

The Best

American

Poetry

2017

Natasha  
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guest editor

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Gibson writes: “As I was writing poems for what has become Not Hearing the Wood Thrush, a series of individual poems, each entitled ‘Passage,’ began to emerge, each poem finding its place at intervals throughout the longer work. In the first of these, the speaker is standing in a dark room, sensing an open door, and beyond that door also darkness. Generally speaking, the series of poems moves toward or into the light. All short, most with long lines, the poems seem to put the speaker at a threshold one might easily miss, the length of passage often being as short as a single breath or the flicker of an image. But all are transformational or hold that possibility. The ‘Passage’ selected for The Best American Poetry 2017 is the final passage of that series and also the last poem in the book.

I have no idea why it surfaced and declared itself. While I love hanging laundry in summer on a line outside, I haven’t done that for some years, as the line has seized up and won’t move and has turned green. Well, we’re all getting on out here in the woods. But once I had the opening image of pinning the cotton sheet, I remembered smoothing the sheet, and from that came the swift passage toward . . . what might have happened, but didn’t. Whatever did happen, however, is remembered as a recurring joy that embraces everything. And so it continues.”

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MARGARET GIBSON was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1944. She is the author of eleven books of poems, all from LSU Press, most recently Broken Cup (2014), whose title poem won a Pushcart Prize for 2016. Broken Cup was a finalist for the 2016 Poets’ Prize. Awards include the Lamont Selection for Long Walks in the Afternoon (1982), the Melville Kane Award for Memories of the Future (1986), and the Connecticut Book Award in Poetry for One Body (2007). The Vigil was a finalist for the National Book Award in Poetry in 1993. LSU will publish a new volume of poems, Not Hearing the Wood Thrush, in 2018. She has written a memoir, The Prodigal Daughter (University of Missouri Press, 2008). Gibson is professor emerita, University of Connecticut, and lives in Preston, Connecticut. For more information, visit: [www.margaretgibsonpoetry.com](http://www.margaretgibsonpoetry.com)

## PASSAGE

Once in sunlight I pinned to the clothesline a cotton sheet, a plane of light  
sheer as the mind of God,

before we imagined that mind creased by a single word.  
With my hand I smoothed any rivel, any shirr, any suggestion of pleat or furrow.

Whatever it was I wanted from that moment, I can't say. It failed to edify.  
Nor did I bow.

And yet the memory holds, and there is a joy that recurs in me much as the scent  
of summer abides in air dried sheets I unfold long after,

lying down in them as one might in a meadow,  
as one might with a lover, as one might court the Infinite, however long it takes.