

SIXFOLD

POETRY WINTER 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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Cover Art: "Vague Religious Feeling," Fig. 14 from *Thought-Forms* by Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater

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Laura Apol

Six Suites for Unaccompanied Cello

The young mother peels
potatoes in the playroom, surrounded
by her four boys. Their stories
compete as she fingers

the kennebecs in the bowl. She takes in
all their voices at once, yet listens to each—
postpones silence until there is silence
to be found. Her own thoughts surface then,

and she'll know what she knows
about love—to keep a part for herself:
a few fumbling notes
on the cello she is just beginning to learn,

a lesson she embraces one hour
each week. She does not choose scales
nor the rasp of simple tunes, selects instead
Bach's solo suites, their ravenous

scope and sweep. She guides the bow
with fierce attention, crosses strings
with singular care. Just one note,
then another—

the press of each measure ongoing,
insatiable.

On my Fiftieth Birthday, I Return

The street, the market,
the church on the corner—how can I turn back
the trees? There would have been
leaves, this yellow, and light, and the same
October air. A woman rose that day, felt
the stretch of her skin and a baby's kick,
breasts tender, back swayed. These motes in the air:
is this all that remains? The body that held me
is gone; brick-solid, the garage apartment
where she slept and woke. These sills
hold that morning: her breath at the window,
her bent-double prayers. The stoop
where she stood, the stained concrete steps—
how can I turn back the sky?

Roots

You phoned Sunday
to say your younger brother had died.

I tried to read your voice the way I read the river,

heard underneath
a story you'd told me last summer
—how, as a child you studied the roads
when your family went for a drive, learning
the landmarks

so that if your parents left you,
you could find the way back.

You were the firstborn.
It would be up to you to lead the others home.

Today your family will gather once more—
dark suits, white roses. For me, you have laid out
the family tree: great uncles, second cousins,
a tangle of generations.

But I see only that backseat boy
who watched out the Buick's side window,
thinking about routes,

knelt for first communion at the rail at St. Bart's
wearing the welt of the razor strop,

who in a few hours will cross himself, kneel again
before something he no longer believes, lay to rest
a hope he can no longer carry

—a boy who never will make his way home.

Seven Years On

The mole the calico brought home
seeps blood, a heart-shaped
stain on the step. I search
the grass for the finch
that hit the bedroom
glass. Such a fascination
with endings: the way the dog
rushes each morning to learn
whether what has died in the woods
is still dead. The way in France,
a whole town gathered around
a piece of star

that fell to a field. And how,
with coffee, we look across the rising
Grand—trees, white apparitions
against autumn grey. We wonder
if there's something wrong,
what is able to survive.
How much, really, do we wish:
bleached skeletons
without bark, limbs empty
and inviting—

place, now,
for the river hawk to roost.

Light, Water, Bones

On the far bank, a willow weeps,
while in the river, its mirror
ripples with light. The cloud-blemished sky
meets a perfect dappling beneath.

Here are Plato's images in reverse,
the ideal in the darkening current:

a leaf, a branch, an evening bat.
Even the heron steps gently,
afraid to startle the flawless
heron at its feet.

Along the lane, the deer carcass
does not teach me about life or death,
but about the curve of ribs
whitening under the moon.

The lessons I learn
are soundless: the light, the water,
the delicate bleach of bones.

After years of listening,
perhaps in my next life
I will not need to learn to trust—

will come back faithful
to my own sense of smell,
wander like the possum, solitary
through the night brush and broken limbs,

burrow fearless as the sleek black mole,
far from this world's polished
surface, intimate with the wet
roots of things.

Jihyun Yun

Aubade

So warm the nights
of plum wine and fruit
on your disrobed bed,
mattress shucked bare
but for our bodies
and the wool whiskered
blanket you cherished because
I'd bled on it once.

I said I'll never understand,
which remains true
but I still miss the moment
arrested. Your walls awash with blues
your wide windows opened to crushes
of milkweed, sage, morning glories
bittersweet as your tongue

in love. Unhusked, I couldn't bear
to look at you. Your mouth enveloping
the bottle's lip entirely, your jaw
when you chewed, the muscle there.
The way you tore into clementines
with your thumbs pushing pungent pith
in and apart.

I covered my breasts
with a sheet, but you pulled it away,
bared everything.
Outside, the night swelled
and lulled, livid with cicadas.
Back then, we weren't made
for tenderness,
though swathed in summer
we fooled ourselves.

Jamie Ross

Stationary Front

—*Rio Arriba, New Mexico*

The men ahead herd cattle
in front of a truck, horse
trailer behind. Rain, early; much
too early, early March; a heat
from California, heat
that feels like anger spreading
in the belly, or a sadness
for the future, for these heifers
huddle-packing one another
in a block of undulating mud, two
hundred legs across the asphalt
pushed against the shoulder.
I'm looking for an intuition.
My hands around a memory—
a wheel that turns the wheels
around this curve, covered
with dung, dogs, cows; men
who need to move, fast, move
large, put parts together; the way
you'd pick up hamburger
and slap it into shape: hand,
heart, man, moon, a cake
of compressed longing
forced across a pan. A dark
hand from Sonora, slick
rope, smeared chaps, saddled
on a roan. A woman
in the pickup, hair pulled-back,
sucking on a cigarette, smoke
against the glass. A fog
that cuts the vision
to shredded lengths of road, meat
pressed into meat, hooves,

barks, brakes, pistons, dirt.
Is this what you prayed for?
All the signs are brown.

Red Jetta

—Rio Arriba, New Mexico

In the breach a man waits, holding,
not sure of the line, not aware
of where or why a water pipe
has broken, under the bathroom

or under the house, he dreams
of rain often, and his ex still
in bed, her freckled forehead glowing,
her closed Irish eyes; it's July

in two locations, one year
by the river in the house of crossing
willows, rented at the bridge
from the Tewa reservation, just below

a highway to the Hiroshima bomb,
between a proposal and an incompleting
marriage, between two paintings
for a failed exhibition, hardpack road

splitting two directions, hers in retreat
south along the Rio, his into the mesas
north near Tres Piedras, sleeping bag
and easel in a green Dodge Aspen

that would soon lose its drive-shaft,
U-joints, alternator ruptured
in a sluice-rock arroyo, two trucks
to follow, decades of repair, though

now he hardly hears the leaking
fissure, rust-cracked iron; he swears
it's the whisper in her long red hair,
loose and restless as the day they met

at the Pink Adobe bar, with a pint
of Bushmill's, her scarlet Jetta;
archeology is history buried
and unearthed, or broken

and scattered, like the Neolithic
birdpoints that surface in the dirt
after monsoon flood—a sudden
heavy deluge that turns each rut

to a sea of sucking muck. You don't
go far without sinking down. And I don't
want a guy, Fiona once said, who hasn't
been run over at least a time or two.

Aluna's Puzzle

—San Miguel Allende, Guanajuato

When I arrived, Aluna was watching the baby.

The baby's name was Aldo. Perched on a cushion in his pillowed port-a-seat, Aldo was so recent he barely reached the table with the top of his head.

Aluna had to stand on her wooden chair, crane her neck over the back, just to see his face.

Since she now was grown, Aldo was a puzzle, as she remembered once being to herself. For sure, she still was a puzzle, but a different one. Almost

six, and even more, three months now in Mexico: *that* was something to really think about.

As she looked at Aldo, strapped in that strange bag, all he did, without a blink or move of his head, was stare—directly at her eyes. Once in a while

he wiggled his hands. So *that's* how it was, she thought, how *she* was, when she was just like Aldo. She just

observed. It wasn't a puzzle that asked you to think. She just looked around. And now that she remembered, she couldn't remember thinking at all.

Burri-Carmina, Family Style Buffet

—San Miguel Allende, Guanajuato

When you walk in
to this open concrete room
with its white tiled walls, steel beam girders
a line of press-block windows
with industrial glass, you will not

feel nostalgia. You'll feel the rumble
of traffic, gravel trucks and tankers, a Flecha Amarilla
with sixty all-night seats
screeching-in, packed,
to the depot next door. Feel squeal-shot

Suzukis, spitting cracked rock, the spew
of smoking Harleys—catcalls, whistles,
the shouts of passing bloods
as they hawk their chicks. You'll hear sizzling

Cuban Salsa, Pop Latino Rap, whooping Janis
Joplin, bootleg Leonard Cohen and Bad Moon Rising
from the max-amp corner speakers
next to Jesus on a cross. Jesus with his hands out
above you as you sit

at a red formica table,
on a candy red molded plywood chair,
with a half-wilted corn-palm in a pastel
plastic pot, a lone salt shaker, a quart
squeeze bottle of orange hot sauce
from a plant in Mazatlán,

across from a steam line, register and counter;
across from two young women
in pink sequined polos
serving the entrees—two señoritas
with hot-pink winks and watermelon grins

asking your pleasure, stirring *guisados*,
 spooning your selection, passing dish to dish,
 lifting each lid, putting it back.
A simple play, a light one: Which rice or beans,
 stew or meat, which garnish
 do you choose?

In a Samuel Beckett play, the props are just two chairs.

This isn't Samuel Beckett. It's an old warehouse
 one door from a depot.
 And it's Valentine's Day—

 with giant, inflated, spinning
 rose-red hearts; dozens
 of flame-glass spheres
 strung like Christmas from the girders
 in a shimmer of nylon strings;

It's New Year's Day, Cinco de Mayo, it's 4th of July—
 It's any day you want

 when you're just off a bus
 in this other country,
with a song in your head, a story
 to write, a painting on your mind;
 and these two sparkling girls
smiling, wide-eyed, staring, for the moment
 just at you.

He Has Not Picked Up a Magazine

—Rio Arriba, New Mexico

There are dozens on the table. He's spent all spring in Mexico. Now he lifts up one.

Most have riveting photos, moving stories—the dwarf elk of Maui, steaming Reykjavik, the newly

published diaries of Khalil Gibran. Not one carries one of his poems. There is nothing here

in Spanish. He will not taste *pollo en adobada* or *cochinita con pasilla* for another nine months.

Or be with Araceli—her laughter in the kitchen, her hair swept in a bun, as she hugs his chest and

shoulders with her yellow rubber gloves. The bells won't chime each morning over the hillside city,

every rooftop garden bursting into color. Nine Months. Nine Months. Gorgeous Araceli. He

lets the magazine drop. He hasn't opened a page.

Sarah Blanchard

Carolina Clay

All I wanted was to sink a new fencepost,
to replant what the chestnut filly took down last evening
when she bolted at the crack of lightning.
But this red soil bakes hard and dry in the kiln of a
southern summer.
My shovel stubs the terracotta earth and bounces off.

My father the farmer would say, *So. Use the right tools.*
I fetch his hand auger, the brace and bit he used a hundred
years ago
to tap the sugar maples in a softer Connecticut climate.
And his 24-pound crowbar, shaped from the front axle
of an ancient Massey Harris tractor.

Before he died, my father showed me how to use a foot-
powered grindstone
to sharpen the crowbar's tapered end.
But I was only thirteen, and alone.
So the steel still bears the marks from the last time he
sharpened it for me.
First, the auger.
Sliding my fingers onto the oak spindle and leaning into the
earth,
I drill five neat holes into redbrick clay.

Next, the crowbar.
Wrapping my hands over his palmprints and hefting its
good balance,
I let the weight drop straight into each hole.
The clay chips and curls away in red-earth flakes.
When the hole is six inches down, I pour in water and let it
seep.
A red-shouldered hawk glides above the pines, riding an
unseen thermal.

I watch the hawk until the clay softens and melts, terracotta
turning to potter's slip.
I scoop it by handfuls into a sloppy mound.
I wear the clay: my hands and arms are slick.
Ochre presses into pores, smears into sweat.
As they dry, flakes of clay peel off like flayed skin.
My brother the potter would say, *The clay lives! You can
create beautiful things.*
Before he died my brother showed me how to work clay on
his wheel,
to turn and shape common earth into elegant vessels.
But I was clumsy and impatient. My pots cracked in the
kiln, so I threw them away.

If I can remember what I am made from,
perhaps I can rebuild the broken bits from this red Carolina
clay.
Perhaps I can fire this earth into hard red bricks,
trowel my tears into ashes,
and make the mortar to point up what has crumbled.

lauren a. boisvert

Save A Seat for Me in the Void

For two consecutive years
I have seen a dead cat on my birthday.
This has to be an omen, I say to no one, to myself
there is no other answer
 except that there are cats in the world
 and there are cars in the world
 and sometimes they meet and don't get along
sometimes things just happen.

One year before the cats
I started believing you might be dead
because no one had seen you in five years
 or at least I hadn't
and I like to base all decisions on the probability of death.
The probability of death was high
so I decided you were dead
and thought
 sometimes things just happen.

The thing about Boisverts is we love hard
but our secret is we hate even harder
but our solution to this is we are terrible at remembering.
I go out in the woods and carve your name in a slab of ice
and watch my letters melt into girl tears
 lusty with glitter and salt
and they are not in the ice but in my body
shaking the cage of me
and there are cats in the woods sharpening the trees.

Stand your back against red clapboards
so I can throw my knives between all your spaces.
The probability of death is low
 you are alive in my grandfather's house
 with my knives jutting through the walls
 we use them to hang our house keys on.

We have the frozen lake behind us
that I stood on once and never again after that
so I am not accustomed to walking on water
and neither are you
I would not like you as much if you were.

The ghosts of two dead cats walk the water
black and white and whole
clean fur
mouths pink as Jackie Kennedy's death suit.
I read that somewhere
she wore "muted pink as the inside of a cat's mouth"
and I think yes, that's true, I have seen that pink
and I sit you down in a chair draped with a bear pelt
and make you open your mouth.
My grandfather lived in the woods
but I am probably misremembering the bear pelt
sometimes things just happen.

I take the omen of the dead cats
ball it up like tissue paper
and press it into your sternum like planting a seed
cup my hands over it and pull out the ghosts.
The cats settle into my grandfather's house
sneezing in the dust of years
licking the old glue that holds together his French novels
rubbing their cold bodies against our legs.
They pick their teeth on the knives in the wall
and so do I
and so do you
scraping away the plaque of false memories
until the tragic real gleams in the thick yellow light.

Frida Kahlo On Display at the Dalí

I've been having dreams
of howling and gold glitter burst from a package
spilling across my body I am naked I am pale and red
as pomegranate flesh.

Nothing is good enough for a speeding train
I tell it that I am here howling my presence to the fast metal
but everything is gold everything stars.
A hand passes before my eyes I will not dream
take this howling and give it back to the wolves.

I am not sweet not even in my blood am I sweet
see how it moves filling the train mixing gold
crawling from my shattered pelvis my twisted spine see how it
moves.

A white paper package bursts like a membrane
later I will pluck stars from my skin keep them in a glass jar
or maybe I will be buried with my body gilded like a relic.

David Foster Wallace says *you get to decide*
but how can I
when bad memories are scattered like pollen
in my frontal lobes blooming and becoming
without my consent?

The best I can do is walk slowly
and try not to complain.

Faith Shearin

Jonestown

I was a child, so it was the children I thought of,
in a remote commune, off the coast of South America,
forced to call Jim Jones *father*. Evenings,

when my own father took off his business suit to drink
scotch and watch the news, I listened to the stories
of disobedient Jonestown children, forced

to spend the night at the bottom
of wells, or locked in plywood boxes;
I knew they were learning to be compliant.

Anyone who tried to escape the cult
was drugged; the Jonestown children lived in huts
woven from Trolley Palm and many

suffered fevers; before they drank
the Kool-Aid laced with cyanide they were called
from bed, during an exercise called white nights,

asked to line up and swallow a cup
of juice without asking questions.
I was asked to line up too, all the time, at school.

I was a child, so it was the children I thought of,
and they were the first to die, opening their mouths
for parents or nurses, in a pavilion, in the middle
of a jungle, in the trembling tropical afternoon.

A Pirate at Midlife

At midlife, Stede Bonnet grew tired of his wife
and children so he built a ship with a library,
named it *Revenge*. He left behind

his sugar plantation in Barbados, swaying
under the sun, and became a pirate
though he knew nothing of sailing.

This is midlife: the nagging wife, the plantation
growing thirsty at noon. Bonnet was a terrible
pirate but he did meet Blackbeard

and, for a moment, was his partner,
which involved walking around
his hero's deck in a nightshirt, recovering

from a lost battle by reading a book.
Bonnet died two years after he went to sea
but, before he was hanged, he learned

to fire cannons, quit paying his crew,
realizing, finally, that money made them lazy.
He was pardoned for awhile by Governor Eden

who lived in the town beside my grandfather's cottage,
just beyond the river of my childhood, and I
liked the drawings of Bonnet in my storybook of pirates

with his fancy jacket and powdered wig. I knew
nothing yet of middle age, of the desire
for excitement before death. I used my crayons

to decorate a picture of Bonnet's children:
waving to him from fields of sugar, while he
raised a Jolly Roger and floated away.

1901 Mourning Portrait of Michael Fitzgibbons

after the daguerreotype

I can make out a fence and two bare trees behind
the coffin which has been opened and propped upright
so the man inside stands, one last time,

beside his wife who is still young, squinting
into the future, with her hair tied in a knot,
a baby in her arms. The older children

are windblown and one turns her face
towards something unseen, outside the frame,
while her brother looks steadily into the distance,

unsmiling, choked by a tie. There is white
behind the dead man's head, and white
on the collars of his children; the baby's dress

is so white her mother holds her tightly
to keep her from floating away.

In 18th Century Britain

It was fashionable for owners of country estates
to have a hermit reside in their garden grotto:

unwashed, hair long. He was paid
to go barefoot, or recite poetry for party guests,

asked to sit in silence at a desk in a hut
with a skull, a book, an hourglass. The hermit

was supposed to embody melancholy
in his druid costume, with his unclipped

fungernails, and he lived in solitude among
ponds and flower beds, his presence unmanicured.

Gardens became less geometric, more free-form,
and a hermit was hired to live in a state

of contemplation, at the edge of a deep woods,
near the shed with its rakes and spades,

beyond ladies in pale silk gowns, taking tea.

Deceased Child With Flowers

after a memento mori

In this nineteenth century mourning portrait a child
has died and now lies in a formal bedroom beneath
wreaths of flowers. What we see is a face

on a pillow—brown hair, long eyelashes—
and it is as if the tiny body is becoming a garden
of white irises and baby's breath, as if grief

has erupted in blossoms and climbed the headboard,
as if the flowers in a nearby meadow
blew through a window and took root in this

mattress which is as soft as earth. There is
no sign, anymore, of fever or infection,
worry or doctors. The medicines, whatever

they were, vanished from the bedside table,
and now the child is becoming the flowers
which are also temporary: cut,

unable to drink, their petals tender.

Helen Yeoman-Shaw

The Mug My Aunt Made

Tonight I sip tea from a mug
my aunt threw on a wheel. Tree rings

of brown clay stretch up, curve into
the lip. Below, waves of sky blue

melt into olive as if they
hug the mountain range at whose feet

my aunt built her dream house with her
lover. Further down, colors blend:

rose, mauve, indigo, sienna
streaking across the bottom like

the Painted Desert. I fit three
fingers through the thick handle. There's

a pressed platform on which to rest
my thumb. I look like my aunt. That's

why she sent her mug home with me.
Or maybe it's her secret way

of telling me that she also
knows how it feels to have your heart

pulled apart then gloriously
reattached, but only after

years of scoring and slipping. As
I enfold the same piece of earth

my aunt embraced, I replay the
message from my mother, study

the mug's glazed palette, wonder if
these particular shades exist

in the Mediterranean
where my aunt was celebrating

her ten year anniversary
and if the hues bled together

when the blood vessel in her brain
burst.

Calling Long Distance

When I call you today
I'll imagine you sitting
at your kitchen table
hillsides of your beloved
Heidelberg wrapping around you
sea pinks blooming on your balcony
as they do in May.

I'm sure Uncle Johnny will answer
neither of us surprised by the other's voice
after all, it is your birthday.

We'll talk for an hour or so
without mentioning your name
but you'll hang between us like a sheet
draped over a clothesline
a lifetime of memories flapping softly
brushing against us as we reach for pins
to keep you from blowing away.

When I Leave

I will leave the moon with you.
She will be your night-light
pushing darkness away
so you may sink safely into slumber.

She will be your keeper of time.
You may count the days
through her opening and closing eye
your grief gradually waning.

She will be your shield
deflecting the sun's blazing revelations
softening his sharp glare so you may
gaze into the heavens unblinded.

She will be your balloon
her beam a silken string.
Whenever you ache, reach high
and she will lift you up to me.

Persephone

Each spring, I bring my
mom daffodils, embrace her,
palms spilling sunlight.

Night Blooming Jasmine

Your hands, two wings
shivering with summer heat
spread like a butterfly across my back, and I
unfold
arch my opalescent face toward the waxing moon
open my mouth, pour my delirious sweetness
into the sticky night.

Sarah B. Sullivan

Iris

—after Audre Lorde's *Coal*

The indigo between violet and blue,
a setting on the field's table.
There are many kinds of births.
How a bulb sprouts wings.
How a bee gathers pollen from the stamen.

Pollen births honey.
Like a bulb planted upside-down
curling itself around and toward the sun.
There are births wanted and unwanted,
in the middle of a field, under a table,
in whatever corner the queen is forced to squat.

Some births live in her belly,
bubbling like drowning fish. Others grow
beneath her feet, throw her off her heels,
like wild horses tired of their passengers.
Tired of being passengers.

A bulb is another kind of birth:
an iris blossoms into a bouquet.
She is indigo because she is an iris.
Take the pollen from the stamen for your queen.

Our Stone Wall

Froot Loops spatter the table—red orange yellow.
My grandson created the art when he raised his arms,
exclaimed, “Look, Bambi!” while pointing out the window.

I am lost in the kitchen sink, in this house with my family,
washing the same pans and mixing bowls
over and over again.

My Uncle, too, is lost. In shadowy solitude. Memory
has betrayed him. The words no longer emerge
in those seven jumbled tiles he once placed strategically.

Did it all start when we buried the dog, the cat,
our childhood loves, by the stone wall
where our home ended and our imaginations began?

My solitude a sapling rooted in a crack of the dilapidated wall.
My uncle’s loneliness: crumbling mortar.
My grandson never knew the dog, the cat.

He misses nothing, yet. He runs
out the door, into his yard, his imagination, to find Bambi.
The Froot Loop mess is left for us to wipe away.

With *My* Luck

Is anyone so special—
to suffer the worst outcome
in every given situation?

Is there a lily in the field
whose good fortune is less than its neighbors'
even if the shade shines darker upon it?

Life isn't fair, my mother told me
when I was six, or maybe three—
A terrible wonderful truth.

—A tantrum.
—A turning away

to lie on the lawn and watch some ants
march by, lugging their loads
while others seemed to stroll.

So many lilies in the field.
A child wondering in the grass.
An ancient man wandering vacant streets.

Boston

after Joy Harjo's Juno

This city is made of bricks, boats, boxes of tea.
The Atlantic to the east, the curling Cape.
The suburbs to the west.
It's always been this way, since 1630,
because pilgrims who were rebels,
fleeing and invading, claimed this land,
molded it with cobblestones and puritans.

Once, a well-dressed silversmith
rode through the streets, hollering.
The bells tolled. They still do,
hourly. The dead
buried beneath their headstones—
which is a world below this world—
watch, judge, murmur of our ignorant follies, sins.

I follow my Freedom Trail,
past chic cafes, up Beacon Hill,
toward the gold-domed capital.
In the Gardens I see No-one's native
son, head against the rough damp bark.
Too dark to see who he might be.
He does not open his eyes.

I keep staring as I walk, my head
turned back. The grass a muddy carpet.
The swans paddle by without looking.
Should I touch his shoulder—him
at the foot of the tree? Say I'm sorry
for those racist remarks yelled out at Fenway Park,
where our city's hopes and spirits rally round?

And I think of all I barely know:
a barber's dealings in a back room in Little Italy,
a fisherman scrubbing the wharf's film from his skin,
a forgotten toddler staring at a broken TV,

the plucked-chicken smell of Chinatown sidewalks,
the violent violations of the Combat Zone,
the Irish pubs bursting with
false glee.

Disclosure

I want to tell you—my body,
how it looks to me,
how much I ate or didn't,
how much I exercised or didn't.
I did not eat, or eat, to draw attention.
(I did not want you to notice.)
I needed to eat nothing. to eat everything.
To get rid of it all in any way possible.
This body is my loneliness,
a shameful secret.
But I want to share these fears
which have haunted me for years.
I cannot hold them alone.

I want to admit to you—my drinking,
now that it has stopped,
or I have stopped, or both.
I did not drink to draw attention.
(I did not want you to notice.)
I drank to be free to be me, to escape me.
Neither worked.
The drinking was more loneliness,
a shameful secret.
I dare not say how much I drank,
what I did and where and when.
But I need to share these secrets.
I cannot hold them alone.

I want to show you—my scars,
now that they have healed.
I did not carve them to draw attention.
(I did not want you to notice.)
I needed those cuts
those wounds that blood
to say what I could not say.
But they are my loneliness,
a shameful secret I regret
and do not regret.
I need these scars to remember.
I need to share these memories.
I cannot hold them alone.

Timothy Walsh

The Girl from Perth Amboy

All that summer, it was as if my motorcycle
knew the way—
Schraalenburg to Old Hook Road to Kinderkamack.
She was new in town, joked that she'd always wondered
what things were like north of the G.W. bridge.

Her eyes froze you, pinned you like daggers,
invited you in to wander, lost.

Whenever she spoke of Perth Amboy, she shook her head.
A nothing town, she said. Rusted-out and crumbling,
a place of has-beens and lost causes.

We rode everywhere together—me and that girl
from Perth Amboy.
She clung to me as if I were her lifejacket,
her last chance—
legs wrapped tightly around mine,
hands tight around my waist as we leaned into turns,
accelerated down freeways.

She thought she was tough, always wore black,
thought she could maybe play bass in a punk band
or one day go to art school.
But that summer we mostly just rode—
up to Bear Mountain, down to Sandy Hook,
west to Lake Hopatcong, the Poconos.

She said she'd maybe like to go out to the west coast—
move to Seattle or Frisco or someplace—
switch oceans for a while,
watch the sun set in the Pacific.

Once, we rode all the way down to Cape May,
took the ferry across to Delaware,

fed the seagulls gliding alongside the boat
from our hands,
the seagulls like emissaries from another world,
like souls, she said, *like souls*.

Later, I heard she'd gone back to Perth Amboy,
got married, lives not far from her old place
near the Outerbridge.

And I was left wondering what if
we had hit the road to Frisco?
What if I didn't crash the bike,
then head up to Boston?
What if I'd followed that road deep into her eyes,
disappearing in the haze of infinity?

Metro Messenger

It was a delivery truck, of that we were sure,
but what we were delivering we never actually knew.
Rugs mostly—a single Persian rug picked up
 at a deserted warehouse on the lower East Side,
dropped off at a gas station in Jamaica Plain—
three rugs picked up at a Teamster’s loading dock in Hoboken—
 all the union guys studiously not noticing us—
delivered to a ramshackle townhouse in Bensonhurst.

So yes, it was rugs mostly, but what was in those rugs
 we never knew—
were smart enough not to look,
knowing that, in this case, curiosity would surely
 kill the cat.

It was my brother’s job—first job out of college—
but over winter break, I was hired to ride shotgun
(no gun actually, just a stack of New York metro maps).
Metro Messenger, the van said with swoosh marks
 to emphasize its speed. *Phone Dispatched*.

We were paid ridiculously well, had more down time than up,
 phoned in after each job for instructions,
sat around a lot in burger joints and bars,
 waiting for our next pickup,
the black van out in the parking lot looking like
 an avenging angel, a dark messenger.

Our base was an old stainless steel art deco diner
 by the Holland Tunnel—Jersey side—
its circular counter where everyone faced the grill man,
 who moved the mountain of golden onions
flipped the burgers,
everyone sipping coffee, reading newspapers,
the frying-onion-and-sizzling-meat smell intoxicating
 while trucks and busses dieseled by outside,
the incessant internal combustion seeping in from the streets,
 setting the counter and coffee cups vibrating,

the roar of traffic deafening yet unnoticed,
like cicadas on a hot summer day.

I was reading the Russians then—Dostoevsky,
Turgenev, Tolstoi, Chekhov—
dog-eared copies of *The Brothers Karamazov*
and *Ward Number Six* on the dashboard,
our conversations about Raskolnikov, Bazarov, Pechorin,
my head full of samovars, *kvass*, roubles, and serfs,
my heart hungry for the steppe

So yes, we were delivering rugs that were most likely
not just rugs,
but sometimes perhaps they were—a set of braided rugs
delivered to someone's grandmother in Queens,
a pyramid of stairway runners delivered to a hotel in Yonkers.

No matter. Whatever the cargo, we were cool with it.
As long as someone would pay us to cruise the canyoned avenues,
race along labyrinthine bridges,
ghost through tunnels under dark rivers,
radio blaring,
brothers seatbelted side-by-side, the curve of the windshield
our common eye,
onion-and-hamburger diners waiting to replenish our coffee,
caffeine lighting our eyes from within like midnight dashboards—
hell, it was maybe the best job we ever had.

Aunt Zosha's Sky Blue Skylark

White-walled tires, white vinyl fastback roof,
 bucket seats and stick shift—
Aunt Zosha worked the clutch in a miniskirt
 and black boots,
the cigarette butts in the crowded ashtray
 all with a kiss of lipstick.

She had us kids sit four across in the backseat,
told us not to put our sneakers on the white vinyl upholstery,
blared the radio, singing along, eyes hidden
 behind huge sunglasses,
always incognito in mascara and eye shadow.

These boots are made for walking, she'd sing,
 lighting her cigarette,
the dashboard lighter glowing like a ray gun—
revving the motor, working the stick shift and clutch,
 peeling out just to give us kids a thrill.

We'd drive to the old neighborhood in Greenpoint—
to Uncle Stanley's Laundromat by the old trolley car barn
or—if we promised to keep it secret—
 her gypsy grandmother on Ash Street
(our great-grandmother, we'd whisper).

While the old woman eyed us across the table,
serving tea or vodka, asking which we'd have,
legions of faintly remembered relatives came and went—
 Ziggy, Stachu, Pavel, and old Bolek,
 Rachel, Bonnie, Agnieska, and Chloé—
playing cards, dancing, the record player blaring,
everyone drinking cups of tea or vodka or both,
Aunt Zosha speaking Polish or gypsy to the old ones,
till inevitably we adjourned to admire her sky blue Skylark
 parked outside—
took some cousin or friend for a ride,
cruising down Manhattan Ave to McCarren Park. . . .

Back at our grandmother's in Auburndale, we'd say
we stopped at the Horn and Hardart's or Baskin Robbins,
felt our lie flush our faces like vodka,
exhilarated,
hearing that gypsy music start up in our hearts,
pulsing through our reddening ears.

Dreaming of White Castle on the Pulaski Skyway

We'd cruised *beneath* the skyway often enough,
tooling around on the boat,
a couple of quarts of beer, playing guitars in the stern,
Monica's sax cutting through the whoosh of traffic,
cruising along the chemical coast,
up through Arthur Kill into Newark Bay,
gliding across the gunmetal calm surface,
oil slicks along the shore making rainbows in the twilight,
the Pulaski Skyway looming gigantically ahead,
its maze of girders and struts arching high
above the water
like the exposed skeleton of some dinosaur or dragon—
gargantuan spine, massive ribcage, lashing tail—
the lines of cars moving along the roadbed
like frenzied ants devouring the last morsels of flesh
from the bones.

So after our last drop-off of the day in the delivery van,
my brother and I decided to take the Pulaski Skyway
back from Queens
even though the Lincoln Tunnel was faster—
take the Pulaski Skyway just for the hell of it
after delivering a couple of Persian rugs to a drugstore
in Flushing,
thinking we'd head over to our cousin's house, make a run
to White Castle around the corner,
shoot the shit. . . .

We could almost smell those burgers as the skyway rose higher
and higher in the air,
those little square hamburgers with finely chopped onions,
small enough you could maybe eat a dozen yourself,
the warm bagful of burgers hanging from one hand
while you reached in and devoured them
one by one
in three bites. . . .

Hurling homeward on the Pulaski Skyway,
the sunset and the fires of Elizabeth spread out before us,
making it seem that all New Jersey was on fire—
an inferno of smokestacks, gas jets, and chemical tanks
 charbroiling the sky—
we listened to the radio's electric guitars reverberating
 off the windshield,
someone singing about love in a dark time,
the tantalizing whiff of those White Castle burgers
 beckoning us onward
to this conflagration we called home.

Gabriel Spera

Scratch

They flock to me, the finches, when I go
outside to scatter seed like the grace
of angels on the stubbled lawn, erased
like most of yesterday by snow

and age, amazed, confused—as I've been, too—
to find, when they expect it least,
the black ice strewn with summer's feast,
a miracle too perfect to be untrue.

They dash and peck, as though they, too, had found
what love provides is apt to melt away
and that same heart that fills our bowl today
tomorrow leaves us scratching frozen ground.

Freeway

Hemmed in by a six-lane traffic jam
on a weekend afternoon, I'm suddenly struck,
blindsided, by the thought, the realization,
that you are gone. Really, truly,
irrevocably gone. And, typical,
you didn't have the courtesy
to mention you were leaving, but slipped away
like faith in miracles, leaving this decoy,
this imposter, in the shotgun seat,
looking for all the world like the one
I vowed to have and hold, absorbed
in work, jabbing at a thin screen, indifferent
to the stream of tail lights keeping us
from being where and when we planned to be.
And for once, I am not cursing
the traffic, which makes it easy to believe
the world's stopped dead, moved to unmoving
by my loss. And almost I don't feel
truly alone and irrevocably free,
the way a soul must feel wafting up
from the tangled wreck—though of course,
there is no wreck, just a bloodless
fender-bender, pulled to the shoulder,
the rubber-neckers at once relieved
and disappointed to find nothing
they haven't seen a thousand times,
their sympathy tempered by the thought,
the realization, they could be home by now
if one or both had only checked their mirrors,
focused on their blind spots, understood
the person right in front of them
might slow, or swerve, or stop for no good reason.

Opportunity

It never rains here, the perfect spot
for an invasion, though of course,
there's not a soul here to surrender,
no square or post to occupy. From where
I stare toward the horizon, nothing stirs
except the nebulas of dust, the motes
clinging to my panels like the pollen
on a drone. I'm left alone
to my devices, which I minister
with the gravity of a child with pail
and shovel shaping ziggurats
for the tide to sweep away. Though of course
there is no tide, no teeming sea.
Nor does the landscape even need one,
evidently, to gather rust, the stones
and crags, like random memory, steeped
in hues of rouge and blush. And like
a sapper through a minefield, preassessing
every inch, I tread deliberately,
obliquely, though in retrospect,
my course seems almost straight,
my state improbable and strangely
preordained. My days are long,
my hours numbered, my fate
to populate a vista so forbidding
even death, if ever he came,
no longer visits. And as the sunset
drains my tired cells, I recite
my litany of wonder, send
my missive, bit by bit, beyond the sky—
as though it mattered, as though
any power beyond my own
could ever reach me, right me, if I scarred
the soft lip of a crater, cascaded
down the talus like a turtle
on its back to rest helpless in shadow,
an instant fossil, fastidious wishbone
lodged within eternity's dry throat.

Blood Moon

The shadow crept like doubt from a sinister quarter of the moon, a malignant tincture that would bathe it in mercurochrome and flare the nearest stars, an event more curious and rare than honest love. I splayed the tripod, set to capture on film the partial phases of erasure. And as I glanced starward from the aperture—a swoop, a shape, a cloak of wings, twin craters laked with eyes. Before I could even think to duck it vanished beyond the roofline, leaving me much where I've always been: humbled, dumbstruck, between the dull pull of Earth and all heavenly machinations, wondering just how many miracles, how many missives from eternity, I may have missed because I failed, in ignorance, to lift my eyes and face the coming silence.

Roots

It's hard not to view
a clogged toilet as a statement
on your life. But though I threw

both shoulders to the tank,
rocking to the plunger's
squelch and suck, nothing sank

but my heart. It was evident
my issue went deeper,
like desire or discontent.

So I slogged out to the source,
uncapped the cleanout port and watched
ooze well up like hope divorced

from history and just as fast
slosh back. I force-fed a spasm
of metal coil down its shaft

and reeled it back, further irked
by the splash of failure. I kissed
its rubber to the lip and worked

my plunger till the pressure
grew too great, a fracking
disaster that sent a gusher

of thin black crude up and out
the backflow valve, swamping
the soil beside the house,

infecting the air. Kind fate
has graced me with sense enough
to know when I've been beat.

I phoned a pro, who passed
a naked blender through the pipe,
pureeing the roots that massed

like dendrites in a gangled
neural net. With one stroke, the knot
was solved, my life untangled.

The sun soon catalyzed
the malodorous muck,
made rich the earth that gave rise

to a carpetbomb of grass
that begged to get cut. And as I
bullied the mower past

there it was: a tomato shoot
where none had been sown, meaning
it had to have taken root

from seeds that plumbed the byzantine
maze of human gut, sclerotic
flume of sewer line

before lodging in the fetid
bog of excrement I'd
unwittingly created.

Was there a right way to react
to such aplomb?
Was I wrong to feel mocked

in my petty disgrace?
Or should I have known nature
would tell me to embrace

even the shit, to throw
my whole soul into it,
because who can know

what we'll be when we've committed
to rise at last up out of it,
self-tried and self-acquitted,

what tender blooms we might
break into when we stand
clean and naked in the light.

Zoë Harrison

Pattee Creek

A week after you died, a fox, hungry white
laid flat in knapweed's purple flowers his ears
strained towards the criss crossed wires you'd strung
with rattlesnake hides, brass washers.

Beyond the mesh
were the chickens and below the chickens
rust, late watermelon rinds,
straw strangled with feathers.

Will I rot, my body tucked under sanded clay
my bones another stone beneath the yard's fruit tree
fallen apple war drums
against my ribs?

As he crept across nude roots
the flock's clucks were
low warning
their plumage raising like parasols.

The cerulean shoelace you hung
danced from the wooden coop
as paws scraped the soil.

When the wire gave there was nowhere to flee,
beaks twittered and cracked like June bug wings,
their feathered heads limp.

Inside the kitchen walls were ledger, the corners sellotaped
seams, curved like origami balloons. Your shotgun was hung
in the wardrobe, you'd never shown me how to shoot.

AJ Powell

Shatter

I sit in a glass chair wearing a glass dress,
holding a glass pencil, breathing glass breaths,
waiting for everything to shatter.

My fingers clink against paper in a minor key;
words fall on the page, sword-strikes
ringing out amid silence.

Light flashes, burnishing dreams both
bright and terrible, and exposing
a million flickering thoughts,

And the glass slivers and flies through the air
to waiting imaginations, embedding itself
where it lands, leaving me flesh again.

Blanket

“This is nowhere,” she whispers in his ear,
“and nothing happens here.”

Then he pulls up her blouse and
ripples her skin beneath his fingers.
Together they spin a blanket
of blissful self-forgetting
threaded with sighs, moans, laughter.
Hide under it for hours
chasing down new shivers
then fall asleep like sated babies.
Wake up startled in the morning,
wide and bleary eyes falling on each other
in daylight.

The myth of meaninglessness
hangs in the air like
dust motes in sunbeams.
She shifts a shoulder and holds the sheet tight.
He brushes away sleep in his eye.
She waits and wonders
if bolting or breakfast is on his mind
and readies herself to be stoic either way.
He doubts his courage to risk what he wants
but, gazing at the lift of her breath under covers,
the want remains.

Sunlight butters across sheets
dappling skin, illuminating freckles
and hair standing on end.
Whatever they’ve woven in moments last night
awaits the morning’s quilting,
still could be cast aside threadbare or
stitched whole,
Time at hand
ready to knit a tryst
into shelter,
as pillows pull magnetic
on drowsy, awestruck heads.

Witch's Work

I sit and stir at fate's cauldron,
toil to stew new trouble,
brew bright and terrible concoctions
for the world from a wise and wizened hag—
one wart on my nose for every
bewitched millennia I've stared down.

I rage today at pretty images, counterfeit and cheap:
tedious portraits of perfection
fit only for thirty-foot-tall screens of silver,
slivering my sisters' instincts into nothing
till they hate mirrors and their
own magic selves.

I choke on strange poison in the air;
a toxic atmosphere has unleashed
a sickening, a standard view
that age and imperfection have
no deep and particular beauty, though they do.
I brew a tonic for modern toxins.

I cackle and curse at faked models—
touched by false prophets who spellbind absent
every time-worn, life-earned wrinkle,
every bit of a body's bump and curve cut—
sacrificed to cellulose tyrants who
demand mannequins of their females.

I cast my hex at the madness of enhancements,
surgical monstrosities papering psyches
till even closed eyelids can't block them out—
my sisters marred by imaginary failings.
What sorcery is this? and who is guilty of
inducing the poisonous deception?

As if marble is what women are made of,
as if fake is how women should feel,
as though holding a warm breast should be less than it is;

as if a heartbeat speeding and thudding through a chest
with love and lust and ready openness
should split from flesh and choose plastic?

Try hovering in love instead.
Hold an eye for human bodies
walking down the road with bottoms
which are double-cupped,
bellies full with a solid sorcery
while illusions of perfection are moving mists.
For we are for cleaving to for life
like a preserver that rides wild waves and stays
afloat in every storm-tossed ocean.

Let us conjure away the ugliness they're teaching,
the curse of magazines and billboards
tossing our sisters in jail-cell expectations,
accosting even our youngest daughters.
Stir the cauldron with me;
banish the bullshit.

Find visions of beauty which follow nature's lead;
let time's travails and treats
build up softly on hips.
Actual is an attribute worthily embraced
with the capacity to embrace back.
Wander then into bedrooms with real women
for potent wizardry, for joyful spells.

Seeds

I will

Eat pomegranate seeds by the handful—
sweet trill on the tongue, tart pull in the jaw—
till lips and fingers stick with juice,
tentative tasting abandoned for honest hunger.

I will

Slip underwater and silence the world,
let nothing approach but bubbles,
which trace skin with lovely skimming
on their way across, around, between, along.

I will

Listen in my car to favorite songs and
remember the stories behind them,
taking a tour of the past, discovering dwindled spaces—
former homes and hangouts gone small with time.

I will

Watch something funny and laugh,
fall into a forgetful hilarity that cracks open
a life of guarded impressions and best behaviors,
guffaw and snort and hee-haw at nothing, everything.

I will

Dance alone to a sad song,
rock and sway in a room of candlelight,
hum along bluesy and true,
welcoming need as a gift.

I will

Stand breathless, cheeks aflame,
hauling in air halfway up a mountainside,
follow the trail to the summit above
as a zephyr quakes a stadium of aspen leaves.

Countdown

Five times she held her breath
Walked five slow roads to nowhere
Wished five wishes into the wind
Watched them catch a gust and flee headlong
Toward anywhere-elses

Four times she skipped a beat
Glanced four backward glances
Missed four passing chances
Lost them without notice so without grief
But still felt absences

Three times she forged ahead
Pushed three burdens through a day
Won three closures in an open-ended world
Clenched them, claimed them, held them fast
In otherwise empty hands

Two times she gave grand gifts
Grew two perfect presences
Loved two new beings with her eternity
Understood them to be hers briefly
Despite otherwise yearnings

One time she died
Loosed one full soul to the ether
Slew one last dragon stalking her
Laid it down to rest with her body then left
For limitless shores

Alexa Poteet

Have You Seen Me?

At once, I am everywhere
and nowhere.
You think you glimpse me

admiring candies like gems
in the halogen glow
of the gas station.

I am an apparition,
selling magazines or gum,
school supplies.

The eyes could be mine
anywhere. At the end
of the jet bridge, clutching

the cuff of a stranger. Flyers
are my paper tombstones,
pinned like corsages to telephone

poles. A leaf, I
float through holes
in the jungle gym, in you.

Time is my plaything. Age progressed,
I am taffy. Stretch forward,
pull back.

Look at me,
and I disappear.

Skywriter on the Radio

Like locksmiths, skywriters
absorb their fair share of abuse
from poets. I'm surprised

to hear the last one in New York
live on the radio. (Though perhaps not.
The vestigial tails of their crafts, wagging

one another. Thump
thump. Heaven-made
bedfellows. The skywriter

and the radio. The three of us implausible
as ever: The poet writing
about the skywriter on the radio.

Did you know we are an incantation?
It's true; If you say, "A poet hears a skywriter
on the radio" three times in the mirror, a Romantic

appears: Shelley, with his pussy-bow
blouse soaked from drowning
in the Golfo dei Poeti. He will pour

out his shoe like in the movies,
and a small silver sardine will dance
in the light at his feet.)

The skywriter speaks of slicers, which blitz
the imagined fingers of God
and faces in the clouds for his celestial

vandalism. The hot, smoked paraffin
and oozing exhaust he leaks
to write love on a blue sky day.

The messages are needy, force him
to fly backwards while holding
a cracked button for smoke with his thumb.

A pocket mirror taped
to the dash reads the hazy
plumes back to him as he hangs,

a bat in the cockpit,
upside down. Mid-scrawl he checks
his work like a schoolboy who stops,

halfway through a B
for the presence of the dotted line,
but this craft is limitless, un-college ruled.

The M's and the R's are the impossibles.
Ask for double-backs to ward off
W, when the world is inverted.

The alchemy of the R,
at once yearning
for bent and straight.

And yet, the skywriter
on the radio written
about by the poet is undeterred

by the earth as a ceiling
and not a floor.
He writes it, difficult and forever,

MARRY ME

Improbable every time.

The Man Who Got off the Train Between Madrid and Valencia

I had been on the train for
two hours. The cliffs of Cuenca
and their small bird-nest houses blurred
into arid bramble for miles.

Along the embankment, hundreds
of brown rabbits pulled their bodies
back into burrows
to elude a metallic beheading.

A small wave of life,
brown on brown in the desert
where no one lives.
(Years earlier in Spain, I lived

with a *familia*. Horrified
when I went to peel a *mandarina*
and two rabbit ears,
white inner hairs still pert,

stood straight up in the trashcan.
I politely spooned
rabbit stew for lunch that day,
hoping my voodoo was reversible.)

Slowing, the train rolled into a station,
deserted but for a dirty sign
ventas with no teller
and a film of dust.

Through the window, I saw him
step off the train.
Jeans, brown briefcase in hand. A weary
walk. The walk of a man who at the end

of his working days
lays down in his clothes
at the edge of the ocean.
Lets the small waves sink him into the sand.

There, he ambled out,
straight into the *campo*.
No homes or fences for miles.
Just the rabbits and me.

For years, he was my talisman.
A patron saint
of loneliness. The man
who walked into uncertainty.

A magician of memory.
Did he vanish? Die?
Had I witnessed him
walking into the desert or

imagined it? The way
a grenade aches
for a man. Or a film, spools silent,
without a reel.

I told only one man
about the man
who got off the train between
Madrid and Valencia. The man

I'd made a myth about toeing
the line between nothing
and everything.

He said he could love us both.

I married him, knowing
that the stations and all the spaces
in between
belonged to us.

Dreaming of Tomatoes in Antarctica

They train for Mars
here, that red planet's
ghost. A twin separated

at birth, no, stillborn,
icy with rigor mortis
in the joints. But

somewhere in Lombardy
There is a field, intraversable
with green, humming

with flies. A casita with earthen walls
and a clay roof. A terrazzo
where hot hay and manure fill

the nose. A terrazzo where skin
goes dusty with pollen. A terrazzo
where one becomes a flower.

There, a lacquered pot
sits split by the growth
of roots, creeping from the cracks
like garden snakes.

There, a tomato plant hangs
bent with fruit. Large,
heavy with fertility.

That red globe waits
dewy
with 1,000 seeds.

Marcie McGuire

Saying Goodbye

— for Bill Worley

Those summer nights
he lay at the window,
chin cupped in his hand,
and watched the stars go out,
the only one awake,
when even the bars
were closed, knowing then
how it was to be.

His friends refused to
understand, and merely
repeated his words,
“inoperable, chemotherapy,”
hopefully, beneath the slow
irregular rhythm of the fan.

Down the street
a screen door slammed.
His wife leaned her head
against his knees.
They tried again to tell us
what we did not want to hear.

Later they brought
slices of lemon pound cake
on clear glass plates
and iced tea with mint, and
he talked of going
to the Texas State Fair
before he died.

And after they had said
everything they could,
we sat on the floor,
our knees almost touching,
between us a half bushel
of lima beans to shell.

Still Birth

— *for Megan Sleadd*

As if I had actually died in that dream and
woke up dead in a garden in late summer
where a child was swinging
in the shade of a weeping willow.
Across the lawn another child
chanted the roses' names: King's
Ransom, Crimson Glory, Sheer Bliss,
while a woman wheeled her chair
among the beds and tilted her face
toward the sun.

As if that garden were real, the path
wide and smooth before it
narrowed and took unexpected turns,
and where there had been roses, suddenly
were ferns and mosses. Hosta dark and
striped, pale blooms on slender
stalks upraised against the sky.
Shadows of tangled vines beneath
a canopy of leaves.

As if for three seasons I had not
carried the weight of her life in mine
and had not seen bare branches blossoming
after a long winter, and had not heard
migrating Canadas returning to green waters.
As if I had never known the one who
grew for a time beneath my heart
kicking and turning in her watery world,
who was delivered into silence
one spring day.

Negative Space

I am letting these empty fields in mid-December
stand for all the places I have traveled through,
the men I might have loved, the women
I could have been, with the sun slanting across
the stubble of last year's crops, dried seed pods
rattling in the wind. I am letting the branches
against the sky and the spaces between the branches
stand for all the time we never had.

Fear

Long after the light has moved
across her bedroom wall and out
into the night, years after the stationmaster
has pocketed his watch and turned away,
she can still hear the dogs howling
behind her house and across the fields,
just before the fast freight
rounds the bend, and her windows
rattle her awake, sensing disaster—
a pick-up truck stalled at the unmarked
crossing, a loose rail, something
abandoned in the shadows along
the tracks, her father driving home
drunk after a late night of cards.

Coming Home

i

Christmas day, driving into thick fog
among black cedars that appear
briefly, then dissolve around us.
Near the edges, fringes of fog like gauze
curtains moving across the trees, lifting
momentarily. A ribbon of brighter fog
floats like silk above the plowed fields and
weaves among the trees. In the distance,
wispy gray branches brush against the
sky's pink scalp. As soft colors dissolve,
I doze in the moving car, the highway
humming beneath my feet, then wake
to a clear black sky and piercing stars.

ii

While we slept, night hardened into crystals
that stung our fingertips as we moved hands
along the metal rail that led from our room
down the wire mesh steps to the parking lot
where a few cars glistened in the morning sun.
Later, driving through Illinois on I-64
past Burnt Prairie and Grayville,
beneath a thin, cornflower blue sky,
a haze of trees circling the open fields,
something glinting in deep furrows,
quartz veins against black earth, icy pools
between plowed rows. We cross the narrow
Black River, and the road curves around the few
isolated hills. A cow stretches her neck toward
distant fields. A pick-up truck has stopped
beside a pond. White smoke rises from the trees.

iii

After miles of dead grasses and leafless trees,
we come across a few startling green fields. A flock
of small birds descending. Near the fence row
two trees grown so close they have become
a single tree, each branching out on the side
farthest away. There is no separating their roots,
deeply tangled beneath the earth.

iv

An hour from home, fingers of fog curl among
the upper branches, smooth the soft gray backs of
hills, slip among the trees. The road narrows,
following the curve of the land, and we begin
a slow descent to the river valley, the sky reduced
to a wedge of gray between the hills, rain on the river,
then open fields again and black rail fences marking off
irregular hill-shaped pastures. We drive beneath
a canopy of branches, following limestone walls
built by slaves a hundred years ago.

v

My mother's living room is dark and quiet,
lit only by a table lamp and the colored
lights of the Christmas tree in the corner.
The walls hold paintings done by former students
in shades of green and blue, abstract seascapes
and clouds, a footbridge over rushing waters.
A rocking chair with arms carved into
dark swans glides through this room. An angel
rises out of a single piece of wood, her face pale
and featureless, her arms lifted and held
slightly back, revealing the hollow
blackened space between her wings.

Late afternoon, I walk along streets
 named Pocahontas, Shoshoni, Hiawatha,
 Mojave, past tidy yards and neat brick
 houses where yellow lights are coming on
 in windows facing the street. Two men
 lean against a truck and smoke, while
 girls jump on a trampoline behind a house.
 A young couple strolls down the middle of
 the blacktopped street, holding hands. The
 houses here are smaller than memory,
 one-story brick with contrasting shutters,
 modest Christmas trees in front windows,
 red ribbons on the doors.

Even those places I went with my lover
 now seem formal and quiet, and not
 part of my past at all. The evergreens
 tower over the eaves like childish drawings of
 Christmas trees taped to the windows at school.
 By the time I turn back, night is moving in
 over the farm beyond the last houses,
 roaming through back yards and
 along the empty streets.

Two days after Christmas, fog has frozen
 on all the trees, encasing branches and twigs.
 We enter through a door that has been wired
 to notify the nurses if the old ones
 try to leave to buy milk for their long-grown
 children. We walk past the visiting room with its
 red floral couches upholstered in plastic,
 past angels made of linen handkerchiefs
 fluttering among dark branches while
 larger angels robed in silver guard the red
 poinsettias. Along the hall, we read names
 of shop-owners and teachers from another
 time. The one we have come to see

is inching his wheeled chair forward
with his toes, singing under his breath,
“Just Molly and me and baby makes three.”

viii

Near campus on an overcast day,
we head east on Clayton, following the path
I used to walk the year I was thirteen,
past the empty lot where our house once stood,
past the Nazarene Church where my best friend
sang “How Great Thou Art” in a breathy soprano
while I played piano, where the youth
played kissing games in the basement after
Bible study. Then down a couple blocks and
left on Avondale, where my friend once
whispered that it was wrong for girls
to beat a boy at any game. Another left turn
and we are heading west on Jackson Street,
where I am suddenly eight years old, playing
beneath the evergreen in secret rooms
where the dark branches touch the ground
in my grandmother’s yard, or roller skating
over rough brick sidewalks and tree roots
to the corner store to get bread for sandwiches.

Just past the college football field, we park
in the circle drive before Pawling Hall,
where mom’s new office is located, the same
building where her father lived as a student
in the nineteen twenties, where fifty years later
I sat in philosophy class, debating what was real,
while Dr. Gragg stood on his desk, swatting
wasps that flew in the tall, narrow windows.
We enter through the door facing the street,
and my mother uses her master key to let us into
offices, classrooms, seminar rooms. We walk
the length of the building accompanied by
ghosts from our past, then exit out the back,
hoping the superstitions about doors aren’t true.

Kim Drew Wright

Spilt Ice

You said meet me at a motel room by the airport. You said it should be cheap. Carpet worn thin as your hair and my smile, walls stained a pattern like defunct Martha Stewart, crafty intelligence plastered over with decoys. I walked to the ice machine and saw a trucker, belt that should be demoted for jeans too low under a belly awning. He wanted to talk about the motorcycle trip he took from Key West to Miami back when his belt was top-notch job performance. Yawning, I wanted to reach my arm in the ice machine and freeze it off, slap it on his face till it fractured, shattered on the ground, and the maid mistook it for spilt ice. I

said, "That sounds nice,"
then walked back toward our room,
carrying my plastic bucket.

A jet cast its line down to me, wanting
to reel me up
with speculations of other

possibilities. I shook them off. Slammed
our rented door
shut. We

had sex like porn stars, until I hurt
and cried out for you to
come.

Afterwards, you
left before I did,
leaving my body
as evidence. I held
my face in the hot
shower spray,
splayed my hand
in your print, convincing
myself

of home.

Sitting in the Parking Lot of Wegmans Crying Over My Imaginary Breast Cancer Diagnosis

that I have been waiting for since I was nine years old. Now, my youngest that age, and I can barely hold my breath long enough for the mammogram tech to say

stay still, you can breathe later. I've had enough scares to be nonchalant, but something about how that letter was phrased, a casual washing of hands, *we recommend an MRI but find out*

first, if your insurance covers it. So, I call—punch numbers until a young man who sounds nice, like he might live with his grandmother, kiss her cheek before getting in his dented Camry and heading to work. He gets on

and says *this call may be monitored for training purposes* and I'm just satisfied I've found a human voice, as I try to explain my noncondition and he says that what I need to do is find the procedure code, but he'll warn me it's likely not considered

preventative, even though the letter said *no reason for concern*, enough dense tissue for radiologists to throw their hands up, like saying *don't blame us if there's a landmine here—you're too thick to see clearly.* *Go back in time,*

your aunt's black hair making silky carpets over heartpine.

Mistook

1.

a lifetime
ago, Georgetown, S.C.
a boy scrawls on a friend's
work and I run, tattling
or seeking justice (however
you want to look at it)
end-of-the-day bell clanging,
teacher snapping at me to *get in line*
confusion of untied
feet and grubby back-
packs, order by bus routes

2.

later mama explains
*she wasn't angry at you, she knew
you didn't do it*
next day Miss I-forget-her-name
leans diplomatically, Empress of First Grade
soothes missed under-

3.

standing—then
a boy, hair summer corn silk
wrestles between bus aisles,
holds another, yanks
down pants of one who could have
lain in the soil of my granddad's farm
(camouflage is not only a device for prey
animals) I turn, press my face to smeared glass,
driver oblivious while the air crackles like autumn husks

4.

or maybe it's not so obvious, only a pale
nightgown given, fringed
neck, served in a white box
that year I learned to snap
she learned privilege has hierarchies
when my mom told me *send it back*

5.
a mobbed Eritrean man, only
standing at the worst bus stop—
shot, accused, bench-rammed—waiting
for justice that never stops, lured
to sleep by motion—a passenger losing her way

*— after Haptom Zerhom was killed by Israeli guards and
bystanders who mistook him for an assailant in a bus station attack
October 18, 2015*

Touched

—With thanks to James Tate’s “The Radish” and Terrance Hayes’ Golden Shovel technique.

AOL tells me 453 pilgrims died, trampled, when I
turn on my Mac. You *can't*
believe how many junk emails accumulate *even*
overnight. I'm a touch ADD so I click on the death link and *see*
Mecca, or no, Mina, a dusty somewhere—god *who*
knows where—a middle east street where faceless faithful herd *the*
past breathlessly to toss pebbles at devils, actually now just 3
columns represent that *enemy*
and I recall crowds yesterday in DC for Pope Francis and wonder
what being crushed is.

Elephants Standing

—for Richmond, VA

The moon is a white elephant.

I reach—pinch it between my forefinger
and thumb to pop it on my tongue,

where it dissolves like a melatonin tablet
you purchase at Walgreens—500 for \$8.99.
The melting sounds like the sigh of 1,000
babies in their wombs and tastes
like protest chants at Standing Rock, sliding
down my dry throat, leaving cracks.

Lightning bugs think
they can illuminate the entire universe,
5 millimeters at a time. A multitude of insects
roar like we are on the Mother
Continent, remind us to be fearful
of clawed predators.

The moonlight tastes protest chants
at Standing Rock leaves crack.
Chief Seattle says,

*If we do not own the freshness of the air
and the sparkle of the water, how
can you buy them?*

The moon is an elephant—stranded.

Michael Jenkins

Namaste

If when I
make of my
hands a temple

you're thinking gentle
palm to palm
to open heart

showing in part
how in you I
see the divine

know my bodymind
is posed sometimes
behind the symbol

my focus going
from feeling touched
to wanting to.

Among Birdsong and Bee Hum

1.

Now that I'm less
should I say desperate
to populate the planet

I'm better able to detect
that feminine animal signal
once lost in the static

back when I dialed
with the rubber end
of a blunt-tipped pencil

the late night AM
radio request line
clueless what to ask for

my numb ear cupped
to the plastic receiver's
busy busy busy song

while south of town
on a guy-wired tower
a red beacon pulsed

in a code I felt
I alone was tuned to
urging me on and on and

2.

on the subject of her
blouse if you'll allow
it was doing its duty

to conceal and reveal
as any magician knows
the breathless audience wants

and with a flourish of fabric
floral and lavender and sheer
as the bounty of iris around us

feathering and filtering the light
floating over the garden's
dark saber-shaped leaves

thrust up like some threat
as if spring were all conquest
or anything less than delights

and shadows at weightless play
among birdsong and bee hum
as petals unbutton themselves

3.
which begs the question why
man ever averted his eyes
to search among the stars

when the gods were burning
here in broad daylight
in the steam off her coffee

her eyes flashing bright
as the green-backed beetle
in the beak of the crow

who nodded and let go
from atop the half fence
a laugh so fresh and raw

I swear I couldn't tell
if I'd been freed
or I'd been caught.

The Garden Next Door

I make up for my ordinary good morning
by praising her peonies.

She makes up for her grass green eyes
by casting them down as if she's shy.

I make up for the half fence between us
by half-leaning into it.

She makes up for no makeup
by letting her freckles shine.

I apologize for ivy on her side.
She admits she's over-fertilized.

The mind has a mind of its own sometimes.
You can't make up for that.

Not in the way she makes up for her blouse
by wearing no bra.

Nor how my hand has smudged
a pledge on my polyester heart.

But she makes up for my marital status
with her marital status.

Honeysuckle writes in the lattice
its own tangled story.

We make up for what we don't say
by what we don't say.

Nicky Nicholson-Klingerman

Black Summers

RIP, Kathleen Hamilton, Jan. 26, 1924 – Jan. 16, 2018

Faces pressed
against thick thighs,
hands held high
and mouths agape
to wait
for thick slabs of jowl bacon,
salty rice
and fried eggs.
Lines of chili peppers
hang on the wall;
peaches pop
into hot waiting mouths.
Strings of beans
running around Grandma's garden;
we dig for red and white sweet potatoes
like we're diggin' for gold.
Summer is
my memory of you
standing at a stove
held closed by a stick
and an old leather belt,
lit by matches
and burnt fingers.

Nicholson Hill

Deep, deep
in the forest of Mississippi
where the real Mississippi lives
is a cemetery,
its lines erased by trees
and blackness,
filled with decaying bones
and teeth
and sinew.

A girl walks by,
seventeen and almost married,
dirt poor and no shoes.
She comes to the plantation
where her ancestors
lived and died and never left.

She digs through the earth with her hands
and plucks out eyes—
Brown, sharp eyes—
a curved nose with wide nostrils,
straight, white teeth,
black, black hair with a hint of injun,
a backbone threaded with steel, strengthened by the lash
and calloused feet that would never go bare.
She eats the red, graveyard dirt
drenched in our blood.
She chews and swallows
then licks her teeth.
With her hands, she forms this child in her womb
so she can take her family with her.
She is the first to leave this plantation,
the only home they've known since—

She stands up and carries
a child with a chance to survive.

Chalk Lines

Let us draw ourselves
outside the lines that limit us,
outside the chalk lines
that display us
laid out on the pavement
shot down by the truth
that our lives don't matter.

Old Gods

We rolled over our gods,
first with wagons
and scythes to the grain.
Then we dug into the earth
for black gold
and coughed up black smoke.
We threw garbage into river mouths
choked their air
and clogged their veins of clay.

Costume

My culture is not a coat
or a hat
that you can try on.
It is not a tan that fades over time.
It is not a fun new eyeshadow.
It is not a phase
or a tool for rebellion.

It is blood
and bone,
chains on my wrists
and a rope around my neck.
It is ritualistic dances
and worship of our mothers.
It is everything
and nothing to you.

Doni Faber

Man Moth

You call at 4 am
looking for someone,
finding me.
Yet my sleep-thickened skull
doesn't let in the realization
that I'm the someone you're looking for.

We forget to exchange names
as though the intimate folds of night
have jettisoned us past our status as strangers.

“Do you know what time it is?” I ask
not upset, just tired.
“No,” you say.
The word splinters into awkward silence,
waiting for contrails
to lead us back
into friendlier skies.

Maybe you need to hear that I hear
the pain edged in your silence,
that I didn't mean to be
its bearer.

I fumble for an apology,
a key that won't turn in the door
without another hand
to coax it into relenting
its flat denial of my entry

like the I'm-sorry's
we say too often to ourselves
and not to the people
who have no idea we need
their forgiveness.

Please forgive the edge of my sword.
I meant only to knight you,
but I see I have drawn blood.

Imagine, we mourn the death of a moth,
even when it is we ourselves
who have crushed its ordinary wings.
No longer capable of flight,
all that remains
is its body-dust imprint
against the glass.

I will brush the dust
into the indentations of my fingerprint
if only this would soothe you into believing
that I will remember you
not as ordinary,
but as a vibrant, trembling being,
one whose like
will never pass this way again,

that I would not relinquish you
to someone else
who slept through your crisis call
and is no more qualified than I
to respond to someone in need,
that it is late
and I know how lonely 4ams can be.

If I inhale long enough,
can I take back those words
that sent us spinning to the precipice
of awkwardness?

“Tell me,”
I would like the opportunity to say,
sending this man moth back to you.

An Attempted Thank You

I ring your doorbell
and hear you yell at your dogs to relax.
I smile as you open the door
and I hand you your gift.

“What is this for?”
“Just because,” I say
not willing to finish with, “you’re great.”

“Where did you find this paper?”
“I made it myself,” not speaking of the long hours
shaking the pulp and leaves onto a frame,
then compressing it between layers of cloth
until it adhered together
and how it turned out all gloopy the first few times.

You carefully slit open the paper to reveal
a framed photo of a clump of dark weeds growing in a field.
And you don’t know what to say.

I speak into the silence.
“I like it because it doesn’t seem
like the sort of thing most people would notice,
let alone take a picture of.”

What I don’t say is
those overlooked weeds remind me of you:
The “I love you’s,” you’ve said plain and simple
without receiving anything in return.

I settle for,
“I hope you like it,”
but even this sounds too demanding,
like I expect to see it hanging in a place of prominence.

I want you to know
that all the times you’ve continued to care
for those whom no one else cares for,

each time you sat with a loner at lunch—
that has been a gift to me.

Maybe if I tell you how you give of yourself
each time you play intensely with your daughter,
the way you bring me into your experience of reading with
 every new book
and always greet passersby with a friendly hello,
you would know
that I see you
as the remarkable being you are.

To you, these habits may just seem
like the weeds of day-to-day living,
but to me, they are memorable.
Memorable enough to photograph.

Keeping Watch

As day slips behind mountains on tiptoe
and the distant blue beacon of the weather tower
blinks its cloudy forecast
through a window too easy to break,
my joey nestles in the pouch of my arm.
She does not notice the blinking light
nor the crack in the glass,
threatening to grow bigger.

She will not be snatched by a fanatic
through a broken window pane and taken to worship in the foothills
nor be threatened by the stillness that seeps
into bodies raised in incubators instead of with human touch.

I serve as her platoon mate,
keeping watch for snipers who wait in the dark
so she doesn't have to.
She will never hear gun fire,
only the calming break of waves,
as an electronic turtle simulates the sea.

I can still see the slivers of blue
through her gently pressed eyelids.
Her feet prod me to make sure
I am at her side,
knees worn from intrepid exploring,
and toes curled as if clinging
to invisible tree branches.

Just now, she whimpers
and I soothe her with a stroke across her arm.
Her chest rises and falls
and rises again, each breath reinforcing
her arrival as the apex of my life.
Her breath steadies into sleep,
wrapping every jeweled moment between now and her birth
into an unbreakable ligament of peace.

I wait for years to procure words
for her to tell of moondreams washing the day
from the back of her eyelids.
Sleep without fear, little one.
I will keep watch till then.

Holes With a Few Roses Tossed In

If the turtle could break out of its shell,
allow its rib cage to recede back into its chest
to embrace a slumbering heart
would it still be exposed to idly prodding fingers?

If Michaelangelo weren't a mere painter,
encasing the small but infinite gap
between God's and Adam's fingertips
in a static scene,
could they some day touch?

Instead of waiting for an invitation,
the vagabond would break through his self-appointed isolation
and grasp hands in a now-electrified circle
whose circuit would be incomplete without his pulse.
Someone would smile at him across the circle.
And that would be enough.

The widow would no longer kneel by the side of an empty hole,
staring into its unfilled grey.
She would know that God has reached him.
She would cast off her wilting roses
and fill the hole in,
treading softly atop the dirt
so it wouldn't collapse.

When she thinks about the circles upon circles of pulses she has
yet to touch
and recognizes that each pulse she has already reached
is still a part of her heart beat,
she would no longer have need to bury them
for their memory is not yet dead.

Barrier

Laughter stumbles across my threshold.
I want to know the joke, so I can laugh too.
But he's too drunk to see my reflection,
though the lights inside are blazing
and he is submerged in darkness.

I switch off the light and peep out the window
as though I'm peeping in, violating someone's sanctum
when really, I'm looking at my own yard.

A throng of college kids toss beer cans
into my yard, one pissing on my lawn.
The laughter crashes raucous around me,
every racist one-liner leaving me tamping down dynamite.

I explode outside, with phone held high in defense
though any image captured would be uselessly blurred.
If getting drunk, smoking, and having sex
is what it means to belong,
I'll fail the captcha test.

Belonging is knowing that others
accept the smallness of you,
that you can be fragile
without the fear of breaking.

I want laughter
to hold my hand
in the dimness of a movie theater,
even if he is silent.

I want him to wrap me in his arms
in the midst of a party
where my hearing aid is useless.

But so far, the light inside is too bright.
I've tried to find him by switching it off.
But then no one can see me at all.

M. Underwood

My Small Song to Your Great Heart

(Chinese Dissident Who Won Nobel While Jailed, Dies at 61. “New York Times,” July 13, 2017)

*You’re going somewhere new. Don’t be afraid of getting lost. . . .
The dark is something to sound out too.
—Colum McCann*

You have gone somewhere new, Liu Xiaobo,
though we still need you, with your rare
courage, in these dark times. Your prison cell
and your hospital bed, where your cancer’s care
came too late to pretend to make you well,
are now as empty as your Nobel chair.
(And we, unprisoned as we are, face that fate
bestowed by senators who have said—to our faces—
that “no one’s died for lack of healthcare.”)
To that end they bound your mouth
and your body in medical parole—
kept from speaking and in pain—
in a hospital in Shenyang,
a shoddy pretense meant to fool
the world now watching, which also heard
your wife’s video to a friend:
there is nothing left to do. Your wife, who was kept
an imprisoned cricket in a bamboo cage,
in the home you’d shared, and there she wept,
the wedding photo in her hands, your smiles with no end.
You wrote to her, when allowed, and without rage:
*Even if I am crushed into powder,
I will embrace you with ashes.*

And so it is and you are gone,
but your name and face are known
to the world, another martyr to the cause of peace,
who vowed to stay in place, to earn the right to speak,
and shared the terror of staring down tanks—

with matching flags unfurled—with young idealists from
whose ranks
was written the charter which showed the way
toward democracy and change.
Thank you, Liu Xiaobo,
for your courage and your light,
and the model to try our own,
to honor you by standing firm,
in the face of fear, for what is right,
and to vow to keep the voice of hate
from poisoning the very fight.

Whistle and Rasp

For Sally, in gratitude

Don't waste a moment in dread,
Feeling the burn of the rope
As it passes through your palms
As you grip it tight to hold
The ship fast, the whole tipping world
From slipping on its axis. You know
What to do: Stop. Listen to the whistle
Of your breath as it enters your body
And the rasp of it as it leaves. Then hear
The sound of fledging sparrows—
Think how hard it is to learn to fly!
Sit outside—it is only July,
Though your mind leaps ahead
To what is coming. Right now, it is July.
And look: there are hummingbirds, two,
So tiny, they are minute
Because they are new
And even they are learning how
To deftly maneuver in time and space
And in all directions. But they are trapped,
Having mistaken porch blue for sky
And the light for sun—grasp each one
Loosely in your opened fists—
Then release, into true sky.

The Seal on the Sardine Tin

The word stench—
think canning factory,
conveyor belt of sardines,
a steadily rolling mercury
silver on matte black, flashing slivers
of former life with bones too thin to ossify—
stench is like the clinch
of an unwanted hug—there is music,
but not the music you like; it is work
to be here now, to grip
the slippery fish with thin-gloved fingers
and tip them head to tail into the tin
which, sealed, vanishes, a kind of magic,
into the empty next, which is where
you want to *be*, want to *know*,
to scissor a paper square of blue and white
and carefully wrap each tin,
your life within it, the gift,
and on it the small seal centered,
silently barking in the snow.

In Other Words

It's opening mail with either industry
or indifference that distracts from the danger—
not of heartache or news
of debt or sudden and unexpected loss
that serves to sucker punch the thoughtless breath—
but that other danger that with as swift a kick
aligns our past and future with now
the way pain and fear can do with ease.

Either way we are distracted when it happens—
in a flash, as sharp as a shard of broken glass,
followed by a disbelieving pause . . .
Then pain that briefly sears like flame.

A tree can kill or maim with falling limbs
or crushing trunks, with massive splinters and with fire,
but this, this thin edge of pulp refined to fiber,
cut from starched white rolls,
folded, gummed, and sealed
with the stuff of life: bills
for phone, heat, house, and health,
a condolence note or birthday card.
It's these we nick our fingers on,
under the nail or along the length
of the thumb's soft pad.
And though it happens again
and again the ebony giraffe
stands unused and penned
in the chipped ceramic corral of pens,
leans long neck forward,
legs and ears canted back
against an invisible sirocco,
its soft blade ready to pierce or bless,
or simply bear the role of witness.

Litany: And We Will

For poems are not words, after all, but fires for the cold, ropes let down to the lost, something as necessary as bread in the pockets of the hungry. Yes, indeed.

—Mary Oliver

We are an army of poets
with holes in our socks
and sorrow in our hearts
and we *will* take you on
and we *will* match you
and like samurai use syllables
to slice through deception;
the volume of our outcry
will be like bagpipes
on the clifftops,
keening for the fallen
and reminding the standing
of the meaning of fortitude;
and we will march forth
emerging from solitude
bearing banners and pennants
and we will not be daunted
by sly stratagems or guns;
we will not cower or cover
our words with our hands
but proclaim them with courage
and hear each other out
and have each other's backs
and persevere in the darkness
lighting our way with our words.

Carson Pynes

Diet Coke

For Ruth

She wakes,
too early each morning.
Drinks a cloud of cigarette
smoke,
a silver-lined
can of Coke.
No sugar,
just Aspartame,
the chemical name
of withdrawal,
headache,
craving.

Her once-blonde hair
is spiked gunmetal,
An ex-Marine-
turned-schoolteacher
with solder in her voice,
her mani-pedi,
her Oklahoma manners,
cursing
battery-acid blue
over imperfect
pancakes.

I'm awake,
too early
on a Saturday
hungover,
headache,
craving.
She's lost one
breast to cancer,

an Amazon,
my best friend's mother
is the sunrise
at the end of the world.

Honey, she says,

when life hands you lemons,
you paint that shit gold.

I Was a Teenage Mean Girl

For L, and for who we used to be

I don't need your malicious charity,
a vile and multipurpose contraption
fake like the holographic portrait of Jesus Christ
for sale at a kiosk in the mall where we meet boys.

It's hard to forget your face,
Sloppy, bland, (I fix your mascara)
violent and slick as you call me "whore"
a banshee screaming at a Halloween house party.
You: a bare-midriff baseball player,
me in booty shorts and butterfly wings.

How could I forget our years spent
living in, like, the high-school language ghetto?
The empty bottles of Bombay Sapphire,
your fake fingernails endlessly flashing like
witch-lights in the desert.

Then there was lunch at the Wildflower Cafe,
salmon caesar salad with capers and a lavender-peach smoothie,
while outside it was snowing and you offered me a cigarette
from a crumpled pack of 27's. I inhaled,
and thought about the rhythm and blues of malfunctioning lungs.

Moonlighting

For Mom

When I was very small
you took me outside, at night,
to photograph the moon.

I wore duct-tape shoes,
you carried a tripod.

I have never told you this,
but with your lens pointed to the sky,
I thought you were taking a self-portrait.

I still believe that.

Bucky Ignatius

Rear View

Dandridge Drive-Thru Beverage
is gone, love child of a general
store and covered bridge,
choked by convenience
chains, economy of scale:
gone, soon forgotten.

No more crony clubhouse
for jokers and smokers
to pass hot nights staring
into the slow parade,
grading the trade, hoping
to catch some thigh.

A species born endangered,
vanishing breed thinner
by one. Its skeleton stands
time-worn, forlorn, most
of the parts still good
for something—maybe

a museum on the outskirts
of town, oil drum around
back for pitched empties
and spit, neon sign starting
to stutter, hot rod dreams
up on blocks somewhere.

Sonnet with Reptiles

Before the Chianti
is opened, before
the pesto is ground,
I'm already high

on basil oiled fingers,
gush of tomato
juice on my chin,
dazzled by darting

Lazarus lizards,
captured and brought
to Ohio from Italy,
who rule the rocks

in my garden, their own
Mediterranean dream.

Hide and Seek

My kitchen is a clutter of purloined
letters hiding in plain sight. Odd
shaped things—Cuisinart blade,
French press plunger—come to mind,
but not to hand without a search.
Eyes methodically scan the surfaces:
counter, three sinks, two tables,
the dishrack. Repeat. Add the floor,
look behind and under, more slowly,
with a curse this time. That vegetable
knife is too large, too brown to hide
in familiar stacks and scatters of glass
and silver where every meal starts
with a prayer to Saint Anthony.

“Something Old, . . .”

A gentle joke mingled
at my second wedding,
“They’re registered at Seven Hills Resale.”

True enough, things I like best
have often been discarded
in the common market.

Home-made, well worn
things, not wallflowers,
participants in the fray.

Companions for hand and eye,
things someone might find
worth trying to mend.

End of September

for Carl Sagan

waning fire down
to quivering lumps
of light, furnace
orange and charcoal

one triangle tongue
of flame in the corner
of the bed flickers out

comfort, warmth, wisps
of smoke, brush of hair
from the crown
of a lover's head

these things and more,
everything emanating
from ashes of dead stars

Violet Mitchell

No One Lives at 1962 McCollum Road

wraparound

porch ties up the

stench of smoke

and 8x10s of me

and my brother

and cousin Kevin,

one from every

year but now

upstairs—

a ghost smoking Marlboros

next to the lady who

rented the top floor,

gone since August

and fled the Ohio farmhouse—

brought some whiskey to

the attic washed-out lemon

party—sour but real—

for Grandfather Rusty's strict mother:

sworn Catholic, first

owner of the house,

forgetting things could still

be solid—

crashes with

extra meds in hand

Rusty tells his life story

rudely sat on his lighter

doorknob spins, Kevin

ends different

every time I ask

Deleting Emails the Week After Kevin Died

Sympathy note from a distant
great uncle who plays bass:
*Know that I am thinking about you
and playing as much music as I can*

for you right now. I can hear his
strings stretch and swirl in notes
I don't know how to read. In his
hands, there's a blueberry smoothie

with lavender foam the same shade
as my hair. The straw is too small,
but he's trying hard to balance his
breath with the ground-up plants.

I wish I could draw on the bricks
of my building the way he can play.
I could remember the sound of just,
and forget the piercings in the crux.

worked hard	metal	sprinkles
lungs	instead of	nutrients
failed	moons	like us
spewing	tulips	not
there was	no	difference
what	you	gave

Remington

I sit with my inherited
typewriter under rainbow
strung lights framing a frost-bitten
window. My fingernails chip
and rip when they catch
between the dusty keys.
The number 1 is missing
and at first I thought I broke it
but then I learned old Remingtons
don't have 1s, so people
just used a lowercase "L"
instead. The stains on my fingers
from the ribbon smudge everything
I touch and I wonder if like
Midas I can turn the cat into
ink. The jags in the ribbon
older than my mother remind me
of teeth: baby teeth riding
the subway, yellowing teeth
hooked in my clenched jaw,
a baby tooth I found in a creaky
chest from McCollum Road that
I flung away because who
even knows whose it was.

A Wednesday I Can't Remember

"The heart lies to itself because it must." —Jack Gilbert

The sale
sticker on
the shampoo bottle is crinkled from
water-dry-water-dry and
reminds me of a sun if it had

a big
"1.99"
painted on it. The last of bacon
is a puddle of grease
and unhealthy burnt fat bits swimming

in the
American
Dream. At work, a ghost scrap of lint has its
toes trapped in the black frame
of the window. It shakes in the breeze,

forcib-
ly dancing.
Some sort of machine hiding in the
walls regulates the air
and washes the silence over with

an on-
going wave
that we filter into as silence.
When I looked down at my therapist's
shoes, trying to avoid

her eyes
as mine dripped,
I said we have the same water bottle.
There's glitter on the floor
from a dollar-store hat that

shed its
skin once the
cake was all gone. Dark brown lipstick on
a girl's lips are perfect
until she opens her mouth, when you

can see
where the pen-
cil ends and her skin that hardly spends any time in the
light begins. A dryer
sheet fell out of my clean

clothes, and
a tangled
grayed silver USB cord is there
with a thin black sock that isn't mine.

Sam Collier

Sanctuary for the Chosen Lost

We buried our fingers in fleece
until our skin shone.
Lanolin. Warm sheep faces
rubbing our shins. Dirt
packed so hard only hard rain
could ease it. Jacketed,
we closed our throats, scattered
geese, penned sly-eyed goats
gave blind ponies, broken ducks,
a feast of sun. In gravel dawns
we soaked our shoes in grass
and shoveled shit. The sky opened us
with its blade of wind.
Your body a ladder of light. Mine
a pillar of salt. Dozens
of birds between us, their chests
too swollen for their hearts
to fill. One time a pig fell over,
couldn't get up. Bad hip.
Huge. We strained to lift him,
a sling around his belly, his eyes rolling,
his bristle-bare skin so human
I looked away. Strange
intimates. He shuddered, shrieked:
indignity of the treacherous body. I
saw. I saw. Sometimes my hands
betrayed me. Sometimes I sang
then thinking, caught myself,
covered it, turning my mouth
to the open mouth of the fan,
generous gale of its silence.

Nocturne In An Empty Sea

In 2007 a bowhead whale was caught off the coast of Alaska with fragments of a harpoon in its shoulder bone. The harpoon dated back to the late 1800s, indicating that the whale was at least 115 years old.

Salt in your mouth and your eyes clouds, you scrape crustaceans
and drift through winters, calling to the secret wells of water

in vowels shaped for love. There were years
when no one came. There were long years

when you thought you might be last. Might be final.
But sometimes from the liquid deep, a beautiful dark shape,

and then sometimes a calf, pressed shining
to the surface, swelled fat on milk and strong enough

to leave you. Nothing lasts. The world is warming and that old ache
still grumbles at your back—a spear carved in a lost century,

so men could read of plagues and angels by the blaze
of your lit fat, or split and steam your bristled teeth

to bind their daughters' ribs. They struck you, but you sank away,
blood darkening the sea. You healed. You've carried the iron

hooked in your bone for so long now it's part of you,
driving you on. You have no word for loneliness. You have no words

for summer. Yours is the kingdom of ice and wind. You swim
and the world spills before you into songs of blue and grey,

you crack the ice and the air is a rush of sweet cold, you breathe
and midnight comes again with its purple dust of stars.

Meryl Natchez

Equivocal Activist

It's Friday. We pull out of the Paris climate accord
and I get my hair cut while Aretha bridges
troubled water. I could lay me down,
but I doubt that would accomplish anything.
Would anything accomplish anything?
Still, I'm uncomfortable doing nothing,
an equivocal activist, pretty sure
I can't count on my teammates,
jumpy as a handful of BBs
dropped on stone.

I can see how restful it would be
to believe in the simple solution.
Instead, heavy-footed,
I tread the Earth, while the sun rises
and sets without comment,
and the chickens, remorseless,
search out any protein around,
even if it's the last Doloff cave spider,
as dragonflies ricochet above us
endlessly stitching
the tattered sky
and I do what passes for the best I can.

Beginning of an incomplete list

Worry prevents harm. You have to worry x7 minutes to prevent each bad thing from happening.

Thinking it will happen will jinx it. Thinking it won't happen will make it happen. If you tell another person it will happen, it definitely won't happen.

If you tell someone how much money you have, you will lose it all immediately.

You can't play the car radio when you're driving around looking for your lost kid.

If the sticky, erratic key turns easily, you're going to have a good day.

If you change the sheets, you get well faster.

If you have two flashlights, you'll have them forever. If you have one, it will lost constantly. (This also applies to scissors.)

Cancellation of insurance causes disaster specific to your policy.

Yelling makes the cake fall.

It's lucky to see a snake.

There is a complicated and ever changing set of items you shouldn't eat. Eating them causes cancer to start growing in your body. This can be stopped by not eating them.

Breast examination causes lumps.

It's a sin to eat super expensive food in a restaurant.

You have to change your earrings after something bad happens.

Right thinking makes seeds grow. Seeds know what right thinking is.

Seeing a beautiful bird is a good omen.

Visual contact with loved ones prevents harm.

The earthquake will happen when your loved ones are on the other side of the bridge.

You have to wash new clothes before you wear them.

If someone's dog rejects you it's because you are a fundamentally bad person.

Leaving home is fraught with insurmountable obstacles.

If God exists, he is not a woman.

Cheese Ball

Whole factories are dedicated to this,
pillars of cheddar large enough
to bear a second story, and wire
that cuts the slabs. Machines
add the precise measure of port wine,
according to Michele Bean, Cheese Ball Expert.

The process takes a long time.
Great steel vats churn and burble,
a conveyer trundles nuts, paddles
spin the balls along till not a scintilla of cheese shows,
all glossed with nutty skin. This must
be a metaphor for something: children
moving through the school system,
or what happens when primitive tribes
encounter matches and carbon steel.

Maybe we're all just cheese balls,
starting from something simple, like milk,
pummeled and slashed
and adulterated and finally extruded
in a shape of use to someone
with a sense of humor
and an insatiable appetite.

Sleepwalking

Each night sleep asserts its mysterious imperative
as the mind ceases to brace itself
against its own undoing, against what lurks in the back
of the dark, the bad luck
and cryptic privilege
of human being: water protein marrow fat, those
convolutes of DNA that say
bleary blue bright brown iris
say barrel legs willow stalks, hair that never grays
or drifts off, the dickey or unflappable heart,
the canny fingers and tricky intelligence
I rely on
because what else have I got?

And even though it doesn't feel like I am merely plasma
in a permeable membrane interacting with air and water
and prejudice and language into which mist
I find myself plunked,
occasionally I glimpse
that it's true, everything fluid,
everything affecting everything else
so that the racist rants of the attacker in Portland
infuse a gritty particulate into the common air,
cold bone fragments make it hard to breathe,
many small knives press against the very flesh of my very neck,
and everywhere clamor, the scrabble for or against
and I am smack in the middle of it:
rage, righteousness, acts later analyzed and repudiated,
but here and now
before sleep comes to claim me
with its car wrecks and crumbling teeth, I acknowledge
that I understand nothing,
not on any team
and on every team at once, connected,
for better and worse
to everything.

William Godbey

Manuscript

Our last great American novel has been broken
across thousands of ragged pieces of cardboard.
Scribbled on by invisible men and women
with no welcome mats, surrounded by the red glare
of neon liquor storefronts and styrofoam cup wallets.

These black marker fragments of spent time,
ripped from moving boxes and orange crates,
blow across hazy bus stops and concrete islands.
They litter beneath our smoldering purple mountains.

Phrases, pleas, prayers slouch unread by the people
white-knuckling their steering wheels
with doors locked and windows sealed, frightened
to make eye contact with anything but the broad stripes
of yellow on the spacious highways.

Rescuing these signs,
your arms full, almost bursting,
is too brave for a young heart freshly strung
on the flagpole. They'll only become heavier
the more you lift.

Let them rest, decay.
Turn the key to your engine.
Roll over this vulnerable kindling,
the way wildfire is blind to poppies.

hide & seek

I found my voice in the bottom of a Scottish well.
Grunting the wooden cover ajar, I peered
through the gooey darkness that was muffling him.
He was draped in gray moss & crumbling poker chips,
shaking how a mouse in my palm would after a moonless night
spent in a cat's alley.
No sunlight had turned his skin seashell white,
a stern look or warm gaze would've cracked him open
& loosed the stench of a rotting jack-o'-lantern.
I spotted his toes, curling black from the soggy cold
that was sucking the teaspoons of air
out of his raisin lungs.
He squinted up at me with navy red eyes, his fear a barb
into the liferaft I had scribbled his name on years ago
& kept chained to my daydreams.
His arms were constellations of pinprick bruises
contouring towards nails scraped raw from desperation
to scale this drainpipe of bricks, away from this quiet prison.
My voice opened & closed his mouth, his dissolving tongue
unable to pick the words between his crowded teeth
that wouldn't melt from a whisper's heat.
The goosebumps that rippled around my chest
as I had imagined our reunion, were now caught in my throat.
We stared into each other, love & repulsion thickening
into a yellow cough syrup that time refused to swallow.
The sound of a crow pierced the distance, shattering
the pink Scotland dawn around my hesitation.
I grabbed the cover & yanked
it back across the well's grim opening.
My voice's *O* of betrayal rang louder than his silence,
but I had been searching for too long, the well was deep
& it was my turn to hide.

A Corn Field in Los Angeles

I strung up my skeleton
on the front lawn sycamore,
the trunk dangling rotten bark.
my neighbors asked me what it's for

it's my scarecrow for the dark.

*when night streaks across the 605,
his wings smother the horizon
strafing Eichlers with midnight napalm,
and while you quiver under your bed sheets
my skeleton jangles and sways,
but will not snap.*

*just how lamb's blood dries, evening
passes over my skeleton
but will crash through your houses,
your bones, pecking at what eats away at you.
a lunar spotlight on whatever insecurities
you squeeze beneath your mattress,
as he drags the husk that's left of you
out with the stalks of sunrise.*

my neighbors gape as I hobble back inside
to slump on my kitchen floor, wait
to welcome my old friend,
with a bottle of gin wrapped in a brown bag,
spineless and safe.

Don Hogle

Austin Wallson Confesses

I had a Known Traveler Number with TSA Pre-Check from the Department of Homeland Security. I'd received the Latin Award in junior high school. Certainly, I was up to the task.

My mentor was a scion of the Scranton Lace Company. He advised I wear a hand-tied wig to disguise myself. We chose a holiday when the staff flew kites in the park and the Marsh of Epidemics was uncharacteristically illness-free.

Once inside the reception hall, I located the Fragonard that hid the safe where the Compendium was kept. The adjoining rooms were filled with enamelware, mostly from the Middle Ages.

As I began to spin the tumblers, I noticed the tessellated floor had been mathematically tiled by a pattern-burring machine. It could mean only one thing: metaphorically, the music was about to stop, and I was without a chair.

Qui gladio ferit, gladio perit. I sat cross-legged on a tufted velvet settee and reviewed my Miranda rights, as lasers striated the gallery and alarms began to shriek.

The Marquis de Levallois Dishes the Neighbors after Dinner

They act like they're in love in public, but there's nothing dove-like about them. They're particles in the Hadron Collider, dressed up in evening clothes. It's said when they first ran into each other at the Dutch embassy in Paris, it was nearly tectonic—the Himalayas forming over pheasant, purée and a mediocre red.

Her people are the Charbonneaus, and that black line has left its mark on her beauty—she has the mouth of a monkfish. His father was the monarch of a principality absorbed into Nice, and he is now, more or less, the king of all those nice Niçois.

I rarely have them over; they're too volatile for bridge, and they frighten the dogs. May I offer you another digestif?

Death Comes with Luggage

When Death arrived at the door, it was not as a hooded figure shrouded in black, but rather a dark, shapeless mass with hands. The hands clutched the retractable handle of a large black suitcase, the kind too many people check on overseas flights.

All she said was—*Time to go*. Previously, on similar occasions, I'd tried to cry out but could produce only a faint rasping sound. This time, I yelled as loudly as I could—*No! No!*

I woke, certain I'd actually shouted. But no one came running to my room to see if I were all right. The old house remained silent, and beyond the bedroom window, the darkness was all around us.

Contributor Notes

Laura Apol teaches creative writing and literature at Michigan State University. Her poetry has appeared in a number of literary journals and anthologies, and she is the author of several award-winning collections of her own poems: *Falling into Grace*; *Crossing the Ladder of Sun*; *Requiem, Rwanda*; *Celestial Bodies*; *With a Gift for Burning* (forthcoming); and *Nothing but the Blood* (forthcoming).



Sarah Blanchard has recently returned to writing poetry and short fiction after spending several decades as a business teacher, corporate marketer, non-fiction writer, and facility manager for an astronomical observatory in Hawai'i. Several of her early poems were published in *Calyx*, *Welter*, *Conscience*, *The Planetary Report*, and *The Red Fox Review*. She currently works as a real estate agent and lives in Raleigh, NC, with her husband, three horses, three dogs and several chickens.



lauren a. boisvert is a poet and a pisces from Florida. Her work has been published in *Spy Kids Review*, *Mochila Review*, *Coffin Corner*, and elsewhere. She tweets @myldstallyns.



Sam Collier is a poet, playwright, and theater artist. Her poems have been published in *Iron Horse*, *Mortar Magazine*, *The Puritan*, *Liminal Stories*, *Guernica*, and elsewhere. Her plays have been developed and/or produced by the Chicago Theatre Marathon, PTP/NYC, New Ground Theater, and Theater Nyx. Sam holds an MFA from the Iowa Playwrights Workshop and is a 2017-18 member of the Goodman Theatre Playwrights Unit. She teaches with the National Writers Series of Traverse City.



Doni Faber enjoys libraries, singing in a band, and emergent homeschooling. She is a retired slam poet, boothie, and third grade teacher. She has written a biography of her grandpa who dedicated his life to making people laugh. This is her first publication. You can find her book reviews at foldedpagesdistillery.com



William Godbey's work has appeared in several publications, including the *Chiron Review*, *Misfit Magazine*, and Slipstream Press. He is currently pursuing a BA in English from California State University Long Beach, where he currently lives. He is 22 years old.



Zoë Harrison, a twenty-year-old Montanan who has only seen a Broad-leaved forest once and found it quite too short. Though she would go back in a second if it meant escaping the gray slush of a February rain.



Don Hogle was the winner of the 2016 Hayden's Ferry Review poetry contest as selected by Alberto Rios among other awards. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Chautauqua*, *The Hartskill Review*, *The Inquisitive Eater* (The New School), *Jenny* (Youngstown State University), *Stone Canoe*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Pocket Change* and *Shooter and A3 Review in the U.K.* among others. He lives in Manhattan. www.donhoglepoet.com



Bucky Ignatius is a semi-reformed hippie who has spent most of his 70-plus years in or near Cincinnati, where he now tends a large eccentric garden and a small comically curious cat. A chapbook of fifty short poems, *Fifty Under Fifty* was published by Finishing Line Press in 2015. For meager wages and inspiration, he operates a century-old elevator in a former factory that now houses more than a hundred working artists.



Michael Jenkins is a homemaker and part-time psychometrics technician whose poems have appeared in *Shenandoah*, *Salamander*, *Redivider*, and other literary journals.



Marcie McGuire is a poet, memoirist, and fiction writer who has been writing for a long time but only recently got up the nerve to submit her work for publication. She was born and raised in Kentucky but now lives in Missouri, where she enjoys the simple things in life (playing music with friends, dancing, walking in nature, keeping bees). She has worked as a librarian, English teacher, and editor.



Violet Mitchell is a Denver-based writer and artist. She is working toward a B.A.S. in cognitive literary studies and a B.A. in creative writing, both from Regis University. Her work has been published in *Loophole*, *Flourishing*, *Across the Canyon*, and *Who's Who*. Her poems about McCollum Road are experimental free verse that explore her relationship to her late Grandfather and her family dynamics.



Meryl Natchez' books of translations include: *Poems From the Stray Dog Café: Akhmatova, Mandelstam and Gumilev*, and *Tadeusz Borowski: Selected Poems*. Her poetry collection, *Jade Suit*, appeared in 2001. Her work has appeared in *American Journal of Poetry*, *ZYZZYVA*, *Comstock Review*, *Pinch Literary Review*, *Lyric* and others. She is on the board of Marin Poetry Center and blogs at www.dactyls-and-drakes.com



com

Alexa Poteet is a poet and freelance writer from Washington, DC with a master's degree in poetry from Johns Hopkins University. Her poetry has appeared in *Reed Magazine*, *PennUnion*, *Sixfold*, *Lines + Stars*, and *NewVerseNews*, among others. She was also a semifinalist for the 2015 Paumanok Poetry Award and a 2012 Pushcart Prize nominee. She has enjoyed staff positions at the *Washington Post*, the *Atlantic* and the *National*



Interest.

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.



Carson Pynes has a BA in English Literature from Northern Arizona University. She is an ESL educator currently living in South Korea. When she isn't teaching English, she is usually writing elfpunk fantasy, or hula-hooping.



Jamie Ross lives west of Taos, New Mexico, spends months each year in Mexico. His work has appeared in numerous journals, including *Poetry East*, *Nimrod*, and the *Warwick, Northwest*, and *Paris* reviews; also in *Best New Poets 2007*. His 2010 collection, *Vinland*, received the Intro Poetry Prize from Four Way Books.



Faith Shearin's books of poetry include: *The Owl Question* (May Swenson Award), *Telling the Bees* (SFA University Press), and *Orpheus, Turning* (Dogfish Poetry Prize). She has received awards from the NEA and the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. Her poetry has been read aloud on *The Writer's Almanac* and included in *American Life in Poetry*. Shearin's short stories have appeared in *The Missouri Review*, *Frigg*, *Meridian*, and *The Atticus Review*. She lives with her husband, her daughter, and two dogs, in a cabin on top of a mountain in West Virginia.



Gabriel Spera's first book of poems, *The Standing Wave*, was a National Poetry Series selection and also received the Literary Book Award for Poetry from PEN USA-West. His second book, *The Rigid Body*, received the Richard Snyder prize. Other honors include an NEA Fellowship and a COLA grant from the City of Los Angeles.



Sarah Sullivan, a resident of Northampton, MA, is a physician, poet, teacher, editor, lover of ocean and sun, partner, parent, friend, meditator, searcher. She is published in *Switchgrass Review*, *Worcester Medicine Magazine*, several anthologies, and her chapbook *While it Happened: 30 Poems in November! 2016*, and her next chapbook in press, *Together, In Pieces: 30 Pomes in November! 2017*.



M. Underwood According to great aunt Eleanor, who smoked when it was forbidden to women and wrote poetry on the sly, M. Underwood's ancestors were all preachers, teachers, and horse thieves. M. Underwood is only one of those things but also writes poetry on the sly while living in Vermont in the company of several furry and winged creatures.



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/>



Kim Drew Wright is an author and activist. *The Strangeness of Men*, her debut collection of short fiction and prose poems won a Silver IPPY and USA Best Book Awards Finalist. Her work appears in literary journals and anthologies. She founded Liberal Women of Chesterfield County & Beyond, a grassroots organization that focuses on connecting and educating citizens to be active in their own government. You can find out more by visiting kimdrewwright.com and liberalwomenofchesterfieldcounty.com.



Helen Yeoman-Shaw is a Los Angeles based poet and member of Writers at Work. This is her first time participating in the Sixfold process, and she relishes her experience as both educational and inspiring. She moves into 2018 as a newly unemployed newlywed and enthusiastically waits to see what her future holds.



Jihyun Yun is a Korean-American poet currently residing in South Korea. A Fulbright Fellow and Pushcart Prize nominee, her poems have appeared in *Narrative*, *Fugue*, *AAWW The Margins*, and elsewhere. She received her MFA from New York University in 2016.

