

the loss letters

between ming holden & bronwen tate

“She went to bed thinking more about another person than about herself. This goes to prove that even minor poetry may have its practical uses.”

Dorothy Sayers, *Gaudy Night*

Ghazal [MH 10.13.10]

Twenty endings I wrote to love, nude in this cave.
Felt the wet of the stories you skewed in this cave.

Love, it's wrought long and wrought hard as steel frame
or not wrought enough, either mood in this cave.

The shape of your absence metallic to taste
Mine the body to which you allude in this cave.

It aches and it seethes, my skin cold on the rock;
I somehow keep choosing to brood in this cave.

Love, in my mind fonts erupted in sun,
Globes morphing water sunglint-hued in this cave.

That this was not living did not cross the
lake, no springs in sunlight to include in this cave.

Only my breath do I hear in the dark
incandescent world you imbued in this cave.

Just before you climbed out, sans light and sans
sound, I missed what you knew; you'd been cued in this cave.

Broken and snipped and ripped ribbons paste
my body to one torn and glued in this cave.

Ribbons catch round jagged rocks that I hit
one on one to make sparks that elude in this cave.

Love, I have ages of blackness to go but for
you just a quick interlude in this cave.

Love, I saw stone, I saw grief, I saw dark,
saw my tears on the rock morning dewed in this cave.

Pantoum for Mina Loy [BT 10.19.10]

Du willst? Könnten Sie?

said Mina, a Madonna of Munich.
The Christ child, a lamp, burst into flame,
parturition blooming in tongues of fire.

Said Mina, a Madonna, of Munich,
“real danger acts as a calmative,”
parturition blooming in tongues of fire,
lamp exploding in the courtyard.

Real danger acts as a calmative,
cave swelling with light,
lamp exploding in the courtyard.
Breath is yours for the asking.

Cave swelling with light,
the Christ child, a lamp, burst into flame.
Breath is yours for the asking,
Du willst? Könnten Sie?

Hope Chest Villanelle [MH 10.20.10]

We forget that play was a serious world
Small hands built out of grains of air.
Children in chaos grew brains that unfurled

Centers with stressors that heightened and curled.
If blankies grew thorns of a sudden, beware;
We forget that play was a serious world.

Did you fight or freeze? Were you boyed or girlled?
A bomb or a deer in headlights, unaware
Children in chaos grew brains that unfurled

Silk in which red flags seem rose petals whirled
About on a breeze that mixed wounding with care.
We forget that play was a serious world,

Until we grow up and our lover has hurled
A blade from a chest that we didn't see there.
Children in chaos grew brains that unfurled

A chemical calm when the oyster de-pearled,
Snapping small hands in its jaws like a bear.
We forget that play was a serious world
Small hands built out of grains of air.

Sestina for Stein [BT 10.22.10]

Waking up each day can feel like repetition,
and rising may require some insistence
it's easier to turn again and fall
asleep again, cheeks like apples,
pillow-creased, and hands
folded like so many sentences.

It's easier to speak in speed-slurred sentences
even risking repetition,
I said, brushing flour from my hands,
and, if you'll pardon my insistence,
we all know that apples
are sweetest in fall.

It's easier to burn yourself or fall,
to read your horoscopes like prison sentences,
to count the seeds of apples,
as if somehow in the repetition
an answering insistence
might fall into your hands.

Take what time hands
even that loss I called the softest fall
when bleeding became a form of insistence,
and I held nothing but sentences
and sought comfort in repetition
knitting stitches, peeling apples.

She said the symbolism of apples
left little to the imagination, and that hands
can learn new chords with enough repetition.
I knew the rain would come in fall
and greeted it in sentences
that sought to echo its insistence.

I fear you tire of my insistence,
you say apples are only apples,
yet thus caress the noun in adoring sentences.
The more we memorize with mouth or hands
the deeper we fall,
so love could be called repetition.

There is no repetition, only insistence,
said Gertrude in fall, her eyes full of apples,
her hands full of sentences.

Sonnet for the Departed [MH 10.24.10]

The first nightmare, the sky has no color. Perhaps it isn't there.
He knew the language of compulsion, spoke to me in tongues.
Heart's a feeble creekbed creature, black-slimered with dry lungs.
I want: him as he wants her, tender in his voice once bare.
Words we daily use are rivers, abundant as the air.
Soft screen blurs, removes, strips the spoken from the sung.
He made a ladder of hypothetical, I held for life to rungs
Made of insubstantial shrouds and then got sick from lack of glare.
Knowing when to release and retain data is a quest,
The struggle of the rhetor. Deception is rhetorical art. *I lost*
My baby: in our language, it could be lover or child.
Signs, they pulse and weave in the disappeared's nest.
One uses devils' words, and the other's light-embossed
Purity outshines the first with God's fresh springtime wild.

Ghazal [BT 10.26.10]

Reach for a leaf and a limb will fall.
The picture you hung on whim will fall.

So pick twigs from your hair, glass from the rug,
And feel within you your dim will fall.

She said it was better, said you were blessed.
She said, "pray, and peace like a hymn will fall."

You prefer ill chance, the fallible flesh,
that a creature too broken to swim will fall.

But trust in your fibers, faith in your womb,
like all the girls in the Brothers Grimm, will fall.

Spontaneous abortion. Retained products of conception.
On deaf ears, a sterilized synonym will fall.

The flesh heals slow, but the mind heals slower.
Hot salt tears on the sketch that you limn will fall.

Each day is too long and each month is too short.
Sleep pulls, and the book the you skim will fall.

Pantoum of the Fashioned Human [MH 10.28.10]

Sister, it deafens us.
Pain carves us here.
This much self-hatred is hard to tolerate in a narrator.
It wasn't fiction.

Pain carves us here.
She clearly hasn't processed her trauma.
It wasn't fiction,
And opening the window, fall.

She clearly hasn't processed her trauma.
All but the glowing velvet clot remains.
And opening the window, fall
Leaves scorch the sky in hand shapes.

All but the glowing velvet clot remains.
This much self-hatred is hard to tolerate in a narrator.
Leaves scorch the sky in hand shapes.
Sister, it deafens us.

Villanelle [BT 10.30.10]

How then to give a shape to pain?
A scratch, a scar, a burn, a careless cry?
A fixed form will teach you to refrain.

Oh tide of excess, flooding fallow grain.
Oh wronging vision, oh distorted eye.
How then to give a shape to pain?

With patterns seek to soothe the addled brain.
With music learn the visage how to lie.
A fixed form will teach you to refrain.

Inevitably, something will remain.
The tender tooth you achingly deny.
How then to give a shape to pain?

There's pleasure in learning to constrain.
Get all the wine into the bowl or at least try.
A fixed form will teach you to refrain.

Faced with blank page, I'm likely to abstain,
Unmeasured, my unbridled pen runs dry.
How then to give a shape to pain?
A fixed form will teach you the refrain.

A Sestina for November 3rd [MH 11.1.10]

It helps to know another wakes only to want sleep again.
A baby fed and changed by robots will die for lack of contact
With another warm chest; its heart will forget how to beat.
My mother through wires advises seeing the morning avalanche of thoughts
As one would the dawn ache of a broken hip's grumbling recovery.
The day is mine to do with but I do not want to do, to rise, to learn to be content.

If the vessel is the answer, and form is the gold, then the trouble lies in content.
Oh no, said a loving woman on a river as the boat engine beat,
As I brooded in nighttime foreign city, *your thoughts*
Are the most wonderful thing because only you can have them. Her contact
With my body took the form of a touch to my arm, but then again,
Anyone moving through space is a theatrical act, or, I add, a recovery

Of scarred brain tissue: new sites, new pathways, new thoughts.
This Wednesday bodies of leaves will make contact
With the earth, and the cells of their hearts transform, destined not to beat.
The year-mark since a woman in white scraped out the content
Of raspberry jam, of what I called my sea monkey, then wheeled me to the recovery
Room after I sweated and chilled and spat rivers onto the floor in shock again

And again. Humans' difference in sanity is by degree only, our thoughts
A spectrum of illness, the answer in how we take in hand what hurts again
And again. I know better than to name grief a ladder; I contact
Hands, voice, blood clot as the wheel circles back to touch the content
Of sadness. She called life concentric circles, and recovery
An act of grace, not theater, or a dance performed to a beat.

The actual quote is *any man moving through space is a theatrical act*. Beat
The drum of concern, learn: from minute to expansive and back again
Is configured in chemicals that take up or don't to determine if we're content
Or not. The poem a field of constraints, the world a field of triggers, recovery
A field of repetition, the sentence before the belief. *You can train your thoughts*,
She insisted, but I know a dream deferred does not explode: its contact

With the living comes in waves, poison rising up in the body, down, up again.
Go for a dreaded run. Scrub the bathroom. Then when your thoughts
Ease up, you'll have gotten the unpleasant chores out of the way. Content
To believe her is as content as I'll be. Little one, it wasn't time; I couldn't beat
Out the right refrain, the right tune, the right heart, contact
The right spirit, the right oracle, the right room, the right womb, the right recovery,

The right content for the right form, the right portal bloom to contact
You and maintain the right touch, but knock again, should I find grace in thoughts
Enough to enact recovery like a recital, match my body to your beat.

Sonnet for an Uncertain Guest [BT 11.2.10]

I bled three drops a day and wrote of ills
the half-expected metronome still brings,
turned from the envy aching lack instills,
quieted again the slowly numbing stings.
I built an idol of intention's gold,
rewed patience with a lover's ardour
and when the longing once again took hold,
I shook my head and told my mind *try harder*.
But, oh stranger, you were with me then,
mayhap you told my tears to run more quick,
your thumbprint in my blood already when
I thought I'd heard another shut door click.
Oh smallest secret only smiling knows,
stay, again a clot of velvet glows.

Ghazal [MH 11.03.10]

All roses and all their names bloom from within
One silken red bud, hope, will bloom from within.

It knows and it glows, its dome-water not sky
But your body, your velvet-lit womb from within.

Attachment to light is the birth of a plot,
Work of Buddha, Jesus taking room from within.

He saw it was good, letters one two and three
Dome to dominion but not doom from within.

Withhold the ooh for the oh and sit still
As the om nest is feathered with plumes from within.

There is no chafing, no narrative arc
But the shape that the god-light assumes from within.

A shape for the pain, unsure the refrain
But your garden's new smile, legume from within.

Easy comes laughter as hard came the tears
From the fall to the clot's happy boom from within.

Most worthy vessel, your shape shaped by pain
Into tentative love, joys resume from within.

Pantoum of Waiting for a Heartbeat [BT 11.04.10]

There's nothing I can do
and I am doing it.
I eat brown rice,
pretend to sip my wine.

And I am doing it,
trying not to count days.
Pretend to sip my wine,
walk three miles each morning.

Trying not to count days,
I still think *five weeks tomorrow*.
Walk three miles each morning,
write the dissertation.

I still think *five weeks tomorrow*.
I eat brown rice,
write the dissertation.
There's nothing I can do.

Daylight Savings Villanelle [MH 11.07.10]

There shone lateral lights on bright leaves to float through
Til a hanging gilt globe summoned dark to the dome.
Would a buddha allow for some hope within, too?

For form to continue to join clots in you?
We are creatures of shape; hope-built thoughts fight the gloam.
There shone lateral lights on bright leaves to float through

Til winter stripped flaming top-leaves for the blue.
Winter's the dissertation, patience a metronome.
Would a buddha allow for some hope within, too

Sparkling a light not to form through the rue
Of hibernation requisite for finishing the tome.
There shone lights on bright leaves to float lateral through

Patience winter instills to weep old til the new
Is sure to be coming, becoming green as home.
Would a buddha allow for some hope within, too?

That I'll find my feet, after winter is through?
And your babe will too, will find feet built to roam?
There shone lateral lights on bright leaves to float through
Til a hanging gilt globe summoned dark to the dome.

Sestina for MH [BT 11.09.10]

In the photograph from an earlier time
you wear a hat of dark striped wool,
about to enter a wider world, you turn,
young eyes unlearned to recognize cold.
We cannot walk again in the same stream,
yet your blessing is a soul left open.

And now a new town, another door to open,
you've been given the gift of time.
And so you walk beside an unfamiliar stream,
come home late smelling of damp wool.
You tell yourself you'll learn to like the cold,
you'll write for hours, it's your turn.

But some things follow even when we turn.
Memories are doors with faulty locks that we find open
after a night of fitful sleep, the creeping cold
not merely dream, grateful only that this time
no stranger came, we rub the sweater's rough wool
wait for dishwater to warm, finger testing the stream.

Keep quiet or open your mouth to release a stream?
Oh anniversary, the world begins another turn.
But who wants to hear of the cotton-wool,
the sweat, the way they pried you open
when you gave them permission to stop time.
Who else has woken up to feel that cold?

When you slept on my couch, fevered and cold,
I told you I was glad to see your stream
of tears, that loss should wound us every time,
that without this our hearts turn
hard and can no longer open.
How I wished to give you more than knotted wool.

When you left for Mongolia, I said that yak's wool
is called *qivint*, eight times warmer against the cold
than sheep's wool. I wanted to warn you, be less open,
fight a bit against the current of that stream,
don't love the wrong one this year, turn,
don't be the only giving one this time.

But time undid us both like raveled wool,
so turn, when you can, but don't turn cold,
your gift is still the stream, the door left open.

Healing Crisis Sonnet [MH 11.11.10]

Here trees drop bloody fingers, scarlet arcs,
The mind eats poison of its own creation.
I fell again into the ravage-marks
That reappeared at every new station.
A would is also portal to divine
Grace come through you healer who would give,
Yet when I couldn't read more than a line
Without forgetting, self could not forgive.
But when the letter written to the devil
Came back because the address wasn't right,
The empty parking lot endowed a power
To me standing by the mailbox in the night.
I did end up resending, but I paused,
The beginning of the end a refrain caused.

Ghazal for *Orlando* [BT 11.15.10]

On your back, you stare up at the height of the oak tree.
You will start a new poem, you will write of the oak tree.

The sky is simply blue or the sky is a veil –
how best to describe the dappled light of the oak tree?

A root like a spine, all that underground shadow,
tells of mystery and time, all the might of the oak tree.

You hack at the Saracen's head hung too high,
but what can protect against blight of the oak tree?

You imagine an ancestor, noble and wearied,
in your play you will call him "the Knight of the Oak Tree."

With the passage of years, you buy silver, reupholster,
your only constant: the sight of the oak tree.

The days grow longer, you might turn to painting,
your first work a marvel: "the flight of the oak tree."

When Shelmardine sails, will the wave overwhelm him?
You're left alone to survive the dark night of the oak tree.

Beauty leaves you ragged, you arrive late to dinner,
and silent, no word touches the fright of the oak tree.

If your land is entailed, you will lose it as Vita,
but who can lay claim to the right of the oak tree?

Pantoum of a Stumble [MH 11.17.10]

The demon knew of the spring in my step and called,
Number flashing after seventeen months' wait.
Heat blasted through my body; I waited, but not long.
But I waited, the baby step of refrain.

Number flashing after seventeen months wait,
He said *I was alone and then I looked up and wasn't anymore*
But I waited, the baby step of refrain,
Before I said, *Whereas I looked up and was.*

He said *I was alone and then I looked up and wasn't anymore*
At his voice my syrup of sex and agony awoke
Before I said, *Whereas I looked up and was.*
Now cold autumn rain, shame at the fall in my step.

At his voice my syrup of sex and agony awoke,
Heat blasted through my body; I waited, but not long.
Now cold autumn rain, shame at the fall in my step.
The demon knew of the spring in my step and called.

Villanelle [BT 11.19.10]

He asks if I have passion deeply felt,
clarity of purpose, firm will to compete,
but passion without confidence will melt.

“Don’t linger at the crossroads where you’ve knelt,
but yet don’t start a path you don’t aim to complete,”
He asks if I have passion deeply felt.

To leave the house of hesitation where I’ve dwelt,
oh, to cast my leaky boat into the fleet,
but passion without confidence will melt.

His queries sting enough to raise a welt,
can I claim to burn with inspiration’s heat?
He asks if I have passion deeply felt.

I’d like simply to play the hand I’m dealt,
to work without illusion or conceit,
but passion without confidence will melt.

I count the stars that gird Orion’s belt,
I type a sentence only to delete.
He asks if I have passion deeply felt,
but passion without confidence will melt.

Sestina for Revision [MH 11.22.10]

Start anywhere: let's say she was born with a brick in her mouth.
"It's an organic process. I put things in, take them out, put them back in.
It's not straightforward, and it's not efficient."
This November night proffers a strange balm of warmth on the skin, a sign
Of nothing; dry cold imminent as the scaly skin of a dream.
Empty parking lot, the ticks of skittering leaves audible, but not her language.

A "field of difference" makes her image a memory of its own language.
The spaces between words are words themselves, the dreams
The words dream of the speakers. They make her up, her heart in her mouth.
God is off spinning some other yarn, the clock he built efficient
Enough to run in what sounds like fits and starts, a sign
Of error to children deaf to the regular tick of the world they're in.

In her poem everything takes the form of something else, language
Vague enough to confuse the boyfriend with the father, and ends with her mouth
Saying something after kissing someone. She'll add flushed canyon later, one she'll get lost in.
Mature writing is efficient.
Like all the butter-yellow ginkgo leaves fallen swiftly as the yield sign.
The rosened canyon morphs to a cornfield in her dream.

"You must kill your darlings," she quotes, in any language.
Because she is Alice, and this is her dream.
Her fish-pale palm on the oak bark is not some sort of sign.
She's looking for Jesus in
The toast, Jesus in her mouth.
She's followed, lost in the cornfield dream;
The pursuit of immaturity's profusion of words nothing if not efficient.

Real adults know how to let go, real poets how to be efficient,
The sign
Of wisdom is in less signs, of course, and more dream.
The course is that of the bottle Alice wakes up in.
Her tears the ocean, her will to live the death of language.
Words curdle to fungus in her mouth.

She's at a crossroads. There are no street signs.
For her, now, thought is not efficient.
Her freeze the path to noticing the butter-yellow leaves in a dream
She might not otherwise have, the fall of language
Buttered mushrooms in her mouth.
It's a kind of tenderness she can swim in.

One of us has a sign around the neck that says "Alice"; the other, "her language."
I'd like to give you my palm to put yours in, but that might not be efficient
Enough for the urgency of her dream, the burgeoning rot of her mouth.

Thanksgiving Sonnet [BT 11.24.10]

“I hope you vomit,” she told me as I stood
on her steps. “Thank you,” I replied, sincere
as she was sincere, and smiled. How else could
I know that you were well and calm my fear?
I felt my own breast (tender?), called my sleep
profound, woke early, gnawed a rice cake.
Days passed till I piled my clothes in a heap,
naked again in the room of heartbreak.
In June I waited while she searched and zoomed
each minute longer as they stretched out blank,
a slow heart, a small form, a loss presumed,
a statistic, no one to blame, I sank.
But now one thirty-two, one thirty-two
heartbeats a minute, I can breathe, it’s you.

Black Friday Ghazal [MH 11.26.10]

The theme tonight is gratitude, in red they're singing tonight.
Tall tree is lit at their command, the townsfolk singing tonight.

"Posttraumatic disconnect" floats my head blurred, apart.
My pleas for help to reconnect a lone bat's pinging tonight.

Or maybe a whale, alone in the depths, its shroud of self hatred the dark.
The pricks of bright all bright at once, frost star-bits stinging tonight.

Please bring me home to the old and the young, wonder piercing me.
A grandma shuffles, her years her trail, her grandson clinging tonight.

Help me to dance and grow old as the trees, that I might look back in joy.
Grandbaby a sapling, she stately as oak, her tree-wisdom ringing tonight.

The mercy of crowds is the loss of the self, precious shared muffles of warmth.
One can unravel and melt through the crowd, through the being they're bringing tonight.

Town square filled with sacred bodies, the tree, the lights, their breaths.
My plea's bird-quick answer pricks light through your womb in the heartbeat heard winging
tonight.

Pantoum for Hurston [BT 11.29.10]

She spent three days under the pear tree,
dialect was in the branches.
They saw a pantomime
because they could not see a woman.

Dialect was in the branches
and so she spoke softly to the leaves.
Because they could not see a woman,
the men heard nothing.

And so she spoke softly to the leaves,
trembling in the first light.
The men heard nothing.
The bee's soft hum of approach.

Trembling in the first light,
they saw a pantomime:
the bee's soft hum of approach.
She spent three days under the pear tree.

Villanelle for Buddha's Conch-Voice [MH. 12.02.10]

Muda *calls the earth to witness*, prayer simply meant to heal,
Sounds soothing through a foreign tongue.
Do not believe everything you think or even feel.

Phenomena a tapestry, earth-pearling karmic wheel,
Rhino horn, white jade, coral, silver strung.
Muda *calls the earth to witness*, prayer simply meant to heal.

Sheep, ram, horse, antelope, ibex, the next meal
Given you by gusty tundra's panting beasts to choose among.
Do not believe everything you think or even feel.

Their hot blood runs like leaf-veins through your chest when first you kneel,
The sweeping sky itself a weaving lung.
Muda *calls the earth to witness*, prayer simply meant to heal.

Aspersions cast in milk as each direction's hand you deal,
Four ways in fluid motions without words awkwardly hung.
Do not believe everything you think or even feel.

Meant to heal by *leaving* meaning, leaving aims with which to seal
The letter scrawled to no one, sacred as the beasts' hot dung.
Muda *calls the earth to witness*, prayer simply meant to heal.
Do not believe everything you think or even feel.

Seasick Sestina [BT 12.5.10]

When I wake up feeling sick,
I know that I am well:
a paradox, like the artifice
needed to portray experience.
Green leaf, blue sky we say we see,
but today I saw red leaves.

I stared up at the red leaves,
and forgot what it meant to be sick,
I said "look! do you see?"
but you laughed, so I laughed as well,
another shared experience;
my self-consciousness adds a gloss of artifice.

Some see a struggle between sincerity and artifice:
why write of buds and stems and leaves
instead of directly about the experience?
Others say that language is sick
and that only by writing well
can we begin to see.

But what would it mean to see?
When a purified language denies artifice
and forgets each word is deep as a well,
some menace whistles through the leaves
and a woman is declared sick
because we lack words to speak of her experience.

Some travel in search of experience
and try to name each thing they see.
Here is where I stopped writing last night, sick,
tried to lie still and summon sleep through artifice.
'The rain fell dully against the leaves
as if to say 'be calm. it's just as well.'

I woke up this morning feeling mostly well,
so symptoms are tamed by what we call experience:
that something unfurling slow and sure as leaves.
I stare at the image but a blur is all I see,
still a gift of technology (or artifice),
that glowing soft cocoon that makes me sick.

I measure time in changing leaves and call it well,
or wake up sick, my body altered through experience
no one can see, a few weeks more I can maintain the artifice.

Snow Sonnet [MH 12.08.10]

My new fear is the darkness in winter,
Grief threatening to shape again our pain.
Anguished thoughts so quickly change the building,
Annexing the dread-wings to the main.
On first white gleaming days belief is seamless,
As if the sludge and muck were never there.
Suddenly, the sleep is plain and dreamless,
White innerscape to save the heart from wear.
“Architecture is frozen music,” professed one;
“Frozen movement,” suggested yet another.
To sculpt with light impossible to none,
Snowflake’s infrastructure soul and brother.
Learning the frame of grief kept us immobile;
Crystals built the heart a bit more noble.

Nightwood Ghazal [BT 12.10.10]

He said you'd be admired by those who read poetry,
surely knowing that many who enjoy novels dread poetry.

So your novel gathers dust, discussed only by scholars,
declared a piece of sublime but often unread poetry.

You told the dark story from each different angle
with metaphors (I admit) that writhed and bled poetry.

Felix cherishes false portraits, his life a museum,
a cavernous circus, each statue fed poetry.

O'Connor wears rouge, drunk on the sorrows of others,
a life of poverty: instead of bread, poetry.

Jenny, a magpie, steals pictures, beads, stories,
collects volumes of famous but misread poetry.

Robin is absent, a magnet, a vacuum,
a mirror to reflect back your longing, dead poetry.

Nora follows through the dark, as close as she dares,
gunmetal eyes wet, heart inscribed with lead poetry.

All sink and all fall with an animal cry
in an unholy union: watch the novel bed poetry.

He wrote you a chamber you overflow with each tide,
you animate the unspeakable; they call the unsaid "poetry."

Please Hold [MH 12.15.10]

All of our representatives are
Assisting other callers
At this time. Your call is important
To us. Please stay on the line,

Assisting other callers,
And your call will be handled
To us. Please stay on the line
In the order it was received

And your call will be handled:
Your shadow will comfort you,
In the order it was received,
Oozing dark lines of calmative blue.

Your shadow will comfort you,
Aloe tongue pulsing in the remains,
Oozing dark lines of calmative blue.
You're keeping hooded eyes on each other.

Aloe tongue, pulsing in the remains,
At this time, your call is important.
You're keeping hooded eyes on each other.
All of our representatives are.

Villanelle Cut Short [BT 12.20.10]

How to tell you?
I can't see to write.
This one died too.

I'm one of few.
It wasn't right.
How to tell you?

The odds skew.
Though 5% seems slight,
this one died too.

The 9th week something flew.
Body alone can't fight.
How to tell you?

And if I said I knew
though I called it fright.
This one died too.

World breaks anew.
Again it's always night.
How to tell you?
This one died too.

Winter Solstice Sestina [MH 12.22.10]

You told me loss should wound us every time.
I wish it didn't.

Its soul.
A world to give you, with this same full moon,
Gusseted in skitting mist, this same rain,
Only one doesn't have to be oneself, to have memory.

Just for a while. This same garden, but the rain
Would wipe the slate of you, clear cobwebs of memory,
And vines assume the shape of time
So time would not wear upon your soul.
Just for a while. Because it didn't.
Nothing knows time but the moon.

The pea vine silhouette would hold the memory
So you wouldn't have to. You would look, new, at the moon.
You would sigh with wonder. The oak's old soul
Would whisper and creak, and every time,
You would know it sings just for you. But it didn't.
The world prays with sound. With the small feet of rain.

The weather screen lights up in green, record rain
For this region. Today the sun almost broke through, but it didn't.
Time supposedly softens the memory,
But it won't yet. As I write the moon
Sails its orb the longest. It's the darkest day of this time
Around the sun, of this year's soul, your soul

Newly rendered old with harsh memory.
The very moment of solstice comes in one minute's time.
I'll leave the table, go out under the moon.
The stars light the way of the one who didn't
Stay, called back to the moon's old soul.
Cold wind will calm my flushed face with rain,

And my prayer will be transmitted by the moon,
Which can be seen despite the rain.
I will pray, not for the pearl, the clot, the flown soul,
Glowing orb which knows no memory
And therefore no pain, only perfection, but for time
To apply itself to you like a balm, since life didn't.

Memory will dwell in you as the little orb didn't.
Loss wounds us every time. But the moon
Is just as relentless, and this rain, bathing your perfect soul.

Eclipsed Sonnet [BT 12.24.10]

We drove in darkness under the same blood moon
that I still called beautiful, then I slept
the drugged sleep as they scraped the cocoon,
the pearl, the clot, now blot, I bled, then wept.
Bled too much, turned pale, waited, trembling,
and sleepless read four hundred pages.
What tore in me, what would not close, resembling
only loss, the bournless ache that rages.
Two days each year I'll walk over the grave
of my own hopes – the ones who would not stay,
but left only with violence; I save
no artifact, no scar, just words to say
I lost. Oh nameless stars, oh burnt-out suns,
Perdita, Perdita, lost one, my lost ones.

Christmas Ghazal [MH12.26.10]

My mother says of AA, "this is the room we come to instead of dying."
My cousin collects a desire chip in this room instead of dying.

We all clap. Today is Christmas. Twenty eleven can't come fast enough.
This December twentieth the day he refused the crown, the head of dying.

Each end-of-the-month meeting, they celebrate "sobriety birthdays;" under
Weak light eat the box-frosting cake of fellowship, not the bread of dying.

The oldest man there asks my cousin to light his candles, his wrinkles twinkle
As he beams out at us: thirty-four years' delay of the bed of dying.

"I ask newcomers to light mine; I know Christmas is a rough time." My cousin
Bows his head. *Angels singing, white light*, those returned from near death said of dying.

My cousin thanks us, smiles weakly, his long brown curls lifted with the night sky's tears.
For those gathered here booze is the devil, swelling to burst, fed of dying.

My favorite man on earth, my guardian, cherub, has never been so weighed
Down with grief, the stone wall of "no," the rock of the fact, the lead of dying.

His shoulders bow. What to say to the emptiness that crashed into him? Into
You? Pale pearl, almost-mother, you did not die of bleeding, you bled of dying.

For the former I give thanks, for the vision of your face. For the latter there
Is nothing. In your body as in his, just a vacuum of cruel space, clot dead of dying.

It happens, is, was, wasn't. The shadow descends at will. The human eats granite,
Sinks like a stone, rocked by inner waves, dark water we tread of dying.

"I'll keep coming back," says my cousin. His defeat lays new foundations. For you,
Brave ones, still say "I can't anymore," but you rise again, instead of dying.

Pantoum [BT 12.28.10]

I buy a blue fountain pen, a skein of red cashmere.
I'm awake at two alone in bed.
Sonnets haunt me. They are easy to memorize
because rhyme is a form of necessity.

I'm awake at two alone in bed
because each of us has a way of grieving,
because rhyme is a form of necessity.
because in two days more we're leaving.

Because each of us has a way of grieving,
I smile weakly when your mother blames the water,
because in two days more we're leaving
to begin the rest of our lives after this.

I smile weakly when your mother blames the water;
she says medicine when she means marijuana.
To begin the rest of our lives after this,
we'll need a rhythm to our days like a sonnet.

She says medicine when she means marijuana.
Acceptance is all we can give though I cough.
We'll need a rhythm to our days like a sonnet –
the only way to sleep is to feign sleep.

Acceptance is all we can give though I cough.
Television always on, a suspect quotes Shakespeare.
The only way to fall asleep is to feign sleep,
or to read until the book falls.

Television always on, a suspect quotes Shakespeare.
Sonnets haunt me – they are easy to memorize,
or to read until the book falls.
I buy a blue fountain pen, a skein of red cashmere.

Villanelle [MH. 12.30.10]

I learn to be with myself to watch the sky draining:
Clouds loping integers of grey,
Murder of crows waxing and waning.

I asked him about marriage. It was raining.
“You're always watching each other, every day.”
I learn to be with myself to watch the sky draining.

He said, rainclouds staining,
“If we had known? No way.”
Murder of crows waxing and waning.

Black bird-dots form one body, morphing, losing, gaining,
His daughter starts another hospital stay.
I learn to be with myself to watch the sky draining.

Love is the disease, the stories, the feigning,
He uses his every last vacation day.
Murder of crows waxing and waning.

The birds weave and morph, crowing and craning.
There might not be another thing to say.
I learn to be with myself to watch the sky draining,
Murder of crows waxing and waning.

New Year's Sestina [BT 1.1.11]

Toasting tired at midnight, I tell myself
next year will be something different
maybe not better, but at least not this.
Bubbling rosé smells like yeast,
I'd thought I'd toast this year with water,
but wanting is not enough.

Any word of comfort is enough
to bring tears, even read by myself,
I wonder about the salt lost in water
and the ways I'll be different
after, like bread without yeast,
I fear, there may be no rising after this.

Discretion veils matters like this.
Who do I know well enough
to tell that there was yeast
but no rising, that now I'm reduced to myself.
On the surface nothing is different,
all's erased, written only in water.

In the kitchen, the sound of water,
love is no more or less than this,
my husband washing dishes is no different
than usual, but for tonight it's enough.
I read in bed till noon to quit myself,
but thoughts ignored still froth and grow like yeast.

The oil slick on risen dough, the smell of yeast,
how *The Search for Delicious* ends with water,
live in these tactile joys, I tell myself,
the finger's joints, the fountain pen, even this,
with patience might somehow be enough:
repeat the dance until you feel different.

A sestina's apt to drag; this one's no different.
I exhaust all likely metaphors for yeast,
and poetry cannot always be enough.
Yet your lines have washed over me like water,
and I've found words to speak of days like this,
no longer merely talking to myself.

If baptized we rise different out of water,
if flour, water, yeast and time make bread, let this
be enough. Lift my thoughts from the mire of myself.

Sonnet for You [MH. 1.3.11]

I wonder who it is that listens in
When skies inside our skulls fill up with rain.
Thudding to the ground, a severed fin,
A rosebud falls before it blooms again.
Who is it that would give us wings, then clip them?
By accident or malice, it still burns.
Torn out of us by someone who would rip them,
Our dreams take form then drop like stones by turns.
Sister, you need not have strength, faith, or hope.
To breathe is all I ask of you tonight.
You can lie still while thoughts of velvet rope
Bind you to the bed of nothing right.
But as you have for me, know that I'm listening.
That's the orb remaining, certain, glistening.

MING HOLDEN served in the Mongolian Writers Union as their International Relations Adviser during her year as a Henry Luce Scholar in Mongolia, collaborating with The Asia Foundation on literary translation and working towards the formation of a Mongolia PEN Center. While an undergraduate at Brown University ('07) she co-founded and served as Editor-in-Chief of the *Brown Literary Review*. Min's poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, journalism, and literary translations have appeared in *Cerise Press*, *The Best American Poetry Blog*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Huffington Post*, *inAsia*, *InTheFray*, *Molotov Cocktail*, *Peaches and Bat*, *The Poker*, *Poets & Artists*, *Prospect*, *The Santa Inez Valley Journal*, *The Santa Barbara Independent*, *Slice Magazine's blog*, and others. She recently taught a cross-genre workshop at the Richard Hugo House.

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COLOPHON

These poems were written and emailed (mostly between Palo Alto, California and Bloomington, Indiana) on the dates that accompany them in compliance (mostly) with the following guidelines:

- Follow the order of forms.
- Reply within 48 hours.
- No non-poem communication. The poem is the message.

