

POETRY SAVES!

QUANTUM FIRE POEMS
Spring 2011

Fire Storm of Change

I live through the material death of me and wear the clothes of others.

I search the toxic pile/hole as a ghost
looking for artifacts from a past life

finding

new green garlic shoots in the burnt garden.

Kelly O'Donnell

Crystal Mountain

for Katherine

through shifting blankets
of charcoal grey ash,
amidst
blackened tree skeletons
pointing crooked fingers
at the sky,
creeps
a shallow wave
of new spring green,
bursts
a riotous multitude
of magenta blossoms—
new life springs forth
on Crystal Mountain,
beckoning others
to come back home

Teresa Louis

After the Burn

Standing in a forest
recent burned
lives scattered
normal not returned

Land you know
is not the same
trunks, branches
blackened frame

Deadened soil
fractured rocks
structures gone
stumps and cinder blocks

Wind still whispers
through tops left standing
The sound has changed
the voice more demanding

I know
it will be different
in many ways
My heart will visit often
yesterdays

And on that morning
when the first birds return
their songs will call me back
after the burn

Mark Rosoff

Smokey Moon

Fire in the sky
burning clouds
charred crystal
veiled moon

trees charcoal sticks
writing words
burnt fear
wind blows ashes

sings Lent
Pie Jesu
run run
down the mountain

Now we offer
grace
gentle rainwater
words

quench thirst
new dawn
requiem's
Alleluia

Joanne Burke

High Meadow Fire

curling black embered smoke

frightens, chokes

overwhelms the forest

two terrified deer stand

in the murky river

waiting

for safety or

inevitable death

looking back

on their silent, peaceful

lives now past

changed forever

night-darkness emboldens the

blaze eating their food

and shelter

caught here between

red-orange night and

black-grey dawn

Gordon Holladay

From: *The Silver Lode – 25th Anniversary Anthology*
Columbine Poets of Colorado

The Great Clock

The few trees left
bear fruit of flame that smudge their muddy bark.
There is wisdom in the glowing pomegranates
that whirl hissing to the ground like molten tears.
There is peace in the breathing
blue leaves of sky, a stormy beauty
in the dirty tricks of cloud.

When fall goes, there is nothing left.
Lonely ashen spikes
branch into simple nonexistence,
await the quenching hush
of winter's white.

The people in the town
peep out through their shutters.
They wait still, breathless, rolling their big eyes
like bright apples along the slits of shade.
Outside, a single mottled arm directs the traffic of the wind,
guides the confused, gritty air
like a conductor shaping Shostakovich.

There is a long, smooth bridge with no one on it.
It opens into the dream, into the shadowed hills
beyond the river of birdsong—a hand of black glass
that reaches into the place we know is there
but can never see when we look for it.

So suddenly spring, the sun
on the bright horizon is falling in on itself,
leaving a magenta dimpled swirl
in the red brick dawn,
like a shimmering pink dust devil
trailing a dazzling wake of metallic feathers,
as if a wild, giant peacock molted as it climbed the sky.

The people flood out,
swelling the streets with human whirlpools,
swinging each other around in ever changing pairs,
an endless chain of arms locking and unlocking,
carelessly flinging each other into another.

A song, more a clamor,
rises from the crowd like smoke.
The rhythm, a hollow pulse,
throbs from the tower of the broken church
in the dead center of the square.
The great clock still tick ticks there
as incessant and monotonous as their own hearts.

The old church catches fire but no one seems to care.
New people come into town from across the bridge,
spiraling out of the darkness with no bodies at first.
No one anywhere has a face anyway, only one large eye as red as flame,
smiling or snarling or opening like a hungry mouth.

The clock tower, now a black skeleton,
a charcoal sketch of itself,
collapses with a heaving sigh,
a litany of ash, a chiming of embers.
One at a time the people go home,
back to their shuttered houses,
back to their own dark beginnings.

M.D. Friedman

From: *Leaning toward Whole*

Ancient Rituals

Ancient rituals become new
when the smoke hides the sun.

A bird with dusky wings
scratches at my window sill,
makes doleful sounds
bids me sing the song of night.

A battered instrument with rusted relays
cracked tones, I am unable
to give shape to the hearing
voice to the seeing.

The sun has passed from view,
the time has come
to quench the fires
bring forth the robes,

make our way to the canyon
to scratch our marks

upon the walls.

Maggie Rowlett

A Visit to the Greene Farmstead

From a distance all seems as I remember:
the rambling, low, white house with crisp green trim,
friendly porch and kitchen stoop and hitch—

The lumpy country lawn is neatly mown
around weedy ghettos of flowers,
lilies and phlox—that once knew hoe and trowel
and graced the farm wives' *coffee klatch* table
or noontime feast of a threshing crew.

Dressed in rippled leaves and glittering specks of sky,
great oaks stretch out their sheltering arms in shade,
like sturdy old uncles so aged they've lost track of the years
since they and the house started out in what then was called "The West."

The giant barn is weatherworn; its honest silhouette is clad in red,
still with traces of "the purple mistake;" some boards, deep-ridged and gone to gray.
Dusty with recall, the still air holds the sounds and smells of horse and cow,
of cats pursuing mice in bins of grain, owls and sparrows flying through rafters, skimming mows
drifted high with hay, its dry, sweet aroma mingling
with pungent whiffs of manure and sweat and steam.

This house that knew how to add onto itself as its family grew in size,
is blinded now by windows covered to hide the vacant rooms
from prying eyes—like mine, grateful for a vagrant shaft of sunlight
on delicate pale green wallpaper, on walls without pictures
on the kitchen with no stove or singing kettle, nor table
sagging under fresh-picked tomatoes—

and yet, near a curtain pulled a bit awry,
a generous spirit seems to linger,
watching,
waiting
for the folks who said they'd come back.

(The Greene Farmstead still stands at the corner of Greene and Hobson Roads in Du Page County, crowding flowers into Illinois.)

Caroline Nadelhoffer Orman

the visitors

walls of incandescent metal
the incessant whirl of the electric
punctuated by busy clicks
of buttons and switches
my head inside the glass helmet
radiating splintered lines of color
like a feral plasma ball
jagged ridges of blue midnight
bolts of lavender, waves of deep forest green
the air was clean but tainted with the smell of ozone
and then in my mind everything at once flared clear
myriad petals of pastel light
fell around me like warm snow

I knew they meant well
I had followed the trail of the broken rocket
to find them and then they invited me in
they were friendly enough
strangely familiar and gentle
their bodies were translucent
with lips tinged fuchsia
their breath smelled of amber laced with fennel
their gold-flecked eyes flickered as steadily
as the stars but warmer, like velvet flame
none of this matters I know
you just need to know I went in
of my own will and now I am fine

let me tell you though
what they told me
they said they
had come to bring us
what we have always wanted
a gift wrapped in starlight
from the dark skies of their home
it all happened so quickly
a flash of current
the exquisite bliss of being fully human
flooded through me
as if I had been an empty vase
and now you see I am blooming

M.D. Friedman

From: *Where We Reach*

Curves

On the interstate I almost crashed
my small car into a semi consumed
with watching a hawk playing
in air currents above me.

I lost track of the semi imagining
how hawk feels, riding curves of her own
making. The effortless arc tilting slightly
up, then down, tilting east then west,
circling wide, tight.

Perhaps it feels like the way
I've always driven my car
in the mountains
fast, fearlessly, choosing
centrifugal force to guide me around
each curve rather than braking.

I want us all to circle like that
without the fear we have
in not feeling connected
to the curve we're given
whether it's suddenly, around a semi,
or trusting our heart's speeding
toward its natural compassion
we're always told
to brake.

Karen Brock

Puma Attends Memorial Service

(A Eulogy)

It was not you, Giacomo...
It was those impostors
claiming to be healers
yearning desperately to control things,
those immature spiritualings
claiming Divinity
but not having much insight
as to their humanity;
it was subtlety,
that intuitive conduit
of your electric presence
into others' being
that defined you.
It was the sense of adventure
seeking out the rarest,
purest mushroom
in the wilderness of human sameness.
You were always looking for beauty,
prime numbers
primal screams of understanding,
that vertebra of fortitude
to sink your claws into
and bite down on the
area of disconnect
between the mind
and the heart,
experiential and bold;
come and discover
that twisting helix
in your self;
crack open that egg
of your divinity
one bone at a time
like snapping your fingers
to a rhythm
that God would love
to dance to...
But it was you, Giocomo!
because you could wait
wait at dusk for me
as your light went out
I would sit up on the ditch
and look down at you
your spirit dancing
as a fisherman's apprentice
catching his fill of fish.
Your joy having no boundaries

unlike the other humans,
your gift was always to share.
As I now walk the ditch
drawn to something more ethereal
something more rarified
than crusty, fertile potent earth
makes me want to crawl
into a cave
and go to sleep.
But I am awake now, brother!
you were that animal/human
who would understand this:
our humble purpose, service;
I must gather your curious
sense of exploration
and walk on,
enriched and enlightened
for having known you.

Puma
(Paul Gessler)

Somewhere at Eight A.M.

*Great spirits have always encountered
violent opposition from mediocre minds*

Albert Einstein

Somewhere, at eight a.m.
Everything happens
At the train station in Boise
On the clock tower with no numbers
It's always eight a.m.

Standing knee-deep in spaghetti
Scraping dirt off portabellas
With a parachute cord
You say you're from Illi—noise
Well—you're not

Terrorists shooting pool with
A blind accordion player
Using real bullets
In their lighted cigars
Leap from their cancerous beds

Carving poems into the pool table
The Gospel Singers wait quietly
For their turn to sing the Good News
And yet nobody really hears them
The kelp is too thick and deep

At the Museum of Modern Art
A smoked Alaskan salmon
Awaits its turn in the box
Someone must have a key
To let out the salt water

The Nurse said, "Roll up on your left side,
I'm just going to spray this in your mouth."
The moon is always rising
The moon is always setting
Somewhere at eight a.m.

Gordon Holladay

After an Illness You Become Cautious

After an illness you become cautious,
observing the sage brush buttercups
on the muddy path, grateful for
the clothes line, the washing machine,
knowing you have too many things,
clothes, books, shoes, furniture,
photographs, emails on your computer,
but you cling to them anyway, all the while
hearing Thoreau's voice, "Simplify, simplify,"
and knowing it would free you.

But for what? Just more loss?
You see the tiredness in his eyes
and know yours mirror his and
how much time is left to either of you?
It's like figuring out the monthly budget,
what time you have, what you owe,
waiting for, expecting the emergency
when there's none left. Oh all that
abundance of life and choice you
accepted as if there was no cost.

After an illness you become cautious
like a treasure hunter sifting through
the sandy minutes, dusting off the metal
shards of time together, feeling the light
dapple you as if you were a leopard in
a jungle created for your life, and
you bask in the febrile air, alert
to when you will leap up and pounce
on some ineffable gift that you knew
though distant was always there.

Pat Maslowski

I awaken

before meadowlark's piercing call
sparrows squabbling.
I hear, *Shirley, are you awake?* open my eyes to the new day.
look outside my bedroom window
check weather on the mountains.
It's clear today peaks capped with snow.
The ground is wet
from birthing rain
dandelions shower the lawn.
There's a fox cruising
the field across
farmer's irrigation ditch
sniffing air.
I savor coffee my husband has made
read the newspaper.
There are no restrictions
but
our perspective
on how to spend the day.
Should we grade tests in Longmont or spring clean?
It's like grading tests. Grade one and another appears like dust on my dresser.
We have clean water to drink and bathe in
walk on two good legs and see each in the other.
There is food in the refrigerator, and yes
somehow the government will not be shut down
but even if it is
I still see mountains in the distance.
So I bless this day as God has blessed me

Shirley Kobar

el señor de trigo

had I not carried you suffered you nursed you
I would swear you are gringo Gabriel Montero's
mother fussed salvaged angry hives peppering his skin
they erupted each time Gabe ate *tortillas*
posole tamales anything with corn his mother waited for
him to grow out of it the doctor said he would
instead his palate refined in every meal Gabe detected
the bitter taste of his mother's disappointment

he ate his last *tortilla* as he snagged his way
through border mesquite *I eat like a gringo*
I will live with gringos make money
like a gringo Gabe kept moving north
found Kansas open fields of grain swaying
like a woman's hips mounding prairie burnished
black roads sensuous/orderly he found *amigos*

after work eating sandwiches white bread thick
with *chile*/peanut butter he confessed his allergy
expected derision instead his *amigos* baptized
him with Bud Light *el señor de trigo*
wheat man of Wichita the name stuck

Trigo prayed this title would not travel
the Mexican grapevine to his mother's ears no amount
of money sent back would quiet her sobs instead he
leaked gossip about Celia whose hips put the swaying
wheat to shame a wedding in the humid Kansas sun

Trigo found work in *la panadería mexicana* the yeasty
warmth drew him/held him he studied flour
sugar water simple gifts of the earth
he discovered starters small bits of yesterday's dough
mixed with today's batch a living heirloom
passed through generations a family's history
kneaded into the kitchen

when Celia announced pregnancy Trigo
watched her cinnamon colored belly grow
thought life grows best in silent
darkness welcomed his son Guzman
with *el pan dulce para m'ijo* sweet bread for
a sweet son airy dough studded with currants
chocolate clinging to the folds each year the honeyed
pastry kicked off Baby G's birthday celebration
each year Trigo's mother sent exotic herbs for the occasion
to ward off *la maldición de la maíz* curse of the corn

Trigo's *pan dulce* became a Sunday morning staple
in the small Kansas barrio a breath of bread luring
the flock home from Mass Trigo's tip jar stuffed
with quarters dollars the *pesos* sent to Mexico
Trigo longed to have his mother visit but she
spent the money another *curandera*
who knew *el secreto* the secret cure

during a vicious blizzard buds of winter wheat
caked with ice smooth black roads
frosted white Celia announced her
return Mexico her family sound of the surf
palm trees corn tortillas no amount
of Trigo's pleading lovemaking tears
changed her decision between bouts of summer
tornados Celia and Guzman drove away
from Kansas out of his heart
his mother sent an inky potion convinced
this concoction would reunite the family Trigo's laugh
barked out as a sob he cackled and cried
as he mixed dough readied for Sunday

he sent money almost all he earned to his mother
and his son Trigo balanced his sparse life
with joy from the kitchen through his baking he met women
had luck with beauties who chose his most impressive loaf
he whispered as he kneaded *appreciation is a road*
going both directions

the potions/powders stopped he knew his mother
was ill the last money sent paid for her funeral a novena
Trigo's wife and son did not attend he sighed accepted his
solitary path no tears this time just surrender to the life
God gives

when his time came Trigo made a will his only asset
the bread starter bequeathed to the church for making
hosts his one wish a tombstone carved
el cielo huele a la panadería heaven smells like a bakery

Hilary DePolo

Six Seasons

(With apologies to Vivaldi)

Should Death strike
during that season of hot salsa
riding waves of shimmering heat
serrated blade bolting from black thunder
ripping asunder the kitchen of the heart,
crumbling crust of uncut loaf on the table
spilling wine from shards of goblet,
liquid burgundy drowning fresh garden daisies,
webbing patterns of crimson in white cloth—

stay still.

When autumn comes,
bathed gold and orange with plump harvest
and beaming moon rays
across this cavern of wound,

take, eat take, drink

then sink
into winter's womb
of soft quiet
salving the jagged wound
preparing the way to spread a fresh table when

spring awakens, lifted on scent
of violets, a baptism
of rain.

Beverly Haley Hadden

Nothing Bridge

Purple tercets of Wandering Jew
do as cuttings do,
while thin white threads root
in the jelly glass. It is itself.
Found in a dumpster, passed on
by friend, scraped from the board—
take hold where you are.
Step out on nothing,
on light, on urge.
These are your tendrils.
This is your tongue,
your breath heaving with the moon.
I follow morning into dusk,
listen to my dreams.
I wander purple. I am my own flag.
Cut me into billions, cast me
to earth. Show me the cavern,
the missing floor, the caravan.
In the presence of other elders
you step out on nothing.

Stewart S. Warren

Think about this question

and nothing else,
especially about answers. This question lies
about in whorls,
not in shells, in a curve,
not in calyx or nacre
or nautilus.

It flies about
in black red rushings Vincent heard,
pulses in his damaged ear,
the reconnaissance squeaks
of rabid bats in his bedroom,
but not in flaps
between bat fingers
nor in black wings' plaster brushings.

Do you wake yourself at night
with the sound of strangers breathing?
His question splits the unborn,
prior silence away
from the silent inconceivable
to follow,
like ticking stripes
between feather and skin,
whichever face is down.

An answer cannot be
a silence, though still, until now,
unspoken.

She was my Vespa lovely, and she moved
to Vancouver,
to an ocean of pearly tar.
She heard dystopic beauty
in gray guitar
and rain.

She said, "My cat Cricket is named
Cricket because he ate a cricket
bigger than his mouth,
which explains how America got its name."

She hears, now,
as purely,
what Vincent heard
when his vase of reasons hit the floor,
when her heart pumps white paint.

Her question
limns the spiraling lines
of the ghostprints of new moons.

It inscribes the paper face of their dead
sunflower.

With clever beak the chickadee picks
a kernel from its ocher grid,
reveals a bit more fragile math,
then springs away to limb or bath
deigning only its name by way of reply.
One seed dies in the earth.
Two seeds lie in my hand.
Three dry seeds hang
from the face of the broken-necked sunflower.
She asks, "If the rain holds
every drop of blood
from every dead soul
who never heard me sing, then
how many are left?"
Five raindrops spatter my window.
Six drops eddy in her syringe.
Seven drops burned on his pillowcase.
My question posits one pre-music mote
yet annuls harmonic potential,
for its wave breaks all symmetry
from a quiet,
a vacuum,
supersaturate field.
It graphs the terse arc of a skull
to meet and crack
a hallway mirror.
Still,
to bone or bruise or glass,
to image or to pain,
I admit nothing.
Fish don't bleed until their time begins.
And then they bleed into sand.
Mute grains collapse through a venturi
and suck breath from the day.
A spinning hourglass of
fish scales
rises to answer.
Nine fish scales iridesce in the basin.
Ten salty fish scales bracelet one wrist.
Put down the knife.
Turn over the timer.
Pick up the knife.

Eleven red fish scales suffice
for this dozen.
How many did you need?

Eric Westermann

What is inside is outside is inside again...

green song
like a robin at dawn
black earth
grey ash
the big moon goes down
the sun takes her place
there is only
a song that answers
a song that calls
the green voice and the chant
the green voice and the vine
leaf hands climbing
chant hands clapping
a hundred drums in the dark...

Are we dancing?

Katherine West