

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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TO CATULLUS FOR #8

Poor horny Catullus you
scratched at an unendurable
itch writing to that proud
bitch Clodia not knowing
how things would end how
centuries would dump themselves
on Rome vanquish Caesars
slay legions how barbarian
decades would humble
the empire tumble it
into time with marble
torsos cracked chamber
pots spent coins

Now

the dust of Clodia
quicken the sweet
meat of later sluts and
we curse lust lusting
to be free

while Catullus
in a poem endures
his eternally aching loins

Robert Leslie Berner

THE THIEF AND (THE CRUCIFIED)*from a painting by Mantegna*

the sudden light
shines on the thief's body
under the cloth
his virility, the sex organs
hair

 muscles strain
pushing their force
against the cross

he is the Christ!

not the grey resigned figure
with arms flung out
despite the nail heads—
death is the same, the agony
flesh, a certainty
held

in the open mouth
 the unaccepting belief
a bare skull
lies at the base of the center post
the legs
are not yet broken, the side
not pierced

Besmilr Brigham

SOUTHERN GIRL DANCING

I slide my beer down the bar
so I can see perfectly

She starts curving & never
stops orbs circles arcs
ovals christ gently undulating
dead centered dart on pleasure's map
pointing *here*

wow I'd better think
of something else I'll think
of bikes & speed & Trout Fishing &
huge death & peace &

round O

my god she's turning
round slowly &

ab-so-lute-ly

well I'd mortgage my house
if I had one
leave wife & 5 kids
if I had any
sell all effects & goods
if I had some
rob banks
convert to Islam
disclose military secrets
slave 14 yrs in South African diamond mines
for 4 minutes
if I could last 4 minutes
in her honeycomb

What a bitch to ruin
utterly
a man she doesn't even know

Frederic Young

**EDUCATION OF A SECOND GENERATION
AMERICAN**

the hero of the piece was
 listed
 in
 the
 program:
 a doctor fellegrini savant and scrutable
 who came with briefcase and stethoscope
 in search of the solifidian truth;
 halfway through la donna's cacciatore
 (she
 was
 once
 queen of denial)
 the mustard plaster head of john
 the rapist beckoned in the arbor;
 when we read it in the daily news
 behind
 giacomo
 (the
 mad
 policeman)'s
 garage
 we choirboys snickered at the joke:
 how fellegrini savant
 and
 sage
 discovered act and causation
 through the instrumentation of marco's
 knife
 when the scrutable doctor's bumbershoot
 was discovered in the lady's avid chute

Joseph Fioravanti

THE BLEEDING OF PENELOPE

*And this whole land shall be a desolation
and an astonishment . . .*

—Jeremiah 25:11

Two years after Protevyeve tore
down Penelope,
ripped open the door-bells,
the icy steel of the
Bullshead,

they still sought blood.

Two years after the north fields
ran barn-paint red
and the swamps that had
lain stagnant since the

Pleistocene boiled in
vicious puberty,
they still sought blood.

So we hid in the caves,
fighting the whine of bugs
driven from the swamp,
we sought our own kind of
blood.

Blood to avenge the deeds
of vicious little bastards
who opened the mustard kegs
to suit their sexual thirst.

And most of all,
as the ancient waters
dripped minerals far back in
the bowels,
where stalactites like mountains
grew in a quiet men cannot
stand,
we fought to stay ourselves.

to the cry of "*Bourgeois!*"
Or the fairness of war
is their fantasy,
and I had time to think
about it as the water
dripped down in the back
of the cave. . .

In the middle of the third year,
like dust clouds,
soldiers came riding on great
black horses,
snorting white plumes of steam
on the mountain air.
And we retreated back into the
cave,
where none would find us.

The word came again,
by another ragged man
and they all were the same;
faces the color of old sawdust
and eyes that looked beyond
then, or even now
and their hair,
gone white by what?
No one knew how old

they were—
children of revolt,
worn-thin men in tatters of
flag.

One brought, then, the word—
Delgrande
had fallen—
The moon had looked down
on a black night of

hounds
 and creeping fog.
 Listrado, the young,
 vicious little bastard

who would eat his
 government's heart,

had taken it to the earth
 and sown the cinders
 with rock salt and
 vinegar—

All saw him coming—
 with eyes so burned-out red
 they waited,
 searching the scrub pines
 far down the slope,
 where soil and damp moss

clung to the slate,

until dawn
 when we went farther
 into the belly of the cave,
 to a place where dark had always been,
 and no man had ever been

before—

and we waited. . .for Listrado,
 the young.

In the fourth year,
 while silent snows piled
 deeper than a man is tall
 no one came,
 nor went,
 save to kill for food
 or to cough out the germs

of consumption,
 for which there was no

cure.

And we still knew,
white-skinned,
thin-fingered people
very like the ragged messengers
who had been this way before—
we knew
that Listrado, the young,
would be followed by
another and another. . .

Pautoli still stood,
and Remindo would write

acid words 'til his
fingers had no flesh left
to blister—

there would always be a
cause for flame,
and caves to die in. . .
always and always.

Thus in April
we left the cave,
five and thirteen,

.

mind,
crossed the Fernier
into the green midlands
where spring sun was a

armed with rock and

black and dismal eye,

and joined
Claudien, who said Remindo
had died
with a pointed stick up his
rectum,
and we pushed north

past the grey remains of
 what had stood as
 fair Penelope,
 and entered the Corlot

in June,
 dragged down in
 sludge

and remembering the caves—

There,
 as the sun burned trees

brown

and the mud baked and

cracked,

we met Listrado,
 carrying a flag of faith to
 Protevyev,
 whose fate had been to

creepin fever a year
 after the denunciation of
 the Bullshead.

Mortende ad infidelandoes,

he screamed

and we met a grim fate
 more than had he thought for us,
 though a bullet fired by
 Protobo, the magic one,
 cut him quickly from his
 saddle.

And we moved

across the lands to the border
 country,

away from deltas,

away from memories of a

nameless revolution

that called itself
freedom. . .

.

And I had time again,
to think.
About Listrado with a single,
bloated strand of gut
drooped between his young
legs,
hung from a hole like
the cave mouth,
where Protobo had shot him
once,
the only man Protobo ever
killed,
for he died, too, there on
the sun-baked Corlot.

.

And now it has been
fifteen years
and Listrado rots in his
grave,
the sullen flag of Protevyev
marking the spot.
No acknowledgment
tells the rest spot of
Protobo,
a bitter piece of ground
somewhere out in the
fucking Corlot.

They talk of a god,
these people new,
but this is a new land
and a stupid people

these.

They never saw
Listrado's guts, or
Protobo, with his eyes, unclosed,
hurting to be free of their
sockets.

They did not walk on
gangrene toes
across the Corlot or the
Fernier, where the stones
are angry knives.
And beyond that, when
they were young
and lived with rats and
the fingers of bitch-winter
they still saw nothing
like the bleeding of
Penelope. . .

And this time they call
me the *bourgeois!*
And I'll eat their shit,
for I'm free now to choose,
and even this shit tastes
better than
a steak off the buttocks
of a man not long dead.
I'll not go back to
the caves
for their lust or anyone's.
I've seen it
and my eyes are tired.
They ache for sleep.

Jim Smith

THE GENUINE ARTICLE

Oh yes, the Acropolis is
the genuine article,
made from real stones
by genuine Greeks
in a century that is
traditional.

But if you wish
to remain closer to home,
for less cost, an old
Winchester thirty-thirty
will do. A piece
of History, it won
the West by killing
guaranteed, naturally-
toasted Indians. You don't
have to go far
from home.

For even less cost, try
a hot dog. It's
the genuine article.
Official American meat
clapped between airy
buns. It's almost real.

In fact, sometimes I think
that we
are the genuine article
though all we pay
to be
is the loneliness
we carry around,
and it comes wholesale
like the wind
absolutely free.

Jonathan Holden

VARIATIONS ON A THEME: DAY CYCLE

1.

Dawn

Noon

Dusk

Dawn the purposeful morn
pale as pale riding to the foreland
as multitudes of birds awake

Noon the engagement of muscles' flex
soil's thick vapor rises like dust
a handful of seed breaks the land

Dusk sun in the sea gathers folds of dark
about itself like loose hands in smoke slowly stroke
the dinner fire like blankets draw about shoulders

2.

Dawn

Noon

Dusk

Dawn impels to activity
the rider leans from the waist
the horse flexes in stride
a green tide of lichens pours across a white rock
as waterfalls of birds whistle down the dark

Noon salt melts through the skin to muddy
the hand crumbling the soil that will yield
stolid force into zealous tendrils of growth

Dusk circle tides of the sea bathe them who sleep
the moon is a marsh through which the sky seeps
tomorrow is a promise which keeps

3.

Dawn

Noon

Dusk

Dawn is the pale rider with wheatstraw hands
who drags this feathered day behind
with a ruckus and roil of wing and hoof

Noon is a black farmer behind a plow
breaking long lines into steaming sod
whose hieroglyphic begins the tale of growth

Dusk is a fisherman of the far side of ocean
straining wet harvest from a molten sea
whose draining net holds the sun like a settling
balloon

T. Cuson

NARRATIVE

Winter and summer I clung like a peach
To the branch I was on . . . sun and shade, bird
droppings,

Rain. Itching from my own skin, I ripened
To feel horror lurch in the pit, but being
Unable fully to believe in the murder of anything
I clutched through the seasons while everything
decayed.

Who knows what shrieking and singing go on in a
peach

When wasps might crawl in sometimes, throbbing
And glistening in the hot dark of rotting pulp?

Only hope was safe, sure in its seed,
Faithful to myths of sunlight and of air.

And when I dropped the seed was all I kept.

Doris Moore

THE OPEN**The Problem**

Though the sergeant damns them
in skilled anger,

You want your ass shot off?

Keep off the goddamned trail!

stalks the woodline,
works a stick against hard heads,
retraining the heart; still
armed, grown men come like children,
wide-eyed, with shy, sidelong steps
out of the hanging shadow
into the open.

The Reason

For a man
will move without knowing
into thinning bush,
his straight line as if by the sun
warped to a curve;

open spaces

open spaces

are near; foretold
by a dry creekbed running
a weak stream of light through the vines,
a chest-wide recess to breathe in.

The Real Thing

Until it erupts — a geyser
of steam, white slivers of shock
and pain, a choking, then release
fierce as a boy's wet dream;
though a dream all air, breathing

RELEASE**1.**

Sunday, in my office,
opposite the beige brick church,
I look up from the blank page.
The four clocks in the four faces
of the tower are telling different
times. Each way I turn,
the hands of the separate clocks
of the separate selves
pose into this and that
posture, dancers
test and change their gestures,
turning four faces one by one
to me, each face that I fear
to become or to come out of.

2.

There I am
in the photo
wearing a saw-tooth beanie,
throwing a pink rubber ball at the camera:
1945, the fleet's coming up the Hudson,
barooming salutes. The Pom...Pom...Pom
is not the noise I expected,
not ripping the air.
I throw the ball at the camera
which is being held by Mr. Weber
home from Italy with a wooden leg.

Profile: boy with hooked nose,
hair curved over forehead and behind ear;
silver jacket with fur collar.
Some mistake of the film.
Strange exposure.
The boy stares
at something beyond the frame.

Is that me, fat and blonde,
held up in my father's arms?
I clutch the lapel of his pin-stripe suit
while the roof's
black tar and open chimneys
devour the sunlight.

Alice poses on the roof,
my sister: just
plump enough
to swell out beneath
the edges of her bathing suit.
TV antennae poke at the sky like broken claws.
Her English jaw hangs heavy on her smile.

We're sitting in the bright sun
of Uncle Charlie's backyard
near the El's spiderweb shadows.
In short pants,
propping Danny on my lap,
I scowl at the camera
and wonder why brothers cry all night.
His pug nose defies
definition.

Nowhere do I find my mother
married. Another roof picture:
almost seven years before
her daughter will be born.
She's 20: her white dress

stark against the black roofs and open doorways.
 The turn in her eye is coy,
 evading the camera's eye.
 The frills on her short sleeves are pretty.
 The Depression is still on.

There I am
 on the beach
 holding my brother Stevie.
 He squints at the sun and reflects
 the scowl of my father
 who is propped on his elbows in the sand.

Sometimes they all seem dead
 though they try to pursue me into marriage
 and my thirty-fifth year and though I often
 wake with my father in my arms trying to save him
 from his early death and I still cannot find
 a picture of my mother married and the coy eye
 evades me in my dreams and my sister grins on the
 roof.

3.

Instructor of English, appointed 1967
 (smiling)

No, this can't be right

Mr. Allman shines white on black
 on the door of 205 Eddy Hall

a trapped hawk claws
 the back of my eyes

I walk on naked feet
 from one abstraction into
 another coughing up feathery bones

diplomas curl on the wall

Married,
one child, daughter, aged six

4.

For Eva whom I describe
as the nymph leaping out of the summer night
into my room:

why should I mark you with words
like savage tatoos?

The Jerome Avenue El squeals
in the valley beneath us
sparking the midnight
our veins thunder O they thunder
love's release

all night
the hollow-eyed white bird
calls

my love
my love
damn these words
what are words
what are words
rags stuffed into a mouth

it seems so long ago
we married

5.

The future holds her in a box,
a small woman with hair turning white.
Even in death, her eye turns away.

The mad don't get madder
biting the spoons in their mouths
(tranquilizers steam in the blood
like fog on a tropical river, the air
fills with the cries of beautiful birds).

The clocks on the four faces of a tower
turn their sibling hours into lust,
meditation, fear, and a blank face:
the nothing that fills in each minute
like a sound that congeals in the air,
a noise that is seen, suddenly, twisting
into a vapor, a thread, that passes away.

6.

I awaken to the midnight bird
who ruffles his wings, preening
(no humans in my dream,
only the sun here, the bird).
On the tips of my fingers
there are tiny photographs
and my eyes open their lenses
to let something fly out
fluttering toward carnival mirror
camera closeups: gyrating faces,
big noses, small eyes, rectangular mouths.
Sudden silence. The sun's myriad
bells toll out light
that beams upward from my cool sheets,
my wife's hips. I arise spreading my arms
like a frail bird running into a thin breeze,
I'm aloft, above the glinting Hudson River,
riding upwards on a voice I still cannot hear,
impelled on its beautiful pure lung force,
up, up, up, up, my brain softly exploding,

fingers stroking my head, my eyes,
my beak. There is wreckage everywhere
washed up on the mud islands, where the sun's knives
cut through water: beer cans, twisted logs, scummy
weeds, curled strips of exposed film. I see the
body of a dog and I scream for joy.

7.

The face appears on the blank page:
my mother's eyes;
the nose hooked like her mother's.
The jaw belongs to some Victorian
Englishman, or a coalminer
who looks like D. H. Lawrence.

It's me.

The Methodist Church
turns a paler beige year by year.
The rectangular tower
keeping four points of time
turns in a circle
and hands on the clocks
give their gestures
in the repetition of hours.

I hear the fleet coming downriver
somewhere, barooming salutes,
while the tall boats, draped in black,
carry the dead to sea.

John Allman

THREE POEMS**Decisions**

at a certain time of day:
the spider stares into the corner
of its eye
and sees the snake,

mice watch cats
dancing around them,

trees lose their balance
in the wind.

I look into a corner
of my evening,
see a thin coiling
of darkness.

On the Island

it's been eleven o'clock now
for at least three hours.
still
no word.

last night I dreamt I was alive,
in a strange land so distant
vultures couldn't find it.

the air is thick tonight,
stars are marooned on a glass plate.

still
no word.

my head floats
in a wash basin.
let it be carried
to the king.

Deep Within the Trees

this petrified forest knows the long winter,
it has dozed here for centuries.

now I grow
older, and feel
the walls of my arteries wooden.
I know
I will never leave.

the stone around me is slowly falling
asleep.

Bill Meissner

TWO POEMS

The Web

*"Old woman, old woman, old woman," said I,
 "O whither, O whither, O whither so high?"
 "To sweep the cobwebs off the sky!"
 "Shall I go with you?" "Aye, by and by."*

—Mother Goose

There's something at the door:
 Knock as soft as grass:
 Fingers shine like silver webs
 Threaded on black vestments.

Wants me to come out and talk—
 Hush, *please*. And go away.
 All things here "decently
 And in order . . ."

And he stands like a stone planted by the moon
 And slowly tunes a guitar.

*Then shoot down the moon and we'll drown him in
 the dark!*

Rain. Nails of ice and light
 Curtains beat like wings with the wind

Race for the closet (crates of junk,
 Crits where mice scratch around in the dark—

Head is stuffed with strings
 Like old rags shoved in drawers
 Poke in one place, pop out another

Wads of floppy wiggly things:
 Knotted tapeworms hooking
 Down to the floor, slithering off
 Coiling in corners, crawling in cracks

They ooze under doors, creep along walls—
 I run with a net scooping them back
 They eel out and flop down stairs—
 I swoop like a gull in a sea spewing fish

Yarn snarls tighter hammered into wire
 Through the coffin in the coalroom—
 Who's screaming from the fire?
Liar!

Raddling on skidding scales
 Don't dare touch snap me *zing*
 Back over there unturned dirt
 Must mildew earwigs spiders
 Roaches rats maggots stink

Look out for the witch! She shrieks at the moon,
 Rides the sky on a bright red broom,
 Whoever looks with eyes like warm

Light through open doors will surely
 Die
 There in the ooze where her little bed lies

(Crouch, cat! Around a rat
 Snapped like a furry fortune cooky.
 Claw out the liver, suck the lungs

(Scoop, up, into the sausage
 For vital organs, the life hiding
 In the blood—)

And with daylight, when the fit has passed
 The poor unchewable tendons

Shriveling, like salted slugs

And a sticky soup thickening
Under my nails, on my bib, in my hair,
My teeth, vomit clotted to my tongue

And the awful reproach of eyes
Like white grapes skinned and pitted—
A house papered with portraits of the dead—

No. I'll

Hide

Back past dirt where fungus flowers toads
And spores thrive, and sowbugs slive,
And Old Man Mose with a carrot for a nose
Giggles sad tunes, says If we
Keep very quiet, *they'll* never know—
And then gets drunk from his hat to his toe—

Further back. Up, just under
The joists where dirt is dry, wood
Warm—a small
Thing might
Fasten, in a cotton shawl
To a silence where nothing
Is except

A chain of ants
Up and down
A wall, so
Quietly—some
Carrying bits of things,
Traveling sure directions
Each behind the next—

Do ants have to feel, and try not to feel?
Do they want what doesn't exist?

Ants are never ridiculous, never
Queer, so that others might notice and talk—
They balance easily on polished bricks
That hold back rivers where tongues wash apart.

Ants don't flinch with the jab of sun
Possessing a bush by light, don't
Hear the crunch of spooks climbing trees
Creeping across the midnight deck
To press their faces on the glass, whisper
Lorelei songs like dangled strings—

I'll join, if I may, this small procession
Up and down a wall

I'll hide in the smallest house but one of all.

Pilgrimage

(Located on the Northern California coast, Ano Nuevo beach has eroded from sandstone cliffs which contain large deposits of fossilized rock.)

The wind at Ano Nuevo
Still whirls the sand like sense,
Whips the littered sand like spume,
And rinds, glass, rotting gulls
Are gone, until wind shifts.
Waves still wash in like bridal lace
Carrying their cargo of weeds,
Rattling rocks, these antique shells
And shapes of lost amphibians pressed
In the symbiotic silt of time—
Now shards, torn loose, caught, on a strip
Not water, not land—catching the sun
Like fool's gold, but never long.

Dragged by plowing surf turned mud
But never far. Rolled back in
For sun to touch and tease again
Before wet fingers reach again
As the surf turns, and then turns back,
A hooting chorus of weed-wreathed hags
Crouched on the sand shooting craps.

So back to this sea where I always come back,
Like that other where we began—
Still dragging a bag, the tangled cord
Half clipped, and cracked like leather with blood,
These Siamese things inside half dead,
Hermit crabs fighting for a fossilized shell
And stabbed on each other's claws:
A heart beat sounds in my head like surf
But tough leather membrane holds it in—
Pounds of water laminate my bones
But the dark screaming creature won't smother and
 the other,
The dear little albino, can't win—
And the aging sun is fat
As a pear left too long on the tree—
At Ano Nuevo earth's gold curve
Creaks down the western sky, water
Lunges at my feet and nothing
Can stop it: the sun will go,
There is no float strong enough to hold it up
Nor wing that will dip to grab me
Before the dark night drops.

Janice Loonie

MRS. LONGFELLOW'S DEATH

This is what really occurred.
H.W. (Household Word) Longfellow
Carried two brides to the altar;
One of them burned.

The first girl he married
Was infirm and died
On a trip to improve Henry's mind
(Amsterdam: In eighteen-thirty five)
Leaving tracks on dry sands of his time.

He took-heart again; he took wife
Since life was still earnestly sung
And Psalms needed harmony.
He'd read her his clerical verses
His proverbs with kernels of truth—
—Hearthside rhymes for the times—
He worked hard on each version,
Each verb a symmetrical urn
And his rhythms were
Burnished.

The Civil War burst but it furnished
No Paul Reveres. Nothing but Shermans.

Early one evening

After the children's bright hour?

He worked in his study. His wife

Henry heard her

Sealed packages in a far room.

He turned pages. She screamed.

She came whirling, her whole skirt

A red blur of flame

Curling. He jerked the rug

Up and hurled it around her

And watched her unfurl, a wild comet,

Who turned, surged, and flew

Burning! Lit up an infernal hell

In the hall. He pursued. She returned

As a swirling torch. He was

Scorched in her furnace.

The third time he smothered

Her burnt murdered face with his face.

Did he slur one soft curse?

All her last words were screams. They

Were worse. They were worst.

Between that black dark and a daylight

She burned to death. Burned

To death.

Burned.

He never published her death

In a poem while he lived, though

He wrote one (in eighteen more years)

Phrased in paleness and crosses

(Not crucibles), snow, distant mountains

White souls. . . such cool grief

Cooler life, ashen bride

Refined from the great blazing poem that

she died.

Doris Betts

AN ARCH OF WORDS
BETWEEN MICHELANGELO'S BOUND SLAVES
AND THE SINGING OF A KYRIE

Stirs barely
and is amazed at his vibrating extent
which is
bound to be god, though but unprophesied
heaving of nothing still, still whole and known,
as a statue might wholly overcome the stone
by closing an eye, and therefore was earth,
and therefore Michelangelo refrained,
the silence of the stone remained,
life but through stained-glass windows touched this
 maze
of organs, pipes, taut guts and galleries
through which what now boils and is born?
until he, at the same loud signal-horn,
woke, and at last amid the simpler hymns
brushes the bright dust from his ringing limbs.

Benjamin K. Bennett

SIMON DOWNS

Simon Downs lived on garbage
and a check from Washington
he cashed and buried
each month in a syrup can,
rusting under his weedy porch.
Children followed his collection
route of wormy meal and cafe scraps
to see him absently snatch
a morsel from the slopping cans
stashed tight behind his wagon seat.
Laughing at him belch
and scratch his pits and grooves,
the children threw torment
like a prickly blanket over
him and his mule, though
neither was ever seen to frown
or twitch a ragged ear.

Simon Downs was fun until
tiny Dilsey Rhodes crying told
her folks a dirty man had
touched her smooth, and her
Daddy and Uncle Rack thought
right off, "Simon Downs."
They called him out
as they shot his mule,
then flailed him with the
handle of a broken kaiser blade
and made him watch his shack
fired down and smoking before
they snapped his neck in two.

The County found his cash
barely scorched and stinking green
in the can below the ashes,
and they gave it all to Dilsey Rhodes
who went to college
and bought her clothes
and scarcely thought of Simon Downs
and the man who touched her smooth.

Ralph Millis

HORSE AND RIDER

I wrote a poem about a metaphor,
Which said I was a soft, compliant beast
Who let herself be ridden brutally,
Until she was no use. (All this was true.)

At poem's end, dismounting heavily,
I cursed as best I could that clubfoot beast,
That skinny winded walleyed metaphor,
That swayback nag who made me straddle truth.

Judith McCombs