

Ars Poetica
ARS POETICA
AT BARN

Chrysalis

Can suffering be interpreted through a different lens?

To watch you suffer rips my heart into a million pieces.
I am overwhelmed by the weight of helplessness.
Restrained in a windowless room,
I can offer you no relief.
I bounce from wall to wall to wall
I pound on the doors
pleading with a higher power to intervene.

How do I make sense of this?
As goodness goes,
there are none like you.
This world has its share of the greedy, the hate-filled, and the graceless,
but you are not them.
You shine like the stars on a clear night
Your radiance and grace inspire
Your selfless acts humbling
Your presence soft and soothing
Always, always you were there.

Oh, your suffering makes no sense to me.
Am I in a world where up is down and down is up
or has it always been this way?
Has my perception been wrong?
I thought up was up, but has it always been down?
Is that why this makes no sense?
Maybe I know nothing at all
Maybe I never did
The illusion is that I told myself I knew how things should be,
but I don't

What I do know is that there is a part of this world we do not see.
We are gifted glimpses of its beauty, its peace, its wisdom throughout our lifetime.
Although it is not fully understood, it is always present

When we connect with it, our perceptions of the world change.
Is there another way to see your suffering then?

Like the unseen metamorphosis inside a chrysalis,
things change inside its body to make the caterpillar into a butterfly,
into wholeness

Is the chrysalis that is your body with the ever-present wisdom of the unseen making you whole

Is it making you whole in a way we don't yet understand?

---*Kelly Stromberg*

Spaces

Sitting in the space between the inhale and exhale, the quiet solitude where nobody stays long. Uncomfortable silence where I don't like to venture. Crossing the line from what is known into the unknown elicits waves of panic. What will I be confronted with? Who will I be confronted with? The sleeping giant awakens, vicious in its egoic grip. Fear fights to hold on to its control.

Sitting underwater in the space between the senses, light from above is absorbed quickly in the dark waters. The light seems a world away sometimes. Separate from me. The clamoring noises in my head explode in rebellion but the longer I sit in this space the thick silence becomes one with me. The clamoring noises in my head fade away, succumbing to its higher power. No more distractions and masquerades from myself here. For in these silent spaces lies truth, revealed slowly.

Sitting in the space between words I meet my formless self. Letting go of who I thought I was. I was the clown who forgot it was just a role, left the make-up on and became the clown. Lines blurred between the real and the unreal. Between what never was and what is. Between that which separates and that which is one. Stripped to the raw to reveal I am. Unlatching the door that was shut so long ago. Embracing. Knowing. Gratitude.

--Kelly Stromberg

Underneath The Mango Tree

The Comfort of escaping to the simple yet complex world that lies underneath a mango tree

I stop to rest underneath my favorite mango tree. With its sprawling branches and wide canopy, the giant tree provides perfect shade from the tropical heat. I lean back against its thick trunk and take my shoes off, letting my tired feet and legs melt into the damp earth. I hear the parakeets squawking high above and let my brain relax to their chatter.

The air is sweet and fragrant from the ripened rotting mangos that litter the grass; some split open from falling off the branches high above. Mushy bright yellow flesh oozes out from the split skins, and sticky sap drizzles from the stems. The smell of rain still lingers from an earlier storm, and with the sweet fragrance of the mangos, it provides a beautiful bouquet of calming aromas.

Leafcutter ants march undeterred in a long trail around my foot, carrying leaf and plant pieces on their backs, determined in their daily food gathering. The grass is almost dry but for lingering rain droplets teetering on the tips of a few blades of grass, the rest having evaporated with the afternoon heat.

The humidity feels like a warm blanket around me as I contemplate my day, grateful for this moment of respite. Tiny beads of moisture settle on my upper lip, encouraged by the moisture in the air.

I see a patch of weed-like grass growing along the tree's side and pick up a long branch from the ground. The stickers from this grass poke your feet if you walk on them and close their leaves quickly upon touch. Lazily, I trail the stick along the top of the grass, and like performing the wave at a football game, the leaves collapse in a mesmerizing rhythm, one by one, row by row, as the branch grazes each blade.

The red hibiscus flowers poking out of the bushes up the way catch my eye, and I realize I must be on my way. I put my shoes back on and walk along the path plucking a red hibiscus flower off the bush. I tear off the red petals one by one, pull the sticky stem from the center, and stick it on my nose, content as I make my way home, joyful in the simple joy and comfort of this wonderfully diverse and complex tropic world.

--Kelly Stromberg

Cold House

In this cold house that echoes with
Footsteps and gunshots
I'll eat jambalaya
With my fist.
I'll pull down the flag and
Bury the cross.
Raise high the banner
Of my true country
Which is love

Live wires hang out of your body
Fizz Pop
I pinch them together,
Igniting the bomb

Freedom's here if you want it
As long as you don't want too much

--*Liz Kellebrew*

Quartered

The sculptor removes the granite that is not
The sculpture
Beads of sweat crown
The thinker's brow

I pull on the dismembered limb. It comes away soft
Still wearing the same rolled-down coveralls
And wifebeater, white as cacti under the moon

Here: a saw, a hammer
A chisel-split tooth
Chisel of laughter, chisel of fears:
It is the same chisel

--Liz Kellebrew

Geologic

The worlds beneath the world are older.
The slanted staircase mountains
Smack the holy night

The earth is a peeled apple.
The wild is not the wild
So much as it is us

Let each century melt in your mouth
Like burnt sugar.
Spider silk weaves itself and
So do you, my friend
You strong beautiful thing you

--Liz Kellebrew

Self-Portrait in Yearning

Outside, the storm wails like a lonesome
Hank Williams heartbreak tune—
aching the air. No words to explain
the hollowness moving through me.

This is a winter to shake your head over.
I peel, core, quarter and thinly slice
Granny Smith apples for my mother's
Iron Skillet Apple Pie—

for the effort of it, for the old way of it.
Outside the kitchen window, the raised beds
outsized coffins. The smell knocks
on the oven door—cinnamon, nutmeg,

three crusts, and brown sugar on the bottom.
Flavors fill the house, but only digging
in dirt and planting sustain me. There should be
a simple recipe to cure this craving.

Yesterday, I spotted daffodils and irises—
little green periscopes popping up.
Now buried under more than a foot of snow.
Right there in the kitchen it comes to me that word

dor—untranslatable Romanian—meaning *to ache*.
Not intended to be gloomy, but give significance
to life, something you miss and embrace,
rather than overcome. What else can I do

--Pat West

How to Write a Love Song

Start with three chords and the truth,
add two people slow dancing inside a moment
where something's about to happen.
Let the notes spin into yearning

and angst. Lay down lyrics
that spill passion on the page,
ravish the ear, shush the rational.
Listen for a rasp of hunger

on the back of the tongue. There's an art
to catching listeners with that tender hook—
those vibrating bars, that riff. Explore fragments
and body parts that ache and burn. Repeat—

verse, chorus, verse. Strum until muscles move
unconsciously in pure sensual response.

--Pat West

Buried Underneath Decades

of clutter stashed in the attic,
I discover albums
that completed
our Saturday nights—
Ray Charles, Ike
and Tina, the simple sex
of Simon and Garfunkel—
I've come to talk to you again.
Along with more unfoldings:
a cupboard painted blue,
three chairs that don't match,
or even balance, the grimy,
the dusty, warranties
for mixers and microwaves
gone to Goodwill, the faded
purple bell bottoms,
enough old tools to rebuild a world,
programs from *Cats*, *Phantom*,
Jesus Christ Superstar,
our life itself
spread on the oak table,
where I sit to read love
letters beginning with *Dear*,
and me left to call this
whatever it means,
clutter, or coffee-stained
dreams scratched in journals,
memories of childhood—
nightmares I dare not tell—
pages full of lost
and never to come again
moments, passing through me—
a comet trailing mystery and dust.

--Pat West

WAVES

The Pacific Ocean
Rolls along
Coming from who knows where
Landing with a roar
Then gently lapping on the shore
In a twinkling of an eye
the drops make a wave slide gently,
Return to the sea
Where are you off too?
What will you do?
Waves, waves, waves no more.

--Margaret Cook

SHOCK

In the same vein death comes in and silently strikes
Swift as a knife
But oh the blow that it leaves behind.
Loss of a loved one eventually fades
But memories remain

--*Margaret Cook*

Evensong

Pondering the fate of the world,
an evensong arises
to praise the day that has been
and the night that will be.

A multitude of arboreal frogs
sing lullabies to the retreating sun,
rejoicing in its steadfast radiance
and continual travels to far flung places.

A barred owl joins the chorus,
enticing the stars to hurl themselves
against the blue black sky as he calls
from the embrace of needled branches.

The reverberating staccato of a
Pileated woodpecker casts off
the remnants of the day into the
yawning grasses below the crumbling tree.

And the crickets, oh the crickets,
the delightful arias they create as
they shimmy and quiver and shake
to croon love songs to the ascending moon.

The choir of chirps and calls and croaks
hush my thundering heart and
still my jumbled muddled thoughts
of a future uncharted and unknown.

--*Lydia Harrison*

Unanchored

Our mother spent her days in a
dark room behind a locked door,
stranding my sisters and I in a
sea of chores and difficult choices.

Silently we guarded her doorway
from demons who still slithered into
her bed and whispered lies and
untruths that could not be untold.

Muffled cries seeped into crevices and
cracks as Mom wept for phantom
heartbreaks and imaginary sorrows that laid
scattered among tissues recently discarded.

Untethered and uncherished,
my siblings and I eventually ventured out
to navigate a tempestuous world,
full of uncertainty, fear, and hope.

--Lydia Harrison

Breakfast

The sizzling, sputtering skillet
of bacon burns his hands
as he grabs the handle
and curses at the ceiling
chirping with irritation,
his daughters stifle giggles,
peering down into plates of
mournful yellow eyes,
tattered and undercooked,
yet imbued with unabashed love.

--*Lydia Harrison*

Staying and Leaving

One tree stands out
its top still full of leaves
the color of beaten egg yolks
glitter and dance to invisible blows
from the sharp winds

Not far away grackles
congregate in barren trees
they chatter excitedly
none can keep still
a few fly up now and then
fifty or a hundred follow
frantically swiveling their heads
side to side
as they take to the wind
with an explosive burst
only to then return again
awaiting the proper time

Suddenly all abandon the trees
uncountable hundreds
flock to the ground
creating waves as they
rake the fallen leaves
jerking each leaf over
desperately seeking nourishment
to power their long journey ahead
something unseen
yet felt to all at once
shocks them in their concentration
all as one lift into the air
wings beating hard
the sound of a hundred drummers
with no director
the ground shuddering under the weight
of so much air being pushed down
this time *this time* they do not return

--Terry Winer

The Interloper

Something spoken by a friend
and suddenly I remember a certain mouse.
A soft gray interloper from the fields surrounding my house
that I had just recently moved into.
An old farmhouse out in the country on top of a hill,
with a stacked stone foundation
that let every little creature come and go as they pleased
through the spaces between the stones.
Stones that were gathered from the surrounding fields
hundreds of years earlier.

We would meet in the dark of night, this gentle mouse and I
as I sat on the living room sofa, nursing my infant daughter
with a blanket thrown over us to keep the night chills away.
He had been visiting this house far longer than I had lived there.
By the light of the moon he would silently climb the cellar stairs
and scurry under the door
and into the sheltered insides of the house.

The time was early March and still deep in the cold of winter.
The warmth of the wood stove lingered in the walls.
With my daughter now asleep in my arms
I kept very still
so as not to disturb the little mouse so focused on his mission
He scurried across the floor by the sofa
and I felt his delicate paws brush against my toes.

I was just a ghost to him I thought
as he passed by me
not worthy of a stop on his journey to the kitchen.
The house was still primitive back then
the kitchen just a sink and stove
that stood on a bare stone floor
Open crates were stacked up to use as storage cabinets
It probably felt a little like home for him too.

He did little damage though, looking mainly
for crumbs fallen to the floor or perhaps a cracker that was left out.
I hear no sounds to tell me where he is
or what he is searching for.
No matter, this was his house
and it all belonged to him.
This journey of his through our home was simply
part of his evening foraging.

I would sit there in the darkness
until I could feel the air whisper to me
of the mouse tracing his steps back
through the rooms and under the door
and down again to the basement.
I imagined him seeking one preferred gap
in the stone foundation
that would drop him back out into the familiar fields.

I wanted to ask him,
And why do you make this journey night after night?

Is it because it has always been such and you know of no other way?

Or perhaps it is to show us how it is meant to be in this world.

But I am a ghost to him and he would not answer.

No matter, I have not forgotten him.

--*Terry Winer*

News Report from Yemen, or Was It Gaza?

He watches the boy in the red paisley shirt
Rummage in the rubble of the grocer's stall,
then slip wrapped candy under his shirt.

Other children on the street, torn clothing,
frosted with dust. Eyes bulging at what they see,
or deadened by the devastation of their neighborhood.

Some roll into a ball in the middle of the square,
hands over their ears, screaming, but unheard
as the bombs drop around them, on the people,

on their dreams. The boy in the red shirt stumbles,
then falls on the cobbles. Oh god, let him rise again.
Another boy, one in a football t-shirt, D.C. United,
touches the eyes of his friend, and closes them,
ignores the still seeping blood, and takes the candy.

--Nancy Fowler

Where does the white go, when the snow melts?

The Olympic Mountains. Snow-covered heights
lost within the clouds. Can I step from our world
into that other, and return? Perhaps one day
I'll learn the answer, but what I do know today

is that even in the cutting cold, melting snow,
kissed by winter's sun, forms rivulets that slither
down the slopes. Drop joins drop. They push.
They cavort, to rest in the bed of the Dungeness River,
before adding to the glimmer of the sea.

Some drops seep into the fecund earth
now blanketing bear grass, oxalis and fairy bells.
With the warmth of spring, each will burst forth
to cover the mountains in snow white blossoms.

Other drops disappear, evaporate. Seemingly gone,
but only lost for a while as they rise to join
their sisters and brothers and create new clouds
to touch their mountain. Each melted drop of white
has met its fate, has fed our world.

--Nancy Fowler

Pioneer Square: Everywhere

A young man leans against the brick wall,
energy coiled, ready to spring,
 like a boxer waiting
to dodge the next blow,
 or to dance in close for a hit.

His feet tap, tap, tap,
 in black leather boots
with glinting steel buckles,
 bought by working odd jobs that he hated.

Bare chest thrust forward,
 he silently cries *I am a man!*
daring the world to take him on,
 daring himself to take on the world.

Battered ears and rough brown nipples,
 pierced by dangling hoops and chains,
scoff at my old soft flesh.

--*Nancy Fowler*

APART

When I dream
I see you clearly.
The first thing I touch
are your hands...
always the lead-point to ecstasy.
You cup my face and
I lean into the embrace.

When I awake
to an empty bed
the ghost of you beside me
the vision of you
dissipates; fades
and you slowly slip away
half there, half not
like white fog settling over a grey, flat ocean.

When I ache
for you
I walk to the sea
feet planted in the sand
burying them and sorrow
as the waves
rise then swell
and plunge into the shore
in the timeless tidal pattern
from eons ago.

The water rushes in,
surrounding my feet
recedes
pulling at me, pulling me in
towards you
disorienting my balance.

Each wave
holds your image,
the ethereal spirit of you
soaring to heights
to reach me
roaring
to touch me
to wash over me
Again and again and again.

–Rebecca Christensen

MIST AND CLOUD

I am mist
and you,
cloud

My grey white cape billows
like smoke from a silky fog.
My hood sparkles from
stolen stars
sewn in the brim
and lighting my path.

When I turn to beckon you closer
You only drift further upward
Away

Under the watchful
Mother moon
we are destined to coexist
but always apart

Sometimes you squall
In rage
with angry claps of thunder

And, I close my eyes
and await your kiss of
raindrops
upon my face.

--Rebecca Christensen

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

In the middle of the road
sits a dog,
always facing the same direction.

Cars approach
stop
a window rolls down
an arm shoots out to shoo the dog away
some even honk a horn.
But she sits resolute
and does not budge.
Eventually each car will back up
and skirt a wide arc around the dog
and go on their way.

Now, you might think this dog
is there to guard the road
but you would be wrong.
For THIS dog is there
to guard the sunset
each and every evening.

And when the fleshy pink colors in the sky
turn to crimson and then inky striations
only then does she leave the road...
job well done
duty accomplished.

But she'll be back tomorrow
and the next and the next

and sit

in the middle of the road.

--*Rebecca Christensen*

Clothesline love...

White sheets
Yellow towels
Blue jeans
Brown pants
Pink shirt
Green blouse
Striped pajamas
A single sock

All hanging together
In one long line
All swinging together
In a gentle breeze
All drying together
In the warmth of the sun.

Clean.

--*Sallie Maron*

that wild ride (2020)

sitting on a spinning top
I spent the time huddled in a ball
balancing at the apex
holding on to nothing
with my eyes wide open
watching the chaos and
wondering
just how was this going to end
then suddenly
the damn thing
shifted into slo-mo
and started wobbling
causing me to
throw my arms wide
kick out my legs
rebalance
in a more precarious position
exposed
still spinning
I closed my eyes
my head bobbing
the top flailing
and then, don't ask me why
I started screaming
loud!
punching the air
I eventually lost my voice
dropped my arms
and fell off the spinning top
splat onto the ground
where I laid on my sore back
exhausted
and mute
but feeling
no more safe than before.

Author: Stephanie Balzarini

Family Belongings

In a tangled tree of lives
for centuries
this place we know
all recorded
handwritten by priests
birth, marriage, death
repeat

My identity revealed
400 years ago
in stonemasons, and farmers
voyageurs, servants
and mothers

The known and unknown alike
one at a time
in succession
we breath this air, filling our lungs
only to exhale satisfied
that we belong.

Author: Stephanie Balzarini

For Rumi, Not for Exercycle Enthusiasts

Until I saw the sign
outside the gym
with an exercycle
I thought “Spin Class” taught students
how to become one with God
rising above sweat and exhaustion
like ecstatic Dervishes
whirling on the threshold
of opening the eyes of their hearts

—*Linda Packard*

***Max's Overhaul Or
One can of Chrome Polish Lasts
Longer Than 20 Cans of Mixed Grill***

Bill worried aloud at breakfast
whether his eighteen pound cat
would wear out or go blind first.
He made quick calculations,
then measured Max carefully.
By noon he had pillaged his Camaro
and liberated parts from a previous
hot rod existence. Max's joints would
be sure to go; nuts and bolts slid
into place. Chromed rearview mirrors
became ears. A Buick distributor,
complete with wires, replaced his heart.
The chamois tongue was better suited
to polish his chrome-plated nose
than the rough red one Bill had to junk.
He dreamed of oil spots on Max's
favorite chair, Michelin tread marks
in the azalea bed and mouse bones
ground to fine powder by transmission gear teeth.

The job was finished by evening. Bill
judged it successful when he clicked
on the cowl-light eyes, brass reflectors
bounced light across the floor.
Then, he let Max go.

—Linda Packard

Sharing a Gemini Friend's Work Space

Clouds of yarn fill old candy jars
that from the corner of my left eye
look like amorphous bodies in formaldehyde.
What were you thinking
as you combined the mohair with worsted,
cotton with chenille,
magentas with grays,
lavenders with browns?
Especially when the threads to my right
are meticulously arranged
by color fading into color
in numbered, clear-fronted bins.

Now you're in the Cloud Forest of Costa Rica
doing God knows what,
while I'm here puzzling over
your weaving supplies
and the word-web of my life

.

The oceans between us may be clouded
but this new work space is well-cushioned
with words and wool.

—Linda Packard

What I Forgot to Tell You

You asked about being alive.

What I forgot to tell you
just came flooding back.

Our lives are rivers
moving through slow banks
carved by ceaseless rounds
of wet and dry,
heat and cold,
decay and burgeoning
colors of the seasons
valuing darks and lights.

The planet on which our rivers flow
a pile of skins
many layers deep,
each one holding the bones
of another's experience,
folding and unfolding,
accumulating stories,
archiving meaning,
carving deeper banks,
then scouring them flat
to birth deltas
dissolving rivers into the sea.
Make the most of your own brief and sparkling ripple
while the current still travels.
The eddy, the hydraulic,
the dry river bed patient before monsoon flood,
will catch you soon enough.

--Deborah J Milton

The Blessing

Sometimes,
an ancient tree simply falls,
an old rock wall crumbles,
a child's tooth lets go.

Sometimes, a dam breaks and a valley floods,
a toddler stumbles,
an old deer simply folds
where she had stood
at the end of a driveway
in a suburban neighborhood.
Sometimes, driving the long way home,
three rainbows appear,
bing, bing, bing,
their tripled presence an alarm of sorts.
I open the door, the telephone rings,
and life, simply and irrevocably, turns.

Sometimes,
a weary, valiant warrior
hears the whispered invitation
and simply says,
"OK, I'm on my way."

--Deborah J Milton

Ant Shoes

Today,
wearing the shoes of an ant,
I traipse across the plains
of a still warm laptop
and climb the hilly terrain
of navy blue couch cushions.
I have the heart of an explorer-
indefatigable, curious, daring,
walking on and on because I must.
But wait!
Ants don't wear shoes.
Can I really imagine
the mind's thought of an ant?

Yes, I can!
I have the gift of imagination...
...I'm human,
But,
I am an ant in the eyes of the moon.
Not even a speck as I trudge across mountains,
walk down urban sidewalks,
labor over pyramids, earthworks, cathedrals,
dams, bridges, and highways.
Once during a lunar eclipse,
I waved my arms
as I stood on the curved horizon line
cast by Earth's shadow.
That blessed curve remained unblemished.
I tried harder, jumping up and down,
waving my arms frantically.
Not a blip!

I am less than an ant in the moon's eye.
Is it this truth
that makes us humans act like GI/ants-
entitled to:
gouge out valleys with our heels,
smog up the air with our smokes,
abolish ecosystems and nations with the stroke of a pen,
build walls to cage and control everything
other than those making decisions,
wreak havoc on Earth
as we toss our wet, well-conditioned hair?

--*Deborah J Milton*

The Big Holy's Release

When you've got a date
with *The Big Holy*
not all the prayers in the Universe...
the dancing,
the prancing,
or even a ceremony
will prevent your demise.

You will still take leave
of your finite form
cause that flights leaving
And it's a schedule that
can't be missed,
won't be missed,
can't be over-ridden,
canceled, or in any way shut-down.

No, these big old soul wings
are going to carry you up, up,
and away into the vastness
that shakes itself free
of mere form, boundaries, skins,
no walls of any measure can hold back
your escape.

The Big Holy is
a call that cannot be denied.
An odd word is used
for what is left behind –
'dead.'
Seems like it should
at the very least say –
'released.'

-- Kathryn Lafond

Saturn Goes Retrograde

There is no standing still
We may slow to a barely perceptible
crawl. We may limp along in our resistance
wishing with every fiber of our being
that “what is” is not so.
We may at other times, race toward
the finish line only to discover it’s been
MOVED! Yes, moved, drastically –
Now What Was, is no longer even a concern.

What Is – Is still making itself known.
We discover bits and pieces like a jig-saw
puzzle – not understanding that purpose
exists to why pieces are missing.
Not understanding that if we saw the whole picture
too fast our lesson would not
stick. Like planets slowing down to go retrograde
we can feel the pace shift, if we tune in.

But,
who truly is comfortable with not knowing?
Who doesn’t resist at every turn?
Breaking down structures one bone at a time,
one wall, one life, depends on what is most
necessary for that soul to take its next leap
into the abyss of life.
Who are we to say
that the new path isn’t absolutely
perfect?

--Kathryn Lafond

The Big Surprise

Conception takes a party
Meaning –
for THAT egg
and THAT sperm
to actually meet
Someone's got to host
the gathering.
Letting go enough control
that the *great meet-up*
is inevitable...
egg meets sperm
girl meets boy
and
Ta-Da!
A divine spark grows
blooms
and becomes
The Big Surprise!

--*Kathryn Lafond*

Words

Where are the words?
They flit and fly
And float through my mind's eye
Elusive
Adroitly avoiding capture
Just when I think I've caught one
It disappears
Evaporates.

Where are the words
That used to come to me so quickly
So easily
Pages and pages of letters arranged in coherent patterns
Full sentences
Words that express me exactly
Gone to ground

I am the hunter and words are the prey that eludes me
I wait
I stalk
I pounce
Only to come up empty handed
The page is blank
Where are the words?

--Carol Hille

Hello You Who Loves

by Janet McLain Smith

Hello soft carnelian red fur of a girl
all curled in a ball in my arms
in your bed. Hello you who loves
the eye kisses, nose to noses,
ear rubs, heart noogies, early
morning all paws massage.

Ah you,
with the underbite that never bit,
but breakfast and treats, and left
passers by thinking you were sending
a smile just for them. Oh, I see that
prance and thick plume of a tail
that shouts, "Oh Boy!" joy
for every one of the million and one
walks and paths you took.

Hello girl who sleeps in the pillows.
I inhale you for the last time. You
slip into your deep dream sleep
and I feel you go.

Patiently, quietly she gently
lifts you from my arms
and swaddles you in hers. Goodbye
good girl. Now there's just
the space of you and I'm doing my best
to learn how to be with who you are.

Good Morning

by Janet McLain Smith

I have just taken
the first sip
of the first cup
of hot strong coffee
and my clear eyes
are lit and resting on time
unbroken, on tides lit
by a morning moon.
Flocks of seagulls ride the dawn,
thick with pink flight,
chickadees and chatter,
sparrow song. The sea is still

a reflecting pond of cedars
and firs from the hill across
the harbor, of old pilings marking
the path safe for passing ferries,
a face of beach mirrored
as a sailboat moves through,
leaving waves quietly releasing
slow breaths across the surface
like mine across the surface
of your warm summer skin.

What's what? Who's where? When and why?

My wordbook is old, and sadly, so dated. Certainly not inclusive, pages torn, covers shredded. Seven decades behind, it's still on the desk, and still the first to be picked up. The classic five are there—what, when, where, who and why—plus, when I looked near to each, there are many delightful neighbor words.

What is preceded by whang and then there is whap; *what* is extended by whatever & whatnot. Later, I found when and, so help me, there's wheeze and whelk and whelm and whelp.

When stretches to whenever and—wait!—whensoever. Perhaps others appear in newer word books.

A lot of words come out when I look around **where**: whereabouts, whereas, whereby, wherefore, where-from, whereupon, & wherewithal. Move on to whet and to whether, followed by whew, which, & whichever. Quickly to whid, whiff, and whiffle, to while, whim, whimper, whimsey, whim-wham, and a well-deserved whine. Cherish a happy whinny, but abuse not with a whip. Neither a whippersnapper nor a whipping boy be, and move through whir, whirl, whirligig, and whirlwind with a wish and a whick. Everyone knows people in white-collar jobs, and others who seek white-elephant deals. Avoid the white feather, don't be too quick to wave the white flag. It's dubious to whitewash your faults, but acceptable to go whither with whiz. Whisper to and whistle with, all these nearby words.

Who goes wholehog. Who can be considered wholesome. Who allows you a whoopee, lets you tell whoppers, and to see those in a whorl?

Now, having read the above, I had to ask **why** so few around why? I found only the whydah bird—which ends this brief scrutiny: at least in my book.

A prose poem
--Gerald Young

THE DOT NOT THE LINE

First, I created a dot
Then, I moved that dot
To the end of a line,
Though that line did
 Not yet exist.

Plodding on
I worked hard on additional lines,
But as I neared the end,
Not a single line had been filled,
 But the dot
 Did yet persist.

--Gerald Young

C/2020 F3 NEOWISE

lights up Northern
Hemisphere skies.

Her tail
sprinkles fairy dust
on Earth's dreamers

descendants of Chinese
stargazers
foretelling comets
in Neolithic symbols

of Serbian braziers
smelting baubles
for their beloved

of Maltese farmers
planting cotton under
celestial exclamation points.

Who told the telescopes
to photograph
this wonder
but not another?

Who said
this specimen
is worthy?

Who declared
this body
nothing more
than a floating rock

untethered?

--*Kristi Helgeson*

Fire

Physical poetry.
Love, elegantly plural, often
a beautiful fire.

A man has fire—
his ideas brilliant, full of light,
his expressions vivid, animated by gestures.

Fire in writing—
light and beauty,
a multitude of urgent ideas.

--Kristi Helgeson

Force

simple to ornate
issued from all parts
of the body in motion.

The heart produces
the force of voice
and power.

The force of sails, of oars;
one force, one's forces—

[The force of scissors on the ground.]

I've lost the familiar
force of people
of wild game
of bad tongues

exhausted by force
of polishing
the metaphor.

--*Kristi Helgeson*

The Second Eye

[a tanka sequence]

our wrinkled newborn
sleeping in my arms—
how lucky is the sun
to have dawned
this very day

home from the hospital—
what are the chances
for the baby's first drive
that all the lights
would be green?

grandparents arriving
from another country—
in the name-the-baby book
a four-leaf clover
marks his page

another feeding—
again we count
his fingers and toes
and they're all
still there

the baby asleep
beside the Daruma doll—
tomorrow
we'll paint
its second

--Michael Dylan Welch

Your Second Heart

This is a false beginning
to get your attention.
The poem will start
in just a moment
after you have taken a breath
and centered your attention
not on me or the poem
but yourself
and how the poem
might stitch itself
to your second heart,
the heart that matters to you.

--Michael Dylan Welch

Perfection: An Ars Poetica

The archer fish knows refraction.
As it spits from its tropical mire
to shoot down crickets for dinner,
it adjusts for the kink in light—
the light that shifts direction
from water to air,
from the imposition of its world
to the world above, of heaven.
Is this a marvel of creation,
a piece of the grand design,
or an accident of evolution?
Or is this miracle simply gained
from the need to feed—
trial and error that perfects the poem?

--Michael Dylan Welch

Attention's Span

I get it now
If I'm only doing *one* thing,
I cannot grasp it.
The sameness, the numbness
Take over,
Freeze me into not quite
Concentrating, not merely
Working.
A paralysis of intention
Dapple-shadows my vista.
But if I do a million things all at once
Connecting in one sunlit gulp,
I can thrive in the gaps the tree leaves.

The trees aren't green
Unless the dryer is thumping
And the music is tapping
And the colors compete with lasagna aroma
When the pen is scribbling
And words are tumbling.

My list of nature isn't expanding exponentially
Unless I'm rehearsing that future song
When I'm expounding about you
And ignoring me.

The verdant acrylics aren't drying
Unless I'm inventing/designing/trying
When my fingers race faster than my mind
And "to-do" becomes a mantra WHILE I'm doing.

The forest of philosophy can grow
When all the tedium is stacked,
Is compartmentalized,
And I, as grand conductor,
Master my universe's orchestral multi-log fire.

--Janetmarie Valiga

One Chip Fell (my stroke)

Mosaic collage, layer upon layer of colored thread,
So many poems my house can't hold all the boxes,
My collections legendary as a Bartlett's sea of quotes—
I have surrounded myself, hidden myself from details.
Metaphors and college degrees, books and more boxes
Pile up and up in the room. Books about boxes.

Tiny tiles of color and sound and dancing wind and words
Assemble themselves while I sleep and dream art,
Taste harmony, glory in nature, encourage synapse growth.
One pixel turned rust. One pixel turned invisible.
The puzzle starts to disintegrate more nebulously than
An Impressionist painting. The colors are no longer
Reassembling. They flake off and I'll never again
Find them in this tomb of boxed potentials.

--Janetmarie Valiga

Hidden Lives Are Not Hidden Lies

The chocolate melts in my dark night,
And makeup blends/masks seem more important
Behind y silent, calm Buddha smile,
Vast volcanic turmoil bounces inside my head.
I do not need to beg forgiveness for indiscretions—
What my mind and heart exist on
Cannot be measured in any terms.
Not even betrayal of vows.
Yesterdays and nows kiss in air, disappear.
All I can think of is you,
But you never consider me.
It's not (there), but it's real
(here)
(fair):
An (amorous) fantasy
(anonymous)
(astounding).
--Janetmarie Valiga