

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL
Volume 23 - Number 2 Winter 1972-73

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STAYING THE WINTER

This January day is twenty above
So I'm out to saw and split.
Oh heart I have loved so long,
 Beat!

To the woodpile down to quarter cord,
Up to three feet of snow, I take
The aging heart I love
 And cut.

That white spruce of sixty feet
The spruce-bud worm has eaten
Stands and cuts wind still,
 Oh heart!

Here we have no thought's distraction
If the spruce will stand above the saw-horse,
Except the fifty-year-old heart
 I hear.

Into this old north silence
The two-cycle saw bucks in ;
Aspen, saw, and self together
 Tremble.

Beat now, heart, while my hands
Take up the axe and pace you
With a steady swell and swing
 And aim.

The straight-grained logs cloud-white
Split true, and they will burn.
But oh good heart I love
 Be like

THE SIBYL'S BATH

When the old sibyl began to spit blood
three of us climbed eastward through the gorge
along the rough terraced vineyards seeking a girl
grown up in sunlight. We saw her first
dancing alone between the olive trees
a young goat capering at her heels, her hair
aflake with light. I felt the sure breath of god
prickling my scalp. Her people consented.

After the old one died it fell to me
to lead the girl down through the caverns to the bath.
She understood we were in the womb of earth
but somehow she was not prepared to meet
divinity. When the lamp revealed him
rising soundless through the black water
gnarled, ancient, white with absence of the sun
larger than common frogs but yet no giant
she began to scream, was screaming still
when I covered the lamp and the water closed around her.
She had not conceived of the god in such a light.

I carried her to her couch in the inner cavern
and soothed her babbling, dried her, gowned her fresh
in the sibyl's robes. When I saw
her hair had turned white I knew the god had chosen
well. Whenever ambassadors came
I had only to meet her eyes to see the shudder
rise in their depths, the holy shiver seize her
and that sweet barbarous hair-raising lilt and fall
of unknown tongue. The god was well served.

She began to visit the bath more often, sing
to the god, lure him to rise, trailing
her long hair in the transparent blackness.
Who could foresee if not the god himself?
We had no sign until that day the caverns
welled up in uninterpretable sound.
She stood beside the pool, the writhing god
dangling before her; each hand gripped one leg
and with a blinding shriek she flung her arms
wide above her head, her upturned face
and hair festooned with blood. And still from her throat
that deep rough croaking outcry spurting.

Now she is calm. We have told the ambassadors
to return at autumn. We must decide
whether or not to go on. If we could know
the meaning of the act: was it his will
to die, did he possess the virgin, goad her
to his dismemberment—or could a girl
conceive and nurse in such translucent gaze
a purpose as demonic as a god's?
We wait for signs. She watches blankly
the croaking laughter dribbling from her mouth.

Ann Deagon

DRAGON FLYING

Take hold.
Slide your fingers
into these wings airborne as bread.
The abdomen's indigo quill.
To be called
the devil's own
darning needle: mare
stinger: copper and bronze plated dragon
flying, stitching paralysis
and vision,
to soar
as a kite or a love
legend above damselflies, bluets and blackwings
who flapdoodle in purple loosestrifes.
To strike on curling flatwater
which always draws
me down.

My meaning
as a dragonfly
is first: seeing brilliantly.
Second: enormous flying serpent.
Third: monster with winging claws and fire.
Fourth: a sea-beast. Fifth: Satan;
sixth — some
meaning they say
is obsolete.

'One reason for *stilling*,' the book reads, 'which involves a complete twist of the insect's head, is to

prevent large dragonflies from eating small ones
when both are cyanided together.'

How many collectors
filling their cellophane bellies
have forgotten the swoop of the Red Darner and
they're gone:
hardly different in these maxillas
from plump flies.

Fierce biplane
whose grown myth
of a stinger is sharp as grandfathers,
long as a hemlock's
boom:

shadowing
only the woman
who is beneath dying power
and knowledge.

My dear
best capture.
Loving you is not to be fixed
but a leaf arrowing
everywhere.

Eating
this seed
how you feed me:
how we see with hemispheric eyes
the only having now
is on the wing,
on the fly.

Beating
in tandem,
drenching your wings
to give the river bottom life.
I hold your legs above the current
keeping us free.

A knight arrives:
in armor that dreams
to be real and visor grit for accomplishment.
A white-tailed skimmer is watching him: an amber-
wing
and a green darner: ten-spot, widow and white-faced
skimmer:
clubtails, biddies and spreadwings:
all are swarming
and ignore the knight

for a field
where thoroughbreds are gazing.
The South is a million flies and midges calling
but the dragonflies touch down:
they drizzle the mares
with their wings.

A crowd
of parental thunderstorms
ungathering. They flicker and smile
their shadows.

A halfwinged woman
lies on the wet earth.
A dragon flying down to her,
his hamules clutch: their bellies bending
and his seed suffuses.

When she has stood,
put up her hair again in stars,
a flaming sword hisses
in the water.

Riding her
as she drops eggs:
golden teeth that sink for the river's gums
where nymphs and satyrs will shoot up
undrenched with sun
like cornstalk roots.

Who was
that piece of a self?
The dabbed makings of a riverbug.
So helpless you could acknowledge
its whole future.

For a time
buried in water.
Silt and blackish larvae of insects.
Molts and instars are worms
that have my skin.

Until I'm dragged
to metamorphosis I wander, dabble
in syllables of mosquitoes, shift
in the river's ink. Ugly
but to survive.

Will you come
looking for me?
A body that clings to the pond's cattail,
exuvia. The back and nape are split open,
viscera dislodged.
I'm gone.

Edward McCorie

TWO POEMS**The Chandelier**

We had eyed the empty mansion for weeks
it was locked behind wrought iron gates
like a vicious dog

we worked open a pantry window
in broad daylight the rooms were bare
and we left small sneaker prints
in the dust on the parquet floors
a double staircase met in a center landing
then split again like a fat hourglass
in the ballroom sun from the south windows
recoiled in a billion particles of color
from a crystal chandelier high on the ceiling
we poked at it with a pole
and it started to sway
we poked harder and it swung it swung
back and forth and around its
crystals chiming its crystals
reflecting off the floor and walls

as it grated and ground like an old porch
swing swinging its crazy lights
and clattering music and its music lit
we swayed with it like a cobra
we got drunk on it we
swirled with it it was
a wild ocean our eyes danced
on the surface up and up
on the swell and then
the fixture snapped

it fell
on the upswing it came down
a bomb a geyser shooting frozen
particles into every corner notes
splashed like paints against the walls

we stood the ocean stopped
we had killed it quiet a pile of dead
diamonds a pile of sharp eyes
we moved closer many were
broken some were perfect
greedy collectors novice crooks eight
years old we matched our avarice
with speed we scattered and scrambled
on our knees we crammed
our pockets with all shapes
and cuts we gathered
jewels up in our shirtfronts
and with our bellies showing
we lit out

weeks later we would be
the one-eyed children
in the tree squinting down through
prisms at the houses houses
dizzily trying to touch in the facets single-
handed single-eyed trying to keep our
balance who else but us
could see a green dog go off four
ways at once in a sunburst we swore
on blood we'd never tell and never
get caught with one eye closed
stalking the neighborhood

Gypsy Children

you have seen them
running through wet grass
their little feet purple with the
cold their eyes enormous
and opaque as honey-dew
whooping it up in a clatter of straps
and laces drooling at the day
spinning in the shadow of the wheel
their fantastic filaments
you have seen them too cooking
on the stove tops of black macadam
picking tar lifting the iron lids
of man-hole covers
skating on thin air their rollers
making no noise
and looking looking
collecting money and dead bees
and pressing their small bodies against
the trees until night comes with her
bag of dark tricks
to sew their eyes with dragonflies

Anne Hussey

Letter to Hawthorne

1854

Dear Liverpuddlian :
I'm writing this indelible nonsense to you
 without pen or paper
 because I can't find
any in this place.
Furnishings we have much of. Even if you
 could stand, you couldn't
 walk without stepping
into Polk's chairs
or Adams' bed. But try to find, anywhere,
 paper to write on.
 Find Leviathan!
You will not.
Consul, can this be such a great impediment
 to a man of your spiritual
 vision? As for myself,
I've turned down
the lamps. Pine logs hiss in the fire-pit
 like gossips. Whoever passes
 outside will see nothing
in this barn

but an incredible pall that's settled over
it, as if something
came and left no trace.

There is
but one window lighted, in Jane's bedroom,
where she is writing
again. Tell me,
what are you writing
in Liverpool with all those cold fireplaces
and long vowels?

I was mad
to send you there.
We miss your visits — Jane especially.
She seldom goes out now
or comes to state dinners,
but recalls
fondly your walk with her on the grounds
at Mount Vernon,
as though it were
a thing
she did today. She shies from strangers,
and blames me bitterly.

Before we came here
Benjamin wrote
his mother: "I hope father won't be elected
for I should not like
to be at Washington
and I know
you would not either." I recite those words
over and over, saying
them at night in bed
like a pledge,
but I still can't sleep even with the whisky
in me, and Jane upstairs

in her room every
night writing
letters to our dead son which she posts
in the morning. I
don't know where
they go,
I don't even know where she finds stationery.
I hardly know my own mind.
At night I hear sounds
that scarcely exist,
I hear my boy calling out to me: "Don't go,
father, don't
go, don't."
I see our train
going slowly along a track in winter, moving
into a curve, but the cars
lurch, we slam against
windows, and the car
we're in begins falling over, it's falling
off the track and we
open our mouths
but our boy
falls under the train and he's gone and I
see it. Good Lord, man,
I should be successful
and smug.
Valets dress me, barbers shear me, writers
put words in my mouth,
footmen open my doors,
I am fed,
my bills are paid for me. But what do I do
that's my own? I
bump into these
blasted chairs.

Old Boy, if you were here we'd make elegant
 kindling of them. We'd
 camp in the White
Mountains.
Remember how you marched in the rear ranks
 of the Cadets at Bowdoin,
 earnest and unwarlike.
I'll be Captain again.
I'll lay the fire, I'll say come up to 13
 Maine, and bring a jug,
 we'll arm-wrestle the boys
from Waterville
and drink to the sun that rises from the sea.
 We'll never dream that we'll
 become what we are.
Good Lord, Hath,
Your humble and most obedient watermelon,
 chief rounder, old haunt,
 fourteenth president,
Frank.

Jay Meek

TWO POEMS

Winter Apples

I have grown tired of the unmystifying reiteration of forests,
Of the buckramming

clacking of treetops forever

Proclaiming, in autumn, a decipherable hollowness, a creakiness
At the root and core of things;

and

In the windgaps gloomed by timber
The depth of leafmulch by late October
Is a surfeit, an ungovernable luxuriance
Of death, of no more interest than—
To the beechnut browsing fawn—
A farborne scent, in the windy fields, of blood.

So more and more I prefer the edges of things;
And, though I do not often see

The raccoon furred with dawning—
His walnutcolored pelt bristling ochre—play in the bigwoods oak,
Or the ruffed grouse thrum from the spruce grove his ancient behooving,
There are

 where the gray squirrels' dentree gives
On briars and thistles, and then—
To the woodchuck's desire—the caviare of meadows,
Events and images to grace
A long abiding.

Especially an abandoned farm
Has the quality to persuade the heart of death,
Of the change of self for self that is not doom:
I know of one place in particular,
Where an old widow lives alone, or else has died,
Where there is no ravine
 or gorge gleaming by moonlight,
No late sunmangling of a brackened hillside;
But
 after the apples
Have fallen behind the house

And, with the onset of winter, begun to ferment,
A certain mossbacked buck comes
Down from the highground hollows, from

I found it once

His special deadfall bed ghostantlered with snow,
And cautiously enters the orchard by the gate;
He ambles about, not fifty yards from the farmhouse,
His winter coat sparkled with wet,
Sniffing the crusted snow for the musty apples:
Nosing them out at moonset—
Such a gray shag of creature,
Snaffling in the clarity of his need:

His branched head beginning to sing from tine to tine
To tine

away from the coldclept and gnarled,
The farmhouse blotch soon lost
To the intervening windwaft snow

flightbounding on

Up beyond the rimepelage of the ridge brambles
And into the thinchill godcourtyards of sky

And on

as to a high

Justification of the boundaried and dangerous,
The windraked abandoned, the gates to be passed through
For battening, *here*

In the orchardcroft: in winter air.

An Outing

They had come out of the woods—a young man and his young wife—
As if to amble in the sun of their still new estate, before
The afternoon, which cast their shadows from the meadows toward the forest,
Were wholly gone. Maybe a nuthatch heard them laugh as they started
To run: if so, it heard the smaller one, stopping short, say
“Oh” with the matter-of-factness the heart reserves for the horrible,

And maybe it saw the larger one come up beside her.
There, some feet before them on the ground, a bloated shape
Of fur was trying to waddle, though it was such a waddle
As a fat man fallen to crawling might approximate
If one leg were chewed off or simply missing. She asked
“What is it?” and he said—having already taken in the wound,
And having decided that no gun could have done that,
That it was selfinflicted by the thing’s own mouth,
As if one caught one’s foot in the works of a combine or
Meatgrinder, and that the act had freed it from a trap—
Entranced by this clear picture of need for freedom, he said
“It’s a raccoon.” She took a halfstep back: “Let’s go,
Let’s go.” It was trying to get away too, but every forward crawl
Sent it sideways or rearward. He seemed to fill with pity
As water may quickly fill the puncture of a new well,
And lurched his hand toward it as though to rectify
All that is broken, ill, ill-served and trapped in nature,
But the thing’s head jerked, toothsnapping like a drunken chainsaw, and cut
Off the offering. She screamed, “You fool! You fool!”

Jerald Bullis

TWO POEMS**Two Women***for C.O.H.*

how a german-irish confirmed catholic stood in a snakepit for years waiting
for mary to come crush the snakes' heads with her holy bare feet

and an ethiopian baptist came up from the sea that summer scraped raw
by the coral the sand and the salt sputtering goddamn

how they made friends

catching one another's eyes over the books in the college library

making a gabfest of a coffee break (or a high tea)

both mad for beowulf macbeth the tempest blake african folktales

yeats and ralph ellison

and northnorthwest for their own poetry

(but one saying her rosary and receiving communion daily

the other lying in bed each night dreamshaken as the sun plunged into her

belly and a voice uttered in greek "i break" and awakening to wander
insomniac to a graveyard and rave at the locked gate)

the craziest syzygy

a white nun and a black lesbian

who wrote letters to and from bethlehem and st. croix
who met to chat in rittenhouse square and strolled in a hush through
the medieval wing of the philadelphia museum of art
who leafed reverent and awestruck through the falasha legends and
the coptic liturgy
who giggled over a meal of tanzanian wali kwa mchuzi and muenster
cheese

how they kept calling each other sister

il penseroso l'allegro
lamb tyger
tweedledum tweedledee

(but one saying I was the first to fall to my knees when patrick banished
the snakes and boniface chopped down thor's sacred oak
the other swearing i should have been a cannibal i should have eaten every

one of those men i should have been a cannibal rather than the water-child who went for the white minister and a moses joke and nearly drowned)

the craziest syzygy

knowing

(*io mamane* laments one woman to another in a moçambique poem)

knowing

(the old stone savages lurking in their skins)

knowing

(but not why)

what close kin their totem birds must be

a dove with fire licking from his throat

a crow with ashes heaped up in his mouth

The Young Woman Explains Why She Has Become a Nun

for Sister M. Paul

26

(How first I believed in John Kennedy and then Malcolm X and then Dr. King and then Bobby Kennedy, how I espoused black power, disarmament, nonviolence, poverty, the counter-culture, Earth Day, and Groppi/Berrigan politics, how I fell in love with dropouts and freaks, until they were all shot or jailed or overdosed or stoned or paralyzed by their own despair, until the steelworks kept chugging out rust-colored smoke and the army ammunitions plant kept getting new contracts and cars kept rolling out of Detroit, until my idealistic soulmates graduated from college and took jobs in banks, my mother voted for Nixon, and taxpayers everywhere shrugged, and until there was nothing left to do but join a Puerto Rican parish and begin reading the Bible again and pray to God.)

It took no lightning bolt knockout
To shock me blind and shake the stones from my hand,
And it took no specter with holes in his palms and a gash in his side
To sink me to my knees (my Lord!) and open my tight lips.
Neither did I rise up on the fourth day
Like bandaged Lazarus stinking from my grave,

SISTER PAM SMITH

Nor did I find myself, a leper, suddenly clean
And, giddy, leave the other nine on the roadway to the priests
And come back to mumble a few words.
My story is older than all of these.

(How a man at the bar and grill told me that his forty-year-old girlfriend moved herself and four kids in on him one day before he could think to say no and her husband was trying to get him indicted for white slavery, how a classmate doped himself through Vietnam and another shot himself in a sleazy boarding house, how my diabetic second cousin drank herself into her last coma, how a friend left her husband, moved in with a lesbian, and had hallucinations in which her teeth grew and broke off until a psychiatrist told her she was schizophrenic and she quit her job and went back to her mother's house, oh Jesus.)

First Elimelech died, then Mahlon, then Chilion,
And after I mourned till I could mourn no more
We, the mother-in-law and two daughters-in-law,
Took to the road, but in time Orpah left
With a goodbye kiss and I stood hesitant
Until at last I knew that like a vagabond

I could wayfare, turn back, and then wayfare once more
Until I had no land and knew no tongue.
So I told Naomi, old mother, I swear
Wherever you go I will go,
Wherever you lodge I will lodge,
Your people shall be my people,
And your God (wherever) my God.
So I gleaned the ears of barley and wheat
And worked as a servant through the whole grain harvest
Until our kinsman took notice and sage Naomi advised.
So I bathed and anointed myself, obeyed,
Went down to the threshing floor (wherever)
And waited till the food and drink gave out,
Then crept (old mother) to the edge of the sheaves
And lay at last at Boaz's feet.

Sister Pam Smith

he had a skinny older brother
 who still played with cap guns
 in the 8th grade
 but he w's sposed to be very smart
 plus an even older brother
 who w's sposed to be very athletic
Harold was just very fat but he tried hard

even sports boy
 did he stink
 as bad as me at least I
 was honest

 "I hate gym balls rackets bats goals
Mickey Mantle fields nets helmets gloves and the gum that comes with
 baseball cards
 is always stale."

"I kinda like basketball
 y'know what I mean Gar?
just half court
 y'know what I mean Gar?"

when there's not too many guys
y'know what I mean Gar?"

(fat Harold was sort of a friend
that year the year
when everyone was reading mysteries
except me, and Harold
read all the Hardy Boys Books
he could get his chubby hands on

I was queer
I read history mostly ancient never
American

more than Harry
I was queer
y'know what I mean?)

I finally knew what he mean
one day
on our bikes me fat Harold
and his skinny brother talking books
straddling 10 speeds of war steed

I challenged
"What would you rather read
Genghis Khan and his horde thundering over the Asian Plain
or the Harrrrdy Boiys?"

two simple grins
and a shout
loud as any battle yell
over that chilly playground

"THE HARDY BOYS!"

A Joyful Noise

Thanksgiving
(when you tell me
my beard smells like apples)

You can lie down like a planting

You can rise up like a harvest
You can make all of the time in between
a season of growing

Thanksgiving

Goodness pours forth
from the horn
Gladness from trumpets
Sweetness is gathered in baskets
(when you tell me
my beard smells like apples)

Folded

Arm over shoulder
Knee around thigh
Fingers on belly
Head against breast
We lie
like prayer
like hands wrapped in psalm

Thanksgiving

When windows are mouths
And blizzards are yells
When insects are dead on my floor
When tiles are too cold
for no slippers

You rest in my warmth
like stores for the winter
And I am a dark wooden closet
of walnuts and apple preserves

(when you tell me
my beard smells like apples)

Gary Keizer

HOSPITAL**1.**

You know, now, the stand-up comedians lied.
 Let them lie down under the knife or needle
 and make the stitched mouth smile.

*

The bed-pan is not funny.

2.

The wooden leg is not a leg.
 The iron lung is not a lung.
 To lie in the hospital is to be a sheet
 of skin and a urine stain.

*

Without glass for their microscopy,
 wheel-less
 for their wheel chairs,
 the ancient Egyptians knew
 enough about the body to surgery
 brains; to lie with them
 is to be that lobe
 where pain is relayed for recognition.
 The metal hand is not a hand.
 The jokes about nurses
 split their sides
 laughing.

*

Today a woman screamed
 with her breast.
 The knife makes a mouth in anything.
 Some are here for the pupil a pen-point
 mistook for the open inkwell.
 Some are here for the knees, some for the arms
 found crossed on the chest at morning.
 Some are here with too much, some are here with too
 little,

and I am here and riddled with holes
for their microphone. They are not funny.
For I have swallowed the throat of a crow
and choke, its rasp
a black bone splintered in my words,
its word
a cyst in my larynx.

*

The language of the hospital
is the last rites. The geography
of the hospital is sand,
is you. At night, by the light
cremation makes, the soul
of an Egyptian priest
is clambering over your thighs
like a swimmer out of the water
heading for home.
His mouth, your incision,
blesses.

*

The stuffed bird is not a bird.
In the hospital every eye is a glass-eye
reflecting your loss of strength
back to you. You can't escape
such vision. Glass:
new-borns drying out on one side,
grandparents barely strong enough
to fog its other,
nod their heads
and look through their transparencies
with the same incomprehension.
The hospital: you can't escape.
The caged crow starves itself in answer.
Food was mummified with the corpse.
To lie in the hospital is to be the head
on the platter

the nurse's eye makes
before winking.
She is not funny.

*

She is no more than a blue pill in a palm.
To lie in the hospital
is to think of sex
as another place for cutting open,
is living on your back
like a dying bird, claws hooking
evening air. Wives
writhe under the ceiling's love.
They take in its long fluorescence.
Search for your love in a hospital room:
the faces are gray with the same shared pain
and you talk to the soles of the feet.

3.

Some Overheard Diagnoses

/“The old umbilical cord is no good
tied around the ankles. Band them
with leg irons, block their flow of blood.”

/Shaking hands is a sign of friendship
or palsy. Handcuff the unsure wrist.”

/“Your eye will be as good as new with your
dead wife's
cornea taking the place of the dead german
shepherd's.

Sometimes your eyes will cross, but just stop
thinking of her.”

/And I must be cured
of the caw in my head
that wakes the floor with its own diagnoses:
“Eyeglasses are not eyes.
Leg irons are not legs.
Handcuffs are not hands,

never.”

For I have swallowed the throat of a crow

*

and must be cured by the drill
into where I keep the songs of my lifetime,
until the red pared nerve-tip touched
by a probing pinprick fills the surgery room
with the plaint of Paul Anka singing “Diana,”
the Teapot Song from the first-grade assembly,
or some sound deeper than even a hole
in my brain that starts to sob a love song
still in my Grandma Rosie’s voice.

*

In one man, one morning
the breath dies.

The nose: a pharaonic tomb
to which we pilgrimage
for its sealing.

*

In one man, a muscle
in one man, a gland
lie in state.
Or a mother tucks her child
into its flag.

*

Or we say a blue pill
for the child’s soul.

*

We are here where the science of medicine fights
the art of becoming history,

*

where my throat is a dead king
bandaged against the rain,
where fever weeps for him
out of my forehead,

where my ribs are cut
with his elegiacs,
where all of his subjects whisper about his *ka*
my lips have unloosed,
and count the days of its journey
by where my life is leaking out
this water-clock,
this catheter.

*

This morning I lifted a jar of urine
to the window, and saw something from me
take on the color of light,
or give the light its color.
And my palm, through that liquid, was magnified
and I wanted to pack the microscopes
and x-ray units away, or out
of the present tense,
and merely scoop urine up in my hands
and run through the fields with something
akin to the wonder
of the first man in the world
to think of glass.

*

If you tapped the mile of test-tubes
you'd hear every blood sample,
semen specimen, and vial of souring spit
give off a different note
of the true dirge.

*

The first act in The Therapy Room Review
is the comics, but they're booed off
for a more dramatic orchestration.
When the arm of the trombonist pumps
my lungs empty
of their music, there is nothing left
on the bed but a pillow

and on it, a tongue
and on it, a crow-feather.

*

The sound of urination
is a string of small, golden bells in the air.

*

This morning I saw we can press out the waste,
if we're lucky, and claim it a symbol of hope.
And I don't want this poem to be despondent
no matter what comes afterwards,
for some mornings even the ravens and magpies
perch like lovebirds
on the shoulders
the t in Albert raises
like incipient wings
for embrace.

4.

When the crow's eye closes
they lock the doors.
When the crow's eye closes
the blue pill dissolves.
When the crow's eye closes
what happens to light
at the center of television
after the world's last comedy
happens to time
at the center of our wall-clocks.
When the crow's eye closes

*

its other eye opens,
the cold hole
sun has set
away from,
and doesn't blink til dawn.

*

This is night in the hospital,
alone
with what is wrong in you.
No matter what your sickness
you're blind. The light
at the center of television fades
from the last man's retinal plate.
The last pill dissolves
with the click of a casket.

*

We are hundreds of prostrate bodies
lying alone
as if already underground

*

in a field
from which hundreds of small tortured breaths
blossom under starlight.

*

Night in the city. Night in the streets.
Whatever is eternal in you
stirs in the blood
like a swizzle stick
and will not fill the thermometer
or give itself to the quick syringe,
but scrambles over your thighs
into darkness
and heads for the flash of the nearest bar.

*

In health, the women seemed sometimes tawdry.
In health, the jokes seemed sometimes bald.
But now it is night in the hospital,
and your body presses its immortality
warmly to the tavern pane,
so the women are seen for their celebration of thigh;
so the belly laugh is seen for its celebration of belly;

so you see the night sky superimposed
in the window on the candlelight.

And you suddenly know
you could glide down the street
like a sheet of glass

*

taking anyone's face
for your face,
showing any half of the world
to its other.

*

Night in the city. Night in the streets.
A second of scarlet stains the window.
To lie in the speed of an ambulance

*

is to feel the wailing sore in your center
rise to the roof
and roost above you,
siren and flasher,
a *ka* for the night.

*

Morning may be a blackbird
disappearing into the nest
sun is.

*

But this is what you must face for the moment:

*

Night is a body
swathed in the wards.
Its heart: the moon
suffocating
behind its ribcage:
neon
tubes in the chest.

Albert Goldbarth

**CONCERNING ARCHEOLOGY: A REPORT,
A PHOTOGRAPH, A PAINTING**

For Arthur Vogelsang

The Archeologists' Report

Mr. Heisig's farm:

Conical mound central on high bluff
over mouth of Turkey River and S.W.
on large animal effigy (prob. an otter).

37 ft. diameter 3½ ft. high at center.

Brush, trees, some old cultivation.

9-12 inches yellow earth;

ashes in a 2-4 inch layer.

At center, at fourteen inches,
an imperfect dog's (?) skull.

Several inches of white clay;
flint chips and a few shards
showing the action of fire.

At original ground level
3 well-preserved neanderthaloid
skeletons in the sitting posture.
One skeleton (a) facing the east,
the second (b) in front of (a)
and facing it. The third: a few
inches north of (a) facing the north.
Two adults, one younger (or female).

Many relics. A rich grave
(containing possibly all their possessions).

A pipe of carved grey sandstone in the form
of a lynx or panther—eyes of pure native
copper having, at that time, great value.

A small polished stone axe (broken).
Near the breast of one
a gorget of blue rocks.

Around (b) five rude scrapers and
about the shoulders and in the skull
of the last are scattered
thirty-one fresh water pearls.

A Photograph of 19th Century Archeologists

Slightly out of focus and deeply yellowed
two males stand on the left and right
made taller by their brushed beaver hats.

It is late afternoon
and in the long exposure
the one on the left has coughed

obliterating most of his face and neck
and all of his right hand.

In the foreground is the grave
with two of the three skeletons visible.

Behind the excavation is the heap
of discarded dirt and behind that
the nameless man on the right stands with
one foot raised, resting it on the debris.

The long shadow of the coat tails
of the man on the left crosses in front
of the group and captures within it
the black shoe of the man on the right;
this makes visible a thick layer of dust
that has begun to settle on the bright shine.

In the left hand of one man is the stone axe;
in his other hand, held forward cautiously and
fully in focus, are the thirty-one fresh water
pearls having, at that time, great value.

Between the men, and at the level of their
shoulders, a thin, youngish woman, dressed
entirely in black, glances down and to the right.
Her eyes appear closed as they are caught in the
shadow of her broad hat's great ostrich plume.

A long, narrow and silky-black purse hangs
in front of her, just beneath the waist.
Her long-nailed fingertips hold it there,
curled around its silver chain.

In contrast to the stern men,
she carries a thin smile; one that is
in the process of shrinking from its broader

dimensions of a minute ago. She knows that they have misinterpreted the last words she spoke and that she must wait this long moment before explaining.

“In April, 1880, the first excavations in Northern Iowa were carried out by these well-known members of the Society.”

Above, and to the left of the figures, beneath a hovering cloud, are illegible notations made upon the face of the photograph in a small dark hand.

A Painting of 21st Century Archeologists

Seated around an octagonal table a more-than-realistic man with ochre hair is typing on a cadmium-orange typewriter while, in that small dining room, seated in front of him and facing him, a woman whose face is in shadows reads aloud from a yellowed booklet whose cover:

“Proceedings of the 34th Annual Meeting
Western Archeological Society—1881”

can be read in a mirror. On the inner pages (which the painting allows us to read over her shoulder) is a report and an early photograph of three standing figures.

To the left of the ochre typist, another man (b), his back to us (and the others), is taking a step

through the doorway in the back of the painting into a kitchen. In his hand he carries a broad crystal glass empty except for ice cubes and a bent slice of green lime. Sunlight passes through the glass projecting a perfect spectrum on the refrigerator door.

On the rim of the glass is a pale yellow lip print. Its tiny crevices are entirely discernable at a distance at which not even the lip print should be visible. A stout, perfectly preserved baby from the eruption of Vesuvius sits upright on the kitchen counter. On one of the fingers curled around the glass there is a tiny drop of blood where the man has been biting his fingernails. A baker is prostrate on the kitchen floor in exactly the position he fell while baking bread.

From the mirror behind the man with the ochre hair we learn that he is typing a report on the group's recent expedition to Egypt.

As we read it we learn that :

the tourguide has just taken him aside,
and for a price, which he holds crumpled
in his small, dark hand, tells
the archeologist that the pyramid, deep
within which they are now standing,
is unique inasmuch as every hour for
5,000 years one of the hieroglyphs
(high above them on the tomb wall)
mysteriously transforms itself into a
small dark bird-like woman who emerges
slowly from the stone but, once free,
drops to the floor and runs off at
tremendous speed like a black heron,
down a deep sandstone passageway.

“As one looks up at it,” he has just written, “the wall where half of the hieroglyphs are missing appears as an unfinished page of typing . . .”

In the pause, the sharp-featured woman who was reading aloud is looking hard at the man who is typing. She is about to begin speaking a new word. His index finger, on its way down, hovers, cloud-like over one key.

After a time a slight breeze passes over the table—upsetting her stare and the incredible feats of patience she has been performing with her lips and eyes. He pretends not to have understood her last words.

Illuminated by the rainbow between the glass and the refrigerator, stringy particles of dust may be seen in the air beginning to settle on the black tile floor like ashes.

The man with the ochre hair is about to say dig all you like.

A. G. Sobin