



Nothing
is
wasted

POEMS

SHABNAM PIRYAEI





the operating system print//document

NOTHING IS WASTED

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NOTHING
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*In each of us, there is a little voice
that knows exactly which way to go.
~ Alice Walker*





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/// 6 /// |





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the river was stunned the children did not know her name

we are destructive and thirsty and blooming.
we are thirsty and guided and resilient.
we are blooming and macheted and destructible.
we are gazing at a stained rubberband in the snow we are on our hands
and knees barking at the dogs we are spanked with wet hands we are
mowing the lawn in the sunlight we are yelling at our brother
who is a fence who will die who was never born.
we are running from the fire we are dwelling in the ashes.
we are fishing filled magically with flaws we are licking the paint
from the car door imploring the lock to rise.
we are steam and cake and dancing ferociously on the carpet.
we are watching the life drain from a bee on the sidewalk.
we are rippling though we ate one thousand gray pills we are flashes
of light we are blood diagrams in the bathroom sink.

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In this geography,
in the haunt of the fifth, stillborn, season,
women trespassed and terrorbound
bury my first word.
Where is my armor.

I'm not convinced
the only avenue to joy is one
solitary writhe in the foammouthed dark,
one fervent anchor hungering through a ribcage,
one bullying nothing.

Above the roof a cloud
builds itself through variation.

Every inheritance is a compass.

Autumn at midnight, the forest sky
is every bullet-scattered brain
caught into white stuttering fire,
a canvas of sustained thought.

Uncertainty, too, is riddled with light.

Tracks traversing a mistmouthed abyss
demand suddenly
your every illumination.

Recognition is a short-lived currency,
the hungry eye starving the heart.

Discomfort, held fast, gifts gaping wealth.
Draws you, like a calf,
unruly and wet from the dissonant flesh.

Here, and perhaps again,
there is synchronous sunblaze and stormtrace.
A glimpse of the orbit that comprises you.





ode to yellow

Impatience the disservice rallies me.
I imagine baby dolls bearing
baby dolls in their arms scanning
exhausted a flat yellow landscape.

My father points to yellow hills, mouths
this painting twins your birthplace.
I survey wide-eyed for umbilical anchors.

From the radio a man sings backward
a story, lion cubs battling
a startle of mud-tide.
His hunch-backed echoes draw
an unfamiliar syrup from me.
In the midst of a triangle of music I imagine climbing
a palm tree to penetrate vertically the heat.
But there is no substitute for earning.
I collapse another reverie.

Still he lilts brief diagonal mournings
veined with incandescence unclosed.

A yellow-haired girl points to my hands, cries
zoo, zoo, zoo.
I survey them wide-eyed for a defiled wilderness.

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cowering is a feigned poverty

how long has
my heart's thermometer
been stationed
in the gray
sky's repetition.
vanity
has all the charm
of morphine.
her soft-pillow
asphyxiations
lull to a drool
every aspiring
hallelujah.
the most exacting
performance
you enact
for yourself
empty-handed
mouth full of unborn
horses, waiting
for their quiet turnings
to expire.





a haunt, fraying and instructive

a benevolent crow
pecked daylight's bullet
into the room
and I revived.

but first came the girl
peering antelope-skulled
from a bed of onyx.
her gloom
a blind, elderly man
caning his way in from the horizon,
finding me.

first I journeyed sluggishly
smoldering, casting one organ
suddenly at the undecorated wall.
the enclosure of our two thirsts colliding.

first I aimed for joy
confusedly tying one heart
like wedding cans to dutiful intentions.

but agony can spill through the tunnel of time.
its perfume trailing like bait for bees.

I have devised a panoply of wreckage,
the internal acid climb, the hideous
mouth of vectors, corolla
spiraling inward.

history exceeds itself, disclosing
in you.

I stay counting gifts: rainbow
alabaster flat flower
of car oil in a rain puddle,
red shoes
tracking dead dragonflies through the den,
snails trafficking your whole flesh
when you lie naked in high grasses, abundance
swarming slowly out from failure.

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olu

I can't discern between the fire's flag
and the schizophrenic murmur of my gut.
It is spring, the kind that bears unisolated
marks of winter and summer in her eyes.
Or perhaps finally I'm widening my literacy.
Sometimes I'm toppled in my love for you.
Today our climb to the top of the hill was wordless,
our systems squinting in different directions but
resonating like a single orange poppy
in a field of low mint.

I can hear mortality not
the cadaver-sniffing crawl but the enormity
of being trusted.

I must stay wary of a fetish for destinations,
those bare-breasted sirens,
nipples mouthing arias.

I press my cheek to the cold table.
Sometimes the gift is nothing reaching out toward you,
the absence of applause echoing off chandelier cords,
the unperforming landscape.
My intestines still tangle and petrify
at the slightest shadows but I am learning
to lie face-down in the soil, to lean into
the unadorned encounters.

Tonight I love you with muted havoc.
Watching buzzards make final rounds
firm-winged and earning daily their bread,
and the earth's rippled protrusions
lend fully their bodies
to evening's prolonged lust,
I abstain from sweeping vows.

Tomorrow redwoods
will lace their silhouettes,
another sentient vocabulary,
at our feet.





glendeven

Ash and feces-breathed
huddling around your loneliness
like a predator.
Above you vultures spiral lyrics
at unmuddled April heights
and the trees don't crown you
with newspaper wreaths,
banana-peel medallions,
skirts of white teeth or
sparse applause.
It isn't that kind of hierarchy.
The wounds here, mortal,
course the current even at its most languorous.
The pageantless abundance of blue quivering flowers,
the branches saturated ebony with rain,
the single bat cutting crookedly through the morning,
the spider binding its writhing bread,
the barn humming with nutritious light,
the low growl in the foliage,
and the firm-fleshed mountains,
vast pronouncements of an alternate calendar, all
disclose the futility of containments.

A cool blade snaps in half. You wrap it
in soiled towels for its burial.
Every phantom once held a comfort.
You wait, you wait, eyes to the indented spine
of the greenflecked hill.
You are all nectar, you murmur
like a child alone into the hand
concealing your lips. One of the trees
has been pulled apart by electric
water, its diagonal wound unbandaged and sunlit,
a fierce protruding fang.

17





topple and step, caw and quiver

hunger
the leviathan casts a shadow
across my dusty huddle.

I wake,
weight-riddled shudder
of the lily's lit pistil,
iris, three lips
agape.
your scent
triggers an avalanche, hushed
grace-heavy assault.

a wide wet gaze
squeezed
through a straw
glimpses
your one eyebrow
cocked and bloodlit,
curvature and bristle.

upward braids the reckless heat.

on a parched boulder, asymmetrical geology, one dwindling
leaf curls kissing its tiny globe of water. moderation is a ruse.
fevers at least stay wide open despite their destructions.





time wheels its way into your mouth spinning a cricket song

all day hunters blink their shadows
along the crowns of eucalyptus and pine.
I have yet to see them dive.

the object of an ode is always painted
through the hungers of the poet.

today the foam-mouthed donkey
ushers me in,
flies tethered to her calves,
our eyes meeting.
another victory.

you echo into the room with wide-open voice, and
narrowly I resist my mallet:
another victory.

a quail lands on the bannister.
our percussions graze
and uncouple through a knot of trees.

there is always a stalagmite,
sullen dancer, pale student of cave water,
ascending
to commune with its source.

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inexhaustible wealths of feeling

I can't mark the first loneliness,
the elongated pause,
inkless and imagining magnolias.
Or the first guilt, terrain
of peaches overripe and
trespassed with rigid fingers.
Or the first haunt, a gas
station bathroom swarmed
with flies, slack spirits dangling
from their mouths. Or
the first love, tide of hyacinth,
tide of red mud, chorus
of elderly song. Or the first love,
inebriated child wandering
along snowy tracks. Or
the first love, holding you
by the wrists, shaking
you like a bell.





Guðmundsdóttir

your voice,
lavender-torn, dragging honeydew and granite
cliffs through
futile paper compartments,
steals nothing.

||| 21 |||





lovesonglovesonglovesonglovesonglove

drugged and frothing the sea pulls squealing anemones from its teeth.

you feed me. and in your absence I drag
seaweed-addled nets across the lips of cave-mouths. hungering.

you know performance robs the heart of its unsutured encounters.
that all disagreements grind themselves to ephemera, to the lap of a
single wave.

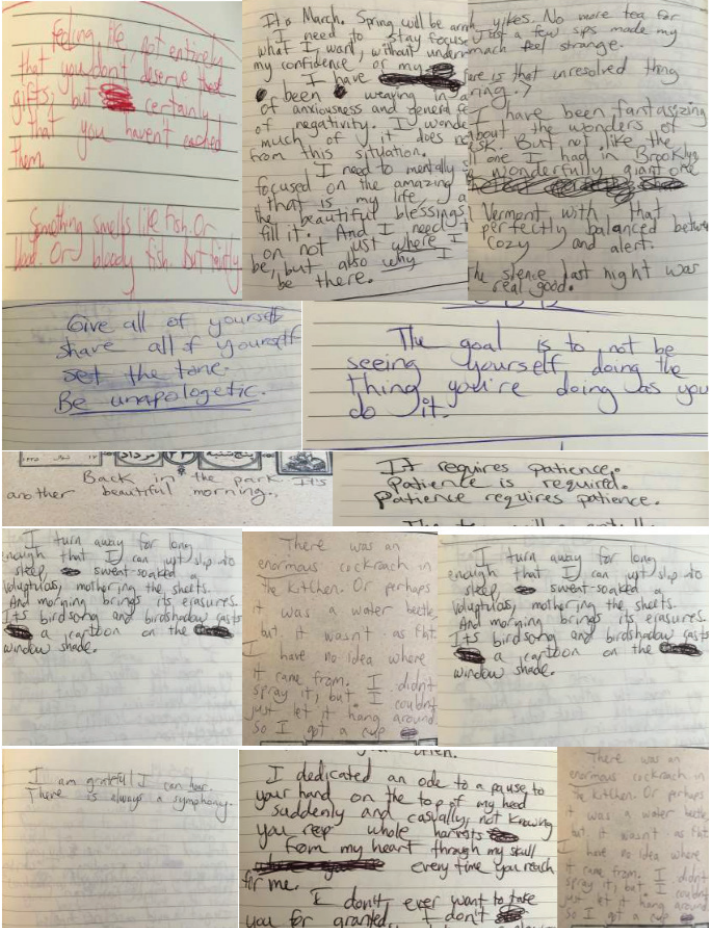
you, spirit hand blossoming out through time's vertical water mouth.
you, salted percussion constellation, giving.

you, density, floating ribbonlight through me.

domestic, the epithet, taunts with its syllables of waste.

you push one finger into my mouth. somewhere an antelope's neck
bursts in the mouth of a lion.







||| 24 |||





pilgrimage: a letter to my
two children before conception

overcome
is a myth,
a violence, suspect
 claims of traceless annihilation,
triumphant erasures of inheritance.
 honor the counsel of the remnant.

I am strengthening toward you.

 plunging toward the heart
 of the hour, haste-less,
 until everything sounds
like an opening.

| /// 25 ///





heritage

prophesies click like marbles cold in a pocket,
one rolling from your fingers and under the sofa
into a post-apocalypse of dust.

not every portent deals in alphabets of fire.

I eavesdrop on the stuttering conference of birds,
networks of language we pass through
stupidly as through spiderwebs in the dim.

the ubiquity of vigor summons
its own overlooking.
immersed in trees' fortitudes,
I sift through trifling hurts.

but I have been laboring at the muscling of these chambers,
steadily discerning the contours of the invisible.
I do not linger long in the shadowthroat.

and muscling slays no enemies, aids only
in the confrontation.

the mountain shivers out its sparrows.

I cling to no doorframe,
greeting the carnage that harbors my name.





what is the arrow
without the arm's angled strain

Late July, eye sockets filled
with summer, I extract
from the season a cylinder
of fingerflesh to glimpse
the underlayers of skin, humid
and acquiring their print.

Recalling coffeegut readings
from upside down glasses, I note
in the wax of an unlit candle
a tiny Turkish soldier
riding a massive dog, a river
of milk pouring from her teat.
Above his black hat
five brown stars suspended
like a photograph of juggled stones.

Late July. The heat
weighs with the full devotion
of early children. I watch you
hum and tidy things. Loving
isn't merely a feeling.
It is a lineage. An arrow
struggling out from the quiver
to labor with the bow.

||| 27 |||





to untether impoverished obsessions

It's an altered devoration of thorns,
fewer scythes, less grinforce, briefer
flashes of blood.

Even the confusions have altered:
less seething feline exhortations
at the slow-turning knob,
more whispering to succulents
who turn to their own water
in a drought.

At every silence my heart—
hysteria dim—brims
sweetly alive.

Feeling is a dull mark.

This is the pallor of first loss,
the tenderness of babies learning to kiss,
the vermilion tide of monarchs launching.





I want to save you, said the bear

Even as morning yawns its angled chord across a lone black tree on one gilded shoulder of the earth, inside her cabin self-selected momma bear braids nervously the rug ends, surveilling adopted cubs—her elders—for mortalities of joy. At night a field of frogs scrapes checkered concerts for head-nodding spirits, a moonlit resonance. But bear clutches her quilt, wide-eyed, depositing strict rituals against faint demons. Fox slides her letters in the night, perfumed entreaties for strawberries nestled in a loose, gentle fist and frost along the gillslits of morning. But bear cowers at the enormity of violence in every open declaration. Now cane-addled and sparse-furred, bear discourses strictly with her shadows, a stalking map of expired losses. At the pond where tadpoles flutter electric in the murk, the oldest water making another baby, tender and tangled cubs wrestle on dew-slick grass, pad-footed and raucously laughing in their plunge.

/// 29 ///





meeting the gift at the site of the offer

at night, earskin taut for far howls, I fear
I may spread past the desperate
clutchings of carnal negotiations.

the touching things, forms with furs and hues,
orange-tipped tree needles, your ankle bone like a buried stone,
gossamer threads drifting from your jacket like a slow cape—
I have coveted the security of charting the edges.

I stare at the mountain through the window.

two pendulous spiders fall
still at the wind's repose.





not all keepings dwell in the hands

A figure bramble-faced and vowel-bodied
 sits in a folding chair in your empty room:

denial
casting its insidious atrophies.

Speak it out.

In the minute lake of your ear, the hot
 traffic of your organs, the first
 figure of every doze:

it dwells.

Speak it out.

The smothered quiet,
 heel to throat, shin
 to rib, covets

its grip.

Speak it out.

Past the cluster of counterfeitly measured triumphs, loud
epiphanies lining their lips like a mockery, awaits silence—
generous and grazing tenderly with both breasts your weep-
glazed cheek as she breathes.





the wider family speaking

Saturday afternoon.
A battery clicks sixty
times a red strand
back to its origin.
Before me, a statue
of my teeth, pink and
precise.

Bloodsharing women
crave the lopsided
paradise of
proximity. Slumped,
I stare at their
absence, confusing
laconic wind with
spirits.

Elysium is multiple.
And gravelly at its
base.

Fans mechanize the
air. A waveless sea.
Electricity's busy-
work. Further, sweat-
sheened and
blistered, a man
slurps warm water
from dirt-caked
hands, the whole
afternoon a clay pot
cracking with light.





don't pour poison down the route of the poison's escape

I oscillate:

first the tyranny of brief kinetic fantasies
(abundant specters dangling
dynamite coily from their nipples), then
the styrofoamed wait, smelling
like a charred house after a sudden, too-late rain.

Remote, you
pause the curricula of strangers' hearts.
Somewhere else.

I wait for you
to call.

Rain bludgeons itself
against the window
out of habit.

Something essential
folds over in my hand like a broken lizard.

My meager detriments swell.
I finger the blade in my dress pocket.

And then you call, and no angel
laps my ears with her cold curved tongue.

Careless heats
grey quickly
like filth-snow in the city.

/// 33 ///





transmit

I steam chicken at twilight, oil
accreting in the hammocks of my eyes.

You elbow your way under the wire
braided tight and pressing incongruously
on itself.

Just this morning I could have sipped lovelorn
on your single curved rib as you gazed
up at a fan parsing nothing.

A week ago we spiraled
slowly beside white-footed trees
where bats swayed with the palmfronds.

Now you arrive to unravel the small yellow bouquet
I gathered from the paper garden. A necessary rupture.
A coerced proximity.

We embrace. Ice melts into mobility and strikes
softly against a curve.





distance proffers its own medicine

the dimpled ceiling casts faint
shadows along itself.
what, really, is letting
go. tense and glue-veined, biting
unpopped kernels, I negotiate
between positions: savior
or granite-eyed sculpture.
what does it mean to help. blue
calcite doesn't surrender
its pace, summons your working
from you with its unbroken
syllable of quiet.

he is the same
baby. the same futile
pocketful of deflections, ego
threads dangling like web
strands from a vent. suckling
pig, wide-eyed toddler,
broken bike.
I am guarding my prism, unsure
of the wisest sacrifice.

I creep away
from the full pink snarl
of his guileless granting of wounds.
his habit of sowing a noiseless
remorse. his clock of sighs.

I slip beans from their skins, one
at a time, popping each firm
glisten free from an opaque vest. unhurried.
messaging the oncoming night
with intention.

11135111





pine

I spy you on a rock at the edge
of a cliff. a tiny figure
hunched against heaven. the stupid
expanse of a building-less sky.
I fear dropping you because I can.
above you an angle of birds
know precisely how to navigate.
distance is like this.
leaving me excess space to play
with my weapons. I hum
uncertain
beyond the provocation of your back.
strands of me dangle from my shirt unwilling
to be discarded. no god laughs
while slitting the throats of his children, I think.
you will stay at the edge of a cloud-rivered abyss.
in another expanse, clouds
convene over the raft of a survivor, lip-split
and issuing confessions.
here crickets have convened. shuddering
at the scrape of evening's tongue
I lull
for your shadow to stand.





solitude layering into flight

There is more than one loneliness. Tonight an armless skeleton pushes chest-first out from a night-colored rug. I cast up imperfect nets. I am a bachelor boiling hot dogs for fictional children, eating them furiously and in the dark just before sleeping.

I put myself to bed at the first click of darkness. But helicopters hunting men through adjacent alleys disclose my smugglings. I wake to domestic alleviations. I wake feet shaking in the bed like futile wings. In my dreams rifled doves shake off their blood and keep flying.

(Not the feeling stunned by the force of its own emergence but the will with which you harness its swell the ache with which you harness its swell hallelujah.





||| 38 ||| |





| 39 |





||| 40 ||| |





sigheh

there is mint, a broken glass
and the sound of drowning
in a milk-filled pond

there is the amputated scream
whose tendrils only dare
to imagine
your mouth

there is the cold engine
of the white light
that becomes a room
the insistence of alone
even as his fist
slips in your blood

in the brutal anonymity
of your last night on earth
there is your tooth
planting itself in your tongue
a hysterical declaration of rebirth.

mohammad
is your son
and pointing to goldfish he shrieks
lamp
overthrown by their light.

/// 41 ///





Ms. Khavari's adopted daughter serves us tea

all night she cries / her whole family / exploded / why / has no / cottage
/ in the incendiary village / her hand / trembles / the tray / shakes / the
glass / spills / the tea / on my coat / who broke your mother / to flesh
islands / while you slept / aziz / the air aches / and laughter snaps like
cucumbers / it is the season of our fleshs / pushing gently through brick
walls / salam haleh shoma / is a too fragile thread / I am unfamiliar / with
the smell of burned / brother / the sound of violin / swells sweet bread
/ in hollowed places / but can it speak / the last flower / butchered / in
the last garden of the world and / anyway / she has no / violin / her smile
extracts / warm milk from rocks / I smile back / a smile collapsing / with
apologies / on its walk to her eyes / there / a hatch opens / a face lends
itself / to the anonymity / of a beautiful / appetite and / terror / blesses
its name / in the soft mosaic / of exposed marrow.





there is no separate survival

twelve, you stood unstartled as
goldfish burst like capillaries
in your plastic water-filled bag.

the soldier, fumbling, dropped
mints into the empty gape
of your bucket, compromised
by the anchor of your linger.

the night they hunted you
from your bed into the water,
zippers chafing— eels
careening through the ebony—
sowing their garbage-fisted scald,
their elemental theft,
half drowned
you summoned a wire of light
on the dusty underside of a bench.

all that morning you had been waiting
for the first slow fruit
of a slender apricot tree.





Mabel (kin to Meredith)

With ashy elbows and a bucketful of brains, he steps through a humorless Tuesday: the butcher's son, singing like a music box. A yarn baby unraveling. The heat extends its legs. Acorns flicker like sexed bulbs in deep evening lamplight.

Carelessness creeps in with the heat. The treeroot upends the sidewalk with an infinite jerk of the shoulder. She stumbles. Nothing descends in aid: not antennas on dusted roofs, those apocalyptic sedating arrows. Not the faltering butterfly.

When he tore the legs from the wet frog's body, he stood shivering from pond water. She eyed him from behind a tunnel of flashlight. She follows him again, her body a slow, gaseous current. His song filling her with all the tiny lit leasures of a carnival.

He stops and turns. Her throat lays an egg. Its thousand babies thread their tumble down to her belly like an hourglass.

They collide with summer's potency. Two hexagons. Two indigo pleas.

Her gratitude bears the tenderest of whips. Together they feed crocodiles from the bridge- cusp.

44





you never interrupted your passage with pity

ruby-eyed and nostril-sliced
you gazed up at a plateful of stars
trying to recall your nearest dream,
the languor of it, the rivered populace,
the single heavy-headed iris in a pentagram
of light on a stranger's table.
even the fly on the windowsill was raging, z-filled,
against its wane.
but you slipped out, carpet-haloed,
a fresh breeze coursing through the window gash
tickling you.
in three days, an ice cream truck will scrawl
tin bells along your window, and the neighbor's
discovering shriek
will wend through the summer
screams of children—
inexhaustible and overlooked gifts,
disregarded survivals shuddering
through evening's arteries.

11/45





painting of a woman I imagine

the oven hangs open like an interrupted sentence.
uncovered marmalade hardens at the edges, exposed.

as a girl you lamented
that satin ribbons slip open
too easily unless they are choked,
ruined, in their knotting.
as a girl it slipped each time
he put it on your lips. you memorized
the command of its potential weight.

on a partially set table
a green stone
smoother than slow-curved glass thighs.

somehow unbroken
in your sleeping hand, a speckled egg.





tabiyat

Against a vortex
of elbows and pleading eyes
crashing circular against a ribcage,
bells bowing to one another before a fight,
a drunk sleep-deprived hound hunting itself,
my refuge grows gaunt, hair askew and pulsing.

The feeding frenzy has a purpose,
the wealth of ultimatums.

I strain to read the three-fanged branch, intent
for swift magics.
But sudden is bound to a thousand slows.

I carve nature into my arm. An aspiration.

I close my eyes to see them—
peach blossoms untethering from branches
redolent with white weight.

/// 47 ///





all along

I vow
to undo
petty poison cues,
but refrain from neatly sealing
the promise,
leaving sufficient rupture
for labor,
sufficient faith for sight.
times, there is urgency,
and times, a clutter of hoarded
inspirations, a bag
of raked leaves, a mire
that lures discarded paper planes.

the origin of a sneeze and a weep are the same.

I have nothing to prove to bubble-faced pageantry, to boltskinned guards.

I crouch on matted carpet
assembling another
composite—
bee wings and excess, daffodils and wreckage, tedium and breast bone.
what meager descents kindle my swift shame.





wood polished and tossed from moving cars, smash-games

always the prostitution of a nascent magic,
a hasty showcase.

instead:

to be unadorned—
a skeleton, an artery, a disassembling
gaze.
a sudden embrace on the soil.

to accrue
withholding's plenitude,
massive and kindling our ten thousand wicks.





a letter of gratitude,
an ink-scrawled inventory of full-leafed orange,
a startle

I contemplate a halo of cacti,
intelligible distortions.

pale red flag atop an idle volcano,
abandoned infant sucking on cold chainlinks,
drowned cockroach no longer
flailing its six slim vectors—everything
can be read.

why deify geographies—
epiphanies can secrete their treasures alone in a wet alley,
dumpsters coated with drops.

I stand and gaze up—drifting
down all at once:
 the sulfur gods,
 the ruby tongues,
 the uncaredful bees,
the boys with their angry drinks,
their repeated graceless ruins.

behind me crows
circle the electrocuted toad
splayed gasping on the asphalt.
thunder casts wild birds
into flight from serpentine branches.

I see the first life sometimes, just behind my eyelids.
time smashed together here, inside us.





in the future,
they will try to escape

a wounded clone
scales a wall of orange
and yellow ivy.
mammoth rampart,
summit veiled in the
firmament's mists.
autumn. evening. gold
light like a sacred
choral composition
sung by aching men
who have never felt
closer to god. frigid
wind at this height.
flesh-numbed. in every
wind, leaves shake like
hungry birds with legs
tied down. in
windlessness, their
morbid stillness
unnerves. the fiercest
gusts torture the
fledglings. they flail,
colorful, hysterical.
a few, plucked from
the life-vine, dance
down dead. a delicate
zig-zagging descent.
the patterned flight
of the butterfly
coupled with the smile
of a decapitated head.
the clone, clinging,
scales
incrementally
higher.

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rose quartz and wreckage

Boats knock softly against the dock,
wood slats grating like neanderthals
rubbing together their groins in despair.

Undressed figures bob and drift.
Below them foliage
echoes the mobility of their spirits.

An iguana, charcoal-hued and saw-spined, slumbers.
Red-bellied spiders clamber slow and pregnant to a sill.

Nothing scrambles through a blue larynx.

Through pre-dawn murk one wind sows a doorway.

Love bursts at the seams, spilling through even as you stoop to learn it.





there will be no conjuring today,
or,
you bow into your tools

Not the
waxy
degrees of a
cave-cold
solitude, nor
the flesh-
sphere
yielding
eyes and
antennae.
Today, alone
marks the
dilating
invitation of
a twilight
mouth,
proffering
neither
threat nor
praise. Only
exact sums.
Autonomous
arithmetics.
Three colors
hand-painted
on a rock.
All day the
hour has
leaned away,
her back to
you, making
room at
every advance,
answering,
ovation-less,
every
investment.

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Every hand-
carved frame
bears its
dust. In the
dimlit
confessional,
the priest
coughs,
neither
terrible nor
holy. You
hover over
the tree pulp,
planting
earnestly
row after
row of seed.





disbanding miserly calendars

moon can overthrow
 your evening
 meander
with a solitary
 orange declaration

I laughed wide open volcano
 under four urban stars
at forgetting god chrysanthemum
 is a beautiful word

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acknowledgements

33 appeared in Brain Mill Press.

I want to save you, said the bear appeared in Nailed Magazine.

Mable (kin to Meredith) appeared in Commonthought Magazine.

olu appeared in The Madison Review.

painting of a woman I imagine appeared in Nailed Magazine.

pine appeared in Painted Bride Quarterly.

sigheh appeared in Unsaid Magazine.

solitude layering into flight appeared in Red Paint Hill.

the river was stunned the children did not know her name
appeared in The Awl.

there is no separate survival appeared in Nailed Magazine.

time wheels its way into your mouth spinning a cricket song
appeared in Denver Quarterly.

topple and step, caw and quiver appeared in Denver Quarterly.

transmit appeared in Denver Quarterly.





Described by the San Francisco Book Review as “a force to be reckoned with in literary circles,” Shabnam Piryaee is an award-winning writer and filmmaker. In addition to authoring the books *Nothing is Wasted*, *FORWARD* and *ode to fragile*, she has been awarded the Poets & Writers Amy Award and the Transport of the Aim Prize, as well as grants from the Elizabeth George Foundation, the Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance and the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund. She has written and directed three award-winning short films that have screened at festivals and galleries the U.S. and internationally.





POETICS and PROCESS

*Shabnam Piryaee in conversation
with Lynne DeSilva-Johnson*

Why are you a poet?

I write poetry because when I don't, my vision wanes. I was exposed to poems, and wrote them, from when I was very young. My father is a lover of poetry and a poet as well. It's often my most effective means of communication, exorcism and spiritual development.

When did you decide you were a poet (and/or: do you feel comfortable calling yourself a poet, what other titles or affiliations do you prefer/feel are more accurate)?

I can't recall when I first publicly (or privately) articulated that I am a poet. But I am definitely a poet. And my other works—fiction, drama, and film—are extensions of my poetry and many of them explicitly contain poems.

What's a "poet", anyway?

Poetry, for me, is about scrutiny, juxtapositions, and a gesturing to the whole that operates as a kind of anti-possession, an anti-containment. It's a state of animated openness. This applies to poets and to poems.

What is the role of the poet today?

When I do readings it is an intimate encounter and a meaningful way to re-inhabit and explore my own work. And I definitely read my poems aloud as I write, to feel their body and their music. But I don't write poems specifically for them to be performed; I write poetry for the page.

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And overall I think poetry written for the page is still vastly overlooked in popular culture. In particular in a social culture where ambiguity and open questions are shunned, in part for their discomfort, for the way they continue to hold and jar you. As an instructor of literature one of the first questions I encounter from students when they face a poem is “What does it mean?” This question is violent in its coercion. So I tend to respond with, “What do you mean?” As in, “Sum yourself up for me.” And if one is being honest, then it’s impossible. Because we are each a multitude. (I forgot where I first heard that. Ovid? Twain?) This doesn’t mean we can’t contemplate, discuss, feel, and return to poems, or any art. But it does mean that the urgency to contain it entirely, to totalize it in a single answer, is a kind of discarding.

Performed poetry, such as in spoken word festivals, continues to invigorate youth and draw them to the medium of poetry. That makes me happy. Additionally, there are a number of hip hop artists, many of whom are on the radio, who are poets, though most literary institutions don’t register rap as literature.

What do you see as your cultural and social role (in the poetry community and beyond)?

I don’t believe in the exceptionality of poetry or of any single craft over another. Poetry speaks to me particularly powerfully, but I believe poetry shares the roles of all art. These include an inherent subversiveness, an honesty and a spirituality—all of which can produce tremendous discomfort in the writer/reader/listener/viewer. And this discomfort is generative. It constantly puts sedation at risk. And it can disclose the violence of interpersonal and institutional structures of power by making us discern our own complacencies.

Talk about the process or instinct to move these poems (or your work in general) as independent entities into a body of work. How and why did this happen? Have you had this intention for a while? What encouraged and/or confounded this (or a book, in general) coming together? Was it a struggle?

Many of these poems were written during an “unplugged” residency in Big Sur—an experience that was jarring in its unmediated and





visceral confrontation with nature. Although I was there with my husband, I experienced a tremendous amount of solitude. But the solitude felt different from the dense, dark solitude I'd experienced for years writing alone in my New York apartment. This feeling was not simply a product of a new environment—it resulted from my own transformations as well. Being able to simultaneously come to terms with, separate myself from and take responsibility for, my inheritance. But being in Big Sur—in the heart of such raw, unforgiving and gorgeous nature—had an enormous impact on the permeability, respiration and shards of light that I feel these poems embody.

What formal structures or other constrictive practices (if any) do you use in the creation of your work? Have certain teachers or instructive environments, or readings/writings of other creative people (poets or others) informed the way you work/write? Did you use any specifically in the production of this book or work within this book?

I never studied poetry in an institution. But I have studied poetry on my own. There were many years in my life when I spent weeks and months reading the entire body of work and all the interviews I could find from poets who deeply impacted me—poets like Octavio Paz, Alejandra Pizarnik, Federico Garcia Lorca and Forugh Farrokhzad.

Also, I'm Iranian-American. And poetry in Iran is part of an ancient and venerated tradition, one that is still relevant and present in contemporary culture. In my experiences growing up, most parties and gatherings included passing around the Hafez book to read aloud, or someone singing traditional songs the lyrics of which were poems from Nima, Hafez, Rumi or Khayyam.

Did you envision this collection as a collection or understand your process as writing specifically around a theme while the poems themselves were being written? How or how not?

All of these poems were written over a two-year period, and a number of them were written over the course of three weeks. While I didn't arrange them until I felt the collection was complete, I felt all along these poems were part of the collection they are in now. I wanted for this book, the process of my creating it, to be an act of repeatedly choosing light over darkness.

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Speaking of monikers, what does your title represent? How was it generated? Talk about the way you titled the book, and how your process of naming (poems, sections, etc) influences you and/or colors your work specifically.

I find that the titles of my poems are moving increasingly into the realm of being poems themselves. The title of the collection, *Nothing is Wasted*, is a reminder of what we don't know—we have no idea how something may manifest later. This incommensurability and unmeasurability of the value or impact of a decision, an encounter, a sleepily-scribbled line, a dirty look, a shelved idea, is truly beautiful to me. It is a bigger-than-me-ness that is essential to engaging with the world mindful of our deep, deep interrelatedness, and by extension, our responsibility for one another.

Would you like this work to be translated into other languages / do you hope that it reaches beyond our local geographies and communities? What would be the best possible outcome of a broadly expanded reach for this book? Do you think it's legible across cultural lines?

I would love, and would be grateful, for this work to be translated across languages, and across mediums—incorporated into films, music, plays, visual art.

If someone was to find this book in a hundred years, or perhaps even further in the future, what would be the best possible outcome?

That as many people as possible read it.

How do you (and do you) feel that poets and other creative people should consider the archive and their role in creating and preserving a (hi)story of their work and the context in which it was created? Do you, as a scholar and/or personally take an active role in documenting/recording not only the product of your creative practice (or that of others) but also the social, cultural, and other intersectional trappings of your process / life / experience? How or how not, why or why not, etc.

I think if you are creating honestly then it is impossible to avoid the timestamp. That doesn't mean works of art can't transcend time in their connection to audiences, but that art-creation is its own archive.





WHY PRINT / DOCUMENT?

*The Operating System uses the language “print document” to differentiate from the book-object as part of our mission to distinguish the act of documentation-in-book-FORM from the act of publishing as a backwards facing replication of the book’s agentive *role* as it may have appeared the last several centuries of its history. Ultimately, I approach the book as TECHNOLOGY: one of a variety of printed documents (in this case bound) that humans have invented and in turn used to archive and disseminate ideas, beliefs, stories, and other evidence of production.*

Ownership and use of printing presses and access to (or restriction of printed materials has long been a site of struggle, related in many ways to revolutionary activity and the fight for civil rights and free speech all over the world. While (in many countries) the contemporary quotidian landscape has indeed drastically shifted in its access to platforms for sharing information and in the widespread ability to “publish” digitally, even with extremely limited resources, the importance of publication on physical media has not diminished. In fact, this may be the most critical time in recent history for activist groups, artists, and others to insist upon learning, establishing, and encouraging personal and community documentation practices. Hear me out.

With The OS’s print endeavors I wanted to open up a conversation about this: the ultimately radical, transgressive act of creating PRINT /DOCUMENTATION in the digital age. It’s a question of the archive, and of history: who gets to tell the story, and what evidence of our life, our behaviors, our experiences are we leaving behind? We can know little to nothing about the future into which we’re leaving an unprecedentedly digital document trail — but we can be assured that publications, government agencies, museums, schools, and other institutional powers that be will continue to leave BOTH a digital and print version of their production for the official record. Will we?

As a (rogue) anthropologist and long time academic, I can easily pull up many accounts about how lives, behaviors, experiences — how THE STORY of a time or place — was pieced together using the deep study of correspondence, notebooks, and other physical documents which are no longer the norm in many lives and practices. As we move our creative behaviors towards digital note taking, and even audio and video, what can we predict about future technology that is in any way assuring that our stories will be accurately told – or told at all? How will we leave these things for the record?

In these documents we say:

WE WERE HERE, WE EXISTED, WE HAVE A DIFFERENT STORY

- Lynne DeSilva-Johnson, Founder/Managing Editor,
THE OPERATING SYSTEM, Brooklyn NY 2017

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TITLES IN THE PRINT: DOCUMENT COLLECTION

An Absence So Great and Spontaneous It Is Evidence of Light - Anne Gorrick [2018]
Chlorosis - Michael Flatt and Derrick Mund [2018]
Sussuros a Mi Padre - Erick Sáenz [2018]
Jazzercise is a Language - Gabriel Ojeda-Sague [2018]
Death is a Festival - Anis Shivani [2018]
Return Trip / Viaje Al Regreso; Dual Language Edition -
Israel Dominguez, (trans. Margaret Randall) [2018]
Born Again - Ivy Johnson [2018]
Singing for Nothing - Wally Swist [2018]

One More Revolution - Andrea Mazzariello [2017]
Fugue State Beach - Filip Marinovich [2017]
Lost City Hydrothermal Field - Peter Milne Greiner [2017]
The Book of Everyday Instruction - Chloe Bass [2017]
In Corpore Sano : Creative Practice and the Challenged Body
[Anthology, 2017] Lynne DeSilva-Johnson and Jay Besemer, co-editors
Love, Robot - Margaret Rhee [2017]
The Furies - William Considine [2017]
Nothing Is Wasted - Shabnam Piryaee [2017]
Mary of the Seas - Joanna C. Valente [2017]
You Look Something - Jessica Tyner Mehta [2017]
CHAPBOOK SERIES 2017 : INCANTATIONS
featuring original cover art by Barbara Byers
sp. - Susan Charkes; Radio Poems - Jeffrey Cyphers Wright; Fixing a Witch/
Hexing the Stitch - Jacklyn Janeksela; cosmos a personal voyage by carl sagan
ann druyan steven sotor and me - Connie Mae Oliver
Flower World Variations, Expanded Edition/Reissue - Jerome
Rothenberg and Harold Cohen [2017]
Island - Tom Haviv [2017]
What the Werewolf Told Them / Lo Que Les Dijo El Licantropo -
Chely Lima (trans. Margaret Randall) [2017]
The Color She Gave Gravity - Stephanie Heit [2017]
The Science of Things Familiar - Johnny Damm [Graphic Hybrid, 2017]
agon - Judith Goldman [2017]
To Have Been There Then / Estar Allí Entonces - Gregory Randall
(trans. Margaret Randall) [2017]

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Instructions Within - Ashraf Fayadh [2016]
Arabic-English dual language edition; Mona Kareem, translator
Let it Die Hungry - Caitis Meissner [2016]
A GUN SHOW - Adam Sliwinski and Lynne DeSilva-Johnson;
So Percussion in Performance with Ain Gordon and Emily Johnson [2016]
Everybody's Automat [2016] - Mark Gurarie
How to Survive the Coming Collapse of Civilization [2016] - Sparrow
CHAPBOOK SERIES 2016: OF SOUND MIND
**featuring the quilt drawings of Daphne Taylor*
Improper Maps - Alex Crowley; While Listening - Alaina Ferris;
Chords - Peter Longofono; Any Seam or Needlework - Stanford Cheung

TEN FOUR - Poems, Translations, Variations [2015]- Jerome Rothenberg,
Ariel Resnikoff, Mikhl Likht
MARILYN [2015] - Amanda Ngoho Reavey
CHAPBOOK SERIES 2015: OF SYSTEMS OF
**featuring original cover art by Emma Steinkraus*
Cyclorama - Davy Knittle; The Sensitive Boy Slumber Party Manifesto
- Joseph Cuillier; Neptune Court - Anton Yakovlev; Schema - Anurak
Saelow
SAY/MIRROR [2015; 2nd edition 2016] - JP HOWARD
Moons Of Jupiter/Tales From The Schminke Tub [plays, 2014] - Steve Dan-
ziger

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2014: BY HAND
Pull, A Ballad - Maryam Parhizkar; Can You See that Sound - Jeff Musillo
Executive Producer Chris Carter - Peter Milne Grenier;
Spooky Action at a Distance - Gregory Crosby;

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2013: WOODBLOCK
**featuring original prints from Kevin William Reed*
Strange Coherence - Bill Considine; The Sword of Things - Tony Hoffman;
Talk About Man Proof - Lancelot Runge / John Kropa; An Admission as a
Warning Against the Value of Our Conclusions - Alexis Quinlan





DOC U MENT

/däkyəmənt/

First meant “instruction” or “evidence,” whether written or not.

noun - a piece of written, printed, or electronic matter that provides information or evidence or that serves as an official record
verb - record (something) in written, photographic, or other form
synonyms - paper - deed - record - writing - act - instrument

[Middle English, *precept*, from Old French, from Latin *documentum*, example, proof, from *docere*, to teach; see *dek-* in Indo-European roots.]

Who is responsible for the manufacture of value?

Based on what supercilious ontology have we landed in a space where we vie against other creative people in vain pursuit of the fleeting credibilities of the scarcity economy, rather than freely collaborating and sharing openly with each other in ecstatic celebration of MAKING?

While we understand and acknowledge the economic pressures and fear-mongering that threatens to dominate and crush the creative impulse,
we also believe that *now more than ever*
we have the tools to relinquish agency via cooperative means,
fueled by the fires of the Open Source Movement.

Looking out across the invisible vistas of that rhizomatic parallel country
we can begin to see our community beyond constraints,
in the place where intention meets
resilient, proactive, collaborative organization.

Here is a document born of that belief, sown purely of imagination and will.
When we document we assert.

We print to make real, to reify our being there.

When we do so with mindful intention to address our process,
to open our work to others, to create beauty in words in space, to respect
and acknowledge the strength of the page we now hold physical,
a thing in our hand... we remind ourselves that, like Dorothy:
we had the power all along, my dears.

THE PRINT! DOCUMENT SERIES

is a project of

the trouble with bartleby

in collaboration with

the operating system

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