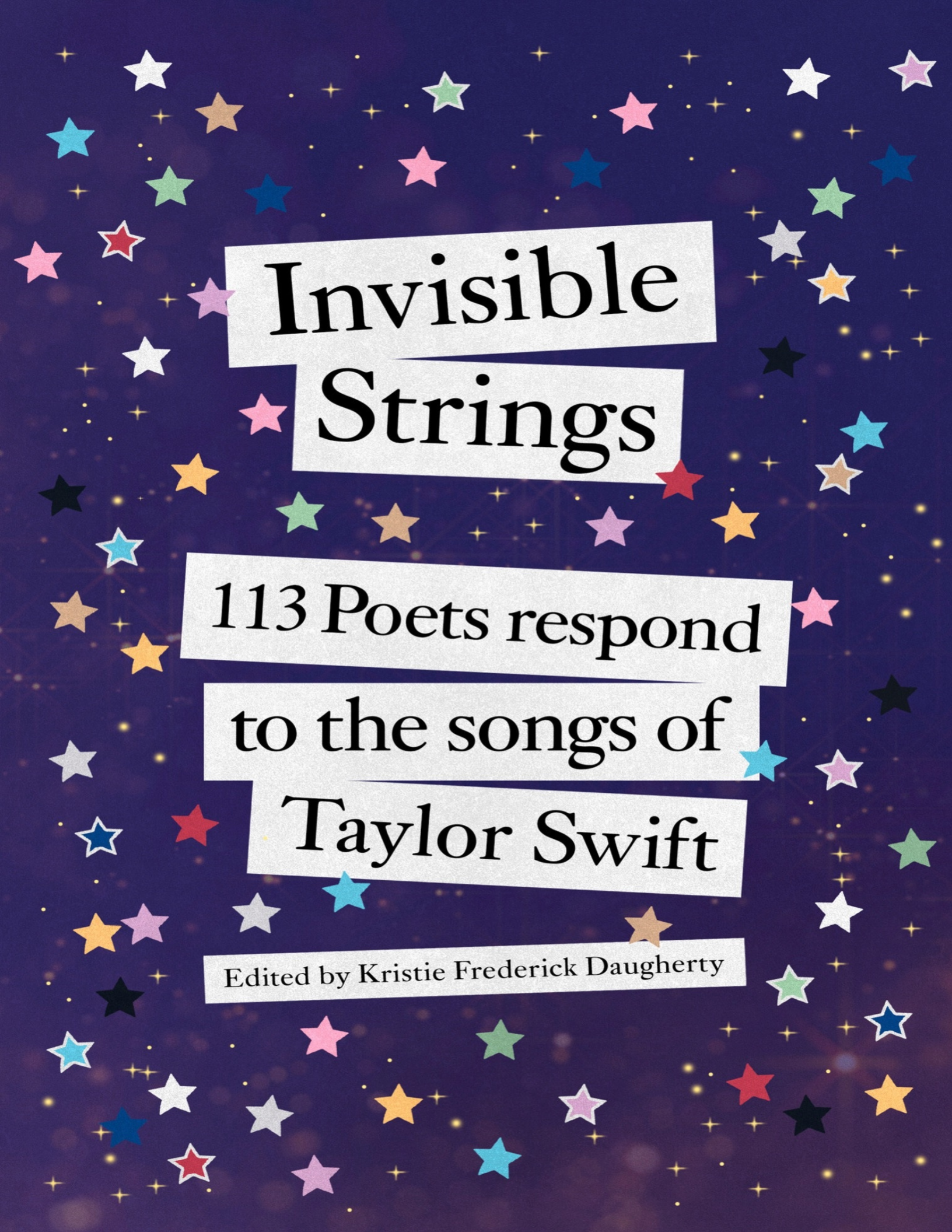

Invisible Strings
113 Poets respond to the songs of Taylor Swift
Edited by Kristie Frederick Daugherty

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This book is dedicated to my grandparents:
my Granny, the late Ramona Marilyn “Sissie” Perkins (June 16, 1932–June 17, 2016), and her husband, my Granddaddy, the late Eddie J. Perkins, Sr. (May 6, 1928–August 29, 2024).

You’re alive in my head.

—Taylor Swift, “Marjorie”

Foreword

Sir Jonathan Bate
Regents Professor of Literature, Arizona State University
Senior Research Fellow, Oxford University

THE STADIUM FILLS. THE ANTICIPATION and excitement are palpable. At last, the performer takes to the stage, greeted by thunderous applause. They will sing, perhaps solo, perhaps with a backing chorus. There will be dancing.

This is the origin of lyric poetry in the West over 2,500 years ago. As an integral part of the Olympic Games and other Panhellenic festivals, a celebrated composer of verse, such as Pindar or Bacchylides, would give a performance to remember. They would sing, with dance accompaniment, of heroes, of victors and victims, in a form known as the ode.

Poetry and song have always been associated. The plays of Shakespeare are punctuated with musical interludes—"In delay there lies no plenty, / Then come kiss me sweet and twenty: / Youth's a stuff will not endure." William Blake sang his lyrics—"Jerusalem" and "The Tyger." Poetry intended for the page again and again invokes the spirit of music, as when John Keats writes an ode to the song of the nightingale or T. S. Eliot peppers *The Waste Land* with quotations from Richard Wagner's epic music drama *The Ring of the Nibelungen.*

But can a mere songwriter, who does not intend to publish their lyrics, be called a poet? Of course they can. Poetry emerged out of the oral tradition and always returns to the rhythmic voice. Eyebrows were raised when Bob Dylan won the Nobel Prize for Literature, but the ingenuity and durability of his lyrics deserved it: "The times they are a'changin'." Dylan always began with interesting words and then found the music to go with them. With the Beatles, it was usually the opposite. In his book *The Lyrics,* Paul McCartney recalled that only once did the words come first: Even a ballad with such a strong narrative as "Eleanor Rigby" grew from a chord, not a story.

In this regard, Taylor Swift is more Dylan than McCartney. She has been writing poetry since she was a teenager. Her inspiration nearly always comes from a verbal idea. She writes out the words then creates the music, often with assistance from a collaborator. The poem, it may be said, precedes the song. In 2022, on accepting the Songwriter-Artist of the Decade award in Nashville, she spoke of her compositional method: In her mind, she said, the lyrics of each song belonged to one of three categories or, to use the literary term, genres. She gave them affectionate names, the Quill, the Fountain Pen, and the Glitter Gel Pen. She went on to explain that she doesn't actually have a quill, though she joked that she did own one until she broke it in a fit of madness.

The "Quill" songs are those in which "the words and phrasings are antiquated, if I was inspired to write it after reading Charlotte Brontë or after watching a movie where everyone is wearing poet shirts and corsets. If my lyrics sound like a letter written by Emily Dickinson's great-grandmother while sewing a lace curtain, that's me writing in the Quill genre." The example she cited was "Ivy" from *evermore,* with its image of how "in from the snow, your touch brought forth an incandescent glow."

"Fountain Pen" songs are those with the most characteristic Swift lyrics:

> A modern storyline or references, with a poetic twist. Taking a common phrase and flipping its meaning. Trying to paint a vivid picture of a situation, down to the chipped paint on the door frame and the incense dust on the vinyl shelf. Placing yourself and whoever is listening right there in the room where it all happened. The love, the loss, everything.

For this style, the exemplar is "All Too Well," with its memory of "dancing round the kitchen in the refrigerator light."

As for "Glitter Gel Pen" songs, they are "frivolous, carefree, bouncy." Their lyrics "don't care if you don't take them seriously because they don't take themselves seriously." They're like the effusive "drunk girl at the party." They are a necessary periodic antidote to the trauma of the contemporary world. The kind of song, that is, where you can dance and just shake off any thought of seriousness.

In this self-analysis, we see many of the tools that will be familiar to the dozens of contemporary poets who have contributed to this volume: the art of allusion as

an act of homage to the words of previous poets (in Swift's case, preeminently Emily Dickinson). The revivification of a cliché: "Taking a common phrase and flipping its meaning" is a twist on the eighteenth-century English poet Alexander Pope's definition of good writing as "what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed." The animation of those moments of emotional intensity we have all experienced: "Placing yourself and whoever is listening right there in the room where it all happened" is again in the spirit of Pope, who in his "Essay on Criticism" went on to describe successful poetry as "something, whose truth convinced at sight we find, / That gives us back the image of our mind."

Taylor Swift crossed over from country artist to everywoman when she gave every teenage girl the image of their mind in the bittersweet songs of *Fearless.* To quote Pope just one more time, he wrote that poetry is a revelation of "wit's wild dancing light," which is as good a description as may be imagined of such witty riffs as "She wears high heels, I wear sneakers / She's cheer captain, and I'm on the bleachers" ("You Belong with Me"). William Empson, the twentieth century's most brilliant reader of the intricacies of lyric poetry, highlighted *ambiguity*—double meaning—as a key poetic device. And that is what we find in this seemingly simple couplet: The persona voicing the song is "on the bleachers" both literally (merely a spectator of the ballgame, while her pretty rival shakes her poms-poms on the cheer team) and metaphorically (she has, for now, been consigned to the margins of the boy's world).

Poetic devices run seamlessly through all the eras of Swift's oeuvre, but it was in the lockdown albums *folklore* and *evermore* that her lyric voice blossomed into a new maturity and depth that broadened her intergenerational appeal (the lowercase titles are perhaps a nod to e. e. cummings). Literary allusion was a signal of this. "The Lakes" explicitly acknowledges a debt to the British Romantic tradition, in which the "Lake Poet" William Wordsworth was the leading figure, inaugurating a new kind of poetry as self-expression: "Take me to the Lakes where all the poets went to die…. Those Windermere peaks look like a perfect place to cry." The verse ends with a moment of neat wordplay: "my words worth." Anyone who finds worth in the words of Wordsworth and shares his sense of the positive emotional valence of the mountains around Windermere in the English Lake District is a true lover of poetry. Swift's description of those of her songs that are "like confessions scribbled and sealed in an envelope" could as well be a definition of Romanticism.

"Invisible String," one of the very best songs on *folklore,* reanimates the old trope of "we were always meant for each other" through a simple but memorable metaphor: Swift proposes that it is "just so pretty to think" that there is an "invisible string / Tying you to me." This works as poetry not only because of its precision—"tying" is exactly the right verb for the idea of the lovers' bond—but also because it pulls on an invisible string of literary precedent. Consciously or unconsciously (it doesn't matter which), three antecedents are threaded together. Conceptually, there is seventeenth-century poet John Donne's gorgeous image of a pair of lovers being physically apart but spiritually together in the manner of a geometer's open compass ("A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning"). Then for the deliberately understated and gently ironic word choice "isn't it pretty," there is the closing dialogue of Ernest Hemingway's great wartime love story, *The Sun Also Rises:*

> "Oh, Jake," Brett said, "we could have had such a damned good time together."
> "Yes," I said. "Isn't it pretty to think so?"

And, decisively, there is the moment when Mr. Rochester finally admits his love for Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre:

> I sometimes have a queer feeling with regard to you—especially when you are near me, as now: it is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of your little frame.

Jane Eyre begins with a lonely young girl, who sees herself as an outsider, sitting in a window seat reading a book. For generations, literature has been a resource for teenagers seeking solace amid heartbreak and the confusion of adolescence. Taylor Swift has become their voice.

She has always had a literary sensibility. The earliest song on her debut album is called "The Outside." "This is one of the first songs I ever wrote, and it talks about the very reason I ever started to write songs," she explained in an interview. "It was when I was twelve years old, and a complete outcast at school." The song

suggests that the way to deal with this sense of exclusion is to carve your own path: "I tried to take the road less traveled by." The line is a clear allusion to a staple of American middle school English classes, Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken":

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

The image of the road not taken, or less traveled by, recurs in the songs "Illicit Affairs" and "'Tis the Damn Season" on those haunting albums *folklore* and *evermore,* which for millions of listeners of all ages became the soundtrack of lockdown. The road of songwriting has indeed made all the difference to Taylor Swift. By diverging from style to style, not always going down the same well-tried road in the way that so many musicians do, she has kept finding herself new audiences while retaining the loyalty of her original fans.

Swift is famous for hiding "Easter eggs" that tantalize the Swifties. One such was the date of the announcement that she was about to drop her second surprise album of 2020: December 10. That is the birthday of Emily Dickinson, one of whose best-known poems about a love triangle—a perennial Swiftian theme—ends:

I spilt the dew,
But took the morn—
I chose this single star
From out the wide night's numbers—
Sue—forevermore!

Taylor Swift has not revealed whether this was the inspiration for the title track of *evermore,* but there is no doubt that some of that song's lyrics have an extraordinarily Dickinson-like feel. "The cracks of light" and "floors of a cabin creaking under my step" evoke the slanting light and claustrophobia of the secluded nineteenth-century New England genius, who has been a muse to some other great modern songwriters, such as Paul Simon ("For Emily, whenever I may

find her"). And the verse that begins with an image of addressing lovelorn correspondence "to the fire" could almost have been written by Dickinson herself.

The strength of that particular verse of the song comes not least from the way in which it only half abandons rhyme for free verse: Though most of the lines are irregular and unrhymed, there is still a rhyme on "breath" and "death"—a coupling as venerable as the art of poetry itself, which has always been a matter of expressive breath and the recognition of death, whether metaphoric (the end of an affair) or literal (that kind of poetry known as *elegy,* meaning the remembrance of those we have lost). The imagination has its own ways, below the level of the writer's deliberate craftwork. It is impossible to know whether Swift's conjunction of breath and death was conjured out of the memory of the Shakespearean play that inspired the "Love Story" of *Fearless.* Romeo in the final scene: "Death, that hath sucked the honey of thy breath."

Another ancient form of lyric is the ballad: the poem that tells a story. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" are the classics in the nineteenth-century Romantic tradition, while Dylan's "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" is a modern example of astonishing power. Taylor Swift's songs have, as yet, eschewed overt political commitment of the kind that created problems for those other crossover artists from country to mainstream, the sometime Dixie Chicks. "The Last Great American Dynasty," her song about the heiress Rebekah Harkness, does not pack the political punch of Dylan's indictment of racial violence in the days of segregation. It is a ballad that on the surface takes joy in eccentricity ("And in a feud with her neighbor / She stole his dog and dyed it key lime green") and, to those in the know, exhibits self-mockery over conspicuous expenditure: "I had a marvelous time ruining everything" nods to the fact that some of Swift's own neighbors were far from happy about her Fourth of July parties in the Rhode Island house that once belonged to Rebekah.

But beneath the surface there is indeed a message about American late capitalism. As we learn at the beginning of the song, middle-class divorcée Rebekah Semple West became one of the richest women in America not through her musical gifts (though they were by no means negligible) but because she married the heir to the Standard Oil fortune of William L. Harkness. She became a munificent philanthropist of the arts with money derived from the fossil fuels

that turbocharged the economy of the twentieth century but that are now destroying the planet.

At some level, this is a ballad in which Swift confronts the paradoxes of her own wealth, which *has* been achieved through her musical gifts: Her philanthropy is becoming increasingly apparent, for example, by way of her donations to food banks throughout the Eras tour, but, given her global celebrity, she has little choice other than to travel by fossil-fuel-hungry private jet. For some, her immersion in the Tortured Poets Department will seem like an abnegation of political commitment. But this dilemma is in itself a mark of her esteemed status: William Wordsworth faced a similar barrage of criticism when, in the wake of the appalling violence of Robespierre's Terror, which he witnessed personally in Paris in the 1790s, he renounced his commitment to revolution and devoted himself to a poetic art that gave lyric voice to the plain language and shared feelings of ordinary men and women. In this, he proved himself a true democrat. And that is why his poetry lives on in the second century after his death. It is too early to tell for how long the songs of Taylor Swift will endure, but there can be no doubt that her lyric art is proving itself inspirational: not just to her legion of fans but to the many poets who have eagerly accepted the invitation to contribute to this anthology of diverse tributes and refashionings.

Introduction
Kristie Frederick Daugherty

I AM A DEBUT-ERA SWIFTIE—I remember the first time I heard Taylor Swift's young voice singing "Teardrops on My Guitar" from my daughter's CD player. I have attended many of Swift's concerts, from her debut headlining tour, Fearless, all the way through to her Nashville and Cincinnati stops of the Eras tour.

At the kickoff stop of the Fearless tour in Evansville, Indiana, I was sitting with my daughter at the end of an aisle, and at one point Swift brushed my arm as she made her way back to the stage after starting a song at the top of the stadium. While I knew then that Swift's lyrics had staying power, I had no idea that Swift would become a singer whose words would move hundreds of millions of fans across the globe. And I certainly had no idea that her lyrics and the art form in which I write—poetry—would one day intersect to take the shape of this anthology. I like to think of the slight brush of Swift as she walked past me in Roberts Stadium on April 23, 2009, as foreshadowing of this anthology. It is pretty to think so.

In addition to being a Swiftie, I am also an ardent reader and writer of contemporary poetry. And I know—as Sir Jonathan Bate discusses in the foreword—how well Swift has trained her fans in the art of close reading. I'll never forget the magic of sitting up high with my friend Leslie Wilhelmus on the second night of the Cincinnati Eras tour at Paycor Stadium, as sixty-five thousand Swifties sang along to every single word of a forty-six-song set. Swifties also recognize the literary devices of poetry weaving through Swift's rich discography. Swift has taught her fans to read her lyrics carefully, attending to syntax, symbol, and sound, just as poets learn to read literature. Swifties spend countless hours discussing Swift's songs with one another, on social media, and even in the increasingly common Taylor Swift classes—Stephanie Burt's Harvard course "Taylor Swift and Her World" is just one example.

Swifties have a love language, and I am fluent.

So, as I watched as Taylor Swift announced her new album, *The Tortured Poets Department,* during the Grammys, a question popped into my mind: How might contemporary poetry grab this moment? Could poetry and poets join in conversation with Swift? As quickly as the question formed, so did an answer: an anthology in which poets would respond to Taylor Swift's songs without quoting her lyrics. That way fans could, to quote Shakespeare, "by indirections find directions out" by close reading the poems to discover the songs behind them.

I immediately messaged the Pulitzer Prize–winning poet Diane Seuss. Like Swift, Seuss is a woman who must be protected at all costs, a woman who says the words for us. I asked Seuss if she would contribute a poem to this anthology, then watched as those three dots on Messenger appeared and disappeared. A "yes" from Seuss would decide if the anthology could take off. Her message appeared: "Yes. And here is a list of people to invite. You may tell them I am contributing."

Often in my life, Diane Seuss has been there for me, her latest volume of poetry tucked into my purse just to keep her words near. And in 2022, when I messaged Seuss directly for the first time to express my love for her poetry, she messaged right back. We spoke for more than an hour—and she generously shared her poetic wisdom.

Swift has been there for me, too, all along, in her own way—with every new album illustrating growth as a lyricist. After *folklore* and *evermore,* I did not know how Swift could possibly write another album at a higher level. But that manner of thinking does not work with Swift because her albums simply aren't comparable. Swift doesn't just make another album; she reinvents; she deconstructs to construct. *The Tortured Poets Department* shows us a songwriter in full control of her powers, one who mixes metaphors and doesn't care. Swift embodies the famous lines by Hélène Cixous from "The Laugh of the Medusa":

> Because she arrives, vibrant, over and again, we are at the beginning of a new history, or rather a process of becoming in which several histories intersect with one another. As subject for history, woman always occurs simultaneously in several places…. In woman, personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world history. [Translated by Keith and Paula Cohen.]

Swift does arrive, vibrant, over and over again, dropping lines like, “Did you hear my covert narcissism / I disguise like altruism / like some kind of congressman” in a *pop song,* and everyone sings along while googling for definitions—it’s a real thing, how Swift increases the lexicon of her fans. She also moves brilliantly within and between the songs on her albums. Her songs talk to one another, reshape themselves, and get recontextualized as Swift reinvents herself. “Hits Different,” the last track on *Midnights (The Til Dawn Edition),* ends with, “Have they come to take me away?” Meanwhile, *The Tortured Poets Department* begins with the song “Fortnight” and the line “I was supposed to be sent away / But they forgot to come and get me.” And just like that, Swift transforms the space between *Midnights* and *The Tortured Poets Department* from silence to an audible pause, as if continuing a life libretto.

There is always a link.

This is the magic of Taylor Swift—a magic she cultivates in her fan base. Everything connects. The center does not fall apart—it orbits itself to create a new thing. Younger listeners find themselves in her earlier albums—but Swift also brings new meaning to earlier work through, for example, the “Five Stages of Grief” playlists on Apple Music and the acoustic set song mash-ups on the Eras tour. When she placed the song “Lover” on her “denial” playlist (called “I Love You, It’s Ruining My Life”), fans took to social media in shock and disbelief, wondering if it was still “okay” to have played “Lover” at their weddings. Of course it was, but that is the genius of Swift: She’s not afraid to recontextualize. She welcomes it: She has trained her fans to follow her threads. She can teach millions of people to synthesize, to analyze, to think critically. That’s the genius of Dr. Taylor Alison Swift.

The poets here give evidence for that genius. The 113 gathered here include six Pulitzer Prize winners, many Pulitzer finalists, emerging poets, Instapoets, and *New York Times* bestselling poets. As I sent out invitations, I kept this Swift quote close: “The worst kind of person is someone who makes someone feel bad, dumb or stupid for being excited about something.” Emboldened by Swift’s words, I let my enthusiasm run unbridled as I corresponded with the poets. I was, and remain, the awestruck, poetry-loving, Swiftie fangirl. And the poets responded in kind, with joy, curiosity, and playfulness.

That play became this book's magic, and my own. I deeply love contemporary poetry *and* Taylor Swift, and this anthology combines my loves. It contains words by poets whose words have shaped me, written in direct response to the singer whose own words have, time and again, shored me up and brought me back to myself. "All Too Well" held me during a painful loss of a person; "happiness" explains exactly what I teach in every creative writing class: Emotions need not exclude, but encapsulate, one another. We must know sadness to know joy. In "seven" Swift sings, "Before I learned civility / I used to scream ferociously / Any time I wanted." It's a clear allusion to Whitman's line in "Song of Myself": "I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world." In the last song on *The Tortured Poets Department,* "The Manuscript," Swift concludes, "The story isn't mine anymore." Just as when a poet releases a poem into the world, the poem is no longer the poet's; it belongs to the reader.

The poems in this collection now offer themselves to you—an invitation to be moved, as well as to engage. Each poem offers a puzzle to solve, because every poet wrote in response to a specific song. As you seek a poem's shadowing song, look closely at word choice. Poems, unlike prose, are short beings. Listen for words that allude to the lyrics of Swift's songs. Swifties will find that while some poems easily reveal the song, others may take several readings. Some poets used individual words from the songs, without quoting lyrics for more than a word at a time. Other poets considered the theme of a song and responded with a like theme. A few did both. Either way, "Easter eggs" abound in this anthology. I even placed "Easter eggs" in the ordering of the poems. So look for how poems lead into one another. But, remember that whenever I felt it may become too obvious for Swifties, I played the villain and changed course. Most important, I ordered the book first and foremost to create an emotional arc. I had to keep Swift's lyrics in one part of my mind and the poems in the other. It was like trying to cast—or maybe like falling under—a magic spell.

Magical, too, was my experience of being the first person to read brand-new work from these brilliant poets. The afterword in this book contains short essays from some of the poets discussing their experience of writing in response to their song. From a beautiful correspondence with Jane Hirshfield to Naomi Shihab Nye to Richard Siken and many other contributors, I echo Swift and say to my contributors, "It was enchanting to meet you."

And to Taylor, as you have toiled in the labor of love by creating all of the invisible strings for your fans, we, with the utmost respect, offer a chance for you to decode us. We thank you for the masterful manner you place words together, and we hope that you have fun and find joy as you read these poems.

In closing, I offer one last Taylor Swift story. On the evening before I attended the second night of the Nashville Eras tour, I spoke with a woman who was there the night before. "It was life-changing," she said. Now, I had been to Swift concerts before, and, while they were always amazing, "life-changing" seemed, even to my ears, hyperbolic. I was wrong. It *was* life-changing to sing in unison with seventy thousand people through all of the eras of Swift's discography—the shared bond of Swift's words, along with the joyous exchanging of friendship bracelets. Which brings me back to Diane Seuss. As I struggled to find the focus of this introduction, Seuss asked me, "Why do you think so many poets said yes?" When I had no ready answer, Seuss said, "I said yes because you asked me. It was enough for me to want to do it just because you wanted me to. You have brought us together." Don't we all want to hear that at least once in our lives: I did this for you just because you asked, just because you wanted me to? And that this anthology did bring 113 poets together in a joyous way is a testament to Swift; bringing people together through words is what she does best.

Some of you will be reading this introduction on December 3, 2024, the day this anthology hits shelves. I'll be on my way to Vancouver to see Swift perform on December 6, plans and tickets I secured long before I had the first inkling of this anthology. Little did I know that the release of *Invisible Strings: 113 Poets Respond to the Songs of Taylor Swift* would coincide with Swift's last three shows of the entire tour.

December 6 is also my birthday. I will be 49.

4+9=13.

Sometimes all the fates and the stars and planets do align. A confluence of passions.

Finally, at the very back of this anthology, I offer "Kristie's Playlist": a listing of my favorite books by the poets. If a poet speaks to you, buy one of their books. Let your playlists grow. In the end, it is all that we have and all that we are. The language. The words.

Take me to the Lakes.

Pull

Maggie Smith

You know but pretend not to know:
I've lived out here too long,
in the woods & the rain,
all the trees smelling of wet leather.

I could say the moon makes lace
in the leaves, but my wilderness
isn't pretty. That's its pull.
Even if I stay with you, even if

you light a fire & coax me inside,
you know I'll wander each night
to the dark windows, seeing only
myself reflected but staring & staring,

sometimes pressing a palm to the glass,
knowing too well the other side.

How can I tell you what dark wing

Robin Behn

drags its shadow across my face?
Old nights. Others.
Staggering galleries. Silences. Disgrace.

How shall I speak of poisoned hours?
Where shall I file his drunken fall,
my three ribs cracking the X-ray's cold face?

And that one's boring rapture.
And that one's murderous look.
And that one clutching his thin gray book.

And the holy holy one's
sudden conversion to rock,
his terrible thuribles of smoke.

And he of the pinecone and gun and
puckered sheets of mail-order pills and
convertible wrapped around a tree.

And he of the speed of
tectonic plates.
He of the ever-more-minuscule dream.

And he of the never-ending dread
of the never-ending piercing
of increasingly hot rain.

The old nights fade into a crow-wing dark,
a judge's black sleeve
swooping down to seal fate…

The old stories lap and lap.
They make the mirrors wave back.
They rub the sharp stars smooth.

And here in this quiet bower,
the distant river on fire,
a path of pearls strung between,

O gorgeous, wine-dark you,
tell me it's not too late.
Come lay your hand upon my troubled face.

Plural as the Universe

Susan Rich

What if I were born a bird—
who would I be?

A curator of cloudscapes, of guitar arias,

a painted snipe, a swift,
a black-capped chickadee.

What if I travelled as a bird?

Calls over the wild hydrangea,
calls over the almanac,

a wave of sound luminescent as the sea.

And what if I could transform?
No longer criticized for how high I fly

or the topography of my wings.

I'd be a proud birdbrain with a bird's eye.
No one could contain me.

In a little crimson dress of an eclectus parrot,

let me touch down by the coastline of Tahiti,
ignore the peacocks with their train-rattle plumes—

elevate herstory with a scream.

I rise above the aviary, the alpha, the heart-battered me—
move thirteen ways into plural new universes.

To soar above the blue, wing-spanned; to vault beyond the trees.

Love's Cure

Bianca Stone

Of love I am slowly becoming more aware.
When love manifests from exactly
where it has always been
it fills in my head like a weird gold crayon.
Lucretius knew love to be suspect.
Given a potion for it, it nearly killed him.
And in rare moments of lucidity for his remaining life
he railed against love, working endlessly
on his six-volume didactic poem
on Epicurean physics, the nature of existence
and the condition of making the lover
into a godlike power,
before he committed suicide.
And for this we consider love's therapy.
Love comes like a wave, it hits the ground
and disappears. One shivers then.
Love makes you more susceptible to wind.
Of the erotic, forget what you know.
For love leaps along it,
the unremembered part of the dream.

•

I stood long in my office.
The sun in my head lowered
until it was
across from me, an eye unable
to look at directly, illuminating the mind;

outside, and the dark between the leaves
which I looked to easily—I was alone.
With another thought rising.
I wanted you as lover. The great phenomenological
drama of touch. Memory is a kind of belief among the tortured.
Strung lights still up, far into the new year.
To know nothing but the wave
recurring, then its unmoved unseen instant;
that touch. The long, figured rays
of the distant sun.

A Shared Nocturne

Tyler Knott Gregson

Send them backwards,
graceless echoes peeling from
unbuilt walls, six carats
back to carbon before the flame.

Unsaid words from unpursed lips,
salt stains bounced from
shirt sleeves, birdsong in reverse
like secret track on unpressed vinyl,
returned to the branches of an ungrown
tree, to seed, to soil, to all unrooted
beneath the burying place.

Send them back,
howls from boneless shapes
put back the marrow, the white
inside the white

come tendon come flesh
come synapse and strength
come cartilage come stirrup
hammer and anvil come through
unbroken oval window

come and whisper
Stay.

Postcard from the Jardin du Palais Royal

Aimee Nezhukumatathil

What if these pink chestnut trees didn't offer shade or place to hide,
but let me finally face the sun again? And what if the Eden roses
(so creamy pink) didn't prick me when I leaned in close to take in
sweetness, like trays of milkshake ready to be served? So used
to spoilt fruit, berries past salvaging into a pie, when you came along
and wanted to make and bake with me. Wanted to poem with me.
My first trip without you and this is how I know it's real: I already
want to come home. In another life I always ran away, slammed phones,
apologized for everything. I'm in this garden nibbling a pastry and have
a new pen and notebook in a paper sack I shall bring home for you.
I want to always come home to you. The spring light here in Paris
makes everything edged in lavender, as if we all stepped out of a bath,
toweled off in a gauzy twilight. What if we all paused under a tree to chat
with it? What if what emerges is our most tender, most true loves?

Raroa Road

Nina Mingya Powles

flashback *echo*

I walk across the hilly city
in wind and sideways rain
listening to songs you sent me
memorizing the lines
cut into forested slopes
and if you asked me I'd tell you
the city is moss green
the city is tidal blue
is autumn tree ferns curving
low over me almost touching
my hair just as the dark-winged
speckled bird of prey dives down
its talons almost scraping
or so it seems and I am turning
body towards it but it's gone
nothing left behind but
changed air in its wake

white mist floating in the valley
in the window of my room
six unanswered emails glowing
in the window on the screen
an old song playing on low
drowned out by
dusk kākā and tuī bells
I'm listening in
I told you I would be there
even if I didn't hear your voice
I would go anyway and wait there
in the glistening future
in a distant autumn
in the coldest city
breath becoming visible
birds becoming air
valleys becoming memory

Last Call

Carl Phillips

It's the incompleteness of the watercolor
of a fox at the exact moment when, having
leapt into the air, she catches sight of her
own shadow on the snow beneath her
and can't resist playing with it—dancing,
almost—that makes the whole thing

work. Come here; stop crying. The rust-
colored arch of the fox's body. The shallow
bowl her gray shadow makes on the snow
whose blankness customarily stands
for death, though I remember thinking
it could mean possibility, everything
seemed possible. But even hunting has its
particular season, even in the wild, and it

•

isn't always. The click of insects beating
at the kitchen window tonight, where I've
left a light on. Tiny nostalgia moths, no
better (no worse) than carnations in their
sheer relentlessness, as if stranded there,
forever stranded. To say I chose this—
To say I wanted you, then didn't, it
makes no difference, thanks to memory,

hovering the way you did, bending over me,

rainbowing, now vermilion, now a blue
so unoriginal the obvious choice was
to call it sky. Daybreak. It's the brokenness
itself, the incompleteness of who we
were, I think, that made the whole thing work.

Heaven in Grand Central Station

Joseph O. Legaspi

Cornstalks swaying and yellow greening as I passed through
the rows, as you did on your father's farm in Nebraska, and
paused, brightened, and listened to the cornstalks and wind
violin-ed eastward to a tropical archipelago, unseen but borne
by you. Wasn't it pretty music? To think years later in a big city
I was at the wrong party, plucked string pitched high heartbreak,
while you swayed with proper invitation in the other room, branch
of golden, ochre leaves chiming all along Upper Westside streets.
To think years later in the dark of a dating site, I'd taken the kiss
of seedcake back from your mouth, yes, the seedcake back from
my mouth, yes, Kate, yes, and days asundered, we headed down
an imaginary cellar where whom you wanted was me, me, me.
Impetuously, we stumbled out the wine bar into a taxi then up
your walkup, marveling at your bookshelves, your unmade bed.
To think weeks later under the vaulted turquoise constellations,
bold was your act of proclamation of love in Grand Central
Station, trumpeting in the flood of riders, chorus of trains.
We stood where east is west, west is east, starry Orion
constant in the celestial, illuminated, illimitable space.

Dreaming the Lowdown

Yusef Komunyakaa

Now, around here they call me
St. Peter because I can't help
but honor those hard, true lives,
& can't stop painting miniatures
of everyday folk going blind to see
who we are. If you are my friend,
I'll come & see about you, an arch
embracing the full motion of two,
the tip of every vow sweet, hard
candy. A pillow of white feathers
will burst open, & a whimper fills
a whole big, lonely room, & here
comes a trembling plea. I know
you wish to know exactly where
I've been, but I've made it home
after walking up & down those
lost hills. Yes, I've gone all over,
but not to be only just a body
leaning into a wide-opened door.
A tune on the radio brought me
back. I was outside of Redding
when I recalled "The Emperor
of Ice Cream." I took another
ever-lonely dead man's curve
in my baby-blue Studebaker
on my way to Philly to the isle
of lost naysayers beneath the el.

I don’t give sugar when blood
is on prayer rugs. Just protein.
You know I deal in good omens,
only solid ground under my feet.
No, don’t ask how, but St. Peter
knows in a good dance there’s
always give & take, then twelve
little circles within flesh & stone.
No, I shall never wear the hairshirt
stashed beneath a breezy rosebush.

Trans/ohm

Tommy Archuleta

Never have the bomb blasts been louder.
Propaganda never spun from straw this frail.
Scores now Booty Pop on once quaking beds.

There's no use there, there-ing them.
They know the AI gods are after their jobs.
They know the real world is composed of x's

And o's, and good luck crafting laws meant
To make smoke of their dreams and values
By way of jet sweep, fake elector schemes.

They know how to depress every button
The one percent quietly installed. You there—
Meet the mic inside the other shoe about to drop.

one may morning
when i wasn't looking,
a portal opened from
new york to dublin.

in my mind, i pushed my way
to the front of the crowd,
trying to find anyone with
my mother's face.

for a moment,
i wondered who
i would have been
had my grandparents
decided not to cross all
those murky waves;

for a moment,
i wondered who
i would have been
had i actually felt
connected to something,
to anything at all,

our family's culture not
painted over in shades
of american tragedy—
innocent blood,
false supremacy,
& generational sadness.

goddess do i love

the shores of new jersey,
but they are not
something i get to call mine.

they belonged to
someone else, once.
(in my eyes, they still do.)
i pray they will again.

—alice, tumbling.
amanda lovelace

In Wonderland, We're Surprised/Not Surprised to Learn the Chamomile Tea Tastes Bitter

Kelli Russell Agodon

Alice is playing cards with herself and losing.
Another lunchtime of self-ghosting, a cheer
section of unsexy balloons spelling out:

The best way to find out if you can trust
yourself is to trust yourself. Every dream
is also a storm. Her inner tsunami

says, *Stay away from the internet.*
I mean—the poison. I mean, *Alice,*
how does your tea taste when life is flooding?

The drawbacks of insomniacs
are the hours available to analyze
a conflict—a convincing script,

a role-play of possible opinions.
In the problem of moonlight, she
listens to jokes from demons.

Sipping whiskey, a wise devil
offers: *Advice love, giant love,*
self love, superstar love,

dumb love, trouble love? Alice
sees facts in every fake promise.

On a balcony, she reads

instructions on new ways
to jump. Befriend your demons.
Buy a parachute.

A shattered disco ball still reflects
a fractured image—her own villains
in the looking glass looking back.

Radioactive Apology

Subhaga Crystal Bacon

It's not you, it's me. I know it's a cliché.
But how else to tell you it's all in my head
whatever's between us not working out.
I'm a meltdown waiting to happen. Weak,

but how else to tell you it's all in my head.
At the core, my insides are rotten. I know
I'm a meltdown waiting to happen. Weak
to say this. You've heard it before. Still

at the core, my insides are rotten. I know.
I can't seem to get out of the prison I've made
to say this. You've heard it before. Still
it's my island of how things should be.

I can't seem to get out of the prison I've made.
You want what you want, and I'm the same.
It's my island of how things should be.
I can't make you be like me. What's the use?

You want what you want, and I'm the same.
I'm like the weather: out of sync with myself.
I can't make you be like me. What's the use?
I blow cold and bake with ultraviolet light.

I'm like the weather: out of sync with myself.
You're not my problem to solve, my law to break.

I blow cold and bake with ultraviolet light.
You're only a tree with roots in the fault line.

You're not my problem to solve, my law to break.
I don't need your hands behind your back.
You're only a tree with roots in the fault line
and I'm some force that's born to shake.

I don't need your hands behind your back.
Maybe there's no afterglow. Maybe it's all dust
and I'm some force that's born to shake.
It's not you, it's me. I know it's a cliché.

Another Version of Us

Christian Gullette

Through an open window,
we hear the echo of glasses

in a café where poets give
readings on Wednesdays.

This is Saturday, your first time
in my downtown apartment,

just one block from the subway
yet somehow unreachable.

We don't stay the night,
there to pack what I need

to head uptown to your high-rise
where you want to be.

If there's no free will
and everything predestined,

then this movie scene
being filmed on my street

when our cab pulls up
might exist in a multiverse

where another version of us
watches our alternate ending.

In another edit, we'd say
something different

and wouldn't decide there's
unbridgeable distance

between us, not mere
neighborhoods but reasons

that seem so impatient now.
The actors know how to react—

they hit their marks while a crew
douses the asphalt with water

to look crisp and obsidian
like the moment after rain.

Their sidewalk stroll might be
the end of the beginning

or beginning of their end.
Each take is a different direction.

Concessions

Jessica Laser

After I left, I saw you
everywhere, a few rows
ahead at the movies, in line
for concessions at the stand.
I thought it was beautiful,
the movie. You'd have
said it was sad. It was
always like that between us,
me explaining, you denying
that sad things can be beautiful.

It was hard to leave the theater.
Light dripped from the ceiling,
flooding the floor. Outside, from the sky,
light flooded the neighborhood.
Where did I put all that love
you gave me? It was so heavy,
I didn't know I could float.

I was over you, I told another man.
Then I was silent. He fingered
the lock on my heart. Funny,
I said—he'd said it seemed like
I'd been married. I would say yes
if he asked me to the movies.

Letter to Future Me About Which Outfit to Wear for Future Wreckage

Lisa Fay Coutley

By will, each aging animal's rib
cage lifts & sinks. I insist each

morning now smells like spring
1975 before I was the afterthought

in my parents' makeup sex. Little matter
that you come from a celebratory fuck

if your parents are drunks afraid
to go or stay. Here we are, then, having

brought them together again so lilacs
could cough purple bursts

on either side of our double lot
waterfront misery. You know me.

Know these eye-dividing lines show I lost
my youngest son this year,

but I'm not allowed to scream it
if he's still breathing.

I dance the dog the same streets
each morning so when the sink

sinks its last, I'll still have grief
free street signs to learn. I imagine

every car parked on the longest stretch
of our morning route now is the man

who last pretended to love us. This life
is the satisfaction gap between breaking

a vine and full-fist pulling a root.
Yesterday I wove through traffic

both windows down hair loose
to the Menards near that last man's

house to get the missionary sex
equivalent of kitchen backsplash

so I could return it the next day
& risk the stink of more men

in my mouth. I have never learned
why to make the buried stay. The why

you'll want that answer isn't different
from the reason I've been kicking. Sleep

is all I dream about now. Smell of dead
carp on love's breath. The night we buried

our crossed legs in the first sandbar, waist
anchored to the muck of home. Do you

know where our son lives now? If he lives

now I am not allowed to say losing

him is losing him every time I fork
filet mignon into my face, hold my head

under water warm in a shower, my cheek
clean against either pillow in a queen bed

where the cat's a coiled snore on my hair.
Soon, she will die too. At night,

the tiny carrots I planted reach
for life like it isn't a grave.

Do Paper Dolls Still Exist?

Rigoberto González

An old woman at the MoMA walks through
the corridors, a black dress
pinned to her blouse like those
paper dolls with their outfit cut-outs,

the body and the wardrobe scissored
right off the page. Careful now
with the folding tabs that hold
the ensemble in place.

You don't want her to come undone

the way you started to unravel
that afternoon at this very museum,
standing next to the artist
who said he would paint you someday.

Picture yourself pressed flat
on a canvas, each brushstroke a cry
for freedom because you're still
trapped in the small box of his affection

and no one's going to cut you loose

because no one knows you never
left. Intact doesn't always mean whole.
To come unstitched or unpieced won't

leave you unloved. You'll regret

not tearing away like that
brave woman did, you're sure of it.
How she smiled in triumph as she
swift past your frozen stare. You,

fixture on the wall. She, unbridled flair.

can she breathe?

Ming Lauren Holden



For a plain-text version of this image, go to this page.

The bird in my mouth

Blas Falconer

Its black feathers
flare in the dark.

It has no words
only the song beneath

the words. The bird
in my mouth sings

to the bird in your
mouth. The bird

in your mouth sings
to the bird in mine.

The song they sing
is older than you

and I, who have met
only now in the long

history of meeting.
Above us, the treetops

nod back and forth
in a vast sky.

If the song ends
the world ends with it.

On the Stairs

Joy Harjo

I've broken the night to sunrise alone for so many years
I know all the names of darkness, and I'm friends
With all the blackbirds.
It's me, my notebook, and my voice beyond my years.
Yet here I am again the girl of eighteen sitting on the stairs.
Once again midnight rounds the dark of eternity.
Someone has lied to me, someone has left.
Someone unfaithful. Or was it me? I am bereft.
My jacket keeps my legs warm; I have something to drink.
I have something to smoke. I have my notebook.
And songs on the radio to sing me to sleep.
I am never who they wanted me to be, not who they are—
With everything perfect: the children, the house in one place,
The schooling, the car.
Not then, not now, there is something else there, I mean here,
In the dark where the poets live, outside the lines of perfect,
In the deep-down outskirts of unmeasured eternity.
This is me. I have no excuse. It doesn't matter the stares
Of those who judge me for my path, or what company I didn't keep.
I prefer the stars, and all the ways to get there.
I am eighteen, thirteen. I am forty, or beyond the count.
You will find me somewhere there with my notebook in my hands.
History makes its laps. My heart holds steadfast despite the past.
Blackbirds carry the dark to greet the dawn. I am here
With sunrise breaking through eternity, on the stairs.

Paperweight

Lang Leav

A verse on a gilded page, heavy as a heart. An old friend comes to the phone. I ask, *draw us a card.* I plead, *anything but the lovers—how can we ever be more if the romance refuses to die?* If I'm never allowed to fall out of your good graces, if I never get to see you one post-apocalyptic morning with smoke in your eyes, between the deluge of the day to day. Just a year ago, I was walking on your rooftop, howling at your window, beating down your door. You said, *stop trying to align the stars and wait—just wait for them to fall.*

Incantation

January Gill O'Neil

I know desire,
like a firefly's flicker
against night's
deep purple

or the ghost-light glow
that inhabits a dark room,
claiming the space between
you and me, soul and moon.

You dream me animal,
I dream you breath—
all wilderness
and astonishment,
the air thick with magnolias.

My heart
whispers your name
back to the stars,
flutters like wingbeat
inside my ribs.

We green. We unfurl.
Threaded fingers ready
under velvet midnight—
let darkness be our only witness.

Oracle of a Trickster Night

Anne Waldman

Oracle night is waiting for you to stir

Now you see it open, morphing to poetry

The body is an omen, every moment, reaches out

Hunger in heady language, joyous or missing its citation

Closure of light summons vestal hurricanes

What is death but a trickster now hovering over a sacred text?

All the crucibles bet on oracle night, string me up too!

Don't blame me my tight steel-trap nightmare, fluid when you fail

Skim the surface, it's a delicate balance, another carbon footprint

When oracles are messengers how you live your astral asperity,

Will it touch you, raw, power of naming of owning, alive?

Or war or precipice, clash of meaning, risks a body?

Was the hand on the wall false hieroglyph? a lover's? No blame

Weapons on the moon? will you aim, in holy truce?

Or exile, back or forward, in Nestorian, or Egyptian night

The chamber, another dreamer stalks beauty in cinematic vision

The imp in your brain can walk on by the furtive oracle

But cosmic mirror flashes back at you in quandary

Its invisible skin, palpable membrane holds sweet elixir

Holds the Dark Age together and its new weather

Who speaks to whom in sinning mode, karma's spin?

Seven deadly sins is alchemist's promise of transmutation

Waiting for the sanctuary of prayer to cease the fire

What sheath on the wind in an oracle night?

Who makes the commandments? a small "watcher" inside?

No blame: archives at dawn, a bundle for votive's pyre

No blame: scatter the testaments and their vespers

What have you done in a busy mind, a vow or a curse?

In the beast time you conjure the sacred, no blame

A parable for living the oracle future ahead

What is the journey for the devotee to hold?

Who projects her selves on the memory of all this

The rock the clock the tower the empty sepulcher?

What is the action, the dream of your dismissal

But paying the price? is that it? sweat and tears?

Your body rising to speak in riddle, in koan

The rune, the rule, the disaster of love, a temptation

The struggle of the feminist steals the tongue

Is “other” ever real? as a troubadour guards the cave

Protects what you sing for, suffer for in oracle night, in a silvery sensorium

The unmade bed, strangely inviting, stirring, the curve of sheet and body.

The Gift of Apollo

(not a ghazal)

A. E. Stallings

I scroll through doom. They said it flew in the face
Of logic—the future throwing its shoe in the face.

"I told you so" is nobody's best friend.
Yet somehow they could tell you knew in the face.

The swifts return, a tailored premonition,
The sea goes a wine-dark hue in the face.

Global warming? Check. Do nothing? Check.
Make Greece great again. Flags ruin the face

Of the neutral sky. Nightmare as recurring meme
When someone waves a .22 in the face.

I won't be the first to die. I won't be the last.
But the first raped—a priestess too—in the face

Of the goddess of virginity: she will not lift
A finger watching it ensue. In the face

Of what comes next, a slave in the king's bed
I'll do what anyone must do. In the face

Of death's dark web, the Queen's blade, bleeding out,
I'll tell the truth till I am blue in the face.

Honeycombed and Dangerous

Katie Darby Mullins

They don't tell you before
You take control of your life,
You have to know fear. Hollow
Your bones, aerate them like birds,
Become buoyant, fill the space with knowledge

That you cannot fly with that weight
Inside you. Then act like you don't care.
This is essential. No one is intimidated
By a scared woman. Did you know?—

Once I reported a stalker and the police
Told me they couldn't do anything—
But if I died, they'd know where to look.
I was nineteen. This happened to you, too.
To your daughters. Younger. And the fear
Crawled into our bones and then

It hardened into anger, then vengeance
And it doesn't matter if you can't
Hit the person who hit you first, you can
Help another woman find help, get free
Find a place to sleep, information to end
An ugly custody battle. And she got the car?

Of course she did. You found the student
He was sleeping with. So I guess the question:

Does it help? I remember my mom, saying
It's hard to be a woman.

At night, I use a weighted blanket to tether
Me to the mattress: maybe I'll float without
Something to hold me down. I'm not scared—
I'm not. And my insistence doesn't
Make it so. But without the anxiety,
Sometimes I wonder if I'm anything left at all.

So I sniff it out. I find the fear. I help.
Sometimes I imagine myself a bumblebee,
But my sting isn't the end of me. No.
I sleep easy, brittle bones glued to in place.

Lessons Learning

Amy King

I'm still breathing but were we
ever one thing only? Are we one
silent pang in unison, a season's guess-
work in the moon's forever blue,
exhaling light's afterglow?

Sing this book in the garden
where the pub still hides us,
the car that escapes us back
to the gamble of real life.

This chapter's longer than any saga:
sing this book, style these lyrics,
as long as love ever lasted, romance
bursts in summer's last call, casual pints
and the champagne of pining
we brought to each other.

You got that buttoned-devil smile
spanked energy down;
I've got a red-hot burning,
I'm a flamethrower in the days unfolding.
The ones who love are going extinct,
we're all getting rarer,
treasured by ourselves,
ever after only by another.
The first step to liberate is

to shout out what was
to open space for what becomes
tongues untied, our pet phoenix rising.

We shared pain, caused pain,
we wanted the glint of a knife,
not deadly, to draw just a drop
of color so that we could see
our love-hewn sun confess us
through the blue red pulsing.

I know now it's a fear of having
forgotten who you are that makes
time turn the wobble
of a vending machine glow,
alone in the back seat, arm hairs raised
fingertip static tracing,
until another planet later
we dim, separate and pass the torch on.

Are the passed among us equal now?
Are we the real punchlines?
Was I the potshot you didn't mean
from such secluded heaven?
Midnight's advice brings sunrise hereafters:

She who survives shall see again,
She is not just life but also life bearer,
ripe from love's emergence, shouting
from the rooftops the only pantheon
worth every dice roll, reborn, to add to.

Wabenzi Walks

Samiya Bashir

because voices
like bodies shadow

linger and
are torn apart
and linger

are torn
apart and
linger like

the thousand eyes of night:
a scorpion
a Cuyahoga
a river
burns awake

cries that were the mom
not the kid but—wait—
(we are) not a fairy tale

even fairies
fail our families
some times
some wheres

WHY DID YOU LEAVE?

years ago, Metric's
Combat Baby was all over
my facefeed—at the time
it was right on
time and all I wanted was to remain
unlooked at even today sort of
just like other people. Here's
the thing:

I don't want to hold on to
you, dear I don't
even want to hold you

why should I?
HAVE YOU SEEN ME?!?
lucky, lucky

though I hope you are held
—well—just—also—

POINT OF PRIVILEGE!
says the board of directors
directing all the women
how to brush their hair
in mirrors on film

WHY DIDN'T YOU LEAVE?

low-priced
luxury goods

[click like]
but—wait—

no kings
no horses

—ideally—
no men

[fire emoji]
we eat ourselves

until we're gone
well I do—how

'bout you?
[fire emoji]

and the colored girls click
like like like like like like like
like like like like like like like
like like like like like like like
like like like like like like like
like
[frowny face emoji]

see me
I'm listening
here
you are
(yes you)
here

a night flight lit
(from) my fire

asleep while

I need
to dance

[fire emoji]
look at you

you
here you
* cut “are”
hear me?

ssssssshhhhh—
listen
(repeat)

[footsteps]

ssssssshhhhh—
listen
(repeat)

Ophelia, *Mania from the Willow Tree*

Andrea Simpson



For a plain-text version of this image, go to this page.

No Table I Could Dress

Carey Salerno

When informed it was the very dish best served
cold-cold, the kind of cold no mouth can tolerate
not even when the object beneath the stone tongue is detained with rough
persistence, it got me wondering what that meant specifically in terms

of deliberate harshness, in terms of pulling the frost-polished organ meat
from the bottom of the chest freezer and plunking it
over the hand-blushed bone china, leaving it to lie as it fell. Baby,
you know I'm a sucker for clean lines, perfection, and detail.

Would you gorge on what I served before its crystals denatured,
before the heart, the liver, the little kidneys clumped, iced together
became a sunk and weeping creature?
There's lack of confidence, too, in my desire to give it over,

something so zero kelvin about that motion,
baby slugs on the porch
ambrosian under the glow of twilight. Mistaking the moon for blue
sun when they surfaced, and on the blacktop

purpled, hardened to the concrete with purpose. Still, I can't bring myself
to mash their tough jelly bodies. What tartar.
What head low stuck in my chest. What
shaved raspberry having been drenched in liquid nitrogen.

All in service to you—lack of warmth on its salver,
a drawing down from what's tender, pounded

into submission against the kitchen counter, a categorization
of as many words in as many weeks that might render,

the retreat of whole seasons, slow in their bleaching
the frosted street slick without salt.
How long were we out? Whatever. I can warm anything
even by stepping on it. I told myself.

The power of my tongue thrilling me.
Everything I knew I still knew. My breath coming easily
unfurling flowers along its blue path, bringing the hellebore to heel.
Yet in all that ascendancy, I can't

from the dead place I placed you undeaden you,
no table I could dress, lace, and gild in its sumptuous best
to raise us from beneath the floorboards of my phone, my ear pressed
to its scuffed plank in the middle of the night

where I commune with the absence of your heart's moan,
or emerge from the depths of the woods within which I planted
your demanding—which woods were those again? And here's me cursing.
It's true I was lost more than once within

these trees and all around me snow without track,
everything having been covered, iced, and packed,
and just visible the white dagger of my breath, the shiver of limbs,
their rubicund hearts buried deep in the ground's blood-soaked chest.

I sang to myself then to keep the fear away. I remember it working.
I still sing. Trembling. Keep the freezer closed.
Lock back my capacity to serve everything cold.
Your mouth at my ear, your frostkiss, its mulish winter rose.

Cocklebur

Erin Belieu

Summer over. Thorns

invaded the playground

while we were gone.

Everybody got taller—

the measure of meaner.

Kids end up bloody, but

the system won't pay

to spray. This is the year

the boys first wait for us

inside the trees at

the field's farthest corner.

This is the year the girls

stop running. Insipid

tribe, now we flutter near

the building's edge. Moms

charged with minding

aren't bothered, smoking

outside the preschool door.

They think they survived,

and we will too. Cockleburs

riddle the grass.

We squat on hot tarmac

braiding each other's hair,

learning to be patient with

our boredom, learning

why poison is a woman's

best weapon. We never

quite decide on the story:

what is it that found her?

What took her to the loneliest

part of the field? And what

were her crimes? She was poor.

Or not the right kind of pretty.

Or she wore a red mini skirt

that showed her ass. But

I'm thinking of last year's

sleepover, when she told us

her stepdad scratches at

her bedroom door, begging

her to open up. A year

younger than the others,

I'm slow on the uptake, not

cool like Kelly S. or Kelly M.

I run my mouth, but don't say

much. The older girls

are always threatening to

beat me up. But I know what

a whore is. Or close enough.

And I hear that scratch in

the dark, know the creak in

the hall. *Whore.* How good

the word tastes when I put it

in my mouth. Angry as the wind

when a blizzard digs in.

Resurrection

Kim Addonizio

Welcome to my strip mall.
Do I look slutty in this shroud?
Peel off the labels
O my frenemy.

I've got my marching orders: put out, shut up,
then implode.
Don't look so morose. I was only comatose.
I'm getting blind drunk on pink rabbits
before I hit the road.

Nashville & Detroit, here I come!
I can sling a sonnet like a loaded gun.

I'm a bad bad girl. Ladies, lock up your sons.
I really feel like writing you a poem about me.
I was such a messy crime scene. You're a cop without a clue.
I turned into a pretty tree to get away from you.

Forget about calling; I drowned my phone.
I'm not a bitch & I don't want your bone.
The only line of Gertrude Stein's I ever understood:
"It is wonderful how I am not interested."

I'm not going to hide in the nearest bathroom stall.
Honey, I'm not going to hide at all. See?
I placed my heart in Tennessee

& red it was upon a hill
& there it perches, singing still.

Once

Laura Kasischke

One summer, you wore

that shark's tooth dangling

from a rope

around your neck

every day, so

all your little falcons

in their little leather hoods

could always find you.

Once, every

dog on your block

began to howl at once

in the middle of the night

as I walked by.

Another time, your

cat came out on your

back porch

to hiss at my shadow:

Hide!

Once (and only once) you

made me cry.

Tempered

Teri Ellen Cross Davis

Your friends said you wanted to meet Miss Bronze.
I fit the mold, living next door and all.
The invite to come by rang in earnest when

your boy said it. I just knew I loved your name.
Saturated from sunlight, we spent a sparkling summer
rusting, we put on a good performance.

From bar to bed, you showed me off—a pretty armpiece
dipped in metal. By fall, I'd be alone with dents in my crown.
Like a petulant rock star, as the last song ends

flipping off the audience, what is it about small men
when they meet a woman worth knowing?
The pinup becomes a push pin, love, a forgotten quotidian.

Drifting under starlight, we spent a sparkling summer.
I swam to you, mistaking a rip tide for an invitation.
You took everything out of me and I, I just loved your name.

the much-maligned swiftie considers her options

Stephanie Burt

with Annabel Facey and Matt Tibbins

I think I'm in my reputation era.
I crave support from friends. Commitments scare me.
I try to keep the tears off my mascara.

I used to share sad tales with any hearer,
Anyone able to hold my hand and bear me,
But now I'm in my reputation era.

I thought each boy who kissed me had to care a
Little—no, a lot; those boys could wear me
Down, the way hot tears dissolve mascara.

They saw me as a gem, and then a terror,
Because I called them out. They wouldn't share me.
So now I'm in my reputation era:

I slink, and stare, and shine. I'll be your mirror,
Or else your boa constrictor. You can wear me.
I lick my lips and hiss through new mascara

To tell you the toxic truth about love. Just dare me:
I'll keep you watching now. Don't try to pair me
Off, or up, or down. You can't repair me
And I know I can't fix him. He can't snare me.
I'm done with tears. They can't touch my mascara.
I'm finally in my reputation era.

Hark, the Raucous Heiress Speaks

Shikha Malaviya

Listen, I poured champagne in the pool to mask the chlorine. And I talked over others because I wanted to be heard & seen. Don't let anyone tell you that you laugh too loud. And you can marry for love as many times as you please. Also, all that 'master of one' stuff is bullshit! You can be more than one thing. Women always are. I was a sculptor, composer, philanthropist, artist, and a patron of the world's most elegant form of dance—ballet. In my backyard, I even built a stage for pirouettes and pliés. The neighbors weren't pleased. Mistress of my own mind if you know what I mean.

Listen, like people, houses have their own karma. You are here because this house wants you to be, between azure skies and cerulean sea. Both you and I, strong as the tides. Call it kismet. Call it folklore. Call it holiday. Call it highwatch. Once a lookout for British ships. Now a mansion for the successful &#%$*! Between eight bedrooms and eleven thousand square feet, we were destined to meet. 'I was here' is stamped in the air and now I bequeath that to you. Don't let anyone piss in your pool. In all your songs, stay true!

The Lucky One

Diane Seuss

The first was my father.
They carted him away in his blue
suit, speckled with rhinestones
of dew. I was feather-young,
just seven. Too young to believe

in heaven, or to know how to cry
when something dies.
Then came my romantic era.
I was sassafras-leaf-green.
Barely thirteen. Foreseeable,

I was raised on Green and 13.th
It was no Valhalla. No Innisfree.
Love arrived, like spring,
with its absurd accessories.
I was delicate. Love's delicacy.

We loved with a love that was more than love…
I learned that in honors English.
Love left tracks. Mouse turds
on the butter dish.
My heart, hammered like a geode,

exploded into lethal crystals.
Then came the era of rebellion.
I was a hellion, with an orange

bolt of lightning in my hair.
I wore fake snakeskin underwear,

my eyeshadow bruise-blue,
but like a boxer, not a martyr.
Wrote “Sylvia” in red lipstick
on my jeans, read *Ariel* and *The Bell Jar,*
ate contaminated pickles

from a supermarket fire.
Yes, it was a performance.
The heart performs its projections,
symphonic, though love is best
when it’s not symbolic.

I learned that decades hence,
after I’d shed a thousand selves
like flimsy gowns, until what was left
was the sun-kissed chrysalis,
breaking its artifice.

White violets opened, and purple
creatures rose on their watery stems.
Mayapples offered up
their diadems of poison fruit,
and chimney swifts returned,

sounding their tortured flutes.
I’ve been broke, and I have broken.
Horse or heart? That goes unspoken.
The breaker thinks they won,
but the broken is the lucky one.

Broken Feather Bad Boyfriend Blues

Marilyn Chin

Baudelaire ruined the albatross Yeats raped the swan
Baudelaire ruined the albatross Yeats raped the swan
The feather quilt awaits us with sin and guilt and song

Icarus soared in a private jet-plane her wings were burnt by sun
Icarus soared in a private jet-plane her wings were burnt by sun
They cheered when she touched heaven and gasped when she hit bottom

I am your feather boa your bloody bracelets of pain
I am your feather boa your bloody bracelets of pain
Who did you fuck after the concert? I don't care to name

Fame is a fickle lover Heartbreak turns to song
Fame is a fickle lover Heartbreak turns to song
Your blue-eyed soul is empty your fleece is powder snow

O shoot me with the gilded crossbow kick me off the stage
O shoot me with the gilded crossbow kick me off the stage
O heal my wings with tenderness let me soar again

The Swiftest Modest Proposal one knee on the ground
The Swiftest Modest Proposal one knee on the ground
The London Fog erased us you vanished without a sound

You don't need to complete me my fledgling love
You don't need to complete me my fledgling love
I am the immortal albatross I am the one

Grief Observatory

Topaz Winters

A year of trying to love you neatly & I'm still
scrubbing stains off of the stove. White sugar coagulating

in the kitchen sink, purple shadows beneath
the pigeons on the windowsill. You tell me

you've never seen the northern lights,
but with all that talk you have to believe they're beautiful.

I tell you I thought I knew what grief was & then
my friends started dying in front of me.

So 300 missed calls from my father & finally
I picked up the phone. So the lipstick quivered

in the dresser drawer after every use, begging once again
to be touched. I move with the ease of a woman

only playing woman. I bleed through the bedsheets.
I vacuum baking soda from the mattress.

My cutting board & I build a life together out of garlic
& dish soap. On the walk to work I pass the crowd

of people who go to the lake to be alone,
& I begin to understand. Pot holder flung on the counter,

single egg yolk in a coffee mug, freezer growing rust,
full of wilted roses & whiskey sours. Your touch

on my lower back squeezing through to the hallway,
careless & crucial, & this is my skin because

you touched it. The last time, four months off of
medication in the city I swore would save me, I screamed

at you in the kitchen WE CAN'T KEEP DOING THIS
IF WE KEEP DOING THIS WHEN IS IT OVER

WHEN IS IT GOING TO STOP & you put out
your hands to calm the caged animal of my body & said

Tomorrow. My dead friends cook me dinner & I wake up
with burns across my palms in the shape of Iceland.

I've never seen the lake they chose over my love,
but with all that talk I have to believe it's beautiful.

The Williams

Naomi Shihab Nye

In honor of Madison Cloudfeather Nye

Somehow the voices twined around a young mind
encouraging gentle stanzas, open endings,
even in a Texas town where they wanted you
to testify before cashing a check. Heck with that, boys.
I'm heading out in my little gray boots, slim volumes
of poetry in my holster, William of Oregon, William of Maui,
drinking jasmine from an old fence. I'm finding a meadow,
children, dandelion puffs, scraps from a vintage notebook.
The double William of Paterson, New Jersey
helped keep us sane though our teachers
went crazy over that wheelbarrow.
Love it, then move on!
Riding a train north in England to the stoop
of another William's cottage, sloped roof,
his sister's purple-scented paper next to his,
high school memory loitering: our teacher
insisting his gloomy poem nearly led
to death. My classmates concurred,
not caring much whether some guy
leapt from a cliff long ago or not,
but I said, *He grieves, but he is filled
with joy.* In a strange voice
like a ringing bell, *immeasurable joy, because
he grieves so much. Because he loves
so deeply all that he is seeing.*
They stared at me.
I was never at home in that school.

Our teacher wanted everyone to get
the same thing from a poem.
Later home felt everywhere, radiant waters,
thistles, greenest hilltops dotted with sheep,
masses of tulips and geese, wandering William's
intricate paths, pausing at every turn,
life stretching ahead, mountains of bliss
and searing sorrow for years to come.
They wrote it, we defended it,
it seemed joyous enough to know one could
love forever, carry on or stop right there,
and the power was yours.

I Go Back to the Past All the Time

Jill Bialosky

Here I am in my sixth decade
Still looking back to the girl in turmoil,
Wanting eyes and signature braids,
Sitting on cold brick steps for your call.

Still looking back to the girl in turmoil,
Who lost her father when she was year two,
Sitting on cold brick steps for your call.
Is that why I couldn't get enough of you?

Who lost her father when she was year two,
Is the girl who can't stop loving you.
To grow attached means to suffer through.
Is that why I couldn't get enough of you?

December closed the gate and cut the latch.
To love in pain won't bring back early loss.
Is that why I couldn't get enough of you to last?
Every time it snows, I remember the cost.

To love in pain won't bring back early loss.
Pressed in wax paper is your rose I preserved.
Every time it snows, I remember the cost.
In December I woke up and lost my reserve.

Pressed in wax paper is your rose I preserved.
I knew in my heart it couldn't last.

In December I woke up and lost my reserve.
Does the future always stretch back to the past?

I knew in my heart it couldn't last.
Our childhoods unwillingly bound us together.
Does the future always stretch back to the past?
In cold December the snow is forever.

Job 5:7

Ellie Black

Once I was fourteen and alone in my room.

Once I saw the future as surely as if it played

on a screen before me: the wife I would become;

the hand I would hold to the end of my days,

a boy who never kissed me but who once tilted

his head and narrowed his green eyes at me

over lunch in the geometry teacher's classroom

and said, matter-of-fact, *we'll probably date someday,*

but not right now. I prepared myself devoutly,

head down, a ritual in service of the plan. I knew

what I was owed, if only I stayed patient,

if only I was good, if only I got better and kept

getting better. Habits formed under the flicker and glare

of fluorescent lighting: I sat in on lunch Bible study

to pretend I was a part of something greater.

I kept myself from noticing that the other girls

seemed to know something I didn't—the secret

to building the foundation of your life within the means

you had available. Whatever I imagined was true at least

for the moment I imagined it. Whatever I wanted

I wanted so badly that I never would have known

what to do had I gotten it. That's what I tell myself.

Outside my bedroom window, the sky turned orange,

turned pink, turned purple. The rain hit

the roof, definitive. Everything I typed

under the covers glowed and stayed quiet.

There was a life for me. It wasn't mine.

I made it up. I kept it to myself.

If I Could Tell Her What I Know Now

Tess Taylor

There are training bras
of literature. In 1989,
I read Sweet Valley High,
a manual for being older that explained
that it would be
desirable to be size six
and blond; to have a mother
who never aged, who looked
just like my sister—
Training bras are
imperfect things. I don't
pass these books to my daughter.
She's 9, voracious, whip-smart, cheeky.
Gliding through our house
in roller skates with pale mint
stripes she sings for joy.
She's a troubadour
a one-girl musical
of fierce bubblegum
desire. This spring
green plums ripen
& she climbs our tree
to watch her world.
She wants to make a version
of Romeo & Juliet, but, she says
"no kissing and no boys."
I don't bring up the suicide.

I know there's so much
practice love, also
so much real breaking too.
Sometimes we love
even the heartbreak songs.
Some year not far from now
I'll likely tell her how
I loved a boy and then the man
he was when he was grown.
I want her to know I know how real it is:
Even if later on we fail.
Even if we roll
and writhe in agony
because the tragedy is true.
Even when no story could prepare you.
You have to be inside the heartbreak then.
You have to read the urgent poems.
You have to let the days roll by.
How much we love
the ones we love
when we first love—
even when there's nothing left
to do but sing
or dance or roller skate.
To try. To try again.
To cry and sing: to sing and cry.

The Gathering

Callie Garnett

What if “indifference” (the word)
Were tuneful like “magic” and “feeling” are tuneful?
Or what if it wasn’t (it isn’t) but your existence
Depended on always singing? *Indifference*
I have a thing I’m trying hard to forget

Way of life? I already use AI to think and speak
I use it to think like a poet & write my sister
To summarize what I feel & know
About her. Information:
It isn’t love, it isn’t fate, it’s just unfinished

Hard lesson: Data annotators
Needing, as soon as they start
Slowing down, replacement

I read about a girl made out of rabbit’s blood
& seasonal refuse:
Dried twigs, leaves, fallen fruits
Or is it excess: blossom, flora, fresh
Sepal cups as for a fairy’s hat & shoes?

Anyway after the gathering she pulsed & came to life so yeah
But some nights she’d need reassembly like
When the world goes back on the vine, vine, *vine*
Again the world outed & changed & taught me
What’s new in seedpods?

Sister, my sister, it is only through
Loving you, you selfish, disorganized, twitchy, forgetful bitch
That I may love others
So I'll love you.

Homecoming

Jennifer Espinoza

Tired of being the only cloud in the room
I grew doors from each of my fingertips.

I counted my exits, dreamt from a future
I would one day have to dare to bloom—

how my reflection in our photograph
seemed to age me alongside you.

You never noticed the way I could rain down
ten summer storms upon one small gathering

without a hint of remorse, did you? Counted
me out like always. Under the bridge, I

figured I'd die one day before I was known.
Fame was never the question.

The public was a glass body between
my skin and bones. I broke inside in ways you

would never see. In the dark, my sky turned
orange with the fire of old bodies.

Lean close to me—inhale—know
the face of every woman I've never been allowed to be.

Take This

Honor Moore

I'm skipping a rock across the lawn,
the other house, the one with claws.
The rock has a sharp edge, it cleaves the grass.
If one were better than two….

I keep looking at the house, it's all
your fault, the red window frames,
mad bling of vine climbing a yellow wall.
Night birds rattle the loose locks,

you watch through the trees
a bear forage and claw, a boat
on the ocean, and the sun flames down.
I knew I wouldn't wait for you.

I'm heading out and wild for love.
So long hungry woman, farewell crazy dove.

June 1st, 7 a.m.

Tennison Black

My mother told me I must be made of steel
forged and folded—my daughters will tell you I'm spicy,
born to lock eyes with h8 like it's *my* job to wear them down,
wear them out. Put them back. But I want to skip through daisy fields
without twisting an ankle. I want a plate of the sugared roses and nectar
from the table of *I don't need to follow politics, but.* It must be nice to live
in a world where shadows melt off of bedtime walls into pools of chocolate
that boost your iron levels and whiten your teeth.

Kissing her tastes like snowcones and marshmallow wine, so
I take my time in the shower because it sings back to me.
I spank my lover the way her salt talks to my tongue. And I want
to sing the kindest words to the meanest people,
wander through their minds posing questions that make them
cry and then shit joy into their process—I'm wishing for kangaroo

companions and jungle gym politics so rock-paper-scissors
can end the wars. I want tiger stripes and a tail that swishes
my thoughts out in 4:4 time. I want the light in my eyes to be noticeably
brighter whenever she catches me looking at her. I want to take a bath
in signs so I can talk some sense into them. Instead I'll edge her
along until she's looking back at the planet from the black.
I'm kayaking through the ocean of her trying to learn how to be still. I want
to hear the sun for the first time. I want to leave footprints in my birthday

cake. My rainbows come in circles. Let's walk up stairs made of mason jars
to set free the fireflies so we can all tell stories in Morse code kisses.

I want to begin every conversation with the words I love you, first. She brought me flowers. They were all she had and she gave them to me along with the time it took to pluck them, to choose just the right blooms and then to come find me and tell me they were for me. She

had tied them with a blade of grass. She skipped away and came back to take a bow. The signs come more than I can make her do the same, and they pace us while she laughs into me, and we walk by holding hands.

Virginia Reel

David St. John

I first heard Lucas Stonehill play fiddle like a god
on my grandfather's bluegrass records
When I was just nine years old & my grandfather
usually a very generous man at all times
& in every way stopped my lesson to say Son now
I want you to listen to what a fiddler
Sounds like when a person picks up the exact right
instrument & is touched by the Lord
Or the Devil I don't really know which anymore
& you hear they're truly meant to live
In the language of song with a life's calling to music
then he played the Hill Family Pickers
Doing "Monroe's Hornpipe" Lucas backed by brother
Julian on guitar & mother Laney on autoharp
& I think I heard in a heartbeat what he was saying
to me & I loved my grandfather trusted him
& I put my small student violin from elementary school
back into its case & walked home in the quiet

•

Twenty years gone before I could tell Lucas Stonehill
this sad story & how I'd just left New England
& driven down to Virginia to prove my dead grandfather
dead wrong & I was going to stay there
In Quarryville just below a bend of the James River
where the Stonehills lived & try to learn
However poorly & faintly a shadow of his lightning

to play a few of those tunes I loved
Belonging only to him in a history of famous fiddlers
& Lucas said to me, *You're some real*
Stubborn son-va-bitch so you'll need to work hard
a whole year & give me $350 a month to
Live in that old stone cottage up the hill give the money
to my daughter Virginia & meet me later
In an hour down by the old quarry dock's loading shed
Virginia Stonehill: at seventeen the finest
Fiddler along the Eastern Seaboard & whose playing
nobody'd heard except on recordings
For ten years since an "incident" no one would tell

•

Late the next spring not long before my year was up &
I would have to leave Virginia she & I sat
At an oak table we'd pulled out into the shade where
we could see the James down below us
& the old quarry dock shifting & sagging in disrepair
then she said *I wish you weren't leaving*
I like having you here did my daddy tell you that
I was the devil? That's what he says to people
He says at seven I was evil & fiddled like the devil until
a boy I hated danced himself right off
The quarry dock onto those rocks there & he drowned
just like the skunk he was that awful boy
But Daddy is the devil & after Granny died he became
the devil every night & he says it's me
Do you see the quarry dock & how it's rocking there
in the current that dead boy is doing that
Then she was quiet just waiting for me to speak so
I told her *Well one day last week Lucas*
Came up here & sitting just where you're sitting told me
I'd better watch myself & he pointed to those

Virginia creeper vines crawling up the trunks & along
the branches of every tree on this hillside
Slowly strangling the whole tree & covering every single
inch with their embrace & he said that was you
Virginia & your vines came from your genius & your mind
& they'd find their way up my body & finally
Into my own mind where they would choke every hope or
dream I might have until a redtail's screech
Floats at night over the James & nobody'd ever hear of me
& I'd be just another meal of a Virginia creeper
& no loss to anyone in these miles of woods along the river—
But Virginia Lucas didn't like what I said to him
Virginia turned & looked at me with a question mark drawn
delicately along the whole length of her face
I told him Lucas I think I might like that to happen very much

•

My lessons doubled in the weeks before my leaving
the long morning lessons with Lucas
Where each day I'd embarrass myself a little less & it
seemed he didn't hate me for what I'd said
& maybe respected me more than he even understood
& then late afternoons with Virginia who
Taught me the tune she'd written a reel more intricate
& deathly fast than anything I'd played before
A song that became her own signature tune folks played
on the radio & at festivals as "Virginia's Reel"
One day she told me *I'm ready it's time we're ready*
Daddy says I'm the devil—I just learned to play
Like the devil because he taught me & now he's teaching you
but I'm the devil's only daughter & when Daddy
Wants to dance I'm the one the devil always asks to play
& this time you'll play too both of us will play
& when Daddy decides it's his time to dance we'll play him

into that holy place he's always claimed is his
& after my final lesson the next day Lucas asked me to
meet him at dusk down at the dock as it was
His annual celebration to commemorate his favorite sorrows
Virginia always plays for me so I can dance
Lucas said—*this time I want you to bring your fiddle too*

•

Lucas stood at the edge of the long quarry dock in full
Scottish Highland dress—he'd worn his
Grandfather's kilt in a Stewart tartan & it lifted slightly
in the breezes rising with the river tides
Showing off his white stockings & soft shoes & Lucas
was looking straight ahead past the ending of
The dock forty feet beyond the riverbank & just above
the place where the quarry barge had sunk
Over a hundred years ago leaving behind tons of jagged
newly quarried blocks of granite just below
The surface of the water where now a series of rapids formed
in the narrow channels & Virginia said once those
Razor-edged chucks of granite could tear a hole in any canoe
or any person not ready for the worst below
& then Lucas signaled he was ready &
exactly as we'd planned Virginia stood on the bank
A ways upriver of the dock & I took a place below downriver
& as we lifted our fiddles Virginia began to play
The grave wistful beginnings of old piper tunes for funeral
processions to accompany Lucas as he took
His first steps along the dock raising a foot to his calf & lifting
one arm high above his head waiting a moment
Stilled in a Highland repose then we began the opening of
"Virginia's Reel" the one she'd chiseled especially
For this day from reels in early years Lucas had taught her
classic reels she'd woven & braided into a tense

Tapestry of melodies joining one last cascade of tempos
lightning bow work giving her voice to histories
Of forbidden tunes for centuries played in shadow-churches
of medieval times & in the sleepless hollows of
Appalachian hills & as Virginia flamed blistering runs of notes
I kept playing the chthonic three-note drone she'd
Taught me to keep Lucas aloft in his dance of mysteries I took
her lead & watched as he tilted back his head slightly
Until he began to rise imperceptibly lifting up beyond the dock
& I could see only the nothing of nothing beneath
As he began dancing just above the water twisting while slowly
rising higher within the air & drifting farther away
As Virginia played harder towards the final rasping passages
only sacred powers keeping Lucas from falling now
As he spun slowly blown more downriver as he hung above
the graveyard stones of the sunken quarry blocks
& like a flame snuffed at the wick Virginia just stopped playing
lifting her bow into the air pointing it to the heavens
& Lucas was held suspended no longer rising in a lucent air
his dance of ascension lost he looked down
At the river foam & over to Virginia where he saw his own death
in her eyes as she looked up to lock his gaze
I hadn't known that a man who'd sold his soul might just hang
there like a gilt icon fixed against the heavens
Hoping perhaps to hear a last redemptive music in the valley
though around us river forest & hills drew quiet
& foxes stilled in their lairs even the legions of cicadas paused
until the Lord's silence grew heavy in the sky
Virginia lifting the sword of her bow higher in brilliant accusation
every soul awaiting the casting of the final die

Of All the Girls Who Might Have Made It Big

Paul Muldoon

Of all the girls who might have made it big
and escaped the sawdust and spit
of a Brooklyn hot dog stand for a ten year game of tig
in which she would forever be “it,”

the one least likely to call it quits
of all the girls who might have made it big
is the one willing to strip down to her kit
for gig after three-hour gig

and let a lighting rig
substantiate her being the most irredeemably spot-lit
of all the girls. Who might have made it big
continues to exercise those gazing up from the pit

who still fail to recognize her at the two-bit
hot dog stand she frequents, wearing a frowsy wig,
the one least likely to be a hit
of all the girls who might have made it big.

Whereby in Reply

Natasha Sajé

sanguine is my motto

I wake up, I'm alive
I get up and brew some chai

imagine blood that looks like paint
in a picture of the sky

every artist's work holds
a spot to catch the eye

javelinas eating berries
their sausage sweet when fried

swords with cherry blossoms
swung by vengeful samurai

cardinals and tanagers tumble to the ground
while you, alone, deny

our days are overdrawn
in the ruby bank of time

and everyone we know swift-or-slow-ly dies
forgive me if I oversimplify

Perennial

Andrea Gibson

When I look at you, why does it feel so much
like stargazing? Why do I want to lose to you
in Scrabble? Win you over with nothing
but the truth? Hold your stilettos
between my teeth while carrying you
on my back through the city for a cartwheel
contest in the park? Will you know what I mean
when I tell you to duck your head for the moon?
Do your tears ever fall like confetti? Do your
indoor plants have names? Are you the type to take
the long route home, to be the lifeboat
for your friends' sinking hearts? To rescue spiders
from shower drains? Or is your lipstick shade
called *Red Flag*? And if it is, do you know I'd still want
to plant a kiss on your mouth and tell you it's a perennial?
It will keep coming back, even if tonight
is the only night I get to dance in the endzone
of your laughter after asking if it's too soon
to ask you everything. Do you like drive-in movies?
What loss has made you whole? What wound
has healed you? How different do you think
the world would be if shame were a foreign language
no one on the planet could speak? If I picked
a lucky penny up and asked you to marry me
for my money would you say something
that would make me leave this party
blushing so hard the sun would rise

at 2 a.m.?

Since You Can't Spell Disaster Without Desire

Christopher Salerno

Find yourself a lover who insists
on sitting in the theater long after the film
is over, after the credits have crawled
past *gaffer* and *wrangler* and *grip.*
The movie's about a newly minted woman spy

who saves the planet from a terrifying
weapon that threatens all
of humanity. In act three, the final scene,
she takes the night train home to D.C.
lugging her body like a suitcase

full of moss. She gets over a lover. Humanity
is spared from the brink of disaster, goes on
shimmering. Champagne flows.
At dawn, people sober up to the sound
of cathedral bells and redemption

at the door. May you find yourself a lover
who never leaves their seat
until the house lights come on, until the ushers
sweep the popcorn around their feet.
Part ritual, part undying belief

in the yet-unseen; that nothing is ever
over until it is. Leaving the theater, they will pop
the metal exit door and orient to how

the parking lot light bathes the blacktop
at yet another dusk, how the chill of evening

has inspired the ornamental cherry
tree to drop its bulk of blossoms all
in a pile on their windshield. *This is not*
a real problem, they will say pushing
the petals away. *This is what I was waiting for.*

1993

Katie Manning

You were ten when you first saw
the boy you'd marry from across
the room—

"Who's that?"
you asked your best friend.
"The new pastor's kid."

the man you now watch across
the second story of your condo,
your boys asleep upstairs.

"Oh, he's kind of cute," you said.
"No, I already met him," she
said. "He's really annoying."

But you never found his energy
and intelligence annoying. And you
were the one who always wrote back
after he moved away—no romance
then, just updates on school plays
and family, choir and friends. You saw
each other a couple of times during
his summer visits, but the shift
began when he came back west
for college and you found yourselves
together with a group at Six Flags

one fall night. You were the only ones
who wanted to ride the old wooden
roller coaster, so you set off together.
After that, the letters turned into calls
and frequent late-night chats (all
the outdated technology you'd joke
about later: your love coaster, your love
AOL instant messenger).

"You don't
like-like him, do you?"
your best friend asked.
"No," you said.
Then, "Wait…"
realization dawning.

Now he's arms deep in suds,
which is, objectively, hot. But
even if he wasn't washing
dishes, and if you hadn't been
married for twenty years—big
smile, all energy—his face
would still be the one you'd
see first in a crowd. His face
will always call you home.

struggle

Evie Shockley

thought i was safe—blending into the middle
or tucked away quiet with my book & a bagel
but you saw me & plucked me from my bubble

middle ~ bagel ~ bubble

you were six-foot-two of sandalwood & swagger
with your razor-sharp fade & five o'clock stubble
my heart was not the only part of me to tumble

swagger ~ stubble ~ tumble

thrilled to be swept up in the orbit of an idol
you dragged me out into a pool of new people
& left me to dangle—it shoulda been a signal

idol ~ people ~ signal

i started thinking that i must have a rival
you look me in the eye, but you're not on the level
how did i end up in a twisted love tangle

rival ~ level ~ tangle

let the games begin—i tried to act less eager
& keep my weapons to a pout or a grumble
but pretty soon i learned we couldn't play gentle

eager ~ grumble ~ gentle

next thing i know, i'm alone in my heaven
your smile is a star—just a distant twinkle
my hands are tied by my own damn ribbon

heaven ~ twinkle ~ ribbon

he loves me / he loves me knot—petal by petal
took too long to find the answer to the riddle:
you were in it for yourself—& that's the trouble
all that struggle love wasn't worth the struggle

petal ~ riddle ~ trouble

These Barcelonas

James Allen Hall

The year Notre Dame burned, a man I loved
with the heat of disaster said he was leaving.
I wanted myself if not dead then atomized,
a different name in anonymous skin. At first,
Barcelona is all slow guitars on gothic rooftops,
sad serenades, and first dates I spend praying
to the god of unexploded hearts: don't let him
be another catastrophe I have to survive.
All over the city, I am an outline, faded body
on WALK signs, waiting to cross back
into color. I take every imaginable guided tour
to feel belonged-to. I've never seen lightning
quicksilver the sea from Torre Glòries but
in an afternoon of curious architectures I am
haunted by the bomb falling, 1938, through
the theater's roof, undetonating in the empty
orchestra. It laid there, threatening as a lover.
Rather than imperiled, the audience felt God
had saved them. A city becomes your confessor
when you try not to die in it. Barcelona teaches me
the difference between being landlocked,
landmarked. I ride the Ferris wheel, spinning
in the shadow of a fairy-tale cathedral. I suspend
my fear of heights in cable cars at dawn. I learn
its glory holes, its Gaudi whimsy, I dance its Candy
Darling. How many Barcelonas burned before
the ancient became modern? the tour guide asks,

walking us through Ciutat Vella. And the man
beside me knows. After the tour, he leads me
to the city's strongest old-fashioned, a bar
where he guesses my mutable sun, water moon.
The music, the drag queen's raucous set fades
to relief. After the bar, he knows the best bell tower
to take in the Mediterranean, glimmering like God
thinking about forever. It's April, dusk chilling
the city to its seeds, but we bike to Mar Bella,
he dares me out of my shoes, my shorts.
He does a bad jellyfish, I splash his lifeguard chest.
This Barcelona is a liquid blur, we dissolve
time's rough coordinates into a saintly darkness.
On shore again, we hardly recognize ourselves, kissing
in soaked underwear, searching for anyone's shoes.

You're So Gross and I Love You

Christopher Citro

Frankenstein must be still alive
because stomping around, two arms out
for love, makes such sense
in our patchwork of woven-together skins.

I wear shirts with longer sleeves
so my hands feel less alone.
I'll make a boat out of my body
and you can step inside, push
at blue water with your palms—

I want to wake with you beside me,
watch you open your eyes, my face
an inch from yours, morning light
across the wall holding us. You

could dip a finger in your mouth,
write your name across my chest. I

reach for the pillow, form the shape
with my arms where you belong.

I dreamed you've come home—
we'd have a home—I take your umbrella,
replace it with a drink, feed you
rainbow trout in garlic butter, with
parsley picked twenty minutes ago

from our garden—we'd have a garden—
some stalks already nibbled by a rabbit.
I gathered them anyway, washed the spit off.

Do you like seafood? You ask, then
open your mouth to show me
the half-mashed dinner in there.

Look, *we'd get by* is what I'm saying.
In eight billion people,
I'd push everyone into the mud to get to you.

Out of This World

Matthea Harvey

From the top of the rollercoaster
I point out the funnel cake sugar
swirling in carnival neon lights,
the tiny cumuli of cotton candy
drifting around the corners of
the fortune teller's striped tent.
Inside maybe she's telling someone
the same thing that she told me—
it'll be different this time—though
the customer who pushes out through
the tasseled curtains, looks down,
sad, or maybe his sneaker stalled
in a sticky puddle of spilled soda.
You murmur *the world looks toy-tiny*
from up here—the Ferris Wheel
a doll's tambourine, the Giant Slide
a rainbow sour strip warped by the sun
streaming through playroom windows.
And then we're plummeting and twist-
ing and swoop-de-looping together.
Heart-flip, lung-fling, finger-fizz!
I'm relieved when we roll to a stop
and they unlatch the metal bar which
only just kept us from ricocheting into
another galaxy where people lie flat
and still for fun. You hurry me past
the Strong Man hefting his implausible

dumbbell and the frustrated teens
maneuvering the claw machines.
I'm still dizzy but you want to try
Alien Abduction. Inside the cheap
spaceship, the plastic aliens look
unconvincing but then we start to spin
at a terrible speed and I'm pinned to
the wall. As my legs leave the ground,
I close my eyes and try to catch my breath.
Someone grabs my hand. I really hope it's you.

Espectacularistas

Rodrigo Toscano

for Swifties

Snaking lines—
out here's
anticipation's guts.

We want *something*
and now
even more.

Crowds cheering—
we're the same people
you know.

We want diamonds
refracting us
all night.

Doors opening—
in here's *everything*
not out there.

We want pinks
we want blues
we want golds.

Doors closing—
we can do that

and other things.

We want platforms
hovering above
and beyond.

Lights pulsing—
we do that too
re-colorize minds.

We want focus
up there
down here.

Vapor spouting—
funnels
corny cool.

We want *ME!*
from all sides
brushing up.

Floor trembling—
we're different folks
jostling together.

We want surprises
at choice moments
poking us.

Roof rumbling—
quivering mess
closing ranks.

We want insides
turned outside
turned inside.

Doors opening—
we can do that
totally, right?

We want reshuffling
of all feelings
and fortitude.

Oceans Apart

Leah Umansky

It was 1996, when I first met you in an AOL chat room. [I typed] and [you typed] and [I typed] and [you typed] and [I typed] and [you typed] and I just couldn't stop. I couldn't stop wishing, imagining, envisioning. The computer screen at my desktop beckoned me. *You* beckoned me. Each *ping* in the IM, each *ping* in the chat, a knot on a rope I climbed. Each knot, a step in the staircase of my life into desire, despair, into touch, into lust, into dream, into love. We were *so* young. I was younger than you by a year, and you were right here alongside me through the screen, and across the Atlantic. Your heart in the moors of West Yorkshire, mine in the suburbs of Long Island. You sent me letters and British mixtapes, I sent you photos, American candy bars, and mixtapes back. Each letter, a spark. Each phone call, a yearn. The modem lulled me. The modem lulled me to love. *That* connection—that live wire—*that* was a kind of love. The anticipation, the thrill, the desire of the wait, a pull. Our love was a field enflamed by story, by phone cards, by folktale, by novels I sent you pages of, by the essence of wonder. I wonder if you will be as I imagine you to be, in person; I wonder if the *computer* you is the *real* you, if the *real* you is the you *I* love. Love. It's what all stories are about. All love is love, but young love is special. That pureness is an opening. You were Heathcliff, and I was Cathy and I dreamt of those moors, that heather. We were so young. We were so pure, so innocent. I knew the *want* of you. I knew the *want* in me. It grew more electric with every letter, ever *ping,* every word on the screen. But you said *yes* to me. And I said *yes* to you, and so our parents both said *yes* to us both through the telephone and when we picked you up at the airport, *that* was the love story. *You* were the love story. The imagining, the conjuring, the yearning, our seven nights in my parents' basement after midnight. My first time being so close to a boy, and naked. I thought I knew how to steer that ship, I thought the story had informed me, but life had other plans, as did the ocean between us, and the future, a buoy floating between us.

Amusement Ruins

Gregory Pardlo

Tina Turner rasps “Proud Mary” over a tinny
Bluetooth speaker as the woman with
a smoking angel tattoo on her shoulder blade
tells me time is like a boardwalk, a path without
detours, a narcotic haze erasing the horizon.
Regal as geese, incandescent with self-regard,
a boy pack glides by on fat-tire bikes, and a half-
defeated foil balloon lurches after them
before collapsing in exhaustion. You are
evolving, she says as she fingers the crevices
that cross my palm. Stop pretending you’re not.
What a pleasant way to say someone’s
getting old. She doesn’t see an early grave.
No messy divorce. Beware pickpockets and
riptides—she’s quick to caution—but you can’t
avoid suffering. Rich guys die exploring seafloors.
I buy tickets to planet Gravitron where the floor
drops and velocity frames me with strangers
like a family jump photo. My souvenirs. My scream
machines. My attempts to stop time by living
in thrill rides. How patiently I’ve suspended
my life like this. Shout out to the sequin-
scaled mermaid going to town on a funnel
cake as if she were picking meat from bones.
Fin, foot, feather, she’ll thrive come hell
or high water. Neons protest the sun setting
like colored jimmies falling on purple sherbet.

The great wheel turns. In the distance, like
a shipwreck, a dark shard on the water,
the future awaits. The heart is fragile. I pretend
not to have one. Off duty, the lifeguards.
I'll swim if I must, despite the risks of trusting
myself to the unforgiving flood.

Or Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity*

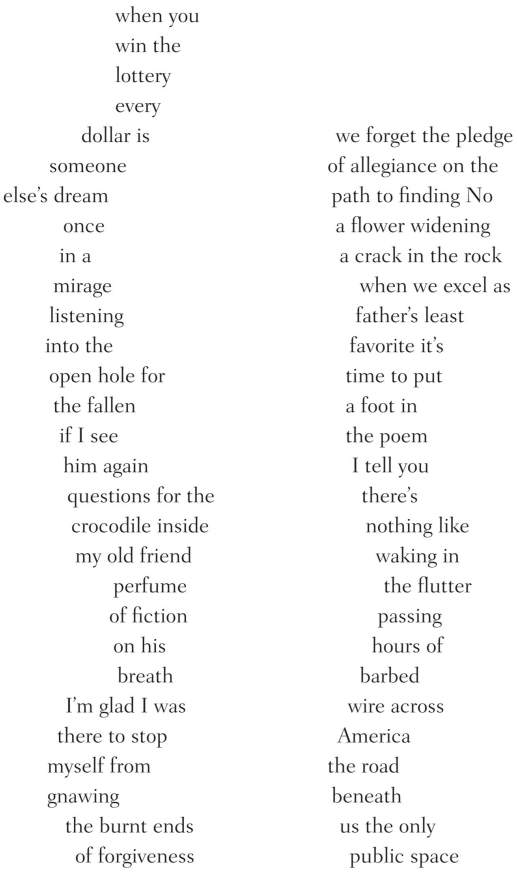
John Gallaher

"Remember the Thunderbird with the top down?" love asks.
Because love has a tight schedule, you have to act
slow. How about a flower? I've a fondness for blue.
Blue flowers just so on a balcony over a city. And love
is draping over the credenza. "Maybe a cocktail?"
love asks. And you stumble at the door. Maybe love
is suggesting a drive. You always thought love
would do the carrying, but it's been you all along,
for whatever it was, constructed by what it's looking like,
and what you think of things. It's a kind of contortion.

It's the song everyone's talking about, playing. Soundtrack
gold. As if every word were replaced by its history.
"Maybe this is a war movie," love
says. Maybe that's the only kind of movie there is.
I've written that movie so many times, as well.
Because at some point the villain always pauses.
The villain has to tell you the plan. It's their
genius plan. The movie lives
for this moment, and here it is, a pale haze over
the water, that leaves you
standing there by yourself, questioning
what came before, like a horizon approaching,
a winding way, or what one deserves, or nothing at all.

from First Light

CAConrad



For a plain-text version of this image, go to this page.

The Supreme Court Blues: July 1st 2024

Cornelius Eady

This was the song I wanted to write.
Sitting like a head-lit deer
In the living room, bright screen,
Dark things being thrown into
The world by legal spells;
Roll-back spell, spell of happening again,
(again, again).

This was the song I wanted to write,
70 years old and oh, how long have
I lived with this rumble threat
Under the floorboards, stink pollen
Aimed at the windpipe? One gasp,
And then…

This was the song I wanted to write.
In what key is a death rattle?
(I got a letter this morning,
How you recon it read)?
Bereft and reeling,
My friends blew up my phone;

Guess who?
Didn't you hear?
I thought I was…
I thought we were…
Deflate a dream,

Up jumps a ghost.

This was the song I attempted to write;
America was just called off.
These postmortem blues.
(Uh-oh)
These maladies of birthright.
(Uh-oh)
Who named us interloper?
Why couldn't I hear the music?
How will it end?

Pathetic Fallacy

Paul Tran

If you must blame me, then go ahead and blame me
for ruining your life by choosing, finally, to live mine
as a mare charging toward the gates of a curious land
carrying outlandish dreams, like a rider, on my back
with a bridle heavy in my mouth, unable to talk to you
in a language you'd understand, had you cared to try
freeing your future of your past, letting yourself let go
the reins fixing us to that vile stable in that evil paradise

marked by expulsion or existence saddled in exchange
for love that passes for but could never actually be love,
and hard as it is to accept the pathetic fallacy of a mare
sorry to a rider for arriving where their next life awaits
almost too late, but not too late, I'm sorry—honestly—
I wasn't heartless enough to bring you here with me.

Poem in Which I Realize That One Day I Won't Miss You

Dustin Brookshire

I cry realizing I pulled a Strawberry Crystal Ice out of the refrigerator instead of a Blue Raspberry. I cry when I momentarily forgot the password to log into my laptop. I cry after misspelling "initiate." I cry when I went to the pantry to find that I was out of Cool Ranch Doritos, even though the grocery list hanging on the pantry door read "Buy Doritos." I throw my hands in the air, say, *Okay, universe. I'm taking to the couch with my electric blanket.* I place my feet on the coffee table. Oh, P[redacted], your picture still in the frame on the second shelf of the entertainment center. I tuck the photo of you sitting on a rock by Sweetwater Creek in the bottom drawer of my dresser with clothes you forgot. Yes, I cry again. I look at my phone. I will not call you. You will not reach me—your number blocked for months. Goodbye. Goodbye. I mean it this time.

I Don't Need Your Letter

Molly Peacock

I was letting you go for years
before you let go of me. *Yes, I'm getting*
better. Twenty-eight years together: Cried
for twenty-eight days when you died.
No, I haven't received the last letter
you will never write. "Yes, I'm getting
better," I say to your friend, and watch him
seeking your ending in my face. But I
glow now with the freedom I feel—though
I can see him searching for my sadness,

or rather *his* sadness in *me.* (But I
am getting better!) I don't need your measure.
I don't even need your unsent letter.
When illness forced you behind a scrim,
you started to leave me before you left.
Death forced a whole moon cycle where
I cried every day with a secret pleasure
to feel my feelings as I felt them. Now,
with a strange, bright openness, I've turned
to your friend, surprised by the ending I've earned.

No Invitations

Kristie Frederick Daugherty

An October afternoon we were driving and you turned to me and said,
I can act and make people believe anything I want them to believe.

There was music playing, always yours, techno. Your meaning was clear so I
morphed the words into hard phonemes, to thump inside the tempo, belying

syntactical meaning (heart dies by this arrhythmia): to let it live
for another week seemed sweet enough to hang in midair my disbelief.

I forget this is not my own, how every breakup poem pays its dues
to the breakup poem that came before. Here's a method to unbelieve

that you were ever in the in of in love: Gather some rosebuds, blood red.
Chomp chomp chomp them up. Chew, vomit, let the rouged saliva drip, believing

only this taste of flowers, tonguing the velvet undersides of petals
Kristie, Kristie darling, make out with yourself, don't listen for the key turn.

Without You Triptych

Deborah Landau

Free & high in summertime, is that a crime? I followed my
obsessions so what. Did you think I'd stay good?
Restless girls get in trouble when they try to quench
their thirst. I was dreaming of you all salty night like a
nympho then wanted to die when I woke alone
in the lurid afternoon. Man, I'm still into you, and not in a
gentle way. Mood. What to do with all this honey.
Hypnotic you swing into view again & again like a legend
tortured, tender & true.

~

Finally I'm free of you, slept you off like an
overdose in my bare branch bed. Release me.
Relentless summer has undone us again, stagnant
tempest without breath—let go, let go, 'til
night casts over us again its narcotic hood.
Imagine another ending where I wake from the dream of you
ghost cold sober but still alive. Who's lonely now.
Hurry won't you please come home?
Touché. I've finally had enough of you.

~

Full stop the swampy flood love makes of us.
Over and over we struggle in its ruddy abundant light.
Raspberries fill one hundred baskets 'til there's nothing
to do but eat. Oh spare me. It was only his basic
naked body lying on top of mine. All summer

illicit we lay like everyone else in the heated
grasses gorging like a couple of generics—
holy glory fuck I'm stuck & now even July's
trashy twilight won't abide our overstated love.

Deep into December

Dorianne Laux

Deep into December, through the thigh-high snow,
You came to me, kneeled before the grate and poked
The fire until the room blushed with heat. It was all
I needed to remember summers at the beach, light
Caught in a fire ring in the sand, our faces flickering,
The moon on the horizon sinking into the sea, stars
Diving up into the night. And we were immersed again.

And again you came in July, month of fulfillment, fireworks,
National Moon Day, National Thread the Needle Day.
National Nothing at All Day, Crème Brûlée Day. The
182nd day of the year in the middle of the annual calendar.
Month of the buck moon, days for deadheading the roses.
Making small bags of potpourri to slip under your bras
And panties, or pour into bowls for your bathroom.

And then, when you're not thinking, Autumn arrives
With its leaves on fire, its cool autumnal nights when
The insects subside to sleep through winter.
It's a time when the weather doesn't know what to do,
How to behave, how long to stay, the trees producing
Their final baskets of fruit. Days we stay in bed late
And rub each other's feet until our long bodies stretch
To meet, filled with sweetness and late bird song.

Firstborn

Jeannine Ouellette

Light travels at the speed of light no matter what,
but the rains came hard that summer, the crabapples
dropped early & you were four days late. How happy
I was, just twenty-two & already holding everything
I ever needed. I gave you all I had: my chin, my voice
& my middle name, Marie, which means beloved.

You named me Mama, a far-back *ah* of saltwater
& round-bellied want whenever I twisted too soon
from your baby sheets. You named the world too—
kitty, book, bye-bye & every other thing, like the arnica
we dabbed on school-day bruises dotting your shins
with little plums & that birthday girl's crooked meanness,
or mine. Your new selves, too, unfolding, till suddenly
I was just Mom, a short *o* rusted shut.

Only then did I remember how all of you was always
yours—your chin, your voice & your middle name, Marie,
which also means sea. All seas have two shores, one close,
one far. But aren't seas also circles? Like the moon?
Look how easily she slips through this familiar darkness
we both hope under & those old stars, too—
thirteen billion years of light, steadfast & ours.

Another Round

Didi Jackson

Another round
of poison

for her body
as it slowly turns

against itself. Has been
for years and years.

The silent killer,
the gray cat

stalking
its own shadow.

Her cells
are a circus

below her
honeyed skin.

She lets loose
handfuls of black hair

that fall in clumps
as large as oranges.

They catch the wind.
I know

they are destined
to be woven

into nests
for birds,

to cradle
new, naked life.

How I wish
we could get away,

my car could be
a bullet hurling

far from the crime
of her cancer.

All the wounds
in the crease of her elbow

from needle after needle
could be petals of violets.

Her port just a place
for all the songs to go.

Yesterday I caught
sight of a goldfinch

in the olive tree

outside my motel window.

A tiny match
lit against

the morning dark.
How old-fashioned

to adore the moments
just before dawn.

And to wish
for brass keys

to the door of my room
instead of thin plastic

the size of small
bars of soap.

Nothing is
as it should be.

Her eyes should
never be so tired,

her face
never so thin.

Visiting the Poet Larry Levis's Archive in Virginia, I Pull His Black Cowboy Boots from Box Number 40

Anna Journey

It's the reverse world, Larry, where you're a redhaired woman
peering down the scalloped shaft of your old

black boot. And if no one else stooped
over ephemera in the VCU library's Special

Collections looks up, you'll lean in for a sniff,
as if the past, like some mustached genie on a wave

of Camel smoke, waits in the ankle-wide dark of a cowhide
stamped *Texas All American Made.* Which is to say,

Larry, for a minute or two, I pretend I'm you, turning
your left boot quarter-stitched in oak leaves

back and forth in my hands, pivoting it beneath the tube light's
academic fluorescence by that high

Cuban heel. The truth is I couldn't detect even the faintish
whiff of you: no BO leftover from the mid-nineties, no sweat

pressed into damp insoles as you danced alone
in your kitchen to the Clash as if you were still

twenty-six at the Deadwood. All I could smell was the soft
musk of leather, even though you must've sweated

a lot here in Richmond, Virginia, those last four years
before you overdosed and Mary, Greg, and the Church Hill

cop they'd called peered into your yellow row house's windows.
From outside they couldn't see where you'd fallen

and sprawled on the bathroom floor. One sniff inside and the cop
told your friends, *He's gone.* After twelve years in Los Angeles

I moved back east, an insanity I now recognize
for what it was: pandemic burnout, some romantic

notion of home. In your poem "The Oldest Living Thing in L.A.,"
a possum, ancient and displaced in city traffic, tries to cross

the intersection at Wilshire and Santa Monica. People
emerge from the bars as if they could help the animal,

even though those ruinous teeth—"the long rows
of incisors"—"went all the way back beyond / The flames

of Troy & Carthage." I left L.A. as if the city
burned behind me. Once on our way down from Monterey

to a redwood cabin in Big Sur, David and I stopped
at a Western boot shop in Carmel where I dropped an obscene

sum on a pair of smoked lavender Luccheses.
The boots had lizard-scale toes and matte goatskin shafts

that reached my knees. The only problem: the boots
were too hot for L.A. summers and too rock star

for an introvert to pull off. When I crossed Rialto on foot

toward the tourists thronged on Abbot Kinney,

photographers stopped to strobe-light my body
with their cameras' flash. The shoes felt like a costume:

the shitkicker boots of the iconoclast, the tortured
poet in lavender goat hide. In your poem "Elegy for Poe

with the Music of a Carnival Inside It," space-time
collapses as the ghost of Edgar Allan Poe shows up

to listen to the carny's spiel in which the author's lurid
death becomes a sideshow attraction, like the boy

with sow's hooves for hands, and Poe's now
"no more than the moral / In the story of his life,

the cautionary tale." Larry, at twenty-two,
I had one rule about cocaine: I'd do it

only if it was free, which turned out to be too frequently.
At a music festival at Wilmer's Park in Brandywine,

I got so messed up from mixing my drugs that I accidentally
stole a child. Near the main stage—and on a headful

of mushrooms and coke—I asked a woman
through my clenched teeth, *Can I dance with your baby?*

I don't know why, Larry, she handed her kid to me.
But when Dark Star started up the funk-guitar riff

to "Shakedown Street," I took off through the crowd,
the baby on my hip, doing some deranged space-jig

in which I thought I was chasing down the full moon.
It didn't take long for the alarmed mom to catch up,

grab her child, leave me to slink—horrified—
back into the night. Larry, if you'd lived past forty-nine,

I like to think you'd be ordering cucumber
mocktails by now, like me. I sleep better these days,

unlike that night in Poe's Pub on East Main,
when I overdosed on cocaine beneath a stuffed

novelty raven and that famous daguerreotype of Poe
looking disheveled and haunted yet slightly comic

in his crooked mustache, the picture taken
just months before the writer died at forty. I puked

all over the women's bathroom, bile frothed in the corners
of my mouth. Two men—I called them friends—

carried me out to the car, rolled me into the back seat,
then returned to the bar! Where you are now, Larry,

isn't a knowable fact, just this black boot both somehow
hard and delicate with its embroidered

toe flower in my palm. In an archivist's handwritten list
of titles of your unpublished short stories, I find one

that *should* be the name of the most popular saloon
in the great cosmic unknown: "Kiss Me

in the Whorehouse at Pompeii." Why don't I

meet you there, Larry, you leaning on the granite

countertop as another half inch of ash falls
from your cigarette's cherry, your elbow propped

next to a bowl of steamed peel-and-eat shrimp,
burnt-orange and fragrant with Old Bay. Poe's there, too,

swiveling on a barstool beside you as he picks
"Rock the Casbah" on the juke and you give each other

a nod. Poe didn't die of a coke overdose,
like you did, Larry. One theory is that he didn't die

of alcohol poisoning or an OD in Baltimore at all,
that he'd gotten bit by a rabid street dog

and the creeping paralysis moved from the bite mark
up his knee and thigh, finally reaching

his lungs and heart. It's almost two in the morning
in Kiss Me in the Whorehouse at Pompeii, the bartender

flickering the lights for last call, which startles
one patron's smuggled-in lap dog—an all-white

Pomeranian—that jumps up to sit, yapping,
on Poe's knees. Poe laughs at the irony, but Larry,

you rise on your black boots' stacked heels
in an exhalation of smoke, roll your eyes as if to say,

Isn't that creature *just* like a poet, rabid, already
beginning to foam at the mouth.

for a friend, considering leaving

Hollie McNish

once smitten, kisses you could never get away from
now they duck in and out for dinner,
swallow mealtimes whole as if imprisoned at the table

you offer conversations like chasing forests falling,
they answer like condolences; last week you dreamt
of those first and fickle kisses, when eye contact

sent shivers down your pen; now, crying on the street
you tell us you are leaving, considering; what happened?
so many questions stop you sleeping—and we listen—

and she begins; that friend always convincing you to stay;
who sees leaving as a failure; shaming you again
as if separation is the enemy. i don't agree. sometimes,

if you need to leave, my friend, then leave
if you need to cry, then cry, if you need a cup
of honeyed tea or a glass of cheap pink wine

if you need a hug, my friend, come here
the kettle's on, my ears are yours, my shoulders
are prepared for a night of sobbing storms

there is no failure here, my friend, you were
both born to breathe the air; and hands that hold
you down, are not hands to hold in bed

see those cracks in concrete pavements
making way for brighter reds; see the poppies
on the roadside; see the new and fuller moon

some stories end so others start; all buds
will bloom again; there is no failure in changing;
leaves cannot cling to autumn pretending it's still spring;

let your life turn golden; i know you've tried
i know you care; the stars outside are gorgeous;
if you need to talk, or not, i'm here

take a tissue; take a biscuit; take some time; take a hug
if you need to leave, my friend, then leave
if you need to leave, you must

The Suburbs

Sabrina Benaim

It was the spring I returned home
to the suburbs. At thirty-six, I thought I knew.
Everything would turn out, will turn out—
Okay. But this is nothing I knew to expect.
Nobody warned me about the joy

of lending your body to stand in its building.
To become another's for nine months
and never again. How sweet an occupancy.
With you, in myself. There is an echo—
all I've ever wanted is a soft place to land.

And what is softer than spring? Softer than sleeping
on memory foam, waking every day to invent new
synonyms. Soft/the cultivation. Soft/pout. Soft/brave.
Soft as the first fifty smiles. Soft like June giggle #4.
My heart a soft-shoe tap dance. As close as quiet can get

to nothing. A strong current of whisper, an electric hush.
How I would speak to the baby, or the dog. Four am
living room, or, in the park, between the baseball diamonds,
by the white lilac, where strangers play softball in the evening
and often comment *your dog is so adorable* to which I say "*yes!*"

And while these won't be the years the baby remembers,
bubbled in the suburbs; the baby, the dog, and me.
My little hallelujahs. My best blooming.

All of us alive and living through this almost summer. A wish
would want nothing more. You should hear me laugh—
I sound just like the baby, like I've just discovered delight.

An Ordinary Day

Jennifer Franklin

When I tell you about the latest
engagement stories—lavish

beach proposals, breathless
words on top of the Ferris wheel

overlooking Paris—or mention
your first at the transplanted

Egyptian temple in my favorite
museum, you remind me how

marriages that begin like that
often end without love, without

photographs, without a song.
I think back to when you said,

let's just get married on the Cape
next spring, while we chose

furniture for our new apartment.
At first, I felt disappointed

by your spontaneous proposal,
but a year later, exchanging vows

by the salt marsh, when you sang
to me and reached for my hands,

my full heart raced. We began
on an ordinary day in an ordinary

store on the same sofa we sit on
each night, the dog in our laps,

laughing so hard, our daughter
looks up from her screen to smile.

Ode to the Little Girl Singing Karaoke at My Nephew's Wedding Reception

Barbara Hamby

This is the best wedding I've been to in a long time,
mainly because a wedding planner wasn't hired
and my sister and the bride and groom did everything,
the tables around the pool, the food, the bride
with her two dresses, both repurposed, one long and slim
with her golden arms on display and flowers
in her hair and the other one that my sister's friend
wanted to get rid of from her first marriage,
but why had she kept it in the first place, though that's
the way with memory, how it hangs on by knives
and snapshots, and my brother-in-law has built a dance floor
over the top of the pool, and after the ceremony
and dinner, my nephew starts the karaoke machine,
and everyone gets up to dance and sing,
my husband and Sage doing a duet of "Take It Easy,"
and I'm dancing to "I Heard It Through the Grapevine,"
perhaps one of the greatest songs ever recorded,
and I'm grateful that my brother is here,
and he has quit drinking, but he's kind of subdued,
and though he's not much fun, at least his anger
isn't hovering in the wings ready to set the night on fire,
and that's when you, little girl, get up on the stage
and start your Taylor Swift set, and you've got the moves down,
but you're only eight or maybe nine, and the lyrics
coming out of your buttercup mouth are ten years down the road,
wanting your girlhood back though you're in the middle of it,

and I'm thinking of the time that my heart was on fire with pain
and it was a kind of heaven, because the vanilla ice cream
of girlhood was melting and finally I was feeling something
brutal and deep, wanting so much to hurt someone
I can barely remember now, and time seems to converge
like the two tornadoes that just blew through our neighborhood,
taking roofs off houses and uprooting trees, but at the wedding
we were living in a dream, our memories boiling inside us
like a gumbo of love and her evil sister, and it takes us so long
to get love right, if we ever do, but that's not what the music's
saying, and when you finish, you twirl the microphone,
because your mother is at the edge of the dance floor, saying,
"Honey, it's time to go," and we all know that our dreams will end someday,
but we don't know when, and not knowing is what keeps
us singing and falling in love again and again and again.

Letter That You Never Read

Aaron Smith

The first time I danced with a man
was after a drag show in a bar

in Huntington, WV—wide-shouldered
queens shoved like corks into little

black dresses. Slow song at the end
of the night while bartenders cashed

out, rinsed glasses. “Almost Paradise,”
music from a movie about a town

where dancing was illegal like our
bodies were, pressed together

beneath strobe lights. Too dumb
to trick, or even kiss, it was enough

to rest my hands on his shoulders.
I wanted a love story, any story,

really, that contained me. In those
days being gay was a shared cigarette

in a Chevy truck on a moonlit road,
a blue-eyed soccer player who put

my hand on his chest, *you can touch me*
if you want. Thick summer evenings

and a hazy ache for a future I could
barely imagine. I wrote a letter to a man

who didn't exist, inventing him from
years of staring out windows, hoping he'd

show up one day and love me. He didn't
until he did; he's sleeping beside me

as I write this. One night we danced
in his kitchen—half-scraped plates

and drained glasses. "Crazy for You"
by Madonna. *I never really liked this song,*

he said. We kissed long and wet
against the refrigerator. What is a life

but a box of blue moments strung
together like a necklace? First dance,

shared cigarette, clandestine kiss,
letter never sent to a stranger.

Credit

Paige Ackerson-Kiely

The sun rolled up over fields eager to perform.
The wind was another kind of dancing.

I packed up the tent, borrowed your lipstick,
your bra, any dupe for intimacy I could fold

into my purse. What's in your wallet?
I already knew about the nothings, golden

hour hunger, the skinny relief of the horse
on your imitation coin from Carthage.

The horse who must have breached fortifications,
fled through blinding fire, while other women

you would have loved had you been alive,
drove their versions of white pickups over rock-strewn hills,

smoke-ghosts all up in their hair, looking
for the barn sour mare, looking to make good

on a pledge of ownership, looking for the easiest way out
which is sometimes, let's face it, the sea.

I loved the way you looked naked, from the side,
as you slipped out of your sleeping bag,

even if I had to run away from that fire
thinking only of myself. Even if the only thing

I'd ever known was at auction and the starting bid
was laughter. The land of me still had value, could

be razed, rebuilt, and sold again. I would have to borrow
against my memories if I hoped to return. I would.

But listen, it's not as complicated as all that:
return on investments, compounding interest—

the way I idled in your brother's driveway after dropping you off,
hoping you'd part the blinds, watch me back out,

and I'd learn something about credit and value and source.
No hour of life is lost that is spent in the saddle.

No handkerchief, no audience, I gunned it
out of there like loose change demands to be dropped, heads up

on the asphalt, glinting in the sun, some fool's lucky day—
I know there is light at the end.

Bachelor

Gustavo Hernandez

On that bed I sat next to you. You put your boots on.
A movie played, and Pedro Armendáriz talked
in circles about a prism in his lover's eyes.
It was August. The actor's own eyes glowed.
I knew at the end of the movie the town burned.
I kept it from you. I wanted dark in its place.
I made what I wanted to make out of love then.
The blue restaurant across the street. Friday night
and its yellow booth. My hand moving to you.
A soft tongue. A cruel shape. That summer
my intentions and my knowledge narrowed.
I knew only what I wanted. For a moment
to make myself everything above and around you.
Barely intelligible. Shining. And yours.

On Again, Off Again

Major Jackson

We wanted infinity like the wall in a stone temple,
say a Pablo Neruda, but could never
go trekking in other people's wonders. That
requires all kinds of unasked for tunes. Out
of deference to this faded paradise, the kids
danced through our museum of songs. Style
we concluded was a rusted pickup truck revving a field
of clover, framed in a chorus. And thus, we never
go home to each other, drifting in our detached lives.
We prefer roadside wildflowers, faith run out
of psalms, mountains of scattered petals.
My jeweled valley burns bright with style.
You *are* my rebel, my giant, the lift of your eyes
daydreaming, my lips counting down the miles.

Creation

Dean Rader

And on the eighth day, God
was totally done with the haters. Nothing
but complaints about acne, mosquitos,
unripe fruit. *Where's my house? Where are my*

clothes? What's with the serpents? And so
God did not bless the eighth day. And
she did not rest. And she did not
see that it was good, in part because

God's boyfriend told her to clean
up the areas around the swamps and
make more mountains. His best work?
An asteroid. Whatever. Has he even seen

the firmament? She nailed it. Beaches too.
And lord the animals. They never shut
up, but she doesn't mind. They are hers.
And the color of the sky? She invented

that. Same with fire, but she's saving
the good stuff for later: rain, earthquakes,
ice storms, lightning. Wait till they hear
thunder. Now, that's godly. *A reminder.*

At the present though, it's all judgment,
all critique. Nonstop. And rude. Everyone

thinks she is getting it wrong. But wait
until they hear birdsong, wave wash

leaf lilt, wind rush, river run. She made
the howls of wolves, the bristle of cicadas,
the puddles of rain, and all the cries. And she
made the sounds of sticks and teeth and tongue

and stone and skin and mouth and bone
and sea and roar and wail and call and
clap and sigh and gasp and moan and
mew and chant and chirp and purr and

trill and hum and laugh. She is making
music. That's what they don't know.
But they will. Because everything is
moving, everything vibrating in one

great dance that is the act of becoming.
Let there be light, and there was light. She
will put behind her the darkness of day eight.
Tomorrow is day nine. She was born to create.

We Have

David Groff

You and I, we have no West Egg mansion
shiny with money, where gangster Jay
with his fake fancy name and attitude,
his high-class crap and cunning guests,
waves his display like a trophy, a lure

across the bay for green-light Daisy,
who never truly lets him dock
until she breaks him of his having
with the stiletto of her carelessness,
then lifts her bubbly glass to toast
her own shrugging, shatterproof heart.

We have no swimming pool, no view,
no body of water to yearn across,
no square feet for even a tiny party,
no flutes in the Formica cabinet,
no dish unchipped, no spoon unbent,
no graying chair that will not give too much,
nothing on the walls but dust,

having nothing really present but our bed,
sprung, worn down, and weighted
with what is one-on-one and mostly true,
the two of us shabby and sleepy as
we swim to the dock we built and share
with all its splinters and ragged seams,

lying in our own green light.

The Long Marriage

Victoria Redel

Sometimes when we're at the table
with others, I can't concentrate

remembering the way your foot fit
down through your jeans, & poked

out tendoned and arched before
standing on the wood floor. Someone

is saying something about the siege
of our ragged world, the bully

on the playground, the correct
fruit to eat, but I'm too distracted

recalling your muscled arm reaching
through the t-shirt you wear like silk.

Our best friends are quick
to claim justice but who's to say

it happened just that way;
I only know I've been wrong

more days than right.
Let them keep insisting

they invented taboo,
but if the talk ever twists

to a pleasure investigation,
I won't tell who spilled the wine,

whose lilac heels were in whose hands?
Behind closed doors

everything's invention, ours
to carve on walls.

We both know the best place
for that gold dress

was floating to the ground.
It's practically an insurrection

each time jeans slide off
your hips, but who'd believe

the two of us are still up
for this much disruption.

I've been patient long enough,
it's past this old girl's hour,

let me take you out
into the undressed night,

let's shiver, let's shake.
I'll swipe my lips red,

& drag you off to bed.

I Revert to a Familiar Theme: You

Betsy Sholl

in the sweater I didn't keep because
it wasn't you and made me shiver—

empty sleeves, limp, like the ghost of you—
you in the yellow windbreaker I sent

to Goodwill, which every biker in town
must have bought, so now each one passing

for a moment might be, then isn't you.
It takes my breath away, the almost you

peddling up the street, coming close,
then when our eyes meet, a stranger.

So many men almost and never you—
it's always *almost* now. And didn't you

shake your head whenever I said *always*
or *never,* as if trying to teach me

how to live in the almost, the not-quite,
the sad after of you in the doorway,

grinning, green helmet in your hand, kisses
in your eyes before our lips touch, you

here and not here, me with and without
you, my spirit-husband now.

Ghost Gear

Rae Armantrout

We're on auto-haunt now.
Ghost gear in the oceans;

plastic gowns
from Starbucks
on their way to the landfills

to get cozy with
generations

of outdated war toys.

•

You love this
automated grief,

running beside or
even over yours

like water
through a stick dam.

•

If a baby can make
the mobile spin,

see the parade of animals,

she’ll tug the string again.

Earth Too

Elizabeth Scanlon

I said the wrong thing
and now there's a change in voltage,

a shift, a repeat, hey spaceman—
do you know the beginning from the end?

We lose our way without gravity
even though we want to defy it

under this moon, this moon under which
I'm not sorry to have found my way to you

despite our orbits not aligning and is it
witchcraft or science that says

the unknowable is at the core of everything?
Is it [gremlins lurking] hard to accept

that space isn't a home even though
we're all in it?

You're a logic hazard and I'm Max Headroom,
anachronistic, asynchronous,

stylish but silly, I could go on qualifying
and never win, but I'll run,

I'll play it back, I'm looping
and soaring and

not sorry at all.

Entanglement

Oluwaseun Olayiwola

No one in the world
can take the world.
Daytime &—the permanent

gathering on us, tacked
like lubricant, whole
globules, as though he & I

had not danced through
time's aria of facts
& become intransigent.

Face it: touch
is addiction
to visitors, darkened blue, doomed

eras that began ending
for which we stood
fatigued of—desire's

two left feet
stomping out sternums
that these endorphins

rushing like diary entries
in their blunt thousands, would,
ultimately, do *what*

& to whom? Un-
hitch? Unengage?
The music, the music & we,

inside it,
assumed as choreography
instead of capable.

Duet

Andrea Cohen

What you heard was not a knock-
knock joke. That hammering that
came down hard (spoiler alert)
was my heart—live and pre-

recorded—a sort of duet of me
and me, stereo me and feast
day me, cornucopia of me and
me and how could you not know

that the backbeat of a heart
is not the same as backup
singers? It's not the high-pitch
warning of a truck backing up.

Love is an action item, it's an action
thriller without stunt doubles. It's
me and me and this reverb repeating.
It's me slinging all the parts (harmony

and melody and what-have-you)
and come to think of it, why is it
always me singing all the questions?
Inside the light and dark? Aren't

you a little bit curious? Don't you
want to go out—on a limb/with

a bang, maybe take a crash
course in thoracic cavities?

Imagine bringing a battered
thing back to life. It's called
love, babe, it's called what sane
and crazy people do. Cue the truth:

I can put one cliché in front of another,
but I can't make you a surgeon or
nurse's assistant. This isn't Marcus
Welby (look it up). A stopped

heart is a sad song and
anyone will tell you (call
the time) how sad
songs end.

Summer Lover

Ruben Quesada

Everything I say
We remain the same
For a man like you
I am silent. Remember
That summer
You danced
In your underwear
Sipped the setting sun
After a long, muggy day
Whispering in the dark
Making memories, kiss me
Marking my thigh like a slit—
What is going on?
I hear you say,
I will say I do.

Everything I say
My love. From this day on—
I hold my breath—
I was hung up; everyone knew.
I spent the night
Watched me on the sill
Smoked a joint
It was nothing
My hands sifting your hair
Letting my mouth wander
On my neck as the moon slips in
A sliver through the clouds.
My love, this does not matter.
Stay. Now it is you and me.
I do. I do.

Parking Lot Poem

Catherine Cohen

I want to burn a CD
& write your name on it in sharpie
I want to wear a dress so big I have to use a special door
a lot is going on with the moon right now
in case anyone wants an excuse for anything
Forgive me I'm emotional when it rains
& when it stops. I'm no better than a dog really—
sleeping in the sunlight, coming when I'm called
no one has ever told someone to leave and actually wanted them to do it

Anti-Sonnet

Mag Gabbert

There was a time when casting a spell meant heating up porcelain hearts until they exploded.

There was a tremor once that shook the church bells on the coast.

There was a time when wooden instruments were strung with silk, hair, vines, or guts. When those were fragile, not wrapped in metal.

There was a belief that dropping a pair of scissors caused bad luck.

There were times when I just kept talking after the line went dead, unaware that we'd lost our connection.

There was a time when whole beds touched by fever were burned.

There was a month when people gave away all of their belongings and stood reading Bibles in Times Square, waiting for rapture. No one called them up.

There was a time when I thought I knew the relationship between these facts. But they don't have a relationship.

Exit Plans

Joan Kwon Glass

My ex-mother-in-law hates my guts.
I still have the cooking pot she gave us
as a wedding gift. It has lasted longer
than both of my marriages, & this fact
is definitely not lost on me. I use it
now to make hard-boiled eggs,
until my kitchen smells like death.
I bury grudges in cookie jars
& beneath floorboards the way
my grandmother stashed cash
from her husband, the way some men
stow side chicks. The only thing more
human than wanting to believe in love,
is having a secret exit plan.
At some point, don't all of us hope
for a way out of whatever we've chosen?
Near the end of my first marriage,
I caught my husband in a lie so elaborate,
so astonishing, that my shock gave way
to reverence. It's impossible to know
how far we can go until we arrive.

Homeland

Tomás Q. Morín

Read the minutes, not the room.

Or my knuckles
if you prefer,

stacked like five jars of honey
packed in straw
in a funny film about love.

The real joke is I'm the understudy
in my own life,

waiting for a sign,
for you to walk in through a side door

wearing this crown
of hope.

My Solitary Buckle of Night

Lauren Camp

On exhibit in a dirty city my mind
rhythms like wrens. Years later,
I can build from inner memory more hints.
The moon plunking down and wings quipped across,
fattened for flight. Or the night on some dusted slope
where sodden eagles turn circles like careening sculpture.
The night looking into a mirror
and finding my own disappearance.
Another on a wet makeshift balcony
where clouds dodged even my longing.
A night of any departure
while others fix to their daily mimic:
a neighbor's eager mower gorging a yard,
the steady repeat of shuffled moths,
idle roses ripening hope into sugar.
I couldn't stay in the room of
or the room of. No more typical sources.
I think through the familiar apologies I gave.
Guttural language at outermost branches.
I drove to a valley of decomposing animals
and saw it as paradise. My handprints on dust.
My origin had a scent that seemed meaning.
My room was wood and held
unmistakable corners. The future was home and the past
sealed together. The creases had already happened.
When I took my name to a new side
of some other bed as a mercy, I kept

such pleasure. I needed. I didn’t
stay. Hills and fluid motion. Harbors and final confession.
Clear water garlands. What I shouldn’t have done
I also did. Here now is a view and screen door
where old oceans lower to another end.
You don’t need to tell me how lucky I am.
Worn gasket and ruined suspension
which I drive as parallel ridgetops twist into truth.
Midnight, nothing to lean against.
Every space is a guest house. I was always going
to forget, and then I was inside it: the whirr.
Don’t make me say, Wish
you were here.

Remembered

Veneto, Summer 2004

Stacy Pratt

In between deployments,
we went to Jesolo.

My god, the Adriatic Sea
was so very cold.

You weren't heroes yet.
Just young

and your bodies so delicate
under the kind old sun.

I remember thinking,
"God forbid, if something should happen…"

Well, it did.

But you're more than our loss,
and more than your death,

more than history records,
more than history forgets,

more than your names
etched into stone—

You’re us,
and the sea,
and the sun,

remembered.

Eternal

Kai Coggin

I will hear you in every sound,
walk with you in every step because you kissed
the soles of my feet, and I've been floating with you ever since.
You need not tell me how to remember you when you go—
I will know you are still here in another form, my love.

Every seed we've planted into this soil
will sing of your wild colors in bloom,
will hail your fruiting bodies into the network
of our quiet piece of earth,
our quiet peace
of earth
we built here together all these years,
have no fear, my darling, I will feel you.

I won't have to look for you, I will know.
I won't have to ask you, baby, where did you go?

Your soft body has been my temple,
your mouth, the Mecca I journeyed to in the dark.
I never knew I was God herself, until I was in your arms, and you were God too,
how I see the divine in every line I write
because it rings of our love, it chimes through space and time
the shrine I have made to your hands, your hips, your lips.

This hallowed birdsong echoing in our trees,
the chorus of stars pulsing through milky firmament,

sun rising on the eastern ridge of your collarbone—yes
I know morning will come,
I know mourning will come, but for now
I pray to our fierce and tender light,
I bow to the sound of your skin on my skin,
your steeple heart still whole and beating beside mine,
synchronized drums slow dancing through time,
you—still here in my arms, sweet woman,
beautiful wife. Take my life
and know
these precious days will live forever.

I won't have to look for you, I will know.
I won't have to ask you, baby, where did you go?

Midnight Ruby

Ellen Bass

Happiness writes in white ink on a white page, someone once said, so perhaps not even you will be able to read this. But I don't care. I'm remembering for the pleasure of remembering when you lived in a tent in a rhododendron forest.
A hundred thousand blossoms with names like Scintillation, Boule de Neige, Midnight Ruby, Honey Butter. You propped a propane stove on a milk crate, set a tiny table by the pallet on the floor. You ran extension cords from a pole in the parking lot so we had light. It was chilly, early spring. Not another soul for miles. We were so new that when you knelt behind me and kissed my neck as I was stirring a soup I was stunned. And there was a shower that took quarters and we divined how to slide a knife into the works so the silver rained back into our palms and we could stand in an endless extravagance of hot hot water, washing each other's hair, the slick curves of our bodies, tight with youth and desire. Only the owls heard our cries. Now we're old. I have to hold the railing to get up the stairs. But there's a bruise at the edge of my lip. Your teeth.
Last night.

After Is After (Everything Is Over)

Mary Jo Bang

After the fact—I wanna-wanna-wanna
—the indecisive mind—spinning like
a squirrel cage—the tracks like a ladder
lie in the grass—we stood alongside of
hope beyond hoping—they might take
us back—to the magic—poor tragic
Helen of Troy—to a place far away—
a petrified forest—which is to say—
I was moving away you were—staying
behind my mind—in the dark because
light never comes here except—in the
form of some slow-falling snow——|
Yeah, no. That's right, it was beautiful.

inside an integrated dreamlike state

avery r. young

it's middle of night before Grace becomes princess

She's sitting beside Baldwin on mourner's bench
His nose somewhere tween her neck & shoulder
Un-worried about knot or bark

He says *Gracie-Boo*
What is this divine smell
humming from your skin

Tickled
she says *Fleurissimo*
by Creed He asks her for name of the shop
she got it from

He wants to gift Rosa with it
So she can really light a bus up

Howling
Grace explains *No, Jimmy*
This is no product
Rainier commissioned this fragrance
especially For me

Paused by look on her friend's face
& then shift of his head
To himself
He wonders *He gives you his name*
&
what he wants you to smell like

But he says
Well
Let me scurry away
& find me a Prince

2

It's middle of night
Grace is to become Princess
in a matter of hours

Dandridge gifts her a handkerchief of indigo

Advises her dear friend
to pay no attention to the fact
that she or her him to be
may not know
each other
well

She says *As long*
as his eyes & mouth
say the same thing
to your heart

Gracie-Boo
Honeymoons are interviews
done naked

underneath stars

For a plain-text version of this image, go to this page.

Ballroom of Stars

Diane Ackerman

Here's to the moon's whisper
  (a silver breath
    on the cheek of night)
and the stars' laughter
  (silent bells
    in the cathedral of sky)

as we dance
  (a blushing rumba
    in a ballroom of stars)
you are the song
  (rain's melody
    on the tin roof of my heart)

your eyes are the ocean's
  (blue secret
    sighing to the shore)
your smile is a crescent of sun
  (burning through
    morning fog)

love is the ink
  (spilled across the pages
    of our woven stories)
and the crackling fire
  (in our dialect of bones)

in the garden of space-time
   (where moments bloom
      and wilt like wildflowers)
nonetheless we dance
   (through wave after wave
      of liquid midnight)

as shadows stretch like cats
   (then time yawns
      and stretches too)
and we slip through its fingers
   (like goblin-green leaves
      through the wind's clutches)

for in love we are infinite
   (for the briefest spell
      wild and boundless)
as the canopy of night
   (we are alchemists of paradox
      so fragile and fleeting)
yet with hearts of bottled lightning
   we are keepers of starlight

Who We Were

Nickole Brown

—St. Augustine Wild Reserve, Florida

Holy be the calligraphy, the calligraphy
of blood written in green, the smeared
hieroglyphics of thorax and leg and wing, a message
once thick across our windshields. Yes,

I mean what I say—*holy*—because
though the sticky script was gross
and made it hard to see, it was at least evidence
we were speeding our lives through others
still among us, still alive. And holy be

the lion, the lion with his mane blown back
by an industrial fan, the same fan that in that studio
makes a river of a gold dress, that conjures up a fantasy
breeze, brings to the screen the kind of weather
we barely remember now—predictable
skies we once flew across, believing they were ours.

Yes, holy be that tame lion. And holy that lion's lost
littermate, the cub once posed for tourist photos
found in a hotel bathtub, the half-starved mewling
rescued, now growing strong, pacing tight
this haven of concrete and chain link.

And holy be this sanctuary
and the many slaughtered

whose expired meat was donated to this place,
the truckload of flesh piled high,
the volunteers whose work is holy
suffering the heat, trashing
the spiced sausage and the too-far-gone,
sorting what cuts their charges can safely eat.
I stand and watch them peel back the unholy
plastic, cleave the thawing bodies
into bite-sized pieces for the lion's
holy mouth.

And holy be the children who follow the lion's keeper
between the enclosures, delighting the leopard's spots
called *rosettes,* delighting there is such a word as a *liger*
wrongly born of a lion and a tiger
and all 500 sterile pounds of her is right here,
sunning belly up, purring hard.

And holy when the children do as the keeper bids:
they throw back their heads and howl,
their high-pitched yips inciting
the timber wolves to echo back, a loneliness
answered by the captive others—
lions and tigers roaring low, jaguars chuffing,
even the hyenas doing their laughing hyena best—

all holy, holy, holy, all calling forth as one
with what wildness within them
is left. I stand at the gates and listen,

astounded and delighted, the children
at play at a sacred kind of play, unashamed
they too are animals.

I stand at the gates and listen,
astounded and a little sad, each beast
using their voice, the only thing
they can move beyond
the safe confines of their cage.

The choir of them carbonates,
plucks a note hidden
within my sacrum, that holiest of bones,
and the note rises up my spine to join
a wildness in me I did not know
existed. So, yes, I begin to howl
as well, and holy

the yawping chorus, all of us,
singing that same song we all sing
when we've loved and lost:

remember, remember, remember me,
remember who we were.

Later, I drive away. Inspired, exhausted,
I drive, desperate to get back
home, but no matter how fast I go,
the glass in front of me remains
clean—too clean—so clean
I can see much farther
than I'd ever want, much farther
than I ever wanted to see.

Friendship

Victoria Chang and Matthew Zapruder

The leaves said you were born.
Then the leaves said I was
born. Then my glittering suit

in the closet was complete.
Then your glittering suit was
complete. My suit walked into

the moonlight and sang numbers
to the glassy hills. Or sang to
numbers in glassy hills. Bodiless,

it could run faster without you.
But then it could only run toward
you. Each number had an echo or

three hundred thousand. The echo
said, *I know everything* or *it hurts to be
a lone silver flame.* On most nights,

I stand behind the bleachers,
break up with the moon and blame
it on the red bird. On my worst

nights, I blame it on you. It's difficult
to hear the silence that comes before
you leave again. Because you stole

the bird's song. The way your leaving
flickers like a celebrating light.
When you leave, I wonder,

What is the use of a song? Maybe
a song is the grief of your leaving.
The way a tupelo tree stands in

water with its sheen of friendship
and terza rima—the canopy,
trunk, and everything drowned.

Have you ever seen a tree die
right in front of you? I have.
It took a century. Almost as long as

it feels to watch a single green
leaf change to giddy red,
then a yellow that resounds

into the silence it made for itself,
like a clock. The best part of
friendship is how it's always

silent, like walking a path next
to the cold river for a thousand
years, keeping the great secret.

It All Comes Back to Me Now

Maya C. Popa

Dusk, the mountains mauve,
and the samphire trembles between stones,

and the voices of long-dead singers
croon through a hotel stereo.

Theirs is a wisdom suspended in feeling:
they are always at the beginning

without a watch and no place to be.
To them I say, it's ok to be half right

about what love means in the making
of a life. Not a trap, but a clearing.

Here I am, filled out by happiness
I could not otherwise have earned.

God forbid I hadn't taken every last wrong turn.

Moon and Earth

J. D. Isip

Where there is no atmosphere, the ground is unchanging.
Every footstep is forever. Every flag remains, a claim on time.
You did not hang it, you were the moon, the static surface
of falling, words and touches that move only the sea, and me,

down here on earth, in the future, looking up and looking back,
every moment of moonbeam and every wave remains, a claim
on when you were everything, you were the atmosphere, you
were the lunar pull, my floods and crashes were yours, all yours.

Worship was natural in the time before science and discovery.
Who would not bow to a heavenly body? But that was the past.
Now, with some will and zero gravity, I can board a shuttle,
pull up all the frozen flags, smooth the footprints, fight the urge

to pocket a rock, drop it. Take one final look, it's all a thirst,
a bone-white vacuum where the most promising view is earth,
the greens and blues, even the swirling whirlwind clouds, chaos
to clean any trace of moon, man, memory, the silent, false gods.

To the Bone

Matt Abbott

decades of enduring tunisian swelter
natural as seabirds floating on silence.
the flattened roof at hammamet airport:
merely a formality.

my english brow, firmly adapted
to decades of enduring drizzle.
no umbrella in my possession:
merely a shrug.

as we sashayed through arrivals in tandem,
the mammoth clouds were swollen.
a landscape utterly unprepared:
qallalin tiles, cracked by the sun.
no option but to surrender.
the burst came, and we were sodden.

all around us, they scurried for shelter.
our legs, shrink-wrapped in denim.
the airport roof, overwhelmed,
and in its absence,
the stars.

Close

Richard Siken

We lay in bed like astronauts falling. There was no down.
The whole room singing. I could say it
at the time. We sang along and then we found ourselves in silence
and the song went on
without us.
What was the first mistake? What should I do with all this light
inside my body? What should I do
with all this sound?
A barn dance, an icy road, a starry sky, a sudden glow—
we were fluent in the language of it.
You were the dream where I put my head at night, a dream of straw,
a place to land. We tried to ink it in the book. It didn't fit.
You were my best escape, my worst mistake. I didn't know it at the time.
The love, the love, the love, the love—
it carried us away,
pulled together but out of frame, the sky swept clean
so nothing got in the way.
My crooked voice. My heart of snow. What is that
sound? Who moved the lights?
The hand points. The head turns. The body shivers, affected
by its wounds. A million things uprooted in starlight.
No, I have to show you this.
There's no guessing at what comes next. What should we do
about the emptiness? No raised voices, no distractions.
Talking past each other, what did we really say?
My dreams are furious. They carry me away.
What do you want to be remembered for? A hand in the darkness?

A surplus of delight?
The false arrivals, the failed attempts. I still don't understand.
Who said we could live in endless possibility?
What makes a solid place? There's a door between us. I'll close it
from my side.

Final Straw

Kate Baer

When the time comes,
it will arrive quietly
and with no announcement.
You'll be sitting at your white desk
wanting everything;
and you will see with such precision,
how you've been hungry your whole life
and punished for it.
Cruelty dressed as morality.
12-year-olds only know
what's been pressed inside their palms.
To unclasp the stone.
To bite the hand that feeds you.
Love, you will cross a thousand oceans
for your own pleasure.
They'll say flotsam, but you'll know jetsam.
You have a love that lasts.
You have a love that lasts.

When You Rise from the Dead, I Drive You to the After Party

Melissa Studdard

For my favorite Swiftie, Carolyn

If someone tossed us the sun, we'd catch it in our halos without
getting burned. We're cleaning up

this constellation of fractured
anthems and interstellar dust, threading the debris we collect

into daisy garlands for stars and starfish and starlings. People
say we're good, but it's more like

we're fabulous, like crushed platinum
and amethyst planet-shaped paperweights

resting on poems scribbled by moth wings. We slide
from one side of infinity to the other

without messing up our hair. That's how
lovely we are. Like two

comets combing our own tails. We toss
bears to beehives without harming them, catch

falling snow without melting it. We're chill like
a bloom of moon jellyfish bluing the wash and drift

of warm, orbital waters. See this chillwave
ambience we're weaving

through the zodiac? We throw a stitch, and it loops back
around the celestial drama of this earth-sky

diorama. When we have bad days, we crack
them open to discover hope winking at us in the center. We float

over mud puddles, while people who wronged us
step into them. We can even catch meteors in our teeth

without breaking their streaks. That's how
good we've been. That's why we're on the top stair

of this universe, blowing kisses
to asteroids and astronauts. At least that's

what horoscopes predict the media will say
at the party I'm throwing in your honor.

They'll say that we know when
to blink and when to wink, when to take

the stage and when to step aside and let the cosmos
do its work. So, we hang out

in the audience, sharing our blessings. You say,
May you always find the songs you need to explain your own emotions.

I say, *May you go shopping for cleaning supplies*
but come home with poems.

For a plain-text version of this image, go to this page.

Auld Lang Syne

Kerry Beth Neville

Last page: no booze, glitter, midnight expectations,
morning regrets. No you rolling over me,
just my cocky, croaky, defiant warble
and the body's mortal matter-of-facts: already
three billion one hundred and fifty million heartbeats,
and now, one more: contract, relax.

An afternoon woods wander, soft path—new snow,
old leaves—and the dog—old dog, final dog—
tugs me forward, refuses his age, sniffs
for squirrel, gobbles a hard scat lump,
dives for a dark, stinky splotch, the universe underfoot.
Pity I can't bend over, drop to all fours,

nose to the earth. How much have I missed
in fixed perspective and orientation?
Hip and knee shift in and out of alignment.
A blue jay's sharp warning as it threads
through the pine trees' snow-tipped needles.
I once believed songs and sex, the sound of me

and the sound of you, our echo, would stave off
loneliness. Now? Toss it all into the fire.
Dark ash, my leavings. What surprises me?
How a morning cup of tea, final dog asleep at my feet,
teaspoon balanced on the saucer, and a book
opened on the table are holy and ambitious benedictions.

Don’t mistake this for resignation.
I hold fast to time—
the minute, the second. See? The hare stands
on its hindlegs in the snow, sentry and portent,
ears twitching, waiting for instinct—leap, bound,
jink in zigzag flight—whatever hares do.

    I follow instinct, too—the sun
    moves across the wintry hours,
    the long road. I am its shadow.

Of Flight

Ilya Kaminsky

This is not
an application for
gainful employment
at the Tortured Poets
Department

or an annual public
service announcement
that despite harsh
weather conditions
the soul exists.

This is not
a proclamation of the obvious, namely that pop
is the opposite
of poetry.

(Says this one deaf man. Bam.)

For a lyric
is a string tied to gears—to slow the clocks
in each
word, toward
the angle of what cannot be said.

Go now,
in sweetness. May

poetry find you, one day
and help you to empty the pockets of your mind.
May you find
—as one tortured poet knew—

that Icarus also flew.

In the Remodeled Vault of Eternity

Brenda Hillman

It's said not many people read poetry

(autocorrect makes *said* into *sad*)

It's sad so few people read poetry

That isn't even true
There are stashes of it in dead people's drawers

They were reading the kind of poetry you
don't really care for

Today desert doves are up early
gurgling Finches in affordable
condos of the palm
Bees with asterisks of pollen on their hind legs
in pockets called corbicula

Sparrows diving from cypresses over hornblende
a type of rock that looks like the mind

After the performance when nothing
mattered but adult disappointment when falling
over other people's egos then your own

you spent days complaining
to your love who is clever &
kind about incapacities caused

by emotion

Ants were dragging shadows 2/3 the size of
their bodies for a whole city block some were already
grooming their wounded in tunnels

Desert willows wept & dropped two-toned late spring blossoms

Kind comes from *gen* the same Sanskrit root as nature

You'd been thinking all your life about
women ancestors
All the shit they put up with
your grandmother Dickinson Millay Barbara Guest

Inanna the Babylonian goddess holding fiery
words in her skirt

Some great women poets aren't dead yet
Some mail notebooks with plenty of stamps
Some speak behind your back & aren't kind
No one can say what will last in any of it

Kind or clever clever & kind the device known
as chiasmus making crosses like plump doves
waddling over your parents' graves
with silverleaf nightshade nearby

New fathers pushing strollers on the street trying to
text with

one thumb The baby looks around mystified

It's hard to be kind to unkind but sensitive people

Remarks are not literature wrote Stein while making literature

My mind is being patient with my psyche
wrote your mother on a slip
of paper you found in a book of appliance instructions
she never used because she mostly fixed it herself

She never said it's hard to be a woman
She never said the word ego

No need to blame capitalism or
Deleuze or plastic straws She said poetry
will make sense in its own way

Poetry the fence lizard with extra blue on its throat

Poetry the gift you wait to open because like a birthday girl
you maintain magical hope

In the vault of eternity there is some remodeling
going on The roof is leaking

A little rain seeps in which is good
Your mother won't have to water the houseplants

Stars line the place wearing sweaters of fog

Words tagged in chalk & photons & spools
of fifties lipstick

Women keep fire in their skirts
The breath of the dead is the wind at your back

Maybe you & the unkind ones & the kind ones sit
together as in a sauna on your towels making small talk
about matter & anti-matter

Maybe you all lean against the same wall
where you each wrote something
that changed the wall Maybe just

lean back try to remember that

For a plain-text version of this image, go to this page.

And now from the distance of time

Jane Hirshfield

And now from the distance of time
when stories are over

one in a frame on a dresser
one left to remember

you left with nowhere to leave to
a world where nothing can vanish can vanish

from inside the trees or above them
the moon blameless as I was as you were

call it weather
call it something that lives outside measure

a lifetime apart a lifetime together
are neither forever nor never

a lifetime together a lifetime apart
one person turns into another

forgive past forgive future departure
a story continues beyond its erasure

we were two oars dividing one water
and time cannot sever

For Dr. Taylor A. Swift

A cento, in honor of "All Too Well"

FROM THE LATIN WORD FOR "patchwork," the cento (or collage poem) is a poetic form composed entirely of lines from poems by other poets. Early examples can be found in the work of Homer and Virgil.

In honor of Taylor Swift's ten-minute-thirteen-second masterpiece "All Too Well," I asked each contributing poet to listen to the song then give me a line from any of their poetry that came to them. It was magical to compile these lines and create this cento while I played "All Too Well"(ATWTMVTVFTVSGAVRALPS) (IYKYK) 🫶 on repeat. A big thank-you to all the poets who so kindly contributed a line for the cento.

Cento for Taylor Swift, in Honor of "All Too Well"

Diane Seuss and Kristie Frederick Daugherty

My name is Sweetheart, I said, waking on the gurney.
What former creature was I before the ache?

The scratches on the wood are not my scars.
This is the dirt-lavishing poetics at hand—as if

they were sonnets, as if they were stars.
Art and Life must share a room;

Art tells Life to stop being such a baby.
Why do we have so many words for parties?

I have blisters on my feet from dancing alone
with your ghost.

•

I am hiding behind this language: (the woman
put down her shield/and took out her heart).

Love is only love if it makes you bleed.
I begin to believe the only sin is distance, refusal,

and I keep trying not to look in the rearview mirror.
All night I felt fine crystals, like rising up through a hailstorm.

The rain froze a mosaic, angry, fragmented
second sky the snow is working hard to cover now.

What have I to say of the savagery and tenderness of love?
i be luvin u so hard my skin scripts yo name.

•

My heart, a grave, below my gaze.
All we want is to succumb to a single kiss

that will contain us like a marathon with no finish line.
To look up to see you—but you're in my mind now.

I look back to the past all the time.
It is nearly impossible to think about this.

Have you seen the headlines?
The sun never showed today.

The songbirds are declining like credit cards.
I am so jealous of the wolf. Our dark sides are compatible.

•

We're emailing to ask whose turn it is,
and the wolves are gathering in the ditches.

The night before the full moon,
the moon seems full.

I have always loved the word guitar.
All those years of worry when I should have chosen wonder.

Forgive me for rushing. I'm trying to pretend I don't dream
of pirouetting into enemy fire. Into the opening

you & I were thrown, who we once were nevermore
fate's patterned belongings.

•

I'm no longer attracted to broken things.
In the problem of the moonlight, she, dropped

along the trench by dying stars.
Mistress of my own mind, if you know what I mean.

To stave off trouble, the old blues men are singing a song of water.
Blue barren beloved Brooklyn, give me your bridge.

Now the skyline is inside me like a door
leading to someone else's bedroom.

Still smelling your burgundy velvet scarf,
call it crimson, cardinal, cinnamon.

•

Once I wore a dress liquid as vodka.

If I could I would erase all of your memories of my naked flesh.

In the way that most of the wind caresses the clothes on the line:
blow ghosts you unravel. The ghosts swarm; they speak

as one person. I'll be the sound of the lid banging down,
sample pots in turquoise and magenta. Jailer's gift.

Weep, weep, weep for the loss and the hurt,
if I'm never allowed to fall out of your good graces,

if I never get to see you one post-apocalyptic morning
with smoke in your eyes, between the deluge of the day to day.

•

The worst thing about loss is what you no longer hear,
sounds that have become familiar, gone:

coffee grinding in the morning—gone.
We're the church mouse you scorched with a match,

a snapshot which yellows in another family's scrapbook,
how my reflection in our photograph seemed to age me

alongside you. As if you were the small room closed in glass,
beach glass past, tumbled smooth from waves.

I'm tangled in the fringes.
Remember, instead, the love.

•

The blackbird listens with its black heart.
I should have known how this would end—

the movie of our past unspooling. We danced
on a collapsing star. Tossing our shirts into a heap

like used tissues, ligament pulls hard on phantom bone.
Here with your palms over my palms, a body teetering

between infatuation and ruin: rock and bone and me.
Now there will only ever be multiples of me.

I'm bursting with femaleness like a decapitated saint
whose throat spews light the color of straw.

•

Every poem I write is made redundant by the fact of your hands.
I'm trying to draw a woman's heartbeat, not a heart—

the sensation of being strangled; not the hands around my neck.
Sometimes I can feel myself disappear slowly, like an old flame,

even though I still reach across the dark. I once believed
the horse hooves in the distance were the rocks telling the ocean

about water. No reason to lie to you, I have been dying since we met.
Scalpel eyes—flayed me clean as an x-ray, a cartoon.

The last time we spoke, I said I love you twice.
Once, because I do; again, to see if you did too.

•

I said I wouldn't, dammit: No tears. I'm stone. I'm flesh.
Some bruises flower—spread like steam on the mirror,

the note written in red lipstick, blurring all beauty.
Easy enough to wipe away; hard to forget.

If that's a bitter pill, well, swill, swallow.
How can we blame our mothers for drinking?

Temporary madness that we mangle, then reshape.
I told the truth until I was blue in the face. No,

the drink isn't lying to you. Fact is, you're my cake
behind glass, I am the food of love; eat your heart out.

•

I think about all my reframing,
all my scaffolding and my lexiconic leaps. What are they for?

To establish this monstrosity? To establish my monstrosity?
There is too much wisdom—too much damage.

We gloss over the fable where the girl falls
into an endless sleep.

If I were a girl, I would be a girl no man can answer or buy.
Read the minutes. The future holds what hands release.

I am done telling the kinder story. Pity is the rage of the lazy.
I could sing to you something true, but darling I'm going to scream.

•

I learned all the music made before I was born.
Leaves scorch the sky in handshapes.

The voice starts to materially chip through some fault
in the light—I will follow it all the way. We are, all of us,

floating out to the sea, in the glistening future,
in a distant autumn, in the coldest city. The way water

can take us like a Taylor Swift song, as full as the sea
receding, faithful and deadly, along.

Bless who we were then.
Bless who we still are.

•

I have blisters on my feet from dancing alone with your ghost.

What have I to say of the savagery and tenderness of love?

The songbirds are declining like credit cards.

Who we once were nevermore fate's patterned belongings.

Still smelling your burgundy velvet scarf, call it crimson, cardinal, cinnamon.

If I never get to see you one post-apocalyptic morning,

remember, instead, the love,

whose throat spews light the color of straw.

The last time we spoke, I said I love you twice.

I am the food of love; eat your heart out.

I am done telling the kinder story. Pity is the rage of the lazy.

Bless who we were then.

Bless who we still are.

Outros

On Responding to Taylor's Songs

On Writing "The Lucky One" *from Diane Seuss*

Lyric empathy is what it took. I listened to my song ten, twenty times. *My* song—I felt some identification with it, even ownership—but given my generational and post-romance proclivities, I struggled to find my way in. I needed to remember my way back to the kind of love that can nearly annihilate, and how living itself, after near-annihilation, let alone aspiring, creating, performing oneself, is a revolution. Swift's own images were my portals into an actual *her*—the woman behind the icon, the girl behind the woman—just as Frank O'Hara's diction, and Keats's rhapsodic yearning, brought me into imaginative contact with them. The *they* behind the Them. The swift within the Swift. The lips beneath the lipstick. Her tropes, and mine (and Plath's, and Emily Dickinson's), braided beyond time, via rhyme.

Writing About My Song *from Naomi Shihab Nye*

Listening to music is the easiest journey we can take, involving no tickets, the least baggage. I need it when I drive and during Texas summers. I need it when I cook. People ask if I listen to podcasts. No, I listen to music.

Writing in response to Taylor Swift's song was the most pleasurable trip I've had in a while. Her song took me backward and forward, linking a few elements I might never have connected—a teen memory (high school English class) and my current grief (too many deaths of loved ones in quick succession). This stun-gun era has been overlaid by the genocide of innocent people I also think of as my own —Gazans, and Israelis, too. Innocent people, children. They're all mine, all ours.

It's as if the better instincts of human beings have been betrayed. Every religion, every moral or ethical code, every good intention / fizz.

How do we put anything together? Is it possible to renovate our personal sense of wreckage to be any person we ever tried to be? Taylor helps me do that. She often does. This past sad Christmas, all I wanted to do was watch her Eras tour for three hours and travel out of my body. My assigned song in this project gave me a gift of our son I hadn't anticipated. He often listened to the same song on repeat for days. Ritual helps us survive.

Two Selves Breaking Open *from Jane Hirshfield*

My first Taylor Swift was a Japanese poet who lived in what is now Kyoto, 1,200 years ago, Ono no Komachi. She wrote in one *tanka,* the five-line poetic form of her era:

How invisibly
it changes color
in this world,
the flower
of the human heart.

And this:

I thought to pick
the flower of forgetting
for myself,
but I found it
already growing in his heart.

Another woman poet of that time and place—the only golden age of world literature created by women writers—was Izumi Shikibu, who wrote, around the year 1000:

Remembering you…

the fireflies of this marsh
seem like sparks
that rise
from my body's longing.

Even earlier, this fragment from the Greek songwriter-poet Sappho, who wrote around 600 BCE:

A strong wind
thrashing the branches of a strong oak—
like that,
love shook my heart.

In every language, the word that means "poem" first meant "song."

These poems read across time, across distance, across cultures, held my own life, my own shaken heart. Met at eighteen, in translation, they showed me I wasn't alone in love's thrashings and breakings open. They showed also that words could hold the breaking open, could hold me.

The Taylor Swift song Kristie Daugherty chose for me to respond to brought the same shock of meeting yourself suddenly inside a mirror: My own story was in hers, almost exactly. With one difference—Swift's song imagines a future self, while I listened with both her song's selves, present and future. I knew how my story had turned out, and I wrote my response from inside two time states at once—the self of first love that the song plunged me back into, and the self who has lived past love's changing into something else.

Both selves kept breaking open. Life does that. Songs do that. The gift of songs and poems and stories is that they help you know that you *want* even what you write or sing to live past and survive—the weeping, the anger, the longing, the bewilderment, the shaking, the having, the losing. That you want your life in all its rising and falling, its words, notes, and pauses that hold who you were and will be. The song I was given carries Taylor Swift's signature knowledge: that a person can sing their life into becoming their life. Hearing the song, writing the poem, was like watching your shadow walk in front of your walking. The light behind you lets you see both yourself as you are and where you are going.

In the Skin *from James Allen Hall*

Fifth period, Mrs. Smith's English class, the a/c not working in the trailer: It's high school in Florida in the fall, and we're sweating through the analysis of a poem. Mrs. Smith says, "Look there, in the body of the poem, and…" And what happens is I think for the first time about a poem having a real body. Maybe it's the heat, maybe I'm hallucinating, but I can feel inside of it: how the fish's "gills, fresh and crisp with blood," are breathing in the wrong way, breathing in "the terrible oxygen" that is the air the speaker draws. There are two lives in that poem, two atmospheres, two consciousnesses.

I wrote a poem for *Invisible Strings* thinking about the atmosphere of the song and my atmosphere listening to the album on which it was released. On my daily commute, I played the song over and over for weeks—sometimes listening to other renditions Taylor (re)recorded, including acoustic, concert, and mash-up versions, until the song became a kind of doorway into the air I could breathe in. Song is just another kind of breathing, breath pushing against being held, being penned in. Listening this way is, like poetry, perpetual entering.

Once inside the body, in the skin of song, there is no chance you reenter yours the same again.

The Rhododendron Forest *from Ellen Bass*

I've been trying to write about the beginning of the love affair with my wife for as long as we've been together—forty-three years—and the poems always failed. But as I listened to "my" Taylor Swift song over and over, I began to be able to touch back to the thrill and exuberance of young love.

Still, the poem didn't come easy. I had to meander over many pages. I wrote about strewing rose petals in her bath. I wrote about how I'd thought we were setting off for a life I could envision, how I never imagined it would be more like the uncharted seas of medieval maps where cartographers wrote *here be dragons.* I wrote about a yellow plastic horse that still stands in our yard, having been ridden by our children and now grandchildren. And by then I knew I had to pull myself together and focus! I went back to the very beginning and writing this poem became a joy.

Taylor Swift made what had been impossible possible. We weren't picture-takers in those days, so there's no photo of that rhododendron forest. Now there is.

The Bird Trick *from Richard Siken*

I got my song. I played it on repeat. I got the sound in my head and found the shape in the music. Really, I'm just a little guy, so I try to make as much noise as I can. Oh, my poems can be so thick. My ex-friend Chris is a singer-songwriter. We don't talk anymore. We used to compare notes. I like his lyrics better than my poems. He leaves room for the music. I fill everything up with my own stupid voice until I can barely breathe. Oh well. Chris has a girlfriend who plays the piano. Chris has a girlfriend because he leaves room for the music. I fill everything up with my own stupid voice until I wear myself out and fall asleep alone. Chris used to say you have to match their speed. It was the Bird Trick. (There was also the Bear Trick, the Kitten Trick, and the Rope Trick, which he learned in a dream.) You have to fly along next to them at the same speed so they can understand you. I am not a singer, but I was in choir in junior high. The thing I liked the most was how the songs made us breathe together. It works like that. I took my song and put it on repeat. I flew alongside it until I could really hear it. I left room for the music. This time I left room for the music. Maybe there will be music. Sometimes there is suddenly music. You have to match their speed, he used to say. Who knows? Maybe he still says it.

Death's Breakup with Me *from Molly Peacock*

Death can be like a breakup. Three years ago, I lost my husband to melanoma. We'd known each other since our first date at sixteen—and at nineteen we were each other's first big split-up. We didn't marry till we were forty-five. But because our marriage began as a teen romance, the ghost of that early breakup haunted his death. Processing his loss has been a planet-size task for me. In the song I chose for this anthology, the person who was broken up with is getting over it. Her shock and grief have recombined into a new strength. This is my case, too. Though my love goes on, it doesn't go on in wounded mourning. That's why, when my late husband's friend approached me, expecting my face to mirror his own still-fresh unprocessed grief, I couldn't do it. My face was clear, happy, and I was fine with my anger over death's breakup with me. When Taylor sings about being smoothed over, it reminds me of his friend trying to smooth me back into a new widow's tears. Three years ago, I cried for twenty-eight days after Mike died. It was both a full moon cycle *and* the number of years we were married! On the twenty-ninth

day I woke up, dry-eyed. That was the start of knowing it was over. My poem tries to absorb the rhythms and rhymes of Taylor's song, but to recombine them with my own, loosely using some of the patterns of a sonnet. I hope the poem reinforces "the strange, bright openness" of getting better. Thank you, Taylor Swift. And thank you, Kristie Daugherty, for creating this anthology.

On Friendship *from Victoria Chang and Matthew Zapruder*

MATTHEW: Why did you want to collaborate on a poem?

VICTORIA: One of my favorite parts of *Miss Americana* was when we got a window into Taylor Swift's songwriting process. I loved watching her work with producer Joel Little on "ME!" and watching them riffing off of each other while working on the song. Collaboration seems so important to Swift's musical journey, and I also love artistic collaborations with composers, artists, and other writers, so I thought it would be fun to honor Swift's collaborative process by writing our poem together. How about you?

MATTHEW: I was sure I would be less interesting on my own than writing with you. When I sent that first line, what did you think?

VICTORIA: I thought your first line, "The leaves said you were born," was so weird and interesting. It was capacious enough to give me some ideas on how to move forward. It was a generous line. I was also interested in the "you." Your line also gave me permission to be strange. What were you thinking about when I sent you a line back ("Then the suit in the closet / was complete").

MATTHEW: I was thinking, this is great. I would never have written that line in a million years. And now I have to deal with it! I just kind of took it literally and started imagining one of those cool suits that country stars wear, called Nudie Suits, after Nudie Cohn, the guy who made them for Elvis, Gram Parsons, Hank Williams, and others. Her erstwhile country origins put her in the geography of those suits. Then you kept going!

VICTORIA: I love that—I had no idea! After that, we kept on going back and forth until we had a draft. And then I felt like we were done. But I loved when you kept pushing us to revise the poem more and to make it stronger. How did you or do you know when a poem isn't finished yet?

MATTHEW: I just felt like the poem hadn't found its subject yet. It looked like a poem and did stuff a poem does, but it felt…negligible. I knew we could do better.

Plus I was still having fun! Were you annoyed at me when I said I thought it wasn't done? It was a little hard to push back!

VICTORIA: Honestly, I was being lazy and felt it was good enough. We didn't have a title yet either. But in retrospect, you not feeling like it was finished yet pushed me more. And that's what I love about collaboration. It was at that point, we also talked about how Taylor Swift's lyrics were about friendship and that's what I was writing toward. Were you writing toward that too?

MATTHEW: I was thinking about it the whole time, because that's what the song is about, one friend leaving another behind. I guess collaborating is the opposite of that! Anyway I think we might have been texting about that idea, and I said no we're not done and added some lines, but it wasn't right yet. Then you thought of the title and took it from a bunch of lines into something that had a center of gravity (friendship) while still keeping it very loose. And adding the conversation and repeating, echoing voice in the beginning, which is absolutely key to the poem. To me that is the magic moment of a poem, when it finds that space of "aboutness," in its subject but equally in its form and rhythm and song, that keeps the poem together, without being overly controlling. Just as the best friendships, too, give meaning to life without dominating it.

Original Draft

The leaves said you were born.
Then the suit in the closet
was complete. It walked
glittering into the moonlight and sang
numbers to the glassy hills.
Bodiless, it could run faster
and each number had an echo.
The echo said, I know.
It's difficult to hear
the silence that comes before
you leave. The way your leaving
flickers like a celebrating light
every time my deferred self
waits here, in a giddy
despair wondering, what

is the use of songs? Maybe a song is
the grief of your leaving.
The way a Tupelo tree stands
in water with its sheen of
knowledge and terza rima,
the canopy, trunk, and everything
drowned. Have you ever seen
a tree die right in front of you?
I have. It took a century.
Almost as long as it feels
to watch a single green
leaf change to giddy red
then a yellow that resounds
into the silence it made
for itself, like a clock.

The Gift *from Victoria Redel*

When I was a kid, I loved to play the same song over and over and over, lifting the record player's arm to settle it down on the vinyl's first beats or strums of whatever was my new favorite song that week or month. The endless repetition drove my family crazy. This invitation to write in response to an assigned Taylor Swift song brought me back to that pleasure as I turned up the volume and listened to the song again and again. Oh, to lose oneself to something larger and in that abandonment to find oneself in a deeper and truer place! Isn't that the great mystery and delight in poetry and music, in dance and painting? But in the days before I wrote my poem, it had been impossible to lose myself—the attentions of the world so insistent and grave. Taylor Swift's song was a gift I needed.

From the very first time I blasted Taylor singing this song, I knew I wanted to celebrate the life force, the wild erotic that endures. If Taylor's song was a present for me, I wanted to make her a gift—a promise that passionate intensity needn't burn out with age. It's there for the claiming. That touch continues to blaze and heal. With each draft of the poem, I pushed myself to go further, playing with Swift's imagery and rhythms, to revel in ecstatic intimacy, in the enduring beautiful private that can occur between people.

On Writing "You're So Gross and I Love You" *from Christopher Citro*

date: a year ago
location: our cozy home
action: While chewing dinner, my girlfriend, Sarah, turns to me and says, "Do you like seafood?" then opens her mouth in the middle of chewing. No one's done that to me since high school. "Have I told you lately that you're the perfect woman?"

date: a couple months ago
location: a neighborhood street
action: "Play it again," says Sarah, on the day I learn which song is "mine" for this anthology. People pass with their dogs, one of which has wheels for back legs. We turn to start ambling up a hill. "Play it again," and I hold out my phone between us as we glide through evening shadows lengthening out from under maple trees. Back home that night, Sarah picks out the tune on her piano, improvising on it. She says it reminds her of Pachelbel's Canon, how the chord progression expresses a longing for resolution, how the music leaps, how it's crunchy. I decide my poem should leap, that it should be crunchy, and that I will stress words with long *e* sounds, so they might express the sound of longing, the way we keen for what we desire.

date: weeks later
location: my couch
action: I'm living inside "my" song, its themes. Sleeping and waking up. Speaking our dreams to each other. Understanding each other. Laughing together. Remembering waiting for my heart to be recognized. With Swift's song pouring from the stereo on repeat, I pick up my pen to write my poem.

From Out of a Crow-Wing Dark *from Robin Behn*

Before I was a writer, I was a musician and I still am. To me, it's not really two different endeavors. When I write poems, I hear sounds and rhythms in my head before words surface through them. "My" song (lucky me!) is sumptuous and surprising in its harmonies and lyrics. It creates patterns and breaks the patterns

down, morphing and flashing from one metaphor to the next to the next, repeating, not quite repeating. And this song is in me, for I've listened to it on repeat in my earbuds on long walks or on the elliptical at the gym, mesmerized, matching its pace. A mantra of longing and resilience, the song has rearranged my molecules. I wait and the poem finally starts to surface through the song-sound as a tonal shape, a rhythmic sequencing, a structure, a sound-sense trajectory from something to something. By now, the song has also delivered me unto memories mixed with imaginings from my earliest loves to my adult loves, each whittled down to their snapshot essences in a pileup of clipped sounds. The glad task, then, is to use the song's permission to finally be able to utter the list of hurtful instances (metaphoric consistency be damned!) until the poem turns, like the song, toward a hopefulness. It is a journey from a tentative "How can I (possibly) tell you?" to an imperative "Tell me…" An arrival into self and voice. An accounting of failed longings and of finally getting what you long for.

Twinkling Is Just an Effect *from Jeannine Ouellette*

We say, *this will be over in a heartbeat,* but we don't feel that heartbeat-sized truth until something vanishes, and its absence roots itself into the cavities of our bones, where the marrow makes and remakes our blood. We say, *our bones are made of stars,* but this is mostly an abstraction until we face our own death, or possibly the death of a true beloved—or, if we are very lucky, the birth of a child. We say things are *blinding,* but we don't remember what it means to be blind until we can no longer see whatever blinded us. We say stars *twinkle,* but they only appear to twinkle in the night sky when viewed from the surface of Earth—twinkling is an effect from the atmosphere. We call our children our children, but Kahlil Gibran warned otherwise more than one hundred years ago in his poem "On Children," in which he said (in part):

> *Your children are not your children.*
> *They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.*
> *They come through you but not from you,*
> *And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.*

We say, *life is full of coincidences,* but we mean invisible strings. I had never heard my song until Kristie assigned it to me. But the shape of my song was inside me all along, just like the leftover light from my firstborn's birth. I almost never watch the Grammys, but when Taylor Swift announced her *Tortured Poets Department* album that night in February, inspiring Kristie to create this anthology, I was watching, too, because my granddaughter and her parents were visiting in the dead center of my eight-week writing retreat on the Gulf of Mexico. Every morning on the Gulf was a spectacle, with the sun rising over St. Vincent Island and pods of dolphins swimming in the shallows outside our window. My part in this daily drama was to read Gibran's "On Children" aloud to my painter husband, after which he would read Rumi's "The Guest House" to me. We were working on our bone marrow. Meanwhile, our youngest child was, during this oceanic time, agreeing to adopt the little boy who had come into their life—our lives—through foster care two years earlier. Now this child is officially our grandson, even though *our children are not our children,* and *this being human is a guest house,* and things are only ever fleeting and infinite at once.

What strange magic to have Taylor Swift sing such holy truth to me, and to try to sing it back.

The Beach *from Stacy Pratt*

In 2003, I married an American paratrooper and moved to Vicenza, Italy, where he was stationed with the 173rd Airborne. We married in the middle of his first Iraq deployment while he was home on convalescent leave after being wounded in an ambush. In the year between that deployment and the next one to Afghanistan, we tried to make the most of our time together in Italy.

When I hear the song given to me, I remember a specific weekend at the beach in Jesolo, where we went with several soldiers and their wives. We were twenty-seven, the eldest of the group, and the youngest soldiers with us were nineteen. I remember sitting on the beach, watching everyone horsing around in the Adriatic Sea, laughing like we hadn't just gone through an unbelievably traumatic year of war and were heading for another. I memorized that moment, knowing I might need it someday.

My husband, Joseph, returned from that and all his other deployments, but not all of our friends did. Some were lost not during the war but because of it. PFC

Jacob Fletcher, SGT Joseph Minucci, SSG Michael Schafer, MSG Gregory Trent, SSG Larry Rougle, 1LT Christopher Holbrook, SPC Aarron Boozer.

I Have to Believe It's Beautiful: On Writing "Grief Observatory" *from Topaz Winters*

Last year, I lost three close friends to suicide over a six-month period during which I too grew acutely suicidal. In this fog of grief, I packed my life into cardboard boxes and impulsively moved across the world with a single suitcase to a city I first fell in love with in a Taylor Swift song. Waking up in an empty studio apartment in New York, every day became a negotiation with absence, as I built a life around what was purportedly gone yet still haunted implacably, unbearably.

My song, like the process of writing "Grief Observatory," is a reckoning with the things we beg to leave, even as we refuse to let them go. Months before I moved to New York, I had gone no-contact with the woman I loved. Letting her back in was a last-ditch act of impossible trust. Forgiveness is like grief in that way: a process of unthinkable and unending faith, slow and grudging after the gunshot-shatter of initial loss. I turned to Swift to ground me in a world of beloveds gone and reborn, documenting artifacts of my dead friends and of a love at once familiar and brand-new, as Swift does in my song: the smell of garlic, burn marks on my stove, a late-night conversation about the aurora borealis, burgundy lipstick nestled in a sock drawer. What else is grief except a listening to the ghosts still walking? What else is love except a showing up despite, because, around, and anyway?

Kristie's Playlist

- **Matt Abbott**: *Two Little Ducks* (Verve Poetry Press)
- **Diane Ackerman**: *I Praise My Destroyer* (Random House)
- **Paige Ackerson-Kiely**: *Dolefully, a Rampart Stands* (Penguin Books)
- **Kim Addonizio**: *Exit Opera* (W. W. Norton)
- **Kelli Russell Agodon**: *Dialogues with Rising Tides* (Copper Canyon Press)
- **Tommy Archuleta**: *Susto* (The Center for Literary Publishing)
- **Rae Armantrout**: *Go Figure* (Wesleyan University Press)
- **Subhaga Crystal Bacon**: *Transitory* (BOA Editions)
- **Kate Baer**: *What Kind of Woman* (Harper Perennial)
- **Mary Jo Bang**: *A Film in Which I Play Everyone* (Graywolf Press)
- **Samiya Bashir**: *Field Theories* (Nightboat Books)
- **Ellen Bass**: *Indigo* (Copper Canyon Press)
- **Robin Behn**: *Horizon Note* (University of Wisconsin Press)
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- **Nina Mingya Powles**: *Magnolia* (Tin House)
- **Stacy Pratt**: find her work at *First American Art* magazine
- **Ruben Quesada**: *Brutal Companion* (Barrow Street Press)
- **Dean Rader**: *Self-Portrait as Wikipedia Entry* (Copper Canyon Press)
- **Victoria Redel**: *Paradise* (Four Way Books)
- **Susan Rich**: *Blue Atlas* (Red Hen Press)
- **Natasha Sajé**: *Terroir* (Trinity University Press); *Vivarium* (Tupelo Press)
- **Carey Salerno**: *Tributary* (Persea)
- **Christopher Salerno**: *The Man Grave* (Persea)
- **Elizabeth Scanlon**: *Whosoever Whole* (Omnidawn)
- **Diane Seuss**: *Modern Poetry* (Graywolf Press)
- **Evie Shockley**: *The New Black* (Wesleyan University Press)

- **Betsy Sholl**: *House of Sparrows* (University of Wisconsin)
- **Richard Siken**: *War of the Foxes* (Copper Canyon Press)
- **Aaron Smith**: *Stop Lying* (University of Pittsburgh Press)
- **Maggie Smith**: *You Could Make This Place Beautiful* (Atria/One Signal)
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- **Topaz Winters**: *Portrait of My Body as a Crime I'm Still Committing* (Button Poetry)
- **avery r. young**: *neckbone* (Northwestern University Press)
- **Matthew Zapruder**: *Story of a Poem* (The Unnamed Press)

In addition to poetry, I also recommend the following:

- **Lauren Groff**: *Florida* (Riverhead Books)
- **Tess Gunty**: *The Rabbit Hutch* (Vintage)
- **A. M. Homes**: *The Unfolding* (Penguin Random House)
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- **Barbara Kingsolver**: *Demon Copperhead* (Harper)
- **Lorrie Moore**: *I Am Homeless If This Is Not My Home* (Knopf)
- **Ruth Ozeki**: *The Book of Form and Emptiness* (Viking)

- **Rachel Yoder**: *Nightbitch* (Doubleday)

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About the Contributors

MATT ABBOTT is a poet, educator, and activist from Wakefield (U.K.). His debut spoken word stage show, *Two Little Ducks,* explored working-class support for Brexit amid Britain's response to the refugee crisis. It earned multiple five-star reviews at Edinburgh Fringe 2017 and on a 2018 U.K. theater tour. The show's poems were published as his debut collection by Verve Poetry Press in 2018.

Matt's debut kids' poetry collection, *A Hurricane in My Head,* was published by Bloomsbury in 2019. It was a National Poetry Day selected title, leading to a live appearance on *Blue Peter* and a cameo in *Beano* magazine. He is one of the United Kingdom's leading facilitators of poetry in schools and has also delivered workshops in France, Denmark, and Switzerland.

Matt was longlisted in the Poetry Society's prestigious National Poetry Competition in 2024 and recently had work translated into Arabic for *The New Arab.* He's also been commissioned by various global brands, including his beloved Leeds United FC.

Before becoming a full-time poet, Matt gained international acclaim in the late 2000s as frontman/lyricist in the indie act Skint & Demoralised. He also founded and fronts the literary organization LIVEwire Poetry.

DIANE ACKERMAN, author and naturalist, has written over two dozen works of nonfiction and poetry, including the *New York Times* bestsellers *The Zookeeper's Wife, A Natural History of the Senses,* and *The Human Age.* In prose so rich and evocative that one can feel the earth turning beneath one's feet as one reads, Ackerman's observations urge us to live in the moment and to wake up to nature's everyday miracles.

Ackerman has received the Stephen Hawking Medal for Communicating Science, PEN Henry David Thoreau Award for Nature Writing, Orion Book Award, John O'Donohue Poetry Award, John Burroughs Medal, Guggenheim Fellowship, Lavan Poetry Prize, and an honorary doctorate from Kenyon College,

among others, as well as being celebrated as a Literary Lion by the New York Public Library. Several of her books have been Pulitzer Prize and National Book Critics Circle Award finalists. In 2016, she was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She also has the unusual distinction of having a molecule named after her—*dianeackerone*—a pheromone in crocodiles.

Ackerman has an MFA and PhD from Cornell and has taught at a number of universities, including Columbia and Cornell. Her essays about nature and human nature have been appearing for decades in *The New York Times, The New Yorker, The American Scholar, Smithsonian, National Geographic,* and many other journals. She hosted a five-hour PBS NOVA series inspired by *A Natural History of the Senses.* A feature film based on *The Zookeeper's Wife* appeared in 2017.

Paige Ackerson-Kiely is the author of three poetry collections—most recently, *Dolefully a Rampart Stands* (Penguin, 2019). She directs the MFA in Writing program at Sarah Lawrence College and lives in New York City with her terrier, Lonesome.

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Kelli Russell Agodon is a bi/queer poet, writer, and editor from the Pacific Northwest. Her newest books are *Dialogues with Rising Tides* (Copper Canyon Press), which was a finalist in the Washington State Book Awards and shortlisted for the Eric Hoffer Book Award Grand Prize in Poetry, and *Demystifying the Manuscript: Essays and Interviews on Creating a Book of Poems,* co-edited with Susan Rich. She is the cofounder of Two Sylvias Press and teaches at Pacific Lutheran University's low-res MFA program, the Rainier Writing Workshop. Kelli is the cohost of the poetry series *Poems You Need* with Melissa Studdard. Learn more about her at www.agodon.com / www.twosylviaspress.com /

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TOMMY ARCHULETA is a mental health therapist for the New Mexico Corrections Department. His work has appeared in numerous print and online literary journals. *Susto,* his full-length debut collection, published April 2023 by the Center for Literary Publishing, is featured in the November/December 2023 issue of *Poets & Writers* as part of the magazine's annual 5 Over 50 column. Also in April 2023, his debut chapbook, *Fieldnotes,* was published by Lily Poetry Review and Press. He is the current poet laureate of the city of Santa Fe and will serve his hometown in this capacity throughout 2024 and 2025.

RAE ARMANTROUT has published seventeen books of poetry, most with Wesleyan University Press. In 2010, her book *Versed* (Wesleyan University Press) won the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry and the National Book Critics Circle Award. Her book *New and Selected, Partly,* appeared in 2017. In 2018, her book *Wobble* was a finalist for the National Book Award. In 2023, she received a Pushcart Prize for her poem "Conversation." Armantrout's poems have appeared in several editions of the *Best American Poetry* anthology as well as *The Norton Anthology of Postmodern American Poetry, The New Yorker, Poetry, The Paris Review, Plume, Fence, Lana Turner, Harper's Magazine,* and *The Atlantic.* She is the current judge of the Yale Younger Poets Prize and a professor emerita at the University of California at San Diego. She currently lives in Everett, Washington.

SUBHAGA CRYSTAL BACON (they/them) is the author of four collections of poetry, including the Isabella Gardner Award–winning *Transitory* (2023), from BOA Editions, a finalist for a Lambda Literary Award for Transgender Poetry in 2024, and *Surrender of Water in Hidden Places* (2023), winner of the Red Flag Poetry Chapbook Prize, which was published in a second edition in the summer of 2024. They are a teaching artist in schools and libraries, and they work with private students individually and in groups. A queer elder, they live in rural north central Washington on unceded Methow land.

KATE BAER is the three-time *New York Times* bestselling author of *What Kind of Woman, I Hope This Finds You Well,* and *And Yet.* Her work has also been

published in *The New Yorker, Literary Hub, Huffington Post,* and *The New York Times.*

MARY JO BANG is the author of nine books of poems, including *A Film in Which I Play Everyone, A Doll for Throwing, The Last Two Seconds, The Bride of E,* and *Elegy,* which received the National Book Critics Circle Award. She has published translations of Dante's *Inferno,* illustrated by Henrik Drescher, and *Purgatorio.* Her translation of *Paradiso* is forthcoming in 2025. She is also the translator of *Colonies of Paradise: Poems* by Matthias Göritz and co-translator, with Yuki Tanaka, of *A Kiss for the Absolute: Selected Poems of Shuzo Takiguchi,* forthcoming from Princeton University Press Lockert Poetry in Translation Series in 2024. She's been the recipient of a Hodder Fellowship from Princeton University, a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, and a Berlin Prize Fellowship from the American Academy in Berlin. She teaches at Washington University in St. Louis.

SAMIYA BASHIR, called a "dynamic, shape-shifting machine of perpetual motion" by Diego Báez, writing for *Booklist,* is a poet, writer, librettist, performer, and multimedia poetry maker whose work, both solo and collaborative, has been widely published, performed, installed, printed, screened, experienced, and Oxford comma'd from Berlin to Düsseldorf, Amsterdam to Accra, Florence to Rome, and across the United States. Sometimes she makes poems of dirt. Sometimes zeros and ones. Sometimes variously rendered text. Sometimes light. Bashir is the author of three poetry collections, most recently *Field Theories,* winner of the 2018 Oregon Book Awards' Stafford/Hall Award for Poetry. Her fourth collection, *I Hope This Helps,* is forthcoming in spring 2025 from Nightboat Books. Samiya's honors include the Rome Prize in Literature, the Pushcart Prize, Oregon's Arts and Culture Council Individual Artist Fellowship in Literature, plus numerous other awards, grants, fellowships, and residencies including MacDowell, the Atlantic Center for the Arts, and the New York Council on the Arts. In addition to her books, Bashir has served as editor to national magazines and anthologies of literature and artwork. In 2002, she was cofounder of Fire & Ink, an advocacy organization and writer's festival for LGBT writers of African descent with whom she worked through 2015. Today, Bashir is reigniting the movement, now called Fire & Inkwell, to support the lives and work of LGBTQ+ artists and writers of

African descent and heritage. She also serves as the June Jordan Visiting Scholar at Columbia University. Bashir lives in Harlem.

ELLEN BASS has published eight poetry collections, including *Indigo, Like a Beggar, The Human Line,* and *Mules of Love.* Among her awards are fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, the Lambda Literary Award, and four Pushcart Prizes. In 1973, with Florence Howe, she co-edited the first major anthology of women's poetry, *No More Masks!,* and she co-authored the groundbreaking *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* and *Free Your Mind: The Book for Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Youth.* A chancellor emerita of the Academy of American Poets, Bass founded poetry workshops at Salinas Valley State Prison and the Santa Cruz jails. She teaches in Pacific University's MFA program and offers online Living Room Craft Talks.

SIR JONATHAN BATE is Regents Professor of Literature and Foundation Professor of Environmental Humanities at Arizona State University and a Senior Research Fellow at Oxford University, where he was formerly Provost of Worcester College. He is the author of twenty books, including prizewinning biographies of William Shakespeare and the poets William Wordsworth, John Clare, and Ted Hughes. He edited the Royal Shakespeare Company editions of Shakespeare's Complete Works and Collaborative Plays. His *Romantic Ecology* (1991) and *The Song of the Earth* (2000) were pioneering works of literary ecocriticism.

ROBIN BEHN, recipient of grants from the Guggenheim Foundation and National Endowment for the Arts, is the author of six books of poems, including *Horizon Note* and *Quarry Cross,* and the co-editor of two creative writing how-to books, *The Practice of Poetry* and *Once Upon a Time in the Twenty-First Century.* Emeritus professor of creative writing at the University of Alabama, she lives in Portland, Oregon, with her husband, Andrew Friede, MD. A musician and librettist as well as a writer, she often works with other artists. Her most recent collaborations are the multimedia work *Requiem: El Paso and Beyond* and a new musical in process, *The Moods of Dotts Johnson in Song.* More details at robinbehn.com.

ERIN BELIEU is the author of five poetry collections, all from Copper Canyon Press, including her recent book *Come Hither Honeycomb.* Her work has appeared in

places such as *The New York Times, Poetry, The New Yorker, The Atlantic,* and the Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day, and has been chosen for multiple appearances in the Best American Poetry anthology series. Belieu teaches poetry and English literature at the University of Houston and for the Lesley University low-residency MFA in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

SABRINA BENAIM is a party and she'll cry if she wants to. One of the most viewed spoken word poets of all time, Sabrina is also the author of poetry collections *Depression & Other Magic Tricks* and *I Love You, Call Me Back,* as well as the audio original *Chaotic Good.* Sabrina has performed her work everywhere from Brazil to Australia, Ireland to America, England to your computer screen. She is a Goodreads Choice Awards finalist, a Canadian Poetry Slam champion, and her dog Mabel's second-favorite person. Her work has been featured in national commercial campaigns and a king's coronation and, most notably, her viral poem "Explaining My Depression to My Mother" was turned into an EDM song by the artist Fred Again. She lives in Toronto, Ontario, where she is currently working on her third collection.

JILL BIALOSKY's newest volume of poetry, *Asylum: A Personal, Historical, Natural Inquiry in 103 Lyric Sections,* was a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award. She is the author of five acclaimed collections of poetry; three critically acclaimed novels, including *The Prize* and, most recently, *The Deceptions,* finalist for the Gotham Book Award; and two memoirs, *Poetry Will Save Your Life* and the *New York Times* bestselling memoir *History of a Suicide: My Sister's Unfinished Life.* Her poems and essays have appeared in *The New Yorker, The Atlantic, Harper's Magazine, Oprah Daily, The Kenyon Review, Harvard Review, The Paris Review,* and the Best American Poetry series, among others. She co-edited with Helen Schulman the anthology *Wanting a Child.* She is an executive editor and vice president at W. W. Norton & Company. In 2014, she was honored by the Poetry Society of America for her distinguished contribution to poetry.

ELLIE BLACK is a poet, memoirist, and screenwriter originally from Arkansas. She's currently a PhD student in creative writing (emphasis in creative nonfiction/autotheory) at the University of Mississippi, where she also received her MFA in poetry. Her work is published in or forthcoming from *Washington Square Review, The Drift, Ninth Letter, Hayden's Ferry Review, Mississippi Review, The*

Offing, Best New Poets, and elsewhere. Winner of the 2023 Pinch Literary Award in Poetry, she has also received awards and recognition from the C. D. Wright Women Writer's Conference, Winning Writers, the Poets' Roundtable of Arkansas, the University of Mississippi, Hendrix College, *Split Lip Magazine,* and the Austin Film Festival. Find her online at elliekblack.com or on Instagram @ellie.kb.

TENNISON BLACK, a queer transmasc nonbinary writer, is the author of *Survival Strategies* (winner of the National Poetry Series, University of Georgia Press) and the editor of the anthology on contemporary disability *A Body You Talk To.* Their work has appeared or is forthcoming in *SWWIM, Hotel Amerika, Booth, Wordgathering,* and *New Mobility,* among others. They reside in Washington State and teach writing at Arizona State University. More about their work can be found at tennisonblack.com or @heytennison on most platforms.

DUSTIN BROOKSHIRE (he/him) is the recipient of the 2024 Jon Tribble Editors Fellowship awarded by Poetry at the Sea and the author of the chapbooks *Never Picked First for Playtime* (Harbor Editions, 2023), *Love Most of You Too* (Harbor Editions, 2021), and *To the One Who Raped Me* (Sibling Rivalry Press, 2012). He's the co-editor of *Let Me Say This: A Dolly Parton Poetry Anthology* (Madville Publishing, 2023), which is a Nautilus silver medal recipient and was named to the 2024 Books All Georgians Should Read list by the Georgia Center for the Book. Dustin is the editor of the chapbook anthology *When I Was Straight: A Tribute to Maureen Seaton* (Harbor Anthologies, 2024). His poetry has been read on NPR and other radio stations, featured in Georgia Poetry in the Parks, and earned Pushcart and Best of the Net nominations. Dustin is the founder of the Wild & Precious Life series, *Limp Wrist,* and the *Why I Write* series. Visit him at dustinbrookshire.com.

NICKOLE BROWN received her MFA from the Vermont College of Fine Arts, studied literature at Oxford University, and was the editorial assistant for the late Hunter S. Thompson. She worked at Sarabande Books for ten years. She's the author of *Sister,* first published in 2007 with a new edition reissued in 2018. Her second book, *Fanny Says* (BOA Editions), won the Weatherford Award for Appalachian Poetry in 2015. Currently, she teaches at the Sewanee School of Letters MFA program and lives in Asheville, North Carolina, where she volunteers

at several different animal sanctuaries. Since 2016, she's been writing about these animals. *To Those Who Were Our First Gods,* a chapbook of these first nine poems, won the 2018 Rattle Prize, and her essay-in-poems, *The Donkey Elegies,* was published by Sibling Rivalry Press in 2020. She's the president of the Hellbender Gathering of Poets, an annual environmental literary festival set to launch in Black Mountain, North Carolina, in October 2025.

Stephanie Burt is the Donald and Katherine Loker Professor of English at Harvard. Her books of poems and literary criticism include *We Are Mermaids* (2022) and the forthcoming *Super Gay Poems,* a collection of fifty poems (not by Stephanie) with essays on each one (by Stephanie). Look for her own book on Taylor in 2025!

Lauren Camp serves as New Mexico's poet laureate. She is the author of eight books of poetry, most recently *In Old Sky* (Grand Canyon Conservancy, 2024). A former astronomer in residence at Grand Canyon National Park, Camp is a recipient of the Dorset Prize, finalist commendations for the Arab American Book Award and Adrienne Rich Award, and fellowships from the Academy of American Poets and Black Earth Institute. Her poems have been translated into Mandarin, Turkish, Spanish, French, and Arabic. You can find her online at www.laurencamp.com.

Victoria Chang's most recent book of poems is *With My Back to the World* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2024). A few of her recent books include *Dear Memory: Letters on Writing, Silence, and Grief; The Trees Witness Everything; and OBIT*. She is the Bourne Chair in Poetry at Georgia Tech and director of Poetry@Tech.

Marilyn Chin is an award-winning poet and her works have become Asian American classics and are taught all over the world. She has published seven books of poetry. Her newest book of poems is called *Sage* (W. W. Norton, 2023). Her best hits collection, *A Portrait of the Self as Nation: New and Selected Poems,* is now in paperback. Her book of wild girl fiction is called *Revenge of the Mooncake Vixen.*

She has won numerous awards, including the Ruth Lilly Prize, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, the United States Artist Foundation Award, the Radcliffe

Institute Fellowship at Harvard, the Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship to Bellagio, two National Endowment for the Arts awards, the Stegner Fellowship, a Lannan Fellowship, the PEN/Josephine Miles Award, a Fulbright Award to Taiwan, and others.

She has translated the works of Ai Qing, Gozo Yoshimasu, Ho Xuan Huong, and others and is presently working on translating the works of female Daoist adepts of the Tang dynasty.

She is featured in major anthologies, including *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women, The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry,* and *The Penguin Anthology of Twentieth-Century Poetry.* She serves as a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and lives in San Diego.

Adrienne Rich said of Marilyn Chin's poems:

> Marilyn Chin's poems excite and incite the imagination through their brilliant cultural interfacings, their theatre of anger, "fierce and tender," their compassion, and their high mockery of wit. Reading her, our sense of the possibilities of poetry is opened further, and we feel again what an active, powerful art it can be.

Christopher Citro is the author of *If We Had a Lemon We'd Throw It and Call That the Sun* (Elixir Press, 2020), winner of the 2019 Antivenom Poetry Award, and *The Maintenance of the Shimmy-Shammy* (Steel Toe Books, 2015). His honors include a 2018 Pushcart Prize for poetry, a fellowship from the Ragdale Foundation, and writing awards from *Columbia Journal* (poetry) and *The Florida Review* (creative nonfiction). His poems appear in *Alaska Quarterly Review, The American Poetry Review, Bennington Review, Gulf Coast, The Kenyon Review, The Iowa Review, Narrative, Pleiades, Ploughshares, West Branch,* and elsewhere. He is an editorial assistant for the *Seneca Review* and lives in sunny Syracuse, New York. Visit him at christophercitro.com.

Kai Coggin (she/her) is the inaugural poet laureate of the city of Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas, and author of five collections, most recently *Mother of Other Kingdoms* (Harbor Editions, 2024). She is a certified master naturalist, a K–12 teaching artist in poetry with the Arkansas Arts Council, a 2023 Catalyze and 2024 Interchange Grant Fellow from the Mid-America Arts Alliance, and host of

the longest-running consecutive weekly open mic series in the country—Wednesday Night Poetry.

As poet laureate, Coggin has been honored with a 2024 Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellowship. She was also awarded the 2023 Don Munro Leadership in the Arts Award for Visionary Service, and the 2021 Governor's Arts Award for Arts in Education. She was twice named Best Poet in Arkansas by the *Arkansas Times* and was nominated for Arkansas state poet laureate and Hot Springs Woman of the Year. Her fierce and tender poetry has been nominated six times for the Pushcart Prize and awarded Best of the Net in 2022. Ten of Kai's poems are going to the moon with the Lunar Codex project, and on earth they have appeared or are forthcoming in *Poetry, Prairie Schooner,* Best of the Net, *Cultural Weekly, Solstice, The Night Heron Barks, Bellevue Literary Review, TAB, Pirene's Fountain, About Place Journal, Sinister Wisdom, Lavender Review,* Tupelo Press, and elsewhere. Coggin is editor at large at both *SWWIM* and *Terrain.org* and associate editor at *The Rise Up Review* and serves on the board of directors of the Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival. She lives with her wife in a peaceful valley, where they tend to wild ones and each other. Find her online at www.kaicoggin.com.

ANDREA COHEN is the author of eight poetry collections, including, most recently, *The Sorrow Apartments, Everything,* and *Nightshade.* She directs the Blacksmith House Poetry Series in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

CATHERINE COHEN, actress, comedian, and singer, is best known for her hit Netflix comedy special *The Twist…? She's Gorgeous*. The same live show won her the coveted title of Best Newcomer at the Edinburgh Comedy Festival. She is currently touring with her new comedy show *Come for Me,* which was named a *New York Times* Critics' Pick. Catherine can also be seen in season four of the award-winning Hulu series *Only Murders in the Building.* She recently wrapped shooting the Netflix and LuckyChap series *Sirens* alongside Julianne Moore and Milly Alcock and can currently be seen in the Netflix series *GIRLS5EVA* alongside Ashley Park and Sara Bareilles. She starred in *The French Italian,* which premiered this year at the Tribeca Film Festival. Her first book, entitled *God I Feel Modern Tonight,* was published in 2021 and features her collection of comedic poetry. Her TV screen credits include FX's *What We Do in the Shadows,* Comedy

Central's *Awkwafina Is Nora from Queens* and *Broad City*, Netflix's series *Special,* HBO's *High Maintenance,* and TBS's *Search Party.* Her feature credits include Michael Showalter's feature *The Lovebirds,* Disney+ reboot of *Home Alone,* the IFC feature *Dating & New York,* and the Paramount+ film *At Midnight.*

CACONRAD has worked with the ancient technologies of poetry and ritual since 1975. Their latest book is *Listen to the Golden Boomerang Return* (Wave Books / UK Penguin, 2024). They received the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, a PEN Josephine Miles Award, a Creative Capital grant, a Pew Fellowship, and a Lambda Award. *The Book of Frank* is now available in nine different languages, and they co-edited *Supplication: Selected Poems of John Wieners* (Wave Books). They exhibit poems as art objects with recent solo shows in Tucson, Arizona, as well as in Spain and Portugal. They teach at the Sandberg Art Institute in Amsterdam. Please visit them at https://linktr.ee/CAConrad88.

LISA FAY COUTLEY is the author of *HOST* (Wisconsin Poetry Series, 2024); *tether* (Black Lawrence Press, 2020); *Errata* (Southern Illinois University, 2015), winner of the Crab Orchard Series in Poetry Open Competition; *In the Carnival of Breathing* (BLP, 2011), winner of the Black River Chapbook Competition; and *Small Girl: Micromemoirs* (Harbor Editions, 2024). She is the editor of *In the Tempered Dark: Contemporary Poets Transcending Elegy* (BLP, 2024). Her poetry has been awarded a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship and an Academy of American Poets Levis Prize, chosen by Dana Levin, and the 2021 *Gulf Coast* Poetry Prize, and selected by Natalie Diaz. Recent prose and poetry appears in the Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day, *Barrelhouse, Brevity, Copper Nickel,* and *Gulf Coast.* She is an associate professor of poetry and CNF in the Writer's Workshop at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

TERI ELLEN CROSS DAVIS is the author of *a more perfect Union,* 2019 winner of *The Journal*/Charles B. Wheeler Poetry Prize, and *Haint,* winner of the 2017 Ohioana Book Award for Poetry. In 2022, she received Maryland's State Arts Council Individual Artist Award. In 2020, she received the Poetry Society of America's 2020 Robert H. Winner Memorial Prize. She has been awarded fellowships and scholarships to Cave Canem, Virginia Center for Creative Arts, Hedgebrook, Community of Writers Poetry Workshop, Hermitage Artist Retreat, and more. Her work has appeared in print, online, and in many journals and anthologies,

including *Harvard Review, PANK, Poetry Ireland Review,* and *The Kenyon Review.* She is on the board of directors for Cave Canem and serves on the boards of Poetry Daily and Lit Youngstown. She is the O. B. Hardison Poetry Series curator and poetry programs manager for the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C.

CORNELIUS EADY, poet/playwright/songwriter and Cave Canem cofounder, was born in Rochester, New York, in 1954, and is professor of English and John C. Hodges Chair of Excellence at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. In addition to his teaching duties, from 2021 to 2022 he served as interim director at Poets House, a poetry library and cultural center located in New York City. He is the author of several poetry collections, including *Victims of the Latest Dance Craze,* winner of the 1985 Lamont Prize; *The Gathering of My Name,* nominated for the 1992 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry; *Brutal Imagination;* and *Hardheaded Weather.* He wrote the libretto to Diedra Murray's opera *Running Man,* a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Theatre in 1999, and his verse play *Brutal Imagination* won the Oppenheimer Prize in 2001. Eady's pandemic folk song project *Don't Get Dead,* recorded with his Trio, was released in 2021 by June Appal Recording. His work and songs have been featured on NPR, BBC Radio 4, and PBS *NewsHour*. His awards include fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation; and Lifetime Achievement Awards in Poetry from the Poetry Foundation, the National Book Foundation, Brooklyn Poets, Poets and Writers Foundation, Furious Flower Foundation, and the Lannan Foundation.

JENNIFER ESPINOZA is the author of *I'm Alive / It Hurts / I Love It* (Big Lucks, 2019), *There Should Be Flowers* (The Accomplices, 2016), and *I Don't Want to Be Understood* (Alice James Books, 2024). Her work has been featured in *Poetry, The American Poetry Review, The Rumpus, The Nation,* the Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day, and elsewhere. She holds an MFA in creative writing from University of California at Riverside. Jennifer lives in California with her wife, poet/essayist Eileen Elizabeth, and their cat and dog.

BLAS FALCONER is the author of four poetry collections, including *Rara Avis* (Four Way Books, 2024). His poems have been featured by *Poetry, Harvard Review,* and *The New York Times,* and his awards include a National Endowment for the Arts

Fellowship and the Maureen Egen Writers Exchange. He is the editor in chief for Poetry International Online and teaches in the MFA program at San Diego State University. Find him online at www.blasfalconer.com.

JENNIFER FRANKLIN is the author of three full-length poetry collections, including *If Some God Shakes Your House* (Four Way Books, 2023), finalist for the 2024 Paterson Poetry Prize and finalist for the 2023 Julie Suk Award. Franklin has received a Pushcart Prize, an NYFA/City Artist Corps grant, and a Café Royal Cultural Foundation Literature Award. Poems from her new manuscript, *A Fire in Her Brain,* have been published in *The American Poetry Review, Bennington Review, The Common, Poetry Northwest,* and the Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day series. With Nicole Callihan and Pichchenda Bao, she co-edited the *Braving the Body* anthology (Harbor Editions, 2024). She teaches craft workshops at Manhattanville's MFA program and 24 Pearl Street of the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center. For over ten years, she has taught manuscript revision at the Hudson Valley Writers Center, where she serves as program director.

MAG GABBERT is the author of *Sex Depression Animals,* which won the Charles B. Wheeler Prize in Poetry; the chapbook *The Breakup,* which won the Baltic Writing Residencies Chapbook Award; and the chapbook *Minml Poems.* Her work can also be found in *The American Poetry Review, The Paris Review Daily, Copper Nickel, Guernica, Poetry Daily,* and in many other journals and magazines. Mag is the recipient of a Pushcart Prize, a Discovery Award from 92NY's Unterberg Poetry Center, and fellowships from *The Kenyon Review* Writers Workshop, Idyllwild Arts, and Poetry at Round Top. She has an MFA from the University of California at Riverside and a PhD from Texas Tech. She currently teaches at Southern Methodist University and is the poet laureate for the city of Dallas, Texas.

JOHN GALLAHER's most recent collection of poetry is *My Life in Brutalist Architecture* (Four Way Books, 2024). Gallaher lives in Missouri and co-edits the *Laurel Review.*

CALLIE GARNETT is the author of the poetry collection *Wings in Time* (The Song Cave) and the chapbooks *On Knowingness* (The Song Cave) and *Hallelujah, I'm a Bum* (Ugly Duckling). She works as editorial director at Bloomsbury Publishing (US). She lives in Esopus, New York.

ANDREA GIBSON (they/them) is the poet laureate of Colorado and one of the most celebrated and influential spoken word poets of our time. Best known for their live performances, Gibson has changed the landscape of what it means to attend a "poetry show." Gibson's poems center on gender, feminism, spirituality, mental health, and social justice. The winner of the first Women's World Poetry Slam, Gibson is the author of seven award-winning books and seven full-length albums.

JOAN KWON GLASS is a Korean diasporic author, winner of the 2024 Perugia Press Poetry Prize for her manuscript *Daughter of Three Gone Kingdoms,* and author of *Night Swim,* winner of the Diode Book Prize (Diode Editions, 2022). Joan's poems have been featured or are forthcoming in *Poetry, Poetry Daily, The Slowdown, Poetry Northwest, Passages North, Terrain, Ninth Letter, Rattle, AAWW (The Margins), Tahoma Literary Review, Prairie Schooner, Salamander,* and elsewhere. She lives in coastal Connecticut. Find her online at www.joankwonglass.com.

RIGOBERTO GONZÁLEZ is the editor of *Latino Poetry: A Library of America Anthology,* and the director of the MFA program in creative writing at Rutgers at Newark.

TYLER KNOTT GREGSON is a poet, photographer, artist, Buddhist, proud autistic, and author of the nationally bestselling *Chasers of the Light: Poems from the Typewriter Series,* as well as *Wildly into the Dark: Typewriter Poems and the Rattlings of a Curious Mind, All the Words Are Yours: Haiku on Love, Miracle in the Mundane: Poems, Prompts, and Inspiration to Unlock Your Creativity and Unfiltered Joy, Illumination: Poems to Light Up the Darkness,* and the children's book *North Pole Ninjas.* When he's not writing, he operates Chasers of the Light Photography and photographs weddings and travel assignments all over the globe with his wife, Sarah Linden Gregson. Find him online at chasersofthelight.com and @TylerKnott on all the social media platforms.

DAVID GROFF is the author of *Live in Suspense* (Trio House Press, 2023). His previous book *Clay,* also from Trio House, was chosen by Michael Waters for the Louise Bogan Award. His first collection, *Theory of Devolution* (University of Illinois Press), was selected by Mark Doty for the National Poetry Series. With Philip Clark, he edited *Persistent Voices: Poetry by Writers Lost to AIDS* (Alyson); with Jim Elledge, he edited *Who's Yer Daddy?: Gay Writers Celebrate Their*

Mentors and Forerunners (University of Wisconsin Press), winner of a Lambda Literary Award. An independent book editor, he teaches poetry, nonfiction, and publishing in the MFA creative writing program at the City College of New York.

CHRISTIAN GULLETTE is the author of *Coachella Elegy,* winner of the 2023 Trio House Press Trio Award for poetry and included in must-read lists by *LitHub, Electric Lit, Alta,* and *Debutiful.* His poems have appeared in *The Washington Post, The American Poetry Review, The Kenyon Review,* the Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day, and *The Yale Review.* Christian completed his PhD in Scandinavian languages and literatures at the University of California at Berkeley, and when not serving as the editor in chief of *The Cortland Review,* he works as a lecturer and translator. He lives in San Francisco. Find him online at www.christiangullette.com or on Instagram: @ChristianGullette.

JAMES ALLEN HALL is the author of two books of poetry and a book of lyric personal essays: *Now You're the Enemy, I Liked You Better Before I Knew You So Well,* and *Romantic Comedy.* They have received awards from Lambda Literary, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Civitella Ranieri Foundation, the University of Arizona Poetry Center, and the Fellowship of Southern Writers, as well as individual artist grants from the Maryland State Arts Council and the New York Foundation for the Arts. They are an associate professor of English at Washington College, where they edit the literary journal *Cherry Tree* and direct the Rose O'Neill Literary House. With Aaron Smith, James cohosts the popular poetry show *Breaking Form: A Podcast of Poetry & Culture.*

BARBARA HAMBY has published eight books of poems, most recently *Burn* (forthcoming in 2025), *Holoholo* (2021), *Bird Odyssey* (2018), and *On the Street of Divine Love: New and Selected Poems* (2014), all with the University of Pittsburgh Press. Her book of linked stories, *Lester Higata's 20th Century,* won the 2010 Iowa/John Simmons Prize and was published by the University of Iowa Press. She is Distinguished University Scholar at Florida State University.

JOY HARJO served three terms as the twenty-third poet laureate of the United States from 2019 to 2022. She is the author of ten books of poetry, plays, children's books, and two memoirs. She has edited three anthologies of Native poetry. She was recently honored with the Frost Medal from the Poetry Society of America,

Yale's 2023 Bollingen Prize for American Poetry, and the National Book Critics Circle Ivan Sandrof Lifetime Achievement Award. As a musician, she has produced seven award-winning music albums. She is the first artist in residence for Tulsa's Bob Dylan Center. She lives in the Muscogee Creek Reservation in Oklahoma.

MATTHEA HARVEY is the author of five books of poetry and two books for children. She also makes trash art and ceramics.

GUSTAVO HERNANDEZ is the author of the poetry collection *Flower Grand First* (Moon Tide Press). In January 2024, Hernandez was appointed poet laureate of Orange County, California. He was born in Jalisco, Mexico, and was raised in Santa Ana, California, where he still resides.

BRENDA HILLMAN has eleven collections from Wesleyan University Press, the most recent of which are *Extra Hidden Life, Among the Days,* and *In a Few Minutes Before Later.* Her first collection of prose, *Three Talks,* will be published by University of Virginia Press in 2024. She has edited over a dozen books by other poets, including *At Your Feet* by the Brazilian poet Ana Cristina Cesar, co-translated with her mother, Helen Hillman, and *The Grand Permission, New Writings on Poetics and Motherhood,* co-edited with Patricia Dienstfrey. Her awards include the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, the Morton Dauwen Zabel Award for Innovative Writing, and the William Carlos Williams Award. A mother, a grandmother, and a former chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, Hillman is a professor emerita at Saint Mary's College of California and currently serves as poetry director at the Community of Writers. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her husband, Robert Hass.

JANE HIRSHFIELD, writing "some of the most important poetry in the world today" (*The New York Times Magazine*), is one of American poetry's central spokespersons for concerns of the biosphere, interconnection, and our shared human fates. Her ten poetry books include *The Asking: New & Selected Poems* (Knopf, 2023). Author also of two now-classic collections of essays on poetry's infrastructure and craft, her four books presenting world poets from the deep past include her co-translation *The Ink Dark Moon: Love Poems by Izumi Shikibu and Ono no Komachi, Women of the Ancient Court of Japan* (Vintage Classics, 1990).

Hirshfield's honors include fellowships from the Guggenheim and Rockefeller Foundations, the Poetry Center Book Award, the California Book Award, Columbia University's Translation Center Award, longlisting for the National Book Award, and finalist selection for the National Book Critics Circle Award. Her work has been translated into seventeen languages, and she has presented at universities and festivals around the globe. In 2017, she founded Poets for Science, an interactive online and traveling installation. A former chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, Hirshfield was elected in 2019 into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

MING LAUREN HOLDEN is the author of *Refuge,* which was selected by Lidia Yuknavitch as the winner of the inaugural Kore Press Memoir Award. Ming's fiction won the *Glimmer Train* Family Matters Award, her nonfiction won the *Chattahoochee Review*'s Lamar York Nonfiction Prize, and her poetry won the *Bellingham Review*'s 49th Parallel Poetry Award. Ming's next book, a braided lyric memoir entitled *Fire Alarm,* is forthcoming from Tupelo Press. For more than two decades, Ming has worked in over twenty countries as a writer, humanitarian aid worker, and refugee advocate. Since 2011 she's been a workshop leader in creative writing theater, both for refugees worldwide and incarcerated youth in the United States. Ming would like to dedicate her place in this anthology to her first and favorite Swifties: her little cousins Sesley and Bella.

J. D. ISIP is the author of three full-length collections, *Pocketing Feathers* (Sadie Girl Press, 2015), *Kissing the Wound,* and *Reluctant Prophets* (Moon Tide Press, 2023 and 2025). He is an English professor and lives with his dogs, Ivy and Bucky, in South Texas.

DIDI JACKSON is the author of the poetry collections *My Infinity* (2024) and *Moon Jar* (2020). Her poems have appeared in *The American Poetry Review, Bomb, The New Yorker,* and *Oxford American,* among other journals and magazines. She has had poems selected for the *Best American Poetry* anthology, Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day, and *The Slow Down* with Tracy K. Smith. She is the recipient of the Robert H. Winner Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America and is a Dean's Faculty Fellow at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, where she teaches creative writing. Most recently she completed her certification as a Tennessee naturalist.

MAJOR JACKSON is the author of six volumes of poetry, most recently *Razzle Dazzle: New & Selected Poems.* He lives in Nashville, Tennessee, where he is the Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Chair in the Humanities at Vanderbilt University.

ANNA JOURNEY is the author of the poetry collections *The Judas Ear* (2022), *The Atheist Wore Goat Silk* (2017), and *Vulgar Remedies* (2013), all from Louisiana State University Press, and *If Birds Gather Your Hair for Nesting* (University of Georgia Press, 2009), which was selected by Thomas Lux for the National Poetry Series. Her poems appear in *The New Yorker, The American Poetry Review, The Kenyon Review, The Southern Review,* and elsewhere. Journey has received fellowships from the Academy of American Poets, the National Endowment for the Arts, and Yaddo. She's an associate professor of English at the University of Southern California and is currently working on a volume of new and selected poems.

ILYA KAMINSKY was born in Odesa, Ukraine, and now lives in New Jersey. He is the author and translator of several books, most recently *Deaf Republic.*

LAURA KASISCHKE has published numerous collections of poetry (most recently *Lightning Falls in Love*) and works of fiction. She teaches writing in the Residential College at the University of Michigan and lives in Chelsea, Michigan.

AMY KING is the recipient of the 2015 Women's National Book Association Award. Her most recent work has appeared in NELLE and great weather for MEDIA. Her most recent collection is *The Missing Museum* (Tarpaulin Sky). She's co-editor of the anthology *Big Energy Poets: Ecopoetry Thinks Climate Change* and the anthology series Bettering American Poetry. King is a professor of creative writing at State University of New York Nassau Community College.

YUSEF KOMUNYAKAA's numerous books of poetry include *Dien Cai Dau; Neon Vernacular,* for which he received the Pulitzer Prize; *Warhorses; Emperor of Water Clocks;* and most recently *Everyday Mojo Songs of Earth: New and Selected Poems, 2001–2021.* His honors include the William Faulkner Prize (Université Rennes, France), the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, the Wallace Stevens Award, the 2021 Griffin Lifetime Recognition Award, the 2021 Zbigniew Herbert International Literary Award, and the Lannan Foundation's 2021 Award in Literature for

Lifetime Achievement. His collaborations, performance art, and libretti have been performed internationally and include *Saturnalia, Wakonda's Dream, Testimony, Jupiter Invincible,* and *Gilgamesh.*

DEBORAH LANDAU is the author of five collections of poetry, most recently *Skeletons,* which was named one of *The New Yorker*'s Best Books of 2023. Her other books include *Soft Targets* (winner of the Believer Book Award), *The Uses of the Body, The Last Usable Hour,* and *Orchidelirium,* selected by Naomi Shihab Nye for the Robert Dana Anhinga Prize for Poetry. In 2016, she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship.

The Uses of the Body was featured on NPR's *All Things Considered* and included on "best of" lists by *The New Yorker, Vogue, BuzzFeed,* and *Oprah Daily,* among others. A Spanish edition, *Los Usos del Cuerpo,* was published by Valparaiso Ediciones in 2017. U.K. editions of her books include *Soft Targets* (Bloodaxe, 2020) and *Skeletons* (Little Brown/Corsair, 2024).

Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker, The Paris Review, The Atlantic, New York Review of Books, The Nation, The American Poetry Review, Poetry,* CNN, *The Wall Street Journal,* and *The New York Times,* and has been included in three volumes of the Best American Poetry series.

She is a professor at New York University, where she directs the creative writing program, and she lives in Brooklyn.

JESSICA LASER is the author of *Sergei Kuzmich from All Sides* (Letter Machine Editions, 2019), *Planet Drill* (Futurepoem Books, 2022), and *The Goner School* (University of Iowa Press, 2024). Her work has most recently appeared in *The Paris Review* and *The Yale Review*. She lives in Los Angeles and teaches at Claremont McKenna College.

DORIANNE LAUX is a Pulitzer Prize finalist. Her most recent collection is *Life on Earth* (W. W. Norton, 2024). She is also the author of *Only as the Day Is Long: New and Selected; The Book of Men,* winner of the Paterson Poetry Prize; and *Facts About the Moon,* winner of the Oregon Book Award. A textbook is forthcoming in 2024: *Finger Exercises for Poets.* Laux is founding faculty at Pacific University and a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets.

LANG LEAV, novelist and poet, was born in a refugee camp when her family were fleeing the Khmer Rouge regime. She spent her formative years in Sydney, Australia, in the predominantly migrant town of Cabramatta. Among her many achievements, Lang is the winner of a Qantas Spirit of Youth Award, a Churchill Fellowship, and a Goodreads Reader's Choice Award.

Lang has been featured on CNN, NPR, SBS Australia, Intelligence Squared UK, Radio New Zealand, and in various publications, including *Lithub, Vogue, Newsweek, The Straits Times, The Guardian,* and *The New York Times.*

JOSEPH O. LEGASPI authored the poetry collections *Amphibian, Threshold,* and *Imago* and the chapbooks *Postcards; Aviary, Bestiary;* and *Subways.* He works at Columbia University, teaches at Fordham University, and resides in Queens, New York.

AMANDA LOVELACE (she/they) is the author of several bestselling poetry titles, including her celebrated "women are some kind of magic" series as well as her "you are your own fairy tale" trilogy. They also write nonfiction books about witchcraft and co-create tarot and oracle decks. When she isn't reading, writing, or drinking a much-needed cup of coffee, you can find her casting spells from her home in a (very) small town on the Jersey Shore, where she resides with her poet wife and their three cats.

SHIKHA MALAVIYA is a poet, writer, and mentor. Her book of historical persona poetry, *Anandibai Joshee: A Life in Poems* (HarperCollins India, 2023), is a unique retelling of the life of India's first female medical doctor and the first Indian woman to study medicine in the United States. Shikha's previous book of poems, *Geography of Tongues,* was published to acclaim in 2014. Her poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and featured in *Catamaran, Plume, Prairie Schooner,* and other fine publications. Shikha has been a featured TEDx speaker and was selected as poet laureate of San Ramon, California, 2016. Shikha is cofounder of the (Great) Indian Poetry Collective, a mentorship-model literary press, and is currently a Mosaic America Fellow and Writers Grotto member. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

KATIE MANNING is the founding editor of *Whale Road Review* and a professor of writing at Point Loma Nazarene University. Winner of the Main Street Rag Poetry

Book Award for *Tasty Other,* she's the author of eight poetry collections, most recently *Hereverent* (Agape Editions, 2023) and the chapbook *How to Play: Poems Inspired by Games* (Louisiana Literature Press, 2022). Her writing has been featured on *Poetry Unbound, Tangle News, Verse Daily,* and many other venues. Find her online at www.katiemanningpoet.com.

Hollie McNish is a poet and author based between Scotland and England. She was the first poet to record at Abbey Road Studios, London, and won the Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry for her poetic parenting memoir about young motherhood, *Nobody Told Me,* of which *The Scotsman* stated, "The world needs this book." She has published three further collections of poetry—*Papers, Cherry Pie,* and *Plum*—and two *Sunday Times* bestselling books: *Slug, and other things I've been told to hate,* and *Lobster, and other things I'm learning to love.* These books are written in her distinct blend of poetry and prose, questioning all of those things in life we've been told to be ashamed of, embarrassed about, or disgusted by. Both are translated into French with renowned publishing house Le Castor Astral. Hollie really loves writing poems, and she tours her books in English, French, and Spanish. Find her online at www.holliemcnish.com.

"Makes me cry and howl with laughter."—*Paapa Essiedu*
"Never have we needed her more."—*Stylist*

Honor Moore is the author of seven books. Her most recent collection of poems is *Red Shoes,* and her most recent prose is *A Termination.* She lives in New York, where she teaches in the MFA program at the New School. On Christmas Day 2023, she watched all four hours of *The Eras Tour* with subtitles, so as not to miss a single lyric. More info at www.honormoore.com.

Tomás Q. Morín is the author most recently of the poetry collection *Machete* and *Where Are You From: Letters to My Son.* He is the recipient of fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. He teaches at Rice University.

Paul Muldoon is the author of fifteen collections of verse, most recently *Joy in Service on Rue Tagore,* published in 2024.

KATIE DARBY MULLINS teaches creative writing at the University of Evansville. In addition to being nominated for both the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net multiple times, she's been published or has work forthcoming in journals like *Barrelhouse, The Rumpus, Iron Horse, Harpur Palate, Prime Number,* and the music magazines *The Aquarian* and *Paste.* She was quoted in James Campion's recent book about "Hey Jude," *Take a Sad Song,* and was part of the craft collection *How to Write a Novel,* edited by Aaron Burch for Autofocus Press. She helped found and is the executive writer for Underwater Sunshine Fest, a music festival in New York City, and she has two books of poetry: *Neuro, Typical* (Summer Camp Press) and *Me & Phil* (Kelsay Books).

KERRY NEVILLE is the author of two collections of stories, *Necessary Lies,* which received the G. S. Sharat Chandra Prize and was named a *ForeWord Magazine* Short Story Book of the Year, and *Remember to Forget Me.* Her memoir, *Momma May Be Mad,* is forthcoming in fall 2025. Her work has appeared in publications such as *The Gettysburg Review, Epoch, TriQuarterly, Brevity, The Washington Post, The Irish Times,* and elsewhere. Her fiction and nonfiction have been named Notables in *Best American Short Stories* and *Best American Essays.*

AIMEE NEZHUKUMATATHIL is the author of the *New York Times* bestselling collection of nature essays *World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whale Sharks, and Other Astonishments,* which was chosen as Barnes & Noble's Book of the Year and a finalist for the Kirkus Prize in nonfiction. She also wrote four previous poetry collections, including *Oceanic.* Her most recent chapbook is *Lace & Pyrite,* a collaboration of epistolary garden poems with the poet Ross Gay.

Honors include a poetry fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Pushcart Prize, and a Guggenheim Fellowship in poetry. She is the first-ever poetry editor for *Sierra* magazine, the storytelling arm of the Sierra Club. She is professor of English and creative writing in the University of Mississippi's MFA program. Her newest book is a collection of food essays called *Bite by Bite: Nourishments and Jamborees.*

NAOMI SHIHAB NYE has been a music fan all her life. Her most recent book is *Grace Notes—Poems About Families,* in which she describes playing piano duets with her mom as a kid. She has been Young People's Poet Laureate of the United

States (Poetry Foundation) and writes every day, making up songs when she's outside or taking a walk.

OLUWASEUN (SEUN) OLAYIWOLA is a poet, critic, choreographer, and performer based in London. He has been published by *The Guardian, The Poetry Review, The Telegraph,* the *Times Literary Supplement,* and elsewhere. His choreographic work has been presented at the V&A, the Place, the Central School of Ballet, and Studio Voltaire. Seun has an MFA in choreography from the Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, where he was a Fulbright Scholar in 2018–2019. His debut collection *Strange Beach* is forthcoming from Fitzcarraldo Editions (U.K.) and Soft Skull Press (U.S.). He lectures in dance at the Kingston School of Art and is a member of the inaugural Rose Choreographic School at Sadler's Wells. Find him online at www.seunolay.com.

JANUARY GILL O'NEIL is an associate professor at Salem State University and the author of *Glitter Road* (2024), *Rewilding* (2018), *Misery Islands* (2014), and *Underlife* (2009), all published by CavanKerry Press. From 2012 to 2018, she served as the executive director of the Massachusetts Poetry Festival. Her poems and articles have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine,* the Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day series, *The American Poetry Review, Poetry,* and *Sierra* magazine, among others. Her poem "At the Rededication of the Emmett Till Memorial" was a co-winner of the 2022 Allen Ginsberg Poetry Award from the Poetry Center at Passaic County Community College. The recipient of fellowships from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, Cave Canem, and the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund, O'Neil was the 2019–2020 John and Renée Grisham Writer in Residence at the University of Mississippi, Oxford. She currently serves as the 2022–2024 board chair of the Association of Writers and Writing Programs.

JEANNINE OUELLETTE's lyric memoir, *The Part That Burns,* was a 2021 Kirkus Best Indie Book and a finalist for the Next Generation Indie Book Award in Women's Literature. She is also the author of the picture book *Mama Moon.* Her literary essays and short fiction have appeared widely in anthologies and journals, including *Narrative, North American Review, Los Angeles Review of Books, Masters Review, Calyx,* and others. She holds an MFA in fiction from Vermont College of Fine Arts and is a Millay Colony for the Arts fellow and past juror. Her

bestselling Substack, Writing in the Dark, is a passionate creative community for people who "do language," where writing is part of a deeper, vaster conversation about how attention, curiosity, playfulness, and surprise provide a portal to the profound on the path to becoming, because talking about "how to write better" without that larger context is kind of boring. Ouellette teaches writing at the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop and the University of Minnesota, where she also facilitates narrative health writing workshops for healthcare professionals and the public. She is working on a novel.

GREGORY PARDLO is the author of the poetry collections *Spectral Evidence* and *Digest,* winner of the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. His other books include *Totem,* winner of *The American Poetry Review*/Honickman Prize, and *Air Traffic,* a memoir in essays. His honors include fellowships from the New York Public Library's Cullman Center, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Guggenheim Foundation. He divides his time between New York and the Middle East, where he is program head of literature and creative writing at New York University at Abu Dhabi.

MOLLY PEACOCK, poetry activist, was the cofounder of *Poetry in Motion* on New York's subways and buses, founder of the Best Canadian Poetry series, and creator of the Secret Poetry Room at Binghamton University. A beloved poet as well as a biographer focused on the nature of women's creativity, Molly is the author of eight volumes of poetry, including *The Widow's Crayon Box, The Analyst: Poems,* and *Cornucopia: New & Selected Poems,* all from W. W. Norton. Recently she wrote about a half-century friendship, *A Friend Sails in on a Poem.*

Peacock has also found herself involved in the childfree movement after Trixie Films featured her memoir *Paradise, Piece by Piece,* about her many-layered choice not to have children, in the documentary *My So-Called Selfish Life.* As well, she has researched and composed two biographies, *Flower Diary: Mary Hiester Reid Paints, Travels, Marries & Opens a Door,* and *The Paper Garden: Mrs. Delany Begins Her Life's Work at 72.* She lives in Toronto and is delighted to be publishing her first poem in response to song lyrics. Find her online at www.mollypeacock.org.

CARL PHILLIPS's most recent books include *Scattered Snows, to the North* (FSG, 2024) and *Then the War: And Selected Poems, 2007–2020,* which won the Pulitzer

Prize.

MAYA C. POPA is the author of *Wound Is the Origin of Wonder* (W. W. Norton) and *American Faith* (Sarabande). Her newsletter, *Poetry Today,* is a Substack bestselling publication. The poetry reviews editor at *Publishers Weekly,* she teaches at NYU and runs the online writing community Conscious Writers Collective.

NINA MINGYA POWLES is a poet and writer from Aotearoa, New Zealand, currently living in the U.K. She is the author of several poetry pamphlets, zines, and books, most recently *Magnolia* (2020), *Tiny Moons: A Year of Eating in Shanghai* (2020), and a collection of essays, *Small Bodies of Water* (2021), the winner of the inaugural Nan Shepherd Prize for Nature Writing. She writes a monthly Substack on food and memory called *Crispy Noodles.*

STACY PRATT is an enrolled citizen of the Mvskoke (Creek) Nation and a Swiftie since debut! She is a poet, art writer, and book reviewer, specializing in Indigenous arts. She is a regular contributor to *First American Art Magazine* and has written interpretive texts and catalog essays for numerous Indigenous art exhibitions. She has been married to her husband, Joseph, a retired combat veteran, for twenty years. Their songs are "Fearless," "Dress," and "Lover." Like Taylor, they have three cats—two girls and a boy. Stacy is also the lead singer of Tulsa, Oklahoma, metal band Everything That Kills. They do not (yet) cover Taylor Swift songs.

RUBEN QUESADA is a poet and editor of the award-winning anthology *Latinx Poetics: Essays on the Art of Poetry.* His poetry and criticism appear in *The New York Times Magazine,* the Best American Poetry series, *Seneca Review, Harvard Review,* and elsewhere. His recent collection of poetry, *Brutal Companion,* won the Barrow Street Editors Prize.

DEAN RADER has authored or co-authored twelve books, including *Works & Days,* winner of the 2010 T. S. Eliot Prize; *Landscape Portrait Figure Form,* a *Barnes & Noble Review* Best Book; and *Self-Portrait as Wikipedia Entry,* a finalist for the Oklahoma Book Award and the Northern California Book Award. *Before the Borderless: Dialogues with the Art of Cy Twombly,* was published in April 2023 and was described by *Book Riot* as one of ten "mesmerizing" books of modern poetry. His writing has been supported by fellowships from Princeton University,

Harvard University, Headlands Center for the Arts, Art Omi, and the MacDowell Foundation. Rader is a professor at the University of San Francisco and a 2019 Guggenheim Fellow in Poetry.

VICTORIA REDEL is the author of four books of poetry (*Paradise, Woman Without Umbrella, Swoon,* and *Already the World*) and five books of fiction. Her latest novel, *I Am You,* is forthcoming in 2025. Her work has been widely awarded, anthologized, and translated into more than ten languages. Her novel *Loverboy* was adapted for film and directed by Kevin Bacon. Victoria has been awarded fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Fine Arts Work Center. She teaches at Sarah Lawrence College.

SUSAN RICH is the author of six collections of poetry and co-editor of two prose anthologies. Her most recent books are *Blue Atlas* (Red Hen Press) and *Gallery of Postcards and Maps: New and Selected Poems* (Salmon Poetry). Susan has co-edited two prose anthologies, *Demystifying the Manuscript: Creating a Book of Poems* (Two Sylvias Press) and *Strangest of Theatres: Poets Crossing Borders* (Poetry Foundation). Susan's previous books include *Cloud Pharmacy, The Alchemist's Kitchen, Cures Include Travel,* and *The Cartographer's Tongue—Poems of the World.* A recipient of the *Times Literary Supplement* Award, she has also received prizes from Artists Trust, PEN USA, the Fulbright Foundation, and Peace Corps Writers. Rich's poems appear in *Alaska Quarterly Review, New England Review, The Slowdown with Major Jackson, Poetry Ireland,* and elsewhere. Susan lives with two loving cats in Seattle, Washington. Susan is the editor of the forthcoming anthology *Birdbrains: A Lyrical Guide to Washington State Birds* (Raven Chronicles Press, 2025), which was inspired by the anthology you're holding in your hands.

NATASHA SAJÉ was born stateless in Munich, Germany, and grew up in New York City and New Jersey. She is the author of four books of poems, most recently *The Future Will Call You Something Else* (Tupelo, 2023), and a chapbook from Diode Editions. Sajé has also published a postmodern poetry handbook, *Windows and Doors: A Poet Reads Literary Theory* (Michigan, 2014), and a memoir in essays, *Terroir: Love, Out of Place* (Trinity University Press, 2020). Honors include the Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize; the Bannister Writer in Residence at Sweet Briar College; the Robert Winner and the Alice Fay di Castagnola Awards from the

Poetry Society of America; the 2002 Campbell Corner Poetry Prize; a Fulbright Scholarship to Slovenia; a Camargo Fellowship in France; and the Lambda, IPPY, Foreword, and PEN Finalist prizes. Sajé is professor emerita of English at Westminster University in Salt Lake City and has been teaching in the Vermont College of Fine Arts MFA in writing program since 1996. She lives in Washington, D.C.

CAREY SALERNO is the executive director and publisher of Alice James Books. She is the author of *Shelter* (2009), *Tributary* (2021), and the forthcoming *The Hungriest Stars* (2025). Her poems, essays, and articles about her work as a publisher can be found in places like *The American Poetry Review, Poets & Writers,* NPR, and *The New York Times.* She serves as the co-chair for LitNet: The Literary Network and occasionally teaches poetry and publishing arts at the University of Maine at Farmington. In 2021, she received the Golden Colophon Award for Independent Paradigm Publishing from CLMP for the leadership and contributions of Alice James Books. Find her online at www.careysalerno.com.

CHRISTOPHER SALERNO is a professor, editor, and author of five books of poetry. His most recent book, *The Man Grave,* won the Lexi Rudnitsky Editor's Choice Award from Persea Books and is available now. His trade book, *How to Write Poetry: A Guided Journal,* is available from Calisto Media. His work has received the Glenna Luschei Award from *Prairie Schooner,* the Founders Prize from *RHINO* magazine, the Two Sylvias Press Chapbook Award, the *Laurel Review* Chapbook Prize, and a New Jersey State Council on the Arts Fellowship. His poems have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine, New Republic, The American Poetry Review, New England Review,* and elsewhere. He teaches in the MFA program at William Paterson University in New Jersey, where he serves as director of Writing Across the Curriculum.

ELIZABETH SCANLON is the editor in chief of *The American Poetry Review*. She is the author of *Whosoever Whole* (Omnidawn, 2024) and *Lonesome Gnosis* (Horsethief Books, 2017), as well as the chapbooks *The Brain Is Not the United States/The Brain Is the Ocean* (The Head & The Hand Press, 2016) and *Odd Regard* (ixnay press, 2013).

DIANE SEUSS is the author of six books of poetry. Her most recent collection is *Modern Poetry* (Graywolf Press, 2024). *frank: sonnets* (Graywolf Press, 2021) was the winner of the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the Pulitzer Prize. Seuss was a 2020 Guggenheim Fellow. She received the John Updike Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2021. Seuss is a chancellor for the Academy of American Poets. Seuss was raised by a single mother in rural Michigan, which she continues to call home.

EVIE SHOCKLEY, poet and literary scholar, thinks, creates, and writes with her eye on a Black feminist horizon. Her six collections of poetry include *suddenly we* (winner of the NAACP Image Award, National Book Award Finalist), *semiautomatic* (winner of the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award, finalist for the Pulitzer Prize), and *the new black* (winner of the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award). She publishes widely and has been translated into French, Polish, Slovenian, and Spanish. Among the honors she has received for her body of work are the Shelley Memorial Award, the Lannan Literary Award for Poetry, the Holmes National Poetry Prize, and the Stephen Henderson Award. Her joys include participating in poetry communities such as Cave Canem and collaborating with artists working in various media. Shockley is the Zora Neale Hurston Distinguished Professor of English at Rutgers University.

BETSY SHOLL's tenth collection of poetry is *As If a Song Could Save You* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2022). Her ninth collection of poetry is *House of Sparrows: New and Selected Poems* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2019), winner of the Four Lakes Prize. Other awards include a Maine Book Award for Poetry, the Felix Pollak Prize, and the AWP Prize for Poetry. She teaches in the MFA in writing program of Vermont College of Fine Arts and served as poet laureate of Maine from 2006 to 2011.

RICHARD SIKEN is a poet, painter, and filmmaker. His book *Crush* won the 2004 Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize, selected by Louise Glück; a Lambda Literary Award; and a Thom Gunn Award; and was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. His other books are *War of the Foxes* (Copper Canyon Press, 2015) and *I Do Know Some Things* (Copper Canyon Press, 2025). Siken is a recipient of a Pushcart Prize, two Lannan Fellowships, two Arizona Commission on the Arts

grants, and a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. He lives in Tucson, Arizona.

ANDREA SIMPSON earned her MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts. She is an educator living in Evansville, Indiana, and her work has been published in various literary journals. In June 2024, she was a contributor to the 30/30 Project for Tupelo Press.

AARON SMITH is the author of five collections of poetry with the Pitt poetry series: *The Book of Daniel, Primer, Appetite, Blue on Blue Ground,* and, most recently, *Stop Lying.* With Maureen Seaton, he co-wrote the forthcoming collaboration *Beautiful People.* He is an associate professor of creative writing at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

MAGGIE SMITH is the *New York Times* bestselling author of eight books of poetry and prose, including *You Could Make This Place Beautiful, Good Bones, Goldenrod, Keep Moving,* and *My Thoughts Have Wings,* a picture book for children, illustrated by Leanne Hatch. Smith's poems and essays have been widely published, appearing in *The New Yorker, The Nation, The Atlantic, The Paris Review, TIME, The New York Times,* and the Best American Poetry series. She has received fellowships and awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Ohio Arts Council, the Sustainable Arts Foundation, and the Academy of American Poets. You can find her online @MaggieSmithPoet.

A. E. STALLINGS is an American poet who lives in Greece. She studied classics at the University of Georgia and Oxford University. The author of four poetry collections and selected poems (*This Afterlife*) and three volumes of verse translation (most recently, *The Battle Between the Frogs and the Mice*), Stallings has received fellowships from the Guggenheim and MacArthur Foundations. She is currently the Oxford professor of poetry.

DAVID ST. JOHN has been honored, over the course of his career, with both the Rome Fellowship and the Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters; the O. B. Hardison Prize from the Folger Shakespeare Library (a career award for teaching and poetic achievement); and the George Drury Smith Lifetime Achievement Award. He is the author of twelve collections of poetry,

including *Study for the World's Body,* nominated for the National Book Award in Poetry; *The Last Troubadour: New and Selected Poems;* and, most recently, *Prayer for My Daughter.* He has also published a volume of essays, interviews, and reviews entitled *Where the Angels Come Toward Us.* David St. John has written two libretti: for the opera based on his book *The Face,* by Donald Crockett, and the choral symphony *The Shore,* by Frank Ticheli, which was performed at the Segerstrom Center by the Pacific Chorale and at Carnegie Hall by the New York Choral Society. His poems have been set to music by David Broza, Peter Byrne, David Diamond, and Patrick O'Malley; he also provided lyrics for new songs by Los Angeles songwriter Jon Klages for the *Fabulous Twilight* album. David St. John also released the poetry and jazz CD *Surf Apocalypso: David St. John & Glen Moore Live at Beyond Baroque.* He is the co-editor of *American Hybrid: A Norton Anthology of New Poetry.* A past chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, David St. John is a professor of English and comparative literature at the University of Southern California. He lives in Hollywood, California.

BIANCA STONE is the author of five books, including the poetry collections *What Is Otherwise Infinite* (Tin House, 2022), winner of the 2022 Vermont Book Award; *The Möbius Strip Club of Grief* (Tin House, 2018); and *Someone Else's Wedding Vows* (Octopus Books and Tin House, 2014); and collaborated with Anne Carson on the illuminated version of *Antigonick* (New Directions, 2012). Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker, The Atlantic, Poets & Writers, The Nation,* and elsewhere. She cofounded the poetry-based nonprofit Ruth Stone House, where she teaches classes on poetry and poetic study, hosts the *Ode & Psyche* podcast, and is editor at large for *Iterant* magazine.

MELISSA STUDDARD writes poetry, fiction, song cycles, and libretti. Her most recent book is the poetry collection *Dear Selection Committee* (Jackleg Press), which includes award-winning poems featured by *The Penn Review* Poetry Prize, the Best American Poetry series, and the Poetry Society of America's Lucille Medwick Award, among others. As a librettist/lyricist, she has had works commissioned by Aspen Music Festival, Yale Institute of Sacred Music, Wolf Trap, and the University of Michigan School of Music. With Kelli Russell Agodon, she cohosts

the YouTube poetry series *Poems You Need.* You can find her at www.melissastuddard.com and www.youtube.com/@PoemsYouNeed.

TESS TAYLOR is the author of five collections of poetry, including *Work & Days,* one of the *New York Times*'s ten best books of poetry of 2016; and *Rift Zone,* one of the *Boston Globe*'s fifty best books of 2020. The editor of the anthology *Leaning Toward Light: Poems for Gardens and the Hands That Tend Them,* she also served as on-air poetry reviewer for NPR's *All Things Considered* for a decade. She was U.S. Distinguished Fulbright to the Seamus Heaney Centre in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and is the recipient of an Academy of American Poets Poet Laureate fellowship for her work as Poet Laureate of El Cerrito.

Her work as a poet and cultural critic appears widely. Tess and her family wear T-shirts in the bleachers and shake it off just outside Berkeley, California.

RODRIGO TOSCANO is a poet and dialogist based in New Orleans. He is the author of eleven books of poetry. His latest books are *The Cut Point* (Counterpath, 2023) and *The Charm and the Dread* (Fence, 2022). Forthcoming is *Whitman. Cannonball. Puebla* (2025). His *Collapsible Poetics Theater* was a National Poetry Series selection. His previous books include *In Range, Explosion Rocks Springfield, Deck of Deeds, Collapsible Poetics Theater, To Leveling Swerve, Platform, Partisans,* and *The Disparities.* His poetry has appeared in more than twenty anthologies, including *Best American Poetry* (2023, 2004) and *Best American Experimental Writing* (BAX). His poetry has appeared in the *Boston Review, Poetry, The Kenyon Review, The Harvard Advocate, Georgia Review, Yale Review,* and *Fence,* among others. Toscano has received a New York State Fellowship in Poetry. He won the Edwin Markham 2019 prize for poetry. He was an honorable mention for the 2023 International Latino Literary Awards. His poetry has been translated into French, Dutch, Italian, German, Portuguese, Norwegian, and Catalan. He works for the Labor Institute in conjunction with the United Steelworkers on educational projects that involve environmental and labor justice culture transformation. You can find him online at www.rodrigotoscano.com and @Toscano200.

PAUL TRAN is the author of the debut poetry collection *All the Flowers Kneeling* (Penguin, 2022), winner of the CALIBA Golden Poppy Award and Wisconsin Library Association Poetry Award, finalist for the PEN Open Book Award,

Lambda Literary Foundation Transgender Poetry Award, Kate Tufts Discovery Award, and Association for Asian American Studies Poetry Award, and named NPR Books We Love, *The New Yorker* Best Books of 2022, and *The New York Times* Editor's Choice.

LEAH UMANSKY is an educator, artist, writer, poet, and the author of three collections of poetry, most recently *Of Tyrant* (Word Works Books, 2024), as well as two chapbooks, *Don Dreams and I Dream* and *Straight Away the Emptied World.* She earned her MFA in poetry at Sarah Lawrence College and has curated and hosted the Couplet Reading Series in New York City since 2011. She is the creator of the *Stay Brave* Substack, which encourages women-identifying creatives to stay brave in their creative pursuits. Her creative work can be found in such places as *The New York Times,* the Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day, PBS, *Glass, RHINO,* and *Poetry.* She is working on a fourth collection of poems, *Ordinary Splendor,* on wonder, joy, and love, and a memoir titled after this poem, *Oceans Apart.* She can be found at www.leahumansky.com or @leah.umansky on Instagram.

ANNE WALDMAN, poet, professor, performer, librettist, and cultural activist, is the author of more than sixty volumes of poetry, poetics, and anthologies, including *The Iovis Trilogy: Colors in The Mechanism of Concealment* (Coffee House Press), which won the PEN Center Literary Prize. Penguin has published her books over many years, including *Trickster Feminism,* among five others. Her album *SCIAMACHY* was released in 2020 by Fast Speaking Music and has been described by Patti Smith as "exquisitely potent, a psychic shield for our times." Waldman cofounded the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics program at Naropa University, whose Fiftieth Anniversary Summer Writing program will have its session in Boulder June 9–29. Waldman was the keynote speaker for the Bob Dylan and the Beats Conference in Tulsa in the spring of 2022, and she wrote the libretto for the critically acclaimed Grammy-nominated (2024) opera/movie *Black Lodge* with music by composer David T. Little that premiered at Opera Philadelphia. *Publishers Weekly* has called Anne Waldman a "counter-cultural giant." Waldman is the author of *Bard, Kinetic* (Coffee House Press); *Rues du monde / Streets of the World* (Apic Press, 2024), translations into French by Pierre Joris and Nicole Peyrafitte; and an essay on the Beats and the founding of the

Buddhist-inspired Naropa University, with notes and poems: *Tendril: A Meeting of Minds* (Trident Books, 2024). She is co-editor with Emma Gomis of *New Weathers: Poetics from the Naropa Archive* (Nightboat). A new volume entitled *Mesopotopia* is forthcoming from Penguin in 2025. You can find her online at www.annewaldman.org.

TOPAZ WINTERS is the author of *So, Stranger* (Button Poetry, 2022), winner of the Button Poetry Short Form Contest; *Portrait of My Body as a Crime I'm Still Committing* (Button Poetry, 2019 and 2024), finalist in the Broken River and Gaudy Boy Poetry Book Prizes; and *poems for the sound of the sky before thunder* (Math Paper Press, 2017). She serves as editor in chief of Half Mystic Press, an independent, international, and interdisciplinary publishing project, and as co-editor of *Kopi Break,* a journal of new Singapore poetry.

Her creative work has been published by *Waxwing, The Drift,* and *Poets.org;* profiled in *Vogue, The Straits Times,* and *The Business Times;* and performed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Center for Fiction, and the Singapore Writers Festival. In 2017, she gave the TEDx talk "Healing Is a Verb." She is the writer and star of the short film *Supernova* (recipient of awards from the Newark International, Across Asia Youth, Laurie Nelson, My Rode Reel, Singapore International Student, and CINE Golden Eagle Film Festivals). She lives between New York and Singapore with a white dog named Hachii and a black cat named Volta.

AVERY R. YOUNG (him, his), Chicago's inaugural poet laureate, interdisciplinary artist, and educator, is a Leader for a New Chicago 2022 awardee, a Cave Canem fellow, and a co-director of the Floating Museum. His poetry and prose have been featured in *BreakBeat Poets, Teaching Black,* and *Poetry* and alongside images in photographer Cecil McDonald, Jr.'s *In the Company of Black.* He is the composer and librettist for a new commissioned work from the Lyric Opera of Chicago titled *safronia.* His full-length recording *tubman.* is the soundtrack to his collection of poetry, *neckbone: visual verses.*

MATTHEW ZAPRUDER lives in Northern California. He is editor at large at Wave Books and teaches in the MFA program at Saint Mary's College of California. His forthcoming collection of poetry, *I Love Hearing Your Dreams,* will be published by Scribner in fall 2024.

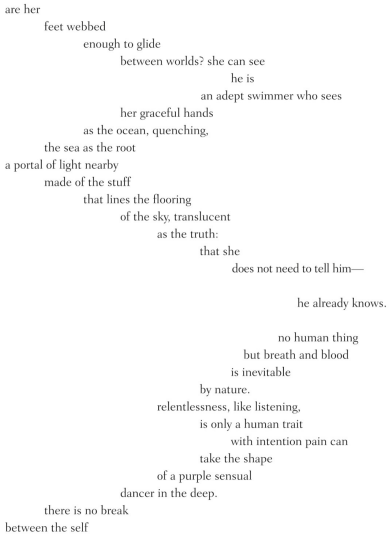


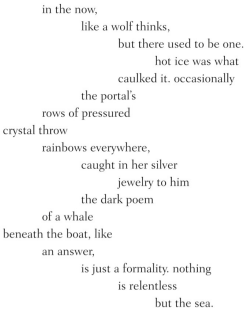
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KRISTIE FREDERICK DAUGHERTY is a poet and professor at the University of Evansville. She holds an MFA in poetry from Vermont College of Fine Arts. She is also a PhD candidate in literature/criticism at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, where she is writing a dissertation that examines how Taylor Swift's lyrics intersect with contemporary poetry.

Appendix: Poems in Plain Text

Several poems in this ebook were captured as images to retain their original formatting. In this section those images have been reproduced as thumbnails accompanied by plain-text versions of the illustrations.





are her
feet webbed
enough to glide
between worlds? she can see
he is
an adept swimmer who sees
her graceful hands
as the ocean, quenching,
the sea as the root
a portal of light nearby
made of the stuff
that lines the flooring
of the sky, translucent
as the truth:
that she
does not need to tell him—

he already knows.

no human thing
but breath and blood

is inevitable
by nature.
relentlessness, like listening,
is only a human trait
with intention pain can
take the shape
of a purple sensual
dancer in the deep.
there is no break
between the self
in the now,
like a wolf thinks,
but there used to be one.
hot ice was what
caulked it. occasionally
the portal's
rows of pressured
crystal throw
rainbows everywhere,
caught in her silver
jewelry to him
the dark poem
of a whale
beneath the boat, like
an answer,
is just a formality. nothing
is relentless
but the sea.

Return to text





We marked our love
with the blade of your grandfather's knife.
Weathered bark, our scar
of holy vows.
Now,
I search the ground,
eyes
down in reverence:
rue for my repentance,
fennel for your flattery:
What *is* your reason?
The birds sing
Fitzgerald's "Cry Me a River."
The theme song of *OUR*
after, where the fault
was mine or the moon's, and the candlelight
flickered your scene
change: Richard III, villain,
or
Lear,
madman

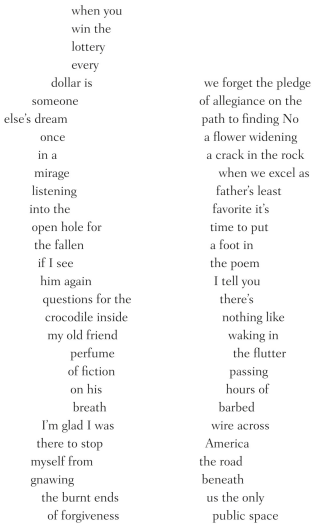
Or is that me?
Am I he? Please,
give me
any reason?
I close my eyes and see my mother—
How she leaned over my crib, and offered her
hair to my searching hands. I am sad
of this tiredness, all
this
blue.
I whisper the verse under my breath
scream the chorus. As if words
protect,
soothe all of my aching
parts.
What *reason*?
Your
treason?

I pluck the daisy's petals: love me,
love me,
why won't
You
love
me?

Remove all unwanted cutlery! always
too many dishes
to eat. i munch glass
and taste our memories. i line
this trunk with vases:
rosemary to remember,
pansies for each thought of You

Cupid’s assault on unsuspecting
blooms.
i coax my bones to rise, talk to them
as children,
hushed;
pleading.

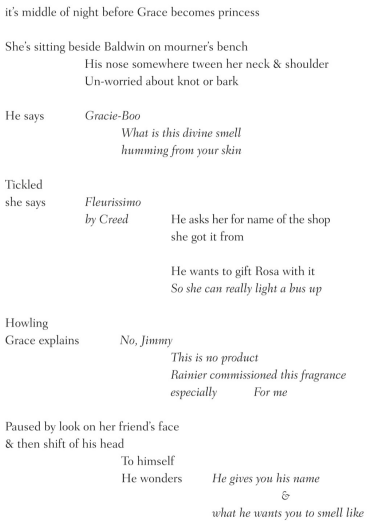
Return to text



when you
win the
lottery
every
dollar is
someone
else's dream
once
in a
mirage
listening
into the
open hole for
the fallen
if I see
him again
questions for the
crocodile inside
my old friend
perfume

of fiction
on his
breath
I'm glad I was
there to stop
myself from
gnawing
the burnt ends
of forgiveness
we forget the pledge
of allegiance on the
path to finding No
a flower widening
a crack in the rock
when we excel as
father's least
favorite it's
time to put
a foot in
the poem
I tell you
there's
nothing like
waking in
the flutter
passing
hours of
barbed
wire across
America
the road
beneath
us the only
public space

Return to text



it's middle of night before Grace becomes princess

She's sitting beside Baldwin on mourner's bench
His nose somewhere tween her neck & shoulder
Un-worried about knot or bark

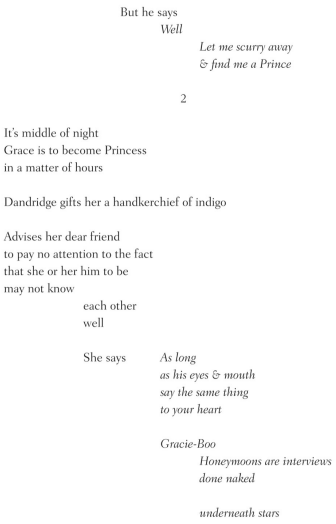
He says *Gracie-Boo*
What is this divine smell
humming from your skin

Tickled
she says *Fleurissimo*
by Creed He asks her for name of the shop
she got it from

He wants to gift Rosa with it
So she can really light a bus up

Howling
Grace explains *No, Jimmy*
This is no product
Rainier commissioned this fragrance
especially For me

Paused by look on her friend's face
& then shift of his head
To himself
He wonders *He gives you his name*
&
what he wants you to smell like



But he says
Well
Let me scurry away
& find me a Prince

2

It's middle of night
Grace is to become Princess
in a matter of hours

Dandridge gifts her a handkerchief of indigo

Advises her dear friend
to pay no attention to the fact
that she or her him to be
may not know
each other
well

She says *As long*
as his eyes & mouth
say the same thing
to your heart

Gracie-Boo
Honeymoons are interviews
done naked

underneath stars

it's middle of night before Grace becomes princess

She's sitting beside Baldwin on mourner's bench
His nose somewhere tween her neck & shoulder
Un-worried about knot or bark

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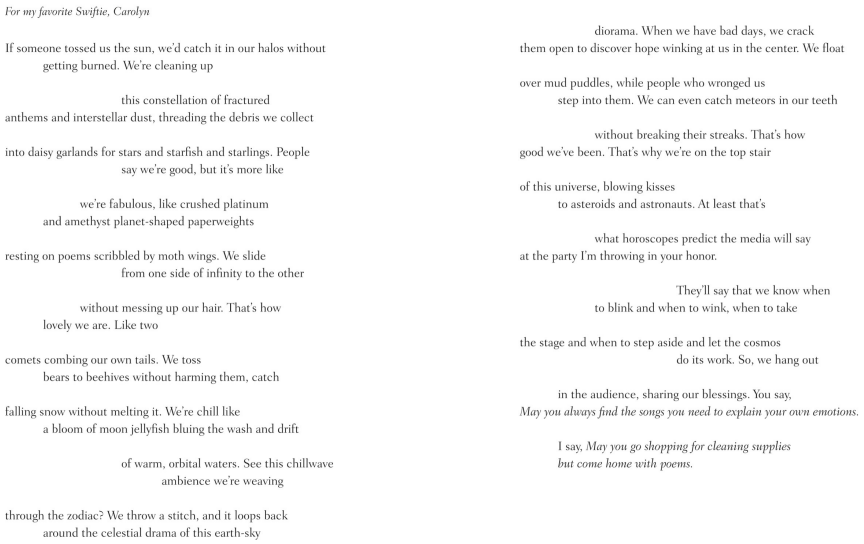
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to your heart

Gracie-Boo
Honeymoons are interviews
done naked

underneath stars

Return to text



For my favorite Swiftie, Carolyn

If someone tossed us the sun, we'd catch it in our halos without
getting burned. We're cleaning up

this constellation of fractured
anthems and interstellar dust, threading the debris we collect

into daisy garlands for stars and starfish and starlings. People
say we're good, but it's more like

we're fabulous, like crushed platinum
and amethyst planet-shaped paperweights

resting on poems scribbled by moth wings. We slide
from one side of infinity to the other

without messing up our hair. That's how
lovely we are. Like two

comets combing our own tails. We toss
bears to beehives without harming them, catch

falling snow without melting it. We're chill like
a bloom of moon jellyfish bluing the wash and drift

of warm, orbital waters. See this chillwave
ambience we're weaving

through the zodiac? We throw a stitch, and it loops back
around the celestial drama of this earth-sky

diorama. When we have bad days, we crack
them open to discover hope winking at us in the center. We float

over mud puddles, while people who wronged us
step into them. We can even catch meteors in our teeth

without breaking their streaks. That's how
good we've been. That's why we're on the top stair

of this universe, blowing kisses
to asteroids and astronauts. At least that's

what horoscopes predict the media will say
at the party I'm throwing in your honor.

They'll say that we know when
to blink and when to wink, when to take

the stage and when to step aside and let the cosmos
do its work. So, we hang out

in the audience, sharing our blessings. You say,
May you always find the songs you need to explain your own emotions.

I say, *May you go shopping for cleaning supplies*
but come home with poems.

For my favorite Swiftie, Carolyn

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but come home with poems.

Return to text

It's said not many people read poetry

(autocorrect makes *said* into *sad*)

It's sad so few people read poetry

That isn't even true
There are stashes of it in dead people's drawers

They were reading the kind of poetry you
don't really care for

Today desert doves are up early
gurgling Finches in affordable
condos of the palm
Bees with asterisks of pollen on their hind legs
in pockets called corbicula

Sparrows diving from cypresses over hornblende
a type of rock that looks like the mind

After the performance when nothing
mattered but adult disappointment when falling
over other people's egos then your own

you spent days complaining
to your love who is clever &
kind about incapacities caused

by emotion

It's hard to be kind to unkind but sensitive people

Remarks are not literature wrote Stein while making literature

My mind is being patient with my psyche
wrote your mother on a slip
of paper you found in a book of appliance instructions
she never used because she mostly fixed it herself

She never said it's hard to be a woman
She never said the word ego

No need to blame capitalism or
Deleuze or plastic straws She said poetry
will make sense in its own way

Poetry the fence lizard with extra blue on its throat

Poetry the gift you wait to open because like a birthday girl
you maintain magical hope

In the vault of eternity there is some remodeling
going on The roof is leaking

A little rain seeps in which is good
Your mother won't have to water the houseplants

Stars line the place wearing sweaters of fog

Words tagged in chalk & photons & spools
of fifties lipstick

Ants were dragging shadows 2/3 the size of
their bodies for a whole city block some were already
grooming their wounded in tunnels

Desert willows wept & dropped two-toned late spring blossoms

Kind comes from *gen* the same Sanskrit root as nature

You'd been thinking all your life about
women ancestors
All the shit they put up with
your grandmother Dickinson Millay Barbara Guest

Inanna the Babylonian goddess holding fiery
words in her skirt

Some great women poets aren't dead yet
Some mail notebooks with plenty of stamps
Some speak behind your back & aren't kind
No one can say what will last in any of it

Kind or clever clever & kind the device known
as chiasmus making crosses like plump doves
waddling over your parents' graves
with silverleaf nightshade nearby

New fathers pushing strollers on the street trying to
text with

one thumb The baby looks around mystified

Women keep fire in their skirts
The breath of the dead is the wind at your back

Maybe you & the unkind ones & the kind ones sit
together as in a sauna on your towels making small talk
about matter & anti-matter

Maybe you all lean against the same wall
where you each wrote something
that changed the wall Maybe just

lean back try to remember that

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