

The Orchards

Poetry Journal

December 2017

Issue IV



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Inspired by the small plot of apple trees near Cambridge, England, where writers have gathered for years with their books and pens, we welcome you to pull up a chair and enjoy poetry in the orchard.



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Featured Poet

Kevin Durkin

Winner of the 2015 Frost Farm Prize, Kevin Durkin has published poems in *Poetry*, *New Criterion*, *Yale Review*, and the anthologies *Poetry Daily*, *Able Muse Anthology*, *Irresistible Sonnets*, and *Measure for Measure*. Finishing Line Press published his first collection of poetry, *Los Angeles in Fog*, in 2013.

Durkin attended schools in West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Germany before earning his degree in English literature from Princeton University. He has taught English in Singapore, Kitakyushu (Japan), New York City, and Washington, D.C. He also has performed in the plays of Shakespeare across the United States. Currently a managing editor at *Light* and at The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens in San Marino, he resides with his wife and two daughters in Santa Monica.

Kevin Durkin

The Lookout

The wind that stirs the chaparral
prompts vigilance in me.
Impervious to the blended scent
of sage and dust and sea,

I walk the fire road all day long,
an eye out for a spark
that could ignite the arid brush
and devastate the park.

Tenants

After his book about his boy was done,
he idled on his deck chair in the sun

or stood before the easel in his room
and tried to paint two bare trees in the gloom

or lay unsleeping on his son's old bed,
staring at neighbors' windows straight ahead

until they darkened and his mind went numb.
Without fail, the enchanting dawn would come

and prompt him to make coffee and a meal.
Then back out on the deck, his life unreal

and endless in its cruel monotony.
He spoke with effort to the glib and free

who paused near their apartments, smiled and waved,
especially those whose children could be saved.

And then, one day—who knows exactly when—
he realized he could join his son again

and planned a trip into the mountains, far
above the city, in a borrowed car.

There, where a cliff rose high above a dam,
he'd seek release from past mistakes and slam

his haunted skull against the rocks below.
But first he'd sell his furniture and go

back to his ex-wife for a three-month stay,
canceling debts and guilt, then slip away.

The deck chair's gone. Two college women share
the light-drenched rooms, carefree and unaware

that when they lead their boyfriends through the door,
the shades of those who held the lease before

still hover in the air, alert and near,
and will not bless the laughter that they hear.

Kevin Durkin

The Elephant in the Room

on a sculpture by Daniel Firman

This elephant—gymnastic? crazy? drunk?—
balances delicately on her trunk
and lifts her hind feet high into the air,
entrancing visitors who stop and stare.
Stiff ears flange out, while curved tusks, sharp and white,
point to the concrete floor that fills her sight.
Suspended in a perilous position,
she mocks the gravitas of her condition.

Not Home

Her window framed midwinter darkness traced
with feathered frost. Half-slumped in her white gown—
my father's arms secure around her waist,
her bare feet on his shoes, her eyes cast down—
she swung, submissive, to the brass and bass
piped through a speaker in the corridor
and kept on plucking at her yellowed lace
as if at a corsage that she once wore.

"Johnny," she said, her first word of the night,
her husband's name. "Oh, John, where have you been?"
"I'm Jim," her son replied, as their slow spin
concluded near her bed. The nightstand light
bathed her divided lenses with its gold
and filled with shadow every crease and fold.

Chest of Drawers

Upper West Side, 1993

1

A few days after Edith passed away,
her downstairs neighbor, Jan, invited me
to take whatever furniture I wanted
from Edith's rooms. Jan still had Edith's key,
and she said no one else had shown an interest.
So, over bagels in Jan's sunny kitchen,
I learned what all had happened since I'd left:
the funeral, the brief parade of friends
coming to gather what was willed to them,
and, late at night, the creaking floor and sighing.
We chuckled for a while about the sighing.
"You know," said Jan, "the day that you moved in,
Edith was miffed. The boarder you'd replaced
had been her favorite, nutty though he was.
He used to drink her scotch and steal her money
to buy his dope, which he smoked night and day.
She didn't like the smell, but she was lonely.
The nurse who checked on Edith every week
said she once found him sprawled across the bed,
his shirt off, napping. Edith loved that boy . . ."

I recalled nights when Edith shuffled down
the hallway, knocked politely on my door,
and offered me a cup of tea—at midnight.
I would refuse, and as I'd fall asleep,
I'd hear her muttering, "Oh dear, oh dear,
he doesn't care for tea, he doesn't care . . ."
in accents proper for a governess
but lightly crossed with brogue from the Isle of Man.
Then she would shuffle back to her own room,
her stiff, gnarled fingers tapping on the plaster.

Jan said, “She socked away a pile of money.
Made it by sewing curtains for the rich—
the wife of Babe Ruth, half the opera crowd.
In those days, she would summer on Long Island,
but had to sell her house there years ago,
after her husband died, to pay rent here.
She didn’t miss her husband—told me so.
His legs were purple, damaged in the war,
which made her pity him. He came from Paris
and stayed three months before she asked for rent.
She claimed she married him to hear his French.
I’d hear him chasing her around upstairs,
begging for love, while she kept shouting, ‘No!’
Don’t ask me why. He was a handsome man . . .”

Edith told me about another man,
her best friend’s husband, whom she stole each Friday
for romps downtown: he liked to wear her heels
and satin dresses; she, his tux with tails.
When he died young, her best friend moved away,
leaving in Edith’s care their only child,
a girl who gave no thanks for Edith’s pains,
a bitter woman who would not return.

2

I climbed the stairs from Jan’s place to the door
I’d opened every night of Edith’s last,
loneliest year, and did not hesitate
to slip the warm brass key into the lock.
The door creaked open, and a string of bells
jangled awhile, as they had always done,
announcing my return. Sweating despite
the unexpected breeze that ruffled through
the curtains down the hall in my old room,

I stopped between the bathroom on my right
and Edith's quiet bedroom on my left.
Her room was dim and musty, and her bed,
stripped of its sheets, was dented where she'd lain,
dying, for months. I turned into the bathroom,
bent to her chipped sink, washed my hands and face,
then looked up, dripping, at her dingy mirror.
The bedroom loomed behind me, and a chill
rippled through me as if I were a curtain.
Turning around, I saw her sagging bed,
and, next to it, her narrow chest of drawers,
the one in which her underthings were kept,
its dark wood warped. I went to lay my hand
on top of it, and, in a voice too loud,
said, "Edith, let me know if it's all right
to take this one." The chill swept through the room,
swirled round my ankles, fluttered up my shirt.

The next twelve months, her chest of drawers resided
in the back corner of a room I shared
with my fiancée. Crammed with underwear,
the chest progressively collapsed, its drawers
swelling or shrinking with the seasons, stuck
or rattling loose, each bottom giving out
and jumbling what had once been kept apart.
Last time I saw it, it was leaning up
against a dumpster outside our apartment,
drawerless, a hollow box of weathered pine,
empty at last of purpose, lost in time.

The Sunset Watchers

They stand along the concrete fence that wends
between the bluff's green edge and gritty path,
their faces reddened while the sun descends
by cool degrees into the bay's curved bath.
The younger couples murmur, point, or kiss.
The older pairs stand side by side, hold hands.
Joggers slow down, and tourists reminisce
about their morning rambles on the sands.

The palm trees, leaning toward emerging stars,
clatter more keenly as the breezes shift,
while far below, six lanes of homebound cars
rush like the surf. The moon begins to lift
above the city, her reflected light
shining on all who face the coming night.



A Shepherd, Twenty-Four December

after Tom Hennen

Sheep huddle, penned, crowding against the dark
And breath-fogging chill. Some few doze. Most listen,
Large-eyed. They have heard the wolves. Armed with dogs,
I watch, knowing what burdens these creatures
Must bear: teeth of predators, knives of butchers,
A reputation for stupidity, their comical
Look after giving up, so patiently, their fleece.
But tonight was born the tiny Lamb of God.

Now, forever glorified by metaphor,
Sheep may safely graze unafraid, overseen
By other brave figures of speech, Good Shepherds,
As we like to say, ennobled alike by these words.
Whatever snows may come, whatever wolves,
This night we herders say Gloria in Excelsis Deo.

Philip Quinlan

Place Furstenberg, Paris

David Hockney, Photo Collage

Here lies
the truth retold,
with dislocation
there and there,
a letting-in
of light and air.

A pictured scene:
one day to stand
for all days, and—
to mean exactly
what you mean—
one place to stand
for anywhere.

As in Arden

Just as you like, it's gay, about a tree;
a gender switch in tran-Sylvania;
the outing of true love (Act 1, Scene 3,
and enter Ganymede); Swan monomania.

It's rumoured that the bard swung either way—
Elizabethans prized their manly love—
though hosiery should not the jury sway,
nor ruffs, nor earrings go the cause to prove.

In Venice, 'boy' meets 'girl', the fun begins:
the Jew's demand for justice being harsh,
bi Balthazar do tax him for his sins.

When Portia states her case, in a moustache,
what dare not speak may, nonetheless, be heard.
'Fair' Rosalind shall have the final word.

Pantoum for Collapsing Maculae

At the Botanical Gardens

I memorize the sweet, balsamic scent of lavender,
And study the shapes of fleabane, yarrow, bee balm
Until, with eyes closed, I can picture them.
I wish on blown dandelion seed—fairies in spindriffs.

Bee balm's flower is clustered, red, tufted.
The hollyhock has a spotted throat.
Dandelion seed and milkweed float like fairies in spindriffs.
The bark of the dragon's claw willow is bulbous.

I watch a bee crawl down a hollyhock's spotted throat
And note the glints in the rivulet making its way down rock face.
I run my palm over the bulbous bark of the dragon's claw willow.
My vision dotted as the petals of the leading lady lilac,

My vision spotty like the hollyhock's throat,
Lacy as the salvia leaves eaten by budworms and beetles.
Blink and I see a mist of dark dots like the petals of the leading lady
lilac.
The blossoms of the dogwood blend together into creamy light.

Through my eyes the world looks lacy, eaten.
Patches of the pond, thick with leaf fall and algae, are erased.
In wind I listen for the bark of dogwood branches knocking together.
Is that a shadow or a chipmunk hightailing it across my path?

I no longer see the skinny legs of skate bugs gliding across the pond,
the perfect geometry of the star-like mountain laurel,
a chipmunk's black-and-white stripes as it hightails across my path,
each blue-green compound leaf of the deep pink bleeding heart.

I memorize the star-like shape of the mountain laurel.
Should my maculae collapse completely,
may I remember the deep-pink double chambers of the bleeding heart.
May a sweet balsamic scent bring to mind the purple indigo of
lavender.

Virginia's Constellations

Whatever actually happened at Yang-ping's house
during that winter, there were seasons before and after

in which nothing happened. Rowboats skiffled along
rain-washed river bottoms, rocky but not impassable.

There wasn't always a drunken moon or salty stars
in a black bowl of sky. A heron followed the boat

seeking clues about the lady in the wide-brimmed hat,
a blue ribbon trailing the wind like its mate's feathers.

The tail of Scorpio slashed the wild sky. The woman
blinded by icy stars, could have been mistaken for a wizened

"Chinaman," thousands of years old. The silent river spilled no secrets
about temptation or regret. The woman who navigated

these waters held a compass that could turn her boat around,
change to any direction. She planted her long legs solidly

on its wooden floor, a book open and faced down
beside her written by a man who'd traveled similar waters.

Many winters before, too many to record in a hand-painted chart,
Li Po paddled a river, his oars dripping stars.

Madame Cézanne with Unbound Hair (1869)

You parted the cool braid
of my hair, it snaked like rain along your shoulder.
Early autumn: yellow leaves laid
a pattern of eyes at our window. Colder
weather would cower them into cones
and we would sit crossed-legged on the bed
each uncurling the other like a fortune teller's hand. Poems
didn't hold us as much as time passing. We read
to one another. You told me my hair
was a fragile ladder, we needed to escape
the turbulent green rivers that dared
to take us under. You kissed the nape
of my neck and spun out the coils of golden brown.
We practiced an ancient tapestry, the art form we found.

The Snow Angel

My father, who dies on the longest night of the year, returns
a month later, somehow fifty-three years old, a wild-eyed charmer,
to tell me that the dead aren't worrying about the living, that

each snowflake falling is a wish spoken before it hits the earth.
I am half awake, I rub my eyes. He stamps the porch, begging for
a decent cup of coffee, saying he has no rest for all those wishes,

no sleep for all those mad-rushes to pull us safely
to the curb. I am skeptical. I hand him his coffee: milk, no sugar.
He has that sheepish grin, that wolf-sure twinkle. "Tell me

you aren't disappointed dad, show me how you know
it's all ok." He guffaws his coffee. "I would sleep like the dead.
Instead, I have dervish-toddlers, toothless men. Mostly I have you.

Lighten up, they say, winter's my busy season." I blink, his cup
is empty, I was about to make us tea. His shoes wait by his empty
bed, Goodwill is coming next month. Each day I walk through

a forest with somebody's name carved on a tree. All winter, during
long feathery nights, wishes swirl round the house, falling
on the neighborhood, on the chimneys while we sleep.

Murmurs of the Crones in Hackmatack

As if a dream made visible, you move
Fluttering through thickets in your nightgown,
Wooing the world, luring the watching eye.

You feel that something marvelous and true
Will heave like mountains into view, will change
You. Because a strangeness will be born.

As if a queen, ethereal and fey,
You'll stray in fairy circles with a frog,
Arrayed in foxfire crown and moonshine shoes.

You'll find a dulcimer left in the fern
And none but you can pluck and learn the strings.
You'll spurn the songs of ordinary men.

What is this something-sensed, soon to take place?
You'll chase the merry tune of your true love,
Bass-notes gone wandering in balsam boughs.

We are the wrenched by years and stooped—Harken!—
We are the crows that darken life with words,
Who caw stark fortunes from the heart of swamps.

Oh, we were fair like you, each lithe-limbed sister
Washed in glamour, the glistening of youth.
Listen! Fly the twisted paths of the marsh.

Flee the willows, jack pine, and leather leaf,
Flee poplar, birch, bog bean, and cottongrass,
Muskeg tea, maple, and speckled alder.

Here you will dance as you wish not to dance,
Here you will sing of chance till your throat burns
And trance casts trembling silver nets on you,

Flee the shade of ash and tamarack,
The trails—black crookedness!—we penitents
Hacked through the brush when we were loveliness.

Cronesong

We courtiers to danger's rule
Who loved to play the fool
Must bide our choices, brook our fate—
This cock-eyed, gimped estate.
Our wealth but icicles like glass
Or sun-seared topaz grass
And opal cloud... The whet-winds blow
When we scoop cots from snow,
And dream of angered barrow-wights,
Harpies, and headless knights
While frolic children bob and shake
Their bells till clappers break.

1963 Impala Super Sport Convertible

I've never been one to wager, but I guess
I've got a gambler's heart, always hoping
against hope for one outcome or another
no matter the math or probability.
So when I wanted that old Impala
against the concerns you raised, I never weighed
its rust-stained frame against our meager
bank account, or let the haze of burning oil
obscure the image of a shoreline drive:
top down, salt spray, heading north with all the sky
on fire above the ocean from the dying day.
You said something about depreciation
and throwing good money after bad
that missed my attention at the time,
and the opportunity cost of sticking
around to see how things would turn out.
And when we finally had the brakes relined,
I was surprised to wake and find you'd decided
to drive that car back east, though I should've
seen the signs—my only regret the twenty dollars
I'd put in the gas tank the night before,
that had seemed a safe bet at the time.

Kevin Casey

Window Weights

These iron ingots
stand listing,
staring skyward
at the small light
winking through
the pulley's groove—
ropes cut, sashes
painted shut,
tall buckets sunk
to the bottoms
of their wells,
and no help now
in drawing up
a summer breeze.

Araneus Diadematus

As if by nature's sorcery,
back-lighted by an orange harvest moon,
the alchemy of spinnerets—
protein into silk, gossamer
suspended between eave and gutter
at the whim of a puff of wind
or the weight of raindrops,
a sparrow's hunger.

In the morning, droplets of dew
hung by night's mist diadem
the filaments, lustered by low
shafts of sunrise, elegance
to rob the breath. Each night
a prayer for its survival. Like
matins and vespers added
to a diurnal ritual, a treasure
of communion, of serenity,
nothing asked in return. Seven
days it defied wind, rain
and predator, a damselfly
or two sustenance enough.
Then, whisked away
on the stealthy wings
of the first light frost.

The Watchers at Punta Ballena, Uruguay

They come in droves. As afternoon subsides
they settle on this bluff above the shore.
La Plata's mixed semidiurnal tides
cannot provide an explanation for
this pilgrimage; nor can the jasmine- and
the eucalyptus-scented air. Baleen
whales passed this spot some months ago. At hand,
the expectation of a flash of green.
But maybe they are here, like me, to trace
the shimmering horizon of the sea,
to scan it for a master plan, for grace
beyond its incandescence, where they see
some human promise in the sun's decline—
a deep though distant sense of the divine.

Prayer on December 26th

We race to Walmart, push and shove,
corral the cut-rate things we love,
forget the price You had to pay,
the cost incurred just yesterday.
And as we reach the check-out rows
with next year's tinsel, bells and bows,
forgive us that our vision fails
to see beyond the red tag sales.

Spirit

How desolate, exposed, the living room . . .
Our customary spruce out by the curb,
how green of me to think, expect, presume
that I'd feel festive as a Hallmark blurb
this time. No elders at the fireside,
I sigh, no kneeling oxen. It is clear
I failed again, although I really tried
to trim my tree sufficiently this year.
In January's pallid, lifeless light,
with April pending like a clockwork star,
the Magi gone, the family in flight,
I value sugarplums for what they are.
Yet I shall pack each ornament with care
and stock up on some half-priced angel hair

Poem Masquerading as Haiku

You cup your palm tight
make sleigh bells out of beach glass
the ocean applauds

You touch sea creatures
they close their squiggly tendrils
the clouds obey you

You speak the round voice
live in the breath of today
fear does not haunt you

The shop of ocean
offers magic to tempt us
you pose on one knee

Honeycombs of clouds
call attention to the birds
we stare at the sea

You look to the trees
write prose against the smooth bark
the leaves publish you

You shield eyes from sun
run finger round the goblet
the scream splits the air

I am symmetry
we come from different worlds
I am the coward

Muted stripes on shirt
you see me running away
stripes and hair, and stripes.

Color Wheel

A strawberry isn't just red;
it has orange and yellow, hints
of brown sludge—dead
and alive—with glints
of light. All of it's layered, a blend
of tones, a composite,
an accretion that contends
this is it.
This is real.
Meanwhile, an artist tries,
with oiled pigments,
to approximate, to surmise
the fruit's mixt figments.
It's never enough, what we do:
each drawing a flawed world made anew.

Repentance

The rough edges of a drawing, the mistakes,
have a name: *pentimenti*—the marks
we leave behind and change, to take
another direction, explore a stark
change, a shift, a decision to say
here is my new vision, here's my
new thought. Meanwhile, the day
does what the day does, moves by.
These lines, though, are a code,
evidence of a mind at work, trying
to record movement, to load
reality into shapes that sing
with change and swirl with mood.
Perfection is the opposite of good.

You Knew

You knew I would write this
song. You knew
that the war started over
words, the same
way knowledge began, and
life. You knew I would
stay up all night
working on the front lines.
And you knew that
when I sang for you
my throat would be raw with ash.

The Mark

From my window, I hear the siren song,
Haunting Lorelei from brown factory stream.
Insistent, whether wide awake or dream.
Dark lullaby that whispers, nothing wrong
With overwhelming rage, for men belong
To their bestial natures, the brutish gleam
In their flaming-red eye, as harp-songs deem
That the night is the plaything of the strong.

So from this towering castle keep I slip
With brain afire, heart drumming, not the least
Afraid of anything, strength in my grip
With each dumb prey, hapless victim, increased
Tenfold, with claws that stretch from fingertip,
Scratch flesh from bone, leave red mark of the beast.

This Tree

I come across a tree that's scuffed and worn
By time and pause to give respect, while peace
That hides in tangled branches seems to mourn
Its vanished youth. The trunks I've seen have grace
And mass and form and they look sleek, but feel
Like matted sand. Ring after ring's engraved
Upon your heart; they're years you can't conceal.
My hands move on your core like hands that craved
The feel of something safe before the storm.
Now headstrong trees shoot up along your stock.
Emboldened by their numbers, they stand firm
And taunt you; with their limber ways they mock.
Then anger streaks my face and I bemoan
To have to leave you gnarled by time, alone.

Larka

My breath steamed her glasses.

She failed to differentiate
between intensity and anger.
She claimed my right hand held an ax
and my left hand a crow.

My breast pocket stuffed with straw
nested wrens' eggs.

She blinked Summer out of her eyes
but left three lumps of coal in the form of an ellipsis.
She feared gunfire in my consonants
and a hangman's noose in my vowels.

My thought bubble floated
drowned herons to the surface
and back into flight.

She stomped the drought to death.
She covered with mud all of yesterday's dried footprints.
She devoured all the animals trapped in amber.
She peeled my proximity back like an onion's paper skin.

My dangling modifier hung like a ruptured cocoon
attached to my tongue, a butterfly mid-emergence.

At the Foot of an Oak . . .

At the foot of an oak, on the fringe of a forest stand,
On the crowded path there, an organ grinder plays
His old familiar song, though on some days
A palsy shakes the blind man's old, tired hand.

The same song rings forever through the trees.
It moves but few. Yet every day it pains
The hearts of lovers with its bitter strains
So like the cries of children ill at ease.

Their song still rings where forest murmurs swell,
Their sound quite faint, their loneliness immense.
The distant woodland rim gleams dark, intense
Where, in the west, the pale sun says farewell.

Translation by William Ruleman

An eines Eichbaums Fuß . . .

by Georg Heym

An eines Eichbaums Fuß, am Waldesrand,
Am Weg der Menge spielt ein Leiermann
Sein altgewohntes Lied, nur dann und wann
Erlahmt des blinden Greises müde Hand.

Das gleiche Lied klingt immer durch den Wald.
Nur wen'ge rührt es. Doch es trifft ins Herz
Den Liebenden sein bittre Alltagsschmerz,
Der ruhlos, wie der Kinder Weinen, schallt.

Im Waldesrauschen fern noch klingt das Lied,
Ein kleiner Ton der großen Einsamkeit.
Der Waldung Grenze glänzte schwarz und weit,
Da in dem Westen blaß die Sonne schied.

Trump l'Oeil

Switching the spotlight on with brand-new coins,
we craned our necks. Now, though we try and try,
we can't make out the ceiling: only sky
where Putti's chubby thighs recede to loins.
What art! Where granite architecture joins
with plaster, the light-and-dark our naked eye
can't see as brushstrokes tells a beautiful lie.
Columns converge in vaulted, yielding groins.
Up there, foreshortening prolongs the height
indefinitely. Birds are tweeting round
the Patron's head, gold-plated clouds enthrone
the Militant Elect, and a skull bone
with wings suggests that even Death's unbound.
It seems to climb forever, but not quite.

Love's Geography

Love is never found on maps,
or books, or travelers returned
from wasteland where thunder-claps
are by sparrows spurned.

Love is hinted in the groping
of young fingers that in haste
capture a fragment, hoping,
without substance, for sweet taste.

So the warnings are not heeded
and forgotten is restraint
then quickly dies what's needed,
leaving lost love's sad complaint.

Heaven

Each Christmas Eve we made pilgrimage
to your wood plank Polish church.

The fir tree's starry lights eclipsed the altar
and the cross of Christ, but all I knew or needed of holy
was in your solo.

Your young round face, hair like thistle,
was barely visible beyond the ranks of farmers
who hushed at your song, as if Gabriel had come.

All the way home, I lay in the bumpy back of our
station wagon, drunk with your refrains,
watching star windows,
each an angel-filled porthole in the night web,
the dark matter of God.

When you were twenty-one, a phone call came
on an afternoon so glorious nothing could be wrong.
You chuckled about your skin,
a shade of green the doctors couldn't explain.
At the hospital, they wouldn't let me bring my baby in.

Seven days later you died, as if you knew just how to
go about it—plunge into heaven—while we
were still learning to pronounce your disease
and get the spelling.

A nurse thrusts your trousers into my hands
saying, *Remove the money*. They are tailored black worsted,
so like you, always spiffy, rather formal, dressed for a funeral.
I drop the coins beside your untouched glass of water.

Outside, the air sticks in my throat,
the night stings my cheek. Heaven is a vast
confusion of dust and gasses and rock.
No angels in the windowless canopy.
Gary, are you singing?

Lottery

Everything my mother needs can be found
at Woodman's: cigarettes, milk, unsalted rice cakes,
six black bottles of diet cola.

I want to buy a lottery ticket, she adds,
weaving stiff-kneed, half-blind, to the far end
of the store, near videos and packaged liquor.

Neither of us knows how to go about it.
I fumble, rubbing in the dots from numbers
she has scribbled on a scrap of cardboard.
I look at her familiar cursive,
wondering what they are—not our ages, birthdays,
not her wedding anniversary.

That's six and a half million a year for life,
she says of the man who won last winter,
and I don't ask how she figured the years left in his life.

Nor do I ask if the money could buy back
her teeth and eyes, her strong bones and lean flesh,
buy back the summers she played squirt guns with us
and caught fireflies we froze and sold to science
for thirty cents a hundred.

No one has claimed it, she whispers,
as if everything is still possible.

Staring

The air's still soaked with rain that fell last night
and tinged odd orange hues that pinch the dawn
to sepia. The light is neither bright
nor clear—old photos that have turned. Long gone
those faces that are stiff in Sunday Best.
Told not to smile but to be still they stare
into our eyes, alive and self-possessed
as we feel now as we stare back. Somewhere,
right now, are those who'll stare at us and ask,
*Who are these folks? What did they do, how did
they love? That smiling face—what does it mask,
what did it cost, and whom did she forgive
to find the peace to live?* The day's turned bright.
Whole worlds of lives have vanished in the light.

The Magic Show

The day goes by. The stream goes west, black ink
that's watered down. This is the only life
I'll ever have. I turn away. I blink.
Surf takes uncounted grains away. My wife's
asleep and journeys too, strange seas alone
with ghosts who tell her cryptic things in rooms
she sometimes knows. All goes. The wind's bright poem.
Torn scrap caught in the hedge. The tick of noon.
The heat the cushion held, the body gone
into the air. The magazine's old news
before it's read, and all that's being born
is on its way to its next form. That blue
I see's a trick of light. This magic show's
the unknown half of what I think I know.

The Death Angel

What you think of me is not
The half of what I really am.
I am larger than a state
And smaller than a milligram.
I am where but also what,
And I can change the year and date.

You see me when you see a flash
Along the corner of your eye
Inside a room completely dark.
I am in hello, goodbye.
I am in your least eyelash,
And taller than Centauri's arc.

If you see me, you are dead,
But death is only time and change.
I will ferry you to where
The others wait, where no more strange
Shadows come. There you'll re-wed
The love you lost while trapped in air.

The Same as Then

When I am dead and April warms,
Remember how the body lies
When we are young and trapped in days.
And later how the soul breaks clear
Of flesh to find eternities
Of our best moments in its gaze
Backward at some wrinkled year,
Whose brows now darken with old storms.

Remember how you said my name
To trap its little word in air
And capture it inside a jar
As if I were your golden insect.
Days like that still flit somewhere
To tell us what we really are.
It's more than what we might expect,
Though only *always*, still the same.

Morning Song

When dawn, gray and indistinct as fog,
rises from stubbled fields and tannic ponds
squatting among apartments, strip malls,
and the damp macadam of empty intersections;
when uncertain light reveals the black boles
of oak and sweetgum and ghosts of saltbox homes,
then smoothes all else to a slurry of cloud
and concrete; this unjointed hour sings.
And once again water and sky are one,
a primeval blur that, like sleep or grace,
promises all, if only for a hallowed hour.
But soon the sun, that relentless draftsman,
will rise and draw the lines that separate
street from sidewalk, rose from bush, and you from me.

Green Heaven

The heart in its bone-house dreams of love
and time, of quiet days and star-shot nights.
It wants a green hill so far away
and high among the rocks that death is lost
on trackless scree and wanders in the waste
forever. And here, where children never die,
where loss and pain are banished, I'd build
a new house of simple stone and timber.
We'd pull our chairs before the fire, its blush
proof against all chills. I'd clear my throat
and hold your hand. We'd read the only book
we owned, the one whose story never ends.

Biographies

Tobi Alfier is a multiple Pushcart nominee and a Best of the Net nominee. Current chapbooks are “The Coincidence of Castles” from Glass Lyre Press, *Romance and Rust*” from Blue Horse Press, and “Down Anstruther Way” (Scotland poems) from FutureCycle Press. She is co-editor of San Pedro River Review (www.bluehorsepress.com).

Gary Beck has spent most of his adult life as a theater director, and as an art dealer when he couldn’t make a living in theater. He has 11 published chapbooks and 3 more accepted for publication. His poetry collections include: *Days of Destruction* (Skive Press), *Expectations* (Rogue Scholars Press). *Dawn in Cities, Assault on Nature, Songs of a Clerk, Civilized Ways, Displays, Perceptions & Fault Lines* (Winter Goose Publishing). *Tremors, Perturbations, Rude Awakenings and The Remission of Order* will be published by Winter Goose Publishing. *Conditioned Response* (Nazar Look). *Resonance* (Dreaming Big Publications). *Virtual Living* will be published by Thurston Howl Publications. His novels include: *Extreme Change* (Cogwheel Press), *Flawed Connections* (Black Rose Writing) and *Call to Valor* (Gnome on Pigs Productions). *Sudden Conflicts* will be published by Lillicat Publishers and *State of Rage* by Rainy Day Reads Publishing. His short story collection, *A Glimpse of Youth* (Sweatshoppe Publications). *Now I Accuse and other stories* will be published by Winter Goose Publishing. His original plays and translations of Moliere, Aristophanes and Sophocles have been produced Off Broadway. His poetry, fiction and essays have appeared in hundreds of literary magazines. He currently lives in New York City.

Laurie Byro has been facilitating “Circle of Voices” poetry discussion in New Jersey libraries for over 16 years. She is published widely in University presses in the United States and is included in an anthology *St. Peter’s B List* (Ave Maria Press, 2014). Laurie garnered more IBPC awards (InterBoard Poetry Community) than any other poet, stopping at 50. She had two books of poetry published in 2015: *Luna* (Aldrich Press) and *Gertrude Stein’s Salon and Other Legends* (Blue Horse Press). A chapbook was published in 2016 *Wonder* (Little Lantern Press) out of Wales. She received a 2016 New Jersey Poet’s Prize for the first poem in the *Stein* collection and a 2017 New Jersey

Poet's Prize for a poem in the *Bloomsberries* collection. Laurie is currently Poet in Residence at the West Milford Township Library, where "Circle of Voices" continues to meet.

Rebecca Guess Cantor's poetry has appeared in *Mezzo Cammin*, *Two Words For*, *The Cresset*, *Whale Road Review*, *Anomaly Literary Journal*, and *The Lyric* among other publications. Her first chapbook, *Running Away*, was published last year by Finishing Line Press. Rebecca is the Assistant Provost at Azusa Pacific University and lives in Fullerton, California.

Kevin Casey is the author of *And Waking . . .* (Bottom Dog Press, 2016), and *American Lotus* (Glass Lyre Press, 2018), winner of the 2017 Kithara Prize. His poems have appeared recently or are forthcoming in *Rust+Moth*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Connotation Press*, *Pretty Owl Poetry*, and Ted Kooser's syndicated column 'American Life in Poetry.' For more, visit andwaking.com.

Catherine Chandler, is an American/Canadian poet living in Saint-Lazare-de-Vaudreuil, Québec and Punta del Este, Uruguay. She invites you to visit her poetry blog, The Wonderful Boat, at www.cathychandler.blogspot.com.

Kevin Durkin is the winner of the 2015 Frost Farm Prize and has published poems in *Poetry*, *New Criterion*, *Yale Review*, and the anthologies *Poetry Daily*, *Able Muse Anthology*, *Irresistible Sonnets*, and *Measure for Measure*. Finishing Line Press published his first collection of poetry, *Los Angeles in Fog*, in 2013.

Andrew Frisardi's most recent book, for which he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2013, is an annotated translation: *Dante: Convivio: A Dual-Language Critical Edition*, just published by Cambridge University Press.

Ed Hack started writing poetry when he was sixteen because that seemed the only way to respond to what the world felt like. He wrote free verse for years, was published here and there, but then, three years ago, feeling the need for the discipline of form and meter, started writing sonnets. The sonnet forces a union of intensity and precision, an economy that one might, with luck and persistence, achieve. He has been published in *Dunes Review*, *The Literary Nest*, *Algebra Of Owls*,

Autumn Sky Poetry, Remembered Arts, Dime Show Review, Poetry South, Adelaide Literary Magazine and other journals.

Randel McCraw Helms is retired from Arizona State University's English Department. He is the author of five books of literary criticism, including "Tolkien's World," "Gospel Fictions," and "The Bible Against Itself." He now devotes full time to his lifelong avocation, making poems. His recent work has appeared in such venues as *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Avis* (in the UK), *Dove Tales* and *Canyon Voices*.

Krikor Der Hohannesian has been thrice nominated for a Pushcart Prize and has appeared in many literary journals including *The Evansville Review*, *The South Carolina Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Comstock Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Connecticut Review* and *Natural Bridge*. Krikor's first chapbook, "Ghosts and Whispers" (Finishing Line Press, 2010) was a finalist for the Mass Book Awards, which also selected it as a "must read" in their 2011 poetry category. A second chapbook, "Refuge in the Shadows," was released in June, 2013 (Cervena Barva Press).

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in *Sheepshead Review*, *Studio One* and *Columbia Review* with work upcoming in *Louisiana Review*, *Poem* and *Spoon River Poetry Review*.

Rob Griffith's latest book, *The Moon from Every Window* (David Robert Books, 2011), was nominated for the 2013 Poets' Prize; and his previous book, *A Matinee in Plato's Cave*, was the winner of the 2009 Best Book of Indiana Award. His work has appeared in *PN Review*, *Poetry*, *The North American Review*, *Poems & Plays*, *The Oxford American*, and many others. He is the editor of the journal *Measure* and teaches in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Evansville, Indiana.

Kenneth P. Gurney lives in Albuquerque, NM, USA with his beloved Dianne. His latest collection of poems is *Stump Speech* (2015).

Rasma Haidri grew up in Tennessee and makes her home on the arctic seacoast of Norway. Her poems and essays appear widely in anthologies, literary journals, and college textbooks in the USA and abroad. Literary distinctions for her writing include the Southern Women Writers Association Emerging Writer Award in creative non-

fiction, the Wisconsin Academy of Arts, Letters & Science poetry award, the Easy Street Great American Sentence prize, and a Best of the Net nomination. Read more of her work at www.rasma.org

Georg Heym (1887-1912), one of the German Expressionist poets, is perhaps best known for his apocalyptic visions of cultural collapse, but he was also a sensitive and romantic observer of nature. His poetic output before his accidental death by drowning at the age of 24 was amazing.

Corey Mesler has been published in numerous anthologies and journals including *Poetry*, *Gargoyle*, *Five Points*, *Good Poems*, *American Places*, and *Esquire / Narrative*. He has published 9 novels, 4 short story collections, and 5 full-length poetry collections. He's been nominated for the Pushcart many times, and 3 of his poems were chosen for Garrison Keillor's *Writer's Almanac*. With his wife he runs a 141-year-old bookstore in Memphis. He can be found at: coreymesler.wordpress.com.

Philip Quinlan is the author of a chapbook, *Head Lands* (White Violet Press, 2012). His work has appeared in: *The Flea*, *The Chimaera*, *Lucid Rhythms*, *Lilt*, *Soundzine*, *Numinous*, *The Avatar Review*, *The Centrifugal Eye*, *Sea Stories*, *Shit Creek Review*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *Snakeskin*, *Victorian Violet Press*, *Whale Sound*, *Studio 360*, *In Stereo Press*, *The Hypertexts*, *Lighten Up Online*, *Antiphon*, *Raintown Review*, *Kin*, *Unsplendid*, *New Trad Journal*, *Atavic Poetry*, and *Life and Legends*. Philip was former co-editor of *Angle Journal of Poetry in English*. Philip lives in the UK.

Rochelle Jewel Shapiro's novel, *Miriam the Medium* (Simon & Schuster, 2004), was nominated for the Harold U. Ribelow Award. She had been published essays in *NYT* (Lives) and *Newsweek*. Her poetry, short stories, and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in many literary magazines such as *Mudfish*, *Westview*, *The Iowa Review*, *The Doctor T.J. Eckleburg Review*, *Stone Path Review*, *Santa Fe Literary Review*, and *Willow Review*. Rochelle's poetry has been nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize, and she won the Branden Memorial Literary Award from Negative Capability. She currently teaches writing at UCLA Extension.

William Ruleman's most recent collections of poetry include *From Rage to Hope* (White Violet Books, 2016) and *Salzkammergut Poems* and *Munich Poems* (both from Cedar Springs Books, 2016). His translations of Hermann Hesse's *Early Poems* (also Cedar Springs Books) and Stefan Zweig's *Clarissa* (Ariadne Press) were published in 2017. More about him can be found at his website: www.williamruleman.com.

Vivian Wagner lives and writes in New Concord, Ohio, where she teaches English at Muskingum University. She's the author of a memoir, *Fiddle: One Woman, Four Strings, and 8,000 Miles of Music* (Citadel-Kensington), and a poetry collection, *The Village* (Kelsay Books).

Gary Whitby is a professor of English at Tarrant County College in Fort Worth, Texas. He received an MFA from the Iowa Writers Workshop, studying with Donald Justice, Richard Murphy, and Marvin Bell, and also earned a PhD in Mass Communication from the Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communications. Gary has published poems in *First Things*, *Slant*, and *The American Literary Review*. His first volume of poetry, *The Weather of One Another*, is available on Amazon, and he is currently working on a second manuscript, *Invisible Waters*.

Marly Youmans is the award-winning author of thirteen books of poetry and fiction. Recent novels include *A Death at the White Camellia Orphanage*, *Glimmerglass*, and *Maze of Blood*. Recent poetry books are the epic adventure *Thaliad*, *The Foliate Head*, and *The Throne of Psyche*. Look for a new collection of poems in 2018!