

BPJ

BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL VOL. 67 Nº4
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BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL
Vol. 67 N° 4 Summer 2017

Editors' Note	5
Greg Allendorf	
Days of '15	6
Carrie Green	
Green Heron (PLATE XXVII)	7
Black-Capped Chickadee (PLATE LXVI)	8
Kentucky Warbler (PLATE LXVII)	9
Michael Lavers	
Works and Days	10
Muriel Nelson	
What is knowing if it's not domesticating	18
Afterthought	
When they stop making pennies	19
David Hernandez	
Where Is Ana Mendieta?	20
Felicia Zamora	
Recognize	24
In wake of theories	25
Taisia Kitaiskaia	
Poverty Bucket	26
Rosalie Moffett	
Nervous System	27
Nicholas Samaras	
Target Practice, Requa, California	32
Runaway, Below Requa	33
Gretchen Stengel	
Nowhere but where	34
John Gallaher	
The Principle of Non-contradiction As Public Event	37

CONTENTS

Jona Colson

Las Meninas II (Maribarbola)	38
Las Meninas V (Nicolás Pertusato)	39

Sam Ross

Recommendation (Number 9)	40
Black's Beach	41

Phoebe Giannisi

<i>(Θέτις)</i>	42
<i>(Thetis)</i>	43
<i>(Ιθάκη I)</i>	44
<i>(Ithaka I)</i>	45
<i>(Λωτοφάγοι II)</i>	46
<i>(Lotus-eaters II)</i>	47

translated from the Greek by Brian Sneedan

Okwudili Nebeolisa

Backyard, Morning	48
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COVER

Seth Pennington, design

Winky Lewis, "Mouse in the Window," photograph, 2013.

www.winkylewisphoto.com

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An arrow at the bottom of a page indicates the stanza does not break.

EDITORS' NOTE

We could not be more pleased with the issue you hold in your hands; from Michael Lavers' gorgeous, grief-stricken paean to nature to the evocative strangeness of Felicia Zamora's little boxes, it feels as alive and changing as summer itself. With some sadness, then, we announce that Summer 2017 will be our last quarterly issue. For over sixty-five years, we've sent into the world this "little packet of perfection" (as one young reader put it) every few months, these small but powerful increments a mainstay of our mission, as "*BPJ*" as the soup and bread we share at our marathon editorial sessions.

In spite of that sadness about what we're letting go, we're thrilled—because what's perhaps even more "*BPJ*" than those soup-fueled quarterly issues is a relentless commitment to meaningful innovation, to the pursuit of ever better, bolder ways to serve contemporary poetry. In that spirit, we're proud to announce that this winter you'll find in your mailbox or on your newsstand a longer, perfect-bound *BPJ*—Volume 68, No. 1, reimagined but packed full of everything you've come to expect from this journal. In it you'll find the astonishingly good work we selected from the thousands of poems submitted for the first annual Adrienne Rich Award for Poetry. As we write, our final judge, Carolyn Forché, is selecting finalists and a winner, and folks, she can't go wrong. With each issue, we'll have space to offer more diverse and urgent voices, more of the world-aware and finely crafted poems that are the "*BPJest*" thing about the *BPJ*.

These issues will go to press twice per year, but there's more! Over the years, we've released occasional chapbooks, showcasing the work of a single poet or highlighting movements or issues in poetry or politics. Beginning with Volume 68, we'll release one chapbook per year, and subscribers will receive it as a third, regular issue. (We're already at work on the first one—stay tuned!)

There are other changes afoot—a price increase after decades of holding steady. (Sure—some changes are more exciting than others!) What won't change—ever—is our love for what we do, our love for poets and their champions. We'll keep publishing poems that challenge us to stay attuned to our own lives, alert to our communities small and large, our imperiled and necessary democracy, our imperiled and irreplaceable Earth. We're at work constantly pursuing this mission. We hope it shows—in the ways we stay the same and in the ways we change. We're immensely grateful for those of you who come along for the ride.

—Melissa, Rachel, and all of us at the *BPJ*

GREG ALLENDORF

Days of '15

after Cavafy and Doty

It was summer and his heart was
a stump. He'd appear when the moon did.

He'd haunt the colonnade or gas station,
song gagged and bound in his organ. Thereupon,
thereupon, thereupon—he was always at the point
of tears cactus needles torturing his paws.

He was I and the darkness was realist,
skink among moon rocks, arterial shadow
of the succulents, no sympathy
for any of us. He turned out his pockets and thunder
made infantile work of his mettle. Whereupon

the heart sagged under its apron of fasciae,
the eyes rolled in the head, found no peace.

I was he and he was myrtle-cloistered,

turning 'round in his room like an iris
in its bulb. It was summer,

newly summer, and the locusts
and catalpas heaved sigh upon sigh
of orotone pollen over the microscope
slides of the windows over the pistil
shivering in his mind.

CARRIE GREEN

Green Heron (PLATE XXVII)

First she draws the limb,
 branches stripped to gnarled joints.
Then the pile of twigs,
 stark as November

and so brittle she can hear
 the snap. Virginia settles
the familiar curves of eggs
 into the jumble

and admires the lack
 of fibers and feathers—
knowing, as the birds do,
 that you may as well

lay your babies down
 on a bed of bone.

CARRIE GREEN

Black-Capped Chickadee (PLATE LXVI)

Virginia eases the stump open along the seam,
afraid the decaying wood

might collapse upon its secret. Inside,
even the heartwood crumbles.

She sketches jagged, illegible rings,
the half moon where the birds first tunneled,

edges sharp as a bite. Her lines cramp
near the tree's disintegrating core.

Against the wood's striations,
the nest appears in relief:

a cloud of moss and down
that holds its shape when released

from the cavity's embrace. A tree's heart
hardens and dies a little each day.

How lucky, then, to have the dust replaced
with bits of moss and fur, to begin

again with freckle-spattered eggs.

CARRIE GREEN
Kentucky Warbler (PLATE LXVII)

As always, Virginia begins
with what's before her:

the lining's dark swirl
of rootlets and horse hair,

the rim of vines,
the foundation of dead leaves.

She closes her eyes to summon
the sapling keeping watch,

the oak and elm leaves
decaying on the forest floor,

piled high as the nest,
circling it like a drain.

It's only after she's added
three eggs to the center

that she sees the nest
for what it is:

a tunnel inside her grief,
the eggs peering up like eyes

from the dust below.

Note on the poems: After her death from typhoid at age 32, Genevieve Jones' family completed her book, *Illustrations of the Nests and Eggs of Birds of Ohio* (published by subscription, 1879-1886). Before beginning work on the project, Genevieve's mother, Virginia, had no experience with ornithology, scientific illustration, or creating lithographs.

MICHAEL LAVERS

Works and Days

Light, so heavy Earth groaned like a boat,
the horsemint, milkweed, sorrel, vetch,
red gorse and pink marsh vapours that dissolve
coarse clouds and without losing breath bloody
the moon; a yellow house, a flock of goats
who feed on ruin and wail and will not spook;
the silver grass around the lake, and angels
falling just to feel fall's cadences:

I want to say whatever's missing,
here it is, inside this wind that's reached
the cypress bough outside your window,
waking you. That's all it was. I'm here
now and will stay a while, and then morning
will come. We'll try *The Earth is like unto
a parable: for those with ears to hear*
and *Nature's not a shambles* and, as your mother
put it once, while whipping cream, *Life
will be appreciated or else*, my prodigal
accountings of chronologies which now
belong to me, too soon unsponsored, and to you,
too soon their little heirs, this hope to save you
if not all then something. First things.
Patch work. Before the rains begin:

In the beginning there was silver grass
around the lake where she who made all this
built up a house and multiplied her flock.
He pointed up at her, and she said *Moving water*,
then he pointed to himself; she said *Mooncalf*. He grew
and made small horses do big things and planted
when the stars, he thought, so clearly said
Plant now. But knapweed.

Hawkweed.

Medusahead.

Thistle, marsh.

Thistle, plumeless.

Loosestrife, goatgrass, buckthorn, dyer's woad
are not the consequences of some ancient curse.
They're things, and things are always growing
harder to explain. Man comes and tills the field
and lies beneath. Sometimes fantastic
effort simply fails. We live and die and think

→

there was a day before this sour air, a time
when angels hovered, thick as cowbirds on an ox.
But Earth was never better than it is right now.
Each winter juncos bend their song to dearth,
the Earth's, I think, best rhyme.
Then lynx tracks annotate the trail behind you
where, just now, blank snow. A box of oranges
still faintly green. And sixty-four species of birch.
What is Olympus if it can vanish in a cloud
or Eden if its fences are so small?

■

Autumn was here first;
the yellow leaves do not need your approval.
You're not obliged to sorrow or to joy,
but in seasons of joy, be absolute;
in sorrow, weep and be not comforted.
Some proof demand of heaven but not much;
this is the only planet not named after a god,
the acres where Seth was conceived and where,
feeling he had a special claim, he jawboned
William to the ground. Then there was Mary,
five years old, who screamed in unknown pain
for seven days, until she died. The Earth is full
of evil things, the sky full of the vultures'
patient whorls. So they dug a hole
and buried her and went to bed. And then
got up again. For what? Coffee and milk
and a nice quince jam? What is the best thing?
An apple? Fresh saskatoons?
That's how easily we are seduced:
a six-month winter, but the first loose scab
of ice, the first card table dragged outside
for brunch, stippled in honey, and we're sure
the world's always like this, flaunting
its gaudy maples like new money.
Lynx tracks on the trail right behind you;
light, nothing and everything at once,
that color where greenfinches end
and goldfinches begin.

→

And Seth gathered anew.
And the Lord filled all his granaries, and cattle
well stricken in age were multiplied:
*While earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest,
and cold and heat, and summer and winter,
and day and night shall not cease.*
That was their promise. It wasn't meant for us.
Too many things and not enough forms,
and so we drift. The wind won't turn the torn rags
of our bodies into sails. The milk pail of the galaxy
has spilled; the willows bend and break
and drape their heavy clothes onto the stones.
Days bend and shed their sunlight like a skin
while into pitiless darkness frays the moon.



Somebody wasn't buried fast enough.
Or somebody was kissed, and the sewers
of some vermin's veins, finer than Rome's,
invaded ours until even the hawkweed
shivered in aftershock. Miles of silver birch
unraveled atmospheres of gauze
but couldn't staunch the rheumy, rife,
and restless air. Distance, that old god,
was dead. How can we think of thinking
to explain? *The world is that which happens
to be the case?* Better a love of shaping soil,
upturned rows well tamped, before time
stops to catch its breath, set down its spade,
and scrape its boots of you; small order, finish,
straightness realized; harvests of sweat
and sound perfection, absolute
control over a practiced hand that can exactly
hover like an osprey in a sunspot's sliver,
still inside the faddish current
of hot air by vast fine-tunings
of its feathers' flickering, or fold
and fall, gutting the salmon-colored air,
a limitless dominion
over small but salvageable fields.



The bees grow louder right before a frost.
Better some botched opus than a perfect silence.
Better a century of creaking floors
and carpet she capitulated to
to cover bloodstains and the smell
of afterbirth the hardwood exhaled
in hot sun. Better, even, the goat
army that sacked it, breeding on the beds,
eating the wallpaper, the glue,
the curtains, Shreve's dress uniform,
the roses, the ten inches of topsoil,
than blank fields. Better the lurid steaming
of the windfall plums, the hatchling tensure
when the foaming mooneye bites,
the blood's curt countercoil and—enough:
fewer adjectives, more nouns. *Serein*: a fine rain
falling after sunset from a sky in which
no clouds are visible. *Serac*: a ridge of ice crowning
the surface of a glacier. Ants queuing
to higher ground, the prairie sounding charlock,
rapeseed, Job's tears, milkweed, sorrel—
faster, before everything goes, let's put them
in our little book: the fireweed, the wood lily,
the whispering of snow.



I'd yield everything and live well on a line or two
of winter sedge, the mare's salt lick, a muddy spring
where some slim muse would say *Fatten your sheep,*
and then be silent! But your birthright
will not be abridged: abundance also
fell under our stewardship. And joy.
Ann made a dress, a white pine was a witness,
and what rings they had
spread from a rising trout. Granaries, half built, rose
no further, and the wheat fermented into
fumes that made even the mayflies dizzy.
We were the only yield that year, the ears
a honeymoon's hexameter conceived.
Whom would their temperance



have pleased? Remember
all the silver grass around the lake?
All kinds of things exist. Why shouldn't we
be happier? ...*a world which though wicked
enough in all conscience is perhaps as good
as worlds unknown* is tempting, I agree,
but no. Salvation from our smoking detritus
in clichés of *a better world?*
Unsatisfactory. The end must be
to cultivate perpetual astonishment
right now and watch light bail
darkness from the flooding sky.
Earth's earth. The rest is silence,
and I've had enough of that already.
Gods, and Mooncalf naming grasses
by the sound they made in wind, then Shreve,
Mary, five Wills in a row, then Beulah,
then the quack touch doctor who preached
mostly Babylon and knew the resting place
of Noah's ark, the names of all the priests
of Baal. And then Lord Al, of nothing
that we knew, and all *nomina dubia*
the night will swallow in its senseless sea.
*Do not the chaste lines of this ark
deny the dominion of space?* It doesn't matter—
just keep going: Afton, Mom, me, you,
the little center of this crumbling chiasmus,
you, me, Mom, and Afton, who filled
fifteen black folios with clippings:
brown blue-ribbon calves, the nurses' strike,
fat birth announcements, lean obituaries,
Sarajevo, Munich, D-Day, each faded
photograph a little grave of light.

■

When the moon threatens to jump if you heed it,
keep your head down, hoe your acre, think
*This is the row I will consider now. This one,
no other.* And yet, aim at no less than all the world.
Mooncalf lay with Beulah. Elizabeth

→

bore twins so early they were kept in bread pans
in the oven for a week. That happened—
not just another of my indolent exaggerations—
in the season of blue damselflies, when all
the violet saxifrage was still in bloom
and swaths of wapiti browsed the mustard fields
and diamond willows courted, coiffed in crows.
This had something to do with soothing you
and calling, with dumb songs, your nightmare's bluff,
with turning fear into some air that can unravel
wind before it tears more genera
out of the tree of life, and you wake up
to ravaged, famished versions of reality.
*What about I did not, however, commit
suicide because I wanted to know more
about mathematics? Too academic?*
*The beauty of literature: I lose a cow,
I write about its death, and this brings me
in enough to buy another cow. Too literal?*
*It should have been impossible not to love
all things in a world so filled... I cannot
make it any clearer: there were
lynx tracks on the trail right behind me.
Too many things and not enough forms.
Not to add to the stock of available
reality but rather to describe existence
and convince ourselves to it, to walk
the field's length and then walk back. Repeat.
It's simple, but I've lost my way.*
Sixty-four species of birch. Fresh saskatoons,
the strings of bees that sow the wild rye west,
Heaven and Earth, what else? Commit it all
to memory: the silver grass
around the lake, the small hole in the snow
from which a thin umbilical of breath
upcoiled from the bear's enormous sleep,
that uncle throwing Hesiod in the fire—
First the Tower of Babel, and now this.
*What could I learn from someone
who spells labour with no u. Barbarians, your poets.*
All connoisseurs of shade. Shepherds,

→

MICHAEL LAVERS

I pointed and said *Look...* But you
weren't even there.

Man comes
and tills the field
and lies beneath.

In the beginning, silver grass around the lake.
I'm here now and will stay a while,
and then morning will come.

Rest,
crow. Rest, dove. Rest, rest.

And so she wept
and knelt down, kissing the earth,
saying *Here is a good land: a little
clover and a little sedge; here I will build
a great house and till fields where my goats
can multiply*, carving the future plot
in creek sand with her foot. And this is all
that's left. It's all I know.

MURIEL NELSON

What is knowing if it's not domesticating

yelling *what's the big idea* when a thought doesn't behave?
It's incorrigible, you say. No sense arguing.
Hold it, they say. Hard to hold still, though, or fall asleep
when you're sleeping with it—or not—
with that nonstop drum in your ear—snoring
with it if you try again and then eyeing it over cereal.
Taking it personally? Getting close? *Thump thump thump*
Seeing its wrinkles over coffee now? Signs of wear?
Why won't it curl up docilely and pull its book cover
over its head? Why does it want to scare you more
watching the "real world" out there? As gorgeous
rippling costumes sway crowds, those big-idea eyes stare,
not like the kid in the emperor story
but worse. The reverse. They see under
the clothes, under robes so long not a foot shows,
and there they see no one.
Not a soul's in there. None.

MURIEL NELSON

Afterthought

When they stop making pennies

how will we know our thoughts?
If I tell you mine, will you want change?
Will you have buyer's remorse?
Some say there's inflation now. Do you want my two
cents plus a great pompositor for president?
The air's mightily heated, too, but so far no fist's
punched down rising clouds. Are you a fan
of *pianissimos*? Of floating cumulus, seeds, dust, s's?
Of the need to lean in close for whispered secrets?
One singer spins his voice out to a long, fine
thread, muscles working hard below like the wind
a spider rides to start a web. Another I know keeps her mouth nearly
closed, her big voice free and soft inside as if her secret's loose in
the room next to yours, and your ear's to the wall. What more do we need?
Well, maybe a cello for me, too, to play us out. And the letter A, that original
ah when a breakthrough's hushed and airy at first like wings
of large birds brushing leaves before the round vowel rolls out. And then—
here's your change—the privilege to hear and relive
bright moments again and again.

DAVID HERNANDEZ
Where Is Ana Mendieta?

and cross the threshold to continue

doing what was loved

while alive, signing every second
the contract made by breathing.

Over and again returning to the natural world

for materials, turning it to canvas, its shores
and riverbanks,

its creeks, the cracked
mosaic of parched earth,

grassy fields shuddering from gusts

from Iowa to Mexico.

What a mysterious and bountiful canvas
to breathe in,

to work in, the way it lingered
following a day's work,

its lush scent

rising from that content and weary body.

■

Here, the person known as Ana Mendieta
is nameless. Here, shapeless

and pronoun-less, without a self.

Here, dreaming of terrain and given one,

dreaming of body and given one
so hands can excavate into the landscape

the abstract shape of a woman.

In death, see, dream and given are one.

Do you understand? If there is distance
between the two, that is want, and want is

DAVID HERNANDEZ

for the human heart. Want is why
the sweet juice from ripe fruit

seeps down the back of your fingers and
around your wrist bone

and rivers along the slow curve of your arm.
And want is why you weep.

■

Here, there is no here

where the making continues.

Hands shape a woman-body

and she becomes the absence

in wet sand. She fills

with ocean and reflection,

mirrors the sky as clouds

glide across her torso,

across each limb, the keyhole

of her face. When she releases

the ocean to the ocean, the clouds

dissolve, and dreaming brings

tempera powder, shower of red

to make her shape luminous as

lava and stars and blood and want.

■

DAVID HERNANDEZ

Camouflage, it is called. How the body disappears
and is seen

only if you look
carefully, as if to say the body is

one with the tree. It is. It is also one

with the mountains,
burning or green.

And one with the undulating ocean.

And one with the gauzy clouds.

It is one with the leaves shifting above you
and one with the unpinned ones
that land in your path
like open, brittle hands.

■

The answer is simple, real as the cells
whorled at your fingertip: Ana Mendieta

is everywhere.

FELICIA ZAMORA

Recognize

& at 42, she discovered her inability to recognize faces; to be told *other can*; to hold a child & be in disarray of name. In the mirror game played; *name you*, then consider not. How we all consist of lovely say *inadequate*; your ankle missing flesh, think think *bike accident*; how at sleepovers you told & retold, *handlebars*; *sear of asphalt*; recognize, how *story* exists, each in *now*.

FELICIA ZAMORA
In wake of theories

A bell tower withstands in Amatrice;
how quake chose & left with such
nonspecific specificity; edifices torn
say *historic*, say *stone* & bodies scatter;
how we report in awful numeration;
say *what toll*; the ache in ventricles in
absence; & the crust of the Apennines
thickens in ascent; *O Gravity O; pull us*;
say *apart*; how none exempt from
obligation, from bind.

TAISIA KITAISKAIA

Poverty Bucket

Have I sold my soul to that devil No-Money?
Would I be better off with a cow for a job?
These are the questions, my friends. Shakespeare
trades my wintry impulses for his own bulge.
It all comes from somewhere, especially the legs.
I'm wearing my tuskalicious bangles today.
I'm wearing that wooden heart, the one I knocked out
of an oak, to the lunch party. I have festooned
myself with galleries. Once I had plenty of cape,
but even so the wind from my apocalypse bicycle
blew the velvet open. I never felt safe.
Today, like a carcass in heels, I have found
my Purpose—to rot in a valley of conservative
gnats. I do, after all, have one kid in the pouch
and fourteen dogs vacillating round my wrist,
ceiling fans in an Argentinian melancholy.
My friends! Why don't you come over anymore?
You do incomprehensible things in your kitchens
without me. I thought we were in this together.
You tremble, cobwebs in the giant's dewy feet.
(I am the giant, and the feet.) The bitten apple's
welling juice is my blood trying to reach you.
And that beautiful couple ducking under the trees
of your swollen yard? My friends, that's me.

ROSALIE MOFFETT

Nervous System

It's the one where the wolf spider's silk
sac is separated from her. The eggs,
removed, are replaced

with small lead shot. Mute, round changelings.
They're returned
to the spider. She can be described as frantic.

She struggles to lift them,
to hurry away. Subsequent experiments
show, with heavier loads

she will break even
her legs, so
intent on reclaiming her eggs—

ROSALIE MOFFETT

A scientist, my mother betrayed
sympathy, describing the study to me.
She held spiders

in such high regard, how could I not sorrow
for the spider-mother. Little Miss Muffett
they called me, but I was never afraid, never

when I was little. When it hit me
I was grown: fear my mother would forget me, one copy
of my self deleted,

leaden shape
in her mind
where I once was.

Her blood so thin when they drew it
her arm grew itself a blue-black
blotch, huge. *Too much*

aspirin. The body, in pain,
needs venom—the brain, its mass of castle-cells,
has pain-only traffic routes:

ache and pang and sting travel on channels
velvet tarantula toxin
can block. *To dream you are bitten by a spider*

reveals a conflict
with your mother—but think of the dream,
the idea of a spider the brain holds

like a lit match, a little request
for venom, a little
like my mother: her blue arm, her self

which held my self, an idea
of me, until I was real.

ROSALIE MOFFETT

I don't say I'm afraid to hear
 something final, some certain
end date. *How is she?*

 I employ a polite veer away: *She remains*
in high spirits. Or, depending on who's asking,
 Her lemon tree is blooming

or *Her dog excels in agility class.* Which is true:
 her dog, at long last, can be coaxed
into the narrow tunnel with one cloth end collapsed,

 a thing existing for this sole purpose:
to appear to have no exit. No dog
 likes the way it looks.

One way is to army-crawl in, yourself,
 a treat in your pocket.
Some dogs will follow, and some dogs will meet you

 at the other end.
But my mother could not crawl, could not
 show the dog

it was possible to enter the dead end
 and find a way out.
I don't know what she did, but now

 I watch her point, say *In.*
And the dog crawls in.

ROSALIE MOFFETT

A web: the most practical art. Whatever
the world offers in the way
of sustenance snares in those careful lines.

Every morning the spider
finds a way to string from branch to house,
from solid thing

to solid thing, in order
to stand on what
looks like air, waiting. It's hard

to believe. By this,
I mean we forget there's a space
where we might wait

for our survival to be furnished.

NICHOLAS SAMARAS

Target Practice, Requa, California

I was the skinny blue jeans and thin shirt of fourteen
in that decade of youth when revolt was possible.
My history of bruises and welts had recently faded,
but the threads of scars were visible in certain light.

As I dreamt for another family to claim me, most days
in that house were either dead silence or screaming—
all of my days bursting with waiting. I don't remember
the specifics of the gun, but it was a military rifle

with a clip of fifteen rounds, gold casings.
The fatigued man in that barracked house
lived for guns and pulled me from my books
to practice shooting rats at the Requa dump.

I remember the downhill road into redwoods,
weaving into isolation away from houses
to refuse, the local garbage piling under an open sky.
I remember the rifle in my hands, the one in his.

Told how to sight down the grey barrel. Told
to lead ahead of movement, the quick, brown scurry
through the bags, the rats twitching from one
pocket of trash to one odor of trash. I stood to the man's

right side, a step back, flinching from the blast.
As I also fired into movement, my splinter of thought
said just to swing the barrel to the left, just an inch
for one second, catch him in the side of his head

and be free to run for help, free to be blameless.
He shouldered. I tilted the gunmetal
and squeezed the trigger, how many shots
going off, a nearby rat squealing away.

NICHOLAS SAMARAS
Runaway, Below Requa

Where does a fifteen-year-old go?
For days, I lived among redwoods,
happy in the world of sedge and fern,

cliffside and crash of surf below
the cataracted shore of Hidden Beach.
My life—and my life there hidden.

A week for the marks on my body to fade.
The gulls and terns spiraled on eddies,
the seals barked below the cliff,

the expanse of the blue vista I saw
every misted morning through the forest
down from the top of Requa.

Every brief morning in that hallowed California,
I was grateful for living alone, sleeping safe.
For those breathless days,

I washed my growing hair
by sea surf, warmed myself by driftwood,
spoke to myself over the tide sound,

the whoosh and draw of cove water.
Though eventually hunger, a longer fear,
and isolation drove me

back to the barracks I ran from, those scant days
below Requa were good practice for saving
my life, taught me how to start.

GRETCHEN STENGEL

Nowhere but where

On our borders her thumbs whir round and
round in a lap as wide as a wraparound porch

Hunker down in it

I can feel you, Grandma, jerry-rig a past from the flowers on your dress

Do rag rugs constitute a region?

Knick-knacks?

Are photos of the dead a dialect?

I rest my head on your continental shelf

You say, *My land!*

Not a daughter but a boarder

you cobbled together a country out of nothing at all

Then you had to live in it

Thumbs like paddywhacks propel us back

No place like place

Sour flower dresses are stiff at the neck
head is dirt-encrusted
body a field of clover mustard vetch
with concealments

This field smells of the manure pile
as it moves in the breeze of her chuffings

I love the way she deteriorates
the way her furniture migrates
from room to room
across time

Her undergarments and enema bag snake
in the shower stall in the back hall
beyond the kitchen door

We send her to the brain salon
to have her neurons rearranged

Angora shawls fold and stack

on the high-backed

rush-bottomed chair

In rooms strung out behind the kitchen door
where the laundry chute disgorges—

where milkman produce man trash tin can man
deliver and remove

where incinerators smudge and stop
 heaters flare up snuff out

Way back in there lives a minotaur:
captive
orphaned
beast of burdens

Crowd roars as she rummages in her drawer

The family
 intact
 upstairs

 distances itself from her machinations

JOHN GALLAHER

The Principle of Non-contradiction As Public Event

Living a contradictory life is required. You must hold these truths to be mostly for the rule of others, the street signs and police stakeouts. The kicking in of doors and health codes. When you're in love, you carry it with you. This little thing is nothing, I'm under control. Hell, as Sartre says from an existentially fraught position in Vichy France, is other people. It's not me, it's you, how one accuses others of one's own faults. The sickness you can see because it's the sickness you share. Stamp it out by stamping it out in others. That sort of thing. Maybe the fox is the best one to guard the chickens, then? As long as the fox is well fed and has the ability to compartmentalize. A hungry fox or a loose-cannon fox is no good for anyone. A little chaos keeps things interesting, keeps the chickens on their toes, but a lot of chaos is feathers everywhere, and what were we talking about? We've normalized the fox. The fox is now called Department Head or President or whatever and has this cloak and thick hedge of advisors and functionaries who share the experience of being a nuisance, of getting lost, and of being powerless. When you're in thrall the thrall will rescue you. The thrall will pay it forward. The thrall will fix the math on your spreadsheet. The sin eater, nearing death, can also have his or her sins eaten, as down the road goes farther down the road. The inauguration doesn't need a fact check. What's there to fact check in balloons? In the adhesive backing of bumper stickers? And what was it again we were talking about? Other people, right. You pass them sometimes and wonder about them by waving your arms in the air and shouting. Their signs read Down With Your Kind, so I'm lying down. It's been a long day.

JONA COLSON

Las Meninas II (Maribarbola)

After the painting, she plays hopscotch,
shy, sugar-colored legs vaulting in sudden sun.

The princess watches, her petite laughter
boring through Maribarbola's dreams like a dung beetle.

High up, in another world, clouds cluster and obstruct
sunlight—a *mariposa* rises from a fire-striped tulip,

dragoning down to the fall of an undersized foot,
Maribarbola topples over—shock of bruise—snap of bone,

the *mariposa* darts from the earth-twitch, only to tell
a berry finch how the little girl fell

and how the princess laughed.

JONA COLSON

Las Meninas V (Nicolás Pertusato)

The princess wants him, not Maribarbola,
in the room when she sleeps. She wants
to hear him laugh when the tame dog
licks his face like a soup spoon. She wants
to drift to sleep, pressing a knee or an elbow
into his back and sculpt her world, forgetting
her father's silence, the strict lessons, the pinch
on her left arm—bruising violet before she wakes.

SAM ROSS

Recommendation (Number 9)

—from the Food and Drug Administration's *Revised
Recommendations for Reducing the Risk of Human Immunodeficiency
Virus Transmission by Blood and Blood Products*

Some cities keep making musical chairs
of a home. Some money ends. Shortfall
and away we go. I belong

to a new house. The room lit by the red
roof of the house next door. The first night
three cards: *Magic, Lamentation,*

Liberty. Second night, I cut my hand
reaching for a knife above the shelf
hidden for the sake of a child.

Blood resists form, handful of mercury.
After the hurricane, I tried to
offer mine. After every

disaster, deferred—in spite of a red
sign that says *We are always in need.*

SAM ROSS

Black's Beach

Stripped to swim in the cindered morning,
we go slack in whitecaps.

Then swept far from our clothes,
we lose them. *Who-will-help-us-and-how*

comes after *have-we-lost-the-plot*.
No more wanting what we thought.

We hike up a switchback naked.
Bluffs break past silver rows of fog

burning between cars. It is no dream
we know, the sea—never still or safe

or finished with us. Just this once—
seconds merely—when the breakers mute:

the sky is clear, the water is clear.

PHOEBE GIANNISI

(Θέτις)

Θέτις

αυτή που τίθεται

ίσως

πάντα αυτή που θέτει

όπως γνωρίζουμε ακόμα αυτή

που αρνήθηκε να τεθεί

στον άνδρα να παραδοθεί

γενόμενη

φωτιά άνεμος νερό

δέντρο όρνιθα τίγρη

γενόμενη

λιοντάρι φίδι σουπιά

ώσου κάποτε στο ακρωτήριο Σηπιάς ο θνητός

την έθεσε γερά κρατώντας

με σταθερή λαβή την λεία κατέκτησε

και την έφαγε μέσα στον έρωτα

άφησε μόνο το λευκό κόκαλό της

το κόκαλο της σουπιάς στην παραλία

καθαρό πλυμένο από το κύμα

η Θέτις δεν είναι πια εκεί

φυσά μια ντουντούκα από τα βάθη

της θάλασσας

ένα χωνί ένα μεγάλο κοχύλι αντηχεί

τα λόγια που λένε

«παρ'όλα τα μελάνια που αμόλησα

ο άνδρας με καταβρόχθισε

εγώ θεά αυτός θνητός»

ο πολεμιστής πάντοτε επιστρέφει νεκρός

PHOEBE GIANNISI

(Thetis)

Thetis
the one who is placed
perhaps
always the one who places
also as we know the one
who refused to be assigned
to surrender to a man
becoming
fire wind water
tree chicken tiger
becoming
lion snake cuttlefish
until once on Cape Sepias a mortal
bound her tightly
in an unrelenting grasp and
devoured her in love
leaving behind only the white bone
of her spine
the bone of a cuttlefish on the beach
washed clean by the wave
Thetis is no longer there
a megaphone blows from the depths
of the sea
a funnel a great conch shell echoes
words saying
despite all the ink I sprayed
the man devoured me
me a goddess and he a mortal
the warrior always returns dead

translated from the Greek by Brian Sneed

PHOEBE GIANNISI

(Ιθάκη I)

στο μακρύ τραπέζι μπροστά
- συνδαιτυμόνες άγνωστοι κρασί
κεφάλι τυλιγμένο -
με δάκρυα ακούω το τραγούδι
ακούω να φεύγεις να γίνεσαι ξένος
εμπρός στην τηλεόραση όνειρο
η γλώσσα σου δεν μου ανήκει
ιστορώντας το στόμα ανοίγοντας
ο ξένος θέλει να επιστραφεί
σεντούκια δώρα φορτωμένος
νύχτα όπως τώρα με καλυμμένα τα μάτια
και οι σύντροφοι θα λάμνουν
και η βάρκα Ύπνος
πριν γίνει πέτρα προσωρινά θα δέσει
στην παραλία
με την πηγή
των μελισσών τους πίθους
τα κοριτσίστικα παιχνίδια
και η σπηλιά
με τις δύο πόρτες
Κλέος και Λήθη
βουβό θα τον δεχθεί
σκεπασμένο στρωσίδια ανάμεσα
στη σιωπή και τη σιωπή

PHOEBE GIANNISI

(Ithaka I)

at the end of the long table
—foreign dinner guests wine
your head shrouded—
listening with tears to the song
I hear you leaving becoming a stranger
a dream I had in front of the TV
your language does not belong to me
telling the story opening your mouth
the stranger wants to be sent back
with chests full of gifts
on a night like this one blindfolded
with a crew pulling at the oars
and the boat Sleep
before turning to stone will tie off
in beach sand
by the origin of waters
bee jars
the games of little girls
and the grotto
with its two doors
Fame and Forgetting
will accept him without a word
dressed in sheets between
silence and silence

translated from the Greek by Brian Sneed

PHOEBE GIANNISI

(Λωτοφάγοι II)

θα μείνω εδώ στην στροφή του δρόμου στο γύρισμα
του κόλπου στην άκρη του ακρωτηρίου στην κορυφή
του υψηλού βουνού στις ανοιχτές της θάλασσας αγκάλες
στην εκβολή του ποταμού
θα μείνω εδώ
τα μήλα κόκκινα τα ακλάδια ζουμερά οι πάτοι
των παπουτσιών δεν φθείρονται
ξυπόλυτος περπατάς με ρούχα ελαφριά
τέλος καλοκαιριού μα ο χειμώνας δεν έρχεται
μπορείς έξω να κάθεσαι την ώρα που νυχτώνει
αηδόνια ακούγονται τα φώτα ανάβουν
εμπρός στα μεγάλα τραπέζια δείπνα μικρά του δειλινού
με νυχτοπεταλούδες δείπνα μεθυσμένα
το φάρμακο το έφαγες
το φάρμακο ένα λουλούδι
το φάρμακο είναι το φάρμακο
η λήθη
το κάθε στιγμή καινούργια αρχή
είναι δεν ξέρω από πού έρχομαι δεν θέλω να γυρίσω
το φάρμακο
το πάντα τώρα πάντα τώρα

PHOEBE GIANNISI
(Lotus-eaters II)

I will stay here at the bend of the road at the curve
of the bay at the edge of the cape at the peak
of the high mountain the open arms of the sea
at the mouth of the river
I will stay here
the apples red the pears spilling over with juice the tread
of our shoes unworn
you go barefoot in light clothes
at the end of summer but winter does not come
so you sit outside until dark
with the sounds of nightingales the lights coming on
over long tables small dinners of twilight
with night-moths drunken dinners
the medicine eaten
the medicine a flower
the medicine the medicine
forgetting
each moment a new beginning
which is I don't know where I come from I don't want to go back
medicine
it's always right now always right now

translated from the Greek by Brian Sneed

OKWUDILI NEBEOLISA

Backyard, Morning

Every morning you go about the house,
waking the people in it, and then prayer—
five decades of the rosary, readings
from the missal a register of rituals.
Everyone else moves like they are walking
in the dark: short sighted, groping, their hands
almost out. Only you seem agile.
The light outside slowly fills the rooms—
what is there else but to fall in love with it,
be bewitched before it tapers off?
In the backyard, your vegetables
are having their unhurried death.
There is no mincing words as you go on
in that mild light, taking them one by one.
Even dogs know when their masters die.
Perhaps it is something in the air,
something with ethereal teeth, terminal.
The backyard is so bare it mirrors the sky.