

**the**  
**brother**  
**swimming**  
**beneath me**  
poems by Brent Goodman



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*The Adirondack Review* - "Doors and Windows for a Room,"  
"Wisconsin Triptych"

*Anti-* - "Information Age"

*Barn Owl Review* - "Lice"

*The Beloit Poetry Journal* - a selection from "Maier" (originally titled "Yom Kippur, 1979")

*Court Green* - "First Queer Poem"

*Diagram* - "Science Fiction"

*Diode* - "Cicada," "Cover," "Kodachrome Slides of my Father in Vietnam," "Recipe"

*Green Mountains Review* - "Moving Past"

*Knockout* - "Mayfly"

*Limp Wrist* - "By Definition"

*Linebreak* - "Evaporation"

*No Tell Motel* - "Directions to my House," "In Europe Everything's Different," "Lucid," "Robots," "This Cat, That Cat"

*Pebble Lake Review* - "Another Prayer"

*Poetry* - "The Brother Swimming Beneath Me"

*Qarrtsiluni* - "Robin Egg Blue"

*Rattle* - "Maps"

*Six Sentences* - "Behind"

*Slipstream* - "Bad Birthday"

*Softblow* - "Armless Iraqi Boy Bears No Grudges for U.S. Bombing," "Blood Poisoning," "Oysters," "Why I Can't Write a Paris Poem"

A selection from "Maier," originally titled "Peripheral," first appeared in the anthology *The Musculature Of Small Birds* (Shadowbox Press, 2007).

"Moving Past" also appeared in the chapbook *Trees are the Slowest Rivers* (Sarasota Poetry Theater Press, 1999)

**i : Narrowly Missing the Moon**

## Another Prayer

Dear religion, there is no afterlife.  
I hope you don't mind me saying this.

When you say *heaven on earth*  
I think: the *dead read minds*.

When you think *dust to dust*  
I say: *this body is a riverbed*.

Will the congregation please  
recite what this wall of stained glass

is trying to tell you? Dear Buddha,  
*I've been knocking from the inside*.

Heaven is not an ecosystem.  
When I dream my brother visits me

it is my brother looking at his reflection  
through my eyes, my sleeping tongue.

When we die we turn inside out and call  
this turning a tunnel made of light.

## Maps

The other night I spaced a stop sign  
and ran it 60mph and died  
but didn't. What algebra is this?  
The night a dusty chalkboard  
erased with moonlight, my life hwy K,  
hwy 51 N intersecting K in a near-perfect T,  
the afterlife this narrowing gravel road beyond pavement  
disappearing into endless juniper and birch.  
It was very dark and the signs obscured.  
By heavens no screaming headlights  
T-boned me into oblivion. Instead  
I kicked up a little dust on the other side,  
turned the pines brake-light red  
and spun around: *fuck!* The very next night  
I witnessed two logging trucks  
cross each other north/south like two vault doors  
slicing closed the ghost path  
I blindly whistled through. Now every night  
I approach that frightened intersection  
with full attention. Sometimes  
I die. Sometimes I continue. But most times  
it's too close to call, the stars  
always rearranging their astrologies,  
each cloud narrowly missing the moon.

## Séance

The dead assemble to summon the living.  
Most skeptical: those spirits still grieving.

Others yet adjusting to their compound sight.  
Imagine even God got it wrong – no directions

in this language. How will they ever  
reach us, their hands now made of light?

Dust gathers dust. Each night they whisper  
our names in unison, praying we will wake.

## Doors and Windows for a Room

*We make doors and windows for a room;  
But it is these empty spaces that make the room livable.*

– Lao Tzu

The point where light ends and all shadows begin is sometimes called the body, these borrowed shoes anchoring earth to passing sky. Seven flowers exhale root to crown, a river of stars breathe through us, we say one thing but always reveal another. Why deep inside the groin do two stones throb like a neon red motel marquee, this salt thirst only the moon waning just above the pines, so many cars passing without exit? Start taking the body away: these searching hands, this open mouth, the white crescent scar where the tumor grew. How many spirits uncoil from the spine like galaxies whirlpooling endlessly upward? The mind figures it strange, this *almost rising*, heart tugging throat, one last shiver under skin. What vast dizziness now wheels behind the eyes? Whose subtle body still searches for its form?

## **Meat to Carry Our Minds**

Start here: the end of your body.  
Go anywhere. The next life wanders,

frame by frame our spirits slide. A story  
about a train stop in a town near where

you were born. Some ground us, some  
abandon, each designs its own resignations.

Body to body this narrative threads  
character to plot to pen. And when one

finally finds you, greet again this first life,  
the grateful one, and all those who love you

shall follow. But this is what heaven –  
any one of us at once? Any one of us?

## Wisconsin Triptych

- after 3 paintings by David Lenz

### *Thistles*

Let's say Irv and Mercedes have loved each other  
for over 40 years, standing here backlit together  
near the end of their rutted dusty private drive.

What heaven is this they've planted, plow chains  
creaking taut against stubborn boulder and deadfall oak?  
Early morning sun ignites mist steaming up from valley

to sky. Their sleeping border collie's shadow  
yawns. Irv's sharp shoulder eclipses half his wife's stature,  
grey hair haloed white as the thistle crowns gone to seed

between the barbed wire fence and her gently crossed arms.

### *Sam and the Perfect World*

Cowlick. Lens glare. OshKosh B'Gosh.  
Portrait at nine. The perfect world

winds all the way down valley.  
Even the barbed wire bends with it.

The tall grass rivers toward the river.  
The far horizon traces a simple ellipse

before a wind smudges it with a thin finger.  
A sundog swallows everything: the eye

plays beautiful tricks. Like what space remains  
beyond a watercolor's spill, this perfect sky

is mostly white, not blue. The whole world  
shifts. Sam leans into it, still squinting at you.

*Cold Front*

He's climbed the quarter mile  
up the winding back  
of this terminal moraine.  
Croplan cap. Salt-crusted brim.  
Third day unshaven sunken throat.  
His soil-smear'd pale cotton shirt  
worn so thin we can make out  
the dark story of his skin bleeding through.  
Such distance between this rise  
and the last two Holsteins grazing the bottomland –  
hiding behind the corrugated concrete silo, his family's home  
primed white as a mortgage envelope.  
A cold front's shadow floods half the pasture,  
though up here he stands face in full sun,  
watching the late summer storm  
sliding open its thundering barn doors.