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## A Flower Song

This white narcissus  
forced in Spring  
color of a lover  
in pain

Sweet  
as the lover's first  
meeting breath

Pale as he waits  
patiently  
bereft  
for one who never  
comes  
Who forgot  
how fleetingly

Beauty goes

From *The New Beautiful Tendons: Collected Queer Poems 1969-2012*, 2012, Spuyten Duyvil / Triton.

**A Stone Falling,  
A Falling Stone**

I am not afraid to fall.  
Drop me from a tower and I  
simply hit the earth. Hold on  
to me, I am earth still.  
I want to fall, it is the first  
dream for me. And the earth  
my drum that I play.

A stone falling, a falling stone.  
Whether I burn or not—  
that's beside the point.  
The point, this:  
when the earth  
makes a stone  
the sky still fathers it.  
When the earth makes a stone,  
it's made for falling.

I am not afraid to fall.

From *The Broken Flower*, 2012, Skysill Press (England).

## An Invocation

From cedar's green feathers  
From moss's cool fever  
From pitch-pine's field-taking  
From the heel-worn path

From cornfield's stalking  
From the cardinal's scarlet  
From persimmon & apple  
From blue-eyed grass in shadow

From footstep to cow path  
From goldenrod's augur  
From ice cracking oak limb  
From beech leaf in winter

From rosehip & goldfinch  
From storm clouds gathering  
From April's spring torrents  
From pond over-flowing

From the word unblemished  
From honesty in bloom  
From granite to flagstone  
From cat-paw & wind-blow

From Star of Parnassus  
From bluestem  
From poplar  
From each handshake taken

From beehive  
From bottomland quiet  
From squash bloom  
From dog sleep

From peril no thunder  
From muscadine's favor  
From mountain in snow light  
From everything under

From garnet & hawkweed  
From trout ever jumping  
From pecan & walnut  
From collard & field green

From bluet & aster  
From wild carrot  
From myself & from strangers  
From mystery's bedroom

From the formless  
From the void  
From the patient rose blooming  
From dove coo at morning

From magnolia camellia gardenia  
From dancing thunder

cedar's red odor  
earthworm's glowing  
pitch-pine's black tarring  
eye-light roaming

bobwhite ascending  
a royalty before us  
urgent oriole feeding  
late summer's Eden

mud pool & duck quack  
winter gathers  
frisson & weeping  
gold filigree forming

thorn & bright needle  
light darting through us  
creek's roaring persistence  
swamp's restraint ending

robust declension  
articulate blue  
columbine freshes  
soft goes the morning

tourmaline greening  
the meadow  
the tulip  
a prayer advocated

golden coagulate bomb  
no petulant view  
a shine  
a rumble

only dwellings to calm  
copper infusion  
a rabbit's furred thicket  
a thistle be thine

the owl & the red-tail  
the roe of attention  
bread everlasting  
canny pot liquor

concealment never  
the umbel of consciousness feeding  
the friend ever trenchant  
love's tortuous wisdom

the formed  
all-in-all  
the perilous night  
to midday's recountal

thrall  
a ridgepole at last

From solitude  
From abundant forgiveness

vibrant fortitude's castle  
compassion's great tact

From whatever you do or not do  
From the river crossing  
From the spirit descending  
From evening's quickening

find a meadow  
an island encountered  
a wine glass uplifted  
harmonious rest

From the secret unfolding  
From whirring cicada  
From apple forbidden  
From the snake on the path

the obvious moment  
velvet occasion  
knowledge abounding  
origin & ending

From sunlight through trumpet vine  
From tears' shivering sorrow  
From veronica & chickweed  
From mountain's re-greening

flame in the belly  
joy reshaping  
earth warmly responding  
eye filled with blue

From *Gospel Earth*, 2010, Skysill Press (England). Commissioned by the North Carolina Writers Conference to honor North Carolina historian William S. Powell.

## Annunciation

She asked only that  
her purity  
be a  
lily-flower and

from her womb might  
come children  
wholesome as fish and  
as green.

Why should an angel  
announce this  
blessing on her,  
a lowly

carpenter's wife?  
Even if David's song  
silken  
her blood

(and Joseph's),  
what myrrh  
can she give?  
To give

Life to a  
fleshless soul was her  
one hope —  
not countless

resonating sanctities  
palpable as figs and  
glowing  
pomegranates.

Still, joy  
confounds  
the common  
Galilean light.

In her smock  
folds  
she feels  
the whole earth

turning.  
While barley  
burnishes  
summery fields.

## Antinous in Egypt

*I myself felt a kind of terrible joy at the thought that that death was a gift. But I was the only one to measure how much bitter fermentation there is at the bottom of all sweetness, or what degree of despair is hidden under abnegation, what hatred is mingled with love.*

### Marguerite Yourcenar

*Memoirs of Hadrian*

Falcon. You were not enough.  
Protection is a harsh device.  
Comes only with the proper tools,  
the appropriate sacrifice. You knew  
that as well as I.

You served me well. At the end your  
hooded sleepy face never betrayed  
the wilderness in your blood. The hungry  
talons: so like myself in my impetuous love.  
Clutching for him took the uncanny  
form of physical drowning in a spiritual glove.

All gives way. All lights extinguish.  
White roses curl five petals  
under Venus's star. My skin oozes  
in honeyed ointment. No struggle  
in the Nile. No pain. Just litany  
and drowsy darkness claiming me.

Hadrian, my master. I am your Genius  
speaking to you from the grave.  
Know this enchantment binds!  
I am your falcon, will follow  
every arrow. No spear can harm me.  
When the hunted falls, they will  
be my prey.

A youthful oddity I am! So few sense  
Death's power. The sheer curtain  
keeping us from it. The blaze, oh,  
the blaze! Earthly passions pale before it.

The priests ignite their incense, murmuring  
their prayers - supplications to the multitudinous  
flower of the spheres. Red poppies flash  
faces at the gate - black throats groaning.

Falcon. You were not enough.  
Together we had to go, swelling  
the blood-bloom sinew in his chest.

From *The Fountain*, 1992, North Carolina Wesleyan College Press.



## Ars Poetica: The Queen

In collaboration with my others  
I build this hive. As I am  
Goddess, this, then, is my cathedral.  
Built of wax and lives. Of light  
and honey.  
It grows around me.

My first sensation  
was of yellow: a hum  
forcing my skin to see.  
Since then I have sung  
the praises of this operation.  
And counted the mysteries.  
Storing my drooly jewels.

From *The Fountain*, 1992, North Carolina Wesleyan College Press, and *Life of the Bee* song cycle with Lee Hoiby, 2001, Rock Valley Music, and *Life of the Bee* a book of poems in progress.

## Beauty and the Beast

Beauty

said the Beast

Please

let's have a little

peace

some quiet between us  
a little arrogance

perhaps

too.

Something sweet  
a little

melon

and a good time.

I'm

not so bad

am I?

I can move you

if you let me

try.

From *The Fountain*, 1992, North Carolina Wesleyan College Press.

## Birth

The beautiful man is dreaming  
All shrouds transfigured all childish dreads dissolved  
I am the man the horse the horse the man  
I am the dream dreaming itself the race done  
All man all human all Nature but Beyond

Along the rippling midnight stallion thrum  
I am the Dark One's dancing veil  
I am Love's shrouded truthful face

The super natural man

I have no secrets left to tell  
you glean them all  
You hear them in the salmon's run  
The badger peering from her ground the dog at play  
The child in mother's arms  
The stallion's stance  
Eden's verdant tendril surge my polished glance

You who have not known me know me now  
I am fecundity in blue  
I am Love's shrouded truthful face  
The azure's fiery gallant youthful locks

Too many words for I am just a face  
Altered by every canter every prance  
Altered by Holy Sleep and Hand-in-Glove  
I am fecundity in blue  
I offer all and nothing imparting Grace

Mystery of Heaven Secrets of the Sea  
Riddle of the Land have all revealed become  
I am the bluest eye and angel wing  
The call to Holy Marriage and to prayer  
The holy navel and the holy well  
I am the veil's immortal fields  
Death Dream and Birth envelop me  
I am the Dark One's circling veil

How many tumbles makes a saint  
How many coarse meals fractured ankles how many stones  
How many crashing oaks how many tears  
after their bloom has gone fragrance the room

Eyes universes in the geometric dark the dreamer's head  
Pale boy whose quicksilver hair becomes the shroud  
The poem of Seraphic Time and Timelessness revealed  
Cold comet harmony radiance of unceasing Earth  
I am the unsubstantial heart grown into Now

The super natural man

Too many words for I am just a face  
A mask of fret and innocence made world  
World teeming with ten thousand galloping things  
that shoot and flower always ever were

Touch soft these lips these eyes they speak a human tongue

Listen hushed in ultramarine as tender crows  
weep midnight sighs within the Sacred Grove  
The beautiful man is dreaming

*Embroideries of Sleep!*  
*Tranquility of the Holy Thorn!*  
*Tranquility of the Resurrected!*

All shrouds transfigured all childish dreads dissolved  
I am the Dark One's dancing veil  
I am Love's shrouded truthful face

I am the Bastard Angel and the Virgin Devil  
I am Again and Then and Was and Ever  
I am assembling and the wind is blowing  
I am the unsubstantial heart grown into Now

From *Spectral Pegasus / Dark Movements*, 2018, Kin Press.

## Bluebird

Blue bird  
come again

to the fastened  
box  
under the poplar  
where lay scattered  
green and orange  
tulips

The blues  
you've both given me

From *The Fountain*, 1992, North Carolina Wesleyan College Press.

## **Bluets**

As if the very  
leprechauns &  
fairies had spilt  
blue tea —

the little flowers.

From *Visions of Dame Kind*, 1995, The Jargon Society.

### Darkwood (from Gilgamesh / Enkidu)

Night in my childhood  
came strange:  
a stick found on the roadside strangeness  
of being  
without company

Our house  
facing the stream  
kind enough

I used to think I saw  
enter the dark wood  
an interruption  
birds singing

a person  
his deep black eyes  
among tree tops:

He threw gloom  
within one symmetry

invigorated air  
to make me Certain  
in the Wood

When my queer guide parted the bushes  
beside the forbidden brook

a single ray  
making me start: passing through me

At last I met the man

He held a lantern  
shedding dim light

Long black hair fell upon his shoulders

*This is the place he said  
I will prepare you*

Dazzled  
my own I saw the features before me were

From *The New Beautiful Tendons: Collected Queer Poems 1969-2012*, 2012, Spuyten Duyvil / Triton.

## Demeter's Sorrow

A heart that never knows it's broken  
thus collapses upon itself

its capillaries thickened                      wayward & wan  
longing                      shaping

And so I strode the world bold & womanly  
Motherly                      rich  
                    until then  
when I knew sorrow becoming grief  
grief becoming anguish  
anguish becoming catastrophe

Meadows sickened under my breath  
Rivers & lakes grew brown with muck  
then                      brown with nothing  
Nothing was my heart  
& nothing my gift to the uncommunicative earth

Where my sweet daffodil daughter?  
Where my pomegranate?                      My red & orange scented  
little me?

No one will answer me  
Stones turn their backs at my pleading

Enough

From my breath which once spoke rain now comes  
flame                      From my womb which one birthed oranges & ivy now  
descends                      Nothing

Nothing Nothing Nothing & more Nothing

I hold back & will not give  
I cannot give  
All generosity flees me stolen by the unknown rapier  
the wretched coward who shall know nothing but darkness  
dry fire                      death  
Surely, my brother Death will appease my suffering                      mirror & enlarge it  
as my futile womb shrinks & desiccates & I  
detonate my fruits with my pain

Let's see what mouths futility opens  
what tales the flowers' tender deaths will inscribe

I am my killing self now  
Do not cross me  
I am where you have never wished to come  
& now                      you are brought here by thievery  
by the unheard soft cries of daughter, Kore,  
my only                      my peach                      my white cloud whose nimbus  
danced the meadow  
whose song winnowed mine



Now all is Nothing  
gone with the morning heat  
blistering into coals

Ash! Ash! Ash on my brow!

I hold back & will not give  
Cannot give

I detonate the earth's fruits with my pain  
Taste fire  
Taste desert

Taste me in my anguish born of grief born  
of sorrow

My last fruit

My final generosity

Originally published in *Virginia Libraries*, 2004.

## Entomology

All I want:

your affection

The rest:

the earth  
mankind:

atoms

of dust

Little insects

From *The New Beautiful Tendons: Collected Queer Poems 1969-2012*, 2012, Spuyten Duyvil / Triton.

## Findings

I took the apple  
from where it fell  
& went down  
under the grass  
under the pasture's last  
wave of  
goldenrod light  
where the mole's  
inner sanctum lies  
where the apple seed  
is a bead of sweat  
in the cool earth.

I found there:  
the sun & the  
third thing.

From *Visions of Dame Kind*, 1995, The Jargon Society.

## Flowering Apricot

February's got  
a pink butterfly,  
*Prunus mume*, caught  
in your hair.  
What an exquisite  
loneliness.  
What a shook  
eye I got.

From *The New Beautiful Tendons: Collected Queer Poems 1969-2012*, 2012, Spuyten Duyvil / Triton.

How peaceful the porch swing on summer evenings  
when heat takes on shimmering coolness

How I sit to watch and listen

Faint musics shimmy from the neighbors  
Cars whizz by like carousel horses

How startling the sun sinks into the maple trees' fired leaves  
Oncoming silence sweet and deafening  
Perfect for remembering ... and forgetting

You will return? Or will your absence  
become coolness—this sweet and  
deafening silence?

From *Don't Forget Love*, 2018, Dispatches from the Poetry Wars.

I am thankful  
where many ferns are  
How tough the black root-masses  
covering stretches  
pale and shaggy  
leaning toward the sun without regret

How perfectly the wild poor ground  
shelters cheerfulness  
sodden drippings  
cold mists

When I was a child  
I learned how good a thing  
shade is                      The sound of it  
The same note repeated  
A secret nothing

Observing things that escape  
strong long-sighted people

From *Don't Forget Love*, 2018, Dispatches from the Poetry Wars.

## I Have Never Wanted

I have never wanted to  
write  
the perfect poem, only  
the imperfect, as the human is  
as the stone  
underfoot's not  
perfect  
but perfected by its being  
stone:  
the poem  
perfected  
by its being  
and me being  
human  
also that.

I have always wanted the  
under  
side of things, the side  
shaded  
by moss, the coolness under  
the walkway  
stone, the silver and  
spotted  
backside of the Elaeagnus  
leaf.  
I have  
always  
wanted the elegance  
of the unseen  
when the  
light

first comes through and the shine  
(is) there all the time  
wanted:

I have  
always wanted  
the poem  
perfected.

From *The Broken Flower*, 2012, Skysill Press (England).

*I will write you when I am coming  
Wait for me on the porch where I  
left you  
Near the mimosa*

I want it to be evening  
The sun just dropping  
I want the porch to be pleasant with  
tea cups and strange flowers  
and dogs snoring under the table

Out of your letter's ashes  
I need no gold nor silver diet

And not till afterward  
a handkerchief stolen from  
the black eyes of evening

From *Don't Forget Love*, 2018, Dispatches from the Poetry Wars.



## Imminent Flower

From the window the blue jay blurted  
out the first thing

So fluid between them: Imminent flower

The only now:                      The little exasperations:

Very quiet a single  
lamp burned in  
the hall

His knotted hands  
His relenting ribs and chest

Love:

An exhausted but resolving clarity

The blue jay got everything between  
them

From *The New Beautiful Tendons: Collected Queer Poems 1969-2012*, 2012, Spuyten Duyvil / Triton.

## Italian Scene

*It is through celebration that we become part of what we perceive; the great arc of birdsong — that runs around the world in the receding darkness & through which we are swept into the light of day — is as much part of the dawn as the sun's first flash.*  
Norman Mommens

Morning swifts piercing rippled clouds their circling narrows a blue tower  
Cypresses between vineyards hillsides hung with goats & stormlight  
Villas in rain figs marrying the vine  
Perpendicular cliff footpath to cave rosemary midnight crevice  
Pick up stone surprise eternal weightlessness how heavy  
Straw whispers Goddess's cold breath  
Then falling water lemony smoke warm breezes  
Pick up stone surprise eternal density how light  
We pass a red blaze roasted pears honey wine  
Under deepening sky a hundred candles in windows  
Simple rapture woman crouching in the garden

From *Gospel Earth*, 2010, Skysill Press (England).

## **Le Quattro Stagioni: The Four Seasons**

### **Spring**

Time of illusive  
shadblow:  
white snow when  
snow supposedly has turned  
its back on the world.

Yellow time:  
forsythia  
and daffodil  
the sun's tiger-green eyes  
through new sycamore leaves.

The skink:  
electric fellow  
listening for the goldfinch  
waiting for the ant's  
civilized caravans to return.

Mothers  
floating  
up:  
scent of violets  
from ruined earth.

### **Summer**

You would not believe it  
if I told you  
but I will tell you  
anyway.

The light faded,  
old fruit  
darkened around its  
edges.

Rains came pouring:  
water from giants  
in the sky to the giants  
of the earth.

All laughing  
at us, at each other,  
laughing so hard  
their tears cleansed

the still paths  
in the garden—  
the more still paths  
in the soul.

### **Fall**

In dry grasses—  
crickets—  
brothers to Orpheus.

Geese in pairs.  
Their cowed heads  
contented, wine-colored.

Late daisies—  
fiddle music—  
the goldenrod's torches.

A jig for love—  
Love me—  
Love me not—

Love me.

### **Winter**

Ice forms before we can name it,  
although its name is as old as the world.  
In the night white fires smolder,  
our bodies heating the cold's corners.

Morning light:  
squirrels waking to dig  
snow.  
Chickadees' slow

hammering.  
Cardinals' sly crack  
opening the chill.  
Between snowflakes

the butterfly's heart.  
Between snowflakes:  
Silence. The night sky.  
A human voice remembering.

From *The Broken Flower*, 2012, Skysill Press (England).

## little: a Happy Hill Sutra

for SF, TM, GW, JW

For all the Little People in the worlds (ours and theirs).  
All of us have not forgotten you.

*I came to crush time to study you to teach.*

### The Buddha

\*\*\*\*\*

Little enough said little enough thought little enough forgotten little enough

Porch's cold concrete bumble bee's rafted catacomb fog lifting

Bat mother in porch eave tell us your favorite supper

Incessant wren listen cars climbing the mountain one mouth feeding another

Doves weeping on boughs dawn rain

Gay feather in daylilies splinter in finger

In the dress shop peonies in the garden peonies in the mind one

My pockets empty wren hopping cricket death chicks cheeping no rain today

Mournful crow fireflies where are you Gods & Goddesses fern fronds

Two green grasshoppers bathroom's red walls you looking in mirror too

Wasp carrying green worm back again one minute here one minute gone Sisyphus or Sage

Negative space no Positive space on

Fingers aflame with spring water nothing lasts

Not this not that white shadows on the hemlock boughs

Too much said too much thought too much forgotten too much

One day a man came I am not he observe

From *Gospel Earth*, 2010, Skysill Press (England).

## Lovesick Shirt

They visit him  
Grown thin  
No flesh  
No bones  
Nothing resembling a body

Love's wrapped him in an ill suit  
No visible trace left

From *The New Beautiful Tendons: Collected Queer Poems 1969-2012*, 2012, Spuyten Duyvil / Triton.

## Meeting the Centaur: HorseMan

I skirt the black and put my flowers on  
I trail a path from tower to tomb  
I skirt the tomb and enter married bower  
I hold the horse's rein and ring the runes

Fair muscled centaur redder than the stain  
Dancer and dance mummer to my whim  
Embrace me churn me in a cosmic shower  
I am the Dark One all more beautiful

Why does the world exist nothing to nothing comes  
Assuming form I do myself undone  
My blaze of tulips parrot galaxies and none  
My foliate armor my wedding pendant flown  
My gloves of hammered sprigs of vegetative force

My eyes gazing from original springs  
I germinate and shepherd within the Green  
And Blue my talisman to my dying self  
And horse myself into reviving God

Blue Prince ethereal  
Authority dignified  
I am the Dark One all more beautiful

Are you terrestrial or real or both  
Saintly pearl ringing in the rune  
I know you sister mother daughter  
I know you brother father son

Here is my beard it grows like water down  
Here hangs my tender scepter sleeping with its crown  
Here my snowy helmet my glittery earth  
Are you my witness or my husband now

My raven whitened by transfigured blood  
My soul sense heightened by prey I've sought and found  
In Jordan's currents delight and stillness reign  
Fair muscled centaur in white we are as one

Why does the world exist something to something comes  
Assuming form I do myself become  
Are you there prancing Grecian young  
Remember the Secret Commonwealth we share

I skirt the black and put my flowers on  
I trail a path from tower to tomb  
I skirt the tomb and enter married bower  
I hold the horse's rein and ring the runes

I am the Dark One all more beautiful  
I germinate and shepherd within the Green  
And Blue my talisman to my dying self  
And horse myself into reviving God

Here ends the last exile of the common man

## **Millennium Approaches**

That the world is painfully beautiful painfully sad  
That spent blossoms recall earth under which they once slept  
Remembering air into which they now fall

From *Life of the Bee* song cycle with Lee Hoiby, 2001, Rock Valley Music, and *Life of the Bee* a book of poems in progress.



## Minotaur

*Hic quem creticus edit Dedalus est Laberinthus  
de quo nullus vadere quivit qui fuit intus  
ni Theseus gratis Adriane stamine iutus*

This is the labyrinth which the Cretan Daedalus built, out of which nobody can find his way except Theseus, nor could he have done it unless he had been helped by Ariadne's thread, for love.

—From the cathedral at Lucca, on the church porch, translated by Guy Davenport

for Anais Nin

1.

Deep the well                  Deep also its darkness  
winding out                  and in  
the deep                  opalescence  
                                         lit  
from the twilight bridge  
spun between

2.

Love  
the first cause  
I sing of  
the bull  
in druidic white  
frothy white as veils  
in Pasiphae's  
dream chambers were white  
bells

3.

Of flowering  
narcissus  
I sing  
of  
he who of this earth(sea)  
wrestled the bull  
among mothwings'  
glitter of comings  
and goings

4.

From night a breast-plummeting bird

That love

may make martyrs of us  
in the heart's quartered house  
I build a labyrinth  
peopled by the half-bull

5.

In this city

likenesses of fire  
of fire

we, the seduced

given

From *The Fountain*, 1992, North Carolina Wesleyan College Press.

## Minotaur Exposed

For John Menapace

*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time*  
**T. S. Eliot**

Think often of my eyes:  
Through one forged of  
steel & glass  
I view the world

Eye awakens:  
Not the water, but  
a patterned energy made visible\*  
by it:

Silence  
music reaches for:

Still point where  
notes gather pattern  
path meets pathway

⌘⌘⌘

If there were a place  
I could enter  
I would enter it finding  
the door in the wall the wall itself

This side that side  
vanishes  
Endlessly here endlessly not

⌘⌘⌘

A door opens:  
Neither somewhere nor nowhere  
On the other side either  
something or nothing

Close your eyes you  
hear it

Open them

Is it gone?

⌘⌘⌘

I shape wood into mist  
I make grasses into water

I grow my hair long  
& white

The eye looking straight on hears  
the zigzag electric  
in the upright thing

⌘⌘⌘

There! A crack  
in the wall  
A moment's verdant skin  
dense with ceremony & resemblances

Green will out

I leave my chambered room  
Yet another nautilus summons me  
Death's river beyond the courageous door  
Living door beyond the tranquil world

Setting forth even lazy boats startle in anticipation

⌘⌘⌘

Receive me O compassionate  
entrances & exits!

O world made contradictory & real  
by time, men, & wander arriving!

I knew you even before my eye  
I knew you before the first leap scarred my heart  
When love thundered through the corridors  
& brutality relinquished me

⌘⌘⌘

A Holiness in the wor(l)d  
Enter into its courts with praise

\*Hugh Kenner

From *With Hidden Noise Photographs* by John Menapace, 2007, Rose Éleveé, and *Gospel Earth*, 2010, Skysill Press, England.

## Mockingbird

Not that he intends  
                                to be seen

No      not that  
But instead  
from the lonely cliff of his heart  
an untame song becomes  
a generous valve  
                                within the cherry branches

Whether the chipmunk  
looks up  
or I  
from her rocky grove  
with bucket and sweet greed  
pause  
in picking  
the red globes

It doesn't matter

The song itself  
The only audience  
The song

From *The Fountain*, 1992, North Carolina Wesleyan College Press.

## Music

I'll not forget that  
afternoon in the room  
when after we  
drank the rime, your  
brown buttocks set  
the new tune.  
How reckless it seems  
now, but what bites  
decorated your lips  
then, and what  
hard symphonies  
we played out on  
that lyre-shaped  
rug-covered bed.

From *The New Beautiful Tendons: Collected Queer Poems 1969-2012*, 2012, Spuyten Duyvil / Triton.

## **Paradiso**

I go where  
feathers blow

World

From *Gospel Earth*, 2010, Skysill Press (England).

## **Pause**

before you turn the page

Pause with me ...

There

That's it

The ancient place

The now place

Now go ...

From *Gospel Earth*, 2010, Skysill Press (England).



## Pegasus

Let me dress you for a funeral  
Let me decorate your grave with tulips and owl leavings  
Let me swift as wind fast as water-wave bathe you in wonder  
Let me in eyelid flick gust quantum breath over you  
Let me descend sleep into you  
Let me clatter my bones in mesmeric song  
Let me cool you with my wings' cold fire

I am Pegasus Spectral  
Pegasus Reversed  
I am your nightmare-longing toward dust  
Be not afraid

Terrible the ways of men  
Terrible the rib-cage's prison Noon's paralyzing auguries

My seed crescents the widest delta  
My grave the blackest richest loam  
And tulips await you on my stony ground

Your dance blesses you  
Your devotion blesses you  
My mystery blesses you  
You my foal seasoned for sacrifice  
Ripe for reckonings and reversals bindings and elopements

Hypnotics of your white eyelashes  
Purification of your head's whitest hairs

Stop shaking  
Every funeral prophesies resurrection  
In quiet you will hear cymbals bang and clang  
Stampedes crushing mind-forg'd manacles

I will instruct you while dressing you  
I will suit you for a crown

Here hides the secret your uttermost desire  
Moist as the grave moist as the birth canal  
Moist as your weeping your dancing

When I release you ravens populate the mountains  
The almond prospers the cloister again

Liberty and Love the two Great Secrets  
Making the Divine Mind smile  
Making Death forget himself and sing  
Paradise regained  
Without contraries is no progression

Your hair standing on end  
The Namer and the Named

## St. Jerome in His Study

after Dürer

There is a jar  
buried beneath the cloister  
with five words I have  
kept in my pocket  
all my life

solitude and wisdom  
light and virtue and  
a shadow of pain with thick lips  
drinking from a cup

Once in the gardens  
I watched a sparrow  
carry a blue silence  
to the mountains

It was a rosy sorrow  
I caught there  
an underground rolling  
of pure water  
life's ever-  
lasting dahlia  
sacred

How the sunlight  
sweetens the room  
all I own written in the very boards  
what I have given away  
what comes to me

The mangled flesh  
of fish  
in a basket  
A weaving staccato  
watering my soul

The almond  
a taste I will never forget  
brown  
beautifully simple

From *The Golden Legend*, 1981, Floating Island Publications.

## Sebastian at Siege

Mother, the air is a thief.  
It steals salt from the body, loosens  
the Will, until it splays out, liquid.  
I sit straight up in bed, naked,  
looking in the mirror. This, my body,  
which I consume. The tendons  
and frets on which it hangs.  
Hating it once, it is now so beautiful, dying  
in its time. Learning how to learn, to whistle  
with the starlings, names a tender absolution.  
In this Byzantine chamber, the air  
makes a fist. An angel  
bursting through the chalice of the flesh.  
In these catacombs I perfect my sweat.

From *The Fountain*, 1992, North Carolina Wesleyan College Press.

## Shedding the Old Self

In silence's adored and silkened embrace  
I shed my body its skin a fragrant  
papershell a narcissus  
I shed it again and again  
under the old motherly moon  
I shed it in dreaming's womb  
and always it remains the same  
wrinkled and smooth

Soft body of sunflowers  
body of iris blue and yellow body  
you taste and smell of olives  
and geraniums  
With the strength of stones  
you settle on the earth

And I shed you  
like light on a mountain  
under the sea  
or a robe fresh woven  
falling gracefully to the ground

From *The Golden Legend*, 1981, Floating Island Publications.

## Snake in Autumn

I could have stood there  
until  
the creek dried up.  
Coiling  
and uncoiling. I  
was that happy and that  
terrified.

The snake silent.

The coiling and uncoiling.  
Both blessed and troubled—  
radiant in my  
red and blue heats  
before him.

Silent.

I

The yellow came from him.  
A golden mesmerizing eye.  
Between us  
the creek flowing.  
Coiling and un-  
coiling.

From *The Broken Flower*, 2012, Skysill Press (England).

## Song

Tomorrow he comes  
We will turn down  
the five blankets the woven spread  
the sheets those doves  
from the dark places  
the recesses his eyes  
with their perpendicular fire  
Green he will say  
Green and slow  
as cold snow whips our window

I'll give up my ghost  
under his crooning  
under his crooning

From *The New Beautiful Tendons: Collected Queer Poems 1969-2012*, 2012, Spuyten Duyvil / Triton.

## Sweet Fennel

Ah, here in the  
tall grasses  
*Foeniculum* umbels  
of green & yellow.

Rubbing my bare chest  
with sweetness &  
soft fern,  
the tongue swooning.  
Profound  
unisons.

From *Visions of Dame Kind*, 1995, The Jargon Society.

## That Night

That body	tree on a misty hill
That face	fawn with dark eyes
That full moon	surrounded by evening skies
That hour	pavement ending in dust
That grass	green with summer's black-green
That night	coming over us with its breath
That sound	crickets singing at eye level
That body	me on the ground with their song
That body	another touching me with fire
That fire	round as the moon burning as the sun
That face	fawn with dark eyes
That you	speaking in tongues unknown and green
That sound	crickets singing in my ear
That body	tree on a misty hill

From *The New Beautiful Tendons: Collected Queer Poems 1969-2012*, 2012, Spuyten Duyvil / Triton.



## **The Beaver**

Sweet is the fish  
which is not fish at all.

Whose great balls  
the hunters wish to take.

Whose tail like a sole  
follows it.

Whose size  
no bigger than a Country Dog.

In daytime, of water.  
In night, of the woods.

Whose upper teeth cut down  
huge trees.

Sweet is the fish  
which is not fish at all.

From *An Elizabethan Bestiary: Retold*, 1999, Horse & Buggy Press.

## The Big Bang: River Jordan

The river's name in Hebrew is *Yarden*  
Derived from *yarad* meaning "descend" or "flow down"

I am assembling and the wind is blowing  
I wear no hat but warm my head with gleam  
The prison of my clothes fast disappearing  
Into the bat-wing motions wherein I fling

The vastness of my scarf teases my voice  
Into a wilderness of wild and tender dances  
I bend the wind I turn my forces  
I lean and wonder through the Paradise I am

I am the first the primal constellating Adam  
I am the pink at Solar System's center  
I am comet burn listing toward the maelstrom  
I whim my hands into a violet prayerful Jordan

I am a beastly bird with bones spontaneous  
With stark disarming potential succor  
I twist myself Gravities of Nothing  
And from my Nothing the Universal forms

I am the Bastard Angel and the Virgin Devil  
I am Again and Then and Was and Ever  
I am assembling and the wind is blowing  
I am the tale telling itself again

From *Spectral Pegasus / Dark Movements*, 2018, Kin Press.

## The Cat

Her eyes glister above measure  
can hardly be endured  
casting forth beams  
                                in the shadows and  
                                darkness.

With the full moon they shine.  
More fully at full.  
More dimly in the wane.

Flattering by rubbing  
                                against one.

Whirling with its voice.

Having as many tunes  
                                as turns.

Seeking fire  
                                birds  
                                mice  
                                serpents.

To lie soft.  
To leap  
                                toss  
                                roll.

To come near and  
                                stay  
home.

From *An Elizabethan Bestiary: Retold*, 1999, Horse & Buggy Press.

## **The Goodbye Nest**

This day  
the orphaned wren's eggs  
laid to rest  
The rest  
        nest and rumble  
tossed to wind in  
the rim of creeping cedar  
back of the house

All is not lost

From *The Fountain*, 1992, North Carolina Wesleyan College Press.

## The Green Man's Man

*The mind, that ocean where each kind  
Does straight its own resemblance find;  
Yet it creates, transcending these,  
Far other worlds, and other seas,  
Annihilating all that's made  
To a green thought in a green shade.*

**Andrew Marvell**

*Green, I want you green.*  
*Green wind. Green branches.*

## Federico Garcia Lorca



For a long time I  
stand at the oak's foot  
asking it

What can you tell me of  
time weather

Its heartbeat doesn't stop  
It moves ahead in  
its rooted place  
swaying its canopy in the wind

Dark wind      Bright wind  
It never says a word  
It just keeps talking



In order to make sense  
of the ground  
I build an earthen hill and sit upon it

The ants welcome me as their brother  
Bees radiate out in golden circuits  
while above the oaks' light-hungry leaves  
spread wide                      The clouds  
call me                                changing their forms

Each day I visit my mound  
till one day the rains come  
Then I float  
happy and wet  
among the tadpoles' delight  
the moccasins' white-mouthed praise

⌘ ⌘ ⌘

I ask the wind to carry me  
and it does

Opening my catkins

I make it rain yellow  
I make sunshine into powder

⌘⌘⌘

I open Nature's book  
finding:  
The more I know  
The less I know

Finding under the oak:  
*majesty in a creeping snail*  
*deliberation*                      *seriousness*  
*shyness and yet*  
*what absolute trust*  
*the deeply slumbering spirit within\**

⌘⌘⌘

Once when the hurricane slammed the oak  
to the ground  
I walked stunned within its branches  
elaborate with mistletoe

Girth sacrificed to its friend wind  
Dignified even then

⌘⌘⌘

Oak:  
*A garden and country\*\**  
Father to perpetual fire  
Channel of the gods and goddesses  
Opening heaven's crack  
Last leaf never falling

I, in my green shirt,  
put on my broad antlers  
sure-footed, Druidic, lichen-dressed

A wizened-woodman

⌘⌘⌘

To entice the eye  
into the mysteries of time and weather  
I sprout leaves

⌘⌘⌘

The oak my father

Twig in winter  
Bud in spring  
Leaf in summer

Acorn in autumn

⌘⌘⌘

All that I am:

A woodpecker at dusk and dawn  
on the white oak trunk

A cardinal flower at field's edge reading cloud shadows

The cardinal points - every direction a good and purposeful one

Every oak an axis through earth's center

⌘⌘⌘

Ah, the lacewing's found the horn-of-plenty at the oak's foot

⌘⌘⌘

Sometimes I think there are two of me  
for my arms are so big I embrace so much  
It just doesn't seem that I can be just one

But then One is what I am and  
like being  
as all the oaks are One Oak  
as all rivers roar into One

⌘⌘⌘

I sit at my table counting  
the times an acorn hit me  
on the head  
or the times I looked up straight  
up into glinty leaf frissons  
when the sun's brevity broke  
through the multitude and  
I, too, looked down at myself  
*Green thought in a green shade*

⌘⌘⌘

The blue jay quarrelsome as  
he is  
                    has style

For this the oak befriended him  
Together they made a forest  
one  
                    acorn  
                    by  
                    one

## A Green Narrative in Green Shade:

Dylan Thomas's "Force that drives the green fuse that drives the flower" alludes, at least in part, to the primal energy signified by the Green Man. Thomas portrays the force's potent urgency toward deterioration and death, but the Green Man's energy, even then, despite Thomas's depressive assessment, brims with fecundity. A figure of unlimited vegetative force, the Green Man appears in many cultures and in many disguises. He survives as both pagan god and Christian icon. In the greater archetypes he is the dying and reviving god of ancient religions, and the Sacred Tree as depicted in the *Vedas* and in Norse mythology. One can catch a glimpse of him, not yet quite overcome by green, in Neolithic imagery, in Tammuz of the Babylonians, in the Egyptian god Osiris, in the Dionysian Mysteries, and in (*Kur-noo-nohs*) Cernunnos of the Celts. We also sense him in the divinities of Jainism, the American Indian, the Brazilian forest, and in the Aztec God Xipe Tótec (whose *heart is emerald*). He lives in the tales of Robin Hood, Jack-in-the-Green, the King of May, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

The Green Man's fertile residence within Christian iconography concentrates, as in no other mythology or religion, in the figure's head. In the West, the oldest type manifests as a single leaf or many leaves forming a male head. In another, vegetation disgorges from his mouth, and even sometimes from his ears and eyes - forming his hair, beard, eyebrows, and moustache. Finally, in some, his face materializes as fruit or flower born and nestled within the green. His eyes always look at us from the original spring.

For me, the Green Man lives most in the Sufi being, Khidr (a *wali*, or enlightened one, sometime called a prophet or even an angel), known as the Verdant or Green One, whose footsteps leave a green imprint. He appears unexpectedly to the true aspirant and inspired poets when they least expect him and most need him. Khidr, in my opinion, is in all probability the strongest influence on our most familiar church images of the Green Man. After the conquest in the West, Arabic masons and carvers shared not only their highly evolved technical skills, but also their stories, with Romanesque and Gothic artists. Present before then in western culture, the Green Man, at this point, solidifies his power as Christian icon. As a symbol of resurrection and regeneration his image becomes integral, especially from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, to many of the great cathedrals and wayside churches of Europe.

The Green Man is not separate from us; he is our source, emphasizing and celebrating the positive creative laws of Nature, the native intelligence that shepherds and protects this world, and the ecological rightness that guides us. The Green Man reveals and bestows life's mysteries – indeed, he embodies them - generating in us the impulse to personify anything that deeply moves us, and compelling us to plow our hands into the soil where his promise dwells, nestled in Persephone's arms, perpetually ready to germinate in and nurture the world.

From *Gospel Earth*, 2010, Skysill Press (England). Commissioned by the North Carolina Botanical Garden on the retirement of Assistant Director Ken Moore.



## The Listeners

for Jonathan Williams on his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday

ONCE there was a country where bird songs were held in the highest regard. However, as it is with most things humans cherish, they were often taken for granted. Nevertheless, much time was spent categorizing and debating their curlicues' and coo-coos' finer points, preserving much admired songs for subsequent generations.

The preferred method for studying songs involved sitting in a peaceful setting (a garden, a wood, a boat on a pond) and simply waiting for a bird to sing from the branches of nearby trees, the fields' verges, the airwaves of the winds. Many beautiful and unique songs were discovered this way. After many centuries, through such sterling and productive methods of collection, a repertoire became established. The people understood these songs. Even their subtleties were discernible by many, and could be explained to those who could not understand (sometimes in quick order but frequently in dense and massive tomes).

Unbeknownst to these adoring practitioners of the listening arts, the world filled with thousands of other, perhaps subtler or brasher, unheard songs from birds hiding in bushes or in the deepest woods, on high mountaintops, in noisy city streets, or drifting above the ocean's roar, the earthquake's rumble and the desert's heat. Occasionally, in the evolution of birds, one of these seemingly awkward but equally serious songsters would fly inadvertently by storm or happenstance or curiosity into the domain of the Listeners.

A predictable response occurred: the offending feathered beast would be shooed away at best, and at worst, pelted with stones for disturbing the peaceful poise of anticipated song. Less frequently one of these invaders, perchance by observing and listening, would learn enough sanctioned winning notes and sing.

Begrudgingly, almost, these entrepreneurs would be allowed a place on the bandstand. A hundred years later, they, too, were part of the canon, often hailed as innovators who changed the way of song forever.

IN this country lived one farmer who since childhood had wondered at the stranger noises he heard on the edge of the fields and woods. Since adulthood, when the crops were in and his other responsibilities laid to rest, he had searched the earth for songs no one had heard.

He was admired for his tenacity, tolerated for his practically querulous obsession with the other, smiled at for his foolishness, and gently pitied for his ear's loose logic and eccentric tone. Indeed, he had been responsible, at times, for coaxing a rare voice to sing from some tree in a Listener's garden so the Listener could take credit for finding a new but acceptable song.

Most often he was ignored, or at least left to his own too simple or too impulsive devices. Why he seemed to have no aesthetic, or at least a schizophrenic one! (Once it was discovered that he could sing with these odd birds, as if he were one of them. Most unusual! And most dubious!)

His mind was full of the twittering of birds. His life's work, when not farming, was to preserve the gene pool of song, the primitive, the celestial, and the lovable unloved.

THUS things continued as they always had. While the Listeners held their conferences and wrote their monographs and bibliographies, the farmer wrote furrows in his fields and planted the field within his mind. While the majority preserved the comfortable, though without doubt the oftentimes valuable and beautiful songs, the farmer salvaged and recorded the unknown ones.

It seemed it was meant to be like this and all were happy. The great numbers of unknown, unappreciated, ignored, or uncataloged and secret birds felt a gratefulness that someone, some one, cared. They could not, however, completely remedy a hint of melancholy in their songs, and truthfully didn't care to. But at other times their protector allowed them to feel the untamed grace of their off-color yet essential notes. Then they would wonder, "Perhaps another world exists or even many, where a vibrant many-ness holds sway, where one listener's ear, no matter how uncommon its inner workings, is as highly cherished as another's."

AS for you, dear reader, search out a new tree, a different hill, a separate cove. Perhaps a bird of some other song will sing for you, a bird of another color will fly before you, a bird of a variant sweetness, or peep, or trill, or caw, or burp, will fill your ear, gut, or heart today. Who is to say then, for sure, in that other country, whether a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush? We can never know, can we?

From *Gospel Earth*, 2010, Skysill Press (England).

## The Loom

Willie Mae Gill  
1903 - 1995

She lived for cotton,  
the growth of sons,  
one daughter lame, a mother  
ornery, mean.  
She walked with coleus,  
gloxinia, begonia stems,  
rooting in a well-dug humus from  
the woods. Sung hymns,  
washed pots, forgave.  
Left nothing undone.  
Molted in summer's tomato-scent air,  
in winter took wings  
warped by textile's shuttle.  
No searing hardship, no  
humidity, feared.  
Not any fabric  
weaves on any loom.

From *The Broken Flower*, 2012, Skysill Press (England).

## The Man Who Ate Butterflies

You wouldn't think  
he would do such a  
thing in public in  
front of children or  
even dogs who have  
been known to eat  
wasps (are always  
embarrassed) But he  
cannot stop himself  
To imagine the sweet  
nectar stolen by the  
proboscis the cool  
air between the wings  
the colored dust He  
thinks "Turkish De-  
light! Yum! Yum!"  
Before you know it he  
has grabbed the poor  
thing and swallowed  
He likes flowers and  
so spends many after-  
noons visiting gardens

From *The Broken Flower*, 2012, Skysill Press (England).

## The Spell

To see my Gods

to charm  
their nudity

with  
a word

I assume

a buck's  
sleek neck

steal

a quail's  
small mouth

From *The Fountain*, 1992, North Carolina Wesleyan College Press.

## The Spirit of the Hive

Back in the shaggy  
underbelly  
of the hive  
in the quick amber  
of the Queen's chamber  
the message  
passes, testifies  
phenomena of order.

Come. Come  
with me to the sweet  
chestnut flower,  
the viola and the fox-  
glove.  
Finger and invade  
the low-slung  
                    swinging willow.

In circuitous dances  
it tumbles:

the one prayer.  
Before and after.  
Precise as distance.

From *Life of the Bee* song cycle with Lee Hoiby, 2001, Rock Valley Music, and *Life of the Bee* a book of poems in progress.

## The Sting

With great stealth and smoke  
approach our dome. For if not,  
a flame, dry and burning, a dazzling  
destruction, only  
momentary,  
will greet you.

You, who threaten, let  
this pin-prick, this red  
fever-bite, be a warning.  
In our saracen tunnels,  
we hold our own, asking  
nothing.

From *Life of the Bee* song cycle with Lee Hoiby, 2001, Rock Valley Music, and *Life of the Bee* a book of poems in progress.

## The Swarm

First, the miraculous  
droning, sibilant  
dances directing and thumping,

buzzing in the foundation,  
snipping and cutting  
green air.

A great muffled drum,  
the chorus tenses.  
Its sibyls pour out

in a drunken jet  
to sing it: the bee-flock,  
the thunder-polleners

who tell exodus in a roaring tissue  
their matriarch with them  
throbbing Exalt!

Exalt! up to the pear tree.  
Then, from the mass molten  
with magnetism and cracks,

a yawn explodes, clumps  
to the pear limb,  
and silences.

Even now, scouts shuttle  
through the branches making  
fiery mummary to the sun:

inciting compass.  
The fathoming nucleus  
waits for the telling.

This is a thing,  
some will say,  
men will not do.

From *Life of the Bee* song cycle with Lee Hoiby, 2001, Rock Valley Music, and *Life of the Bee* a book of poems in progress.

## **The Whale**

Biggest and most  
monstrous creature.

Lying calm  
in the close deep.

From *An Elizabethan Bestiary: Retold*, 1999, Horse & Buggy Press.



## **Thrush's Parable**

Tree

## **Adam's Gospel**

Torso trunk tree

From *Gospel Earth*, 2010, Skysill Press (England).

## **Told in a Dream**

My job one raindrop Listen

From *Gospel Earth*, 2010, Skysill Press (England).

## **Variations on a Malay Theme: The Changes**

Cotton changes into thread.  
    Thread into pants and jackets.  
You let me go. Forget me.  
    I've become another.

Many men show black locks.  
    I hang bracelets on my arms.  
Many say, Forbidden.  
    I obey my heart.

From *The New Beautiful Tendons: Collected Queer Poems 1969-2012*, 2012, Spuyten Duyvil / Triton.

## What I Know About Poetry

for William Carlos Williams & Jonathan Williams

Bindweed grabs  
the cornstalk not  
                    to strangle  
but  
            to blossom.  
Honeysuckle trips  
                    the walker  
so he  
            falls.

Thus:  
to smell the sweet

            flowers  
                    near  
the intelligent  
lowly  
            ground.

From *Visions of Dame Kind*, 1995, The Jargon Society.

## **When You Stop to Rest**

the swallows  
in you  
remain  
in you

From *The Fountain*, 1992, North Carolina Wesleyan College Press.

Your lack anointed me  
I stood wretched in its wrack  
Rain forgot its way through the oak leaves  
Troubling its way onto the moss then stopped  
It gave up to sun just dappled just broken  
Then rain again

You in another city where no rain falls  
My streets glistening with your stride your shadow

Stepping down into the moss I wonder  
*How can I live?*

The pine warbler trebles  
She knows something I don't  
Listening I hear her telling me  
promises that *won't* be broken

From *Don't Forget Love*, 2018, Dispatches from the Poetry Wars.