

Two Poems by Sandra Meek

Postflight Edema

Blade by blade, the juiced sky sunsets
the window blinds, my flooded ankles, calves
of fallout and rain I prop on pillows to drain this day
after night kept arriving as a wash of hours
already flown. Nearing the speed of sound, the body is thrown
into stasis, gravity pooling
blood to the feet, flow I failed
to jumpstart this afternoon lapping
the slogged pasture, stamping the long grass to breakage
inexplicable as crop circles to whoever tomorrow might
stumble upon it, path sudden as the morning's
fairy-ring of toadstools, birth of a yogic

samskara: a finger's tracing scarring air to glass
a coin etches, canyon a river carves
deeper through millennia. So a repeated thought
impresses the mind—grooves
in a record's vinyl, the soul engraved
one longed-for song: *Manyana*, village I finally
did return to, now houses of bricked concrete,
satellite dishes and water taps
in dusty yards girls still sweep but no longer need learn
to tie string to ankle and post for walking
a perfect circle in sand to foundation

home, walls of termite-hill soil muscled
with cow dung beneath a roof of grass they'd
cut and haul and tightly weave—
this, one *how-to*'s narrative winding
my too-nasal accent unraveled

two decades ago for my Batswana students

straining to follow a story they
already knew as I read them the passage

in English. Circling back doesn't mean
you find what you imagine you once had
to lose; retrace your steps again
and again and maybe
nothing flashes in the grass except the ghost
you make from the smallest toadstool
beginning to sprout there, its milky head
a pearly ostrich-egg bead, a gleaming glance of the village
dimo: half white man, half snake, roaming
the sandy river bed near David Livingstone's Tree
where the missionary camped
to convert the locals, pausing his trek
toward his true heart's delight: tracing the Nile

back to the tear of first thought.

How that *dimo* terrified
students walking to evening studies, *a big light*
on his head like a migrant miner's lamp rising
from a darkly glittering South African crater where
how many of their fathers had fallen
off the face of this earth. World away
from this stop-over, an upstate
gentrifying countryside city-transplants are hammering back
to clean geometry. So many farmhouses
in renovation: Victorian wrap-
around porches ripped from their boxy

Federalist hearts, truck full-

throttling until the chained house groans a near
human ache to restore the turn
of a distant century, 1790 in all its
never-was glory. Above this unfinished

guest room where I lie
coddling my feet pregnant with what
they won't let go, a rail-less stairway holds
to air, rising to a ripped-away storey lost
as that dimo still
roaming the riverbed in the now
electrified village, the long ragged train
of his scaled body the small shadow
made of night's drowning

in a humming white haze. David, wasn't it
beautiful then, wasn't it sublime how the crystalline sky
seemed to turn from the stylus
of each thatched roof's cone as the village disappeared
into the darkness that justified us;
couldn't we count even on falling
stars to return each evening's sweeping
swell of light—wasn't it,
wasn't it beautiful, then; didn't we feel just
exactly at home?

Colophospermum Mopane

Mophane tree, you fascinate
for what feasts
your blown limbs—
crop of caterpillars
women hot-ash roast
and sack; elephants
farmers curse, tourists photograph

looming your half-ruin.
Unbroken, your crown shimmers
only with distance:
more salt pan than the one
river east, close up
you parch; your paired leaves,
wings, angled more angel
than butterflies’

ascending tilt, channeling sky
even as they dip
to drink
some other tree’s blooms;
your angel, less Heaven
of Renaissance oils
than church-play

cardboard and tinsel and glue.
Not even Latin

can candle you
the music of *Imbrasia*
belina: mophane

worm, Emperor Moth
caterpillar that swallows you

down to your name, feeding
your emerald descent
to autumn rust, tint of a season
absent here, this far north
in the South. Even
what you fruit—withered
pod, wrinkled seed—no interest
to harvesters,
nor the modest pendants
of your clustered flowering
yellow-green as glass in a depression-

era brooch: costume color
of no stone worth
mining, worth a mine laborer's
cutting his own arm
to stitch into that wound's
secret nest what the first
X-ray machine in southern
Africa, passing over
any live tumor's

jewel, lit on as twin
at his contract's end: that searing

white light. Your leaves
shadow with winter
and drought, road dust
no one will ever
rinse away—the tourists
all down at the waterhole
photographing the elephants' elegant

over-the-shoulder splash.
What never

touches you: camera light
that bathes the very trunks
that broke your strongest limb
across the sand road
before you, lying there still
like the ancestral bones they
will lovingly turn,
their trunks' grace
caressing that loss as your shadow
leans over yours in the late-

falling evening. Your frail trunk
quivers, burdened to hold
sky to earth. The trunk
we pray to? The one given

Ganesh, Elephant-
Headed God, Remover
of Obstacles, to incarnate
Om, sound of the wavering

unwavering universe. Mophane
tree, *Colophospermum*
mopane, what god wears
your desiccation, your crown
of dry leaves? Still,
I'm stopping
on your road's shoulder;
my camera stands you

to its one glass eye.
I'm leaving you now

this one gift: a moment
of pure incandescence,
the flash of being
finally, fully seen—

Something for you
to remember me by.

-Sandra Meek