

# Gather in Poems A Virtual Reading

Tuesday, April 13, 2021  
7:00 pm via Zoom



*This program is supported in part by a grant from the Worcester Arts Council, a local agency, which is supported by the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency.*

Poems are presented in the order of the reading

Jonathan Blake

TENDERNESS AND TOUCH

Even as a young boy I knew  
The peace and power  
Of the garden. His age now  
My grandfather returns to me  
In the breaking winter light  
After the storm. It is the time  
Of long summer shadows, an early  
Charcoal fire and tending thick cuts  
Of meat once wrapped in bloody  
Butcher paper, tied tight  
With string; the time of the last  
Flowering before we dug the bulbs  
As big as my small fists, stored them  
In wooden boxes on the cool dirt  
Floor of his cellar.

I can smell the jars of kerosene  
Where rose beetles floated  
Like constellations of the season. I know  
The balance it took to walk  
The crooked stairs out  
Of the sun and into the darkness,  
Each tool in its place, each hanging  
Peg upon peg above

the oily workbench.  
I knew what dreaming looked like,  
Though I couldn't name it; knew it was  
A safe and still place a man might enter  
And forget the quiet shame each of us knows  
With the failures of our lives, that his  
Shadow was long and strong and solitary  
As the sun fell slowly through the heavy trees,  
And what he saw standing among the long  
Rows of gladiolas, the swaying lilies  
And the iris healed him, was a sweet  
Balm of light and fragrance  
That returned him to the gardens  
Of his mother in Alsace, and that she  
Spoke to him in that soft faraway voice  
Of the dead, like his own laughter  
Rises up in me now; that when he removed  
His wide brimmed hat to wipe  
His brow he resigned himself to loss,  
Understood love, spoke with god.  
I knew then the garden was a place  
A man might stand alone and be  
Unafraid, happy with what tenderness  
And touch might blossom and become.

Published in *Crosswinds*, 2020

John Hodgen

THE SOUND THAT THE EARTH MAKES

(AP) – *Scientists report that each planet gives off its own peculiar sound. One scientist describes the sound the earth makes as “sad.”*

I do not know where the old men go  
When they walk out alone in the night.  
I know they must carry the weight of their lives  
In the curl of their sullied hands.  
I know their children have gone out of them  
And are lost in the world, are ineffably lost.  
I know their wives live their measure of sadness,  
That their hands are both busy and breaking.

I know the old men walk out in the night  
To escape from the clatter of young men and talking,  
That they stand by themselves in the darkness,  
That they hold what is in them for as long as they can,  
That a sound rises up from them, awkward and lonely,  
Drifts through the fields like the cry of a night owl,  
Lifts like a stillness gone up from the trees,  
To where they are going, to where they remember,  
To the endless river of stars

from *In My Father's House*

Nicole DiCello

**If I Could Go Back to February 1963**

I would make Sylvia Plath soup—

A clear broth of new

Potatoes, spring turnips, comfort

Then square it on the place-

Mat before her—perhaps

She'd weep as she'd

Draw the first spoonfuls—but I'd rub

Her back like a nurse-nanny

While she inhaled wet sobs

On her cigarette. Nothing

Would peel—or perhaps

The corners of the linoleum

In their waxy rigidity would

Curl like rebellious teenagers—

But none of it would matter

We'd cackle over the cocktails

I'd pour—to hell with health—

The birthright of men—what we'd revel in

Would be more wicked—to alight

The descending staircase—a pivot  
Of hooves—hips—breasts—

Our mind's mausoleums twining  
Like clematis—that purple-starred  
Beauty, ordained—foisting

Lit nightmares on semiotics  
Not yet keen enough to keep  
Up—brave enough

To truly listen—I am legion  
Of her—would whisper this  
In her ear—

Root-mother—Witch-mistress—  
Not mad but peripatetically  
Genius—bleeding her grievances

Tulips & Eye Motes & Cauldrons  
Onto all those sacred papyri—footpaths  
Of some Byzantium ur-goddess

Illuminating the dark—

**Jane Awake**

Frank O'Hara

The opals hiding your lids  
as you sleep, as you ride ponies  
mysteriously, spring to bloom  
like the blue flowers of autumn

each nine o'clock. And curls  
tumble languorously towards  
the yawning rubber band, tan,  
your hand pressing all that

riotous black sleep into  
the quiet form of daylight  
and its sunny disregard for  
the luminous volutions, oh!

and the budding waltzes  
we swoop through in nights.  
Before dawn you roar with  
your eyes shut, unsmiling,

your volcanic flesh hides  
everything from the watchman,  
and the tendrils of dreams  
strangle policemen running by

too slowly to escape you,  
the racing vertiginous waves  
of your murmuring need. But  
he is day's guardian saint

that policeman, and leaning  
from your open window you ask  
him what to dress to wear and  
to comb your hair modestly,

for that is now your mode.  
Only by chance tripping on stairs  
do you repeat the dance, and  
then, in the perfect variety of

subdued, impeccably disguised,  
white black pink blue saffron  
and golden ambiance, do we find  
the nightly savage, in a trance.

Mary Fell

In Coal

The sun gets up and lords it  
over the stooped hills. Below him  
Brood and Blue, those bent old women,  
Shake out their sooty aprons at the town.

Going out, my husband lifts

His arm against the light

That hurts his eyes.

Last night he saw timbers falling

In his sleep, his hands

Digging air as if it were dirt.

I've sunk all I've got in that mine.

All day I feel its mouth at my neck

like some rich old landlord

I owe back rent.

I'll spend this morning sweeping

dust out to the shack.

It's the one thing I can count on

sure to come back.

Tonight when sky turns anthracite

And one star burns, a miner's lamp,

I'll take my wish to the gate

and wait for him

to rise one more time. He'll have  
two dollars in his pocket,  
a coal-black face. He'll be wearing  
the moon in his mouth.

From *Persistence of Vision*

Bill Tremblay

Summer of Love

In the beginning was the cliché.

I'm half in the bag all the time,

Lubricating my

contradictions. My wife slapped

me for scaring the kids. I asked

a shrink, Which one of me

has the hollow leg? She said

a power suit will hold your self

esteem together. I parked outside

my goldfish bowl gunning my engine

until it screamed bloody murder.

I'm so American, a puritan hedonist!

I shouted, in a fit of self-analysis.

I'll write myself out of this

pickle, use only infinitives, stop

passing the virus. But as I scanned

the words began to divide, divide.

An eraser would not be enough.

I thought. I need a stroke

a rainstorm over the alphabet

*From Rainstorm Over the Alphabet*

My Student Asks Me How I Know

Jennifer Freed

that north is north. How,  
if I look at a map of the world, do I decide  
which puzzled shape is home?  
And in the picture book I gave him, how  
can it say pyramids date back four-thousand years  
if all the years we count, each time we write the date,  
are two-thousand twenty one?

My student is 27, or 25, or 29—he does not know  
for sure. He does not know  
of dinosaurs or Darwin, of Santa or satellites or cells or germs,  
but he knows how to find  
the best bamboo,  
how to cut it, carry it, transform it  
into walls and floor and roof to last  
three rainy seasons.  
He knows how to spear a fish,  
how to shroud the dead.  
He knows the language of his people,  
and the language of the government his people fled,  
and the language of the refugee camp  
where he grew from boyhood into marriage.  
He knows how to write  
a little of all three of these, which mattered little, before now,  
because so few of those he knew had ever needed

written words.

And now he's learned to read  
a third grade book  
in English,  
to drive a car, to walk in snow,  
to use library, laptop, bank.  
He's learned to live with a silent tongue in a text-rich land  
whose people carry Moses, Medusa, Mars, and the moon  
as lightly as pennies in their pockets.  
He's learned how to stack packages  
all night, and go to classes  
in the day, and to keep going, day after day, in a language  
that points to holes in the world he thought he knew,  
holes through which he hopes to climb  
into another life, easier  
than this.

Previously published in *Off the Coast*

Joe Fusco Jr.

Knuckles to Knuckles

My wife goes to bed at 10 pm,

She has work in the morning.

I stay up and watch Fox News after taking my Ambien,

I like feeling unsettled.

When I join her in the bedroom, my wife is sleeping on her back, her left hand outstretched.

I put on my CPAP and mouthguard then position myself on my right side, my left hand extended.

Our knuckles graze.

My wife doesn't like cuddling or even touching anything in her sleep but I keep the knuckles in place and hope it doesn't disturb her.

We have slept together for thirty-five years now.

Like any couple, we've had our share of joys and sorrows:

Four astonishing children, nine beautiful grandkids;

I've lost my Mom, Dad, and younger brother;

Cyndi watched her Mom pass and Covid-19 took her Dad.

We are both navigating the semi-golden years,

God knows how much longer we'll keep our health, our house, our connection.

I just know we'll try, knuckles to knuckles, to carry on.

Jenith Charpentier

### **Under the Bridge**

I dream of teeth shook loose, wake to run my tongue along the edges still present and sharp even while I sniff for signs of blood, even while I check my sheets for debris. It's a cliché dream. I try to remember what my teacher told me it meant - all those teeth coming free in my head while I press my hands to my sealed lips. There is no relief in finding my face intact. I measure, brew and drip coffee. It smells like soil or clay or mold. The steaming mug sits and cools on the edge of the table. I don't take the warmth into my palms. I can't stand the thought of opening my mouth today - I've no idea what might fall out.

**I Never Knew Bukowski, And Most of Our Mutual Friends Are Dead**

By Victor D. Infante

There's a shot of bourbon waiting for me at the Reno Room in Long Beach, California.

Not my favorite bar, not the seedy dive it appears in Buk's poems  
But the one where all the young poets went to chase his ghost,

like he were shuffling back there, between the pool tables and the upscale Mexican food.  
Even Long Beach changes; even Worcester changes; even all these working class towns  
I felt so comfortable in transmute to something new over time. That, or face extinction.

In Worcester, there's a tapas bar where Emma Goldman's ice cream shop once stood.  
The restaurant actually *is* one of my favorites, although the prices make me plot sedition.  
I don't think about anarchy when I'm eating there, at least not often.  
There's not likely many alive who remember Emma Goldman personally.  
She died eighty years ago. Bukowski died in 1994. I knew lots of people who knew him.

A lot of those folks are gone now –  
Lost to cancer or COVID; or moved to Vegas, which is practically the same.

People only get to transform so many times

before we expire, before we vanish into the stories of those we leave behind,  
and when they're gone, if we're lucky, our work remains.

Buk's poems don't care that I was hit or miss with them. They'll live on regardless.  
I liked Frances Dean's poems better, and I worry her writing will vanish with each high tide.  
I liked Gerry's poems, too, but he planted so many they'll be turning up for decades.

Some days, I don't like anything I've written, but that makes no difference  
as to whether any of those words survive or not. That one's not up to me.

Will the young poets ever turn up at Nick's in Worcester looking for my ghost?  
Will they buy a Manhattan because they know that's what I drank there?  
Will it change by then, quirky cabaret bar transformed  
by proximity to a baseball stadium?

Who knows? Nothing to do with me.

By the time that all happens  
I'll be somewhere else.

Maybe haunting a bar  
that was never my favorite,

drinking whiskey  
in another time, another place  
when everything was filled with starlight.

**The Radioactive Artist**

By Tony Brown

The radio today  
brings me the story  
of an artist who builds sculptures  
from radioactive waste.

I sit back amazed  
and listen to a doomed voice  
in full cry  
on behalf of his art.

He has  
his Nuclear Materials Handler license number  
tattooed on the back of his neck.  
He has the stuff of his every sculpture in his blood.

He builds his work  
from the scraps and tools left behind  
in the wake of nuclear weapons manufacturing  
and keeps them in a gallery

that will be off limits to critics  
for 10,000 years.

Someone has to do this, he says.

Someone has to make these things beautiful.

He says this  
and the energy of the earth rises from below his feet  
and the energy of the sun closes around him like a sphere  
and he stands at the center of our modern storm.

And he will die, sooner rather than later,  
having made art that no one will ever see  
and considering it a privilege  
to have done so.

And his art —  
the sculptures  
I will never see?

They made me quit my day job.  
They make me want to fly low  
over volcanoes

to feel that heat  
and bring it back with me  
on a legal pad.

It makes me weep  
to think that I've wasted so much time —  
to think that we've all wasted so much time.

-Juan Matos-

### **Heart, Do Not Tremble**

*For my sons and daughter before Cupido's arrow-*

Heart, do not tremble as you stand before  
the mirror; cast the mortal fear aside  
that plagues you; cling to love; even the score;  
pain awaits him who from himself would hide.

The profound anguish that you wear like skin  
clothes you in fear and makes you wholly blind;  
though you would give yourself entire, you find  
you must deny what that self feels within.

Oh, what a saddened heart! So full of fear  
that your torment has you in its control,  
and yet you deny love when it comes near  
the fragile barriers of your wounded soul.

Do not deny, poor heart, life to your life;  
your breast wanders from delirium to dread;  
be strong in battle; find your restful bed  
far from the place of sorrow and of strife.

On that morning of mornings, you, adorned  
with the sun's emblem of courage on your breast,

will cause fear to fear you, the self-reborn.

Be resolute, the helmsman, self-possessed  
on waters so secure that you will scorn  
forgotten darkness, sorrow laid to rest.

“No tiembles corazón”

Translated by Rhina Espaillat

From: *The Man Who Left / El hombre que se fue*

## Painting

By Gertrude Haslstead

on the back of this old whitecollar shirt  
i paint nightmares and the sun exploding  
cathedral windows and the light always the light  
pattern on the stones at Sainte-Chappelle

i paint black boots and books burning  
i paint you blind because you would tell them nothing  
i paint you free falling from that high windowledge  
before they kicked your door in

i paint trenches i paint the charred  
ribcage of my father's house  
i paint the dead ashgray  
and the light always the light

From *space between* Allbook Books

An Entire Life

Michael Milligan

One night a cold front brought rain.

Then floods.

I remember the dust cloud

days before

the mudslides after.

What in-between hinges the two?

The dry.

The wet.

And at which moment exactly did the first become the second?

Wings                      by Judith Ferrara

Am I dreaming?

For six nights they grew

In sections along my spine.

Bogged down by their weight,

Confounded by their color,

I fly on my back among jittery stars.

Heaven sent?

I don't believe it.

Consider my transformation:

Escort to Kafkaesque killers,

Lackadaisical liars, mudslingers

Gunslingers, necromancers

On their way to perdition.

You sleep while I topple them,

Tumble with them

Until they are sealed in tombs and

Vanquished.

Wings. Webbed. Lacy.

X on my back forever,

Yoke of solitude, flying me through

Zones of history repeating itself.

If my mother could see me now.

*From A Brush with Words*

Amina Mohammed

Beginning again

You see it's time for me to come to a realization that I the reason I never truly healed was because I never did begin again

I never truly moved on

Never truly allowed myself to grow properly

Each time I tried to close that chapter I found myself trying to start all over again

The problem with me starting all over again was that I found myself trying to erase my past

I found myself trying to erase ME

You know I spent years trying to forgive myself from past mistakes

I spent years wish things would have been differently

Years never truly coming to terms with reality

And as such I sought to "start all over again"

And erase the significant parts of my story

Erase the parts of Me that honors who I am and who I stand for

And you see the thing with beginning again is that it allows you to come terms and own All parts of your story

And I mean every single part

Scary huh?

Scary because the only way you can truly move on and create something, anything better

Is to begin again

It has taken and is still taking me time to realize that I can never ever go back

I can never try to change the beginning

What has happened has happened

What I can do is try to change the end

In doing this can enable myself a chance to build bigger and better

So guess I will continue to take big deep breaths and continue to begin again

It's going to be hard but I suggest that we all just take big deep breaths and begin again

Somehow We Survive

By: Dennis Brutus

Somehow we survive  
and tenderness, frustrated, does not wither.  
Investigating searchlights rake  
our naked, unprotected contours;  
over our heads the monolithic decalogue  
Of fascist prohibition glowers  
and teeters for catastrophic fall;  
boots club the peeling door.  
But somehow we survive  
Severance, deprivation, loss.  
Patrols uncoil along with the asphalt dark  
hissing their menace to our lives,  
most cruel all our land is scarred with terror,  
rendered unlovely and unloveable;  
surrendered are we and all our passionate surrender  
but somehow tenderness survives.

Fran Quinn

LENTEN SONG AT PENTECOST

When God whispered through the feathers of the owl,  
I cried. I too once was feathered. I too  
knew Her soft voice.

When moonlight glistened off  
the sea's arching bosom, I trembled. (I must  
try to remember the prayer I said as a child that brought  
God so close I heard Him breathe. His breath still  
murmurs within me, a just fragrance.)

When I become more awake among clementines and  
raspberries I must realize I still know Her music. (Its aftertaste had such a sparkling peace, such  
a deep and colorful silence.

Its echo must be what speaks through my longings.)

When my hand opens and finds yours fits so comfortably there,  
I must remember we walk the road beyond Damascus to where a Third  
Testament writes itself with each step we take. (Our shoes and the sand saying,  
"Him/ Her, Him/Her, Him/Her." These pronouns must end. Neither is right.)

Mike True

WORCESTER, MAY 1986

It's the pleasures of cities  
that one me over to you:  
workers— men and women—  
who speak across centuries go labor  
and love.

As I walk down Elm Street  
from Ashland to Russell  
to a sculpture of a young boy  
and a park in splendor  
their craftsmanship win rich profusion  
says, "Our bodies moved  
through these spaces,  
making architecture, precise and lyrical

in many languages." In silence,  
wooden arches above stone  
echo music of Doric columns,  
mansard roofs, Victorian porticoes.  
Earlier, you wounded others  
into poetry, but me you welcome  
with Florentine diversions:

unexpected gardens,  
hillsides, and  
contented ghosts,  
who charm their winter labors  
into spring.

Forsythia            Susan Roney-O'Brien

From the hall I watched him shatter the orange dishes  
my mother thought unbreakable—  
slamming them against gray tile  
as she crouched, denying milkman, mailman,  
all who came to the house while he was at work,  
who heard quick breaths between her words,  
appraised her body.

Each night

I set the table and when it was time  
we all sat for him to lead us in grace,  
careful to keep our elbows off the cloth,  
careful to eat everything so he wouldn't say  
how ungrateful we were for the food on our plates  
and then, with his leather belt, teach us manners.  
But when he smashed those dishes I ran.

It was still light so it must have been spring,  
yes, May, because I crawled through wands  
supple as whips but studded with blossoms  
to get inside the forsythia cave.

I looked as hard as I could:

each stem was a tight green throat,

each mouth tongueless gold entered by bees

whose furry bodies spun back out  
dusted with pollen,

and watching them

I almost forgot the sounds inside the house  
until my mother slammed the windows down  
and my ears filled with buzzing.

Huddled in the damp earth beneath forsythia,  
straining for silence, I watched night  
billow up from the dirt, sapping the flowers.  
When the crashes stopped,  
she called for me: *Come in Come in.*

from *Bone Circle*

*Dan Lewis*

Manifesto

This is exactly what I mean. In the middle  
of the half-acre dump, piled with broken bricks, old tires,  
and the street sweeper's waste, two bright sunflowers  
stand beatified in the slant light of morning.  
We must over and over again bear witness  
to the wonder of this world. After the bone-rich  
ash is shoveled from the ovens, after the scarred witnesses  
have told their terrible tales, after the weapons have been gathered  
and burned, someone must still have voice to sing. This  
is the only ground we have to stand on, this  
scorched and defiled garden. It is here we must raise  
the cry until our throats tear with the fierce hymn of praise.

From *This Garden*

Cheryl Savageau

**Murmuration of Starlings, Quincy MA Dec 2015**

Flock of birds, good luck, I think as they lift from the trees and start circling, each bird on its own course. In the trees, there is a constant chatter, but when they rise it is only the beating of wings. It could be a scene from the Hitchcock film, birds gathering in threatening flocks, flying with purpose overhead, driven by some inner tide over the gas and subway stations, the fast-food places. The sky suddenly clears and a new being moves, a cloud of birds shifting into one marvelous shape after another. Fish know how to do this, and the plasma rising and falling in the centers of stars, and giant gas clouds drifting through inter-galactic space. And lovers, surely lovers know this, bodies so attuned they move together without thought, each movement a response and an invitation.

**David Williams****Lasts**

Before the first big storm, I get out my old heavy boots. They're cold and stiff, a topographical map of last winter, but I put them on, and they start to soften up. I think of the shoemaker with his rows of lasts, all of us reduced to those few blunt shapes. I think of my mother heading back to the shoe factory the morning after her father told her, scholarship or no scholarship, girls didn't go to college. And I think of the stain going through her fingers, into her blood, and years later cancer. I can't help it, I think of the millions killed with no testament but their shoes tossed in a heap, and the others who, being barefoot, are even easier to forget. If I go on like this, I'll be struck dumb, but the news is full of rumors of war, conjured glories, willed amnesia, and I need to join with everyone trying to say something true. When I remember the Holy Innocents, I forget the Flight into Egypt. Three more refugees made it through the desert. I take off my boots and am pleased to find a little red dust hidden in the seams. I wore these boots in Chaco Canyon. Chaco! Imagine those cavalymen a hundred years ago, confident the Union had been restored and the Navajo contained, snapping their reins, God's own vanguard in the wilderness. And then getting lost. And coming upon those ruins, older than anything they'd ever seen - whirling kivas, room leading onto room, cliffs full of voices and faces - out where they were positive nothing could live! Everyone I have ever touched has put more life in my hands, and entered my blood, and lit my brain, and even now moves my tongue to speak.

**Before the Drum**

Bill Siegel

*for Milford Graves, percussionist/healer*

Tradition says

before the drum was the bird  
was the bird came before the drum  
was the bird's feet the wings flutter  
was the heart beat of the bird  
came before the drum

Tradition says

before the drum was the whistle  
was the whistle of the bird came before the drum  
was the night song of the bird  
came before the drum

Tradition says was first the whistle

before the drum

Tradition says

before the drum was the body  
drum was the body drum before the drum  
was the deeper part of the body drum  
was the heart the stomach  
was the lungs before the drum

Tradition says was first the body drum

before the drum

The drum says  
Was First the Drum  
Tradition says  
before the drum was the drum  
was the drum came before the drum  
The drum says  
*Comes the Drum*

Etheridge Knight

**excerpt from ILU, THE TALKING DRUM:**

kah doom / kah doom-doom / kah doom / kah doom-doom-doom  
 kah doom / kah doom-doom / kah doom / kah doom-doom-doom  
 kah doom / kah doom-doom / kah doom / kah doom-doom-doom  
 kah doom / kah doom-doom / kah doom / kah doom-doom-doom

the heart, the heart beats, the heart, the heart beats slow  
 the heart beats slowly, the heart beats  
 the blood flows slowly, the blood flows  
 the blood, the blood flows, the blood, the blood flows slow  
 kah doom / kah doom-doom / kah doom / kah doom-doom-doom  
 and the day opened to the sound

##### ####

**WE FREE SINGERS BE**

*“If we didn’t have music, dancers would / be soldiers too,  
 holding guns in their arms, instead of each / other.”*

- Father Boniface Hardin

We free singers be  
 sometimes swimming in the music,  
 like porpoises playing in the sea.  
 We free singers be  
 come agitators at times, be  
 come eagles circling the sun,  
 hurling stones at hunters, be

come scavengers cracking eggs  
in the palm of our hands.

(Remember, oh, do you remember  
the days of the raging fires  
when I clenched my teeth  
in my sleep and refused to speak  
in the daylight hours?)

We free singers be, baby  
tall walkers, high steppers,  
hip shakers, we free singers be  
still waters sometimes too

(Remember, oh, do you remember  
the days when children held our hands  
and danced  
around us in circles, and we laughed at the sun?)

(Remember, oh, do you remember  
how we slept in the shade of trees  
and woke, trembling in the darkness?)

We free singers be  
voyagers  
and sing of cities with straight streets  
and mountains piercing the moon –  
and rivers that never run dry.

(Remember, oh, do you remember  
the snow  
falling  
on Broadway

and the soldiers marching  
thru the icy streets  
with blood on their coat sleeves?)  
(Remember, oh, do you remember  
how we left the warm movie house  
turned up our collars  
and rode the subway home?)  
We free singers be, baby.  
We free singers be.

*The Essential Etheridge Knight* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986)

**Paul Szlosek**

**Who-We-Are-Not**

We are not now who we once were,  
evolving from ancestors covered with fur,  
a hairy ape to an erect bare-skin creature.  
Each of us transforming from infant to mature  
adult, from fresh young pup to mangy old cur.  
Our views who we are may differ, but we all can concur  
we are not now who we once were.

We no longer believe with such fiery fervor,  
those passions of our youth no longer stir  
in our hearts, once brazen, now demure.  
Time has become an insistent chauffeur  
driving us to places we would prefer  
not to go. From all this evidence, we can infer  
we are not now who we once were.

From naive to weary, to pro from amateur,  
from being called "Kid" to addressed as "Mam" or "Sir",  
the couple in the photo: I'm not him, you're not her.  
I stare longingly at our past like a voyeur.  
How did we both grow so old? My memory's a blur.  
Of only this, I can be sure -  
we are not now who we once were.

**Ralph Hughes****Villanelle # 1**

Why sweat small stuff, stuff like the villanelle?  
If Life is a bitch and Art's how you feel,  
then Heaven's a scam and no need for Hell.

News of our world exhales an awful smell.  
Our lewd muse makes us yearn for sex appeal.  
Why sweat stuff as small as the villanelle?

If life depends only on what will sell,  
and pop-psychology is Art's ideal,  
Heaven's a scam and there's no need for Hell.

Now, if I had Whitman's yawp and could tell  
the ancient truths our nature still conceals,  
I wouldn't sweat stuff like the villanelle.

Or if everyone's spontaneous yell  
were guaranteed, I might buy the spiel  
that Heaven's a scam and no need for Hell.

But I'm not sold, none of this rings a bell.  
For me, I'll keep my shoulder to the wheel.  
If I can sweat stuff like the villanelle,  
and Heaven's no scam, I won't need Hell.

David Thoreen

Late Fall, Early Snow

Our children asleep at the end of the hall,  
the TV's on mute. People move without making a sound.  
I hear the car turn into the drive,  
go to the door. Her head sweeps side to side.

The TV's on mute. People move without making a sound.  
He died in a room full of doctors. She stood outside in the hall.  
*Go to the door.* Her head sweeps side to side,  
pulled down, held. The simple weight of this fabric.

He died in a room full of doctors. She stood outside in the hall.  
She moves as if in a grooved track,  
pulled down, held. The simple weight of this fabric.  
Snow on the ground. She opens the trunk and takes out his shoes.

She moves as if in a grooved track.  
This unshovelled sidewalk. Time doesn't stop.  
Snow on the ground. She opens the trunk and takes out his shoes.  
She's holding his shoes. The world dissolves.

This unshovelled sidewalk. Time doesn't stop.  
I hear the car turn into the drive.  
She's holding his shoes. The world dissolves.  
The children asleep at the end of the hall.

One Art                      Elizabeth Bishop

The art of losing isn't hard to master;  
so many things seem filled with the intent  
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster  
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:  
places, and names, and where it was you meant  
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or  
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,  
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.  
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture  
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident  
the art of losing's not too hard to master  
though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster.



*eternally dancing between worlds*

Eve Rifkah

*photo by Natasha Hanna*

she conducts the rose-tint sky  
a whorled evening in blues,  
grays, salmons, pinks  
overlaid with a black tating of hemlock

arms rise in thin hallelujahs  
an ecstasy of command  
the twigs of her unruly hair

snap and crackle

has she summoned this chill

through bones and branches

a shiver to exalt the night

cut to black with hidden stars

from *Lost in Sight*, 2021

Louise Monfredo

Packing the Knife – 1943

The sharp knife cuts a bright red scar  
in my hand,  
like a streak of lightning numbs the mind,  
shines cold gray,  
the short handle ghost-white  
from a fallen oak.

How can my husband grasp this weapon,  
carve a path through bougainvillea  
and the human jungle of the Solomans?  
He whittles tops and toy soldiers,  
bobbers and fishing poles,  
and holds me gently in his arms.

Now it is November, time to ship  
Christmas presents overseas:  
candy and cookies, paper and pens,  
sweater and socks, a pipe,  
and a long loaf of bread  
to hold a whetted knife.

My fingers of animal claws  
draw out the soft white heart,  
touch the walls of this cave

filled with emptiness. Insider,  
the knife, wound in leather  
and fine-oil embalmed,  
is laid like a body in a casket.

Wrap each article in guilt and shine,  
Stars of Bethlehem, kisses and tears!  
Pray for Peace in a war-mad world  
full of children carving flesh and fishing poles  
with the same weapon.

Today as yesterday, my hands,  
crimson and raw in lamp light,  
wrinkled and old as mankind,  
handle the sharp stab of memory  
shouting No! No! at silent white crosses  
still gathering on the outer fringes  
of a war-bent world.

From *Thin Ice*