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WALKING TWO LANDSCAPES

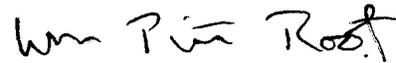
poems by

Greg Glazner

B.A., Hardin-Simmons University, 1981

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts
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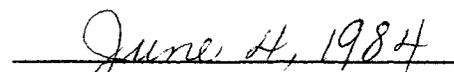
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Acknowledgements

Poetry: "The Valley" and "New Stars"

Portland Review: "Listening for Nothing as a Boy" and
"Meditation in Late August Drought"

Willow Springs: "After Sunset"

SOUTH

A Rural Anatomy of the Soul

"it is the settled conviction that nature is in fact
 much simpler and barer than it appears to us in experience."
 --Iredell Jenkins, from "The Postulate
 of an Impoverished Reality"

Waist-deep in a weed field cleared
 of the last squat mesquite and post-oak,
 even the wrist-thick stumps grubbed out,
 home for August drought
 on snake-crushed, pump-jacked land,
 along a string of steel coyote traps I first saw it,
 gray motion, rushing out of its wake
 along the terrace, low shouldered,
 wolf-faced. With every colt that disappeared, every calf,
 a local myth was building.
 I'd been half afraid to walk the land,
 something running loose out there, hunger
 way past anybody's knowing or control. I waited out
 the leaps and headlong thrashing, wanting its
 ripped anatomy, and sighted it in the crosshairs--
 the impossible long fur in gray mats,
 ears raised suddenly as it slowed, nosing lightfooted
 and ghostly past a carcass, head turned
 to face the full stench of my scent. I fired
 and saw it jolt, acres of gold heat rolling on every side,
 and lost it in the high grass.
 And after an hour of circling, imagined anyway
 what I had come for, ants ticking
 in the bloodstream, hard cells
 in the flesh, in the shelled bodies
 the shattered particles of longing and fear.
 I abandoned it for dead, found shade
 in an empty workshack, and slept.

(stanza break)

And face to the floor, I dreamed,
 my black, imprinted absence laboring
 out from under me, wing-spread
 and enormous, despising the million
 quiverings of shined hair,
 my blazed breathing, the random churning
 as I fell along the hysterical lossway.
 It struck, fed until it had
 its picked simplicity,
 and collapsed back under me,
 fleshless, under clean bones.
 Then an old woodscent in the blackness,
 sand-grit, the violent
 disembodied flight of memory,
 and I was lost over the dirt roads
 years back, into someone's farmhouse.
 The weight of my limbs was pressing me,
 ravelled curtains above me thick with gold light,
 clothes laid out at the foot of the bed.
 There was the smell of death,
 I dressed and cracked the great, brass-knobbed door--
 the worn, gray hush of Sunday dress,
 the farmed out, drought-drawn faces softened with grief,
 a big hand motioning. The heavy door opened
 into a reverance beyond me,
 meat laid out on the oak table,
 host of the flesh, flight bones of the hunter.
 I laid a pale sliver cold
 and limber as my death across my tongue,
 my body suddenly whitened and frail,
 and rose into a huge, weeping woman's arms
 beside the window, the grief at her face
 unspeakable, dead vines woven into the iron
 foliage of the railings, all of that flat distance
 drawing me into the emptied field, death risen into wonder,
 a whirlwind passing over, lifting cotton bolls, oil cans,
 dust.

(stanza break)

The eyes open,
the old faces vaporize, the workshack
empties itself into the day,
fieldbirds winding-in the distance
over weeds and one long roil of phone lines,
wasps climbing into the chinks of light.
The floorboards groan as I stand,
a loose nail rolls, rust-shagged
red as cedar, the whole shack
sags its rotten wood, turning its architecture loose.
Some unnamable smell clings
like wet sawdust to my shirt,
clings even as I walk home by black wire, steel posts,
opening the gate, creaking out a question, what
have I known outside desire, a few head of slaughter-cattle
nosing along the fence.
I stand and let the stiff grass blow through,
a seam rippling in the distance, wind-flaw
or hidden animal passing.
What have I despised, gut-shot
and breathing the risen bloodscent,
the hard need hot in its belly,
the ants rising with their husks of food,
the butcherbird settling,
piercing a beetle to the post, leaving it,
as I sit in droughtgrass loud for miles
beyond me, over fear rooted out
and passing dead as understanding,
over the steel sickness of the terminal mind,
the hot wind in hard gusts now,
the land teeming on its own conditions
even as it parches, even as it rots,
as the posts shake,
as red sand grinds the sky,
as the fence rocks in waves,
as the field blown with loose dirt and locust hulls
lets go into the storm.

After Sunset

The snow crunches underfoot,
ankle-deep and furrowed
on the plowed land,
no other sound
as I cross tracks
and imagine deer running
toward the thicket
where the church once stood.

Between stars and on blue
snow, along the drifted edge
of memory, the light
tints like old glass. Years
catch in the clear spaces.

I stood in this field
as a boy, and the sky
was a huge arch
hollowed out and abandoned
by wind, full of blue light
like Sundays in the wooden
balcony. Something pure
dissolved where it touched
my hands, the steam
of my breath. I saw it
fall for years, through miles
of air, between the last
stars as they showed, through
Christ crucified in stained-
glass, always shining
and going out, hidden
like the shape of clouds
passing under the dark sky.

(new stanza)

At the center
of the frozen pond,
snow lies in the shape
of an hourglass.
I think of snow
falling equally among
the houses and the hidden
deer, the buck standing, two doe
on their folded legs,
and a fawn trotting near them,
all of them watching
the snow fall, knowing it
by the cold feel
of their coats, and I think
of how it buries everything
except its own
shape on the ice, of these
white rows and how the earth
is opened
to sow the wheat
and receive those who eat it.

I stand at the edge
of my shadow, breath
freezing in my beard. Still
in the fields, at the center
of the frozen pond, snow
is whiter than the moon,
something irregular as snow
falling into it.
I watch the dim
sparkle of the drifts,
not one thing fixed
against the cold
and flawed light. An owl

circles into the stars,
its image distorted
on the white fields. The wings,
wide and deliberate
on the ice, beat
like something fallen
trying to fly
with a body of snow.

Listening for Nothing as a Boy

While cattle cars and flatcars
ran repeating themselves out of town,
into the dark farmland,
I would wait, until the clatter
rolled back like rain
and finally lost itself in wind.

There, it became a thing
of my own making, lost
as the shape it took
along the long curve
at the edge of town,
though it seemed to echo back
when the flagchain rang
the schoolyard pole at random.

I would close my eyes in bed
and become my father
under the railroad bridge at night,
where as a boy he dropped his line
between stars and huge catfish
he never caught, and watched the trains
pass over, and saw the brakeman
in his frame of light, writing
the day's work in the logbook, smoking
as he watched the stars sharpen
out of town, feeling himself pulled
through the rich, black middle of the land.

A Couple Walking Through Mission Hills Apartment Complex
Abilene, Texas

What counts about them isn't how I
feel, but how, when you picked up this page
half out of boredom, hard-eyed or generous
these lovers became you and me
embracing, silver cans scattered in the gutters,
new cars sliding by, memory flaming forward
base of the skull toward the face,
flames all along out arms. Poor-eyed, solemn,
we're slumped together in the courtyard,
me already leaving, stunted mesquites,
grass worn to nothing from the summer
ball games, brittle in the heat. We know
what it is we want, gold all around the walks
as clothes wash and charcoal
whitens, kids from every building
churning in the smokey grass. How purely
it dissolves. Out of the bad jobs and daily
motion, it is the love of longing
binding us--both of us drenched in the restaurant's
grease, another day's petty incidents
seeping out of our hands where we touch.
I'm here, leaving but not gone, and even
as I tell you this, the low sun setting everything
afire, I know it's nothing of my life
you would have come here for,
but maybe some agonized drift
of tenderness, like the one
we wander into by mistake
beside the laundry. Look there now,
aren't the ruffled sparrows still scattering
over us in the gusts of red sand,

our hands relaxed and smelling of soap,
memory gathering us in, touching everything off
piece by piece like so many brilliant leaves?

NORTH

The Valley

begins against the
confines of the skin. The snow
falls through falling light.

The mind, when crows swirl
in the snowfall, turns like a caged wren.

The air flakes like soft
ash, it spins the high, black forms,
frees them into white.

--

Splitting a thick pine log, the fire
blazes, two days since your death.

Daylight, through falling
snow, through the window, falls
gray. Children wave

as if to swim the air, voices
blurred in the wind. Flames

reflected in each pane
swirl and rinse their glass arms. Minutes
splinter in the room.

--

In a hall dingy with old light,
you're talking to someone

younger, who speaks
with my voice. You joke that you're not
writing, couldn't scratch

your name in the sand with a sharp
stick. You both laugh. The sound rings

(stanza break)

flat against the bare walls.
Leaving, you drag a stiff leg,
huff through your single

lung, swimming your years, the air
thick as if with snow or dust.

--

Emptiness, we say,
forgetting the fine, white ash,
the intricate dance

of shadows when the mother
calls at dusk. Someone sings

a deserted town to life
with grief, claims only
to weave splintered wood

with sounds a little warmer
than wind. He isn't telling

everything. What shacks
could ring with words, lean and fall
and go on ringing?

--

In a faint, blue arc, somewhere
a powerline breaks. The room

goes dark. The pages,
pale and flawless as in
memory, wash their words

in the moonlight, and the valley
finds all its registers,

(stanza break)

a dog catching the wind
in its throat, bone-white
wind chimes flailing as if sound

were marrow, the loose
doorjamb singing, singing all night.

--in memory of Richard Hugo

Under the Orange Street Bridge

somebody lights up a smoke
and starts to mutter. The rain blows,
he takes something off his shoulder,
crushed oil cloth or trash bag
holding what he owns, and leaves it,
the cigarette reddening
and his voice picking up.
A few grunted notes rise
over the sound of rain
and he bends over the river
shaking out his hair, one sun-ridden day
of loose grass, sand, live black specks
dropping into his reflection, gone.
He coughs or laughs,
his blackened face broken underneath
by rock, from above
by blunted rain, tosses in the butt
and watches himself there,
carrying nothing and his features erased.
All around him, big drops swollen up
on the pigeon-streaked, rusted beams
plink and come clean in the black water.

A Short Hike Under Moving Shadows

I ease across the first
dry rocks, where old roots
dip into the river, gesturing
in the uneven current, and slip in
up to my knees, the edges
of my loose shirt translucent
in the sunlight. The absolute
clearness of the water disappears
where I stand, the shadows it leaves
change shape on the smoothed rocks,
and the current circles a new way
without admitting me.

Across it a few yellow leaves
scatter on a short trail, even this
a chasm of shadow, chasm
of light. The huge birches shine.
The shadows ripple all over me.
Whatever I'm looking for seems
hidden under all the surfaces.

A seed's white sail lights up
as it drifts by, the kind
Jesse once showed me.
The light I remember
is as brilliant as this.

 He's five,
and I'm trying to read
on the front steps. He sits
down beside me and says,
"Look at this," holding out
a chuted seed. "Wanna see it fly?"

(no stanza break)

He ungrips it and grins--"There
it goes." He points at a moth
and tells me their wings
make them fly. They have magic
powder on their wings.
I believe him. I ask him
what magic this light has,
and he just smiles.
He doesn't understand. He runs
into the yard and finds
the bud of a wild daisy
and brings it to me. He says,
"Look what's in here," and pries it
open to the yellow heart.

I walk through slices of yellow light, the maples
already turning, a leaf rocking
through the air beside me. The weeds
shine, and the bushes, and it isn't
enough, isn't what I'm looking for.
The bees, lost somewhere
in the wildflowers, hum. The crows
call out in their baffling
language. I look up and watch wind
move the shined limbs, chunks
of sky opening through the leaves
and hanging moss, and branches simmering
where a gold-bellied squirrel
darts out of the light.

November

Weeks ago the last flutter
of red, now rain
has stopped falling

from the knuckled oak
budded out with gray light
where the water hangs.

Smoke rises from the houses,
unravelling where no wind
takes hold or breaks away.

Past the mist,
still, like shadow,
something dark falls empty

on the footbridge
in the late, clear light
you have imagined.

The first wind rising in the bone,
the hunger where the red pith
stars settling to nothing,

calls you without reason
along this fresh rot of needles.
The curled limbs of diseased pines

never speak the names
of magpies, the startle
of white-patched wings

(new stanza)

always before the voice
from high branches. This air,
heavy with water, seems

to surface just above you.
It was the same at night
when lamplight fell

from a window
through the thin hedge,
yellow in the fluid air.

Overhead, the bird
drops its hard voice
and rings beyond itself,

beyond you, the sound
sharp as the thought of light
defining trees and long shadows.

Obstructed View

It is huge and vacant
yet the trout flares up suddenly,
whips its tail, vanishes
below the swirled surface, water pouring
over boulders, over green shadows
through which something must eventually
rise without warning, as now,
yards of still air below the bridge
break in the clamor
of a jay's wings, the bird
circling out of sight, girders of shadow
rushing over him as he flutters,
and takes hold somewhere below us.
A thrashing on the surface, the white spray,
by the time we see it, lost in the falling lint
of cottonwoods. Some small body
slides against the bottom--fish, dropped rock--
glare streaming across the wide current
which defies us.

It is the mind stuttering even
at its own designs, and I remember
circling an icy runway once at night,
the city shining like jeweled metal,
each stud and sliver fitted
and polished over, the whole of it
shapeless as a flung handful of coins. Later,
crawling through traffic, we passed
along our private strands of meaning,
this bridge across a frozen river, 5th Street,
our porchlight glaring on the bricks.
Then the yellow kitchen wall where I leaned

against you, your warm hands
on the small of my back,
everything little and dark tangled
in your hair, in our breathing,
the glittering whole of it still lit
in our minds, as one at a time,
across the shined miles of pavement, the houselights
began to go out.

TWO LANDSCAPES

River Scene on a Morning Without Fog

We lean on the bridge-rail,
 wax-wings churning deep
 along the river, over old tires
 and newspapers and the gray water.
 We listen, a distant car, wings,
 the river moving, the birds gliding
 through a plane of light. Dazzling and tremendous,
 Whitman said, how quick the sunrise
would kill me, and we stand not
 saying a word, as if the heart didn't shine
 and take wing also.

Behind us, the precise
 footfalls of hard-soled shoes, and for a minute,
 they're walking into the south
 a year ago, a couple passing through the slums
 without speaking, clicking their shoes
 between the gallery and the motel room,
 Munch's dissolving landscapes, the cathedrals
 by Monet, Rothko's huge chambers
 of ochre light lodged behind their teeth.
 The blacks stop talking, turn toward them,
 then lean back into their language,
 fluent in every joint of their bodies,
 and the wax-wings turn abruptly,
 lighting in a single birch. A hiker
 sleeps on his pack below them, ravel-shirted,
 undisturbed, as if he had dreamed
 the tree, the birds, the rust-eaten sign
 laid out beside him, which says Cafe,
 the plane of light tilting into the river.
 He turns over, yawns, stretches his arms,
 birds flashing from limb to limb in his sleep.
 Then the sound of something very soft and light
 beating into a hundred pieces, and they rise,
 ragged as flames letting go of their branches.

my voice falling, blurry,
 two bright coins dropping into the well.
 The black water ripples,

is smooth,

I hear the shuffling of my own shoes
 and he's hugging us like always, stooped
 over us on my grandparents' concrete porch.

*

And years earlier, my mother wakes us hours
 before dawn, spreads a blanket on the lawn and we all
 watch thousands of meteors

fall across the fixed stars
 of 1966, silent fireworks, I tell myself.

Even then, I know there's more to it than the white
 flaming and going out,

or the way a low one
 streaks below the horizon,

and for minutes sears some
 black, imagined underside of the past.

And though I don't think of how they'll
 vanish in the clean, dawn light,

and all day long,
 invisibly, burn themselves out like faces
 disintegrating as they touch the blank light of day,

I shield my eyes, stars
 falling a hundred times a second, grin
 when I see what I'm doing,

and look down
 to see what faint, electric flashes
 might light up across our faces.

*

Watching fog settle into traffic,
 trying to recall the features of a certain
 gray-haired man,

I'm telling myself
 a lost face won't spread like smoke
 into old light, or eyes sink like iron
 wafers into cloudy water,

as if I could
 peel off this soot-colored winter sunlight
 and see by some human lustering,

as if a sentimental lie
 were better than to touch the truth
 however gently.

And those Leonid meteors,
 burned out or whirling years away
 over nothing but a little loose dust,

for no good reason,
 light up anyway, my hands tingling
 as I remember.

*

Thin tines grating across the lawn,
 the dusty leaf-smell rising, the rake
 is big as I am,

and Mr. Sims turns a long
 polished rock over and over in his hands,
 watching me work from his chair. He's 82.

His wife died six months ago,
 sand beginning to gather in the empty feeders
 wind-rocked in his oaks. When he leans up

to write my check, nothing shows in his face,
 though I'm sure he's sad to his thin

bones. He tears it out so slowly I can

hear each strand of paper break,

and puts it crimped and fluttering into my hand.

*

A little glint in his eyes, lips pressed together,
 he's telling me it's the skin we're born with,
it's our own shape gone slack and white,

though his lips don't move. And though I'm listening,
 there's some other sense still hoping to be
 cut loose, if just for an instant,

like so much

breath in winter.

I remember leaves spilling
 into the gray river a few weeks ago,
 the water wind-roughed and murky,

and notice a dark shape below the surface,
 a pair of jeans hooked

on a submerged branch, the waist
 wide-open to the current, a pocket wrong-side out,
 ballooned like a small, white lung.

Below,

bleached legs shifting like the body
 of a huge, sleeping fish.

*

Some nights I wake up suddenly,
 wind outside like running water, the room cold,
 a cube of moonlight fluid with gray clouds,

and know the lax, heavy feel
 of the body sleeping in its skin,
 how patient it is while it waits,

forget,

it says to soothe me, cool shapes
drifting over as they change.

Even now, listening to the blue
chamber of a fluorescent lamp
humming back all the years I can remember,

I know it has its own, cold designs,

I know

how completely it owns me,

my hands

white on the desk, face lit in the black pane,
frost all around it sharp with the geometry of its blooms.

*

Sometimes, maples holding nothing but a little wind,

And I admire the way they have no use
for the past, and pass under them
full of the hard, useless truth,

and sometimes, mornings when I walk with my wife
in the cold, wearing the coat my uncle left me,
the heavy collar buttoned all the way,

I feel the heat welling into an old shape,
all the creases of warmth
pressing me through my sleeves.

I know the way the weight
gathered along his joints

as he crooked his arms

to fumble with the black buttons

or reached

down into the frost for the morning paper,

I hear

everything with clarity, her breathing in her scarf,
the swishing layers of all our clothes.

His oldest girl was five. Sometimes I tighten up
and feel even in my gloves the criminal smoothness
of what's rubbed numb and ordinary in my hands.

*

And when I think of what is lost
and hold it with the hands
I'm allowed to touch things with,

I feel all its sides,
the brief, irrational crackling

rising off my skin

as I smooth the cat's white fur back,
slow along the small ribs, the rounded
muscles of her haunches, and rub her thin ears
in my fingers.

Even now, wind outside
shifting gently through the brittle leaves,
another face lights itself,

a few scraps of newsprint
trembling in the fence

the way they have a dozen times
when George Pate next door,
stepping out to feed the squirrels,

uncrumples one
and looks it over hard, as if to find
under the ripped voice shaking with words
his wife's name written there.

I've seen him tuck one in his pocket,
loss wrinkled in his hands, wind in his jacket,
pull out a black nut and offer it for minutes,

(stanza break)

as if anymore, it was that task or nothing,
to hold it out gently in the crust of his skin.

And when the squirrel takes it and is gone, I've seen him
watch the bare fence, letting the breeze
touch him through his clothes,

and I can tell by his eyes
he's thinking of nothing,

light falling in the dark rings
of the wood,

as he takes a long draw on his pipe,
tasting the smoke in his breath
a long time before he lets it go.

Walking Two Landscapes

for Ann

1

I step out into the cold air
 and watch chunks of snow
 glint and drip from the pines.
 I pick up a last birch leaf--
 it's ice-cruste'd,
 red-ribbed--
 everywhere woodsmoke dissolving in clear light,
 and knock two more sticks of wood together,
 ice shattering in the sharp air.

The dry weeds, sunbleached, stiff,
 resonate over an inch of snow.
 Magpies settle
 onto the fencerow, and call out,
 and I know nothing to answer them.
 They pace the rails, cackling,
 glancing sidelong at me, and fly.
 Flashes of my face
 scatter in their black eyes.

2

Sweltering one summer in the Texas heat,
 I gnashed my Baptist faith
 until it snapped like a tether,
 and walked the flat streets emptied.
 Pecan trees waved the leaves
 they might hold five more months,
 and the thick skin of paint
 cracked and scaled from the houses.
 Wysteria blooms draped in clusters
 from the fences, like blue
 grapes I wanted to consume.
Know only the blooming when they fall,
 I thought, smooth-faced and nineteen,

the wind already rushing past me
 carrying all the years I'd live.

3

Under small, sharp edged bits of light
 which might have gone out centuries ago,
 or which already have exploded
 into novas our children
 will live too soon to see,
 we walk our frozen path to the mountain,
 certain, for this night,
 of the gentleness of stars,
 as their gauzed light
 drifts onto us, and rises again,
 ghostly, in snowlight.

And under rough maples full of stars,
 through crusted layers
 where everything we love scars
 its names across us
 the way I cut mine in live oak,
for always, with my first lover's,
 afraid, even then, of the day I'd be a liar--
 we cut the old words a new way,
 and sheets of thin light press into us,
 and even the chill voice rattling the weeds,
 rising, as if hearing our words,
 to tell us These you will
abandon, or die from,
 pushes us closer.

A horse loose from the stall
 climbs ahead of us, head down,
 black coat shined silver,
 and trots into the clearing,

the night flowing perfectly
into the tatters of his mane.
He stands and looks
without desire,
without knowing what he sees,

and disappears into the trees again.
We glimpse the white ankles,
a piece of his back, and once,
his whole broad head, the night air
silvered in his breath. For minutes,
the low branches rustle and break.

4

When it is silent
and the tall grass has given up
each sliver of warmth,
we stop, our breath lighting up,
the smell of pine sap
cutting the cold air,
and watch a few clouds drift over.

They ooze from their linked shapes,
slow, thick, as if they too had flowed
from a split in the crusted wood,
shadowing us as they pass
under the new moon,
now white-edged, blooming out of themselves,
now lungshaped and warm.

New Stars

A wasp drifts against the high window,
its flight a loose scrollwork, the wing-hum wavering
over me in the dark yard, filling the pane
as if glass ringing with praise
would melt, or enough singing transfigure
an ordinary room, its nightstand and closed book,
the small lamp that blinds each
segment of the eyes. Still,
out of the useless thrumming,
the sound goes up, from arclight
into the thick air
along the black rim of mountains
where the slow, unrisen moon
smears the low clouds.

Once, rising
early from a frame house on the plains,
a month of sandstorms already ground into the teeth
of the picket fence, I stood on the porch and listened,
the house creaking in the wind as always,
as it had the night my father lost his brother.
He had put down the phone without speaking,
holding some other voice back in his breath,
as if what that voice wanted to sing was too
bitter to flow across the tongue.
And listening to the wooden porch wear down in the wind,
I understood for the first time
something was settling into us, a constant
silt in the veins my father couldn't stop,
and I knew we would be filled completely.
I waited, the dark pouring in from the south
across silos and tin roofs, resinous as a low
wail bowed across the guy wires,
until the air crumbled into the first
dust of ordinary light.

(new stanza)

And years later, along the snaked
turns of a logging road,
in a sweep of the headlights,
I saw a badger's eyes smoulder
from a crushed skull, blind with the fear
of nothing living. A hundred elk
turned their coal-eyed stares
back up the mountain, and ran
hip-deep in snow, the young
calling out behind them
in high-pitched, swanlike voices.

Now the lit end of a cigarette
wavering across the road,
the cadences of words
and a single firefly,
light, nothing,
higher light,
drifting out of the known, almost inaudible pitch
of bones wearing in their case of flesh,
into the dark sky.

And as if someone else
were looking through me, I forget
what a star is, and see the huge
black bodies of horses
stacked to the cloudbanks, the sky dotted
with the silver light of their eyes,
and the indifferent way the grasses
shift in the wind begins to sicken me.
I think instead of how my grandfather's
cigar-end reddened when we'd stop laughing
and lean back in our chairs,
as an insect disappears
into that black mass where I
suddenly want to climb,
the clouds still drifting as a few old eyes
close, and new ones open overhead.

(new stanza)

Another voice seeps through me
steeped in bits of gnashed teeth and salt water,
the few bars my uncle hummed
as he plowed the dust of a drought-crumbled
field of the 1950's, my great-grandmother's
gravelly voice as she sat alone in her den, sewing gray
stuffed animals before Christmas, calling each of us
by name. It is a voice useless to bring rain
or give the dead their old eyes back,
and I sing with it often, bitter tasting and strong,
and it wakes the sky. The horses shift
all night making room for us, the farthest stars
glittering like dust in their bodies, and all the dust
in my bloodstream aches. Nothing I can say
will stop them, not these words,
not the ones I'll praise them with
when I breathe out a last warmed
scrap of the sky, and lie down
filled among them, as someone,
maybe my son, turns out the light
and notices the clear black sky, the stars.