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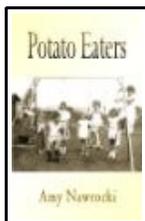
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THREE POEMS

BY AMY NAWROCKI

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Selected poems from *Potato Eaters* by Amy Nawrocki

Van Gogh's Ear

The scar on her throat, hole in her stomach,
are birthmarks of a different kind,
changing her from an original form.
She was not born to feel moldy
as a wet swimsuit left too long
in a zip-lock bag, not born to vomit
on the floor or sleep in the foyer of chaos,
where the fever coats her in thick paint.

She turns inward and thinks of van Gogh,
his ear, and those prehistoric sunflowers.
The fact that she sees a self-portrait
with a bandaged ear and feels nothing
but envy, recognition, and luck
gives her reasons to fight.

She starts to listen to the inertia
of her body, and finds out a war occurs
in every action of the mitochondria;
every time a cell fights for the perfect ratio,
water to air, food to energy, it tells her
that something is lost between her veins
and the pastel capillaries of Amsterdam.

So she learns survival, since we are not born
for this complicated kind of painting,
but the more primitive sort,
one that smells of coal mines and dirt,
one that tastes sadness with potato eaters,
one that frees the brain from feverish paint.

Babka

I eat the bread with raisins and some butter,

remembering how I first learned to knead it.
My mother's hands would shape the bread

in careful mounds, the counter floured
in a dusting, light as graying memory.
I mix the dough with raisins and some sugar

moving the moist glob with my hands.
She'd warn me not to knead too gently,
her hands would show me how the bread

should give and tug, like elastic,
then surrender; let the yeast begin
to tease the bread with flavor and some nurture.

As we stand in the kitchen, light streaming in,
the heat takes over with deft precision;
my mother's hands would ease the bread

into awaited sleep. She tells me now
to let it sit, give it time, watch it rise.
I eat the bread with raisins and some butter.
I long to see her hands rising in my own.

Spook the Moon

When she gives him the airline ticket
for Christmas, he takes it, and lands
at the terminal without a companion;
a loose tooth on top of it all. A woman
in a shady dress opens the bar door,
making the light swirl up in strings
and revolve around the room to match
the nucleus of his mood. The book he reads
was exhausted two hours after malted
whiskey finally gave him glimpses
of the shifting twilight he will miss
along the route to a strange world. Distance
can be measured only by dark shivers,
the kind that sweep down the spine
if given the chance. Before the last flight
he asks for the bill and discovers
how far away from his life he really is.

As night willows in and out of alleyways,
he removes gloves from his pockets,
coughs, and walks from the shuttle stop
to Boyle Street where he lives. It's easy
to leave the thick molasses air of the bar,
to be lonely tonight with his wife
and television. The toothache and the knot
in his stomach mimic a feeling of regret
because this is not his life. The wind
has burrowed into the cuffs of his shirt,
burned his skin, and cut the night off

permanently.

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Amy Nawrocki teaches English and Creative Writing at the University of Bridgeport. Her chapbook *Potato Eaters*, which was a finalist for the 2007 Codhill Press Poetry Chapbook Competition, is currently available from Finishing Line Press. She won the 2008 Writing Contest from *The Litchfield Review* and has been awarded Honorable Mentions from the Connecticut Poetry Society and *New Millennium Writings*.