

# THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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## **THESEUS**

What would the child have known of father-king?  
Only his mother, left long years ago,  
To nurse him and her own remembering,  
And strangest patrimony in a stone  
Too great to move. What could the boy have known  
But exultation when his hard arms heaved  
The massive stone at last, and he beheld  
His father's sword pointing the way to Athens?

Some madness raged in him that he must leave  
Dead murderers like milestones on the way.  
Ambitious boy! to slay Periphetes,  
Rip Sinis all asunder and move on,  
Athens-bound, to send the wicked Sciron  
Screaming from a cliff into the sea,  
To wrestle Cercyon into his grave  
And lay Procrustes dead in his own bed.

More than mere ambition led him on  
Through dread amazement to the Minotaur  
And triumph over that most potent male.  
Far older fury than the youth could know  
Ignored the promised token of a sail  
And hurled the king of Athens to the sea.

**Robert Lowenherz**

## ON GOING

## Twenty-one Short Poems

1. In sum  
    all such  
words come  
    to not so  
much  
    as go.
2. Home, white  
    bird, to the Holy  
Ghost's white  
    whiskers.
3. O take a soft  
    comb and comb  
folklore from  
    the baby's hair.
4. Do you go  
    yellow when  
the moon  
    is full?
5. If Cousin Mary Martha's got  
    no more sense than to marry a sot  
she *ought* to have lumbago.
6. The green flame answers  
    or the blue one  
    or the yellow.
7. Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,  
    they beat me with a belt  
every living night.



look  
away,  
Dixieland.

14. Least still  
things no  
one looks  
at look  
at him.

15. Piano walks  
on three  
legs. Shall we  
waltz?

16. Of five like birds  
flying over,  
which one spoke?

17. Excuse  
me, spider whose  
web I just tore  
through.  
Furthermore,  
God curse you.

18. How go the  
bittersweet  
tears?  
Silverquick.

19. Bear  
burning smoke  
of sulphur  
to be brimstar  
born.

20. Chicago is  
hog enough:  
go home.

21. All  
things grow  
small  
lest these  
least poems  
go.

William Harmon

## STONE MOUNTAIN

" . . . a massive dome of bald granite, said to be the largest in the world, in DeKalb Co., Georgia, about 16 miles E. of Atlanta. It rises about 700 feet above the comparatively level surrounding country, and its visible bulk has been estimated as over 7,000,000,000 cubic feet. In 1920, commissioned by the State, Gutzon Borglum (q.v.) started a heroic carving in bas-relief on the north face of the rock as a memorial to the Confederacy. In 1925 he was replaced by the sculptor Augustus Lukeman." *The New Funk & Wagnalls Encyclopedia*.

Gray obstinacy, property of geologic age,  
Beacon abandoned in the crunch of ice  
And snow and frozen desolation, void of life,  
Unconscious of bone and blood, the human tone;  
First Ararat, perhaps, had there been soil or growth  
Whereon to hang breath, the airy nothing  
Intermitting between mankind and you.  
Deadness absolute, neutrality of nature,  
You neither run, nor fall, nor shine, nor change;  
Durance is your sole intent, survival of the basic.  
You fought with immobility that other gray  
Of which they tried to make you symbol.

Borglum wept frustration when you could not be  
made  
To cuddle Lee, Davis, Jackson,  
Though Rushmore joyed in Washington, Jefferson,  
and Lincoln.  
Lukeman brought dynamite to scar your side,  
But failed to be physician to provincial ills.  
Fragmented Lee achieves a bare and partial look,  
A half-man astride a steed that has no eyes and rides  
nowhere;  
He would have cleft a nation, nave to chaps,  
And no white beard or snowy head could hide so  
green a wound.  
The lichens bind his lips, and Jeff and Jack  
Cannot break clear of U. D. C. encrusted granite.  
Perhaps Lukeman knew; he came down from his  
scaffold  
And seemed to live. Though the timbers rotted,  
Grandsons sat in camelia comfort and stuffed their  
sons  
With cotton valor in a coca-cola world.  
On occasion youth has mounted Lukeman's relic  
stairs  
To be awakened by the feather snap of weathered  
wood  
And screams self-made upon jagged scraps below,  
Embryonic epitaph before a hall of memory never  
made.  
But men too have an immobility and stubborn sides;  
So they will try again to elevate a hundred years of  
loss,  
To shroud in star-crossed bars narcissic admiration,  
While their bleached-field-hand voices unctuate  
That whiteness is all, in the glacial wastes of geologic  
certitude.

John C. Stephens

**CHRISTMAS NIGHT TRAIN**

I pack my child up and take her hurtling  
On a train across the cold and windy continent,  
Bearing that little life like a fragile dish  
To let the mother of her mother say some words  
To as much as she will ever know of eternity.

We go flying through snow drifts in cold moonlight,  
Bearing the child to her mother's mother,  
And I sit in the dark with other dark fathers and  
    mothers  
Going to visit other fathers and mothers.

All night as the train rattles and veers  
I watch in the darkness the movements of travellers,  
Outlines against steamed windows and dim lights:  
One woman carries five children to her mother  
(Five times as much eternity to hope for),  
And five times this night she bears hugging boys  
The length of the brawling coach to the rest room.  
Between times she answers their little night cries  
And goes to the rest room herself (no little peace)  
While all the other shapes stir and rub their eyes.

I awake to the morning light vaguely  
Through the dim and dripping windows.  
I awake thinking about eternity  
While my eyes glide along the telephone wires  
Drifting like a bird dropping to rest,  
Now dropping below them with a baffling train drop.

So Elysium is here, or a little after,  
And I must bear a bluff eternity on a long train ride,  
With children bear Elysium home to parents.

**Robert Lewis Weeks**



**FISHING, FATHER ALWAYS SAID  
DON'T SHOUT**

Fishing, Father always said Don't shout,  
Don't talk, it scares the fish away. The woman  
Idling a bamboo pole over the pier  
Eyed me crossly from underneath her bonnet,  
Too boarded up inside her private protests  
To whisper SSH, however viciously.

But we were gliding from her shaded frown  
To quiet, liquid nowheres, rocking gently  
In our thin cradle, parting the very swell  
Of breathing Death, into whose darkening  
Depths I peered, through my reflection, to  
Another parting: half-secret flash, three,  
Four, far down; then darkness, and no flash.

No word from Father, who had laid the oar,  
Casting his thought across the water, then reeling  
It in—a whizzing sound; but still I peered  
Over the boat and down into the silence,  
Knowing it was fish who fled; and heard  
Echoing in the glassy hollows of my mind:  
O dear and friendly fish! flee! flee!

For in reality they are my brothers;  
Here, where afternoons are blue and cold  
As milk, where the turning of a fin  
May well deliver one from danger, or one  
May hide among the pink anemones.

Amorphous place of green and even lights:  
Hope to see no more than fancy hooks  
Near any black spot in our silvered ceiling.  
Hope not to see a net; hope that no man

Falls swallowed, breathing bubbles horrible  
And bright, upon our clean and easy floor:  
For all these bridges built of sand are our paradise;  
We have everything to lose, and more.

Robert Grant Burns

### THE AGED WINO'S COUNSEL TO A YOUNG MAN ON THE BRINK OF MARRIAGE

A two-quart virgin in my lap,  
with hands that shook I peeled her cap  
and filched a kiss. It warmed me so,  
I raised my right hand, swore *I do*—  
we welded fleshies, I and she,  
in mutual indignity.

Now when I hear of wives that freeze,  
bitter of lip, with icebound knees,  
who play high-card for social bets  
and lose, and feed you carp croquettes,  
who nap all day, who yak all night  
what Ruth told Min—now which was right?—  
who count with glee your falling hairs  
but brood a week on one of theirs,  
who'll see your Parker House poke out  
before they take a stitch, who pout  
at change of moon, as I hear tell,  
I say, son, wed you half as well.

X. J. Kennedy

**D.A.R.ling**

The Daughters (sic)  
 of the American Revolution  
 ('76 was ago nine score and four  
 and all appearances notwithstanding  
 you know they couldn't *really* be)  
 But yank a doodle dandy!  
 the ladies still preserved preserve  
 (it says right here in my sources)  
 the memory of those bright souls  
 who thumbed their gorge at Uncle George  
 and clobbered all the *status quo*.  
 So let us ever thankful be  
 for service duly rendered.  
 Old Thomas Paine of common sense  
 to comprehend the crisis  
 would, one supposes, be forgot  
 long since, had these dear ladies not  
 kept his rebellious name a torch.  
 And that staunch leader of the rabble  
 (a plague on your pickled red herrings!)  
 Dark Crispus. Where would be his fame now, think  
     you,  
 had not the flame of his memory  
 been tended so selflessly by these?  
 (Name us your own rogue's gallery.)  
 Go to! I say they are not sweet mummies,  
 Nor barnacles on ship of state.  
 Salute these *filia!*  
 I deny categorically that they are necro.  
 A good revolutionist these days is hard to find.

**Ray Mizer**

**THE QUARRY****(Pygmalion)**

This is the place, I think. Here, let me take  
Your hand. Sharp white fragments of stone awake  
At our approach, and I would not have one  
Bit of you bruised before the task is done  
And morning smoothes the edges of these trees.  
Come, do not be afraid of dark. You please  
Me still. You think I cannot see your face.  
But I have learned the line-work of your frown,  
Intricacy of every terror-trace,  
Gouge of the stricken lip that cannot line  
Fear with a scream. Shall I forget? Shall I?  
Why do you weep! Tears did not sway the stone  
Pillars whereat you lately sought advice . . .  
Here is the place we'll bare down to the bone  
Endurable days and nights you've prattled of.  
Are you surprised? Here is the mound where love  
Flowed in the light, where marble turned to dust.  
I never made the thing I could not trust.

Your fingers sculpt my palm. You can recall,  
I think, the morning you awoke to tall  
Trees blocking out the sun? I watched you rise  
Slowly from where you'd slept. I knew surprise  
Was not what one might wish, who had travelled  
How far through stony dark to find this gravel

Of a sculptor's bed! I sighed and sighed.  
Could I have known you'd skitter mortified  
From slightest praise? Hours you hid (so like  
A work of art!) until that bric-a-brac  
Of abstract stones, in front of which I crouched,  
Drew from your face a smile, and you approached.

I hear you laugh. I could not understand  
Your laughter ever. It slips as through the hand  
Of an old witch, cupped before her mouth,  
Who watched a hopeful youth  
Bear off her gift of foul advice beyond  
His fellow-creatures . . . I marvel at how fond  
You strike me still.

I hear you weep. Retract  
Nothing. I shan't. Why flaw the artifact  
Of this return? Rise, girl, onto this mound  
Into the shaping light where you are crowned  
With shame; revel in doubt at what this blanched  
Heart asks of you. Pose! Make my hands unclenched  
Your flesh made hard! Listen! from this device  
They'll wrest you then . . . as they would a sacrifice.

**David Galler**

**CURRENT REASONS FOR YOUR  
CHRISTMAS PUDDING**

Because there was no room in the inn, naturalists  
Have come up with the notion that He was kind to  
animals,  
Having been born among them in a kind of catalysis  
Even though they don't explain why He ate more  
than vegetables.

Because there was no room in the inn, politicians  
Have suggested that He made so many poor  
Loving them so much more that we should renounce  
conditions  
Of sovereignty and freedom except for the fewer  
and fewer.

Because there was no room in the inn, advertisers  
Advise us to wire ahead for a reservation  
Even if we have reservations about advisers  
Who know what's good for us and our nation.  
But thinking about it at this Christmas season,  
I feel that there's really an existential reason.

**Albert Howard Carter**

**PARODOS: passio apum**

In the height of the honeyflow,  
the golden chitined virgin springs  
in her perfect sky and rises,  
over the summer cyclamen and the white  
orchards, scribing her spirals  
to the hero-shining sun. She climbs,  
she throbs and blurs her wings,  
she spurns the mating cage, the greenhouse,  
the most careful  
plans of scientific men.

Rising glittering  
in the light, she draws the drones  
in a cloud of singing gold,

war-crested with all  
their eyes and following her fragrant voice  
with thirty thousand wakened  
senses. She rises still, she leaps,  
exultant on her wings, beyond,  
and higher, till the overreaching drones  
collapse exhausted and stagger  
homeward dizzy and winglame.

One yet follows  
on and rising after,  
climbing still  
unwearied to the apex of the summer's  
noon where she, the quean,

his golden goal, waits  
suspended from the sun. On blazing wings  
he rides against her breast  
and grasps her, as she clasps him now,  
with hairy arms and legs.  
Embracing face to face they spring

straight upward through the cymbal-  
ringing air on the doubled wings  
of bodies joined  
in the holy rhythm of doom.  
Brow to glistening  
brow and unarmed mouth  
to mouth they rise one

winged creature in their mortal  
mating. Too soon the strained  
limbs lose their flying  
hold and both spent bodies  
drop together down the vibrant  
hush of noon. As he tries to turn  
away from her, the achieving drone  
helplessly tears his flesh apart,  
gutting his body  
to free himself. He falls, not flies,  
to earth, to quiver  
shattered in the burning field  
where his brothers sleep and hum.

And she, crowned now,  
rides the accomplished day home  
to the hive, bearing in triumph  
the surrendered oriflamme of all his life  
streaming in her flesh. Now I,  
blind in the gardens where the dedicated thron  
stores its sweet gold  
life and hangs immaculate cities  
from heaven, must close  
my eyes and lips: for tears,  
for praise; caught  
in analogies too deep,  
too precious for craft.

Suzanne Gross



**THE FIG IN WINTER**

My train comes in on the lower level  
But I have always lived on the aching level.  
The other morning a neighbor joined me on the way  
to the station—  
The station is only the H-T from G.C.—  
And asked me how the children were.  
Fine, I said, fine,  
And they are fine.  
Suzanne, seven, does fine work in second grade,  
Larry, four, does fine finger painting  
And Pete, nine months, has a fine formula and does  
mighty fine duty.  
My wife is fine, too, but more of her or less of her  
later.  
And in a manner or several manners of speaking I  
am fine.  
I am secretary and general counsel or general counsel  
and secretary,  
Depending on which flipper I put forward,  
Of a large company which can buy and sell many  
other companies  
And frequently does. At a directors' meeting the  
other day  
The vice-president in charge of operations—  
The vice-president in charge of publicity calls him  
our medical man—  
Brought up a knotty problem.  
The president, with his keen eyes keener still,  
Spoke at length in favor of affirmative action.  
Asked, I said his analysis was keen  
But whatever we did now would be misunderstood in  
the field

And even a vigorous educational campaign would not  
be enough.

Around the table all the directors agreed with me.

Later I wrote up the minutes.

When I think of all the unwritten minutes of small  
corporations

I feel sad.

My wife is a television actress or a well known writer  
Or an account executive with a good but small  
agency.

She is all wool and an inch wide.

Across our lawn at break of dawn

Run Petey, Mikey, Johnny, Hal,

Suzy, Nancy, Betty, Sal,

Stevey, Harry, Danny, Dick,

Patty, Sara, Linda, Vic.

There is always one missing.

The neighbor who brings me home,

Not the neighbor who walks to the station with me,

Lives at the end of our block near the stop-sign

With his wife, a married daughter, the son-in-law,

Three grandchildren and an unmarried son of

thirty-five:

One of the twisted and tormented.

Sometimes I think he sees me plain.

The Bankers Trust serves very good chicken salad,

The Morgan-G. has very good meat,

I had a very nice dessert at the Industrial Bank of  
Commerce,

But by and large I have eaten better at the Chase  
Manhattan

Than at any bank in town.

The bare wonder is not that he does his work so well

But that he does his work at all.

Where is doctor, where is thumbkin?  
And when Suzy was that age and we would say  
"tomorrow night"  
She would stamp her foot and say "No, today  
night."

In the last analysis it will probably appear  
That Procrustes was the wiser.

I like to see our guests come and go.  
Some day I am going to speak to one of them.

Our lawn is wide and spacious,  
Our trees grow straight and tall,  
The air is clean and sweet.

Nothing weighs more than a commutation ticket.

**Henry Stone**

### **THE COCKERELS**

Outside my door  
six cockerels roar  
to be let in.

Their constant din  
retards my mind  
to hide behind

white drapes and peek  
at each bright beak  
pecking at grass

and broken glass;  
to watch their combs'  
red flopping domes

and taloned feet  
barbed for defeat—  
ing roosters and hens.

If I went out  
and picked one up  
he would be warm,

his feathers slick;  
but I will not.  
The young cocks step

in a brown swarm,  
and now I pick  
three apples up,

raise the window  
just a crack  
to toss them out.

They roll and stop  
as the cockerels run  
quickly to snatch

what they can catch.  
Six beaks plunge in  
through smooth red skin,

the apples go  
to bits of show.  
With one-eyed sight

six cockerels fight  
for pulp and pips.  
I bite my lips.



and the chessboard will shrink  
 into a cell floor and the flesh will  
 be reconverted into words  
 and you'll crouch in your cell till the Queen  
 closes in and  
 when mother smothers you there is no  
 crying for breath  
**Glauco Cambon**

### SMALL CRAFT WARNINGS HAVE BEEN ISSUED

Dovekies were blown inland over Newburyport  
 And signs rattled their slats down Boylston Street.  
 Rain was mixed to a fine mist by swizzle sticks  
 Held in drunken fingers of clouds. Squeegee feet  
 Pressed out momentary imprints on flowing walks,  
 Legs leaned to the dire northeast and my skin  
 Huddled closer to the pulp of my body. Tell,  
 My love, how you keep the winds from crashing in  
 Beyond the breakers of my adoration.  
 Weather men predict the storm will last for days.

Dovekies, dashed upon the whiplash shore, will die  
 As gulls descend with clicking bills. My forays  
 May dribble out in patters on a puddle  
 Or stride past startled beggers babbling by rote  
 Their curses on the rain; but you, I know, will  
 Step your way with sunlight glinting off your coat.

**Stanwood K. Bolton, Jr.**

## FOUR POEMS

## From the Lake

She rose from the lake of that usual summer  
through ripples of rowers, rose from the water,  
my stardripping darling, lissom in bullrush  
and lightspilling lily; moisture and dust,

she came like creation from minnowy mosses  
up to my eyes, through turtledark places,  
swam to a surface of summer and sameness  
diamonding light to brighten my days.

Rowers and spiders kept skimming the scum,  
elmleaves and willowleaves shadowed the gleam  
where she came stirring circles; gem after gem  
dripped from her hair and the tip of her hand.

But what changed? Still there hung in July light  
prisms of midges, dragonfly eyes—  
swimmers dipped arms in, fishermen dangled  
lines in the lake that her rising had spangled.

Trees stayed as graceful, ducks at a distance  
paddled like platitudes, sands of indifference  
shimmered the shore where her shining foot  
touched—

a vision like Venus reaching the beach.

And the air didn't alter with artists to paint her  
or flattering Flora, adoring, await her.  
Nothing much differed except in the one  
her brightness bewitched, myth struck since then.

**Harold Witt**

**Already April**

Before I finished March, already April  
unpetaled trees midpraise I hoped to keep;  
pastel oaks began a jader dapple,  
the sun increased and dried the sliding drop.  
I saw the snail fatten on the rag  
of perforation where perfection was.  
I bent in scents of May to clip the rose,  
no sooner cut than its exploding cup  
shattered along my arm what roses lose.  
A bluejay moment and all June was gone;  
the beetle tocked half-past goodbyed July.  
Kneeling in August Africas of grass,  
I dug up stickery stars with milky bloods,  
and mid-September, when I straightened up,  
October's golden pendulum had struck.  
Chrysanthemumed November, stalk by stalk,  
poked December sticks before I looked,  
but even in the January frost  
a February robin hopped the thaw  
and I was praising started March again  
when April interrupted me with time.

**Harold Witt**

**Again, Again**

Again, again I swim  
in images of foam  
down to the seadrowned town,  
under the rim of brine.

I walk the sandribbed times



of saltscent, pelican  
(his slack beak skims sardines).  
The sea is green as limes.

I hold my breath between  
the fishers on the pier  
and find my father there,  
a pole curved from his hand.

He smiles, he's winding in  
a hooked lip dripping gems,  
o-eyes, black, immense—  
the rest of it is fin.

It struggles among buckets,  
it tugs at my childish eye  
until I don't quite cry.  
My father, big with knuckles,  
slaps it into a creel.  
The glittering agates rise,  
sinker, hook and line  
fly whizzing from the wheel.

I run the other way,  
I never hear since then  
*Christ, fisher of men,*  
except the cruel bait

arcs from my father's hand,  
the fooled tail flaps  
in a metaphor that gasps  
in air where I first drowned.

**Harold Witt**

**Swallows**

I swear the swallows talking woke me up,  
outside under the eaves, and shadow swallows  
winging across white curtains worked and spoke,  
skimming like scissors, closed their busy tails—  
ask bird experts how their bird feet clung  
to an edge of nothing as they dabbed with mud  
the abstract outline of a vase-shaped home.

I heard their conversation while they hung—  
as if one swallow gave a bird direction  
the other answered, and, in swooping loops,  
chattered creekward after still more mud.  
With feathered patience—not much left of spring—  
they modeled their pottery bottle crumb by crumb,  
a house in which to hatch a brood of down.

Marvels of monument, miracles of dome—  
egg jewel floating in the Roman air  
I've gaped and ohed at, but never until now  
met at my window two such engineers  
starting my morning with a mud alarm  
on metal awning, and eavedropped on the view  
of architects whispering as when Thebes began.

**Harold Witt**

## STAR IN THE WELL

His body—five months back tall Abraham  
Who plowed and sowed, rode herd and mended fence,  
But now living sepulcher lodged gaunt  
And voiceless in the platform rocker—stared  
Out through the window in his sitting room.  
He saw the land that needed him to plow,  
Now March was mealing winter out of it.  
He saw the pulley well he'd meant to fix,  
And saw his wife of eight months stomp to it . . .  
Sakes, Sheba, sakes, what're you up to now,  
First poking at its curb and then its flap?  
I know you're madder than a stirred-up hornet  
At my will you found today, though eight months  
old.

But use your head. Don't toe those planks again.  
You know how rotten through they are—you've  
known

Since last I looked them over, five months back  
And warned my boy and you away from them  
Till I could fix them new . . . He saw her whirl  
And stomp from sight . . . Five months ago today  
I looped that rope around the juniper  
Beside the well to hitch about my waist  
To hold me safe for ripping out the frame.  
The rope still coils there useless just like me.  
That was the day I climbed to slide the planks  
Down from the woodshed beams but slipped and fell  
Hard on the chopping block . . .

“Now, Ike,” he heard  
His wife, then on the backporch, stomping at his son  
And Abigail's, “you fetch that stovewood in  
Right now. Then you can mooncalf for that star  
To make a wish on, when it's in the well.”

Abe's wasted fingers snailed all master-pale  
About the chair-arms; and his brown eyes moved  
In his fixed skull as if *they'd mend* the well . . .  
Sakes, Sheba, sakes, you needn't fuss that boy.  
He's only five, and good to help. Just give him  
Leeway—just a mite—to whack a stick, or think  
About his mom. A tyke so much alone  
And shy like Isaac takes his boy grief hard.  
He needs his own mom more of late—much more—  
Than two years back when neighbors buried her.  
For now I can't tend ranch so he can trot  
Along and look for nest of lark, or scare  
Groundhog and rabbit on the rimrock shelf,  
Or climb the derrick rope, hand over hand,  
Or find a new-born calf or colt for us  
To share . . .

He heard her nag the kitchen pump  
Until it screeched and rattled, heard her jog  
The supper dishes in the sink—then stomp  
Into the sitting room. He saw her sharp hand  
To the wrist still dripping dishpan suds  
Hack down and up. And then her magpie voice  
Retched at his ears, "That brat is loading up  
His arms with stovewood like he grudged each stick  
To me. Now that you mope there like a lump  
For me to wait on, hand and foot, and feed,  
I'm out of mind to humor him." Abe's eyes  
Rolled starey-slow in their fixed skull, yet he  
Could see no more than her thin hand chop air  
And thud her gingham apron sleezing wet  
Across her scrawny hips. "He's on my nerves,  
And I've a mind to take a horsewhip to him  
Like you never done. Of course, you hadn't to  
The way he minded you. I'm not the kind  
To dote on him like you." She shook his chair,

In which she'd found his will at noon that day.  
 "You even dared to make your will with half  
 To him and only half to me. I thought  
 Back when you married me, you'd treat me right  
 Like Abigail—and will it all to me  
 Just like I know you done for her. Oh yes,  
 You said in case *he* died, I'd get it all.  
 Well, Abe, you'll rue this will; just mark my word.  
 And now I'll take that brat in hand unless  
 He's fetching—" Stovewood rattled to the woodbox  
 By the kitchen range. "That sneak's been spooking  
 us  
 Again."

She clumped back to the kitchen. Abe  
 Strained to turn his head. It turned a bit—an inch—  
 The first time since his fall. He saw his tyke—  
 Tow head and overalls—on trail this side  
 The well, slow-gazing at the evening stars  
 Just coming bright . . . Sakes, Sheba, sakes, don't  
 wrong  
 That boy. Don't lay a whip to him this time  
 Or any time. I couldn't bear it. Don't.  
 For like I overheard the doctor warn,  
 A shock'd likely strike me dead—or else,  
 Just maybe shake me from this living death  
 To free my son from being sacrificed  
 Each day to you and me—much more today—  
 More since you snooped and found my will today . . .  
 He then heard Sheba, from the kitchen porch  
 He guessed, half-coax, "Now look into the well  
 And if your star is down there, make the wish  
 You said you would to make your daddy well."  
 Abe saw his son step near it but halt.

"Fraidy cat,  
 Look in," she dared him nervously. "Look in.

It's sure to be there—now.”

Abe's fingers clutched  
The chair-arms harder than he knew . . . No! Don't,  
Don't do it, Isaac . . . The words writhed to his throat  
And choked there in an unheard gulp. The boy  
Stood still (his stare fixed on the rotted boards.  
Abe watched him glance back once and step ahead,  
Undo the step, stand still and stare at the well.

“You'll look in,” Sheba fussed from out in back  
Somewhere, “just like I say. I'll see to that  
Right now, or lay this whip to you. You hear?”  
The boy just stood.

Abe saw her stomp the trail,  
Whip-pointing to a star above the well.  
The boy stared back at her. She neared and jabbed  
And jabbed him with the whip-end—jabbed. The boy  
Glanced up, then at the well, but didn't budge.  
She drew the horsewhip back—“Look in,” she  
screamed—

And lashed the thong about his hips—again  
And yet again. Abe groaned, and strained to rap  
The windowpane, but sprawled from chair to floor.  
He heard—or did he?—Isaac yelling, “Dad.”  
His fingers gripped the floor, his thin legs jerked.  
He crawled and crawled but couldn't answer—  
crawled,

Crawled to the kitchen porch. He felt his legs  
Deaden so again, he couldn't drag ahead.  
The whipping stopped. He looked: the boy had hold  
The lash. Then Sheba gripped his ear and bending  
Forward, twisted him up to the wellhouse curb.  
The boy glanced in, writhed back and gasped. She  
yanked

His ear back to the curb and shoved. He grabbed

Her hand and yelled. The curb snapped in. They  
screamed

From sight.

Abe moaned and gripped the top-step edge  
And tugged his body, step by step by step  
By step, down to the trail.

“Dad, help me. Water’s  
To my chin. You got to quick.”

Abe gouged the trail  
And inched ahead, dragging his limp legs  
Inch by inch by inch by inch until he groped  
The ripped edge of the well, and then the rope  
Hitched to the juniper.

Abe fumbled the rope  
Down till it slackened, then he waggled it.  
It tugged down, tautened. “Dad.”

Abe waited long,  
It seemed, his fingers tighter on the rope  
To feel it come alive still more and more  
Until the boy crawled out into his arms  
And snuggled shivering to him on the ground.

“I stood . . . on her . . . down there.” Abe stirred the  
rope again:

No tug, no sound from in. “I saw the star . . .  
From here . . . down there and wished.” Abe then  
hush-fingered

Isaac’s mouth and swabbed the dripping tow hair  
smoothe

And looked down in the well for her, but glimpsed  
The water’s dark unblurring back the star.

Conrad Pendleton

**THE LULLABY OF UNCLE SKULL**

Uncle Skull is hunting home, home  
with a wonderful knife in his eye—  
with a bone through his nose and a thread on his  
thumb.

And the world tonight will mime his song,  
now Uncle Skull is hunting home.

He walks with a cougar perched on  
his brow, with an owl in his heart, with  
a snake on his thigh. He walks like a minstrel who's  
lost his lute, but he knows a song for  
the world to sing: he knows a song

that lacks a tune. He holds a leash  
full of starry hounds baying at shades  
their eyes reflect. Their kennel's the sky; their quarry  
is earth: and Uncle Skull, he holds them  
close, for their mouths are sharp; the earth

is lame, and the world is still as  
a hiding hare. Open your gullet,  
Uncle Skull! Rattle the bones of the mountainside!  
Light the seas and let them steam with your  
song of songs; let the cougar mew!

Remember your thumb—let it pluck  
the harp of your hilt, the vibrant edge.  
Untwist the python. Bid it choke the foolish owl  
that hoots and strikes! Come, Uncle Skull. Hum  
lullaby, now you've hunted home.

**Lewis Turco**



### YAKUTAT AND SOUTHERN R.R.

Here, where the high-backed bears  
 Wander like hungry sleep walkers, where salmon  
 Berries hang like fish eggs from the boughs,  
 A locomotive flakes away in the rain,  
 And fungus rises as big as loaves  
 On flatcars. Symmetrically the rails  
 Race to a green doom. Alders thrive  
 As they march up the ties, green drivers and tendrils.

The white men are gone, the rain nibbled  
 Them away as the salmon spawned  
 Along the tracks. I see the eggs spilled  
 Upon the cinders, a hatching of toads for the cannery  
 men.

The tin cans are stopped with their mouths  
 Open, the *Iron Chink* bites the air.  
 The uprights of the goldwatch have caught their  
 deaths  
 On time, true and white; while the irresolute, scav-  
 engers

To the bone, stoked out their lives,  
 Burning railroad ties with the Indians.  
 The local poverties drank heavily for a new commerce,  
 And there was the sound of rust and bankrupt  
 horizons.

Cemetery, what corpses rode your coffin cars?  
 Silver salmon and golden men have left  
 Distorted children; five generations of murder  
 Have given us tailless fish. Theft

Becomes a pure crime by impossible reclamation.  
 I am afraid of the rain and alders, their evil

Rejects my criminalities. My bones  
Rattle down the track where I fall  
Stunned by drops, strangled, root and vine;  
Strange berries pulse and swell  
Like hearts as the long sentence of nature ends.

Now the Indians have an army truck  
With true railroad wheels, tubercular travelers,  
Clicking their gold teeth down the track,  
A trick they do with drink, down an alder  
Warpath, where lungs and boilers die.  
I run after them in the name of the verbal man,  
Yelling. The thunderbird turned phoenix is there.  
Stop, stop. And my voice is eaten by the rain.

**John Pym**

### IN THE FISH HATCHERY

At first this tank appeared like all the rest,  
    Needled with arrowflights of energy,  
But soon a difference was manifest:  
The imperfections hurt us, or depressed—  
    The tails awry, the heads a travesty.

Roe from a single trout will stock a stream,  
    Millions of fry go pouring into tanks,  
And yet we focus on these few who seem  
Defrauded: not for them the sunny gleam  
    Over the shallows, mossiness of banks.

We cannot turn away to contemplate  
    The normal; we must hover still and stare  
At what it is so easy to create  
And just as easy to eliminate—  
    Eager translucent bodies, unaware.

**Celeste Turner Wright**

**SHLUM****for don schenker**

from the desk the pencil of light before it sinks  
a blazing timber black with perceptible  
expulsion of breath & what's left is charred  
& seems. The mind a burning shield

the hand entangled in cobwebs the heart  
naked & sore: the past top of the laugh  
present without motion the childish caravan  
future in the back of the brain—all time

here in the body. From what we see  
we gather, we hold, we disseminate. Watch  
the silence broken by the crash of carapace:  
a woman dreaming her bald head wrapped in a scream

shaking her withered fist in rage. A drunk  
felled like man by man into pitfall of despair  
clutching the bottle half his age  
a coin of Puerto-Rican girl black-eyed in white

picks up his pint of lights, the fights  
peanuts and pours it out. A mother's voice  
from upstairs windows rains forty days rains  
malediction with golden hands. In a jewelled box

a bearded dusk is playing the biblical shepherd:

Abraham with his jew of frightened blond-faced boys  
 chariot of David carved in brick—already bowed  
 beneath a weight of fear—a masque for synagogues:

pray, knead, unleash this bread. Thank Jehovah  
 for the one true child with eyes ablaze—his race  
 holding a heaven of light, with a noise of glory,  
     joyous  
 tumbling, clatter of shields. The ashcans  
 settle on the street. Fill the sky it empties itself.  
 I am smoking a black cigar. The smoke is blue, the  
     few  
 are grey. The view like everyone works for a gleam.  
 When I come home the walls are damp. My hands I  
     hold

to a cooking sun splashed with a surplus of paint.  
 A lacquered Buddha drinks the atmospheric coffee,  
 the gulls catapulting from brick & stone—I sit  
 my heart in hangmen's knots, my mind is rusting  
 choked with a yellow country's dust. It brings me  
 no riches not even joy—black bread from Russia  
     gefilte-  
 fish red California green Wisconsin. In formless  
 silence. No eye to see, no listening here, no ear, no  
 hearing aid, a radio blue-green chachacha, no God  
 (what's up!) to wrestle with. Only because of  
     struggling  
 sex, the grass-blade vexed its finger pointing  
 through the stone, the gingko tree, do we perceive  
 the silence shaken when it comes. Writing poetry  
 on the butterknife edge we are thinking backwards  
     now  
 my love is smiling through her death. My solution's

a glass of sand turning with speed of the American  
dream coming excruciatingly through. St. John  
of the Cross walking his eyes on a distant mountain  
& laid to rest on twin instruments. Jew & Celt &

Slav

have kissed my lips at last & hung my heart  
in its tinselled parts in a frothy bottle of coke.  
O brandy leave my balls alone! From the top shelf  
of my frigidaire comes religion. On the sea-waves  
of my air-conditioner blow politics. Only believing  
this creature was not born without lamps in his  
pulse.

Down in the street a faceless man leaps on another  
to take his life—he'll clothe in tissue from the corner  
stall & feed his wife the flesh of another. All fat.

**Christopher Perret**

### HER FATHER IS DRUNK IN THE GRAVEYARD

A hand of stone on top of a tipped tomb  
That pointed up to heaven once now points  
Straight at my father's slumber where he lies drunk  
In wet grass in shade of an upright tomb.

My father's fingers point along the grass  
At nothing—unless at a dove who died  
Under a bush, its wings outstretched, head squashed,  
With father's empty bottle lying beside.

Age or vandals with these slabs have played  
In time a crazy kind of dominoes;  
Yet no one comes to straighten up the rows  
Of tipped or leaning stones where father sleeps.

When they stretch together in wet grass,  
Each pointing toward the other, I see  
That stone and dove and man's ends are the  
same—

What father knew too well would come to pass.

No middle for him: a beginning and end,  
An unending ending of his waking life,  
A shade drawn daily against the living world,  
A walk in blindfold to a borderland,

Where this stateless man sees, or dreams he  
sees,

The soft, welcome shadow of his lover  
Waiting, secret on the river's other bank,  
Arms outstretched, beckoning him softly over.

And there he lies peering over the water,  
Weeping, without a passport for his crossing,  
Lies on the edge pretending he is dead,  
Ears stopped to cries of wife and daughter.

Do all men stray to dark, beyond our cries,  
 Fiddle with death, and listen to music played  
 By instruments of their sober trades:  
 Lawyers drawing wills, the surgeons knives?

Did these vandals race to end of reason  
 To find life under this life, and dig hard?  
 Or did they in wild love turn up the yard  
 To show us nothing is here, nothing at all?

For my husband let me have the vandal  
 Who will outrage the other life and leap in this,  
 Who will topple bombs and outrun scandal—  
 Beat Death in dominoes before we kiss.

Dear dreaming, wasted father, floating  
 Further each day from my hardening memory,  
 I will let you slumber here, let you lie  
 While I move further from you tenderly.  
 O my dear dying, drunken father, go floating  
 Softly to her dark, winged kingdom waiting.

**Robert W. Watson**

### POINT OF NO

The new kite flopped,  
 Cripple-ripped along one edge,  
 and the big red balloon gaped lewdly.

The toy dresser turned out to be  
 cardboard, underneath the gloss,  
 and the china doll had one eye turned  
 irretrievably awry.

But, squashed low in the fly-moist  
 garbage can, it was the six thousandth  
 sardine can  
 that made the difference.

**Genie Rollings Valentine**

**HORSES**

Ours is a town, after all, with cars beetling,  
streets and the walks paved, the lawns mowed, the  
    young  
learning economy, learning our closeness  
of heart. That there should be horses! I heard them,  
their hooves on the concrete, rapidly cantering—  
saw them, saw girls, straight-backed girls in their  
    teens,  
wearing shorts, their legs bare on the bare and the  
    brown,  
on the muscular sides, girls with loose hair  
lifted by movement, girls with their chins  
set proudly, their faces serious as those  
of the horses, their flanks as firm, and sweating  
along with their horses, whose hooves rocketed,  
bounced on the street like granite hail.  
I love those girls straddling, love them for loving  
their horses. Let there be horses, horses,  
between all the young thighs, on all the clean streets,  
uneconomically, all through our town!

**Judson Jerome**