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Publisher & Managing Editor

Nnorom Azuonye

editor@sentinelquarterly.com

Poetry Editor

Mandy Pannett

poetryeditor@sentinelquarterly.com

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Blackcap

FRAN BAILLIE

Sways in a cypress,
mournfully flutes,
the world's judge
in eez black cap.

Mary doon allow
stript o'er beads
in petticoat an kirtle
sports er black cap,
haid on the block,
waitin.

Executioner fae Calais
sports eez black cap,
hears the alarm call,
'TACC, TACC, TACC' like
strykin stanes.

Blackcap
sweengs in a cypress,
sings eez hert oot,
kens aa about daith,
seen it aa afore.

Game

FRAN BAILLIE

Given from her father's arm
into another's hands,
she is the prize
in the pass-the-parcel game.

Her veil peeled back,
she's unwrapped,
revealed,
a ringed bird.
He revels in
what he thinks is his.

Much later she will detach,
compile shopping lists,
think of England;
panting by numbers
while he skinnydips,
dabbles in the transparent pool
he thinks she is.

Mr & Mrs Andrews take exercise

LESLEY BURT

Mrs A. removes hat, shakes white lace cuffs,
hinges at the hip for a dead-lift. Mr A.
buckles his shoes, watches *BBC Breakfast*
on muted TV above his treadmill.

*Others wear correct gear: black Lycra
embellished with go-faster leg stripes,*
she states, hitching her skirts; he smirks,
tucks his fowling piece under one elbow.

A woman executes sit-ups on the mat:
tattooed butterflies head from waistband
towards shoulder-blades; Mrs A. sighs,
looks at pigeons outside the window.

Mr A. increases speed and incline,
Mrs A. takes off her hat, adds weights:
Tomorrow, she says, let us walk in fields.
We'll go shooting, he replies, with my dog.

Sonnet 74

RICHARD CRAVEN

Whan that Novembre wyth hys soddyngge leaves
of Yndyc Summer hys layt standde hath drownn'd,
and raynnes yternal blyte ye mowldy glebe
and clerkes skulck yn thayr cells yn studye brownne;
whan erly nyt and drearye mornyngge greyye
array ye darklyngge slummes yn damppe drabbenesse,
and laytest tydyngges fromme ye U.S.A.
extyngwyssh'd havve alle howpe and happynesse,
than longen knyaves to ganne onne herowynne.
Nowwe sleezye marchaunts bearyngge Chyna Wyte,
and hypsters wyth a thyngge for Bombayye jynne
and Wyte Ace drynkers who forsake thayr Spryte,
converge lyk starvyngge dogges onne queynt Stowkes Crofft,
and daunce Saynt Vytus jyv wyth armes alofft.

Chiang Mai fire

CHRISTOPHER JAMES

A half-mile away,
a farmer is staking out ground
as if planting flags. Fades in,
out, in, an unopposed intention
in a smoky picture frame.
What's not forest shifts to farmland.
The paddies are reeking black,
the forest is burning, our hopes too.
Floods will not come as we wish
or cleanse stockpiled seas.
We know, balk, just drive our
unseen credits into the ground,
jet lag our sense of time,
shadows of ourselves yet
ourselves wholly.
Like that distant farmer: the sound
of hammering then, misaligned,
the sight of numb violence.

To become One with Nature

JOHN LINDLEY

Today I learned to recognise the alder
by its leaf-shaped leaves, yesterday the bullfinch
by its bird-like wings.
Each day my knowledge of the natural world expands.
I sweat rainforests through my revision.
I am a bud opening, a seed cracking, a spring splintering
into part summer, part autumn.
I quaff questions from the rain and sip answers from the sun,
the light of my knowledge edging past daylight saving time
into long hours of brightness. I hear why the snake unsheaths
and what becomes of its abandoned scabbard.
Last December, knee deep in pentangles of snow,
I noted the sky and its shifts, sorted cumulus from alto cumulus,
cirrus from strata; learned the collective name for them.
Today I memorised where owls nest – in trees;
what the goat eats – everything; the direction of swallows
in winter – south; the colour of bluebells.
Tomorrow I shall open a book made from forest
and beckon badger and vole to tell me what they do,
why they are here and why it should matter;
wonder, if these facts aren't available,
if they ask the same of me.

Foetal Position

SIMON JACKSON

Child to be,
curled like a sleeping dog
in a flesh basket you doze,

folded into a cartoon tiptoe,
approaching in silence,
hand to lips;

you are a bass clef,
your heart a throbbing bassline,
your flywing eyelids a buzzing drum skin;

a Buddha balloon, bobbing on an umbilical string,
waiting to be cut loose,
a zen smile playing across your mouth;

an apostrophe, replacing that something
missing between us;
a new world, your gravity dragging us together;

nose to nose, my arms enfold your mother
and we become a pair of parentheses
the three of us a single, self-contained clause.

Notes on an Expedition to Mexico

JACKIE WILLS

Two men, with *native* help, report on each bird they snare. Starting on the plain, they climb through thorns and cacti, streams and cloud forest. They list hawks, kites, doves,

note how the stomach of a squirrel cuckoo contains a beetle - and half way up they catch a single female screech owl. I can hear the flock of swifts they netted in a ruined Spanish cathedral,

a young swallow *far from home*, see four humming birds feeding in a blur, a family of nine wrens busy in a hedge. One specimen had left its nest *not more than ten days before*.

I close the book on lost whistles, whirrs, squeaks, trills and setts, on the dawn chorus unhooked from its skins, carcasses emptied of sky, skeleton wings spread in cases

that used to be trees, under glass that seizes light like water but cannot flow. A row of fly-catchers from Angola - five brides asleep on russet veils. Six green broadbills together on their backs,

their emerald breasts a line of hills, beaks pointing at the sky like stumps - knotted round each claw is a label and string. Lastly, three hatchlings arranged in a nest, forever pleading.

Belonging

STEPHEN JAMES

A hawk seen from the fast lane
is a welcome visitor,
but here, above this silent crag,
she authenticates the landscape.
I, too, am made in Northumbria,
but the bedrock I rest on is unyielding
and my fingers find no traction
among the roots of heather.
Nor can I match the shirtless farmer,
whose ruptured shoulders and iron mallet
drive a stake through the greasy turf.
I must go back to the hallowed halls
of waxed wooden floors and weak tea,
where the brain games come too easily.

Syria as Metaphor

ANDY MCLEAN

Aleppo

Is not one of the Marx Brothers
Nor Hamas and Hezbollah
Chick pea dishes.

Blessed are the bombed
For they must have deserved it,
N'est-ce pas?
Those inadvertently baptized
Into the Aegean
Are already saved, so we're all good-
Yes?

Images of refugees are clear, yet
Bashar the Ophthalmologist
Is no Ananias. And Paul will remain Saul
Until
Someone else can heal and be healed
On the road to Damascus.

When I Write

SIMON PERCHIK

Before the rise of the Cockerel
From his wooden roost
To break the silence of dawn,
A crowing bell in his throat,
I must pluck my steely pen
From its holder, its nib
Spurting with grief floods.

I must wake the haunting Muse
And summon visions of gods
Bestriding skull domes,
A blood mass gleaming under their feet,
And how with matchless and cruel intensity
They must exhale fires from puffing nostrils
To afflict the fields, bleed the trees,
Strip young leaves of songs,
And cripple a crouched land
With a baggage of sorrows on its back.

I must etch lines about ancestral hills
Stripped of heads,
Of hemorrhaging birds
With pruned feathers,
Of crimson rivers that belch
The stench of their rotten entrails,
Of wailing streets stormed into fright
By the bomber's blasts and the slayer's stabs.

I must etch lines drenched in dolour,
Of a gnarled world that groans and smothers
In the claws of murderous beasts.

So, I write of Aleppo's cold blood rivers,
Of Mogadishu's plains gasping in gory floods,
Of Borno maidens snatched and hauled into a cruel fief.
I write of the execrable thrones of demons
Of a newfangled world that decrees abominations
And mock the tumult in the clouds.
I etch lines about mongrels in fat castles
Gorging on the sweat of Calcutta's slave factories.

I sing of the fury of avenging winds
That set reprisals against those forbidding thrones.
I write of blood pumping in a swell of retributions,
measure for measure, soul for soul.
I muse, I write, I etch
Of the blood of reckoning seasons.

Sunset at Dusk

(i.m. Chinua Achebe)

SIMON PERCHIK

Were you the last pillar of reason standing tall
In the wild forest shaken by rustling winds?
Were you the last stone capping the rock
In the savannah stormed by wild anthills?

Blacksmith, whose fingers anvilled words
Into arrows of truth! You walked this land,
Where angels had fled on wings of haste;
Where men faltered and fell in the clefts of soil.

Has death swept the custodian of truth away
Leaving the land and its ancient lore unguarded?
Has the Ogidi gong gone silent when the songbird rode
Into heaven's gates in clouds of swash?

The earth trembled at your passing,
Brazen gong, who told how kings and princes
Danced naked in the village square
And then wiped his nose with glory.

You told how the Cock farted and the earth hounded him
Like a drunken mob chasing an outlaw,
Because we know that the head that upsets the wasp
Must face the wrath of its sting.

For integrity you spurned
The laurels of a nation that sold its gleam,
Oji tree, whose head pried the secrets of the skies.

Bastion of birds of sorrow, now will they that nested
On your boughs scurry into unfamiliar
Thresholds where the sun holds back its gleam?

The sun that set at your dusk has cast grim shadows
Upon the broken walls of the clan. We still remember
How you held off the fury of gods like a rampart,
And walked where warriors dreaded to tread.

From a deep well of memory I sing you
This song of honour. I sing of your nobility,
Faithful custodian of truth, *Oja* flutist
Who plucked home a wealth of glory.

Kashmir

DEBASISH PARASHAR

The city
danced
to the tune of curfews
a tribhanga
reduced to fractured joints
aesthetically numb

(Tribhanga: Tribhanga posture is the thrice-bent figure in Indian Classical dances in which the head is inclined to one side, the upper body is bent in the opposite direction and part of the body below the waist takes again the reverse direction.)

Beard / Mixtape / Spellbook

JOHN PAUL DAVIS

Looking back on those days what else can I say except
I've never been photogenic?
For that reason, I carried around a really amazing camera.
I flirted briefly with a beard & loved myself, my face & pulse
arrayed under its raiment.
But the wife made a face with eyes narrow & her nose wrinkled
when she talked about it.
Even though it was right there in the room with her.
We had opposite philosophies of life. Like, she wanted to get ahead
& I wanted to build little cairns thanking the world for each magic
as we stumbled into it, grace by grace. To memorize it like
scripture. For example when I was a boy
if I heard a song I liked on the radio I would mash RECORD and
PLAY on my cassette player to trap as much of the song as possible
for listening later.
This is, by the way, technically illegal.
But tell a kid that. Tell a kid enraptured by the hook in a song
not to believe in fantastic other worlds. Tell a kid humming another
enchanted country that the future won't be better.
Tell a miscreant who can smell the prayer of tomorrow's music
that perfume is unimportant. I also stole my father's walkman
when I was nine & was grounded to my room for a month.
That's when I read the entire Bible, including the story of Samson
who lost his strength when he cut his long hair
& I am in no way blaming the failure of the marriage
on the electric clippers or the razor or the billion pinprick kisses
the winter left on my naked cheeks but after it was over,
when I had moved into the studio apartment,
the dark & wonderful new alone I just never went round
to the pharmacist's to buy a new razor
I just let the days & months & years accrue

like criminal fragments of song on the palimpsest of a worn
cassette, snatches of spells,
a thousand outlaw joys recorded over the lost original music.

In the Garden of Spring

MATT DUGGAN

In the afternoon garden
full with flaws and clowns,
sipping apples
with an ear inside the bragging crowd;

an accent jumps like a bad audition
for a villains bit part
from Streetwise Mockney
Into Afrikaans –

Potato Skins
in Tarragon and Paprika;
bearded men carry their spawn
inside beige papooses.

Ramblers gather for latte
Cappuccino,
undermining
whoever serves them!

Cocaine noses twitching
like tadpoles in a pond of teenage spittle,
I see them strutting
swaying like hard shouldered drugstores;

Another afternoon
With the flaws and clowns of Spring!

Blind Man Sleeping at The Great Machipongo Clam Shack

GLEN LYVERS

What do you dream about, blind man? Voices
coming from below the ground, long canes,
longer than the world is deep?

Do you imagine you have experienced sight,
a great salty yawn spilling cracked oysters,
each unique odorous texture a vision?

I wish you would wake and tell me your dreams,
in words sufficient enough to remove my vision,
forever in the way of what you see.

Some Thing in the Bed

GLEN LYVERS

There is a long window that doesn't open overlooking the parking lot. In its recess, a black leggy thing, weightless and still, lays on its side. It is to fly as the thing in the bed is to my mother — holding only the shape and none of the spontaneity. She too is weightless, buoyant in the heavy air, adrift in familiar halls — fourteen disbelieving eyes stare at a shucked husk.

Tigers in Cloud Ships

STEPHEN PHILIP DRUCE

Clad in spiked plummet -
stilled vapour rip
as cotton ball angels drift,

sail scratch prowl -
circle bird cluster
in snow coat applause,

suited cream orchestras
abandon scarred circus skies
in chorus salute,

and tigers in cloud ships
roar unmanned -
their sweetest melody.

Your eyes hurt me

ISAAC ALESH MELCHIZEDEK

Your --
because one and one doesn't equals
one anymore, because
your one is a tsunami
& I am the victim of this
eye calamity

---Eyes
that are not blue-sea as the sea,
not as calm in January cold
as the wavelet cuddling
the sea at night;
not a canoe
but

---Hurts
like sinking in the sea,
keeping mute, because,
well, because screaming at
the stolid sea isn't just dumb
but punishable by death

Me---
I've loved you since my lessons
of love-language
& hating you now is like
swimming against the Atlantic
just to save myself:
useless, tiring...

I'd rather drown in your eyes.

Voids

AJISE VINCENT

what should we do, elders? what incantations,
or prayers can we chant to croak these demons
with eyes like that of an owl, savoring darkness,
smoking stamens of sequestered figs on the hallway
of our verdure? elders, we have sprinkled venoms
and ashes of burnt pythons on the borders of our
bay, hearth and camaraderie. yet no result? remember

we are on the brink of war. we are on a self-induced
armageddon. how potent are our charms? how sharp
are our arrows? that we sleep, like gods, while dews
and dust of gutty mornings lurk on the pinnacle of
our heads. it is time to remove the remora of nescience
from our eyes. it is time to gear up, like a cavalry. and
mount the stools in our shrines, it is time to ask,
“who shall be our deliverer?”

Emily As I Took Solace In The Idea Of Russian Dolls

DARREN DEMAREE

Emily says she has collected all
of my formers
& is excited, most of all

to meet the last, tiny man
I become. That's sweet, I told her,
but did you have

to save the thousand
versions of me
that were drunks only?

Of course, she said,
I kill one of those for every month
that you are sober

& that is what allows me
to continue to love your new layers
without punching you in the face.

Emily As Cooled, We Began Again

DARREN DEMAREE

The sequence is a myth
because the sequence ends.
We are always new

& the idea that we keep choosing
to stay together
with only our petty dramas

separating us from time to time
means that nothing is certain,
but we've invented a new faith.

Emily As A Lovely Mouth With So Much Force And Ambition That I Bought A New House For Her

DARREN DEMAREE

I wanted to write a dirty poem
about Emily,
but the when of that poem

was decimated by the wind
of her wanting to stir
our world with her words

& since I am only a poet,
it took eight years for me
to do the only thing she asked

me to do. I learned to cook
her favorite meals for her
as well. Now, I have ten

minutes to write some filthy
elegance about my dynamic wife,
but I chose to brag

about all four walls
she now climbs, like she isn't
pregnant for the last time.

Lost in the zoo

MIRIAM CALLEJA

Your skin stretched hard
So clear considering your age
Trying to take a selfie
With the giraffe that stuck my hand in its mouth
But that was years ago
You didn't know me then
And now we have four million years of eyes
Between us, only gazes
Of what might have been
And we know the potential is there
And we're not going to grab it
It's feeding time for the lion cubs
You cannot call something cute
When it's eating a rabbit whole
Blood on its light fur
And the noises, those noises
Of greed and hunger and nothing will come in its way
I devoured the scent of your lips
Fruity and secret
And you lost me in the butterfly house
Purposely, because you wanted to lose me
Somewhere beautiful

Tribute to The Stalwart Warfared Stallions

ABDULRAHMAN M. ABU-YAMAN

I throw my salutes
to the stalwart warfared stallions
for their roles in shaping and reshaping
maps of territories
by gravitating their riders to
victories undefeated! Through their
stunts and calculated footworks
when dodging arrows and spears,
bullets and grenades.

History may have forgotten the
snorting swift stallion of King Arthur
with which he conquered kingdoms
in the UK,
but I will do my part and hail its courage!

History may have relegated the
striking sparks of light made by
Alexander the Great's stallion when
stepping on pebbles in battlefields;
stretching and expanding empires
in Europe,
but I will play my role by wailing its tenacity!

History may have omitted the clouds
of dust raised by Uthman Ibn Fodio's
stallion during its acceleration through the
Maghreb region to sub-Saharan Africa,
where he established his caliphates, but
I will blow my horn and howl its steadfastness!

History may have zeroed how the
stallion of Sun Tzu penetrated into enemy
forces when elongating his sovereign of
dominion in Asia, but
I will bleed my pen to write of its resilience!

Even as history is myopic of
the stallions mounted by Achilles and
Hector in the famous war, yet it
still rewinds and pauses to immortalize
the giant wooden decoy; the Trojan horse!
after a computer virus.

Still in all, I cast my votes
for the staunch stallions, whose
memories history has left to sink
into an oblivion.

Central Square, Douz, Tunisia

SIMON FLETCHER

*A response to Marcus Goldson's watercolour
in the Qube Gallery, Oswestry, Shropshire*

The washed-out tangerine earth, the sheep and goats;
the farmers, travellers, artists meet in the square.

Striped carpets are laid around for comfort, rest,
a date palm's branches lend shade to the square.

Mere motes in the distant eye of a dusty god:
our ant-like business draws us to the square.

The sun beats down on thirsty shaded talk,
a million grains of sand compound the square.

Each on their dry and solitary journeys;
so many wandering souls inhabit the square.

So why do others' journeys touch you so,
Simon? What draws you into this square?

Breaking the Cold Adult Shell

BEN NARDOLILI

The sweltering soup feeds the speculative device,
After an hour I'm ready to piece together
The rise and fall of the Roman Empire,
Or try to inquire into the values of quality

I'll probably do what I did yesterday
When I last felt so charged with responsibility
And the blessings of inspiration:
Going out for a meeting with all nearby edges

There, I consider limits, setting up borders
By pulling down fences with laughter,
The new world is open and the land is colored
With the shades of broken down nations

The Next Day

HOLLY DAY

The alarm went off and we found that the world hadn't ended, that all the ramblings of the church elders weren't true. My husband sighed and rolled out of bed found there were only dirty clothes left for him to wear sighed again, got dressed, went to work.

I could hear birds chirping in the yard
a squirrel on the roof, cars
passing on the road out front.
I held onto my dreams of apocalypse
for a few moments longer, savoring visions
of the angels, the devastation
that could still be waiting just outside the door.

To Be

LANA BELLA

I have often wondered how you will kiss,
if you'll use too much lips or not enough
tongue, or just enough breaths to curl
my toes back--

if time sleeps on the floor where the sun
is no longer yellow but darkly slate, then
I will make it so that your articulation can
slip through my skin, in perfect crimson
heat--

I lick the air, tasting the coming rain, yet,
you need me still between the rhythms of
light before the sighs halfway on my mouth
begin to draw back--

perhaps the manic strokes of Van Gogh or
the elastic delicateness of Chopin would
soothe the fiery blood into abstract series
of metaphors, with the pregnant turning of
your name leaving my lips—

Lighthouses

ALAN CATLIN

Once upon a time, the vocation of lighthouse keeper was a venerable one. It was the perfect get-away-from-it-all profession like joining the French Foreign Legion only with water instead of sand. The job required a special kind of temperament like being able to withstand long periods of isolation and be able to concentrate during times of stress. Watching the seas, for distressed ships, is a tough business. Being able to deal with the densest kind of fog imaginable, being hemmed in with zero visibility, sometimes for days at a time, is no fun either. Through it all the keeper had to keep the lights focused so that ships could find their way to safety under these kinds of adverse circumstances. Obviously, the work isn't of everyone. Look what happened to Jack when he took the caretaker's position in "The Shining". Similarly, one of Poe's last, incomplete stories, has a rather unstable personality signing up for a couple of years in a particularly desolate place, hoping to finish a novel that wasn't going well. As might be expected, stuff of a cataclysmic nature starts happening immediately, conjuring images of "The Fall of the House of Usher" on the high seas, with lost manuscript pages. And what could be more tragic than that? Lost manuscript pages that is, given how Poe was perpetually short of money and got to

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the point where he would write just about anything for cash. Well, we never do find out what happens, but we know it won't be good, given how Poe has stacked the deck against his hapless narrator. In fact, one idly wonders, if the lighthouse wasn't built under the auspices of the Stevenson clan, given the forbidding location, though their structures were built to last, unlike Poe's. Not many people are aware that Robert Louis Stevenson was meant to following the footsteps of his famous engineering family, who considered his dreams of writing, daft, at best. They basically disinherited him and he decided to emigrate, first to the US and later, with the woman he met on the voyage over, to Tahiti, for his health. Regardless of how you feel about his work, you have to admit that, plying your trade on a tropic paradise, beats working on a deserted pile of rock, off the windy, stormy, Scottish coast.

Frankenstein

ALAN CATLIN

When we mentally conjure and image of the monster, what we see is most likely a mug shot of Boris Karloff under a ton of green makeup, eyes, downcast, hooded, swollen, even, as if he were just waking up from a Purple Jesus punch party so hung-over he can barely see. One supposes, if you had just received about a million volts of electro-shock treatment you'd look pretty peeked, as well, but that's another story. The signature scar on his forehead would appear infected, his neck electrodes blackened at the ends where the jumper cables had been affixed.

You can always tell who has actually read the book, as opposed to someone who has just seen the movie, or movies, as it were, though, only the first movie really counts. Whale knew all about monstrosities. Anyway, readers refer to the creature as, Frankenstein's Monster, while the others merely to the surname, which, of course, refers to the mad scientist, the creator, Victor Frankenstein. Frankenstein, as Mel Brooks, would have it, does not count either. The book is about more than a horror story, but about how scientific discoveries during the Romantic Age are running amok, posing a danger to the world as they knew it in the 1820's. Little did they know how right they would be, but that is a much longer, sadder story. Of course, the book is also about the excesses of emotion that typified the Romantics, and led many a bright young person to extreme

personal decisions that often ended badly. Crazy how young Mary's book is the only work to come of the Horror Story challenge issued among all those bright young things: The Shelleys, Percy and Mary, Byron and his professional leech, Dr. Polidori. Now many suggest that Percy wrote Frankenstein but there is much to suggest he did not. After all, Mary continually tinkered with the book all her life and showed a propensity for writing bad novels all through her career. Percy, on the other hand was, well, a great writer, though dramatic prose was not his strong point. Some point to the alternating chapters in the novel, with all the philosophizing, played to Percy's strong suit: the habitual need to write essays on all kinds of esoteric subjects. No doubt he gave input to the composition of "The New Prometheus," but should not be given credit for Mary's work. After all, she had great writer's genes given who her parents were. One does wonder what Mary would have thought of Branagh's "Frankenstein". It may not be as excessive or as bad as Coppola's "Dracula" but only by degrees. Best not to go there. In either case. Ever. Recall, instead, the moment when the monster accidentally drowns the child; a moment of rare beauty and tragedy amid so much trash and bathos.

The Silence that Rome Deserved

WILLIAM DORESKI

Creaky as the December moon,
a prop that no longer persuades,
your face in the mirror reflects
the ghost face of the husband
who refuses to honour Catholic
dogma by remaining dead enough
to attract the scavenging angels.

Wrapping you with random limbs
I try to drag you into the light
but the light fails, the power off,
the city gone blank. Christmas
has postponed itself. Puritans
dishonored that pagan holiday
and denied themselves their daily

tote of rum to commemorate
the silence that Rome deserved.
I never drink rum. Too sickly
sweet, troubling my digestion.
And I always sleep through sermons
to let the Word enter my pores
without the mind's grave censorship.

You take notes, chew on scripture,
and shrug off your husband's ghost
with a joke or a crude remark.
But at this moment the moon peers
through the skylight and illumines
the space we expect to occupy,
the bedclothes already in a funk.

How much visible universe
do we have to press to our hearts?
I unwrap and lead you to stand
beneath the skylight and bathe
in the feeble light of old gods
burning their last possessions
as the tide of dark matter rises

Old Dublin Road

WILLIAM DORESKI

A long narrow marsh crowded
by a slope of post-glacial mountain.
Deer drift from the leafless forest
to drink in sight of houses
restored by wealthy absentees.

Driving along the gravel road
we note how random the notions
of oversoul and spirit become
when confronting so much brown.
The idiom of the earth creates

imperatives we follow like wheels
in icy ruts. But no ice today,
the winter solstice: the vague light
a language devoid of principles,
even when it slathers a freshly

painted yellow barn, a house
with green window trim, a truck
with a load of seasoned firewood.
You agree that illiterate landscapes
solve nothing: the bang of rifles

still fatal to the browsing deer,
the click of a computer keyboard
honing the silence to a point
sharp enough to pierce and deflate
the most pantheistic moment

Wordsworth ever suffered.
You agree that the cunning of hills
sloping to censor tiny streams
and slot them into rocky beds
corresponds to something willed

in the ego, something we decline
to discuss on starry nights when cries
of dismantled coyotes filter
and season the air. Driving south
with the marsh on our left, hillside

on our right, we're part of the scene,
which folds itself up behind us,
crushing the big expensive houses,
then to reassemble everything
later when we've run out of gas.

Infidèle

AGBAAKIN OLUWATOYOSI JEREMIAH

My pen is a divided city.
She pays homage to two masters;
but the two aren't equal.
she is a slothful slut when I pin her
down to my cozy paper.

They say Muse is a philanderer
that makes Generals go coy.
she plays whoredom to this hunch-
to write, though my hands be numb
from drilling the holes in my head
for literary crabs and singing birds
as stars frolick around a Crescent
but I swear,
these words are not my sons
ask this whore who did warm her spine
and ejaculated words into her loins
when I was away burning her papery beds.

Other Side of Being Wrong

BRADLEY MASON HAMLIN

On
the outside again
like that penguin
Chilly Willy
crying ice cubes
while trying to figure
the way
back inside
and the words
melting
because we're not listening
to each other
just
waiting to make up
make love
naked & crazy
like the first time
I watched you
cry
and promised
to never hurt you.