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NANCY WILLARD

A FIELD SYMPOSIUM
When Nancy Willard died in February, the New York Times obituary rightfully praised her as a novelist and writer of children’s books, but it omitted any examination of her achievement as a poet for adults. We hope this symposium will help redress the balance. FIELD was perhaps especially sensitive to the oversight since Willard played such a significant role in the history of this magazine. Three of her poems first appeared in #12 (Spring 1975), and over the following four decades we were happy to publish nearly three dozen more. We reviewed her important 1982 volume Household Tales of Moon and Water, and she contributed illuminating essays to our symposia on Randall Jarrell (1986) and Emily Dickinson (1996), which were later reprinted in Poets Reading.

There is in fact a good deal of both Jarrell and Dickinson in Nancy Willard’s work: combine Jarrell’s keen-eyed, incisive attention to detail with Dickinson’s visionary wit, and you might get a poet something like Willard. But through the course of a long and varied career her voice remained distinctly her own: wry, slightly detached, often balanced between the lyric and the narrative, between childlike innocence and darker experience. Storytelling was central to her poems: the structures of myths, fairy tales, and fables recur, as does the sense that such narrative modes are necessary ideas of order in a world that frequently seems unstable and haunted. Willard is regularly celebrated for the wonder and sense of discovery she brings to her subjects; perhaps less often noticed is her awareness that such pleasures are evanescent. It is precisely because, as she says in a poem about snow, “Whatever I try to hold perishes” that the moments of joy are so unexpected and rewarding.

Above all, Willard is a poet of radiant vision, who suggests that even the most ordinary objects, when regarded with sustained attention, will be revealed as vital and mysterious. Poems like “Saint Pumpkin” or “The Exodus of Peaches” are exhilarating in their metaphorical reach, one brilliant image giving way to another in a constantly surprising chain of association. The truly remarkable thing is that this never feels like showing off; rather, it’s as though the
poet is simply paying attention long enough for the inherent strangeness of things—or, alternatively, their essential truth—to shine through. Revelation seems an act more of empathy than of invention. Nancy Willard was one of the rare contemporary poets most capable of Keatsian negative capability, of opening herself to the world. The following essays, on poems published between 1967 and 1989, deftly explore a variety of ways in which her keen attention brought the unseen world to light.
THE INSECTS

They pass like a warning of snow,
the dragonfly, mother of millions,
the scarab, the shepherd spider,
the bee. Our boundaries break
on their jeweled eyes,
blind as reflectors.
The black beetle
under the microscope wears the
blue of Chartres. The armored
mantis, a tank in clover,
folds its wings like a flawless
inlay of wood, over and over.

“There is something about insects
that does not belong to the habits
of our globe,” said Maeterlinck,
touching the slick
upholstery of the spider,
the watchspring and cunning
tongue of the butterfly, blown out
like a paper bugle. Their humming
warns us of sickness, their silence
of honey and frost. Asleep
in clapboards and rafters,
their bodies keep

the cost of our apples and wool.
A hand smashes their wings,
tearing the veined
landscape of winter trees.
In the slow oozing of our days,
who can avoid remembering
their silken tents on the air,
the spiders wearing their eggs
like pearls, born on muscles
    of silk, the pulse of a rose, baiting
the moth that lives for three hours,
    lives only for mating?

Under a burning glass, the creature
    we understood disappears. The dragonfly
is a hawk, the roach
    cocks his enormous legs at your acre,
eyes like turrets piercing
    eons of chitin and shale. Drummers
under the earth, the cicadas
    have waited for seventeen summers
to break their shell,
    shape of your oldest fear
of a first world
    of monsters. We are not here.
Unpretentious, anything but dour and suspicious, Nancy Willard’s poetry shows us a mind grasping for inspired images, and taking pleasure in that grasping, until the object of contemplation escapes human ingenuity. Often her poems are lenses focused on the natural world. Even a brief catalogue of her titles will draw up references that reflect her interest in the nonhuman: tortoises, newts, lobsters, geese, fruit bats, jellyfish. Her sensual intelligence, what amounts to the freshening quality of her attentiveness, animates the plush, tactile quality of her lines. With her respect for and attraction to animals and plants, she is an ecological poet of sorts, a naturalist mapping the way the human mind moves toward the non-human through metaphor.

"The Insects" enacts the drama of making sense, and making the sensory in words. She quotes Maeterlinck, "There is something about insects / that does not belong to the habits / of our globe." Implicitly, the poem poses a question: How should we think about what seems, upon examination, to be utterly alien to us? Surely it’s not uncommon to align insects with the craftsmanship of humans, but Willard charts a destination for consciousness that is both sly and expansive—finally rendering us secondary to the insects we’ve observed: "Our boundaries break / on their jeweled eyes, / blind as reflectors." In terms of intricate and ingenious human artistry, insects enter the poem in metaphors that range from the monumental to the flimsy: Chartres, wood inlays, upholstery, watch springs, a paper bugle. The poem’s shape, with its serrated edges of indents and exdents, reinforces her focus on artifice. The poem impresses us as a made thing, unfussy and yet intricate, each gear in place.

In a sudden eruption of violence in the third stanza, a hand crushes an insect wing. The smashed wing becomes "the veined / landscape of winter trees"—stretching toward the immense and multiple, a drama of scale. Despite our ability to alternately savor and abuse, to “smash” living things in the natural world of which we are a part, Willard shows the unerring capacity of that world to act upon us. After she aestheticizes insects by seeing them in light of our own designs, she pivots to consider their capacities to communicate with
us by noting “Their humming / warns us of sickness, their silence / of honey and frost.” She then focuses on the artistry of insects, their ornate tents, their pearl-like eggs. In the final stanza she considers the human urge to destroy insects, drawing up threatening images of turrets, a hawk, cicadas breaking through the earth, a prehistoric “first world / of monsters.” In the heat of “a burning glass,” we set fire to what we don’t understand and fear; we destroy the alien, although some insect species—not all—will ultimately escape, the first and the last survivalists.

The poem has swerved from appraising the beauty and irreducible strangeness of insects until we intuit a prior world, before clockwork artifacts, resistant to language and a provocation to the imagination. The poem appeared in Willard’s 1967 collection Skin of Grace, decades before we learned about the colony collapse of bees, and the direct implications of such devastation on the prospects for human survival.

What allows “The Insects” a final unsettling note: the closing statement, “We are not here.” We are displaced from not only the poem but from our own sense of primacy. The more we study other life forms, the more their uncanniness registers upon us, and the more our attempts at comprehension are challenged. Science doesn’t domesticate the facts for our convenience. One small recent example: Research published in The Science of Nature in March 2017 claimed that spiders eat as much prey as do humans or whales. According to the researchers’ calculations, spiders—our emissaries and companions—annually consume the combined weight of all humans on the globe.

“The Insects” seems to be about misapprehension as much as apprehension. Figures of speech, particularly the metaphor, focus attention but finally fall away, creating our own displacement. Each metaphor suggests what is only partly perceptible, exposing gaping distances as reflected images escalate toward their own undoing. A common argument presents metaphor as a form of failure—the swerve from the actual, the clutching after connections, the conjuring and capitalizing on the attempt to draw one reality into the sphere of another. If metaphor is a linguistic net of sorts, it’s a torn one. What “The Insects” does is to reveal that as observers, makers of structures of resemblance, we may be cast out of our own observations: “We are
not here." By first creating intricate images in the stained glass windows of her stanzas—and then acknowledging our expulsion from what we've observed, Willard allows for far more than the high sheen of inventive description. The poem's abrupt final statement pushes us away—"We are not here"—from assumptions about our own authority. We cannot deny other forms of life, alien and powerful, existing before humans and after us, just as Emily Dickinson couldn't deny such power when she summoned another sort of nightmare: "I heard a Fly buzz—when I died—."
WHEN THERE WERE TREES

I can remember when there were trees,
great tribes of spruces who deckled themselves in light,
beeches buckled in pewter, meeting like Quakers,
the golden birch, all cutwork satin,
courtesan of the mountains; the paper birch
trying all summer to take off its clothes
like the swaddlings of the newborn.

The hands of a sassafras blessed me.
I saw maples fanning the fire in their stars,
heard the coins of the aspens rattling like teeth,
saw cherry trees spraying fountains of light,
smelled the wine my heel pressed from ripe apples,
saw a thousand planets bobbing like bells
on the sleeve of the sycamore, chestnut, and lime.

The ancients knew that a tree is worthy of worship.
A few wise men from their tribes broke through the sky,
climbing past worlds to come and the rising moon
on the patient body of the tree of life,
and brought back the souls of the newly slain,
no bigger than apples, and dressed the tree
as one of themselves and danced.

Even the conquerors of this country
lifted their eyes and found the trees
more comely than gold: Bright green trees,
the whole land so green it is pleasure to look on it,
and the greatest wonder to see the diversity.
During that time, I walked among trees,
the most beautiful things I had ever seen.*
Watching the shadows of trees, I made peace with mine. Their forked darkness gave motion to morning light. Every night the world fell to the shadows, and every morning came home, the dogwood floating its petals like moons on a river of air, the oak kneeling in wood sorrel and fern, the willow washing its hair in the stream.

And I saw how the logs from the mill floated downstream, saw otters and turtles that rode them, I never thought I heard the saws whine in the woods I never thought men were stronger than trees. I never thought those tribes would join the buffalo and the whale, the leopard, the seal, the wolf, and the folk of this country who knew how to sing them.

Nothing I ever saw washed off the sins of the world so well as the first show dropping on trees. We shoveled the pond clear and skated under their branches, our voices muffled in their huge silence. The trees were always listening to something else. They didn’t hear the beetle with the hollow tooth grubbing for riches, gnawing for empires, for gold.

Already the trees are a myth, half gods, half giants in whom nobody believes. But I am the oldest woman on earth, and I can remember when there were trees.

*Adapted from the journals of Christopher Columbus, as rendered in William Carlos Williams’s In the American Grain.*
Cynthia Hogue

THE TREES OF A LIFE

Among the distinguishing aspects of Nancy Willard’s poetry is her particular reverence for—as well as intimate knowledge of—the natural world, including people as part of Nature’s ecosystem. Her poetry offers a link between an ancient tradition of pastoral poetry, in which her poems are rooted, and the postmodern pastoral poem, as exemplified by a recent anthology such as The Arcadia Project. In Bishop’s (and Dickinson’s) wake, Willard often makes remarkably unironic use of such personifying figural devices as anthropomorphism, which sketches flora and fauna alike with human features. A poem like “When There Were Trees,” for instance, which opens with a catalog of many native North American tree species, familiarizes them wittily, even at first light-heartedly for readers. Spruce tribes “[deckle] themselves in light”; beeches, “buckled in pewter, [meet] like Quakers”; the golden birch frills like a “courtesan of the mountains.” These descriptions feature intricate musical patterns as well—the internal slant rhyme of “deckled” and “buckled,” for example—and if they delight us (and they do), it is in good part for their playful inventiveness. We have entered a world struck by earthly wonder before we even finish reading the first stanza.

But we don’t stay there for long. It is a short step to encountering something more serious, akin to cosmic wonder. “The hands of a sassafras blessed me,” the speaker continues, with a sonically allusive undertone hissing along the branch of the line. “I saw maples fanning the fire in their stars” and “a thousand planets bobbing like bells / on the sleeve of the sycamore, chestnut, and lime.” Those bobbing plosives, like the sibilant sassafras, gesture toward an older story. The figurative language Willard employs to evoke the moment in which a branch of a sassafras tree brushes the speaker’s arm subtly renders the encounter sacred. The contrast of scale and diction—the thousand bobbing planets on the sleeves of the trees—enacts the intersection of heavenly and earthly domains. The next stanza asserts, “The ancients knew that a tree is worthy of worship.” Transcending this world to bring back the souls of the dead “no bigger than apples,” they danced with “the patient body of the tree of life.” Willard’s sustained use of anthropomorphism and redolent music in
these opening stanzas help turn the poem to myth. We’ve been in a prelapsarian world from which we are about to be expelled.

History and experience enter the poem with the arrival of “the conquerors,” whose quoted language—drawn from Columbus’ journals as translated in William Carlos Williams’ In the American Grain—interrupts the poem’s otherwise smooth lyric surface. Although the conquerors also look in wonder at the “Bright green trees,” it is telling that the figural devices disappear, the lines flatten into direct statement, and the trees, far from being alive to the invaders, are objectified. As Columbus wrote, they were “the most beautiful things I had ever seen” (italics Willard’s, emphasis mine). The speaker’s appreciation of trees contrasts with the country’s rapacious economic history, beginning with the arrival of the conquerors, which Marianne Moore once bluntly characterized as the mind of “plunder.” Once the “tribes” of trees were objectified as things, they were commodified. As the speaker recalls first hearing the “whine” of saws in the woods, she reaches the limits of her imagination, literally the unimaginable. She laments, “I never thought those tribes would join / the buffalo and the whale, the leopard, the seal, the wolf, / and the folk of this country who knew how to sing them.”

Similarly, she reaches her experiential limits, noting that she has never seen anything that “washed off the sins of the world / so well as the first snow dropping on trees.” Although circumstance has forced her past such limits, the process has had nothing to do with acquiring a better understanding of the tribe of trees but rather of their demise. Following the sonic trail to this mournful insight—the alliterative sound that tethers the “whine” of the saws to “woods,” “whale,” “wolf” and “washed”—foregrounds the tragic irony of the poem’s ecological conclusion. Although the speaker herself remembers trees in loving detail, they have disappeared in her lifetime. As she tells us, “Already the trees are a myth, / ... in whom nobody believes” (emphasis mine). Here, by way of hopeful (or desperate) gesture, the speaker reanimates trees by subtly returning to the use of anthropomorphism.

But something significant has changed. The status of trees was never in question earlier in the poem, but at the poem’s end, the personifying figure occurs in a statement that denies the very existence
of trees and of anyone being left who believes in them. The speaker, moreover, is basing her authority on the claim that she is "the oldest woman on earth" who "remembers when there were trees." That statement questions rather than confirms her claim. In emptying out the speaker's authority even as she avers it, Willard exposes the limits of any human claim to know another living species. Anthropomorphism invites us to identify with another even as the device reveals the essential artifice of the gesture. But is the feeling artificial? I don't believe Willard is saying that. The poem's closing is strikingly unlyrical (the poem's music disappears with the trees). Willard intensifies the fact of the loss of trees "whom nobody believes" in, both because of the feeling of knowing what has been lost and also the excruciating revelation that, whatever our feelings, we now can never know trees. It is no comfort to realize that we never could.
1. Do gorillas have birthdays?
   Yes. Like the rainbow, they happen.
   Like the air, they are not observed.

2. Do butterflies make a noise?
   The wire in the butterfly’s tongue
   hums gold.
   Some men hear butterflies
   even in winter.

3. Are they part of our family?
   They forgot us, who forgot how to fly.

4. Who tied my navel? Did God tie it?
   God made the thread: O man, live forever!
   Man made the knot: enough is enough.

5. If I drop my tooth in the telephone
   will it go through the wires and bite someone’s ear?
   I have seen earlobes pierced by a tooth of steel.
   It loves what lasts.
   It does not love flesh.
   It leaves a ring of gold in the wound.

6. If I stand on my head
   will the sleep in my eye roll up into my head?
   Does the dream know its own father?
   Can bread go back to the field of its birth?

7. Can I eat a star?
   Yes, with the mouth of time
   that enjoys everything.
8. Could we Xerox the moon?
   *This is the first commandment:*

   *I am the moon, thy moon.*  
   *Thou shalt have no other moons before thee.*

9. Who invented water?
   *The hands of the air, that wanted to wash each other.*

10. What happens at the end of numbers?
    *I see three men running toward a field.*  
    *At the edge of the tall grass, they turn into light.*

11. Do the years ever run out?
    *God said, I will break time's heart.*  
    *Time ran down like an old phonograph.*  
    *It lay flat as a carpet.*  
    *At rest on its threads, I am learning to fly.*
Dore Kiesselbach

EATING STARS

Nancy Willard gave up full-time teaching (and tenure) at Vassar in 1973 to spend more time with her two-year-old son, and with her writing. First published in FIELD #19, “Questions My Son Asked Me, Answers I Never Gave Him” arrived five years later, presenting her reasons and validating her choice. That which she sacrificed income and status for—time—is present, explicitly and implicitly, throughout the poem. Time is intrinsic to the poem’s rhetorical structure, and appears onstage as a subject. Beginning narrowly, with the commencement of time for an individual (gorilla), the poem ends with a figuration of the end of time, per se.

Against this tick-tock backdrop, Willard presents an act of recollection, a pushing back against time. A mother (Willard could be speaking for any parent and child but I’ll credit the poem’s intimation of autobiography) recalls a series of questions once posed by her son. The questions are those of a young mind seeking to learn and grasp the world, fresh with innate wonder and a logic not yet prized from imagination. Like verbal pollinators, they fly from point to point, denizens of dreamtime. Willard’s real-time answers are not recorded but we can speculate. Efficient, factually-accurate answers from a harried parent would have, in most cases, involved a no: apes do not have birthdays; water was not invented; the moon cannot be Xeroxed; etc.

For a writer as predisposed to affirm and encourage superluminary thinking in children as Willard proved to be, such negation would not have felt sufficient. Something important about the child’s questions has gone unanswered; something in them calls for a deeper response, a yes.

But the kind of imaginative responsiveness required to offer a truthful yes to questions like “Can I eat a star?” is not instantly available to the parent anymore; only the child effortlessly inhabits that realm—the child alone can speak its true language. That a stressed parent must (and should), even at the price of significant life-adjustments, work to regain familiarity with the dreamtime is, I believe, the central holding of the poem. Meanwhile the vibrant questions linger, awaiting reciprocally-alive answers that must be searched for and found by the adult in her art.
In the poem, flight is a metaphor for unencumbered fantasy (a word that traces back to “making visible” and that Willard treated with high respect\(^1\)). To fully engage the child’s soaring inquisitiveness, the parent must (re)discover a way to fly. Obligingly, Willard offers us complementary instances of flight being, first, lost to humans (Section 3), then found again (Section 11). In the former, in response to a question about the kinship of butterflies and people, the mother distinguishes between the taxonomic orders not on the basis of morphology but of a condition or state of mind. Flying, in the sense at issue, was once freely available to us but we “forgot how.” It is a cultural given that this forgetting is the price of growing up, of gaining the kind of mature critical intelligence necessary to survival.

But in the final section of the poem, Willard pushes back against that received truth, emphasizing deliberate, conscious renewal of what has been lost. Time’s sway has been stilled; it is no longer a coxswain calling out the strokes of daily life, but laid “flat as a carpet” upon which the author rests. In such a timeless environment—in Willard’s case perhaps achieved by adjusting her teaching workload—flight of primordial fancy can be relearned. The legendary resonance of the flying carpet trope suggests that not only is it possible for adults to regain such imaginative vitality, but also culturally important that they do so; great works depend upon it.

But we aren’t in Disneyland; the adult knows that time is not ultimately escapable. Throughout this exuberant affirmation of regenerative capacity darker notes sound. We hear one in the title’s “Never.” The parent has succeeded in summoning responses that circumvent reflexive negation and affirm and encourage the call of her son’s unbounded curiosity. But these responses are not, in fact, for the child at all. The adult’s path back to dreamtime is through artifice; the adult can fly only by making an image of flight. The mediated utterance, the poem, cannot be spoken back to the child, whose experience remains unmediated. This is the heartbreak in the line “God said, I will break time’s heart.” As is her way, Willard plays these sobering notes so lightly that we—the strangers who benefit from a mother’s life-changing need to relate authentically to her own child—barely hear them at all.

\(^1\) In Alberta Turner’s 45 Contemporary Poems (Longman, 1985) Willard writes “Good fantasy is not an easy refuge. It’s a bridge that leads us back to our ancestors, the way dreams do.”
How the Hen Sold Her Eggs to the Stingy Priest

An egg is a grand thing for a journey.

It will make you a small meal on the road
and a shape most serviceable to the hand

for darning socks, and for barter
a purse of gold opens doors anywhere.

If I wished for a world better than this one
I would keep, in an egg till it was wanted,

the gold earth floating on a clear sea.
If I wished for an angel, that would be my way,

the wings in gold waiting to wake,
the feet in gold waiting to walk,

and the heart that no one believed in
beating and beating the gold alive.
Beginning with its cartoon-evoking title, Nancy Willard’s “How the Hen Sold Her Eggs to the Stingy Priest” moves immediately to a sales pitch, and from thence to layers of lyrical reflection. The title reveals the outcome of the story, but it doesn’t prepare us for the process that makes it happen. This is one clever hen!

In the first five lines, the appeal is economic: You can’t afford my eggs? Let me tell you: “An egg is a grand thing for a journey.” Following the insistently spondaic “grand thing,” the hen’s voice becomes a little arch (“a shape most serviceable to the hand”), which adds to the comic effect; but it’s clearly the voice of a salesperson, referencing the most basic needs of the traveler—food, clothing, the shelter of opened doors—even as it moves from the comically modest (a darning egg!) to the grand: “a purse of gold.”

If the purse appeals to the priest’s stinginess, the rest of the poem references his vocation. The “vision” of the next three lines is of “a world better than this one,” but the hen isn’t thinking of heaven. No longer selling her wares directly, she becomes reflective, as if she’s forgotten the priest—though of course she hasn’t. A more complex and lyrical style reflects the shift, beginning with the subordinate clause and continuing in the beautifully inverted syntax of “I would keep, in an egg till it was wanted, // the gold earth floating on a clear sea.”

The “gold” that closes the first two arguments, referencing coin and yolk, acquires more layers in the final five lines of the poem. Echoing the previous sentence, the hen, her appeal now unambiguously religious (“If I wished for an angel”), extends her vision in language that is rich in spiritual and poetic association. Her “angel” is of course the chicken in the yellow egg yolk; but it’s difficult not to see as well the gold-adorned angels of Christian art in the penultimate couplet—partly because of the language itself, with its repetition, assonance, alliteration, and pararhyme: “the wings in gold waiting to wake, / the feet in gold waiting to walk.”

The final couplet is even more allusive. The beating “heart” belongs, like the wings and feet, to the embryonic chicken, which is brought to life in the last line: the priest is being offered a biological
miracle, not a spiritual one. But fused with the beating heart is the process of beating gold into gold leaf—to “aery thinness,” as John Donne has it. Since beaten gold doesn’t turn up much in contemporary parlance, that process may remotely evoke the Hebrew Bible, with its “beaten gold” shields and candlesticks, and we’re surely in religious territory with “the heart no one believed in.” The question of belief is clearly being superimposed on the evolution of life, as in Who would believe you could get a chicken from an egg? (And how then not to wonder which came first!) But are we also invited to think of the Sacred Heart of Jesus? Whether or not, this final overlay of the religious on the biological—of gold leaf on egg yolk—is the poem’s most stunning moment.

The remarkable movement from the comic to the sublime occurs in just thirteen lines—fourteen, if you count the title; the primary turn, at the first “If I wished for,” suggests an inverted sonnet form, with the sestet occurring at the beginning rather than the end. The last twelve lines are in couplets, with a nod toward rhyme in the ending vowels or consonants, culminating in the pararhymes of wake / walk, and believed in / alive.

More tradition, then, in the form; perhaps the priest would like that. But the real wonder of the poem is its ability to transmute a mundane and potentially silly situation into poetic gold—pure gold, one might say, adding yet another layer.
A WREATH TO THE FISH

Who is this fish, still wearing its wealth,
flat on my drainboard, dead asleep,
it's suit of mail proof only against the stream?
What is it to live in a stream,
to dwell forever in a tunnel of cold,
ever to leave your shining birthsuit,
ever to spend your inheritance of thin coins?
And who is the stream, who lolls all day
in an unmade bed, living on nothing but weather,
singing, a little mad in the head,
opening her apron to shells, carcasses, crabs,
eyeglasses, the lines of fishermen begging for
news from the interior—oh, who are these lines
that link a big sky to a small stream
and go down for great things:
the cold muscle of the trout,
the shining scrawl of the eel in a difficult passage,
hooked—but who is this hook, this cunning
and faithful fanatic who will not let go
but holds the false bait and the true worm alike
and tears the fish, yet gives it up to the basket
in which it will ride to the kitchen
of someone important, perhaps the Pope
who rejoices that his cook has found such a fish
and blesses it and eats it and rises, saying,
"Children, what is it to live in the stream,
day after day, and come at last to the table,
transfigured with spices and herbs,
a little martyr, a little miracle;
children, children, who is this fish?"
WHO IS THE STREAM?

You can't step into the same river even once.
—Attributed to Cratylus, as quoted in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*

We, little fishes, after the image of our Ichthys, Jesus Christ, are born in the water.
—Second-century theologian Tertullian

The form of Nancy Willard's poem "A Wreath to the Fish," despite the whimsical play of its questioning, acts like a gentle but stern sensei discouraging attachment. If, while reading, we become overly caught up in following one figure—fish, stream, hook—the stream-water of this poem's continual shifting keeps knocking it onward and away from us. A new topic floats up.

Curiosity creates this poem's momentum, running so rapidly that nonattachment comes across as a kind of freewheeling giddiness rather than a strict discipline. "What is it to live in the stream?" the speaker wonders first; quickly that question transforms to "Who is the stream?" "What is it?" is an interesting way to ask "what is it like to live in the stream?" or "what is the nature of living in the stream?"

The poem itself seems to seek to enact the sensation of living in the stream—not just the literal stream but the figurative stream or "flow" of equanimity or openness to shifts in fortune and/or form. How does it feel? The next question "who is the stream?" is a kind of asking "who is change?" Does change have a self? Where does the self go when swept up in flow?

I love how the stream does have a self, here, if a sloppy one ("who lolls all day / in an unmade bed")—and a gender ("opening her apron"). That somewhat suggestively open apron, both wild and domestic, nurturing and daring, holds "shells, carcasses, crabs, / eyeglasses...." The stream's openness to holding—indeed, its somewhat reckless lack of discernment regarding what humans might view as worth holding—can also be read as a feminine-heroic trait. In Ursula LeGuin's "Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction" she describes an alternative to what she calls "the Story of the Ascent of Man the Hero." In that piece she envisions "[a] narrative conceived as carrier
bag/belly/box/house/medicine bundle [containing] necessary elements of a whole which itself cannot be characterized either as conflict or as harmony, since its purpose is neither resolution nor stasis but continuing process.” Who is the stream if not “continuing process”?

Even change is not immune to change. There is an element of choice in Willard’s characterization of the stream’s active apron-opening, but there’s a choicelessness to the way the stream is vulnerable to the “lines of fishermen begging for / news from the interior”—even as there’s a vulnerability to the fishermen’s own “begging.” Soon those lines are going to “link a big sky to a small stream,” changing the stream by creating an intersection. Even the stream is not the biggest container. Even the fishermen with their rods and bait (perhaps more the tools of LeGuin’s “Man the Hero”) can only control part of the action, can only access fragments of the big depths—but it is their same partially-accessing lines that connect the stream to the “big sky” as the trout fly out of the water. The stream and the fishermen, then, participate in an interdependence by way of the lines.

“Who are these lines?” And here the poet winks because there’s an ars poetica hiding out in the stream with the eyeglasses. One can’t read “lines” without thinking of writing. Linking the big sky to the small stream, after all, is one thing a poet tries to do. The poet, too, wants to “go down for great things.” But what does it mean to ask “who” these written “lines” are? Why not “where do these lines come from?,” or “who wrote these lines?” For one thing, Willard’s repetition of the same pronoun throughout the poem acts as a linking tool equalizing the various entities to which her attention (and ours) turns. For another, its owl-like chant of “who, who” gently interrogates static selfhood, as if we should be asking at every turn if we still know ourselves and each other.

But who are these lines? Well, these lines aren’t anybody; they’re not human, as the stream is not human. It’s as if the voice of this poem only knows how to ask after human accomplishments, can’t quite take in the feats of the nonhuman. The answer keeps evading the questioner; more questions, instead, arise. The questioner wants to get to the bottom of it. If we could pin down these lines, if we
could catch Willard’s “shining scrawl of the eel in a difficult pas-
sage,” we could own it. But it seems we don’t even control our own
hook. Even the hook gets a “who” pronoun, Willard’s stand-in for
sovereignty apart from human controlling. “Who is this hook?” The
hook does not just carry out the fisherman’s casting; it has its own
agency. Willard calls it “cunning.”

In Willard’s poem/stream, no power relation is simple, and
every being or entity could at any time surrender to a larger force.
Ownership only goes so far, lasts so long. The stream may have
power to carry the trout, but the trout doesn’t give up its coins. The
fishermen cast their lines into the stream, but the stream withholds
its interior. The hook “tears the fish, yet gives it up to the basket.” The
basket in turn gives the fish to the Pope—who, it is important to note,
is not overly reified but given a casual perhaps: “it will ride to the
kitchen / of someone important, perhaps the Pope.” The Pope, too,
deflects his momentary fanfare, redirecting the spotlight with cook
and fish: “[rejoicing] that his cook has found such a fish.”

“Children, what is it to live in the stream, / day after day, and
come at last to the table, / transfigured with spices and herbs?” asks
Willard’s Pope. How else to read this poem’s grammar of questions
now but as a rhetorical scaffold of awe? “Transfigured”: the fish be-
comes Christlike in its sacrifice and transformation. The poet’s title
gives to the fish a wreath of honor; the fictional Pope praises it,
calling the fish “a little martyr, a little miracle.” And one thinks of Je-
sus’ miracle of loaves and fish, or of early Christians’ stick-figure
ichthys drawings.

By the poem’s conclusion, readers’ attention is allowed to finally
rest on the fish, as if the stream has run its course and is taking a
breather. At the same time, the fish is only “dead asleep,” suggesting
that its transformations have not yet ended. The Pope, upon re-
ceiving his magnificent dinner, repeats the poem’s first question:
“Who is this fish?” This echo of the poem’s first line suggests a return
to the start of the story. Who is this fish? Who, besides Jesus, are we
meant to think of when considering it? I wonder if the question
Willard is asking under that question is something like “who is the
hero of any one story?” or “how much control does the hero really
have over his or her destiny?”
Czeslaw Milosz’s “Ars Poetica” tells us that the “purpose of poetry is to remind us / how difficult it is to remain just one person”; Willard’s poem reminds us how difficult it is to praise just one hero, as so many participants seem to have taken part in the fish’s trajectory. The Pope praises the fish but this poem also praises the stream, which is able to hold so many selves’ intentions and outcomes. Who is the fish, apart from all of these players? Who is the stream without the fishermen; who are the fishermen without the stream? What is this intersection of intentionality and accident? A wreath to the fish for giving itself up to that.
ONIONLIGHT

Sacks crammed with light, layer on luminous layer,
an underworld calendar, the peeled pages faintly lined
but printed without month or measure
and pure as the damp kiss of a pearl,

as if the rings in an old tree should suddenly separate
and bracelet the axe; I have stooped among onions all morning,
hunting these flightless birds as they perched among roots.
I have yanked them out by the tail

and dropped them into my bag like chickens
and pulled away the thin paper of their last days,
pale winegold, a silken globe, pungent,
striped with the pale longitude of silence.

Now over my door they shimmer in knobby garlands,
gregarious in chains like a string of lights
on the boardwalks of heaven where an old man
who loved his garden understands everything.
THE POTATO PICKER

The plant lifts easily now, like an old tooth.  
I can free it from the rows of low hills, 
hills like the barrows of old kings

where months ago, before anything grew or was, 
we hid the farsighted eyes of potatoes.  
They fingered forth, blossomed, and shrank,

and did their dark business under our feet.  
And now it's all over. Horse nettles dangle 
their gold berries. Sunflowers, kindly giants

in their death-rattle turn stiff as streetlamps.  
Pale cucumbers swell to alabaster lungs, 
while marigolds caught in the quick frost

go brown, and the scarred ears of corn gnawed 
by the deer lie scattered like primitive fish.  
The lifeboats lifted by milkweed ride light

and empty, their sailors flying.  
This is the spot. I put down my spade, 
I dig in, I uncover the scraped knees

of children in the village of potatoes, 
and the bald heads of their grandfathers.  
I enter the potato mines.
In “Learning by Heart,” one of her later poems, Nancy Willard speculates about her writing practice, her attitude toward writing—her poems learn by heart in several senses of the term. She is talking about how she apprehends, but she is also saying the writing process is how she loves her world.

In “Learning by Heart,” Willard explains one process of composing, the process of organizing “perfect memory,” constructing a house with its house-plan as a kind of algorithm, and then, room-by-room, furnishing the house as a memory device. She is quoting a rhetoric lesson Cicero taught, the poem tells us. Francis Galton, the Victorian scientist, used a similar method when the locations of shops and such in his repeated walks up and down Pall Mall were the basis of a memory device.

The method of Willard’s poems is accumulative, a lyric discursiveness—she talks in metaphors, a speech as regular and consonant as waves or any other natural repetition, one metaphor absorbed by the next. At one point, she says that for her poetry is a “collective noun.”

Willard’s world is enchanted, not merely metaphorically true. Pablo Neruda’s onion (The Elementary Odes) is poetically true in a different way. It is palpable and for the hand, domestic. Charles Simic’s kitchen utensils (Willard has a terrific hardware display poem) are poetically true but menacing—at once domestic and otherworld, throbbing with intensity. Tone tells us how we should feel. We are comfortable but alert with Willard. The energy in Willard’s poems paradoxically comes from the matter-of-fact voice with which the poems are delivered while the imagery is spilled out. Her tone, the face she turns toward things in response, is perpetual delight.

In Willard’s world, we do not know what we will find because we are explorers whose knowledge must be firsthand and evaluated without prejudice. We are excited by a kind of domesticated strangeness. Perhaps Willard’s vision as a writer of children’s books makes her write without preconceptions, make mental jumps, but in a tidy manner. Our notice of the incongruities in imagery is momentary because we exuberantly rush to new metaphoric configurations.
It was this rush of metaphor that drew me to Willard’s poems. I saw her work first in the early issues of FIELD. After that, whatever magazine, I always looked for her poems. I’m astounded by her production—seventy books—poetry, children’s literature, fiction. Naturally, the poetry carried over into the fiction; the working methods, the narrative urges, the vision were distributed as needed. Do we feel a kind of innocent—what to call it—inquisitiveness—that the writing of the children’s books may have given to Willard’s writing in general?

The title of Willard’s 1982 book, *Household Tales of Moon and Water*, seems to echo the brothers Grimm collection. The figures and narrative tricks, the special dispensations of the tale as a form are present in Willard’s poetry as well as in her fiction. In the craft lecture “The Well-Tempered Falsehood: The Art of Storytelling,” she reminds us of “the original goal of the storyteller: to entertain.” She tells that the first book to keep her reading all night was *Household Tales of the Brothers Grimm*. She explains that fairy tales deal with extraordinary events, but any story is *told*. Earlier in the lecture, she quotes from *Tristram Shandy*, my favorite shaggy dog story, in which Sterne says “Writing, when properly managed, is but a different name for conversation.” Telling is what Willard does to keep us in the poem or in her prose.

This pair of garden poems shows mid-career Willard. She is so clear. The poems are laid out neatly, simply. Breaking by the phrase, regular stanzaic structure, anecdotal in that a speech occasion is created—the poems, in that sense, are deliberately fashioned. That is their power. The utterance is direct so that the imagery, like jewelry spilled out on a neutral background, can do its work.

In the way that a poem is a format, the garden is a format, a way to organize a distributive planting or the harvest of it. It is “the satisfaction of the ordered earth,” as Michael Pollan talks about the pleasures of the garden in *The Botany of Desire*: “I’d call it the Agricultural Sublime.” Plants change us as we change them in “the great reciprocal web that is life on earth,” he says, a “coevolution.” But the potato, one of the four botanical subjects of his book, at once familiar and archetypal, doesn’t seem to belong in a formal garden’s beauty because of its unruly sprawl. Its importance as an object of human desire is that it represents control—human desire directed. That’s for Pollan—Willard’s potato isn’t just a potato either.
The onion and the potato should be humble underground growers. But in these two poems, they reveal themselves to the harvester, who is matter-of-fact about the surprises she unearths. The first stanza of "Onionlight" is a startling mix of notions—that "light" has been buried, that the onion is a kind of calendar whose multiple skins as the vegetable is peeled show no dates, that the onion has the purity of a pearl's "damp kiss." We agree with the descriptions—we are astonished at the accuracy, not by the strangeness of the details. And we don't argue about the mix of comparisons, the compounding. We don't argue because the images don't cancel one another as they tumble out—the surprises are so continuous.

"Onionlight" divides into three movements—the first two stanzas in which the sacks of onions are evaluated and the harvester summarizes her job, the third stanza in which she describes the process by which she forcefully dislodges the onions, the fourth stanza in which we see the onions knotted in garlands "gregarious in chains like a string of lights / on the boardwalks of heaven." The knotting together of the onions changes their power. Light is no longer buried as in the poem's beginning but illuminates the "boardwalks of heaven," and helps light the understanding of the old man figure, who is worthy because he loved his garden.

In "The Potato Picker," the narrator, digging for potatoes at the poem's end, will "uncover the scraped knees // of children in the village of potatoes, / and the bald heads of their grandfathers." The harvester does what she must, completing the cycle she began "months ago / before anything grew or was." She doesn't question her part or what she finds.

The rest of the garden has died or is stuck at the end of a cycle, but the potatoes have been ripening into the present. What is this underground world? I like what the harvester recognizes—the "scraped knees of the children," the "bald" heads of the older village inhabitants. Maybe the harvester can recognize the transformations only because she comes to the place in the garden ("This is the spot") the way the prince in "Cinderella," though he speaks to the girl, can recognize his beloved from the ball only after the shoe he presents fits her foot?

I like how the harvesting directions in "The Potato Picker" are step-by-step transitions—or the magic won't happen? "The plant lifts
easily now,” and “And now it’s all over,” and “This is the spot,” and “I enter the potato mines.” There is a necessary participatory element in the poems—we join the narrator. And there is an attitude—“I have stooped among onions”—vision demands a bowing or kneeling stance?

The harvester in both poems is vigorous in the procedures. We’re not at Versailles, and neither garden (or have we been in different areas of the same garden?) is Eden. There is magic, and the pursuit is to uncover the nature of things, but we are finding what ultimately will be food.
Kevin Prufer

BLUEBERRY

She wanted to play with the blue parakeet,
so she cupped it in her hands, then let it perch
on her index finger
until her father said the bird was tired,
dear, it gets tired, it’s just a little thing,
so she made it rest an hour
then took it out again,
letting it balance on her shoulder. Sometimes
it tried to fly,
but its wings had been clipped
so it fluttered to the floor and hid under the table
until she lifted it again, stroking its head,
while her father said,
it’s late now, the bird needs to sleep
and so do you,
so she climbed into bed
and the bird would survive a week.

+ 

It is wonderful to be in love,
said the drone to its target,

but the target
was talking to his daughter.

In love, in love, in love,
said the drone fluttering at the target’s window.
It had a hot engine, a propeller’s low pulse.
It took twenty pictures
which it sent wirelessly
to the Central Office,
pictures of a man in a well-lit dining room,
his black-haired daughter,
and her blue parakeet.
He was, the investigators believed, a very bad man, so they observed him with the attention of a lover. Everything he said, their drone recorded, compressed, and sent on to the Bureau where such information was processed for the prosecution.

Before she returned it to the cage, she let the bird peck at a pile of seed she held in her palm. The bird ate just a little. Blueberry, blueberry, she said, stroking its feathers, while her father spoke tersely on the phone, then studied the map he’d spread on the table, a map the little drone tried to photograph through the window.

In her bedroom, the cage was an empty head. But when she opened the door and the parakeet hopped inside, the cage was alive with thought. And when she covered it for the night, the feverish cage imagined first the apartment.
and its tempting windows,
then the sky beyond them,

the pulse of heat on sun-dappled wings,
the vast
   and heavenward distances.

+ 

Darling, her father said at her bedroom door,
I’ve got to go out for a bit. But I’ll be back very soon.

So the girl turned on the TV
   while the drone
followed him down the street, hovering above his car
as he merged onto the highway—

+ 

   The blue parakeet balanced
on the girl's finger, looking toward the black windows.

Then it hopped onto her shoulder,
it's quick little heart
   flickering in its chest. Blueberry, blueberry,
she said, posing it on the chair’s back, the mantel, the bookshelf,
until the bird fluttered to the floor again
and hid among the newspapers—

+ 

Don’t forget I love you,
   the drone said as the bullet found its victim
and her father slipped the gun back into his pocket,
walking calmly down the dead man’s driveway.
I love you,
as he pulled into the street, I love you
as he turned left onto the highway ramp toward home,
the little drone
right behind him.
Click, click, click,
said the part of its brain that takes pictures
and sends them on to the young men
at the Central Office—

+ 

When he got home,
he found his daughter asleep on the sofa,
all the lights on, the blue parakeet
catching its breath
on the curtain rod.

She's so light, he thought,
carrying her to bed, light as a thought.
He loved her too much.

+ 

And the young men at the Central Office
put away the lovesick drone.

And her father put on his pajamas
and turned out the lights.

In the middle of the night,
the parakeet returned to its cage
where it knew it would be safe
Charity Gingerich

SOMEBWHERE IN SEPTEMBER,

the girl with an eye for lost chickens
    is taking a trip around a small pond,

where two sheep and a tall man watch fish fling themselves into
    sunset air.

The girl has healing-longing.
    The tall man's horses walk up to her

despite the heat of the day like the too-orange skirt she wears.

They bat flies out of their wide, extraordinary eyes;
    the blond one puts its neck next to hers,

as if to say, I need stroking, too—but am afraid—but feed me, and
    I'll love you forever.

The girl with hands
    like pieces of a puzzle called moon with maple leaves,

wrings them again and again in the fire that is her orange skirt—

despite the solidness that is man-with-horses sky.

    But listen, this is what she can't forget:

there was a field of frost bright as a fallen star,

and before she knew it, she was at its center, alone,

with something that could have been a map of the sea
    or a trail called sweet blackberry thorn moon.
You grow sensitive to the slightest sound. Light years away, a star flickers out. You hear the needles click and clack as a spider knits in the corner. In the next town, a car backfires. What is taking her so long in the bathroom? It is not the infinite you fear, but the slow tick of the hour. The only way out of the room: a thin rope of smoke up the chimney. If you could get a grip, you’d shimmy up.
THE ARRIVAL

The blown tattered flags point to the east. The black smoke from the stack of the west-bound train stalls above a brick wall, although it’s easily mistaken for a storm cloud. The train departs; the weather is yet to arrive. The statue, with its back to us, looks into the same distance, shoulders hunched as if to cold wind. Or has the weather departed and the train’s arrived? Evening, certainly. Long shadows at acute angles to their objects, pointing east, or more precisely, a little north-east. We are new to the country and have not quite found our bearings. No matter. We leave tonight: beyond the wall, between the twin palm trees, to a further set of tracks. Our papers are in order and rattle now in our grips.
Presently, I am living inside a tenderness. Time was, I had called it suffering.

What makes something so? Timeworn narratives do the work of a god.

One can’t know how one is loved. The feather you brought back is a mystery.

This is August, still and all. Sometimes, a familiar song drifts over the treetops.

*I know just what you mean*, I want to say. Life is poignant like that, little by little.
UNTO HIMSELF

My father is singing,
A song without need of words.

Remember that one?

   And then the ever-since God shone down.
   The or-else arrived.

I try to go back: imagine him a boy.
He raised rabbits.
Killed chickens because it was Friday.

Made himself useful.
Made himself scarce.

Missed his mother? Must have.

Where does he go now, singing?
We were in bed with the baby, the lights low, both of us holding one of her rabbit feet.

Give them free and fair or something close and revenge is what they'll take. Their turn.

In the morning I drove back north to my green pearl room.

You took a wrong turn to get here, a woman at the station said.

I froze and she nodded at the license plate on my truck. How do you like it here?

At the pump I fudged the credit card, then gave the code to the cashier.

And the last four digits, she said. And a fingerprint, she laughed. And your blood, she laughed.
I was the paperback next to your figurines.
One dozen cassettes packed in a shoebox.
I could pack up quickly.

I was your tenant, your boarder.
Convenient, your roomer.
A good sleeper-in.

Could sharpen the rusted instruments.
Knitting needles, a proper cheese knife.
To me, the lawns always looked to be waiting
for blankets or rain.

What home I made myself.
What for.
When I was grounds-walker, garden-watcher.

Your disciple of eaves, occupant
taking air in near the tent and colored lights.
Bandleader, hornblower,
the whole of an invited and thirsty crowd.
I was groom, bride, oath-taker, years

I was your guest.
Wayne Miller

TWO SISTERS

In the picture, the woman on the left is dying, the woman on the right is healthy. They look nearly the same—same features and hair, same t-shirts—

and that backlit space between them seems to float, like Rubin's vase. In six months one sister will appear unchanged; the other will be waxy, hair nearly gone.

But here the world still feels large—you can see it—and after the shutter snaps, that object their bodies have made together in the air will disappear as they cross the lawn toward the rest of us gathered on the porch.
AFTER THE MISCARRIAGE

We went out to sit in the car
—snow coming down—
just to get out of the house.

I lowered the window sometimes
to stop the snow
from sealing us in.

The lights were still on
in those rooms where our daughter,
barely three, kept moving,
shifting her things.

How many days—
weeks—did we leave her
in that lit-up silence?

Back inside,
we let our footprints
melt on the floor.

She ran and hugged us
each entirely, as though
we’d come home after curfew
to this devoted,
oblivious parent.
They’re threading the creek through a tube, red clay on red clay where grass was stripped away. They’re making the creek a secret, hiding it beneath a place they’ll call White Pine Hills or White Oak Harbor or White White Acres. I like that the creek is still there.

I love its movement under me like I love plate tectonics, the whole planet eating and making itself from itself. I like that it slows them, stalls their stripping, tree ripping, makes them touch something that moves a world, grain by grain. I hate that everything’s for sale, even the field fires, the thin veil of smoke drawn over the trees.
Brandon Krieg

COAT

Far snag, small turtle  
brushing flies from its face

You unshelled—  
your hair floats strangely  
in your child-bath bodily trance

Put on your coat, let’s go  
again among snakes and turtles, oaks, the us  
there’s no pronoun for

Your coat, someday, a doll’s coat  
in a box I open I close again give away  
this day that day

Ah, son, what my own father could not explain  
for all he tried—

your coat.
Fire-banked color
of oak leaves after
a season under snow:

mask of light
on every your face.

Here is a reed.
Take what spoke
what ancients spoke.

What goes filling in
these claw-marks in mud with impossible gear teeth, ice?

It’s turning us.
Here is a road.

On either side, you of many eras,

your eyes wasps’ empty papery hexagons,
your eyes asterisks
of ice.

Take this reed down that road.
March midnight, the gardener said,
as we came from the station
seeing taillights of the late train
snuffed by fog. Someone walked behind us,
we spoke of the weather.
The wind throws rain
across the ice of the ponds,
the year spinning slowly towards the light.

And at night
the roaring at the keyholes.
The fury of stems
splitting the earth.
And come morning
light roots out the dark.
Pine trees rake the mist from windowpanes.

He stands down there,
wretched as stale tobacco smoke,
my neighbour, my shadow
right on my heels as I leave the house.
Yawning sullenly
in flurries of rain from the bare trees,
he tinkers today with the rusty chicken wire.
What’s in it for him, noting investigations
in his blue octavo book, my friends’ car numbers,
keeping watch on this hardly vulnerable street
for contraband,
forbidden books,
scraps for the belly,
stashed in a coat lining.
A single twig to stoke the feeble fire.
I never came here
to stir up the darkness.
Nor will I scatter the ash of my verses
on the threshold
to bar the entrance to evil spirits.

This morning
of damp fog
in its Saxon-Prussian uniform,
lights are being extinguished at the border.
The state's a blade,
the people thistles.
I climb as usual
the creaking stairs.

In his room I find my son
before the cuneiform script of Ras Shamra,
deciphering the Ungaritic text,
the embrace
of life and dream,
the peaceful campaign of King Keret.
On the seventh day, as the god IL proclaimed,
a hot wind blew and drank the fountains dry,
the dogs howled,
the donkeys cried out with thirst.
And without the use of a battering ram the city surrendered.

*translated by Martyn Crucefix*
Every day is a snow day, so I lean on perpetual pancakes. After breakfast, I spend the day’s daylight snippet at my porthole window watching snow decide which way to blow. Back home I thought winter my favorite. All muted, all serene. No sounds of neighbors forcing plant matter into hard geometry. Road use bare. Bodies settling into saintly sedation. This glass is so thick, concrete so dense, no sense of storm beyond its silent film. It’s always around this time—the three o’clock in the morning of the year—that I forget the sound of a howling wind. The central thermometer reads 95 below, a new low, and other than my lotion-burnt knuckle tops, I’m not complaining. To be so close to deadly is death magic. Humble calm. The arctic waits on the other side. I am in here; it is out there. Can’t get to me unless I let the howl inside.
Jennifer Atkinson

STAR CALENDAR

Before the snowdrop stars can bloom
Streetlights just on

TVs flickering behind the curtains

Day’s rain still slick on the tarmac
Night’s thunderheads moving in from the west

Jupiter’s lion-eye opens

Not hunting, not yet, just watching
For the lame ones, the injured, the slow.

|   |

Under the guttering stars of Virgo
Their wax-drip splatter and the gaps of half-dark among them

Scald and frost—

In the marble loggia of moonlight
Between cypresses, pillars of the living gate,

Sleepless and greedy—

But for what? The raveling scent of smoking wicks,
A grand candelabra just blown out

|   |
New-moon light near moonset bleeds
Through a curved incision

In the sky’s dark body—

Driving, so many of us in our separate cars, driving,
Driving, toward and away, invisible to one another

Choking on tears, on fury, on fear—

Unseen, unheard. The mute hiss
Of the planet spinning in its vacuum
The fears of the octopus are clouded in ink. A parable:
Long measure, a child’s home. The measure out from:
They were just words on the gravestones, just words:
If it is empty, it is not a mirror. And if it is never empty.
QUADRILATERAL : NEBULA

Love was an asteroid covered in asters. We were close enough to see:
One makes promises to combat omens. One does not make omens:
Impersonal yet intimate, as in *That's the hollowest shirt I've ever seen*:
You die one day. Once. Someone's future memory, origins out of view.
Our mother in a cantaloupe dress, breezing the sunset through:
The piano calibrates the player. One day, the gait syncopates:
This wayward agency, gable to gable, and some peaks pass us over:
Not events, but atmospheres. Not trains in the night, but whistling.
Dear nightingale hiding in green thickets,
I don’t want to think of the girl
who couldn’t tell her story, how nothing she sang
said what happened to her, her voice smudged
like wet ink the left hand blurs as it writes.
Well, worse than that—the knife at her throat,
the whole dark alley of him, errant star
burning inside her, then burning her out,
the red of her, the words. Her tale
like no tapestry you’d hang on the wall.
But the sweetness of your song, Bird,
it tears at the heart, as if hidden deep
in every family there’s a story like this.
So in ours.

There was a man who couldn’t sleep nights
hearing your song outside his window.

Long before his daughters ever told,
he tore himself into an endless tremor.

He’d sputter and cough, choke on his food
and seem to deserve the more pity for that.

What is a story but a nest, and what is a nest
but a vessel made for breakage and flight?

Those girls were not made for the story
they had to tell. But tell it they did.

Out of such troubled bodies, a shattered song,
out of the thicket, pouring forth.
There’s a road north of here
that’s under water twice a day.

Sometimes, when the tide goes out
a fish is stranded
and gets run over by a car.

Imagine:
a fish
run over by a car.

There must be other worlds with us.

There must be other worlds in us.

There must be other worlds.

I think of that O’Keefe painting,
*Sky Above Clouds*. There’s another horizon above the horizon and the bottom is also a top.

After work I wish
I were simply waiting for the train.
But nothing is simple. My mind is locust-dark, my heart is honey-heavy.
My horizon is apartment buildings.

What am I missing?
Lights come on in kitchens
I can’t smell.
January supper.
Meat sauce and desperation.

How little I have helped today.

And there’s always the problem of describing the winter sky.
Its pale incandescence like a fish belly.

But what even is the sky to a fish belly?
I think of what Emily said, *As firmament to fin.*

My dreams are peopled with people I’ve never seen.
How is this possible?

And how common is true dissimilitude in this or all possible worlds?

Maybe somewhere, at this very moment, pink sunset, 5:13 on January 10th, there’s a salmon flopping on some dock, gasping airlessly and flashing the last luster of its salmon belly to the salmon belly sky.
Dore Kiesselbach

DISAPPEARANCE

The tide comes in like an old house.
It is where you would have lived.
Darkness is in its joints and its shingles clack. It slumps over, reaching shore. You study it alone. The one you came here with is gone. Sunlight had been vanishing when you saw her last, gathering from among stones she found at the tide line the ones she liked best. She filled her pockets with them. As the light lengthened and lowered it found parts of her body that you had not thought would pass light.
While I slept, Death pinned up linen swatches in my brain. Then he knocked out some walls. New curtains can only do so much. What this place needs, Death said, is a little more light. I blinked. I liked my furrowed dark and unraveling afghans, red onion in the pantry sending up shoots. It was cozy like a grandma’s apartment over the funeral home, there by the freeway exit that was under construction for years. Death carried a clipboard with a shiny metal clamp. He ordered a Danish couch, all leather and chrome. What I wanted didn’t matter. On his copy of the blueprint, he drew a dotted line where the skylight would go.
I straddle the straws of a cocktail with two fingers. I jostle the ice. I sip.

Across the street, a man presses another man’s shirts in the window of a dry cleaner’s shop.

A taxi passes.
A taxi passes.

Next to the dry cleaner’s, a toy store where an electric frog swims in a tub of water.

Its stiff lime limbs butterfly out and back. Its middle-body whirs.

I love this city because it makes me receive my grief willingly, almost.
HARBOR ISLAND

Look outside.
The port’s rust red cranes
stoop, stoic
against a pre-squall blue.

Nothing moves.
Not ships. Not locks.
Not I in my
docile, kitchened body.

Last summer you taught me
this: how to stand
perfectly and harmlessly still.

You left my body a lake
in mid-winter,
my voice a school of fish
beneath ice.

Look outside.
The first floodwinds are churning
the Sound
into the opposite of me.
It's a night for
Grievances in the willow, high comedy in the pine—
One wind that works both ways.

I remember that other April
When the dawn broke down and left me
Abandoned by your body.

Hero of the easy chair,
Philosopher in his drowsy cups,
I was a fool for feeling

There'd be no boundaries to beyond,
Only a long history of desire
Contradicting the clocks.

Neither science nor séance
Can bring you back, nor some ceremony
Of chalice and chasuble and gilt-edged book.

What's better than music
To make old bones move again, that scratch
Of black wax over the blues,

Or maybe, in an eerie E-flat,
The *Ghost Variations* of Schumann,
Last score before he went mad.

And yet, when the first crocus
Pokes out of cold mud, this spring
Will split my heart

Like an axe in an oak stump.
I can put my finger
On the map whose legend says
One inch equals the infinite,
And find the exact location where
Nothing meets nowhere,

But this hand, all dodder and spots
And tremor along the fault lines,
Can never touch you again.
August, and the air grows fat, and only a drink
Cooled by twelve cubes of ice
Could keep my tongue from sweating the words away.

All the swaggering lilies have lost their heads.
And weak to its wobbly roots,
The big sick dahlia bares its petals at the sun.

Only the weeds thrive in this heat. I should have
Goats to crop them, a whole herd,
Restless in their ragged bellies, their evil little horns.

Why won’t this weather break? I need to hear
Rain plinking the leaves like a gamelan
And wind rattling the branches in a nervy beat.

The swollen moon looks so soft, so low
A passing firefly could injure it,
Could bring that lonely pallor down to blood.

I’m listening to the crickets, those banjo wings
That fill the wide night. They tell me
Any way I turn, the dark is never wrong.
THE MAN PLAYING WITH MATCHES

He sits in the dark
and lights matches
to keep warm.

One by one,
he holds up
trembling lights
with human heads:

  grandfather,
  father,
  uncle,
  and a distant cousin—

  carbon profiles,
  flame hair.

They flicker,
throwing shadows
on the walls.

They rise, move, and glow—

then, one by one,
he blows them out.
IN THOSE YEARS, NO ONE SLEPT

Some, like my grandfather, slept standing, hiding among corn stalks and listening for dogs.

The woods were full of women dressed in black.

The woods were full of veiled women who'd come to him and ask
Did you see my son? Is he still alive?

The woods were full of veiled women and young men sleeping, standing behind every tree trunk.

The woods were full.

Young men wore rifles and slept standing behind every tree trunk.

The women were dressed in black with large wings on their backs.

Did you see my son? My husband? Brother?

The woods were full. So were the cemeteries.

Everyone slept standing.
Doug Ramspeck

CHICAGO

Today an outstretched arm
came toward me

just before the Clark Street Bridge,
and the teenager pressed

the sharp point of the barrel
into the folds of my ribs,

and I was thinking, in that moment,
of describing snow as “white ash”

or “mummified,”
though didn’t that call to mind

The Mummy’s Hand or The Mummy’s Shroud?
And then the boy asked

in such a breathy voice for my wallet
and watch that it seemed

the words were snow.
If I call this a garden,
it’s a garden. It’s a marbled affair—
the a/c units dripping green-black rivers,
the residue of last night’s rain
sitting in a cheap cherub’s eye
while an imbalanced neighbor in a sunhat
tends sweetly to her basil.

If I call this the antithesis of alone, it is—
the ticking of his father’s wind-up watch,
the flash of beer cans
lined irregularly on the counter
as I step outside into the rays
as if I was born heliotropic.

This day is proof
that there is a sundial
for every single decision throughout history,

and a garden is a garden
once you name it,
once you call it
by its Christian name.

I don’t expect you to fall for my logic. I don’t fall
for anyone’s. I am here with him
because I want evidence.

Except the light is blind this morning
like a child at a funeral,

asking, What are we all standing here for?
This is no aubade. This is
a ship sailing into you
then breaking off
faster than you think.
This is Experience speaking:
what you need is a man
who will carve you
like a thick slab of marble
in his stable, idiot hands.
I like your little black slip though,
and the way you wash your face
like something good is about to happen. I’m only good
at killing what I know, then taking off. So take it off
if you want to. They can’t say I didn’t warn you.
I’m a master of manners, not morals.
I was never born to do this right.
You hear Magdalenë Magdalenë. You thought yourself alone here. It’s not your name but you answer anyway. Sap trickles from breast and thighs. Trees sweat, gray and hard as a hound’s call, the forest thickly wooded.

When there’s no room left, you scrawl names with the branches of trees, which splinter in cold. In a clearing you make angels, arms and legs working. Halos wings gowns in a sweep.

The lake’s iced over for the moment, the floes hulking along shore, bordering the white hillside. This is how it always was. Call it an unreadable pattern, all those melting tracks uncovering the random strips of green beneath. Or wing it.
BEES

When the gas man came to fix the furnace he delivered an impromptu lecture on Armageddon and royal jelly. I listened to the bit about the bees, such bumbling around for the stuff that cures all. I remember in the last winter how snow turned fickle, a burden of white dusting trees whose branches broke easily. They’re dying, you said, dream o’ my heart, the bees from that spray, and I, ever selfish, as long as it’s not you. One day, you shrugged, or another. “May their bones, the bones of bees, be as albatross around the world’s neck,” a plane stuttered across in sky-writing. And really, I wouldn’t deny how I wanted to brain the repairman spewing bitter truths for amusement, talk talk talk while he opened our uncooperative furnace as if we had, after all, all day.
Michael Teig

WAS SEVERAL CUBICLES WE’VE KEPT OUR HEARTS IN

and here the grief I thought was my own
was a couple of grandfathers:
one a faraway bridge
to a past now largely elapsed
and another holding an explosive device in the photo
because that past too was violent and dull.
and still is, and people act accordingly.
they feign blindness. they slug each other
in the backyard the trees all around in awe.
just open the door. north of here
there is a tool shop folded
into the hillside a long time.
there are children like any autumn
discovering grief or perjury. my grandfather
if he’s lucky isn’t remembered for anything.
before that he stood on the deck of a ship
just coming into view
as serious as a doorknob.
he put on his hat and walked into an evening
as any person would,
as if summoned. as if surrounded. as if
readjusting his coat to the new ideas there
and the street that was assembled
and the downstream too trellised with lights
and the new names for bread
and forgiveness which had come into use
at the end of a day so long
we too have a hard time remembering.
there were so many people there
it was snowing people—tiny Ukrainian people.
people with eleven sisters and one cow between them
like a bank account. he was a fine man,
resolute and mean and bending
to clear his throat into his lapel
as if called forth to finally speak
into a tiny, delicate microphone,
before thinking better of it,
having waited so long already, and moving on.
AND THIS MUST OCCUR MANY TIMES

I took my son by the hand and walked out to speak plainly of love, and how we were a people who had come from a long line of people who mostly, at best, bewildered me, and how he might still grow mildly different from us, the way one day follows the next and your clothes might become faintly more dashing over time or more ridiculous, and how if the police come to the door don’t say We don’t talk to police, say It’s hard to see in this light—another warm and flawless evening with his hand in mine like a ticket.
Ralph Burns

THE PARTS OF A WINDOW

There is something in a chisel that wants to follow grain. Cold and knowing a river comes, current takes the body time; the lathe only turns in sleep; the sill, the keeper, the muntin allow air and light; glass made of sand brings people to stand and look out; the house creaks at night when the bottom rail levers the sash weight, when people dream or lie awake and try not to think—it’s heavy, weight in walls, inside casing, but it lets things rise, touches other iron if wind gets strong, brings back street noise, the inner track, horn and pulley, access, meeting, mortise and tenon, walk and talk, stride, piano music, bust out.
I THINK I SEE MY FATHER

Ghosting through daylight gleam at the edge of tin, wind moving a few stems, then he’s gone. The mind moves where it does not want to be sometimes. Thinking breaks down right here in this poem. Sodium light buzz in a valley of the Brazos. Rabbit hold to what you got—irregular heartbeat under shadow of lettuce—soon a syncopation. A door opens, a threshold because it marks a barrier easy to go through but not really say the frogs all at once in mud at the bottom of the world, and not today on either side of the road with headlights making wings and country music bouncing through molecules of regret, corn silk angels, frogspawn passage.
Bern Mulvey

FOUND ONE FALL MORNING
ON THE WAY TO WORK

To be wanted
and in that way
absolutely
even my flaws
delicious. Love
that hungry beast,
now licking wet
great lumps of fur,
then pause and hot
breath on cool glass,
an old tale, two
barely apart,
a road always
here and nowhere,
need’s honey scent.
The woods about
us seem empty,
still, the coming
sunrise yet a
pale pink distant
in a dark sky.
One moment our
eyes connect, see
there the other,
a shared wonder,
and off I go,
late, street narrow,
the bear bigger,
my flesh a thin
tin door away,
winter coming.
Los Angeles to be exact, 1970 to isolate the year,
my parents nude in their bedroom, kissing

and more than kissing, the war still going on,
protests against the war still going on

still going on, sit-ins and daisy chain halos,
handmade signs, the citizens demanding

with voices, lifted fists, poster boards, ink,
simply insisting, PEACE NOW. Now arrived later

with more body bags, rows of the unmade
from here to over the curvature of the earth.

~

They had made two already and decided
to make another: me. They kissed, undressed,
lust multiplied by lust. After August
folded to September, the renowned California sun
browning their fallow skin. Crosstown,
a deputy loaded his tear-gas gun

with the wrong canister: wall-piercing, 10-inch.
It made a hole in the Silver Dollar Bar’s curtained
entrance, made two more—one in, one out—in the skull of Ruben Salazar. The peaceful

~

protest on the Eastside had turned
to bedlam, you see, and he only wanted refuge from the unfurling smoke, the eye-stung

and running crowd, tossed rocks and glass bottles, the gas-masked police who swung

their long black batons, in the swelling haze of tear gas

they came down quick on activists like minute hands cut loose from clocks.

~

All is chaos and accidental, I am thinking, or all is systematic. Or, somehow, both.

Here in my green yard, the wind says which of the three, keeps saying it, saying it, but I don’t comprehend the language of wind, inscribed on every swaying leaf around me.

~

Away from the pandemonium, Ruben ordered a beer. His barstool creaked as he shifted his body. It was still his body then, and his hands were still his hands, resting on
the curved wooden counter. And his breath. And his mind, replaying what he had witnessed:

faces born from smoke, faces erased by it. Let us stop picturing Ruben now. Let us instead focus on the curtained entrance. It is still hole-less. It is still holding on to before.

~

California jolts—commotion of bricks stampeding off my parents' roof, glass glass glass singing as it shatters on the floor, sings again for the broom. I sip amino fluid, done growing new bones, organs, fingers to grip whatever comes by. For months she coos down to her stomach, for months my father tries pushing open the only door that won't budge. Against his shoulder the wood cries as I eventually will do, entering.

~

And where were you before your birth? When did you become you? What a thin, momentary opening everyone passes through, this I tied to skin, this being between two oblivions.
O LORD, when the Angel said Listen
when the Angel said Do not fall to the earth for anyone
we were already stained in glass.

A circle of black flies biting
our arrival. Scales scraped off of a fish.

Starved girls folded at a line from Leviticus.

This is how it happened: one day we looked outside
& the bloated bodies of frogs were fucking up the yard.

Our hands bled. We saw Rorschach blood in our wounds,
Pietà in egg yolks. There was a hope chest & a threshold
& a bridegroom—revoltingly pagan. We said

“Bring us the coat-check ticket for our eyes.”

Nothing was so underpaid as our attention.
If ghost, if whore, if virgin—same origin story:
because X was a face too lovely, Y was a corpse in the lake.

Our sisters said Wait. Our mothers said Stay the hell awake.
We bled on our white clothes—we bore them redly
to the table. Our fathers said Tell me, will you ever

feed me something that isn’t your own trouble?
We cast away stones. There was room at the inn.

There was time to be floated as witches.
When night came, an egg-moon slid over the steeple. We stared at the blue yolk yawning in the fire.

Our Father. Who Art in Heaven.

There were men in the alley. We knew them by name. They said they wanted to prove we were holy.

Your Angel said Listen—

There are not vultures enough
in this world, there are not crows
to shoot out of the sky in a shaking black line.

Please, we’ve been trying
to say out loud the words for this—

to see You write it out red

in a fish-hooked curve. Have mercy—
Mouth of Poison Flowers: Speak.

Mouth of Asphodel—Say it.
Christopher Howell

HER STICKY NAME

She was only slightly darker than the others, at first, darker as a bright day darkens from looking at it. She was not encrypted, desalinated, or intravenous, not at all that strange, simply unexpected like an inflatable policeman in your grandmother’s closet or a zebra made entirely of funnels. When she lay down, the whole world desired her and deflected its desire by thinking of molten shrubberies and crossing its legs, though the world was surprised to discover it had legs. Still, she enjoyed many seasons of unrequited worship, many hats and slow loops on the trapeze. What she wanted tore at her fig leaves and lips. What she disdained left town and launched a thousand thousand ships that sank dreaming of her shoals as though falling toward them from the top of an immense hen. Day by day she grew from slightly large to minimally huge, until she was more or less a planet, or a room built of nothing but size, her singing terrible for its loudness and for our gathering around, campfire style, making small smoky gestures of approval and carving her sticky name, which was forbidden us, into all our parts.
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Blue spider mincing along the spine of my tattered volume of Tacitus, if you are the ghost of Professor Schnackenberg who caused me to acquire the book, how is it to walk as though made of glass conjecture? I’ll bet it’s hard to fold up those legs when not in use, when you’re dreaming of your old fireside, surrounded by beautiful daughters who fail to believe you will ever die. I failed to believe it also, and here you are! terribly changed but still contentious, eyes sparking like fists of tiny diamonds, beginning to weave what will become your other history. When once in a while your old name comes up, I, ghostly student, will shake my head, “Ah, Tacitus. Contention and change, always his special topics.” Tacitus, who became this book in which I find you again.
Nancy Eimers

PHOTO OF 50 MANNEQUINS POSED IN FRONT OF THE COUNTY COURT HOUSE IN LAS VEGAS, NEVADA, BEFORE THE 1953 "ATOMIC ANNIE" NUCLEAR TEST

Fiberglass ... currently the most widely used material for manufacturing mannequins ... has a balanced ratio of weight and sturdiness.

These objects, stable in form, looking placid, maybe a little bit surprised but calmly so, incurious can be seen and touched but can they be apprehended? Behind the faces: facelessness, this is where we go on storing anonymity. Sitting—someone has seated them—
in folding chairs all turned in the same direction to look like an audience is waiting for something that isn’t happening.

These objects are not waiting that in some other life are ship hulls, longbows, drum sets, Christmas tree angel hair.
PHOTO OF UNNUMBERED MANNEQUINS PILED IN FRONT OF THE COUNTY COURT HOUSE IN LAS VEGAS, NEVADA, AFTER THE 1953 "ATOMIC ANNIE" NUCLEAR TEST

Fiberglass ... is not as resilient as a piece of solid wood, but certainly stands up well to the relatively minimal abuse that most department store mannequins experience.

those mannequins undamaged or not wiped off the face

are gathered / have been are dumped / set down

like burdens / placed here picnic-style if

picnickers were dying next to / over / under / across each other not on blankets grayish stuff

a photograph has made of grass a heap of arms still gesturing the fingers curled please over come / sometime for morning / are you

welcome / tea was all distant politeness could recall
Karen Rigby

TO MARION COTILLARD ON HER 2008 OSCAR DRESS

Glamour is a mermaid silhouette: Jean Paul Gaultier in scalloped lines, X-back sweeping to a fishtail hem.

Never mind white like wedding cake piping or fit like second skin. What I love about sleeveless couture is negative space:

collarbone, shoulders, neck

fugitive as the first crocus. The dress stops everyone on the red carpet—including me, the viewer at home—

    a silk aerialist spiraling onto the stage. It’s that color of palladium
I mean, the exact moment a body galvanizes air.

The day I watch you playing Edith Piaf I understand the brute song housed in the chest finds a way out.


The best dress I ever wore was forest green velvet tapered to a bee’s waist. The skirt hung like a bell, all my sundered selves.

Glamour is muscle made movement. A body turned salt.
They have no close living
relatives, but because of their
ability to form aerial roots
and sprouts, ginkgo trees growing
one to two kilometers from
the spot where the atomic bomb
was dropped were among the few
living things to survive. Even now,
in autumn their fan-shaped leaves—
thousands of monks in their saffron
shifts—hold on
and wave. It's ok
to wave back, like elephants that return
repeatedly to the skeleton
of a matriarch to fondle
her tusks and bones. Once,
when a researcher played the recording
of a deceased elephant's voice,
the creatures went wild
searching for their lost relative, and the dead
elephant's daughter called for days.
In the basement I shuffle
the heavy stack of x-rays
of my mother's back, vertebrae ascending
the way the chunks of ancient
Roman columns rise, her ribs espaliered
like the branches in Taddeo Gaddi's
Tree of Life. I deal the thick celluloid sheets
around the room, sometimes hold them
up to the window for light,
but the ribs become transparent, the dark
between them all that's left
of sight. When we were
children, we would hold and hoist
each other up—first on knees,
    then shoulders—believing if only
we could reach that bottom rung
on the telephone pole, we could keep
    climbing higher and higher, the way
that ginkgo limbs, after millions of years, go on
inserting dashes into what they think
    is an unending sentence.
KIRSTEN ABEL, a writer from Steilacoom, Washington, has an MFA from Columbia and currently lives in Seattle. Her work appears in Two Peach, Leveler Poetry, Cosmonauts Avenue, Cata maran Literary Reader, and elsewhere.

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NANCY EIMERS is the author of four poetry collections, including 02 (Carnegie Mellon, 2011). Her poems have appeared recently or are forthcoming in Poetry International, Michigan Quarterly Review, and Zone 3.

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CHARITY GINGERICH teaches creative writing and literature at the University of Mount Union. Her work has appeared in Kenyon Review, Arts & Letters, Quiddity, Ruminate, Redivider, and other journals. She was a 2016 Tennessee Williams Scholar in poetry at the Sewanee Writers Conference.

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CYNTHIA HOGUE’s ninth collection of poems, In June the Labyrinth, was published in April by Red Hen Press. Other new poems have appeared recently in Crazyhorse, Prairie Schooner, and Southern Indiana Review.

CHRISTOPHER HOWELL’s eleventh collection of poems, Love's Last Number, was published in spring 2017 by Milkweed Editions. Other new work may be found in Poetry International, Gettysburg Review, and Alaska Quarterly Review. He teaches in the MFA program at Eastern Washington University.

PETER HUChEL (1903-1981) was one of the most important postwar German voices. “Hubertsweg” depicts the period of his life (1962-71) when he was kept under virtual house arrest by the East German government. MARTYN CRUCEFIX is a British poet and translator whose recent publications include The Lovely Disciplines (Seren, 2017) and the chapbook O. at the Edge of the Gorge (Guillemot Press, 2017). www.martyncrucefix.com
DORE KIESSELBACH's first book, *Salt Pier* (2012), won the Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize and the Robert Winner Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America. His work has appeared in many magazines and been awarded Britain's Bridport Prize. His second collection is out from University of Pittsburgh this fall.

BRANDON KRIEG is author of *In the Gorge* (Codhill Press, 2017) and *Invasives* (New Rivers Press, 2014), a finalist for the 2015 ASLE Book Award in Environmental Creative Writing. He teaches at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri.

JASON MASTALER was a 2014 finalist for the *Cincinnati Review*'s Schiff Award. His prose has appeared in *Harvard Review, The Los Angeles Review,* and *Massachusetts Review.* He lives in north Idaho and online at bstll.org. This is his first published poem.

KATHLEEN MCGOOKEY's most recent book of prose poems is *Heart in a Jar,* just out from White Pine Press.

WAYNE MILLER's most recent books are the poetry collection *Post-* (Milkweed, 2016), which won the Rilke Prize; a co-translation of Mokiom Zeqo's *Zodiac* (Zephyr, 2015), which was a finalist for the PEN Center USA Award in Translation; and the co-edited book *Literary Publishing in the Twenty-First Century* (Milkweed, 2016). He teaches at the University of Colorado Denver and edits *Copper Nickel.*


TIMOTHY O'KEEFE is the author of *You Are the Phenomenology,* winner of the 2017 Juniper Prize for Poetry, and *The Goodbye Town,* winner of the 2010 FIELD Poetry Prize. He lives in Athens, Georgia.

JOHN LAZEAR OKRENT, a poet and family physician in Tacoma, Washington, has published poems in *Tupelo Quarterly, Artvoice,* and *The Bridport Prize.*

ERIC PANKEY's new book is *Augury* (Milkweed, 2017). He teaches at George Mason University.

KEVIN PRUFER is the author of *Churches* (Four Way, 2014) and the forthcoming *How He Loved Them* (Four Way, 2018). He is the co-curator of the Unsung Masters Series.

DOUG RAMSPECK, who teaches at The Ohio State University at Lima, is the author of six poetry collections, most recently *Naming the Field,* forthcoming from LSU Press in 2018.

KAREN RIGBY is the author of *Chinoiserie* (Ahsahta Press, 2012).

SAM ROSS is a 2016-2017 Writing Fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

MARY ANN SAMYN's most recent collection is *My Life in Heaven,* winner of the 2012 FIELD Poetry Prize. She is Professor of English and director of the MFA Program at West Virginia University.

DENNIS SCHMITZ's ninth and most recent book of poems is *Animism* (Oberlin College Press, 2014). He lives in Oakland, California.
CLAUDIA SEREA, a Romanian-born poet who immigrated to the United States in 1995, is the author most recently of Nothing Important Happened Today (Broadstone Books, 2016).

BETSY SHOLL’s most recent book is Otherwise Unseeable, which won the Maine Literary Award in 2015. She teaches in the Vermont College of Fine Arts MFA Program.

EMILY SKAJA’s poems have been published in Best New Poets, Blackbird, Black Warrior Review, Gulf Coast, jubilat, and other journals. She is Associate Poetry Editor of Southern Indiana Review. emilyskaja.net

ANALICIA SOTELO is the author of Virgin, the inaugural winner of the Jake Adam York Prize, selected by Ross Gay (Milkweed Editions, 2018).

MICHAEL TEIG is the author of There’s a Box in the Garage You Can Beat with a Stick and Big Back Yard (both from BOA Editions).

LEE UPTON’s most recent books are Bottle the Bottles the Bottles the Bottles (Cleveland State, 2015) and Visitations (LSU Press, 2017). She teaches at Lafayette College.
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Mose Tolliver (American, 1915–2006)
Untitled, 1987–1988
Enamel on plywood, 59.1 x 40 cm (23 ¾ x 15 ¾ in.)
Collection of Bill Arnett
Photograph courtesy Ricco/Maresca Gallery

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