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Cover image: “Man with the spirit of his helper”
William Hope, c. 1920

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THERESA BURNS

2020 NJ Poets Prize Honorable Mention

TEACHING WHITMAN IN THE 21ST CENTURY

They weren't ready when I first brought him out, '04, '05 maybe. Short hair was fashionable again. Even the college kids clean shaven as stockbrokers, and here he was all bearded and louche, holding their gaze from the yellowing flyleaf. The boys especially squirmed in their seats when I told them he was gay, or at least bi, and suddenly they understood stalking Lincoln through the streets of the capital. Wandering like a dreamer into enemy territory. The prose they liked okay, concerned mostly with War and Death, which were safe. But wasn't he getting a little weird about the soldiers, young men he nursed as they died alone under tents. He held their hands like the children they were, penned their last words to their mothers and fathers. My students grasped his outsize heart. How they shrank, though, when we read the long poem, that unleashing. How strained the room became as they went around, mouthed their two run-on lines, then dropped their eyes to their phones again. Song without apology, without shame. At nineteen, I cringed too: *Who is this guy?* So full of his selves, himself larger than the world, himself in every beast and flea and paramecium. It was only when I got a little closer to the dirt, my parents ready to nestle there for good, I came again to his long lines lapping like tides coming in, receding, then advancing. Around '09 or '10, I felt a shift like weather changing, and we read the poem where he bends to kiss the enemy soldier on his cold, white lips. And not a single one of them giggled or muttered *gross*, though they had absolutely nothing to say about it, nothing about any of the lines he had crossed, sentences he had eradicated with that kiss. A few years later I decided to shut the door, make them commit. We stood up and belted the lines, slingshot them across the room, and when we got to the dirty parts, kept going. When we finished, one of them muttered *sick*. But not the kind of sick they meant a dozen years before. He meant sick as in *awesome*, as in *epic*, as in *Who the fuck is this guy?*

IN MARCH, CUT BACK

butterfly bush, oakleaf hydrangea
before they have a chance to leaf,
says Barb, plant authority up the block.
Take the knockout rose back three feet,
start it all from scratch before the April
rains begin. Cut back brittle barberry,
actually get in the bed and hack that shrub
you never loved but keep
because it adds something—red. Because every human
tires of all that green (*how much*
I want you green) but how much to leave
and not overshadow the peonies?
Bosomy sun lovers, their shoots
look parched and need a shower
—like me, now I've cleaved for hours
in sudden warm, swatted
and swore through it. Cut back thorns.
Pinch the bleeding heart with fingers so dirty
my eye oozes when touched. My skin lashed
by witch hazel, first flower to open
I cut back to make more.

MARINA CARREIRA

LIKE I'M ALREADY DEAD

Like I'm already dead— a carnation in a dim funeral parlor, corpse stiff in burgundy Sit your knees on the little stool, rest your head on my stuffed belly Tell me again how your favorite day in the history of the world is June 30th Describe how hot-hard the rain slammed against our car that night, how hot-hard our first kiss made us Tell me how you first said *I love you* by accident, how I didn't shave until you returned from Portugal that summer That even at my most, I am still the one your soul loves Hold my hand in the hush

Like I'm already ash—the shit grey of pines after fires ravaged most of Bairro Alto Tell me about your day at work, how the office was a circus tent, how the administration fails the teachers and teachers fail the students and students fail each other and everyone goes home anxious and unable to do anything but sit in front of a screen for hours swiping and waiting to do it all again tomorrow Tell me you're over the moon having married someone who cares tanto tanto in the face of fierce American apathy Sing me your affection

Like I'm already a ghost— at the top of the stairs, hands soft as silk, bare feet on the too-cool floor, humming a fado closer to hymn Burst through the door and slip the fat silver ring you gave me years ago onto my barely-there finger, close the curtains we just bought Accept my apology and call night by some other name: darkbulb or expiredlight Remind me that dinosaurs never became extinct but phantasms, their bones aide-mémoires of what love wore 70 million years ago Open-mouth laugh 'til you're dead too

PETER CLAVIN

ODE TO LAKE M-----

witness whiteness
playing indianness
noble savages & Mad Men
the lake Men Made
Mohawk
to honor those driven off
Their lands, razed
enclosed
civilized
a private community association
spiritual amnesia
raised in its stead
 He cannot see

 Gonna take my boat to old Lake Mohawk
 Gonna ride it 'til the fuel burns out
 Can't nobody tell me nothing
 You can't tell me nothing

a charming club for those of some fortune
on the lake's north shore
outside the grand hall that houses the many celebrations
of the venerable Lake Mohawk country club
lies a totem of rugged capitalist spirituality
a visage of an imagined stately red-skinned Chief
Chief Mohawk presumably died for his people here
& now benevolently graces
this hallowed body of water
this jewel in the crown
of white deer plaza
 He will not look

 Gonna take my boat to old Lake Mohawk
 Gonna ride it 'til the fuel burns out
 Can't nobody tell me nothing
 You can't tell me nothing

Mohawk is as mad
as any other shrine
to White supremacy
raze raise erase totem sing
Chief Mohawk

abides in the land of easy
living in the heat of July
violent pasts are muffled
as we stand on the jetty
& the riptide surf
softly reverberates underneath
a thousand desecrations
 We cannot see

 Gonna take my boat to old Lake Mohawk
 Gonna ride it 'til the fuel burns out
 Can't nobody tell me nothing
 You can't tell me nothing

in the local schools pubescent white children
scribble swastikas on bathroom mirrors & stall walls
but back on Lake Mohawk
serene as the calendar turns
to silent nights of christmastime
holiday wreaths adorn lampposts
spartan season's greetings stifle
Chief Mohawk's sullen sigh at sunrise
& at sunset indeed
at all times
with his eyes closed
a thousand decorations
 We will not look

KELLY CORINDA

IF I WAS MADE TO DO IT LIKE THIS THEN I AM DOING IT RIGHT

If I was made to take medication twice a day

as needed

and be unsure about the concept of love

then I am doing a spectacular job

If I was made to turn in circles

and sing

We can fall in love at the Dairy Queen

We can be nice or we can be mean

But right now

I'm just in the shower

then I am doing it

I feel full and sad all winter

because I was an untapped maple

in a past life,

and I am doing it, I am doing it right

I had a dream that my hair

was made of glass

and you told me your real name

in the dream my friend said

'damn girl you were born to

smile like that'

because a smile had appeared from nowhere

just like that

like I was made to smile

and I was doing it,

doing it right,

this is a dream remember

it is midnight again

in real life

I turn in circles

and grab at the tails

of whatever passes

DEAR SAMANTHA, (APRIL)

my legs are so
long

I am almost an insect
now

a stranger bought me a
rosewater soda at the bodega

yesterday

and I am so full of
goodwill

I am almost
invisible
in my gratefulness

I bought another metrocard

and plant

I held a deeply serrated
leaf in my hand

like a knife

SELF-PORTRAIT WITH A MIDNIGHT HORSE

My face is a dream sized diorama dripping ice.
I have never been in love so I am holding on
to the hair of my best friends as they slip
through the floorboards, diaphanous.

I come burning hot
Into an apartment full of paintings.
My friend pulls snow from the fire escape
Like so many ice cream cones,
Trying to straighten my head,
Straighten my teeth for me, again,
With the cold.

She grows blue hair naturally.
I turn my head to the side in the lamplight and
The shadow of a horse runs out the door.
We create smoke and tea and I don't ask
About what it means to be forgotten.

PERENNIALS

I have a wound
that radiates

and desert plants
have unlimited forms.

Frida Kahlo said
“I paint flowers
so that they will
not die.”

Whatever.

Let's raise
real dead
real plants

from real
graves.

Ask each other the same
real
questions
year after year

but with everything heavier now.

Prickly and fragrant.

Because you know me.
I've always been a fan
of green filigree,
of verdant majesty,

of refusing to let anything die.

MY EX-BOYFRIEND SHOT A DEER

How did you ever live on a farm,
How did you ever shoot an animal?

We drove eight hours and saw
a closed library door.

It was on the way.
I put my feet through glass

onto the rocks below.
That metaphor for a lake is so old

but it's as clear as the thirty seconds
of video I have of the road to Montreal.

To sit in the blue and gold of old world
style majesty and taste its poutine.

The amount of free time we had
even five years ago is incomprehensible now,

enough to cry about.
Have you ever been chased

out of a park by bees?
You would know if you had.

You would know why.

A HOUSE THAT BURNS

Two hooves up in a house that burns
and a jug of white hot water in one hand.

Behind your head is a galaxy, still,
with a ceiling and two walls.

Let me climb up on your shoulders,
my feet burn in this plastic universe

and I go crazy with the traditional dance
called shake yourself free of anatomy.

Shake yourself free of the lonely ladder
and the step step step in your snow boots.

A halo is an emanation of power.
Look at my face in front of this
house that burns.

HUGO DOS SANTOS

AT THE EDGE OF LIGHT

as time goes
there comes the doubt
of how:

how dark the shroud of ignorance.
how much difference could make

a little light arrived.

i do the same i have done for all
my time. routine
of a laborer descendant.

wring my hands, accept i come
from a long line of people who read
no books. that i am the first of mine
to find awareness. then a voice kind
and patient corrects:

we have a limited understanding of literacy. yes.

how slender the openings
of my memory. how
my avó could only
with great concentration sign
her name

but taught me words even the dictionary
has not learned. magarofos.
bôdamerda. others, too. her smile
opened worlds to me,
how she clapped when she smiled.

in my narrow memory mute
her hands are the echo of that joy.

there are gifts i go on receiving
with time, i understand them
as they are revealed by life. *how*

they are revealed by life.

how god means to me
loneliness that never feels
pain. how boring
the vastness must seem
lately, not a birth
but a sermon.

how long the time, how long
the distance. and how
to navigate the in-between of

my memory and her light. my
avó's light. the difference
light still makes.

i didn't know (then)
how what she gave me
could be substance

so much later. so removed
from where she loved me.
how she loved me.

i smile arrived
at her gift
at this gift
neither fast nor slow
but just

as i could. as i did.

at last

i am released
from the illusion
that death was a removal.
that from her grave she could teach
no more.

how freeing to learn
i was wrong. to say
without burden that i will
make only new
mistakes.

TO MEET A HOME (THEY SAY YOU CAN'T GO AGAIN
BUT I KEEP TRYING JUST THE SAME)

on returning to
my cities, my rituals
remain unchanged.

polite wiping of my soles,
doors i remember

opening. like my *life*,

like *my* life, in the home
that is not mine. i
am here.

undone. again
in a way
not like before.

each return an echo

of
— an apartment left abandoned
— an other, memory unnamed.

these old streets do not recall me
though i tender all of my
heavy-worn yos.

hey yo, they got
life. hey yo,
they got home.

hey yo, we ain't a same

with the mirror hung between us —
lifetimes closer, then they appear.

back out front i remember
there were words for this
once, when home was my address.

i forfeited
my way to say
when i gave

no goodbye.

like discovering in the smile of a stranger
the eyes of the child you once were.

unchanged despite time.

LIZA KATZ DUNCAN

LOVE SONG (2)

We sing of factory towns, of smokestacks that leaked
poison into the bay until it swelled, glowing
sickening green, too liquid for its frame. Beneath it,
sunken houses, clams turned to plastic in their shells.
Dark planets above, mire below. Once, this was a harbor.
Neon clouds stipple a sky that breaks and remakes,
pours down its wet rage on the tortured apartments. Even
the manor on the hill, that stronghold, shaken.
Foundations rolled under our feet like the planet itself.
Machine smell tinged with a singe-fist of hair,
a hiss and spit of ash. Sleep. Be silent, dark town.

LOVE SONG (3)

At the bayshore, stray cats stretch out in the middle of the street
and stare you down until you move your car.
No one admits to feeding them, though nearly everyone does.
This spring, hardly any sun. The dogwoods flowered a month late,
then burst in a neon haze. The cloud cover heavier each day.
My husband and I jump the guardrail and walk down
to where the rocks meet the sand. Our shadows together
pace in triplicate, in the cross-hatch of streetlights.
Each step a spark that cuts through the rain and fog,
like remembering last night's dream. Downed branches
scatter into our path, and he guides me gently over them.
A fleet of gulls lifts off the bay, sensing dusk,
the tide's coming swell. Above us, someone's toy drone spirals.

WAWA POEM

On the Wawa sign the Canada goose
always flies toward water,

its back aligned with the W's twin serifs.
The name itself, the first syllable of water:

start and restart, hesitation, as if by speaking
the word in full, you might conjure water

where you least want it. Look: a saltwater bird has built
its nest in the second a: its round acrylic mouth like water,

as hospitable as any sea cliff or dune. The a invites life;
the w sloughs it off: the name, when written, like water.

I get my coffee and walk to the water.
Waves against the seawall, brash,

arrhythmic, as if something underwater
is arching, aching, to come up for air.

JONATHAN GREENHAUSE

THIS IS THE SAGA OF A PIG IMITATING

butterflies, how
the pig flies but is no longer cognizant
of his pigness,
is covered in iridescence, his legs
pneumatically

lifted by their flapping. You're perched upon
a windowsill
observing the pig pretending to be
colored insects
plummeting to asphalt. You're a knife,

& I'm a pig,
& the butterflies talk about shapeshifting,
every window
a prior meeting place for the mating
of butterflies, but

now a new moon sprouts wings, flutters
to earth, crushes
the Arctic, sends stranded polar bears
scampering
'cross dusty craters named without fearing

their nearness.
You're a blade, & I'm the butterfly pig,
but look closely
& you'll miss what's far away, my clothes
a flurry of wings,

of antennae & feelers & proboscises,
a tickle by
the slightest sense of airiness, by
my lightness
lifting me with just three butterflies,

my body fading
into levity's unsustainable madness,
into a mountain
stuck in the process of erosion. I'm the pig
ecstatically steered

to the slaughterhouse, unaware how
the rapt crowd
cherishes their bacon, hungers for ham;
& so I leap,
waiting to soar, the wind whistling banshees.

FIVE RIVERS

A clever child, once you could name
all the rivers of the Underworld:
Styx, of the remorseless one-way ferry;
Lethe, oblivion's purifying waters;
the woeful current of Acheron;
Phlegethon ablaze and broad Cocytus,
whence rise eternal cries of regret.
This would be useful to know, you thought,
as you meandered through your life.

RICHARD KROHN

ELOPEMENT RISK

Waiting to be buzzed through glass doors,
I see him on the other side, stabbing a finger

at the Neuro Unit sign, ELOPEMENT RISK,
his snarled *Shit! Shit!* turning to wheeze

as we shuffle to his room. *They're too late,*
you already eloped. Remember that ladder? I say.

My hands climb syllables as I stage-whisper,
Juliet, wherefor art thou? his laugh souring

to red-faced cough. *That's me, Mr. Romance.*
Took my belt, can't even keep my pants up.

I remind him how John and Yoko swore off clothes
when they spent that week in bed, but his grin pulls

down as if weights had been hooked to his face.
Can't even do that. I hate this. When can I go home?

Out the window, the hospital's abandoned annex;
beyond its yellow brick, a piece of downtown, sky.

Were you at my wedding? Instead of reprising
my best man's toast, I say, *Wedding? You eloped!*

Drove like a maniac straight across the Atlantic.
A miracle! So tell me: how was Paris, Lindbergh?

He stares at the door-less bathroom,
begins twitching between news channels,

something about *Mussolini with a blond wig,*
but scandals and Syria can't keep him awake,

and when the nurse returns to test his sugar,
he only stops snoring to open one eye and ask

who it is. *The dozen roses you ordered,* I say,
so watch out: the thorns may prick your finger.

BURNING

like her glare, clattering
a last dinner dish into the sink,
thinking he just yelled thanks
for keeping the *home fries* burning
as he tossed his tie on the couch,

or because she did hear
home fires, capturing the romance
of mac 'n' cheese and runny noses,
her gym bag itching by the door,
plans to return later than promised,

he, dozing to Dylan,
smoldering when she doesn't come in,
then waking to make her omelet,
a half moon of baby spinach
and wild mushrooms,

his morning gaze,
skillet to clock to skillet,
the sizzle of onions after prying
eyes from a Russet, peeling and
cutting, then flipping the slices in.

FALLUJAH, RAMADI, ALEPPO

These cities we never had heard of
that could be exotic oases
instead now just words that mean sorrow
like names of the newborns who perish,
a grief that we bury in meters.

The mantra and chant of a nightmare,
each one with its cadence of wailing,
an image of veils with their bundles
who run between cars set on fire,
the rubble as if from an earthquake.

The random exchange of machine guns,
half-walls of what's left for the living,
the thick drift of smoke in the desert,
a stock phrase we quickly fall into,
like asking the darkness *where am I*.

EVE

He wakes to dusk, Recovery,
the blur of lingering ether,

fear of the coming years
sailing him into her past,

imagining her squatting
at horizon's edge in the farthest

corner of the room, chanting
herself back to early men,

a brother's ugly touch,
years of slights and leers,

gropes of dates and strangers,
brandishing above her now

not a long, curved rib
but the piece of his hip

they've just sawed off,
gripping just below

where the head veers
sideways toward its end,

the skin her father paraded
naked through her youth,

stretched over a stewpot
she braces between knees,

the piece of hip raised high
to beat down like a drum.

MARYANN L. MILLER

ENARGIA

flings images at your face
makes you duck for cover.

You remember the history of desire
the way it played out
in brief art. Look up paintings
with guns in war see how accurate
the aim of an artist
who probably never pulled
a trigger. See politicians in the pocket
whose fingers lay against metal
smeared with oil and duck blood.

Run from crazy white boys
sparked by code words
felling children
as intended consequences.

Lit canvases show more
than we care to see
in our unsafe homes—
museums of flickering images
vivifying the mess.
Burnt tired,
we fall asleep during the noise.

MY FAITH FLEW UP

In my childhood church
painted Futurist figures lived
in plaster. My faith flew up

to Christ with a Severini face,
saints with Modigliani necks.
Maybe there was

a faint aroma of chrisem,
the scent of sanctity
in the palm of God.

Our priest brought to coal country
the mystery, the history of Italian art;
his parish expected a Germanic passion

of Christ, blood-stained in glass.
We were from mountains not museums
bewildered by the clean spirituality of dry brush.

Look! Look at what you have come from!
Not steel or coal or glass factory.
Be proud that you are not ordinary.

You are part of Mystery and The Works of Mercy.
In God's time, a day could be an hour
or a million years.

SHRAPNEL

First, the flat triangle lodged under my breasts
the one that slips out between my sternum

and second rib

it reflects an odd light from the mirror he said

I looked into too often.

Next, the curved piece of violet glass in my behind.

It hurt more going in
along with the prickly demands attached to it.

There's space in there now for a slice of self.

Now, the cruciform under my tongue
pushed out through a salivary duct
stings like heresy.

It will no longer
interfere with my pronunciation.

I suspect there's another one
probably in a kidney
or a fallopian tube

a shriveled pea rolling around down there.

When it surfaces
I'll pluck it.

STEVE MYERS

BOW TO STERN, CAPE MAY POINT

—*Lucky life is like this. Lucky there is an ocean to come to.*

We breath easier here, in mid-October's bright sea air. Lucky
the ambulance found us down our black back road last night, life
a thin whistle in my wife's windpipe. How crisis loads its is
on is. Gulls. Gulls. Low tide, my father's recent death like
the wreck of *Atlantus*, exposed in the bay before us, this
foundered anomaly of seaborne concrete. A big man, also lucky:
served the war in Hawaii, no active duty; shipped from there
to Nara, where the Daibutsu Buddha tutored him: *What is
being, but sand, gravel, broken stone? A leveled city. An
aggregate, its weight, illusion. Go lightly. The ocean
has the taste of salt; this teaching, freedom.* So. Things came to
him; he set them free again: family Bible, gilded shovel, violin. *Come
home,* The River whispered. His last fall a rising, his going from a coming to.

PLACE SETTING

—*in memory of Len Roberts*

December, my name day. At dinner our friends eat *paprika hendl*, my favorite literary meal, broiled in oil and fresh-shipped Plugra, with snippets of yellow onion ladled on. Done to a turn—the juices oozing from punctures made by my twin-pronged fork and running down the skin, clear, fat-laden. How thirsty it made Jonathan Harker on the coach road to Budapest, at the Hotel Royale, who poured more wine, imagined a sliver of chicken on his little Mina's pink tongue, the moon in the novel gibbous as this one outside our dining room window, a silver sigel hung in ash trees over our snow-covered lawn.

One friend describes his return to Slovakia, the ancestral home, and eating rich cream pastries with a needle scratching Dvořák on an old LP. Len recites from his translation of Sander Csoori, feeds us lines from the Hungarian: “As though a wolf chased a herd of wild swans over you, the wind carries the snow over you, the wind carries the snow.” We have killed three bottles of a Szekszardi Kadarka. As the gypsy woman in the B-movies put it, it will thicken the blood against winter. Soon New Year, and here's to us. We raise our glasses and the red is riven with candlelight. We lower them and look down into dark pools. We are using Old World cut crystal and the best silver of my great-grandmother. I lay two knives cruciform on my empty plate.

PAULA NEVES

2020 N7 Poets Prize Winner

PASSAIC

—*from the Lenape word pahsayek possibly meaning ‘place where the land splits’*

“We’ve heard all kinds of stories from the older generations that when they were younger, they’d get to go and swim in the river. And we’ve never during our lifetime ever seen that”

—Sergio Rodrigues, interviewed on NJTV News 2017

On Monday, they may remember
Sunday morning with concentric rings,

Ironbound antiphons in the breeze,
fishhooks and faces abstracted on the green.

You should’ve been in church, but even then,
you pulled yourself out, to watch others

haul bluefish and bass, show them,
glistening and struggling, to strangers and kin,

declaring, “Here!” as if there was
no other proof of being.

And you—you made more of a line
than anyone, treaded mud to untangle roots,

mourned ducks whose bills dangled hooks;
wounds blurred colors of countries you’d left,

iridescent in the workday runoff
and they all said and did nothing

in papers filed out of state.

By Sunday evening,
there is little unraveling:

Communion’s long past
bait in hand, turn of head, Amen.

Ribs turn back to gill in protest,
livers sing the size of fists,

crows grow quiet on the rooftops,
geese huddle on loading docks,

trees clothe themselves in dusk.
A student asks, "What's Agent Orange?"

Monday morning late one century,
they may remember

how names were written on these currents.

No. They'll say they invented it,
subdivide and sell the waterfront.

And words will write themselves again
without us:

Oceans rising,
pray the puddles.

Oceans rising,
pray the lakes.

Ocean's rising,
pray Passaic.

AMENITIES

1.

The backyard peaches rotted on the tree this summer
flayed by rain til July 4th fireworks

appeared for sale in the LA Fitness parking lot
beside the new luxury apts. with “curated amenities”—

swimming pool and onsite Starbucks.
Half your salary on a studio rent.

Oh right, the backyard peaches.
There were like 50lbs

last year, most still ziplocked in the
freezer like bodies waiting to be ID'd.

2.

The cat's been at the vet's since Thursday.
Now I think after 16 years she wasn't all that

friendly to begin with—feral creature in a saltbox.
But she has green eyes like patinated pennies

in the cornerstones of single detached dwellings,
and still will when I put her down, though now

it's all about the cryptocurrency.
At the corner deli

I order my peppercorn turkey provolone wrap
because I'm not vegan, and it's just lunch,

30 mins too short save the planet
on my street, a quarter mile from one bridge

to our latest re-birthed city,
where cut outs in the construction paper sky

float to earth like blessings and lead flakes
to land on sign posts that threaten panhandlers

with \$500 fines.

3.

In another Jersey town,
hint: the latest one to become Brooklyn,

I turn to you during a documentary about Afghanistan
In the independent movie house

and say, “That woman cooking naan is only in her [insert age]
but looks so much older than us.”

We shake our heads in practiced disbelief,
confident in our unbuttered popcorn.

The woman, meanwhile,
surrounded by her daughters

says, “I’m [the subtitles insert her age] and never learned to read...
...it’s up to these girls now. Their father is too old to work.

They are now my sons.”

4.
NPR reports that migrants under the new policy
can no longer seek asylum

to escape violence for which they have no proof
that it was violent enough.

5.
More new luxury brickfaced apts. going up by Shoprite
on the site of the aluminum bat factory

whose boiler room blew up in ’80 and killed an electrician,
who may or may not have stopped

at the liquor outlet on his drives home
like my father used to before he got his green card,

look a lot like the nursing home across the street
that my mother and the neighborhood committee

prevented from going condo in the ‘90s
(the traffic and parking were already bad enough),

but that fortunately had a ground floor room for her
to die in in the 2000-teens.

After factory cancer, hip and heart breaks,

It was nice to have convenience.

MY FATHER'S LAST SUNDAY

—*for Luis*
—*after Rimbaud and Modigliani*

1.
He turned Sunday to Monday
like water to wine,

stories he learned through
escola primaria and

a 9th birthday spent spreading
sulfato on the fields,

so his father's corn, wheat and rye
could rib his mother's broa,

the hard future
neither cake nor surprise.

He decided then
to leave the terra

behind for his father
and the flat footed

to pound with their aguardente⁺
at the peasant festas⁺⁺.

He decided to trade
Salazar for saltwater,

float lighter than cork
on the waves.

2.
He turned the calendar
by habit to Monday,

drove his Toyota Rav 4
with canja⁺⁺⁺ in his belly,

his mother's recipe,
a light supper for Sunday.

The late afternoon drive
painted NJ's July

a Modigliani landscape
art he'd never learn

in the window above
the teamsters time clock.

Oh carotid promise
you stick your neck out enough

working double overtime
unloading the world's conscience

in Port Elizabeth-Newark –
25 years prioritize,

make stewards from stevedores,
no time to consider

whether Monday is midnight, slip
deck shines from sea-slick or steel,

crane operator gives
a thumbs up or down,

lift chain cracks
a thorax into crumbs,

that feed the seagulls
your father's pomace,

your mother's bread,
your children's paid-for teeth

drifting.

+Fire water

++Festival

+++Portuguese chicken soup



NORMAL

A LITTLE GOD

a little god
a little child
both singing of roses
watching splattered skies, dying summits.
the earth will scream a thousand deaths,
but for the orphaned wanderer
there is no ending.

a little god
a little mother
reaching into the night
searching diligently for
a shackled hand,
hiding away in her heart
the most beautiful church
in the world.

BALLAD OF ANOTHER AMERICAN BOY

I am from an ancient culture
I am from a new people
I am from the Pale of Settlement
I am from a fleeing mass who walks & prays in circles
I am the grandson of dung-covered horse soldiers & shawl-draped
Temple builders
I am first cousin to a total wastrel & second cousin to the
World's most famous mime.
I am the town to which I shall never return.

A history of Dark Handiwork has prepared me for life
The quickening of seasons has polished my urn for death.

I am the once wagging tail on Howard Johnson's dead dog
I am Harpo Marx chasing Margaret Dumas with a duck horn
Mickey Rooney chasing Corliss Archer
The last hobo jungle on the American River
I am The Little Tramp
The face that will never be printed on the Forever Stamp
I am the last dying elm in the town square
I am hot apple pie at Pops & Skeeter's All Night American Diner.
I am the town to which I shall never return.

I am the Bijou I am the hoo-doo the fisher of gar on
The Bayou I am the blood in the gutter on the other side
Of the tracks. I am the other side of this towns secret sex
I am the rabid firehouse dog wrapped tight in a confederate flag
I am the Monsanto baby with the hydrocephalic head
I am the railroaded the blindfolded the stoop shouldered
The truck loaded I am the black elixir that wakes you
The greed that drives you the machines that run you the
Cybro-hoo-doo that guides you the robot that replaces you
I am the jukebox the jalopy the last wild horse in the western Sunset.
I am the town to which I shall never return.

FROM THE FIRE ESCAPE

every day
i'd see him walking the street below me
sometimes in an overcoat
sometimes dapper, with a small poodle at the
end of a long leash
other times it was a checkered shirt & a mis-
matched pair of bermuda shorts
i'd catch pieces of a whistle tune he'd
pass between his teeth
caribbean or klezmer couldn't tell
seasons passed
trees whipped
trees stilled
one day i saw carrying african daisies
another day, a long french bread & a quart
of pepsi cola
clouds darkened
paint peeled
radios changed their themes
one day i realized it was 6 months since
i'd seen him
then a year
today, he came to mind for the first time in
50 years maybe
life is just that way
sometimes a trace,
but mostly,
a long line of things we just remembered

"I PRAY ALL THE TIME"

*As I walked further I grew happier
and less nervous; although I am an
atheist I pray all the time*

—Philip Whalen, "One of my Favorite Songs is Stormy Weather"

Worship, She said
Worship the plainsong
Worship the birdsong
Worship the caterpillar & Lord Hawk, the newborn calf, the shriveled rose
Worship the enigma, the dada, the jaguar.
In bliss, in horror Worship.

Worship the snoring buddha, the jungle pyramid, the sleeping volcano
Worship the bald mountain, the peacock's trench coat & the devil's pompadour
Worship worthless pearls, smashed hearts & the backstory of gooseflesh
Hail praise to the octopus, the platypus & the grotesque goddess,
Then pray, pray, pray all the time.

Sing Holy to the crippled toad, the broken tree, the final unicorn
Holy, the squatting black clouds
Holy, the birthing statue with its offspring of speechless dolls
Holy, the wheelbarrow's trail to extinction.
Worship, She said
Bow before Elysian Fields & wasted crumbs
The wedding night, the charnel house
In sunlight % in sickness,
Pray, pray, pray all the time.

Give praise to everything & nothing
Wagner & puccini
Shakespeare & bukowski
Cigarette & sunflower
Coquette & hag
Sperm seed & dead star
Death in its time, life in its surprise
Diamond & merde chien
The charging bayonet & the womb's chute
Bless feet hands heads teeth genitals palms hair follicles
Heartbeat cohering expanding fading within memories membranes
Deeds coming going disappearing gone.
Bless Zero & Absolute
The cheering crowd, the pallbearer's pressed lips
Bless the madhouse
Bless the poorhouse

Bless the beggar's outstretched hand.
Pray, pray, pray all the time.

THE SKELETON FACTORY IS OPEN BENEATH AN ICY TURQUOISE SKY

hello!
now that you are here,
what have you to say?
do you wish to speak WITH me
to me
at me
pray with me
laugh, weep, sit quietly WITH me
drive the night, draw a gun, rent a room &
now that you are here, would you care
to examine the fickle machinery of each other's
private craniums, the hard drive of our bewilderment or
maybe visit a ruins, an insane asylum, a wonder bread factory
perhaps write a letter together to jean genet or your
guardian angel or mine & shall we
visit the last all-night movie house that still keeps bums
warm till the morning sun &
let us with joy join the rain
falling today on the bulge of the fat buddha's belly &
while you are here perhaps we might admire the light,
rue the dark & pet a dog, no, let us pet
many dogs, chant, work a loom, follow an
animal trail, foster a child, brush horseflies from
our sweating skins, gaze upon the flight of geese,
mourn the vanishing old world warbler, piss on the
new world order, envision a bodhisattva, embrace
a nirvana
unroll a lost scroll
boil an egg unboiled
sing a song
beat a drum
review history on the map of our counted scars
listen to our stories one by one &
now that you are here
be WITH me
say what you have to say
if not, then
please,
go
away.

WELCOME TO THE MERRY-GO-ROUND

Days of reckoning
Days the clouds have open mouths
Days the clouds begin to speak
Hello Hello The Merry-Go-Round
It is the spasm of crickets & low flying rockets.

Little girl on a railway platform after a London blitz
A history rich with battered suitcases & one-way tickets
Today, it is raining bones & void promises
Smoke in the window
Today, there is ash on the violets.

From the World Bank to the West Bank From a Serb to a Croat
A Tutsi to a Hutu A Sha'et to a Sunni
The eyes of old men seasoned in stews of raw meat.

Oh, Big Daddy, who plucks peacock feathers in the midday sun
Send forth your androcidal missiles
Stop off at the Walla Walla for your plastic bottle of shocked water
Touch the fluorocarbon heaven with skyscraper fingers
Beauteous as a boiling pot of half-dead maggots.

Yesterday, I watched a white crane fall from the sky
Last night, heard the Brahmins laughing
Tidal waves breaking
Wildfire light cracking on the peaks of the High Sierras
I woke up to piss & read excerpts from an epitaph
Emptied world history into a handkerchief of dead doves
I wish I could speak Esperanto.

This morning, I stood with Saint Francis at the window
The songbirds were receiving divorce papers from God
From the Leviathan's belly pour the biography of human devastation
Took lessons on how to swim in ambergris from a bible written by
Artificial Intelligence
Obadiah to Zachariah to Nehemiah & back again to the Maccabees
Hello Hello The Merry-Go-Round
Back & forth an eye for an eye to the Fall of Man.

Head pressed weary to the window
Wind across empty pages
Heirs forgetting the memory of ancestors
How then shall I contemplate this existence
Shoals of multi-colored angelfish

Bundles of frogs, shivers of sharks
Dolphins carrying to shore the bodies of drowned sailors?

Today, the pissoirs are filled with the blood of the poets
Once again, we eat our skin.

SIMON PERCHIK

*

At last and the bare wood
half maple, half before morning
though this rag is already wet

caught up in a seedy summer rain
heated on a table not yet mountainside
wobbling, battered by waiting streams

trying to hold on, drink from a surface
sweetened by water –you lower the cup
face down, help it look for dirt

for its fragrance all night closing in
warmer and warmer alongside a dress
shrunk to fit the soft rim

running naked between your teeth
and dead mornings, around and around
squeezing the sleeves till they go black

the way this washcloth stares in the dark
for a sea to break open, by itself
find mud, the small puddle, her arms.

*

You hold this stone to your cheek
as if you hear the bed
widening and a second pillow

keeping the other half warm
though its bell-scented blanket
is filled with driftwood and snow

covering the Earth each night
with the arm you sleep on
—she wanted the room cold

calling out from a corner
the way your shadow turns
still faces the wall to remember

where by holding on to *stop!*
stop it! just stop it! it's the window
that's open and breathing.

*

You single out this bottle
the way each wish starts
as emptiness and place to place

alone, uncertain she will become
night skies and mountainside
broken open for the river that's late

still drifting along in your chest
and its longing for rain
—you are listening for water

from the 40s, defenseless
not yet the glass bringing you closer
washing over her, making it happen.

*

You bask beside her comb
the way a bullfighter is trained
emptying each blade and afternoons

that come over you as the flourish
more beautiful than a woman's breath
suddenly there –now is the time

for the lunge her breast makes
when touched in the dark, refreshed
though there are no braids left

only her death hidden under your sleeve
that belongs in stone
as if what it holds is never enough.

WANDA S. PRAISNER

OFF COMPASS CAY, THE BAHAMAS

It loomed alongside me,
off the reef where I filmed
French angels nibbling coral heads.
I saw its length, blurred stripes,
its eye—a wahoo mackerel,
a tiger shark?
My camera slapped the surface
as I splashed back toward
shallow water—
it behind, nearing.
I touched bottom, fell backwards,
it veered left to avoid beaching,
still after me, not leaving.
I stood up, knees shaking,
unable to steady the camera—
capture that shadowy margin,
that dark body
longer and larger than my own.

REBECCA REYNOLDS

MANY THINGS CAN ENTER THE BORDERS

Cossacks can enter

barrows, costumiers

arthropods any of a linear series of primitive segments

(a metamere)

into which the body is divisible

in whole or in part like a voice with its resin or a dip in my lenses

bi-focals

here the objects open nearer there the leaf
sets itself back while setting forth

the grass and the grass refuses me unless I call it
by another name

apron, billow, sea
as if I'd unrolled the sod

and the rabbits and the squirrels and the chipmunks and the deer

were already destined for the postlapsarian civ into which
we think we've ushered them

and the spaciousness around them is a cloak
that we have pieced

from air and leaves
from snot and fumes and gulls

from touch and touch-me-not.

THE MORTAL REMAINS

The composer stitched this waltz together from organza ball gowns, opal hat pins, muffs and lacery dumped on the floor in nacreous creams and twilights, surprisingly vacant as if the dancers had simply hatched from their skirts before departing for the camps the way dancers do, suggesting incompleteness, not to feel oneself except inversely from the gut or learn the secret of a page by turning it. Turning it to see the morning seep across the streets, or the night workers let out beneath a lamp, smoking in the early fog. Turning it to see the crumbs, the paper cups and rats, the dandelions springing from discards, the bottle caps and rusted bolts, dawn rising in the broken warehouses smelling like dirt and grass. To see what's always on the other side until you're one with the cogitations, the ruddy leaves, the nut, the pupa in its instar, a shit-faced delicacy. Turning it to command the cyclamen, the fern, or the purple-headed anthuriums. Turning it to see the flesh from all sides. The flesh of the thigh, the flesh of the under arm, the flesh and groove of collarbone, the stem of the neck, the pillow of earlobe, the chorus of spirits, or the end of the act in which you turn.

THE BRIDE LAYS WORLD ON, MORTARS THE WORD

Put the whole bride under a glass case, or into a transparent cage.
—Marcel Duchamp

Spongiform scholar: see bride in altar,
bride-in-tree with the layings-on of voice.

See the stratosphere of fallow dawns.
See turf around her, winter leaves and glints

in the morning's folder. See her quietism
in the sky-color with chickadee feet,

New Jersey/D.C./the Bronx,
hardscrabble squirrels and schist,

her litter gown her cloth of tissue her fog
which no one can fix

in their appointment books, in the signal to noise
ratio.

She is thinking herself close/
a bio,

a ball of furiousness and forgetfulness,
of flint and labor, or what belongs to her

like daytime smoke co-mingled behind
the confounded sun.

See the lock you locked
or the hasp you loved for its heft

or the uninvited war.
See her delay, her joints akimbo,

the wheels in the rafters—
for all we made of her:

a transparent lyre, a fault, a fire.

SPECK

The infinite is
sideways. A cloud
that shoves more cloud into its pockets

not the polite clouds of lunch ladies
but the boxing clouds of drinkers
and every day

they knock you out. You see—
because this is what you imagine. You are a little stick
(for that is how you draw yourself)

put down here, on a sheet of air

\\\ like this ///

where the infinite teases, without plinth;
it is

inarguable, the missing world
and now one must seduce intelligence,
like unlinking loves

in Michelangelo's
Creation of Adam. O angry God of yours

who let you go,
here is me with pectorals.
Here is me on my globe of moss, and yet this little cliff

worries me not. For if I fall
I drop in the woolen light of your equations
without void or end. I dip into the borders of my bones.

VENUS

After waking then coffee then gazing
at winter roofs, divested
trees, a curling shingle, laundry-mist
at the end of everything, so early after sleep
like sun floating up in the west—
you could make me believe: Hesperus, Phosphorous,
luminous furls. I put my hands together like *this*
and lay my head on neither down nor up. Day one.
Day twothreefourfriday.

That work week behind me with hundreds more
that litter the stones. Now this. Now winter breath. Now weather.
Now the shutter is slow, the eye of frost
propped open like a fish
and for months the air tastes like metal. Is there
blood here? Is the morning star filling the stadium?
How can one answer be more true and one more false?
Hesperus *is* Phosphorus.

Use credit card to burn through days. Pretend
you need those velvet boots,
that you go to cocktail parties, the sort
to be invited anywhere/anytime
that you would stop drinking after one
parceled gin with lime.

Jesus: I am come to bear witness unto the truth.

Pilate: What is truth?

Well perhaps it's in the second volume. This
whatever-space-of-consciousness
becomes less true and less untrue
as each day finishes the hank. The earth is almost up, they say.

We should do more to heed our end. We should
seek our villages
and go where we became ourselves.

AFTERSPACE

There is no understanding between the letters of an alphabet or even the letters of a word
Therefore, we invented inherence
And then came rest
We see ourselves as sequences. We do not see ourselves as sequences
God was the first poetic intervention but that was a long time ago
And now instead of believing in mystery people believe in God
I see the darkness outline the leaves, pricked by daylight, and the light looks like Cyrillic
And the writing advances through the woods but I can't read it
Any more than I can taste the honey of Slovene bees
Beneath the portrait of a deer in the mint-green kitchen
Any more than dandruff or the golden flakes of a halo
On the kitchen saint. At the other end of the woods
The boxy offices sync beneath teetering trees
And erode in the shade
Where I go for my lonesome appointment with America
With my primary provider
Is there knowledge in the forest with nobody there to think it
If I had followed the links in my other life
And met my shadow and waited unto death
After Zoroaster in the spore-less parallel
With *One Life to Live* surely
The land would have reverted back to chicory and field grass
Or opened on Springtime of the Peoples
With the scouts and the bittersweet
and the folded butterflies.

CAROLE STONE

THIS HAPPINESSS

To be in the kitchen,
darkness falling at 4:46pm,
backyard hill fading
into the landscape,
deer no longer
climbing down,
these apparitions of nature,
haunting the suburbs.
On WQXR, Haydn
and me dancing little steps,
thinking lucky, O lucky,
as I count my years
on my fingers.
Who said, “Old age
ain’t for sissies?”
My brother, Jerry,
an aficionado
of Forties movies
says it was Bette Davis.
And yet, this happiness
in my kitchen, slicing
an acorn squash,
squeezing lemon
on the flounder.
Just me, myself, and I.

EMILY VOGEL

DANCE LESSON

From what nocturnal places
Do dreams arise?
Bats rampaging from the eaves
Like the haunting of the past.
Do they follow a trajectory?
From dark to the subsequent dark?
My mother is climbing
To the top of the Eiffel tower.
I am eating dinner
With my father's old friends.
I am teaching professional dancers
To dance
Because a woman I once loved
Has asked me to.
I am marrying another version
Of this woman, an unpopular girl
From high school,
But we forget, we neglect
To say our vows.
I cannot fathom why we have not
Said our vows.
I tell my mother the Eiffel tower
Reaches to too great a height,
And I want to climb down.
There is an extraordinary hotel bed
And the dancers
Are all sprawled across it.
I'm not sure if the woman and I
Are married.
We're in a car, and neither of us
Is driving.

MORE CARS

The car is flying
And my old lover is flying it.
I tell her to watch the road
As she bends to retrieve something
From beneath the seat.
We fly over the guard rail
Roughly a mile over
A shallow river.
There are misshapen rocks and stones
At the bottom
And the water is murky.
I pray the way people pray in dreams
That we will land
In the shallow part of it
And will not sink.
We land at a restaurant
In a foreign country:
I'm not sure which.
It seems like the menu
Is in Dutch. We are
In Holland I think,
But then I think Italy.
I keep asking and asking people
Where we are.
It is critical that I decipher
The language.

STAIRWAYS

There is no car
But there are multitudes of stairways.
There are feces everywhere
And children
That cannot make it to the bathroom.
The feces continue
To spill out everywhere.
My son falls to his knees
And there is blood everywhere.
It spills like the red sea
Through various rooms.
Moses holds no dominion.
There are dentures everywhere
Among hoards
Of sundry confectioneries.
We keep climbing
And descending the stairways
And the feces won't cease.
The blood will not cease.
Half-awake,
I realize I am sleeping beside my daughter.
I think my husband is beside me
On the other side
But it is a crowding
Of mountainous pillows.
Morning hits me
Like arthritic heels.

THE CHAPEL

Not a soul is in the car.
I am in a chapel
With the elderly, the disabled,
The poor, my children.
Two deformed children
With no teeth
Approach me for coins.
I don't know if I should offer them coins
Or offer everyone in the chapel some.
A door opens onto a patio, or perhaps
a balcony. We all wander out into the light.
The holy Spirit moves us onward.
My son is old and in a stroller.
There is the elderly in wheelchairs,
Doddering with canes.
My daughter is walking beside me.
I am terrified
That I will lose her.

WHILE SLEEPING WITH MY DAUGHTER

The past channels itself
Into a large school
With many complicated rooms.
I have a teaching assignment
But it is lunch time.
I am attempting to select food
But I want all the food
That is available.
The food becomes disgusting.
There is no time
Before my next class.
I go to pay for my food
With a rolled-up wad
Of dollar bills.
A tall man offers to pay
For my food
And gives me a free pass
To play tennis with him.
I am late, but I like this tall man.
A door opens to a courtyard
And I am not reprehended
For being late.
Instead, several people
Are playing guitars
In the sunlight.

ANTON YAKOVLEV

LEGENDARY ROCK STAR COAT

In memory of Leonard Cohen

Good morning. It's good to see you back in my future.
I admit it, the clams in my brain lit up at the news
in their waves. The mold from the fountain
washed up nowhere. The half-eaten cardinal
hung like a candy cane from the bookstore awning,
beleaguering the cats: *Good morning, good morning!*
I hear you're huggable again, the mayor even gave you a helicopter.
Still, I hope you don't mind me keeping my own
lantern. I may need that Mayflower vision.
Yes, yes, your marginalia did go a long way, but Jesus...

I've been status quo, thank you for not asking.
Brent geese are still my company,
and a few people still picket my vida loca,
but don't go full-orchestra about it. I'm all over
the news, widely read in the slaughterhouses.
I sustain the bookstore with my speed-reading impulses.
When fishermen go to bed, they dream of my karma.
Each morning I take a walk in front of the tavern,
look out at the sepia dunes and cry out: *Killer!*
I scapple my sunlight. Wouldn't want it to go unfiltered.

So how will you get here? Your usual sugar donkey?
Can he carry the mass of your wine and your godhead?
Will you show up with Hessians? Will it be rainy
or boring? Will canaries go on strike? Lately,
as I redraft my memories, I lose corners.
The lawnmower people gave up hiding their horror
at carcasses popping up. The mountains still break.
They've built a house on the lot where we used to smirk,
but the wall with the shadow of your face is still there.
It's one of my most loaded places to visit.

Call me when you arrive. I'm sure you will.
For a few minutes let's think of each other as people.
Let's take a train to some very specific fissure
then bury our heads in each other's favorite confusion.
Your legendary rock star coat is safe in my labyrinth,
not hardened by foreshadowing.
Your eyes are still good and lost, don't worry.

When you're tired, feel free to peekaboo here.
We'll stare at death together and not rub tombs.
You don't need a permit to cry.

PREVIOUSLY OWNED BY GOD

There are cauldrons of hot wax in our basement.
We've been making Monty Python of our gradual drifting apart.
We watch playground basketball, not wanting to face each other.
We'll never get over the exit signs over the exits we took together.

Someone I know doesn't walk through the open door,
and there it stands, and I write a small dissertation.
There are rabbits who will kill half of our armies with a single tooth.
There are cows previously owned by God now living in our bedroom.

We make the basketballs deflate with our eyes.
I won't be able to go to our mutual friend's funeral.
You say I'm shooting with a cannon at a sparrow,
and I'm the only one who understands what you mean.

Sometimes the music between us is louder than a black hole.
Sometimes we have no weapons at all.

KEY WEST

Awakened by a call from a human

I thought was dead

A city measured in panic

Flowers wilted so rapidly they made wind

I swam past sunrise off the Southernmost Point

All along the jetty until invisible

An anthem admitting all

A boy in the road full of models and advanced riddles

A dog dragging a chicken across and everyone clapping

Benches mostly of dust

I understood

MINOTAURS MINOTAURS

Look at the way those people weave through their labyrinths.
Look at that thread between lovers who only bark at each other.

Look at the rope that stretches from a pedestrian's neck
toward the house of a person he wishes he didn't know.

A grudge is the mountain you can turn into a molehill
but never blast off the planet. Look at those support groups

paying each other for fracking techniques against grudges.
Look at those tractors failing to smash a ten-year old anger.

Sometimes we forget our grudges. Still we sit, Skype at the ready,
not understanding why we can't press that green button.

And sometimes we find ourselves standing in the wings
of a Willie Nelson concert next to someone we cannot forgive

and tell them something we had meant to take to our catacombs,
and they are the only person who understands.

INTIMATE BEACH

The daffodils he ate the day he told him
have all been pulled; the antiseptic building
replaced with northern lights; the parrot's ashes
dropped in an unregistered time capsule.
Still, the honeysuckle blooms with anthills
above, as city planners sanction courtship
and loners shyly reach for willing shoulders
behind the obelisk of First Encounter.

GEOFF PECK

A CHILD IN RUINS

by José Luís Peixoto
translated by Hugo Dos Santos
Writ Large Press, 2016
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Hugo Dos Santos's translation of José Luís Peixoto's collected poems, *A Child in Ruins*, captures Peixoto's deep introspection into love, melancholia, and the poem's capacity to make sense of the human experience. The collection is divided into three parts, selections from Peixoto's previous three books of poetry, but *A Child in Ruins* reads like a single-breath reflection on the rhythms of small joys and inevitable loss, the steep cadences of life. The result is a collection that is at once intimate yet inaccessible at first glance, the breathless pace encouraging a quick read while simultaneously requiring a closer look.

The first section of the collection contains several untitled, interconnected poems about life, death, and love. But the first poem, "Ars Poetica" (the Art of Poetry), sets the stage for these themes in the opening lines as Peixoto tries to describe the elusiveness of poetry: "the poem has no more than the sound of its meaning" and "is sculpted of senses and that is its form." Sensory experiences are what ground us to the world, and thus, what the poem is grounded in, and Peixoto elaborates on how the word "poem" itself is elusive but can be found in the mundane objects and everyday experiences of our existence to give it meaning. "The poem," Peixoto writes, "is where I was happy and so often died." This is the first introduction to those simple, certain emotions of happiness and loss, and Peixoto continues in "Ars Poetica" to bring in the third, love, which straddles and complicates the binary, writing that the poem is also "when I know, without rhymes / and without metaphors, that I love you...and, until then, it will be always and everything."

Peixoto continues his exploration of the poem's capacity to make sense of life, death, and love in the second section by moving to the ways we struggle with expression, especially when it's directed towards those we love most. "Words for My Mother" begins the section as an open apology: "mom, i'm sorry, i always hoped you would understand / the words i never said and the gestures i never made." This becomes a recurring sentiment throughout the section as several of the poems are directed to the speaker's mother and sneak into the interstices, some coming as single lines: "mom, each word you taught me repeats your name one thousand times." The brevity and interstitial sequence allows the open space of the blank page to simultaneously disrupt and intensify the reader's reflection, as Peixoto sharpens the sense that even in our small joys, moments we take for granted, we still so often fail in expression.

The third section opens with a series of ekphrastic poems where the speaker reflects on past experiences after being spurred by the everyday objects we acquire and encounter along life's way: photographs of vacations, birth certificates, and even roadside crosses. These representations of life, death, and the small pleasures we enjoy are rather obvious, but the collection concludes with "Washing the Dishes," a poem that captures the complexity of relationships in one of life's mundane chores. It opens as a continuation of an evening gone wrong with "And destroying all the evidence of a night: / two glasses,

two bodies, forks spooning / together, knives like repeated words. And believing that the world is reborn in water.” Love, loss, the bitterness brought on by both, Peixoto captures it all in *A Child in Ruins*, but also the endlessly rejuvenating potential of life, even the way it’s found in the mundane, even the way it’s bound to our failures of expression. In this way, it serves as a resounding conclusion to a collection that avoids reduction in the same way that life avoids reduction and encourages us to look closer.

CONTRIBUTORS

THERESA BURNS's poetry, reviews, and nonfiction have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Prairie Schooner*, *America Magazine*, *New Ohio Review*, *The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, *The Cortland Review*, and elsewhere. She was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2018, and her chapbook of poems, *Two Train Town*, was recently published. The founder and curator of Watershed Literary Events in New Jersey, she teaches writing in and around New York.

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