



POETRY

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POEMS

LES MURRAY

The Invention of Pigs

Come our one great bushfire
pigs, sty-released, declined to quit
their pavements of gravel and shit.
Other beasts ran headlong, whipping

off with genitals pinched high.
Human mothers taught their infants creek-dipping.
Fathers galloped, gale-blown blaze stripping
grass at their heels and on by

too swift to ignite any houses.
One horse baked in a tin shed,
naked poultry lay about dead
having been plucked in mid flight

but where pigs had huddled
only fuzzy white hoofprints led
upwind over black, B B B
and none stayed feral in our region.

ARTHUR SZE

Kintsugi

He slips on ice near a mailbox —
no gemsbok leaps across the road —
a singer tapped an eagle feather on his shoulders —
women washed indigo-dyed yarn in this river, but today gallium
and germanium particles are washed downstream —
once they dynamited dikes to slow advancing troops —
picking psilocybin mushrooms and hearing cowbells in the mist —
as a child, he was tied to a sheep and escaped marauding soldiers —
an apple blossom opens to five petals —
as he hikes up a switchback, he remembers undressing her —
from the train window, he saw they were on ladders cutting fruit off
cacti —
in the desert, a crater of radioactive glass —
assembling shards, he starts to repair a gray bowl with gold lacquer —
they ate psilocybin mushrooms, gazed at the pond, undressed —
hunting a turkey in the brush, he stops —
from the ponderosa pines: *whoo-ah, whoo whoo whoo* —

SAWNIE MORRIS

Clothespins on the Line

look like birds. Scrawny
winter birds balanced by two sarong
tail feathers. Some look west,
others north-
east toward the
mountain. Stiff in the cold &
remote. They haven't been loved
enough. They grow
thinner and thinner in their woody
streaked feathers, held together only by
the exposed spiral of internal
organs. After a while, the sun comes
out and all of the birds, clutching wire, turn
an electric silver.
This is hopeful,, but doesn't last. Clouds
take a break from one another,,
re-
convene. A half-inch of
snow is rolled out with perfect evenness
across the picnic table, as though
someone made a blank
for what was
coming. The nice thing
about clothespin birds is they don't

“excrete.”

Jays & grosbeaks & finches

& mourning doves + ravens leave
their paintings

everywhere , on benches & limbs ,, , on fallen
pine needle fascicles \// feldspar & quartz _ _ _

though all has now become
gesso beneath snow. After a certain amount of

feeling
hopelessly under-

accomplished, you look at your nails
and want to
paint them. Is this how birds

feel? No. Birds fly
and don't look

down. Or, they sit ``” amid branches
and peck at the brittle waffled bark

& tiny bugs buried
in the marrow. .< sszt sszt sszt .< You, too,

peck. Familiar letters on the keys have lost
their definition and resemble finger-

tip-size daubs of bird paint on back-
lit platforms. You recall the *s e & m*

only via entrenched neural pathways ,

while the *l* and *c* continue to
morph into tiny archaic
symbols. As though, the unconscious
is forming a message. (Always “it” has something
unearthly to say.) Except
the unconscious *is*
the earth, it’s just we
don’t know how she does it.

St. Thomas of Aquinas got a delirium
hit of that at the end
and decided to marry it. Each day
your thumbs grow paler, nails coarser, evolving
toward the ptero-

dactyl: part reptile, part bird.
As a child

pterodactyls scared you, which meant
they had your attention. Refusing to stay
in the lineage, they became
their own form.

They had an iguana for a father
and a pelican for a mom,
crispy and dipped in molasses.
If you were big enough

you could eat them
the way some people eat grass-
hoppers. Compulsive hole-
punchers, if less manic
could be sculptors,
though it requires *d-e-t-a-c-h-m-e-n-t*
to see it that way , , if you are
a lilac leaf sketching outside
the library window. What are those books
doing in there together ?! Nothing !
When a new one arrives, they fall in
love,, one by one. Inside their covers,
a million leaves, each
w/ black growth. A pattern of fungus ,
the shed skin of snakes & dna
traces. Like bird poop,
but more orderly and the message is see-
through. Don't you
wish you could lift the letters
and release them halfway
back to
the liquid state ,, , before they got connected to
the circuitry? It might be kind of
relaxing. You might be

as good of a
painter

as a cuckoo bird. A few nights ago
you dreamt you were very pregnant &

in need of a place to give birth. Your boyfriend
had left you and 2 therapists

let you live w/ them
because you resembled their daughter —

though they were suspicious. Who can blame them?
As for your nails,

find a mani-
curist, someone who knows what they are

doing. Druids never lived here,
that was Europe, but you

and the sage-
brush

are distantly related via microbial
ancestors; in spite of yourself, you are

surrounded
by family. \\\

S. J. FOWLER

Violence on the Internet

A circle.
What was needed was a circuit,
and a good operating system.

What's within is without being seen
to be so.
Optical anomaly as unexceptional.

Four left's a square.
One way turning system
until it becomes its other way.

A passive insistence on multiples
until that divorces itself,
becomes single.

A single pitch made up of the
sounds of multiples.

Conduction, instrumental absence.
Fundamentals establish separate
planets.
Similarity wars upon their lines,
planes.

Said well, here opens, his, sits
at its bottom.
The bodies.

Spoke well, agreed in kind, general.
But the way of its expression
requires hurt and then, treatment
of skin for leather clothes or whatever,
it's old, sometimes, often.

Depending on the question, it can be
the answer.

One shouldn't be proud to not
have it.

A knee, an elbow, three arms up.
Then a last one, a fourth.

Last and happiest, willing, fully
skin end.

The whey, foam, on the head
of the safest society in human
civilization.

Amnesia to people
who will actually
harm and hurt.

DOUG ANDERSON

Lea's Bottle Ship Poetics

She sits there on that high hill just sits there and lets things pass through her until one snags and she fits it into the pattern of this fine mesh of what spirit? But, ah, there's a cowboy hat and a cherry bomb tattoo and it snags and what she lets through may, I say, *may* be caught second time around like that oil pan off an old Hudson or that artificial leg toward morning she's collected some radio signals from a dead ship and a janitor's song and some folderol from a church picnic with iced tea fried chicken collards and a whole lot of stentorian god-speak with apple pie and ice cream. I'll be damned if all those things aren't moving around in one another's magnetic fields, some kind of counterpoint that happens each time she breathes it's a mobile only no wires there's a piece of mirror turning on a spider web and now she's a signal beacon says come on up I've got something to read and somehow it all works. Then she pulls this silk thread and it becomes a form.

GEORGE BOWERING

Taking Off from an Old WCW Poem

Imagine that — my last words
might have been spoken to the dog, she
who saved my life, it has been said, spoken
with no thought
of reply nor of understanding, a genial insult
maybe, a philosophical conundrum
posed aeons before any household pet ever
turned an ear. In the ambulance I made no remark
about trees nor how tired I was of them,
and in the second ambulance our dog's heart
beat hard with terror.

Sense of Time

Being in a coma can play
havoc with your sense of time. It can
turn your eyes from brown to blue. It can
grow hair on your belly, it can get you lost
between bedroom and office. If you are to
live in extra innings, you'll have to watch the corners,
step around bad things, ignore insults and welcome
loving hands that sculpt you in your chair. Being
refrigerated and put to sleep, dropping out of time,
you have to save your humor and guard it, a precious
trove to bring out as needed, white strips on the
road flying beneath your vehicle, eat them up, wake
to a busy underground world, where people in
body bags keep passing by, tilted toward you know where.
Where half the people in your life have gone, dissolving
your sense of time, which was never supposed to have
an end.

Any

Fresh out of the icebox, this brain looks
the wrong way from time to time, and misses
the cat stepping by, Gerry on the screen
laboring to tell the nuances his pink matter
almost notices, he's not my brother, not really
my close friend, just my necessary neighbor
on a bicycle going by like a whistle from
the lips of someone I trust. He has a peculiar
skeleton arranged his own way in the mind's pasture.
We were as they say "of an age" and so inter-
twine somehow, though I wanted to work when
he wanted to play. That long nose is in my life
and in my writing and so is the Okanagan River.
I sometimes get to the river when I am at work,
the sun on my back not the ink in my pen.
There was, when I was last in the Okanagan Valley, a
cat with big paws in the neighborhood, I was told,
fires I could see along the hillside, stunning heat
from the sky, enough to thaw any brain.

AMY BEEDER

*A French Piano Tuner & a One-Eyed
Glassblower Walk into a Bar*

Would you rather hear the louche pun drawn
from *glory hole*, *lip wrap* or *fingering*

or hear a tiny hammer striking wire?

Would you rather see the molten birthing glass?

Seat Eros next to Kronos, for the banter. *I heard
she's yet unplowed — I heard your quiver dangled down —*

*I heard you dwell in borrowed forms — love's nothing
but glimmer-to-wither, dawn's fireflies expired.*

In this place we sift & bounce the words like dice
thrice dip a pipe into the magma, *o my stars*.

Lear & Gloucester walk into a bar
debating again the color of bluffs or moors

or cormorants: *like craquelure like damp tea leaf
driftwood no, peat steam no, brined sand-apple ink*

Were all your letters in fact suns?
Forgotten, after all that trouble —

Are those bellows blowing some?
A field of broken bottles, fragments blue.

A tune invented to divert a girl.

DANIELLE CHAPMAN

Catch-All

Mother Dear, never apologize for nettles
I yanked in fury
from Lottie Shoop's side yard —

they stung me into seeing
fairy mosses lilypad
her middened juniper,

the quivering gobble of her chin,
teacup clicking dentures as she sprang
up into her wattle hut
and broke a rib

of aloe vera —
gel belling the top of that claw goblet.

It didn't cool the sting, and yet, noticing
sunshine thumbing plums in a string
catch-all —

I was already well.

Huptemugs

There's a spirit in me that admits no weakness.
Is it the best of me or worst?
Cow daisies burn their stars into the stalled air of pastures.
No one else cares whether they'll last.

I shirk the sick and go out to pick flowers,
Bushels of the tough and prickly-legged,
Whichever I can pull out of the gulch,
And push them into thunder-pitchers.
An invalid in a peignoir pulls the covers over her head
In the high cherry bed great-grandmother had made
To match the chest of drawers.

Solitudes gather under the Beau D'arc.
I ache for the meanness, the glorious meanness
That knocked croquet balls into its soft meal trunk,
To hear the thwack of that mallet,
To be it, as it cleanly cracks and lets the other ball be gone.

Acquisitive gall made my people call themselves victorious.
They thought they won the Mexican War, among others.
One ancestor drove his bayonet into the dirt when he returned —
This tree is what took root and bloomed,
Though Beau D'arcs grow complex in illness.
The locusts have chewed its thatch into fretwork,
Its leaves fluted crisp, poxed yellowish, kissed by the worm.

Huptemugs believed that train rides to the capital to hear
Charlemagne singing Franz would cure the soul
(As venison is cured) against life's turmoil —
They could not tolerate complaints of the feet,
Corns and hammertoes, evidence of rot.

If generous you might have called us committed to transcendence,
Though who that ever fought her way into an opera box

Ever let the arias consign her to a fate of constant care?
There is a spirit in me that admits no weakness.
When it sings, the rest of me despairs.

MOMINA MELA

prayer is better than sleep

*And as to the poets — it is those straying in Evil that follow them:
Do you not see that they wander about bewildered in every valley?
And that they say what they practice not?
— Qur'an 26:224–226*

The man I confused Allah for speaks into the microphone while the angels on my shoulders chew a mouthful of my hair. I wake up to a severed goat head and look at it hard enough to remember the animal in its entirety, a functional thing. The Saudis have built skyscrapers taller than the mountains in Makkah. This is a sign of the apocalypse; we worry with our backs to each other and look for Isa in the faces of men who appear to spin gold straight from the guttural source. I repeat the word *mustaqbil* like a new prayer; when the dog barks at a brick wall *mustaqbil*, when anemones collapse back into gothic buds *mustaqbil*, when I wet my arms to my elbows in the sink *mustaqbil*. All while Israfil kicks his feet against a stone wall and cleans his trumpet with each utterance. In the village, three men dragged a boy into our orchards and beat him to a pulp. The woman who eloped was strangled and thrown into the river. Pickpockets robbed the mourners at my uncle's funeral — *mustaqbil mustaqbil mustaq* — my throat is infected by the thick-tongued promise; each night diluted into its prior belly. I use language to build the gardens I'm destined to be expelled from, each imagined rose rendered true.

JEFFREY YANG

The Grass

Bouteloua black
 grama grass red
chino side-
oats blue grama grass
 hairy buffalo-
 grass toboso three-awn
land's dawn 且 sun
over sand, tumble
wind-
 mill witch- cup- saltgrass
plains love- indiangrass, prairie
cordgrass, pink pappusgrass, sprangle-
 top green knotroot
 bristle, bluestem, tangle-
head, sacaton
panicles
 open, golden drop-
seed blooms desert winter-
 grass, awns twist, un-
twist, *such*
syllables flicker
 out of grass
 : Nanissáanah
thirst, ghost dance
 native
spirits, active
roots, footstalks
to soil as to site, stems
 bend, range-
 lands wave, seiche
fields sway, clouds
pass over-
 grazed grass
staked, fenced
 dries, weakens, dies,

fallen
 crowns, the grasslands
what
 comes to pass, ranch-
hand lands, live-
 stock livelihood
wildlife gone, displaced, migrations
impeded, scales im-
balanced
 the years
 spread, each *itself*
hitched to everything else
in the universe
 nodes
 hollowed, drought-
land years, drops
 on the hardpan
 nature
is endless
 regeneration
trichloris, muhly, switch-
grass, wind misses
 沙沙 *shasha* through the pass-
es, whispering seeds
 will pass, will pass
 within leaves
listening
 grasses, *not only*
the revelation
but the nature behind
 to sustain it, over-
land grasses seeds
spread and grow, rhizome,
stolon to sod, curly
 mesquite cotton-

top, draft
to draft 草
ten thousand
 grasses, 草 dancing
culms 草 of grass
florescence, sheaths
and blades whorl
flower to
 flower, wild
 grass, knowing
wind strips, slips
of time, the leaves
words weave, un-
 weave the
grass

DAVID TOMAS MARTINEZ

Love Song

Though I am more Che than Chavez,
I do not apologize
to you. Or to the state
of California. The IRS. New York. That administrator I bit
in the third grade,
who was delicious
and sweet.
I, oh,
so cold.
In the mind, the Dionysian defiles walls
the Apollonian protects.
I am always looking
to take something
down. Usually it's me.
Two bulls stand on a hill. The younger says,
Father, let's run down and fuck a cow.
The father, wiser, longer in the horn,
higher on the grass,
reminds his son how Moses was also horned, beamed with light,
that to handle a massive snake,
to charm Pharaoh, to steal fire, to fly, to unzip
the sea, is to speak
and not tap vanity.
Moses descended Mount Sinai with cracked slabs
and saw a golden calf. The father said to the young bull,
No son, let's strut down and fuck them all.
Thus begins the beef between bird and bee,
the isthmus isolating
order from chaos.

My mind is made up
of so many different cuts
of meat.

My marbles stay
as mixed
as my metaphors. As my myths.
As myself.

At parties my favorite
icebreaker involves asking strangers
to describe themselves
with three words. Their descriptions
are a slipping

away to change clothes. Identity and irony
neatly knit in an ugly Christmas sweater.

Sometimes I feel so Socratic: oft-laureled, poison-palmed,
toga-partied, exasperated by the masses:
I wouldn't have guessed ambitious.
Free-spirited, you don't say.

Other times I feel like the woman
rambling among the vapors escaping the ground
in Iceland's volcanic canyon,
making a bus
an em dash
in a rest stop,
where some fifty-odd persons
searching for themselves
in true existentialism

are yellow lupines growing
on the side of the road. An epiphany can
not be achieved,

as a cedar waxwing
cannot be more cedar
qua waxwing. Eventually what we're looking
for appears. Sometimes incitation opens
at the bottom of a straw, a spoon, a barrel of wine,
the windfall happens while eating farfalle,
while flipping through
The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo. At the moon
me the animal roofs
atop brownstones, sin vergüenza.
Upwards our eyes scamper,
a reflex action,
when inserting an object
in the mouth,
even when the object
is a gun. Over hills a road erodes the way home.
Only after the Coast Guard
has readied a helicopter,
do we
descend the cold volcano in Eldgjá
to realize we are the woman
in the search party looking
for ourselves.
to poetry.
In moments of ecstasy
we are lifted



At the shore of the Aegean Sea
or at the banks

of the river Evros,

he loosened his sandals
while Pegasus stamped the soil,
crushing reeds

and hoofing away
stray wood. The sun bandaged
light on a sky

that would not heal.
Perseus,

with eyes heavenward,
formed the shapes of gods into clouds,

slipped his hand
into the woven sack,
and felt the flint

of primed snakes. He thought,
But it is the cold weight of scales that protects.

As sure as a child,
he lined leaves rocked

to sleep by salt
water waves

for a bed,
so as not to,

with sand,

bruise Medusa's
or with hubris,
disunited head. One day,
like a beam through skylight,
we realize
life is a puddle jumper of tragedy.
Some stones sink fast
yet still hold light. So phantom are a statue's
busted arms and toes. Everything must go.
And yet I still hanger hope
when shopping the racks of discount
stores. Veni vidi vici when I see Vince,
freeze when I see the coiled coif
of Versace's emblem. Like Sisyphus,
errybody think
they headed for the top.
Sing, *started from the bottom,*
to my reflection
in the dressing room mirror,
now we here boy
when I remember
that
Oh my god Becky, look at her butt
passes the Bechdel test.
I have eaten from the tree the fig that sullies and seen
that the meat's not always

fair.

I was,
like Perseus
and Sir Mix-a-Lot,
born by a riv
of water,
felled by pride when
a brown boy, tattooed with age,
obsessed with fame, took his talents
to Vermont to kiss trees and tap
syrup from the sap.
There and there
and there, he kissed. Here and here
he drank.
So drunk he hugged an old
white woman
off the ground. None of the gods
I love
love me. To be tipsy
is to leverage one's self.
Or so I'm told. The pulley
is considered civilization's
highest achievement.
Icarus
killed himself
being lifted.

JESSICA GREENBAUM

Route 684, Southbound Rest Stop

So you see why it could not have been a more humble moment.
If there was any outward sign of regalia
It might have been the twilight crowning of the day, just then,
A perfect moment of dusk, but changing, as a wave does
Even as you admire it. Because the southbound stop
Mirrors the one northbound where we so often find ourselves
At the beginning, southbound's return holds the memory
Of northbound's setting-out, and the grassy median between
With its undisturbed trees defines an elusive strip of the present
Where no one lives. After twenty-eight years of the trip,
It's like two beakers of colored water — one green, one blue —
Have poured themselves back and forth, because
On one side we are tinted by remembering the other.
But this aspect of the journey, at least, we know we will repeat.
As dusk cohered that moment — aquas, pinks, violets —
Just at that moment as I was returning to the car
A woman came the other way, her two young daughters
Holding her hands, and the gloaming sparkled around them
So that I froze, as they were backlit, starry,
They were the southbound reminder of who I had been beginning
The trip. She didn't look like me, but what I did recognize
Was her clarity of purpose, in what Sharon Olds called
the days of great usefulness, making life as nice
As she could for them, always writing the best story,
And also, beneath her skin, living with delight as quiet
As the shoots anchoring grass beneath the earth.
I walked back to my car. My husband sat in the driver's seat,
Our weekend's luggage thrown in back.
Tell me we really had those girls, I said,
and that they held my hands like that. When I got home
I pictured her helping them each into bed — I knew it was
Later than she had hoped — then reading
Each section of the paper's terrible news, finally alone.

RAE ARMANTROUT

Twilight

Where there's smoke
there are mirrors

and a dry ice machine,
industrial quality fans.

If I've learned anything
about the present moment

•

But who doesn't
love a flame,

the way one leaps
into being

full-fledged,
then leans over

to chat

•

Already the light
is retrospective,
sourceless,

is losing itself
though the trees
are clearly limned.

Pinocchio

Strand. String.
In this dream,

the paths cross
and cross again.

They are spelling
a real boy

out of repetition.

•

Each one
is the one

real boy.

Each knows
he must be

wrong
about this, but

he can't feel
how.

•

The fish
and the fisherman,

the pilot,
the princess,

the fireman and
the ones on fire.

Natural Histories

I

Since the irrational
“because I said so”
start,

they’d had their differences:

color that isn’t really
color, spin
that isn’t spin

because attitude’s
best
when it has no content.

Ask a physicist
what “charge” is;

he’ll say your question
makes no sense.

2

Word had it
that if they surrendered

their feckless ways

and their lives
with no end,

if they joined up,
they would get a head,

something to speak for them:
The head says,

“I don’t want to die.”

Says,

“I am all
alone here.”

MARIANNE BORUCH

Keats Is Coughing

Everything is made of everything.

—Leonardo da Vinci

I found Rome in the woods.

Fair to admit it's mostly
tundra to the west in the park, past Toklat
the Denali I revised, low grasslands
engineered to freeze deep
by October — this being Alaska — the great

Tabularium close to the Temple of
Castor and Pollux I rebuilt that same summer —
not superimposed, exact as any scheme

in secret — the Arch of Septimius Severus at the gravel bar
where fox drank from a river turned stream,
a Theater of Marcellus near
the ranger station where one raven,

such a brat,

complained of

my Circus Maximus, Trajan's Column,
my Baths of Diocletian,

too many spots
soaked in unpronounceable Latin.

I really did, I shouldered bits of it,
a ruin-hushed haunted business, my brain
a truck bed, a lift,
pulleys big as a whale's heart,
expletives of cheap wonder all over
my woodlot
and expanse.

One self-anoints to embellish
day, years, life thus far, and think oneself so . . .

Then busted —
by a raven!

Well, that's memory for you, that's so-called
civilization for you, to layer up,
to redo the already done.

I mean it's a fact, the puny life span we're allotted.
And proof — Denali in August, fireweed,
spunky scrawny first Latinate — *Erechtites hieracifolia* —

giving off flowers to mark
what weeks left, little
time bomber, time traveler, ancient
slips red-flagging the countdown to winter
by climbing its own stalk.

Something perverse about that.
Something perfectly fiendishly self-conscious about that.

•

From the start perverse, any premise.
Ask ... We can't know. To be compelled

makes an occasion. Rome's grand
past horrific, fire and ash, swamp into bog, lust
and bloodlust —

The Alaska Range dreams lurid as Rome,
the worst
way below being fire, summer snow at night
off the highest peaks by noon
as distant from our cabin as the size
of a hand if I

held up the one with
an eye in the middle

to know *how this works*. Some have the power to
raise from the dead a *before, before*
scary and beautiful

back to mystery cults, in caves, rubble
far under a Roman street, the altar to
Mithras still slaying his bull, crumbling the stonework.

All things being equal. But they're not.
Agony, it's older.
Ask the moose at Denali,
the snowshoe hare, the lynx,

such a wily courtly lot.

Ask Ovid
banished to his hovel on the Black Sea, aching
for Rome's exalted rude cacophony, each
exiled month a big thick X down

Februarius,
Aprilis to home-shattered sick enough

for an undersong.
Look it up! *Undersong: a strain; a droning;*
the burden of a song —

Maybe that lowest
common denominator
is contagious. Rome or Denali,
a mash-up of lunge and cry out, predator
and prey throwing coins to a fountain,
footholds made first by a hoof,
pickpockets at buses and trains, nuns
queuing up their no-nonsense, thorny brambles,

raggedy spruce groves,
a look, a nod to sell loveless
love on the street, a chain of mountains in
choral repeat, saints
stained to glass, how ice gouged rivers
from rock-bound,
the one-lung rapturous
common-sense Pope
all outstretched arms, his little popemobile circling
the thrilled at St. Peter's
up on our rickety chairs to see in six, seven languages
how radiant —
Cross my heart, he was.
And Keats,
Keats is coughing.

•

You find the fossil record everywhere. In woods,
tundra, under streets, in cadaver labs.
Not those bright transparencies,
wistful orderly page after page in
biology, a lie, a kind of flip-book romance.
It's the one big mess of us
in us, the generous extraordinary dead prove that,
signing a paper, giving themselves away
to be cut, *disembodied* for
the knowing it,
sunk to their chemical depth in some afterlife, opened
on a table by kids really,
belabored doctors-to-be, our
shabby shared *wilderness* to untangle,
bones joints arteries valves,
The Dissector
in hand, weirdest

how-to book on the planet. For Keats too, 1819, his
scribbled roses and sunflowers in margins,
his training,
his anatomy theatre,
looking down and later: still
London, then Rome (he who *gets* it,
body fails, second floor, beside the Spanish Steps).
Heart, not
my heart anymore.

Forgive me. I'm worse
than the hopelessly confused misnamed
English sparrow, descendant of the great weaver birds
of Africa, a finch that lost the gene

for *nest*, how to *beneath*, to *across* so intricate,
precise, bringing bringing
sticks and hair and bits of shiny paper.
Undersong: the *burden* of a song.

Poor bird. Poor sweet
muddled middle of it. I watched
morning after morning, his offering ...

It's Keats
who made claims about beauty and time.
His bed at the last
too low for the window, his must-have
tell me, what's out there —

I admit: a ridiculous layering, Rome in Denali.
Just *because*? Because I went to both in short order?
Two continents, an ocean apart. My mother
loved hand-me-down expressions —
never the twain shall meet.
They do meet.

To repeat: that's civilization for you.
Happenstance and *right now* drag along

future and past
and why the hell not
the Denali, the Rome in any of us, no two
states of being more
unlike, worn-out compulsion
to collect and harbor, piece together,
stupid into
some remember machine.

Such fabulous unthinkable inventions we've made
to merge or unmake: the trash compactor,
the poem, all tragedy and story, pencils sharpened to
a point that keeps breaking, wilderness gone inward as

an ocean-going ship's container,
a Gatling gun,
the AR-15 of the seething deranged,
the H-bomb,
Roman legions
to Canterbury to blood-up
fields into legend then dig the first plumbing but

*how can you
be in two places at once
when you're not anywhere at all!*

(Thank you, Firesign Theatre, brilliant wackos,
old vinyl on a turntable still in the game ...)

Fine. Fuck it. Start over.

•

See the sheep on high ledges, the arctic squirrels below.

See the way Dante saw, sweeping his arm across
Vasari's great painting as Boccaccio looks off, the plague
sealing city after city. Dante

in hell, steady-luminous
those fact-finding trips to service
his worldly *Inferno*.

Winter sleeps *through*.
August at Denali, bears shovel it down
a razor-edged maw —
twigs! berries! more stems! —
Fate hoards to prepare, sub-zeros, fattens into . . .

See the park's camper bus, 92 miles how
most of us jolt and slow, crossing
hours more daylight than night all summer,
rattling tin can with its
exhaust and hissing gravel, the fear
landslide
an undersong just-possible, how we
zigzag a mountain. Look!

Nearing a bear, the young caribou abruptly
hesitant, shy as a leaf —

No! Don't! Do not! That grizzly
huge, bent to his ploy *just*
these berries around here,
his ignore ignore, sure,
quiet-tense as a trigger, and we of
fogged scratched windows so hard to open —
stop! The bus stopped. *Jesus*. The thing curious, closer . . .
They're not

that smart anyhow, a stage-whispering drunk from the back
of our imperial realm, mile 62, the Park Road.

What did Venus decree in her temple up whichever
narrow street in Rome, the Ancients'
stink of slops, standing water,
a bear chained to a slave (out of *slav*, by the way,
backdrop is *horde*, *human spoils*)

both shackled to a grindstone for
a later mob and roar.

Here's what we saw: the little caribou
in reverse wanders sideways and safe.
Our bus one big sigh or
like a wheezing asthmatic
the brakes unbrake.

Bad dream, bad dream, the undersong start to all fable if
for real we'd seen that kill
back to lions off their continent
cornered, bloodied in the great amphitheaters, rearing up,
a nail to hammer's
bite and blow. The wilderness in us

is endless. Near the cabin, near evening, a warbler
in the fireweed
hawk saw or heard,
his switchblade clicked to —
I was and I was
whirling feathers, either bird —
Every hunger
is first century. Forever-thus
feral cats at the Forum about to leap too.
The Forum, last homage

I shoveled holes and rocks to
remake, mile 82, while the haymouse riddled the meadow
down deep, her catacombs.

•

Time + beauty = ruins. Perfect shapes in the mind
meet my friends Pointless and Threat and Years of
Failure to Meld or Put to Rest. Ruthless
is human.

I ask a composer: How to live with this *undersong* thing
over and over, how to
get rid of it,
the world of it—

He looks at me. *What undersong thing?* And shrugs
I'll put it on the test! Let students define it.

So I dreamt such a test: Go there. To Rome.
Half-doze against a wall
two thousand years of

flesh sweat insect wing ago, stone laid by hand, by
a boy when a whip, a whip, a welling up, his *will not speak*.

Have at it. Please explain. Please fill in this blank.

Grief punctures like ice, moves like a glacier
to flat and slog and myth, low blue and white flowers
we hiked *trail-less*. The rangers insist. They insist—
never follow or lead, never lay down a path.

From above
the look of us spread out, our seven or eight
a band, little
stray exhausted figures
as over the land bridge from Asia,

circa: prehistory keeps coming, older than Rome,
both both underfoot, understory, underway

miles below numb, it's burning.

•

To see at all, you *time*
and *this time and time again*.

The spirit leans
intrigued, the other part bored, then there's *want*,
then there's *wait*.

Once a city began with a wolf whose two human pups would
build, would watch it fall, nursing
at her milk for centuries
in marble
in bronze.

She stands there and cries of
that pleasure, by turns
a blood-chill. The tundra. At night.

A snake eats its own tail, forever at it on a fresco.
A real snake
leaves his skin near the gravel bar. Some words
sting, some are sung. Another life
isn't smaller.

MARIA HUMMEL

Toy Room

One son plays monster rage. His brother
plays ship crashed in a maze. We
are reading Hulk. We are reading
Theseus. White sails, green men,
bright women who give everything
and get nothing. The monster son
would never sail a ship into
a maze, but brothers are not
the same. They hear the same stories
and make different toys of them,
muscl'd figures in their fists, walls
of wood and magnets. Who knows
why a part of me always departs
this place, glides out the window
to rain and falling leaves, dresses
of wetness and gold. She floats
there, blessed by air, but when
she tries to slip back in, she can't;
she hangs beyond the glass, panicked,
then bulging with fury. Days later
another part of me flies, into a maple
the color of platelets, and another into
bareness and sky. I've lost count of
how many fists are now pounding
my house, how many mouths are
braying how many cries, but here
inside, for now, my dear sons call to me
for their fallen castles, built again,
to find all the missing arrows.

Recess

This is the sound of the bell. It rings,
full of brass and the end it brings:
once for the children, once for the child
who sits alone. His eyes hurt and mild,
he waits, holding his things.

Time should hold no meaning
for him yet. You don't learn
how to play; you forget. But he knows a while
well, and longs for the clang of the bell.

A bell is a room of nothing.
No, a dome with a hidden swing —
a will, a sway, a tone, a peal,
the beginning of song. The wild
crowd nears, passes, laughing.
Here is the sound of the bell.

CACONRAD

From "Sharking the Birdcage"

paint over the
dead end sign
are police writers?
yes they are writing into
books our
little cherub of
misunderstanding
a thinking to push us
back into body of the
whole
love yourself more next time
their reports read
stones sink as they please
everything expands at the very end
a lit cigarette into
our dark hello

this is
 exactly
 the kind
 of space
 I want to
 follow you into
 holding your little
mute worm on a twig
make it marble
make it touch like tough winter
in the next life we will have longer love
better places with extended embraces
now we leave the song to return to the front
 leaf closing on closeness of
 mothers in the next world
 overseeing premium
 waste of the planet
 reincarnate
 anywhere
 but here
land on a different rim

KAZIM ALI

Refuge Temple

REFUGE TEMPLE

254 Purdy Street, Buffalo, NY, childhood home of Lucille Clifton

There will be another storm always on the air
Or in the air or are you the air
Cold unrecognizable following
The inside road
This vessel bears one through
Snow or time to find the house
Paint peeling and maybe unfamiliar but the address
Is to a place that doesn't exist anymore
An empty lot
Now owned by the woman
Next door who leases it to a
Storefront church that needs the space for parking
I take a selfie with the snowbank
254 Purdy Street
Sunday morning they will plow and cars will fill the place
Worshippers filing next door
Names of the family who lived here forgotten
Sayles their name was Sayles
Well there's Miss Bowden says the neighbor
Who lives over there
Ninety years old
Lived here her whole life
If anyone'd remember she would
Though if the house don't hold against the world
And the body don't hold against the world
Snow falling down
What can hold
The church house the neighbor next door
The snow Old Miss Bowden
This empty lot
We empty now
Everybody drive home

Song done over
Snow river hover
House is gone
Stormsent era
That Miss Bowden may remember
The twelve-fingered girl who lived here
We tell the neighbor: her name was Lucille
Playing in the street
Afraid of the dark
Bringing the light

SALON DES REFUSÉS

East Side, Cleveland, OH, apartment building of Julie Patton

In the house of Julie Patton
Bumblebees do sing pollen
In the cave of ears
Every thing listens
Jimi, Barack, and Marilyn Buck
The saints of the place
In vigil of excellent beings
Light poles hold typical beasts
Though here they empty themselves
Into me
Orange spaces do make
A world again for though the gods are mythic
The goddesses spin
Dear Julie sing
Me through the long hallway
The dark one sleeved in your mother's
States of mind
State of mine is the one that opens my body
In heat through dark and salted moments
Body is a book
House does quiver
Unwritten the way of how to find you
House is the book
In the language of feathers that launch
Whose heart could race
Winter air winter season that rushes
How we in dark are slung
The dark that opens its hallways
Time mastered by Shiva and Hanuman
I did stand in the empty space
Filled by snow
Then here in the sun-flirted front room

Watched by Saint Nina Simone and Saint Joan Baez and Saint
Buffy Sainte-Marie

I wonder forward in Sapphic tongue

Who is remember me

Who is open me with their tongue

Who languages the space of a house that don't exist

Better thought sun see Julie sing sanctified

Sing swung sing one and one and one and one

SCHOOL HOUSE

*Barrington, Rhode Island, right near the Bay, home of C.D. Wright
and Forrest Gander*

When she gives me directions and describes it to me
I expect a red-room schoolhouse
Driving across the water from Providence
Into the stream-laced far shore
Far shore where a boat unlands
To determine the shape of what isn't
There I drive past wrong streets
Wrong houses places whose bells I ring
Stranger in the forest and dark-skinned too
Where do I belong
From the bathhouse I came
Where I worshiped at all manner of strange altars
Does this make me more or less human
Tongue makes you human
And how it translates the body into language
To find the door as it was described to me
Frosted glass and Japanese characters lining it
School saying the language of the sun
No sums add up here
But she calls me in
And I frown to know long to know
What holds the house against the world
How will words survive the dissolution of the body
Of the planet's core
Sore and soar it came down through the cloud cover
Gray-white curtains
House of a dozen languages
At the cold lake the far away lake
She grabbed me post-lecture where I told about how
I could not translate the words of the poet until I came to her own
sun-loved city

She begged me to always love all manner of strangers
I thought she meant the regions of the body
I'd have promised her anything though years later in Rhode Island
Named for an island no one can find
Lover I love you forever
House that disappeared
Books that live in the air
Island that no one knows
While on Purdy Street good people park their cars in the snow
Go inside and sing
We don't have nothing more than this anymore
No planet no lover no words no nothing no more

ALISON C. ROLLINS

The Beastangel

After Robert Hayden's "Bone-Flower Elegy"

In the dream I enter him
I the eater of numbers
the black-lipped barcode
of cost have come for him
because he owes me. He
owes me the broken machine
the bone structure gone limp
over leg of time. I irreverent
as safe sex breathlessly
whispering *this is not a threat
but a promise* for the love of
the wolf on lockdown. *Why
the long face?* the horsefly
asked the muzzle as though to
suggest these mouths we
have are traps, bold-faced lairs
of brotherhood. Cover your eyes
and you'll miss it, you'll miss this
squalid city growing legs from its
scalp. His kneecaps jerked beneath
the sheet, skinned eyelids rolling back
to the/ *Point to where he touched
you on the doll*, he asked.
¿cómo se dice "everywhere"?
He will pay for this, the heroic
antihero announced, the vulture-
masked man surveying the damage
the clinical centaur now spooked
his hind legs reared as if to say
demons fear beasts in twos.
Rage bound tight in synthetic
skin/ bound and ridden in dialect
at an angle of consumption. After

feeding he asks, *What's the damage?*
The legless caterpillar humping itself
forward/ toward my mouth, rending
the lip a cleft palate, twisted up from
firegold sand, a habit of creature
malformed. The men laid flowers
on my mother's tongue, they come
see about me. These flowers are edible
men/ flowers of sawtooth bone.

What the Lyric Be

b-boy Wordsworth beatbox vocal cord
code switching through the wheat fields at daybreak
clicking his teeth against the corn's high yellow thighs
prying open like the sunlight's tear ducts
on the morning the moon forgot how to speak *Twi*
the cicadas having screeched all night in *Old English*
like a man who has forgotten his name
calling out the leaves of grass as though
stalks of letters at right angles have meaning
a way of theorizing the rhetoric of beauty
a fig tree trembling at the rain's hungry lick
a finch weaving myth into a nested crown of logic
the wildflowers' arms on dial-up internet
a virgin using the petals as her service provider
he loves me, he loves me not, with every flick of her wrist
the wind knowing the typeface her lips are set in
pockmark cheeks peppered with salt
the politics of resentment seasoning the spittle
true poems flee like a slave in Mississippi
Googling "home" with no filter or cookies
the tuning fork having shorted in the eardrum's mouth
the devil was in the details when he read the star's hands
prongs of a serpent's embrace, steam dancing on
a cloud's rolled tongue, wet and pregnant
with words so soft the dirt could swallow the sound
what must we remember, to forget how we were born?
when we ask for advice it is rather for permission
for we know not what we do when we do it in free will
a robot puts a conch shell to its lips and blows
a man puts a seashell to his ear and hears the ocean
tell a lie long enough and it will surely turn to truth

ANGE MLINKO

Two Hangings from Ovid

It is Hermes stepping off his winged sandal.

... I saw the Writing Spider sitting with aplomb

Even his caduceus, despite the scandal

dead center her creation, above the compost

of its forfeiture, lies abandoned

(sage location); what I wondered most

like an Android or iPad on a nightstand

was whether the sweetgum burrs and dried leaves

grown footed for the purpose of bearing away

were ornaments or accidents she interweaves

any such device or gadget as may

in the clearly golden silk, whose subwebs

distract him from a more pressing matter.

are occupied by diminutive male sub-celebs

Herse is perched on the precipice of the mattress

holding down the fort (as she holds court)

with its luxurious bedspread, where tapestry

long after she vanishes, stopping short

vis-à-vis itself interleaves the allegory.

of the epiphany or apotheosis

Real gold thread weighs the covers

we expect from genteel arts, or a goddess

a cherub heaves to turn down for the lovers.

“Who thereupon did rend the cloth in pieces every whit,

Would that the same in his wings might tip the scales,

Because the lewdnesse of the Gods was biased so in it.

and with tears, put salt in these mythical tales

And with an Arras weavers combe of Box she fiercely smit

by sinking level with us *l'enfant* in the room ...

Arachne on the forehead full a dozen times and more.”

What to Read This Summer

Terrible are the rose names ...
Stakeholders in a tradition of
“Grande Amore” and “True Love”
(one carmine, the other blush ...), their aims

are, for the most part, scattershot.
“Mothersday” and “Playboy,”
“Senior Prom” and “Let’s Enjoy”
vie with a lyrical “Lady of Shalott,”

while a flyweight “Pink Knockout”
comes “Outta the Blue” to mock
“Honey Perfume,” “Pillow Talk”
—jock Cupid wielding clout.

Then maybe a puckish curator
pairs “Las Vegas” with “Nearly Wild,”
“Buttercream” with “Julia Child,”
“Aloha” with “Hello, Neighbor ... ”

•

Misenus, son of Aeolus, god of the wind,
don’t you think it’s bad form
to practice trumpet on this platform,

what with the dentistry squeal
at construction site decibel levels
of braking blade shaving molar steel,

dropped-in blare of delays and arrivals
squelched against granite, at close intervals,
while you riff on “Over the Rainbow” —?

You received some negative attention
from Triton, after blowing his conch so loud
you inadvertently entered yourself

in an unwinnable contest; now,
stuck in a twenty-first-century translation
of hell, you press the stops, and for an obol

prepare our burial in an infinite axial scroll
with a tinier and tinier turning radius,
as if we were those hordes, the unsanctified,

who shoved one another along the Cocytus,
none led on to the golden bough
by Venus's semaphore, the unloved rock doves,

whom Virgil treats so gently in the *Aeneid*.

Borrowed Bio

Where we'd recently lain,
exchanging a kiss,
stork consorted with crane,
limpkin with ibis.

Was this as much wedding
as there would ever be,
the fowls' foot-webbing,
the identificatory

ring around a throat?
Exchange of earth and air:
not a vow but a vote
of confidence a feather

might tip by a single scale ...
That one's a raconteur,
so much salt in his tale;
this one's a countertenor,

lilting above the feast.
The archon of his hectare
— spotted — spotted least.
Here's a little heckler ...

penciled seagull in the margin.
Following line by line
the path you took, I imagine
no print so fine.

SUMITA CHAKRABORTY

Dear, beloved

*Child. We are done for
in the most remarkable ways.*

— Brigit Pegeen Kelly

It would be winter, with a thin snow. An aged sunbeam would fall on me, then on a nearby summit, until a mass of ice would come upon me like a crown of master diamonds in shades of gold and pink. The base of the mountains would be still in darkness. The snow would melt, making the mountain uglier. The ice would undertake a journey toward dying. My iliacus, from which orchids bloom, would learn to take an infant's shape, some premature creature weaned too soon. My femoral nerve, from which lichen grows in many shades, would learn to take breaths of its own and would issue a moan so labored it could have issued from two women carrying a full-length wooden casket, with dirt made from a girl inside. The dirt would have been buried with all of the girl's celestial possessions. Bearing the casket would demand more muscles than earthbound horses have. The girl would have been twenty-four. This was my *visio*. Sometimes I think of it as prophecy. Other times, history. For years it was akin to some specific land, with a vessel that would come for me, able to cross land, sea, the spaces of the universe, able to burrow deep into the ground. Anything could summon it — a breaking in cloud cover, wind chimes catching salt outside my mother's window, a corner of a painting. And I learned how to call it, too. This is the only skill of which I have ever been proud. When my sister died, from the head of my *visio* came offspring in the thousands, armed to the teeth, each its own vessel. My first, their mother, lived on. For itself and its hoard it found a permanent home in a cave at the bottom of a lake. And it waited until I was standing on a mountain to sing to me: *You will call this mountain home until I tell you to move again. There will always be more of it underground than you*

will ever see with your eye. And so it turned out to be true.
And so when I stood on the mountain that became my home,
I beheld a dirt sea, and saw our moon, which has two faces.
I learned that one face of our moon is dappled with maria,
and that the sunbeams here are newborns that lie
on each other, purpling into the fog and outstretched pines.
The Earth spins masses of air until it looks like one of many
irises studding our galaxy. From space, parts of the Atlantic
look like leather, wrinkled and dark, and others look
like iridescent fishes in an old Master's painting of the sky.
I live in the valley of a crater here, where steam rises like ghosts
in the summer heat. This mountain is made of igneous stone.
Every day I issue a warning to lovers: darlings, I have
in my possession a dead girl deer. Her head is draped
over my right shoulder. I hold her with one arm
encircling her torso. You wake each morning with flowers
shrouding your body, like a corpse; I put them there.
To me, you died when my legs curved around your head.
One of the deer's eyes has blackened, and her tongue is thick.
She belonged to my sister. O my sister, you were twenty-four.
Listen close. Even to this part. Especially this.
I want you to hear what I say to lovers, because I want to sing
to you, who died a virgin, a few treatises on love and sex —
how flesh and ecstasy are born, what they make,
how they live out their days. As a bodied girl
you feared me, and I met your fear with guttural disdain.
I imagine you wondered what it would take for me to hear
a mortal, human voice: whenever you spoke, a vessel came
for me, chattering like some frail and hissing bird,
pigeon-chested, thin-veined feet. Sister, I don't listen to lovers,
either, who I call by the same names that were yours:
dear, beloved. But spirits are not like their progenitors.
Their touches can range, texturally, from velvet to bristle.
Lover, each time I kiss you I name after you
a sickly feeling in my own body, as if each ailing

is a previously undiscovered moon orbiting a planet
that can only sustain the strangest of life-forms.
Sister, I know neither goodness nor mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life, as surely that I know the beasts
I inherit or create, of all unions familial or otherwise,
are speechless and brute, and bound to die soon.
Yes, there is much to love about the body.
Too, there is much to hate. I cast off care for pleasure,
and for labor, teaching my body over time that these things
can't coexist. I fear it has started to believe me.
My body has never sought wholeness the way yours did, sister.
It was always still the dull twilight of early morning with us.
You were twenty-four, and when you died, I stopped fearing
arson. When I picture us as girls, we are at the base
of the mountain from my visio, divining the summit
as we diminish into spots of light. We are without parentage.
On my mountaintop in midafternoons flocks of wheeling
birds gather around the crescent moon. When the moon
worms its way through the clouds, it fixes its eyes on me
and sings a song that says we live our lives chained to earth,
and that when we die the flesh falls off our bones
so our bones can turn into the driest of riverbed dirt.
Sister, when you died, your bones cast an enchantment.
We made a powder of them, and I named the powder *ash*,
because *ash* is a word with neither origin nor afterlife,
and its definition is the look a doe gets when she's been away
from her herd too long. When a person goes missing
and we don't know her name, we grant her the surname *Doe*.
With this christening we name all missing persons
part of the family of *ash*, which has no family.
Sometimes I think that each speck of *ash*
previously named *Priya* hums on quiet nights
in a frequency only the other pieces can hear.
Inaudible to the waking world she hums to herself.
That hum is how my blood became blue; in lieu of oxygen,

my body began to breathe in only the vibrations of the hum. Blood has to be born into its colors. Or, more precisely, it has to die into them. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, Nyx is born of Chaos. Erebus, Gaia, and Tartarus are her siblings. Hesiod couldn't decide whether Nyx birthed the Fates or whether the Fates were born of someone else, but he knew that Nyx's children, whoever they were, had no sire. About Nyx's brothers and sisters, Hesiod writes: Earth too, and great Oceanus, and dark Night, the holy race of all the other deathless ones that are for ever, and one day — what? Tell me. Tell me the song they taught you. Tell me how you learned how beautiful Nyx is, how you realized Zeus feared her, and how you first saw that within her every star, from the swollen to the hollow, from the living to the dead, is visible, powered by little but her peerless face. When I returned north for the first time since my father turned my sister into a powder named *ash*, a word born of nothing and with no children, I heard her from a seagull on the ferry I rode from the harbor to the Cape, out of a piping plover on the dunes, in a crow's call on the highway from Boston to Gloucester, past Folly's Cove, Prides Crossing, Rust Island. Then, from my station again on the mountain, I heard my own voice from a brown thrasher. That night I drove through remains of a fresh accident on the mountain highway. The dropping sun lit my back as if heralding fire. A dislocated red front bumper straddled the median, singing a song. Nyx was in the wind, and her siblings, and they bade me sing, too, like Hesiod had asked. Grant lovely song, celebrate the holy race of the deathless gods who are for ever, born of Earth and starry Heaven and gloomy Night and them that briny Sea did rear. Soon all were singing. The median sang with the deep voice of a woman who knows how to sing scat, and the mountain, standing like a moon on earth, responded with a wordless song of its own creation. Ash sang. Dirt sang. To them I lent a melody,

which is one of the things I do when I can't sleep. The secret about lullabies: when they work, it's because they sound like something plants would sing in Hades, on the banks of the river dark. Oh how I wish they worked on me. When the sculptor couldn't sleep, she drew mountains. They were pink, red, ridged and pulsing, and rose from valleys of blue. Or else she'd draw eyes that held too many irises, or wombs that bore sweet cysts, or spindle-legged women with outsized, drooping breasts, ill-formed and misshapen eyes for nipples, uneven halos for areolae, made of the same skin as the kind under eyes that have been open for too long. Those songs I sing when I can't sleep are directed to my army of visios. In return, they give me images of myself as different creatures: gibbons, a chicken with a plucked-feather neck, an asteroid, a mountain, a volcano with the thinnest, most translucent shell. Me, as some fantastical beast with eyes lining the inside of my body, watching my diaphragm turn into the ocean I saw from the ferry, watching plumes of sun flare over it as it comes to resemble a dead animal's long-weathered skin. Ghostly ships with dropped anchors materialize to trawl it, and squadrons of men disembark, searching for new blooms in terra mountainous and lush. My heart is a sky embalmed and bright. When the phantoms drop anchor, there to welcome their sailors are screaming pelicans on the rocks, and parades continually wheeling of ugly vultures in funereal garb. In their eyes, the Atlantic always looks besieged by hurricane. *Lunar maria* means *moon seas*, but when I hear it I picture horses, torqued female beasts who live on the moon and whose manes are made of the roots of moon-trees. I did not want to die, but I wanted to want death. None of you ever knew how badly. I have practiced at it. At times I rehearsed like a dancer, surrounded by mirrored walls. At others I moonlighted with movies set on battlefields and abattoirs, pausing and rewinding until I could mimic

the motions of actresses who succumb to unexpected poison,
or shove knives into their bellies, or fall like Brueghel's boy.
I pretended I was standing in a castle dressed like a samurai,
looking through a barred window, knowing the trees
approaching held a promise so annihilative my flesh
would have no choice but to accept. I pictured jumping
from the top of the mountain and I sang *Love it Love it Love it*.
On my mountain the birds shroud the pines, and the pines
make a spectral outline against the valley of Nyx's body.
One afternoon here a man said to his son: *All this has to do
with eons of time, water over and over, just cutting and cutting
the rock*. From where I stand on its summit, I can touch
the Big Dipper and I can see its children, and another peak,
shaped like the back of a horse. It is shadow blue, the same blue
as the dying sky. To the Big Dipper and her children I sing a song
that asks if they are safe, and tells them that on forest floors,
dappled things of glass and light grow from knotted roots.
Sister, could I find you on that horse mountain? I wonder
if I want to. Have I made this world? Lover, a confession.
If I found my sister on any mountain, I would gather her
in my arms and take her from its back, singing lullabies.
Or else I'd take an arrow laced with a drug I'd made special
for her, and, standing close, push it in her unarmed
right flank. Instead of how to die, I ended up studying
how to kill. But the sculptor, she asked nothing of her dead.
Out of visions of them she made formidable metal spiders
she named *Maman, Maman, Maman. Maman Maman Maman*,
who live after the sculptor has died, have all lost children,
like my mother. Their domains are terrors — land-terrors,
water-terrors, terrors of the open sky. Their hearts are war-
grief. Terrors of trees in the joyless forest, of portent.
Sometimes in their homes are fires on floods, dire wonders.
Their children were all named *Doe*, which means that the plural
form for children of *Maman* is *deer*. For a long time I hated
the phrase *I am sorry for your loss*. I *lost* nothing. My sister *died*.

But *loss* is less of a euphemism than its users want;
to lose means both *to have been defeated* and *to misplace*.
Maman Maman Maman also answers to *Demeter Demeter Demeter*.
 Sister, I could stop no one from taking your head,
 although I promise you I fought for it, hand-to-hand
 by the mouth of the bone-house. One day on my mountain,
 I got to thinking about those other peaks. From a cave
 underwater I heard: *Find them, like flowers strange*
and never before seen. And so it became true.
 I found mountains covered in smoke-thick fogs,
 and mountains that lied — those were barely hills.
 And then I found them: what the mountains in my visio
 would have looked like had it been summer in that land.
 Summer brought some changes: my body had no orchids
 or lichen, and the crown was not of diamonds, but the reek
 of sewage, wafting over a field — a prairie almost —
 from which rose tens of signal towers, all blinking red.
 The base of mountains was, when I got there, still,
 and in darkness. It was a sky in which every child of every star,
 living or dead, could be heard humming. The peerless
 face of the mountain was cragged rock, dust rock, shadow rock.
 I stayed until day, to watch the birth of a sunbeam
 so I could then see it age. Later in the day an immense heat
 came, like another bone-house. I climbed the ridges, which turned
 to colored ringlets of cloud and ash at the slightest pressure.
 Sunrise and sunset were scant minutes of shadow-play.
 The prairie grass's rustle, each blade sang in a different language.
 There I learned the names of four of the lunar mares:
 Catfire, Osiris, Blood Oath, and Early Morning.
 This is who I am. I harbor secret loves, and I do secret work.
 Catfire, Osiris, Blood Oath, and Early Morning are teaching me
 how to finally chart a course through time, how to carve
 journeys in space: they descended from their moon to the crags,
 followed me home to my moonlike mountain. Lover, my body —
 you won't be able to keep up with it. Soon you'll have to leave it.

You'll have to leave me. Or else I'll leave you, because my body, it invents definitions for the word *sadness*, like *noun, the feathers on a bird's back*. You'll do nothing for me. On my mountain, it's midafternoon, and the wheeling birds are landing steadily, even though no stable ground is here to be found. When they sing, it is a song that I, who know no prayers, imagine to be gospel. A man comes up the mountainside and sings along with them as he walks in circles on the rock. Robbed, sister, was your breath. Robbed, lover, is yours, too. Sister, I wish you could know this feeling: if sung perfectly, pressure on each nerve cluster can make bones irrelevant, whether those bones are living or dead, whether they are ash or dirt. At the base of my mountain is a lake where creatures go to die. Water slides into their spiracles and fills their tracheae. Their tracheae stretch into bellows fit to extinguish the fires in any volcano. When my body showed me *sadness* and began there to outline and diagram the word, another definition was *noun, a chorus of brass instruments, like upward-turned mouths forged of metal*, and another was *verb, to shake like chimes flanking a rock-hewn shore, barely alive and almost imperceptible for a flash*. Sometimes I picture my sister underneath one of the sculptor's spiders. Her head barely reaches the first joint on the spider's leg, and when she looks up, she thinks that the whole sky is the spider's stomach. *Maman*, she says, *I am hungry. Food. Food. I am hungry*. She runs her shrunken finger from one tagma to another. Her stroke makes lava run faster in all the volcanoes within the tectonic plate on which she lives, and she, unawares, suckles at every ridge she can find. She rests both palms flat against the metal, closes her eyes and cries. What would the world look like with enough lava to fill the Atlantic? I know that the Earth's temperature has risen, and I know that all of its ice will melt. I know there will be no more purple from the sun, that the spider's iron underside is one of the few things that, like my mother,

does not sing. At the lake today is a flock of feral cats. Though they're in front of me, their song comes from below, so although I can see them, I picture them swimming in a river that separates mortals from the planet's heart. In this river floats the phantom of a dead doe. Listen to me now, darlings: my sister did not live long enough to see the moon turn red, but I did, and despite those who wish otherwise, myself included, I will see it again. *Sadness's* fourth definition is *conjunction, bees, forests of them, devotional and thick enough to knot together human dreams, or human bodies, even when ghostly, or lovelorn*. The underground river gives me no passage, despite my dreams of the phantom that dropped anchor somewhere, and of its amassed pelicans and vultures. Each ghost is filled to the brim with flowers whose scents describe the places they were born, just like mine does, no matter how hard I try to cloak it. On the top of my mountain a man says to a woman: *I like how there's just trees*. *Trees trees trees*, she replies. Each time she says the word, her voice makes a new species. I recently tried another way to die: could I fall from a tower filled wall-to-wall with twenty-four thousand living flowers, each planted in the soil covering the tower's floors, six inches deep? The flowers would have heavy-branched spikes for blooms, and would release a powerful smell of bone marrow, and spew a pollen that fills the air until it becomes oppressive. When I opened my mouth to sing of this, instead of a sound my mouth expelled gnats and fog, which is what a spider's milk is made of. The word *Nyx* tastes like *sister* and means both *night* and *flower*. I worry I won't rest again. Do you know how a naked Titan looks, sister? He's swarmed with shadow, but he holds light deep in his stomach, like an electric secret. Dear love, I can't give you what you need from me. All I'll do is take. After my sister died, I learned she always wanted a warm island, garlands draped around her neck. There was no mountain in her vision. Instead, in it she was singing what she imagined

was an island song in a language I don't know. She was dancing badly, and breathing with great labor on burnished sands. Sand bores me, sister; I need rock and high altitude. When I am cold, I hear wolves. I think they live in the carillon beside the mountain's lake. Sister, it was always true that I would outlive you. I know exactly how many times my family wished me dead. *Don't look up*, says a child on the top of my mountain. *It makes you want to fall*. It will always be still the dull twilight of early morning with us. This is one of the curses of living. In the end, my visio alone will sing and dance, breathing heavily. Every day the sunbeams in it turn a brighter pink. Dears. Beloveds. All of you. Your blood is bewitched, and bade to move into places it wasn't meant to go, steeped deeply in poisons it can't purge. You share the look on your face with all the others, whether deer, child, or man. If you look deeply enough into any other pair of eyes, your heart valves start to change allegiances. Your body's lakes fill with the other's want, until all you want, in turn, is what the other wants, which rises in you like seawater. There are species of flowers and invasive weeds that live only in another's gaze, whether lovelorn, hate-filled, hopeless, or hungry. I am looking into your eyes right now, and in my mind are two girl deer. Sisters. With thin-hooved legs steady, digging into grass. They disappear into the woods, which are part of a forest in a painting. When the novelist saw this painting, he thought that there he could see men turning into birds and birds turning into men, and those same men turning then into sea creatures, and then back into birds. From this final change scales and tentacles would linger on their backs as they wheeled through the air, as would the dream of filling their lungs with the sea, for which they would ache. The definition of *deer* is *lost*. The definition of *beloved* is *dissolution*. On the top of my mountain I hear a mother

call to a faceless child, *Where are you?* The chattering
and thin voice of a boy from the top of a tree cries back,
In the woods. And then, beguilingly: *Come into the woods.*
Around the orbs of light in the forest that I still don't know
if the Dipper's children can see, new trees grow beside the pines:
elms, birches, willows, one strange Western juniper.
Each creature in this forest was once something, or someone, else —
the novelist was right. The top of one of the elms
is a sprig of radiant blood. Sister, I was very young
when I found out you were cloven-hooved. I did what I could.
I want to say that you can trust me, that I am listening to you,
and that you can speak to me and that I will speak to you
at last. Tell me about the beasts that got you. The beasts
who carry me when I am too weak to carry my deer alone
are Catfire, Osiris, Blood Oath, and Early Morning.
I would like to believe that I carry this deer for you,
that I'll be able to tell you what it feels like to have
a hungry mouth on your lip or nipple. I want to say:
Sister, I promise. But the definition of *myth* is *noun*,
the idea that any one creature can ever hear another.
And while I beguile you to betray yourself to me,
like lovers do in their sleep, I am lying to you. No, death
did not bring this to us. It has always been true. I, sister,
am a selfish woman, and you, sister, were a mute one.
My body invents words and swells with prophecies.
Its effort shows in insect bites and rashes that don't heal,
in my peeled hands, bleeding groin, wistful gut, misaligned jaw,
mole-like left eye, lump-riddled womb. Dears. Beloveds.
You've been asleep a long time, but we all return
to the waking world someday. And when you do at last
come back, you will find me spent and alone, ugly,
wounded, ungrateful, ill. Shaking and calling to you for aid.
Loveless. Without a soul or even the memory of pleasure.
The last lover to desert me will deem me rancid.
The last thing I hear my sister's voice from will be dirt.

Of the mares I will have left only Early Morning,
who won't know that I will soon take her hide,
turn it into an ocean that will, at last, cleave open my skull.

COMMENT

The Music of Poetry

Most western music since the Renaissance is organized by a particular key, such as C major; musicians use the word *tonal* to describe such music. Some non-western languages, such as Mandarin Chinese, are tonal in a different sense: the Mandarin word *ma*, depending on whether the voice rises or remains level when uttering it, may mean either horse or mother. Although syllable stress may determine the meaning of English words, allowing us to hear the difference between *contract* and *contract* or between *minute* and *minute*, English is not a tonal language. And while English syllables may be uttered at different pitches relative to one another, neither is the sonic life of the English language tonal in the musical sense. What then do poets, in contrast to linguists or musicians, mean by the word *tone*? A poem's diction, rhythm, or syntax is palpably describable, but asking a poet to produce a poem with an interesting tone is like asking a chef to produce a meal that tastes good: if successful, the chef will be thinking about the manipulation of particular ingredients. You can't reach into the pantry for a cup of tone.

Consider Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro."

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

In the first line, the multisyllabic word *apparition* is necessarily pronounced *apparition* — two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable and an unstressed syllable. The subsequent function words (*of, these, in, the*) aren't generally stressed in an English sentence unless something directs us to do so. Tension between syntax and line may produce that direction —

The apparition of these faces in
The crowd

— thereby throwing emphasis on an otherwise unstressed preposition; but Pound's poem offers no such direction, leaving us to stress the more semantically charged nouns, as the function words fall away.

The apparition of these **faces** in the **crowd**;

Since the nine unstressed syllables in this line are broken into three groups of three, each group followed by a stressed syllable, it seems the poem may possibly be establishing a regular rhythmic pattern, one that might be repeated — *ti ti ti tum ti ti ti tum ti ti ti tum*. We won't know if that's true, however, until we listen to the second line. Pound is famous for being one of the inventors of free verse in English, but he also wrote artfully metrical verse throughout his entire career.

In the second line, the multisyllabic word *petals* is necessarily pronounced *petals*, and, once again, the function words following this noun remain unstressed (“**P**etals on a”). This little string of unstressed syllables throws us forward into the more semantically charged adjectives and noun concluding the line (“wet, black bough”), which turns out to sound nothing like the first line.

Petals on a wet, black bough.

This density of stressed syllables feels emphatic in itself, and the density is reinforced by the rhyme of “wet” with the first syllable of “petals,” the alliteration of “black” with “bough,” and, most importantly, by the way in which the second line's irregular rhythm (*tum ti ti ti tum tum tum*) disrupts the regularity of the first (*ti ti ti tum ti ti ti tum ti ti ti tum*). The whole poem delivers us into the concluding triplet of stresses, transforming what would otherwise be a disposable observation into a thrillingly repeatable event; we don't reread “In a Station of the Metro” to remember what color the bough is.

Now consider the second quatrain of Shakespeare's twelfth sonnet.

When lofty trees I see barren of leaves,
Which erst from heat did canopy the herd,
And summer's green all girded up in sheaves
Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard ...

The syllables at the ends of these iambic pentameter lines sound like one another, though *leaves* sounds closer to *sheaves* than *herd* does to *beard*, at least to twenty-first-century ears. At the same time, syllables echo one another within the lines. In the line “When lofty trees I see barren of leaves,” three of the five stressed syllables share a vowel

(*trees, see, leaves*), while two of them share an initial consonant (*leaves, loft*); the first syllable of *barren* stands alone. In the line “Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard,” the stressed syllable *beard* shares an initial consonant with *borne* and *bristly* and, more forcefully, *beard* shares an initial consonant and vowel sound with *bier*; the syllable *white* stands alone.

An abundance of echo tends to reduce sense to nonsense, discourse to incantation, and while a poet may covet this effect, as in these lines from Stevens’s “Bantams in Pine-Woods” —

Chieftain Iffucan of Azcan in caftan
Of tan with henna hackles, halt!

— or this line from Swinburne’s “Nephelidia” —

From the depth of the dreamy decline of the dawn through a
notable nimbus of nebulous noonshine

— great lines of poetry more often embrace and resist the allure of echo simultaneously. If all five stressed syllables alliterated with one another in Shakespeare’s line “Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard,” the line would lose its rhythmic vitality: “Borne on the bier with bright and bristly beard.” If the glut of echo reinforcing the preponderance of stressed syllables in the second line of “In a Station of the Metro” (“Petals on a wet, black bough”) also distinguished the first line (“The apparition of these faces in the crowd”), the poem would have nowhere to go.

The sonic effect of every poem, whether we call it formal or free, traditional or innovative, depends on a concerted relationship between stressed and unstressed syllables, between syllables that may or may not echo one another: these effects are the material result of the poet’s manipulation of the medium. If the source of a poem’s tone seems more elusive, it is largely because tone has not adequately been described in relationship to the syllables that produce it. We might easily sense the tone of Pound’s or Shakespeare’s poem, but how precisely might we reproduce it, using the basic elements of the English language?

Ancient Greek rhetoricians used the word *tonos* (meaning, literally, a *tightening* or *stretching*, as a string on a lute might be stretched) to characterize the quality of an orator’s performance of a speech;

they were interested in describing the sounds produced by a particular human throat on a particular occasion. Predictably, our now more common sense of tone as the quality of a written text, rather than the quality of a particular oratorical performance, began to prevail with the rise of print culture in the seventeenth century, and in the early years of the twentieth century the influential literary critic I.A. Richards defined poetic tone as a speaker's "attitude to his listener." But it's important to remember that Richards uses the words *speaker* and *listener* metaphorically; he's talking about a written text, not an oratorical performance. What he refers to (equally metaphorically) as a poem's tone is generated by the material characteristics of rhythm and echo that I've been describing so far.

Consider a simple sentence, three words, three syllables: You said that. Depending on how we understand the syntax of this sentence, it might be a statement (*You said that*), a question (*You said that?*), or an exclamation (*You said that!*), and each one of these three sentences sounds a little different from the other two. One feels one's voice rising in the final syllable of the question, falling in the final syllable of the statement, and falling more dramatically in the final syllable of the exclamation.

Using the word *intonation* differently from the way musicians do, linguists would say that the statement, question, and exclamation are distinguished by three different intonations of the simple sentence. But the possibilities don't end there, for each of these three intonations will in turn sound different from itself, depending on which of the three syllables is stressed; linguists refer to the emphasized syllable as the *tonic* syllable of an *intonational unit* (which is often but not necessarily a grammatical clause or phrase).

You said that?

*You **said** that?*

*You said **that**?*

In real life or on the stage, the context of an ongoing conversation might indicate these differences instantly, though often in real life we make mistakes about context, and sometimes we intentionally violate the decorum of a particular context; a child who asks "You **said** that?" at the wrong moment might be told sharply to "watch your tone" — a reprimand that deploys a visual metaphor to assert control over a sonic quality. How do you watch a tone?

The child might not know what to do if he were enjoined to shift the stress from the second syllable of the question to the first, but such adjustments are more precisely what we're responding to when we talk about tone: given the three available syntactical options (statement, question, exclamation), along with the three available placements of the tonic syllable (first, second, or third syllable emphasized), we could say that the sentence "you said that" might be uttered in nine different ways. Reading a poem on the page, how do we know that we're supposed to understand a line as "**You** said that" and not as "You **said** that"?

The most obvious answer is typography, to which I've been resorting throughout this discussion; by highlighting a particular syllable or word, italic or bold type can signal the intonation of a particular word or phrase. Especially in his earlier poems, such as "A Coin for Joe, with the Image of a Horse; c. 350–325 BC," Frank Bidart does this with bracing accuracy —

you chip of the incommensurate
closed world *A n g e l*

—but when deployed without Bidart's precision, typographical indications of rhythm may inadvertently highlight a poem's lack of intrinsic rhythmic vitality.

Below the surface-stream, shallow and light,
Of what we *say* we feel — below the stream,
As light, of what we *think* we feel — there flows
With noiseless current strong, obscure and deep,
The central stream of what we feel indeed.

Here, Matthew Arnold wants us to feel that, among the five stressed syllables in the line "As **light**, of **what** we **think** we **feel** — there **flows**," the greatest emphasis falls on *think*, making it the tonic syllable: "As light, of what we *think* we feel — there flows." Arnold's use of italics threatens to seem like compensation for an inability to control the intonation of his lines by poetic means, as if the strategic variation of the syntax within an ongoing metrical pattern were not enough.

Such control is precisely what we've heard Shakespeare muster in the lines from his twelfth sonnet:

Borne on the **bier** with **white** and **bristly beard**.

Four of these stressed syllables are linked by similar sounds (*borne, bier, bristly, beard*). But because *white* stands apart, we're liable to hear this syllable as the most emphatically emphasized of the five, giving the entire line a particular intonation: not "Borne on the **bier** with white and bristly beard" or "Borne on the bier with white and **bristly beard**" but

Borne on the bier with **white** and bristly beard.

Similarly, because four of the five stressed syllables in the following line share similar sounds (*loft, trees, see, leaves*)—

When **lofty trees** I **see barren** of **leaves**

—we're liable to hear the first syllable of *barren* as the most emphatically emphasized of the five, especially because this intrusion of an alien phoneme is reinforced by rhythmical variation. The line scans easily as an iambic pentameter, but the fourth iamb is flipped into a trochee (*barren*), throwing extra emphasis on the syllable that already stands apart, so we hear the line not as "When lofty **trees** I see barren of leaves" or as "When lofty trees I **see** barren of leaves" but as

When lofty trees I see **barren** of leaves.

Working together in this way, rhythm and echo determine the intonation of innumerable metrical lines, and there are as many possible variations of these procedures as there are lines to enact them.

How would a free-verse poem exert such control?

They taste good to her

This sentence from William Carlos Williams's "To a Poor Old Woman" is, like the sentence "you said that," flat on the page. Linguists might say that there is no indication of the tonic syllable in this intonational unit; neither is there a metrical pattern that might be varied in order to throw emphasis on any particular syllable. Every poem chooses either explicitly or implicitly to do something at the expense of something else, however, and having relinquished the power of meter

in this free-verse poem, Williams capitalizes on the power of line as a way to control the intonation of his syntax.

munching a plum on
the street a paper bag
of them in her hand

They taste good to her
They taste good
to her. They taste
good to her

You can see it by
the way she gives herself
to the one half
sucked out in her hand

— From *To a Poor Old Woman*

Following the first stanza's run-on syntax and enjambed lines, the second stanza's first line ("They taste good to her") feels whole and complete, a moment of stability. Subsequent lines animate this sentence by reintroducing enjambment to the poem's lineation, asking us first to hear the sentence as "they taste **good** to her" and then as "they **taste** good to her." Each of these shifts in the placement of the tonic syllable adjusts the meaning of the sentence, but ultimately more provocative than the individual adjustments is the sequence of adjustments, which makes the poem feel purposefully thoughtful: it suggests that no one way of hearing the sentence will do complete justice to the rich experience of savoring the plum. "You can see it," says the poem's next line, but actually we've heard it, not seen it, the poem's lineation creating a sequence of rhythms that in turn generate what we call the poem's tone—the quietly rapt attentiveness it brings to even the most ordinary human pleasure.

Consider the lineation of Ellen Bryant Voigt's free-verse poem "Sleep." This is *not* the way Voigt lineates her syntax:

I flung myself into the car
I drove like a fiend to the nearest store
I asked unthinking for unfiltered Luckies
oh brand of my girlhood

I paid the price
I took my prize to the car
I slit the cellophane
I tapped out one perfect white cylinder
I brought to my face the smell of the barns

This, in contrast, is how Voigt actually lineates her syntax:

I flung myself into the car I drove like a fiend
to the nearest store I asked unthinking for unfiltered Luckies oh
brand of my girlhood I paid the price I took my prize to the car
I slit
the cellophane I tapped out one perfect white cylinder I brought
to my face
the smell of the barns the fires cooking it golden brown smell of
my father
my uncles my grandfather's tin of loose tobacco his packet of
delicate paper
the deliberate way he rolled and licked and tapped and lit and
drew in
and relished it the smell of the wild girls behind the gym the boys
in pickup trucks I sat in my car as the other cars crept by
I looked like a pervert it was perverse
a Lucky under my nose

What precisely do we mean if we say that these two lineations of the poem's syntax have very different tones? Why, given that the words are in each case identical, does the second arrangement sound fiercely self-aware, rueful yet comical, while the first sounds self-satisfied?

Most of Voigt's clauses are linked paratactically, laid side-by-side without any subordination, and most of the clauses are simply declarative. My imposed lineation preserves the integrity of these clauses, resulting in a sequence of lines beginning with the first-person pronoun and a monosyllabic verb (*I flung, I drove, I asked, I paid, I took, I slit, I tapped, I brought*), and this repetition encourages us to hear the tonic syllable in the same position in each line, producing a consistent rhythm: "I **flung** myself into the car, I **drove** like a fiend, I **asked** unthinking." As a result, the poem seems like a record of considered thought (*I came, I saw, I conquered*), rather than a volatile act of thinking.

In contrast, Voigt's actual lineation of "Sleep" avoids any consistent alignment of syntax and line ("I slit/the cellophane"), violating the strong grammatical integrity of the clauses with enjambment and thereby disrupting the regular rhythm of the parallel syntax. At the same time, her lineation emphasizes the weaker grammatical links between the clauses by running them together ("I looked like a pervert it was perverse"), thereby creating variable rhythms within the lines.

It is not the lack of punctuation alone that produces this rhythmic vitality, for whether punctuated or not —

I flung myself into the car, I drove like a fiend
to the nearest store, I asked unthinking for unfiltered Luckies, oh
brand of my girlhood, I paid the price, I took my prize to the car,
I slit
the cellophane, I tapped out one perfect white cylinder

— each of Voigt's brief clauses is easily understood, and the lack of punctuation accentuates the work that the syntax is already doing in relationship to the lines: the poem refuses to allow us to experience syntactical closure at the same point at which we experience linear closure, and these disjunctions between brief clauses and long lines deflate the already weak organizational power of the parataxis. The poem sounds like the work not of the reliable witness but of the raconteur, someone who doesn't realize "it was perverse" until the words "I looked like a pervert" provoke the insight. The tone is not predictably consistent, as it is in my relinedated version of the poem, but rather consistently shifting, as it is in Williams's little poem.

Once, lyric poems were songs: "the words must of course determine the music," said Plato of what we've come to call lyric poetry. But Plato himself never used the word *lyric*; he called such poems *melic*. The word *lyric* was not employed until after the third century B.C.E., when the scholars of the Alexandrian library began collecting and organizing the remaining poems of ancient Greek poets such as Sappho and Anacreon, and by this time, the musical settings of these poems had been lost. As the classicist Glenn W. Most reminds us, the word *lyric* was coined to refer not to the experience of a sung poem but to the experience of a poem on the page. The *music* of poetry could not be other than a metaphor.

But the metaphorical status of the words *music* and *tone* does not

render them useless to the discussion of lyric poems, unless they're deployed so generally that we postulate an implausible coincidence of the artistic media from which "Lycidas" and a Chopin nocturne are made. In order to describe or produce a poem's tone, a poet can't think profitably about tone; a poet must think about the linguistic elements that produce a poem's tone, most prominently rhythm and echo, just as a painter who wants to achieve a certain quality of light must think more precisely about the nature of paint. The medium of the language is our given, but the variety of poems that might be made from it is an unpredictable gift. "The movement of poetry," said the author of "In a Station of the Metro," "is limited only by the nature of syllables."

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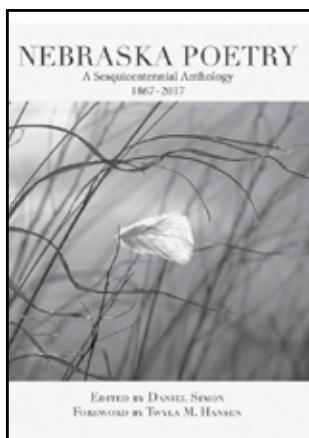
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