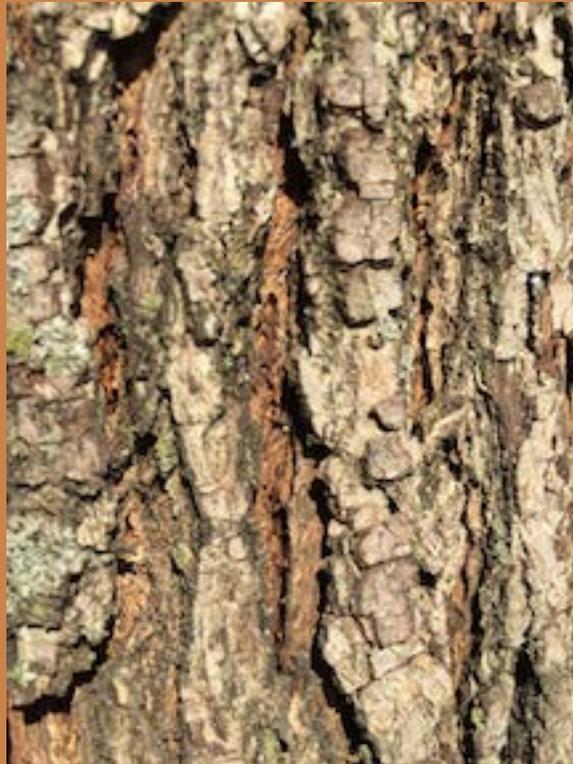


otata 24 (December, 2017)



otata 24

(December, 2017)

Copyright ©2017 by the contributors.

*<https://otatablog.wordpress.com>*

*[otatahaiku@gmail.com](mailto:otatahaiku@gmail.com)*

## *Contents*

<i>Tokonoma</i> — Peace Pilgrim	5
Billy Mills	7
John Levy	11
Dave Read	18
Elmedin Kadric	19
Elisa Allo	20
Patrick Sweeney	21
Alegria Imperial	23
Gary Eaton	25
Rosa Maria Di Salvatore	26
Johannes S. H. Bjerg	27
Margherita Petriccione	29
Zlatka Timenova	31
Stefano d'Andrea	34
Antonio Mangiameli	37
Joseph Salvatore Aversano	38
Lucia Cardillo	41
David J Kelly	42
Clayton Beach & Hansha Teki	43
Adrian Bouter	45
Christina Sng	46
Scott Waton	47
Eufemia Griffio	49
Angiola Inglese	50
Sonam Chhoki	51
Olivier Schopfer	55
Jack Galmitz	56
Alessandra Delle Fratte	57
Angela Giordano	58
Madhuri Pillai	59
Malcolm Ritchie	60

From otata's bookshelf —

F.J. Seligson  
*The Life of Words*  
& *Other Mysteries*



## TOKONOMA

When I started out, my hair had started to turn to silver. My friends thought I was crazy. There was not one word of encouragement from them. They thought I would surely kill myself, walking all over. But that didn't bother me. I just went ahead and did what I had to do. They didn't know that with inner peace I felt plugged into the source of universal energy, which never runs out. There was much pressure to compromise my beliefs, but I would not be dissuaded. Lovingly, I informed my well-meaning friends of the existence of two widely divergent paths in life and of the free will within all to make their choice.

There is a well-worn road which is pleasing to the senses and gratifies worldly desires, but leads to nowhere. And there is the less traveled path, which requires purifications and relinquishments, but results in untold spiritual blessings.

— Peace Pilgrim



*Billy Mills*

from *Four*

bird in the willow sings  
clean tones: small bill  
beak yellow: black form  
vivace: bird's song

that it is deep  
the leaf breathes  
in its own way  
this unifying fire

that drives all  
that flows  
burns gloriously  
(as it should)

in memory  
as much as now  
the path climbs  
& we follow

this bright arc  
the heart stills  
enter the depth  
of things

& everything burns  
everything sit  
in this dome  
of vivid tree

teeming with light  
a system potent  
forms the leaves  
shape space

& glow a prism  
walk in the process  
of respiration  
a transfer south

we turn the earth  
follows everything  
folds outwards  
opens a volume

consumed flame  
serves the sun's zenith  
leaves sessile  
above

this oak the sky  
above the sky  
radiant space  
uncomprehending

& below the bark  
buds wait (not  
willed) links  
in a ring of

moments this third  
is depth feel it  
grow follow the sun's  
arc breathe light

blow the wind  
thiswards ever  
a cycle drift  
thermal currents

lift far power  
drives the function  
there is no mystery  
but this fruit forms

this wave shapes  
what is life a leaf  
converting energy  
into green deeps

the earth turns  
on an axis of fire  
hidden betimes  
blazing again

transferring energy  
a crystal lattice  
the space between  
weaving life

in three dimensions  
light burns &  
this needle turns  
following sun's

trajectory brings  
warm air home  
leaf radiates  
what it is to be

what it was again  
this volume holds  
its own form  
its own flame

*John Levy*

*Poets at Work (Parking Lot)*

for Peter Yovu

Your typical Wednesday morning, 9:30,  
parking lot in front of the grocery store  
packed, no one inside the open  
store. Each driver, alone in a car, pretending

they're alone in the universe, each  
talking aloud while writing a poem  
about potatoes. There's time, after finishing a few  
poems, to shop — but now's

when each mind in each vehicle  
strives  
to place the potato  
squarely, solidly, fragrantly,

unforgettably, perhaps even  
angelically, into syllables  
and rhythm, breath  
without corners.

*To John Phillips*

Dear John,

It is Sunday  
again.  
IOU a letter.

IOU is three letters.

I wonder  
if other languages have an acronym  
for debt. Googling this, it seems  
Japanese borrows IOU and pronounces  
each letter with equal stress. I was thinking  
a little earlier  
about how prowess  
makes me picture a boat, but  
it turns out it can be any pointed  
or projected front part of something, such as  
a car or building. So the I in IOU  
is a bit prowish. Searches

related to prow, according  
to Google, include waddlesome. Following  
up on that, I find this: The ship waddled into port.  
This waddles down the page, swaying  
or rocking. According to Dictionary.com The Word  
of the Day is anthropocentric, viewing  
and interpreting everything in  
terms of human experience  
and values and/or assuming human  
beings to be the final aim and end  
of the universe. Who  
could

assume that, even  
on a Sunday? You and I  
may agree that humans  
have likely engineered the end  
of Earth eventually, but  
we may also agree the universe  
will not end at the same time. Cheery letter, this

isn't yet. I almost began it (after mentioning it's  
Sunday) by telling you about the webs  
on the windowsill this morning behind the blinds and  
in the sun with the spider, the author  
waiting for readers to  
arrive within the lines, but  
so far none. All that work, the  
individual lines, and hollow form

anchored to our home. It is  
a light yellowish-brown, that  
eight-legged child of  
the universe with its  
fangs and 48 knees (thank you, Google). Before  
you and I were born, back  
in the 1920s, people said in English that something  
was the "bee's knees" (an expression some  
would say "has stood

the test of time"). I suppose they didn't consider  
multiplying the wonder  
by saying it was "the spider's  
knees" and thus  
24 times better. This  
letter is about over  
and will end by following the spider  
detour

into one last Googled fact: some  
tiny spiders carry about 25%  
of their brain in their legs. I mean how  
can I think of killing it  
in my home  
thinking of how that brain is likely  
both above and below  
dozens of knees?

Love,  
John

P.S. I emailed Philip Rowland and asked  
if he knows if IOU is used in Japan. Not  
as far as he knows and he asked Yuriko, his  
wife, and she agrees. Did IOU  
this P.S.? I just didn't want you to be misled.

*ra-TOO-shin-SKY-yuh*

After reading this morning's New York Times  
obit — of Irina Ratushinskya (1954 - 2017) — I  
put my coffee down and take out a

scissors. I hadn't heard  
of her before, but should've. In  
a gulag she wrote poems with burnt

matches, on pieces of soap, memorized  
the poems, would then wash  
her hands and send the poems

down the drain. She'd copy  
the poems later and smuggle them out  
on cigarette paper

to her husband. Her last name  
is pronounced ra-TOO-shin-SKY-yuh  
and the obit quotes a single

poem  
about the beauty of  
frost on a prison window.

I tape the obit to the inside of my study  
door, then retrieve my coffee. Floating  
atop the coffee is a dead black

bug, small as a period in 12  
point font. No obit  
for it, unless this counts. I intended

to write about this  
late bug and yet began this poem with a title  
taken from the obit, a guide

to how to pronounce the late poet  
and dissident's  
name. The coffee did go down the drain, although

just a bit of it — a spoonful

the bug starred in, sharing  
the two leading roles in this poem (its

costar Irina ra-TOO-shin-SKY-yuh, whose  
poems I plan to  
Google later today, a Saturday

in July). "You know nothing, Jon Snow," I  
unexpectedly recall my wife quoting  
from Game of Thrones, then asking

the name of the slain character who kept  
telling Snow how little he knew. Neither of  
us could remember right then.

Ygritte. Irina's middle name  
was Borisovna  
and for a moment, reading her obit, I thought

that name was perhaps her mother's  
maiden name, but it turns out  
her father's name was Boris and so

perhaps if she'd been a boy  
her first name would've been Boris.  
I admit I like, almost as much

as her frost on the prison window poem, how  
her last name is pronounced,  
ra-TOO-shin-SKY-yuh. And now just

for the SKY. I wonder (morbidly) if the bug's  
last moment, last vision, was of  
what may have seemed a sky, but was

a kitchen ceiling.

## *Overacious*

Over and under the words  
we go, typo

or not, following. My friend  
meant to type voracious and I'm

delighted that he created, inadvertently, a  
spacious adjective, far from

specious for me despite its  
newness. The sky, say, over us,

overacious. My mother  
if she were still  
with us might come up with a couplet

rhyming overacious and delicious  
to celebrate some loved one's birthday or

anniversary and then she'd sing  
her new song and if at home accompany

herself on piano. I used to sing with her,  
often it was Moon River, before

I got older  
and older, and then she died in a hospital

unexpectedly. Lives  
are over

and that's a given. I wouldn't want, if I were  
in charge of writing

the definitions, to let overacious  
mean the end of anything living.

*Five First Lines by Rebecca Elson*  
*Then Three First Lines by Alice Oswald*

for Julie Swarstad Johnson

We astronomers are nomads,  
Above a pond,  
Under the breath of roses  
Faint blue galaxies  
For one long day we were like that,

It is the story of the falling rain  
A questioner called Light appeared,  
I'm going to flicker for a moment

*Dave Read*

meadowlark ...  
the sun lights her  
greying hair

the mountain  
we imagine  
evening fog

light snow ...  
a plow shovels  
sparks

*Elmedin Kadric*

deep breathing

like a telescope

the trick

a brick

is just

a brick

on writing

something

of a ripple

in anything

but water

## *Elisa Allo*

*fiocchi leggeri  
si appoggiano un istante  
sulle mie mani*

light flakes  
poised an instant  
on my hands

*tempo dei sogni  
il seme muore  
sotto la neve*

dream time  
the seed dies  
under the snow

*il lago all'alba  
poche stelle nel cielo  
miriadi sull'acqua*

lake at dawn  
a few stars in the sky  
myriads on the water

# *Patrick Sweeney*

before the end of my broken  
onjoji vase story  
she's checking messages from space

first to estimate  
the weight of a neutron star  
the bricklayer's son

only child snowflake  
has joined the crest  
of a moon-bright drift

pitted by freezing rain  
the wings of the boy's  
snow angel

blizzard  
the flunk ink  
of a startled crow

short-punching wind  
baring the woad flesh  
of a dead crow

snow fog  
the sour taste  
of this spotted apple

# *Alegria Imperial*

## *words*

grey wet chilly shivery swatches of day on old skin, the kind of touch invisible fingers shrinks one's soul, hence...

I name the hour November  
not a caw of protest from a crow soaked in rain

I forgot to wipe the grease  
a plumber left off his thick soles strangely like cloven hooves

I remember half-devil half-horse figures  
rising off my cousin's comic books fathers wearing masks

I saw him bite a cow-butt roast  
choked croaked hang his head on the meat, "todiefor"

I still hear laughter

as I scrape bottom items of a dictionary for a letter-string how to call, "death", not saying it because we swore never to invoke...

*words/(words)*

squeezed out of brambles (because they)

lip-mark foggy windows

*like rain*

trapped in foliage... (remind me) if a bit of sky falls

does it with dozing stars?

*blossom*

long over, still an arborist

examines the genus (of our seeds)

*ballooning*

in a closet, tubers senile a(u)nts

nibbled (at half-time)

*glowballs*

mistaking at solstice calm

token-spirits (waving, 'hellos')

*ofuntruths/ofuntruths*

*autumn unseen*

1.

on marble walls  
rain pencil-dancing  
with headlights  
on fallen leaves  
an empty sky

2.

churning in a vat  
night racks up roiling aches

glum busts of returnees peeking into unlit rooms from bus windows

where fall winds howl supplications  
a shoe pair creeps out of deeper deep inclines

over crushed lavender hems  
the smudged moon sails

churning night storms in a vat of leers

*Gary Eaton*

the secret life  
of a saucer of milk  
new moon

# *Rosa Maria Di Salvatore*

*fichi d'India —  
i frutti saporiti  
maturi in autunno*

prickly pears —  
the tasty fruits  
ripe in autumn

*mandarini —  
il colore del sole  
nel mio giardino*

tangerines —  
the colour of the sun  
in my garden

# *Johannes S. H. Bjerg*

*nu jeg er 60 kan jeg løfte mine hænder og sænke dem igen mens jeg sukker*

*uden at kende Mozarts Requiem  
flyver en sommerfugl  
fra elmen til ahorntræet*

now that I'm 60 I can raise my hands and drop them again sighing

not knowing Mozart's Requiem  
a butterfly goes  
from the elm to the maple

*ved siden af Biblen er der en rulle klisterbånd. det betyder sikkert ikke noget.*

*anden dag Kyrie eleison uden ophør*

next to the Bible there's a roll of adhesive tape. it probably doesn't mean anything.

second day Kyrie eleison ceaselessly

*hvordan kan vejret ikke være stabilt i sin vedvarende instabilitet?*

*mens jeg vasker pensler  
én stjerne og én stjerne  
og én ...*

how can the weather not be stable in its constant instability?

washing brushes  
one star and one star  
and one ...

*i et kort øjeblik den anden dag ku' vi lave små skyer med vor ånde.*

*mellem  
observerbare  
supernovaer*

*en espresso  
og en smøg*

For a brief moment we could make small clouds with our breath the other day.

between  
observable  
super novae

an espresso  
and a smoke

# *Margherita Petriccione*

*odore di stallatico —  
il silenzio della terra  
in attesa*

smell of manure —  
earth's silence  
waiting

*schiocchi di merlo —  
impercettibilmente  
il buio*

a blackbird snaps  
imperceptibly —  
the dark

*på visse togture opdager du at regnen er større end din rejse*

*armbåndsurs tid klister sig til dig*

on certain train rides you discover that the rain's bigger than your journey

wrist watch time sticks to you

*og når regnen endelig stopper genopdager du ensomheden*

*tilmed i din indre celle fluer*

and when the rain finally stops you rediscover loneliness

in your inner cell too flies

## *Zlatka Timenova*

две чаши на масата  
в едната -  
онази вечност...

two glasses on the table  
in one of them -  
that eternity...

арабски пазар  
вихър от цветове  
и мустаци

the souk  
welter of colours  
and moustaches

утринна мъгла  
църквата търси  
кръста си

misty morning  
the church is looking  
for its cross

краят на лятото  
мирис на бавно кафе  
без обещание

the end of summer  
scent of slow coffee  
without promise

нова история  
само между мен  
и огледалото

a new story  
only between me  
and the mirror

лястовици  
прекрояват небето  
време за вечеря

swallows  
cutting up the sky  
dinner time

нова луна  
най-тънкият акорд  
на цигулката

new moon  
the finest chord  
of the violin

# *Stefano d'Andrea*

*malinconia...  
un'ape distratta  
dimentica il fiore*

melancholy...  
a distracted bee  
forgets the flower

*nella radura  
i dolci tonfi dei ricci  
— echi d'infanzia*

in the clearing  
the sweet thuds of chestnuts  
— childhood echoes

*della peonia  
la carezza bagnata  
di temporale*

peony...  
the wet caress  
of thunderstorm

*fontana muta —  
solo il cri-cri dei grilli  
nell'aria afosa*

silent fountain —  
only the crickets' chirp  
in the sultry air

*leggendo Lorca  
— goccia di mandarino  
sulla pagina*

reading Lorca  
...a tangerine's droplet  
on the page

*le ali screziate  
d'una farfalla morta  
— mosse dal vento*

the pied wings  
of a dead butterfly  
— moved by the wind

*la prima uva...  
un gecko mi osserva scegliere gli acini*

the first grape...  
a gecko peeks at me picking grapes

*Antonio Mangiameli*

a man  
a bottle of wine  
embers of paper

*Joseph Salvatore Aversano*

light on  
the isle  
in the  
middle of  
this river  
as seen  
from this  
bank in  
the very  
same light  
now in  
light on  
the isle  
in the  
middle of  
this river

this river  
this river

this river

*after Bob Lax*

the olive's  
silver light  
in leaf

carousel  
I get on its  
swiftest horse

going as far as my umbrella's edge

more of the sky fallen leaves

*Lucia Cardillo*

*lago al tramonto ...  
un airone ripiega  
le sue ali*

sunset over the lake  
a heron refolds  
the wings

*vento d'autunno ...  
una gazza dondola  
lieve tra i giunchi*

autumn wind ...  
a magpie swings  
among the rushes

*David J Kelly*

hummingblrrd

*Clayton Beach*  
*Hansha Teki*

*the imprint of dreams*

golden midges  
circle in and out  
of existence

*around the moon*  
*a halo widens*

mackerel skin  
patterns in the wet sand  
*become strato cirrus*

*the familiar becomes*  
*the imprint of dreams*

*before the siren*

autumn sunset  
before the siren  
the flash of lights

*deeper into night  
a bedside vigil*

leg twitches  
the ragged snores  
of an old hound

*a breath of wind escapes  
the sanctuary of light*

*Adrian Bouter*

changing wind  
on the chess board  
fallen pieces

walking...  
a dog follows  
kings and drifters

origins rain into a lake rain

balcony a dove tumbles to the sun

*Christina Sng*

dark matter  
the difficulty  
of reconciliation

## *Scott Watson*

If a person survives a traumatic event, he or she cannot completely understand his or her experience. Is it even possible to communicate what is not understood? The act of trying to understand the meaning of an event changes the survivor.

For an eleven year old child, seeing a mother's dead drowned body brought up out from a well she'd let herself fall down was a traumatic experience that Santōka spent many years trying to find the meaning of. It might be said that it was an event which transformed his entire life, setting him off on a quest, the goal of which was acceptance.

It has been suggested that Santōka was so disturbed by his mother's suicide that, beginning as a young adult, he sought relief with saké, or that he eventually took to walking in order to accommodate an undesirable past. Taking it outdoors provided ample room to air maybe.

We might wonder why it took so many years for that event to become the issue it eventually did. After all, subsequent to his mother's suicide, Santōka seems to have led a life relatively undisturbed by traumatic memories. He continued schooling and got good grades (continually in the top 25% of his class). He did not become a juvenile delinquent. He was not violent towards others. Nor did he torture animals and insects. He did not set things on fire. He did not inflict himself with wounds. He did not run away from home. He exhibited none of the behaviors typically associated with a "problem child."

But in the five years of schooling (at a time when four years were compulsory) prior to entering a junior high school course there were 1500 school days. Santōka attended 977. That is only a 65 percent attendance record. There is no known explanation for all the absenteeism. Nor is it known whether his times absent from school increased after his mother's death.

Truancy is a word that might characterize certain aspects of his later life as husband and father. Not there a lot of the time. And then it becomes a permanent state in which he is often never anywhere settled.

It is possible that Santōka was not even conscious of the fact that being absent was his way of dealing with trauma. In certain works by Freud and Ferenczi, life itself is seen as trauma. We're all terrorized and because we are we're absent (not in the here and now).

Santōka described himself, and his life, as a mess. Traumatic experiences tend to leave personal histories that are messy and unresolved. The only means available to Santōka was poetry. Making poems, he tells us, is one of the few things he is good at. Another was drinking saké.

It is not my intention to pick out particular poems and tell readers they represent his striving to understand his mother's suicide or deal with the abandonment the boy Shōichi (Santōka) may have felt. But is the fact that he turned to poetry and that poetry became a mainstay of his life connected in any way to that sad loss of his mother? Poetry became a surrogate mother. That is the red thread umbilical connection that had been broken (drowned); poetry was its reconstruction. It is her renewed body as his body of poetry.

Why couldn't he disappear in a crowd? Why did he have to pursue a life of singularity? Because she left him. Mother in Japan—and elsewhere too maybe—is the prime buffer between child and world. She helps the child blend in. She is love's body/bodhi. All is lost when she's gone when he's eleven.

He becomes increasingly unconnected with the world and the adult roles it asks him to play: husband, father, provider. For a person of his sensitive nature, is poetry where he feels most secure?

He was able to “get over” his father, but his mother held him back. He was moved towards the Buddhist priesthood early on, but his inability to transcend his mother prevented an encounter of the highest perfect wisdom kind. He couldn't become an “enlightened Zen master” as did Ikkyū, Hakuin, and Ryōkan. Unable to extract himself from her death, he continually fell back into the world's disturbances. Ups and downs, he tumbled as in an automatic clothes washer, seeking a way out through a poem. His poems are all about her.

# *Eufemia Griffio*

first snow  
my steps  
among his little footprints

bowl of rice  
watching the snowflakes  
disappear

incense stick  
imagining his face  
every night

# *Angiola Inglese*

poplar —  
the bank of the river  
winds in the sun

## *Sonam Chhoki*

### *Hearing with Silence*

Climbing the ridge to the cave shrine, a glimpse of serenity in the scudding clouds, in the slow-motion plunge of a waterfall, in the slabs of larch shadows and in the rise and fall of a lammergeir's call over the outcrop. Even my vagabonding mind pauses for a moment.

*where roads end  
a lone star  
keeps silence*

## *Surrendering to Moments*

Sometimes when it seems the whole past has become an indistinct mass, beyond reach, some memories come to me: The soft gold of an old bamboo mat in the family room and the aroma of chestnuts roasting on the open fire.

*filling the eaves  
after the house martins  
hiss of night wind*

## *The Disorder of Dreams*

In grief I dream frequently, intensely. Your name in letters of gold pulses like a beacon among the moon-piercing spruce. The air is aromatic as if the forest itself is offering incense. A strike of light appears in the distance. I rush towards it stumbling on the sprawling roots and lose my way in the chill mist.

*anniversary offering  
your favourite blue pine  
bristles with spikes of frost*

*Inadmissible imaginings*

When the pyre is lit,  
the bones, flesh and organs  
burst, crackle and sizzle  
in the juniper-infused flames.

We mourn  
this palpable sundering  
from a parent, a sibling,  
a lover, a friend.

Gather their ashes  
for tsa-tsa offerings  
in sacred caves, ravines,  
rivers and lakes.

Offer  
a hundred-and-eight prayer flags,  
thousands of butter lamps  
and endless prayers  
to the deities of the realms.

Yet, what it is like for the Dead?  
What form of karmic return  
And when?  
Is it an unending Bar-do  
or a quick eternal bliss  
and a joyous tryst  
in the Copper-coloured-Mountain Paradise?

these hills  
where I drag my misery  
are a stairwell to the stars  
the birds sing themselves out  
in deepening boreal shadows

oak leaves  
fall like whispers  
in the gloaming breeze  
this sorrow of things  
I do not know

*Olivier Schopfer*

faded ink  
on an old postcard  
autumn rain

no small talk between you crows

# *Jack Galmitz*

An autumn night  
hearing the bars of Satie's  
Nocturne No.1

Mother and father  
were very critical  
I wore a windbreaker

# *Alessandra Delle Fratte*

*tre gelsomini  
profumano il mio tè –  
e si fa sera*

Three jasmines  
scent my tea –  
evening is coming

*cade la neve –  
solo un ramo di pruno  
trova dimora*

the snow is falling –  
only a branch of prune  
finds a home

*ritorto ulivo –  
nell'ombrosa frescura  
tutto s'acquieta*

twisted olive tree –  
in the cool shade  
everything calms down

*Angela Giordano*

drops suspended  
above a ray of sun —  
cyclamens

home —  
a scent of oranges  
in the alleys

*Madhuri Pillai*

black dog I feed scraps of my thought

what's left of the sun the mourning dove

*Malcolm Ritchie*

*specific gravity*

weight of your body  
against its imagination

\*

the sea at its border turns  
itself over  
to itself

\*

a snail snailed to a wall  
for winter

\*

in the Plaza de Armas  
a woman with two hands  
holding a yawn to her face  
(Iquitos: 2014)

\*

death is the balance  
between all decisions –  
when the body makes up  
its own mind

\*

etymology is the spiritualism  
of language  
when words speak  
with their ancestors

\*

tomorrow will be  
another sky

\*

this river propelled  
by the fins of fish

\*

wind through a bamboo forest  
carved from flutes –  
that blows my mind  
perfectly

\*

stone  
not wishing to become statues  
or walls of municipal buildings  
remains silently  
in the mountains

\*

the hyphen that connects  
summer to imminent winter –  
body of an old man

\*

an artist draws breath  
no one can see



















