

# 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 enjambéd,  
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.

# 3: A Taos Press

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.

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FROM *TURQUOISE DOOR* BY LAUREN CAMP

## Letter to Mabel—From a Door Turning Inward

I drove through the old blinking light to the ranch you gave Lawrence.

As if the road could take me through reasonable perspective. The road with its spindly bushes and dust. The sky, combed and curling.

The Ranch is bending down. The body of land baked in sun. Beside his door stands a pity of trees. Even Georgia's pine has suffered and suffered again, and is now without fragrance, needles whipped from the heat.

Despite sudden afflicted weeds and shamble, the needy arrive for opinions. Yet the house has shed its unsteady hand. Every breach, each final line, the pace of his sentences. Walls in the cottage crack.

We want his spelling of sorrow, all the trembling. Have we asked too much?

Up the slight hill, where he holds to his revolutions, yellow lumps indulge in a pattern. I nearly kneeled in its persistence, or I should say, reeled as it billowed.

The dark grew rough, and I left. Time was again to its pauses. I saw two horizons: one when I looked back, hunted by hawks.

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FROM *THE CAIRNS: NEW* and *SELECTED POEMS* BY BILL BROWN

## The Cairns

They're stacked beside the creek  
on a hidden gravel road—patience  
and craft, the artful searching,

seeing, chipping, shaping. Mostly  
limestone, each rock—millions of years  
forming, fossilized, story-filled—itself a cairn.

The hours spent in rugged contemplation,  
water burble, wind in leaves, the forest's sway—  
a present for those who pass as the earth

crumbles in time what human hands have made.  
I stack words to remember what words alone  
can't say. *The tongue is an eye*, a poet wrote,

not just a choking muscle, fumbling with age.  
The earth a grave of lost words, stones  
and children's bones; a cairn, itself, crude and holey.

*The gift is in the labor*, mother taught—  
scraped palms, broken nails, tired backs,  
the ordered wonder of shape.