

Chameleon

*Il n'y a point de Polype, ni de Caméleon, qui puisse
changer de couleur aussi souvent que l'eau.*

—G. Bachelard

*Mutamenti del fuoco: da prima mare, e dal mare una
metà terra e una metà fiamma in cielo.*

*Morte delle anime é diventare acqua, morte dell'acqua
divenire terra: ed é dalla terra che si fa l'acqua,
e dall'acqua l'anima.*

—Heraclitus

The road climbs aslant the cliff
Wrapped in myrtle and juniper.
The cliff bursts into phalanxes and clefts and peaks
above the sea that alters with the sky. Neither
octopus nor cuttlefish neither chameleon
nor jellyfish can change itself like
the water. And water rises in the hollow
sky of the soul where the soul meets its death.
The water on the spiked coast of Liscia becomes
earth pointing a finger against
the blue air. It is granite
shaped by the wind, hemmed in by somber clouds of
sulfur, facing the sea. It is liquid copper
flaring up in the fire, it is fire
which the wind widens into lava slabs to
extract the very last shapes of gods and
plants, of men and wild beasts.
Already reptiles run on the burning
fire, fish get trapped, lead
has buried the snail inside the granite,
and now even the granite sees with eyes
of silver on a red field. Melted by
the raging wind, earth has burned the water,
it is dead; but now, lo!, here inside the earth and
inside the granite there is a wind which

alters with lightning and fire; it is light. And
ammonia and phosphorus, methane and nitrogen
drip the living stone into the water.
If you retake the road
that climbs up the cliff covered with myrtle
and juniper, you observe again—it is the coast of Liscia—
the pattern of the world
imprinted on each grain of sand. A chameleon flat
in the sun replicates the signs of the stone up to
the stars. The stars' opaque dust drips down
into the salt which the sun distills. Mornings, the parched
grass sprouts again with the same
rustle of the snake when it slithers out
of its hole. The earth is a ram
piercing itself with new shoots of liquid green.
Water gushes out and it is earth, and you walk
on the sea, your steps steady on waves of
grass and of earth. You are afire. In the sighs
of the deep waters, in a
single atom of gray dust, you become
crystal. Your song bursts out of
their soul.

*Rosita Copioli
translated by
Renata Treitel*

Pond of the Washerwomen

This is the shallow tarn,
the only water body
 within the vastness of trash.
Washwomen from Morano, Jharsugoda and ten other villages
 come,

carrying loads of laundry. They sit in the sunshine
and drop saris, *cholis*,
pajamas onto the water's surface.
Traders' shirts, a dairy woman's shawl
float, drift away like swans—

Forgetting how old they are, the washwomen jump into the water
 and splash at each other
like little girls. Someone swims to gather
the clothes back. Then, they wash them
with bar soap, tie them to the clothesline.
Kurta—kamez—shalwars
 become crane wings in the gusts.

Sankar Roy

Fish

Dawn,
like petals of drenched roses.
Six naked bodies
glide forward furtively
in the practiced motions of some dance,
rippling the water's sleek body.

Slowly they close in on one another,
cutting across the cries
 of kingfisher and kite.
They move up, six torsos,
 black and naked,
deepening the repose of snail and ancient toad.

And now the net is wound,
 rising up
under twelve greedy, watchful eyes;
threshing bodies of carp and tiny fry,
 brilliant as the sun.

Bhanuji Rao
translated by
Jayanta Mahapatra

Heart of Ruin

The roof comes down on Maruti's head.
Nobody seems to mind.

Least of all Maruti himself.
May be he likes a temple better this way.

A mongrel bitch has found a place
for herself and her puppies

in the heart of the ruin.
May be she likes a temple better this way.

The bitch looks at you guardedly
past a doorway cluttered with broken tiles.

The pariah puppies tumble over her.
May be they like a temple better this way.

The black-eared puppy has gone a little too far.
A tile clicks under its foot.

It's enough to strike terror in the heart
of a dung beetle

and sends him running for cover
to the safety of the broken collection box

that never did get a chance to get out
from under the crushing weight of the roof beam.

No more a place of worship, this place
is nothing less than the house of god.

Arun Kolatkar

Oileán Thorai

after Pat Collins

Let us waken slowly to the wardrobe
slipping its moorings, to the buoy music
wire hangers make, to belongings and hand-me-downs
setting sail, to Holy Marys, periwinkles, shells
making themselves at home on our bedroom floor
among hair strands, dust balls, shed skin,
and accept from the hands of our one neighbor
who crosses from the mainland in a light craft
fashioned from sallies and the skin of a single cow,
the leaves he claims grow there in abundance
and passes out on the quay like tender.

Thomas French/ Tomaso Frinseach

Traits

Exotic nettles and the lush smell of mint,
a shading of alders, some rusty tin-cans,
rat tracks and flood puddles, my shadow
corrugated and misshapen, a place behind
a stone wall that fronts a new road
or any out of the way corner, forgotten, abandoned,
we secretly love these wild spots, just as
we love our own wayward traits best of all.

Tadhg Russell

The Turning

Almost solstice, and on the ice-blue sky the fluffed-wool
dissolving trail of a jet, stitching, unstitching; tonight
there will be stars, sharp as broken ice-glass
and small birds sheltering somewhere, in the earth's care;
here love evolves, through the small events and the remarkable;
you, in the garden, vivid in red windcheater,
your rubber gloves—one yellow, the other red—as you deal
in clay and mulch, lift the tubers of this late summer's
dramatic dahlias—the bitter-lemon Pentagram, the all-hallows-red
Bishop of Llandaff—and lay them out in knotted sausage-shapes
in the tigin to dry; you turn, a moment, towards me, and smile;
the house is quiet, where I sit inside the window, watching,
hearing the vole-like scritch and scratch of my biro, as it turns, turns
to work at the daunting, cosmic whiteness of the page.

John F. Deane

Tiger

*Inspired by Lady Charlotte Canning's journals
and her watercolour of the sitting-room at
Government House, Barrackpore, 1859.*

She ordered 450 yards of her favourite
blue-striped chintz with rosebuds—
it was all very *pretty, cool and English*

though the twenty foot high ceiling
was hung with punkahs, those strange fans.
And there were so many doors,

thirteen in all, and at each one
a watchful, turbaned servant, hands
joined, as if in prayer.

Jhilmils, just like Venetian blinds,
and *tatis*, wetted grass veranda screens,
kept out every chink of sun.

But nothing could keep out India.

Like a tiger

it roared through boredom
roared through Englishness and British rule

more ferocious than the Hot Weather
it tore through ceremony and certainty

its jaws aflame—

Cawnpore, Lucknow, Bibighar, Allahabad—all fell.

Fighting & guns & murders...

And then the retribution—the rallying cry:

“Remember Cawnpore!”

Dear Lady Canning wrote Queen Victoria
Our thoughts are almost solely occupied with India.

But what did the tiger know or care
about thoughts or letters
or chintz or watercolours?

Moniza Alvi

Ode to a Sindhri

eating a perfect

ripe

yellow-orange sindhri

is a gift only summer can give. you
hold the curving firmness of it in
your palm and gently stroke

a knife beneath the thin, thin skin
and as it peels off in a curled sweet spiral,

you might take a moment to lick the
honeyed juice about to trickle
off your wrist

and slicing neatly, deftly, the mango
falls into scimitar-curved pieces into
a bowl, and then

you find a fork.

Mina Farid Malik

He can make us cry

No one notices ten-year-old Billu
But sometimes he can make us cry
Just for one rupee

A rupee can't buy anything anymore
And it is being phased out from paper money
To copper coins

A seven-billion-dollar expense on a new Space Station
somewhere
The splurge on atomic and non-atomic weapons
Foreign debt
Loan forgiveness documents on private accounts in banks
And a thousand such customs and practices
Have utterly ruined the rupee
And even beggars at traffic signals
Expect at least twice as much in alms

What does Billu receive
For serving burgers, sandwiches, samosas, and tea
We have never cared to ask
Our own problems are legion
We need several thousand just to get a young man
To study an American book on Business Management
And there are many other miscellaneous expenses
That keep us striving and busy

Usually, we take our evening tea
At places where a single cup costs around forty rupees
But our mid-morning tea at the hotel where Billu works
Costs only four

Perhaps Billu's master has forbidden him
Or, maybe, this is what his parents have taught him
Whatever the reason

When he refuses to accept the one rupee change
Which we, out of the goodness of our heart,
Wish to leave him as a tip
From the five we paid for the bill
It leaves us quite in tears

Tanveer Anjum
translated from the Urdu by
Waqas Khwaja

Two Pictures

A prayer rug under the Judas tree,
but we read aloud in a remote room.
A Mantuan song on the radio, a namaz,
and a man who sold horse meat
blended in the window for hours.
A small cut in a clay fence—
like a squint of a wolf nursed by the plains,
a veinless brown halo coiled between
water in a cement pit
and a curtain of the hundred-year-old house.
You, same as before, squat
as if searching on the ground, in the September heat, for a dead
bee—
in that spot where the acid music had shimmered, now
inaudible. Nearby something has grown smaller, trickier than
emptiness,
here, and away into an adobe chiseling—
an appendage to a monochrome ring bought in the old quarters.
He no longer read in the remote room—
Foscolo on Death—instead he was squeezing
a woman's fingers that, without initial coldness, slid into his hand
as into their own case, and only nails
smaller than nostrils searched the air
as if preparing to drum on a red tambourine
against the Sunnite heat. Remember:
father, so life-loving, even he sometimes withdrew, in front of an
abyss
in his beautiful study, glugged by the trivial darkness,
and the son thought, what wisdom: a gift of faithlessness before
the gray road.
Time. Lukewarm tea in a long dining hall.
Smoke, without crumbling, sculpts a male figure on the white-hot
road.

Shamshad Abdullaev
translated by
Valzhyna Mort

The Room. January 1st

I'll touch it—just a little more and...
I'll stand on tiptoe in the morning,
and then, come evening, I will reach
the tender fir tree's ticklish withers,
forget about myself beneath it,
feeling the topmost needle's touch.

All morning, the accordion's
complaints were heard, the worrying
over my palm's unlengthy line.
But toward evening, you are higher
than yourself—a view from the spire:
the tree, the winding road, the moon.

As if you're on the downward slope of
your years—though smart, hopeless,
left alone inside a rocking tram.
The view is the same—and yet it's altered.
Whom will you tell that you've just started,
and a new force pulses through your palm?

Irina Mashinski
translated by
Boris Dralyuk & Irina Mashinski

Postcards in a Bottle

1.
like young eagles in communist songs
crazed by wicked boy-scout insomnia
on new wings of wanking euphoria
up from government-issued bunks

off we soared and now we continue
as wild geese over woods hill and farm
on a postcard from lena to nina
immortality's wishes we are

3.
The proletarian-peasant pose
tickled the teen with its quaint name
and proletarian-peasant prose
hardly promised to entertain.

At fourteen a fellow best
prefers something with a zest.
With innocent smiles those bastards,
the angels, granted what he asked for.

4.
To E.M.

When the love of my life, exhausted, incoherent,
collapsed onto the bed still in her travel shoes,
from elevated heels, subtlest of Sherlock's clues,
a distant foreign isle loomed visibly apparent.

When the love of my life cussed like a regular comrade,
desirous to untie her shoestrings yet unable—
Sweet mirror of my youth, both fairest and most fatal—
I thought with a bright sorrow in my head.

Dennis Novikov
translated by Philip Nikolaev

Pathway

I saw my father walking in my garden
and where he walked,
the garden lengthened

to a changing mile
which held all seasons of the year.
He did not see me, staring from my window,
a child's star face, hurt light from stricken time,
and he had treaded spring and summer
grasses before I thought to stir, follow him.

Autumn's cathedral, open to the weather, rose
high above, flawed amber, gorgeous ruin; his shadow
stretched before me, *cappa magna*,
my own, obedient, trailed like a nun.
He did not turn. I heard the rosaries of birds.
The trees, huge doors, swung open and I knelt.

He stepped into a silver room of cold;
a narrow bed of ice stood glittering,
and though my father wept, he could not leave,
but had to strip, then shiver in his shroud,

till winter palmed his eyes for frozen bulbs,
or sliced his tongue, a silencing of worms.

The moon a simple headstone without words.

Carol Ann Duffy

The Hinds

Walking in a waking dream
I watched nineteen deer
Pour from ridge to glen-floor,
Then each in turn leap,
Leap the new-raised
Peat-dark burn. This
Was the distaff side;
Hinds at their ease, alive
To lands held on long lease
In their animal minds,
And filing through a breached
Never-mended dyke,
The herd flowed up over
Heather-slopes to scree
Where they stopped, and turned to stare,
The foremost with a queenly air
As though to say: *Aren't we
The bonniest companie?
Come to me,
You'll be happy, but never go home.*

Kathleen Jamie

Dog Otter

When the light was starting to leave a last trail
I was looking for the dog otter Jean told me about,
a big beauty she said, you'll see it at Ardtornish
and sometimes it comes down here to Lochaline

I found myself trailing the sea loch
imagining its sleek head rising forth, its eyes dark
and soulful, its leap from the water a kind of a wave
and yet I never saw it and the light left the sky

but not before I saw the bright flash of a kingfisher
on the river Rannoch and thought that life tosses you
its own philosophy; if you hunt for a dog otter
you will get a kingfisher and perhaps vice versa

Tomorrow I'll go looking for the bright blue flash by the river
then
and perhaps instead of a poem, the story
will come, a big beauty, sleek-headed
finally, with the pink light in the sky still, the leaves turning.

Jackie Kay

we dreamed her

remember when I said
if he asks——what's down there——maybe I'll let him——
be——gratefully——devoured——beaks snapping between
silicone legs——I——blue-mascaraed octopus——flash——in glee.
she——peered over——mango bubble tea——&unhinged——
four sets of jaws——clickclickpop——&smiled——gently——
gently——at we gutter-children——girls &——the not-
girls——scabbed palms lined with laughter——the kind——that
haunts——as he——haunted us——fucked us——stuffed us——
in car trunks——
she——squelched over——to our side of the table——butterflied
all 44 hands through our hair——&crooned

“what do you really want?”

tonight——our——slender pale suckers——tenderly——
tenderly——unhinge occipital bone——he——sheds——
like a Hatsune Miku wig——your thigh-socked——Pearls
of the Orient——so——masturbatable——masticate——
astrocytes——sweetly——sweetly——while she——smiles——

come, see——his punishment——open her rage-studded
throat——& eat.

Jiaqiao Liu

Plunge tectonic

These millennia will be our answers waltzing through.
Strange dancers. And who? Go to water and out again.
How it cozens. One after another replaced. Dozens.
Borders redrawn, broken. Retrace. Something large
twists its mouth. Such distaste. Make a paste. Renews
its vows to try harder. More land on my pillow.
Whatever. I sweep the floor clear of debris. Maybe
I'll catch the flu, as you watch me. Keep it together,
in the end. Harry our father. Not our friend. The
fatherland. Dawn chews the stern. Bother other lands
instead. A kinder man's no Mister Room, sister womb
to combat, future zoo. What a little husbandry can
do for you. Tombs enough for plenty. I sweep it all
clear of debris. Cross the stage, dyed like a peahen,
I get to thinking now and then. Going into water
and out again, maybe today I'll catch you watching
me. Cracks tectonic as much for posterity. Humpty
Dumpty can't touch me. Given time, things can start.
Prime the engine. Reel apart. Arbitraries dissolve
again, once more. Now time to give birth. Land on my
pillow. It's so clear. We're here. Eyed by a peacock,
I cross the stage. Carry a feather, down the storm.

Ivy Alvarez

City Rise

lights go out when we least expect it
it's your presence
night, a body without words
we clothe ourselves in it

it's your presence
an intellect turning, breaking
I clothe myself in it
refuse of the world gathers in

an intellect turning, breaking
kiss of small stars
refuse of the world gathers in:
four of hearts from the Dunedin Casino

kiss of small stars
bloom pink and tumble
four of hearts from the Dunedin Casino
still you are closed like a secret

blooms pink and tumble
night, a body without words
here is my mouth like a secret
lights go out when we least expect it

Alison Wong

In war

Soldiers come home from war
with their last breath jumping from finger to finger;
counting whose son died on the front and was left behind like litter.
Their palms exuding expectations
ready to celebrate a second-hand freedom
but their limbs are cut out by chains;
gunshots confining mind from believing in a tangible reality.
They vowed
before the nose of a breathless pistol
that they will live to see roses blooming out of concrete.
They throw their eyes to the distance of burnt houses they call home.
No one told them that soldiers are useless;
only meant to breathe on the battlefield,
after war; the fighting never stops.
They are found hanging outside
on a branch of tree behind their burnt homes.

Soldiers come home to war.

Busisiwe Veronica Mahlangu

This is another poem about your face

This is another poem about your face.
But it is now later.
There is nothing of what was,
this is another poem entirely.

We are sitting in the garden
on the porch chairs
as another sunset happens.
The colour's getting dim.
The moon will rise.
Night will come.
These are our certainties.

We talk, we talk so much,
as we always have,
trying to figure it all out.
Then there is a moment of silence.
Your face looking to the sun,
the shadows of the trees,
and your face is softened again,
by time, and by all that's happened between us.
When you turn to look at me
I try to hold it all,
to remember the angles of your face,
the way your nose looks against your cheek,
the parenthesis around your mouth,
the curve between nostril, cheek;
your eyes, hooded by this distance.
Trying to hold it, failing,
knowing I'll have to rely on photos in the end.
But I try,
for a few moments,
at the end of this long dry winter,
I do try.

Arja Salafranca

Part 6: The feet

My mother asked me
How is it that I find the time to walk away
From all that I have loved?
I tell her that what I have loved has
Made me walk away
I tell her that before I pray
My hands tell me to un-touch a man that needs
My mouth tells me to silence my speech
and hold my truth all in
my nose tells me to forget the smell
of perfume that lingers inside of an Arabic book cover
my face tells me to look away
my past is but a passing lover
my arms, they feel the wounds of war
each time they grip the warmth of nothing
they touch and hold up my world
but still
it's a world that feels like something foreign
and then there is my mind
it tells me how to live
it is the thing that beats
my feet
my feet
have stories to tell
they often stand in one place and long to be in another
they long to walk besides yours
under your umbrella

Shameelah Khan

Wick

A Newden candle disrobing wax softly
in the dark mouth
of the room,
the current of my exhalation
and unsteady
whistle
of
asthma in her lungs
volleys a rippling flame between us,
inducing a moth of silence to hover
just outside the circumference of light. and
the only thing braver in the room
is a soft mint
dissolving, without attention,
like beeswax,
inside the toothless night.

Somber dentures (older than me),
baptised in a chipped glass,
a saucerful of black Teaspoon Tips tea,
the R1 promise to buy Nik Naks tomorrow,
cocooned in the maroon and grey of grandfather's church-fancy
handkerchief.

All is forgotten,

but the self-immolating candle.
Only, umakhulu says nothing of
the anxiety of her shadow – shrinking away from
the bedroom's palate and walls
faster than the flinching flame.

Siphokazi Jonas

THE YEARS:

1994-2018



Now, Since

Now, since he's had children, my brother's become them.
rises in the body of our father
to brush the girls' hair,
clean their fingernails with his silver penknife.

He fixes breakfast for everyone,
holds them close to the table
like a man working horses, feels a pain in his chest,
as our mother did, when they scatter to school.
Like her, he sits in the car
stretching his mind after them, folding his body
into a student's desk, and raises his hand behind each one
to clarify what's too complicated for a child.

But then like our father he goes to work
and forgets
the children, spends whole days
winding himself in ropes
of his own manufacture
until by dark when the girls come in
he is exhausted and touchy.
By now his house is unfamiliar to him.
While supper dishes clatter
like an overture,
he lies in the darkened bedroom,
a caricature of himself as a child,
waiting for one of the beautiful girls,
the one who looks like our mother, to come get him.

Charlie Smith

Mother at 75

An ocean, wild and vast
is now my mother's mind.
The pelicans glide in loose
formation out of her eyes.

I sit quietly and trawl,
gather in nets and try
to read the random tides.
Sometimes they turn up clues,

an octopus on a Minoan jug,
the incense cask of a village
priest, will bells that still ring
through the rust. I sift,

toss back strange whelks,
the pipefish whose faces I don't know.
Some snapshots surface, a man
on a dock in uniform.

His arm circles the ripeness
of a woman in summer dress.
More faded, an older woman
whose face wears loss like an island

home, by the mustached man
who clutches a round-backed mandolin.
Four children gather at their feet,
the one girl looking as though

she knows you, or did once.
The brine runs out, slips
between my fingers. I hear
the distant shorebirds cry.

Derek Economy

Baptism with Water Moccasin

And the Lord said to Satan, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it."

—*The Book of Job*

His bulk amazed us,
the way he's maneuvered his folds
onto a switch of elm
directly above the baptizing hole.
after all, Cedar Creek offered
numerous spots for a snake
to wile away a Sunday, but only one
fit to baptize in.

Not even the brilliance
of proselytes, a rite of sheets
fluttering about them
in the early morning breeze,
had moved him. Not the most
floral, feathered, tasseled of hats,
nor the highest notes of a Doctor Watt
being held till the last thread
of their power—
nothing made him so much
as shift that plated lozenge of head,
shovel through the chilly fork of his tongue
to even feel us out.

It was as if he already knew
what was going on, as if
he had been returning for ages
to blaspheme the Creek.

While the deacons
crawfished into place,
one could scan the bank of faces,

almost hear people calling up Scriptures,
favorite prophets to deliver us.

The sister in the blue crêpe de Chine
sees Joseph released from Potiphar's prison,
and the old man there
with Stetson still on
is remembering Daniel in the lion's den.
Over there Jonah is being spat up . . .
Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.
Everywhere shields were rising,
going forth against the tree.

A few boys with the story
of David and Goliath
burning their hearts,
gathered stones to make war,
aimed to chuck the devil down
into the cloudy waters below,
but Pastor Gamble, an old hand
at this sort of thing, cautioned
"Leave him be, chillun.
Long as he up there,
we knows where he at."

Claude Wilkinson

Listening to Poetry in a Language I Do Not Understand

Here is a door
and a pipe the rain runs through.
A yellow flower
with twenty supple lips.

I like how you move your hands.
How the black T-shirt you have worn
for the last three days
drapes loosely
over baggy blue pants.
You stop so abruptly
I fell into the breath
of the person next to me.

We can look at this poem
from the high mountains
above the roof
or stand under it
where it casts a cool shadow.

Is this your family home?
Your grandfather's tiny buddha?

One word rolls across the room
and lodges under the slipper
of the man who has felt uncomfortable
all day.

Now he knows what to say.

Naomi Shihab Nye

Baptist Hymns

for Marcia, Marilyn, Nancy, Beth, Susan, and Eileen

They come to me at the oddest times,
tumbling out warm and electric
like the cotton socks and underwear.

A charge to keep I have, a God to glorify
when I let down the door of the dryer
or rolling in like a Friday night storm
as I stand looking across the lake.

All hail the power of Jesus' name
In my Friday night writers' group—
a Baptist, an Evangelical United Brethren,
two Methodists, an Episcopalian, a Catholic and a Jew,
all lapsed and relapsed—we are talking
about the houses we grew up in.

I mention the gospel music purring
inside the white plastic radio,
turned yellow and permanently tuned
to static, when someone across the room
breaks into *The Little Brown Church in the Vale*,
and before long we're all holding hands
and singing *Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam*
and *Bringing in the Sheaves*.

Except for our Catholic, who rises
to her feet, ceremonious and erect, and offers
Latin incantation that silences us all
in the middle of Verse Two, Repeat Refrain.
How mysterious those *a capella* words,
how seductive that ancient tongue.

This is what my mother, keeping watch
in the choir loft, was afraid I might hear.
Instead, I discovered the Pre-Raphaelite poets
and Matthew Arnold, though as I stand each year
before my class reciting *Dover Beach*, the sea

I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore
of those old songs may come crashing into the text:

It's Easter Sunday, I'm in grade three,
my new dress with its stiff with crinolines

makes me bob like a buoy and I glance down
to the page of my hymn book, though I never
need to look at the words, and squeezed
between my tenor father and off-key grandmother,
I join my eager monotone voice
with those rising around me, feeling the refuge
of song, *the power in the blood,*
and love lifting me,
(even me).

Anita Skeen

Psalm: God of the Syllable

God of the Syllable

God of the Word

God Who Speaks to Us

God Who Is Dumb

The One God The Many

God the Unnameable

God of the Human Face

God of the Mask

God of the Gene Pool

Microbe Mineral

God of the Sparrow's Fall

God of the Spark

God of the Act of God

Blameless Jealous

God of Surprises

And Startling Joy

God Who Is Absent

God Who Is Present

God Who Finds Us

In Our Hiding Places

God Whom We Thank

Whom We Forget to Thank

Father God Mother

Inhuman Infant

Cosmic Chthonic

God of the Nucleus

Dead God Living God

Alpha God Zed

God Whom We Name

God Whom We Cannot Name

When We Open Our Mouths
With the Name God Word God

Mark Jarman

Lilting

Donegal

In the lull just after
McKenna's reel, a girl
with a port-wine

stain upon her
throat stood delicate
as a heron, while

the hard-faced farmers
all froze. Head tilted
and both eyes closed,

she soared two octaves
and trilled as a local
grocer hummed

the drone. The surf
and bramble of Irish
syllables filled

the pub between
sill and lintel,
sweeter than linnets,

more urgent than
a crow. And the scent
of raw lavender

was anchored in it,
thrifty and radiant
as a mouse's clean

bones. Not even
the barman dared
clink a glass,

and every villager
listened, as her
wordless notes

shivered, then rose.
A century ago
on winter nights

like this, to the tune
of no instrument
but such a supple

tongue, two dozen
outlaw couples
in a shuddered

room whirled
and shuffled
to defy the priests

who banned the flutes
and smashed every
fiddle on a stone.

Within the hushed
Moment before chat
and porter could

once again flow,
she held every eye
with the weary glow

of a wilting lily,
and the wind outside
was talking treason,

quiet as a woodbine
embroidering a trellis
or native moss

softening the nest
of a seaside heron
just after she's flown.

R.T. Smith

Children in the Church

are the white the artist adds—
the black—
to paint, producing tints and shades, amending
an otherwise too-pure pigment,
one without nuance or grit.

They are at once
new minted spirit, joy, small silver minnows
and absolute body, appetite, distraction,
the laundry after the rapture,
what you're given
to up the ante when it gets too easy.
Monastics should
import small children once a week the way
batters swing three bats,
runners wear ankle weights,
oysters inhale the catalyst of pearls.

Susan Blackwell Ramsey

Janis Joplin Visits Cheerleading Camp

How dare you take my songs,
blast them out to the world,
then make up little routines—
precious steps, turns, tossing
sleek hair back to mock my frizz,
your sneakers and shirts matching,
skin burnished, suntan bright.
I'd like to take a piece
of each one of your hearts,
ripping them out so you know
how it feels to be voted
ugliest man on campus when
you're a girl from Port Arthur, Texas,
the kind of girl shunned during
proms, parades, tailgates, hayrides.
You girls don't know the howl
I hear in my head is Bessie's howl,
a black woman's sound coming out
of a white woman's mouth,
unruly growls your mothers would not love,
calling me dirty, not worth a dime.
I'm worth a whole lot more dead
than you all are alive, voice stronger
than all yours together, my clothes
the clothes you are silly enough
to pay big money for, calling them
your slumming clothes—velvet,
swirling cascades of scarves and beads,
fringe and feathers you play in,
not knowing their passion, power.
The world called me Pearl,
what will it call you?

Allison Joseph

Poem

Blunt daffodil spikes
split frozen earth. They're yellow,
the coarse dead yellow
they died back to
last summer, leaf tips
returning as pale flames:
unburied candelabra, a dead
queen rising form below,
led by a cold torch.
Sparta, Athens, Rome.
Mecca and Medina. From underneath,
blades bayonet the ice-cracked
black crust, the blade-tips
yellow, tinged with last
year's death and, already erect
—Constantinople, Paris, Rome—
they green, they come alive.
Moscow, Berlin, Tokyo.
The murderous, back-
from-death preblossoming
blossoms, promising
the frilled afterthought
of flowers, bright cups
tipping in the March-god's fist.
They are not cups. But watch
bees drink from their crimped lips.
Frail blade, but see what it
destroys. Cold fire, but feel
the dead world's constant simmer.

Andrew Hudgins

Orpheus Enters Hell

When Eurydice saw him
huddled in a thick cloak,
she should have known
he was alive,
the way he shivered
beneath its useless folds.

But to her he was
only a stranger
confused in a new world.
And when she touched him
on the shoulder,
it was nothing
personal, a kindness
he misunderstood.
To guide someone
through the halls of hell
is not the same as love.

Gregory Orr

Homing

Our fall has been a scourge of porcupines.
A neighbor says they're holed up in the shack
That rots in the woods behind the graveyard where
The Thynges are buried. At first, we found just signs:
Gnawed apples, broken branches. Then we woke
To a midnight rumbling in the barn and startled,
Head in a bag of Cortlands, one fat as a bear.
Gunless, we lured him into the Hav-a-Hart
With apple and peanut butter and lugged him away.
His family cruised the orchard in broad day.

Abruptly the barking stopped; soon, head down,
The dog came shambling from the border brush
And up across the orchard. Our first glance showed
Her muzzled with what might have been a crown
Of thorns she'd nosed us from a neighbor's trash—
Like the hats, the gloves, the shirts that she brings home,
Sneakers, once a sheet; so the whole road
Knows, when something's missing, where to come.
She made no sound, but with a yellow pay
Waved vaguely now and then across her jaw.

The vet raised pointed pliers. "You can thank
Her stars it isn't worse. Take a hound—
A hound keeps homing in when it's been quilled,
Get stuck right down its throat." He braced, and yanked
A barb from the lolling tongue. Our eyes found
Each other's, then the poster of a horse,
Its parts all named in French. He laughed. "The skill
Is to be brutal"—yank; then yank. "Of course
Some dogs will learn, but others never will:
Instinct bites deep and holds, like hound or quill."

Tonight the orchard is silent, empty; no
Strange scent enters to rouse us from the hearth
Where we and the dog are drowsing: subdued—or dreaming
That miles away in the swamp where we let them go

(Five in the end we trapped in the Hav-a-Hart)
The porcupines have gathered, are setting out
Through woods and fields and backyards, homing, homing,
Over river, past mall, across the Interstate,
To the rotting shed out where the dead Thynges lie
To set up house again, and multiply.

Charles W. Pratt

After a Miscarriage

When spring came I came alive again.
The air was finally gentle
and I breathed deeply of sweet

lilac and hyacinth and some faint
scent I couldn't find or name.
It wafted through the house

like light, forgotten in our long
winter of darkness. The plums
and cherry trees around the block

were laced with flowerlets
and tiny leaves and made a subtle
dazzling of hope. Not a forgetting

but a softening, as if the harsh
outlines of loss were growing
over now with something

like the tender grass of spring,
its blades a clear luminous green,
a color from childhood,

from a time before grief
and its terrible healing
makes traitors of us all.

Harriet Brown

El Panadero

After I leave you at your door
I walk back across the still dark town
to sounds of birds waking and complaining busses,
engines reluctant to start the day.

El panadero stops in front of a *tienda*
and pulls a crate of *pan dulce* from his van.

He has been up all night,
kneading, sprinkling sugar,
drawing full trays from warm ovens,
covered in the smells of his shop.

He nods at me, as if I'm a fellow laborer.

I nod back, agreeing:

I have passed these hours caressing your back,
kissing your thin lips,
and dipping my face

into the fragrant curls of your hair.

Before I walk on, I say, "*Nos vemos,*"

which is half a prayer that like *el panadero*

I should return to work each night

until my hands mold to your body

and my skin holds your scent.

Mark Brazaitis