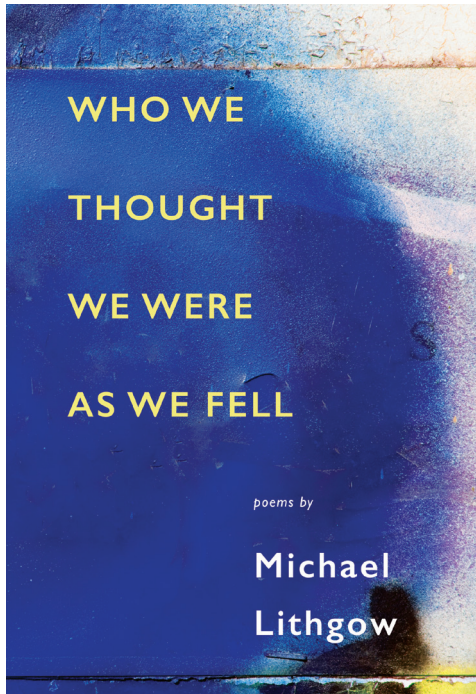


**Sample Poems from *Who We Thought We
Were As We Fell*
by Michael Lithgow**



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Cradle

I watch the movement of my daughter's fingers
opening and closing in darkness like sea anemone,

her small body asleep in my arms. I am a cradle
in a windstorm. Outside, the savage air moans

against the window like something angry and lost.
I am first among giants to carry this little piece of sun

into the night — we have each of us become
mythological; she is a colossus shattering days;

my hands are bigger than her chest. She senses
my restlessness, my own unsettled airs pitching

against the walls, mixing with her breath and soughs.
I try to tease the sounds apart, a strange mix of moths

and noises in the wind: a muted crash some distance
away; the sighs and grunts of a child's body staying

alive. Hostilities waged in family photos hanging
in the hallway. The shuffle of straw men

everywhere jostling to rein in the future.
An uncertain centre swaying in the lullabies of a storm —

An old house going to ruin by the highway

An old house going to ruin by the highway
pulls everyone off the road. It looks senseless,
like it's been in a fight. Like vice. Weather
blows in from all sides leaving open wounds —
rotting walls, punked stairs, cracked counters;
garbage of seasons everywhere. It reminds you
of crimes; someone else's at first, then
one or two of your own. Window glass
is long smashed away as if whatever happened
inside needed to escape, or be punished.
Even the sky above this empty stretch of road
seems friendless.

You walk in circles around the wreckage.
Objects dragged from inside are being
eaten by tall grass — broken furniture, a carpet,
a plastic lampshade that reminds you
of the moon. Wooden handled tools rot
in the yard — a shovel, a rake —
and a rain barrel is fallen in its hoops.
The shed has a roof on its floor.
You feel bullied by this catastrophe,
a kind of wreck & decay that reminds you
everything has its own end. A home
undone by accident, by economic helplessness,
by what sickness takes and leaves behind,
by succumbing to age and decline.
By the toxic residue of what we do

in the worst ways we quarrel. By the horrible
silence that follows deaths of those we need.
What happened here?

Rustlings in the stand of saplings trespassing
into the yard absurdly make you think of violence.
You hurl an apple into an empty window

and from the dark cavity comes a pleasing “thud.”
You make your escape.

On the road you roll a window down,
wind roars at the barking doubt in your head.
What can you know, anyhow? How fast
it all goes? How in the end what matters most
will be poles apart from what you need today?
Something to do in the meantime —
you speed until you think you might be caught.