

Timeless:

Like Fossilized Footprints

As a reader, I turn to poems to feel accompanied. The best poems do that by creating not only a sense of location, but also recreate the experience of a mind making its way through that location. Poems become, in this way, timeless; like the fossilized footprint of an early human uncovered by archeologists, good poems fix time, they gesture and recreate, and render into language a sense of mystery. The best poems create feeling while feeding the senses. They give pleasure.

The poems in this issue of *Provincetown Arts* offer a variety of pleasures—those of story, lyricism, or formal procedures. Work too is a pleasure when it engages the mind, and some of the poems here may require heightened sensitivity or openness; these poets trust the reader to bring her best reading-self forward. They do not underestimate their audience, which I consistently admire. The poets you will read in these pages live in all parts of the country (and one outside of the country)—North Carolina, Boston, Oakland, Brooklyn, Ann Arbor, Texas, Rome, Provincetown and elsewhere, and reinforce the notion that literature is a national art form that transcends all borders. In addition to geographic diversity, these poets are at many different stages of career, though a majority of them I count among my peers. I gather this selection of poems and present them—not as an indication of a trend or as members of a school—but as occasions for the pleasures of reading.

—Mark Wunderlich

Carmen Gimenez-Rosello

Photo of a Girl on a Beach

Once when I was harmless
and didn't know any better,

a mirror to the front of me
and an ocean behind,

I lay wedged in the middle of daylight,
paper doll thin, dreaming an ocean

meant for somebody else.
Then I vanished.

That day had been like all others.
It passed obediently through its life

and, as always, I promised myself
never to lose its warm fine goodness.

I gave the day a fingerprint,
then forgot.

I sat naked on a towel on a hot June Monday.
My eyes were closed.

The sun etched the insides of my eyelids
while a boy dozed at my side.

The smell of all oceans was around us—
steamy salt, shell, and sweat,

but I reached for the distant one.
The tide rose while I slept,

and soon I was alone. Try being
a figure in memory. It's hollow there.

For truth's sake, I'll say she was on a beach
and her eyes were closed.

She was bare in the sand, long,
and the hour took her bit by bit.

Jason Zuzga

Reagan

Second grade: he's shot.

Ouch that stings, in the armpit,

I could feel it too, shoulder clutch and

huddle now against the wall. I engage

the entire second grade in a simulation of

Escape from Witch Mountain. I am picked

last for kickball. I kick the air hard.

All night the green lights in the trees are

spies; home is not a building; it is us.

My dad meets Reagan at a dinner and shakes his hand.

One day I stay home sick from school;

my friend Jennifer comes over

and tells me how at lunchtime

one girl had swung a whole loop

around the swingset, got tangled up

in the chains and broke both her arms.

That was a lie, a good one.

Cynthia Huntington

Curse One: The Wraith

You are a small shape of death crouched among leaves.
The twist of your red mouth is the torque of poison.
Tangle of leaves, spill of leaves, slow rot of leaves . . .
Misery, ruin, iniquity. You are the scuffling thing in the dry grass.
rodent, snail, the curly-legged spider, centipede, rat snake.
I see you by the black-hooded barbecue in November, brooding
like the smoke of burned meat. The fire in the coals gone out,
the sun hung low and weak in a smoldering sky, cold
breath of winter. You are all smoke breath, grief and conniving.
The knife blade under the rib, the stone carried in the lung.
You are the alien thing invading my garden, a haunt, a plague,
lurking beyond light and warmth, there in the shadows wearing
death inside out, a curse on the sky. You are a spot, a flaw, a
blotch and a stain on the world you corrupt and I hate
you and fear you and look for you everywhere with dread.

G. E. Patterson

Am I scared,
he wants to know,
am I scared

My condition is a poor excuse for that

A Certain Mood invented by Candlelight

“ . . . think of it”
—Robert Duncan

“ . . . leading to the beginning”
—GalwayKinnell

Say the rain started in the night and stopped
Because it is time and it is important
Continuing the wind lessened with help
The pearl seen in the open mouth of love

The answer is a factory of candles
While for what it's worth the street's hum and glow
Who dreamed up garnet or the color jasper
This light the damp air the encircled body

Yes the wind failed despite the noise it made
The wind dropped beneath a gibbous moon
When the sun's out shadows dominate gardens
This is true: See the sky is a soft gray

The wind died without a line on its face
Before it reached you it was hurrying

Cyrus Cassells

The Shepherd of the Villa Caffarella

adjusts his earphones,
as the sheep range around him
in the Roman sun.
I am an apprentice of umber
light and shadow
in the villa,
and I know him a little
from my walks.
Usually we talk
of the quotidian,
soccer or weather,
amid brambles and voluble
belled goats,
constellations of Queen Anne's lace—

On villa land,
he has shown me
a ruined columbarium
from the days of Constantine,
and a sacred grove,
inundated with daisies—

Once he led me—the villa
emerald again after winter—
to a grotto adorned
with a nymph's statue,
headless, voluptuous, agile—
The water in the ornamental
pool shimmered.
The dusk was freaked
with the little
upended exclamation points
of poppies,
and there was a pulse,
a thread between us, rife
with waiting.
But we grew
fainthearted, afraid to touch,
as if some shared
holiness might be defiled—

Still, out soft-natured, sustaining
friendliness prevails,
undeterred.
And like any beautiful and commanding thing,
the shepherd of the Villa Caffarella
is uncapturable,
transfixing as the infant
Moses drifting among
the astonished reeds—
or a red flash:
a pheasant in the grass
near the grotto.

Katharine Whitcomb

Through the Window

I am lucky,
Despite
What the rich may think.

My soul is new
On the earth.

These wounds are serious.

God once
Bathed me in brilliance
From the corner
Of the living room.

I remember everything.

A blinding light swept
My head.

I spend my life learning
And will never
Be healed.

Second Dream

Code over the water. It was March, snow streaked the winkle-scattered sand. Beach flung with medallions. Code, our hand-to-hand; code, each word a dalliance. Code, *you get me?* In the cold wind there was no ivory fan, no lamplit room, no perfumed dress. Lover, this account works on the surface, semaphores across a page: my ungainly traveled laughter. See how much I want everything still. Code, *what I'm implying*. And how foolish not to offer (say it—*to give*) that which is mine.

Cate Marvin

Your Call Is Very Important To Us

Which is why when we call you we keen,
so you may shake harder in your waiting,
and should you question whether it is true,
you'll learn from your longing how very

important we find you. So when we drop
blue upon your head, then swing ourselves
against your eyes like a leaden pipe, then
soothe your brow with golden, streaming

clouds of light, you'll wake at last from
your fever, your fright, and know we knew
you'd call, that we've been waiting for you
all along. Then we'll call back, shriller still,

for what is an audience that does not cry back?
For whose lover does not hold back?
For who loves and will not answer the phone?
So when we drop night's block on your head

as a door loves to slam a hand in its jamb,
when we land beneath your heel, our stars
shards of glass left unswept on a floor,
we are only waiting for your call.

We knew it had to be you all along.
Your alertness to the sky, your painful, "Why?"
Your somber way of walking yourself home
alone. If not for our siren cry, what would

you do? How else could you believe anyone,
anyone at all, cared about you? Here, have
a drink on us; we'll have a drink on you.
Your taxi has left. Your home is ransacked.

We would ask that you not cry out. We would
ask you not to speak, although we speak to you.
You will consider the back door, a distant country.
Know we can reach *at least* that far to find you.

Monica Youn

Venice, Unaccompanied

Waking
on the train I thought
we were attacked

by light:
chrome-winged birds
hatching from the lagoon.

That first day
the buoys were all
that made the harbor

bearable:
pennies sewn into a hemline.
Later I learned to live in it,

to walk
through the alien city—
a bee-keeper's habit—

with fierce light
clinging to my head and hands.
Treated as gently as every

other guest—
each house's barbed antennae
trawling for any kind

of weather—
still I sobbed in a glass box
on an unswept street

with the last
few lire ticking like fleas
off my phonecard *I'm sorry*

*I can't
stand this, which
one of us do you love?*

Christine Hume

Send Up

Seas surround us and ambush the city. One sea drums its names through beltways and straightaway Nowhere cuts in front. Sun burns the water there and we go above on boats. We had been thinking in black and white anyway: five arctic hares swimming in their own outlines, sirens cartwheeling the pitch. In the beginning we saw only dark water and the radiant brains of distant wave-carved ice. Before this, we had a scene in mind and forgot out bodies there. Anything that real cannot be found in an ocean, but its lapping draws us well underway. All this takes the sea's shape, and after that, it takes away. Once we had pavement glitter and traffic's appetite. Once all water hung in a cloud above us. That water moves through the spillway; it moves as if it doesn't believe we exist. Where were we then? Without belonging, we wear out. We wear our *hither* to the hilt. Long as a vanishing point we take for a shortcut. We're ticking off stars until they drop sorry out of sight. They fall into dirty water slapping the horizon happy. But where were we? The city's lights stare up hard at us. Our first heaven held under, that we may grow asunder.

D. A. Powell

[chapt. ex ex ex eye vee: in which scott has a birthday]

chapt. ex ex ex eye vee: in which scott has a birthday
[many happy returns of the day, says piglet] & buys himself a puppy

soon the scent of burning leaves is too much. hunting season
the crisp flannel air and hot oatmeal: instead of fishin'

crunching out through the yawping woods. with his terrier
legs spindled as muskets. his slight chest heaves. his slender derriere

a pale chalkmark among the birches. for a time he sits and smokes
scratching the curious brown dog behind its ears. then snow

dusting down like dandruff on their collars. they wait on haunches
listen for the woodchuck or roebuck: they have their lunches

and the whiteness covers them almost completely. almost
far enough away from this moon and those rabbits and the geese

Nick Flynn

Blind Huber (xii)

Thus transfixed, stare blank at one
immovable thing, ocean
or statue, fifty years thus, to see
if it moves. Burnens
covers the walls with prepressed
comb, factory-punched,
so we can live inside a hive,
my chair dead-center, beside my
queen. Chain after chain
of bodies, a fabric
above, lowering. Forty days
I sat, until the comb began
to press my chest. Burnens
brought water at first, described their
labors, the tomb being built.
when he could no longer join me
I lived on what honey fell
to my lips. I wanted to see
if the hive moved,
& it did,
but not as much as I had hoped.

Wax Father

Each day
the son came for more, scraping comb
freshly laid, kneeling
apologetic. The father collapsed, the boy
wasn't ready, so he built a replica of the old man
in order to save him. When
the legs gave out he fashioned legs,
when the hands began to tremble
he fashioned hands,
& as the fever spread he mad a head. At the
bedside, he studied the creases edging
his father's eyes, the bones pressing up from the
cheeks,
the places the skull
turned inward. The lungs filled—
he built a torso. As he finished
each limb, each organ, he carried it to the church
& pinned it above the altar, until nearly
his entire body hung there.

Rae Gouirand

Mira

Last due date: SEPT 30 1985.

In the margins, some previous reader pencils in excitement, ringing nouns

in the thin gray line. The circles gape like heads of nails, breathless disturbance. Amidst the firmament

the hand connects—graphite scratch of swift planets, bodies without address or rest. In later pages,

the haloes fade, revealing sharper points. Arrows fix their objects, entirely desire. Lucid among the stars,

the bill of a crow indicates what it wants, pointed, perpetually hungry capella. This stillness

seems endless. Other stars hang in the periphery, varying sizes— chapters pass before I suspect

the descent of Cetus, the Whale, gloating in a long, complex song, cool gray recital, every tip

gleaming, x and y axes twisting for radiant emphasis. A half-erased cross flickers at his fluke, between mass

and muscle. “Periodicity” has been underlined twice. I lean in to the varying star, her red rise blurred by pages’ faces, and darken

dim Mira, the asterisk he uses to push.

Frances Richard

Silver Cup Studios

Across the riverness. Reflected on the scummed estuarine wash, upcurrent from the DOMINO sugar dock. *A verite’ folle*. The present slipping out. And so it happens

to be dusk again, predictably, because you crave crepuscule and are yourself unsure. People are not like landscape. Even landscape is not.

The grain of molecule. Murmur’s sex. Encrypted

or describe such nondescript, low comforting drone, an autoerotic ode to. Flâneur-ify: new hyacinth, drab awning or soot window briefly bronzed, storey-high frowzy neon stutters on reliably. Nice blight.

Your campfire tale. Your lovenest. All unrels—
Unclarity: is ownership

a picture and does pleasure give confidence. The sodden mattress bulges, silky pallet in the weeds, read bubble-writ, enshadowed tags spraypainted. Your name

for this, the tender lurid surface means the river doubles as the river. Does stability-what. Something. Does it please.

Sarah Messer

My Personal Savior

In this season of puddles opening and closing
their ice in the driveway, you'll balance on one leg

in my yard, an aficionado of hypodermics
and cartwheels. You'll pickle your own fingers

to make me love you, rub mud on your tights. Inside my
tar paper shack, I'll be the girl sleeping under the plastic

tent, spider webs knitting my lungs. You'll be my lawn
ornament, pin-wheeling the down pour, your yellow Easter hat

tossed among the rusted chairs, the sunken El Dorado,
the oil barrels turned on their sides like old ponies.

Your wet robe will cling like egg yolk, your mind, a soggy
flotilla hop scotching through thoughts of resurrection—

fingering earthworms like DNA strands and recalling
that inside beyond the weather stripping, spaghetti sticks

to the ceiling above the stove and somebody might be
dying. Last year's lettuce flops in make-shift gardens—

window-boxes, tires, the abandoned coffin freezer—the leaves
frozen and refrozen like EZ bake stained glass. Your white

sneakers are two doves perched at the edge of the muddy lawn.
The doctors have long since stopped calling you

inside to say goodbye. When I last saw you, they had
to life the oxygen mask so that I could speak—clear green, an old

aquarium, my voice leaky and filled with outlined fish.
Everything I have I said, I give to you not because you deserve it

but because you've stood outside for days in the rain
in that ridiculous Jesus outfit.

Carmen Gimenez-Rosello has published poems in *Boston Review*, *Chicago Review* and *American Letters & Commentary*. She lives in Oakland, California.

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