

# THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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## NEW ENGLAND SUITE

### I

*I hear in my brain all New England echoing down  
and around me,  
And in the colony of my heart away. My land is a  
factory now,  
Or a suburb, a parking-lot, liquid in sun on the level  
tar.  
Below local histories, markers and chartered ground,  
beneath brick,  
Bright cemented disclaimers, lie crushed and still  
Indian-  
Haunted rock, lie the bones of hard people often un-  
comely and cold,  
Lie swatches of hair, and commodes, lie mirrors and  
lobster-pots, letters  
In palimpsest, arrowheads, fish-knives, and ropes  
now all mummied in tar;  
Good familial books and chipped jugs, penwipers,  
samplers and useful shells;  
Whalebones and beads, genealogy, sweetgrass and  
old uphill passions;  
Birchbark and dimity, cracked leather straps and  
shrunk iron, denials;  
And spyglasses empty of eye, the salted-green brass-  
bound recallers  
Of the masted-in-intricate-pride, of the widowing  
seas, and the land  
Sea defines: the tides of the mind leave this rack on  
memory's shore.*

## II

The regional bird is the gull, protected by law, protecting

And proctoring, fouling and scavenging all our most visited shores:

Able, unlovely, raucous, persistent, at home in the storm;

Friendless, eternal, yellow of eye and whitely aware;  
Undiscouraged if dun, a clown to the camera, famishers' food.

The southering bird on whose feather has fallen the rumor of snow,

The flier afflicted with instinct and warned by the touch and the go

Of a soft geometric—that sniff and that sift in the needling air—

He leaves. All the birds know by the cold, and believe in the sun,

Slant as he may.

(And you watch. When last did a bird of this world

Seize a child from your bloody town, mar a woman, accuse or unmake

Any man?)

To the birds who ensky many myths they would scorn—

Who high-bracket New England—New England is only a flat like a map

With the waters precise in the infinite inlets, a visible ground

Laid out for their feeding; is neither to nest on nor haply to fall.

For themselves, the seen birds, whether migrants or natives, have never

Been known to give names to the curious people, to count

All the tourists or label the ankles of strangers like  
     herons who stalk  
 The emptying estuaries, quiet, with glass to the  
     questing eye.

### III

Musselled, sea-lavendered shores throwing beaches,  
     low dikes  
 To put sand between salt of the wave and the salt of  
     the meadowing marshes  
 Where silt waves have grained into grasses of silver  
     and green, are unpeopled  
 Like the beaches that run under gull-foot, below ea-  
     gled cliffs and the headlands  
 Inspected by whales, and the uplands patrolled by  
     the bear overhill  
 And the horsy, high-shouldered moose with the ant-  
     lers of ossified kelp.  
 From the mountain to shore, through hills, rises,  
     valleys and rivers, odd ponds,  
 In their pockets, the bent stands of scrub and the  
     hungry foundations, all acres,  
 The regional beast is no proudfoot, deep in his chest,  
     nor a brightmane,  
 No flasher of eyes, nor bayonet-brandisher frightful  
     of man;  
 The regional beast is a trinity noxious to dogs, know-  
     ing men:  
 The muskrat, the skunk and the woodchuck, all drab  
     in defiance, all near.

### IV

The regional fish is the mackerel, or else the low pas-  
     toral cod

In the market; but over the eyelid's horizon goes  
     swimming away,  
 Like a barrel of anguish, the great whale trailing his  
     stintless blood  
 In a moonpath of red across the Pacific savannas, and  
     huge  
 Green valleys down, below the white sails and crisp  
     oars,  
 The sharp intentions, going under and down. Both  
     whaler and whale,  
 Pursuit and profit, loss and return of the voyagers,  
     now  
 Read as history's blow; and the strike and the flurry,  
     the sounding,  
 The flensing, the reek of the try-out recede to a  
     region  
 Of rowboats for rent and of dories agap and awash  
     with petunias,  
 Of seafood at roadside, clean restrooms and gas. The  
     regional fish  
 Is the clamcake announced in electrical script; the  
     seasonal fish  
 Is the sucker.

*And all New England echoes down and away.*

## V

Violet, daisy, sweet-william and black-eyed susan,  
     sea-rose,  
 Queen-anne's-lace, the goldenrod, sumac and orient  
     hydrangia  
 Unbelieved, but brought home by new-bearded son  
     with new judgment in eyes—  
 Like lilac, no bride was declared in the cargo; colum-  
     bine, laurel

And honeysuckle, trumpet-vine, buttercup—all these  
combine  
To make the regional flower, with fireweed and In-  
dian-pipe, paintbrush  
Of devils, the gentian, the jewelweed, milkweed, the  
poison-bright ivy:  
These, and more, are given to see, the good herbs are  
left to discover.  
The flowers were pressed between leaves of the books  
—the few books and good—  
And the books were impressed on the brains; on a  
continent brains were then sown.

## VI

Whole graveyards on hillsides are stone-fledged with  
beards, and upended  
To heaven and frozen of chin to the flint of the soil;  
whole hillsides  
Are graveyards unhallowed, perimeters nubile with  
birches like hopes  
Of young serious virgins, all clean and surrounded  
by sentinel cedars:  
Dark daggers at wrong, evergreen like original sin.  
Planted here  
In this undulant underground churchyard, are the  
hopes of New England,  
Unique in their angles and white in their morals,  
unique in their bite  
On the sky; these fears are redeemed by their force,  
which made and still makes  
But metaphor of winter weather. The wind frays the  
flags and shrivels  
The wreaths that sag onto urns eroded, under stiff  
wings

In the moving air over earth of such confined rectitude,  
Cold regard of recording stones, generations of marbled woe.

## VII

Our tree is ubiquitous pine—possibly spruce or the tamarack,  
Maple whose blood bespeaks sugar in veins—but the bark is of birch,  
And the leaf is the loyal hard brown old man's hand of the oak.  
Sweet groundpine or juniper, wild grape or bayberry, brambles—all run  
Like the nerves of this ground whose berries taste tart as an apothegm.  
But the tree that the colonists planted as badge of their towns was another—  
And this is their reason—: the reach and the slendering height of the straight,  
Academic, imperious elm, like the aim of New England in art,  
Lurks in the crook of the root gripping soil, in its thirst among rocks.

## VIII

The regional colors are wilder by contrast and subtler than Mexico.  
The urge of the autumn, the accent of frost, makes the primary chords:  
The scarlets and oranges, yellows and purples, the high exclamations  
In leaf, and the firmer, full statements in fruit.  
Brown earth and pale sand,

And impossible snow make the canvas. The sky and  
the sea do the rest:  
All the blue, gray and silver, all greens not alive that  
can change;  
All the changes among them, and sunsets in season,  
all weathering motions.  
The regional hues that are minor are man's: the  
glosses of lanterns  
And tar, the dulled ictus of rust and the glint of the  
hair-thin ring,  
Wedding-gold. The regional colors dream under neon,  
and wait.

## IX

The life of New England in centuries gone is a guess,  
or proverbial guff.  
Lust could wear homespun and wonder on calico, sun  
sweeten sweat  
On the skin, or skin get the alternate ache of dry  
salt from the sea;  
Love could walk barefoot and brown with the dust  
of the sun, or go booted,  
And berried in cheek and bright lip by the hollying  
frost. The life  
Of the regional youth was no glimpse between head-  
stones of wives early gone  
From the childbed and footstones of children still-  
born or but shown for a season  
Or two; the life of the youth of this country was not  
just a summer  
Following thaw, before blizzard, a sun between snows.  
The youth  
Of this region was everything strong, little easy: if  
hard, yet it shone.



—Cleaning and bleaching, mending and patching,  
 painting with paint,  
 Oil or varnish, with whitewash or tar; the quilting  
 and candling preserving  
 And saving, here making and there making do—but  
 they made!

*To mend*

Is a form of *to make*, and to paint is a shaping, an  
 outward approval;  
 Doing without is an aspect of using: the use of each  
 thing is to wear  
 It utterly out as loving old couples have done of their  
 bodies,  
 And yet live and apparently love; as thinkers have  
 whittled their brains  
 Into words, and still see things and laugh; as the  
 poets I know  
 From this region can go to the antarctic ice-cap, alone  
 with a pen,  
 And there make New England of nothing, or scrim-  
 shaw whole Indies of ice.

X

*These states are my mind, and my blood with their  
 history flows all down  
 And away, bleeding west in an empire and south in  
 a passion; these states  
 Are the map of my intricate heart, and no orderly  
 page and no print  
 Can reduce them to handbook. The mind flows away  
 to beginnings in water,  
 Past sand, over rocks and rock-pools, to the rising of  
 hills through the pines  
 And the pine-heavy air of all lands, and across the  
 whole cloud of the sky.*

*Yet my mind is this country of slower than tropical,  
longer, more passionate  
Growth, and this ocean contains my imaginings;  
mountains suggest  
My haphazard projects; astonishing snows are my  
silences, gales  
My level declaring of Autumn. In August untended  
wild roses  
That overwhelm silvering shingles of cedar amount  
to my tenderness.  
Quite like a monument, steepled and peeling of paint,  
worth preserving  
By the civic of mind, I am nothing alone without gift  
of this ground  
To grow in and give in the double-bed dark to my  
boys in the sacrament  
Love before driving the seed of my being, long warm  
with a wife  
And all green with a poem, under the quilt of this  
elderling earth.*

Charles Philbrick

## IN MEMORY

Purple shadows gather towards the night.  
A light no man can see glows inwardly.  
And I, a stranger in a rented attic  
Chamber, lie upon my shrouded bed,  
In the twilight of the week, remembering

How it was angels and heaven then. The sun  
Ran wet and golden through the curtains,  
Splashing a child, as all alone he sat  
Among the rushing motes and danced his dreams  
In the holy hush of noon, in the hot and liquid  
Silence of the Sabbath sun. Beside  
Him on the flowered plate, some silken fruit  
An old and roughened hand had polished, a slice  
Of doughy cake, raisin rich and veined  
With cinnamon, dispensed with care, and measured  
Sparingly into the eager hands  
Of the expectant grandchild. Later still,  
The steaming cup and icy chip of sugar,  
Melting, tongue-tipped, in the amber sip  
Of tea. But first from sainted pillows rose  
The breath of sacred sleep; lovely and low  
It rose and fell, scattering praise and whispering  
God's almighty word that it was good.  
Above him on the wall, in faded navy  
Tunic, Little Boy Blue slept on forever,  
One arm across his face, a knee drawn up,  
And horn forgotten in the olive meadow.  
While bright behind their dull and dirtied windows,  
A swarm of rainbow fish flashed through the water,  
Twinkled gold and red among the leaf-fringed  
Coils of grass, or lingered, quivering,  
Above the sunburnt sand and stretching snails.  
And on his port of glass a fierce and frenzied  
Fly started, raced his prop, and flew . . .  
As fled in unremitting time forever  
Gone, the holy hush, the burning god,  
The sleepers' hymn, and I, the child among  
The dancing motes, floating his dreams in the hot  
And honeyed river of the wine-blessed day.

Samuel A. Weiss

**THREE POEMS****Heron in Swamp**

Had I not caught him by a swerve of eye  
In movement as his natural element,  
Air plastered to his wings, thin falls of sun  
Cascading down his breast, legs locked in flight,  
I should have thought him reed, so pure he stands  
Frozen in silence; bird into vegetable  
Transforms hard fact to fluid miracle;  
So thinks himself a reed that reed becomes.  
If there's such sanctuary in belief  
I'll trust the verdict of the hoodwinked eye—  
Know, if I clap my hand,  
One reed will stay, though all the swamp fly off.

Frances Minturn Howard

**The True and Happy Fable of Beauty and the Beast**

Her sisters asked for gowns and gems  
To glitter on their ugliness,  
Like stunted trees so bright with birds  
Their true proportions none might guess.

But Beauty asked the hardest thing—  
She wanted one white rose, to be  
The starkly crystallized, thorned and pearled  
Symbol of her virginity.

Fine gowns and gems were quickly bought—

But Beauty's rose—its cost was high—  
Her father's life, unless she came  
To charm a Beast, or see him die.

So Beauty watched the castle doors  
Swing wide, without a touch of hand,  
As if an unseen lover stood  
Athirst, aflame, for her command.

Yet there was no one but her host,  
That gentle Beast, who nightly pled  
For Beauty's heart; she dined with him  
But still, reluctant, shook her head,

For lying in her satin sheets  
In dreams, alone, in her gold bed  
By a young prince with amorous eyes  
Beauty was nightly visited.

So Beauty and the Beast both pined  
For ideal unattainable;  
It is small wonder that she found  
Her splendors insupportable,

And begged the generous Beast for leave  
To visit home; her envious  
Sisters then kept her there by means  
Sisterly, subtle, devious,

Until in dreams she saw her Beast  
Reproach her, dying, from the ground  
With broken promise; then her heart  
Burst wide with knowledge like a wound,

And hastening to her Beast she kissed  
His lips, and saw him change to Prince;  
As beasts for other girls have changed  
Besides sweet Beauty, ever since.

**Frances Minturn Howard**

### The Sleeping Beauty

Was it because the prince delayed too long?  
The thicket lengthened, blocking off the view,  
And other girls lay beautiful in sleep  
With no hedge to get through.

Still she lay tranced, love tracing on her face  
Some subtle pattern of foreknown desire;  
Some ardent inkling, some receptive grace  
Deployed about her lips like the shadow of fire.

The white transparence of her temples rose  
Twin cliffs against the green's encroaching host,  
Like some abandoned city, half in time,  
Invested with the beauty of the lost.

Would no man buck the formidable fence  
Sequestering what lay, remote and pure,  
For the brave hand? The thorns would vanish then—  
But could a lad be sure?

At last the thicket itself began to hover  
In restless movement above her silken things—  
The heavy petals trembled around her head  
In small sweet sighs.

Until the bramble's lithe and living weight  
Lay on her utterly, from foot to head—  
The slow, sweet driving of the thorns possessed  
Her maidenhead.

Then she was rose, all rose; off she went wandering  
Through the blue evening air, green foot by foot, and  
gave  
Her tumble of flowers to every wayside fence  
For the commonest passing lad to take and have.

Frances Minturn Howard

## IN THE CENOZOIC SPAN OF SLEEP

graymalkin creeping  
    stalking sparrow  
    lift one paw  
and freeze  
    freeze there  
    stalking creeping  
graymalkin stop and tell me  
why  
    you copy panthers  
    cougars  
followed as you are  
    by unweaned kittens leaping  
loose your hynotizing eye  
    let the sparrow  
    fly away  
    graymalkin stop  
    and tell me  
why  
    my tendons tense me  
    as I stand and watch you  
    stalking  
did our genes  
    once link a creature  
do I stalk and creep myself  
    deeper somehow  
in the cenozoic span of sleep  
    graymalkin

Dean Chase

## A CHAPLAIN RETURNS TO THE ISLES

The ten-year wound persists in limp and scar.  
My leg, slew-footed in Pacific sand,  
shows stitched and graying tissue near the knee.

A shattered rifle rusts between wet rocks,  
abandoned for a decade to the swill  
of hurricanes and spreading verdigris . . .  
What hands once gripped and aimed it at the caves—  
the rifler's eye crow-footed at the sight—  
while corsairs dove into the rising flak  
and beached battalions slithered into holes?

The ocean, geysered by the lighting shells,  
clogged slowly with the bodies left adrift  
or bobbing in the ruck of piers, debris  
and all the jetsam of direct assault  
by waves of soldiers on defended shores.

One boy I calmed by lying on his legs  
until his panic from the mortars passed.  
Later on the beach I cut his jangled tags . . .  
His squirming legs still stir me in the night,  
and fever-wild I dream him to the ground  
and shield him always from the enflade . . .

This afternoon I found the ten-year cross  
and stencilled name I once saw punched in discs  
of tin and threaded on the plastic cord  
I cut from what lay underneath a piece  
of tenting on a pier where corpsmen broke  
the sulfa packs with frantic hands and swore.

Only the shattered rifle wedged in rock  
tokens the night that kept me supplicant  
and crouched behind the prone or squatting men—  
the wounded, calling from a somewhere trench—



the shot that sprawled me backward in the sand.

Balding, I loiter now where waves subside  
and spill into the level, green lagoon.

Beyond the reef, Chamorrans dive for crabs  
or laugh in pairs and dredge the shore for clams.  
I watch them dump and rinse the weedy nets,  
pointing at the catch like children pleased in play . . .

My children, fill me with your children's joy  
and proffer me your hands as I give mine.  
You do not know the midnights I have seen  
this island burning and these tides convulsed.  
I am one who smokes and walks to stay awake.  
My children, hold me in your children's joy.  
I bring you medals, beads and holy cards.  
My children—friends—why run away from me?

**Samuel Hazo**

### from ORIGIN OF A DESIGN

IX O ghost all made of dazzle,  
feel my flesh please, its asperities,  
then start your healing grace.  
Bless the hung seed in the bread,  
breathe your weird sparkle-shine  
on the wine, try your whole game  
of blessing-blame, fill my tomb  
with a life that is cleanstained,  
shrive, melting across skies,  
your once glorious game,  
pearl patina the city. All right.  
But first please touch my flesh.

**Neil Weiss**

## THE TRANSFIXION

The nun lay in the chancel, robed in white.  
She had died young, her face yet dazzling in  
Its coif. Between her breasts Christ lies transfixed  
In red and white. The two young girls outside  
The chapel whisper in the dark "No one  
Has seen us come. Get me the cross, and I  
Will have the Mother Superior change my room."  
"Is there nothing you'll let me do instead?  
I'm afraid the Lord will punish me with hate.  
She's still His bride, before His altar dead."  
"Don't be a fool! You know God won't destroy  
You here or now. If it's the sin you fear,  
Think of the sin gone by and the sin to come.  
What is theft to that? What's theft to all  
The sins that you'll commit and yet repent  
Before you die? Besides, Theresa's dead—  
Sister Theresa is dead. It's not the same."

The words between them stopped. The taller girl  
Went through the chapel door but kept her gaze  
Upon the ground. She hung well back in what  
Brief shadows the Candlemas tapers and vigil lights  
Allowed and reached the corpse with eyes averted  
Still, but stumbled as her foot came down  
Upon the corner of the bier. Her hand,  
Thrown forth to keep her from a fall, was rough  
Upon the cross. The breast she touched was soft  
Which she had thought would be hard as stone:  
Her eyes fled to the face she knew alive  
But dreaded to know dead. Christ how serene!  
A burning shaft struck fiercely to her heart  
From high above the altar, where she turned.  
Those eyes were lidded too; the side was pierced,  
And blood ran from the wound, the nails, the thorns.

Her fingers closed about the cross—withdrew  
From the dead. The fragile golden linkage snapped.  
Possessed, the girl ran up the center aisle  
And flung the cross to the other at the door,  
Then moved unknowing to her room and bed.

In the night she spent her dream and lived an old  
One through. Upon a sudden thought she moaned  
And writhed, arose, and went to the other's room:  
"Give it back to me, give it back. I have to put  
It on her breast again. I didn't think  
Of her." The other came awake, first stared,  
Then smiled denial. "Give it to me. She needs  
Her cross. It will help her into Heaven. She's damned  
Without the cross. She used to speak of Hell:  
Burning in other torment, other fire.  
The cross will save her. Give it back to me."  
The other lay back, stretched out her legs, and closed  
Her eyes. Her thin white gown was like a veil.  
The tall girl cried aloud and swayed and fell.

**Harry Morris**

**GREEK ALMOND**

Leaning against the winter  
The almond tree flares  
Suddenly white, bright  
In the February weather,  
A blur in the blear garden  
Where barren trees  
Twist in silent agonies  
And vines  
Like veins of monsters  
Splay against the walls.

Slender, slanting across the wind  
The almond tree flares  
Like an eager girl  
In a swirl of blossoms  
White and faintly red,  
Clouds banked behind her head,  
The sea in a gray hush—  
And Winter appalled,  
Enthralled to find at his side  
A brief, erratic bride.

**Sy Kahn**



to right unwinding  
fro, fro and to

Myristica  
and the vine-veined air  
    enlightened by a flute  
cockateel-flash  
    over fern  
ash of rose-pearl  
    aralia,  
    dulcamara . . .

And the chain coiled  
unmassed  
coiled on the tree  
the dark gold choiring  
choiring

When he wound to the right,  
collection of arms  
menaced the provinces;  
unwound, new penances passed,  
    but light,  
    light;  
to left, rapid and regal music,  
    levies . . .

and two white monkeys  
all suggestion  
in the guarded wood.

Beyond, beyond,  
all snow and fields of snow.

**John Berry**

## Iliados

## I

“There was this Helen, and —”  
 to herward we set course in the wooden ships.  
 Deep-soiled countries, Lake and Mere terrain,  
 sending forth young men to do battle  
 For the daughter-in-law of God. Ships  
 drawn like a bow up over the breakers,  
 Bulwark of the shore. Siege to the fortress  
 on the edge of the sea where the foreign duke  
 Lay with her, the land drawn about him,  
 watchmen on all the straits. Bronze shining  
 On the plain, voices of young men far from  
 their native land, singing a rapid song.

## II

Nightly centaurs came down for a fight.  
 Omens there of coming and going, by day.  
 The big eyes of the convalescent moon  
 peer from the covers at the nematode,  
 Fungus, nelumbo, and the wild shining  
 sorcerer migrained in the world's mist.  
 Under the slain, under the crude, under  
 the subtle dead, lies ritual earth.  
 Men standing like young elms, gigantic  
 and violent, questioning dawn, gaze inland  
 Over the familiar battle-roads.  
 These wrinkles are from waiting, not from war . . .  
 Awaiting the friend who comes bearing resolve,  
 that lance, for the long journey of a friendship,  
 The world is silent as if it were alone.  
 In the night all things delegate  
 To the cry of a woman their cries.  
 He comes. The sun delivers us from thought.

## III

Narrowtown laid waste, her capital goods  
weighing the gunnels of a whole Realm,

Her specie and jewels, scrolls and images,  
and best, her persons with their wills torn out . . .  
. . . caught the west wind at ebb, and sailed.

Ship lies like a trout  
in the quivering sea;  
passages of mass  
under-upon this  
long thing, this  
sliver, this  
dear ship

Constant fish!  
She swims, she swims!  
Cling to the finnies of your wriggling  
ship!

This is not water, this is destiny.

Sundown, and: colloquy between  
the Sun and Things.

If thou hast a mind, stay below,  
at such an hour, ere night grab thy bow.

**John Berry**

## Two Songs

## I

The first rain  
from the sky declines;  
all the clustered blenched nuns  
of the blackness  
make declaration  
of dependence;



waterhoard in sedition  
among the branches.

When the wind has crazed  
our hair  
thoughts devour the limbs  
in the hour  
of the second rain.

Men have been known  
to die of silence  
between two  
songs.

## II

The clouds divide  
metamorphose  
banks of eyes  
diaphanous  
they mark well  
the unreturnable  
Way.

Silence of  
the uninhabited world  
when the ear  
is no longer virginal!

Sun embedded in  
the naked Now,  
navel of our system, is  
inconceivably  
ignorant.

Hail, pellets of sunlight  
in the painted air!

*(It is well to know where  
the navel is located.)*

John Berry

**Concerning the Finch**

Praise be to him  
    who sends as messengers  
surprising to the branch  
    such tophet raised  
        such apron speckled  
and the wings yellow  
    and there was  
red and white  
    peaceable war-paint  
around the grey plumage.

And when he saw  
that I had understood  
he went  
back.

**John Berry**

**Landscape with Figures**

Two herons  
white  
in a blue field.  
One stalks about,  
one sits  
on the ground.

My mother  
believes that  
the one who  
is still  
has an internal  
wound.

**John Berry**

## Journey to the Way to Kapilavastu

### I

When a prince mistrusts his gift,  
what is there left?

A journey  
through the modalities of  
the trance—  
reason, passion and the faculties—  
to the Khan—  
not a fond presumption of palaces,  
but as it were,  
the referent of thrones.

Behind you is the trip  
you may not take again  
(for roads are moved  
when you have passed)  
to kiss the Stranger  
you would not accost.  
You have no time to know  
or not to know these things.  
Pass on!

### II

Beyond the far district  
are the mountains of ice,  
Shires of the clouded leopard, the musk deer  
and the moose deer . . . Perilous descent . . .

(Yet they came, and the scrolls undatable.)  
There is a monster of wisdom in the ice,  
But you are too young, and in haste

. . . by night westward through the bleak passes.  
Snow land there, bitter and bright air,  
Thinning and thinning ("Crazy! 'S' out of 's head—  
should of gone south — south!")

Towering domes of ice and steeples of ice  
in a tangle of sky-storms. ("Heart's —")

### III

Lumpy aether tumbled about us, formings  
of greynesses, earth but assumed below,  
And bones of hackled eons in the ice.  
Through the stiff air, over the buckled ground,  
Up icily came we then to Nalanda . . .

While we sought breath among these warring  
shapes,  
our souls visible at every breath,  
The Golden Eye scorned over us, moved down . . .

Nymphaea nelumbo on the black water,  
asleep—  
Thou shalt walk on lotos pads,  
over this pool,  
Like the bronze-winged jacana.

Lata,  
sinuata . . .  
yielding of green jungle  
that closeth after  
the bodies of men.

Palustris,

asper . . .

Thus far we came,  
relics.  
The others we honored.  
And  
there are rumors  
that the Khan  
is dissatisfied  
with all of us.

John Berry

## Persai

## I

We fought well;  
fear made resolute by desecrations  
and the impure pomp of the stranger.

On the rocks, with little speech,  
we combed our glittering hair,  
gold or xanthous, gravely;

seated there with our bodies, bode attack,  
loitered for omens. Battle begun,  
glory mounted the day;

and the vine of the soul mounting also  
over the barrows of the morningland.  
We garlanded the ground, we two.

## II

The sky shimmers with languor of silver bells  
laid waste. Troublesome night grows near.

What shall be the deed of the dream-speaker  
for the people at such an hour?—

Man of accomplishment  
easily crazed by sights;  
bird-winged neighbor of the gods;  
flying at the clash of bonds:

Pardon our guilty grins.  
Make lasting songs for us  
but remain with the very old,  
the very young, and the virgins,  
behind the walls;  
for war disfurnishes the imagination.

Having heard, go, and let our deaths  
attractively appear in the Event.

**III**

Song, woven in the web of gratitude,  
 in the web of remonstrance, in the web  
 Of a thousand reconciliations  
 in war! Sword of the new iron  
 Of Victory like the sickle of the moon  
 at morning when She walks on the shore.

And the nobility of the men surpassing  
 the wing-tips of the white sea-faring gulls.  
 O stone more clear than the blond eye of dawn!  
 And the Prince's thought, holding court  
 In the light-time, enters the commerce of  
 soul's perilous terrain, night's bluntest edge.

Win or lose, the Victory is yours,  
 Prince: you are the opening of doors!

**John Berry**

**Prisoner**

August,  
 a fateful month  
 in the calendar  
 of war,  
 carries on its tunic  
 the death  
 of proud ships.

Over the grave arbors  
 where I labored,  
 body stained black  
 from the juice of the sun,  
 I saw riding

the sun-glittering warcraft,  
gold-amorous wing  
swiftling amid clouds,  
arching below  
the lazulite.

Gods,  
may they find service;  
may the dignity  
of their limbs  
be found sweet  
in posterity.

I see notable visions  
for the world  
knots round me here.

Dancing, force, elections.  
A flare-eyed man  
carrying a babe, burning.

Foreign waves  
wash the lineaments  
of the beloved;  
cheeks color of love  
recalled  
in tranquillity,  
by tropical waves  
washed away.

Autochtones  
wear the white teeth  
of exiles.

In the mist I hear  
the voices of children  
far from their land  
(*telothi patres*)  
singing a rapid song.

**Soliloquy of the Prince**

Now I am alive.  
In ease and openness I take my now.

I know my wile.  
Though I preside here like a hill,  
I am not solid.

Am an uncobbled play of atoms  
romancing at their lasts and firsts.  
Pell-mell through existential time  
I summer as steadily in the otherwhere  
as a voyage of ducks.

To ascend, to condescend,  
descend to be myself,  
I'll winter in the everywhere.  
My moved unmover,  
I will not move.  
My obligations—  
brain, heart and the bodymaster—  
I'll stake outside.  
Moving like waiting wings they stir this stillness,  
urgent to bear it nowhere and everywhere.  
They have but elsewhere.

Now I am free to be old and innocent,  
I advise you to be on your guard.

**John Berry**

**His Death Rumored**

In a forest of fluted trees  
the margraves daughter  
strokes the antennae of



an antelope,  
the while feeding him lupines.

A land journey, a path to  
the Water's edge  
and sleep marine, the waking  
upon depths conceiveless!  
The mollusk mind gapes open  
to Cosmos.

Swarm in, astrologies!

"Come Clubfoot out of your  
detayning night.

Wakeful one, what say you  
of my plight?"

"You will remember when you hear . . .

I saw the golden head of Solavar  
and it shone in a forest of the sea  
and the blue eyes of the god  
were turned in white sleep  
O fair form turn again . . ."

Daughters of the king under panoplies  
float down the rivers to new lands  
mentioned in the treaties, and their names  
therein also coupled with young monarchs.

But the chagrin in the heart of the swallow  
glitters in rays over the promontories  
like the lines of a million pure triangles.

The light continues with one tone,  
which is that of love.

John Berry

**THE RELUCTANT PHOENIX**

Reluctant phoenix, timid bird,  
peeked between the flames and longed to pull  
a Garbo act: no meddlers here; tapped  
talon angrily as he recalled  
how when a mere young grub he had been  
fool enough to fall beneath the glass  
of visiting archaeologist  
who couldn't keep his mouth shut. "Kra, kra,"  
he sadly clucked, "look what that led to."

The people bought tickets for the miracle  
and three brass bands rehearsed the national  
anthem  
while the souvenir venders set up their stands.

Reluctant phoenix, decent bird,  
longed to duck beneath the twigs, slip back  
into the spice-bough egg, and pillow  
his head in ashes. He squawked complaints:  
bad enough to do this conjuring trick  
in private; in public it's bad taste—  
flapping widdershins like a ruddy  
flaming nincompoop—it's not good form.  
Why must Leap Year always come so soon?

As people stood waiting for the miracle,  
the President arrived dressed in asbestos,  
climbed a sand dune, and began to make a  
speech.

Reluctant phoenix, dutiful bird,  
decided to get it over with  
as soon as possible, preened feathers  
(shaking off the soot for benefit  
of photographers), checked air pressure,  
estimated altitude, and flapped

his wings in a trial run (they ached  
and were out of joint from long disuse),  
then ascended singing to the trees.

The people who had come for the miracle  
licked ice cream cones and listened to the  
speeches  
and were so intent upon the President  
that few noticed the curious jumping rooster  
except a conscientious cop who warned, "Hey!  
Pipe down. Can't you see there's a miracle  
going on?"

**Jack Anderson**

## AN OFFENDING CROW

Here in this rag-picker's springtime of alleys,  
Sodden beneath the ashes and snow,  
Far from the temperate green valleys,  
Rots an offending crow.

High in the summer he flapped and cawed  
Over the city, ragged and wild,  
Proud his black eye as he glanced abroad,  
Raucous and undefiled.

What lofty endeavor found him God?  
What sweet death in that high field  
Dropped him among us, profoundly flawed,  
His alien feathers furled?

Now as I shuffle along the alleys  
I scuff him up in the thawing snow,  
In his dead eye the sight of green valleys  
Gone, the offending crow.

**Samuel Moon**

## ROBERT MEREDITH

### REBIRTH

My brother and a friend  
coming to the bend  
in the road

that dropped  
our house from view, stopped,  
saying,

“You stay here,”  
but I followed without fear  
at a safe interval

a hundred yards behind  
spring tape in mind  
to wind up

out of town, where they had been told  
not to leave a five-year-old  
alone.

The landscape cleared—  
houses disappeared  
behind a hill

where water tower and steeple  
stood for town and people  
no longer seen

(and as they passed the crest  
I had quietly drawn abreast  
of them.)

The outlook opened wide—  
scattered farms in the countryside  
blended in.

Around the shrinking lake  
summer sun had baked  
mosaics in the mud,

drew back its liquid cover,  
the lake-bed to discover  
with its secrets

*cracks in the earth's crust  
separating last from first  
in design of time*

*drying life solution  
sending evolution  
on its landlocked way.*

Drawn to the emergent shore  
we came as to explore  
our point of origin,

following winding trails,  
found circling snails  
coiled at the end:

reversing leaves

that unrolling fling  
overhead a tent in spring  
and a brown and amber mussel  
with elliptical  
concentric rings

turned on end  
grow infinitely thin:  
lines blur:

surprised! too quickly closed,  
tender flesh left exposed  
in the narrow slit.

We came to a hole, dark and deep,  
obscure as sleep  
and half-remembered dreams.

The sun, aslant, could not reach  
the slimy depths to teach  
what lay at bottom.

Noon would have let us see  
when shadows shorten to infinity  
but curiosity cries *now*.

The other two, like scholars trained  
in medieval logic, strained  
to know by deduction.

"It must be a frog," my brother said.  
"If it is, it's dead,"  
his friend replied.

"Maybe it's a trick."  
"Let's poke it with a stick."  
But I,

a born empiricist  
thrust in my fist

and felt around

where I could not see.

“It feels like iron to me,”

I said,

running my finger round a snapping turtle’s jaw  
raised in anticipation: then natural law  
was invoked.

*The world came sharply in to focus*

*O dividing day that woke us*

I saw myself there

joined to a fellow creature,

in nature

and aware.

Eyes wide with wonder,

I looked about for thunder

to shatter my illusion:

the sky was clear,

reflecting back my fear

in its glassy oval.

My comrades stood perplexed,

then tore me out of context:

I was born again.

My finger sprinkling blood,

I blessed the earth I trod

running home.

Past or future, or between,

I’m at the center of that scene.

**Robert Meredith**

**LIESEL IN HER GARDEN**

It was an hour between seasons  
When the equiponderant sun fell flush  
With the red brick wall, casting no shadow,  
And blue-gold bumbleflies were bourdons  
To silence: from the shove of her spade  
The tough earth broke in a shift of crumbs  
And at her knees was an aisle of beans  
Flowering. "Oh," she said, "Oh  
How can I tell?" No, she said nothing:  
It was an hour between seasons  
And words, there was only sprawled earth,  
A canticle of beans, and the opening silence,  
And the breath of her lungs that flew in silence,  
Spiring like Sandro's native angels  
To fade into a burnished sky.

**Harry Mathews**