

Poetry City, USA, Vol. 6

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A journal of poems
and prose on poetry

POETRY CITY, USA, VOL. 6
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Cover design: Patrick Werle
poetrycityusa.com

Publisher: Poetry City, USA

ISBN-13: 978-1537623757

ISBN-10: 1537623753

CONTENTS, TABLE OF

Michael Smith NO SHORTAGE OF ROCK	14
Danika Stegeman LeMay RIVER	15
Alison Morse THE GREAT LAKES	16
Dobby Gibson Does Poetry Really Matter?	17
John Sibley Williams THE DISSOLVING OF NARRATIVE	19
Iris Dunkle THE WAITING	21
Sandra Youngs reviews Chase Twichell's <i>Horses Where the Answers Should Have Been</i>	22
Brian Engel SNOW EMERGENCY	25
Nena Johansen A WAY OF KEEPING ON	27
Michael Gould reviews Richard Siken's <i>War of the Foxes</i>	28
Shahe Mankerian WHERE I WAS BORN	30
Ruth Madievsky I WANT TO WATCH SOMETHING UNDESS, 31	31
John Sibley Williams VARIATIONS ON A THEME	32
Matt Mauch reviews Gregory Lawless's <i>Far Away</i>	34
Tracy Mishkin THE UNEXPECTED PAINTING	38
Joanne Dominique Dwyer RE-ENTRY	39
Gale Marie Thompson BULKHEAD	41
Grant Clauser PRODIGAL SATELLITE	42
Farryl Last ONE PHILAE FINALLY ARRIVING	43
Kalie Havener reviews Amanda Nadelberg's <i>Songs from a Mountain</i>	44

Danika Stegeman LeMay REPAIR	46
Samantha Ten Eyck FLOWER HEART	47
Autumn Cooper reviews Gretchen Marquette's <i>May Day</i>	48
Cary Waterman NOT A POEM	50
Brett Elizabeth Jenkins TRANSUBSTANTIATION	52
Bill Olson reviews Sierra Demulder's <i>Today Means Amen</i>	53
Cynthia Manick LAST NIGHT INSIDE MY BLOOD	54
Hajara Quinn ALGAL BLOOM	55
Brian Beatty WORK AS A DREAM	56
Autumn Cooper reviews Matthew Rohrer's <i>Surrounded</i> <i>By Friends</i>	57
Jake Sheff RETROACTIVE WITH NEGATIVE G'S	60
Greg Lawless IF YOU AGREE	61
Matt Mauch reviews Alice Anderson's <i>The Watermark</i>	66
Alex Lemon QUIVERINGS	70
Gale Marie Thompson DUAL GLASS	71
Dana Wernke reviews Tess Taylor's <i>Work and Days</i>	74
Paula Cisewski ONE THOUSAND OR MORE VORACIOUS ORACLES, ARRIVED TO FLOCK THE CLOUDS IN MY WINTER-LUMBERING HEART	76
Elizabeth Onusko SO LONG	77
David Cocherell reviews Reina J. Leon's <i>Sombra: (dis)located</i>	78
Paulette Beete 40 CONFESSIONS	80

Ruth Madievsky HOW TO SHAME YOURSELF OUT OF HAVING A PANIC ATTACK	82
Shaindel Beers My heart is a diner that never closes. . .	83
Lukas Hall reviews Patrick Philip's <i>Elegy For A Broken Machine</i>	85
John Gosslee I'M IN A MOOD THAT NO SONG FITS	87
Brian Engel PURE BEEF	88
Dana Wernke reviews Sandra Meek's poem "Acacia Karroo Hayne (White Thorn)"	89
Alex Lemon A THOUSAND MILES OF FLESH & MORE	90
Elizabeth Tannen SNOW DAY	92
John Lucke reviews Logan Phillip's <i>Sonoran Strange</i>	93
Magdalena Hill ΣΚΟΥΞΙΜΟ	96
Danika Stegeman LeMay DANGER PANTOUM	97
Kyle McGinn CRESCENDO	98
Matt Mauch reviews Don Share's <i>Union</i>	100
Sam Campbell My Halsted is not the same as your Halsted	105
Sean Thomas Dougherty THE ABSCISSION OF SORROW	106
Shahe Mankerian HAPPY BIRTHDAY—ON THE 63RD ANNIVERSARY OF GORKY'S SUICIDE	108
Paula Cisewski Why Poetry Capital-M Matters	109
Jacob Borchardt IN WHAT GROVE THE PIG	111
Alison Morse THE LIGHT UNDER, A CONVERSATION WITH "DIBAXU (<i>UNDER</i>)" BY JUAN GELMAN	114
Kayla Little reviews Ruth Madievsky's <i>Emergency Brake</i>	116

Hajara Quinn CORN BELT	118
Sharla Yates BEHOLD	120
Patrick Werle reviews Sylvia Plath's poem "Edge"	122
Shaindel Beers The con man's wife. . .	125
John Sibley Williams CATHEDRAL	127
Jasmin Rae Ziegler Touchstone	128
Rebecca Macijeski BECAUSE MY FAVORITE QUESTIONS ARE THE ONES YOU DON'T ASK	131
Marguerite Harrold AT THE SOFITEL	132
Jennifer Manthey BERLIN,	133
Hajara Quinn HELLO NO MORE	134
Alex Lemon WELCOME TO THE COUNTRY CLUB	135
Brett Elizabeth Jenkins OMENS	137
Paula Cisewski THERE IS NO I IN ME	138

Foreword

At the end of *Swann's Way*, Proust's narrator, Marcel, reflects on how the name of a place, bookmarked by a word, becomes in one's imagination something impossibly more than what that place actually is, that the name of a town mulled over, tended to, and built up as it is longed for in one's head, whether the word is spoken or thought, conjures "not a town at all, but something as different from anything I knew, something as delightful, as might be, for a human race whose whole life had been spent in the late afternoons of winter, that unknown marvel: a spring morning." Just as a place like Paris, romanticized by the machinations of the mind's eye, is something quite more than even that great city can be in real life, *Poetry City, USA, Vol. 6*, to those of us who have built it, contains multitudes.

While no one person's multitudes can be another's—your Paris is not my Paris even if we'll both always have it—we believe there are multitudinous multitudes contained in this little magazine in your hands, the order of which is not accidental, but contains, we think, an arc-ish quality that makes it its own thing, inextricably of that which it contains, but with an existence of its own. Our aspirations in building it were as high as are our hopes that something like what it does for us is something like what it does for you. Bon voyage. *MM*

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I don't want to break
bread with the word unless
convinced I have something
in the mix that bears
kneading. And someone to
finish off the wine with,
who is listening.

—C.D. Wright

Michael Smith

NO SHORTAGE OF ROCK

No shortage of rock in the world,
what will you do with the shifting

tides? With the money that belongs
in the ground? This is our hope:

the metamorphosis that won't silence
began with the just-noticed clatter

of stones in free-fall off the canyon
edge. What will you do swimming

in the avalanche? What will you do
when the ocean ceases its endless

circulation? No manna will fall
from heaven, just rock, endless

rock and the tectonics of waters
liberating their pent-up tears.

Danika Stegeman LeMay

RIVER

we call this river the way out
it makes me worthless with joy

strung into multiple currents
pixel-cut and seamed in

river I just want you
open like leaves

or glass shards in guttered light
exalting wonder over purpose

river the earth's turned
half machine at least

but river you'll always have
the same body you'll always have

the same heart we call this
river the way out

a landscape should spread with ease
its lines tacking outward

Alison Morse

THE GREAT LAKES

On the scan of her after-stroke brain, we see her alien graymatterscape darkened by pools of dead neurons we dub The Great Lakes of Dementia:

Lake Nonsense, Lake Lost Way, Lake Can't Be Left Alone,
Lake Scrambled Space and Time, Lake Black Hole.

She greets the plumber, sock on one hand, pants at her ankles, *oh,*
the turmoil
in Ukraine. From her chair into walls she can't see, she bolts,

rebounds, shuffles over her big toes on the way to her piano.
The Chopin étude she first learned more than sixty years ago

clangs atonal until one arpeggio, two, three, harmonize past her plaques
and tangles,
hammer a chain of heat through the piano's lacquered burls, wires,
ivory keys,

the yolk-yellow finches perched like grace notes on the feeder,
our helpless hands in our laps as we listen, submerged with her

in Lake Pleaseanneal, Lake Inexpress, Lake Singhilarity, Lake Nothing,
Lake Boundless.

Dobby Gibson

Does Poetry Really Matter?

*The purpose of poetry is to remind us
how difficult it is to remain just one person.*

—Czeslaw Milosz, from “Ars Poetica?”
Berkeley, 1968

Does dance matter? Does sculpture matter? Does Escoffier’s *technique de cuisine* matter?

Other than classical and jazz music, I can’t think of an art form more routinely required to self-audit and rationalize its mere existence. And then there’s the cruel irony: the defense of poetry is nearly always performed in prose.

Poetry has been suspect from the get go. Socrates accused it of corrupting youth, confusing reason with passion. Poetry’s precarious cultural status—simultaneously exalted and despised—might be its most defining characteristic.

Lately we only have to pick up an *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harpers* or *New York Times* to see the doubts of poetry’s cultural value put on parade. These publications’ annual “Poetry Is Dead” think pieces can’t agree on what poetry is, but all are sure it’s dammed for not kindling fame, competing with TV, generating profits, or producing a magical poem able to unite America in an “I’d Like to Teach the World to Sing” moment of Coca-Cola hand-holding.

“Poetry is Dead” think pieces share the same misty-eyed nostalgia: Poetry became irrelevant the moment it abdicated its public responsibility to give voice to the masses. When that model civic era was, these essays fail to agree. They gesture wildly, hundreds of years in either direction, at the Fireside Poets, Whitman, Dylan Thomas’s U.S. tour, or Robert Frost—all white men, not coincidentally. The short list of villains includes modernism, post-modernism, and the increasing publication of overly “individualized voices” (code for writers of color).

But what if poetry’s marginality isn’t new? From Han-shan to Dickinson, isn’t one tradition of poetry to intentionally seek

the periphery? Socrates wants us banned from the Republic: that sounds like a really good position from which to make art to me! The question “Does poetry really matter?” makes me want to ask, “What kinds of poetry?” and “Matters to whom?” and “Matters measured in what ways?”

There are poems that matter because they speak truth to power. There are poems that matter because they’re sources of shared wisdom. There are kinds of poetries that allow us to simply talk to ourselves (Stevens’s “soliloquy of the interior paramour”) with an honesty we crave but couldn’t otherwise locate, and that matters because only then can we begin to understand ourselves. There are poets whose bodies of work provide entire systems for paying attention to the world. More than 150,000 readers have purchased Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen*, a lyrical map of racism that shatters illusions of American justice. Do I need to announce that matters?

But I’m drifting into Keats’ poetry is a “vale of soul making” territory, and it gets fuzzy fast. Keats suggests poetry requires us to embrace its uncertainties, and our own doubts. And in that respect, if I’m honest, one answer to the question “Does poetry really matter?” has to be *not always in the ways I want it to*.

I’m not sure I can name a poem that’s ended a war, filtered lead from a metropolitan water system, stopped a thug cop from reaching preemptively for his revolver, or overthrown a crooked prime minister. It’s the most moving moment in *Citizen*: page 134, where the litany of black bodies killed by white cops grows with each of the book’s re-printings. The more successful *Citizen* is commercially, the more dramatically the lyric re-inscribes the gap between its virtual aspirations and the actual world the book inhabits. As the poet Ben Lerner has written, nicking from Alan Grossman, this is the “bitter logic” of poetry. Poetry matters more than poems do.

Poetry matters so much, in fact, that it’s unable to stand under the weight of the demands we ask it to shoulder. But it fails in carrying that burden so we don’t have to. So we—through a fresh “poem event”—can imagine ourselves rising up, and boldly moving forward into the unknown.

John Sibley Williams

THE DISSOLVING OF NARRATIVE

Crushed between two spoons
into a fine powder dissolving
last night's celebration into
a kind of elegy, a strange pill
untangles the knot in my chest.

Sparks constellate behind
my pressed eyelids like
something important struggling
to be remembered. Trinket.
Totem. A kaleidoscope of almos.

The story I've made of the world exists like this:

•

through morning's window
the bees look like they're on fire.
My head, on fire. The air,
a honeycomb of fluttering embers.

Fuses of maple ignite a lawn
where childhood continues
to burn itself out.

Inside my heart
there is a room that opens
to a room I cannot leave.

This morning I choose
the chair furthest from the window
and rest in this antechamber of forgetting.

If the story I've made of the world exists,

•

the earth can hold together by cicatrix alone.

THE WAITING

for Jackson

Once you arrived we walked the block like convicts:
you, a tiny bundle in a green felt snowsuit,
me, wearing a body too large to recognize as my own.

The leaves chattered their teeth, the wind shoved us along.
We hadn't found words yet. We spoke in touch.

I point out the monuments of our walk:
Snow White and the Seven Dwarves figurines
tucked behind an abandoned house.
Winter apple trees clinging to their red, shriveled fruit.
The path out—

But, always we'd return to the white shuttered house,
to the unbundling, to the flush of warm air awakening our faces.

And each day became a flag strung up to the next—
words formed in your mind like animals hiding in clouds

and you spoke them to me:
thick stones dropped in an ink-dark pool.

Sandra Youngs

A review of Chase Twichell's *Horses Where the Answers Should Have Been*

Horses have historically been viewed as benign creatures in literature and mythology. Often they represent a noble spirit, elegance, power, and freedom. In *Horses Where the Answers Should Have Been*, “horse” takes on a more ominous connotation. Twichell twists our perception of what should be something we can trust as good at heart, and compares the horse to men—men, who we should also be able to trust are good at heart—are seen as predatory and dangerous in Twichell’s collection. This is not a generalization of the gender, however. Twichell gives examples of specific contexts and situations in which girls, specifically girls on the verge of puberty if not younger, are preyed upon by unsavory individuals who happen to be male. Thus, when the speaker introduces centaurs, it is an easy leap for the mind to make that these creatures, half-horse half-man, are the combined halves of evil. In this collection, horse becomes synonymous with man and loses all its grace and innocence, corrupted just as these girls are being corrupted.

The strongest examples of this corruption appear in the poem “Savin Rock,” a lengthy poem detailing the experiences of girls at an amusement park. The reader wanders through rides and a funhouse, experiences catcalling and unsolicited advances from men along with the speaker. We arrive at a barn together and the speaker emphasizes that,

for girls it was about trust
being part of a couple
the horse and the girl,
but for the man in the barn
it was about making the girls feel
groomed and visited.

Following this, the examples of sexual harassment in the rest of the poem are no longer subtle.

The first half of the collection focuses on childhood memories and games, such as in “Walky Talky,” and many are described with

the clarity and hindsight of an adult, such as in “Savin Rock” and “Sideshow,” both of which follow an amusement park theme. There are several repeated phrases throughout this section, such as the notable “girl who was eventually returned to her family unharmed” which first appears in “Savin Rock.” The phrase is repeated to reassure us in several poems that follow, as well as the phrase “the girl who likes to get high.” The girl may or may not be the same as she who is eventually returned unharmed. The nature of their identities is unclear, but that ambiguity is tied to the title, as many of these poems present questions either directly or indirectly that seem to be unanswerable.

This idea of the unanswerable becomes more prominent in the latter half of the book. In “Mask of a Maiden,” a poem heavier with mythology than the previous poems, the speaker shifts to a more self-reflective stance and delves into introspection. The speaker presents many questions, often wondering whose questions they are, as not all the questions are his or her own.

The imagery literally heightens as clouds are introduced as a metaphor for thoughts, rising away from the idea of horses and men. Instead, the speaker combines humans and animals in “From a Distance,” describing the “selves I’ve invented” in the forms of a “horse-child,” “dog-child,” and “child-mammals,” each of which have a very different tone from the centaurs described in the first section of poems. There is not such an ominous weight attached to these selves, but rather something mystical and wonderful, something powerful and affirming. Or, perhaps, reaffirming—a reclaiming of one’s self.

In “Cold Water,” the speaker ends the poem stating that they are a “manufacturer of poor quality / word-clouds. Why listen to me?” However, the poems that precede this self-deprecating conclusion belie that notion as they address a number of difficult concepts, concepts such as existence, death and the afterlife, human nature, consciousness, a specific form of Zen Buddhism called zazen, and various other abstractions with concrete images and a frank honesty that makes these high, heavy topics accessible to the wider audience.

“Clouds and Water,” which may stand, literally, for “thoughts and oblivion” based on Twichell’s previous metaphors, along with

the rest of the introspective poems in this collection, reminds me of solitary winter nights in Minnesota: crisp, clear, and comfortable to wander through for someone used to such an environment. Being inwardly focused myself, I find great solace in observing the mental journeys of others and comparing what lessons they find (and how such lessons are found) with my own experiences. In this way the author's poetry acts as a kind of therapy. Following Twichell's cloud factories through this collection, from the traumatic start to the arguably serene end, brings a measure of peace into my own life and, I am sure, the lives of many others.

SNOW EMERGENCY

Imagine if you will an image,
an imagination of Will, tall.
An image. Image of image.
And then the imagination raises
the will to imagine a prison.
A prison in a prison of prisons.
The prisons a prism of images,
of imaginations imprisoned.
Painted. Stuck there
in image,
an image of images
from prison.
Even painters and dads in prison,
waiting to paint and to parent.
To human. Humans. Rights. Humans
right. Right. Right. Left. Humans.
Rights. To human.
To right. To left. Humans left rights.
Left rights. Lefts. Humans. Rights. Rights.
Right. Left. Human. Right.
The instant replay. The instant. Instant. The instant
replay. Insane replay of the insane
instants. The tigers. In the tanks. In the
tank. In the television. Re-run the television.
Live. The lives. Replay the lives, the tigers,
In the instant. Replay. The lives. In the tanks.
In the tank. In the insistent insanity in the tiger.
Replay and re-run that. The re-running
of running. Of running away.
We replay, the instinct, and run
toward the tiger. In the tanks. Tankless we are
but we are! An instant star of broken stars.
More than an image

of star. Clouds laced and snowing.
Covering another emergency.

Nena Johansen

A WAY OF KEEPING ON

*I step into a world where everything is fragile,
leans toward breakage.*

—Stephen Dobyns

Even the walls of the house were bruised—
paint left peeling, tiles cracked, stained

wallpaper we had not known
to care for. We had not known

anger was a locomotive
tearing through the frigid prairie.

Now needles cannot stitch the sheetrock,
nor broadcloth replace the window glass.

We search for other tools
beneath a veil of dust,

and to each other
we repeat:

Bend your head
into the wind

Bend your head
down in prayer

Bend your head
there is work to do.

Michael Gould

Yellow Music Singing Pink: A review of Richard Siken's *War of the Foxes*

On the cover of Richard Siken's *War of the Foxes*—the long-awaited follow-up to his 2004 Yale Series of Younger Poets Award winning debut, *Crush*—there is a painting of a human figure walking through a field of grass set at the foot of rolling gray hills. The figure is small in proportion to the surrounding landscape and as such does not establish itself as the main focus of the painting, which—when you consider the figure's head is on fire—is surprising.

This is David se las Heras's *La Nube Roja*, and I find it an appropriate cover of *War of the Foxes* for a few reasons: foremost, the painting is a good lead-in to a book of poems that features painting itself as a subject; the speaker of these poems often takes the role of an artist with brush in hand, bringing their work into existence before our eyes. In the poem, "The Mystery of the Pears," Siken writes:

I looked at the pears. I painted the pears, what they
were like. I waited for the pears to reveal their
mystery. Five brown pears in a chipped white bowl,
soft and scarred and blushing yellow in the throbbing
dark.

I am intrigued here by the speaker waiting for the pears to reveal their mystery, and, without needing that mystery to be defined, I enjoy this passage for its power to estrange—to distort my perception of a simple image and pull it into the realm of the uncanny. I credit this effect to Siken's use of verbs: the pears *blushing* yellow. The darkness *throbbing*. These phrases work to inject the bowl of pears with potential energy—with bottled-up electricity just waiting to be released. Siken approaches the threshold of motion a verb can attribute to a subject in repose, thereby infusing the pears with the quiet energy so often present in his work.

In addition to writing poetry, Siken also paints (many of the poems in *War of the Foxes* share titles with the watercolors

published on his personal website). The effect of this artistic versatility on his writing is clear, as the poems, which explore the subjects of the body, the mind, and the impermanence of all of the above, are crafted with a painterly attention to visual detail. And thinking back to *La Nube Roja*, we can begin to see how the painting serves to prepare the reader for the way Siken will approach his existential subjects. His poems ask us to think of the world as a canvas and its inhabitants as the brushstrokes painted in across its face. Siken contemplates the age-old “how-did-we-get-here” question with subtlety and freshness, bringing his keen attention to the intricacies of the human face. In the poem “Portrait of Fryderyk in Shifting Light,” Siken studies a face he is painting swept in shadow, a face that “congeals as [it] settles in.” Siken channels his inner Ashbery here to probe the portrait’s detail with his own characteristic lyrical skill. The poem begins: “There is something terribly wrong with his face— / empty, restless, one side older than the other.” A few lines later, it continues:

I find the parts that overlap with mine and light them
up in clays and creams, yellow music singing pink,
the flicker of his mouth a purple rust. His face
congeals as he settles in. His hair is bronze in here,
not gold: walnut, bark, and cinnamon, chipped brick
tipped in ink.

I love the way Siken coaxes emotion from his subject’s face while comparing its features with his own. He writes: “I find the parts that overlap with mine.” It is interesting to note that when Siken writes about the subjects of his poems—the subjects who didn’t have any say in their sudden existence (he makes sure we understand this point)—it is the person *behind* the brush—the only character in *War of the Foxes* we never actually see—who becomes the most real. The speaker of these poems develops a personality, one of reverence, subdued playfulness, empathy, and sadness. This sense of getting to know the speaker—I like to think getting to know Siken—is one reason reading this book is such a joy.

Shahe Mankerian

WHERE I WAS BORN

Twenty years later, we went back to Beirut
and stood in front of CMC Hospital
for a photograph. We couldn't go

inside because during the war,
it burned down, not because of misguided bombs,
but because a doctor set himself on fire

after they wheeled his dead wife
into the Emergency. Years later, hollyhock
bushes and wild fig trees covered the pink

and black walls of the entrance.
Militiamen had posted pictures of martyrs
on the crooked wall that separated

the sidewalk from the front lawn.
The statue of Virgin Mary with broken
hands cried near a dehydrated water fountain.

Ruth Madievsky

I WANT TO WATCH SOMETHING UNDRRESS,

maybe a tree or a beehive,
or you in your navy suit,

which is the color of everything your body
is thinking but not saying.

I want to work a forty-hour week
in the crooks of your elbows,

to stare into the eye of your zipper
as it blinks, opens. All week,

anxiety has dragged me across the floor
like a garbage bag. I kept feeling

like the kind of person who dies first
in a B-rated horror film,

which is to say, God bless Lou Reed
on vinyl. God bless the sound pants make

when they fall to the floor,
the soft collapse like a champagne bottle

opened underwater. I want to be
the headlights on your bed sheets.

I want your gaze to become the dress
I am wearing, then the one I am not.

John Sibley Williams

VARIATIONS ON A THEME

Say horse.

Say the fencing has rusted to bits and we are tracking

an escaped horse deep into night.

Again. Desperate,
as if a single star loosened
from Orion's belt and we didn't know
what to call it anymore.

Say home.

Say we are trying to name what we've built to complete it.

Say every nail is essential.

Every acorn. Ghost. How things lose their shape

more when lost than buried and forgotten.

Or burned. Say this with me:

•

we all want things.

I, for example, want what I've lost

to have burned me.

Isn't that how grace works?

•

Say there was a girl once
or the girl still beside me
has wandered from touch.

I'm not so sure

we're not horses, she might be saying,
as I gather her nakedness inside me
in hopes of completion.

Say love,
 how we round our empty mouths to say it.

•

You know the story: it is night
where everything is retrievable

•

though no one knows what is missing.

Matt Mauch

A review of Gregory Lawless's *Far Away*

If it's not nary, it's close to nary a restaurant that doesn't offer on its breakfast or brunch menu some version of The Farmer's Breakfast, featuring eggs (usually as you like them), one of the house potato dishes (hash browns, American fries, tots, etcetera), plus meat of choice, and toasted bread of choice. It's a simple and hearty meal intended to evoke, as if hovering about the table, an image of uncomplicated and robust families in overalls and straw hats selflessly husbanding the land between our cities and below our mountains (or on mountain plateaus) for the greater good. Whether or not farmers ever did or do eat such a breakfast matters not to the sense of Americana delivered up merely by having the option of ordering The Farmer's Breakfast from the menu. If eating breakfast is good for you, eating The Farmer's Breakfast is good for all of us.

Unless, that is, you come from a farm or a farming community, in which case—even if you grew up eating or still do eat eggs, meat, potatoes, and toast every morning—The Farmer's Breakfast as menu item is a sham.

Think of where you live. Think of where you grew up. Think of where you've loved to live but no longer do. Now imagine a menu item purporting to be that place's singular signature breakfast fare on menus nationwide. The New York City Breakfast. The Austin "Keeping It Weird" Breakfast. The Southern Breakfast. And now you get it, yeah?

Getting it on this level—understanding that the complexities of rural life blow apart any simplified stereotype that "rural" is, and is merely, all that one imagines Red State America to be—is what gives Gregory Lawless's *Far Away* its truth.

I say this as the kind of insider who recently sent an email to a radio show when the host and sidekick were exhibiting their raised-in-the-city ignorance of the kinds of things everybody who grew up in a farming community just knows. The topic was corn sweat and its contribution, or not, to the heat index, and the host and sidekick, as part of the corn sweat (moisture in that

atmosphere that wouldn't otherwise be there had not each plant in a field of corn sucked it up from the ground and spat it out (though its leaves) discussion, presumed that all the corn in all of the fields was sweet corn, that because what we eat is sweet corn it must be the only kind of corn a farmer would or could grow. In telling them, in my email, that most of the corn one sees in fields driving city to city is field corn not sweet corn, and is processed into various products for various uses (drywall, glue, cosmetics, toothpaste, diapers, etcetera) but is not edible off the stalk in the way that sweet corn is, I was spreading as a disciple might the gospel of *Far Away*.

In the national conversation, if brought up at all, rural life and people are reduced either to Farmer's Breakfast bucolia or the Republican party's base. If these stereotypes were endpoints on a spectrum, what *Far Away* gives is the true range of colors in between them. When we happen upon "Two lures in the trees/ A pair of hooks there/ and fishing line too fine to see," we understand that the people of these places are shepherds not of sheep but of remains, ruins, and ghosts, and they not only know that this is their lot but embrace it by controlling it, building their barns "to fall apart/ a certain way."

Of lives lived so, generation after generation, so much practical knowledge is ingrained, as if the skills of a survivalist were second nature, putting those who are "of there" in touch with a more primitive way of living. "I blew through/ my hands like a password/ into fog" is the aura such a set of skills engenders. How not to be so in touch with that native intelligence when "I hear the faucet voices" and "bread [is] just smoke you can eat," where one is so deep into one's being that any foreign-ness it might bespeak is as unapparent as the things that make up the atoms we forget make up us: "My wife said her shirt smelled like leaves/ but I could never tell?"

Even though no person or thing has been literally lost, there is nonetheless a pervading sense of loss: "Plastic sheeting rains down the panes"; "What can't live in what? I take the fake chrysanthemums to my wife"; "I clean my glasses. The grease is gone, but the scratches stay." The quotidian here doesn't do something so meekly as "adding up." Rather, it bubbles up: "So strange, these things/ I'm given/ to hate: horsenettle and

homecoming,/ burn drums in shabby backyards,/ other people's kids/ slapping their voices/ across the field." The picture is of a place not where one gets the occasional trying time, but where every season is a hard season that steels one further into the sword one becomes and is ever becoming. These "So many/ dark rooms. So many *such*/ hours" folk are folk who sleep "in the yard car," steaming "the glass with bent dreams," knowing all along that they're not understood by those who speak of them in the national conversation, like an undiscovered tribe that will "smear the landscape with a dream and ask it to remember."

Smearing, of course, is an action that requires a medium—a something smearable. In *Far Away*, that medium is a kind of mastery of hard beauty as portraiture, which becomes the most solid known in a sweep of unknowns. We see as they see "The rigs [lit] up at night like cruise ships in the trees." We look over a shoulder as "I stare through roof rot at the sky, God's eye, and stuff a tunnel of newspaper inside to blind it." Thinking we may be spies on the trail of "heel-strikes like hearts in the ground," we instead find ourselves followers of those footsteps, as if among the converted. When monotony rather than love becomes the color of one's relationship with one's station, we step into a scene where boys "draw human figures . . . with/ magic markers" on a "white cotton sheet between/ two hickory trunks" and shoot them until "Their hearts are rags" and their "faces fray and all you see/ are trees and fields through the flaps," and whatever you may think of the Second Amendment, those guns are in your hands, too.

Living in a city, what one tends to fear most is that which is outside of one. What one tends to fear most when one lives in a rural place—flip the coin—is that which is inside of us. Of the many ways in which they are two different worlds, this may be one of the most consequential. It is simplistic but not without the benefit that comes from simplifying the complex as a starting point, to boil things down to "city poets are driven by their fears of that which is external to them to look inward, while country poets, inflicted by the same tenor and level of fear, only deriving from within, are driven to look outward." Unless or until we can all be both, we need country-mouse books like *Far Away*, written by poets as skilled as Lawless, to serve as counterpoint and

complement to city-mouse books, and vice versa. If you are one or the other and think you aren't missing anything, au contraire: you're missing everything*.

* Alternately, you can pick up this book and not read it front to back, but can pick a poem, any poem, on any page, and read it sans context—as my friend did the other day when I left *Far Away* out on the table—and say, “Wow, great poem,” as if you were on a road trip across America, taking state highways and county roads, eating mom-and-pop cafe lunch or strolling this and that byway, really taking a look at what we miss when we go fast fast fast via interstates and flight paths.

Tracy Mishkin

THE UNEXPECTED PAINTING

A paper bag slouched under a manicured bush, and sprinklers belched after a night of rain. A tunnel under the train tracks drew us in, entrance shadowed. We took a few steps. Behind us, the herds returned to blare and clatter. Ahead—dark, quiet, dry. Animals flashed across the walls, as if the light of phones had conjured Lascaux. A faint vibration of trains. Dun horses and running deer. A hint of pipes. We were not gone long. We returned to work unchanged. We are still following the red ochre bison, listening to the bone flute.

Joanne Dominique Dwyer

RE-ENTRY

Be it a porcelain bathtub or the Red Sea,
some of us are afraid of water.
Others are afraid of eating uncooked meat
or of spending our lives tethered like balloons
to dialysis machines or unwanted partners.
At dawn I spy a rare blue-collared dove
on the rim of the birdbath, reminiscent
of an Egyptian queen stoic in a falling rain.
For most of us the feathered creature is beauty incarnate;
but for my fiancé, it conjures a flashback
of his father dove-hunting with a large rifle, not in forest,
but in a city park resplendent with heroic statues,
old men playing chess, teenagers skateboarding
and toddlers taking their first steps.
But instead of disentangling myself from the son
of the depraved dove-hunter, knowing that
some pasts cannot be recovered from,
I find recipes in an out-of-print French country cookbook,
for Dove Breast, Dove Stroganoff and Doves on Toast.
And cook these meals for my fiancé for three consecutive Sundays.
The dove is the sacred animal of Aphrodite
and disembodied souls rest in the sawdust of dove cotes.
But how odd that doves are mascots for both pacifists and militants.
And what about re-entry after a disfiguring rain?
The coming back to a shelter, be it a lean-to
or a missionary's mansion, after getting soaked
down to the infrastructure of bone?
How one minute you are under the spell
of being spun, blindfolded with a paper donkey tail
in your little hairless hands, whirling as if you are
inside a great wind and the next moment
you are in a welting, vision-impairing rain.
A rain that falls like dying doves,

except no one has hit you in many years—
no concussions or bruising of flesh.
Yet, some of us are afraid of stairs,
of being stepped on, of cherries.

Gale Marie Thompson

BULKHEAD

A glimpse of that
which would be good for you,
I had wanted potency
and milky persistence.
The outward moon of me
in hope becomes this smiled
space you share, two enormous
copper arms shrunken down
to figs on a screen.
It isn't my doing, in all fairness.
But still I breathe in like
a small house, cross-hatching
in accordance to whatever
wind you carry. Disguising
myself as a catching: unfastened,
clotting. Dream of coarse figurines
with a crowd of swollen bellies.
Of every first breath as migration,
evening kick and unspill, a full
bottle fluttering out screaming
and miraculous. Where hemisphere
meets hemisphere, attuned to
some early bursting mystery
we have yet to practice.

Grant Clauser

PRODIGAL SATELLITE

Eventually even the things
we've launched into space
return to us as flame.

Orbiting the earth like coyotes
around a campsite, the scouts
we launch come slouching

home, their histories lost
in long forgotten contrails,
arms outstretched for warmth

as the link between battery
and perpetual motion finally dies.
There's always an atmosphere

to break through, a river or border
to cross, a burn upon reentry.
Those words you wrote on the wall

before you left are still there
covered by paint, now
someone else's space.

ONE PHILAE FINALLY ARRIVING

Since you no longer can see in the dark,
you no longer can feel.

Did you leave the drawer
undone?

Touch the center of space: a dark
static, rockblack endless
oil slick sky, stained glass
flecks of distant light
never growing closer.

You packed your scarf.

Who are you, who thought the sun could turn you
human, thought you could go on breathing
and feeling and feeling and feeling and feeling. The smallest god

sleepless in the shadows?
A cry of night, incandescent?

Kalie Havener

A review of Amanda Nadelberg's *Songs from a Mountain*

The energies of light and dark mingle in the whimsical new *Songs from a Mountain* by Amanda Nadelberg. Take the poem "Matson": It's a ball of confused energy, gaining momentum with each personal discovery, whether it be by the reader or a character in the poem itself. For the speaker of the poem, this discovery results in memories that start off as seemingly nothing of particular importance: "My mother and sister in a/ Calvert's in Massachusetts, 1986, I was/ under a rack then descending some stairs/ to a basement room of jeans. Is anything residential?/ I showboat the apartment you/ carried upstairs in a dream to me but of/ you I like best the part not saying a thing/ sitting here next time beside me looking in/ direction of light." The speaker likes the part that does not say a thing. Why? Perhaps it allows her to catch her breath, mulling over her thoughts. But in looking towards the light it appears that she is not alone. Could this be her past self sitting alongside the present day self? Light and dark are taking shape as two different women. Like a shadow, her memories (good or bad) are always tailing her. The question at hand is whether or not that past is a safe place to visit. What could be unsafe about Massachusetts in 1986? This is for Nadelberg to purge onto the page: "I've already now forgotten what all the/ men I'll ever know smelled like. Maybe/ devotion on the beach in the middle of/ the week which is dumbed down with/ planetary imagining song." I don't think this part is strictly speaking of lovers. The smell of a father is a powerful scent of early childhood for many. Nadelberg often comes back to imagery like this to use her childhood memories as a safe haven. While these innocent memories serve nostalgic purposes, it comes without saying that a few unpleasant memories come up for her as well, a la "Matson."

"You Can Run the Moon," Nadelberg's brilliant merging of a fantastical and an everyday world, contains beautiful imagery: "opalescent hands mark the sea for the/cartographer, light like

pure cheering./ Life! Light and waves. A photograph of/ seduction trapped under a tree.” “Run the Moon” is a metaphor describing a duality wherein the speaker views herself as otherworldly, and the moon is her mirror image. The moon bathes light onto all who seek its truth, and with that power Nadelberg reveals how light and dark are one in the same. The sunlight coming through the trees enlightens; the speaker is a picture of beauty in and at this moment. She may be stuck inside her own head, but isn’t it a nice place to be? “We want nothing/ and also to be there, however long it takes to/ tell a story, animals endlessly returning the/ children to bed. The world, fog or fire/ it must be something” shows that she wants badly to be seen as something other than herself, but when the smoke clears she is anxious that she may be discovered. Her mindset—“And while I’m no one’s/ diminutive statue I call myself from some/ painted distance”—is what keeps her protected. It does not matter what the world thinks of her. She is happy in her world.

In *Songs from a Mountain* Nadelberg’s writing is energetic and ethereal. At times it felt as though I was taken to a garden inside myself where memories bloom with time, and thoughts flit around like dragonflies as I lay in the lush green grass. *Songs from a Mountain* is a fine balancing act between light and dark energies, a balancing accomplished with the utmost grace.

Danika Stegeman LeMay

REPAIR

happens in poppy fields and hospital wards. I.V. strings
fed by one and eaten by the other count time. Landmines

grow wild along roadsides, custom-made sounding boxes
patient to be plucked open. Fire-range grammar spreads

behind our teeth. We begin to desire dust and easy melodies.
The weight of a rifle surprises. Luckily, distance cheats an image

away from its object. Razor-wire becomes a spiral; a fig tree
becomes smoke. The only noise we hear is blood, a constant

suffering to restore itself. My melancholy baby, none of this
matters much. Haloes still swell around the streetlamps when

the electricity is on, beckoning for us to exalt something
external. Turn your face. Turn your face this way.

Samantha Ten Eyck

花心

FLOWER HEART

It isn't a daisy.
It has more petals
than you'd bother
counting. More like
a chrysanthemum.
Hard to know
if it loves you
or not. Watch it
spread soft tentacles
in hot water. Taste it
before it gets bitter.
You shake its
mane of dead
petals like an amateur
lion tamer.
Don't bother
sweeping up.
They will find
their way home in
the steady breeze
of your breath
as you come
and you go,
as I come
and you go.

Autumn Cooper

A review of Gretchen Marquette's *May Day*

In a pop-culture world where depictions of female emotion are oftentimes sexualized and turned into Opheliac clichés of self-destructive and self-indulgent behavior, it is refreshing to return to a medium that allows a female perspective to focus on the nuances of sadness and desire within the human experience and their larger context within the world. Gretchen Marquette's collection of poems in *May Day* plays a host of familiar female characters: the concerned sister, the distraught lover, the vulnerable doe—but does so in an unusual light that accentuates the muscle on an array of otherwise waifish figures.

Such small figures are depicted in poems like "Prologue," where a child feigning sleep is carried into the house by her father. She is quite literally in someone else's hands, physically and mentally, until she feels "for the first time her weight/ in someone else's arms." This sudden shift from naiveté to astounding physical self-awareness is how the poems find strength through weakness, as in "Know Me," where Marquette writes, "I was the new strawberry," then quickly drains the berry of all potential fleshly and sensual color, taking control of her physicality to become inedible and perennial, a "larvae white and hard."

Strength through vulnerability is only one facet of the imagery, however. The surprising shift from one perspective to another highlights another theme in *May Day*, which is how the things in the universe that surround us can make us unrecognizable to ourselves and to others. Marquette writes poems filled with scientific facts, including undeniable truths about cardinal calls—"A mated pair of cardinals shares song phrases, but the female may sing a longer and slightly more complex song than the male"—and about how there are "hundreds of billions of galaxies in the observable universe." But this is empty information when truths cannot be reconciled with personal understanding and feelings towards the world. One way Marquette reconciles the strangeness of universal and scientific truths is by contrasting them with natural and feminine metaphors, such as fruit,

cardinals, and particularly deer. Each metaphor and symbol serves as a surrogate body for the emotions felt within the different roles that women play. Whether it be the role of caring sister in “Trophy,” or the heart of the deer in “Deer Suite” (“Blood implied a living thing. All/ that remained was/ its four-chambered heart,” and its butchered body “strung up in the neighbor’s yard, throat/ unzipped”) each metaphor reconciles delicate emotions with something outside of the speaker’s physical body, therefore validating their existence in the universe. This is the wonder of Marquette’s *May Day*. The subtlety of the feminine symbolism allows the reader to see from the broader perspective of female desire and uncertainty.

Cary Waterman

NOT A POEM

This is not a poem but a silence
even though there's noise,

news with the latest disasters.
This is not a poem but a facsimile

like the mannequins in stores.
You think someone's there but

she's not seeing you even though
she looks your way.

Sometimes it seems like
I've come back from the dead.

That I've been gone but now
reemerge and I know that can't

be true but I feel it like a curtain
undulates back and forth and I step

through from one side to the other as if
it could be that easy, the coming

and going, the holding of breath
and then the breathing.

A friend's daughter is dead
four days ago. She just stopped

breathing. Another friend is on dialysis,
passing from empty to full every other day.

I do it sometimes sitting in my chair.

I'm there and then I'm gone

someplace else, some other life
careening toward completion.

This is not a poem, not a drowning
not a fence to keep me out

but a linen invitation to the singing.

Brett Elizabeth Jenkins

TRANSUBSTANTIATION

To love the dead is endless tears

–Nick Flynn / Anne Carson / Hericlitus

I take the things that other people say
and say them again in my own voice.

I say the same words with a different inflection.
I say *I love you* in as angry a tone as possible.

Somehow there is a mathematic principle un-
folding itself in my soundbox.

As many times as you say it,
that's how many times it is true.

I can say *It's alive!* and the people become scared.
Or I can say *It's alive!* and the people

clap astoundingly. Here I am standing over
your grave trying to change

my feelings from wine into water.
That isn't what I want to say.

What I want to say is that there's only one way
into the mouth,

but these words leave the mouth
without ever having entered it,

and this is my only magic trick.
It will never bring you back.

**A review of Sierra Demulder's
*Today Means Amen***

In her fourth collection of poetry, *Today Means Amen*, Sierra Demulder masterfully crafts an exploration of mental illness and love. Each poem of this collection is filled with self-doubt, heartbreak, and recovery, as Demulder allows for both new and seasoned poetry readers to remember the times we writhed in our lowest moments, only to be able to recover from these moments and move towards a goal of being content with oneself.

The collection opens with "In the In-Between," where the narrative of the poem explores a relationship ending. The speaker's love is compared to a boxer, a still birth, and a struck down animal: "I woke midday to the sound/ of stillness, nothing, and knew where/ our love lies now. Our bodies/ refusing to rouse to a world bled of it." The title poem, "Today Means Amen," is a testament to the recovery process and is also self-claimed to be a response to one of her earlier slam poems about depression and self-harm, "Werewolf." "After Googling Affirmations for Abuse Survivors," is unapologetically personal: "My hands were built for crawling on./ How do I write myself gently? How/ do I not worship the shipwreck that/ stranded me here?" While it and most of the poems bear a sorrowful weight, the closing lines of "Today Means Amen" are an affirmation of the strength to carry on with every day's grueling moments: "You made it/ this whole way: through the nights/ that swallowed you whole, the mornings/ that arrived in pieces. The scabs, the gravel, the doubt, the hurt, the hurt, the hurt/ is over. Today, you made it. You made it./ You made it here."

If you and I were walking through a bookstore and you asked for recommendations, I would steer you towards this book.

Cynthia Manick

LAST NIGHT INSIDE MY BLOOD

I was scent-starved
for oranges in winter.
Wanting pips and half-
hearts to burst.
Send my nose to that
August in Ireland,
where I was free
from the spells
of kin and rule.

There was a boy
with steady fingers
and a hollow-
body guitar
like a black sword
on his back.
A jazz fest full
of down-beats,
pints of Bulmers
and he knew
how to peel my rind
like a Marabel potato.
All in one go.

He didn't stop
to breathe or drop
pit-tales like
crumpled orchids.
He peeled so
our birth cut
like a trade wind,
our sternums
barely covered
and wild.

Hajara Quinn

ALGAL BLOOM

We arrive at a standstill in a sound too full of sails for sailing

Your past breaches between us like an algal bloom

This is where we begin to split the difference

Trembling omniscience of light on water

Irreconcilable differences versus the part of me that is indivisible

A seedling versus the wall of sound

Brian Beatty

WORK AS A DREAM

His yellow leather gloves
shimmered in the night like two bright clouds
of fireflies hefting a cracked ax handle
the direction of the moon.

Autumn Cooper

A review of Matthew Rohrer's *Surrounded By Friends*

My least favorite duty as a human being is to find a distinction between the special and ordinary. It's extremely hard to do and often burdensome. What's special? I mean, what's *better*? I mean, what has meaning? These questions are no doubt why people meditate. Does my job have real, essential meaning? What about my favorite jeans, or the way Coca-Cola tastes, or how my fingers get pruned when I wash the dishes?

The truth is none of these things mean anything without language; they simply exist, and I've found through meditation that it isn't the adjectives that describe how fleshy and old my wet fingers appear, or how tired my job makes me feel, that gives them meaning—it's the fact that I choose to drink that Coke, that I choose to work that job, that makes them special. It is their existence that is special. How I define them is secondary, but it's good insight into how I see the world.

If washing the dishes were ever described as a sublime act, or ordering a Coke was made out to be something of profundity, those sentiments might be read in Matthew Rohrer's poems. *Surrounded by Friends* is just what the title suggests. It is a book filled with familiar scenes, familiar objects, and friendly reminders of the profound honor of being surrounded by life, no matter how mundane. Rohrer's poems are pensive reminders not only because what he depicts has inherent meaning, but because they have resonance:

He has a job, but it's a sad job.
He has to wear a tie. He drinks
a beer in the church when no one's
looking.

I work a job that I don't love, and oftentimes I'm afraid I'll be stuck doing it for years to come. It's no surprise that many people face a similar problem. Even less shocking is that in order to combat the feelings of uncertainty, many turn to various distractions, like alcohol or plain denial, or like I mentioned

before, meditation. Rohrer takes feelings we'd rather ignore and manifests them into the tie you have to wear to work. He is your wife who ties the tie around your neck just a little too tightly, he is the spring pollen that makes you sneeze.

Upon my first reading of *Surrounded by Friends* I thought: Rohrer is a crazy man preaching on the subway, urging others to put more meaning into the everyday. But instead of putting in my headphones and ignoring him like I usually would, I found myself intrigued by his delivery of ideas. Rohrer uses form and imagery like a Shakespearean jester uses humor to mask deep insights of reality. Each poem is a brief meditation on modern life that begins "Wherever you are in the city" and leads to surprising, almost divine insight. Like haiku poetry, Rohrer uses airy language that separates contrasting images, allowing room for ventilation and a change of breath, often within each new line.

Observations of industrial starkness and natural beauty are blurred into one coherent image:

The crazy guy
gets back on the train
the sun comes in low
late spring
hundreds of cars and trucks
not going anywhere
on the overpass
near the river
the train enters the earth.

Such conglomerations are further reflected in the associations between the crazy man on the subway and divine salvation, and return back to a mixture of city and nature: "the light dims/ Crazy had something to say/ about salvation/ loud and clear/ the flowering trees/ drop their petals on the land/ a perfume blows across the city."

Rohrer further echoes haiku by omitting the use of heavy metaphors in exchange for a sense striking self awareness of both the genre ("Poem," "At Dante's House," "Poem Written With Bashō") and everyday objects like a t-shirt or children's toys ("She Stepped Outside," "Poem Written With Buson"), as well as by referencing traditional haiku poets Basho and Yosa Buson, famous for their simple directness of expression as well as their

keen attention of association between images.

Because of Rohrer's simplicity, even poems set in unfamiliar scenes, such as one depicting the trials of the Mars rover ("There is Absolutely Nothing Lonelier") hold resonance:

so far away from Bond street
in a light rain. I wonder
if he makes little beeps? if so
he is lonelier still.

Because of the intense simplicity of the poem, the rain, the beeps, and the loneliness do not need to be fancifully illustrated to elicit meaning. I understand what Rohrer is preaching, and I find it refreshing. It is through Rohrer's meditative clarity that I find peace in not having to distinguish the special from the ordinary. All I have to do is read.

Jake Sheff

RETROACTIVE WITH NEGATIVE G'S

Tuskegee, 1944

By lifts and falls in his overall perception,
Like the flights above a mountain range
Or dogfight training in the canyons
By themselves, the pilot stumbled to
The mirror to see his gaunt reflection's
Crooked, or dislocating, similarity
Laughing at him and the almost harmony
With suffering at your own hand. Like
The woman, by injections, blabbering
About progress to the lab that swallowed
All the human nature it could nourish,
For the same goal and heartbeat of a late
Appeasement, gobbled up by lack of
Funding, or The War Effort; unofficially:
Off-the-books. By looking at the angry,
Self-encumbered nimbus on the Doppler
Through the eyes of air controllers,
Turbulent in thoughts brought on by
Numinous rosettes within the fleeting
Blips of patterns that resonate for hours,
One can see, in plain-sight, the pilot's
Patriotism on the wings of all wars.
And the woman's, belabored by
The white-coat's fortitude against dints
Of her own resistance, whereby the canyon
Is compelled, and all is provided
To those very air controllers with lunches
In tin-pails. Nothing is wayside, but
The center of the gulch and its line
Of fit, known by *Treponema*, and of late,
Penicillin; extracted from the mould in clay.

IF YOU AGREE

I need

space

to tell you

this

•

To tell you

& presumably
your listening

flowers here

that under the shelf
of grief

the self-dust
gangs

together

into a ball
of almost

wings

& stirs
from the door's breath

that is

from the merest
greeting

•

If you agree
that life

is just a list
of events

then

a mere series
takes the place

of story

& each

new entry
is just

another step
finite but

in some way

further

from the infinite

•

A phone call
between friends

these things still happen

occasionally

she holds the blue light
to her face

speaking through the blue
to an invisible man he

is on a long journey

so long
she must say everything

twice he on a train in the desert

she asks him about water

her voice is passport blue

•

They hang up

I mean I assume that

he hangs up

too

•

That's funny she says

to the waiter (I couldn't hear

the funny thing he said)

from the other side of space

the blue side where

there is water

•

It is easy

to speak

of

the desert here

•

Later she says
to another

friend

I suppose

that

her phone is dying

gotta go

don't be fooled

the phone is

just fine

•

Hello

you don't know me

I say

but the phone

is just
 fine

Matt Mauch

A review of Alice Anderson's *The Watermark*

Highway 169 used to run through the guts and stoplights of Shakopee, Minn., on its way to the Twin Cities, a road I took, and that took me, many times to and fro, and I remember it best not just as a conduit but for its various landmarks, one of my favorites being a sign at roadside that marked the official high-water-level of some long ago flood. The line marking the high water was simple, straight, and several feet above the vehicles passing it. That there was an official sign indicated the historical nature of the high water. You don't make and erect a sign like that for a ten-year flood.

I still take Minnesota State Highway 169 to get from Minneapolis to Mankato and parts further south and back, but no longer mark my progress by the familiar landmarks—the Mystic Lake Casino teepee of lights, the Canterbury Downs horse racing track, the Valley Fair amusement park, the Lions Tap and its “Famous Hamburgers,” and the high-watermark sign. They're all still there, but 169, like a river the Army Corps of Engineers has given new banks, now skirts Shakopee in four lanes of 65-75 mph efficiency. It's a fate many of our best meandering routes have suffered—routes those of us, who by taking them over and over, one day cherished, and now hold inside us, like our bodies at rest are repositories of past motion.

A watermark like the Shakopee high-water line is a kind of ceiling. A watermark is also a subtle design in paper, identifying the maker, seen best when the paper is held to the light at a good angle. That a watermark can be not just those two things but many other things, too, emerges in the poems of Alice Anderson's *The Watermark*, which begins with two long poems documenting, first, the storm surge from Hurricane Katrina as it takes the Mississippi coastline, and, next, the calm after storm, in poems respectively called “The Water” and “The Quiet,” each entity of which is personified as “she.” In “The Water,” “She engulfs you like an orgasm that/ won't ever quit, her wet excess/ going and going and going, breathing alive with electricity,/ like the sharpness//

of a slap on sunburned skin." In "The Quiet," "she is the new truth—the word etched into every/ drenched surface, never uttered aloud . . . opposite of birdsong, enemy of buzz . . . she's a breeze—buck naked, with// nothing to strum . . . She locks your thighs in her ghastly grip, and never/ stops kissing you while she fucks." The personification remakes the storm. It's no longer some historical thing or event; it becomes somebody we hate loving like we do, as if Hurricane Katrina were not a single meteorological occurrence but manifested tantrums and flowers-after-the fight interactions with Greek-style divinities full of human foibles, the sexual encounters, desired and not, rather than being impossible or verboten simply a natural part of the equation.

That there are no other gods here than the storm and its survivors leaves one asking, Who is god? Who is mortal? Who is a cross betwixt? The answers to the questions are not academic here. You, as you identify with the people of the poems, want to help, but you don't want to step on anybody's feet, and you don't know which god with more power than the god that protects you, or that you are, protects another. The answers matter, because saving others is equivalent to finding the light among the dark: "You must// find grace within/ the calamity—// that's where all/ the beauty// lives."

All ages are affected in a world without gods but of our own making, and everybody is on edge: "Her fever warms/ the concrete, her fear/ sets stop signs afire./ When a doorbell/ rings, she thinks,/ *Small window.*" These questions, once answered—correctly or erroneously—lead to action or inaction, and each has consequences: "You are fourteen . . . your fight-wearied/ parents are fast asleep . . . You drive and know/ the world can be made over in your mind . . . you notice for the first time how much light/ there is in darkness . . . glint of quartz in the asphalt . . . You do not, as the paper/ will report, stop to pick up friends . . . You do not, as the paper will report, smoke or drink or/ turn 360s on the lawn . . . *night air . . . rough water on the Gulf . . . luck . . . freedom . . .* You're a story in the paper: *No More Joy For Teen.*"

The marked are overwhelmingly girls who grow above the marks into women, and the waters that mark them are the violences of abuse, rape, and incest ("They do not tell you this: that you will never be the same.") But because they've some of the

god (or gods) within them, there is bravery here: “Were the big/
cranes there, or did we have to/ heave the darling/ cadavers up
and out/ ourselves? Did we drag them, or carry/ them one by one,
together? Did we lay them/ to dry on the gilded levee grass? How
did/ we know they’d revive?” The bravery is often an individual
bravery—a forlorn bravery (“There’s a drop-out girl on my block
. . . who/ each day sits on Sweet Earl’s front porch// eating a
purple onion like it’s a black/ plum . . . last bite beckoning/ night
. . . a galaxy of// shoplifted glow-in-the-dark/ stars on the falling-
panel/ ceiling . . . Sweet Earl kissed her/ violet prize . . . she still
don’t/ shed a tear”). We’re disgusted by the need for such bravery,
which we see depicted in the adults, but way too much, and too
devastatingly, in these Mississippi Gulf kids, these little girls.

A coastline at any given time is a kind of watermark. It is also a
kind of border. Water is constantly eroding the coastlines. Water
erodes and cleanses at once. Watermarks like the high-water line
in Shakopee that were part and parcel of one generation’s route
are unknown to the next. Katrina and its aftermath—238 dead
and 67 missing Mississippians notwithstanding—don’t feel like
the worst of watermarks here because numbers aren’t personal
in the way that any, but especially these, poems are. In some
ways, like a god whose inconsistencies force ambivalence upon us,
Katrina provides, finally, an opportunity for cleansing, an avenue
that allows one to help another (“In this part/ of the story stars
sway/ like celebration balloons/ of another day allowed us . . . I
want to believe that/ the dark shoreline of my heart/ has a portal,
and that you, with your/ cocky-ass walk and your/ eyes the color
of silver caskets, can stroll through”). As with Katrina, family and
sex and one-on-one relationships as sources of violence turn out
also to be—if not sustaining at least occasional—sources of light.
“Keepsake Serenade” depicts such a source of light, and in scope
hearkens back to “The Water” and “The Quiet.” It is a good-love-
recalled poem that feels like kin to the two earlier poems in that
the good love is not just recalled, but, in a sprawling poem with
mythic sensibilities, it, too, becomes one of the world’s divinities
 (“Let me fall/ one more time into our night/ before I set it away,
like a skein of scarlet/ silk ribbon, thrown and unfurling/ into
the battered sky”). A sort of best hope comes from finding love
with another who is so similarly scarred, one who crashes gender

borders just as the deities and violences previously crashed physical and family borders, a “wound to wound” love leading to a new kind of family feeling: “we are the pact/ made with the ones that fucked/ the baby-good out of us. In the dirt I/ whisper all your names . . . I know them/ by heart . . . don’t care which one/ I’m fucking now, I’m fucking/ all of you.”

It’s hard to tell how many voices we are hearing from in the poems of *Watermark*—hard to tell how many are distinct individuals and how many are different scenes and moments featuring the same person at different times. Whether it is one, a handful, or many, the voice/s do find a portal to sympathy earned as sympathy is for dues paid. That sympathy leads not only to romantic love but to communal love (“They move// slowly, heads down . . . wearing my dresses, my jeans, a tall man with a black eye/ squeezed into my boy’s sleeveless New Orleans Saints jersey . . . Social Security number still scrawled/ in Sharpie on the alabaster underside of her arm// in her father’s slanted hand”). The urge to flee is tempered by an urge to assist, by endurance in the face of.

Of empathy and sympathy, empathy is more profound, and empathy is what Anderson’s book of sympathy urges us toward. *The Watermark*, in its presentation of watermarks, shows us that we harbor, that we hurricane, that neither has a right to claim itself good or bad, that doing and being both we live, and, for whatever it is worth, living may be all we get, that doing so to the best of our abilities and disabilities makes gods of us all.

Alex Lemon

QUIVERINGS

To help your anxiety,
You might imagine
Strangers without pants.
Correct this by imagining
Them headless. There
Is so much to describe
Under the falling down
Daylight, so see it
With deer-in-the-head
Lights eyes. All the beans,
The leg-climbing favors.
Hat on sideways, hands
In the air. Let us say
A little prayer for
The future: prepare
Us for whatever is
Going to go down
With fancy new silken
Ears, grace-slippered
Tongues & explosions
Any time we point
At something. Give
Us fried eggs smeared
With mayo, habeneros.
Listen now to the slow
Collapsing inside
The chest, the caterpillars
Playing smash & grab
In the Chinese mulberry.

Gale Marie Thompson

DUAL GLASS

Going full back can't go full back now
There is nothing inside
but the swell, a battering in
what heaves now into ritual
all instinct and fury
and grappling

you came to me
and I went into reverse

It's too soon to tell, I think
my hands spread over torso
as I recall the proper names
for influx organs

I wouldn't be surprised
if no one in the building heard me

so I scribble at the kitchen stove,
come up
with a handful of soot

•

I can't tell you that I miss
the valley coyotes
can't follow your blue steps in the snow

stags on the highway,
their antlers clear and oiled

I've lost track of being an animal

failure by hand, or by a softness of teeth

so knuckle ingrained, so mouth
pummeled white, being taught
to hate my own

a few green pine needles
finding their way inside
me, distances given over
to the same shocks, same war

it makes sense that galaxies can collide

•

you went first and left
with dander on your cheeks

and now in the night my body throbs
a flowerless victory, a kind of
self-needling, some lean muscle

the cement a screen in front of me
a homing of blue tinting
nudge and urge

what will not refocus, reappears
fallow, blown and open

•

I awaken to sift, to what I am under
my freight reticent
relapsed

clean sheets on the bed
and a recorded voice
on the tile pushing toward you,
*says anything that leans
against itself is a house, says
the body is this*

much stronger than

its persistence startling

Dana Wernke

A review of Tess Taylor's *Work and Days*

Tess Taylor's *Work and Days* guides us through four seasons of searching, in the least clichéd way possible, for the “meaning of life”—in food and crop, in the world, and in our own tiny paths we trek. Taylor is so descriptive about this year she spent working on a small farm, I felt exhausted after nearly every poem. I am there with her, shoveling the mulch, planting leeks, and hauling weeds to the woods.

In Part I, set in winter, Taylor establishes the tone of the book with “You Look to Peck Small Tracks Across It.” The title is very revealing as we discover soon how inquisitive she is toward the meaning of her own life and how she tries to make an impact on our world by interning on the farm. This thought is strengthened in “Time on Earth,” as she ponders how we came up with names for things, and how really all we’ve been doing our whole life has just been speaking words that were given meaning by someone else, and we are just the “reciters.”

In spring, the “farmers start the old art,” and so does Taylor as she tends the earth. She notes how they work helmetless, though in other parts of the world there are people on their knees, planting small seeds exactly like she is, but they are wearing helmets. Their fingers probably ache the same as hers, but they wait for the sounds of bombs and she listens to the radio. As her little cucumber seedlings freeze, there are beetles that will destroy entire crops, sick pregnant women, and rainforests being dozed down in another part of the world, in the “elsewhere” that seems so distant that we hardly think about it. But yet here we are, stressing about how we won’t have the cucumbers to send to the restaurant so they can chop them up and serve them to someone in an heirloom salad.

Despite the ripening of a beautiful warm summer, Taylor takes a darker turn in Part III. She watches as crops rot from too much heat, how hungry birds eat the fruit she carefully planted; she reflects how little control we have over nature’s course despite doing everything in our power to control the outcome. We soon

discover Taylor's own struggle with controlling nature. In "Bright Tide" she beautifully illustrates the struggle to conceive as "a fragile mix of luck and tending."

We close with another solemn reminder of how small we are in the world. Taylor drives down a dark road as the radio lectures her about global warming. She thinks about how one thing leads to the next and all of a sudden something happens; it creates a path to something unknown but inevitable. She is still so small as she drives alone down the dark road, passing a pregnant animal.

Paula Cisewski

ONE THOUSAND OR MORE VORACIOUS ORACLES, ARRIVED TO FLOCK THE CLOUDS IN MY WINTER-LUMBERING HEART

When everything is sky-dependent
everything seems treetops.

And so I love the bare branches,
and so I love the branches

full of crows. A scavenger's love.
Tin foil, pinwheel glitter, what sparkling

relief: thieved bits carried off, an unmapped
territory of private dialect in proud beaks.

It's not that keeping anything had made sense,
it's just that I had long since stopped questioning

keeping. Crows' manifesto, cawed across phone-wire:
rapid-fire sixteenth notes on a staff.

Elizabeth Onusko

SO LONG

Flash forward ten years
to the day the weather is
the same I wear these pants
with that sweater it still
smells like you how
this is possible I cannot say
we are all sensitive instruments
endowed with elusive
faculties dear dearly
departed it is time
to finish your leaving
death by arrow takes
at least an hour but rare
is the demise that lasts
a decade ask a white-tailed
deer I hear they glide
through the ether there
impenetrable targets
the shape of a life is
a pupil contracting
in slow motion
the lapis iris is yours

David Cocherell

A review of Reina J. Leon's *Sombra: (dis)located*

Reina J. Leon's newest (and third) book, *Sombra: (dis)located*, is the work of a deep minded individual expressing the emotion of being dislocated, an outsider without a place to call one's own. The constructs of what it means *to belong* and *where you belong* have always been a confusing amalgamation of culture and personality. Her poetry touches an instinct in us all, a baseline of humanity and emotion. It's as though we are given the chance to understand by looking through the very eyes that witness these polarizing sensations. No matter how alien the issue, the reader identifies.

Sombra, which translates to "shadow," comes through in the dark and mysterious tones that frequent many passages. Meaning here is furtive and shrouded. Yet to try and find the secrets lurking within the pages is an endeavor well worth the effort. Each mystery is a treasure that strikes the heart as strongly as the effort it took to look within one's self and discover what gift the author meant for you to find. Pay attention to an excerpt of her poem, "Calypso and the DJ":

Mojave desert. Waste, empty, heat. I speed
Through tears, praying for sirens. I won't stop

Any other way. You raced down the hill from your
Apartment;
I never know where you are heading.

The last embrace I thought it wouldn't be.
Glass ripples. Sirens never come.

I could break and stop the breaking,
Turn around on that lonely highway.

I imagine the same: mattress on the ground,
a square of space on my side that I have to justify.
The person/speaker depicted in this piece drives endlessly down a

road even though she knows there is nothing for her. Everything around her seems empty, barren. So much that she prays for the police to pull her over, just for some substance to fill the void. The reader can feel the pain and yearning, but is unable to understand for what—why “I could break and stop the breaking”? Once again we look at the title of the collection, its focus on isolation. The author reinforces the *sombra* that runs through it all by creating a character that feels so out of place that she feels she doesn’t even deserve a corner to sleep in, “a square of space I need to justify.”

Leon’s passion for nature, culture, race, and freedom, and the use of multiple languages, including English, French, Arabic, and Spanish, creates more shadows. Emerging like light from these shadows is her work’s excellent diction and equally incredible line structure, pages seeming to open themselves up to the reader, as in “All that time, waiting to bloom”:

Mother is garden,
Life is stillness

Kiss her lips,
Light as the bee

Searching for nectar.

Garden, lips, nectar: the imprint is soft. The poem itself depicts different flowers blooming, “alstroemeria, orange rose, bupleurum, orchid, lily.” The imprint remains soft, just like the imprints of love, desire, purity, passion. This is a step away from isolation, and in poems like this Leon cleanses the spirit. More than just understanding what these flowers represent, she captures their essence and crafts them to tell their own story. Her abilities with symbolism are one of the many things that mark her creations as truly remarkable. *Sombra: (dis)located* is an inspiration for readers and writers alike.

Paulette Beete

40 CONFESSIONS

You should know my mouth is not holy.
In photographs the light around me always turns a little blue.
You should know some women wear their blues like a talisman.
I do not know if I am that kind of woman.
You should know I wear anger like a wristwatch.
You should know I may bruise you.
You should know I am kind and also mercenary.
You should know many words have wrecked themselves on the rocky
 beaches of my tongue.
You should know I like to French kiss.
You should know I may be lying.
I have no use for maps.
I measure the size of a man's love by the weight of each wound.
I make little jokes.
You should know my mouth does not possess a father.
You should know my father didn't turn me to salt.
I'm not a beloved taste left in his mouth.
You should know I'm a woman who wasn't born sad.
You should know I wear my sadness like some thrift-shop mink.
You should know it's normal that I appear as if I'm walking through a fog.
You should know I'm worth my weight in sorrow.
You should know I don't speak the language of angels.
You should know I once helped an angel break its neck.
You should know I wear hunger like a gift.
You should know I believe the soul is God's little joke.
This is a joke, too.
You should know I know nothing of the body and its place in the universe.
You should know I speak of my wounds in terms of star clusters.
I will not speak of anger.
You should know I rarely recognize the sound of my own name.
You should know I can't identify my own hands.
You should know there are no existing photographs of my mouth.
I am magnificent.
You should know I'm not a short story.

You should know it's always about my father.
You should know my mother had a father, too.
You should know all fathers are wingéd things.
You should know birds follow me like sins.
You should know I'm out of forgiveness.
You should know I loved the hollow where my father might have been.
My father died, I kissed him.

Ruth Madievsky

HOW TO SHAME YOURSELF OUT OF HAVING A PANIC ATTACK

If you begin to see darkness as a thing you are meant to swallow. If you stop saying things like, *My brain is backing me into a corner*. If you tell yourself the metro you are riding is not a bullet bursting from its barrel, that your eyes are not warning shots. Maybe then. Maybe if you teach your hands to be sailboats. A salt-swept harbor, starfish asleep beneath a rock. If you touch the hand of the person next to you and don't think life raft. Don't think about serotonin reuptake. Don't think about how you are not so different from the kind of person who gets kicked off a bus. Don't get kicked off the bus. Count all the diseases you don't have. Think butterfly, not butterfly knife.

Shaindel Beers

My heart is a diner that never closes. . .

I.

Look in this ventricle at the waitress,
giving tired smiles and pouring coffee.
She knows her regulars the way a disappointed
mother measures her children against
the children she dreamed of. She wonders
about the man who comes in every few weeks
for pie – each time, a new girl across from him
abuzz with talk about a movie. What is wrong
with him? Why can't he keep them?
And the woman who comes in sometimes,
salt tracks dried down her cheeks from crying.
When will she be all cried out? Bereft of the thirteen
tablespoons trapped in every human body?
She wants to tell the tear-stained woman he isn't
worth it. Instead, she puts down a coffee,
tells her which pies they have that day. Offers
to warm them for her, add a small cup of butter
to pour over the already oozing pecan. The woman
never eats. She's always shaking. The waitress
used to be that woman before she was the waitress
inside the diner of my heart. Look at the busboy
clearing the tables. He has a quick mind and kind
heart but little English. He likes to glide
through the diner unseen. He is the ghost
of empty cups, saucers with swaths of blueberry,
chocolate, whipped cream smeared across them.
The owner of the diner smokes in the office of my
right atrium. He kills himself drag by drag thinking
this isn't the life he planned. Once, he loved
a woman in my left atrium, and he thought
she loved him. But, really, she was a lover of dreams.
The type who would never settle. Head always

in the clouds even though she was firmly lodged behind my breastbone. He used to sing her the sweetest songs. Sometimes they would make my heart catch. Sometimes, they still do.

**A review of Patrick Philip's
*Elegy For A Broken Machine***

Patrick Philip's most recent collection, *Elegy For A Broken Machine*, is a series of elegies on an idea of machines. Philip uses the word "machine" to describe bodies, relationships, memories, and mechanics, all while weaving together the loss of his father, death in a broader spectrum, and his own mortality. These three individual parts, woven together, represent the three sections of Philip's book.

In the first poem, the title poem of the collection, Philip opens with "My father was trying / to fix something." The poem's speaker watches and listens closely as his father shares, ruminating on the idea, that everything at some point will break down. The powerful opening serves as a springboard for the reader to get a feel for the style and tone of the collection. Later, we see the breaking down of his father's own body, as in the poem "Elegy Outside The ICU," a poem which, with medical accuracy, details his father's open heart surgery and, as a result, the loss his father has of himself at the end.

This loss of self is really at the center of the collection. Like the father who stares into a mirror not recognizing himself, the speakers in the poems are often caught in a loss, unaware of how to continue. We see the body dissolve between human and machine, as his father's body is being propped up by the IVs and breathing machines that are keeping him alive during surgery.

This loss of self comes to a head in the poem "Elegy After A Suicide," a poem which allows the speaker to put him or herself in the shoes of a person who has committed suicide and to see the ease at which a body could break itself. The ending is stunning: "your face the stunned face / of a prisoner then / at the gateway / through which he's released." It serves as a sharp reminder of the awe that one feels when faced by one's own death, but also the sense of relief one has when their machine has been broken for so long, and they can finally be released.

In other poems, the machines are portrayed as smoking, pubs,

gasoline, all of which are the unexceptional and that is what death becomes in this book: unexceptional. Nothing about death in this poet's eyes is exceptional. It is always happening. It is all around us and we will all face it. One must sit back and let it happen.

Even Philip, himself, is dead at one point in the collection, as, surely, none of us are spared. Soon after this death sequence we see his will (in the poem "Will") acting as the closer. We see his ashes scattered across the green-glide, cool creek, and darkness. Philip examines death in a fresh and subversive way, so as to get at the beating heart of his idea, that death is as everyday as fixing a car, or smoking, or singing, or getting a haircut. It's a realization that we, as machines, will all break and we have to find moments, actions, things that give us meaning to keep going.

John Gosslee

I'M IN A MOOD THAT NO SONG FITS

There are so many undefined ways to feel the cars
parked on the street at night,
the footsteps outside the front door
consistent as the signature on a grocery receipt.

The bones have so many edges,
bury them. They rise toward the sun
in the trees, the grass,
the park benches outside of the office building
where so many lunches divide the day.

•

The universe is everything past the skin
and the earth is inside the body, the hips,
the stomach inspired by a warm dinner.

The small orbit of my body above the earth
when I jump to grab the feather winding in the air
and for a few seconds I am like the moon.

•

I am also a tree on the bank
of a rising river, the hands that shovel the dirt
washed in the bathroom downstream
and part of me goes, but what stays
knows it is never over.

Brian Engel

PURE BEEF

Pure Beef. Pure Love.

–McDonald's

Total advice. Pure emptiness. Natural
Darkness. Pure delight. Pure love. Pure
Beef. Pure cow. Pure life. Chicken delight!
De-lovely!

Total pure. Purex.

Totally total eviction. Pure fuck. Total
fucking love. Total natural hole. Pure Dianna.
Pure Ross. Total Supreme. Totally just go for it.
With ketchup. And sesame seeds
All over your face.

**A review of Sandra Meek's poem
"Acacia Karroo Hayne (White Thorn),"**
from *Ecology of Elsewhere*

I'm not sure if Sandra Meek meant to tell me the story of a person throughout her poem, "Acacia Karroo Hayne (White Thorn)," or if my interpretation stemmed from my own thoughts during my first time reading it. This person I imagined (or created) in my head is much like my younger self in many ways. I read these words and it inspires pushed-away memories to sneak back into my brain. I feel like I am reading something written by Theresa, a young woman I sponsor. I read this and I remember a girl I visited in detox, whose eyes would drift off and her knees would shake and I knew that she was pushing away these memories too.

Each of us were pure at a point, not yet molded or influenced by things we didn't have the power within us to stop from happening. Fear controlled most things we did—the fear of losing our control or our power, especially. It led the blade to the wrist, the bottle to the belly, and the girl to the streets. Once our bodies had enough of fear, they pushed the sharp thorns through the layers of our skin and that was that. "Don't get too close," the thorns warned those around us. But the thorns didn't only scare away the guy who said he'd drive you home at closing time or the creepy uncles or the boy who you thought really cared but he didn't care about your heart at all. No. The friends you knew since you were in diapers, your mother, father, the ones who only wanted so badly to help you, all got too close to your thorns one too many times. "You avoided pain by becoming its measure."

I looked up a picture of the White Thorn after my third or fourth time reading this poem. The funny thing is, it's so pretty! Thorns disguised by big, bright, round, happy yellow flowers. I'm sure if someone strolled by it, they'd think to themselves, "what a beautiful bush," and continue on. You see a girl with a smile on her face, maybe she has good clothes, nice things, and I see the girl with the shaking knees.

Alex Lemon

A THOUSAND MILES OF FLESH & MORE

Maybe the problem is trampolines
Or the fact that we are all children
At the bottom of the ocean. One
Thing the hormone factory is
Missing is a pavilion out front
For people who hate everything
About their lives: a loose gold
Incisor cap, the sky spackled
With exploded clouds, fake lenses
In their glasses. It cannot be
Forced, so more: monkey-faced
Moneyclips, waking from sleep
With the sheen of erotic-free slime.
If the pairing is right, it is said,
The animals will follow: two
By two & asking early on if you
Are the type of person who believes
Anytime is the right time to learn
How to bump & grind, that safe-
Distance means celebrating a birthday
In the weird-dusted light of high-
Rises about to collapse. If I may
For a moment go out on a limb—
I'd give up everything to get
Better at giving. Objectively:
Bathtub of chains & chastity
Belts. If you have to trap or trick
Someone then you should make
It me, probably. Nipples on.
Nipples off. I am pretty much open
To anything. The answer is: do
More but remember, children,
Never stare at the sun for too

Long or you'll see the dirty-
Bird in all of us. In case of
Emergency, break my nose.

Elizabeth Tannen

SNOW DAY

You'd never know it to look
at me but some mornings I wake

with the five-fingered panic
of elephants. It's December. Which means:

the spread of things, oversized. Which means:
the cars crust, light leans like an almighty

trust, like you're not going to get to work
even if you didn't intend. The tendency

isn't to sweat the details, it's to ponder the end
while maintaining the meaning

of today, just a pause from the burgeoning
daily of winter. The pressure is right

on time. The last leaves hang on
as if they're not paying attention

like stubborn children, like last year's disease,
like the yellow memory

of being, beloved.

Psychogeographic Landscapes of Myth: A review of Logan Phillips's *Sonoran Strange*

Landscape poems are very frustrating to me. More often than not, I find them candy-coated but ultimately bland and unsubstantial, imparting headaches instead of nourishment. They are like the self-help books of poetry, over-simplifying the complexities of life into a neatly packaged promise. This especially bothers me because landscapes are important, if only for their beauty, but it can't be said they have all the answers, they don't bestow complete understanding. They inspire emotions and ideas, but any certainties derived from them are always laced with ambiguities. It is through embracing these contradictions and uncertainties that Logan Phillips has created landscape poetry worth reading.

In *Sonoran Strange*, Phillips weaves a narrative of a land and its people, observing the eternal influence of territory over a multitude of occupiers. He describes the relationship, this marriage of land and culture, through shifting perspectives of flora and fauna, mountains and politicians. The nighttime wanderings of the destitute are interspersed between cosmic ruminations and a prophetic saguaro cactus. Tracing the history of human presence in the desert borderlands of modern Mexico and Arizona, Phillips demonstrates the tragedies that arise from imperial greed, presenting a new understanding of environmental and immigration issues that plague that area today.

The surreal sense of the landscape permeates each page of the collection, but is perhaps best maintained by the recurring "Sonoran Strange" poems. These nine poems, focusing on specific cities, regions, and geographic features, continuously revive the overpowering, lasting influence of the Earth. These bold poems float high above the rest, providing a comparative objectivity to the mundanity of other poem's players and happenings. The physicality of these places represents "the unnoticed realities" and "the lesser recognized senses" that the inhabitants too often

ignore. In “Cibola,” Phillips writes:

Giant powerpoles on the rez
built to look like kachinas
woven in traditional Hopi blankets,
the same way the high-voltage lines
stitch themselves into the dawn, on
the loom of landscape
and the myth of progress.

In another “Sonoran Strange” poem, the provisions of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo are characterized as the effects of LSD force-fed to the conquered. From this vantage, Phillips employs brilliant and striking metaphors to explain the temporality of culture, describing it as the earth’s face-paint, as easily applied as it is washed away.

This is not to say the remaining poems in “Sonoran Strange” are unimportant. These poems, covering topics from centuries-old land use debates to modern Tucsonan nightlife, showcase the human perspective, the struggle of Arizonans and Sonorans to survive in and understand their harsh and often unforgiving homeland. Phillips describes the area as “psychogeographic landscapes of myth”—barren deserts, dry riverbeds, and craggy peaks inextricably tied to the mentality and emotions of the occupiers. Acceptance of the region’s natural state lends itself to praise, as the poems hold native cultures in high regard, and describe the untouched as “—alight in a lightness of being, borderless.” Denial, on the other hand, begets destruction—“We’ll send Phoenix back to ashes—/dust to dust and all that/we learned in your churches.”

It is from this argument that the book achieves its greatest literary accomplishment, in that it is able to tie a surreal, elusive composition of a region to the bewildering and fractured society that now inhabits it. The mythical symbols developed from the landscape unravel the complex political web into basic truths: greed creates want, ignorance breeds chaos, etcetera. The lasting effects of imperialism are showcased in Phillip’s descriptions of gentrification, racial profiling, and economic exploitation.

In one of the nine poems in the “Sonoran Strange” series, Phillips writes “Sonoran Strange, everywhere/ the obvious has gone into hiding.” History, landscape, and the errors of past

civilizations are there to teach—perhaps it is time to see them and other unknown realities as part of a larger whole.

Magdalena Hill

σκούξιμο

& i rose
from linen
like a demon,
hair knotted
like nautical
demonstrations
lips stained
with the prayers
i didn't say the
night before

but something
had to be
in a corner, the attic
miracle for a heart to
speak after silence.

and i awoke
screaming

Danika Stegeman LeMay

DANGER PANTOUM

Danger I named you my miscarried brother.
Split gravel from gravel, lift the railroad ties
and trick them out into a staircase
that leads to our mobile home.

Split gravel from gravel. Lift the railroad ties
and leave gaps like gaps in photo negatives.
Light bleeds in our mobile home
through rusty screens. Brother you are there—

living gap like a gap in a photo negative.
You tell the windows all about the dirt
through rusty screens. Brother you are there.
In the fake wood grain in the fake wood walls

you tell the windows all about the dirt.
Let's tear out the cheap wiring and all the bent skirting
and the fake wood grain and the fake wood walls.
Let's strip it and panel a life-sized Punnett square.

Let's tear out the cheap wiring and all the bent skirting.
We're good at making new things from gone things.
Let's strip it and panel a life-sized Punnett square;
I'll be the little b's if you'll be the big ones.

We're good at making new things from gone things.
I named you my miscarried brother.
I'll be the little b's if you'll be the big ones
tricked out into a staircase.

Kyle McGinn

CRESCENDO

Let me isolate the trembling
vibrations of autumn—the bass

rumble when those trucks
wheel through my block—

try to capture the whine
of pipes and radio waves.

Let me isolate the coughing
of the neighbors—percussive

poundings beyond paper
thin walls. The building

creeps through the morning musical
with the symphony of waking.

Let me isolate the silencing
of little dogs—diphthong

howls for the wet slosh
of water bowls. Cats scrape

through litter boxes
like branches on windows.

Let me isolate the isolating
right angles of the city—

so much humanity stacked
parallel and perpendicular

to one another. The quarter notes
and half rests of the living.

Matt Mauch

A review of Don Share's *Union*

Imagine how odd it must be to have your first book republished after its publisher's demise led to it spending over a decade in hiding. Imagine you've had two collections come out since then. Imagine you've become Editor (no adjectival accoutrements needed) of the most revered "little magazine" ever.

But for reading the cover flap, if you picked it up at Magers and Quinn say, you wouldn't know Don Share's *Union* was rescued from the dead. We all know who Don Share is, but as with many prominent poets and editors we know of, we know little else by heart (Jah bless the internet). Me? How did I get here? I saw a single poem, "Faithful," exploring how particular domiciles are intertwined with a family's sense of family, posted online to market *Union*, and thought, *I dig this a ton. I have to get this book.* I belong to a family in which domiciles strongly inform and shape our understanding of what we are. I expected to—and did—find that strain of seeing in *Union*. What I didn't expect to find, but did, and is odd for me is a way that unbeknownst to Share participates in the oddity he (I imagine) has experienced upon republishing his debut collection, is that way back when this book first came out on Zoo Press in 2002, I was THIS close to having been the one who designed the interior and back cover and oversaw the nuts and bolts of its production.

Among the oddities Share has dealt with are oddities that many poets have dealt with when dealing with *It's coming out (or I'm sending it out) again*: Do I revise it? I think I can make this poem better. I know I can. Or is revision a kind of crime against aesthetics? Do I add or remove poems? This one about my iPhone seems to fit the old arc nicely, and updates the book, but is the me who wishes to make this poem better so very different (at least as I see me) from the me that made it as it is, that revising it would obliterate a rung of my ladder? Is part of artistic judgement leaving past aesthetics frozen in time? What would Walt Whitman do?

The oddities I dealt with brought me back to being behind

the scenes. Rewind: I have a home office with a big church table for a desk on which is a monitor as large as my grandparents' old console TV. Wednesday, a black cat who lived to be twenty-one, and whom I still miss, sits on top of the monitor as I work, soaking up the warmth that the monitor exhales. I am finding time to design, layout, and produce, with a cover artist, the first season of Zoo Press books. I must find time because the job that pays for the home office, monitor, etcetera—making books for publishers of middle-grade school-library books—is demoralizing. The editors in New York and Austin justify their positions by, among various other irritants, changing things for the sake of changing things (my take), establishing their authority over me. Biographies and historical truths are washed clean of any controversial material, meaning young readers who check out these books from the library to do reports from are basing their basic understandings of our world and its movers and shakers, its flora and fauna, on pablum. Rewind: I am making poetry books for Zoo Press because it feeds the part of me that book packaging for the ALA crowd starves.

Fast forward to now. Here we are, imagined Don Share, you and I, having taken our two different but not dissimilar roads from that way back when (knowing each, whatever we tell ourselves in old age, is about the same as the other), finally coming together on this very page as we near-missed doing so, not so long ago but oh so long ago, over a book called *Union*. Fancy that, and add an idiosyncratic sense of “union” to the various other senses sounded in Share’s book, where the word “union” itself is a roundabout with the ability to send you off in several directions, each of three sections like a different town that goes by the same name, so when their high schools play each other, it’s Union versus Union, though neither would be mistaken, in character or deportment, for the other. The speaker in these poems is often private and inward looking (“Sunset registered on magic-eyed Magnavoxes and Zeniths/ till we dozed with Jack Paar/ his adult joke bewildering me”) among public goings on (“people lived, died, quietly as possible,/ in postwar solitudes of lightless/ living rooms, views into other apartments/ liked framed photos”), affirming that “the one” and “the one as many, as part of a union” are not exclusive sensibilities. The split sensibilities are neither

all-is-rosy harmonious, nor Jekyll and Hyde unbearable, but provide, throughout, one of the foundational tensions of living and living out one's life as an American ("But not even a war set everybody free . . . We pitched a dilemma, and it still/ heaves us around on its wild horns.")

The growing up and coming of age that dominates section one is a growing up and coming of age that shares an ethos with my own growing up and coming of age, and, I imagine—it can't just be imagined Don Share and I—is shared by many others for whom the Great American Melting Pot was an idea we believed and adhered to, and when we thought about what we'd grow up to embody, it was that. Was the GAMP mere pablum fed to us young readers by bottom-line oriented New York editors? Perhaps. But we bought it ("knowing that roots are, themselves, a form of rootlessness . . . They told, and retold,/ stories that drifted into notions/ like butterflies reluctant to alight"). Millennial bashing or praising aside (don't we always talk about the up and comers in generalized terms?), our times now are times that focus more on differences than on similarities. But if I can take you back to the time of Share's and my youth, and if you'll entertain my boldness to speak on behalf of an era, we grew up in one (an era) during which one's identity was in many important ways established by identifying with the public idea of the USA, and much of that was tied to identifying with what we received via pop culture. Section one here is largely an origin story for those of us who have no cultural heritage to speak of—whose roots are not by family hand-me-down European, African, Asian, Latin, or Other, but whose sense of family lineage and identity arise from American soil ("our house tocks and ticks/ like an inherited clock . . . Its moods . . . punctuate the minutes . . . as if to say,/ Something about us isn't even us"). It's a odd place to come from. Our origin story, and all we are, is nowadays oft decried as inappropriate cultural appropriation. All that we have was appropriated, because we believed in the idea of that GAMP, and that we were becoming part of the liquid future.

The rich images of section one zoom through time in a coming of age, "what is the meaning of life," St. Elmo's Fire-y (and that's a compliment) way ("What would a Saviour make of our half-thoughts?") The poems force us to examine—to go beyond self-

image (“Lips, thick, slow to laughter, drawn-in”) into self-judging (“Fear mixed with hope leaves me obsessed”). Love, as ever—and appropriately so—is the salvation one finds coming out of all that, which Share depicts in the beautiful poem “Laura,” where, “Sunshine forced the ripples/ to glow like bent halos, // and the black marker lines shivered/ like brain waves in their final cogitations.” These are poems constructed out of the banalities of existence—the things “the one” focuses on which the “one who is part of the many, of a union” might without that other part of the self dismiss—section two’s focus on the break up of a marriage—a personal union—included. And lest you read my reading wrong, or I present it incompletely, the three sections aren’t cookie-cutter creations. The primary focus of each is woven through the other two, the three making a kind of thematic braid. Throughout, for one example, the wish to connect is often realized sotto voce in some natural environment, as in the excellent “Spiced” (“each plucked from the same earth,/ would still have soil clumped to their roots/ as if everything varied is joined, strangely, underground”), one of the many instances where nature or the urban natural are salve. As well, the banality of being an American with “America” as your cultural heritage permeates the book, as exemplified with a wonderful addition to the American road poem tradition: “Old Highway 78” (“good hearth-smoke/ stealthily fills the iron-colored sky/ and mixes with the clouds./ There is just now/ the intransigent vapor/ of what turns old plow points/ to rust”).

Union is a book about home, about homes, finding and trying to establish them, and eventually, in section three, going back to them—in Share’s case to Union Street in Memphis, a section in which Memphis stands as a living symbol of the successes and failures of American attempts at union (“Old Glory/ Flaps North, a keen nuisance to the senses./ As you knew, great force usually wins/ While a wind never ends”). This is a Memphis where “The South” has lost its old sense of home and exists in a kind of permanent state of melancholy (“I can bring you this news:/ that all around us, Sir,/ the nation still suffers/ its successes and defeats,/ that we remain at war among ourselves”). It is one of the homes of the war that presaged many wars we still wage among ourselves, with ourselves, making appropriately complex what the

idea of “union” really means (“And hearing/ all these blues// the afternoon/ would grow dark// then the afternoon/ would grow light// then the sun would/ set as if// nothing ever happened// no note added/ or taken away// And you would hear/ that this water-eyed blues// is not a bitter blues”).

Ultimately, the poems fail to find peace of mind via nostalgia, and this leads to a pervading sense of mourning among us. That the past is ever present in Memphis’s monuments, just as the present is ever on its way to the future in the Mississippi River, is characteristic of the depth of calming (perhaps impossible) that these poems seek. *Union* is book of sad hope—hope as impossible goal, but a goal we, my fellow Americans, need: Hope like a fairy tale the “happily ever after” ending of which we’ll never have fully, but may touch now and again, like a poem—certainly any good poem, but many a poem here—does. It is Epic in the sense that it captures the arc of one life led to its natural, not-dead-young conclusion. If you have lived long enough to have heard “it never gets any easier,” and have graduated from skeptic to adherent (which if you keep reading poetry and don’t die young you will), you will find here proof, and you will thank Share for a lesson better learned than denied or ignored (we know who they are that do that), and so elegantly rendered.

By my sussing, Share is roughly a decade older than me, making me more or less the same age he was when this book first came out. According to at least one study I can’t forget reading, this age that I am at, and Share was at (another union!) is at the start or in the midst of the saddest years a person ever goes through, but that things get better. If imaginary Don Share were here, I would ask if that is so, now that he is over the hump. But because imaginary Don Share is not here, I am going eagerly, then, on the heels of this, to *Squandermania* and *Wishbone*, his collections from 2007 and 2012 respectively, for the answer. No internet needed, I will soon know this one by heart. And will perhaps see where I am headed.

Sam Campbell

My Halsted is not the same as your Halsted

They find your cousin dismembered in a garbage bag
And I have no advice to give

Sympathy and empathy cliché their way out of my body
Taking my gasps with them

You stand and stretch
Decide to walk hallways the rest of your life

You said you like the way your footsteps echo in your head
When you tap them on the tick of the clock you can't tell what
time is

I try to change the color of the sky
You suggest I walk farther north

I try to move mountains around you
But you don't want to live in shadows anymore

You metronome through your methodical days
turn your back to the privilege that wasn't looking for you

Decide nothing has changed before and during
Won't know about after

I can't suggest anything
But I pace my stride to the tick of the clock

Sean Thomas Dougherty

THE ABSCISSION OF SORROW

past where Ernesto was shot.
The chalk lines long washed away,
though every 11 months the flowers
are left on the side of the road,
the rotting smell of wilting.
Even the brown dog was silent.
I was full of love & I was not afraid.
You are the opposite of elegy, I told her.
The moon was that the burn
was his—the blood I remember
on the sidewalk, the cigarette,
this hole in his mouth— Her brother
Joey who ran with him told me,
the ex-Marine, made of Jack Daniels
and mescaline.

•

In the bar named Halfway House,
Joey hung with women with names
like Bullet. Smelling of jasmine
& gin, This bar, he told me once,
sends more people to hell
than anywhere, because the barkeep
knows what bodies need to burn—

•

He hated roses for their heavy stems,
We hadn't talked about his health.
I couldn't find his eyes in his small face.
Our silence shut out the bright cold air.
How he ambled into the wards
of the dying, the seam of crocuses

through the snow an elegy.

•

I smuggled him packs of Mavericks.
Why not? He told the nurse,
his skin's yellow tinge,
he was already dead.

•

His sister Anna drove back from school
She moved like a flag
waving goodbye.
We took him home.
They were both orphans.

•

Jesus feet dangled above the dashboard
as we drove through the neighborhood
of Italians, Puerto Ricans & Bosnians,
the one who shot Ernesto we searched
for months, asking dark haired
children carrying book bags, calling
each other *puta* and *jebi si*. "Waterfall"
on the radio, he told me he didn't need saved.

•

And no, some love needs no conjugation.
No money enough the things we die for.
I drank bourbon over breakfast,
I was long past the wreckage,
I felt myself growing smaller
& no, there was no abscission
though there was the petunia
in the clay pot on the sill
slowly losing its petals.

Shahe Mankerian

HAPPY BIRTHDAY—ON THE 63RD ANNIVERSARY OF GORKY'S SUICIDE

Today you will have breakfast, two hardboiled eggs
and squeeze blood oranges. Today you will save

the peeled shells to feed the mad waterfalls in your head.
Today your fingers will feel pain without paint.

You cover the canvas with the Mother's face.
Today you will remove the clothespins from the clothesline.

You will need the rope and the sunshine of your studio.
You will need a sturdy chair and the ceiling fan.

Today will mark another birthday as you swing lightly in midair,
suspended like the butcher's meat back in the city of Van.

Paula Cisewski

Why Poetry Capital-M Matters (culled from notes for the panel by that name curated by Matt Mauch at the Normandale Writing Festival April 2016)

Here's to all the times I tried to say something exactly right and then learned I was trying to say something unsayable. Writing poetry is in some ways a reaching toward the impossible, which doesn't get easier with practice. But who devotes a lifetime to something because it's easy? It fascinates me and alarms me when a poem succeeds. Every good line feels like getting closer.

Mary Ruefle has written, "I am at once struck by what a perfect example the poem is regarding metaphor as event. Metaphor as time, the time it takes for an exchange of energy to occur. Metaphor is not, and never has been, a mere literary term . . . If you believe that metaphor is an event, and not just a literary term denoting comparison, then you must conclude that a certain philosophy arises: the philosophy that everything in the world is connected."

When I was in junior high, my grown sister lent me her copy of *The Prophet* by Khalil Gibran. A poem called "On Joy & Sorrow" contains the lines:

Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.
And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was
oftentimes filled with your tears.
And how else can it be?
The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more
joy you can contain.
Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was
burned in the potter's oven?

And in the moment after first encountering those lines, little fourteen-year-old me thought, "Holy shit! Am I not the only person with a bottomless well for a center?"

In that moment, an exchange of energy occurred. I felt a new kind of limitlessness. A new way of feeling connected at a source.

Metaphor was an event for me that day and most of my best days since.

•

Poetry matters because it is for everybody. In *The Language of Inquiry*, Lyn Hejinian states: “The only qualities necessary for reading and enjoying and learning from poetry are freedom from preconceptions as to the limits (and even the definition) of poetry and curiosity and confidence in the possibilities of something’s being new and interesting.”

•

When I do not carve out time for poetry—the reading and the writing of it—half my brain is distracted, writing anyway, and so I begin to trip over my own feet and break glasses. I become irritable and dull and less present in my relationships and in my other work. In this way, poetry matters primarily because I am a poet and I need it to function in the world.

I believe the most important social change comes from people who are at once connected to the world outside and capable of rich interior lives. People who are receptive to experiencing metaphor as an event. Poetry matters because when we make a poem or are moved by one, we become a house for that happening.

Jacob Borchardt

IN WHAT GROVE THE PIG

I do not know where the road goes
or how old it is

but beneath my bare feet it is irresistible

bone-white sand, banded with clay the color of porphyry
the path is motley and garish
even under the shade of the pines

I walk
and the wind blows
to either side
of the road cut
longleaf boughs
pulse like muscles

the forest is
an evergreen serpent
and I am stuck in its throat

the sluggish tide of cool sand
underfoot pulls me forward

until a bristled hump appears
in the road

a pig
or what once was

its coarse skin a-hum with flies
a yellowy crab apple oozes
between its teeth

I smell dry needles and sun turned fruit

the thing's naked jaws open

Do you know now where you walk?

it speaks in my father's voice

Somewhere, now—

the boar's broken mouth flaps
like the sole of a beggar's shoe

*two strangers meet
and know each other only as heat
and smoky light
they will grow old together
sleep with their hands clasped
and their foreheads touching
as each eats
the other's breath
but never—*

the wind blows again
hard this time—the trees bend
and buzz like bull-roarers

*will one know the other
as more than smoke and light*

pine-straw flows like
molten copper into the road cut
a hissing deluge over
clay and sand and pig

*never will they have more
than voices half heard
and the fleeting memory
of color, little else*

such—

the hog with my father's tongue.

Alison Morse

THE LIGHT UNDER, A CONVERSATION WITH “DIBAXU (*UNDER*)” BY JUAN GELMAN

Under the metal wing
of another plane leaving home

a field of clouds, moisture
no one can hold

under the clouds
a white page of snow

under the snow
roofs like book covers
splayed open

under the roofs
our cranial bones

under bone
our songs remembering
life after leaving:

*in the city
we walked in rags
wrapped around our feet*

*hunger held us;
we did well
if we had potatoes*

*new laws took
our fathers' work
then took our fathers*

they aimed at our elders' hearts

*for "friendship
with God's enemies"*

*led us to clothed bones
in barrels; yes, we said
these are our sons, disappeared.*

*Certain of always losing
we stand on the Strong Cliff
ready to strike.*

Our tongues tremble
with this exile.

Yet, under our songs of the separated

our roots sing through soil
to other root clusters
feeding trunks, branches
multi-mouthed, green-voiced
leaves of every shape and language

under the leaves, the word
light/
luz/
luce/
lumière/
licht/
CBET/
ارون
און

under the word

Kayla Little

A review of Ruth Madievsky's *Emergency Brake*

Emergency Brake, Ruth Madievsky's first collection, showcases her talent for weaving metaphors effortlessly, constantly turning the bodies she speaks of into objects, and everyday objects into familiar bodies to the reader. Lines like "night opened us,/ the envelopes we are" and "you spent most of the day/ feeling like a receipt someone forgot at McDonald's" are two prime examples in which she transforms not only the bodies of the subjects of the poem, but the readers, into common objects, that are rather fragile, and that most people easily use or forget—something that she runs with through the book in connection to human bodies. She also connects human bodies to much more dangerous objects, as in "If The Body Is A Door," in which she connects the body to a crime: "I think the body is a door, and what is a door/ but a crime scene waiting to happen" and in "Shadowboxing" where the body is connected to fire: "I let my mouth/ become a matchbook, / I lit myself on fire." Each metaphor she uses is clear-cut and simple, yet beautifully worded in a way so as to make me want to slap myself for not thinking of it first.

As with Madievsky's prior poems, *Emergency Brake* has themes that are common throughout her work—mainly, childhood sexual trauma. Throughout the book readers can glimpse this trauma—how it haunts the speaker and, yet, how she is able to start to move on from it. In such poems as "Some More Things I Don't Know" and "Sidewalk," Madievsky paints the daunting picture of a woman who still actively thinks about her abuser as an adult. In "Some More Things I Don't Know," Madievsky states:

I don't know his last name
or why I keep trying to find him
on Megan's List, why I keep scrolling
through the one thousand and sixty eight pages
for Los Angeles County,
over three thousand
Lewd Or Lascivious Acts

With A Child Under 14 Years Of Age

This is one of the moments in the book in which Madievsky shows the speaker actively engaging with her trauma and her abuser; in the other poems that mention the abuse the speaker is thinking of it, such is the case in “Sidewalk,” a poem in which the speaker is still in a similar obsessive frame of mind, yet we see it acted out in a different manner:

You are probably alive
Somewhere in the world,
and I don't know how I feel
about that. You're tightening
the screws of a run-down swing set
in an apartment complex in Hollywood
and winking at the girls

Here we see a speaker mentally exert herself rather than physically trying to find her abuser, as in “Some More Things I Don't Know.” Both add depth to the speaker, the situation, and the on-going battle that childhood sexual abuse brings.

The final poem in the collection, “Because It's October,” ends with a triumphant declaration that makes the roller-coaster of emotions and pain seem worth it in the end. The closing lines of the poem stand as a testament to the fact that people can grow and become stronger after abuse and sexual violence:

I think I'm ready
to spit out
the needle-nose pliers
in my mouth,
I think I'm done
being a dimmer switch

The cycles that the speaker goes through in these poems, in healing, in obsessing, in connecting everyday situations to her abuse, feels honest and real. As a survivor of sexual abuse I connect to the speaker in so many ways. Madievsky does such a wonderful job of matching words to feelings that many survivors will be able to relate to and understand.

Hajara Quinn

CORN BELT

One season after another
comes marching

in on its ogre legs.
Squats down.

The hills flatten
drought valleys, muted

colors, one letdown
following another on

its short leash. Dry well,
broken bucket,

string of pearls.
Lay it down where

we'll never find it again.
How long has it been?

Latent, I am no less voracious.
I am the fiercer for it, but

I want to be less
like an anchoress

and more like a field
of corn birthday

candling up into its rows.
Even the shadows pant.

The time for persevering

is now. The time for

persevering has always been
now. A tadpole intuits

what he must do in
order to become.

Pour me into the green
lap of the corn belt.

Sharla Yates

BEHOLD

Mother is peeling potatoes over the kitchen sink. She explains, as she scrapes potato eyes with a dull blade, how Ester was faithful by letting them audition her before the king. *Predestined*, Mother stops to tap the blade against the steel sink. For God would ask her later to risk her life for the Jewish people.

I imagine what it must have been like to be the prettiest girl on a foreign stage, while men's voices murmur from a dark balcony.

Who do you fear?

I can smell the gasoline coming up through the rusted floor of father's pickup truck. We don't say much because the radio is blaring. A voice sings Gloria! G L O R I A, and with a static snap, father switches the dial off. He is frowning. I recognize our common struggle: the insurmountable weight of a dirty imagination.

*When we hold hands and rise up, we are weightless.
We can escape the snares by growing deaf,
drowning them out with a chorus.*

We are lying on the rocky riverbank at one in the morning. My friends have stumbled off into the woods, and I had only half my beer, but playing a convincing drunk. At least I think so. He is a friend of a friend and works sweeping the floors at Albertsons. He is still wearing his nametag on his shirt that's pulled out of his pants from when we were tugging at each other's clothes.

The first time I snuck out of the house, the first time a boy said how much he liked my breasts, the first time I let a boy touch them, the first of many. The next morning, I was a live wire charging the

ground, the trees, the river, the roads spidering home all the same
vivid early yellow.

*We billow from our centers, eyes upward like laundry
stretched on a wire tussling with the breeze.*

Patrick Werle

A review of Sylvia Plath's poem "Edge," published February 5, 1963

This past summer I attended an annual writing workshop at St. Olaf College. One of the poems presented to us for discussion was "Edge," rumored to be the last that Sylvia Plath would write before taking her own life February 11, 1963. I have never read much Plath, aside from "Daddy" and a bit of *Ariel*. Her work was never on my radar, perhaps because I knew so much about her struggle with mental illness and, ultimately, the tragic way in which she took her own life—another soul lost to the disease of mental illness. "Edge" brought me to the realization that I should have paid attention. I let the myth and the tragedy of a life overshadow a collection of amazingly beautiful, challenging, honest, and tragic works.

"Edge" is a hauntingly sad poem, which goes without saying. Perhaps a suicide note? Perhaps a peace accord with life and death? The poem reads, for lack of a better term, ghostly, as if we are sharing in a decision already made in the poet's mind. Yet, aside from the pain, there is a sense of peace wanting to be made. The poem opens:

The woman is perfected.
Her dead

Body wears the smile of accomplishment,
The illusion of Greek necessity

Flows in the scrolls of her toga,
Her bare

Feet seem to be saying:
We have come so far, it is over.

It lets us know that somehow there is peace with how the poet will be leaving this world and stepping into the next. I assume Ms. Plath never saw herself as perfect; the challenges of sexism, body image, and mental illness being so much that to finally attain any

manner of perfection was seemingly impossible to attain. Perhaps the idea of “the woman perfected” tells us that she is done. The sadness of this idea is overwhelming, and yet, in some strange way, beautiful.

In the poem, Plath uses the image of a serpent to represent the children that she perhaps will be leaving behind. The idea of not just her actual children, but the children she has created in her poems, her words, her place in the world. The idea of leaving her “children” may have been the greatest sadness she experienced during the contemplation of stepping out of this world for the next:

Each dead child coiled, a white serpent,
One at each little

Pitcher of milk, now empty.
She has folded

Them back into her body as petals
Of a rose close when the garden

Stiffens and odors bleed
From the sweet, deep throats of the night flower.

She is telling us that she has nothing left to give to the children, the world, if you will, and that they will always be inside her and she in them. A mother’s love and connection, a woman’s connection to the world, a world often unkind and unjust, cannot be contained or forgotten. Plath is aware of this and realizes that in leaving, she is also somehow preserving the life she lived.

The final stanzas of “Edge” bring a closure that is not without questions and, yet, leave no real questions to ask:

The moon has nothing to be sad about,
Staring from her hood of bone.

She is used to this sort of thing.
Her blacks crackle and drag.

The moon has experienced loss but there is nothing new in this loss. Perhaps Plath understood this and, in a way, that was the sense of peace she needed to step out of this world. “She is used to this sort of thing” somehow lessens the pain. Perhaps it is

Plath who is used to the thing—the battle with mental illness, the “crackle and drag” of her own pain, and the wondering of why things happen the way they do. Why and how she ended up here at the very edge of surrender. A surrender that would lead to her taking her own life, succumbing to an illness that to this day continues to affect so many.

Shaindel Beers

The con man's wife. . .

is the first victim after Truth. Patient Zero
of a disease she doesn't know she's spreading.

You've seen the story before—another family
in the same state. Another wife showing up

for the funeral. You wonder, *How could anyone
be so dumb?* Thinking this makes you feel safe.

Once, I believed anything that was said to me.
I believed I was smart and capable and beautiful.

Once, I believed everything that was said to me.
I believed I was stupid and crazy and dangerous.

Some days I believe I've broken my brain by
believing all this at once. Once, I wanted to be

the last thing you'd want to throw on a gas fire.
Then, I wanted to be the first. Now, I am learning

to be the fire itself. Discovering the lie was like
realizing the salt shaker had been filled with ground

glass all along. You start examining all the places
you've been cut. Picture your stomach shredding

itself like a meat slicer. Then, you think of all
your dinner parties, family meals—all the salt

sprinkled across others' plates, all the shakers
passed across the table in pairs. Your stomach

churns now, hungry for its own blood. I spent

six years mourning a boy who didn't die

because he never existed. He was a brilliantly
executed lie, a story fabricated from nothing.

I still send money to the country he was never born in.

John Sibley Williams

CATHEDRAL

The nights are always starless here.

On flattened stone land, we lie shadowed
by rundown pylons, rusty petroglyphs;

only the energy sparked by small gestures
shows we are still alive
in hidden places—

the exact tone of her skin
against mine, where they harmonize
and diverge, the angle of every curve,
trajectory of sweat, of lip, tongue, combustible memories
as they streak wet between folded thighs, one atop
the other, energy spent—

and it hurts this much because it must.

We are alone
to read this book with our fingertips.

Gently, very gently, I fold
back into her body blind,
lambent beneath iron gods.

Jasmin Rae Ziegler

Touchstone

I recently had the privilege of attending a writing residency for women poets up on Rainy Lake's Mallard Island, between International Falls and the Canadian border. One of the cabins on the island used to be an old bordello for the loggers. Our caretaker and guide for our stay said, "Wouldn't it be lovely to have been an unknown floating around that space, watching it all unfold, like a secret power." I thought, I know something about that feeling.

Fifteen years ago, I was living in Florida with my heroin-addicted boyfriend. He had bought a gun and it sat heavy and cold in a safe across from our bedroom. I was afraid of him and more afraid of leaving him. I packed up one backpack, swallowed a handful of whatever I could find, and said goodbye to all of my belongings and ran. I still remember packing the backpack while hiding in the bathroom. It amazes me now: that I can remember a last moment in that house. That I did leave.

When you have little power, you learn to unearth power from the unlikeliest of spaces. Fifteen years ago, my geography lost anchor. Homeless doesn't tell the story. But despite my lack, I sifted comfort from my anonymity. I floated. I hovered. I was able to breach underground spaces without acknowledging my complicity in those spaces because, who was I? I was no one.

I ended up alone in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. I knew no one. No friends. No family. I would hang out in the dance clubs late at night and dance and drink. And drink and drink. I'd go to the sex-shops just to buy whippets and fog my brain out before crashing to sleep in some dreary motel.

In my imagination, I was anthropologist and shaman. I brought light to these spaces as invisible witness. I created taxonomies to collect these spaces. I caught them in nets and killing jars. Their hard bodies pinned in the glass boxes of my aura. Sometimes I want to vanquish them. Sometimes I burn sage. Sometimes I go all fury and feral and break all the glass. Sometimes I write about these spaces.

It isn't easy to write about these spaces. I don't do it because I

need to confess. My sense of shame about my past does affect my writing. I fear my community's reaction because so much of my past contains social taboos. And though it didn't then—because I didn't have it then—community has come to mean everything to me.

On Mallard Island, we had dinner as a community every night. Twelve of us women gathered around a table full of bounty—food, wine, intellect, and generosity. Every woman there knew my name. I was not anonymous. It was the opposite of Myrtle Beach. I felt nurtured in their presence. We all took turns sharing stories and ideas. I was able to joke about my past without being maudlin. This simple act of community dining and engagement helped me shed some of the shame that has inhibited me from sharing more of myself with others.

There are ways that I am still affected by my past. I startle easily. I can't watch violence in movies or TV without having a panic attack. I have to make sure I don't drink too much because under too much pressure my mind goes back to those times where I was the target and terminus. I have broken several glass coffee tables and many collections of glassware. In my mind in those over-saturated drunken rages, I'm still getting beat.

After three years in Florida, my time in Myrtle Beach marked a death and re-birth. There was such a lightness to once again being in control of where I went and what I did. I no longer had to worry about a violent and possessive man watching my every move. I was electric. I was grief and celebration—weightless and glorious.

After fifteen years here in Minnesota of being highly guarded about my past, my time on Mallard Island marked another cycle of death and parturition. There is a new lightness. My sense of shame acted like a possessive man, isolating me and keeping me from sharing my writing, my art. The great medicine of nature and community have brought me to these words, to this page.

The anonymity I gained in Myrtle Beach had its power and just as clearly its existential unbuttoning. I sought humid places so my lungs had some grit to inhale—so that I could be weighed down by something. During this period of time I wrote obsessively. I would spend hours filling notebooks with random tetherless words. I wanted each word to serve as an anchor or pin me down. I scrubbed my skull with words and then wrung out the

sponge. Eventually, the language wouldn't come. My blush left its terminal place. I had no sense of context, continuity, or language.

Grace, in her many forms, came to me. Some might say I was saved, spared, rescued, redeemed, or freed. I don't like the friction of these words. Saying these words is like chewing on the fuzz of a vegetable gone bad. Is it because they imply my lack of agency? Is it because they frame those spaces as decidedly abject? Or is it because those words invoke an over-wrought cliché? Yes, yes, and yes. I see now that Grace is the convergence of community and nature.

I am still a ghost-body in those spaces. Some strange elegance haunts those stony landscapes in the folds of my mind. I like to think I am here because of other people. I like to think I am here because I am dogged. I like to think I am here because of the moon's orbit. Waves fold through the sea in infinite ripples that echo, vibrate, trespass, and shape-shift with the force of what is above, below, and beside.

It has become clear to me how very much my past is sutured, salvaged, clustered, and knotted to my writing. Why deny it? Power shifts like the waves shift the sea. I find power in the communities I gather with—I am so grateful for the gifts I've received as a part of the writing community here in Minnesota. I've found it to be a nurturing and joyful community. I would be remiss to remain anonymous. Here I am, skipping a rock across the water.

**BECAUSE MY FAVORITE QUESTIONS ARE THE ONES
YOU DON'T ASK**

My mind is not a trap. It's a kind of lagoon
 where ideas grow warm in the still water.

My mind wants to say hello to your mind
 and that's where these pictograms of sound come in.

My mind has its own seasons of wind and change,
 sound, and the green that explodes beneath morning trees.

Each day brings a new janitor to my mind's school room.
 He wears gray work shoes and gathers up the marbles
 I've left spreading their glass circles around the floor.

My mind remembers a time when it was a quieter mind
 running through tall grass and pinching crickets into my hands.

The mind that I have now is a mind inside a mind inside
 a mind inside a mind—each one painted in different floral dresses.

The worst days are when my mind expects something
 —like a walrus or a cameo—but pulls nothing
 from its endless chest of drawers.

The best are the ones when my head opens
 and my mind watches the world from its little trolley car
 as I walk through my day collecting memories
 like shiny toys when I pass.

This is my mind's best mode of travel, as a surprise
 passenger in this gangle of sinew and bone
 that waits under sun to feel itself warm,
 that piles itself in blankets each night
 and asks to be re-made.

Marguerite Harrold

AT THE SOFITEL

The world was a wall of impeccable glass
Slanted Tilted out
Almost parallel to the sidewalk
Whole body pressed against it
I was like floating
Here On the other side of the projects
Breath sucked in
Cheeks all puffed out like a child playing Dizzy

I wanted to fall at first

Maybe I could have landed on top of that big rich woman wearing a fur
She looked like a bear leading dinner on a leash

It would be fun to see me
Neck broken like a curious owl
A little blood ribboned around for color

It was the first day of spring
A snowflake One
Came right at me
Like a playful sparrow
A dive bomb
Then a rising
It seemed to laugh
Linger long enough to catch wind like a wave
Dance a little then disappear

Jennifer Manthey

BERLIN,

I thought you could teach me about heartbreak.
Your flower boxes were trailing,
spilling over,
covering the age of the walls, the violence of bullet holes,
the way a woman, nearing 50, covers her neck
with a beautiful scarf.
You persuaded me to wear more black
and never jeans,
but you gave me a girl
walking down the sidewalk in a bright red raincoat
when I needed it.
You led me from the Brandenburg Gate,
triumphant and severe about glory,
(remember when history was something straight-backed and
beautiful?)
one kilometer down Ebertstrasse to
Potsdamer Platz,
with its post-traumatic architecture and its commercialized
concepts of moving on.
There were times,
Berlin,
when I felt you and I were like a man
who has attended his father's funeral over the weekend,
coming into work on Monday with a smile,
saying, "Good, good,
I'm doing well thank you."

Hajara Quinn

HELLO NO MORE

Hello no more
tantrum of rain
slapping down
dead branches
in May.
Hello no more
calisthenic display
of leaves
backpedaling crimson only
to the ground
in October.
Goodbye pillar
of isometric strength
in March
when I am waiting
for the bus.
Each to his or her
own childhood
climbing tree.
Maybe as soon
as tomorrow morning
a crew of men will
have arrived to cut
down the elm
at the end of the drive.
But first I must climb up it
and never come down.

WELCOME TO THE COUNTRY CLUB

Cricket song helps
The dead become
Comfortable being
Dead. In every
Shovelful of turned
Up dirt smile
The faces of kids,
The leeching wear
Of everyone's stiff
Skin. The crisp air's
Caress is brittle.
The wind is your
Favorite mixtape
Melting. Come
With us. Barrel
Of sparks, boombox
Dumpsters. Come
Now. One more
Step & a shallow
Pit of glowing
Coals. Get fresh
With the man
On fire. Get
Close to the
Hotness. How
Beautifully icky,
The compost stench
Of burning hair.
The stickiness
In your palm.
Hold on, hold—
You're already
Forgetting how

Far you've come.
Don't say any-
Thing yet, listen
To us purr the let
Go, the unfolding.
We're just going
To etch this song
Into you—deep
Down, all of us
Want, at the last
Second, to change
What we've done

Brett Elizabeth Jenkins

OMENS

Twice I have seen cars burning on the side
of the road and wondered
what it meant, though God knows I am one
to misread signals. I once
misread *persimmon tree* as *permission tree*
and all day went around
feeling beholden to the people I passed
on the street. *What am I to be*
asking permission for? I asked myself. My lungs
have just as much
right to fog up this lazy street as any other
hands-in-pocket walker.
But I held that permission tree inside me until
night when I was alone,
and let it bloom, and on the ends of its branches
were delicious, plump grenades.

Paula Cisewski

THERE IS NO I IN ME

Don't say no

to everything

but say

what else

what else

unwebs us

from the elegiac so elegantly

stabilimentum autograph

a new name, unzips

say

what other
(clearing)

work is worthy

who can become

a clearing

(Me, I am become)

even

amidst the violence

a team

beauty encroaching

a clearing (too much

for which

to clear the way)

Afterword

Poetry City, USA accepts unsolicited and solicited submissions during two annual open-reading periods. We read all submissions, solicited or unsolicited, blindly. We believe that knowing the identity of a poet can change how one reads a poem, and we want to publish the poem first and the poet second. It may be that our blind reading policy changes what, in a traditional sense, “solicitation” means—that not giving special consideration to those we ask to send us poems is something less than what soliciting has always been. If that’s the case—if our sense of solicitation makes the word more elastic—we’re okay with that. Our editors read widely, in print and online journals, looking for poems they love, for poets to add to our list of “those we hope to solicit submissions from.” The list of poets we solicit from is a balance of the diverse voices and constituencies that comprise contemporary poetry.

We hope that what we do would receive the approval of Harriet Monroe, our forbearer in these endeavors, who said, and we concur, and attempt to follow in the tradition, that “The Open Door will be the policy of this magazine—may the great poet we are looking for never find it shut, or half-shut, against [their] ample genius! To this end the editors hope to keep free from entangling alliances with any single class or school. They desire to print the best English verse which is being written today, regardless of where, by whom, or under what theory of art it is written. Nor will the magazine promise to limit its editorial comments to one set of opinions.”

We can’t pay poets cash as Harriet Monroe did (our poets receive complimentary printed copies), so we encourage you to use the tools at your disposal—the internet, bookstore, pocketbook, wallet, course syllabus, reading series, etcetera—to learn more about, read more of, and support the poets whose poems, found here and in our back issues (www.poetrycityusa.com), stir you. *MM*