

Double Dutch

By Gregory Pardlo

The girls turning double-dutch
bob & weave like boxers pulling
punches, shadowing each other,
sparring across the slack cord
casting parabolas in the air. They
whip quick as an infant's pulse
and the jumper, before she
enters the winking, nods in time
as if she has a notion to share,
waiting her chance to speak. But she's
anticipating the upbeat
like a bandleader counting off
the tune they are about to swing into.
The jumper stair-steps into mid-air
as if she's jumping rope in low-gravity,
training for a lunar mission. Airborne a moment
long enough to fit a second thought in,
she looks caught in the mouth bones of a fish
as she flutter-floats into motion
like a figure in a stack of time-lapse photos
thumbed alive. Once inside,
the bells tied to her shoestrings rouse the gods
who've lain in the dust since the Dutch
acquired Manhattan. How she dances
patterns like a dust-heavy bee retracing

its travels in scale before the hive. How
the whole stunning contraption of girl and rope
slaps and scoops like a paddle boat.
Her misted skin arranges the light
with each adjustment and flex. Now heather-
hued, now sheen, light listing on the fulcrum
of a wrist and the bare jutted joints of elbow
and knee, and the faceted surfaces of muscle,
surfaces fracturing and reforming
like a sun-tickled sleeve of running water.
She makes jewelry of herself and garlands
the ground with shadows.

Gregory Pardlo, "Double Dutch" from *Totem*, published by The American Poetry Review. Copyright © 2007 by Gregory Pardlo. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Source: *Totem* (The American Poetry Review, 2007)



Gregory Pardlo was born in Philadelphia and grew up in Willingboro, New Jersey. He is the author of *Digest* (2014), winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. The Pulitzer judges cited Pardlo's "clear-voiced poems that bring readers the news from 21st Century America, rich with thought, ideas and histories public and private." Pardlo's poems, reviews, and translations have been widely published and are noted for "language simultaneously urban and highbrow ... snapshots of a life that is so specific it becomes universal." He is an associate editor for the literary journal *Callaloo* and teaches creative writing at Columbia University. He lives in Brooklyn.

[See More By This Poet](#)