

NMJ
V.2

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Anne F. Walker

light edged Valentine's

Did it slip out in the rest stop in Florida

when three days running each
of us would fall sick to the swamp
fever and no money for gas, eating thirty second
noodles counting eternal fragmented days
away - or
room peopled with students?

with the baby's head in the sterile green
Was that the afterbirth?

First in your basement room with no light the bare
bulb. Turned backward like a soft small hand. We always faced together in sleep always
finding the skin
sensitive.

Washed in with welfare & the fireplace
where paper & picture histories were burnt
striped comforter, dull brown & white as the lack
of money

pulled out
into a rope that bound
our hands together,
chairs back to back in
that melodrama outside our control.

stronger than grained film
or high speed
- that feeling more real than
alive.

the breaking,
your son died
to you. the breaking passion driven into words

all the rest steadily colder, skin recoiling
as angry all the time Skin blotched with contaminants
in that furious red midnight sky above the Basin.

Without ever saying goodbye we left
each other left each other

& separate as space

between turned

backs

at night

I inherited your penchant for

looking twice
before I leave a place

& feel older

in the million fallen hymns.

Voices 1

Unlike a movie about Oliver Twist, or those
heartless English capitalists in those early industrialized nineteenth hundreds,
I live with stars and Presidents and media whitewashing
families sleeping
 in warm crevices
over industrial laundry vents,
empty stomachs

like night
screams of a baby
unaspell
 and out of arms:
 doors shut
and lights off.

A leather-faced woman
lives in the treed-in picnic ground beside the swamp,
blow-dries her hair in the fake marble rest stop bathroom
of the huge interstate. Mobile vacation homes pull through.

About your first Wife (It alters)

the man that held me in
the kitchen a couple of hours
ago. A long drink of curdled milk.

Our crates stacked with books,
candle melted into a pottery tequila bottle,
window trimmed with black then red high gloss latex.

Outside night, the color of a flashlight
shining through closed hands.

from *if a book is a map: grief, recovery and hurtling forward*

Day 5: Hurtling

Write into this. Write into this blank. How can I write into that which is not, into the houses in which lives are being lived that I do not enter? How can I write into hurtling past?

I start by spellchecking. A way of going over and checking. Yesterday I practiced speed-reading like I used to when I was younger. I skimmed for words that popped out. I read the first sentences of paragraphs. *I am worried that my mind is failing. That this grief is undoing my mind.* I skimmed Benjamin and ended up at the epilogue to "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (or Reproducibility)."

In the epilogue, Benjamin delicately denounces the fascists and the futurists. He writes "instead of draining rivers, society directs a human stream into a bed of trenches; instead of dropping seeds from airplanes, it drops incendiary bombs over cities; and through gas warfare the aura is abolished in a new way." I drive through. Through life. In this moment understand reading at last in a way that has been blocked. I understand that I can float inside the mind of this man. I can run with him from France, trying to get to Spain, to escape the Nazis. I can feel his feelings.

He is a house outside the window of the car in which I fly by. But for a moment he isn't. For a moment he is my father. He is a writer from whom I am descended, in whose fear I live. Of whose horror I feel the bare edge so it reminds me of the comfort of a small room in the hills with a small group of students where we go over the readings. The comfort of some more money coming in than I need for basics in any given month. Comfort of food and structure. Of knowing list

making because bpNichol, another father, showed me how the variance of lists is art.

I know again the pleasure of reading.

Still it is warm in my home. The cinnamon tea is soothing. There is no one else in the house and I hear traffic from San Pablo, the far off train down toward the water. It chimes with the freeway sound behind me. The low high-pitch sound in my ears that is drowned out most of the time.

I still wonder about the hurtle through the valley from one side to the other. The San Joaquin River and the overflow fields just on the north side of the road there. The way the fog settles in, in early day and night when I would drive by it in the commutes where I left home before light, and returned after light left the sky, spending the whole day hours from my house. The whole day uprooted.

I find now, since Papa's passing, that I want to stay close in my house.

This writing becomes again like my hurtling along the 132 over the San Joaquin River. I write little houses, create them in the fog, and don't stay to tea as I have to hurtle forward. I have so many words to write this month. No time for re-reading. Classes to teach. Meetings to get to. No time for re-reading, for being the spectator to my own spectacle, as Benjamin would call it. Tick Tock. Fishing, I will keep fishing and pulling and fishing and pulling.

Day 7. the fields again / i want

After the rise and the first passing of the river is the loop with the higher cliffs, then the river next to the road on the right. Sometimes I have driven through there, in wet winters, where the cow pasture on the other side is flooded. I imagine that the road floods now and then.

a running narrative and return point

looking for stories as i hurtle by

the small amount of knowledge that i have at all

Even when I live in a moment, a house, a relationship, a social setting, and it feels like I am not hurtling by, when I examine it, I still do. I still skate by so many memories, don't really understand how someone is feeling, or the depth of it, or the way that turns and becomes something else. Each social moment is mutable and complex beyond any way for me to understand.

Thus.

I skate.

Even when I feel that I am inside a house and not driving by it. Even when I live in a house and understand its corners and shape, the way things work within it, there are all the visible and invisible ways that are alien to me.

My dad used to sit out on his balcony that overlooked other downtown lakeside high-rises and the playground between them. He used to let thoughts and memories unearthen and float up to him from that core inside.

skip skip skip

When studying with the students I see also where my mind, even in close reading, skips over things I don't understand. I contextualize certain words or phrases out of existence. They disappear if I don't understand.

Day 4. Swimming

Sweeping around today my mind goes first to the drive home from Holy Names. The sweeping view across the bay. The clear yellow lights, and dark of the bay. In the afternoon Detroit called about how much money was left and how Papa wanted it distributed. She describes it as a quite small amount relative to his life as a professor in Canada. From what she says there will be enough for me to pay down Jamil's student loans. I had worked all the jobs I could while he was going through, but there was still some he had to borrow and I had wanted to pay it off for him since the get go. Detroit and I talked while I sat at the big wood lacquered desk in my office. When my dad had told me he had made Detroit the executor I told him I thought it was a bad idea; we agreed to disagree. Details of management crawl over me like ants. I brush them off.

My mind sweeps back with the leaves of the trees at Holy Names. In the small lecture hall on the upper floor I have an average of four or five students on any given afternoon for the literary theory class. One wall has windows that look up a drought-landscaped ascending hill. Small wide trees scatter across the dry earth. The students and I circle up chairs and go over readings, relating them to other readings, making key concepts into graphs, lists and designs on the whiteboards.

A student brought Nietzsche up today in relation to Benjamin's epilogue on fascism from "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," relating concepts of futurist art to a distancing from anything in the world as a "thing-in-itself," in this case to the function of the art. In "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense" Nietzsche wrote about how language and concepts move objects further from their actual being, from the "thing-in-itself" (which echoes Kant). He

uses “leaves” as an example, articulating that the word “leaves” summons a concept. Because “leaves” is a universalizing of many leaves into a unifying thought, creating that concept moves away from the actual truth of any given leaf.

She, the student, often seems to be doing homework for other classes in our classes, math or science equations, with a somewhat bored teenage affect, then comes up with original connections almost blinding in their light. Next week I am getting the kids to read bell hooks’ “Postmodern Blackness” and Berlant and Warner’s “Sex in Public” to look at some late twentieth century race and gender theory. My hope is that it will wake them up more to integration of theory with this lived world after the more abstract, and historically distant, theorists.

This is the work I learned from hearing my parents year after year in constant conversation with one another. He was a social geographer and she was an economist, and they would read social theory and talk about the ideas with one another. In the twenty years before he died we would talk on the phone. I was in California and he was in Toronto and we would talk regularly about ideas and how they place in this living world. After my mom died he and I took a couple road trips across country that were filled with the almost nonstop talk while we moved objects from Toronto to California that had come the opposite way decades before. Conversation is the old wood loom on which my family has worked in all of my knowing of kin. It is the family craft, and working it with these students comforts me.

These are more of the fluttering leaves of daily kindness and responsibilities. It is hard to stay with anything today.

...

When I had my housewarming after I bought my house, and I flew my dad out for it, a minister came to bless the house. She walked room to room with those of us who wanted to follow. She was blonde, slightly built and with a slight Los Angeles American accent that sounded like could be mid-West that has resettled in the Bay Area. Her voice was just a little nasal. She'd brought a pad of frog-shaped green paper, a big package of multi-colored felt pens, and a piece of wood that looks like a large clam shell. Everyone wrote some kind of blessing in multicolored pens on frog-shaped green leaves of paper, folded the papers and put them in the wood clamshell.

Today I look through the blessings on frog paper in a wood shell in my front bedroom studio. That was something I wanted to do, to look for Papa's blessing. I go into the living room to get glasses and by the time I am back in the front studio I forget why I am there. I stay and relax into being for a bit, just a little dissolved about not remembering. Then I see the sign that says *Please leave your shoes outside* from the housewarming night, just over the blessings. It is such a poignant small pleasure to be able to remember. To look through all of those blessings. To see that my atheist Papa evoked Apollo in his written blessing for my yard and garage. He wrote in thick brown marker on a frog-shaped green paper: *Bless the outside yard and garage O! Apollo* and signed it *Jerry*.

Skate skate skate.

I am not feeling extremes now. I am feeling a dull thud.

I resist I resist I resist.

Pulling back through my mind I pull like a horse pulling against reins. Like my head comes back close to my neck and shakes the mane. A white horse, gold reins.

I resist I resist I resist.

Suddenly I am a memory of the car driving through the 132 across the Central Valley to work at UC Merced. Six years of driving.

The feeling of exhaustion like this. The knowing that there were things outside the vehicle in which I travel. There are stories in the dark by which I whisk in exhaustion. I roll down the window to stay awake and feel the sharp threat of tule fog along the part that crosses the San Joaquin River.

Again, the stories that are in the air, that are behind the fog, in houses I pass, and orchards I pass. I feel all those stories as I hurtle through.

Lunar Notes: An Interview with Anne F. Walker



Why do you write? What pulls you into the page, and who inspires you?

I have written since I was little. When I was six my family moved from Berkeley to Toronto, Canada. We crossed the continent and national border in the old Ford van that had the engine between the driver and passenger seat. The beige van where the beige vinyl back seats left imprints like train tracks on bared skin. I drew pictures of places we passed, the lakes and farms and the Great Canadian Shield. My mom put the pictures into a book and wrote brief narratives I dictated for each. She created the blue-purple lined stencil reproductions. We folded them and sent them to family members. Something about the break from one life, from one country, to another, propelled me to writing. It became a safe space for me, a way of connecting to my more inner self.

After that I know I wrote poetry. When my oldest sister, Juanita, passed to cancer in 1994 she had a poem of mine on the corkboard in her room. My mom sent it to me. I had written it at about seven to nine years old and it was about wolves. It end-rhymed. The only time I have not been writing was when I failed out of high school at 15 and hitchhiked around North America for about a year and a half. I was so disconnected from myself I had no words, or perhaps no way inside, no safe space. I found my way into York University just before turning 18, and I started writing again, taking classes with bpNichol, Frank Davey, Eli Mandel and Susan Swan. Often poems come to me when I am in motion, biking, walking. Sometimes I need to move around to jog an idea or word sequence into place.

bpNichol was my first poetry teacher, and he inspired me. I studied with him at York University 1982-86, and he continued to mentor my work before his passing. He had already been winning national and international awards with his concrete poetry. Once I asked him what a concrete poem on his office door meant. It had the words "frog," "pond" and "glop" interacting, and it really didn't seem to be what I understood poetry to be. He said that when one writes in perfect syntax, with correct punctuation, one is working with the established power norms. He said "fucking with language is fucking with power." I understood this. His teaching remains impressive to me. Even though he was a rock star in the poetry world he never tried to form replicas of himself. Rather, he had a capacity to deepen individuals' understanding of their own works and capabilities. He reached into a student's capability for understanding, in my case knowing that the idea of fucking with power through language would speak to this 17-year-old girl. He was a rock star.

If you were the last person on earth and you pulled the last book from a pile of ash and cinders, what do you hope it would be?

It would be the book by Pablo Neruda that has "Naked You Are As Simple As One Of Your Hands."

What space does/should writing occupy in today's climate?

In answering this I pull words from W.S. Merwin and from Audre Lorde. I pull from them because they have started to articulate something I feel and barely know how to say.

I interviewed W.S. Merwin in March of this year, asking: "If you were speaking to poets coming up now, poets emerging right now, what would you say? In this world, in this crazy, crazy place that we're in." He answered, "Well, don't think of poetry as being something else from what, from what you're doing. What you're reading about is just this [thumps chest] all the time, it's just exactly this. It's about the real world. The real world actually isn't what we're looking at. Do you think having that guy in the White House is the real world? It's a lot of mistakes tumbled together, you know?"

In "Poetry Is Not a Luxury" Audre Lorde writes: "The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized. This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are, until the poem, nameless and formless—about to be birthed, but already felt."

Especially now, it seems to me essential to write, to encourage others to write, to recognize that writing is not "something else," that it is not only about the real world but part of creating how to understand this world. It gets to something inside, something that is the world and is part of its song. Creative works are crucial in today's climate. And it is crucial that we support each other in writing, narrating, singing, that which we are going through.

What was the first piece you ever had published? Are you the same person who wrote it, and if not, how have you changed?

Again, this story leads back to bpNichol. He had suggested that I start sending my work out saying it was as good as anything out there being published. I appreciated that he gave me that worker among workers, poet among poets, vision. I decided to send work to *Contemporary Verse 2*, put together some poems, a cover letter, and put it in a Toronto red post box. This was back when everything was snail mail. I remember the rush of putting it in that box. Shortly afterward I remember seeing bpNichol walking from the Fine Arts building over toward the Ross building, the

central campus structure at that time. I hid behind a small tree and jumped out as he came by. I'm not sure why I did that, but I remember him laughing, and we walked together. I remember telling him about the adrenaline rush of sending off that package. He said, "And someday there will be the rush of acceptance, and then of people asking you for your work." I loved that man. *Contemporary Verse 2* published "Mother Love" and "Knife Dance" in summer 1985 (Volume 9, Number 1).

I seldom jump out at professors from behind shrubs these days, and I am a much happier person generally. My work is more open in terms of voice. Then I was still intent on a poem being something of small animal prints left on the page. Imagistic, symbolic, or minimalist poetry felt perhaps more secure to that me who was used to feeling unsafe. I believe it was a way to get a lot on the page and still feel protected. I found that when I moved back to California my voice changed. When I heard a colleague at Mills College, Andrea Adolph, read her poetry I could hear the Central Valley in it. In her words and intonations. I started to let a longer line emerge, a longer thought, longer sounds...the only way I can describe it is like a metal brush being played over a taut drum. There was a slide and a let-out to the language that started a new direction of growth. I still love to experiment with form, to learn new models and new integrations of poetic shape.

Do you find poetry more challenging to write or prose? What inspired the shift from poetry to prose for *if a book is a map: grief, recovery and hurtling forward*, and what was your writing process like?

if a book is a map: grief, recovery and hurtling forward was the hardest writing experience I have had. Where my job as a writer is usually to stay open to the muse and stop to record when she sings, *if a book is a map: grief, recovery and hurtling forward* involved so much staying with pain. I did not have the anesthetic quality a lyric creates for me. Instead I had to pull myself to the page day after day, to make it discernible to readers.

if a book is a map started as a National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) project. At the end of October a friend told me she was going to write into NaNoWriMo and I stepped into it too. The first day was two days after my fiftieth birthday. I fished around for where it might go, pulling images from around me and from imagination, writing seventeen hundred words. The second writing day I did the same in the morning. Then I got the news that my dad died. Like the film technique where sound goes down to nothing in an explosion, his death hijacked the writing into memories of him, recovery and hurtling forward, while articulating my process of grief. Seventeen hundred words a day came in through the first twenty-eight days of grieving. I used to turn to my dad when something big was up. His death was something big and I kept wanting to turn to him, and he was gone. It was a kind of human animal loss that really went deeper than what I had felt before.

My dad had been writing short memoir vignettes for a few years. He took a class at Ryerson in Toronto, enjoying the writing and the camaraderie of it. It occurred to

me that woven in and out of *if a book is a map* I wanted to see if I could use some of my dad's recollections from his memoir class.

I had been in collaboration with my father's stories, as a way of understanding the world, since I was little. When my oldest sister, Juanita, had been dying in Toronto twenty years before, my mother had taken care of her. My father was support for my mother and I listened to my father in long distance phone calls. I was getting an MFA in creative writing at Mills College, and my son was only two.

My father would tell me things, like the doctors were: *irradiating the top of the brain pan to alleviate horrible headaches from the tumors. But radiation makes the brain swell, she's had one of five — she's in hospital through emergency from not eating and barely drinking five days.*

He would say: *Between Sunday and Tuesday she lost cognitive ability. Lone's in tears because Nita can't remember. Talking to her. She wants to die at home. Not caught in the fucking machine.* And I would write it down. I couldn't hold what he was saying but I could write it down. I would integrate it with my poetry. The poems became a book. They integrated into *Into the Peculiar Dark*.

May 24, almost six months after he passed, twenty five years after my son was conceived, my brother-in-law emails me that he is sending me some of the ashes and all documents, photos, writings from all computers. May 28 the box arrived. I rearranged the house around it. Cleaned dust from under every piece of furniture I moved, but could not open the box.

At first I thought that I would be telling Papa's story, or perhaps a story of my family, but as I edited it quickly became clear that I was telling my own story of mourning. I was telling my story of skimming over surfaces of life, of some of the deep pockets I fell into, telling some part of the story of my recovery, telling a story of myself as an artist and of myself as a becoming being. I hope it reaches out and is of service and hope to someone who reads it.

I found I had an insecurity writing the book that I had never had before in writing. Maybe all the insecurities I have about me came up. I would be workshopping it and barely want to read the words, they kept curling back, wanting to curl back, but I did push forward. I got it through to the fifth draft before I felt like I could send it out. Now I'm looking for a publisher, which is a whole different animal of fear of rejection, and actual rejection, that I have to pass through.

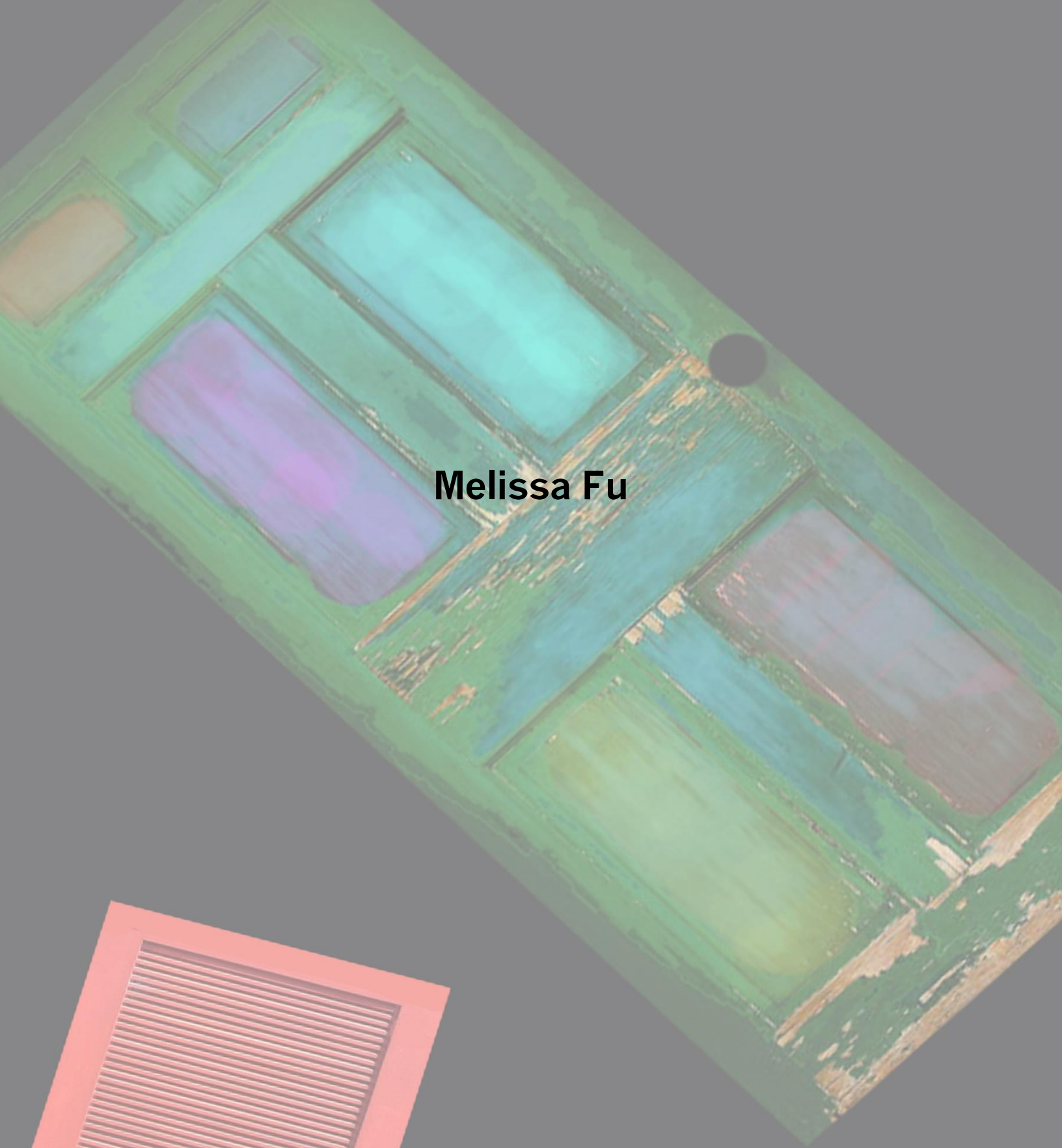
What books do you have on your shelf right now? Who are you reading? Anything or anyone you're excited about?

On the digital shelf I have Carl Philips and David Tomas Martinez. I love the lyric evocative qualities in Philips' work. Martinez grabs my attention with his use of space on the page and varied pockets of micro narratives. Lorna Cervantes

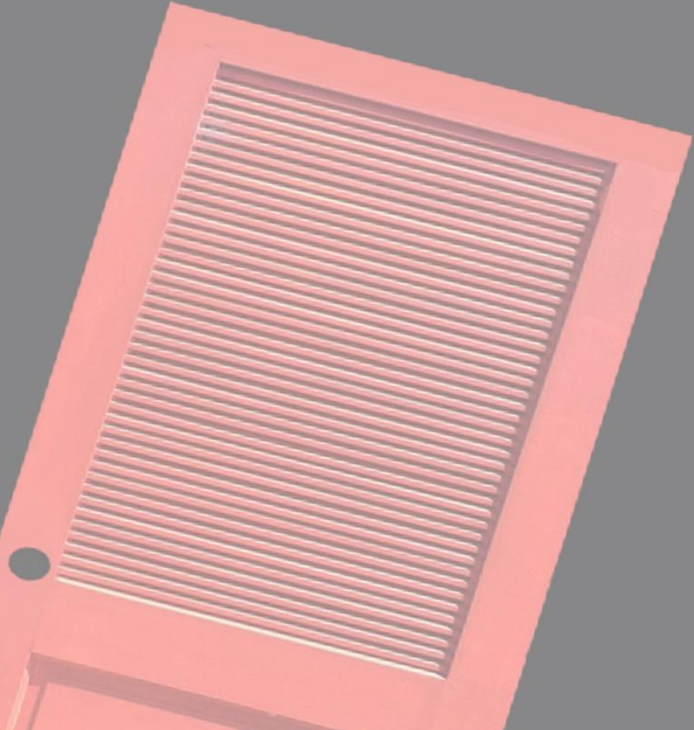
"Freeway 280," always a favorite. Her freeway as "a raised scar" knocks me out every time. Gwendolyn Brooks' "the mother" from *A Street in Bronzeville* was published in 1945. It begins "Abortions will not let you forget" and goes on "I have heard in the voices of the wind the voices of my dim killed children. / I have contracted. I have eased..." It seems to me an incredibly brave moment in women's writing. She just stared it all straight in the face and didn't blink while writing. She is my hero. *Incarnadine* by Mary Szybist and *Garden Time* by W.S. Merwin are on my nightstand.

What advice do or would you give to a writer just starting out?

Write. Keep writing. Let the process of publishing be a whole different animal. Let all the weight of rejection be on the rejecter, none on you. Learn and push forward. Keep writing. It is resistance. It is staying to the core of who you are. It can be truth and beauty; however ugly it is. And however ugly it is, it can still be beauty. Keep writing.



Melissa Fu



invitation to the monsoon

arrive at the dip in the day
everywhere, a lull

unfold differently -
heedless, hushed

assume a hidden dimension
between salt and waves

listen long: the sea bluffs
shingle of shells, poker chip pebbles

bring cinnamon tea and
the chords of no moon at all

circles

the earth	the sun
the moon	the earth
the mountains	the horizon
the willows	the lake
the wagons	the camp
the dancers	the tree
the stones	the fire
the garlands	the bride
the ring	the finger
the bee	the blossom
the moth	the flame

Threshold

Until then, I was almost
invisible. Nearly not seen,
unlabeled, unmarked.

In those moments
when I didn't know if the sky
was very large or very small,

when I couldn't tell you my name,
or yours, or the nature of
our acquaintance,

I found something that
almost cradled my cheek
like cottonwood down

that almost stroked my shoulder
blades like sunlight, that almost
felt like home.

That if I listened with
the soles of my feet
whispered

*be still
count your heartbeats
measure your breaths.*

And there I was
waiting and
unaware,

tracing my lifeline
with a pine needle
and a jay's feather.

Gypsy pajarito

Her ancestry is mixed,
which is shorthand for
restlessness in the blood.
She feels her heartbeat
in her stomach.

When she travels, she carries
the ghosts and rubble of
what she doesn't understand.
The less she understands them,
the further she carries them.

These small stones,
whether grit or diamonds,
materialize in every pair
of dancing shoes
she has ever spun through.

She loves like the wind;
sometimes zephyr,
sometimes tempest,
twirls ribbons of a
Maypole at midnight.

Trails scents of juniper and
huckleberry, bluebells in April,
salts the sky with meteors,
and with a stick of pine,
paints autumn on the hills.



Armin Tolentino



Spaceboy's First Mission, Age Ten

Twelve poplar logs, dried and light
as Styrofoam, dragged from the forest
and fastened with jute
we snuck from Dad's tool box.
Summer vacation testing buoyancy
on the lake where
an island bloomed from its center,
glittering alien planet,
and no way to know
how many fathoms deep
if the knots should relax
or the wood suck too much water.

The night before our launch,
I asked, *What do you think
we'll find?*
He was packing provisions:
fish hooks, compass, *Double Stuf Oreos*,
a book mapping stars.

*Mammoth bones or ruins,
probably*, he shrugged.
*Just hope we don't see
any dragons. Whalers used to say,
A dragon at sea meant you'd never
make it back home.*

Next morning, I faked sickness
and confessed to our parents
the summer-long project
when he didn't come home by dinner.
Dad borrowed a neighbor's skiff
and my brother was grounded,
telescope privileges forbidden as well.

He wouldn't even look at me.
*At least you didn't see
a dragon*, I said.

He stared out the window.
It was dark too soon already.
His anger, my gratitude—
two stars to navigate us to the equinox.

His words fogged the window.
How do you know I didn't?

A Letter that Spaceboy Never Received

You wouldn't know, at T-minus 7
I shut my eyes
from the shuttle's exhaust,

a blossom of orange that burned itself
into grey. Couldn't shake the feeling
you'd just strapped yourself

inside the throat of a dragon.
The crowd sang goodbye,
at zero you broke the thick quilt

of cumulus, but
I never watched you go.
Another confession:

the summer we built a log raft
with twine, a handbook on knots,
and no knowledge of nautical physics,

I wasn't too sick to join in the journey,
just a copilot frozen by the unshakeable thought
the lake was alive and halfway across

would love us too much to ever
let us go. If I sank, what would Mom have left
to lay in my coffin? Would my soul snap loose

from its anchor of bones?
How would it find the surface?
That morning you sailed,

offered her prow
to the water's give, but I witnessed
nothing, locked in the bathroom,

crying too much to wish you
good luck. Since blast off, I've trained my eyes
to stay open, to stare at stretches of sky

without tiring, so patient I now can spot
black migrations of midges against empty
miles of blue. Brother, I promise I will not blink,

I will not flinch, pull back this time,
I will not miss one second of your return.

Spaceboy's Wife Builds a Widow's Walk

It's not as if she doesn't yearn
to know as much as he,

to distill darkness and distance
into a single equation,

both Newton and quantum
secure in her fingers,

two halves of a lover's heart
she aches to sew through an equal sign.

It's just...
she doesn't need to *touch* it.

She believes in
the liturgy of numbers.

Strings of digits stretched across
a college blackboard:

a tabernacle for the sacrament of
unquestionable truth.

Not him. Doubting Thomas
will only believe if his fingers sink

into black holes of space. At liftoff,
she wept, a cloudy day that blurred

as the shuttle shrunk to microscopic.
He left her nothing but a question

theoretical physics couldn't answer.
Spaceboy's wife builds a widow's walk

to perform her first experiment:
how many steps back and forth across

a twelve foot span of roof will elapse before
his shuttle flukes the atmosphere again?

Too many variables to reduce and she fears
for this equation, absence is the constant.

Spaceboy Gives a Eulogy at His Mentor's Funeral

How could your story end this way,
hollowed and buried in Bayonne,
New Jersey? We should have returned
 your body to stardust,
dressed you with incense and garlanded fireworks over your chest,
 jettisoned into sparkling darkness,
most distant shore of the sky where you could explode
 into supernova and fall back
to earth some future day
 when we would most need
 a reminder
 of your light.

We should have split
 your ribcage open and offered the splayed
 red halves to heaven.

Stress Tests and Survival Skills

Light deprivation, twelve days
bound in shrouds of black
plastic. I breathed through
tubes and streams of fluid
drifted into my wrist. I learned
the sound liquid makes
as it works through the body's
waterways. Nothing to do
but listen and breathe in a replica
of the galaxy's borders, a darkness
where even the sun's fingers
can't stretch. I didn't open
my eyes—not once—to prove
there was nothing missing,
nothing more I needed than
the rhythm of my body surviving.

Then, I was released,
unhooked and dizzy. Without a break
or bite of solid food, they moved me
to a sterile room, so white I kept
my eyes shut until the burning lessened.
There, a book on origami, plus
a stack of plain white paper. A single
command through loudspeakers:
fold one thousand cranes.
Just another test of endurance
and I folded the layers, crease over
crease, until the paper blistered
my fingers with dry friction.

Now, with the shuttle's engines
shattered, I understand it wasn't testing,
but training, and I've folded ten thousand
cranes that float about the capsule, one
for every light-year I've drifted away
from Earth.



Sarah Stoves



Breach

When we spoke of reverence unending, carelessly
we tethered our words to the years we'd spend
separated like lovers in different cars on the same train.
I wish we could have set aside our logic brains,
urged out neurochemicals the old fashioned way:
lovingly shared needles and gotten the same diseases.
Then, at least, we'd possess some pain other
than this loss that we thought we could control
if only dying meat wasn't so alluring
if only cigarettes could be lit at either end
if only your brother could be saved from warmongering
if only we could stop writing ourselves into voids—
because i'd exist in your nowhere if only you could let me in.

Remembering Jay Reatard

Your pinkbucket face
poured out a substance
undefined by any words
I've ever learned. I cocked
my head sideways, for that
godlike goop to spill in / steep
my skull with the awareness
of all things forsaken by our
shallow thoughts of civility

Like what not to say to your
grandmother who considers
you to be just a side effect
of one lie she told a man
or how we cannot accept
ourselves as ordinary.

We all stood waiting for you
to morph into some foreign thing
more appropriate for your temperament
but you kept screaming and spewing
and never apologizing 'til we all
got knee-deep in your life.

Never Mine

Birthday eve is moonless,
a hard omen to digest
with whispers over waves—
I miss our naked happy

 that I used to want
to live in a crushing love
—now I float in a pause,
fancy the thought of you

 devoured
by a giant sheet cake



Chan Huang



Rebirth

In the muddy river for too long,
I have to scrub away the dirt from my body
in order to float to the surface
and to breathe.

In the unseen abyss,
live many evil creatures
wearing false make-up,
hiding their greed and ugliness,
to permeate my skin,
drag me downward.

I do not want to live
as slippery mud without shape
or ash that goes only with the wind.

I hold my breath to the smell of decay
and keep my brain from dumbness.
I follow a beam of light in the suffocating darkness,
to breathe the brief fresh air
that will recharge me
for the battle of a whole night.

When I finally stumble ashore,
leave after me a trail of dirty marks
on this vibrant land,
remind me of where I come from,
that I will never stop to look back.

A long awaited new world!

The Dream

The blue sea, so deep
and speechless
as a century old man.

He approached me, explaining
how to draw
the glass, half-filled with water,
a broken stem with green leaves.
A telescope, he said. Knowing
I might not understand.
Frightened, as I'd rather be left alone
and be ignored.
Make it bigger? I frowned then felt relieved.

In my dream,
the fishy smell, the fresh and soft wind,
blowing my face. So familiar.
The rain
rolling down the footsteps
of a child,
worry-free
and as young as me.

Looking for something lost.
For what are we here,
from place to place, wrapped in heavy
uneasiness and fatigue?
Loved ones, heads down, sinking into thoughts:
one unsettled heart,
an unforgettable dream.

Contributors

Anne F. Walker earned her MFA at Mills College and completed a PhD at the University of California, Berkeley. She taught at the University of California, Merced, for six years and has been directing the graduate writing program at Holy Names University since 2014. Her full-length published poetry books include *Six Months Rent*, *Pregnant Poems*, *Into the Peculiar Dark*, and *The Exit Show*. *when the light of any action ceases* is her recent poetry chapbook.

Melissa Fu grew up in Northern New Mexico and currently lives in Cambridgeshire, UK. Her work has appeared in *Words and Women: Two and Four*, *Bare Fiction*, *Envoi*, *Bitterzoet Magazine*, *Right Hand Pointing*, and other publications. Melissa was the regional winner of the [Words and Women 2016 Prose Competition](#). She is delighted to be a 2017 Apprentice with the London-based [WordFactory](#). With backgrounds in physics and English, she has had a career in education as both a teacher and curriculum designer. In 2014 Melissa combined her loves of writing and teaching to start [Spilling the Ink](#), a small business offering creative writing courses and coaching.

Armin Tolentino received his MFA at Rutgers University in Newark, NJ, and his poetry has appeared in *Arsenic Lobster*, *New Millennium Writings*, and *The Raven Chronicles*. A full-length manuscript of his was a finalist for the Red Hen Press Benjamin Saltman Poetry Award and the Kundiman Poetry Prize. Tolentino is an Oregon Literary Arts Fellowship recipient and works in a government agency addressing poverty and education. His next project focuses on fishing and racial identity, but he fears it's also an excuse for him to spend way too much time fishing under the guise of "research."

Sarah Stoves is a Northern California native who's currently living with her partner, projects, and many plants in Birmingham, Alabama.

Chan Huang started to write poetry in the spring of 2017, her second year in the United States. She has experience in urban planning and design, tutoring and painting.

