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# Yes

Poetry by  
B.J. Best



A Parallel Press Chapbook



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Poems by  
B.J. Best

**Parallel Press**

University of Wisconsin–Madison Libraries

Parallel Press  
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*For Erin and Henry*





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Your nine-month-old understands the word *no*.  
Whether he chooses to respond to it is another story.

—*Baby 411*



## **sandhill cranes**

they stand like chessmen in the field  
shorn down to stubble, and soon they will slide  
across the troubled checkerboard of october:

early frosts slashed through by night.  
they are gray and austere as dolphins  
etched onto the lid of a coffin, as a tin bucket

filling with a truckload of snow.  
this pair of downy candleholders, it is said  
they mate for life, relighting their red crowns

again and again. it's true: my wife  
and i made our moves long ago: queen  
to knight, cheek to chest, bird to bee.

now, when i stand cooking eggs  
in the rookery of our kitchen, or i'm there  
reading field guides in the rocking chair,

sometimes i feel grace sweep my neck  
like a feather. i expect her to be behind me,  
but no: she's ironing, the fat silver tongue

grooming her clothes like a cat,  
while she hums songs she's made up  
about mothers, flying, the weather.

## Cloud Journal

Someone is sending smoke signals from his shack on a mountain in Montana, and soon the sky is choked with them. What are they saying? Something about turtles and the way they swim, ships and the way they sink, birds and the things that eat birds' bones. Or maybe just how lonely it is to live in a shack on a mountain in Montana.

I live in a house with my wife. Easy enough. And I, too, can send signals: just look how I order another beer or let the driver who cut me off know he was frightfully wrong. But the damper of our fireplace rusts for want of use, and our blankets are only laced with cat hair.

Sometimes clouds are just clouds, Freud would have said had he spent more time outside. We live where we must, writing our homes with light bulbs and lemon juice, vinegar and oil, our voices filigreeing the air. When something incredible sails by, we look up to say, *Incredible!*, then blink at each other like shuttered lanterns, our hands tender as fluttering flags.

## **the weather in paris**

is nothing like the weather here.  
when it rains, it somehow does so

in french, smelling of boulangeries  
and fancy cigarettes. here, the rain

is familiar as the yellow umbrella  
we bought together. maybe i'm changing

my opinions about god. maybe  
you never thought it would be so easy

to orbit a body, a lake,  
a globe. in a month, there will be flurries,

those old crystalline questions.  
you're in paris, and i'm where

i want to say this: i love the nation  
we have built, and want to sew you a flag:

dirty dishes, hummingbird, the first few notes  
of debussy's "rêverie," a dot

representing either des moines  
or our eyes, all on a field

of our bed's summer-green sheets.



## sudden prayer

if i believed in meteorites, i would know  
what to wish for: the arc of an ark;  
a long, cool burn; forgiveness for the pigs'

coily tails. instead—ineffable and blank  
as a gunshot—we're left with tautologies  
of inept mathematicians: prayer is warm

as the gleaming palm of an iron,  
dark as a fire log washed out  
by rain. so perhaps i should pray

to these cedar waxwings, cuddled in boughs,  
muddling the air. just look at their markings:  
a monk's shrouded face, a slash of blood

singed on their wings, yellow tail feathers  
smelling somewhat like sulfur, all with  
a feather in their caps. i would ask them

for flight, i suppose; for ants to play  
the pan flutes of my toes;  
for my coffee cup dull as their breasts

to be right where i left it. mathematics  
teaches us  $a$  equals  $a$ . so i pray for  
knowing what to pray for.

**egg toss**

we stand at the cusp of a line  
in the yard of a fourth of july,  
cradling our babies closer

than an oyster polishing its pearl.  
but soon, upon orders, they must sail:  
these uncooked chicks, these uncashed

checks, these unhatched desires like a squadron  
of stars constellating the evening with the terror  
of flight. we hope our partner

who is paces away knows her patience;  
the scoop, catch, and glide; the body  
and the things that beat there.

thus, through the night  
spangled with humidity, flows  
the arc of a conversation

that sounds something like prayer:  
*don't let me fall; don't let me  
shatter; pool me in your soft hands*

*so i may never fly from you again.*

## snow angel

from above, on the white paper of the lake,  
it looks like you're scribbling a grand sentence,  
something about clouds and the weather

they push with their plows. from below,  
the fish think you're washing their windows  
poorly. then you stand up to study

your splotch: an arc of motion,  
a bell frozen in its ring, the feathers  
of a vibrating bird. and you're disappointed

at this pointless effigy, as if your cookie cutout  
could fly, as if your snowman  
could sing. whatever brings holiness,

it's not this portrait stung by sun,  
not the act of lying on your back,  
arms arched and wide, this empty

cruciform of cold. but look:  
as you brush off the fluff from your coat:  
watch the way the flecks of snow

ring their little white bells in the light.

## **snowing like hell wouldn't have it**

it's a matter of geography, my father says:  
we live in january wisconsin where the cold  
kicks our chests until we wear coats blue  
and bruised by oil, leaking out flurries

of feathers. he would never be caught dead  
in california, with its santa ana winds  
and bikinis like strings of suggestion,  
because he is a stubborn old man. my wife

disagrees: when these nights hang on their hooks  
for fourteen hours like butchered black pigs,  
she's ready to hightail it to tucson,  
pluck prickly-pear needles from her pinkies.

each hell is different, i suppose:  
low-pressure systems dropping boxes of nails  
tipped with tetanus, or pyrite, or  
frogs that explode into ichor on the pavement—

my father plows the driveway  
like spreading frosting on some unhappy cake.  
recently, a jesus fish has swum onto his truck's bumper,  
sudden and unexpected as a sunbeam.

the devil, sharkskin suit and red tie,  
is studying his weather maps again.  
my father slings a shovel on his shoulder like a rifle,  
revising the sudden whiteness of his will.

## knocking down icicles

they hang like new hayforks,  
ready to pitch grass, ready to spike snow.  
the pole for my purpose is long  
as a lightning rod, daring in its gleam,

and soon i'm washing those watery windows  
and shattering every one. i'd just as soon  
let them touch down like ray beams,  
lock the house in a delicate prison.

but my father warns about ice dams,  
how they roost on the eaves like silver hens,  
kicking their cold eggs into the attic,  
where the yolks break and bloom brown

on the bedroom ceilings. water  
is sinister, he says, serpentine and soulless,  
and it'll pop rivets from the rafters  
if it wants to. therefore, i'm a surgeon

with my ridiculous scalpel, breaking  
all the bones, the wounds still weeping.  
beneath my boots, the snow squeaks  
as if it were crying. *it will heal*, he says,

meaning spring, meaning crocuses like debutantes  
with their fancy necklaces of rain.

## **sudden prayer for the climbing tree**

halfway up, you relearn the world  
is, finally, air: the west wind finger-paints  
the lake, smudging its black puffs;

the chickadees navigate their crazy maze  
of limbs. the pine needles seem astonished  
at their own explosion: shooting to suck sun

and old sounds. my friends all agree:  
we're getting too old for lots of things,  
now: sunrise after the sharp blink

of night, girls with tattoos that leak  
down their backs, songs that use the word  
*love*. climbing you today, tree,

my shorts ripped at the thigh, showing  
the scar of underwear beneath.  
my arms scratched like someone struck matches,

my hands sweet and sickly with sap.  
someday, god will wash your hair  
with spring rain, then split your skull

with his electric white drill. he wonders  
what he might find: toothpicks and pool cues,  
heart attacks emanating in rings,

the vow from a drunken pontoon boat  
when you were only knee-high to his knee.  
—i hope our splintering is gentle.

i hope someone writes some new songs.  
the world, finally, is air:  
somehow, i'll have to climb down.

## Cloud Journal

Calm night. A half-moon slowly erasing the stars, spilling its bucket of cold light. Today, the clouds galloped through like horses: a team of gray stallions wheeled their long, low wagon of rain; then wild white mares went rearing; then the sky nothing but a pasture of blue. It is now after midnight, a new day to be led from its paddock to run steeplechase over the great cities. It is music to hear wind sift through pines; it is music to hear my wife breathing, asleep. I want to know whom I should thank for the moon, the horse heads like fluxing nebulae, the orchestra of refrigerator and dishwasher in the kitchen. Calm night. Stars now almost drowned. In the yard, crickets tune their oboe-black legs.

## tornado watch

all day, the weatherman says, the storm cells  
have roosted in the west like a clutch  
of electric eggs, while the wind has been still

as a stone. but soon, the blue teeth of a cold front  
will eat through the air while barometers' needles  
flutter down like feathers. therefore:

between six and ten, he says, we should  
be careful: clouds might unroll their elephant trunks  
and suck up whatever they will.

*pay attention*, he says, so i do: the cats  
are asleep, tacking down their patches of evening sun;  
the dishes in the sink still need to be washed.

my wife is taking off her nail polish,  
localized floods of pink acetone from the cotton-ball  
clouds. —it's easy to stand on the deck, squint

at the sky, hands clasped like some sort of sage.  
it's harder to love the weather indoors:  
the squall of the shower, the coolness of linoleum,

the mixer typhooning through some batter.  
those are the real hours of watchfulness:  
dust sifting like snow to the shelves,

the light bulb heating up my reading. then  
there is the way my wife and i talk in bed  
about our days, wheeling the humidity,

while the storm whimpers and wheedles outside.



## **sudden prayer for the shooting star accidentally photographed**

it is tiresome to be framed by anything  
for too long: the bristles of hair  
that sweep your hot eyes,  
your childhood house leaky with light.

i used to think i understood burning,  
the pot's grim affairs with the stove.  
now i'm not sure. tonight is aboil  
with stars, hydrogen being broken

so we can coo like doves stupid  
with wonder. the mausoleum of our fireplace  
cracks more each winter; the orange tongue  
of the candle talks for hours

with little luxuriance to say. and then  
there is you, meteor, the old insect  
locked in the amber of my lens,  
the panicked bat in our dark attic.

even at light speed, i only knew you  
after you were gone, you teenage father,  
you scent of autumn smoke, you  
whom we are told to love.

i can't believe how old  
the universe is getting: the wrinkled face  
of the ocean; the wobbly, cantankerous planets;  
the translucent skin of new leaves.

but here, in the omnivorous cyclops  
of my camera, hangs your electric-blue heart.  
who will say that can't last forever?

## **vodka**

i like the way it rattles in my blood  
like boxcars drunk with potatoes.  
i like saying *vodka tonic*, those hard *k*'s

little hatchets of speech convincing the bartender  
i'm ready to chop up some liver.  
my father says it's a summer drink,

and by the time it's duck season  
and he's grown a beard like a forest  
of dead birch, he orders

brandy old-fashioned sweets. they are drunk  
only by old men—and god, i suppose,  
sitting on the weary cloud of his barstool

while some lesser saint polishes the rails.  
they taste like soot spiked with sugar,  
and their cherries are alcoholic grenades

for the kiddies to play with.  
but i like limes, and i like watching  
the spring constellations fold away

as into a box of old sweaters,  
and i like to mean what i say:  
vodka. more vodka for me.

## lime daiquiris at the frangipani hotel

1.

we discuss the finer points of bodysurfing:  
the flailing and gliding, the unintentional somer-  
saults, the sand in unspeakable crevices—  
most bodies, it is agreed, are imperfect,  
like the southern cross with its fifth star  
as beautiful and meaningless as a mole.

2.

in my dream, our argument was  
complete. not as in *finished*, but rather  
pure and whole. there were boxes of clothes  
flung like shedding skin, words falling  
dead to the ground. we  
did not touch. the heaven  
of icebergs; the ocean  
and its grave of broken shells.  
i woke up alone, not knowing  
where i was, but i took the dream  
for what dreams are, finally: bodiless,  
and therefore useless.

3.

another night and then we'll sail north,  
wander through the arboretum of native vegetation:  
the flexible akee, the nutmeg which can be used  
in tear gas, the cannonball tree with its new flower  
every day. even the frangipani, perfume and oil  
that will attract a lover, manifold arms  
groping naked between leaf and blossom. the ixora,  
whose flower is used locally as a birthday candle,  
celebrating the day we were given our bodies,  
leaving the garden,  
burning, singing.

## tangerines

they come from wherever it's summer,  
nestled in their crate like ornaments  
or a cluster of simmering stars.

i undress one with my thumbnail, its neon robe  
sloughing into shards in the bowl,  
to find what we all know is inside:

something delicious and wet. my wife  
cannot believe i'm eating tangerines:  
they are not hot dogs, nor pork chops

burned black, nor any of the three other foods  
i would willingly eat as a child.  
i peel it apart and each wedge is a jewel.

it is time for surprises, i say, wheeling her  
like a kaleidoscope around the kitchen,  
or planting a note like a seed in her coat pocket

where later it may bloom into the purple flower  
of romance. when we make love,  
i will not shower afterward, instead

carrying her perfume in my pores  
like a heart-shaped tattoo, the way  
my tangerined fingers smell like sun,

sticky with sex and delight.

## **sudden prayer for my mailbox**

curled in the corner of the cul-de-sac  
and the scent of sweet august grass,  
it stands like the head of a hammer,  
ready to bang its telegraphs to the world.  
sometimes it raises its red hand,  
so excited for the postmaster to call on it;  
other times i open its mouth and it yawns  
like a lion, bored with three days of no news.  
it's a brown trout pregnant with thin fingerlings,  
a safe where the stamps glitter like jewels.

in this life, i would like to take whatever  
is sent to me, read it in the language  
in which it is written, work for days  
on the words of my reply. but often  
my heart is a wolf with no forwarding address,  
trampling through snow, hunting too hard.

o holy barn of my business, o black hole  
at the center of the mailman's faith:  
let me learn to love my last name;  
the zip code of my coats' zippers; and  
the omelets i'm making for breakfast,  
red peppers in their envelopes of egg  
to be mailed in care of my wife  
who is just getting up, her bathrobe  
wrapped around her like a package  
i'm excited to open right there  
in the bright post office of our bed.

## **fingernails**

my wife tends the small garden of her hands:  
weeding the edges, soothing the soil.  
soon, the flowers of her fingers bloom poppy red,  
then the petals fall off in soft flakes.

the fields of my hands have been kept  
by a farmer with an affinity for bourbon.  
where the lifeline is furrowed, you can see  
where his tractor veered three separate times.

he has not yet cut firewood from the broken trees  
of my freckles rotting behind the white hills  
of my knuckles. the patchy flax on my fingers  
has yet to be harvested, and the joints creak

like the rusting springs of his truck.  
these january nights, our house is bitter as hay.  
my wife keeps the bulbs of her thumbs shooting  
in the greenhouse of our electric blanket.

lit by a gray moon, i study my hand, the hangnails  
standing like snowmen. my fingernails  
are five frozen ponds at the edge of that field.  
you can imagine a couple ice-skating there,

carving their curlicues, discussing what  
they should grow in the summer: beans, maybe;  
red peppers the rabbits will eat; or a child  
whose hands they will forever tend together.

## **tampons**

they are packed in their box like a rack  
of fireworks, each ready to bloom red streamers  
of light. or else they are mushrooms: strong stems,  
spongy caps to sop up the spores. my wife

tells stories about tampons: the crimp  
of a cramp, the creepiness of cotton, her life  
and the rusty chains of its cycle. but it's not  
a curse, she says, just like a drought

isn't a blessing. so i watch for other cycles:  
cartwheeling cumulus, a swallow's flight  
cut into arcs, the calendar's curious compartment  
of days. then there's the way the moon

is white as a host overhead, but slowly  
steeps in earth's blood as it sets.  
you never want to run out of tampons, she says,  
bringing home another carton for the cabinet,

like a box of matches i'm too blunderbussed to light.  
but i like when the forecast for our bedroom  
is sex, and the ninety percent chance of conception,  
i like that, too—the fallen flowers of all those years

of tampons risen as the plastic-smooth skin  
of a newborn, crying and petaled with blood.

## vitamins

in the white plastic kettle churns an alphabet soup  
of health: *a* for your eyes, *b-12* for bingo,  
*e* for egregiously expensive. i haven't taken vitamins

since i was eight and they were chewable,  
and it shows: my bones bitter with rust,  
my eyes busted binoculars, my left hand

always suspicious of the right. but suddenly,  
my wife is taking strange ones: calcium,  
niacin, and folic acid in a pink pill

shaped like a womb. *we want everything to be healthy,*  
she says, and i suppose we do, but that doesn't explain  
the mystery of minerals, or pheromones

and their cryptograms of scent, or why i sneeze  
like my father: a diesel engine backfiring  
into a wheeze. and what to tell a child,

if she comes? you have your mother's hair,  
your father's nose, and you should take vitamins  
because there are some things

we can't give you? there are carrots, and then  
there is milk, and then there is the way my wife  
swallows her vitamins: before bed, in the bathroom,

a glass of dull tap water: a glottal shudder  
followed by an aspirated *a*, a sigh  
round and gravid with hope.



## **garter snakes**

in autumn fields, they are yellow ribbons  
afloat on a thin river of sun;

their tongues flick out like forecasts  
that come back all forked and thistled.

or else they're still as railroad spikes,  
laying track for the blue locomotive of winter.

this is after they've sloughed off their scales,  
leaving honeycombs buzzing with light;

after the crickets have canned their concertos.  
soon, they're curled in their burrows dark

as question marks; soon, the snake egg  
of the moon hatches into a strip of cold stars.

\*

in a photograph, it is easter, and my wife  
is eight, yellow ribbons nesting in her hair.

she is cute and smiles straight ahead.  
she is not thinking of snakes,

nor of the final dull breaths of march.  
her fingers are twined as warmly as ivy

embraces its trellis. she doesn't know me yet,  
of course not, and she doesn't know

how we'll take the daughter we still might have  
to the disused railroad bed in october,

scattering locusts that flicker like fireworks,  
and say to her: *this is a garter snake,*

*it won't hurt you;* watch it sew its black thread  
back into the hem of the grass; and watch her

flutter her tongue in response, trying to taste  
the next astounding thing that will come.

## Cloud Journal

This morning the sky unrolled its fine bolt of muslin until the sun was no more than an almond. Then things got diffuse, then something else happened, then—

I'm thinking about this, murdering the clouds by throwing at them these hand grenades of print, when there will be just as many tomorrow, or more, or less, or I'll awake amazed that the light has been erased from my eyes. My wife sees it differently: she's memorized the arcs of my arms, wants to belly-rub the bunnies who are gourmands of our garden, says there's a stain on the carpet that wasn't there a month ago.

That may be. Evening now, the wind soothed into silence. Swallows cruise the water, plucking insects like grapes from the air. I have done so little to deserve any of this: the birds, the sunset, her hair. But I can try to make the clouds of these words disappear: look: the sound of windows opening to leach the night air. Look: the scent of dew forming on grass, little tiaras of humidity. Look: her feet I'm rubbing with my fingers.

## vegetable garden

this is the story of my mother's bandanna,  
deep blue with paisley swimming like amoebas  
in that lake. she would wear it  
when she was gardening, hatching the red eggs  
of tomatoes within their wire cages;  
varnishing the lattice of carrot leaves  
with a shower from the hose; pulling out a chive  
and holding it by its bulb like a wand,  
calling me to smell its bitter sorcery.  
she used it to soak up the sweat, then wipe  
the dirt off her hands where it hung  
like dark, velvet gloves.

this is when it was summer and i was eight,  
maybe, rumbling my dump truck over the lumps  
of our yard, over a small clump of clover  
where a bee was attending its sweetness.  
it punched my leg with sizzling electricity,  
like the lightning of venom, the acupuncture  
of pain. this is the story of how she came running,  
and how the bandanna fell from her hair  
like a blanket swaddling the weeds,  
like a love letter too late to answer.

## peeing

today, i stood at the edge of a rock and unzipped,  
and suddenly, i was throwing my own party: a firework  
of phosphates from that measly mortar, a confetti

of gemstones from a pummeled piñata. girls, we know,  
do it differently: my mother's dog, for example,  
squares her hips over a splotch of lawn,

but can't stop wagging because she's excited  
to see me. sure, we all carry around our little pouches  
of gold, but it's nothing to write home about,

especially when there are weather and women  
and wine. but maybe i should do just that:  
—dear mom, today i stood at the edge of a rock

and peed. thank you for teaching me the difference  
between water and acid; thank you for saying  
thunderstorms are not god's way of doing

his business. i have learned about clouds,  
and the tannins of grape skins, and how to love my wife:  
thank you for teaching me the way to do right things.

## **sudden prayer against the moonrise**

the campground on the east side of the lake  
is tilting orange, and there it blooms:  
a tiger-lily stone ascending. it is a coldness

we are taught to love, the sun's bathroom mirror,  
the same way we are taught without worms  
nothing could ever be born.

and so, it skids across the sky, an egg  
no one will incubate, a planetoid that needs  
no population. sure, you could sing silvery songs

about it, leash it with lightning if you must.  
but i want to orbit something softer:  
the white-throated sparrow that mistook the window

for just another sky, blood now glazed on its breast.  
the apples constellating a pie, and the way  
they are eclipsed by a sphere of ice cream.

or the way i hold hands with my wife, our fingers  
locked by electromagnetics, by gravity, by pheromones'  
fascination with sex. the moon will set soon enough

without anyone's help. so let me love what i circle:  
an icicle or an idea, the cat's meditation on the letter *r*,  
or the twin moons of my wife's breasts beneath covers

while she sleeps, which might become  
whole worlds to an infant,  
hands reaching for her moon-gray eyes.

## Cloud Journal

A battalion of battleships armed with mere air; a flock of pretty white fish.  
Long drags of God's blue cigarette.

I've done little good with this skin, wishing mostly to dissolve into steam.  
My wife says she'll be pregnant by this time next year, but she does not say  
by whom. Maybe children are like clouds: beautiful, sudden, and a pain  
in the ass to photograph well.

I should be serious. I should say the weather doesn't matter to the eggs  
sleeping in their refrigerated cardboard coop. I should say my elbows  
ache, hard and ugly as the beak of a snapping turtle. I should say children  
are like clouds: unsuressurely developing and ridiculous to love.

A cheek full of whispers; a bakery for light bulbs. Sheep drinking from a  
river of wind.

Let me write the right song. Let me look at Tomorrow's eyes, overcast  
gray, and say, I love you! Let me photograph our arms and hang them in  
a mobile over the crib—

Immaculate icebergs; pillows so soft we can't touch them. A choo-choo  
train with a sleepy conductor.

## a coin collection

in 1858, an eagle flew through the copper sky  
of autumn, and just hung there: until  
it was pressed into a blue album,  
a photograph of a year i know nothing about—

except *compromise*, maybe, liberty and cotton,  
or the way i forget my wife's sadness:  
*each period is another vanished child.*  
these shoeboxes of coins—cracking barges of ore—

were given to me by my grandfather as easily  
as an old deck of cards, a jangling solitaire  
he couldn't win. by then, he collected  
almost anything: string, stamps, scrap wood,

antique tools clenched with rust that would never  
hug another bolt, kiss another screw.  
i must have been nine then, my cursive—  
*nickels needed*—blooming in unsteady petals,

my lists austere graveyards of dates.  
that summer, my fingers were sour with silver,  
waving a magnifier like a lollipop of light.  
eventually, he died. eventually, the coins

became uncirculated for more than twenty years.  
still, they seem like good things to teach  
a son: *steel cent, carson city, seated liberty,*  
*very good barber head dime.* then, when he tires,

say, *these coins are worthless, unlike wisdom,*  
and leave it at that—: and watch  
how he spends his care, his money, his time.



**for my son, who is not eight**

the dinosaurs are at it again.  
the neighbors' cottonwood tree  
didn't just chop down itself.  
men rode them in,  
brontosaurus mostly,  
their thick tails shattering the wood.  
during lunch, i fed one a can  
of split pea soup, its muzzle  
soft as a peach. look.  
the can is still on the counter.

in this fishbowl swim  
my old marbles: *boulders, jumbos,*  
*jumbo-jumbos.* this white one,  
lines blue-thin as veins,  
is a *king.* here's a red one,  
bright and pretty.  
if you drop a handful in a milk jug  
and shake it around, it's like watching  
a filmstrip about science.

when you become an astronaut,  
i hope the only thing still visible of earth  
is fox hill (and the day like today:  
drizzling october, the arborvitae  
scaly and orange as lichens),  
and standing atop it  
are your mother and me,  
gesturing toward little cedar lake,  
arguing like we have since last year  
about how far it migrates  
while we sleep.

## **sudden prayer for me, crying**

july, a month of stupid life and death:  
one pregnant cousin, one pregnant friend,  
another adopting responsibilities

unfathomable. then a mother with cancer  
like charcoal briquettes, the cup of her breath  
spilling within a year. our dead cat

whose last three days were nothing more  
than an ellipsis. a man who drowned  
twenty-four years ago, whose last dream

was women drinking red wine. his body  
didn't come up in the spring. instead,  
today is wednesday, the trees a hemline

of the lake's green skirt, the clouds  
like slivers of citrus. this is a moment  
that makes me want to roll:

through the sweet duff of the forest;  
into the limp blue of my bed  
where i will never come out

ever; across the wide missouri. i want  
the wind to dry my cheeks until i can feel  
my wife's skin. i want to memorize

the constellations of salt suddenly specked  
on my glasses. tonight, the delta aquarids:  
meteors born into blue slashes of light,

into the sudden seizure of a sob.  
i have tied a hammock to the shore,  
its netted teeth curving

into what seems to be a smile.  
tonight, i will hang there like a comma,  
not earth, not sky, not stupid life and death,

but in between: in between, where everything—  
everything!—is so damned beautiful.

## **mushrooms**

along fractured fences, in the greenery of a ditch,  
from the hothouse of the forest they come:  
buttons sprouting from the vests of the dead.

after a thick rope of rain has coiled into puddles  
in the yard, i might find them there: their gills  
breathe like fish; their stems suck from the core

of the earth, not the sun. soon, the grass is haunted  
with ghosts; soon, crickets are twirling the fancy  
white parasols they've found. *never eat a mushroom*

*you can't positively identify*, the field guides tell us,  
and with good reason: they eat through the logs;  
they rise from the rot; and scattering the spores

is like watching the fireworks of death, our oohing  
punctuated by coughs. there is wisdom in decay  
because there is hope in tomorrow, and i like it

when my wife scrutinizes the brown mushrooms of my eyes,  
pries off the caps to see what's inside, and says, *yes,*  
*we'll keep growing into something amazing.*

yes

when she asks me if i believe in god, i say  
yes. when she calls me a liar, i say yes.  
i've been trying to say yes to most things lately:  
another beer; a broom that wants to kiss  
the floor, coughing its tempests of dust;  
the winter light that comes in all slanty;  
the old pear of my guitar which i play  
so poorly it scares the cats. watch tv?  
yes. an antique tin with a golden woman,  
fan, kimono? heavens, yes. waiting five minutes  
until the taco shells are ready, hot little envelopes  
of corn? yes, yes, yes. when she asks me  
if i want to see her tanning-bed sunburn,  
i say yes, and suddenly the seven inches of snow  
to which i said yes are erased  
by a parliament of cardinals calling *yes* from the pines.





B.J. Best is the author of three books of poetry: *But Our Princess Is in Another Castle* (Rose Metal Press, 2013), *Birds of Wisconsin* (New Rivers Press, 2010), and *State Sonnets* (sunnyoutside, 2009). He has also published three chapbooks with Centennial Press: *Drag: Twenty Short Poems about Smoking* (2011); *Mead Lake, This* (2007); and *Crap* (2005). He teaches at Carroll University and lives in the Wisconsin countryside with his wife, son, their three cats, and the occasional salamander in their basement.

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