FIELD

CONTEMPORARY POETRY AND POETICS
NUMBER 92 SPRING 2015

OBERLIN COLLEGE PRESS
CONTENTS

Frannie Lindsay 7  Revelation
7  To Heartache

Maya Catherine Popa 9  Date, 2005
10  The End of the World Has Been Canceled

Scott Abels 11  A Quiet Pond

Thomas Lux 14  Attila the Hun Meets Pope Leo I
15  Praisegod Barebones

Dennis Schmitz 16  Lies
17  Systems

Lee Sharkey 18  Paris, 1947

Johannes Bobrowski 19  Pike Season
translated by Elizabeth
Oehlkers Wright 20  Experience
21  Encounter
22  Bird’s Nest

Nick Neely 23  In a White Jewelry Gift Box

Elton Glaser 24  Death Wish

Gibson Fay-LeBlanc 26  High Forest State Marginal
27  Letter

Éireann Lorsung 28  Dungeness Apartment
29  Aldgate

Charles Wright 30  How I Failed
30  Homecoming II
30  “Get in Line Brother If You Want to Go Home”
Marianne Boruch 31 Dickinson in the Desert
32 Dickinson in Snow
33 Dickinson in the Woods
34 Dickinson and the Future
35 Dickinson’s Twenty-First Century

Timothy Liu 36 The Unsaid

Anna Journey 37 Fried Chicken Prom Corsage: Ode to My Thirties

Emily Vizzo 38 You Can Jump Over
39 Your Mouth from the Maypole Where It Weaves
40 Air Animals

Judy Halebsky 41 Warrant
42 Public Record

Dan Alter 44 Gates

David Hernandez 46 Figures

Christopher Howell 47 Another Crossing
48 Looking Glass Edge
49 Turnpike & Flow

Dave Lucas 50 Gawain at the Green Chapel

John Allman 51 How Far
52 This
53 Password

Ray Amorosi 54 An Aging Farmer on a Clear Night

Erin Malone 55 Testament
56 April
Sandra M. Gilbert 58  Gauguin, “The Meal (The Bananas)”
59  Jacob Lawrence’s “They Were Very Poor”

Bruce Beasley 60  Revised Catechism
62  Report to the Provost on the Progress of My Leave

Poetry 2014: Six Review-Essays

David Young 66  Listening to the Silent Generation
Mark Strand, Collected Poems

Martha Collins 74  So Filled the Paper Cannot Absorb
Ailish Hopper, Dark-Sky Society

Kazim Ali 80  But the Darkness
Tuvia Ruebner, In the Illuminated Dark: Selected Poems

Elizabeth Savage 84  Mystery Is Belief
Cynthia Hogue, Revenance

Pamela Alexander 87  What Does Water Say?
Jane Mead, Money Money Money Water Water Water

David Walker 94  Body and Soul
Marianne Boruch, Cadaver, Speak

101  Contributors
Not one of the prophets could bear
to speak of the real damnation,
the one ignored: a subway stop
where the inbound train was always
ten minutes late and the same old man,
a drunk who had never wished to be
anything else, hunched over
his red saxophone, playing badly,
not making a cent,
while in the village farthest away,
a boy still wearing his father’s
softened, mud-stained shirt
lazily chewed on a reed
of sweet grass and stroked
the neck of his favorite horse, one
of the Four, in view of the barn
that looked on like a sorrowful parent
the moment before
the timely and measureless
burning
TO HEARTACHE

how could I ever have known you meant such business, wandering as you did from Sunday night to Sunday night

in those hideous shoes from Goodwill, tips torn off your umbrella spokes, glasses fogged, how could I have known

when you came to settle the debt and I offered a bar of field flower soap, a place to lie down for a while,

that you would demand the huge ring looped to my belt, heavy with keys to homesick locks, a black porch

wisteria-laden, an empty glider back-and-forthing in the wind’s creak, time for another cigarette, a page of names ripped from a rained-all-over book, and still it is you again, always you, impervious as never before, standing in the overgrown yard

with your back to the little window lamp you smashed on purpose once (how it glows now like a forgiving sister)

And the same dress you always wore hiked up to your terrible thighs just so the weeds could brush them
New Jersey, land of extra lands,
snouts breathing in the grass near fuses.
You lived here once, and just once I visited.
Under the pitch of your stick-on stars,
we lay thinking rain but not hoping,
not touching for the pleasure of delaying it.
Then Italian pick-up, the lookout with the view
of the nuclear reactor that could kill us instantly
we posited, counterfeiting urgency.
Deer approached the hand-me-down car,
a tameness we called a product of the water,
sixteen and full of educated guesses—
even to remember is to feel slighted by time,
a world full of desires and our parents still in it
cracking a door open, warning us to leave it that way.
THE END OF THE WORLD HAS BEEN CANCELED

Pygmalion of anonymous days
glossed, fitted for the reckoning ball.

*

Dawn parts trawler fish,
lustrous deaths
on Seaport’s docks.

*

What’s the difference between
periphery & prophecy?

The end’s a fence
deactivated at night.

*

I threaten the mailman with empty packages,
tell him I can smell greetings on his fingers,
the carmine ink & cadence of proposals
composed just under the wire.

*

What do we know of this tilting life,
fresh out of Babel & into outer space?

The fluency of arches, driftwood
of truces, light the rift between
tomorrow, no tomorrow,
two movies competing
for the same ticket.
A QUIET POND

When you throw a stone
into a quiet pond
we drive a truck
onto a frozen lake.

* 

And we, we speak clearly
into the red phone.

We’ve had those wolves
shoved down our throats before.

Elvis, eating peanut butter,
still has high hopes.

Most people don’t live in New York.
Deer licking water from a fucking pond.

**

After
a Lutheran soup
and pie supper fund raiser
Jesus sweeps up. He knows

they’ll leave some hay behind
Choy’s Wigs Wigs Wigs,
owing to its common usage.

Jesus, playing with a baby.
He jumps on his bed like a fish
out of a pond. This
is my body. Take it with
a grain of salt. No more scanning
through every frequency
in a new city.

***

On an oxbow lake
a stipend is paid upon teaching.
We are self-absorbed
into a steady stream.

To do my best,
to do my duty, as in
to obey the law at all
times and to help other people.

To push a spoon
through the ceiling.
To give the spoon away.

****

The stream will not give up.
A stream is doing work
that can’t be done
any other way.

I’ve been happy lately.
The kids are using pizza.
Now you are safe inside.

This fiddle is a field hospital
after a battle. An arm and a leg
in the details. And I am good about talking about myself.

It’s just, I get back to work not having forgotten the question.

And I am leading the life you live to them.

*****

You will be asked to define example. You will be asked to at least recycle.

Outside the natural world, two kinds of geese walk into a bar, and the third one ducks.

I believe politics are important, but not as much as imagination.

I know what they say about the early bird, eating peanuts.

When they give me hell I build a decorative windmill.

They are going to want to see a great space around it.

That is the idiom. This is the pond. That’s how you’ll dress when you are not needed.
I doubt it went well,  
for the Pope. There was horse-sweat and saddle smell,  
there were hungry men, unsated and sated,  
the acrid of blood on iron,  
a thousand cooking fires  
roasting the roastable. Who translated?  
Scribes were present. Attila smashed  
his wine cup on the table, splashing  
the Pope’s cassock.  
Attila, that night,  
polished his boots with it,  
the Pope weeping in an oubliette.  
I’d rather think of another Attila: Attila József,  
the great Hungarian poet.  
He was teased as a schoolboy about his given name.  
For most of his life, if he had milk  
in his coffee, and someone else did not, he felt guilt.  
Attila followed by József  
lives before Attila followed by The Hun.  
And so I wish it to be for my daughter, or son,  
and as well with their daughters and sons.
I'm taking this name: Praisegod Barebones, the pseudonym of a long-dead preacher. Why? I, too, have an impulse to praise, am unambivalent about God, and bare bones, unless they are burned, is the way it will be. I like the bang, bang, bang, bang of those four syllables in a row. What would my friends call me—Boney? Boney, don’t you know me? I’m taking the name because It's difficult not to write satire. Juvenal wrote the above, in Latin. Look it up, you can do that easy now and not need to climb a library's high ladder to haul down a creaking book like I did when I was Tommy Lux, who is gone now, absorbed into PGBB, like a good verb that absorbs, and therefore makes superfluous, its adverb.
LIES

Churchill used them as *terminological inconsistencies*.

* * *

The would-be suicide—does the help-line clinician use musical notation to record her cries?

* * *

At Delphi, afterward, having said it, the god longed to have said it clearly.
SYSTEMS

Any system works at its own suicide
its own way like our scavenged

'36 Packard my dad called Dowager,
or a system of endangered but inbred

plover closed off in a few acres
of Point Reyes sand. Or, system within

systems, my Berkeley neighbor planting
his Ford pick-up with nasturtiums—

hood gone, more dirt shoveled in
through the windows, the truck trucking

a bed-load of lantana & poppies uphill
into our shared driveway. Or, earlier, entropy

in my '70s Wisconsin commune. Never wrought
enough to be over-wrought, I thought why not

just turn over & dream in this fertile dark?
& why not, at night, tonight, steal one swim

more if the community pond too is a system
& the wind's underbelly dragging through

pond grass is only the story's way
to distract me from drowning?
Lee Sharkey

PARIS, 1947

Should you arrive in the evening
as everyone sleeps and the street is quiet
you would see one window lit and two men sitting at a table.
One of them is writing, the other bends over a book.
From time to time they speak to each other.
Should you arrive at that moment
you would think they were writing a novel—
Non! You will learn they are composing a letter
one brother sliding his finger down dictionary columns
the other shaping meticulous courtesies
with a fountain pen in an Old World cursive
to a family in America they imagine
tending their business, their peonies and roses.
The women are gone. They have only each other.
They write one painstaking draft after another
until the letter is good enough for you.
Johannes Bobrowski

PIKE SEASON

Roots,
hold me,
roots of the ash, I’m falling
from the world
of this world, marble-veined stone, a swallow’s
wing its brush! White-breast, swallow,
fly off, follow
the fog trail.

The bitter pike
I tore from the lure,
struck against stone,
before its green grew pale—
its blood I bound
in a burr weed’s leaf.

Canoe, take me
to the other shore.
How white the sky is. A tree
made of bird calls
opens its eyes.
EXPERIENCE

Signs,
cross and fish,
engraved on the wall in the underground cavity.

The procession of men
submerges into the earth.
The ground arches over them,
healing herbs, a little green, grown
through a thicket.

The current rises
to my chest,
the voice of sand:

*open up*
I can't get through
your dead
they drift in me.
ENCOUNTER

From the overhanging bough
I called the raging fish
by name.
Around the white moon I drew
a figure, with wings.
The hunter's dream, I dream,
he sleeps with a deer.

Clouds move over the river,
this is my voice,
snow-light over the forests,
this is my hair.
Through the night-black sky
I came down this path,
mouth full of grass, my shadow
leaned on the wooden fence, it said,
Take me back.
BIRD’S NEST

My sky
trades places with yours,
even my dove
now
flies over yours,
I see two shadows
drop
in the oat field.

We take
each other’s eyes,
we find
shelter:
Rain,
we say
like a story
half-told,
Green,
I hear:

to my forehead
with the speech of birds
your mouth
carries up
branches and feathers

translated by Elizabeth Oehlkers Wright
IN A WHITE JEWELRY GIFT BOX

after Milosz

Here you are again,
newtlets, seething in place
as if to lift
this cardboard lid
and return to the wet humus
of the forest.
Little mummies, potpourri
gathered long ago
from the basement,
you were born
in a flooded garden
drain, an accident that crawled
inside your mother, only
to pace
the concrete,
the color of a redwood
canyon. Monsters and sisters,
what trails, where
is the moist corner?
Time after
time, we carried you
outside, gummy on our palms,
but you always
reappeared—even now
the parchment tight around
your collective spine—
so determined to squirm,
twist and flash
that incendiary orange
underbelly, which signals
you can kill a boy.
DEATH WISH

Summer of sweet basil and backyard tomatoes
And sherbet pale as the moon—
I still remember how I craved,
In February, that lost month,
A new fortune of the sun, spendthrift days
Spilling their gold on the frozen ground.

And now I almost enjoy
Even the stink of compost, that good rot,
Hot writhings of weed and corn cob and clipped lawn—
Even, almost, those hillbilly lullabies on the radio,
Fiddling around with their nasal miseries.

Shimmer of gnats and noonlight
Over the peppers on the pepper plant, red
As their own incendiary heat. In my donkey years,
I’d just as soon lie under
The shade of maples, as spread a hammock
Beneath some palm trees rattling with parrots.

Here, too, the hibiscus blooms,
Flowers as big as Frisbees,
And waves of lilies spiked along the gutter banks,
And the roadside blue of chicory
Trembling in the long exhaust as cars drive by.

I’d just as soon die under
This high Ohio sun. Let me burn down
To the size of a cinder
And be carried off by the pallbearing ants,
Above us a retinue of bees, like helicopters
Over the procession of a dead president.
I don’t want to go
On some cold afternoon, wretched ambassador
To the court of the winter queen.
Summer’s my season to leave,
With mosquitoes whining a dirge
And fireflies strung out before me, enough
To light my way from Akron to the afterlife.
Gibson Fay-LeBlanc

HIGH FOREST STATE MARGINAL

I fiddle a radio dial in answer
to a question no one asks how
why where what happened to bring
you lower than median grass and soot-
crusted snow the shiver your whole
body trembles with when a truck
muscles past which is also as long
as I see your face sign eyes
looking not looking looking not

High Forest State Marginal
some of us want a law in order
to not see you I would feel better
fail better too my boys backseat
like birds what should we do what should
we do nothing though one day I
talk big church charity program
something nothing the lines the lines
in your face the steel ingots the cracks

High Forest State Marginal
I tell a story in a car

needle spoon ink fist
it’s all I know to do bottle
cot bottle needle the only way
to see not see you there is
nothing to us but wishes wind
cardboard cloth words their lack
LETTER

Nights I pound a power hammer in the metal shop
I wake and there is nothing—

not fame, not a long life, not safety—that I want more than you. But last week

I woke in the night and saw you gripped by some kind of hand, unconscious:

a body in a deep current. I know Blake

pounded on catalectic feet and how to hit the upper right corner before the goalie

lifts a glove. Jays weave what was my hair into nests and my snoring keeps the woodchuck from our peas.

I haven’t called the plumber yet and the fridge keeps blinking its quiet death: 8-8,

8-8. We know how not to fight and how to run a year-long camp for two good boys

who keep breaking windows in a garage that may never not be falling down.

A new fall is here.
A new gray strand. The new

creases, etched leaf-lines, around your eyes make you more and more. Rain’s needles

melt on the roof, and when I vanish for days into whichever dark shop I do that’s me hoping I have yet to lose you.
DUNGENESS APARTMENT

There was a lighthouse against
a white sea wall, a nuclear plant

in the direction of the shore,
a low black wooden house on shingle

beach, a blue flower in an English
desert, and we travelled to it. Prophets

barefoot across cobbles. We hung
our coats behind the door. Got cheap

electricity for what we pumped
into the grid. Overhead were large things

moving, almost human.
ALDGATE

Water underground
uncurls via crack

in tile, in terra cotta.
For a year I reached

for a man whose response
was confusion.

In East London, well before
dawn, foggy air passed through us,

not one bit of consent.
My shorn hair reflecting

in the river. Because I knew
it useless to cup water,

I thought I knew what
it meant to hold.
Charles Wright

HOW I FAILED

I tried to fit the body of light into the body of darkness.
I tried to lengthen the last landscape.
I tried to unhinge and reconstruct
the language I had been given.
I tried to fit the body of darkness into the body of light.

***

HOMECOMING II

Outside, beyond the meadow, the green light glistens in its green shell
Through the half-dark of the west window
As ghosts, and then half-ghosts, move through the tall green grasses.

***

"GET IN LINE BROTHER IF YOU WANT TO GO HOME"

I have to be careful now in what I say
as it will be returned to me:
Nature, for instance, which waffles in the evening wind.
The landscape, for instance, which doesn’t.

Well, the old, it’s been said, have no tears.
We’ll see about that, hombre,
but it sounds right to me.
The River of Heaven has no water,
the wind no answer.
DICKINSON IN THE DESERT

Repeat. No trees. Repeat.

How it spreads. Vast bronze, burnt orange to ocher to unsettling. Clouds scatter-deepen thought or no thought dazzled to a cactus red-flowering all over the place low, not quite a heart into shards.

She might love this. Then she does, she’s doing and I say: why? And Dickinson: why wouldn’t I be here? My needle and thread, my words to fit pages I cut and make little books no bigger than my hand to hide in this spot of future weirdly uneventful, just like before, in Amherst. I’m crazy curious, remember?

Her hand, any hand wired up to the sparking furious brain cannot sleep. I’ve read that much. It’s the ache of trees I miss.

You’re here in the desert not even a week, she says to me, you’ve seen the hot hours, then night’s lovely-cool under a blanket. She’s making conversation, upbeat as the 19th century gets these days. She shrugs. Of course.

Wait. Dickinson—shrugging!

By now it’s dark, vast down to vague, word of no color. She’s staring—

The desert takes a turn: forget what I was, forget that.
No sound from the start or words just give way. Must be rage in it. Perhaps I made that up, her windows surely dark-deep in its crepe months on end

and probably her never the proper shoes like men got.

In summer, her stab at wit, part unkind, part prophecy. That story, an old woman confused trying to get home, stopping to ask bewildered, and Dickinson—down there, turn left, that’s right—matter of facting her straight to the graveyard.

My grandfather called such a place a marble orchard each time we passed its calmest eye and stones spiring up near fields. So many chiseled names weathered to unreadable. And closing in, the busy self-absorbed corn.

But snow is snow. Dickinson in it no matter what season. Blank as years from now, any page before any words. And the past coming down in silver flakes, like after some terrible fire, all that ash.

A low whistle at night. Might as well be snowing. Sleep on that train, strangers only dreaming awake, awake—their triumphs sufficient or never, not in this life.
So it is under the world. She and I pass the time.

Done, Dickinson says. I wrote like a multiplication table equals what?

What is what we still open, I tell her.

Little swarms! Those poems came at me. I had no headgear, no fancy moonsuit between me and their mesh. Some claim I put too many hives in the shade, that I got it wrong—bees love sun.

Here, I say, some peppermints to shatter the dark mouth cold. And they sting.

My body isn’t anymore. But thank you.

Her thank you—was that so surprising? Or how I cherish it.

Woods get quiet. Mid-afternoon won’t draw down like dusk, isn’t fragile or birds. Barely, her you hear that?
DICKINSON AND THE FUTURE

Sure, but she’s—what was the word once?—indisposed. As in: come back later. She’s sewing a wren together which is hard. It keeps trying to fly. She’s intent as that time she turned the dove inside out to fix it. And found a snake there.

I definitely need glasses to do this one, Dickinson says, though already she admires how feathers hook together against rain, plus the little wren beak she might speak to and from, were she that sort of poet.

Those jottings: inscriptions on a tomb. Again, this minute! Her jerry-rigged loops.

Define unknowable for me, she thinks to ask the bird anyway, define door, define key. Not a chance, given the wren is almost, and if things do work out it’s mostly forget after.

To be mesmerized, pause and future pause which takes to itself each darkening eye—

The dove at a loss now is fine, still singing dread, how sorry, sorry sorry everything not the least of it.
Because she never could. Can't resist urgency, a phrase, a fable that's true....

For instance: two ghostly lovers who do not forget, two chairs with their imprint each morning, a grand salon in the desert, oldest house around here, every night shattered glasses, knives thrown to the floor no motion detector picks up. The docent says so.

It's D (if I may) dimly, and close: I never stop thinking.

That's the famous human what to see in this town, I tell her, brochure in hand: the 1850s, the poor two of them, their names even—

Astonished, her mo-tion-de-tec-tor? is her pulling thick taffy to my saying it. But no one does that anymore, whatever steamy-sweet kitchen I know.

Still it comes to her, the 21st century. She's mouthing it, and best, for them: Motion detector!—beloved Armando, oh Inez. A warning to the cohort, very slow and keep yourself hidden.
Drew his face on a sidewalk,
not with chalk but with
my mouth, my lips moist
against the hot cement
where girls had been playing
hopscotch all afternoon
until they were called in—
street lamps flickering on
in suburbs shielded
from the stars. He taught me
names for constellations
hard to forget—secret
passwords left on my body
the neighbors can't hose off.
FRIED CHICKEN PROM CORSAGE: ODE TO MY THIRTIES

It’s when I sucked the velour antler-buds of an adolescent mule deer in a dream until my front teeth broke off that I began to take inventory. I’m tired of trying to impress people. Heels derange me. Red wine won’t let me sleep. No, I never did go to my high school prom as a teenager. But now, I’ve noticed an ad for the “fried chicken prom corsage”—a novelty object sold by a florist in Kentucky. I suddenly wished I’d had the chance to wear one. The golden-breaded cluster of drumsticks cinched in their fuchsia ribbons and a wrist-elastic. That brutal extravagance I had once. But I must say, I look better in this decade—toned abs, no frizz, a manageable neurosis. I should throw myself a party for having even survived. The fried chicken prom corsage could be optional. The small legs broken and crossed, hardened and tied.
YOU CAN JUMP OVER

The apartment smells like basil & chlorine,
my friend in her bathing suit pressing
her thumb to the processor button.
Her friend watches beneath a wet ballerina bun.

Goody-bye, maybe forever, I say,
dragging my luggage behind me.

The green stairs. The crawling bugs.
My life like a torn lung.

Let me begin again. The apartment
pressing, a ballerina dragged.

Luggage basiling. The color of olive
oil a song in my throat.

Let me begin again. I am all hairs of the bun.
Let me stay. I'll be anything
YOUR MOUTH FROM THE MAYPOLE WHERE IT WEAVES

Parade me slowly for the disrupted body I am. The funeral of trumpet flowers peabodied like a brisk slap in the face. Love me like you love ammonia, like you secretly love bleach. The perfect-making.

I don’t trust people who fuck on white sheets. How clean can you be? Or maybe you love the honey-stains, or maybe your body gives nothing but air kisses. I couldn’t know. Someone asks me, What type of men do you attract?

And I have an answer for that, a good answer.
AIR ANIMALS

My beautiful friend is pregnant again. Though there is the question of age.

What *about* my age, is what she told the doctor. She’s 34, and I’m 34.

She has a son. My children are still air animals, things that might or might not exist. A child is not a *concept*. Nor a thing. If I believed in heaven,

I could know my unborn children were lofting in the snow-clouds.

If I believed in science, I could know my unborn children were “not.”

In the grocery store I saw a mother push her daughter in the cart.

She was a wild little thing, that daughter.

Like any pet she was collared: brown seashells strung around her neck.

I waited with peppers in my hands, gauging my hunger.

I could not tell if I wanted to own it or be it.
Orange jump suit, orange underwear even
the nurse said, *your blood pressure is terribly high*

after they questioned him
the detective said, *I wish this had gone differently*

Dan, our chubby joyful aid, said
*the detectives knew they didn’t have a case*

the arrest damaged his heart (which is a muscle)
damaged our house (which is terra cotta and cardboard)

some parts can heal, others stay wounded

*you mean the country?*

*no, I mean the body*
*and anything on the other side of the I-80*

practice this word, *lawyer, lawyer, lawyer*

a leaf stem on a branch in November
PUBLIC RECORD
— after Izumi Shikibu

1.

Here you are Sierra Juniper
growing at the edges of a reasonable habitat
maid, maiden, chosen or settled or owned or sewn into place

not all of the branches live

they called her the floating woman
for this floating world, for the way she drifted
from one lover to another, each who died suddenly

we will both write a journal as an act of repair
fusing the half-numb heart with mountain hemlock

2.

on the benches, I met the bondsmen
from a lender called Bad Boys
that’s funny, I said
it’s not funny now but it will be later

Jacob walked out, looking as though
he’d been released from a hospital
from an illness he had barely survived

3.

directions: cast off from the starting place and go anywhere
distribution: I have lived like this—unmoored
at first, I watched the shore longingly
then I forgot where I wanted to return
I went below deck, dreamed of sharks
listened to the radio
made lists of which books to get from the library
made a guide to palm reading
learned the sounds *sky pilot* and *red clover*
he smooths the sheets
I frame the view out the window: wisteria, April
1. Arches

*Sha’ar p’takh dodi*, he wrote, near the year one thousand, in Saragossa, despairing in the citrus and pools of a walled courtyard, his Israel calls: *open the gate, my love, get up and open*—

eight lines locking like arches around the grief of exile. As in: Cordova, the sound of a door leaning into the air, cindered, after his people fled the Juderia, his father among them. *Open the gate:*

2. State Developmental Center, Stockton, CA

The smell of the halls, a floor soap they must use only in the buildings where people are discarded: a violent clean smell like a decaying body layered with perfume. Vinyl tile flooring, painted concrete-block walls; the aggressive scent following us to her ward’s entrance. A heavy steel door, wire-mesh laces the viewing-glass. Against which, first to respond to the buzzer’s abrasion, two or three of their faces press: wet with drool or mucous, eyes thick, mouths askew with their various conditions. As soon as the orderly with the ring of keys lets us in, they close around us. They talk over each other gummily, repeating their five- or two-word stories, trying to meet our eyes.

3. God heard

*For my spirit is terrified, is taken with shaking,*
like grasses in the roadside wind, or scarves of kelp winding in tide. *God heard the other boy’s cry,* wrote Ibn Gabirol, and wandered
to Granada. *In deep midnight I am chased by the wild ass, run over by the forest boar.* His words would go on, copied, sung, while he lay down on a stone floor. Valencia, his last harbor. Asking please let me out, or, into—

4. State Developmental Center

The ward waiting room. Wall-mounted televisions, fluorescence, and more of them on the shabby couches, staring or shuffling here to there on the checkerboard floor. And her scarred, doughy, patched face, some drained color of sweatsuit hanging bagged on her body. Her broken-toothed grin.

Her years behind this door or ones like it. Brain clogged with the tiny growths, marbled with anticonvulsants, pinned down to one thought, of a family thirty years ago, still under one roof. On every visit my sister asks, when can she come back.

5. Harbor

*Open up the gate, my love, get up and open*—

Saragossa, which sounds like wind in grass, or stone walls, mossy, which sounds like the ocean’s brush on sand: it has charged up the shore, is now receding, having changed its mind.
FIGURES

The math. He calculated
at his desk, in November’s chrome light
slanting through his office window: taxes paid
times the price of one Reaper drone
divided by federal budget.

He found the numbers online,
photos of the aircraft, its fuselage
narrow and windowless, a bone
sheared lengthwise. Then a video:

five in the crosshairs.

Infrared will make anything carrying heat
black. He thought, five black seeds
slipping along the dirt trail.
It made watching easier. One walked ahead
or four lagged behind, one

smaller than the rest, which he wished
he hadn’t noticed. The explosion
looked like a black bouquet falling away
down the center of his monitor.

Black bouquet too, he thought.

If I tell myself it was just four cents,
I miscalculated, it was three, if I tell myself
my pennies went to another drone,
I chipped in for flight, not flame.
The light beside him brightened

and he gave his eyes to the window, the wind
behind the window, the wind diving
across the street, shaking up the neighbor’s oak.
The leaves. He could not stop

witnessing their letting go.
ANOTHER CROSSING

It was the river of death
and we crossed it
or the river of forgetting
which is why I don’t remember
crossing it,
holding your hand as we were reborn
strangers to every river
and ourselves, fly away spirits
whose bodies were dreaming.

Love was not our number
and the days, if they were days,
were like any dark limb or whistle,
any momentary singing
from the back room of an old hotel
where no one sat at the bar
with no one else
carving in dust the signals
of our disappearance.

What is a wound if not this
crossing under the moon-like eyes
of the boatman who has waited
among the willows
all these years, sad king of patience,
old blue fire of human things,
last things, beauty itself
bent to its oars inside us.
LOOKING GLASS EDGE

In rainy light
the book I dream of
raises its face asking, purring,
its little melody of private praise
extending a green wrist, gift-like
memory of a dancer
or a dance. It doesn’t care
who I am or which of me might
embody its longing to bloom
along the stringlines of what may be
only the sadness of an echo or a god.
It does not want me
to touch the soft dark of its pagination,
its binding presumption of life
after life after life
holding on, spoken, wanting each other
as fire desires itself. It knows I would
give everything to open
and step into it, but it does not care
to wake.
I.

We say it is a long road
but it is only
a life
slipping past, dark and bright, abandoning
a few broken tools and shoes, once
in a while something beautiful but too big
to carry. Of course, nothing but the road
can make it the whole way.

II.

Every day I think you will return to me
who has kept faith
in the dark and slobber of the body's wish, in flint
of the crow’s dreaming. Every day
I find I am the empty room we joked about
and that you are the absence
of a door.

III.

Listen.
I am tapping another song of grit and tin,
a hollow sound, forgotten underplanetary voice
become again a mole's longing for the sun
he cannot deserve. Forgive me, river of this hour.
Here is my solitude of sticks, the shivering
ice blue charm of my surrender.
GAWAIN AT THE GREEN CHAPEL

The year yawns.
Dumb as stone the day lies down.

Gone so long among the seasons’
bob and wheel

at last you come to the knight’s grim hold
where the hour whets its edge.

Each stripped birch
stands a clean bleached bone.

The crows preen in slick blacks.
They caw and question:

where is that bold boy orphaned
at the feast?

Have the evergreens always seemed
this sharp with arms?

Now, the sun gone, the chapel
falls within your ken.

Now you too must enter the dark
and bow your head.
How far can a thing go and still be itself? The leaf curling, crisping into red. My need to see you after a week apart.

A bullet from the sniper's rifle, its metal jacket a kind of buzz, a bee, which loses itself the minute it stings. The planet spinning so casually, its orbit so egg-shaped, as if birth were imminent, its parallel self an airy rotation through the realm of mountains, the shaped energy, thought streaming to conclusions that what is here will stay, that word, intent, and vase can be one, can be a painted porcelain valley, where entrance beckons, where at the very edge I stare into nothingness and then turn and turn in the ceaseless air, where limit keeps rounding and things seem to press so gladly against my skin.
is the road to Rm 340 where we’ll be made
computer savvy. This the verge of pebbles and
freshly laid macadam sticking to our wheels
like intrusions on meditation, all the stop signs
obscured by uninhibited trees. This the question
glowing in early sunset, the halo of the unsaid,
where human footprints have disappeared just
beyond the sign Road Closed. So what does
nowhere mean if the traffic of mind, memory,
worry, anxiety, fear prevent not just sleep but also
discovery? Is the world constructed on why?
Not when or where or who? I take cool water down
my throat, the element so much of me prone to
flow and freeze, while the life of now becomes the
stare of whatever looks back at me. And I hear
the shrill call of a bird about to leave its branch.
What do you need to get inside? Your grandfather’s nickname, “King”? Your cut wrist when you were barely eight years old—the name of the doctor who got out of bed to stitch you up? You hit Enter, but get Access Denied again. Start with the numbers you were born from. The war of that time. The cost of unhomogenized milk. The bar where your father found heroic words. The first three letters of your wife’s first name. The year they removed your mother’s left lung. The number of stars counted at your daughter’s birth. The last letters of the last words your friend Jay spoke at his death. Put them all in a plastic globe and shake it. Empty it on the new leather couch. Close your eyes. Select seven. How easy when you don’t know if anything you ever did matters. Just enter those blind, fallen choices. You’ll have infinite, random access. No one will understand what you’re printing out. Or why.
Ray Amorosi

AN AGING FARMER ON A CLEAR NIGHT

The quarter moon swallows the innocent.
We don’t know how this happens outside our windows
but the stars smirk.

God is old and so tired of us.
No more coins in the beggar’s cup.
We’ll never see our daughters again they
disappeared into the three hundred Spartans
at the pass who charmed Greece.
In this village no one has laughed openly
since the firstborn died so young.
Wolves saunter down the hills
and sleep round our totems, blue herons
screech at dawn when they should be dancing.
Where are the huge turtles whose eggs we protected
all summer, no mallards in the marsh.

Hundred-pound bags of lime fruit
plump, sweet, thin-skinned.
The unexpected deletes us though clues abound.
TESTAMENT

Where there’s no view of the bay
I hang a painting of the bay. The world is half-full,

half-tame like the cat next door
that answers my neighbor’s calls

sometimes. It leaves birds
dressed out on my table

as if by a gentle
undertaker and removes them before morning.

Is it because I’m older that I remember
how to pray? More and more

I like the wilderness of me

in spite of the weight I’ve been assigned, my faded
color, the first knuckle

on my left hand flattening.
Swell and ache.

Until now my heart has played an owl
questioning

its suspects. Costume it instead
as a land animal browsing apples abandoned

to the grass and after all

let the world’s accidental gaze be kind. I offer

my breast to the technician positioning me.
I hold my breath for the camera.
APRIL

Thought I’d go for a walk but look the trees have started to tremble and raindrops sting. The only bird here is a nest under glass, the only bird here is a souvenir skull thinly attached to the wall by a spider’s web.

That’s what the sky is like, vague and threaded. Other shores have sun. I imagined a blue patch but the lighting is humble again. My spirit animal is half of a shell.

I have a hand open admitting disappointment the way a kid might, a kid who finally clips a piñata hard enough to bust and out shower Styrofoam peanuts while the uncles snicker in their plastic chairs by the pool, beers foaming over.
That's another somewhere. This week finds me wearing

fencerows furred with moss, muddy boots and indirect

longing. I mean some days without you the silence

is hard, like listening for a snowstorm. Like listening

for snow
Sandra M. Gilbert

GAUGUIN, “THE MEAL (THE BANANAS)”

Was this fairy tale banquet set forth by the shadow in the doorway? Whoever’s in charge, the imperial table dwarfs the children, it’s so long, so high, & swathed in unfamiliar white folds of cloth, & laden with mostly peculiar objects or anyway objects out of place.

What’s a calabash doing on this foreign weaving, & what is this little figured bowl whose walls are thin as eggshells, & why is the coconut milk lying in this other bowl so much wider than its own hairy home, & where did the giant bananas come from, those swollen red fingers, their weighty cluster bigger than grandfather’s head?

Half-hidden behind the heavy boards, wrapped in fabrics as weird as the one on the table, the three are dumb with wonder, Manua witlessly staring, Teiki squinting, and Eeta, rising star girl, nearly in tears as she studies the knife so casually waiting beside the oranges, its point aimed precisely at her.
and they bowed in their poverty & their
difference over
the blank bowl & platter

they had, the brooding
board where no bread
was—

& they lost the past of yams, melons, greens,
rabbit loins, chicken legs, squirrels, & all
the Big House stuff

they stole amid storms of chains,
hails of whips, black bits
in the mouth,

they lost the salt & sweet of that
food, they lost the sour & bitter
of the god who had

forgotten them, they lost the hot dead
air in the cabins, the weevils, the blood; the mice
whispering through the bins, the wind

howling as the trains blasted
northward, & what was left was only
the bowl of empty

color & the sky-bright wall
& the great cauldron
dangling from the danger

of a new nail.
On Prayer

Say what is a prayer. Outhiss and foam-spurt from a spent hairspray can, trash-spilled,

when you puncture its side with a pitchfork just to hear what it might say.

Under what conditions must we formulate our prayers? As though a leper’s scabbed lips unswelled enough for speech.

How shall we have confidence our prayers have been heard? Kneeler-scrape across the oakgrain floor:

gash the supplicant’s weight scars between the pews.

On Catechism

Where shall our satisfaction reside: in the restlessness of our questions, or in their satiation?

As the orb-weaver hangs between raspberry canes, spinnerets empty, concentred in the whorls of its finished spiral web.

Say whether the answers themselves might still be errable. Hollow in the raspberry, scarlet-juice-brimmed, where the stem has just fallen away.
Might we build a foundation on what, nevertheless, shadows-forth to confound us?

As the orb-weaver hangs between raspberry canes, spinnerets empty, concentred in the whorls of its finished spiral web.

On Prayer

How might our prayers be expected to alter the will of God?

As surf-foam clings
to stringers of kelp
yanked seaward, then shoreward,

that settle in a receding
streamlet the moment the tide
no longer can reach them.

On Catechism

May we question also that which is not dubitable?

Should the spider’s legs stick to its own capture silk?

Does the spider consume, each night, the orb of its web, to furnish again the very silk it will need to rebuild it?
REPORT TO THE PROVOST ON THE PROGRESS OF MY LEAVE

In me thou see’st the glowing of such fire,  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
As the deathbed whereon it must expire.  
—Shakespeare, Sonnet 73

*

I have taken, with your blessing, leave  
of several of my senses,

let them slip without a tug from what has often choked them  
then dragged the empty collars by their leashes, spikes  
clattering all morning and afternoon down the leafblocked yellow  
streets.

**

I’ve gone missing,

the way someone else  
might go drinking, caroling.  
I have gone

from house to house, missing, gathering  
back the parts of parts of me I’ve left

self-strewn behind. But already again I find myself  
a stranger  
and sojourner among all these

my catalogued and dissilient pieces.

***
Self-Sabbathing, left fallow, I shall be
sown no more, nor
pruned. Only these
hard-cracked, weed-choked rows of stubble.

***

I would as soon
self-yield, as when,
half-gone in nitrous oxide, I saw my self—
with its spit-suction cup and plaque-scratchings—
beneath myself

as one wholly arbitrary site to locate such a long
history of doing, thinking, having-done.
A few feet of flesh, merely organic, mind
frost-misting around it, a life

I could either take or, more likely, leave,
and the hygienist suspected something going
strange and said, giving
that patient’s shoulder a tiny, intimate shake,

*I’m here. I’m still here.*

***

Or was it me
speaking?
There lay some body, with its little paper bib,
taking leave
of its *me*.

Of the ultimate things, says Dickinson, *Parting—is all we know.*
Everything, of late, seems
of late,
steeped in its too-lateness.
Almost everything surpasseth understanding.

Some scintillation glimpsed from the last things
ashes youth
dearthbed expire some
intermurmuring music I can sometimes make out
bare ruined
fadeth late something
far away and intimate that sings

of what is last, all-lasting, nearly here.
Since I have gone absconditus the odds

have evened I can hear it thou must leave
let it rise through the ruined

choirs of my ears
and take it in.

To leave means not to take.
But I will take

your part, unknowable To-Come.
I will take every last bit of it.
As required I have sealed up all
in rest. Desisted
from all duties and exertions,

deserted. The way
the lilies of the field, which
neither toil nor spin, still split

and split their bulbs
underearth. Per the terms
of my original proposal,

my soul hath cloven, and murmured strangely. Self-
parting, I have learned
to leave that well

which I must love, again and again, ere long.
LISTENING TO THE SILENT GENERATION

Mark Strand, Collected Poems (Knopf, 2014)

Note: This review was written in October and November of 2014, just before Mark Strand died on November 29. I had hoped, of course, that he’d be around to read it.

A very large book sits on my desk these days. It has a cartoon on the cover, by Saul Steinberg. The word YES, a wagon, is rolling rapidly downhill and will soon collide with the larger word BUT, which stands in its path like a bulwark. This is the jacket of Mark Strand’s very impressive Collected Poems.

Steinberg is wonderful, of course, but this is a strange choice for the cover of a collected poems by a major figure, some fifty years worth of poems from thirteen collections, amounting to more than 500 pages. I suspect it is intended to remind readers (many of whom take poetry too seriously) how teasing and funny this poet can be. A large book of poems, yes, but packed with entertainment, sleight-of-hand, and lots of playful humor.

This book was passed over for the finalist list of the National Book Award this last October, an astonishing omission in my view, and in that of many others. Perhaps Strand’s age and eminence were held against him. The speculation led me, among other things, to thoughts about Strand’s generation, which is also mine. He has just turned eighty. Many younger poets may not know him or read him. They may think him too old to be relevant to their own doings and accomplishments. If so, they are making a giant mistake.

Strand’s generation was tagged the Silent Generation in the fifties. Born in the Depression or during World War Two, we were “cautious,” “withdrawn,” and “unimaginative,” in the view of Time magazine. Too late to be heroes? Or too disillusioned about the heroism of our fathers? Conformity, the leading social characteristic of the
fifties, seemed to trouble the writers too; in quite various ways, they had to react against it.

If we enlarge the picture beyond the American scene we get European existentialism. We get Samuel Beckett and Camus. While the Silent Generation tended to observe social norms and social order, it did so with an ironic consciousness of their specious meanings. The man on the street might be clothed in the notorious gray flannel suit; his counterpart in the arts was watching meaning and value disappear around the corner. We were not “suffocated,” as some claimed, but we were aware of numbness, loss, and isolation, a “lonely crowd.”

The Beats were one reaction to the postwar anomie, but a lot of that felt like delayed or prolonged adolescence (Gary Snyder always an exception). More to the point were poets as different as Charles Simic and Sylvia Plath, Jean Valentine and Russell Edson, Dennis Schmitz and Nancy Willard, Michael Harper and Charles Wright, James Tate and Sandra McPherson. Donald Justice taught a number of them, with good results. What they held in common was a sense of dissociation and profound distrust, a willingness to challenge old norms and values, coupled with a refusal to be drawn into schools and tired wars about poetics. Pound was a poor model, as the work of poets like Charles Olsen and Robert Duncan could demonstrate. Auden might be quite wonderful in his way, but he couldn’t speak for, or to, the Silent Generation, as some found out by too much allegiance to his example. And Surrealism, while it helped connect the existentialist outlook to a vivid artistic practice, was sometimes almost beside the point. As Simic said once in an interview, “Surrealism means nothing in a country like ours where supposedly millions of Americans took joyrides in UFOs. Our cities are full of homeless people going around talking to themselves.” American reality was strange enough to inform artistic practice. It didn’t need distorting or dressing up. And Mark Strand seemed to understand that. He caught the zeitgeist, jolting us into recognitions of ourselves and our strange lives in his mirror-like poems.
So a reader opens this big new book, this collection that covers fifty years, and comes first upon this poem:

WHEN THE VACATION IS OVER FOR GOOD

It will be strange  
Knowing at last it couldn’t go on forever  
The certain voice telling us over and over  
That nothing would change,

And remembering too,  
Because by then it will all be done with, the way  
Things were, and how we wasted time as though  
There was nothing to do,

When, in a flash  
The weather turned, and the lofty air became  
Unbearably heavy, the wind strikingly dumb  
And our cities like ash,

And knowing also,  
What we never suspected, that it was something like summer  
At its most august except that the nights were warmer  
And the clouds seemed to glow,

And even then,  
Because we will not have changed much, wondering what  
Will become of things, and who will be left to do it  
All over again,

And somehow trying,  
But still unable to know just what it was  
That went so completely wrong, or why it is  
We are dying.

This gigantic sentence, so cleverly rhymed that readers almost don’t notice, mixes certainty and uncertainty, forecasting the familiar
Strandian harmonics. There is imagery, but it is elusive and infrequent. The speaker might be describing something as big as a nuclear holocaust or as trivial as an ended vacation. We’re invited to speculate, but not to reach conclusions.

What the poet will go on to develop is a habit of telling stories, sketching landscapes, reporting on weird encounters and shaping desperate experiences of loss and isolation. Always, while he is able to share these with us by way of the poems, the speaker’s essential sense of separation and solitude will persist. I compared this once to Merwin’s world, but noted that “Strand’s world is more painterly and his gothic sense more playful. His landscapes are mysterious without necessarily being austere. They remind us of silent movies, old photographs, and the work of atmospheric painters of loneliness like Edward Hopper” (Longman Anthology 476). As another example, I have always liked “The Kite,” from Reasons for Moving (1968):

THE KITE

It rises over the lake, the farms,
The edge of the woods,
And like a body without arms
Or legs it swings
Blind and blackening in the moonless air.
The wren, the vireo, the thrush
Make way. The rush
And flutter of wings
Fall through the dark
Like a mild rain.
We cover our heads and ponder
The farm and woods that rim
The central lake.
A barred owl sits on a limb
Silent as bark.
An almost invisible
Curtain of rain seems to come nearer.
The muffled crack and drum
Of distant thunder
Blunders against our ears. 
A row of hills appears. 
It sinks into a valley 
Where farms and woods surround a lake, 
There is no rain. 
It is impossible to say what form 
The weather will take. 
We blow on our hands, 
Trying to keep them warm, 
Hoping it will not snow. 
Birds fly overhead. 
A man runs by 
Holding the kite string. 
He does not see us standing dark 
And still as mourners under the sullen sky. 
The wind cries in his lapels. Leaves fall 
As he moves by them. 
His breath blooms in the chill 
And for a time it seems that small 
White roses fill the air, 
Although we are not sure.

In its playful rhyming and deadpan reportage, this may be a little too drawn out, and mannered, for its own good—later Strand will be tighter and more economical—but its handling of details, which recur mysteriously, and its treatment of the uncertainties of the "we" show Strand's mastery of his peculiar rhetoric (many simple declarative sentences, in this case, as contrasted to the giant sentence in the earlier example) and his establishment of atmosphere from generic details: the farm, the lake, the weather, the change of season, the kite flyer who is somehow the bringer of winter, and the cautious exhilaration. Silent Generation characteristics, expertly handled.
We should note as well how comfortable Strand has always been with prose, from his first book on: prose poems interspersed with poems, short stories (*Mr. and Mrs. Baby*), the inimitable mixture of modes and styles in *The Monument*. He is capable of brief and cunning fables, cast in rich paragraphs that may remind us at times of prose masters like Borges and Calvino. His most recent book before this Collected Poems, *Almost Invisible* (2102), is made up entirely of prose poems of a consistent length. Here’s an example:

**THE MINISTER OF CULTURE GETS HIS WISH**

The Minister of Culture goes home after a grueling day at the office. He lies on his bed and tries to think of nothing, but nothing happens, or, more precisely, does not happen. Nothing is elsewhere doing what nothing does, which is to expand the dark. But the minister is patient, and slowly things slip away—the walls of his house, the park across the street, his friends in the next town. He believes that nothing has finally come to him and, in its absent way, is saying, “Darling, you know how much I have always wanted to please you, and now I have come. And what is more, I have come to stay.”

The nimble construction here is a good example of the economy of style in late Strand that I mentioned earlier. Not a word is out of place, and “nothing’s” doings, or non-doings, are driven home swiftly and with legerity. Prose seems the right medium because it can report all this so coolly and effortlessly. We may not laugh out loud, but it would be a dour reader who could not summon a smile.

Strand’s persona is probably irritating to some, captivating to others. William Logan, easily irritated, speaks of “easy-going charm and labored whimsy,” of “contrived fables and dopey meditations,” of “louche charm and languid good manners.” He seems like some-
one who can’t enjoy a party or a few sleight-of-hand tricks. His most telling characterization notes that “critics have long had trouble dividing the absurdist Strand, the one who could sell Dada to Eskimos, from the moody, philosophical poet who has occasionally made an appearance through the long and desultory career.”

But what if this is a false distinction? What if those two sides inform and strengthen each other? I think of Wallace Stevens, about whom these same things might be said, and who is surely Strand’s most significant American mentor, in an alignment that can also be traced further back to Emily Dickinson.

Whitman? Not so much. Whitman deserves some teasing:

SONG OF MYSELF

First silence, then some humming,
then more silence, then nothing,
then more nothing, then silence,
then more silence, then nothing.

Song of My Other Self: There is no other self.

The Wind’s Song: Get out of my way.

The Sky’s Song: You’re less than a cloud.

The Tree’s Song: You’re less than a leaf.

The Sea’s Song: You’re a wave, less than a wave.

The Sun’s Song: You’re the moon’s child.

The Moon’s Song: You’re no child of mine.

This is Section 35 of The Monument, to my mind one of Strand’s finest sustained accomplishments, from 1978. Logan might say that the little Whitman riff is just Strand being silly. He’d be partly right. But
what if the passage is also serious and profound, a statement from
the Silent Generation by one of its most central speakers? The reader
must decide how far to take it, and that dilemma is delicious, in my
view.

No book of poetry this size is going to be wholly reliable in qual-
ity. Strand’s career, filled with courageous experiment and innova-
tion, has sometimes made him inconsistent. But working a broad
range of subjects, forms, tones, jokes, and parables has given him
breadth and depth when he is at his best. We can now see, in this five
hundred or so pages, just how powerfully he has performed, and
with what consistency and integrity he has practiced his art. He has
had a voice, a persona, a style, that younger poets should envy and
that they can learn from if they know enough to sit and listen, both
to the poetry and to the silence from which it emanates and returns.
Perhaps it’s too much to ask. But if it can happen with Dickinson and
Stevens, it can and will happen with Mark Strand.

David Young
Ailish Hopper’s *Dark-Sky Society* begins by evoking an all-too-familiar contemporary scene: “From a broken storefront window, smoke / canopies two young men....” But wait, the title of the poem is “Self-Portrait as Smoke”: that’s the poet canopy-ing, covering (as in music? as in reporting? as in disguising?). More scene, and then the speaker explicitly appears, in “some white // people’s living room” watching (as we might have suspected) TV: “Terrible, / I say, & change // the subject, as if my body were / diffused [...] dispersed, ribboning.” Then another scene, more violent, deadly—oh! a lynching. The poem ends in “flame,” but meanwhile the speaker is smoke, dispersing, deflecting. Complicit? Silent? Elusive, in any case, which leaves the “reading” of the scene(s) to the reader: what the poet may be saying/intending/offering about the “self” in relation to all of this is also elusive. Which makes this a deeply challenging book, its challenges rewarded by each re-reading, as reader becomes witness, filling in, finishing fragments, making connections, or, more importantly, acknowledging the blanks, the absences, the (yes) “white” space, of which there is (on the page) a great deal. “Terrible, / I say, & change” [stanza break].

The emotional center of the book is clearly race. This, along with its central strategy, is made explicit when someone asks the poet why she is writing “about race.” (Did I mention that Hopper is “white”?) The speaker/poet offers a choice between “a gentle answer // and a tough.” When the questioner chooses “tough,” she says: “Actually, that one // you have to learn / for yourself.” That we do (both “have to” and “learn”) in this remarkable first book is a tribute to the tough thinking and feeling and exploring that Hopper has done and the strategies she uses to mirror that difficult process.

The book’s scope is both larger and smaller than “race.” On the one hand, it’s set against a background of American (and occasionally other) history; Washington, D.C. is a reference point throughout, beginning with the cover photograph. On the other, it’s grounded in family, particularly in the dissolution of a father’s mind. These larger
and smaller concerns come together (with "race" included) in two longish poems, the title of the first ("View of the Capitol from St. Elizabeth’s") referencing both. The father’s confused notebooks appear in both these poems; his stammerings to his daughter ("Dw dr") are quoted, and a section title, "Disappearing, Inc.," evokes both him and a film scene (a man chased by someone calling him "Boy") that can only be interpreted as racial. The film-man and the father both appear in a painfully moving ending that also evokes the work of writing: the man’s face is filled "only with // imagined life," and the father’s face is "a page / that flutters // blank. Once, there was / they say // beautiful ink laid there."

The long poem that comprises the center of the book’s five parts also fuses race, history, and mental loss, beginning with its title, "In the Hospital for the Negro Insane." Only figuratively "about" that particular hospital, the poem begins with the first of three "Emancipation Tests" that conflate a recognizable "mental test" and history:

Instructions: Please draw ‘slavery’

(Facilitator: first remove all slavery
from the room)

Scene of 4 Drawing of person. Crowds Brown Legs
And Head Around Tiny Torso. In Chains

3 Caucasian Monster. Legs Float in Space, Arms Not Obviously Connected.
Head is Not Present

2 Drawing Reveals Some Indication of
Tree Being Received. A Rope

These lines (not the end of the section, which is a scorecard for "the test") are one of the book’s many references to lynchings or slavery, some of which appear so briefly, in such unexpected places, that we might almost wonder whether we "heard that right." "Ways to Be White in a Poem" begins with adolescent strictures about "lines I am
told / not to cross," and moves rather casually from there to a cheerleading scene "in the gym," with the speaker thinking "about cheers" and then "Never of / A cheer // as the body / went up [. . .] Branch creaking // Rope taut." Or this, in the middle of a poem in which the speaker is riding a motorbike through Washington, D.C.: "Through // They forever try / said the traders, to destroy // themselves."

Another section of the long "Hospital" poem—one of several poems or sections made up of tiny short-lined fragments that the reader must piece together—seems to insert a lynching into a poem about something else, but read more carefully it's clear that the entire poem is suffused with the lynching—or, conversely, that a souvenir memorial to Civil Rights (represented by Kerry James Marshall's Souvenir paintings honoring that movement) cannot be experienced without the lynching: a souvenir is a (lynching?) postcard is a painting is a noose. The section begins:

So many myths

Even death

Send me a postcard

hard to swallow

Study for souvenir painting

WE MOURN OUR LOSS

Acrylic on canvas

A noose

There are many such mergings in the book, some of them juxtapositions rather than fusions. "Dream, Technidifficult," for instance, is so literally "After Martin Luther King, Jr. and P-Funk" that it's not until the end of the poem that the speaker enters the established dialogue between the two voices:
There,

There,
You can't get under it

I may not get here
Our only guide,

But look there
the groove

Here you are

Beyond such identifiable pairings, the book is filled with a dizzying array of juxtapositions, dislocations, and other stylistic challenges to the reader. These include a couple of recognized forms, a palindrome and a (somewhat disguised) ghazal, as well as a lot of word play, repetition, and almost pure music, the latter often lyrical even in the service of the painful, as in: "I draw a cell I draw // The person inside I draw // The cell a person I draw // Inside the person // A cell inside // The cell a person I draw // I draw inside a cell // Inside a person // The person inside I draw // A cell."

One of the richest and fullest of the poems that work by accretion is a collage—or maybe remix is better, reflecting the work of Lee "Scratch" Perry, who is quoted in the epigraph. Shakespeare's sonnets ground the poem, but they're held together with racial glue, beginning with the promise of "forty acres and a mule" to former slaves and including a lot of contemporary references as well. The poem is called "The Good Caucasian" (evoking Shakespeare's "the good" queen, duke, etc.), and quoting it may be a way to note that this book is as allusive as it is elusive (I haven't cited the many instances, some but not all revealed in the notes, in which Hopper is consciously quoting or reflecting or "riffing on" other writers, singers, and visual artists). Here is the poem:
When forty acres have besieged
my brow, and a mule

and a winter, cold
as Ice Cube, I try

a remembrance of things, floating past—
Miss Daisy, and her necklace

of fingerpointing Title pages
On the South now squares of ash

centers embering
If memory be a mountaintop

mine is hidden

by fat, puffy clouds, and other symptoms. But, when dis-raced

in men’s eyes, and by time—
dust, the centuries—I will admit

impediment. My body
is where we are held

My eyes have drawn

your shape
and you mine. Not

I Have a dream

A cold, cold feeling
The undercutting line break that transforms "fat, puffy clouds, and other / symptoms" and the missing "g" that makes "disgraced" into "dis-raced" are among the poem's many stunning moments, as is the courage of its last line. Though it's full where other poems I've cited seem lean, I think its combination of the allusive and the elusive can stand as a technical microcosm of the book as a whole.

One more word about the book's moral/aesthetic center. In "The Real Abolitionism (Will Never Make it in the Books)," Hopper uses a book on Chinese and Japanese painting techniques (we're told in the notes) to describe a poetic "landscape" that is, on the one hand, almost not there: "Broken ink—a paper page, a missing leg / In both, the brush skips a snowfall's layer of silence." But then:

I need
The miracle body. A brush,
so filled
the paper cannot absorb

The racial landscape Ailish Hopper inhabits in Dark-Sky Society is so filled with traumatic history and complex emotion that it would obviously be easier not to go there at all, as the questioner mentioned earlier (why is she writing...) implies. Brava to Hopper, for her tough venturing and tough answers, for her more than timely (brush)strokes.

Martha Collins
Tuvia Ruebner belongs to the multilingual generation of Israeli poets who managed to flee the political situation in Europe (though his entire immediate family perished) and arrived in Mandate Palestine writing in other languages. It was only after twelve years of writing in German that he transitioned into writing in Hebrew. Like his contemporary and colleague Lea Goldberg, Ruebner remained ambivalent about the political and nationalistic expectations that accompanied being a citizen of a new nation and writing in Hebrew. His relationship to Israel was vexed then and remains so. In her introduction to the volume, translator Rachel Tzvia Back quotes Ruebner as saying, “Lea Goldberg wrote that there are [for her] two homelands.... I feel that I have two ‘no-homelands.’ I was uprooted twice.... Slovakia spewed me out and what is happening in Israel today has uprooted me again.”

Part of Ruebner’s shift to writing in Hebrew seems clearly related to being immersed in the sounds and rhythms of the language in his new adopted country, but Back seems to indicate a greater reason was his marriage to a woman who neither spoke nor read German. Ruebner seems to have seen the potential for a greater delving into the mystery of common moments inherent in the constraint of working in a second language: “My God, what am I to say? Oblivion / veils your words/ ... / In my mouth my foreign tongue flails about.”

Like Yannis Ritsos, another favorite of mine, Ruebner is most invested in quiet moments, but unlike Ritsos, Ruebner leaves less unsaid; he seems drawn to—or driven to—giving anguish its air. There’s an unsuitability to the poems that feels inevitable, unapologetic. A poem about the landscape begins, “Reaching out into the world like a slave clutching / at his master’s knee.” He goes on to ask, “Let me touch the grain, shade of the leaf / all that breathes, this whole lit-up darkness and every fingertip. / Praise.” Rather than continue this praise-song in the way a pastoral poet in the West
might do, Ruebner is haunted by absent shadows. He ends the poem with a seemingly out-of-place supplication, “Don’t deny me. Please, don’t close me up / in my heart. I’m reaching out—.”

Ruebner never bought into the nationalist positioning of either landscape or city. In his poem “This City” he says of Jerusalem, “She is marked by a branding iron in the Angel’s black hand” and later, “Churches long to fly / … / Suns wandered on her outskirts, became thorns / … He who sleeps and his heart is awake knows how at night / this heavy city ascends to walk with the moon.” Back points out in her notes that Ruebner is heavily referential here, drawing from various ancient and contemporary sources, including Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, the Israeli national anthem and the Song of Songs.

Ruebner remains affected by not only the deaths of his parents and younger sister in the concentration camps but by the disappearance of his youngest son in the early 1980s, just a year after the boy began his mandatory military service during the invasion of Lebanon. “Home / is not a home. / A hollow,” Ruebner ruefully muses, “The amputee’s sleeve knows / the warmth / it once had.” He writes up to the jagged edge between what words can and cannot do: “Words are whores / after the death / they say He went / Is lost / Left.” Though even as he mourns the boy who has been missing for more than thirty years, he puts his faith in the ability of words to create new realities: “My son who was lost / my youngest son / came back / found a secret / hiding place / in my eyes—.”

Others of Ruebner’s poems engage with visual art and artists as varied as Rembrandt, Yosl Bergner, Vermeer, Max Ernst and ancient Egyptian art, and with other writers like Franz Kafka and Ruebner’s fellow poet and friend Dan Pagis, while yet others take the form of imaginary postcards and epistles. The epistolary poems are a stark echo of the earlier letters that the young Ruebner, safe in Palestine, was sending back to his family in Europe, letters that remained ominously unanswered. It wasn’t until years later that Ruebner was able to discover their fate. These letters and postcards, written from locations around the world, are Ruebner’s way of asserting a voice that can survive the catastrophes of history.

In “A Postcard from the Hebron Region,” Ruebner opens the poem by describing the historic and ancient city where Abraham and
Sarah are said to be buried and where much strife exists today between Jewish settlers who have moved into the heart of the city, the Israeli army which maintains a strong presence there, and the local Palestinian population. After describing their morning meal—"pita and olives and labane drenched in olive oil"—he catalogs some of the violent clashes that have overtaken the city in modern and recent history. "Are the stones multiplying?" he wonders. "Slowly, unstoppable, the stones are being fruitful and multiplying."

In these and many later poems written after the peace talks broke down in 2000 and during the second Intifada, Ruebner is sharply critical. Poems like "Victims, Again," "Voices," "It's Been Years," "Footnotes to the Book of Job," and "One Plague and Then Another" use a nearly documentary technique as well as specific Jewish literary and cultural contexts to interrogate and critique the Israeli actions and strategy of control.

In the end, Ruebner's poetics are as informed by politics and history as they are by music, sound and observation of a tenderly lived-in world. "What would we do with this hunger that will not be sated?" he asks, referring to poetry itself. "If after everything that has happened / you can still hear the blackbird," he says "don't be surprised that happiness is watching the clouds being wind-carried away." Wracked by loss, distressed in what seems like a time of endless war, Ruebner nonetheless finds a way to be hopeful, to be alive.

In a final poem "After Beckett," written as an imaginary dialog, not yet published in Hebrew but which Ruebner asked Back to include, he sums up thus: "It's late. We have to say goodbye. / Seems so. / But the darkness. / Is there any choice?"

It is a question that lingers and haunts. In addition to Back's introduction, which provides much biographical and critical context, she has also provided a preface elucidating many of the difficulties and challenges of translations. She has selected poems from thirteen of Ruebner's later books, all written in Hebrew. The poems are followed by a comprehensive collection of notes which trace sources, discuss issues in translation and provide literary and historic context for the poems. Back is an accomplished translator, having also rendered volumes by Lea Goldberg and Hamutal Bar-Yosef as well as edited a volume of Israeli poets against the occupation of the West.
Bank and Gaza territories, With an Iron Pen: Twenty Years of Hebrew Protest Poetry. She also translated many of the poems that appeared in this edited volume.

As a scholar and thinker, Back seems well positioned also to handle Ruebner’s particular relationship to language and political and geographical landscape; her own academic research has focused on contemporary American poetry in general and in particular on the writing of Susan Howe. Back’s critical book, Led by Language: The Poetry and Poetics of Susan Howe, traces Howe’s engagement with the vexed landscape and history of colonial New England, in particular in the encounters between European settlers and the Native Americans of that region. The attentiveness that Back brought as a scholar to the connection between the autobiographical, the geographic and the historical in Susan Howe’s work helps her elucidate these same dimensions of Ruebner’s work.

One hopes for a wide audience for Tuvia Ruebner and his deeply felt, sensitively translated, essential body of work.

Kazim Ali
Cynthia Hogue, *Revenance* (Red Hen, 2014)

Cynthia Hogue’s *Revenance* inspects loss and grief with a keen calm that overturns Emily Dickinson’s famous description of surviving pain through emotional freezing and the courteous restraint of “formal feeling.” In this generous collection where not one poem seems extra or out of place, Hogue addresses many kinds of loss—days lost to sleep, eyeglasses lost to distraction, precious conversation lost to faulty recording devices, parents lost to disease and age. The experiences of these bereavements, trivial and profound, accumulate in the context of one another to show the explosive potential of “grief’s sudden / capacious charge.” These poems, while admirably diverse in form, tone, and use of the page, illustrate the notion Lorine Niedecker poses in “Sorrow moves in wide waves,” where sorrow is a force, like waves or words pushing or passing through us, that seems to disregard, yet also is affected by our presence. Hogue’s poetry explores the ways this force impels us towards more intimate connections with ourselves and the world.

Loss and the pain it causes are often articulated in isolating and static terms, as if they are discrete phases of life one moves through and past, like a winter landscape, sometimes craving or succumbing to their numbing powers. *Revenance* travels at times through the “tense / sudden silence of blizzard, the whiteout”—tropes of abjection; but it also carefully observes far less familiar manifestations of suffering, including the intensifications and transformations of awareness they may bring. Hogue’s work mourns, but it also marvels at the power pain awakens. In “Revenant (1),” the impression and collapse of repetitious days (lived by those tending the dying and the bereft) unfurl in a kind of synesthetic witness:

Evenings a rose window, worm-hole, gyre appears in the wood, not round,
exactly: tree limbs from monochromatic tesserae darken to scarlet shot through with the last blue light as time shifts to false account: I’m more alert to hear.

Hogue’s thoughtful word and line breaks capture at once the slowing and strangeness of days passing and the luxuriant particulars revealed through the difficult labor of waiting, as one both dreads and seeks the arrival of the dead. This poem, like many others in the collection, recall Walter Benjamin’s prediction that film would radically alter perceptions of the human body’s most ordinary, unnoticed movements by letting us see them frame by frame. The layering of visual images over the temporal sequencing of unfulfilled lines and words suspended from stanza to stanza suggests the slow motion of the grieving mind. When that slowed but acute consciousness confronts the natural world, it provides a similar alteration of perception, only one that varies and enriches rather than blinds.

“Revenant (2)” quite differently reorients the relations of body to time and space through tactile and aural gesture:

Spanning her scalp, invisible hands, cradling. She turns to fire, overcome. Happens where suddenly, alone. The face, she feels, close to hers.

While “Revenant (1)” captures the tension and attention of waiting, “Revenant (2)” presents with wrenching accuracy grief’s utter disregard for the passage of time (which is supposed to heal and distance) in its capacity to appear suddenly, unexpectedly, seizing the entirety of the griever. But it is these moments of physical, inexplicable contact with the beloved lost that startle and shatter the self and remove the boundaries among human, natural, and supernatural. Hogue’s
poems imply that these moments of profound un-freedom in which loss overcomes us initiate us into unknown realms of experience by, in a sense, showing us what we’re missing of “meaning’s meaning.”

In *Revenance*, the mystery and magic left out or missed by “empiricist’s distortion[s]” of the world are confirmed through the shattering forces of loss. One title, “Mystery is Belief,” quietly states the central philosophy of these varied, complex poems; it is this central tenet that guides them with such humility and intelligence. For Hogue, belief in the unseen and unintended realms of existence doesn’t offer transcendence of the world, nor does it promise some return to wholeness. Instead, the fragmentation permitting glimpses and visitations of intangible presences guides human vision more intimately to the world we are in, and us to one another, for whom we are responsible and to whom we must, inevitably, return.

*Elizabeth Savage*
WHAT DOES WATER SAY?


The title of Jane Mead’s fourth full-length collection is a couplet quoted from Theodore Roethke’s poem “The Lost Son.” Like Mead’s book, the 1948 poem is a multi-part journey of deep lostness and searching, but while Roethke ends on a note of hope, predicting the return of “a lively understandable spirit,” *Money Money Money Water Water Water* closes with a speaker looking back on childhood play and mischief set against a present that is “ours, the pit and sink // to nowhere.”

Near the middle of the Roethke poem, Mead’s title lines appear:

Where, where are the tears of the world?...
All the windows are burning! What’s left of my life?...
I run, I run to the whistle of money.

Money money money
Water water water

How cool the grass is.
Has the bird left?
The stalk still sways.
Has the worm a shadow?
What do the clouds say?

Similar worldviews and strategies link the two poets. In Roethke’s poem, questions are a way of moving forward. “Tell me: / Which is the way I take; / Out of what door do I go, / Where and to whom?” he asks. These are the kinds of questions Mead poses as well, in her own distinctive voice.

Another similarity is that the earth is a refuge, though not an easy one. Both poets are willing to tunnel into the physical world. Here’s a passage from Mead’s poem “Stalking the Pleasures”:

87
The pleasures
are primitive stalks of might-be
and aftermath, shaded

and bamboo-like grasses
on the arduous walk
to the waterfall: first

brush so thick we crawl,
then down into the dense
and muggy grasses, muddy

ebrows and no idea where
the path is—stalking
the pleasures: heart-beat

can-be, stone’s-throw, want.

Mead’s perspective, however, is more complex than that of “The Lost Son”; the book cannot always be read as a retreat to and return from healing nature. Sometimes it is through the natural world’s grass and water that we stalk the pleasure of being alive, but at other times we find a “poisoned planet poisoning.”

Water-borne poison
Poison borne by air
Data on dead animals

Angry children on the move

That profound damage surrounds us is also attested to by moments of disillusionment, even cynicism, as in “Dying of Stupidity,” in which our lives are characterized as “anaesthetizing clatter where once we carried upward.” Another poem describes light as “a (post-desire) landscape (post-verdant),” the use of parentheses mimicking the fragmentation of both habitat and society. And in a third poem the speaker says, “The concern of the comfortable / for the comfortable makes me sick.”
There is great variety in the book. Its title and the subtitles of its three sections reflect different approaches—environmental, historical, social, and spiritual foremost among them. Some poems have a speaker who refers to a mother or lover, others do not have an identifiable speaker, and still others use “we” to refer to all of us, the human collective.

A clause from the Magna Carta, the 800-year-old model for our Constitution, provides the first section’s subtitle: That the Church of England Should Be Free. The section opens with industrial landscapes—“the electrical plant,” “the white crater of the borax plant”—then moves to a six-part poem, “Cove,” in which the speaker is an institutionalized manic-depressive who enjoys satirizing “life made proper.” Here’s the fourth part of “Cove”:

I was raised on the enlightened consumerism
of upper bohemia, fell from grace into
lower bohemia—which is defined by

an inability to take adult responsibility:
don’t sell me anything on credit.
In fact, don’t sell me anything at all.

Thank you. Now listen here—
I took the workshop on basic functioning,
studied the universal precautions

and the diagram of the evacuation plan,
I sent away for the free booklet
on why I was born. You can trust me

with your children now—the eggs
are hidden in the bushes to signify
rebirth, bread in the oven, beans

on the stove, knife in the drawer.
To signify rebirth.
The last stanza’s turn toward the ominous is not out of place in this first section; titled with reference to the ideals of freedom and democracy, it struggles, deliberately ironic, with various individual and societal illnesses, in our “nation of clatter and tremble.”

*Fallen Leaf Lake* is the title of the book’s second section, but this is not a Sierra Club hike; the going is arduous. Animals appear frequently; a five-part poem centers on mule deer, while dogs and elephants have smaller roles. One of my favorite poems from the book strikes a bright note:

**THE GEESE**

slicing this frozen sky know
where they are going—
and want to get there.

Their call, both strange
and familiar, calls
to the strange and familiar

heart, and the landscape
becomes the landscape
of being, which becomes

the bright silos and snowy
fields over which the nuanced
and muscular geese are calling.

I admire this poem’s skillful use of repetition and line break, and the way it uses them together to build a hypnotic but active sweep down the page.

In the last section, *Dorothy Pretending to Be Water / Dorothy Pretending to Be Sky*, the poems often deal with memories—of a mother, a father, of farm life. The farm segues into a vineyard, its tractor, a restrained memorial for a dog. Moments positive in tone are more frequent, but of course no happy ending arrives. The section is a tangled, crooked story of “missing scenes” (the phrase recurs), stray
dogs, and children lost in “dream-masks” and “blind bodies,” not yet aware that their playful pretending cannot restore the clean skies and waters their immediate predecessors have wasted.

While the questions raised by _Money Money Money Water Water Water_ are serious, Mead sometimes treats them with humor, as in the following poem, which manages to spoof both science and spiritualism:

**SOLIDS AND NON-SOLIDS**

The air is solids and non-solids.
The person is solids and non-solids:
Solids and non-solids all the way down.

Halo of leaves. Aura of notes.
No kidding. All the way down.
Forgotten and not forgotten.

The old-fashioned stream remains.
The mind remains, thinking lost, lost, loser—all the way down.

The unhelpful categorization of the title phrase makes comic hay of science; “all the way down” laughs at the well-known story of the woman who said the world rested on a turtle, and when pressed further declared that the turtle rested on another turtle, and so on, “all the way down.” The word “loster” is characteristic of Mead’s inventiveness. The last two lines of the poem capitalize on the humor but also turn the poem in a new, poignant direction.

A more literal turtle appears late in the book, looking for a place to lay eggs and hampered by the falling water table, the shrinking water hole. She perseveres, “bumping along... for she is one / of the sturdier gifts / on this mission.”

Throughout all three sections, each poem has a main body followed by a short coda at the bottom of the following page (always verso) consisting of a tercet and a one-line stanza. These can be read separately as well, as a book within a book. The table of contents lists
the titles of poems in capitals followed by the first lines of their codas in lower case. Thus the contents read, often, like a poem:

WALKING, BLUES
    Going to town for vodka at noon
WE GO FROM LIGHT INTO DARKNESS
    With barely a word to say
    Now as animal bodies
STALKING THE PLEASURES
    There was only one egg

The contents extend for five pages, longer than the poems themselves, which are all one page or less.

Tracking the mind at play here, whether in formal elements or imagery, tone, and trope, is a pleasure. The book is not an easy read, but it's not a strenuous one, either. A number of poems, like "The Geese," are straightforward—simple and eloquent. Here's another:

BEEN A GRAPEVINE IN MY STEAD

    In the end you are
    and then after some time
    you are not, more or less—

    as the saying goes. What
    did you want? You
    who were barely honored

    with birth in the first
    place, who nearly missed
    being in this world, you

    when there could have been
    a grapevine in your stead?

    In three sentences, two questions. The first, "What did you want?" chills with its use of past tense. The longer question is one most thoughtful people have asked themselves at some point in their mysterious lives, though perhaps not in such interesting terms.
The penultimate poem in the book, this one tangles the speaker and the reader with the shift of pronoun from first person in the title to second in the body of the poem. This happens despite the detail of a difficult birth, which doesn’t apply to most readers.

In another of the multiple perspectives of the book, animals are seen as independent consciousnesses living on a plane parallel to the human. Dogs and deer appear throughout, and the turtle. Here’s the second part of a five-part poem in the second section, “The Mule Deer on the Hillside / The River Dream / The History”:

> John says the dead  
> and the living share  
> the same world, only

> the living do not know it.  
> The deer we named Argonaut  
> lifts his mule face

> into his deer-history,  
> and his deer-thoughts shine:  
> chewing, unblinking,

> he regards me gravely.

“Grave(ly)” is clearly a pun here, having appeared in enough earlier poems to have acquired emphasis. It’s one of a number of repeated words and phrases that weave the book together, both in the poems and what I have been calling the “codas.”

Freedom, or a long-standing symbol for it, stands at the top of this book, followed by a welter of human difficulties. In Roethke’s terms, Where are we going now? Mead’s book doesn’t answer the question, but examines its many aspects with an imagination that is, like her flying geese, nuanced and muscular. We may be “magnificent defenders,” but the book calls us to task throughout and closes with another question that is also statement: “How much can you subtract now // How much and still get by.”

_Pamela Alexander_
A few years ago Marianne Boruch took a leave from teaching in order to immerse herself in two radically different but linked pursuits: she enrolled in a life-drawing class, and she arranged permission to take part in a medical school dissection lab. Six hours a week drawing live models, twelve hours a week of Gross Human Anatomy: it’s no wonder that the book that resulted is intensely engaged with the body in all its baffling and radiant dimensions. Boruch has always been a poet driven by curiosity, turning her wry, quizzical gaze on the ordinary world in order to uncover its essential strangeness, but this thematic focus takes her even farther in that direction. Most of the time, assuming we’re in reasonably good health, we tend to live in our bodies unconsciously, feeling at one with the contraption of flesh and bone that enables the self to function. Cadaver, Speak undoes that comfortable obliviousness, forcing attention in a variety of ways to our peculiar status as conscious beings inhabiting a physical object that is both intimately our own and surpassingly mysterious.

In the second poem, “Face,” for instance, on a long-distance red-eye flight, the poet becomes keenly aware of all the drowsy, shifting bodies surrounding her: “awake, then almost, then heads slipping back / or to the side, mouths jarred open. / There are words / bodies vanish to—curved, slumped, relaxed, released. / And a sound, not the underwater lament of the whale, not its / distant me to you, don’t even imagine.” When she gets up to walk down the aisle, the experience is even more disorienting: she sees

...in the dim
not-yet-dawn the arms
and legs of Shiloh and Gettysburg flung
every which way.
Then past that easy horrific—
those strangers merely out, gone out,
curled to each other: love
in the abstract, love
how it never comes on purpose.
The bodies robbed of thought could equally well be corpses on a battlefield or converging lovers: she’s struck by the way that sleep, like death or love, drains the body of purpose or individuality, “just a simple forgetting who / is who and if ever.” This in turn stirs a childhood memory of the time she was taken to meet an old blind woman, who reached out to explore the young Marianne’s face with her hands; vulnerable, exposed, the child looked back at the old woman’s face:

...Most private part of the body now, hugely calm, the kind that suspends and lets go, her eyes blue in their milky drift regardless, looking not anywhere or straight into, this— no end to it, flying over a continent of ice and sleep and ruin and light.

Although the charged moment is a vivid connection, at a deeper level it seems to signal a failure of both sight and insight: despite the intimacy of touch, the child and the woman remain locked in their separate worlds. Characteristically, Boruch refuses to resolve the tension, returning abruptly to the plane with its sprawling bodies suspended in midair.

The first half of this volume presents a variety of such encounters with the paradox of incarnation, some drawn directly from the world of the drawing studio and anatomy lab, others from history, art, religion. A pope lies in a glass coffin below a painting of Saint Jerome on his deathbed, Adam reaches out “to touch fingers with a god who / maybe is curious,” Old Master paintings are densely populated with bodies flying off to heaven: “those martyrs, their gorgeous flight north / reward for fire, for stones, hot breath in the ear.” Parochial-school education offers images of faith literalized through the body: Saint Agatha’s severed breasts carried on a plate, the Sacred Heart as an actual heart. Clearly the impulse to create art is deeply rooted in the attempt to record and preserve the self through representations of the body, yet some of the most poignant images are of works of art in decay. “At the Forum” begins: “Outside, one
statue keeps its head. // And inside the museum, so many puzzle pieces missing / in the frescoes. Missing: a belly, a neck, an arm.” Works meant to memorialize presence become a testament to absence, standing simultaneously for the effort to preserve and the inevitable ravages of time. Boruch’s treatment is wonderfully tender: “To see and see. What to say. The bent figure of a woman / made of that stone. / A small hand on her lower back. / Nothing else left of the child once attached to it.”

The scientific counterpoint to works of art, the attempt to come to terms with the body by examining it empirically, leads to equally complex results. “Human Atlas” explores the effort to map the body, to “stop time” by reducing the organism to its constituent parts, as though taking the statue apart could be a preemptive strike against its dissolution. Boruch describes a book of “slick pages and pages given over / to slow the blood, remake muscle, to unsecret / that most mysterious lymph, its arsenal / of glands under the arm.” But she charges that such a neatly rendered representation of our physical self, “booked, bound, mapped,” is an incomplete way of knowing it, since actual bodies exist in time and are subject to change: “the whole body ends, remember? / But each ending / goes on and on.” The other objection, of course, is that, unlike the idealized image of the body found in the book, each actual body is distinct and idiosyncratic, tied as it is to a particular self. There is always a gap, the poem suggests, between “that arm you’ve known for years” and the bright, precise anatomization of it (“raw, inside out, near wanton run of red vessel and nerve”), and in that gap the individual self is lost:

Then tell me who that
me is, or the
you understood, the any of us, our precious
everything we ever, layer upon
bright layer.

If the first half of the volume serves to complicate easy assumptions about the oneness of mind and matter, the second half, consisting of a single 32-part poem, pushes those complications into a com-
pletely different dimension. “Cadaver, Speak” immerses us vividly in the experience of the dissection lab where the poet spent a term. But rather than presenting the narrative from her own perspective, Boruch’s audacious strategy is to speak in the voice of one of the four cadavers, that of a woman who died at the age of 99—and who, amusingly, is somewhat dismissive of the writer in the room, “the quiet one” always taking notes and clearly out of her element. This is high-risk material, of course, and in lesser hands it could prove either ludicrous or mawkish, but Boruch makes it work astonishingly well, partly by having the old woman find the whole experience of the dissection lab as bizarre as anyone would—and also as miraculous. Here’s how the poem begins:

The body—before they opened me—the darkest dark

must live in there. Where color is wasted.
Because I hear them look:
bright green of gallbladder, shocked yellow fat, acreage
flat out under skin. To think I brought this
on myself....

But you know what? It’s more, it’s how
there is no sleep. It’s how words
come apart in a dream.
And then you’re awake.

The strangeness of this is hardly surprising—after all, the old woman has never died before, let alone been the subject of an anatomy lesson, so throughout the process she’s constantly making discoveries as radical and revelatory as the ones the young medical students are making in their hushed, cautious exploration of her body (“They stare, they keep probing. To idle / amazement, to trespass like that. // Is it brave? What’s brave? You know / then you unknow”). Her reactions are complex: a bit resentful of the invasiveness, yet clearly fascinated by the procedural details:
What to hate most: this mummy way they’ve wrapped our heads, thick wet towels close, in orbit. Or the distant shock of it

I half love. The pretense that they’ve blinded us. So they can work, of course, without our staring back. Work—first taking down and out what’s left of us, gristle by gristle, siphon to sprocket, their silver probes in those empty bits....

What’s perhaps most moving is the implied ethical interchange between the students and the cadavers: “before they cut, they imagine / we imagined them / imagining us as we made this offering / for all humankind, one of those / hero movies, our signing the paper.” Reciprocally, the old woman is grateful for what she calls their “rituals of kindness”: “that young man, Ajit, who / rubs my shaved head now and then / for something more than luck”; “The way one of them, // I’m sorry to me / when her knife flashes wrong. I’m sorry, / so sweetly.”

As the body is gradually excavated and dismantled (“I’m so many pieces!” she exclaims), the old woman paradoxically becomes more and more completely realized. The meditation moves back and forth between the lab and the woman’s memories, Boruch imagining herself fully into her long life history: her passion for storytelling and language, her relation to her husband and her daughters, her girlhood. So the moment when at last the top of the skull is removed and the brain lifted out “like a cake from a box” is genuinely shocking, precipitating yet again the question of where the self can be said to reside apart from its home in the body:

Are they thrilled or what? And what’s left of me in there—the times I finally, or wanted so hard but could not or would not, or didn’t know for a lifetime I had. Cool, someone says, if only we could wire this baby up to a computer and play the ninety-nine years of her movie.
The poem's last section—too long to quote in full—is a dizzying meditation on the moment when the future becomes the past, on time as both end-stopped and cyclical ("And now, here: the never-will-be / was. Which is to say, / the rest could be said by anyone, I suppose"). Boruch, "the quiet one," is confident enough to let her subject have the last word:

Past tense of past drifts
into ruin or myth or
did-it-happen-at-all. I won't even ask. I dreamt same as you do. I did.

It's a beautiful ending, as the old woman eases into calm, then silence. Yet for me these lines resonate with another passage a few pages earlier, which seems to reopen the question of ending:

We start simple, the teacher tells these kids.
One cardiac tube in the womb.
One gut tube.

Look at me. There's more, just wait. We grow strange
te grow strange
te grow strange
te grow strange—

Boruch's great achievement in this book, it seems to me, is how fully and precisely she engages the mysteries of consciousness and its relation to the body without foreclosing on any of its possibilities. When cadavers speak, we should listen.

David Walker
CONTRIBUTORS

SCOTT ABELS is the author of *Rambo Goes to Idaho* (BlazeVox) and *Nebraska Fantastic* (Beard of Bees). He lives on the family homestead in rural Nebraska, where he edits the online poetry journal *Country Music*.


DAN ALTER has recently published poems in *Zyzzyva*, *Fourteen Hills*, and *The Cafe Review*. He is a member of the Squaw Valley Community of Writers, where his poem in this issue was begun. He lives in Berkeley with his wife and daughter, where he makes his living as an electrician.

RAY AMOROSI has written five books of poems. He is currently working on a new collection, *Broken Promises*.

BRUCE BEASLEY is the author of seven collections of poems, most recently *Theophobia* (BOA, 2012) and *The Corpse Flower: New and Selected Poems* (University of Washington, 2007).

JOHANNES BOBROWSKI (1917-1965) was a postwar East German writer widely known for his lyric poems and prose that give voice to the interplay of history and landscape. *Wetterzeichen*, containing the poems in this issue, was his third and final book of poems, appearing a year after his death. ELIZABETH OEHLKE’S WRIGHT’S translation *Door Languages* from the German of poet Zafer Senocak appeared from Zephyr Press in 2008. Most recently she co-translated with Marilya Veteto Reese a 182-page ebook of prose, poetry and sculpture images by Zehra Çirak and the late Jürgen Walter titled *Kunst der Wissenschaft/Art of Science* (Schiler Verlag).

MARIANNE BORUCH’s most recent poetry collections are *Cadaver, Speak*, reviewed in this issue, and *The Book of Hours*, winner of the 2013 Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award. Her ninth collection, *Eventually One Dreams the Real Thing*, is forthcoming from Copper Canyon.

GIBSON FAY-LEBLANC’s first collection of poems, *Death of a Ventriloquist*, was chosen by Lisa Russ Spaar for the Vassar Miller Prize and published in 2012. His poems have appeared recently in *jubilat*, *Slice*, and *The Literary Review*.


ELTON GLASER has published eight full-length collections of poetry, most recently two in 2013: *Translations from the Flesh* (Pittsburgh) and *The Law of Falling Bodies* (Arkansas).

JUDY HALEBSKY is the author of two collections of poetry, *Tree Line* and *Sky=Empty*, both published by New Issues Poetry & Prose. Originally from Nova Scotia, she now lives in Oakland and teaches at Dominican University of California.
DAVID HERNANDEZ is the recipient of a 2011 NEA Literature Fellowship in Poetry. His recent collection, *Hoodwinked*, won the Kathryn A. Morton Prize and is now available from Sarabande Books.

CHRISTOPHER HOWELL has published ten collections of poems, most recently *Gaze* ( Milkweed Editions, 2012) and *Dreamless and Possible: Poems New and Selected* (University of Washington Press, 2010). Since 1996 he has taught at Eastern Washington University, in Spokane, where he is also principal editor for Lynx House Press.

ANNA JOURNEY is the author of *Vulgar Remedies* (LSU Press, 2013) and *If Birds Gather Your Hair for Nesting* (University of Georgia Press, 2009), selected by Thomas Lux for the National Poetry Series. She teaches at the University of Southern California.

FRANNIE LINDSAY’s fourth volume, *Our Vanishing*, was released by Red Hen Press last spring as the 2012 Benjamin Saltman Award winner. Her other three titles are *Mayweed* (The Word Works), *Lamb* (Perugia), and *Where She Always Was* (Utah State University Press).

TIMOTHY LIU’s latest book of poems is *Don’t Go Back To Sleep* (Saturnalia Books, 2014). Read more at timothyliu.net

EIREANN LORSUNG lives in Belgium, where she runs Dickinson House (dickinsonhouse.be), a residency space for artists and writers, and MIEL, a micropress (miel-books.com).

DAVE LUCAS is the author of *Weather* (Georgia, 2011), which received the 2012 Ohioana Book Award for Poetry. He lives in Cleveland and teaches at Case Western Reserve University.

THOMAS LUX’s most recent book is *Selected Poems 1982-2012* (Bloodaxe Books, 2014). Houghton Mifflin Harcourt will bring out *The Left of Time* in spring 2016. He is Bourne Professor of Poetry at Georgia Tech.

ERIN MALONE’s just-published *Hover* won the First Book Award from Tebot Bach Press. She is also the author of a chapbook, *What Sound Does It Make*. She works for Seattle Arts and Lectures’ Writers in the Schools, teaching poetry writing to elementary students.

NICK NEELY recently received an MFA in nonfiction from Hunter College and an MFA in poetry from Columbia University. His essays have appeared in journals such as The Southern Review, The Harvard Review, and Ninth Letter, but this is his first published poem.

MAYA CATHERINE POPA’s writing appears in *Tin House*, *Kenyon Review*, *Poetry London*, and elsewhere. She teaches English literature in NYC. www.mayacpopa.com

ELIZABETH SAVAGE is author of *Idylliad* (2015) and *Grammar* (2012), both from Furniture Press Books. *Verse* will publish her dossier-chapbook *Woman Looking at a Vase of Flowers* later this year. Since 2008 she has served as poetry editor for *Kestrel: A Journal of Literature & Art*. 
DENNIS SCHMITZ's recent book is Animism (Oberlin College Press, 2014). His eight previous books include About Night: Selected and New Poems, also from Oberlin College Press.

LEE SHARKEY is the author of Calendars of Fire (Tupelo, 2013), A Darker, Sweeter String (Off the Grid, 2008), and eight earlier full-length poetry collections and chapbooks. She is the recipient of the Abraham Sutzkever Centennial Translation Prize.

EMILY VIZZO is a San Diego writer and educator who completed her MFA in Writing at the Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her work has appeared in The Journal, The Normal School, North American Review, and Western Humanities Review.

CHARLES WRIGHT, four years retired from the University of Virginia, is the current Poet Laureate of the United States. He is a native of Kingsport, Tennessee, and a longtime friend of FIELD, his favorite literary magazine.
FIELD and the other publishing efforts of Oberlin College Press receive financial support from the Friends of Oberlin College Press. In a time of increasingly scarce resources, we are particularly grateful to these individuals for their continuing support of our mission. We invite others to join the Press in our efforts on behalf of contemporary poetry. Friends at the Supporter level receive a free subscription to FIELD. Friends at the Sponsor, Patron, and Benefactor levels receive copies of all our new publications. Contributions are tax-deductible to the full extent allowable by law. To learn more about joining the Friends, please contact our Managing Editor, Marco Wilkinson.

**Benefactors and Patrons:** Anonymous, Ray Amorosi, Tracy Chevalier, Marvin Krislov and Amy Sheon, Anne Marie Macari, Georgia L. Newman, Nina Nyhart, Wes Sanders, Diane Vreuls and Stuart Friebert, David Walker, David Young

**Sponsors:** Marianne Boruch, Edward Derby and Caitlin Scott, Barbara Florini, Dennis Hinrichsen, Dore Kiesselbach and Karin Ciano, Thomas Lux, Tom and Mary Van Nortwick

**Supporters:** Anonymous, William Aarnes, Ray and Alice Andrews, Linda Bierds, Andrew S. Brenneman, Peter Buchman and Jolene Hjerleid, Henry Carlile, Michael Chitwood, Steven D. Culberson, Angie Estes, Stephen J. Farkas, Jr., Carol Ganzel, Paul C. and Susan E. Giannelli, David Goodman, John Hobbs and Jutta Itner, Ben Jones and Tanya Rosen-Jones, Richard and Shu-hua Kent, David Kertis, Martha Moody, Mark Neely and Jill Christman, Gert Niers, Kurt Olsson, Carl Peterson, Carl Phillips, Lynn Powell, Gretchen Primack, Kevin Prufer and Mary Hallab, Peter Schmidt and Lisa Aaron, Dennis and Loretta Schmitz, Elaine H. Scott, Charles Wright

$1000 and more: **Benefactor**  
$500-$999: **Patron**  
$250-$499: **Sponsor**  
$100-$249: **Supporter**

Our appreciation also to the following donors: Rebecca Calvo, Alena Jones, Sarah Maclay, Rebecca Newman, Mary Ann Samyn, Amy Schroeder, Linda Slocum, Etta Ruth Weigl, and Mimi White.

The Press also receives essential operating support from Oberlin College.