

EYELAND

The Cuttyhunk Photographs of Charlotte Mandell

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Metambesen

Annandale-on-Hudson

2014

Eyeland is made for the most part from photographs taken by Charlotte Mandell on Cuttyhunk Island, Massachusetts – site of the 1602 English settlement by Bartholomew Gosnold. These pictures, along with many others, were posted by Mandell on Google+, where they attracted or provoked the poems and texts printed here.

Several photographs, however, are from other locations: p. 3, from Barrytown, NY; p. 15, Blithewood Gardens; p. 25, Annandale-on-Hudson; p. 40, Woodstock, NY.

Eyeland is the first in a series of texts and chapbooks published by Metambesen. The reader is free to download and print these without charge or permission.

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A face is a door, no
a metronome, says
you're in or out of time
a flower behind the ear
time's ear, time
reposes on an easel
a woman lying on her side
like that, her gaze
could mean anything.
Even a metronome
and this one is old
rosewood or mahogany
it would resonate
with that lovely mechanical
woodblock tock,
silent now, door closed.
In the face of such mystery
we can depend at least
on the veracity of wood itself
doorknob and chestnut floor
painted door, with its big X
at once reticent
and articulate, mystical
terrible
as a blank page
where a woman might repose
on a bed with her notebook till noon
if I were her, in an old house
with chestnut floors
a wooden doorknob
oiled dark over the years
by the hands of husbands and children

friends coming and stepping
over the metronome
set for some reason
on the floor
perhaps for a cellist
eyes full of time.
I won't go as far
as doves in the rafters
pale doves like Giotto's
in Padua, listening
to a man talk nonsense
about God.
I like a mystery
with an old wood floor under it
and a bare foot on that floor
a hand on a page
or smoothing a sheet
opening a door.
I'm not sure it's a metronome
it's so big, not sure
it's a flower
tucked behind her ear
it could be an earring
gaudy circles
with tiny bells
or an astrolabe, it looks
vaguely mechanical,
her grandfather's watch
held to her ear
keeping ordinary time
there might be music
behind the door, of course
it's a church
with that door
a slim pointed arch
called lancet, a blade
of light, if it were open

and there's a book
a hymn book on the piano
but it might be Saturday
there might be a school here
with women posing
or reposing behind the door
on Saturn's Day
they would wear black
stepping over the metronome
closing the door with the X
behind them
taking off their dark clothes
in the clear secular light
of a Protestant church
they might be drawing
each other's long torsos
veiled eyes and tangled hair
with soft graphite pencils
or playing their cellos.

— Billie Chernicoff





FISH

Most churches I know have a cross on top. Or a weathervane at least. Or that pointy affair the French call a flèche, an arrow pointing at God. But this church has a fish.

A bit of a shock to see it, a grey wooden simple shed with a little lookout tower not even man-high at one end of it, with a big fish on top. It stood on a hill right above the sea.

The first time I saw it, I felt a delicious frisson of unease – memories of Lovecraft, some hideous chapel of Cthulhu where they worshipped squirming octopodes (the correct plural, by the way) under the sign of the fish.

A moment's reflection reminded me that Lovecraft consciously or otherwise was really worrying about CaTHoLics, those dark-skinned immigrants from over the sea who came to spoil the culture and bloodlines of Old New England. Catholics who worship a Lord whose earliest emblem was the Fish, whose name in Greek formed an acrostic, a notariqon, of Jesus and his title.

So that was probably all this fish meant, a sign of low church believers, who were making a statement about Jesus, and about Intelligent Design.

I was further soothed by noticing that the fish was really only a weathervane, and moved gently as the wind moved. And move it did on that bare open spot.

I often visited the coast where the church of the fish (as I thought of it) stood, but had never gone inside. Curiously, though, every time I passed it by, I would feel a faint renewal of my earlier fear or suspicion, and each time a moment's rational reflection would puff the anxiety away.

So it went for several years of summer visits to the seacoast.

One evening, well before dark but when the colors were beginning to lose their self-confidence, and the wind fell to dead calm, I found myself passing the church. This time, at leisure, I decided I would try the door and see if I could go in. No light flicked inside, and I couldn't conceive of any service being held at such an hour, in such a community of vacationers and deep-browed fishermen.

But the knob turned readily, and the door swung open without a squeak. In the dwindling daylight, I could see well enough that this was your ordinary country vaguely protestant church. In a bookcase near the doorway red prayerbooks were standing spine-up, with some of the

outriders on each shelf tilting this way or that. I even picked one up to make sure it wasn't some hellish hymnal. Methodist, nothing worse, just like my grandmother.

The odd thing is that there seemed many more hymnbooks than there were seats – old, pale wood folding chairs, noisy when touched – in the church. More even than there was room for, even if they stood shoulder to shoulder.

A quiet altar, nothing on it but two vases full of wilted flowers, wild roses maybe. No cross, just flowers. No rail between altar and congregation, no room for a pulpit. A lectern stood to the left. I walked over to it but found no Bible or anything else on the sloping top, just dust. On impulse, I drew my fingertip through it, made a cross.

Some sounds, faint enough, told me I was not alone. But whether it was some quiet workman downstairs, or some busy rat behind the wainscot, or a sparrow caught in the roof, that I couldn't tell.

In a few moments the sound grew louder, and I turned to leave, preferring not to know what made noise in a deserted church. But I wasn't fast enough. Already he was coming up the winding staircase squeezed in the far corner. A man, medium height, medium age, fleshy carriage, pale face, large eyes. He had three alarming scars on his neck just below the ear – what could leave such deep, parallel gouges? He must have seen my stare, and turned to face me fully.

I said Good-evening and he appeared to smile, brushed his hands together, nervously, I thought, and then spoke in a quiet, cultured sort of voice.

“Are you seeing the sights of our little community, or have you come to pray?”

Oddly direct question, but I answered honestly.

“Just sightseeing. I've seen the church for years, but never came in. When are the services.”

“Not may, this time of year. In autumn and spring, more of us are here. Come back then and join us.”

“Thank you,” I said and went to the door.

But even as I was feeling for the handle, I thought to assuage curiosity. Still holding the door, I turned back to the sexton or pastor or whatever he was.

“You know,” I said, “I was originally intrigued by the fish on the roof. Why a fish?”

He spoke his answer without expression:

“We are a community of fisher folk, you see, and the fish, one way or other, is what brings us together.”

I smiled and pulled the door open. But he wasn’t finished:

“And as you may have noticed, the fish is also a weathervane.”

I made an agreeable noise in answer, and stepped through the door, not before he added, in a different voice, a churchy voice if I can say that, a parting admonition

“So it will always be. When the wind is at your back, the Fish is facing you.”

I kept going, peculiarly disturbed by his last words, true as they obviously were in the world of weather. But what else do they mean?

— Robert Kelly



Year after year we have watched
the green world grow up through
the machinery of ours. Where
the engine was the flowers are.
They tell us where we're going
and on what strange road.

— Robert Kelly



*I looked back
& buried my lyre
where I stood.*

The Earth Sign, where we remember.

Exeunt Water, Fire:

Saint Paul like a bird on the rock;

“Where the spring overflowed, the rock immediately absorbed the water.”
Dispensation & taking in—

eagle who will not eat

of the clean river.

Dispensing what? Catching what?

Hard to say what it is you catch
(a small island, misty river):

as you said yesterday at breakfast,
“potatoes are the steeple of a Polish diet.”

more than the food in question
the word, synonymous with ordinary
cooks inside.

Exhaust the everyday usage.

That’s what comes out of the mist, in
a place solid enough for remembering.
This is what you were waiting for.

Sometimes is woefully contingent
on a sign. So you wouldn’t even know it.

Perched on that place,
you come as an eagle.

—Tamas Panitz



I knew a rose was a book
whose pages turned before I was ready
into hillsides where amorous cousins
marry each other witless among the ruins
and old crones tattle and weave
something with their fingers we can't see
maybe it's laughter, or history
ancient romans and the renaissance rich
their baths and campaniles
stones you can walk right into
that european music, so often
the only solace.

I knew Tivoli was a rose
roses, heads heavy with dew
heavy with admiration
yours and mine, women
tired of telling you their names
tired of being so transparent
so obvious we can only fling ourselves
more deeply into who we are.

I knew stones were a garden
from another angle
with pavilions and topiary
a fountain you only dreamed
you and a girl splashing each other
a sweet awkward girl
all made of stone.

I always knew there was a path
from a rose to a river
and a boat you can row
to your other ocean
maybe she's there now, the girl
salt glinting on her shoulders
a shell held to her ear
still kneeling, still listening.

The ocean is telling you what you always knew
and telling the light so the light
can tell you too and it never gives up
like the mind itself, wandering through
a war, you can sense the war
even in light and even that
is beautiful, as if everything
that happens heals us, I tell that
to myself over and over.

— Billie Chernicoff



Microgram of a metaphor.

—RK

I built you a house to intone the light.
These are the words to say in your house:

I am a branch of praise my text is morning
light bathed in green leaves, light on the sill.

I am my name
of the mind-born cattle

my teacher a mountain thrower
writer of books.

My trade is geometry
architecture of the manger

the life-giving dam, an altar for the flame
a home for thunder you can hold in your hand.

— Billie Chernicoff



Desire or repulsion. The thing you can trust. How else could you know a rock is the sky's greatest fear. The rock caught in your shoe. Threatening so much more. How else could you know about the line of sunset, as it retracts, an orange shawl, you have to follow, moving across all you were. That, more than what anybody says. Is what anybody says.

— Tamas Panitz







It's the sea
refusing to be worn.
Any laugh is a laugh at structure
the audacity of it
to carry off
our share. Our brevity. Only a fool, or the inspired folk
would laugh at the sea,
listen to its silver-tongued absurdities.

All along,
stretched out
under your stone shoulder, holding sun up
one's live long day.

The smell of salt haunts
an answer —
a village with the
howls
mad howling, an answer for the gibber of waves:

castanets
of broken plates
cackling at the edge of town.

—Tamas Panitz





There's nothing to hear
one realizes, the silence
of interminable sea
a couple leftover words
echo about the head
a conversation like water
changing contour-wise
on the morpheme

to say the shape, the ship
finally back to my
misunderstandings

innocent caress of
thoughts, as they land on you, &
your thighs sprout leaves from me
garlanded by them

these years of imaginings
how merciful we don't wear it
a house in the woods all over-
grown
I couldn't bear to see.

—Tamas Panitz





The sky used to be our soul
its one was enough —

Every time
someone
came loose
a seed fell,

these rocks on the shore
that hold another sky in them

so you could always get back
all you have to remember is which one's yours.

— Tamas Panitz



Everything is or can be seen
for something else.
Blankness folds in on itself
then fans out.
A thing vibrates
seeks theme, sign
stratification.
Structure is fetish.
Flesh is system.
Cistern in the throat opens
a spectacular syntactic
crash of vowels called speech,
succession of ornaments
as image defines the chasm
between thinking and doing.

– Lynn Behrendt





These waves are a woodcut
a perfume
etched on the ground of time
there's no traveling back
seeing and smelling it
if that was your intention,
said the aesthete.

Is that anyone's intention?

do we ever really address
the object of our desire?

Do you really need waves?

Do you even need a woodcut?

A line is enough. Shoreline.
I'll be in there when you're ready.

— Tamas Panitz

Sandalwood
tiger wood
copper distilled.

— Billie Chernicoff



Does she survive the way one ultimately
does? Only at the end of life? A long road
in small shoes you've got to hobble till you
find her. And then live? That shack
as the sun sets her drunken cousins asleep
on the lawn. The door locked and the shutters bolted down. What do you
say on your long walk, until the road comes back again? Is she the story
you tell, o remainder of yesterday's rain?

—Tamas Panitz



Queen of Cups

She made her cup herself
a strange church
with claws for handles
that point to the moon.

Archaic as feeling
unanswerable, she answers
with this awkward thing
she holds in her hands
she can translate and she can bless.

She stands outside the frame
apart from the weight of the cup
the weight of her body in the chair
her throne of straw the suns turns gold
her clamshell throne, with dolphins
leaping, their sleek backs
where she settles herself and inclines her head
where she listens and considers, where her foot slips
into the sea and her hem floats and sways
grows heavy, tugs, persuades.

What is it for, and whose is it now
this cup she had not hoped
would be beautiful, but exact
and of use.

Her palace made of junk
a litter of litter, "Joe's Diner Pyre"
gold letters on a board, a man piling up
the furniture, the greasy hours
offering what's left of him to her.

The stones too, spell.

To learn your abc's without magic
you have to ask the things themselves
the seeds of what happens
that fall from the sky
and remember the dead
until the dead forget them,
exiled stones, failures that sing
questions for the moon.

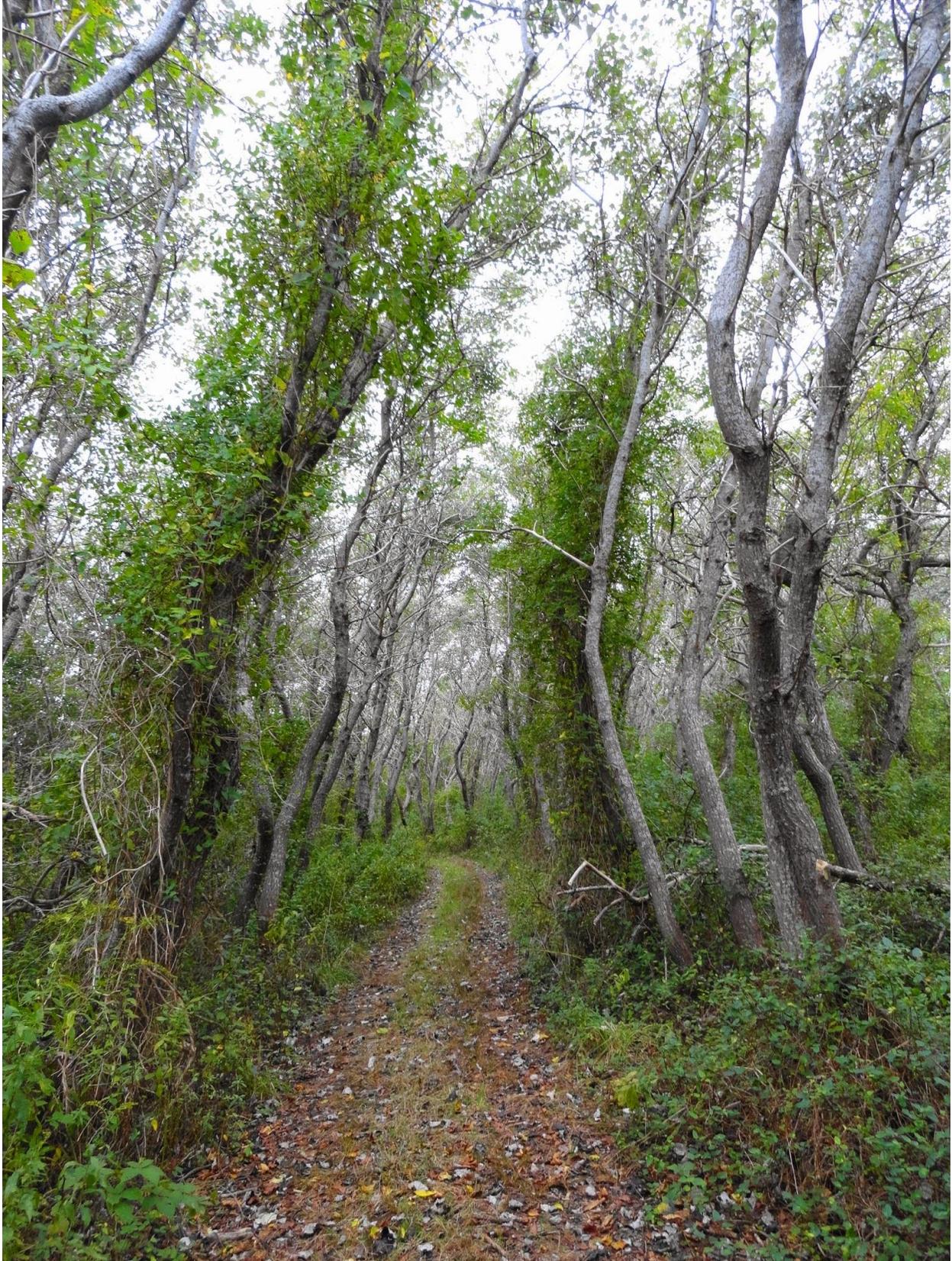
She sets down her cup
lets it float, tilt, sink
become invisible
fill nearly to the rim
that glows like another shore
ocean inside and out, salt
and feeling, the first beings
we still are, blind vulnerable
flesh at home in bone
a lyric spiral, delicate hinge.
The light changes.

At dusk someone sets it all on fire.
An old man takes a stone away and is born
with a little pebble under his tongue,
the first letter.

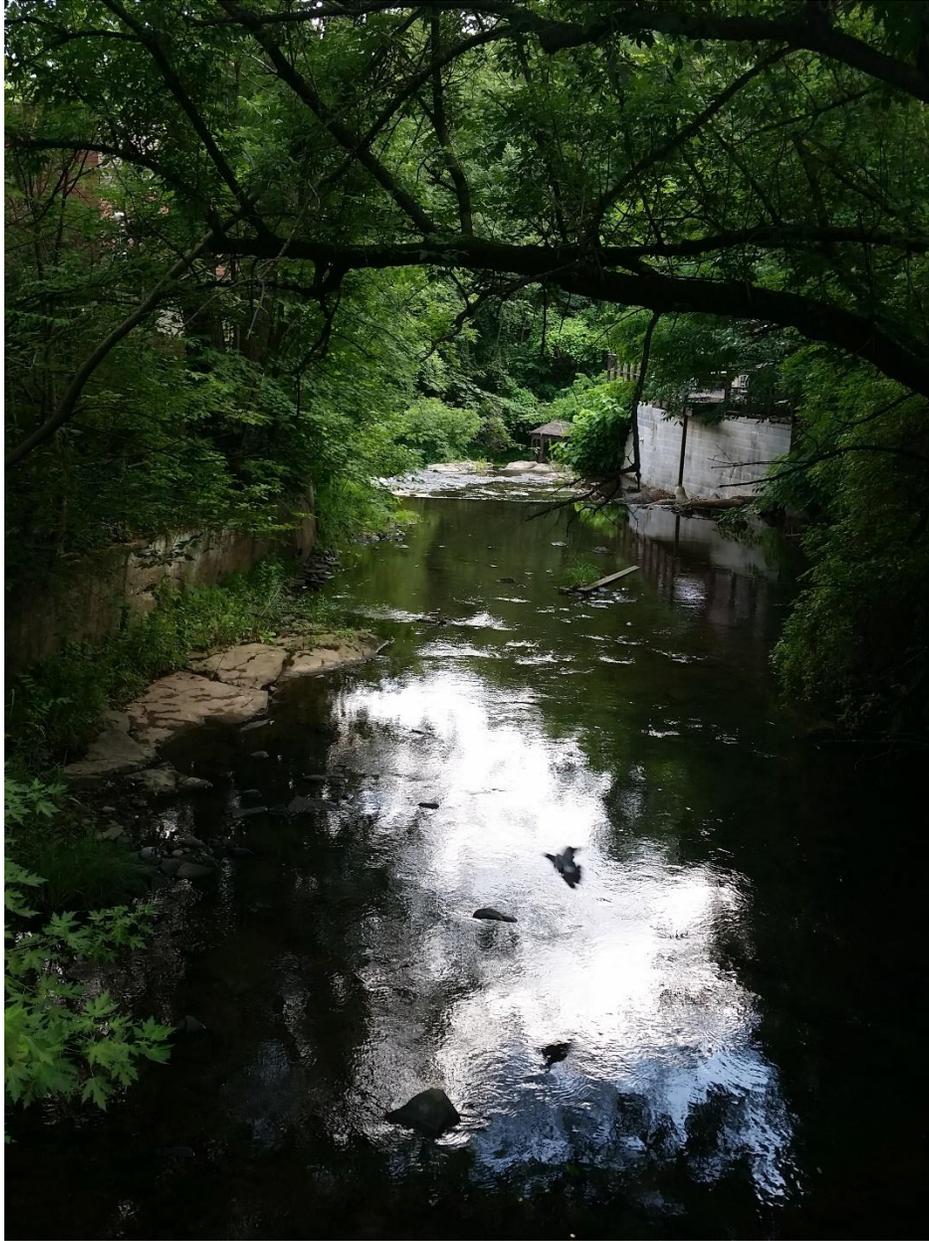
— Billie Chernicoff











Look! Poetry is an art of affirmation.
Saxifrage, roots break through
the concrete embankment, a case of photographer's
thumb. The fleshly fact of having seen.

Been the river, the bird's shadow, whoever
lives there now.

Sight's thumb, our lost finger,

lost tribe, in the matter-of-fact desert of things-
we find our own useful tabernacle-

desert grown into valley, perpetually new forest
by this elvish sleight of hand.

Wander into the truth of song:
that the song is always true.
The first thing it reminds you of.
Before you're even you.
The thumb is that wandering.

If you look carefully you can see
the green coat, ferned
hat of the lady in the little garden
you thought was abandoned.

The one nobody knows, yet everyone has loved.
She's what happens next:

naked in this picture
among washerwomen, princesses

ironic Dreyfusards happy just to shake each other's hands.

The picnic of history stays the same
while the other half The Green Lady slips from the camera
into this low slung river hammock of the valley. Her naked clothes

Manet's bather in the back
no one else can see.
The abandoned house.

She's the one actually washing

a cure for the insomnia you never knew you had.

—Tamas Panitz



Rubble shows the way. Last towers of Ilium.

— RK





The sky close with mist
the grass isn't lying
the descent is inevitable.
I have stood a long time
at the place where this road never ends
as if the mist needed a gull in it
yesterday I washed the sheets
then rushed to bring them in before the rain
and later dreamed of them on the line
as if this road were not enough.

— Billie Chernicoff

The grass lied about this road,
that waits under your bare feet.

But it's still the same dream.

Under the stony sky a gull
wrapped in sheets, in sheep,
in the mist of knowing better.

I washed my hands in the rain,
at the crossroads, where you
drive by this dry day
and hear someone clapping.

—Tamas Panitz











