

New Poetry by Pawel Grajnert: “Michigan”

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Wild Delights: Patrick Hicks Interviews Brian Turner

BRIAN TURNER

the
wild delight
of
wild things



Patrick Hicks: Brian Turner earned an MFA from the University of Oregon and taught English in South Korea for a year before he joined the United States Army. He served in Bosnia-Herzegovina with the 10th Mountain Division and, when he was

deployed to Iraq, he became an infantry team leader with the 3rd Stryker Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division. His first collection of poetry, *Here, Bullet*, won the Beatrice Hawley Award, the Pen Center USA "Best in the West Award", and it was a *New York Times* Editor's Choice Selection. His second collection, *Phantom Noise*, received equally strong attention and it was shortlisted for the coveted T.S. Eliot Prize in England. His memoir, *My Life as a Foreign Country*, has been praised for both its clear-eyed perception of what it means to go to war, as well as its narrative structure, which is fragmented vignettes that examine the many wars that America has been involved in. Turner nudges us to think about the long after-burn of war and how one generation influences the next.

His work has been published in *The New York Times*, *National Geographic*, *Poetry Daily*, *The Georgia Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review* and many others. He received an NEA Literature Fellowship, the Amy Lowell Traveling Fellowship, a US-Japan Friendship Commission Fellowship, the Poets' Prize, and a Fellowship from the Lannan Foundation. Turner gives readings all over the world and he has made appearances on NPR, the BBC, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, PBS, and RTÉ in Ireland. When not writing or touring, he is a faculty member in the MFA Program at the University of Nevada Reno at Lake Tahoe. Although soft spoken and humble, his readings at book festivals and universities are deeply thoughtful and moving explorations about literature, global politics, and our responsibilities to each other.

Turner has three new collections coming out with Alice James Books, and we sat down to talk about the first in the series: *The Wild Delight of Wild Things*.

Patrick Hicks: Let's start with the title, which comes from a line of poetry that your wife, Ilyse Kusnetz, wrote. In fact, the very first poem in *The Wild Delight of Wild Things* isn't your work, it's hers. It's as if we have to read through her work in order to get at your own. And perhaps not

surprisingly, she infuses the entire collection. She passed away of cancer in 2016 and, as I read this new collection, it felt like a restoring of her presence or an act of determined memory to be in conversation with her. Could you talk about Ilyse's place in this collection and how she continues to influence you?

Brian Turner: Our home in Orlando, Florida, has a small entryway that leads to the living room. I've never told anyone this, but whenever I'm about to leave the house and whenever I return home, there's a very brief ritual I do that reminds me of Ilyse. It's one of the many ways I try to be alive with her in my life. To be present. To be in the presence of. To be in conversation with. And I think this practice mirrors, in some ways, the construction of this book—as her voice both begins and ends the meditation.

It's also a chance for me to share her voice with others, which is a way of saying it's a chance for more people to fall in love with her. And on that note—I dare anyone to read that first poem of hers and not fall at least a little bit in love with her.

PH: One of the first poems in *The Wild Delight of Wild Things* is "The Immortals." It's about jellyfish that seem to resurrect themselves from the dead and become young again. It's a denial of death, and it's rooted in nature. You write, "They have learned to reinvent themselves in defiance/ of the body's undoing. They rise from their own deaths./ They rise from the bottom of the sea." For a poet who has been lauded, rightfully so, for your work about the Iraq War, there are many references about nature woven throughout *Wild Delight*. Was it liberating to focus on things other than the Iraq War? In many ways, this collection feels like it comes from Brian, and not from Sergeant Turner.

BT: You know, this is something I've thought about quite a bit—not only for myself, but it's a dynamic that I recognize

in many writers and artists. When I lead writing workshops for veterans, for example, I often mention that my intention isn't to simply give them writing tools and meditative approaches that might help them to explore and navigate their experiences while in uniform. I tell them that my larger hope is to offer tools that might help them to write their way into the rest of their lives.

And here I am, doing that very thing. You know? Becoming Brian, more and more with each passing day.

PH: "The Salton Sea" starts off with a rumination of the crew of Enola Gay practicing bombing runs as they drop huge barrels of concrete onto a target that would eventually become Hiroshima. And then the poem switches to the Cold War. You mention how twenty-four million gallons of jet fuel spilled "into the water that Albuquerque rests on." Ilyse grew up in Albuquerque and died of cancer. It's entirely possible, as you write, that she is "one of many unrecorded deaths on the home front." In the poem, you talk about a reluctance for some people to think that she could have been a victim of the Cold War. Could you talk about what prompted this poem?

BT: This poem is watermarked with so many conversations Ilyse and I had after her diagnosis. And the anger welling up near the end—that's her anger, blended with my own. There's research involved in this poem, too, sure, but the basic argument and the emotional structure of the poem were drafted by her one conversation at a time with me as its first audience.

If we take a bird's-eye-view of this... I've long been fascinated by the boundaries drawn between what some call the home-front and what we might think of as a conflict zone. There's a kind of psychic disconnect there, I think. While it's a very practical and seemingly logical thing to associate conflict zones with places where pain and trauma and death and violence occur, it does a disservice to the complexity of

experience when we untether the home-front from the battlefield.

It's similar to the experience of looking at an oak tree—how easy it is sometimes to forget that the root structure below can grow as much as three times larger than the canopy above.

PH: Maybe we could stay on this line of thinking for a moment. In the poem immediately following "The Salton Sea" you write about Cuvier's Beaked Whales beaching themselves—and dying—due to the "acoustic blasts of active sonar" in submarines. Just as the military inadvertently poisoned the water of Albuquerque, the Navy is doing collateral damage to whales. In both poems, you question the long-term hidden effects of war. Do you notice such things, perhaps, due to your experiences as a soldier? You have spoken at book festivals about the grave and lasting harm that has been caused to children caught in war.

BT: It's impossible for me to know whether I might have written this poem if I'd never worn the uniform. But I'm moved and troubled by these losses when I hear of them. Collateral damage. I recently visited the battlefield in Vicksburg, Mississippi, and walked some of the Union lines. As I considered the landscape, I searched for stands of red cedar and live oaks. I was looking for survivors—for ancient trees with stories to tell. Eastern red cedar, for example, can live up to 900 years. And I wondered if some still held minie balls or grapeshot within them, or if trees sometimes weep bullets the way the human body can sometimes weep shards of glass or metal fragments long after an initial injury.

PH: In "The Jurassic Coast" you have a lengthy stanza that lists off the animals that will likely go extinct before the century is out. I have to admit, I hadn't heard of many of them, which is precisely the point I think you're trying to make. What are we inadvertently killing? Why don't we care? You end the poem with a powerful stanza about the last

passenger pigeon, named Martha, who died at the Cincinnati Zoo in 1914. Just as you celebrate the wild delight of wild things in this collection, there is also an undercurrent of lament and despair.

BT: I wonder sometimes if the vast scale of it all is simply too overwhelming for the mind to grasp. I know that's true for me. While this book holds an intimate conversation with Ilyse at its center, that conversation is mirrored, in some ways, with a meditation on climate change and what it means to live in the Anthropocene. Elegy is at the heart of this, I'm sure. A way of praising and lamenting and grieving and offering comfort all at once. My hope is that it's clear-eyed in its compassion.

PH: Very much so. And even though I just mentioned an undercurrent of despair running through this collection a few seconds ago, it is equally true there is profound awe and fascination for the world around you. Some of these poems span lengths of geological time that our minds simply cannot fathom. It's clear that a great deal of research went into these poems. Can you talk about your research process and how you threaded that information into these poems?

BT: Long before this book truly discovered its form, I began an earlier version as a kind of challenge: I would write 100 brief lyric essays on nature, and in each piece, I would learn something about the world and I'd also in some way be in conversation with Ilyse and our relationship. It didn't work as a book, though—and that was a hard thing to accept at first. I had to sit with that fact for some time before rolling up my sleeves and weighing what was necessary and what had not earned its place on the page.

One of the beautiful things I learned in this entire process is that scientists and researchers are incredibly kind and helpful and clear and generous. Only once or twice did I not receive a response to a query. The opposite was true of the

vast majority of folks I reached out to for their expertise. I have a standing invitation now, for example, to visit cave sites in India and to see first-hand the cupules I've written about in "The Auditorium Cave." And I can't wait to go!

PH: One of the most powerful poems in this collection is "Ashes, Ashes." You start by saying "California is on fire" and then mention how trees and plants have been turned into particulate that rides the air as ash. You also bring our attention to the longest burning fire anywhere on Earth—an underground coal seam in Australia that has been raging for some 6,000 years. The third part of this poem focuses on your father's body being broken down by the intense flames of a crematoria oven, and you write about it in great detail. Lastly, there is the haunting image of you cradling Ilyse's ashes the night you brought her urn home. Could you talk about the writing process for this poem? How long did it take to write "Ashes, Ashes"? It's one of your longest poems in the collection, and I sense that it took a while to piece together.

BT: "Ashes, Ashes" took several years to write, though the bulk of the writing was done in three phases. The first half of the poem was written after my father's death, in 2015, and Ilyse was still alive. We didn't talk about Marshall's death. It was something I pushed down inside of myself emotionally. And yet, I wrote this meditation during the autumn after his death. Ilyse read everything I wrote and this meditation was no exception—as she was its first editor. And so, in a sense, we talked about this grief through the page as she suggested edits and choices in language, but the conversation stayed there and I didn't talk about his loss outside of that.

What I couldn't see then—or had blocked from my own imagination—was that this meditation would later include the second half that you mention. A version was published in *The Georgia Review* (Fall 2017), and that was later scaled down into the much more streamlined version that's here in the

book.

I'm continually reminded that there are things I want to write, and there are things I need to write. It's a rare thing for a poem to contain both of these things at once.

PH: A difficult question, and I want to ask it delicately. In "The End of the World" you write, "I wanted the ruin. I'd be lying if I said otherwise./ I wanted the hurricane to destroy what was left of my life./ [...] if that hurricane simply crushed me to death/ and then splintered the home around me into an unspeakable/ puzzle of what was once our favorite place on Earth—so be it." Ilyse passed way in 2016 and you have also lost your best friend, Brian Voight, as well as your step-father, Marshall. Grief has been your companion for a long time now. How have music and words sustained you?

BT: Now that some time has passed—it's been almost seven years—I can see a bit more clearly. I can see that writing helped me to find my way forward. I had a lot of anger for quite some time, and it's been difficult for the body to metabolize that and then slough it away. Part of what helped was the research I did into the natural world. In some ways that attention to the details of this amazing planet helped me to fall in love with it once more. And yes, I had fallen out of love with it. When I realized that art offered some ways back into memory, and into conversations with the dead I love—that began a series of creative meditations both on the page and with sound that have sustained me to this day. Ilyse and Brian both died far too young. Both were artists that had so much to give to this world, to all of us. Part of my work now, as an artist, and as a human being, is to find ways to collaborate with them so that others might have a chance to meet those I love.

I've found that the sorrow that lives within the body remains, at least for now, with a kind of ebb and flow to it. It's something I'm learning to live with. We each grieve in our own

way, and the signature of love and loss is unique to the heart that carries it.

A friend in Colorado has shared with me some of the trees up in the mountains that are a part of his life. Lightning trees, as he calls them. You can trace the smooth skin of the trunk where lightning has discharged through the tree with such intensity that the bark has been blown off. They are mapped with scars from the ground to the sky. They are survivors. They radiate a quiet wisdom. And I can't explain what it is or how it happens, but when I place my palms on the trunks of those trees, a sense of calm washes through me, something timeless and transcendent, and I open my eyes, and I breathe, and then I walk back into the days of my life.

PH: There is a definite, and yet subtle, soundscape to this collection. Waves appear in many of the poems. So do birds, clouds, fire, and the fall of rain. You've done something unique for this collection because you have literally created a soundscape that can be accessed by a QR code. Once a reader finishes *The Wild Delight of Wild Things* you invite them to listen to a thirty-minute song called "Clouds," which in many ways is an auditory meditation on the entire collection as a whole. I can hear the sounds that hold these poems together and there is also film of clouds taken at 30,000 feet. I'm not aware of seeing—or hearing—anything quite like this before. Could you talk about how the idea, and the song, came together?

BT: I didn't realize I was creating this when I began it. In Chennai, I sat under a sacred tree and recorded the birds above. I then had the honor of speaking with over 100 students of traditional dance and song in a nearby classroom—and so I asked if they might follow my lead and sing a wave-like meditative pattern with me, which I recorded on a hand-held recorder that I often carry with me. Likewise, while living in Ireland as the inaugural John Montague International Poetry Fellow for the city of Cork, in 2018, I was lucky enough to

have a full choir bussed in from an outlying town to record in a gorgeous chapel. The waves themselves were recorded late one night on Anna Marie Island as Ilyse and I sat on the beach to watch the Perseids rain down.

And so, this meditation in sound arose organically as I began to learn how to live in the word after. Now that it's done, I hope that "Clouds" might help the reader to process their own thoughts and feelings and experiences once they're finished with the book. But in a larger sense, I hope this meditation stands on its own—and that it might prove meaningful and helpful for others in ways that I can only imagine.

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[*The Wild Delight of Wild Things*](#) will be published by Alice James Books in August 2023. To hear a sample from "Clouds," [click here.](#)

New Poetry by Sharon Kennedy-Nolle: "Soundings"



HOLE IN ME / *image by Amalie Flynn*

SOUNDINGS

Things,
your black b-ball shoes,
loose-laced, open-tongued,
curse one corner;
your books, benched, titles turned down;
your trophy array, glitterings speechify

—steering far from the sirenic
roar of your closed room—

The tulips drip,
yellows slackening,
some randomly red-lined
with a quirky genetic scrawl,
into a drinking glass
you left ...

Listen, all I can do
is endure for a word
in edgewise.

However I heave and haul,
the lines come back hooked empty.

So fuck it,
boots, shoes, shirts, books
Throw them all in
the hole in me,
landfill in
free fall
spiking off
the split bark of winter trees
down fire-escaped stories
through the uneasy laps of whitecaps,
to thud some sandy bottom
where you came to tossed rest.

Such depths, no fathoming?

New Poetry by Lisa Stice: “Our Folklore”



FIND MYSELF LOST / *image by*
Amalie Flynn

Our Folklore

Long ago, you were molten rock, and I—
well, I spoke the language of bears.

But now that I have been out of the forest
for so long, all the words and grammar escape

me, and I often find myself lost. And you—
well, you are often mistaken for a statue

in this solid state. No more rumblings and
agitations. We are both quiet these days.

New Nonfiction from Patricia Contaxis: “Luminous Things”



It is late October and the season is turning. The morning chill is not the surface cool of fog, the chill you feel in summer here at Point Reyes National Seashore, but the deeper cold of coming winter as the hemisphere tilts farther from the sun, a cold that settles in to ground, rocks, trees, and your body. I am on Trail Patrol, carrying my usual pack and a radio strapped to my hip belt.

Volunteering for Trail Patrol with the National Park Service was a gift to myself, to celebrate my coming retirement. For sixteen hours each month, I rove the park freely. My pack includes supplies for visitors in need—extra food and water, a medical kit, everything needed for an unexpected night out—and I'm trained to warn against hazards they may not realize. The park calls this preventive search and rescue. I'm also encouraged to share my continuing education as a naturalist, which the park calls interpretive work. I might explain leash laws to a visitor with a soft start-up, an offhanded invitation to view, say, the small, camouflaged snowy plovers nesting in the sand above the wrack line. When a dog tears through the nesting area, it destroys the nests. When a plover is frightened off-nest, it won't return and the chicks won't hatch. Over time there won't be any more plovers. On a good day you can see the light turn on in a visitor's mind.

I've only had to use my training in wilderness first aid once on Trail Patrol, to recognize that a horseback rider, who was diabetic and nine miles off piste at the end of the day as the sun was going down, needed rest, water, to stay warm, and have some food available while I drove into town for help.

My assignment each shift is to choose a route through these seventy-one thousand acres of wonder: a peninsula of coastal ridge jutting out ten miles at its widest point, bordered by wild beaches; a hot spot for migrating birds; home to wild, free-roaming tule elk, to bobcats, and one shy mountain lion. As I wander the actual landscape, an internal world opens to me, maps itself onto the wild and familiar terrain of Point Reyes. And on this particular day, I am forced to take account. At the trailhead I call in my location and planned route. The radio squawks back: "Copy. Have a good day."

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In the slanted morning sun, I walk through a corridor of orb weaver spiderwebs. Beaded with dew, they glisten and wink at

me as I pass. I feel charmed, delighted by them. Then I climb the first rise, noting the effort it requires, and feel the first frisson of fear. Twice in the last few years, an episode of exhaustion has overtaken me while hiking, as if someone pulled a plug and all my vital energy drained. Both were brief. A drink of water, a bit of food, and they passed. But these are not things I felt in my younger body. Walking the long, deep quiet of Point Reyes, I feel more alone than in my usual daily life, a solitude that harkens to a much bigger, far longer solitude.

I enter a valley whose steep walls prevent me from hearing the ocean on the other side of the ridge. Within the valley sound is amplified. My boots thudding on the rutted, hard-packed trail remind me of a saying both chastening and reassuring: You are not the only pebble on the beach.

Rabbit, raven, spotted towhee, and quail. A downy woodpecker, vociferous and hardworking. Rounding a bend, there is a gorgeous, healthy coyote. A big one, close to fifty pounds. Coyote sightings this close up are not common in the park, in my experience. In three decades I have only seen coyotes from my car as they slinked across the road ahead of me and disappeared into underbrush or foraged in a field far from the road. This one has staked out a gopher hole, snout down, back curved, still as death. I wait and watch. The coyote leaps into the air and pounces, missing its mark. It swings its head toward me. I could feel that I am seen. A chill. Sharp intake of breath. And then it faces forward, trots away so swift and smooth, it is as if it were skating.

In late morning I climb the rise that will take me out of the valley and begin the long descent to the beach. I have warmed up through the morning's hike and acclimated to my pack. I feel loose and strong. A thought surfaces that I am deep into the park, hours away from any possible rescue, which is true, factual, but not imminently relevant. I take a moment to check my surroundings in case my intuition is ahead of a situation I

haven't completely registered. But I see no actual danger. I keep walking.

I decide to note my fears as I would note thought and breath while meditating. I list them as they float through my mind:

~ I'll meet a dangerous human. (Possible.)

~ I'll be stung by a bee and go into anaphylaxis. (I carry an EpiPen.)

~ My hip or back will go out, and I won't be able to walk.

~ I'll stumble and break a leg or arm.

~ I'll fall down a cliff.

~ I'll choke on my sandwich, and no one will be with me to squeeze my diaphragm and blow it out. (This one made me laugh at myself a little.)

~ My heart will give out.

There it is. My father did not live to be my age. He died of a broken heart. Stroke. Heart attack. Years of heart disease claiming his every breath. I was twenty when he died and have lived most of my life without him. But his decline haunted me, and as I approached the age at which he died (he was sixty), some subtle thought line worked its way out, as if entering a narrows in a small skiff, the disturbance of the waters increasing, my grip on the gunwales tightening. And then I was through. Slight disorientation from a future foreclosed to the usual unknown: bright, hectic, and sweet.

Still, something lingers. The visceral shock—unfathomable, really—held in the body that we are here and then we are not. I am sixty-three now. I'm retiring. I'm happy. I'm writing and playing music. I am in love. My father was none of these. The radio squawks, a ranger calling dispatch to check a license plate and VIN number before issuing a parking ticket.

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At noon I reach Coast Camp. A large group of high schoolers is packing out after a week-long service project of trail restoration. They trudge in knots of chatting, bumping magnetism, edging me to the side of the trail. I seem invisible to them. I walk to a picnic table and slide my pack off, enjoy the lightness. I sit on the table, eating my sandwich while watching a dark-eyed junco flit from campsite to campsite. A song sparrow supervises from a post and then from an unused grill. The sun is directly overhead in a clear sky. I can feel its warmth on my arms and face and on my back, where it dries my park-issue khaki shirt, damp from carrying a pack all morning. After lunch I amble down a wide cut through the coastal bluff that leads to the beach. Halfway down the gentle descent is a broad-canopied eucalyptus with a rope swing on which my daughter played all the many times we camped here when she was a child. On the beach a wide wrack line tells the story of a stormy night. But the surf is mild now, a gentle lap followed by a longer, quiet interval. At the shore sound surrounds you, even the sounds of an easy tide and amiable breeze. Climbing back to camp, sound resumes its directional quality, comes at me from identifiable points, and the air around me feels different, heavier, ground-stilled.

The junco and sparrow have moved on, also the high schoolers. I have the place to myself, and I sit on the picnic table a while, gazing at an outcrop of sandstone halfway up the western slope of the coast ridge. It is enormous. Sections have weathered into shapes like ramparts and parapets, looking like a medieval castle. I can still remember the rush of joy I felt the first time I saw it, thirty-one years ago. It was 1987, the year my wife and I moved to the Bay Area. It was our first hike in Point Reyes. The castle loomed above us, standing alone, as it does, on a dry flank sparsely dotted with rubble and low scrub. We were on the upswing of a ten-mile loop from ridge to beach.

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The radio crackles, then falls silent. Sometimes the radio helps me feel less alone, but sometimes it reminds me of how alone I am, how far from base, as I ramble into the peninsula. There are dead spots in the park, places where radio repeaters cannot penetrate. In the months following the death of my wife, I took to this landscape like the balm of Gilead. I was fifty-six years old and full of pent-up vigor that wanted to spend itself on these hills, quick-stepped and blind, all motion and breath. It was as if movement through this landscape would scrub my grief, rinse my hot, swollen eyes with the cool waters of wonder and awe and possibly, if ever again, promise.

In those days, not so many years ago, I walked fast. I pushed my thumping heart ahead of me to its limit. It was as if I dared it to break. "Go ahead," I might have said. "Try it!" I traveled light: an ultralight pack, a small bottle of water, my EpiPen, a map. Nothing like the pack I carry on Trail Patrol. Fear was not part of my landscape, inner or outer, then. I may have been too exhausted for fear, my shock and grief having wiped out a wide swath of emotional range. I was just doing everything I could to feel alive. I kept moving.

My mind cleaved, in the aftermath of my wife's death, into an altered, bifurcated state I both inhabited and observed. On the one hand, I was a small creature standing on the crust of an empty world in a vast, cold universe, completely alone, with a galactic wind whistling around me. On the other hand, it seemed the natural world had been lit from within, and I was transfixed by that glow evident everywhere I looked. I moved through the world—pushed myself through it, really—to keep seeing the next luminous thing. All objects sentient. All events sacred.

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The radio squawks again, another parking violation and also a call for maintenance to repair a utility shed near the lighthouse. I take up my pack and hike along the base of a low escarpment. Soon I enter a riparian clutch, singular and unexpected, an oasis in this otherwise dry expanse of low coastal scrub. And then I am out along the exposed bluffs. I spot the red bandana of a northern flicker and watch it for a while. Further along a pair of red-tailed hawks hovers over the pale-blond hills, hunting. I stand still a long time, watching. They hover and dive, hover and dive. They pop up, glide, circle round, and return to the same spot. After a long, long time, they catch nothing.

A group of three hikers pass me. The women are in shorts and sneakers. The man carries a light day pack. They're in their late sixties, a few years older than I. Trim and fit, swift and chatty. They blow past me with cheery hellos and disappear over the rise.

The red-tails move south. Two ravens catch up to the hunting pair. They dog the hawks, fly over the hunting ground, circle out over the beach bluffs, and swoop in again. I stand in the shade of a tree and watch.

At the Sculptured Beach trailhead, I size up the path. It's a steep trail along a narrow drainage down to the beach. My companion on this particular day of Trail Patrol—inchoate fear—organizes itself into questions. What if I can't make it back up? What if I get hurt on the beach and the tide comes in? Are there bees?

I hesitate at the trailhead. I imagine how I would feel back at my car at the end of the day if I allow myself to get this far and then turn away out of fear. Turn away from something new. I have never been to Sculptured Beach. My radio has been quiet all this time. I am out of range.

I force myself to continue down the trail. It briefly winds

down a scrub hump and then narrows precipitously through a cut in the coastal bluffs, a corridor with cliffsides that are sheer and very close. The trail becomes a section of rough steps cut with long plateaus and inhumanly high risers. Turning sideways, I step down from one riser to the next. The weight of my pack forces a harder landing than I would like. I hesitate on one for a moment, for no reason, really, perhaps an intuition, when a terrible crash comes from my left. I freeze. Sudden as a lightning strike, something passes in front of me. It is too fast. I cannot comprehend. My mind is wiped clean. An explosion of fear racks my body. I feel as if I am inside an enormous bell that has been hammered. And then I see the three deer. They had leapt from the sheer cliffside on my left, onto the path before me, and then up onto the cliffside to my right. I could have touched them, they came that close. One after another. Pow! Pow! Pow! Having descended the cliff to my left, they could not stop and wait for me to pass. They committed. By chance, we crossed one another's paths at that very moment, a miracle in a world of a thousand trillion encounters. The deer bound up the cliff in a few jumps. Once near the top, they pause to look at me. Three young does. Tails erect, ears like radar saucers. One ear twitches.

My adrenalated body feels wispy, as if cool air were blowing through holes in my existence. I feel like a ghost. We stare at one another, having cracked open time. I laugh. When else had I seen such a thing? Joined by these three wild characters that are poised on the hillside, looking over their shoulders at me, we are line breaks in a poem, something sudden and new, cheeky and fresh in the seconds before leaping up and over the ridge top.

New Poetry from D.A. Gray: “Our Backyard Apocalypse”

We set small bowls of sugar water
on the garden's edge. Bees were scarce
since the freeze which had almost finished
what the pesticides had started. Still,
some survived.

Poetry from Eric Chandler: “Hetch Hetchy”



THERE'S A DROUGHT / *image by*
Amalie Flynn

Hetch Hetchy

There are two signs on
The towel rack.

One says, “cozy” and explains that
The towel rack
Heats your towels.

It’s next to the switch
That fires up
The electricity to the towel rack.
That fires up
The coal fired power plant.

The power plant
Sends up the gas.
Is the drought because the power plant
Sends up the gas?
Either way, there’s a drought.

I looked down through that gas at the
Hetch Hetchy reservoir.
White bathtub rings surround the low
Hetch Hetchy reservoir
Because of the drought.

The second sign on
The towel rack
Says they won’t launder what’s on
The towel rack.
Only what they find on the floor.

All the water in the city comes from
The Hetch Hetchy.
They’re conserving water from
The Hetch Hetchy.
They hope you won’t mind.

Enjoy your hot towels.

“Hetch Hetchy” previously appeared in Eric Chandler’s book

New Poetry from Lisa Stice: “Water Cycle”

No matter where we are, the oceans
meet us in some form.
I am small
and my daughter (who is only eight) –
is even smaller
and still, our dog is smaller
yet, then there are those microscopic zoe-
and phytoplankton
and the not so micro
fish that eat them and so on

New Poetry from Ben Weakley: “Beatitudes I,” Beatitudes II,” “Beatitudes III,” “Beatitudes IV”



THE BROKEN SKIN / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Beatitudes I.

The Lord blessed us with knowledge. Twin curses, good and evil.

Why else plant the luscious tree there, where we were bound to find the fruit? The purple and shivering flesh never lacks in spirit. The ache and growl of our naked bellies are the price

for the moment's delight. So, we gorge and the juice drips sticky down our chins. Let angels have the eternal heaviness of paradise; ours is the moment. The act, willful and with intent.

Advised of the penalties. Done poorly. Knowing this kingdom cannot last. Looking beyond the gardens for a more convincing view of heaven.

Beatitudes II.

Are we not also blessed, we who praise
the clear night and its silence?

Betrayed by the absence of stars, we mourn
a billion-years' light no longer burning.

We whimper at the withered grass burning,
the breathing forest burning, the one
great and living ocean boiling and burning.

You who created time, who is before all things, who will
remain after the ruin,
will you be waiting for us in the cool garden?

Will we lie down with you in the dew-damp grass?
Will we be comforted?

Beatitudes III.

Are the meek blessed tonight in their bundled and stinking
shelters
beneath frozen bridges? Are they blessed with patience in
their waiting
for the Lord of compassion? For the Lord that *suffers with*?

They suffer together. Their children will inherit the
suffering
of generations,
the split lip of submission, the broken skin of the earth.

Beatitudes IV.

Blessed. From a word that meant *blood*.
Latin for *praise*. Blood and praise to the hungry; they are
weak.

Blood and praise for the thirsty. For those who bathe
in fetid water.

What are words
to those who hunger in a gluttonous world?
To those who thirst beside the brackish rivers,
choking on garbage? We say, wait for righteousness
to come from above. But they have starved
in their flesh so that our spirits could be filled.

**Poetry by Amalie Flynn +
Images by Pamela Flynn:
“#150,” “#151,” “#152,”
“#153”**



Flow #150

SPIDER / 150

Thick in Louisiana swamps

Atchafalaya Basin

Hot cypress shooting out
Stretching in that bayou
Where pipelines
Pumping black gold oil
Cross across the swamp
Like spider veins.

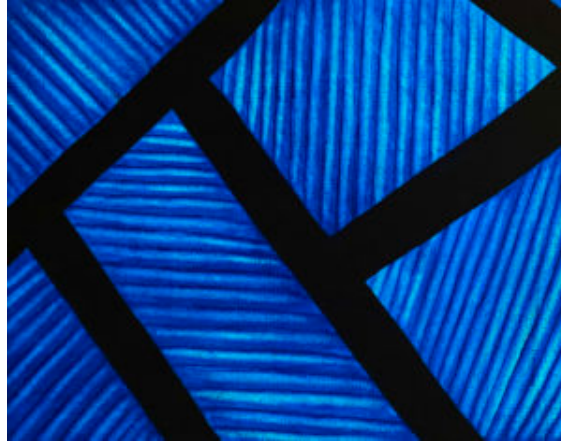


Flow #151

TRACKS / 151

How I find tiny cuts
The skin of my inner
Thighs outer lip my
Labia
Cuts from his finger
Nails small bloody
Crescents

Like beetle tracks.



Flow #152

SPOIL / 152

Or deep in a swamp

How oil companies

Create canals

Push earth into piles

Push mud into banks

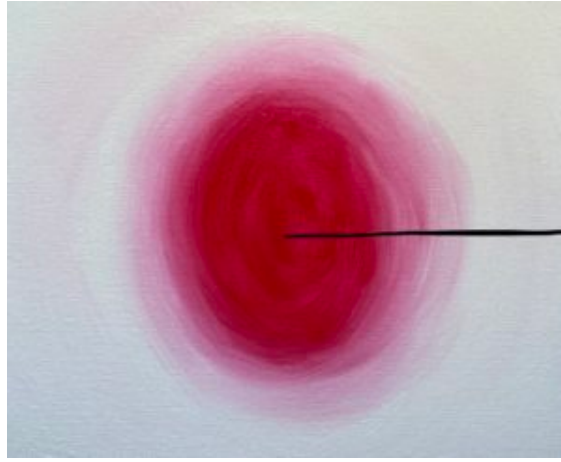
These spoil banks or

Dams

That block blocking

Water so it cannot

Flow.



Flow #153

CLAM / 153

The sky is full of trees

Now after

After he hits me over

The head

With a pipe metal pipe

Hard on

The crown of my skull

Bone and

Suture cracking like a

Clam shell.

[Pattern of Consumption](#) is a year long project featuring 365 poems by Amalie Flynn and 365 images by Pamela Flynn. The poetry and images focus on the assault on women and water.

New Poetry by Stephen Massimilla: “Wounded”



CAPILLARIES OF ROOTS / image by Amalie Flynn

WOUNDED

—to Laura

Bleating thing without wool
Thunder without sound
Ghost of wooded peaks, of constricted arterial waters

There is a dog inside the heart, voice bursting
Interminable silence, blown-open iris

Over organs buried deeper in the earth
where capillaries of roots still bleed orange dust

Leave me be, hot tongue of fireflies,
cracked pharynx of ice

Do not ask me to slip
 down among green nerves of water-weed
 where the flesh of the sky
is unmoving and fruitless

The moon still hovers in its surgeon's coat

But do not try to satisfy the dead
who hold on with claws like desperate fevers

Leave my sutured skull of empty ivory forever

But pity me; put an end to this much hurt

 I am love, I tell you
and all the quick wings accumulating
as restlessly as the breaths

 that were once inside
these wheel-crushed, wind-scattered leaves

New Poetry from Gail Nielsen: “Something Like Nightfall”



BLACK LACE TREES / *image by Amalie Flynn*

SOMETHING LIKE NIGHTFALL

something, like night falls
slow, as if
nothing in the world has ever moved
but distant hope descending, still ablaze
days soften to wonder

what else leaves
silhouettes these black lace trees
fades from me

it is you from my life
steadily, quietly
as celestial movement

New Nonfiction from Ulf Pike: “Tone Deaf”

With a slightly youthful blurring of reality, sandhill cranes resemble pterodactyls in flight. Each year when they return to the valleys and high plains of southern Montana, their warm bugles trill two miles in advance of their prehistoric forms, sounding the merciful turning of the season.



Fuzzy aspen catkins map sporadic, swirling gusts while the thawing ground gives underfoot. Surrounding peaks loosen their hold on treasures of snow, reluctant at first and then with the ecstatic flourish of a gambler intent on losing it all—as one must be, in the end, to live free and die well.

Drainages thrum with frigid, crystal surges, pulling down silver snags and churning up boulders. A great tumbler, the mountain unlocks, releasing winter to the rivers and creeks in muddied volumes. Sagebrush slopes and grassy pastures blush green where fawns wobble on new legs after their mothers and

drop like speckled stones at the faintest threat. Smoke rises in thin columns from slash piles and wafts throughout the valley, drawing on long memories of starry skies, the sharing of food and mingled voices around an evening fire. Days open and close in slow beauty along the arc of the sun, in the ungovernable balance of the planet, in the violent, wordless, infallible perfection of natural phenomena sustaining us. Atmospheric pressures constrict into fists and then fall sharply. Cumulus clouds gather and darken into an anvil where the season's first low peal of thunder is hammered out like a skeleton key to the warm womb of the universe.

In the beginning was the tone: that matter-manipulation wrought between the amplitude of some original cosmic drop. The vibratory paradox of which resonates in perpetuity, pleading with us like a mother to please, for heaven's sake, turn off that noise and go outside. Deep down she feels an impossible urgency to protect her babies from her own need to protect them. She is plagued by her duty and meditates on one true miracle: In the beginning, she knows, either something came from nothing or everything is infinite. She peers into the pit of strip mine, down through geologic eras and finds herself traversing veins of minerals through time. She feels the sublime adrenaline of a shrew falling under the shadow of an archaeopteryx, everything vibrating at harmonic frequencies with the unequivocal imperative of that original-bird. Both lived in

vibrant, kinetic, absolute necessity. The shadow of death is what kept them both alive. That was the tone. For millions and millions of years. Anthropologists surmise that during an era in emergent hominoid history the tone forever changed when consciousness was identified.

What is perhaps most unique about being human, as far as we know, is that we know. We know we are here. There is a thing that it is like to be human and we know of this thing as an abstraction from our corporeal, moment-to-moment presence. And

what purpose does this knowledge serve? To know we are here means we also know that at some point we will cease to be? This ancient epiphany was the foundation of the first timeline, the first mystery of existence.

Life was suddenly charged with new impulses for projections and provisions. Planning on death redefined human instinct to produce surplus, more resources than were required to satiate immediate hunger. By fortune of birth or early migration, populations in resource-rich environments were able to procure exceptional stores of wealth allowing their numbers to grow exponentially. In their numbers was previously unknown strength. The protection of such wealth spawned the crude hierarchy of class and government, the legacy of organized warfare and systemic dependence under which our race of knowers still generally functions today. Though “functions” is a relative term. A heart, after all, can function just as flawlessly as a guillotine.

On the flip side of the surplus coin was the novelty of free-time, at least for those of some status. The cultivation of self-consciousness, almost by necessity, amplified the otherness of everything outside the experiencer’s internal landscape. Just as projections of an abstract physical future produced surplus and therefore power, so a burgeoning mind-world whispered of similar promise. That which was hunted and grown for food became the subject of worship. It became the life-giver, the savior. In the form of painted representation it became an idea which transcended the physical realm into the other place, the spirit-world, the invisible home of the soul into which death was the portal. Perhaps the sum of all human expression—technological, artistic, religious—can trace its origin to a single moment of clarity between near-human eyes staring into glassy water—the moment a mind cleaved itself from nature.

We’ve come a long way in a very short time. The standardly cited fulcrum is the Industrial

Revolution, a mere 250 years ago. The chart graphing human consumption, reproduction and toxic emissions from that point on looks like a cartoonishly steep tidal wave looming over all our tomorrows. Ever since, many constructively sane and criminally insane have been waving their hands, warning us that we're taking a long walk off a short pier. They cry that we have gone deaf. That seems to be the tone these days. Panic, desperation, delusion, denial. Through technological proliferation and our inextricable integration with it, our abstraction of death is now so thorough and complete that its sudden arrival falls over us like the shadow of some prehistoric terror. Our dependence on surplus and the powers that rule over it has been proven our greatest weakness. But for very few, we no longer are capable of providing for ourselves, for directly contributing to our own survival and the survival of those for whom we are responsible.

The system thrives on our unexamined dependence on it. The system, as it were, is the Shadow Mother and we the feeble children at her chaffed nipples, dimly aware of the in beauty we have forfeited for instead being coddled. This revelation is a profound, visceral injury to our pride, one from which the psyche staggers back and hides in the dark to protect itself from the compounding insult of closely assessing the trauma. Yet this is what must happen. The hard look in full sunlight at the wound. Tragically—perhaps catastrophically—this wound will fester in darkness while we fumble to put the fragments of our habituated, abstracted conceptions back together then sheepishly push them out into the light as decoys, only peeking out once in a while from hidden safety. We will not risk enough to be free.

A time traveler wandering deep into the misty mountains might find themselves greeted with outstretched hands holding a vessel of water which had been hummed and chanted over for days, purifying it for the intrepid visitor. Endlessly compelling is the geometric symmetry of fine sand formed on a

screen when vibrated by harmonic frequencies and then is scattered and blurred by dissonant frequencies. More compelling still, is the same effect such frequencies have on the molecular structure of water. Which begs the question: Are we not mostly water ourselves? What is humming and chanting over us?

Spring is returning and with it the sound of sandhill cranes, of rushing wind and water. Soon like a mother that low peal of thunder will vibrate through the atmosphere and lodge in our chests: *Go out there, child. It is dangerous. I love you, and you must go out there.*

New Poetry by Mary Ann Dimand: “Earth Appreciation” and “Lusting, Stinting”

New poetry by Mary Ann Dimand: “Earth Appreciation” and “Lusting, Stinting”

New Poetry by Carol Graser: “Parkinson’s Triolet” and

“Summer Isolation”



THE WIDENING FAULT / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Parkinson's Triolet

I cup the base of your skull, catch
precious cells spilling out like salt
that seasons your limbs, your unholy lurches
I cup the drumbeat of us, mis catch

the rhythm, drop plates with a crash
You feed pills into the widening fault

My palm on the back of your head catches
our precarious marriage, heavy with salt

Summer Isolation

I paint the porch with strokes of blue
diamond. By sunset, it's a veranda
of green and you have fallen asleep
at the shore of a lake that glaciers through
your dreams. You wake with stones in your
teeth and ice melting under your skin
You arrive home with feet delighted
by the verdancy at our entrance. We
dig holes in the ground, nests for roots
the width of thread. You shake ancient
drops of water off your bones. When
a ruby-throated hummingbird
zips past
we see it

**New Poetry by Betsy Martin:
“About What You Have,”**

“Female Figure in Photos,” and “To Missoula”



GRASSES QUIVER BEFORE / *image by Amalie Flynn*

ABOUT WHAT YOU HAVE

In my dream

Dad, age one hundred twelve,
has his first cell phone—

big and square,
with a rotary dial.

With a proud index finger
he dials my mother,

gets her voice mail.
Together we lean in,
listen

to her low, driftty voice,
its mist so warm on my ear
as it rises from deep underground.

I ask Dad for *his* number,
but he can't recall it
before fading into the passage. He's left me

messages, though,
like: When eating fish be careful
not to get a bone stuck in your throat; when walking
tuck in the tummy; think
about what you have,
not about what you don't.

FEMALE FIGURE IN PHOTOS

fourteen-year-old mop of hair
sullen air in mod raincoat
on London sidewalk with
beaming scowling father brother

seventeen leaning
on brick wall in black-and-white flannel shirt
no cigarette yet mien

as in movies seen through a puff of smoke

college-era long hair

akimbo arms

eyes narrowed

to spot foe in tall grass

sixty odd in a museum at a window

face a little wooden

and through the panes

an autumn-leafed tree flames

TO MISSOULA

The cold air her pillow of courage, she skirts
the northern rim of the nation.

As she crosses the Dakota Badlands,
where even the hardest grasses quiver

before earth's uprisings and revolutions,
her eastern forest home has tilted

and is sliding over the rim!

She pulls her wings in closer
to fly fast and low

over layers of pink and gray guts
squeezed from deep under.

A tail feather tears loose,

whirls away;

she almost bursts into a plume of magma.

Night cools into dawn.

She parks the car,

steps out into a new world,
a young woman with compass and camera
and a crown of mountains.

New Poetry by Sam Cherubin: “Don’t About Not,” “Mermaid Tavern,” and “Emerald Inula”



SUN HOLDING ME / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Don’t About Not

If I can’t or think
do it like I’m doing now

a beach

sun holding me

I am holding space
not space itself

not looking
being

gathering toward me

sun's filaments

fluidity
is all I need

Mermaid Tavern

A night-wind touching bare backs lying down
and bare arms spooned across my bed, in blue
light dreaming over skin, light-fingered sparks
of seaweed, dendrites rippling through the room.

Scales rubbed against smooth sheets, in silver
puddled water, a smell of open
ocean, roseate tips of waves, our hips'
undulations, in my body's rhythmic memory.

Emerald Inula

i.

Apples in Schiller's desk, Balsam of Peru, rockrose,
rose alba, Helichrysum Everlasting, *Immortale*.
Why can't this be enough?

ii.

Dried petals staining the pages.

Attar of cells breathing sun.
Flesh never accepting, but aching.

New Poetry from Hannah Jane Weber: “My Childhood Smelled Like,” “Surprise Dawn”



FROSTED WITH MOONLIGHT / *image by Amalie Flynn*

MY CHILDHOOD SMELLED LIKE

cabbage, salted tomatoes, and cracklings.

the flume of dust I awakened when my fingers
untangled the shag carpet's red mane.

crayons I melted against the wood stove,
our terrier's feet, with that same scent of fire.

night crawlers, shad, algae, and lake,
blanketing our boat after a morning of fishing.

Dad's scrapyard, fragrant with hot tar
and smoke from his brown cigarettes,
acres of rust and grease, a twisting maze
leading to one abandoned refrigerator after another,
each filled with jars and jars of ancient rot.

fireworks and muddy gravel roads,
leadplant, elderberries, horsemint.

Grandma's lilac bushes,
reeking of booze from the bar next door,
their purple bunches lighting up the dark
with neon liquor perfume.

SURPRISE DAWN

rows of cedars push through slats of slain brothers
dense boughs gushing berries
frosted with moonlight

my bike light skims twilight from creamy sidewalks
a premature dawn blaring from the flashing bulb
illuminating the wind's fabric
in rustling leaves

I lean far from the sweep of branches
but my jacket catches the emerald froth
and propels me into the flustered chatter of birds awakened
and tossed about by my helmet's pillage of their feathered
hearth

**New Poetry from Alise
Versella: “Parallels,” “Red-
Breasted Sparrows,” “I Wonder
If History’s Men Knew They
Would Be Great,” “A Fierce
Sense of Resolve”**



TRENCHES OF MY LUNGS / *image by Amalie Flynn*

PARALLELS

The birds with conviction

Tap out their lyrics in the snow
And their chatter descends upon the mountains
Look how the flowers still struggle to grow
Like lungs filling with air
The soft despair
 of endings
 of so much life lived
It must be written
And then it must be sung
Like the chorus of a sun after a lightning storm
The bees like oboe players thrum
The morning sky an afterbirth of blood
This is how we love
It's also how hate seeds in the veins
But mostly
Morning's birthing is how the stars are made
Occasionally
The stars burn out
Like flames in church hall candles
Their ashes floating on the wind
But for centuries death is how time begins
Infinite explosions and black holes
All the songs the Earth sings that we don't know
The words to
Like psalms in a foreign language
But they have always been my favorites
Like autumn's blood-red season
Her heavy soil and decay
I love how a little death choreographs
The sycamores in a grand ballet

RED-BREASTED SPARROW

There's one red-breasted sparrow and he speaks
To me of grief, how snow diseased emerald
Spring, the morning worm dying in his beak
All alone he'll sleep between twigs nestled

As I am nestled warmly into bed
Goldenrod spears through plants on windowsills
That know not of sickness in heart or head
Mourn not, for there's glory in winter rose

The map of my veins runs wild with blood
I breathe to fill my lungs unconsciously
Outside the beehive with sweet honey hums
Hexagonal cities, combs built between

These milk bones of mine like geometry
Have faith in the calculations a body sings

I WONDER IF HISTORY'S MEN KNEW THEY WOULD BE GREAT

In case you were wondering
 If at all you do wonder
I mean stare off into the space collecting dust particles in
the sun
Wonder
I hope you wander forward

Do not get stuck in the loop of reliving
All the conversations you wish you held
 Isn't it funny how we always think of the
right remark after the arrow has left the quiver?
Sailed on like great fleets on uncharted seas
Circling around unknown America thinking it was the West
Indies

 We all just want to discover something

Like a cure for the aching
I hope your daydreams lead you to rejoicing
In the architecture of your body
 A city skyline rising
 How it glimmers like those dust particles in the sun
I hope you wonder about the things you could become
 Not what you have done
I hope you never ruminate on anything you think you missed

That it isn't here anymore only means there is room on the
gallery walls for new art

Do you understand what I am telling you?

Your mouth is a paint brush; I want the acrylic to speak to me
a new language

Teach me a new word for matrimony

That colors and my empty sighs could wed

And the canvas and I

Would bleed a glorious red

 The beautiful ruin of the withering day
How you empty it out for its worth because no gold can stay

In case you were wondering

I dream about the galaxy, turn my mind to stargazing

Believe in little green men terrorizing craters like two-year-
old boys ransack the waiting room

We are all waiting for something to begin

Daydream about what that is

I know it to be breathing under water; I am waiting for my
gills to appear

I want to swim, Pinocchio in the mouth of the whale

Don't you see?

Movement is the way the lake ripples, breathing

The sky is a wave cresting

And you could be as great

As history's greatest men

 If only you believed the way they did.

A FIERCE SENSE OF RESOLVE

Resolutions require revolution

And I have been at battle with the nation of my body since
puberty

I have gone to war with my heart as it broke

And broke
And broke
Reinforced the battalions to hold the pieces up
And the bullets ricocheted off the trenches of my lungs
And I swore the fires pillaging the village of my stomach
would wipe out the living

I am living like a militia razing the fields of foreign
countries
I am burning the boundaries
Rewriting the policies
I am done policing this body

I am done living like I am a war-torn country
A refugee seeking refuge from my own self-pity
I am finished doubting the ability to achieve my dreams
Just because they haven't happened yet

Civilization was not built easily
There was death in battle and conquerors invading
Trespassers trying to take away
All that I made
Of myself

How dare I
Monarch and sovereign body
Forget that I am royalty
A king
A rajah in the Bhagavad
How dare I lose faith in the ruby red of my blood
Propelling the turbines of this heart

I have resolved to tap this vein
And inundate the land
The great flood once again
Ready your ark and corral your lambs

The fox is on the hunt
I am cunning enough

To see through the lies I tell myself

A kitsune never deceives herself

Never traps herself in the hunter's snare

She will own the year

And the forest

And the air

Breathe the freedom she pulled from his rib.

“Art-Making is My Light:” An Interview with Poet Suzanne S. Rancourt

As Suzanne Rancourt notes, her work is a bridge between disparate worlds, attempting to make connections between these worlds, whether they be the Indigenous and Anglo worlds, or the worlds of the veteran and the civilian. Her poetry (but not only her poetry) reflects a healing process that involves artistic creation as a method of “finding our way back home.”

Her first book of poems, *Billboard in the Clouds* (2004), evokes the prevalent themes in her work: the continuity of the past and its impact on the present, the interaction of childhood and adulthood, Nature, the enduring strength of family and heritage, relationships, and cultural loss.



For example, in the poem "Even When the Sky Was Clear," she recalls childhood experiences of observing her father's connection to and understanding of Nature: "I would watch him/through my mother's kaleidoscopic den windows,/ . . . I would watch my father/stand in the center of the dooryard appropriately round/ . . . Even in the summer/he'd look to the clouds, to the sky/at dawn, at dusk." Her father was able to read Nature for knowledge of snow, rain, and wind. As an adult she stands "in a circle" and sings "to the clouds/in the language/my father/taught me." In this way both the family and the broader cultural heritage are remembered.

The idea of the continuity of memory is also shown in "Thunderbeings." In this poem Rancourt recalls her "Parisienne farm woman" grandmother, Dorothy, whom she called Memere. Memere, killed in a freak lightning strike in 1942 (before Rancourt's birth) while touching a post of a brass bed, was an artist who "painted in oils/the light and dark of all things-" Rancourt recalls that as a child she would trace the brushstrokes on the paintings, "wondering where these ships were sailing/in my Memere's head." Then, forty years later, the adult Rancourt discovers the bed and polishes the "spokes and posters," with the bed transformed into a "brass lamp" which "illuminated images of a woman/I never knew." As the poem ends Rancourt writes: "For years I slept in this bed,/and often heard her/still humming in the brass." Rancourt creates unexpected connections through visual imagery and forges a link between the grandmother she never knew and her adult self, between past and present.

That the link endures is also shown in "Haunting Fullblood." Memere represented Rancourt's European heritage, while in "Haunting Fullblood" Rispah is the Native "Grandmother to grandmothers" who embodies her Huron/Abenaki heritage and speaks to her "through the generations/ . . . Were you anything more than a photograph ?/Oh, yes, Rispah, Grandmother, my subtle bridge/over flooding time-shhh-/I am

breathing proof.”

Her second book, *murmurs at the gate* (2019), extends and develops the themes in the first. In “Harvesting the Spring” she reflects on past springs and recalls how frozen ground would thaw so that she could “sink my feet into” the mud and how spring would blend into summer and the longed-for wild strawberries. She ponders the familiar memories, the certainties, of childhood, that often stand in contrast to the confusions and losses of adulthood. The poem concludes: “I long for wild strawberries/and the little girl/who used to pick them.”

There are also meditations on Nature in such poems as “Along the Shore—Five Miles,” “Grace” (“Gazing across the valley, across the Sacandaga, across the surface/ . . . drinking the self/drinking the Universe”), and “Swimming in the Eagle’s Eye.” In this poem she sits by a “secret” pond in quiet observation. She would lose herself in the “reflections of backward worlds” and, echoing Thoreau, “I recognized something/in this Eagle’s eye/this everything and/nothing/striking calm.”

However, she is more explicit in *murmurs* about the violence of war and her military experience. “When We Were Close” details a lover’s PTSD. “The Execution” uses “the photograph I grew up with,” Eddie Adams’ photo of the execution of the Viet Cong prisoner on the streets of Saigon, to ask about this incident, which is metonymic of the brutality of war, “You will remember, won’t you? Won’t you?” “Iron Umbrella” notes that “The burden of war is strapped to the backs of the survivors.” Other poems address her MST, as in “Against All Enemies—Foreign and Domestic.” The anger at her violation is palpable: “I wanted to kill you/assailant/because you violated my home—my body.” The story “The Bear That Stands” discusses in more detail her rape and its aftermath.

Rancourt also utilizes music to express her experiences.

“Sisters Turning,” (co-written with Anni Clark, who also did the music), is based, as the liner notes indicate, on the “testimony and writings of Army and Marine Corps veteran Suzanne Rancourt.” In the song she recounts her military sexual trauma (MST) as a “naïve Marine” at the hands of a Navy man. This is her first betrayal. She tells another woman what happened, but is initially not believed. This, she writes, is her second betrayal. The song suggests that healing from MST can be facilitated by women trusting in the truth of the others’ experience: “Where do we turn/if not to each other . . . If we lose each other/we’ll never get home.”

Rancourt utilizes music, dance, photography, writing and other modalities to help others heal from various types of trauma, substance abuse, domestic violence, and Traumatic Brain Injury. Using her education, life experience, and training as a photojournalist and information specialist in the Marine Corps she created an integrated Expressive Arts program that promotes healing. She lives in rural New York State and works locally with veterans in a peer to peer program but also travels internationally to work with others to help them regain a sense of home.

*

The novelist Henry James wrote that “A writer is someone on whom nothing is lost.” If I expand James’ aphorism to include any creative artist, then Suzanne Rancourt is that artist “on whom nothing is lost.” Through memory, emotion, and observation Rancourt reveals the truths of her experience in all its dimensions.

LA: Let’s start with discussing your new book of poems. How does it continue or differ from previous work?

SR: My third book of poems, *Old Stones, New Roads*, has been picked up by Main Street Rag Book Publishing and is scheduled for release in Spring of 2021. *Old Stones, New Roads* differs

from previous work in that I am further down the road in age and healing. The continuation aspect is seen in the things that simply remain the same, my spirit, temperament, how and where I was raised, my culture, and various trauma events. All of these factors propel my continued self-exploration, figuratively and literally. For example, this book is dedicated to my father's mother, Alice Pearl, who collected stones. I clearly remember, as a child, sitting beside my grandmother in front of the stone hearth at the Porter Lake camp. I was incredibly young. I recall Grammie pointing to each stone and telling me where it came from and who brought it to her. Each stone had a story, a life, a history. Since a small child I have also collected stones.

I come from independent people who enjoyed travel. Mobility was supported at young ages: hiking, bicycling, driving, travel in a variety of vehicles, learning, exploring something about resonance of place and how some places "feel" more than others. I was encouraged to observe, ask questions, take note of how people lived, to respect differences and similarities and to figure things out. It is interesting to me, and hopefully readers, how where we come from is always brighter the further we travel from it. Part of this phenomenon helps me take a look at what is identity narrative and what is trauma narrative. Post-traumatic growth, for me, is being able, first, to recognize what is a trauma "story" and accept that that trauma "story" is not my identity, and then to ask, how do I transpose the trauma stories, tones, and images into syntactic stones, and new discoveries?

LA: Various themes emerge in your work: relationships, family/history, Nature, Indigenous heritage, impact of the past on the present, loss.

SR: The themes that emerge in my work are simply the themes of life that everyone has in various intensities and manifestations. It is in our commonalities, our collective consciousness, and shared experiences, that metaphor can rise

up into our forebrains. Sometimes this happens subtly and sometimes not. Part of traveling to ancient and sacred sites strikes me as collective resonance. Maybe this is a type of empathy?

Perhaps there is something about dowsing. As you may know, I come from a family of dowsers and was taught to sit quietly in the woods, to be attentive. This clearly supported my multi-modal sensory development and still does. Some folks may refer to this as situational awareness, or Zanshin, or synesthesia or being present. Either way, it isn't by living in the past that I explore the past. Au contraire. I must be firmly in the present to view the past, present and future. This is why stacking wood is one of my favorite meditations; I'm in constant movement while fully conscious of the past, present and future. I am willing to step into all the memories to find the beauty, the strength, and yes, grief and rage, and then emerge. I don't heal or get stronger by denial, or by pretending that something never happened, or that I wasn't involved in something. I am but a part of the natural world and the natural world is a part of me. No more, no less. Perhaps this is a way of annealing the Soul.

Furthermore, life isn't linear. That is a Eurocentric perspective. Life is circular, non-linear. Some people experience life as an upward rising spiral, as opposed to Dante's *Inferno*; we traverse through levels and layers of increased awareness that each experience offers in support of our progression. What stays the same? What changes? My writing is always a journey, an exploration, always something to learn, and yes, things can get pretty dark. One of the most profound lines of poetry I carry hails from a fortune cookie: "It is better to light one small candle than to curse the darkness." Art- making is my light.

LA: Part II of *murmurs at the gate* seems to be more about military experience with reflections of the Vietnam War, like in "The Hunt," "Iron Umbrella," "Tsunami Conflict," and "Ba

Boom.” In “Throwing Stars” a “hyper-olfactory” stimulus sets off a memory of a traumatic event.

SR: *murmurs at the gate* is a deep exploration of events, memories, incidents, character development that ultimately reflects decades of exposure to war trauma in some variant form. Part II indeed dove into war and conflict experiences. All things in the physical realm change molecularly, atomically, when under pressure, and the intensity of fire. Elders always taught “that all truth is found in nature” if we know how to simply see that which is before us, no matter what the environment. My concreteness of a metaphor’s abstraction is always the natural world and/or my current environment. For example, when I taught creative writing at Clinton Correctional, the windows still had that old blue glass with the bubbles in it and it had the same thickness and blue hue as my Grandmother’s old Ball canning jars, the ones that had a rubber seal and a latch to hold the glass lid. The lessons of seeing what is before me, the environment, whatever that environment may be, offers an endless vocabulary for metaphor, similes, tension, meaning. Images and lessons from nature fuel my questioning that hopefully inspires others to question, wonder, consider.

As a writer, I distinctly recall being extremely young, fully open, and experiencing with all my senses, the outdoors. I had the good fortune of no video games and incredibly limited TV. For some reason, Western society attempts to lead us into a false belief that there is a magic this or that to eliminate memories and residuals of trauma. From my individual trauma survivor perspective, my experiences are what bring depth to my humanness. My poem “The Execution” is a true event, both the execution and my seeing the corner of the photo as a writing prompt. **1** I was trained in the Marine Corps as a photo journalist/journalist/public relations person. This training has made me keenly aware of how words and photos can spin propaganda, politics, and deliberately mislead the

masses. That's what this poem is about and when I read this poem at events, I read it once through without commentary. Then, I ask how many people recognize the photo I described. I follow that up with questions about the two main people in the photo. I follow that up with the truth about the individuals, the complete story to properly place the image in its true context. We have to look at the era, what type of film and photo equipment existed, and how point of view and images out of proper context can be manipulated to mean the exact opposite. The poem is a warning as much as anything. I end the brief discussion with a re-reading of the poem and note the measurable change in the audience. Think about it.

I believe the artist is a witness. This is my mission and perhaps this has been the mission all along right up to this specific moment for you to ask these questions and to whoever is reading this word literally, right now. I want people to ask questions. Many of the poems you have mentioned are true word for word. Some poems hold a person, image, of event that is nonfiction and then I enter into it and allow the narrator to question, answer, apply the "what ifs" without editing, just the freedom to express. This is where the surprises can emerge in the movement. Telling our stories is a bridge. Telling our stories is an action that connects generations, human to human. This is healing, this is "medicine."

LA: How much does your military experience figure in poems like "The Hunt," "Iron Umbrella," "Tsunami," "Throwing Stars," and "Ba Boom"? You were in both the Marines and Army.

SR: My most recent time served was from '05 – '08 in MEDCOM. In "The Hunt," for example, one place I was working at was an Airlift Wing where I had to pass through a hanger of Black Hawks. They seemed so docile cycled down and their prop blades really did remind me of the long ears of hunting hounds I grew up around as a kid, "their hound dog props pick up to attention/at the sound of clips, bolts, boots." Also, worth noting, I know the difference between a clip and a magazine.

Clip refers to snaffle-type or carabiner-type clip. Everyone was always on alert, always training, training that triggered rapid response. Sounds, smells, heart rate, respiration, everything in response to a hunt. A hound dog sound asleep only has to hear a minute sound and they're by the door and fully alert. "Iron Umbrella" was inspired by a black and white photo prompt of an indigenous father and son clearly in a tropical country that, of course, was in the throes of violent conflict. I gave myself permission to ask questions of those characters and let my narrator respond freely. I allowed my military experiences and being a parent to inform and fuel my narrator. In this way, the tone remains authentic, the story plausible and real. The poem "Tsunami Conflict" is what I call truth-inspired because the shell is a gift that a Viet Nam era vet gave me decades ago. It was something that he acquired when on leave and carried in his A.L.I.C.E. [All-Purpose Lightweight Individual Carrying Equipment]. I still have the shell. It is on my desk and I can reach out and touch it even as I write this. I hold the shell, sometimes. It brings comfort, simply brings comfort. "Throwing Stars" is a true account. Smells. "Twenty years later when I'm at the park at Saratoga,/You'd hardly notice that I knew anything./And if it weren't for my hyper-olfactory,I would have forgotten you." Some smells one can never scrub clean of. "BA BOOM" is a tone poem that is driven by the adrenalized beating of one's heart – hard, strong, the type of beating you hear from the inside of your body, the type where it feels like your heart will explode violently through your chest. The title, in bold capital letters, when spoken is one's heartbeat, you know, that onomatopoeia thing, while also exploding. There is a tension of hypervigilance in this poem that hopefully helps people who have never felt such things, to feel with their bodies via the vagal system, primitive brain, not the forebrain.

All of my experiences get transposed into an "experiential" vocabulary for my art- making. A metaphor requires two parts:

a bass line and a melody, concrete and abstract. Our bodies are naturally wired to remember sights, sounds, smells, air tension displacement and much more than we are even consciously aware of, like the situational awareness/hyper-vigilance combat and other threatening situations require. How could I not draw from my military experiences? Or any of my life's data? Writing as craft is the skill of shaping, forming and transposing these stories into a form that people can receive.

My military time is what they refer to as broken time, meaning I was in, out, in again. When I first went into the Marine Corps, the times were way different. I am an MST survivor, veteran, and have been the spouse and partner of combat and non-combat veterans. Thus, my military experience is multi-faceted.

My MST happened while in the Marine Corps attending my photo journalist/ Public Affairs/Information Specialist training. Things went downhill rather quickly after that. My next stint was in the Army because back then I would have had to give complete custody of my child over to someone else. I declined. My second MOS was a Medic. I fulfilled my commitment and moved on after also working as a Chaplain's Assistant. My most recent time in was from 2005 – 2008. By then a whole lotta shit was catching up with me that I had never addressed. That's when I connected, for the first time ever, with Travis Martin's organization [Military Experience and the Arts](#), now headed up by David Ervin. My life changed significantly and for the better. I'm still in contact with many of the folks from that first MEA 2012 Symposium. *murmurs at the gate* is what I refer to as my heuristically-inspired "poetic dissertation." It was the first time in my life that I could safely acknowledge how much the military was, and still is, who I am. The word is validation.

LA: In *Native Voices* the editors note that 'Fabric' and 'The Smell of Blood' are fine examples of her ability to intertwine

personal experience and communal history.” 2 Is this what you try to do in your work? What is your creative process?

SR: Ahh, my poem “Fabric,” so much love and loss in that poem. Better to have had some good love than none. I wrote the first version literally decades ago and was told by an academic that it was garbage. I did not throw the piece out as suggested. I trusted something deep inside me that said no, that it was a strong poem and I held onto it. I held on to myself. In 2015 I was invited to write a piece for a special women veteran’s issue of *Combat Stress* magazine 3 [released January 2016] entitled, “Women Veterans and Multi Modal Post-Traumatic Growth: Making the Tree Whole Again.” By then I had experienced several failed marriages, lost so many people that I had truly loved, been retraumatized in a variety of ways linked to unresolved military experiences, that I rediscovered the poem. I renamed it “Fabric.” As a result of new connections with the military community, I had finally been receiving the help I needed to make sense of things and recognize unhealthy patterns and beliefs. And, I was always writing. I tweaked the poem and added the last two lines about accepting life, love, and loss. I am a human being and so are my readers. The causes of our specific experiences, i.e. love, loss, violation, may be vastly different, however, our humanness connects us. By diving below the surface of self, into the currents of hurt and love, I give myself permission to validate with words and images. And this, I feel, lets others know that they are not alone in their existence. We see each other. Indigenously, if I say, “I see you,” it means that I see ALL of you and it has really nothing to do with your occupation or your wealth or poverty. I see who you are. I see you. We see each other. Sometimes it is but a flicker in one’s eye or a microexpression, but the soul is there. This reflects my work experiences with people in comas, or people who are quadriplegic – this skill of seeing isn’t really about using my eyes to visually see. Recognition is something far deeper than that.

Because of the types of trauma that I have experienced, coupled with a rich memory base of the powerful smells from the natural world, and also my quirkiness, I have always had a strong sense of smell. Bears can be like that. I did not sit down with the intention to write "The Smell of Blood." It could have been something as subtle as passing a person in a store who wafts a certain odor or literally a restroom with old trash. I used my writing to release the reaction that became a list poem of sorts. When I do the first write of a piece I just let 'er rip. Patterns, rhythms, meter – all that reveals itself in the rereading and editing process. I am an honest writer, meaning, I just say it. This poem offers an opportunity for people who have not experienced trauma to feel on a cellular level anxiety, a triggering event, run-away thoughts. As a writer I had to be responsible of the climactic curve and tempo. This poem had to have that final line to allow for breathing, release, resettling. When a person's PTSD is triggered, it doesn't make sense to most folks. This poem lets people know that I hear them. It offers validation. We are not alone here, in the in-between "...in the lives outside of reasoning."

LA: You mentioned that you were influenced by Robbe-Grillet, Samuel Beckett, and Eugene Ionesco, among others. What impact did they have on you?

SR: My mother used to sing that Cinderella song to me, the one that goes "In my own little corner...I can be whatever I want to be." As a young child this is possible. However, one hits a certain age in child development and realizes the outer world can be quite cruel. That's when creativity gets shut down and injured on so many levels and in so many ways. Much later in life I reignited my creative self. This rebirth, if you will, was definitely fanned by the freedom that Robbe-Grillet, Beckett, and Ionesco said yes to. Trauma, especially when it occurs to children, can close us up. The innocence of being open is no longer safe. As I matured intellectually,

spiritually, physically, I discovered healthier ways to be open and safe. Some folks may refer to this as “self-regulation.” To finally have the go-ahead from significant creatives to ask questions, explore and discover through art-making, I was finally able to feel comfortable in my own essence as writer and human being. Just think of me as an example of the 100th Monkey, the one that breaks the pattern, walks point, changes the outcome, someone has to do “it” first.

LA: What do you mean by “I Am My Own Evidence”?

SR: I am my own evidence. Yes. And my evidence and experiences are as valid and, in some cases, more so than any individual in any hall of academe or therapeutic field. My experiences as a kid, my theories, came from very physical experiences, often pain-related, like profound migraines, for example. Only within the last decade has neuroscience been able to offer data that I frequently wrote about in various fields in the 80’s, ‘90’s, and early 2000’s. I am multi-modal, which is no different than cross-fit training. I am making sense of my world through the senses and art-making modalities available to me and that includes what is culturally specific, whatever those cultures may be. Be authentic. Be yourself. Let your narrators tell the story because there is absolutely no way your own experiences will not find their way through your narrator. For people who would like to research this more, look into Heurism as research method. A fantastic text is Clark Moustakas’s book, *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications*. **4** This understanding and method is one reason why I refer to **murmurs at the gate** as my poetic dissertation.

LA: You work in various modalities: poetry, song, photography, dance, drum-making. How do these all connect?

SR: The various modalities that I express and create through connect within myself as a human being and also as a living,

neurological organism. Each modality has a predominant or primary sense that it requires for expression. For example, dance for me is physical and relates to all that movement requires, singing actively engages my auditory mechanisms including self-soothing, photography fires up my visual cortex and all that that requires, and so forth. Writing is like the piano for me in that to learn the piano one learns all the keys and therefore can read music for all instruments. Writing is my primary modality where I can use all sensory mechanisms to better engage the reader and/or listener. This is my cross-fit training and I do include actual physical fitness! The connection is the whole person that is me. It has taken time for me to get here and I certainly didn't get here on my own. I had to ask for help and thankfully there have been and still are really good people who are there for me. This is called Community, with a capital C.

LA: You did some songs with Songwriting with Soldiers: "Running Out of Flags" and "Just This Side of Freedom." How did these come about?

SR: It took me a long time to get up the courage to apply and attend the Songwriting with Soldiers retreat in New York. Those two songs were written in 2015 and I had just finished up about a year and a half of seriously intense work with the MST doc at the local VA. I was still pretty squirrely. An Air Force woman vet and I were teamed up with James House to write "Running Out of Flags." Again, I brought what I know to the table. I am the recipient of two of our nation's casket flags. I know what it's like to have people in dress blues show up. I know intimately that grief that I still carry. I lived through the Vietnam War. I remember the Kennedy assassinations, MLK assassination, Civil Rights movements, war, violence, more war, more violence ... what are we creating? How many generations will forever be scarred by our actions?

*Oh oh they're running out of flags
How many more are they gonna have to make*

*Another one flies in the cold at half-mast
Take a thousand years to call out all the names*

“Just This Side of Freedom” is a song that came forth when I was paired up with Darden Smith. 5 There are two versions of this song. I brought to the table my original version to which Darden applied his professional songwriting skills to create the second, Songwriting with Soldiers version. The first version I titled “Sacred Light” and it emerged from one of my lowest life points. I gave myself permission to let the weight of my plight flow. I wasn’t in a good place. I was on the verge of being homeless. No job. Life was bottoming out and shitloads of unresolved trauma – decades worth – was all bearing down on me. I have had trauma events where I was dead, without life, and had to be brought back. Western medicine doesn’t talk much about this type of death experience phenomena with trauma survivors or even acknowledge it. So, one aspect of the song was to give voice to that in-between place and to validate my fellow in-betweeners. Western medicine will call us crazy when, in fact, what we’ve experienced is most real. The “Sacred Light” version speaks of a clear memory of one of my experiences. My Indigenous ceremonies that I participate in and conduct are what bring comprehension to my experiences that I offer up for others’ validation: you’re not crazy; when the Soul, spirit, life force – whatever you want to call it – leaves the body, it is a type of self-preservation; and, I’m still here because you need to hear what I am telling you, we can get through this too. You are not alone.

After I wrote the song, I would listen to it from the inside out. I felt the chords, the incredibly slow tempo, the tone. I was too close to an edge. This song is when I realized I must get help. When I play this song out in public, I always pay attention to the people who respond to it and have even stated generally to the audience my story and that we are not alone on this journey. There is help right here. Right now. There

will always be wars. There will always be warriors. There will always be warriors, both men and women, coming home and therefore there will always be a need for an empathetic Community to welcome them home, validate their experiences, be present in the Coming Home process, which for some of us has taken decades if not lifetimes.

I have also had the great experience of working with Jason Moon's program, Warrior Songs, where I teamed up with Anni Clarke for *Women at War Warrior Songs Vol. 2*, "Sisters Turning." **6** Ironically, Jason didn't know that I was from Maine when he paired me with Anni Clarke who attended U.M.F. [University of Maine at Farmington] at the same time I did. Synchronicity...is it?

LA: Can you talk about Expressive Arts Therapy? How does art help "find your way back home?" How does art lead to healing?

SR: Expressive Arts Therapy **7** is a relatively new field for Western/colonized societies.

Positive psychology, I have found, focuses so intently on keeping all things positive that it negates and fails to validate the trauma experience of the trauma survivor. Granted, this method creates a bubble-pack buffer zone around the therapist/counselor that better protects the therapist/counselor from client trauma transference; however, from a military trauma survivor perspective, especially military sexual trauma, this active practice of only perpetuating the positive exacerbates the "same ol' shit" of non-validation wielded stringently when attempting to report rape in the military system. I mention this to better clarify that Expressive Arts Therapy draws more from the Phenomenological and Heuristic philosophy schools where we use a variety of art-making modalities in safe, respectful settings that support the natural emergence of experiences via the art modality in action. There is indeed a sound paradigm from which methods of application are skillfully employed. The

process remains fluid within a frame designed to support the modality being used, the participant(s), and the experience as a whole. Healing is usually an uncomfortable and sometimes painful experience. Just because we deny its existence, doesn't mean it isn't constantly working in the back ground like some software worm. *murmurs at the gate* is what emerged when I delved into those hurtful places. There are also poems of profound beauty and sensuality in *murmurs at the gate* that emerged from the darkness of trauma. Neurologically, the brain is a fascinating mystery that Expressive Arts Therapy is accessing when application practices are comprehended. I was way ahead of my time with multi-modal practices and the more I worked with adult survivors of Traumatic Brain Injuries, the more I realized I had to keep learning. Hence, this learning led to numerous degrees, certifications, cultural immersion, and a reclaiming of identity, because back then there simply wasn't anything close to Expressive Arts Therapy. My entire life is the validation of existence and all my experiences that have brought me to this point and wherever I travel to next. A friend in the Army, a very long time ago, called me "Pathfinder."

LA: In your essay for *Combat Stress*, you mention your 1978 MST. How does trauma and the experience of the military and war come out in your work?

SR: I'm more of a Wilfred Owen fan because he describes the in-between weirdness of PTSD along with what we now refer to as moral injury. No fanfare. His work offers what he sees and what he feels, not what he interprets...Holding on to the concrete is a way to remain "in body," so to speak, to remain present in the unreality of trauma events swirling about you. When brain chemicals are released *en masse* and tsunami into your physical body...shit happens...sometimes literally. This neurochemical wash of neurotransmitters can be akin to dropping acid. There are specific things that happen that only another who has experienced may recognize. I recognize this

in Owen's work. I also recognize this in Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone*. When I've read and watched documentaries of J.D. Salinger, I also recognize behaviors that reflect experiences, perhaps, from his WWII trauma, and I wonder if Salinger wasn't attempting to deliberately trigger this neurochemical dump to comprehend or re-create a tone or a sensory experiences. Neuroscience has indicated that trauma can change our DNA. Perhaps that's where my idea for a PTSD equation emerged from. [(trauma event over intensity) **x** (duration over frequency)] **x** by length of time, i.e. 1 week, 3 mos., 18 mos. 2 yrs., 20 yrs.

I'm finally at an age where all of my experiences are a part of me and I'm O.K. about that. Therefore, to quote another one of my favorite writers, "How not?"

LA: How has your work evolved over the last 20-30 years?

SR: My work has evolved because I have evolved as a human being. I never give up. Giving up is never an option. It's just who I am, it's my temperament. In this process I have become more informed in my professional fields and more accepting of who I have been, am now, and becoming. Outward Bound winter survival when I was sixteen. Wow. Then Parris Island. Again, I am alive because somehow my upbringing and who I am was able to transpose events into strength. I still do Aikido and Iaido. This quarantine is profoundly difficult for many and I miss my Dojo. Ceremonies have helped me make peace with being solo. The natural world, my land, I remain in relationship with. Self-discipline is crucial. Being in recovery essential. The last 20-30 years I have gathered tools.

I have had, and continue to have, some amazing elders, mentors, editors, and my family who have painstakingly kept me going. I will always have profound gratitude for my family and the future of my family. Being able to ask for help and then being willing to receive help is key not just in my survival,

but in my thriving. As a writer my craft is strengthening and changing. I love it. I never know what will emerge, what new relations will I meet and make, and where will this next thread take me. The wind, you see, it's always in the wind.

8

1 The poem appears on pp. 50-51 of *murmurs at the gate* and refers to Eddie Adams' famous photo. See, for example, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/01/world/asia/vietnam-execution-photo.html>

2 *Native Voices: Indigenous American Poetry, Craft and Conversations*, ed. by Marie Fuhrman and Dean Rader, North Adams, MA: Tupelo Press, 2019, pp. 270-279.

1. *Combat Stress*, Vol. 5, No. 1, January 2016, https://stress.org/wp-content/themes/Avada-child/lib/3d-flip-book/3d-flip-book/?mag_id=16192, pp. 72-86.
2. Clark Moustakas, *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications*, Sage Publications, 1990, Moustakas, Clark. *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications*. United Kingdom, SAGE Publications, 1990.
3. See Songwriting With: Soldiers video: <https://www.pbs.org/video/klru-tv-their-words-songwriting-soldiers-episode/>; web site: <https://www.songwritingwithsoldiers.org/>;
4. *Women at War: Warrior Songs* Vol. 2, available through warriorsongs.org
5. See <https://www.ieata.org/>
6. Suzanne Rancourt website: <https://www.expressive-arts.com/index.html>; books: *Billboard in the Clouds* (2004), Curbstone Press, <https://nupress.northwestern.edu/content/curbstone-books>; *murmurs at the gate* (2019), Unsolicited Press, <http://www.unsolicitedpress.com/>; *Old Stones, New Roads* (forthcoming, 2021), <https://www.mainstreetrag.com/>

New Poetry from Eric Chandler: “The Things You Leave Out”



LEFT OUT LEAVES / *image by Amalie Flynn*

The Things You Leave Out

after Yamamoto Jōchō, Jim Morrison, and Robert Frost

You quote

*One cannot perform feats of greatness
in a normal frame of mind.*

You leave out

*One must turn fanatic and
develop a mania for dying.*

You quote

*I drink
so I can talk to assholes.*

You leave out

This includes me.

You quote

*I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

You leave out

*Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.*

You leave those things out
so we won't know you're

morbid

livid

timid

New Poetry from Liam Corley

In Which I Serve as Outside Reader on General Petraeus's
Dissertation

[The current version of the Army's Field Manual on Counterinsurgency, FM 3-24, originated as a doctoral dissertation written by David Petraeus at Princeton.]



Premise flows from premise like water over the edge
of a waterfall, entrancing those not caught
in the turbid spray, those not lingering in the limestone
chutes that channel the first descent. *Dulce et decorum*,
those molecules in free fall, powerless to reverse
dictates of gravity, whether they be composed
of dollars or bodies. A theorist must maintain sense of scale,
must view war at an appropriate distance, so that its beauty
may emerge like a cold, perfect moon that draws the restless
from their beds with dreams of space flight. The best way to
lie
is to get one big whopper on the table and move on quick
to crystalline truth after truth in a train of plausibility

so compelling we don't see how down becomes
up, so convinced are we by the quality of our reasoning
that he leads to see and eventually to eff and tee, and the
best
first lie aligns with ones we've already bought, like how we
cheer
Frost's traveler in the yellow woods longing for the road
not taken, nodding along with his glib boast that non-
conformity explains contingency because we can accept
failures chosen on noble grounds more than unforeseen
leaf-covered ways that erupt when footfalls complete
the circuit of pressure plate IEDs. Mr. Petraeus, your
counterinsurgency
tools could only work in countries we didn't create, republics
not birthed
by death from above, and so I regretfully conclude
this dissertation presents the naked assertion of imperial
power
as the contribution of a helpful guest, final proof that
intelligence and gulled innocence, in general, betray us.

Double Rainbow at Dawn, 15 North at the 10

The rubberneckers slow down
as they do for other hazards,
brake lights merging into
the penumbra of a double rainbow
due west of the traffic lanes,
while in the East the rising sun
irradiates vapor-soaked air.

We are all late, looking askance
at the fireworks of nature,
wondering how our priorities
match up with this display.

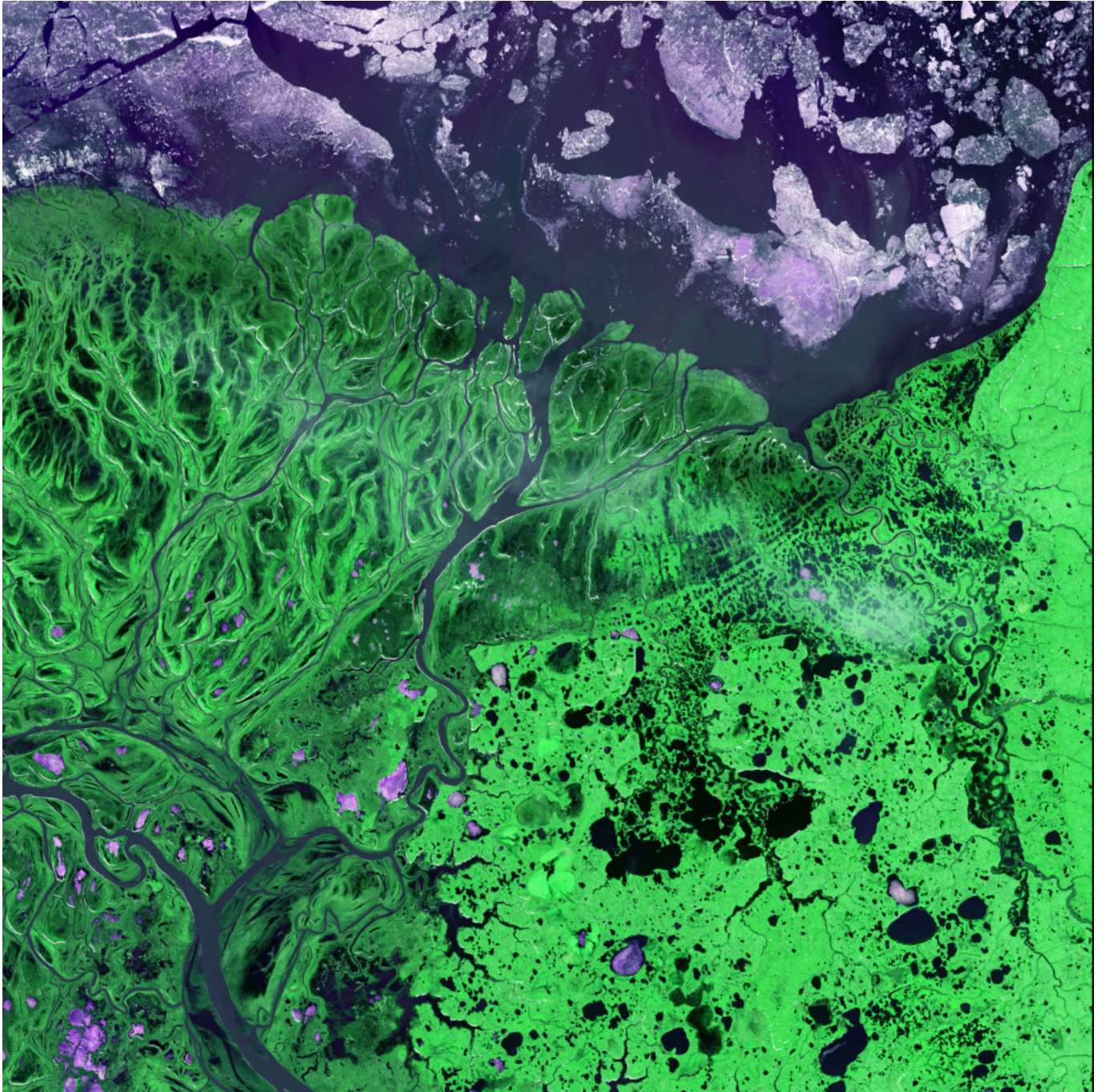
Double, not just one: two arcs
of vibrant color proclaiming

peace on earth if we
don't kill each other
trying to take it in.

New Poetry from Shana Youngdahl

After the Maine Tin Min Company Prospectus, 1880

The earth has veins we can
open with our hammers.
Follow the cassiterite crystals
down where the iron dark
is picked by the swings
of men who name minerals
by the feel of them on damp
fingers, the bands of elvan
quartzite like the rough
footprints of mythical
man, or the smooth track
Of native silver, or gold
Ore floating in the salty
Rubbish of St. Just. Imagine
Fellow capitalists, what
Enterprise can find
Rose colored mica, purple
Fluor spar, tourmaline,
And a thin river of
Tin Ore imbedded among
calc spar crystals, follow
that river, I say, crack
the vein open.



To Find the Center of a Circle from a Part of the Circumference

Which is all I am really after, the path to the midpoint
and how to get there from this little arch
of my hand I'm told to *span the dividers any distance*
and with *one foot on the circumference*

describe the semi-circumferences: today pollen and blue sky,
book bound in navy cloth and draped with black
velvet. The ache in my wrist, throat and head dull
like the birdsong we stop hearing weeks ago.

I'm trying to find the center: the point I can cut from.
I pencil out two indefinite lines and lean
under this dome into the illuminated center.
Someone a very long time ago, told me to call *point P*.
There is comfort in such specifics, but still I feel
like all the unwound clocks that fill old buildings;
there is something I am supposed to do, but
in the fog I am unfocused, turn my head
to another arch and am led away.

—

1.

First or only?

My child is three—
wakes three times

a night
has no room

I would know. Wouldn't I?

Piling her piss-soaked
blankets on the wood floor
I leave them to fume,

wait for the calendar or the swelling.

8.

I know
and don't. I'm half-open
hungry, two days
from late.

I dreamt my name wrong.
I dreamt a boy laughing,
my girl pulling his

baby boots on, spelling
her own name that I
could read by water.

37.

Find
a stone to fit the palm,

our last iris, photographs of daughter's wet curls, half-
burned

and broken candles, recall when sister
believed the rainbow alive.

Collect your pebbles.

38.

I leak
dying larkspur and the strain
of mileage.

It's a glass night,
with clean towel,
and midwives in
the basement room
where spills won't
wet spines and this damp
brings the cool harness
of crying.

39.

We set out walking
the child grabs a stick
points at clicking marmots
shakes the trees and piñon
bleeds into her fingers
she twists it into her hair.
She is pitched
and dust rises like fire
billowing between sisters.

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 Fiction from Ulf Pike: Son of God

I. Esses

The warmth of his voice makes us wary of his intentions. He bears our sin of greenness like a precious burden, our softness like a direct order from God to transform us in his image.

A helmet fits his skull like the mold from which it was cast. When he removes it his bare head glistens in the sun. We pretend not to look, as though he were a woman undressing, feeling almost queasy waiting for him to put it back on. His skin is fair and something childish in his face does not relieve it of an old mortality, which is what one feels when caught in his stare. Under the kevlar brim crouches some secret in eyes, level as a landless horizon. He takes in the world as if in the path of some vast, righteous burning.

“Without death,” he tells us, “there could be no beauty.”

Behind us in all directions, warping heat weaves the sky and earth together like two banners in a low wind. He continues, "They had to consume death to know how to live."

Had we not been standing around the smoldering carnage of a recent Apache gunship engagement, talk might have remained speculative. The target was a small truck, now a skeletal remnant riddled with 30mm holes. We all lean on it and peer in. Of the reported three enemy kills, the charred remains of one are scattered in the bed. The way the body has come to rest, it looks as if his hand is trying to prevent more of his brains from spilling out. Esses fixes his eyes there while he removes one glove and probes gently around. He pulls at the partially coiled pink and black matter.

Standing at the tailgate he considers what he holds between his fingers like a sacrament.

He looks up, holds each of us in his gaze, searching our eyes as if for the words he wants to say.

He speaks warmly: "Even the light of a dead star can guide us." He smiles, pleased by his own insight. He says, "The past is always present but never as it was." Then extending his hand: "Memory comes back in pieces, some of them not our own."

II. Chrysalis

Upstream, an elk lowers his velvet crown to drink. A sudden gust tears a flurry of leaves from their branches and they flutter to the current like butterflies. He remembers being told as a child that before they could fly, they were caterpillars, and they ate milkweed because they knew it was poisonous to their predators. Some predators were too hungry to care and ate them anyway. Only one-in-a-hundred caterpillars would get to fly. But they ate milkweed anyway until they were fat, then they curled up in a sleeping bag

called a chrysalis and hung from the branches of trees to wait for their second birth.



Abraham Begeyn, "Still Life with Thistle,"
circa 1650s.

A storm rumbles off across the valley and sunlight breaks through in its wake. The dirt road is scattered with shining blue and silver portals. He remembers walking with his mother, holding her hand, imagining being pulled through them into that underworld and drifting weightlessly. He remembers her voice, excited to show him something beautiful. How she motioned ahead: "Oh, sweetie, look!"

Wing-to-wing, hundreds of Monarchs covered the surface of a

puddle like a
burnt-orange blanket, undulating lethargically in afternoon warmth. He remembers crouching down and his hand recoiling to the sharp change in her voice, "No, no! Don't touch! You can't touch them, honey. They are very, very delicate."

He remembers curling up on the couch early in the mornings and twirling her hair between his fingers while she leafed through the thin pages of her old King James Bible. She says it was the most obsessive thing he did. If he was crying in church it was likely because she wouldn't let him claw his way into her long, brown, carefully styled hair. In the event of an outburst he would be escorted to the nursery and left with all the other criers. He learned to twirl his own hair and draw on the back of donation envelopes and prayer request cards, whatever it took to endure an hour of liturgy without causing a scene. According to the pastor there was an invisible war being waged inside of him and his soul was in the balance. According to his mother, his actions and even his thoughts could tip the scales.

When he walked through the sliding glass door, blood streaming from his scalp, holding a
fistful of his own hair in one hand and scissors in the other, her terror was quickly suppressed by rage. Following the swift and blunt force of her hand he was marched to the barber shop where for the first time he felt the cool, metallic pleasure of clippers vibrating over his skull and the feeling of wind moving over his exposed mind as they walked back home. They stopped on the sidewalk to speak with her friend who insisted on running her open palm over his new bristle. She cooed to the sensation and a mysterious pleasure fused him to that moment, to her touch, like a corridor of heated light.

He remembers hiking to Fallen Leaf Lake in northwest Montana and his father giving him
what was in his metal-frame rucksack so his weary youngest sister could fit inside. The extra weight made his shoulders

chafe and bleed, made him proud. It rained a warm summer rain and when they arrived they were all soaked through their clothes, except for his sister who emerged from under the top flap of the rucksack dry as a bone. They had a small fire and he remembers feeling almost magical as he unrolled his sleeping bag and sealed himself inside.