

# FIELD



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芳南堂



# FIELD

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## FIELD #80: AN INTRODUCTION

When a student asked me, in 1968 or early 1969, why Oberlin did not have a literary magazine, I understood his point: there were lots of writers around and lots of writers coming through, mostly poets, so Oberlin seemed a logical place to locate a publication that would feature contemporary writing. Since I had no good answer for him, my colleague Stuart Friebert and I rounded up the other poets who lived in town and we began to lay our plans.

Since no one would be paid or get time off from teaching, we were cautious about the size and frequency of our publication. Twice a year seemed manageable, and a journal devoted just to poetry and poetics seemed a useful focus. We deplored the unevenness of the poetry in most magazines, and resolved to pursue excellence relentlessly. We also knew that good magazines could have agendas — *kayak* and *The Sixties* and John Logan's *Choice* were admirable and lively — but we thought it might be wise to be more eclectic, more catholic, drawing on many schools or aesthetics. Thus it was that the first issue contained work by poets as diverse in their affiliations as Robert Francis, Gary Snyder, Louis Simpson, Denise Levertov, Robin Skelton, and Ian Hamilton Finlay. We have continued, over the years, to try to cast a wider net.

Editors have come and gone over these forty years, but our founding principles have remained remarkably consistent. We read without regard for reputation or previous association, and each poem we accept is read aloud, as a final test, before the editors vote. None of the founders, I think, imagined we would still be producing FIELD forty years later, or even thirty or twenty, for that matter. Longevity in such matters is mostly luck, and we remain mindful of the need to have new contributors, and especially young contributors, in every issue. We have also felt, from the beginning, that translation widens the magazine's horizons significantly, and all translations are welcomed and carefully scrutinized.

Our prose features have evolved over the years into a fall symposium on the work of a particular poet and, in the spring issue, a cluster of reviews, mainly by the editors, of books from the previous year. We have suspended that spring custom for this anniversary issue, in order to present as full a complement of new work by poets as we could find room for. We thank all our contributors, in this issue, previous issues, and issues to come, for the opportunity to feature their work and for their friendship and support. We also thank all our editors who have served the magazine since its founding, at various times and in various ways. It's been a good run, so far, and it looks to go farther.

*David Young*

A NIGHT IN MARTIRIOS

Sometimes when the story is wildly implausible  
the author will have one character say

*I have a hard time believing this*

and the other explains:

*it's the axle working loose,*

*the fog in the orchards,*

*controlled fires in the canebrake.*

Now we are resting at twilight

on a frayed floral quilt

and the dimity curtains open

in the wind from Orizaba.

Now the author has the characters undress

and sleep together, they are naked

as the space between words,

the lamp is unlit, the bed unmade,

the silence is absolute,

occasionally a faint hiss of rain

or the scritch as the author

erases his own name.

## EVORA

Maybe we may talk our way out of death  
given that the *I* disappears so disingenuously  
whenever you look for it, so does the poem,  
leaving only the track of a snail  
in the stucco alcove where we catnapped  
in Evora, in late summer, scrunched  
in the osier bed, before you knew me,  
before I didn't know you, when the future ended,  
cracked sun in the mirror, when the finches  
instructed us in thin scattered voices  
to stand our ground against delight.

## THE LONG STRUGGLE AGAINST THE MIND

It colored the oak: we unpinned the leaves.  
It invented the wind: a bowing, a resistance,  
a pressure, a rolling without an eye.  
We undid that labor: there was no wind,  
the wind was in the mind. It made us undress,  
stand face to face flushed if in front  
of a shy sorrowful mirror. It made us  
resist it, try to discover something hard  
and soft besides hardness and softness,  
a world, a room with a blue blue curtain,  
a small bottomless sky, a dog dish, a wineglass  
with a hairline crack, a center, a wife,  
a husband: then it unmade us: we were elms  
with zippers, who knew they would die,  
we were clouds who had no choice  
but to advance naked in mind-breaking silence  
toward that shining absent presence.

*Christopher Buckley*

SCIENCE, MATH, AND THE MUSIC OF THE SPHERES

Matter, where we are you and I...

As every star is moving.

— Ernesto Cardenal

The soul weighs

the same as a slice of Wonder Bread —

white light

keeps on going,

our atoms' broken bones

unequal

to the equation

of space....

How we get from our electrons

to one grand abstraction

backing up

the whole production

beats me?

What a small music

holds the heavens up,

and what,

in the short run,

does it do for us

to know that?

The past

keeps coming at us —

we touch one end

of the harmonies

unraveling from the net,

the quasars,

after 15 billion years,

arriving

with their news.

Dead or Alive,

more of the same —

the universe is stretching

like a piece of lace,  
more nothing  
in between  
the interstices and  
light-stitched bits....  
Who hasn't heard  
we are so many  
envelopes  
of common chemicals,  
sealed  
with sea-music in us,  
salt still on the tongue.  
And who could be  
out there  
beyond the ionosphere  
to hear  
our blue quotient of notes,  
to know  
the denominators  
that will never tell us  
how many equal parts  
make up the whole?  
I remember the '50s,  
arithmetic chalked  
across the blackboard —  
fractions  
and long division,  
the numbers, the finite sums  
I could never work out...  
that chalk dust  
rising forever  
into air  
as I clapped  
the erasers after school —  
the white fingerprints  
on my navy-blue school sweater,  
the 2

small clouds of my hands

held up

against

the indivisible

night sky.



SPUD

In a deep tomb he lay,  
a dark-hued pharaoh resting in peace.

In private, he shed grief-stricken tears  
for the honest mud where he was hatched.

Here he is now on a plate, arrogant, boiled,  
crowned with parsley, smeared with butter,

solitary like a newborn, he who saved  
from hunger both the damned and the just.

Look, a thin knife cuts him in half.  
Look, a fork sticks out of his back.

But, friend, don't be sorry for them.  
Don't look darkly on the world of potatoes,

since other saviors in sacks are sprouting  
hoping to see the polestar on a clear day.

## SILENCE AND SNOW

The snow falls on the frozen earth. The snow falls.  
In the silence I think I hear the sound of its fall,  
the rustle of a cloth or the crackling of a fire.

In the silence as thick as billions of particles  
of an exploding Niagara,  
or the slide of some Himalayan avalanche.

In a photograph from Japan, swarming with snow  
there are monks in orange robes  
under umbrellas made of bamboo.

They were caught walking past a garden wall  
and some black pine trees arrested forever  
in the silence solidified by the falling snow.

This silence is eternal and never to be repeated.  
She's the gentleness and softness of bird feathers,  
the bliss of October afternoon the color of honey.

She's the dust from wooden book shelves,  
the yearning of an old man for the carelessness  
and the endless sweetness of childhood, Paradise,  
as fresh as the taste of just-picked strawberries.

## THE RAIN WANTS TO KILL ITSELF

With its fingers the rain stains your window and mumbles.  
It wants to come in and kill itself.  
I see you are in bed and couldn't care less.  
In the dark. Naked. Couldn't care less.  
Your hair loose. Your thighs spread open.  
And there, in plain sight, black moss.  
Your left middle finger busy, busy!  
Villain, searching for the red crest.  
While golden honey already oozes.  
You call me from your delirium tremens.  
Me already changed into a crow.  
I fly down into your lap and peck, peck.  
And then in my beak carry the caught fish away,  
to go play cards and drink.  
While the rain with its fingers  
makes stains over your window and mumbles,  
counts its beads,  
wants to come in and kill itself.

*translated by Charles Simic*

THE CITY OF MANY LOVERS

*Lunedì. Martedì. Mercoledì.* It's moon-day. Moon that strikes on the downbeat. Tomorrow, a day for Mars. And a day in the middle, which is a miracle. We visit your ex-lovers. Which is to say, the sense that you could leave me tomorrow. Not the most loved. The most new. What to count on? In the Japanese film, the Buddhist praises her god in each of his 36,000 manifestations. Of course, you like me. I am round. I have no edges. You can play with me, so can your dog. Then I crawl into an absence I have been remodeling all my life, a crockery, walls smoothed with warm water. Moon Dreaming of her Brother Bronze. Cold Milk Moon over Lake and Fog Diptych. We have been here a month. I have left my people behind and adopted yours. I imagine I have made this happen. I imagine a tree falling and the tree falls. It seems both gift and penalty that I was left alone as a child. While you, in your city, learned civility.

THE INTERNET

If it is dead when you read this poem  
remember its many grassy ways,

its empty spaces filling with light.  
It had such trees and lace-like roots,

such pools where ideas turned,  
where its brain floated in broth.

I drank  
until stars fell from the clouds.

Winter brought networks of static  
from the curved glass sky,

the circuitry of ice on water,  
snow deleting the fields.

I loved it so much  
I couldn't catch my breath.

If it has outlived me,  
sit beneath its endless branches

and think of my empty mouth  
turning to granite.

## PRE-ELEGIES

And what have you got now? A mother? Father?  
Voices that pulse through the lines then falter,  
the phone's emptying heart? They say they love you,  
but now they are hanging up. Early day, things to do  
tomorrow. And now they are maybe lying  
in bed with their magazines, now they are talking  
about someone else, no one you know.  
Lights out, now — it's late, and they've grown old.

But both are still alive, and that's good luck.  
They've drifted along with their lives just  
as you have let yours drift. And here you are, alone,  
half drunk on the couch, cradling your phone.  
The dark outside is gentle and insistent:  
Best to lose them slowly to their distance.

MOTHER'S NIGHT

She's celebrating it for me. She's coming back  
from the place where she was scattered, from the place  
where she was introduced to medical students  
and their teachers and was slowly taken apart,  
back from where she lost herself among nurses,  
from what was left of her house, from her single bed,  
from her sink and her kitchen window where she could see  
the dead stalks in her garden. She's coming back,  
her arms full of the flowers I gave her once  
a year in April, and she's asking me  
to put them back on the stems in the greenhouses  
they came from, to let them shrink away from the light.

PAIN

The surgeon has done all he can and the beautiful  
people on the wall-mounted T.V.  
smile down on me.

When the pain returns, it is slow, insidious. Intimate, even.

It wants me.

It wants my skin.

It wants my breath.

It enters the red silk lining that runs the length of my torso  
and closes its fist.

The nurse covers me in snow  
white blankets  
and checks my pulse.



## DOWN TO THE COFFEE

The woman in a brown coat and red hands  
disappears behind a door.  
In the very spot where everything vanishes, it stays.  
The way that coffee date with my dad stays.  
I go there now and work my way to the pulsing  
at his neck, and to that part of his shoulder  
exposed by the gown. If there is the crack of knee  
when he stands (yes, I think there must be),  
I will go there too, and from there  
to his slow descent, holding,  
he's holding on with both hands,  
to the chair, and now we're sitting  
knee to knee, lifting the coffee in white  
styrofoam cups. If there are dark flowers  
with a single bright yellow bloom among them  
I will find those, too,  
and my question, in the way of all questions,  
will rise at the end.  
It's been 12 years since I draped my brown jacket  
over his knees to warm them.  
Thanks, he said.  
I placed my hand inside his hand,  
and I was gone.  
And he was, too.

NOSTALGIA AS PROPHECY

Already the dead have forgotten us,  
Noisy children who still need to breathe.

Widows in a stoop, men stretching their suspenders —  
They're playing shuffleboard beyond the stars,

Or sitting hollow-eyed on an unmade cloud  
Like mopes in some Hopper knockoff.

Down here, with sunlight surfing the leaves,  
We keep the little things close, fetish and relic —

Corncob pipe, hairpin from a cold pillow.  
We look behind at the backdrift, ahead to the dark.

There's never enough heaven to go around,  
But the grave won't take no for an answer.

ERMINE NOOSE

Mink runners up the thirteen steps, mink  
the hangman's hood  
and black marten his gloves. The priest's cassock  
mink, his crucifix chinchilla, each hair combed  
to catch dawn's silver light, his black book gilt-bound.  
Some can choose  
(pay for) the noose  
to be softened, lined  
with ermine,  
but when the floor-door's latch unsnaps  
they drop  
as sharply as anyone,  
or more so: softer nooses tighten faster.  
A comic in the crowd  
holds a lifeless mouse by its tail  
(or might that be a baby mink?)  
which he tosses  
into the open grave  
in the graveyard  
adjoining the gallows' ground.

## LUX

Lux: Bohemian, un-Anglicized at Ellis Island. The old-timers pronounced it *Lukes*. Not a common name but not unheard of either.

Lux: Henry Lux made the boots John Wilkes Booth wore when he murdered Abraham Lincoln. Lux was not implicated in the crime. No relation.

Lux: A small town in Southern France. No relations there.

Lux: Lower case lux: the international unit of illumination. Ditto no relations.

Lux: THOMAS LUX SUXS MORE THAN LOUISE GLUCK, website unaware that Gluck is pronounced Glick.

Lux Soap: Detergent, dishwashing liquid. No kin, unfortunately, though the speaker was called Lux Liquid sometimes on childhood playgrounds.

Lux Ave.: A small street in the speaker's hometown named after distant relatives whom he never met.

*Lux et Veritas: Light, and something else, a rare, singular thing.*

Lux: The name of a dog — third cousin to the speaker — in the household of Anton Chekhov's niece, Olga Chekhova.

THE UNINOCULATED,

the nonimmune, line up  
and lie down.

There's not  
enough medicine  
in the world  
nor enough needles  
to deliver it. See  
that white box  
with the red cross  
painted on its lid?  
So much depends  
upon its emptiness.

THIS IS YOURS

Wish I knew how to say  
no to nothing.  
Nothing, though,  
has a persistent charm.

The lonely set of stairs  
and the trip they invite.  
The dead air, televised.  
Walks along fields

once farmed. Hope hung  
up too long to dry.  
A postcard to God  
returned. Only

I didn't write a return  
address. Which means,  
doesn't it, something?  
Someone cares to say:

This is yours.  
Keep it a while longer.

CEMETERY

The afternoon in a puddle.  
One step and I'm

done with it. Outside,  
the apples are dripping

with ice. Some neighbor opens  
the door to a car, roadside out,

and gets swiped by a speeding truck.  
This is happening. Some of us gather

by a curve of new black road.  
No, on the hill

leading up. We can't, any of us,  
get our footing. Cars are passing

out in ditches. No one tells the children  
with their sleds to come inside

and listen. At least it's a beautiful  
road, someone says. We ride a long way

in a car that never overturns. Of course  
I'm the child, of course,

and the old woman suddenly  
new in her quiet. I could raise her

arm and watch it  
clatter down. Selfish, selfish child.

THEORIES OF ART

Lottery tickets,  
examined by pachyderms,  
mottos of master sergeants.

This, oh friend, is my poppy.

Verse metrics won't last.  
No fun queuing up anymore  
for the right to visit  
invented lands.  
Better to up  
our antes, bullet and rope  
are reliable, the barred  
windows, the flecks  
of color on paper  
and old eyes  
a sure thing.



## IVORY

Time for us  
to celebrate our farewells  
inconspicuously,  
we'll go *single*,  
tenderly, no  
showing passports,  
let's travel, let's,  
and always  
to Friaul, to Gradisca,  
absorb my sighs,  
that'll help, my tickets,  
the entries  
in summit-ledgers, the words  
whispered in huge  
flabby ears  
or grasping trunks.

## PUNCTUATION MARKS

Have gone,  
have gone like birds, —  
who went, who flew,  
comma, chickens,  
birds on foot, who went?

Have gone,  
have swum like chickens, —  
sickly colored, down the brooks,  
who went, who swam,  
fishes, strangers,  
semi-colons, who went?

Have gone,  
have flown like fishes,  
who went, who swam,  
who's died,  
chickens, inconspicuous clients,  
question-marks,  
border crossers, who went?

*translated by Stuart Frieibert*

Michele Glazer

PART OF WHICH IS REMEMBERED AND  
THE OTHER PART IS NOT FORGOTTEN

*[Middle English, from Old French, from Latin musculus,  
diminutive of mus, mouse.]*

*in the naming, as in the matter of  
in the naming muscle,...*

The path was made of things cast off  
too, and ground down  
to be mute, indistinct.  
Bark-browns sifted with cellulose and insect bits.

On top, plain sight, you were a thing  
intact in miniature

of toenails, whiskers, naked tail      the color of birth.  
Youna said *pink*      and I said *scrubbed*.  
But you were even before scrubbed.

Slid onto the cardboard back  
of a pad of paper, stiffest thing around,  
you came alive.      Who was more startled?  
How could skin the light sees through hold something in?  
Soft without cushion,      soft in its surface, hard depths,

smell on my fingers the smell of what birthed you      the smell  
of your skin  
the smell of inside of her.

It presses itself.

Little bent knuckle,  
you were tucked.  
You were new and then, the skin on your back

stretched to translucence.  
Shiny so an eye looking in might  
see it self.

In the folds      your surprising extremities  
gathered as in arrangement  
for intimate conversation.  
We talked to you.

You were new, and then  
from the rudderless ground

you were lifted.

You were nobody's business.  
*We'll keep it, save it.* Matchbox, shoe box.

Someone runs past, on the path, and the motion of muscles is the  
motion  
of small mice running back and forth beneath the skin.

It might be the beginning of any number of animals in our minds  
and all the time it is only one thing,  
perfectly formed and indeterminate.

THE FORTUNE-TELLER, or  
CLASSICAL RUBRIC IN TIME OF WAR

A crow was in the hospital. Not as a patient. He had flown in. An open window. And perched; this is the way of crows: on the metal rail of a bed. That bed was empty. The bed next to it was not. And the woman in the bed next to the bed where the crow perched was sleeping: this was the way of the woman, this particular woman: or of her illness: and so she did not see the crow, as it perched on the metal rail of the bed next to hers and ruffled and unruffled its feathers and cocked its head at several different angles and even raised a claw as if it were thinking that it might be worth its time to make some more elaborate or sophisticated gesture. But did not. The window had been left open. By a nurse. Who, down the hall, steeped in her own cares at the nurses' station, did not see. The crow, or the woman. Sleeping. So that when the nurse did return to the room, the room was empty. Of the crow, at least. And the nurse closed the window. As if nothing had ever flown in, or out. And the nurse — who, after all, was a good nurse — smoothed the covers on the sleeping woman's bed before she left again. And the woman in the bed next to the bed where the crow had perched kept sleeping.

ELEPHANT SEALS

Muffled thunder like clouds rolling over  
in sleep, and mirrored underneath —  
gray sodden bodies, enormous slugs

with Spandexed buttocks and thighs.  
Under rain, under pencil-thin strokes of lightning,  
one, with his long dangling nose

like something lunar, tumorous, lumbers  
across the sand, nudging through others who arf,  
who rise on fins, then belly-flop down.

Easy to argue from nature anything  
at all — dead ends in evolution's maze,  
or evidence of God's wild earthy wit.

But the bulls argue over their harems,  
one youth galumphing toward a battle-scarred  
alpha who rears and roars, till the upstart

backs off, biding his time. Around them  
the sea sputters, rain pocks the sand, the pod  
piles up. If this is the utterly other,

still, when one drowsy-eyed mother,  
lolling as her baby nuzzles in to nurse,  
lifts a fringed, finger-like fin to scratch,

everyone watching feels an itch.

SELF-PORTRAIT WITH CATFISH

Stately is the catfish in its electric suit —  
silt-filter, river-drinker,

bottom-squatter in its sleeve of mud,  
tail fanned into a winning hand of poker,  
and lips closed like the curtains of a confessional.

This is the fish that hears the fisherman's heel  
at one hundred yards,

the fish that listens, unseen, beneath  
mirrored waters, in the mud dark,

the fish of bayou and impoundment,  
of lake and slew and bottom:

chucklehead, mudfish, fiddler,  
polliwog, butter cat, greaser.

Legend says that a catfish holds up the world.

I believe it.

I believe the stars are glimmering fry,  
the Milky Way the milt of ten thousand catfish,  
the moon a doughball closed in a bullhead's mouth,  
and the folds of space as smooth as a catfish that slips  
the hook and swims away. Yes, I believe it.

Tomorrow, let us awaken as catfish.

Tomorrow, let us touch all that we know  
with our tongue-skins.

Magnolia petals taste of cardamom,  
and *Lonely* is the salt-blooded tinge  
after a tooth is pulled.

What is the sound of ten thousand catfish  
swimming in a levee pond?

How long would it take thirteen catfish  
to circumnavigate the earth?

A catfish dies knowing wake and wave  
and wefts of light, knowing electric shimmer,  
the tremor of tectonic plates, and the odor  
of a body adrift in the waters of Lake Pontchartrain.

A catfish dies knowing that longing is barbed,  
knowing the feeble shelters we make beneath drift  
and wreckage, and how easily everything settles,  
drawn downward by insatiate mud, to be swallowed  
by catfish and made into flesh that will rise again, slowly.



HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT ON THE SUBJECT OF ANGELS

Fallen  
angels

look like  
flakes of soot  
abacuses  
cabbage leaves  
stuffed with black rice  
hail  
painted red  
blue flames  
with yellow tongues

fallen angels  
look like  
ants  
moons wedged beneath  
the green fingernails of the dead

angels in heaven  
look like the inner thighs  
of an underage girl

like stars  
they shine on shameful places  
they are pure like triangles and circles  
with silence  
inside them

fallen angels  
are like the open windows of a morgue  
like cows' eyes  
like the skeletons of birds  
like falling planes

like flies on the lungs of fallen soldiers  
like streaks of autumn rain  
connecting lips with birds taking flight

over a woman's palm  
wander  
a million angels

devoid of bellybuttons  
they type on sewing machines  
long poems in the shape  
of a white sail

their bodies can be grafted  
onto the trunk of an olive tree

they sleep on ceilings  
falling drop by drop

*translated by Joanna Trzeciak*

*Lilah Hegnauer*

WE FUCKING SANG IT

Gust, suck the curtains out the window. I want you standing in a hot shower with an apple brandy perched on the edge of the tub.

Two stories up and three doors down, between my palms, feet hip-width apart and no one counting the breaths. I want a new tattoo, a fresh shake of salt, a few too many cooks in the kitchen. I want all my eggs in your basket. I move within a half syllable of time and you, you watch me do it.

Snowpack and dewpond and kitties in the cupboard. Your clean clipped fingernails, your indecision, your hard to get, your limp tendrils, your darkroom door flung open.

Seattle in the winter and San Francisco all the dog days of summer. Every city on every map reveals that we live there. Call me Martha. I'll call you precious and hot cakes and Lucy on the sly.

JUNK GARDEN

Sweet narcosis of blonde  
Beers and the recurring image  
Of your face.

Annihilating daylight.

Sickly hopeful  
In my new black skirt.

Once when I was a child, I called out your name.

Meanwhile, the exterminating had begun.

An old little girl, I am  
Dumb in its blinding.

I move my body but  
I never leave this room.

Death row of the  
Soul, dirty train ride.

And I will never

Come back.  
This love, trembling —

## KINGDOM OF DIRT

Soon the ambassadors from the Netherworld  
Will begin

Their descent. Death,  
Disguised inside me, already,

As sleaze.  
Grime and her magnificent seed.

Brother Michael, clutching his Bible  
Hallucinating helicopters.

Brother Michael, child-like and  
Wrecked.

Infamy, and the cosmology of chronic  
Raveling and unraveling. Or,

Displaced insanity. Dirty Cindy, little  
Glitter of her father's

Spit: unseeable androgyne and fragment  
Of his, discovered on the bottom of his dream chest.

Draped in my black cape of smut glue and  
Subterranea, they mistake me for

Some guy in drag in my nasty  
Boots. Why, just look: a manifestation

Of Sterne. Or, appoint me hustler of  
My brother and his kinky noir

Scheme: me, at thirteen, on the beach  
In candy-striped bikini.

Inside or out  
Of time, Heroine Glamorine.

Groom of the Underworld, please  
Come with me

To the discotheque at the end  
Of the world. Piss-

Elegant at the halfway  
House for the trashed and gone galore.

Meet me in the love-  
Burned orchard

Where the doomed to beauty  
Meet at last.

## WISH FULFILLMENT

Finally,

On the crimson leather  
Back seat of a rental,  
Parked in a locked car lot,

My very own Club Utopia.

I just can't wait to die.

Everyone has a secret they need to  
Talk to.

ROSE IS DEAD AND CRASHES THE PARTY

My miscarried sister wants to be an owl —

At the costume ball, she's pressed against my basement's  
white wall, raises the fluttering

mask of an io moth  
to the would-be

of her cheeks, her not-yet  
nose's Swedish hook

sharp on the scent of the before  
and afterlife.

Some people  
have all the luck. The glut of her look's

pure-helium-and-paper bird,

startling some brief  
mardi gras

each time the sun strikes. This is the part of the ball

where no one  
asks me to dance, and I sip my wine

like it's asking for it, like lips  
are the right answer. By now, I'm mean

and drunk and say,  
*Some owl, sis. Christ.*

I say, *Get a life.* When she flies off



the whole room  
watches her eyes, heavy-lidded and green as sweethearts —

I'm damn jealous. Her face, painted in god's  
near-perfect drag,  
comes close to the real

thing, but still the tongue-  
tied animal.

THREE STILLNESSES

Near  
you beside whom.

Again, when you left off  
carving and sanding  
a profile meant to swing towards-and-away:  
that place where the hinges would go.

By way of  
once in Ohio,  
sharp light in my attic room  
swearing it would be  
long ago someday,  
even then —

THE LEE SHORE

I want a darkness I can remember

Here  
Even this

lip of the continent  
this garden of whales  
this nightwater

foam arrives mottled like the hides of harbor seals  
like the moon clouded over

It doesn't matter what I want

\*

I watched the oats in the pot  
breathing

like a man's chest  
rising and falling as he sleeps

like the heaves of hill upon hill  
making shadows in the yard

How does it feel  
that last breath that turns you  
into night  
into ocean salt  
into coral

\*

Or did the twin sparrows on your chest  
bear you the miles home  
to the foothills

where your brothers found  
black veins in the earth  
new light

\*

At the bottom of the sea there is no light  
no lamp to read by

Just the memory of white lilies arranged in a milk bottle  
by an open window in July

STAKES

Playing cards, God where are you?  
In the water glass bedside.  
Behind the thick curtain up my sleeve.  
Under my teeth, the shallows of my neck,  
edge of my tongue pus of my finger.  
Wen, sore night.  
Spasm son  
in a follicle, crease, sputum. Come back  
to the table you sat at when I bluffed  
and you dropped out sweeping  
my small stake in. You owe me. Yes, you do.

## LINEN

Those who strain over linen  
sleep on straw.  
We love muddy feet  
from the marsh.

Their tiny cuts, blisters of white peonies.  
It doesn't matter  
if you have skill  
at anything but walking.

John Amorosi. 1948-1952.  
There were no deals,  
one dies soon but we've  
become one walker.

Little brother,  
I'm a bit dead you  
alive in linen white blister, alive  
in my staring at straw —

my skill at nothing.

ELEGY FOR LIAM

Insert the rain in this picture  
so you can feel the full weight of the words;  
insert late summer evening:  
that particular failing light, so heart-breaking.

The neighborhood grass is green for this late in summer;  
so much rain, we never saw before. Insert the river  
that runs in the direction of nowhere, where time is,  
and where we stood on a rock inside the water's hushed words.

How can I say this? Everything is dying around us,  
and everyone, including some at the ends of pistols  
held by their own hands. What the hell  
happened to staying around.

THE DEER CAVE DRAWING IN SOUTHERN CHINA  
THAT THE CHINESE GIRL DREW ON THE NAPKIN  
TO SHOW ME EXACTLY WHERE THE CHARACTER  
NOW USED FOR THE WORD DEER CAME FROM

Her black hair hung across her face at the angle of repose, a mid-  
night sheen, and then I'm on the river of her eyes; have you ever  
seen that? Dear god.

I have been so near beauty, I will never be the same.



MULTICOLLINEARITY

Constant: The bones beneath  
the house of childhood are  
like ribs of a small child  
or dog, the one heart gone.

Variables: On cheap  
butcher paper in big city  
classrooms, watercolor blues bleed  
into the green of grass

and red of rising sun.  
Is this the enemy of truth?  
They fail because of no breakfast  
because they got no sleep

because of shouts and fists the night  
before because they fail because  
of work linked to food linked to school  
linked to work and before that and after.

Analysis: You stand  
in rows with your sorrows,  
my children, orderly,  
your mittens abandoned,  
collections of stickers

lost. As statistics, you must be  
one thing, the same thing, not  
the ones you are; so I can chart  
the causes of suffering  
and account proportions of blame.

Dream: Weeds grew from the tops  
of my thighs, roots running  
down through veins. I wanted  
but was afraid to pull.

BOND

It was not cousin Harry,  
home from the war.  
Tipsy, silly,

he liked to twirl alone  
to the music,  
wagging his finger

in the air  
to boogie woogie.  
No, someone else

took me in his arms  
and led. Balancing,  
I focused

on my stocking feet  
not slipping off  
his shoes. Surely

there was laughter  
as we danced?  
I've erased his face,

his voice, but not  
the scent of wool  
and danger.

FROM "THE AURORAS"

I. *Dawn Aurora*

The nothing you know is as immaculate a knowing  
as any moment moving from a distance into dawn.  
All of the awakenings, or the old unconscious lies...  
I'd waited all night, holed up in Selene's derelict houseboat —  
drinking tea, drinking scotch, thinking of the rain  
that night in Camden Town when she went missing for hours,  
coming back only to say, Sayonara baby; thinking of  
the way so many things touch their own fates. The motorcycle

heads for the cliff, or the bus stops just before the bench.  
Everything seems more shabby in the dusk; everything glorious  
holds its light. Look to your sons, look to your daughters.  
Look to the blades rising out of the dark lawn. Don't worry;  
each of your myths remains emblazoned upon the air. The way  
the wind moves across the vellum of the mountain,  
as the silence lifts its chords from the old piano. In the still dark  
& still uncertain dawn, there begins that slow revelation larger

than the mind's, as the light grows coronal, & the house fills  
with those elaborate agendas of the day. The monastery &  
philosophy —  
this morning, both seem so far away.

II. *Lago di Como*

The blood of the visible hangs like blossoms of bougainvillea  
as they turn & twist along the lattice of limbs shading your  
terrace, stretching like a ruby squid across one corner of the  
stone  
villa above the lake. We sit looking out over the unqualified  
excellence

of the morning, & there is nothing you might desire to recall. You believe in a space that is as large as logic, that is as logical as the word.

Tell me. What is the "beautiful," what is the "lost," & what lives still, just

at the edge of the sound of the trees? It could be the syllables of habit;

it could be a single phrase of gratitude... or an unbroken prayer.

Tell me.

What will stay, & what will hold its grace & lasting ease?

### III. *Autumn Aurora*

The illusionist steps to the stage. Everything he claims will be, will be. I know because I've watched him before the curtains began to part, & I've seen he is not just one man, but he is also a woman. He is as multiple as the rain. He is all children in the future — those children both the woman & the man he is will bring from their couplings, their embraces, & those silences of the clasped plural of their

nights, their individual nights. How have you left me? You have left me with my hopes. How have you dreamed of me? You have dreamed of me beneath the cool of the evening. There I am, holding my dulcimer, holding my mandolin. There I am, singing to you, always, singing to you, always, across the blade of time. In the monograph of dawn, all of the tendencies of shifting light... & now the bells are sounding. This evening, we will discover

only the fragrance of the October moon.

#### IV. Florentine Aurora

I saw what would proclaim itself as *beauty-beyond-surface*.

It was the rarest of days. I'd walked directly from the train station  
& found the gallery empty, yet filled with a golden light as if  
dozens of  
gilt bees rose lazily to the eaves, each a reflected particle of the  
afternoon.

It was a whole universe lifted by the painting; it was a universe  
that mirrored  
the afternoon — & its singular burnishing within the painting —  
& the young

women, articulating the angles of desire, the hopeless erotic fortune  
that proves itself in beauty. The shell of the day unfolding, the  
perfume of

the moment filling every pore we call the imagination. The day,  
today, seems

inexhaustible. This is my praise; this is my proclamation. This is  
the apple

I place on the white plate, before you. This is my metaphysics of  
possibility.

This is the fury of the present. This is the memory of the questions  
I offer like pewter goblets. Let us share what remains, while it  
remains.

LAST SUMMER OF SINGLE-DOM

The summer I learned how to make a successful jam, I felt full of secrets. All the flakes of fish food I tapped into a bowl deliquesced at the surface. I forgot: no fish. A man said to me, *I am the only exile of Switzerland — you must love me tonight*. The water on the bar was a maypop vine leading me anywhere but this smoky scene and initials keyed into the leather of the greasy booths.

\*

— Where is the bloom?

\*

Instead, I flew a thousand miles to Florida and could not begin my tour of rest without a walk with my mother to check each fruit tree in the back yard: each seedling, each bud and redburst. Fire ants waited for me to linger too long while she told of the fruits fallen and given to waste. Or canker. Or blight. We bent to check the bottom branches for heavy swells about to fall into the moldy sandscape. *Ixora blossom and strife. Blossom powder and pistil dust*. The wild and twisty leaves of croton shrubs teeth through the gummy soil. *What a smile, what a smile*. When I returned to New York, to my fiancé — I only offered him a single gift: two pieces of mango taffy. Of this he did eat and eat. He kept the wax paper as proof.

FLIGHT

Scramble of buckeye. Leaf buds hatching. The empty swing.  
Every year the same as if nothing has changed.

My hands the same ivory color as the piano keys. Music floats  
into the peach trees. All those hammers, frantic beneath the pol-  
ished wood.

Iris, violets, and bursts of dogwood.

*You touched them.* My father scoops out baby rabbits with a garden  
spade and crushes them in the trash can. *They would have been  
abandoned.*

He caught me staring and cross-stitched my eyes shut. He caught  
me and shook me until my bones turned to sand.

I move out of the breaking. I am touched by air.

I leave a path of little sacrifices.



I KNOW WHERE THE COLOR WENT

The forsythia, not pretty  
was in the third day of his bruised knee

bird-foot violets huddled under  
a decaying log

they were  
under his eyes and at the elbow joints.

The blue of the colorless sky  
was not really blue

so it was his blood  
not really blue

and what had spilled  
was  
the cardinal out back  
that cocked its crest at me.

I get how green begins everything.

He lay twenty feet from the car  
in the embankment woods

not really a place at all.

When the sun was finally low  
it greeted me head on

and then I did  
figure out the orange.

INTERRUPTION BY ARCHANGEL

The angel is adamant,  
rat-face mean — *up yours*  
says the finger and so it happens,  
the whole run of luck  
from the almost-stoning to the stone.

Can't you see she's trying to read?  
She keeps her thumb in the book,  
thinking she'll get back to it,

but there's a smudge on the edge  
of the elongated outline, a fuss  
where the doves were erased  
except for their crossed tails,

a cornice of sorts that crowns  
the usual portals with six or seven  
inscrutable characters.

He clears his throat. She  
clutches her collar shut, as if  
that would do any good.  
That alleged yes.

(Simone Martini, *Annunciation*)

## BLUE NUDES

As if she were a rind pulled back

from a dried-out fruit, crouching with her face on her knees, her  
flesh etched and streaked, as if she were disconsolate or

drowned, bobbing by the moorings in a yolky light, her head  
dropping below her shoulders

as if bending to wash, a breast hanging beneath her like a bag of  
coins, one day shy

of a year since she saw him last, naked on the settee, ready to  
yield to the shadows, the leaf and shag, as if she were

found dead, fifty feet from the berm between the quarry and the  
neighborhood, her skin mottled and bruised

as if he gripped her so the flesh blanched, then suffused again  
with deeper pink, as if

she heard someone come in downstairs and set her book down on  
the bed,

cornered, her body a curve to contrast the entablature, as if she were

woken in the blue hour, sweating cold, rising again to attend to a cry,

exposed, only an arm to shield herself, or

cut, torso from limbs, then scissored into shapes — megaphone,  
hambone, fortune cookie, tadpole, melon, drumstick, udder, fin  
— her body

printed in error, pressed with punctuation, a nipple and a navel,  
as if she were

turning an ear toward the door, letting her mind stray  
into the afternoon, into an old argument, as if she were  
opening her mouth to speak, starting to form  
an answer to an unasked question, as if she were  
ready to get out and towel off, reconsider, reach over  
to straighten the lamp, catch a glimpse of herself in the globe, as  
if she were  
about to sit up, remember the time, refuse, seize  
the pieces scattered on the sideboard, gather her hair again in a  
quick twist, as if she were  
opening her mouth to absorb the shadow and press it into syllables,  
ready  
to get off her knees, rub out the stiffness and steady herself,  
stash a few things in a satchel,  
shake off the chill, as if  
her body were tensing to rise, as if  
she set down her book and turned to hear who was coming.

(Pierre Bonnard, *Blue Nude, Nude Crouching in the Bath*; Picasso, *The Blue Nude, The Blue Room*; Matisse, *Blue Nude I, II, III*; Roy Lichtenstein, *Blue Nude*)

SEE / BE SEEN

1: light

Once scholarship postulated that light emitted from the eye of one  
who sees,  
illuminating what is seen.

Approximation was merely distance. And absence? Not lack  
of presence. Lack of light.

2: city

I am inventing the city. It is not like building but moving into a  
darkened room.

Or like the space of a body as a void beneath clothes; unmapped  
continent  
postulated to teem with strange plants and people.

If I tell you never to look upon my feet  
how is it I stand without them?

If I ask if there is a city behind me as I leave it,  
the answer is always *yes*;

if I will not turn to see one who calls after me on the street, I am  
still called.

1: light

Once scholarship postulated that light emitted from what is seen,  
entering the eye of one who sees.

Sight kin to consumption:

Cathedrals gluttoned to the clerestory, whole towns pressed in and  
jockeying  
not for acoustics but an unbroken view of where the host would  
be held aloft.

Seen. Therefore eaten of.

2: bodies

What is seen, made material. Capable of being acted upon.

If I look at you, you are made real and consumed  
in the making.

When I tell you to look at me, it is an act  
of prying open.

CONTINUOUS UNTIL WE STOP

But when I came to what I'd been told  
was the zone of tragedy — transition — it was  
not that. Was a wildering field, across it the light  
steadily lessening, and the tall grasses, waving,  
deepened their colors: blue-green, or  
a greenish blue...hard to tell, exactly. Was like  
when the body surrenders to risk, that moment  
when an unwillingness to refuse can seem

no different from an inability to,  
though they are not the same — inability,  
unwillingness. To have said otherwise  
doesn't make it true, or even make it count  
as true. *Yes, but what does the truth  
matter now*, I whispered, stepping further inside what,  
by then, was night, almost. The tamer animals  
would soon lie down again, and the wild go free.

## CATHEDRAL

And suddenly — strangely — there was also no fear, either.

As a horse in harness to what, inevitably, must break it.

No torch; no lantern — and yet no hiddenness, now. No hiding.

Leaves flew through where the wind sent them flying.



*Laura Kasischke*

LANDSCAPE WITH ONE OF THE EARTHWORM'S TEN HEARTS

and also a small boy with a golden crossbow,  
and a white rabbit full of arrows.

Also snow. And the sky, of course, the color  
of a gently stirred winter soup.

I am the inert figure behind the barren apple tree.  
The one who wonders for what purpose  
the real world was created. I ruin everything by being in it, while one  
of the earthworm's hearts, deep in the ground, fills up the rest  
of the landscape with longing, and fiery collisions, and caves  
full of credit cards and catalogues. You can tell

I hear it, too, by the look on my face:  
That inaudible thumping insisting without believing  
*one is enough is enough is enough.*

MORNING POEM

Yesterday I asked myself again if life can be corrupted by what you don't remember. Greg was on the phone waiting for my steel cut oats to simmer for the minimum half hour, to collapse and dissolve. When he told someone *she likes the oil paint version of oatmeal and I like the acrylic* I thought it might fit into a morning poem that spoke about the Steins' long-haired trophy cows, how the puny straw-colored cow had looked like she'd just woken up, the forelock veiling her amber eyes and clumps of coarse hair stiffening all over her torso into peaks pointing different directions, whipped-hard egg whites, and me sliding past the field on the way to class comparing the car clock to the clock on the tape deck to the wristwatch, each set ahead of reality in varying degrees. On the winding road I tried to remember how easy it would be to kill someone accidentally and how the time I did I hadn't been in the car at all and it had been empty, slowly rolling heavily backward and she much older and perhaps not hearing it at first, walking away outside as I was reaching for ice cream, for a loaf of bread. How she hadn't looked dead but only pale and almost naked as they tried to save her with their bare hands, then with a kit of blade and sparks, while I watched from a few yards apart as she lay still and more still and more still.

FROM "SINDBAD"

On the twelfth day it seemed to him as if the waves  
washed his body ashore, as if his hands  
grasped at roots, as if a grin came over  
his face, as if all were finally still inside his skull,  
as if he staggered along the beach with outstretched arms,  
as if he heard now only his breath; not the calls  
of the men that bore him into town, not  
the voices of the doctors who stood round his bed, not  
the wheels of the cars in the street, out into which  
he seemed to step, or was he still swimming  
in the sea, or did he still exist at all, who then  
was the woman, with whom he there or here or wherever  
seemed to stand before his house, who put her arms  
around his neck, who spoke to him, but  
he didn't hear her, he heard only his breath, that  
at least seemed sure, what then was  
the rest all around him: the faces, the wedding,  
that seemed to be his wedding, the furniture,  
that seemed to be his furniture, the money, that had to be  
his money, who was it, who held it in his hand,  
he or not he in a house at the window and where  
was the sky, it was no longer there, so the images  
had to be his death  
or salvation.

*translated by Anne Posten*

FLOATING TURD NEXT TO THE DEAD FLOATING SNAKE

Bone black, bone char —

what is ancient  
of my name means princess. Hagar  
is Egyptian for *fugitive*, or *flight*.

Together, would they become the color  
that is made

from the burned bone? The black

and white rivers meet...  
run separately in two colors, then blend

toward the sea. There, the sea lavender will flourish —

and then falsify

where we'd made love that morning. Your nightmares, Love,  
in Manaus. The Hotel Continental —

below the chandelier at the confluence

of massacre. No,

we don't overlook  
the plumbing for the latrines — a creaturely  
plastic piping

straight to the river. And we witness

our hopes of one another — my dream, in Manaus,  
of a hatchet to my skull —

its tip, wedging gently open,

and that relief.

DAWN-SICK ROSE-SICK WORD-SICK WORM-ROUND

Dawn-sick rose-sick word-sick worm-round,  
The good body knows to float down  
To the tire-smoke roads to the chain-sing scene  
Of work, work, his darling, his lust and his leaning,  
And steep in the green-shock of screens and un-screened  
Calls, of all day screen-green call girls.  
O but toward home soft clover bristles,  
Near sizzles with motion, and what's cordial,  
Immortal jiggles below it and through  
And through the raw fellow of the good body.  
And he comes down the walk, warm,  
Down, down the walk, and sings to Emily,  
Sings I am the angleworm, I am the dew,  
I am the bird-shine, the caw,  
The step-aside robin that eats the fellow raw.

I HAVE SEEN, LOUD GOD, THE CRACKLE  
AND SMASH OF STREAMS

I have seen, Loud God, the crackle and smash of streams.  
I have seen the mornlight burn red in hedges.  
How after rain the yard's pulsing worm face  
is tender, after your manner, Loud God,  
and dangerous-naked, ripe for the pluck  
of bird-beak, the foot-fall crush.  
I have felt the blindness of pine smoke,  
Loudness, how the fleshcups  
of peaches swell up around pits,  
how the fleshcup of the good body  
swells against its pit-red heart.  
Loud God, Long Lord, Longing Glow,  
when I fall like a stream, when I bleed  
like a lit-up hedge, when I pulse, Dangerous,  
Naked God, then I smell you: the tenderest, blindest smoke.

OCEANIC

A scream on the floor.

I'm picturing hard wood *and* sandy bottom.

Leftover rant. Sound like a skid.

So that was October, for whatever it's worth.

Everyone said *when a lake is this big*.

— You did it and you know it.

I smoothed my hair and told myself.

The alarm was set to go off.

Always, it seemed, in less than an hour.



## SOMETHING ABOUT VULNERABILITY

— Remember the drawer of birds? Neither do I.

That was so many field trips ago.

Honeycombs meant *you could do it in stages*.

I didn't press my face to that window.

A tag around the ankle teaching exactly that.

Is it true that places where I'm not don't exist, for me, just now?

If so, I'm fucking heartbroken.

And if August is a myth, don't spoil the ending.

I'm going as slowly as I can.

NIGHT FLIGHT TURBULENCE

Some things need to be done  
in the dark by yourself.  
I'm not saying it's right.  
In the greenly-lit restroom  
I looked pretty ill, like  
a vampire locked in  
a confessional;  
the drug had no effect  
whatsoever, maybe  
slightly more arctic and fearful.  
Angel of meetings  
long despaired of, poor girl —  
we could put something together  
to eat, or  
watch an old movie,  
you and me  
friendless  
in this winter city  
glimpsed for a minute as far off  
lights passing under the wing, just  
two more cripples Jesus  
never got around to.  
One theory says  
we won't remember dying anymore  
than being born.  
Where can you go at this hour,  
stay with me.

WALTHAM CATHOLIC CEMETERY

*Jordy Powers: 1948-2007*

On Calvary Street in October  
we have not done nothing with our lives —  
walking along still honing some words  
to a bright and anonymous  
saying.

Across the Marist Sisters'  
crowy hill, the source  
of the perpetual  
stillness  
we alone hear.

Down Calvary Street, where  
I know the hidden  
footbridge  
to  
and over you;

Calvary Street  
where we go to visit  
our family the strangers,  
and nobody asks us  
what we do.

TO A BOSTON POET

Personality changes: astonishing, even  
voice timbre and handwriting

altered, the face too  
to a degree

though perhaps I hallucinate  
that (but

if so  
then which I)

These are good words  
They were here first

Crimson twilight crow  
November mansion desert snow

Aldebaran  
Now rose-gray winter Fens, the

room  
overlooking the end, that

knee-high mound  
of dentures —

Toward the conclusion the music speeds up, then  
slows

into eternity  
which

having arrived, the time being  
(once again) now

about five in the morning  
I changed

into my very worst clothes  
and heading east set out on foot

At this point the narrator's  
faced with a decision

Retain his super powers  
or take the medication, or

if we are travelers  
and clearly we are

all homeless travelers  
to follow the poor

shade of John Wieners up Joy Street  
and into the white morning air.

MY BROTHER'S INSOMNIA

A boy ties (but will not remember how)  
An intricate knot that slips at the slightest tug.

He remembers reading that drops of blood  
From Medusa's lopped head bred cobras and asps.

He cares little for snakes, but fears spiders more.  
The recluse spider is his least favorite.

Some nights in bed, he holds his breath and is dead.  
Some nights in bed he holds his breath and listens

To wind rattle at the unlocked front door,  
To time rustle and scratch in the attic like mice.

Some nights he forgets if it is summer  
Or winter, if snow or a wren pecks the window.

## EDGE OF THINGS

I wait at the twilit edge of things,  
A dryspell spilling over into drought,

The slippage of shadow silting in,  
The interchange of dusk to duskier,  
The half-dark turning half-again as dark.

There: night enough to call it a good night.

I wait for the resurrection, but wake to morning:  
Mist lifting off the river.  
Ladders in the orchard trees although the picking's done.

## DISTANCES

Despondent, I ponder the larkspur  
But hear only rhyme:

*ark, err, lurk, spar.*

Far off: sluice-clatter on rocks,  
A slipstitch of rapids and flash  
Before the shallows.

I hear the wind speaking its riddles —  
Each word snuffed before I can write it down —

When all I ask for is a straight answer.

The dark repose of distances,  
The future always closer than the past,  
But neither on the map at hand,  
The dark repose of distances

nicked by headlights:

Dark matter fills in the spaces.

Another day. Another chapter  
In which the plot is postponed.  
I made a wrong turn

and ended here.

My father said I'd come to nothing.  
I do believe I've arrived.

Two horses, heads down,

consult the sweet grass.

Then one looks up as if to point the way.



PULLING OFF THE HIGHWAY ON THE WAY TO A  
DEATHBED TO VISIT A WORKHORSE AT REST

*for Amy Stephens*

We are no more  
than matter, our hair on the wind off the foothills  
will not even be

ash hovered above a collapsing wave  
off a coast harsh with gulls;  
still, look how

Levi the aged Clydesdale bends his stupendous neck,  
his braided mane tangled  
with sunlight,

over his mess of hay and oats;  
look how his hips, shuddering with arthritis,  
are sturdy enough

to walk the corral's perimeter, completely  
ignoring us, noble no longer, his gorgeous red hide  
flicking nothing away

but heat, his fine pale fetlocks muddied  
by urine and dirt,  
his hooves

that worked the acres when we were young  
imbedded with pebbles. And still, look  
how his venerable, achy legs,

hour by rainless hour,  
with all the gravity once entrusted them, keep on  
stamping the dust in front of his water pail.

## THE URN GARDEN

They slid you free of the hearse  
in a cardboard box shaped just like the boxes  
florists use for their lanky roses,

but this box big as a man  
with a night-green wreath where the face  
belongs. I came because

I needed to know the right father  
had died; to cast the borrowed coat  
of my mercy down.

It takes four hours to burn  
a person. I didn't know that. Father,  
I might have shopped,

or wept, or practiced naming  
the rowdy morning birds by their calls  
but I sat instead in the chapel,

made lists on some Kleenex,  
then slipped loose at last  
of your vast cold sleeves,

and wandered the young summer day  
bare-armed, heavy with life,  
a daughter no longer.

THE LAST VISIT

*(for my father, 1939-2008)*

Streets opened onto streets,  
doorways onto doorways. And there:

a courtyard of orange trees;  
and there: the Ukrainian bar —  
one stubbleface tipped forward

over his tumbler. So we passed  
beneath the windows of deepset rooms,

their bookfilled interiors — that  
honeyed library light. And farther,  
steam rose from the sewer grates,

swelled from the candying peanuts,  
the chestnuts fleshy and charred.

Linger before the tankers in the harbor,  
the cavernous nostrils of horses;  
I'll wade through the pool

of pigeons in the square, they'll rise  
before me as though I were wind.

And the fan turning in the wall  
behind the hotel, and the two subways  
riding forward together, their lights

joined in the tunnel — then sharply  
veering away. We continued

down the steps, past pawn shops  
and surplus stores; a man was sailing  
tinfoil boats on a silent fountain.

And then the streets grew narrow,  
thin terraces hung over us, — voices

like branches, like bowers of leaves.  
A boy was selling spices in bags,  
icons from a folded church.

Then a lovely face at a table —  
we nodded hello — then a railing

and nothing but sea.

## ONE SOLDIER

*(after Capa)*

Sealed by the City  
in the hollow of the machine

to be held upright there  
as he is still:  
arms thrown back

and thumb barely  
yet stamped to the rifle,

the weight of his body  
no longer on his feet, but now  
in motion backwards,

and the bullet:  
an invisible thread

passing through him  
— through the instant —  
held in place

by the shades of gray  
inside him. Here,

today's light rubs against  
his stark shirt and black  
bandolier, the bruised valley

in the deeper distance.  
His life: an invisible

thread passing through  
the upright plane  
of the picture —

to disappear

like the bullet  
on the other side of it.

AMERICAN WATER

They didn't trust the other country's water,  
the crystal ropes uncoiling from the faucets,

so they brought their own in plastic bottles  
that vibrated on the cargo plane — cases

mounted on cases mounted on pallets.  
In five gallon jugs they brought their own,

shouldered and flipped into a cooler  
where the water babbled and released

ghostly balloons whenever a guard was thirsty.  
Once it was snow until the sun pummeled it

down the mountain face. As witnessed  
only by monumental pines, the water stretched

cellophane across the skulls of boulders.  
It drove the fish forward — bug-eyed arrows.

The guards drank their own, but showered  
with the country's, mouths clamped

against any bacteria that fell upon their heads.  
Some were even skeptical of the water

that boiled over the burner, of glistening peas,  
the nubby, nail-less fingers of carrots.

Some believed the water was good  
for one thing: to drench the cloth

pressed against the prisoner's face.  
The water seeped into the nostrils,

the flinching lungs, until a human voice  
sprung from below the hand, saying anything.



EVANGELICAL FUGUE

The whirlwind, for one night only, in the Thunderdome?  
If we can find parking, Amit, we can find religion.

*Ours is money-making, not money-minded business.*  
Mammon backs the religion. God's behind the business.

Girl's got to put *something* in that Vuitton purse.  
The whore of Babylon is eyeing religion.

The business of religion is not-for-prophet.  
*God, says Pastor Mammon, is my kind of business.*

Folks can't see a burning bush, not from the nosebleed seats.  
Ask your prophet for a better designed religion.

The Lord's evangel reclines in a first class seat.  
The Lord's archangel is stuck flying business.

*What saved you from despair, afterwards?* The blind soldier  
Paints a picture. The deaf soldier signs *religion*.

Our cleanshaven prophet wears a three-piece suit.  
*Thine is the kingdom, it says, mine, the business.*

Think of business as a semidivine religion.  
We demigod-demagogues wine and dine religion.

Are you evacuating everyone? *Only the righteous.*  
*You may see some flashes to the east, Amit. Mind your business.*

## HYSSERLIK GHAZAL

Each Troy churns under to fertilize the next Troy.  
Welcome the ships. One less sack would mean one less Troy.

The Iliad Homer's hexameters brailled?  
A layercake ruin, a palimpsest Troy.

Blind fingers read the rubble and rap a rhythm.  
Look there, in the bonewhite playpen of Troy's chest: Troy.

Dig with spoons, or you'll fling one over your shoulder.  
Next time you smell ash on the ocean wind, guess Troy.

Iliads soaked the soil and sprouted this ghazal.  
Rot is reborn as the root, Amit. Troy begets Troy.

EURYDICE WHO GUIDES

Eurydice who guides      Orpheus who guides  
who first has to return to death  
the one who sings  
the one who opens first  
of all the animals his  
mouth to her song  
her thirst his thirst  
the ones who nurse each other

Don't be afraid the blackened saucepan said  
I met them in the country by a well  
and once I drank from them  
I never thirst

FIRST ELEGY

*Frédéric Chopin, 17 October 1849*

On all the world's mountaintops, no love...  
A body cachectic and blotched  
with the world's wear and tear.  
Where had the heart gone?  
O voices of plain-chant  
O real  
rising toward eye-blue stained glass where a dove  
spreads an enigma's wings  
between two discreet roses!

The body had been profaned  
its viscera studied nocturnally  
by a band of medical students  
come from the east  
they had come barefoot through the dust of Silesia  
humming old ballads

The heart torn out

embalmed  
hidden in a basket of eggs  
and taken across the border river

lost in the snow one day then found again  
filched by God's conjurors  
presented repeatedly by charlatans  
at county fairs  
before disappearing  
sole passenger  
and cargo of a vessel on the high seas  
that was the body loved so often by the same hands faithful  
to each member

the multiple body rain-battered  
at the song-thrush's flight

## TOWARDS BUXTEHUDE

He kept walking  
between the poplars and the tarmac  
went by farms fields  
power stations  
cars passed him  
black inside  
one rainy night he put his foot on something  
crunchy and soft:  
a run-over hedgehog  
thrown by the impact's violence  
onto the road's shoulder  
it had begun to snow very early that year  
but that didn't discourage him  
slowed him down a bit at most  
he would sing a psalm or canticle  
and had the impression  
that a fur shawl  
had been wrapped around his shoulders  
the innkeepers  
unused to seeing clients arrive  
at that time of year  
made him welcome  
he would have a meat pie and a piece of fruit for dinner  
sleep in plushy beds  
all for a few coins  
then would depart again at dawn  
across the sleeping white-roofed villages  
having forgotten for quite a while  
the music that had set him  
on this road.

## MISTER NOBODY AND THE THEATER

If he could, Mr. Nobody would have written plays,  
would have done nothing but that, ready, he tells himself,  
to drop everything, his family — reduced, it's true  
to a sister living in another hemisphere,  
the hydrangea on his balcony  
and his beloved translations from the Aramaic.  
Characters appear to him, then disappear  
to be replaced by others, some return;  
all these strangers are now — and really,  
from the moment they take shape in his mind — well-known to him,  
more than that, are his children,  
at once his doubles and unlike him,  
children who will never change,  
will perpetually wear the same clothing,  
whom nothing will dislodge from the park bench, from the window,  
from the parlor of an inn  
or from an empty neon-lit room colored only by a red blind —  
he sees them do outdated dance steps,  
he hears them quarrel and reconcile, evoke their memories,  
exchange impressions, tell each other the world's news,  
sometimes a joke,  
strike up sea-chanties or marching songs,  
and love songs, especially, with flowers, birds, fountains.  
Oddly, he never invents plots for them;  
he puts languages in their mouths which feed his fantasies,  
Italian, Danish, Polish,  
and, when you think of it, it is his dreams as well as theirs  
woven together  
which would best animate (or perturb) the unwritten works  
that he sees as clean sheets  
hung on a clothesline  
above new grass sprouting in a springtime garden.

*translated by Marilyn Hacker*

THE EMPTY MUSEUM

Plumbed from a cadaver, the brain  
inside a jar is a cloud of coils  
and magnified, the way a fish  
when it swims to the corner of a tank  
looks inflated. I think of a government  
that's lost its country, of an eyeball loose  
and trolling the dungeons  
of the sea. There are people  
who love the color pink so much  
it defines them. They wear pink  
sweaters and purchase pink cars  
and juice them up and down  
the highway. The brain is the color  
of the road, of the Midwest gloom  
that hangs in the spindle left of trees  
past winter. I carry that hue inside me  
like clay-scented air. I was raised  
there, and it's one kind of tether  
and sometimes inside my dream  
as the day heats up around me  
it's a rustic sort of place that I can't  
back away from. The guide says  
the self is elastic, it fogs over, twins.  
We engineer a filter and backload  
a story. I ask if I can touch the brain,  
maybe hold it, and when I do its weight  
tests the give of both hands. I think of bowling  
and watermelons floating in a pool, an infant  
translating the blast of shadows  
that enter a room. I forget and I remember  
and I can tap a memory of boy in his yard  
carving a moat around an underground animal  
making noise with its teeth. I think of summer  
still as an entrance to the palace  
where the sun actually lives. I bused north

growing up, to a green/blue place  
where a herd of us smuggled  
an orange life preserver through the woods  
without getting tagged. There was a girl  
who would die in college, I see her  
by the boat launch, in a towel like a cape  
hair dripping with lake water. When she passed  
the songs we learned with God in the chorus  
stopped living in her brain. A person travels  
with a net collecting for the factory.  
A person passes a window  
and feeds on the view. Under a large  
and unfamiliar hat a person  
lifts her chin at the mirror  
and tilts her face to the side, then looks away  
and back again, her whole life  
the same question: I'm not sure  
if this is *me*. I shake the brain  
carefully, wanting a file to slip. A him  
or a her knitted in the tissue, odd muzzle  
behind fixative. If this pile,  
folded, inscrutable, were alive  
I imagine a table littered with jewelry,  
and the light jumping all over it.



KILIMANJARO

There's always a light at the end of the tunnel,  
but I'm not in a tunnel, it's a train station,  
and that isn't a light, it's my dog sneaking out  
the screen door, but as I run to get closer,  
it isn't my dog, it's something skittering about  
like a napalmed bar napkin with writing in a hand  
I can't decipher, except I'm not running,  
no matter how I pump my legs, my knees clogged  
with thumb tacks and peanut butter,  
I'm thumping along like a ninety-year-old,  
my mind still blue heat like a GTO's muffler  
but my body an anthill eroding in Kilimanjaro —  
Kilimanjaro a word I long to spell out sing-song —  
but now I'm at the tiller of a sailboat  
and I'm sobbing as I sizzle down a highway  
lethal as an alley in a kung-fu movie,  
I see bottom, every life-wrecking rock, every sunk  
tree trunk, yet the keel slices neat as straight razor,  
I skate over faces crying up at me, veer onto  
the shoulder sometimes, but it doesn't matter,  
just as it didn't when I peed on stage in kindergarten,  
I'm going to make it, nobody will notice,  
then — wham! — it's just me in a room  
with a silver stand, shimmering like a candelabra,  
a single sheet jammed with notes in the bass clef,  
but I never studied the bass clef,  
I played clarinet, here it is melting in my fingers,  
if I can still be said to have fingers,  
and there's this clicking, maybe a tongue clucking,  
maybe a hand flipping a light switch over  
and over again, and every face I've ever loved  
is watching, breathless for the solo I see now  
I should've practiced every second of my life.

ALERT

Night sweats, sweat between my breasts;  
the sheet slick, my mind  
a mattress left out and pecked open,

stripped of its stuffing  
by magpies battening their nest  
high in the courtyard's cottonwood.

2 A.M., 3 A.M., 4, I watch your mother's paintings  
process their basement archive  
single file, see how narrowly they avoid

the boiler, the stacked and vacated  
steamer trunks. In the sunroom  
a gessoed canvas clamped to an easel,

clean brushes furred to the taboret.  
*Don't miss the bus, don't miss the bus,*  
my father talmudically warns

from beyond his freshly tamped grave  
as an owl's twin searchbeams  
exhume the dark. The nightly raid

begins with a series of hoots.  
The sheets are soaked. The heart  
I gave you, the one currently

confined in me, fibrillates  
non-stop like a tin spoon  
banged between iron bars,

self-celebration morphing  
into solitary panicked protest  
in the shadow of the owl's launch.

ROOKERY

1. (n) Colony of rooks.

Or ravens. Or crows. Related to the passerine order of birds. Family Corvidae. Kin to magpies and jays. Hatchlings fall onto bricks, and a woman buries them beneath the crocuses. She wonders why her husband doesn't come home. Why his fingers curl into questions. Why his hips are as brief and hard as June thunder — her own body a chimney full of rain. One night she dreamed him in a basement stroking dead jackdaws and whispering someone else's name, and when she tried to brush his singed hair and ask why, he licked salt from her eyelids and whispered *Don't look. The cradle is on fire.* And she looked into the darkness and the darkness looked into her. She awoke, and the bed was full of feathers. Black feathers. Hundreds of them.

2. (n) A breeding place.

Open nests of crows. Colony of seabirds. Harem of seals and their pups. Hawksbills bury their clutches and crawl back to sea. A mother and daughter walk the shore dropping starfish into a pail of vinegar. *It's unlikely they suffer* the mother says. The daughter looks at her, eyes like wood wet with rain. The mother finds a pale, capsized Medusa, says *The only immortal animal is a type of jellyfish. It matures and then grows young again. Over and over. It will live forever unless it's killed.* The daughter brings it home, goes to her mother's sewing box and removes the pincushion pierced with bloody needles. High tide brings the dead to shore — auklet, fiddler crab, a school of herring. A blowfly circles and settles on a flounder, wings twitching, she sings to her eggs as they leave her body.

3. (n) A crowded tenement house.

Dilapidated. Packed. Rooms and rooms teeming with the crush of people waiting for the war to be over, to pull the world back out

of the dragon's mouth. Pilgrims of blind alleys. Sojourners walking backwards into the future. Blazing trails with graffiti of cinderblock saints and copyrighted love poems and prayers for apocalypse, knowing somewhere Christ is preparing a new city for them. There are dead oceans on the moon and a storm on the sun. The earth circles its star, one celestial body around another. One revolution. Two revolutions. Three. Four. And God comes down from the ceiling, bites the ears of everyone awaiting rapture, says *I can't see you. Set yourself on fire.*

ALYSSA'S 7<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY PARTY, WHEN HER  
MOTHER RETURNS TO TOWN MAYBE FOR GOOD

We're all out back and her mom is reading by request the Mad Hatter's tea scene from a cheap and beautiful gilded volume of Carroll. She left four kids here for the ostensibly rich man in Portland.

We don't have answers. I'm looking at the mask of make-up, The dark roots. Alyssa's mother says quietly mid-sentence "Here Is a word I'm afraid I just don't know." Alyssa frowns, kicks the picnic

Table, slow-thawing tarts slide. I set down my mug of no tea, go around

To her mother, lean over the thin page and I say *Treacle*. I say it's like a syrup.

Where the book says *nothing* makes sense. Alice is grumpy, headed For tiny. Alice is kind of a nightmare. Alyssa says she isn't bad and She wasn't bad in the movie, either. Her Mother says *Never?* Her Forehead is dented. I want to press my finger there gently, as though To fill in. One of the aunts says "It's trickle. It's British." And Lewis Carroll raises his hand to say See how confusing it is, these eight year Old girls, knowing what to do? But I always know what to do, I always

Know who dreams of horses, who dreams of cigarettes, who dreams Of rivers and who is just pretending she is at a party for a girl.

## GREEN MAN UNTRANSLATED

He kept his good leaves all  
Winter. When you're leafy  
And a man, you see the big  
Picture: centuries are moments.  
He added up, he didn't add up.  
(All that aggression, un-mounted  
Makes an exact translation  
Impossible.) But I brought him in  
To my city, my soft house, my calico  
Forest. He delivered tea, stones,  
Gently sautéed morels to my bed; then  
Tripped my dog; tangled my hair; his  
Branches broke through my roof.  
With him I slept as if sleeping  
Outside under stars. And in him  
There were two bad breaks, a split,  
Black knot: scars same as mine.  
Some say that's *disease*; he said No  
Good is always green but Death must  
Also grow. Then one night  
I woke: a young woman screaming  
For help down below in the street.  
He didn't put on clothes. He didn't see.  
He didn't seem like an oak or  
Even vines then. I called the police.  
He was gone. She wakes me up  
Every night. So many false alarms.

MAGICIAN'S ASSISTANT SAWED IN TWO

From the fountain of drool that is dog  
and the languor of bathrobes.  
From the humility of cereal and fall weather  
and the starless light of the fridge  
where I stand, hero, god in underwear.  
From where I ride in the car's worn lap, passing  
into one future then another,  
like the magician's assistant sawed  
in two. From the pillow  
which sets out my dreams like a rope of  
paper dolls with fire.  
From telling my students it was Wittgenstein  
or Heidegger or quantum mechanics  
that said anything we can imagine is possible, *is*.  
From tubs of old soap,  
the ankles of my future children,  
tented ears of the cat.  
From the suburbs of rust, houseplants  
that won't die and my boyfriend who will.  
From the great assembly of mushroom and wood,  
the metronome of tennis courts,  
electrocardiograms and  
my voice made of the old skin of water and wire.  
From the surprise of fingers touching down,  
delivered on a bad day to the lowland of my back  
and the chair pulled closer to mine inevitably,  
we, with mouthfuls of food,  
hurtling through a moment that has only  
wind and open windows.  
To be remembered for loving avocados  
and fog. For loving four legs and not two.  
To communicate like the secret language  
of central air. To be a song  
with broken arrows, a woodstove making ash  
of yesterday's news.

WILLFUL BLINDNESS

So you know what it's really like: Cindy almost blind,  
her daughters twin shapes on the grass. A bee  
stings one and both scream. Her fingers wade  
through their tears, feeling for the welt, the stinger.  
In a flurry of blossoms, hummingbirds dive for sugar  
from a giant plastic strawberry. I am tired of seeing  
how tired of seeing you are, tired of good advice  
misapplied: stay by the wreckage, drain gas  
from the wings of the plane for fire and wait.  
Look for help and you end up stripping naked  
by a frozen stream and lying down in snow. I know  
a business that will turn the ashes of loved ones  
into beautiful jewelry. That's all I want now,  
the only ring I want to put on.



NATURE

I had a little cat who slept under my lamp all night as I read Emerson  
in a stiff-backed American Library edition on a hard-backed chair,  
with a pencil in my hand squirreling, in the margins,  
insights as embarrassing as my intention  
to follow him through the snow,  
bare-headed on the Cambridge Common.  
Not out of love, but because I wanted to nail him  
into the body of my comprehensive exam,  
in the section before Melville and Emily Dickinson.

The cat had brindled paws and the most intelligent eyes  
of green cracked marble. She was young then,  
but she would become ancient with me,  
nineteen, dreaming on sheepskin by a window  
or watching through rheumy half-blindness  
the shadows of crows chasing a hawk.

We were penny-poor, the cat and I, and thin.  
Each night I broiled one chicken leg and one sweet potato  
under the gas fire in my Somerville kitchen.  
She got the skin, grew a glossy coat, and slept

while I read what we all read in the late 1980s:  
Freud on *Hamlet*; Derrida on Poe;  
captivity narratives. It was like happiness  
but it was not happiness.  
It was concentration, a pool of light,  
inwardness, loneliness,  
the patterns of all readers and involutes.

Those who don't know it will never know it.  
Those who do, do.  
A waste of time; a way into time; both.

Remembering the past by what you had been reading,  
and where, and what it felt like, and what it always feels like.

## THE PRISON DIARY OF BARTLETT YANCEY MALONE

*Point Lookout Penitentiary for Confederate Soldiers, Maryland 1864*

Mister Morgan of South Carolina is my teacher.  
He took the cook house for our school.  
I write these words in a book he gave me:

Consort is a husband or wife.  
Concert is a harmony.  
Disease is sickness. Decease means death.  
Foul is filthy and fowl is a bird  
such as those we have at hand in the camp  
but can never grasp: wild swans,  
big by half as a man's body,  
gulls that are wilder still.  
Peahens we have none.  
Quail seek higher ground  
than what we lie on.

This is a strange ambiguity.

We are 16 men to a tent,  
three men to a blanket.  
They say we number 18,000.

The 6<sup>th</sup> was cold and cloudy and we had nine men to die at Hospital.  
The 7<sup>th</sup> was very cool and a small snow fell.  
The 10<sup>th</sup> was nice and I saw the man who makes the coffins.  
The 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 64 was a very pritty day and it was my birthday,  
which maid me 25 years of age.  
I feasted on crackers and coffee.

Toward evening the air changed and the night was very cold.  
Five of our men froze to death before morning.  
Two was so hungry they caught a Rat  
and cooked him and ate him.

Last night. I dreamed of Mrs. Greenhow's escape  
from the Old Capitol Prison.  
She was flying far above the Chesapeake.  
When I reached out to touch her  
she wrapt me in her skirt.

I have not got any shoes.

I was borned in the Year of our Lord 1838.  
Raised and graduated in the Corn field & Tobacco patch.  
The first day of July 1861 I left home.

Earthborn is to spring from the earth.  
Earthbound to be confined by it.  
Erenow I was nobody.  
Erelong I will be nobody still.

I would tell you my poem of the breach,  
how we escape like a sip through straw.

Whether you believe it or not,  
whether or not you believe,

we slip through.

ALCHEMY

*Bernheim Forest*

In fall the forest turns metallic: gold  
fading to copper, falling to quiet,  
until all that remains  
is the scrape of baser metal — the oak  
who denies her leaves but holds on  
to give them grief. Her brand  
of alchemy: gold into iron, daughters  
into a rattling sweater of rusty cans  
for the wind to snatch at, swiping  
with his hook.

Mother, forgive me,  
three years gone, and I'm still  
rattling in the shadow of your death.  
Tramping these woods, I find myself  
looking for substitutes. When I was young  
you used to sing to me, but all signs  
of a pebble-murmuring brook have dried up.  
Roots too — for you were mine surely —  
and see how these roots shrivel in air  
dangling over a dry culvert. Now  
you look back from this forest mirror,  
not what you were but what you became.  
A stony thing. And there I am, still pushing  
your chair, singing *I'm Just Wild About Harry*,  
trying to bring you back. That was always  
my trouble, wasn't it? Even now, stuck  
on my umbilical twig, rattling the dead for a kiss.

## DERMATOLOGY

Beneath the white,  
polar bears have black skin  
to absorb what heat there is  
in a world of chill.

Never  
mind the designer cashmere  
catching the eye. It's skin  
that counts. The necklace  
riding the breath registers  
nothing of the oily touch  
fumbling with the clasp.  
Only the delicate nape  
grasps the whole under-  
story, there where the fine  
gold hairs read Braille and  
memorize.

Peel a sunburn.  
Under is the blush of all  
your old embarrassments.  
Even soles, shy in shoes,  
are tickled silly with  
what's afoot. We take in  
through our skin. What wife  
doesn't know that?

Each night  
when he comes home, I lean  
in to him, unbuttoning his coat  
to reach the warm. I hush him  
with my mouth. I am reading  
the news. Lip to lip, skin to skin,  
what slights he has endured —  
what little murders.

CURRENCY

It was in between all seasons I had known.

The bottoms of my soles worn flat.

What else to conceal?

The restaurant check came back.

A dollar less each time.

He who paid me twice what anyone's worth.

Till I was eating off of him for free.

His tongue all coin.

His mattress stuffed with specie.

Spindled regrets.

Sending me downriver on his makeshift raft.

AN ASSIGNATION

where our initials remain

carved into the trunk  
of an American beech

come loose — words

only lovers could inflict  
on a landscape gone

to seed — staggerbush

wherever snakeroot  
spread beneath the shade

of false Solomon's seal —

MONOGAMY

[NINTH LABOR]

Big bluestem and slough grass brushing against his sunburned neck and unusually long armhair, he walks the mowed path through the center, toward the fresh firebreaks, and imagines white smoke, the slow crawl of an ignited line across the scrub. Tomorrow, if the high pressure system stays put and the wind is flat, park officials will set fire to the seventy-four acres along the gravel road, a controlled burn of the last remaining prairie in the county. Last night, typing into the blue-framed chat window for hours, he and a pulseless stranger wrote — back and forth, with intimidating detail, all in lower-case — an elaborate story involving their bodies.



## MINDFULNESS

[FOURTH LABOR]

There's no grave enclosed with a silver fence  
because I've never had a body,  
never been illustrated in an acid-free

book of books. I pass through  
folded laundry, every hesitant keystroke,  
the entire experiment — humanity —

that for now continues, and look  
and look at you, through you, feeling nothing,  
all the deck hands scrambling to restore

steering to the rudderless vessel  
glued inside the sideways bottle.  
Their shallow breathing's neither bad nor good.

Join me here, in the untherapeutic  
everywhere, and see the futility  
of revision, self-promotion.

Of going on about freedom,  
the holographic boar you try to net  
and subdue in the shoveled snow.

CANTICLE OF MORE WISHES

For the dusk, salt, sour, summer-earth flush of your skin

For oranges twisted and plucked from the tree, the silvery rustle  
of leaves — that taste

For gnocchi browned in brown butter and sage, braised fennel  
with pecorino, broccolini with garlic and crushed red pepper,  
for unsalted bread, the lonely savor of penance

For a balm to be set on the torturer's tongue — ripe pear flesh  
dripping its honey

For a balm to be set on the prisoner's tongue — ripe pear flesh  
dripping its honey

## CANTICLE OF THE NIGHT PATH

I want the moon to overflow, spill over, and drown me in dust light.  
I want whatever happens after that.

I want the barred owl's one note to lull doubt to sleep.  
I want to walk the night path.

Let the deer leap, the creek sing, the ferns open their damp infant  
fists, I promise I won't look.

Let the stars open like time-lapse roses, I promise to close my heart.

I want to taste the ozone, the fire-cleaved air, the acrid certainty  
of terror.

I want to be picked up and shaken.

Let day's slow fall, resistant as a single feather, be done.

I want what has nothing to do with wanting.

## CANTICLE OF STONE

An almanac of storms, spent rains, snows snowed and summers quenched;

A ledger of debts and excesses, each ten billion lives compressed to a mineral glyph, a serif;

A glossary of mattes and glints, sift and flow, clench and thaw;

History told backwards, the score, the gospel of evolution, sutra of change, psalter of ante-, ante-, ante-;

Unplotted, un-authored, all ibid and op. cit., an endless dissertation on on.

SONG OF MYSELF

Who gets the god's drink pure & who gets  
just a sip diluted with spit or human sobs

only Heifitz could've played into a Paganini  
encore? I'm taping up my torn Whitman,

already crackly with tape, in more tape  
as I metaphorically rewrap the Clark St. book-stall

where Whitman was wedged with thrillers  
& Harlequins. I began writing my bad Whitman

in the book next to his, riding the Lake St. el &  
trembling because each person on the train expected

the poem-word that would turn away suicide  
or cure flaccid love. I was exultant too

with the train at third-floor level past  
grimed stock-rooms & secretaries maybe

flustered their first time in poems, but their faces  
lit with nuance thanks to my inadequate Whitman.

Seldom a *comarado*, never an *imperturbe*,  
I'd channel Whitman in my Chicago coldwater flat,

its wallpaper pimply with roaches  
I'd smashed impasto & gritty in crockery pieces.

I chanted Whitman until my breath was  
a runny glue of whispers. Then, in the shower's

hot clouds to ease congestion, linoleum slick,  
I'd be a tenor, his lips in a memorized zero,

with all his 300 lbs squeezing out "addio."  
But drinking water out of the toilet or barking

at other strays doesn't make you a dog;  
you can't *learn* levitation — only Whitman

was Whitman.

## TALKING INTO THE MONSTER'S HAT

but not daring to wear it, I'd whisper  
*let me be your Igor*, talking to the Nazi

who'd worn the hat all my childhood ago,  
a Frankenstein my uncle tried not to be

in a war he'd fought until he'd finished,  
liking beer too much, tight-lipped about

deaths for which he'd volunteered.

The hero version has my bloodied uncle take

the hat wet from the head of the man he'd killed.  
But it's a Wehrmacht dress hat, the Nazi

buff or collector I sold it to sighed, & not  
the Luftwaffe hat your ad said. Your uncle,

he said, bought it with cigarettes from his opposite  
in the long line of the Nazi uninjured that

films show us. Or the hat was trophy from Alps  
of captured stuff the Allies bulldozed as the first step

to German forgetting. See how all of us play  
at the evil, rub ourselves in it, eat it second-hand

in spit-up — what metaphor says enough —  
dipped in fixative, my uncle flapped & writhed

on a pin of conscience? Or, my favorite image,  
the prancing Igor of the movie, who, dropping it,

almost stepping on it, finally gets the bad brain  
back in Frankenstein's lab basin?

APRIL EVENING

Spring buzz-cut on the privet hedge,  
a couple of yellow cups  
Down-drafting from the honeysuckle.  
One bird in the hapless holly tree,  
giving us lift-off and glide.

It is amazing how beautiful springtime can be,  
Bell jar over our ills and endless infirmities,  
Transparency into where we know  
the light will never reach us.



## NO DIRECTION HOME

After a certain age, there's no one left to turn to.

You've got to find Eurydice on your own,

you've got

To find the small crack

between here and everywhere else all by yourself.

How could it be otherwise?

Everyone's gone away, the houses are all empty,

And overcast starts to fill the sky like soiled insulation.

## MUSIC FOR MIDSUMMER'S EVE

Longest day of the year, but still, I'd say,  
too short by half.

The horses whacked, the dog gone lost in the mucked, long grass,  
Tree shadows crawling toward their dark brothers across the field.

Time is an untuned harmonium  
That Musaks our nights and days.  
Sometimes it lasts for a little while,  
sometimes it goes on forever.

## CONTRIBUTORS

RAY AMOROSI's new book of poems, *In Praise*, will be published by Eastern Washington University Press.

JENNIFER ATKINSON is the author of three collections of poetry, the most recent of which, *Drift Ice*, was released in 2008 by Etruscan Press. She teaches in the MFA program at George Mason University.

ERINN BATYKEFER is the author of *Allegheny, Monongahela* (Red Hen, 2009), winner of the Benjamin Saltman Poetry Award. She is currently at work on a memoir titled *Cut Out Your Heart and Spit in the Hole*.

JEFFREY BEAN is an assistant professor of creative writing at Central Michigan University. From 2006-2008 he was the Axton Fellow in Poetry at the University of Louisville. His first collection, *Diminished Fifth*, is forthcoming from David Robert Books.

THOMAS BRASCH is one of Germany's foremost contemporary voices. Working in many genres, he grew up in the East and moved to West Berlin in 1976, following the publication of his first major work in the West, but he felt at home on neither side of the Wall. "On the twelfth day" is the final poem in the cycle "sindbad," from the collection *Kargo* (Suhrkamp, 1977). His translator, ANNE POSTEN, has been working on translations of Brasch since 2007, when she was a student at Oberlin.

TRACI BRIMHALL is the 2008-09 Jay C. and Ruth Halls Poetry Fellow at the University of Wisconsin-Madi-

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CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY's 16th book of poetry, *Modern History: Prose Poems 1987-2007*, was published last fall by Tupelo Press. *Rolling the Bones* is due from Eastern Washington University Press next spring. Buckley was a Guggenheim Fellow in Poetry for 2007-08, and was awarded the James Dickey Prize for 2008 from Five Points Magazine. He teaches in the creative writing program at the University of California, Riverside.

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GÜNTER EICH (1907-72), the German writer (notably of poems and radio plays), was a founder of Gruppe 47, the recipient of major awards and prizes, and considered one of Germany's most important postwar poets. **Valuable Nail: Selected Poems** appeared in 1981 from Oberlin College Press. The poems in this issue were published in Eich's 1966 collection, **Anlässe und Steingärten**. His translator, STUART FRIEBERT, has published seven collections of translations. His 13th book of poems, **Speak Mouth to Mouth**, is just out from David Robert Books.

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JANICE N. HARRINGTON's first book of poems, **Even the Hollow My Body Made Is Gone**, appeared from BOA Editions last April and won the 2006 A. Poulin, Jr. Poetry Prize and the 2007 Kate Tufts Discovery Award "for a first book by a poet of genuine promise."

LILAH HEGNAUER's **Dark Under Kiganda Stars** (Ausable, 2005) was an honorable mention for the 2007 Library of Virginia Literary Award. Her MFA is from the University of Virginia and her poems have been published in *FIELD*, *AGNI*, *Kenyon Review*, *Orion*, and *The Cream City Review*.

DAVID HERNANDEZ is the author of **Always Danger** (SIU Press, 2006) and **Suckerpunch** (HarperCollins, 2008). He has recent work in *The Threepenny Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, and *Gulf Coast*. Visit his website at [www.DavidAHernandez.com](http://www.DavidAHernandez.com).

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CAROL MOLDAW's most recent book is **The Widening**, a lyric novel. **So Late, So Soon: New and Selected Poems** will be published in the spring of 2010.

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EMMANUEL MOSES was born in Casablanca in 1959. He is the author of seven collections of poems, most recently *Figure rose* (2006) which received the Prix Ploquin-Caunan of the Académie française, and of eight fiction and nonfiction prose works. A selection of his poems, **He and I**, is scheduled for publication this fall in the FIELD Translation Series. His translator, MARILYN HACKER, published the earlier collection, **Here There Was Once a Country**, by Vénus Khoury-Ghata, in the FIELD Translation Series.

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AIMEE NEZHUKUMATATHIL is the author of *At the Drive-in Volcano* (2007) and *Miracle Fruit* (2003), winner of ForeWord Magazine's Poetry Book of the Year Award. She is associate professor of English at SUNY — Fredonia ([www.aimeenez.net](http://www.aimeenez.net)).

CAMILLE NORTON was a National Poetry Series winner in 2004 for *Corruption: Poems* (HarperCollins 2005). Her recent collaborative work with Jaroslaw Kapucinski was performed in Poland and in Finland in July 2008. She is professor of English at The University of the Pacific, Stockton, California.

D. NURKSE'S recent books are *Burnt Island* and *The Fall* (Knopf, 2005 and 2002). New work is in the *Times Literary Supplement* and *TriQuarterly*.

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CHRISTOPHER PHELPS took degrees in physics and philosophy only to find himself in love with poetry, which to his relief does not begin with ph. Now an autodidact, he reads widely, works in a sculpture workshop, and lives with his partner in Venice, Florida.

CARL PHILLIPS' new book of poems, *Speak Low*, will be published in the spring of 2009. He teaches at Washington University in St. Louis.

KEVIN PRUFER'S books are *National Anthem* (Four Way, 2008), and *Lit-*

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TADEUSZ RÓŻEWICZ is widely considered to be the most influential post-war Polish poet and playwright. He has published over 20 volumes of poetry. The poem in this issue is from the 1969 collection *Regio*, and will be part of the selected poems, *Alarm Clock*, which his translator, JOANNA TRZECIAK, is putting together for W. W. Norton. She teaches in the Translation Studies Program at Kent State University and has also translated Wislawa Szymborska.

MARY ANN SAMYN'S most recent book is *Purr* (New Issues, 2005), and *Incredibly Small and Impossibly Lovely* is forthcoming from New Issues in 2009. She teaches in the MFA program at West Virginia University.

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DAVID WAGONER has published 18 books of poems, most recently *A Map of the Night* (Illinois, 2008), and ten novels, one of which, *The Escape Artist*, was made into a movie by Francis Ford Coppola. He won the Lilly Prize in 1991 and has won six yearly prizes from *Poetry* (Chicago). He was a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets for 23 years.

G. C. WALDREP's most recent collection is *Archicembalo* (Tupelo, 2009), winner of the 2008 Dorset Prize for Poetry, judged by C. D. Wright.

RYAN WALSH attends the MFA Program in Creative Writing at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and co-edits *Rivendell*, a place-based literary journal.

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KATHLEEN WINTER is an MFA student at Arizona State. Her chapbook, *Invisible Pictures*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2008. She has published in *The Cincinnati Review*, *Tin House*, *32 Poems*, and *Tight*.

GREG WRENN's poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Yale Review*, *Colorado Review*, and *Boston Review*, among other journals. He teaches creative and expository writing at Washington University in St. Louis, where he is the Third-Year Fellow in Poetry.

CHARLES WRIGHT teaches at the University of Virginia. These poems are from a manuscript entitled *Ses-tets* to be published this spring.

FRANZ WRIGHT's poems are from a new collection called *Wheeling Motel*, which will be published by Knopf next fall.

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Detail...far right panel with balloon -

*Hot Air Balloons in an American City* (detail), 1867,

Utagawa Yoshitora, Japanese, active ca. 1830-1887,

ō-ban tryptich woodblock print: ink and color on paper,  
14 3/4 x 29 5/8 in.

Collection and photo courtesy of  
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