



## Feature

### Judith W. Steinbergh – Five Poems

#### PERSPECTIVE

Flight 461 East Coast

Just a little off the earth  
the continent flattens to paper,  
needle to pine to green black thumbprint  
lake to pond to mirror to sequin glint  
sandy cape to bent arm to curl of hair.

From 6 miles up,  
barrier islands are mere eyelashes,  
wisps, calligrapher's curve, brushstroke  
beaches, pale line of chalk, a thin hem  
to the cloth of the continent,

Little breaks, thumb of sea pushed in – blue into sand,  
black up the tidal rivers, brown into the lowland marsh.

What keeps the sea at bay? a stone jetty, a splintered pier,  
sea wall and sea grape, sand bag and jellyfish stranded,  
shingle of shells, eel grass, cedar shack  
corn rows, tobacco sheds, shoots of rice?

The sea encroaches, licks away  
familiar shapes, breaks barriers,  
Spring tide and neap tide  
sea suck and storm surge.  
Urgent.

Wake up, traveler,

Do not shutter that portal  
that tethers us to the land's embrace,

Smoke billows,  
storms swallow  
our continent, so easily  
erased.

WALKING MERRILL ROAD  
Lovell, Maine

MORNING

Let there be a bear around the bend  
Not a huge male, perhaps a modest cub,

loping between birch and beech, and then  
stunned, at the edge of the gravel road, rubs

his snout in roadside berries, tart black,  
like midnight bear eyes, tongue tangy

a soft humming hump of dark fur. Back  
in a shadow of hemlock, his mom, anxious,

whistles him up a tree. Ears up, one last taste,  
he backs away, gives a complicit stare

turns like a heave of flung water  
vanishes back into shadowy lair.

I conjure the creatures from flickering dawn,  
Moose, fox, raven, owl; feather, flesh, prayer.

EVENING

Look into the woods and see those lumps,  
damp granite, fallen walls or are they stumps  
of rotted pine, of broken birch? I stop to watch

if one will move; a hunched and curious  
young bear I saw stepped out of shadow  
yesterday, turned and ambled up

the gravel road ahead of me, but staying  
in the margin of the wood, while I stopped  
walking, tried to hold my breath.

He did not sniff the roadway or the air,  
and yet, in thirty yards, he hesitated,  
turned; I didn't move. Perhaps I scuffed a stone,

His muzzle led the way along the footprints  
he had made, And at the very spot he'd stepped  
into my path, he turned back in, brushing beech,

so lightly, then, was swallowed by the dusk.

#### KITCHEN YARD

Lovell, Maine

A toad lives in the potted plant beside  
the kitchen door, beneath red petals of

impatiens, though he, dark spot of breath,  
is patient, invisible to us, yet palpable

as dirt he crouches on. And just below  
the step, there is a perfect hole bored

down into the ground and tunneled toward  
the woods. Inside our cabin by the door,

our cats hunch, staring through the screen, peer down  
the hole, having once, maybe days ago, observed

a vole scrape out the dirt, emerging  
at the other end, and maybe soon, one will

poke up right near the toad, the cats will leap  
onto the screen and claw right down the mesh,

Above, an eagle spirals, loons cry out

the threat, and we, transfixed, await the tightening net.

## KYOTO AUBADE

Goodbye lovely room with two balconies and Kyoto wind.  
Goodbye Oike-dori eight lanes wide, bicyclers pedaling down  
the checkered pavement, children in dark uniforms,  
bright hats flowing toward school. Goodbye lumpy  
mountains and peaks in clouds, shrines hidden among  
your deep cedar forests, your bamboo groves. Goodbye  
sudden monkeys by the hillside villas, vast temples  
with winged roofs, serene Buddhas. Sayonara gardens  
of moss and rocks, of raked gravel, rushes and grasses,  
hiragana history in twisted pine, last plum blossoms,  
froth of cherry, blood camellias, azalea blaze, goodbye  
ponds and streams, wet and dry channels and falls, dripping  
and free flowing water, warp and weft of the city, farewell  
to crows laughing deeply each dawn, to herons on stilt legs  
aiming for koi, farewell tatami weavers, sake brewers,  
mochi pounders, bean paste bakers, papermakers, elegant shops  
of matcha tea, sewn books, calligraphy brushes, raku cups,  
cutlery, combs and kimonos.

We entered under  
the Torii gates, past the fluttering Shinto prayers.  
Purified, we toss our coin, bow, clap and bow  
muttering thanks, reluctantly backing toward home.

**Judith W. Steinbergh**, poet, teacher, and scholar, has taught poetry to students of all ages throughout Eastern Massachusetts since 1971. Her 5 poetry books include: *Writing My Will*, *A Living Anytime* and *Motherwriter*. Judith's books on teaching poetry include *Beyond Words*, *Writing Poems with Children* (with Elizabeth McKim) and *Reading and Writing Poetry with Teenagers* (with Fredric Lown). Judith was a Bunting Fellow at Radcliffe pursuing her research: "Poetry and the Developing Child." As first Poet Laureate of Brookline, MA from April 2012 through March 2015, Judith led poetry workshops for writers of all ages, developed community events on the themes of Brookline Special Places, Caring for Our Earth, and A World of Poetry, involving poets of all ages and speakers of many languages; and she created displays of poetry and art by Brookline writers and artists in the libraries and public spaces. Judith continues her work with children along with her own poems and essays. She spends a good part of each summer by the shore of Kezar Lake in Lovell, Maine.

