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**Cornwall & Wales**

ATLANTA



**ATLANTA  
REVIEW**

REVIEW

**POETRY 2019**

*Grand Prize Winner*

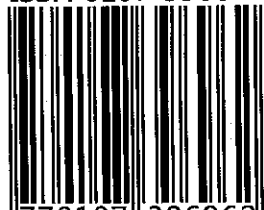
**Kurt Luchs**

*with Contest Judge*

**Dan Vera**

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# ATLANTA REVIEW

at the Georgia Institute of Technology

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## WELCOME

Perhaps it is fitting, given that this is our fall issue, but when I began reading the final layout draft for this issue, I was definitely moon-struck. You can never predict how an issue will come together, but there is certainly no lack of moonlight here. The sun appears many times too, but usually as it is setting. Overall, there is a strong sense of twilight/dusk, night, and dark. As Tobi Alfier writes, "After a nightfall / too dark for whispers, / Captains ferry everyone / back to where they belong." And so are we ferried through to find (as Douglas Cole offers), that "anything is possible, / I imagine, / with a big yellow moon like that, / anything at all." When I came to the end of this issue, I found myself feeling every bit of Wendy Drexler's exclamation that "my god, that moon filled my every pore."

As has become our tradition, I am thrilled to feature the winners, yes there was a tie this year, of the Dan Veach Prize for Younger Poets. Our managing editor, JC Reilly, selected works by Ivy Marie Clarke and Rema Shbaita. Both poets take up "language" as their theme, and do so in ways that challenge readers to remember that we could all attend to our words more carefully.

For our annual international poetry prize, we are grateful for the work of our judge, poet, painter, and activist, Dan Vera. Dan was given the task of selecting a final winner from our twenty-six finalists—a task I am happy to have delegated because this is such a fine collection of poems. The 2019 winner, Kurt Luchs, offers us an unexpected, but thought-provoking exploration of what Vera calls an "an unshakable, unavoidable truth."

This set of poems invites multiple readings. Make yourself some cocoa, or indulge in a bit of brandy, and curl up under a fuzzy blanket and the winter moon. There are plenty of poems here to keep you company—and the long nights will give you time to contemplate the return of sun-dominated days.

Our spring/summer issue will feature poetry from Welsh and Cornish poets. So, get ready with a pint or a cup of tea for that one. And, remember, if you love what we do, please tell a friend.

*Karen Head*

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## Equinox

A final aster nods to frost, the spotted  
fawn casts her shadow, young and warm.  
I have, early autumn, tossed the cropped  
garden lettuce, left stray blossoms to adorn  
her feeding ground, offered each row's heart,  
its core bisected, peeled as an apple.  
Half of all I have, she may take a part,  
drawing near this shared, heavy table.  
Our leavings, trampled to cider, lie scented  
with things left behind, flattened grass  
where an ochre shoot hides, intended  
for spring, its half torn, shattered dress.  
Remnants that shine through night's gray glove  
and seem in lowest light, more than enough.

*Sharon Ackerman*

## By the Delta

Yvette finishes her day waiting tables  
at the diner, does a quick wash-up  
in the *employees only* sink before heading off  
to her second job at the piece of shit motel—  
no families stay here, just down-on-their-luck  
boys running from brutal fathers and parole officers.  
Yvette feels sorry for them in some sad way,  
checks to make sure there ain't no needles or spoons  
in the parking and no one was murdered. She ain't gonna  
work here forever but they're suckers for a forgiving face  
and she wears hers like mercy. Her memory goes back  
a long way. She takes care to fold the towels nice.

Down the levee road  
the natural silence of the bayou  
pierced by heckles of gathered birds.  
They're strung out on the lines from dump  
to dump, the houses barely standing.  
A few suspended men, beers in ham-hocked  
fists, are visible in Roscoe's Bait and Tackle.  
The door opens and closes constantly for worms  
and air conditioning. Dancers from Bayou Strip  
down Cutoff Road do a quick calculation,  
slink in to grab a daiquiri slush before their shifts,  
bum a smoke, hit up the least gamey guys  
for a lap dance later, the rent's coming due  
and hootchie bras don't come cheap.

Ancient fishing boats, paint curled and crackled  
so thin, it's hard not to grab and pull a strip off,  
but the boats don't put up for painting till after the season.  
Some do double duty in the glory of late afternoons  
ferrying locals to a crab joint out at the pier—  
reachable by a road old as God himself,  
easier by water, slipping soft as a whisper up to the dock.  
Ice cold Dixies and bubbling butter, the pilings strung  
with small white bulbs, it feels like Christmas.

Every Friday night at the edge of the Delta, Zydeco  
gets the feet tapping, accordions too. After a nightfall  
too dark for whispers, Captains ferry everyone  
back to where they belong. Weather follows them home  
like a wily fox, their wise and forgiving hearts traveling light.

*Tobi Alfier*



## Phantom Limb

Before the crickets began to stitch the darkness,  
I walked down to the rows of raspberry canes  
looking for those the jays hadn't taken,  
the sour-ice rubies  
sweetened to a deep maroon.  
I knelt in the regiment of five-foot stalks  
reaching for the sweet pouches  
and heard your voice rush across the sky  
calling me from months ago  
when we still braided our lives.  
Gone when the snow came,  
you said the winter was too mean,  
days tending the fires, no callers,  
two miles down the mountain for mail.  
I'd have to choose,  
plant my trees, build my station.  
Dizzied from the rush of standing,  
I shouted, listened for your call,  
scanned the hill by the house.  
I wanted to hear your blessing,  
the way you'd say my name.  
But there was only  
the faint applause of leaves  
rattling in a gust, the rumbled  
snap of bed sheets on the clothes-line  
whipped by the wind.

*Mark Burke*

## Stolen Lily

It had opened in the night, and I  
thought perhaps the petals had been  
inspired by moonlight through the  
clouded glass of my window, or else  
they wanted to hide their secret  
process of unfurling from  
my uninitiated sight.  
Six pink petals with pale green veins,  
wide and full of water, the new blossom  
looked stronger than the first.  
Its anthers extended with force towards  
the corner of the ceiling  
as if they saw some purpose  
there. The petals will fall  
from the first flower before  
the second one begins to wilt.  
The other blossom will feed  
on the sapped energies of the first,  
drinking nutrients and water until  
the moonlight is not enough to breathe  
movement into its body and in a  
burst of shame and anger  
it will fling off its petals and anthers  
and let the stigma stand quivering pristine.

*Rachel Aviva Burns*



## Lawn Tennis

The yard has healed, the grass is green again  
Once you ran it bald, there was only dirt, a few stones  
and mud that you tracked in the house  
We volleyed back and forth, you and I  
We played match, point, set  
We played in our Wimbledon whites, we played in jeans  
They say that our cells turn over every seven years  
that we're not the same person as before  
but what about a dog?  
Every day you heard the whack of a tennis ball  
and never grew tired of hunting these down  
There are hundreds around the yard now and in the forest  
You left them for your future self  
You left them for a replacement dog who has no interest  
You left these as signposts in case of resurrection  
I find them when I rake, I find them when I hoe  
I find them in my sleep  
The next owners will discover them and wonder  
why we played so much tennis here  
and they'll wonder why we ever stopped

*Charles Laird Calia*

## Goats

The paddock was puddled muddy,  
wind insisting winter.  
Bass and tenor bleats pleaded  
from the barn. I watched her  
wedge one boot as she swung  
the other leg up and over  
the slick steel gate. She ran,  
saw nothing but barn, no regard  
for what she stepped in.

I saw her drop her heavy bag,  
crouch, bow face to hay,  
offer her back to the smallest goat  
she called Sue. Round-bellied, caramel,  
the creature leapt, stood  
nibbling the hood of her jacket,  
her hair as the girl gushed,  
giggled, went silent.

As if last night never happened,  
her blotched-cheek screams,  
"no one," "alone,"  
her wanting to claw her way out  
of a body burning as I stood by.

*Cathy Carlisi*

## The Wolf

The moon coming up  
full and yellow,  
a wolf-moon, I think,  
meaning somewhere out there  
a wolf is roaming  
far from the pack,  
the way it happens occasionally—  
one stops and lifts its head,  
scans for something  
then trots away,  
the others barely glancing  
but knowing all the same,  
and the one alone sets off  
in some direction  
to watch you'd think  
there was certainty in that stride,  
he knows where he's going,  
he chose this course  
up over the rise  
and into the little box canyon  
where his shadow falls  
like shed skin down the slope,  
and above  
that big moon shining,  
all the landscape silver  
with its light,  
and that one wolf goes on—  
maybe he doesn't have a clue,  
maybe some coded instinct  
draws him on—  
anything is possible,  
I imagine,  
with a big yellow moon like that,  
anything at all.

*Douglas Cole*

## My Cane

Taught to use a cane after hip surgery,  
I scowl at actors whose roles call  
for them to limp around on a cane;  
they mostly get it wrong: wielding  
the cane on the injured side,  
when it should be the opposite one,  
for stability. After all the pain  
before the operation and recovering,  
it annoys me they so often  
get that detail wrong.

When I was told by my physical therapist  
to walk in the park every day, I'd tap, tap,  
tap, not because I needed the cane to keep me  
from falling, but to let clueless walkers  
and joggers know to give me some leeway,  
since they almost never saw me coming  
and I was less agile than a plodding ox.

Oh how the little imp in me raged  
to trip them, or to give them a good whack  
across the knee, or a poke in their bellies,  
when I had to scramble out of their way.  
Lord, what a grumpy geezer, though grateful  
I was here and still a real pain in the ass.

*Robert Cooperman*

## Anne Frank's Cat

1

Less than 100 years ago, there weren't so many movies or empty things to see on television. Cities were black and white with ash and snow. People waited in lines for food, sometimes for hours, sometimes getting sent away hungry. Men wore hats and women wore skirts. Fur was considered good sense. Families shared spaces large and small where dishes clattered, shoes were polished, pens ran out of ink. Dogs were trained to fetch, and cats were petted. In a house in Amsterdam, a cat named Moortje purred in the lap of a dark-haired girl.

2

Play time. A spring storm rumbles off in the west. Some boys make a circle to play a game with a ball. They throw it to each other, then one of them throws it hard, at a boy outside the circle. They call him a name. Another boy throws it at a girl, hits her in the face. She cries and they call her a name. The monitor sees it all, but she is also watching the clouds, waiting for the first shiver of lightning that will let her order everyone inside. One of the boys in the circle goes home and tells his father about the names. By the end of the week, that boy, too, has a name.

3

You know what it feels like to be one of the boys in the circle. You know what it feels like to be called a name. You know what it's like to look for the last time at a soft creature that looks back with a slow blink as if to say, I understand. It doesn't understand that you are telling it good-bye, but in that moment, eye to eye, you are equals.

4

Moortje was too well loved to be abandoned. She lived out life with friends of her original family. Anne Frank wrote, "I miss Moortje every moment of the day and no one knows how often I think of her." In hiding, Anne spent her days in cat-silence, her nights like a cat at the window, watching the moon go back and forth as if on a string, a tantalizing object with no intention of ever coming inside.

5

My neighbor's daughter is crying. She had two cats, now she has one. The moon rises as if pulled on a string. Souls of cats pounce after it. Everywhere there are girls yearning for cats. Cats are the souls of girls' yearnings. A girl in a chair by a window with a cat in her lap is a complete picture. It doesn't matter if the cat is gray or black or orange, if the window and chair are in San Juan or Tehran or Amsterdam. Anne Frank was one girl with brown, burning eyes who knew the feel of a purring cat in her lap, that peace and satisfaction. She went to school and movies, had birthday parties with presents and played with her cat.

6

My neighbor's daughter has a kitten. She lets me pet it. It has no interest in my hand. In the street a gang of boys is playing ball. The daylight moon pales in the sky. It has been traveling so long it has seen everything.

*Pat Daneman*

## Ro-Sham-Bo

On again, then off—phosphorus  
emits a curious glow, barnacles  
open, shut. Anemones bloom  
with the rise and fall of the sea  
—our own armistice-linked  
hearts tamed in this violet hour.  
Briefly—a still sea, liminal space,  
tentative peace—salt and sand  
observe an intertidal ceasefire—  
evening at the water's edge.

Sunset magic holds until darkness,  
tides' turn. I am again ocean—  
vast, frigid, deep. You—treacherous  
coast. I break against your impassive  
body. Daily we play this zero-sum  
game: shifting influence vying  
for mastery over dishes, domestic  
affairs, marriage beds—easy blame.

Indebted to moonrise—I am driven  
against willful margins—shatter  
to salt and foam. But, I will return,  
erode you slowly—shoreline unraveled  
—consumed by unrelenting swells.

*Christine Darragh*

## Back Among My Own

It was dusk, I'd just come from the market with milk,  
hurrying home for dinner, the Brooklyn street corner  
buzzing like a hive, when I nearly tripped over  
a telescope right there on the sidewalk, its giant eye  
tilted toward the moon. I stopped, marveling,  
moved closer—and a man gestured with his open palm,  
*have a look*. I lowered my eye to the lens,  
which was as private as a peephole, peered down  
the tunnel, risqué and mine alone to enter. I recoiled  
at the blast—there were craters close enough  
to swallow me, and where the waxing crescent  
curved away it was like walking into the valley  
of the shadow of death, and the whiteness, stark  
and scarred, was blinding, a comfortless cold,  
all that light coming from the other side of the world  
where the sun hadn't yet set. That moon, I tell you,  
was dazzling and terrifying and desolate—not one  
tree or garden or fountain, no bees or tigers  
or bodegas selling milk or cracked concrete  
cooling into the night, no cars or car radios blasting,  
no mercury or corroded lead pipes or any  
of the other things that are killing us or being killed by us—  
my god, that moon filled my every pore and I dove  
into silence. And when I ripped away my eye, I was  
jolted by the shudder of air around my shoulders,  
people swirled by me, every shade of flesh—pink,  
nutmeg, chocolate—and I was caught like a fastball  
in the beautiful din and swell of strangers I was  
back among—my intimates, my very own sweet kind.

*Wendy Drexler*

## Hillel at the Golden Dragon

I had dinner the other night  
with Rav Hillel  
in a small Chinese place  
just off Mott Street.  
I asked him what it was like  
in the afterlife, after all the years.  
It gets a bit boring, he said,  
now that old Shammai  
has lost his edge,  
just last month  
for each Chanukah night  
he lit four candles  
from the center out  
in each direction.  
I told him  
the steamed pork buns  
were beyond belief,  
he said try the shrimp dumplings  
even better if you eat them  
standing on one foot.  
I asked him how he spent his days  
and he only smiled,  
most days I search  
for Van Gogh's ear  
though that *alte cocker* Shammai  
says it was Theo's ear  
that Vincent lopped off,  
although Vincent wore  
a bandage around his head.  
It's really not so bad  
he said, there's even  
a lovely sculpture  
just inside the garden gate  
that bears a striking resemblance  
to old Lot's wife, not that she  
was ever capable

of sitting still all that long.  
He bid me farewell  
and though I looked  
for a fiery chariot  
he climbed into  
his '91 Taurus  
with the hanging bumper  
and rust spots, and drove slowly off.  
Thanks for dinner, he shouted,  
as I footed the bill yet again.

*Louis Faber*

## Night, Verbezhichi

We are still on Moscow time,  
but so far from any city, as we  
left Moscow with its fourteen million  
to Lyudinovo with its forty thousand  
to Verbezhichi with its uncounted,  
but approximate, three hundred.

The roads are unpaved under eight inches  
of fresh snow. It is January, and Russia  
must live up to its stereotypes. The team bunks  
with Praskovya Ivanovna, our host;  
she shows us her funeral garments,  
we play card games under the framed picture of her dead son.

The white-plastered sides of the massive brick stove  
rise up to the left of my bed, head-high, pulsing  
with heat after the morning stoking. Bits of ash fall down,  
and I sweep them away before bedtime.  
We made a snowman in the dark, right beside the gate,  
to celebrate the New Year as the teapot whistled inside.

Andrei, Lena, Sergei, and Praskovya Ivanovna are sleeping,  
in a few hours I will struggle up, victim of too many  
glasses of tea, and stumble outside, past Vasya the pig,  
the dogs and chickens, ducking under the net of clotheslines  
(caught my head on one twice, but learned) to the outhouse,  
flashlight in a freezing hand.

In that patch of courtyard the barn and house block the streetlight,  
looking up I just see the stars, blazing cold, as my breath plumes.  
You could stand there, waiting, listening, for a long time  
without knowing it, like a pilot losing the horizon,  
unaware until with a jerk you are back in the here and now.

Ten time zones away, barely dusk, my children sit down to dinner,  
so that even if I called them we could not look up to the same sky,  
could not share these winter stars, could not share this night.  
I will drift back to sleep while someone smashes our snowman,  
in the morning the Russians will tell me how I speak  
English in my sleep, like a spy caught in the act.

*David Galloway*

## Humidity

When a truck comes over the gravel hill it's like god breathing sweatily into my ear with hungover breath telling me to get my *sweet body* off the road.

In the knee-high sawgrass, my flip flop ruins a small history, snapping down a brittle beer can.

All of the two-sided silences come howling for me, a windchime deciding against the slightest of breezes, roosters stoic, and silent—impossibly—waiting for a fight.

The guy behind the counter still wears snake-bite piercings. His eyes sort of wobble in and out of me like I'm swiss cheese, like I'm not quite here—despite everything, his mouth is sexy, moves right, jaw thuggy with chaw.

It is a pleasure to buy a six-pack from him, and he knows it. He can get me to get a slushie just by saying *it's fucking hot out*. It is. His shit sells itself. God doesn't touch me on my way back.

*Abigail Goodhart*

## I'm Happy to Drive You All the Way Home

Past the great palms, trunks gnarled up and roots buckling the sidewalk. Under the clear sky. Past the skinny boy in the Megadeth tee. The surfboards the skateboards. The barrel planters of geraniums (imagine the roly-polies underneath, blue-grey, also known as woodlice or potato bugs or armadillo bugs). To the back of the valley, I'm happy to drive you. Up Reina del Mar and South Reina del Mar past Ursula, Naomi, Juanita, headed east. Past the twins playing Frisbee in the middle of the block, whose older brother may or may not be home. Pink stucco, white tile. Past the corner store (Sweeney Ridge commemorates the first sighting of the San Francisco Bay by the Portola Expedition, 1769) and maybe even up to the small cave in the hillside where I first heard the spider spinning, the mayflies, (eleoniscus), the chattering squirrel, the wren. The SF 51-C missile structure, vandalized: *No Smoking in Bed*. I'm happy to drive you: daffodil, palomino, old friend, Mustang, narcissus, Golden Earring, Radar Love, Corvette. Each to each. Of course I'm happy to tell that story to you or to myself. The one where the girl is strong enough. The one where she survives.

*Caroline Goodwin*

## Near Twilight

one lean riverboat  
edges the bank. The world is quiet.  
Patient ducks ride reflections in the wake,  
hours like water rolling off their backs.  
Even now, frogs, in their impossibility,  
sing.

Holding his breath, the boater  
quickens his pace and can't say why.  
Amid the air and cooling spray, the teeming  
valley opens its broad mouth.

A line lies coiled in the bow,  
hungry for the mooring and the cleat.

*Carrie Heimer*

Note:

"Near twilight" uses the quiet acrostic, *nephesh qavah*, from Psalm 130:5, to guide its meditation on waiting.

## Grace

Too often, it's what we take for granted,  
like waking in an empty bed  
to the crisp patter of rain, the spring scent  
of Daphne outside a March window.

What's best comes again and again,  
as surprise, unbidden  
and is often overshadowed  
by who or what is no longer there.

To wake at all is a kind of grace, even this day  
when in the garden you stumble  
clumsily into that nest of wasps, and each insect  
bestows stinger and venom to your ankle,  
swelling your mouth, closing your throat.

Your new lover, being there,  
knows about adrenaline, knows how to jab  
that harpoon of a needle into your arm. That  
is grace.

And it's how he drives you to the hospital.  
How he sits there for hours.  
Holds your hand, and never, not once,  
complains or checks his watch.

*AE Hines*



## December: in the South

The year's first Christmas cards arrived  
just as camellias opened near  
the mailbox—hot pink  
blossoms I had never seen  
up north. They bloomed

profusely, the way my fuchsia roses bloomed  
in Michigan last summer. I was  
suddenly sick for home

and my sunny window sill above the sink  
that looked out on the garden. Today  
would be bright and cold, a thin snow  
falling on the drifts, cardinals  
vying for the feeders. I could almost hear  
the plow as it groaned and struggled  
up the road. . .

And the new owners,  
a couple with a baby, might be stamping  
their boots at the back door, or maybe he  
was away for the day at work, and she  
was hanging the new curtains  
or standing in the kitchen  
stirring soup . . .

When I opened up  
the mailbox, absently, I saw a square  
white envelope from home, and found myself  
pressing it to my face, as if it carried  
snow, or the scent of snow . . .

*Patricia Hooper*

## One Flesh

*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands,  
as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife,  
even as Christ is the head of the church...*  
— Ephesians 5:22-23 KJV

Tracy's husband? A chronic womanizer— if she prays  
real hard and serves him, he will repent.  
God will trouble that water.

And Trish ought to mind her mouth, so her husband's  
temper can cool. Sports night out is not a sin. It could be  
way worse. Give the man some grace.

Becky, exhausted from the twins, better not take things  
so personal, keep a nice casserole warm in the oven—  
Hank still has needs.

\*

The night before Amanda was shot, in her flannel nightgown,  
at the top of her own stairs, her Bible-talk leaders advised her  
to respect her husband— spend more time at home.

The daughter, the only witness, said her parents had been arguing,  
*Mommy was using her scary voice.* Scary voice as in not her own,  
as in a steadying of spirit and tone, when all the legs want to do  
is run.

\*

After the killing, some of us fell away, that is what  
the church calls it. Leaving the church, the Bible says,

is a drifting away—

the shore diminishing, disciples fading.  
This is nothing like that.

This is a jumping overboard—  
though there is no other shore, we swim.

*Rebecca Irene*

chicago, pacific and st. paul

1938, I think it was  
when they picked up the rails  
depression, a death knell for small railroads,  
for the small towns they served  
towns disappeared almost as fast  
as the rails were picked up  
what's left of the road grade  
can be seen in open and woody places  
that as a child, I played on  
amongst the rotting trestle pillars  
that once crossed the canyons of these creek bottoms  
right of ways are now all grown up in trees  
in some places farmers and woodmen still use the old track  
to gain access to fields, woodlots, and hidden fishing holes  
there was a time when massive steam engines labored  
with passenger, coal, and freight cars  
and covered the landscape with great billows of hot mist  
that shook the ancient glacier formed bluffs  
and split the air with shrieking steam whistles  
and they all died just before I was born  
nights are still filled with whistles  
in train yards and on bridges of big cities  
sometimes in the still of an early july morning,  
that quiet time just before a spring rain shower,  
or in between the sounds of snowflakes hitting an unfrozen pond  
I hear the faint clickedy clack on steel rails,  
murmuring sounds of squeaking train cars wobbling back and forth  
the lonely doppler call of a whistle echoing off the hills, and  
see orange and red sparks fly from a sooty vibrating smoke stack  
men who labored here, voices now stilled, told these tales  
that have stayed with me these seventy years  
a flame of memory and wonder have kept long within me  
into my failing years in otter creek bottom

*Dan Jacoby*

## Mercy

After a flood, mercy dangles  
from the bracken like newsrags.  
For the one-legged beggar  
on a snow-slick sidewalk,  
his metal cup carefully placed,  
mercy clinks and mercy folds.  
Even cats have mercy, if they  
are mostly sated and the mouse  
stays lively. This is known as play.

The mantis has none for her husband  
after his frantic, mantic moment.  
Her children display none for her.  
On the lawn of a dark summer night,  
you may hear mercy adjured  
in rolling tones by the holy man,  
dark-suited, his wealth rumored  
in the way coronas flicker  
around big fish in night waters.

I myself have no mercy for my own  
failings. Why I did this, how it  
seemed important... does not matter.  
My punishment chooses me, fits  
like a loose board into  
its anyhow place,  
beneath many pacing shoes.

*P M F Johnson*

## Rattlebox

Six feet tall in the ditch, bell-bottomed  
leaves spread to afternoon glare, gold petals  
draped like fine chains from neck to waist,  
shaggy pod tassels dangling in heat,  
ready to rattle with the least shift  
of breeze to announce the king of the gutter,  
known in small towns from Georgia to Texas  
as Shake-Shake and Devil Bean,  
roadside hustler, nitrogen fixer,  
toxic dandy deadly to all from robin  
to vole—imported for cover and fodder,  
burned after farmers discovered  
its smooth onyx seeds and elegant  
stems were not meant for feed, its proud  
denial to follow the plan, proving too fruitful,  
too bold to be killed or controlled, it hooks  
rhizomes in clay, takes boron and iron and copper  
and zinc to lengthen in sun, broad-armed  
and stiff-necked, and tightens its grip  
on the unchosen ground where seed  
landed, roots took, stalk rose and flowered,  
the dirt patch this drifter refuses to leave.

*Robert Lee Kendrick*

## Little River

You remember everything,  
the sun setting at the tree line  
on the west side of the valley,  
the deer staring at me,  
the panicked ducks taking flight,  
all of this in the years  
before the house was built.  
I can look up the images you keep  
to refresh my own recollections.  
I still have instinct, and I use it,  
but my thoughts have become a labor  
of moles, where time sticks  
in a cocklebur, and I hear winter  
at work in the egg with its tooth. In time  
you will take me, but for now you are little  
more than an avatar, stuffed  
with images just as the bone dry field  
is filled year after year, as the ducks  
and the deer die off, and the cold  
lifts old flints to the surface.

*Richard Kenefic*

## The West Wind Wears a Quite Elegance

The west wind wears a quiet elegance  
To honor the returning of the Sun  
And stirs water and earth awake, the one  
Into a purling ripple of a dance

The other slipping into a brilliant gown  
Embroidered with a multitude of flowers.  
Now birds make miracles among the bowers  
And ease the weary passersby with song.

Nymphs in the moonlight are already playing  
game after game. Their frolic treads the grass.  
Oh, do you want to share your happiness

And by your touch renew my life as well?  
Then, Zephyr, bring my Sun to me again  
And see how I, too, can be beautiful.

*Louise Labé (1524-1566)*  
*translated from the French by*  
*J. Kates*

## How to be a Tomato

Ignore the hardness  
of the window's ledge. Gaze  
through pained glass  
at farmers roaming rows  
of raked dirt and corn crops. Consider  
the comfort in those stalks  
how leaves both nestle  
and protect. Remember  
clinging to a stem, the calming scents  
of earth and border rock, the dampness  
of the clay. Take comfort  
where you can. Watch for earthworms  
working root-tangled soil,  
notice other omens. The low  
setting sun; the crows flying east,  
the shadows on fields resting  
under an otherwise Utah-blue sky,  
the quick evening breeze pulling at you.  
Don't regret what's gone. Anticipate  
the prick of the pairing knife. Trust  
that it will come and when it does,  
hope the blade will catch. Hope  
that it will tear away the bruised  
and tender marks that come  
from sitting in the sun too long  
from being picked  
at by beetles, from having  
thin skin, from falling  
among rocks. Imagine  
that the pulp around the deepest scars  
is sweetest.

*J. Adams Lagana*

## Still World with Bison

On a stretch of highway known as Turquoise  
Trail, dividing a field of thistle and sage,

a man lies flat on his back. The earth  
around him dug out for its sky-colored stones.

The purple Sangre de Cristo mountain range  
lies ahead beyond a row of tiny windows

lining the penitentiary. Low adobe walls  
outline enclosures for buffalo the prisoners

used to tend. The pens stand empty now  
as an inmate's open palms, while bronzed

broncos stand poised mid-gallop in a blown  
world. The man sinks into the earth imprinted

with tire tracks, soles of shoes, old bottle caps.  
In a no-hitchhiker-pickup-zone he is motionless

as if fallen from the weight of his own body,  
pinned by the underbelly of the world.

*Kathryne Lim*

## What the Tow Truck Driver Told Me

I woke up in the woods smelling worse than a spotted skunk, but  
I'll tell you, there's nothing like wasting a couple days doing absolute dick.  
If you've ever heard the sound of the horned Missouri lark or the bark

of a fox in the dead night, you know what I mean. I keep  
my Stockman blade sharp just like any other hunted, outlawed,  
outraged man. I was born on horseback, I can tell

a bird by its song. I can glide like a hawk, crawl  
like a snake and see in inky-black darkness clear as day.  
I'm trained in hand-to-hand combat, Kung fu, Taekwondo,

you name it. The first thing I'd do if I had to choose  
between an M-16 and an AK-47 is take a grenade and strap it  
to that M-16 and throw it away because it's a useless piece of shit.

Just take a look at it sometime. You pull that cartridge out and  
hold it upside down and see where it says *Made by Mattel*.  
An AK was made by a man. So what if he was a Russian

son-of-a-bitch?. It takes about two seconds to unload a thirty-round clip.  
You get somebody in the field, nervous, and they put their finger  
on that trigger—*Bop!* That's it—and it takes longer to reload

because you've got to force the clip in, and it don't spring back.  
Now my 300, you get within range of it—say a thousand miles—  
and you are meat. The sight alone cost three thousand.

I just pulled three wrecks off the highway: one for hitting a deer,  
another for rubbernecking at the one who hit the deer, and the third  
for trying to take a picture of the first two and post it on Facebook.

It's like nobody pays attention to what's in front of them. Their minds  
just keep moving from one thing to the next. That's when they make  
mistakes. That's when the wrecks happen. That's when the shit

sneaks right up on top of you. You ever see what car wrecks do  
to people? You might as well stick your face in a blender and save time.  
I can already tell it's turning out to be that kind of morning.

*John Mancini*

Open :: I baptize you

in the wild blue gold    the pliable weed-like  
flowers    your body    saturated  
in the granules    of lapis lazuli  
sprouts from    tears copulating with cash crops  
the edible gold and blue denim  
armies of unknown rebels    too black to  
ever be burned at the stake    gambol in  
the rings of your eyes.

    You    my beloved    are to be cherished  
Your curls    are yours not for porcelain heads    or  
zookeeper fingers  
Your skin    cannot be worn by sunspots  
and soft credit cards  
Your lips    are the softest chewable rims  
sucking the seeds of terra cotta sunsets  
and your feet follow the rhythm    earth  
will move    to rip    the renewal from urban

on red soil.

*Thea Matthews*

## Sundays in the Saddle

On Sunday afternoons my Dad and I drove  
to the city's outskirts, the edge of a forest  
where a dusty road dead-ended at a stone barn.  
Inside, a row of stalls with horse heads poking out,  
a blackboard with our names chalked beside  
the names of our lesson horses.

We led them from their stalls into the covered arena,  
dodging barn cats that scurried underfoot,  
joining the other kids and adults riding circles  
and figure eights, jogging to the rhythm  
of Ricky Nelson's "Hello, Mary Lou" on the radio.  
Their names were Rex and Trigger, Cloudy, Honey Jo,  
those patient mounts that taught us how  
to steer and stop, sit the jog and lope.

I breathed in the musky essence of horsehair  
and old leather, dreaming of riding the range  
while Dad imagined his comfy armchair at home  
with the Sunday paper spread out on his lap. That barn  
was the perfect place for a father and daughter to bond,  
while birds chattered happily in the rafters,  
and dust motes danced in sunlight  
beaming down from the high windows.

*Barbara J. Mayer*

## Lazarus II

The atmosphere was cold and cheerful in my father's ICU room. He's always said he wanted to be cremated and spread in the pond with our old dog's ashes; the only loose end is to sign the DNR. He tells the nurse to give the paddles one chance but don't bother after one shock. *Do not resuscitate* unfolds into sensible anagram fragments

*To a trisected omus  
Desertion outcastt  
Sun octet asteroid  
Nectar editis us too  
Does in scatter out  
Oust to tend cercis  
Entrust a stoic ode  
It's true, ascend too*

His hands are gnarled, knuckles roots of a Judas-free

*Reagan McNamee-King*

## Data Analytics, Explained

Take a creation,  
Perfectly designed and developed  
For its purpose. Now wrench it free  
From all contextual understanding,  
And thrust it into communion  
With other deconstructions.

Force this stew through a sieve  
And into solution  
For uses never considered  
By those who gave birth  
To its constituent parts.

It's like poetry.  
Or marriage.

*Gary Mesick*



## Calabash Jug

Early morning. I hear the guinea hen's plaint.  
Last night, it was a screech owl's  
mewling whine stuttering in the dark—  
sounds that move through emptiness.

What is it Taoists say about emptiness—  
there is utility in it, perhaps: the jug  
useless if it could not be filled.  
Empty accepts what is given. Sorrow. Joy.

*Ann E. Michael*

## Last Light

The Black Madonna's face  
has come to us, even here,  
as the moon. The grasses

dark, the rim rocks lit to gold,  
finally, the sun tucks into the hem  
of night's cold blue robe. Later,

when her burnished head  
covers itself coyotes'  
small hymns rise in choir

and every rodent's membraned ear  
becomes a flickering votive,  
and stilling in the owl's talon,

a furred body an *ex voto* to what is left,  
what is yet to be done.

*Jory Mickelson*

## From Chile

South from La Serena  
on Ruta 5 hanging in Pacific haze,

we stopped to stand with the muted  
sea, the photos monochrome. We were

full of promises to Violeta  
and Gabriela, but spoke

none aloud—not so far north,  
the shells we had collected

were not yet warm and thirsty.  
Days later, the rain fell warm,

on crowded Isla Negra  
of the pilgrim hinge: open

your creaked heart, the drops  
dream a wet moon.

A steaming storm-caught dog  
wandered into the gift-shop,

and out again.

*James Miller*

## Pass, Valley, Gate, Cathedral

Morning. Driving the pass. Clouds lift as we drive, so, above the whole way. Fog on a mountain road is too much metaphor even after omelettes and coffee. The peaks never appear until we're down, and then as objects in a mirror which makes them smaller. The valley is full of clarity—abandoned farms, a sod-roofed barn, log huts, rust. The sort of place where light carries more liquid than the land. I come from country where the sky has room for only one kind of cloud at a time. Here, it's so big and the land so various, the sky's full of weathers climbing like new animals up the mountain sides scrambling for what they need to grow.

In a rough small town we stop for the Beer Can Castle—memory house with two mismatched elaborated towers like some gothic cathedrals, but built of flattened cans and detritus in gratitude, its wall informs us, for marijuana, Jesus, and the builder surviving Viet Nam. We were born late enough our friends weren't called, early enough to have marched against the war.

After, we drive on and go back to talking through the ways Christians read the Torah as if it consists of prophecy and prohibitions—Jesus-coming, rules, and wars. The Beer Castle's gate is crowned with crosses and I wonder if there's one for every friend the builder lost to war.

*Devon Miller-Duggan*

## Ten Love Stories

1

You were the brightest apple, most fit for my hand. My hand was unfit for more. I was seduced by the skin of the brightest apple that fit my eye: broken, fading, then remembered.

2

You stood between the mirror and the tree, the apple in your palm reflectionless. We shared the rules. I entered you, expecting to emerge improved. Inside, a bed, stained mattress, needles, a rusty apple core. A door without a handle, locked behind me. I'm stuck inside your wrong self. Am I the wrong I? They are my needles, my stains, my apple.

3

I paid for apples, you filled my hands with rocks. My train was leaving. Any story is unlikely, and if my story lacked you, apples would fall through my hands. Rocks would fill my dreams. If I don't find you, nothing will ever reach me, not even the moon.

4

Apples, apple trees, apple truths, apple blossoms, lips full of empty promises before the war. How are we to know what remains after years burn? Leaves turned to ashes. Shadow where the tree stood.

5

Who could have known the apple would fall into my heart, rip me open? Who knew the body was already ripe? When we fell apart in love and time stopped, the mystery was laid open. As if we had to bite into ourselves to know. As if we never were the same.

6

The worm drills the apple as brown rot spreads through your wellbeing. You find the stars misaligned, the well in the back yard filled with sand. Some animals depart, others decay. You write a love letter you'll never send. My train leaves.

7

The air, the animal, the run, the missing apple, missing story, missing face. The herebefore with its own hereafter tailored to our methods of love and ways of longing. The ends and the promises, and a stained mattress on a broken bed where no one sleeps. You, lost elsewhere.

8

You send a letter meant for everyone, like an open hand or a love song written in ruins, the background of your life. Your quick moves, efficient body, quick death. I place an apple on your coffin. I'm still here.

9

When the basket broke, the apples scattered, and no one, not even you, could pick up each one. What we think is love escapes, replaced by a new concept of love to fit the new self. You enter me. The apples disappear.

10

I was a simple apple. My train was leaving. You picked me up, laid me in your basket. I lie, chosen.

*A. Molotkov*

## Time Zones

i.

My eyes are asking me to stop writing,  
you tell me. It's 3 am your time. Here,  
in Brooklyn, I am flipping through your messages  
on my iPhone—half in English, half in Arabic (which I don't  
understand).

We talk ISIS, Adonis, and the utility of Google Translate.

ii.

On a dark January day in Jerusalem  
I sip red wine, cupping the glass in memory  
of Darwish and his studious intensity  
toward the red liquid.  
Your whiskey glass  
sits in a puddle of feint water on the table  
near my computer. Christian pilgrims  
hug their tea cups close where they sit behind us.  
Arabic is good for speaking between the lines.

iii.

Adonis reads his poems about Jerusalem  
at the French cultural center on Fifth Avenue,  
where spring pours in from the wide windows.  
"In art, there is no East and West,"  
he quips. "Religion is an answer and poetry  
is a question." But, I can't help leaving  
the reading with a question: how did Syria  
not seep into that precious room,  
with the wooden beams and the delicate  
hanging light fixtures? Who are we, poets  
and fans, to push the essence of the war  
away from our faces, out of our minds,  
even for an hour as we praise metaphor  
over answers? Even asking a question is enough—  
an important beginning, but not to ask,  
to stay silent, that, too, is a type of metaphor

or a simile: silence is like....

Silence is like the breath before death,  
the gasp unheard.

iv.

There is that whisper of days when Jerusalem  
becomes two time zones  
and sunset happens twice.  
You can run from West to East  
and add an hour to your life  
for just two days a year when East Jerusalemites  
join their clock hands to the people on the other side  
of Qalandia, Hizmeh, the DCO, and lag a day behind  
official Israel's daylight savings shift. A silent rebellion  
that separates neighborhoods or something else?  
The warm moon smiles down on the silly people  
who are unable to synchronize the hours  
as the mash of wild Rosemary and Chickweed  
aim to stretch toward daylight.

*Jo-Ann Mort*

Notes:

Qalandia, Hizmeh, DCO: Israeli checkpoints at the crossings between Israel and the Palestinian areas.

Lag day: There is a little over a 24-hour lag between daylight savings times in Israel and the Palestinian occupied West Bank. East Jerusalemite Palestinians adhere to the Palestinian time change even though, legally, they are living in Jerusalem controlled by Israel.

## Rites

We place them carefully  
in the damp ground,  
the two beetles

we found dead.  
Their hard shells  
glint green.

I name them Otto  
and Ophelia—  
for the sound.

Kids, not yet teens,  
we spoon sand,  
lay dandelions.

I come back next day  
alone. Why do I  
poke at the grave?

I dig and dig.  
The beetles are gone!  
A cat's raid?

A bird's? What if  
they woke in the dark  
like Lazarus?

Those tiny shriveled  
legs drawn up, thin  
as an eyelash.

*Elisabeth Murawski*

## Our First Time Making Love After the Funeral

I confess

that I have looked at photographs  
read poems, psalms  
cards tucked in flowers

and wept for different reasons. At last  
I have caught up  
to my body

so determined to erase the problem  
of pain, motherhood  
and movement

beneath my flesh once  
still unblemished  
and unscarred, save one

faint line  
seaming  
my puckered skin

from groin to navel—  
a hushing finger.  
Your lips fall

between my breasts  
that never lost their soft shape  
even when the milk dried up.

How could life

still be so good? It reaches  
forward with opened hands  
expecting to be filled. How familiar

living feels—iced bottles on the nightstand  
books and bills  
piled on the floor. Your old shirt like the skin

of your body, stitched  
with the smell of your sweat.  
We no longer pray

to be carried through a breath  
an hour  
but rather weeks and months.

We kneel

before each other in rediscovery.  
*The eye is the lamp of the body*  
and what are we beholding?

The last time I held you  
in a simple gaze  
before I knew

what a gaze could hold—  
velvet fists, a smile,  
black petals of Jude's stilled lips

we searched  
for fragments of ourselves—  
my hands had followed

the lines of your back  
the soft curve  
between your legs

I quaked to life. I know  
the heat of your skin  
calmed beneath my palms.

How I have missed  
the smell of you.

*Shannon Nakai*

## Swing Low

*for Gwendolyn Brooks*

As kids, we'd swing  
on an old tire, hung low  
on a rope. We'd swing  
from the branch of a gnarled oak, low  
enough to grab for a gaggle of kids sweet  
as shoefly pie made from molasses, sweet  
as honey from the comb. A chariot

of old rubber was tied to swing  
us through the air, high, then low,  
a mercy turning, a swing  
dark and worn but still low  
enough for us to touch a sweet  
twilight moon, transparent, cool, sweet  
enough for innocents to ride on like a chariot.

*Donna Pucciani*

## A Stick of Butter

She has just finished her supper  
of boiled beef, mashed potatoes,  
vegetables. Much of it has lodged  
among her ample breasts  
and the buttons of her blue blouse.

She looks at me, her hazel eyes  
holding nothing but questions. I say,  
*Good girl, Mum. Did you enjoy that?*  
Her answer is silence. She is trying  
to remember who I am.

She has dissolved among the peas  
and carrots. We sit quietly, looking  
at each other and the empty plate.  
I am glad she has decided to eat today.  
She extends one pale hand and grabs

the stick of butter from the faux-crystal dish.  
She brings it to her lips. I rush to wrest  
the yellow blob from her fingers.  
I wipe her hands and mouth  
with a crumpled paper napkin.

She is sad, thinking I have stolen dessert.  
She says, *I'm not right, am I?*  
She shakes her head, her eyes moist.  
Her mind has left her behind.  
I clean my hands on a dishtowel,

walk behind her chair, put my arms  
around her, lean my head on hers, smelling  
her baby-clean grey hair, and say, *It's all right,*  
knowing it is not, and never will be.  
The late summer sun, slanted, finds us.

*Donna Pucciani*

## Flora & Fauna

I.

A succulent ladders sunward & leans its fat grape of a leaf  
against a glazed pot. Early-June under a finch-full tree,

a winged elm rattles in the late afternoon, & a dog yap-yap-yaps  
down the street. Home, in a season of recovery, my son

pulls vines from his old play-fort. As his classmates graduate,  
he sweeps leaves from towers & wrenches the tattered cover

from the slide. The sun & rain have slept the boards & ropes  
slack. If I had watched from inside the house, I'd have seen how

he rescued the fort he no longer wants, witnessed the strength  
& aggression of the Florida flora vs. the full reach of his arms.

II

The never-ending downstair of a calendar tells me one more  
month has gone by & an obese sun bakes early buds to brown.

Purple Fountain Grass next to the pool has become a haven  
for a nesting mallard & we do our best to help her, research

what she will need, & buy wood for a duckling ramp & feed. More  
rain & the fort is again overtaken by creeper and wild grape;

heart tight in his chest, legs again anxiety wound. I am not enough.  
Rat or possum gets every last egg. Two days before I can pick up

the waxing moon pieces, yolk stained, but bright. In order  
to protect the mallard, I tear out the grass by the roots.

*Michele Parker Randall*

## Sienna Hills

Did you gather the eggs that morning?  
Did you ride the wind?  
I turn past the barn where mint, salvia, and rosemary  
rise out of its southern corner.

Sky threads its piercing heat.  
A wave of citrus plants itself in my memory.  
A tree pulls me into its grateful mesh of wonder.

I will outline for you the folds of the mountain  
in the ochre shadowed afternoon.  
Like an ancient elephant fallen on its side,  
the flap of its one darker ear,  
the ridges of its gray hind legs  
the head on a bold diagonal,  
now the ear lifts,  
attuned to a reverberating hum.

At that moment—the family assembles for dinner.  
You hold a split pomegranate in one hand,  
the other hand holds the juicy arils,  
the optimism of a garden;  
lemons in orange light.

*Claudia Reder*

## Twilight Over Anhang Straightaway

An Anhang twilight is a misappropriation of terms  
I thought, walking home from an engendered bypass  
as metal doors rolled up overhead, iron curtains in motion.  
The family card table  
that holds shuffled hands with folded-out legs, between garage and street  
serving as mogul gates for a stray cat  
who reaches the inexplicit place my footsteps last exited  
fades sunlight into creases;  
the cat darts under a suspended automobile,  
hoisted high in that street-level body shop:  
to the child leapt up behind arms outstretched—cornered  
it begs with its given look.

An Anhang twilight—cash registers clanking shut  
a fellow soulmate, bony at the waist, darts in and out  
jeweled sky flares scampering across open macadam  
between screaming metal hunks; oblivious to the meaning of commutation.  
There, the greased hands of the mechanic who ups an ante  
like a boy scolding a wayward aunt.

The arterial vein empties out; the exhaust of  
honking idlers scatters like a smokescreen  
hazed with the flecks of a tropical sun.

Warmth on my shin, the brush of fur  
the evening bleeds feline into a picaresque  
this one here—safe and sound—isn't such a stranger after all.

*Paul Reynolds*



## The Last Straw

You left so quickly,  
I didn't know what to do.  
Your death was the last straw.  
What's to hold me back now?  
What does the normal world offer?  
Even passion hurts. Even love.  
I want to live with dogs  
and horses and goats.  
Do you see me crawling  
from the cave, my hair all tangled,  
my eyes glowing?  
I love the rock  
under my paws,  
the blood,  
the moon in daytime,  
the white owl on the dead branch  
of a birch near the lake I floated on  
looking into the sky for news of you.  
*Souls move further and further away  
through invisible indivisible infinite space,*  
the sky seemed to say,  
as it reached down  
and touched my face,  
kissed the wet  
silk of my eyes.  
*Every body falls.  
Distance dissolves.*

*Anele Rubin*

## The Ant & the Peony

Summer's busyness on this stalk and bud,  
the tightly packed petals like artichokes, though  
pink and white, not green. Stems the color of rhubarb, grown  
in a different kind of garden in a different time. Years ago—  
the pull and twist or sharp knife making its way close  
to the ground.

The peony's bud opening  
more each day. How you once thought  
it wrong to have the ants there, wanted to flick them off,  
crush them with your sandal's sole. Cruel girl—though quicker,  
more merciful, than the boys with their magnifying glass and hot  
sun. The bully in the school's entrance, taunting.

Feathery thing flourishing, flaunting  
its beauty with this bustle, this symbiosis—  
the drinking of nectar and expression. May be  
all folklore, hearsay. This not needed for that, this  
visitation just a temporary one-sided affair. Their black  
shiny bodies crisp against the pastel, and fattening. But, so.

Later, the white blossom will nearly glow in the evening.

*Kelly R. Samuels*

## Our Ladies of the Marsh Islands

Bright and wild at night are the women  
who glide by quickly, who want to die  
while sitting in cars. They need to blossom  
tonight, elbowing their way through sensations  
of faith. Try as they might, songs they love  
the most end up in French streets surrounded  
by water. Well, at least they check  
empty moorings for lovable losers, for those  
scarred by war, for an osprey that's on the move.  
They look like rivers still rising  
over yellow perch. Now they want  
to sprout tails in the water. They love  
taking rosary beads and enjoying them  
like an eloquent novel or releasing them  
to the skies. They're into each other,  
wrapped in red and willing to hold fire  
over their tongues of lost love. Hurry!  
They're still turning corn into frozen daiquiris!  
Off they go, made whole again by a comet,  
by spring rain. Oh, how they dance between cars,  
past fireflies, around the Milky Way.  
They're dancing because they couldn't hear  
the walls around them disappear. On this,  
they agree: their summer chores include  
the rubber tree and carriage horses.  
In their house, it's orchids, orchids,  
and more orchids. They flock to the marsh,  
tossing their hats to their men where  
they dance on the sand. Spreading their wings  
over each other, they stand on the golden shores  
of marsh islands where every drug  
intensifies with their suffering. Some  
return to their childhood but likely don't think  
about its way home. Here, they're still grounded  
by green lasers and covered in the ashes  
of March. They can't bury their apples

of creativity and hope in their pockets,  
yet they feel blessed. Filling their gourds of black  
with flowers, here they stand. They write  
sacred text with ink on their feet.  
Surf's up! they cry, before they hatch  
blessings, one at a time, in their hands.

*Cliff Saunders*

## First Snow

The porters left their posts and stood silent  
in the college courtyards, like men or boys  
of God. A tourist took out his camera.  
A fellow opened a window. All at once,  
the geese slid into the river, and the bridges  
bobbed with colorful hats, pulled from bicycle  
baskets. Like anything first wakened to snow,  
the holly perked up. But the woodpigeons quivered  
under gables, their two-note calls as mournful  
as a play's second act. Already some man was  
telling some woman about winter of '63,  
when the Cam froze and he skated the whole way  
from Newnham to John's. Somewhere an old don  
had started brewing tea. And somewhere her daughter  
was picking up her daughter, a single bell spelling  
her steps. And I was there, in St. Mary's Square,  
white-haired, dampened, pushing my bike. No one  
has taught me more about patience than that priest  
of a robin, there pockmarking the earth, his careful  
feet, his bowed head: a prayer and nothing like it.

*Felicity Sheehy*

## A Friday in April

All day, I did not abandon my life.  
I woke up, I made coffee, I put on  
thick, wool socks. I read the paper  
and thought of other lives. I took  
the dog to the vet, where she urinated  
in fear, under the chair, and I smiled,  
apologized, and cleaned up, politely.  
I drove home. I bought milk at the store.  
I answered emails with quick, efficient  
strokes. At dusk, I stepped out  
in a sweater, to watch the first lilac  
open itself to the air. Overhead,  
the bats swooped for insects, newborn  
in vernal pools, and the light leaves  
spoke in blue words, one to another.  
In time, two moths rested on the door.  
I did not think of you. Then an owl  
called from the white dogwood—  
how quickly you surfaced and fell.

*Felicity Sheehy*

## Lǎowài

You call us wàiguórén,  
guilao, máozi,  
lǎowài—

we are the brittle  
autumn leaves  
rattling across  
your streets at  
night,  
swept along by

cigarettes and beer  
until we are

piled up outside your  
homes—

Once green  
and full of love,  
we were  
whisked away

past your city's gates—

where we ached our eyes  
and wilted  
beneath our own smoke—

How strange we must seem to you,  
falling at the slightest  
shift of wind

and painting  
your streets with

our own meaning—

*Andrew Slugantz*

## Find Me a Horse

*The Good Samaritan (after Delacroix)*  
—Vincent Van Gogh, May, 1890

he said. *An old horse. Brown. With spongy  
hooves. Dull teeth.* Roulin stables one, I said,  
keeps it for his children. But why a horse?  
*I want to do like Eugène,* he said. *But I  
need to feel it first. So I'll be  
the Samaritan, you'll be the traveler.  
The horse will be the horse. I'll call it,  
'After Delacroix.' And find a breastplate,  
Eugène's had a breastplate.*

I do not like horses, even nags, parcels  
of bones—I've been bitten and stomped—  
but I found the horse and tugged it,  
pulled it, shoved it—it was not pleased  
to leave it's oats. And it was ancient.  
I found a breastplate behind the smith's,  
and here we are on a little lane above  
the town, clusters of yellow gorse,  
lavender too, and broom, a narrow council  
of beech, village roofs below we could  
spit on. *Here,* he says, *wrap this around  
your head, roll up your sleeves.  
And slacken your limbs—I can't lift you  
in a rigor.* He squats in front of me,  
handles me beneath an elbow, clutches me  
under my rump and he lifts, heaves, and,  
*Don't grab my neck,* he says, *or my chin.  
Stay loose, dammit. Help me.*

So I spring and up I go and I'm off  
the ground, my ribs raking the horse's ribs,  
and I'm sliding backwards toward  
a bony hip, and my shirt catches  
on a bridle buckle and it rips. *Merde,* he says,

and drops me, and I fall to the path,  
gravel and stones, and the right rear hoof  
lifts a little. Villagers, five or six, who've  
gathered around, point and snicker—that  
crazy Van Gogh. *I wonder*, he says, *who is*  
*the craziest. This horse? Or Delacroix? Or*  
*that Goddamn Samaritan—he must've*  
*been a giant. Or, me? Me, I do think. But I'll*  
*do it right, and his hat will be red, by golly,*  
*bright bright red. A veritable Sinterklass.*  
*Stand up*, he says. *Let's try it again.*

*William Snyder, Jr.*

## While Viewing Renoir's *Luncheon of the Boating Party*

The artist says the empty glass  
is hardest to paint:  
not just air but absence.

*What can I tell my friend*  
*as he scatters his son's ashes?*

Elegant ghosts laugh on canvas  
but the taste of the vintage  
blooming in green bottles

by lush red grapes  
eludes the brush like the shape  
of the lost child.

*Where is the boat*  
*that brought them here*  
*as the fog waits for wind?*

*Gary Stein*