

POETRY

Guinevere in Meditation

Is a man only another place
where imagination can begin to work?
I live with a king who is often no more
than a speck in the blue distance
in a white boat. Do I keep him there
with the wind sharp against his face?
Or does he not know how to be anywhere
but in that distance,
the shadow of his body moving swiftly on water?

Margaret Lloyd

War Near the Humber

To make me a greater queen
Arthur took me into the middle of it

ground crawling with wounded bodies
the distortion of the dead

o the arms, o the legs
horses of the dead and wounded straying

river flooded with blood
mud and cold rain

silence and the cries
sad buzzards in the trees

the pity of it
o the ravens on bodies

Margaret Lloyd

**artifacts
for Alicia**

I watched her hands and saw us younger
playing jacks at school
how we'd toss those little red balls up
swipe metal stars into our fists
click them against pavement
drop them through hooped fingers
and slide them into caves...
how we made a game of juggling stars

and squishing pennies
sneaking off to railroad tracks
bright copper onto steel
freights passing over
Abraham's face
erased by heat and motion
little girl fingers pin hole drill
loop string through
currency into jewelry
common stars
me and Alicia
with galaxies around our necks

Michelle D. Seaman

In One Room

As we walk along paved road,
a one-room house lowers
its head in the heat of afternoon.
I can't imagine your grandmother,
her five children and a husband
in this shy limestone dwelling,
no running water, no
running away. I am guessing
it was one of the larger homes closer to
the sea where Nazi
officers dined, the best
china holding
their feast, the finest
linen catching their
drippings. After dinner,
your grandmother
stole scraps
with the poise and quickness of a
cat. It was her ritual.
She never knew if the officers,
sipping port in the drawing room,
suspected – or might care.
Terror ricocheted
through the olive trees
as she stumbled home.
Her trembling unleashed
bits of food to stray cats,
their bodies like bones
scrambling in her path.

In the aftermath, an unsettling
sea breeze rattled the corners
of the *platía*. Your grandfather
rested on a *tavérna* chair.
A Communist began
to speak. Your grandfather
brought his hands together like cymbals
in sympathy. In the morning, soldiers
carried him through the sharp air
(continued, no new stanza)

to the stone prison in the neighboring
village. Every day for months,
your grandmother walked miles
up the mountain, the sea breeze
whipping her along to bring him
favorite foods he fondled in the darkness
of his cell, the sea breeze whimpering
around every corner.

Years later, in a room
of your mother's house,
your grandmother leans
off the edge of her bed
as sunlight sneaks
through a crack
in the shutters.
A bread knife glistens
on the bedside table.
She holds out
a cup of tea, her
hands like heavy machinery
in the peace process
as your grandfather's
eyes fix on
her steady arms, then
on the cup
as it trembles
in his hands.

Donna J. Gelagotis Lee

Lost Dancer

No one else in the tour group
wanted to stay up that late
and so she returned alone
waiting to be murdered
or to catch a train back
to the hotel, whichever came first.

Almost alone –

a young man sitting on a bench
across the tracks
was embracing a guitar while
waiting for a train going
the opposite direction.

She hadn't danced in twenty years
but there was no one here to mock her
and the music was telling her feet
what to do and there was nothing
she could do about it.

Her hips bounced, this side to that,
her heels cracked smartly on the concrete
in time to the tune. Just as
she was imagining the young man's
appreciative response, a train burst
out of the darkness and gobbled up
the man and his music.

He kept right on playing
and as the train took him away
she envied all those
people going the other direction
who had the music now.

As she shuffled awkwardly
alongside the track
she spoke her thoughts aloud
for there was no one now to hear her:

"I may have lost my music,
but he has lost his dancer."

Toni La Ree Bennett

The Shoe Salesman

Four days after making love
and I still can't pinpoint
my last period.
Sometime before Mother's Day
appropriately.
I was buying sneakers,
self-conscious because
the shoe salesman's nose
hovered at my knees,
and I probably smelled
of old blood or sex.

But then I didn't care.
I thought maybe smelling women
was a job perk
for this young man
eye-level with possibly pregnant
knobby knees.
Knees old enough to be his mother's
and God knows
she doesn't have sex.

Susan Ayres

Revealing the Heel

– after J. Franklin's MFA exhibit

1.

My heel has always callused easily
I have tough feet
that need pumicing.
And you B the first summer
you decided to go barefoot
were bitten by a centipede.

2.

Kick up your heels
like we used to do
on St. Patrick's Day.
Not the one when I was preparing
for a deposition
while the rest of the world
kicked up its heels.
Not the one
when we first kicked up our heels.

3.

The heels I know:
self-important doctors
and lawyers.
"Physician heal thyself."
Especially the ones
as narrow-minded as spike heels
their myopic vision excluding
all else.

4.

The St. Patrick's Day
we first kicked up our heels –
was it the fuck my pumps?
A feminist yet I parodied
my stance.
Young female associate
blue-blood law firm
the brief case, the suits,
the silk blouses,
the pumps.
The no underwear symphonies
of my youth.

5.
Now I am down at my heels.
Two preschool children
wearing me down
and a dog who doesn't heel
but walks ahead a foot.
Whose heel? Must be the dog's
own sense of heeling.

6.
My children will have the illusion
of being well-heeled.
With their doctor-father
and lawyer-mother.
And yet, no two pair are alike,
even if they have diamonds
on the soles of their shoes,
they are children of this earth
bequeathed to the dirt.
In time they can find me
under their shoe soles
as the uncut hair of graves.

Susan Ayres

Ever Since Penelope

For Joan

To keep off
the assault of the new
which you can only imagine
as like the old
but inferior
because you've already got
the best – don't you? –
you undo your work
every night unweave
the fabric so
nothing shapes up.
You maintain the stasis
your man can wend
his way through back to you
slowly
via islands
through those other women
(your chastity
making it possible)
maintaining the hearth by
unworking your self
so when you're gray
when he arrives
he can pronounce
"Home!"
Then knowing
you in place
he'll leave again.
Will you weave then?

Kathe Davis

Growing

She has keys now,
comes in herself from the neighbors.
I am unnerved, maybe from drinking.
I know it will take all
the last of my strength to get through
the bath hour, reading *Barbar*,
the talk of hair, how and if we will braid it,
tomorrow's homework review –
I am really in a poem I say, cutting
lines together, images, this poem
I am always aiming at, pulling the sheet over
the day's trial, pulling browned buds
from the night flower (didn't give it enough
water this winter – it might not bloom
this spring). Brushing out
my daughter's fine hair over her
wide forehead, caressing it, I put
another story together; she says
in eight-year old directness, "you threw him out
didn't you?" This is the moment
I gather the lines, the poem, the raw
tendrils, watered or not, snapped in urgency
(the night flower has such a pungent smell).
"He wasn't with me anymore sweetie,
he slept on the couch in the living room,
that's not being together." She weighs this,
the poem, in fragments, may never get written.
We are managing this – I am calm, I am on
other territory, a kitchen of plenty,
school problems solved, pencils sharpened,
the lesson memorized. "Did I do it right?"
she asks of the math review, I am calculating the lesson –
Motherhood, this sudden test. Unprepared,
untutored I am telling her the grade isn't important,
it's what you learn, what you can take with you.

Adrianne Kalfopoulou

Proposition Blue

In Bora-Bora, bower-birds
with plumage too dun
to stir the heart,
in lieu of fancy feathers
create blue art.

Their towering maypoles
are cerulean bowers
studded with jay-feathers,
beetle wings & bright cornflowers.

When lady bower-birds hop by
the males are said to mew
& mew & mew; are seen jumping
up & down, dancing 'round
indigo shards that decorate
their ferny yards.

They come on flashing –
a blueberry held in the bill
& shaken. A morning glory...
any two carat sapphire will do.
A bird was actually observed
waving a pack of *Gauloise Bleu*.

A lady bower-bird will hop down
any path leading to an azure bower.
When viewing objects of a bluish hue,
she too will mew and mew and mew.

Jill Bart

The Alley Kids

I drive decidedly around the back,
(The front doors inaccessible as the
Landlords and repairmen.) My headlights
Shine on a swarm of squirming kids
Rushing out of the cracks and crevices
Of the dark, American alley,
But toward me, now away.
Their faces bathe in warm moonlight,
Their eyes bright as Pleiades.
I say, What are you doing in the alley
At night? They answer not in words,
But in gentle tugging on the hem of my skirt.
Laughing, they place grimy hands in mine.
I cannot see, but do not have to say: help me.
They escort me safely up the creaky, back
Stairs. I grope blindly for the ragged bannisters
With missing rails. They prance skillfully over
The paper and glass and lead me to the third
Floor where door bells don't work. I knock; they
Just push on the unlocked, broken door
And beckon me in. I turn away.

They will probably say a social worker
Stopped by this night. I will say the alley
Kids gave me flowers, made my day.

Beverly Normand

Baby Girl

for Rachel

This would never have happened

had the child not
eaten the birds' bones,

had the man forgotten
his camera.

Somewhere, seashells clatter in a reaping tide.

Little girls in a jungle weave
their arms like willows.

Bright eyes of the sky weep.

* * *

Not I must answer

to a leafless girl with
bird blood on her chin.

I will call her – Lobelia

for the color blue
of twilight. I will call her

Dianthus for the sun's jagged cry.

In the mornings I will call her
wildflower.

I will give her name

as fast as the bite
of her good teeth on bone.

* * *

Now I am learning the secrets of regret.

Poetry

Bright flower of twilight,
what would you give for love?

All the blood
in your lean body?

The last lash of
your riverbed eye?

Your name
on the page

of a foreign Bible?

* * *

I am slipping
on light,

my tail fanned downward.
The trees take me

into their whispering.

They
do not lie.

They are saying,
"You will live
on the far side of the ocean.

Your things will be handled
by strangers." Astonishing

cruelty, in your small body
so much sorrow.

Wildflower,
bloom furiously.

Look for a sign.

Judy Galbraith

Cell Divisions

This splash of silver, slapping
white-crested and unyielding against
black rock face, could have been
that other coast, Atlantic crag,
stretching out before me
like a life punctuated with wind.

A girl with long hair and big, vague plans,
the wanting as untiring
as water, even then. But
that was before every wave became womb,
the tease of perfection in tide-pools,
when time promised to hydra-divide.

In between was what was not
beauty yet drew beauty,
and I never felt it coming,
just as I never saw it
leave.

Here at this rock, rapt
in the salty crash, your careful
brushstrokes behind me and
the tumble of other people's children
rising above the surf,

I remember imagining how it might be,
before it was.

Hollis Kurman

Hear It First From Your Virginia: 1912

“On the Occasion of Accepting What I Should Well be Excepting.”

O, Vanessa, Sister in Art, I am
long past saving. He has asked

again and at last. Learning that
Leonard loves me (loves me in

That Way) is boring in, nestling
into tissues like a tick. He has

asked and made his love my duty.
Here at my breast it curls, fitful

as Cleo's asp. I can barely take
in air like fire (more than my

old problem with your paints)
now Desire has pushed imploring

palms against my chest
pressing me to torpid depths

of my favorite wind-backed chair.
Yes, love has pinned me there,

frail lunar moth on antique velvet.
Record it all unblinking, Sister

Sensuality, as you are wont
to do. You, melon Aphrodite,

fashioned for flesh in all
its raucous tenderness while

I seek to lose myself, to sink
inside this curve of cushion

like a crescent orange returning
to its rind. How I have tried to

Poetry

find, huddled in inanimate arms
of syllables, one more moment's

imperturbable shelter. You know
all I seek and hide behind, you

of Persephone's great lidded eyes.
Viewers in your assured artistic

future may surmise, my Sweet,
all this and more long generations

after I have wrung my heart
and ringed my hands and made

my peace with being precious
to another soul whose love must

make demands. So I close my
agitated song with distant wishes:

May some future Sisters like our
selves, but in time freer than

our own, praise your work
and mine. And when the story

of our Lives and Art is told
may they clasp hands and hold.

B.A. St.Andrews

Small Wonder

The barn cat curls up in the bucket
after the schoolgirl has emptied
steaming water into the horses' pails.
January we take our warmth
where we find it.

We bundle out to the woods
in February to catch the first
sighting of green poking itself
up through the snow: Skunk Cabbage.
Heating the earth to 72,
melting the bitter-end cold.

Janet Tracy Landman

Urbana, Ohio

The sky's a heavy-hammered flatness.
For the first time, I see horizon: manured soybean fields
amble for miles past the stoplight in the center of town,
past Kroger's, the Presbyterian Church and pickup trucks
parked beyond the railroad tracks at Debbie's Diner.
Raccoons have nested in the drain at the corner
outside my window-seat in the Victorian wrap-around
where I rent three rooms from a landlord who has
forgotten to fix my stove but has loaned me a hotplate
and a broom to chase the bats up the chimney.

Donna Pucciani

Breakfast With My Father

Sunday morning every month or so
he's happy to come over for the kind
of meal a good woman makes for a man
who was waited on for thirty years.
I do the eggs up right, in my grandmother's
skillet, shortbread and compote on the side.
Too much, he says of the table laid out.
Too much, of the cheese in the grits,
the bacon feather light.

He's still got it, the style of the company
man, a taste for the finer things, nodding
in that princely way when all he did was roll
down the window and tell the boy, *Fill it with hi-test*.
He carried the Southeast like a summer jacket,
owning the road from Richmond to Jackson,
Memphis to Durham. Back home on the weekends,
his feet up, meals brought in on trays, his shoes
buffed and waiting by the door.

Now the company sold, he minds the luggage
department in the mall store, spends an hour
at my table before clocking in. I buy him a paper,
some peaches in season. We speak only of today –
my kids, my job, the weeds in the yard. He calls me
Sugar, the name he used when he called from Natchez,
the days I waited all buffed and ready to be met
at the door. The days I would've given my eye teeth
to be the sugar in his tea, the change in his pocket,
the Parker in his hand, the territory he claimed
like the shine on his shoes.

Linda Parsons Marion

Mysteries

A wavery spectrum was lit
with a needle, jittery,
licking its lips back and forth.
I watched in my father's workshop.
It watched me, a Cyclops' eye
a jewel on the face of a black box.
I do not know what is was.
I never asked. The clay-colored
leather of his slide rule case
was scratched, soft. I pretended
understanding as he tried to teach
me. I slid the numbers back and forth.
Nothing has ever moved so smoothly,
and the little lines, tiny, tiny, so black,
so precise in a country
where numbers tell big things
and I was not wondering at all
what they meant

Carol Hamilton

Shopping Trip

Out of the hospital,
bandages still on my chest,
I decide to shop at the
corner market.
After having a breast removed,
I find myself looking at women
in a way I have never done before
and on the fruit and vegetable aisle,
everything round reminds me of breasts.

Linda Herring

Things That Go Bump

I terrified my little brother
by telling him that procodactyls –
did I have a yen for prosody even then? –
swam in the swampy carpet between
our beds, their huge reptilian jaws,
glittering teeth, an immense hunger
for tiny toes – kept him in his bed, all night.
Howdy Doody and Buffalo Bob, their disembodied
heads bobbing along the ceiling, our little gods,
looked down on us from their wallpaper border,
frowned at my bold-faced lies.

Later, there would be the Tunnel of Love,
which wasn't, but rather, a dank passage smelling
of cellar, where sudden turns and bursts of light –
with dangling hairy spiders or pointing skeletons –
might make you throw yourself at the boy you rode
in with, let him put his bony arms around your neck.
We needed Bruce Springsteen to sing us the dark here:
*The house is haunted and the ride gets rough,
You've got to learn to live with what you can't rise above.*

And then we rose up into the real world,
where airplanes on the way to Paris can explode
for no reason, or fly without a pilot on a ghostly arc,
windows iced over, until running out of fuel
over North Dakota. . . .
where The Troubles, be they in Ireland
or the Middle East, never end, peaces
and truces crumbling like castles of shells and sand. . . .
My mother said, "When you grow up, you'll understand,"
but now I have, and I don't.

Barbara Crooker

***Having Stayed Late
For
Enrichment
Club***

Up Steeplechase Hill
the school routh home
 Girly Girl, Ricker wants
 to butt-fuck you
the sniper's hiss from
five yards behind wreathed
with snickers, fat whispers,
slippery guffaws. Paralysis
a brick upon each shoe;
I consider jay

walking but the street's stitched
with cars, debate a swift shift
to a less-traveled road –
but if they pivot? I keep
my pace steady, chin pinned
to the crest

of this never-ending lurch,
my tongue *rigor mortis*
on its sawdust bed. Fast-forward
to Father in his chair with Walt
Whitman, Mother and her easel
in the sunflower

garden. Don't let panic show
its rabbit pulse in my eyes;
don't turn me towards faces I'll
recog- *Girly Girl Hey Ricker wants*
 Ricker wants

Shoshauna Shy

Dumstruck

I walk along Route 7, past mowers
and road work crews, weaving
through stalled cars until I come

to a beach, and there you are!
sitting alone on the bleachers,
clenching your knees

with the same hairy hands
I remember from high school.
I haven't seen you in years,

but you don't have time to chat
and point to a pick-up truck
filling up with hushed women.

I join them for the ride, but
no one speaks. Back in the city,
soldiers order us off and herd us

across a park to windowless trailers
where more women and old men
stand in line to walk in, then crawl out

single file, silent, their stunned
faces marked with numbers.
I run to an alley and climb

a fire escape. A marching band
assembles below me and plays
a dirge until an officer on a horse

emerges from the shadows
and points with a hairy hand
to the trailers and lines of people

waiting to enter. The musicians
follow him to the park, scuffling
through piles of trash, their mournful

notes lingering behind, discordant
and patchy in the airless dusk.
I crouch on the fire escape,

remembering the strength of your
father's hands as they set gravestones
in place, and praying for thunder.

Berwyn Moore

Dryad

When the maiden flutter of twig
and fling of branch
thundered among saws and cutthroats,
did the tree carry her with it,
a magician's assistant,
to be sliced into shakes and bloody lumber?

Cut high to spare
the flared skirts of the fir,
the stump which is clearly without profit
harbors the nymph
as long as the wood sheds rain,
rot's river slows,
and the brown powdering clouds her
as she rises bathed,
a white shaft of sunlight
striking her red hair.

E. G. Burrows

Apparition

In a photograph taken
in my garden at dawn
the Blessed Lady appears
outlined in rainbow mist.

It is the same graceful Virgin
of Guadalupe
with which we are all familiar,
arms gently opened
over my small cove of violet
and fern.

Someone copies the photo
begins to show it around
and the priest calls me in, concerned.
Things will get out of balance
out of hand. Some people
are easily
misled.

My husband is concerned, too,
that people will soon be tramping
our back orchard, taking our rocks,
bothering our dog.

I burn the negatives,
and all the pictures I can find.

Three years go by.
We suffer many things.

Sometimes,
I can't help wondering
if she's still there.

Nancy A. Henry

from
Love and Tribal Baseball

excerpt, page 18

Open wide to sunlight, edging a pasture
in an empty granary outside prosperity
with duck eggs laid everywhere, ducks eating up
what little cash there was in wheat she quilted summer
hand-pieced the previous winter.

Pinwheels:

lemon yellow E candy pink E mint green.

excerpt, page 19

Watch her in the black wicker chair E reflection of snow making more light through
the window, glassed precision as she pokes her needle through taut cloth, perfect
daisies, peonies, french knots, chair stitches open and closed, herringbone
pleasures,
just minutes from ecstasy her thin and sensitive fingers winter sky

earth pulls

excerpt, page 20

weight of snowdrifts at noon E crystal curves and edges:

her thundering steps through the house muffled
now buried under snow, bordered by spruce E hardened
wounded wind.

excerpt, page 21

Bordered by certain trees:

 unlikely larch amid poplar, aspen and long brome grass
grandparents asleep in a community of dead Germans
a spot reserved for open secrets

life cannot be located in falling leaves
until death's forest discloses knowledge
blood wanders: flesh opens

waits for the bleed to come in a systole's return
summergrounds E a slide into home, familiar
crowd alongside a derry E sessile oak.

Susan Andrews Grace

Green Mother Lullaby

My varicose rivers roll green in your runoff.
Every green you have remembers me: apple,
spring, ocean, pea and pine gathered together
into a grand cornucopia. All this that you see
my children, is piñata, a bright tissue paper burro
pendulous with toys and sweets. Batter it. Take
turns away from each other. Grab and gobble.
Multiply and fill me. Make new maps, marking lines
margins, municipalities. When you lick your hands
clean of ink, come back. Malachite will click against
your teeth, uranium will warm your trembling tongue.

I spill spring over you with blossoms, refurbishing
the slopes your wars have blasted. Even your bombs,
splintering the sky, you borrowed from my branches,
pistils and stamens stolen to slam and dissolve bridge,
bunker, bison, ibex, every blessed green brush the conifers
adorn themselves with. An indulgent mother, I pick up
after you, while you mimic my mannerisms, pluck polished
stones from my hair, urge yourselves far from my thighs,
as if you could ever move that far away, as if you could
travel, and not take me everywhere with you.

Your first words were *Mine, mine*. Such cavernous hunger
reverberates, insatiable echoes tantrumming between
jagged spires in the dark, jabbering through
my lullaby: jade, emerald, jasper. I jangle words
before your eyes, like keys. You will love me all your life
for games I give you, for verses vibrating your inner ear
in the wee hours, in the devouring olive grey
of uttermost night: Hush. Sugarplums, aluminum. Hush.

Susan Spilecki