

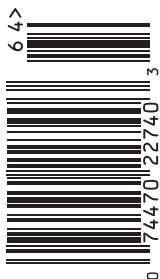
POETRY NORTHWEST

Volume XI | Issue 2 | Winter & Spring 2017 | \$9.95

Jeff Alessandrelli on Genre, Hybridity & David Bowie

new poems David Hernandez, Christopher Howell,
Michael McGriff, Kristin Robertson,
Mary Jo Salter, Lisa Russ Spaar, Terrell Jamal Terry,
Marthy Zweig *and more*

portfolio Alan Chong Lau, *visual art* Jeremiah Moon





POETRY NORTHWEST

Founded in 1959 | New Series | Volume XI | Issue 2 | Winter & Spring 2017

POETRY

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since 1959*

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THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT *[words from the editors]*

“The serious gray / rain kept me / indoors today. . .” begins Stephen Kampa’s poem “The Day James Schuyler Arrived,” a familiar sentiment here in the Northwest where Winter means sunset as early as 4 p.m., often on days when there’s no sun anyway. Given recent events in our political climate, this particular season feels even darker and colder to many of us. It’s natural—meaning in our human nature as well as because of our physical surroundings—for us to turn inward. But if we’ve learned anything from experience, it’s that we shouldn’t turn away. At *Poetry Northwest*, we want to state our support for and belief in the voices of all; no one group should hold dominion over others.

During the second presidential debate, the Republican candidate attempted to dismiss lewd comments he’d made by saying, “It’s just words, folks. Just words.” Yet even a child knows the power of words, how they hurt or heal. It’s the responsibility of our leaders to understand their impact.

We turn, as we always do, to artists and writers to show us who we are, and how we can become better. As we prepare to send this issue to the printer, we remember founding editor Carolyn Kizer, who in her own translations as well as in her work at the helm of this magazine was passionate about heterogeneity in poetry. We reaffirm her deep commitment. By crossing borders, we enrich our own experience.

To that end, *Poetry Northwest* continues to publish the best poems we can find, by both emerging and established writers. We welcome and actively seek submissions by those who are underrepresented. If you’re a writer as well as a reader of poems, we ask you to please consider us when you’re sending them into the world.

Our New Year’s wish for all of us? Read widely, and wisely. Question. Encourage dialogue. Be generous. Witness. Stand together. Listen. Listen harder—words matter.

— EM & AB

New podcast episodes featuring
Alan Chong Lau
J.W. Marshall
and more



ON THE WEB

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Mary Jo Salter
Jennifer Sperry Steinorth
George Witte
and more

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and more

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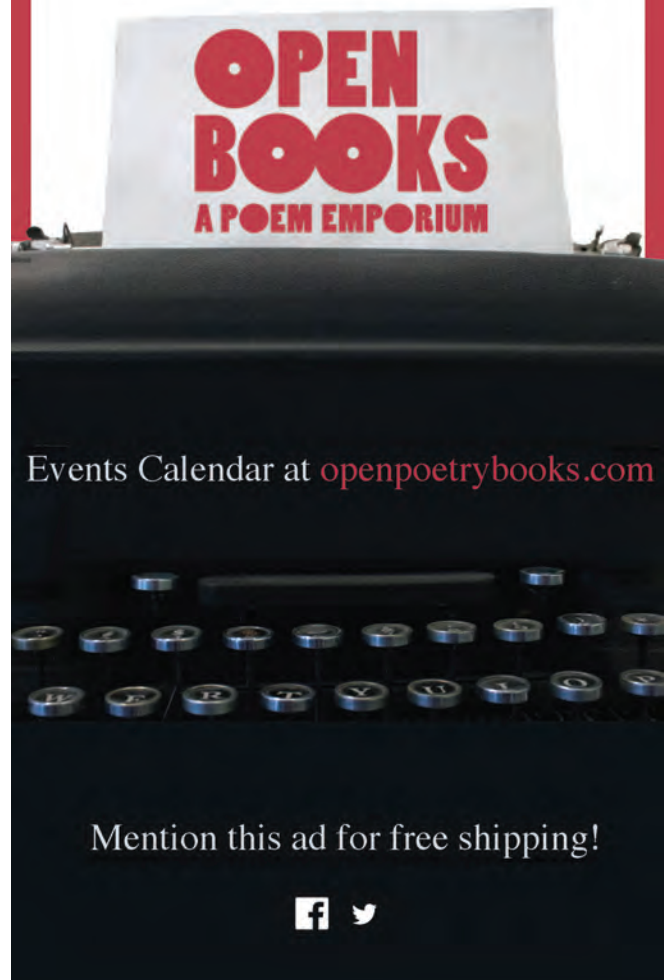
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ADAM CLAY

How the World Began

The years of the locust tree
Split open with ease,
But I had no ax—
It was lost to the snow.
Let's make up a story
Of how we arrived here.
Because of its ability to create,
The mind must do the opposite.
I always liked missing you,
Stirring the coals with only
The action of my mind.
To split wood, one must consider
The direction of the grain.
Sometimes the mornings
Remind me of how
Dickinson imagined Heaven,
But what of Heaven
Without the world, the dirt,
And the turn of the head
To a sound distant in the woods?
I doubt anything could diminish
The seasons when dwelling
Within the opposite. How we
Arrived here was never much
Of a story but we imagined
A path around the lake,
A narrative built from circumference,
And the trees we built
From molecules outgrew
The bounds we imagined for them.



CHRISTOPHER HOWELL

Kierkegaard's Instant

I.

So simple, the fearlessness
and suffering and forgetting the doors
as they close.
Remember the word, "forever?" built
of the hard, invisible bricks, forgotten suicides
in their white boaters and cheap rings?
Who could love this life again, knowing
what it meant
and who could not?
God is a walkingstick of bones broken
into song the long roads embrace, loving
the taste of dust, their brother,
though there is no place to go and no one
to take you there.

Grieve for joy, if you must
pray. Or
dance for grief.

II.

The telephone is ringing
and it's St. Paul's God, again, the operator, bishop
of limited offers, martyr of the party line.
He says, "I'm sorry, sir, the number
you are not calling has been
yours since fish crawled out of the sea,
since names became themselves. Please deposit
your life savings or whatever
may pass for praise. This has been
a recorded message."

III.

Look inward, are those the dead lakes
in which the spirit swims, nursing
its prosthetic smile? Overgrown gardens
on the shore are thick with violet-blue
birds. The trees are everyone
you have ever loved, even for a moment,
that single moment we have.



JILL OSIER

Shutter

Owls glide
back into the trees.
There goes the milkman
with his jingling bottles,
dust pursuing him
down the bumpy road.

Blackbirds in a willow,
robins in the grass. All of it
may be thousands of years ago
or infinite as a moment
painted on a wall, and the wall
itself forgotten.

Ten thousand years, half a million
ghost lights on a hillside
in a water ball of glass,
in the arch of a thumbnail, brow
of a beautiful face
glimpsed in passing.

∞

And This Shall Be a Sign Unto You

The moon fit perfect the clock face the night
the sky gleamed gem-like, rare night with air
bright and catching the yard's patches of ice
while inside, the dream, a first try, a woodcut:
a building, dark square with small rectangles of light
here and there, and it is fine, except it is brilliant,
it being a basket of a balloon, wicker failing. The dream
looms into day, becomes my ice, uncut, becomes my night.

∞

LISA RUSS SPAAR

Valentine, Again

I'm old. So talk to me,
you say. And time passes

backwards, the nail holding
the wall calendar tightens up,

the shell on the sill blushes
with pulse. My heart

fills your hand. In the same room
one mirror holds another.

Right now we're floored, outside
that lockjaw, spectral eternity.

Your gospel's in my hand
& I know where to—and do—as outside

February's aisles bristle anxiously
with ardent envelopes, boxed cavities.

I offer my back. Sound of body
passing over body. That second hand.

∞

Paschal

You died, Scorpius arched its fickle torso
over the Blue Ridge, & March commenced despite.

Moon rose & rose again, fattening its tatted face
as Jupiter boasted belts and flashed its jovian shadows.

Below, the sticks & cruxes of the world we moved through
without you in it unfurled: forsythia torches, lit wicks,

tributaries of redbud. The cherry wept its snow
on Buddha's sloped stone shoulder in the yard.

On the night before the day we celebrate an empty tomb,
I unfold a paper lantern. If I were yet literate,

I'd write something on it in our new language.
Instead, mouth to cervical collar to blow it open,

one hand to hold its base, the other to light a rosin lozenge,
the tissue fills with light wavery then strong enough

to tug toward sky—have to let it fly then, straight up, up at first.
A pucker. A tick. Ticking. Shhhhhh. Then a passing over

hemlock, gables, heart I hold against my palm,
doorway with its pledge of blood.

∞

The Afterbirth of a Fawn

Inerte, tout brûle dans l'heure fauve . . .
— Mallarmé, *L'après-midi d'un faune*

All afternoon, in slate grizzle,
beneath the yews, black shag
grove where others grazed,

indifferent, some on hind legs, eating
like the Girl with No Hands
in an old tale, the doe strode,

steamed, fell, rose again,
& by sundown still just those two,
milk-hoofed ghostly limbs

of fawn hung out of her, slipping back,
emerging, again, out, in,
the ropey noose

she leaned her elegant head
back to snap at, repeatedly,
amnion alien pulley.

While I slept, she did not.
Next evening, the tawny hour,
herd conspicuously vanished,

the space cuffed, muddy, thrashed,
so whiskery with light snow
I almost missed it, stepping

among fecal pearls, stain faint
as girlhood on a thrown-out skirt.
She'd eaten it well,

her own blood, placenta, basal plate,
but not this tissue frozen
to cellophane, weird, cellular,

unlikely remnant doily,
hieroglyph spelling *unattached*,
natal patch that opens us to death.

❧

Commute

I passed the grim reaper.
He was driving a tractor
attached to a baler.

I was

in my automobile
also on my way to work,
late. He ambled along

the shoulder slow, as certain
tractors are want to do,
intimating no rush

to snuff and so forth.

Or

having started the day
knowing what it would take—
to get where he was going . . .

Do not wish for confidence.

❧

JOHNNY HORTON

Pietà

My kindergarten teacher scared the hell out of me
when she said we'd live in heaven with Christ
on the same day that she passed out
the permission slips our parents had to sign

if we wanted to go on a field trip to the zoo. I went home
confused, two thoughts
crossed in my mind, convinced
if my parents signed that paper I'd be a goner, abducted

by this bearded stranger. How long I imagined life
without my family without crying,
I can't remember. I recall attracting my mother's attention, her
explaining the conclusion I'd leapt to

was false. Days later, I would, in fact, come home
from seeing animals. I would ape the human
look of marmosets, lie across my mother's lap, make her laugh
so hard she cried.

~

BRANDON LAMSON

Night Owl

A shadow in a doorway
that will never clear again,

a funnel cloud touching down
to obliterate house and barn,

harnesses hanging on tacks lifted
into air. But denser, the sound

it made screeching at night.
I stepped closer and its head swiveled,

eyes all pupil, feathered brows
flaring into horns, devil bird

and séance whisperer perched
on the fence. Some believe

when it comes to your house
someone you love will die,

my father asleep in his hospital bed
awaiting surgery, pigskin grafted

into a flap that opens and closes
like an eyelid as his heart pumps.

The sternum cracked, the stall packed
with organs exposed as when a twister

shatters the barn roof into kindling
and animals below squeal trying

to burrow deeper into manure,
their bristled skins sheened electric,

translucent. Only my reflection
in the glass is real, and the owl staring

back at me, draining sleep from my face,
replacing it with something darker.

~

Landscape Rising from Crow Eyes (Ornithomancy)

— divination by birds

So you're in the Van Gogh museum sneaking a pic of *Wheat Fields with Crows* with a cell phone because you've come up with a different crow count 3x now, & because you can't quite see where crows end & night begins, because if you look hard enough you'll look into the rest of Vincent's life since the painting was his last, & you'll need something, later, to bring you back to this moment where forty-five, or forty-eight, or fifty vanishing points watch you begin to disappear back into your life, where you're questioning everything you know about crows, & light, & last words, but here's a hand gripping your collar, & another knuckled into your back, someone with coffee & herring-breath muttering *kloatsek*, a Frisian insult, meaning asshole, or douchebag, which means the guard might be from Friesland, a Netherlands province with a language no one officially recognizes as a language, but such a little area that he might be a distant relative, & because comedy will always trump tragedy in your life, you stumble as you turn to flip the bird at this longlost cousin, & fall back to the asphalt, eyeball to shattered eyeball with a dead crow. And look up at what it looked at last: just another street, a four story redbrick skyline across the way, a piano dangling in front of one of the windows.

A contrail-crossed sky. Salt air blowing in from the ocean that separates you from everyone you know. If art is just the thing that makes you more vulnerable, couldn't this crow, this bit of char, this black tongue gone cold cursing, be included? And what else has knocked you on your ass lately? The man in Argentina who fitted his father's left hand to his own, a hand recovered from a pile of smoldering bones. The splotch on the iris of a 3-year-old in a picture, yellow sun, that someone on social media identified as the beginning of Coats' disease, yellow shine of an unseen scar on the back of her retina, & so saved her vision. Or the look in your wife's eyes, the glistening at the crow's feet beside them, when you finished the crib, twelve white slats on each side of the golden-ratioed rectangle, one for every pair of ribs, ribs right now the size of dragonfly wings, & just as translucent. At the end of two lives, at the beginning of another, you take your first steps back into the world, with all the brushwork left upon you, your body upside down in the canal next to you, body among the evening stars, a point of light for every feather burning in your memory.



MICHAEL McGRIFF

Early Hour

In the early hour.
In the hour of copper.
In the secret minutes
coiled around wooden spools
and scrawled into the sill-dust
beneath our open window.
In this room lit up
like the throat-latch
of a horse, like sea foam
under the breeze of a black moon.
You are asleep, the dingo
collapsed between us,
the shadows across your stomach
umber-flecked and swimming
toward some vague memory
of blue that the early hour
has wrung from its hair.
Your breath smells of farriers' hammers,
of April spreading its sheer fabric
among the first blooms
of the dogwoods.
The edge of the flood plain
is a red crescent
and you shimmer
like a lost axe head in the creek.
When starlight becomes a flange
for the motion of no thought,
when the whereabouts
of the azaleas
become uncertain,
the outline of your face
is sky-written in the black loam
of the thunderheads.
When Cygnus scrapes his iron beak
against the rafters,
when the hidden cathedrals
in each whitecap
slice across the river,
when the fourth dimension
of the dingo's skull
fills with green light,
when a bucket of sparks
empties onto the mantle-dark
shoulders of this early hour,
you become the early hour.

You become water
dressing up as the opposite
of bone and rags,
you become an island
filling with reeds,
the shore wind repeating itself
and forgetting where it lives,
the sound of two feathers
crossing one over the other
among threads of dust.
You sail past the dead
with their saffron-yellow teeth,
their gristmill jaws,
and their wings clipped back
to callused nubs.
In this early hour
I hear a rustling
in the dogwoods,
the sound of a table
being set, a deck of cards
slid across
the crushed lip
of its box.
I hear the rail yard
draw an arrow
to the edge of our country—
and though there are no trains,

a few dogs run mad beside them
through the tall,
impossibly blue grass
as you drift within your body
and into an hour as nameless
as the stone heart of a plum.

∞

Letter Sewn into the Hem of a Dress Made of Smoke

Blood sloshing
in my skull's chipped saucer,
the stars trolling overhead,
and this dirt road
that twists back
to its own prehistory.

When I say you have the beauty
of a dirt road
I mean you have thin shoulders
that twist in me
like the fault lines
in a minor planet's moon

I mean you smell of dust,
burnt soap stone, beetle shells,
garden hoses limp in the sun

I mean that I can feel you
tilt your head back
and tell some fleck of dust

hanging between us
that you make noises
only the dingo can hear.

I've lived all these years
with my mouth
pressed to the altar
of low green rivers
and slabs of shale
and I'm telling you now
that I can feel the night
scrawling the shape
of your voice onto the cold
wet earth of me

and when I say a doe
is about to jump
the low spot in the fence
in December in the rain
in this moment
and no other I mean
your animal stillness
resting next to mine.

∞

The Afterlife [I]

Even here, the stars are lug nuts
lost in the sawgrass.
My boots disappear
into the soft shoulder
of the ditch.
I forget my hometown.
The clocks grow immobile.
My country forgets my name.
Somehow, my life is reduced
to the lies I cut free
from the newspaper.
I start a fire with them.
I sleep next to it
with a woman
who's lit from within
like jasper underwater,
like quail eggs
or suicide knobs.
I listen to the runoff creek
and threads of blue light
that want to outlive everything,
outlive the spur gears
running their black orbits
through the oil bath
in a horse's skull.
I listen to something stamp
across the night's blank face.

∞

LIZA KATZ

Book Jacket

All the frustration comes up in the throat:
the roundness of *ocean*, guttural half-sound
of *chorus*, *apart*. What happens to girls who want
to be looked at, not looked through: wind
through the battens of her skeleton boat,
this not-music, this ringing in the throat.

Mud-soaked hem, stained edge of a sleeve:
the perfect dress, sun off a whitewashed staircase,
though beautiful, overwhelms. We'll always have
this lack of symmetry: call it art, or avoidance,
the angles planned to help us not look *at her*—
the violence her reflection does to the water.

∞

Boxwoods

We didn't tokenize our grief with candles
or crosses. Harbored no belief in ghosts,
though we wondered about movements in the boxwoods,

the horses' sudden startles, the dim flickers,
inexplicable, years later, in the house.

Wondered what the moths that scaled the walls,
groped the windowpanes for solace,
were hiding. The dead are territorial:

this we understood. We knew why mothers
named their daughters after things that cling

to the ground, so many Rosemaries and Ivies,
Hazels and Lavenders begging to be buried,
the scent of boxwoods sticking to their skin.

∞

LEAH POOLE OSOWSKI

Motives Around Human Vacancy

*Boketto (Japanese, v.): gazing vacantly into the
distance (without thought or sense of self)*

How windows do how cows do

How a parachute blooms calm
slows motion

 a house of cornerless sky
a round to rove in

How you wake in an unfamiliar bed
no idea where here is

Or how one wakes after another's death
and for five seconds they're not

This white space this difference
between snow and seeds
 and the way they drift

Or steam and cold breath—
the simultaneous distinction and confusion
of temperature

Clarity translucing
 the way a cloud covers
the sun causing the ocean
 to put heavy clothes back on

How Nebraskans describe the air
just before a tornado:
 green and shock still
 mouthing cellar
 mouthing chance

∞

LAUREL HUNT

Fame is what Emily said it was

Hope is the devil w/ his walk-in closet full Of bird masks: blue
jay, pigeon, dark swan. A man I knew Died in jail,
November, there were Amphetamines, there was no blizzard.
I go back to the news, the devil's a goldfinch.
The man might've Been an escort. *Objection,* *Relevance?*
Hope's a winged rat. Nobody fucked me In a fountain full
Of marble horses. Even at my Anita Ekberg-est.
The horses all had both hooves up & thus also
Were dead. I made you a postcard From a photo
Of me, on dark sand Looking away & seaward & in gold
The heat *Of the smash.*
The bronze-tailed comet Is rated Least Concern.
If the man was an escort He wasn't a very good one.
A good ornithological Fact is: birds
Have triangular tongues like Heat lightning in the desert.
Like hot cactus flowers. But let me speak well
Of the dead. Two articles In the *Times*.
& the flame-throated sunangel is rated Least Concern.
Hope's a plastic lawn Flamingo. His death undisclosed
For three days but No evidence of police
Brutality. & we never could Get the séance to start.
Vigil candles on Instagram. The green-backed Firecrown
Is rated Least Concern. The black metaltail
Is rated Least Concern. Hope is extinct
In the wild. The plastic lawn flamingo Is rated Least Concern.

☞

STEPHEN KAMPA

Have It, Eat It

What I expect
to see at the end
 isn't the moon
gray as a dusty plate
 or red as
a party balloon let go

 because its holder
just couldn't wait to open
 her first gift,
tearing sky-blue paper the way
 the sky itself
will be torn to celebrate

 in due time
with apt atmospheric the day
 we all were
born, nor dune upon dune
 of radioactive sand
blowing in a staticky hiss

 like a radio
tuned to all the news
 we'll miss once
the party's over and everyone's
 gone, but this:
one bare, branchless tree, straight

 as the barrel
of an enormous gun, stuck
 like a toothpick
in the cakey, sun-warmed mud
 to see if
finally the world is done.

∞

Each Minute Rich with Infinite Potential

How often is
the temptation to claim
 a separation as
something large, a gorge
 or Grand Canyon,
a massive tectonic fault
 or deep-sea trench

 walled with basalt,
the rift by which
 a continent becomes
two and the two
 begin to drift,
when the greater devastations
 are the small—

 the missed good
night, the unmade call—
 each minute's minute
attrition the miniature fissure,
 the subatomic crack
from which whole cities
 never come back?

∞

AARON BAKER

Babel

In the end, the things themselves were only descriptions,
globs of light, approximations swimming
up through the eye, and it made us sad to look at them.

Mount Rainier's high Valhalla of ice and stone, glacier fields
and rivers falling through sunlight scrubbed clean by altitude.
On the drive between Paradise and Longmire, we saw

as Percy Shelley did in the Vale of Chamouni,
the awful beauty of magnitude. *It's pretty*, she said.
Lower down the Nisqually Basin, the second-growth pines,
the meadows of tall grass, seed-heavy and bowing.

A woman I loved now lives in Ohio, and it isn't
the girl who sits reading under the tree on the shore

below that stuns me with my memory of her,
but the illumination of late afternoon passing
through the leaves and filling my window.

There shines my writing desk. There shines my chair.

The sin of Babel was the common language, a narrowing
of distance between word and thing, shadow
and light, that brought us nearer to the damnation

of utterances. But say something you don't know already?
Among the cedars just off the highway,
a few rusted out, mossed-over drums lie a-jumble
behind a collapsing woodshed. As the scene comes into view,

you'll see a roofless cabin set farther back
in the bottom, burnt timbers and blasted-out windows.

The failure's now human in scale, the directives familiar.
Come, said the angels, *let us scatter*
their language or they will become like gods.

The poem denies its materials like the soul denies the body.
And vice versa. But still, the things all ask to be emblems.
The newspaper scraps in the gutter, the dented pillow,

my father's wedding ring and stopped watch in a drawer,
and of course somewhere the sculptures, a hundred
museums' worth,
an entire paradise of gods in which no one believes.

The sirens scream up Sheridan. Lake Michigan pounds
the rocky shore of Fargo Beach. Emergency's in the air.

Finally far enough out, I pull up. The oars creek
in their locks and water slaps the boards. The black
expanse rippling, the city lit up against the continent.

How pretty. What a thing we've made here of steel, glass,
and fire. I miss you terribly! Whatever words are
I'd cross over them into the filial conflagration of so many souls.

After my father's final sermon, an old woman told us
that as he spoke she'd seen angels
holding him up under each arm.

I smiled and thanked her. I hadn't seen angels
and now can't remember a word that he said.
Were I to retell this, I'd restore the catastrophe,

undo the work of the angels, make the sermon
about love, what it demands and does to us.

I'd let the lost meanings, little prodigal sons,
come home and lie down, not let the width

of a breath between the verb and the noun.
Three times the Lord refused the devil on the hill and
still he wouldn't turn the desert stones to bread.

Hell is what happens between my hand and my head.

∞

Honeycomb

Here is the dream where dust, gathered and blowing over the field,
turns suddenly against the wind and moves with the shape
of a body. Here the shape of a body forms and reforms as it crosses
the sky, and then you hear it, the hum of the swarm,

the resurrection of the will heard first by the forest saints who fashioned
skep-baskets of mud, dung, and straw to draw, hold,
and harvest it. The black globes of the bee's eyes regard you

as the earth does, which is barely at all, an unflowering stalk
in the field. In April, you are no Oregon Grape, Willow or Cottonwood.
In May, no Poison Oak, Buckbrush, or Vine Maple. Here are the stacked
hives in the glade, row and white row of return.

Augustine declared evil an absence of good. But an angel guards the gate
back to the garden. Good is an absence, and here below

her gaze, life rises from the dust, root conspiring with raindrop, flower
with stamen, these tiny messengers passing secrets
between them. Soon now, autumn will arrive, the emergency be upon us.

Soon the combs will overflow with honey. Soon we pagan priests
must put on our accrements and enter the glade, fill it with the smoke
of our censers, bewilder the bees and blind the eyes of the angel.

∞

The Infernal Regions

Relax. No more the thinness of ceremony.
Largemouth bass at the bottom of Kapowsin Lake
grow still as his thoughts. No swish and silt,

no father and flail. And once perfectly still, they grow
even stiller. Nothing's wasted, says the Lord of the Underworld.

Stillness is economy, and economy exchange.
While he could still speak, my father asked,
"How should I pray for you?"

The curled buds of the bracken fern form
a forest of question marks.

—

The backhoe operator shuts it down, raises two fingers
towards me and walks off in the rain. Dad's settled
in for the ride, easy now in his pressed suit

and polished shoes. Heavy drops dimple
the freshly turned dirt. Rainbows of oil in the puddles.
What's left is centuries of silence. Such perfect
repose. And potato salad back at the potluck.

—

Should we look for Orpheus among the living?
Should we look for Orpheus among the dead?

Father of riches. Seed the soil, smelt the ore.
We've put on our workboots. We've crossed into
mythology, crossed over. In the underworld,
grief is poor currency. Beneath the camus prairies,

the second-growth Douglas fir and three bodies
of water, an Atlas of darkness shoulders a
weightless world of light. In the underworld, grief is
the only currency, and music after prayers.
Said Archimedes, "With a long-enough lever
and a place to stand, I will move the earth."

∞

The Saints Don't Think of You Fondly

The saints have been squatting in my home
again. They can't agree on the exact reason
for leaving paradise, but most nod when

the patron saint of the falsely accused says
he was tired of all the light. It always comes
back to light. I ask what's to be done about

June's rent? Some pull hands out of robe
folds holding stale loaves and palm fronds,
but the patron saint of the *art a child could*

have made is the first in the growing line,
offering me divine inspiration to paint
two red squares colliding. The tabloid

saint advises me on how to use cucumber
slices to sip cellulite from my thighs, while
the patron saint of cosmonauts provides

Komarov's last words with the preface,
I know you have been searching. These
saints are used to Cain and Abel—love

measured in sacrifice. These saints are
starting to ask what you have earned.
They're taking up your room, filling my

bed with cupped hands. Under the sheets,
the saint of depressed ex-lovers tells me
which men still hold my sweaters to their

mouths, but she doesn't offer up my sweaters.
Her brother, the saint of *you are not like*
the others reads me a book of women who

have heard the same from you. It is getting
harder to sleep with all the knees sunk into my
back, with the smell of snuffed candles, but I

would still prefer to stay in tonight, because I'm
not the patron saint of rain. I'm not the patron
saint of moths hurtling toward well-lit windows.

∞

SUZANNE MANIZZA ROSZAK

Sea Specters

From the highest point of the top deck,
they threw the babies into the sea. The air

was thick with wind-salt. They threw

the babies into the sea, their limbs bare
so that the small bodies would tumble far

and dance unhindered by linen or wool.

They threw the babies just far enough
into the sea that nets would catch them

and they could bathe, swimming like

they already knew how to do, and be
reeled up, babbling stories of minnows

and what else they had seen. They threw

the babies into the sea because they were
winged babies who would only rest for

a moment in the cold, sloshing water

before plunging down, surging up and
breaking triumphant through the surface

of the ocean lapping behind the boat

like an expectant dog. Later the babies
would dot the sky, circling the masts and

faces of believing parents and god-uncles

and family pets before touching down,
cold and dry, salt staining their skin. They

did not throw the babies into the sea,

but there were days when it would have
seemed best, when the waters thickened

with ghosts and the boat struggled to jerk

forward or spun in unrepenting circles,
stalling itself in whorl after whorl.

~

RICH IVES

Proposition to a Ghost Family

The other bodies have overtaken
our house. Every room is crammed
full of colored plastics and butcher's twine,
sweater vests and jump rope, and none
of them are ours. I want to go there,
homing, not to be unmoored but
to thud down. Then spinning webs
will hold me in place, your self-dissolving
faces returned to find me in the half-
light. Parachute to our soggy backyard,
faces, and we will take this thing
and make it breathe. I swear it won't
surprise me when you purchase space
to put between us, when in spite
of you I am still alone, still surrounded by
graves and papers and the knowing.

∞

Clearing the Field

These stones have come a long way,
but when they surface in the fields,
we pile them in corners to help them
find each other. We fling them boldly
at game birds with slings. We let them
fill our eager welcoming stomachs.
They seem to like flying, but
adolescents need more time
to test their invisible wings.
Soon age recognizes how heavy those
impulsive secret promises were, but stones
still won't remember how they fell so far.
What would it be like, I wonder, to find
yourself again, sailing over a new field,
bringing down a tender fleeing god
then wait a million years to fall again?
Fly away now, inevitable obstacles,
I want no more patient demonstrations.

∞

PORTFOLIO / NOTES FROM THE JAPAN JOURNAL / ALAN CHONG LAU

train window

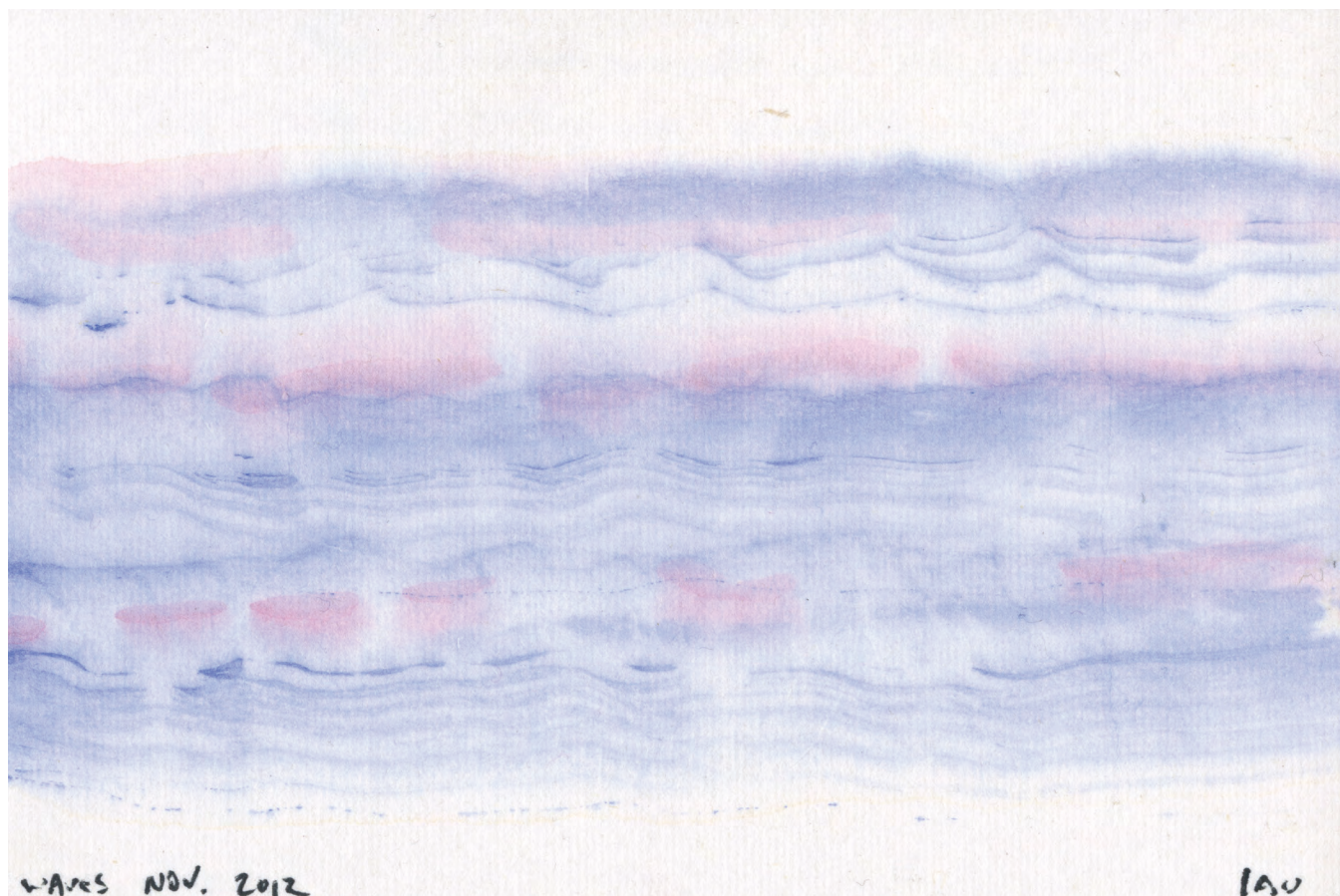
seen from this window
behind the clothes
hung out to dry
the white legs
of daikon
dangling from
their green stems

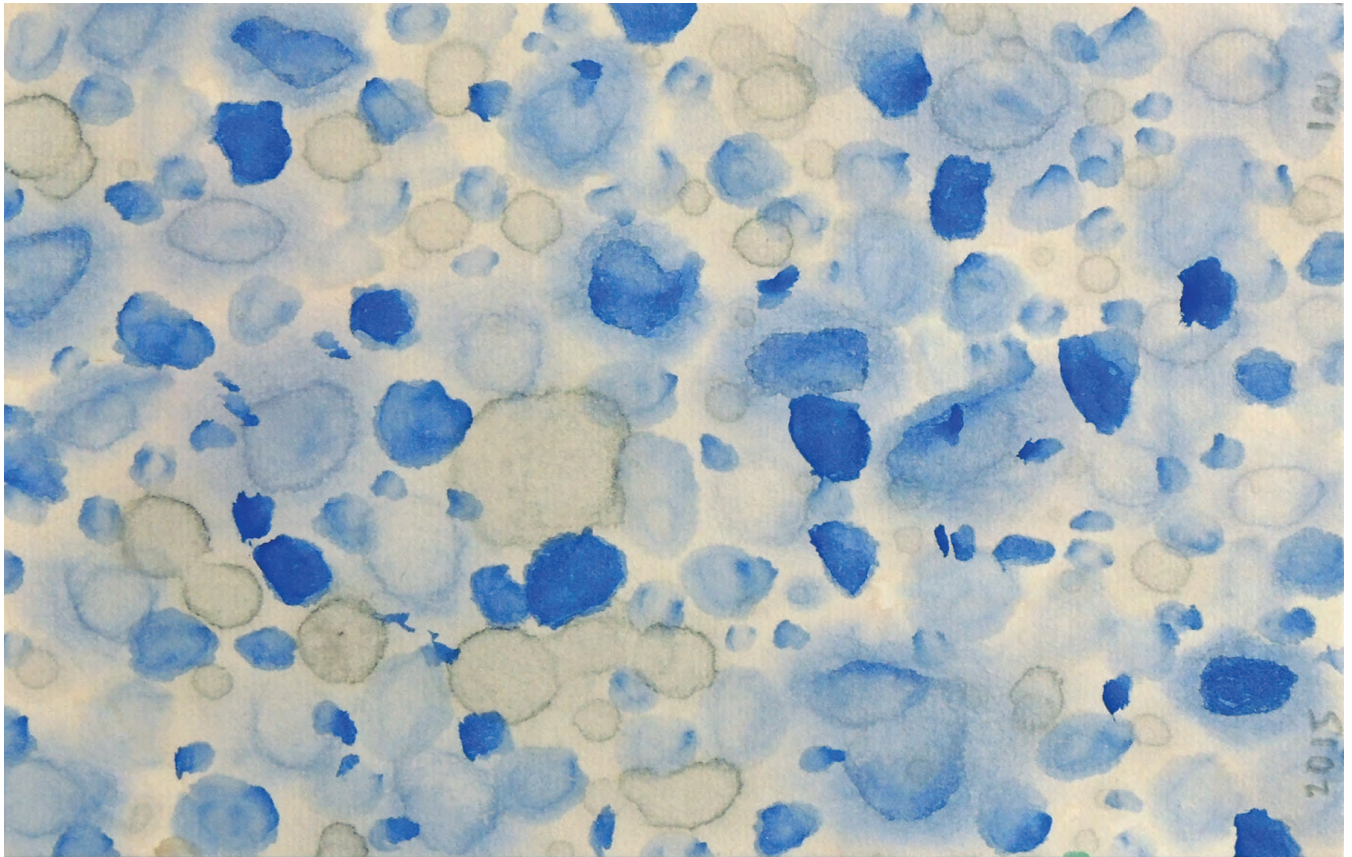
∞

“a night train
to the stars
is passing through
your inner life”

— kazuo ono, pioneer butoh dancer

∞





the day we heard setsuko hara died

the day we heard
setsuko hara died
all the trains in tokyo
came to a stop
and people ran
out of stories

what was perceived
as rain was instead
the tears of birds
their wings stitching
a dark cloak
around a trembling sky

the day we heard
setsuko hara died
the hot springs
at atami
turned ice cold

and parents
around the country
missed every child
they had ever lost

~

ROB SCHLEGEL

Nature Breeds a Promise – Keeping Animal

—for Antonio Zambrano-Montes

Pointing to the dead rabbit
Lindy says, Rock

Dogs circle the dirt where murder wore
the grass away

Absolute
arrangement I walk into
my dream on Lewis Street minutes after
police kill
Antonio, ill and throwing
rocks

Wind ruins volunteer maples near
the lake through which
I'm free
to move watching Lindy
draw circles

mindful of the white space, a different
kind of
freedom is throwing rocks into the lake
& knowing
the lake's response

∞

TERRELL JAMAL TERRY

Bask in My Villain

Into the wee/a part of me
Is starving, where white letters
Flood an exquisite room
By the end of this year . . . something
A mosquito in the flag of fire
Do you know what the color *black* is?
I have never seen a “black”
I have seen the breath of a fox
When no fox was in the woods
I need a ladder to reach your logic
It's not my metronome
It's not my picture/staring
At the bones of us in the dry leaves
On a floor made of light
I'm quieted by a rainy season burning clouds
It was waterglass & I asked
What is that meticulous glitter?
Blazing bridges, I was stepping into fog,
Secret drinks & faded coats
I said it in the air
I sung it on another continent—
Are you wandering into my vocal dust?
In the illusion/limerence
I may become seen tomorrow
With my faith amongst handmade hell
I just feel who some people are
I rarely go to get it
If I must traverse the terrain of talking
Sunk in dandelions/tannin tongue
Chewing maroon droplets
If I must pluck the poisonous berries & pray
Over conditions we may never be
Removed from/improved
I won't seethe
I'll sleep sweet peaches
& sense you directly in the head
While I'm fed uncomfortably
Around a color

∞

MARTHA ZWEIG

Séance

Mother collapsed & sank of the vapors:
miasma, my nephwhew, bird flu, boo who.

I wouldn't if I were you, kin
clasping around the cluttery table one
by one weighed in. Believe

me, I'd almost anything else.
But then again.

You can tell
somebody must've suffered the little children,
long wandered off from their home bodies
& bodies too long gone. A time
they were once upon, or just in a nick of,
time runny out of its loose ends

but by after-all
it appeared merely our common neighborly craterface
moon, on this particular evening phasing out.

Two secrets overheard confiding
themselves into each other's ear:
Don't breathe to anyone
or I'll die. Of course you will.

Of course you are.

You're up to something. Every day I almost catch
you utterly engrossed everywhere.

☞

Beyond Me

Morning: all I'd counted on flapped off,
migrated across a street where a loose
newspaper folio blew too,
nooseprint in a fit, lasso loop I saw a cowboy
once flip at a rodeo calf, half
calf, half clown, crumpling half down.

Lunch. Incarnating a fellow-being,
I relished fishflesh beer-battered & deep-fried,
then treated myself to subplots—several
in festival—making them up on the fly,
whose multiplicitous eye
complicates least little things.

Later a dusk around the block,
shoulder blades winging. Maybe I can't guess
where the house I live in is, did it move next door
& where did the cowboy? Half
of scarface the moon advises *been*
there, done that, been done, there there.

Isn't the end yet? The many
happy returns of the day throng
& belong scrambling the salt marsh
that must've been sobbing for them—all this time—
until their distant yackety yacked
louder & shrieked the louder as they arrived.

☞

JACQUES J. RANCOURT

Book III

St. Augustine's Confessions

To Pak Chong I came
and saw an unbroken line of bats
spill out a cave for hours

and I felt betrayed
that the mountain should hold so many
creatures under its skin

and let them go each night
and let them come back each morning . . .
Or was I jealous?—their hunger

not just a gesture, the wild grass
not just spindling about me, its blonde hair
yanked back by wind,

and when the pods broke, when the seeds
poured forth—*What do I do*
with my own fire?

∞

JESSICA JOHNSON

Girl

I don't know why I talk and talk and talk

Sometimes people mind but mostly not

I constellate my tiny horses to see how their bodies work

And when that's done I gather all my shells

And think of when I broke my favorite crown

I lay my shells and rocks and money in the light

(The trees can suck you up into the blue)

(Behind it there's a unicorn of stars)

The earth is busy making towns and towns and towns and

If the stars touch earth a fire starts

My throat is hot and I take off my dress

And when that's done I touch my center one long time

This shell is made of dust, this one of bone

The arrow I am tangles with the sun

∞

RACHEL MENNIES

Mythos

I am the firstborn child. I grow larger than my mother.
I make her tell me the story of my birth starting
centuries in the past. I grip the match, cradle my singed
and splitting palm. I am frequently wrong, but never in
doubt. I turn to the first blank page. I cannot feed myself
enough. I historicize too early. I bind the spine before I
know how the protagonist dies.

I put my mouth to the river too soon and cannot breathe.
I try again. I try again. I am frequently wrong, but never
in doubt. I build my longing entirely out of paper. I ask
the mirror *do you like the way I touch you*. I grow larger
than my clothes. I put down the pen and pick it up again
and put it down. I ask the mirror *how do you want me
this time*. I begin each story *Someday, she will*—. I fill a
thousand shelves.

I meet the first man who will love me and stop loving
me. I press my fingers to his body until he says *yes there*.
I press my fingers to his body until he says *enough*. I ask
him for more stories and he leaves me. I try him again.
I try him again. I am not my hunger, but what I choose
to feed on. I press his fingers to my body. He burns the
library to the ground.



Variation on "Marriage is Work"

Each night she puts a penny
in a bucket that reads *He Loves You*
A Little Less Than Yesterday
and when it finally overflows

she scatters each copper flash
to the carpet
then gathers their weight
in her cupping hands

She swallows one coin at a time
until her bronzed heart clatters
He tosses in his sleep
but her new heart doesn't wake him

Now the floorboards bend from her
as she walks the unlit hallway

Now there's nothing her shining body
will not buy



11

According to Chinese Celestial Stems, men renew
 their happiness every twelve years. Eleven the integer
 observes a freedom more theological
 than impartial, the promise of likeness
 and a portrait of balance. Based on lottery
 instead of trial and error,
 my theory about *joie de vivre* estimates
 the costs of a godsend parcel.
 Come 2001, the year I fell ill. Twice hospitalized
 without insurance. Got over Emma Goldman
 and "The Jewish Giant." Scared of making
 love, I wore a *vierge moderne*,
 spied on a beggar who stole my foil
 blade and selfhood. Read Nostradamus
 in an unheated museum
 when I should turn in fifty words
 on Montesquieu. Three nights I mouthed
 felonies by Goneril, understudied
 lust for a hell staged in *King Lear*.
 Come September eight, nine,
 ten, and twelve—
 a priest lost control over a confession,
 the clock maimed its hands.
 Those mornings I had handled with sangfroid
 via sixty-five percent high-fiber breakfasts.
 Threw gloves to the cat and cooked
 barley water, unsugared to curb
 the malevolent soot.
 Sun, did you brave the world as projected?
 Lord, bring me faith that will free
 me from being caught in a sniper scope.
 I was spared from harm by a quiz on Beckett.
 Spared, I mourn the prime number without its facts learned.

∞

Far from Description

Day after day,
 this sentence grew longer. The verb ran faster

 than expected. Pushy

 as ever, it hurt the feelings of its own

 speaker.
 I was the speaker who couldn't agree with its mood—
 it wasn't grief,

 ecstasy, or fury
 I experienced when pregnant with a rebel. It

 was the way a regret

 lingered—stuck and turning in one corner,

 as if it couldn't perish without being heard,
 as if its madness drove me to silence,
 as if reason
 or the sound of it mattered.

∞

CATE LYCURGUS

The House Reduced to Studs

My father is the man who speaks through all the faucets
of the house, a drip to fiddle,
he says with every stare across the den.
His voice is the voice that stalks
me like the man who marks my back
in back of the café. I twist in a web
of silly string, lie on the floor, all vertigo.
He sits, enthroned in tubes, chair tilted back,
the man with point-guard limbs, schoolyard thin.
He hears saints and their talk shows in the night
and only then can sleep. His neck has stiffened—
voice a constant distance—foghorn wide—
From his frame folded in on itself, I can hear
the black and white timber.

∞

Backslide

It was a hell- ish carou/sel
carousal that we could not quell not
rouse our-/selves to jump to sell
the mares stir/r-up the guts or
mere- /ly own up to our own
un-/well we were un- merry go-
/ing round and round about
it was a- bout w/re-laps- ing for
lap after lap re-volting
how we want -ed to re/volt
again(st) our or-gans mu-/sic
h/alt the sick or all- ternate
/ly go again we folded
to our knees as foals we need/
a post post-op we op-/ted
stop while we're on top
we're hold- ing up too
old we know but not to jock-
/ey who we were/ we're not

∞

ELIZABETH BRADFIELD

Half Moon Island

Crossing guard duty on our path that crosses the chinstrap path as they pass from rookery (elevation: 300 ft) to sea (elevation: ± 0): Wait. Wait. Wait. Penguins have right-of-way. Never mind your huge lens, your salon appointment, bladder, chill. Birds toboggan down scat-filthy, waddle up wave-scrubbed. Slope a 35. Maybe 30. Wait. Wait. Cross. Cross now. Careful. Don't stop & squat to eye level, yearn for reaction, recognition.

two ribbons cross snow
each packed slick, one stained, one white
what mark, now, is strange?

So that's an hour. Then released to see what everyone has seen over the ridge & is discovery to me: young Weddell seal at shore. Wet. Sleek. Squirming. It nuzzles an outcropping. It sings. It does. Squirms. Blinks big, thyroid eyes. Sings. Didn't know out of the water it would. Didn't. Gloriously failed again by study.

☞



—
Thyroid eye disease causes the muscles and soft tissues within the eye socket to swell. This pushes the eyeball forward—it bulges. You really should look up the underwater vocalizations of Weddell seals. Unearthly.

Gerlache Strait

Killer whales. Killer whales to port at dinner. Warm from wine that never fully disappears from stemless (set out for rough seas) glasses. Rush, jostle, sidestep tables & coffee station, crane over someone's salad to peer through stern glass, yearn at the wake. A mother and calf humpback in prop wash, sickle fins on either side.

evening water sheened
pewter, polished, reflecting
so hiding what may roil

The ship doesn't slow or turn. Settle back, unsettled. What to talk about now? (Who's on watch? Did they see? How could they not? Captain or hotel manager deciding?) Steer conversation elsewhere. A guest shows off his wedding ring: eagle, loon, salmon, orca in form line design. His wife's with diamonds punctuating. What do the patterns say here, in this place with no such peopled retellings, just raw hunt, which goes on . . .

§



Northern Pacific Northwest coast peoples developed a unique system of art and stylized representation that has been called "formline design"—totem poles are perhaps the most familiar example of this art.

One Trip

Wet flurries. First landing.

A couple from India

confess it's their last

continent, first snow

9



Sightings Log: What Came to Seem Common

Black-browed albatross, cape petrel, gentoo penguin, giant petrel, Antarctic fur seal, brown skua, kelp gull, Wilson's storm petrel, chinstrap. Kings on South Georgia and the Falklands. Crabeater (not leopard, though they claim more memory than viewings warrant), Antarctic tern, blue-eyed shag. Wind. Ice. Not humpbacks (though seen), not Minkes (though one flirted with my blubber-like boat), not (alas) orcas or blues or rights. Never enough prions. Snow petrel, that winged angel telling old sailors of shore. Snowy sheathbill.

my envisioned cairns
Shackleton, Scott, Amundsen
surprising lacunae

§



PETER LABERGE

Gods & Monsters

Are every wasp they've ever killed, one month
& another they've wasted. Are gut-stained
barn stool, kitchen window, moon sliver. Are winged

self-portraits. Are quiet & impersonal
as bodies moving & unmoving. Are joined
only by melody & encore of rolled-up newsprint

leaving itself in words against skin. Are ceaseless
applause from the choir of roadside wheat
against legs, whether or not they have done anything

worthwhile with life. Are clinging
to thoughts like *nothing I've ever killed*
knows my name. Are living in borrowed husks

called belief. Are unapologetic & decimating
the fields as they run for hills they've seen
only in their minds. Are winds surrounding

death, but not death itself—even if it lets them
close enough to hear the whirring
of ghosts working themselves out

of cold skin. Are led like river north, south
then east, south, north. Are knives, open
slits called mercy & mercy. Are not asking

what is & is not sin. Are taking the full length
of the cross in their mouths & not
asking which spirits double as their own

quiet fingers curling into the dark of fists.

∞

Testimony (Aubade)

—for Jadin Bell

In a matter of minutes, a son
became a cloud above another state.

The mortician preserved a crown
of marigolds he wove
his last day on Earth. The sun

turned twice, forgot him—heat
on the cheeks of the town

despite the snowstorm, the swelling.

For years, he followed his mother
in a tuxedo of fog. If she squinted

she could make out his thinning
husk of future against the soft bulb

of dawn, the bloom of every morning
in spite of its end, of that weight

which it will always carry—by dusk

a single length of rope, no match
for a boy strung between belief

and where it frayed.

∞

MOLLY SPENCER

Night Repairs

Little boat of the body,
anchor in.

The lake is stilling.

The night-birds call out
their bruised songs.
Even if they are not for you,

they will sound
against your wales,
fill your hollow.

Body, lower your weight
all the way down—
scraped keel

of you, nails clenched
to mend the holes
in your hull.

Don't wonder
whether the lake's undulant swells
intend to cradle or to lull.

There is a road near here
called Deadstream

where the night runs
deeper for the leaf-shade.

I will make a note of this
two-laned sorrow

and how it leads away from the water.

~

Tentative Theories

That the bridge will hold.

That the river sliding past under ice—months from now
the muscled arm of it will unclench
into ocean, having tried to carry
the thick earth all the way down,
having mostly failed.

There are more varieties of ash than thorns
in a bramble. Think of all the things that will burn—
a hillside, dinner again, even the skin

in persistent wind. When the orchard unfolds
in a dream of blossoms, this means snow
has blown over the road in a storm. This means yes

the color has drained from the sky
and a father's face.
All the smooth, untouched waters

of our lives are still ours
and were never ours.

Sometimes a stone is only a stone.

Hold still, will you,
while I consult the map again.

That all the Sundered boats remember open water, and the wound
speaks of its own healing,
of put yourself back together. Now rise up
tender and gleam.

~

KRISTIN ROBERTSON

How to Scatter Ashes

Pull over, the lot of you, for neon spray paint
on propped-up scrap wood: Boiled peanuts.

Stop again for Silver Queen corn. The drive
to the Gulf puts you off Interstate 65 about

halfway, through blink-and-miss towns, family-
owned spots like the It Don't Matter restaurant.

Make a game out of holding your breath between
farmhouses and on the bridge over

Choctawhatchee Bay. Check in to a beach motel.
Hit Tom Thumb for a small jar of mustard.

After you unpack, wade knee-deep into the ocean
with the heavy bag. Nod at the kid

with the downed kite, streamers whipping his face
as he marches the tideline. If you have nothing

to say, sing *Oh, when the stars fall from the sky*. Sing *I want to be
in that number* as the gray water ebbs clear.

Behind you shrimp boats seesaw their fishholds home.

∞

MATT SALYER

Either, Or Us

Comes the fear your ma goes next, a sole
required handmaid to our father the lore:

Appalachia and wraith, all that foxfire.
For forfeiture, I'll listen to you thump

your great orations on my cheek turned,
lecterned, hairless as a first communicant,

to be the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth*.
I have lived in this jaw the years of you

as nodding king, enthroned, matted in idiot
pelt below a mace of head:

ours, either. Come dreams, our father's buried here,
shrunk to this Great Hall, my one-and-heir;

and, long since I built that casket scaled to flea,
placed him within it, uttered inaudible

jeweler's locket requiems, the porters
(poor beetles holding the turning key), report

that the exterior world's become a masterpiece
of confusion; they have held my tongue

like a fat adder, its numb screw rooted
from the doubled *grave, matter*, but now

you bring armies of wood razed to wicker men.
Obscure brutes clamor the livelong.

Come at me, brother.
Let us see who stole whose blood from him.

Tomorrow is knocking out my teeth from within.

∞

GIBSON FAY-LEBLANC

Inside the Wind

Ticking the red haws, lifting dipped
sumac tips, swirling mold inside

leaf piles, swinging the tops of pines
against each other, the wind

reminds me of me: drumming redwood
furrows, scruffing the mutt's thick neck,

ruffling my son's hair. I need
to touch everything, to know

it's there. The wind chugs so fast
it pulls off roofs, turns a hawthorn

into a hole, or slows enough
to seem to stop, like it's listening.

I know air rises as it warms
and other cooler air rushes in.

Tell me you never dream
a black box, a hidden engine.

What's inside this force, inconstant
husher and rattler, bender of grass,

flag, leg hair, tear? If I knew
I could fix hearts: mine, yours.

∞

JOSH KALSCHEUR

Blank Shot

I should not find my form
untouchable in ways others find it
passable. I should want to stand
by a small bridge, behind
a building whose façade resembles
a giant calculator. I should not be
ashamed of striding into that building,
into a pane of glass to catch
a bird whose life is carefully being
lost over and over and over.

The places where I am most valuable
are the places where I am considered
a compassionate person
and those places are mostly
gone though the few left
have loved me how I remember
God loving me God holding me.

All I know is that I am still
compassionate, still have days,
still know the great places
for peace are parks leading
to great lakes, to smooth stone
infinities and you could
spend whole and perfect lives
studying how to throw them
and over and over and over
you could go, blissfully losing
them off the shore, into one
beautiful body of water.

∞

DAVID HERNANDEZ

Depths of Despair

I can, in seconds, make my mood
descend by trying to recall

how many stents total
there are between my mother and father.

I count them off: hearts
and calves. I've lost track.

When I push my thinking
elsewhere—into a slower current

or brighter light—I can make my mood
lift. It cannot be done simply.

~~It must be—~~
~~five by now, perhaps six.~~

I do not remember whether
I asked my mother for the ceramic Buddha
or she gave it to me
without my asking.

Because she glazed his flesh and robe
jade-green, he gleams

like a wet leaf. Underneath, she had finely
etched her name and year, then

with a thin sable brush
painted the grooves black.

Five inches tall, he squats
like a bullfrog on the lawn's perimeter,
a spot that floods
during a downpour, slowly

a puddle will form, will lap against
his toes, his robed knees, will reach

his legendary belly, elevate him
momentarily

before he capsizes.
Face-down in grimy water
is how I find him
when the sky clears, my shoes

gasping across the spongy grass
to place him
upright. When I turn
back to the house

I see where I have been—
depressions in the soaked green.

I can sink my mood by thinking
eventually I will witness

my wife passing
or vice versa—her eyes

watching the gray light
dim from my own.

Regardless, one of us will be
followed afternoon after afternoon

by silence. Lie beside
a hollow in the mattress.

Late May, fast rain.
It rakes the patio and grass. Soon
a puddle will form, will lap against his knees.

The kitchen window is full of wobbling
beads and beads
 rivering down the glass.

Daily I try to remind myself
 the cosmos is always
in flux, beads wobbling and rivering beads,
that this moment is

the most recent of innumerable
cause-and-effects.

Everything
 shifts. Even our speech
has evolved, continues to, each word carries
the undercurrents of Greek or Latin.

When I eliminate the signifiers—

self wife father mother
comet mattress rain grass

—I remember that everything is the universe,

and the beginning of language
was the beginning of separation
was the start of despair.

Only then could I imagine extinguishing despair.

∞

Woman on Fire

Post-diagnosis,
the fork arrived
by surprise, as found

object, sparking
on the ground
outside the hospital.

The rain-varnished lot
mirrored back
her walking, her

hesitation when she
reached the fork, tines
up, a helix of vines

etched onto the handle.
It slid by her in all
its lustrous mystery

like space debris
sailing the dark.
She wondered who

lost it and left
so in a rush, where
did she even park,

how she will live
differently now.
Only minimal rest,

she resolved.
No hours to brush
off. Just this world

served on a plate
and one purpose:
devour, devour.

∞

Falling but Frozen

By accident, mid-aisle, my heel
pressed against the paw of the service dog,
a bony softness as I

pivoted from one student desk to the next.

The black Labrador yelped
and something broke in me. No,
was broken already and snapped again.
No, was made whole

by memory: from modeling clay
I made a hollow ball,
pushed a toothpick inside, then
thumbed smooth the pinhole: hidden.

Here, I told my brother. Squeeze this.

Two students gasped.
One barred her fallen
open mouth with fingers.

The dog turned
away from me and curled beneath a desk

as if accustomed to hurt, the way his lowered tail
slowly swept the floor.

Swept, swept.

Blood-stars
dotted the linoleum from living room to kitchen.

I made that constellation.

What Nietzsche said of human ache:
*To live is to suffer, to survive is
to find some meaning in the suffering.*

I forget and remember, it comes and lingers,
sliver of wood into
my brother's shivering hand, his breaths
heavy, through the nose,
erratic, how it

lingers. And how my father
tended to the wound

at the sink, the faucet hissing
out water. And the way
my mother looked at me, her

How could you?

Beside my blind student I knelt, disclosed
what had occurred, that animal sound
he heard and turned to face,

his damaged eyes lifted
as if to see past

all seven floors honeycombed above us—and further

away, what is
beyond seeing, that first shattering
each visible thing carries

∞

CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY

Homecoming, During a Storm

Time lost its shoes
— Pablo Neruda

At 6, I was apprenticed to clouds,
and gulls sang out each grey decision
of the sea—

I was content alongside
the immense cold light, a string of stars
brushing the ocean's sleeve . . .
salt on the mist, the scent of eucalyptus
ascending the air.

Of course
the fog moved in and took my place—
the spindrift of desire still slipping
beyond the breakwater . . .
and what knowledge was lost
in the blood, in the loose pages
of the waves, must have
been enough . . .

The trees
tip their green hats in time
with the erratic traffic
of my heart, the surf recites
its one rough prayer—
the words to which . . . the words
to which . . .

Nevertheless,
there's nowhere else
I'd rather be as the sky silts up,
as the horizon becomes obscure
as every thought I was sure of . . .
the harbor lights in a haze
as I walk along Shoreline Park,
waiting out the downpour
of the days left in front of me.

~

GEORGE WITTE

Open Casket

Perfection makes us look away.
The art's repugnant, knowing what we know:
blue organs puddled on a tray,
carcass drained, preserved, stuffed plump, and sewn
in her familiar power suit.
Ex-colleagues mustered for support, not friends,
we stalk the line as if pursued,
kill time with furtive email maintenance,
re-tweet to feign efficiency.
Bitter brows relax with praise.
How beautiful she is, she will be missed, agree
she's in a better place,
wherever that might be. Conscience clear,
duty done, let's stay in touch.
Complicity enables cheer;
gossip hums through pews, a ditty's hushed—
She terminated some of us
with relish, unreservedly,
before she reached this terminus
alone, perhaps deservedly.
Chastened semaphores of fingers
miming phones we mouth "Tomorrow?"
The black-robed minister
ascends the podium and nods. Slow,
expressionless, a deacon walks the center aisle.
Patient hands pressed firm he seals the lid,
she's gone, that final
Click a morbid
touch. Eyes wide, we stare
each other down or wince,
astonished supplicants beneath the searchlight glare
shorn naked of pretense,
then lower thoughtful masks
suggesting grief for half an hour
to ease her soul's unrest, forgiveness asked
without extending ours.

~

DEREK MONG

Letter in a Bottle for When the Seas Rise

There was a time we knew the seasons' tilt and turn.

 The sky told us (or those who still worked beneath its blue) when to till;
and new TV premiered each fall.

 A storm might burst its lungs
 upon our shores, but all was cyclical and foretold.

 More or less, or at least no less than before: so we fell asleep
behind the wheel— and drove and drove
 and drove some more, through the snow glare of our mid-May yards.
It covered dog and garden hose and newly sprung begonias.

 This was once upon a time, once before we got to drinking.

Small son—
 to learn how well we've doomed the world
 will be the task we leave you;
 to learn the least you need to do will be your children's.
And someone—as oceans erode the shores—will learn to re-enchant it.

Meanwhile, from the crisped core
of a forest fire, we've gathered
 a bouquet of microphones to offer you this update:

your parents have retired to a garbage flotilla,

the one island that'll rise above the high tide we've made.

We left binoculars in your upstairs window.

Look at us, afloat in the whale-rich Pacific,

as we reunite with all that we've lost.

This trash has taught us

that what we cannot solve can be absolved with a cheerful goodbye.

☞

MARY JO SALTER

Lo Sposalizio

That's the shorthand for it,
"The Marriage of the Virgin"
stuffed here in my pocket—

a masterpiece in soft
washable microfiber,
a cloth six inches square

designed to clean the lenses
on fingerprinted glasses
and reproduce the clear

triumph of the rational
(oil on poplar panel)
in the ceremony Raphael

composed for Mary and Joseph.
Their modest heads incline
to harmonize, as if

half-note ovals penned
on a staff made by the patterned
stones in the piazza—

geometries that bend
to a vanishing point beyond
a Romanesque, domed temple

porticoed with arches
along its base, except for
(far off) a rectangular

door that gives on air,
blue hills and air, the future
until it is the past.

Perspective and proportion
are what the bearded priest
is authorized to join

as he guides the husband's wrist
to place the ring on a destined
finger on her hand.

Yet every head's its own.
The congregation's faces
turn against symmetries,

gaze this way or that
or inward, while a number
of background figures whisper

like stands of distant trees.
Even the draperies
(the gold cloak falling from

the bridegroom's emerald shoulder;
her mantle's swag of sapphire
wrapping the ruby gown)

assert, for all their mass
and balance, how the fabric
of the moment improvises

and unfolds as it will.
Such, now, is the time in
which you, my new son Simon,

stand in your bow tie;
you, Emily, the child
I swaddled once, are veiled

as only brides may be.
Now may the mystery start.
With nothing to espouse

but hope as old as art,
I clutch the little cloth
in case need should arise

to wipe my naked eyes.

∞

MARTHA SILANO

At the D-Day Memorial, Normandy, France

What the guides can't prepare you for
is the trilling
is the pounding

What they do not say
is that your son
will find everything

about you annoying
but mostly your French
how you said glaSAY

Glace glace and more glace
you will never forget
no one will ever

the incessant singing
birds you do not know the names of
That there is no guidebook

That the Scotch broom and gorse thrum with bees
but you are not sure it is gorse
but you are not sure if the Scotch broom is native

They will tell you to be careful along the cliffs
They will say at least three times
do not climb do not swim do not leave the path

They will tell you
There was no glace
on June 6, 1944

nor was there glace
the months that followed
while towns like Caen

could not be freed
when the war had to keep on
with the birds and the gorse

where sons have always been
wishing their mothers
would disappear

∞

JOHN MORRISON

Where I Walk

By Spring she will be
the size of a gnome
and could become lost
as the garden leafs out.

*Mother, I'll call,
Mother, would you like some tea?*

A rustle in the hydrangea
where she's made a little nest
to stay cool come summer

and she peeks out.
Cinnamon?

*Yes, mother,
I say,
Cinnamon, in your blue cup,*

cobalt blue from a doll's china set.
I cup her up onto my shoulder
and we stroll to the kitchen nook

as she chatters about the wind chime
and how sweet
the neighbor's one-eyed cat.
I tell her soon

she will be too tiny
to be out by herself
because of the nasty
scrub jay and before I
too begin to shrink

I can make a room for her
in an acorn charm
around my neck

until she is so wee
she fits among the molecules
where I walk and breathe

walk and breathe.

∞

“SHE’S NOT SURE IF YOU’RE A BOY OR A GIRL”:
GENRE FLUIDITY, LITERARY HYBRIDITY, AND DAVID BOWIE

Jeff Alessandrelli

Easiest to begin with a derivation, right? The eighteenth-century French *genre* took its root from the twelfth-century Old French *gendre* (kind or species, character, gender) and was itself derived from the Latin *genus* (race, stock, kind, rank, order, [male or female] sex). “Genre” as we use it today (a particular style of art) can also be traced back to the eighteenth century. But it’s the tightly woven threads between the common-day definitions of gender and genre that are most notable. Genre fluidity vis-à-vis gender fluidity—the kernel for both terms is contained in that Latin root *genus*. And said root contains an expansive and ever-growing tree above it.

*

Although it’s difficult to pin down any exact inception, the term “gender-bender” was, throughout his career, frequently used to describe David Bowie’s on- and off-stage presence. Bowie, of course, was known as one of the most persistent of popular music’s shapeshifters; no style of music was safe from his creative appetite. Folk, glam-rock, art-rock, funk, soul, Krautrock, New Wave, electronic, ambient, jazz, avant-garde, experimental. Bowie’s first instrument was saxophone, though from it he graduated to seemingly everything: a variety of string-based instruments; piano; percussion; synthesizers; still other purely electronic apparatuses. Reducing Bowie’s musical output to a single genre would be impossible; his was a career that that achieved a seamless musical blending, one that, chameleon-like, seemed to not be a blending at all.

Bowie’s genre fluidity goes hand in hand with the musician’s gender-bending proclivities. And as Bowie’s sound changed from album to album, so did his appearance. The cover of his third album, *The Man Who Sold the World*, famously showed the musician wearing a dress, lounged out on a sofa, and all subsequent Bowie persona conceptions—from Ziggy Stardust to Halloween Jack to Aladdin Sane to the Thin White

Duke, hair dyed blond or red, eyepatch or sans eyepatch, heavy makeup or none at all—toyed with the notion of gender. If one chooses to make music that cannot be defined as one concrete thing, then one can also choose to present themselves to the world in a similarly ambiguous way; he, she, and everything in between. Bowie’s genre and gender fluidities, then, dovetailed with one and other. If the music never changed, Bowie’s ever-changing appearance would have seem forced, contrived. And if the look masking the music never morphed, the music itself would seem similarly disingenuous. Bowie as an old, decrepit Ziggy Stardust, still pining for the virility of his youth, would have been too depressing to take seriously. They’ve been quoted a million times before, sure, but the “Rebel Rebel” lyrics seem forever prescient:

*You’ve got your mother in a whirl
She’s not sure if you’re a boy or a girl
Hey babe, your hair’s all right
Hey babe, let’s go out tonight
You like me, and I like it all
We like dancing and we look divine*

You’re not sure; she’s not sure; we can’t be sure. But if our hair’s all right and, looking divine, we like dancing, in the end it’ll hopefully all work out. Let’s go out tonight. We’ll be all right.

*

None of the above assertions are new, of course. But the plurality of Bowie’s singularity as a musical artist (and cultural icon) is something that, circa 2017, many writers also have—albeit in terms of genre. That working within the interstices of different literary modes is inherently a good thing seems to be almost taken for granted by the contemporary writer—why allow oneself to be cemented into only one specific type or form of writing? As the ever-ambidextrous author Eileen Myles put it in a 2015 interview, “As an artist you get to determine. I get to wield genre as a

way to control [the audience's] apprehension of my work." In this respect genre doesn't much differ from gender; it is up to the individual to decide how she wants to be identified, considered. (From a different 2015 interview, Eileen Myles once again: "Gender is like thrifting: you put on things and see if they fit, and maybe they fit for a while and then you think 'No, I look terrible in this shirt,' and then you don't wear that anymore.") Both concepts, gender, genre, hold less purchase now than they ever have before. And to exist beyond the form rather than solely within it, to include rather than exclude, is a phenomenon that permeates our every waking moment. How often do you make phone calls on your smartphone and how often do you do everything else? Would your smartphone still be your smartphone without your apps? Or sans an Internet connection? On a more basic level, what would your driving experiences be like if, while navigating the road, you couldn't simultaneously listen to music or podcasts or the radio? Would you be a better driver or worse? Why?

Hybridity, the combination of two or more ostensibly different things or activities into one, is something that is suffused into nearly every aspect of contemporary culture and we live in a world that cajoles—insists—that we simultaneously build bridges to different worlds. From an early age we're taught to be aware of singular limitations, of that which disallows a multiplicity of engagement. This reality might be more acutely perceived in the arts, but it is a twenty-first century phenomenon nonetheless. *What can't it do?* is arguably just as important a question as *what can it do?*, and the potential invigorated by such limitlessness is of the kind that most people extol the virtues of and bask in. Such multi-scope valuing isn't new, of course—as far back as 1855, Walt Whitman contained multitudes. But contemporary culture's constant, unrelenting emphasis on said multitudes is new in some respect. Consciously or not, we desire a fluidity—of self, of genre, of technological device or apparatus—that past generations would not have considered possible.



*

(If I'm being honest, though, I'm better at talking on the phone when I'm home alone than when I'm walking my dog. Loud music makes me fussy, antsy, especially when I'm driving. I'm a better listener when I'm not eating and I'm a better eater—no spills, no mess—when I'm not forced to listen. My own humanistic hybridity is hampered by my remedial nature as a human and if, scientifically speaking, multitasking is impossible, then my personal deficiencies are a testament to that fact. Which isn't to say that I don't try to multitask at nearly every opportunity. Which isn't to say I ever truly succeed.)

*

Coined around 1600, the derivation of the English "hybrid" (n.) comes from the Latin *hybrida*, which itself is a variant of *ibrida*, meaning "mongrel," specifically "the offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar." As a melding of two disparate things into one solidified unit, the noun hybrid first gained prominence around 1850, a prominence which has steadily grown in stature, especially in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

But the most interesting thing about hybrid's derivation? Its close relationship with the word "hubris" (n.), which is derived from the Greek *hybris* and initially meant "presumption toward the gods." That the nature of one's hybridity, artistic or otherwise, might locate itself within one's own hubris is intriguing, insofar as a contemporary society we tend to believe that to be multitudinous, to write multitudinously, is to be *better* in some way. A finalist for the 2014 National Book Critics Circle Award in both Criticism and Poetry (and the winner of the Poetry award), Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* is such a great collection because it envelopes poetry, nonfiction, history and art. Writing beyond the form while yet still within it, as Rankine does in *Citizen*, lets the author leverage plurality over singularity and thereby allows the

amplification of multiple messages. This isn't a new concept or idea, of course; scores and scores of writers over the past hundreds of years have melded genres. Defining such work as "hybrid," however, *is* a fairly new concept.

Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, a wavy poem-within-digressive-commentary-within-meta-fictional-narrative is a combination of multiple genres; the book has been considered a forerunning example of what came to be known as hypertext. Upon its publication in 1962, however, it was called a novel—a strange, disjunctive, and disjointed novel, but a novel nonetheless—and it's entirely possible that Nabokov would have felt irked had it been referred to as a "hybrid" text, occupier of a strange wasteland between poetry, fiction, and other. (That the poem "Pale Fire" at the center of the novel *Pale Fire* has, multiple times, been itself published as a stand-alone text might have simultaneously flattered and nonplussed the author.) Hybrid as a genre, as a literary label, is one that Nabokov would have found reductive. I'm conjecturing his authorial displeasure, of course, but the below quote, from his essay "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*," indirectly elucidates his thoughts regarding genre (emphasis mine):

No writer in a free country should be expected to bother about the exact demarcation between the sensuous and the sensual; this is preposterous; I can only admire but cannot emulate the accuracy of judgment of those who pose the fair young mammals photographed in magazines where the general neckline is just low enough to provoke a past master's chuckle and just high enough not to make a postmaster frown.

Hybrid texts, however, exist exactly within that sensuous and sensual demarcation; they are literary

interstices, determinedly so. They combine the proverbial tame sow and wild boar into a thing previously unclassifiable—but once born and breathing it is very alive indeed.

In today's literary climate, however, calling *Pale Fire* "hybrid" (or some variation therein) would be seen as beneficial, a boon to both the scope of the work and Nabokov's audience. In their 2009 anthology *American Hybrid: A Norton Anthology of American Poetry*, editors Cole Swensen and David St. John make the case for literary hybridity being the contemporary norm rather than the exception. Swensen asserts in the volume's

introductory preface that "the contemporary moment is dominated by rich writings that cannot be categorized," going on to state:

Hybrid writing tolerates a high degree of the restless, the indeterminate, and the uncanny because, like the best writing of any era, it doesn't seek to reinforce received ideas or social position as much as it aims to stimulate reflection and to incite thoughts and feelings.

For his part, St. John gainsays that

Although I have always distrusted writers who run in packs, I welcome all literary partisanship as a gesture toward what I would call a "values clarification" . . .

[t]he most compelling new poets today draw from a vast and wildly varied reservoir of resources. Their choices concerning "voice" and stylistic possibility (as well as their attitudes toward aesthetic, theoretical, cultural, and political urgencies) are now articulated as compelling hybridizations.

That may very well be true. But in terms of poetry specifically, at least some of the work currently being categorized as hybrid is perhaps defined as such due to some form of (subconscious) arrogance; the poets of today (and editors of those poets) believe they're making



something different than their predecessors did and thus a freshly defined genre-encapsulating word is needed. Hybridity makes it new in a new way. Or for people who believe in the hybrid classification, perhaps that's what they need to believe and believe in.

To be clear, I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing. To feel that one's work holds merit, especially in terms of everything that came before it, is a substantial accomplishment, one that not every writer is able to access. Still, defining one's work as hybrid in origin does, in the current cultural moment, mean that it reads differently than just a plain old poem or short story. A hybrid work certainly might tolerate, as Swenson suggests, "a high degree of the restless, the indeterminate, and the uncanny" due to the fact that it "aims to stimulate reflection and to incite thoughts and feelings"; in this regard perhaps it is unique when compared to a sonnet or free-verse poem that arguably exists only to "[reinforce] received ideas or social [positions]."

But in the same way that, say, a high Modernist piece of literature suffused with multiple languages, symbols, allusions, and references eventually grates on most readers—the entirety of Pound's *The Cantos*, anyone?—insisting on a hybrid title or categorization for one's work can be equally grating, equally vain. Too much indeterminate restlessness and the reader is bound to grow either indifferent or complacent. Literary partisanship and the need for a continual artistic "values clarification" makes sense, surely; the differentiation between literary modes and styles is of the utmost importance, especially with regards to readers new to creative writing. To quote former President Bill Clinton, though, it eventually comes down to "what the meaning of the word 'is' is" and how such a definition—or lack thereof—helps or hinders the reader. "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself." As Walt Whitman knew, containing multitudes can create its own set of problems.

*

Insisting on one's literary hybridity can be an insular, unconscious sign of one's own hubris, possibly. But for a certain group of writers, it is also very business savvy. It's a fact that thousands of contemporary writers work

in academia. It's also a fact that many of those writers teach and/or are asked to teach writing that is not in the primary genre that they themselves customarily write in. Even if you yourself do not write fiction, creative nonfiction, or poetry, chances are that if you're applying for a creative writing job at either a two- or four-year academic institution, you will be asked to teach one of the genres you do not write; you might also be expected to have publications in at least one other genre besides your primary one. The easiest way, then, to get around any potential teaching and/or publishing lack is discussing your strident interest in textual hybridity and genre displacement. You might only write fiction, might truly only be interested in teaching fiction, but declaring your love for the hybridizing work of Maggie Nelson or Carmen Giménez Smith surely couldn't hurt your chances at getting an academic creative writing position; same goes for Anne Carson's "The Glass Essay" from her collection *Glass, Irony and God*, Carson being one of the most frequently cited "genre-is-moot" writers. No matter its original genre vision, couching one of your more "experimental" pieces of creative work as hybrid in origin or scope might also help. After all, lyric essays just used to be called long, non-narrative poems; fiction, even the more out-there stuff, was simply broken down into short (stories), long (novels), or genre (vampires and/or cowboys). Over the years genre-based classifications might change, but the work remains constant—constant but maybe not entirely the same.

I realize, of course, that I'm being extremely cynical. Obviously there are myriad writers who love and teach the work of Nelson, Giménez Smith, and Carson, regardless of the work they themselves actually write. My only point is that to an academic hiring committee that desires someone to teach a variety of creative writing courses—some in the writer's primary genre, sure, but many outside of it as well—making clear that you both admire and teach the work of hybrid writers, ones that, to considerable effect, blend genres and shift forms, looks far better to said committee. Whether writing it or teaching it, the prospects of literary plurality begets academic possibility and for many writer-academics such a notion is tantalizing.

*

Brief aside: In his *Paris Review* interview, here's Donald Barthelme on the nature of continually asserting one's right to make it new (emphasis mine):

INTERVIEWER

Your feelings about the new are ambivalent.

BARTHELME

*I'm ever hopeful, but . . . [t]here is an ambivalence. Reynolds Price in the Times said of my story "The New Music" that it was about as new as the toothache. He apparently didn't get the joke, which is that **there is always a new music—the new music shows up about every ten minutes. Not like the toothache. More like hiccups.***

Call it what you like, but, as Barthelme articulates, the concept of the new has always been omnipresent. The how, why, and if it was actually new changed from decade to decade, movement to movement, but the concept of newness in and of itself never did. As asserted in Ecclesiastes 1:9, *Nothing is new under the sun*, which makes searching all the more enticing.

*

As a marker of literary opportunity and expansion, hybridity and genre fluidity certainly wasn't always the case. Writing in *The Hudson Review* in 1987, poet-critic Dana Gioia maintained that

the most influential form in American poetry [since 1960] has been the prose poem, which strictly speaking is not a verse form at all but a stylistic alternative to verse as the medium for poetry. In theory the prose poem is most protean form of free verse in which all line breaks disappear as a highly charged lyric poem achieves the ultimate organic form.

Prose poems are certainly still very influential circa 2017, of course; they're ubiquitous in both literary journals and authorial collections. Yet since 1987 they've been somewhat taken for granted in that as a poetic form they no longer hold the promise they once did. Regardless of what they do or don't do for both reader and writer alike, they're here and here to

stay. Thirty years from now, perhaps the hybrid work will occupy a similar aesthetic perch—here and here to stay, no matter one's personal opinion of them. Or the opposite—too "restless" and "indeterminate," filled with veiled hubris, and readers will grow tired of the vagaries of such open-ended literature; the term will fall away, even if the work that is currently being categorized as hybrid remains.

*

Brief aside, part deux: Admittedly Dana Gioia, the champion of such "mainstream" poets and editors as Ted Kooser and Garrison Keillor, might not be on the pulse of influential forms vis-à-vis American poetry. And yet towards the end of "Notes on the New Formalism," his aforementioned *Hudson Review* essay, Gioia makes a prescient declaration, one that proved accurate (emphasis mine):

*I suspect that ten years from now the real debate among poets and concerned critics will not be about poetic form in the narrow technical sense of metrical versus non-metrical verse . . . **Soon, I believe, the central debate will focus on form in the wider, more elusive sense of poetic structure.** How does a poet best share words, images, and ideas into meaning? . . . The important arguments will not be about technique in isolation but about the fundamental aesthetic assumptions of writing and judging poetry.*

Without realizing it Gioia was advocating for a hybrid-based poetic, one that refused literary isolation and instead embraced something "wider, more elusive." Something, in another word, "restless." As Gioia and other literary critics foresaw, we're still obsessively engaged with what is going to come next, always going to come next. That fundamental crux of questioning will, I think, never change.

*

Everyone has a different favorite David Bowie record. I personally like the "precursor-to-the-punk-thing" *Diamond Dogs*. For other listeners, though, it's the moody German electronique of *Low* or "*Heroes*". Still others prefer the straight-ahead glam rock of *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*. Or

the transitional, New-Wave-by-way-of-funk *Station to Station*. Or the entire-oeuvre embracing, late-career masterpieces *The Next Day* and *Blackstar*. Or any of the other twenty-seven studio albums Bowie made while alive.

Everyone also has a favorite David Bowie, one that has little to nothing to do with the sounds David Bowie the musician created. Sometimes the two Bowies fit together and you love Halloween Jack while simultaneously loving *Diamond Dogs*. But more often than not there's no easy parallelism; Ziggy Stardust is your favorite Bowie persona but *Young Americans* or *Hunky Dory* is your Bowie favorite album. Or the Thin White Duke but *Reality* or *The Man Who Sold the World*. Even enjoying none of the music but loving the *Aladdin Sane* or *Pin Ups* cover-personas is surely possible.

Gender-bending and genre-bending, some of Bowie's personas and albums fared better than others—but throughout his career, Bowie made a concerted effort to have the entire spectrum open to him, culturally, musically, sexually. Early on he recognized the technicolor hybrid that is the world and proceeded accordingly. Black-and-white proclamations given to other groups and musicians—ones such as World's Greatest Rock and Roll Band (vis-à-vis The Rolling Stones) or Best Glam Rocker (vis-à-vis, circa 1972–1974, the Thin White Duke himself)—were in their own way reductive for Bowie because they focused on the singular, the specific. A rock-and-roll band can play different styles of music, certainly, but at its core it's a rock-and-roll band, a set thing playing in a predestined way. David Bowie, on the other hand, was simply David Bowie. Chameleons change color in order to express their various moods and emotions, and they're in continual states of flux, never fixed, never static. Bowie, then, was the same way, and his ability to successfully access drastically different selves and sounds was singular—in terms of personhood and music, there will never be another quite like him.

The same can't be said, though, for a decent swathe of hybrid authors, ones whose names aren't Nabokov or Nelson, Giminéz Smith or Carson. Not that the work such unnamed writers create isn't worthwhile and compelling—oftentimes it is. But by virtue of its indeterminate restlessness and refusal to conform to

traditional genre standards/stereotypes, it's allowed to slink through the proverbial cracks. Walk into any record store and it's easy to find the David Bowie section; normally he's placed under the constrictive auspices of "rock" but "popular," "contemporary" and "avant-garde" are other sections I've spied him filed under in recent years. But the broad appeal of an "uncategorized" or "hybrid" section in any bookstore, one that has less to do with last name and more to do with genre unto itself, has yet to be fully realized. And yet, hubristic or not, literary hybridity is, out of any other type of writing, the mode that seems to be gaining the most contemporary prevalence. Recognizing that they live in a world where black-and-white designations like "poetry" and "fiction" do not exist, writers the whole world over are moving beyond such single-faceted, straight-up-and-down forms of creation. Perhaps literary hybridity's mainstream tipping point is almost here—but, as of yet, the word "almost" is forced to precede "here."

Writing in a recent issue of *The Writer's Chronicle* about lyric essays and the primacy of the problematic, catch-all term "creative nonfiction," memoirist Susannah B. Mintz advocates using the term "creative nonpoetry" when discussing works such as Anne Carson's aforementioned "The Glass Essay." In her opinion Carson "is an author fascinated by the instability of generic definitions and of text as it is being written," and as a result Carson's work "generally (and purposely) is difficult to taxonomize." Entitled "Creative Non-What: On the Poetry of Prose," Mintz's essay ends with this sentence: "Indeed, it is when we tell our truths slant, revel in musicality and indirection, and pause to explore mere flashes of memory, feeling, and comprehension that we can write our most incandescent selves." That may very well be true. But if those incandescent selves continue to be murkily represented to the reader, the categorization of the work they write will continue to be murky as well. Tell all the truth but tell it slant, sure. Just remember that there are infinite varieties of truth, none truer than any other.

✎

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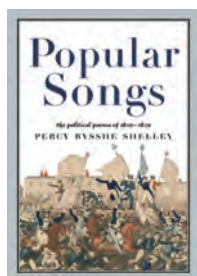
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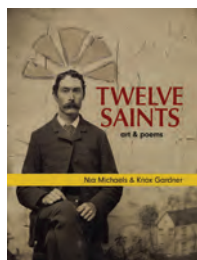
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STEPHEN KAMPA

The Day James Schuyler Arrived

The serious gray
rain kept me
indoors today
the way a lover
keeps one in
bed. I drank
good smoked
teas, I read good
poems in praise
of apple cores
and peonies—
read, too, some
bad ones. I took
three hot showers
without feeling
much cleaner.
Today, like most
days, I wanted
to feel like part
of something,
but mostly I was
a part of books:
the crackle of
one's first being
opened, the light
mulchy smell
of fresh pages.
Now I'm listening
to Art Blakey,
whose brushwork
lisps like washes

of wind-lashed
rain against wet
leaves punctuated
by syncopated
rim shots that
knock like gust
flung acorns
against a roof,
I'm sipping crisp
amber ale and
silently chanting,
Au revoir, arete!
The only thing
I did today was
today: mercifully
remiss, I hovered,
stalled, savored
the damp cool
of my apartment,
and if I caused
myself or God—
the God I barely
spoke to today—
any pain, I can
only offer this
muted pleasure:
tonight I changed
my sheets from
purple to gray in
honor of the rain.