Peter Gizzi has said that “the elegy is a mode that can transform a broken heart in a fierce world into a fierce heart in a broken world.” For Gizzi, ferocity can be reimagined as vulnerability and discovery, a blending of emotional and other-worldly depth, “a holding open.” In Gizzi’s voice and sorrow make a complex ecosystem. In their quest for a lyric reality, these poems remind us that elegy is lament but also—as it has been for centuries—a work of love. “This new poetry,” Kamau Brathwaite has written about Gizzi, “taking such care of temperature—the time & details of the world—meaning the space(s) in which we live—defining love in this way. A way of writing along the edge. A way of writing about hope.”

“These poems are elegies. Or these poems are about being torn apart and floating free. They come from an old place where grief overlaps with beauty. Gizzi is a poet of disembodied brightness. Reading Gizzi is almost like having a near death experience, you know those accounts from people who have nearly died and who say they left their bodies, looked down on them from above, and everything was fine, better than fine. Gizzi’s writing invokes and produces something like that, a near religious ecstasy, but one with no God in sight. It’s as if he has learned to give up control and still find perfect balance riding whatever carries his voice. If anyone tells you the lyric is dead, give them Peter Gizzi.”

—Rae Armantrout, author of Finalists
ALSO BY PETER GIZZI

Now It’s Dark

Sky Burial: New and Selected Poems

Archeophonics


Threshold Songs

The Outernationale

Some Values of Landscape and Weather

Artificial Heart

Periplum and other poems
Fierce Elegy
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for Suzanna Tamminen

all these years
Only in connection with a body does a shadow make sense. ROSEMARIE WALDROP
Only in connection with a body does a shadow make sense.

ROSMARIE WALDROP
Fierce Elegy
Thus far we have spoken
only the codes,
a litany of survival.
Thus spoke the silvered asphodel
next to the factory ruin.
Sound carries on water.
My subject is the wind.
To take umbrage at what a tree can do,
watching one single birch
become lightning stunning the sky.
Landscape is a made thing,
to see the mind seeing itself.
To see thought, a wing
in night, the long brooding.
Take it, listen, the night is orchestral
when the power’s on.
Everything disporting.
A furred wand upon nothingness.
I get it, it was good to leave the world,
to find myself in thou.
There’s a lot to be said
for seeing in the dark,
and more to the light
when there’s nothing to see.
If I write about the moon,
it’s because it’s there.
I am landlocked, surrounded
by rivers and lakes, pills and leaves.
I saw a better life, it was far off,
sun on moss next to a friend,
the softening air, the dandelion fluff.
It was kinda real, and kinda not.
Can’t see it today.

And out of nothing, breath.
A beast-like shadow in the glass.
If I brought back every feeling I had
where would I put them,
what could they mean
to this world on the floor?
It was best to let the moon unravel
and focus the truth of the music.
It was best to let the music
unravel and focus the truth of night.
Like when I found you
in the back of my mind.
I am talking about people
and the night.
People inside the night.
The night and what we are made of.
The things and the people.
The signal and its noise.
I’m Good to Ghost

It was all so Orfeo
the other night.
When the face you carry
is not your own
and the history in this
is a history of
haunted ground.
The world is a veil.
Its effects total
the imagination.
What have I been doing
without me
all this time?
Don’t know if
I want to anymore.
I wonder distance
and its discontents.
I trouble distance
nevertheless.
The poet is abuzz.
The poet becomes
a bug in air.
How did I lose you
between the rug
on my floor and
the sun setting
out the window,
between the radiator
and a dusky
kaleidoscopic light?
To wander that light
ingenious before dark.
To wonder the beautiful
so close to death.
Where do you go
when I don’t see you?
Or who am I when
you’re not around?
Revisionary

I’ve decided to let my inner weather out.  
Even in the nerves flashing, some things  
    are only shadow.  
What’s up with that?  
My muse bruises me.  
Some days I sit hours to be relieved  
    by a word.  
Today’s word is invisible.

I’m putting trouble into place, turning  
    toward what is.  
Listening to stone translate into silence.  
Here is an old rock covered with lichen  
    in the mossy forest inside the self.  
I like it here when it’s green.  
This is me evolving.  
I’m hanging on. A whisper.  
Certain prayers are tied to this ribbon.
How in hell can nature throw clay into art
   into a speaking being into air.
I saw a world that was an afternoon.
This cloud in my hand.
Sky pouring into sky reflecting the absolute
   of the lake.
The flock and its tangle of shadow.

Nearing the end, I could hear a lark.
Its trill fixing itself to my brain.
It seemed a thing becoming a wave.
A thing dissolving into the world
   as I found it.
Illegible. Agrammatical.
To parse the velocity of trusses and stars
   flowering here at the edge.
Calling me.
Dissociadelic

To be a desperate player
in the invisible world.
This is something different.
To have crossed over into ink
and to loiter and bleed out
on the occasion of the universe.
I've learned this.
My spirit broke long ago
so I won’t be broken.
This is something quite different
inside the song.
Come as you are, collapsing
and thriving with endings
like beginnings.
When 8 Ball says “ask again.”
When the day reveals
the prismatic systems of loss,
a blinding shimmer
on new blacktop in a sun shower.
Everything always in black.
Whatever.
When you’re brought to your knees,
sing a song of praise.
When you’re gutted,
embrace the whorl. FTW.
There’s nothing like it.
Creeley Song

all that is lovely
in words, even
if gone to pieces
all that is lovely
gone, all of it
for love and
autobiography
as if I were
writing this
hello, listen
the plan is
the body and
all of it for love
now in pieces
all that is lovely

echoes still

in life & death

still memory

gardens open

onto windows

lovely, the charm

that mirrors

all that was, all

that is, lovely

in a song