is enough,  
those embers she carries  
tell me it is too soon for her to travel far.  
The Ferry anchors.

Our giggling daughters creep back  
down the stairs, each cautious step  
they take toward her erases  
any sense of absence ever.

PICKUP STYX

Through the long day with silent fidelity the Seine carries a green bottle  
in which Genevieve of Marcilly has placed her neatly folded hope.

Pursing her lips like a purse seine Bobbi Su Haycock slips into the  
murk of the Neuse,  
thinking, "Chin up, it is around my neck, it is, the Neuse is around  
my neck."

Pierre of Natchitoches upon the shell of an ancient Chrysler sits  
and sees in the swirly Mermentau the brunette cascade of his distant cousin Gail.

iRio Ochomogo! Look how they hold you back with a wooden dam . . .  
Armando does a death-defying backflip  
while Arelys lolls and flirts in her giant innertube  
dreaming, dear Ochomogo, of rice pudding!

After Lenkeningenken the Memel is joined by the Szeszupe –  
hence the fish begin to feel more daring and slightly loopy.

You're probably one of those people who think the Rio Coco has only one name.  
Did your mother never tell you it's also been called Wanks, Wankí, Benks,  
Vankes, Wanx, Wonx, Huanqui, Oro, Yoro, Yore, Yari, Pantasma,  
even Telpaneca?  
Perhaps she was protecting you—but from what?

Steep, steep are the hillsides above the Yangtze;  
steeper still is the tumble from self-bubble into the roiled waters of human  
otherness.

Trailing in the black water her long arm tattooed with the indelible stains  
of her interesting adolescence Oona cries,  
"Flow gently, Sweet Ompompanoosuc, 'till I end my song."

In vessels upon the Euphrates so much more has occurred  
than you could ever appreciate, it's as if you had hardly any mind at all,  
though on second thought this observation is useless!



Which calls to hardly-any-mind-at-all the *bon mot* of the great George Gullette who met the challenge of that unpuntable African river with “That’s too Zambesi!”

The bridge over the Rio Tajo is railed in pink  
and old men linger there to lean and think.

Don Carlito and I shot the rapids of . . . the Charles! Unthinkable!  
He kept shouting “Rio Carlos! Rio Carlos!” but was our kayak unsinkable?  
And when Quentin Compson went off the Longfellow Bridge,  
a six-pound weight in each pocket, did he find that dark Carolingian water  
undrinkable?

He did. He did, and he is gone, like many a lover in song,  
and like many a crazed mudspattered fighter near the delta of the Mekong.  
Such absences do not disturb the turtles cruising at midnight.

If you Google Anna Livia you will see the “Floozie in the Jacuzzi”  
(as Dublin wags tag the prone riverine half-submerged Mother of Us All)  
but ask how many river names are in the famous chapter you come up empty.  
Suffice it to say she dies in her father’s arms, like Cordelia, but unlike Ophelia.

May you go on countless forays  
ere you disappear for aye into the Clamores.

A boy aged three sits on a dock above the Mississippi, he shivers,  
his wet hair plastered flat; he has learned to swim in this famous river.  
Sixty-nine years later he dips a toe: it is the same river. May it be so forever.

JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS

---

## ORIGIN OF TOPOGRAPHY

Your face is an atlas. That look you'd give me

between sobrieties just another red valley  
mapped among mountains. A whole village

down there. Paper mills. Horses. Bars. Vats in every yard  
for when the rains end. Thirst. Radios crackling with war.  
A house to rebuild & re-burn. Not to be confused with rage,

these raging winds. How they dance the chaff off  
winnowed wheat. It's all self-

flagellation. Take the animal out & we are still animals.

Isn't that what they say about beauty? That it is never more itself  
as when its absence hurts. Hurts

like a series of streams ending in a river that too ends  
in ocean.

Something like salt, like rubbing salt into wounds, like loving  
despite & because of. This field

that is your body coming down hard on smaller bodies is the field I'll return to,

tenderly, until there's no returning left me.

MIGUEL MURPHY

---

THE MUSEUM

*—in memory, Fred Vindiola*

How the edges of the buildings began  
like stillness in the evening

disappearing, the waves  
fallen, curled, turning  
iris to darkness. We walked

a blue air, half-demon—  
We wanted  
to stay

here forever, passing through the halls  
hung with black-and-white photographs  
not of fires, but of the faces of children watching fires.

The frightened stone of their expression.  
The bust of Licinius. We wanted  
inner hunger. We walked outside instead

struck by wild color  
as if the sea from that vantage were a flower  
on a metaphysical stem:

dark, shapeless, restless, vast—  
a sunset in winter,  
and the pocked air and the scalloped

blacks of roses. Rain. Rain  
on our necks at night. Ragged  
lavender. We felt

a curtain of mist behind us;  
the distance, silver—  
In the museum gardens, we wandered.

Silence drinking from the flowers,  
their throats.

## THE PARKING LOT

1.

Where has all the time I inhabited,  
like a minnow in a stream,  
vanished to? Collected in calm pools  
among boulders, I like to imagine,  
as where waterfalls chimed away the spring  
before the stillness of late autumn.

And who are you, imperious maker  
of minnows, bells and water,  
all this your exacting handiwork,  
solid as the stones in these temple walls,  
mysterious as the boundary that divides  
noise from music,  
adoration from common prayer.

2.

I apprehend myself of a sudden,  
crossing some open space—the parking lot,  
denuded asphalt like a desert plain  
hard-ridden by Comanches—I come to myself,  
shuttle into focus, bus engines idling,  
a flowering tree on the berm  
not yet ready to relinquish its blossoms,  
that single note  
of beauty—I resolve out of the haze  
and back into this,  
my body. Sun pouring down,  
slots filled with gleaming automobiles,  
the absolute plainness  
and calmness of it—a recognition,  
an animating awareness.  
And an after-shock, like a gong,  
which, having sounded its brave reverberation,  
echoes infinitesimally to silence.

3.

Days from now, years from now,  
there will be a war  
inside of me  
to recollect this moment.

I will lose.





that offer insight about intimacy as oasis from the burden of public censure, as in the poems, “*10 hail marys*,” where starry-eyed lines such as, “the girl and I we/got goosebumps at the exact same time/i think that’s romance,” and in the more complex adult relationships as in the poem, “environments building on themselves not themselves anymore when the balloon is up and up and rubber touching air squeaking the sky but never rubbing the blue off,” in which the speaker knows there is a place between “boy on girl on boy,” where the speaker “can’t take my eyes off your body full/of motion...our love lives in the darkness/of a blink.”

What could be a heavy dose of victimhood is completely avoided in Buccieri’s work because of any refusal to explain or apologize about her queer womanhood experience as the poems explore awkward social situations. In the introspective poem “on being mistaken for my girlfriend’s brother at the wash and fold,” during a chance encounter, a “bro,” is startled by his first impression gone wrong. The narrative pulls the reader into the immediacy of the situation, watching and feeling the speaker deflect and absorb the error so that the “nice man/feels reassured,” anger turned inward instead of outward, as female rage is considered deviant in American culture.

Buccieri’s poems are propelled with a need to be in the world, to be heard, poems felt, and poems crafted without missteps. I suggest this collection for teens to adults, and for anyone who likes to be invited into technically skilled poetry that also had tremendous empathy and self-compassion at its heart. There is not one wasted moment, not one extraneous word. It is carefully crafted and affecting, especially during moments of vulnerability because of Buccieri’s willingness to bring in humor and openness even when the moment is uncomfortable and forbidding.

ALBERT GOLDBARTH

---

## THE MANAGEABLE SONG

“Asunder”—not “burst open” or “ripped apart,”  
no, something Biblical of scale, something cataclysmic  
in magnitude that the mind can’t hold: the sky  
is torn asunder, and the alien starships swarm  
in their Satanic grandeur, in movies with  
more CGI than taste, and in the Roswell-style myths  
that test the limits of our awe. Then how

—through what arcane decisions—are they miniaturized  
to mascots on our tee-shirts, little  
parakeets of aliens, little goldfish, little  
bobble-heads of aliens, on our decks of cards,  
our cigarette lighters. Jesus  
too: that universe of meat  
and grief and faith inside his shining

broken body, more than an oil tanker  
could hold, or more than an ordinary life  
could keep inside itself if stuffed full  
every day from birth to death: what is this  
need in us, to make it a calendar page,  
a candle, something safe and portable, something  
manageable. The human heart is messy,

insistently muscular, the home of entire  
city-states of sorrow and jungle continents  
of sweet sweet longing: how did we reduce it  
to valentine lollipops. I know the story  
of Joanie and her daughter, an Icelandic saga,  
an ancient Akkadian epic, of a story—kept inside  
a heart-shape locket as tidy as a quarter.



70: LATE MAY

From what I've gathered on ghosts,  
in myths, in ancestral reportage, in psychic research,  
only a very few of us must have deaths  
dramatic enough, and under the proper  
ectoplasmic-conductive circumstances—whatever  
those are—for a spirit to boil out of the flesh  
and linger. As for the rest of us

we simply simmer away, and then become nothing  
more than memories in the electrochemical storage  
in the brains of the living...until they also  
no longer exist, and enter the long  
diminuendo of transformation  
into the fossil fuel of the future  
—whatever  
elysium or hell, whatever human or human-cyborg combo,  
the future is.

-----

I'd been feeling a cellophane crinkledness  
in my blinking for a couple of weeks,  
and so wasn't surprised when the ophthalmologist said  
that I have "age-related drying of [my] tears production."  
I'm coming to hate, to bitterly hate,  
the modifier "age-related." Youth,  
of course, is also an "age" (see Shakespeare,  
"the seven ages of man"), but

nobody looks at some twenty-something drunk partyer  
on top of his/her drunken date  
on a pool table, and announces the clinical diagnosis  
"age-related stupid fun."

-----

Yesterday in the bookstore: in my peripheral vision,  
a magazine titled *Irving*.  
My father.  
Dead now all these decades—dead  
the same week the space shuttle *Challenger* exploded.

And when I pick it up, to page through it  
(see above, “crinkledness in my blinking”):

*Living.*

Well, yes (see above, “electrochemical storage”)  
in a way he is.

-----

My wife is in the garden right now  
—a sweetly clumped-up redheaded shape  
attempting to coax the shapes  
of this year’s somewhat recalcitrant flowers  
from the soil; and I’m on the front porch sorting  
decades of fading, corner-curved photographs...at 70  
for me and 63 for Skyler,  
age-appropriate uses of time.  
Those pictures...you know how it goes:

these *are* the people I knew, in some  
the people I’ve loved, and yet they *aren’t*, they’re only  
captured light  
(the “photo” of photograph) in a spritz  
of developed chemicals. Some women here  
made me weep, when I was twenty, although it was linked  
in its moment to pleasures  
(or hoped-for pleasures) that felt as monumental  
as World Wars, as the planet’s total  
of boogie-woogying tooshie-shimmying Mardis Gras.  
Also the weeping over graves...my parents...  
Hannah...Bobby...these people...are they ghosts

or are they memories—and are these distinctions  
meaningful, even? It may be the way  
that smoke is confused: it can’t be  
part of a body again; but it hasn’t yet  
become empty air.

-----

Professor Caroline Wilkinson is  
“a specialist in the digital craniofacial depiction

of people from the past.” Leosha Nyoka-Smith,  
an expert on Neanderthal life, has studied  
“particles trapped in the dental calculus”  
of their teeth, and can tell us their diet included  
“woolly rhinoceros, deer, wild boar, sheep,  
mountain goat, bear, rabbit, quail, duck, tortoise,  
dolphin, monk seals, date palms, and barley,”  
and she has handled—gloved—their jewelry,  
“pierced and painted seashells from the Aviones cave.”  
*We have so many ways to reconstruct*  
*—to memorialize—*  
*the missing!*

Most are more mundane, though not necessarily  
less affecting. These photographs  
of Skyler in the garden, from when we first met,  
thirty years ago...she’s in this same  
bent-over gardening posture I’m poet-peeking at  
from the porch right now: but sleeker then,  
and her hair more like a red Gulliver  
of hair, that the Lilliputians have temporarily  
bunned up...but for all of the differences  
three decades make...  
*Albert Goldbarth, a specialist*  
*in his wife, can see a retrogressive X-ray*  
*of her then-self in her now-self.*  
A cotyledon of her.

The flowers in those old photographs, though,  
seem to be exactly the same,  
the literally same, ones  
that she’s tending to today.

-----

Flowers. People all over the country are setting them  
onto graves. A corsage or a boutonniere  
for the annual cheek-to-cheekbone dance.  
It’s Memorial Day,

May 28. The cemeteries all over town  
look more like botanical gardens. From the little  
time has saved for us, from sites like Shanidar Cave,  
we believe that even the Neanderthals  
set flowers alongside burials: some have survived  
in that association: brittle, spindly armatures  
around which, once, a symbolism  
flourished; and we've seen elephants  
scatter leaves on top of elephant corpses,  
swaying their trunks in a seemingly  
stately and elegiac manner

—cotyledons  
far back in the genome, of this annual  
commemorative gesture that currently blossoms in us.  
I believe in Memorial Day,

in fact I think there should be Memorial Hour,  
Memorial Happy Hour,  
Memorial Every Minute,  
before the threads to our past are severed completely.  
Let me bring flowers, or words-as-flowers, help me  
remember my parents, remember  
the Magna Carta as well as the opening shtick  
to the Rocky and Bullwinkle show, let's not forget  
our shamefulness either, the many killing fields,  
the guns gone wrong in wrong hands, let's bring flowers  
to the ancient Greeks, and the bodies  
that will never rise from the streets of our inner cities,  
bring flowers to bees, to lava, to water, to pills, to plastic,  
to atomic structure, to oxygen,

to my eyes  
that fifty years ago,  
at the slightest emotional cue,  
would moisten generously  
and brim with tears.

CHARLIE CLARK

---

DEVIL RISES IN A HOTEL CALLED THE RHÔNE

Dogs sleep deep in snow patches the color of cobbled stone.

Some days you touch your own nipples and shudder

only at the window's open cold. This entire time

I have detested the phrase *speaking your truth*,

yet I think it is a pity, albeit a small one, that no matter

how much nonchalance you deploy it with, it will never feel

like anything but a borrowed extravagance to breathe

the word *piazza*. On good days

I prefer to call the same a privilege, to cross

how many decades and have such a word never once

diminish in astonishment. Somewhere near, for a long time now,

someone has been baking. Even the truck exhaust tastes fresh as souls.

As much as my waking hours are spent enjoying others',

I sometimes think my life comprises one long want of bread.

CHARLIE CLARK

---

## DEVIL'S SPRING FEVER

As though the world could be saved by a word,

I am incanting *saxifrage* to the cockeyed circling birds and wishing

such flowers were as nourishing as their name is rich. Look, I know it's useless.

I have these dreams that depress me when I wake. If you dream of money,

you have them too. In mine, flush colors are rampant and suffice for  
everything.

Even the terrors I face there co-opt the gaiety of pink until everything goes  
green.

Until everything goes green, my fear is that everything will go orange.

I mean the whole earth turned to ruthless rust. When I scrolled through my  
thesaurus

to locate that hue's best name, first I found *tangerine*, then *bittersweet*. I  
couldn't get past these,

though neither did the trick. Some days I wake up covered in bitter sweat.  
Once I was so wet

I told you I must be the source of some new spring. You said you'd plant  
flowers by me then.

Soapwort. Lilies. Maybe jasmine and wild rue. I never felt more beloved. I  
went to sleep.

I dreamed of dead bees feeding from my tongue. I woke to find the fever gone.

We were so pleased. For days our house smelled of toast and oolong tea.

## THE MUSHROOM SUIT

When my young husband died unexpectedly, I wanted to find the perfect coffin for an open casket. He was so tall it would have to be custom-made. I couldn't imagine it any other way. I wanted to see David again at his funeral. I knew his eyes would be closed. I would never see his eyes again, but I could see his peaceful face at rest, as if sleeping, his square dimpled chin smooth and freshly shaven. His lips slightly smiling as if he had kept a secret from us all, he would be meticulously dressed in an elegant business suit with a dapper salmon silk tie. His golden curls always smelled of evergreens. I wanted to lean down, to kiss his forehead and smell his hair, once more. To mourn him, to honor him, I wanted closure. I imagined how his mother and his father would feel, seeing David laid to rest in the best coffin money could buy.

I assumed an old-fashioned funeral would be healing. One day, I expected, we would visit David's exquisitely landscaped gravesite, marked with a large marble headstone and a magnificent imposing statue in the local cemetery with its painted iron gates opening off the highway.

These thoughts soothed me—the gravesite, the statue, the headstone, the coffin, David's body pristinely displayed in the church for gathering mourners. Even so, I couldn't settle with the knowledge of how we lost him. None of us had been ready. It was a terrible shock. So terrible it didn't seem real. That was why I started laughing when I found his body. Certain people, especially his parents, have a hard time forgiving me for that.

Faking his death was a game David played with me. Each time, he would gaze at me, strangely, as if studying my reaction. He would laugh and put on the weird cream-colored pajama with a full mask that buttoned over his face. The pajama had gloves and slippers, so none of him was uncovered, no skin exposed. No holes for eyes, it troubled me, worse than the bogus deaths he put me through. Something about the weird pajama broke me. It was impossible to have sex or cuddle when he wore it to bed. It was as if he were shutting me off, shutting me out. Inside that pajama, he was hidden, repeatedly.

"What have you done?" I asked, when I found him in the living room. Slumped on the sofa, he was dressed for work in a stylish gray suit. I thought he was playing games, but I was shocked to see the suit was ruined. "David? What's this?"

Blood, lots of blood dripped, splashed. On the ceiling. On the stereo. On the television. On the mantel. On the sofa. On the curtains. On the windows. On the walls. Hair hung in blood. The back of his

head, wet and messy, splatter covered his face. A gun cradled in his right hand, a bullet lodged in drywall.

I was furious, thinking how difficult it would be to wipe the syrupy stuff off the ceiling and wash it out of the sofa and curtains.

I shook him. He was limp. Unresponsive. This was another of David's tricks, I thought. He was a decent actor. He did things like this, using fake blood to scare me. All the time, pretending to be limp, dead.

He wasn't acting. Not this time.

He was gone. Just like that, I found the weird pajama laid out in another room, on our bed.

"I would have appreciated a trigger warning," I said, though he couldn't hear me.

That's when his older sister Melanie arrived, before I had the chance to dial 911. A realtor who worked with David, she was tall like him, statuesque and daunting. Dressed for a closing in a tailored charcoal pantsuit, she wore cinnamon lipstick matching her high heels.

"Don't come in here," I said.

"Why?" Melanie asked, opening the screen door and pushing past me with her designer high heels clacking on the tile. "Where's David? Why wasn't he at the closing?"

She strutted into the living room to stop short in front of David on the sofa. I realized I was witnessing the moment her life was changing forever.

She looked at me as if I were a murderer.

I laughed.

She fell on the rug. Weeping, her nose rested between David's large polished dress shoes.

I laughed for hours. I laughed when the police arrived. I laughed at the ambulance. I laughed at the coroner. No one was laughing with me. They looked at me with pity. When his parents found me laughing at the police station, they told me to go to hell. Straight to hell, where I belonged, but in my mind, hell was where David was. It was where he had gone. I didn't know how to tell them. According to my religion, I had lost him forever because of his suicide, which meant no heaven for him. His family refused to believe he would kill himself. They blamed me. Literally. They told the police I should be investigated for murder. The police just gazed at me as if they couldn't believe what I was doing. I laughed, until I wanted to cry but couldn't.

I answered all their questions, several times, still laughing.



Always laughing.

They started to smile at me.

In hindsight, I can see I married a suicidal male. David knew it all along, what he would do. He knew what he was going to do long before he met me. He tried to warn me. He told me I should marry someone else, someone who would stick around. I was worried he would leave me. I just didn't know where he was going.

After the police told me I was free to leave the interview room, after hours and hours of talking at the station, they told me I had to be escorted home.

My in-laws showed up to drive me to their home, since they said that I shouldn't be at my home, until we could hire professional cleaners. I was still laughing, and it was starting to hurt because I couldn't stop.

"Alright, alright," David's father said. David's gracefully uptight mother was so furious, she wouldn't even gaze at me. Unlike David, his father was short and squat. David's mother was the tall parent, but her personality remained devoid of humor, not at all like David, the practical joker.

"Calm down. Settle down, Gillian," said David's father, gazing at me with pity as he opened the car door. I climbed into the back of the Lexus. It still smelled new, as if David's parents had been taking it for an extended test drive. "You okay, dear?" David's father whispered as David's mother got into the front seat, passenger side. David's father closed the door and stared through the windows. I realized he was beginning to think I was so overwhelmed with grief that I was caught in the grip of hysteria. Was I? "You're not right, are you, girl?" He asked, just before he started the Lexus, as if there were something truly wrong with me. As he drove down dark streets with me laughing quietly and David's mother sitting stiffly in her straightjacket of silence, streetlights appeared haloed in rainbows, blurry out the Lexus windows.

Just when I was about to stop laughing inside their tastefully decorated house with its view of the country club's ninth hole, David's parents kept saying funny things to make me laugh. I wondered if they had sex in their hot tub, like David and I had done when they were away. I kept imagining David's parents having sex as they said absurd, ridiculous things about David and their plans for his funeral. I wondered if they were just like David, after all, because the bizarre things they were saying were just the type of things he might have said, to get a rise out of me at the most inappropriate moment.

“We want him buried in a mushroom suit,” his father said.

“A what?” I asked, not believing my ears. “Because of the incident at Mellow Mushroom, with the mushroom pizza? My god, did David finally tell you about that? Unbelievable. I thought he’d never admit it. I thought he’d die first,” I said, recalling the notorious incident that got us kicked out of the restaurant, where we were waiting for our mushroom pizza.

“What incident?” his mother asked.

Bless their hearts, I thought, they’re trying to help me, to make me feel better. To humor them, because they were humoring me, I explained what happened at the Mellow Mushroom, when the manager threatened to call the cops on David.

David was drawing a mushroom on a napkin when a horde of elementary-school children arrived by the busload and began loitering beside our table, getting rowdy and bored. To entertain them, David showed them the mushroom drawing. The next thing I knew, the kids’ teacher approached to say David was a disgusting man and should be ashamed of himself. She called him a *pedophile*. We thought she had confused him with another man. I tried to tell her she had the wrong person. The manager then approached our table and asked us to leave.

“Why?” David asked. “What did we do?”

“That,” said the manager. “That. Look at that! What is that? You can’t have that in here.”

“What?” I asked, staring down at David’s drawing. “This?”

“Oh, god,” whispered David, under his breath.

“It’s illegal to show that to children,” said the manager. “I could call the cops. Now, scram!”

David and I gazed down at the drawing on his napkin and realized his drawing resembled a mushroom-headed dick. The restaurant manager, the teacher, and the children all thought my husband was drawing dick on a napkin to show to children. David and I tried to explain it was a misunderstanding. Examining the drawing in a new light, I realized the manager would never believe us. David’s friends entered the restaurant, just in time to follow us into the parking lot, asking what had happened. They began teasing David mercilessly for his drawing. Not knowing what to do, I gave the drawing to David’s friends, who thanked me profusely and had it framed.

“He told you about that?” I asked David’s parents. I covered my mouth with my hands and burst out laughing, hard. I snorted. I

imagined David dressed as a giant mushroom. David in a mushroom costume! David! David dressed as a mushroom for his own funeral. God, he would have loved that.

Then, because of the look on his parents' faces, I wondered if someone had given me something other than a sedative.

Maybe I misheard? No, they assured me I had heard correctly. David's family wanted him buried in a mushroom costume. That, I thought, was funny. Hysterical. A great joke. I congratulated his mother on her sense of humor. I couldn't stop laughing. "Oh, god," I said. "A mushroom costume. Oh, lord. That's rich." His mother just stared at me, and I realized she was dead serious as she explained the suit wasn't a mushroom costume. Made of mushrooms and organic cotton and seeded with mushroom spores, it decomposed a human body while cleaning toxins before they reached the soil. She said, "We're all full of toxins, you and me and David. Most people carry BPA, heavy metals, preservatives, even pesticides. We also carry nutrients."

"I can't deal with this," I said.

"Mushrooms are nature's cleaners. Even edible varieties are great at cleaning soil," said David's father. "David's suit has spores from edible varieties but also from a customized hybrid mushroom bred to decompose David's flesh."

"How can that be?" I asked, feeling sick.

"It's like pajamas covered in netting full of spores," said his father.

"No," I said, sinking at the mention of the word *pajamas*. I started to remember the weird pajamas David wore the year before he died. Were those weird pajamas a burial urn?

"You just said you would be fine with him dressed in a mushroom costume at his funeral! Now, you're saying you won't allow him to be buried in a mushroom suit?" his mother asked.

As she poured our coffee, I realized she wanted to deny me a classic coffin for the classically handsome, statuesque man she had borne and I had lost. I had never seen a man as healthy or as exquisite as David before and knew I never would again. He was taller than other men and had extremely refined symmetrical features with a friendly smile that opened doors usually closed for others. It was hard to explain that no one who met him or even saw him in passing would have thought he was the sort of man to kill himself.

His mother wanted to allow mushrooms to devour his gorgeous body. She wanted him to be food for mushrooms. I wanted him

properly prepared, preserved, embalmed. His father wouldn't hear of it. His mother accused me of wanting to poison the earth with her son's corpse.

"His body, his body," was all I could say between sobs. Choking on the piping hot French roast his mother had poured into an elegant teacup, I shivered, remembering being naked with David, the way he held me as I kissed his face, his neck. I kissed him everywhere he would allow me, again and again.

"Don't you see?" asked his father. "We could all be a part of this, with David forever."

"It's what he wanted," said his mother. "From his body, the mushroom suit will feed a fruit tree, and its fruit will feed our bodies. When we all die, we'll be buried in mushroom suits, like David. The seeds from his tree can be planted in us. When his tree dies and our trees die, others will grow from the seeds in us. We will become seed savers and also a family orchard, so none of David ever goes to waste or ever really leaves us. From his body, we will become part of an orchard to feed each other and the world."

"I don't know," I said, feeling nauseated from the coffee on my empty stomach. "It seems untraditional."

"So," said his mother, "you'd rather David's body be pumped full of gallons of toxic embalming fluid to leech out into a casket in a cemetery of pesticides?"

"Yes," I said. "Yes! That's what I want."

His mother gasped. She said his body would be buttoned inside a burial suit seeded with fungus feeding on his flesh. "They'll devour what's left of him," she said. "See, it's beautiful? They'll live on him, long enough to feed something else, which will feed something else, which will one day feed us."

"Why?" I asked. I imagined mushrooms eating his toes, his eyes, every part of him I had kissed and licked and sucked: his tongue, his dick, his balls dangling like delectable plums. I loved him so much that when we were making love I felt as if I could eat him alive. That was why I couldn't bear putting my husband inside a suit lined with flesh-eating mushrooms. What wife could?

"It's simple and practical," his father said. "Don't be a baby, Gillian."

"How? How is it simple?" I asked, thinking a coffin and funeral with an open casket was traditional, dignified, certain.

“Would you really rather him be embalmed, put in a coffin with a concrete liner, and buried in a cemetery?” his father asked.

“Yes,” I said. “I would.”

“Why do all that harm to the environment? That’s not what he wanted,” said his father.

But what about what I wanted? Did that matter? Apparently, not. I guess I was the selfish one. “But what about his body? He said it was mine,” I said.

“What do you mean?” his mother asked.

I told her sex was the one good thing about our marriage. The sex was fabulous, the best either of us ever had and we did it all the time, in every room of our house and theirs. We did it in cars and in bathrooms at parties. We did it outdoors and in public places, often in theaters, amusement parks, churches, buses, pools, and diners, and in the houses and buildings he listed as a realtor. It healed us and brought us closer. It confirmed and restored our love. I remember touching him, lying beside him, licking him, sucking him, riding him, kissing him all over, the way he kissed me as he buried his exquisite dick deep inside me like a secret between us. I thought we would keep doing it for decades. I thought we would never stop. We gave our bodies to each other, again and again. That was why I wanted to be buried beside him, for our bodies to be put to rest the same way, near each other, though now I understood my coffin wouldn’t been needed for decades, though he needed his coffin now. His body needed his coffin to hold it for me because I couldn’t hold his body anymore.

\* \* \*

I was, after all, very acquainted with his body, even if I hadn’t known what was in his mind. None of us knew all the things he had been thinking or what he was planning. What happened was a complete shock, at least for me. I’ve always assumed that’s what started all the disagreements about his burial.

“There were so many things you never knew about him,” his mother said. “So much he never told you. Things he told his father and I that he could never tell his wife.”

“You bitch!” I shouted.

“At least you’re not laughing anymore,” said his mother, smiling.

“What did he tell you? What did you know about him that I

don't know? I slept with him. He put his dick inside me. Doesn't that count for something?" I asked.

"Not in the way you think," his mother said.

I started to cry, finally, and she put her hand on my shoulder and explained he was part of something called the Urban Death Project.

"David and I took a do-your-own-death workshop for home burial," his mother said. "We did it together. His father is also in on it. We were planning for all our deaths—yours included."

"It soothed David in ways you'll never know, and it's a comfort to us now," said his father.

"It was his passion, his hobby. He could never share it with you, but he shared it with me and his father," said his mother.

"No!" I needed to vomit. My head was spinning.

I longed for a coffin. I needed a coffin. Only a coffin would satisfy my needs to lay David to rest in a style that would allow me to feel I could let go and show my love for him. The thing no one wanted to speak about was how very young he was. And how unexpectedly he died. And how beautiful the corpse. It hurt me. It was a pain like no other. David and I weren't even of legal age to drink yet. I thought we had decades ahead of us.

\* \* \*

I felt a familiar taste in my mouth, blooming behind my tongue and through my teeth. It was mushrooms—the earthy flavors of the mushroom dinners David used to prepare for me. I couldn't tell his mother that. I couldn't tell anyone. I couldn't hardly even admit it to myself, since I was raised in a conservative religion where despair was the greatest sin. I was raised to believe my young husband had gone to hell for what he had done, and that I would be going to heaven, so his body was all that was left of him, at least for me. I didn't want to give it up to mushrooms.

Mushrooms! For God's sakes! The thought wasn't so much gross as it was indignant. David and I ate mushrooms all the time—on pasta and on pizza and in quiche, when he was alive. It was one of our favorite foods. He was supposed to eat mushrooms, not the other way around. I had lost him, really lost him, and my loss was mushrooms' gain. Now my gorgeous man, who used to eat mushrooms, would be fed to mushrooms. Now that his soul had gone to hell (yes, I knew thinking that was

retrograde, but it was my religion), I couldn't stand to lose his body to something as passive as mushrooms fashioned into a suit to devour the flesh from his bones.

"Think of all the money you'll save on the coffin and on embalming," said David's father. "He's already paid for the suit. He raised the mushrooms with the help of a lab. They were bred just for his body and taught to hunger for him. David trained them and grew them. He cared for his mushrooms."

"We were married. His body is mine!" I said, again, but in saying this I told his mother the wrong thing. She slapped me. Both of us were surprised, not so much by the slap but for the simple fact that it had the ability to surprise us both. We had both lost ourselves in losing David and had been walking in a fog of pain, a stupor of grief, both of us hating each other but vaguely because so much of our energy was focused on fighting over his body while living without him. It had only been one day since he died, and his mother and I had been arguing for hours and hours, sleeping little.

Losing him was like losing myself but that was such a cliché I couldn't even say it to anyone. All I knew was the love of my life, my husband, needed to be buried. Soon.

I told his mother again, because I thought it might comfort his mother to know how much I loved him.

"Suicides, the experts say, increase in May," she said. "Something about the spring, the blossoms and the warm weather. The longer days and the sunlight, the beauty of the robins and the roses. Something about the hope of the new season. No one knows why, dear. David was part of that trend, the May suicides."

I would always hate the month of May after that.

Apparently, David and his mother had plans for his body that didn't include me, including a customized burial on his family's acreage.

"David was part of an online group of healthy people who discuss plans for their death," his mother said. "He was extremely active in the group."

"You could have stopped him," I said. "You could have told me." I hated her, more than ever, because I started to wonder why she didn't tell me, why she didn't try to stop him. It was almost as if she had enough information to know what he would do. But did I?

"Don't deny his mushrooms," she said, "the ones he raised and trained to eat him. Don't kill what he worked so hard to keep alive."

I covered my mouth with my hands, retching as I remembered his little project in the basement: the mushroom garden he had been growing. He was very particular, watching them grow, misting them in the shadows and feeding them secretly. Once, I caught him putting hair from his hair brush and his fingernail clippings into the soil where the mushrooms grew. When he cut his nails, he took to standing over the mushroom garden, letting the toenail clippings fall into the soil near the mushrooms. Whenever he got a haircut, he saved the hair and buried it in the soil of that garden. Feeding the hybrid mushrooms his own hair and nails, he taught them, just like his mother and father had said. David was training the hybrid mushrooms to hunger for him. What made me really sick was how often he cooked with the edible varieties—making the two of us intimate, gourmet meals with mushrooms before we made love in the kitchen, on the table and on the tile. He would sometimes gather the mushrooms and seal them into plastic bags in padded envelopes to mail.

To calm myself, I closed my eyes while imagining gorgeous, jewellike caskets, starting with a midnight blue deluxe casket, a deep blue reflecting the midnight sky. My sister had told me to order a black casket with white velour interior from Overnight Caskets, though a funeral director informed me majestic mahogany is for “special loved ones.” What about for loved ones who aren’t special? I wondered. Then, I glimpsed the orchid steel casket—strong durable steel in antique orchid with a starburst design, so soft. What about the simple pine casket? My mother had asked, informing me I could order it from Amazon. I knew she wanted me to get a cheap coffin because she worried about my finances, and for some reason that hurt like hell. What about the traditional oak? she asked. David wasn’t that traditional, I had to remind her.

While a stainless-steel casket is only 2700 dollars, a copper casket is \$2900. But the bronze casket with a white velvet body is \$6900. My favorite was the Xiao En Center Casket with its fine mahogany wood, burgundy velvet interior, and hand-painted artistic accents, but it cost \$36,400. My mother said that was obscene.

“Think of what David would have wanted,” David’s mother said, still arguing. His mother was probably right. But what did it matter? He wasn’t here anymore. She was. He probably would have wanted to just disappear into mushrooms, to degrade beneath a tree, coffinless, to just disappear into a suit of mushrooms so that he would become something



else, gently but quickly, all evidence of him absorbed into a sack of fungus tailored to devour his remains. His handsome remains. His mother started crying, asking, “Why, why won’t you give him what he wanted? This one last thing.”

That’s when I realized one of us would have to be the one to steal his body from the other. One of us would take his body away from the other. Since I was his wife, there would be no contest. Legally, his body was mine because there had been no formal will. In spite of everything, he had left all details up to me. But why, why, his mother kept asking, wouldn’t I give David what he would have wanted?

Maybe, I began to think, just maybe, he assumed I would give him what he wanted, even if it wasn’t what I wanted. Maybe, just maybe, he didn’t really want what he claimed he wanted. Just like maybe, just maybe, he didn’t really want to die. There were days he wanted to live, and there were days he knew he would kill himself and wanted someone to stop him.

Was it possible that all of this—the mushroom suit, the mushroom garden, the gourmet mushroom meals, the mushroom-headed dick on a napkin—might have been some sort of an elaborate cry for help I was unable to answer?

I didn’t know.

His mother kept asking me, again and again, why I wouldn’t just give David what he wanted.

I didn’t answer his mother’s question, though the answer was clear and simple. It was something his mother could never understand. Why wouldn’t I give him what he wanted? Because what he wanted was to destroy himself. That’s what he wanted all along. By loving him so intensely and by giving him all I had to give, I tried to keep him from doing it as long as I possibly could. Because I loved him, I didn’t want him to have what he wanted, even in death. And now, once again, I was going to have to let him have what he wanted because he was never really mine.

\* \* \*

Over the years, everything changed among us because of what I allowed David’s parents to do with David’s body. I caved. I let David be buried in the mushroom suit, and everything was nothing like I thought it would be. There was no open casket, no casket, no viewing, no headstone, no

statue.

Instead, there was a peach tree.

David's parents allowed me to select a young peach tree from a tree farm in Georgia. The tree was supposed to produce large, sweet fruit. His father carefully placed the peach tree in the soil over David's body after installing an incubator with a sensor embedded in the soil. The sensor sent custom updates, going right to our smart phones with an app that monitored the health of the growing peach tree. It grew from David's body, wrapped in the mushroom suit, which became a biodegradable urn.

Our modest family goal was to be able to eat David's peaches in three years' time.

"I hope the mushrooms start to eat him faster," said his mother, checking the tree on the app. She had so many plans for the peaches—fresh peach pie, peach fritters, peach ice cream, peaches and cream, peach cobbler, peach bread, canned peaches, and peach preserves.

Me? I just wanted to pick a single perfect peach and eat it straight from the tree. That was all.

For David's family and for me, eating the peaches that grew from his tree would connect us to him, nourishing us. Eating the fruit that grew from the nutrients of his decomposed body would be the closest we ever came to sharing life after death. Planning the moment of eating the peaches felt both strange and sacred.

When the peaches were finally ready for us to harvest, they had grown round and bright with yellow and pink skin, like the warm colors braided into the sky at sundown.

The peaches tasted like the sweetness of our love mingling with a strong tartness making my tongue ache, reminding me of how David loved me and how he hurt me. How it hurt to love him and to lose him. Biting into the first peach, I kept imagining I tasted his sadness but also his love.

FELICIA ZAMORA

---

## VEINS & GHOSTS & OTHER CIRCULATORY SYSTEMS

Storms: the way a tornado wears a farmhouse inside out; we call this intimacy. We call anything shredded & torn down to the nub, sawdust on our lips: *paradise*. All this motion & emotion, the singularity of the *e* teases your pupils to brain into tinkering inside themselves; clever little collector, the one Time licked & slobbered, shaft in one hand, balls in the other. Still the Sonoran sun melts you down to underarm stench, flushed chest, vaginal lips stuck together; we're papery thin, if we choose to be. *Labia; labia; labia*. The ruggedness between your legs folded just so. How we are whispers in hushed throats, masturbating behind the clothesline pole, desperately wanting the neighbor down the lane to splay fingers & see the sweat on our brow. Isn't all breath, hot breath? This respiratory engine we lug in bone. How can anyone calefaction you like you do? You're a patchwork of tubes; route for oxygen-depleted blood; a four-chambered organ's muse; *ba-bump, ba-bump, ba-bump, ba-*; you're the skip & ghost of skip. Specialist reports your jaws entomb scars & wounds. Teeth a scorn, a lash to buccal mucosa. & of the tongue, esophagus, what damages ensue? We think we control language. *Gullet; gullet; gullet*. Sling a word out far enough, edges boomerang back to you; knock you on the head; make you bleed.

## SIX FUNCTIONS OF BONE

### I. Support

As in the heaps & heft of skin; 20 pounds of flesh you lug along Earth's surfaces; an organ of nails & hair; epidermis raincoat & six more layers; dressings; a garment grown from us as us. A clothesline of sorts; holds up our limp masses of organs, muscles & skin; what you hang your face on; a scaffold living inside us living; what our tissues drape from; combinations of collagen for softness—proteins & varied molecules—& calcium for strength—steel beam of us; how we embody opposites; our frame embeds in undersides; our hidden Halloween homages.

### II. Movement

Fulcrums all we, levers & joints; how the puppet & the puppeteer share the same trunk. See the structure pirouette; strings built in. How lovely & mechanical if you deconstruct any silhouette in locomotion. Muscle attaches to bone & bone; internal stacks; our forces transmit—radio of us; all these connection points in which we articulate from; & in contraction we conjure: magician as magic; *voilà voilà*; mandible articulates with skull; & the silent vaudeville roils, tent expands & stage erects for you—you one-person show—splendors fissure in the dark.

### III. Protection

You know of safety, bone. You know of wounds & a body spills when sliced, leaks when gashed; of all you try so desperately to hold together, to cradle & keep womb-like for the synapses we call memories; you hold memories in the cavities, in the spongy places we hide away in; the places broken, pinned & clamped back together; the gelatinous tendrils where our worlds implode & grow from; how this soft tissue hardens when attacked, beaten, dehumanized & cowers, refuses to cross vestibules of optic nerves to brain; some of us just hold on tight.

### IV. Blood Cells

At your interior, let us speak of connectivity; let us speak of marrow in friendship; in names of ilium, ischium, scapula, sacrum, clavicle, carpals, talus, ulna; all the names in which you bind; a gathering in your gentle stature. Do you hear yourself being spoken into existence? You bring the red marrow & you bring the party: erythrocytes, leukocytes,

platelets; how you live production; how you seethe a minute world bound in a biconcave disc, no nucleus, to transport our oxygen, our carbon; & when I say *our*, I mean yours; your breath into our tissues.

#### V. Mineral Homeostasis

A seismograph of sorts; how you monitor the tremors of our inland climate; weather vane of sternum & ribs attaches to all that pulsates; how a single neuron fires up to 50 times per second & we are all electrical & humming & needing of nourishment. Consider calcium & phosphorus in levels, minerals as equations; what you do for us, dear bone, dear lover of balance & thwarter of mischief, you love; a love bountiful & harsh you release when must; bone to blood; the delicate art of never being a bystander, of never letting this body fend for need.

#### VI. Storage

Hidden in the diaphysis of the long bones, another marrow forms; let us speak of yellow marrow to understand our age, how our body grows from child to adult & transforms even in the deepest hollows; you take triglycerides, esters of glycerol and fatty acids, & huddle them for safe keeping in our axial skeleton; here you generate fat, cartilage & more bone; yellow the color of fat; what does this say of our head & trunk as collectors; even the most minute parts of us, mimic creation over & over until you, dear bone, believe any birth is possible.

LISA MORROW

---

## REVIEW OF *IF THE ICE HAD HELD* BY WENDY J. FOX

*If the Ice Had Held* by Wendy J. Fox opens in a small Colorado town, where the American dream is reduced to worrying about what the neighbors think and trailblazing teenage girls become single mothers at the first unplanned pregnancy. Where locals spend their lives uneasily wondering ‘what if.’ Unable to change the unexpected consequences of single thoughtless moments, they ignore their dissatisfaction with too much alcohol and the minutiae of ordinary life.

The main character of the novel, Melanie Henderson, is the result of one such moment. Her birth mother was just 14 when she became pregnant with Melanie and her birth father Sammy drowned when he took a shortcut across a river and fell through the ice. The lack of Sammy, his absence, is a catalyst for what happens next. The novel revolves around how Melanie came to be raised by Katherine, in reality her aunt, whose best friend is Irene, Melanie’s birth mother. This subterfuge lets them all move on without regret, both physically and metaphorically.

Melanie is unaware of her true parentage but her adult choices with regards to monogamous full-time employment and relationships as one night stands, are very much coloured by her background. Fox seamlessly moves between Melanie’s past and her present to explore notions about parenting and sense of self, and the different roles men and women can take in their children’s lives. All variations are in play throughout *If the Ice Had Held*. When the family you have is so bad none at all would be better. What happens when they are cruelly taken from you? Is there a difference being raised by a single mother, drunken father, caring parents, or someone who isn’t really your birth parent at all?

The narrative arc in *If the Ice Has Held* takes the form of a series of autonomous yet contiguous scenes from individual lives, woven together to make a whole. Each of them explores the results of a moment in time that set the person on a particular path. Fox uses concise, exquisitely worded descriptions to create a compelling story comprised of numerous layers and multiple unique voices. Aching good descriptions of suburban despair form the backdrop for each life.

The stories being told are intensely personal yet set within the context of important universal themes of family and identity. At a time when ideas about what exactly constitutes family and identity are fragmented and constantly being reshaped, *If the Ice Has Held* takes a clear-headed look at the possibility of rethinking unintended consequences without regret, to find different and potentially happier endings.

*If the Ice Has Held* is Fox's third book and was the winning entry in the 2017 Santa Fe Writers Project Literary Award. Since publication of her first book, a prize-winning collection of short stories, Fox has developed her skills in writing about the complexities and oftentimes incomplete and unsatisfactory nature of human relationships. If I were to compare Fox's writing to a piece of music it would be Satie's *Gymnopédies*. The atonal discord of Fox's characters in *If the Ice had Held* is astonishingly melodic and seductive. Much as their dysfunction is off-putting you can't help but read on.

GARY McDOWELL

---

## IT'S LIKE THIS

You must be still. To survive, you must  
be completely—look closer. The robin's  
nest, eye-level. Do they sing? Careful now.  
Is this a nightmare? A tableau. Beware

of pride. The sun rises, and from here it is  
every instant, every silence, and the question  
should be, what's the way in? Draw a map  
of the house only to find several rooms missing

or filled with finches singing, their yellow  
wings rimmed with black, their eyes mirrored  
in their gaze, how they scissor overhead. But what  
could that mean? What if the finches, too, escape?

Reach for them, turn them to glass in your hands,  
and love the tender sound they make as they shatter.



GARY McDOWELL

---

## MISSING MAN UNWITTINGLY JOINS SEARCH PARTY LOOKING FOR HIMSELF

Long before you arrive, the night.  
There is *almost* and then *already*. Rain  
batters the window and the beyond the window,  
and the boy from your dream washes

an apple in the sink—his pockets are filled  
with pink sea salt. Everything he tells you  
is true. You circumnavigate, you peel,  
you haunt the eaves—. The curve of his spine

against yours. He eats from the cup  
your hands make. They say loneliness  
has a long shelf-life, and if you burn  
your tongue, if you touch what's dammed-

up in the night damp. Sometimes you prefer  
to undress after you switch off the lamp.

**SPRING II.**

We took the referral name, hailed a cab after being up all night eyeing the skyline. I went first. Disrobed from the waist down as you sat in a chair and watched the screen like you would the weather channel – nothing but grey clouds and rain. She moved the wand inside me as we both stared at the empty space. You have a good thick uterus. You see the rim here? Next. You sat still wondering where the wand would go, half in dream, not here, she snapped. Then we waited. The doctor made jokes, trying to make light of it—pointed at plastic models of body parts. He said at best we could hope for was community college, you understand. We were quiet. Shocked maybe at his lack of decorum. Then the blood work began, and the appointments, and the phone calls: a real human sounding like an android, reminding me to have sexual relations with a significant other. I sat watching the clock listening to this message, exhausted, far from of a significant other, while listening to static in that empty space, imagining the thinning walls, soon to be shedding.

MARY LOU BUSCHI

---

## TENSION

We ordered the drugs from Canada. Unpacked the video. Placed the syringes tip toward the TV. I made the sheep dug tea as instructed. Opened all the windows and doors to let the peaty brew exhale from one window to the next. Unwrapped the packets of mixed vials. Sat next to you to watch the video, while encouraging you to drink the muddy liquid. We watched in silence both facing the set. A woman calmly opens her legs and allows her partner to inject the serum into her main artery. Shoulder to shoulder we leaned in. The video ended. Your tea was gone. I packed the vials, capped the syringes, wrapped the video and sealed the box, looked into your eyes, sat back down, untethering each of us from hope.

## THE ADVENTURES OF SMALL ANIMALS

### The straw man came with me

The straw man came with me wherever I went, although he was a complicated animal, called Cyrus, a companion cat that passed away a few months ago. Another cat, a stray that's an older male, wants us. Sometimes. Some traces and gestures of the new cat are like the beloved cat but it's not the same. There are worlds within worlds (the way my reflection in a mirror must be more real than my actual self, and I don't like my image, which might chase me out of my Seattle bathroom.)

Cyrus was terrified of a cat clock in our kitchen whose tail and eyes moved electrically to and fro. My husband and I used to lift him toward it as a punishment for eating something he shouldn't or scratching where he shouldn't. The other new animal is too large and enjoys flinging himself into the landscape, trying to catch whatever moves. He's too unconstrained to replace my other animal.

Can the body dream without the participation of the mind? As a child my sister had a birthmark like a red tail up her spine. It eventually faded. A friend told me of a woman writer with a splotchy birthmark the color of raw meat on her cheek, near her left ear. Her man punched her on the mark.

In *The Wizard of Oz*, the Straw Man, or scarecrow, needed a brain. He was superstitious about birds and strangling emotions. If a violent wind sifted through him, he would become fodder for horses. Such breath repeats itself, becoming a gesture. His shadow was imprisoned in his straw body. Would I accept a straw version of Cyrus, my former cat?

### The Adventures of Small Animals

- 1) Before battles with the Egyptians the Persians released cats onto war fields knowing the Egyptians worshipped cats and would surrender without fighting.
- 2) In Cyprus 9,500 years ago a human and cat skeleton were first discovered in a grave together. (*National Geographic News*, "Oldest Known Pet Cat?" John Pickrell, 4/8/04)
- 3) In Seattle 1996 cats gathered for a conference about rain, but they scattered and hid when they got wet. (*Me*).
- 4) In Quanhucun, China cats were domesticated 5,300 years ago because the cats liked the rodents who liked the nearby

- grain. (*La Nacion*, “*Gatos fueron domesticados en China hace 5,300 anos*,” 9/9/14).
- 5) During the Age of Discovery cats rode ships everywhere, floating, eating mice, their eyes shining vividly in the dark.
  - 6) In Medieval Ypres cats were not needed in springtime to protect the villagers’ wool from vermin so people threw cats off of a belfry tower, which is now symbolized by throwing toy cats from high windows and is called “The Cat Parade.” ([www.kattenstoet.be](http://www.kattenstoet.be)).
  - 7) Sweden, 1948, the first cat deciphered the language of mice in order to catch more of them. This language was named “Mousian.” (*Me*).
  - 8) In Japan the “Maneki Neko” is the good fortune symbol of a cat, with one paw raised.
  - 9) Cats in Russia are encouraged to wander through a new house to bring it good luck.
  - 10) Freyja, Norse goddess of love, fertility, and beauty, rides a chariot drawn by cats. (*Faulkes, Anthony, 1995, “Edda,” p. 24*).
  - 11) Black cats crossing our path will ruin, punish, and/or bring us bad luck (because they remind us of shadows.)
  - 12) One afternoon my cat dangled by its collar from a branch as a way of arguing about its nine lives.
  - 13) What was between a familiar and its witch? Flying monkeys had little time between them. The intention was synchronization or travel or moving beyond an event or superstition to understand what really happened.
  - 14) In Indianapolis, 2020, cats began walking permanently on their two hind legs in order to reach more hidden treats. (*Me*).

### The Surfaces of Ghosts

Being older, I can’t trust my body to do what I want it to do. I wear it out, especially in dance classes, remembering what it could do. I’m not sure how much I care about appearances, although I still have so much to learn. I’m softer, rounder and, like the Lion, need courage.

My husband makes the best pies, especially the crusts. So how do I arrange words? In a circle? I want to go home, after breaking a foot,

after an operation, or often after seeing the doctor. I want to get better with people I know around me. Days that the bone protruded made me tremble so I couldn't move. I would sleep with my foot out yonder, resting over the covers in an orthopedic boot with a tiny sombrero covering my toes. Does everyone have a near death story where they call a loved one? You call them to watch the cat die one last time in its one last life, and, unlike the Tin Man, you already have a heart which might heal. You hope there aren't any more secrets or surprises left for you in this world. You click your shoes together.

### **A Disagreeable Imagination**

The world is reliable, but I can mistake one thing for another or, for a while, see a very yellow raincoat everywhere. Sometimes gossip, expectations, a trick of the imagination work on me so that anything is possible, the same way the Straw Man, Tin Man, Lion, and Dorothy saw the Wizard in different forms, a beast, a woman, a ball of fire, a giant head, and finally just an ordinary man. The mind is bodiless, the black dress of sky with its various sequins of stars always reaching upwards, towards what the mind thinks it knows. My shoelaces wander, still a toy for my dead cat. There is little left for the living.

### **Seeing Inside, from the Present Tense**

I'm clicking my heels, but I'm already home inside. Outside, I am lost but searching for love and what could love me. It's a small moving thing. Everything and nothing. Sometimes that thing is writing; I let it out the door in the evening, not sure if it will return. I'm looking for a word or a story to explain what's deep in us and connects us to one another.

Blood and wings, not together.

A bird repeating apologies.

A landscape of decisions, clear horizons.

Dreams unfurling like early vegetables.

The Past crossing a street to greet the Present.

The face of the world covered with beautiful insects.

A piece of glass pulsing like a human organ.

Headlines breaking everything and placing everything gently inside me.

## Oh My God

I used to tell you everything. But I didn't always need words. I wanted to hold onto you to hold onto myself. You used to live in the other Emerald City. I'm still here in Seattle. Nothing has ended. It's just that you're gone.

## Collections of Breath

I want to forgive myself for not having the lion's courage, for sleeping with married men, a circus employee, a high school wrestler, a gambler, a teacher, a union representative, and some of the much older men my mother tried to choose for me because they had money. For not speaking up in writing classes or when someone hurt my sister or when people made fun of me or another person. There were nights I couldn't sleep while thinking about all the replies I should have uttered. I considered all the people I should have been kinder to. I once tried to give an acquaintance a pottery plate my cousin had recently made and just handed me because the woman said she liked it. Even when I try to be kind, I insult someone. I drive my ballet teacher crazy because I give her gifts she doesn't want.

## Listening to Small Animals, a Trial

My mother woke me in the middle of the night as a small girl. She rummaged through my bed at the start of her sleepless night. She repeated, "Nobody loves me." She wanted company, animal love, television. I was suffocated by emotions, tired and then awake. At the end of the night the inquiries began.

Mother: I'll give you a note so you can stay home from school tomorrow.

She hands me a starfish.

Me: No, I want to go.

Mother: Take one of my sleeping pills.

She hands me a porcupine.

Mother: What did your father say about me?

Me: I always think someone is taking something away from me.

Mother: Did you dream about me?

Me: You are always a vampire in a large chair with your back towards me.

Mother: Where is the man I really want?

I hand her a groundhog.

Me: If you listen carefully you can understand the language of anything.

Mother: Where is your father?

Me: Some days I wonder if I already died and didn't know it because I'm living the same life as before.

Mother: I'm stirring my face in the mirror.

Me: As usual.

Mother: I want pieces of everything.

Me: Peel it open. Watch it closely.

Mother: Where are all my visitors?

Me: Birds are attracted to dead branches.

Mother: Are many men coming to see me?

Me: A turtle. A wolf. A snake. A pigeon.

Mother: You could make yourself look so much better.

Me: Would you eat something so friendly?

### **A train leaves a gray station**

A train leaves a gray station, chases you along the same old tracks. Branches sprout leaves and flowers, white moths, perhaps in the exact same spot as last year. I am attracted to parades and I have a tendency to follow anyone who seems to know what they are doing, a piece of this or that to make their opinions plausible, but it's what I feel that makes me want to burn down whatever I can.

Magic changes everything, unpredictably predictable. The little girl wants to go home and her companions want to improve themselves. Can we stockpile enough belief to create magic? Instead of graying fur I see where the moon has made a wish and left its pale color to retrieve later. Instead of a leash there resides a thin black leather book with stories about religion. Instead of a rabbit is there only a hat? There are tricks we use on ourselves, an astronaut seeing the earth through a window and feeling its closeness, and the tricks we use to convince others, a photograph of the astronaut with a planet poised on his head. Ultimately I want to know what I'm thinking.



« BILLIE HOLIDAY FROM WIKIPEDIA »

« her »

« her »

« Her »

\*

« her  
voice »

« Her »

« her  
damaged voice »

\*

« [hide] »

Method:  
—highlight entire Wikipedia article  
—copy and paste to Word document  
—move through entire text erasing what I want to  
—the fragments I keep must be put in angle quotes « »  
—every fragment must stay exactly as the original  
—I must keep fragments in their original sequence

MAARI CARTER

---

**SLEEPWALKER [SPHRAGIS]**

Before: ego-fisted      dandelion seeds parachuting in wind—

    You trumpeted the lips.      I dreamt the hollow stem.

But now: from the root I      quell you      blank of flesh

    and am crowned. Mar—      you are only the body. But I'm a dying-

and-rising god      come to peck rot      from Time's cataracts

    like skin from a muscadine.      You'll go forth      as Bartholomew did:

flayed in oblation      all through the white-knuckled evening.

    I'll be the rhema      on your idle tongue.      And only when

the treble moon      hangs low      in the night's gut

    and your voice wants nothing more      than to break

light over a meadow      will you reclaim our scheme

    of muscle. You are only      the body Mar—

but I'm the heartbeat      you imagine      returns to a lifeless bird

    when she's held long enough      to a willing ear.

MAARI CARTER

---

## SLEEPWALKER SPEAKS TO BAKHTIN'S AMPUTATED LEG

Vis-à-vis *nothing*, you mind the wintering

chestnut trees *beneath* the disciplined

heavens. *Each day*, forgetting the shape

of his mouth: *a prism* casting languages.

*What they call* phantom is only jargon

in a kneecap's image. You were the *absence*

of its aspect long before the saw, *rejoinder*

within, already *alien*. What corpses populate

that gap between object and *impulse*.

What utterance and what *horizon*.

*Give them* this day their vocabulary,

*their living* tissue with its awake

blood. *We* are the indices, the reminder:

everything that enters *must* do so

through negation and new *context*.

We are *the dead* wasps in every ripe fig.

MARTIN OTT

---

## IT'S TIME TO DO NOTHING ABOUT GUNS

Let's fast forward to a time when proud parents push their loved ones in strollers for strangers to admire. *What gorgeous gray eyes.* The crying? *Baby Remington has a booming voice for a little*

*guy.* Pistols and rifles are swaddled, oiled, and sung a lullaby so as not to explode. *One gun one vote.* This slogan, peppered into street signs, proves prophetic when guns outnumber folks. To be

a family means to carry your crew on your hip to show your nurturing side. You learn to look stylish in Kevlar as the little ones often spit up. *If you love your gun and set it free it will come*

*back to you* becomes our parenting code. People don't mind that they are being phased out hit by hit, the random gunfire like an angel's kiss, the pistols and rifles aiming to come of age

on the streets. There is no longer any global warming or shortage of food, the next evolution so sturdy and cute, an assembly line of joysticks for the true believers and the last straight shooters.

MARTIN OTT

---

## CAN POETRY SAVE YOUR LIFE?

This is the wrong question.

Start with something smaller.

Can poetry open doors that stick?

Not just the tome used to pry open

the passage between fire and rain.

Can poetry navigate the crumbling road?

Mystery is the engine not the destination.

Wheels spin in flowers and petals in wind.

Madness of both kinds collide in lines,

the cadence of bending bread and time.

Can poetry believe in itself?

Now we are cooking with aromatics,

from childhood kitchens or bunkers,

smoke slithering into the great beyond.

Can poetry pass through the vale?

You have been lost before in verse

and canyons impossible to traverse

when words lift into impossible light.

GLEN A. MAZIS

---

## REVIEW OF *SONGS OF THE SUN AMOR* BY WADE STEVENSON

*Songs of the Sun Amor* by Wade Stevenson welcomes the reader into a world where the poet crafts language to add a depth to the everyday, a wonder to the unfathomable and an expression to emotions that require new connections made by kindly metaphors to resonate more fully. I say “kindly” of Stevenson’s metaphors, since despite often having the unexpected turn to language that gives the reader a jolt of recognition, there is *not* the mere associative juxtaposition of words and images that aims to be oh so clever, but leaves the reader untouched by the word salad of slick ingenuity. Stevenson has a tale to tell of his life’s journey of discovery of meaning in love. Through healing from his early wounds and needs, his language forges a bridge to the reader’s experience beyond mere word play. There is a sincerity in his poems, an admirable trait in a poet, and not something passé.

Steven’s collection begins with his start in life: dealing with a distant, polio-ridden mother, and an absent, emotionally rejecting father—an obviously “well off” upbringing that was psychologically and emotionally impoverished. His poems call forth images that express powerfully how the hurts of the past haunt us and the difficulty in outdistancing them. As we travel with the poet through the poems, his life, there is a tension in each poem of the clinging ghosts of pain from his “white stain” father and his “shattered” mother with the lurking announcement in nature, in everyday things, in the stars and in everything all about us of gods or God, or more precisely, of a love, “Doctor Amor,” who transcends and infiltrates all. The pain of grief for what is gone or was withheld also sparks with redemptive possibilities.

There is a generosity of spirit that runs through the poems. The poet is willing that “some better man than me may get to see/ the snake tattooed on your behind” (38), not gladly, but knowing that things change, and people change, and all passes away despite its beauty right now. He is a poet who can appreciate “how tenderly the sunlight touches all the edges of everything loved in you” (39) without grasping or hoarding but wistfully seeking the return of the burning bright moments of youth and love that reappear in more muted shades. Yet, he knows when walking with love, life is easier to confront in its losses. One feels in each poem, even when exploring dark corners, there is the gleam of

the recurring image of the sun as the warmth and burning of a pervasive love.

The poems speak of loving, erotic connections, of the parting of ways, and of how aging often tears at us even as it also enriches. The poet in each poem doesn't just suffer or lament, but seeks to learn and enlarge, as when "the roots you seek grow up into the sky" and the poet comes to experience how the blue above belongs to him (55). There is a quality to the poems of a poet immersed in the depths of experience as someone who has "run the race from within" that pulls the sensitive reader into those depths. If the reader will take the time to sit and read the poems successively without leaving their presence, I promise that they will be left with a feeling of affirming the breadth of life's experience. The poems try to recapitulate the process that "When all the shadow/selves have been effaced, what is left is love" (67). There are so many lovely turns of phrase that seem to emanate from a loving perception of life. The spirituality is open and non-dogmatic, questioning and allowing of mystery. There is the exhortation that "surrendering to the great IT/the more tenderness exchanged" (62) with the poet's conclusion that this is really our grace.





& I didn't think you wanted to know about the man who followed me from the metro stop, how we only seemed to be meeting for the first time.

He wouldn't tell me where we were going, let alone the color of his second wife's hair. Abigail, Luisa, Meg. The names of women started to accumulate, a heap of flowers in which I would eventually drown—

Needless to say, the space between his mouth and mine bore the weight of it all: the plucked rose, the bouquet, the notes you slipped beneath my door. The envelope & its scorched papers.

Days later, he's still stammering about the time he touched my hair, blue dress trailing from the platform. You see, there's a way I can leave a room without even getting out of my chair.

Now that you're listening, the same question is burning at the back of my throat. Now I'm looking up from the dictionary, now I'm raising my hand—

*Thursday 7:03PM*  
*February 1, 2018*

but I never cut the other  
          kites     & since            then I  
recall how I was made  
                  me kneel with my  
facing outward  
                                  a pail full  
dark            sky                not to mention  
other things                & my two hands  
                  designed to be flown  
pressed together                & seeing that  
I could get some air  
                  the same to me  
as to the others  
                  again to what  
question was already covered  
                  facing outward &  
forced my head down            without my  
                  knowing just as I was  
                  a long string  
about to  
                                  cloth or plastic  
                  come closer to me  
I shook  
my     half-carried

to leave something like that  
as above an altar  
unreturned  
& to start to see  
how another was standing  
in for  
my body (one  
always reads  
just as I was about to  
too much  
breathe deeper  
into things)  
it is always  
a question of  
cutting & this was  
repeated again & again  
not to mention  
my youth as far  
again & again  
as my chest  
& called in another  
again & again  
to accept the first part  
(several times in a matter

& personally took (a)part  
of minutes to which  
held me with my feet up  
I could only sing silently  
in the air  
a hymn I had known by heart  
to try some other method  
as a child)  
am I supposed to  
lie then  
on a bed of news  
papers keeping  
to myself  
so to speak  
(I was once again  
& this repeated  
silent)  
thinking what's been left  
out what I can't  
do you  
remember after  
syndication  
after the careful  
rendition

to be read  
but I never  
more than two  
ways cut  
to a  
question I  
credit  
sequence &  
try & protect  
the seething flesh  
too large for the film  
so as to never be  
shown together in a single  
shot  
this is what D&G  
call  
a *smooth space*

*Friday, 9:365PM*  
*February 2, 2018*

ADAM CLAY

---

## FORM OF LOVE

“I always think that I can manage the highest form of love.”  
-Angela Ball

I've always been a painter  
with no talent for painting,  
no patience for the blur  
of color or for putting  
the marble blue in my mind  
down on a canvas cold  
with promise. My mind  
holds the past too well  
and not well enough  
at the same time, some  
strange purgatory dreamt  
by a god that never had time  
for time's passing. It's these  
things, yes, but it's also  
the thought of the audience  
in the gallery, the onlookers  
alive now and those that aren't  
born yet; it's this audience  
in particular that slows the  
the impulse I feel but cannot  
name. How willful must one  
be to stop the body from enacting  
the mind? A mistake made  
and forgotten makes its luster  
streak silvery and perfect  
and new each time.

ADAM CLAY

---

## CONFLUENCE OF OBJECTS

Radio turned from static  
to news of a storm approaching

and worsening but then:  
no—it's a star passing

across the night sky, moving too fast  
to be anything cosmic

except for the star stretching out  
to nothing everyone saw but you,

but then you *do* see one  
but it's most likely not a star

and how strange to look up and out  
for how many million miles

and not see what's just below  
your body in the water,

how strange to hear the instrument  
pluck of the bullfrog's croak

from somewhere to the northwest,  
to the southeast and not know which

and yes in this blanket form of night  
the eye matches image to sense pausing

on what memory finds an urge  
to catalogue, but not actually

because the mind is its own star,  
its own object both anchored

to and aloft in the night sky,  
burning not fuel but a memory

of what's past due or forgotten  
for the sake of convenience, of finding

a rare flower in a field of grass,  
of rows of corn that carried

and will carry a bright morning star,  
of finding an unnamed fire in the sky,

but *no* is an arrival because the names  
we write down for what we see

will only matter for a moment, lucky  
confluence of objects our bodies are,

for the self is always on its way toward  
a place where collective memory

will be no memory at all, and yes it means  
less to mistake the light of the sky

with the objects overhead because mistaking  
an object for another is the sense of the mind

working itself out or rather it's a quarry  
to be mined, and to be left for nature to fix

or is it *quarry* as a verb or most likely a path  
through two fields, past a dark house,

the tongue held to preserve the silence,  
a prayer for the oldest worlds within us.



GEORGE LOONEY

---

## ANYTHING BUT CLASSICAL

You cannot swear sleep's something you'd want  
to be found in. To be defined by. Say

a name once yours hailed a cab  
& gave the cabbie an address  
no cash would ever be enough to get it to

but he kept driving long after he knew  
his cab would be found rusted-out, a wreck

almost hidden by foliage far from where  
your former name had asked him to take it.

Such distances can only be covered in sleep,  
where roads don't have to lead anywhere  
any map indicates, the names of towns

in constant flux. At times where you are becomes  
where you once were, the past no longer

lost. It surrounds you, & all the names you had  
on the tip of your tongue are yours again.  
Other times, you find yourself where you think

you wanted to end up, nothing the way  
you expected. The woman asleep beside you  
murmurs vague words in a foreign tongue

you can almost name. The cabbie has  
kept the meter running, the cost of this  
adding up. The music coming from

the radio in the cab is anything  
but classical, the plastic Saint Sebastian

doing a dance over the dash that couldn't be  
mistaken for anything formal. Whatever  
it is, you want to be dancing with that Saint,

the music holy enough to heal every wound.

## DOUBLE-EDGED BLADE

Chaplain Christopher is having trouble with the Wiccans again. Only half a dozen of them here, but they got him heated like no one else. Just yesterday he commandeered the library to bring them together to discuss the situation. I know from eight months of watching him work that he genuinely wanted to find a resolution, but when he came out of that room, his face looked like a puddle of oil on the highway baking to a shimmer in July heat. He balled his fingers into a pointed fist that resembled a small football and, I'm sure, considered punching the nearest cinderblock wall, even if it broke his hand.

Men do that: punch walls. It seems to be encoded in our chromosomes. Anger overwhelms us, and we lash out at the offending face of plaster, drywall, brick, stone, or steel. I have no doubt that when our fathers tell us "This will hurt me more than it hurts you," they're thinking about that time they picked the wrong outlet for their rage. I guarantee there's not a man in this prison who hasn't called a wall his enemy.

The chaplain didn't swing. His arm twitched as if he had been shot in the shoulder. Then he raised his right Oxford and stomped the tile floor with a sound like someone dropped a book off a roof.

I wanted to say "Spider?" but figured it wouldn't be a good time for one of my jokes.

Chaplain Christopher glanced around and, when he saw me watching, tucked his hands in the pockets of his black Dickies, nodded my way, then walked off as though nothing happened. I hoped he had a softer, more receptive wall waiting for him at home.

From what I hear, when he started working at Boone County Correctional Center, he got along well with everyone. He was tall and broad-shouldered, always smiling. There were rumors he had been one of us, locked up elsewhere for some drug crime or other, until he *got religion* and turned his life around. He spoke kindly to even the rudest convicts and helped many through their grief when he had to break the news to them about a loved one's passing. He understood us as more than evaluations on a psych test and a litany of crimes. Because of that, he seemed slower to anger than other staffers. The only thing that seemed to faze him was when someone sang the wrong words to "Amazing Grace," which he played soulfully every Sunday on his blue Takamine guitar. "... how sweet the sows" could get a man thrown out of religious services. Inmates could babble all they wanted during the other hymns, but there

was no joyful noise allowed during “Amazing Grace.” We liked that about him, though. It was weird, and weird was flawed, and flawed was human like any of us.

His reputation changed when he wrote up his first inmate for Insubordination. Warden’s orders, he said. He wasn’t supposed to let anyone get away with bad behavior. He needed to establish boundaries. So, when inmate Jake Young—one of many in the prison nicknamed Red—cussed loudly about having been woken up to attend an AA/NA meeting, Chaplain Christopher put it on paper. The timing of it was bad, causing Red’s parole hearing to be pushed back by four months. The chaplain went from being one of us to one of *them*.

Now he’s sitting in my office, three doors away from the library in the education wing. I know it’s not technically *my* office. Inmates don’t get their own offices. I call it that anyway because I spend most of my time alone in here, waiting for troubled or frustrated inmates to bring me their legal problems. It’s quiet and, although cameras stalk me at all times, at least it feels like I have a little privacy.

My office is referred to as the law library, despite there being no books. Instead, the room consists of three hard plastic chairs—two blue, one beige—scattered over the tile floors and three laptops tied to the wall but not connected to the internet. This area used to be one side of the non-contact visitation room, so one wall is made of wired shatterproof glass. The empty room on the other side serves as a barbershop on Friday nights.

“They want to sue you,” I say. I talked to the Wiccans yesterday after Chaplain Christopher left, and they explained their situation to me.

The chaplain places his hands over his eyes and runs them slowly down his face as if trying to wipe away tears or clown makeup. “Lord, give me patience,” he says.

“They have a case.”

“Doesn’t everyone in here?”

I shrug. “This is different. It’s a federal 1983 action for violation of civil rights under color of state law. Don’t get me wrong. We both know the guys in here want to file this crap all the time. *Oh, my rights have been violated because the doctor won’t give me my pain medicine. Oh, I want to sue because that awful Aramark food doesn’t meet legal health standards. Oh, poor me, poor poor me.* Yeah, I get it. The courts rarely give those cases a second thought, and that’s what I tell folks. Like I said,

this is different. They've got a good argument that they've been harmed, and they've already taken that through the whole grievance process. Court's the next step, and you of all people understand the importance of religious rights."

He nods.

"This could be one of those hard cases that the District Court hates to consider but has to anyway. Wicca's a recognized religion, even in the DOC, and those guys need what they need for their ceremonies."

"They want a knife," he says, his condescending tone not aimed at me.

"An athame," I correct him.

"It's a double-edged blade with a hilt and a stabby end. Call it what you want. I call it a knife."

I'd rather not be here arguing the semantics of sharp objects with him. It's a quarter after three, and I'm usually upstairs in my cell by now, puffing on a roll-up and blowing smoke into the vent above the toilet. The next inmate count starts in forty-five minutes, which means in fifteen the guards will bring the Road Crew in from work and strip everyone out to check for contraband. They do this in the barbershop on the other side of the glass. I've had this job for eight months and caught that show twice, which I consider two times too many.

I never wanted to be the inmate legal rep. When the position opened up, I didn't apply for it. It was offered to me because of my unique qualifications—three semesters of law school up in Morgantown before I cracked under the pressure and drank myself into a negligent-homicide charge for DUI Causing Death—and I accepted it because, let's face it, I'm too lazy to work in laundry or the kitchen and too out of shape to run the floor buffers. Besides, it's the only time in my life I'll ever be able to practice any kind of law, so I might as well take advantage of it. While I do help inmates file lawsuits on occasion, I try to talk them out of it because they won't win and, like I said, I'm lazy. A lot of what I do is read legal documents about divorces, child support, forfeitures of assets, or whatever, and try to explain these in a simple way that the cons can comprehend. More often, they bring me their write-ups and I represent them in front of the Institutional Magistrate. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, they don't beat these write-ups that could put them under loss of privileges, send them to the hole, or even rob them of their good time and extend their prison stay. The standard for conviction under the

rules of West Virginia DOC is “some evidence,” which is a long way from “beyond a reasonable doubt.” I’m straight with everyone about it. I even have a slogan: *You’re probably screwed, but we’ll see what we can do.* I’ve found that I’m pretty good at explaining to the men about their situations and convincing them not to fight the charges but let me portray them in a better light and try to get the severity of both charge and punishment reduced. I do that by talking a lot and joking around during hearings. The Institutional Magistrate’s a serious, straight-faced guy, and I know that if I get him laughing, things go a lot better for my clients.

“...knives in prison,” Chaplain Christopher continues. I’ve zoned out and missed some of what he’s been saying. “That’s the last thing anybody wants. Sure, right, yes, let’s just hand six weirdos a weapon.”

“Wiccans,” I say.

“Sorry,” he says, surprising me. “I shouldn’t have said that. I didn’t mean to. I’m frustrated, that’s all.”

I nod with my eyes. “We’ll keep that one between us,” I assure him. He’s right, though. They’re a weird bunch—not because of their beliefs so much as their personalities and appearances. Some are whiny, others silent to the point of catatonia. One, when he stands up, is so stretched he could be the offspring of human-like giraffes. Another has the opposite look, so squat, sloping, and orangish that he could get a job as a traffic cone. A couple of the others, if I saw them at night in a cornfield, I’d swear they were extraterrestrials. Not one of them resembles an average inmate or even the hulking cons you see in movies. As a group, they’re more like teens at the outcast table in any high-school cafeteria, not fitting in with the cliques or, seemingly, even among themselves.

“Zep,” he says—everybody calls me Zep, short for Zeppelin, because my parents deserve to have a son in prison—“I can’t afford to lose my composure like that. Not just here, but anywhere. Those guys really get me in the gut.” He does the face swipe again, moaning low.

I start to make a joke to lighten the mood, but can’t think of anything that begins with *Two Wiccans walk into a bar...* I wonder why that is.

The chaplain says, “You don’t really think a judge will side with them, do you? They don’t get knives. That’s not a right, no matter their religion. I wouldn’t give Christians a knife either. I’m not showing favoritism here.”

I hear myself sigh. “An athame is something they use in their

rituals. From what they tell me, it's *crucial*. They said it guides their energy or something like that. Still, I think you're correct. The courts often rule that an inmate's rights can be superseded by legitimate safety and security concerns of the institution."

"Thank you," he says. "That's what I thought."

"What they *will* tell you is that you have to offer them some kind of reasonable accommodation."

"Meaning?"

"Find some middle ground."

"How do I do that? They want a knife. Lord, help me. We're going around in circles."

Again, I almost joke that that's what the Wiccans do, but Chaplain Christopher still doesn't seem to be in the mood for my sarcasm. "There's got to be a way. Have you talked to the warden about all of this?"

The chaplain laughs as if I'd told a joke after all. "He said to give them a stick."

I laugh with him. I can't help it.

"See what I'm dealing with?"

After I suppress the chuckles and can breathe again, I say, "You know, he might be on to something. Not a stick..." More laughter. "... obviously. But a substitute. When the Muslims need stuff for their services, how do you handle it?"

"We have a catalogue of religious items we're permitted to order. I find what they need in there. They've never asked me for anything that wasn't in there. It's no use with the Wiccans, though. There's definitely not a knife in there."

"You keep using that word: 'knife.' It's an athame."

He shrugs.

"Okay, does the catalogue have pagan stuff in there?"

"Sure. There's all kinds of witchy stuff. Looks like toys and costumes for a Dungeons and Dragons party if you ask me, but it's in there. There's even stuff for..." He grits his teeth and speaks the last word through them. "...Satanists." Pause. "Of course, we don't recognize them as a religion here."

I don't argue the point. That's for another day. "So, this catalogue, would you be willing to show it to the Wiccans and let *them* find something suitable?"

"I don't think I'm supposed to, but I'm not sure there's any specific

rule against it.”

“There you go. That’s your way out.”

Chaplain Christopher’s eyes glaze over as if I’ve offended him.

“Let them pick their own athame substitute. Then you take it to the warden for approval.”

His mouth drops open as if he’s catching snowflakes on his tongue.

“Tell him you found their stick.”

The chaplain’s speechless. His arms fall onto his lap.

“Chaplain?” I say.

He’s staring, but not at me. Instinctively, my eyes follow his gaze before I realize what’s happening and can stop myself. On the other side of the glass, a blue-armed inmate has stripped out of his boxers and is bending forward, hands reaching back to spread his cheeks, while a gloved C.O. stands back, staring, unfazed and numb to this horrible routine.

“Think it’s time to get out of here,” I say.

Chaplain Christopher’s head swivels in my direction. “Lord, help me,” he says. If the rumors about him are true, he’s been the man bending over. He’s felt the humiliation, stripped and cold-eyed. I suspect he hasn’t been on the other side before now. I imagine he must feel the same way an armed robber does when someone else pulls a gun on him. Which side would he rather be on? The one with the gun, no doubt, but which is which?

“You’ll show them the catalogue?” I say, standing and pointing toward the doorway into the education wing.

He rises, nods, follows my aim as though I’m saving him from a fire. “Right,” he says, the brain behind the voice still somewhere else. “The catalogue. I’ll take care of it.”

“It’ll be like Witch Christmas,” I say. I can’t help it. “Witchmas.”

He doesn’t crack a smile. I’d have thought he’d have learned by now that if you don’t laugh at the absurdity of every monstrous thing you’ve done or seen, the guilt and existential dread start to destroy you. That’s how I deal with it anyway. When people ask me about my victim, Carla Long, whose blue Honda Civic I drunkenly rolled into a ditch one night, I tell them she gave me the keys and asked me to drive because, compared to her, I was sober. “You’re making a joke out of it?” they always say. “No,” I reply. “I’m finding laughter in the joke it’s made of me.”

## CONSTRUCTION PAPER

Three nights ago I dreamed about construction paper, and when I woke up I discovered a ream of it under my bed. I tore off the cellophane wrapping and fingered the rough, colorful pages. The smell was just like I remembered it from kindergarten.

I called Terra into the room and we spent the whole morning playing together, ripping off random shapes and arranging them on the floor into exotic animals and strange people, like a man with a pink head and a green body. She got a pen and drew him a face, with my eyes and my glasses, and when we were finished we recycled it all.

#

Two nights ago I dreamed the solution to that day's crossword puzzle.

Terra and I did the crossword puzzle together at the kitchen counter. I didn't tell her that I already knew the answers. Was I developing some kind of power? Was it really possible?

The final word was, just as I dreamed it would be, *locomotive*, and with that I secured my abilities. I cancelled the babysitter and took Terra to work with me, doting on her while my coworkers looked on with disdain and my boss, who once called me *uptight*, made sure to explain that it wasn't exactly bring-your-kids-to-work day.

Their detractions didn't affect me at all. I felt nothing but sorrow for them, for these tiny people who dreamed pure fiction while I, in my deeply mysterious way, dreamed into being a brand-new world. They would go to sleep and dream some scary nonsense about their boring pasts, if they dream at all anymore, while I would go to sleep and dream up the future.

#

Last night I dreamed up a white man, which scared the both of us awake. I scrambled up against the wall and he crawled out from under the bed like a centipede, each of us too startled to actually scream.

"Who are you?"

"I don't know," he said, with the kind of Midwest accent that Midwesterners think isn't an accent. He was probably my age, maybe a few years older, but, ectomorphic and confused, he looked a good deal younger.

"Where did you come from?"

"I don't know," he repeated. "Do you?"



In fact he looked like a twelve-year-old boy, curled up in a ball on the floor with the cobwebs and dust bunnies, and my surprise melted into motherly concern.

“You can sit on the bed here if you’d like,” I said, starting to feel powerful again.

The white man stood up and looked around the room. “I think I should go,” he said.

“Sit,” I said. “We have a lot to talk about.”

He sat down and tried not to look me in the eyes. “So, do you have a boyfriend?”

My laugh surprised him. “I have a daughter. She’s 6.”

A flash of concern in his eyes, a wince at the edge of his frown. “Do you work?”

“Do *I* work? Do you?”

“I don’t know,” he stuttered, getting angry now. “I don’t think so.”

He looked even smaller now, like an eight-year-old, and I imagined him out in the world, popping in to Terra’s office to tell her it’s not exactly take-your-kid-to-work-day one day, *uptight* the next, and all the while glancing more than once at the hem of her skirt, or the right rear pocket of her jeans.

“This is too much power,” I said. “I’ve gone too far.”

“Can you call me an Uber or something?”

I stood up. “Sure,” I said. “But I use Lyft, and they usually take a few minutes around here.”

He followed me into the kitchen, where I sat him down facing the window and told him to watch for the Lyft. I ran my fingers over the knife block and picked out the smallest, cleanest one. I could probably do the job with my bare hands, I thought. It would be like strangling a toddler. But I’d learned before not to underestimate people like him, and I wasn’t about to take any chances.

“I’m sorry,” I said, plunging the knife into his throat. “But I brought you into this world, and I think I’d better take you out.”

There wasn’t a struggle, and the kitchen sink caught most of the blood. I had the body bagged up and dumped by the time Terra woke up, just in time for the morning crossword to arrive. We got stuck on 21 across and couldn’t finish.

## A REVIEW OF TRAVIS DENTON'S *MY STUNT DOUBLE*

Travis Denton's *My Stunt Double* is a collection of fifty-three seemingly effortless and magical poems. Effortless, since Denton's voice is natural, easy to hear, genuine, and frequently conversational. Magical, because the poems take you to places you would never have imagined, even if these places lurk in your neighborhood, are right around the corner, or in your own room, waiting for you to notice. The collection has a single theme that works like an armature or skeleton, easy to overlook yet holding the book together, permeating it, making it a unity.

The book opens with two epigrams: one from Berryman, "*I saw nobody coming, so I went instead,*" and the other attributed to Chekov, "*Any idiot can face a crisis; it is this day-to-day living that wears you out.*" These two quotes make explicit what the book is about; and the book, rich in that day-to-day living, recounts the struggle, gives it voice, and in the process, transcends it, which is where the magic of these poems lives. To Denton's credit, he does this without ever stooping to some cheap trick or resolution. So the book is an honest unblinking examination of being human and real in this world.

The book's first poem, "What Beauty Gives Us," is set apart from all the others, like a preface or introduction, giving the background, announcing the theme. The poem's title is a masterful example of misdirection since the poem makes no mention at all of aesthetics or beauty; instead it takes us to visit a dying distant planet. It starts in the real world with the narrator looking up into the night sky to see some unnamed dot reflecting light from lamps that may have died long ago – light, distance time and being confounded. The narrator quickly moves from the unnamed dot to recollect TV images of a rover scanning a barren extraterrestrial landscape with an imagined being we might recognize as alive, "Standing – the last trudging prince ... the one to see / The light yellow and thin." And this pitiful being (like us) on its dying planet (like ours), "looks out to that green dot / And not having the words, .... / For *chapel*, or *mayday*, kneels, / But won't lie down." So this is what beauty gives us when seen honestly and face on, the ability to endure. Many of the poems use this same strategy, beginning in the real world, moving into a highly imaginative and fantastic vision, to end with a return to the gut.

So where does the Stunt Double come in? His cue follows two more poems. The first poem is "The Body," as though introducing us to ourselves, peopling the book, grounding us. The poem begins like all

poems, inside the reader's mouth, sensuously: "The orange pines / For your tongue – / Starves without you." One short sentence over three lines. The opening, 'The orange pines,' semantically tricky, trips the eye, forces a stuttered reading with the ambiguous noun/verb *pin*es, in this case announcing privation. So our body, its needs, defines us.

The second poem, "Balloons," describes how "The sky opening, as if scored, and bled rainbow – / An unrelenting rainbow that swelled / And bellowed more rainbow." As the poem progresses, it is easy to see the balloons peopling this world where Denton lives with his Stunt Double in a kind of Walter Mitty symbiosis that seems universal. But this is not poor Mitty's imaginary superhero compensating for the trials of dailyness, but more like Mr. Bones visiting from Berryman's "Dream Songs." For example, take "Dream Song 76 (Henry's Confession)" which begins with Mr. Bones saying; "Nothin very bad happen to me lately. / How do you explain that?" and continues with a tragic parody of a minstrel show patter between Henry and Mr. Bones, the dialogue really a soliloquy about the father's death, 'so long agone,' closing with the two, Henry and Bones, arm in arm, walking out of the scene with the last line, "I saw no one coming so I went instead."

Travis Denton's Stunt Double is John Berryman's Mr. Bones. The desperation of dailyness is the burden we all carry and is the burden this book shoulders. Denton makes this clear in the poem "Love Letter to My Failed Crisis," in which the narrator talks directly to a second person *you*, (Mr. Bones?); the crisis "... right there like a word on the tip of the tongue ... / ....Your titanic / Beauty shimmering like a frozen continent. / My Hale-Bopp comet of the heart.../ ... I'd trade this *everyday* for you – / This grinding down, this slow waking, for your sudden quake – / Tether-snap above the tram – .... / ... and then, nothing." But anyone can end in a blaze, the thrill of a cataclysm. As Camus begins *Sisyphus*, "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide." Is that an unworthy exit, as Chekov (and Camus ultimately) suggests; the one that Berryman in 1972 and his father 46 years earlier, both chose?

All the poems in the book have some things in common. For example, the first letter of every line of every poem is capitalized, which today seems idiosyncratic and archaic. The convention is particularly curious since the vast majority of the poems are chunks of text that ignore the conventions of stanza breaks or the approximate uniformity

of line length. This creates the impression that Denton has little concern for the poem's appearance on the page and is more concerned with using enjambment to control the tension between the poem's grammatical and syntactical structures and the imposed line breaks. The tension also controls the rhythm and phrasing of the language, and reflects the fact that Denton's conversational tone, the informality of his language, combines with a fine ear for music and sound, making these poems well worth reading aloud since "The sound pines / For your tongue, / Starves without you."

The last poems of the book circle back to encounter death as though the book's first three poems were setting the stage and the last three clearing it. "Goners," the antepenultimate poem, makes its point recounting a hundred year family history of death in a shuffled chronology, that uses *goner* as a refrain, labeling each deceased as another *goner*. The penultimate poem "Nudiustertian" recounts a tropical beach scene that may or may not be a dream, moments before a tsunami wipes it all away. "All he hears is a roar, / A chug, his voice yelling back / At him – his shorts yanked to his ankles / and he's back on the playground, / Beside the slide and seesaw, / His mates snickering, pointing, / A water balloon slapping him on the cheek." How can we tell what it real and what a dream – I think we can't, but the question is irrelevant as we catch the balloon that peopled the second poem returning for a last bow, creating a balance, whether intentional or not.

And the ultimate poem, "In a Better Place," features the estate sale of all we do not bring with us to that *better place*. The poem begins, "Without a toothbrush and change of clothing in backpack / So many people have gone there – / Left just like that ..." The title of the poem, like that of almost all the poems in the collection, does double duty; it names the poem while being an intrinsic part of the poem's text. Usually between a poem's title and its first line there is a gap, a change in pitch, tone, emphasis, at least a breath to mark the *now we start* moment. But almost all Denton's titles elide with the text; they require the reader to ignore the gap between title and text. Grafting the title to the opening of the first line kicks the meaning to another level. Denton accomplishes this magic more often than not in this collection. The poem, and the book ends with, "waking to your father shouting, / *Look out, look out, look out* – / His hands full of the same dark you let in" leaving you to consider the dark of that better place.

[BEFORE DIFFICULTY]

---

*—from the Albuterol patient information from MedlinePlus and Proair patient information*

Before  
difficulty.

Before  
chronic.

Before  
four times a day.

Before  
but will not cure your condition.

Step 1  
Step 3  
Step 7  
Breathe.

Figure B  
Figure I  
Figure K  
Breathe.

Do not stop  
breathing.

Remember  
this  
last  
paradoxical  
disclaimer.

You are  
no longer  
plastic.

You are  
pounding  
in your throat.

Your lungs  
are foreign objects,  
  
wrong            and            wrong.

Count down  
how many  
  
seconds  
you have left.

Air  
will change to red  
and shake.

Breath  
no longer  
a part of the body.

JENNY MOLBERG

---

## ENDING THE AFFAIR AT THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS

*Happiness is like glass; it soon breaks.*  
-Flemish proverb

*Left*

I visit the Prado three times in one week, spend hours circling  
Bosch's panel, turning the ring he gave me over and over  
in my right hand, gold already worn, the cubic zirconia  
glinting dully like molars in the museum's white light.

What callous monsters crawl from the pond with their slithering  
amphibious tails and their thousand multiplying cilia.  
I am tempted toward cruel people, drunk on my own  
capacity for forgiveness. For weeks, he offered me

handfuls of fruit until I bit. Once in the dark, pinned  
beneath his body, I heard him say *I will never let you go—  
do you hear me?* Eve with her wrist in the vice of her father.  
Eve with her bird bones, Eve without Adam.

Eve who cannot even touch her own ground.  
Eve in the shadow of all the pale animals, Eve  
who is always hungry. And Eve, when you're always hungry,  
I know, chances are you'll pick from the wrong tree.

*Center*

Chaos of all the bodies  
in this world. So many of them  
cruel, so many of them driven  
feverish by the giant red fruit  
of the body, huddled and pyretic,  
red-hot, picking seeds  
from their teeth. Remember this,

I tell myself: there is always  
a serpent in the water.

*Right*

There he is again, in the mussel shell.  
Legs sticking out: the muscle of the tongue.  
Skin ridged. Black and iridescent  
coffin-lid of his narcissism, closing—

And when his mood darkened,  
the houses in his brain caught fire.  
I tried and failed to lift the knife  
from between his ears, which severed  
his ability to listen.

Now I am fastened here in the hell  
we built for ourselves, dreaming  
of finned things that dive beneath  
the surface of the mind, that breathe  
entire worlds into the brain, which open  
and close at the slap of a single white hand.



OLIVER DE LA PAZ

---

## DIASPORA SONNET 35

The romance of the suitcase is all elegant weight. The click of latches and the clasps

nestled into their metal fists. The urge of zippers and the urgency of the shimmery fabric

like a false wall in old houses. Where the secrets breathe in the cortex of their knowledge—

what they know: love. Love is a continent away. It is chenille, soft and long-suffering

and worn only once. And there are other more secret wants. Folded and folded again

into the tight corners. The brazen collars. The articulate slacks. Love is in the creases

of this bindery. This mystery for another place to be opened with all its irrational promises.



# CHAPBOOK FINALISTS

## 2019

JAKE BAUER  
SARAH CARSON  
JEFFREY HECKER  
ALLISON JOSEPH  
ERIN LYNDAL MARTIN  
SHEILA PACKA  
KIMBERLY ANN PRIEST  
SHENANDOAH SOWASH  
ALEX STOLIS

JAKE BAUER

---

## TODAY IS MY BIRTHDAY

Hope flexed her honest  
to god wings on the swingset. What's perfectly fine  
is to scratch hatch marks on soft bark  
on the island. To jump a low fence,  
like the month of November.  
I'd like now to establish  
my listlessness. My wistfulness.  
My exuberance running wild  
in the cornfield in the snow globe of your cordoned-off  
imaginary dance number.  
Happiness sells itself like hard candy at the street fair.  
Winter rain smelling of honeydew.  
Big pool, oh.  
Not lately, I was wearing the light.

JAKE BAUER

---

## THE CONSCIOUS UNIVERSE

The universe thinks about jealousy.  
The universe thinks about anger  
management. Once, the universe  
was told to kneel on the tile  
in the corner, to think about what  
she had done. Now, on the empty  
bus home after another long day  
at the plant, the universe notices  
a few CAUTION signs clipped  
to the electric fence surrounding  
her mind. Maybe the enigmas  
of morality are not so distressing  
after all, she thinks. I could dart  
off at the next stop and steal  
an extravagant dessert. I could  
lick the gum from someone's shoe,  
if I wanted. Or I could just drift  
into the great black unknown  
of myself. When I arrive, I'll be  
a teacher instead. On a lonely planet  
where no creatures exist, I'll give  
advanced lectures on cat grooming.

SARAH CARSON

---

**IT'S MAY IN FLINT, MICHIGAN, AND WE  
SKIP WORK TO WATCH AIR FORCE ONE  
DESCEND OVER THE CITY**

After a year full of  
winter,

dogs' teeth find leaves,  
vines,

stray roots  
where

there once was  
a golf course.

Couple on a hill  
hold a Zippo

to a glass bowl,  
'til their fingers

are one fire,  
two flames.

SARAH CARSON

---

**IT'S MAY IN FLINT, MICHIGAN, AND WE  
SKIP WORK TO WATCH AIR FORCE ONE  
DESCEND OVER THE CITY**

GG plugs in the VCR.

SARAH CARSON

---

**IT'S MAY IN FLINT, MICHIGAN, AND WE  
SKIP WORK TO WATCH AIR FORCE ONE  
DESCEND OVER THE CITY**

To watch the President  
bring his best

to the dying,  
the not dying:

*Don't we all deserve  
someone*

*who will come to us  
in times of trouble?*

And he just means Congress,  
Merrick Garland,

but damn if the kids  
on the floor

don't bowl over  
with wonder.

Jesus himself  
on a stage

two sizes  
too small.



SARAH CARSON

---

**IT'S MAY IN FLINT, MICHIGAN, AND WE  
SKIP WORK TO WATCH AIR FORCE ONE  
DESCEND OVER THE CITY**

Shift supervisor at the Rally's  
walk-up

hangs a presidential portrait  
behind the deep fryer

swears Rachel Maddow  
is calling his name.

SARAH CARSON

---

**IT'S MAY IN FLINT, MICHIGAN, AND WE  
SKIP WORK TO WATCH AIR FORCE ONE  
DESCEND OVER THE CITY**

Kid with a neck tattoo  
spots

personalized plates  
across the Walmart parking lot,

*calls, Girl, I thought  
you were in Ypsi &*

the girl stops  
her cell phone argument

with the gas company:  
*No, baby,* she says.

*Not today.*

JEFFREY HECKER

---

## **BULL & POSSUM**

Bull feels responsible for plants wilting, fields withering. Interesting your domain over nature stops at the property line, says Possum, have you tried relaxing, holding humans who own you accountable, or God? Bull released over 120 kilograms of methane in 2020. Killed a sunflower. Possum describes climate change to Bull, then slavery.

JEFFREY HECKER

---

## LEOPARD & CHEETAH

Leopard notes I don't like the fact I keep seeing military ads: teenagers who convince uneasy parents they're joining an army or navy. Cheetah notes those spots simply emphasize the value of consulting guardians before entrusting your existence to a government. Leopard notes he's glad there's no major conflict or war. Cheetah volunteers to slay Leopard.

JEFFREY HECKER

---

## **BUFFALO & ROOSTER**

I'm donating my heart to science, repeats Buffalo. Rooster repeats not directly to the ailing? Going only to inventory? Going going gone? Why not whole body? I need my heart examined postmortem, repeats Buffalo. Rooster repeats do you divine they'll find anything not already present, like soul? Buffalo repeats no, no, no, I sold mine, and yours.

## MAGIC BAG

Tell me what's inside that magic bag  
you carry with you each day, clutching  
its heavy weight like a soldier clutching a rifle.

Tell me what's underneath those jeans of yours—  
those tight, painted-on, hip-hugging, make-me-wanna  
slide that zipper down pair  
you haven't washed for a month.

Tell me the name of your last girlfriend  
so I can write it down  
on a tiny piece of paper so small  
that a single candle flame will burn her up  
forever—

Tell me you're sane.

Tell me you don't exude peroxide instead of sweat,  
that you're not radioactive.

Tell me, please tell me, that those aren't implants,  
that you didn't buy them  
from a cut-rate doctor in Copenhagen—

I want to know you were born with those, however  
you swing them.

Tell me your social security number, your last  
three addresses, your home phone number,  
your work number, cell phone,  
your e-mail, your fax—all your digits.

Tell me your doctor's name, and don't tell me  
you forgot or that you don't have one  
or that you never get check-ups  
because you hate waiting rooms

full of aching, coughing sick people.

Tell me the name of your mechanic, your priest,  
your guru, your sheik, your shrink, your rabbi.

Tell me the name of your sixth-grade teacher.

Tell me the last time you thought of her—  
her chunky high heels,  
her hem that rose when she sat on the desk  
to cross her silken legs—

tell me what she made you think of—  
or better yet, tell me where she made you think of—

or if you are shy, just tell me  
what's inside that magic bag.

ERIN LYNDAL MARTIN

---

**FROM *BOOK OF SHADOWS***

o.k. o.k.,  
I will not say “cabin fever” anymore  
I will say “wedded”  
I am wedded to this damsel mountain  
I am wedded to this damn mountain  
the old ball and chain  
already I can feel my fate improving

oh electricity!  
come alive and throb indefinitely on my clit  
this is the only way I can find faith again

you who have watched my faith disappear like this:  
for every need, a penny in the fountain  
sooner or later you run out of pennies  
my blood tastes like copper too  
it will not suffice  
I have been told that  
ungraciously

I tried throwing pebbles  
into a stream  
making wishes

I ran out of pebbles  
I ran out of stream  
I still have my wishes

I ran out of holy  
when I say holy  
I mean one night Tony did magic tricks  
with cigarettes at the pub

then I slept beside the campfire  
he put his windbreaker on me

magic is real or it used to be  
god got jealous of it  
which is why there is no glitter  
in heaven



ERIN LYNDAL MARTIN

---

**FROM *BOOK OF SHADOWS***

the rupture is the disappearing  
not the disappearance  
the rupture is making a fake life  
in which you kill the real one

pardon me  
I am in rupture right now  
everything I own in motion  
like celestial bodies or ocean ships  
or else left behind  
or gone from a fire

new beginnings start with flights  
you reschedule three times,  
barely make, don't remember

flying into this place beyond tired  
this place all past and an hour from the mountain  
you sometimes want to put your arms around  
or would sometimes take a hit out on

new home, old home, I tied curtains  
back with hair elastics  
so I'd remember this was now  
it's all so country I masturbated  
to the traffic I could see from the window  
I didn't get off, never get off

SHEILA PACKA

---

**FROM *SURFACE DISPLACEMENTS***

^

A blueprint on a scroll of paper: a bridge  
made for floating on air, but heavily,  
on pylons, in plaits of current, between  
curved lines, steel cables and bows of  
quicksilver and mercury and yellow  
signs. A plan to join the separated, cast  
a permanent shadow on the water, resist  
wind and gravity, and above all, hum.

SHEILA PACKA

---

**FROM *SURFACE DISPLACEMENTS***

^

Here, a sketch of shore. The pencil  
draws a water line, a vanishing point.  
In graphite, wings of a bird in flight.  
Two more curves, parabolas that float.  
Next, between the boat's ribs, a bench.  
A wave on the water's surface — not  
much — just a few grasses on shore  
bent beneath a wind. Then a shadow,  
three-dimensional. There's a need  
to leave things out, those that peer  
uneasily, advance, and then withdraw.  
Granite outcroppings — broken by ice.  
Already the currents pull and the hull  
lifts and sways, restless. I render this as  
if I were — disembarked — without a  
body, a current of air.

SHEILA PACKA

---

**FROM *SURFACE DISPLACEMENTS***

^

In the city are those who cannot be traced. In the city of good air and bad, in ghost cities, old cities, cities of war. With lamps that no longer burn but pierce the tongue, cities write with smoke in the book open to depredations, the cities that reassemble endings in a dark room of unknown dimensions, suspend belief, up-end the fields, affix the disappeared to sheets of onion skin. Cities of stains or smudges. They trans-literate. Splice the image.

SHEILA PACKA

---

**FROM *SURFACE DISPLACEMENTS***

^

My hand disappears over the horizon  
and pulls up the sea for cover. I travel as  
a cloud for miles citizen of bruised sky.  
I cross the waves and tides to climb the  
coast on the roads to the interior and  
rivers flow over my banks. My border  
spans the continents, and my spine, a  
mountain range. My arms can't carry  
the refugees.  
Everywhere they come forth.  
Everywhere, off course.

SHEILA PACKA

---

**FROM *SURFACE DISPLACEMENTS***

^

Inside the fallen trunks are circles  
around circles. The roads are built,  
but the center was never a destination.  
Insects in the canyons of bark travel  
with their bundles, fall into the dark  
rooms of the camber, get caught in  
rivers of sap turning to amber. Anchored  
in the rot where so much thrives — on  
the rocks, lichen reaches up to sketch  
new lives that die in the heat.

KIMBERLY ANN PRIEST

---

FROM *PARROT FLOWER*

\*

Tell me you are listening, she says:  
[*I am listening.*]

I want you to notice the track marks on my  
arms.

I want you to hold a  
mirror in front of your chest and breath in,  
then out,  
so that I rise and fall  
in its frame

as though we are making love.

There were always bright objects in the  
room,

feathers of light  
spinning overhead. [Someone]  
making love.

It's called *passion* in the movies when they  
fuck for hours,

it's called *cinema*.

FROM *PARROT FLOWER*

---

\*

In a second, it can represent something  
altogether nothing,

all the same anything sounding  
refreshed.

Open this envelope and read the inscription

underneath the flap.

Yes, that's what you imagined it would  
say  
& that's why it says this.

There are metaphysical spaces  
filled with all that we believe; loop  
your finger into string,  
pull balloons out of mere sound.

John Cage wrote,  
"There is no such thing as an empty space or  
an empty time."

2 pm brims with metamorphosis,  
onions sautéing on the stove in olive oil & salt.

"There is always something to see," he  
continues, "something to hear. In fact,

try as we may to make a silence we cannot.

[but]

For certain engineering purposes it is  
desirable to have as silent a situation as  
possible."



KIMBERLY ANN PRIEST

---

FROM *PARROT FLOWER*

\*

Mucus, mosses,

[memories]

climb the back of her  
neck. The instant she hears the word *romantic*  
her lungs detach and fray.

Such is the fabric of this  
journey—

the meaning of a flower, the meaning of  
torn tissue, the meaning of

[silence &]  
everything

a man has to say: *let me fix*

*your strings and the way  
the weather hangs in the backdrop.*

*Look at me Love, I'm drowning  
in a sea of grief. Just*

*let  
me touch you*

*once.*

*Climb the back of your neck, repeat: Stop*

*then Go.*

FROM *PARROT FLOWER*

---

\*

East Lansing to Chicago— the  
cinema  
to the skate park—

between perfectly squared neighborhood  
sidewalks and streets.

Although “between”  
implies

not the places she comes from  
or the places she’ll go:

A portrait hanging  
with its back

to the window

swirling with  
a dozen falling  
leaves.

*Have you experienced any childhood  
trauma?*

Yes.

*What kind? Sexual.  
Can you be more specific?*

I was molested.

*How often?*

Yes.

FROM *PARROT FLOWER*

\*

In the future she prepares to be infinite,  
reading all her letters before sending them  
away.

The swallows return to their nest [&]

when she disagrees with her therapist,  
he says  
it is a good thing.

*Have you experienced any  
childhood trauma? Yes. What kind?  
Sexual.*

*Can you be more specific?*

I was molested. . .once.

*Do you think this affects your  
behavior? Yes.*

*How? I am attracted  
to other people who have experienced  
childhood trauma.*

*Does this  
bother you? Yes. Why?*

. . . .because they have so many problems  
and I [seem to] have enough.

*Do you  
have enough?*

## QUESTIONS FOR A LOVER

Have you considered  
the skeleton in  
each little child?

Have you yet pondered  
bones, formal as spoons,  
rows of bones in labs?

Have you scripted your  
entrance in pink costume,  
or do you just fucking wing it.

## SHENANDOAH SOWASH

---

### SOME PEOPLE

Watching the lean man repair shingles  
on someone else's house I am pretending  
to be a person

I wear sunglasses because people's eyes  
are sensitive to sunlight  
& I wear no shoes although others wear them

After he leaves & each fixed shingle  
quits shrieking I say aloud to no one  
*I am going out to eat*

I stay home and eat stew by candlelight  
I dream I am surrounded by people  
also eating stew by candlelight

I wear sunglasses because my eyes  
fear fire though some people love it  
Some use it to cook meat

Some keep warm with it  
Some say *holy holy*  
and walk on its coals

**BLINDS**

I'm looking out my window this morning  
deciding if the blinds should stay down

if I put them up a man might walk by and look in  
might see something he wants and take it

if I leave them down  
no one will know when I die

## SHENANDOAH SOWASH

---

### CHEERIO

I woke up & watched the President's farewell address, his brave gray heart unresigned, & I watched the new king & his tiny fearful mouth, his oilmen & blondes; & I decided that we would soon destroy ourselves; & I read the back of the Cheerios box: *can help lower cholesterol*, & I cradled my bowl in one hand while balancing a spoon on the end of my nose, hoped a child would see me.

ALEX STOLIS

---

## JULY 4 BRAINERD, MN

We're two thousand light years from home. Lost in perfect whorls of miles of random touches of nowhere. We crumble beneath the sun's thick boot. The radio crackles, more news that doesn't matter. Here there are no stars, there are empty dry river beds, the earth is clay. The fire-eater clears his throat between flames. We're golden hour-ed and scripted, the center of gravity, lust, desire and craving. We chase after the Promised Land, unfurled and reckless; the sky lit by cinders.



ALEX STOLIS

---

## JULY 6 MARQUETTE, MI

July 6 Marquette, MI

We live in tragedy, we are carnivores on an empty plain. Let's fill our pockets with earth, wallow under the squalor of loave. One day soon, you'll stop setting yourself on fire for me. I think it's time to improvise. Every town has a lover's lane, everyone loves a good crucifixion. We're verbs swimming beneath the belly of the sky; flesh and blood ghosts hipflask-ed together on our way to a crime spree.

ALEX STOLIS

---

## JULY 26 TRURO, N.S.

When I was ten I learned to breathe underwater. It wasn't a wish it was necessity, a language created for the initiated. I saw you there. It was voodoo and fire, salt burned my eyes, waves pulled me down. At first I struggled, arms flailing lungs burning as I held my breath fighting the fall. Finally, I gasped for air and it was like floating between particles of light. There is nothing left to rewrite but the past; let's float over dirt roads bordered by gray unplowed fields. I recall the feeling of coarse sand running through my fingers, lips brushing against my face, water that's not water, air that's not air.

## CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

**Hadara Bar-Nadav** is the author of *The New Nudity* (Saturnalia Books, 2017); *Lullaby* (with Exit Sign), awarded the Saturnalia Books Poetry Prize (Saturnalia Books, 2013); *The Frame Called Ruin*, Runner Up for the Green Rose Prize (New Issues, 2012); and *A Glass of Milk to Kiss Goodnight*, awarded the Margie Book Prize (Margie/Intuit House, 2007). Her chapbook *Fountain and Furnace* (Tupelo Press, 2015) was awarded the Sunken Garden Poetry Prize. A National Endowment for the Arts fellow, she is currently a Professor of English at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

**Jake Bauer** is the Marketing Director for Saturnalia Books. He is also co-author of *Idaho Falls* (SurVision Books, 2019). His poems have recently appeared in *Threepenny Review*, *Thrush*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *Inter|rupture*, among others.

**Laurie Blauner** is the author of seven books of poetry and four novels. Her most recent novel is *The Solace of Monsters*. Her essays have appeared in *PANK*, *december*, *Superstition Review*, *Sycamore Review*, and *Your Impossible Voice*, among others. Her website is [www.laurieblauner.com](http://www.laurieblauner.com).

**Ace Bogges** is author of the novels *States of Mercy* (Alien Buddha Press, 2019) and *A Song Without a Melody* (Hyperborea Publishing, 2016), as well as four books of poetry, most recently *I Have Lost the Art of Dreaming It So* (Unsolicited Press, 2018). His fiction appears in *Notre Dame Review*, *Superstition Review*, *Lumina*, *The Sonder Review*, *Flyway*, and other journals. He received a fellowship from the West Virginia Commission on the Arts and spent five years in a West Virginia prison. He lives in Charleston, West Virginia.

**Bruce Bond** is the author of twenty-five books including, most recently, *Immanent Distance: Poetry and the Metaphysics of the Near at Hand* (U of MI, 2015), *Black Anthem* (Tampa Review Prize, U of Tampa, 2016), *Gold Bee* (Helen C. Smith Award, Crab Orchard Award, SIU Press, 2016), *Sacrum* (Four Way, 2017), *Blackout Starlight: New and Selected Poems 1997-2015* (L.E. Phillabaum Award, LSU, 2017), *Rise and Fall of the Lesser Sun Gods* (Elixir Book Prize, Elixir Press, 2018), *Dear Reader* (Free Verse Editions, 2018), *Frankenstein's Children* (Lost Horse, 2018), *Plurality and the Poetics of Self* (Palgrave, 2019), and *Words Written Against the Walls of the City* (LSU, 2019). Presently he is a Regents Professor of English at the University of North Texas.

**Mary Lou Buschi's** poems have appeared in *Lily Poetry Review*, *Thimble*, *Thrush*, and *Cloudbank* among others. Mary Lou's full-length collection, *Awful Baby*, was published through Red Paint Hill (2015). *Tight Wire*, her third chapbook, was published by Dancing Girl Press (2016).

**Mathieu Caceres** is a student at the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina. He has been published one other time in the latest issue of *Miscellany*.

**Chris Campanioni** is a first-generation American, the child of immigrants from Cuba and Poland, and the author of *the Internet is for real* (C&R Press) and *Drift* (King Shot Press). His "Billboards" poem was awarded an Academy of American Poets College Prize in 2013, his novel *Going Down* was selected as Best First Book at the 2014 International Latino Book Awards, and his hybrid piece "This body's long (& I'm still loading)" was adapted as an official selection of the Canadian International Film Festival in 2017. He is currently a Provost Fellow and MAGNET Mentor at The Graduate Center/CUNY, where he is conducting his doctoral studies in English and redrafting narratives of exile. He edits *PANK*, *At Large Magazine*, and *Tupelo Quarterly*, and teaches Latino literature and creative writing at Pace University and Baruch College.

**Sarah Carson's** work has appeared in the *Colorado Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *the Minnesota Review*, *The Nashville Review* and others. She is also the author of the books *Poems in which You Die* (BatCat Press) and *Buick City* (Mayapple Press).

**Maari Carter** is originally from Winona, MS. Her poems have appeared in such places as *Meridian*, *Sundog Lit*, *Superstition Review*, and *Salt Hill Journal*, among others. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Creative Writing at Florida State University and lives in Tallahassee, FL.

**Wes Civilz** lives in New Hampshire. He writes poetry and fiction, and is also at work on a memoir about intoxication. His writing can be found at *The Antioch Review*, *Quarterly West*, *The Threepenny Review*, *Arts & Letters*, and *New Ohio Review*.

**Charlie Clark's** poetry has appeared in *New England Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Threepenny Review*, and other journals. He is a 2019–2020 NEA fellow in poetry. His book, *The Newest Employee of the Museum of Ruin*, will be published by Four Way Books in fall 2020. He lives in Austin, TX.

**Adam Clay's** most recent collection is *Stranger* (Milkweed Editions, 2016). His fourth book is forthcoming from Milkweed Editions. His poems have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Georgia Review*, *Boston Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Iowa Review*, and elsewhere. He co-edits *TYPO*, serves as a Book Review Editor for *Kenyon Review*, and teaches in the Center for Writers at the University of Southern Mississippi.

**Marie Hanna Curran** is the author of poetry collection *Observant Observings* (Tayen Lane Publishing, 2014). Alongside poetry, her short stories and viewpoints have appeared in print and her regular column, *musings from her couch*, can be viewed in the magazine *Athenry News and Views*. For more see [www.mariehcurran.com](http://www.mariehcurran.com).

**Kristina Marie Darling** is the author of thirty books, which include *Look to Your Left: The Poetics of Spectacle* (University of Akron Press, 2020); *Je Suis L'Autre: Essays & Interrogations* (C&R Press, 2017), and *DARK HORSE: Poems* (C&R Press, 2018). Her work has been recognized with three residencies at Yaddo, where she held both the Martha Walsh Pulver Residency for a Poet and the Howard Moss Residency in Poetry; a Fundación Valparaíso fellowship; two grants from the Whiting Foundation; a Morris Fellowship in the Arts; and the Dan Liberthson Prize from the Academy of American Poets, among many other awards and honors.

**Oliver de la Paz** is the author of five collections of poetry: *Names Above Houses*, *Furious Lullaby*, *Requiem for the Orchard*, *Post Subject: A Fable*, and *The Boy in the Labyrinth*. He also co-edited *A Face to Meet the Faces: An Anthology of Contemporary Persona Poetry*. A founding member, Oliver serves as the co-chair of the Kundiman advisory board. His work has been published in the *Pushcart Prize Anthology*, *Poetry*, *American Poetry Review*, *Tin House*, *The Southern Review*, and *Poetry Northwest*. He teaches at the College of the Holy Cross and in the Low-Residency MFA Program at PLU.

**Sharon Dolin** is the author of six books of poetry, most recently *Manual for Living* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016). Her translation of Gemma Gorga's *Book of Minutes* (Field Translation Series/Oberlin College Press, 2019) received grants from PEN and Institut Ramon Llull. Her current project is translating the *Selected Poems of Gemma Gorga*. She lives in New York City, is Associate Editor of *Barrow Street Press*, and directs Writing About Art in Barcelona.

**Sean Thomas Dougherty** is the author or editor of 17 books including *The Second O of Sorrow* (BOA Editions 2018), co-winner of the Paterson Poetry Prize, and *Alongside We Travel: Contemporary Poets on Autism* (NYQ Books 2019). He works as a Med Tech in Erie, PA. His website is [seanthomasdoughertypoet.com](http://seanthomasdoughertypoet.com).

**Rachael Gay** is a poet and artist living in Fargo, North Dakota. Her work has appeared in *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Quail Bell*, *Rag Queens*, *Déraciné Magazine*, *Gamma Poetry*, *FreezeRay Poetry*, *Rising Phoenix Review*, and others. She also appears in the 2019 anthology *What Keeps Us Here* and was a 2019 Sundress Academy for the Arts resident.

**Albert Goldbarth** has been publishing books of poetry for nearly half a century, two of which have received the National Book Critics Circle Award. His latest is *The Now* from the University of Pittsburgh (November 2019). He lives in Wichita, Kansas. *Somebody* has to.

**E. Laura Golberg** received a first class education from an English girls' high school. She emigrated to America at age 21. Laura won first place in the Washington, DC Commission on the Arts *Larry Neal Poetry Competition*. Her poetry has appeared in *Poet Lore*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Spillway*, *RHINO*, and the *Journal of Humanistic Mathematics*, among other places. More information can be found at [www.ELauraGolberg.com](http://www.ELauraGolberg.com).

**Gemma Gorga** was born in Barcelona in 1968. She has a Ph.D. in Philology from the University of Barcelona, where she is a Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Spanish Literature. She has published six collections of poetry in Catalan. Her most recent collection *Mur* (Barcelona: Meteora, 2015) won the Premi de la Crítica de Poesia Catalana. Her new book of poems, *Viatge al centre*, is forthcoming in 2020.

**David Gullette** is Professor Emeritus of English at Simmons University in Boston. He has written two books about the confluence of poetry and revolution in Nicaragua: *Nicaraguan Peasant Poetry from Solentiname* and *iGASPAR!: A Spanish Poet/Priest in the Nicaraguan Revolution*. His poetry has been collected in *Questionable Shapes* (Cervena Barva Press). Gullette was one of the first editors of *Ploughshares* and is Literary Director of the Poets' Theatre in Boston.

**Mark Halliday** teaches at Ohio University. His book of poems *Losers Dream On* appeared in 2018 from the University of Chicago Press.

**Jeffrey Hanson's** work has appeared in *The Adroit Journal*, *Blue Collar Review*, *34th Parallel*, *Forge*, *Blood Orange*, *Houston Literary Review*, and *Poetry Pacific*.

**Jeffrey Hecker** is the author of *Rumble Seat* (San Francisco Bay Press, 2011) and the chapbooks *Hornbook* (Horse Less Press, 2012), *Instructions for the Orgy* (Sunnyoutside Press, 2013), and *Before He Let Them Guide Sleigh* (ShirtPocket Press, 2013). Recent work has appeared in *La Fovea*, *LEVELER*, *decomp*, *Entropy*, *BOAAT*, *Dream Pop Journal*, and *DELUGE*. He holds a degree from Old Dominion University. He's a fourth-generation Hawaiian American and he currently resides in Norfolk, Virginia, where he teaches at The Muse Writers Center.

**Troy Jollimore** is the author of three books of poems: *Tom Thomson in Purgatory* (2006), *At Lake Scugog* (2011), and *Syllabus of Errors* (2015). *Tom Thomson in Purgatory* won the National Book Critics Circle Award. As a philosopher he has authored *On Loyalty* and *Love's Vision*. He has published poems in the *New Yorker*, *McSweeney's*, *Poetry*, *The Believer*, and elsewhere, and has been the recipient of fellowships from the Stanford Humanities Center, the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, and the Guggenheim Foundation.

**Allison Joseph** lives in Carbondale, Illinois, where she is Professor of English and Director of the MFA Program in Creative Writing at Southern Illinois University. She serves as poetry editor of *Crab Orchard Review*. Her books and chapbooks include *What Keeps Us Here* (Amersand Press), *Soul Train* (Carnegie Mellon University Press), *In Every Seam* (University of Pittsburgh Press), *Worldly Pleasures* (Word Tech Communications), *Imitation of Life* (Carnegie Mellon UP), *Voice: Poems* (Mayapple Press), *My Father's Kites* (Steel Toe Books), *Trace Particles* (Backbone Press), *Little Epiphanies* (NightBallet Press), *Mercurial* (Mayapple Press), *Mortal Rewards* (White Violet Press), *Multitudes* (Word Poetry), *The Purpose of Hands* (Glass Lyre Press), *Double Identity* (Singing Bone Press) *Corporal Muse* (Sibling Rivalry) and *What Once You Loved* (Barefoot Muse Press). Her most recent full-length collection, *Confessions of a Barefaced Woman* was published by Red Hen Press in June 2018 and is the Gold/First Place winner of the 2019 Feathered Quill Award in Poetry and was a nominated work for the 2019 NAACP Image Award in Poetry. She is the literary partner and wife of poet and editor Jon Tribble.

**Jake Levine** is an American translator, poet, and scholar. He received both his BA and MFA from the University of Arizona and is currently Abd in a PhD program in Comparative Literature at Seoul National University. He works as an assistant professor of creative writing at Keimyung University and as a lecturer at the Literature Translation Institute of Korea. He is the assistant editor at *Acta Koreana* and the editor for the Korean poetry series Moon Country at Black Ocean.

**Lisa Lewis** has published six collections of poetry, most recently *Taxonomy of the Missing* (The Word Works, 2018) and *The Body Double* (Georgetown Review Press, 2016). She directs the creative writing program at Oklahoma State University and serves as editor-in-chief for the *Cimarron Review*. Recent work appears or is forthcoming in *Crazyhorse*, *Gulf Coast*, *South Dakota Review*, *New England Review*, *Four Way Review*, *Florida Review*, *Tampa Review*, and elsewhere.

**Kim Loomis-Bennett** is a life-long resident of Washington State. Her poems and book reviews have appeared in *The November 3rd Club*, *The Copperfield Review*, *Poet's Quarterly*, and *Hippocampus Magazine*, among others. Her most recent work is included in *The Far Field*. She used to teach at Centralia College, but is now a freelance writer and illustrator. She has an MA in Creative Writing from Wilkes University and an MFA with a concentration in poetry, memoir and editing. She lives in Lewis County with her family. Online, you can find her at <https://kloomisbennett.wixsite.com/website>

**George Looney's** books include the Red Mountain Press Poetry Award-winning *What Light Becomes: The Turner Variations*, the novel *Report from a Place of Burning*, co-winner of The Leapfrog Press Fiction Award, *Meditations Before the Windows Fail*, and *Monks Beginning to Waltz*, and the forthcoming *The Worst May Be Over*, winner of the Elixir Press Fiction Prize. He founded the BFA in Creative Writing Program at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College, where he is Distinguished Professor of English and Creative Writing and serves as editor-in-chief of the international literary journal *Lake Effect* and translation editor of *Mid-American Review*.

**William Lychack** is the author of a novel, *The Wasp Eater*, a collection of stories, *The Architect of Flowers*, and a forthcoming novel, *Cargill Falls*. His work has appeared in *The Best American Short Stories*, *The Pushcart Prize*, and on public radio's *This American Life*, and he currently teaches at the University of Pittsburgh.

**Erin Lyndal Martin** is a poet, fiction writer, essayist, and music journalist based in Madison, WI. Other excerpts from "book of shadows" have appeared in *Crab Fat*, *Yalobusha Review*, and a *glimpse of*.

**Glen A. Mazis** teaches philosophy and humanities at Penn State Harrisburg. He has published 80 poems in literary journals, including *Rosebud*, *The North American Review*, *Sou'wester*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Willow Review*, *The Atlanta Review*, *Reed Magazine* and *Asheville Poetry Review* (best of 1994-2004). His poetry collection, *The River Bends in Time*, was published by Anaphora Literary Press in March 2012 (nominated for a Pushcart Prize). He also writes books of cultural critique and philosophy, including his newest book, *Merleau-Ponty and the Face of the World: Silence, Ethics, Imagination and Poetic Ontology*, which appeared in October 2016 (State Univ. of New York Press). His poem won the 2019 New Orchard Press National Poetry contest [The Malovrh-Fenlon Prize].

**Gary McDowell's** *Aflame* won the 2019 White Pine Press Poetry Prize and is forthcoming in Fall 2020. He is also the author of *Caesura: Essays* (Otis Books/Seismicity Editions, 2017) and *Mysteries in a World that Thinks There Are None* (Burnside Review Press, 2016), among other books. His poems and essays have appeared in journals such as *American Poetry Review*, *The Nation*, *Ploughshares*, and *The Southern Review*.

**Campbell McGrath's** most recent book is *Nouns & Verbs: New and Selected Poems* (Ecco Press, 2019). He teaches in the MFA program at Florida International University in Miami.

**Reggie Mills'** work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Buffalo Almanack*, *The Impressment Gang*, *Wolves*, *After Happy Hour Review*, and *Maudlin House*, and has been nominated for the Journey Prize.

**Jenny Molberg** is the author of *Marvels of the Invisible* (winner of the Berkshire Prize, Tupelo Press, 2017) and *Refusal: Poems* (forthcoming, LSU Press). She coedited the *Unsung Masters Series* collection *Adelaide Crapsey: On the Life & Work of an American Master*. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Ploughshares*, *Gulf Coast*, *The Missouri Review*, *Poetry International*, *Boulevard*, *Copper Nickel*, *The Adroit Journal*, *Best New Poets*, and other publications. She is the recipient of a 2019-2020 Creative Writing Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as scholarships and fellowships from the Sewanee Writers Conference, the C.D. Wright Conference, and Vermont Studio Center.

**Lisa Morrow** is a Sydney, Australia-born sociologist, author and creative/opinion essay writer who lives in Istanbul, Turkey. Her books include essay collections *Inside Out in Istanbul: Making Sense of the City* and *Exploring Turkish Landscapes: Crossing Inner Boundaries*, and memoir *Waiting for the Tulips to Bloom: Adrift in Istanbul*. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *English Kills*, *The Independent UK*, *The Smart Set*, *Hyperallergic*, *New York Times*, *Meanjin* and elsewhere.

**Miguel Murphy** is the author most recently of *Detainee*. He lives in Southern California where he teaches at Santa Monica California.

**Martin Ott** is the author of nine books of poetry and fiction, including *Fake News Poems* (BlazeVOX Books, 2019). His work has appeared in 20 anthologies and more than 200 magazines, including *Antioch Review*, *Epoch*, *Harvard Review*, *North American Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Zyzyva*.

**Sheila Packa** is a writer and teacher who lives in Duluth, Minnesota. Her work has been published in *Entropy*, *Split Rock Journal*, *Unbroken Journal*, *Rock & Sling*, *Cortland Review*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *Ploughshares*, and several other publications. She's received two Loft McKnight Fellowships, Arrowhead Regional Arts Council grants, and a grant from the Finlandia Foundation. Four poems of hers were used by Helsinki composer Olli Kortekangas for "Migrations," a cantata premiered by the Minnesota Orchestra in February 2016 and the Lahti Symphony Orchestra in Finland in 2018.

**Aimee Parkison** is the author of five books of fiction, including *Girl Zoo*, *Refrigerated Music for a Gleaming Woman*, *Woman with Dark Horses*, *The Innocent Party*, and *The Petals of Your Eyes*. Parkison has won the FC2 Catherine Doctorow Innovative Fiction Prize, a Christopher Isherwood Fellowship, and the *North American Review* Kurt Vonnegut Fiction Prize. She teaches in the creative writing program at Oklahoma State University. More information about Parkison and her writing can be found at [www.aimeeparkison.com](http://www.aimeeparkison.com).

**Caroline Plasket's** work has been published or is forthcoming in *The Cortland Review*, *The Atticus Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Compose*, *Barren Magazine*, *Orange Blossom Review*, and *Stirring*, among others. She was a fall 2016 mentee in the AWP Writer to Writer Program. She lives in Northern Kentucky with her family.

**Kimberly Ann Priest** is the author of *Parrot Flower* (forthcoming from Glass Poetry Press, 2020-21) and *White Goat Black Sheep* (FLP, 2018). She is a winner of a 2019 Heartland Poetry Prize from New American Press and her work has appeared in several journals including *The Berkeley Poetry Review* and *The New Delta Review*. A graduate of the MFA program at New England College and former book reviewer for *New Pages* (2015-19), she is currently an Assistant Professor of First-Year Writing at Michigan State University and serves as a poetry editor for the *Nimrod International Journal of Prose and Poetry*. You can find her work at [kimberlyannpriest.com](http://kimberlyannpriest.com).

**Michael Robins** is the author of four collections, including *In Memory of Brilliance & Value* (Saturnalia Books, 2015) and *People You May Know* (Saturnalia Books, 2020). He lives and teaches in Chicago.

**Anthony Robinson** lives in rural Oregon. His poems and essays have appeared in *Drunk in a Midnight Choir*, *Gulf Coast*, *The Iowa Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Typo*, *Verse*, *ZYZZYVA*, and elsewhere. His full-length book of poems will be published by Reality Beach in 2020.

**Dana Roeser's** fourth book, *All Transparent Things Need Thundershirts*, won the Wilder Prize at Two Sylvias Press and was published in September 2019. Her earlier books won the Juniper Prize and Morse Prize (twice). Recent poems appeared, or are forthcoming, in *The Indianapolis Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *GMR (Green Mountains Review) Online*, *Cimarron Review*, and *Pushcart Prize XLIII* (2019).

**Shenandoah Sowash's** work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Gargoyle*, *The Collagist*, *Menacing Hedge*, *PANK*, *Smartish Pace*, and elsewhere. She has received fellowships from the Bread Loaf Writers Conference, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts (VCCA), the Kimmel Nelson Harding Center for the Arts, and the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

**Page Hill Starzinger's** second poetry collection, *Vortex Street*, is coming from Barrow Street Press in April 2020. Her first book, *Vestigial*, selected by Lynn Emanuel to win the Barrow Street Book Prize, was published in Fall 2013. Her chapbook, *Unshelter*, chosen by Mary Jo Bang as winner of the Noemi contest was published in 2009. Her poems have appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Fence*, *West Branch*, *Pleiades*, *Volt*, and others. Starzinger was Copy Director at *Aveda* for almost twenty years, and co-authored *A Bouquet from the Met* (Abrams, 1998). She lives in New York City.



**Janyce Stefan-Cole** is the author of two novels, *Hollywood Boulevard* and *The Detective's Garden* (Unbridled Books). In addition to serving as books editor for *Freewilliamsburg.com*, short fiction, essay, review and freelance journalism have appeared in: *The Open Space* issue 21, *Things That Matter*; a story, "Conversation with a Tree," received the *Knock Literary Magazine* Eco-lit prize, and was republished in the anthology, *Being Human: Call of the Wild*; Editions Bibliotekos. Other venues include: *Fiction Writers Review*, *Pank Magazine*, *The Healing Muse*, *Main Street Rag*, *FLYPmedia*, *American Book Review*, and the anthology, *Dick For A Day*; Villard Books.

**Alex Stolis** lives in Minneapolis; he has had poems published in numerous journals. Recent chapbooks include *Justice for all*, published by Conversation Paperpress (UK) based on the last words of Texas Death Row inmates. Also, *Without Dorothy, There is No Going Home* from ELJ Publications. Other releases include an e-chapbook, *From an iPod found in Canal Park; Duluth, MN*, from Right Hand Pointing and *Left of the Dial* from corrupt press. The full length collection, *Postcards from the Knife Thrower* was runner up for the Moon City Poetry Prize in 2017. His chapbook, *Perspectives on a Crime Scene* was recently released by Grey Border books and a full length collection *Pop. 1280*, is forthcoming from Grey Border books in 2019.

**David Swerdlow's** poems have appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *The Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, *Poetry*, *Poetry Northwest*, *American Literary Review*, and elsewhere. He has published two books of poetry with WordTech Editions: *Bodies on Earth* (2010) and *Small Holes in the Universe* (2003). His debut novel, *Television Man*, is now available from Czymate Productions. Swerdlow teaches literature and creative writing at Westminster College in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania.

**Leonard A. Temme** is a research neuropsychologist in a government laboratory. He studied writing most extensively with Marie Ponsot, Sue Walker, Josh Davis and Kristina Darling. In addition to his professional publications, his writing has appeared in numerous literary and small presses. He served as Poet Laureate of North West Florida between 1989 and 1992.

**Daniel Uncapher** is a PhD student at the University of Utah with an MFA from Notre Dame, where he was a Sparks Fellow. A disabled bisexual from North Mississippi, his work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Sun*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Tin House*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, *Penn Review*, and others.

**John Sibley Williams** is the author of *As One Fire Consumes Another* (Orison Poetry Prize, 2019), *Skin Memory* (Backwaters Prize, University of Nebraska Press, 2019), *Summon* (JuxtaProse Chapbook Prize, 2019), *Disinheritance*, and *Controlled Hallucinations*. A twenty-two-time Pushcart nominee, John is the winner of numerous awards, including the Wabash Prize for Poetry, Philip Booth Award, Phyllis Smart-Young Prize, and Laux/Millar Prize. He serves as editor of *The Inflectionist Review* and works as a freelance poetry editor and literary agent. Previous publishing credits include: *Yale Review*, *North American Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Southern Review*, *Sycamore Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Saranac Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *TriQuarterly*, and various anthologies. Visit him at <https://www.johnsibleywilliams.com>.

**Felicia Zamora's** books include *Quotient* (forthcoming, Tinderbox Editions), *Body of Render*, 2018 Benjamin Saltman Award winner, *Instrument of Gaps, & in Open, Marvel*, and *Of Form & Gather*, 2016 Andrés Montoya Poetry Prize winner. A 2019 CantoMundo fellow, she won the 2015 Tomaž Šalamun Prize and was Poet Laureate of Fort Collins, CO. Her poems appear or are forthcoming in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Boston Review* online, *The Nation*, *Versé Daily*, *West Branch*, and others. She is an editor for *Colorado Review* and programs manager for the Center for Imagination in the Borderlands at Arizona State University. She lives in Phoenix, Arizona.

**Micah Zevin** is a librarian poet living in Jackson Heights, Queens, N.Y. with his wife, a playwright. He has recently published articles and poems at *The Otter*, *the Newtown Literary Journal and Blog*, *Poetry and Politics*, *Reality Beach*, *Jokes Review*, *Post (Blank)*, *the American Journal of Poetry*, *The Tower Journal*, *Five2OneMagazine* and the What Rough Beast Series at Indolent Books, *Maudlin House* and currently has two poems in the special *Heavy Feather Review* issue called *The Future*. He created/curates an open mic/poetry prompt workshop called The Risk of Discovery Reading Series now at Blue Cups in Woodside, Queens, N.Y.