

Marsh Hawk Review

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Edited by Mary Mackey

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CORINNE ROBINS

Impressionism

Before the rain comes
nail down the lie of sunlit skies.
It's not too late: the horses
riding away, the escaping figure,
a woman's back and, to the side,
those gloves on the table
leaving nothing to be said.
Every line has its shadow,
the quick dab making fog,
cloud, rain speak, a haze
of a face under a cartwheel hat
and the blur of half closed eyes
along with the mirror surface
of traveling water holding
out its hand sensing a presence
we cannot call to
from the other side of the river.
So we stare in the same direction
regarding a painted sun.
Object, tree or stone.
Paint the wind seen through tears
a prism of leftover words
defying the illusion of sharpness.
Not quite what we saw,
not quite the weight of light across a face,
tears dissolving patches of color,
sonorous reds, lying blues. Try again.
Agony scratching the surface,
himself standing tall to dab and dab again.
Now you have it, failure done over and over.

Corinne Robins (1933 – 2016)
From *Today's Menu* (Marsh Hawk Press, 2006)

MAXINE HONG KINGSTON

Once I was on an airplane . . .

Once I was on an airplane beside
a village girl in the window seat. At takeoff
I asked her, "Where are you going?"
"Waw!" She shouted in surprise, and grabbed
ahold of my hand, "You speak like me!"
"Yes, I speak Say Yup language."
"Are you from the village?" "No, my MaMa
and BaBa came from Say Yup villages.
They left for New York. They lived in New York,
then California. I was born in California."
I feel like a child, younger than this girl; I'm
telling about parents as if I still had them;
I'm talking in my baby language. "Waw!"
she exclaimed, loud as though yelling across fields.
"I am going to New York! I
am meeting my husband in New York. He's
waiting for me in New York. He works
in a restaurant. He's rented a home. He sent
for me, and waits for me." She did not
let go of my hand; I held hers tightly

as we flew the night sky. She looked
in wonder at webs of lights below.
“Red red green green,” she said.
“Red red green green,” my mother
used to say, meaning, Oh, how pretty!
The lights were white and yellow too, and gold,
blue, copper. And above, stars and stars.
Mother, MaMa, as you leave
the village family you’ll never see again—
Grandfather walked her as far as he
could walk, stood weeping in the road until
she could not see him anymore when
she turned around to look. She’s off to that lonely
country from where he returned broke— “I felt
that I was dying.”—MaMa, girl,
you are not traveling alone. I am
traveling with you, here, holding your hand.
I know that country you’re leaving for,
and shall guide you there. I know your future.
I’m your child from the future. Your husband
will certainly meet you. BaBa will
be at the East Broadway station.

You will recognize each other,
though he be dressed modern Western style.
You will have a good, good life.
You will have many children, and live a long,
long life. You will be lucky.
“You are lucky. Your husband has work.
He’s rented an apartment, and made you a home.
He saves money. He bought your plane ticket,
he will be waiting for you at the airport.”
She listened to the wise old woman teaching her.
But how to instruct anyone the way to make
an American life? How to have a happy
marriage? For a long time in the dark,
dozing, dreaming, thinking, we sat
without speaking, without letting go
of warm hands. The red red green
green appeared again. I told her,
“That’s Japan. We’re over Japan now.
We’ll be landing soon in Narita.”
“Waw! You speak Japanese too.”
She admires me too much. Inside
the horrible confusion of the international

airport, how can a mind from
the village not fall to crazy pieces?
I found a nice American couple making
the connecting flight to New York, and asked
them please take this Chinese girl
to the right gate. She thanked me. She said
goodbye, see you again. “Joy kin.”
She did not look back. Good.
Gotta go, things to do, people
to meet, places to be.

© Maxine Hong Kingston
From: *I Love a Broad Margin to My Life*

WIL GIBSON

The softest wings

There are moments of
being uncomfortable that
are worth watching.

None of those
are on television.

There is no way to be
uncomfortable for someone
without showing it.

Myself,

I change
position in my seat,
or

shuffle my feet.

A small way to cope
with my discomfort for others

is to make myself
physically uncomfortable.

I know that this does not help them,
does not make them feel better.

My lack of physical comfort
makes me more comfortable.

Movement is comfort.

Silence is not awkward;
feels

honest,
like

just after

a car crash,

or

the first minute after
someone has begun
to die, the beautiful tinge
of blue that their skin turns when
they stop being able to breathe;

the instant a

newborn deer
walks,

or a butterfly
unfurls
itself. Those

soft awkward and
most authentic wings.

From home

You have no idea the
damage you've done.
Your childhood was
an afterthought, even
to you. The broken
barn and blurry buried
autumns are still here.

Every blade of grass,
every crushed rock in
the driveway, every
rusted nail that keeps
me together, we all
remember you. We
started to fall apart
when you left us here,
like a cliché you can't stop
saying, we didn't even
know it was happening.

Strangers took up the spaces
you had filled. I changed the
color of my skin, painted my
veins white, and they left too.
Now my skin peels, and my
blood cakes to the floor.

I have seen thousands of storms.

My walls were never
meant to keep people
out. The dust on my
eyelids is so thick they
won't open. Scars
across my back like
bedsores on a forgotten
family member. A black
balding skull full of bad
thoughts and good memories,
just cobwebs in the attic.

I know you have come
to see me, touched the
vinyl siding flesh you helped
wrap me in. I will never be able
to say hello. I am sorry to
lock you out. I do not know
who I belong to. I have been here
for years, in this spot. Empty.

Night Sweats

We drank till we had
no options for escape then
ran away anyway,
had spent all energy

on wishes to be somewhere
less like the movies. We
know our place in the
movies. We are not the

main characters. We are the
plucky best friends, the bad
guys because of where we
live but by the end of the movie

you've come to see that we
ain't so bad after all, but are
still the antagonist. In these
movies we are not protectors,

we are always depicted as the
aggressors. We are greasers and
greasy. No matter the reality,
we will always be seen as the

problem. The ones who escalate
tense situations. Wolves that howl

at the moon,
slammed car doors,
and scars. The ominous
figure in the corner, cornered.

THOMAS FINK and MAYA D. MASON

Mirror

I have that glazed
look in the eyes as
if drunk, but I'm
not.
I don't look

in my eyes much because
I find reproach
there. She acts like singing
is an act of violence.
I'm going to hug you now.
Better

to sit still with
very wide eyes.

Dirty Zebras

The Zebra Café
had superior black and white coffee.
I trekked to the Pittsburgh Zoo
expressly for the zebras.

The café proprietor hankered for zebra
artwork on his gray
walls. By the time I reached

the zoo, the zebras
had been sent out
for cleaning.

SUSAN TERRIS

Still His House

The husband, brain webbed by dementia, enters
the house, walks upstairs to the bedroom with

a live mouse on his shoulder. It's grey-brown,
hunched. The woman moves closer. It's not a mouse

but an orb-weaver. The husband must have
breached a garden web on his way in. *Spider*, she

says. The husband looks in the mirror. *Spider*, he
repeats. Then, slowly, he remembers and plucks

the orb-weaver from his shoulder. In this house,
still his house, no one kills a spider. To kill one in

a house brings bad luck. The husband has bad luck
already. Doesn't need more, so cupping the ticklish

creature in his hands, he carries it down the stairs,
then outside, and frees it next to the broken web.

Old Beard

I am sending back the key
--Sylvia Plath, "Bluebeard"

Till death do us part. Did it seem romantic
then, as a girl without art.

Coming to your house, your heart. The beard
I married, though, is disappearing and has

darted, perhaps, into some rabbit lair
in search of the Alice I was and there

I can see / my x-rayed heart

which makes me fear death in life more than
death, so, to start, I return the key. . . .

*Line in italics is from Sylvia Plath's poem "Bluebeard"

The Bell Jar Effect

Sisters, your song / Bears a burden too weighty
--Sylvia Plath, "Lorelei"

Virginia put stones in her pockets and waded
into the River Ouse. Have you ever. . .

For Sexton: carbon monoxide. Teasdale: pills.
Reetika—a knife, Deborah—a fall.

It's not just the women. Think: Celan,
Berryman, Pavese. Yet men die from *anomie*,

while women die for love or for its absence.
You have climbed that rock. Would you. . .

For Sylvia—old soul grown older—the oven,
that hearth-heat. It's said a woman ages

when her lover leaves. Yours left. You may grow
old but will, for spite—won't you—hold fast.

SUSAN KELLY-DeWITT

Arranged Marriage, 1938

They sit next to each other
in the residents' dining room
though he lives in the facility
next door
and it is as if a big black door
closes and locks with facility
between them, no room
left to smile at each other.

Alzheimer's, a broken hip--
but it looks charming, the old
couple in side by side
wheelchairs. An arranged
marriage—the daughter who arranged
her father's visit, and sits by their side
here, tells me this; the old-
est child of eight living, hip

to her mother's permanent frown
and sudden obstinate silence.
Her mother will not eat tonight
“in protest,” the daughter half-jokes
though we both understand there's no joke
when it comes to night
on the day of an arranged marriage. Silence
might be the bride's only way to frown

at her new husband, proprietary lover.
He chews his gums, toothless
but eats the fruit cocktail with relish.
Absence of mind is a new kind of pleasure.
Forty years without any pleasure
in each other, the daughter says, without relish.
Their anger was toothless
but not false. Married, but not lovers.

The daughter wears the mother's beauty
with the father's pale eyes.
She too was born in China, married

young, but for love.
You can tell how much she'd love
for them to forget married
life's grudges, catch each other by the eyes
and hold there some long denied beauty.

STEVE FELLNER

Ode

I remember finding out that a gay porn star
with a huge ten-inch cock committed
suicide which I assumed would turn out to be a joke

that the guy strangled himself with his own dick.
Once I found out that it was in the papers
I decided to watch one of his movies, trying to find

a moment when you saw sadness flash
over his face, a point where his penis was
flaccid from depression, and then came back to life

through rapid-fire editing. I imagined the director
of the film shouting something like *Deeper!*
Deeper! which may have triggered a picture

in his mind of being buried underground, accidentally,
alive and hard, happy that his disappearance
was a relief to the people he once loved. I looked up

the porn star's bio and found out that he made
close to five-hundred films, and couldn't
help but think, *how did he have time to be depressed*

when I wholly understood why
I would. I was a fat, middle-aged gay man
who once could seduce someone good-looking

not as a result of his superior appearance but because
bold, horny queers were nowhere to be found,
and I was waiting and ready. Once I wanted anonymous sex

and a man arrived at my apartment and we both immediately
knew he surpassed me in looks in every way.
Before he could dismiss me, I started to cry and begged,

pity fuck me, and he said that wasn't his thing,
so then I said, *hate fuck me*, and he said *that I can do*
which I think was a pleasant concession, causing me to hope

that if he ever decided to kill himself

God wouldn't punish him too badly since
he distracted someone for a good four minutes

from obsessing about their own

imminent death. I remember when I first saw you,
my dumb dead student, enter my classroom.

I was shocked that someone so good-looking

would want to take a poetry workshop. Your shirt was tight.
So tight. I knew you didn't care about my appearance.

This is what I learned from being a slut:

If someone's going to sleep with me,
they're going to sleep with me. That goes for the people

who are ungodly beautiful. In fact, they have

more at stake. If I reject them (not that I ever would),
they might not be as beautiful as we both

had thought they were. You came to my office and your shirt

stretched even more over your muscles, which I didn't think
was possible, and you didn't seem to either,

because you kept looking at your pecs as if

they were going to burst like balloons. You said,
I want you to know that I've been thinking

of killing myself, and I just laughed. Here I was,

an openly gay man who had a nervous breakdown
five years, two months, three days earlier,

listening to this beyond attractive gay man who had

everything ahead of him, tell me that he had it
bad. *Are you on meds?* I asked and he said,

Of course as if I knew. As if he told me one night

when we were lying in bed together, with his
tight shirt torn off during another

unmemorable strip tease. Or did he expect me

to confess the obvious, that I was a pill-popper?
Don't forgive me for telling you to go off your meds, proclaiming

that every gay man is depressed and one day they'll
find that the happy pills cause migraines
or cancer or some other aggressively banal illness

someone who isn't depressed should be dealing with.
You ended up dropping my class, and, for that,
I hated you, too, because I spent time putting written comments

on your work, which was something I normally only
did for my unattractive students, who needed to
believe college mattered, because what else

did they have to live for when most of them weren't
good-looking or intelligent? When I found out
you took your own life through pills,

I was annoyed by the lack of imagination
of your death. Even there you were uncreative.
I attended your funeral, not for sentimental reasons,

or that it might look good to my department head,
but that I wanted to see if you would be
as attractive in death as in life, and, yes,

upon seeing your dead body in the casket,
I can say with shameful predictability, you were.
The funeral was small. It was good I was there.

Even if I was nothing more really than a poorly-
dressed hired mourner. Afterwards a man approached me
in the bathroom and said, *How much?* I was confused. *How much?*

he repeated. *You think I'm a prostitute?* I asked.
And he wasn't my type, even with my serious
low standards, but I took the hundred dollar bill

he was offering me, and then said *give me fifty more*,
and he handed it over after he said,
Happily, and then unzipped his pants.

Then I ran. I learned something. You could say I was blessed
by your death. *There is a price*
for everything, they say, which isn't true when you're tearing

through the streets with confetti just made from the cash
you could have used to pay off your monthly
student loan for a second college degree that

never mattered to anyone except to a pock
-marked future boss who always reminds you
that things aren't free, but they are certainly exchangeable.

STEPHEN PAUL MILLER

DONALD X

moves to the Nation of Islam.

SANDY McINTOSH

Falling In Love In the Kingdom of Spam

After Ron Padgett

I want to meet you
We met last year
Do you need a mistress?
I'm pretty and slim and want a child
I could be very nice and filthy
Our date will be best thing happened to you
Me and my girlfriend want you bad
My girlfriend earns 10,000\$ an hour
Here is an application
I invite you for an interview
Want me to lick you whole?
When will you call me for dinner?
Tomorrow we can go to cinema
Write me today at evening
I like you very much
I think only about you
I won't let you be lonely
I'll whip you until you scream
I scream very loudly
Do you want to marry me?

Poem by Leonard Cohen,
Graffiti by McIntosh

Marita

Please find me

I am almost ~~30~~.

~~40~~ ~~50~~ ~~60~~

~~70~~ ~~80~~ 82

RUSTY MORRISON

Room 37

Sudden sharp

then blood runs down your wrist from the Venus mound of your palm

merely cutting into the apple you'd cupped in your hand

weren't you

what can't be released from the puncture wound you press to bleed

what will fester

violence

you will not abandon once you let it be exposed

what you keep hidden like a real eye on a tray of glass eyes

in the contained space of a bathroom of a hotel of moment

you needn't let conform so quickly to the exacting shape of your mother's hand its grasp

closing around what is

with the shape of what always has been

as you reconnoiter the past's turmoil instead of minding your task

the restlessness of mortal life

its restlessness is not interested in your mother

and never was

ROCHELLE RATNER

The First Day on Feverfew

--May 24, 2000

Today my skull was cleaned,
lifted gently out
of the body,
held in the mountain stream
letting still-wintery waters
wash over it.
I opened it, rinsed inside,
used a small gold brush
to get at all the crevices.
If only I could articulate
how different it feels now,
but you, you see skulls
as trophies
hanging on the wall
of some hunting lodge.
I can't begin to show you
pain or explain its absence
even to myself.
Settle for this skull, then,
newly discovered on some
forest path, not killed,
just found there,
free of dirt and blood now,
pure white and resting gently
on these shoulders you like
to drape one arm around
so protectively.

Rochelle Ratner (1948-2008)

From: *House and Home* (Marsh Hawk Press, 2003)

ROBERT GIBB

THOSE WHO ARE FALLEN, THOSE WHO ARE LIFTED UP

i.

Hiking Falls Ravine Trail
Through the mixed woods
Of the park, I heard a squirrel

As it missed its mark
Among the groined vaults
Of the trees. That cry

Of surprise surprised me,
As did the sound of him
Crashing to the ground.

A furred burst of turbulence
I'd thought incapable of making
Such a human mistake.

ii.

Some nights in the mountains
We'd come home to find
Flying squirrels in the house—

Tiny hang-gliders that sailed
Themselves about the room,
Touching down lightly

In the dumb cane, the soft gloss
Of the ficus. I'd snatch them up
To launch outside, back toward

The treetops, their taut bodies
Skimming once again
Like bits of windblown bark.

RATS

Twilight, and out from under the juniper
Comes the alert, gray, furtive shape—

Hunch-backed, nib-faced,
Scavenging for seeds beneath the feeder.

I mistook him for a squirrel the other day
Till some sense of the impending

Said to search in the shadows for the tail.
And there it was, naked as if mangy

And lankly cabled with blood.
Some sense of menace in a place of wings.

Childhood's nightmare shapes,
Rats would wake me with a clatter,

Overturning the garbage cans
Set out below my window, ravening

The table scraps and pot liquor swill.
Sewer rats, big and motionless

At first in the gravel of the driveway,
Before each one seemed to swarm.

Maybe it's the plague-haunted fables
We're read growing up, or the ones

To come scuttling from the tenements,
That invest their presence with such dread?

(The hold of the ship in *Nosferatu*
Spilling its scampering cargo.)

Again last night I awakened to scratching
In the wall just above my head.

BIRDS OF THE INTERIOR

That winter I felt like the sparrow in the parable,
Flown back out of the banquet hall,
A small brown thing battered under the winds,
Which is the way I thought of it then.
Half the year, imagine, under the rain
And helmeted sun, learning to be alone.
I thought of Hardy and his darkling thrush,
The Dickinson “thing with feathers,”
Of myself as fledged, eventually, like a redwing
On a reed, the sun setting fire to the water.
That was the spring I was going to let nothing
Get past me, each blink of my eyes
The jump-cut from one perception to another
Further budding of the leaves. And yet
That year as always I looked up to find spring
All around me, its green haze on the hillsides,
The lone trees in the crop fields casting
Their shade. It’s a wonder I managed at all,
What with all that longing to consume me—
Leaves, seasons, a sun-torched marsh
Filled with settling wings. I could hear them
At evening, the darkness closing in,
Last notes loud on the water,
An elaborate fountain that patterned the air.
I’d be doing alright, I thought,
As long as I wasn’t found on the ground,
Battered like providence’s sparrow.

RICHARD LORANGER

Destiny

The Walgreens on Telegraph Ave in Temescal
has a 60' cinderblock wall that runs along the parking lot,
windowless and bland, almost forbidding,
or would be if it weren't for the three broad swathes
of jasmine, thick and fragrant, climbing the wall
on hidden trellises at geometric intervals, plotted and
contained such that folk walking by,
on their prosaic stroll past rows of ticking cars,
may have three sure doses of enchantment,
regularly timed, a planned event designed to
momentarily mitigate that brute block of earth,
or formerly earth, stamped into form
by the addled mind beset with capital
seeking to incite an urgent act of purchase.
I have paused many times by those captive vines
to soak a nerve-draught of euphoria
so needed to allay the temper of the day,
near as oft as I have paused across the lot
to witness the entire scene, carved box of wanton waste
wrought and raised by a degenerate species
vainly masking its wont with candid blooms,
how's that for cynical, in fact just the other day
I fell into exactly such a misanthropic fugue,
prompting this very writing, as on that occasion
out of the blue it dawned on me, and dawned on me
like a real dawn, shocking and resplendent,
that a mere three hundred years hence, that wretched block,
reduced to rubble, sunken and collapsed, struck down
by the sheer strength of time and vine, would become
a vast morass of jasmine, pit of earthly fragrance
sweetening a stunned swath of the crumbled land,
radiating verdance like true life should,
and it would all be worth it.

3 Minutes

I stand on a broad flat rock, 3 minutes of my life – of what? 3 minutes – a few dozen breaths, if you're counting, several dozen heartbeats. A few billion nerves firing. A small brown feather fluttering across a field. Slow drip of an old sink. My life – my what? 3 minutes waiting in a room. 3 minutes watching the tide come in on a stony beach, listening to each wave crash like a heartbeat, like a long, slow breath. 3 minutes of an engine running. 3 minutes of an exquisite cantata.

I stand on a broad flat rock, an outcropping really. 3 minutes. 3 minutes of nothing. Time an invention of the mind, if you're counting, and probably not what it seems at all. 3 minutes thinking about that. 3 minutes of bone pain, of absolute grief that lasts a year. 3 minutes of orgasm, pleasure-pulsing right out of your body, then slowly sinking back in. 3 minutes in the presence of a loved one. 3 minutes waiting in a room.

I stand on a broad flat rock, an outcropping high above a valley, late at night, well past midnight, full moon at my back and glimmers of aurora borealis flickering across the north sky, flickering just these moments, a few dozen breaths, moon behind in faint mist hemmed by a ring of rainbow this really happened, Milky Way hanging brilliantly in the West against darkest space, silent, and the stars shift imperceptibly, I mean the earth, if you're counting, and the slightest hint of dawn comes in from the East and dims the spectacle, and that's it, it's over.

RAFAEL JESÚS GONZALEZ

Luna llena

en vísperas de los días de los muertos

Esta luna llena sale
como cuenta grande de sílice amarillo
transmitiendo los sueños de los muertos.

El único paraíso — nos dicen —
imperfecto que sea

es la Tierra

llena de flores y de plumas,
oro aquí y jade allá,
encanto de cantos y de arcos iris.

El único infierno — nos dicen —
imperfecto que sea

es el mundo

que nos hemos hecho.

Y la luna se esconde
entre neblinas de tinieblas.

Full Moon

on the Eve of the Days of the Dead

This full moon rises
like a great bead of yellow silica
transmitting the dreams of the dead.

The only paradise, they tell us,
imperfect as it may be

is the Earth

full of flowers & of feathers,
gold here & jade there,
enchantment of songs & of rainbows.

The only hell, they tell us,
imperfect as it may be

is the world

we have made for ourselves.

And the moon hides
in mists of darkness.

La poesía alimenta

Si pudiera convertir
 mis palabras en pan,
si con mis palabras
pudiera reabastecer de peces
las aguas de los mares y los ríos,
si mi voz pudiera
hacer brotar el maíz puro y sano,
si con mi voz pudiera unir
las nubes para aliviar la sed,
mi canto llenaría
hasta el silencio sagrado
 de las piedras.
Pero quizás más grande milagro sería
como el del Maestro en el monte,
no multiplicar pan y pescados,
sino hacer amplios los corazones
y abrir la mano de la codicia.

Poetry Feeds

If I could make
 my words into bread,
if with my words
I could replenish with fish
the waters of the seas & the rivers,
if my voice could
make the corn bud pure & whole,
if with my voice I could herd
the clouds to relieve thirst,
my song would fill
even the sacred silence
 of the stones.
But perhaps greater miracle would be,
like that of the Master on the mount,
not to multiply loaves & fishes,
but to make hearts wide
& open the hand of greed.

Solomon's October

Stay me with flagons,
comfort me with apples,
for I am sick of love.

Sick of love
apples cannot make me well.
Once the leaves have ripened scarlet
on the boughs and the birds winged
their scribblings toward the south,
no prayer can crack the secret alphabet
of all that we remembered to forget.

Sharp are the curves of apples in this light;
their braille unlocks the veins
which spill their juice
more clear and acrid than the apples' blood.

I see the leaves in ecstasy of death now hatch
colors spawned by time in a decaying hoard
of days collected green in careful youth
and in their fevered riot try to catch
from the colloquial language of the Lord
some allophonic truth.

El octubre de Salomón

Confortadme con pasas,
con manzanas reaníname,
que me enfermo de amor.

Enfermo de amor
no me podrán sanar las manzanas.
Una vez que las hojas han madurado
escarlata en las ramas y las aves volado
sus garabatos hacia al sur,
ningún rezo podrá descifrar el abecedario secreto
de todo lo que nos hemos acordado a olvidar.

Son afiladas las curvas de las manzanas en esta luz;
su braille en relieve abre las venas

que derraman su jugo
más claro y acre que la sangre de las manzanas.

Veo las hojas en éxtasis mortal ahora empollar
colores desovados por el tiempo
en un montón podrido de días acumulados verdes
en prudente juventud y en su alboroto febril
trato de captar alguna verdad variante
de la lengua familiar del Señor.

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PUMA PERL

Two Days After

We walk through silent streets
The dog and I

It's quiet on the days after

Nobody argues over parking spots
or complains about the broken pipes

The rats will come out tonight
They always do

On Bodega Alley
the Viet Nam Vets
and the old women,
top heavy and vacant eyed,
huddle in wheelchairs
and walkers underneath
the awning

Beer and coffee at noon
Nothing changes, not
by rain or administration

We are on schedule,
like the rats

The Lower East Side,
my country

My grandparents' footsteps
carved the cracked pavement

My father sits on a pony forever
His only childhood photo
Avenue C and Fourth Street
He wears a ruffled white
shirt and looks grumpy

My mother's parents.
fleeing pogroms, cold

water flat on Essex,
a few doors past
Clayton Patterson's place

My paternal grandmother
falling almost to her death
on the steep East Broadway
subway steps

My landmarks, my country
my journey, wraps itself
around 10th and 7th and
3rd, ends on Water Street,

Two doors down from
the old Gouveneur Hospital,
where my grandmother's life
ended, after the fall

It's the day after and longhaired
men rant in the park,
stop to greet the dog

Nothing changes for them either

In the gray,
by the river,
past the library,
over to South Street,
up the path,
we walk

Nobody has much to say
We glance at one another,
no longer sure who's who

We live through it,
and for some it can only
get worse and for others
it will only get better

If we hold on tight
to our streets

The Lower East Side,
our country

No Presidents
on Montgomery
or Clinton or Jefferson
or any of these invisible pathways

We don't count or matter

Yet

We wait and wonder

Who will hear the first
knock on the door?

We are not saying much

Not yet

Why It's Better to be Dead

Because my funeral set list is already planned and because everyone will be forced to respect my decision to include Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Soul to Squeeze* and its segue into *Under the Bridge* as well as Bone Thugs n Harmony, even though *Crossroads* is admittedly an obvious choice. It will be the only chance I'll ever have to tell a DJ what to do.

Because better bands will play at the memorial than I usually hear and my musician friends will take the jam to new creative heights and one of them will finally write some music for my lyrics.

Because there will be a tremendous turn-out, including all of those people who never found time to go to a show when I was alive, and I might even sell some books, the profits of which will be designated to a pit bull rescue organization.

Because I can wear black leather no matter the weather and someone will do a fabulous job with my hair and I'll finally get someone to do my make-up, maybe even Miss Guy unless Deborah Harry dies that **day in which case I'll be dead for nothing.**

Because I can eat whatever I want and that thought is so delicious it really doesn't matter that I probably won't be eating.

Because when you are dead there are no moral issues and your plot is paid for outright, no rent or mortgage, and all your questions are answered, and your name will be correctly spelled on your tombstone, although in my case some money may have to change hands so I can still lie about my age.

Because that's when you matter. That's when everybody loves you and reads your work and realizes you were a genius and the ones who cry the hardest are the biggest liars and because all the times you lied when you said it really didn't matter really don't matter after all.

And that's why it's better to be dead.

PAUL PINES

Single Subject Design

The cardinal back
in the crabapple tree
blossoms into song
his red body
on branches full of red berries
form a single moment
that defies

the probability
of such a match
in nature randomly
assigned

suggests
categories
of correlations
that cannot be measured
or replicated
at regular intervals
under similar conditions

the cardinal's song
is not the same as the berry
his red a different red
but they seem to indicate
some harmony
within a construct

that cannot be
determined from
the variables as presented
how does one control
for the angle of sun
wind direction and
intensity

cloud density
and previous rainfall
none of which
account for
this threshold
created by a bird singing

on a branch
that opens
into the whispered
promise
of absolute
order

From *Gathering Sparks*

Redness Remembered

Cardinals in the back yard
bring their redness to bare limbs
in a time of war when we are
bombing Ur
from which Abraham
rose with his household gods
and left the flaming ziggurats
temple whores
that terrible lust
for death and renewal
their redness
after a long winter
in the north
we can hear their song
before sunrise
whistling fills our ears
while elsewhere
missiles explode over the Tigris
where bearded King
Asurnasripal II
from a chariot
in stone relief kills lions
with his bow
bald Sumerian statues
mouths and eyes
forming perfect
zeros wail to their gods
IPGs exploding
vectors of chaos to
ring in the new year
as the old one
bleeds and
Lilith keens by
the vanished Ishtar Gate
the sacrifice required
at the birth
of a new order
Gilgamesh astride
spectral battlements
we move artillery
and troops into
the garden of first things

where Inanna wept
at the loss of her tree
rooted in the Euphrates
inhabited by a serpent
and a bird so bright
it appeared to be on fire
like the valley
in last night's dream
brilliance of fall leaves
a spark of that fire
now on a bare limb
in my back yard
what redness do cardinals
bring this year
what redness do
they bring

From *Gathering Sparks*

The Eye of Horus

Making love
this morning before sunrise

dog is up
cat demanding food

my wife the warmth
I sink into

red tipped
pulse connecting us
blood whispering
to blood
secrets
we keep from
each other and ourselves

become the shared eye
that sees what separately
we do not

the breath
of infinite space
clothed in leaves dancing
on the shade

over breakfast
we discuss the relationship
of attachment
to envy

struggle
to reconcile
what we thought
we wanted
with what we have
become

this shared eye

in which we are reflected
singly and together
held and let go

From *Gathering Sparks*

PATRICIA CARLIN

It Was Dark When You Left

after Barbara Guest

Nothing restrained you. You tried to come back but there were no doors,
just forgetfulness. I've lost the chain. My dog is gone, my dog with the one gold tooth. And
there were never any doves.

Do not forget me. I'll be climbing an iron staircase down in the dark. There will be no castles,
no cliffs, no pears or illusions.

Your letters will allow me everything, tell me nothing. Because you are combing your long hair,
leaning out of the silver tower and blowing me kisses. This minute is calling, but you are gone
and there's no one to hear.

MICHAEL RERICK

From: a field guide to western reptiles and amphibians

introduction

fields guide what a purple leg dodges with radioactive iodine
we species procure (after pursuit, capture, euthanasia, and
dissection) to illustrate an evolutionary historical marker to
identify, for identification, for study and climatic variation
tools in paper and bound and bent like a back to the ground
herpetologist or layman, or layman herpetologist in hand
the animal should be released with valuable information
though collusion and vagrants across ranges are rare cases
habitat interaction teaches what teeth say in a salamander
a few tools like a lizard nose and a steady gait can poke
around a roadside, for example, to find fine scale harmony
and live brilliance unrivaled by museum jewels or flocks
of facial expressions and scale relative to scale endows
comparative plates for color range and structure but carry
a coffee thermos and a pocket of hard candy for extended
surveys of absent or deflated and discolored vocal sacks
with designs for shinny night shore amplexus and snakes
may need probing as learning animal sounds outside cities
such as clicks and rubbing pebbles in a western region
with estivation nods or diurnal kit kat munching cresting
with pines and furs along a crepuscular ridge with nettles
deep with logs down the valley so defensive and locomotion
habits help as sure as color but are variable for eating
and the behavioral and physiological changes in subspecies
may or may not be of categorical importance but should
be noted in moleskin with a mechanical pencil and tucked
in a Columbia coat with a magnifying glass and a disjunct
rule and orange flagging tape for range introductions because
new species turn up at picnic grounds, cotton fields, and
different vegetation belts to add to the life list and maps the
surprise roadside waif clambering down slope from the woods

From: a field guide to western reptiles and amphibians

making captures

commute the wrecking bar to loose bark, leaves, and crevices
or the snake's neck or look before log stepping or botany
but bevel and craft the snake stick for lifting and pinning
wire noosing can be effective for warm bodies on the run
cut from an electric cord, stripped, stranded, twisted, and
elongated and shank twisted again but loosened with a lizard
slowly at first and distracting with wiggling fingers then
jerk or twine a snake into a can, all of which is not cruel

asphalt, ditches, and wild-plant growth favor night driving
with western or classical music and favorable weather
to capture suspicious objects at 15-20 mph or toward a storm
for dramatic frog songs and dances or the triangulation
of vocal creatures with slow honing movements best done
in twos or hold a light to the side of the head and blast yellow
and green eyeshine fields early and late when tracks are fresh
for the story of the hunt and evade and carry long cloth bags
sewed with drawstrings or glass or plastic jars for amphibians
with perforated lids and a generational rucksack for storage

From: a field guide to western reptiles and amphibians

caring for captives

gallon mayo jars with moss or rocks and lids
in the back of the Mazda wagon with the dingo
and a stick make comfortable temporary quarters
but cages should be slick and screened surfaces
though nothing escapable or nose raw rubbing
the substratum should be moist or dry, contain
rocks and branches, sand for burrowers, and
provide water and hiding and a lamp for reptiles
as terrariums set in the little front room gather
passing glances and mealworm feedings from
the mealworm colony (though not captured,
are captive and reared on a bran and nutrient
rich diet) or termite colony (confined to ice
trays and paper towels) protected from ants
and amphibian tadpoles need a clean oxygen
water gallon to grow with algae, spinach, or
if carnivorous, egg, lunch meat, or pond grubs
found in plants at Mirror or Mosquito Lake
and prepare a rocky shore for the emergence
to land once transformation has begun and
release, though leaf animals can be collected
for mature critters, and reptile eggs can spoil
so obtaining little known new information
of temperature and concentrated temperament
with peat and plastic indentations for each egg
can fill notebooks and if any captive refuses
to eat release in found habitat and recapture

MARGE PIERCY

I pass them

Houses have stories
we mostly cannot
read. That shingled
neat lawned well
mowed one is now
marked off by
police tape.

That one, strips
of old paint dangling
windows grey
with dust, now
sports new car
white. The old
woman died;
her children didn't.

That man must hate
trees, has fed
them all into
his fireplace.
Here a boat
never touches
water, rides waves
of grass.

That had rows
of antique bottles
in front windows.
Last week
gone. Divorce?
House sold?

Houses are outer
skins telling stories
only close friends
can read. Still I
appropriate them
parting curtains
to guess within.

Cats for dummies

Living with cats is a constant odyssey
into their likeness with us and their
strangeness. They seek warmth,
affection, food, distraction like us.

They hear mice scuttling in the walls.
a beetle's cry, a grain of rice falling.
Xena's asleep a floor and three
rooms distant. I open a can. She

appears. I say the word 'chicken':
she materializes with three others.
The scent of roasting meat wakes
her. She smells a mouse hiding

in back of the stove. A world
of tunnels and caves exists
invisible to us that they romp through
and disappear into when a carrier

comes out. They cuddle together
at nine in the morning and spat
hissing at noon, then chase-play
up and down the stairs at night.

They hate suitcases that mean we'll
be gone. Boxes and bags--their
pleasure. They love fiercely
entirely with everything they've got.

Idiots and so called experts call them
solitary, but feral cats live in colonies
and sisters raise their kittens together
and rescue cats give you their whole lives.

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At the turning of the tide

The river has been swelling all morning.
Now it turns on itself, giving back
to the sea all that it stole.

A blue heron strides in the shallows
its beak a spear that impales a herring
driven by sex to thrust upstream.

No eggs from that one will float
and hatch. Muskrats splash and dive.
A redwinged blackbird lays claim

to its new home, perched on a cattail
while his mate eyes a neighbor
with flashy wingbars. Busy, every

one is in a hurry. Even the aspens
are mad to push their buds open.
Clouds scud over the narrow land

to sink into the sea. The sea gives
land and takes it away. I too am
restless to take charge of my life.

I will not hibernate in a grey fog
of despair. I will sing now and work
and fight till that last winter closes in.

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JOSHUA McKINNEY

A Rendering

The road-kill opossum rots quickly
in spring, its body breaking down
along unguessed gridlines. Each day

there is more and less of it. As we pass
the spot, my dog strains at his leash,
nosing toward the stench, the bones

unfleshed, insects nearly finished
with their excavations; a thin echelon of ants
trails away into grass. I tug my animal

back from the carcass, to *my* senses
all but gone, yet to the dog still vivid
in a rich matrix empaneled on the air

for his delight, webbed vectors of creatures
passed and passing into other forms
in the language of decomposition,

which he conjugates again, fleshing out
the traces, seeing beyond annihilation
of mere light-reflecting surface. And though

I name him *beast*, or *pet*, or *friend*,
and bend him to my will, he suffers it all
meekly. In him the world is recomposed,

the roadside dead drawn in in inspiration,
their quick contours recast into a living
whole. Through his breath they walk again.

As it happens,

the anniversary of my father's death
is also the anniversary of my birth. For years
afterward, I refused to celebrate, forbade
my girlfriend, now my wife, the giving of gifts,
the dining out, the cards. It seemed unfair
that loss should hold my joy in check, or tip
some cosmic scale toward dark. But I had changed.
I remember when the news came I stood
stone still, my body sclerotic as his heart.
And when, at last, I could move again,
a hardness remained. Call it the legacy of pain.

As it happens, my boy is twenty-two, the age
I was when my old man died. I've done my best
to love the boy, to teach him not to fear the end.
But he has witnessed my gradual slide—the loss
of strength, the shorter stride. The truth is plain,
though I have tried to conceal it; the weight
and waste and disappointment and regret are facts
that he already senses. I can feel it
when I embrace him—the way his body tenses.

BRAD BUCHANAN

The Non-Complaint: Night Thoughts of a Cancer Patient (after Edward Young)

I don't know why happiness should be postponed.
I used to carry golf balls home by the armful.
Crouched over darkness, I did not find it profound.
A poem is a transaction that can be transformational.
The apartment I dream of might be condemned
for lack of keys, no sense of an internal
prejudice in favor of order and command.
Faced with eternal loss, I hope survival
will make up for the damages sustained.
I have a wife and daughters, mostly cheerful
but realistic enough to be forewarned
that no one who loves you can be too careful
and that fancy never fully leaves the ground.

JON CURLEY

Cloud of Necessity (hymn track)

I.M.O. Olivia Barker (1974-2014)

The body overcome
strides by the mind
to a kind of release;
lets loose in solace
the wake of thought's
debris; shakes a soul
seeming back-lit by
memory's magic
to buttress effacement
with scenery. Some ventures
to relent textures fail
necessarily yet flight
does take for what we can
only consider spirit—that
which trembles on the hem
of theology, inexact because
law cannot penetrate the stark
contrast of radical spiritual
re-assignment surgery,
that deliverance *from* habitual
obedience *to* a further
fastening of future as
a grace redemptive beyond
space or accurate contemplation:;
From/To, from/to: a miracle
of passage, a ghost's qualia
leaking out of the need
for existence to be a stone's
solid. Only timid guesses
about limits endorse the dim
imperative to withstand
the vision of threshold. Residue
of resident need not transact
integrity of integument—
the trail leads elsewhere.
The body overcome is not
the body all consumed.

Disillusionment as Inheritance, as Modern Inconvenience

Walt Whitman in an astrakhan
Walt Whitman in a trashcan

I sing the body Con Edison
with two brats nipping at my sleeve
and teenage trysts in desolate parking lots
more remote than your satellite sister.

For every free spirit there's a spirit to be freed,
for every half-decade there's the sentiment
We dub zeitgeist,
And for every whim there's a screw
to tighten your smile into the shape of an ache.

No longer a product of the Age but its consumer,
you expose yourself as a late-bloomer flowering,
like a worn-down stalk in blue-green fields
or desolate parking lots.

What wit Walt: I saw you somersault
in the autumn and not relent until the preacher's tent
was folded and he left town for no good.

Walt Whitman in a headdress
Walt Whitman in a hair shirt

Choose conscience not commerce
and you'll never get far in this Age
at least at your age, at this time

My Illegal Estate, Under Construction and Out of Control

I built my roofless Parthenon as a villanelle and octagon
ringed with lights and cowrie shells
beyond the Pale of pheasant feed

The tinkers who wandered on the site
deposited crockery and dun-colored babies
who emboldened the earth with their fontanels
and raised the scaffolding and lowered the eaves
so that the structure convexed and collapsed concave

Artisans plastered garden scenes that mirrored the veldts
of the sub-continent where it all began
Bricklayers out of Breughel cast lots for their labors
while out the gap rose a stranger I would like you to meet

I would like to introduce you

He wears a gabled hat and oilskin suit and has lit a match
and the flame darts wildly
He wants to meet you and I would introduce you
but the fire reduces the grounds to an ashy, derelict square

His name was Oedipus Rex, a fugitive of Thebes,
and now the edifice wrecks, contracts, and erases

Time for a drink of poteen and a dance
then we'll set the spirit level athwart and pray for rain
And a ceiling for our story

The Master's Reckoning

On Pier 17, Melville perches trance-like,
revenant among stanchions and shadows,
folding into himself as the Battery
builds congestion and real estate
over his former *locus classicus*.

“At one time,” he offers, “the docks
were stalked by stevedores and lifters,
regaling landlubbers with tales of misfortune,
black market, cargo commotion, and adventures
real and imagined, on and off Manhattan.

Now the island is only an oasis of itself,
hovering like Swift’s *La Puta* over its
historical roots. Those Tribeca triremes
are now sculled by enterprising pirates
and powered by sub-prime mortgage diesel.
A whale of a sea-change.

The times are much moved.”

And then he dove into the Hudson, down
into the river’s archive, his exotic,
submerged Custom House, to file his report:
mildly negative but mostly bewildered.

JOAN GELFAND

The Ferlinghetti School of Poetics

“All that we see, or seem, is but a dream within a dream.” Edgar Allen Poe

I: The dream within the dream within the dream
What is it, Ferlinghetti,
Taking star turns in my dreams?
Strolling in front of cars
Haunting alleyways, stairways,
Bars? Beating moth like flitting through
San Francisco’s sex fraught avenues? In North Beach
Where XXX marks art and
Nasty commerce collide, intersect Columbus,
Telegraph Hill, Jack Kerouac Way.
You are fog whispering in from the sea
On another sunny day.

“There’s a breathless hush on the freeway tonight,
Beyond the ledges of concrete/Restaurants fall into dreams
With candlelight couples/Lost Alexandria still burns.” *

Ferlinghetti’s words sink, weighted
On the business end of an invisible fishing line,
Dredging last nights’ dream to surface, gasping for air
Shivering like some catfish
Eyes bulging, wet lake water dripping off its scales.
The knife of memory slices open
That dream, finds me on haunted streets,
Instructing small boy:

*“You gotta go to the Ferlinghetti school. It’s totally rad
and completely cool.”*

II: Ferlinghetti Makes an Appearance

Phantom audience shouts: “Higher! Higher!”

Egg the poets on – after all, they’re not on the wire.

Higher? We spin the memory wheel until there’s my father

Strolling through his own Coney Island

And there he is again winning a goldfish

The clerk hands it over fish circling in plastic bag

Big Daddy pretends

It’s all for the kids.

He needed to win like that fish needed water.

III: The Poet Reconsiders

Is the skill of life just keeping on

All the gears oiled, the doors open?

Even if the past keeps drowning and the knifed open

Dream fish still swims around?

In dream theater Ferlinghetti arrives.

Was it the Regal, the Royal or the Metreon?

I rise to make room for he who started everything

Got the wheel of poetry turning, broke

Open language, letters. Vaporized

While he drifts

Haunting my dreams.

*From “Wild Dreams of A New Beginning” by L. Ferlinghetti

JANE ORMEROD

While the City Sleeps

Steps, a door to the night, a worry about no thing. These steps are nothing worth noting: the glove, the window, banister, spindle. This is all forest and crag, marshland and marsh water, banks. There is one letter missing. It sticks to the air and the air is pleasing and yet on alert, alert, alert. Oh, bright eyes. Oh, librarian and mistakes. What do you think? Is it good morning? Is it good morning? Is it good morning? Is it? Is it made of wire and kind fellows? Gimmicks dangle above you. Fish with blue eyes. Oh, hello. Hello. You are all for valued romance. Ask your mother how to laugh. Demand a champagne cocktail with brandy chaser. Bite the glass. Bite the glass twice. Where would a woman like you be without a man like him? Sketch this face, replace the old one. Oh, you hear kittens. You hear Florida. Coffee, coffee, coffee while the population sleep so far from their poisonous treaties.

Too funny for words, too funny for words. Hand him two fun words and insist they form new language. Understanding the urge to experience poison. Rotting mountains, fake food, stories peeping from the sludge. A desk reminds him of a bloodied character. A subway car is a life flying high above another. Vastness means pure grit.

Deep city. Deepest city. Backwards yet primed. Murderous. A borderline to glue because tonight the sleep negates last night. Oh, doctor. The city release of fact. The string around your little finger leads—bang, bang—to the mouth.

Two Bars, A Wing, Medicinal

I was born facing France
Sixty miles from the French coast,
sixty miles from London
The sea is my side
I have two hearts. A line. Two shores and sisters
I was born by the sea among fripperies, models of
trains and tunnels
The land of toys, pinball, space invaders, pac
I was born by the sea, treading miles of water, miles of land,
every and each means of escape
Water with sewage, suicides, the rare swelter of summer
The brave, the lazily loved and lowered
The foolhardy, jugglers, lifeboat observers,
and face-to-face waves
I am Viking, Norman, Huguenot, Martello
Both clearing and copse.
Snake and elm
I am positive space and redoubt
I have water, chalk to write and erase
Chalk to fall from. Human and physical
and military geography
My house is light-cased in salt
I blush near the eye, near the eye, near the eye

Small Island with Wildlife

Tokens, sweethearts, all home-style, all knock-about-out, all weekday. Still there is no message. Our hotel lies many miles west. The cares of the young begin with “hello?” but we shift fifteen minutes closer to termination. Fifteen minutes from alleged wonder, gardens bursting with gardenias and gazebos and god-frippery, bridges with less faults, no witnesses to crime. Shake gold-bronze, rush to the east, think thrift and fabrication. Nothing remains but candlesticks. An island of candlesticks. No buried keys. Here it is later than later on.

Look...look...look. Beside the blessed, by countenance, by the time of tether. Thunder, auburn, violet, rosemary, Tennyson, the orb. Leaning people, bred in the mealy bone, souring, souring. Needing this absence of light to leave. Needing this absence of need. Five examples: jawbreak, gym encounter, chessboard, desire of silverware, graveshores. This is the battered end of the satellite age. The end of our spinal cord. Stamina stuttering at last. Harness decayed.

No more talk. The island is soft green softening further. Small animals smash the guardrail as the final commentator presses mute.

JANE HIRSHFIELD

Three Poems on Fate

A Cottony Fate

Long ago, someone
told me: avoid *or*.

It troubles the mind
as a held-out piece of meat disturbs a dog.

Now I too am sixty.
There was no other life.

(Previously published in *The Paris Review*, *Harper's* and *The Beauty* (Knopf, 2015))

A Person Protests To Fate

A person protests to fate:

“The things you have caused
me most to want
are those that furthest elude me.”

Fate nods.
Fate is sympathetic.

To tie the shoes, button a shirt,
are triumphs
for only the very young.
the very old.

During the long middle:

conjugating a rivet
mastering tango
training the cat to stay off the table
preserving a single moment longer than this one
continuing to wake whatever has happened the night before

and the penmanships love practices inside the body.

(Previously published in *Poets.org Poem A Day* and *The Beauty* (Knopf, 2015))

Amor Fati

Little soul,
you have wandered
lost a long time.

The woods all dark now,
birded and eyed.

Then a light, a cabin, a fire, a door standing open.

The fairy tales warn you:
Do not go in,
you who would eat will be eaten.

You go in. You quicken.

You want to have feet.
You want to have eyes.
You want to have fears.

(Previously published in *Poetry*)

GEORGE QUASHA

6

horn of the bull plays to gore

There's a moment in the dance when the eyes see through.

Here is where you see them seethrough.

The sacrifice begins with any identity at all.

Giving up hope is not hopeless.

Tens of thousands breathe away death together, it's one of those moments.

Verbal revirgination is not getting unfucked.

Saying still gores.

The open air threatens dark dance giving future.

Any moment you mind runs scale invariant along the median.

Dead center homing in is incandescing until bounding.

No pun intends it but things do fuse to say the more they are.

Every engagement with the daimon is an homage to itself in home flow.

Things happen two ways at once and one way at twice, same time, same place, new.

We've been detained by ambiguity.

There's undertow in undertime.

Eternity is a dimension of song after song.

Still kicking time around to know I'm here.

Poem is talking for itself while I'm giving up.

Knowing so suddenly you don't know it's knowing.

The pronouns startle thinking for themselves.

I'm lost and now I'm found thought after thought in no time round.

If I were looking for a way out you'd have given it to me long ago, so hanging am I.
Anything said in person surprises here among the falling stones.
Always on trial by self prosecution.

A word is a turn on the focus wheel.
New objects from old make bold my inner fool.
Root projects. What verbs verb from the thing. Action in and out of view. Viewing.

A grammar of false endings precedes speaking having been.
There, there, the gut rush bespeaking spoken truly.
O life of strife strip back down.

Saying rescues at the level of call down.
If you don't know there's a vision how can you know the vision happening.
Thinking knowing what is said is making a lot of noise.

Gorgeous noise is recourse in full stream.
My thinking was printed in my walking walking her way.
The mind is its own place/and in itself can make...

The her body reality is asking to be asked.
One sarod is not one save as oneself, is saying it's not one, goes without saying.
No wonder it wonders with wonder.

Killing egos makes more egos, mirrors with vengeance.
Words disappear in your ear but you know they're there.
I disjoin in the hot place.

EILEEN TABIOS

The Petal Hidden From View

Which author, (false) god, or chemical reaction was sued
by the *unrelenting* litigator in your mind for the script aborting
joy from your life? You are the bald girl who hurled rocks

at orphanage windows precisely because intellect dwarfs
the malnourished body—Madagascar's sleeping birds drank
tears through a harpoon-shaped proboscis they slipped

beneath your eyelids—You are “Mentwabe Dawit” whose rape
was subsumed into “Angelina Jolie”—You are the mother
when a father's fist against a mother's cheek integrates

the malignant into myocardium—This ethical difficulty: how
to rationalize when what is good does not give an advantage
in a world you define as alley? “Can you stop running if

the monster does not stop chasing?” All those children asking
for cameras: what becomes real requires photographs they
can always witness see, occasionally caress, occasionally

crumple... Karma sucks anti-lollipops—My son is afire and
with all the water of pre-drought Sierras fauceting through my
fingers I still cannot caress him cannot hold him cannot help

him... The petal hidden from view might as well be stillborn, or
a wound—You hid anger over losing (illusions of) nobility
because there is nothing noble about giving or receiving help.

You were angered over being (a) minor—The estimate of orphans
worldwide is inherently a square root—The wabi sabi vase is not
only more luminous but stronger once repaired, its ruptures

transparently presented to a world stuck in a binary over orphans:
avidity vs. indifference—O lack of empathy not anticipated by
thousands of Central American children unaware the world of

147 million orphans predates their births as a parallel universe
few choose to enter and many prefer to ignore—A new parent cried
out on behalf of many adoptive parents, “I didn't save a child:

a child saved me!” Attempting the opposite of fog—Too often
aftermath is a dwindling—The reeds were frozen *into* it because
the river was entirely frozen—Defining anew “forbearance”—

O sickened oceans vomiting dead fish and dumped sewage from
every myoclonic jerk—What are unfolding beyond asterisks—
They were born into a dowerless present—So many voices weary

from replaying details: *Susmaryosep, ibaga manen ibaga manen!*
New snow pretty, but without clarity—Smiles in photographs veneer
phantoms behind shut doors to closets or rundown barns—Longing

for “first world problems”—A religion from beginning a world through
a human orphaned by paradise—Battling priests to re-educate
a child into learning consequences occur before any after-life—

What nature of rehabilitation was required to trust Michael Gerard
Tyson with doves? Boxing as trading stares which effect the knock-out
before the first clenching of the fist: the “Pre” before “face”—

I counsel you: a stranger need not author the script to your life—

Memory's Gauze

A grandfather pugnaciously faced fire, fist trembling
at the indifferent sky—Grandfather stood before fire
rushing through a legacy untouched by three centuries

of Spanish colonialism—Obscenity defined as the elders
when their shoulders sagged to ruin, when their gazes
dropped like debris—Memory defined as a country always

at the opposite of where I stand on this earth—Behind
me—Memory's gauze: an uncle's water buffalo who provided
a lumbering tour of my kingdom whose borders my

six-year-old eyes could not see—A poet fashions an arc
-hipelago as spaces between what are visible, the invisible
as real as *your body whose hands once raised my wedding*

veil—Grandmothers always grinned at me, unashamed
their gums held no teeth—The house that never fell, solid and
stolid as a boulder on a ground ever-shifting from nature's

tantrums, gentle but persistent rain, occupying soldiers ...
To abandon misery until it became mere concept, then poem—
Forget the mud in monsoon season—Illusion defined as mud

a placid surface but camouflaging sharply-edged stones—
Sentiment defined as mud, gooey and bearing the complexion
of rotten bananas—Love defined as mud like the skin of my

grandmother, her gum-teethed cronies and other wiry residents
of a patient village beaten by the sun—Fingertips smoothened
to black velvet from constantly rolling leaves of tobacco—

Authenticity defined as eating mangos before ripe, savored
through salt and first soaked in vinegar—like the brother who
marked his 21st birthday by dying on a Los Angeles freeway—

The brother who finally spoke to me by giving me a rainbow
enameled atop a box that will remain empty forever—light burned
and still eyes remained open—O pain of watching children

soften harsh wool with thin fingers in exchange for broken kernels

of rice—Children who tricked their hunger with cups of weak tea—
A neighbor stole my pet pig and ate the evidence—Fevers refusing

to abate even when drenched with seawater—It doesn't matter
which country: lower its flag. Lower all the flags—To narrow focus
is to discover something else—It need not take more than one person

to bring the world to ruin—for my daughter, that person was me—

DANIEL LAWLESS

“Schizophrenia”

Not the thing, but the word.
Often misused, like *surreal* when people in spotlights,
Barefoot, shake their heads as they look back at their house
In flames or recall exchanging a few words
With Jack White at a bar; in our house
After my brother’s diagnosis, it became Mama’s *cruccio* –
Her pet peeve. As a noun

It was a rectangular hole in the dictionary,
The jagged edges of pages 151-153
In The Wonderland of Knowledge.

But, oh, in its adjectival or adverbial form –
That’s when the fireworks started. 34 across
In a crossword to improve her English –

“Like a two headed monster” –
Meant a furious, scratching Bic, or *Congress*
Is a bit schizophrenic on this issue...
How her whole crumpled face would tighten up
Like a fist aimed at poor Roger Mudd.

Which was nothing compared to the bitter ire
Reserved later for the inevitable “schizophrenic”
Preceding *homeless man* or *serial murderer* –

A rage so inwardly extravagant, so invisibly
Arms flung out, head-clasping
Italianate overtaking her, her whole body
Trembled with it, afire as she pitched
The Courier, The Reader’s Digest
Out our third-story window into the street.

“Schizofrenia ” with its truffled *fr*, I heard *her* say,
Once and only once,
To the priest as I waited outside while the long line

Of our nosy neighbors grew longer at the confessional
On Good Friday; eight years old, fidgeting, the pew
Knotting my thighs, my shoulders, until finally

She pushed open the heavy door.
Watching her pause as she did, but tried to hide
From us, on unfamiliar busy street corners downtown,

Waiting for the red light to turn and even then
Looking both ways, ashamed and terrified.

Ant

I confess it was I
Who stole a bag of hosts
From the sacristy
After serving eight o'clock Mass
And ate them for breakfast
With a bottle of chocolate milk
Behind the dentist's office.

Who in eighth grade got a blowjob
From Angela
In the choir loft
One stormy spring afternoon
While the faces
Of your fiery prophets
Darkened with rage.

I, who stole twenty tabs of oxycontin
From Gramma
When she had all her teeth pulled.
Not to mention her car,
Which I wrecked and left somewhere in Tampa.

I who so many things.

Yet still you find me,

Lord,
This fine October morning
Head bowed
Before the sports pages.

You who are the author
Of my most intimate desires
Ringing your bell
As if I were a child at recess,
And sending I see your most esteemed
Black-robed emissary
To fetch me.

DENNIS NURKSE

Ahamsara

Children were splashing in the river,
frisking in the morning heat
but the boatman told me: 'Not you.
a sickness in the water
will dissolve your bones.
The little ones are immune.'

A boy dove and came up with a pearl
and tendered it to me,
breathless in the net of ripples.

'No,' said the boatman.
'He wants to please you
because you are a stranger,
but if you take that gift
you goad him to dive too deep.'

We came to the confluence
of Manas and Moksa, banyan leaves
thick as small hands, a shade too green.

Could we land here? 'No,' the boatman said,
'there are pythons' and at once
I saw one clinging to a branch
but the mind had confounded me.
It was a coiled vine.

My guide comforted me. In that heat
error was tangible as the god
or the moiré crisscross wake.

On the close shore
huge fragile butterflies
seemed about to burst into flame
or tear themselves apart in mid-flight.

Those jacaranda had irises
that followed us, with veined whites
and a night-colored pupil.

Deep in each corolla
a hummingbird flew motionless.

On the far bank, cell phone towers
receded among the rattling palms
but in my mind, they were temple spires.

Each face I imagined I will never know:
child, acolyte, old man, shadow.
What I took for a pyre was a lit screen.

The boatman walked backward
with his glittering punting pole,
sometime wielding it to clear us
from a submerged reef.

We seemed to advance without effort
but I watched his expression change
from serene to exhausted.

Error was the charm of strangeness,
the laminated passport holder
cool on the ball of my thumb.

Ignorance is the story I will tell,
rebirth, liberation, emptiness,
as if there were no current against us.

Mount Tabor Overlook

1

The tall elms must be seen
or heard or at least sensed
in order to be elms
(their smell is faintly spicy--
burgundy shoe polish,
butter rum lifesavers)--

but the companion climbing the mossy path
and the small dog who follows her
at an excitable distance:
they exist because they say so.

If it's twilight
it's because she moves away from me.

It's summer because I follow her.

The dog pauses to bark
peremptorily, at a glowworm.

The self isn't born or reborn.
It's just the way the summit
becomes invisible when the path
towards inward along the cirque.

Mount Tabor is only a word
like "marriage", "child", "loneliness"--
the names won't answer me
anymore than the dog will roll over
if I think "wire-haired terrier."

2

All those snowcaps
might be happier being clouds.

When The Dead Appear In Dreams

1

She holds up her hand.
No more bargaining!
Enough recriminations!

She lets me touch her
on a hem or a cuff.

She has all the majesty of death
and the reticence of dreams.

2

It's August in that city,
every time I walk those quiet streets.

A little hotel where you might spend
a night with a lover, know happiness,
promise marriage, quarrel, part.

A vacant house where you might tie off
and shoot up with a milky needle.

An alley in which to sleep late
and wake with a throbbing mind
to church bells, strangely off-key.

And every door locked,
with a cardboard sign: LOCKED.

3

Always evening in that walled park.

She's there waiting
with the explanations prepared:
Why does G permit E?

Raul at 4AM, lines on a mirror,
the adamant hallucination, suicide?

But as she gives me the answers
they merge in a single vowel.

Now she's drawing a diagram

with her umbrella in the dirt
illustrating everything:
how the contract breaks down,
the recipe for duck sauce,
why to put a fresh-minted penny
in a vase with cut tulips.

I look closely but see
only a scared ant, a mold spore.

And now she turns.

3

The teaching said: all things
are empty of self, even the self.
Even dreams, even emptiness.

But you can still stand
in the high window and let the breeze
touch you and fill your mind
with the tang of laundry soap
and bread baked at daybreak.

DANIEL MORRIS

Postcard Written on Bud Can

Dear Mistah Powell: Help! Fridge ignition measures
perform daily indentation. Plus, Emily deny disavowals:
how *do* other species' members pronounce posterior?
Blind pig can? Elocution sure is unbecoming!
Once more "Un poco loco" keepin' tabs -- 40 licks of Bud
Pillaried slumber. So, now you fail to disturb the viaduct
From suppurating? Nah, Miles plastering: "ah hah ol' Bud,
he not waggish, just sozzled." Heaps of undergoing.
You never can be canopy without enumerating.

arbitrio diatribe

To skeptical neighbors my daddy was misread.
This so because he was like the rain, only more elaborate.
By like the rain I mean he lived three lives, or, to be precise,
One life in the three different states spoken of
By the ancients. He was a vegetable man, but not
Merely a field of brightening snow. No no no.
Father fancied himself an eclipse; the end of his kind.
And yet, liquid man he was, my old man oozed seed to glue the dying snow
to fields of soy.
Awake, in reasonably good health given his naked winter raves, he'd dream
Of touching God's garments while remaining the sociable fellow he fashioned himself
eventually becoming.
A fellow of the atmosphere, Daddy admired his breath aglow in twilight.
A flushed red bird of paradise, sea planes sliding
On white tarmac, half created windowless rooms, a cistern.
A misanthrope, he chanted and fasted and counted flies.
Yeah, it took me a while to reach conclusions freely.
Still, who'd blame my lack of comprehension?
It was, after all, only at 30 I'd swore he'd wore the beard of Melanchthon.
Back then I missed the mark.
The folly of following Erasmus into a spark of light.

BASIL KING

Highway Obstacle

For Robert Creeley

Friend and mentor
Who taught me
How to turn
Things upside

Down

Mother of Pearl there is an Olmec head
In my garden and it can't stop talking
It says his brother has been betrayed
His brother is locked up in a museum
Where there are no windows
Artificial light surrounds
Cases of sculpture and artifacts
And he knows who made them
He says he has seen men and women
Stare at him wanting to know
Why is he so simple
Why is he so complex
The Police want to know
And they have questioned him
Photographed him and they tried
Without success to fingerprint his culture

Pause

Mother of Pearl there is an Olmec head
In my garden and it can't stop talking
It says if he finds a letter
And he doesn't know the sender's name
Before he throws it away he checks
The sender's address
Remember children grow up
To understand every word
Has its own
Highway Obstacle
A deck of cards address unknown
A profile of a three-dimensional shape

The ridgepole has its own security

With it you build a house
Without a roof rain will destroy
The house and its contents consist
Of names I have never heard of
Creeley asks forbearance
By his own accounting he has been
Procrastinating over the difference
Between a short Line and a long Line
Oh, mighty Ovid replace the metaphor
And give us a phrase that ignites
Brevity

Pause

Mother of Pearl there is an Olmec head
In my garden and it can't stop talking
I was told that I would be given everything
New York would be mine
I was 50 and it was 1985
I was betrayed
1985 was the year of my second dunking
All the promises came to naught – nothing
I licked my wounds and we went to England
To the land where I was born
To the country that I'd never called mine
I had not been back to England in 38 years

England has made itself into a Little America
The tongue and the wardrobe has dismissed Turner
And Constable and has become a bloody carcass
Francis Bacon rules
Bacon's space is contagious it is housed
In the Thames the tide and the bridge
Meat Fish Bow Bells
What I had been writing in my head
Since before I went to Black Mountain College
Daisy chains jellied eels the Second World War
Anti-Semitism
MIRAGE

Calligraphy is for lovers
A short story has no ending
If it fails begin again

Pause

Creely turns and asks forbearance
We are not always given what we ask
But ask again the ridgepole has its
Own security and without it
We cannot build a house
Without a roof
Rain will destroy the house the contents
Consist of names I have never heard of
Creeley by his own accounts has been
Procrastinating over the difference
Between a short Line and a long Line

Oh, mighty Ovid replace the metaphor
And give us a phrase that ignites
Brevity

From *History Now* (Forthcoming from Marsh Hawk Press)

Pause

Vermeer reminds us domesticity is the Wildest and if you leave home
And go into the streets
You will find Holland's Golden Age
Silk satin and lace
The Night Watch defers to sunlight
To a God that is never challenged
Catholic Protestant and Jew
Rembrandt sleeps knowing he is envied
Master of fortitude he fingers
Between two thighs the pulse to conceive
The Dutch have more ships than
England France and Spain combined
Craft and canal urge on
Urge on a portrait a desire
For more Vermeer

Delft Haarlem and Amsterdam
She pours milk she reads a letter
The Queen opens her mouth
And eats the first herring
Red light Green light
Frans Hals introduces his patrons
To a light they have never seen
Light is a question not an answer
When sex ignites
Tulip Mania

CLAUDIA CARLSON

First MRI

There's a swarm in the tunnel
I'm the branch they try to land on
a wind of reckoning keeps us apart

close my eyes and the bees
are hived for winter
shivering around the honey

stillness in the roar
the hum is louder than think . . .
I watch bees pulse in and out of clover

it could be summer again
I could be well.

Claudia Carlson (1957-2015)
From *My Chocolate Sarcophagus* (Marsh Hawk Press 2016)