

SIXFOLD

POETRY SUMMER 2017



SIXFOLD

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Sixfold is a collaborative, democratic, completely writer-voted journal. The writers who upload their manuscripts vote to select the prize-winning manuscripts and the short stories and poetry published in each issue. All participating writers' equally weighted votes act as the editor, instead of the usual editorial decision-making organization of one or a few judges, editors, or select editorial board.

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Kathryn Merwin

Jersey

I.

A girl storms out of her body to sing you the highway: your skin is calligraphy and ink. Back turned, soap and seawater leather her palms.

II.

The tide batters your knees: blood-puckers of coast, blue bruises dusted over telescope skin. Nothing was ever more worth it.

III.

Your words are gloved in oyster silk, the low bass tones of twilight. You probably wouldn't know me now. I bite my tongue, my teeth taste like cough-syrup.

IV.

I was thinking of silver needles, tire-tracks in a sliver of moonlight. Route 13, the wooden house by the hospital, white bridge and *fuck you*, carved in the rail.

V.

The sharp bones of oak trees keep you safe somewhere in Jersey. The aria lifts: your eyes, blackened sea pearls, whisper, *don't you lie to me*.

VI.

Up north, a blue wind lifts the hair from your shoulders. You will wade through your bogs, fill your terrariums, slowly become fluent in the flutter of seabird wings.

The Yellow Marrow

I could have loved the wolf. Alone he was a fist of night sky,
body of starlings, hydrogen, helium. I held a flashlight

to his chest, traced the glowing web of his arteries to prove
that something moved
within him. He buried small things in in the storm gulch:
elk's teeth, brass keys, warped

violin strings. Sharp teeth dug craters into my throat. *Now*
I've made you the moon. I could have
loved the wolf, but I wanted to be hunter. Wanted teeth,
blood, bone. I wanted the yellow
marrow.

Inglewood

*I wish to cry. Yet, I laugh,
and my lipstick leaves a red stain like a bloody crescent
moon on the top of the beer can.
—Sylvia Plath*

My skin is a sheet of Braille: moon-hungry,
shiver by the widening current, curling

into pale shins, bewitching me further
into its darkening plane. The moon, hanging

like a ball over the western seaboard,
annihilating, with every glance. I am
the girl who does not dance: your
eyes catch the light, your teeth catch
my hair. Night
is temporary insanity: barefoot girls

with tambourines, purple lights
in Santa Monica.

For Aaron, Disenchanted

Something once soft hums in you
while you sleep. I watch it lift

through you as you thrash,
flail. The bright tangerine

of your heart comes apart
in slices. I find them hidden

in your pillowcase. Mama's eyes
are the color of your absence

now. A little more grey
than gunpowder. You

never pressed your ear to my lung. Never
tangled my synapses into sailing knots. Never

folded my body like an origami swan, passed
your secrets up through my throat. You are not mine

but you always were. The forgetting-boy

lives in a hollow of atlases. The birds
knew his name before I did. Knew the geometry

of our loneliness, our rabbit-hole
in the evergreens. Our blue jazz at midnight.

Something ached between us, but there was nothing
to hold but our compasses, the unlocked gun-cabinet

in the cellar, the yellowed globe
in the bedroom, spinning darkly.

William Stevens

with a twist of lemon: six senryu

if your pen
and my paper met!—
such poetry.

you laugh:
my hummingbird throat
beats against its cage.

dark eyes and darker lashes;
nothing is sweeter
than brevity.

Sunday morning—
the paper mumbles, meaningless.
I read your coffee rings

down the street,
not across the road:
I don't skip a single block.

I carve your name
on each of my branches but
it is the world that bleeds.

Celestial Bodies

Dark, bright eyes: ebony chestnut and marble, blue, you;
gold hair, sunshine gold and amber—a bit blue, too.

We antithesize, paradox, parallel—
I scream tangentially past you
shooting star sprinkling dust
a thousand asterisks
for you to shovel off the stoop.

(I always knock the footnotes off my shoes
before I enter your apartment.)

What do I have to show
for all that hammers in my heart?

A cloud of shining words in orbit,
burning away in the upper reaches of your atmosphere.

My love it is a quiet thing

My love it is a quiet thing,
A patient hand on wheel;
And steady as a silent spring
It keeps an even keel.

My form no timber, no birch-bark
No needle pine consumed;
I warble like no meadowlark
No kestrel crying doomed.

Yet as a sailor to his port
And falcon to his perch,
The lee-wind tears my sail apart
So heart and tongue do lurch.

A life in several paragraphs,
And death's parentheses—
My heart's too hot for metaphor,
My fire doomed to freeze.

“Aztec sculpture of the god Quetzalcoatl” two thoughts on (Meso)America

I
Quetzalcoatl
Radiant divinity
Feathered serpent now still stele
Stony in silence
Sedimentary scales flecked with the dust of age
Layered around his holiness in concentric sprays of deific plumage
Pinions pinned in the moment's beating wings
Hummingbird rapid—but
Condor quick, and soft, silent, unheard
The all seeing serpent himself hides
In rows and ridges
Time has taken its toll on this carved creature
Rock-locked and lost to flight's timeless mortality
The instant now an age
Bejeweled, bedecked with charms and honors
The coup counted around his neck hangs heavy, like himself,
Stone, like himself;
Like his stone, like
The day, cloudy, vague, ill-defined:
Felt more than seen.

*Oh guardian of the sky temple
Oh lightning illuminator
Bring me rain
Without rainbows*

II
From afar,
the accumulation of cumulus masks the rainy basin
below the tall tree's tops
where denizens of that airy realm
titter and play and feed on one another.
Sky, earth, water—
all mingle as one.
Memory stirs here, too;
fog-like, mist-like, river like, mirror-like:

a dew-drop glass suspended from a leaf tip
reflects the world and, in so doing,
encapsulates and contains it—
a perfect pearl of remembrance, exquisite
in every upside-down detail.

A new world of monkeys, sage-faced, lithe-limbed
prowl: ebony, ivory, russet, cacao and terra cotta,
emerald and jade ribbons peel from branches
lidless eyes open from the inside to see more deeply.
Tongues taste aromas and threads rising from below
and fall delicately from above.

Were we to creep closer, we too would see life in myriad shapes:
the piercing eyes and keening cry of the harpy eagle
the welcome threat of uninhibited mortality:

golden gaze
tar-black talon
plumage fresh-plucked from Andes peaks.

We scuttle but cannot escape his grasp;
the snow-white reaper culls the strong
to make himself stronger still.
His beating, bloody throat,
eyes bright—

the barrel of the gun
the diving altimeter
the gleaming airlock
the edge of the guillotine
the pearlescent sclera of the judge

—we gorge ourselves
and are in turn gorged upon.

Sky-god
do not weep for us
when it is we
who should weep for you.

the tyrannous stars

7

I pick out stars for our constellation, but it's so hard to choose:
So much darkness between us, but *so much* light.
In the distance, already fading *going going* gone we lose
sight of each other, wrap ourselves in strangers and sounds, neglect the
paths we might
use to find our way back again. But I refuse
the trail signs, street signs along the way. I *will* fight—

6

but not for us. I've made my choice
(or had it made for me like so many times before). You've already refused
my paltry attempts at peace. Light—the only bit that's left, weak and light
indeed—freckles your face amber clad in halogen and cold and even
though we might
never meet again, I can't bring myself to touch you, trembling. I can't lose

5

control—and maybe *that was the problem in the first place*. To lose
you seems such a large thing *now*, a fight
that should have been louder, larger, more—all my might
against your silence. But back then, the choice
was obscured, blurred by the brightness around me. My ego weighed me
down, not light
enough to lift above petty pride. You almost refused

4

to meet for the last time—just like back in the beginning. You
refused to even consider me. Life was full of people we could lose
ourselves in. Maybe that's why the crowd, the public place. We even lost
ourselves in the light
of each other. Now, evening rain slicks cobbles—bloody from the coming
fight (*our* fight)
and the sinking sun spilling his guts on the street. A good choice,
then, to end like beginnings. To start again at the ending. You might

3

even change your mind (or so I thought). I might
even apologize (or so I hoped—oh god I hoped, refused
to think about how *bitter* I was, how much I *hated* you, how I *chose*
to hate you). The sun gets in my eyes, blinds me like I blinded myself. So

I lied—said we'd lost
each other, that I'd lost you—like some kind of fight
I couldn't hope to win. Truth: *I threw you away*. Street lights

2

brighten the pavement (or the gloom deepens, I never could tell which)
and now house lights
are lamp yellow eyes sweeping the sidewalks. Try as I might,
I cannot slow my steps to the square where our fight—
for love? understanding? each other? to win?—will end. The sun refuses
to go down, will *not* set, and what a terrible fucking metaphor—trailed by
twilight I can't lose.

Now it is too late to wind back the clock: we will meet and speak and
break and why did I choose

1

to come *here*? Morning light filled me with optimism, a desire to refuse
fate an easy win. Starlight, star bright, might I skip this chance tonight? I
always seem to lose.

Ask me again: in a fight between a world without me or without you,
which should I choose?

Kendra Poole

Take-Off, or The Philosophy of Leaving

I try to imagine the time of leveling. I am glued at an acute angle, watching the aisle arch skyward, waiting for gravity, strapped, committed to leaving you behind. Below, the city wrinkles, ribbed and colorful, acrylics on earthy cardboard.

I like it better that way. I can never fall in love for real. I'm too fond of falling out of it. If I leave you here, you can miss the me I made for you. Take care of her.

Already we are leveling. The sky nestled below us, we skid over weather and sunbathe above the atmosphere. I press my nose to the glass to remember it is colder up here. Before we touch down, I expect I will really miss you once and pretend to miss you twice.

Turbulence jerks awake the sleeping, we descend under the cover of night, dark cities are just inverted skies: little stars dropped on their heads, calling themselves *streetlights*, confused about the origin of their spark.

After reading about the Rwandan Genocide while I waited for my volunteer shift to begin at the Annual Apple Festival, Brookside Nature Center, Maryland.

When it started, I helped the kids
fold fingernail dirt into their apple turnovers,
little tongues licking sugar
off their fingertips, dipped back

into the bowl after. Oliver, his mom calls him,
crafts a paper crown to be the apple king.
Apple peels float in the cider. An autumn
leaf falls into the apple press. It is demolished

and then forgotten. A mother tucks her palms
under a pregnant belly while she laughs,
then spoons applesauce for the toddler.
It smells like funnelcakes and fire smoke.

I mold the apple turn-overs, crimping
the edges. I am so far away
from genocide. I slice each apple into pieces;
they are bites of family time and sunny afternoons.

Do they grow apples in Rwanda? Can you slice them
with a machete? When I walk the orchard
path to leave, I gather fallen
apples. How can I carry them all?

AJ Powell

Mama Atlas

Standing
at the sink doing dishes
my fingers are foamed with soap and warm water
my belly, broad and soft from past pregnancies,
presses against the counter
my shoulders, my back are
Monumental, tiredstrongtired
and my mind amasses the world's weight

The Atlantic Ocean is by my right ear
and the Pacific is by my left
Arctic ice shelves crack
across the top of my forehead
while the Indian Ocean dribbles down my chin
The Continental Divide swinging down through the Americas
protrudes from the back of my skull like a crest

Square between my eyes I see frag—
menting continents
I smell scrubby tundra at the top
clean and cold
smokestacks and sweat below
All the aromas of
heaven and earth and humanity
encircle my head

I am carrying the world on my shoulders
Weight and Lift in equal measure
holding me up and pinning me down
for the responsibility of it all

Because I have children
whose eyes are wide and ears are open
Nothing gets past them
who require explanations and reassurances

And while the news used to throw curve balls
it now hurls thunderbolts

The foam is gone from my fingers
but the plates are clean
and the children are sleeping
Till morning

So carry the world I will
for them
until I can hand it off
whole I hope
and if not, if fracturing
then slathered in love like paste
and stubborn gratitude like glue
adhering our futures and universes and
World up here on top of our shoulders
determined hopeful flawed
All the unfinished glory of the turning globe

Bread from Scratch

If Grandma were still alive

I would learn how to bake bread from scratch
for a dozen people a day
because that's what it took to feed her family
not just how to bake the bread
but how to do it
Everyday, in and out
how vice-like her grip and chiseled her patience
from the mixing-kneading-pounding and waiting-to-rise
the work of unending nourishment
they required
on a frugal budget
It's no surprise she spent her graying years a cook in the hospital
cafeteria
She'd spent a lifetime in the business of feeding legions

If Grandma were still alive

She would show me all there is to know
about blended families
for she started out so swiftly a widow
with two of her own
when she married Grandpa and the two he came with
then they mixed in seven more of their own making
(it's okay to gasp)
for a grand total of eleven children she hollered at and raised
What a recipe that must have been
for love
and leavened expectations
No wonder her grandchildren never tested her endurance
Coming as we did in more prudent numbers

If Grandma were still alive

I would ask her what it was like to lose
her first love
the one she gazed at in an old photograph

held in her papery hand
her first partner in love's nourishment
and the father of her first children
taken by war, lost at sea
hidden in deep waters
Did she crumble
like sift
when the telegraph was delivered?
And how did she get up again?
Dying, she said she most looked forward to seeing him

How Grandma endured so much
while delivering sustenance to so many
is a wonder to me
an art I struggle at
my fingerpainting to her Mona Lisa
And all I ever knew her for
was her drawer of Sunday School prizes
like from the bottom of a crackerjack box
And the scent of yeast that wafted from her steady hands

X is Us

X is us—
Variable to the enth degree
and changing with surrounding terms
always on one side of equal or the other
never Equal itself
Now the metaphor is belabored
for we labor
under rules and precisions
beyond our control
like gravity and
metabolism

But we make music
which means
mechanics has a hold on us
but so does Mystery
biology but also Beauty
and sometimes we are content
to Encounter rather than solve

(I painted my fingernails silver
and my toes for no one to see but me
for the holidays)

Prisms take invisible light and
fracture it into rainbows
our hearts work the same
Hard in wholeness but
when crushed by life's pestle
to a fine grain
we are Medicinal
the substance of us, the fragrance
is Released

This is why we seek love out
like treasure, water, air
even though it has to end in heartache
Has to—does—

Because
we are insidiously fragile
we are brief and dying
Our best hope is to go quickly
to spare caretaking loved ones
before they follow, in a decade or a day
the steep descent
to Endings

Thank goodness for seasons
for moons waxing and waning
tides coming in and going out
and perennials
Every scrap of Nature that reassures us
things leave to come back
Are not gone forever
live on
 somehow
 and so might we
seeding our belief
in Resurrection

Bath Time

My daughter and I close the day
with a water ritual
She climbs in
turns clear water to gray with
the well-earned grime of childhood
She lifts her head in shimmering pride
and I smile to hear her boast:
“I’ve been playing!”

She spent hours digging in the side yard
All day the dust settled and stayed
on the droplets dappling her forehead
smeared along her forearm
every time she swiped it
across her sweaty brow
Now dirt under her fingernails
dampens, loosens, steeps
into the bathwater like tea leaves

She is a country-king
made happy by heroic comings and goings
by tree-climbing, creek-crossing, path-exploring labor
Like a farmer she gestures satisfaction
taking in the plowed fields of Play

So I know the best I can hope to do
is send her out into the world
to drink to dregs
each and every swollen day

Matt Farrell

New Year's Eve: Sitting on a lawn chair in my front yard in Dillon Beach, California

Down on the beach
shadows of families
huddle around exploding fireworks.
I am far above them.
My house is black,
made bigger by the darkness,
smaller by the wind
that slurps up the last of the white paint.
Next week, the new owners move in.

Fireworks pop and scream
as if the beach is being bombarded.
Ships materialize in the fog.
Waves grow and open their mouths.
Ice plant sucks the soil dry
and takes the hill.

Is it too much to ask that everyone gets a turn?

The piñata,
beaten to death,
bleeds candy on the lawn.
It was once a giraffe—
neck so thin
it broke on the first swing,
the fatal blow delivered by a boy
no one wanted
to invite.

Living room

The old man had made clear plans for his death.
He was not buried in the family plot.
Nor was he cremated.
His ashes were not scattered
on the lupine-covered hill by the ocean
where he had first kissed his wife,
wind carrying the smell of driftwood and dead fish,
twisting her hair around both of their heads.

Instead, the local butcher cut the meat from his bones,
and a ninth-grade biology teacher
glued him together into a standing skeleton,
just like the plastic model the teacher displayed in his classroom.
The old man's daughter placed his skeleton in her living room,
an elbow resting on the grand piano, as specified,
so he could still greet the neighbor's cat when she pawed at the door
and get to know his grandchildren better.

Waves in the dark

I'm alone on the king-sized bed
of this hotel room that smells
like a hotel room.

The ceiling groans
with the weight of others,
gently cracking like the ribs
of a seasoned wooden ship
soon to be retired.

My uncle was a merchant marine in the Mediterranean.
In the worst storms
he had to tie himself to his bunk at night,
waves knocking at the porthole,
superstitions of old sailors warning
that the moans of the boards
were actually the creaking bones
of the dead
tightening the ropes.

Willamette River, past midnight

Light from a faraway houseboat
reflects off the water
like a gap between curtains.
I turn my body sideways
and slip through.

Timothy Walsh

Eating a Horsemeat Sandwich at Astana Airport

So yes, this blizzard in May has grounded the plane,
well, perhaps not a blizzard—a snow squall
with gale-force winds—
the building shaking in the gusts,
wind-blasts roaring and swirling off the endless steppe
like something alive,
writhing and coiling round the wings of the airplanes
that look so toy-like and disconsolate on the tarmac.

And why wouldn't I want one last horsemeat sandwich,
slathered in butter, a few pickle slices,
to go with my coffee as I wander through the terminal?

All around, people are curled up on benches,
coats and jackets for blankets,
looking like survivors of shipwreck—
the frosted-over window glass shivering and trembling
while the Kazakh policemen in their absurdly big hats
patrol the corridors confident as wardens.

The sun must have risen by now. Outside, the grey skies
and snow globe chaos
are perhaps brightening by small degrees.

As I munch my horsemeat sandwich, I see there are horses
for sale in the souvenir shops—
Kazakh horses in felt finery to go with the elaborate
felt yurts, camels, and ceremonial horse whips.

There are statues of horses everywhere in the city,
winged unicorns on all the coins,
horsemeat in all the restaurants and markets,
often washed down with *koumiss*, fermented mare's milk,
so minerally acerbic it can knock you down,

though everyone swears it's the secret of health—
the milk of horses, like the meat, made part of you
as homage to creatures we sense are somehow
greater than ourselves.

Kazakh Woman in a Windblown Skirt

"Nothing is more remote than yesterday, nothing is closer than tomorrow." — Kazakh proverb

Far from her ruffled bed,
far from the wrinkled mountains,
she walks the rush hour street fronting
the endless steppe,
a thousand miles of windswept grasslands
perpetually whispering to her,
whispering of what once was,
whispering of what will be.

Riding the glass-walled elevator twenty-eight floors
to her cubicle,
she remembers horses, the rhythm of a horse beneath her,
a mountain of muscled flesh,
her knees and thighs sensitized
by the thunder of hooves on resonant earth.

She grew up in the foothills of the Altai,
nomadic,
her grandfather still riding out at eighty,
a hunting eagle on his arm,
her family having fled across the mountains
to Mongolia generations ago,
fled from the Soviet forced collectivization,
the slaughter of the migrating herds,
the mass starvation of the people.

She had never known permanent buildings—
home having been their commodious yurt,
plush with carpets and pillows,
family including the fellowship of horses,
the cycle of sunlight and grass.

But now they have returned, rejoined the twentieth century—
their former homeland, suddenly independent,
calling back all exiles.

Now she dresses in Parisian skirts, modish jackets,
suede boots with stiletto heels,
shares an apartment in a steel tower with her married brother
and two cousins,
helps prepare the evening meals of *plov*, *manty*,
shorpa, *kuyrdak*,
the gas jets of the stove not a dung-fueled fire
under the stars,
but still a fire,
a fire that whispers like the wind,
whispering of what once was,
of what will be.

At day's end, she descends in the glass-walled elevator,
walks the windswept streets,
the wind-groomed grasslands whispering eternally,
whispering to her heart,
to the horses of her heart,
her heartbeat attuned to the thunder of hooves,
her eyes forever scanning horizons,
knees hungry for a horse,
but perhaps soon might settle for a man.

The Apples of Almaty

Not the famous “Apport” apples in the Green Market,
but the wild apples in the foothills of the Tien Shan,
the Celestial Mountains,
their snow-capped peaks rimming the horizon,
marking the border with Kyrgystan to the south,
perhaps also the border with the world we see
and the realms we do not.

Here in these wild apple thickets burgeoning with fruit,
traders on the Old Silk Road took seeds and cuttings
westward to Europe and eastward to China
spreading apple trees across the globe.

Almaty, meaning “Father of Apples,” a city surrounded
by apples,
born of apples, suggesting that the earth itself
is perhaps a ripening apple
hanging from a canopy of stars.

Here, on the far side of the world, where day
is night and night day,
you can stand on Kabanbai Batyr Street
looking up at the moon,
feeling the pulse of the city, the pull of the mountains,
the silent stealth of snow leopards
gliding across glaciers.

Here in the forgotten heart of the world
where humanity first domesticated horses—
learned to ride horses, milk horses—
perfected the art of mounted warfare,
of horseback archery,
their bows, eons ago, turned to the task
of playing musical instruments—the *kobyz*,
ancestor to the violin as surely as these wild apples
are ancestors to our Jonathans and Granny Smiths

Here, where human language stirred among nomads
traversing seas of grass,
where maral deer forage and steppe eagles soar,
I walk the luminous streets, the moon, our mother,
a silver apple suspended in the sky,
and I think of the orchards of coulee country back home—
how I'll paddle down the Kickapoo come spring,
the slopes alight with apple blossoms,
each blossom reminding me of friends across the world—
Ainur, whose name means moonlight,
Zulmira, who is Kazakh and German, Liliya who is Tatar,
Aliya who is Uzbek and Russian,
myself Irish and Polish twined into an American

Where, I wonder, would we all be without this wild profusion
of cross-breeding?
No succulent apples, far less human beauty or genius,
the world and ourselves stultifying and static.

In today's human thickets of migrants and refugees
surging along hellish silk roads,
you can see it in their eyes—
beneath the hope and fear, the terror and anguish,
the unsuspected seeds of the future,
hidden like apple seeds within an apple—
orchards of unimaginable fruit that may or may not
come to be.

Buying an Umbrella at Khan Shatyr

It's true—Genghis Khan's mounted troops
could ride for days,
drinking blood from a slit in their horse's neck,
but here I am in this fantastical city on the steppe,
my stomach rumbling just hours after
a sumptuous breakfast.

I've sampled *shubat* and *koumiss*, fermented camel's milk
and mare's milk—
reminded that we are mammals—"of the breast"—
drinkers of milk,
with humankind alone continuing to drink milk
beyond infancy,
unable to let childhood (or butterfat) go,
its creamy richness,
our attachment to our mothers.

Here in Khan Shatyr, the world's largest tensile structure—
a tent, that is—
a space encompassing ten football fields, six stories tall,
I am lost amid the posh shops,
the labyrinthine food court,
life-size dinosaurs lending a Disneyesque touch
while legions of signs in Cyrillic bewilder my eyes.

Through the translucent, high-tech polymer
covering this gigantic yurt,
I see that it is raining outside,
so I browse a rack of umbrellas,
feeling like a modern-day Marco Polo
in some ersatz Xanadu.

I open one umbrella after another,
testing their mechanisms, their latticework of ribs,
remembering Genghis Khan's great ambition
to unite "all people who live in felt houses,"
nomads, that is,
and I toy with the thought that umbrellas make us

nomads all once again,
wandering through a world of wind and rain.

Counting out Kazakh banknotes, I buy this smallest
of tensile structures inside the largest,
and walk the crowded promenade, dazzled by
the chic clothes, Parisian couture, American fast food,
thinking that just a hundred years ago the Kazakhs—
or “free riders”—
were bound to their animals, always on the move,
their lives joined irrevocably to their horses,
their sheep and goats,
the cycle of seasonal migrations.

Venturing outside, I recall how Proto-Indo-European,
our collective mother tongue,
has no word for “city.”
Overhead, *Tengri*, the omnipotent sky god,
is a boundless umbrella of leaden gray,
my own modest umbrella paltry as a parachute
buffeted by the breeze,
the winds whispering how all mammals,
whether herbivores or carnivores,
owe our consciousness to grass,
while cities of concrete and stone
partake of the tomb.

Nancy Rakoczy

Adam

Clay is always cranky so soon
after creation.
Separation from the riverbank's
a nightmare.

Days remembered along the
riverbed among the snails
and fishes flashing past.
Worms
carving homes prematurely in him
he sees now.

Flesh holds the memory of fingers
dug deep into him
twisting pulling shaping
rippedslappedawake
more to come I promise.

The hotheads & hotbreath:
"Making it up as you go along?"
he wants to say;
still damp he knows to stay quiet.
But clay must talk
or it wouldn't be clay.

But already he chafes at the
clay covered nail that traces
his veins up his arm.

Each step away from the river
is one closer to him, he thinks;
soon there'll be nothing left of
the riversmell on him.

The mud promises to hold his space in
case he returns.

He's taking the riverbank with him
and the sweetness of clay.
Let it cling, let it cling to me he thinks.
I don't care what he says.

My Clay Man

We tell each other we like it this way:
things were too easy before—
fat apples dropped in your lap
never taste as sweet as the ones
you have to climb to get.

We say.

This way we have our homemade world.
We get to make everything ourselves.

We'd be fat we tell each other. Fat & stupid.
This way we learn. Now we're smart.
We love the sweat that hangs off our lips and nose
to be licked off after a day's work.

Burrow my nose in his chest and
smell his clay smell and breathe his clay soul.
Night time I hold his hand up to the light and
see the small silver fishes dart among the arteries,
hiding behind the knuckles shy and trembling.

In his dreams, the riverbank is never far.

Me, I'm a rib away from eternity.

From dirt.

Press my ear to his
and hear the call that
still echoes between the whorls
and curves of ear and brain.

His tears cry on my face and twist his smile out of shape.

Lick a finger and curve his lips around it
like a droopy jar wet from the potter's wheel.

Fix it with a kiss. Stretch his smile with my fingers,
my clay man. Kiss it. Fix it.

I know I'll have to do it again and again.

Tickle My Face

Tickle my face
with these green hopes,
sprung from the center
of my fine green heart.

Tickle and tease,
breathe on me with
your whistling breath
that warms and shakens
my limbs grown long.

Let me Adam walk
and Eve pirouette
with these lions and lambs
who wait with me in
the deep violet dusk.

Together we'll lie
in the pink dimming hush
and wait for the one who
gave us these names
in the light gone long.

Joshua Levy

Venezuela Evening

Sweat and sea salt
glitter in the hairy vines
of the old man's beard:
Venezuela, Christmas day, 2016.
His guitar is a lemon slice
he squeezes against his ribs,
pouring his audience *blues* lemonade.
Between his sun tan and the restaurant tables
a local woman dances, caught like a fish in his song.
Her good looks flap against an orange sky.
When he goes to the bathroom abandoning his chair,
freckled girls search the hollow of his guitar
for rabbits, moonlight, magic.

I'm lying at the other end of the beach
—the shadowy end—feeling the ocean hurtle
crab dust on to my back.
Musing about the stork I saw this morning
stab the water
like scissors through an ancient mirror
and feeling happier because I saw it.
Now I can hear the tourists
guillotining their burgers and fries.
The wind reeks of banana rum, lobster.
A toilet flushes and the man's
fingers find the Spanish chords,
warm as blood.
I ask the clouds for messages.

Kibbutz Hazorea

The size of Canada makes me shiver
as I rest on this sliver of a country.

On days off we change colours
on Haifa's Carmel beach,
gamble with ear-marked cards,
throw down 10 shekel bills for large
mixed drinks of fruit and milk
and compare Hebrew expressions
culled from restaurant napkins.

We watch the waves crawl to sand on shredded knees;
exhausted from splashing with Spanish fleets,
swimming under French bathers' legs,
being kicked by Italy's boot,
and melted by Greek sunsets.
Final stop of the Mediterranean.

I'm sitting to the side of the group
a guitar on my hip,
Pia's lips curling around the edges of my song.
Grooves line her brow. A trench between
her upper lip and nose deepens when she eats.
The pale skin under her eyes always has a veiny blue hue.
In short, I'm in love.

Pia, why do you have a boyfriend
tucked away back home
like a bookmark?

The Beach

Life is simple on the beach.
Seagulls are kites tugged by mermaids.
Jellyfish lie marooned in blue heaps, deflating their poison.
Seashells remind me that bodies are temporary homes.

I surrender my sandcastle to the waves' kisses
and smile back at a couple jogging by. Love cannot be hoarded.
An ocean breeze leafs through my book like a very old woman
licking her fingers before flipping each page.

There is commerce in the ocean:
a frantic swapping of fish and shells and secrets
but no luck for the fisherman
who throws up his arms, and says to his son: "Nobody's home."

Boat after boat falls
over the horizon's harsh plank.

Ryan Lawrence

A Buffer, Douchier Me

They could be up to no good,
these doubles of mine: coming in
and out of my life and muddling things,

though they're usually benign like customers
at happy hour, literally the case
during our \$1 oyster special,

which really packs 'em in between 4 and 5,
when this one showed up
in tattoos and crisp jeans:

my buffer, douchier doppelgänger
according to Carinne who spotted him
as he put his name on the wait list,

and put his braceleted hand
at the waist of his ladyfriend,
who perhaps was a fit and tanned variant of another,

but I was only interested in him,
who I have to admit,
under his gelled head (still wearing shades),

looked liked me, but buffer,
and showcased it with a tight tee,
veiny arms bulging out,

though on the scale of buffness,
from dad bod to movie ripped,
I'm near the middle, a solid 4 at least,

a suggestion of muscles
and faint boundaries drawn on skin,
an archipelago of abs just below,

which I examined later that night
as I flexed in front of a mirror,
making modest continents emerge,

and wondering where I live
along the latitudes of Doucheland,
and if I can still leave.

Most Memorable Insult

I've been dissed and trashed,
put down, poor-mouthed, and shat on,
but only one smear I remember,
only one slander stuck.

It's when Gina said
You're nothing but a baby,
and I had just sipped coffee
from a hot paper cup,
I had just taken a hard drag off a smoke
and puffed out as the tip cooled.

I don't remember what wrung me up,
what made me bawl and rage
and be the swirling blades of a hurricane,
then later the placid eye.

But it's her addendum that cast
the insult in bronze,
a smoking, coffee-drinking baby,
and the scene it conjured,
that I'm helpless to erase:

fat-cheeked me in a crib
with my bottle on its side,
a dark drip on blue cotton
and bitty nails on chubby fingers
pinching a cig, so slender and white,

as I tremble in anger and start to wail,
but Mom leans in, cupping the light.

Vegan Teen Daughter vs. Worthless Dad

I gave him the edge,
and figured he'd look like a late-round Rocky
before he'd go down for the count.

She had the strength of youth
and all its extras:
idealism and self-importance
and an iPhone, munitions of data
discharged with a finger-swipe.

I'm a waiter, not a referee,
though I wanted to throw a flag
when she rejected the pommes frites,
having realized the fryer
had been fouled by pork rinds.

That's not gonna work, she says,
which as a spectator I wanted to applaud.
In forty years I've never been that direct.

*The mushroom tarte,
no butter or cheese, please.*

No problem, I say,
because I know the kitchen is on its toes,
eager for new challenges,
ready to go off script in an instant
because they know an audience
can see more from the seats
than can be seen from the stage.

Dad rushes out the corner
and leads with a half-dozen shrimp,
which arrive pink and curled
beside the dismembered tentacles of an octopus
interred in a hump of ice.

He follows with a combo:
a stack of bones cleaved in two,
the marrow bared and salt-flaked,
then an assload of pig-fat infected frites
circling a kilo of charred beef,
gaping and red as a quartered saint.

She's gotta be on the ropes,
staggered by the bounty of massacre on the table,
all of it plated on frilly china,
but with her middle finger
shoves her glasses up her nose and says
*You had people working under you,
now they're above.*

I want to call the fight,
the dad is done for,
but instead ask if everything is all right
and offer him another glass of wine
like a bucket to spit in.

What are you doing with your life, she says,
a roundhouse swing that glances off him
and gets a piece of me, too.

Stay down stay down
is what I want to yell
when I drop the check

but he lifts his hands and says
I'm not done yet.

Averages

It's pouring now in Portland,
though usually it's mist
or soft rain,

which tends to be a little boring,
a run-on sentence
and not a single period of thunder.

Meteorologically speaking,
it's neither loaded spring or dead coil,
but a drizzling in-between,

better, perhaps, than desert extremes
or a hurricane,
or one on top the other.

If it's not one thing it's seventeen,
I've heard, but I must admit
it's nice when it's nine,

cruising through
the flat averages of life,
not a care or curve in sight,

instead of like the squirrel I've heard about,
starving and lost,
thinking it can't get any worse,

when he's suddenly struck blind,
and suddenly surrounded by nuts.

Narcosis

My last days will be like each day
before naptime

when I'm gripped by a weariness
that pulls me toward sweet daytime sleep,

though I'm stressed that I haven't done
what I needed to do,

haven't even come close,
and I hate that: pleasure being ruined

by regret, and so I seek to shift the balance
by increasing what I get

with a cup of wine, dark and too full
for 2:00, but perfect for letting go

instead of circling the drain of the day
and rowing against the truth:

you can't do it, it hurts,
so take this and forget it.

George Longenecker

Cape Cod Elegy

Cold wind whips a beach by a bay,
nine gulls float slowly on gusts,
in sand lies a dead coywolf,
fur russet, grey and white,
still fluffy, ears soft,
legs spread like he's still running.

Sand has drifted over his mouth,
jaws agape showing ivory teeth.
Was he looking for snails or limpets?
Maybe he was hoping for the dead cormorant nearby
when last night's icy wind cut through his fur
as he tried to run one last time.

Near the solitary beach coywolves
hide in pitch pine woods within sight
of Wellfleet's white water tower—
part wolf, part coyote,
elusive as sea tides.

On the edge of the marsh a skim of ice,
everything grey and white
like the dead coywolf's fur
in tufts between his paw pads and claws.

In the cottage yard a single rose
still blooms despite frigid November wind,
wine, warmth and supper
only take me back to the beach
where the gale whips sand through his fur.
Then I realize it's not merely wind,
but coywolves howling,
music from the marsh.

Yard Sale

A house can be haunted by those who were never there
—Louis MacNeice

Under an awning await furnishings,
exposed and alone without the house,
which has been emptied of the maple table
where first sun shone each day
on coffee cups and worn silver spoons,

emptied of oak four-posted bed
where for fifty years,
two people loved and awoke each day,
of matching bureau whose drawers
held socks and underwear.

This house is empty of the cradle
where children first slept,
empty of carpets chairs, knives,
spoons and forks, mops and clocks.
Window panes reflect bare floors.

Signs advertise the sale. Furnishings sit,
while two curious crows swoop overhead,
while the empty house waits.
The clocks tell no time.
Car doors slam as the yard sale begins.

Crows caw once, twice, circle over.
Soon the oak bureau, maple table,
bed, cradle and clocks are gone.
All that was there is gone.
Inside, the house is too quiet, too bright.

Chimera

I wake up kissing a pig,
she asks me if I think there's a God,
even before she asks me what I'd like for breakfast—
I know better than to say bacon—
scrambled eggs with biscuits and grits, please.

Human stem cells can be legally implanted
in pig and other animals' embryos—
it was in the news yesterday—
human brain, liver and heart cells.

I can feel her heart beat,
different than before when she was just a pig,
71 beats a minute just like mine
(except during sex or exercise)
but I'm not ready to jog with a pig—
and I can't even think about sex—
so many nipples.

She throws on a nightie,
I hear her hooves clatter downstairs,
smell coffee.
I wonder if I'd be more compatible
with a sheep or a dog.

Live Science August 5, 2016

"Strange Beasts: Why Human-Animal Chimeras Might Be Coming"

—Rachael Rettner, Senior Writer

Silence Comes

This morning the last geese passed south
a few honking stragglers in a small vee
brown leaves fluttered in beech trees
I realized how silent it was
snowflakes whispered on my coat
the only other sounds
a few chickadees calling from pines
and a distant train whistle

Mailbox

alone on a hilltop
gray paint flaking
flag missing
beside a narrow road so little-used
grass grows down the middle
its broken door hangs by one hinge
vibrates in the breeze
a faint harmonica off key

most days when I pass it's empty
this winter morning snow blows everywhere
one crow perches on its crest
today a postcard
a drugstore circular
and a little snow inside
the house cannot be seen from anywhere

two sets of footprints in a dusting of snow
someone has come and gone twice
come too soon
waiting perhaps for this card
or just waiting
I can't tell where the tracks come from
and wonder who lives in such loneliness
that mercy hinges on a postcard

Susanna Kittredge

Four Theories About My Ovaries

I. Deaf

Dear ovaries, can you hear me? For weeks my pituitary has been screaming hormone louder and louder, and still you don't respond. I imagine you twiddling your proverbial thumbs as you wait patiently for instructions that never seem to come. You're just starting to wonder if you should look for other work.

II. Temperamental

I should have known that they would be fussy artists like myself. In adolescence, they were daring, releasing one egg after another to an admiring reproductive system. But as they've aged, the self-doubt, the perfectionism have set in. They are embarrassed by their haphazard early work. Anxious that the eggs they make will be ridiculous, they lie still praying for precise inspiration to create the perfect ovum.

III. Retired

Susanna, lookit—we're pooped. We've been doing this gig since you were, what, fourteen? Every month: *pop* *pop*! We're over it! We consider our fortune made, like young tech entrepreneurs. From now on, you'll find us kicked back on the banks of Fallopia, sipping luteinizing cocktails, rubbing balm into our achy follicles.

IV. More

My ovaries are not craftsmen, not businessmen or drones. They are not even poets.

But don't call them *failure* or *vestige*.
Call them monks, eating from begging bowls
of artificial estrogen. Call them a pair of Pisces,
afloat in my abdomen, forever dreaming.

Medusa

There are conflicting stories of her origin.
She was born a scaly, serpent-headed monster,
or she started as a lovely maid.
She was virtuous or vain,
raped or wanton with the god Poseidon.

We know for sure that Athena took her severed head,
her frozen cry of fury and still-writhing snakes,
and mounted it on her shield to augment her own divine power,
a flat-handed thump to her war chest.

I look at the forked tongues of my hair's split ends,
the dull smudge of mascara below my eyes
and speckle of toothpaste on my shirt.
What a weakling I am, never daring to be truly hideous;
smiling sweetly and dangling silver from my ears
lest I should turn a man to stone.

Apology

You've got that stab-eyed sweetness, apologizing
for some tiny thing. I know what it's like to see black birds
between us and to want to turn them into smoke.

We'll both be lonely this snowstorm—you with the sad
Vaudeville of your roommates; me with an empty house
and an internet I.V.

It's better this way, because: look at me—
I'm writing again! And you—you've got your feelers
feeling in a new direction.

You didn't need to apologize—I wasn't angry;
I was only teasing you for being a tree
with so many daring branches
and so many stubborn roots.

My Heart

is a slowly dripping popsicle
visited only by half-starved hummingbirds
and nervous brown butterflies.

My heart is a traffic island, terrified
by the honking cars around it;
too stunned to comfort the wild-eyed pedestrians
stranded on its surface.

My heart is the cat that entertains a caress
until startled by its own pulse
into biting the hand and bolting
under the bed.

My heart is an empty notebook,
naked of ink, flipping closed
against the poet's ravishing gaze.

Morgan Gilson

Dostoyevsky

Strands of time travel
in red threads of conspiracy
out from now to thousands
upon thousands of eventualities,
and my stomach cramps,
nauseous at the thought
of these other realities
we can't see. Yet
it is written:
Our days are numbered
(possibly itemized,
and maybe even bulleted).

I woke up panicked
and perspiring.
I had been dreaming
of Dostoyevsky.
I was a piano key,
black and white,
and sounding
the same note over
each time I was struck.

Relapse

every day is the same
as the day before, the day soon after.
it is the happenings that transform.
six months ago I couldn't get out of bed.
voices came and went; sleep went
more often than it came. And I remember
all of this not because I ever saw the sun
rise or set on any of those days but because
it is not <now>. the most beautiful flower
blooms in the field next to your house.
it is aflame, a star with earthly roots.
change is the only dawn.

Always the beautiful answer who asks a more beautiful question

-e e cummings

always ~~only~~ (is only) always
the earnest eternal
beautiful change (which) may
answer back ~~again~~
that echo that
asks what is (asked ~~of it~~)
an emptiness more empty
even than the void of a heart
more vast than the (last
beautiful) expanse (of stars not known so
question answers that [answer] question[s])

I Want to Pick Out My Own Coffin

I wish I was warm inside
my mother's womb again.
And I could float through life
listening to the rhythm of ventricles and lungs.
Safe inside my placenta suit,
my eyes would be bulging, dark spots
beneath a film of skin (the softest, slimiest skin
covering my everything: little hands and toes, with
the tiniest nails, that squirm and wave wildly).
No thought would ever enter my prenatal mind.

But thoughts do come constantly piercing my brain
that was born. Uncontrolled,
this thing in my chest goes on without asking.
Breathe in then breathe out,
and keep sucking up life.
I'll never be unborn again,
so I'll be alive until there's something else I'm in.

Klonopin Dreams

I have epiphanies,
instants of mental lightning,
like moments of lucidity

(flashes of brilliance and clarity)
and then nothing.
I have epiphanies

(that turn my eyes to kaleidoscopes) so I can see
how tiny puzzle pieces continuously form and reform to
compose everything.
Moments of lucidity

twist (like light bulbs) in the sockets of reality
and (spot light the universe as it) opens its mouth to sing:
“I have epiphanies!”

They resonate in the consciousness like harmonies
resound in the ear of the mind of the heart.
Like moments of lucidity

life (washes over me),
wave upon heavy, drowning wave.
(I have epiphanies)
like moments of lucidity.

Jim Pascual Agustin

Snail Mail

No one had called it that,
not yet. For us, it meant taking time
like drawing from a well
that stood in the middle of a desert.

We walked in daylight knowing
even if we reached the dust covered
stones, picked up the dry bucket
that lay upside down and checked

the rope, it may already be dark.
Still we gently unwound the creaking
pulley, the echo of its way down
like music from stones

gently stroked in circles
with moist fingers. The sound
of wood touching water
where we could not see.

Then to haul back home
what we have alone,
but always less
and less lonely.

The Annihilation of Bees

Pesticide manufacturers, blamed
for the death of bees worldwide
continued to profit. He had
no shares in them, couldn't care

less for the next luxury
car purchase of their CEOs.
But he couldn't help feeling
something loosen inside

the chambers in his chest
when he read the news.
He glanced at a framed photo
on his desk. A small girl's

fingertips touching the petals
of a daisy. The dark lines
in the cove of her palm.
Fine golden dust released

on a field of wild flowers blurred
out in the background.
In a breath, the past
relived. A day for baking

cookies embedded with chips
of chocolate. A dead bee
on its back by the window
sill, sting intact. Curiosity,

a poke, a little heart
coming to a stop.

The Heartless Giant and the Dwarf the Size of a Heart

She thought things had always been small
and breakable. That people spoke only in shrieks,
fists, stones and sticks of flame thrown
from a distance. Too many times they tried

to set her hair on fire while she slept.
It became a choice between giving up
sleep or looking for caves they hadn't scorched.
Until he stumbled on her baby toe

when his eyes hadn't yet adjusted
to the darkness where she lay.
A jewel instead of a toenail, he saw.
He'd heard people talk of her

having no heart, how with her stare
she could turn a person into a piece of coal.
He should have run back to the gaping light
outside, but something inside him ached.

The smell of her unsinged hair, the colour
of her eyes when she's at rest,
her voice when she's not angered
or afraid, he longed to find out

for himself. He could never believe
a living thing would be void of a soul.
So he sat in patience until she woke up
without being disturbed.

Imagining Aliens

Eyes drowning in stars, a boy
sent out thought waves,
imagining aliens were out there

sailing the waterless expanse,
waiting for signals that matched
their instruments.

Had he looked inside him
he would've found an alien
probe already making a nest,

but not like those in horror movies.
A homing device, invisible
yet palpable as the bark

of the tree he loved to climb,
had long been caught in the waves
he sent out to the universe.

Time and place, and a bit of luck,
would one day open a portal
between them, turn their worlds

inside out, until they became
aliens to each other, exploring
the warm unknown.

Taylor Bell

The Dedication Depends On Where You Are

You know it's winter in the city
when everyone gets to talking
about where they'd like to go
to get away. All great escapes
require careful planning though
they never go quite as planned.

There is one week until Christmas.
The lines skated in folks' faces
seem to run a bit deeper,
like their pestilence had been
frozen in ice that is beginning
to melt. At zero kilometers
plaza the Christmas cone that's
named after a cell phone carrier,
is all brilliantly alight and shining,
strung with golden beads and
someone somewhere's good deeds.

I think it is ten degrees warmer
than it's supposed to be, and
I feel superbly guilty
for not getting anything
for anybody. As is tradition
with all lists, I do not exclude
myself from any of it.

When I was young
in Manhattan, I bought a map
just to make sure I knew
where I was
getting lost. Deliberately
is the only way to deliver
ourselves to unknown corners,

24 hour diner booths,
recondite subway stops,
the harbor view from
a talcum unpaved roof,
The slide in the city park
is frozen over, and snow
unshoveled stuck on
the sidewalk, so we walk
in the road. On the road
is where we wish we were;
out of the cold,
wishing for the world
to unfold like an atlas map,
instead of squeezed, perhaps
inside of a fist. No matter
what postal code can fit
in the corner of an envelope,
we've always played host to
a thousand forms of hope—
historically reserved for the skeptical
or the desperate, so desperate
to be preserved like a turd
on the road.

Muyuk Takin

There will always be trees,
even when the last chicken
has been sold: headless
like old lettuce, and manifold
mustached men wheeling away
what's left of the green grapes,
turned away for not having come
of age, set like a stage
to the side to make way for
a woman with overripe eyes,
stuffing her avocados in a sack
and then heading back
to the room made from river mud
where her sons were born
and her husband died.

How much despair can be pared
off with a knife
and stuffed into a cup,
then sold like a mango flower,
for whatever price
you think your life
might be worth?

Tomorrow the woman
will go back with
her burlap sack
to the Zocalo,
lay herself out
like a deck of cards
among rows and rows
of split papayas, bananas,
cantaloupe and garlic cloves,
coffee grounds, Roma tomatoes,
one million wonder colored eyes
she watched like herself:
growing from a seed.
And to see them seeing her

dying alone, she knows
there will always be trees.

12/19/2015

It's Sunday and the sound
of drums comes drifting in
through an open window.

It's been a disappointing while
since I went to see who it was
outside. With winter coat on

I walk a few miles to the cafe
where they play Bill Withers,
Joan Baez and The Temptations.

I think about what I'd say
in a conversation I'll never have,
with beasts who live in shadows.

I think about what I'd drink
if I could afford to be anything
but bored.

The drums come from a church
with a bishop bathing a baby
in holy water, whispering

in its ear: nothing is sacred,
save for the time you wasted
wishing you were someone else.

And then the choir breaks in-
to song and the baby has a long
time to take itself home

to wonder if whatever it is
everyone told him was a lie;
His whole life, in fact,

to sit in front of empty coffee cups
to forget how he listened to music,

to look out of a thousand windows

until he hears the echo of a drum
and has to ask himself where it is
the sound has been coming from.

To the students in 1^oA

Tell me what you love the most,
not what someone else said,
and you thought it sounded nice.

Nice is not

what I want to hear.
What I want to hear
is what you love the most,
and I'll bet that it

is not nice.

I'll bet that you're afraid
to admit it, to be different
for still going shopping

in the paranormal romance section,
or eating Cheetos with chopsticks,
or saying 'okay I believe you' when

someone tells you you're not
looking too good these days,
and you really are

not is nice.

Browsing Tinder in an Aldi

I get restless in the recesses
of the endless supermarkets.
I check my phone too much
in checkout lines. I think
of an idea I once had and
how I'll never have it again,
and when did I become this
collection of nervous habits?

Was it always everyone else
pressing their noses up against
the glass of the human zoo, or
was it me, or you in the menagerie?
Poisoned with honesty, crude
as a carrot tossed in a stew,
I'm too tired of telling the truth,
I guess, to tell you what
is going to happen next.

So instead I will continue
to text strangers while fishing
for change in my front pocket,
throwing away the receipt
only moments after I receive
it; a new message left
unread for hours while
I remind myself how
we ourselves flash and yearn;

so desperate to not appear
so desperate. So desperate
to disappear once again
into the deep recesses,
and to feel less restless
when the basket is empty,
so to speak. So there's no
need to clip coupons, or

be preoccupied with temporal
discounts, or price comparisons
that are so ostensibly odious
that after so much time spent
browsing, there's still so little
to show, save but for this
vertigo of infinite choices,
paralysis from all the potential

options, a thousand different
ways to make spaghetti sauce,
the mascots on the cereal boxes,
the haste with which we cross
one of our flaws after another off
the list, and the faint whispers of
a woman coming from somewhere

like background noise, reaching
from some other deep recesses
herself, flashing and yearning
like an island, putting me here
in this line, asking the question:
who exactly is checking who out?

David Anderson

The Fall of '16

The season takes a turn for the darker days
autumn gots to offer. Preacher man says; “It’s
due to upcoming elections and all the whoring
and thieving of morals that are part and parcel.”

Me thinks politicians running their gums
don’ cause the sun to seek a hidey-hole.
It gotta be related to peoples livin’ large
an’ all a sudden going under dead broke.

I’m noticing peculiar weather conditions—
roiling purple clouds ride fearsome squalls
causing trees to loose their leaves—lending
an All Hallow’s Eve feel to the landscape.

Bog fires flare ’neath the peat marsh.
Acrid fumes mix wiff tule fog; streaking
clapboard siding like vinegar hot-ironed
onto the rump of go-to-meeting trousers.

Weevils, skinned darker than the innards
of a buried coffin, lay ruin to fiber crops.
Withered sumac, dried kudzu, and wasted
nightshade somersault into tumbleweed.

That preacher keeps rattling on; “Repent!
The end is near!” He’s been a pitching this
drivel ever since I fool ’nough to wander
wiffin range of his baptismal font.

The day after election results git tallied, all
hell busts loose. Nightriders mount up; me, I
hightail it, leaving forty acres gone fallow and
the gov’mint mule turned out to his own kind.

Cat O' Nine Tales

(1)

I let go the yardarm, fell hard from my perch.

Cap'n Jack stood me before the mast and flogged me 'til I cried.

(2)

I stood a midnight vigil mourning shipmates lost at sea.

Cap'n Jack stood me before the mast and flogged me 'til I cried.

(3)

I harbored rumrunners fleeing a guarded coast.

Cap'n Jack stood me before the mast and flogged me 'til I cried.

(4)

I gambled ship's money—then lied to the purser.

Cap'n Jack stood me before the mast and flogged me 'til I cried.

(5)

I challenged the first-mate to a dual and persevered.

Cap'n Jack stood me before the mast and flogged me 'til I cried.

(6)

I jumped ship in a foreign port.

Cap'n Jack stood me before the mast and flogged me 'til I cried.

(7)

I consorted with trollops on the Barbary Coast.

Cap'n Jack stood me before the mast and flogged me 'til I cried.

(8)

I lay down in lust, awoke diseased.

Cap'n Jack stood me before the mast and flogged me 'til I cried.

(9)

I surrendered to death in a bilge-water lagoon.

Cap'n Jack stood Mother before the mast and joined her when she cried.

Continental Rift

We
stood agitated,
facing a great divide,

the grandeur of the
Rockies marred
by our rising voices.

Raptures
circled ominously,
love stumbled and lost.

We
cried out at a
clap of thunder,

sought cover
when lightning
arced.

Eyes
spilling rivulets,
we scrabbled for purchase

when ground gave way.
His tears flowed east,
mine tracked west.

Waning desire

Each of our whispers is a love letter,
even those beginning: Kiss me,
because we always did,
again, and again . . . ,
and again,
again.

Until
the novelty
grew thin and
life got in the way—
feedings, diapers, and colic.
Shh we whisper, don't wake the kids.

Special Needs

My blackened eye
and broken jaw will heal,
my stutter, probably not.

Mom's soon-to-be-ex is looking
at ten to twenty, with the
possibility of parole.

His lawyer put me on trial. *Me*,
the teenage punching bag,
the one in the way of:

his fist,
his drinking,
his uncontrolled fury.

When school resumes,
counselors label me
special needs.

Rest assured,
my intellect is intact,
even though I'm about to be

deposited like an empty vessel in
a maze of compartmentalized slots,
suggestive of an old-time soda crate;

brimming with rheumy-eyed children,
fragile as gossamer threads of DNA,
unaware of individual plights.

My classmates are
a giggle of special Eds
and extra-special Wendys.

Officials label our lot
a case of empties,
not eligible

for a decent return
from the district's
limited resources.

Charles McGregor

Twink Chaser

—For a gentle bear

I.

He was a violin serenade man. Roses were in my future. I knew what convenience meant—a back seat privacy. Tampa Bay has palm tree boulevards and bridges to islands. I didn't recognize anybody there. The odometer turned 100,000 on our last trip. I felt every mile. I know he did too. I was embarrassed riding that long. Monotonous car rides are moments when the weight of air reads the seconds aloud. I felt guilty, but liked the attention. When his ultimatum popped, I wasn't ready for revelations.

II.

Lakeland Square Mall stores the town's gossip. Shelves are adequate barricades—they reinforce the ideal of specter queers touching our boys. She—the one I bring around Momma—talks about him and his beauties; *he buys them comfort and performs*. I laugh. He could be listening on the other side of Superman abdomens. I feel the miles.

III.

I think back to the slow power lines that dipped and rose—that moment when the meaning of silence was as recognizable as the taste of salt. His gaze made me feel lipstick beautiful, but the citrus rays don't hide very long in the sticky summer heat. I know the comfort of a tangerine sunset without him.

Before I lifted my palm out of his hand, he said everything was okay. He gave one last squeeze before he let go. We both understood the stars and stripes consciousness of secluded highways. Plastic Jesus's abdomen cries Kool-Aid blood from the cross every Southern Sunday pitying the kneeling boys peeping up at Him.

The Boys that Don't Know

My tongue is the musk of masculinity—a scent that keeps me safe on the center court's flaming cross.

I calm the nerves of the boys that don't know—
my well-placed *fudge packer* taunt, the *you would know*

response. The conversation ends with my basketball
fluttering down a rainbow arc. I can't extinguish

the extra flare of my flicked wrists, but like all good boys,
I strap on the masque of sweat—it's the Christ-like effort

that counts. Sneaker squeak sirens control my desire—
I long for my place with the boys that don't know.

There are other boys and they know the wooden helm
that steers my gaze. One rewards my jump shot

with Golden Delicious hips lulling me towards the bleachers.
I bluff with bone bruising knuckle sandwich fists,

but his oasis dimples have already undressed me:
I hope you're good at this game.

Yanking Bootstraps: An Affliction

I felt like a monster reincarnation of Horatio Alger: A man on the move, and just sick enough to be totally confident.

— Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

Bye, Bye, Birdie

The Army's got you now

I'll try Birdie

To forget some how

— Ann-Margret, *Bye Bye Birdie*

I.

Florida soil liked accosting my feet—
the black droplets seeped through the holes in my socks.

I could smell citrus tree ghosts between my toes—
I didn't take off my shoes, I didn't want to look. I wept.
Father looked down at me. The crevices around his eyes—

chiseled onto a Roman coin—deepened as he pounded
the earth. The colossus of my youth yanked
my crackling shoulder into his flaky metal car.

Be a man...

...rattled against my skull—the steam from the cul-de-sac
engulfed the baritone commandment. Sweat and dirt
gushed out of my stomach's folds. I stopped weeping.

II.

I now see Father clearly; yellow Polaroids from his wedding
reveal a smear print of translucent tears across his red face.

I ask Momma *why* to avoid the littered silence
of our ticking cuckoo clock. She doesn't reply.

We look out the window at Florida's pastel evening
blinking with desert eyeballs. Neither of us want to answer
with Iraqi Freedom. I don't always know why I cry—

sometimes I just raise my arms, yawn, and the tears fall.
During more certain times, the lachrymal salt soaks my cheeks
while I dream of Napoleon's crown—the perpetuation

of the leather bootstrap pull-up. I am moved by the myth
of anyone's empire. From Dollar Tree socks
to black booted emperor of the Gulf of Mexico. Father,

III.

my classmates were ambitious too—
MBA dreamers mastering their destinies,
unlocking the front doors to their business loan

comic bookstores housing blue anaconda biceps
bursting across the clearly dictated line
of good and evil. Too many of my MBA dreamers

reel off whiskey breath flashbacks of Iraqi Freedom,
flinch from Florida's midnight lightning crackling the skyline.

A soldier will fight long and hard to move up ladders
while dodging loose rungs hurtling back to earth
like arrows flung from Sagittarius's opaque bow;

the flames from reentry are legendary—the spectacle,
the horror generates stateside applause.

IV.

I am an instrument of Fortuna—Father died
funding my climb with life insurance, a warehouse 401k.
Maybe, one day, Fortuna will shatter me across her knee—

the day I reach the celestial titans, the day their exclusive universe
collapses my voice. Oh, the lure of success—the scales across my eyes
leave me without imagination, leave me without my plausible reality

of M16 shoulder rifles, white beams terrorizing
Florida's skyline, black droplets slithering down my face.

I would've known my father's blue eyes—
why they burst like flash grenades

across our humid winter,
across the faceless coins,
across leather bootstraps that snapped at the seams.

A Debt to Privilege

The long days of forklifts poking reams of *buy one, get one*
newspaper excerpts
on the silver floor of warehouse dystopia means we all owe you.
You loved telling me about each ultraviolet ink stain
on your blue collared shirt—Publix’s green Thanksgivings, Wal Mart’s
Black Fridays.
I knew each cedar plank lodged into the pores of your shoulders;
lugging Horatio Alger crosses takes holey palms.
Grandpa never drove you to do your paper routes on snow days.
Your bicycle cut through the chicken wire wind
delivering Cold War men news about how close they were to
apocalypse.
The yellowing Polaroid parables lead to a tidy thesis
for my Dairy Queen paystubs—an act
of resistance against *the moocher class*.

I never knew what your artie eyes wanted from life. You answered
American Dream
with nuclear family privilege—a house, a silver truck, a wife and kid
you weren’t obliged to see. You’d sigh
into your sweating Natty Light on my bi-weekly tours
of your wooden paneled trailer crammed with freezer steaks
and premium cable evenings. Hollywood doesn’t film men
that can’t find the time to cross their cedar T’s
on unfinished blueprints that would craft that thing
people must buy from you—the invention
of bio pic academy award whispers
reverberating into the noiseless space
of our pockmarked skyline.

Beautiful Savior

I love when victims reassure me they're all right. I live
for resurrection moments—moviegoers love popcorn beautiful Jesus
ascending into the stratosphere. Until then, hushed gasps
must clatter down climactic cobblestone streets.

My hammer's claw will be ready to slide palmy nails
out of a lacquered cross; the audience will whisper *so brave*,
and I'll know they're talking about me.

I'm in love with the idea of bloody pulpit Jesus—
the woods with the earless Roman, Judas's puckered lips,
the scripted dignity of a martyr. I can say I was there
for the final act—a disappearing deity's escape
from His stony sepulcher before the black sky
rained closing credits.

Cameron Scott

Ashes to Smashes, Dust to Rust

Ashes when my lips consume sun.
Ashes when everything goes up in smoke.

Ashes when I walk through last night's fire
and in their singing am singed, in their burning

burnt. Ashes to bless tomorrow's tomorrow.
All this green world, ashes lifted from earth.

.

Smashes when I dream the dream of windows.
Shattered snippets of conversation.

Strawberries, blossoms of red, sonic booms.
Black holes. Broken bones. God is made of glass

and porcelain. Glasses of wine, wafer thin.
Smash the glass. I am waiting, waiting.

.

Again the dust, again ground down. Devils
twist in wind, wrap in the robes of saints.

A sudden thirst for lime and water. Mouth a husk
of bread and dust. Rising, falling, settling; binding,

blinding. Dust is the decoy of lesser gods.
Motes rise from every step like breath.

.

Rust as iron as softening as butter and flour.
Over time, fizzes, flakes. Over time tickles

freckles, curls tongues, locks jaws. To stretch
too far. To tumble into love's numb after life.

To listen too much to Neil Young and Crazy Horse.
Live. Living. As good as an object of affection, rust.

Irrevocable Year of the Ranger

The world claims itself as a flat screen. My truck dies every
night in the phantom
light and refuses to start in the morning. Kicking tires does
nothing. Closed fist.

Open fist. Tinker's fingers. A thousand false starts might
mean a thousand more.
All I want at night is to be swept away in a birth of dreams.
The morning is just

morning. Is just the sweet dreams of birth of a swept away
night, of a thousand false
starts, of a fist hot as a small sun. Unable to open. Unable
to close. Again to tinker

and turn into a kick-a-long tire. In the morning's first
refusal of phantom light
my truck is flat as a spatula and all I want at night is to be
swept away by a round

world, in a round of dreams, in the phantom light of
morning's birth. But the world is
closed. Open. Flatly. Claims order. Claims disorder.
Refuses to start, refuses not to.

Bus Poem Revisited

Dreams are born of common faces. This
bus an accordion which collapses on
corners as riders bury themselves in
electronic screens. How many hungry
gods live in our fingers? Each light's fairy
luminescence, beneath each bridge a troll,
the innumerable scrawl of spray paint.
Who is an adept, which a plastic shell
among the blue velvet faces of the interred?

The Law of Averages

It washes over like waves, some wicked equation.
Breaking the overhead light while fluffing the comforter.
Fly rod snapping in half inside the ferrule.
Alternator dying three hours from the nearest tow truck.
So what? Appointments pass in twos, in threes,
in night sweats and tightening chest,
as prescription pills, parking tickets, no shows.
Toxins creep through pipes, accumulate. A hornet's nest
or stroke or misstep. Everything wants transportation.
A creeper wave. A kind of awe. When it crashes upon us
we become drenched in a kind of magnetism.
The law of averages catches up, a spin cycle, an undertow.
Brief shimmers turned inside-out, nothing but lint, burs
stuck in laces, bodies left breathless in bed.

Bless the Last Words Standing

Bless missing s's
how the wind carries us
impossible distances, (cats)
in brackets, questions without answers
and things that are broken
and broken-open in reverberation
like fists that find fingers
or misgivings in the heart
that flake apart like alfalfa.

Kenneth Homer

Tlaloc

Tlaloc blesses us
At the Mexican restaurant,
Granting us shards of corn,
Which we baptize blood red.

The diners favor Quetzalcoatl,
And a plumed serpent leers at us
As we study the menu.
In the kitchen a cook
Frees tortillas from plastic bags.

We will not set foot in the Temple of the Sun.
The last codex has been burned,
And our hearts remain with us
As we flay the waiter for such poor service.

A resin Tezcatlipoca stands by the bar,
Coatlícue grins at the faded picture of Cantinflas,
And Huitzilopochtli hovers above
Frozen on the wall—
Such is the fate of conquered gods.

Inferno Redux

If Beatrice were consigned to a modern American hell,
That hell would be something very like
A downtown parking garage.
Dante would encounter no boatman—
That job having been automated.
And he would drop coins down a metal gullet.

Cerberus, having assumed human guise,
Would be sprawled at the foot of steps
Stinking of stale urine and lost hope,
A corona of broken glass around the stuporous form.
Dante would walk by slumbering metal giants
Oozing dark excrescences, the ichor of a culture.

Hell would be a low efficiency regime:
Leaking pipes,
Scabbarous paint,
Chipped plaster—the scrofula of neglect.
Here and there the walls of this man-made cave
Would be covered with impromptu messages
From the East Side Locos,
The Bloods or the Crips,
Or similar lost souls drifting through
The nether regions of society.
Spiritless guardians would occasionally drift by.

Dante would encounter American demigods:
Jefferson who failed to
Grip the wolf by the ears,
Punished by a ravenous wolf
That eternally gnaws at his great heart;
Jackson condemned to shed
A Trail of Tears;
Nixon bound by ribbons of shame.

Robber barons and princelings of industry
Would be punished by the theft of their souls:
Rockefeller would hand out dimes
To buy his salvation;
Morgan would find all hope foreclosed,
And Madoff, an American Tantalus
Would never be sated.

And then the nameless shades:
Politicos never to seize
The ever- receding prize,
The vainglorious in search of long departed youth,
The friends of Jim Crow.
Dante would search for Beatrice as in the original story.

How to Gut a Poem

Scale the silver scales.
Eliminate all layers of meaning
Until the dull meat remains.

 Cut off the head.
Ignore the pearl-like eyes.
 Sever the flashing tail,
And remove the poem's heart.

Take a sharp knife,
And guide it along the poem's plump belly.
Remove the viscera.
Drain the blood.
Discard the spine and the small bones.
Soak the poem in buttermilk
To remove any strong taste.
Poach the pale flesh.

Last of the Yahi

A simple soul
And relict of a slaughtered tribe,
Ishi stumbled into the twentieth century,
An object of curiosity—
Much like curios collected in a Victorian home,
Barnum's omnium gatherum,
Or the cabinet of curiosities of German princelings.

Of course Ishi was a sensation,
A boffo hit—
Until the novelty wore off.
And the last of the Yahi
Succumbed to the White Plague*
That killed so many then—
A noble savage among savages,
A victim of the Twentieth Century.
And that microbe that we call progress.

- Tuberculosis

Alice Ashe

lilith

Her flesh is antithetical to him. It oozes the firstness of everything felt & the secondness of everything thought. She is undomesticated & like a windstorm her savage eyes upset & upend everything that is ordered within him. Did you say your mother was planning to stop by he will ask & April will say yes I mentioned that & he will quietly disappear & later I don't see why you're so afraid of her & he will reply (cynical) isn't she from Georgia & she will roll her eyes yes but mom's not *like that* things are different now it's the twenty-first century & he will say exactly (comma) we're all still so young

& probably she will kiss him while the unsaid rest settles prettily into the floorboards.

for every smoker i've ever fucked

Your hand alight on my cigarette skin
(*shall we?*) breathe in
our tar-stick filthy sweet
illuminated selves
our soot-heavy cells
mingling, settle
in the chiasmatic fogging of our breaths—

(*oh I love*) our overs and acrosses
our hopscotch-tangled legs and laces, heat-saturated
traces of
all our little linkages—

(*shall we?*) disintegrate, commit
to our mutual ash

tight-laced

It was July when the fever burrowed deep
beneath the snow-soft blankets
of your skin, and blushed your cheeks, twin
rose-petal virgins, wet
with the dew of night's discovering

and while you murmured and dreamed I took
your sweat-soft hand and your gypsy grandma's
book on palmistry, and then, dear heart, I laid you
(oh, so wonderfully) open as our waiting caskets

(and still sometimes I feel your braided lifeline, twisting
over and around my ligaments, tendons, knotting
us in a mess of muscle and bone).

for lips and travelers

Soft hungry animal
devouring continents
my body or
the land to which it has returned
whispers your travels
feeds your dank breath
crumbles—
I am not
I am not
the vestige of your heat
the willow's sun-scorched leaf
though I think you do uproot me
I lovingly decay

the lover's coda: sapphic reprise

There's a dab of lipstick on your tooth,
plum, smack
on the jagged edge where you
run your tongue over again
and again—
a stone on the beach,
tide rushing in—
and do you think one day
I may wear you down, out,
run my gaze over your face
until I've washed it out, away,
all your little rough edges, you?

I only know when the moon is high
and your hand is pulled just so
toward mine
by some hushed impulse of the night,
a little more, each time,
I erode.

Kimberly Sailor

Historic Faces

Grandma has a chin
so sharply contoured
you can grab the point
and shake her 'til it's 1956
when my parents first met

at that gravel yard
where she had a chance
to stop them
avert their eyes
interrupt, or feign a faint, or play a trombone
packed in the Ford's trunk
for just such an emergency
to avoid a lineage of trouble
today: in 2017, where it's still upsetting.

Grandpa has a bland mustache
not really long or short
a handlebar or tightly-trimmed model
not white or gray or paint-by-number red
just colorless and present
like the many drab Easters the grandkids
suffered through
inside that Cincinnati house

Grandpa was always too polite
to say anything about Grandma's funny chin
or her tense and sad way of doing things
in the crumbs of a shortbread and tea evening.

The Mothers of Reykjavik

leave their babies outside. When I saw, I reported a crime:
Abandoned Children!
on . . . every street? outside . . . every shop? the cop,
in some manner of hybrid language I understood
only through his disappointed tone, told me that
americans and icelanders
are not the same. that here,
the mothers take care of *all* the babies, and the carriage
sleepers would be *just fine*
while caregivers looked at sulfur coasters or goat soaps
inside, because retail transactions
are “very important” on an island country
where citizens take so little shit
they proudly eat their national bird
and serve whale in restaurants
because both are nearby and free
and deliciously prepared with oil glazes
while a fellow american tourist, noticing today’s
controversial specials,
declares her independence with a shot of birch schnapps
to honor our eagles and daycare centers
back home

Marriage's Weekly Schedule

the men who brought my stove
—heavy and expensive and the season's bestseller—
arrived on a *Wednesday*, after the neighbor brought donuts
from that bakery you never tried

because it's closed on *Saturdays*
when you are free for cake explorations.

She brought the donuts
because she knew I was sad. But the men, they did not care.
The men said: will this fit? is the gas on? where is the broom
because we must sweep this space first

while the neighbor
seeing my preheated tears
took the broom and said, "I will listen to you, men.
I will clean. I will make this work."

While He, the one who baked my tears,
on *Tuesday, Monday, and Sunday*,
worked in Europe
and also wondered if the new stove would fit
from his lunchtime spot by a quaint canal
or how much resale
hot appliances fetch
should the house sale be divided in two.

Homecoming

I saw an eagle
bald and unabashedly soaring
like the heroes we fly our flags for
after they are old, and march in Main Street parades
where we stand and clap, feeling at once connected and removed
because we only know civil liberty wars now

not territorial disputes
of which this eagle had none,
snagging a field rabbit right along the interstate
just past the edge of town where we take our grass clippings,
root vegetables, filthy livestock straw, and used espresso clumps
imported from Cuba,
because we are responsible, composting citizens now, who share
and trade.

I saw an eagle
in a wild act of instinct from my roving analysis station,
but I did not tell you, even though you were beside me in the
Volkswagen
looking east out your window, perhaps wondering if Germany
has a national bird,
or admiring the mild unplaceable drawl of the radio newscaster
who reports in birdsong
with high trills for good weather and whoop-whoops for the
high school sports team

who always wins the home games.

I saw an eagle
but I did not tell you,
because I wanted a bit of splendor
and majesty, familiarity and rarity, all to myself
that lovely day last summer, when the oaks bent to hear our car
wheels
push the ground, shaking with concern that we returned.

When I Leave

I have to lose twenty or thirty pounds and practice requisite
“self-care” which may mean eating soil-grown earthy
composted straw for holistic positive attention from my peer
group of mid-30s mothers who are dullish white with satiny
kitchen cupboards and semantically invented corporate
titles, because if I am not at once smaller and bigger
there will be no more of me left to give
the one who arrives after you

and I think he will get here soon

because even though I have couple’s therapy alone since
“the unit was beyond help”; even if my nose blackheads
don’t diminish with charcoal and I only burn electric;

even
or because
and should I never see you again

I will yawn the great sigh
of Christmas
with a different monogrammed wreath
but the same
painted pinecones
fashioned to a new front door
bright blue and finally,
my own

Kim Alfred

Soul Eclipse

My life has revolved
around many suns
always the incandescent
glow being the trigger
for the hypnotic transformation
of each self.

Revolving, my body dizzies
into an oblivion.
Who am I today,
am I suddenly grim?
I am drifting, a new moon,
constantly bearing darkness, and

light again. My life revolves around
many suns, deepening the ability
to feel. Who am I today,
who will I be,
among the infinite selves.

Brewing Innocence

Coffee shop souls differ from
all others;
we are the ones who
get our caffeine fix from
the delicate and creative
energies of beings
with their faces in newspapers,
ceramic mugs steaming with
sweet roast aromas, and from
those who are comforted behind
large rimmed glasses,
watching from secluded corners.

Coffee shop souls thrive off
the untouchable madness
found by looking into the eyes
of the man at the bar
sipping his cappuccino,
surrounding us with something
so rich that five dollars for a coffee
somehow seems reasonable in
relation to the richness you cannot
pay for by sitting inside
this little coffee shop.

The Virtue of Realism

When you find yourself,
take notes.
Beautiful being,
remember how this feels.

All knowing, openly inviting
your soul, you understand.
Remember this feeling.
Do not let it go.

Otherwise, you'll have to reach
the bottom of too many glasses
and be destroyed, in order to
find yourself again.

So, darling,
take notes
or join me in a cheers to
disillusioned thinking.

Complacence

I sit here, bare, in a lifeless room.
But there is movement all around me;
the monotone hum of a ceiling fan,
television commercials full of hypocrisy,
the rustle of untouched lists on the dresser.

Yet still I sit here, bare,
my body pale and weak,
emptying shallow breaths into a room full
of movement, my presence languished as the
lifeless materialism that surrounds me.

Uncorked

Will you stay sober enough to still
love me in the morning,
like this?

Or will I be left with only the lingering scents of
your skin, trapped between
these cotton sheets.

I hold your shirt near me as I sleep.
Loving you is unpredictable, constant change.

I move the shirt from the bed with a deep inhale.
I should love myself in the morning,
like this.

I roll to my side, see only my reflection in a mirror—
holding my shirt as I sleep, wishing to wake in love,
sharing a cheers with the empty bottle on my nightstand.

Contributor Notes

Jim Pascual Agustin writes and translates in Filipino and English. He moved to Cape Town, South Africa in 1994. His work has appeared in *Rhino*, *World Literature Today* and *Modern Poetry in Translation* among others. His eighth book of poetry, *Wings of Smoke*, published in 2017 by UK-based independent publisher The Onslaught Press, is available through most online retailers.



Kim Alfred A tug on your heart, a push of your lungs, and a pull of the red string that connects all life. Poetic works can be found on Instagram using hashtag #kapoetry.



David Anderson resides in rural Nevada. He has served as Managing Editor of *EDGE Literary Journal*, published by Tahoe Writers Works. His poems and short stories have appeared in anthologies and all manner of print media.



Alice Ashe is a twenty-something lady/grrrl/queen bitch with a fancy degree in gender studies and the soul of an aging British librarian. She's currently shacked up with an art school dropout in Atlanta, Georgia, where she writes, acts, reads Tarot, drinks tea, hugs trees, spoils her dog, and waits tables on the side.



Taylor Bell is from Fort Worth, Texas, and currently lives in Wellington, New Zealand. He only has three cards in his wallet: a debit card, a backcountry hut pass, and a central library card. The rest all got lost at some point. His writing has appeared in *The Sagebrush Review*, *The Shorthorn*, *At Home Abroad*, and other journals. He is the co-author of the chapbook *Picnic Table Sleeping* and forthcoming chapbook *Fucking off Lonesome*.



Matt Farrell I grew up in Sacramento and currently live with my wife in Portland, Oregon. I received a BA in Film & Media Studies from Stanford and an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Oregon. I now attend medical school at Oregon Health & Science University, doing my best to write between rotations. My fiction and poetry have been published in *Switchback*, *Arcadia*, & *Potomac Review*.



Morgan Gilson is a teacher in Fort Worth, Texas where she lives with her husband, son, and two dogs. Aside from writing poetry, Morgan spends her time reading, traveling, and attempting to teach herself to play the ukulele using how-to books and Youtube videos.



Kenneth Homer has an abiding interest in history, so many of his poems are based on historical personages or events. His poems have been published by *Wiregrass*, *The Southern Tablet*, *Blue Unicorn*, *The Lyric*, *The Great American Poetry Show*, *The Corner Club Press*, and *Verge*. He is an English professor at East Georgia State College.



Susanna Kittredge's poems have appeared in publications such as *14 Hills*, *The Columbia Review* and *Salamander* as well as the anthologies *Bay Poetics* (Faux Press, 2006) and *Shadowed: Unheard Voices* (The Press at California State University, Fresno 2014). She has an MFA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. She lives in Boston where she is a member of The Jamaica Pond Poets and the Brighton Word Factory. By day she teaches middle school.



Ryan Lawrence is an award-winning writer living in Portland, OR. His awards include the 1991 Presidential Physical Fitness Award and an Honorable Mention for a science fair project about dinosaurs. His girlfriend, Bailey, adores him occasionally.



Joshua Levy tells stories on *CBC Radio*, creative non-fiction in *The Rumpus* and *the Oxford University Press*, and poetry on magnetic fridges. He splits his time between Canada and Portugal, with his wife.



George Longenecker lives in Middlesex, Vermont. The woods around his home inspire his poetry, as do strange stories in the news. His poetry has been published or is forthcoming in *Main Street Rag*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Haight Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Two Cities Review*, *Whale Road Review*, *Saranac Review* and *War, Literature & the Arts*. His book *Star Route* is forthcoming from Main Street Rag Publishing.



Charles McGregor habitually dreams of putting his memories on the page in divergent ways. A lot of the themes in his poetry deal with growing up queer in the South, negotiating the American Dream, and reconstructing the identity of his father. He is also interested in prose and is increasingly exploring ways to blend the two genres. As someone that identifies as pansexual, he longs to express himself through all the different identities of genres he loves.



Kathryn Merwin is a native of Washington, D.C. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Prairie Schooner*, *Natural Bridge*, *Blackbird*, and *Sugar House Review*, among others. She has been awarded the Nancy D. Hargrove Editors' Prize for Poetry, the Blue Earth Review Annual Poetry Prize, and nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She is currently pursuing her MFA at Western Washington University.



Kendra Poole is from Albuquerque, NM, and graduated from the George Washington University with a degree in English and Creative Writing. Kendra is a poet who also dabbles in politics, journalism, and international development. She enjoys reading, biking, traveling, jazz, and bagels.



AJ Powell is a once and future teacher who raises her children, serves on a school board, and attempts to write in the wee hours of the morning with varied success.



Nancy Rakoczy has been published by *New Millennium Writings 2013*; Dancing Poetry Contest 2009; San Francisco, CA. She's written art reviews for the Mdaily.co, and has studied at the Unterberg Poetry Center, NY.



Kimberly Sailor is the current Editor-in-Chief of the Recorded A Cappella Review Board. She makes her home in Mount Horeb, WI, where she is an elected official on the school board, fosters rescue dogs, and keeps a lively backyard chicken coop. Kimberly Sailor is the author of the novel *The Clarinet Whale*, as well as other works of fiction and poetry, and an in-progress children's book.



Cameron Scott was recently awarded The Blue Light Book Award for his second book of poetry, *The Book of Cold Mountain*. He received an MFA in poetry from the University of Arizona and currently implements Fishtrap Story Lab, www.fishtrap.org. In the summers he is a fly fishing guide for Taylor Creek Fly Shop in Basalt, Colorado. If you have leftovers, he will eat them.



William Stevens is an English teacher at Great Mills High School in St. Mary's County, Maryland, where in addition to teaching various classes he acts as the faculty advisor for the school's annual literary magazine. Previously published in Kutztown University's student-run literary journal *Shoofly*, William has finally taken a tip from his students and started writing again. When he's not teaching, grading, reading, kayaking, planning D&D sessions, or tending cats, he tries to write poetry.



Timothy Walsh's most recent poetry collections are *When the World Was Rear-Wheel Drive: New Jersey Poems* and *The Book of Arabella*. His awards include the Grand Prize in the *Atlanta Review* International Poetry Competition, the Kurt Vonnegut Fiction Prize from *North American Review*, the New Jersey Poets Prize, and the Wisconsin Academy Fiction Prize. He is the author of a book of literary criticism, *The Dark Matter of Words: Absence, Unknowing, and Emptiness in Literature* (Southern Illinois University Press) and two other poetry collections, *Wild Apples* (Parallel Press) and *Blue Lace Colander* (Marsh River Editions). Find more at: <http://timothyawalsh.com/>

