The Cultural Center of Cape Cod 8th Annual National & Regional Poetry Competition

A National Prize of $1000 will be awarded for a single, unpublished poem that has not won 1st prize in any national competition. Open to all U.S. residents 18 years & older.

A Regional Prize of $250 will be awarded for a single, unpublished poem (that has not won 1st prize in any national competition) by an adult resident of Cape Cod, Nantucket, or Martha’s Vineyard. All Cape and Islands poets are also eligible for the National Award.

Judge: George Bilgere

George Bilgere’s most recent book of poetry is Imperial, from the University of Pittsburgh Press. Other books include The White Museum, selected by Alicia Ostriker in 2010 for the Autumn House Poetry Series, Haywire (winner of the May Swenson Poetry Award in 2006) and The Good Kiss (chosen by U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins to win the University of Akron Poetry Prize in 2002. “In the house of contemporary poetry,” said Collins, “George Bilgere is a breath of fresh American air.”

Bilgere’s poems and essays have appeared in the Sewanee Review, Kenyon Review, Southern Review, Poetry, Best American Poetry, Georgia Review, Ploughshares, Iowa Review, Field, Shenandoah, and elsewhere. He has received grants and fellowships from the Pushcart Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Fulbright Foundation, the Society of Midland Authors, the Ohio Arts Council, the Ohioana Poetry Foundation, and the Witter Bynner Foundation. His poems are often heard on Garrison Keillor’s The Writer’s Almanac, and he has been a guest on Keillor’s A Prairie Home Companion. He teaches literature at John Carroll University in Cleveland.

General Guidelines

- Submit up to three poems of any style or subject totaling no more than five pages with an entry fee of $15 by June 16, 2014 (postmark).
- All entries should be typewritten on plain, white paper. The poet’s name should not appear on any page except the cover page, which should include name, address, phone number, and email address, the titles of the poems submitted, and a brief bio.
- Simultaneous submissions are permitted, but please notify immediately if submissions are accepted for publication elsewhere.
- Manuscripts will not be returned.
- The names of the winners will be posted on the Cultural Center’s web site in September 2014. No other notification will be made.
- Make checks payable to Cultural Center of Cape Cod. Mail submissions to: Poetry Competition, Cultural Center of Cape Cod, 307 Old Main St., So. Yarmouth, MA 02664
Poems from the 7th Annual Mutual Muses Exhibition: A Marriage of Visual Art and Poetry at the Cultural Center of Cape Cod 2014

These poems have been posted—not published—after inclusion in an unjuried art exhibit and are therefore eligible for competitions or first-time publication elsewhere.

All poems are copyrighted by the individual poets. All rights reserved. Readers may copy poems for their personal enjoyment but not for reprinting or publication in any form without written permission from the poets.

For more information, contact Lauren Wolk at 508-394-7100 or lwolk@cultural-center.org
100 or More
By Eir Lindstrom-Holmy

Lashes. Too many
Lashes I lose myself
In their decadent forest
Failing to number them
One… Two… Three.. Four..
Lashes. Thick. Black.
The fluid sweep- curve
of a whip in motion:
Lashes. Hail down on me.
Five… Six… Seven… Eight…
Each lash a prison bar
Your eyes Venus fly traps
My heart a Venus fly
Nine… Ten… Eleven… Twelve…
Your beauty my motive
Abandon my crime
These lashes my sentence
Thirteen… Fourteen… Fifteen… Sixteen…
No butterfly kisses
Sweet lashes
Cut me
Leave no visible scars
Seventeen… Eighteen… Nineteen… Twenty…
With these lashes
You cannot make yourself ugly
How many other hearts
Have you trapped here?
Twenty one? Twenty Two?
Twenty Three? Sixty nine?
Guileless as nature
Deadly and divine
Snow is piling up in the back of my little cabin
A wall of snow creating an alien landscape
As I grow older minute by minute
My bones hard and brittle
My world cold and bleak
Frozen out of my comfortable soup.

The phone rings:
“Think about strawberries,” my sister says

The image comes crashing in
Juicy, red, and delicious
An imaginary bold bite, blood red
Running down my gullet
Feeding my hunger for connection

“And remember,” she whispers
“You’ll always be my little sister.”
DAWN
By Kathleen Healy

five year old elbows
sharp
in the small of my back
I wake and sigh
roll over
ready to let fly
my whisper tirade
fueled
by irritation
at such an early start
but the sight of you
asleep
stops my heart
I notice first
two perfect lips
pursed
in slumber
the gentle slope of
your freckled nose
eyelids softly closed
I shut my own now
for a moment
let slip
a quiet yawn
and think
how lucky
to be roused by
five year old elbows
sharp
in the small of my back
in time to greet the dawn
I thought it would happen
I thought it could be
you and me
but now that it hasn’t,
now that we aren’t,
the business of ending
the task of unraveling,
disentangling,
unentwining
you and me
begins.

the fabric of us
years in the making
stitch after stitch,
woven and sewn,
knitted and knotted,
together
you and me,

colors and smells,
textures and tastes,
thoughts and dreams,
real and imagined,
appear at every knot
in every stitch,
with every tug,
and every cut,
of the fiber
of what was
you and me.
Who would expect their appetite
would come to seem ominous?
But now I know

eye are voids of hunger. They plough
a field of plankton, turn,
plough again. They strip the water

like loggers on a clearcut.
The bay this spring seemed overrun
by stern, enormous beetles:

black, vaguely military, inexorable.

Poor plankton, adrift
in flailing clouds, poor blushing copepods
with delicate antennae, watermelon scent—

you don’t stand a chance.
I am stunned. Week after week,
right whales eat the bay down

until they have to leave it.
Time and proximity have made them
monsters. This must be how it was before.
At the door, three fates,
young girls in their twenties
full of full-blown hair
long thin fingers
fingering the pages of our evening,
finding our place.

They debate table numbers,
place our destination
on the porch, glowing in amber light,
soft maple walls, the windows
a barrier to night,
candles flickering tiny poems.

“Be here now,” Ram Dass told us.
I heard voices, soft music,
idly wondered: Why Elephant Walk,
saw Mirabai swaying high:
“I have ridden on the shoulders
of elephants. Try to be serious.”
HOW TO LOVE A WOMAN
By Kate Wallace Rogers

Loud as a hummingbird engine, listen to her heart,
like the rattle of a snake on your threshold.
Bring her frequent bouquets of all petals, shapes
and colors, like kindergarten love notes on the board
or written in hopscotch chalk on the sidewalk.

Bring everyday treasures, shells, feathers and
skipping stones for her so she will look out
further into the sparkle and glaredash
of waves, rolls, fins, whiskers, whole porpoises
she never thought she'd see. Love

the gorgeous roots and vegetables she conjures
and eat with chopsticks so the fun will last longer,
and because that's the way she does it. Take your plates
outside, under the tree that lays out in the sun
a generous blanket of dappleshade for your picnic.

Take care of yourself, because self-care is sexy:
a haircut, run, massage or pedicure, all the yoga
you can imagine as you grow flexible together,
supple and strong. Celebrate her birthday suit,
the magic of her texture warmed by smooth stones.

Sing her songs you remember your mother sang
drifting in moonlight, stars landing on temples
and scars. At dawn make blueberry pancakes
together savoring slowly the love you create,
every luscious, blue, sticky syrupsweet bite.

As Saturday slips past noon, and there's still more love
to be made, tender her, breathing in lovelight
provided by a universe designed to shower you with
blessings, like the indecipherable plush of birdsong
strung along the tanglevines stretched before you.
Un
By Lauren Wolk

About green in summer, gold in fall,
the un-eyed tree knows nothing.

But about sun, the tree knows.
About rain and the rising of warm sap.
About the softness of owls.
The zest of lightning.
The press of snow, leaving, as it melts,
cold runes and raveling drink.

About the blue of day-sky, the tree
is as ignorant as a mole.

But it knows about the tall darkness in which
it rocks and rocks,
giving the wind
its tattered song,
its un-invisibility,
its endless, un-wept woe.

About you,
I am as unlettered as a cub.

But I know what the tree knows—
that you have no ax,
no saw,
no fire to fuel,
no whetted knife
no untapped bent for carving hearts.
MASSON AVENUE
By Neil Silberblatt

At the Viand Coffee Shop
on Madison Avenue
    which must not be confused
    with the Viand on East 86th
    or the Viand on Broadway
come the young ladies fresh from
their visit to the Met
or, if they dare, the Whitney
    because one can only
    take so many Rothkos
    or Van Goghs
    in a morning
wearing their
dazzling tennis whites
which have never seen,
and will never see,
a ground stroke
as they pick apart their salads
and each other.

Enter the ladies bearing handbags
with names like children,
the real thing of course,
no knock offs here
as they survey
the dieter’s special
and eye the desserts
cordoned off
behind the counter.
Their conversations hushed
as they spread
butter
and gossip.
Two blocks away
from the Viand Coffee Shop
on Madison Avenue
   which must not be confused
   with the Viand on East 86th
   or the Viand on Broadway
stands a refugee
from Senegal
as black as the plum into which she bites,
its juices dripping down the side of her hand
as she hurriedly sets up
her display of handbags
on the street-corner.

She is
real;
the plum is
real;
the bags –
   as she will quietly tell you
      in her rich Senegalese accent,
         with her breath scented by plum -
are beautiful,
but fake.
THE WOMEN’S HOUSE
By Dianne Woods Ashley

When I sleep
my mothers move about my house.
My mother’s mother sparkling
the kitchen, setting her crystal apple pie
on the moist counter. No one sees her
go to bed or get up. ”Look,"
my sister’s daughter points, “her
apron is growing from her shoulder blades.”

My own mother hides
under the sofa. No one can coax her
out, but she giggles when we bounce
on the cushions and burbs and falls asleep
without brushing her teeth.

My father’s mother arrives
while I am sleeping. Her trunks
are made of porcelain. She’s been
to China and to Greece visiting
herself in a former life.
She has sent my sister
on a quest to an unknown country.
I want to touch the faint mustache
of this large grandmother but she won’t
cuddle. She has exotic gifts--
all for my sister.

In the morning I can’t remember
where everyone is. I wash my daughter’s face
and so many eyes stare back--
I wonder who I am really taking care of?
and when will I see my sister again?
In Japan it’s rare to visit someone’s house—mostly because homes are small and crowded—but, in the case a friend invites you, you must take a small gift wrapped in a furoshiki—which is a square of beautiful cloth; you present the gift in it, and afterwards take it home.

With the gift, you give the beauty of the cloth—the dense untying of the loose knot, the heavy sweetness of the fabric in your friend’s palms, its purple red yellow in your friend’s eyes as she unwraps the gift, which will be two perfect pears.

Remember, as the giver of the gift, you will be taking your furoshiki back to your own too small and over-filled house. At home you will fold it into its cloth origami, and the fabric will lap onto your fingers, the golden yellow beside the plum blossom violet. With its weight in your hands, you place it into the cabinet.

You wonder how many gifts it has wrapped, how many thank you’s; you think of the pears, your steps toward your friend’s house, your steps returning, as you close the cabinet door.
TURNING THE CLOCK BACK
By Carole Stasiowski

Too soon it returns, this season of light
releasing itself into encumbering leaves, the leaves
laden with falling light, the light accepting
the density of underground, root-bound.
All week no step was safe: so many fallen ones
locked in frosted lace, starting towards unrecognizable,
crushed, only a few stems intact, some orange tips.

Nearly All Soul’s Day, nearly November, that pilfered
swath of time. The coming cold will bleach the hours
gray, sap light from the trees’ bones.
The light holds all I love. Glory came late this year,
the beeches only now loosening their hold,
running molten down the towering air. The tupelo

flickers slender red prayers. It is a test each day
how much I can attend to the shivery names of the lost
suspended one last moment
in diminishing branches. I circle the house,
roam the slanted beams of clamorous gold and scarlet,
detained, with late afternoon, in ravishing flame.
VINEYARD SCALLOPER
By Susan Webb

We all travel the Milky Way together…
our own little comings and goings are little more than tree wavings
John Muir

He wades the lagoon
dip net and tube basket
tight to his chest
tethered peep box bobbing behind.

Morning is measured
by his passing my window
as I watch the Buffleheads
whose skid stops and head pumps
are not to be cast aside
for the lure of a new recipe

or to chase out the door
to the hardware store
in pursuit of a brighter watt bulb
one that might fool me into sunlight
when winter clouds descend
and the salty winds whip
everything into obedience.

Later I will drive Skiff Ave
and see him sitting there
in a metal chair on his front lawn
head bowed
shucking and sorting his catch.

Later still I will learn his name
long after I leave the Island
and read it
in the newspaper obituary

where he’ll nod to me out of the print
as we nodded to each other
through those steely fisted winters
when we passed on our way.
I hope to find you
in a nuthatch head down
on the seeds,
above a black Oberon cat
wrapped in watching
As faded, leggy petunias lean over
the shadows of lost
Summer and first light.

I want to see you on the
faded blue steps, where
my son sits and prays that
a cigarette will calm him into
beginning something,
after an uneasy sleep.

I look for you, with the cosmos
in your eyes, billions of souls
and stars in your slightest quick
wink, to toss me up
like an oak leaf scratching
across the drive, away
from my self.

You find me, with
fingers wrapped around
my cup of coffee,
trying to open this tiny, haphazard
heart to the day
you have made.
LONG LEGGETY BEASTIES
By Sheila Whitehouse

From ghoulies and ghosties and long leggety beasties and things that go bump in the night, Good Lord, deliver us
~A Cornish Prayer

Anyone snuggled in bed—then grabbed awake by a chilling, panic-stricken dream, knows that even awake we don’t forget all that day the grim half-truths written in the night. That unexpected jolt keeps uneasiness lingering, malaise, near and vibrating, our defenses persuaded we may still be quarry, chased by the last remnant of some thing too terrible to name, unshaped vicious with merciless xanthine eyes, yellow with hatred zealous with spite.
THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING
By Bill Priest

If Einstein was confused, what about the rest of us!
Look out at the Universe through huge telescopes at black holes
And it’s all explained by the Theory of General Relativity.
Then look through electron microscopes at the smallness
And it’s all explained by the Theory of Quantum Mechanics;
But Mathematics, the god of the our modern underworld, says that
These views are both proven and impossible for both to be true.
Or perhaps it’s just our singular hearts that want a theory of everything.
All I know is that after the Theory of Everything
There still remains the issue of clean underwear.

We seek a simple clarity, as between women and men;
A man sees strength as power over others, while a woman
Sees a nobler strength in power *through* others.
And, Man, if you don’t know the ascendancy of the woman within you,
You’re missing the message of your lifetime.
Family is not just those who share genes or those we grew up with,
But beautiful strangers, with ties to a deeper past.
Women are choosing, or not, to give birth
Or to discover the Theory of Everything.
All Hail to the woman rising!

My Theory of Everything is that, in the end,
What matters is what we choose to praise.
THE SHEETS
By Marjorie Block

It’s the middle of May. Larry’s mind is elsewhere.
Not on June and the tests and the surgery
that could take a kidney, his prostate
no one, they say, knows what else.

Larry’s mind is on the sheets.
In the dark last night he saw his mother
bending and lifting raising her arms
the waves of cotton catching the wind.

Larry wishes to bleach the sheets
in which he and his woman sleep.
Not that they need it.
But the thought of it
of scrubbing the sheets
makes Larry smile.

He carries the old metal tub out to the yard
fills it with hot water boiled in the kettle on the stove
throws in a bar of lye and a good dose of bleach.
He churns the twisting cloth
around and down and around,
bends to sniff the rising heat
lets it all cook in the sun
before he plunges both arms
up to the elbows into suds.
He lifts the heaviness of cotton and water
to the surface and light
squeezes the last drops from each sheet
he carries in his arms like a bride.
Larry pins the overlapping corners to the line
where they unfurl a parade of ghosts
billowing parachutes in the breeze.
LET US RELISH THE CYCLE

By Mitch Tishler

Let us relish the cycle,
the cycle of the breathing,
the conduit that is both
the weaver and the weaving.

So effortlessly drawing intention
into each facet of this glittering jewel,
the breathing reminds us that
as we wander along the path,
our work
is to play.

For as we move within its current
we are called to rest often in its eddies,
to imperceptibly inhale the intoxicating illuminations,
caress the undulating tendrils of the iridescent moon rays
and savor, ever so slowly, the succulent dewdrops of dawn.

And so, let us relish both
the weaver and the weaving,
in this eternal rhythmic cycle
of the breathing.
Ted Hughes Lifts His Head with Memory
By John Bonanni

VIEWER:
Was it difficult living when you started? How did you do it?

HUGHES:
Any small job. I went to the school, I experienced the terrific exhaustion. I wanted to keep
myself, as if I had the right. I found something else. Then I saw money could be made by
children. An ax seemed to me preferable to devour great stretches of cash. Also, it seemed
children tore quite a few ax in magic. I couldn’t sell any of them. I sold them only years later,
after my reputation. I was living on what one lives on: Anything for cash.

VIEWER:
Do you have to or can you anywhere?

HUGHES:
Hotel rooms are good. Railway compartments are good. I’ve had several huts of one sort or
another. Ever since I began I’ve been looking for the ideal place I’ve known several—Sylvia
had a friend who used a chair. A blank wall, the tide going in and out. Of course, you think it
oughtn’t to matter, and sometimes it doesn’t with a woman—I just went on noise and bustle.
I’ve tried to test myself, and my feeling is that to be happy you produce some empty silent
place. Fast asleep, we keep track of the time to the second. The person conversing at one end
of a long table found in that first year or two a tiny cubicle at the top of the stairs that was no
bigger than a table. At the time it just seemed like a convenient place.

NOTES
Home…

an inner branch
where the robin rests
its flight at night,
sings to the sun at dawn,

a muddy hole
where the fiddler crab
sidles to hide
and survive,

a cardboard carton
roofing a homeless grate
or a comfortable house
cradling us, the restless

who love to travel
racing cross-country
on bullet trains
shaking ancient railbeds,

or, captive in our latest SUVs,
speeding on miles of asphalt
divided by yellow: solid, broken
dotted by rotting road kill,

or, mostly hurried, skystreaking
to foreign adventures
pressurized, on silver wings
above the clouds,

heading for a terminal
that never is,
home embedded
in the brain,

as we round-trip back
to the warmth of the bed
in the empty room
of the familiar

the rest area, where
we’ve seldom really lived.

By Leo Thibault
PAIRS
By Phyllis Hartley

The morning socks
pairs encased (no lax in the packing)
then
the minute you open.
aaaha!!
They are out
eager to divorce.
They scurry to hide in impossible
places
top priority - get lost
each from each other
but especially
from you.

Failing all search efforts
no match for their skill
you give up and matchlessly march
on.
One orange - One yellow.
One orange> - One yellow
One orange - One yellow
down the hall,
the morning drill.

To the sink for a little dental hygiene.
Then off you go.

You look in the mirror.
Who put this here?
There . There!
A low growl of a note that whips into
high
WALDEN POND, OCTOBER 2001
By Lucile Burt

On this perfect autumn afternoon,
I sit in a tiny patch of sunlight
creating a small boat of driftwood.
On it, maple leaves and a candle.
I sing a song and send it,
fragile and tilting, onto the pond.

My mother’s body was already gone,
when I arrived this morning.
She’d been whisked away for research.
Her practical plan, helpful and frugal.
Only a husk, I tell myself,
trying not to think of saws.

There is no ritual for this
in our family of lapsed Christians.
No one to say what must be done,
no funeral director, minister,
no service to plan, no body to bury,
no neighbors delivering casseroles.

The water dances with light.
This is no river. There is no
fierce boatman to row her over.
Only my little boat, carrying
my pagan prayers for her
drifting into dazzle.
The copperhead flows
across the disturbed stones
onto the terrace where
its crossbands gleam
as it streams past the baby
asleep on a quilt.

Last night you lay on the footbridge
as if in an open coffin,
the Pleiades, marcasite rivulets
whose trails vanished between blinks:
silent. Now, the *shuss*
of the snake's scales on dust --
that line from snout to eye,
a path you trace by breathing.
BREASTS
By Judith Partelow

We bone them, pound and stuff them
and proudly pass them to our guests
we share them

We’re fond of them when they are cooked
or placed into our mouths and shook
we want them

We tug them with our baby lips
and with our full-grown fingertips
we touch them

We squeeze them with our tiny hands
and suck the milk from swollen glands
we pat them

We put them into wired cups
we tighten them and press them up
we bind them

We measure size to hold them in
or swing them freely in the wind
we flaunt them

We want them larger than they are
or not so cumbersome by far
we fix them

We search for lumps or hidden mass
we crush them between plates of glass
we probe them

We ogle, use, they sag, they bruise
and if the diagnosis proves
we lose them

But when in poetry or art
breasts inspire the artist’s heart
and all the bliss that comes from this
we praise them
TUPELO
By Chuck Madansky

Thou shalt love creation with all thy heart and soul and might, and these words shall be upon thy heart
--Deuteronomy

until your heart breaks
and the words fall in
and take root.

Tupelo, swamp tree, ito opilwa,
water nymph, sour gum, nyssa sylvatica,
pepperidge, beetlebung, wood spirit dancing,
first plant to break my heart.

Arms like brooks
flowing straight from the stalk,
standing as several
yet seeming as one,
a head that bows humbly,
a fruit black and pruney,
maker of mallets
unsplittable wood.

Early to scarlet
and late to leaf,
the longest lived tree
in the northeastern states,
stopper of wine barrels,
feeder of butterflies,
hollowed out home
to honey and bees.

Core wood of plywood
and source of veneer,
it isn’t our using
that makes you holy,
but waterform gestures
and outreaching branches
that break the unsplittable heart.
OLD WOMAN GRUMBLING TO HERSELF, 
TURNING HUMUS  
By Kathleen Baker

I have been the crow in the moss garden all day  
Tossing things skyward  
With a sharp beak  
Smelling the damp, the black underneath  
Searching out a morsel to sustain me  

Yes, with an attitude  
Yes, in Johnny-Cash-Black  
Yes, with raucous complaint  
My friends came to listen  
And flew off
COME BACK...
(C.P. Cavafy)
By Alice Kociemba

Too fleeting to be memory—
you are here—then gone.
One night, outside, was it July?
The red planet, the brightest light
in a massive sky. Your voice,
a low rumble, those eyes, darker
than sky. Your persistent tongue,
tasting, stroking, dipping inside,
a slow, slow, shudder—yours, mine?
Some nights, a sigh—
when lips and skin remember…
A SOLUTION
By Mary Kane

A man walks up Main Street
with a cardboard box on his head
and decides he likes it

better than Catholicism
but not so much
as a cigarette at a bar.

Adjustments might be
necessary, three fresh lemons
dropped in whole

for weight and bumping against the box
as he turns onto Elm. Or maybe
potatoes so as to avoid

stark color contrast. It won’t
be difficult on his marriage.
They are well past

exploratory conversation.
And when he hums, he’s his own
hive. There’s no such thing as yesterday.
You can’t imagine how fear
drove her pen – you’d have to see for yourself
the 25-page phone bill fanned across her desk
beneath the gooseneck lamp, the mint-green
bookkeeping sheet she used — all 30 columns —
to chart the hundreds of calls from his private line,
how the numbers she scribbled ran down page
like rats from the belly of a torpedoed ship.

You’d have to be vigilant, use every trick,
like pressing *69 each time you come home,
to find out the last number that called. You’d
have to hold your breath as you unhook his pants
from the bathroom door to search the pockets for receipts
and ticket stubs, or wait till he’s asleep to run to his car
in slippered feet and see what’s stashed in the glovebox.

And, once you discover his lover’s number,
you’d have to slip it to a friend, a cop
who offers to run it, and leaves you a message
of two words. So, that same Friday afternoon,

when your husband tells you to call the airline
and confirm his trip to Pompano Beach, you do,
giving the flight numbers, dates and times.
And, when asked for the passenger’s name,
from the fire pit of your chest you spit out
not his name but the one you just learned.

And, still, you’re stunned
to hear it confirmed.
cognate means blood-related
By Christine Rathbun Ernst

linguists have somehow identified a handful of words that have survived since the last ice age relics of a mother tongue spoken by hunter-gatherers somewhere in neolithic anatolia as the glaciers were receding 150 centuries ago 15,000 years of story and song and slang millennia of uncountable dialects in which we have misunderstood each other from the very beginning the cognates of 23 proto-words persist living fossilwords or ultraconserved as the archeolinguist describes them: spit worm flow black bark ashes hand not we who ye that pull this mother man old fire what I give hear and one word even more vigorous than the rest the only word that occurs in some form in 700 living languages spanning the families indoeuropean and chuk-chi-kam-chat-kan and kartvelian from the arctic to india western china to ireland spoken by half the people on earth for the past 15,000 years one word distilled the purest word the absolute descendent of all words the heir of language itself thou the word thou and its living cognates: you tu ti turi esh-te te t’kin dhe thou thou not me or I or even we thou the longing to be comprehended by the one not oneself contained inside the sound thou dhe t’kin te esh-te turi ti tu you thou so that when I say you! hear me -- give this fire to the mother -- pull the worm off the black bark and give it to the old man, and no spitting in the ashes I might be understood by a caveman in stone-age Turkey or a reindeer herder in bronze-age Greenland by a pilgrim at Stonehenge by Alexander the Great himself by anyone on any number of continents tomorrow afternoon understood through the ages in any language the sounds I make familiar and eternal but I am speaking to you now to you you
Pikers plod the dry dirt roads drudging for work. They wear salvaged gear: ponchos for a buck, brown corduroy jackets torn at armpits, a gamey whiff. Shoes with flattened lugs.

They sniff for rain to feed the fields so they can pick the crops. White skies tantalize. Will it pound the ground like iron, sing a soft soak, hail dilapidated tractors with baseballs that bounce?

The sound of thunder, a cart over cobblestones. Moisture pools on a parched tongue. The brain leaps to Friday night What’s to eat that’s sweet and salty? Fat-ribs burgeon on a plate.

Grab an empty diner booth. One paper napkin, one fork, one serrated knife. The heart is but a muscle pumping, a hole that doesn’t speak.
THE HABENÊRO OF YOUR MEMORY
By Greg Hischak

I almost always use too much of you
in every meal—every flavor
next to you becoming
the flavor of you
My fingers retaining
the flavor of you
I should not have rubbed my eyes
or touched myself where I did
without anticipating
the flavor of you
—the habenêro of your memory
The shaft of steam
that billowed skyward
as you stepped into the shower
like lava touching sea
Your vibrato
blistering the frost
from the cold grout
Sliced into the thinnest
of halfmoons
the flavor of you
still searing the blandness
still shattering the plate
that could not contain you
LOVE, with a FOOTNOTE
By Mary Ellen Redmond

“Everything had broken down, and new things had to be made out of fragments.” –Kurt Schwitters

What value of x makes the equation below true?

I love you but I’m not in love with you.
I love you the way I love someone when I want sex.
I love you the way I love thin-crust pizza.
    [Soundtrack of your life goes here.]

There once was a girl who had a little curl.

Do not be seduced by:
Isn’t the beach lovely this time of day? or
Care for a glass of chilled rose? Olives?
    [Insert your picture here, smiling.]

Sweetheart, everyone’s faithful until they’re unfaithful.

Notice how easily the o can drop, replaced by an e and a.
Soon you will be news at eleven, an expiration date,
a page ripped out of his spiral bound life.

    Leave: from Old English – to be left over.

Leftovers.

Johnny by the ocean,
Johnny by the sea,
Johnny ran off with a celebrity.

Curse his every body part.
    [Insert his picture here.]

What is the probability that the arrow
will land on a section containing
an odd number both times?

    We are all in the dumps,
    For diamonds are trumps,
The kittens are gone to St. Paul’s.

Sometimes paper doesn’t burn, it smolders.
The villagers call me a monster,
not without reason, I have killed one or two.
Okay many.

They provoked me:

Erected mead halls in my forests
brought in oxen whose blood makes me ravenous
battled o’er hillsides with murderous lust
killing their own.

The shaper glorified their deeds with his beautiful harp,
proclaimed God colored the fields and seas,
lit the world like an altar with sun and moon, then
divided it between dark and light.

These were all lies but even I started to believe them.

I admit I liked the screaming
when I rattled the doors of Hrothgar’s hall,
enjoyed chewing flesh.

One young knight dove deep through the firesnakes,
invaded my mere, to prove his bravery.
I only toyed with him.

The heroes come closer every day,
history shapers right behind,

as if killing me will make their world safer.
THE OLD ROAD TO BAYFIELD
By J. Lorraine Brown

Where is that country road
sweet with the smell of hay,
untidy bundles cluttering the hillside?
The farmer pitched ragged forkfuls into his wagon.

Where is the horse, weary, snorting, swinging his head at flies?
And the dirt road flanked on either side by a deep, narrow ditch,
the starflower and gooseberry that specked the field beyond?

And the bridge with the low stone wall,
the swash and gargle of the rocky stream below?

And the railroad tracks?

Where is the train station
whose overhanging roof shaded an empty platform,
and the stationmaster who smiled at me through his barred window?

Where is that place where sky and ground meet in an unbroken, wavering line?
Radio Swiss Classic
By Barry Hellman

It’s been more than a year since you died,
and I continue to go to your Facebook page
to see if there are any updates, and to click
on the radio station out of Bern, Switzerland,
the one you liked to listen to when you were
writing poems. Right now they’re about to play
the last movement of Violin Concerto No. 2
in D Major, K 211. Although the announcement
is in German I think the guy’s saying Mozart
wrote it at age nineteen, began composing
at five, kept creating until he was thirty-five.
And as usual, I’m tearful sitting here
at my computer with the speakers turned up,
this time remembering you told me we should
ignore the relentless progress of our lives
and carry on as if we had plenty of time.
That you stopped thinking about age when
you were twenty-eight. How time was out
of your mind until your sixties, when you began
again to count the years; how at seventy-five
you found yourself checking off the months, and the days.
dance of life
By Rosanne Shapiro

sacred circles
within circles
moving toward the flame
circle of life
eternal flame

my breath
our breath
within
sacred circle of life

my dance
our dance
pulsation
and rhythm
dance of life

my life
our lives
are one
unbroken circle
eternal, unchanging
whole and holy

web of connection
through time
sacred journey
sacred circle dance
This is a new poem.
It will explain everything.
We are one
it will say.
Impermanence
it will say.
Compassion
it will say.
In a lake,
a waterfall,
the sea.
For the tenth time
she is stepping up on the cushion
to kiss him.
Someone hovers
to hold her elbow.
Her toe slips on the worn velvet
as she reaches towards his ruined face,
her hair, a perfect pageboy.

How can she kiss his lips
sewn forever,
or adjust the cross
placed inside his breast pocket?
How can she hold his hand,
a cluster of wasted fingers
that once folded over hers?

Their smooth hands
shimmer with wedding rings
in a photo 40 years old.
It is spring, and the distant calls
of children resemble mating cries of birds.
Afternoon, and we sift through cotton
to match calico prints bought in town
or torn from some old dress or skirt.
Leaves sprout from faded bushes,
one brilliant greens and blues, but now
barely there – perhaps only, a trace of thread
which embroiders the soft folds of cloth.
A light frosting of dust – like stars
in a dark sky – covers the lot.
We work quickly: sorting, piecing,
basting. The needle pushed toward summer.
Inside, the verdant air closes thickly upon us.
What do we know of passion?
Only this – a song, a spring dress,
a woman’s longing for night and heat.
At this hour, white blossoms float in
through an open transom.
At least to pray is left, is left
–Emily Dickinson

The children, too, quicken
As they move past his closet.
Something still there
leans in dark and heavy.
There are offers of help
but these are my labors,
our estate –

The string from a bare bulb
brushes my cheek,
each tie is a memory,
no one will wear these suits.
I feel him on scrawled notes.
The dust accuses me.

The tops of legal files cut my
bare knees. In a room
filled with paper
I am looking for others
left without counsel.
I will keep these for a time
until the blood dries, at least.

Too soon, the earth is warm.
The garden is one more place.
I will cry until I’m done,
lie down while
the green covers me,
while the green covers me.

By Maureen Leveroni
THE WASH
By Brooke Styche

She stood: winged-elbows jutting the kitchen center.
Without steps—a mere moment of innate inertia,
She flew.
Falling face into linoleum,
Hands still resting on hips,
Not even a finger to break the fall.

My center in a heap.

She wailed red.
I scrubbed red pink.
I scrubbed pink gone.

I scrubbed fear, but it stained.

If only I could wrap her in bubble and put her in a box
Marked \textit{fragile},
Marked \textit{be very careful},
Marked \textit{do not open unless you understand how to care for something so perfect}.

But it’s bound to pop:
Staccato turned crescendo,
So I keep scrubbing.

I just keep scrubbing.
OVERHAUL
By Paula Erickson

Become the matrix
of flight patterns
surrounding the globe—
like the beaded mesh of a calabash
played by hands in Africa
to mark a daughter's arrival
on the long red road
of womanhood.

Become the pulse
of this quickening-toward-life
we call Spring—
it's many small packages of DNA
offered in frantic writhings
like salamanders in vernal pools,
or the impossible ballet of woodcock
high above the blank faces
of still-frozen fields.

Become the flow
of a wild icy river—
from the tentative release of snow melt
as it pools and drops
through the tumble of land,
undeterred by glacial erratics,
tree-skirted strainers,
and finally, the skeleton of a deer
like a ship wreck,
flesh from bones picked clean
by an endless falling
of blue.
Triolet #4
By Eric H. Edwards

The cat comes to the door,
wanting to be let in;

just as five minutes before,
the cat comes to the door
wanting out...it starts to pour...

sometimes you just can't win
with the cat; coming to the door,
wanting to be let in.
A Matter of Life and Death
By Wilderness Sarchild

She trusts her pain.
It’s the fresh cut
on her wrist
that assures her
she’s alive
though it tastes
like death.

He doubts his joy.
It is an old scar
on his tongue
that negates
death
and smells
of life.

One half of every moment
she is puzzled
by the petals of summer
teetering on the edge
of death,
bleeding their brilliance
into the earth
until all signs
point nowhere.

Twice every hour
he understands
how the bare branches of winter
balance on the center beam
of life
blasting their nakedness
into the sky
until all clouds
sink into everything.

Pushed over
by invisible hands
she lies in the deep
dark oozing mud
and whispers,
“Thank you.”

Held steady
by invisible webs
he stands in the shallow
tide at the water’s edge
and shouts,
“Yes!”

Bleeding through
to the other side
of all that jazz,
she hungers
for the saxophone
that steals the last word
and never fails
to make her cry
and tastes like death,
delicious and odd.

Rising through
to the inner core
of all that jazz,
remembering a
melancholy tune,
he fills himself with a silence
that births the first drop of rain,
and makes him smile.
It tastes like life,
familiar and now.
Hinged where it shouldn’t be, it dances.
The eyes and face are nowhere,
which helps increase one’s chances of forgetting
this is a mirror.

An artist drew her. Once she slept
through lists of dos and yet to dos;
her nights a shadow play of debts,
and fears, regrets and never throughs.

Look outside beyond the door she guards:
long light plays round the cloudy courses.
Leaves of caramel and russet red
drift down, returning to their patient source.

The day grows chill, whirls past
the bone white tokens of a girl.
Ein Kleine Nachtmuski

By Lisa Nickerson

It isn't ever rage
it is a gentle drain

more how night siphons heat
off the end of a hot day

How the sun surrenders in blood
how night flowers open or the hidden drone
of insect songs

a dulcet pain
just a bit
naked cinnamon on a tongue's tip
HENRIETTA
By Neil Silberblatt
In response to Henrietta by Karen North Wells

This chick here – not yet skinless, boneless – is contemptuous of your cast iron or stainless steel skillets, your deep fryers, your Torquemada-approved rotisseries which have slaughtered countless of her kin.

She is not ready to be quartered or butterflied, will neither shake nor bake, and has no need for your finger-lickin’ mystery spices. They hold no mystery for her.

Descended from the feathered creature who beheld, but could not save, a young farm girl as she received voices in the garden, before that girl too was roasted.

With sharpened talons, her grandfather battled blindly in the beer-soaked alleys of Majorca, before leering men and luring women.

She can trace her lineage to those who crowed the first dawn, who warned of the sky’s falling, who watched as a teenage virgin pushed out a child on a cold night and was the first to behold the star while the shepherds wandered and the magi slept.

This chick here is more than the sum of her parts. She will not not now, not ever, this chick here will never cross the road just to get to the other side.
Here I Am

For José “JoeGo” Gouveia

By Martín Espada

He swaggered into the room, a poet at a gathering of poets, and the drinkers stopped crowding the cash bar, the talkers stopped their tongues, the music stopped hammering the walls, the way a saloon falls silent when a gunslinger knocks open the swinging doors: JoeGo grinning in gray stubble and wraparound shades, his leather Harley vest, his shirt yellow as a painter’s hallucination, sleeve buttoned to hide the bandage on his arm where the IV pumped chemo through his body a few hours ago. The nurse swabbed the puncture and told him he could go, and JoeGo would go, gunning his red van from the Cape to Boston, striding past the cops who guarded the hallways of the grand convention center, as if to say here I am: the butcher’s son, the Portagee, the roofer, the carpenter, the cab driver, the biker-poet. This was JoeGo, who would shout his ode to Evel Knievel in biker bars till the brawlers rolled in beer and broken glass, who married Josie from Brazil on the beach after the oncologist told him he had two months to live two years ago. That’s not enough for me, he said, and will say again when the cancer comes back to coil around his belly and squeeze hard like a python set free and starving in the swamp. He calls me on his cell from the hospital, and I can hear him scream when they press the cold X-ray plates to his belly, but he will not drop the phone. He wants the surgery today, right now, surrounded by doctors with hands blood-speckled like the hands of his father the butcher, sawing through the meat for the family feast. The patient’s chart should read: This is JoeGo: after every crucifixion, he snaps the cross across his back for firewood. He will roll the stone from the mouth of his tomb and bowl a strike. On the night he silenced the drinkers chewing ice in my ear, a voice in my ear said: What the hell is that man doing here? And I said: That man there? That man will live forever.
CONTINUUM
By Susie Howard

I
when peepers sing
as fiddleheads play on firefly nights
I’ll dance for you

II
crickets thrill the air
while we rest nude in the
lamplight of the moon

III
now pearl and onyx
once moonstone and opal
on forest floors rest

IV
big dogs and calico cats
hide from fat-flaked snow
in deep drifts of sun
HEIDEGGER ON BOTH SIDES

By Eric H. Edwards, in response to Why by Sophia Chatov

There is the Advocate
and the Devil's Advocate
slippery eel at both ends

on the bottom
the question
or nematode
or lock of hair
(that locket is where?)

So many questions
some of identity
or where this is going

poems have only one,
to which they refer
as if you
were there without
question

as if looking
over one shoulder
to a sound –

But no sound –
the emptiness within
apocalypse without

a look, yes,
who am I?
good question
as my heart broke.
PICTURE PLAY
By Barrett Warner (Standing in for Mary Ellen Redmond)
In response to Avignon Window by Michael Helfen

A lighted-lamp falters inside you
as if an angel has gone blind to good and bad.
Close your mind and you’ll see everything,
says Rilke. In my horse’s eye there is no motion,
no God on my back and no devil at my loins.
Maybe you can’t see me? Look again.

My pineapple wreathed by so much sky and smoke,
and a threshold bearded with trumpet vine.
You loom like a fate hinged on regret, waiting,
waiting, so gorgeous and so miserable Don’t believe it.
On your knees I must seem a second floor
something—a horizon, a height, a reach—

you want answers? You want the fat pigeon!
Mating for life, half dim with faith and eye fungus,
sitting chilly in the copper rain gutter,
its talons green with malachite.
You smoke ruby tobacco and suck a bruise.
What just happened—an orgasm, a murder?

Downstairs I’m rustling yesterday’s bread
to ground it below the pain scented window.
The rock-bird and I have a secret
about immortality, goes like this:
We know you. Because we know you,
we know you will fall. Just don’t fall in love.
Sapphic Perspective
By Lucile Burt, in response to Night Grass by Kirk Goetchius

1
Winter trees are silhouettes on a snow field.
Afternoons are dim in the slanting sunlight.
From the window, I see the shadows. We are
heading for darkness.

2
Crude oil runs in rivers on beaches, slicking
over water, reaching its fingers into
birds and marshes, mindless as death, reminding
where I am going.

3
Drones drop bombs on villages, stealthy terror.
Blood streaks walls and floors there, while I sit watching
wintry trees in faraway silence, knowing
I am a killer.
**Stella Demise**

By Gregory Hischak

In response to *Guardian Spirits* by Carl Lopes

She says she needs a ride back
from her spirit quest
desert nights and tilt-a-whirl operators
who seemed starry—seemed nice—
who lured her with strands of cosmic pearls
that she snagged on the doorhandle
of his suspect galaxy
quasars sent skittering across
the tarantula nebula—she explains
her thousand years of collapse
to a calliope of overhead neon
and fried dough
countertop glare and dippers
of cream into styrofoam cups says
thanks for the lift mister
fumbles the knob for the music
of dying stars
points across the sage firmament
to a pale orb flickering from
the base of a black distant range
says that lightyears ago
she left from there
A NIGHT AT LINCOLN CENTER
By Susie Howard
In response to The Poet’s Garden by Sue Pellowe

Look at all those fancy people
Dressed in ain’t we special attire
Who can’t keep their eyes open unless startled awake,
By high C’s, bass drums or a wife’s elbow to the ribs.

How can they care about the brilliant shifts and turns
Filling those golden walls with the genius of Mozart?

They might as well be home scratching their guts and drooling.

Once I was able to attend but I lost it all
Now I have traded in my gown and calfskin gloves,
For 2nd, 3rd, even 5th generation rags that,
Homeless, ignored, stepped over, are
Invisible to the Angel’s of the Opera.

Here I stand tonight, swept off my feet as
I have the unique pleasure of Mozart’s Magic Flute
Playing in my soul as it’s performed inside
While watching the enchantment of Chagall’s lyrical art
Dancing its way across wet street’s reflections.

The joy need not end as the center empties.

Tonight, I’ll tuck in here, warmed by the after-glow,
Dreaming of all that made tonight glorious.
DEMISE
By J. Lorraine Brown
In response to Lava Flows by Spenser Lariviere-Werner

Look around, Lorraine; everyone here is quite odd. ~Aunt Kitty on a good day

1.
When Kitty fell in her old house, she cracked her hip.
On her way down, she clutched at pillows, dragged them from the couch.
She yanked a table doily and sent a red vase crashing to the floor.

After eighty-six years, she was done.
She wouldn’t be turning her key in the door, or climbing the turn in the stair, or setting the table for one.

No more drawing on eyebrows with a black pencil, such fine feathery lines, or choosing a brooch for her jacket.
She wouldn’t be playing the piano either, or singing “I’ve Got the World on a String.”

She tumbled like the vase, cracking the swell of her hip, and every thing seeped away.

2.
Over and over, an elegant woman in the dementia ward hums a two-note tune. Busy, busy, she tears a napkin into strips, rolls each piece as if it holds a secret, then slides her handiwork across the table to my aunt.
THAT DREAM OF YOU AGAIN...
By Alice Kociemba
In response to an untitled work by Cecilia Rossey

this time a Black Friday Shopper in drag, racing in at 3 AM for “Double Discounts.” You slice though a forest of clawing hands; score the last Grand Theft Auto—perfect for your juvie-in-training.

Then you sprint clear across the store for the “Free $10 Gift Card” to buy Clyde his Magic Bullet Blender. Grab enough Duck Dynasty boxers—

to fill his Christmas stocking.

That automaton voice:
“A temporary price cut on Barbie’s Malibu Home,”
Ferrari and pool boy extra.
Now you strap a Gaia Yoga Mat to your back for your budding anorexic.

Just ahead, but out of reach, I see you swipe your debit card…
now the Christmas Club’s hacked.
I snap awake—the Sunday circulars plastered to my face—
MISTAKE
By Kim Berner, in response to Three Venetian Houses by David Cravenho

It was a mistake,
coming here,
coming back,
coming at all.
What with travel so complicated now,
the threat of terrorism and violence,
the fear of delays and toothpaste,
flooding and droughts and volcanic ash.
A staycation, drive to the beach, or the
mountains,
read all those books, go for a walk,
they suggested.
You won’t recognize it,
so much has changed,
it’s a, young person’s city you know…
A taunt I didn’t ignore.

Actually the neighborhood’s exactly the same,
I found it without trying,
like a turtle swimming unconsciously home,
no eggs to lay now,
driven by instinct alone.
The sunlight hitting the buildings just after four,
turning peaches and corals
to ochre and rust
slowing the afternoon rush
driving us all away from the windows,
off of the streets, out of the squares,
deep into rooms
where turquoise and mauve hide,
into ourselves,
and sometimes to others.

Nunzio’s granddaughter works the bar now
the five o’clock rays angled just so,
still hit the mirror
unleashing rainbows across the café,
floor, ceiling, walls
all canvas for the display.

The meloncello’s as good as,
maybe better,
than ever,
I sip as I sit,
anticipating the release,
the unlatching of locks.

By six o’clock the breeze has returned
Isabelle has brought olives, hard cheeses
and cold white wine.
The fish is excellent, she says
I can’t wait, I reply
Recalling
your hand on my thigh, under my dress
the white sundress you bought
that fell to my knees
and felt like a whisper,
your fingers exploring
finding their way.
I can’t wait, you said
across the street
upstairs,
away from the window
in the dark
wonderful
room.
Sheets damp and wrinkled
(You’re) laughing
one hand on my thigh,
the other supporting your head,
it’s time for a drink, you said.

It’s all just the same
That window up there
I shouldn’t have come
It was a mistake
WHAT YOU LEFT BEHIND
By Deirdre Callanan
In response to House on a Hill Overlooking Penobscot Bay, ME by Patricia Garry

Dawns which slaked the Bay’s thirst
with drama and gilt

mangroves draped in lights
blinking blue then white all winter

the cabbage palm withered
in the strangler fig’s embrace

ibis who pecked their way
past the copperheads’ den,

past Birds of Paradise
which cloaked the grave;

a mirror’s blank face,
its cloud eyes

barren rooms,
slant light on stone:

this house a husk
and you its crab

who shrugged it off
then scuttled away
it was hilda who showed us how to die
is a blossoming

and the teacher tore off her pedagogy and stared at herself in the mirror

what was kept secret breathed, its breath touching the walls, measuring its own dimensions

and without need for hidden identity,
what loss of power

they had all been living by winter afternoon sunlight, which is to say, composed mainly of shadow

rose petals in her palms, light in her bones, she has the sense that if she spreads her arms and fingers wide, what falls might arrange itself into illumination

all that’s ever not been spoken is layered here too and peels

and the prison is the passageway
SEA NETTLE
By Bill Priest
In response to *Jellyfish 17* by John Tunney

We’ve all been there before—falling
For the beautiful until we ache
Or are stung awake.
Like Odysseus, tied to his ship’s mast,
His soul in his ears listening to the song of the Sirens,
Or his soul in his hands as he touched the nymph Calypso,
Or, most of all, his soul in his eyes as he looked upon
The sadness of his faithful Penelope.

If he learned anything in his long odyssey,
He learned that his soul was not within him,
But he within it, like a nettle of the sea,
Floating downwards in lacy tendrils,
Falling and reaching for possibility.
GETTING READY FOR PABLO

By Barry Hellman
In response to Lipstick2 by John Cira

She closes the cover of Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair. doesn’t like some of the ending lines— or the ones around her eyes and ruby-red mouth. And the way her legs stick together when she’s asleep, how they seem to meet somewhere between desire and vulnerability. It’s hard not to think about who you are when the evening’s humid, the kind of night that clings to what’s left of you. She remembers the first poem: Cuerpo de Mujer, ‘Body of a Woman’; wonders what would happen if he came through the window and the room was full of moonlight; whether she’d be content with one kiss— or if she’d be insatiable.
PATCH WORK
By Chuck Madansky, in response to Sentinel by Julie Lariviere

Would it help
if we could see
what things
are made of,
see the stardust
patched together,
how the birds
are made from rag-ends
stitched with lava,
fallen flowers,
tangled pieces
of the past?

Could we see the cost
if we could see
the blood that stitches shirts,
the labor cheap,
when every fiber
is a needle
in the eye?

Would it help
if plagues fell plainly
from the lying mouths of men?

Would it help
if love were visible
and we could see what
herons marshes
saints and sinners
pieces patches mysteries
are made of?
Crocker Land

By Elizabeth Bradfield
In response to Vortex by James Musto

There are atmospheric tricks of cold
to explain it: how Peary saw the peaks
and shores, how MacMillan, seven years
later, did too. Pujok, said Peeawahto. Mist
that in frozen air seemed
like a broad shore, like hills.

For symmetry, there should be land. The North
should be a beautiful stipple from Maine
to Siberia, point after point to name.

Only when they stood on the map’s brown spot,
thirty miles in on its vague outline, they felt
the sea beneath them, new ice flexing like leather,
and saw
further off, another summit. Pujok. Another

fog. Months before, when rations weren’t considered
and when known shores made the horizon,
someone baked a cake and iced it thickly white.

They gathered around a table in the main saloon,
raised forks, Crocker Land in their mouths, a confection
so sweet their teeth ached and dreams warped strange.
BACK TO THE BEGINNING
By Judith Partelow, in response to Who’s Ribbing Who? by Marcianna

Before the serpent, fruit, and tree,
a seed –
a seed of truth from which all knowledge sprung;
placed in fertile, unpolluted soil,
watered with pure rain,
warmed by the resplendent sun,
its original branches blossoming
in God’s holy air.

So it was, a perfect apple grew –
a tantalizing specimen too good to resist,
plucked from the branch and tasted,
against God’s command,
by a woman and man like me and you.

The serpent, not to be forgotten,
hissed and crept guilelessly out of that Garden,
on the journey to the present
tainting the apple’s core ‘til evil dominated good,
spitting venom over the fragrant countryside,
wounding hearts that crossed its path.
Soon man took up weaponry
to smite those in his way
to spite God’s power,
upon which desecration was born.

Now it’s come to pass
all manner of discord
predominates in the land—
a list so long I cannot bear to write it here.
And this bountiful creation, Earth,
is bowed with unbearable sorrow,
its ravaged grandeur
quaking and erupting
as if to say, STOP! Just stop it right now!
Go back. Back to the beginning,
back to the seed.
Let us begin again.
LONELY FOR AFRICA
By Donna O’Connell-Gilmore
In response to Mariner’s Compass by Christa Edlund

We in warmed red plaid Masai robes rush through bush open vehicle night drive
Giraffe rivals bludgeon each other with their necks for right to gorge at termite mound
Maribu stork tall decorum with massive bill poised while vultures swarm carcass
Lion cub licks half-healed scar of lioness gored by African buffalo she brought down
We on guided walk sharpshooter with rifle Masai with spear spy fresh lion toe pads
Gazelle wet wobbly no time to nurse flattens immobile on ground as hyena approaches
Zebras doze standing rest heads on fellow zebras’ necks
Secretary bird orange-red bare face long legs stomps snake with hard padded feet

not
Hippopotamus ejected from crowded waterhole searches dry plains skin in danger of overheating crackling
Cloud forest elephant burdened with massive tusks lifts head partway then lowers to ground

(The unique shell craft “Mariner’s Compass” by the artist Christe Edlund elicits loneliness of the sailor far from home and loneliness in me far from my trip to Africa.)
BOUND
By Brooke Styche
In response to Painting Fort Hill by Deborah Fowler Greenwood

I reached for you—
Always steps behind.
Whispering to your hair, I begged:
slow down.

Be side-by-my-side,
Only a moment, I promised.
Let’s just say hello.
Hello, my eyes—rounder.
Hello, my lips—straighter.

You reflected twisted perfection
And seemed so real.
You eluded me.

Winded after the chase,
I looked closer:
And saw you.
Strange shapes no longer fooled,
I dropped my arm.

I see you.

And yet I reserve hip-space,
If you ever
slow down.

Maybe then,
You will feel our past through my fingers.
Maybe then,
We can braid ourselves anew.
An ornery little bird,  
who sleeps in the dark and waits for morning,  
who sings with the loudest voice  
per pennyweight of them all.  
Carolina wrens nest in stumps,  
tree holes, on branches.  
(They do not nest in birdhouses.)  
But seek out mailboxes, windowsills, old shoes,  
clothespin bags, tool sheds, boat houses,  
spark plug boxes on garage shelves.  

Carolina wrens, brown, modestly dressed,  
minuscule tough guys, hang out in bushes like guerrillas,  
purloin tidbits for their children;  
including shaking large insects  
until bits small enough to eat fall off.  
When the babies’ two-week nurturing period is over,  
parents throw the offspring out.  
(Don’t worry about the kids; remember who they are.)  

Oh you neverthinkers, hearken unto me!  
Unbending Carolina wrens have been singing  
Every Evening  
singing every evening in the underbrush  
as spadefoot toads  
and wood frogs sing in the vernal pools, have sung  
for hundreds of years before on the sandbar of the Nausets,  
and even before then,  
those Carolina wrens  
were singing in winter when snow fell--as it does still--  
in large soft white petals that hung together  
like puzzle pieces and stacked up  
in beautiful piles on twigs and leaf stems; they sang,  
warning other Carolina wrens, like tough guys,  
but hey, also singing for us who were on our way.
remember when
By Mitch Tishler, in response to Sunday Peace by Jason Eldredge

Remember when time had spaces,
remember those sacred drifting places.

Remember to wander,
remember to wonder,
for often the light grows dim.

So let us always remember
our child is calling,
let us all ways listen
from within,
shhh.
In response to a silver and paua necklace by Carole Johnson

I had called you from your hiding place:
Oh barnacled one, with gull feathers for wings,
skate egg cases as eyes,

seaweed dangling – a bedraggled gown.
The sweep of the lighthouse beam
casts you in silhouette;

boats in the distance
haul fishing lines and men’s battered hearts.
Shy soul adrift in the waves:

you float over blue harbors,
kettle ponds and salt water bays.
Birds trail in your wake, their *cree cree*

signalling your earthbound work --
to close the eyes of the dead
and cradle the newborn,

to pour salve on wounds,
to comfort mothers mourning the lost,
and give wings to the downhearted

until you are called back.
Now, there is only mist as it rises
over open waters.
RED
By Wilderness Sarchild
In response to *Promises Kept Are a Source of Wonder and Dismay* by James Wolf

buried in white
half hidden
screaming

red spot
on panties
made me
a woman

red spot
on sheet,
first time
with a man

blood
on hands:
war paid
with my
tax dollars;
my oriental rug
my diamond
my fine chocolate
produced by
modern day slaves.

unlike raging
red sunsets
and bleeding
hearts that bound
into my spring garden,
some reds are buried
in white
lie
half hidden,
screaming.
“Is It True Blondes Have More Fun?”
Or Playing the Waiting Game
By Rosanne Shapiro
In response to Where’s MY Galactic Insight? by Susan Danton

Do I look like I’m having fun?

I’d rather be home
in jeans and a t-shirt,
drinking a beer.

Instead, I’m wearing
a ridiculous dress,
nursing an insipid girlie cocktail
and waiting –
for “the man of my dreams”
to sweep me off my feet.

lost my driver’s license –
one beer too many

So, I sit here,
waiting
for my friend with the car
to grow tired of
waiting
for “the man of her dreams.”

I’ll ask her to stop
on the way home
so I can pick up a bottle

of Lady Clairol #20B
and put this blonde
out of her misery.
The Mountain

By Suzanne Sullivan, in response to *Face in the Mountain* by Jennifer Stratton

Purple haze intersecting lines of misty connection
  building to crescendo
        in the gap threads part allowing
          one single manifest being to emerge

Free as the tall Sequoia whose roots
  must interlace in order to survive
          must touch to support the drive to grow to
                    kiss the sky as ambassador from another time

Free as the eagle with outstretched wings
  face filled with determination and grace
          with its eye on the horizon
                    and its flight path to the mountain top

Free as the Lady of the Harbor
  torch high, inviting all to enter at will
          beckoning with regal bearing and silent awe
                    reflecting each individual dream in the ocean of life

Free as the mountain itself, standing still
  thrusting the facets of its four faces
          north, south, east and west, and in the center the one
                  solitary journey through blue sunlit clouds.
POV

By Susan Berlin
In response to Mountain’s Heart by Martine Jore

On my desk, an abstract print,
an image, digitally manipulated by the
artist and given to me as a gift. Regardless
of which way it’s turned, anyone who sees it says:
It looks like a vagina. A few weeks ago, I would have
said the design resembles chunks of sea glass viewed
through the lens of a kaleidoscope, the original image split
into two smaller parts. But ask me now, after hearing the news,
and this abstract print becomes an aerial view of a mother bird, feeding
her young. Of course, as with any piece of art—or really any anything—it’s not
just what we see but the frame of reference we bring. Today, waiting to be rung up,
instead of clucking under my breath at how long the old woman is taking to unwright
her coupons and count out her dimes for the cashier, I look up and notice a bird
trapped inside the store for who knows how long, and I leave my cart to race
down Aisle 6, make a slit in a 5 lb. bag of seed and deposit a few mounds
on the floor before returning to my place in line where I hum a French
goat I haven’t hummed since both my boys were young and,
with a surfeit of patience that was customary once,
I wait my turn, pushing my cart back and forth,
back and forth like a carriage, pushing it
a little bit away and then quietly
bringing it home.
ANOTHER ELEGY
By Maureen Leveroni, in response to Thought of Violet by Karen Ojala

I died when you did.
Not all at once,
but in pieces –
you fell away from us –
I fell too. When you stopped
breathing, so did I,
letting go your hand,
my hand.

Then, loss was simple,
like placing a vase
of hydrangeas on a polished table,
like taking it away.

The other side of grief
needs a secret addiction.
Now, it is a tooth, a claw.
So, in the blue dark
I conjure you –
piece by piece I
call you back.
How Many Daphnes Can the Gods Save

By Phyllis Hartley, in response to Namaste by Kim Medeiros

Past damp
into wet. Just right gray water.
Makes a wet pile. Not just sand but
stick to itself sand. Center it
on a wheel.
The wheel spins fast but not too.
The pile starts to change shape.
Hands, experienced hands, draw all that upward. Like magic
it flows up
  out thinner
  then in
  then a
  rim.

Tweaked and done
but for the baking in a huge oven.

The ladies watch the whole process
through the cracks between the slats of the wall.
This never happened to them
They never went up. Not at all.

  just flat and wide then
  baked at 2300 degrees F

Just as they were about to be caught, sold, and turned out for street slavery,
they were snatched up by the gods, who made them safe, cast into beautiful stoneware.
Blessed so by the Gods they are on proud display by the front door.
Tall in their plate stands
ready for someone to just, properly, fall in love.

Nervous they wonder
where this new face will be placed.
Stoneware goddess or on the street under dressed.
She is so fancy no need for a stand.
Is she going to steal the show?
Not horizontal. Not a plate
but vertical as in vase.

The girls wait. Her eyes are closed. Then flutter open.
"Hi girls my name is Daphne. Gosh you girls look so fine." They did indeed they agreed!
If it were possible

to remember that first slippery moment:
egg and sperm collide
cells split

to be conscious
of the first curious drop
that headed toward land

to leave a footprint
in the dust of ancestors,
pick a flower
sprung from remains

to see shades of the end:
cells switching off,
adrift
beginning again

or sense the larger beings
that sweep us from
their eyelids
while they dream?

we’d measure lives
in blinks, flutters,
beats …

Now.
Now.
Now.
Now.

By Betty Ann Lauria
In response to *Origin of Life* by Ruben Valenzuela
zig zag

yakity yak

By Judy Askew, in response to Zag by Michael Ernst

what can we say about today's *civility*?
he did to her
she did to him

buried under the carpet?
oopsy daisy
musical chairs

hardly visible, not risible
learn how
the world can work

upbeat zig zag
knives and shotguns, hand revolvers

nicey nice chit chat

yakity yak

TV spews celebs

red carpet crawl
teeter totter
up the zig zag

la-di-da
yellow in the sun
blue in the night

this private plane
shadows here,
shadows there

that private party

whoopsy

dirty linen

pendulum swings

now to now fro
What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?...Maybe it just sags like a heavy load. Or does it explode? -Langston Hughes

He sits upright, stubborn sweat glistening. The boredom of the job, the sum of a life, a jail he’s tried to escape for years. Spirit subdued, mind bent, grace remains. Slender fingers caress the broom, wishing music, like Yo-Yo Ma’s channeling Bach or Brahms. He hears a symphony beyond his reach, his arms trained not to master the bow, but to sweep sordid relics off the floor of the Front St. bar. With the demeanor of Madiba he’s free to imagine a revolution still to come that will install him front and center with the Silk Road Ensemble where he’ll glow in the applause of a welcoming, eager audience.

HARRY! Broken glass on the floor! Where are you…?

He rises, strides back into the bar. The cello fades. The broom takes up an angry crescendo.
**Life Contraption**

By Marjorie Block, in response to *Dream* by Pia MacKenzie

You’re on your way.

  Hold on. It wobbles.

  No wonder. You built it
from parts and pieces you found along the way.
  And though you included neither
  design nor direction it would
you said, warm to fantasy.
  And contraries would make it go.
  Its domain a sea of graffiti blues
where past and present collide
  pulse to the edge and beyond
  where dreams illuminate
the things that can’t be seen
  where a heart is in-waiting and life is viewed on its side
  and intuition calls out
to step outside
  ride the spirals and the circles
  take the journey chance the risk.
The thing shakes the fittings rattle
you feel the shift
  you see the breach.
PALINDROME IN BLUE
By James W. Kershner, in response to Fleeting by Robert Nash

a patch of blue
a hole in the clouds
remember
even on dark days
the sun shines
above the clouds
one summer long ago
we made love on the beach
unexpectedly
feel the joy
now
right
now
feel the joy
unexpectedly
we made love on the beach
one summer long ago
above the clouds
the sun shines
even on dark days
remember
a hole in the clouds
a patch of blue
Every day is the dream-swing
sighting
who to love
how to love
what to do to how
what I am
what I should

I am dizzy at this false flying,
this moth light, this bird crumb
Where is my dead brother?
We rode together
pushing in and out of what was real
what was possible

He is the hawk without gravity now
flown from the pendulum
with a needle in his arm

I can hear him keen to me
and I answer in kind
The blue is a tangle of echoes
between us
We are suspended
by our own strings

I am.
I am still.
I am still working at this untying,
this leap from the ledge
of the swing
to the grave soft thud
of me.
PERSISTENCE OF MEMORY
By Sheila Whitehouse, in response to Lyric by Vittoria Sault

If you came to my door, I wouldn’t know you.
You’re probably bald and frail, and I have wrinkles on my wrinkles,
but, Oh, my love, my darling. let those six syllables

float on the air, and in a whisper of wings
I am perfumed, coifed, aquiver--
breathless for you and the evening to come.

We’ll dance under the glittering ball
with other flickering couples, as
Louis Armstrong mops his brow.

We’ll walk on a balcony over the mysterious green Atlantic
holding hands, watching the moonlight catch
all the little waves that stretch from here to Portugal.
MUTE CACOPHONY
By Susan Webb
In response to A Journey through Thought by Tessa D’Agostino

Every morning Isabel walks through a corridor of ribboned chatter sewn into archives kept in files

Her sandaled feet slap the floor tiles her eyes settle on a remote blur she weaves her way through words

cushioned in cotton batting through worn adages on torn edges prodding her to speak

She deftly cuts to silence

They come to assess, gather some data (such silence must be labeled)

In the art corner, she slips on a smock they watch her lift her ink black braids so her friend can button

Taking her turn at the easel her brush bleeds rainbows of purples and reds

and they think they hear her hum they want to hear her hum
PATHS UNWINDING
By Dianne Woods Ashley, in response to Unwinding by Michelle Law

There are more wooded paths than time to follow.
Imagine hunters on horseback on the opposite hill,
Bows taut, arrows flying. They race down.
Deer, except one, disappear in the trees.

There is more to know than time to learn.
Further to go than means to get there.
“Shoot Flying Hill Road“ carried stage coaches:
Brides to the west, caskets to the east.

Is there more to a year than spring in the woods?
Light, shadow, and rain turn all early green.
Violets appear and birds claim space.
An old rock brags a new moss shawl.

More paths beckon than we can choose.
Each full of time and space and distance.
The woods do not reach as deep as before.
Route 6 stops the growth of the forest floor.

That highway’s its own path. Faster we fly.
Like a giant spool our lives unravel.
We step through the undergrowth, heads bowed.
No road is without a fork and an end.
ApoCalypso
By Kate Wallace Rogers, in response to Eve Oak by Phyllis Hartley

There was another life I might have had, but I am having this one. Kazuo Ishiguro

Blue sun on tonight’s horizon dances me
so close to my edge, it blankets the beach, my outermost reach
wind clips chip wave dips flip leaving,
behind on the sand, my judgments
permanently altered.

I know nothing
except curiosity as limitless as mirrors;
I jump in to expose myself to huge love
songs of whales pierce and thrill
through me like synapses firing,
tearing a riptide across
my heart.

Unfathomable
sea escape ripples my character flaws,
resilience replaces resistance.
I surrender like a sand flat,
inevitable as a billion tons of salt-
water flooding over me.

Infinity
without fear, without flight from
inescapable abundance and beauty,
just as Calypso, letting go,
allows me to lift up
like seaweed
in that first translucent swell.
helen
By Kathleen Healy, in response to What Is Reflected by Dale Michaels Wade

beware the ones who sail by
in paper boats with pillowed sails
attempt to redirect you
shape your character
write your lines

from two dimensions
they will round your sails
with their own motivation
create new needs
and swiftly meet them

when at last you find
your own direction
define your character
improvise lines
dispute blocking

you will step off the page
and fling the others
hurling toward the ether in your wake
caught between two places
in a world that isn’t

they will haunt you now and then
with pleasant scents
on breezes
reflections in the water
familiar music in your ear

your sweet face
will someday launch a thousand ships
do not lie too long here
toy boats are incapable
of keeping you afloat.
And when I move, things will be different
By John Bonanni, in response to Held by Nicki Palmer

Everything in this town is closed--
Unless you're wearing a secondary color,
you won't fit in. Take,
for example, the bakery
on Center Street. The one
that's had that orange face
for years, with all the women in pinks and purples
exiting into suburbs, their bags full
of extra skin tone. In the north
east, the blue-gray restaurant
stretches the length of the block.
There's no tables left there.

At least not for our kind--
we weren't washed unpurpled enough.
And in the east, there's that brick
building that houses all the young people.

We weren't invited to their party either.

They only have enough paper plates
for their smooth skinned friends, red-faced on the patio.

And as for the jazz district,
hovering just east of center,
the blues clubs took over,
cackling to us at each doorway--

It was a Friday. They'd reached
their occupancy. Fire code.

And from the outer edges,
we could hear the real fire roaring.
We didn't bother to search for it.

We kicked a blue mailbox on our way home in
protest. And it rained. And when it rained, one
couldn't even see what the other one looked like.
She, Spring
By Lauren Wolk, in response to The One by Richard Neal

Lemon light and the blue of robin’s eggs rocking as their cargo stirs.

She is glazed in these and what insists on rising as April comes:

the green of shoots butting out of their paper hulls, feeling their way up

through the mustardy clay, the mealy dirt still keen with frost,

the agony of almost-there, almost-warm, and of beginning anew when so much else has ended.

It’s in her bones and belly, this business of youth again, this violet thaw that bruises at the very thought of touch—

but to be touched, to thaw ... this prospect drenches her in a citrus gloss,

trims her in the prospect of Queen Anne’s lace—in truth the broaches of wild carrots thickening underground,

savaged by tiny blind beasts and portly grubs, doomed to quick consumption or indigestible old age.

It is the idea of small, white blossoms that urges her to bloom, regardless.

To flower while she can. To open. Despite everything.
LAST WAVE
By Robin Clarke, in response to *Sunset at Grey’s Beach* by Lois Grebe

Pink sky
dips to ash,

shadows foretell
dusk,

setting sun
casts eerie light,

I straddle my board, and watch.

Swell rolls in
from ocean depths,

propelled by
cosmic pulse,

paddle hard,
mount the crest,

one with motion, motionless.

Moon rises with
its star,

murky brine
turns ominous,

one last longing
look at waves,

I surrender to the night.
king’s highway
By Christine Rathbun Ernst
In response to My Drive to P-town by Carole Ann Danner

I always take the old way scenic route longer
but lovely winding down through town
then out and up past the last farm standing that is now mostly a
farm stand selling jelly and expensive pies to tourists
past the giant oaks close to the road
past the crabapples that are like the three graces in may
the big house in the dell on the left just before spring hill
has been going up since fall
in the footprint of a lesser dwelling a tear-down
the postwar ranch and detached garage hoved in and turned to landfill one day last september
I am skeptical october I grimly await the city-architect take on olde cape cod cedar shake colonial warehouse triple gabled nouveau saltbox three-car garage lexus in the driveway trophy reproduction summer home complete with brass pineapple door knocker and the mailbox number rendered in poor richard’s almanack
but it rises elegant unlikely at home on its low-slung acre like it’s been there for centuries and and the view of the sea the view from what will be the second floor bedroom window the view well the view so the house framed out october windows doors november farmer’s porch christmas
I watch it become someone’s home weekdays over winter on the ride from preschool drop-off to work and even as I guess at the millions the slate floors the quality of the doorknobs the septic variance january: I love this house
tuesday february two guys in carrharts on the roof
windy day clouds like frigates the air the light the teal plank of the ocean I honk as I drive by bey house! bey you guys on the roof! and though the house is not close to the road one of the guys hears me honk he waves as I slow down I see him I wave back honk again and he thrusts his arms into the air like a king gestures to the sea then to the sky or maybe god and I can’t hear him but I know he shouts I know right? like he’s the luckiest guy in the world like he was waiting for me like he knows that I know he’s the luckiest guy in the world and the view the day the clouds the old road are all ours
IN THE MOMENTS BEFORE THE FALL
By Eir Lindstrom-Holmy, in response to Fragile by Tom Lauria

When everything precious is still whole and unbroken
The most valuable things flow casually as a breath, a heartbeat,
Sun gently kissing the runners as they near the finish line
Ordinary things, not fading embers in sudden endless night
No one agonizes over what they might be doing differently
There is nothing to undo, no call for a time machine

There are so many ways
The world can end, you see
Just some small thing
Like a virus
Or an atom
Or a cell
Or a dying honey bee
For every heart
One thousand small
Apocalypses

But in these moments, futures are unwritten
And there is no nightmare to wake from
Hearts are not burdens re-forged in lead
There is ample milk and honey
No bitter taste in our mouths
No knot in our guts
Nothing to untangle
And there is still time

These are the moments of our lives
Can you taste their fragile sweetness?
There are so many ways
The world can end
You see
WAVELength
By Paula Erickson
In response to Just Crashing by Odin Smith

Before this shaft
of light between us,
this rosy language
of clemency,

There was a silent
spiral inward,
the snug closure of
operculum door.

Before that years
of red shouting
a bruised pounding
of words.

Before that, pouting
in the big green chair
and crying
for no good reason.

I have tumbled
smooth the jagged
stones made pearls
out of grit.

Beloved,
this frequency is
no casual music
to my heart.
At this depth, 2400 meters, the Earth’s lungs –
if we can call them that – are blue not pink,
so many magnitudes of benthic blue
than we have words to name.

White is not light but a mat of bacteria
glued to the rocks at the vents,

turning hydrogen sulfide into sulfur,
chemosynthesis utterly unhitched

from the sun’s green alchemy
by which all that we know dies and lives.

None of what is sacred to us survives
where chimneys accrete from the molten core,

belching our forebears into toxic supersteam:
hydrogen, carbon, oxygen, glittery copper, zinc.

This is the world reversed, domain of light’s orphans:
white clams, anemones, limpets, docile mouthless
tube worms, snaggle-jawed nereid worms,
barnacles tracing their line back 153 million years.

Five hundred creatures newly found thus far –
feeding, swaying, procreating in self-luminous

opposition to millennia of science and belief.
What if you and I did not arise from heaven’s light –

from God’s prime thought or an asteroid’s
kindling dross -- but from the lethal spew

of black smokers, the non-alive blundering
towards mortality and a fissured mind?
MODEL
By Lynn Stanley, in response to *Musing* by Shawn Nelson Dahlstrom

It’s my job to be
undraped as a newborn.

Call it life; call it art:
try to draw
the borders of my heart.

I model life
I am I think
I see you and
I do not blink.
**Empty Metaphor**

By Pia MacKenzie, in response to *In the Beginning* by Michael Giaguinto

Two outlines, not a man or woman
SETI charts, side by side in
space like a desert offered,
no garden, just a dead tree,
black arms twisted
over golden emptiness,
perhaps some blank planet.

Here is no birth, no origin,
no tree of Life or Wisdom
no grace, no temptation,
no embrace, no affection.

Two not-people stare forward,
not face to face, measured by
a line from eyes to genitals.

Only to the fake snake,
the outline man offers a
vague and bulging gift,
hidden from the outline
woman.

Here is no life to lose
no insight to lust for,
no inner light, no outer dark,
no joy given away, no exile,

no God to hide from
no bodies to be naked
no price to pay.

So, what is the offering?
You feel the creature arching its back & galloping on, though as usual much is watery & flimsy & in too high a voice.

Virginia Woolf

FADE
By Lisa Nickerson, in response to Blue by Jeanmarie O’Clair

Like sunburn on the cusp
of a long ago September

or hesitation in the wind
to move a season

beyond a boy with hazel eyes
caught biting

a granny smith apple.
Eve always takes the fall

for devils in leather jackets.
The ripe fruit

the scrapes & bruises
when desire
comes as a honey-tongued
bee-stung angel
vulnerable in the presence

of end to end rainbows.
Short skirts and then
child-birth

the slow death of one
then love again rising from the dirt.