

3: A Taos Press

FROM *COLLECTING LIFE: POETS ON OBJECTS KNOWN AND IMAGINED*

Edited by Madelyn Garner and Andrea Watson

Selected Poem from *Anthology* by Fiona Sze-Lorrain
from *Water the Moon* (2010), with some lines after Victoria Chang,
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Shoebox Filled with Mao Buttons

Stubs of sun, deflated saffron orns, scoop up a fistful—
they chink and clank, megaphones chime The East is Red.

Betrothal gifts à la mode, virgin factory girls gave sex
to comrades, and pinned their souls to Chairman.

Students bartered them for steamy pork buns,
a professor swallowed two to commit suicide.

Plexi-glass sunflowers, now italicized mementos.
Dragon-sons, phoenix daughters! Speculate and trade

your shamed nostalgia for museum fortune, Mao on money,
his mole is art, postmodern aesthetics, the rust is a lie.

Denounce it? Flip one over; needle enjambed,
hook still kniving, yes, there us blood tinning on your thumb.

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FROM *SEVEN* BY SHERYL LUNA

The Breaking

We break and rise as the ocean, moon and stars.
Silence follows.
Were we meant to unhinge?
Low beat of morning.
We crack like children's bones;
mending is possible. The letting-go like dawn.
The piano keys strike
in time to the light shimmered pines.
We are plural and singular sadness,
broken in the high desert when snow refuses to melt.
Streetlights lull against the darkness.
Bats shrieking, bellow of strange heaven;
bats of bendable bones hang
in their upside-down thrones. Caverns light
with their darkness. Stalactites shimmer
with man-made lights.
Snaps of the mind: circling, turmoil in nets, flight.
A burst of shade flaps madly by the thousands.
This is the old dusk, the dark awakening.
But we break as glorious as whales breach seas,
as if we too must suddenly
and spectacularly breathe.

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FROM *THE LUMINOSITY* BY BONNIE ROSE MARCUS

When Death Comes

When death comes growling, gnawing, scratching at my door,
window, gate, when death comes gigantic, awesome, without
reason, suddenly slowly, minute by year, when death comes chilly
to the bone, sweating fire, when death comes to the place, time,
space of my waking, when death comes bloated, bestial, bantering,
battering, cajoling, calling, cat on a hot, cat on a cold, catapulting
my ego off the edge, when death comes tomorrow or the next
moment, comes suddenly on me like a fever or a bad dream,
daring, devilish or dressed in white wings, comes cascading, rocky,
raucous, ravishingly rude or (even beautiful in its fierceness),
glorious, gluttonous, no clue, no time, when death comes entering,
breaking, busting down the door, when death comes, I want:

I want to be radiantly ripe, peel scars into petals, joust judgments
'til they surrender, tattoo fierce faith on every inch of my skin until
the divine imprint becomes my own face, drown hesitation in an
ocean of mercy, waves spitting miracles, become emptiness, silence
shaking my bones, rejoice, relinquish, manifest my teacher, when
death comes, I want to rip out my heart, offer it to those without,
remember to remember to bleed suffering into forgiveness, dance
translucent rain 'til rainbows take me, when death comes, I want
to know, go graceful, glow, (flow rivers) into heart/breaking
transformation.

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FROM *TREMBLING IN THE BONES: A COMMEMORATIVE EDITION*
BY ELEANOR SWANSON

Charlie Costa Plays a Joke

With a stick, I draw a picture in the dirt
of a train and make the sound a train makes.
Woo woo, I call to my bare feet,
to my toes, wishing I could have
a real train or any toy.

I kick a rock past our tent, pretending
I'm playing Kick the Can,
but it hurts my foot, so I stop in front
of the Costas' tent where Mr. Costa
is pretending a circus is going on,
saying, "Come one, come all,"
and motioning to the kids nearby
who like him because he makes us
laugh, even when we're hungry,
and tells us to call him Charlie.

He says my name and gives
me a newspaper rolled up
like a spyglass.

He says it costs a penny
and his wife Cedi yells,
"Did you buy spyglasses
when we are starving?"
We kids yell too, "Let's see."
When he hands me my telescope,
I put it to my eye and look around
wishing I could see stars
or the moon, right now, in the day.
I look down the row of tents
for my mother.
I want to see her.
I want her to be pretty.

All of a sudden, everyone is laughing:
Charlie has put charcoal on our telescopes,
and we all have black eyes.
We are all laughing and can't stop.
Even though we are hungry,
we can't stop laughing
at our funny black eyes.

I put the spyglass up to my other eye
so I will look like a raccoon.
This time I will see things
only raccoons can see,
stars and planets just for raccoons.

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FROM 3 A.M. BY PHYLLIS HOTCH

Crowned With Pale Blue Moonlight

If you are
the reluctant oracle
I am
the petitioner
renewing
forgotten hopes

White wimple
stark
above
tender
blue oval

Skirt of blackbirds' wings
spread wide
holds

sequestered fragments
streaming diamonds
fears burning
dark water

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FROM *EARS OF CORN: LISTEN* BY MAX EARLY

Matrilineal Winter

*Traditionally, at Laguna, the house is given to the oldest daughter
At Acoma, the house is given to the youngest daughter
The house belonged to Grandma Marie
Given to her oldest daughter, Jane
Soon, Jane gave Sister Clara
The family home*

Three sisters in their winter
Share their mother's house
They are Orion's belt
Wintry sister stars

Three stars softly fading
Reminisce festal shadows
Mom's chili stew cooking
7-UP in the Frigidaire

Three sisters embrace home
But not like they used to
Keep moving around
More aches flare

What do we do with your house, Mom?
We feel bad that you're getting old
We'll help you when we can
We miss the old you

Serious oldest daughter
Humorous middle girl
Cheerful youngest baby
Wintry sister stars

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FROM *ELEMENTAL* BY BILL BROWN

The Light That Follows Rivers

Like the light that follows rivers in the night,
a figure hovers ghostlike in my dreams,
my father or stranger, sometimes the same,
his blue eyes stained, his thoughts to read.

His gruff hands hover luminous in my dreams,
above my childhood slumber they touch my head.
His blue eyes like his hands I wish to read—
yet I am older than my father when he died.

Above my childhood slumber they touched my head—
his eyes, his hands, his storied voice, all lullabies.
Though I am older than my father when he died,
as men we travel alone, I know that now.

His eyes, his hands, his storied voice, his lullabies,
my father, my stranger, always the same—
As men we travel lonely, I know that now,
like the light that follows rivers in my dreams.

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FROM *ROOTWORK* BY VERONICA GOLOS

From *The Lost Notebook*, Mary Day Brown

**Hastings Street, Springfield, Massachusetts,
February 1, 1848.**

on the visit of Mr. Frederick Douglass to our home

It is late, very late, & I sit by the last of the fire.
Mr. Douglass visited us tonight. He sleeps
in the loft upstairs.

When he stood in our narrow doorway, he looked
to be filled with light; it shone off his shoulders
behind his head, through his fingers. Then

he entered. At first I thought him to be made
of cliffs—his cheekbones, his jaw, his thick arms.
His shirt so white, so very white, against the rock of his face.

Then there was his voice. How it rumbled, a deep roll
of sound that caught me in my chest. Not only
his voice, but his words.

What he knew.

The girls served him beans, corn bread
& a bit of the last of the lamb.
I stood back, near the stove, in case there was need.

I watched him. His large hand moved in circles along
our table, as if he would polish the raw, unvarnished wood, would
make it gleam, as he seemed to gleam. I felt, I suppose, pulled

by that hand, its back & forth motion
as he & John Brown spoke, argued, leaned to each
other—my husband full of fury and action;

Mr. Douglass,
his words. What he knew.

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FROM *FAROLITO* BY KAREN S. CÓRDOVA

Grandmother's Voice on the Telephone

66 pounds. Dying by ounces.

When she speaks, air within her
crackles like the sweetest dove trying to walk,
to flit on autumn leaves
without breaking them, honoring
those few moments
before haze shudders and rain completes,
returns Abuelita to her beloved garden
feeding roots of ancient plum and apple trees
that give both life and shade,
that lean into the *acequia*.

Yes, there will be that silent day
when leaves disintegrate and cover her, becoming
her *petate*. No. Not yet—
Brittle and crisp,
her voice still shades me
from harsh knowing she is leaving
as it crushes English/Spanish
into sound scented
paperwhite and fruit of *manzanares*:

Come. See me now.

I'm here. Tell everyone good-bye for me.

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FROM **GODWIT** BY EVA HOOKER

Of Soul I Keep Margins

utterly free, feet shod
for grievous walking: all

erasable footing, loose sheets of water, white
letters (your mark) in a black field.

I make preparation for the wake of breathing,
costly, perfect spillage & stumbling.

What if beauty is only a settling, a practiced
disruption polished to dangerous gloss?

I set my foot down to keep the index of bruising
tender to its supple edge. Trace

a wing.

Listen for the long hollow cry of the goose.

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FROM *THE LEDGERBOOK* BY WILLIAM S. BARNES

Before the Rain

The sand bar gives itself back to the river in scallops.
The conversation lifts, urges.

Fish rise: white-sided, plump, deeply scaled.
Side-by-side. The world is copper. Figure-eights touching
shoulder, rib, hip, thigh.

Bird tracks. A scarlet-backed damsel-fly.
A single tree, burnt. Black.

The wind is full of children. Cotton rafts in a copper river.
Southbound. Cloud boats. Full of seed.

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FROM *THE MISTRESS* BY CATHERINE STRISIK

Morning Glory

May I study you
by touch? Your

vine periwinkle
blue circling your slender

torsos? I want to touch
your centers, deepest where

marriage circles dark waters,
strokes your sacrificial hands.

Strokes your
hair and the balance between

each strand. Appearing
as separate, yet the heat

from your open mouths.
Only then will I carry

the bowl filled with pomegranate.
Oh how your bodies suffer beauty.

Wait. Where are you going
inside my touch? Off to

visit the Queen of Morning
Glories? I clip. I deadhead.

My fingers stretch the vine.
Your bodies without the attendant

reminds me
to hold my breath by its root. I'll hold

I will
as long as you will

until we are—
nothing nothing

ever felt this—route
to the heart—from the cornea.

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FROM *LIBRARY OF SMALL HAPPINESS* BY LESLIE ULLMAN

One of Leslie Ullman's own poems that illustrate her essays and exercises on the craft of poetry:

Reading James Wright on Flight 357 from Albuquerque to Chicago

Sometimes a poem offers a series of
chance encounters—partial phrases that slip
into the next seat and lift me before
I re-engage approved electronic
devices. Sometimes a poem reads my mind
in that private space before thought gathers
itself into subject/verb, cause/effect—
the shades are down but I can see in
or the words are clear and the spaces be-
tween them are shades closing off the whole sky
of what's been left out—a spare, thrilling diet.
When my feet touch cracked tarmac again, part
of me remains behind a high, golden
window. Sealed off from the thronged neon streets.

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FROM *DAY OF CLEAN BRIGHTNESS* BY JANE LIN

approximate

as in the words
for the repetition of a bird waking you
just as you begin to concentrate
as in vanish

recall something in the chest
flexed into hardness
every time your mother vexed you
as in water

how it can't move fast enough
when bodies collide
rises up when your child needs you
having always needed you
from the breast

how yesterday was pancakes
she asked if there was time and you said yes
then there wasn't and still you made them
because you love her and she asked

as in thirst, your mother gone
as in it could have been song
now you're late and put out put
upon it could have been
song

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FROM *BLOODLINE* BY RADHA MARCUM

A Brief History of the West

Like years, the desert
has no edges—red dust, red
dust condensed, busted ash—like years,
a corrupt uniformity we cut through.

:

Where miniature houses sail out
over shelves thrust up, where air breaks
down on rock, on conglomerate
that defines a sky.

:

Or dream dry salt seeps
from pores in your calves.

:

In one settlement, a headless
fire truck rusting by a shed, plastic
cowboys. In another, rancid
frozen confection.

:

One year, the lakes were too white
when we went by.

:

Where we go trailing
our own wake of glass, like years
we enter, enter again, stop seldom, and rest
in our own dust impressions.

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FROM *HUM OF OUR BLOOD* BY Madelyn Garner

Surgical Mask in the Time of Plague

Half my face erased, only eyes
above horizon—unmoored
from a crooked nose,
muffled mouth.

The nurses insist I wear a mask—
white as blisters,
as bone, as mausoleum marble.

Snow fort.

What have other mothers done
in times like these:

Hide in their homes?

Come swaddled
in gown and booties, blue-gloved?

Or do some of them attend, defiant—
faces bare?

For days I have kissed my son
through paper—
sail billowing with each exhale.

Now watching him again turn away
from me as if a stranger,
I choose.

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FROM DARK LADIES & OTHER AVATARS BY Joan Roberta Ryan

Sequel

Dear Husband and King,
I'm writing to you because I'm afraid
someone is rewriting our story.

Lately, your mother has been
licking her lips and eyeing
the kids rather strangely,
and knowing her ogre-ish
lineage, I fear she admires
Daisy's round arms and Dawn's
dimpled knees with other
than grandmotherly affection.

I know how important your war must be,
but I'm worn out trying to make
my lamb printanier and blanquette de veau
tender enough to please her. Unless
you return to the castle with haste,
we're in imminent danger of losing,
my dear, our happily ever after.

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FROM THE DOCTOR OF FLOWERS BY Rachel Blum

Who would have come
if the angel had not come

*Was there something
you wanted to tell me*

A river flowed
through my house

*so there is nothing
you cannot say to me*

Water that
begins in the stairs
carries a velvet dress

like plaster
when my legs
are failing

and salt like snow
so suddenly
your laughter

and the sound
is a boat and the
boat is my hands

and I remember you best
with my hands

there it is always
the same day

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FROM *BIRD FORGIVENESS* BY MELINDA PALACIO

The Praying Tree

Ten years of driving the same highway, past the same tree, the picture is at last complete. The eucalyptus tree and narrow birds above a blessed steel sea with no thoughts of yesterday, today, or tomorrow.

Black cormorants on bare branches spread their wings as if in prayer. A sunny day in Summerland, and the tree, visible only from the highway, hides its penitent perch from cars racing by too fast.

Four wheels swerve to avoid a sheer cliff, southbound on the 101. The fat sun slides its yolk into the glass ocean. Slow down. See an empty nest of woven round sticks in the praying tree.

Birds soak in rays without fear of cancer or the nature of forgiveness. Slick imperfections, wet wings open and close in Morse code for good-bye.