

FOREWORD BY MICHAEL KLEIN

I READ POETRY to stay awake. Awake meaning access to a certain secret about being alive; a way of seeing things in the dark. I also read poetry to feel what time it is. How the *right now* of the poem being written informs the mind through image and longing.

The poems that I selected here are filled with so much beauty and seeing that on first reading I was so startled that I had to read them again immediately to make sure I knew what they were; and then, again, the next day, to go deeper with them. And they stayed with me and still stay.

They're different from each other, of course. But they all speak to the presiding and sometimes difficult and lonely fact that we are here to watch each other live and die. These are all poems that are in many ways about the planet that we are living on and its trouble and its beauty. But they also seem to be bound by one recurring image, an image I couldn't make disappear from my mind when I was reading them: someone looking down from very far away, perhaps from another time, and saying, Look! My God! There are people down there.

Matthew Lippman

Schnitzel

I tried to get my head around peace.
Then I threw the tape dispenser out the window.
It hit Gerald Stern in the head
but he was in New Jersey.
My imagination gets the best of me
when the firecrackers blow up
and my daughter freaks out.
She wants peace.
She wants Gerald Stern to eat schnitzel with us on Friday night.
Mostly she wants her mother to wrap blankets around her ankles
when winter arrives.
What if the Nazis came back?
The Cossacks?
The white people up against the black people
and the Turks and Armenians
not to mention
and not to mention
and not to mention.
It's enough to make your head go to church and your face to shul.
Enough to make your eyes braid themselves into the break of a wave
and your lungs to forget how to breathe.
Still, I tried to figure peace out.
Gerald Stern tried to figure peace out.
He's in the breeze now hurling obscenities at crazy drivers
who speed up the street in BMWs and Volkswagen Jettas.
He's parking his tongue between the raspberry bush and the weeds.
My daughter goes out to meet him
but he's gone
and when will the next burning log rain down on our heads?
I can get my mind around a world with burning logs
but not the other thing,
a world with campfire benches and fire.
That's where people just sit together,
tell stories,
sing songs,
look up at the sky until it gets stupidly quiet.
That's what I can't get my mind around—
the stupid quiet that everyone enchants.
Oh Gerald Stern,
oh wild silence.

Joan Larkin

Singapore

Ice clouds rose in a glass.
A ghost mushroom floated
in clear broth. Eel-streaked
pillows of eggplant like our

flesh. The marina darkened
under its gemstone necklace.
A flash turned a child rising
from the pool, fungus-white.

Many-mouthed quiet. Malay.
Mandarin. Singlish. Tamil.
I hardly know where I am,
tasting green Cambodian fire,

opening a hinged valve
to its scar. Swallowing silk.

Mark Conway

in the pines

the world is fire / again
 today: summer pours through
 my eyes / ignites
 behind the face
 of everyone we meet...
 then glances off
 my shining business-
 suit of light ::
 - july -
 silkscreened to
 the skin...

 our bedroom's flap-flap fan
 wastes all
 the requisitioned wind :
 long-day sun
 drinks gin :: then burns the dawn to stumps...
 my seven souls lie down -
 overheated from the past /
 good dogs -
 they pant off in the pines ::
 children burn through
 another week of empty street / make us
 trek to hermit's point
 where we throw ourselves into
 the unspeakable:
 the local unclean lake

 the small ones - bored -
 head up the beach / dripping off their fire ::
 here is the new love;
 always the old love

Ada Limón

Mowing

The man across the street is mowing 40 acres
 on a small lawn mower. It's so small, it must
 take him days, so I imagine that he likes it. He
 must. He goes around each tree carefully. He
 has 10,000 trees; it's a tree farm, so there are so
 many trees. One circle here. One circle there. My
 dog and I've been watching. The light's escap-
 ing the sky, and there's this place I like to stand,
 it's before the rise, so I'm invisible. I'm stand-
 ing there, and I've got the dog, and the man is
 mowing in his circles. So many circles. There
 are no birds or anything or none that I can see.
 I imagine what it must be like to stay hidden,
 disappear in the dusky nothing and stay still in
 the night. It's not sadness, though it may sound
 like it. I'm thinking about people and trees and
 how I wish I could be silent more, be more tree
 than anything else, less clumsy and loud, less
 crow, more cool white pine, and how it's hard
 not to always want something else, not to just
 let the savage grass grow.

Bruce Smith

Two Poems

Sometimes the clouds are at one remove from experience and sometimes they appear above the smoke of the rocket strike on the school as if they were contractors, defenders of the old regime that brought art to the citizens as it enslaved them, darkening their meals, cooling their loving in the heat after which they fought about money and went outside where they were redacted.

Whose treaty was torn-up to make home of some downslide hills and waste from Crucible Steel that irradiates the waters of the lake that glows in my dream of magical kindness? Bees pollinate the pools. In the run off election between loneliness and enlargement, loneliness wins and installs a shadow government of big lots and small purchases from which to kiss in the rain.

Bruce Snider

Homo

—*The Hall of Human Origins, Smithsonian Museum of Natural History*

I love you as one grown man can love another in this room of tooth-nicked skullcaps, ridged doors to instincts, hunger. Pinned to walls, the bone sockets flash black: *Erectus*, *Sapiens*. We stand near hand-axe, cut spine—*Floresiensis*, *Neanderthal*—grooves notched into pelvic bowl, spot-lit ribs, heart's ornament and armor. This, the sign says, means evolution: spear tips nudging crumbled bridal wreathes, flint knives near mating-beads on wire. All morning, we walk hand in hand, passing leopard skins, human skins, men huddling over split logs, learning to make fire.

Liz Rosenberg

Rules for Widowhood, #44

I dreamed that someone else bought the milk
 And I was pleased, in that mild, surprised way one is,
 To see the new milk in the fridge. One task I need not do.
 One worry lifted. But that was only a sleeping dream.
 No one else is buying the milk.
 No one is mowing the lawn, on the other end of the phone
 There's no one who's always glad it's me.
 No one is dropping off, or picking up,
 Or straightening the covers on the bed.
 The bed is where I'll lie alone till I am laid atop
 My love, a handful of bone, a fistful of ash—
 And for none of this must I feel self-pity.
 For I was made for happiness.
 In the dream, the cartons of milk sat side by side,
 In solid, quiet confidence. Touching.
 The old beside the new, a pair.

Chase Twichell

Buzzyboy

Buzzyboy's right on schedule:
 at the public boat launch, gassed up
 and in the water by 4:20 every afternoon.
 He does tricks for a couple of hours—
 tight figure 8's so he can hit
 his own wake
 twice, using the up-kick to flip entirely,
 the two of them one circle, him and his
 beautiful sleek black seal of a machine.

I watch him with binoculars
 from the twenty-second floor.
 I can also look directly down
 into the Yacht Club's white precincts,
 its sixty white sea-houses
 tethered in their slips,
 and one wooden cabin cruiser from the 1950's,
 dark among the icebergs.

In one white porthole,
 different roses every night.
 White t-shirts and shorts
 pass origami-flower hors d'oeuvres,
 bright petals to eat.

Watch out, there's a lot of broken glass
 by the boat launch. Big weekend out there
 on the water, tourists and locals both.
 They all leave their shopping carts
 in the parking lot for someone to pick up.
 But who? Underlings from Big Market,
 of course. Cart jockeys. Jobs.

Tony Leuzzi

Novaya Zemlya

Lately, I've been thinking again about Novaya Zemlya—
that boomerang-shaped archipelago jutting up from mainland Russia
like a plume from the hat of one of Chekhov's Vankas
or a molted quill writing steel vessels trapped in ice
while radioactive reindeer scatter scarred mountains and plains.

I used to see it as a crooked finger rising out of the Arctic
beckoning me with the promise of two
bright bungalows in a prairie of red grass, one department store
in Belushya Guba selling Robin's egg blue bowlers
until dignified doctors insisted on black, because
black is forever, like the Widow Unn and her thirty-two owls—
one stacked on top of the other as a breathing totem pole.

I imagined people from the north island of Severny having nothing
to do with people from the south island of Yuzhny
and if it weren't for the Matochkin Strait between them
they'd have slaughtered each other years ago. My first story was
Thomas of Severny pining for Rita from Yuzhny.
A polar bear named Isaac carried their forbidden letters
back and forth on his four-sailed schooner. Isaac didn't mind
playing pander, though there was nothing
Thomas or Rita could do except fast each morning.
Over time, both found themselves falling for Isaac, upholding
the grand fiction of their starving ardor
that he could continue from one to the other.

At seven, I received a Rand McNally map of the world
and was instantly drawn to places near the margins:
Svalbard dangling over Norway like a sprig of mistletoe—
New Zealand falling back from Australia like an astronaut from
his shuttle—
and, of course, Novaya Zemlya, that Cezanne brush stroke, dash
of jaunty elegance, a scythe cutting water, an open
parenthesis, as if the Kara Sea began a dream that would not end.
Someday I'd live there in absolute splendor, separated
but close enough for weekend trips to Finland. I would build
my own house
a green, three-storey colonial
with white trim and a balcony facing Murmansk. I would

bed all winter with Jack the Husky, two puffins
named Walter and Anne, and that unnamed goat
from a page in Crusoe, before Crusoe could strangle it.

By suspending "now," dismissing its facts,
there was a place I could live and belong in the world.

On March 03, 1984, I delivered a five-minute oral report
on the indigenous Nenets, those brown hunters
of foxes and seals who come and go
with the turning of weather. We had to pick an island cluster.
Jason chose Hawaii, Michael Indonesia, Jennifer
Galapagos, No one cared what anyone found.

On July 17, 1596, Dutch explorer William Barents said
you could talk to God in Novaya Zemlya, for He
would hide in such a place, withholding His secrets
from cities and men. Barents overwintered there, spooning
heated cannonballs until he died
the following June. Michael covered civil war. Jennifer
rambled on about turtles. Years later, when I read
Kurt Vonnegut, I thought of her standing before us
in a plaid jumper sweating like a Slavic wrestler. O, the tears
we might have wept! But Jason sneezed
which made us laugh. "I did it for her," he whispered
in my arms while I dreamed. "She couldn't bear
another second."

On October 30, 1961, Khrushchev ordered the detonation
of Tsar Bomba, the largest nuclear weapon
in human history. 500 miles away 24 Soviet soldiers
watched from a shore of the Arkhangelsk Oblast, their stiff
cocks standing at full attention as a ball of fire
turned to cloud and tore at pleasure with rough strife.

IMDb says *Novaya Zemlya* is a bleak thriller. A group
of prisoners are spared state sanctioned death for the sake
of a social experiment. All goes horribly wrong
the way social experiments do at 74° N which is why,
instead of watching it, I began my own experiment

called Novaya Zemlya, but was neither suited nor inclined to meet the architectonic challenges of novel writing. I remember my terrific first sentence: "Here there would be no weddings or football." But when I considered 2,500 people eking existence in government bunkers, I felt something—not quite guilt, closer to compassion—and saw me presiding over why-not weddings, structuring game days for rudderless children.

Maybe, if I'd turned the novel upside down I could have finished it, but I'm more of a poet. When I stand this poem on its head, I remember my father planting eight silver maples at the edge of our land. He knows he is dying (eleven months the doctor says) but keeps this morsel to himself. March rain. I shiver beside him, wishing I hadn't insisted on holding his shovel each time he bends down to mix peat with soil. Three years after his exit, what he planted will be twice as tall, branches extending so wide the trees will begin to touch one another. They will never be silver.

When I tip this poem on its side, I am stepping my name in snow, asking myself if someone somewhere else is, too, wondering what I will do now that I know I am and always will be lonely. I don't imagine I will cry, since loneliness is a nesting doll, a white angel in a red devil and inside the angel a tiny apple painted gold. Lately, I've been thinking about rectangular suns, the high refraction of light between atmospheric thermoclines, of horizon warped as hourglass—in other words Art. The world needs more rectangular light, more orange rivers, purple leaves, more folded homes and pocket cliffs. More silver.

When I stand this poem on its feet it asks a riddle: How do you find your way out of the forests of Novaya Zemlya?

Hugh Seidman

Lava

Six-month, street-ditched tot.
Psycho Mom walks off.

ECT tit swapped for Dad.
Talk about mixed metaphor!

Shocked Mom comes home.
Babe's bed at parents' bulb.

Past it, Freudian strobe.
Had that shut sonny up?

Did not talk until three.
Doc said: a spew, if ready.

Yes—fire-smart, avid.
Cooled to paradox of rock.

Yet Mom spat: rotten brat.
E.g., babe nixes galoshes.

But—why not rebirth?
Not the re-screwed watts.

Stubborn rubbers jabber?
Either way, whacked Pompeii.

Martha Rhodes

Ascension

Rose, the mother,
as her child rose,
up into the trees,
with her shattered child.

In her arms, the broken child.
“Don’t go, don’t go,” cries
of the husband. “Don’t
leave me. I can’t bear it,”

though surely he could
come if he wanted,
she thought, he could
will himself up, up, to join

them, his small family.
John! But there he stands,
smaller and smaller, “Look
darling child, there’s your father.

Now shut your eyes and forget him.”

Andrea Cohen

Station

If you’d asked,
as we sat

in a spring rain
of racing blossoms

at the station,
who do you love?

I’d have said:
I love the you

already on the train.
But that’s a you

who didn’t ask—I
loved her too.

Michael Klein’s fourth book of poetry and prose is *When I Was a Twin* (Sibling Rivalry Press, 2015) and there is new work appearing in the *Oxford American*, *Slice*, *Ploughshares*, and *Poetry* magazine. He teaches in the MFA Program at Goddard College and at Hunter College, and lives in New York and Provincetown.

Andrea Cohen’s poetry has appeared in the *New Yorker*, the *Atlantic*, the *New Republic*, *Poetry*, the *Threepenny Review*, and elsewhere. Her books include *Furs Not Mine* (Four Way Books); *Kentucky Derby* and *Long Division*, both from Salmon Poetry; and *The Cartographer’s Vacation* (Owl Creek Press). She directs the Writers House at Merrimack College and the Blacksmith House Poetry Series in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Mark Conway is completing his third book of poems with the working title *the blue father*. Other poems have appeared in the *Paris Review*,

American Poetry Review, *Slate*, *Ploughshares*, *Kenyon Review Online*, *Iowa Review*, *Boston Review*, and *BOMB*.

Joan Larkin’s fifth book of poems, *Blue Hanuman*, was published by Hanging Loose Press in 2014. Her previous work includes *My Body: New and Selected Poems* (Hanging Loose, 2007), recipient of the Publishing Triangle’s Audre Lorde Award, and *Legs Tipped with Small Claws*, an Argos Books hand-sewn chapbook (2012). Her honors include the Shelley Memorial Award and the Academy of American Poets Fellowship. A teacher for many years, she recently served as Conkling Writer in Residence at Smith College.

Tony Leuzzi has written three books of poetry, including *Radiant Losses* (New Sins Press, 2010) and *The Burning Door* (Tiger Bark Press, 2014). In 2012, BOA Editions released *Passwords Primeval*, Leuzzi’s interviews with twenty American poets.

Ada Limón is the author of three books of poems. Her fourth book, *Bright Dead Things*, is forthcoming from Milkweed Editions. She teaches at New York University, Columbia University, Queens University of Charlotte, and the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center. She lives in Lexington, Kentucky; Sonoma, California; and Brooklyn, New York.

Matthew Lippman is the author of four poetry collections: *Salami Jew* (Racing Form Press, 2015); *American Chew*, winner of the Burnside Review Press Book Award (Burnside Review, 2013); *Monkey Bars* (Typecast Publishing, 2010); and *The New Year of Yellow*, winner of the Kathryn A. Morton Poetry Prize (Sarabande Books, 2007). He is the recipient of the 2014 Anna Davidson Rosenberg Poetry Award, and the Jerome J. Shestack Poetry Prize from the *American Poetry Review*.

Martha Rhodes is the author of four collections of poetry, most recently *The Beds*. She is on the faculties of the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College and Sarah Lawrence College. She also teaches at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. She is the director of Four Way Books, a literary publisher in NYC.

Liz Rosenberg is the author of award-winning books of poetry and novels, most recently *The Moonlight Palace*, a #1 Amazon best seller. She teaches at Binghamton University. Her husband and lifelong love, David Bosnick, passed away last year.

Hugh Seidman has published six poetry collections. His awards include the Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize for *Collecting Evidence* (1970) and the Green Rose Prize for *Somebody Stand Up and Sing* (2005). He was trained in mathematics and theoretical physics, and currently works as a technical-writing consultant.

Bruce Smith is the author of six books of poems, most recently, *Devotions*, a finalist for the National Book Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award, the LA Times Book Prize, and the winner of the William Carlos Williams Award.

Bruce Snider is the author of the poetry collections *Paradise, Indiana* and *The Year We Studied Women*. His poems have appeared in *The Best American Poetry 2012*, *American Poetry Review*, *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *VQR*, and *Gettysburg Review*. A former Wallace Stegner fellow and Jones Lecturer at Stanford University, he's currently an assistant professor at the University of San Francisco.

Chase Twichell's most recent book is *Horses Where the Answers Should Have Been: New and Selected Poems* (Copper Canyon Press, 2010), which won both the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award and the Balcones Poetry Prize. She splits her time between Miami and the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York.



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