

Finding Place on Paper:  
Contemporary Poets Explore  
The White Mountains

Museum of the White Mountains

## **Finding Place on Paper**

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[PSU Poetry Workshop \[Fall 2016\]](#)

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## Winter Blue

This cold's deadly lace  
is knotted from glassine threads  
spun from iron and spite.

This cold's marrow  
shoots its quartz through  
bones of granite.

This cold never wanted you here,  
never asked for evidence  
that you lived or strove.

This cold buries its own axe  
in your throat, climbs its way  
into your sinuses and brain,

dares you to take another step  
or break one more inch  
of frozen trail along its backbone.

This boulder-cracking cold,  
this shoulder-aching cold  
is the blue of midnight,

the blue of the last edge  
of consciousness, right before  
the tilt into deepest sleep.

## **In the Company of Giants**

You see his back but not what's behind him.  
A break from silence, his boots startle  
a dry grape-nut crunch underfoot.  
Treetops sway in the cool fall air as he trudges on and on.

His boots break the silence, startling,  
and he's humbled by waiting giants.  
Treetops sway in cool fall air, as he trudges. On and on  
his thoughts echo through both tangible and cerebral mountains.

He's humbled. The giants wait.  
Frayed threads tickle his calves, reminding him of where he's been.  
Thoughts echo through both tangible and cerebral mountains.  
This is where he knows how to be.

Frayed threads tickle his calves, reminding him of where he's been.  
The crisp air chills the sweat that clings to his shirt.  
This is where he knows how to be  
a stranger to all that's there, especially the trees

The crisp air chills the sweat that clings to his shirt.  
He nods in homage to the horizon,  
a stranger to all that's there, especially the trees,  
until the balsam brushes his shoulder, a whispering *hello*.

With a nod in homage to the horizon,  
his soul is soothed by the silence  
until the balsam brushes his shoulder, a whispering *hello*.  
He's travelled so far, with so much.

His soul is soothed by the silence.  
Tired shoulders triumphantly ache.  
He's travelled so far, with so much  
you can't see. All he's carried up this slope

has tired his triumphant shoulders. They ache  
beyond the echo of dry grape-nut crunch underfoot.  
You can't see all he's carried up this slope.  
You see his back but not what's behind him.

PSU Poetry Workshop (Fall 2016): Caitlin Andreasen, Kelsey Davis, Lindsey DeRoche, Hannah Dutton, Zoe Kay, Tucker LaBelle-Hayford, Sarah Liebowitz, J'lillian Mello, Janina Misiewicz, Peter Ntourntourekas, Casey Ouellette, Ben Prinkki, Rebecca Rand, Nathan Theriault, Ellen Wilborg, and Liz Ahl.

## **A Row of Stones**

In those December storms that start as rain  
but end as snow, I try to count the flakes  
as they begin to fall. But it's in vain.  
I lack the dedication that it takes  
to be a census taker of the snow.  
I'll be distracted, as the snow squall breaks  
across the field, by a long gray narrow row  
of stones, a wall within a stand of birch:  
a thousand stones at least, pried, grasped below,  
pulled up and piled. In this hard springtime work,  
the greatest effort spent to make the wall  
was lifting each the first inch off the earth.  
I know when things get high enough they fall;  
I'm struck in wonder that they're raised at all.

Robert W. Crawford

## The Naming of Lights

A line of storms has cleared Mt. Lafayette  
and opened up the sky for counting stars.  
Some nights this is the show I want to watch  
but not tonight. A front has passed. The hints  
of autumn air make me more interested  
in local constellations, human lights—  
I want to see how many I can name.  
I think I can account for most of them:  
the easiest are the Cannon summit station,  
the Pinestead Farm, the Mittersill Resort;  
harder are Franconia Inn's back lights  
half-hidden by the trees along Ham Branch.

Up where the interstate from Boston leaves  
the notch, car headlights slide, a broken strand  
of pearls, toward Littleton and Montreal.  
Maybe one of them is one I know,  
driving a Subaru, familiar with  
this valley, me, enough to find me here—  
someone to help me name those last few lights.  
And in the moment that it takes to see  
the mountains now are darker than the sky—  
to feel the chill that overtakes my arms—  
the stream of cars has been reduced to one.  
A single light drops down the mountainside:  
a hot white tear, or slowly falling star.

Robert W. Crawford

## Mountain Language

Each mountain is a new romance  
language, sharing a few cognates

and roots. I climb the mountains  
to misunderstand the real again,

to speak in tongues  
of igneous and sediment, intrusions

of granite in the vowels. To travel  
the trail is to reinvent the wheel

of what I've known, whatever I meant  
by *here*. No longer fluent, breathing

comes hard and deep, resists  
limit and lung, mouths air's translation

from leaving to return. I begin  
believing in home again, unbalanced

and rebalancing in the sound  
landscape of its other names.

Alice B. Fogel

## Quartz Spines

Here's where the wind has been, wiping  
clean the mountain's slate, daily erasing

the granite with its rags and taking  
away all the silicate it can carry.

Here the glacier ran, in flutings  
scratched along the rim, rocks in the fists

of ice dragging by. I would have liked  
to witness that migration,

to be deafened by erratics  
on their way through the Whites,

but even this ordinary wind's lift  
wears me down. When I stroke the stone,

I can feel the parallel lines of hard quartz spines  
left behind. This morning when I stepped out

onto open rock, I wanted something I didn't need—  
a fear of heights, of exposure—to erode

and something else, metamorphic, to break  
into the wind and cold.

Alice B. Fogel

## Breakfast Shift at the Inn

Cassie, her ponytail streaked blonde and black, worked breakfast shift most mornings, 5 to 10—the inn the one good place in town for tips. So that meant she had weekend nights to drink at the inn's pub, flirting with Tom, who owned the corner stool when not out giving sleigh rides. He was her best friend Tina's older cousin—mellow or dumb, depending on the light. They played a drinking game called Nail the Guests: guess the state they're from or take a drink. Tina, working the bar, would play along. Cassie would win: an accent, brand of purse, even the dye jobs helped. She'd miss sometimes, just to take a shot and go outside to find the constellations that she knew, rising above the mountains to the south.

Later, they'd pile in Tom's truck, head through the notch to Lincoln and the ski resorts, or further south to bars at Plymouth State. Cassie knew some people from her classes but didn't bother trying to say hi: "That's right, you're in my chem lab," blah, blah, blah. She'd stick with Tom and Tina for a while, then find a vacant corner, sip her beer, and wait. When it was finally time to go, she'd steer them out the door into the cold. They'd laugh, watching their breath make puffs of heat they'd walk through, just to have it warm their faces. She'd drive them home, feel the darkened mountains gather her up toward day and the breakfast shift.

Midge Goldberg

## **Path**

Each cairn appears out of the fog  
just as you need it to find your way  
along the ridge,  
a pile of rocks topped  
with one white quartz—  
a light, as much as rock can be,  
light in the absence of light,  
your way lit by stone.

Midge Goldberg

## **Between**

### *Cols of the White Mountain Ridges*

In the intervals between high granite peaks,  
Always these tender hollows, moist and green  
Where banks of fern are undershot with light  
Reflected from a barely-moving stream.  
The summit is what everybody seeks—  
The breathless steep of sky above ravine—  
But few can stay for long at such a height  
Before retreating somewhere more serene.  
Our footsteps slow in the stillness of the col.  
Our eyes grow soft, our focus becomes fine:  
Enchanted by the way the grasses lean,  
By beads of water hesitant to fall,  
The warmth of your arm pressing against mine  
As we rest together in the space between.

Jennifer Highland

**The Spring**  
*Mount Starr King*

There is a place  
high above the valley  
a place wrapped in spruce  
and the sweeping west wind  
where sand lines the dark hollow  
beneath sheered granite—  
and from this space  
wells the filtered essence  
of cloudfog enfolding the peak  
of snowmelt sieving through rocky veins

so that here at last the traveler  
who has walked so many thirsty miles  
may kneel  
and dip up with cupped hands  
water pressed from the mountain  
water tasting of stone.

Jennifer Highland

## Old Speck before a Storm

red bunchberries underfoot  
blue fruit from faded trout lilies

thin trickles of water over the basalt crevasse  
stark feldspar, smoky quartz, shining schist

broken hieroglyphics on the graphic granite  
pillows, cradles, rippled rock

long beds of damp, starred sphagnum.  
covered remains of an old blow

upright spruce cones, as yet unshattered  
sheets of birchbark, skinned to the bone

bright bits of witch's butter in the twisted wood  
steady croak from an unseen rook

watcher in the balsam blind  
heavy fog falls down the cols

cold clouds following on the climb  
senseless white where the dim trail breaks

into the opaque open, into the first sting of rain  
into the slap and roar of oblivious wind

Sonja Johanson

## Loon

I bought a cassette tape of loon calls so I could speak their language that summer I camped on Russet Pond. This was the eighties so cassette tapes were *the thing*—

side A was for *where-are-you-I-am-here* or *I-am-hungry* calls, meaning hoots, wails, and peeps; side B was for aggression and distress—yodels and tremolos, the latter

a kind of alarm laugh that led to the saying “crazy as a loon.” Kids today don’t have the chance to choose between side A and B—*B*, the poor man’s intermission

or a sleeper song’s second chance—but now I’m talking 45 records, 1972, with “Deeper and Deeper” on the B side of “Billy Don’t Be a Hero,” which was more a tremolo

than a yodel, a sentimental, romantic, anti-war song that slew my heart in third grade. No one I knew liked “Deeper and Deeper,” though on Russet Pond I learned

that loons, with their solid bones, can dive deeper and longer than most birds; and I found I preferred wails to tremolos, wails being the kind of call I’d perfected myself by then.

Meg Kearney

## Warbler

By early winter the warbler  
is gone, but its song lingers  
the way a hike up Canon  
Mountain lingers in the knees,  
or the smell of smoke

hovers in the cabin  
on foggy mornings, embers  
cool and damp, even,  
like the newspaper and her  
books. She should have

headed south by now,  
too.

Soon. When she runs  
out of wood. Scrounging  
for kindling at the forest's

edge, sitting wrapped  
in a blanket where sun  
hits the porch—she hears  
that bird at the oddest  
times: *please please*

*pleased to MEET-cha—*  
this afternoon as she's  
headed to the spring  
with her jug. The dog  
doesn't seem to notice,

for here is the path  
blazed by deer to where  
they drink. Maybe the dog's  
company isn't enough.  
She's hearing things

Or, like her, one bird  
has stayed past all  
warnings. There it is  
again. From the porch  
she can't see the mountains—

it's snowing in the Notch.  
*We should go now,*  
she tells the dog.  
Black as the top of Canon  
is white, he settles

on the hearth rug.  
She criss-crosses  
sticks over crumpled  
paper, finds matches  
in the little blue cupboard.

Meg Kearney

## **Into the Flume**

Stream, crouching  
on silver haunches,  
leaps  
over ledge –  
spume and spray,  
into black-ink chasm;  
springs  
with muscle-ripple  
through granite gorge,  
walls fractured, glazed;  
roars  
over boulder-tumble,  
mottled rock,  
caterwaul-snarling,  
spewing tannin froth  
at its mouth;  
twitches its tail  
and slinks out of sight.

Suzanne Rogier Marshall

## The Presidentials

On the bible of evangelical nerve  
is written: "White with its absence is pure."  
Blinding white, snow logic white against the blue  
powder sky. Mountain peaks argue such verve,  
such pale heat. A cloud like smoke drifts unsure  
from the peak. Birches defy this scripture, turn  
leaves to yellow flame and warm a few—  
give hope to the pine and barren brethren.

Beneath, golfers—happy atheists--play on  
as if cold will never come. Inside—*Macallan*,  
black tie, and hot tub—God's gold indeed earns  
warmth's illusion. Still, I am here not spurned,  
flannel shirt, trousers in need of baptism  
and sandals, a blend of capital's schism.

Rodger Martin

## The Botany of Man-Made Things

They groomed the long throats of seabirds.  
Stars schooled inside every barrel and spackled

the clearings there. Dogs scratched at back doors.  
There were things winded, white, swordlike and edible.

Most unnatural was the applause of leaves:  
it lacked the crackle of an umber wing.

But nothing is such a sword, running the sun  
from its tip. Not even forests. Not even fields.

The garden was corrupted by pumpkins; some of the wounds  
wouldn't close. New places came, places that flies,

upon seeing, divide out as scenes. They watched  
what they thought was ownership burn toward

the world, along a road broken off at the stem  
and into gullies scraping like shins at the dam.

Jennifer Militello

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## Morning Brilliance

In morning brilliance of one day, month, year,  
from some-where or from no-where [place and time  
were frozen (yes!) transfixed] as you appeared;  
your voice, a distant song in the vast, deep sky

reverberating through the winter trees  
as apparition (as this life?); grace soaring  
from the silence (somewhere) to perceive  
enchantment at my heart's wide oaken door;

your presence lending vivid to the time  
that's delicately balanced in the day-  
ness of each day and night-ness of each night.

I know you now, just as before, and as  
the one I've known since the beginning, when-  
ever the evermore beginning was.

EM Patridge

## **In the Mountain Forest**

When the wings of the Great Horned Owl  
silently tilt the evening sky  
into brilliant hemispheres

and my grandchild's wide-eyed  
gaze meets mine  
(as yours did),

white-tailed deer in the deep snowy  
mountain forest lift their heads  
their ears, stand;

one downy brown feather floats back, forth;  
tilting back, forth  
to land.

EM Patridge

## April: Beside Lucy Brook

The parking lot dusty like summer  
but wildflowers sprouting from mounds  
of gravel left behind when snowmelt  
runneled downhill and into the woods,  
we climb for half a mile, autumn's  
leaves still soggy underfoot, to see  
the rush, the rowdy meeting of rock  
and mountain runoff, water's constant  
funneling down, chiseling its path  
through layer on layer, every splash  
not quite an echo, cascades skimming  
over striations in stone the way  
a voice fits itself to a story  
it's suddenly time to tell. Above  
the falls, a massive slab of ice hangs  
from the mossy granite, dangles down  
and drips itself into the brook, its  
trickle a whisper lost in the roar.

Brian Simoneau

## Watch the River Flow

I lived once where the river turns north  
as if it could return to its source, climb  
the latitudes back through time and pass  
the meeting of Pemigewasset  
and Winnepesaukee, come  
to the cliff where the Old Man lies  
in heaps of granite, gravity  
having won again. It always does  
but still I'm caught off guard, a child  
who stacks whatever he finds, block  
on block, pebbles and rocks, the topple  
always a shock. I'd walk in spring  
and watch its cresting water fall  
over dams and locks, its constant  
drilling into bedrock, downhill  
run to continent's edge. I'd stop  
to study the spot where it turns  
and tries to revise the maps but only  
winds up flowing east to lose itself  
in seas, snow and rain diffused  
in the Gulf of Maine and hauled away  
by currents and tides a mountain  
wouldn't imagine even if mountains  
could, a summit's slow erosion  
nothing compared to an ocean's  
pounding, the steady pull of a moon.

Brian Simoneau

## Every poem I write for my father is called twilight

Clouds make shadows on the mountains.  
I walk through their green darkness. I want  
a wind to silence thought, a storm to drown  
out prayer, electric stillness, the promise  
of breaking. You can walk three days  
into woods and not find a single birch

worth a canoe. I know. I have done it.  
I have loved slender saplings peeled white  
and mourned for their cracking death  
in ice. You never trusted your canvas  
to my hands, never taught me the courage

of rapids. But I learned to read cocoons  
and the wings of beetles, spider silk  
and the veins of fern. I can follow bear  
spoor studded with blackberry seed,  
walk through thorns and not care if my legs

are bloodied. I have knelt on bruised knees,  
mouth to rough water, asked the snake  
to rattle your path from his one rock.  
I want to remember dawn. I will listen for  
the hawk to fold his wings.

Kelley Jean White

## **Aubade**

### *At The Frost Place*

Rain has little to do  
with love, yet  
here you are.

All the trails up the mountain  
are steep, you'd said,  
thinking out loud.

Each has a scramble,  
a rock face,  
and in the rain  
could be dangerous,  
you'd said, when I left  
and drove north.

After last night's moon,  
after the sharp  
pencil line of mountain peaks  
against dusk's falling  
and rising sky,

rain spattering the screen  
surprises, and my mind  
races to locate  
what bed is this  
I wake in  
without you?

Mimi White