

# Theory of dog days

Ryan J. Browne

The conifer's roots bust like knuckles  
against the open face of the dug pit  
that'll be filled in again with those bulls

whose eyes retrograde across the night  
sky like slower moons. Their tongues lop,  
still lovely. One's been broken first.

The other hit in the face with an axe.  
Don't be fooled. Dogs consider our tools,  
those meant to stump, those that leave winks

in softer spots, how those used for one  
ought not be used for another end. But fire, fire  
slicks ears back, imposes its licks upon huckle,

and man, when it catches a scent in the air, it sics.  
It'll char that dirt, burn the knot from the throat,  
make no yowls because now the only living things

that were once tied to this tree cascade  
from their nests into penciled lines.  
Day's return will be a shovel's momentum.

# Theory of rune

Ryan J. Browne

Snow laced a landscape of horse.  
Gallop, caught, flakes turned in the wind.  
This being runic. Örvar-Odd was to be killed

by his mount. He cut himself  
a club from the woods. Before, its mane  
only once flared like quills and that was at the sound

of its own hooves skipping against evening's long sunlight.  
He buried it deep.  
Night leapt off branches in strange directions.

Hundreds of years were correctly filled with blood  
oaths and war. More horses in more countries.  
But none quite appropriately in snow.

So, home. Past  
timbered buildings, tugged beards, undone  
barrows and stakes, he cried

and beat his chest as if beating  
the architecture from the universe.  
But each bark of his sounded a reply from skulls

that couldn't help but bare their teeth.  
Each step shoaled graves.  
The terrible country rallied about him

in a language he had begun to dream in.  
It was then he knew. He must act.  
Ahead there would be ribs, a courser's

skull hooded in frost, long home to a serpent  
that would uncoil and strike. Like a glacier  
he tore his way through the forest, the warm rings of revelation.

# Theory of lightning

Ryan J. Browne

Wait for the water to rise, the thicket of roots  
run into the river. Shake the branches.  
Like embers they'll rain down from the dark

tissue of mangrove trees and we'll gather them  
together. Return to the hotel room, draw the shades  
on Bangkok's neon and buzz. Light switches

to pitch black. Open the jars. Odd paths  
dot our night sky. We'll lie on the floor beside  
each other as some begin to settle on the walls,

some blaze the spider's web in the corner only to vanish  
and give way to the ones under the lampshade  
that return fire to an ancient dragon. The bed sheet kindles,

then smothers as a small beacon appears over our heads.  
We'll theorize. Deny accident, illusion, saccades.  
To say they are like stars is too easy. More and more

blink and thump their grammar into the inky ceiling.  
The slow buildup of pulses speeds. For anticipation  
to deliver us a perfected system we must turn our bodies

into mirrors thickening with blood, into geniuses.  
Braid our fingertips. There'll be but one breathing  
chest, and inside, the once strophic reports synchronize

like Cimmerian applause, like the cells of the heart,  
like the simultaneous flashes of the males who flit  
like electric tongues against the door, and we'll mouth *sex*.