

MORE POEMS¹

There are no nonsequiturs—only unexamined relationships.

(First line from “Transactions with Emptiness” in *Forms of Resistance*, published in 2022)

Forms & wanderings

Here is a thing made rare,
with no other reason than to be—
and insistent on its instancy—
a one-off,
self-published in one volume:
words and images
that do not match up.
All kinds of scribbles.

All kinds of scribbles:
latch onto this:
formed and wandering.
No matches.

All kinds of scribbles.
But though each be matchless,
how we try to match ourselves
to get in stride
and overtake the mortal tide!

In wildness is the preservation of the world. —H. D. Thoreau

A Word from the Wild:
The world that the wilderness preserves may not be ours.

From George Floyd to Monument Avenue

Stride on stride—
a back and forth,
a ping and pong:
Attach. Detach.
Game. Set. Match.

¹ Many of the poems come from a collection of drawings and poems given in 2023 to Brooke Vandervelde, my friend and collaborator on *Nightcaps*, produced in 2023, in Amherst, Virginia.

White Heat

To Davenport, Mengele, & S. Miller

We go where we're bent
to go, though we foul
the line; though events
flowed red; though details
emerged from the blank-
out-nature-of-white-
supreme-as-if-meant-
to-be: That some sank
atwist and aggrieved;
That all are now dead,
and That in the blank
pure whiteness of ash
a space has appeared.

We enter that space.

Believe what you will.
I breathed, had my fill
of creek and of mud,
the burn of the rope,
the boat white, aflame,
adrift from my name;
the blankness of fear.
Believe what you will.
May nothingness fill
your hearts. May my place,
so empty, fill you
with emptiness, ghost-shape:
blank eyes and face.

A Cup and Cafetière on the Breakfast Table

Outside the wash-house:
 clothes on a line,
 and bluebells,
 and horned toads in the sand—
 Luzianne in the morning.

WATERSHED

In my watered-down philosophy,
 all Grand Syntheses, Societies of Mind,
 Aspirations, Realms of Meaning, & Peaks
 experienced in terror or in bliss—
 the Magic Lamp, the Tinder Box you find
 by chance; Tomatebako box you're told
 KEEP SHUT! By Pandora in kimono—
 All such boxes, academic memes,
 and Structures of Reality are clouds—
 the texture of breath, eternal pilgrims,
 always settling on new topographies,
 always driven by gradients to diverge,
 heap their fluffy patterns to bear down on
 and score the hills and piedmont
 with graven images
 later relaxing into creeks and rivers.

Sunrise

Nothing's here that wasn't here before:
 A shrunken house with all the rooms intact.
 A fast on faith that piques the taste for fact.
 A tide that still advances on the shore.
 But by day, the moon now hides her face.

Hill's Garden

Working camellias or abelias, bees
 on an October day stayed with the pollen
 chosen: no mixed media. Use the given.
 Flight's minimum is fifty-two degrees,
 Hill says, handing me a fig, fresh-picked,
 and scion of Calabrian stock. The seeds
 he casts in alleys grow from weeds
 to carrots. Piles of paw-paws he has raked
 uphill from the river, where they had fallen
 in retreat, we scoop in bucket-hats;
 pour them tumbling into wooden flats.
 So things are given: We live for the fallen.

Decorating the Abyss

Nietzsche said if you look into the abyss
 it may look back. I say,
 Give it something to look at.
 After all, it never made anything.

Starlet

A dust-up of Golden dust
 From the feather-duster
 Of Egypt's Macedonian Isis,
 Who in a dust-up took a powder
 to become a nebula.

Angler's Guidance Counsel at the Academy

How to dress yourself
 in uniform
 empowered to justify
 the public good;
 to officiate, not asphyxiate;
 to separate contenders by the rules,
 offending no one's hate
 and letting passions pass:
 Pick a costume, in schools or law,
 and, as if choosing fly to cast,
 pick proper tools to instrument the state.

Wreck 1

Thrown clear of wreckage, the Leader landed
 Face-down in composted pledges of loyalty
 To his Conspiracy of Belief, now swollen
 And burst like a hemangioma
 From the Main Line of the bilious Body Politic.

Wreck 2: Missing in Person

Thrown clear of the wreckage,
 Mama had landed face-down
 on a mossy bank,
 but when I stood, she'd gone.
 Only a wafer of porcelain
 was left—like a tiny quilt
 with a pattern of numbers
 and a brand-name on the reverse.
 In person, later, after
 release from observation,
 I found the corporate office.

The read-out from the wafer
 was Mama, of course—
 restored as she had always been,
 believing that we were fine
 and that, as she told me,
 I would someday be somebody.

Peripheral Perspective

Human in a garden:
 Like the number One,
 An Index to the scene,
 Eyes focused
 On salmon-orange petals,
 Spiky bulb, and delicate ring
 Of yellow stamens;
 Ears stopped
 By droning engines,
 Humming circuits, wailing
 Cranks and cranes;
 Eyes focused,

Filling the ring of macula
 With detail and clarity;
 The mind with insight,
 Enlightenment, and Purpose;
 Ignorant of the Ambient Scene
 Around the Indexed Scene,
 The surrounding whirl of leaves
 Turned inside-out, clouds
 Indigo, not with purpose
 Or malevolence, but deadly
 Nonetheless—dropping hail
 On the crashing trees.

Field of Dreams

Arms and the (may I say: less sweetly than ads
 Recruiters in pursuit of quotas post)
 decorated man I do not sing
 but mourn (from the City's crenulated wall,
 where pebbles, tar, greek-fire, and vitriol
 are kept handy to pour down, but from where,
 instead, the scene of uncollected dead
 is visible). Such men, in trucks and tanks
 fresh with ideals before the deal has soured
 have listened to the final peroration,
 climbed into cabs, and driven to the Field
 to play for yards. And the cards are played.
 And none collects the decorous discards—
 the hearts and clubs and empty diamonds
 of stolen bases. None collects. None minds.
 None wails from the wall. And so, I mourn.

A Dead White Tree

Embodied in the human episode of our unfolding—
 This multiplex, cross-angular, and vexed,
 Transfigured folding—less sturdy than a redwood's trunk
 Or spider's thread—had free imagination.
 Though distracted, it abstracted from teal-green pulp
 And slurried forms, smooth rosewood, summer haze,
 And sheer wasp-wings
 The burst heart of a lover twice betrayed.
 We of the Cosmos move on while it sings.

Camped on a Ledge

Rockface, smoothed by wear,
 facing nothing indirectly,
 a pool of rubble beneath;
 you find yourself in the picture,
 coiled on a ledge,
 waiting for Agni
 and the stories he whispers.

Deep Access

Find a deep access—
 the usual advice
 in times of deep duress;

times when—slice by slice—
 the soul is pared away
 by every blind device

societies provide,
 as if a quest by guess
 could ever be a guide.

Aging

Molting to new life, I wake.
 Molding a new strife, I wake.
 Molten mass, again recast,
 I take up life again. I wake.

Standing Figure

Standing
 like the number One;
 pointing
 like an index finger
 always
 where eyes focus,
 the Dreamer of Realities
 lingers
 on the smashed relics
 of insights and intentions—
 standing,
 not like a rooted tree
 or shaft of light
 after the storm,
 but S-shaped,
 a spring pulled past its limit.

Show Well

In mem. Thornton Wilder
 The day of the fair,
 the household rose early
 not only for pigs and heifer
 but for themselves:
 the family must show well.

Since dusty Miocene,
 the family's performance
 has been spotty:
 no blue ribbons
 since the Axis Times

of Siddartha,
 Zarathrustra,
 Pythagoras, and Lao,
 republicans in Rome;
 democrats in Greece;

Chuangtsu, Jain,
 Thales and Josiah.

First place only once—
 the once we didn't show:
 the time the Horntails won

with their fungal partners
 softening the path
 for larvae through the bark.
 They won the Grand Prize
 for gentleness.

By that year, we'd laid asphalt
 over hills and meadows,
 and only softened Earth
 under tanks and backhoes,
 exploding shells, and condos.

The Sea, our ancient sponsor,
 gave no prizes. But it rose.

A Conspiracy of Belief

The weakness in his limbs increased
 when he was told to claim
 to know what he did not.
 The palpitations in his chest
 began to grow after he vowed
 to keep eternal secrets
 no matter what.

Composition

What we're made of:
 neither here nor there;
 flickering proposals;
 tilting vagrants posing
 for photos; near misses;
 photofinishes—
 not what little boys,
 or little girls,
 or other little persons
 are made of;

not gluons stuck on themselves
 together—exactly, of course—
 but loose confederations
 of conversations
 we make up as we go.
 We're made of what we seem to know.

Dahlias

Elders with tangled arms and shaggy head,
 straw-pale, the color worried out of them;
 locked in obstacles from root to stem;
 snapping in a breeze grown critical
 of upright poses for such fretful leaves,
 we're cut to ground to make new golden beds:
 Leave them below, restless with regrets.

Functions of Relationships

- F1 We are more than either one of us.
- F2 You have extracted something from me.
- F3 We enlarge each other.
- F4 We fragment each other.
- F5 We empower each other.
- F6 We diminish each other.
- F7 Repeat F1-F6.

Clearing Brush

Not quite dead,
 I presume to write
 though none read;
 to speak
 though none listen.

Unquiet head—
 a loom threads thicken on:
 where light hides,
 I presume to find
 pattern; story.

Not quite dead,
 not delivered yet

to be burned.
 Stories wait:
 words and spaces
 churned.

Tsk, Tsk, An Obelisk

Twinkle, twinkle little star,
 you claim to know just what you are.
 But like the humming dragon-fly,
 implicit in the marshy sky
 (who's also diamond-hard in thought)
 or like the winging herald
 singing, perched upon the world,
 you are complicit in the lie
 that brightly twinkles in your eye.

What serves

He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.

—*St. Paul*

In death we empty ourselves,
 taking the forms of servants
 to life, again diffused,
 and are released again to bondage.

Or to links, relationships,
 new ties—is this perhaps
 preferred? But what is dust
 or grass—since Walt the Tramp once asked us?

Empty? Yes. Done with us.
 The grass goes on its own.
 The broad or narrow zone
 it occupies, with feathery spikelets,

proud glumes, rigid stalks,
 and nodding, seed-dense stems
 flattened by the wind
 then propping up again to stand,

is no new form of us.

We were the form that served
to think life through; take walks—we are
the form that talks back to dust.

Conversations

Carried like an ember
From site to site—
Fanned into stories
Against the night

Passengers

So—I'm riding the bus to Rockett's Landing.
Doodling, as usual.
A guy gets on—rather disreputable—
I say or mumble hello with a nod—
He says
Good to see you
And good to be seen
People see you
But no one knows all you are

Ambient Attention

Ambient attention
mediates
between intentions,
false-starts, tiring
reassessments,
turn-arounds,
and various paralyses
by crossing the churn
between focused effort
and the swollen sense
of work undone.
From the false habitat
of Interior Reaches
to the true habitat
of a Calm Stream
of peripheral visions
that moves sideways
into a pool of light.

Abundant Life

(with thanks to Gertrude Stein, e.e. cummings, & Josef Piefer)

O
 the chatter
 of atoms
 boing
 boing
 of being
 irrefutable
 drift into
 bounce into
 abundance
 indisputable,
 into vaulting
 somersaulting

O
 of now
 and O
 and now
 again
 of O
 and O
 again,
 of owing
 what
 to how
 of owing
 knowing
 to no
 thing
 tamed
 or aimed,
 to nothing
 on a stage
 or under lens
 but only
 O
 but only
 to wonder.

Forgettable Relics

I am resigned to forgetting,
sinking the net
to recall poor samples
sticky with associations.

So much learning:
finished works swimming away—
slippery selves.

I am aligned with forgetting,
whirlpools, and loss,
and the hard surf shaking—
battering and breaking prospects:

So much planning.
Drying, baked black on the beach—
crazed, puzzled heart.

I have consigned to some strangers
all of the claims
I had nailed fast down—now
loosening in mental weather

that swept thinking,
perched in a deafening squall,
down in writing.

All for Fun

Sometimes you'd like the corpocrats
to put their dark money
on black holes and toddle off:

The Tunnel not of Love but Doom
would give the high rollers
a high-riding Whip-a-Thon.

A funhouse for the self-involved—
with screaming dives—I'd say,
would pin empire-building back.

An Unfinished Opera

For the human project

Prologue

Of how we began, such as we were—
 loose, archaic plaques and sediments
 mica-glittering in dark sea-vents,
 ferrous residues, sulfurous stench,
 tumults on the shelves of continents,
 magma ten ocean-depths below the sea,
 and wandering water from a comet's tail—
 such as we were and have become, I sing
 in the high, grave style to match the griefs,
 pain, and wounds, and puzzling arguments
 the human phase of such eruptions brings
 to pattern thoughts upon such boundless things.

To muse without a Muse; to reckon how
 the pulse began; reversely engineer
 faint tracks from pin-point zero-time;
 dwell in the shifting frames of magnitude
 that stretch the eye and ear, dismember touch,
 embody sense in bots that do not breathe,
 or dream, or ever feel a twisting heart;
 to claim to know enough to tell—the sign
 of human life—not because of signs
 or prophecies or sights on holy mountains,
 but only as a way to set the scene,
 like a bracket, axiom, or premise:
 in this embodiment I make my way;
 in little theatre I have my say.

Paradises, whether lost or found,
 are similar devices—premises
 to bracket and embolden supposition.
 But watch—for entering parentheses,
 like being trapped in the Minoan Cave,
 means meeting monsters, whether in yourself
 or on the loose. And monsters don't behave.
 Too old to gather how I know these things,
 cite sources, thank lenders and dear givers,
 I only say: praise to all teachers; please behold
 and treasure insights, be they warm or cold.

Cold before cold days existed; dark
 before Sol spilled into the outer disk;

void before any felt the emptiness;
 airless and unaccommodating; dry,
 unmapped, unknown, unaimed, the origin
 was making registers and settings—frames
 leaping into being and nonbeing,
 annihilation and acceleration,
 rarity and density; dumb chance
 and possibility, and death's advance.
 Be seasons cold or warm, death will advance.

Remember death, therefore: I move to dwell
 on ever-springing life's brief episode,
 not stars' mad rush to sink in nothingness.
 Is there a second? Can we at least concur
 on life's exigency? Should we refer
 the matter to committee? Is there time?
 So many wait to be told what to love
 and by whom or what they should be moved.
 Ages always too late, they say, "So moved."

The human story-line begins with seas:
 no sacred center, but peripheries
 in sumps and shallows, lakes and island coves—
 remnants of Yarrabubba's walls of ice—
 where swiftly changing probabilities
 aligned in frothy clay fixed on a plot
 to serve the moment—wheeled—broke an impasse
 to transactions, and deftly packaged light.
 Creative light, source of all breathing life,
 first captured visible by layered grana,
 gave up a pulse from millions to inhabit
 and engender life. Thus stepping down
 and guided, trembling, into bonds, light settled
 in our fronds, and leaves; our bones and eyes
 beholding it in sunset, sunrise, and distant stars
 thrown out from pin-point times, and lover's glance:
 stepped down—no divinity's descent;
 no hero sent to settle scores; no bolt
 to show a Bully's power, no raping swan
 to disguise an act of violence;
 no god, Shoah-blind, who keeps his silence.

Not a myth that tells things as we wish,
 or justifies some vast atrocity:
 yet, we need the pattern of a myth
 to transform understanding to belief.

Beyond knowing, grasping, testing truth,
and power, we recruit the will to act
by telling stories and by playing parts.
Now, poet: humbly summon all your arts.

Act I Scene 1

Chorus sotto voce from stage right:
We ostracods, ostracoderms, and stars
of diatoms, forams, and fairy shrimp
made glowing constellations in the deep—
in pools, and blue-green seas that dip and swell.
We began the story you must tell.
In glass, hypoxapatite, and lime,
we brought minerals to life, and streamed
in clouds of larvae over coral beds;
swam rivers; walked on jointed legs,
welcomed the stony meteor, and drifted,
even in dying, to make mountains, cliffs,
and benthic monuments of valves and shields.
By covering and enclosing our soft lives,
we flourished, and our way of life still thrives.

Act I Scene 2

*A roar from timpani and thunder sheet,
smoke, lightning, and, arising center stage:
a snowy peak, basso profundo, sings,*
None live, or rise, or sink, or know their place
outside the many forms that I embrace.
My countless stage-names—Nuna and Taconic,
Panotia, Rodinia, the Plains,
the Great Divide, Gondwana, Rift, and Steppes—
were passing revelations of my strength
and deep foundations. *Here play didgeridoo.*
All begins and ends with me, the Source
of flowing mountains, muddy cypress flats,
and sinking cities. All returns to me—
brash and subtle, cocksure, meek, and brave—
I, Shaper and Destroyer, Source and Grave.

Act I Scene 3

Second chorus, with rain-sticks, stage left.
We are the supple rains who truly shape
the valleys and the plains; seep into mines,
foundations, bridges; undermine all schemes;
pool in the pasture, freeze and crack the well;
soak books and circuitry, and grease the slide

of hopes and houses down the mountainside.

Act I Scene 4

All exit. Spot on flat upstage of flowers, bees, and a summer meadow. A child sings.

Come and see the morning—

Bees and thistles.

Come and hear the morning—

Chirps and whistles.

Come and taste the morning—

Berries, honey.

Come and feel the morning—

Warm and sunny.

Act I Scene 5

Sentiment should not obscure this scene. Fairies, leprechauns, and revenants, Madame Blavatsky, and esteemed savants speaking for the spirit world: Exeunt.

Half-light then, but keep the foot-lights bright. Perhaps you think the entrance of dawn-men merits surround-sound, creepy lights, and mist. Let's keep it crisp, like changes in dentition and mothers' gossip over frying fish— flatfish curling like leaves, eyes atop.

Under overhang and steamy downpour,
women in seal-fur, with wobbly young,
turn the fish-scrolls with stone-tangs, and wait
for men off somewhere trotting down kudu;
wait for rain to stop, the fish to cook,
the sun's release, waves' lips to withdraw
from sandy beach, where poking siphons reach
from clams, their secret liquor sweet as speech.

Act II Scene 1

Now for the complication, when the story turns. A chorus of sperm whales, bottle-noses, Sahel gales, and angry cockatoos might convey alarm, if it were noticed.

Let's settle for an oscillating siren.

To arms! To arms! Fire at the gates! Look out!

The débris trail extends beyond deceit.

The exit's rammed with home appliances.

Down the stairwell to men's custom-fashions!

brought *tostadas* and a human chili,
 and a Georgia mob brought shoo-fly pie.
 King Henry choked on eels and little lampreys
 while Ishi brought two platters up from hell.
 I see them all now—even Jesus, outside,
 drawing in the sand—the Janjaweed
 encircling him.

Doctor: What do you see behind—
 Standing Room Only?

Patient: Oh yes, I see the sea,
 the violet, violent sea, where all dissolves.

*Good place for a dissolve. Action resumes:
 Patient on the table. Nurse on the ready.
 The doctor shakes his head.*

Doctor: No IV yet.
 Relax, sir. Take a few deep breaths. Just rest.

Patient: Yes, I'm tired, but the feast goes on.
 Kochs bring in plastic steaks broiled in dark sauce;
 cooked in a fire-pit of hallucinations.
 Lincoln and Douglass weep over a stew
 of chunky ancient debts no one can stomach.
 Midas, visiting from Phrygia,
 lies in the Neiman-Marcus set flown in
 from Dallas, swapping tales with Gould and Palmer
 while Buffet butters toast.

Nurse: Doctor, his vitals!

Doctor: Wait. He must divulge the full conceptus—
 all that he has caught in patterned thought.
 The adhesions and ensembles must come loose
 and then be born in their own way.

Patient: I thirst!

Nurse: Doctor!
Again, the doctor shakes his head.

Doctor: In this kind of case we play the odds,
 and gamble that a break-through will arrive
 with Osiris or Prometheus—
 both of them always good for pills or gimmicks.

Patient: Quetzalcoatl, from floor ninety-two
 steps in to give the toast to Romulus
 for all his wolfy ways, a lovely poem,

a model-concept for empire, straight roads,
 snappy laws, and pillage. I give you Rome!
 Sumner, who took a beating once, eats beans,
 gives waiters a hot tip to clear out fast
 ere all scheduled speakers can outgas,
 and steadily observes the darkening sky.
 Trump drinks diet coke; itches to speak.
 But the keynote is Old Blood and Guts,
 George Patton, then Tecumseh Sherman,
 with a swift three-point attack: *Be first,*
he says, in Destiny, Discovery,
and Domination. Know your Enemy.
 Utnapishtim and Russell Means look up.
 Vera staggers on to sing *We'll meet again*
 again, while Walt and Winston smoke like comrades.
 Xerxes, somewhat humbled by the landslide
 at Delphi, whispers that no great exertion
 will overcome blind chance or ignorance.
 Yahweh underlines his ten-point plan.
 And the drunk and simpleminded Zeno
 repeats again that Slow and Steady wins the race.

*At that very moment Nurse injects
 thirteen milliliters of distraction.
 The tenth floor collapses, as was mentioned.
 Down comes the clinic, stage, and banquet hall,
 floors piling upon floors, snickety-snack:
 Here ends the second act—and the flashback.*

Act III Scene 1

*Débris and puddles scattered on the stage.
 Backdrop of a city-scape in ruin.
 Strings muted, hovering in fourths and seconds.
 The tableau: a mixed chorus of survivors,
 speakers, and assorted soloists.*

- Priest and Rabbi: An ellipsis—not apocalypse—
 an empty space where, had care intervened,
 the white, blank spaces and ineptitude
 would be replaced by fearless gratitude:
- Chorus: Sing in the ecliptic, strike the chord,
 you starry beings. Earth-bound once, you soared
 above all human summits. Sing and tell
 your woeful messages of grief and yearning.
- Postal Workers: All the messages of grief and yearning,
 letters laboring to change the scripts
 that others wrote as ways to other means

in other places, other roles and scenes:

Chorus: Ram with your curled horns in a desert bush,
speak of your labors and your sacrifice.
Let the shofar mark with grave observance
lies fomented, and their deadly dance.

Refuse Workers: Paper flying, Styrofoam, and plastics
melted, matted, glued, and spattered
multitude of lost and swirling things
of wants construed, and waste such urging brings.

Chorus: Whirl! Whirl! Drive dominion from your heart!
Whirl! Whirl! You write the script. You play the part.

Make a human scene of your survival.
Through every bottleneck, a few have passed.
So far, it is today and you're alive.
You've time to make a human scene survive,
and practice roles that make the living thrive.

Make a final scene for your survival.
Find the common good and caring path.
So far, it is today and you're alive.
You've time to make a human scene survive,
and practice roles that make the living thrive.

Act III Scene 2 and Finale: TO BE DETERMINED.

A poem on consignment

Jody,

At first, I was stumped by your specs
for a poem, and slumped by your hex
on a rhyme with your name.

But, taking the challenge, I whittle away
‘til words say what I want to say.

(Geezers have time for the game.)

Ode to Jody, The Elevator

Just as her last customer,

older than dirt,

dips over the counter,

yaws, and falls

onto the tip jar—

deft and expert

judge of descents,

Jody steadies him

with a wise-crack.

“Pull out! Your wheels are up!”

Thus **Jody showed he** could reverse
his downward dive. We could do worse,
when slumped, than hear a little jive.

(10/19/2023)

There Are Always Reasons

Green hair and nose-plugs,

Double-breasted Harris tweeds,

Tractor mowing circles

on a quarter-acre lot,

Spiked heads at the City Gate,

Barbed wire over the river,

Miniature porcelain dogs,

Miniature flat-faced dogs

unable to breathe,

Conquerors’ faces on the sacred mountain,

Single-sided documents

with single-minded intentions;

Dwelling on details

as the dwelling burns.

The Disposition of Waves

Several unruly passengers embarked
upon our conversation and began
pushing us aside to make their way
over the Deep, which did not so much beckon
as absorb the crests and undulations,
troughs and undulations, smirks and shrieks,
hoots of ridicule, banalities,
and rollick ripping through the reputations
of those who sent Regrets.

The Deep absorbed
the Accusation and the lame Defense,
the whittling Analysis and the puffy Plan.
The Deep absorbs. It does not reply.
For resolutions, look to yourselves.

The Existent

Porthole eye at the launch of the Existent
peers down the vessel's flanks
into the canyon between the great ship
and the high cliffs of the coast;
peers level, port or starboard,
with a cloud adrift, or eye adrift;
punctures the scene with observation.

Since the singularity that launched it,
the Existent is how things are.
There is no nonexistence,
although Being is different,
because it blooms living forms:
so there is being and nonbeing.
This is what matters to humans,
darting between other scavengers
to get at bones for marrow.
It is a human matter, linked
to the cooperation that yanked
the net over other predators.
Pull together.
Trust in one another
led to trusting the Existent,
the deep integrity of being,
the seasons, and all regularities:
migrations of deer, flowerings,
setting of fruits, the natures and strengths
of rock, wood, copper, and iron,

and blistering fire, and the care
of mothers: not gods,
the trust in the deep integrity of being,
the often personified
reliability and benefice of being.

Who understands this
cares for the community,
and is considered wise.

Who uses understanding
to control the community
and violate trust
returns to scavenging bones.

Beckoning Tool

Stones, perhaps, or wedge-tipped stalks,
or ground-glass lens setting fire to straw—
any tool beckons the user
to return, to repeat the making,
to grip handle, pliers, paragraph.

But our new tools beckon
with commanding presence;
demand our attention,
define us by our engagement with them.

We therefore return, repeat the taking
ourselves hostage that is required,
wait to be told what to do next.

Seven and Four, Then Out the Door

Someone told me, won't you stop.

Please, won't you stop!

Who it was said that, I know—
yes, know quite well:

Always cutting in—he keeps
cutting right in.

He cuts quite a figure—tux,
pomade, and spats—

a bit like William Powell
(Nick & Nora).

Not that I mind him, or mind,
on my hind legs,

anyone who tells me, stop.

Perhaps I will.

RELIEF EFFORT

Gradations are the rule: the gradual
 topographies of leaf-fall, saline wedge,
 fronts high and low, and salients of caste;
 the glittering ion flow from thought to thought,
 long climbs—dragging histories behind.
 No wonder, then, the contours love can take,
 its summits, sinkholes, and its arid slopes;
 massifs left standing after tumult's passed.
 Yet these monadnocks and declivities,
 scaled down by time, and by a better map,
 present an even surface; render spikes
 of fear and anger by a fuzzy line.

Why can't you hear me now the tumult's passed?
 So much conceived, and then so far dispersed—
 so much believed, so much achieved, then dropped,
 deadly cargo, in a whistling dive;
 then like a boundless wish, it bounces, bursts
 on field, on inner sea, on city square,
 where we deceived ourselves that love holds on,
 and rubbles us. So much was not enough.
 What's left: low, inner contours like a mask
 reversed—and a yellow drape of cloud
 to stage the still and fine detail of loss.
 Why can't you hear me now the tumult's passed?

Gradation is the rule. Make any slice
 down generations folded on themselves
 and knotted in some Cause or True Belief
 backed up on grievances, wherein the grief
 must render desolation. Make a slice
 down the Urals, Attic coast, Cascades
 striped with stories of how gods and heroes
 pitted will against a gradient
 as insurmountable as that we face—
 a graceless effort moving muddy chunks,
 raking rusted truths, and lifting corpses:
 one of them still smiling at the sky.

Trailing edge of stories such as these,
 we, folded on ourselves, disjunct but joined
 in the cumulative culminating tasks
 of deep relief and redirection, pause.

Gradation is the rule. That much is known.

The curve of frequencies shows here the selves
 who intercepted searing violence,
 taught peace, gave up getting, offered care,
 a clean bed in a room with door that locks;
 a steaming cup of mellow conversation.
 Those selves, rising in the distribution,
 make the narrow braid of us that lasts.

Not My Parade²

Three hundred vendors and a pet parade:
 Officialdom and Veterans of War
 put on their grins and uniforms they wore
 last year this time. The Homemakers have made
 a Float—the Kitchen of the Future—meant
 to awe the restless dreamers in a line
 who raise their phones like pilgrims to a shrine
 to watch themselves beholding the event.
 Though all the crowd admirably agree,
 and Merchant pile sweet berries in his stall;
 though Dancer leap in measured flight,
 yet nothing in this festival for me
 arrests the sense that we are in free fall,
 try though to resist it as I might.

² This poem was published in the first issue of Ruby's Lyric in 2024, a digital magazine of the Poetry Society of Virginia.