

# **New Poetry by Richard Epstein: “The Dance”**

New Poem by Richard Epstein: “The Dance”

---

# **New Poetry by Ellie J. Anderson: “Impact, 1984”**

New poem by Ellie J. Anderson: “Impact, 1984”

---

# **New Poetry by Peter Mladinic: “Fist”**



AIR THICKER THAN / *image by Amalie Flynn*

In Okinawa I made a fist  
and my fingers stuck together  
that stop over night  
my one stop before Danang,  
between two worlds,  
the flag burning, tear-gas  
U.S. and the Vietnam rat-tat-tat  
automatic fire, the LBJ  
How many kids ... and the sandbag  
fortified bunkers. Didn't  
see anyone die, only the dead.  
In Okinawa, planes  
on the runway, the air thicker  
than Danang's.

The smell of napalm,  
how real for some.  
I stood holding a metal tray  
in a chow line, slept  
in a top bunk, spit-shined boots  
so their tips were mirrors.

---

## **New Poetry by David Burr: “Harvest”**

Hurl of metal – iron, steel – as shrapnel,  
as bail hail, as HE detonation, all  
forged and spit out again with new fire,  
matériel barrae, meat-mincer for

---

## **New Poetry by Jayant Kashyap: “The War”**

New poetry by Jayant Kashyap: “The War”

---

# **New Poetry by Phillip Sitter: “Krakivets, Odyn” and “Elemental”**

New Poetry by Phillip Sitter: “Krakivets, Odyn” and  
“Elemental”

---

# **New Poetry by Shawn McCann: “All I Can Do Is Watch” and “No Way To Fight Back”**

New Poetry by Shawn McCann: “All I Can Do Is Watch” and “No  
Way To Fight Back”

---

# **New Poetry by Kathleen Hellen: “People Boats” and “Pretending There Is A Garden In The Spring, Paradise In**

# **Time”**

New Poetry by Kathleen Hellen: “People Boats” and “Pretending There Is Garden In The Spring, Paradise In Time”

---

## **New Poetry by Lawrence Bridges: “Time of War and Exile” and “Taking an Island”**

New poems by Lawrence Bridge: “Time of War and Exile” and “Taking an Island”

---

## **New Poetry by Matthew Hummer: “Amortization”**

New poem by Matthew Hummer: “Amortization”

---

## **New Poetry by Almyr Bump:**

# **“Plowing Water”**

New poem by Almyr Bump: “Plowing Water”

---

# **New Poetry by J.S. Alexander: “Sabat”**

New Poem by J.S. Alexander: “Sabat (Loyalty)”

---

# **New Poetry by Ben White: “Cleaning the M60 – 39 Years and January 26, 1984”**

New Poetry by Ben White: “Cleaning the M60 – 39 Years and  
January 26, 1984”

---

# **New Poetry by Kat Raido: “Blood Goggles”**

New poem by Kat Raido: “Blood Goggles”

---

# **New Poetry by Luis Rosa Valentin: “Desperate Need of Help”**

Desperate Need of Help

[Luis-Rosa-image](#)

---

# **New Poetry by Jim Kraus: “Amphibious”**



ABOUT TO DISAPPEAR / *photo by Amalie Flynn*

## **AMPHIBIOUS**

In Hokusai's "Kanagawa Wave," the boatmen  
look like a school of masquerading fish  
about to disappear into the vast trough between waves,  
the scene a masque for the knowing seascape.

Underwater, Ahab,  
pinned to the great white  
creature, like a wave that has  
disappeared into silence.

In memory's slow dancing,  
flesh now dissolved,  
seafloor muck covers bones



and shark-tooth nodules.

Out of the bubbling methane,  
Ahab is reborn with tripod limbs  
and tiny feet, the wooden leg  
now a trail of seafloor slime,  
amphibious.

---

## **New Poetry by Carol Everett Adams: “Rabbit Trails”**



THE TEXAS DUST / *image by Amalie  
Flynn*

### **RABBIT TRAILS**

in the Texas dust. We're flat in the dirt

so we can poke around down there with a long stick,  
while above us bullets fly and children

hold up their honor roll certificate shields.

You say blankets are the answer,  
and backpacks and better officers and armed teachers

and doors that shut like Vegas vaults to keep your money safe,  
keep your money safer than my child.

I forgot what we were talking about.

---

## **New Poetry by Lisa Stice: “Our Folklore”**



FIND MYSELF LOST / *image by*  
*Amalie Flynn*

## **Our Folklore**

Long ago, you were molten rock, and I—  
well, I spoke the language of bears.

But now that I have been out of the forest  
for so long, all the words and grammar escape

me, and I often find myself lost. And you—  
well, you are often mistaken for a statue

in this solid state. No more rumblings and  
agitations. We are both quiet these days.

---

## **New Poetry from D.A. Gray: “Cactus Tuna”; “We Return from the Holy Land. God Stays”; and “Reverse Run”**

New Poetry from DA Gray: “Cactus Tuna”; “We Return from the  
Holy Land. God Stays”; and “Reverse Run”

---

# New Poetry from Tanya Tuzeo: “My Brother, the Marine;” “My Brother’s Shoebox;” and “My Brother’s Grenade”



WAR HAS DONE / *image by Amalie Flynn*

## **my brother, the Marine**

the recruiters come weeks earlier than agreed—  
arrive in alloy, aluminum with authority,  
military vehicle blocks our driveway  
announcing to the neighborhood  
they’ve come for a boy here

who will have to go—  
though he sits at the top step  
and cries

i follow them,  
strange convoy to Staten Island's hotel  
where all the boys are corralled—  
farmed for war, becoming weapons  
of mass destruction  
when before they picked apples  
at family trips upstate

a hotel lobby—last stop before using lasers  
to blow off golden domes,  
silence muezzins in the crush  
of ancient wage and plaster—  
Hussein's old siberian tiger left thirsty,  
watches other zoo animals  
being eaten by the faithful—  
just like a video game

i clamp onto my brother  
beg him not to go, we could run away  
he didn't have to do this—  
recruiters quickly camouflage me,  
am dragged outside—my brother lost  
did not say goodbye  
or even look at me.

### **my brother's shoebox**

the room across the hall is inhabited again,  
home now from another tour  
like sightseeing from a grand canal  
where buildings are art  
and storied sculptures animate street corners—  
my brother returns a veteran.

i want to remember who this person is,  
or at least, find out what war has done.

he leaves with friends to drink—  
that is still the same,  
later tonight  
he might howl at our parent's window  
or jump on my bed until the sheets froth,  
uncaring and rabid.

but i don't wait for him to come home  
and begin searching the room  
that is his again.

it is simple to find  
where people hide things—  
a shoebox under his bed  
that wasn't there all these years  
furrowed by sand  
and almost glowing.

i open to find drugstore prints,  
rolls of film casually dropped  
for a high school student to develop—  
silver halide crystals take the shape  
of shattered skulls  
goats strung and slit  
a school made of clay  
blasted in the kiln of munitions  
"KILL ZONE" painted across its foundation—  
each 4×6 emulsion a souvenir  
of these mad travels,  
kept to reminisce and admire.

### **my brother's grenade**

my brother's room in our family vacation home

has embossed wallpaper, indigo or violet  
depending on the light that filters through the mountains—  
and his grenade in the closet.

i saw it looking for extra blankets,  
thought it was an animal resting in eiderdown  
kept by my mother in one of her tempers  
but it didn't move  
and so  
i picked it up.

inhumanity held beneath iron's screaming core—  
a pleasant weight,  
like the egg i threw across the street  
detonating onto the head of boy  
who said i kissed him but i didn't,  
is it like that for my brother?—  
fisted mementos of thrill?

seasoned by cedar sachets,  
neatly quilted metal shimmered as i turned it  
forbidden gem, his holy relic—  
i placed it back in the closet and began making dinner,  
said nothing.

the slender pin preserves this household  
where our family gathers  
unknowing a bomb is kept here—  
my brother roasts a marshmallow  
until it catches fire, turns black,  
plunges into mouth.

---

# New Poetry from Nidhi Agarwal: “The Goddess Incarnates;” “Cow Dust Hour;” and “Emancipation”

New Poetry by Nidhi Agrawal: “The Goddess Incarnates;” “Cow Dust;” and “Emancipation”

---

# New Poetry from Laura King: “Orange”



MY ACIDIC PAST / *image by*



*Amalie Flynn*

**ORANGE**

It's June, and a few stubborn ones  
still hang on the trees.

We stand on the back of the pickup to pluck one—  
so easy to peel, this old girl the sun has sugared  
since December's sharp tang.

Now it's sweet as honey, sweet as candy,  
sweet as that boy child  
who wrapped himself up in his binkie,  
his raw thumb firm against his upper palette,  
who sat on the stairs facing the wall  
because I'd snapped at him again.

Why was I upset all the time?

Though everyone forgives me, no one forgets  
my acidic past; bright orange, raw rage.

---

**New Poetry from Virginia  
Schnurr: "Touchstone" and  
"Valentine for Lewis Carroll"**



VALENTINES IN ME / *image by Amalie Flynn*

## **TOUCHSTONE**

My child's fairy-tale quilt is frail:  
the wizard ripped, the prince bald,  
the fairy's wing clipped.  
Only the wishing well and frog prince survived  
camp, college, the conception of my grandchild.

My eldest daughter wants the irreparable  
repaired for her daughter, Maeve Arden,  
named after a Shakespearean forest.

No longer willing to stitch painted pomp

I sketch a new quilt: a forest where the snake waits,  
the dark trips, death lives behind every mushroom:  
reality feelingly persuades me what I am.

My cataracts removed, I have a grander vision for Maeve's  
covering.

I add the fool with his  
books in running brooks, tongues in trees.

Absolute in my giving  
savvy to the darker side of things  
my needle pokes the sweet uses of adversity.

### **VALENTINE FOR LEWIS CARROLL**

Purchased by an old woman  
for her grandniece  
I'm a blue plastic Valentine bag.

I have on me  
a rabbit from Wonderland  
whose creator liked  
little girls without pubic hair.

I sit all year  
on a doorknob  
awaiting the day of hearts.

I'm singular,  
not a carelessly covered box  
but reusable.

My child places  
her carefully labeled  
valentines in me.

Unfortunately, this year  
will be my finale.

My rabbit will hop off  
offended by the onset  
of hair.

---

**New Poetry from Marc Tretin:  
“Justin Alter, Slightly  
Drunk, Addresses Maya, Who Is  
In Egypt” and “Maya Ricci  
Alter After Excavating A  
Pyramid South Of Zairo”**



HOT WIRES SCALD / image by Amalie Flynn

**JUSTIN ALTER, SLIGHTLY DRUNK, ADDRESSES MAYA, WHO IS IN EGYPT**

Now as I am hungover and queasy  
stumping about the tilting house  
and sappy as my face is green,  
Maya, your sculpture of Qetesh,  
that goddess of sex and ecstasy,  
whose torso of clear pink plastic  
has a heart made of puzzle pieces  
dangling from wires that run to an  
automated external defibrillator  
normally used to shock  
a rapid cardiac rhythm

back to normal, stares at me with eyes  
filled with both desire and despair.  
Though feeling embarrassed  
I touch the pink nub you meant  
to be her clit and a soft whirr starts, then  
puzzle pieces spin so fast they tear, and scatter  
and the bare hot wires scald  
the insides of her perfect breasts.  
I pull the plug, but the smell of burnt plastic  
fills our bedroom despite the open windows.  
Why do you have to be gone so long?

### **MAYA RICCI ALTER EXCAVATING A PYRAMID SOUTH OF CAIRO**

As I stooped beneath the  
standing sun within the  
meter-by-meter carefully  
measured order of this  
archeological dig and  
brushed pottery shards  
and papyrus crumbs through  
a sieve to sift out the sand,  
the heat's strong hands  
touched me like a half-  
wanted lover, whose warmth  
is too familiar with my  
body to refuse and that's  
why when Jamaal, the site  
boss said, "You look  
overheated.  
Cool off in my trailer."  
"Yes," I said, knowing I  
wanted to betray Justin  
but not knowing why, so  
after we had sex and while  
I was thinking how can I

use this experience,  
I saw Jamaal shave with  
a straight edge then I saw  
the dead-on right image for the God Set,  
a cave-sized skull made of razor blades,  
entered by stepping  
over teeth made of sharp knives  
into total darkness  
except for a weak light  
piercing this skull  
through one of its eyes  
and in that eye is a web  
and tangled in its threads  
are Zipporah and Justin.  
Their faces, formless rags.  
Their bodies sucked out hulks.

---

## **New Poetry by Michal Rubin: “I Speak Not Your Language” and “Omar Abdalmajeed As’ad of Jijlya”**

I, born from the womb of  
my mother’s remembrances  
wrapped in the cocoon  
of her story[...]

---

# New Poetry by Scott Hughes: “Still”



THE FAULT LINES / *image by Amalie Flynn*

## STILL

I never thought of you  
as a hopeless romantic; this was news to me.  
Are you still meditating? Meditate  
on this:  
You can take the Mulholland Highway across  
the ridges of two counties  
and stay high a long time.



We parked there once in your subcompact  
in love and unconfined.

From the afternoon shade of a scrub oak  
I remember the ridge route home,  
the silhouettes of Point Dume and your profile  
in the afterglow.

Since then I have been a jack of all trades  
and a master of nothing:  
unremarkable, unsubstantial, undignified;  
unresolved, unremembered, unconceivable;  
unqualified, unpublished, unreadable.

I looked for you in the county beach campgrounds  
where you went with surfers from your high school.  
I looked for you in all the places I heard you were in love.  
I looked for you where rumors sent me.  
I looked for you in the hills of Northridge  
where we walked around the fault lines.  
I looked for you among the barstools  
from Venice to Ventura.  
I looked for you in old Beach Boys songs.  
I looked for you in stacks of photographs.  
I looked for you in the bottom of a glass.  
I looked for you stranded after a concert.  
I looked for you at the Spahn Ranch.  
I looked for you in the bittersweet words in books.  
I looked for you in unsold manuscripts.  
I looked for you in the margins of old college notes.  
I looked for you in every woman who looked at me.  
I looked for you in dharma talks.  
I looked for you in shrines.  
I looked for you in my next life.

I don't think my karma is right.

Forty years on the hard roads of two counties  
and I am

still.

---

# New Poetry by Rochelle Jewell Shapiro: “Each Night My Mother Dies Again”



FALLS ON NIGHT / *image by Amalie Flynn*

EACH NIGHT MY MOTHER DIES AGAIN

Each night the phone rings—

*Your mother has passed.*

Each night I expect to be relieved, but night falls on night.

Each night she is the mother who makes waffles,

batter bubbling from the sides of the iron, the mother

who squeezes fresh orange juice, and serves soft-boiled eggs

in enchanted egg cups. Each night I squint into her face

as she carries me over the ocean waves, her arms my raft.

Each night she refills Dr. Zucker's prescriptions

for diet pills and valium. Each night she waters her  
rosebushes

with Dewar's. Each night I see her hands shake,

her brows twitch. Each night she adds ground glass

to the chopped liver, rubbing alcohol to the chopped herring.

Each night she puts a chicken straight on the lit burner

without a pot. Each 2:00 a.m., Mrs. Finch from 6G phones—

*Sorry to say your mother is naked*

*in the hallway again.*

Each night my mother is strapped into her railed bed

at Pilgrim State, curled into a fetal position,

her hands fisted like claws.

Each night she calls to me

from her plain pine coffin, calls me

by the name she gave me, the name

she hasn't forgotten.

---

**New Poetry by Stephen  
Massimilla: "Wounded"**



CAPILLARIES OF ROOTS / image by Amalie Flynn

## WOUNDED

*-to Laura*

Bleating thing without wool  
Thunder without sound  
Ghost of wooded peaks, of constricted arterial waters

There is a dog inside the heart, voice bursting  
Interminable silence, blown-open iris

Over organs buried deeper in the earth  
where capillaries of roots still bleed orange dust

Leave me be, hot tongue of fireflies,  
cracked pharynx of ice

Do not ask me to slip  
down among green nerves of water-weed  
where the flesh of the sky  
is unmoving and fruitless

The moon still hovers in its surgeon's coat

But do not try to satisfy the dead

who hold on with claws like desperate fevers  
Leave my sutured skull of empty ivory forever  
But pity me; put an end to this much hurt

I am love, I tell you  
and all the quick wings accumulating  
as restlessly as the breaths

that were once inside  
these wheel-crushed, wind-scattered leaves

---

## **New Poetry by Kevin Honold: “A Brief History of the Spanish Conquest”**



RADIANT AS NOON / *image by Amalie Flynn*

## **A Brief History of the Spanish Conquest**

Tell me again of that fabulous  
kingdom where a single  
ear of corn is more  
than two strong young men can carry, where cotton  
grows untended, in colors never dreamed of,  
to be spun by gorgeous slaves  
into garments that lie  
cool as cornsilk against the skin and shine  
radiant as noon.

\*

How sordid and predictable history can be.  
Within sight of the prize  
but out of ammunition, they  
lowered three men down the volcano's throat  
to fetch sulfur for gunpowder.

This

was the vision  
prefigured in the prophet's eye:  
three men curled in a basket peering  
back across the centuries,  
their dewy starving faces so  
desperate with hope  
as they dissolve in a yellow mist,  
felons set adrift.

\*

North by west toward the cities of gold,  
the soldiers in rags walked half-bent  
with hunger and dysentery, nursing  
grievous wounds sustained in hit-and-run attacks  
by moss-troopers talking Choctaw.

Beside the mother of rivers, the horses sickened and died  
but the soldiers, being less reasonable,  
proved less destructible.

At disobedient towns they dragged out  
chopping blocks to punish malefactors  
and departed in a shower of ash, their legacy  
a heap of severed hands slowly  
clutching at flies.

\*

But the much-sought golden cities sank below the horizon  
like the tall ships of fable. For the Spaniards,  
the age of miracles ended  
somewhere in southwest Arkansas. The palaces of silver

turned Outlaw Liquor Barns, Triple-X Superstores,  
the stuff of vision a mustard-colored mix

of smoke, dust, emissions  
from riverside refineries and coal  
plants along the Mississippi where squadrons  
of John Deere combines like barn-size locusts  
roll in drill order over the dry land,  
half-effaced by squalls of chaff.

At night the fields burn.  
Stray flames browse the blackened  
shoulders of the interstate,  
crop the stubble beneath the billboards.

\*

In the state park south of Hot Springs  
I fell asleep in a chair in the heat and woke  
to a titmouse perched on the toe of my boot  
with that peculiar weightlessness  
shared by birds and planets

and I searched without hope for my place in the book.  
Buzzards killed time there, their shadows  
slipping across the iron ground  
like fish in a shallow pool  
while Time gaped  
    at the spiders that battened  
    on the flies that  
swarmed the rotten  
windfall apples.

\*

Tenochtitlan.  
At the imperial aviary, we found  
a pair of every kind of bird in the world:  
parrots and finches in profusion, brooding vultures,



egrets, ibis is sacramental scarlet.

Seahawks stooped and banked

through that hostile truce and we marveled

at God's prodigality, His exuberant

inventiveness, then piled tinder

to burn the thing to the ground.

Flames sheeted over the soaring

lattice dome like the fleet

shadows of clouds. For a time,

the structure smoldered,

a hissing wickerwork steaming as it cooled.

Here and there, a bird crashed the skein of ash

like a rogue comet bursting

the flaming ramparts of the universe.

Charmed in place, we held our breath,

beside ourselves, like couriers

trapped in a snowglobe, blinded

in a tempest of embers,

astonished at the work of these hands,

the everyday miracle of destruction.

---

## **New Poetry from Gail Nielsen: "Something Like Nightfall"**



BLACK LACE TREES / *image by Amalie  
Flynn*

## **SOMETHING LIKE NIGHTFALL**

something, like night falls  
slow, as if  
nothing in the world has ever moved  
but distant hope descending, still ablaze  
days soften to wonder

what else leaves  
silhouettes these black lace trees  
fades from me

it is you from my life  
steadily, quietly  
as celestial movement

---

**New Poetry by Doris Ferleger:  
“Praying at the Temple of  
Forgiveness,” “Internal  
Wind,” Driving Down Old Eros  
Highway,” and “Summer Says”**



TURNING EVERYTHING AROUND / *image*  
by Amalie Flynn

**Praying at the Temple of Forgiveness**

*for Zea Joy, in memoriam*

Last Monday you threw yourself,  
your body, dressed in red chemise,  
in front of a train.

It was your insatiable hunger  
for a more tenderhearted world,  
your husband said at Shiva.

Now no one will get to see  
what you saw from inside  
your snow globe where you lived,  
shaking and shaking,  
breaking into shards  
of ungrieved grief, unanswered need.

I will remember  
how tirelessly, with your son,  
you worked to help him turn  
sounds—coming through the implant  
behind his ear—into speech,  
speech into understanding.

Everyone will remember  
how you skipped across the dance floor,  
waving pastel and magenta scarves,  
and prayed to angels.  
O, dear Zea, your human bones  
thin as the bones of a sparrow—

the way you could fold  
your body to fit anywhere.  
Rest now. You have succeeded.

## INTERNAL WIND

When you died, our son  
became *my son*; I watch  
through your eyes

and mine how he lifts  
his whole body into  
a long accent à droite,

arms taut, wrists impossibly  
rotated back, fingers and toes  
also pointed back

to all the hours, years  
of practice in turning  
everything around.

~

Over the hollow  
you left, our son stretches  
his fingers across

frets and strings  
in C minor,  
Bach's Etudes

the way you taught,  
the way you closed  
your eyes, nodded, satisfied—

our son will remember.

~

Remember how  
he watched you deep-  
breathe into yoga postures?

Now his own focused flow

heals what Western doctors call  
*tics*, quiets what Eastern doctors call

*internal wind*. Listen  
how our son calls  
to his yoga students

what he learned  
at your knee: *Effort*  
*brings the rain-*

*of grace.*

~

When our son and I argue,  
I feel homeless, divided,  
until I remember how you

and I took turns massaging  
his neck that ached from its day's  
staccato singing-

~

Sometimes I can see his *tics*  
as flawless, meticulous,  
a body expressing itself

with perfect diction.

### **DRIVING DOWN OLD EROS HIGHWAY**

Me, in my Q50 with its hot flashes and warning beeps,  
heading toward Sweet Desire, New Jersey, where my love,

soon 70, will woo me with mango, melt the mushy pulp  
in my mouth-or perhaps he naps.

You, CeeCee, painting the walls pink in the tiny house in Pullman, recently moved in with your old college flame, coming so easily

against his new ceramic hip, just the friction of it. You say your pelvis never quite fit with anyone else, including your soon-to-be-

ex-husband of 30 years. Me, with a G-spot suddenly. A rainbow of chaos tunneling through me when his fingers find it and flutter.

And long live the reckless tongue. The old-fashioned clit-kind of climax. Like a young planet rising. Oh, how old and greedy I am

for that whole-body wave and chill and quiver and release. You, purposely avoiding that whole-body wave of shiver,

as it reminds you of your ex's dogged insistences.

For your 60th, your daughter gifted you with a mini vibrator

on a rubber ring for your index finger. A *sex-thimble*, you joke.

Sex over 60 seems unseemly to talk about, CeeCee,

but it seems more ungrateful to say nothing at all.

You and I speak of what our mothers couldn't give us.

Daily I pray at the temple of Venus.

## **SUMMER SAYS**

Pay attention to  
your heat, your survival—  
the tree rooted in your garden

is a sequined vernacular, a cashmere sweater.

Because nothing matters in the end  
but comfort and the bending light.

Summer says, I will be the room you die in.  
You will dream, neither of regret,  
nor in the language you were born into.

A stranger will comb your existential threads.  
You had thought, for instance, humans  
were gerunds or harps bent

on playing in a diner that serves  
black coffee and hard donuts.  
You ask, *What is the past?*

*What is it all for?*

Summer says, The wound of being  
untaught. Says, hungry.

Says, the cypress is a hospice,  
says, falter, falter, falter,  
bloom bloom bloom—too soon

a pall will keep you company.

---

**New Poetry by Ricardo Moran:  
“ABBA-1975” and “On the  
Street”**





TAG EVERY WALL / *image by Amalie Flynn*

### **ABBA-1975**

Abba's lyrics, like water  
shot from La Bufadora,  
mingle with volcanic steam  
from metallic pots of corn.

And the scrape on my knee  
from chasing the seagulls  
bleeds, but does not hurt.

On this Sunday, the ocean breeze slips  
in gossip between vendor stalls  
as young men in speedos walk past.  
Tables of silver bracelets tap my eyes  
and ABBA's Spanish melody  
carries on my tongue

before any English syllable  
ever arrived. Before the summer ended  
when it tore me  
from the sands of Ensenada  
to a desert north of the border,  
to a land with tongues  
unfamiliar and stiff.

And now when I fall  
chasing my shadow, my ABBA  
lyrics cannot permeate  
foreign soil. Cannot stop the pain.

### **On the Street**

Run naked through the streets  
and shout, "Make love to me!"

Tag every wall in a turf war  
with quotes from the palatero,  
from the child who yearns for love,  
from the gay son who hopes his father  
will welcome him,  
this time.

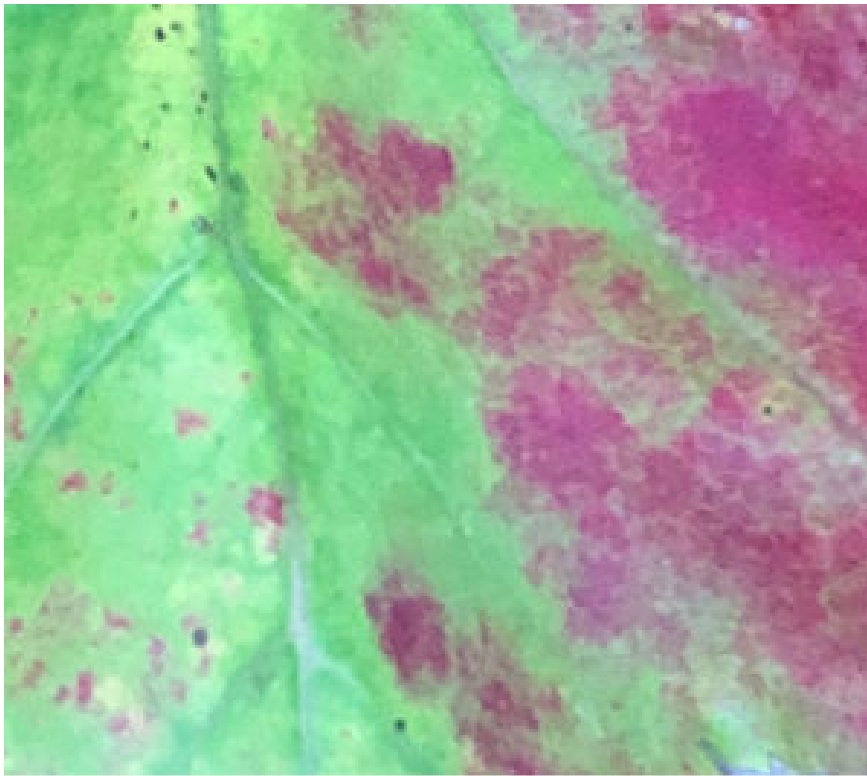
With your sharp and fast tongue, mesmerize  
passersby as they get caught in the gunfire  
of stanzas and sonnets,  
popping the air.

Bellow on the street corner  
of how love abandoned you,  
how your life is empty,  
how you aborted your dreams.  
And every day it rips into you  
of every opportunity you threw away.

I want that on the wall.  
I want all the pain and hurt  
to get out of bed, to grab that bullhorn  
and run naked through the streets.

---

## New Poetry by Michael Carson: “Politics”



BLAME OUR BRUISES / *image by Amalie Flynn*

### **Politics**

Every 20 years or so boys dress up  
And kill each other for fun.  
It's the way of the wrack of the world  
The wind of our imagination and our love.  
To blame our costumes for our beauty

Is like to blame our bruises for our blood.  
The chime is what drives us, what ticks  
Our tock forward to the next spree.  
The foreshortened humiliation,  
The immaculate imprecation,  
Is neither what we fear or what we covet.  
Man is. Rats are. Take what you can  
While the day is rough  
Move lengthwise into the past  
And blame god for never enough.

---

## **New Poetry by Kevin Norwood: “Rabbits in Autumn”**



THE LUSHEST GRASS / *image by Amalie Flynn*

### **RABBITS IN AUTUMN**

Who will find our bones in a thousand years,  
bleached and brittle under the unyielding sun,  
scattered in dried grasses by feral dogs or vultures?

Who will hold such curiosities, not knowing  
that we stopped here to kiss and murmur  
that our love would outlast the moon and stars?

Who will hold our bones, never to imagine  
that under the same sun, we once made love  
on the lushest grass, under a sapphire sky?

In autumn, the fox lies in wait, hearing rustling  
in the tall grass. Having eaten, the fox moves on.  
There are no questions of why, or how, or when.

Smoke rises acrid in the air; the sun sets earlier  
each day; the grapes shrivel on the vine. Time  
is the fox; we are the rabbits. Please, hold me.

---

**New Poetry by Betsy Martin:  
“About What You Have,”  
“Female Figure in Photos,”  
and “To Missoula”**



GRASSES QUIVER BEFORE / *image by Amalie Flynn*

### **ABOUT WHAT YOU HAVE**

In my dream  
Dad, age one hundred twelve,  
has his first cell phone—

big and square,  
with a rotary dial.

With a proud index finger  
he dials my mother,

gets her voice mail.  
Together we lean in,  
listen

to her low, driftty voice,  
its mist so warm on my ear  
as it rises from deep underground.

I ask Dad for *his* number,  
but he can't recall it  
before fading into the passage. He's left me

messages, though,  
like: When eating fish be careful  
not to get a bone stuck in your throat; when walking  
tuck in the tummy; think  
about what you have,  
not about what you don't.

## **FEMALE FIGURE IN PHOTOS**

fourteen-year-old mop of hair  
sullen air in mod raincoat  
on London sidewalk with  
beaming scowling father brother

seventeen leaning  
on brick wall in black-and-white flannel shirt  
no cigarette yet mien  
as in movies seen through a puff of smoke

college-era long hair  
akimbo arms  
eyes narrowed  
to spot foe in tall grass

sixty odd in a museum at a window  
face a little wooden  
and through the panes  
an autumn-leafed tree flames

## **TO MISSOULA**

The cold air her pillow of courage, she skirts  
the northern rim of the nation.

As she crosses the Dakota Badlands,  
where even the hardest grasses quiver

before earth's uprisings and revolutions,  
her eastern forest home has tilted

and is sliding over the rim!

She pulls her wings in closer  
to fly fast and low

over layers of pink and gray guts  
squeezed from deep under.

A tail feather tears loose,

whirls away;

she almost bursts into a plume of magma.

Night cools into dawn.

She parks the car,  
steps out into a new world,  
a young woman with compass and camera  
and a crown of mountains.



---

**New Poetry by Suzanne  
O'Connell: "Airport Luggage  
Carousel" and "Shipwreck"**



IMAGINE GOLD DOUBLOONS / *image by Amalie Flynn*  
**Airport Luggage Carousel**

A battered cardboard box

holes punched in the side  
tied with frayed rope  
lid popping up  
plastered with masking tape, wrinkled.  
One lone orphan  
going round and round the luggage carousel,  
heading nowhere.  
Packed in chaos.  
Full of soiled clothes  
bloody Kleenex  
unpaid bills  
splinters  
and Dear John letters.

This is what the last year has been.

So I imagine the contents differently.  
I imagine gold doubloons,  
a child's drawing of a rainbow,  
a coupon for a free fried chicken dinner.  
Maybe a photograph of a family, at Christmas,  
standing together on a hillside,  
everyone wearing red and green,  
the husband holding a puppy,  
and Carol,  
still alive.

## **Shipwreck**

She sniffed my trenches,  
turned away from the skin she made,  
her own thick blood  
flowing in my waterways.  
Me, a vacant dwelling on the shore,  
wearing swaddling,  
drinking low-fat milk.

Oh, wire mother of the soul,  
entertainer of strangers.  
She of too many decibels,  
too many bright colors,  
passing macaroons to visitors  
while I carved "I love Chris"  
in the dining room table.

Find the fur coat,  
find the hairdresser,  
find the beach umbrella  
find the wine coolers  
find the plants in pots  
resigned to death.

Little fish swim by her ankles.  
Like me, they long for contact.  
Mercy, the color of the sea,  
never granted.  
In that day, at that hour,  
on that wretched beach,  
she wanted an audience  
but found only me.

---

## **New Poetry by Tony Marconi: "Song of the Roadway Door"**



WE AND MACHINES / *image by Amalie Flynn*

...three hundred miles,  
    ahead the road more visible  
    as the land dissolves in the pink light  
        of almost dawn

you sit beside me,  
    eyes fixed and restful on my face,  
    offering hot coffee from a thermos  
        while the farm news  
        breaks morning music  
        on a local station

i could be here forever,  
    moving toward an unfamiliar place,  
        held by speed and the vibrating engine,  
  
        touched by the warmth of your breath

i could be here forever,  
even as day turns into twilight;  
you borne lightly on sheets stiffly cleaned,  
wrapping your strength within, around mine;  
prepared for tomorrow's miles

we and machines;  
only we moving, moving;  
i could be here forever...

---

## **New Poetry by Sam Cherubin: “Don't About Not,” “Mermaid Tavern,” and “Emerald Inula”**



SUN HOLDING ME / *image by Amalie Flynn*

## **Don't About Not**

If I can't or think  
do it like I'm doing now  
a beach  
sun holding me  
I am holding space  
not space itself  
not looking  
being  
gathering toward me  
sun's filaments  
fluidity  
is all I need

## **Mermaid Tavern**

A night-wind touching bare backs lying down  
and bare arms spooned across my bed, in blue  
light dreaming over skin, light-fingered sparks  
of seaweed, dendrites rippling through the room.

Scales rubbed against smooth sheets, in silver  
puddled water, a smell of open  
ocean, roseate tips of waves, our hips'  
undulations, in my body's rhythmic memory.

## **Emerald Inula**

i.

Apples in Schiller's desk, Balsam of Peru, rockrose,

rose alba, Helichrysum Everlasting, *Immortale*.  
Why can't this be enough?

ii.

Dried petals staining the pages.  
Attar of cells breathing sun.  
Flesh never accepting, but aching.

---

## **New Poetry from Alison Hicks: “I Took A Walk With A Friend” and “Untitled”**



AWAY INTO SEA / *image by Amalie Flynn*



## ***I TOOK A WALK WITH A FRIEND***

Instead of starting a poem

*I told her about my son's first semester*  
As long as he's home & happy & in one piece, she told me

*Worry squeaked out my sneakers onto wet pavement*  
The rest dissolved with the pitcher of margaritas

*Though it was wet & rainy*  
I did not get a headache

*Married for thirty-four years*  
We selected the movie about divorce

*By the time we finally got to watch it*  
He fell asleep

*The book was about a friendship that started in*  
*graduate school*  
I skipped ahead to the parts where she snorted OxyContin

*Didn't want to think about graduate school*  
But stayed up reading the juicy parts anyway

*Personally, I blame the recliner*

## **UNTITLED**

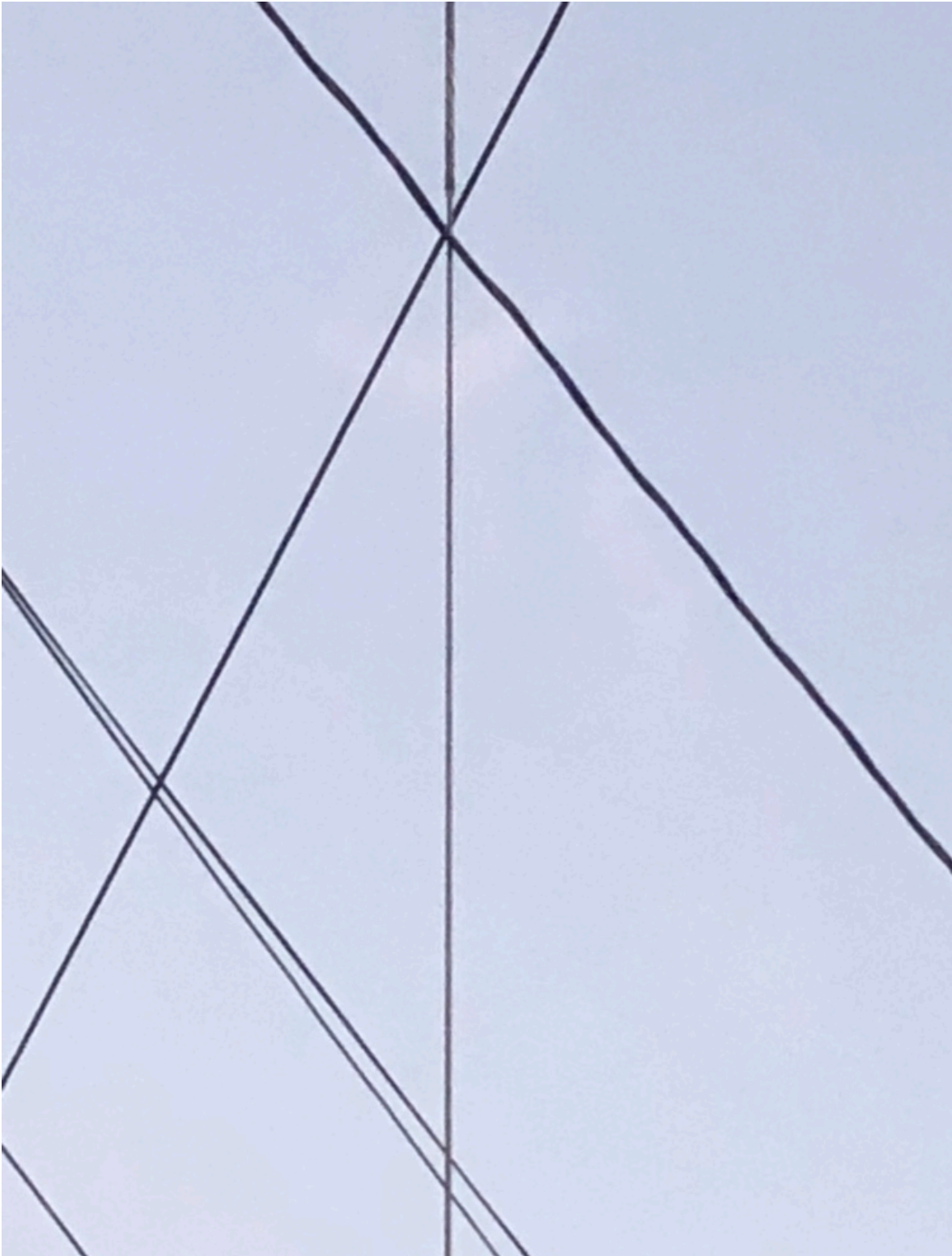
The sea is a room without walls. It spills, falling over land.  
Land shears away into sea,  
rooms echo with spills and falling walls. Walls are powerless  
in the war of land and  
water, swells uproot trees, sweep cars, shopping carts,  
diamond necklaces out to sea,  
rooms of plastic ingots drifting down. The sea has room,  
gathering spoils from falling lands.

(UNTITLED is included in Hicks' new book *Knowing Is A Branching Trail*, winner of the 2021 Birdy Prize and forthcoming in mid-September from Meadowlark Books.)

---

## **New Poetry from G.H. Mosson: "Warrior With Shield"**

*after Henry Moore*



AN X STILL / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Blasted, broken to frag-  
ments, left arm won't-  
both legs blown &  
absent, the spaces abuzz  
w/ anger-but I edge  
forward, shield up

as leg-stumps toe  
for foothold. My mouth  
is an X. Still-  
ness. Yet I see.  
I've been left.

Moonlight empties  
onto my chest,  
rivulets down  
in a branching sheen  
& I swell w/ a hunch  
I'll make it  
as if an old tune  
warms the heart,  
as if I too  
might sing  
again to Shelly.

I've been  
          some-  
                          one  
else  
          once  
                          some-  
body  
          other:  
                          a child.  
Dandelion  
          pods  
                          tumble  
past my  
          open  
                          palms.

---

# New Poetry from Barbara Tramonte: “Tailored To Fit In”



I WAS GATHERED / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Somebody sewed me with a string

On the bias

I was gathered

And about to pop

This has been a pattern all my life

They hemmed me in with notions

Each stitch bringing me

To a false whole

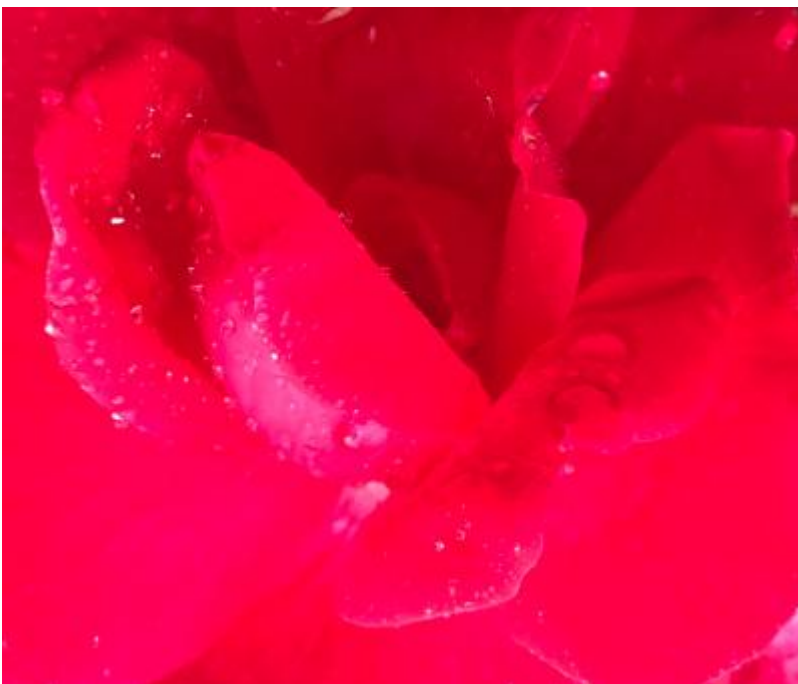
(I longed to slit my wrist)

I jolted with a shock of recognition

To see that I had drifted to the wrong side

---

## **New Poetry from Alita Pirkopf: “Roadkill,” “Sounds of the Past,” “Spring,” and “Unhealthy”**



BLOOD IN BUCKETS / *image by Amalie Flynn*

## **ROADKILL**

I bring you blood in buckets,  
a heart that I hear, a palsied hand.  
It has been eight, ten  
years, my issue.  
The same as twenty years ago  
when your father felt  
about me as you do now.  
I felt the world shrink  
but I thought something,  
not necessarily the world,  
would end. I had not thought  
the world lay flat, as Renaissance  
cartographers mapped it.  
But now, like an automobile tire  
not only flapping, flattening,  
parts of it, or me, lie on the shoulder  
of my road with dead things and dirt.

## **SOUNDS OF THE PAST**

She thought she had found  
soft music and warm dialect,  
a sunny sort of near-Italian soul,

But surfaces surprise.  
She found out. She found  
that underneath pounded  
a martial drumbeat  
vibrating still

from Vienna's center,  
his childhood years  
under the Third Reich,  
a father fighting  
occupying Yugoslavia

with others  
missing  
the village polkas,  
his son.

A burst of marches,  
explosions, still resounding.  
All of us hearing  
pounding steps and hearts.

## **SPRING**

Shreds remain—  
unraveled weavings  
of brown grasses and mud—  
in branches a bird eyed  
for her family tree.

The rest, the nest,  
that we had watched  
through last week's window,  
fell.

The dog found  
blue broken eggs  
in the grass.

Families, all of us  
consider seriously.  
Upsetting winds  
come to nests.  
It is spring  
and windows  
open views  
and dooryards fill  
with the ambiguity  
of lilacs.

## **UNHEALTHY**



I loved my doctors  
until one  
played sick games,  
touching and taunting,  
and knowing of rules  
I didn't know.  
Telling jokes  
I didn't understand.  
Dismissing me  
for my naivete-  
stupidity.

The years passed,  
and he operated  
on me appropriately,  
savingsly. Later he  
mentioned dining  
together or going out  
for coffee, but didn't ask,  
and got angry for reasons  
I didn't know, saying  
I hadn't said I'd go.

---

**New Poetry from Jesse  
Frewerd: "Symphony"**



OUR TARGETED HEADS / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Ballistic medleys project ambition, while dancing tones find their pitch. There is unexpected buoyancy in our youth. March, advance, train, drill, prepare, disseminate. It's the 4am ensemble, time to crescendo awake for guard duty. Report to post, front gate, alert and ready. Hours, minutes, seconds, tempo depends on the action. The symphony begins with an RPG flying over our targeted heads. Return fire. Bullets staccato the enemy location. A cappella commands over the comms. Write the counterpoint, execute. Threat neutralized, they retreated. Though my heart is playing allegro, via adrenaline. Dynamics decrescendo the scene, bringing it to normalcy. I return to my life as it is, my new normal cadence amid syncopated pop-shots, RPG's, mortar rounds, and IED's.

---

**New Poetry from Hannah Jane  
Weber: “My Childhood Smelled  
Like,” “Surprise Dawn”**



FROSTED WITH MOONLIGHT / *image by Amalie Flynn*

**MY CHILDHOOD SMELLED LIKE**

cabbage, salted tomatoes, and cracklings.

the flume of dust I awakened when my fingers  
untangled the shag carpet's red mane.

crayons I melted against the wood stove,  
our terrier's feet, with that same scent of fire.

night crawlers, shad, algae, and lake,  
blanketing our boat after a morning of fishing.

Dad's scrapyards, fragrant with hot tar  
and smoke from his brown cigarettes,  
acres of rust and grease, a twisting maze  
leading to one abandoned refrigerator after another,  
each filled with jars and jars of ancient rot.

fireworks and muddy gravel roads,  
leadplant, elderberries, horsemint.

Grandma's lilac bushes,  
reeking of booze from the bar next door,  
their purple bunches lighting up the dark  
with neon liquor perfume.

## **SURPRISE DAWN**

rows of cedars push through slats of slain brothers  
dense boughs gushing berries  
frosted with moonlight

my bike light skims twilight from creamy sidewalks  
a premature dawn blaring from the flashing bulb  
illuminating the wind's fabric  
in rustling leaves

I lean far from the sweep of branches  
but my jacket catches the emerald froth  
and propels me into the flustered chatter of birds awakened  
and tossed about by my helmet's pillage of their feathered  
hearth

---

**New Poetry from Tyler Vaughn Hayes: “They even pipe it into the bookstore,” “His first time: flight by ropes,” “The edict,” “Rappel annuel”**



WAX-LADEN DAY / *image by Amalie Flynn*

**They even pipe it into the bookstore**

It's never quite silent, though  
there's no lowing, not from God  
nor his gluttoned blind bovine. Only

the thudding of shuffling ungues  
on stereos hemmed, hidden

in the high grass–muzak

piercing through, prodding each  
tagged ear. Far better this way–  
now they needn't contemplate

the cacophony in BARN 8, the strain  
of strings tucked tight to necks, jammed  
trumpets jutting through guts, and

the flutes flushed fast with blood.  
No, much better this way.  
Bow, hark, try not to think.

**His first time: flight by ropes**  
*(for Corbin Vaughn)*

it's fleeting  
the rebuff  
of a flutter  
fleecing  
the sway  
in his wee  
depleted eyes

exhausted  
the college  
girls of August  
ferry a whole  
life on the neck  
heaving TVs  
sleeping late  
they flit  
from mom  
then return

we can't split  
a pendulum

a heavy head  
tightened white  
like a fading grip  
on the tethers  
just out of reach

give it up already.

### **The edict**

There is, without question,  
a tendency to beg for  
those things we have  
already.

For instance, I once  
commanded God: turn me  
into a poet, else I'll pretend to  
be a walrus.

Bruggghllff!

### **Rappel Annuel**

I  
(for one and once)  
intend to celebrate  
a soothing din  
the cleansing mess  
fresh from the wet  
wax-laden day.  
Hip hip

---



**New Poetry from Andy Conner:  
“Apples,” “Untouchable,”  
“Remanded In Custody”**



YOU MEAN NOTHING / *image by Amalie Flynn*

**Apples**

*'The landmines are just like apples'*  
*Khmer Rouge survivor*

Apples can peel your skin  
Like it isn't there

But more often than not  
The cruellest fruit  
Sucks the rusty blade

And leaves threads

Dripping

Threads of skin  
Threads of your life  
Dripping  
Seeds onto barren ground

You mean nothing to the apples  
You mean nothing to the apples  
You mean nothing

Their anaesthetic minds  
Hold no sense of time  
No sense of pain  
No sense  
No sense of what remains

And if you  
Are one of the hand-picked  
Who escape in a step-right-on-it flash  
Give thanks for this windfall

Which leaves survivors  
Green  
To the core

As they crawl  
With the worms  
With the worms  
And the decay

Praying  
To scrump a handout  
With no hands  
For the crumb  
Which may or may not come

As they sit  
In their own shit  
Begging  
On their stumps  
For a friendly worm  
To turn  
Up  
And eat it

### **Untouchable**

On my recent trip  
to Gujarat

I took  
numerous  
pretty photographs

of Modhera  
Palitana  
Dwarka  
The White Desert

and other pretty places

but

the image  
I can't delete  
from my heart

my hard drive

is of a ragged street child

at Vastrapur Lake  
who stepped out  
from the promenading crowd

raised  
his left  
index finger  
into the stifling  
late afternoon

air

and drew  
a rectangle  
to take  
an imaginary selfie

with me

### **Remanded In Custody**

How can you talk  
Of an even split  
When you're parents  
Of three kids

How can you ask  
For understanding  
When you won't say  
What you did

How can you demand  
We keep calm  
When all you do  
Is shout

And scream  
It's your own business  
When we're what  
The fight's about

How can you plead  
You need your freedom  
When you've built  
Our jail

Whose four sad walls  
Have heard it all  
Every selfish  
Last detail

How can you think  
We're stupid  
'Cos we don't know  
What it means

To move on and  
Make a new start  
When we're not yet  
In our teens

If you two  
Are so clever  
And know what  
Life's about

Why must it  
Take forever  
To sort  
Your problems out

You've no thought  
For our feelings  
Or respect for  
What we think

While you resent  
That we need feeding  
When you don't have  
Cash for drink

You complain  
We're far too young  
To understand  
Your trials

Well in this case  
It's not the children  
Who're acting  
Like a child

You both believe  
That you're the victim  
Of the other's  
Poisoned mind

But if your eyes  
Can still open  
You might see  
The only crime's

Neglect of  
Your own kids  
All three  
Ripped apart

By being used  
As silent weapons  
Against your  
Other half

How dare you  
Claim us as conscripts  
To fight  
Your filthy war

When the offence  
That we committed  
Was only  
Being born

You'd never think  
You're guilty  
But if you'd any  
Common sense

You'd see the last thing  
Left in common  
Is we've all got  
No defence

---

## **New Poetry from Lauren Davis: "The Flowers You Brought Back From Italy"**





FACES TUMBLING DOWNWARD / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Each time I open my notebook the pages stick.  
Because I've forgotten.

And onto the ground  
they fall:  
royal purple flowers fall  
out,  
emerald stemmed, blue veined,  
life  
from the coast of Italy.

You pulled them from the earth,  
pinched their feet  
with your fingertips,

you breathed into the sea

and thought of the way my hair

swayed between my shoulders,  
while you once walked behind me  
near an American riverside,  
flowers sway in the field  
the same way.

You placed the poppies then  
into the spine of your bible  
you pressed it,  
punched the face  
and rubbed the back  
onto the ground  
to release water  
into sacred words  
you pressed,  
wanting me there  
and you breathed into the sea.

Yesterday, you stood in the kitchen  
of your new house  
while the songbirds in the yard  
called *good morning*,  
you opened your bible  
and pulled the flowers up  
by the end of their stems  
like tails,  
their faces  
tumbling downward

and I opened myself / my notebook  
and tossed the flowers into  
my spine / my book's spine

and there  
I closed it  
and pressed it into the granite  
underneath  
to press

wanting to stay there with you  
out.

You asked me:  
*when again do you leave?*  
*Two weeks.*

Now,  
one-thousand miles away  
the pages stick  
each time I open my notebook

and onto the ground they  
fall,

and I remember how  
you must have looked  
collecting purple poppies  
by the sea of Italy.

Our modern lives,  
so set apart,  
both  
by miles  
and unsteadiness.

---

**New Poetry from Scott  
Janssen: “Bottle Tree”**



VIETNAM DID I / *image by Amalie Flynn*

On my first visit I asked  
A stock question about  
Whether you'd been in the military.

Marines, nineteen sixty-six, you said,  
A hint of menace in your eyes.  
I never talk about it.

On my way out the door  
I asked your wife about a  
Tree in the front yard,

Its branches capped with  
Blue and green and pink

Bottles made of glass.

It's a bottle tree, she said.  
Pointing at a cobalt blue bottle  
Glinting with sunlight,

She told me it had  
Special power to lure in  
Ghosts and lurking spirits.

They get trapped in there, she said.  
Then sunlight burns them up  
So they can't haunt us anymore.

Eight months later  
You could no longer walk.  
I rolled your wheelchair

Onto the warbled porch  
Where we sat and talked  
About how rough life is.

I never told you about  
Vietnam, did I? You whispered.  
I shook my head.

As you spoke,  
Your eyes averted,  
I looked at that cobalt blue bottle

And imagined it slowly filling  
With blood and shrieks  
And grief and the sound of

Rotor blades and the smell  
Of burning flesh and the  
Taste of splattered gore

And the sensation of  
Adrenaline pulsing and

Memories of home and

Buddies who were killed  
And of fear and rage and  
betrayal and weeping

That lodge in your throat  
Before you swallow  
It all down

Into your belly.  
Don't ever tell anyone  
About this, you said,

Your hands trembling,  
Jaw shivering.  
I asked if there was

Anything else.  
You started to say something  
But stopped yourself.

No, you said.

---

**New Poetry from Ben Weakley:  
“Checkpoint,” “There are 4  
Ways to Die in an Explosion,”  
“Good Friday,”**



PRAY FOR THE BLAST / *image by Amalie Flynn*

### **Checkpoint**

The car came from nowhere, it came  
from everywhere –

white blur and tire squall,  
a four-door payload  
of heat and pressure and steel.

When it is over, there is just  
the tinkle of falling brass and a man  
slumped  
in a pool of broken glass  
and coolant on hot asphalt,  
calm as a corpse.

Doc cuts his shirt.  
His face is weathered by years  
of this. Layers  
of skin and yellow fat pucker  
from his open side.

He breathes.

In the trunk of the rusted-out sedan,  
where the bomb  
should be,

there are only two tanks,  
an oxygen mask, and a box  
filled with apricots and dates.

## **There are Four Ways to Die in an Explosion**

First the blast rips limbs  
from the torso. Throws tender bodies  
against concrete walls. Pulverizes  
bones against pavement. Those closest  
to the bomb are never found  
whole.

Then the fragmentation.  
Little pieces of metal debris,  
like the one that punched  
an acorn-sized hole through the back  
of Sergeant Gardner's skull.

Heat from the explosion starts fires.  
Vehicles Burn. Ammunition  
burns. People burn,



alive. When a driver is trapped inside  
white-hot steel, prayers  
must be said silently for the smoke  
to take him first.

Pressure collapses  
lungs and bowels. The bleeding  
happens on the inside.  
It can be hours  
before the skin turns pale  
and the bulk of a person  
drops.

None of the anatomy is safe,

so when the time comes, pray for the blast  
or fragmentation. Pray for the heat that vaporizes.  
Pray for the kind of pressure  
that makes the world dark and silent  
before the bitter taste of iron  
and cold panic.

**Good Friday, Udairi Range Complex,  
Kuwait**

The first time I saw the sun  
rise over the desert  
it was 4 a.m.

Across miles of sand  
and rusted hulks, the throbbing  
of heavy guns echoed.

Over the horizon,  
where the beginning and the end

meet and disappear, Friday arrived.

We saw the jeering crowds, the scourge  
and spear-tip, the crown of thorns  
and the crucifix, waiting.

What could we have known about atonement?  
What did we know, then, of judging  
the quick against the dead?

---

**New Poem from Nazli  
Karabiyikoglu: "Hymn: A  
Coffin at the Gates of  
Topkapi"**



COLD SONGS / *image by Amalie Flynn*

The head, decapitated,  
it sits on a shore, at some corner of the world.  
Desperation is what they feel as blood gushes out from the  
half-neck.  
Death, however, has always been there,  
nothing new, an enslaving event.  
The name of the deal was predefined –  
“flight”. It has been around since the Order of Assassins.  
Part of us see the beauty in all this, even when the tortures  
last  
till the moon starts to shine over us.  
Sir!

There you lie, your frail length almost pours out from the bed.

And here I am, by your side, barren inside,  
yet my mind replays a moment with you,  
where you feed me freshly-picked strawberries.  
My worst nightmare is finding a way into my life,  
into you, through your flesh and bones  
yet my heart replays a moment with you,  
where you dress me with freshly-picked strawberries.

Sir!

Many calls for prayer have been sung.

And here I am, can't look away.

My devotion may be in vein, but what I'm losing now is transcendental.

You missed most of it, as they held a mirror to your nose  
and checked if you still breathed. So beautifully you lay there.

Before this fate, I was as effective as a human shield.

Here I am, bitter as rock, by the frilled duvets,  
thinking how we must keep you alive  
and not sickly-yellow and quiet like this.

See? I'm here by the frilled duvets, ice cold,  
thinking how I crave to coil up next to you.

Sir!

We finally made peace with death. First our eyes watched the floors, then our fists beat our chests. Distances reached, horizons obtained, flasks of scarce water and worn sheaths. Almost everyone lost their sons to this war. Our sons. Our people. They believed in the protection of their shields and wanted to go as far as it got them, is that why we say our hymns for our sons, on and on for days? Is this our fate?

I decided I'll surpass fate and kismet and luck or

whatever. So here I am, standing before that reckless hope. I grabbed it by the chin, pushed it against a wall and I let anger take control. I asked it, and I was quite sincere about it too, "How is it that death gets in?"

The way you put your head on my head,  
lifeless, breathless, heavy.  
Your word is my law, and I stand by its chime.  
With largest oceans behind my back,  
you were my creation, and I gave you away.  
Your first steps, your first words, have been my challenge.  
And the way you put your shoulders on my legs.

Sir!

Greatest storms whirled inside me, and, oh, I prayed  
to the Almighty; to His holiness, I presented all of my  
organs,  
but they pulled out my womb, or what's left of it,  
and even then, all that mattered was you, sir.

Something penetrates, once, twice, my spleen  
watches it happen, smells pleasant, like linden, my  
favorite, something to go for a child is being  
created, from the char of my liver, my flesh puffs,  
my flesh grows fat,  
count those things that penetrate me, arms maybe,  
one, two and three,  
stop there, stop at the second syllable of my name,  
I did not do this to  
me, I did not choose to carry this burden

Beings must produce, yet I'm barren inside.  
Your look is my law, and I stand by its tingle.  
With vastest moors behind me  
you were my darling, and I gave you away.  
Your first words, *my sultan, your highness*, have been my  
challenge.

Beings must produce, yet I'm barren inside, and you're lovely inside.

That's what you said

All this glory and all these gifts, what use do they serve, I pondered for a long time and I could not find the answer. I knit for a long time, laces and wools too, wore them in the cold maroon rooms of this palace, in the cold of my own body, cold, songs were cold, my violin was warm, only to me. They took me right away, and no surprise there, I was pretty, I stayed quiet when they split my legs, but I'm known for kicking quite hard. How funny, the way things change so much so fast, we were a thousand and now I'm just one, do the winds always bring injustice with them or does it travel in the pockets of soldiers?

Crying my lungs out, biting my tongue, fires scorching my stomach, do these all go together for me now?

Or have I just comprehended death and broken apart while at it?

If we can't breathe where the dead go, tears can flood, for the duration of the earth's age even, quail with rice or grape compost.

He found his place in the history books as did I.

It takes courage to stand before a dagger; I did, I stood still as a brick and I shed tears.

If it wasn't for your shadow, I'd call you my child, my life, my signature, the one that makes me get lost in those oceans.

Don't be hurt, because I'm ordinary, I think you'll outlive

me.

You'll have no idea though how we managed to get that life out of you.

I bit my tongue, held back at every chance, and saved the pain along my spine.

My womb dried off and shrunk, they pulled it out, but I will not give up on your scent.

I yearn for your chest to rise up to the highest, for you to take one deep breath.

If it wasn't for your soul, I'd call you my child, my flesh, my bone, the one that makes a prisoner out of me.

Don't be hurt, because I'm ordinary, you'll outlive me.

I think I see the blue of your eyes again, yes.

You'll have no idea though, what getting that life out of you cost us.

I bit every part of me within my reach, saved the pain deep in me.

The nightingale dried off and shrunk, they pulled it out of me,

but I will not give up on you.

How hard it was to bring you to life!

If it wasn't for your soul, I'd call you my child.

Sign off my sentence, my tears are my sin.

Tightly tie the rope around my neck

and tightly tie a knot to the rope that goes nowhere.

***Translator's Note:*** The story, although fiction, sits in actual history, and gives us some pointers towards having an understanding of era and geography. Topkapi Palace is in modern day Turkey, and was mostly used as the emperor's residency during the Ottoman Empire's rule between 13th and early 20th century. The Order of Assassins, Hashashiyān or Hashīshiyā, was a radical Nizari Isma'ili sect that assassinated Muslim and Christian leaders before that time period. The ordeal of flight, as in the work towards enabling humans to fly by any means, caused controversy in the Muslim world in

*the past, since it is simply unnatural for humans to fly, but attempts are encountered in Ottoman history. The story, too, is likely placed in a time period where such attempts stir political balances.*