

## Three Poems by Matthew Chamberlin

Matthew Chamberlain

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## MATTHEW CHAMBERLIN

### Savanna

Shall I take the wheel?  
The man with yellow eyes  
had spoken, all the busfull nodding.  
The old witch on the aisle nodded too  
and darned away.  
I tried to tell them stories,  
could not move my lips--she'd sewn them shut.

Off we flew, the sailing wind, the winding clock!

*Mein Gott*, the Germans whispered.  
All could see the running herds, the flocks,  
the tribal birds and bleeding beaks,  
and underneath the breaking earth the chasm of the rift.

The wheels squeak,  
we've lost the brakes.

Those howls! Do you hear them, do you  
think we've  
drawn away from our pursuers?  
I saw a wolf leap in the air, become a monster.  
Lumbering behind, a bear with six large eyes,  
a moth whose velvet wings  
exude magnetic fields and over all  
a sloth that flits above the treetops,  
whispering as children do,  
who've learned powers--

## Badlands

The road bends northward,  
straightens near the edge of things.  
A strange, strange place, where clear skies gather  
clouds of swallows,  
darkening the orange country.  
There's life here, of a kind:  
Pale horses graze the sedge, while devils  
paler still raise pillars from the dust.  
Above the rim the red-rust land  
breaks through,  
broad shoulders cracked and tumbled  
rise in domes and ridges  
from the sand.  
White hands appear on feldspar walls,  
splayed wide to warn away  
or beckon onward.  
Whatever's down there's meant to stay.

Once a willow grew nearby,  
trailed fingers over moonbeam shallows.  
Silvered boughs threw shadows  
whipsnake thin on yellow stone.  
Come midday, vipers telescoped from roothole narrows,  
basked in skins of green and gold.  
Sun-drunk at dusk,  
they tapered into holes again.  
Around a white acacia, the musk of death.  
Gray shrikes dwelled in sunlit heights,  
draped tender prey  
on spikes and thorns.

The shrikes are gone. The willow tree--  
a shade itself, a fire-blackened shard of bone--  
squats gleaming and caliginous.  
Now what stands here, stands alone.  
Carved deep in burnished wood a dark  
and brooding face,  
black whorls for eyes, lips cut in twists  
of curling bark.  
Around the whorl-hollows turns  
the feathered moil--

swift beard of swallows parts and grins.  
Over all the Badlands peers  
a brutish god.

Unwanted

I found the wall,  
the doors that opened wide to others,  
never though to me. I wept  
and kicked the patient stone, wedged fingertips  
between the rocks  
and knocked with force of rage a bloody hole.

Then wriggled through,  
awaiting wonders. No-one there, nothing at all  
except one tree,  
a listless spruce above the cliffs.

At once a vision filled my mind, a sky  
that roared with drumming song, a knoll upon the bluff  
where from a lonely gibbet  
hung a solitary figure, looking over  
all the great wide sea