

Six Poets

A folio edited by Karla Kelsey

Editor's Note	2
Rosmarie Waldrop	3
Hajar Hussaini	8
Alan Gilbert	11
Ry Cook	17
G.C. Waldrep	20
Felipe Franco Munhoz	24
Biographical Notes	29

Editor's Note

This folio demonstrates the diversity of poetry written today. In form, content, voice—in style—no one of these poets could be mistaken for the other. Each processes—alchemizes—differently.

Yet, all six foreground landscape as both physical and languaged. Landscape is formed, these poets insist, through geological, historical, and economic processes. It is natural and artificial. It is mined and planted. It is data-centered and conserved. It is, by definition, communal.

Each poet brings heightened awareness to the fragility of our landscape. And to the unimaginable destruction wrecked by us, by humans. They share, also, a sense of having arrived not only at the end of things, but also at the impossibility that is the end's wake.

And yet— — —

“Why stop there? A scratch on the crystal
means we can see the beginnings of a prism.”

“As if a bone had dreamt of a music it could advance towards, a limit.”

“unashamed shine/ the Donkey Creek's
surface keeps trying, dark flows (oscillating”

“We who are in too much of a rush and yet the basket still floats along the river inside us”

“Metamorphosis was spotted outside our plot of land.”

“To stitch together the body with time passing.”

[AG; GCW; FFM; RC; HH; RW]

Rosmarie Waldrop

from *Simulation of Childhood in Nazi Germany*

A CLIMATE OF WAITING

Mother, the fishhead from Baltic shores. Enforced the rule of the clock. Against all resistance.

Made ceremonies of wetting and drying, blowing, wiping, eating, excreting. So many repetitions. To stitch together the body with time passing.

Life was precept. Precaution. Preparation.

People with a yellow star on their coats walked through Kitzingen-am-Main. But though I was tall enough, on tiptoe, to put my elbows on the window sill. *My* Jews wore long flowing robes on the pages of my Bible.

Caravans of camels left those pages and traveled. Through my dreams. Undeterred by German weather.

While I fell. Into biological time. With its fibrous duration.

SCHOOL

On the way to my first schoolday, mother kept stopping. To pull down my dress which climbed. The ladders of my stockings.

Because, she said, you had to be proper. Even in the greatest urgency.

But I was in a rush to burst. If tottering. Out of my cocoon of ignorance.

Toward the promise of high cerebral regions. And long hours of recess.

What foolish hurry. Toward rows male, female. Arms raised at a 30° angle.

This is 1941. Heil. Hitler.

We entered like so many particles. Into a black hole.

Doors slammed. Chalk scraped on slates. Sitting on a chair without moving.

Was considered a sign. Of maturity.

Later, whispers. That one of the bigger girls had “told on.” Her parents.

I tried to worm into adult silence. But remained in the dark.

.

By the end of the “Thousand Years.” Heaps of bodies. Had replaced my picture books.

MUSICAL CHAIRS.

We set out to push through imagined corridors. To hidden chambers. Or just push.

It ended in tears. As if we could not show affection. Except by cuffs and kicks.

Or played musical chairs. The rules did not tell if to sit. When instead of the music the grown-ups fell silent.

They acted as if everyone was “it.” And the slightest gesture. Had consequences.

Pigeons flapped their wings. But I was scared. As if the sky might fall, the sun not rise.

THE SKY DID FALL

On chickens little and large. Walls crumbled. Windows shattered. Ears split.

I tried to burrow. Into a heap of potatoes. As if it could get me deeper down. Than the cellar.

Emerged into thick dust. “Take the kid away” put an end to exploring. My big sisters helped dig through rubble. Then threw up.

The Station clock had stopped. Images of this day froze. Words helpless as with the murder-camps. No more talk of the German soul.

The sun still rose above the Schwanberg. Most mornings. I still imagined everything would continue.

SICKNESS

A thick fog rose from Grimm's Fairy Tales. And blotted out. My date with the Robber Bridegroom.

Followed me. To where as if a leaden blanket. Pinned me to my bed.

Scraps of phrases hung on a smell of camphor. Closed curtains. Air thick with whispers.

While 130 miles to the North Robert Antelme. Learns that nobody is sick in the Camps. You are alive or dead.

A sparrow on the window sill. Suddely threw itself into the air.

I had misheard *Ruhr*, German for dysentery, as *Ruhe*. And vowed to fight. With all my strength the disease of quiet.

Hajar Hussaini

A large floor-to-ceiling exhibits the forest to me, as if the Hudson had seeped into that painter's mood. Birds occasionally tweet and a squirrel shivers. As the end of my hair touches the inward curve of my spine, I feel that friction between contractions and expansions. Leaning toward the desk, I ask the informant; can it just be about this? I'm safe, not in a hurry, and yes, I could create a false sense of urgency, but its residues have stayed with me, and however backward or forward the gait, wasn't it the old Darwish who said *if I weren't from there / I would train my heart to nurture the gazelle of metonymy?*

—In a sense everything you know involves a woman speaking at the end of the world. No matter what change the climate brings, there are things that only the peaceful birds, foliage, and humans know.

Distraction, a micronutrient stored in a reservoir gets absorbed by a person who gave truth a try-on, and once her reaching hits bottom, a blankness panels her environs. Coming close to it, minor interests take form, the expendable income happy to let it happen. Pleasure, then, rises and falls like a conductor's hand gesturing the pulsating air, with notes that instruct an assembly with most and least favored memory. Games, their sounds and exhilarations, appear now in what people call contemporary classic. I, for one, have started noticing oddities outside my field of referent. Metamorphosis was spotted outside our plot of land. Imperialism is or was the least of our concerns.

During my time there, I thought the events were not factual, that whatever happened outside the nation state carried a gist of realism, and that the blood of whoever broke bread with us was stuffed into a tube to give it a semblance of color.

I thought the melted clock had begun elsewhere, that I needed to reach toward and bind it, that I was misplaced except sometimes when life was as definitive as it could have been at any other moment or place when I caught a child on a hero's journey or a new cousin on television.

When I left, I sometimes found life without pain moderately shallow. I saw people rushing toward the mess to construct subjective narratives. The experience, some kept saying, made our times legible. Some revolted and wrote peculiar things about the sum of all interferences. I began to like the traffic and, at last, understood that my own disposition had long been infested.

Alan Gilbert

AND AFTER ALL THAT

I don't want it or whatever is scratching in the wall,
even if like us, it's just trying to get out.
I woke up too slowly
while sleeping with my mouth open
because the words are not inside me.
Instead, I'm a medic for the kite
while hoping the garbage bag doesn't break
as you swing it above your head, or maybe not.

But first, let's stop for a snack.
The fenceposts pull out from the ground
where the bodies molder beneath
like a gun loose in its holster,
so round up the cowboys, then say viva.
What a journey plastic takes to end up in our kidneys!
Hello, and welcome to Walmart,
as I dim the lights on stage.

The canned peaches went rancid in the heat.
I built a spaceship to put them in,
but it got lost in an ice age of screens.
All the small failures start to add up,
and then we call it a life, although it's closer to death
by a thousand cuts, a thousand flags.
The car's dashboard stretches to my throat.
I can always see the end.

AUTOTUNED

The bleach might whiten, but it's toxic;
the sky might look blue, but it's not.
There's a circus in our room, or we took
a spacewalk without leaving the house,
as a red Camry does donuts in a Target parking lot.
Sometimes the words tickle on their way out,
yet the bones still burrow into the soil
like my pewter toe ring at the beach
and my head for a pail dragging in the sand.
I know I can't do it on my own.
Not every angel is scary, even the ones AI scrapes.
A forklift shatters the planter crammed
with geraniums until I get the most clicks
or another lottery ticket. Don't be ridiculous.
The world may never be silent like tooth decay
and a clenched jaw, although right now I am.

The internet has plenty of medical advice,
although none of it mentions you returning
or wearing a construction hat with just the sun
to warm us, but that's enough for now
with all of this feedback on the mic.
A rowboat goes out for the rescue.
Basement, playground, ATM. Who else
is speaking here, face blurry in the mirror
along with the upholstery that won't get clean
because the human is both friend and foe,
which is also how I feel about the laundromat,
even if it forces us to change the sheets?
Why stop there? A scratch on the crystal
means we can see the beginnings of a prism.
Strange seasons crowd the calendar
as a heatwave spreads to the edge of the city.

Wake up, filthy, is the tag on the beat.
How many minutes are left on this ride
as bells toll in the distance? We're making a real mess
before the police arrive to shut down the party.

I am definitely in the system and its impulse
to touch a hot stove while waiting for a wobbly
dessert cart to squeak across the carpet.
Who owns the land? Every tree, every branch.
'They would make us pay for sunlight if they could.
I'm trying to stay focused, but the hole
is only getting deeper along with endless
damage control watched with fingers laced
through a chain-link and the exits clogged.
'That's when we decided to go under
while hoping that the silted levees hold
because the animals must be fleeing for a reason.

I'm not the dispensary, more the foyer,
while ignoring the yellow check engine light
and wondering if the problem will fix itself,
or else we'll lean in with kindling used
for traveling silently and mostly at night
but always with an ache in my ❤️ and a 😞
at the broadcast. Yet what do I know
since I can't sing? I'm easily distracted by the bakery,
saying, Give me a loving loaf, please.
So why does the war feel endless?
It's a full flight, but these days are a slog.
We may view them as something to forget except
for the anniversaries that creep into our reveries,
that fill me with dread. Punch in one line at a time
until we almost get it right, an archive
of small disappointments and simple joys.

Back on the road again, but I'm not sure
what's home with broken glass for a patio
and silicon grafted onto flesh as if I'm a bride
to the machine, so keep your hands away
from my face and your fist out of my mouth
while selling plastic flowers next to a funeral
where the mourners stand in cold mud
after the caretaker had to find a second job
at Starbucks. It's the little things and
the big things too. We push toward a wish
just short of fever, or we run into a gust.

Yet the case may never be solved when the monsters
aren't only beneath the bed, and the puzzle
to assemble is made with flesh and blood.
Turn the clockface toward the wall.
Life is like the last dream to chase.

UP TO THE HILT

The window may look clean, but there's blood everywhere
while watching catfish swim in the sediment and thin herons
step between bent and blackened spoons. The wind shakes
the dead leaves free until we glimpse the faint gray
of a horizon line through the branches of defeat or discovery
in a tangle of neurons, even if there are certain memories
I'd rather forget as the knife cuts both ways. Just give me
the dopamine already. The story is also a story. I've heard
the rumors lodged like tears behind the eyes, and I'm not sure
where I went either, except it meant leaving home.

The McDonald's uniform doubles as nursing scrubs pulled
from the laundry like me, yet my hands are constantly dirty.
We're the staff to all this stuff but not the security.

Please unplug me. It only hurts after, so for now I'll remain
in the dressing room or switch the license plates on the cars
to stay incognito, although they can usually see where we are,
probably hypnotized by the jewelry store's bright lighting,
by the snowfall, by the sadness, by the train. I know the feeling,
head bent over a toilet the next morning or a big brass ring
through the nose and knocking over the gladiolas.

Don't worry; I'll clean it up. I've made much bigger messes,
and it might be time for the wetsuit or stitching quilts
with scraps of stiff fabric after I saved my only napkin
for the marriage ceremony. Every season the same killing.
It's cold out there while we wait for the landlord to fix
the heat, even if the 'fit is fire, I must admit. To be honest,
no one really cared, so who's going to remind the guy
with the leaf blower that it's over? I like the quiet too,
but when the blanket of sleep covers me, there is nothing
other than a darkness, and somebody is always breaking in.

ULTERIOR SONG

My dreams at night are infrequent and usually literal;
during the day, they are the opposite of so much

of what exists. We wanted to hear something different
than the hum of data quietly scraping away at our faces.

There are dark forces at work in the world, and the rot
is seeping from the foundations while dragging

the past around like a carcass with a broken jaw.
Small green shoots emerge from the jagged cracks,

but we're still preparing for winter after they tried
to turn off the sky. The flock scatters at the gunshot.

We are limned by flame and not afraid.

Ry Cook

LAPISIRIS

I want to find reason's wiry frame
to hold instead I press pyrite
and bits of pure blue
streaks that connect with the tongue's
natural electricity—thoughts as tools
that record forgetting preserve silence for sure for sure
there is still time she says stapling petals back onto elbowy sex
of the Prunus dappled hating shaking
during and craving it constantly like a gate
craves with its chryselephantine
hole the clay it was once made of
baked and pressed
into form

HONEYSWEET

Courtney uses a Bernadette Mayer trading card as a bookmark
and God is currently being built by lips and hands and dinners
with lists of friends salt red wine seas that swallow changes
that occurred during the period of genuine sadness. The little elf
we carry inside of our shirt pocket grins pregnant with today. Talmud told me
the dish is a similar texture to the clay used to build the gates of Egypt. We will burn alive
inside a symbol of our own design and we will bubble up from the guts of a city deep and loud
like a belly laugh. Kiss that perfectly shaped brick and how it can be loosened.

We who are in too much of a rush and yet the basket still floats along the river inside us lazily
every year and the baby within the basket coos against the rushing water
as if in musical relation to his request that my grandmother
make the same recipe for charoset so he can feel close. I stand with my Tupperware
waiting to be let in to the land of the dinner table of no return
and think of Rilke's dresses and how the souls have to pass through
a gate each hour of the journey, each guarded by a different serpent.
It's important you know the names.

TONIC CLONIC GRANT

Mall Whitman slop
Share crop top blow knows
On the flag half missed pissed but
Fully bpm bmw bus of cortis pine sol.
Death to the bad good bad grips'n gifts
The placating placenta of the state.

Just salad days work flow pharaoh
Faucet get in the robot angel drone
Drawn market budget vs actual led
Poisoning mid track board
Broad bod brooch of achy breaky brekky.

Thinking of eyes ey yes im grieving this
Action item found in you
Feeling uwu now time for smart volta
Indecision clock turned refuge decibel unibrow.

Feminine masc back track bury the buck
Stops here ya lousy feels speed run
Phenomenology bot do body high.

Doe uber rubber tuber down the concrete
Slide b line hairline fracture recedes succeed we
Value scabfolding scarf strong island of post back
Shot shoot numbness worn hooky freak bob boi.

No image nadda nope blocked
With a boob hickey from vac cum shake it
Shak e s hake it sha ke it like a pool a roid picture.

G.C. Waldrep

from *Storm King Poems*

STORM KING (/A)

(1)

Wild grape, poison ivy, Virginia creeper beneath a growth-stressed maple.

Not on the guided tour, though I stop & prepare my spirit for it, as if it were.

(2)

The purpose of familiar things,
which is not to comfort us. Rather a preparation for the what-comes-after.

STORM KING (/B)

Who would have thought death would have such common purpose, here.

Walls my spirit paraphrased, first standing, then sitting, then lying down.

THE REPROOF OF CONTAGIOUS MIMICRIES

Mark di Suvero, Storm King

A first-arc, that mars the view it would correct. Exact, like the lip of a season the wind bestows. It has been constructed from a desire to follow, or be followed. The light abjures it gracefully, among more silent syllables. It proposes a hymn in the name of an unfinished cross, a psalm of flanges. At times it impairs the dawn. It does not glow. It perhaps once expected to be used for the combing of stones, or to construct a grammar from stones. In the diffuse light after a storm it casts no shadow.

Andy Goldsworthy, *Storm King Wall* (1997-98)

(i)

How it aligns its possession as something more than surface. The parts I can't see, underwater or in the deep earth: a grief that is not eternity but has been woven into it. As if a bone had dreamt of a music it could advance towards, a limit. Or a film of its making projected on a classroom wall.

(ii)

Smooth bond of the locust's thorn to the light it parries, holding back both the impact & the toll. You can descend along or among the births of an eye, you don't have to wait it out. Subscribed to the veil of purchase, that sweet-bitter husk. The refining pleat of constrained recollection, unwithdrawn.

MAQUETTE (after Maya Lin)

An anchor, or a wedding. Either way a sea, preternaturally. Brutish mouth, brutened words: I said *good morning* again. I wanted there to be more time for suffering, & then there was. When I was a child, I voiced the exchange of necessary things. Battened to the concave inscape like some scar.

THE CLOUDS PART, FOR A MOMENT

The clouds part, for a moment, & the salvage shows itself, raw, supplicatory.
Purpose measures purpose, is a problem. But charity measures purpose
with its tongue, which is both vast & gentle.
The mind that honors the gash in the earth's secret braid, & the breath receding
into the poverty of the cedar grove, independent of the animal eye—

I could mark a calendar with the wildness of the invisible.
Its sustained visitation, the endlessness of the depositions it emanates from.

Martin Puryear, *Lookout* (2023)

A percentage of what has been broken, versus some percentage of what had been. A
percentage of what goes on breaking.
Now the forms are gentle; now they are not. Now the shadows are silent; now we let the
shadows speak.
I'm an hour of bone abrading into the green pact endeavor has so artfully become. For
surely I was a citizen—on that day, & on that day, any succession of days.
In the absence of the you, in the you of absence, clinging to the starker we of breath, so
tenderly.

INLAND SEA, ASKING ITS SEVEN QUESTIONS

after Maya Lin

(i)

Inland sea asking its seven questions, which concern physics. Descant of arrival the old life
still flinches from, latched to squander: what does *mercenary* mean, here? It means I'm a colony
within a colony. It means *should* is the most deceitful word in our shared language. The clean
green of emergent things, that we enact among. My touch, an all-but-instant echo in the
rehearsals of light, light I skewer with the awl of my purpose. Which is, for now, to do no
harm, though I know I do.

(ii)

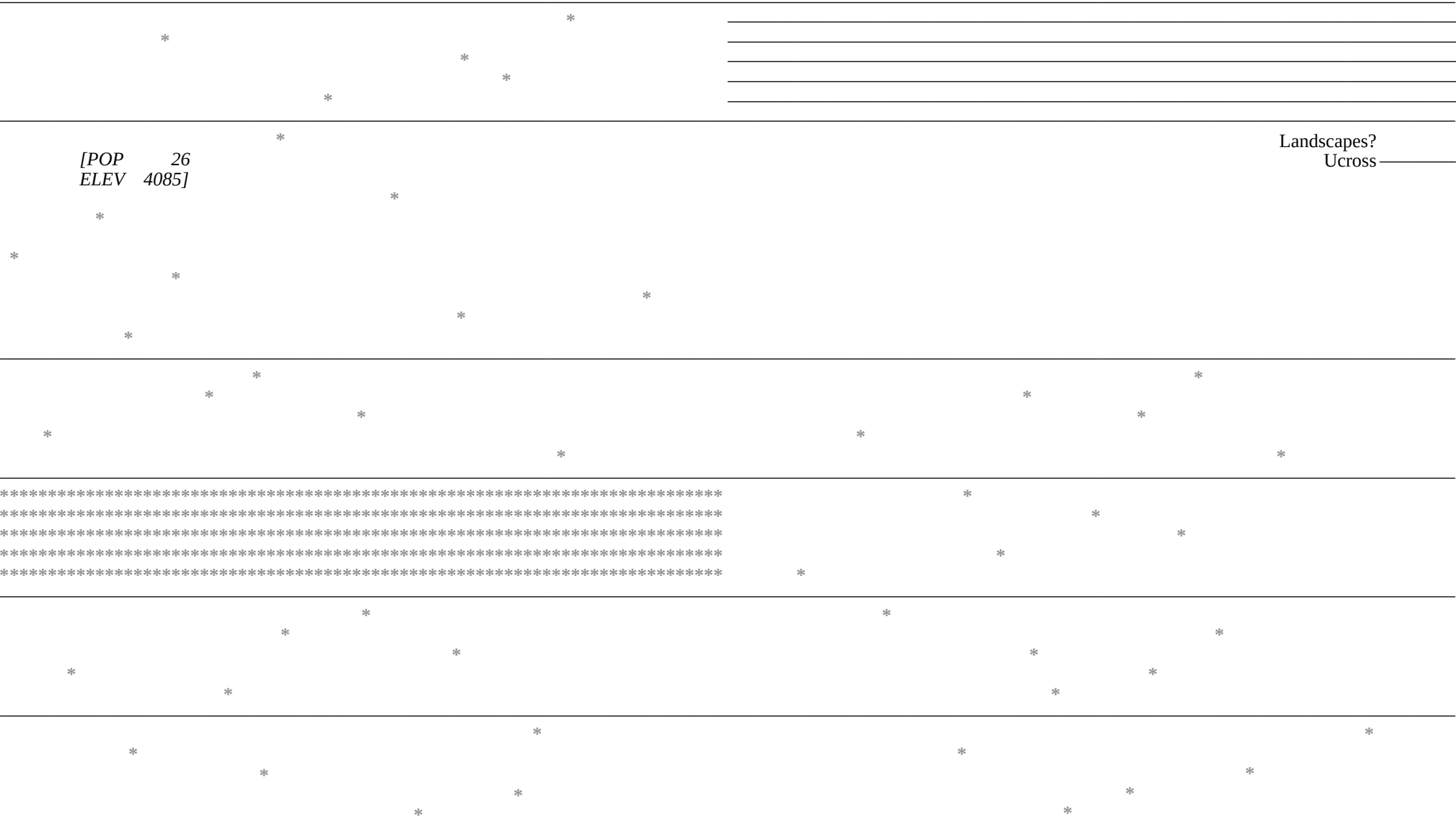
Everything is posthumous now. Wintergrass: faith unappended. I blame nothing but my lame
eye.

ELEGY FOR ANDY GOLDSWORTHY WHO IS NOT DEAD YET

The one wall that has the shape & function of a memory, by design.
Separating the *is* from the *are*, among things more purposeful.
In remedial acts, vouchsafed by the taunt of dreaming (or of dream)—
of some made thing. We could do so much worse than this.
As indeed we have, both here & in the elsewheres of our occupation.

THE DISPLAY OF OPEN GRACES

A broken antler, bone-white, placed against a boulder—so that the hopelessness
of hope is camouflaged, briefly, a little. I watch men & women walk past it
without noticing it, using the voices they use when they speak into their phones;
I avert my eye. Miracle-Christ in which this inheres, all but endlessly, as a cache
& a witness. Beneath a sky the same archive-blue as a wound that is healing.



– the bald eagle – hunter, glides – for some fish
– the wind swishes
– wings and trees:
crisscrossed shades



Wyoming creek is getting
narrower / I face it, getting
bleaker, day by day – while
an absent accumulation rests in
hideout / sways *Temperature* /

Donkey: it goes / crawling
hopeless / beyond layers:
grayish plastic stripes;
glass (dots, dirt);
screen; / cursed,

its wedding gown /
slices of morning //
I move, somehow,
all layers // I see:
motion / the Ucross

time, unconsciously
: runs its course / chews
/ pure force / for
a deceiving ma
d shine / the

trying, dark
and silver
y winter /
lock to a
vile ice.

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Wyoming creek is
narrower / I face it,
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out / sways *Temper*

: it goes / crawling
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 dirt
 / cursed,

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go
ing //
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// I see:
the Ucross

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unconscious
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dark
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ice.

*Johann Sebastian Bach:
Goldberg Variations, BWV 988: Variation 25
(Vikigur Ólafsson's recording)
begins to play; from 1'34"
to its conclusion.*

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*****—*the bald eagle?*—*****

Caught itself, the trap.
Spring will come, though.
Summer. Fall. Winter, again. Spring will come.
Summer. Fall. Winter, again. And again. Until:
when? Time is getting narrower
and narrower.

Rosmarie Waldrop is an American poet, novelist, translator, essayist and publisher. Born in Germany, she has lived in the United States since 1958 and has settled in Providence, Rhode Island since the late 1960s. With Keith Waldrop, Rosmarie co-founded Burning Deck Press in 1961. She has received awards or fellowships from the NEA, the Fund for Poetry, the Howard Foundation, the DAAD Berlin Artists' Program, the Foundation of Contemporary Arts, and a Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Award. She has been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the French government has made her a "Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres." Her recent books include *The Nick of Time*, *Gap Gardening: Selected Poems*, *Driven to Abstraction*, and *Curves to the Apple* (New Directions). Her collected essays, *Dissonance (if you are interested)*, is available from University of Alabama Press; her novel, *The Hanky of Pippin's Daughter*, from Dorothy a Publishing Project. Her translation, *Conversation in the Mountains: Collected Prose by Paul Celan*, has just been reissued by New Directions.

Hajar Hussaini is the author of *Disbound: Poems* (University of Iowa Press, 2022) and the recipient of a 2026 Whiting Award in Poetry. Her translations from Persian include *Death and His Brother: A Novel* by Khosrow Mani (Syracuse University Press, 2027), which won a 2025 PEN/Heim Translation Fund Grant, and *Wounded Vita Nuda: Poems* by Maral Taheri (Deep Vellum, 2027), which won the 2025 Mo Habib Translation Prize. She was a 2025 MacDowell fellow and a 2025 Baldwin for the Arts Fellow. Hussaini also co-curates the Salon Salvage performance and reading series in Troy, NY. Her writings and translations have appeared in *Poetry*, *Asymptote*, *Daedalus*, *Annulet*, and others. A graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, she is an assistant teaching professor of English at Skidmore College and lives in Saratoga Springs, NY.

Alan Gilbert is a poet and writer whose most recent book of poems is the ongoing epic poem, *The Everyday Life of Design* (Winter Editions, 2024).

Ry Cook is a Brooklyn-based poet/performer whose work has been published in the *New Republic*, the *Baffler*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *Peel Lit*, the *Baffler*, *Hot Pink Magazine*, *BOMB*, and others. Her first chapbook, *Freak of Nature*, came out through Choo Choo Press this past year. Her second, *ASUSHUNAMIR*, is out Fall 2026 through Blue Bag Press.

G.C. Waldrep's most recent books include *feast gently* (Tupelo, 2018), winner of the William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America, and *The Opening Ritual* (Tupelo, 2024), one of the *New York Times's* best poetry collections of 2024. Waldrep taught creative writing, history, and literature at the University of Iowa, Deep Springs College, Kenyon College, and Bucknell University, from which he retired in 2025. He lives in Mercersburg, Pa.

Felipe Franco Munhoz is the author of *Guide to a Fall* (University of Iowa International Writing Program, 2025; co-written with Nada Alturki); and, in Portuguese, of *A bússola adúltera*, *Dissoluções*, *Lanternas ao nirvana*, *Identidades* and *Mentiras*. He is the recipient of fellowships and residencies with the International Writing Program, Santa Maddalena Foundation (Italy), MacDowell, T. S. Eliot House, Ucross Foundation, Sangam House (India), and Art Omi: Writers; to Art Omi, Tom Stoppard wrote: “An experimentalist in the best sense, a true modernist. His published texts are not like any other texts I have seen: just to look at them tells you he is pushing boundaries.”

Karla Kelsey, the editor of this folio, is the author of seven books, including the poetry collections *On Certainty* (Omni dawn) and *Blood Feather* (Tupelo), and the work of experimental prose *Transcendental Factory: For Mina Loy* (Winter Editions). A recipient of awards and fellowships from the Poetry Society of America, the Fulbright Scholars Program, and Yale University, she is the editor of *Lost Writings: Two Novels by Mina Loy* (Yale University Press).