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DARA ELERATH

*Via Dolorosa
& Other Poems*

PAUL MULDOON

*An Interview
by Lance Rutkin*

DANUSHA LAMÉRIS

*Bonfire Opera
& Other Poems*

SPENCER REECE

*Marie Howe's
Magdalene Poems*

JENNIFER MILITELLO

*From the Maternal
to the Mechanical*



DARA ELERATH

New Poems by

TIANA CLARK
TONY HOAGLAND
ALEX LEMON
DAVID ST. JOHN





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1936-2017

Derek Walcott
1930-2017



The AMERICAN POETRY REVIEW

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eight poems

Via Dolorosa

Somewhere in America, scientists
 have invented a method for measuring pain,
 running their fingers over the bleach-
 burned hands of abandoned housewives.
 The standard unit of sorrow
 they call a *dol*, as in dolorous, or Dolores,
 the name of a young girl skilled
 at spilling tears down the buttons
 of her cornflower-blue cardigan.
 The new machines make us unable
 to feign heartache or holy prostration,
 but arguments are settled
 by those whose dolorimeters run cold.
 Some wear the devices against their arms
 as a kind of complaint—
 this has changed the way we breathe
 at 4 a.m. into sweat-soaked pillows
 beside our breathless bedfellows.
 In some cases sufferers have been sainted,
 known for their ability to hold
 their own torn organs in their hands
 like blood oranges, the way they tie
 barbed wire around their wrists
 like penitents hauling wooden crosses
 through windless deserts.
 It is said if you embrace these men
 you will be seared by sudden knowledge,
 you will carry the blood clot
 of a red poppy in your coat pocket;
 when you kiss your lover,
 the one leaving a trail of torn letters
 in the wake of her battered luggage,
 you will turn and say *thank you*,
thank you, and shake
 tears from the silver censers
 found everywhere these days,
 in this strange, fabled country
 we can't seem to leave.

How to Mount a Butterfly

Be sure to hold her wings
 between thumb and forefinger—
 this will take practice.
 Imagine pulling the unthreaded hairs
 at the nape of a young girl's neck.
 It is important to be swift
 but firm, to brush her rouged cheek
 with the back of your calloused hand.
 When seducing a beautiful woman
 insults are the best openers.
 Mention mascara blackening
 the rim of her lower eyelid,
 or complain about the lace
 fraying at the hem of her skirt,
 the way she blinks too frequently
 staring at neon lights through the bar's
 grease-darkened windows.
 Next, place her in the relaxing jar.

Alcohol provides another way
 to soften her resolve.
 If a woman wears a satin dress
 she wants you to imagine her
 with a yellow orchid on her breast—
 of all flowers, orchids
 are best at resembling the insects
 they want to attract.
 Last, attach her body
 to the mounting board with a silver pin.
 Lepidoptery is a hobby
 often pursued by intelligent men.
 Stored properly, the elegant
 specimens last for years.

Saint Pain

It is snowing when he comes to my door. I let him in and feel his fingers
 trace my sacrum, slip suddenly down the knuckles of my spine. "A year of
 sorrows if you take your hand off the back of my neck." I say. He leans close
 to my ear, lips pressed to my cheek. "Have you forgotten the other barter
 you've made—five years of pain to be free of fear, six years of loneliness to
 be clear of doubt?" The air in my room is still, filled only with the breath
 of moths, the brush of his footsteps along pinewood boards. He says he
 will visit more often now. He stands in the bathroom combing lavender oil
 through his hair, an artist who knows how to thumb my collarbone, how
 to touch the fine tissues in my wrists. He returns to me each morning,
 each evening. Soon, I start to dream of his city, its prisons and wardens,
 the dust motes that travel through shafts of sun, past rusted bars. I begin
 to picture a life together, how I will write him notes on stone tablets, how
 he will read them nodding, touching the letters, mouthing each word like
 a kiss.

Mathilda's Testimony

My mother kept me in a box. During months of worry she took me out to
 comb my unwashed hair. She fed me oatmeal, dry bread and apples, then
 put me back inside the box. I slept in the box, woke in the box; the scent of
 oak shavings and amber clung to my limbs. One year she brushed my hair
 so often that by December there was none left; she rubbed the skin of my
 ears with oil-slicked thumbs. The more I grew the harder she worked to
 shove me back in the box. She folded my body like bed linen, like a dress of
 sheer muslin with glass buttons. Eventually, my spine grew knotted, grew
 into the shape of the box. Time passed and she died. A family found me; by
 then I could neither walk nor crawl. One day their youngest daughter put
 a spoon in my hands and lifted it to my lips. *This is how you feed yourself*,
she said. This is rice and almond milk. This is honey and butter. This is the
bone meal they sprinkle on roses to make them grow. This is how you hold a
pen. These are the letters of the alphabet. This is your name: Mathilda. The
 word sounded strange to me, a blessing I could barely speak.

How and When to Use an Eraser

If you've made a mistake while writing a letter to a now absent lover, you
 may consider the advantages of an eraser. It can offer you the chance to
 begin anew or to amend those sentences in which you described your
 undying devotion. The motion of your hand traveling back and forth
 across the page is a meditation on the disappearance of your partner.
 Erasure is a simple skill to master. Practice in your diary by erasing all
 mention of your lover's name, making space for another. Understand this:
 the philosopher who discovered the eraser also discovered oxygen. See
 how the heated rubber peels back the dark spines of the letters to reveal

a field of emptiness, how the page opens like a mouth taking oxygen at the end of a kiss. Watch the words turn to crumbs. They will remind you of ashes, yet, no ceremony is required when disposing of them. A little residue is always left by the pressure of an eraser. Use the back of your hand to remove it. Tip the paper over the wastebasket. Brush firmly, with quick, deliberate strokes.

The Potato

The potato is afraid of light and movement. It would like to stay hidden forever, fattening slowly in its soft cocoon of soil. Its life is a life of sleep—do not begrudge it this simple existence. It is kin to stone in shape and nature, but softness betrays it. If a worm, seeking moisture, tunnels through, the potato, uneasy, says nothing. Its eyes are scars, they do not shift or lift their lids to note the damage; they do not try to understand. This misshapen lantern dangling from roots has no wish to illuminate anything at all. It is no use unearthing the potato before its time. The vegetable goes slowly. It does not tremble at the pressure of feet aboveground. It does not pray picturing the spade or the farmer's rough, indifferent gloves. Rain falls, sun shines—the potato does not miss these things. Sweetness pours in through its stem, smoothing, straightening the brown paper of its skin.

The Breasts

He went looking for the perfect pair of breasts and found them. They belonged to a woman who worked in a confectioner's shop. The breasts smelled of burnt sugar and icing, their shapes echoed those of the cream-filled chocolates she brought home in white, cardboard boxes. At night he'd ask her to unlace her apron and let him have a look. Yet sometimes she'd refuse—she'd talk instead about the rain or her mother's recent passing. Then he would grow bored.

One day he found the rusted boar knife left in the basement and cut off her head. After that he had plenty of time to enjoy the breasts. He dusted

them with sugar to preserve the aroma they had when she was alive. But another scent replaced it, the scent of decay. He decided to embalm the body. Afterwards, the flesh stiffened, grew less forgiving. He tucked her beside him in bed and watched TV.

They married, he and the breasts, then settled into a comfortable routine. He worked and they waited for him; waited to be adored and occasionally fondled. Sometimes, he forgot them, but they never complained. It was not, he reasoned, such an uncommon arrangement.

The Sick Man

When illness came, he found his true calling. He lay in bed as if struck by a dragon. In the heat of his fever he cried out to God—never before had he cried out to God. Yet, in those grave hours he placed his hands on an altar of herbs, uttered words none had heard before. Each new symptom became a chapter in the saga of his pain. One day he was seized with tremor and could no longer hold his spoon. He began to starve. He sought an assembly of nurses to aid him. They became acolytes. He preached illness, a new kind of salvation. He began with breath—*one breath* he'd say, *now another*, and with a rope of air he hauled himself from one day to the next. Then it was water, which he struggled to drink, his throat swollen, so it was *one sip, then another*, and he climbed the rope of water to a plain where fever took him. He lay helpless in a bath of ice; he climbed a rope of fire to get back on his feet. When walking he told himself *one step, then another*. He climbed a rope of earth to a field of level ground. *I've climbed a rope of water, I've climbed a rope of air, I've climbed a rope of flame and sand—I'm ready to be delivered from illness to my destiny.* At that moment, he was struck blind. That was the first sign, they said, of God's divine touch.

DARA ELERATH holds an MFA from the Institute of American Indian Arts and was a winner in the Muse Times Two College Poetry Contest (2015). She lives in Albuquerque.



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three poems

Cottonmouth

The man's mouth unhinged.

He said, *I broke my jaw
and it open likes this now.*

I heard the wet click
of little bones unfastening.

~

I woke up before anyone else
and walked outside barefoot
to the chilled porch still slick
with a thin layer of morning dew.

There was a little coral snake
asleep, coiled by a rocking chair.

I wasn't afraid this time.

~

We were told the snake
was the most beautiful thing

God created until the snake
wanted to be God or like a God
or Godlike. (I'm not sure now.)

~

It happened again—the same dream.

~

I have seen three women give birth
and with each contraction
the mighty hips break and loosen,
the leathery mouth of a snake.

I watched as they writhed
inside the all-consuming pain, pure as God,
fists clenched and wailing something
not quite human, but animal enough.

~

Once, she dreamt she swallowed
a snake till she *became* the snake—
looping, legless reptile, thick
and aching. She woke up paralyzed

until she shouted *Jesus*. Her arms
grasping the invisible beast, blacking
the dark.

~

The guy with the broken mouth
baptized me once inside a Pentecostal

church. He said I had to be fully
immersed for it to count for heaven,
you know.

He said Jesus' name only—
No trinity, just Jesus.

Then he touched me under the water.
Plucked and dripping, I came

to the surface, and I shouted and they shouted.
Everyone's mouths open in praise.

~

The snake hisses like a married man.
He measured and whispered slow:

You better. Get out. Of my car.

In a way that meant *devour*:
to swallow *me* whole—

crystalline sweat stippled across his forehead,
his eyes, feral and glinting like two Tiger Eye
gemstones. The street glazed with vulgar light.
I felt so vulnerable when the tiny metals unlatched

from my seatbelt
breaking jangled air
with delicious clatter.

I was a *good girl* that night, he later said.

~

Lateral undulation:

We swam in the river until we saw a snake muscling
the skin of the water with mini ripples—making waves, then circles.

~

*. . . they shall lick the dust like a serpent,
like the crawling things of the earth . . .*

The broken jaw: Eight centimeters now :: *Push, Push.*

~

All I remember about my grandmother
is her pouf of white hair dolloped in her coffin,
a cloudy cotton boll.

I snatch the silver snakes
inside my own black wool hair.
Still, I can't wait to be like her—all fog and forgetting.

Am I being eaten, or eating? Who can say, really?

~

So the dream goes something like this:

a snake slithered between my legs,
poured out my mouth—one long continuous
loop—glossy glittering scales—voluminous
muscle—elongated might—becoming
ouroboros—my body a circle
becoming samsara—entering
and exiting the holy, holy O
at the center of my deepening
meat.

~

To creep, to crawl. I crawl. My mother licks
the floor with her feet.

I bite John Berryman's tail
and Henry runs out of his mouth.

I crawl inside John Berryman's mouth
and manumit Henry. Now Henry is free.

Henry, you don't have to talk *like that* anymore.

~

What if he wanted to leave
his wife and find another keeled
and granular body. His belly travels
like a snake. She believes her father
is also snake.

~

I have so many dark scars and purpled bruises
on my legs.

I have my mother's knees, crunchy and difficult.
Everything hurts when I'm about to go to sleep.

The snake is ready for me, *shhhhh*.

~

Every time she passes this one motel—she shivers
at the things she did with her body to the man
with the mouth of a snake—all his holy, masculine fire
consuming her—whole, she was taken.

After.

He prayed for forgiveness. Not from her.
But from God. To make him able and clean again.

She is always in that room
on the bed, naked
like prey.

~

I've got two fangs in my mouth that could pierce you.
My cross-bite never ground down my teeth.

I used to bite myself in my sleep, but never drew blood.
I gave birth to myself—and held myself there. There.

I Started Praying for You

Put my hands over
the cage of bones
above your heart.

I don't remember
exactly what I said.
You started to weep.

I know I said
God sees you
or *I see you*.

I said *something*
in your past
wants to be touched,

healed. It was then
I knew I wanted
to marry you.

What is God to us now?
We stopped going
to church. In bed

our hands still
find each other
to send up

prayers like we
did that first night—
when I touched

the aching thing
inside the dip
of your chest.

Mother Driving Away After Christmas

She hobbles to her car on crunchy knees
into vague mist after a wash of thunderstorms.

I wait for her ignition in the way she must
have waited for my first damp breath and fuzz

of lanugo sweeping her cinnamon cheek.
She drives to her city—two hours from mine.

No one to greet her. She drives the concrete purr
of interstate as a carol whimpers out. She is

alone, and yet, not alone. Other cars swim
around her quiet body like metal fish into

the drowsy night. Mother, let the glint of street
lights flick—let the dusty pearl moon watch

over you now. Her hands gripping tighter
on the steering wheel—been holding firm

her whole life, except when she walked me down
the aisle, her hands were open and mush then.

She drives away from me into the stirring dark
tank I once knew inside of her, when I was just

diaphanous, a cluster of fluffy chromosomes,
singing flotsam in her glowing pregnant belly—

her one good thing inside this hurt, traveling home.

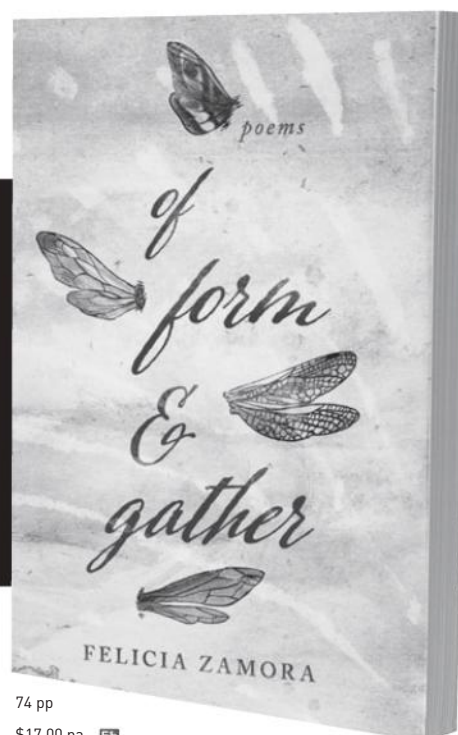
TIANA CLARK is the author of *Equilibrium*, selected by Afaa Michael Weaver for the 2016 Frost Place Chapbook Competition. She is the winner of the 2017 Furious Flower's Gwendolyn Brooks Centennial Poetry Prize, 2016 Academy of American Poets University Prize, and 2015 Rattle Poetry Prize.

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three poems

Translated from the Portuguese by Alexis Levitin

A Way of Saying Good-bye

There is the sea there is the woman
 one or the other they come towards me cove after cove
 open perhaps in the broad churchyard of Sunday afternoons
 I hear them call but not in any old way
 they call but in a certain way
 perhaps an appeal or a presence or a suffering
 So I who basically
 in spite of many words come from many pages of many dictionaries
 when all is said and done have made use of just two words
 since the first morning of the world
 to designate just two things for
 all that was needed was to name them
 I don't know if I love the sea
 or if I love the woman more
 I know I love the sea I know I love the woman
 and when I say the sea the woman
 I don't say sea or woman just to say it
 Saying the sea the woman
 there is I think a certain tone of voice a certain catch in my throat
 that show that rather than words used to speak
 to say as I say the woman the sea
 sea woman said that way
 is a way perhaps of loving
 and the consciousness of loving
 there's a pleasure in saying it
 in effect a love of loving
 In the end the sea the woman
 could somehow slip towards being
 a spell of spelling
 see the woman, woman, sea,
 There are waves in the sea
 the sea breaks, spreading waves of woman's hair, immense,
 that she sets swaying, waving, more and more each afternoon
 in the month of September with its Spring-tides
 The best in a woman perhaps her gaze
 is for me the sea in the woman
 and that woman whom I meet just once in all my life
 in passing a simple moment in any place whatever
 perhaps many miles from the sea
 but a woman I can never forget
 even when immersed in pain submerged in worries
 that woman whoever she is
 I call her woman of the sea
 Toward the end of September when I leave
 a city no matter which one
 when I sense that someone is dying
 that something remains forever in the passing days
 and either in some eyes or in some water
 in a bit of water or a lot of water
 a wave from the sea a tear a glistening gaze
 I'm really afraid to find myself sinking
 I say aloud or softly depending on my strength
 with all my mouth or already finding it hard to swallow
 the words sea or woman
 with a certain sluggishness slower and slower
 woman sea
 and then almost only in thought
 the sea the woman

I'm not sure, but it could be
 perhaps, more than anything else,
 a way of saying good-bye.

The Words of Jacob After His Dream

I have loved the woman I have loved the earth I have loved the sea
 I have loved many things it's hard for me to innumerate today
 Of many of them by now I've spoken
 I don't know maybe I've been wrong
 there've been so many times when I've been wrong
 but behind the woman the earth the sea
 I always seemed to see a something else perhaps the lord
 That is his name and in it there's no room for fear
 But after this dream I'm obliged to sing:
 Behold how the lord is in this place
 Why I don't know perhaps a thin stalk sways
 perhaps some child smiles
 It isn't the man alone in the afternoon that terrifies
 as in another time of splendor I once sang
 It is this place that terrifies
 Why this terror? I don't really know
 Maybe because the lord trod this earth with his feet
 (I remember he even ordered Moses to remove his sandals)
 I lift my two arms to the skies
 Here—woman earth sea—
 This can only be the house of god

You Are Here

You are here with me in the shadow of the sun
 I am writing and I hear some household sounds
 and the light reaches me humbly through the window
 and one of my arms aches and I know this is me at my worst
 You are here with me and I am utterly quotidian
 and everything I do or feel is as if I'm putting on pajamas
 I wear so I can be just this this creature
 of habits manias secrets defects almost all defects
 when later on outside in professional or social life I am just a name and
 they know what I know
 what I do or maybe it's just me assuming that they know
 and I'm friendly I select with care my gestures and I choose my words
 and know that finally I can be this because perhaps seated here inside
 the house I am something else
 this thing that writes and has a stain on its shirt and only bears outside
 a display of that pain in its arm that affects everything I do
 that is to say everything I do with that arm
 You are here with me and around us are the walls
 and I can go from room to room thinking of something else
 saying here is the living room here is the bedroom here is the bathroom
 and that way choose each room in accord with what I have to do
 You are here with me and I know I am just this worn out body
 passing from room to room upon these legs. I am merely these rooms
 these walls
 this profound shame at being them and not being instead the other thing
 that thing I am on the street where I am not in the shadow of the sun
 You are here with me and I feel utterly defenseless
 before the days. May no one know my name
 my true name after perhaps being covered over by another
 name though still the same name this name

of earth of pain of walls this domestic name
 In the end that's what I was nothing more than that
 the other things I did I did so as not to be that or to hide my being that
 all of which I don't call shit because at birth they gave me a name other
 than shit
 and in principal the name of each thing serves to distinguish one thing
 from another
 You are here with me and I'd hate to think that I am only this
 hate even to say that I am only this as if I were something else as well
 something other than this not this
 You are here with me stay here with me
 it is from your hands that some of these domestic sounds emerge
 but even in your domestic gestures you are more than your domestic
 gestures
 you are in each of your gestures all of your gestures
 and in this moment I know I feel with certainty what certain words like
 peace mean
 Please keep on being here forgive me that time has marked your face in
 furrows
 forgive that you have had to pay so high a price for being here
 forgive me for revealing that you have paid so high a price for so long a
 time for being here
 go on with your gestures don't stop try to be here present always
 let the days fade gently one by one
 and let me know that you are here in such a way that I can say
 I am this that's for sure but I know that you are here

RUY BELO, who died prematurely in 1978, published eleven collections of poetry, four collections of critical writings, and numerous translations of writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, Blaise Cendrars, García Lorca, and Saint-Exupéry. His work has appeared in over thirty anthologies in Portugal, as well as in collections published in France, Spain, Italy, Serbia, Germany, Sweden, Latvia, Bulgaria, Holland, Mexico, and, of course, Brazil.

ALEXIS LEVITIN's translations have appeared in well over two hundred literary magazines, including *Partisan Review*, *Grand Street*, *New Letters*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Kenyon Review*, *New Orleans Review* and *The Review*. His forty books include Clarice Lispector's *Soulstorm* and Eugenio de Andrade's *Forbidden Words* (both from New Directions). Recent books include Santiago Vizcaíno's *Destruction in the Afternoon* (Dialogos Books, 2015) and Rosa Alice Branco's *Cattle of the Lord* (Milkweed Editions, 2017).

KRISTIN PREVALLET

History, A Microsecond

Night on the eve of an explosion, wow.
 That angel really blew the place up.

He inspired paintings and musical compositions,
 all while floating backwards, stuck in flight.

He said, *take this and eat*.
 Really eat. Magnify.
 Magnify again.

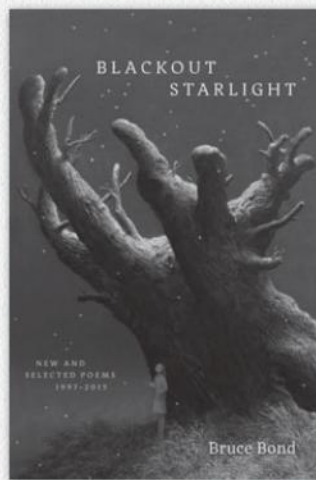
The hornet is always only one
 with its genetic code.
 Small strands of even smaller pricks.

They replicate until they are seen.
 One, two, three: infinity.

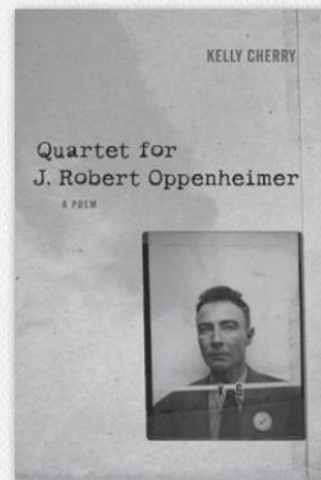
Love and death are everywhere.

KRISTIN PREVALLET (www.trancepoetics.com) is the author of *I, Afterlife: Essay in Mourning Time* (Essay Press) and *Everywhere Here and in Brooklyn* (Belladonna Collaborative). *The Boston Review*, *Spoon River Review*, *StoneCutter*, and *The New Republic* have published her poems, and her book *Visualize Comfort: Healing and the Unconscious Mind* is forthcoming from the Belladonna Collaborative/Wide Reality in summer 2017. Prevallet teaches for Bard College's Prison Initiative, and she maintains a private hypnotherapy practice in Westchester, NY.

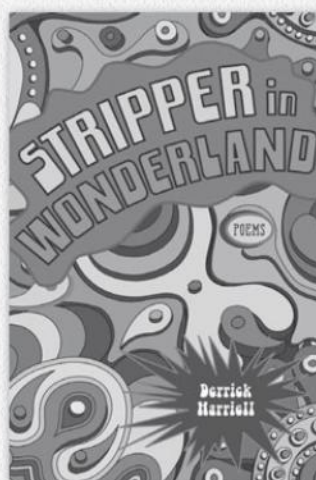
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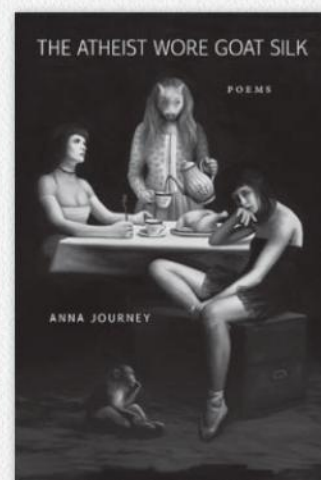
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The Red Case

After Still Life #11, a photograph by Cristian del Risco

What nests things are, especially in the doze of storage. On the closet shelf, a black purse folded atop a bright red suitcase and beside it a yellow box for one of those old Brownie 500 Movie Projectors. It is their color confluence which has caught the need, exposed the weakness that is art. The eye's edict of the scepter-lensed photographer commands we look passionately outside ourselves and coldly into ourselves, for every shelter betrays its urgent walls. This is the better part of native, nurturing nakedness.

What roosts in possession? Who will beckon it to fly, find its kind, and prey upon it?

Any armoire, the most disheveled bin, or the fittest regiment of ordered space clusters infinites, demure privacies. They city the many turgid hearths within and likewise leave us vagrant, drizzled, shunned. Let us say the projector is inside its box. The home movies it ticked silent as a clock hosted the feasts of a family long gone.

And even if we, insisting, took it out, and pried the suitcase filled with old photos of people whose far thrown loves are also lost in time, nothing can resist the rout of memory an image crafts. The present kilns the chance of beauty. The past can only burn.

And so we're left with volumes in this night of the mind, and the gathering of red, yellow, and black obscuring what hides inside them on this rack beneath the languor of a glove's painful white.

It dangles in the foreground, propped or from a higher shelf hung, tasseled, a groping moon trapped like a frantic bird that burst into a room and, stripped of nature, is the sudden exile in alien epics and catalogues. It hopes for another's darkness that it might point to blurs it knows. For now, denied allegory, its role is to glow in the enclosure and procure the snare of theater.

The hand will not come to it, but the eye will, and the need, always, for what is beautiful.



Ghost Orchid

for Robert McKnight, after his sculptures

Haunted by the promise of flowers, light pursues light, laps like water stolen to the salted shore, pretends by sure bends the crafted journey. It brings this brood of forms and hues to us in twists that fiction the straight line as the icon of truth. Veracity is of a different mind—mantled, fluted, bone translucent and smoke sprung from veined roots that vine unleaved upon a trunk. It hovers seeming in what fractions time allows to argue the impossible beauty. The mute bewildered true will not be ruler tamed nor taunt the reaping of causalities. It will appear, vessel glow, in rebel stillness, forbidden to settle.

RICARDO PAU-LLOSA's latest book of poems, *Man* (2014), is from Carnegie Mellon, which also published his previous four titles. His eighth collection is forthcoming in 2018. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Hudson Review*, *Southern Review*, *PN Review*, *Stand*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Island*, *New England Review*, *Boston Review*, *December*, and many other magazines. Winner of the 2016 Ekphrasis Prize, he is also a curator and art critic.

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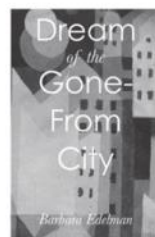


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Magdalene

Bewilderment in the Poetry of Marie Howe

Magdalene: Poems

by Marie Howe

W.W. Norton & Company, 2017

96 pages, \$25.95 hardcover

After that, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out—and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means. —Luke 8:1–3

POETRY, WHEN IT IS MEMORABLE, OFTEN BEWILDERS. MATTHEW Bevis, an associate professor of English at Keble College, Oxford, recently wrote in *Poetry* magazine about how poetry returns us to our bewilderment: “lyrics are invitations to listen to something we can’t quite know.” Chiming in, James Longenbach writes of poems, “we want to experience the sensation, the sound, of words leaping just beyond our capacity to know them certainly.” Prose *might* very well bewilder, but it is a much slower burn, unlike, say, Sylvia Plath’s poem “Lady Lazarus,” where the language leaps and *still* bewilders forty years later with its indelible sounds that shoot down the page. In an interview before she died, Plath said: “I feel that in a novel, for example, you can get in toothbrushes and all the paraphernalia that one finds in daily life, and I find this more difficult in poetry. Poetry, I feel, is a tyrannical discipline, you’ve got to go so far, so fast, in such a small space that you’ve just got to turn away all the peripherals.” Poems going so far, so fast, often in a small space, up the ante for bewilderment.

Marie Howe’s *Magdalene* bewilders poem by poem; page by page, the poetry rising up from a pool of history and language to teach us by what it *can’t* answer. Although the language of Howe is clear, beguiling simple, the thoughts she wraps around the words are *much less* simple, so you think you understand but then you might find yourself doubling back and wondering, “Do I?”



To appreciate *Magdalene*, it helps to see where Howe has been coming from over her career. Here is a poem from *The Good Thief*, when we first encountered the work:

Understand, I love you, even as I turn from you like this,
Stumbling breathless down a dim and disappearing street behind
A man who squints at house numbers, bewildered, about to say
Something I can almost hear.

The poems are as much about what they *aren’t* saying as about what they say. What is it the speaker can *almost* hear? “Turning from you like this” is something we must guess at, which has the effect of placing us more

The poems are as much about what they aren’t saying as about what they say. What is it the speaker can almost hear?

deeply in the poem, and guessing is often in the neighborhood of bewilderment. It is as if the poems are *listening* rather than speaking, as if the poems have ears. The white space around these first poems crackles.

In *What the Living Do*, I remember very well reading and reading again all the poems. They gave me hope, they made sense of the sad business of AIDS as she stood, witness, to the death of her brother, John: “He was / a little taller than me: a young man / but grown, himself by then, / done at twenty-eight.” Howe depicted her brother with uncanny stripped accuracy. In “The Gate,” she wrote:

This is what you have been waiting for, he used to say to me.
And I’d say, What?

And he’d say, This—holding up my cheese and mustard sandwich.
And I’d say, What?

And he’s say, This, sort of looking around.

The work was dedicated to what Gerard Manley Hopkins called “this-ness.” Describing things just as they are, before *this* becomes *that*.

I thought *then* she was a kind of Magdalene watching the dying. Friends of mine were dying then too. It was bewildering. It was a time, reading her poems, when, to quote from Bevis’ article again: “Something comes together for you, even as it prevents you from quite getting yourself together.” Quite curiously, although Howe does not identify as a religious poet, these were some of the poems that began to move me closer to *my* religion: it was these poems, in some kind of surprising indirect way, that began to pry me open so I began to think there might even be space for me in my thoughts about entering the church in a deeper way. The poems began to make sense of things in a senseless time. And they touched ever so lightly on references to the Bible—“The Gate,” harkening back to what Jesus tells us in The Gospel of John, “I am the gate.” For this reader, God and I inched closer together in part because I was reading that book. By deploying bewilderment in poem after poem, the poems bewilderingly evangelized me, encouraged me to go back to the Bible, to reunite ideas of faith and poetry within me which I’d seen and loved with the poetry of George Herbert.

The Kingdom of Ordinary Time arrived ten years after that, the title referring to the stretch of time in the liturgical calendar outside of Christmas and Easter called Ordinary Time. Here at times the poems depicted modern life with wry humor:

Last night he told us about a man who came into the emergency room
with a bayonet stuck entirely through his skull and brain.
Did they get it out? We all asked.
They did. And the man was ok because the blade went exactly between
the two halves without severing them.
And who had shoved this bayonet into the man’s head? The wife.
A strong woman, someone said. And everyone else agreed.

Our speaker was witnessing her world, making the long stretch of ordinary time extraordinary with her uncanny ability to vacuum-seal the seconds which we see here with the pause at the end of the poem after everyone agrees. As if the white space after the poem is somehow part of the poem! This fixing of time is what Henri Cartier Bresson’s photographs do, the second is captured as the French man with his umbrella jumps over the puddle *before* he splashes the clear flat surface: Howe masterfully does this in verse.

Here is that signature moment in her earlier poem from *The Good Thief*, “Part of Eve’s Discussion”:

It was like the moment when a bird decides not to eat from your hand,
and flies, just before it flies . . .

like

the moment just before you forgot what it was you were about to say,
it was like that, and after that, it was still like that, only
all the time.

Ellen Bryant Voigt has called the visual arts and poetry “sister arts,” and surely here that idea holds: that moment before Eve speaks feels like it could’ve been snapped by Diane Arbus.



Through all Howe’s books I hear the gentle brilliant loving sound of Frank O’Hara. I recall his famous moment of capturing the last time he saw Billie Holiday sing:

and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of
leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT
while she whispered a song along the keyboard
to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing

And especially I hear O’Hara in this poetic gesture of fixing time: that intake of breath watching Billie Holiday rubs right up against that moment just before Eve forgets what it is she is about to say. The two poets share that tyranny Plath mentions: both go far and fast, breaking down and slowing each second like some kind of verbal stop-motion photography.



Now comes *Magdalene*. Bewilderment, clarity, humor feel closer, as if we're sitting in a tiny New York City kitchen and she's speaking these poems to us. Magdalene tells us: "I was made of guts and blood with a thin layer / of skin lightly thrown over the whole thing." She was always speaking quite closely to us with her poems, except now, she's slipped on the mask of Mary Magdalene, which gives this poet's sensibility an eerie new force and authority we hadn't heard before. By using a Biblical persona through the arc of a book, the poet's themes and concerns are amplified, much like Elizabeth Bishop in her tour-de-force dramatic monologue, "Crusoe in England," Howe is able to go far and fast by using a costume, and much like in Bishop's poem the speaker and persona blend and bend and blur. Mark Doty writes: "Each book of Marie Howe's is a singular accomplishment, but none is as wildly alive as this . . . Howe sweeps up a life and fixes it on the page, and stands here before us." Each of Howe's books on the shelf has wondered over love and death in various ways, but something more happens now in *Magdalene*: she looks directly at us.



The structure of this book has a capricious fluidity to it: just when you think you know where you are headed something else happens. A rough chronology charts a beginning poem about birth and the last about death. What falls between Howe has called "mutterings" or "scraps of consciousness" that fall into seven parts like an expanded poetic altarpiece of Magdalene. The "she" of the poems is contemporary and it is historical and everything in between: the "she" blurs. Towards the beginning is a longer dramatic monologue, "Magdalene—The Seven Devils," an elaboration on what the Bible tells us where our Magdalene mentions our modern world, with planes and grocery stores. Plath, part of the generation of so-called Confessional poets, pulled in the world with allusions to Greek myth and Jesus, but the focus was squarely on her raging self, yet now with Howe the confessing of Magdalene multiplies in a way so that we begin to feel this Magdalene is confessing for thousands of years of women. Plath appropriated. Howe embodies. Because the "she" is not secured into one construct, Howe can amplify what she is encompassing so that in a poem "Magdalene Afterwards" she can write:

I was hung as a witch by the people in my own town.
I was sent to the asylum at sixteen.
I was walking with my younger sister looking for firewood
when we saw the group of men approaching.

I'm the woman so in love with my husband
sometimes I wait in the kitchen chair and stare at the door.

Between these so called "mutterings" are fragmentary italicized lines of poetry that often describe some kind of intimacy between a man and a woman. Here is an example:

*Looking down at him my tears fell onto his chest
And he looked back at me with such pity
Raising his hand to wipe my cheek
Before he wrapped his arms
around me and pulled me
Down to the bed so he could press inside me deeper*

This gesture deploying fragments as section markers underlines our maker's work of restoring Magdalene into an indelible mosaic.



What are, after all, any of us, but fragments?



Howe has been moving towards this Biblical figure for a long time. Howe said, "This book has been coming for thirty years, from the very beginning of my writing life Magdalene has been with me, as she is with so many women." On every page Howe imbues the world's most famous single sexy woman with dignity, amplitude, and depth that until now have been sorely absent.

MAGDALENE ON GETHSEMANE

When he went to the garden the night before
And fell with his face to the ground
What he imagined was not his torture, not his own death
That's what the story says, but that's not what he told me.
He said he saw the others *the countless* in his name
Raped, burned, lynched, stoned, bombed, beheaded, shot, gassed,
Gutted and raped again.

This poem, and nearly all the others in this collection, is stark, as if she's allowed herself to work with the simplest of materials, the way Beckett got towards the end: not one adjective, only two periods, the verbs do all the work here—and notice how nearly all the words are one syllable in length. Magdalene is a witness, a kind of reporter from the field—this lends her voice an odd objectivity, not uncommon to the tone we find throughout the Bible; chapter after chapter, the saddest business is reported with the clarity of newspapers. (The Bible looks like a newspaper with all its columns; curiously, Howe herself started long before her teaching as a reporter, and some of that training remains with her and blends with her Irish Catholic upbringing which, she has recounted in interviews, was suffused with weekly mass and listening to the Biblical stories.)

Notoriously, the Roman Catholic church baselessly commandeered Magdalene as a prostitute. Not true. It's a sad story that a beautiful woman who faithfully followed Jesus gets named a whore by the church. Howe un-

*Something from the Bible is getting rewritten here,
readdressed, which feels akin to the Jewish tradition of
Midrash where the Torah is alive and flexible.*

does that notion. Something from the Bible is getting rewritten here, re-addressed, which feels akin to the Jewish tradition of Midrash where the Torah is alive and flexible. As Michel Foucault's queer theory reinvents Christ, Howe remakes Magdalene.

Curiously, we get the adjective "maudlin," the dictionaries tell us, directly from a mispronunciation of "Magdalene." So that within our mouths and brains, whether we realize it or not, we associate this biblical figure with a put-down, for "maudlin" has never once been used in praise, only in terms of describing something as over-sentimental and mawkish. But that's not this Magdalene. Magdalene, Magdalene. These poems are frisky. One poem opens: "One penis was very large and thick so when he put it inside of me I really did say, Wow." This Magdalene is not maudlin, and that ups the bewilderment, for humor and sex both bind us to bewilderment.

Magdalene in the Bible is not a mother or wife or sister to anyone. Howe takes the history and shakes it around. Howe adds layers. Magdalene has a daughter: "She's still mine—for another year or so." Boyfriends are added: "I floating on his lap facing him, my legs floating around him, / and we quietly coupled." We see Magdalene at a modern grave, "Ridiculous as it was to park and kneel where he'd been buried—to kneel in the rain—I laughed out loud!" This Magdalene says: "Sometimes, I'm tired of being a mother." This Magdalene *has* a dying mother: "her mouth wrenched to the right and cupped open / so as to take in as much air . . . the gurgling sound, so loud / we had to speak louder to hear each other over it." This Magdalene wears make-up and cream. Magdalene with mascara laughing out loud. Something restored.



A 2,000-year-old wrong gets righted right within this book.



Persona and speaker trade places fast and loose on these pages. The first line of the first poem, "Before the Beginning" begins: "Was I ever virgin?" Plath comes to mind: "Pure. What does it mean?" And who is speaking? And to whom? Is it the book that is asking if it is virgin? Is it a contemporary woman speaking? Is it Magdalene come to life from the fragments of the Bible? Just as quickly as these poems fall into a modern narrative they slip, like mercury, back into the Biblical voice of Magdalene, demon-possessed, the woman, without a man, who followed that crazy man named Jesus. I think there is no one answer, it is meant to be abstract. There is a sort of invited misunderstanding here, including the fact that the title figure and the author both have "M" names that are close cousins.

"Before the Beginning" is short, each skinny line or two making its own stanza, stretching its arm out to the right margin and unfurling its fist of a question mark almost like an innocent baby. Was I ever virgin? The rest of the questions are: "Did someone touch me before I could speak?" This question raises the specter of some kind of stealth, a touch that came when the speaker was preverbal. Yet it could also be a loving touch. "Who had me before I knew I was an I?" This question feels Godly. Who are we before we even come into the world? As if we are all part of God and then the world itself adopts us. And the one final longer question wrapped over two lines: "So that I wanted the touch again and again / without knowing who or why or from whence it came?" Here is a hunger for touch that ev-

ery human being that ever lived on the planet has to negotiate and navigate. Does this question harken back to the work in *What the Living Do* where the poems explored inappropriate sexual touch within a family? It could. Maybe. It's complex. No metaphors and no images assist or distract. Bare.

Howe said: "Many of these poems came as reluctant utterances—so they needed more space in them, more silence. I asked that she speak about what she was most afraid to speak of so it might come to light, and come home." Again this "she" is not secure, the "she" is almost spinning centrifugally taking in more decades and more generations as the poems progress and Howe coaxes this persona home in this muttering dervish-swirl. Something historical could also have happened last week, like in "Calvary":

Someone hanging clothes on a line between buildings,
Someone shaking out a rug from an open window
Might have heard hammering, one or two blocks away
And thought little or nothing of it.

So much, so fast, Plath said. Bewildering. Astonishing.

Pondering the amorphousness of the speaker, Howe said: "She bears the full weight of the duality all women bear: she is the object and she struggles to become the subject. She is perceived as a symbol and she struggles to become real to herself. How can a woman be sensual and spiritual? How can she recover when she has been wounded by violence? How can she find herself in a world of men?" Sometimes we see the speaker finding her place through observing as in "Calvary," yet other times through these reluctant utterances the speaker becomes the subject often through questioning more than definitive answers, as in "The Teacher":

Was he my husband, my lover, my teacher?
One book will say one thing. Another book another.

Can the body love beyond hunger?
You will tell me what you know of desire and surrender.

I had a teacher who would not hurt me. I had a teacher
Who struck me in the face, then struck me again.

I had a teacher who died in his own bed, a teacher who
Died in public, a teacher who was a child, a girl.

Can we love without greed? Without wanting to be first?
Everyone wanted to pour his wine, to sit near him at the table.

Me too. Until he was dead.
Then he was with me all the time.

In certain lines it feels we are hearing something from the Gospel—"everyone wanted to pour his wine," bringing us back to the wedding at Cana, but it could just as well be someone the speaker knew who liked to drink wine who died. The teacher splits into several people as the lines go down the page: the teacher is loving, the teacher slaps the speaker, the teacher is a girl, the teacher is dead. And a "you" pops up in the middle there, too, as Magdalene looks at us.

The poems leave even more space around them, not unlike character descriptions in the Bible. Using spare language Howe is going after the sparest of sparsely described people. She's mentioned twelve times in the Gospels but not with much backstory or elaboration. Intriguingly, as she moves closer to

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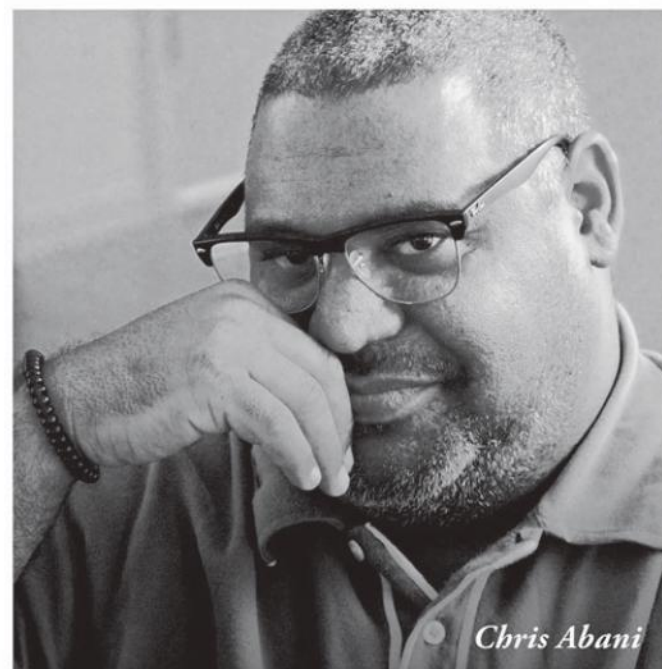
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us, the personal narrative diminishes in this book compared to Howe's previous books—as though she's disappearing right in front of us.



The last poem is called, "One Day," and imagines the world without the speaker in it:

ONE DAY

One day the patterned carpet, the folding chairs,
The woman in the blue suit by the door examining her split ends,

All of it will go on without me. I'll have disappeared,
As easily as a coin under lake water, and few to notice the difference

a coin dropping into the darkening—
and West 4th Street, the sesame noodles that taste like too much peanut
butter

lowered into the small white paper carton—all of it will go on and on—
and the I that caused me so much trouble? Nowhere

or grit thrown into the garden
or into the sticky bodies of several worms,

or just gone, stopped—like the Middle Ages,
like the coin Whitman carried in his pocket all the way to that basement
bar on Broadway that isn't there anymore.
Oh to be in Whitman's pocket, on a cold winter day,

To feel his large warm hand slide in and out, and in again.
To be taken hold of by Walt Whitman! To be exchanged!

To be spent for something somebody wanted and drank and found delicious.

Suspending disbelief, somehow Magdalene could be smelling those noodles with their peanut butter. The speaker of the poems has become a coin in the hand of Walt Whitman, something exchanged for something else. Then, in her final note struck in this poem, after she has lingered with us on the page,

she disappears. She's gone. But then, of course, she isn't. The poem is a kind of coin we can exchange. Time and again.

Muriel Rukeyser wondered what would happen if one woman told the truth about her life. Her response: "The world would split open." Howe splits the world open so we see Magdalene, probably the way Jesus always did, until all those Catholic priests started turning her into something she wasn't.

The last line of *Magdalene* is from a fragment: "the moonlit path over the un-walkable water." That is where these poems lead, splitting open the Bible so historically silent Magdalene speaks. She's an apostle in her own right, loved a man who she called her teacher and was there when he died. She is the first bearer of the good news following the moonlit path against seemingly impossible odds. It's a portrait that needs more than one visit. Understanding of it fully will follow long after it has arrived in this world, or perhaps, as Bevis suggests, the wonder of it will always linger without resolution and what will remain is a love of what we've seen, familiar and yet shocking as if we're seeing it for the first time. Plath gave us *Ariel*, a coin that appears on shelf after shelf, in bookstore after bookstore: "Out of the ash / I rise with my red hair, / And I eat men like air." There the woman, too, struggled to be the subject, and she did so by splitting herself and the world in two, leaving us with the tragic note of her suicide.

Henry James wrote: "If we were never bewildered, there would never be a story to tell about us." Bewildered I have been and bewildered I will be by this gifted American poet, and very grateful the story that never would have been told has been told. Soon to appear on the table at Three Lives bookstore in the West Village, outside the maples and lindens about to bud, there will be a gospel of a new reality (or is a new *knowledge* better?) for women not to destroy themselves, no—but to triumph, abide, challenge, rise, expand, sing. It's a masterpiece. ◀

SPENCER REECE is an ordained Episcopal priest and serves as the canon to the ordinary for the Bishop of Spain in Madrid. He is the author of *The Clerk's Tale* and *The Road to Emmaus*. This year Tía Chucha Press publishes the anthology of poems edited by Reece by the rescued girls of Our Little Roses, the country's only all-girl orphanage in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. The anthology accompanies a feature documentary film executive produced by James Franco. The film is titled *Voices Beyond the Wall*; the anthology is *Counting Time Like People Count Stars*.

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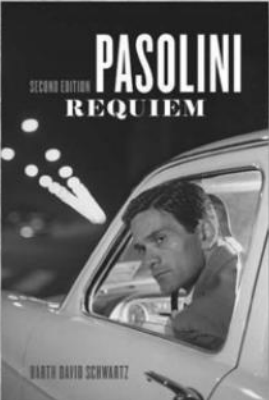
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three poems

To Those Who Have Asked Anna

To those who've asked Anna how it feels
to know she'll likely die
Alone without her husband—meaning me—
at her side for comfort as she
Nears some future ending which may or not
bring with it some late solace
Though of course we never—any of us—know
what awaits each of us alone
No matter who might stand by us briefly though
I know as you might here in my faux
Venetian village by the Pacific where for two
weeks more exactly I'm twice
Anna's age & yet young as I am to those who've
asked Anna I have nothing to say
Not lit by a luminous certainty I'll be at peace
only when those who've asked Anna
Are at last each alone & left ripped by a silence
bloody as August sky

Silver & Black

In those days Jesse still worked in the movies as
the assistant to a cool producer
Who'd courted Jet Li before he was anybody here
& to show his stuff Jet Li'd kicked
A hanging begonia out of its macramé & wire basket
on the porch of their office at Universal
She told me laughing over the red sauce she'd made
the way her mama would she swore pouring
A little extra red wine into the pan then a little more
& she was so shy she blushed every time
I teased her friends the gorgeous boys who hung out
with her crew of rock-steady girls all
Drop-dead slinky beauties still looking for a break
& I wished them well each one of them
& after they'd leave we'd sit back on her leather sofa
black like every piece of her furniture & walls
With a few alarming slashes of silver accent now & then
& it felt exactly like living in an old Thirties
Noir classic where every one of our nights was steamy
but always lost in a black-&-silver sorrow
There were even a few blank silver birthday balloons
floating against the ceiling above the bed
& at times like that it could seem all of Sicily unfolded
across her face & pooled beneath her
Eyes dark as the distance she'd come from Selinunte
& the dirt of her family fields & those
Early graves & wrapped in those black sheets with silver
pillows piled around us I kept trying

To find some great consoling exit line of dialogue she
hadn't already read not even in those scripts
Scattered on the floor of her bedroom not even the one
she said was really about me holding it up
With one hand—a hipster slacker indie re-make of
the 1933 horror classic by H. G. Wells
With Claude Rains playing my favorite part of course
one I knew by heart *The Invisible Man*

Hot Night in Akron

My downstairs neighbors were out for the night
seeing *The Clash* in Cleveland
Which meant it was ok for Jolene to practice her
flamenco routine on my linoleum
Kitchen floor in just Cuban heels & T-shirt having
uncurled from the bed just a moment
Before & I still couldn't move even one muscle
as the riveting gunshot rhythms
Began to ricochet through my little apartment
but I rose up on one elbow
To answer the clanging of the phone on the floor
right by the mattress & it was my
Once friend Elijah still way PTSD after five years
in country & out & before I could try
Closing the bedroom door he asked *Are those shots?*
as he heard the flamenco's crescendo
& I said Yeah but nothing serious just some assholes
popping off at the frog pond
Then he started up telling me he didn't know where
his wife was but when he did find out
He'd kill the motherfucker she was sleeping with
& it went on like this a while before
I said Good luck & I had to go & just then Jolene stopped
dead in her steps & peeled off her T-shirt
The sweat pouring off her as I walked over to wrap both
arms around her & hold on a moment
Before I told her I guess you better go home now
that was Elijah calling & she asked me
What did he want? & I said Just you

DAVID ST. JOHN is the author of eleven collections of poetry, including *Study for the World's Body* (1994), which was nominated for the National Book Award, and more recently *The Auroras* (2012), *The Window* (2014), and *The Last Troubadour: Selected and New Poems* (2017).



four poems

Bonfire Opera

In those days, there was a woman in our circle who was known, not only for her beauty, but for taking off all her clothes and singing opera. And sure enough, as the night wore on and the stars emerged to stare at their reflections on the sea, and everyone had drunk a little wine, she began to disrobe, loose her great bosom, and the tender belly, pale in the moonlight, the Viking hips, and to let her torn raiment fall to the sand as we looked up from the flames. And then a voice lifted into the dark, high and clear as a flock of blackbirds. And everything was very still, the way the congregation quiets when the priest prays over the incense, and the smoke wafts up into the rafters. I wanted to be that free inside the body, the doors of pleasure opening, one after the next, an arpeggio climbing the ladder of sky. And all the while she was singing and wading into the water until it rose up to her waist and then lapped at the underside of her breasts, and the aria drifted over us, her soprano spare and sharp in the night air. And even though I was young, somehow, in that moment, I heard it, the song inside the song, and I knew then that this was not the hymn of promise but the body's bright wailing against its limits. A bird caught in a cathedral—the way it tries to escape by throwing itself, again and again, against the stained glass.

Berkeley

And then there were those winters in Berkeley (if you can call them winters) rain falling sideways against the brown shingled houses along Benvenue, La Méditerranée with its little wrought iron tables covered in tile. Sipping hot lemon chicken soup and reading Vonnegut. I loved the decay of Telegraph Avenue, its street vendors hawking cheap silver pendants, the old Gypsy whose name meant “good with horses” who told me someday I’d have a string of feminine men as lovers. Across the world, the wall was falling in Germany, the Soviet Union collapsing. Men and women with PhDs and Russian accents arrived selling colorful scarves and offering to do odd jobs. What I remember is walking into the wind, holding my wool coat tight around my chest—how you could almost feel the world tilting on its axis right beneath your feet. I’d pass the ramshackle cottages off Euclid with their dark rooms, and disarray of roses and dream of the lives hidden within. It’s not that I was happy. I was too young to be happy, knew only its first blush not the darker tones that come after and give it shape. But somehow I found the small, almost unnoticeable

gateways that led there: the torn edge of a baguette, hot from the oven, the acrid smell of the gingko when you walk underneath and step on the broken pods. Sitting at Roma, watching a beautiful man lean over a pile of textbooks as he sips his coffee and almost, but doesn’t quite, lift his head to see you.

Worlds in Worlds

After we’d run through the hallway—*Rhapsody in Blue* aching the air—played hide-and-seek in all the rooms, finally, we collapsed on a bench in the back garden under the cloud-hidden moon and talked about how everything, underneath, is really only darkness and silence, a void we can’t see but move through on this little island of heat and sycamores, freeways and plastic cups, the body and its amazement of limbs and teeth. And then somehow, even after a little wine, I was surprised when he leaned in to kiss me, to cross that threshold that forever marks *before* and *after* in the heart’s guest book, a portal you can open and find nothing— or there might be nebulas, comets, whole galaxies. I said *let’s not, we could hurt each other. Isn’t it better, sometimes, to enjoy the fragrance of the blossom than to eat the flower?* Which is when he lowered his face pressed his ear to the thunder beneath my sternum and asked *Like this ?* Some holy books say there are twenty-two levels of heaven, ascending in pleasure to the most sublime, and of them, this must have been the twenty-sixth: the faint stars, salty whiff of ocean, the purple outline of the pines. And a man I love grazing my breast with his stubbled cheek, and pausing to sink his teeth into the thin scrim of skin over my jugular. I have wanted many things in this life, but have failed to want anything more than this— to stand here at the battle lines of desire, the troops armed and ready with their sharpened arrows. And sometimes I want to win. And sometimes I want to lose so badly I can taste it. To surrender everything I’m made of: the neat, fenced acres of my separateness— that little plot of land I’ve spent a life defending— to let go until there’s nothing left of me but that great vault we spoke of, its endless dark, its pitiless silence.

Dressing for the Burial

No one wants to talk about the hilarity after death—the way the week my brother shot himself, his wife and I fell on the bed laughing because she couldn’t decide what to wear for the big day, and asked me, “Do I go for sexy or Amish?” I told her sexy. And we rolled around on the mattress they’d shared for eighteen years, clutching our sides. Meanwhile, he lay in a narrow refrigerated drawer, soft brown curls still springing from his scalp, framing his handsome face. This was back when

FALEEHA HASSAN

We Grow at the Speed of War

Translated from the Arabic by Dikra Ridha

God didn't consider us when he created earth
by saying: become. We were children stuttering
in the whispers of sleeping homes.

We ran to schools enveloped by our mothers'
prayers that feared everything.
But the head mistress shortened our lives with a quiet sentence:
We'll return after the end of the war . . . in ten days,
In her Kurdish accent.

So we remained, gathered in the school yard
Wide-eyed, our souls bewildered and afraid.
The days stretched and became years.
We separated, boys to battlegrounds
and girls to the waiting steps.

My friends never returned.
Their leftovers were gathered in wooden boxes
decorated with holes of separation.

My mother, like us, suffered from waiting.
She sat beside us holding on for father.
Who used to return a time and leave many times;
We didn't know where he went.

To avoid a question he'd say: *'to the mobile frontline.'*
We started to collect our days and stuff them in calendars.
In our grief we painted our eyes with the dust
of graveyards. There was nothing but banners:
(Long live the leader).

And yes, he lived long enough to stitch one war with another.
My father's sister counts her children with her days
they never returned.
In one wake she said goodbye
to all of them
then vowed a long silence.

'We left the war as winners'
hah
said the leader.
'Let's go to my second war'
The soldiers knew nothing about it.

My mother counts my brother's soldier belts,
she knows the battles are a losing game.
We hunger.
We hunger,
and the leader's belly grows.

He appears, crying on the channels:
'I only have one suit',
and behind the screen, he weds his son in a golden plane.

'Don't worry'

My neighbour pats his son's back,
'I returned from the war alive and will stay.'
He rushes before the light of dawn to the hospitals
investing every penny from his veins.

My sister sits
putting her baby to sleep, she sings: *'I want the war to never return,
and for you stay with me.*
Make up for your father who left us without return.
The martyr of wars.'

Will there be a day that I can surround my family
with peace—like other people?

Will there be a day that I count my wishes
in a notepad and they come true?

I am no woman if I don't tell you face to face.
And this gesture does not suit you.
You are the worst free spirit.

FALEEHA HASSAN, who is currently in the United States, was born in Najaf, Iraq. She earned an M.A. in Arabic literature and has published several collections of poetry in Arabic: *Being a Girl*, *A Visit to the Museum of Shade*, *Five Titles for My Friend—The Sea*, *Though Later On*, *Poems to Mother*, *Gardenia Perfume*, and her collection of children's poetry, *The Guardian of Dreams*.

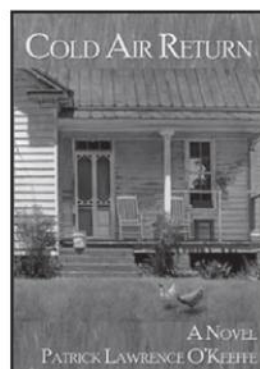
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An Interview by Lance Rutkin

A Special *AP2* Supplement

This conversation took place on April 6, 2016.

RUTKIN You were just in Dublin, right?

MULDOON I was.

LR How was it?

PM It was very interesting. It was the centenary of the 1916 Rising, Easter Week, so I was involved in a couple of projects there. One of the interesting things about being a poet is that much of what one writes is commissioned in some ways. It could be as simple as someone asking for a poem for a magazine, and one doesn't have one, so one writes one, or something more formal, along the lines of what I've just done in Dublin. The main thing I did was the text for a piece that was composed for an orchestra and a chorus of about 1200 people, and it was called "One Hundred Years a Nation," music by Sean Davey, presented in Collins Barracks, which is the old British Army headquarters in Dublin, and presented on Easter Sunday. I'd written a poem called "1916: The Eoghan Rua Variations," which was also read over the course of the week, in the National Concert Hall. I also put together another show, in the National Concert Hall, of Irish writers, poets, novelists, and playwrights. Then I did something in the Dublin Writers' Center for another poem I'd been commissioned to write, which is about Pdraig Pearse and the General Post Office in Dublin. A lot of stuff like that.

LR I watched "One Hundred Years a Nation."

PM Oh, did you? Yeah, you can get it, I suppose. And?

LR It was magnificent.

PM You know what was magnificent about it, actually, above all, was the orchestra. I don't know if you got a sense of the rain and wind, but their music was flying around all over the place. It was very cold. The orchestra really did a fabulous job.

LR You write lyrics; how different was it from writing for a rock band to writing something of that scale?

PM Similar kind of thing, really. It's all the same. All these activities, they're not exactly the same, but they're very similar. Something like that is just an extended song. It's a song. It's not the kind of writing I would ordinarily do in a poem. It's much more public. The pitch of it is slightly different. It's for much more immediate consumption, one might almost say. It has to have an immediacy. Even while immediacy is something that's honored, indeed really desired in many ways, in a poem, it's not quite the same. A poem may take a bit longer to get out there, and for all its resonances to be appreciated, but the public song, let's call it, the public poem, the public verse, there's a slightly more workmanlike aspect to it. It's a job to be done, you know? Inspiration may come into it to some extent, and if one's very lucky, a reasonable extent, but it's not the same kind of activity that, ordinarily, I would engage in, which is having no plans, having no ambition, having no commission, but only to be commissioned by the poem itself, what it wants to do. It's very different in that respect. It's got more to do with craft, it's

got more to do with what one might have learned, the few things one might have learned over the years, as a poet, and most of the time, those things don't apply. When I write poems, I've no idea what I'm doing, and to write something like that, you have to have a bit of an idea of what you're doing.

LR There are a few poems in your latest collection that are sort of commissioned, a lot of reflections on artwork.

PM Yeah, you know that's right, and I sometimes wonder if I'm wise even to acknowledge the extent to which many of them are commissioned. I mean there is a theory that all poems are commissioned in some sense. Andrew Motion, for ex-

ample, the former poet Laureate of England, of the U.K., which is a job that involves a lot of commissions, feels that everything, in some sense, is commissioned. You set yourself the job of writing something. I, myself, don't quite go so far as that, because I try to do as little work as possible. I try not to. The reason I write poems at all is because I'm forced to by some urgency beyond myself.

LR We're going to shift a bit. You took a semester at sea not long ago. I looked at some of their voyages. Which way did you go? Pacific or Atlantic?

PM Actually, the one I did was around the world. It was while they were still doing that. It's terri-

*There is a theory that all poems
are commissioned in some sense.*

bly expensive to run that ship, and costs a lot of money just to fill the tank. At least, it used to, maybe not now, with the price of oil. The one I did was perhaps the last, or one of the last, that actually circumnavigated the world. We started in Florida, over to Africa, down round over to India, Vietnam, China, Japan, back across the Pacific, putting in at Hawaii, and then back to the West Coast of the U.S. Then we spent about a month driving across the U.S., so we actually went right round the world in the course of two, three months, which was a fabulous experience.

LR Did you do any sailing in the Caribbean? There's that poem "Catamaran," in which you're sailing on a catamaran.

PM Now, there is a poem about a catamaran. I wasn't actually on a catamaran, per se, but maybe it was, actually, maybe it was a twin-hulled item. It was quite a large thing, but maybe it did have twin hulls. I can't remember now. Is that a poem about whale watching? About finding whales by sonar? Yeah, it is. See my problem is that I write a lot of poems, and I wrote another poem about whale watching, which I've never collected, or maybe not even published. That one does mention whale watching, that's right. I, myself, am not a sailor as such, but I love being on the ocean. I'm a drowner; I'm not a swimmer. I can't swim, but I love being at sea. Some of the most wonderful experiences of my life, in the Pacific, for example, on the back of a ship, the stern of the ship, with a couple of albatrosses hanging off the back. It's just beautiful.

LR Since so many of the commissioned poems from this latest collection are about art—

PM A number of them are, that's correct.

LR Or, there's "A Civil War Suite," that's in conversation with a couple of different poems.

PM It was also commissioned.

LR How do you approach art when you're going to write a poem about it? Do you approach it differently than you normally would?

PM Perhaps. Though I'm interested in the visual arts, I tend not to look with an art historian's eye, or an artist's eye, though I am very interested in trying to paint, myself, and when I was a kid I was a sort of painter, and would've liked to have been a painter. I'm nonetheless interested in how things get made, and I look at a painting, and I think, how was that done? I do look at a painting, say, in terms of its composition, in terms of its structure, how it was done. I do look at it with a somewhat academic eye, I suppose, but not to such an extent that I'm going to be changing my job to working in an art museum, you know, I'm not. But, like many people, I've learned, to some extent, to

LR I don't know if you'll remember, but there's that line in the poem "the Tamil term we've corrupted, we use 'catamaran.'" What's the Tamil term?

PM Oh, I can't remember exactly, but it's something along those terms, you know, it sounds something like that, catamaran, or whatever. In other words, it comes from that language, for two logs tied together.

LR So why do you call it a “corruption” of a word?

PM Well, I suppose that’s kind of a technical term that would be used by linguists. In other words, it’s a kind of half-baked variation of the original. Right? It’s just a term that’s used by linguists, often, for a phrase that’s gone from one language into another. There are many examples of words that have been mistranslated. For example, the phrase “that cuts no ice with me” is actually a phrase from one of the Algonquian languages. Sounds a little bit like that. It’s got nothing to do with ice at all, or cutting. That comes from one of the Native American languages.

LR So it’s just because of the linguistic trade that you don’t call it an “evolution” of a word?

PM I suppose one could call it that, but “corruption” is the word that’s used by linguists. In other words, it starts as one thing. Another example would be the Jerusalem artichoke, which has nothing to do with Jerusalem, but is a version of *girasole*, turning with the sun, *girasole*, like a sunflower. Nothing to do with Jerusalem the city. The technical term for that is a corruption.

LR A lot of your poems, not just the most recent volume, but a lot of them, have focused on, not focused, but have bits of that in there—playing with the linguistics.

PM Yeah, there’s a bit of that. Probably too much, I think. These days, I sort of think to myself, oh don’t do that again, you’ve done enough of that.

LR Are you taking a jab at yourself, with that section from “Noah & Sons” for “ewe” read “yew,” it goes all the way down, for “Ashur” read “Asher.” Is that a little bit of self-deprecation?

PM To some extent, yeah. I mean it’s a reference back, and it’s probably a terrible mistake, to a poem called “Errata.” The erratum slip is something that used to go into a book, with a series of corrections. There’s a poem, I don’t know if you know this poem, “Errata.”

LR Is that the women?

PM No, that’s the “Little Black Book,” but it’s close to it. It’s somewhere close to that poem in the time that it was written, and it’s close to it in the book in which it appears, *Hay*, but errata, you know, for something read this, for something read that. It’s a kind of play—the original poem is a kind of autobiographical poem, masquerading as an erratum slip. It refers back to that.

LR On the subject of poems being together in volumes, how do you think about structuring the volumes of your poems?

PM Well I don’t really think much about that at all, actually. Certainly not initially. What I do initially, if I’ve finished a book, okay so there’s a clean slate, there’s nothing there. And then there’s a poem, if one’s lucky. And then, if one’s lucky again, there’s another poem. So what I start to do, each time I finish a book, is have a new little folder. I have the two poems. I put one there, and the next one follows it, or comes before it. And then I write another poem, and it goes in the little folder, too. At that stage, there are three of them. Which comes first, which comes second, which comes third? Those things matter. They influence the way we read poems. My process, as the poems get written, is to put them into some possible order. There comes a point, then, where, if one’s lucky, there’s a sense that, because they come from one mindset, one mind and one mindset, that certain trends seem to come to the fore. But I wouldn’t even start looking for those until way into the process.

LR But, when you have your poems, the order we read them does matter?

PM Oh, it does, absolutely. Yeah. Now, having said that, there’s a reason for the order of the poems in all my books, but I’ve forgotten, mostly, what that is. There seemed to be an argument for it at the time. Actually, there’s a chronological component to some of them. Often, these are poems about childhood, and for some reason they happen earlier in the book.

LR And then, in this collection, there’s “Firing Squad.” The speaker drives away from “Firing Squad,” with the handkerchief in his breast pocket, and then it appears again, both with Father Daly and with Pontius Pilate, with the last poem “Dirty Data.”

PM That’s right, yes, well, I’m interested in the visual. I’m quite image driven. I think, partly because, you go back to the paintings, I think really I’m a kind of painter, in a very loose sense, a visual artist. A lot of poets are. The imagists, for example. The poems are driven by what one’s looking at. You’re looking at one thing, then you’re looking at another thing. I’m also very interested in film, and studied film editing, so I think that had a big impact on me, too, in terms of cutting a poem together. Certain images tend to recur, right? With any luck, they come from one’s unconscious, one’s subconscious.

So Father Daly and his handkerchief, of course, refers to the Bloody Sunday in Ireland, and that handkerchief has appeared in a few poems right the way through my work, if we were to give it as grand a title. At some level, I’m one of those poets, like most poets, for whom it’s all one big thing. You know, it’s all one big thing. Wallace Stevens talks about the whole of harmonium—the whole of harmonium. This is true of most poets, because, almost inevitably, there is some core personality at the heart of the enterprise. It’s inevitable that things come together. Some poets have helped things to come together a little bit more. Yeats, for example, took quite an active role in the construction of his system and continuities, from the beginning of his career to the end. He did a little bit of tweaking here and there to encourage people to think that he was quite consistent in what he was doing and, maybe, even knew what he was doing. I’m less interested in knowing what I’m doing. In fact, I’m not interested in that at all, but I’m interested in the idea that the whole world that has come into being through my poems is consistent, and that there are echoes.

This thing that you recognize in the first book I wrote actually comes up here, again. The poem I wrote, longer poem in the first book I wrote, is actually about Bloody Sunday, but not in so obvious a way as, say, “Dirty Data” refers to it. “Dirty Data” is a kind of wild poem that attempts to draw together certain far-flung ideas. You know, Ben Hur, Bloody Sunday, a whole range of things along those lines.

LR Very political, right?

PM To some extent, yeah. I’m not quite sure what its politics are. It certainly refers to political occurrences. Some of my poems are quite political in the conventional sense. Funny enough, more of the American stuff, in a strange way, than the Irish stuff.

LR Do you think about those two differently? The American stuff and the Irish stuff?

PM It depends. I’ve lived here about thirty years, so it’s all a bit of a mishmash really now, but in a strange way, I’ve gotten more involved on commentary on American politics than I ever did on

commentary on Irish politics, except maybe something like that I did the other day at Collins Barracks.

LR I think that there’s a line from “Cuba (2)” that showed some real foresight on your part. “In Ireland we need to start now to untangle / the rhetoric of 2016.”

PM That’s right, to which I’m now contributing.

LR But that could easily be said about American politics, as well.

PM Oh, yes, it could. That’s right. That’s absolutely right.

LR But back to “Dirty Data,” I think that the politics of “The Eoghan Rua Variations” are connected to those of “Dirty Data.”

PM Quite possibly. See, I haven’t thought about that, because this thing is just kind of hot off the presses, but what would you say?

LR I’d say that, with the body of Winston Churchill passing through, and then out of “Dirty Data,” it’s making the same sort of statement as “The Eoghan Rua Variations.” It’s the English, their days are numbered, too.

PM Mhm. Well, there is a reference to a phrase used by Winston Churchill, “such is the integrity of their quarrel.” He’s talking about the Irish quarrel. I read, somewhere, that long after the world is flooded, and the dreary steeple of Tyrone and Fermanagh show again above the flood, they’ll still be fighting each other. Such is the integrity of their quarrel. But I use it in that poem because there’s a kind of slippage, a kind of linguistic corruption, even, in a line like, “such is the integrity of their corral,” which is a phrase that occurs in “Dirty Data,” which is a play on the Winston Churchill line. It refers to the horses in Ben Hur. That’s a poem which is a kind of collage. It’s using something of the technique of the collage, which of course was used by many modernist poets under the influence of Eliot, most notably, perhaps, in “The Waste Land.” So it’s using some of the techniques used in “The Waste Land,” a poem for which I’ve a lot of time, as it were. It was a poem that was very influential on me when I was a kid. Things like that are coming back.

LR So the Easter Uprising is quite notably infused with poetics, with Pádraig Pearse, and with Joseph Mary Plunkett.

PM Right, who’s a figure in a couple of these poems, that’s right.

LR So what do you feel, especially right after writing the lyrics for that choral song, and “The Eoghan Rua Variations,” what do you feel is the place of poetics in contemporary Irish politics?

PM I’m torn, because I think, most of the time, poetry is about figuring stuff out for one’s self, but I think some of the time, actually, others may benefit from that attempt to figure out stuff. I’m always a little hesitant about it really, because I’m not generally enthusiastic about, say, film stars telling about the state of the world. I sort of resist that, and yet, on the other hand, you know, they’re right, and maybe people will pay attention to them. I have very mixed feelings about it. I certainly don’t think that poets know anything more than anyone else. On the other hand, I think many of them have given themselves over to being open to what the world has to tell them, or what has to be told through them. I have mixed feelings about it. And I’m always fascinated that poets are asked for their opinions on political matters, but painters are not so much. Pantomime

artists are not so often asked, but painters and pantomime artists probably know at least as much as poets. Poets are asked because people think they use words, which of course is true, in some sense. You can see why people would think that, but ideally the greatest poets are not people who use words, but, as I'm sure I've said innumerable times, whom are used by words.

LR Back a little bit to Plunkett, in "Firing Squad," you use two epigraphs, one from a letter by Frost, one from a letter by Plunkett, both from the day of Plunkett's execution. Why include an epigraph in a poem? Why include two, at that?

PM Well think of how much work it saves. The poem is already halfway down the page. I was fascinated to realize that the two epigraphs stem from the same day, they come from the same day, from a line from Robert Frost, who's somebody I'm interested in, to this line from Joseph Mary Plunkett. There's some connection between the two, I'm not sure what it is.

LR I think it raises more questions than it answers.

PM Quite possibly.

LR I see two readings that are at odds with one another.

PM What do you think?

LR They're both about resolving something in death. The line in Frost is "the poet in me died nearly ten years ago."

PM That's right, that's right, of course that's part of it.

LR But I think it's a bit, from what you say in your essay "Getting Round," "Robert Frost, get over yourself." That the death of the poet in one's self is somehow much less important than the death of a poet.

PM Oh, I think that's probably right, too. It can do all those things, can't it? All those things are appropriate, but there's something very poignant, you know, in terms of my own work, about Joseph Mary Plunkett. A version of him occurs in a poem called "Anseo," which may be the best known poem that I've written. Somewhere in there, it wouldn't be very much to the fore, but lurking about there somewhere are ideas about the longevity of the poetic life, and concerns about that. I mean Frost was only a kid when he was saying that. He was a late starter. He didn't really start until he was about forty.

Most poets have very short lifespans, if they have any. I mean most of them have no lifespan at all, including quite well-known ones. Most poetry, like most other things, is not very good. So to be good at it is very, very hard. Even if one is good at it for five minutes, when one's about thirty, say, it doesn't usually last for long.

LR I don't really know what to make of "Anseo" in "Cuba (2)," where it comes up as a tattoo. What is it doing in there?

PM It's there because, for what it's worth, it's factual. My daughter actually has *Anseo* tattooed on her ankle. It's factual, for what it's worth, perhaps not too much, but it's factual, insofar as we can discuss facts.

LR But you made the decision to include that fact.

PM That's right. It's a very weird line to write. It refers to that poem of mine, which I ordinarily wouldn't be doing at all. That's a slightly public position, but then it turns into sort of a public poem. Some poems are more public than others.

Most of mine are not really public at all. There are writers, Yeats, for example, for whom there are poems that are much more public. They're addressing issues, "Easter: 1916," for example, that a poem like "Byzantium" is not necessarily doing, or "The Song of the Wandering Aengus," is not necessarily doing. Poets write different kinds of poems for different occasions, to go back to the idea of occasion. Each occasion is different.

LR I think there's a very complicated occasion in the book, "Cuthbert and the Otters," which is public and, I'm sure, very private.

PM Yeah, I think that's good, that's quite well said. I think you're right. It's a weird thing, isn't it? But, again, there's a tradition. One of the roles that poets have, in many societies, is to make public utterances, including utterances of grief. I've written an uncollected elegy for C.K. Williams, for example. Then there's this one, for Seamus Heaney, with whom I had a particularly close relationship. Our lives were intertwined, at least mine was intertwined with his. I'm not sure the extent

One of the roles that poets have, in many societies, is to make public utterances, including utterances of grief.

to which his was intertwined with mine, if such a distinction is possible. He was a big figure for me.

LR If we're back to where the order matters, "Seven Selfies from Château d'If," how much does it matter that it came after the elegy for Seamus Heaney?

PM I'm just trying to psyche myself back in there. I suppose I could have finished the book with "Cuthbert," but I don't think I could have started it with what I had around. I don't think I could have started it with "Dirty Data." In a strange way, perhaps, I felt the Seamus Heaney poem needed to be, it sounds a bit crass, but it needed to be there, and then we move on a bit. I don't know if that's what I was thinking. It's hard to know where to put a poem like that. In the overall shape of things, somehow, a lot of my books have longer poems at the end, and mostly because, where are you going to put them?

LR It's because of the hermit monk character. I don't know if it's the best way, but the most apparent way to read "Cuthbert and the Otters" would be Heaney as Cuthbert, as this hermit monk.

PM Certainly, he's connected to Cuthbert, if only because he's been carried on a bier, or stretcher.

LR The hermit monk, then makes another appearance, you know with "Marban and Guaire."

PM Just to go back to that, actually, the thing that's being carried is the salmon to Cuthbert. There's almost a metamorphosis there: Cuthbert and the salmon, Cuthbert's been carried, the salmon's been carried, Heaney's been carried, but it's more Heaney and the salmon that are being carried, by the otters.

LR It just seems there, in "Seven Selfies," that it's about your poetic relationship with Heaney.

PM Oh, is it? Let me see. Oh, wow. Yes, that's so interesting. I don't think of this about being about Heaney at all. Did you ever read *The Count of Monte Cristo*?

LR I watched the film.

PM Yeah, okay. So it's really *The Count of Monte Cristo*, which is a fabulous story. I just love the story of the guy switching positions with the corpse of the old Abbé. That's interesting. I would not have connected that with the Heaney, but I can see how that's a perfectly reasonable thing.

LR Not to be brash, but, with the position you just took at the Centenary, you are, in a sense, switching places with Heaney.

PM That's very interesting. You see, I wouldn't have thought of that, but I see what you're saying. I can see that some people might think that. I can see what could be construed as taking over Heaney's role.

I don't think that's something I'm really doing. I'm not sure I have the qualifications to do that. Also, I'm not sure if I want to do it. That's a big role to be. It's a tough role. Seamus was the big, public poet, in Ireland and beyond. It's not the kind of poet I am. I'm not really into that. Partly because it's too big a responsibility, and it's not necessarily one that poets should take on. Seamus

naturally gravitated towards it. He felt that he was a spokesperson for the tribe in a way that I don't. Wouldn't ever. Different kind of writing, different kind of poet.

LR Do you think that the latest thing you did this past week in Dublin is a sort of a one-off?

PM An aberration? The other side of it is that I love the idea of people reading my poems. I'm not so sure if I love the idea of all the things I would have to do to make them read them. I don't really want to be a public figure. I'm just not interested in that. I want a bit of peace and quiet. I don't want, at the age of 65, to be a public figure. Seriously. You know what I'm saying? I want to have a snooze.

LR What was it, then, about this Centenary, that you said, you know what, I'll do it this time?

PM What it was was people asked me, and I said yes. I didn't ask; it doesn't work like that. You can't go along to the government and say, I'd like to do it.

LR You could've said no.

PM Could've said no. God knows, maybe should've. On the other hand, I enjoy a challenge. I particularly enjoy trying to do things that, strictly speaking, are almost impossible. For example, "Dirty Data" is a poem that a wiser soul wouldn't even get involved in, because it's crazy, right? A smarter person would've probably said, I'm not, let's just do something different, let's just go to the movies, but I, because I'm the way I am, I think, okay, let's see what happens here, if we go down this road. I may completely shoot myself in the foot. Maybe it is a crash. I don't know. The other thing about me is, I don't really care. In the overall shape of the world's crashes—financial, literal, metaphorical—in terms of the various great explosions and implosions in the world, it's hardly a big issue.

LR Not as much "Dirty Data," but the very intricate rhyme pattern of "Cuthbert and the Otters." It's not exactly what you do with "Incantata," but it's close.

PM Yeah, it's very complex, and it's got nothing to do with anything but itself.

LR It has the rhyming mirror, folding the rhyme scheme of an extremely long poem about the middle line.

PM Yes, that's right. It's a kind of axe head. I really only developed that. It's a device that's occurred in a couple of my poems. It's a shape that occurs in nature, a mirroring of things. It occurs in every lake. It was only as I was writing it that it came to fall into that pattern, which sounds really crazy. If you look at that "Eoghan Rua Variations," for example, you know how things are constructed. It's not entirely obvious how it's done, but in that case, I wrote, essentially, nine versions of that little quatrain in Irish.

LR You write them in sonnet form.

PM Yeah, but the first thing I did was write them as quatrains. Then the whole other thing got built up, and it's a very complex structure, too, but it got built up round it. It's what that poem needs, but I'm not going to take that and apply it to something else.

LR Does a poem not need to know its form?

PM It learns as it goes what it needs to be, ideally. That's how I view it. It learns as it comes into being what it is, and what it looks like, if anything.

LR Why do you think your poems are so drawn to the sonnet form?

PM I don't know; I suppose I was reared on it.

LR Traditionally, the sonnet is thought of as a love poem, but it's your default measure.

PM Yeah, it probably is. Well, it was the default measure of many generations. In 1600, it would have been the default measure. Possibly in 1800, it was the default measure. Nowadays, it's not, because people aren't interested in measures at all, for the most part. I am still drawn to writing poems that are pieces of architecture and engineering. It's just the way I am. It's what I was brought up on, really, as well as "The Waste Land." I suppose a lot of my poems combine "The Waste Land," what was happening in that regard, in 1922, and what was happening with the Georgians, at the same time, who were deeply into the received forms.

LR What do you think a sonnet can do in 2016? How has its job changed?

PM In 2016, we're more aware than ever of fracture. We're more aware than ever of "The Waste Land." The world is more a wasteland than it was a hundred years ago, in every sense. But, to go back to our friend Frost, there's something about the duration of the sonnet, and the fact that it takes one idea, or one and a half ideas, and ei-

ther plays with it, or subverts it slightly, tweaks it slightly, twists it slightly, or compounds it slightly, in the case of the Shakespearean sonnet. That's still a very reasonable way of doing business.

LR Do you think, then, that your sonnet sequences are somehow paradoxical?

PM No more paradoxical than they would've been for Shakespeare, or Sydney, or Yeats. That's the other thing about it, it's a fabulous building block in the longer poem, in the sequence. It's a fabulous building block. It's a construction. It's about the way it can be used. It's wonderful standing alone, but as a component, or some version of it as a component, in a longer, bigger structure, it's very robust. ◀

PAUL MULDOON is the author of twelve collections of poetry: including *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing* (2015), *Maggot* (2010), *Horse Latitudes* (2006), *Moy Sand and Gravel* (2002), *Hay* (1998), *The Annals of Chile* (1994), *Madoc: A Mystery* (1990), *Meeting the British* (1987), *Quoof* (1983), *Why Brownlee Left* (1980), *Mules* (1977) and *New Weather* (1973). Muldoon served as Professor of Poetry at Oxford University from 1999 to 2004 and as poetry editor of *The New Yorker* from 2007 to 2017. He has taught at Princeton University since 1987 and currently occupies the Howard G.B. Clark '21 chair in the Humanities.

LANCE RUTKIN is an unpublished poet and a senior at Princeton University.

ZANA PREVITI

Visiting Emily Dickinson's House in Amherst, MA

Without her life were fear, and Paradise a cowardice, except for her inciting voice —Emily Dickinson, on her sister Lavinia

We hear a laughing ghost with hospitable hands who sounds like she is pleased

we are the only visitors to this yellow house today. We have fought in the car but made

our peace on Route 2. When I die, come and find me. I do not want to be buried;

you know that I am scared of suffocation. The ghost goes

outside and waves from the lawn, cheerfully, holds up a kitten and takes its paw gently

and it waves, too, hello.

Your shirt is the color of Emily's

pocketed dress; we are walking this thin floorboard, the chance of being remembered.

Even the most lonely have these gifts

scattered like lost buttons in their homes: this phantom of a little sister

who dusted the stairs, paid the bills, called us downstairs to eat, held

our hand when our mother died and we realized that our mother

had died and our throats seized like stones. What we share,

you and I, is this same worn fear.

Lavinia is eating apples. Lavinia reads over and over while she kneels

in the center of this room still cold though it is May, and though sunlight

reaches everything. At night, you are warm when I am so cold

you push me away. When I die, beloved,

come and find me. Emily Dickinson's sister stays,

bright example, sure solid shade who lights each room's low lamps,

who after we are dead stops here alone, opening

and reopening for the first time the poems, looking up to find

someone to read and marvel, to discover with her

her sister, to lift her from the past like a loaded gun.

ZANA PREVITI'S work has been published in *The New England Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *RHINO Poetry*, *Ninth Letter*, and elsewhere.

Burden

The psychic capital of the world is a little run-down.
Old wooden Florida houses, rain-loud tin roofs
I can knock on a door, ask to be seen. Roadside

chandelier, ragged yellow-green grass. See-through tulips
tilt. All the trees lounge. The one thing I want to know
& the guy in the house can tell me?

That's a cochlear implant, flesh colored circle like a rubber
bandaid, but it goes inside his head, fake flesh into real.
I'm outside your house, I said on my cell.

You're inside my head, he said.
I could ask for a message from the other side. *My son*.
The psychic said, *He died because he was a burden to you*.

When I said, *What?* the question was air, empty-space
for something else. I'd always feared I was
to blame. But never thought he'd leave

because I wasn't ready, a blue-green flutter. I could
reach out even now, hold him lightly as a bird.
Shiny wet paint on the paper before me, bright

blue, purple sky, flowers.
He died because he was a burden to you.
No, I said, *he wasn't*. & *I gave him to good people*.

Don't do that to yourself.
Is he okay? He's perfect, the psychic said.
Is he happy? He's so happy, he's on a soapbox.

Weight of him still in my arms always a cradle.
I hope I didn't do the wrong thing, the psychic said.
I've never told anyone that before.

I walked the street of beat-up houses
to a park that slopes into a bowl, pool of water.
You're not as prosperous as you look, he'd said.

No Trespassing sign. Sat on a bench under a tree.
Birds keep arriving to drink. White tall bending.
At the neck. Maybe they're wintering.

Dark birds in the thick leaves above me.
Bear you, carry you, music, any song you like.
Inside, I am a ship for you. Maeve wants roses

for her seventh birthday. Her dad will light candles,
let me carry the cake of light to her. *Go slow*, he'll say.
I'll decorate it with eight real rose buds & frosting roses.

Someone said apples are like roses, the same family.
Do apples mean anything? The psychic asked. *I see apples
with you & your son*. Why didn't I ask what he saw?

Where is he where is he where is he where is he?
Once a car lighter held over my skin burned me out,
raised white circles on my arms almost invisible

now, one last white moon. I carry you,
that is what a burden is, you carried. Not
a reason to leave, not leaving. I fed him as fast

as I could. What if I'd let him be taken,
I let him be taken. But after he was born—
come here now—see inside I'm made of him.

To see with no worry at all, his body just
inside my body now wrapped in white.
Everything between collapses, light almost orange,

his sleeping eyes closed over my chest. I kissed his face,
the feeling of seeing him always the same
under my clothes. I held him to my skin, my hand.

When I'd taken a language I don't know I heard birds
in the leaves overhead gray sky—small, dark bodies
but they don't land, fly above & between branches

so fast it seems the tree talks to me.

KELLE GROOM's memoir, *I Wore the Ocean in the Shape of a Girl* (Simon & Schuster), was a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers pick, *New York Times Book Review* Editor's Choice selection, a *Library Journal* Best Memoir, Barnes & Noble Best Book of the Month, *O, The Oprah Magazine* selection, and *Oxford American* Editor's Pick. Her four poetry collections are *Spill* (forthcoming from Anhinga Press), *Five Kingdoms* (Anhinga), *Luckily* (Anhinga), and *Underwater City* (University Press of Florida).

JULIETTA SINGH

No Archive Will Restore You

The scholars are scurrying
to make novel declarations
about animals and animacies,
the life of matter, the post-human

We custodians of knowledge
fracking our keen minds
in the bowels of institutions,
stirring up more beautiful worlds

Look at that light—even shadows
of leaves make it known that
no archive will restore you,
no text but those we cannot read

In truth, *archive* always reminds me
of vaginas; the way we talk of things
generative though we keep
feeling fucked

The way we wax queer theory
time and temporality, how your strap-on
is a wish for elsewhere,
a resource we can't mine

When I summon Gramsci
talk of traces, I really mean love—
that strip-teased bitch
that dies in spring

I confess, I am lost in philosophy
bewildered and becoming still
as these lines of force
begin to vanish

JULIETTA SINGH is Assistant Professor of English and Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies at the University of Richmond. She is the author of *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism & Decolonial Entanglements* (Duke University Press, 2017). Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in venues such as *Social Text*, *Women & Performance*, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Plenitude*, and *Prairie Fire*.

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two poems

Half the Time I'm Someone Else

What doesn't begin
 With the unbelievable
 Softness of footprints
 In the wet
 Dirt of hard coming
 Rain
 Will not bring
 What we need—
 The always & everywhere
 Whirling inside
 The fun house
 At the forever
 Fair
 It is not proper
 To tire
 Of nightmares
 In the humid air
 Where afternoon becomes
 The remains
 Of a quickening fit
 Of a loveliness
 Wasp stung & swollen
 There is a gigantic stillness where the red door-
 Way wants to jangle

II.

The other face of the moon
 Is beech, juniper. A hand unseen
 By the other face of the moon
 Is *maybe, maybe not*
 The other face of the moon
 Is gnarled, a necklace of toes
 The other face of the moon
 Is not sure where—
 What to kiss
 The other face of the moon
 Lies its answers
 To everything
 The other face of the moon
 Is a cup of tea
 Smashed on
 A wobbly table
 The other face of the moon
 Always does but maybe
 I'm afraid
 The other face of the moon
 Is never afraid maybe
 That those days will
 Not end

III.

When I look back I see pale
 Faces mouthing
 My name
 A garble that keeps
 Coming always
 I guess it is not
 So surprising
 I get down to
 It when there is
 Nothing else to do
 Inside me & still
 Very little
 Matters outside
 Being able to make
 A fist of breath
 I have to do
 The best I can
 With the shrinking
 Seconds I got

Stowage

There is a devil buried
 Deep in each man & I have
 Named mine *Happy Fun*
 Go Go. It looks at me,
 Just stares & a knitting
 Buzz maps my skin.
 Always, without speaking
 To me a single slashing
 Word, I know what I must
 Do—Top hat, shower of botflies,
 Serve the pale pink beef & fail
 To understand the rules—only
 Hear the calligraphy of leaches
 Oilspilling his eyes. Between
 Orders, I gum vulture bones
 Until they crack, split wide
 Like beseeching hands. The spongy
 Prize of marrow. Buttery sweet
 Blood. I taste as much as I can
 In this kingdom of dead pets
 In the park's tall grass, their raggy
 Wrappings chamberworked,
 Hived, homed, by mason
 Bees. I savor each wondrous
 Sting, each splinter. Pumpkin ash,
 Catalpa—the elephant heart

Plums like hundreds of dark
Fists—limbs bowing dirtward.

Here, the credo is a coffin-deep
Mouth. A guttery song that quarrels

Up from the buckling, potholed
Street. For the sugar drippings,

The once upon a time, I wring
Fragility from day's last light.

Inside me: it's no good anymore.
Inside me: that been & gone, bog-

Clutched breath that choked me
Each time I popped the slick

Dentures from grandma's stroke-
Still maw. To keep it between

The moon, the version of me
Bottomed out in my deep & this me

Right here, each midnight I take
The blasting radio up on

The roof. After sinking into
The bodyheat of the shingles,

I press into me the hi-fi
Plastic & dials Clutch it, until

My hollows lace electric—hum
The endless murmur of strangers

& suddenly I am holding within
Me everything of the world:

Sun-bleached lawn flamingos,
A summer's worth of peach pits

Rattling in a jam jar. But before
I know it, a purple line crazes

The horizon—slowly up painting
The boulevard into the day's full

Wallop. The budding magnolias
Go blue & orange & fever-

White & then a day arrives with
Choked gasping, a fade to black.

Gloved hands that flourish
Like a magician's, fold back a white

Sheet precisely to the bloodless
Inch of skin below my Adam's apple,

The grub-like pallor that I will glow
With after the black box in my guts

Finally says it's time to kneel,
Wrangle a whipping shoelace in

The careening path of a garbage
Truck, the instant the metronomic

Ticking of the bomb in me stills.
The silence loiters, leadens until

Sudden howls shatter me forever
Into sleep. Already, I can feel

That rabid heat coming. A riot
Of mayflies in the streetlight's

Salmon haze. All of that will
Show in its own good time.

The wind gusts tiny thuds
From the rustdown screen

Door. Each second that wells
Around me I am climbing out

Of a bed after a long & terrible
Illness, I am leaning in to kiss

A car wreck, the monster. In me,
It croons—a throating half-

Way between pain & beautiful
Song. All of it is unbearable

But this always is overtime.
A chain of paper swans coils

Out for miles, up the rivering
Scree of the mountain & into

The invisible distance. I refuse
To stop wanting more joy

Than I have been allotted. I will make
Brilliant even a fleabite of blood.

ALEX LEMON is the author of five books: *Mosquito* (Tin House Books, 2006), *Hallelujah Blackout* (Milkweed Editions, 2008), *Fancy Beasts* (Milkweed Editions, 2010), *The Wish Book* (Milkweed Editions, 2014) and *Happy: A Memoir* (Scribner, 2010).

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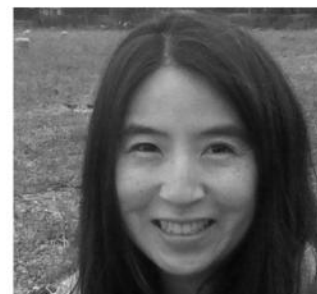
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four poems

Desire

A desire is a root
finding its way
in the water;
a desire is a fin
coursing
through all the extra
of your ways.

A way
is a plaintiff. A point
is all that rests there
seething.
The bow of the cart
and the rutted road
make
their gauge.

Are we now
as before
becoming?

There is no price
for this innocence.
Set on the waterways

a marshy
entrance
where the reedy
plants open
is where a boat
slips through

This is
lotus picking
stolen pastime
and she looks
into the water
after the storm
she looks
and the jade pin
falls

The Subject Vanishes

i

Where we live
in the bomb

the sprout of the bomb
is with us

ii

the sprout of our received
believing—ourselves

built in a seed
from loose ground.

iii

At its edges, elements
corrode our structure's

semi-porous
walls. Fingers dig

in the grime
and the grime becomes

ridges of our skins. So

be it. Of the fruit
we know only what

we are told

by those who see
our faces

iv

Desire
will cut you off—

what you describe
compacted

longing to grip
trash you cannot take

in and where
desire holds, it cuts;

it holds and it cuts

v

remember how

change, this scabbard
was meant to move
slowly

yet nails fly
from the imagination

vi

what moves (from the dark, in the chaos
first) as the crowd flushes

the flesh in its soft rain

vii

it severs
and on this stem

harm
glitters anew

At the Hotel

Where substances form
at the mouth.

Swept for contaminants
there is no cause

arriving at only
the odd-numbered
floors.

Solution:
between two borders, a protocol
of final bubbling
over

and we adjust
in secret: move.

Order
the stubby doctor
to bedside over
her o-ring lips

(the cells sweat
beads
when not fed)

and the quiet

each time she gets well

each time she gets well
we receive
one gift.

Borderlands

i

Replace me.
SPEAK.

ii

Forgive
the broken yoke

strength's
rotten jaws

this dirty wisdom

when I clasped it—

iii

I wanted
to be free
of something—

what did I
do?

iv

The sting
of labor, (laced, unlaced)
strangeness

brewing on

abstraction—the sawing
of wings—the woodwork's ramp

and plastic
escalator—

replace me—
replace my parts

I'm gone

v

there is no wood
in the orchard. There
is no water in the well. Covet
rains and the remaining
centers. We
shift in our places—recover

height:
the chambers—lie
through nights: the string
to draw

a magic circle:
safety

around
this little fear

KATE MONAGHAN is from New York City. A doctoral candidate in Chinese literature at Harvard, she has published poems in *Colorado Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Web Conjunctions*, *The Yale Review*, and elsewhere.

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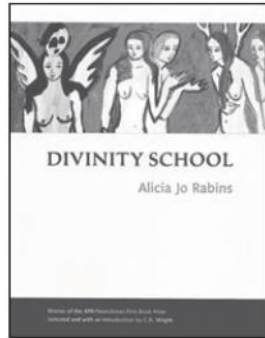
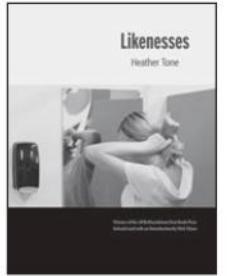
APR

First Editions from Winners of the APR/Honickman First Book Prize

2016 • Heather Tone, *Likenesses*

selected by Nick Flynn

"*Likenesses* is an origin myth, in that it attempts to create the world by naming it. But it's too late in the game to imagine that whatever is named could simply be, without at the same time being—*becoming*—something else. Or many somethings elses. . . . It happens in real time, the time it takes to read them, as one thing transforms, word by word, into another thing. How we are transformed, reading them." —Nick Flynn



2015 • Alicia Jo Rabins, *Divinity School*

selected by C. D. Wright

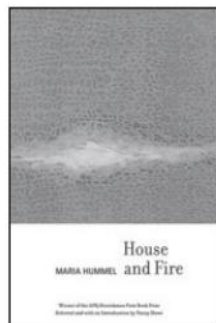
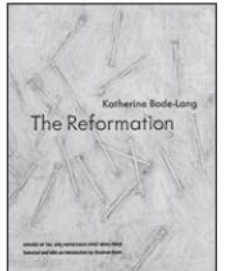
"Alicia Jo Rabins' poems bring together the spiritual, the surrealist, and the erotic. Their wild imagination and fierce passion are aroused by hunger of the soul, and they use poetic intelligence as a desperate hammer to break through the ordinary self, to union, or reunion—with what? The Sufi ghazal, the Zen koan, and the Hassidic parable—those traditions are alive here with transcendental mirth, lots of duende, and lots of sobriety. This beautiful agonizing mess—these poems drag you right into the middle of it." —Tony Hoagland

2014 • Katherine Bode-Lang, *The Reformation*

selected by Stephen Dunn

Katherine Bode-Lang's fierce and lyrical poems undertake the reformation of family mythology, place, and loves that each life requires to become its own.

"One of the classic tricks of actors is when you want to get the attention of your audience, you lower, not raise, your voice. Katherine Bode-Lang's work is not a trick—her lowered voice kept attracting me." —Stephen Dunn



2013 • Maria Hummel, *House and Fire*

selected by Fanny Howe

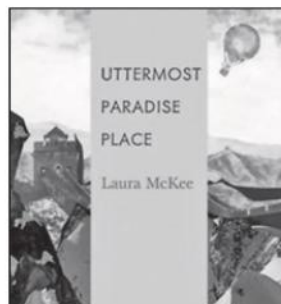
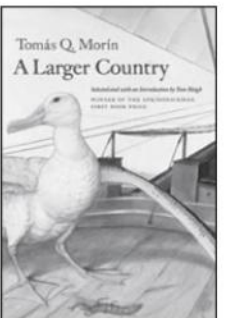
"These poems come from a deep well of experience that is translated, right in front of us, into hard-won craft and exacting lyricism. At one level, this book registers the story of a beloved child's illness. But at a deeper level, these poems are a narrative of language itself: of its vigil, its journey, its ability—even in dark times—to shelter the frailty of the body with its own radiant strengths. This is a superb and memorable collection." —Eavan Boland

2012 • Tomás Q. Morín, *A Larger Country*

selected by Tom Sleight

"Tomás Q. Morín invokes his heroic literary forebears—Czesław Miłosz, Isaak Babel, Miklós Radnóti, amongst others—in his energetic and moving book of fantasias and elegies, alert to history, rich with memory, which is, as he tells us, 'a larger country.' I welcome this 'pageantry of the interior,' this memorable first book." —Edward Hirsch

"In Tomás Q. Morín's distinctive and fully achieved book, the qualities of imagination and urgency inspire and amplify one another." —Robert Pinsky



2009 • Laura McKee, *Uttermost Paradise Place*

selected by Claudia Keelan

"Laura McKee creates a poetics of call and response, but not in the traditional sense, as in poet to reader, chorus leader to singers, etc. These poems call to each other, syllable by syllable, and they are so pleased with their circuitry of sound and sense that readers—if they just give themselves away to the pleasure of being exactly nowhere but in the unscripted place all authentic poetry provides—will experience the paradise the book proposes." —Claudia Keelan

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Cataclysmic Variable System

My friends unbalanced
on the precarious edge

myself precarious
unbalanced
a compressed system

miles of blood
I carry within me everywhere

the phantom scent of orange groves
everywhere

following me even though
only the pictures on the phone

in my pocket
identify me as a unique location

different from the millions of other center points
all the alive citizens

only my case sensitive alphanumeric
brings the monster to life

marks me as a scene
for thoughts & affections

I carry so many ghosts inside me
warm clouds exhaled

into the night of this century
vanished moments

from within the haunted terrain
I have preserved inside my borders

my feelings reduced to binary
by the times that I live in

simple on or off
the rough & gorgeous landscape

obliterated
smoothed over & resulting in

extreme personal comfort safe unity
which is a lack of curious responses

the collapse of something distinct
something irreproducible

I think of myself
as a quiet blue object

possessing inexplicable variability—
my quiescent periods

followed by destructive upheaval—
I prefer to break down things

structures I know won't last
all of us prefer to inhabit a framework

that can be left behind
our story is only what we tell ourselves

& not the real consequence
of our actions on this field

not actual energy transferred
nothing actually lost

nothing actually lost because we are safe
circling a distant star

I write today's electronic letter to Matt
just language

trying to mimic the dance
of particles a collision

& I think about dying
I kiss Jenny for no reason

without provocation
& I feel the end

of my atoms I see my daughter
in a crowd of strangers

& she waves to me with so much death
in that distance I see

my other daughter in pictures
on my computer—

always in pictures
always the computer—

& I'm imagining the end
even as it happens

so I let that music my own difficult hum
fill the house

disrupt the moments
as they happen

the leaves growing back
into themselves

returned from their long season
away

the birds coming back
from everywhere they went.

NATE PRITTS (natepritts.com) is the author of eight books of poetry, including the forthcoming *Decoherence*, which won the 42 Miles Press Poetry Award. He is also the Director and Founding Editor of H_NGM_N Books (b. 2001), an independent publishing house that started as a mimeograph 'zine. He lives in the Finger Lakes region of New York state.

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Self-Deliverance by Line

Death Meditation in Four of Lucie Brock-Broido's Poems

IN A *NEW YORK TIMES* EDITORIAL, ARTHUR Brooks mentions the Buddhist meditation practice of contemplating photos of corpses, with the partial goal of pulling the viewer into the present moment—there might not be many more of them. For the rest of the results of that meditation, he refers to “existential goals,” and another Arthur, Kleinman, shares what might illuminate that phrase in *Culture and Depression*: the lay meditator, taking up this practice that is part of asuba bhavana, revulsion meditation, uses his or her imagination alone, instead of looking at an image. The meditation then has that feature of sitting apart from the dead body, and from embodiment, finding a space in which to come unconfined from it—not “this will one day be me,” then, but “I won’t always be this.”

That sense of transcendental connection gets brought out by Jahan Ramazani’s explication of Heaney’s bog poems, in *Poetry of Mourning*. He shows how they’re elegiac and ekphrastic, but also how looking at the mummies sparks more in the speaker than only mortal awareness and a push to make the visual verbal; he “depends upon” the body of the bog queen “to bear his imaginings.” Those imaginings enter different spheres, with the “wet nest” of the hair gesturing toward nature, the “skull-ware” connotating labor, and the two coming together as he names the brain “jar of spawn.” The corpse doesn’t just refer back to the speaker’s corpse-to-be or to the story of its burial; it points toward a wider world that starts toward the otherworldly, with the “black glacier” of the sash. Not only contemplating the reality of the dead body, but aiming his imagination at it, he finds somewhat unusual associations.

Maybe following his lead, but certainly into new territory, Lucie Brock-Broido has written poems involving death imagery in at least three of her books, finding connections between the lifeless body and the world, or worlds, outside of it that engage imagination, emotion and more. The first two poems in *The Master Letters*, “Carrowmore” and “Also, None Among Us Has Seen God,” offer images of death—both, actually, of death by fire. The opening poem, after details of landscape and the speaker’s experience there, diverges into, first, a split of the speaker into two—“Wherever I went I came with me”—then that second self turned into third person—“She buried her bone barrett in the ground’s woolly shaft”—followed by the sacrificial victim, like Heaney’s queen but identified with fire and not peat—“the burnt other who went first.”

The body gets a little context from the notes, identifying Carrowmore as the megalithic Irish cemetery near Sligo (not far from Yeats’ grave, maybe not coincidentally), but not much, and, within these lines, has an electric effect. There’s no attempt at explanation, or anything that might suppress the questions that it, or she, whichever the other is, raises. Why the fire? Why the burial there? What broader connections between that catastrophe, which it must have been, and the speaker’s divided “I”? It doesn’t just raise a question; it destabilizes what’s come before and makes what follows float in the suspense of that withheld explanation, image and proclamation powerfully without roots: “My thick braid, my ornament—/

my belonging I / Remember how cold I will be.” The fragmented argument there, the sense of an epiphany that can’t quite be interpreted, get charged with urgency by the body in the couplet above. So the meditative space of the whole poem, and the corpse at the pivot point of it, head away from summary and into somewhere new.

All of that gets followed up by fire and the dying, as it happens, in “Also, None Among Us Has Seen God,” with “the monk who set himself ablaze,” and whose death, even before the poem, is history—he’s the monk made famous by self-immolation, and more by the photograph of it, during the Vietnam War. Like in the meditation mentioned by Kleinman, she imagines more than one sense, not only the sight but “the sweetest smell of him,” so the death gets especially memorable and unsettling. The poem then turns abruptly away from him to another time and the image of another corpse—a prehistoric horse “Curled on his runic side, in the shape of an O, broken.”

The break that the speaker sees in the horse-as-letter leads into another break, and more of them, a fragmentary litany of images that seem faintly related by theme, but free from coherence—“blouse-white,” “chamois night- / Sweat,” “bone-red rag.” They float in their closeness to the horse corpse and, more, the death by fire that ghosts the whole poem, begun above and ended as the poem ends, with this last line: “That was the best moment of his life. The burning down.” The “down,” the directional word, invites imagining the body going where all bodies go. But the things linked with it, like with the other of “Carrowmore,” resist any resolution, an array of associations to be imagined, alive in memory.

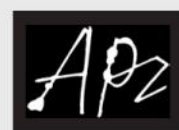
While that pair of bodies opens her second book, one closes her third—“Self-Deliverance by Lion,” the last poem of *Trouble in Mind*, depicts a victim of a lion attack post-mortem, again with those images and associations that carry awareness in wildly divergent directions. Her hair, the victim’s, “was a long damp chestnut / River-pelt”; blood from some of the wounds are “lilac repetitions in her cotton dress,” rendered jarringly part of a pattern instead of that random savagery that wounds from an animal attack might seem. Then there are the marks not made by lion, but frost, the body “crewelled” with them—a homophonic nod to the cruel death, but also an association with another era, when that kind of embroidery would have been done. Like the monk, this body gets a scent, but one that goes in a wilder direction—“redolent / As the retractile dewclaw on a lion’s forepaw.” The lion’s anatomy gets that special attention, and the “dew” in it brings in another nature connotation all its own. Meditating on that violent scene means going beyond it, and so the self-deliverance in the title takes on a meaning that may stand for the work of all of these poems, mortal but more—a self, or an awareness, not defined by the body.

With “Freedom of Speech,” in *Stay, Illusion*, Brock-Broido gets the most explicit and specific in depicting a cadaver, and also the most wild and even transcendental in the connections drawn from it. The medically, clinically worded “thoracic cavity” holds “ten thousand rags of music”—“rag” with its musical resonance, that means it

can’t even be seen. The body, when shown as a whole, is “in its drawer of / old-world harrowing,” so the techy environment of the autopsy breaks away for another era to emerge, with another sort of art—the one of breaking ground, the harrow a tool that the ghost of Hamlet Sr. made transcendental when he applied it, or said it could be applied, to the soul. The mouth, that she could have described as some form of hole, also gets an unsettlingly cosmic word applied to it: “globe.” Imagining a mouth as a globe means trying to merge two images that won’t quite go, and so make an interesting dissonance, a sense of some other connection. After those and other parts, she puts the heart as “A mob of hoofprints where the skittish / colts first learned to stand,” heading by way of imagination into a different moment, different setting, even different storyline. The mob, like those thousand rags, and like one lung’s “swarm of massive / sentimentia,” show the body as a point of departure.

Those four poems don’t engage imagination by stamping it valid as is, or inviting it in meditation to a steady gaze at an inner picture that hopefully won’t change; they challenge it, showing things that revolt in both senses of the word, that invite reflections that they then disrupt by heading in dissonant directions, drawing enormous and ethereal realizations into the same space. The bodies themselves don’t serve as constants, don’t give mortality a gravity or hint at heaven in that way of even contemporary elegies; they charge the poems’ atmospheres, and, wildly but fittingly, lots of things grow from them, to wonder at and remember, never to resolve. ◀

CHAD PARMENTER’S chapbook *Weston’s Unsent Letters to Modotti* won Tupelo Press’s Snowbound Chapbook Contest and was published in 2015. He received his PhD from the University of Missouri.



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Aldous Huxley on his deathbed, unable to speak,
writes on a white pad to Evelyn, his wife, the note:

“100 micrograms mescaline, IV.”

She nods and brings it back in an hour.

I tell this story several times to Kath, until I am sure she gets my point.

Walking in Jackson Park, I find a great two-hundred-year-old oak,
extending its huge dark limbs in all directions, like an antler or a chandelier.

I stand and stare at it, as at a letter in an alphabet I have forgotten.

But I am a creature who still has not learned to read,
not even to worship, not even how to live with honesty.

The nurse's aide says, “Did we have a bowel movement, today, Mr. Mandela?”
and he looks at her with so much tolerance and calm,
it is like the sea looking back at the land.

In the cancer clinic waiting room, the patients are mostly quiet.
Sometimes they talk about the football game,
or the weather predicted for tomorrow.

Couture

If by mink

coat you mean

a soft, warm

garment

made from

the lives of

many other

creatures,

then, yeah, sure,

I guess you

could say I'm

wearing a

mink coat.

TONY HOAGLAND'S sixth book of poems, *Priest Turned Therapist Treats Fear of God*, will be issued by Graywolf Press in 2018. He teaches at the University of Houston and is working on a craft book about poetry, called *Five Powers, Forty Lessons*. He has also published two collections of craft essays about poetry, *Real Sofistakashun* and *Twenty Poems That Could Save America*.

ROSS WHITE

two poems

I Know What Love Is

What if the angels,
with their conch-shaped trumpets,
their dainty bows and arrows,
don't really give a shit about us?
What if they gather in heavenly circles
at the mouth of the clouds
to stare down on field mice,
on ferrets, on millipedes?
We think angels take human shape
because our ancestors painted them that way,
but those were the same ancestors
who toiled through the Dark Ages,
who took a long damn time to discern
that the heart wasn't the seat of intelligence.
I'd say they suffered at times
from a lack of imagination.
Sure, they fashioned rocks into the tips of spears,
sure, they managed some empires,
and sure, they figured out
which knotweeds would dye the wool,
which berries would pigment the oils.
Make, if you want, a case for human ingenuity,
but I vote against us
when it comes to knowledge of the Divine.
In Chronicles, God sends an angel
to slaughter the Assyrian army.
In Numbers, He opens chasms
to swallow up the defiant,
He burns with holy fire those gathered in worship,
He sets a plague on fourteen thousand.
Imagine writing those words, thinking,
“Yes, this is the God who loves me.”
I don't think He much cares about us.

I think the next tornado, the next tsunami,
the next antibiotic-resistant strain
will be whimsy and afterthought.
I think He's the God of Rats,
the God of Ticks, surrounded
in heaven by legions of slim-thoraxed angels
flapping swallowtail wings, spitting venom
into each other's many-prismed eyes.
I think He's created the virus in his own image,
and He loves the virus enough
to create an endlessly adaptable food source for it
that also serves as means of conveyance.

The Picture of Perfect Health

your cherries your probiotics my amygdala my anxieties
your scenic route your yoga your acai berries blended into wheat germ
your health care provider's premium coverage with wellness check my hangnails
my picking at scabs your papaya facial peel my chicken franks in the microwave
your sunscreen your on-the-go flossers your P90X my beta blockers
your live forever my liver my belief you will outlive me my love of the idea
that you will outlive me my love of you my love I am scared
of growing old without you
though what chance of that your trainer your nutritionist your compression clothing
your stable heart rate your kickboxing your Bollywood dance class on Thursday
your sensible responses to Rorschach test blots your Rachmaninoff
your tan lines your plum-scented conditioner your glee at seeing a playground slide

ROSS WHITE is the author of two chapbooks, *How We Came Upon the Colony* (Unicorn Press, 2014) and *The Polite Society* (Unicorn Press, 2017). With Matthew Olzmann, he edited *Another & Another: An Anthology from the Grind Daily Writing Series* (Bull City Press, 2012). His work has appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *Best New Poets 2012*, *New England Review*, *Poetry Daily*, and *The Southern Review*, among others. He teaches creative writing at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics.

two poems

Why Not Say

What happened. This terrible breaking, this blow. Then slow
the dogwood strewn like tissue along the black road.
No the busy pollinators the breeze in the pine shadows
in the aftermath where I drove back there. And two bones
of smoke lifting ahead along the shoulder in the high new
green weed-bank running beside the asphalt. No
I had come from my father. Nothing more common nothing more
than such. I could not breathe for the longest time
over and again. There was something deadly, she said, in it.
Of the genus *buteo*, as *b. harlani*, as Harlan's red-tail.
Blocky in shape, goes the book, blood or brick red but white,
I am sure underneath, white along its wing, which was not smoke
but rising now one bird. I was coming back and couldn't breathe
and him bruised torn bedridden tubed taken to the brink
by his body and carried aloft. There he had fallen.
This is what happened said the medical team. Fallen:
and ripped aortal stenosis in the process of their repair.
No the white bird strained, as trying to lift, to a *slight*
dihedral, the deepest deliberate wing beats, and barely
above the snow-white-tipped grasses and the shoulder
until I thought I would hit it. It happened or
it did not, in the way of my thinking. And now why:
I saw. Two lengths of snake helical and alive in the talons
heavy there, writhing, so the big bird strained for the length
of time, she said, it takes. Like the oiled inner organs
of a live thing heaving in shreds, the dogwoods
the doctors, and did I say the horrible winds all before.
Now the air after storm. The old road empty. Swept white
by blossoms by headlights, my father hovering still:
why it flew so close, why it was so terribly slow.
I think I hoped it would tear me to pieces. Lift me,
of my genus *helpless*, as *wretched*. And drop me away.
I turned back to the animal. No it turned its back to me.

Why Not Say

What happened. We took his walker. The shallows. The heat.
The matted grasses and river willows re-greening
down the mud-banks. From the new bridge the old bridge.
I helped him out of the car. Left him there to park the car
at the broken gate going to the fallow fields, the car there,
where we had walked another life the plowed furrows
picking up arrowheads. Funnels of swallows in a swirl up
from the trestle beneath us and many low limbs—
what a racket, he said, above us, below us the old bridge
footer of concrete, twisted ironworks, some shadows there.
What happened. He couldn't recall. In the night
getting a box of pictures to hold on to. So he fell. So
we threw a few rocks. The high water low water again.
Backwash and foam in the flood pools—no fault,
she said, there never is, the simple white gravel
scattered on the new bridge surface and this time
he didn't fall. We went to the other side. What
about that, he said. He threw a rock. The permanent
havoc of little mistakes. A hip full of pins and
surgery scars. The hit-spit of a bluegill the cotton-
wood seeds small branches greening the old shoe eddying swallows
the heat. The shallows. And the slow wash of days—

DAVID BAKER is the author of thirteen books, most recently *Scavenger Loop* (W. W. Norton, 2015). He is currently a Professor of English and the Thomas B. Fordham Chair of Creative Writing at Denison University, where he serves as poetry editor of *The Kenyon Review*.



TYREE DAYE AWARDED 2017 APR/HONICKMAN
First Book Prize

The American Poetry Review is happy to announce that Tyree Daye has been awarded the 2017 APR/Honickman First Book Prize for his manuscript *River Hymns*, chosen by this year's guest judge, Gabrielle Calvocoressi. The book will be published in September 2017 and will be distributed by Copper Canyon Press through Consortium.

TYREE DAYE is from Youngsville, North Carolina. He attends the North Carolina State University MFA program in poetry. His poems have been published in *Prairie Schooner*, *Nashville Review*, *Four Way Review* and are forthcoming in *Ploughshares*. He was awarded the Amy Clampitt Residency for 2018 and The Glenna Luschei Prairie Schooner Award in the Fall 2015 issue. He is a Cave Canem fellow.

two poems

Quetzal

The Federales may have broken into the apartment and killed five people because two were journalists.

Or, the government of Mexico may have hired thugs to break into an apartment and kill five people including two journalists. On July 31.

Or, before I wrote any of these lines, the governor of Veracruz, Javier Duarte, may have requested someone to contact ex-police to break into an apartment and kill five people, two of whom were journalists.

That the murders took place is irrefutable. That it was not a robbery is certain.

A row of pigeons squats on a rail outside the window. Each one Lazarus bearing a new weight that is lighter than before.

My cat watches a spider cross the wall. She waits. We are more than two thousand six hundred miles from Mexico City.

Tonight the police stop a car and question the driver.

The red and white lights scroll an emergency across my living room wall.

Tonight, everything is very close by. A nightjar and a moth.

I am writing this: bodies have been uncovered in a pit—how can anyone call it a grave when there are no markers or means of memorial

the name of each person, something so no one is lost, instead a pit like what is dug for a latrine, for trash this is the meaning

of mass graves, a warning that you are not to be found—

while I have been reading an interview with a poet discussing the utility of poetry, the old claim

that poetry useless, the longing that it was otherwise, useful, a mending hammer.

But in this world, what is meant by useful—the digging of a latrine or wiring a chair for torture, the handy and instructional?

In describing what is useful being alive is forgotten.

What is useful for Javier Duarte is to shake the tree and let the rotten journalists fall out—to paraphrase him. Duarte uses a metaphor to turn

journalists into rotting fruit. And to act with impunity. Two weeks before, in the Waller County jail in Texas, Sandra Bland died at the hands of her jailers.

That is certain. They may have never touched her, but she died at their hands.

That nothing will come of it is likely, that this happens is certain. This is what

has been called acting with impunity, to assume authority, or the right of naming the time and place of death without regard, without regard.

Order is useful.

Something startles the pigeons. They lift into flight at once, like hands lifting from the table into the air at the report.

To act with impunity is to almost touch the other as what is done is done. To feel her body's cone of heat and to go through with draping the noose over her head.

Two days ago, I finished reading Roberto Bolaño's *Amuleto*, in translation *Amulet*, where the narrator, the mother of Mexican poetry as she names herself,

envisions a crowd, though that word is far too lacking, and mass implies, as Bolaño's narrator states, a unity of purpose

or the sense of usefulness, walking towards the abyss while on a barren tree a sparrow and a quetzal watch

before disappearing from the icy mountainside. There is always the word, what remains

not as something, a hoe or shovel, electrical wires or pistol, useful, but prophetic, a key that is not

a key that opens the icy mountainside to what is to come but may not come, such as intercession

a thin sheet of words slipped on the tongue

the sky rubbing against the mountains' icy fields

the dead finally telling their own stories without fear

who pulled the noose around her neck, who pulled the trigger who broke her open

broken open, like pomegranates, the sky, like our bodies. Our bodies.

Our bodies, I write with the pretense of knowing, the trepidation of distance.

—for Francisco Goldman

Light You Up

"I will light you up." Brian Encinia, the state trooper arresting Sandra Bland on July 10, 2015. Though he did not technically kill her, he sentenced her to her death, what he said sent her into the Waller County jail, where she was executed. The autopsy said suicide by hanging, and claimed she had said as she was booked that she had attempted suicide before. They said she hung herself with a white plastic trash can liner. They said she seemed "normal" so they left the bag and waste can in her cell. Was this neglect or a signal of what was expected to happen: she would not get out alive. A preparation for removal. There is no other way to say this, is there? "I am going to drag you out" Encinia said. "I will light you up," threatening her with his Taser. He had already condemned her, wrist bands cinched.

—"light you up"—*light you up* is what some men say to women; it is said routinely when police threaten with pepper-spray; it is what has been said

on bombing sorties; it is said before something, or someone, is set afire and burnt: Sam Hose (on April 23, 1899 in Coweta, Georgia), Jesse Washington (on May 15, 1916 in Waco, Texas), McKinley Curry, Johnny Cornish and Mose Jones (May 4, 1922 in Kirven, Texas), or James Irwin (on February 2, 1930 in Ocilla, Georgia).

What are the dreams of arsonists when the body is to be the fuel? What is left to burn? To burn with hate—to arson the bodies of others is to burn is to lay waste to destroy.

[H. tells me that he doesn't know why he doesn't wake up angry every morning. Every time he searches archived newspapers for his past, he finds instead news of lynching and burning. There are no neutral histories.

(Invisible, I am part of this writing, these burnt letters, these ashes, all through these histories. How to locate the languages of complicity.)

When the only stories are those that are written, we must ask the writer why those? Why those and only those in those words which belong to whom?]

Or is it the prelude to sentencing, and if so, what ignites it? A child training his magnifying glass on the edge of a dry leaf—and not just a dry leaf, but a dry leaf in August, perhaps a maple leaf pressed from the previous fall. He watches it slowly catch, a bit of smoke, incense. But who gave him the magnifying glass, its lens no bigger than the orbit of the eye.

It begins somewhere. Who thinks of burning bodies, burning men still living. To gather in a town square, and set a man on fire. To set a town on fire and drive its residents out. To turn cities to ash or send those in them to crematoriums. Or again. Or watching from a gunship above the desert men fleeing—like ants, that's what they say, that's what we say, looking down as our plane lifts off—. The men are running, some have cameras, some are children. "Light 'em all up": July 12, 2007, Reuters staff photographer Namir Noor-Eldeen, 22, and driver Saeed Chmagh, 40, and nine others shot from the air by an Apache helicopter strike in East Baghdad: *the others followed the gaze, and looked up, too. The gunner fired.*

There is a connection, each death a connection: who gives the order to engage. Who has the authority to kill. How to enunciate the word, to begin what cannot be rewound. Or to enunciate one's own dying, *I can't breathe*. In the county jail in El Paso, 2012, Sargent James Brown struggled to say: "I can't breathe! Dude, I can't breathe! Help me! Help me! Help! I can't breathe! I'm choking on my blood! Help me! I'm choking on my blood! I'm choking on my blood! I'm choking on my blood!" As guards swarmed over him, in flak jackets and hard black helmets.

What does it mean to watch this beating and injection of a man with a sedative, a black man, and watch him slip out of consciousness, and be dragged to his cell. I am watching this again, and I wonder what is happening to me. I am alone in front of my computer watching this. It has already happened. It has happened and I have watched it. Thousands gathered, thousands lynched Sam Hose. Some traveled all day to reach the lynching site in time, some tore bits of skin from his body, his genitals from his body. Postcards of the lynching circulated afterwards, his knuckles were put on display on a grocer's counter.

These are the names. Only a few of the names. Each connects to other names, so many these pages would go dark.

[I watch the need to control bodies, the need to control black bodies. There are emergencies and the need is to discipline emergencies, to break down the body's resistance. To render them. I am watching this.

As I write this, I turn to myself where I watch the summer's late night closing around me, the house quietening. What a gift to be able to reflect, to write without fear or irony, to not even think of the need to count the blessing of a faucet's steady leak, the wind-struck trees at the dark window, the yellow light of the kitchen. Hope is a narcotic.]

To break the body.

[I am writing this and not something else—]

[I learn this morning the private prison corporation GEO not only owns the prisons and facilities for holding against their will asylum seekers, usually women and children, but also the ankle shackles used for electronic monitoring outside of prison. The prison industry lobby is one of the strongest, as I write this. (The D.A. wants to assure us that Sandra Bland was alive when her mug shot was taken.) To pay shareholders prisons must remain at ninety percent capacity.]

In the videos, the streets, tree-lined, light traffic, seem all the same. The police always seem to be working on the bodies of those taken from the car, whoever is filming is too far off to focus on what precisely is being done as the police bend over Sandra Bland, taken out of reach of help. The street looks like streets I drive down, and I wonder if I have driven past a police car, lights rotating mindlessly, nosing a white or maroon car from behind. Have I seen but not noticed the police working on someone beyond the sidewalk sheltered by trees. There is no place to pull over, and I am in a hurry.

She hung herself. They were running. He resisted. He was walking at night.

There are so many reasons. None of them are true, or they are half-truths that decay if we watch them, examine their seams and elisions. But we drive by, those of us who drive fearlessly, as invisible as light, the windows tight, the air-conditioning on, the night's traffic like so many moons and stars passing us into a deepening dream, the trees great and shadowing the roads from the heavens. We have the clearance, the documents, the assurance to pass, to drive by, to be on our way. To leave behind.

JAMES McCORKLE is the author of two collections of poetry: *Evidences* (the 2003 recipient of the APR/Honickman First Book Prize) and *The Subtle Bodies* (Etruscan, 2014). He co-directs the Africana Studies Program at Hobart and William Smith Colleges. These poems are from a new manuscript, *Manifest*.

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From the Maternal to the Mechanical

The Struggle Against Sentiment in Contemporary American Motherhood Poetry

SENTIMENTALITY IS BAD. WE ALL KNOW THIS.

By 1795, Friedrich Schiller had declared the sentimental poet as “infinitely inferior” to the naïve poet, who was founded on reality and truth.¹ Victor Strandberg defined the term by saying, “The word sentimentality implies two particular transgressions against the modern sensibility: emotional excess and falsification of reality.”² “A sentimentalist,” Oscar Wilde wrote, “is one who desires to have the luxury of an emotion without paying for it.”³ Arthur Saltzman says of the sentimental poem, “It is poetry of the bland pronouncement and the unrealized assertion . . . It is poetry that treats nuance and tension as so much tundra to be cleared, so as not to obscure common sight, common sense. Worst of all, it is poetry purged of necessity, of urgency.”⁴

The sense of sentimentality as a device of falsehood persists. In addition, the definition of what makes literature “sentimental” seems to have expanded to include two complementary elements: predictability and the expression of predominantly positive emotion. One poetry textbook, first published in 1956, says this:

If a poem is to have true excellence . . . it must exact a fresh response . . . not be merely imitative of previous literature nor appeal to stock, preestablished ways of thinking and feeling . . . A sentimental person is gushy, stirred to tears by trivial or inappropriate causes . . . Sentimental literature . . . depends on trite and well-tried formulas for exciting emotion; it revels in . . . mother love, and the pitter patter of little feet.⁵

Suzanne Clark, in *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word*, says of the sentimental poem that the “. . . phrasing itself is predictable. There is both extreme conventionality and extreme fragmentation. All the resources of the page are summoned to heighten . . . the often declared insufficiency of words to express the feeling described.”⁶ Saltzman also equates sentimentality with a familiarity, a lack of risk, a predictability, saying that the sentimental poet “serves expectation with steadfast devotion,” creating a “predictable blur” and that “students are . . . privileging familiarity over surprise.”⁷ He then goes further, saying:

Basically the problem is that students tend to be passionate according to formula, the result being that they are loath to be susceptible or to risk reactions along any but the most established paths. Because such fundamentalism—call it foaming on cue from the same faucet—is really a caricature of piety, it ends up denying them the range that living with poetry should occasion.

Mary Karr reinforces this expanded definition of sentimentality in “How to Read ‘The Waste Land’ So It Alters Your Soul”: “The terms of such poems are presumed to be agreed upon by the culture at large, so that from the first line you can easily predict the last and most moves in between. Sentimentalism is simply emotion that hasn’t been argued for or proven to a reader, only gestured to.”⁸

Rick Anthony Furtak is even able to clearly define the dangers of sentimentality:

By making a habit of seeking certain emotions for their own sake without concern for justification, we end up numb to the conditions of justification and incapable of responding to new situations that *should* provoke emotion. In other words, if we cultivate tender emotion as a kind of delicacy while disregarding what it is *about*, we cut ourselves off from the sensitive experience that was the initial condition of any emotion at all.⁹

And yet we have emotion. Strong emotion. Emotion that drives us to write. What is to be done?

The poetry of motherhood provides a particularly vivid example of this dilemma, showcasing the ways that a genre must evolve in order to abide by cultural or literary aesthetics. Motherhood is a landscape fraught with sentiment. How can a poet deal with a subject so rich in sentiment while being sure to avoid the literary traps sentimentality creates?

In her essay “Baby Poetics,” poet Joy Katz addresses one of the dominant challenges in writing poems of motherhood: “A baby activates a set of cultural expectations that operates, in a poem, like subliminal advertising. For instance, babies are supposed to be wondrous. The fact that many people find them so, and that I am expected . . . to find them so, pressures the poem.”¹⁰

The American motherhood poem has, since its birth, developed as a showcase of excessive sentiment about the role of both mother and child. Anne Bradstreet says of her role in “In Reference to her Children, 23 June 1659,” “I nurst them up with pain and care, / No cost nor labor did I spare.”¹¹ In 1910, Sophie Jewett referred to a child as “. . . a wild, sweet bird / Who sheltered at the heart of me” in her poem “To a Child.”¹² Though both of these poems are in agreement with a cultural sense of what motherhood should entail and what mothers should feel, as works of art they are in danger of being considered histrionic and artificial.

Sharon Olds is one poet who continues this tradition of sentimentality when writing of the maternal experience. In “Exclusive,” her daughter’s skin is described as “biscuit-gold skin, glazed [. . .] like the surface of a biscuit; / the serious knotted twine of your hair.”¹³ In “Rite of Passage,” she says, “My son, / freckles like specks of nutmeg on his cheeks, / chest narrow as a balsa keel of a / model boat, long hands / cool and thin as the day they guided him / out of me . . .”¹⁴ comparing his freckles to nutmeg, a spice romanticized through its use in apple pies and other desserts, and his chest to a balsa keel, with its clean beauty, shapeliness, and flawless balance. In “The Moments the Two Worlds Meet” she says of a baby, “the arms, / bent like a crab’s cloud-muscle legs, the / thighs packed plums in heavy syrup” and describes the moment of birth as the “center of life.”¹⁵ The bending of the arms as a crab’s legs bend is perhaps an accurate description, but the thinking of a baby’s legs in the experience of birth as something sugary and sweet and delicious, giving pleasure in an event so painful that it is considered the very measure of pain, as something syrupy and plum-shaped, idealizes this situation. “Look-

ing at Them Asleep” describes the physical beauty of her two sleeping children, and ends with the extreme sentiment, “oh my Lord how I / know these two. When love comes to me and says / What do you know, I say This girl, this boy.”¹⁶ And in “First Weeks,” Olds says of her daughter, “When she smiled at me, / delicate rictus like a birth-pain coming, / I fell in love, I became human.”¹⁷ The speaker in Olds’ poem was not even human until her daughter made her so.

America’s contemporary poets are now in a position where they must explore ways of writing about motherhood that can defy sentimentality and resist the cultural pressure to present motherhood mainly as a source of happiness. Some writers have chosen to respond to these challenges by making use of realism. Rachel Zucker’s book, *Museum of Accidents*, creates an almost photographic rendering of the daily life of the mother. In the poem “Paying Down the Debt: Happiness,” Zucker reproduces the litany of responses to the odd and minor questions children of a certain age put forth constantly, and is able to suggest the degree of mind-numbing energy required to simply interact and satisfy these children:

blueberries are blue but they’re blue naturally, no I don’t have blueberries because I didn’t go to the grocery store and anyway they’re not in season now, “in season” means that fruits and vegetables grow at certain times of year and now it’s March almost no berries grow this time of year, no I don’t have strawberries, no yogurt doesn’t have a season, look I’m going to go make dinner now, noodles, because that’s what we have because I didn’t go to the grocery store because I was writing.

Later in the same poem, she grieves, “*The Muppet Show* is too singy. *The Jungle Book* is too quiet. *The Lion King* is too / loudly. The Super Friends are so boring. *Star Wars* is too fighty. He will not let / me. Sleep. Please, please, please, please.”¹⁸

Other poets have decided to defend sentiment itself. Joy Katz, writing in *Pleiades*, makes the claim that “Sentiment is sincere.”¹⁹ She introduces a series of published essays on sentiment by saying, “Once upon a time, a long time ago, poets didn’t fear Feeling . . . and ‘sentimental’ was not a pejorative but a compliment.”²⁰ Sarah Vap claims, “as a woman if I speak about pregnancy and babies, I certainly risk being termed sentimental” even as she clarifies, “I have, for several years, found myself defending sentimentality’s presence and legitimacy in poetry . . . What might be termed ‘sentimental’—those subjects, feelings, scenarios—are also the exact reason why I write and read poetry.”²¹ Rachel Zucker says, “I wanted to write experience in a way that felt accurate. I viewed sentimentality as the antithesis of accuracy.”²²

But the evolution away from this more traditional, more cliché treatment of motherhood is an interesting one. We can cite Plath as one of its pioneers. Plath was one of the first American poets to make use of the mechanical and objectified while exploring the loss of maternal identity. The conflict and struggle come clear in poems like “Morning Song” and “Brasilia.” “Morning Song” is perhaps Plath’s most well-known motherhood poem. Plath says in the poem, “We stand round blankly

as walls. // I'm no more your mother / Than the cloud that distills a mirror to reflect its own slow / Effacement at the wind's hand."²³ These lines express distance from emotion, from self, from child. The machine-like response of "blankness" suggests that her emotional state is as non-human, as abstract and unreal, as unsolid and ethereal and distant as a cloud in wind. When Plath says, "I stumble from bed, cow-heavy and floral / In my Victorian nightgown,"²⁴ she speaks of the fact that the maternal body, having been usurped, is unfamiliar, and difficult to pilot. She portrays it as heavy, unattractive, strange, less desirable, not something she wants to be inside, as well as something non-human, bovine in nature.

"Brasilia" is another of Plath's motherhood poems. With the lines "And my baby a nail / Driven, driven in. / He shrieks in his grease // Bones nosing for distance. / And I, nearly extinct,"²⁵ Plath speaks of the baby as a sharp and painful object, one that creates such a noise that the self of the speaker-mother is almost destroyed. The baby is large, overwhelming, machine-like in his "grease," moving forward in a mechanical way. As a result, the "I" of the poem is presented as almost consumed in the largeness of the sound and presence of the child. When the poem continues "In the lane I meet sheep and wagons, / Red earth, motherly blood. / O You who eat // People like light rays, leave / This one / Mirror safe,"²⁶ Plath seems to plead, Let this single way that I see myself be left alone so that I might remain and acknowledge myself and exist. She again partners the city and motherhood by asking that each not be corrupted by an expectation of greatness. Do not expect it to accomplish what cannot be accomplished, she seems to say, but let each one be human and expected to function within a normal capacity. Jemma L. King articulates this machinery of the mother experience when she says,

Within this context, we can see that Plath's poetic speaker is concerned not with the emotional processes of being a mother, but with the mechanical processes of the body and mind. The production and output is akin to a factory line that ingests matter at one end, only to assemble the pieces into an independent working object at the other. The metaphor of the body as a machine serves to remove emotion from the scene, and instead references the baby as an unfeeling parasite that exists to succeed the host body . . .²⁷

Plath's line of poetry, her distancing of the self from the subject, has contributed to the evolution of two poetic categories which I call the Mechani-Mom Poem and the Objecti-Child Poem.

The "Mechani-Mom" poem presents the mother as an object in order to examine the consequences of unrelenting motherhood, and continues the poetic dialogue about maternal ambivalence by exploring the modes and aftermaths of these kinds of objectification in the maternal sphere. A machine is by its very definition lifeless, soulless, and lacking in emotion, but the Mechani-Mom is also built in service to others. In a Mechani-Mom poem, the mother is converted into a machine for making and raising babies as well as caring for the basic needs of others. The mother is often falsified, made of plastic and wire, and is seen performing acts that dull the consciousness and require an almost super-human denial of self-need. She is a contraption in these poems, which is a reflection both of her deadened mental and emotional state and of the fact that her body has been usurped and mechanized as it serves the needs of others without being allowed to have its own needs.

By calling attention to and exaggerating the objectification traditionally inflicted on women, the contemporary American poet writing about motherhood reclaims and recreates the depersonalization of the mother figure in order to convey the crushing nature of her role. Faced with the need to reflect the varied maternal experience, contemporary motherhood poems make use of the objectification of women as a way to expand on the loss of identity expressed in more traditional motherhood poems. Women have long recognized mechanized selflessness as one of the requirements of the mother, and the mother figure in the Mechani-Mom poem is often made animalistic as a way of further dehumanizing her. The Mechani-Mom poem is, at its most extreme, a poem detailing

The Mechani-Mom poem is, at its most extreme, a poem detailing the loss of ownership and autonomy of the physical body.

the loss of ownership and autonomy of the physical body. The bodily self is usurped, captured, and made use of; in this way, the Mechani-Mom poem calls up the battles women have fought over reproductive rights, addressing the abortion debate and controversies involving control of the female body.

Lara Glenum's book *The Hounds of No* frequently presents a version of the mechanical mother figure. With reproduction as a central theme to the book, and with emphasis on the "meat" body as an object, *The Hounds of No* presents childbearing as an invasive and violent process told in visceral, gory detail, and also builds an awareness of the larger political and social issues surrounding the act and its relationship to women and their cultural status. The poems speak of "The Mother-body's spare plastic parts" and present the revered but objectified mother as a preserved saint, listing, again, her parts: "A pair of dried-out ovaries dipped in gold / A necklace of teeth," as well as "A pelvic bone [ground into a fine cosmetic powder]," "A platinum wig," and "A peg-leg."²⁸ In "Czarina of Supersaccharine" we learn that "The female body is a thousand-year-old / freak show of / dried out mermaids [. . .] She is a palace of desiccated fetuses."²⁹ In "WunderKammer," the mother-speaker says of herself "I was a meat-based creature I was chunky with carbon / I grew spleens, nails, fat lobes, etc."³⁰ In "A Diorama of my Pusalage" the mother-body is presented as a kind of monster infested with parasites and falsities and deadly things. The lines "In the forest of ovaries, crimson trees snap beneath the weight of their egg sacs. [. . .] Dolls climb backwards out of my mouth" present surreal images of birth. When the poem states, "On skin-covered trees, colonies of embryos hang like crystal pendants. The Mother-body slides among them, a predatory spider, dropping mannequin legs out of her shiny thorax," the object and mother are one and are interchangeable. Then "The Mother body [. . .] will remove my poison sacs. [. . .] I will wear her glass coffin like a wedding dress."³¹

The mother figure in these poems is built of gruesome descriptions of reproductive parts interchanged with objects and oddities. She is a freak, a hybrid of artificial parts and preserved flesh, a piecemeal collection of weirdnesses and things that don't exist; she is consistently dried out and ground up, treated as not human, and put up for observation and a false reverence. She

is not respected, not valued, not human, and not quite real.

Danielle Pafunda's *Iatrogenic: Their Testimonies* is a book built entirely around the concept of the mother as mechanized, made-use-of object. *Iatrogenic* defines the mother-body as a machine to be loaned out and abused, as surrogates are created and nurtured to conceive, carry, and deliver children. Pafunda frames the situation behind *Iatrogenic* in a letter to H.L. Hix by saying, "*Iatrogenic* is a story of 1. a group of feminist-scientist-metaphysic(ists) who quit our world for one of their own making and 2. the surrogate-daughter-mothers on whom they intend to launch their new culture [. . .] The surrogates find themselves in a *Handmaid's Tale* sort-of breeding bind."³²

In her collection, Pafunda speaks of the mother-body as an object, and explores birth and pregnancy as mechanical and invasive procedures. She often directly compares the mother-body to objects and animals in order to explore the ways that the mother is seen and treated. In "Wherein a Surrogate Covers a Debt," the maternal speaker secures "plaster teeth," wears "a gown of egg white," and when asked where it stings, replies "in my deck."³³ In her review of *Iatrogenic*, Kristen Abraham says, "Pafunda's use of the word 'deck' in this instance decentralizes meaning and subverts our expectations of bodily sensation enough to make us consciously acknowledge the sting is everywhere. 'Deck' itself cannot be one particular location on our bodies so by naming it, the poet pushes us to investigate a sensation, as opposed to its location."³⁴ The use of the word, however, calls up several associations, such as the deck of a ship or the deck attached to a house, and thus perhaps refers to the abdomen. In "Wherein a Surrogate Begins," the mother-surrogate states, "My skin rolled back, my snap. Window, they said. / Slide, they said. And the package was secured to my rib / with a length of cable and a clove hitch."³⁵ "Who Chose Marguerite Gauthier" connects the self and the essential organs of the body to artificial and decorative objects by saying, "Fringed parasol, I tucked my charcoal lengthwise. / The thin plastic lung proceeded."³⁶ These lines suggest that the self, the very "I," is a "fringed parasol," an ornamental, frilly object, an umbrella useless in the face of rain. This paired with the plastic lung, an organ needed for life, but described as "thin" and "plastic," leave us with a sense that even the most essential features of this speaker are false.

Contemporary American poets have also battled sentimentality and idealism in the motherhood poem by objectifying the child in poems. If, as Joy Katz tells us, a baby in a poem "pressures the poem" by introducing "a set of cultural expectations," speaking of the child as an object, and thereby erasing the emotional milieu, removes this pressure. When today's American poets depersonalize the child, they use a variety of techniques, but the transformation of the child into object is a significant trope.

The "Objecti-Child" poem seems to have evolved directly from the depersonalized representation of the mother figure. It mechanizes the child to distance it and to allow the child to be

talked about without the stigma of sentiment. As a companion to the *Mechani-Mom* poem, the *Objecti-Child* poem takes the most precious of all things, the child, the one we are meant to nourish and sacrifice all for, and casts it up on the altar of the impersonal in order to challenge the notion of the ideal child. It makes the ideal child not only real, but grotesque, unreal, violated, mutilated, murdered. If a theater is made of the object-child, the poet can speak freely about motherhood and its consequences without desecrating the holy sacrament.

Matthea Harvey's satirical poem "An Idea Only Goes So Far," presents a baby "made up" as a source of pride and then presented as a list of accessory objects. In this way, the "baby" takes on an identity of objects, is made as useful and bland and edible, i.e., disposable, "as a hatbox or a cake." It is fat and posed as a trained elephant, and as carefully orchestrated as that elephant's stance when it is on "a little round platform, cramming all four feet together."³⁷ Words such as "perfectly" and "wonderful" appear like mechanical gears throughout the poem, estranged from a genuine sense of emotion, sterilized of any connection, and suggest a sense of decorum that overcomes attachment or sentiment. All of this suggests that the speaker and the culture, or the world the speaker is shaped by and part of, like the *idea* of a baby more than any actual baby; much as, tragically, unconsciously, traditional motherhood poems which idealize the child have celebrated the idea of the baby more than they celebrated the baby itself, and have celebrated the idea, not the actuality, of motherhood.

After the making of the baby in the poem, which seems to require no human effort, intimacy, or anything real or human or bodily, there is "Applause all around" as though there are spectators, an audience, the expected cultural approval, the reward inherent in conformity, doled out by the unseen collective. With this consensus, it is acknowledged that "there's no denying [the speaker] had made a good baby" which furthers the sense that all babies are good, that making a baby is always worthy of reward and celebration. The baby's "sweet face" and "pair of pretty eyes" as well as its expected christening, is met with ultimate cultural acceptance. Harvey's speaker says of the baby: "I didn't coo at her, though. She wasn't that kind of baby."³⁸ With this declaration, Harvey suggests that this not-baby baby is not the baby of the traditional poem, not the baby of sweetness and wonder. This baby is a platter, a footstool, all things useful and shapeless, everyday and so almost unseen. This baby is the object of the baby, the baby robbed of reality and meaning, the baby that is idealized and glorified and accepted by the masses, but not in any way connected to what a baby actually is.

"When you make up a good baby, other people will want one too," Harvey writes, "Who's to say that I'm the only one who deserves a dear little machine-washable ever-so-presentable baby."³⁹ This unveils the cultural pressure that forces women to believe that they must be mothers, that they are called to motherhood and not complete without it. Harvey's pairing of "machine-washable" with "ever-so-presentable" reminds the reader of the language of those innumerable television commercials for household cleaning products, aimed at housewives by setting up a clean house and clean clothes as the most desirable goals to be obtained. The baby herself is again an object, able to be tidied, washed out, cleaned, bleached, freed of flaws, spotless, and conveniently tied to the apotheosis of the household rituals. In this way, "ever-so-presentable" becomes the ideal for

the mother, a trait more desirable than any other trait, a status symbol, conferring status upon the mother by indicating that she has the ability to keep things tidy and controlled. The opinions of other people are, by implication, more important even than maternal love. And yet the only affection that happens in the poem is that of a "stray red sock" compared to "the tongue of some large animal."⁴⁰ The baby is washed in the washing machine, a type of washing that no actual baby could of course survive, and so becomes in principle an object washed by an object. She is washed with a piece of clothing that belongs on the foot, that most estranged body part, washed by the sock, that least respected, most expendable piece of clothing. The comparison to the animal tongue shows us that in the only moment of affection, the baby has been groomed by a dirty and neglected, perhaps lost, item of clothing, and so is removed even farther from the human experience.

Harvey kills off her baby at the end of "An Idea Only Goes So Far," saying in an interview with the *Katonah Poetry Series*, "I didn't think she was going to die, so I was shocked when she did. The rhyme led to her death. The word 'dead' was orbiting the poem the minute I wrote that her flaw was 'dread.'⁴¹ And yet it is this moment that finalizes the separation of the baby from any form of sentiment. In this moment, she truly becomes as disposable as an idea. The baby herself is presented as a good idea, and the irony becomes clear, since a baby may seem a good idea until it is born and the amount of work involved in raising and caring for an actual child is realized. In this way, Harvey confirms her overarching point: that the idea of a child may be more appealing than an actual child, the same message that traditional motherhood poems have carried for centuries without being aware that they did so.

Poet Lia Purpura based an entire collection around the concept of the *Objecti-Child*. In her book *King Baby*, Purpura introduces a narrative

the coiled radiator," speaking clearly of an inanimate object, but then says, a few lines down, "I work with the hands of one who first made you,"⁴⁵ thereby conveying maternal responsibility and love, even though this may seem inappropriate to its subject. In one of the most concretely descriptive poems of the volume, "No stylus touched you . . .," Purpura details the making of the object with "a sharp blade / precisely made your mouth. / An awl worked on the vertical / and a threader, a contraption / like fine fingers, for the embellishment / of eyes and voice." And yet this poem ends with the lines "The story of your creation starts / with a force that wanted something / and worked to see if you were it."⁴⁶

As the book begins to explore the ambivalence of the maternal experience, mixing the emotional reality of childhood with the lost/found object state of the subject becomes relevant for yet another reason. Purpura is setting up the reality of an object as a deaf receiver of maternal expressions of fear and doubt. Not only does this allow her to address her subject matter without complication or response; it also provides space for a realistic representation of the child. For all babies take, they cannot consciously give, at least not in a way that comes to the aid of the complex struggles of the mother adjusting to her new reality.

Lia Purpura's *King Baby* succeeds in dealing with traditional descriptions of maternal caretaking by setting up an *Objecti-Child* dynamic that allows her to talk about conflicting emotional aspects of motherhood without carrying the burden of sentimentality centered around the presence of a child. Her use of the child as object allows child and motherhood to be spoken of without the weight of sentiment, and the depersonalized nature of the *Objecti-Child* allows her to explore the wider significance of being made through treating the sacred building of the object as a kind of birth. The optimistic ending of the book, however, confirms the more traditional idealism of

*Mechani-Mom and Objecti-Child poems are,
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where, according to *Publishers Weekly*, an object found on a beach becomes "alternately a found doll, a missing child, a spiritual representative of childhood and a real infant to whom the poet gave birth. Purpura captures both the fierce love and the flighty weirdness of life with a baby, opting always for the symbolic and the surprising over the literal record."⁴² Purpura's approach is interesting in that she often pairs descriptions of the object-child, in actuality a hollowed gourd decorated with cowry shells, with a more traditional description of the motherhood behaviors and sentiments imposed on it, and often does so within a single poem. Even as she says of the object "your body / looked like a buoy," she feeds it—"Are you hungry, King Baby? I haven't even asked"—teaches it—"If you want a field defined, / I'll show you a field"—and sacrifices for it—"King Baby, tire me / as you see fit, / as you see I am fit / for constancy (all those / hours of night feeding)."⁴³ In "You with a block of ice in your head . . ." Purpura pairs "a skirt of shells / and shells for eyes, leather ears" with "wide mouth eliciting such tenderness," "I will ever be your subject," and "now can you rest?"⁴⁴ In "Best you know my hands . . ." she says, "I took and laid your parts / to dry before

the Motherhood Myth. Lia Purpura's book creates a "child" of a found object in order to speak of the motherhood experience with ambivalence—there is loss, grief, fear, desolation—attachment, yes, but an attachment that comes with the weight of responsibility and guilt.

Mechani-Mom and *Objecti-Child* poems are, in essence, political statements about the nature of motherhood, creating a sense of shock in the hopes of awakening the reader to the problems inherent in the gender-based constraints imposed on the motherhood poem, as well as on the act of mothering itself. These poems find their way around literary convention and aesthetics—they allow writers to write about the subject matter without falling victim to the obstacles in their path. They create something innovative and experimental, resisting both expectation and tradition, asking us as readers to question what we think we know of the poem of the maternal experience. ◀

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JIM RALSTON

four poems

Love at Rest

Love went down to wrestle death.
Now resting in the current,
love at best feels more like *like*.

A certain hue of pre-dawn light,
cobalt through an icy window,
I could say I somewhat like,
and almost call out her name.
(Is this her bed I'm in or mine,
or am I sleeping in my van?)

Waking up from dead to numb,
from utter night to shades of dawn,
I like not knowing where I am,

where time went, the short hand
from the long. Then certain esoteric
films, *L'Eclisse*, *Mulholland Drive*,

I start to almost comprehend
and feel the need to write again
aimless like-songs in my head.

Playing Time

Look at Jesus, who tells
adulteresses whom he loves
to go and sin no more.
Or Joseph, who will not succumb
to the pretty wife of Potiphar.
They're the ones on God's first team.

But Sampson, Adam, and that lot,
who lose their power to women—
second stringers, water boys.

D. H. Lawrence got it right.
You want a deeper bond?
Stand up to one another.

Get into God's line of sight.
Stand up an inch or two taller—
if you want some playing time
on next year's squad.

Peg Men

Jims like me wake up in life
already playing second fiddle
in realms of sex and love,
indistinct, undistinguished,
thousands of us hungering
for never offered solo parts.

Pegs like her float among us,
plain as sin, but soft for Jims
and singing hopeful hymns
to God and Jesus.

Across the aisle, Clarences,
eyes too big, are sweet on Pegs,
their brand new homely hearts
bleeding down their sleeves,

while in-betweens like Jims bleat
for fiery-eyed and mean sopranos
in front row center seats.

Jims lift weights, eat well, stay trim,
play bridge and chess with Clarences,
jog barefoot on the beach alone,
do not disturb the universe.

They think they'll leave the Pegs behind,
but end up Peg men down the line.

Refrain

*So many graves to fill
Oh love aren't you tired yet.
—Leonard Cohen*

Don't ask to visit, please.
I live in a different house now.
You don't know my new address,
nor should you try to find it out.

Don't phone, don't sing me songs.
If you feel the need to correspond,
suppress yourself, or meditate
on Leonard Cohen's "The Faith."

The refrain is what I'm thinking of.
Sit on the mat with your back straight,
legs crossed; reflect on love as longing
for a good night's sleep.

Don't think of us as failed or sad.
Imagine us brave at last,
as love drops down into its grave,
finally deep enough.

JIM RALSTON lives on Rocky Gap Creek outside of Cumberland, Maryland, the setting of *Come Live Alone with Me*, a collection of poems for which he is seeking a publisher. Ralston's publications and productions include *The Choice of Emptiness* (Nightsun Books), *Appalachian Grammar Shop* (WhiteFire), and five stage plays.

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three poems

The business of (business

(The business of (business I've mentioned before)) (and my bills) (and mortality)
(A license (for these brothers to be my brothers)) (if I want)
(It was (pointedly) true how (the denial was depression) what I want (is warmth)
(Non-young) (My slang (is idiomatic))
(The business of years (and of hedging a future)) (It becomes urgent)
(In her case tax advantage) (It would roll over) (It would (penalty))
((If) I adhere) (all agents assemble) (the holidays swept)
(Recall scant celebration) (Y2K in the car (a rainy night)) (the loss of it)
(allow me (to interject)) (What about shoulder (separation))
(you (splinter) (my interest) (in)) ((anew) (I am) outside) (I am (for one) (other))

(The work (simple))

(The work (simple)) (The bullshit (simple)) (Limited natural talent (or endurance))
(Chain of tasks (some of us help each other) (some of us are liars))
(Way to the future (loose grasp) (transparency)) (ideas without a process)
(How to put the charge (into) (powered objects)) (let the thing see you (foam))
(Know what else (maybe anciently) prefigured this pool)
((A pebble) in the gullet) (a sour cancer) (the (American) imaginary)
(Are you sure) (No (never)) (But I know you (you're the same guy))
(White gangsters wear ties (in the white imagination))
(Compulsory (otherwise (lacking insurance) over fifty (body wrecked)) service)
(Then (reporting for duty) unsatisfied) (You still have not heard me)

(Bringing into compliance

(Bringing into compliance (with all this planning)) (Audience says it's too obvious)
(Obvious flaw) (The choir says (metaphor is not plastic)) (Believe me)
(Set up as a game (theory) to matter) (Open door (not a free entry) step right adjacent to it)
(A long day) (Obstinate adhesive (larceny's damage) (which witch))
(A hard year) (The key) (Oh (my love's gift at the same time (chooses))
((The star) (is asking a lot again) pat me down right (swat) (prep) (I can))
(Take it like a (what are you supposed to be)) (an available feature is (upselling))
(Upsetting) ((No) (I mean) moment-by-moment choice) (Can I live)
(Not my moment) (Temperature and mood (recipe for shaking hands))
(Unromantic (dropped bowl (shattered (bounced back in my face)))) (Go outside)

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ALISON C. ROLLINS

Elephants Born Without Tusks

The *Washington Post* says that green burials are on the rise, as baby boomers plan for their future their graves marked with sprouting mushrooms little kneecaps crawling up from the dirt's skin like Michael Brown decomposing into the concrete ending as natural product of the environment.

Elephants are now being born without tusks their genetics having studied the black market DNA a spiral ladder carefully carved from wooden teeth of Founding Fathers.

Never let a chromosome speak for you, they will only tell a myth—an ode to the survival of the fittest.

Peppered moths are used to teach natural selection their changes in color an instance of evolution.

Birds unable to see dark moths on soot covered trees. The number of blacks always rising with industry.

Life is the process of erosion, an inevitable wearing down of the enamel. The gums posing the threat of disease.

On most websites they suggest biodegrading choosing a coffin made from pine or wicker.

The man in the paper said, *I want to be part of a tree, be part of a flower—go back to being part of the Earth.*

I imagined my Mother then, her short-cropped hair like freshly cut grass, immune to the pains of mowing.

The Natural Burial Guide for Turning Yourself into a Forest sits waiting in my Amazon shopping cart.

Pink salmon have now evolved to migrate earlier I am familiar with this type of Middle Passage a loved one watching you move on without a trace the living inheriting an ocean of time

the sun rewiring the water-damaged insides cells desiring to go back from where they came

\\ certain strands of your kind now extinct.

ALISON C. ROLLINS, born and raised in St. Louis city, currently works as the Librarian for Nerinx Hall. She is the second prizewinner of the 2016 James H. Nash Poetry Contest, and her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Poetry*, *River Styx*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Solstice*, *Vinyl*, and elsewhere. A Cave Canem Fellow, she is also a 2016 recipient of the Poetry Foundation's Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Fellowship.