

ELF OWL  
(*Micrathene whitneyi*)

The saguaros lose weight and pleat  
as they enter the death phase. It may last  
for years. It's been so long since water  
made good the sky's promises  
there's a rattle in the desert's breath  
not made by the sidewinder.

Leafless ocotillos dangle blips of red  
against day's end, one-spark blossoms  
like bobbing semaphores  
signaling the elf owl to hunt.

In midnight sandshine, the tiny raptor  
withdraws to its hollow  
in the oldest saguaro. The cactus tightens  
on its own tall thirst, narrowing its cells,  
its clustered spines hard as medieval maces  
guarding its deep secret moisture.

Twice more the pigmy predator haunts the night,  
silence feathering swiftly over empty silence,  
coming home empty.

lenna Holloway  
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as they enter the death phase. It may last  
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*all my  
senses are  
engaged*

Leafless ocotillos, arcing across day's end,  
dangle blips of red-- one-spark blossoms  
like bobbing semaphores  
signaling the elf owl to hunt.

In midnight sandshine, the tiny raptor  
withdraws to its hollow  
in the oldest saguaro. The cactus tightens  
on its own tall thirst, narrowing its cells,  
its clustered spines hard as medieval maces  
guarding its deep secret moisture.

*Beautiful!*

Twice more the pigmy predator haunts the night,  
silence feathering swiftly over empty silence,  
coming home empty.

*I'm  
breathless!*

*the imagery  
immerses me  
in the  
working of  
this lovely cactus*

*you are a gifted poet!  
Carol V.*

*Glenna*

## HOMING IN ON THE HIGH SIGNS

### I. On the Way

It happens every year about this time:  
Faint signals almost out of range compose  
A whisper-lilting melody to prime  
My consciousness between these beige plateaus.  
New colors hold their glow in twilight's rise  
With nimbus rings like cotton newly ginned.  
A needling rain begins to bleed the clay;  
It leaches gravel, milling it to sand,  
Exposes diamonds set in granite's gray,  
Strings opal beads all through the hardwood stand.  
I wander this kaleidoscope, a child  
Whose ever-changing mountainscapes grow wild.

### II. Arrival

I wake up wondering what sound I heard,  
And was it dreamed or did a blue wing brush  
My arm? Did lyrics from an unknown bird  
Make harmony with sparrow hawk and thrush?  
I think of first dance steps, and first good-byes,  
Subliminal, just out of reach of reason.  
A place where early loves still magnetize  
Me like a compass in the autumn season.  
The dogwoods send up flares when summer's done,  
Red compliments for laurel, spruce and pine.  
The aspen beacons challenge noonday sun  
As whitetails flash between their shade and shine.  
It's out of my control; I heed the call  
To climb these heights of majesty each fall.

.N

Ten-year-old boy: tan face, grass-stained bottom,  
trading heavily in risky ventures and strong sun  
while girls retreat



who judged?  
Ooiee Fink

TROMPE L'OEIL

It means deception of the eye,

this unique art form

making the willing

believe nonexistent things.

Your den's north wall appears lined

with shelves of brightly-bound classics,

a bust of Ovid, a Ming censer, brass pots

trailing ivy and lavender inflorescence.

Your clever painter lies and you provide

real scent of lilacs to satisfy the nose

while the hand that tries to grasp

a volume of verse or feel jade's coolness

resents being made a fool.

Yet the eye insists, forcing

another confrontation with flatness.

(cont.)

So must I resolve you

in the brain's right and left privacies,

in the involuntary offshoots

where facts fade.

The artist has blued your eyes

in shades of faithfulness and burnished

your skin with soft premises. Sometimes

my hand finds heat and contoured strength

more than a match for sight's illusions.

Yet I know I'll touch again

that one-dimension sweep, that rigid lack,

try to read by light that isn't there,

face that depthless smile.

And all your old false colors

will shame me for my blindness.

*you write  
as Flaubert says?  
"he not just".*

DECODING 101

It's late. Elongated shadows crosshatch  
my back yard. Gray on gray  
cryptograms I can't read.

My neighbor's window draws my eye.  
Her silhouette hunches over her desk,  
lurches abruptly. She rises slowly.  
Her hand flies to her face, lingers:  
A single bent but legible line  
among hieroglyphics in a shaded frame.

I never liked her by day:  
Origins, isms, idioms looming large,  
differences sharply lit. In this moment  
I recognize a lamed and lonely sister.  
A deciphered blip on night's graph.

Tomorrow she will have a new neighbor.  
Tomorrow I will introduce the self  
just met  
to her I never knew before.

## A PLACE OF GENTLE REPAIR

He came from hills where threadbare limbs were patched  
with ice or snow--to sueded cypress knees  
and sun and shade-striped quietude soft-thatched  
with gray-green living leis on wading trees.  
One day he snagged a greedy gull that tried  
to steal the fish from off his steel-finned hook.  
He nursed her well; the day she flew he cried:  
"Go graze your natural hunting grounds and look  
for sequined flash between the folds of foam,  
bewareing of the barbs of hungry men  
who, watching you, have recognized their home."  
He trolled sweet warmth to mend himself and then,  
far from the bony ridges of his land,  
his ragged edges soon were smoothed with sand.

## TRUE NORTH

A friend said I'd never really see Alaska unless I was game enough to fly with a bush pilot. He introduced me to one named Grimby. Next thing I knew, I was in the makeshift back seat of a biplane that looked like a leftover from a rummage sale.

I was along for the view. The official passenger was a neatly bearded Mr. Clark, going to join a pipeline survey team near the coast. We settled in our places like pros.

"Tighten your seat belts, we're goin' up fast," said Grimby. "We got us a williwaw, a sudden weird wind off the Aleutians. Full of silt and seal hair and rutting moose musk. One thing about a williwaw, you can take off downwind with just enough power to rise vertical like them fancy VTOL aircraft. A smidgen of runway is plenty-- which is good, seein' it's turned to slop we need to get shed of in a hurry." His next remark was: "Your innards'll catch up with you in a minute." He glanced at Mr. Clark, back at me, then stared at Clark.

"Uh--oughta be a bag in the door pocket," Grimby said to him.

We soon leveled out over a snowfield filled with as many shades of blue as a painter's palette. "It's more beautiful than I thought," I exclaimed aloud.

"You ain't flown in a bitty bird before, eh?"

"No, we were always too high to appreciate the scenery."

"This little ole gal shows you ever'thing. Never had a designer crate, never will. Adam Adcock used to call his ole bush plane a bunch of spare parts flyin' in formation. Mine's old too, but



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# SEARS HOLDINGS CORPORATION

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Sears Holdings  
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September 2, 2014

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## THE HUNGER MOON

Summer is sweet on the tongue,  
soft on the shoulders as kachina clouds,  
ephemeral as Muingwa's shades of green.

Yesterday when the sun centered on my roof,  
the red-tailed hawk reeled round the hot yellow  
forcing shut my eyes, tightening his circle  
and hurling down his cries on my doorstep.

He is back with the dawn.

Down and down he throws his keening  
like splinters of cold.

The hawk is a prophet of the hunger moon:  
The time of no more corn, when the deer goes  
making no tracks to a place no man ever finds.  
And the great bear eats bark before he sleeps,  
and things that crawl.

None of us will starve nor will the hawk.

For me, famine is of the spirit  
while the body fuels on dried fare  
and sweets that come in jars.

The wings are first to wither  
then the deep singing.

cont.



Someday I will follow the hawk. I will climb  
past wilding mounds of dead-gold buckwheat.  
My foot will rattle shards of ancient lava,  
startling a pika into range of beak and talon.  
I will face the he-wind  
angering in the cinder cones,  
prying at broken shadows of the sacred peaks.

There in the secret heights I will master  
the proper maintenance of wings.

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## THE INTERLOPERS

Beneath inverted black jungle  
of water hyacinth roots underweaving my hidden bayou,  
my diver's lamp the only hold with my world,  
I disturb a concert of stripes: hundreds  
of inch-long fishes silver-slanting right or left  
as my hand directs. A king size mud cat  
like Genghis Khan eyes me from the olive drab floor.  
And overhead! My lost boat! Impounded  
since last summer— clamped listing in a wet/dry vise,  
sun-half of bulbous green vases feigning  
innocence with flowers; night-half of fringe  
and garland chain, propeller upholstered in velvet.  
I rip away the slimy grip and feel  
hairy stalactites creep closer, more determined.  
than topside kudzu. The gasoline-fed screw might  
thresh a yard before losing. A new spring army  
of trees wades out to make a stockade.  
Roman-helmeted herons patrol  
the spreading perimeter above with lances.  
Here, the mighty Khan rules, guarded by turtles.  
And I, slave to light and lungs  
must fight myself free.

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## AFTERNOON AMONG THE ARTIFACTS

If not for the small sign, I'd have passed it  
without interrupted interest in the other displays,  
without pausing at the thing that changed the world.  
It's called The Fat Man.

The name is apt— a bulbous unarmed twin  
of Nagasaki's Nemesis  
obsoletely catching dust and fingerprints  
in a museum on the fringes of Milwaukee.

Hard to think it a bomb or even a weapon,  
more like a time capsule maybe filled  
with swatches of this century's first third:  
a beaded flapper dress, a megaphone,  
a rumble seat. A tub for making gin  
or soup enough for Depression lines—  
all things before my time but no more alien  
than this bulging precedent marking the floor  
with shadows, forerunner of smaller packages  
of streamlined rage. We went from atomic  
to hydrogen to nuclear with sinister interstices  
filled with equations that don't translate  
the same in every language.

I'm curiously detached. This is abstract art,  
this huge clumsy egg. It should be seething  
with metaphor. It should cry out  
with the voice of Isaiah over the wails of hell.

cont.

No stanza break

I'm missing something. I've lost my hearing.

Maybe we stood too close to that first blast.

Maybe it damaged our inner ears and eyes  
and all our inside senses, jarred spaces  
in our cortex so we can't relate one thing  
to another. The circuit arcs over the voids,  
sputters, skips. A cerebral non sequitur.

I wander among the airplanes, mostly wings of war,  
fifty years of progress in flight. I stop  
beneath an ultralight, stare at a lunar lander.

By the time I return to The Fat Man, a kid  
has scrawled an obscenity in yellow crayon  
on its dark bulk. It won't rub off;  
it only smears. Maybe Eliot was too elegant.  
Maybe the world ends without bang or whimper,  
just one final blurted scatological curse.

The Fat Man is supremely indifferent.

I try to multiply thousands of lives  
by millions of next time, by megatons of now.

How far past kill is overkill?

What is now? When is today?

Is it the decade or the afternoon?

Or the last minute?

Baobab means upside down in Swahili, an apt description of the tree's appearance  
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## AN AFRICAN SYNOPSIS: THE BAOBAB TREE

Morning:

A ragged inkblot against the sun  
erupts like a geyser into crazed sky.  
Zigzag in slow motion  
a black quill  
returns to tangled branches of calligraphy.  
Limned roots that grew bark  
and aspired to heaven,  
lurch upward to await the twilight embrace  
of winged exclamations who won it.

Afternoon:

Berserk lines on vellum glare  
spell an ancient theme  
of heathen heat blanching the horizon.  
Daily elephants edit details;  
warped shade smudges lion printing.

Evening:

Reunited on the moon's page,  
birds and boughs compose  
cryptic verses of silence  
rising above  
the voices of the veldt howling hunger.



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## URBAN TAPESTRY

My oar dollops the water, ravel the reflection:  
Bridges above me—giant warps over river,  
lanes, tracks, the yarns of my childhood.  
Creeks were my flosses, keeping my linings  
from fraying, keeping me close  
to the ways of catfish and beavers.  
My origins were up there in a garden-patch bungalow  
once atop that burrowing segment of superway...  
Now the new tunnel, breechloaded with cars,  
blasts a volley of steel across the bow  
of my small boat; the half-hoop of iron bridge  
steadies the warning appliqued against carbon sky.  
An oil barge passes me, rocks me under the new span,  
into its shadow and roar, and I think  
of the old hilly thunder prowling the pinestand,  
unmuffled by rows of stacked people-bins  
thwarting its rounds, teasing the lightning.  
The barge slides the river like a disease-bearing snail  
spinning its slimy wake near the bend  
where my slow fever swears the bones of my old home lie.  
Torn memories underweave the weft of the city  
and I have run out of thread leading to freedom.

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## THE POTTER OF THE RED HILLS

My hands are ancient:

Older than the painter's, that stick-man  
who lost his best dimension in a cave,  
older than the lightning god's gift.  
Older than the hands of the wood worker  
and the stone carver who made man a hunter.  
Man was born a gatherer. He was born thirsty.  
Mud leaks slower than woven leaves and grass.  
My hands molded wet dirt; sun dried it.  
Unlasting as a meal.

It wasn't an accident: Don't believe  
tales about forgetful old women  
leaving clay cups in newly mastered embers,  
finding precious substance in cold ashes.

Too thick or thin, too wet, too coarse—  
exploded, fractured—ceramics  
miscarried often but had no careless birth.

It was my hands made man a storer,  
preserver, trader, foundations for peace.  
My fingers fashioned beads strung on willow  
to mark a woman mine.

cont.



My palms made the first wheel,  
made two with center holes for a stick—  
a plaything, a lost exclamation point  
in time defined by rock.

You new ones blessed with knowing hands,  
never forget the source: Clay must be searched for,  
seasoned with digger's sweat, praise words  
and promise words, collateral for the loan  
placed and covered inside Earth's wound.  
Creation breathes in her marrow,  
the raw dough of eternity  
waiting to be baked like bread.

Entrusted with mounds of her living self  
willing to your touch, remember,  
  
remember all the hands that formed before  
each time you make another miracle  
and yield it to the fire.

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PILGRIMAGE TO BLUE

A ripe moon mounts agate steeples  
like an ageless mystic hailing the appointed time  
for celebrants of some ancient rite  
my cells seem to remember  
here in the high blue watching places.

A summer-shedding coyote flings herself leanly  
into the chase of shadows silent as a star shooting.  
Rampant tollways vanish  
in the ash patterns of a potter's cold fire;  
custom-made cacophony is buried  
under the humps of hogans listening to Venus rising.

In the morning I will inhale turquoise horizons  
unscaled by stacked containers  
shoved together by corporate cliff-dwellers;  
I will move slowly through wood and granite halls  
enclosing nothing but swatches of light,  
posing for the centuries, staging endless similes  
under the direction of wind and water. I will touch  
forgotten textures, ocotillo, malachite, horse hide, turn  
and stare back at pronghorns as I leave.

Undiluted azure anoints me now, my mouth tastes of royal.  
And the crimped mass of springs and wires within me  
loosens like a resurrection plant in rain.

## A VASE OF PINK PLUM BLOSSOMS

The dull clay coil in my potter's hands  
obeyed my fingers, my will,  
but only casually.  
The relinquished form lusted after light,  
rearranged its gray molecules in sun,  
reveled in its experience with fire.  
Still an apprentice,  
it drank deeply of earth's unguents  
flowed over its flaws, then healed  
and ripened in the last lap of hereditary heat.  
Today it came into its own  
first flowering  
alloyed with pollinated sisters of the soil.

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## ROSES IN THE WOODS

It was where my map ended, a hunter's speculation:  
The place was half swamp, full of deadness, never owned.  
Kudzu borrowed skeletons of pine and berry bush,  
snapped off canes for its stalking  
of the swatches of good ground fleeing ahead.

An out-of-season quail broke cover, crazing silence;  
fallen branches split underfoot. Sudden pointed pain  
entered my ankle. Green-brown claws surrounded me.  
Beyond, telltale magenta spurted up  
like open arteries between birch bones.

It was no man's land, anti-personnel entanglements,  
tightrope-walking boughs over redoubts of wood spikes,  
caltrops on hidden runners conspiring  
with limbs to make trip-nooses. Finally  
I curved my fingers around battle-dyed satin,  
hunched open-mouthed amid exploding life like a parasite.  
All blooming centered in a six foot sweep;  
upright tufts of petals hid their stamens  
till they dropped. Untame, but never wild.

cont.

I prodded languorous green mimics  
for a rusty plow, chimney bricks, foundation parts—  
things that outlast dooryard ramblers.  
But leaf-locked shapes were only broken stumps  
and tangled layers of forgotten summers.  
No house ever stood.

I returned to the flowers like a dream walker.  
My probing stick struck an almost buried boulder.  
Vines quivered, veins darkened. The rose defended  
like a many-headed Medusa until, cursing,  
I hacked it with my hunting knife.

Thorn-crude carving on the stone read: Jonas Johnson,  
Orphan & Bachelor, 1790—1812. His only wishes were  
a grave where he fell & justice for this land he loved.

I don't know why my seasoned eyes were wet and flaming  
or why each rose flamed out and fell—  
red-blown shrapnel for an instant,  
then soft panoply for the breached woven shield.

I go back now and then, but not for quail—  
to plant roses  
there where the mapmakers quit.



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## HOPI HOMECOMING

The drought is worse than I thought.

The crops are congregations  
of desiccated crones  
leaning on each other  
rattling last wishes.

The racing shadow in the dry washes  
and high basalt roadcuts  
is my bus from Chicago.

I can participate in its cubist image  
by holding my papers up to the window  
though no one else would notice  
the shade of difference I make.

Out there the bus is being  
its true self, compressing  
its length, recoiling  
from desert and heat, rising  
taller to look back for its lake.

Blue Corn would smile at the analogy—  
that smile that begins at the left  
of her mouth and leaves a luminous aura  
there after the rest of her face  
has forgotten it. Odds are  
she'll be at the bus stop

cont.

with the want ads and the appaloosa  
instead of the pickup.

Hell, a horse'll feel good  
between my legs after steel chairs  
and seminar stools. The horse and I  
will be in synch before we pass  
First Mesa. But how well will I  
interface with my Badger Clan?

I'm like this bus— speeding  
a new highway still sticky—  
a joint-effort vehicle of alloy  
containing other lives besides.

Which one am I? What of the spirit I,  
the smoky abstraction the sun reveals?

Blue Corn, my love, you write happy  
from your mother's Bear Clan.

You too are no longer programmed  
by Kachinas. When you dance I know  
your head is clear beneath the mask.

Most of you belongs to me  
but the foot, the drum, are your own.  
Can you make any part of me whole?



A DIFFERENT ROAD TO SUN-UP

My mother would have muttered a certain chant all day.  
All the omens were there: Sickly sun  
plunged wide shafts into the ground, sucking it dry,  
giving no warmth, only taking, leaving a swath  
of cold-parched earthworms and rock/clay crumbs.  
The first wind pried shutters, crashed my lamps,  
spilling all the oil far from my green firewood.  
Alto afterwind was discordant whispers,  
slaps of chill, wavy scent of damp animals.  
Half of me gathered wolfsbane, racing decaying light;  
the other half swallowed a drugstore ball of sleep  
then centered together under the blanket  
woven and dyed with my mother's mystic patterns.

Awakened by blackness darker than sleep, heavier  
than night, I tried to surface, swim up through it  
like a cave fish looking inside its head  
for its lost eyes. Night pushed up  
from all the world's old graves, smelling  
of all the world's old sins. A wolf night,  
diseased and howling. A night to grow everything old.  
I lit a trembling candle. Morpheus had fled,  
leaving me an empty bottle, floating me in vertigo.  
But Pluto was there to breathe out my frail flame.

The charred moon smoked, reversed itself,  
revealing a death's head just as she always said,  
withholding its down-shine, dripping  
ice sweat— wolf sweat— grave sweat—  
Black was nebulized violence and violation. Black  
stained walls and air, seeped into books to lie in wait forever.  
Trackless black where the wolf walked,  
bearded reeking black, silhouette of hills not there,  
of beasts clanning moonward, necks fletched like arrows.

I said my mother's name, her part of me  
clutched the stems of aconite, flung them over the bed;  
she rose in me like ether. I groped beneath fear  
for the incantations drummed into my childhood,  
stumbled and skidded over roots my father planted;  
some trailing tendril snagged and held.

Weed essence opened the flue; friction made a spark.  
Still sneezing, I relit the candle,  
snatched up the wolfsbane for a funeral pyre  
crowned with a hand-hewn table. Leftover night  
was stilt-legged shadows on a hearthlit stage,  
the usual cast with known names. I am  
no part of her or here. Tomorrow,  
I announced to the snickering flames,  
I will move back among my kind.

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THE BOTTOM LINE AT THE UPTOWN SESTINA STAR STUDIO

Glenna Holloway

We're talent scouting for six words  
Elite enough to pose six times  
Exposed in loose-end bas-relief,  
And again in the last scene's core.  
What verve they'll need, what windshield nerve!  
Dun & Bradstreet should list such worth!

Once hired, we pay by market worth  
Less agency percent. Some words  
Hit big then burn out fast. The nerve  
Of one pronoun is raw at times.  
Adjectives get frayed to the core.  
We may provide pills for relief.

Here at Central Casting, relief  
Only comes with proven net worth.  
We look for pith, a solid core  
Of guts when we audition words.  
It takes muscle and wit these times,  
Know-how to punch or tweak a nerve.

cont.

New stanza

Soft female endings lacking nerve  
Must rely on comic relief.  
Even if they bounce with the times,  
They still must serve a sentence worth  
Its space, and top all other words.  
Heights wilt cliches with hollow core.  
  
It's a jungle, baby. Sweet-core  
Vowels and sucrose-drip pall nerve  
Ends eighties-wired for mach four words.  
You just won't do! Go on relief.  
We've got to get our Webster's worth,  
Can't shine with shades of former times.  
  
Next? No imitations, please. Times  
Rage. Shock is in, even hard-core  
Truth can steal center stage, now worth  
As much as fiction when peeled nerve  
Plays the lead. Bored fans find relief  
In violence voicing over words.  
  
You has-been words, at certain times  
You're pure relief for jaded core  
And bungled nerve. You may have worth.



BAND PRACTICE

(Getting Ready For Elections, 1984)

Tap your fingers to static, watch the leaders:

hot-eyed, misty-eyed,  
smoke-eyed, star-eyed  
in huge halls swaying  
to something-for-everyone lyrics  
anyone could have written in flats,  
snagging any handy pumphandle  
for yea-yea choruses. Folk-rock op-  
portunity racking up the people  
always clapping for a new rhythm,  
clasping anything that changes key,  
even chants by professional virgins  
singing pander songs.

Listen, punk-rocked, lullabye-rocked, rooked citizen-player,  
whoever leads the magic combo,  
sheep shuffler, shibboleth-dancer,  
tunes coiled deep in the horns won't change.  
Watch the big sound break decibels,  
shatter decimals and eyeballs  
while your hearing trickles  
down the slot where echos go,  
hung-beat in your brain, afterbeat  
in your bones, and clap, damn you,

cont.

but come on hard with your hulking  
homemade drum and your own sure tempo!



THE IGNIS FATUUS: LIFE STORIES

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AN AFRICAN SYNOPSIS: THE BAOBAB TREE

Morning:

A ragged inkblot against the sun  
erupts like a geyser into crazed sky.  
Zigzag in slow motion  
a black quill  
returns to tangled branches of calligraphy.  
Limbed roots that grew bark  
and aspired to heaven  
lurch upward to await the twilight embrace  
of winged exclamations who won it.

Afternoon:

Berserk lines on vellum glare  
spell an ancient theme  
of heathen heat blanching the horizon.  
Daily elephants edit details;  
warped shade smudges lion printing.

Evening:

Reunited on the moon's page  
birds and boughs compose  
cryptic verses of silence  
rising above  
the voices of the veldt howling hunger.

11.  
BUTTERFLIES AND OTHER NOBLE THOUGHTS

What about those that wobble wet and wingless  
on the torn flap of the chrysalis?  
Born too early or late, too much, not enough—  
forgetting the formula for how to change,  
still too wormly for heights.  
Some do soar via bird beak and maw;  
most fall unknown in the ragweeds  
to be savaged by ants before flying as dust  
in the jaws of prominent winds.  
Do their glistening granules return  
to incubate again in more fertile capsules  
or must they wander wasted  
forever looking for their missing colors  
and a womb?