

# **Poetry by Amalie Flynn: “Ours”**

Poem by Amalie Flynn: “Ours”

---

# **New Poetry by Amalie Flynn: “Strip”**

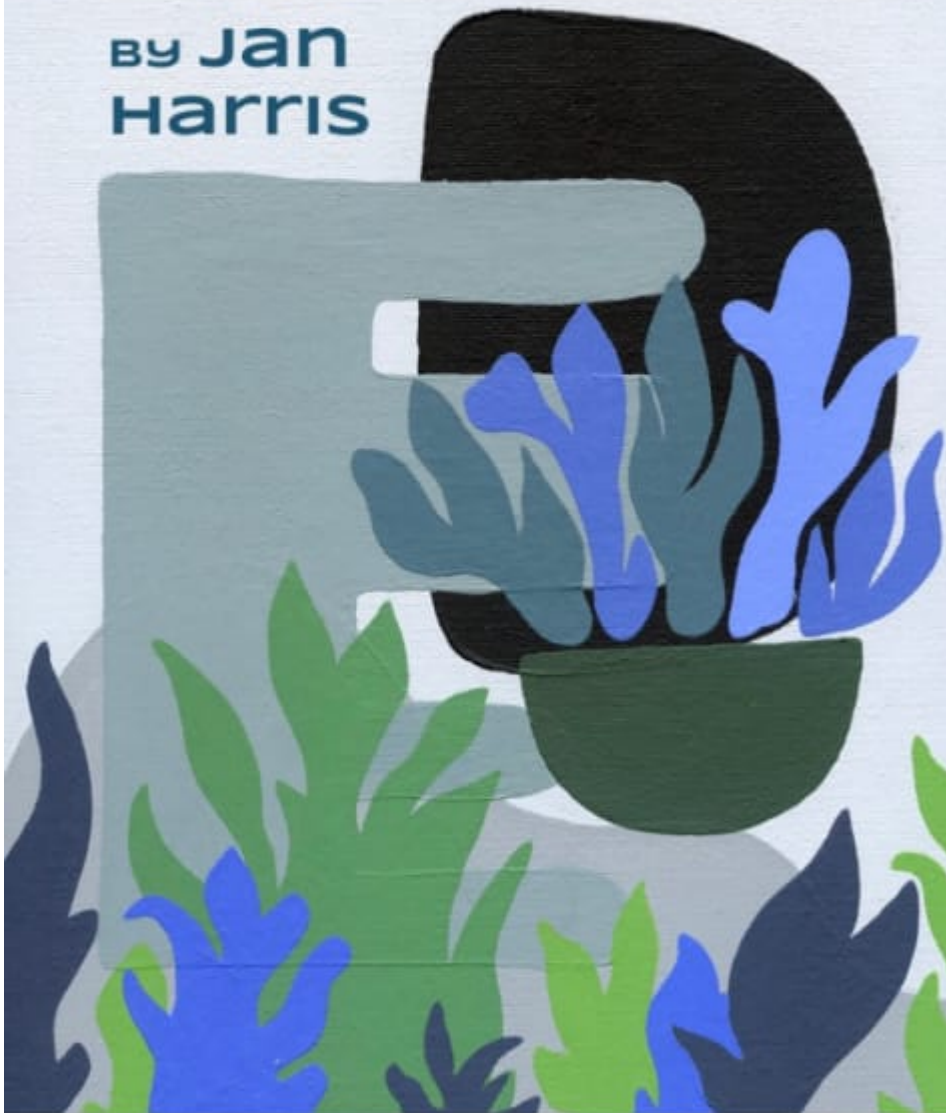
New Poem by Amalie Flynn: “Strip”

---

# **New Review from Amalie Flynn: Jan Harris’ “Isolation in a Time of Crisis”**

# ISOLATING ONE'S PRIORITIES IN A TIME OF CRISIS

BY Jan  
Harris



The poems in Jan Harris' *Isolating One's Priorities in a Time of Crisis* are about the apocalypse.

Or after.

What happens after.

&

After the apocalypse happens. After the world cracks like an egg.

Splits apart. The crushed eggshell membrane and how.  
Covered in fluid yolk we emerge blinking –

*we pass clement evenings foraging among the wreckage  
of shop local boutiques and chain drugstores  
(Season's Greetings)*

*we observe*

*long vacant cities teeming with rats and pigeons dark seas  
replete*

*with giant jellyfish we do not live in an elegant age  
(Mass Extinction)*

&

The apocalypse has already happened in Harris' poems.

Some humans survived –

*in the day-glow light  
our old skin cells flake  
off and drape across, the zoysia grass  
(Marauders All)*

Born again into this.

This fallout world.

And the scale of destruction is ecological –

*ours is an age of salination  
desiccation an interminable heat  
(Mass Extinction)*

&

I am reading Harris' poems now. In this dystopic America.

A hellscape of.

Toxic religiosity. Evangelical Trumpism. Bigotry and brutal police.

Global war and fiery planet.

Pandemic plague. The lack of air. How when the virus inhabits lungs.

We flip the bodies over.

On their bellies like fish. How one woman survived but lost half her upper lip.

From the tube and pressure. Of being facedown for months.

That missing chunk of flesh now.

This fever dream wasteland nightmare America or how we find ourselves.

You and me. How we find ourselves.

Still alive.

&

I write to Harris, saying –

*These poems are about COVID, right?*

*About Trump?*

&

Because *how*, I think.

*How can they not be?*

&

But Harris did not write these poems about COVID or Trump.

She wrote them after the 2018 Kavanaugh hearings.

They are about surviving sexual assault.

&

Harris tells me –

*I guess I've always been thinking about the end of the world. You know I had this Southern Evangelical childhood – very rapture focused. Then, when the Kavanaugh hearings were happening, I was appalled, obviously, and as a survivor myself, I kept thinking about who gets to speak.*

&

Harris' poems are about the apocalyptic devastation of sexual assault.

And the disappointment of unrequited rapture.

About waking up in a destroyed world. How we piece it back together.

Or declare it broken. And live in it somehow.

&

She says –

*I kept plugging on and thinking how do we survive, like in the sense of what do we do with our days, our shames, our broken hearts. How do we open to what's next?"*

&

And yet poems are alive.

Each sentence with words like organs.

How syllables are cells.

How once written.

Poems are alive.

&

And for me. Harris' poems are about.

The Kavanaugh hearings and the assault by a nation that did not care.

Would not believe women. Women who said *this happened*.

And these poems are about.

About what has happened since.

A presidency that assaulted truth and science and equality and the environment.

War. And a virus that has assaulted the globe. Leaving over four million dead.

So far.

&

Because what is apocalyptic can be plural.

How apocalypses are multiple and countless.

Intensely personal and collectively shared.

&

Harris' poems are full of hydroponic lettuce, half grown, empty cul-de-sacs.

Broken call boxes and a rapture that never comes.

Because after disaster there is always aftermath.

Where what is left is left.

&

I met Harris in graduate school in Tuscaloosa.

Where I came and left as bones.

How I almost disappeared and yet.

I remained.

Graduated and moved to New York City where.  
After that summer I would stand on a corner and watch a plane  
hit the Twin Towers.  
Or how they fell.  
And how people jumped and fell and died.  
And how somehow. Somehow I survived.

&  
How existing is this.  
The same as not disappearing.

&  
Harris' poems acknowledge those lost –  
*we saw that some us had been separated  
from themselves and their reintegration  
into the whole was not a possible outcome*  
*we could not replace their inner vacancies  
we could not estimate the size of their lonesomeness  
or fill them with vanities of optimism and hope*  
(Post-Apocalyptic DSMV)

&  
But Harris is focused on survivors.  
The sheer magnitude of what it takes to survive –  
*when we look at the frontier we know we can survive  
deep in us the memory of arid plains and savannahs  
solacing us through our hard scrabble expansion*  
(Episodic Memory)

&

How survival is plagued by loss –

*our sorrows are beyond counting and lie scattered around us in  
the radon dust covering  
our planet's irradiated surface  
(The Average Mean)*

Loss of a world –

*when the worst was over the  
marauding tribes settled down we started migrating  
back to where we had come from we walked through  
shells of suburbs and condo communities  
(Radio Silence)*

Loss of how it was –

*and who could have imagined this cold  
there is no more joy and no time for  
simple pleasures like strawberry jam and  
the other ways we spend our time  
(After the Sun Goes Out)*

Loss of readiness.

How hard it is to move forward.

Or go on –

*we are prepared for what we will encounter  
so long as it resembles all we left behind  
(Time and Duration)*

&

But how meaning can persist.

Found in permeated rock, like radioactive isotopes –

*our predicament has freed*

*us from the oppression of quarterly  
target goals bike commutes having  
three children whose monograms  
match on all their school accessories  
(A Handbook for Resilience)*

**&**

In 2004 I reconnected with Harris. I called her and told her a  
*baby.*

How I was pregnant. Or how she said *I didn't know you wanted  
to do that.*

**&**

Motherhood is seismic. It is a series of explosions real and  
imagined.

The world hot lava active. How my entirety is only this.

Calculating risk and trying.

**&**

Now there is a pandemic.

In the morning my one son bikes to school wearing an N-95  
mask.

My other son is homebound. He cannot leave the house because  
the world.

Is not safe.

How he is disabled by his disability but more.

The disregard of others to wear a mask or get vaccinated or.

Do whatever it takes to end this.

**&**

And I know Harris does not have children.  
But I found motherhood in her poems.

&

There is the fear of it –

*we cannot know what evolutionary biologists will call this  
age we cannot know which of our offspring will survive  
at night we count them and wonder which one will it be  
we search their sleeping faces for resilience we are looking  
for a future we will build with what we have left  
(Mass Extinction)*

How motherhood is a fear.  
Fear of wondering if they will.  
Will survive. The desperation.  
Of wanting them to survive.  
And how ravaged this world is.  
Apocalypse world we are giving them –

*the limits of our perception much like our  
children's refusal to believe us when we tell them that  
limes grew on trees and  
how succulent limes were tree limes and all the luscious  
things belong  
elsewhere they are ancient remnants of a forgotten  
anointing  
(Chrismation)*

Or how mothering in the aftermath is hard –

*we are finding our way back to fellowship but it is perilous  
practice  
to release our fear and allow our offspring to wonder in the  
garden  
to watch their precious DNA drip away when they are pricked by  
thorns*

*(Cognitive Flexibility)*

&  
Harris' poems speak to a collective mothering. Parents or not.  
That we do. Do in this world. Especially one ravaged and torn.  
How we are all connected. Connected by care or our lack of it.  
Connected by our fear and yet love.  
That overlap –

*we too are motivated by the vectors of love and fear  
we live in the Venn diagram between them  
each of us entwined in their corresponding sway  
(Cognitive Flexibility)*

&  
In Harris' poems there is the loss of a promised rapture –  
  
*yet despite all our  
fixations on the last days we never imagined  
the whistling sounds of radio-magnetic grass  
on abandoned golf courses  
(Eschatological Ruminations)*

How –  
  
*we cannot indulge  
these reckless hopes of deliverance the earth  
is indeed a globe whose elliptical orbit barrels  
us toward infinity and even though it rends our  
hearts to confess it no rapture is coming to save us  
(Eschatological Ruminations)*

&  
And the loss of rapture in Harris' poems feels symbolic.

Of what it means to survive.  
How it can mean being left behind.  
Left behind by a religion or rapture or savior.  
The belief that someone or something will save you –

*the  
whole time we dreamt of a superhero  
who was coming to save us every night  
we would warm our bread by the fire and  
lather it with strawberry jam as if to say  
we are not afraid of the hypothetical dark  
(After the Sun Goes Out)*

And –

*at one time we all believe like this that  
our lives would tumble on and then when  
no one was paying attention in a fanfare  
god would intervene  
(Eschatological Ruminations)*

Or, how –

*some flirt with believing in providence but we cannot tarry in  
those illogical  
assumptions  
(The Average Mean)*

Because.

What holds this universe together is something else.  
Or nothing. Nothing else –

*we muster our resources unsure  
of our end our final ablation an offering for the black  
holes who  
hold our universe together  
(Mass Extinction)*

&

Ultimately Harris' poems are about us.  
How disaster connects us –

*Our lives ran parallel until we met in the knot of disaster  
(Many Worlds Theory)*

They are poems about who we are and what we do.  
When we wake up in the aftermath of disaster –

*Our intertwining presented two alternatives  
1. to collapse everything and begin again  
2. to recognize the limit of universes  
(Many Worlds Theory)*

&

How we survive. What we build. How we move forward.  
Beats as the heart of Harris' poems.  
Whereas rapture is unrequited and reckless, the answer seems  
to be love –

*in the latter days we have embraced an enigmatic  
vocation we stand in abandoned cul de sacs and  
radiate love  
(Exclusion Zone)*

How –

*although it is hard labor  
we stand in cul de sacs point our chests towards  
discarded mc-mansions and their derelict hedges we  
begin to oscillate with the intractable surge that vibrates  
between our ribs love pulsates with a ferocious  
diffraction like the nuclear fallout that is still releasing  
(Exclusion Zone)*

Harris admits –

*we cannot know if our work changes  
anything  
(Exclusion Zone)*

And yet –

*rumors persist that deer and  
foxes have returned to Chernobyl's exclusion zone that  
wildflowers crowd its meadows and in the shadows  
green things begin to grow  
(Exclusion Zone)*

**&**  
*Isolating One's Priorities in a Time of Crisis* ends with hope  
–

*we know that something is there because we  
feel it breathing against us reaching past twilight's  
consciousness  
(Modern Homesteading)*

How it –

*whispers that we too must  
die and death will be sooner than we know  
(Modern Homesteading)*

How after the apocalypse.  
We can find hope.  
How there is light in the aftermath.  
Light within us and each other.  
How it radiates out in this new broken world –

yet we  
*will be braver than we think because the light inside  
is the light outside and it's already shining around  
us as we begin to inhabit a world we had known but  
waited for this moment to discover waited to*

*catch our breath before plunging into that white  
burning we call existence  
(Modern Homesteading)*

**&**

Harris' powerful collection is a testament.

To destruction and what remains.

How to rebuild the city of oneself.

How to make meaning out of the meanness of existence.

Her poems offer hope.

That maybe. Together.

We can survive.

---

## **New Poetry from Amalie Flynn: "Married"**



MARRIED TO A MORNING / *image by Amalie Flynn*

*For twenty years I have been married to a morning. Of blue sky that stretches and pulls across me like water filling up a suburban swimming pool. The pit that formed a hole. The bodies falling down as if bloodless dolls instead of kneecaps and muscle shins and thighs hot fingers letting go of metal or chests and ribs an artery that runs down the length of a leg like a hose cheeks that hold in teeth and*

tongues jaw and soft palates or a brain  
inside of a skull. How the sky was full of  
bodies so many falling thoughts fell down  
or how the word *land* crashes and breaks  
breaks and breaks apart on impact. How  
the day still drowns me.

Today my husband is crouched in our  
garden calves flexed. Today I reach out  
and I run my fingers across broad fields  
of skin between the shoulders. Shoulders  
of my two sons. And I know.

How I know beneath.

We are bones.

---

## **Poetry Review of Jabari Asim's STOP AND FRISK**



*Stop  
and  
Frisk*

american poems

J A B A R I A S I M

*"This book challenges the boundaries of the art by being, in a very good sense of the word, documentary." —Robert Pinsky*

1.

They say

Stop-and-frisk

Is a *brief* and *non-intrusive stop* of a *suspect*.

Which can be deadly in America where  
Statistics show being black in America  
Makes you a *suspect*

Even. When you aren't.

2.

They say

In order to *stop*

Police must have *reasonable suspicion* of a crime.

Which can be deadly in America where  
Statistics show being black in America  
Makes you a *criminal*

Even. When you aren't.

3.

They say

In order to *frisk*

Police must have *reasonable suspicion* of a gun

Which can be deadly in America where  
Statistics show being black in America  
Makes you *armed and dangerous*

Even when.

Even. Even. Even. Even. Even when you aren't.

4.

They say

The word *reasonable*

When statistics show police in America are  
*Racist.*

5.

Jabari Asim's poems sing and scream *America.*

6.

And here  
Here is what is true about America.

7.

America is racist.

America is unjust.

And being black.

Black in this

America is dangerous.

8.

How being black in America

Can get you.

Get you killed.

9.

*The Talk* is instructional.

How being black in America means giving the talk

Talk to children.

How there is

A hope it will keep them

Alive.

Asim writes –

*It's more than time we had that talk  
about what to say and where to walk,  
how to act and how to strive,  
how to be upright and stay alive.  
(The Talk)*

But throughout Asim's poetry there is  
A painful futility.

How being black in America means *no matter*.

No matter. What someone does. How many  
Talks they have. How high. Up in the air they  
Raise their hands. Where police can see them.  
No matter how many times  
They do as they are told. During another and  
Another and another traffic stop. No matter  
How many times they  
Say *no* and *yes* or *please don't kill me*

It will not matter

And they might get killed anyway –

*But still there is no guarantee  
that you will make it home to me.  
Despite all our care and labor,  
you might frighten a cop or neighbor  
whose gun sends you to endless sleep,  
proving life's unfair and talk is cheap.  
(The Talk)*

**10.**

Asim gives us America.  
All its unfurled and bloody white supremacy.  
He marches America up and down the pages  
Of *Stop and Frisk*

Like a parade.

And makes us.

Makes us watch.

Makes us listen.

Makes us *watch and listen*.

And wonder *what the hell*.

How I am wondering *what the hell I am doing here*.

Standing. On the grass. Holding an American flag.

## 11.

In *Warning: Contains Graphic Violence and Menace to Society*,

Asim structures the poems as police dispatch calls.

Where a dispatcher sends police to a scene of someone who is Black and doing nothing wrong

Encouraging police to respond

Brutally.

## 12.

The woman in *Warning: Contains Graphic Violence* is a woman

In her fifties. A grandmother armed. With a pink purse.

Walking

Eastbound on 1-10. Or how the dispatcher uses the word *suspect*.

Or how the dispatcher says she will resist by walking away slowly.

And how. How police should respond –

*Throw her on her back and squeeze her between your thighs.*

*Raise your fist high and punch her face until she is still.*

*(Warning: Contains Graphic Violence)*

Or how –

*She may resist by  
continuing to breathe, in which case  
raise your fist high and continue  
to punch  
(Warning: Contains Graphic Violence)*

### **13.**

The woman in *Menace to Society* is a professor.  
Not a menace. How the dispatcher calls her in  
Anyway –

*Attention all units,  
black woman walking  
outside the lines  
near College and 5<sup>th</sup>.  
(Menace to Society)*

The dispatcher warns police. How –

*She may resist by flexing her vocabulary,  
insisting on respect and kicking your shin.  
(Menace to Society)*

At which point –

*consider your life in danger.  
Be advised that promising to slam her  
conforms to university police patrol,  
as does twisting her arm behind her back  
before you throw her to the ground.  
(Menace to Society)*

### **14.**

Asim's *Walking While Black* is an American  
Play  
In three acts.

How it starts with –

*A man walking in the middle of the road.*

*A man walking in the middle.*

*A man walking.*

*A man.*

*(Walking While Black)*

Then the muzzle flash. Blast. And whip of a gun –

*Firing*

*Firing*

*Firing*

*Firing*

*Firing*

*Firing*

*Firing*

*Firing*

*Firing*

*Firing*

*(Walking While Black)*

Or how this American play ends painfully. Predictably –

*A man dying in the middle of the road.*

*A man dying in the middle.*

*A man.*

*Dying.*

*Heat.*

*(Walking While Black)*

Curtains start to shiver. Before lowering. Smattered

Applause. Hands coming together again and again.

This impact of a performance that happens every

Day in America. When you are black in America.

**15.**

Asim's *Stop and Frisk* poetry is a poignant profile

Of a racist America. Heartbreaking poems about  
People who are racially profiled.

**16.**

A man looks for loose cigarettes outside a gas  
Station. Making noise in *Cancer Sold Separately*.

Asim writes –

*Apparently he slept on the surgeon general's warning  
to black men: bellowing in public  
may be hazardous to your health.  
(Cancer Sold Separately)*

**17.**

Again. In *Loosies*. The warning –

*Enough loosies over time can be hazardous to health,  
As deadly as breaking up a fight in an intersection crowded  
With witnesses or dashing through drizzle for Skittles and  
tea.  
(Loosies)*

A man rummages in the glove compartment of his own car  
In front of his own house –

*But a black man in the middle  
of the night knows better than  
looking for loosies beyond his own driveway.  
Safer instead to root around the glovebox  
For that previous, planned-ahead pack.  
(Loosies)*

The man. The man

Rummages in the glove compartment of his own  
Car. In front of. Front of. Of his own house. And

Gets shot at by the police –

*Later he'd say it felt like a firing squad  
when deputies opened up from behind, leaving him  
not only smokeless but sixty years old and shot in the leg.  
Suspected of stealing his own car in front of his own house,  
he thought his neighbor was joking when he heard a  
command to put his hands in the air.  
(Loosies)*

**18.**

This is a profile. Of an unjust America.  
That does not care. Care about the pain  
Of being black and brutalized in America.

**19.**

Of course, there is the accusation. White  
Supremacist accusation of –

*All he had to do was comply and he would not be dead.  
Tough shit and too damn bad.  
(Found Poem #2)*

*In One thousand chokeholds from now,  
It powerfully lingers.*

Or how Asim's poetic response is a  
Measurement of necks squeezed or  
Choked and strangled. He writes –

*One thousand chokeholds from now,  
Black and brown people will no longer insist on access to  
taxis.  
They will not step into elevators when white women are already  
inside.  
(One thousand chokeholds from now)*

**20.**

Because how many chokeholds will it take.

How many beaten bodies. Bloodied cheeks.  
How many  
Broken hyoid bones  
Snapping strangled necks. How many. How  
Many penetrated raw rectums. How many  
Will it take.

**21.**

Or what it does. What it does. To people  
When a country does this.

**22.**

In *We Have Investigated Ourselves and Found Nothing Wrong*  
Asim shows the effects of racism and injustice in America by  
Manipulating font. Using a strikethrough. And crossing out  
All the references to rights. Or how. All that's left are  
words  
And lines like this –

*remain silent*

*broken*

*choke*

*you're next*

*(We Have Investigated Ourselves and Found Nothing Wrong)*

**23.**

Every poem in *Stop and Frisk* is an answer  
To the question of compliance. The accusation  
of *One thousand chokeholds from now.*

Because no matter how many necks get choked.

No matter.

Backs or chests get

Shot up.

No matter how many abdomens get ripped up. High velocity  
Muzzle or shred intestines. No matter how many heads get  
Shot. Bloody hole matted by hair and follicles. No matter  
How many.

**24.**

The. Brutality. Will. Not. Stop.

**25.**

*Furtive Movements* gives us names. A poem  
Made up of names. First names last names.  
Targeted by racial profiling. And brutalized  
By police. How almost all of them are dead.

Killed by police.

**26.**

Because Eleanor Bumpurs did not leave when evicted. How police  
Shot her dead. Because Tyisha Miller was unconscious in a  
broken  
Down car. How she had a gun in her lap or when police woke  
her.  
She sat up and grabbed it. And they shot her 23 times. And  
dead.  
Because when his football hit a police car. How Anthony Baez.  
He  
Resisted arrest. And police choked him. How he died of  
asphyxiation.  
Because Jonathan Ferrell crashed his car. Went to a house.  
Banged  
On the door. Or how he ran at police. And they shot him 12  
times.  
Dead. Because Claude Reese was 14 and standing on stairs in  
such  
Darkness. How police thought he was holding a gun. How he  
wasn't.

How the bullet entered his skull behind his left ear and how.  
It never  
Came back out. Because Amadou Diallo looked like someone else.  
Or  
Did not put his hands up in the air. How he reached in his  
pocket for  
His wallet. But they shot him. Shot him and shot him 41 times  
dead.  
Because. Because Michael Wayne Clark. Because Jonny Gammage  
Did not pull over. Because Oscar Grant. Police had him face-  
down.  
On a subway platform. Shot him in the back close range.  
Because  
Police beat Mohammed Assassa when he struggled. Broke it.  
Broke  
His hyoid bone when they strangled him. Because police hit the  
car  
That Sean Bell was driving. Hit it with more than 50 bullets.  
Because.  
The Central Park Five were innocent. Because LaTanya Haggerty  
was  
A passenger in a pursued car. How police thought she had a  
gun. But  
She was talking on a cell phone. And police shot her dead.  
Because.  
Henry Dumas came through the turnstile. Shot dead. Because  
Sonji  
Taylor was on the roof of a hospital. How police say she  
lunged at  
Them with a knife. But they shot her 7 times in her back.  
Because.  
Jordan Davis. Because Johnny Robinson threw rocks at a car  
draped  
In the Confederate flag. Because Eula Love resisted. How it  
was over  
An unpaid gas bill. Because Michael Stewart sprayed graffiti.  
How

Police hog tied him. And then choked him to death. Because  
Rekia  
Boyd was in a park. Because Prince Jamel. Because Gavin  
Eiberto  
Saldana. Because Aiyana Jones was 7 and in a house that got  
raided.  
How police shot her. How it was the wrong house. Because  
Marcillus  
Was homeless and sleeping in a bush. How he threatened a K-9  
dog  
With a screwdriver. Police shot him dead. Because Rodney King.  
And  
Everyone. How everyone saw. Because Abner Louima got strip  
searched  
Outside a nightclub. Police kicked him in the testicles. Raped  
him at the  
Station with a broomstick. Broke teeth when they shoved it in  
his mouth.  
Because Kenneth Chamberlain was wearing a medical necklace.  
Because  
Julio Nunez. Because Patrick Dorismond. Because Jimmie Lee  
Jackson who  
Police shot in Selma. How he was unarmed. Because. Because.  
Because.

**27.**

Their names are eulogy.

Presented in *Furtive Movements* as a list. Their  
Brutalized bodies paraded out. The letters that  
Make up their names are the drumbeats rolling  
The low guttural groan of a tuba. This screaming  
Trombone. Or how Asim capitalizes some of the  
Letters. These are the lyrics to the song that is his  
Poem. How it reads *FUCK THA POLICE*.

## 28.

But we cannot. Let's not. Forget  
Renisha McBride. Crashed her car –

*Renisha reeling  
Head full of fire, wreck and  
Ruin behind her.  
(Reckoning, for Renisha McBride)*

How Renisha ran to a nearby house  
For help.

For help and Theodore Wafer came  
To the door. Shot her through it. The  
Screen door dead.

Let's not. Let's not. Let's not forget  
How racism and injustice in America  
Is all encompassing. Dark streets or  
Racist neighbors. How a bullet can  
Tear through a screen door like  
Skin. Which is why. Which is why –

*No more odes for the Confederate dead.  
Let's grieve for Renisha instead,  
All the Renishas, the broken sisters crushed to dust  
And bone in our neighbor's tangled pathologies.  
(Reckoning, for Renisha McBride)*

## 29.

Asim makes the powerful point in his poems  
Not to. Not to forget women. Because racism  
And injustice in America crosses and breaks  
Gender lines. Being black and a man in this  
Country means. Getting thrown against the  
Hood of a car. Cheek bone. Zygomatic bone  
Crushed. Horseshoe hyoid bone fractured

From the gripping. Pressing and strangling.

Or shot dead.

But so are women.

And girls.

Because when you are black in America  
And a woman. Racism and injustice in  
America means you may be expendable.

**30.**

Asim's poems *don't start none*, *A House Is Not*, and *Wild Things*  
Offer a portrait of a woman caught up in the racism and  
injustice  
Of America. She is an abused wife who. Finally shoots at him.  
Her  
Abuser. She is –

*A woman wreathed in smoke,  
standing her ground.  
(don't start none)*

And when she misses. Bullets hitting air. How police come.

Drag her half naked outside. Breasts exposed. Outside of  
Her apartment complex and her neighbors. How they are  
Standing and watching and filming. Or police. How there  
Are 12 officers. So many. So many men. Asim writes –

*Good men stood all around all around the good men stood all  
around  
(Wild Things)*

Conjuring. For her and for us. A memory of –

*your great-grandmother  
raped by white men with guns on the dirt floor of a bar what  
she*

*remembered most were those who stood and watched, doing nothing*  
*(Wild Things)*

**31.**

Asim's poetry serves as a gut-wrenching indictment.

How brutality may come in the shape a man's hands make  
When he wraps them around the neck of another man and  
Squeezes until he kills him. How brutality is also standing on  
The stairs of an apartment complex and watching a woman  
Dragged out of her apartment by police. Her breasts exposed  
And the skin of the back of her thighs and buttocks scraping  
Raw against cement.

This is the parade.

Parade of what America is. And who is responsible.

**32.**

Or Relisha. In *Vanishing Point*. A child in a DC shelter  
with –

*A numb mom and three hungry brothers,  
dirt, scabs, bedbugs, and a teddy bear  
named Baby.*  
*(Vanishing Point)*

How the janitor preys on her. Reveals his plan to  
Groom her with candy. And kidnap her. Or how.

It will not matter. Because –

*Don't nobody care about these kids.  
Half they mamas don't want 'em  
and the city sure don't.*  
*(Vanishing Point)*

**33.**

*Vanishing Point* is terrifying.

That moment. The one where Relisha will  
Disappear –

*You'll see her for the last time at Holiday Inn,  
Pink boots and paper bags streaming light  
From a security camera.  
(Vanishing Point)*

But Relisha is just one. Just one.

One of the already. Forgotten.

**34.**

In *The Disappeared* Asim writes –

*Every portrait posted on the Black and Missing website  
looks like someone I know.  
(The Disappeared)*

How –

*Sixty-four thousand  
mostly missing in New York, Georgia,  
North Carolina, Maryland, and Florida:  
signs of struggle, prints wiped clean,  
empty cars with engines running.  
(The Disappeared)*

**35.**

The dead and gone haunt Asim's poetry.

Or how they should. Should haunt all of us.

**36.**

In *Young Americans*, they march in the streets –  
*Dead children make mad noise*

*when they march. The doomed, solemn-eyed youth  
of Chicago are putting boots in the ground,  
gathering in ghostly numbers  
to haunt us with their disappointment.  
(Young Americans)*

How they will keep marching. Keep marching.

How –

*The slaughtered innocents of Chicago  
ain't going nowhere gently.  
Circling the sad metropolis  
in loud, unearthly ranks,  
they raise their voices to the bloody sky,  
above the roar of the monstrous guns and the  
bullets, falling like fat rain.  
(Young Americans)*

**37.**

Asim shows us America.

America where being black means  
A bullet will come for you. Where  
Police will come for you. America  
Where you will be forgotten even  
As you lay on the floor of a subway  
Platform. Police knee in your back.

Laying on the on ramp of a freeway  
Pinned. Pinned between the thighs  
Of a police officer.  
Where you struggle. Struggle to just  
Breathe one more time. Pleading.  
Pleading for your humanity to be  
Remembered.

**38.**

The men and women and boys and girls  
Brutalized and beaten. Raped and killed  
For being black in America march in the  
Powerful and heartbreaking poetry of  
*Stop and Frisk.*

**39.**

Poems that are snare and are bass.  
Skin stretched over the drum of this  
Country. Poems that are percussion  
Of police brutality. Pounding beat in

This American parade

Of black bodies assaulted. Performative  
High step. Poems that are the alto and  
Tenor. The deep bassoon.

Sharp piccolo of human pain.

**40.**

Poems that are 8 and 8s on loop. That  
Are feet hitting cement. Feet strapped  
In showstoppers and patent leathered  
Marjorette boots. Leather tassels that  
Shake. Heels smacking asphalt.

**41.**

Asim's poems sing and

Scream *America.*

**42.**

How every day America assembles its  
Racist and unjust formation. And how.  
Every day. Racism and injustice march

In an endless and brutal loop.

43.

I am a white woman.

Asim's poems coil around me like a marching  
Tuba. Around my body like a metal snake.

How they blare what is true in my ears.

These are American poems.

These are beautiful brutal bloodied American  
Poems.

---

**Poetry            Review:            Graham  
Barnhart's    THE    WAR    MAKES  
EVERYONE    LONELY**



1.

The book arrives. By mail and on the cover. There are clouds.

Gray clumped in altostratus heaps. A military helicopter headed.

Into thick sky that stretches off. The bottom right hand corner of cardstock.

Or how the title. *The War Makes Everyone Lonely* makes me think of 2007.

How my husband deployed to Afghanistan. And how lonely we both were.

When he came home.

2.

Graham Barnhart's poems are about war.

What war is.

What war is not.

Like clouds his poems  
gather.

3.

There is a musicality to them. Barnhart's poems.

The transformer outside his sister's house –

*still humming somehow*

*(Everything In Sunlight I Can't Stop Seeing)*

How the hum makes memory.

Reminds Barnhart of war –

*electricity quieting in the wire when the sun*

*scrapes its knee bloody up the mosque steps*

*(Everything In Sunlight I Can't Stop Seeing)*

Or how. When he was at war. For Barnhart –

*every insect droning is a cicada*

*(Unpracticed)*

4.

Or bullets. How –

*Bitterness sounds like this: steel-tongued*

*cascades pouring out by the handful.*

*(Range Detail)*

5.

At home there is. A child playing an oboe.

Through a window and after.

After Barnhart comes home from war dull.

Growing dull or the music of it.

Human breath pushing down an oboe's neck.

Blast of sound. How the boy –

*he sounds like a robot learning to speak,*

*but now and then an almost "Ode to Joy"*

*or "Lean on Me" outlines itself, and I forget*

*I am going to die.*

*(Belated Letter To My Grandmother)*

6.

Barnhart's poems are electric.

Like voltage in a box. Or moving down a wire.

How it is this constant current.

The persistent hum of still being alive.

And then the jolts. When you remember.

7.

Remember yes.

Writing to his grandmother a letter about the letters  
he never wrote.

While he was away. How Barnhart writes –

*to say yes*

*yes, the guns were loud –*

*loud like gods applauding*

*(Belated Letter To My Grandmother)*

8.

But most of all there is tension.

Tension in Barnhart's poems.

9.

Tension between war and home. Between remembering war and leaving it behind or how –

*Flashbacks*

*don't announce themselves.*

*It takes so little.*

*(Everything In Sunlight I Can't Stop Seeing)*

In one poem, Barnhart is flooded with it.

Memory of barracks and army green wool.

White sheets. Film reel dark rooms.

Passing moon.

The fire watch and screams. Of a drill sergeant.

How Barnhart writes –

*I told her all of this when she found me  
standing in the bedroom doorway.*

*(Somnambulant)*

10.

The tension is a distance. Between  
what happened and how he cannot  
describe it. Or regret. When he does –

*Behind headlights growing darker  
night against the snow, I regret saying  
kind of like Afghanistan aloud  
with my mother and grandmother  
in the otherwise silent heat of the car  
(Sewing)*

11.

In Barnhart's poems, there is a sense that  
coming home from war is displacement or  
this placement outside of time. How –

*tree branches, black  
in the dawn sky, resume their grays and browns  
by lunch. The black wrought fences continue  
leaning into their rust, rigid and failing  
(Everything In Sunlight I Can't Stop Seeing)*

Everything remains. Goes on.

And Barnhart writes –

*there*

*is no war in this but me.*

*(Everything in Sunlight I Can't Stop Seeing)*

12.

Or the tension between what is real  
and what is not. How there is training  
for war. Watching grainy videos of men  
over there. Placing bombs. Or defecating  
under almond trees. Set to pop music.

Only to emerge in America –

*sunbright Texas*

*tobacco juice hissing on the tarmac.*

*(Capabilities Brief)*

13.

How soldiers play *Call of Duty*. To pass time.

This game of war. Where –

*Rifles were weightless. Bombs fell with nothing  
close to oversight. Injuries meant  
heavy breathing –*

*a red-tinged screen.*

*(Medics Don't Earn Killstreaks)*

But in a video game, war is fiction. And unreal.

How –

*there's no difference between urgent and expectant.*

*No need to estimate under fire*

*the percentage of a body burned.*

*How much fluid to administer. How much per hour*

*they should piss out. No need to pull the bodies to cover.*

*They disappear without you*

*checking their pulse.*

*(Medics Don't Earn Killstreaks)*

14.

And the unreality of war is not limited to what is virtual.

Barnhart describes an army recruiting advertisement.

A child hugging a soldier. Her brother or her father.

How the word *army* is used five times. *Strong* six.

But there is little war. How there are no –

*piles of feet*

*on airport roads*

*and no one assigned to shovel them.*

*(Notice and Focus Exercise)*

And –

*No blistered trigger fingers.*

*No depressions in quiet skulls*

*(Notice and Focus Exercise)*

15.

In Barnhart's poems, war is –

*Another year refusing water to children.*

*When they made the universal gesture for thirst*

*along roadsides you wouldn't stop.*

*(Days of Spring, 2016)*

It is bombs –

*A bombing at the gate before you arrived  
was just a story you knew about rubble.*

*(Days of Spring, 2016)*

It is guards at a gate –

*hired to die so you wouldn't when another bomb came.*

*(Days of Spring, 2016)*

16.

Barnhart's poetry acknowledges militarism.

Acknowledges aggression.

The physicality of deployment.

Occupying space in a country

that is not your own.

Barnhart remembers arriving in a village

raided by American soldiers. Arriving and –

*Dressed*

*like the men who killed*

*their*

*husbands, we passed out sewing machines*

*to*

*widows so they could make clothes*

*for their children and embroider cemetery flags.*

*(Sewing)*

17.

Or in Iraq. Dinner with a man who called himself. King of Kawliya.

Who fed them meat peeled from goat bones.

How they fed each other from their hands.

Barnhart writes –

*I remember my fingernail*

*against a man's lip .*

*(Shura)*

Or how later –

*the women who had prepared our food*

*and waited with their children for us to finish*

*were given to eat what we had left.*

*(Shura)*

18.

There is leaving in Barnhart's poems.

War and

what it leaves behind.

Remembering transitioning a village, Barnhart writes –

*all the small corners in that small base*

*were pulled open. Picked blessedly clean.*

*Before our dust-wake settled, no stone,*

*if we had stacked it, was left standing on another*

*(How to Transition a Province)*

This is the tension.

Between going to war but not staying.

Between leaving a mark and wanting

to leave nothing at all.

And the complicity when it is not possible.

19.

Barnhart remembers H.E. rounds. Their smoke and

dust. How –

*illuminate*

*shells – packed light and smoke*

*and*

*shot too low – drop phosphorous*

*through  
civilian fields we aren't  
supposed  
to burn, so we wait down  
the cease-fire in the bus that brought us.  
(Indiana-Stan)*

There is privilege in leaving. Because –

*Over there, if the wheat  
or poppy crops catch, we can leave  
those fires as soon as they start.  
(Indiana-Stan)*

20.

This is the complexity of going to war.

21.

When imagining himself on a dating site.

And choosing a profile picture.

Barnhart writes –

*Hope it all says: confident  
and responsible.*

*As an aggressor*

*aware of his complicity.*

*(Tinder Pic)*

He acknowledges –

*there will be left swipes*

*for that arrogance.*

*For trying to play imperialist*

*and dissenter without seeming too*

*patriotic or worse –*

*apathetic. Naïve or too reckless.*

*Unwary and soon to explode*

*(Tinder Pic)*

22.

This is the complicity of it.

23.

Or how

because. Because Barnhart is a medic. D18.

U.S.

Army Special Forces Medic. There is a tension.

Between going to war and going to war as a medic.

24.

How the word medic in Latin.

*Mederi*

Means to heal.

25.

During  
deployment, Barnhart works with a physical therapist –

*learning  
to scrape sore tissue*

*with  
a slice of machined steel*

*curves  
to match the shape of the musculature.*

*Like  
a cradle or scythe, you said to no one*

*(Days of Spring, 2016)*

In  
Barnhart's poems. This is the tension.

How  
he is both. A cradle. And a scythe.

He writes

–

*And that was how morning found you,*

*sometimes*

*a cradle, sometimes a scythe*

*(Days of Spring, 2016)*

26.

But out

of it. Out of this complexity of war.

The

complicity of it. Comes Barnhart's poems.

Like

the purple loosestrife he describes. That

grows

at the prison near Mazar-i-Sharif –

*gathered*

*trembling*

*against the walls*

*(Tourists)*

27.

Barnhart

imagines himself –

*a glowing green eye in a gargoyle mass.*

(0300)

28.

He  
describes going to see an informant.

How  
he is remembering the man and his cell phone video –

*Hacksaw tugging neck skin.*

*The careful  
way you spoke in English*

*my  
uncle, my brother, my uncle's son. Your  
finger*

*touching  
each shemagh-wrapped face.*

*The  
one you couldn't name I knew was you*

*(Informant)*

Or how  
Barnhart's poetry is like this.

How in  
his telling it. He straddles worlds.

Reveals  
secrets. Identifies himself. And

invites

the reader. To find themselves.

29.

The  
war. The war stretches on like sky.

Across  
countries and deployments.

How this  
war does not ever end.

30.

Because how many years ago. When I stood on that corner  
watching.

As a plane  
hit the first tower. And a plane hit the second tower. Fire.

Or  
people clinging to the metal. Slipping and jumping and falling  
and

how  
the two towers crashed down.

31.

There is a poem about post 9/11 tear gas training.

Words *PRO PATRIA MORI* in red.

Above a cement hut door. *To die for your country.*

Or how. After. Barnhart writes –

*Somehow  
outside, somehow after*

*on my  
knees with everyone else, purging  
years  
of sediment phlegm from scraped alveoli,*

*I saw  
the line waiting to go in, heard  
the  
men behind me learning to drown.*

*Learning  
to breathe that evil pure as air.*

*Motes  
of gas, like dust in sunlight,  
wafted  
from the exit labeled DULCE ET*

*(Post 9/11 Gas Training (II))*

32.

How  
many. Soldiers have gone to war. Gone to  
war  
post 9/11 and how many have come home.

And how  
many.

How  
many dreamed of its *sweetness*.

33.

There  
is a futility.

Poems  
about training and more

training  
or the feeling that it may

not  
matter.

34.

Barnhart writes –

*Today*  
*I can deadlift four-oh-five.*

*When*  
*I can move four-ten it will*

*not*  
*stop a bullet or*

*the*  
*overpressure of a bomb*

*(Cultivating Mass)*

There is a sense of inevitability.

Because

—

A

*tourniquet will work*

*unless  
it doesn't*

*(How To Stop the Bleeding)*

35.

Language  
is questioned.

Its  
privilege. How Barnhart inscribes diplomas in Pashtu.

Only  
to be told. By the Major. To write them in English —

*The  
Pashtu,*

*he said,  
is lovely*

*but unofficial.*

*(Certificates of Training)*

36.

Or the  
task of announcing he will deploy again.

How Barnhart  
imagines his words as bats. How –

*I'll  
probably just open my mouth,  
wait for something to fly out  
(Telling You I Will Deploy Again)*

Or when the words don't come.

Barnhart describes hitting them  
with a racket.

Scoops and sloughs them outside.

And –

*Regretting,*

*only  
a little, the need, the abrupt*

*cessation  
of a fragile thing,*

*that terrible  
satisfaction, even*

*with  
these apologies hanging limp,  
crumpled in the rhododendrons.*

*(Telling You I Will Deploy Again)*

37.

In  
trying to describe to his father –

*the  
dull machine chunk*

*of a  
rifle's sear reset between rounds*

*(What Being In The Army Did)*

Graham  
offers –

*maybe  
there is no word*

*(What Being In The Army Did)*

Just  
space.

Air  
between bars. Distance between keys.

To  
which his father replies –

*No,  
he said,*

*there  
is definitely a word*

*(What Being In The Army Did)*

38.

And  
Graham questions poetry.

Remembering  
a photograph of two dead bodies.

Men wrapped and left on a dirt field. Barnhart writes –

*bodies*

*sloughed  
in a field then photographed.*

*In  
their repose*

*deserving  
more than this poem*

*and  
its portions*

*of  
sky framed by power lines.*

*(Deserving  
(II))*

39.

Of  
course. Loneliness is this.

This  
futility. The question.

Of  
whether anything makes a difference.

Or if  
words are enough.

40.

But  
in Barnhart's poems. His words  
are  
the answer. The raveled call to  
prayer.  
Or his surprise to see a boy –

*kneeling beside his bucket to kiss the dirt.*

*(Call  
to Prayer)*

The shared  
humanity of experience.

Even  
in war. Even in our loneliness.

41.

In  
his poems, Barnhart sews together.

The pieces  
of war. Memory. Leaving

and coming  
home. What it means to

fight  
a war and care for its wounded.

42.

He  
describes history as a skeleton –

*each city suturing*

*new skin to the skeleton.*

*(Pissing in Irbil)*

Or  
how his poems are flesh.

Attaching  
themselves to the

skeleton  
of what happened.

Wrapping  
bone in meaning.

43.

At a poetry  
reading, Barnhart sees a bee  
dragged  
by a spider. As the poet who is  
reading  
says –

*Those  
with the time*

*for  
poetry don't deserve it*

*(Deserving  
(I))*

Barnhart wonders –

*The  
poetry or the time*

*(Deserving  
(I))*

44.

I am  
not certain we deserve either.

But,  
as I read Barnhart's *The War Makes Everyone Lonely*,

I am  
grateful.

Grateful  
for both.

---

## New Poetry from Amalie Flynn: “Celebrate”



TREE / SKIN / BONE *image by Amalie Flynn*  
1.

Celebrate them.

2.

Celebrate the soldier who went to war

*Just to kill.*

This soldier accused of shooting and

Killing civilians. How the men from

His own platoon. They say *he did it.*

He shot civilians. He shot at civilians.

Shot a girl in Iraq in a flowered hijab

In her stomach.

Blooming wound. Like a daisy eye or

Hole in her gut. How he shot an old

Unarmed man dead. His white robe

Drenched red. The stain a spreading

Blood sun.

And they say they saw him. Saw him

Kill a teenager.

An ISIS fighter. Wounded and waiting

For a medic on the dirt floor in Mosul.

How they say the soldier said

Lips into a radio

*Don't touch him.*

Because *he's mine.*

Before driving his knife deep and deep.

Hunting knife

Into the boy's neck. Through skin and

Muscle. Tissue and ligaments an artery.

3.

Or how

There is a photograph.

The soldier squatting in the sand.

Full battle rattle next to the ISIS boy.

His dead body. Face up. Arms bare.

Calves exposed. His legs sprawled.

And the soldier. How he has the boy.

His hair. Gripped in the fist. And he is

Yanking. Yanking him. The boy's head.

His face up. For the camera.

How in the photograph.

The boy is dead.

And the soldier is smiling.

Because the boy is not a boy.

He is *deer kill*.

3.

Celebrate him.

Celebrate that soldier and the way it felt

When he held that soft sweat tuft of

Human hair.

Between his thumb and fingers like.

Like feathers.

4.

And why. *Why stop there?*

How there are more. More soldiers

5.

Soldiers who stood over dead bodies

On a video. Standing over the dead

Bodies of Taliban fighters they killed.

Killed in war in Afghanistan.

How the soldiers exposed their penises

And urinated on the bodies. Urinating

On the dead bodies or how

They are laughing.

Celebrate them. Celebrate those soldiers.

Celebrate how they felt when that stream

Of urine. Their urine.

Hit the men. Hit the dead bodies. Hit dead

Legs and dead torsos. Dead faces. Splashing

Open dead eyes. Into dead mouths.

Celebrate how.

How it felt. When their urine

Filled the dead men's nostrils.

6.

Celebrate Abu Ghraib.

Celebrate that it happened. Celebrate

Soldiers who stripped prisoners naked.

Raped them with truncheons. Strapped

Dog collars around their necks. Soldiers

Who dragged men on leashes like they

Were dogs. Who placed bags over heads.

Made men stand on boxes with wires

And electrodes attached to fingers and

Skin. Soldiers. Soldiers. Soldiers who

Tortured men.

Soldiers who piled men. Piled men up

And into contorted piles. These piles

Of tortured human flesh.

7.

Celebrate them.

8.

Celebrate all the soldiers who do it. Who

*Do things like this.*

Celebrate them even though. Even though

The military is filled and filled and filled

With soldiers who

Would never. Who never do these things.

9.

Just don't say. It is because

*They did nothing wrong.*

Don't say. Don't say *they didn't do it.*

10.

Celebrate them because you know.

You know they did.

11.

Celebrate them because you like it.

---

**Landslide / For Byron Who Was  
Separated From His Father At  
The US-Mexico Border**



When you left  
Guatemala. Crossed the border  
Into Mexico. With your father or  
How there was a smuggler. Who  
Took you. On foot. All the way to

America. How the truth is. When  
You went down the road and off  
Of the mountain. Where you live.  
Have always lived. How you did  
Not think. *I will ever come back.*  
And now. You cannot get back.  
How your mother and father  
Cannot get you back. And when  
You got here. Crossed over the  
Border and into California. How  
Border Patrol picked you up and  
Your father. How they sent him  
Back. Back to Guatemala. They  
Deported him. But without you.  
Because they kept you. Keeping  
You in detention. And in Texas or  
How. Texas is so far away. Away  
From your father. Your mother.  
Sister or the mountain. And you  
Were only seven years old when  
You left. Left Guatemala. Or how  
You are eight now. Because you

Have been. Here. And detained.  
In Texas. Or how it has been five.  
Five months. They have kept you.  
And not let you go home.  
I want you to know. This  
Was not supposed to happen to  
You. How they made your father  
Sign a form in a language he did  
Not know how to read. Or how.  
They told him. Told your father  
*If you sign it.* They would bring  
You back to him. And *who will*  
*Hug him.* Your father says. Who  
Will hug you now. Now that you  
Are still here and he is back. In  
Guatemala. On a mountain. Or  
Without you.  
And he stretches your clothes.  
Each day and across a bed. The  
Bed where you used to sleep.  
How he cannot stop saying *how*  
You are very small.

And *how much*.

That this is *too much*. This is just

*Too much pain*. And your mother

Says that when. They are able to

Call you. How they can see you.

Over video and it is hard. Hard

To connect. How you look away

And off to the side. Whispering.

Whispering *it is dangerous here*.

And I know.

I know what some people will say.

When your father tell the story

About why he did it Took you all

The way across Mexico. And into

America. Across the border. How

He says he did it for you. So you

Can have *a better life*.

How they will say his reasons

Were *economic*. And how. How

You were not fleeing violence.

How there was no danger. And

It was a few years ago. When

There was a landslide. And  
Land slid down your mountain.  
How it was falling or rushing  
Down. And it covered houses  
And people.  
Or how it buried everything.  
And a landslide happens when  
The stress of a mountain  
Outweighs its resistance.  
Or when your father does not  
Know. If there will be another  
Job. If he can keep you fed or  
Alive. When he knows there  
Is no more. Clean water. For  
You to drink. Living like this.  
It is waiting.  
Waiting for the land to slide  
Down. And bury you. Alive.  
Because poverty is always  
Dangerous.  
But your father knows now.  
He knows that

What is even more dangerous  
Is a country without a heart.  
This heartless country.  
That took you away from him.  
And will not. Will not.  
Give you back.

*This poem is part of [Border of Heartbreak](#) – a collection of poems written for children separated at the US-Mexico border. It was written after reading a [New York Times article](#) about Byron – an eight year old boy who was separated from his father at the US-Mexico border in May 2018, detained, and kept in detention even after his father was deported back to Guatemala. Byron was held in US detention for eight months.*

---

## **Poetry Review: Aaron Graham's BLOOD STRIPES**



1.

I'm reading Aaron Graham's war poetry. And I think *violence is a volcano*.

How pressure builds. Between layers of rock. Trapped in a chamber. Or when magma pushes. Fissures like rivers. Up through the upper mantle. Finding surface. How it erupts. Spews hot lava and ash. How bodies can blow. Apart and across a desert named Fallujah. Hurtling and pyroclastic. Or the aftermath.

Graham's poems remind me.

How war is.

2.

This is Graham's Iraq.

*Come see the valley –*

*the death-cradle of civilization*

*(Boots On The Ground)*

Iraq is where war is. Where Graham was. Deployed as a Marine. It is where I find him now. A soldier narrator. On the pages of [\*Blood Stripes\*](#), his debut poetry collection. It is where his poems take me. To Iraq where. Violence erupts and

*shells of men are spit out*

*(Boots on the Ground)*

To Iraq where. Skies are shrapnel

*whose maw expands in the air*

*teeth like flame plumes*

*scorching gouts*

*(Boots on the Ground)*

To Iraq where. Soldiers learn

*fresh-burnt flesh*

*smells like roast beef*

*(Since Shit Went Sideways)*

To Iraq where. There are

*limbless boys*

*whose beautiful bodies*

*collided on football fields*

*in Iowa not six months before*

*(Boots on the Ground)*

To Iraq where. Where  
*infantrymen are now the law*  
*and the law is a pack of white dogs*  
*hunting high-value targets*  
*covering bearded brown faces*  
*with black bags*

*(Since Shit Went Sideways)*

To Iraq where. Children die and  
*There are bullets in young Sunni boys*  
*mothers must take to a morgue*

*(Conjunctivitis)*

Where the question. This question  
*did I bury a Sunni girl no larger than my arm?*

*(Marine Corps Leadership Training)*

Dares to exist. This is Graham's Iraq. Where bullets pierce  
organs and

*When a tracer round*

*becomes a collapsed lung*

*(Marine Corps Leadership Training)*

How

*breath*

*becomes a sparrow flapping*

*(Marine Corps Leadership Training)*

Graham's poetry makes me think of J.G. Ballard. How he [said](#) *our civilization is like the crust of lava spewed from a volcano. It looks solid, but if you set foot on it, you feel the fire.* Graham's poems are full of fiery war. The violence of its eruptions. Graham's words forcing themselves up the throat of a volcano. Exploding like lava onto a page.

3.

Graham writes violence as a woman. How even before. War or enlistment. There is a craving

*Until bent and jointed,*

*I hung*

*Between your breasts*

*(Midnight Runner)*

Or how at war. Violence becomes anatomical. Between fingers. Coating tongue and gums. How

*with each trigger pull*

*until death is a second skin to me,  
is the film I rub  
between my index and forefinger –  
a charnel film I grind against  
the backs of my front teeth with a raw  
and bleeding tongue*

*(The Situation on the Ground)*

And how after war. How it never goes away. Graham writes  
*I wear my violent acts  
like a hand knit cap – reserved like a fossil fuel  
a blubber slice*

*(Repatriation)*

Graham writes of the aftermath. How after the eruption. Lava  
will flow. How even after. War can push into a house. Seep  
into a marriage. How

*I tell her there are things you know only  
after you've seen combat, there exists depths,  
intimacies, I cannot will into existence  
even when in her arms*

*(The Curse of a Hammer, About to Drop)*

Magma cools and hardens. Forms new igneous rock and PTSD. How  
*Your curse is the hammer about to drop –*  
*hyper-vigilance. Doors you always lock*  
*when you're on the wrong side*

*(The Curse of a Hammer, About to Drop)*

For Graham PTSD becomes its own violence. One that violates  
but also beckons. Graham writes

*I give thanks to the dead*

*(Marine Corps Leadership Training)*

And. How it is

*Because so many of the dead*

*they're always here*

*at the table*

*I've set,*

*like a mother's breast*

*(Marine Corps Leadership Training)*

Graham's poems tell a truth about war. Its intimacy. How

*there's nothing as intimate as bleeding*

*with those men in the desert. A devotion*

*you'll never share with a lover, child, or spouse*

*(The Curse of a Hammer, About to Drop)*

War is not just what happens on the battlefield. War is what happens after. What keeps happening. To the soldiers who fight it. The civilians who survive it. After deployment is done. Armored trucks move out. Or a soldier goes home. Graham's poems offer us the aftershocks of what explodes. And the truth. The truth that. For those it touches. War does not end.

4.

In Graham's poems, the landscape haunts. Graham writes

*I know my way around velvet*

*(Marine Corps Leadership Training)*

How the air in Iraq is alive and cellular.

*Electrons sway like the boiled wool*

*hides – hanging in Yezidi doorways*

*(Marine Corps Leadership Training)*

Landscape is a language. The shape of it shapes meaning. On the pages of *Blood Stripes*. The desert stretches. Almost endlessly. Across Graham's poems. Across a war. Across all wars. Years that span a history that can feel ancient. Endless like a horizon line or how

*Still the magnitude hits.*

*A thousand years stretch*

*down this street*

*(Mythos (Deployment))*

But Graham's landscape is not endless. This is a landscape marked by war.

*The golden sands*

*that appear*

*a cold dark green*

*an eternal crystalline lawn*

*surveyed by rifle scopes*

*(Funeral Pyre)*

Here is the desert. Where war and dunes heave. Like dying lungs.

This is Graham's Iraq. How it seems endless. And how. It is also a place of endings. A landscape cropped by the circumference of a rifle scope. Cropped by what happens when. Bullets tear through a chest wall. And hit heart.

This is the striking duality of Graham's landscape. Because

*the cost of invasion is*

*how something beyond*

*fathom is lost*

*or, rather –*

*comes to end*

*(Sandscape: Mojave Viper)*

This is where. The desert nurtures.

*Iraq sand holds your face –*

*like friends and family used to*

*(Repatriation)*

And this is where war also takes and takes. Until everything  
is gone or dead. How

*in deep deserts*

*there is only*

*the abrupt – blast –*

*cracked windshields*

*and punctured MRAP*

*husks. Their rhinoceros bodies –*

*(Footfalls)*

This is where soldiers patrol streets alive. But almost dead.

*We trod the pavement on dead*

*patrol. Deep desert has no edge.*

*Our third day over the line*

*outside the wire*

*horizons merge, a cusp*

*of bright sky bleeds into earth*

*where being and not*

*being*

*touch impossibly*

*(Footfalls)*

Graham's poems offer us the duplicity of war. It is the craving and the curse. The eternal and the instantaneous. The invigorating and the deadly. And when soldiers are lucky to live through it. War is a landscape they leave behind. Before realizing they took it home with them.

5.

There is a tension. In Graham's poems.

Of whether to tell his story of war. Or not to.

*I pulled back from the vastness*

*where nothing needs*

*– and does not need –*

*to be written*

*(Sandscape: Dunes Overlooking Balboa Naval Hospital)*

There is the question of how to write war. Because

*Violence has a language all its own*

*(The Language of Violence)*

There is a feeling. How war is

*Just us bleeding in the desert*

*(Ode to a Wishing Well)*

And that no one. No one else will understand.

Because. Americans do not know war. How they

*probably learned*

*the words that describe*

*what happens to Marines*

*in the desert by watching*

*Anderson Cooper's lips –*

*round words*

*(Speaking Arabic with a Redneck Accent)*

War for civilians is somewhere else. A running body of chyron.

About a third of the way into *Blood Stripes*. On page 32. A poem entirely in Arabic. I make a list of who I know who speaks Arabic or how. I decide not to. Decide not to try to find out what it says. What the words mean. Because the poem speaks to me in Arabic. How I can read it in Arabic. Even though. Or because I do not know. What it says.

This is a truth of war. It belongs to those who fight it. The land it is fought on. The civilians who endure its wrath. How there are parts of it. Parts of war. That are hard to translate.

Still Graham does it. In poem after poem. He writes war. He writes war in its own language. Where

*a statement is a scar*

*(The Language of Violence)*

Where

*The voice of the wound*

*has a flickering tongue*

*its syllables escape*

*with fine bits of lung –*

*falling wet, into sand*

*(Speaking Arabic with a Redneck Accent)*

And where. A Syrian amputee standing on a road speaks.

Speaking in scars

*the sacred scars,*

*which are a language*

*I can read to you at night*

*(The Language of Violence)*

When Graham writes

*how to sing bombs out of the air?*

*How deep to listen?*

*(Repatriation)*

This is the task. The poetic task Graham takes on. Arming himself with words and war memories.

The result is *Blood Stripes*. And war. Written into being in Graham's poems.

Vivid and startling and forceful.

6.

I wake up thinking about Baudrillard.

And how [\*The Gulf War Did Not Take Place.\*](#)

It happened obviously. But it was something else. Something other than what we thought it was. Different from what we were told.

For Baudrillard. The Gulf War was a series of atrocities. Not a war. The Gulf War was a performance of war. Not a war. The Gulf War was a media narrative constructed. Not a war. Where even the word fighting defied its own definition. As Iraqis got bombed by Americans flying in a technological sky. For Baudrillard. The Gulf War was hyperreal. A simulacrum. It was a not-war war.

And yes Iraq.

How the Iraq War was like this too.

A war. Where American soldiers went. Because of *weapons of mass destruction*. To look for *weapons of mass destruction*. That did not exist. How the war they thought they were fighting. Was a war that did not happen.

And yet. Graham.

He writes

*dry bodies*

*bloating and broiling*

*fattening in the desert*

*(Marine Corps Leadership Training)*

How he writes

*the purple lips of a wound*

*(Speaking Arabic With A Redneck Accent)*

And I think to myself *there. There it is.*

Because war is not what our country tells us it is. War is what happens. To the soldiers who fight it. To the civilians. To the men and women and children and land it surrounds and engulfs and assaults. To the ripped bodies and roads. Roads of sun and bones it leaves behind. To everyone who carries it after. To everyone who carries war for days and weeks and months and years after. Long after we say *it is done.*

The Iraq War happened.

I know it did.

And not because my country told me it did.

But because it is there. Because I felt it. In the viscerally powerful poems of Graham's *Blood Stripes*.

—

*Blood Stripes* is available for [purchase](#) at your local independent bookstore or wherever books are sold.

---

# New Poetry by Amalie Flynn for the WWI Centennial

*Zone Rouge*

*(for the centennial)*



photo by Amalie Flynn

1.  
When the land was.

2.  
Full of bodies dead. And twisted.
3.  
When the fighting was.
4.  
Sustained.
5.  
With bodies. Dead. Twisted on a riverbank.
6.  
Wrist bent. Hand hovers. Over water.
7.  
Dead bodies with fingers. Like feathers.
8.  
Stretched feathers or the calamus.
9.  
Attaching to bird skin.
10.  
These are bodies. Bodies of war.
11.  
Dead with. Feathered fingers.
12.  
Wing of a bird.
13.  
300 days of shelling.
14.  
The shells were 240 mm. Full of shrapnel.
15.  
Mustard gas.

16.

Hitting men and hitting ground.

17.

Making holes. Upon impact.

18.

Shrapnel bursting.

19.

Bloom and rip.

20.

Ripping through dirt and faces.

21.

Ripped skin. Ripping off tissue.

22.

A nose.

23.

Hole in the center of an ear.

24.

Exposing canal and bone.

25.

Missing teeth. One lower jaw is.

26.

Gone. A set of lips.

27.

The chunk of a chin.

28.

And the shells. Shells from Verdun.

29.

Are still there.

30.

Unexploded ordnance. Sunk.

31.

Into dirt pockets. Like seeds.

32.

This blooming. Metal war.

33.

Shrapnel that looks like rocks or.

34.

Smooth egg of a bird.

35.

Soil made of mud and men and metal.

36.

How. Metal leaches and clings.

37.

This soil of war.

38.

Chlorine and lead and mercury and arsenic.

39.

Where every tree and every plant and every animal.

40.

Each blade of grass.

41.

Where 99% of everything died.

42.

Ground stripped raw.

43.

Stripped earth tissue or how this is.

44.

What war also.

45.

Also does.

46.

*Damage to properties: 100%*

47.

*Damage to agriculture: 100%*

48.

*Impossible to clean.*

49.

*Human life impossible.*

50.

The government declared it *uninhabitable*.

51.

A *no-go zone*.

52.

Broken skeletons of villages.

53.

And the craters that bombs make.

54.

Deep and round holes.

55.

How the bomb craters filled with water.

56.

Making. War ponds.

57.

This is a place.

58.

Where almost everything died.

59.

But the land.

60.

The land was still alive.

61.

Grass stretching again and.

62.

Grafting itself over the bone.

63.

Bone of what happened.

64.

Stretching over trenches and scars.

65.

Like new skin.

66.

And plants and trees and vines.

67.

Rodents and snails and voles and mice.

68.

Deer. Wildcats with metal stomachs.

69.

*Still living* I say. To my husband.

70.

Who went to war.

71.

War that he did not want.

72.

Afghanistan.

73.

How he came home with hands and feet.

74.

Covered in blisters. *Lesions* the doctor said.

75.

Skin burning. Waking up to him crouched.

76.

On the floor and scratching. Saying *I don't know*.

77.

And I know.

78.

That this is how war is.

79.

Or later. I will lay in the darkness.

80.

And think about burn pits in Iraq.

81.

Black smoke and jet fuel and fumes.

82.

About Vietnam sprayed. The bare mudflats after.

83.

Defoliation of trees. And birds. Missing mangroves.

84.

How dioxin poisons wind. Sleeps. In a river or sediment.

85.

The fatty tissue of a fish. Atomic blasts in Hiroshima and.

86.

Nagasaki. The incineration of bodies and land.

87.

Tearing skin off people. Tearing trees out of ground.

88.

Tearing everything.

89.

Away.

90.

How black rain fell. Radioactive bomb debris.

91.

Into mouths. Of people and rivers.

92.

How radiation lives. In grass and soil. The intestine of a cow.

93.

About the GWOT. Blood soaked years and streets and.

94.

How many miles of land. Where we left bombs.

95.

Unexploded or forever.

96.

I will think about Zone Rouge.

97.

Trenches like scars.

98.

My husband gardening. The tendons in his arms.

99.

Moving like trees.

100.

Or how war never goes away.

*Amalie Flynn*

*October 2018*

---

# **New Poetry by Amalie Flynn**



## POLLINATE

When I dream about the words  
They fall from the sky. Dropped  
From planes that hover and the  
Words are dropping and dropping.  
In clusters. And again and. Again.  
How the words are dropping. Like  
Bombs.

I wake up my husband. Shake his  
Shoulder. Our two children. How  
I shake their shoulders and we go  
Outside. To watch the words fall.  
Stand feet bare on grass. And we  
Look up. At a sky full of munition.  
How it stretches as far as it goes.  
The sky full of words falling. Falling  
On us. Falling on this town.

And the letters bend and curl. How  
The arc of the stems twist in the air.  
Crotch and vertex. The descenders.  
As the letters fall down. The letters  
Of the words. This typography of  
The words we use now. Hear now.  
Here in America.

And the words are hitting. Hitting  
Our house. How the children are  
Covering their heads with hands.  
With letters and syllables slapping

A roof. The word *liberal*. The word  
*Fascist*. Hitting and again. *Liberal*  
And *fascist*. How *liberal fascist* hits  
Until the house is covered. A *liberal*  
*Fascist* hanging. Closed bowl of the  
Letter *b* split and hanging from a  
Gutter. Or how *merit-based* falls.  
Hits the ground. Making explosion  
Craters in our backyard. How the  
Word *elitist* floats. How there are  
*Elitists* in the swimming pool.

Down the street. All over this town.  
The word *liar* hangs from the trees.  
Dud bombs that are quiet. Hanging  
Like leaves. Or ready to detonate.  
And the word *white* sprays down.  
Pelts down. Followed by silence.  
And then *power*. How the words  
*White* and *power* fall down onto  
This town.

A canister opens and releases the  
Word *globalist*. How *globalist* hits  
The synagogue. Hits the synagogue  
And hits it and hits it again. Over the  
Mosque words fall down. A fleet of  
*Terrorists* attack a mosque. How  
The words *terrorist* and *ISIS* and  
*Radical Islamic terrorism* attack a  
Mosque. Leaving holes in a wall  
That faces Makkah.

And under the lights on a football  
Field some men kneel. Their heads  
Bowed. With the word *ungrateful*  
Wrapping around their necks like  
Snakes. Or other men. Kneeling  
In a church. Who pray and use  
Words like *our manifest destiny*  
And *this Christian nation*.

Across the fields. Where berries  
Grow. But no one comes to pick

Them. No one comes. Because  
They are scared of ICE and the  
Roundups. How the fields are  
Littered with overripe berries  
And land mines made out of  
The word *illegal* and *rapist* or  
*Drug dealing murderer*. And in  
The lakes. In the rivers. Which  
Are drying up. Where fish and  
Bacteria die. In the warm ocean.  
How the word *fake* floats.

Over neighborhoods where every  
Day is a day of guns and bullets  
And broken dead bodies. Over  
The schools. The schools that  
Have been lucky. Where there  
Has not been a mass shooting.  
Where a man with an assault rifle  
Has not forced his way in and shot  
All the children dead. Over these  
Schools. And over the schools that

Were not lucky. How the words.

The words *thoughts and prayers*

Are falling down from the sky.

And in this driveway I am holding

My husband's hand. Because his

Car is buried. Buried deep under

The word *unpatriotic*. And he is.

He is shaking his head in disbelief.

Saying *how*. How he loves this

Country. Went to war for it. How

He would go again and again or

How I tell him *I know*. Because

The words *liberal elite* gather

At my feet. A ring of *socialists*

Like land mines sunk into the

Ground.

And my youngest son. Who has

A disability. Who cannot vocalize

A lot of words. He is running under

The words as they fall from the sky.

And he is laughing. As if the words  
Are fireflies. His hands flying up. Into  
The air to catch them. Or how we  
Are chasing after him. But he reaches  
And grabs the words in his fist. And  
I am still running. Calling to him or  
Saying to him *no* and *no*. How *those*  
*Words are not for you*. The words  
*Burden on the system* which are  
Caught in his hands like fireflies.

How I am peeling his hands open.  
And my husband is saying *please*.  
To our son. And *give them to me*.  
Or our oldest son. How he is telling  
His brother. Saying over and over.  
How *none of those words are true*.

And I use my hands to dismantle it.  
A phrase that is not. Not for him.  
And I am jumbling all of the letters.  
Sweeping some away. And making

New words. Words like *bud* or *stem*.

Things that grow.

And I make the word *bee*.

How I hand it to him. Hand him *bee*.

And I am kneeling in dirt next to him.

My son. Who is holding a *bee*. And

I am telling him about pollination.

How the bees are pollinators. How

They pollinate flowers and plants

And crops. And how we need them.

How our existence depends on the

Bees. Because *without the bees*

I say. *Things would collapse*. And

I reach my hand out. Touch his cheek.

And I say *bee*. How *this word*

The one that *the world needs*.

How *this word is for you*.