

**THE DOCUMENTARIANS**

We make wide arcs around the children  
playing in the surf  
tap the little yellow box  
of focus  
tiny sun  
to get the light right  
not so much light  
that the surf looks washed  
cloudy in the shot  
we want the background rocks and strangers  
correct  
not too close, not too busy  
I point and tell them where to look  
I hold a thumb  
to the screen the position tips  
the scale of light  
on these bodies  
(we love them the children  
in the photo  
their bodies being circled  
to get the light right)  
we love their acceptance  
as we pass  
closed playgrounds  
juice box straws  
buried in bark mulch  
lights blinking  
on empty sidewalks  
we hardly find a door  
uncobwebbed  
chanting the fuzz  
off my mouth one day  
in a crowd I want you here  
listening to the neighbors  
get a little loose  
listening to rain drown  
the pollen  
rain slick on the hides  
of small creatures

creatures  
we've freighted  
with meaning all spring  
we've freighted plot  
on something as simple  
as what happens  
at the birdfeeder  
and where  
was the president  
my child asks  
when something bad  
happens  
hiding sorrow  
in profit, I say  
probably afraid  
yes, very bad  
I add  
yet  
completely worldly  
and it was only  
one day  
how to say  
when each lasts  
so long  
as long as rocks  
The Rocks  
they are called  
in one painting  
by Van Gogh  
and they do seem  
quite specific  
when I turn  
to see them in the sun

## FERRY

We were walking, then circling,  
to find the third level. We  
passed many islands. Grandpa

(not mine) told the Pig War  
story. Michael left his hat  
behind. I knew the name

from his coffee cup. He left  
that too. Tom worked here—he wore  
a badge. An enormous chain

held a barge in place. It was  
sculptural, proof we could bend  
metal beyond utility.

Or proof of another world  
where circumstances were huge  
and crying over small things

meant crying for ourselves.  
We floated toward a harbor  
known mainly for its weddings.

Fathers queued at the coffee shop  
to compare percentiles,  
head shapes. There was paperwork

for everything. It showered us  
like confetti as we moved  
to the prow. Would there be flowers?

Sometimes I brought flowers.  
It was night when we landed.  
Coins lit the eyes of cold houses.

## WHENEVER I AM IN THE VICINITY

*"Many were the thoughts / Encouraged and dismissed . . ."*

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, *THE PRELUDE*

Whenever I am in the vicinity  
of an opaque Levolor window blind  
I know I am far from home  
I'd never blot the light like this  
if I owned the white walls  
or gray floor I've skidded  
the coffee table across  
black marks for future moving day  
caulking knife to wall  
where I've just now hung  
the Singer Sargent print  
*El Jaleo* too big for the museum's thieves  
or not enough of a landscape  
dim scene empty chair  
a few guitars and music  
in this room I read about  
the wind  
about long nights of unsleeping  
if you've studied the great non-sleepers  
you'll have sighed into  
Lorca's *ni mi casa es ya mi casa*  
and you'll know the wind  
moves everywhere

decides what to destroy or preserve  
of our coastal dwellings  
salt-lashed marsh shacks  
and driftwood castles  
it's said at the end  
the whale is winner

but really

water

takes the parking lot  
takes the beach where children  
buried themselves  
like clams for the bake  
in cold sand saltwater seeps  
from an imperceptible source  
tonight I could have and then did  
make dinner and watch a movie  
about a father who wants  
to sit down for a meal  
with his wife and daughter  
but always finds himself  
choking out the bad guys  
with a broomstick

like weather

these fictions

find a way in  
the blessing gentle breeze  
the blue room's violence

always streaming  
our good knights can't  
resist breaking the idyll  
even Wordsworth  
noted he lived in a time  
of the oppressed and among  
the oppressing  
yes see how the breeze can cradle  
a tyranny  
how wind coos against the surface  
of artificial lives and whatever  
you'd call this poem  
at the beginning in the end  
it can't avoid imparting some half-  
consciousness to what we know  
is unfeeling  
Nature  
we've seen rage having escaped the city  
and thought it was a tad dramatic  
to name our trip an escape  
when it's a wanna-get-away  
when it's only right with winter en route  
to turn to wandering clouds  
some floating things though  
high deep thoughts are there  
liberty and abstruse

mornings  
you wake  
determined to walk the whole jetty  
and bring a scrap of Lispector  
*the terrible duty is to go to the end*  
but that's a little vivid  
so you check on the old bar  
fashioned from street signs  
in the beach town  
where you lived and learned  
how weather could be  
memory  
tonight I'm walking  
the harbor to watch boats  
snuggle in their moorings  
I hear a noise behind me  
on the empty street  
but it's only music  
an accordionist on a bicycle  
I take her tune with me  
I used to borrow  
freely  
would simply float another's vessel  
from the dock at night  
in fourteen lines Wordsworth  
makes the boat his own  
slight sonnet of dispossession

poor Shepherd  
I'm sorry  
it's just the stars and their multiples  
we can't spend all night  
making crises from  
whatever is knocking  
in the home beautiful gas lines  
gables or the quiet insulation  
keeping the wind outside  
while the hero in the kitchen  
scrolls financial records  
conclusions drawn but unexplained  
this ovular  
rod taps  
the sill  
some old custom to leave  
the window cracked in storms  
before the house explodes  
though it's not pressure that does it  
it's the lift of the roof the carapace  
aloft  
in the movie now  
a drone strike leaves  
its black mark on the desert  
once I thought no war could start  
if we stood out here at the edge of things



but then I drove home through  
the states that elected the bomber  
found a dreary winter basement  
to watch two wars on television  
green flashes from the embassy roof  
the other panning black and white  
walking across the graves  
a historian speaking of trees

as witness  
to violence  
suppose

I send my daughter from here  
toward the year 2100 but can't  
by fiat grant her a moral life  
it's her birthday and each red dot  
is where a bomb fell  
not enough viscera in the color  
on a map in a bar graph in the street  
a pneumatic tube counts  
cars leaving the zoo concert  
a plane makes its banking turn  
high above IKEA should we skip  
all that's obvious  
for the action sequence

another evening  
whiled away  
writing

an email "I just resent it"  
but I don't begrudge a thing  
what I meant was "sent again"  
"see you soon" to many people  
I've come to see only the back of  
they drift in the middle of the lake  
they drift  
in unsent correspondence  
we might meet again on the seacoast  
taffy stores and t-shirt shops  
it really could be anywhere  
but it's more specific than that  
colder like a world  
without Bach or Belize  
or a friend you learned was really  
just a circumstance  
the light that  
lights the switch  
that lights the  
lamp flickers  
in its plastic shell a flame in ice  
a way to make the darkness warm  
while even now on planet Earth  
someone fashions a bell against  
despair someone paints a mural  
or fires hot air into the lifting

balloon and the film was from  
a damp unfeeling place  
yet there was allegory to its ferity  
two types  
of weather  
the kind you run from  
and the kind where it's best  
to stay put  
on Main St. a man hears the call  
to prayer and lays a purple t-shirt  
in the parking lot another man  
is shouting something about Waco  
sidestepping them into the gallery  
I fall from the canvas into  
the whiteness of the wall I duck  
beneath hanging caterpillars  
I mark the occasional dark glance  
among us not that anything  
bad would happen until  
it does I would never believe  
in a bike-by stabbing  
but then it happened to me  
a yellow bike a street hung with Spanish moss  
and then the muscle visible  
letting in  
the wind  
like something of our politics

has me back on Tolstoy's digression  
on bees which was no digression  
at all simply the city captive  
to the death of its queen  
while the baby sleeps  
in the next room with Tylenol  
with traffic revving  
at the four-way stop  
one slight wheezing cough  
as soldiers approach the hideaway  
my father at the fringe  
of the march smoking  
or not smoking that mist  
on the lake lifts  
there's Wordsworth  
in the boat he stole  
the camera drifts  
gray walls of the Pentagon  
the lens shifts  
among hippies and then  
among cops but this  
isn't even one fiftieth  
of our story we must  
digress  
again  
but smaller

a single bee in the frame  
its fuzzy thorax two glass wings  
flying into this room which  
is now fully mine and soon  
will lack one wall

I'm on the set

I've made I

repair and fix

I repair and

fix and then

I take the blue tarpaulin away

## TURBOT

The ocean threw forth  
its tremendous, proverbial catch,  
one fish, rumor went,  
twice big as prior nets

had hauled. Along the docks,  
rumor of this largeness grew,  
and with distance came credulity.  
Eventually the species switched:

no longer turbot, but red mullet,  
more regal having been  
for a patrician's rosy shoes  
thus dubbed. Also, double-bearded

with long wisdom, flood-borne  
from the reflection pool  
on some coast estate, and having heard  
the net's winch whine,

the fish thought it was its old lord  
whistling for feeding time.  
Even as a potter prepped  
bespoke tray of gold inlay—

how dramatic would red scales  
flake upon that hue—  
some said the catch must be returned,  
wary toward what pursuits

the rich may tend when lacking  
docile mouths to feed.  
Having commandeered the hot tubs  
of many summer homes,

I volunteered to sneak the fish  
back through the mansion gates,  
and within me an old coach urged,  
*Act like you've been there before,*

which I had, having grappled  
my baby brother's eel-like flesh,  
struggling to keep the swaddle tight.  
He had limbs, of course,

but they hardly worked. Now  
he's thirty-two; I can't hold him  
like that anymore. On the causeway,  
hefting something I could

barely fathom, I watched morning break  
upon all the taking  
that the ocean proffers,  
classic rock and the honor system

aboard each outbound trawler,  
the future flying full speed,  
chop-chop through all of this.  
Through you and I and through the fish.

## BILL CARTY

**Bill Carty** is the author of *Huge Cloudy* (Octopus Books, 2019), which was long-listed for The Believer Book Award. He has received poetry fellowships from the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Artist Trust, Hugo House, and Jack Straw. He was awarded the Emily Dickinson Award from the Poetry Society of America, and his poems have appeared or are forthcoming in the *Kenyon Review*, *32 Poems*, *jubilat*, *Denver Quarterly*, and other journals. Originally from Maine, Bill now lives in Seattle, where he is Senior Editor at *Poetry Northwest*. He teaches at Hugo House, the UW Robinson Center for Young Scholars, and Edmonds College.