

# Afterings

Many of these poems have appeared  
in the following journals and anthologies:

*Bayou, Blueline*

*Cold Mountain Review*

*Crazyhorse*

*Gettysburg Review*

*Harvard Review*

*Iowa Review*

*ISLE (Journal of the Association for the Study  
of Literature and the Environment)*

*The Kent Collector*

*Mantis*

*New Orleans Review*

*Ploughshares*

*Poetry Monthly* (Beijing, in Chinese translation)

*Smartish Pace*

*Scry!*

*Writers in the Gallery* (University of Rochester Press)



Afterings  
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*For my Daughters, Zoe and Clea,  
and for Rosanna, great friend, great reader*



11 10/9/06

I

- 15 Auroral
- 16 The Odd End of Days
- 17 Your Absence Has Already Begun
- 18 *Mountain Road*
- 20 The Body As
- 22 Audiology
- 24 Sung Out
- 27 The Thing to Watch Out For
- 28 But in the Onset Come
- 29 If a Tree
- 31 Morning After
- 32 Daylights
- 35 Anymore
- 38 Time Effect
- 40 How I Tell Time
- 41 Because She
- 43 Daughters
- 44 When the Wind's Before the Rain

## II

- 49 Seraglio
  - 53 Gaudí-esque
  - 55 Recapitulation
  - 57 Setting
  - 60 *The Artist's Studio in an Afternoon Fog*
  - 62 Montserrat
  - 67 Lost Uncle
  - 69 Odyssey
  - 71 Upshot
  - 73 Echo Factor
- 
- 77 Notes

## *And I the Aft'rins o' the Earth*

From the start she was after compression. It took many forms: syntactic, idiomatic, associative, allusive, elissive. She was after an intensity of tensions, a tension of intensities — it went both ways. Among the poets whose practice mattered to her were Wyatt, Roethke, Brodsky, Heaney, Boland, Plath, Niedecker, McHugh. By the time of *Summons*, her fourth book, eighteen years after *Ninth Life*, she had made density a mode of thinking, far beyond pizzazz and dazzle. Style achieved its purpose through what language-under-pressure revealed.

In her nonfiction, Deborah could mosaic research into an arc of thought, yet even her prose leaned toward lyrical charge. By the time she unlocked the form of her essay-memoir, *A Family of Strangers*, in the last year of her life, she had mastered the telegraphic paragraph. The distances she traversed she did electrically, eschewing footsteps. Like a skipping stone, she crossed the wide river of familial and cultural silence and the traces of story that could barely be made out. That book came out a mere two months before she died. During the arduous two years of cancer treatment, she, as Melville once said of himself, unfolded within herself.

The poems in this final collection were written both before and afterw she was diagnosed. Torque of compression took time to acquire. She wrote slowly. Her method was accretive; she put lines and phrases, things read and speech overheard, into her notebooks and would comb through them, gleaning, aggregating, and adding once she glimpsed the nucleus of a poem and its intentions. She worked first by accumulating and trajectoring, then by concentrating and distilling.

Implicitly, she thought of language and landscape as alike. Both have horizontal and vertical dimensions and

fourth dimensions, too: time, change, the buried. She treated landscape the way she treated language — a terrain to be read; and she treated language as landscape — a topos to be walked and explored. Logos and geo-logos. This last collection of poems was still a work in progress. She needed to walk it more fully than she had time to. At the last, then, she left it to Rosanna Warren and me to do a final editing. Which we've done, lightly. Her final, haunting poem, "10/9/06," we've placed at the start.

She arrived at the title, *Afterings*, late. You won't find it in the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* between *afterimage* and *afterlife*, although it has the sense of what lingers on, spectrally, as well as the sense of future life and even life after death, by which she would have meant, I think, the way what's gone continues to haunt the living. She knew, from her island years in Western Ireland and rural years in Upstate New York, that *aftermath* came from *aftermead*, *mead* meaning meadow, and *aftermath* meaning, originally, second growth — the grasses that come back up from the first cutting. She would also have known Hugh MacDiarmid's, "Or is this Heaven, this yalla licht, / And I the aft'rins o' the Earth?" And from the *OED*: *afterings* — the last drops from a cow's milking, which are said to be the richest. Her faith lay in facts like this and in language that preserved such knowledge, which, she might have said, was another word for memory.

— David Weiss







*10/9/06*

*How easily they come apart  
in the end*

*those inner marbles  
silently ceding to daylight*

*swirling their spectral  
insight*

*of all that's inner  
the noisy insides*

*of the never-seen body  
asserting its hail and farewell.*



# I

*Man, who invented time,  
then invented eternity for contrast.*

— Marguerite Yourcenar



## Auroral

Dew glint  
and first hint of August's prescient  
Judas tree

vines still heavy with pumpkin and squash  
moan of mowers battling weed  
and the here-again  
gone-again broadcast of sunflowers.

It's a Wednesday  
in the ordinary world.  
There are complaints to answer  
minor griefs  
that dent the sky, recruiting shadows.

Night has cleared its throat  
of thunder. The damp grass  
dares.

Walk with me quick  
to the brow of the hill  
past palings, fevered  
windowpanes.

Dawn.  
The moment it was  
it was over.

## The Odd End of Days

*Today, 11/19/99, is the last day of your life  
that all of the digits of the date will be odd.*

The world's apportioned, dressed and named.  
What's a zebra to a lion?  
Prey.

What's joy to a raptor?  
A canceled body part.

We didn't know time's  
beveled edge  
would round us off

the nightly hecatomb of limbs  
be fervor's passport.

From here on  
we pay our respects  
to aftermath.



## Your Absence Has Already Begun

Say a calling knocks you out of sleep  
draws blood  
is accessible only by water.

Say you believe you pilot your life  
but you have looked away  
and your absence has already begun.

You grapple out, patched together  
by medication  
and makeup, scale the broken

cadence, the frost-heaved lanes  
walking papers  
clenched to your chest.

It's late in the season. You forget  
what lured you:  
Icarus still tumbling through the stunned stars

his fingerprints  
all over your heart.