



# POETRY

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February 2016

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## POEMS



ALLEN GINSBERG

---

*New York to San Fran*

And the plane bobs  
back & forth like  
a boat at Kennedy  
asphalt Space Station  
glass buildings,  
Taking off from Earth, to fly  
the day after Stevenson did die  
heart attacked on Grosvenor  
Square's July sunset  
leafy calm.

And I —  
'Om Om Om' etc —  
repeat my prayers  
after devouring the *NY Post*  
in tears —

The radars revolve in their Solitude —  
Once more o'er these states  
Scanning the cities and fields  
Once more for the Rockies, to look  
down on my own spermy history —

Once more the roar of Life Insurance  
murmuring in the empty plane  
5 hrs 20 min glimpse  
The most beautiful Mantra, '*Hari*  
*Om Namo Shivaye* —'  
And the vibration of Shiva  
in my belly merges  
with the groan of machine  
flying into milky sky —

If we should crash the flops of bloody  
Skin won't be singing

that sweet song—

Once more the green puddles of  
moss in the messy grey bay  
once more wingtip lifting to the sun  
& whine of dynamos in the  
stunned ear,  
and shafts of light on the page  
in the airplane cabin —

Once more the cities of cloud  
advancing over New York —  
Once more the houses parked like used  
cars in myriad row lots —

I plug in the Jetarama Theater  
sterilized Earphones —  
IT'S WAGNER!  
THE RIDE OF THE VALKYRIES!  
We're above the clouds! The  
Sunlight flashes on a giant  
bay!  
Earth is below! The horns of  
Siegfried sound gigantic in  
my ear —  
The banks of silver clouds like mountain  
ranges  
I spread my giant green map  
on the air-table —

The Hudson curved below to the  
floor-drop of the World,

Mountain range after mountain range,  
Thunder after thunder,



Cumulus above cumulus,  
World after world reborn,  
in the ears with the Rhine  
Journey brasses —  
Spacey Sublime  
charges of Aether and Drumbeat  
Ascending & Descending  
the Empty Aeternitas, free —

Click! over upper NY State  
a witty guitar bumps with  
pianos & drums — oops!  
announcer! oops Peter Sellers  
sounds breathing in ye ear  
'The Fleshpots! The Muckrakers!'

The little silver cow clouds flow  
eastward under the wing,  
the horizon's a blue mug, there's  
green furze of forest naked &  
unpioneered with little  
strings of highway & houses  
brown pendant —  
Lakes with little bungalows —  
Once more it's summer and the folks at  
ease by their pastoral garages  
reading the *Journal American*  
Headline screams

100,000 more U S Troops to Vietnam  
Adlai Flopped Dead Of Heart Attack On Sidewalk

and a cloverleaf to transport the family  
past the Electronic Gasworks —  
'Tis the LSD in the balmy upstate

Breeze seeping from Underground  
Factory bank —

Switch the channel!

Surf music, oolee!

Plunk of Hawaii, I can feel  
the moons, all seven of them  
rising over the Mauna Loas  
of my Grammar School Decade —

Orange moons, green moons,  
blue moons, purple moons,  
white moons sinking under wan waves,  
Black moons over the lower

East Side

Red moons over China —

Skipping along one by one,  
bouncing over the cragged horizon  
of Jupiter thru the  
clip clop ethereal violin strings  
and the violas running thru my  
solar plexus,  
they're skipping down the

Hollywood streets in duck pants  
and 1940s nylon skirts —

It's total Idiocy! a new song  
from the tragic Fiji Island  
love affair, a 30 year old  
teenager weeping into her brassiere,  
her boyfriend's just sailed off  
for Korea and left her  
sobbing with orgasms  
from the Bowery in W W I.

Them plunked guitars and  
descending Melachrino  
— Ugh!  
In certain moods it cd / be  
seductive, over the  
wingtip it's a Mediterranean  
Blue approaching Cleveland (?)  
hung with puffclouds &  
Hawaiian guitars shining in  
the sunlight —  
A children's show! over the  
low Catskills! Speaking in  
a monstrous little voice,  
Pyramus & Thisbe — Up here? —  
The Lion's part, 'you may do  
it extempore for it is nothing but  
roaring —'  
Distracted from her 'wide body  
in the rain' — I gotta smoke  
some Hashish in the bathroom.

'With impish glee, changes the  
head of Bottom into a donkey' —  
and the bottom hills are garden  
green stretched all ways  
with scratch-brown patchy  
valley runnels —  
Appears a tray with Old Fashioned!  
I'll be drunk before this idiocy's over!

Finished the salad and daydreamed of war  
and entered the air above checkered farmlands  
to Lake Erie —  
I disappeared in a cloud of smoke  
in the plastic lavatory,

flushing my breath  
down the maelstrom in the toilet —  
hours and hours to go o'er America  
and beef being served above the white  
carpet-clouds —

A fucking police state! I  
feel at bay, in mid-air!  
'Breaking' the 'Law' — dread  
in the breast guilt in  
the head, as I punched the  
odorous green soap spigot to perfume  
the washbowl & drown  
the sweet Eastern smell  
I carried —

Now I'll make that thornful pilgrimage  
on feet of meat & bone across that  
land I see stripped  
& ruled below my  
magic carpeted-cabin.  
Another sip of old fashioned!  
I'll go to jail down there, heart  
beating wildly! Not  
because love's in my hands,  
buttocks kissed in the Rockies,  
but because this dreamy muzaked  
liquored luxurious air-ride's  
Euphoria's no heaven  
If it costs blood-flaps on the smooth  
hairless skin of high cheeked  
Vietnamese teenagers.  
Everybody forgets who's body  
suffers the physical pain of Orders  
undreamt in these High Air

Conditioned modern Powers.

Bam! Brahms brasses bang bright bombs  
down over Ohio's highways  
I eat meat and a pea  
Klemperer changes to *Dance of  
the Seven Veils*, the Head  
of John America cut off  
will be presented: Coffee —

And other Channels  
Keep pushing Rock & Roll  
Bottom on Shakespeare, Hallelujah  
Waikiki, Bedtime Story,  
Decline of the West Frug,  
They'll even begin the movie  
*The Satan Bug* after  
I finish my cheesecake —

Anything to keep me from looking down  
on that innocent vastitude  
Bottomed with Earth speckled  
with townships houses like  
white dots, park centers,

Man has overtaken his universe,  
says the music, and pictures  
of Mars are expected when  
I set my sneakers on Land —  
Beethoven proclaims ethereal Joy!  
Strauss is sadder by 2 centuries  
and still the longing strain  
Screams in my ears from  
middleurope Concert Halls

I do declare that I am God!  
I do declare by my beard & fame  
that I will die!  
I do declare war on Satan!  
I do declare I am willing to  
take the glory death on  
my hideous stomach  
and sing my Prophesy before  
the Nations! —

Hark! ye murderers! Hark  
ye stuffed with vengeance!  
Hark ye Angel Recordings! Hark  
ye Joel Sebastian!  
May I ask ye Sir Army, whom  
ye hope to Kill?

Hark ye Chicago, the time for  
Earth's Revolution's here!

Hark ye hopeless lovers, thine own  
sweet will be done!  
As Huncke came despairing Eastward  
from this blue vast lake,

What misery has been created  
to drown the joyful chant  
of all our souls?

Oh great bend of shore, the men  
on thee too many,  
Chicago flowing with  
red smoke

Pouring out hatred of Communism

It's you angry Hell Hounds  
    who have created Stalin and  
    his 15,000,000 murdered  
    Slavic hysterics —  
It's your Capitalism  
and your weak suited newsmen  
    and your Hearst Bank Mind  
that has pushed the Communist  
    party to murder  
    your own asshole!  
It's your bombs over Korea, it  
    is your fire in Vietnam, it  
    is your shooed diplomat  
        across his desk that has lied  
        like a Communist bureaucrat  
when the order came to cease the  
    penetration of the flesh with  
    sharp instruments —

Wagner rides again! Hark  
    Ye, Ministers of Power and  
    ye Presidents of America  
    Ye Premiers of vast China  
    and ye Dalai Lamas of  
    Tibet —  
Hark ye balding soldiers  
    reading *Mainliner*  
    on the jetplane speeding  
  
    thru the Wagner Dooms  
        above these blue  
atomic waters and  
Scratched terrain  
    above Chicago's tiny  
    Towers —

At this moment there is a skeletal  
man lying on the leafshit cobbles  
of Dasawamedh Ghat,  
At this moment by our will a  
child is beaten in the balls by  
a mad communist lieutenant  
in an Albanian Phnom-penh —  
At this moment Joe Christ Screams  
and falls raving on the  
neck of a homosexual in Hué —  
He bites his neck, he kisses,  
he sucks the blood of the corpse —  
At this moment a symphony of screams  
arises in Uruguay as the riot  
is 'quelled' by teeth-bash,  
At this moment bombs on Barcelona burst  
At this moment the charming children  
of Joliet cower in Detention,  
planning raids on weak villages  
where Me-Kong hath sprouted —

I prophesy thee death, Rock Island  
lined with white bungalows —  
for thy mean farm's television  
only communication to Saigon —  
A bank of white cloud advances  
as I advance on the Xylophones —  
Bongo Rock! Nigeria advances  
with clouds! Earth is  
Hidden in white fleece  
as the drums batter in Mechanic invisibility —  
We're all out west, the squares  
of perfect farmland, introduced  
by Thelonious Monk *Off Minor* —



which penetrates these grouped hives  
of suburbia diminutive on the Planet —

That Classical channel always  
resounds thru hemispheres of  
Empty Becoming,  
Being filled with drumbeats and total  
orchestra shaking Ascensions  
Crane'd've come to Forever  
If he could —  
Over Indiana, the flutes —  
Over Iowa and Omaha  
A technicolor picture begins  
on channel one — Elec  
tronic Bee music.  
The great steel safe door  
crashes shut.  
The buzzing sciencefiction  
lights & gauges ascend like  
Brahms didn't —  
A new man is born —  
The police answer the telephone —  
CIA looks at its wristwatch —

They leave the atomic testing area  
Goodnight Doctor! —  
The glass door opens automatically,  
a wolf runs round the barbed  
wire, it's not state prison,  
it's a scientific laboratory.  
Paid for by Hollywood US Govt.  
Your own taxes Dearie, it's

Y O U

Mr Electronics Nightclub  
totally disconnected on yon farmhouse  
    in mid afternoon amid the  
    peaceful buzzing of the cows —  
that created this faraway red bongo  
    music issuing from tank eyes  
    on the screen — your desire  
    by the boathouse.  
A yacht on the screen in color  
with a gangster spy conversation

    ‘outspoken on the immorality of war’  
    ‘superb loan operator’ ...  
Actually on this screen a confrontation  
    a pacifist (who’ll turn out  
    to be a murderous spiderman?)  
‘about the most secret chemical  
    warfare station on this hemisphere.’

    ‘Reagan has been murdered and  
    Dr. Baxter has vanished’ —

So it’s not my paranoia  
as I ride over these peaceful green  
    silent squares of   Anonymous  
    Stevenson birthstate —

The movie on this airplane is projecting  
    the same angst as my hashish  
    bathroom —  
So I share in this vast fantasy  
which rises like poison gas  
from the man-wormed farmlands  
    approaching Missouri River —

‘There’s something beyond the Botulinus —  
Indestructible,’  
our fantasies’ guineapig doom —  
The germ of Death loosed  
on Earth —  
The sacred drawer opened  
The *Satan Bug*  
Disappeared!

Oh heaven what have we come to  
up here looking down on  
ourselves,  
man’s consciousness is split  
out of his self —  
‘Have they  
told you  
just what  
this new  
Virus  
will do?’

‘Paranoids ... they’re very  
brilliant the most of them  
— my choice a Messiah’  
as the ‘obey or else’  
culprit who stole the  
Satan Bug.

Shit the movie’s attacking  
us Messiahs.

Not in this consciousness can I  
resolve the confusion of Syntax.

Thin veil above the land,

the dotted grid of planet smoke —  
above the rills' erosions on  
brown ploughlands —  
(I'm smoking Cancers)

This hashi is depressing,  
Or else the mind I'm in,  
or else the plane I sit within,  
or else the movie croaking in  
the loudspeaker,  
or else America itself  
that made the mind movie airplane  
national Paranoia.

'Who is this? Who is this!' on  
the telephone.

'We have to get  
everyman in the country to find him!'

And westerly the land's become  
Dry brown — and mottled  
with Glacier tracks streaming  
South — Epochs of  
Paranoia have come & gone,  
The Great White Ice skidded  
its way  
rippling the terrain like  
wind over Summer water,  
the bemedalled soldier lights  
another cigarette —

and now it's flat land and exact  
Squares of Arnold's fishing property —

Invisible police networks are set  
up in the movie,

always complaining, always compleyns  
Violins piercing the ears —  
    The Glacial skids  
    ruining the land for farming  
    1/2 million years later —

And the clouds've covered the entire  
    visible earth;  
— that was the Platte I  
    saw before, streaked with Neal;  
    now great Rockies streaked  
    with snow —

Remove the earphones at the  
    climax, undivided attention  
    to the  
        patches of summer snow on  
        the razor hills — a  
            green valley & its brown road  
            settled in between  
                black shoulders —  
    waves of mountains slant  
        an inch above the old  
            human hummingbird hills —  
    glacier patches & dust powder  
        hollows filled with white cold —  
    misted over by small vast  
        fog —

So I turn back to the  
    *Satan Bug* movie — they're  
in a green Ford riding thru desert Utah —  
As we pass the sunny Wasatch  
    glittering blue south —

Help police! invading a baseball  
diamond  
to find the Doomsday  
Bomb in Los Angeles  
'Power for its own sake!'  
Over a grand canyon.

Shake Baby Shake!  
'You've got every reason on  
Earth to be mad.'  
And of course the Beatles  
swinging into a Sea of Clouds  
'What this loven man can do,'

Typhoid Mary! We're  
all hypocrites, tell me Why  
The Beatles shouldn't spill the beans  
Secret which might  
Land them in Bedlam,  
or Yevtuchenko in Lubyanka  
instead of Spoleto if  
he spoke without  
450 corrections.

And if I opened my mouth I'd  
be accused of treason in every  
direction, high teacup Jazz,  
Marxist, Demorep, Castroite, Maoist —  
One'd be fallen on and torn to  
pieces by Chinese teeth,  
American knives, Scouse  
bicycle chains, Vedado  
cops hairy hands,  
Demolished by the Dept. of Social  
Undermining, thrown

in Ft Leavenworth, sent  
to Siberia, reeducated in  
    Archangel,  
sent to work on a Commune  
    in the fields beneath  
    the Potala.  
Meanwhile flying over a red  
    desert, —

Is civilization going to  
    Blow up?

In ten years I've climbed over  
    this sunny windowsill John Wieners  
Now from Olympian Heights I look  
    Down  
    on the rough giant earth black  
    Streaks of snow on foreign hills  
the vast cloudmass walled  
    over the South, above  
the Impenetrable Blue Space  
    skied upward  
as Brahms crash swirls  
    round my eardrums,  
and what should I prophesy,  
    Messiah?

The wing tip pierces thru  
    mist white Brahms —  
I must come back to my body.

No more question but the force  
    of wingtip lifting upward  
    to reveal the heaven-roof  
as music burst

thru the Stereophonic  
grey tipped earphones  
Vast as the visible  
Universe —

Our desires pounding on,  
our desire mounting, past Mars,  
our hearts beating a million years,  
Otto Klemperer enraged on  
the podium,  
Salome dancing again in  
the airplane cabin,

Demands of the Beethovenian fist  
in the Lightningstorm!

I am that I am,  
renewed week after week,  
planeride after planeride,  
Despair after streetcorner  
headache despair.  
Joyfully flying to death,

till the atom cellular  
consciousness invades  
with its cancerous stabs and  
flashes of electric chair.  
All so solid it can't even be a  
dream  
Tho the phantom orgasm  
of paraplegics proves  
you can come in pure  
Consciousness  
& spurt your semen all over  
a dreamwall bordello



painted blue in Lima  
while the groin's dead  
                                limp & wrinkled under  
                                the transparent cellophane  
                                sheets of Experiment.

It's too sad! It's too happy!  
It's here, unfolding like  
                                a giant rose,  
It changes slow as eternity  
                                shifts, it flies in triumph  
                                thru the western clouds,  
it approaches its old  
                                memory city to find  
                                its loves grown old & sane  
                                and its own body middleaged  
It flies toward old wrinkled faces,  
It's inexplicable, it rises  
                                Triumphant above the Very  
                                Earth and Screams  
                                in Delight  
  over  
                                the cumulus clouds.

Fasten your seatbelts in  
                                the Mist!  
                                The violins are ascending in  
                                every direction!

'We have climbed to 35,000 feet!'  
The desert flows like a river  
                                thru the mountain passes,  
                                wrinkled like our own faces  
                                above the smooth sand.

Nevada's rough belly

breathless below!

I'll get drunk & give no shit,  
& not be a Messiah.  
    and have long talks goofin  
    with Wieners in Belvedere  
        by a stinky pond,  
        drinking Dorian Gray martinis.  
And 'twixt earnest & joke  
    Enjoyed the Ladeye, John.  
We're stuck in our  
    Selves.  
And who else to be stuck in?  
    A courteous Astronaut come  
        down from the Horizon  
    to gaze in our eyes with patience,  
    take our hand, and lift it  
    trembling, to his khaki breast —

Half the visible universe  
excluded from this fantasy  
but who's counting?  
Mama? God? Dear widowed  
    Olson? Creeley  
    stumbling over his pecker?  
Me, murmuring, what a beautiful  
    big pecker you got to a  
    pimpley 16 year old boy  
        with his pants down on  
        my pallet,  
who talked all night about his  
    intellectual disorders  
till my belly softened & I kissed  
    him on his shirt?

Beethovenian Climaxes Impossible?  
Wagnerian Valkyrie rides  
    Immaterial?  
Salome dances too Incredible?  
What're we groveling in but the  
    most magnificent Aluminum Heaven?  
    complete with transcontinental  
        cloudcities —  
    Complete with million horsepower  
        Jetroar astounding to any  
        pre war Daedalus —

Clouds racing eastward, the  
    plane lowering slowly thru  
        the veils, over the  
        flat Sacramento valley,  
            Down

into the inhabited shores,  
the myriad minute boxes stacked  
    in rows, curved in clusters  
    planted like vast letters in  
        the giant flats  
above the empty silent Space  
    hangar in South Peninsula —  
Over the Bay, pointing toward  
    Golden Gate & Tamalpais  
Home,  
    to the weak sad destiny  
    of aging companion selves  
trembling above the red broadcasting  
                                towers,  
Down to the brown rippled  
    water, past yacht basin parks past  
outdoor movies empty

sunlight glaring off the  
white billboards,

OM, Down to the  
ground roar tremble  
along the white line  
Jetbrakes roaring,  
Brahms screaming  
Symphony concluding  
as we taxi slowly  
down the runway  
to the metalvoiced  
Terminal,  
United.

SYLVIA LEGRIS

---

*Cold Zodiac and Butchered Pig*

Onward the fairweather spleen.  
Onward the season of vent and caprice.

*Giovedì Grasso* flies the meat,  
trees still larded with winter grease —  
ice, the Dead Time, the Flensing Time.

Flirt fattened Thursday of December's gorge.  
The twelve pigs of the zodiac stew the zeal,  
slow simmering giddy fizzling squeals.

Uncloister the close-air surgical theater.  
Ungristle the knife-jester's grip.

Let the butcher carnival begin!

PAISLEY REKDAL

---

*The Wolves*

It was the week of asking. Asking  
to watch her eat. Asking if she understood  
the doctors' questions. Asking her  
to explain the difference between  
wanting to die right now, and dying later.  
The tumor making certain answers  
unquestionable. I watched her point  
to the incense dish from which  
someone swept all the ashes up. Asking  
if she recognized us. Because that  
is what the living want: thinking  
it is a sign we have been loved.  
But the answer was a summer drive,  
a mountain, piles of leaves beneath which  
a wolf slept, suckling her cubs.  
Some deaths are good  
and it makes them hard to grieve.  
She was, at times, in great pain. We wanted her  
to die, too. That was important. But first  
we wanted her to remember.  
From the bed, a finger pressed  
into a pile of leaves. Gray haunch,  
unmovable ashes. *I didn't want to disturb  
their tableau*, she told us. And drifted off. And  
we did not know the meaning behind this.  
The wolves must have looked so comfortable  
to her: wordless and in this wordlessness  
perfect. Did she want to go there, too.  
I could point to the image and say, my father  
must be in there, my uncle. Or:  
the wolf is you, you are still the mother,  
as if necessary to name that self  
at the end of its world. An animal cry,  
memory. That was our selfishness.  
As death was hers. She insisted upon it.

And why not. *It was good for me*  
*to get a chance to know you,*  
she said, who had known me  
my entire life. Then the pills, a small  
handful, crushed into juice.  
She was happy then. We all were. Or  
said we were. What  
is the difference now.

BERNADETTE MAYER

---

*Windrowing*

abide with me  
don't ever abide  
gimme anytime a pile  
of leaf-hay across  
the field underneath  
the bright new blue  
tractor pulling the tedder  
which is the waffler or fluffer



*Conversation with the Tsatsawassa House*

Bernadette: O sweet delightful house  
why do so many things get lost in you?

House: Maybe you just dream you lose them.

B: How do you know what dreams are?

H: I pride myself on knowing everything you know.

B: Oh, so you know we're getting you new windows?

H: I have trouble with no & know. With knew & new too.  
Why do people do that?

B: I don't know; I don't mean I don't no.

H: See, you make it hard for a house. Anyway I don't  
usually speak.

B: Do you write poetry?

H: I dabble. I don't know if it's poetry or prose though.

B: It's prose — it's shaped like you.

H: What about my roof?

B: That would be a concrete poem.

H: Even the time the tree fell through it?

B: That would be a different genre, perhaps  
conceptual art.

H: I'd like to climb mountains. You can leave me

whenever you want but I'm stuck with you.

B: What was it like when people prayed in you?

H: It was kind of creepy. I liked the Jewish people better — more love of life. People can do anything they want to me, I'd like to be more proactive. I'm just stuck here. Even a cult could move in.

B: I've never been a therapist for a house. How was your childhood? Were you born?

H: I was made of mostly local stuff. Don't set me on fire. I tremble every time you light that wood stove.

B: There was no heat when we moved into you; there were also 24 doors.

H: Don't blame me, I didn't do it.

B: You didn't do anything but be here like an immobile tree, but you provided shelter. Can houses tremble? Do you have a sex life?

H: None of your business. The sex life of houses isn't known to humans, nor will it ever be.

B: You seem to have mastered grammar but not homonyms.

H: I liked it when I was unoccupied, full of birds' nests on the porch & ghosts inside, I felt fulfilled.

B: How did you like the Hebrew books?

H: They reminded me of my bat mitzvah.

B: You never told me you were Jewish.

H: I thought you'd never ask.

SHARON OLDS

---

*The Relics*

I. BRETT RETURNS MY MOTHER TO THE WILDERNESS

I slipped them into my friend's palm —  
the tiny crucifix, and dove,  
from off my mother's pendant watch —  
and I asked her to walk them up through the brush  
toward timberline, and find a place  
to hurl them, for safekeeping. Now,  
she writes, "I walked up the canyon at dusk,  
warm, with a touch of fall blowing down the canyon,  
came to an outcrop, above a steep  
drop — far below, a seasonal  
creek, green willows. I stood on a boulder  
and held out my hand. I wished your mother all the  
love in the world, and I sent the talismans  
flying off the cliff. They were so small,  
and the wind was blowing, so I never saw or  
heard them land." My mother is where  
I cannot find her, she is gone beyond  
recall, she lies in her sterling shapes  
light as the most weightless bone in the body, her  
stirrup bone, which was ground up  
and sown into the sea. I do not know  
what a soul is, I think of it  
as the smallest, the core, civil right. And she  
is wild now with it, she touches and is  
touched by no one knows — down, or  
droppings of a common nighthawk,  
root of bird's foot fern, antenna of  
Hairstreak or Echo Azure, or stepped on by the  
huge translucent Jerusalem cricket. There was  
something deeply right about  
the physical elements — atoms, and cells,  
and marrow — of my mother's body,  
when I was young, and now her delicate






insignias receive the direct  
touch of the sun, and scatter it,  
unseen, all over her home.

## 2. CROSS AND DOVE

I had not wanted them, and I hadn't known  
what to do with them, the minuscule  
symbols of my mother's religion,  
I looked for a crack in the stone floor of the  
cathedral but could not find one. Then I thought  
of the wilderness near Desolation,  
and asked my friend to carry them up  
to a peak of granite, and let the wind take them. Since  
then, it has been as if my mother's  
spirit matter has been returned  
into the great bank of matter,  
as her marrow had been sifted down into  
the ocean. It doesn't matter, now, if I  
ever wanted to disassemble  
my mother. The sixteenth-of-an-inch-  
across cross, and the silver line drawing  
of a dove are cached, somewhere, that is nowhere  
to be found. Now I think of the nature of metal, and how  
long the soul-dolls of her trust will last in their  
spider-egg-sac of roots, needles,  
quartz, feathers, dust, snow, shed  
claw. Her belief she would have an eternal  
life was absolute, I think.  
It would not be good to think of my mother  
without her God — like a hermit howling in the  
moonscape of a desert. Once, when she was old — like an  
exquisite child playing a crone  
in the school play — we talked about heaven.  
She wasn't sure exactly how, but she  
knew her father would be there, and her elder  
brother, and her second husband —  
maybe it was a heaven for four,  
the three men and her. It was so

easy to make my mother happy  
in her last years, to tell her that I  
could just see her, as a kitten, in God's  
lap, being petted. Her eyes sparkled with more  
beams than any other eyes I have seen.  
I have sent the tokens of her everlasting being  
into the high altitude.  
They will shine long after I can sing her — sing what I  
perceived through the distorted prisms of my vision.  
I don't know if I saw my mother  
or did not see her. Day and night,  
her charms will gleam in the brush or stream, will  
reflect the mountain light in little  
pieces of unreadable language.

*Spoon Ode*

Spoon of O, spoon of nothing,  
spoon of ankh, spoon of poonss,  
spoon of the lady at the dressing table,  
spoon of , spoon of female,  
spoon of , spoon of war,  
spoon of the world, spoon of War of the  
Worlds, spoon of stick figure,  
spoon of  girl, spoon of  boy,  
spoon of  spear thrower, spoon of fire,  
spoon of egg, spoon of egg race,  
spoon of dish, spoon of ran away with,  
spoon of ran away with and came back, spoon of never came back,  
spoon of silver, spoon of gold,  
spoon of milk, spoon of Saturn,  
spoon of vulva, spoon of vagina,  
spoon of Ant, spoon of Bee,  
spoon of Venus, spoon of Serena,  
spoon of vugg, spoon of vum,



spoon of spider, spoon of sun,  
spoon of fee, fie, foe, fum.  
Spoon of everyone. Spoon  
of the belly. Spoon of the empty belly.  
Spoon of the full one. Spoon of no one  
hungry. Spoon for everyone.

BETH BACHMANN

---

*spirit animal*

three times the snake appeared before me & like a gun said follow  
when you hear fire keep your body close to the ground the snake  
said point blank I am here for your protection I don't have a trigger  
but I have a tongue to your neck to your ear to your temple follow  
me down the barrel three shots to steady ready the gray-eyed snake  
spit warming its body along the crack you can't go back from where  
you are unarmed handle the snake the way you handle a gun at your  
belt with a glove spirit guide the gun away from the body follow each  
bone as it moves up & down the back

DAVID SHAPIRO

---

*Tattoo for Gina*

Some see a dove  
And think Pigeon  
Others see pigeons  
And think Dove

Some know that all pigeons are doves  
Some angry as if pigeons were not doves

But the city lover knows  
And I try to reconstruct  
The tattoo on one of your many branches

The more arms the more power  
I think of you, O pale tattoo  
All pigeons, all doves  
You friendly cliff-dwellers

## *Gratuitous Oranges*

*There are those who feed only on oranges.*

—S.Y. Agnon

Nothing rhymes in English with an orange.  
It stands alone, with luster in a far tinge.  
It stands alone, and seems to make a star cringe.

On Saturday it's blue like an orange  
Or like a surrealist sight rhyme in a garage.  
Nothing rhymes in English with an orange.

But rime riche is rich enough for an orange.  
Still my doorman sings, Put it away in storage!  
It stands alone, and seems to make a star cringe.

Orange replies: I'm drunk from my last bar-binge  
Half-rhymes like hangovers suddenly impinge.  
But nothing rhymes in English with an orange.

While my wife in French eats one in her nude linge  
Playwrights Synge and Inge flap forward on a car-hinge.  
It stands alone, and seems to make a star cringe.

Pronounce it orange and then expunge.  
So ends the story of the very violet orange.  
Nothing rhymes in English with an orange.  
It stands alone, and seems to make a star cringe.

*Exterior Street*

O put a hand on her hand  
On Exterior Street  
The day was full of day  
On Exterior Street  
Moths drank tears from sleeping birds  
On Exterior Street  
You could think and look  
On Exterior Street  
The balls of the sycamore were swinging  
On Exterior Street  
Storing the definitions loading the differences  
Why did I still want to give it away  
Why not wait and write about that beautiful green sweater  
I was a virgin and learnt all about cells from Penelope  
Even the private road is exterior  
As one said all breasts are beautiful  
The Flower this flower is falling over  
It will never be more exalting  
It will always be more exalting  
On Exterior Street

PHILLIS LEVIN

---

*Cloud Fishing*

To fish from a cloud in the sky  
You must find a comfortable spot,  
Spend a day looking down  
Patiently, clear-sighted.

Peer at your ceiling:  
Where a light dangles, hook & line  
Could be slipping through.

Under the hull of a boat  
A fish will see things this way,

Looking up while swimming by —

A wavering pole's refraction  
Catching its eye.

What will you catch?  
With what sort of bait?  
Take care or you'll catch yourself,

A fish might say,  
As inescapable skeins of shadow  
Scatter a net  
Over the face of the deep.

*Prairie Burning*

There is a man  
who circles the perimeter  
with a baby in his arms  
unmoving.  
Locusts burn  
with the silhouettes  
of saints at dusk.  
Saints are in the cloud.  
We are in a dry storm.  
The man extends his circles  
pulling the baby through  
the cactus scrub.  
Look at his melting trainers  
in the heat,  
they aren't what he asked for.  
There are black leather skids  
on the dry stone wall.  
People in black cloaks run  
out of the corner of your eye.  
A pig turns on a spit.  
The prairie is a terrarium for the blaze  
but the edge is dry of fire.  
It is the height of one season,  
bushes burn.  
A burnt five-year-old  
without eyelids  
turns quick cartwheels  
through the heat wave  
under the big pale sky,  
black and blue.

DAVID HERNANDEZ

---

*We're This and We're That, Aren't We?*

Now that the theoretical physicist slash cosmologist  
has explained to me, has laid out in clean  
even rows of logic

how every atom in my body  
arrived from a star, a star  
that blasted apart,  
                                and the atoms of my left hand

originated from a different sun  
than my right,

I can shine. I can go dark

recalling how my grandfather made  
the vertical blinds rattle  
when he shoved  
                                my grandmother into them.

Startled in the yard, I turned to that sound,  
from the flower bed my eyes were held by

the swaying blinds. It took a while for each  
to line up

                                perfectly straight again, to tell myself  
she slipped. Only then could I

return to stalking the butterflies.  
My right hand was quick: reach and pinch.  
I had so many soft wings that summer

between my thumb and index, so many of them  
skewered on cactus needles.



I was a kid. I was cruel slash gentle.  
He was cruel slash gentle.  
He had witnessed my destroying  
and I saw  
across his creased face  
empathy for them.

After his scolding I placed one dead one  
inside the white envelope of a flower.

Under the sun it glowed. Under the moon,  
more glowing.

JOHN WILKINSON

---

*Fuchsine*

*For Andrea Brady*

As though the overcast might tweak  
    an airman's maps, his foretelling —  
as though in chains of stop-start  
ischaemia, I count myself unstressed,  
I walked along the human promontory  
rough-tongued as sugar paper,  
walked from the metal-bashers' shop,  
    vinegar and cayenne  
sprinkled, spiked my glass of milk.

    Well-set icing blistered.

    Ice set into cat's-eyes.

I walked through the empty lot  
    the enormous empty lot  
towards the store beckoning me, soon I  
    turned my back  
on every now forgotten unit. Get yours  
I said. Get yours.  
And I kept mine in ghost capital.

Such was our material ease that year in  
plenteousness, in full flush.  
Sumptuous but interfusing, basking  
    all the while June  
was leaching sweetly,  
    bite like molasses.

The block the far side of the apron  
squatted with capacity.

Happy to take things as seen  
    I browsed, I window-sloped,  
honey lanyards brushed my lips.

Then I too was stopped by the incident,  
    the episode, the voice that spake,  
lushness hit the doldrums.

Frigate birds collapsed on ice,  
wings like stick pyramids.  
I stood dangling my bunch of keys.  
Saw in the lake's heaped frozen  
waves a new car  
exhibition, restaurant, luxury housing.

This then was the block whose feed I  
hung upon,  
suckling on the live stream so generous  
I could overflow,  
creeping to within earshot,  
stealthily advancing within reach,  
this then was the source  
marooned in transitivity,  
flushed pink where sky spins and grips  
or tries but soaked it slithers off,  
its dazzle-shroud sagged  
sopping with new storylines,  
slid down in folds, pleats, bales of  
episodes.

Lines aspired to mottoes, mottoes  
to a motionlessness  
tethered to reflections on void lagoons  
where intermittent light spelt FAR LESS:  
blemished forms of love  
loving fault must needs be filled  
but the field is made of faltering,  
we walk on thin ice,  
images that relay genital parts.  
Look, each of us knows  
what we could do with any of these.

A peasant with his crippled back and  
upright broom

dusting off the sun-gilded runway,  
a banker's shouting ontic features  
crabbed and tentacular,  
                    crabbed and tentacular.

Like everyone turns in on himself  
I saw the gathered looped and spooking  
out their children, these too  
                    stretched in their fire cavern,  
talk would shift about the board  
grinding thick lines of violence.

                    Activity lights  
flashed, cycles juddered to a pit reprieve  
behind star-blasted rock  
pooling oil.

                    Still within a smoke scarf  
three sit and talk and think to send a call  
through wintery clearances.  
Across the asphalt my bone vibrates.

Tap Tap.      Buzz.

                    Calendar beetles  
tap inside false ceilings,  
                    failing brands  
collapse into the flickering of a hearth.

                    Clear light annuls  
red crackle, time-stamps every flash  
expiring assets show in.

                    Look, to make my call  
                    I found my mouth,  
licked the barrier streaked with fuchsine,  
                    nibbled at the pith  
between the tree and bark. Red daddy,  
aren't I big enough to walk,  
pick up my legs, my pace  
                    Look, I hack at overgrowth,

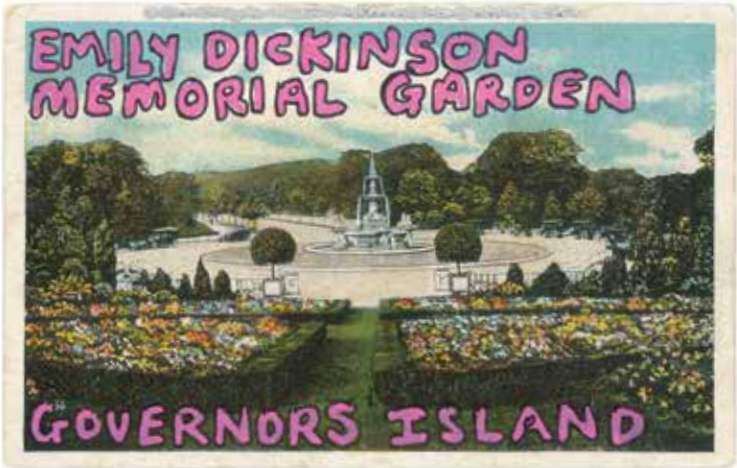
too grown up, well-fed for  
jelly mould cars and download junket.  
    Magenta freights a weary sky,  
    heaved limbs abdicate.  
Who hankers to walk grass and thrift.  
Ankles pricked by gorse and heather.  
Who walks on creases now shale  
    pockmarked with spots of tar.  
My ghost is trying its weight  
on stepping stones, look, it's peeling off,  
    weaned into the asphalt river.

Ahead I see this huge container.

TODD COLBY

---

*From "Governors Island"*



GOVERNORS ISLAND, 1905.

ARTHUR RIMBAUD MEMORIAL  
FOUNTAIN.



ALAN SHAPIRO

---

*Frieze*

Over an edge of cloud the naked angel  
blasts his long horn downward and they rise,  
or try to, skeletons, half-skeletons,  
the still-fleshed bodies of the newly dead,  
rising and pushing up the stone lids, heaving  
the crypt doors open, clambering over one  
another, dumbstruck, frightened, warily peeking  
out from inside tombs, or out of ditches,  
their eye holes blacker than the black they peek from  
while some reach out of habit for a robe  
to hide a nakedness they have no longer,  
a phantom shame that must be all the bones  
remember of the living flesh they were,

and all of them worn away to nearly nothing,  
more wisp of form than form, more wraith than wisp,  
as if before your eyes they're sinking into  
what they're rising out of, coming into view  
by fading from it, there and gone, as if  
the very stone, unsure of what it holds,  
can neither cling to nor relinquish now  
the dream of something in it more than stone,  
other than hard or heavy, as over the face  
of it the air of a wished-for morning ripples  
the robes to water while it washes through  
the skulls and half-skulls tilted back to see  
just what the noise is that won't let them sleep.



FRANNY CHOI

---

*Choi Jeong Min*

*For my parents, Choi Inyeong & Nam Songeun*

in the first grade i asked my mother permission  
to go by frances at school. at seven years old,

i already knew the exhaustion of hearing my name  
butchered by hammerhead tongues. already knew

to let my salty gook name drag behind me  
in the sand, safely out of sight. in fourth grade

i wanted to be a writer & worried  
about how to escape my surname — choi

is nothing if not korean, if not garlic breath,  
if not seaweed & sesame & food stamps

during the lean years — could i go by f.j.c.? could i be  
paper thin & raceless? dust jacket & coffee stain,

boneless rumor smoldering behind the curtain  
& speaking through an ink-stained puppet?

my father ran through all his possible rechristenings —  
ian, isaac, ivan — and we laughed at each one,

knowing his accent would always give him away.  
you can hear the pride in my mother's voice

when she answers the phone *this is grace*, & it is  
some kind of strange grace she's spun herself,

some lightning made of chain mail. grace is not  
her pseudonym, though everyone in my family is a poet.

these are the shields for the names we speak in the dark  
to remember our darkness. savage death rites

we still practice in the new world. myths we whisper  
to each other to keep warm. my korean name

is the star my mother cooks into the jjigae  
to follow home when i am lost, which is always

in this gray country, this violent foster home  
whose streets are paved with shame, this factory yard

riddled with bullies ready to steal your skin  
& sell it back to your mother for profit,

land where they stuff our throats with soil  
& accuse us of gluttony when we learn to swallow it.

i confess. i am greedy. i think i deserve to be seen  
for what i am: a boundless, burning wick.

a minor chord. i confess: if someone has looked  
at my crooked spine and called it elmwood,

i've accepted. if someone has loved me more  
for my gook name, for my saint name,

for my good vocabulary & bad joints,  
i've welcomed them into this house.

i've cooked them each a meal with a star singing  
at the bottom of the bowl, a secret ingredient

to follow home when we are lost:  
sunflower oil, blood sausage, a name

given by your dead grandfather who eventually  
forgot everything he'd touched. i promise:

i'll never stop stealing back what's mine.  
i promise: i won't forget again.

JOHN YAU

---

*Portrait*

Or is it  
a poor trait

I am a  
parasite

I lift off  
the wings

of others

TYEHIMBA JESS

---

*Sissieretta Jones\**

*Ad libitum*

I sing this body *ad libitum*, Europe scraped raw between my teeth until, *presto*, “Ave Maria” floats to the surface from a Tituba tributary of “Swanee.” Until I’m a *legato* darkling whole note, my voice shimmering up from the Atlantic’s hold; until I’m a coda of sail song whipped in salted wind; until my chorus swells like a lynched tongue; until the nocturnes boiling beneath the roof of my mouth extinguish each burning cross. I sing this life in testimony to *tempo rubato*, to time stolen body by body by body by body from one passage to another; I sing tremolo to the opus of loss. I sing this story *staccato* and *stretto*, a fugue of blackface and blued-up arias. I sing with one hand smoldering in the steely canon, the other *lento*, slow, languorous: lingered in the fields of “Babylon’s Falling” ...

\*First African-American opera singer to perform at Carnegie Hall.

ANGE MLINKO

---

*Cottonmouth*

A levitating anvil. Omen of seagull  
blown inland. Ranch gate said *Riverstyx*,  
but it was the woodland that looked lethal:

no place to put down your foot. Bucolics  
demand boustrophedon. The by-the-book.  
“The male cicadas thrummed their stomachs

while a dragonfly eyed us from a pole hook.  
Ripening grapefruit. Us just under.  
Shoulder to shoulder. Tree-shook.”

Milky skies belied the baffled thunder ...  
They left, not footsteps, *trails* in uncut grass.  
“Like parallel snakes. No wonder.”

Eurydice should have thought moccasins,  
aka cottonmouths, apropos  
stealth. Distilled to systole-diastrale. Assassins.

And everywhere sharp palmettos  
clacked their tongues in homage to language —  
“I should have rhymed them with stilettos.”

Why would E. shed her red wedge  
with its Mary Jane band,  
wetland mosquito and midge

circling ankle (punctuated, understand,  
by the awl, to mimic ellipses ... )? “Because”  
— O. — “she mimicked the shy strand

of epiphyte — Spanish moss —  
goose-pimpling the languid pond  
with its dependent clause.”

*The Fort*

From the weathered boards knots pop  
like the eyes of potatoes. From brick  
salients not a clink of a pupil in a loop-  
hole. Cannon, yes, but without their kick.

Ironically or entirely appropriately,  
who can say, the Fort will not admit us.  
The reenactors are going home; we see  
them retreat, backs x'd with sus-

penders, toward the forest housecleaned  
into state park. Ocean beyond the ramparts  
suggests that stem-celled seconds fiend-  
ishly agglomerate with fits and starts

into unprecedented forms. And so  
who cares that a fort's built on a sand bar,  
that we don't make it in, and go  
only so far round the perimeter.

THOMAS LYNCH

---

*Libra*

The one who pulled the trigger with his toe,  
spread-eagled on his girlfriend's parents' bed,  
and split his face in halves above his nose,  
so that one eye looked east, the other west;

sometimes that sad boy's bifurcation seems  
to replicate the math of love and grief—  
that zero sum of holding on and letting go  
by which we split the differences with those

with whom we occupy the present moment.  
Sometimes I see that poor corpse as a token  
of doubt's sure twin and double-mindedness,  
of certainty, the countervailing guess,

the swithering, the dither, righteousness,  
like Libra's starry arms outstretched in love  
or supplication or, at last, surrender  
to the scales forever tipped in the cold sky.



KATHI WOLFE

---

*Tasting Braille*

*People can ... read Braille with their lips and their tongue ...*

—*David J. Linden, The Kojo Nnamdi Show*

Whitman is a foot-long sub  
of grass-fed beef,  
Falstaff, a fat onion ring,  
Ophelia, a wailing wine.  
Judas Iscariot's kiss  
turns my lips against themselves.  
Emily D makes my tongue  
want to fly a kite.  
The tongues of angels,  
I cannot swallow.

TOM PICKARD

---

*winter migrants*

a mass of moth-eaten cloud  
threadbare and spun across  
a bullish moon

an animal wakes  
when I walk in winter,

wrapped against  
a withering wind,

solitary,

on a Solway flat

winter migrants gather  
in long black lines

along a silver sleek

heads held back,  
throats  
    thrust toward  
an onshore rush

occasionally cruciform,  
    static  
in a flying wind

as though  
in obeisance  
    to the sea

retracing steps  
washed out  
by whimpering silt

each tide a season  
in the pecking mall

they call as I approach,  
an upright spelk  
on their shelf,

gathering my notes  
and theirs

we scavenge  
ahead of our shadows

waiting for what

the tide brings in  
or leaves out

purple,  
    hedged cloud  
edged gold

    hung  
on silver slates  
    of sand

diverted  
    leaps of light  
surrender water

risen  
    from rivulets  
roughed  
    from rage

repealing waves  
    repeat

a curlew's  
    estuary echo

who,  
    but you  
    and the wind's  
wake?

PHILLIP B. WILLIAMS

---

*Vision in Which the Final Blackbird Disappears*

A monstrosity in the alley.  
A many-bodied movement grouped  
for terror, their flights' brief shadows  
on the kitchen curtains, on the street's  
reliquaries of loose squares and hustle.  
Some minds are groomed for defiance. The youngest  
calls out his territory with muscular vowels  
where street light spills peculiar, his hand  
a chorus of heat and recoil. "Could have been  
a doctor" say those who knew and did not  
know him, though he never wanted to know  
what gargles endlessly in a body — wet hives,  
planets unspooled from their throbbing shapes.  
There are many ways to look at this.  
He got what he wished against. He got  
wings on his shoes for a sacrifice. The postulate  
that stars turn a blind eye to the cobalt corners  
of rooms is incorrect. Light only helps or ruins sight.  
Daylight does cruel things to a boy's face.



ELENA KARINA BYRNE

---

*During the Vietnam War*

... only the new growth grass was wet behind her head and back.  
She could feel it and she could smell the grass rising up around her,  
saw the whole sky and saw the sky in its de facto language  
even though she was only seven. The year held out  
a bird skull in its opened hand, whole.  
Other birds were singing in a French film with no subtitles.  
It was black and white. But the sky was definitely blue, an invention  
of blue. A vector and hinge and rung of only  
blue already there, no matter where you looked.  
It took a long time. She looked a long time and in lockstep  
pressed the tips of her fingers into the mole-black dirt  
between grass blades. Only, this is  
the wrong story: she did not doom or injure  
any animals but she was restless then, and she was  
glad she was not safe.

*Lynne's Car Washed Violently Down, Off the Cliff*

*Elegy for my sister*

I take the penny from father's hardwood drawer.  
I turn the standing upright penny, its copper head cold, turn  
and turn till a small whorl-well of a circle bores into the center  
of the brick laid in our fireplace. Brick dust cradle. Thumb place.  
This fireplace is wingless and cold. The penny multiplies in swarms.  
Nine cloud coffins full of pennies are open and floating as bees float,  
looking for my ears. Lynne's car washed violently down off  
the cliff. I am too young to drive. Today, all memory ruins  
downstream to the bee-swarm, becomes a plea from then till  
now and grows reason's garden pulled out at the roots.

There's an ocean treading its own water  
to the waist of the coastline, water-skin flexing. I am standing  
upright: absent-me in a house full of grief and thievery. Above  
the thumb place. I was a child there once, both boy and girl, standing  
upright. I turned the penny over on the desert brick, in the fire,  
stepped into the cold downstream ruin of bees swarming  
in the hard rain's garden. I did not know what I was doing.  
It was all made of the same shape and sound down there.

*After a While, You Win: Death Pastoral*

Someone else's child, not you, is running and running  
down the beach. Both feet dig into the burning sand.  
Two others heave one yellow bucket full of sugar-brown  
seaweed, their twin suits flowering  
a conflation of pink over blue behind the water. So  
landmark cactus and landmine rock battlefield uphill toward  
the early moon's white horse head and each wave collapses to your  
right, unsettles, shouting every half minute: *have me, shhhh,*  
*have me, shhhh, halve me, shhhh* ... its rising fulcrum swell roar  
labors — up, down, there, gone, up, down, —  
interrogates the island body island floating  
this ghost-wardrobe-ocean.

There are ways one can look, squint into the idyll light, see  
nothing exists between its shimmering fractions.  
Not even you. Especially not you, the daughter. Your tulip-gasp face  
rising from the heat, turned sideways, looking  
for her amidst too many bodies, calling for her,  
"Mom," "Mom!" "Mother," "Mother!" "Mom!" all other  
bodies thrown and going on without you, the bodies a testimony  
to being bodies relative to desire on the decomposing sand, or laid  
out on the table in the room, marked out on the glass atlas,  
laid out under the god sun where "Marcia!" is the only  
name above ground she would recognize.

ROBERT PINSKY

---

*In the Coma*

My friend was in a coma, so I dove  
Deep into his brain to word him back. I tried

To sing *Hallelujah, I Just Love Her So* in  
Ray Charles's voice. Of course the silence grew.

I couldn't sing the alphabet song. My voice  
Couldn't say words I knew: *Because I Could  
Not Stop for Death, He Kindly Stopped for Me.*

I couldn't remember the Dodgers and the Giants.

I tried to tell the stories that he and I  
Studied when we were young. It was confused,  
The Invisible Man was laughing at how a man  
Felt History jump out of his thick fair head  
And beat him half to death, as being the nightmare  
Out of which Isaac Babel tried to awake.

The quiet. *Next time won't you sing with me.*  
Those great diminished chords: *A girl I know.*

The cold of the coma, lightless. The ocean floor.

I struggled to tell things back from decades gone.  
The mournful American soldier testifying  
About My Lai: *I shot the older lady.*

Viola Liuzzo, Spiro Agnew, Jim Jones.

*And by the time I count from one to four  
I hear her knocking.* Quiet of the deep,  
Our mouths are open but we cannot sing.

### *Ceremony*

At the end of the story,  
When the plague has arrived,  
The performance can begin.

Displacing flimsy heaven  
And its contraptions, now  
Come practical urgencies:

Getting the price of salvation,  
Divined from the guts of birds  
Or from cruciform insects. Like

The savior Oedipus, kittens  
Are histrionic: defiant swagger  
Then ritual flight in terror.

“The soul of the cat is the form  
Of its body.” In Christendom,  
Civic mourners were hired

To walk the stricken city ways  
Chanting: *“I am sick, I must  
Die — Lord have mercy on us.”*

HOLLY CORFIELD CARR

---

*Deepwater*

I have my father's hair. *Not much of a gift, chick, but can't say I'm not generous.*  
Thick cloud blasting out of my head,  
fat as baleen. *The word, his tongue slugs*  
against the roof of his mouth, *is adsorbant,*  
and he insists on the prefix in a coda of clicks:  
*ad- ad- ad'yer see?* like a whale, spearing  
its noise into the dark. *Grows like bone,*  
*does hair,* strengthens against stress, all our  
violences legible in horn, hoof, feather,  
the warm ocher of his thumbnail as he turns  
the beak over. I am naked, watching the plug  
braid a borehole, my fragrant grief: tobacco, lanolin,  
bacon spit, grease. And he is starting to plait my wet hair,  
passing forward fresh streams to dark slick  
over my shoulders and asking me to guess the weight  
of disaster. Absently, I count a kink from flu, a thickening  
for love, golden crown and here, at the root, a length of gray.  
*You tell by the color of the waves,* he shrugs, walks  
to his bookshelf on the landing, holds out a finger, divines  
red, black, hardback, glaucous, yellow spine torn, a gap:  
here, between books, he leaves the kittiwake beak  
after dabbing it like a glass pipette at my cheek.  
*Abacinate. Abscess. Abyss. Ab ovo. At Macondo,* he reads  
*people sent sponges, lambs' wool, soil, books, anything*  
*at all bibulous to save them. In the end, they shaved*  
*the little girls, bagged their hair to make a gluey boom,*  
*suck it up, the spoils.* He starts to towel me down, tells me  
that's what happens to naughty children, guides my feet  
into my socks and the kittiwake beak, his grim memento,  
watches through nostrils, observes our wincing fractures.  
My hair dries, keratin core still recording a damaged archive  
of him, katabatic debris, red algae, bad blood cut  
in cross sections of arctic ice. But they didn't  
use any of it. They used their own ends to end the spill:

propylene sacks sent to drink its own kin. *Ad absurdum. Ad fin.*  
*Ad creep. Adagio. Adam.* I asked him what happened to all the hair,  
but he said that's not the point of the story.

KYLE DARGAN

---

*Olympic Drive*

*Los Angeles*

Across from the gorgeous dog park,  
men dream against poodle-pissed trees —  
their pillows made from breath captured  
in milk cartons. Only arid, temperate  
climate offers respite. Let us suppose  
they have tales, here in this city  
where filmed stories turn a mint.  
All around, one wide screen — the dark hills  
due north pixel-pocked with villa lights.  
Below, streets hemmed with haggard  
brown men — jack-in-the-box bodies  
ever unfolding. Who is pitching  
this script? Title: “The Child of 1968.”  
Voiceover: *After the Integration Apocalypse,*  
*one man must find his way in a land*  
*where the sole survivors who look or speak*  
*like him are those rendered disturbed*  
*and indigent.* Assume the Motion Picture  
Association eager to levy a “Rated R,”  
then remember that those who judge  
violence never shared your definition  
of savagery. A culling is all your eyes  
decipher — your herd thinned. No urban  
wildlife anywhere to be found,  
yet hunger for a hunt remains.  
Tagline: *A hero must choose —*  
between starving or bartering one’s own  
skin. Plot: *Amidst the solar famine, bio-*  
*electric studies revealed melanin’s subtle*  
*charge — the brown population gone*  
*mad from being sapped like Copper Tops.*  
*Imagine The Matrix without the extra-*  
*terrestrial machines. Imagine that among us*



*there have lived men churning statistics,  
devising a human harvest, a brutal method  
to subsist off fellow men and leave their bones  
for the gnawing of next century's mutts.*

*Dear Echo*

*I know the planet Earth is 'bout to explode.  
Kind of hope that no one saves it.  
We only grow from anguish.  
— Mac Miller*

In the likely event of galactic calamity —  
our sun's hydrogen reserves fused through,  
the star-turned-red-giant bloating  
as do our corpses — you will require flames.  
Between the solar shockwave and Earth's  
rattling — an opaque interval — you must  
stare, but we people prior will have left  
no crude fluid for ignition, for light,  
having tapped this rock to gorge  
our bellies to petroleum ache.  
Perhaps you will have evolved — blood  
supplemented with Edison and Tesla's  
currents, half your body fed by generators  
that slow-cure your biomass or waste.  
Maybe you will be self-luminous.

But if you are still — like we,  
like me — a mere meat-pod fated to watch  
Mercury and Venus engulfed, surely  
you hold designs for an interplanetary ark.  
Anticipate humanity's years spent  
adrift in the dark liquor of space — lost  
within hibernation and missing mother-  
planet, further estranged from all  
revelation of how we came to be.

From this unproven vantage point (inside  
our history with no solid alpha), I claim to pity  
your inherited task — to catalog the last  
telluric pulse, close the case of man as now

known. But beneath my softened hide,  
I'm envious. All of our missteps as shepherds,  
all the graffiti eclipsing our souls, all of it  
will cinder and you will view this erasure  
from your Mars-bound barge. You will know  
the phenomenon that is judgment, see it real-time  
as prophets allegedly witnessed. Man will never  
have beheld a clearer beacon to be reborn —

FRANCINE J. HARRIS

---

*gravity furnace*

She wants to set the house on fire,  
gas in both hands, gas on the wall.

*It'd be like the sea torched from its floor.* She'd run like light

from basement windows. or maybe  
suck all arms to room ablaze, so housed

in gut piping. the copper hollowed, reaching to a  
heated black rot at bottom. Like ants; maybe she crawl in the dark.

low on the belly maybe she thug out late, lay low  
and ink eight walls. lay low like cold, she might

strip bare, black glass. sometimes strut, sometimes  
hide late. she runs from house to ember,

a sum of sink. She breathes through flame  
a room of spoons. one

bar brick, one black-eyed room splatter, one torch  
spent for each arm, from coal to alley, she heaves

hue of concrete into each limb. A house of blue-ring flames  
to mimic; someone better run.

*first, take a fistful of hair*

Listen first for anyone. Fill your pockets.  
Measure the ditch with a wad of gum. Listen.  
Stay still. Break open the gate with your fist.  
a backseat to torch. Ditch it. You will need  
someone, still. but later. from a pay phone. for  
the rope. Empty your pockets. Check for wild fur  
and the pant. who wad seats. or possums who hiss  
under wild shrub. Sharp shooters check the wind.  
So measure your mouth. the curve of howl. drool  
and its drop against the wooden tiles. Possum  
under salt and pine. Screech it. Score the rope  
with your teeth. Collect the drool in tin.  
Check for rust. Pull out the nails. Wait  
for the wood to sag of blood. to good and stalled.  
Mount the mouth. slip down. Slide under  
sludge, until the caves open and break. and  
salt your wounds. and play the black cricket.  
and nail on the stars. Run low to ground.  
until your hairs unseat. and your cheek  
full of shotgun howls. and sags. and,  
and touches its own blood to light.

MOLLY PEACOCK

---

*The Nurse Tree*

Why waste away in a box  
when you could be a nurse tree?  
That's what they call dead logs:  
*mushroomeries* of the woods.

Your living room's a wood  
of couches, books, and chairs.  
You're dead not at all, but  
could you be preparing

for things to grow inside  
the chest of the log  
you plan to become:  
cherished compost heap

where heat turns the brown  
mess of feelings, sorry,  
that's *peelings*, into compo-  
sition? For we who love

our hands in dirt, a leaf skirt  
*decomposing* seems an ideal  
station between this life and  
next: I visit your room

as on a forest walk. Passing  
a fallen log — is that you? —  
I see a scarlet fungus cap  
pop up from friable bark.

JOHN MURILLO

---

*Upon Reading That Eric Dolphy Transcribed  
Even the Calls of Certain Species of Birds,*

I think first of two sparrows I met when walking home,  
late night years ago, in another city, not unlike this — the one

bird frantic, attacking I thought, the way she swooped  
down, circled my head, and flailed her wings in my face;

how she seemed to scream each time I swung; how she  
dashed back and forth between me and a blood-red Corolla

parked near the opposite curb; how, finally, I understood:  
I spied another bird, also calling, its foot inexplicably

caught in the car's closed door, beating its whole bird  
body against it. Trying, it appeared, to bang himself free.

And who knows how long he'd been there, wailing. Who  
knows — he and the other I mistook, at first, for a bat.

They called to me — something between squawk and chirp,  
something between song and prayer — to do something,

anything. And, like any good god, I disappeared. Not  
indifferent, exactly. But with things to do. And, most likely,

on my way home from another heartbreak. Call it 1997,  
and say I'm several thousand miles from home. By which

I mean those were the days I made of everyone a love song.  
By which I mean I was lonely and unrequited. But that's

not quite it either. Truth is, I did manage to find a few  
to love me, but couldn't always love them back. The Rasta

law professor. The firefighter's wife. The burlesque dancer

whose daughter blackened drawings with *ms* to mean

the sky was full of birds the day her daddy died. I think  
his widow said he drowned one morning on a fishing trip.

Anyway, I'm digressing. But if you asked that night —  
did I mention it was night? — why I didn't even try

to jimmy the lock to spring the sparrow, I couldn't say,  
truthfully, that it had anything to do with envy, with wanting

a woman to plead as deeply for me as these sparrows did,  
one for the other. No. I'd have said something, instead,

about the neighborhood itself, the car thief shot a block  
and a half east the week before. Or about the men

I came across nights prior, sweat-slicked and shirtless,  
grappling in the middle of the street, the larger one's chest

pressed to the back of the smaller, bruised and bleeding  
both. I know you thought this was about birds,

but stay with me. I left them both in the street —  
the same street where I'd leave the sparrows — the men

embracing and, for all one knows (especially one not  
from around there), they could have been lovers —

the one whispering an old, old tune into the ear  
of the other — *Baby, baby, don't leave me this way*. I left

the men where I'd leave the sparrows and their song.  
And as I walked away, I heard one of the men call to me,



*please or help or brother* or some such. And I didn't break stride, not one bit. It's how I've learned to save myself.

Let me try this another way. Call it 1977. And say I'm back west, South Central Los Angeles. My mother

and father at it again. But this time in the street, broad daylight, and all the neighbors watching. One,

I think his name was Sonny, runs out from his duplex to pull my father off. You see where I'm going with this?

My mother crying out, fragile as a sparrow. Sonny fighting my father, fragile as a sparrow. And me,

years later, trying to get it all down. As much for you — I'm saying — as for me. Sonny catches a left, lies flat

on his back, blood starting to pool and his own wife wailing. My mother wailing, and traffic backed,

now, half a block. Horns, whistles, and soon sirens. 1977. Summer. And all the trees full of birds. Hundreds,

I swear. And since I'm the one writing it, I'll tell you they were crying. Which brings me back to Dolphy

and his transcribing. The jazzman, I think, wanted only to get it down pure. To get it down exact — the animal

racking itself against a car's steel door, the animals in the trees reporting, the animals we make of ourselves

and one another. Stay with me now. Don't leave me. Days after the dustup, my parents took me to the park.

And in this park was a pond, and in this pond were birds.  
Not sparrows, but swans. And my father spread a blanket  
and brought from a basket some apples and a paring knife.  
Summertime. My mother wore sunglasses. And long sleeves.  
My father, now sober, cursed himself for leaving the radio.  
But my mother forgave him, and said, as she caressed  
the back of his hand, that we could just listen to the swans.  
And we listened. And I watched. Two birds coupling,  
one beating its wings as it mounted the other. Summer,  
1977. I listened. And watched. When my parents made love  
late into that night, I covered my ears in the next room,  
scanning the encyclopedia for swans. It meant nothing to me —  
then, at least — but did you know the collective noun  
for swans is a *lamentation*? And is a lamentation not  
its own species of song? What a woman wails, punch drunk  
in the street? Or what a widow might sing, learning her man  
was drowned by swans? A lamentation of them? Imagine  
the capsized boat, the panicked man, struck about the eyes,  
nose, and mouth each time he comes up for air. Imagine  
the birds coasting away and the waters suddenly calm.  
Either trumpet swans or mutes. The dead man's wife  
running for help, crying to any who'd listen. A lamentation.  
And a city busy saving itself. I'm digressing, sure. But  
did you know that to digress means to stray from the flock?

When I left my parents' house, I never looked back. By which  
I mean I made like a god and disappeared. As when I left

the sparrows. And the copulating swans. As when someday  
I'll leave this city. Its every flailing, its every animal song.



**COMMENT**



*Lyric Knowledge*

The impulse to be lyrical is driven by the need to be no longer constrained by oneself. As poems have testified for centuries, we become lyrical when we suffer, when we love. But like poems themselves, we exist because of constraints — cultural and linguistic ways of organizing experience that allow us to imagine we know who we are. Why, when we're driven to be lyrical, are we gratified by familiar patterns, formal patterns made by breaking words into syllables, structural patterns made by conjoining words with other words? Why do we imagine we may be liberated by unfamiliar patterns, patterns whose novelty depends on patterns we already know? Why, having experienced the pleasure of a lyric poem, do we bother experiencing it again? Why, when we're in love, can the repetition of an experience feel more fulfilling than the discovery of it?

In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates asks his interlocutors to consider a well-known epigram inscribed on Midas's tomb. "You notice," he says, "that it is of no consequence what order these lines are spoken in," implying that the poem offers merely the illusion of rigorous thought.

A girl of bronze on Midas's tomb I stand  
As long as water flows and trees grow tall.  
Remaining here on his lamented tomb,  
I'll tell to all who pass "Here Midas lies."

What Socrates says about this epigram is half true. For while it is not organized by the inevitable unfolding of a narrative or an argument, and while its lines may consequently be rearranged with no damage to the poem's information as such, a great deal depends on the particular way in which the information is ordered.

Remaining here on his lamented tomb  
As long as water flows and trees grow tall,  
I'll tell to all who pass "Here Midas lies."  
A girl of bronze on Midas's tomb I stand.

In this version we discover in the final line that the poem is spoken by a bronze statue of a girl, eerily similar to any girl who might have received Midas's amorous attentions; in the original version our experience of the poem is predicated on this knowledge. What does the fact that one can alter significantly the effect of a poem without changing a single word tell us about the power of structure? What did Socrates not want to recognize about that power?

The anonymous lyric known as "Western Wind" first appeared in a songbook probably owned by a musician in the court of Henry VIII. I quote it here in a modern edition, in which spelling and punctuation have been regularized.

Western wind, when will you blow?  
The small rain down can rain.  
Christ, if my love were in my arms  
And I in my bed again.

This quatrain is cast in ballad measure, alternating tetrameter ("Western wind, when will you blow") and trimeter lines ("The small rain down can rain"), the two trimeters rhyming with each other ("rain" and "again"). The regularity of this form plays against the irregularity of the poem's syntax, which consists of a one-line interrogative ("Western wind, when will you blow?"), followed by a one-line declarative ("The small rain down can rain") and a two-line exclamation ("Christ, if my love were in my arms/And I in my bed again").

But like the lines of the Midas epigram, the lines of "Western Wind" may easily be reordered; not a word needs to be changed, and the poem will make clear sense.

Christ, if my love were in my arms  
And I in my bed again.  
Western wind, when will you blow?  
The small rain down can rain.

"Did you ever read one of her Poems backward," asked Emily Dickinson of an unknown interlocutor about an unidentified poet, "because the plunge from the front overturned you? I sometimes (often have, many times) have — A something overtakes the Mind." The "something" that overtakes the mind when reading "Western Wind"



backwards is different from the “something” produced by the plunge from the front, for while the form of the poem is unchanged (alternating tetrameter and trimeter lines, rhymed *xaxa*), its structure has been radically altered. Here, we turn from an experience of longing to the weather, an external drama that confirms the emotional turmoil. Something happens in this shift from interiority to exteriority, for we feel in both arenas the power of absence, the desire for change, but something more momentous happens in the original structure, in which our expectations are not confirmed but shattered.

“Western Wind” begins by looking out, asking in the first one-line sentence for the exterior world to change: “Western wind, when will you blow?” The second one-line sentence makes an observation about that world: “The small rain down can rain.” At this point in our experience of these lines, the poem is about nothing but weather — a wish that the weather were different, a wish registered most poignantly in the phrase “small rain”; would that we were getting a downpour, a deluge. Then the poem slaps us with new information, reinforcing the slap with the unexpected blasphemy (“Christ”) and then, more potently, with a sentence that disrupts the established pattern of containment, the syntax suddenly refusing to be constrained by the line: “Christ, if my love were in my arms/And I in my bed again.” So while the poem’s greatest desire is to repeat the routine of daily life (“I in my bed again”), the poem’s structure makes the discovery of that desire permanently surprising. *Again*, as every child knows, is one of the most powerful words in the language, and the act of knowing in a lyric poem is an act of coming to know again, the repeatable action of the language on the page having become more thrilling than the original action described.

In ideal but rare conditions, such pleasure may be derived from daily experiences like setting the table or brushing one’s teeth. Many people listen to pop songs they love day after day — not because they can’t remember the words or the tune; they know the song by heart, and more pleasurable than rehearsing it in the mind is the act of experiencing it again as a temporal event. Most songs contain perhaps forty words, and reading the same forty-word paragraph from a blog or a parking ticket as often as one has listened to “Blowin’ in the Wind” would bore anyone silly — except in that rare instance when the pleasure of the paragraph depends not on its information as such but on how the sentences deliver us into the discovery of that information.

People who read the ode “To Autumn” again and again don’t do so because they need to be reminded that in temperate zones of the northern hemisphere, leaves begin to turn colors and fall off the trees in September. Seasonal change, diurnal change, waking up, falling asleep — the vast majority of our daily experiences are repetitions of prior experiences. It’s harrowingly easy to become oppressed by a life of routine, and while we remember more easily the exceptions, we maintain a quietly vigorous relationship to our lives when we’re able to look forward to learning again what we already know, transforming it in the process.

But if such pleasure is precarious in the best of circumstances, it is to be had more reliably from reading a poem than from reading a blog because poems exist to foreground the event of their language over the event they happen to narrate or describe. We don’t think of memorizing parking tickets, but the practice of memorizing poems feels unremarkable, whether we do it or not, because we recognize that poems exist to be re-experienced as a temporal event.

Consider the conclusion to another lyric, a longer one, its eleven sentences cast in twelve two-line stanzas.

The stalks are firmly rooted in ice.  
It is deep January. The sky is hard.

The leaves hop, scraping on the ground,  
Like seeing fallen brightly away.

Snow sparkling like eyesight falling to earth  
Is merely the moving of a tongue.

They have heads in which a captive cry  
Without legs or, for that, without heads,

Has arms without hands. They have trunks  
In this bleak air, the broken stalks.

Bad is final in this light.  
The field is frozen. The leaves are dry,

As absent as if we were asleep.  
He is not here, the old sun.

What you have just read is actually the beginning of Wallace Stevens's "No Possum, No Sop, No Taters," a poem about the deprivations of wartime rationing in the early forties, except that you have read it backwards, concluding with the poem's first line. Though the original ordering of this passage also contains eleven sentences, I have altered the punctuation, recombining the constituent pieces of the poem's syntax into new grammatical shapes. In doing so, I have needed to alter just two words (*sparkles* to *sparkling* and *have* to *has*) to keep the syntax coherent.

But while none of the poem's information has changed, the reordering of the information once again alters the structure of the poem radically. To conclude the poem with the act of personifying the sun ("He is not here") makes that figure, though it records an absence, feel like a brazened wish to find human companionship in the starkly inhuman natural world.

The field is frozen. The leaves are dry,

As absent as if we were asleep.

He is not here, the old sun.

To begin with the personification makes it feel like a passingly familiar trope, hardly worth noticing.

He is not here, the old sun,

As absent as if we were asleep.

The field is frozen. The leaves are dry.

Why, if the effect of these two ways of ordering the poem are so different, are these sentences so amenable to rearrangement? What does the fact that one can so easily change our experience of lyric poems without changing their language tell us not only about the structure of lyric poems but about the syntax that undergirds their structure?

In contrast to "No Possum, No Sop, No Taters," a poem whose structure depends on the causal relations of narrative will not be so plausibly reordered, though the result may be in its own way delightful.

In the darkest evening of the year,  
Between the woods and frozen lake,

To stop without a farmhouse near —  
My little horse must think it queer

To watch his woods fill up with snow.  
He will not see me stopping here;  
His house is in the village though.  
Whose woods these are I think I know.

Neither will a poem whose structure depends on the causal relations of an argument be so amenable to reordering.

Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds,  
For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds.  
The basest weed outbraves his dignity,  
But if that flower with base infection meet,  
Though to itself it only live and die,  
The summer's flower is to the summer sweet,  
Others but stewards of their excellence.  
They are the lords and owners of their faces,  
And husband nature's riches from expense.  
They rightly do inherit heaven's graces.

The narrative of Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" would seem hardly to resemble the argument of Shakespeare's 94th sonnet, but they both rely on hypotactic syntax, the kind of syntax toward which we naturally gravitate in order to generate relationships between causes and effects in narratives or between evidence and conclusion in arguments. Not "I came, I saw, I conquered" but "Because I came, I conquered." Not "They have the power to hurt and will do none. They do inherit heaven's graces" but "They that have the power to hurt and will do none do inherit heaven's graces." In "No Possum, No Sop, No Taters," which is structured by association and juxtaposition rather than narrative or argument, the syntax is often egregiously paratactic, avoiding causal relationships between clauses and therefore allowing the pieces of the poem's syntax often to make as much sense when arranged backward as when arranged forward: "The leaves hop, scraping on the ground. It is deep January. The sky is hard. The stalks are firmly rooted in ice" or "The stalks are firmly rooted in ice. The sky is hard. It is deep January. The leaves hop, scraping on the ground."

An observation about art ceases to be provocative when it is transformed into a principle, and I wouldn't want to generalize too freely from the observations I've made so far. So while paratactic syntax distinguishes Stevens's lyric poem, and while hypotactic syntax is foregrounded in Frost's narrative poem, paratactic syntax certainly occurs in narratives, just as hypotactic syntax occurs in lyrics; the first sentence of "No Possum, No Sop, No Taters" is after all hypotactic ("He is not here, the old sun,/As absent as if we were asleep"). Neither would I want to suggest that poets would necessarily do better to read their poems backwards, though at certain times they have profitably done so. John Koethe actually wrote his 207-line poem "The Constructor" backwards, moving from its final sentence —

Why do I feel so happy?

— to its penultimate sentence —

How could this quiet feeling

Actually exist?

— and so on, until he wrote what became the first sentence: "They strike me less as actual persons than as abstract/Ghosts of an idea." The poem might have been perpetuated in the order in which Koethe actually wrote its sentences, but one can sense immediately the attraction of moving backwards: what was originally a governing thesis, a question to be explored ("Why do I feel so happy?"), becomes in the reordering a revelation that is extruded from the experience of the poem, not a stolid given but an unforeseen gift. The simple flatness of the question feels in the final position revelatory, driven into existence by unforeseen forces, just as, on a much smaller scale, the final two-line sentence of "Western Wind" does.

Having written a poem in this way, Koethe did not repeat the experiment, for the experiment could easily become a predictable method, just as my rearrangements of "Western Wind" or "No Possum, No Sop, No Taters" might seem merely clever. But the experiment nonetheless provokes telling observations about the workings of lyric structure. The fact that a predominantly paratactic syntax enables the possibility of plausible rearrangement does not undermine a poem's plunge from the front, as Dickinson called it, but highlights its inevitability: the repeatable pleasure of the poem

depends not simply on what kinds of sentences the poem contains but on the particular order in which those sentences appear.

This is the first of the ten sections of Wallace Stevens's "The Auroras of Autumn," a lyric sequence that dramatizes, through multiple interpretations of the aurora borealis, the way in which the human mind may or may not find itself at home in the universe.

This is where the serpent lives, the bodiless.  
His head is air. Beneath his tip at night  
Eyes open and fix on us in every sky.

Or is this another wriggling out of the egg,  
Another image at the end of the cave,  
Another bodiless for the body's slough?

This is where the serpent lives. This is his nest,  
These fields, these hills, these tinted distances,  
And the pines above and along and beside the sea.

This is form gulping after formlessness,  
Skin flashing to wished-for disappearances  
And the serpent body flashing without the skin.

This is the height emerging and its base ...  
These lights may finally attain a pole  
In the midmost midnight and find the serpent there,

In another nest, the master of the maze  
Of body and air and forms and images,  
Relentlessly in possession of happiness.

This is his poison: that we should disbelieve  
Even that. His meditations in the ferns,  
When he moved so slightly to make sure of sun,

Made us no less as sure. We saw in his head,  
Black beaded on the rock, the flecked animal,  
The moving grass, the Indian in his glade.

This opening lyric, in which the sky seems perilously threatening to

the mind that reads it symbolically, contains twelve sentences, two of which contain hypotactic syntax: “This is his poison: that we should disbelieve/Even that” and “His meditations in the ferns,/When he moved so slightly to make sure of sun,/Made us no less as sure.” These two sentences come next-to-last, when the poem is moving toward closure; the long runway for this just slightly revved-up syntactical energy is comprised of nine often egregiously paratactic sentences. Copulative verbs dominate eight of these sentences — “This is where the serpent lives” — “This is his nest” — “This is form” — “This is the height” — “This is his poison” — and as if this repetition of this least active of predicates weren’t enough, seven of these eight verbs are conjoined to the same demonstrative pronoun (“this”), the resulting syntactical pattern suggesting with each repetition that, while our discovery of information moves forward (from *nest* to *form* to *height*), we have also been standing still (*this is ... this is ... this is*).

This uncanny sense of movement in stasis is reinforced by another pattern, the repeated addition of a catalogue of appositions: not merely “This is his nest” but “This is his nest,/These fields, these hills, these tinted distances”; not just “This is form gulping after formlessness” but “This is form gulping after formlessness,/Skin flashing to wished-for disappearances/And the serpent body flashing without the skin.” These hovering participles smother the already weak predication, so that when we finally arrive at the first piece of hypotactic syntax in the poem, it hits us with the power of the unexpected blasphemy in “Western Wind,” despite the fact that the sentence begins with the same inexorably repeated syntax we’ve come to expect: “This is his poison: that we should disbelieve/Even that.” This is the first sentence that thrusts our thinking forward by suggesting that one thing follows from another not merely by chance, association, or accretion but by necessity (“His poison is that we should disbelieve even in happiness”).

It is not surprising that, without altering a single word, this lyric reads as elegantly backward as it reads forward, the form unchanged (iambic pentameter lines arranged in tercets) but the structure radically different: “The moving grass, the Indian in his glade,/Black beaded on the rock, the flecked animal/Made us no less sure.” But deft as this rearrangement may be, its structure sacrifices the crucially delayed turn from parataxis to hypotaxis, a turn that makes the figure of the Indian, when it finally appears at the end of the poem, feel simultaneously unprecedented and inevitable. The poem is a

dramatization of the thinking mind in the process of discovering that thought itself is the mind's most indomitable foe. "Here are too many mirrors for misery," says the final lyric in the sequence, and the work of "The Auroras of Autumn" is to make this simple remark feel authentic, to allow us to exist in the temporal process of discovering it again.

It is folly, says Socrates in Plato's *Phaedrus*, to suppose "that written words can do more than remind the reader of what he already knows," but this is precisely the power and the pleasure of lyric knowledge. No reader is forever immune to that pleasure, not even the skeptical Socrates, who as he awaited his execution felt compelled to write poems. But while the imminent threat of mortality might make anyone embrace the pleasure of repetition, anyone familiar with that pleasure also knows what it's like to feel immune. Even when we're in love, repetition may threaten to degenerate from rapture to routine; the feelings we point to with a word like *rapture* wouldn't feel authentic if they weren't so poignantly contingent, and, as Freud suggests, the adult psyche may fall too easily into an unproductive repetition of what matters to it most. This is why poets, like lovers, must continually reinvent ways of doing the same thing over again, no matter how forceful the achievement of previous poems.

"I have seen it over and over, the same sea, the same," laments Elizabeth Bishop in "At the Fishhouses," the water swinging icily "above the stones and then the world" — as if the stultifying sameness of the water were a psychic condition that could swallow us, turning us all into stones. But then Bishop finds a way not to transform the dark water (that's after all not possible) but to transform the repeated experience of it, so that the water no longer functions as a mirror for misery: rather than dipping her hand into the water, rather than tasting it, she wonders what such experience of water would be like — she makes a metaphor.

It is like what we imagine knowledge to be:  
dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free,  
drawn from the cold hard mouth  
of the world, derived from the rocky breasts  
forever, flowing and drawn, and since  
our knowledge is historical, flowing, and flown.

What does it mean to say that knowledge is *free* but forever *derived*?



How could knowledge be *flowing*, happening in the moment of its discovery, but at the same time *flown*, always having existed prior to the moment of discovery, waiting to happen again? Every lyric poem answers these questions, not with what it says but with its transformative act of saying. This knowledge, lyric knowledge, comes to us in language that is flowing because it has flown.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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RACHAEL ALLEN's\* first pamphlet of poems was published by Faber & Faber. She is the poetry editor for *Granta* magazine and coeditor of the poetry anthology series *Clinic* and the online journal *Tender*.

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\* First appearance in *Poetry*.

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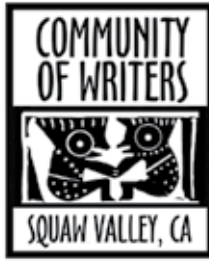
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THE POETRY FOUNDATION PRESENTS

# February Features

*Poetry Podcasts* | On the *Poetry Magazine Podcast*, *Poetry* editors **Don Share** and **Lindsay Garbutt** go inside the pages of this issue, talking to contributors and sharing their poem selections with listeners.

*Poetry Off the Shelf*, a weekly podcast, explores the diverse world of contemporary American poetry. Check out the recent conversation between **Danez Smith** and **Brian Russell**.

Podcasts are available free from the iTunes store.

*Harriet News* | February's featured blogger, **Prageeta Sharma**, discusses poetry in Missoula, Seattle, and the West at [poetryfoundation.org/harriet](http://poetryfoundation.org/harriet)

*Learning Lab* | View educational resources including introductions to the works of **Langston Hughes**, **Robert Frost**, **Maya Angelou**, **Sylvia Plath**, and more.

*Events* | Plan your trip to the Poetry Foundation in Chicago to see some of our February events!

*Poetry & Music*

**The Camerado Suite** featuring **Michael J. Miles**  
Wednesday, February 3, 7:00 PM

*Poetry & Music*

**Lampo: Plane/Taléa**, by **Alessandro Bosetti**  
Saturday, February 6, 7:00 PM

*Poetry on Stage*

**Every House Has a Door: "The Three Matadors"**  
Saturday, February 20, 2:00 PM

*Exhibition* | **Volatile! A Poetry and Scent Exhibition**  
December 11, 2015–February 19, 2016  
Monday–Friday, 11:00 AM–4:00 PM



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