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The Adrienne Rich Award for Poetry

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NYC

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COVER
Seth Pennington, design
Amy Casey, “Rubble,” acrylic on paper, 2008
www.AmyCaseyPainting.com

→

An arrow at the bottom of a page indicates the stanza does not break.
We are delighted to announce
that final judge Naomi Shihab Nye has selected

Jehanne Dubrow’s “from Dark Lines Against the Dark”

as the 2018 winner of

THE ADRIENNE RICH AWARD FOR POETRY

---

**Finalists** (selected by Naomi Shihab Nye)

Robin Myers, “NYC”
Rachel Edelman, “To Belong Less to the Aggressor”

**Semifinalists** (selected by the editors)

Julia Kolchinsky Dasbach, “There is no name for this.”
Daniel Arias-Gómez, “I Catch Michelle Eating Dried Figs”
Momina Mela, “YESTERDAY THE FIELDS WERE ENOUGH”
Emily Pittinos, “Subnivean (or Holding Back the Year)”
Sean Shearer, “Rewinding an Overdose on a Projector”

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“... EVERY POEM BREAKS A SILENCE THAT HAD TO BE OVERCOME . . .”

—ADRIENNE RICH
from *Dark Lines Against the Dark*

I mute the mouths. I stare
until the screen has turned to snow.

Good night, I say, walls flickering reflected light.
How real the faces I have seen.

Someone else will have to rise,
the cushions like a cave in their collapsing.

Good night, I say, gripping the remote.
I press a button with the word OK.

Numbness is another way
of turning off the news.

Think how busy cafes were in war,
patrons lifting sweetened cups
of bitter to their lips, the brothels full
of sounds resembling ecstasy.

No, the singer said, there’s nothing I regret.
Tonight, I’m putting stoppers in my ears—

I call it falling because I drop
like ice into a glass of sleep.

I mail my photograph
and payment for the tiny book

I will carry in case of crisis.
When it comes, its pages are blue emptiness,

unstamped with exile I can imagine.
Hasn’t my family run from countries known as home?

Isn’t that our custom?
I place my hand on the cover—
the golden bird embossed there, looking back
at a sky that’s almost black.

For a few days: frost
remakes the lawn as frozen spines.

I’m stepping on small bones.
In these outlying parts

streets are named Whispering or Leaf.
I’m leashed to a small companion

who leads me from one message to another,
squats in the grass, rubs

against a hydrant’s iron neck.
I’m bundled in feathers,

the downy air, to prove
what breed of animal I am.

I’m watching people play
with little windows in their palms.

To change the scene they touch the glass.
Words bubble up in blue and gray.

Later we might say our ears
were wired with enormous sounds.

We swiped faces as if rubbing
smudges from a mirror.

We became what we liked, a thousand
thumbs held armless in the air.
Let me pretend already
the poem must be hidden
in a paper cup. To read
what’s written is to drink.

Now all stories are served
with a stir of something sweet.

I’m spilling words from a tiny
packet torn open at the top.

The day in review is a scroll
of shapes across the screen—

I read not for meaning
but to track the vanishing.

The words say that he said,
I NEVER SAID. In this way,

meaning is the last pink light
that glows above a fence.

I watch it disappear. Again,
he says, I NEVER SAID.

In the yard, there are only dark
lines against the dark.

A voice is saying very fine.
Fine people, it’s saying

into the mic. The people are fine,
it says, both sides of them.
Sides both are people fine.
Both fine on side people. Fine,
it says, fine fine. Some very
fine people on both sides.

Once in a foreign city, I fell
into a fever and dreamed of trains
going farther to the east.
A man collects samples of concrete
to say a word for chamber is emptiness.
To say it never happened.

What Prussian Blue on the walls, he says.
Like this, he disappears the dead.

An alternative to fact is vertigo,
the floor rising up to strike my face.

The pigeon in the box
learns to press a button
with its beak, from the dark
a pellet of food released.

This is pleasure and reward.
I push a key. The screen
asleep in front of me returns
to light. I am modified,
conditioned to respond.
My room is glass on every side.

Filtered, the sky is a picture
I would like to post.
When I removed myself
from the thing that’s called a feed,
as if conversation were a kind
of eating, I felt like famine.
For a time, I missed the sharing
as it’s known, the communal
passing around of news, small bites
I used to take of other lives.

The opposite of truth
is a river in the underworld—
the dead drink to forget.
When the viper bites
our heel, we don’t feel it.
Maybe we have fallen in,
fog of floating in gray waters,
soot flowers on our eyes.

If I type dot dot dot,
I mean words are curtains
fluttering in vacant rooms.
I mean the temple is crumbling.
I mean someone is listening
even to the air between.
I send an image of the sea. I send
an icon of someone running.
Better not to speak.  
By the sign of a tilted face,

I say half of me is laughing  
at the moon, its silver lunacy.

In a foreign city, I touched the holes  
where nails had been,

a groove in the wood like a body  
dug up from the ground.

Here, I make my house  
anonymous and, therefore, nothing

fixed beside the door.  
Nothing of the long unrolling

of history, the silver case  
that held a parchment scroll.

Nothing. No absences but those  
that have been drilled inside of me.

After I walk through  
the doorway without walls,

my body patted by blue gloves,  
I sit among strangers, watching

the talk we make into our hands.  
I remember threats

were given colors, red severe,  
orange when the risk was high.

Now there is no chart.  
We tie the laces of our shoes
and cram our burdens
into the little space above.

When I say believe me,
I mean the tongue goes numb—

it could be singing or lying
on the floor of the throat.

Did I mention the body
is a great hotel and it's filled

with golden things?
The eyes are flatscreens.

The ears never stop playing
one broken sound.

Believe me. Believe me.
The mouth is a door

that locks from outside,
its glittering key melted down.
ROBIN MYERS

NYC

The child goes willingly, offering up her rosebud backpack to the police. Up there and outside is the snow, the scraped sky, the barbershop quartet, the fourteen-dollar glass of wine, livid pigeons, Rikers Island, ice skaters embracing, the rise and fall of some but not all things relevant to our story. The girl’s mother flickers behind her. The policeman grins like a fickle father. Someone pings a steel drum down below all this. The tunnel’s metal marrow hums its hymn, blurs pixels that bid us to obey. If you see something, say something. If you’re here, pay.
RACHEL EDELMAN

To Belong Less to the Aggressor

Shem means name, Shmuel the name
embossed glittergold
on the vault cover
lowered onto the coffin.

My tongue ululates
between palate and teeth
between eulogy and kaddish.

Grief sleepwalks,
listening yisgadal v’yiskadash
toward Jerusalem. Toward Jerusalem
the scrolls turn like clockwork.

Through splayed roots
the river’s fingers figure anthems:
we say sh’ma and v’habvta
toward Jerusalem, aleinu
with a bow.

We linger.
The nightmare looms.

Portion follows portion
toward a dispersion
in all kingdoms.

Disperse, the order
before the recorder hits asphalt.

Dia “apart,” sperein “to sow.”

My mother’s rabbi

says, Israel isn’t always right.
I let my father tell me
about the male prophets,
tell me God has
    a masculine pronoun, tell me
manna in the desert is feminine.

Lamentations figures Jerusalem
as an abandoned woman
    not beautiful, but visible.

In the Old City
    outside the Arab Gate
    I spoke in my second tongue
to belong less to the aggressor.

Dia “apart,”
sperein “to scatter,” like ashes.

The historian tells me, I am calling
my senators. We are all shouting
    STOP
    into the wind.
Descent Fragments

When we arrive, the rabbi says, we make a cemetery first. Then a kosher butcher, then a synagogue.

When one gull’s caw sets off a sky-siren, I rubberneck toward a dozen chasing off an eagle. Is it that easy?

Is that why we burned our papers as our ships neared shore?

Aren’t you descended from a famous rabbi? says E.

The rabbi says Ashes to ashes, but we don’t cremate. Something about a body for the rapture.

No need to tell my J about packing up the motionless hatchling and bleaching its stain off our balcony.

Would you rather be exterminated or assimilated?

Between the eaves and gutters, clumps of death-come-quickly volunteer their violet blossoms.

Without a prayerbook, without the requisite ten men for a minyan, I whisper the mourner’s kaddish after the administration’s first bombs.

I watch K worry her roving into matted shrouds before needle-felting the migrants: mothers, slim-limbed men, children.

We have a homeland now; the rabbi says.

Inside their fleeced radiance, a flotation.
the ghost of the dead sea rewrites the history of drowning

—after Patrick Kindig

KATELYNN HIBBARD

Romeos

Now I can’t remember what my father’s feet looked like—is it possible I never saw him barefoot? He wore work boots in the barn, of course, caked with dirt and manure, and in the house he wore romenos, hard-soled leather slippers that looked like dress shoes.

He was a big man and shy in his magnificent body. Summer evenings he sat with his shirt off at the kitchen table, his torso pale and clammy where the fabric had been, the rest of him dark as redwood, like a photographic negative of another shirt he could never take off. He liked to read the paper and half-listen to my mother going on and on about nothing much. I can’t remember what their romance looked like, never heard them proclaim their love or fight, though of course they loved and fought, their voices low and shattered from behind the bedroom door, stripped to their underwear in front of the window fan. My father was a foreign country I could not wait to leave. I never knew how he felt about leaving the farm, that familiar cartography of cows, their bony hips swaying out to pasture, day in day out, muzzles caked with sweet ground feed. I liked to follow them out to pasture, taking them where they already knew to go. Did my father ever want to keep on walking at pasture’s end one sunswept morning in June? He might have made it to town by sundown, but always he’d have turned back, the good middle child. He ran a modest farm, learned not to want the things he couldn’t have.

To my father’s hoarse cry at day’s end, Ca-boss, Ca-boss, the cows came back to be milked again, again without needing me, plodding up and down the same paths their forebears travelled in my great-grandfather’s day, back before the state had a name. A cow will return to the same stall day after day, year after year, then one day refuse to enter, though no one can tell you why.
A Hysteresis Loop

For any phenomenon there is a shape, dashed lines, points in a plot. 
: a loop, say a fountain pen's italic f.
I want to tell you that it's beautiful.

Sir James Alfred Ewing, studying earthquakes in Tokyo, 
discovered that magnetic force, when applied to pianoforte wire—it was the Meiji era, 
late 1880s, Brahms hard at work on his third piano trio—both saturates and flees 
the wire at the same rate, creating a mirror image, chartable over time. 
There was a lag, however, between cause and effect. He called this hysteresis.

Fig. 11

Pianoforte steel wire 
Normal temper

From the Greek verb hystereo:
I am late, I fall short, I lag behind.

In his 1885 paper, Sir Ewing put it thus: When there are two quantities M and N such that  
cyclic variations of N cause cyclic variations of M, then if the changes of M lag behind those  
of N, we may say that there is hysteresis in the relation of M to N.

: variations of a father on 
a daughter and the daughter's changes to 
herself variations on the daughter charting how 
her father changed her variations to 
the way a daughter struggles to erect an image 
of herself how she lags behind herself

It's not the truth you want, 
it's the process,

walking back tonight, one foot 
ahead of mine crossing traffic, 
my husband says.
Quick steps,
involutary motions—
one moment, next, the way our lives
stitch into a shape behind us,
disappearing if we look.

Red light: a car stops, bass rumbling.

You’re right, I say.
Though it’s not enough.

: either soft or glass-hard, cooled, annealed, taut or
normal-tempered, either steel or iron—
saturate the wire with magnetic force, then chart its drop

Tame is what he
seems in this instant,
chewing his beef in
small efficient bites,

eyes looking down
at his dinner plate, those
long black lashes my
mother fell in love with
fluttering thin.

Old tiger prowling in
a kinder, gentler cage:
watched, he knows I’m
watching him.

I want to tell you that it’s beautiful—
one upward curve tracing the rise
in magnetic force, one plummeting

at precisely the same intervals, forming
a natural symmetry, a loop.
Little things—
pill bottles multiplying
in his bedside tray. Hand
against his back as
he shuffles to the sink. Twitch
of his white-socked foot
as he nods off, TV blaring.

I chat about the storm
driving home tonight, where
to shop tomorrow—
placemats on the table, trivet
beneath the bubbling dish—
everyone is safe.

So I am cruel
in this instant, an exploding
bottle of ink
because I can’t help thinking
no forgive and forget, no love
always wins.

Fig. 16

Graded cyclical magnetisations
of an annealed pianoforte steel wire

Let me tell you about remanence:

What remains of magnetism in the body
after the field has been removed.

We are talking, my sister and I, across
a lightly distressed farmhouse table, two cups
between us, about our parents, how difficult
our father has been, where they’ll retire,
our to-go cups wrapped in cardboard sleeves
cooling off’ between us, my sister the doctor
almost pleading he’s not going to change,
I think his neural pathways are set, the tears
beginning to pool in her eyes and I,
tearing up too, saying *it’s different* 
*for me, I had a different experience with him,*
though what I mean is I can’t care 
the way you do.

What remains (from the Latin *remanare*) varies with each 
material but can be plotted as a point on the horizontal *H* axis somewhere above the 

*Let’s do it again,* I say to the cellist—

rehearsing for a wedding, our notes 
sliding past each other’s on the beat.

Breathing in together, we start again: 
bows in unison, a rest, and then his eighths,

my quarter note, coming together. 
I could go on like this, can practice 
forever when perfection is at stake, when 
any emotion can be acted out regardless

of how I feel, then put aside gently, 
like a sweater I don’t need, lifted up 

to a cool, discerning light.

Oily, salty: how his scalp smelled 
on a humid summer evening, neck 
of his white Hanes T-shirt no longer 
actually white, the cage of his lips

narrowing in anger, crumbling 
like the tip of a pencil pushed 
too hard. I could do that to him. 
*Help him, help him,* part of me thinks.
The value of \( M \) at any point of the operation depends not only on the actual value of \( N \), but on all the preceding changes (and particularly on the immediately preceding changes) of \( N \) . . .

When you’re tuning a piano
you must choose which set of chords
should sound most in tune—there’s no perfect
temperament, no perfect pitch: each note
borrows the shadow of its neighbor,
is the product of a host of strings struck
all at once, and every string exists
to be tightened, loosened, pushed.
To the Supreme Associate Judges,

. . . For we be, either of us, weary of other.
—Medbh McGuckian

Today the sun re-struck a path along my neck and loosened
down my shoulder blades and as I reddened

beneath its poor man’s kiss I remembered how
I never sued for your forgiveness, viz.,
my hair’s continuous shambling, the flushed confusion

of my face, my purse
without a penny. Honor Tenor or Uproar or Bitter, please

advise how to best mend
my pastures’ bruised fences, how much soap mixed
with how much spirit to sleek

the oiled curve of my frontispiece, how little I must love
my windows. My words want

your honeyed distinction, the rigid—lily of your voice,
so I can fetch only the crude truth
for my writing you—this morning the sun

fierced over and through me
toward our ill-bred mare who, warmed

and kicking, bit her new colt’s stomach
to patchwork. He stumbles alone, mouthing
with lack of purpose. The truth is I’m frightened

of his obsession with her thick salary
of milk and it reminds me how my mother would counsel me

against men, bold, bold
on, bold, and I held, until I didn’t.
And after I wanted to cry to her, Look!

There are no limits to this well, no end
to the body’s stretched felicity! Forgive me,
Honor Melt or Hammer or Temper. This body
   can be a careless companion, bucking beyond me,
   all heat and hormone, headland and early

summer. Please reply with guidance as to:
   item fence, freeing; item sun, forwarding;

   item body, airborne rose. I wait here
for your letter, that law you lay down—exact,
   exacting—those words louder, larger than my own.

Note: The epigraph is from McGuckian’s “The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter,”
and the language “how little I must love my windows” is adapted from a line in the
same poem.
Reader, I

have not so much time for thinking. September, 1854. Brontë three months in. Time gone to the needlework, stray visits. Time to the dust pan and the broth. The cough. The pleasant walks. Happy, she still kept stock. That trick about preventing blisters—I fill a plastic bag with water, place it inside my shoe. In the freezer, the leather expands, new form. Thinking—if you’d call it that. My nights more hunting down the danger lines, the wiry what-ifs. Calm your mind, he coaxes. As if. Still, there’s less room for it—the high beam, the proficient angst. Perhaps a weighted blanket. Something soothing, crochet. All the doctors, all the pills, a journal by the bed. Are you thinking about what you read? Thinking. No. Prism in which one Me forgets to say please. One waking with scuffed knees, too many gimlets. Me sitting silent in the room where Father died. Me always sorry plus never quite. Me an unphotogenic bride. Me wiving, me future-wide. Me vs. children, my pride. A mirror flashes back your blind spots. A man reveals worse: your possible selves. The you you might have been. See it fill his eyes.
DANIEL ARIAS-GÓMEZ

December 31, 2017, 4:49 AM

Half dreaming, I see Michelle bend  
over a bowl, early light sifting  

between the curtains—steamed white rice,  
broccoli, carrots, green peas, and a week-old  
turkey leg—after having worked all night  

at Denny’s with no lunch break. I imagine she’s too tired  
to eat but too hungry to sleep. A helicopter hums  

outside, searching the nearby school grounds  
for someone, echoing the clatter of Michelle’s fork  
against the bowl. And I think of my friend  

Saúl, how a circle formed real quick around him  
and Eduardo, the bully who shoved me  

at the bus stop two blocks away from  
school—only that time I didn’t take it, I stood,  
walked up to his huge nose, said qué pedo  

pinche Tucán and he laughed and slapped me on the cheek, and Saúl  
walked over, shoved his shoulder hard, and a circle formed  

real quick around them. I carried his  
backpack after the fight. The other night they pulled a body  
from our neighbor’s apartment. The only sign  
of his death was the awful stench we could smell  
when we took the dogs out for a walk. Once he called  

Michelle a bitch, I called him something  
back, and he shoved my shoulder hard. I’m not strong. I don’t work  

out like Saúl did. But the stench of our neighbor’s corpse  
 lingered for days after that, and we  

could smell it every time we got home. And later I went over  

to the bathroom and found Michelle bending  
over, scrubbing the bathtub with bleach and wearing nothing  
but a pink thong. I kissed her shoulders as hard
as I could, ran my hands over her
back, her belly, her thighs, her lips, through her
hair, bit her neck, rubbed my fingers under the pink
thong until she came leaning against my chest, then we went to bed
to finish.     Michelle wants to buy an RV and a piece of land
to live in, with a little yard for the dogs to dig holes and run
around in. And she wants to go
to the Harry Potter World in Florida
and to London and the Opera House
in Sydney and spend more time renovating
the furniture that she drags in
from the trash like the desk she sanded
and painted red and black

with bat silhouettes on the drawers—but I keep
thinking about the night Saúl and I and our friend Alex

were walking down the avenue
     after getting drunk because Saúl got his girlfriend
pregnant and then Saúl throws up standing in the middle

of the street and he throws up because
     of the beers but maybe also because of the baby,

and seeing him throw up makes me throw up, and
then Alex throws up too, so we’re all just standing there

throwing up on the street. And when we got to Saúl’s,
his father beat him for getting home drunk, and he beat
him later too when he found out about the baby, badly enough

that Saúl missed a couple of days from school—but that night we are
lying awake in Saúl’s bedroom, and we turn over and we see

Alex asleep on his back with his arms crossed on his chest and his
head carefully cradled on the pillow, and Saúl says that Alex mastered
that sleeping technique so that his spiked hairdo doesn’t get messed up while he sleeps, and we just start laughing so hard we can’t breathe, and we both keep trying to shush each other but neither of us can stop laughing.

Tomorrow I’ll wash the stack of dishes that’s been piling up on the sink. And I’ll sweep the dead leaves in our patio and clean the dog shit. And maybe we can go to the movies because Michelle has been wanting to go even though we don’t have money and our car needs so much shit fixed. And afterwards we can buy strawberry scones and iced Thai tea and we’ll sit and talk about my friend Saúl and Alex’s sleeping technique and about going to London and buying an RV and a piece of land with a little yard for the dogs to run around and dig holes in.
I Catch Michelle Eating Dried Figs

I catch Michelle eating dried figs in the kitchen, and I
make a face at her and say figs are gross and dried

figs are even more gross, and she says I’m crazy and she loves
eating figs—I love splitting them down the middle—and she

uses her hands to show me. Then she tells me a story

about her family spending a couple of days every year
with her uncle who lived right next to the factory
her father worked at when he was younger, next to an orchard
of fig trees. Her father used to bring back bags full
of figs, and they would eat them together. And afterwards she would
sneak into the orchard for more figs even though her father
cught her once and scolded her about it and told
her she’d get in trouble. She leans against our dirty
fridge, staring out beyond me, beyond our shitty, crumbling
kitchen, imagining the rows of trees, the summer heat.

I know

a lot about figs—that they are the only fruit
that ripens on the tree, that they contain
a natural humectant used to keep
baked goods fresh, that another chemical
in them has been used to treat pigmentation
diseases, that Jesus Christ got pissed
at them once, and that they are not really
a fruit but a flower inverted into itself,
the seeds

inside being the real fruit. I look at Michelle, see how tired
she is because she had to take a second job assembling

sprinklers at a factory because we need the money
for her father’s funeral and because she wants to save

for a used truck and because we need the money. Tell me again
how you like to eat figs, I say—and she smiles and raises her arms, extends

her hands towards me, her thumbs digging into the imaginary
fruit, ripping the belly open, splitting it in half, the skin,
the meat, juice dripping down her fingers and wrists.
EMILY PITTINOS

Subnivean (or Holding Back the Year)

I expected the snow, but waking stuns.  
A world of storm struck white—distance  
collapsed by an absence of shadow, the valley  
either acre or infinite. I must become so still  
to hear: a rustle, a hum  
that sounds human, though  
it couldn’t be. Not here. I never meant  
to be this lonely. Coated saplings, nearly invisible—  
they, too, become what they carry.

Once, hemmed in by a blizzard,  
I boiled snow to drink. I clutched  
a pillow case of pet snakes to my belly.  
They’d have died without my human heat;  
they are the only ones.  

Now, a scarf of breath.  
The slinking creature barely glimpsed.  
Bark once marked by velvety antlers—  
the newly budded made sharp by attack.  
The deer only multiply, though I hear  
they are starving each other to death.  
I’ve heard a snowstorm is only good  
for the path one can leave. Even sparrows flee  
the ice hour. Now my way is the only way home.

I’d be lost  
without my own bright footpath: tilled snow:  
cloud cover: moonglow refracted: the shotgun crack  
of a bough unburdened.  

Could I walk off the hours  
I’ve spent ashamed, attempting a life  
that would make the dead proud?  
What does it look like,  
how much does it weigh?
In the hall of iced cedars, it seems possible
to forget the spring. Forgotten: the lilac bush
that leans over the water, a *widow maker.*
Forgotten: honeysuckles that carry on
with their wafting, the dew I received
as a blessing.

Spring is only a spasm—
before long, the weeping cherry’s hem of petals
fallen to nourish the earth.
Winter endures, the crystal casket
it grows around the world.

There—a gunshot, just a disturbance
through the trees—far off, an uncertain kill.
How awful, death relived at its slightest suggestion:
the trail a smooth passing, but then
the fallen animal.

A corpse is a corpse,
that way I did not see him—cold,
and colder. I’ve become
the one to cry _adore me_
in the direction of all there is,
the nearest flock startled into separate explosions.
It is always the birds who fall back together, freely
leaving the silence to roost.

How long have I followed tracks without realizing
everything stalks all else?

_A animals, exposed, don’t know
harmlessness. This land without mercy._
This whipping drift so dense
it may as well be the blizzard that blew me here.
There are kingdoms under snowpack, tunnels
unseen unless destroyed.
The knot of mice
breathes heat into the haven. A fox
listens for prey before tearing into the snow.

Winter rain arrives, pocks snowbanks, exposes
deer tracks, their piss. The holes left by hooves
are deep, flooded with bog water, its frozen mosses.
The river high and fast. Dead grasses,
cedar fronds dipped into water like wicks into wax—
bright bulbs of ice
I want to shatter. How much
of enjoying a place is destroying it? Marks made,
however unlasting, lasting. I’ve killed a creature
to see if I could. I can’t tame myself.
Or won’t. I flick snow from my jean cuff.
I could stuff a songbird into my mouth.

Once, I found a finch’s skeleton still
hanging from a glue trap. The dead
do not speak—to me
they’ve said all they can. Hours spent
ashamed, attempting. What will be possible
when I’m no longer sorry? I can want
until I’m blue. Blue dark cast on snow, the burn
of fingers coming, once again,
alive.

In this mind, I may trudge
toward the ravine of forgetting—
a stampede of velvet horses,
a dream too new to burn.

Forgotten: the giddy
sunflower field, the frog spared
beside the river. Encased in winter,
all too clear: a gasping body glows,
a moon sinks on the end of a wire.
I’ve come a long way
to do my goodbyeing.

What will it look like?
How much will it weigh?

During grey days, I grew
more afraid. I feared even the fear,
the staying afraid.

Why is it gloom
produces the most angelic light,
days cast as more precious
in shades of platinum, the branches
locking horns again, birch skin silver
as scrim? More awful still to find
this way of being is bearable, if only that.
In our old garden, autumn stalks
of daffodils may remain,
braided before their decay,
under the freeze. Imagine
all the long-awaited releases.

Movement in the thaw. Warmth
of movement without touch. There: a deer gone still
beside the river. The iridescent eyes. The moment
before she leaves me. Light snags
in the rain, threads of light. I hear lightning
can spring from heat alone. But not here,
in the land of aurora, blush of green
across the cloudless sky.

What follows?

Sweet water
flowing down the bend. Sweetness made
bitter by its passing. Made sweeter. Made. All of this
made. A path long eroded made longer.
Assuming, Once Again, It’s Done With,

It’s easy to think, what’s left,
now that I no longer
cover in the light of you—

A lapse in grief
is another emptiness; a space, in turn, filled
by the usual remembering: the unthinkable
made so possible as to become fact—be vanished
and she went on—

In my periphery,
every shadow is a new dead thing—

the coyote dead beside the water, its clean bone
the unwasting work of birds.
EMILY PITTINOS

Torpor, Interrupted

The cold snap at last releases
the ginkgo leaves, the ground gold,
and before long,
it is snowing—breath seen
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------
escaping, hot.

Glare-white noon dims
to blue-black. Another fantasy
about the vessels flirtation can open.
I am too alone
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------
to sleep, too aware
of the burden absence brings, or perhaps
too unaccustomed to peace.

Nightjars bed down in snow, take flight
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------
at the first sight of danger;
I remember nights when the danger
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------
was me—strange hackles, all pricked up.

I’m hungry again, reliving the latest commotion,
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------
the rules broken. This body
dragged around so the mind
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------
could take part, decide
what is alluring, worthy. The snow

is what does it to me, landscape a whetstone
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------
I slide against until I become
the animal. I am
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------
not actually out for blood, just want
the feel of it, loosed
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------
inside, its vision: I’ll have. I’ll be bad.
On the Recrystallization of Fallen Snow

A paper read by John Wolley at a meeting of Scandinavian naturalists, Christiania, 1856

Spit of sail across the water, and I was in love. Tindhólmur Isle like a broken jaw shoved up into a crash of gulls.

Waved into berth. We bagged cormorants right off the dock. I’ve been where Saharan sand blows a thousand miles to land on your eyelids. Here, even the roofs bloom. Wet-nosed deer pick forever at their caves. Each creature seems sewn for its domain like a glove for fingers. Some tastes linger on the tongue: those fallen flags of weather I melted to drink all winter; blood hatched from my lips. I found in a pine grove a wild swan’s nest, the pair frozen in place, all our bodies caked by the same storm. A whole Arctic winter I passed in the dark, forgot if my eyes were shut or open. Between, too, is somewhere. Tent-rows of glass mountains. Look:
KASEY JUEDS

The Field

Here is only the obvious
edge where the downed

fence rusts and trees
quicken and signal

in wind harder to divine
how even inside this border

the field divides one shade
of gold succumbing

to the next Apostle
the summer unspools

beneath your crossing
over grasses the deer

have furrowed like thoughts
in the mind you follow

where bent or broken
stalks allow where hooves

have tamped and darkened
the stems down though only

from some great height
might you see

the field split
again and again

by animal passage
and now your own
The Guardians

Again still the birds
surround you say always

though you do not
always admit them

cotted as your thoughts are
blotting out their constant

high-up shiver the way they shape
this air stitching the invisible

net that holds you as you have wanted
so long to be held

you know them mostly
as rustle as tremble in the chest

in thickness of late leaves
singing infrequently now and seen

if they are only from the corner
of an eye admit Apostle

what tethers you here
amid foliage not yet kindled

only one branch of maple
reddened before the rest
An Education

Choate Rosemary Hall, the elite Connecticut boarding school, said on Thursday that at least 12 former teachers had sexually molested—and, in at least one case, raped—students in a pattern of abuse dating to the 1960s.
—The New York Times, April 13, 2017

There are no people or stray cars in the aerial view, only trees beginning to flare with color around the lawns and ball fields. The flat perfection of tennis courts and brick buildings that receive the sun at predictable times. Fidelitas et Integritas—the motto no one really remembers—is still sealed with a crest: a gold boar and three swords aiming for the future.

You may picture me with a knapsack, walking to the chapel to draw balconies and arching windows. The assignment is to show perspective. Any object—however large—will try to disappear, its lines veering toward a dot on the horizon. This is the morning I discover a pulse sloughing down my legs and blooming through layers of clothes, the morning I lock myself in a dim green stall and hide in the echo of running water. The raw cup of the body fills and drains without me saying yes.

What I do not know is that history follows many kinds of shame through white Corinthian columns. Our teachers, unsealed in middle age, take the delicate knot of a student and press the spine of her textbook flat. Trust enters so quietly, without interruption, and can almost be caught in the tones of two muffled voices talking behind a door. The details scatter into a cat that a girl bends down to touch, into cups of tea spiked with rum. Every rule erodes around the child whose kiss is so new that it’s still wet with questions.

How does anyone find a way out of being told to get in a car and hide under a blanket? The girl who breathes in the dark, under the smell of dog and exhaust, is not given back to herself in the same condition. Neither is the boy who enters an apartment with a book and gets talked into bathing with the shades drawn. The damp expanse of his back receives an imprint of lotion that he will never lose.
Silence is a lectern and the aisle that meets it, sun across rows of empty seats, an unplayed organ hulking in an upper balcony—its pipes vaulting towards the ceiling. Silence hovers over all the beautiful heads, over hands rinsing blood in a porcelain sink or opening a blister pack of birth control.

It is not me. It is me. It is any of us in a sundress, standing with the French teacher. Our shoulders pale enough to burn in those first hours of May, turning a smooth immaculate red.

Any of us with a spray of baby’s breath in our hair, looking from the gulf of our lashes towards the camera and a world that doesn’t see a story in the tilt of his shoulders or the indecipherable flower pinned to his lapel.
ADELE ELISE WILLIAMS

Hey Hannah Take My Body

When you cried and died I figured
OK> I will take your dog and your
hooker hoops and your mother
on my shoulder, your father on my
resume> What a sad show of reverie
what a bunch of love>

I was thinking your rose gold name
plate I was thinking your canine
charity clutch I was thinking your stone
mason boyfriend and his bookend jaw
his toed hands> When my other friends died
I got all their things

silver serpent
cat eyes
high leather pumps

but you aren’t really dead> Just looking like it

You wept a bitch’s worth
of salt in those suicidal months
and though you did not all the way die
something sunk in your heart
and festered there> So I gave
you my own blood box
for starters>>>>

Your eyes were so pug something
had to be done> Your eyes were so
beat beet so tucked tight
so freshly fucked>>> OK Hannah
here are my windows
they are green like infection and bright
like money

My hands were next because you
needed to help yourself then armpits
because you envied my fuzz (adios
ditch pits). Take care of my knees>
They lock on their own notice
my moon bed nails my strawberry
stress spots the flop in my mouth
OK you can take these tiny tits
OK you can take this phone voice
OK you can take my picture skin show
OK you can take the cake

Do not misplace my long neck
you can use it to swallow or
be a bird forever> Do not forget
to pill all the pills> Do not
forget to breathe breath

It is only life you sick bitch> It is
only a taut flesh temple fraught
with trying You cry and cry but
I know you are living quiet inside
like a mother at mass, like a new baby
first yell
like a building squawk

Hannah>
I only want you alive
on arrival, Hannah>
I only want your loudest sound
Rewinding an Overdose on a Projector

Blacker. Black. The foam drools back
up his chin, over his lips and behind his teeth.
The boy on the floor floats onto the bed.
Gravity returns. His hands twitch.
The heart wakes like a handcar pumping faster and faster
on its greased tracks. Eyes flick open.
Blood threads through a needle, draws into a tube.
The syringe handle lifts his thumb.
The hole in his vein where he left us seals.
The boy injects a liquid into the cotton
that drowns inside a spoon. He unties the leather belt
around his arm, pushes the sleeve to his wrist.
The wet cotton lifts, fluffs into a dry white ball.
The flame beneath the spoon shrinks to a spark,
is sucked inside the chamber where it grows cold,
then colder. The heroin bubbles to powder.
The water pours into a plastic bottle. The powder rains
into a vial where it sleeps like an only child.
All the contents on the bed spill into a bag.
The boy stands, feeds his belt through the loops.
This is where I snip the film and burn it.
What remains are the few hundred frames
reeling: the boy unlocking a bedroom door,
a black jacket rising from the floor, each sleeve
taking an arm like a mother and father.
Under every skirt is a slip

under mine, he tells me,

is a lifetime of them

when we drive

right through Belvidere into the trailer park.

All the other railroaders fast asleep.

I am trying to stay

sober in this trailer with my AA sponsor.

He was born

twenty-six years before me

on a table just like this.

When he finally convinces me

to have sex

I say my own name

like my very first word: Annie.

I am just some girl dumb

almost despicable

on his nerves

but he knows I should be dead

so he gets up

as if he really loves me

to peel the potatoes.
Some hours are larger

than others when I reach over
to close my mother’s blue robe
sickness swallowing her hard
& I do this all clumsily
with scabs on my knees, thin eyelids
I’m a little terrible
this is all like seeing myself
a junkie
even when my son came out of me
I couldn’t stop for good
until the second one
snipped my strings
a puppet rolling around
in the dusty pile of my life
& now the warmth of their bodies
pulls me tighter to some vivid
different sun, some smaller hour
where even the absent arms
of my mother become nothing
but a flicker of water over dinner
my mother
making buckets out of hospital baths
wash rags out of t-shirts
I remember her
washing her hair last in the shower.
Some Nights

My father doesn’t drive straight home
from work but finds some empty
parking lot where he can sit
in thoughtless silence, close his eyes,
leave the world. He says this calmly,
as if being afraid of going home
to what you have created
is a point in life all men progress to.

It’s easy to say I’m not like him,
will never be, but then I hear
the timbre of his shoot-first voice in mine
whenever I scream at you, feel
the strength that comes from trafficking in fear.
My fist splits the bedroom door,
and just like him, it’s not my fault

until it is, and I come back softer,
offering all my best excuses. Please, I say.
My instincts—so often they are wrong.
Babysitting My Adolescent Brother

When again he’s powdered the couch with flour
or smeared the bathroom mirror

with the turd he scooped back out—
his brackish grin watching me

go in, after—
when I’ve scolded him and pointed

up to his room, escorted him there,
clicked the door shut. I think again

of Emerson’s brother, Bulkeley, in McLean Asylum,
taken out then put back in, who took the train
to Mont Vernon—impromptu toodle-oo—
collecting names, door by door,

for the singing class he’d teach
until he was returned, like a mislabeled package, home

before anyone could learn
a thing. My own brother, the one now sitting

on his bed behind the door I closed,
was also driven home like that

on mornings he, ten years old, naked as dirt, rose
before the birds began

shuffling in the yard’s imposing oak
and crossed the main road that wore

blemishes of flattened squirrels,
went porch to porch, slurping the lukewarm dregs

from beer cans forgotten overnight.
He knocked on doors to express his thanks.

What a nice boy, they’d say, eyebrows raised,
returning him to my father, still groggy

in his boxers, as my brother,
exposed and luminous,
flashed from the foyer to the stairs
back to his room where he’s crying

on his bed, and this bafflement keeps
walking me back, to open the door again.
JOE WILKINS

If I Could,
or Poem Against the Crumbling of the Republic

Old friend,
I am afraid you are lost,
the streetlights sputtering,
the night about
hard & dark.

I know you’re tired.
I know this is not
where you thought you’d be.

Jesus Christ,
be careful.

The door you see might well be
a mouth, its rusty voice
the lie’s hinge.

I’d bring a flashlight
& a sack of beef jerky sticks

if I could.
Maybe I can. Maybe if I reach out
my fingers might shape

the bones of your face.
JOE WILKINS

For Nothing,
or Poem Against the Crumbling of the Republic

Old friend,
your mother sent a card at Christmas,
like always. Finally,

she wrote,
letters terribly slanted,
penciled so hard as to sheen to silver,
we'll have a President we can look up to.

I set the card down.
I poured myself a stiff drink.

I thought of the time
she caught us
with a skin mag. Were we even

eleven? That was the year
she was always crying

for nothing,
just crying when she picked us up
from basketball practice,
crying

over cigarettes,
rainbows of grease in the sink. Anyway,
she snatched the magazine up
& smacked you a good one.

Then she smacked me.
Even Now,
or Poem Against the Crumbling of the Republic

Old friend,
what is to become of him—
the boy whose lank, mud-colored hair
is always in his eyes,

whose grandmother
after six straight hours drinking Jack & Pepsi
at the video poker machine
has just made rent,

the boy even now
rattling the hay rake around a field
of bull thistle & cheat grass—

don’t say you don’t—

you know him.

I mean, it’s never
been easy. We barely got by.
Didn’t we

got by?
JOE WILKINS

Each Dawn,
or Poem Against the Crumbling of the Republic

In the eye of the night
I woke to rain. Even for the cold
we had the window open.

I tell my new friends I don’t,
but I do. I understand
exactly. Old friend,

I know just how it sounds
but the woman I love
sleeps each dawn

beside me,
our children across the hall.
After coffee I turn gladly
to my work, away

from dreams of you.
JOE WILKINS

Even After,
or Poem Against the Crumbling of the Republic

Old friend,
when I think of us now
I see the grain man’s
bent back, even after
he unfisted both sacks.
Postcard from Standing Rock

I wish you were here.
   I know, every day
   I was supposed to leave
   yesterday. Pack up
the hollow bones of the tent,
   stop feeling, each night, like a stowaway
in the sway of the grass.
But,
you
   know how I love
this work, the tiny snapping turtles in the river,
the wild plums, tart on my tongue,
   my days full with kids weaving drums, the bright sinew
holding everything together.

You’re already back in Missouri, keeping lit our garage sale lamps,
   when, after school, Val and Alayna surprise me
   with the camper, home, sweet home sign hung on the door,
   and the deep blue curtains Val stitched just for me,
   with the strawberry Pop-Tarts in the cabinets,
   nestling in.

   And I know then I can stay. And I will,
    nestling in,
   with the strawberry Pop-Tarts in the cabinets,
   the deep blue curtains Val stitched just for me,
   and the camper’s home, sweet home sign hung on the door.

When after school, Val and Alayna surprised me,
   you were already back in Missouri, keeping lit our garage sale lamps,
   holding everything together.

My days full with kids weaving drums, bright sinew;
   the wild plums, tart on my tongue;
this work; the tiny snapping turtles in the river.

Know how I love
   you.
But
   in the sway of the grass,
I stop feeling, each night, like a stowaway.
The hollow bones of the tent
packed up yesterday.
I was supposed to leave,
    I know. Every day,
    I wish you were here.
there is no name for this.

we watched for what felt like hours
through the chain-link fence
that fits my son’s entire arm
or just his lips and chin
his tongue stretched out to inhale
crushed bricks / wires / roots / someone’s
dead plant / mud / bones / pets’ or rodents’ / maybe / their owner
the excavator’s overgrown arm
scooped through grass and soil
as easily as skin making room
for new construction that will tower
at least two stories above most
other houses on our block
/yama/ / pit / hole / ditch / trench / crag / crater / higher
my son asks / ravine / hollow / more / more / his fingers climb
the fence / he is ecstatic / growing / a grave
the man in the backhoe’s cab
tips his hat and smiles
waves as he thrusts
the whole machine forward
its giant tires swallowing mud on the brink
thick legs anchored deep to fight the fall
the bluff where silt slips down soil walls
crumbling as easily as skin and in my mouth
I taste the rust
the lines and lines and lines of bodies missing
from this moment when my son’s whole face
is pressed against a fence ignited by the other side
and all that lies below
/yah/ I / me / myself / / ma / mama / mammal / YAMA
he yells / MAMA YAMA! / they don’t belong here / ghosts / bones
should have been left across the water / blacker soil / not this / not this /
/ / / red mud / not deep enough / not past enough / not enough / this / is not enough /
YAMA MAMA! / they don’t belong / these sounds / so close
to llama / sharp and comic / comma / drama / I’m laughing / crying /
gagging / trauma / he can’t get enough of it / YAMA! / the word / its earth
sick to my stomach I tore his fingers
loose from the dust and metal
and we walked through fresh puddles and debris
he found a string with two deflated green balloons
_yayás_ he calls them the sound
as far from _sharik_ as this dugout is from Babi Yar
as he is from the ghosts he doesn’t know
he comes from as this house is
from the bones on which it sits
The Sherman Anti-Trust Act

You are a person
whom the American Sugar Refining Company gave the right to thrive.
You are a person
but not a construct of fat and fingernails, a noun with unique skin,
your face a thousand truck bays, automated doors, whose concrete teeth
in turnpike grass are embedded in the gums of economy.
You are a person
whose clean fleet of cars we are enjoined from slandering,
We believe
in your stated aims to minimize ultraviolet and pragmatize our common bounty.
We believe,
on our greatest lakes and rivers, your touch refrains from empirical damage.
We believe
in your broadcast arias, your libretto of claims on wide screens and narrow.
You are a person,
not a rumor of stunned cows, nor an enterprise to sandblast serial numbers,
nor explosive machines in deep storage now that so many men and women
have fewer limbs than balance requires.
You are a person
whose eyes see through the eyes of state legislatures,
with an ear to the ground for its hiss of multiple fuels,
with a hand in rerouting icebergs to facilitate shipping.
You are a person,
not a party complained of, not a microchip lodged in our secret petition.
You are a person
discussed in print but immune to libel, engendering trust and anti-trust.
CHARLES RAFFERTY

Moon

The dirty monocle stares down at us. It is keeping the birds awake. Somewhere, the tides are rising, drowning the shoreline stone by stone. I cannot read by this light, cannot discern the colors on my map. Only worry can thrive beneath this strange eye. No matter how hard I throw these stones, it will not look away.
CHARLES RAFFERTY

Poetry

Suffering is the only footprint that refuses to wash away, if only because we keep freshening the path, pushing our toes into the water-flattened sand as we head for the gunmetal sea.
Feed

When his face appears among the people-you-may-know, I know the algorithm has entered and picked me clean. A corpse in the ground, a young man forever in the cloud, with hair like a bushel of castor beans, Nick smiles on and on at me. I watched the backhoe bury him. Liked his mother’s posts. I almost click. Does someone’s stock rise a half tick if I stalk my friend’s body at midnight? It’s so easy to tease the screen’s belly, slide my nail to touch his face.
Homeschool Family and Consumer Science

My brother cooked his upper lip
against the rim of a stock pot,

standing on a chair at the stove,
barely able to peek over and see

the potatoes boiling. No one ever talked
about how he must have fallen,

how far to the floor,
how unforgiving the kitchen tile,

or how cold. No one knows
how many rooms he must have begged

before he found someone. Instead
we called it his first mustache,

that mark of manhood welling up
and scabbing under his nose.

How hungry that scar made him

look. How we laughed
at his chewing, careful

and open mouthed, each bite
breaking skin apart and raw.
Homeschool PE

This is the way you make a fist.
This is the way the thumb curls
around your fingers so it doesn’t break
when you strike a man. When you strike a man,
here are the soft places to aim for.
These are the piercings that can be
easily torn out in a fight, and this
is why you’ll never pierce your face.
This is how much pressure it takes
to tear a man’s ear from his head.
This is how to hold a gun,
and here are the places you aim
to kill a man. To kill a man,
you must pull the trigger calm
as a finger curled through hair,
anything more might cause you to miss.
This is why you don’t miss and this
is why you don’t miss. Here
are the exercises to keep your hand
from cramping up at night. This is the way
you sleep, same as the way you stand,
stick straight, staring straight ahead.
This is the way you breathe, in
through your nose, out through
your mouth. Your mouth
caged by teeth,
this is the way a tongue leads
to ruin, and this is why you don’t speak
and this is why you don’t speak.
Homeschool Woodshop

We called his backyard Little China
because there was a shrine on the porch,
because he burned incense that tickled

our noses, but mostly because he grew
the bamboo that we spent the school year
stealing. My brother and I,

we would kick his trees
until they snapped,
twisting and wrenching

the longest stalks we could save
and dragging them up the hill.
The stalks were so green

they made our hands look gray
and our veins purple.
We never stopped to think

how many years it must have taken him
to acclimate the trees to Carolina’s
red clay while we sawed them

into swords and practiced shoulder rolls
and bruised each other’s wrists.
We had a thirst for sweat and dirt

and dried bits of leaves in our hair,
a thirst so strong we convinced ourselves
it wasn’t stealing. That God

had grown those trees, given them to us
that we might pretend to kill
each other. And while we were rehearsing

our deaths, we never imagined
our neighbor might tell our father
what we did to his home,
killing five and six stalks
at a time. So green,
they made our bloody knuckles

look blue. We could have hated him
as we were bent over our father’s knee,
and as we shattered broomsticks

or plastic pipes instead of his trees,
but we were too busy beating the weakness
out of our bodies. We didn’t learn anything,

didn’t grow up to be the killers or saviors
God wanted, just moved away and never talked
about whatever hurt we felt

or how it excuses nothing.
Things Dying & Where

Steve Hutchinson, Eagan, MN

It seems my father has been old
an awfully long time. It's likely
he will die that way. Funny grapes,
he calls the Minnehaha choke-
cherry, cuffing the bunch. Itty bitty.

What a bear-weird shape, my father
in the hale grey of this place. Eyes
souped & wild. He smells of a tired
mustard. Everything seems ready
to take him: the lichen, the falls,
the hungry earth. When he trips
I don’t catch him because I am small, I say,
or because he is darkened & peltlike,
nape loose as a great-backed animal
& gravied with sweat. The late
bloom of him.

Oop, he says.
Sorry, honey, & stands, brushing the veinless
space under his knee. My father’s lessening
is a strange harvest: each fingertip
a skulk of borzoi, his nose a waxy
Spanish lamppost, his eyes ink-pewter
& baby’s dough. When he falls
I don’t catch him,

his fiddled-with heart
already the rhododendron root ball.
The Minnesota State Fair’s *Miracle of Birth Center*, sponsored by Subaru

Before I smell it, I imagine
I smell it: copper-slick, torn.
Butter and musk. What gathers

in a working groin. The barn’s
no different from outside, really—
foot-beaten and humid, maybe

a little more soiled—and inside, a cow
heaves curtains of red tissue
from her backside. Quilt of trembling

oil. *Oh, that’s just afterbirth*, the vet
tells me. The cow’s bored eyewhite
stark in her skull. Her chin fretted gossamer.

Nearby, a bursting rabbit endures waves
of toddler palm; if gentle, they receive
a blue ribbon (*First Place in Not Hurting*

*Something Smaller Than You*), and I think:
Thin velvet of a lambscheek, for which

my hand also hungers—to touch
what is new and milk drunk. To cup
something pink and cropped, mysteriously

focal. A sign on the wall lists the times
of each new birth: 6:14 AM, three lambs—
Becky, Delilah, Marge—that I can’t see

through the kneeling team of boys
by the pen, their lager-yellow
crew cuts. Only the mother sheep, who

looms to the left. Her indecipherable eye
between bars.
Fox News

there is no deception

just the calmness of soil
beneath their soft paws, the wide duct
of their ears never floating from their heads
into a stadium of whoops & boos

their fur is no butter, but the mood of butter

the trees around them are rough & dark
& without contouring or
cup holders, this place of trees
is so beautifully & painfully specific
they would like to stay here forever
without broadcasts
or guns or flowers made of icing

they would like to keep their pointy teeth & functional skin

where they live nothing has a name
but everything has a texture & a taste:
velvet night, green lake
fennel darkness, sopped wood

let us allege that sometimes the foxes wander—not in search
of bacon, or experts, or the elevated floor
of the therapist’s office, and sometimes
we see them—red flames cutting
through suburbia or bounding away
from an exit ramp, the whole world flashing fox—
for, perhaps, a bit too long . . . and let us love—
in this year of reckless counterfeit presidents
& more mass shootings—how perfect this news,
how joyous that, in this instance, nothing needs

to be scrubbed or shredded
PAUL NEMSER

Janus

To the gate we walk, as out-of-our-time
As air bubbles trapped in volcanic rock.
It’s east, you say, pointing west.
How easily one erases to the other.
The god of endings hangs on his hinges,
no right, or left, or wrong.