

**James Galvin** / 5 poems

## **What Gives, Elise**

Less is not more,  
But more isn't more, either.  
Before we die,  
Or before we get flunked  
Into the last act  
Let's talk about the sky,  
Brutally beautiful,  
Too bright without birds,  
Sweet nothings  
On a plucky wind,  
Under it your hand  
Pressed against the window of a bus  
As it heaves  
Out of the station.

Was it yesterday,  
Or the day before  
I felt a pleasing  
Lack of urgency,  
The tranquility  
Of your influence?

The proprietors of suffering  
Are winning,  
With their baskets of snakes,  
Their greasy mitts,  
Their cheerful meteorologists.  
We can't let them.  
Nobody wants to die  
With a mouthful of feathers.  
I lived my whole life  
Without you,  
Thinking there must be more.

Belief in joy  
Requires surrender  
To abject despair.  
I learned that listening  
To Beethoven.  
Every love I ever had I lost.  
You were just the first  
And most.  
Desolation, consolation,  
Isolation, a misty rain  
Will lead the horses  
Into further pastures,  
And I will follow them,  
As I have always done.

## **Girasole**

—for Alem Tsehay Araya

The sun tethers  
Itself to her wrist  
By a string of photons  
So it can't sail away  
Like a child's balloon.  
She walks to work  
Through fields of sunflowers  
Which adore the sun  
Heliotropically,  
And mimic the sun  
Morphologically,  
And vie to be  
As blindingly yellow  
As the sun.  
But the sunflowers turn  
From the sun, absently,  
To gaze at Alem  
As she passes.  
When she knocks on my door  
And I open it,  
It's like I open my arms  
To receive a bouquet,  
Not of flowers exactly,  
But fields of flowers,  
Planted not to please,  
But to heal the earth.

Her name means,  
More or less,  
*Sun shines on the earth,*  
And so it does,  
Regardless.

## **Before**

That spring before, there burgeoned  
Massive blossoms — redbud  
And dogwood against my windows —  
And then the rain rained gustless,  
Soft, so I couldn't help  
Tracking red blossoms and white  
Blossoms — trampled angels —  
Like the next end of the world  
All over the floor. Was I  
Supposed to sweep them out?  
I can neither confirm nor deny  
My involvement. I wish the case  
Were otherwise. This failure  
At well-being, this gust  
Of self-blood come to be  
Was never up to me.  
I loved my horses—all the more  
When I put them down. I loved  
My windows hemorrhaged with blossoms.  
Listen, if damage cuddles  
Your teddy-bear,  
Wouldn't it be better  
To loosen that grip?  
Self-pity, like pity itself,  
Is condescension.  
Can you condescend to yourself?  
Easy. Be indomitable.  
Desolation hums

Like a refrigerator  
Of low-rent fear,  
While a mansion of terror avails  
Itself of unbearable luxury.  
Drift easy through its spacious rooms,  
Sleep in its sheets of infinite  
Thread-count,  
Confess your involvement  
With blossoms, trigger your finger  
In their defense.  
You are just another gust  
Of blood on its way somewhere else.  
I say else. I don't say better.

## **No Title**

—for Emily Dickinson

My heart hammers  
Because it is a hammer.  
Now that it doesn't matter  
It matters even more.

Once came down scarcity galore.  
Twice came down symphonies of terror.  
Thrice came down stuttering despair  
In the form of failure

To utter something about how, say,  
Nature is the opposite of money  
Or God's glass pony  
Galloped all the way away

And death,  
If you're the one who's dead,  
Is just another  
Do-da-day.

## **The Seer**

One of my horses,  
A sorrel one,  
Went moonblind in one eye.  
Moonblind is when the eye  
Stays full, but the white,  
The iris, and the pupil  
Disappear: the white that shows  
Fear, the iris that shows  
Color and a horse's willingness,  
The pupil that lets light in  
So the horse knows what is coming.  
The whole orb turns cyan  
So that from one side  
The horse looks  
Like a blind seer.  
From the other side  
He just looks like a horse.  
No one knows what causes it.  
No one knows a cure.  
The vet from Laramie tried  
Antibiotics, but allowed as how  
She'd never seen it before.  
The vet from Ft. Collins said  
It was over his head,  
And gave me some ointment.  
Everyone, including me,  
Thought a horse blind in one eye



Could no more survive  
Than one with a broken leg.  
Nina doctored him all winter long.  
She says it comes and goes  
With the phases of the moon.  
I don't know about that, but it does  
Come and go.  
We call it blind  
Because it looks like the reflection  
Of a drought-year sky.  
But if being blind  
Means running into things  
You could have avoided,  
Then who's not blind?  
My horse isn't blind.  
He sees just fine.  
He looks like a seer,  
Depending on the phases of the moon.  
His eye is an orb of ether.  
He foresees what he needs to foresee —  
That I'll appear tomorrow  
With his halter and his hay.

Jane Miller / 2 poems

## Jade River

I can walk to it from this rented house.  
I have swum across it.  
Anyone can borrow a boat and fish there.  
Just today, a pudgy old man fell in.  
Broke the surface with his backside, trolling for carp.  
A bare ass like a bald head  
disappeared out of its floating shorts.  
His rolling belly below a shrunk shirt,  
how cool it must have felt,  
after the shock. Nearly naked like Buddha and absent awhile.  
He surfaced and did not look around,  
except for his skiff. Still there,  
lucky for him. He spoke to himself  
while he rubbed his face like a little boy.  
From this I infer everything about life  
because of course  
life is a simple matter of failure.  
Simply part of a flow,  
I know now. Until it happens to me.  
Then I forget, thinking it important.  
Attracted by a fleeting glance of a fairy  
in a chandelier the size of France,  
no, of China, one is not really sure  
existed. But for a minute.  
Then I am bereft again.  
As to the river, I understand  
jade is a famous Feng Shui mineral.  
Confucius wrote that it is like virtue

and its brightness represents heaven.  
You see the mass-produced gem shaped  
into turtles, dragons and fish too,  
when you are in your home country.  
Because you are loud and young  
in a lithe body with a splashing energy  
of a puppy, a stray,  
I never thought I could love you.  
I sought peace at seventy.  
A jade river inside me. Green. Slow.  
Long life, I said to friends,  
and inside said, Poetry, over.  
Money, spent. Parents, buried. Brother,  
lost. Childless. And my beloved disappears  
inventing day and night in her studio.  
As busy as a bee, as the fake poets used to say.  
Now they say, busy as a walrus hanging  
upside down in the stately tree of death, to be creative  
and funny, because of the tragic world.  
Must you stand on a bare branch, and why  
should I care? None of it matters  
a hoot, as is said in imitation  
of the great owl, rarely seen  
but more important than ever.  
More important, rarely seen, great owl,  
some things I would never say  
before, because they sound  
imitative, common. Except now  
I get perfectly what is “important.”  
What is “bare” and “more.”  
One never knows which words  
get one imprisoned  
tortured and murdered

so every one is exemplary  
and depends on whomever  
designates their meaning.  
The words skinned alive.  
The words sexual freedom.  
It's the same in America and China,  
the world over. I wake  
with a dread of you in a jail  
for ten subversions or a hundred  
against an emperor or mother.  
I blow by every somnambulist  
in the dream and fly to you.  
Why can't you simply  
fear and admire,  
rather than wander as smoke,  
smoking, rolling bourbon around  
your mouth, sucking men's nipples  
and more in the ether streets  
of your country, only recently a child.  
As Rimbaud would say, so much the worse  
for the wood that discovers it's a violin.  
One of your many instruments,  
no doubt, another gift I don't know about.  
If your poems survive the age,  
if the earth survives us,  
may mercy find you  
in the mouth of a river  
in the lap of an emperor  
made of palladium leaf,  
steel pins, walnut ink,  
and thousands of green glass marbles.  
You were born to mutilate the old rules.  
The rest is heroic and belongs to you.

## The Lovers

Don't misunderstand me, beloved.  
Were I to hike toward the moon,  
I could consume a flask of fine wine

before coming down Taishan Mountain  
among schoolchildren, elderly, and pilgrims.  
My legs, back, heart, all good, beloved.

One climbs the stone steps in the dark  
to see the sunrise from the peak,  
the Yellow Sea stained by sands of the Gobi.

And yet, now that I have reached  
the age you were when you died,  
the Azure Cloud Temple has transformed

into bamboo, paper, and satin, a fan  
that is closed to me. On the night trek  
one would miss the sultry pink

petals of peach trees blossoming.  
You whom I have never seen,  
who cannot keep the petals from falling,

how you endured  
the loss of your husband  
until he became a stick of incense

is beyond me.  
The melon cart has turned over.  
I've lost my property and my ax.

beg you, please come to me.  
I despair that you will not.  
I was born a seabird

who flew from wet weeds into darkness  
to alight on a stone pillow.  
It would be a great pity

if time was our real barricade.  
I have poured jasmine with lemon  
and mountain honey, and being alive,

I intend to drink it. It is the green Lorca  
drank, and how he survives on magpies.  
Autumn colors will follow,

a festival of horses in a stream of agony.  
Poetry does not need to give birth to a Prince,  
nor must anyone understand.