

otata 26
February, 2018



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in memoriam
Johnny Baranski
1948-2018

Tokonoma

When I was a boy I looked for God by directing my gaze toward the light coming from on high.
As a young lad I looked for God in my brothers and sisters around me.
When I grew up I sought God along desert tracks.
Now I have come to the end of the road; I have only to close my eyes and there God is, with-
in me.
If I see light I see God in the light, and if I see darkness I feel God in the darkness. But
always within me.
I no longer even feel the need to search for God, or to kneel down to pray, or to think or
speak in order to communicate with God.
I only need to think of my human state — and there, in faith, I see God in the midst.

— Carlo Carretto
from *Essential Writings*, Robert Ellsberg, ed.

Johnny Baranski

deepening snow
the conversation turns to
release dates

with absence of malice the winter wind

plum blossoms sans quotation marks

summer dreaming
dragonflies released from
a convict's pencil

cherry blossoms
the unseen scars
of Hiroshima

breaking wind
280 characters from
the White House

empty sky
the moon and stars
on the privy door

a hearse leaves
the prison compound
cold moon

Van Gough's cleft palette and a severed ear sunflowers

hermetically sealed jailhouse windows super moon

Corrado Aiello

lost world on my track the maidenhair

red spider
lilies... her moonlit
face

rice fields...
a large fly is about
to shake off the rain

lost children —
endless adventure
under the quilt

Joseph Salvatore Aversano

the sea they say
all the ones they have
in mind

pointed at
through the wall-like
blocks of flats;

and the freight ships on it
can go entirely missing

if the wide mirror at the barber's
is tilted towards a
shining thing washed

with the rain on
the antique peddler's
rack

in steam still
coming off of the samovar

spoons in
empty glasses the clink

each step makes up the street
under the spoons

in empty glasses
the weight

of calling it
a weight

John Levy

driving into the mist on a bridge
dressed in time's gauze

Green

Where does green belong? In
Eden? At the end

of stalks and twigs? In the strands
of dyed hair girls

and boys, men and women
flaunt, brandish, dare

someone to love? The elusive
green moment

as the sun drops under the ocean.

One Giacometti

statue of a man
his head a wedge
his torso a wedge
one arm raised
one stretched and pointed down
with one finger pointing out
is called, not surprisingly,
"Man Pointing"
dated 1947
and the man's head turns
in the direction he points
and anyone who sees him
pointing
can decide
whether or not to imagine
what is being pointed out
out there where nothing gives us
a clue

Two Israeli Poets

Yehuda Amichai carried in his duffel bag
Leah Goldberg's book of poems,
From My Old Home, when he fought in 1948

in the Negev desert. Pages
got torn; he protected them
with Band-Aid strips

and knew by heart what words
were beneath opaque tape. He wrote
her a letter, when he was

24 and a commando in the Israeli Army
and she was 37. In it he said
that frequently, in between battles

or "in the gloomy wasteland of the
Negev" he'd read her and that afterwards
"all was good." Much later, after

her death, he wrote that she had the only eyes
that could compete with his father's
with regard to being sad.

Ronald Johnson writes

"with all a lichen's curious thrust"

returning me to a small mountain with no
path my late father and late mother
followed on one of our
rare hikes and how
the yellow and orange and pale
green lichen on
scattered boulders
held my eyes, though I
didn't tell my two brothers or
parents
how I loved the color and flattened
spread on stone of
what barely seemed to live

Jim Kacian

a small quirk of spelcheks

digividual

ones elf

anarchangel

enpathy

hummmingbird

what i do
turns into what i did
early autumn

dragged behind
the last dusk bird
silence

on a green day
if there is green
the blue sky if

nothing
comes of nothing
the first day

know thyself
but never thy next or last
hiccup

Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo

lukewarm bed —
my companion
the midnight sky

naked season-
a soft blanket
of fresh snow

old chestnut tree —
just around the corner
my childhood

Sonam Chhoki

1.

DREAM HIEROGLYPH

The path is a winding mosaic of granite slabs under lichen-festooned trees. There is an airless calm as if the place is holding its breath. Verdant ferns brush my arms and as I climb further down the dark spiral of the track, I feel the moist spring of moss under my bare feet.

I peer through a gap in the undergrowth. A man is seated on a rock, with his stomach ripped open. Where his heart and lungs should be are black and red triangles. His hair is tied in a topknot and glows with an orange light. His eyes are drawn down across his face and his mouth is opened in a long ululation.

The path disappears. I approach the figure murmuring a Padma-sam-bhava mantra that father taught me. The man slowly disintegrates into sparks of flame. The rock is nowhere to be seen. In its place is a deep ultramarine pool. A red lotus with a golden centre bursts through the still surface of the water and spreads its waxen leaves.

In a rush of recognition I wake up exclaiming, 'The red and gold of the Natural Liberation* text!'

*night hoarse with rain
the drums of the oracle
lead the way*

Note:

*Padma-sam-bhava's teachings on the six bar-dos.

2.

FOUND IN TRANSLATION

I have been browsing Leonardo da Vinci's drawings of water. His red chalk, ink and pen studies of 'Water Passing Obstacle' and 'Water Falling' have a cinematographic vision. The stylized swirls bubble and foam with dark intensity. In other sketches the 'Storm over an Alpine Valley' and 'End of the World' are apocalyptic depictions of maelstroms. Of all the elements water exercised the greatest fascination for Leonardo. He called it 'vetturale di natura' ('vehicle of nature') and wrote: 'In time and with water, everything changes . . .' His portrayal of the movement of water has an indefinable inner rhythm that makes it both evanescent and mesmerizing at the same time.

membrane of mist
the wavering gold
of the temple dome

It is late winter. Snowy patches on the ridge. A lone eagle circles over the larch grove. Down in the valley it has begun to thaw. The ice that covered the old mule track is now a rivulet. I stop to let a herd of cows pass. The patter of their hooves on the melting ice draws my attention. Where the path descends, water runs down in patterns of semi-circles and as these touch a stone or a twig they arch into shapes of the letter M. Wave after symmetrical wave streams by.

spill of light
gentians on the slope
sparkle like spar

I have often walked this way to the river. How did I not notice water rippling rhythmically down this gradient in a sequence of semi-circles to pool the letter M? In the stillness of this distant village it is as if Leonardo has given me a textual bearing for the improvised beauty of water markings on a familiar path.

empty sky
the willow spreads
a transparent fan

3.

THE FORTRESS OF VICTORY (DRUK-GYEL DZONG)

The winter sun picks out the blackened skeleton of Druk-gyel Dzong against the towering peak of Jo-mo-lha-ri. Shab-drung Nga-wang Nam-gyel, the founder of Bhutan, built it in 1647 to commemorate his victory over the invading Tibetan army.

In 1951 a fire started by a butter lamp in the main temple in its precincts took hold. The villagers in the hamlet below the ramparts of the dzong, struggled and then looked on helplessly as much of the fortress was charred to the ground. Three hundred years of the kingdom's history was devoured by this conflagration. The ensuing decay is perceptible in the way the ends of wooden beams arrested by the fire in their natural progression to the neighbouring walls, point desolately like amputated limbs. Map-like patterns streak the pounded-earth walls where bracken intertwined with wild rose suckers hangs like unruly hair. The central tower still stands, a phantom figure.

An icy wind whips across the empty rice terraces, which fan out beneath the dzong ruins. The harvest has long been gathered. Only paddy stubbles remain, browned by the low winter sun. Cinders! I try not to labour associations. The cold air carries a mixture of wood smoke, juniper incense and pine resin.

Down in the valley in the farmhouses the monks chant the New Year in. Their plangent voices meld with the deep gong of the long-handled drum, the clang of cymbals and the booming tone of the trumpets. The entire population of stray dogs in the village seems to have gathered in the courtyards, waiting to be fed by families propitiating their ancestral gods.

The chanting and sacred music echo in the hollowed dzong . . . I can almost hear the triumphant yowls when, a New Year rite in 1647, commemorated the resounding victory of the Druk-pas over the Tibetans, sealing the authority of the Shab-drung in the 'Southern Country of Medicinal Herbs'.

*almost dark -
a crow follows a leaf
to the stone cairn*

*Scops owl calling
in the towers of pine
stars crystallize*

Notes:

Druk-gyel (pron. DRUK- GYEL) "Victory of the Dragon Sect".

Druk-pas: (pron. DRUK-PA) 'Those who uphold the dragon (Druk) tradition of Tibetan Buddhism.' The Bhutanese identify themselves as Druk-pas.

Dzong: (pron. Zong) – fortress and administrative centre.

Jo-mo-lha-ri: Abode of Jo-mo, the female protective deity in the Tibetan Buddhist iconography. Towering to about 7314 meters the range lies on the Tibet- Bhutan border. It is sacred to both Tibet and Bhutan.

'The Southern Country of Medicinal Herbs' (Tibetan. Lho-Jong-Men-Jong): This was the name given to Bhutan in ancient Tibetan accounts.

4.

MONOLOGUE OF TERROR

Long corridor. Doors on either side shut. He knocks on one. No response. He knocks on another, then another and another in a row.

He hears murmurs of conversation. He is certain he has heard his name. Chairs scrape the bare boards. Clatter of feet. Keys turn in locks in a row.

He flees the long corridor.

Outside, men walk heads bent, collars turned up in the rain. He crosses the road and looks back up at the window.

Faces stare out in a row.

5.

dawn moon fading dream

6.

sky burial
thigh-bone trumpets
in the fog

7.

stained to the iris depth
what does a bee know
of the cuckoo's absence

8.

its bloom faded
the sunflower
seething with seeds

Mark Young

Looking out

In the morning,
after the rain, she
listened to a couple

of Aretha Franklin
tracks & then got
ready to go out.

On Friday

Faster than fingers
or speech. The mind.

Not what you thought
but a belated précis

of it. Bits missing. This
is Thursday's poem.

Constantly risking absurdity

I amuse myself by listening to pdf
files of poems interpreted by the
synthesized voice of the Adobe Reader.

Everything sounds like Ferlinghetti.

The Buddhist vampire

The problem with being both a vampire & a Buddhist, & being staked around the end of the First Millennium, is that when the wheel had turned & he returned to a corporeal existence some five or so centuries later, he came back as a page of Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks. When they later held him up to a mirror they still couldn't make out what the hell he was all about.

Travel / Travail

I try not to undertake journeys

that have only the one destination

but somehow they always overtake me.

The Love Song of Kurt Weill

When the music comes to me, it is

always first heard

as if being sung by Lotte Lenya.

More / Harry photos / may emerge soon

Feverish handiwork?
Or unformatted head-

space? Some
other thing

often takes the
place of structure.

ain't no cure for the not yet even summertime blues

Poems
melt away
in the heat

after just a
few short
wor....

there is

no such thing

as

no such thing

Robert Christian

I.M. Mike Elliott

What did I give him
Just what reverted to me
Didn't you take something of me Mike
into eternity?

There for me will always be
(now I think of it see-)
Your smile and impatience and the way
you said 'Sheez' so often to me

4.1.16

28 Thorold Street from 'the Sunroom'

Look at the garden it's so beautiful
in frost

Whilst in the Park the trees
are brains witches only now

except for the firs - which keep
their grace and grandeur

in sweeping lines to last forever
not only in summer and winter

28.12.16

gondola slice

1.12.16

Technique ballast

22.4.16

It would be enough
to ask to be
unlike so and so
knowing I could not
last without
-long-
the poetry of what
I do not know

20.3.16

As you scrape
in your kitchen
I listen, but
there is no need —

thoughts of Trish,
Sally, John Beaven
this or that
fade

for now in mostly
blue I see you
waiting steadily
my darling for me

Andy McLellan

mountain path
I add another cairn stone
to the pile

Goat Fell
close to the summit
we can all be eagles

remaking myself
from dry bones and mud
winter rain

somewhere a rain cloud
I stoop to drink water
from sphagnum moss

Sonam Chhoki and *Geethanjali Rajan*

PILGRIMAGE

Coins clatter into his steel bowl, a few hitting the stone steps.

keeping watch —
the yellow eye
of a dandelion

The path to the temple adorned in festoons swaying in the breeze.

mist here and there
a family of langurs shadow
the pilgrims

A canopy in shades of green, the air cooler near the shrine.

*the murmur
of insects in the grove beyond —
the chants within*

The smoke-darkened sanctum peopled with guardians of ancestral hope.

*clarified butter
the old brass lamp holds
a steady flame*

Gabriel Bates

hazy moon
I dream
of dying

busy
street
crossing
the
snail's
path

chasing shadows
the people on Main Street

gusty wind going through the motions

Praniti Gulyani

gunshot...
the tulips hold on
to bits of sky

Johannes S. H. Bjerg

1.

six decades and some, that's a rosary plus

as I said
to someone:

*that's your
daily memento*

some of
my fave albums
remain unchanged

*to watch
the clock that stopped*

since before
I was born

*just to pass
time*

.

seks dekader og noget, det' en rosenkrans plus

som jeg sagde
til én eller anden:

*det er dit
daglige memento*

nogle af
mine yndlingsalbums
er uforandrede

*at kigge på uret
der er gået i stå*

siden før
jeg blev født

*for at fordrive
tiden*

:

2.

crossing the new year threshold the rain keeps its scent

the time
it takes

*it's not like
in the movies*

to notice

*when you remember
a situation*

time

*you see
yourself from
the outside*

and what
it takes

*your toes just curl
automatically*

.

over nytårstærsklen bevarer regnen sin duft

tiden
det ta'r

*det' ikke ligesom
på film*

at lægge
mærke til

*når du husker
en situation*

tiden

*ser du
dig selv
udefra*

og hvad tiden
ta'r

*dine tæer krøller
sig blot sammen
automatisk*

:

3.

as soon as they see me seeing them a pair of crows takes off; must be my crow suit

frozen

o.k.

ground

*let's idolize
some dead guy*

still

*and get back
to explore
boredom*

.

så snart de ser mig se dem letter et par krager; må være mit kragekostume

frossen

o.k.

jord

*lad os forberlige
en død fyr*

stille

*og gå tilbage til
at undersøge
kedsomhed*

:

4.

once straight-thinking men straightened out the streams of the land and the waters died

a tiny
ocean

*on my table
of ten thousand
flies*

with tiny
singing whales

Psalm 51 (50)

building up
in my left ear

forms a paper ladder

.

engang rettede retlinede mænd åerne ud og vandende døde

en lille
hav

*på mit bord
af titusinde fluer*

med små
syngende hvaler

*danner
Salme 51 (50)*

opbygges
i mit venstre
øre

en papirstige

:

5.

it's a one-sided and protracted quarrel between me and my laundry

30 minutes
more

waiting

of daylight?

*yes, that's
has addictive
potential*

you call that
light?!

too

.

det' et ensidigt og langtrukket skænderi mellem mig og mit vasketøj

30 minutters
daglys

at vente

mere?

*ja, det kan
man også*

kalder du dét
lys?

*blive afhængig
af*

:

Peter Newton

her biodegradable glitter to the wind

the surf's creation erasure art

horseshoes on the sandbar
the July
of our lives

the world on a string
how little time I take
for tea

Ella's scat skiddly knots in my heartstring

moth-eaten no hiding what I've become

we leave each other
poems
on each other's machines

Alegria Imperial

post-perspectives on (that night)

1.

been told where midnight birthed the Child, a goat
bleated and a lamb stared away to count adorers, i was told,
beyond three said to be kings, in fact, a throng
—could they have been cloned? no heralds really
and only the soundless rise and fall
of wondering eyes moved

on the one hand
stars (might have) abandoned
the stable for hillocks

2.

but said of the gifts laid down on hay, gold
singeing the silence for one, incense and myrrh
rising acrid mist—all unfit for dancing around the manger—
no eye winced, not the mother's veiled though lit like a crescent moon
or the father's side-glance, bent and weighed down, it had seemed,
braced by a cane possibly de-limbed from a comet-burst,
so i caught from word that came around

silenced (no trace)
boom of horns

3.

deeper into that night, the telling somehow tangles—a wild moon, i was told,
that the star outshone, hence, grown bereft flailed, and in shreds
fell on shepherds the heralds missed, as the camels drunk on light crossed over
from a universe of desert breasts coming to, centuries since,
a seething patchwork of wheeled-what nots, and men—the narrator opined—
pining to be kings scissor-ed streets, where spires of gothic cathedrals taunt the skies,
finding in a huddle of felled pines,
and plastic star-garlands,
their own stable-born

morning ruckus
(balled-up) winds hang
on sand-rimmed clouds

4.

but said of the adoration:
a stream of footfalls—human-forms spiffed up
in business suits and woolen coats, the unclean eaten by greed,
the twisted of bone, the mummied-up flesh, though not a whiff
of malodorous wounds—inundated the aisle to the crèche
a parade of hands that rumbled a litany of rants
like bamboo clappers
breaths rising into

petulant wing shapes (or shapeless)
fog on the rose windows

5.

one story teller, un-glued, swears he did catch
the Plaster of Paris baby's lids flutter, as lambs peered at the adorers,
and the child's mother blowing praises into her infant's folded ears,
while the father leaned back, perhaps deciphering a dream, and
late adorers crept in, rustling with agonies reprised
over and over in a rhythmic ejaculation
of supplication for mercies,
so the story rambles on

corner knot (finger-frayed)
the pain of denial
leaves a wound

6.

this renegade tells
how he, too, waded
his way in, palms damp
from doubt, teary from wafts of incense,
lispings as he counted nights lost on fingers,
confounded by shifting
animal sounds
and the
leaps and
swirls of
limbs
where

on a cross (hung from a concrete sky)
the midnight Star

Alessandra Delle Fratte

*verso l'inverno —
recido e piego rami
d'acero rosso*

toward the winter —
I chop off and fold up branches
of red maple

*riscaldo il giorno —
come ieri anche oggi
tè alla menta*

warming the day —
like yesterday today too
a tea with mint

street games —
red flower petals in the wind

*giochi di strada —
petali rossi nel vento*

Malcolm Ritchie

from

Mountain on Top of a Mountain

Selected Poems: 1980-2017

i've always worried over that phrase
to 'put it down'
referring to writing
while it suggests
killing

Old Saxon writan means
'to cut' 'to injure' and 'to write'
the pen is mightier than the sword –
'words' is an anagram of 'sword'
the pen already writing
in blood

as i pause the mountains pause

black cloud decanting its ink
for the mountains' white calligraphy

above Goat Fell a dark cloud brews
mountain tea

on the shrouded mountain
someone who's never been born
wanders

no form waiting to be released
from stone
only stone
waiting to be released from form

in Merkland Wood leaves
pointing to other leaves

the memory of that tree i burned last autumn
still bending in the wind

autumn sunlight clutching a rowan
like a keepsake

ten thousand winds through one tree
one wind through ten thousand trees

Valentina Meloni

*uva fragola –
resta qui pettirosso
un chicco a te uno a me*

stay here robin –
one strawberry grape-seed to me
one to you

*l'uva è matura --
tornerai a trovarmi
amica volpe?*

the grapes are ripe –
will you come back to see me
my friend fox?

*duende e flamenco —
nel vino nero dondola
la luna piena*

flamenco music —
in the black wine glass sways
the full moon

*luna crescente —
in pancia il bimbo mangia
solo ciliegie*

crescent moon —
the baby in the belly eats
only cherries

*le labbra rosse
di rossa melagrana —
sorso d'autunno*

the red lips
of red pomegranate —
sip of autumn

*rompendo noci
per i bimbi e i passeri –
mani di nonno*

grandfather's hands
breaking nuts for children
and for sparrows

*porterò ancora
pendenti di ciliegia
alle orecchie?*

I'll still wear
cherry pendants
on the ears?

*pere e formaggio --
il contadino è ricco
e neppure lo sa*

(Il proverbio dice così: al contadin non far sapere com'è buono il cacio con le pere.)

pears and cheese –
the farmer doesn't know
he is rich

(The proverb says: do not tell the farmer how good the cheese is with pears.)

*la prima neve —
un passero mi chiama
da dietro il vetro*

first snow —
a sparrow calls me
behind the glass

*si accende il bosco —
lanterne di alchchengi
lungo il sentiero*

forest lights up —
lantern trees
along the path

Stephen Toft

lake reflections
i return a fish
to the clouds

autumn dusk
in my landing net
only leaves

snow settles
on our fishing rods
winter silence

old fishing tackle
i breathe in the river
of my childhood

winter fishing the emptiness grows

old fishing net -
scent of the river that
once drowned a boy

meandering
from the pub
the old anglers

now just a trickle
the river where the local
boy drowned

Lucia Cardillo

*nevica fitto –
d'immobile silenzio
si veste il bosco*

dense snow —
the forest dressed
in motionless silence

*grigio di neve –
nel nido abbandonato
solo silenzio*

gray of snow
in the abandoned nest
just silence

Adrian Bouter

mother tongue
from the coat rack
a silk scarf

acceptance the wolves at the gate

at the bar
a sailor
drowns the sea

crack in a window
the labor of light

Christina Sng

neither
mouse nor deer —
mouse-deer

pool of
elephant tears
ivory moon

worn path
feeling going
in circles

frozen mountain
bearing the pain
of arthritis

Margherita Petriccione

*mimosa -
nei capelli della nonna
tracce bionde*

mimosa -
in the grandmother's hair
blond traces

*un corvo sul ramo nudo -
retrogusto amaro nell'ultimo sorso di vino*

a raven on the naked branch -
bitter aftertaste in the last sip of wine

*balle di fieno -
le voci del ritorno
nel tramonto*

hay bales -
voices of the return
at sunset

rondini-
Un odore salmastro
di patatine fritte

swallows -
a brackish scent
of fries

saldi invernali-
un profumo fuggevole
di dopobarba

winter sales-
a fleeting perfume
of aftershave

fumo di legna -
un cane sulla soglia
fiuta il freddo

wood smoke -
a dog on the threshold
sniffs the cold

Maria Laura Valente

lost lullaby..
my parents' voices
from next room

after a fight —
the bitter taste
of next morning coffee

blind mirror —
the fine art of avoid
my own gaze

first rain of spring —
from me to us
smell of wet tarmac

red moon —
a wish silently slips
in our bed

Kim Dorman

Weeks now
abandoned

by the muse

I lie awake
nights, leave
the bed

before dawn

throw a blade
of grass
to the
drowning
ant

after Joubert

Cold Night

A squirrel, or
rat, behind
the wall, gnaws
or claws
at something.
Perhaps the wall
itself.
It haunts me
in the wee
hours of night.
Trying to get
in — for what?
As if the mind,
trapped,
was prisoner;
scratching,
searching
in the dark.
For warmth, or
escape?

vincent tripi

the arrival
of wild geese
“All Rise!”