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Born in Virginia Beach, Virginia and currently making her home in Kansas, Washburn has also lived and worked in Arizona and Missouri.

## The Mailman, 2004

"Maybe it's the gap, the feeling that someone isn't listening, doesn't get it, has half heard us, that compels us to write and explain." —Natalie Goldberg

I was the mailman and  
I thought I was carrying letters:  
A, B, the whole symbolic mess  
of alphabet turned to words, one  
son or daughter writing from the third  
world or some other pretechnological  
handwritten place, but instead  
I found myself  
going insubstantial, literally,  
believe me—it happened—  
blinking out, like migraine  
flashes of light that float  
and disappear. Each text  
I carried was blank with unmeaning.  
In this century and at the end  
of the last, I was noself and the words  
depended only on words. I delivered  
letters to boxes. Mother,  
receiver of delivery,  
maker of the daughter—or son—  
made meaning of the blankness  
of the letter, of the word: You  
know how you are, she said,  
You know what you're like.

## Poetry: A Resurgence

for the poets among us  
—"The British critic F.R. Leavis used to observe  
that a poem is not a frog." —from *The Creative Writing*

At the end of the twentieth century, we were warned.  
No one could find frogs in the volume to which  
we'd grown accustomed. Upon inspection,  
the frogs we found were missing legs or had extras.  
Small hind quarters jutted obscene  
from their thick and proper limbs, their sight  
was bifurcated and tenuous, their faces  
misshapen. The polar icecaps  
and the frogs were virtual canaries  
in the coal mine. Take heed, the great seers said.  
We have seen and not seen said the see-ers.

Poems, however, were ubiquitous. Their growth rate  
was alarmingly high. You could find the Laureate  
at the end of the newscast reciting unrhymed lines  
or singing on radio shows. Trudging to your car  
after a long shift, you'd find stanzas pressed under the  
wipers.  
Even our young drank beer and heard the rhythm  
of the night's hundred poems chanted from their stages.  
The poems were a chytrid fungus, rapid and mortal.  
We were breathing through our skins and we didn't know it.

The Good Reader lived here and there, lifted the wipers,  
pressed  
her bifocals to the soft cotton covering her belly,  
and commenced, tuning her voice to the  
violin's virtuosity. The world was getting warmer  
by the instant. The real gardens bloomed into the winter.  
All the imaginary toads might have died. Yes,  
they said, but at least we all died in the truth.

## Hunger: A Philosophy

from "Guts (Gutz) n." in *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*  
By Captain Francis Grose, Edited with a Biographical & Critical Sketch  
& an Extensive Commentary, By Eric Partridge, M.A., B. Litt. (Oxon.)

### I. The Vulgar Tongue

My great guts are ready,  
ready to eat my little ones.

My great guts are ready,  
ready to eat your little ones.

Littleneck clams salt the guts  
that crave little little ones:

capers, baby crookneck,  
crabs that crawl live  
from the oyster's glossed shell  
down your throat, the *amouse-*  
*bouche*, gherkin, kernel,  
floret, thin stem  
of chive, and celery's seed.

Great guts are ready  
to eat the little guts. My guts  
begin to think, begin to think  
my throat is cut, else how  
this sparsity, how wait?

### II. Classical Thought

And as my guts begin to think  
of what they are wont  
to think and think and want,  
it's only a matter of time

before great guts conjecture  
and little guts postulate  
on atoms and theory and wings  
shifting, infinite expansion,  
reasons for decapitation,  
reasons for reason, reasons  
for bomb, gutting, dragging,  
flaying, the enforced march  
and the pressing down.

### III. The Guts

My guts curse my teeth, foul  
movements rumble snoutward,  
words vulgar as the acts  
and days. Nothing to chew on.

My guts curse my teeth; my guts  
are cursing and thinking  
and ready. Horrid as they are,  
my guts, like any guts, my guts

like your great guts and little guts  
will take possess keep shroud  
and change, digesting with relish  
whatever we will send down.