

The New Criterion

Verse Chronicle

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Shock & awe

by [William Logan](#)

On *Red Bird* by Mary Oliver, *Ours* by Cole Swensen, *Letters to a Stranger* by Thomas James, *Warhorses* by Yusef Komunyakaa, *Figure Studies* by Claudia Emerson, *One Secret Thing* by Sharon Olds.

Mary Oliver is the poet laureate of the self-help biz and the human potential movement. She has stripped down the poetry in *Red Bird* until it is nothing but a naked set of values: that the human spirit is indomitable, that the animal spirit is indomitable, that she loves birds very much, that she loves flowers very much, that even her dog loves flowers very much [\[1\]](#) As for herself—

Onward, old legs!
There are the long, pale dunes; on the other side
the roses are blooming and finding their labor
no adversity to the spirit.

If we trust the landscape of her poems, Oliver lives in a vast nature preserve she polices like a docent, strolling from bush to bush, from beast to beast (I'm told the wildlife of Cape Cod have asked for a restraining order against her).

Oh do you have time
to linger
for just a little while
out of your busy

and very important day
for the goldfinches
that have gathered
in a field of thistles

for a musical battle ... ?

To which the only sane response would be, *Hell, no!* Oliver's humble requests and mousy prayers are sweetly bullying—she sounds like a Dominican converted to the Sierra Club.

For all her love of nature, it's curious that Oliver's birds and wallpaper landscapes are the dullest ciphers—she rarely offers even the smallest detail of description. A field is simply a “mysterious field.” Trees are merely “beautiful trees.” If there are ravens, they aren't real ravens, but a “miracle// of Lord-love/ and of sorrow.” This isn't just a failure to imagine the world (all description is an act

of imagination only partly tethered to the world, if tethered at all); it's a refusal of the responsibilities of language. She'd rather be a crow:

Anyway, my thoughts are all feathery.
I prefer simple beak talk.

Maybe it's having wings.
It does make a difference.

Poets have been seeking transcendence through nature for a long while—the wish is not merely religious, though drawn from faith in nature as an expression of or substitute for the divine. Lots of poets are in love with the ordinary—that's one of the graces of contemporary verse, as it was for Wordsworth, Clare, Bishop, Larkin, and many another. But should the ordinary, after such poetic attention, seem so, well ... ordinary? It's as if you'd been promised a miracle, yet all that lies on the tablecloth before you is a dead mouse on a garbage-can lid. (Yet think what Bishop would have done with that mouse or that lid!) Poetry teachers say, "Show, don't tell," until they sound like idiots, knowing all the while that a good poet learns what to show and what to tell. Late Oliver shows nothing, tells everything, until you feel like one of Coleridge's wedding guests, buttonholed by an ancient mariner the sailors would have drowned two days from shore.

Thousands of readers, their lives having a poetry-shaped hole in them, read this stuff and are satisfied. Worse, they come back for second helpings. If you're going to be a popular artist with pretensions, when you pledge the reader profundity you ought to offer more than shopworn banalities like "Nobody owns the sky or the trees./ Nobody owns the hearts of birds" or "Instructions for living a life:/ *Pay attention./ Be astonished./ Tell about it.*" Yet Mary Oliver is the bestselling poet in the country. When I remember this, I sit bemused, and stir my tea, and decide never to write a poem again.

Readers complain that it's not fair to review such a guileless poet (readers complain about a lot of things—which is good, because complaint is the first symptom of criticism). But if her poems were without pretensions, they wouldn't invoke Rilke or use an epigraph from van Gogh or keep looking over their shoulders at Wordsworth. If you never review Mary Oliver, or Ted Kooser, or Billy Collins, or Sharon Olds, you're ignoring half the poetry sold in the country. The worship of simplicities is not a mean thing; but it is made mean when conducted with such hand wringing, such urgent tears, such Victorian sentiment. Those tears are shed all the way to the bank.

Cole Swensen's *Ours* might be called a long contemplative rant on gardens, especially the baroque gardens of André Le Nôtre, who created the formal designs at Versailles. [\[2\]](#) Swensen is one of our most diligent avant-garde poets, wrestling like a Laocoön with the shape of her sentences. Poems are often triumphs or failures of rhetoric; and one doorway to a poetry otherwise mysterious is through the syntax it deploys and the syntactical evasions to which it succumbs. The order or disorder of words does no more than leave the lingering shadow of the author—but it tells us more about how the author thinks than any annotation of theme or subject.

Swensen's off-center look at shrubbery finds its intellectual sources in thinkers like Derrida, for whom the gaze was always enough for some heavy theorizing, for propositions as difficult to grasp as a will-o'-the-wisp. Swensen has ideas, which are dangerous things to have; but, unlike a lot of experimental poets, she doesn't browbeat the reader with them. She develops them in gorgeous, hazy images and under-punctuated sentences that rarely know where they're going and sometimes forget when they've arrived.

Because the kings of France loved Tivoli
these windows bearing oranges

globed,
glowed, and that's how night becomes day
without taking your eyes off their palaces
in winter.

The scene is magical, even if the logic is suspect, the sentence wobbly as a two-legged stool. (Is the antecedent of “their” *night* and *day*, or *oranges*, or *kings*?) These things matter more than the style recognizes—it isn't quite enough to argue that such ambiguities please us through deceit.

The avant-garde aesthetic almost demands some form of one-upsmanship, yet there are only so many ways of torturing syntax or splashing words onto the page. (Certain avant-garde mannerisms have been around so long, Calvin Coolidge could have written respectable poems with them.) If the avant-garde wants to make it new, in Pound's dictum, what can be left to accomplish when the etiquette has been as codified as the place setting for a twelve-course banquet? Most experimental poets still come out of William Carlos Williams's pickle jar or Charles Olson's boot heel.

Swensen has researched her subject thoroughly enough to slather the page with horticultural facts. She composes her verse in short phrases alternating with runaway lines that hurl themselves acrobatically from margin to margin. Her virtue lies in restlessly teasing her material until it yields peculiar insight: “A garden is a window: ... each pane/ recording the faceted plantings/ that a single finger traces/ in the crisp veil of late frost,/ some fortunes turn dust to dust.” A deft period or semi-colon would have done wonders for the sentence structure (shouldn't syntax be tended like a garden, too?); but I'd rather cross-examine the Red Queen than argue punctuation with the avant-garde.

Swensen has a painter's eye, bringing her scenes into focus with a twist of the brush: a “forest always just/ about to pour over the wall,/ which makes the house fuse and the clouds adhere,/ leaf by leaf/ to the painted world/ on a porcelain cup.” There's a seductive languor to her best lines, and sometimes a Jamesian sweep of authority. The poems don't quite take advantage of the depth of these descriptions, preferring to improvise on whimsical themes—the garden as mirror, or allergy, or rearrangement of a previous garden, or machine for multiplying, or asymptote, or much else. More modesty might save her from Anne Carson-esque generalizations like “Any garden is a description/ of its era's metaphysics” (an era's metaphysics far more likely describes its gardens) or the Jorie Graham-ish pomposities of “Gardens belong/ to the class of all things that go beyond.” At her worst, Swensen is beguiled by Carson's arch, pretentious titles or Ashbery's brusque absurdity (“We will,/ all our hats upon/ this sunny day, capsize/ in a storm/ and with a horse under each arm, Madame”).

There are too many pages here where the profound is jostled off the page by the pseudo-profound, where the jittery indentations seem all too familiar, as if they'd come from *How to Write Like a Beatnik in Ten Easy Lessons*. As for André Le Nôtre, how can you not like a man “who took three snails and a cabbage/ for his coat of arms”? Even Swensen's vices, which include a taste for bogus science and nonsense etymology (*garden* has nothing to do with *garde bien*, and *balustrade*—from *balautium*, the pomegranate flower—is not even distantly related to *ballad*), can't entirely detract from a sustained performance with touches of acidic humor. This long poem makes the garden as strange as the weeds from which gardens come, and to which they inevitably go.

At the age of twenty-seven, some months after the publication of his first book of poetry, Thomas James shot himself with a .45 caliber handgun. In the thirty years since his death, *Letters to a Stranger* has gained a small cult readership.^[3] Whenever we read the book of a young suicide, death salts the poems with might-have-beens. It's easy to turn sentimental about those who die young, their promise unfulfilled; and even poets who die before sixty are sometimes treated as if they'd been as young as Keats.

James's poems are drenched in Sylvia Plath, or rather in her imagery—you feel he must have written with *Ariel* open on his desk. He was hardly the only young poet of the 1970s so bewitched. These boyish poems seem incomplete, amateurish at times, full of period mannerism and imprecise gesture. James crams his short, rough-edged sentences with metaphors and similes—there's scarcely a noun without an image clamped to it like a moray eel.

Love, the gold mouth has broken open.
Stars are hard as quartz.
The moon hangs like a half-eaten melon.

The veined hives bleed in little spurts,
Then thicken. Lambskins whiten
In blue weather.

This mob of images, few with the melancholy ripeness or feverish rot of Plath's, lacks the shock of recognition that made hers so disturbing. Her images conduct a counter- or double narrative, akin to the double plot of pastoral. Rarely mere window-dressing or tinsel, they're shadowed by a muscular and resistant pathology. Whatever lies upon the surface, beneath lurks the psychological disruption to which the images attest. Plath was a disastrous model for someone depressive in his art and suicidally inclined (many of James's poems take place in the recovery ward—he knew those scenes too well). The deadly flourish to her last months of desperate, manic composition might have seemed less a warning than an invitation.

James, whose real name was Thomas Bojeski, obviously found in Plath a secret sharer (I wonder if something similar happened to Hart Crane as he read the poems of Samuel Greenberg). When not scribbling on the ward, he wrote about dissecting a pig or dragging a lake for a body, about a snake-bite victim, the iron maiden, lunch with a hangman, and suicide, suicide, suicide ("The room is livid./ It is like opening an artery... // Scarlet splatters over the buffet"). He had a lurid imagination: the execution of a crippled duck is followed by five examples of decapitation in myth and history.

James's most accomplished poem was in the voice of a mummy of the Twenty-first Dynasty:

My brain was next. A pointed instrument
Hooked it through my nostrils, strand by strand.
A voice swayed over me. I paid no notice.
For weeks my body swam in sweet perfume.
I came out scoured. I was skin and bone.
They lifted me into the sun again
And packed my empty skull with cinnamon.

The young poet never possessed the burnish of the mature artist, but his last poems reveal a gathering authority. ("I see you," he addressed two aunts, "With your bustles puffed up like life preservers./ Your needlepoint rose garden./ Your George Eliot coiffures./ Your flounces gathered like an 1890s valentine./ You both took heroin." The echo of Lowell sharpens the presence of Plath.) That final access of imaginative power might have killed him—it isn't the hard winter that murders the farmer, but the first blush of spring.

Lucie Brock-Broido, in her somewhat overheated introduction to this expanded edition, praises James's gift for imagery—his cobblestones "ribbed with frost," the peonies' "torches of acetylene," the moon's "facets smudged with soot," the moon "brittle as a wineglass," the "small, improbable moon" (the moon makes all too many farewell appearances). Though this was not yet more than a twitch or tic, James had an Aristotelian eye for metaphor. Brock-Broido claims that *Letters to a*

Stranger received just a single review, which rather oversells the romantic myth of genius unrecognized. Though criticism was mixed, the book was reviewed in the *New Republic*, *TLS*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and elsewhere—it was not ignored. I disagree, often as not, with the editor’s readings. The speaker in “Room 101,” for example, is not “already dead”; he’s a failed suicide, finding himself hardened against the world—if he were dead, he wouldn’t lie in a room, day after day, while a nurse brings in “needles, gauze, and pills.”

This book is the only world James left the world. As a graduate student, Brock-Broido grew obsessed with him. (She wrote him an eighty-page poem titled “Pornography,” with a prose explication, illustrated!) Later she tracked down his friends and eventually his only surviving relative, a sister, with whom she promptly lost touch. It would now be impossible to write the poet’s biography, so many of those close to him have died, so he has become a *tabula rasa*, as Chatterton and even Plath became, ripe for projection. Brock-Broido, who undertook this edition as an act of devotion, has added a dozen or so uncollected poems, though she never reveals where she found them. It’s no use exaggerating what Thomas James was, a talent only half born, and that half not quite enough for him to be remembered.

Yusef Komunyakaa’s *Warhorses* is about war, and scarcely a poem avoids it.^[4] It haunts even the field of love, where a lover is forced to say, “Sometimes I hold you like Achilles’/ shield.” We live in a country now almost permanently at war (an incursion here, a pocket war there, something endless somewhere else), whose political narratives have been infected by the War on Poverty, the War on Drugs, the War on Terror. Love and war have been entangled as long as there has been literature; you could say that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are about a war caused by one dalliance, almost lost for a second, and about a homecoming delayed by one dalliance after another.

Komunyakaa was a soldier in Vietnam, but he never finds quite the right tone for these fictions and meditations of battle—at times he’s too solemn by half (if something isn’t melodramatic enough, he makes it apocalyptic), at times too lugubrious, falling prey to every kind of sentimentality you can imagine. (It’s as if he were influenced simultaneously by Revelations and Stephen King.) Some of his ideas are giddily awful—the title poem is a “performance piece for voices, musicians, & dancers. Two or three seesaws are on the stage.” I’m not sure, but I think the seesaws are horses:

Horses carried men to grasslands
of the Crow, Shawnee, & Apache.
Horses carried men to the gangplank.
Horses carried men to Shangri-la,
Nebo, San Juan Hill, & Xanadu.
Horses carried men to the trenches
stinking of mustard gas & betrayal.

Faced with more recent disasters, the poet proves as helpless before the banality of evil as he is before the banality of good. You turn a page and find a poem in two tall columns, one slightly broken at the top—of course! It’s a concrete poem about the Twin Towers!

Some were writing e-mails
& embossed letters to ghosts
when the first plane struck.
The boom of one thousand
trap drums was thrown against
a metallic sky.

The purple-hued poetry of the “embossed letters to ghosts” and those heaven-assaulting trap-drums

doesn't stop there—rescue workers “tried to soothe torn earth,” “signed deeds & promissory notes ... hobbled in broken shoes/ toward the Brooklyn Bridge” (this last perhaps due to an unhappily placed antecedent). The good poem on the tragedy of September 11 has yet to be written. It might seem an impossible task, an unscalable rock-face of contemporary prejudice, sentiment, and banality; yet imagine what Auden might have done. His greatest war poem was not “September 1, 1939” but “Musée des Beaux Arts.”

The most ambitious poem in *Warhorses*, taking up half the book, is the “autobiography” of Komunyakaa's alter ego, a Vietnam vet who has been a bartender for twenty years, the man the poet might have been with a little less luck. The portrait seems at once too manufactured and too naive—this soldier in a mirror life was wounded by a sniper and won a Silver Star for bravery (Komunyakaa won a Bronze Star, but as a battlefield reporter). The portrait of the soldier's father, who sang cover versions of Nat King Cole and the like, is sensitive to a world now gone, a world of powder-blue suits and Philco turntables; but Komunyakaa can't stop there. When he revisits our racial past, he equates segregating a dance floor with raising a flag (both use ropes) or “tossing a noose/ over an oak limb/ at the edge of a field—/ a riot of red blooms at dusk.”

I like poets who have a historical memory, who know that “shock and awe” is our contemporary version of Greek catharsis. But why succumb to historical judgments so ludicrously misplaced? “Why is our enemy/ always dark-skinned ... ?” asks the aging veteran. This forgets those enemies from the American past, the British, the Spanish, the Germans, the Italians. It's not enough to milk the reader's tears or reinforce his prejudices, never enough to force the poem to yield, in its last lines, a greasy dollop of sentiment—“Yes,/ the oldest prayer is still in my fingertips,” “that air made of loneliness & nitrate,” and, perhaps best of all, “Forgive my heart & penis,/ but don't forgive my hands.”

There are moving moments in this book—peasants during the Russian Revolution “swinging// long-handled scythes against the Russian infantrymen,” a Jewish father in mourning “calling/ his daughter's name over a loudspeaker.” But Komunyakaa is rarely content unless he's hammering a point (the reader is the anvil), and it's always the same point. If you want the moral complexity of Wilfred Owen or Anthony Hecht or Geoffrey Hill, you'll be disappointed. Komunyakaa has nothing but the drive of conviction, which mistakes moral judgment for the ethos of art.

Claudia Emerson's well-behaved, slightly prissy poems deserve more attention than they're likely to receive. They thrive in an oddly narrow register between regret and paralysis, as if the duties we owe the past were enough to kill us. (If there were still maiden aunts, they would write such poems—and they'd sprinkle on the arsenic in double doses.) *Figure Studies*, Emerson's first book since she won the Pulitzer Prize in 2006, is a latterday variation on *Spoon River Anthology*—she remembers a world of all-girl schools, of parlor gossips and piano lessons, of a mannequin in an attic afterlife after the dress store closes for good.^[5]

Everyone was forced to read *Spoon River*, once—but Emerson sees these straitened souls from outside (Masters's townspeople spoke from beyond the grave, which made for a very noisy cemetery). In a small town, every success is resented, every disappointment hoarded—but she avoids the grander failures for quiet lives lived quietly, slightly out of the way, blighted but struggling. The girls' school has a housemother:

This life began as mere employment, something
that would pass; she had private joys then,

reasons to close her door. This is how she breathes
now, moving sharklike through the halls' courses,

sensing the constant blood of wakefulness,
girls' hands swimming—pale fish—into and out of tense
bodies held still as water dense with early blooming.

There's a lot going on here when nothing is going on—the portrait is done in a few discreet strokes. Having private joys no longer, the woman traffics among her charges, a shark arrowing through them, always hungry. They sense they're in danger (are those flowers floating or drowning?)—if not from her, then from the adult world that soon will notice their blooming sexuality.

Emerson knows—the way Masters did, the way Frost did—how lives go wrong. She recognizes what is required of women in such a world. In addition to the mannequin and a female anatomical model (both screaming, *Symbol! Symbol!*), there is the little girl—always the most beautiful, always plucked from the other girls at the last minute—chosen to be the Virgin Mary in a living Nativity,

center stage where a spotlight reveals her

gazing marblelike into the manger—nothing
for her to know beyond the fact of being

chosen, nothing for her to practice,
having learned already this stillness.

These lines could easily have become yet another diatribe against the male gaze; but Emerson, like those girls she writes of, remembers when to be silent. She has a confidence in her syntax (too often these days, poets use their syntax like a pile driver), a trust in the unassuming force with which the poems pursue their ends. That's the virtue of patience, of waiting long enough for the ordinary to turn into the unexpected.

Poems that depend on such transformation are risky investments—it's easy to start a poem with a bang, harder to find a place to stop that pays off all the debts accrued and adds something extra, for interest. It's difficult to quote her endings without going halfway back into the poem—like Larkin, Emerson roots the final lines deep in her stanzas, so they are half surprise and half fulfillment.

The local boys are, of course, forbidden.
This leaves only the rare visiting

father, awkward brother, the headmaster,
the boy who bushhogs the pasture,

or the chaplain in his telling collar—starched
tooth at the throat—to remind them.

This chaplain will remind them by his voice, by his sermons, by his wool-suited authority; but what we focus on is that white tooth, that sharp visible square of dog collar, which manages to shiver into being the hunger of and for religion, the reminder of the primeval mistake by that woman in Eden.

Some of Emerson's poems fall apart while waiting for an ending; some leave their moral lesson too close to the surface. She works best by indirection, making the reader think the poems aren't going anywhere in particular, before they home in like that shark. (The best place to arrive in a poem is the place you didn't know you were heading.) She leaps into some poems *in medias res* and sometimes

abandons them there, too. There are touches in this hothouse world of Flannery O'Connor's South, though a South less fraught with hard faith. I'm drawn to a poet who, trying to recreate a childhood memory, asks a friend to burn a piano on the bank of the Hocking River. He's thanked in the acknowledgments.

When you open a Sharon Olds book, you know what to expect: lurid vignettes followed by privacies most people wouldn't whisper to their doctor. The body count will be high. The dramatic grammar of an Olds poem is as predictable as a horror movie's—if there's an innocent girl in the first scene, she's sure to be raped or murdered or to die from lead paint by the end. Olds is our most Freudian poet since Plath—if there's any complex or condition, from the Elektra complex to the anxiety of influence, Olds has embraced it as her own.

One Secret Thing is laid out like an autobiography. [6] It begins with scenes wrenched from the Second World War (Olds was born less than a year after Pearl Harbor), though some could have occurred any time afterward, and others might have been recognized by Homer. A family, about to be taken to the death camps, stands exposed in their home, the daughter “with her music/ in her hand”:

They knew
families had been taken. What they did not know
was the way he would pick her cello up
by the scroll neck and take its amber
torso-shape and lift it and break it
against the fireplace. The brickwork crushed the
close-grained satiny wood, they stood and
stared at him.

Olds loves big scenes as much as Otto Preminger. The shock of this end of innocence, this destruction of art, lies in the premonition of death borne by the crushed body of the cello. In the proofs, this was spoiled by the clumsy handling of pronouns, so it was easy to confuse the victims with the victors. Now it's clear who breaks the cello, but the reader wonders why only one Nazi (the poem has been retitled “When He Came for the Family”) would be sent to arrest these Jews.

After this phantasmagoria of war come the poet's childhood, youth, marriage, age; but the dominant, dominating figure is her mother. This figure of terror from previous books (apparently she stood only 4'11", no taller than Alexander Pope) seems more confused than calculating. If there's a fairy tale at the heart of Olds's poetry, it's of the innocent triumphant—she's the Little Red Riding Hood and the Goldilocks of her own poems, and in the end the wolves and bears lie slain around her. In this peculiar merging of fairy tale and Freudian myth, where a parent's every errant impulse has some base motive (“my mother was made of desire leashed”), Olds is the anti-Plath, because she always comes out smelling like a rose (the underside of Plath's influence, which Olds does not escape, is blaming everyone else for your unhappiness). A mixture of eros and disgust lies at the heart of the maze.

My mother was such a good kisser.
From where I sat in the tub, her body,
between her legs, looked a little
like a mouth, a youthfully bearded mouth
with blood on it.

This makes it seem that the daughter wants to kiss her mother's vagina. For the child to survive, the

monster must be slain.

You feel sorry for the mother, trying to do the right thing by this small, obstreperous child and getting it as wrong as most parents do. (When she takes her daughter to a doctor, he diagnoses the girl's problem as a "sense/ of humor.") As her mother ages, the slow rapprochement between them seems more like mutual exhaustion. After her mother is strapped to a bed in intensive care, pleading to be untied, Olds quietly sings to her, like a mother to her mother—it doesn't even occur to the poet that this mirrors her own famous childhood trauma, being tied to a chair. But then Olds did not inherit a gene for irony.

These new poems sometimes read like rough drafts, the badly constructed sentences collapsing into slightly rabid lists of phrases. When the poet learns she might need a hysterectomy,

I bent over,
wanting to cry out, It's my best friend, it's like
having a purse of your own, of yourself, it's like
being where you came from, as if you are your origin,
the basket of life, the withies, the osier
reed weave, where your little best beloveds
lay and took heart.

Having a purse of your own? Elsewhere the writing crawls with weedy similes: "like a scrimshaw Crusader/ chess-piece rotated slowly on its base," "like the low singing/ of a watered plant long not watered," "like eating hard-shelled animals/ at mid-molt."

Olds's virtues have been forthrightness, lack of embarrassment, and a greedy attention to the body (sometimes these were vices, too); but the purposes her virtues served were often narcissistic. (Has anyone noticed how chilly and unlovable her poems can be?) *One Secret Thing* is filled with classic moments: there's a poem, both hilarious and repulsive, about the state of the poet's ass ("this compendium/ of net string bags shaking their booty of/ cellulite fruits and nuts"), and another where she becomes a fly on the wall, trying to lay eggs on the wallpaper roses while watching a child spanked—spanked to the tune of "Onward Christian Soldiers"! Much of this, nonetheless, feels like a poet taking dictation. Perhaps Olds has mined the ore of her life so long, there's nothing left. Perhaps, aged sixty-six, Sharon Olds has at last grown tired of herself.

Notes

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1. *Red Bird*, by Mary Oliver; Beacon Press, 81 pages, \$23. [Go back to the text.](#)
2. *Ours*, by Cole Swensen; University of California Press, 101 pages, \$16.95 (paper). [Go back to the text.](#)
3. *Letters to a Stranger*, by Thomas James; Graywolf Press, 114 pages, \$15 (paper). [Go back to the text.](#)
4. *Warhorses*, by Yusef Komunyakaa; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 86 pages, \$24. [Go back to the text.](#)
5. *Figure Studies*, by Claudia Emerson; Louisiana State University Press, 65 pages, \$39.95; \$16.95 (paper). [Go back to the text.](#)
6. *One Secret Thing*, by Sharon Olds; Alfred A. Knopf, 100 pages, \$25. [Go back to the text.](#)

William Logan's most recent book of poetry, *Strange Flesh* (Penguin), was published last year.

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