

# FIELD





# FIELD

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## CONTENTS

<i>Joseph Campana</i>	7	<i>Vanya</i>
	8	<i>Lease</i>
<i>Erin Malone</i>	9	<i>Letter Never Sent</i>
	10	<i>Letter from Egg Lake Road</i>
<i>Heather Sellers</i>	11	<i>Retrobade</i>
<i>Ralph Burns</i>	13	<i>Birthday</i>
	14	<i>Whose Voice Do You Listen For?</i>
<i>Christopher Todd Matthews</i>	15	<i>A Boy Will Be an Expert on His Grandma's Purse</i>
<i>Frannie Lindsay</i>	16	<i>Elegy for My Mother</i>
	17	<i>Against Rapture</i>
<i>Michael Chitwood</i>	18	<i>The Good Old Days</i>
<i>Richard K. Kent</i>	19	<i>Lines Written on the Day before the First Snow</i>
<i>Richie Hofmann</i>	20	<i>Abendlied</i>
	21	<i>Imperium</i>
<i>Elton Glaser</i>	22	<i>First Anniversary</i>
	23	<i>Life by Misadventure</i>
<i>Richard Robbins</i>	24	<i>God Particles</i>
	25	<i>Pen</i>
<i>Sylva Fischerová</i>	26	<i>Elba</i>
<i>translated by Stuart Friebert</i>		
<i>Lee Sharkey</i>	28	<i>Equations</i>
<i>Mark Irwin</i>	29	<i>Moment</i>
<i>Arthur Sze</i>	30	<i>2'33"</i>
	31	<i>Midnight Loon</i>

<i>Emily Vizzo</i>	32	<i>Island Stories</i>
	33	<i>Fig</i>
<i>G. C. Waldrep</i>	34	<i>Tanmacnally</i>
<i>Bruce Beasley</i>	35	from <i>The Mass of the Ordinary</i>
<i>Sandra McPherson</i>	42	<i>The Tiny Landscape and How It Is Worthy</i>
<i>Bern Mulvey</i>	44	<i>The Memory of Now</i>
	45	<i>Eclipse</i>
<i>George David Clark</i>	46	<i>Heimlich for a Heavenly Windpipe</i>
<i>Ray Amorosi</i>	47	<i>The Hills</i>
	48	<i>Only Amber</i>
<i>Edoardo Sanguineti</i> <i>translated by Will Schutt</i>	49	<i>"The Aeolian Harps Do Not Play for You"</i>
	50	<i>"That One Who Sleeps"</i>
<i>Rosalie Moffett</i>	51	<i>Self Portrait with Scratch Ticket</i>
<i>Mark Neely</i>	52	<i>[first a forest burned]</i>
	53	<i>[slow and stately survives]</i>
<i>Lindsay Turner</i>	54	<i>Apology</i>
	55	<i>It's Not Raining and It's Not Not Raining</i>
<i>Angela Ball</i>	56	<i>On the Subject of So-Called Forgiveness</i>
	57	<i>Methods of Choice</i>
<i>Anna Journey</i>	58	<i>Asymmetrical—</i>
	59	<i>Reasons Why Licking the Anesthetic Backs of Waxy Monkey Tree Frogs Could've Made Me Stand Living in Texas</i>

<i>Mike White</i>	60	<i>Break</i>
	61	<i>Ark</i>
<i>Marci Vogel</i>	62	<i>And the Hours, They Felt Like Years &amp; the Years, Minutes</i>
<i>Angie Estes</i>	64	<i>Dessert</i>
<i>John Gallaher</i>	66	<i>In a Landscape: XIII</i>
	68	<i>In a Landscape: XV</i>

### Poetry 2012: Five Review-Essays

<i>DeSales Harrison</i>	70	<i>The Memory I Am, the Memory I Follow</i> <i>Yves Bonnefoy, Second Simplicity</i>
<i>Jessica Grim</i>	78	<i>Denatured Form</i> <i>Evelyn Reilly, Apocalypso</i>
<i>Pamela Alexander</i>	87	<i>The Art of the Art of Falconry</i> <i>Andrew Feld, Raptor</i>
<i>Kazim Ali</i>	93	<i>Attempted Treasons: Some Notes on Recent Translations</i> <i>Translations from Hafiz (Matthew Rohrer); Osip Mandelstam, Stolen Air; Marina Tsvetaeva, Dark Elderberry Branch; Alice Oswald, Memorial</i>
<i>Martha Collins</i>	101	<i>Some Madness Is</i> <i>Steven Cramer, Clangings</i>
	107	<i>Contributors</i>





VANYA

There's always a pistol, always a play  
always some second-rate characters:

a theatre sifting dust, tea cooling  
in gnarled hands, in gnarled hands

in the country, in the endless afternoon.  
Cards click down their fatal caricatures

only to rise and fall and shuffle back  
all the same. Where is the orchard?

Where the city? Oh my lost one you  
exhaust me I could be anything why

won't you kiss me? We cut down all  
the trees again. We covered the streets

with song. There is no room for what  
I should say to you. There is only time

observing you as if from great darkness  
as you wait and wait and wait and repeat.

Someone's leaving. You never catch him.  
Someone's taking off. There's nothing here

to take away.

## LEASE

Nothing's not a thing  
I have known: I have

picked up my tickets  
at the window. I have

piled myself high  
with scarves. In my

bag are three books  
from the library. I am

not, here or now, a naked  
thing. Nothing's not a thing

I am, not a thing I could be.

I can check out more books  
after dinner. I can borrow

one hundred forty-seven more.  
Why I disguise, why I shrink

from you: some such nonsense,  
all that rent. Bare, forked thing,

empty library: why are  
you crying in the dark?

Nothing almost sees almost  
nothing: there are miracles,

but there is also misery.

LETTER NEVER SENT

As for the weather, it's fair to say  
fine. The cherry trees are rioting.  
I got your note

two dishtowels and the small white  
mixing bowl. In my dresser  
your ring is in a box.

I walk  
to the sound of bicycle wheels  
and a voice warning *on your left*.

The trees are an industry.  
There's too much of more  
and my thoughts.

I walk to the sound of a bird  
singing *Okaleee!*  
Another goes, *Potato chip*.

And because the dead are never out of work  
you're up to your soapy elbows  
calling, *Well hi there!*  
when I'm coming in the door.

## LETTER FROM EGG LAKE ROAD

It troubles me to tell you the sky today  
is the color of an unlit bulb  
and that predictions call for the extinction  
of Edison's incandescent.

I'll miss filaments, those fragile insects  
that break when shaken, their sound  
like sleet on a skylight, and the beauty

of the inner ear. I confess  
wasted hours under the gooseneck lamp,  
erasing. Some things  
we'll never know. As for this house  
between two trees, I can't say  
how it holds me, or explain the deer  
who graze outside its glass and then so surely  
disappear.

RETROBADE

Mornings I never look  
at my body, quick find  
a shirt that won't scratch,  
a skirt that works as a flag.  
Mornings I'm my own country,  
bicycle my military. Now I  
help a small bug cross our  
quiet street. No thoughts  
for hours. Morning puts off  
its arch-enemy, afternoon.

Mornings I woke my mother.  
She said, "What do you  
want?" I didn't know. I didn't know  
what we were talking about.  
For a long time a child confuses  
the whole day with the mother.  
Some summer mornings she took us  
to the lake. I opened mussels  
with her good letter opener,  
in order to set them free and kill them.  
Mornings I ate my damp sandwich.  
Early. Lunch, she said, is always better  
on your own. There are so many  
ways to go hungry. Bologna  
in a sweet lake. Morning, ruined.

Mornings I met my lover in a not  
built house—tiers of cement, plat-  
forms over a dark lake. We lay on  
thin coats, watched the high  
high-school students, his friends  
go late to class. We heard the bells.  
Alarm? Homeroom? Evacuation?  
All I thought about was could I live

in this house when it was finished.  
Who would I be and how her. Mornings  
he read his poetry aloud. I said *la la la*  
in a mean way. I meant it.

Mornings I was pregnant, then not.  
Mornings, I was married, chatting  
on the telephone at noon with him,  
planning him. Evenings are divorces.  
You can't have a future morning.  
Not this morning.

BIRTHDAY

The way traffic stills then moves on  
the man and woman look at each other  
and turn away. Don't worry about them.  
The warp and woof of daylight thrills  
the coming rain, the going silver in her hair.  
If falling down the atmosphere nears the temperature  
of bone urban heat and convective make us still.  
I take from air an episode from Virgil  
and climb into a cypress, and find myself  
in hell with my father in his Hawaiian shirt.  
Nobody warned us in real life that this moment  
is more real than paying or getting paid,  
and of course you can't return for things forgotten,  
only for air which starts at the top of the world,  
sucks up water from the Atlantic.  
If it's up to me I say take a minute and think,  
find some expression for love to carry all five  
hearts like the earthworm glowing in the gutter.  
But it's up to you who hold this book to remember  
someone shaving in the half bath off the bedroom,  
the way the image in the mirror looks out, talks, looks back—  
who does this ever the right way, the one way?

## WHOSE VOICE DO YOU LISTEN FOR?

My uncle in his small kitchen lit against chaos,  
but chaos came in my shape, my brothers  
and sister, my mother recently divorced asking  
questions but needing money.

I listened to dangling legs of the mosquito,  
light in a glass of carrot juice, bitterness and hope,  
cool dry air when a refrigerator door opened.

When my uncle's eyes rolled he was trying to think—  
*What do I do now? Where do we go?*

We who wore sunburns in loopy dark, bounced in and out  
of the screen door. It banged and light flickered.

My Uncle Ralph had just stopped drinking—you there,  
lift your life from burden—you, our necessary patriarch—  
who scobbed knobs, lifted up uncertainty,

turned it blue and red in the light. When floors rocked under our  
weight—

you could hear stress in boards not meant for too many people,  
you could see a constellation vacate a precinct which ordinarily  
held silence. Put a whistle down on daylight flap.

Make frequency, as in time with its own wave.

Blue spruce, 8 o'clock mist, shoots of stars orange as George  
Washington's teeth.

I think, Uncle Ralph, that when you looked at us  
your panic climbed out of the top of your head  
and jumped onto me to take on and off like a Yankees cap  
when I'm driving Garden State Parkway in traffic and snow.



*Christopher Todd Matthews*

A BOY WILL BE AN EXPERT ON HIS GRANDMA'S PURSE

Perched on her hip then hauled round  
It stays huddled and mean, no eyes, all mouth.

A knotted clasp opens with the same  
twisting pinch that wrecks the clotted flesh

of snails in her zinnias—and out comes  
one smaller—pink distended

inner thing, hippocampus, heart,  
so crammed with coins their divots scar

its skin with smiles. And why not. Joy  
is being here, inhaling so much drapery

while something gets bought. For you.  
All any transaction ever requires

is letting go of her hand.

ELEGY FOR MY MOTHER

But I still have my river-mother  
and all of her glittering fish,  
  
my sycamore-mother who never is cold,  
  
my star-white mother whose eyes  
need no closing,  
  
whose wind-stripped hands need not crochet,  
  
whose dove-plain dress does not rip  
on the drag of the gutter's wind,  
  
whose kicked-off galoshes never lined up  
with all the black pumps of the mothers  
of Morningside Avenue,  
  
my mother whose fiddle has two  
curved hurts for its f-holes,  
  
magnolia-mother shedding her petals of snow,  
tearless November mother refusing soup,  
  
leaving her wig on the steps  
for the grackles to nest in,  
  
my broad-boned mother, my corduroy  
notre dame of the worn knees,  
  
mother of sidestroke stillness  
and loose knots,  
  
my mother who blurs from the effort  
of being remembered.

## AGAINST RAPTURE

It. Is. Going. To. Happen.  
—*Harold Camping*

Gradually things began to appear in the house  
that belonged to the risen-away: dahlia brooch  
on the lapel of the blouse she never wore,

pebbly bath soap damp with the scent  
of a woodfitter's palms. Scraps of the red  
that had never been torn into cardinals.

From her fire escape she could still  
see the non-wing of heat lightning  
grazing its chosen. Gone

were their rumped picnic blankets, nary  
a crumb in the brambles. Gone  
their guitars and their little plump hymnals.

From the outskirts came reports  
that even the slowest dancing had stopped.  
Still, she took up her hair brush

and worked an errant tangle loose.  
She leaned back on her pillow. Imagined  
the downpour of valuables,

all that scared starlight. Noticed  
the tepid moon failing to warm itself  
in the old, stern hearth of the birch ribs.

Noticed the nightstand needed  
a decent dusting. Noticed  
how grateful she was for that, for dust.

*22 May 2011*

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

Here on these few streets  
people are known for their faults,  
a liar, a skinflint, a woman  
who sings too loud in the choir,  
but they are known.  
This is what everyone in big cities  
wants to get back to  
or that's what they say  
though they don't come back.  
The pie *is* really toothsome at the diner,  
there's that.  
And just the right number  
of flies for the occasional waving away.  
If you are passing by  
you might think you are being waved to,  
now who was that,  
I know I know him.  
Oh yes, he made his boy  
carry buckets of water from the house,  
the wire handles biting into his hands,  
and pour them into the creek  
for laughing in church.  
The creek did not swell,  
not even slightly.

*Richard K. Kent*

LINES WRITTEN ON THE DAY BEFORE THE FIRST SNOW

Then go on, pass through the moon gate  
of the O in omen,

there where the four directions meet,  
where sage and simpleton

join hands, where one walks  
in the dust of fathers and mothers,

where whatever path one treads  
is vanishing now with each breath.

ABENDLIED

All the animals in the city: blood  
in a butcher's window. Beneath  
a butcher's stoop. A white parrot  
in an opera lover's bedroom:  
keeping watch, telling. I hear them all.  
Even a family crest above an entrance  
studded with bees. Even a lion  
with a ring in his mouth. Even the lips  
troubled with knocking.

## IMPERIUM

As if yoked in a wooden beam, our bodies cross  
into the thrall of the river

whose name means red—hooves and sandals  
with iron hobnails hammered

into the soles, one after the other  
into the muddy water. We move at first like light on brass.

Now like a legion. Now a piece of the river  
being crossed.

FIRST ANNIVERSARY

Outside, a restless rain, in this April of no return.

I keep the dusty window shades at half-mast.

I rearrange the magnets on the white refrigerator door:  
Fleur de lis of the Saints, gondola, pelican with its eyes shut.

In some parallel world, you're still raising the bridal veil.

One glove left on the dresser, the other lost.

Every morning, I wake at two or three, the pillow damp,  
And go downstairs to nothing, slave of the empty hours.

My mind stumbling in the dark, my tears like sealing wax.

What passport will take me across the cold border to you?



## LIFE BY MISADVENTURE

At this moment (now that moment, lately passed), in which  
The dead still live by being still dead,  
I understand at once  
That every story has a backstory, and how pain comes  
Like a spider crawling on the soul.

We begin in blood, alien babies with a wrinkled scream,  
With an appetite for love and fresh disaster,  
And learn to become  
Masters of the damaged flesh, the nerves jerking, the heart  
Fucked up but thumping on.

And some believe in bishops and devils, believe they'll be  
Firstfruits lifted up by the rapture.  
And some still wonder  
What errors put us here, perplexed among the strange impediments,  
The enigmas that leave us numb.

This morning, the sky means business, clouds spilling their dark,  
Early news making the brainwaves jump.  
Are you the lover  
Who will stay for breakfast and a slow kiss, or the one who goes out  
Alone into the small wet dawn?

GOD PARTICLES

They show up after a death, arranging a face on The Shroud.

They make the waterfall fall.

They make the shine in Whitman's eye, the flies in orbit around the  
hungry.

Under the Alps, they lose the recent race to protons.

They make grilled peach halves over strawberry, the drizzle of honey

They make that hand, one finger over another.

Under the Alps, they make the six-legged horse just over a rise,  
coming this way, bearing down.

## PEN

You didn't mean it, I hope, the day you walked into the surf like the last shot of a film, upright through the first surges of foam, even as you advanced toward the middle of the ocean, through the first wave breaking through your chest, upright through the swells beyond the break line to the point you might either float neck-deep or try to walk—even if the air in your lungs, even if your natural buoyancy would not allow it—beneath each swell toward dimmer and dimmer light. A lifeguard found you out before you disappeared. Pulled you back to shore. You didn't complain.

Or the day we made bread in the summer kitchen, a version of heaven or belief, dry breeze across the countertop. Your floured hands fluttered in the room with other living things, each now rising above a lip of metal, a small horizon.

Or the winter afternoon crossing the high Idaho meadow on our skis.

Or our first garden with its dozen zucchini, its infinite hope.

Versions of heaven or belief.

You didn't mean, I hope, to disappear from a certain part of day, then part of every day, to some system orbiting ours, one that returned you singed or frozen and with a different kind of look.

I have begun to talk to you with this pen to draw the permanent line between us. A pencil will sometimes lie.

ELBA

*for my sister Viola*

Elba! Green like a uniform  
or a hope. What  
did you recite to yourself, hatted  
Napoleon?  
Detailed lullabies of victory,  
exchanged for return?  
Now you've become a plaster bust, an image  
on dishcloths for tourists.

Father! Look at us:  
here we are, sitting in the house  
by the vineyard,  
your daughters, each  
born from different women.  
How the guilt mounts up.  
Forgiving is a tin can  
you can stuff with anything.  
Like Napoleon, like Waterloo.  
I and I,  
I and the others.  
*"And then, you mother took the pills—"*  
*"And then, father told me: Go to her—"*  
Stories, and  
stories.  
It's what my sister's interested in.  
While I see principles  
turning the corner.  
Those of yours, father, were still  
coiffed, an architectonic jewel.  
But mine are church gargoyles,  
with gaping maws, crooked jaws,  
boozing, doing drugs,  
monstrosities

of power and memory and of themselves.  
But still, they persist—  
Like the English, the Russians, the lump sum of Empire,  
its golden apple turns red and crimson.  
Where does ego go—where's the salvation?

Father! When we go to sleep,  
down below in the bay  
a lighted ship will sail:  
your ship, it was your sign.  
It will carry Napoleon and dishcloths.  
I'll wipe the dishes with them  
at home.  
And each of us, sisters,  
will write a wholly  
different poem  
about that house in the vineyard,  
about that evening.

*translated by the author and Stuart Frieibert*

EQUATIONS

My white cloth by candlelight is your white cloth by candlelight

I remember a meal the covenant once served me

My violin is your violin

The rain of the land in its season

The witness sets out

I rub the door post where the mezuzah held its prayer

A prayer is a tiny camera

My former rain is your latter rain

My latter rain is your former rain

So, our days may be multiplied

My white breath with your white breath

At childhood's gate, a snake

In the act of swallowing a toad, legs first

Transfixed, we watch until

The one looks out of the other's mouth

Where we go the covenant follows

We begin to see it has intentions for us

MOMENT

after moment. What  
we took. Years. It was cold. You wore  
  
red mittens, then later  
made meatloaf from ketchup. Fingerprints on a green  
  
bowl. *The Ruler of the World* holds one hand up in the air and one  
behind his back, but has  
  
no arms. Summer. The light late  
upon us. Blue coppers, just hatched, rising from a mountain pool.  
Living  
  
moments. A Popsicle  
melting and a worker bee carrying  
  
a mummy away from the brood. Now shadow  
dismantling a chandelier. Almost, not  
  
yet. "Make it last," you  
said. —Moment after moment. The resolution of many will come  
  
as one. A robin atop a piñon singing,  
tall as the rain, then you are sent to a country of nameless people  
  
where there is no time.

2'33"

Land mines in fields are waiting to explode—  
from the right lane, a car zips ahead:

you brake and as it brakes into a left  
turn bay, you glance at the movie marquee

and twenty-four hour grocery store:  
at a checkout counter, a clerk scans

an eight-pack of AA batteries, asks  
if you're playing Monopoly; no, no,

and tonight you're lucky: you don't need  
a kidney transplant; no one angles a shiv

at your throat—a farmer hesitates  
to pace a field before planting yams—

his father's leg tore in a gunpowder burst—  
along the riverbed, you spot a few beer

bottles and tire tracks but no elk carcass  
in the brush: no snarling dogs leap out—

Orion pulses above the Sangre de Cristos—  
and you plunge into highway darkness ahead.



## MIDNIGHT LOON

Burglars enter an apartment and ransack drawers;  
finding neither gold nor cash, they flee,

leaving the laundry and bathroom lights on—  
they have fled themselves. I catch the dipping

pitch of a motorcycle, iceberg hues in clouds;  
the gravel courtyard's a midnight garden,

as in Japan, raked to resemble ocean waves  
in moonlight, whirlpool eddies, circular ripples—

and nothing is quite what it appears to be.  
When I unlatch the screen door, a snake

slides under the weathered decking; I spot  
the jagged hole edged with glass where a burglar

reached through the window, but no one  
marks the poplars darker with thunder and rain.

In moonlight I watch the whirlpool hues  
of clouds drift over our courtyard, adobe walls,

and gate, and, though there is no loon,  
a loon calls out over the yard, over the water.

ISLAND STORIES

I.

It's not fair to fall in love on an island.

It becomes so picturesque.

The way you fed me raw coconut with dark fingers & roped my  
body  
with the ecstatic weight of young jasmine.

Bitter coffee in heavy rains.

The seat of a dusty truck a sprung throne among cane fields.

You at 6 a.m. Long paddle and whale song.

II.

Pineapple champagne and mushroom quesadillas.

You brushing mud from my yellow swimsuit.

You are right. I no longer know anyone.

III.

On stone steps, I peer through long temple windows.

Bright islands circle like green prayer beads.

*It's a girl*, your recorded voice tells me, 1 hemisphere away.

Hitching home, my brown belly smooth against its cotton skirt.

I always did love an island; the way it belongs to itself.

## FIG

I want to own *fig*, that word,  
wear it like a jammy ring on a pale finger  
or a velvety brooch on my breast.

*Fig* is like *fuck*, the way that it  
digs and it digs. The word *fig* fits in my mouth  
the way a real *fig* fits.

I mean my tongue wants to  
tap it, that figgy *g*  
finishing *fig* in sugar velum-smacks.

Because when I spread *fig* with my fingers,  
the diacritic dot of *i* becomes tiny seed  
spreading. And I want those seeds.

Each *fig* a burl I wrap my mouth around.  
Each husked seed a small cracked  
planet I can love.

I want *fig* seeds in my teeth and split pulp  
on my tongue. Because  
it's late. Because I'm alone.

TANMACNALLY

hermitage: afraid  
of what beauty: brute

mutton of knowing:

byre vs. battle:  
it is not as if altitude  
answers defense:

but we go there:  
for the view, we say:

the wind machines,  
the private farms

& their enclosures:

supernumerary:

the stars in the wire  
blinking slowly,  
on & off (as it were):

copula: clerestory:

in an otherwise  
relatively low interior:

& permitting entry  
only on its west side:

livid hive-breaker:

thorn from flesh,  
*Master, come & dine:*

Bruce Beasley

from THE MASS OF THE ORDINARY

*ordinary*: of no special quality or interest; commonplace; unexceptional  
*ordinary*: an order or form for divine service, especially that for saying  
the Mass

I. Kyrie  
*Christ Have Mercy*

Out of the ordinary something keeps  
emerging, inordinate, like the white  
nerve-net of raspberry roots I almost just yanked  
out of rainblown earth on my roof,  
the gutters everywhere bursting with their spiked canes.

Out of the ordinary something keeps insisting  
on summer's antirarefaction,  
its teem and refusal to be culled.

---

Come now, World-to-Come, are You really there.  
Now-here there's word-spilth, weed-creep  
through split gutters, down the eaves, common

and improper as nouns.  
Suzanne called up from the lawn, *Well, do they  
have any berries?*—wanting,  
like Christ at the fig tree,  
to leave them rooted  
deep between the shingles, if only they bore.

---

World-to-Come, You're late. You're other-  
wise, You're elsewhere, like the word  
*verb*, meaning  
just the thing it isn't.

---

Today I flunked the Oxford Happiness Test.  
I could not strongly agree  
that *I feel able to take*  
*anything on.*

There was *a gap between what I would like*  
*to do and what I have done.*

I didn't *feel particularly pleased*  
*with the way I am.*

Lord have mercy Christ have mercy Lamb of God have  
mercy—

*Kyrie*  
*eleison, Lord: are You*  
*particularly pleased with the way I am?*

---

*Have mercy, Lord, the way*  
*a dog*  
*will have its fleas, inrunning*  
*through tracks of gnawed fur, as outward*  
*and visible sign*  
*of inner summer. Feckless*  
*and fecund. Paw-smack and whimper. Have*

*mercy, Lord, the way this gutter*  
*bursts with what lays down roots*  
*in its improbable dirt,*  
*teeming, refusing to self-*  
*cull, and means,*  
*in spite of every propriety,*  
*to stay.*

II. Lumin de Lumine  
*Light-from-Light*

What wavelength, Light-from-Light, are You on?  
I don't see You, just  
raspberry roof-bush's  
blowing back-and-forth  
shadow over cramped basil pot, zigzag  
dark-trace of no-see-ums, and neighbor's  
five-story Victorian  
perfectly englobed in the black dome of my barbecue grill.

Anything wholly lucid I can't see.  
Light just leaves it  
behind.

Things, we don't see you  
but the light you won't let through,  
your shoving back to us  
the luminance, light from  
light's repulsion off a mass.

---

So what comes to light  
*is* light. I'm reading Galen.  
He thinks the brain releases a swarm called *pneuma*,  
a soul-stuff out of the eyes  
that makes the atmosphere around us perceptive,  
electric, ennering and enbraining all the air  
till the *pneuma* reflock and fly back through the crystalline lens  
to give the brain tidings of what's out there.

Maker of all things  
visible *and* invisible, it's  
the *invisible* things that interest me right now,  
among

the compulsive en-nounments of the summer:  
there's nothing save light  
we see, so  
everything *except* light's invisible.

It's plain the photons get blocked along the way.  
It's plain the tear-film has been pierced, over and over, with them.

Deep in the chronicle of what could never occur,  
everything this morning seems  
*unseemly*, unakin  
to the merely ordinary smear-  
print of the way things  
usually seem, and are.

### III. Ante Omnia Saecula *Before All Things Were Made*

Week of solstitial  
insomnia: its  
exceptive tempo, reciting  
to myself hour after hour, from  
ten-thirty dusk till  
four o'clock dawn,  
*Deum de Deo*—with every jerking heartbeat—  
*Deum*—with every exhale—*de Deo*  
on every intake of breath.  
Truégod from truégod, One in Being.  
*Deum verum*  
*de Deo vero*.  
With Him all things are made.

Blood-throb  
in the temple, blood-throb in the wrist.  
Pneuma-swarm and -throb, seeking through the dark  
something to bring back news of to the brain.



By-Whom-All-Things-Are-Made, make me again.

---

Then it's time  
to reenter Time:  
as if it were  
all there were

I go before the day, its halt  
processional,  
the twenty-seventh  
of July, the ordinal, the  
relentless *th* of it.

*By enlarge*, my student wrote, meaning  
I guess *by and large*.

By Enlarge the raspberry has lifted itself, *osanna*  
*in excelsis*, tight-  
packed its rootwad wall-to-wall all down the gutterspout.

Things blow this way, ordained  
by destiny, or deity, or  
Enlarge. They're *meant*, it seems, *to be*,  
though no one can agree  
who it is that means them.

The tidings keep arriving, not  
all of them glad.  
My sister has a camera  
small as a pill in her gut  
moving through her seeking  
something bleeding.

---

I can't remember this processional even pausing

before it came to be  
known instead as a *recessional*,  
the colors of its banners gradually darkening  
to mauve, then mauve-black like a bruise.

*You are connected*, my laptop tells me, *to the server Kronos.*

I have loved the strangest  
words for what recurs, what's  
clogged—like the gutters in raspberry brambles—with Time:  
*hebdomadal*,  
*catamenial*.

*A quotidian fever*: one that lasts just a day.

There's nothing common in the commonplace:  
no two of us know it as the same,  
the chronic, the chthonic, the served-by-Kronos.

*Beyond this point*, said the airport sign, *you must  
continue to exit.*

Kronos, jealous  
all-devourer. Who swallowed  
each of his infants, sent  
them back into Time.

*What is* is what occurs, except  
what's not, which also  
takes its preappointed place

at the right hand of the Father.

---

*Deum-de-Deo.* Dailiness  
clings to everything, un-  
scrub-off-able, like algae  
to the lawn table's iron underslats.  
I took a toothbrush to it, its bristles all gone green.

*Deum verum.* Everything  
today feels *nounal*, stuck  
in its own thinginess

like dribblets  
of rain each surface struggles  
not to let slip again away.

You must continue to exit. To exist.  
You must  
continue both to exit and exist.

*Be not troubled, says Marcus Aurelius, for in a little while  
you will be no one and nowhere.*

Fugit, Time.  
Untemporize; de-verb.

The tedium of sequiturs, their unsurprise.

I would be  
disconnected, for a while, from the server Kronos:  
No One, No-  
where; self-culling; averbal; dis-ennouned.

THE TINY LANDSCAPE AND HOW IT IS WORTHY

The bank of the river,  
bank of clouds,  
and fish-counters.

The sums  
of color.

The poppies,  
the poppy jasper,

great rockies  
of Jasper.  
The esteem

the lode has  
for its path.

“Big” frogs  
croak under the boat;  
a plankton bloom is on.

Gray diggers  
chomp tough grass  
by creek current.

Streamside goes  
from flat to wallish—  
cubist, with nooks and scoops,

an overhang with roots  
like heartsick  
carrots, red-nose-red

runners rappelling down,  
small yellow composites,  
dried-pink tufts

topping rush stems;  
in a hollow  
a toad, yellow

streak down  
his back:

the bank of Odell Creek,  
mini-numismatical  
in this luminous evening,

worth  
all the territory  
of minutes, *minute*

hands, and the *minute*  
hands  
hearing the nursling lap

from the mother  
burrows,  
the wide percent

of Davis Lake's  
fly surface  
beyond.

THE MEMORY OF NOW

Memory is walking out a back door,  
an evening garden, everything in its place  
just the angles changing as one moves through,  
each shadow, each shape new, set stones today  
a stream frozen, forest lane, bridge across,  
lantern a tower moss-capped, sentinel,  
the *no* silent, suspended, azaleas  
in season now, strawberry bouquets raised,  
knotweed and dwarf pine, leaf blades a silver  
shimmering. We'd sat right here, how it seems  
just like it seemed, all strangely lit, candles  
along the main road, sun but a crescent  
pink above the mountain tips. The neighbors,  
worried about us, had brought by crackers  
and Kyushu tangerines, a care package  
wrapped tight in the day's horrible headlines.  
They stayed for our water and whiskey,  
a last, hoarded box of *Meiji's Almond  
Chocolate*. Four pieces each, we ate them  
slow, our voices carrying like sirens  
in that cold, that awful quiet. And then,  
a shudder, branch still shaking as the bird  
took flight, dark against a sky darkening.

## ECLIPSE

*A solar eclipse took place in many parts of Japan on May 20, 2012.*

Everyone seems to know but me,  
7 a.m., the street is filled  
with kids wearing tinted glasses,  
faces skyward, paper and pens  
ready. *What's up*, I ask one boy,  
who sighs as boys do when adults  
don't get it. *Nisshoku* — The sun's  
eating, he tells me, which doesn't  
help, then looks away, head shaking.  
Around us, an agitation,  
shadows slant, angel wings then thin  
curves of light, the air tangible,  
mist without fog, sky a cloudless,  
deepening grey. A year later,  
smiles of shade, parents in line,  
their children sketching a hungry  
star, how we assimilate loss,  
how the blue pours back. Cruelly well,  
the world works to be beautiful.

HEIMLICH FOR A HEAVENLY WINDPIPE

Like ice-cold cola in its transit through a plastic straw  
sometimes a pleasure enters him, and, after a smooth  
drafting down the spine, issues from his leg,  
the crippled one he drags behind him,  
the one sunk to its ankle in an angel's mouth.  
Spaghetti negro at the beach café in Positano,  
for instance, with the bougainvillea tinting the breeze  
purple in the avenues that scale the hill.  
That refrain of Roethke's and Samantha quoting it  
to mean she'd like to rest a little longer on the chaise  
in her bikini. Fall in the Blue Ridge, technicolor fall.

Occasionally though the angel chokes on something.  
Standing on the porch at the propane grill  
with whisky in his coke and skirt steaks cooking,  
the man hears a motorcycle fire up in the alley,  
knows it wakes the baby and the vegetables inside  
will be delayed. The neighbor's house in desperate  
need of paint. This first warm night in April, small  
and larger hardships running through it. Fat, gristle.  
And now the angel gags. If the man is annoyed  
by what's become a ritual of panic—the holy face  
plum-colored, sputtering—still eventually he stoops  
and lifts the creature to its feet: difficult  
because the wings are huge and clenched in spasms.  
When at last they part, he stands between them,  
joins his hands, and jerks back hard  
under the crystal ribcage till the clot's dislodged.  
Dry coughs, then furious breathing. Milky feathers  
scattered on the porch and in his cola. The angel  
already kneeling, unhinging its jaw for more.



THE HILLS

Wee beastie this heavy night you  
long-eared one on the hearth  
glaring at such a giant, sometimes  
a twitch,  
                    a nibble keeping ground.

Reading into sleep and there you are do  
you sense the mouse in me.  
True, lately I've been someone I don't admire.  
No offense.  
But you like no confessions.

We can never imagine the past, the oleander  
the smash of glass after the German  
                    tourists left the tienda  
then gun muzzles poking our luggage and the  
marsh opens—Damon's Point, Hen  
Island on dawn's fire,  
precious scissor marks of an eagle over Little's  
Bridge North  
                    River rising

How do we become so weakened, curled up

*Formenterra, 1973*

## ONLY AMBER

And roses round the grey house yellow  
roses in Matado you  
pulling rough lace at dawn over  
slate through our bodies there.

The sea had stunned cobblestones yellow down  
to Las Ramblas where it seemed everyone in the world  
was waiting for us.

Sailors in rough cafes yellow stripes on their sleeves  
thrilled by you filled our coffees with anisette. You  
read them poems by Vallejo from your knapsack  
and silenced them.

Frisky waiters yellow knuckles women under  
floppy blue hats laughing Andalusian  
red streaks in their eyes.

You bought only amber from the gypsies we crossed  
the double avenue, gambled all our pesetas away.

And that night monks led the moon out each  
beast floated to the hills beyond each in turn,  
by size. A family of blood.  
Like us and the pillars unlit vanished.

Such a sadness from yellow a leather pouch  
buried under windows a slate so clean  
what does it matter  
who is dead, any shame endures us.

*Wilhelmina, 1972*

Edoardo Sanguineti

"THE AEOLIAN HARPS DO NOT PLAY FOR YOU"

the Aeolian harps do not play for you:

that one in room 10

(circa 1800) of the Museum of Musikinstrumente, I heard it at the  
Institute

für Musikforschung: a very brief, very rare clip recorded  
on tape:

the team of Asian specialists (one man  
and many women), enchanted by every *Tafelklavier* and *Hammerflügel*  
(the guide played them a nocturne by an obscure precursor of  
Chopin),

had already gone:

if not exactly lying in a meadow in bloom  
you were, at least, sitting on a bench in the garden at Bundesallee  
among old women armed with canes who spoke "*un petit francais*":  
you, anyway, were *ermüdet, unruhig, schlafsuchend*, with your  
excruciating

headaches, with your amorousness and nerves all shot:

and simply dreamt

of hopping on the S-Bahn, of reaching that oasis, Pichelsberg:  
(thus Goethe's *Siegelring*, display case 26, exists for me only in a  
catalog):

“THAT ONE WHO SLEEPS”

that one who sleeps in a corner of the living room, so full of life:

that one who adores

the polished parquet floor: we all feel it clearly: in four months

she'll become an enormous thing:

we'll return her to the shopkeeper in slacks from the Café  
Belvedere, in the courtyard at the spa, this impossible tortoise

inside a massive

cardboard box (with several air holes) for Pelikan felt-tip pens, with

a wedge of lettuce (and a slice of tomato to boot):

this monster that does not speak:

*translated by Will Schutt*

SELF PORTRAIT WITH SCRATCH TICKET

The scratch ticket wears its jacket like a person  
asleep on a train: pulled up over its face.

It's hard to win when you're undressing someone  
who is passed out on a train. That's why you hardly ever do

better than get back the change you spent on the ticket.  
When I am tired of America, I reach for an ice cold America.

After a long day at work, I just want to claw at something  
and have it tell me I'm a winner. I want the silver or gold

under my fingernail to be the stuff that I took off  
to reveal whether I got better or stayed the same.

Often at night, a car alarm goes off and I wake up,  
still a number or dollar sign under a blanket,

waiting to have my eyes  
scratched out.

[FIRST A FOREST BURNED]

first a forest burned  
then grassland

hid the hunters  
tonight a silo

squats between two  
cities and we undress

under a painting  
of a muscled

buffalo  
car lights flare

between the drawn  
curtains steam

creeps under  
the bathroom door

I take a beer  
from the plastic

ice bucket  
and sit on the bed

the clock blinks  
fearfully

[SLOW AND STATELY SURVIVES]

slow and stately survives  
the plains fat catfish deliberate  
in a cranny of the quarry

and I lie in this police outline  
of sweat numbering sins  
thrown stones

and crows on the courthouse  
gargoyles like the black eyes  
of a judge I am led

to the roof of an empty factory  
where I await my sentence  
this is your prison

says the woman and draws  
her knife in an arc  
from one horizon to the other

APOLOGY

When the music starts I think  
I think twenty-four minutes to figure everything  
to figure everything out, twenty-four minutes  
to sit on the floor and figure out  
everything, the spaces between the vertebrae  
sometimes and impossibly  
hurt and the leaves the color  
the color of life, the color  
of life as a joke, the leaves  
hanging there out over the sidewalk  
shielding something from the sidewalk  
hiding it from the sidewalk and from me.  
Later as the dawn comes, as the dawn  
as the dawn comes up an orient square  
of window, the window turning white I want  
to apologize, I want to apologize  
if I sneered, I want the white dawn  
to keep coming up and arrive.  
This early the moon now is hanging  
hanging there still, the early moon  
like a bad joke in the sky  
in the chambray sky  
the chambray sky and the shirt  
I sneered at, a thin cloud  
running through the center  
of the moon, through the early moon  
like the hollow pole that hangs  
the round pale sign for the diner, the pole  
holding up the sign for the diner  
and supporting it, the early white moon  
hanging like the sign, the sign  
a joke there in the sky and the flowers,  
some purple lilacs in the flower store  
in the store the lilacs are colorful, the purples  
now like a joke and I want to say it,  
I apologize, all the glorious  
summer leaves are hiding something  
hiding in the yard, all the colors  
too glorious to be comfortable with that as their work



IT'S NOT RAINING AND IT'S NOT NOT RAINING

Denser air    Wild mint leaves

lose serration    It's hot

was that a drop I wish it were

Is there a difference between heat lightning

and lightning between *rained in* and

*I don't want to leave*    Hanging halfway

between blue and horrible    I didn't leave the bed

to check I spent the morning there    The wild mint

grows flush and hardy at the brick but when it rains in

you don't smell mint just wet window screen

Wouldn't it be nicer if the storms came up

much faster if one of us could bellow like a tugboat

none of this croaking nonsense    Let's be

unilateral less humid and less close

ON THE SUBJECT OF SO-CALLED FORGIVENESS

You found a bill addressed to your husband  
For a young woman's tuition.  
"That's unforgivable," he said,

Referring to his action,  
In a voice not of apology  
But of grimness.

He expressed reservations  
About continuing to share a home,  
Citing the poisonous atmosphere that blame  
Could create.

*Dressing his assistant in burlap  
And tying her to a pole  
Was unforgivable on the part*

*Of Houdini, though she went on  
To further acclaim as half of a dance team  
And life-long Houdini loyalist.*

Most find begging forgiveness  
Unseemly, but chiefly, it's misguided,  
Since forgiveness is involuntary

And may constitute a desire not to reference a thing  
Ever again, as opposed to having it smeared  
All over.

Some traditions keep dogs outside  
Along with forgiveness.

Always, you couldn't  
Keep still. Always, you couldn't move.

## METHODS OF CHOICE

In Miss Elbow's class, late Friday afternoon, you played  
Orchestra. The piano gave you "Charming Village,"  
A version that ate its own tail. A box opened with a flourish,  
You chose your instruments.

The tambourine the pet.  
The triangle the queen. The wood block the last chosen,  
With its rude stick. They didn't think it made music.

When struck,  
Its low thwock went straight to the xylem and phloem  
Of trunks, to a harsh clearing,  
A page ripped precisely in two.

Dumb block, singing itself  
To the incapable, the ones who would grow up  
Prizing the showy, the uncaring.

ASYMMETRICAL—

Mole on my shoulder. Roadmap  
of the whole damn state  
of Texas. His left arm—darker  
and more freckled than the other  
from dangling it out the window  
of his pickup while driving. That dream  
where I grind down the top  
row of my bleached teeth. I broke  
our lease after three-and-a-half years. That dream  
where I'm bitten by something large  
and swift underwater. Crawfish  
in a pile at the seafood diner—live—all  
waiting to one side of the tank.

REASONS WHY LICKING THE ANESTHETIC BACKS OF  
WAXY MONKEY TREE FROGS COULD'VE  
MADE ME STAND LIVING IN TEXAS

Because it's what trainers gave their horses  
in order to suppress the feel of injuries because

the potion's forty times stronger than morphine  
because in a Texan heat my breath

on the pillow is the equator because insomnia  
the hottest spot throbs in both ears

because three-and-a-half years is too long to live  
in a place where that bar commissioned

a statue on its patio of a car-sized  
armadillo with a mirrored shell

because when I drove past the creature each day  
on my way to school my reflection broke

into well over a hundred  
pieces because this was

the price the swamp required  
because I felt every part of my body move farther

and farther off like a galaxy  
even if I looked away

BREAK

Off the interstate  
a girl in the traditional  
if not My Little Pony sense  
of the term who works  
I'm guessing three nights a week  
at McDonald's can be seen  
speed-limping in full uniform  
across eight lanes of stop and go  
traffic to meet her boyfriend (not  
a boy) in the blotchy shadows  
behind the Wendy's parking lot.

There they are, half-hidden, half-,  
when he bends to light  
her cigarette from his cupped hands,  
their cap brims touching  
in the sudden orange aura.

I think *crush*  
and in the same breath,  
*crèche*.

Here is someplace that is  
never not light,  
and the stars, as a consequence,  
do not shine, do not work.

## ARK

The small shy animals  
that go on

breeding and dying  
in the condemned house

left more open than not  
to seed drift and starlight

God be praised

still have no one  
to answer to

AND THE HOURS, THEY FELT LIKE YEARS  
& THE YEARS, MINUTES

- [00:00] One
- [01:00] day, we meet on a ride called Zero Gravity, & it makes no difference because scientists say time is a function of memory, not watch. Even when
- [02:00] we fall from the top, fling ourselves
- [03:00] from a suspended catch air device (otherwise known as SCAD), the perceptual chronometer still blinks
- [04:00] numbers too fast. The ground careens
- [05:00] forward. Lately, our timing has been
- [06:00] off. Last week we met
- [07:00] at the farmers' market, but it would have hardly registered if not for the cashier who asked who was
- [08:00] first. You said I was but, really, you were already there, waiting to buy daikon radish, baby bok choy, basil, well before I arrived. Still mistaken, the woman
- [09:00] asked if we needed change, before catching
- [10:00] our separate gazes, my Chinese broccoli, a gathering of spring onions with green tails. *You're not together*
- [11:00] she noted, not unkindly, & you responded *Not yet*, causing us to turn, face each other
- [12:00] & laugh as she added you up. You placed your things in a string bag, before leaving said,



[13:00] *See you next life.* The watchmaker's children,  
[14:00] well, you can imagine, have shoes, but never know  
what time it is, are caught in analog, don't speak  
digital, are forever dialing the wrong number  
[15:00] of the sun. He wears four watches around his wrist,  
inconceivably thin. The daughter, she sets her clock  
[16:00] twelve minutes fast & yet is always passing the right  
stop, as if she inhabited the wrong stop-action film. In  
[17:00] the time we shared before, were you the cadaver  
[18:00] on my table, your gallbladder no longer Robin's egg  
blue, but a stunning green olive? How we know this  
[19:00] before death, I have no idea. If that was you, I would  
[20:00] slip off second, year, minute, hour. Lean in close,  
whisper what it is like  
[21:00] to hold your bare heart  
[22:00] in my still ticking hands  
[23:00]  
[24:00]

DESSERT

It's what will be  
    set out once the table  
has been cleared, from the French  
    verb, *desservir*, to unserve or remove  
    what has been served. But should we use  
*service à la russe*, in which one dish  
    follows another, or *service à la*  
*française*, everything served  
    at once? Michelangelo's steps  
    to the Laurentian Library have it  
both ways: they come out  
    to meet you like an open  
package of Necco wafers, gray  
    licorice scent rising, or a flipbook  
    of the lower lip descending. While  
they were reading, medieval monks  
    murmured, lips vibrating as if each word  
were a blossom and the world  
    around them the amber memory  
    of bees. How often our own lips  
have passed each other  
    on the street, although Bernini claims  
a person's face looks most  
    like that person the moment before  
    and after he speaks. They rustle  
like elves in the leaves, so the French  
    call them *lèvres*, the levers, lapels  
of the mouth, where we lapse  
    into ourselves. In the Capuchin catacombs  
    of Palermo, the bodies of parishioners  
dating far back in time  
    are laid in rows hung on the walls  
so that ascending from the depths  
    of the catacombs, one sees the clothing  
    covering the bodies

regain its texture and color, the faces  
    their individual features  
as if each body were entering Chaucer's  
    House of Fame, where all the voices  
    of human beings rise from the earth  
and assume the shape of those  
    who spoke them. Like waves spreading  
up the beach, their words keep  
    getting thinner until it seems we might  
    see though them, just before they  
sink into sand. In Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*,  
    for instance: is that a smile  
or a simile? Since lips  
    can be parted, Antony tells  
    the messenger, *Speak to me*  
*home*. On long car trips,  
    I kept asking my parents, *Are we*  
*there yet?* And they always  
    replied, *almost, nearly,*  
*close.*

IN A LANDSCAPE: XIII

How many people haven't you married, that you thought for a moment—who knows—maybe you would? It seems to me right now that one should take such things as warnings, but of exactly what, I'm not sure. We should all be allowed to feel this near miss, how many things happen at the same time, and how people have varying degrees of perceiving that. That could be the warning. Or just that "you never know." Or better, that song by Heart that went, "It goes to show you never can tell." And so and so, and so and so. But even with all the parsing, at some point there will only be one person left. When my uncle died, for instance, he was playing cards with my aunt. It was his move and she just thought he was thinking. If so, he's been thinking a long time. When she died a few years later, I don't know who was there. Someone she loved, I hope. And if not that, at least someone.

I hit a possum once, late at night on my paper route, 1990. I stopped and looked back at it lying there in the road—a patch of blood on its head. Then slowly from the bushes past the curb, several more possums appeared. They went to the one I hit. It almost looked like a ceremony, light as a feather, stiff as a board, or something. And the possum rose to its feet, wobbling a bit, and followed them back into the bushes.

At some point that one thing will be for certain: we're standing in line. I picture us there as if at an airport waiting for our various flights to be called. And from my spot in line, I worry about the people around me, like when Natalie was at her first sleep-over. Mostly I worry that she'll be comfortable, and that she won't

feel lost. Eliot, who's three, was lost for a while the other night. I was in the kitchen reading John Cage's *SILENCE*, and he was playing in the living room as the house grew a little dark, and then I heard him call out, "Hey guys. Hey, where did everybody go?"

IN A LANDSCAPE: XV

It's a nice idea, to think we might have no effect on what happens, as that allows a theater to erupt all around us. When I was in my late 20s, my cousin Lyle died like he was in a movie. He was ferrying a small plane—a Piper, I think—from somewhere north down to Houston. While flying over Kansas, he radioed the lead plane to say, "Hey, let me show you what this thing can do," and he proceeded to attempt a loop the loop, which clipped the lead plane and tore the rear ailerons from his plane, effectively turning the Piper into a rock. My parents didn't tell me about it until a few months after his funeral. They were worried I'd be upset. They bought me some mint chocolate chip ice cream at Baskin Robbins. And it was rather like a theater, one where we can sit there in the fluorescent lighting with our ice cream, wondering if at some point we might ever become immune to our parents, while it melts down our fingers.

I was adopted close to my fourth birthday, in October, I think. Just before Halloween, when I dressed up as Casper. I flew in on Continental Airlines ("with the golden tail"), from Portland to Wichita (Kansas, again, which is probably why I'm thinking about it) and a new name. Who was Martin shall now be John. And I can imagine one of these names as my stage name, and the other my mild-mannered alter ego.

I've read that thinking such things is common for people who were adopted. Or maybe just for people in general, as we all exist on an arc of behavior. The disconnectedness of being adopted, that there's always this hole, this unresolved bit. I

don't know. I feel rather disconnected from such theories. Better, I think, is this idea I read once years ago that for every event that goes one way, the universe splits so that it can go the other way as well. I wonder then whatever happened to Martin and to Lyle. They were very young in their different ways. They hardly knew anything.

## THE MEMORY I AM, THE MEMORY I FOLLOW

Yves Bonnefoy, *Second Simplicity: New Poetry and Prose, 1991–2011*, translated by Hoyt Rogers (Yale, 2011)

French and English, the oldest of frenemies.

Has it not always been so? Does not the Channel mark an unmistakable boundary between England and France, as though laid down by nature herself to keep bangers-and-mash on one side and *pommes de terres à la dauphinoise* on the other? And did she not—still more anxious to separate the hotdog (*dégueulasse!*) from *l'andouillette* (revolting!)—ordain an entire ocean be spread between America and France? We ignore the nature of things at our peril. The cowboy famously asked: If God didn't want us to eat animals, why'd he make them out of meat? This was after he'd (somewhat less famously) declared: If God wanted us to worry about French poetry, he'd have made sure it was in English. Likewise Philip Larkin (that most English of cowboys) announced, "If that glass thing over there is a window, then it isn't a *fenster* or a *fenêtre* or whatever. *Hautes Fenêtres*, my God! A writer can have only one language, if language is going to mean anything to him." No one has more than one mother, says Mother Nature, and no one has more than one mother tongue. But invoke film noir, or the french fry, and all of a sudden, our cultural heritage reveals itself to be irremediably and unignorably mongrelized. As Stevens had it in his Adagia: "French and English constitute a single language."

A single language! If this is so, they avail not, distance and place—neither do the Channel, nor the Atlantic, nor Larkin, nor sumptuary laws concerning the enjoyment of freedom fries, freedom kissing, and freedom ticklers. If this is so, then Stevens' single language is one that practically nobody can speak perfectly. The vast majority of us English-speakers are not just monolingual, but hemilingual. Similarly the famous French pastime of reviling the ever-accelerating impingements of English upon *la vraie langue française* is less a vigilance maintained on behalf of cultural integrity than it is a kind of autoimmune response. To think of oneself pri-



marily as an English-speaker or a French-speaker, then, is to be fundamentally alienated from part of one's linguistic heritage.

Yves Bonnefoy, as this superb new collection makes abundantly clear, situates himself squarely in Stevens' camp. Though unmistakably a French poetry, nurtured and sustained by the traditions of Hugo, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Laforgue, Yves Bonnefoy's work has evolved through an unceasing engagement with English-speaking poets. He has translated and published criticism on an astonishing variety of English, Irish, and North American authors (to say nothing of Spanish, Italian, and German writers as well). The reader of his poems encounters the ghostly presence not only of Baudelaire and Mallarmé, but of Shakespeare, Yeats, Dickinson, Borges, and Celan. Wallace Stevens could have been anticipating Yves Bonnefoy's work when he called for a poetry articulated in its own "*lingua franca et jocundissima*," a joyful, practical negotiation between tongues native and foreign, between the familiar and the unknown.

The books from which the present selection has been made constitute a voluble outpouring from the poet. No fewer than seven books are excerpted here. Yves Bonnefoy, who will turn ninety this year, finds in old age and lateness an energizing stimulus, as Stevens and Yeats did before him. What remains to be said, the poet frequently asks, now that one's life has been entrusted almost entirely to the past? Such a life for Bonnefoy, is no longer something to be fashioned or invented, but pondered, wondered about, approached as one would approach any other accomplished facts of the world. Even memory, a perennial topic here, has a quality both concrete and foreign, and asserts itself as a kind of interior stranger. Bonnefoy frequently dramatizes the encounters with this stranger as an encounter with other people, very often children, atavistic inhabitants of an earlier, newer world. In this regard, Bonnefoy is less a postmodern poet than he is a post-Romantic one, and the work is unapologetically subjective and recollective in its commitments. The interiority described here is not a blissful and daffodil-dappled solitude, however. The attention owed to the soul is an attention owed to someone else. In Bonnefoy's world, one does not commune with the self, one struggles and negotiates with it.

If in this way Bonnefoy's poetry is conceptually complex, in sound and feeling it is deceptively simple. The poems are for the most part arrestingly straightforward, delivered in a frank, self-disclosing voice. In fact, the work seems to offer a sequence of encounters with a person, a personality, rather than a sequence of encounters with individual artworks. Central themes return with the regularity of private preoccupations. No fewer than ten poems in the collection are entitled "A Stone." And stones provide a central figure in many more. To understand all of the many valences of stoniness in the work, one is best served to read and reread the poems as an extended, even recursive sequence, treating them as objects or itineraries of contemplation. The same is true for the theme of snow, whose frequent recurrences variously evoke beauty, effacement, the blankness of the page, the formlessness from which all form is wrested, and a near future in which all particularity and specificity will be effaced in death. In the narrow compass of their thematic circuit, the poems do not ascend toward epiphany or pronouncement, but follow a downward, spiraling path toward a realm wherein all acts of will—and the will itself—are ultimately dissolved.

This tendency inclines the work toward a radical austerity, the simplicity invoked in the collection's title. At its most self-abnegating, a Bonnefoy poem evinces an almost perverse eagerness to vote itself out of existence. Here is one of the several poems bearing the title "A Stone," its center-justified lines invoking simultaneously weather-rounded rocks and funerary inscriptions:

The books: he tore them all apart.  
The devastated page. Yet the light  
On the page, the increase of light. He knew  
He was becoming the blank page again.

He went out. Torn, the visage of the world  
Took on another beauty, seemed more human now.  
In shadow play, the sky's hand reached for his.  
The stone where you see his weathered name  
Was opening, forming a word.

The poem coheres within the force-field of a characteristic tension, between on the one hand an interest in inscription and recording, and on the other, a longing for whiteness, blankness, and featurelessness. The arrival at speech (the word formed by the stone) is achieved only after all of the inscribed pages have been destroyed. It is a particular—and for some, no doubt, a particularly annoying—sort of poem that evinces such discomfort with the very means of writing. But for those who are impatient with this sort of approach, the work rewards forbearance.

The stone imagined is, in part, the author's own tombstone, or at least some kind of memorial dedicated to him. The theme of a writer composing his own epitaph is hoary enough, but this poem does not indulge in the usual fretting whether posterity will remember the poet "and bid fair peace be to his sable shroud." Instead it assumes that posterity will care little, if at all. Records are for tearing up, and the "visage" of the world itself is now and shall always be torn—whether by grief, suffering, or mischance. It is only when the poet can acknowledge this inevitable defacement and confront his eventual erasure that he is able to hear the word that the stone forms for him.

But what is this word? If you require answer to that question, only frustration awaits. Any answer would compromise the bright blankness this poem, and many others of Bonnefoy's, seek to reproduce. Such a word is not to be transcribed; such a word remains and must remain untranslatable. It is an irony, then, that this book is a book of translations, translations of poems which themselves are fascinated with the limits and dynamism of translation, and that this book should point so resolutely toward an untranslatable center. To put it differently, this edition is comprised of Hoyt Rogers' adept translations of Bonnefoy's adept translations of something wholly resistant to expression in French or English or any language. In the concluding section of a poem entitled "From Wind and Smoke," the poet describes this predicament:

These pages are translations. From a tongue  
That haunts the memory I have become.  
Its phrases falter, like what we recollect  
From early childhood, long ago.  
I built the text again, word for word:  
But mine is only shadow. As though we know  
All origin is a Troy that burns,  
All beauty but regret, and all our work  
Runs like water through our hands.

So the book declares itself early on to be a shadow. And what then of the translations themselves? Herein lies the rub. It should not surprise that there is something in Bonnefoy's work that will always escape the translator's most diligent efforts. In French the first lines of this quotation read:

*Ces pages sont traduites. D'une langue  
Qui hante la mémoire que je suis.  
Les phrases de cette langue sont incertaines  
Comme les tout premiers de nos souvenirs.*

Rogers, here as elsewhere, renders the original in a straightforward and coherent English version, and for the sake of these virtues he sets aside some of the more bedeviling subtleties of the text. What Rogers translates as "I have become" is not in fact the French verb "to become." "Je suis" in French can be either "I am" or "I follow," and both senses add a dimension of complexity to the original that is absent from the translation. To be memory or to follow, pursue, or come after memory (and perhaps to do so at the same time)—these are not at all the same as "becoming" memory.

Of course, to be a translator, especially of a poet already much translated, is like nothing so much as competing in the Paris-Dakar rally in a school bus full of backseat drivers. But though invariably infuriating, backseat drivers are not for all that invariably wrong. The stakes of translation are all the higher for poems which themselves

seek to open the lines of communication between different languages or even different genres of art. One such poem is Bonnefoy's "The Only Rose," a beautiful and extended reflection on the church of San Biagio, designed by Antonio da Sangallo and built outside Montepulciano. The poet imagines the structure's shapes and volumes emerging from the disorienting whiteness of a swirling blizzard.

Rogers translates the description as follows:

They rend the mist, as though their earthly  
Architect had fathered forth in stone  
The centuries' desire, the final form  
Of birth into the suffering of matter—  
And then, with a single stroke, had freed it  
Into weightlessness, and tossed it  
Like a flower from his hand.

The translation grapples nobly with the original but, in the end, hinders at least as much as it helps. Here is the French:

*Ils déchirent la brume, c'est comme si  
D'une main délivrée de la pesanteur  
L'architecte d'ici avait fait vivre  
D'un seul grand trait floral  
La forme que voulait de siècle en siècle  
La douleur d'être né dans la matière.*

In the original, thank goodness, we encounter no neurasthenic flinging of flowers. The single, great gesture of the architect is "*un seul grand trait floral*," where the "*trait*," which Rogers translates aptly as stroke, is described also as "floral," as though the austerity of line could entail within itself, like a wintry bough, the capacity to blossom. The greatest loss in translation, however, is Bonnefoy's own "*grand trait floral*," the long, austere, sustained sonority of his line and of his thought. Rogers seeks to assist the reader by breaking down this long period into two steps, separated by the "and then"

not present in the original. However, in seeking to tame the original he ends up hobbling it, impeding the ample cadence and stride necessary to sustain Bonnefoy's complex meditation. A dyspeptic literalist somewhere back in the school bus might propose a version more cumbersome but arguably closer to the French:

They tear the mist, as though with weightless hand,  
As though in a single flourish, a mortal  
Architect had brought to life a form  
Which had desired, from age to age,  
The suffering of being born in matter.

This dyspeptic literalist might well think twice before dispensing with Rogers' lovely "earthly" and his decisive "stroke," but it's clear enough what he's trying to get at: a sense of a continuous thought encompassing in a single gesture, "*un seul grand trait*," the efflorescence of a single but demandingly multifoliate idea.

In any event, the dilemma that Rogers faces is not one to be envied, torn as any translator of Bonnefoy must be between two competing musics. The first is the music of meter, particularly the ghostly music of English meter, which haunts and necessarily straitens Bonnefoy's French throughout. The second is the music of syntax, more inalienably French, and to this reader at least, more saturated with the delicate chromatic effects of Bonnefoy's poetic imagination. One cannot have both. Let the literalist's complaint, therefore, be credited to Rogers as testimony of the great and worthwhile task that he has taken on. His extensive and in exhaustively helpful introduction to the volume is perhaps the best English-language introduction to Bonnefoy's work as a whole, and anyone seeking to acquaint himself with Bonnefoy could do much worse than to start here, even though the focus is necessarily on the later books. Yale has done the reader, even the non-French-speaking reader, the service of printing the poems and their translations *en face*; when Bonnefoy quotes Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" in one poem, one can see how starkly the original English stands out, blooming, as it were, amid the alien corn of the original French. Perhaps the best way to read Bonnefoy's poetry is in the way this splendid volume encourages us

to read, suspended in the middle space between the translations and the originals. These originals are, after all, as Bonnefoy himself avows, also a kind of translation, from many sources, some architectural, some from painting, some from memory, some from English, and some from the “lingua franca et jocundissima” of Bonnefoy’s relentlessly fertile imagination. This middle space allows us to appreciate the depth and elusive intricacy of Bonnefoy’s project with a sort of startled gratitude, as though we were hearing the voice a great performer, recorded here for the first time in stereo.

*DeSales Harrison*

## DENATURED FORM

Evelyn Reilly, *Apocalypso* (Roof Books, 2012)

It's relatively uncommon in contemporary poetry to do the Future thing—to write out of a sense of the future that's not simply tolling the earnest warning sounds of where-we're-headed-if-we-don't-start-cleaning-up-our-act-now—but work that actually revels in the language and trappings of a more “old-fashioned” futurism—verging on the rich, particular, and fantastical language of sci-fi.

Evelyn Reilly, in *Apocalypso*, goes there—and comes around again from the other side with a momentum that pulls along with it lovely detritus from a range of literary-historical moments and texts (Revelations, Browning, and ecopoetics, for starters), and a focus on the sometimes comedic if in fact perilous condition we find ourselves in at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The pieces in *Apocalypso* engage nature and “nature writing,” agency, and humanity's convoluted and self-reflexive attempts to communicate its humanity. Reilly's dystopia-infused landscapes, where interesting parts and pieces of our late-capitalist moment lodge and fester, are essentially celebrations of the possibility of language.

The book's opening piece, “Dreamquest Malware,” begins with a quote from the Materials Sciences Division at Lawrence Berkeley National Lab:

*Throughout history, advances in materials have been the basis for advances in civilization.... Materials that we cannot now imagine will form the basis of devices and applications in a future about which we can now only dream.*

This sense of deep optimism—the *dream* (not the nightmare) future—underlies this book's playful, sly, provocative exploration of the possibilities of language to “decode” experience.



Time stamp: ZMT 77104  
Report from build site: 423

It is windy terrible and the time frame conform slot  
so doted over  
keeps hurtling

today: 12 chapped columns  
3 quartered globes  
244 knuckled sheets

and the scalped dome project “lays wavers”

Astonishingly the corner tear is back-lit in dreamlight  
and this night after night

Still we keep pouring digital spit into this blog storage device

having unboxed the urbox *permanently*

yours, sincerely

Each of the ten parts of the first section of “Dreamquest Malware” starts with a “Time stamp:” and “Report from build site:” couplet—yet the sense of highly particular chronologic & geographic “location” alluded to is received as utterly random—there is no ability to map “real life” meaning or geography to such “coordinates.” These coordinates thus destabilize—*unplace*—the poem following.

The sense of weather (in this case windy) and environment (kind of dangerous, here, with hurtling time frame comfort slots—whatever exactly those might be) suggested in the second stanza is an oft-used touch-point throughout the book. What is it *like*, here, in the poem/in the world. What are the *conditions* impacting the lines/words/writing?

Lists of odd and seemingly random items—"today: 12 chapped columns / 3 quartered globes / 244 knuckled sheets"—appear numerous times in this poem. As if numbers of things were the anchor, the quotidian comfort holding the whole to the earth—or to a world, in any case.

On the Sunday afternoon I was thinking about and re-reading this piece I allowed myself to be distracted by a media event which turned out to be oddly consonant: the freefall from space of Felix Baumgartner. I tuned in to the live feed just as the cameras from inside his capsule showed Baumgartner opening the hatch at 127,000 feet. The steady voice of the man at the controls on the ground (the previous freefall record holder, Joe Kittinger, as it turns out) talked Baumgartner clearly and slowly through the steps he needed to take: 24 put the jump valve all the way to the rear; 25 roll the door open and engage the door stop; 26 unplug the oxygen valves; 27 release the helmet tie-down strap; now 28—slide the seat forward, stand up on the exterior step; start the cameras, etc. And then he jumped, rapidly becoming a white blur of space suit, receding from the gaze of the capsule he'd just left.

Lists denote control. In "Dreamquest Malware"—"44 liquid squares / 3000 circumvention rods / 2 mush buildings"—while the components are not exactly familiar (what are liquid squares, let alone mush buildings) the abstraction is pulled to attention by its list format—it's *in order*. The various orders in *Apocalypso* are no more or less random than the steps taken by Mr. Baumgartner in his "daredevil" afternoon in space. I like the mapping, the sequencing, that these poems provide, giving structure and possibility to a host of linguistic slivers of current, past, and future "whatness."

The forms of address used liberally in "Dreamquest Malware"—from the "yours, sincerely" ending the section above, to the "TO: [...] RE:" memo form used in part two of the poem—make the writing feel both intimate and voyeuristic, and mechanical. Most of the pieces in part two are addressed "TO: The Authorities," giving the sense of a series of reports from the field, communiqués from some outpost—sketches of the future present where conditions are precisely as they are—strange, unmoored, and also particular:

TO: The Authorities

RE: Cumulo Cirrus

Variation in days            clear unclear clear clear abandoned

The proposed paper fairness cones  
appear to be attractive and supportive

and will be used (as suggested) in the service  
of our collection ecstatic devotion practice

Or, in one of my favorite, from part one:

Ms. T,

It was a shock that you would send  
this ignition system

instead of the slogan-infestation compress  
we had so explicitly requested

*What exactly was your intent?*

The second section of *Apocalypso*, "Chilled Harold," is a skewed and off-kilter riff on the familiar children's story *Harold and the Purple Crayon*. At a decidedly steeper pitch, it involves Harold in problems of equity, social complexity, and agency. This is Harold with a complicated moral compass, impacting the world he's creating with a certain edginess; Harold on a roll. Reilly's Harold is far less benign than original Harold, and somehow both more troubled by, and more impervious to, the situations of *his own making* he encounters.

After drawing a path, and "some fierce protection" to guard the "one remaining tree, / with fruit needing protection," as in the original Harold unwittingly draws a sea:

then quickly got in over his head.  
Eventually, he climbed onto some sand,

where a sign read "Reserved for American  
Picnic" before an astonishing spread.

He ate a huge amount of appalling pie,  
and then shared the rest with a moose

and a deserving porcupine,  
leaving the undeserving porcupines

cold and hungry, because now Harold  
was drawing a mountain

from which to locate the window  
of a room he misremembered

as a place of perfect refuge.  
This image so distracted him,

he walked straight off a cliff.  
Frantically he drew rescue vehicles,

none of which stopped his rapid descent,  
until he engineered a balloon

that brought him down before a home  
he didn't know he'd been looking for.

The stakes are real, the agency vivid. And the angles sharp enough to  
cause some pain—though not necessarily to Harold.

Rather than progressing via haplessness alone, Reilly's Harold  
has opinions, dissatisfactions, and judgments regarding the world  
he's creating and inhabiting, which renders his acts both intentional  
and consequential (the undeserving porcupines starve). While

Harold's regard for anything other than his own well-being is hazy at best, his tenacity is remarkable and in the end he carries forward into the unknown with admirable if self-serving verve:

Dauntless, Child Harold picked up  
his darkest crayon and drew.

At nearly 40 pages "Apocalypso: A Comedy"—the longest work in the book, and the last—is its anchor. Its field is wide, its tone playful and bemused, its concerns serious yet held at an angle from which a steady gaze is not possible.

"Thus strange verb tenses must be enacted:  
these are those things that *will have had to have been*,  
that *will have had to yet occur*."

One of an interesting collection of epigraph-like references preceding "Apocalypso," this quote from BARGE (Bay Area Research Group in Environ-aesthetics) points to one of the most provocative and resonant ideas in the poem—the notion that torquing or "making strange" the language creates—or at least raises the possibility of—a distinct place/time in poetics through that destabilization.

The epigraphs, along with the single three-line stanza on the following page: "And I became the Alpha / and the Omega / and my little dog too," in conflating references to the Bible and *The Wizard of Oz*, suggest the fascinating and sometimes wild ride this poem draws the reader into. It's a fantastical future adapted or patched together from a myriad of sources, most prominently Revelations, with varying degrees of literalness and veracity. Here is the first piece:

*Come and I'll show you what once  
shall have taken place after this*

forever and ever and ever, etc.

at which I took my glue gun  
from its hipster holster

and twenty-four elders  
began to sing:

*Eight swimming creatures covered with eyes* (state of the oceans,  
check)

*Sixteen birds with sinister wings* (state of the flyways, checkers)

But even the end of evolve, luv? (I was down with the animals)

Then the twenty-four fell down:

*clad in white garments*

*and wearing golden crowns*

(this is the revised standard  
sedition edition chapter four  
verses one through ten

in which enumeration equals

a technique of *calm*

3 2 1 we are calm

Setting out from that place of verb disjunction, the lovely precision describing an endlessly self-referent “future now,” the reader is beckoned into the fray, and simultaneously out of any sense of identifiable time frame. The specificity of the “glue gun”—that most wondrous of 20<sup>th</sup>-century home craft tools epitomizing the weird DIY culture of “now”—followed by the 24 elders (Revelations 4:4, 19:4) singing their short list of nature’s creatures, the environments of which are summarily accounted for; it’s “all good,” no worries, we’ve got them covered. Followed by the colloquial almost plaintive inquiry “But even the end of evolve, luv?” as if the ultimate expression of the demise of the “natural order” comes down to a casual, personal disappointment.

The references to Revelations contain grains of direct quote—

phrases, or word sequences, usually more-or-less contained in the same passage in *Revelations*, stitched together—off-centered, maybe overlapping, with strips of “connective tissue”—Reilly’s language—binding them. The gesture of pulling a cite into the body of the work—“this is the revised standard / sedition edition chapter four / verses one through ten”—its “sedition” addition—becoming such a strip, or hinge, from which the surrounding language pivots and moves.

Enumeration as pacifier, as settler, containing *as technique* the power to calm, here echoes the interest in enumeration evident elsewhere in *Apocalypso*. But it also moves, with “3 2 1 we are calm” into a punchy reference to the pop psych cliché—becoming faux-mantra as this phrase is repeated numerous times in the piece.

There are sections of “*Apocalypso: a comedy*” which play bluntly, and delightfully unpoetically, with quotation.

Here’s a favorite poem  
rediscovered at [ubuweb.com](http://ubuweb.com)

*Garbage Event, Daybreak, Borneo*

1. *Pigs and chickens feed on the grass  
in an inhabited area until it is bare of grass.*
2. *Garbage is added to the area.*
3. *The participants defend the “abandoned beauty”  
and “town-quality” of the environment against all critics.*

For we have stepped into the sacred areas  
and wept over our waste procedures

which is will have been being our transcendence

(This is the revels  
shared *common-ly*)

To directly quote a poem within a poem, to have that quoted poem

be not exactly classically "poetic" in form or "meaning"—and to frame that quote with the utterly quotidian "Here's a favorite poem..."—these are radical gestures, and send the reader onto a plateau which is then abruptly elevated with the final five lines of the piece, which are as close to utopic as any in the book. But because the transcendence is so beautifully obfuscated by the craggy and contradictory verbs preceding it, there is no sense of actual arrival at or inhabiting, even momentarily, the "truly" transcendent. The piece then gives us the frame—that of "revels / shared *common-ly*." A fair, if not greatly elevated, place.

Reilly's work in *Apocalypso* is a mash-up of imagined literary worlds—Oz, the Bible, Harold, Browning's "Dark Tower" (in "Childe Rolanda, or The Whatever Epic")—pulled forward past "where we are now"—and set loose to work out the details of how it might be we'll survive. The odd—and refreshing—thing is, the poems in *Apocalypso* don't yearn to find their way home again. No nostalgia surfaces, no mourning. And no moralizing. The looking back is with humor, and is neither heavy-handed nor sardonic.

*Apocalypso* takes gleeful advantage of its sources to present an amorphous machine future enlivened by its prickly vocabulary and unsentimental gaze. It's the encounter with the new normal's tomorrow. The dust of flowers, the exasperation between co-inhabitants, the evocation of anachronistic faiths (in literature, god, the "natural world"). The beauty of nature, and what might be the tragedy of our actions "upon it," are part of the textual weave of this work, but not its "point." Reilly uses the language created out of that mess—like using the tools of mayhem to build the mirror—but the thing reflected is just the tools, not the "path." Things are left unfinished, half thought of, and only very vaguely prescriptive—the rest is blowing in some kind of warm and welcoming, mildly toxic, breeze, for us to enjoy.

Jessica Grim



## THE ART OF THE ART OF FALCONRY

Andrew Feld, *Raptor* (University of Chicago Press, 2012)

The technical knowledge that informs this book is precise, thorough, and fascinating. The reader sees hawks in various contexts, from the historical and literary (falconry in the Middle Ages and in Shakespeare) and the inspiring (treatment of injuries and release in the field) to the humble (cage-cleaning and talon-trimming).

Epigraphs to the first and third sections bracket the book's historical range: one from Frederick II's *Art of Falconry*, c. 1250, and the other from a falconry and photography guide published in the late twentieth century. Reading them and scanning the titles in the table of contents, one might be justified in expecting raptors to be the subject matter, worthy but straightforward. But the book is not myopic. The poems have a distinctive way of tilting their wings and spiraling down into layers of social and personal history, some of which might seem disconnected were it not for the graceful flight.

*Raptor* includes poems about, for instance, Johnny Carson's last show, a mammoth motorcycle rally, and a "week-end war buff" who enthuses about the historical accuracy of his Nazi pistol. Poems about birds of prey may dominate, but together these function as a territory for us to inhabit, a place from which we view and understand world, self, and what a character in one of the poems calls "Forever." *Raptor* gives us a wealth of information about the fierce birds and the art of falconry; it also gives us insights into our relationship with them and with the natural world (which is, after all, our only one).

I will discuss "Cascade Raptor Center: Capture" at some length because it so clearly shows the poet at work, its first part describing a literal raptor incident and the second the same material reimagined into something larger.

The poem begins with a wing-shot hawk just arrived for treatment. "He hadn't *meant* to hit the bird, he said," is both the dramatic opening line and a boy's repeated and disbelieved denial. Eleven years old that day, "still a child," he shot the hawk with a new gun, a birthday present; his father, furious, punishes him partly by requiring

him to watch the hawk's surgery and to suffer the unfriendly silence of the Center's team.

The scene is presented with just the right details—the boy, for instance, is put in a corner near defrosting rats used to feed captive raptors—not a clutter of specifics. The tone is not judgmental: even while using surgical tweezers to pick bone shards from the wound, the speaker registers the boy's pain as well as his own.

The second part of the same poem uses vastly different strategy, perspective, and form, pressing more deeply into psychological and cultural levels of what has happened.

Briefly, about form: instead of the nine-line, rhyming and off-rhyming stanzas of the first part, the second uses unrhymed tercets with long first and third lines enclosing a short line. The effect of the formal appearance on the page shifts from the traditional, with each stanza end-stopped like a chapter of the story, to the tense jaggedness of the uneven lines, unrelenting (17 out of the 24 stanzas are enjambed) as the teeth of a saw. Throughout the book Feld demonstrates this kind of formal versatility and control.

The second part of "Capture" is an extrapolation into the lives of the father who drove three hours to bring the bird to the Raptor Center and his guilty, defiant son. "I can't keep my mind / out of the front seat," the speaker says. The statement is relevant elsewhere as well: there are many places the poems can't keep themselves out of, to Feld's readers' benefit.

Building outward from what is knowable in part one (the "brick-red" Subaru, the box the hawk was carried in, the science textbooks that had been in the box, "the silence... full-blown and brittle") to the speculative (the boy reaching for the car radio, the minds of father and son), the poem creates an electrically tense fiction. While still narrative, it uses metaphor to find the deeper story, a more complex level of the incident that brought the man, the boy, and the hawk into the speaker's hands. (And into ours. Of a different bird he says, "I fed her as you hold this / Poem—at a reading distance.")

Another poet might have been content to call the poem finished at the end of part one, which is excellent on its own. But the speaker's imagination and sympathy for all the creatures of the narrative, avian and human, leads him like a retrospective clairvoyant back to when "the hawk // slid down the sky screeching." Here and elsewhere, what emerges is sad, beautiful, and complex.

He imagines the father driving too fast toward the raptor center while still reliving the shooting. Then, shifting to the son, with ironic understatement, the speaker says "I think the boy could use a little music."

He'd like to hear the thin mouth of the car stereo sing

a page or two from the Great American Songbook.

The father is still running  
across the field. After the interrogation, anger

will twist the vise-like muscles of his jaw shut.

Inside are eddies  
which at their base resolve into black circles

the same size and shape as the volume and tone knobs  
on both sides of the stereo's  
face. Just because the songs are minimal variations

on a few themes, bright gloss or rebuttal, doesn't mean  
they're any less heartfelt.

They're still us. When the boy tried to turn the radio on

his father slapped his hand away, which was the only  
time they touched

in the three hours it took them to drive...

Imagery is deftly handled. The radio, for instance, has a "face" in the minds of both people; in the boy's, its "thin mouth" mimics the anger that is so loud in the car and which he wishes to dilute with companionship, however impersonal, from voices singing about love and rebellion.

The father's jaws are "twisted shut" by a metaphorical mechanism that transforms itself into the knobs of the radio, the instruments of its control. Control is the man's response to anger—control first of himself and then of his son's access to relief from it. He uses the slap and the silence as punishment, later adding the guilty witnessing of the hawk's treatment and a further form of abandonment (he waits for the boy in the car).

"They're still us." The introduction of love in one of its more demotic forms in the midst of the scene—a dramatic pause carefully chosen—is one of the many moments I admire in this book. The singers on the radio are still *us*. The father and the son, the latter driven by what the speaker surmises to be rural "boredom that turns into a kind of fever," are us. The man, the child, even the hawk, that wounded "bit of froth" in a box blazing across high desert toward us, are us. This poet understands that all of us are complicit, that we and other creatures are entangled. If they are threatened, so are we.

Sometimes the speaker projects himself toward them, as in the first stanza of "Capture" when he sees the bird seeing him: "When she flicked the milky filters of her eyelids / I saw my shadow-shape projected across / a screen, grown representative and monstrous." Sometimes a raptor "speaks," as in these two lines from "Raptor," the first poem in the book: "Because except what you allow me there // Is no wilderness, there is no wilderness." And occasionally the speaker invites a raptor-like perspective into very human situations, as in these lines from "The Art of Falconry":

Since marriage is a form of making, some days  
we're lightning-struck. Others, faculty meetings.  
In the kitchen reeds and switchgrass click as the dish-washer,  
that excellent  
machine, thrums through the stages of its mimic  
intelligence—*soak, scrub, rinse*—and in the moment  
the machine allows for us I hover above  
you, stalled by an imperative wider than thought.

The field grows distant. Then closer than ever.

Or, more briefly and humorously, in "Tongue: An Ode," when the speaker, eating a sandwich, compares the crunching of toasted bread to "the brittle ribs of a thrush." In moments like these the distance between human and bird shrinks.

The most explicit example of this is the poem "Cascade Raptor Center: Release," which is in the form of an interview in which an

italicized voice asks "*why, exactly, would anyone choose / to have a child?*" and the romanized voice describes the release of a healed hawk.

Time is again reversed for part of the poem, in this case two late stanzas; in one the hawk is "un-shot" and in the other a child is "un-born":

The hole in the wing, the impact, the bullet bearing our imprint connecting the bird to the barrel, the explosion, the kick, the punctured primer, the firing pin, the pulled trigger.

The being born, the blood sugars monitored, the insulin injected into the stomach, the first-trimester Zofran and the pillows next to the toilet, the pre-natal vitamins.

The answers to the questions as well as the balanced quality of the above two stanzas suggest an equivalence between hawk release and human birth. Such an equation upends the conventional view of human life as the most important of any; the poem invites us to consider life as a shared property. They're us.

But the stanzas are separate spaces for the two species. The entanglement is deep and binding, but entanglement is not identity; the speaker knows a hawk from a handsaw. The book is not unrealistic, nor does it romanticize the birds. It brings a sharp eye for image and a sharp ear for language together to scrutinize and celebrate what it seems ludicrous, in the face of these poems, to call "ordinary life." Intelligence and humor abound. One of the zanier moments arises in "Hybrid Imprint," a poem about a cross-bred, nonce bird. "An imprint, a bird which thinks it's human... has *boundary issues*... expresses fellow-feeling in the form of aggression, / renders all questions of wild or tame / specious." I take the italics of "boundary issues" as a kind of wink at the reader; the whole poem is comic, ending with the speaker taking the bird home "because we are as close to its kind as any." He gives it his middle name, acknowledging kinship and responsibility.

The theme of responsibility, ubiquitous in *Raptor*, is for the most part implicit. Occasionally it's louder. In "Visitant" the speaker calls birds blown wildly off course "trouble's / Sparks spinning in the

auto-da-fé we're making of our / Planet." And from the same poem: "Once out of nature, you / Can't get back and are home only in an increasingly in- / Tricate cage." True for visitant, hybrid imprint, and trained falcon, it's also true of us.

"Visitant" imbeds responsibility in the image of an ancient saint, uncertain about what his next action should be:

... In answer to the falcon as an  
Image of the soul, or of the desiring mind in flight, I  
Offer the carved image of the martyr, Saint Gorgonius,  
Ca. 1500, a missal in his slightly elevated right hand  
As a falcon grips his gloved left fist, forearm held at  
A right angle, in the proper position, as the as-yet-un-  
Decided noble hesitates between our world and the next.  
The falcon is the world.

If elsewhere in *Raptor* the falcon has been an image of the soul and of the desiring mind, no internal conflicts arise. As I said earlier, Feld's vision takes falconry as a place to stand, from which no manifestation is unacceptable.

One of the last poems in the book is the simplest. "The Hunt" addresses prey gently, in eight all-lower-case quatrains and in simple language reminiscent of a lullaby:

come out come out  
in your crumpled bag  
of fur your ears  
stiff it's November

While perspective, tone and other elements of style vary dramatically among the poems in *Raptor*, the overall effect is of a large and precise imagination at work. The poems embody the rapture of the falconer afield; they are the bounty brought home.

*Pamela Alexander*

ATTEMPTED TREASONS: SOME NOTES  
ON RECENT TRANSLATIONS

"Translations from Hafiz," translated by Matthew Rohrer, *American Poetry Review* 41:6 (Nov/Dec 2012)

**Stolen Air: Selected Poems by Osip Mandelstam**, translated by Christian Wiman (Ecco Press, 2012)

**Dark Elderberry Branch: Poems of Marina Tsvetaeva**, a reading by Jean Valentine and Ilya Kaminsky (Alice James Books, 2012)

Alice Oswald, **Memorial** (Graywolf Press, 2012)

In the note accompanying his translations of Hafiz which appeared in a recent issue of *American Poetry Review*, Matthew Rohrer makes the kind of confession that usually makes me immediately suspicious: "I have never read Hafiz in his native language. But the more I read translations, the more I have come to understand that really, honestly, there is no such thing as *the* poem translated from one language to the next. There can't be." For the moment let me set aside my general worry about Hafiz *once again* being translated by a person who by his own admission knows neither the language nor the cultural, religious and linguistic contexts of Hafiz' production, and agree with the general character of Rohrer's statement. Unitalicize his "the," of course, and we would have a disagreement.

Rohrer goes on to quote Matthew Zapruder in saying that despite all the pitfalls and difficulties (and ultimately, that pesky built-in guarantee of failure) a translation can work if it aims to translate the "movement" of energy in the original poem. There is an idea here, probably becoming more popular in contemporary translation, that translation need not worry about the sound or rhythm of the original language, those physical characteristics of language that famously "do not translate," but rather should pay attention to meaning and sense-making mechanisms; in some new translations one sees a greater attention to the sentence structure and syntax and grammar of the original language insofar as those things reveal the outline of the mind in motion. Walter Benjamin would be proud: the places the translation fails reveals the actual core essence of the original poem.

"Like a parrot I said / what everyone else said," Rohrer's Hafiz declares, "Roses and weeds / are exactly the same." But for most of us, of course, roses and weeds *aren't* the same, and that's the problem, isn't it? If Hafiz is trying to write toward a dissolution of boundaries between an individual and the divine, then Rohrer's translation of the attention to spiritual intent to an attention to more earthy concerns of wine and sexuality may end up bringing that verve of language energy even more clearly to the fore—but they run the risk of missing the mark; of missing a lot of marks. And while it is fine to say then that there should be many translations of a poet, one still must confront the basic fact that the most readily available translations of Hafiz—including these ones—are all by men who have not read Hafiz.

Rohrer's translations stemmed from his reading stilted (and to his mind, unpoetic) literal versions made in Iran. He marvels at the physical beauty of the Farsi book he sees the poems in, but is "so mad at these terrible English versions of Hafiz." He goes on to claim, "I knew what he was talking about and these poems weren't talking about it. He was talking about getting drunk...he was talking about what it feels like to be alive." Once more, let me set aside the quibble that in Sufi poems of devotion mentions of wine and sex can often be metaphors for ecstatic connection to the divine and not mere "this-world" (to borrow a phrase from Jean Valentine) revelry, and comment instead on the substance of Rohrer's response. He is describing here a moment felt often by readers of translations and even poetry in its original language: the moment the reader can see *past* or *through* the limits of language, history and culture to the unbridled and boundless "movements" of human perceptions. If you are reading a poem in an original language (often one you yourself have written) that seems limited in its music or perception, you might well attempt to rewrite it. It seems a natural reaction for a translator to read another's translation and see the places a new translation might illuminate or even return to deep shading.

This is the moment confronted by Christian Wiman in his new translations of Osip Mandelstam, a poet that he—like Rohrer—could not read in the original language. Wiman, however, sought out a native speaker—in this case, Ilya Kaminsky—and asked him to make



transliterations and recordings of the Russian as well as literal trots of several Mandelstam poems that Wiman then set out to recreate in translation. One of Wiman's chief concerns was precisely sound and rhythm and the way the poem moved in its physical shape. He conducted extensive research into Mandelstam's poetics and made many comparative analyses to existing translations.

The poem Wiman calls "To the Translator" is a beautiful example of this attention to sound and rhythm. Where Mandelstam suggests to the translator that eating glass would be equivalent to the chore of trying to translate a foreign language, Wiman writes, "better to bite a light bulb / eat an urn." Wiman stays faithful to the content of the line—as Rohrer says—while trying to ratchet up the sonic qualities to match the Russian. Thus the single line of Richard and Elizabeth McKane, "a strange bird's scream," becomes Wiman's enjambed "sky-wide scream / of a bird we cannot name." Oftentimes, according to Kaminsky in his introduction, the Mandelstam we have come to know *isn't* the actual poet in the original language: another poet has criticized Wiman's extensive alliteration, and Kaminsky points out to the friend that Mandelstam's Russian *is* highly alliterative! Wiman is in fact *restoring* those formal properties which had formerly disappeared in translation.

I asked a friend, a poet and translator, about this new Mandelstam. He said something like, "I don't really appreciate these liberal approaches to translation. When I read Mandelstam it's Mandelstam I want to read, not the translator." "But," I said, feeling saucy and perhaps a little irritable, "you *aren't ever* reading Mandelstam. Because Mandelstam wrote in *Russian*."

Kaminsky, for his part, has been working overtime, it seems, to bring the freshness and visceral power of Russian into English. With Jean Valentine he has brought out a book of fragments and poems of Marina Tsvetaeva in which the primary concern is the music and imagery of particular lines and not even the "movement of the mind" through the entire poem. They do not refer to their project as a translation but a "reading" of Tsvetaeva.

Regarding this "reading," W. S. Merwin recalls a moment somewhat like the one Rohrer had with the Hafiz book, after reading Tsvetaeva's poems: "a feeling that, vivid and searing though they may

have been, she had been in them like a ghost in a cloud, and was gone again." The reader *is* the translator, in cases like these—reaching *through* the words for some sense of meaning or energy.

In one of their excerpts of "Poems for Moscow," Valentine and Kaminsky explore the assonant sounds of the bells: "Seven hills—like seven bells / seven bells toll in the seven bell towers / all forty times forty churches, all seven hills / of bells, every one of them counted, like pillows." Later they describe the "nuns sweeping to mass in the warmth of sleep" and call the riotous citizens of Moscow a "crazy, looting, flagellant mob." The repeating vowels and the liquid sounds of the "L" resonate through the lines to call to mind the ever-present bells. Sound and energy meet here in these powerful sonic shards, carved off the larger poems in Tsvetaeva's work. Not merely the physical shape of the phrases but the energy or movement of the entire poem is compromised in service of the translators' "reading" of the poet in her own language.

Alice Oswald enacts a similar "reading through" in her recent volume *Memorial*, which "translates" *The Iliad* through an accounting, death-by-death, of the soldiers fallen during the course of the book. This approach to the otherwise-epic gains particular resonance during our current moment of troop withdrawals after a decade-long engagement in the Middle East, during part of which time it was considered unseemly to even list the American dead or show images of their coffins returning. The faceless epic of the war achieves human scale and poignancy when the dead are registered individually, a quality of the conflict that Homer understood full well when he provided biographical details of each soldier killed, including surviving family members and information about his farmlands and estates back in Greece.

Oswald explains her project by saying that it is "a translation of the *Iliad's* atmosphere, not its story." She goes on to talk about its "*enargeia*, which means something like 'bright unbearable reality.' It is the word used when gods come to earth not in disguise but as themselves. This version, trying to retrieve the poem's *enargeia*, takes away its narrative."

She begins her project with the full list of the names of the dead, beginning with Protesilaus, who died leaping from the boats trying

to be the first ashore, and ending with Hector, and she finds in each small moment of death the infinity of perception that is the cost of war. And what cost is it to the actual *Iliad* and what Oswald calls her “reckless dismissal of seven-eighths of the poem”?

When it comes to translation—“carrying across,” as Odysseus, with Hecabe’s complicity, carried the icon of the Palladium across the threshold of the city, thus dooming it to fall—Donald Revell finds the practice actually “Edenic.” The translator “is a compulsory innocent, incapable of significant harms.” After all, Revell opines, “Adam did no harm to the Garden, only to himself.” But is that true, after all? If Oswald is heightening our sense of loss and death by removing other parts of the epic and focusing on the individual bodies, does Rohrer’s chore of focusing on the wine and wild abandon of Hafiz similarly reveal something missing from the original poem? Or does it conceal? And how do we negotiate the political contexts at work here: Oswald’s epic in context of new wars in “Asia Minor,” and Rohrer’s place in a long lineage of white poets reworking poems of writers from the so-called Middle East according to their own formal and linguistic contexts, a lineage that might also include translators Daniel Ladinsky, Coleman Barks, Edward Fitzgerald, and Richard Burton?

Revell says something lovely and fruitful about the mechanics of the translator’s task: “Never—call this a caveat—let the issue of mastery of a foreign language discourage or dissuade you from a spell of translation. You and I shall never master English, for heaven’s sake, and so what hope have we of mastering a *second* language?” It is a fair point; but Wiman, for example, asked Kaminsky’s help in sounding out the Russian lines of Mandelstam and engaged in tireless research in order to learn the acoustics of the music he was dealing with, as well as historical, literary and cultural contexts. The task of the translator is the task of the poet, true, but it seems the motions of the mind as well as the topography of the words themselves *can* be brought into English.

And as a poet, one hopes, as always, that the bringing of the translated work into English *changes* English, but there is no denying that any translation into Standard English, that global and culturally imperial dialect, has tremendous effect on the original. After all,

where *is* Hafiz in the original language, inaccessible even to his own translators?

Redirected from the surrounding events of the *Iliad* in Oswald's *Memorial*, the reader is left solely with death and its aftermath. Of the actual process of translation Oswald says, "I work closely with the Greek, but instead of carrying the words over into English, I see them as openings through which to see what Homer was looking at." This moment of "translation" then incorporates the structure of the poem as a whole as well as its individual lines.

In this sense Oswald's project might be seen more as reinvention, eschewing the general goals of the translator. Oswald, Valentine and Kaminsky, and Rohrer all approach their original source text *as* source text for new creative work, though only Rohrer goes further in his framing of his project *as* translation even while claiming as his very justification the impossibility of the project: "What happens, rather than a translation, is that we get something *like* it, but written by the new person, the translator."

The McKanes' dark Mandelstam warns the translator who seeks to be too faithful to the physical qualities of the original, "In punishment for your arrogance, you incorrigible lover of sounds, / you'll receive the sponge soaked in vinegar for your treacherous lips." But Wiman's Mandelstam knows the truth—like a scheming James Bond villainess who, even while she is threatening Bond with a dire fate, is secretly hoping the suave cad goes ahead with his desperate mission:

So: you, then. Your animal urge. Your primal pride.  
To you is given this sponge dipped in vinegar, bitter wad  
Of silence: you, who thought love of sound alone could lead to  
God.

Wiman is as adventurous in his treatment of his source text as Oswald or Rohrer, but his intention is try to move closer to the shape of Mandelstam in the original Russian. Stephanie Sandler, the scholar of Slavic languages who wrote the foreword to Valentine and Kaminsky's *Tsvetaeva*, said about Wiman's Mandelstam that she could "barely believe that Christian did them without knowing the Russian

and knowing it deeply. And in some poems, the further he goes from the Russian, the closer he comes to the poem's actual effect."

So how is this different from Rohrer's essaying Hafiz, not having heard the language? True, Wiman sought intense help and schooling on the Russian, but his beginning was exactly the same as Rohrer's: "I 'translated' (I had no resources aside from other people's translations) a single early eight-line poem to try to show...something I could not find in any existing version."

Rather than the careful and methodical approach of Wiman, who worked from transliterations and trots by a native speaker (Kaminsky), nor by Valentine and Kaminsky's approach of collaboration, nor Oswald's theorized radical revisioning of the original, Rohrer worked spontaneously, off the cuff: "I hardly thought about what I was doing. I wrote out in bald, direct language what I thought the poem was about.... And I kind of liked this sort of game of wading, late at night, through the writing to find out what he was really saying. I did ten of them, and then I went to sleep."

It is possible that their success as poems is precisely due to Rohrer's state of mind—sleepless, late at night, irritable, alone with this beautifully illustrated book of "dreadful" poems with "Faux Victorian verbs ending with -eth," he leapt forward to re-write the poems without too much forethought or theorized intention, done on a lark, in the moment, though informed of course by Rohrer's own poetic skills and learned attention.

At any rate, it's a risky gambit—one might even say reckless—but I'm feeling reckless, charmed against my better judgment by this funny, irreverent, contemporary and American Hafiz. I'll insist on one major point, though: *unlike* "Kazim," the emphasis in the name is on the *second* syllable: Hafiz rhymes with "please."

And as for Rohrer's work as a translator, I'll let his god-drunk wonder have the last word:

I have followed him  
many times  
into the unlikeliest bars

Even hecklers  
cannot spoil this fun

*Kazim Ali*

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## SOME MADNESS IS

Steven Cramer, *Clangings* (Sarabande, 2012)

The association between poets and madness is as old as Plato, with a roster extending from the institutionalized Christopher Smart to the periodically institutionalized Robert Lowell. But “Much Madness is divinest Sense,” as Emily Dickinson said: it’s difficult to think of the visions of William Blake as mere hallucinations, and in our post-Freudian age such poets as Theodore Roethke and John Berryman (as well as Lowell) have consciously explored psychological disturbances and depths in language that has been illuminating for all of us.

What has not happened much in lyric poetry is the deliberate creation of a genuinely and consistently psychotic speaker. Bravely, Steven Cramer has, in his fifth book of poems, created a persona who uses “clang associations,” defined on the book flap as “mental connections made between dissociated ideas through rhymes, puns, neologisms, and other non-linear speech.” If this sounds like a definition of one of contemporary poetry’s most significant tools, that is surely no accident, though it’s also true that Cramer is not using these techniques simply as a way of projecting a self onto an alter ego like Berryman’s Henry. Cramer’s character is (at least eventually) institutionalized; and although the author’s notes mention only limited borrowings of specific “clangings,” they are sufficiently scholarly to suggest that he has done a good deal of psychiatric homework.

Nonetheless, the most cursory reader of *Clangings* will be reminded of the *Dream Songs*. Like Berryman, Cramer uses a consistent form: 47 of the 49 untitled and unnumbered poems are written in five four-line stanzas rhyming ABBA. “Two rhymes snagged between rhymes, / spun puns, all my blinds up in flames,” his speaker says, and adds: “The voices in the noise are getting wise.” The voices are not as easily distinguished as they are in Berryman’s (white) Henry and (black) sidekick Mister Bones; but Cramer’s speaker similarly—and more extensively—has a “companion” of sorts, who is introduced in the first poem as “my kinship, Dickey.” That Dickey might

be at least partially a masturbatory fantasy "friend" is suggested in this poem and addressed more directly in the third:

Think I mean dick when I say Dickey?—  
I do and I don't; or did, but won't say  
anyway. Makes a greener chameleon.

—but this is by no means the extent of the "relationship," which is emotionally central to the book. Cramer's speaker similarly teases us about gender, the conflation in some ways parallel to Berryman's racial projection: "I feel as male as I feel female. / Dickey grins. No way he's telling."

But it's on the level of language that the parallel with Berryman is most apparent—and at the same time most different and most original. Muting the form with off-rhymes, and with frequent enjambment that is often itself the source of wordplay (Dickey's name stays "taut in the face of taunts, refrains / from songs"), Cramer's rhyming is seamlessly absorbed into the weirdly musical language that the clangings create. This is rarely a matter of simple one-word puns, though these occur, as in "Back when he got all dyed [died] // I didn't want me going red." Usually there's more slippage, with one word substituting for a similar-sounding one; thus, in the first section, the speaker "took care" to "weep up the tea / stains where once was coffee. / Not one seep from him since. // What, you wander, do I mean?"

All of this is a source of musical pleasure, especially in extensive riffs that keep playing from sound to similar sound, like this one, on Dickey: "Quiet as a virus, everyone / lying inert he inserts into, stands alert, / becomes a member. That's his cavort." Sometimes these riffs include neologisms: "An inexact psalm, / my chain of althoughs grows wider / and weirder, wired equaliteral ladder." Neologisms also occur on their own, some central to the speaker's "condition": thus "duophrenia" (not schizophrenia) and "Duelatives," as well as "starvlings," "unson," "behelded." Sometimes, too, one part of speech substitutes for another: "I'm unkempt? / I'll kempt." All of this is not to mention the constant "clanging" of alliteration, asso-



nance, and sheer sound, the pleasures of which increase with each reading.

Though inseparable from its verbal pyrotechnics, what is ultimately most compelling to me is the emotional trajectory that accompanies a narrative of sorts through the four sections of the book. The first poem introduces, briefly, the parents ("I hear the dinner plates gossip / Mom collected to a hundred"; "Dad's a nap / lying by the fire"), and then, immediately, Dickey, who becomes the central focus of the first section, interrupted briefly by a four-poem excursion into—and critique of—religion: "Man, God's mistake; or God, Man's, / please deal me my get-out-of-hell card."

That "card," through most of the first section, is Dickey. The speaker's "relationship" with his mental creation is so effective that it forces the reader into both empathy and identification: the speaker's feelings are not unlike what our own might be about someone "real." Even the gender fusion is appealing: "Our flesh is his hers. / If we split, we'd mean fingernails." Beyond constant references to Dickey, there's a sustained "love poem" addressed to him, full of lament as well as desire, the ending reminiscent of John Donne:

Back in our ragtime times, jism  
pasted pearls atop a bottom sheet.  
The percale got pretty percolate.  
Now it's sackcloth time all the time—

unless, unleashed, you hound me,  
Dickey. Release. Furnace. Even  
be feline. Fillet of my heart, quicken,  
embroil, or, anyway, boil me, honey.

In the next poem, we're told that the speaker and Dickey married and had a son (more explicitly "unreal" than Dickey) who was soon taken away. This is the penultimate poem in the first section, which ends with what appears to be an account of anorexia with a purpose: "The more I fast, the feastier he'll sing."

Though Dickey doesn't disappear from the second section, the focus shifts to the speaker's parents, primarily his father. There's a connection between the God of the first section, which references "the garden," and this one, where we're told that "Mom and Dad made livings in Eden": authority figures, whether parental or theological, present problems for the speaker (as for most of us). Some of the problems are external: there are a number of references to alcohol. But it's the introjection of the parents that's most disturbingly profound. "They're co-stars staring from my talkies, / voice-overs, visors," the speaker says of them, and of his father: "He keeps me awake in my sleep." The poem in which the latter line occurs is one of the most focused in the book, developing as a forceful extended metaphor:

Dad. He plays dead, and his leash  
depreciates its lash. What's he after  
in the afterlife? The more I dog-ear  
the moors, more I sniff his ash. Hellish.

"Should I take him out more often?" the speaker asks in this poem, and in the following one creates mental patricide.

That this exploration of feelings about parents could be based in psychiatric treatment is suggested by the ending of the patricide poem, in which the "groundskeeper mowing . . . hospitable grass" asks "'Hey you, what'd you do with your Dad?'"—and also, perhaps, by a later poem, in which a parent seems to be speaking to someone seeking clinical information: "*From the time he opened his mouth his talk was off.*"

Whether its source is treatment or not, the third section opens with surprising news: "Dickey's death feels all over me." The section is consistently elegaic: "My 'he' is 'O,'" the speaker says in this first poem, and the lament continues throughout the section. If the language is a little less noisy here, it's no less original, and often remarkably beautiful. Comparable in its use of sustained metaphor to the poem in which the father is a dog is one in which the speaker's heart is a bird. The poem begins: "A finch in my chest flinches to get / heard," and ends:

. . . I placed my ear to my chest.  
Finch-slitters from the solar-plexus,  
beaky reminders keep keeping pace.  
Oh my minute pecks, tend your nest.

The oblique references to treatment continue in this section, one poem noting that (presumably in reference to Dickey) “Unless I leave him be I’ll get a smack,” another discussing a Rohrschach test. In the last poem of the section the speaker suggests that he may now be “A bit more person, less son underneath.”

That conclusion would seem to be confirmed in the last section, where the speaker begins: “So I left my apartment, got down where / I tried getting going outgoing. You know, / taking control.” And for several poems, he appears to be living a more “normal” life, with references to school, bars, work, girls and women, at least some of whom may be “real.” But this doesn’t last: half-way through the section, there’s an apparent suicide attempt. What follows, and ends the book, is a half-section in which doctors replace parents and treatment becomes central: “Your head meds serve my serfdom. / Pile on, pill after pill,” the speaker complains, and then: “What’s *with* me? I was born whizzing, // then you guys poked dents in my Pills- / bury badboy, a new *don’t* every minute.” The last extended poem is a final lament for Dickey, couched in an extended metaphor:

Dr. Rivers sees to it my seas belong.  
His orderlies tip white-caps at me  
like I’m a stranded merman. Dickey,  
my buoyed up somebody, unsung  
  
island gone inland, you swam out  
of my blues, but our duo disordered  
the herds. Nobody played shepherd.  
Well now, you and I are words apart.

The last poem in the fourth section is a single quatrain:

I feel well, but keep hoping to get well—  
not just better you know. But every day  
I get well, I hope on the following day  
I'll feel better, but instead I feel . . . Well

Which raises the book's implicit question: does madness have its own rewards? In partial answer, *Clangings* invites us to share the speaker's complex emotional life of "unwellness," and in the process realizes the intention expressed at the end of the first poem: "Except for slinging my songs / wayward home, how do things / in people go? is what I mean." Unique as the speaker's experience may be, it may not be so unlike our own after all.

*Martha Collins*

## CONTRIBUTORS

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SYLVA FISCHEROVÁ's *The Stomach of the Soul: Selected Poems*, translated by the author with Stuart Frieber and A. J. Hauner, will soon be published by Calypso Editions. Her translator, STUART FRIEBERT, will publish a third collection of Karl Krolow poems with Bitter Oleander Press, and he has new poetry, prose, and translations in a number of journals.

JOHN GALLAHER is the author, with G. C. Waldrep, of *Your Father on the Train of Ghosts* (BOA, 2011). He's currently editing, with Laura Boss, a selection of poems by Michael Benedikt, and his next book will be the essay-poem *In a Landscape*, out in 2015 from BOA.

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ARTHUR SZE's ninth book of poetry, **Compass Rose**, will be published by Copper Canyon Press in 2014. He is also the author of **The Ginkgo Light** and **Quipu**, and edited **Chinese Writers on Writing** (Trinity University Press).

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Manuscripts must be submitted during May 2013, through the online submissions manager on our website ([www.oberlin.edu/ocpress](http://www.oberlin.edu/ocpress)). The contest reading fee is \$28 and includes one year's subscription to FIELD.

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