

BPJ

BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL VOL. 63 N°3 SPRING 2013

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COVER

Mary Greene, design

Harry Bernard, "WasHereAlso 2.10.2," multi-plate oil monotype, 2012 (front); "WasHereAlso 1.11.1," multi-plate oil monotype, with chine collé, 2012 (back)



An arrow at the bottom of a page indicates the stanza continues.

A Short Note on the Long Poem

We read them. From the beginning we've published them, from time to time devoting entire issues to a single poem, such as John Nist's Civil War epic "Dulce et Decorum" (Fall/Winter 1958/59 and Spring 1960), Albert Goldbarth's "The Two Domains" (Spring 1994), and more recently Michael Broek's "The Logic of Yoo" (Fall 2011). Though we're always on the lookout for the distilled lyric that steals our breath away, we also welcome poems that create a broad field for exploration. The world's a big place, after all, bigger than the inch of turf trod by too many contemporary poets.

The issue you hold in your hands came about serendipitously. Over the course of two quarterly editorial board sessions we found ourselves accepting six long poems with wildly different styles and subject matter, the breadth of each contributing to a still larger breadth in the aggregate. We like the geography: Poland and Maine, Palestine, Arizona and Mexico, England and Italy, mons veneris and mythological mountains. We value the cultural and historical reach: violins and the Holocaust, airports and cyberspace, Edmund Spenser, the Song of Solomon and Ahdaf Souief, the Penitentes, tooth fairies and labors lost.

We see the long poem not as an undisciplined effusion but as a vehicle for formal innovation: Alicia Stallings's application to the domestic sphere of the ottava rima epic stanza, Margaree Little's interleaving of prose and verse in a narrative of interleaving times and places, Susan Tichy's mesostic conversation with John Ruskin's notebook entries. Each poem in the issue has a shape fit neatly to its expression.

We admit to a bit of mischief in juxtaposing poems governed by such blatantly different aesthetics. We hope that juxtaposition invites careful reading and broadens your sense of what is possible in contemporary poetry. During the months of March, April, and May, all the poets with work in this issue will contribute to a discussion on the *BPJ* blog, the Poet's Forum, about the crafting of their poems and the long poem more generally. We invite you to join the discussion at blog.bpj.org.

John Rosenwald and Lee Sharkey

BRUCE BOND

Face

A woman I know friends a person she just met,
because, whatever, she can always click delete,

even as the halo of her circle grows.
Love selects. The heart valves of attention close.

But the world wide web goes on, its arteries
deep in the noosphere we never get to see.

■

All across the airport, travelers tap the shadows
of their fingertips, of friends they do not know.

The seer and the seen, each a burning mirror
of the other, a lone god in search of a believer.

They know: long ago, the universe fell to pieces.
You over there, me here. A name for that, for this.

■

A name for the nameless god of the whole.
Is it the same with you, I ask my liquid crystal,

my search engine as it tears into the past.
History is out there. So said the early priests

as they looked up at the sky's shattered pieces
and saw their ancient fathers, still alive, still passing.

■

Tell me, is the clarified face of God no face
or each. The soul feathers her own nesting place.

To love the whole is easy, but the sum of the parts,
where do you put them. At the end of day, when I put

my screen to sleep, my dark face floats to the surface.
I see what my pillow sees, the ghost it friends.

BRUCE BOND



Long ago, I cried out on my swing for the mother
who did not come. Oh, she heard me. She was somewhere.

She knew something I did not, that now and then
a boy needs a mother's absence to hear his own

in silence, to sit a while in the sun and listen.
Dear sun, dear shadow, laid against the still horizon.

DAWN POTTER

Mr. Kowalski

1

In last night's dream I was preparing myself
to travel over the Tappan Zee Bridge on a moped
at midnight in the sluicing rain.

I would have to steer by means of a contraption
that was, more or less, a shoelace,
and the bridge was not, as during my lucid hours,

a long cantilever span over a broad river
but a viperish snarl of tarmac and iron grates,
twisting, coiling,

exits merging into on-ramps,
cars caroming from the left, from the right,
howling like an onslaught of wasps.

I filled my tank with gasoline
and imagined home, wherever it might be,
imagined my narrow tires—

how they would grip hopelessly at the metal road,
slide from lane to lane among the furious wasps
as I wielded my impotent steering-thread.

But I knew I had no choice: I had to cross this bridge
because my mother was watching me fill the gas tank
and I could not let her know I was afraid.

2

Awake now, I am embarrassed by my own transparency.
In the barn I load a feeder with hay
as the goat snorts, flitting her elven ears

and pointedly glaring at the grain bin.
Hay is not what she wants, though it's what's good for her—
what keeps her four busy stomachs

in churning, belching, clockwork order.
Grain is what makes her fat,
but her greed is shameless and irresistible,

so I dole out a handful of sweet feed,
letting the sticky collation of oats, pellets, cracked corn
slide through the fingers of my glove

onto her charging, grasping, prehensile tongue.
I wonder how it feels to delight in voracity
instead of coaxing it into harness, year in, year out—

don't drink one more glass, don't eat one more bowl,
don't reread one more novel, don't say
I'll open that violin case on some rosier morning—

never wondering how two people invent a necessity
or why a simple litany of breaths and exhalations
becomes fear instead of sleep.

3

If I say,
I want to talk about the nature of fear,
you might assume that I have something precise to say.

But I have nothing precise to say.
I think that fear is not precise.
It is a weight, a stench, a twinge in the bowels that will not be vanquished.

Yet though fear may not be precise, it is very simple.
I am afraid to drive over bridges so I dream of driving over them.
I am afraid of showing my fear to my mother

so I dream of showing her my fear.
I was afraid of Mr. Kowalski, and when, on a January night,
his wife telephoned our house to tell me he had died,

I was appalled at my relief.
Never again would I have to sit on the bench
under the dingy quilted window shade

in that house smelling of cabbage and my own weary dismay,
waiting for him to appear from some distant recess,
wearing his shorts and brown socks and plastic sandals,

ready to thrust me a few steps further
toward the future he had laid out for me.
I was his last violin student; I was his only choice.

He didn't seem to notice that I was the wrong choice,
or, perhaps, like me, he was afraid to admit that I was.
That's how fear works, after all.

4

Let me tell you about Mr. Kowalski.
By the age of ten—a black-haired gnome, dour as a judge—
he was soloing with the Warsaw Philharmonic;

he was playing Paganini. Imagine it: Paganini!
If I had been his teacher, watching his fingers
scramble knowingly among the accidentals,

I would have felt, sitting on my crimson chair
in the hushed room, as if I had fed him
Machiavelli instead of music.

Such devilment in the small grip of a child:
of course it was egregious, but prodigies,
like pinheads, sell tickets. The year was 1921.

Soon he traveled to Paris to study under the great Thibaud.
Events transpired. By the year 1982 it did not occur to me
to imagine Mr. Kowalski as a prodigy.

As a young man,
he was a popular performer on Polskie Radio.
Listeners from all over Eastern Europe

sat next to their radiograms, knitting or smoking,
enthralled by the echo of something magnificent
yet fleeting, phrases too tender, too brief to explain.

Because his father had been a regimental conductor,
Mr. Kowalski understood the rules of advancement.
In his spare time he composed popular songs

and plotted his career.
One must attract the attention
of an arrogant master

and then a greater arrogant master,
and again a greater, and again a greater,
until one becomes the arrogant master oneself.

In person Mr. Kowalski favored the Leopold Auer stance
so popular in Russian imperial orchestras
during the 1880s—left arm stiffly, nobly poised,

like a stop-motion ballerina's,
fingers arching rigidly over fingerboard and bow.
He was accustomed to the routine

of bloody fingertips and dusty dinner jackets,
of second-class rail travel and creaking stage floors,
of dismal audition rooms and vaporous reviews.

For all I know, he looked forward to retiring to America
and becoming a short old man in brown socks.
But perhaps the crackle and hiss of the transmission

softened the formal tension; perhaps his radio listeners
imagined a young man in soft shoes,
in a birch forest, in a patch of sunlight after rain.

5

I don't know.
I never heard Mr. Kowalski play anything on the violin
except for snatches of études and scale exercises.

His tone was harsh and thick,
as if it were climbing slowly, hand over hand,
up through the muddy dregs of an abandoned well.

Lest you conclude that there was something erotic
about studying the violin:
there was not.

Yet when he put his shaking hands on me
to correct my posture, yanking my left elbow and wrist
into imperious formation, crunching my fingers

into archways, I understood the protocols
of obedience. In that darkened house,
I threw back my head and dropped my eyes.

6

In 1939 the Germans arrested Mr. Kowalski
in Węgrów. He managed to escape.
His wife told me this is how it happened:

An admirer said,
You are too great an artist to die.
I will take your place.

On the run, clutching his violin case,
Mr. Kowalski forged his way to Brest-Litovsk,
where he met the Russian violinist Miron Polyakin.

Great violinists were everywhere in those days.
I have seen the photograph
of Polyakin's letter to the Moscow Conservatory

recommending Mr. Kowalski's admittance.
It is brown and tattered and seems to have been written
on graph paper.

So Mr. Kowalski went to Moscow.
In the meantime
the art lovers of Węgrów were exterminated.

7

Playing the violin saved my life
could be a bumper sticker.
One night I may glimpse it on a passing car

while dream-driving a moped over the Tappan Zee Bridge.
Not that it applies to me.
In Mr. Kowalski's place, I would have died.

That's what happens to talented children
who don't practice their scales.
If one is not greedy about art,

one is nothing.
I used to sit in Mr. Kowalski's foyer
imagining that our lesson was already over,

that I was stepping back into the sunlight
as it gleamed on the tidy sidewalks
and his neighbors' little square garden plots

overflowing with grape hyacinths and pink narcissi.
My mother would be reading Virginia Woolf in the park,
and I would announce, I had a good lesson today!

We would idle on the bench like best friends; we would chatter
about prom dresses and cats and nineteenth-century novels.
The violin would wait in the car.

8

Muscle memory is what wakes me up at midnight—
I find my left hand arched around my right wrist,
fingers held high and wide, fingertips pressed squarely

into the docile tendons, tapping out,
with exactitude, the opening of a Bach partita.
Underneath strains my left thumb,

poised for the subtle shift to second position, then back to first.
Muscle memory is what drove my boyfriend crazy
because every time we held hands I accidentally started

fingering arpeggios into his palm;
I didn't even notice; he had to yank his hand away
before I understood I had one more thing to apologize for.

Muscle memory is the habit of performance.
The body refuses to dismount from its high wire.
Even after the Nazis invaded Soviet-held Poland,

Mr. Kowalski was traveling through the provinces—
rosining his bow, tuning his strings, donning his dinner jacket.
Why didn't he stay in Moscow,

ensconced behind the conservatory walls?
When the Gestapo arrested him in Lvov,
they'd had just about enough of such behavior.

But en route to execution, he attacked his guard and escaped.
Did he strangle the man
with his strong, flexible, obedient hands?

And what had they done to his violin?
What had they done
to his hands?

No doubt muscle memory kept Mr. Kowalski awake
during the twenty months he lived under a Ukrainian pigsty.
Great violinists were everywhere in those days.

9

In the course of my life I have mucked out sheep sheds
and stanchion gutters and dog yards and loose stalls
and maternity pens and calf hutches and litter boxes

and buck barns and henhouses and pigsties.
Each genus of manure has its own particular stench,
and, when well mixed with fresh air, some varieties—

horse droppings, say—can trigger a farmhand nostalgia.
But pig manure is foul, whether fresh or aged,
though, given time, even mild-mannered goat pellets

will transform into a choking miasma
of dust, sodden rot, maggots, and ammonia.
Therefore, today, after much procrastinating,

I fear I must break down and clean my goat barn.
By “much procrastinating”
I mean one month. By “goat barn”

I mean the droppings of one goat
mingled with a quantity of dry hay.
By “fear” I mean nothing comparable

to the state of mind of a thirty-year-old strangler of Nazis
who spent six hundred days under a Ukrainian pigsty
without a violin.

10

Imagine the rest of his life
as the plaintive, fragile, vaguely muddled coda
which a genius composer’s kindhearted but mediocre executor

decides to append to the maestro’s gargantuan final symphony.
As a reporter for the *Jerusalem Post* sighed,
“Today, thin spread are the God-gifted Jewish violinists

who formerly grew like mushrooms from the soil.
With Kowalski, Eastern Europe, once an inexhaustible reservoir,
has delivered to us one of the last pearls.”

Somehow he acquired another violin,
managed to stride across an Austrian stage,
bow to the darkened audience,

bring his instrument to his throat,
arch his steel-sprung fingers,
and play not one but two nearly impossible concertos.

11

So did I hate playing the violin?
No.
It was one of the sounds of my body.

The hands aligned; the clock struck;
at that instant I was fluent
in music and words.

I was swift. I was facile. I was vain.
Fear grew inside me, imperceptibly.
Practice became the loneliest hole in the day.

My automaton fingers plugged invisible dikes—
G, A, B, C, D, E, F sharp, G, A, B, C, D, E, F sharp—
three octaves up, three octaves down,

now the melodic minor, now the harmonic minor,
now in chromatics, and by thirds, and by minor thirds . . .
and the automaton fingers marched on and onward.

What endured was pure intonation:
I could not abide a slovenly pitch.
Though I knew I was not the angel,

I always heard the angel's voice.
In this
Mr. Kowalski and I were very much alike.

12

The body refuses to dismount from its high wire.
Perched on a piano bench, small and square-kneed
in his shorts and plastic sandals,

Mr. Kowalski sipped at his glass of hot tea and announced,
When you grow up,
we will drink cognac together,

and you will marry my son,
and you will play the concertos.
He said this not once but once a week.

At the music stand I opened a Beethoven romance.
The year was 1982. Lifting a violin to my throat,
I threw back my head and dropped my eyes.

13

A weight, a stench, a twinge in the bowels—
a dream, a reproach—
an obligation—

a dynasty unclaimed—
a muddle—
What did they do to his hands?

And what of the peasants who fed the pigs?
What of the mushrooms that grew from the soil,
the listeners resting beside their radiograms,

the young man in soft shoes in a birch forest,
the woman in the park, reading Virginia Woolf?—
a dream, a reproach, an obligation,

a greed that will not be vanquished,
a viperish snarl of tarmac and iron grates—
and meanwhile this hunger that must be fed.

An admirer said,
You are too great an artist to die.
I will take your place.

You will marry my arrogance,
we will drink cognac together,
as if I had fed you music

instead of dust, sodden rot, maggots, and ammonia.
The stars shriek, a sharp bow lacerates the dark.
You must cross this bridge you are afraid to cross.

PHILIP METRES
from A Concordance of Leaves

On the occasion of my sister's wedding in Toura, Palestine

*as if I could not sing
except when you sing*
—Pablo Neruda

on drying racks tobacco leaves swim
wind turns the pages of the book

we can only read in the rough translation
of my soon-to-be brother-in-law

& this is the brother of my soon-to-be
brother-in-law, inhaling through the straw

of his cigarette: holds it between ring
& middle fingers, palm up: the unseen

& inaccessible sea caresses our strange faces—
blind & we wait for our lines to be read

ورق

& this is the cemetery, where the father
of his father's father's father's father's

father's father's father's father's father's
buried, bodies marked by broken stone incisors

among neighbors we sip sage tea, *maramia*—
named after the mother of God—for sage slaked her

PHILIP METRES

desert tongue & now a cousin comes, footfalls
white explosions of dust, from the mouth

of that abandoned quarry, its Jurassic cranes
& rusted conveyers hauling nothing now

ورق

& our family will ask so many questions we will
be called The Question Factory

& you my future brother will write your answers
with my slowly disappearing hand

The Question Factory asks: what is a dunum?
Answer: *slowly disappearing land*

The Question Factory asks: what is that line
on your skull? Answer: *a failed poem*

*by one who tries to write over everything
already written over*

ورق

The Question Factory: why do you smile?
because I still have my teeth

where are the doll's missing eyes?
in the back of my mind I believe

PHILIP METRES

in what?
I believe I hear a song

why do you laugh?
because I still have my tongue

there is a song, & yet
I hear no singing

ورق

consider the olive: it gnarls as it grows
into itself / a veritable thicket / it throws

up obstacles to the light to reach
the light / a crooked path in the air

while beneath our sight it wrestles the rock
wrests water from whatever trickles

beneath / it doesn't worry it looks like hell
refuses to straighten for anyone

each spring offers itself sweet to be eaten
first brambles / then olives

ورق

PHILIP METRES

because there is a word for love in this tongue
that entwines two people as one

& there is a word for love in this tongue
that nests in the chambers of the heart

& a word for love in this tongue that wanders
the earth, for love in this tongue in which you lose

yourself in this tongue & a word that carries
sorrow within its vowels & a word for love

that exudes from your pores & a word
for love that shares its root with falling

—*after Ahdaf Soueif*

ورق

something larger than a wave hovers
& buoys us in its wake, large as the sun as it breaks

into hills as if coaxed by the singers
to hold another's shoulder or hand off our hands

to another & sway our branches
& stamp the dear earth so hard

it feels we are lifting
from its trembling chest though the wedding

PHILIP METRES

photos will be ruined when the pitiless
enters the darkroom unbidden

ورق

having been warned to tell the truth
and nothing but the truth or else

I shall be subjected to penal action
I, the undersigned, do hereby swear

the sun-cured page of each tobacco leaf waits
to be crushed & burned into lungs

each olive tree's thousand eyes
ripen into sight

& the pomegranates of Toura are planets
neither mouth nor fence can fit around

ورق

behold my beloved beyond the wall
within my sight beyond

my touch
he standeth behind the wall

*he looketh forth, shewing himself
through the lattice*

PHILIP METRES

beyond the wall her family held
a feast for her

I stay here & wait at the gate
until my bride arrives

—for Rani Ghassan Qabaha

ورق

you my sister you my brother
outside the walls / in the wind

if Aristophanes was right
& we walk the world

in search of, a split-
infinitive of *to love*, if two

outside the walls / in the wind
should find in each other more

than mirror, then we should sing
outside the walls / in the wind

you my sister you my brother
that tree & stone may answer

outside the walls / in the wind
& let our echo ring

A. E. STALLINGS

Lost and Found

1

I crawled all morning on my hands and knees
Searching for what was lost—beneath a chair,
Behind the out-of-tune piano. *Please*,
I prayed to Entropy, let it be there—
Some vital Lego brick or puzzle piece
(A child bereft is hiccougging despair),
A ball, a doll's leg popped out of its socket,
Or treasures fallen through a holey pocket.

2

Amazing what webbed shadows can conceal—
A three-wheeled Matchbox car, or half a brace
Of socks or shoes. Oblivion will steal
Promiscuously—lost without a trace,
Microscopic bits of Playmobil,
The back-up set of house keys. You misplace
Your temper and your wits, till you exhaust
All patience with the hours it has cost.

3

I thought too of that parable, the other—
Not the one men preach of the lost sheep,
The lesser known one, on the housewife's bother
Over a missing coin: how she must sweep
The house to find it. No doubt, *she* was a mother,
I think, and laugh, and then I want to weep:
The hours drained as women rearrange
The furniture in search of small, lost change.

4

"Tidy up your room," I told my son,
"That way, it's easier to look." (It's true.)
He made an effort, a half-hearted one
Abandoned after just a block or two.
"It isn't fair," he said, "it isn't fun,
I never do what *I* would like to do,
But you, you always do *just what you want*."
Which plucked a string, as though a cosmic taunt.

5

I paused. "Is *that* what you think, then," I said.
(Sometimes he seemed less seven-year-old boy
Than teenager.) "That making you go to bed
Or washing dishes is something I *enjoy*,
And that I've nothing better to do instead
Of hunting for a crappy plastic toy?"
Raised voices, tears, apologies all round,
And yet the crucial piece was never found.

6

That night I was still seeking in my dreams,
Still groping after fragments and the maimed,
Just as in dreams a seamstress stitches seams,
Or politician spins truth unashamed,
Or loping through remembered fields and streams,
The hound pursues the scent that can't be named,
Her paws a-twitch, though heavily she lies,
And dogsbody the body does not rise,

7

Or as a poet stalks a skittish rhyme
Behind her lidded eyes, beneath the mask
Of sleep—because the mind has no free time
But keeps at night to its diurnal task
And pushes the stone as high as it can climb
Before it trochees down again. Don't ask
The mind to rest, though someday it must cease;
In life, only the flesh has any peace.

8

It seemed I searched, though, in a dusty place
Beneath a black sky thrilled with stars, ground strewn
With stones whose utter shade seemed to erase
The land's gleam (like a tarnished silver spoon);
A figure neared, with adumbrated face,
Who said, "This is the valley on the moon
Where everything misplaced on earth accrues,
And here all things are gathered that you lose."

9

The moon? Yet I did not dispute the claim.
She seemed familiar—hard to tell among
Such alien surroundings. All the same,
A word seemed out of reach, tip of my tongue,
Close-clustered consonants and vowels, a name.
Beneath her hood I glimpsed a face not young
But elegant, refined as it grew older.
My name she knew, although I had not told her.

10

Now that my eyes had focused in the dark
I saw that what seemed mountains, ridges, hills
All hemmed around us, flinging down their stark
Chill silhouettes, were overflowing landfills,
Huge heaps of congeries. And I could mark
Here was a mound of keys or socks or pills
(Those were the things that I could recognize),
Like bombed-out cities black against the skies.

11

Somehow it brought to mind the vestibule
Jumbled with hats, umbrellas, backpacks, totes,
Scarves, gym shoes, that they keep at my son's school
Behind the lunchroom: bins of winter coats,
Hairbands, sunglasses stacked up on a stool—
Each thing spoke volumes or quipped anecdotes—
Lorn, makeless gloves; lunchboxes starting to mottle.
(I'd come to seek an AWOL water bottle.)

12

"Look there," she said, and gestured to the keys,
"Those are the halls to which we can't return—
The rooms where we once sat on others' knees,
Grandparents' houses, loving, spare, and stern,
Tree houses where we whispered to the trees
Gauche secrets, virgin bedrooms where we'd burn,
Love's first apartments. As we shut each door,
It locks: we cannot enter anymore."

13

There was a mound that loomed above our heads,
A skein of dusty strands large as a barn.
“Are these,” I asked, “the sum of hair one sheds
In life, or all the rips one has to darn?”
She laughed and said, “Those are the frayed, lost threads
Of conversations, arguments, the yarn
Of thought and logic’s clews we’d thought we’d spun
Only to find they’d somehow come undone.”

14

Then there was sunk, among the hills, a bowl,
A wide, shallow depression, in which “O’s”
Or ciphers gathered, thin, and black as coal,
Like washers of black iron. I asked, “And those?”
“They mark our absences—it’s through the hole
Of lapsed attention that the moment goes.”
I thought of those assemblies with repentance
Where I had mocked the prizes of attendance.

15

“And that?” I pointed to a pyramid
Of papers, ever threatening to tumble.
It shifted—sheaves of pages suddenly slid
And settled again. I stepped back from the jumble,
Thinking we might be buried there amid
An avalanche of foolscap—a hushed rumble
Shuffled its menace. I whispered, “Then are those
The poems lost, or pages of sure prose—

16

“Maybe even something that would sell
(A book about a young aspiring warlock?)—
That disappeared when something broke the spell,
When toddler learned to work the study door-lock,
Or the telephone brayed bad news—or the front bell
Portended importunity from Porlock?”
“The poems,” she said, “that perish at the brink
Of being, are not so many as you think,

17

“Nor yet so great. No, no, these are the letters
We meant to write and didn’t—all the unsaid
Begrudged congratulations to our betters,
Condolences we owed the lately dead,
Love notes unsent—in love, we all are debtors—
Gratitude to teachers who penned in red
Corrections to our ignorant defenses,
Apologies kept close like confidences.”

18

A vague, headachy cloud among the towers
Rose, heaped of dusky down as from black swans.
“Those are,” she said, “Insomnia’s desperate hours,
Lost sleep: countdown of clocks, the impotent yawns;
The teething cries, sweet drowsiness that sours,
The night feedings that soldier into dawns.”
I watched as creatures, etiolated, pale,
Weighed bales of feathers in a brazen scale.

19

What were the creatures doing? She explained,
“For every hour that we lose of sleep,
Another hour of wakefulness is gained;
There is a tally that we have to keep.”
“Unbearable minutes!” She saw that I was pained.
“Perhaps,” she said, “but sometimes in the deep
Of night, reflections come we cannot parse—
To *consider* means to contemplate the stars.”

20

Skittering round us, skirls of silver sand
Would swarm and arch into a ridge or dune,
And then disperse, as if an unseen hand
Swept them away (there was no wind), then soon
Accumulate elsewhere, a sarabande
Of form and entropy, a restive swoon
Of particles, forever in a welter,
Like starling murmurations seeking shelter.

21

"The sands of Time." (I didn't have to speak;
She answered straightaway with some disdain.)
"With scything hands you hasten through the week
Clockwise, while widdershins, the fair hours drain.
Haste," she declared, "is Violence, in Greek."
Then she bore on in silence once again.
"Why won't they rest?" I asked in puzzlement.
"Minutes are not lost," she said, "but spent."

22

Nearby, a glint of vitreous splinters, foiled
With silver, bristled in a jagged mass.
"This is a woman's loveliness that's spoiled
With age," she said, "and tears, and days that pass—
Her raiment that is creased, thread-worn, and soiled.
Here, seek that vanished beauty in this glass."
And gave me a reflection where I sought her—
Nothing at first—but then I saw my daughter—

23

Eyes brown, not blue; the hair, not straight, but curled.
"Not truly lost," she laughed, at my surprise.
"Some things fetch up on the bright shores of the world
Once more, under a slightly different guise;
Meanwhile, they are not lost, but somehow furled
Back into the heart of things from which they rise."
And saying this, she turned, and did not wait,
But something nearby made me hesitate,

24

I could not make it out at first: a pile
Of bone chips, ivory splinters? Like a sleuth,
I sneaked a handful, following the while,
But stopped short when I realized the truth,
And let them fall, and dropped my neutral smile:
Each keen point was a tiny human tooth.
I looked back over my shoulder for a glimpse
And gasped to see a thousand small, grey imps

25

Go scampering up the hill, with wrinkled wings
Leathern like bats, with backs hunched up to carry,
Slung over their shoulders, sacks bulged with grim things—
More teeth, I thought—remains you ought to bury.
My guide observed me watch their scurrings.
“But don’t you recognize a real tooth fairy?
Each baby tooth, deciduous but bright,
Stands for a childhood rooted in delight,

26

“But those that come here stained, starting to rot,
Are childhoods that are eaten up with sorrow,
Eroded by the acids of their lot
And others’ sins they are compelled to borrow.”
“So many!” I exclaimed, as fairies brought
More chatterings of teeth. “Yes, and tomorrow,
It never stops. Each childhood is outgrown
For sharper permanence. Even your own”

27

(Children, she meant) “cannot stay as they are.
Already, your son’s childhood is consigned,”
She held up six fine milk teeth in a jar—
“Already he is leaving it behind,
Striding forth as light strides from a star;
Though the star itself blow out, inert and blind,
The light strides on, and reaches other eyes
That in some distant time scan these same skies.”

28

At last our path came to a spring whose gleam
Provoked my thirst. Two cups of battered zinc
Hung from a pair of hooks there: one had “Dream”
Inscribed upon it; on the other, “Think.”
But when I dipped each cup’s lip to the stream,
Immediately it began to sink.
When both had vanished, she said, “Do not wet
Your lips here with the waters of Forget.”

29

Not water, exactly, I knew as I drew near it—
It was a liquid, true, but more like gin
Though smelling of aniseed—some cold, clear spirit
Water turns cloudy. “Many are taken in,
Some poets seek it, thinking that they fear it,
The reflectionless fountain of Oblivion,
By sex, by pills, by leap of doubt, by gas,
Or at the bottom of a tilting glass.

30

“But you, you must remember, and return.”
Now I saw clearly skin of alabaster,
Her moon-washed hair, a gaze one could discern
As gunmetal grey—and then at last I asked her,
“Who are you? Are you she who learned to master
The art of losing? Or she who used to burn
With sweetbitter eros? She who did dying well,
The beekeeper’s waspish daughter? Amherst’s belle?”

31

“Don’t you know? But everyone who loses
Has prayed and laid an offering at my shrine—
Though each who knows me calls me as she chooses,
My name’s Mnemosyne; I am divine.
I am,” she said, “the Mother of the Muses—
Imagine, you have two, but I have nine!
More even than that—for all the arts that be,
All sciences too, are born of Memory.”

32

It made me smile to picture her at her loom
With a gaggle of teen-aged daughters at her feet:
No-nonsense Clio, Melpomene garbed in gloom,
Graceful Euterpe, Terpsichore, who won’t eat,
Thalia, laughing—Polyhymnia in her room
With prayers to chant—Urania taking a seat
At the telescope, Erato fine-tuning her fiddle,
Calliope starting her story in the middle.

33

She led the way now through a garden of musks
From dark, fanged flowers—incarnadine, maroon.
We came upon two gates: one made of tusks
Of prehistoric elephants, one hewn
From massive, savage horns. All round, the husks
And bones of great extinctions had been strewn.
“Here we must pass,” she said, “but not together.
You pass through one; I shall pass through the other.”

34

Then something began to happen. I felt her arm
On mine, we seemed to travel, standing still,
I saw a light. Had someone come to harm?
I heard a distant siren, pulsing, shrill—
But then I recognized the old alarm
Harping on its monitory trill—
It's Dawn again, come with her golden rule
Like a shepherd's crook, to harry us to school.

35

There are lunches to make, I thought, and tried to find
Some paperwork from last week I'd mislaid
(Due back, no doubt, today, dated and signed),
Instead, unearthed a bill we hadn't paid,
Located shoes, a scarf, a change of mind:
I tried to put aside mistakes I'd made,
To live in the sublunary, the swift,
Deep present, through which falling bodies sift.

36

I saw the aorist moment as it went—
The light on my children's hair, my face in the glass
Neither old nor young; but bare, intelligent.
I was a sieve—I felt the moment pass
Right through me, currency as it was spent,
That bright, loose change, like falling leaves, that mass
Of decadent gold leaf, now turning brown—
I could not keep it; I could write it down.

MARGAREE LITTLE

Thanksgiving

1

In the hot bedroom half a mile from the border

I opened David's Catullus, the last lines of number sixty-three,

women mutilating themselves before a god, red pen marks

translating the Latin: *Drive other people crazy. Drive other people mad.*

We'd just come from mountains that were green for the first time in months,

as happens here in August, and the sun was going down

over the cottonwoods, Border Patrol trucks parked on the hills

as we drove up Grand Avenue and turned on Crawford by the liquor store,

where teenage girls were standing, and where one,

in a pink tank top that looked like silk, lifted her right hand to her left shoulder

to pull up the strap that had been falling down.

There could be poems in which he does not appear,

my teacher said. She meant the man we found. She meant,

I think, *go back to the world again.* But there are things with holes in them—

like the stone foundation where a house had been, where my sister and I played

when we were children, a house that must have burned,

though we never discussed it. Wild geese taking off from the lake.

Sister taking off her clothes. It was cold, and I think she wanted to see

how far she could go without minding, as at the end of the day, from indoors,

it can look like it's already gotten dark, but if you've been outside all day



you know this is the bluest part, deer putting their faces to the ground
to eat at the beginning of winter. No one could tell me how they knew to do that.
Or the bald eagles coming back, why they came back
not in Maine's far north but central Maine,
along the coast where people live, where I worked one fall
at a farm, and where I lived, thirty miles from the farm,
with a woman who sometimes filled the house with lilacs in glass jars.
In the evening, when she broke the jars one by one against the kitchen wall,
smell of lilacs, smell of beer, her hands didn't shake,
since the moon came in from the field outside, since beyond the field
were pines, then another field, we were alone, we could be anything there—

In the morning she'd wake me, light coming in through the green glass bottle
by the window by the bed, and I'd watch through the window
as she'd go out to the field, unstringing the electric fencing
for the sheep we kept. Some days she'd bring in basil
I'd planted in the yard, and how could I tell the difference
between the smell of basil, the sound of her voice slurred though it was still
morning,
and what the voice was saying, something about beauty, something about
what we'd be, those days in September, when she'd pull me down on the
kitchen table.



Later she'd go into her room. If I put my ear to the door
I could almost hear a sound coming out, like ocean stored
in the curve of a shell, her raincoat over the window
to keep out the light, the apple tree in the yard, its delicate branches,
in a certain light it appeared almost intact—

2

In June, walking all week from Sásabe to Tucson with fifty others who'd come because people are dying in this desert, people were dying as we walked, I made a list of things I'd tried that spring in exchange for which the man we found might not have died, such as not sleeping, such as lighting candles at specific times, such as praying. And this walk, carrying a plywood cross through the desert as the others did, each cross bearing in permanent marker the name of someone lost, though most, like mine, said *desconocido*, which means *unknown*.

If I tried hard enough, while I walked with the cross, I could begin to pretend that in another minute he'd walk toward us, Elias. And then, surely, he would walk past us, since what would I say if I saw him like that, light catching in the thin grass west of the highway. Gel combed in his hair. A tattoo, maybe, on his left shoulder, of a rose. And a name printed under the rose, the ink so faded to green that I couldn't read it, and neither could he, since he just saw what it used to be and not what it was becoming, something closer to the shape his mouth made of trying not to express pain, at seventeen, when he rolled back the sleeve of his blue and white school uniform and a man bent over him with a needle and ink. On the wall over both of them Elias watched a page torn from a magazine, photograph of apple trees in the orchards of Washington State, where a girl wore a tin ring the man with the needle had given her.

3

The phone call came the second week of September, a man named Andrés, calling from Washington, calling to say his sister was missing, left behind two weeks ago in the desert west of Tucson, from a small town in Guatemala, twenty-two years old, ninety pounds—

Sarah was the one who took the call.

Sarah, who'd turned to me last spring, her calm face, her voice saying, *I want you to know, the doctor went out to where you found the man, she found other bones, she thinks they're from another body*—Sarah's an RN, she knows things about the body—who'd said, weeks before that, *there's no space in ordinary life for grief*, which is what people say, only her face was a calm I wanted to put on, her long arm around me in her green windbreaker.

In September, after she took the call, I stood with her in the gravel parking lot.

The afternoon sun came down around us, and we discussed going that day or the next to look, though we didn't say the girl's name was *Santa* which means *saint*, at home on my desk a letter from my teacher, a bowl of oranges, a chair by the window where I'd go to wait, since we weren't saying it had been two weeks already, we weren't asking *at what point do you lose your name*—what Sarah said was, *let's go in the morning*.

So in the morning we drove out to Ironwood, the others who had come to help following in the jeep behind us, to Nation land west of 86, the place Andrés had described, which was also the place Sarah had found the other girl, who'd come from the same town Santa came from, who'd been coming, in a pink sweatshirt, to surprise her fiancé in Oregon.

He'd called and asked Sarah to look, so she did, and she found the girl in Ironwood, in a shallow dip of sand under a tree.

She has very long hair, the fiancé had said, and *she did*, Sarah was saying, *she did have long hair*.

Then we were walking under the power lines, looking for a trail on the land running flat and hard to the mountains west of us, past the thin dirt roads rutted next to mobile homes rotting out, the dust of their walls held together with formaldehyde, but only just.

Imagine living in a place like that, the windows like windows a child would draw, the child watching you get up every morning, prepare meals out of habit, as people who live in shadows must sometimes touch their foreheads out of habit, to make sure they are still there, and later their grandchildren notice it, one hand like a flicker at the forehead.

4

There's no secret to this. You look for a trail and then follow it,
though you have to know what to look for, and then try not to lose track of it,
when the sun, in the middle of the day,
begins to make things move around, when everything begins
to look like a trail, and the wind and even your own steps might be voices.
I wanted to ask Sarah if you get used to it, after a while,
the backpacks left under the trees in the wash. The empty gallon jugs.
Cotton shirts hung in mesquite trees, the fabric getting so soft and thin
you could almost see through it if you were to look.
But I didn't know how to ask, and we kept walking, two weeks since the girl
was lost,
two weeks of Andrés sitting at some card table in Washington State
while it rained in the orchards around him, praying, maybe, and maybe fingering
some light blue hair ribbon he was abstracting to all women,
if his sister was a woman, he was realizing then that she was,
though he used to know it in a different way when they both were children,



when they'd play the kind of game children play
though sometimes they'd go further and he'd forget it was her he was moving over
under the cedar trees at the edge of town, the roots of the trees
painted with lime to protect them. Then he was calling us from Washington
and we were stopping, we were standing in the thin shade of the power lines:
his sister had called, she was already detained, she was already
sent back to Guatemala, and Sarah said into the cell phone,
thank god she's safe.

My teacher who sent me back to the world,
it's October. Out walking last night after the first rain in weeks,
I saw three nylon jack-o'-lanterns swaying in the wind in someone's yard.
Fall here isn't like fall at home—
no lake, no geese taking off from the lake, no swallows in the trees.
Coming up to Annie's house last night after the rain,
I opened the screen door without knocking,
washed glasses in the kitchen, waited for her to come back from the desert
and put her arms around me. They'd found another man who died.
Today wasn't like before, she said. Today I felt strong, I knew what to do,
her voice getting high and thin in the night.
And I did what I knew how to do, though I didn't know I'd learned it,



brought sheets out of the closet, made a bed for her on the couch on the
back porch,

pulled a mattress close and lay down on it.

After a while she lay down, too. And after a while I turned off the light,

left the two white vigil candles burning. Then I pulled a blanket over her,

which is what they'd done for the man they found that morning.

5

I saw them when I got there at first light, the eagles, in the stand of pines

at the foot of a hill, settling into the shape of a crown in the branches.

I'd left when it was still dark, the woman asleep in the wide white bed,

I'd scraped frost off the windshield, driven out past the blueberry fields
toward the farm to work with the others, killing the turkeys John had raised.

The week before Thanksgiving. We pulled rubber gloves over our coat sleeves,

used our hands to break the ice in the tubs in the driveway,
where we'd put the birds we'd killed the day before—

you've got to stop the heat fast, John said, or they'll go bad—

it was up to us if they went bad or not. We pulled the feathers
out with knives, gutted them, bagged them,

weighed them in the shop. And when our hands got too cold

to hold the knives, we beat them on our legs and started again,
though later we'd wake and find they'd gone numb while we slept.

We worked until there was no more light. And before we drove home

in the freezing dark, the rain turning slowly to snow in the road,
we swept what was left, what we didn't need,

down the drain in the center of the floor in the shop,

so it ran to the trees where the eagles were waiting
for a river running toward them filled with food.

6

Strung out like one who bolts behind an unbroken ox

Catullus writes. *Where did I imagine I'd find you?*

When she doesn't tell me what she sees when she stays up at night,

my teacher, I think it's out of kindness. But later I think

maybe I didn't ask the question right, since maybe,

after so much practice, you start to see it just as well by day—

not the way his face was not a face, the man we found,

but how, at the end of the walk through the desert in June,

we came down from the West into the city, to a park,

and people were waiting for us, clapping. And then it was time

to put the crosses down, lean them

together against a tree, and mine went with them.

SUSAN TICHY

That the Earth Is Not Only Supported by Their Strength
but Fed by Their Ruin

Jump cut
to his wedding
night—that 'first walk on rock
& under pine'

un-helped by the fantasies

of painters—'workmen
who had not looked at the thing'
its crisp turf
its sun-burned
rock
the 'mountain thus raised'
or the split valleys
'whose vast original depth is proved'

by lake-beds not yet filled.

Or conjure this:

'strange pieces of broken shade, accurately remembered,
 or accurately invented as the case may be,
 cause a condition of un-
 intelligibility, quaint and embarrassing
 almost in exact proportion to
 the amount of truth
 it contains.'

Observe, he said:

'this study of mine
 does not profess
 to be a *picture* at all;
 it is a mere sketch or catalogue
 of all that there is
 on the mountainside'
 for 'you

can only show how light affects the object
 by knowing
 thoroughly what the object is.'

The problem

was how to make a glacier
 emerge from white paper

(as oil will neith-

er dry
nor carry safely):
butter-
flies flit
through the pencil-point,
age-stained,
tea-dark,
as bedding
falls to the northwest:
piles

of Jura-clays
& gneissic rose,
of sandstone, trap, and serpentine—
the first crossed out with three hatch-marks,
the last one labeled

'better
thus'—
the lower hills a scattering
of quick
light
lines, their elegance

just
true
enough
to hold the lovely summits
to the page:
'no one,' he said,

'more averse than I
to the substitution
of knowledge for the outward and apparent fact—'

Scattered woods below forest

scribbled across
an unfinished slope—

judged a failure?
or simply
abandoned
when his eye had followed its logic
long enough?

Summit, with him

never **r** a verb: he carved no steps
in sandstone, paused
for no pleasant chats
of snow slopes or arêtes.
Climbers spread-eagled on vertical rock
like beasts of ill-repute
nailed to a barn

amused him no more

than the ill-joined
anatomy
of a badly drawn ridge.
What climbers discovered,
rock-drunk,

on the single path accessible

through all inaccessibilities—
the additive truth
of pause and step,
muscle and eye—
he sketched one-handed:
that 'strange quiver-
ing substance of rock

itself,' the first **o**bject
of right attention, cataclysm mapped
 in 'the **w**hirls, loops, braids and ropes
 of **m**ineral

matter in a single rock'
muscle matter
 in a **s**ingle step.

'To placidly **d**raw the folded beds
 of Skiddaw and **Cau-**
sey

Pike slate
without the slightest
 suggestion **n** of bruise in any part of them'—

such wrong seeing the base **i**njustice
 up**o**n which every
human frailty
 depends. And so his shock

at the dizzy **r**avine
 where 'of **c**ourse the paper is to be white'
 & cloud to part convincingly
 (though **h**onestly, on divine heights
 one does not expect a **t**hicket)—

Interject a sketch
of a fossil sea-
urchin, its delicate shell
of black flint
rising
through
layers
of chalk and grey dust
by means of a careful penknife: light
in such
endeavor required
to be unremittingly

mortal. The jumble
of horrors
unearthed
that night
included his own

particular
madness:
'for whether you have one, or ten,
or twenty processes to go through,
you must go *straight* through them,
know-
ingly,
foreseeingly all the way'

—and **j**ustly;
 ‘**f**or if you get
 the **th**ing
once

wrong,
 there is no hope for the **b**usiness
 but in **w**ashing or scraping
 boldly down to the white
 ground, and beginning again.’
 Thus:

‘nearly unable to **s**peak anymore
 except of the natures
 of stones and flowers,’

his sketch
 of the **c**ommon buttercup
 concealing terror

in **j**oy—
 ‘as in the aiguilles
of the great alps, so in this lowest
 field **h**erb:
 where **r**ending is the law of being
 it is the law of loveliness—’

