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**BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL**  
**Spring 2002, Vol. 52 N°3**  
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### COVER

**Shanna McNair**, "Pushing for Out," copyright 2001

### TITLE PAGE

**Shanna McNair**, "Electric," copyright 2001

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An arrow at the bottom of a page  
means no stanza break.

## MARION STOCKING

### Introduction

When we called for poems by poets under twenty-five, nearly three hundred and fifty envelopes arrived. We treated them like our regular submissions: multiple screenings and winnowing to about forty sets, reading those aloud to each other, selecting from them those poems that called to us most strongly. We were dazzled by the range and strength of the music of the poems you will read here: the lyric grace, the linguistic passion, the nuanced and relentless rhythms.

Two things impress me as I reread them now. First: although they were composed before the cataclysms of September 11, during a period of supposed prosperity and domestic tranquility, the vision in most of the poems is dark. These poets have had to learn without illusion to cope with personal and political grief and grievance. Our usual submissions do not reflect so much “darkness visible.” Second: each poet has transformed conflict and disillusionment through resourceful language. “There is nothing so composing,” says Frost, “as composition.”

Yet how various they are! Consider the luscious sprung-rhythm rime royal, with its baroque richness of diction, in Garth Greenwell’s “Devotions.” Then skip to the quick slippery wit of Julie Green’s “The Mathematician’s Wife.” Listen to Paula Raimondo’s sinister foreboding in “The Lightning,” then to the complex aria and recitative of Faye E. Joost’s “Baring Down.” Beside Joost’s eloquent improvisation, savor the more formal inventiveness in the excerpt from “Chiaroscuro,” Vanessa Stauffer’s crown of sonnets. In Eric Pidkameny’s “Aubade” the “meaning” lies in the aesthetics of the words’ chiming like musical tones. In contrast, words strike like knives in Nicholas Gilewicz’s “Radio Poem #18.” Several poems press out or in to the limits of language, edging toward the inexpressible, honoring the silences.

I would like to be around to hear what these poets are writing in 2012 and 2022. But for me, they have already defined a generation.

**PAULA RAIMONDO**

**The Lightning**

The voice blinks on, a neon dot  
on the soundboard, the recorder chases  
an imperceptible second behind the reading.

The library is dressed up like a theme park.  
Here's a day when I just can't follow a word of it.  
The Consulate pours rich red wine to celebrate

the five Slovenian writers as the tape winds on  
around the party, capturing the discussion of *freedom*  
on its spools in at least three different languages.

Laughing, Wendy tells us her nightmare of the lightning  
suspended in the sky. The lightning uncoupled,  
no thunder, just the sky's mouth wide open

as, in dreams, the words won't follow  
and no one speaks. We've assembled on the lawn,  
still the horrible sheet of light will not recede.

**KAREN RIGBY**

**Postcards: New World Bed & Breakfast**

Have you slept in sheets the color of wolves  
turned inside out? After fleshing, silver pelts dry  
outside the furrier's lodge.

Imagine heat.

The furnace shakes like dice.



The bed-posts are pineapples  
carved from cherry:  
no flies between  
each notch. What island  
did the first tradesman  
think could translate into snow?



Coastlines framed in glass above the dresser: Caribbean salt mines,  
whalebone, cane sugar, Boston shipyards odorous with tar, Yukon  
mother lode, Revere silver, guano raked over shoals, tobacco,  
Roanoke, Hudson, lime barrels sealed for the long haul around the  
southern cape. Iron ore, tackling block, hog slaughter, a whole  
republic of *heave-ho* and *can-do* banking its fires on imported and  
home-bred flesh: hyphenated chain gang, -American, -American.

**GARTH GREENWELL**

**Devotions**

*Not the beauty of the body nor the glory of time . . . not the fragrance of flowers and unguents and spices, not manna and honey, not limbs welcome to the embraces of the flesh: it is not these that I love when I love my God. And yet I do love a kind of light, melody, fragrance, food, embracement when I love my God; for He is the light, the melody, the fragrance, the food, the embracement of my inner self—*  
—Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, X.6

*The homosexual does not know the boundary of his own body. He does not know where the body ends and space begins.*  
—Dr. Charles Socarides, to Congress, 2/23/1967

Our bodies, formed of breach and breach, would be made full, Augustine, each slick hollow sleeved with surfeit—crave and cleave, exhaust, *reprise*—his shape what I am shaped to; and, though sheathed, his still sharp, still quickened want me breathes what life. And would you seal them up, Augustine? Suture my lips and eyes, the clenched, mistrusting

sphincter's final give? I had been—what? *stifled?*—in my drawn function, Father, so fell back upon Invention, the Profligate, delighted to unknow presumed-known Nature: our flesh not *Temple*, *nót Blówn of the Breath of God*, but meat, and field that, barren, still would be furrowed, sown and trampled—*kenned*—

through heave and labor, lack and long. To long, Augustine, is to wish the body *nót* body, but, Freud's Eden, something too long *surface*, too long *of*, let go. Cannot. *But is it still my body, once, Sex thought, he's entered?* In that friction which I know may sicken, whole for unwhole blood let flow—

*(yet who among us could be whole?)*—where does  
my body end, where his take hold? Sweet boy,  
Augustine, even your strict soul's strict love  
must put aside ascetics and employ  
the body's unbetterable lexicon of joy.  
Shutter my body and my soul eclipse:  
How can I come to praise him with sealed lips?

**AARON LEIS**

**Falling**

Something about the way black pours  
like night over your shoulders—  
it makes me wish, on nights like this,  
that I could beg so much of ink,  
could ask such ease of words  
to let them wander the page in waves.  
But ink can never mimic the migrant fall  
of blackbirds trailing tresses through clouds,  
or climbing wisps of wind with something  
so like persistence, we cannot help  
but think it metaphor. Their dance  
reminds me, sometimes, of the way  
two people can slip casually,  
entirely into each other, then continue  
down as one—tentative at first, eager—  
but soon, grasping calmly for nothing  
but each other and the whispered  
promise of wind to hold them,  
they begin to carry each other  
as blackbirds do, knowing the difference  
between falling and rising  
depends on something so simple.

*for Maria Celeste*

*These stars, long burnt out, in whose light we make our truce.*

—Lise Goett

There was a ship, there always is  
in tales like these—some ventured vessel adrift  
on whatever wave will carry it. A couple,  
two students in an all-but-seedy boardwalk bar,  
are sharing their own tales over ale. He, a poet,  
knows too well these seafaring conventions—how  
a glimpsed flotsam flipper suggests serpents, knows the stones  
the sirens sing him towards—but still he listens, follows  
the semaphore of lids over eyes ice-glazed and glittered  
as a midnight sea. She pauses to drink a moment's silence  
through her cigarette—smoke lingering between breath and word—  
before heralding the morning's news. She leans closer,  
takes his hand, tells him, "This needs to be

■

a poem." She read once that distance recalls  
a face "faded, like a favorite dress washed  
too often," learned from countless epics the way  
lovers idle themselves while the other is missing.  
On the news a man says the golfer's jet  
flew too high over six states of maize,  
too close to the sun that couldn't melt  
the frozen dew of its wings, the crystal condensation  
over glass—says, at that height, the air is too thin  
to breathe. In the next room, she wishes  
she could be the calm Penelope, weaving towards return.  
Instead, she speed-dials his cell phone, persistently thumbing  
one ear shut against the newsman's words.  
"Only the autopilot is calling," he says, "constantly  
begging response." At times she thinks she hears him  
answer dimly, before the signal fades

■

lost. Through all of this, a chaos  
of shimmer and wave swept past  
even the horizon's unfathomed  
glimpse into everything—even here  
we plead order from above.

In 1872, on the bridge of the *Mary Celeste*  
the helmsman gazes through the last uncast sky  
he'll know to find Orion's belt. His place,  
he might tell us in an equally windless voice, is found  
there, in that light-pricked intrusion of order—the Hunter  
damned to sail the sky for love  
of Artemis, mother of moon and monster, pursued  
by a scorpion of stars. Every seaman knows  
this tale, but as our navigator narrates his own  
rending, he thinks of his wife waiting  
at every port he's promised to ply the seas  
back to, watches the first black breath of cloud  
cover Castor, Pollux—Gemini's twins—until even  
the sky is silence. "The heavens  
hold a star for each of us," he wants  
to tell her as distant lightning warns  
the storm, "and mine will shine for you if even here

■

I die." As this final morse-murmur flitters  
into frequency, the radio operator begins to breathe  
the gas-tainted air with something like acceptance.  
After the bomb, he thought the sea would be  
safest, always lingering between destinations.  
He couldn't have known the poisoned breath  
his ship, the *Ourang Medan*, had waited miles to exhale.  
This is the revelation of Shakespeare's dead,  
he thinks, the desperate awareness of knowing  
too much. He barely feels his teeth clench, his body  
surging to stiffness. In a phosphene gleam  
he sees his wife, the day she threw her ring  
into the grass after their last fight. Alone  
he searched for it, lost in waves of bermuda. Now  
he manages his hand to his pocket, fingers  
past compass and coin, and finds it there.

→

Having breathed these dreams too deeply, he thinks  
he sees her standing past the fumes. He reaches  
the ring towards her as if tempting the softened light  
to shine, whispering to nothing, "It's found,

■

it's found." They kiss the way waves might, standing  
outside the bar. With his free hand the poet moors  
a loose strand of hair behind her ear, knowing how intimately  
the past is lost in these first breaths of affection. They search  
through the glow of streetlights to find the Hunter's belt,  
the middle star. He tells her how the light falls  
fifteen hundred years before it finds us here, how  
no one can say its source still burns. That night  
he lies awake beside her, watches the sheets rise and fall  
calmly with her windless breath. He remembers  
the *Mary Celeste*, almost her namesake—promises her silently  
she'll never have to search again. He closes his eyes,  
his arm still holding her as they sail together towards morning.

**MOANA MINTON**

**The clock**

It took two years for you to wind down,  
your hands, needles, hands bound together.

The two of you lying down together. Lying—  
Mom and Dad together. Your needles whined together,

“Addict,”—there’s a ring to it—Addiction. And the heroine  
sinking the heroin through tightly wound needles,

and the candles, with their pointed lights, and all  
the lights on. The two of you lying still together.

The two of you with your hair, Mom and Dad together,  
growing, with the grey and all the grey even with the lights on—

we could see lying with the lights on all the grey between  
the heroin and the candles with their needles and the two of you

together. That you have each other. That you’re together. That  
Mom and Dad together sink the heroin with the candles

and the needles with their hands, wringing, “Addict, Addict,”  
and the hair, with all the eight years growing,

greying, addict. You can barely see the clock  
for all your lofty bedding, the pillows piling

up against the edges of your bodies.

You won’t know when you need to wake up.

**MOANA MINTON**

**The long nap**

His skin is darted and crossed.  
Insects move between us and the net of light  
coming through the lime trees outside.

In my dream, he comes to lay  
his body beside mine. This is the bed  
he and my mother have always slept in.

The hairs on his legs are fine and beautiful.  
His back is small—no longer a swimmer's.  
He can see his mother's legs, tan and sinewy,

her fresh red toenails cresting over the side of the pool.  
She is far away. He cries in his sleep, the light sounds  
breaking through a pillow.

As children, we placed our bodies between their bodies  
to be clearly, unquestioningly theirs.  
This is what we come back to.

The bruised and punctured places  
are healing, the scarring fills pink holes,  
smoothing and erasing them in his dreams.

When I reach to touch the blonde seams,  
they are soft and smooth as he must have been,  
his body afloat or streaming. We wake together.

**MATTHEW FLUHARTY**  
**Fidelity versus imagination**

*for Greagoir O Duill*

Who is that woman in the blue dress?  
There, in a tattered gown behind the pine trees.  
Her fingers have pulled out my breath.  
Her beautiful fingers and my loose teeth, a little blood, good-bye.

She left some spectral text,  
some stray birds, the nauseous embrace of sleep deprivation.

Fidelity versus imagination: a cold room,  
waking up in my clothes without a straight story.  
I know the mind isn't such a sure-thing,  
and memory is a faint line run between black-start and black-end,

but I can muster a few things into place:  
half-serious light, white walls, a few books and scattered notes.

The rest is no easy translation.  
Wherever I was last night, it hurts: short on breath, sore jawed,  
some loose teeth. Why have my lungs expanded into hollow air?  
Who is that? There. Behind those trees.

**MATTHEW FLUHARTY**

**Blackout theatre**

**1.**

I find myself still sick after all these months,  
still heaving the same dry barge of shit across the plains.

In a dream last night, ice blue pines  
pulled through the wings of a motionless bird,

suspended by nothing over an infinite blue.

But now I am awake.

The sound of tearing cloth has not relented  
on the insides of farmers wasted by grain alcohol,

I see my heart as a room bound in sandpaper,  
set in the unresolved landscape of appalachia,  
left to scrape the colorless air.

There are horses groaning over the hill,

down in the back alleys of the marketplace,  
where my marrow is sold for cheap turquoise bracelets.

**2.**

Here I am, drunk in the bomb shelter.

Here, pawing at the break in the aluminum and cement,  
sure of what had always existed:

huge blue sky, big pretty world.

**ALISON STINE**

**Rembrandt's Mistress**

Picture: in Antarctica,  
the woman doctor undressing.  
It is August, and nothing  
is alive to feed the wind.  
The men on the mission  
are well-trained, not  
young. They give her space.  
Above her quarters, their low  
voices collide like sex.  
The small lump shocks,  
stinging frost. She wonders,  
in the dead cold,  
how a thing can grow.

In still heat, home, her mother  
cried at news of a girl child,  
every woman over forty  
marked, a black branch.  
They lived near plum trees,  
brought the thorax fruits  
in their skirts to the house. It's about  
age, chronology, her breast  
flattened in the water  
hands of the nurse, then  
in the guise of the machine.  
All touch is occasional;

but sight lasts, the way scholars track  
the cancer of Rembrandt's  
mistress, the white sac of breast  
rippling into tumor. Below  
his eye, cells burst into bloom.  
The water in the brush jar froze,  
and she shivered, standing.  
One wife dead, did he think  
he was saving her? Or past that,  
sought the contact of paint  
to flesh, the last look,  
his: the last passion.

The planes come at first break,  
    lighting the tree line. By then  
there will be growth outside,  
    dark-tipped and trembling.  
She slips gauze in disinfectant,  
    gathers the slide and hollow  
needle. The pain is the pierce  
    of the first time. Here, miles  
from light, she is surprised  
    she remembers—his mouth  
like a small flower, covering  
    her breast, the shock of contact,  
then the numb descending, then  
    nothing.

**JULIE GREEN**

**On the Metro: A School Girl**

A girl wraps  
the tummy of her pink jacket. She is black  
and small. The woman next to her  
is old and talks.  
Talks like a grammy. Pulling,  
the girl grasps the puckered rim of her  
coat. Between the rim and the belly are a  
thousand sprinkles of spilled glitter. It was  
when the woman talked. "What is  
your name dear." *Darnisha*. "What." *Darnisha*. "Arnisha. How  
fancy." This is when the seedlings  
split their pouch. Released like milk  
downing the drain. Smooth  
and beautiful, but dead. *Darnisha*  
cradles them. She presses them  
deep to her unripe abdomen. She can  
press them back in, maybe. The white  
woman talks.

**JULIE GREEN**

**The Mathematician's Wife**

Is this poem

Done

Yet

**JULIE GREEN**

**White Black Bleeding**

The sun squirmed at the edge  
of the woods. One boy had a black sock,  
the other a white sock, each covered in mud  
on feet running past the lilac  
bush to the pump's bubble.  
They sprinted from the infesting fire

rash, swamp dirt, a prairie fire  
masking their skin. The cuff edge  
held recalcitrant while the bubble  
sky peered down. A black sock  
hid from the ocean of lilac  
above in the foot's basement of mud

and stone, sucking down. The mud  
sprawled up the legs, the smolder of fire  
to battle the slow tears of lilac  
that dripped off the sky's edge  
reaching for each choked sock  
foot. The boys slid over the lawn bubble

to the pump, where it sprayed bubble  
foam. Warm vanilla cracked the mud,  
but it fought. Stronger, it adhered skin to sock  
to foot and pillaged up, a bitter fire,  
scalding skin's inside edge.  
A split of red across the lilac

ocean. The salt-sea sky leaned over lilac.  
The mud hunted the boys. The bubble.  
The white black edge. The edge  
pleaded. To lilac. To one boy. To two. To mud.  
To end the white black bleeding fire  
war, dying yarn thin sock

dark—dead. Fiercely, each boy pried off the left sock,  
husked the right. The edge stumbled, the sky fell lilac,  
blood iced mud burst. Red tears melted sapphire  
onto the naked feet. The bubble  
folded moist purple haze around each mud  
sick sock. One. Two boys ran to the edge

of the edge—no edge, but a red sock  
fallen from the laundry line in mud, a breeze of lilac  
clean. Splattered earth bubbled on a warm glowing fire.

**VANESSA STAUFFER**  
from *Chiaroscuro*

**VI. INVENTORY OF CARAVAGGIO'S POSSESSIONS IN VICOLO DI SAN  
BIAGIO, ROME, 26 AUGUST 1605 (BELLORI):**

<i>A dagger, a tall</i>	<i>wooden tripod,</i>
<i>a belt, and a door leaf</i>	<i>Item a mattress.</i>
<i>Item a blanket.</i>	<i>Item a shield.</i>
<i>Item a stool.</i>	<i>Item an old chest.</i>
<i>Item another chest</i>	<i>containing twelve</i>
<i>books. A guitar, a violin.</i>	<i>Item two swords</i>
<i>and two hand daggers.</i>	<i>Item a small</i>
<i>coffer . . . containing . . .</i>	<i>ragged breeches—</i>

*The painter was extremely negligent  
about personal cleanliness . . . for years  
ate off a portrait canvas using it  
as . . . tablecloth for breakfast lunch and dinner.*

<i>—Item cart containing</i>	<i>papers with colours.</i>
<i>Item ebony chest</i>	<i>containing a knife.</i>

**VII. SILVER BEECH**

A handle of pearled ebony, the knife  
opened with precision's razored snap,  
the grove ghosting in memory like

those lost hieroglyphs: dried sap,

my parents' initials, my own name cut  
into silvered bark—incisions they'd made  
for me years ago, before they faded

in my mind. I don't think they meant

raw scars. The moon's cool burn skewing  
shadows as I traced letters. I didn't want  
to see this again, to withstand

the absence I refused, knowing

only this touch, as if I could prove  
I'd kept the only name they let me have.

**VIII. JOHN BEHEADED, 1608**

A commission I wish he would have  
left undone: the blackened expanse shining  
with huddled bodies—the painter's

debt to knighthood, the patrons who gave  
him his name (Identity's trick is finding  
one that fits). Perhaps their gesture

pushed him to look deeper. The executioner  
bent over the saint, who'd fallen face first—  
tangled limbs & lifeless hands. What new light

in the mind's graying palette prompted,  
for the first time, the artist's name, letters  
rendered—*f Michel A*—in blood from the saint's

half-severed neck? Do we find our names  
in worlds incarnadine with sacrificial flames?

**IX. UNACKNOWLEDGED SELF-PORTRAIT, 1610**

Shades incarnadine, the sacrifice the same.

Unrivalled in both mastery & fame,

he sought again the clarity of shadow,  
the truth of light, painting David aglow,

strangely, from within, his skin the placid,  
tempered sheen of autumn's nonchromatic

dawns, outstretched arm knifing through the gloom.  
Light found another shape: a head exhumed

from dusk, dangling by its hair from David's  
hand, eyes glazed & bulging under creased lids,

thick ropes of crimson pouring from beneath  
the chin. Mouth agape, ashen skin. The death

again his own: self-portrait as Goliath's severed  
head. He reached for hell & found he couldn't leave.

**X. DAVID WITH THE HEAD OF GOLIATH**

Her calf breached, the Holstein's flanks heave,  
swollen, but they've decided not to cut

her. I am six & too young to see this.

Flared nostrils flecked with foam & she's frenzied  
half the night. I'm ferried on my father's shoulders

to the barn where she delivers into sawdust,

calf pulled from its wet blue bag, wiped under  
a flurry of hands . . . Jim steps back, halted.

Something's wrong. Skulls fused, black eyes—the calf

has two heads. My uncles shoot looks thicker  
than blood, their knowledge of survival: *Perfect*

*from the neck down.* I'm lifted, carried

beneath a frozen night so torn with stars

the air shimmers with the shotgun's blast.

**XI. NARCISSUS, 1599; LAKE ONTARIO, 1999**

The surface shimmers with the shotgun's blast:  
*he'd done a painting that was half reflection,*  
*life seen in a glass darkly . . . all you saw*  
*were shadows and some brilliant points*

*of light.* The day hard with a winter sun.  
Gusts carve the water & reflections  
shift, fractured, multiplied to fragments—  
what's enough? *The mirror had entered*

*the painting itself . . . sheet of dark water*  
stretched to fill a chasm in the shore's granite  
jigsaw. I'm crouched just like Narcissus, ever  
looking deeper, but my glass is stirred by wind

to flash & shadow: a thousand trembling faces  
in my own, the foolish excess of a thousand deaths.

## BARING DOWN

Faye E. Joost

This is my silence. Silent. Unprotected. Break me.

A separation occurs, mind from body, the lost voice.

A three year old body

I hope he thought she won't remember

A three year old body

Perhaps he thought she has no memory

Perhaps perhaps

A three year old body

easily overpowered

A three year old body

object of desire

A three year old body

easily overpowered

Fit for use.

Just a body. Just a body. Just a body.

Fit for use.

Used. Used. Used. Used. Used. Used. Used

over and again.

Three year old body. fit. fit me. use me. over and again. over and again.

fit me. use me. overpower me. use me.

Three year old body. just a body. fit.

Old body. old. body. fit me. old body. use me. old body. perhaps body.

perhaps.

body. body. body. body. body with memory. memory. body. body. memory.

body.

This is how separation occurs. This is how separation occurs. This is how separation occurs. Body stolen. Mind erased. This is how separation occurs.

And what to do, what to do. . . .

Each time we speak we are also spoken. . . .

The curse: write.

I shall write. I will not apologize for this {veiled apology}. I will not give up the power contained in my pen {surrender now take a breath pen = inanimate object, not like yourself, give credit, take credit}. I will write

→

what I know {now do it}. I will write the world {do it}. I will write every word I know, feel, hear, speak, dream, envision {do it}. I will not preface or explain anything {what I mean is I will say what I mean}. There will be no need for further silence.

Yes, but how?

It continues. As words flow out of me, I can begin to see what is underneath. Unravelling begins and speeds, but like riverrun it is maverick. Gets caught in its eddies, tangles within itself, slows, moves back, regroupes, and gains momentum. The pace if you can call it that is not steady, sometimes is not at all. The trust is that the flow will come, continue to come, as it always has when it needs to be. *It is always fluid, without neglecting the characteristics of fluid that are difficult to idealize.* A push outward, a release. What is left, what I see as I move in close is enormous.

What do you see now?

There is a there there. There is a wall between. There is light. There is darkness. There is gray. There is a between. There is oneness. There is separation. There is color. There is sound. There is fear. There is disconnection. There is wholeness. There is void. There is wholeness. There is disconnection. There is fear. There is sound. There is color. There is separation. There is oneness. There is a between. There is gray. There is darkness. There is light. There is a wall between. There is a there there.

And who are you now?

I am she who. She who knows, she who loves, she who knows how to love and be loved, she who bears, bears it, bears down, bears scars, bears hope, bears dreams. I am she who alters vision, holds up a mirror, then flips and inverts the reflection. She who remembers. She who stories. She who changes everything by being now. She who knows the only way to change the story is to tell it. I am she who. She who waves. She who bleeds in the presence of the moon. She who has already turned the world over. When she who moves. I am she who moves. She who names herself. She who spills, spills over, spills outward. She who walks. I am she who walks. And I am bare.

How does the story go again?

Upon falling I notice I don't like the feeling of falling and so reverse myself. I decide the hole no longer needs to block me and I remove it. I am not a hole, nor in a hole. I am a continuation.

This is the story.

I have a bruise where you slept on Sunday. It is a bright purple yellow, yellow like fading sun, purple specks in orange sunset. Thus I know you were here and here. If I were to trace the contours of my body . . . images float random, no, everything has a progression, connection, association, circles around, throughout, above, below, between us. Air is thick with history, future, but thickest in that moment when . . . in that time struggling to try to remember not to remember and not to forget and not to hold anything too tightly, and whether I know it or not remember or forget my body always remembers always holds everything together touching . . . like Sunday when you touched me as he did and I remembered and I liked it and it scared me. My passion wrapped in my fear, old fear, not tainted but colored, yellow the color of hope, blue the color just over the horizon towards which in every direction I am always moving, flanked by green, envy. I can not go back, backtrack, change, exchange, or even remain. There is movement in me, continuous. I had nightmares on Sunday. I don't remember them, I feel them. I woke over and again, over and again in a jerky motion struggling for breath, air thickest in that moment when . . . there is no detachment everything connected . . . touch of you bringing everything . . . I cried. You held me there, our breathing matching, our pulse matching. In your sleep you were present, trying not to know too well, but knowing. We were in close contact all night. I have a bruise where you slept on Sunday. It is a bright purple yellow, yellow like fading sun, purple specks in orange sunset. Thus I know you are here and here.

These tendrils reach out, connect and affect, are affected by, all they touch. Nothing slips by. Nothing

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Notes:

Strands from Gertrude Stein's *Everybody's Autobiography* and from Judy Grahn's "She Who" poems are woven into the fabric of this piece.

*It is always fluid.* . . . from Luce Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One."

**MELANIE KENNY**  
**Hungry as the Sea**

*Postscript to Shakespeare's Twelfth Night (II.iv.100-101)*

Dead leaves scent the hall with nutmeg.  
The soldiers are in the bunkhouse.  
The courtiers have gone home, drowsy  
with gossip from the day's unveiling.  
No one sees the slight boy-shape in the corridor:  
feet bare, boots in hand, sword left on her bed.  
She moves slow, undoing  
the past few weeks of walking like a man.  
His door carved with grinning foxes opens.  
In the sudden bright, he seems lost to her  
until his breath heats her neck:  
*My Caesario, my delicious boy—*

Bodies in navy-issue broadcloth,  
plain white shirt fronts, breeches both.  
Before he knew her truths, the same  
thin black leather belts clasped their waists.  
She could not have him, she had thought,  
only gleam a bit by living in his clothes—  
the world on her skin just as it must be against his.  
Fingers on brass buttons fumble for the known difference.  
He unbinds her chest, spins her from male to female.  
His mouth is softer than hers, softer than any woman's.  
In the tremendous burst of feasting,  
the wreck returns to her.  
She feels the ocean pulling within her belly.  
*I have swallowed the sea, Orsino.*  
She bites his shoulder. He sucks her salt.  
*Mine is all.*

**REESE THOMPSON**

**Castrati Songs of Death and Redemption**

I.

I took a scissors to my tongue to keep from revealing the crime  
and its victim.

I cut the ground in a graveyard and called it my wife, a slot to  
drop my grain in.

I kept a kennel in the catacombs, built my house from the  
tombstones, and gain  
my salvation by recreating what I am not and cannot love. I took  
a scissors to my tongue.

I took a scissors to my tongue as though the act would take back  
the things I've done:

the damage from playing pedestrian to the scrutinizing eye of the  
scavengers that alight

the benches of playgrounds, gambling on patience—when only  
the innocent are contrite.

A leaf sprouts and Spring yields what I cannot, what I could've. I  
took a scissors to my tongue.

I took a scissors to my tongue to keep the confession sound,  
planted a bulb in my lung

I water with wine and razor blades. My song is a bouquet of  
blood, my song is a spider.

A rose rises from inside to bloom in my mouth—I bite hard on  
the word and it withers.

I cultivate the ground of a graveyard, and still fail to wake. I took  
a scissors to my tongue

and the rose in my mouth only a lisp could pronounce—a word,  
a rose among

the dandelions. A spray of blood in the washbasin when I say it;  
and when I sing

I fleck blood to the staves, a blood alphabet, a handful of scabs.  
The notes I wring

from my lungs, the rank washcloth of my heart, are petals falling  
from my tongue.

II.

My mouth is a well that can catch the tears you cry.  
Deep down is a bucket that carries my tears—two coins.  
I weep in my hands, cupped like a box, and close them.  
I keep it deep down, clanging in pocket change—a sirloin.

They robbed the house, they set it on fire. I am on fire.  
Orphans are ageless, forever finished in a second. I am no liar.  
I go from adolescence to infancy, no one is the wiser.

They wean the beast and put out his fire. I am extinguished.  
Manhood is a fraud, the stuff of myth. Virtue impoverished.  
I grope the dark for a promise. God, doggy and devilish.

My mouth is a well that carries the golden coin and the wish.  
I'll sing a lullaby of lilacs in their slow unfolding, a kiss.  
I keep my heart in my hands, cupped like a box, and close them.  
I sleep down inside and wake up changed, gripping the new stem.

III.

I blew a crater in the graveyard and swept the residue up with a rake.  
I made wind-chimes with what the dogs left behind,  
and listened to the breeze pronounce the names I reworded.

I am God's concubine. Love is my currency.

I made such music—me and my tintinnabulation—I might be  
inclined to favor it better  
in the finished version, after the reassembling of so many skeletons:  
that error of God's

I was good enough to correct.

**JOSEPHINE PALLOS**  
**Going Forward to Meet It**

*from the travel diary of Noah's wife*

**April 9**

During the first week it was good to see  
the tops of things disappear.  
I felt smug standing on the deck, arms folded,  
as the waters rose and the boat,  
sealed in pitch, lifted up like an awkward pelican.

But now I haven't slept in days  
and I no longer worry about the rain but instead  
the mold, persistent, inching over flanks and hooves.  
We lie side by side in the hay—  
Yahweh save us, there is hay everywhere—  
lying without touching.  
The darkness moves, takes breath in pairs.

**April 16**

Noah's withdrawn, talks only of the basil and the dill drowning,  
the rosemary and thyme reaching up, tangling like seaweed.  
What will be left when the water recedes?  
Crustaceans sucking on the bark of cedars and pines?  
Will the hills have washed into the valleys,  
leaving the land as gently sloped as a collar bone?

**April 25**

Each day we shovel dung and feathers overboard.  
We drink rain from oak barrels.  
Our store of grain is clumped and mealy,  
but the tubers seem inspired by the humidity.  
The sweet potato and the turnip are trying to take root,  
excited, clawing into the dirt between the planks.  
We are less optimistic.  
We huddle, we pray.

We do not discuss those left behind,  
aardvark, possum, child—  
all whose lungs had once been sleek fish  
working behind the ribs  
only to float now salty and still.

**May 8**

This morning, a silence.  
The llamas and the penguins froze,  
and in the rafters, the crests of the black palms lifted.  
Noah swung the swollen hatch open  
to find the sun had returned like a letter  
and he went forward to meet it,  
moving stiffly across the warped planks of the bow.

**May 15**

That little bird finally flew back to us  
with its burden of olive branch.  
Then after lunch the first hill appeared  
like a loaf of bread, steaming,  
and as I write I can't help but remember  
my sister's sweaty thighs  
and the mossy head of her son  
crowning between them.

**JEN HAWKINS**

**Stop - Gap**

**I.**

Almost before I piss baby-blue,  
the boy is given up.

For nine months, waterlogged,  
weepy-croched,  
I lie and lie,  
I eulogize.

I dig a carpet trench,  
bed to toilet, toilet, bed,  
insert, excrete,  
gnashing—teeth all in me—

I may be digesting or dragging my yolk behind me.

**II.**

Incubator, floor drain, biohazard  
stall, IV, bed-gird,  
utilities.  
The steel is  
stainless.

**III.**

After, I stink  
of nurture, as if rolled in good mother's musk.  
I shed  
relics on kotex and wide rule.  
I take  
pills for the heart in my head.

**IV.**

You, husband, will cheer me  
on saline.  
You will take me to the ocean.

But there is this

Slur.

A gristle.

It is a mobius strip, one-sided.  
Absurd as singular water,

broken water.  
There is this umbilical strand,  
taut as fishgut fishline  
strung like a gag of blue cherubs, choker beads.

It is a tentacled minus  
spine extracted  
skeleton key to a prolapsed gate.

And an eel  
and its hollow  
and a vomit tube  
is me.  
The absence called mouth  
cavity cut like woman  
nothing but throat  
is me.

**V.**

You, husband, will take me to the ocean.  
There was a boy here, no more.

You, dear, will firk me out of my shell.  
I will still be  
choking on my pearl.

**KATIE BODE-LANG**

**She's heard it said that if it weren't for the sky  
we would go mad**

This will be the blue tear in the sky that lets you see the moons of  
Jupiter with clarity,  
the light ringing Saturn, our piece of green and blue seeking heat, the  
small system spinning  
30,000 light-years from the center of the Milky Way, the trillion stars in  
its spiral arms.

Her mother writes: I fear the gray bowl about us,  
the wooden spoon you put to it. You have such clear eyes.  
You have seen Mars and the dark opening  
between his shoulders. You are the girl who pulls galaxies  
from his sternum and lets them fire in your hands.

This will be the rip that shows you how many light-years across the  
galaxy is,  
how many galaxies just like it hover with gravity close to our bush of  
stars,  
this will shoot you past Andromeda and into the Virgo supercluster.

I want you to let the Black-Eye Galaxy go.  
Let skin be as hollow and as dark as the barrel  
of your telescope. Stop polishing your lenses, cutting mirrors,  
seeing yourself as the *Ocean of Storms*.  
A girl cannot be the moon.

You cover a piece of sky with your thumb and with the swirls of your skin  
hide  
just one star. This will be the stone through the window that gives you  
galaxies like sand.  
Where there is one star, there are the shells of a thousand galaxies. Your  
thumbnail will fill  
with points of light. You will see galaxies of galaxies. You will want to  
cut your ear off.

Girl, we can see 3,000 stars above the horizon on a good night.  
We can name the craters of the moon. We can calculate the  
distance  
to Delphinus. Do not forget the call  
of gravity. Do not draw constellations from his back.  
No longer be a burning point.

**KEVIN SMULLIN BROWN**  
**Three Paragraphs (To Thiebaud)**

**1**

Wayne, they love you for your cakes,  
Aligned, on platters, round and sliced,  
Wedges of marbled cakes on plates,  
Your cakes and your hot dogs,  
Aligned, on platters, elonged and shiny.  
Hot dogs and cakes. You painted them  
As if they should be eaten. I've seen toddlers  
Reach for the crusted frosting, the yellow  
Ooze of mustard. Me, I want to take a knife  
To the gallery, but mostly I want to know  
Why, after seeing your round, tall  
Shadowless cakes, I feel like every building  
I enter should smudge my hands with frosting.  
We live in hot dogs and cakes, but sometimes  
We forget.

**2**

You painted a canal.  
You served in the Army with Ronald Reagan.  
You worked for Disney; you drew Mickey and Minnie  
Simultaneously, at age 15, for Disney.  
You painted a canal:  
It's there, like a horseshoe across the canvas,  
Surrounded by fields the colors of Key West.  
And the canal, its perfect racetrack path of water,  
Is watched by one lonely tree on the levee.  
An oak. This is California. Disney. Reagan. Thiebaud.  
Thank you for the oak.

**3**

A girl I once kissed  
Took a walk in her neighborhood,  
Oaks and elms, sidewalks swept,  
An ice-cream parlor, little-leaguers by day,  
Nights of families and young couples, watersweat on wax cups,  
She walked past a house, paintings on every visible wall.  
A man walked past her, 'Come inside. I'm Wayne's son. He'll be back  
soon, he's at the grocery store.'  
What does Wayne Thiebaud buy at the grocery store?

*(three acts)*

**I. A note to the Reader from the Poet**

You should know that Mnemosyne,  
the Greek goddess of memory,  
has eight daughters, the muses. Their

daddy is Zeus: the king, lightning  
tossler, the rapist. They approach  
artists with tales and not until

the artist creates something (“how  
can we know the dancer from the  
dance?”) will the muse say whether the

tale is true. Euterpe is the  
muse of non-religious song. She  
is known as the “pleasure giver.”

**II. Mnemosyne’s Monologue**

*(In direct address to all)*

*dawn*

Remember:

Euterpe could no longer give you pleasure when she became deaf.  
No more quivering pleasure in your ears.

*day*

I was watching her there, aging, aged; I was watching her grow  
into my profile. Her skin was pressing out into my  
inevitable shape and she knew it. And now, I tell all of  
you of my horror; I was silent then because, you see, she  
couldn’t give herself gifts anymore.

*evening*

Does her memory sing to her? I’ve watched her imploring it to,  
immersing her body in the April Atlantic. The ocean was  
our true apothecary; it was the salve for cuts and rashes  
and burns. But it was none of these epidermal ailments  
that made her feet fall up when the water was above her  
waist.

*night*

What I understand is that she isn't like you. She is one of the  
universal daughters (you know them: Echo, Persephone),  
resonating in her own fault-filled gifts.

*dawn*

Remember:

Euterpe's maternal heritage was limp, slack as Apollo's cock,  
once she became deaf.

*day*

I was watching her push adolescence, roll it, oftimes ascending,  
but sometimes she would rest and suss out her father  
from the grace notes, search fermatas for space, the air  
flooding her lungs. This is what you all heard during  
your first orgasms and then she pushed on.

*evening*

But of what difference is her memory to her now? There was a  
time when (even though she was opposed to the boys her  
playmate wanted and the worms that she chased) they  
sat together on the pavement. She stuck her fingers in  
the scrape, trying to extract flecks of tar and she told me  
later that she had pondered the risk of play.

*night*

What is memory, now, to Euterpe but a boulder? There is no  
tincture for rolling, falling down, perpetual knee-scrapes.

### **III. Euterpe's Song**

*(a reply to Mnemosyne)*

Mama, Mama,  
this story is  
still green on my  
ear and you'll know  
soon if it's true.

**KATE UMANS**

**The House in the Cliff**

Optical illusion: now domestic, now unmade  
as the eye chooses foreground, subject.  
Either way, there's triumph in the face

of windows—the stopped moment  
of becoming or letting go, held  
in amber light. Above, the chimney

surfaces like a snorkel through rock and moss.  
What's shelter will not rest in its small purpose.  
It feels the pull of centuries, inherits

the erosion nightmare of the mountains.  
What's rock cannot ignore the inner  
chambers, the bloodstream rush of people.

In the midst of remembering  
and forgetting, the house (or rather:  
windows, stairs, facade) stays steadfast

as a hermit crab, carrying on its back the burden  
of its safety. It holds its soft  
divisions as horizons do, past argument.

**KATE UMANS**

**Literal**

The geese are bolted  
to the green. They've reached  
consensus, common ground

on winter grass. To make feast of survival  
never occurs to them—they'd make  
survival of a feast. They're literal,

bird for bird. The sky is empty  
of each one. We also grace  
what we can graze

but have so much in mind.  
Forgetting is a feat.  
Shut out by memory, that dollhouse

fully furnished in a scale  
we can't inhabit, we're still entranced.  
Love too plays tricks. In trains

stopped side by side, motion in one  
misleads the other. So much  
descends with purpose.

The flight we know, but not  
to hunger accurately:  
the sparrow's eye the exact

size of a seed, the geese  
offering the grass no tenderness  
it does not offer back.

**ERIC PIDKAMENY**

**Aubade**

It is 8 o'clock and I may have already won.  
It is the day of one thousand fallings.

We go out toward scarring, in the morning wind,  
we go out with bandages, with great heaps  
of cloth to let go of, we go out to release our skins.

It is the night of one thousand fires.  
You may already have been a winner, a friend.  
It is the morning wind. You may already be a Socialist.  
Don't look now, but you may already be one of a thousand.

It is 8 o'clock and there are only symbols today.  
There are only exclamations, wind: pfff or shhhh or kwwwaa.  
These are not letters. It is the day of all-ins  
and there is only the Property of the US Postal Service,  
and the Soviets. Today one thousand fires may start.  
You may start a scar on yourself today, you may be falling.

In the nighttime, there is no way to tell about gender.  
The cloth, the Socialists; there is no way to tell  
what it is like. It is like being a symbol. It is the only exclamation  
we can make. There is already a fire, a wind toward one thousand  
releases. You may have already been friends with the US Postal Service.  
You are not a winner, you may have already had letters, you are all-in.  
The Soviets in great heaps, falling, only properties, there is no such thing  
as the night of one thousand fires. There is no way to tell your skin to  
exclaim.

We are one thousand friends, scarring symbols, repeating a single  
exclamation. Pfff. It is like a fire, only not looking, not telling,  
releasing the day, the nighttime, the kwwwaa. You may already have been  
what it is like. You are only a friend, a morning, a property of winning,  
a Soviet gender. You are your fallings, your day of one thousand  
exclamations.

You may already be a fire, a wind symbol. There is no way you are not  
starting.

Today might be already the Property of the US Postal Service, but don't  
look now.

Your letters are scarring. The night is one thousand skins, the making of  
cloth.

→

We are the morning wind, great heaps of fire, friends of scars, single  
Socialists. You wake up.

It may be 8 o'clock, you may be a property of the nighttime, releasing,  
going out, shhhh.

There is no way to tell what it is like to have already been a skin, a  
letter, a falling fire.

**NICHOLAS GILEWICZ**

**Radio Poem #18**

Explosion on board, baby on board,  
plead me out not guilty, please,  
the talks were broken, oh!

Take your part of meeting, go home,  
kill some people, then blame Britain,  
I blame Britain, myself,  
with justice sifting in my arms,

I know the embattled must end,  
the council will let me have my arms back,  
although I've learned pedal autonomy.

Devolve the power down,  
the feet are the seat of the soul.  
Feel it, fell it, gummy paths,  
kicks to groins. Don't deny it:  
I fight dirty.

I live in the North, there is no federation here.  
I believe in devolution, in the active retardation  
one finds in a total eclipse of the moon,  
the blood disappearing into the pupa  
of the Druids who demonstrate:  
their burning prayers and runes.