Facing the Bridge [Poems]

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Facing the Bridge

by

Claire Hibbs


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On Poetry

Every morning fresh with birds,
an incessant ache that asks: be everywhere.
City of No City

There is a bridge
in search of you. Cables hold fog suspended
and the burning coal of taillights masks the faces moving
toward what I want to name a house out of the rain
because I must not leave before I arrive. That I could
walk into the shipyards and watch the containers, black
with salt stains, lowered to the ground, or stand beneath
the cranes, mechanical hands too large for the sky
moving cargo back to earth, back for the dead weight of coins,
but go on past the stalled cars mid-way with tires gone
and windows that have been eaten from the inside.
I have gone from one city into another and this one speaks
in factory roofs, in the sound of rain over bent backs,
hand small levers, while dreams move inside minds like waves—
Exit signs everywhere, no passport with no name written inside it,
invisible wires cross-hatching this life to the sound of iron
clanking as men shake hands on the corner and stores un-lock
their windows for the day in this city whose indifference
is this pulse, red in the vein. The children still sleeping
continue to rise— an ache like the sound of bells—
take from this street the glass and make it a table
from which we eat, if digesting these shards would bring
you closer— line the walls with alphabets that you could arrange
into the directions to your house— I would explain
to the loud owner of the corner store as the children begin to enter
that she must not shut you out. The bars on the windows saying
that there is no other way for now, for now, children take my hand
and tell me I am their teacher. That somehow I can be larger
than the pieces of iron holding back sunlight in the classroom,
that I am armed with more than these holes in the walls, holes
in rooms where mothers and fathers cannot comb your hair,
and the sound of death pulled through the open door of this city
which we fill with paper carrying the names of what we think you are called.
History of the West (one)

It started with the shovel, 
hard against my wooden deck, 
clearing two feet of snow 
that had fallen while we slept. 
I know I had been dreaming 
for hours before I heard 
the blade’s clear scrape into ice. 
And you were there. Everything: 
white and gleaming. At first, 
we did not see anything except 
lilacs blooming outside my window 
and the Blackfoot’s swollen banks. 
Birds flew in and out of the Clarkfork 
valley as we walked the dogs. I was afraid 
for a long time of the horses. There 
were other things, too, that I feared.
Facing the Wind

I walk out with the dogs toward the cemetery, the stone graves wounded by ice and wind, stationary and voiceless, rough as sand, secret as dead languages. The dogs pick-up sticks and chase each other in the snow. The willow branches are gold in the winter sky and for a moment it is not as hard to say, this is all there is. The tall willows at the edge of the road scarcely move in the wind.
Snowing over the Missions. Near the dead deer
the coyotes leave no tracks. Jocko Valley’s river is thick
with ice, and on the fence tattered Tibetan prayer flags
in the wind. It washes through them as if all the old monks
were somewhere forgotten. It is easy to believe all this falling
without utterance is significant. Even if we could go beyond
language, what holy words could bring the metamorphosis
we’ve been asking for? Watching snow pile over trees—even
the wind blows in several directions.

A gaunt thing crawls through the sky.
It is hungry and cries for days above the village
where a mother leaves clothes to dry
across the courtyard. The billowing shirts
and red scarves look like party banners,
swaying between windows
staring in opposite directions,
as if to announce a festival. When fathers begin to hear
sounds from the sky, they feel a craving
beneath their breastbones.
Everyone in the village prays. They hide
the laundry inside. Legs and sheets hang from nails
on ceiling beams. Dresses hum with heat.
They float headless.

No longer of a single origin, your own breathing
reminds you that there are things you must remember
to let go. They were here. In the smallest way footprints
are erased by snow, and the bean stalks are skinny against
dry wind. Hurry, the mountains fall away in every direction,
fossils disappear into tourist shops along the highway,
the Sangre de Christo’s iron-red earth bleeds
into night. We are all melting into ideas of ourselves,
wax into small bowls.

We were not given this life, my father said,
stepping up a slope covered with blooming mule’s ear, scrub oak newly in leaf and tiny spots of snow melting in the white sunlight, *to waste it on inaction*. I knew he was talking about spring and his faith in science. He had seen a boy he loved die from the disease they were tracking through Bolivia, whole villages ruined by the virus, his machete cutting through the jungle attempting to solve the puzzle. We continue up the path through rocks blushed with browns and reds, a turkey vulture circling above. *I want language to be responsible*, and before I can continue he points to the worn mountain mahogany, three scars where it was hit by lightning. We can see the hospital small like shoeboxes along the foothills. There is supposed to be one word at the end, explaining. *There is silence at the end,* and it doesn’t explain, it doesn’t even ask.
History of the West (two)

There is no key to sadness.
Rooms enter into one another
once you have found your way there.
I have decided for the sake of survival
that the pine needles are singing.
They are singing for someone
who has died. Singing in blue stitches
that belong on the hem of the tall woman’s dress
as she crossed the plains, buzzards
and crows following her wagon train.
I have decided that mountains collect rain
the way memories are conglomerate.
It isn’t just the notion of blood in the grass,
but that the notes falling through needles
can never be given back, or held as apology.
There is a room with doorways everywhere, some of which can never be opened again. Behind one stand bodies of children you remember from your dreams. The hallway is filling with paper—each piece has been written on by hand. The signatures in pencil stand for how they would like to live. There are equations that never amount to the same answer, water drawings which are made from tears. Some pieces are written with nothing but zeros. There are stories that can never be spoken even if broken by glass.

In one drawing there are guns holding up a house. There are other doors—but this one is closing on you—look, a child points to a page that has your name written beside a lion whose giant mouth and teeth are closing in on your face, and you watch as the child translates for the lion: sometimes the wind won't stop dragging the branch back and forth along the fence, half outer bark, half metal bruise, and what should be
straight is bent.
The story is not the branch
or the wind, but the chain-link
fence whose barbs are made
to keep things in their place
even if there are doors
that might open away
from that room.
The Leash

Sitting in the cafe window
watching commuters step off the J,
jogging women sprint past,
slow walkers with grocery bags, I waited
to see myself pass by,
with Leo, his leash
wrapped around his left
leg, just before the intersection,
and the way I lean down to unravel it,
my hair falling around my face,
not covering my moving lips. I cannot
hear the churning
rails of the J, the spinning
washing machines, the man
hunched over his cart at the bus stop. I am
numb to the woman watching me
through the cafe window
and how she wonders
how I could be so careless—
everything going by dangerously fast—
with the leash.
San Francisco's Castro Theatre

Tonight, on the street
  the old fighters no longer
  look sideways,

they wear leather chaps
  showing muscular butt cheeks
  even in the cold,

the porn shop opens its doors
  to the half-numb
  flashing their ready-made erotica—

down the street the same homeless boy
  holds his cup in the red light
  of the Wal-Mart sign, saying please,

the sick come in and out
  of the glass doors
  with their expensive medicines, showing strength.

Tonight it's a Truffaut film
  black and white images
  reflecting rapt faces like movements from day to night,

last night it was the same feature
  someone else sat here
  some other man making love to the world.
I was gone for a week and the postman
had to shatter your window and call
an ambulance. You can't leave.
It's as if we were chosen to live here.
Sharing the same breeze through the pines,
the same incandescent sunsets. You say
this is a darned good place and fifty-five years
after you left the war and bought your cabin,
you never left, so I believe you.
Gray paint on your house peels away
in the wind and I watch you pull the torn
screen door, balancing a cane, your hunched
shoulders moving solidly, without speaking,
a whole history in your wake. Who else
could tell me how logs can break your back,
pinning you beneath a truck for hours
until someone drives down a mountain road,
or winters on the Blackfoot when snow
rose above school windows,
and how much you love your trees—or the way
your laundry dries quickly in the evenings.
It is so much work for you to still be in this world.
In the early dawn I hear you feeding
my dog chocolate cookies,
I don't watch to disturb your privacy,
but I hear your plain old-man talk,
and it hurts in my chest to picture you,
leaning like a priest at communion,
giving your Saint Francis hand
through the fence.
Canyon de Chelly

Planting words, like seeds, under rocks and fallen logs—letting language take root, once again, in the earthen silence of shadow and bone and leaf. —David Abrams

I come to the edge of the stone cliff
in the evening and the sun’s softness
on the rock is the translation of ember
in any language. The wind is rising
and I look across the canyon
to Whitehouse ruin. I cannot speak
for the hands that built underneath
that great wall. I am not allowed to
imagine the small fingerprints that have been washed away a hundred times
in high water. I am not afraid of loneliness in this archipelago of light. There is no one
to watch me leave and make my way down the steep switch backs.

The day I brought my students here
on the bus from Chinle,
they ran to the sandy bottom
and threw their bodies into the shallow river as if a god had wanted them baptized. Muddy and red from the blood color of the sand, they walked to the base of the ruin to dry.

I find a small remnant of stream
and wash my face and arms.
The ladder in Whitehouse ruin has been bleached by the sun and glows a thin white in the early night. It watches me.
I am not alone. When I climb back up the canyon I look back three times and the ladder plays tricks with me. I see a thin skeleton, an old man in the doorway of his home, and the lines of an ancient world still pointing in four directions.
On leaving the Navajo to go North
For it is only at the scale of our direct, sensory interactions with the land around us that we can appropriately notice and respond to the immediate needs of the living world.—David Abrams

A strange spring:
rivers fill with dust and Russian thistle—
each day the washes open like begging bowls
to a sky so blue it hurts the naked eye.
Each morning more heat,
more starving sheep, more empty beer cans,
more bruised children. Arroyos planned
by the government wash away in the wind.
Metallic water towers shine fat bellies in the sun.
My children tell me that when they grow old
they will build swimming pools in their houses.

Always thirst:
even the train’s full
of desire. *Union Pacific*,
like a habit-driven animal
through the bones of the desert,
rattling into a maze of shadow.
I watch the land’s dry lips
curl and flake rice grass
and globe mallow like pieces
of dead skin, sunburned
and weightless across the sand.

Clouds break and become spears,
luminous and fragile. Skinny cattle
are statues of loneliness at their watering holes.
I follow complicated tar patterns across lanes
that lead me to believe in uncertainty.
A black buzzard like a seed in the sky, waiting,
trusting the weakness of the dying,
circling above me through all this border crossing.
Track

A town I once knew kept pounding itself into the prairie, boxcars filled with sign-posts birthing Main Street, Willow Avenue, Johnson. It was the constant bursts, meteors showering bolts into the rock and coin-saloons. It was this call for gold, this dismal slow signal of dust bringing in the morning train, suffocating the low grasses that made all this rise like mortar on a platter.

All west-facing windows, shrill whistles and wagon beats against the dusty gravel roads, I will carry. I will carry the sins of violence against whatever stood in the way of the train. I will carry the not speaking about absence and the silences that follow rain on a blackened street where once there was no road but small fires and the softness of human feet. To carry the word, propelled forward like Billy the Kid or a history built on verbs, all that freight—the wind moving clouds in a sky so large it could never disappear. I carry this weight because my land is crossed over with appetite, that roaring heart of steel on the tracks.
Violation

After the Medieval practice of burning a home
if a woman was raped inside its walls.

The village has prepared
for this. They are walking
with baskets of fire underneath
their clothes. The cove
of kitchen is no longer green.
Her pans hang
as if they know what hands
unspoke and tore away.
Her calico and grease
against the body. No figs
in the bowl and the pitcher
is not empty, but each
window full of the steps
towards her. We cannot
be free of diminished distances,
even with waves washing salt
against the panes.
When the house falls
it will be as the body, nailed
to a pillar, falls. As star
becomes cinder, and so swiftly
is erased.
Estuaries

The boy who lays the rabbit on the table
and watches his grandmother skin and pound it
until the bones are broken
and the body is made unrecognizable
knows to pay attention to the pelt’s strange emptiness
and the pounding which is not the pounding
of his own heart
and the blood spilling across the wooden table
which is not the estuary
where the river invades the sea.

Upstairs a girl listens as her grandmother
unfolds the shutters. The river moves quietly
but she has forgotten how to hear it.
Her body has stopped growing
and she wonders if she ends there.
Outside a planet has just fallen
behind a chestnut tree.
She dreams of the world beginning and ending
and just before waking she stands alone in the alley
and watches the gardener water his ground
while two hundred and twelve people
raise their voices to sing
for the dead inside the village church.
Cathare Ruins

This afternoon, chose to walk
quietly, a ruin, a stone
no longer a wall,
over whose shape I climb
in search of a key-hole.

When you boarded the ocean liner
and held the rails with olive gloves,
the waves and people motioning
from the pier, signaled a becoming,
a past from which some things
cannot be retrieved. The sky
a temple, ceiling vertical to nothing,
clouds a skeletal body,
four pillar absence, a sentence
running away from the listener, this

blueprint, a voice lining the absence
of a house, falling back in the same direction,
motion of rain, (yellow umbrella), sloping
off the stones, a window
heaved inward. And there is

no need for recovery,
the boxwood has grown confused
in the rain, blocks of home
continually the size of shadows

where the village stood, stronger
for the one who traveled
alone across the sea, something in her
blood hushed by that distance.
Semantics

Present in our utterance
is the world: small particles
of rain on the window, there,
as you think of what you are
in two languages or the glass
with yellow leaves on your face
as if you are always walking
through a storm of images.
On Swan Mountain

They are in a hurry.

Bridges of leaves fall
into the river. It doesn’t matter
that I am a human figure walking
as everything else also moves toward
a final destination. My words
only part of the yellow light there
on the trail and the profusion
of fireweed only pieces pulled
from white rocks (the picture
changes with the wind). Near the edge of the trail
he is all I want, and becomes the words
we don’t have for the wholeness of fires
in the pines and the rains sweeping afterwards.
If there were windows in the room and no
needles to rise from, we would not hurry
but the mouth is the world
opening as the body opens, a pale
center, calling after what language cannot say, never
close enough to petals holding
the world yellow as the mouth tries to say
what is quiet about leaves falling like salt
in the bodies of the living as if
the world was his mouth opening
and salt on the skin
of leaves falling in a pale light
until it disappears
the way absence is alive
on the branch.
Distances

Only the bells on the mares far away,
chewing on grass along dark banks that held back
the Pacific-driven Flathead, the river that fed
the Salish, before the first expedition of white men
changed the history of your blood-line.
Unlacing your heavy leather boots in the lantern light,
I could hear the sounds of two rivers flowing
into each other. Dogwood leaves fell into reddish mud,
and the woven curves of the wind moved against
Turtle Mountain. I remember the strange smell
of smoke on your chest, the gentle slope
of muscle where I could hear a heart beating.
You had a scar on your shoulder, raised
and streaked like blades of grass. I wanted to ask
about the accident, the sounds of horses moving
through trees as they walked towards the meadow.
Manifest Destiny

But right here it is just you coming home
from the mountain. You are always quiet
when you return and out of politeness, wash
before you kiss me. I made a pie. (Can you feel
the heat from the stove? ) and you kiss me (shaven)
and your smell becomes the whole world returning,

from which nothing of this scene can be
omitted (yes, the peaches are fresh, I chose them
by hand and peeled them with my knife, see
the yellow skin on the cutting board— ) I am asking

you how many aspen leaves across the path, larch needles
(falling now), how many shots, a final center, a direction

I wish I could stop the wheels for. But as you un-pack
your knives and sweaters I recognize we are left

with a shoreline of moving docks (you are now speaking
about the ride in the dark and the horse moving towards me)

hip bone against hip bone, breath tossing through the night—
a frontier, a dream of distances: some meadow where we stay.
A Rustling

When the postman passes
I watch how he believes
in the words he deposits, believes
we are not so alone in our languages,
believes we are still
holding each other under
the roof while the rain
slopes and quivers
to the ground.

You lean, and move your arms
above your head, (letting a yellow
shirt fall to the rug): I watch
your body become whole, (bare
knees) a charge of leaves blown
beyond (window)
and I cannot collect

you. I watch leaves
shudder in the cold, shudder
and move away. I cannot
see them leave. In the morning
it is all bare rain and I reach
for you across the pillow. Don’t
wake you. Don’t touch ear
or hand. Don’t go for
the mouth. Do not begin
there (inside), just
listen to the rain. You rise
up and
do not begin there (your skin)
you rise up and the rain
keeps the sky quiet. Begin (again):
I hold you like a blown
leaf. I hold you into my mouth.
I hold—— yellow against a wall,
blowing (again), a history (of)
rustling.
Letter

Charlie Parker played while you showered, and I listened to the water knowing its way around your body. In it, there is breath and a world of notes, smooth and bare again. But tonight you are quiet and have given me no chemin dans un pays perdu.

I am asking to be more. Open as a word in the back of the throat, a small guttural feeling meant for the outside, a bridge. Who says that language has no body/wings, little units of sound like a thimble moving against a needle, finally landing just within the frame of your window, birds, (so still) this evening. And what is the difference between the lily flower and the water that keeps touching you in my house with the porch light a small humming and the dust from the horses hooves and the salt from their bodies and the blood from the animals you quartered washing from you as though in that water, away from the mountain sides, there were words finishing on the page.
Writing on the Flathead Indian Reservation

Because now you are in the field
with a view of the sharp-edged range,
and the man beside you, whom you love,
carries a portion of this Salish ancestry,
some things must remain secret.

You listen as the Jocko river and the wind
through the pines make inhuman sounds—
which are willow leaves and the hum
made in sunlight and the bee eating flowers—
here in the light, day washes over
a thousand needles.

Because here under the mossy
rain-drenched meadow,
in which I write,
there are objects buried underground:
a water pitcher passed from one valley to another,
a stone bowl a mother used to pound corn.
They are hidden in the earth the way blood
is quiet in the body.

Because a story without pages can still sing,
you listen,
there are birds shaking from branches,
seeds, air-borne and rising, on the wind.

Before you were here
this field had a view of the mountains
and in the field, with bear grass
to his knees, a young man without traps,
without a gun, stood watching a deer
come out of the pines, almost without sound,
almost without fear.
The Triptych (with people passing)

Shadows along the white walls
pass faintly across the triptych, caught
for a moment against the frozen scene:

as if in passion the maiden into the vagaries
of horizon. A blue frock. And underneath—
perhaps, a birthmark, darkening in its hidden disorder,

a splatter on pale skin. Only the panels on either side
indicate the limits of space. Moment by moment
she is an unseen horizon. Lingering there, spread,

her body and its perpetual desires. Now the museum
goers lean forward, as if celestial, resurrecting breath
from her mouth as church bells flex their ample sound
to mark the seventh hour of morning— until finally
they are fixed shapes again in a room of forms,
back from a crossroads, the tongs of space attempting
to close in upon the blue light that comes from her dress
as fume and salt light against the sea. Across the city,
bridges up-lift the night traffic, and workers make their way home.
Triptych (she slips out of her dress)

She slips out of her dress,
steps away to the window.
Yellow folds of silk gather
in a pile, seams hidden.

When he lifts it off the wooden floor,
he smells her body.

He notices emptiness in his arms.
In the lamplight, he touches the delicate stitching:
ribbon of wheat, boundary-line,
fence made of smoke.
Triptych (the body filled with longing)  
*The clouds float north*
*The clouds float south*

The body filled with longing has to have air. She loosens her braid, lets it weep.

Letters smell of cigarettes and wet leaves. All day she was inside of it.

She becomes the half-sister to tears. All day she was miles away from herself.

They rose and fell, hyacinths in the rain. On the bridge they moved like doves, or candles burning.

Afterwards the birds cried *chick-a-dee, dee, dee* instead of his voice.

She left a bowl of apricots in the rain. They kept coming back, singing below her doorstep.
L'Église

Through the archway
into the chapel— a dampness
like the touch of a palm against

my face. Dimness like the weight
of ashes, a mineral light, condensation
that both smolders and lifts-off

into the nave. Alone
in this century’s erasures.
We have gone so far into exile—

two candles burn. What I pray for
cannot———, (did I speak?)
they will glow, a silent theater, until nightfall.

Here the sleeping village rested. Here,
a whole world of saints down from the cliffs,
faces pale from clay and rain. An ancient aria

seeping through a language we no longer have
words for. It is no longer a body
holding up the altar but the eyes

and their wooden sadness, a color
beyond the sea more silent
than a photograph. Everywhere

stones, and windows too tall to see
out of and I want to console
something of the abandoned here.
Voices

I no longer trust my own life, you say
through the telephone. The world outside drips with rain,
black soil turning to spring mud, bare lilac trees
glistening with droplets. It's hailing
in Eugene and I'm alone with the cats.
I tell you it is okay to be sad when it rains.
Wait for the first opening, the blue entrance
of light. I can't believe it, you say. In your
sadness you become every woman as she dresses
in front of the mirror, wondering how
to hear over noisy street sirens
and what to eat when there is so much death
falling from the radio. Into silence
I recite Sappho before you can stop me once again,
limb-loosing love shakes me, bitter-sweet,
untamable, a dusky animal even though I know
you have never believed that language
can heal us. That night I dream over
and over of Greece, of rocking inside our boat,
white sails full of wind. I remember voices
whispering beautiful and fragile things to love about the world.
First Frost

First frost, skim of crystalline stillness, blades leaning toward the inevitable— my dog's

crashing through the red and yellow groundbrush, chasing his visible breath, everything caught

at the edge. All I see is the unraveling of leaf-matter, nakedness

of my hands. Leaves, flushed, fallen— it's as if my animal understands this,

coming through the bramble of heightened color, carrying his prize. His instinct as constant

as geese to their nesting ground, just as fighter planes curve toward their target,

he runs to me holding a kingdom in his jaws,

his black coat radiant, moving across the fractured earth.

He drops the deer leg at my feet, severed below the hip-joint, hoof a perfect smoothness,

hair almost the color of skin. I am struck by the arc, the yellow bone and sinew. Severed

from the body, it becomes a young birch stripped for kindling, my own pale arm.

Here's enough to hold the pillars of Jerusalem, here's the strength to jump barbed-wire.
The Horses on the South Fork of the Flathead River

In the river we see our horses
reflections, two brown manes facing
away from each other. They seem to float
from the river, toward the white cliff face
where the idea of a wall becomes more
than what holds us here.

For the horses, this does not change
what it means to stand inside a river.

We can see what it is to be water
underneath a body filled with light.
Leaves float over us and the two horses
continue across the river. On the mountain
in the distance there is a thin line of snow.
Red Leaf

A storm blows in. You are like a lost leaf and let it take you. Not speaking about two countries, you know more than to say the word (exile). But it lives like geese always moving in opposite directions, without power to stop leaving. Clouds come down and you wonder about penance (la cathédrale d’Albi, demons out of flame) and homelessness. You watch the darker ones leave and return. You see the sky open and hail on your garden, breaking flowers, but it passes and you collect green fruit with your hands. Storms never stay. You are a lost leaf and let it rush over you.

You are a leaf that has fallen and asks the wind to leave it there, by the schoolyard, in the palm of the child who will write a story about the red leaf—how it blew in from a village garden, smelling of the sea, having moved above blue waters like an albatross, wanting to go back and wanting to leave.
Winter Storm

To live as if nothing were known
of death, no world. Windows and walls holding
out the storm. Even the bleat of the goat
before it died, a lost note singing as it bled
into our veins, and then was silent. It wasn’t
just the sacrifice, it was the idea of the small carcass
settling under the roots of snakeweed. Of spring
and rainfall, of my own hands carrying its scent.
A bowl of blood next to a fire and a mouth moving
through the smoke. I’ll never know if we always
work against the world. The need for something
solid keeps tapping at the heart, the obligation
of building roofs, the resonance of hammer, tar, wood.
All night it falls and sings and I wonder if those
who hear it feel a sorrow in their throats as though
they are hearing the last song of the night-owl.
The single note giving way.
a welcoming to earth
—For Mara Montgomery Parks

You are born to a fathomless geology,
your eyelid a hammer between pounding images,
the petrified wood's maze of rings,
or the savage frost which collapses
out of an orange-flint glow
now folding into night.
Your world is what falls
from this early air,
cold and laced with tiny crystals,
what holds the heart in motion,
what vanishes in these avalanches of wind.
A Hunger

There are drafts everywhere, old coffee cups, notes to call a friend, laundry piling in the corners. You would give it all away, the ache toward a vision that never lasts, the poem that keeps remaking itself as the world is blown apart in other places. After an explosion there is just death: horror. No attempt to capture what is still exuberantly blowing in the air, the fractal madness of the pines, what is inseparable about dead lilac leaves and violence. We want to die inside the poem that says everything about our life—the blazing mercuric blasts that dazzle and do not wake us from what we have been dreaming.
Adélaïde’s Twelfth Century Home

Alone in the grand hall, you hear whispers.
A long mirror reflects your own pale cheeks.
You lean in, touch the wide marble hearth, her
fires fallen to a common darkness, meek.
An inconsolable stillness you fight
as the modern also rages against death.
Young troubadours desired her blue light.
She became steam rising from lakes, what is left
after the bell tower sings, bareness like a gate
ajar. I have almost lived there.
Nightfall

The sun goes down and turns
the mesa to blood as it brings
us night. A few miles away
in the last light along the canyon

rim, the jewelry sellers
are turning their pick-ups toward

Chinle. Their lights sweep like lanterns
across the desert. Last night snow

blew into the cracks of sandstone
and the peaks beyond the mesa. Now

the wind is picking up again. The sky
darkens and the mesa bleeds—
everything turns into sand washed
through the body. We are turning

away. We might use the words
*the sun has set*, but the body knows

it is the earth that leaves. Circling
as crows might, or aircraft before war—

we turn our backs. Snow from the west
continues to pile below a small juniper.
History of the West (three)

I have seen ridges that trace your body
through a distance I desire more.
There was dream of fishing this river
and the salt water I walked across:
there was a thought of falling through
and pale flowers after. Coming into being
with needles crisscrossing the path,
the frozen air held us, firs wrapped in night-call,
shadows falling away. Stars moved over the lake,
and fell again, and there is no memory
of the first time I tried to be everywhere:
there is nothing slow in the night,
no memory, only what warms us.
On Blue Mountain

Mountain ash shivers heavily
in the wind. A hundred birds leaving
(never enough time to know

their origins). I could sense all of this
and the season's golden fire. I could sense
all roads that move away in ten thousand different
gestures, tar and fissures laid-out beyond
the eye. Can I believe in what follows?
That at the end of those black corridors

lies some kind of answer, that these small
human efforts lead to the dream
of a fire so brilliant you have to close your mouth.

Breath everywhere: the sky never stops widening
to the far lines of the day-moon, dropping
upon us with leaves so full of death

that we are left only with meager
sentences to honor them. How can this be enough?
This crossing from one river's slow turn
to the hush of wings on a bridge-wire, an ecstatic
line that reaches from the particular; needles
that point away from the sky: script hidden

under the snow: blue filaments in the night.
And what I could say there. Say with a whole basket
of vowels, the copper labor of the fields,

Queen-Anne’s lace crocheting a grammar
so full of quiet that I am filled with variations
of the only word that means birthplace, heaviness,

sewing, and at this hour. By staying here
there is no sum and substance of the sea, no
great horizon. Essences are scattered and fossilized

in the ground. Salt moves on the mountain,
elk and deer linger there, tongues remaking
the memory of their origins, each atom echoing

backward, asking us to feel how far back we lean,
how we can almost be made alive,
full of wind and verbs, shelves of marsh-salt

and the smell of rot between the heart’s beating,
between the delicate submission of hill-grasses
and your own veins, their brightness pulsing.