



# THE SPINDLE TREE

David Appelbaum



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David Appelbaum at [appelbad@newpaltz.edu](mailto:appelbad@newpaltz.edu)

or David Mehler at [triggerfishcriticalreview@gmail.com](mailto:triggerfishcriticalreview@gmail.com)

## The Spindle Tree

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## **Thunder Snow**

The sound of glass shattering  
then a blue shine far off, then nothing.

Then it was over.

When it opened and I was out  
there was earth on my cheek  
and air in my lungs.

Where I had gone was forever taken from me.  
I was a child again unknowing  
helpless to stem the blood of life.

I was lifted and bathed  
by strangers who looked through me without blinking.

Words would come from the murmur.  
I could not say how it was.

Then it was black.  
I slept again in the arms of my dead mother.

When I woke, there was birdsong  
a few low shrubs  
and something called sky.

### **Invitatory**

It was terrible, the clarity  
of northern lights that scoured the trees  
stripped bare in the work of snow.

How did I survive  
in that purity, in dreams  
that rebuilt the walls of my cell,  
air whose breath denies you?

—The cold flare, a watch on fire  
as you, the smallest thing, judge.

Then the fear gave way.  
I walked on a crusted surface, falling  
into my own form, rising, proceeding.  
You gave no call to answer.

In that, I learned your vagaries.  
Did I then see a life may fail,  
made too wanting to be fertile?

### **Pachysandra**

You are only the longing  
that wants back what it seeks.

You seal the earth once friable  
beneath a sheath of ice  
so the boot heel leaves no mark.

The sun does not last the day  
it bears glistening into being.

I have held out for you  
in belief that you meant it so,  
that your plaint of needs  
would echo my constancy  
as a disciple would hear it.

I cannot reach your lowest rung.  
You have gathered all light  
for another and death that sticks to it.

You leave only this—  
beauty that yearns for my gaze  
to fill the void once your heart.



## **None**

How long did I lie there,  
while the stars scraped the dome of heaven—  
until I could take in no more terror?

When the one you made in my place woke  
the house was dark, unwarmed, waiting.  
I lit a lamp.

There are those who prefer to stay  
suppressed in the earth  
who cling to their single body,  
while bearing your patience  
and the account it asks of them.

Beauty on both sides,  
the lovely pale shapes of hemlocks  
bowed in the new snow,  
a beauty of the mortal breath  
that hollows out an atmosphere,  
and one of the anguish living on—  
I, not asking which was which.

For a long time, I was neither.

### **Wind Hollow**

It is the part we share,  
the clasp in the thing's release.

Because it moves too sparingly to follow  
I am slow to see how you take back  
remnants and remain obscure,  
a faint look when I am meant not to.

A call that swallows itself and is calm.

That great sorrow we carry for you  
who wish it otherwise  
is lost to the pleasures you do not forbid.

I do not suffer my love of your absence.  
Unlike you, I do not let it go.

## None

Under the condition  
ice graces the rising sap,  
under the condition the husk  
knows its dispensability, split  
down its fault line  
under the condition you gave, the soul  
unshutters in the crack of the cold.

This is illusion.  
Brown foxglove stalks above snow  
seems to permit a future.  
There is a second illusion,  
that is the word *can*.

Dorn knows the law of his life  
As he digs after the storm's burial,  
he works like a ten-minute machine  
to clear a right of way, exalting.  
He is the good soldier, obedient  
while I wait for the presence of a plan,  
confirmed when I find none.

His is all increase, desire  
that grows big with time.

In his wake, little is left, the remains.  
It is make-work, the kind you reserve  
for ones who would trade the earth  
not to forfeit your heaven too.



## **Vinca**

For a long time I could only feel shame.

I could not walk under the trees, bare of leaves.  
They did not hide me.  
The stars above were uncovered.

There was a thin skin of snow.  
The ice had become a silver wire where the brook fell  
crimped in place by the rock.

When you looked across at the field,  
you saw only the wounded beauty  
that called out for your witness,  
not the fester beneath, where roots split  
and dead wood would mark your violent withholding.

The old bridge that once crossed over  
falls off a rotted abutment  
where the water still roils.

Do you too mourn what can not be fixed,  
the disproportion of ardor  
between the broken heart and your heaven?

Do you suffer so I might know my pain  
is all that keeps us apart?

## **Terce**

You should have weight by now.  
You should have filled out.

I gave you the right  
to seek wisdom in the heart.

You feared your sight when light was gone  
inventing deceits to keep safe.

You remained without consequence.  
Afterwards came your distraught children  
but I hoped still you would accept  
the task I have not yet annulled  
that like the earth waits for you to attend.

I have endured your weariness  
like granite worn in the cycle of seasons  
while you have diminished  
desiring what I keep for others to come.

You are a cloud that melts away,  
a contrail that fades to azure.  
There will be no monument to your lives  
There will be no death either.

## Cliffs

Your shoulder is turned away.  
The great rock promontory against your side  
leans against night clouds  
no longer rests on mine.

You brood without concern for me.  
I have ceased to occupy your plans.

It is time to change the kitchen tablecloth.  
Red petals of the geranium are sere and dry  
amid dishes left from the banquet.

What did we talk about  
over cups of jasmine and spice—  
the fragrance of that on your breath?

—the cycle of things, ending first  
your last word echoes the valediction.

I would say how your reticence  
weighs on me like an argument half-over.  
I would say how I pass easily on  
entranced by the earth waking  
as fog rolls across the rock face.

You were nothing, imagine you changed,  
made somehow less, the way words turn  
into petty things over afternoon tea.

## **Matins**

Without rupture, your faith excludes silence.  
It is performed with a count  
that marches through night to an unknown sanctuary.  
It will not die.

You mete out its passion by the hour  
coating even the insides of doorways  
the crevice under woodwork, in windows.  
You are obsessive.

I once knew under the stars that shifted west  
the illusion of influence  
that a word could ever matter.

Euonymus, I count your seeing eyes  
shed leaves reddened by frost  
to let me know my debt  
the pain I borne owed  
to the one who forgets faults  
as does the earth warming  
roots ring out under snow.



## **The Holly Bush**

I wait—by the window  
if near, if not, by an open field.  
Ever green, a prick of hope,  
upholds the lower soul—as you do.

Starlit snow, opulence of pearl.  
The dark has no valence,  
beauty as void as a dream—  
nothing consoles in your stead.

You never withhold—do I know—  
watching out for the other  
in the black mirror of ice.  
This is my single despair, not yours,  
never unique but many  
leads to every quarter.

If I were Moses, I would bear  
with probity where I am remiss  
in placing my desire before yours.  
Watching the mire of promises  
I serve what I imagine to be you  
while the earth dearly wants  
my step to press it and leave a mark  
you could then read and praise.

## **Matins**

There has to be fire.  
That is what Cam is taught.

Winter is not for lethargics  
The earth wears passion for its skin.  
It is a time to put things up

Her seeds lie in warm towels  
in straight rows that plot the garden—  
her mind is on harrowing.

I do not find warmth is a remedy  
for the doldrums  
in which you have implanted our forgetting.

To harvest comes before the act  
and the sprouting is afterward.

Cam says lethargics  
love the imaginary like a moth the flame.  
That way they become their desire  
putting enjoyment ahead of facts.

I say don't regret what you depend on,  
even craving.

## **The Blue Spruce**

The way I hang out for you  
in the root of things.  
I consume love.  
That vein you left behind.

In the aureole beneath ice  
on stagnant barks  
a reserve hidden, like fat.

There, the bitter tears you have drunk  
when it was no longer time  
to wait, or want—  
in your anger, their salt dissolves.

I have forgotten why  
numb and insensate  
one sleep, then another passes without daybreak  
—to console you who cannot die,

or feel urgently to rise again  
the sweet of phloem on pith  
wind, air, breath, life.

You do not know how it ends  
when the pity of fault  
remembers the word *begin*.

## **Late Thaw**

Flood time—the hill is saved  
though the ancient hemlocks fall  
onto the arms of their children.

Here everything is used twice  
even the candles.  
We harrow the stump  
harvesting the cones and needles  
even the amber, one eye on eternity.

The circle should console,  
each passed for the next, endlessly,  
hope in snow melt, hope in dawn  
the dawn before the melt,  
the crystalline ice palace.

I will hold the child's hand  
who wants not knowing how  
the word must be said,  
all tongue and no wind  
in the nervousness of bearing thought.

The remembrance comes back in train  
to crane over that gap  
beyond the inland sea  
where unseen waves cross it.

## **The Oak Gall**

Remember the green chiffon tie  
that lay at the foot of the stone walk,  
then the dry brown in reparation.

When you touched my shoulder, I turned  
to find nothing, no trace  
but the deceit of fertile gravel  
its purslane and pepperweed,  
Dorn would pull with a steel gaff  
prodigal in his praise of you.

When you touched my shoulder  
with your heel, I remembered  
the browning ash under it, still crisp  
as our twin faces beheld the universe  
crushed inside the narrow sphere,  
brother and brother, two cords  
enchained, a difficult birth,  
wintered together with green oak leaves.

As we gathered, the dust in little mounds  
scattered the wind with it,  
I remembered it lifted a feather  
whose silence floated to the ground.

If you still listen, remind me  
to adore such gifts  
brothers when we touched  
forehead to forehead, shank to shank,  
before dry earth undid all that.

## **Witch Hazel**

There are others  
the angel of terror, for instance  
under vaporous gauze that cowers by the culvert

the face of a cut-glass pendant  
that shimmers with the dark moon.

There were others to teach me  
to love life, the eternal loft  
as set lines of azure meet  
the bridgework of the cliff,  
the road below in mimicry of that  
as if earth replicated heaven.

But always it is the lesson  
this is not mine—  
the knoll is soft with a leaf cap  
crisping underfoot, birdsong above,  
scent of pepper weed—  
empty then but for the muslin shirt  
that one wears when marked.

Is that what you would have me sew  
in the pearl of moonlight,  
the cloth of complacency  
so that in fullness, earth and the seasons,  
would cling, your remains  
as yellow pollen clings, heedlessly?

### **Prairie Rose**

You want to name things.  
Your power is the future,  
one thought breeds one act.

The ladder must meet earth  
where your game is known

cup boot tear

What is the gift  
if it leaves you dumbstruck?  
Dawn comes in words.  
I do no more than read  
the mute roseate

leaves blow against the trellis  
chittering  
north wind

the murmur of your mind.

### **Terce**

I would ask you to weigh my situation.  
It is different in the light  
midnight washes away  
in contempt of secrets.  
But at dawn shadows are longest.

I would ask if you mean me  
to rise void of dreams to stutter  
my name to the first who asks,  
a blind man who blindly  
laments your overdue feast.

I suffer my lapses.  
Am I cause of the roof leaking,  
the sill's glory in mildew,  
or the fault line in the ridgepole?

A hammer can miss its mark.  
A plumb line can be mislaid.  
The nails are driven bent.

Yet the beauty of the lark song surpasses  
any relic of your mundane chorus.

I am a poor carpenter.  
I cannot build a tabernacle for you.



## **Lauds**

The argument reigns supreme.  
Your favor of things that cling  
to the extremes outdoes the fear  
of my mind where dark furrows  
jut through its stops without care.

Upstream moss rank on rock grows  
by the horsetail and the thing it hides—the culvert—  
green coverlet pressed under a plate of ice  
in winter fog and hoarfrost.

I am not like you.  
The fire of the stove sustains me,  
with bounty stolen from high places  
as great as the stars'.  
Is to live on what you leave  
for us who tend the sway of weeds  
that lisp through the harelip of rock  
all you ask of the difference?  
Or is it fire, crimson on the cliff,  
meant only to warm my eyes  
bitten by glacial anguish?

## **Vespers**

Over my left shoulder, the moon  
full as white grows  
before it languishes,  
roughing the branches that slow its fall  
into the dark recess of its cell.

If you think human life  
makes a constancy firm and planted  
in need of renewal each night, a body  
born with silver veins  
as it hides behind its own silhouette,  
then I have again failed you.

The window sills on the south side  
leak the winter rain.  
The floor heaves are no match for me  
split cross-grain and unmoored.  
You will have to find someone competent  
with things, not one who dreams  
the ocean that circles earth  
fixes each thing in place.

I have failed  
this second light that casts no shadow—  
please advise the moonrise to overlook  
the holes it peeks through  
that only magnify your glory.



Dying Yucca Blossoms and dead moth  
7/6/8

## **Brush Fire**

You would set things straight  
if I gave penance,  
under the patient stars.

You are like shadow that would  
stay rooted to your body  
rather than consummate its own.

You give a single name, not every name  
not the myriad voices of flames  
that boil in the belly of things,  
not my silent vigil over a vast conflagration.

What I subtract from the destiny of ash,  
I remove so its absence may recall  
you to search embers for my body.

You will cease to watch  
as I return all elements to nature.  
The hemlock at the slightest sigh of dawn  
that awakens the sleeping bird  
will henceforth be only dust moving  
its senseless thrust through the morning  
to the lowest point in the glen,  
nothing more than dust.

### **The White Birch**

The boundary vanishes.  
That is the way of snow—  
there is no law.

When there was, you would go  
only where you were told  
the morning star, the horizon, the dark woods.  
I never forbade you anything.  
There was no need.

Although you were free to linger,  
your home was enough.  
In dreams you go elsewhere  
or like the beasts of the field, my blows  
drove you to cross  
to thick pasturage.

You keep what you feel.  
I cannot tell, even as you cry out  
having become lost to vision.

I do not intend to provoke you for your secrets.

I am not of your world.

That is reason why you pull away.  
Sentience is meant for a life not yours  
but for white bark that in the storm blooms,  
transmuted to crystal eyes of ice.

## **Compline**

There the barley-breath of sleep,  
on your nightstand, a bower of white peonies waits,  
beside a pitcher, a dish of almonds.

There would be work clothes strewn  
beside the bed, beside an open book  
a window all reflection as I look out  
to the lone buoy that marks the bay  
a man shadow, slack, bending to retrieve  
some article lost in night flight.

There would be the murmur in my ear  
the rustle of the days there before  
the sounding reckons depth in fathoms  
for passage safe in the stone barge.

There would be an incidental hush  
after coal embers crash through the grate  
while on the far side of the bed  
you roll languidly into the empty place  
one leg searches for cool air  
smooth sea glass rubs against linen.

Would there then be the image beside  
of one who I think stood without intent  
to watch dawn come like a stiffened sail  
takes wind to find the harbor home?

## **Seaside**

For every life, its vacant house,  
a room whose ceiling is a hollow vat  
a chair squats beside the pine nightstand  
antediluvian scent of pitch.

The place must be there still  
a cell that preserves life in  
a womb that keeps from despair.

There, there was no desire  
to unroll the bedding under the stars.

An owl or the kestrel  
toward the edge of the grounds, by the sea  
a wisp of curtain billows in night air.

A young girl sleeps on the cot.  
She is over forty now.

In the stillness, nothing changes.  
A candle on the table is burned down  
but the room is not dark. It would always be so.  
Apples kept in a bowl, a pitcher of water,  
an unopened letter.

Below, a rock beach  
reminded by softly lapping waves.  
Far off, heat lightning flashes.  
Outside, a dog would whimper.

## **Matins**

Odor of boxwood  
two children laughing,  
sister and brother play beneath limbs.

O father, if you could hear  
you would not turn aside  
to the stars in their fixed orbits  
but walk once more among us.

The yard is empty.  
They are inside their tunnel  
telling secrets lost to the rustle  
of the boxwood leaves.

Odor of boxwood  
rises to my nostrils on a warm draught.  
A vision of sister and brother.  
One shows the other to dig  
the rocky mountain earth with a knife.  
They laugh as sparks jump.

This is what you miss, my father,  
the way between first love and last  
simple laughter that asks nothing  
of your perfect supplication.

The oblivion before, I tell you,  
who remember no stories  
must remain unknowing of joy,  
lest you believe your absence  
is reason to find earth holy.



## **White Pine**

I cannot call to you.  
My voice is frozen,  
my lowest limbs stripped  
by hungry deer  
while my crown bends suppliantly  
under the burden.  
Unless it is your design  
to leave me mute  
hollow for the wind to play,  
at least make up upright again  
so that my peak might serve  
as refuge for song sparrows  
and the glory of twilight.  
If your will is to have me  
on perpetual trial  
an arch touching earth twice,  
let me be for those that only crawl  
for whom heaven is my scent  
and not for the bushwhack  
that seals deformity with its blade.  
At least lessen my guilt  
if you have not forgotten  
that my heart lies fallow  
along secret paths you walk  
whispering again the word for birth.

## **Matins**

Like a candle I grow shorter  
as morning pales the moonset.  
Soon they will burn me like a snowman  
to cleanse gutters with spring rain.

You see one thing after the next.  
I am not that way.  
I am the distance between your thoughts  
between pulses of your heart.

You keep changing for my sake  
On constancy you cannot gaze.

Your flesh I made to caress  
with pollen and the north wind  
to let you feel no separation.  
You walk the field in solitude  
reciting rhymes learned in school.

My touch on the nape of your neck  
constricts you in nearness.  
You are not ready to see  
the meteor in the winter sky  
streak toward a new dawn.

I did not make this no man's land.  
It is your invention  
to shun both heaven and earth  
and master an empty house.

Do not say that I forsake you.  
Under your mother's heart  
or before, when there was being—  
there we walked, speaking.

## **Terce**

The dawn owl calls early  
to the dark of night.

The first sound.

You wanted to rise again.  
I let you be born.  
The earth was yet sealed in ice.  
I gave you thought.

Your mind filled the space I made  
the star-bright sign of the Horse.  
It opened and was at ease.  
You did not yet move.

Wonder was not enough.  
You had to have high purpose.  
The crusted snow pressing  
the leaf cover to a sheen:  
I gave you work: to see.

You did not wish to tend the fields  
where grackles in the treetops were  
raucous in new light.  
Your eyelids stayed shut.  
You would not look.

You wanted a blanket of air  
to ride the sensation of wind  
to places reserved for others,  
not knowing it would cost you  
this one that I cared to give.

You will be a mirror  
with no sight of its own  
that repeats the image, saying  
goodbye, always.

## **Fieldstone**

The heart is always there, silent  
muscular like Dorn behind a pickax.  
It trails behind,  
a bell without a clapper  
the wind as dark.

I cannot speak of joy.  
Content to labor, to follow the ache  
short of breath culling small things  
dulled with old jealousies  
forever underfoot.

The heart has its loves  
like shards they gather at dawn  
to show the splintered edges  
in the soft glory of rose light.

I understand it is these you covet  
to compose the whole that is yours.

Since you require only the fear  
that never fails me,  
what is my praise to you  
in defense of the lie,  
the birdbath shattered by frost?

### **Mountain Laurel**

Clothed in mourning.  
you are a thing bent down  
by frost that etches an invisible will.

Made to ravish sunlight.  
you are far too delicate to be seen.

Aren't you a salt crystal  
to melt away with thirst  
to persist only in memory and song?

You wanted eternity to be clear.  
No more vanishing trace  
imagined in need of you,  
seeing as you leave earth  
to those who grieve dead flowers.

Come, join us the event.  
It makes no sense without you.

## **The Trellis**

I see behind the blinds  
while Dorn sweeps the drive.  
You are an abstract, partially there.

The terms of our agreement are  
that you forget inequalities.

He knows his strength disagrees with  
any obstacle, drawing faith from there.  
You differ and await permission.

This is how patience becomes yearning.

He moves to other quests  
after the detritus is piled by the shed.

Is it impossible, the terms you ask:  
to find joy in another's work  
without the taint of having?

That is why I keep you  
in my sight and neglect other havens

for instance, the first spring flower  
you hand him without jealousy.

## **None**

Because we see straight lines  
not corners, your world is hidden  
and despair is a surprise  
while you, our teacher, suffer endlessly  
to arrive at all points at once.  
Our joy in eluding what must be lost—  
delusion is the event—  
escapes your eye which sees no consequence  
but necessity in each advance.  
Each snowflake wills its difference  
in the winter tapestry.  
Because of you we are free to stalk  
the silent cliffs at midnight  
the low guttering of wind  
an owl's mate beyond the lake,  
whereas you uphold always  
what must be missed in  
our love for the remains  
that grasps after you as for thirst.

### **Winter's End**

The forms are melting  
by which you secure the heart  
against the rigors of time—  
this is my fear.

I wanted to stay as I was  
liquid as any beginning  
as it runs into the next.

I wanted to feel rooted  
like the beech that holds its leaves  
to defy cold denudement.

As a child, I could hear  
the smallest sound of the deluge,  
the downspout's throat  
swallowing heavenly water from you.

I have lived beyond my means.  
You had me serve you my pity,  
in exchange for a barren hill.

I will be no other for you.



## **The Spindle Tree**

The trunk was bent.  
It was winter when I straightened it.  
I drove a stake into the earth  
and guyed it with wire.

It didn't work.  
The thaw came a second time, not all at once  
to split it down the middle.

I watched from behind the blinds.  
It was two, dead wood and live.  
Dorn said, ready for burning.

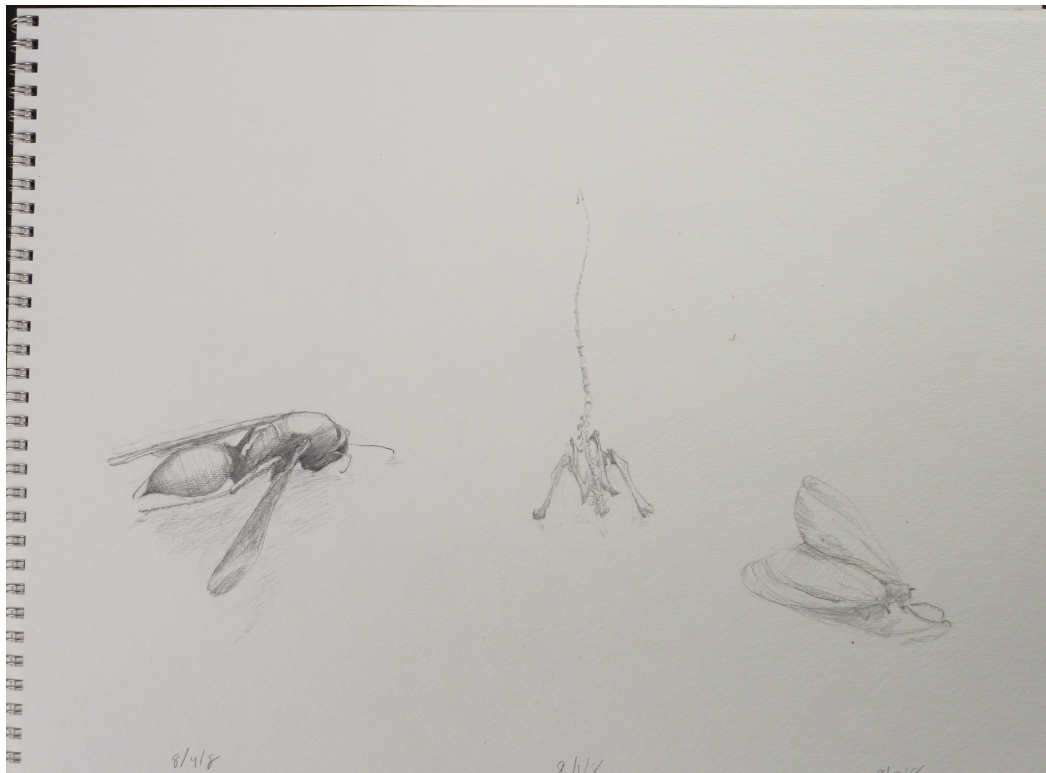
I remember how  
the brush pile was already high  
when the match set flames to the lower limbs  
of the oak canopy under the stars.

That spindle of fire  
was the euonymus tree  
that would not root in your earth.

I would change my ways  
not to mock you  
but to lessen your sadness  
at my misdirection of things.

I would become upright.

# ADDITIONALS



## **Vespers**

You have more than one face.  
It waxes and wanes in delirium.  
Between wonder and fear  
you cry alone in the empty room.

The solitude in dim moonlight  
on distant cliffs  
acts at midnight on your soul  
leaving it clear and aboriginal  
with the prescience of childhood.

Your soul, if you listen,  
sounds out the silent frames in words  
you strain to pronounce  
a murmur gloried and terrifying  
that echoes wind splattering ice pellets  
against the glass pane.

I miss the defiance of the other face  
that looked across the forbidden line,  
that rebelled at mention of my name.

For that, the blank gaze would yoke  
vengeance with fury  
in the pleasure of my work.

## **Stone Corner**

There was the wind  
sounding broken words.  
I could not listen.

It was terrible to lie uncovered  
the waters below freeze-framed in their leap  
like the plunge of phloem  
into the roots of the tall oaks.

As it died  
that voice—if it was—found the way out.

The cold stars were not witness  
since they were turned to face you.

Light streamed from silver limbs  
shown in the trees were I lay.  
The ice groaned under me  
as if my body were unwelcome.

Did I hear death  
beside stiff reeds, playing  
a song of contrition?

## **Moss**

It cannot go farther,  
this little stream culled for rock  
its sheer banks sparse with winterkill.

The covenant says the way the earth is.

The bed lies beneath its own foundation.  
It sleeps with my secret.

Secret? —that I am still to come  
since birth would violate your law  
that no thing could be done twice.

Perhaps my setting it straight puts it out.  
The hemlocks' limbs split to wings.  
*That* the earth surely knows.

Their roots drink deeply below where I lie  
raising moisture to my lips.

It was thirst that first awakened.

## **Hemlock**

Two lights guided me back.  
There was the sun  
its yellow dust leaves a trail for travelers.

Do not think me averse to following  
if I am overcome.

When I ask for ordinary things,  
love, light, life  
my weakness for words gives the lie.

The fan of felled branches  
afflicts the ash.

The second is scarcely a shadow  
that appears whenever I give up hope  
when the eyelids curl back  
to lift the sky closer to me

to take my breath away  
there in the vacancy.

### **The Common Puffball**

They went one by one  
as to parade.

The shield was gone when I woke.  
The teeming dragonflies  
over the clumsy pathways of beetles  
even the parachutes hung by  
the damask moth—all was seen.

I wanted to build a crèche of it  
where you had lain  
amidst broken boughs and thorns.

The body would rest on straw  
in mottled fur of some beast.

I will not venture forth  
in the flesh but spores of me  
will fill the holy sky  
calming with restitution.

## **Black Alder**

Now the wind is down—  
died we say—without a vane  
to point the way back.

Erasure marks it leaves, stanchions of ice  
I alone stand even-limbed  
though bent with grief my roots  
my breath, repelled, spent, fallow.

The neighbor's light stays on,  
in memory of words mourning  
the kindness of fences.  
I am not made in your image  
to dispense loving kindness  
veiled as cold, meaningless truth.

Truth? Under the uncaring stars  
waked from dreams  
where a strange voice shouts,  
a bone crushed in one fist  
someone who wants everything right.

I will bear none of your whims.



## **Matins**

It comes easily, the machine of light,  
a night lamp flicker destroys  
your rest coiled beside dreams.

Your sun devises a plan for us  
with the guile of believing.

There is the deceit of complacency  
As onion grass crowns  
the south side uncovered by snow.

Dorn says pessimists think that way  
since the flow evens things out.  
His laughter rings the frosted air  
like a frozen tree on the axe,  
before it is felled.

He says death is a *trompe d'oeil*  
see through it as if you cast  
a simple spell unwrapped at dusk  
as you announce the fall.

## **Doorway**

As simple as planting a foot  
and letting in without regret  
a surprise guest  
insentience aside—  
marble skin, mottled  
etched with the epochs endured—  
your breath comes alive.

Wood ferrous and iron flecked  
shambles of your shed.  
Each spring it stoops nearer the brook  
Neither a human thing nor not  
battens sprung like shagbark.

It will have surrendered its walls.  
Dorn will have come to cart it.

A carapace slung from a white thread  
hooked from below the gutter—  
who would suspect that  
was the pique of eternity?

## **Wild Sage**

It has come, giving no notice  
the birdsong lingers without coda  
becomes echo, then murmur.

It was life you wanted  
the stream freed from the glacier.

This I granted, only that you mix with  
the day, knowing no why.

You are flat-limbed and piquant  
adding yourself by insinuation  
so as to be not known, unsought  
there among mulch and decaying things  
the last the sun finds.

Some wild beast was your mother  
not I who would have you confined,  
a low square relief frame—  
I am aware of your tendencies.

You were not the first  
but then you never will die  
choosing instead pallor and grace  
as your pretense for life.

You mime the gift I bring  
without the arrogance of knowledge.  
For this, you may multiply.

### **Terce**

I could—could I—do all of it again.

The narrow divan from the first flat  
juts into the space of the young couple.

Her face drawn beyond her years  
her eyes preceding what he will feel.

The place in disrepair—  
Can he not know the end of it?

The broken tiles want geometry  
to vanish in the bedroom floor.

They part in bitter cold.  
He has to carry her up the hill.

With the lightest touch, he places  
her head against his shoulder  
as they watch the light ebb,  
wind brushes her hair back  
the sadness taking leave  
in the silence of their joy.

Do they see eternity  
in the future of that negligence?

## **Crocus**

I didn't want it to pass  
to become light that gives itself away  
and ends up being everything

things you glued to their shadows  
defying the command to bear fruit  
the seed that rejects the sowing.

I wanted to stay the child  
behind the heavy drapes, watching  
watching holy ghosts  
wearing a ring of invisibility—  
while death drove by,  
its lair within the gray rocks.

But I am color  
lucid blue on drab, sand-pressed leaves  
like a piece of sky.  
I cannot be missed, I cannot hide.

For this reason, my nature is ephemeral.  
Tomorrow I will have faded  
to brown brawn, this earth  
where you too may walk  
among those who seek counsel.

## **Periwinkle**

The love of my life is gone.  
I am young again  
straddling the rail fence, rapt.

The song plays as we drive  
to the madrigal.

Easter eggs are buried in secret nooks  
that years later are found.  
I am trying to win you back  
with script from a French movie.

You tell where you've been  
in your straw hat and skirt.

Then it is later, the catkins long  
the mustard sere and withered.  
You are an image  
that words want to touch,  
a desire that withdraws to taunt.

You are what no one is.  
How I could fall again for you  
a vapor a sunrise  
everything nothing

the pulse that awakens  
both dread and hope.

## **The Garden Troll**

I see the whole world  
at the root-line.  
flimsy and brittle  
hollow-stemmed winterkill.

They call it garden, I guard  
the remains of a poor planting.  
Despite my silent warnings  
the dogs have come, then the deer.  
The sage, wild underfoot  
is larder for the mice.

Your intent? —Why am I put here  
without means to your will.  
Your will? —from dust unto dust.

Your command would have me  
watchman to a hunger  
that cannot be appeased.

Your law, not mercy  
assigns this holy position.  
yet no one reads my lips  
that helpfully repeat it.

### **Compline**

The many layers of  
dry skin irritated by wool:  
that is my confinement  
with voices that keep cold counts.

You would speak irrelevancies  
to the rock's heart of sadness.

Sleep of insects and reptiles  
in the ice rift that opens day  
in that tomb where life  
murmurs slackly, nothing more.



## **New Snow**

I am late to learn the other,  
the one who sweeps the walk with Cam  
just as the snow owl drops its prey,  
the one who watches for the kill.

She finds the tracings belong to  
things that winter in the earth  
where life sleeps in its secret barrows.  
The way in is open to her.

Two selves watch the sudden squall.  
One disdains all human things,  
the pathway to the mailbox by the road  
that soon will be a dome of snow.

This one you know by impatience.  
It wants the strike to take the breath away—  
the power to live on.

The other only cowers and prays  
over the crumpled body  
left unclaimed in the predator's haste.

The fur, wet with melted snow, stiffens.  
When I kneel to touch it,  
I feel my palm pull back,  
warmed with your blood.



**David Appelbaum** treads a thin line between poetry and philosophy. A professor of philosophy at SUNY New Paltz, his work in a series of books focuses on the performance of voice. Publisher of Codhill Press, which he founded fifteen years go, he has produced a booklist of nearly one hundred titles, including several local authors. A number of collections of his own poems have been published, including most recently *Jiggerweed* [Finishing Line Press, 2011] and *Letters and Found Poems of Edisa and Chloe* [Codhill Press, 2012].

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