

**THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL**  
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**THESE MATTERS MUST BE MEASURED  
ON CORRECT SCALES**

For silver, gold, and precious stones

*Troy Weight:*

¼ carat = a single grain

2 dozen grains, one pennyworth—

of which twenty will comprise that ounce  
in sapphire, pearl, or bullion  
to be exacted of me every night  
by my expensive dreams.

For potions, drugs, or poisons

*Apothecaries' Weight:*

20 grains = one scruple

3 scruples, one dram—

I measure carefully for the deep  
eventual cost of sleep.

One scruple, even a grain, could shift  
my balance, tip the sensitive beam  
against all prior dream of voices  
coming to me in decibels of light  
but slower than light—  
so that time seems to hold false  
like the skip of pulse  
between the telling of a word  
and what is heard.

**Virginia Elson**

**TWO POEMS****Letter From Brooklyn**

“Mrs. Rosen,” thirty years ago a warden of  
a Nazi extermination camp, was recently  
recognized by two of her former prisoners,  
in New York, and subsequently arrested.

Thirty years  
I've lived here safely, but  
Today a look of recognition

Stopped me, as if  
Out of the corner of my eye  
I'd seen drapes rustling,

As if rolling over  
In bed, I'd seen a spy  
Instead of clothes on hangers.

I know that woman, all of them, they say,  
“He vanished so fast . . . the water  
Was left running. Upstairs, footsteps

Scattered like dropped silverware.  
We fled like roaches.” So did I,  
I changed my name, dyed my hair,

Yet recognition spread, a bruise  
Across her face. Whispers  
Seep under my door like gas. What now?

A porcupine in a taxidermist's box,  
For every needle on my back  
A murdered Jew. She lifted the lid and shined

A flashlight on my terror—  
I'm stuffed, packed away  
In sawdust, but today she saw  
The pupils of my marble eyes contract.

### For Joshua

You count years on your fingers. Now you're four.  
We've a cake and candles, ribbons, chewing gum,  
A brush and jars, like rainbows, of thick color,  
Marbles like cloudy planets at your thumb.

I'll start profound but end in common sense,  
I'm moved to make a wish in your honor  
Against a birthday, maybe decades hence,  
When a slightly fishy angel may appear

And whisper, *How is longer life an advantage?*  
*Look out your door: the tide recedes too fast*  
*For you to scrawl what you should have done,*  
*a message*  
*Sealed in a bottle, and hurl it into the past,*

Or, *Men of good will and bad come to the same.*  
It's true, good deeds are needles buried in hay,  
We light a birthday candle to blow out the flame,  
Valleys surge up and mountains erode away

Yet men rise not an inch, Pisces the Fish  
Has swallowed his fill and struggles on the shore.  
But before you shut your eyes and make your wish,  
Accept, as blood, these words, and mark your  
door:

Like others, I've observed gray sidewalks cracked  
By grass. Some find a moral, as well we might,  
Such as, *The mask breaks at the smallest act*  
*Of life.* The blank, blank mask, If they are right,

That likeness in the street is yours and mine,  
Breathing dust in, 'laughynge with oon eye  
And that other wepyng.' And every time  
The mouth questions, and one ear hears reply,

The other hears, between the words, a hush.  
By which I mean that, as our masks are drying,  
We can let the colors stiffen on the brush  
Or let love billow like a paint-drop dyeing

Water in a glass. This hasn't sufficed  
As evidence that we should wish, should say,  
*Bless the day that I was born.* But, Christ,  
It seems so right, it seems so right today.

**Gjertrud Schnackenberg**

### **THE DANCER ON THE WALL**

The friendship quilt, patch-work  
for my bedroom wall, to present  
with one green and orange leg  
the present dance, dances, yes,  
with one gold leg above my bed,  
one pink leg, one pink chance,  
in careless violation of the land-  
-lord's lease, which plainly says:  
no nails/ no late guests/  
no dancing on the walls.  
He should only live so long.  
The illicit patches pirouette  
above my head, above her head,  
on floral satin legs of chance.  
One velvet leg out-stretched  
a different leg, a different dance.

**Kenneth Fifer**

**ENERGY BURNING**

father  
its true  
i swear  
the wire  
tap picked  
up clear  
wet messages  
trapped inside  
the heart stream  
hiding  
from the air world  
cowering  
in blood net vessels  
afraid to let go  
with flying  
father/ flow  
words must fly  
let loose fly  
and fly invade  
the suffocation  
with electric shocks  
of steaming breath  
let loose  
words must bear out the body  
in all its truth  
overtake space and height  
marked advance  
marked flight  
father  
words must soar  
in speed currents  
brandishing sun  
from streaking wings  
intone  
intone screaming

shout  
 and spell out  
 soundown  
 gotta be found  
 free of blood  
 free

of twining muscles  
 grabbing at the throatsound  
 shutting off the wordsound  
 drowning

father  
 the wire  
 tap picked  
 up clear drowning

*convert to read out*

patiently  
 i listen to blood

*heart pressure up 20.  
 words pump thru thick  
 and loud  
 echoed noise crowds  
 the eardrum  
 thumping*

*... read out ...*

*control and code  
 sort out the confusion  
 channel clogged with dreams*

i cradle myself carefully  
 in cupped hands  
 rock myself gently  
 with whispers  
 to the sun  
 poised in hushed suspension

i wait the brain transmission  
of the music signal

father  
the music sings.  
intake  
with breath waltzing  
i sail my arms flashing  
along a deep crescent  
once up then downslide  
inertia pull  
into the upglide  
arch sweep  
into the zenith ride  
release  
fingers burst  
in rhythmic flourish  
scatter words to charge the air  
i laugh  
squeeze myself dancing  
free from blood

the moon glows soft  
like friends  
i know i see  
but cannot touch the light  
that streaks the trees  
and sweeps me home at night  
in quiet talk  
then leaves

yes  
the mechanic works  
at the moon  
the mechanic lives  
beside the night  
im sure.  
he never lingers



near the door  
 that rushes in the day.  
 yes  
 im sure  
 the moon burns soft  
 like friends

*resolution:  
 to solve the problem.  
 to examine energy mechanisms.*

father  
 im afraid  
 ill never be free of blood  
 i cant listen  
 i dont want to hear anymore

*energy must have a link up.  
 to pull out the plug  
 is to go insane,  
 energy must flow.*

i know  
 i know  
 i felt that power sheer  
 comfort driving  
 when the mechanic  
 worked at the sun  
 triggering signals  
 to tap the heart  
 words were said  
 words were done  
 let loose  
 to fly  
 into the eye of the sun

*in time  
 in time again*

time buries

*in life*  
*in life again*

life is buried

crushed under  
the plodding weight  
of time  
life slips away into the time  
of movie shows

the same screen  
that is energized  
with cruel light and dark patches  
razor swift flashes  
of joy and pain of  
dreams and wishes  
that seem to be real  
is wrapped around my eyes  
i cant help but view life as haphazard  
mosaic  
clicking off frames  
(without direction)  
of spliced in nightmares  
that drain reflection and  
consume the energy  
poured into words  
that no one answered

now there is no answer  
to fill my eyes

no one here to shut off the machine  
peel away the screen  
and head off drowning

the mechanic  
works at the moon  
with pale energy

close to cold  
 so far away  
 his world is night  
 my world is day  
 and i can only fly inside of sleep  
 the door that rushes in the day

*plan what words should say  
 energy is exact  
 pressure is mounting.*

its just that  
 the air surrounding me  
 strangles words  
 sounding me  
 before they get off the ground  
 i cant condition my heart to speak  
 what my eyes see flashed  
 on distorted sheets.  
 the heart feels through  
 the glossy screen  
 reaches for texture  
 not for letters  
 if im not exact  
 thats what i mean  
 feel beneath the surface  
 past arrangement and shape  
 into sources of darkness  
 and figures of light  
 is your world the day  
 or do you live in the night?  
 no one has answered.

father  
 i dont want to listen anymore

energy burning  
 burning holes

in the floor  
energy burning  
burning holes  
in the door  
want some more  
want somemore  
wansomere

*heart pressure erratic.  
immediately code and control.*

waasomor

*code and control*

wahsom

*immediately*

wahso

*code and*

wah

wah

*immed  
con*

wa

wa

*imm  
co*

no

fly

no

moon

drown

*im*

yes father  
it hurts to breathe  
the words  
that force contact  
with the air  
burn out  
fast dissolve  
into disappear  
their strength  
drained thru  
the dark mouth of space  
that engulfs the distance  
between my hands  
and the voice  
that answers from across the room in disbelief

im afraid to reach  
to care  
now  
speak less  
(speechless)  
for safety's sake  
stuff the last  
of the sacred words  
into the heart well  
where they clot and tangle  
with springs and dials

energy wastes away inside  
i hear the meshing of bloody gears  
tear into sound

drown

*i*

into dreams  
search the dark side of the moon

**Harry Purdy**

**BIBLICAL**

So many of us are still so many of us;  
My sister, now seventy, looks like my mother did  
One morning during the last world war;  
My brothers, like my father looked one morning  
When the Depression made America different  
again.

So many of us will not end this century;  
Will not, can not, extend any solving mysteries;  
Given what we were, we are the midnight  
walkers  
Of rooms, making nothing heroic in our times;  
So many of us go from crises to nothing  
Biblical.

So many of us look no different once again;  
An apartment houses us like red winds in rains;  
Like birds, dogs, cats, wombats, flametrees . . .  
In the open seasons raging into tomorrow . . .  
And God said, and Noah, and Moses . . . and my  
father.

**Harry Roskolenko**

**TWO POEMS****Wonders of the Invisible World**

A northwest wind has maddened the river.  
Waves churn and flatten and lose themselves in ripples—  
Swirling in frantic half-circles—  
Breaking on the high-banked ice—

Yesterday the river ran swiftly to the east.  
Now it plunges everywhere, drowning.

A small brown-painted box rocks in the wind.  
It turns from side to side in that nameless tree—turns halfway,  
turns back.

Empty, its roofs sloped like the roofs of our house.  
Where are the birds? Hidden everywhere.

There are absences heavy as the ceilings in old houses,  
thick-beamed, built too low.  
There are memories thinly poisonous as the smoke of old  
wood-burning stoves.  
There are slashes in the flesh that become eccentric scars.  
That noise in the brush alongside the house?  
Sparrows, invisible.

A woman is forbidden abstraction.  
She must heal; she must touch.  
She must braid us all together.  
By love, as by roots in the soil, we will be connected to  
one another.  
We will not fly off the surface of the earth and drown in the  
Void: so secretly rooted.  
But the connections must be underground,  
Such wonders performed invisibly.  
If you are not wonder-working,  
Who will have you?



**Sinners in the Hand of a Righteous God**

Newly brittle, the snow's crust resists our weight.  
Our booted heels can hardly crack it.  
And what of the earth we must imagine now,  
    miles and years into winter?  
Frozen hard as moon-rock.

Nothing has changed, or everything.

The wind is as insolent, the sky as razorish a blue.  
The same people in the same overcoats are walking  
    muffled, heads bowed into the wind.

Is it winter that burdens them, or their innocence?

We, having sinned, stride through the freezing afternoon.  
Our eyes burn with tears, but only from the river's wind.  
Our guilty smiles shade into steam.

Sinners may be cleansed pure as snow,  
    by snow.

No God abides in this landscape but the landscape:  
Brittle the crust, perfection in each footprint.

**Joyce Carol Oates**

**IN THE DARK**

Alone in his home close to the park  
lives a certain plumber who will swear  
he has seen one night every year  
in the middle of autumn the dead awaken.  
They yawn. They rise like a deep groan  
from the grave and brush beetles away  
with wide leaves left in the loam.

Around the vacant park they parade  
under old oaks, break into song  
and circle a cedar which shed its shade  
all summer. He may be mistaken,  
however he vows their shrill noise  
harms the hearing of a hungry squirrel  
and drives your dog to attack its tail.

See how cats shy from shrubs shaken  
by a breeze? Whether anyone believes  
his sober story, there's a trace  
of evidence something is stirring.  
Rumor has blown about the county,  
debated by birds, mentioned among mice.

What's in the wind? Do the dead dance  
all night and sing ballads as he claims?  
Are fine footprints engraved on the grass,  
or old bones strewn in the lawn when they leave?  
Or do we deceive ourselves and hear  
some ghost whose voice visits the ear?

Nevertheless the eve of All Saints' Day  
comes and goes, the sky grows grey,  
and it snows. And snows. Fast flakes fill  
orchards and fields and all but bury  
St Paul's small churchyard and chill  
an angel's loins in the cemetery.

Meanwhile our friend the plumber stays  
indoors and drinks apricot brandy  
from a fat jar. People wonder  
if he told the truth, how will we know?  
For what it's worth in these cold days  
the answer lies close to the earth  
under our eyes, under the snow.

George Keithley

### THREE POEMS

#### Narrative Continuity

—a poem in 10 chapters

1.

I've always wanted to write a novel . . .

2.

"I have taken great pains  
and gone to great expense to procure these  
for your mistress, and now . . ." —and here  
she extended one gloved hand in a gesture  
of approbation withheld— "I fear  
the culmination of all my arduous scrutiny  
is demolished by this near-piratical action  
from a person  
whose view of human nature is so emphatically  
base  
as to allow him to initiate his heinous plans  
with the nonchalance of a parlor-maid  
dusting a figurine. I  
am discredited!"

3.

. . . but have no knack  
for narrative continuity, a Bedouin or thieving  
politician  
always bouncing off the wrong mote  
of Brownian motion, and a tangent  
to my life becomes my life, as an amoeba's  
sticking  
a trifle of itself out into the ecosphere  
becomes the amoeba. I'm speaking  
of locomotion in unicellular structures  
now, in the middle of what  
was to be a love poem, see?

4.

And with those words  
she turned upon her heel, leaving  
the startled shopkeep to his surmises of the  
universe  
as a clockwork, and in the sunlit streets  
was immediately abducted by a Bedouin  
or a thieving politician.

5.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch,  
a woman I love is leaving me. There is nothing  
I can do or say to stop this, and a word  
I use loosely, every day,  
*inevitable*, is defined in the ridge  
where the blouse is taut through anatomically-  
manifested  
determination across the tightened bones of her  
distant, diminishing back.

6.

I'm rethinking chapter 4 and revise the word  
*immediately*  
to *welcomely*. In his desert tent he covers her  
with kisses from head to foot, inbetween  
the two of which he lingers, then slowly  
undoes his robes and turban or  
unzips his gray flannel pants and hangs them  
so the crease keeps. Then his whole life enters  
where he extends to her  
like an amoeba.

7.

Or *I'm leaving her*. I always forget  
which is which, my lack of narrative continuity  
always  
confusing which side of the bed  
initiates action, as if the Foil

pouting petulantly in one half of the blanket in  
another world could be the Protagonist,  
sympathized-with, wept-over —and this  
befuddles the best friend  
standing all day in the Brownian motion of dust  
    rising  
sunstruck off figurines  
and ready to enter the plot with a bundle  
of blame to lay  
with a gloved hand imperturbably  
on one of us or the other.

8.

Say it's the man  
who leaves the woman,  
Reginald. Even with a bloody  
smack of loss and guilt  
to either cheek, think, my  
boy, of the freedom! That lack  
in his life of continuity, of  
knowing the next way-station  
that the carriage pulls into is definitely  
Falling-Actionshire, if you'll forgive  
my trifling wit, is a way of saying anything  
is possible! No, I guarantee you,  
despite the onus of social responsibility,  
this man we have imagined and tossed  
so precariously about at our whims  
to serve us, is let go  
and serves no master now but  
each new day, and who are we  
to say that the next day's carriage is not  
from an exotic land and laden  
with adventure! Even now it's on its way,  
and he may climb the howdah and ride off  
whooping gay as a Bedouin.  
He's ecstatic!

## 9.

The chill sea slapped its face. The porpoises  
had been fun, and the sea-horses  
frolic'ed with it, zooming out  
spawn from their bellies, each new wave cupped  
new sun. But now  
all was night, was cold, and the giant  
amoeboid creature had tossed it  
hither and yon in a mucky polyp  
with no regard for the straight line, and bitter  
brackish water cut  
deep in its hairline fractures. Oh  
the world wasn't always easy for a porcelain  
figurine  
come to life at the touch of a magic feather-  
duster! Swimming  
home, to Dresden, across the Atlantic, from  
Tampa,  
Florida, was no lark! And what  
of the air force pilot, the rum-drunk Klondike  
dancehall girl,  
her faithful collie, the one with the eye-patch  
and ineluctable Georgian accent, weren't they  
possible, weren't they due?

## 10.

Or he's sad.  
In the final chapter  
there is no resolution.  
There is no climax.  
A woman I love is leaving me.  
There is no continuity.

## The Wine-Dark Sea

1.

For the color of amino acids;  
for the whispered conversations taking place  
in your amnesia;  
for the pencil's tracing village ruts  
on a map as sweat in this forehead's wrinkle  
follows a convolution on your brain  
where the definition of senility is stored;  
for the breasts and pubis  
still in a gene;  
for times: the chronological flick  
of your life when the ocean's blue descending  
rises clear in cupped palms,  
takes on the color your hug is;  
the moment a high vibration  
nails your wrists  
fast to a bomber's shadow;  
for any porch light's halo of moths,  
a ring  
with which pure radiance marries  
substance; for what eyesight drains  
down the o's on a page of Whitman;  
for the hand  
letting go the knotted string  
of the red kite  
her kiss sucks to your neck;  
for the spiralled, splitting, somersaulting  
denizens of the rain  
washed in the single tractor-tire track  
you use as a unit  
to measure your life's accomplishments by;  
for the sound of the vertebral cartilage expanding  
to full size during sleep  
or compressing under the vertical strain

of a man sprinting into the horizon;  
 for the bubble breaking  
 the toilet's surface, a gasp  
 only your day's waste  
 could give voice to;  
 here, in the room where your heart ticks time,  
 for the doorknob's silent turning  
 counter-clockwise to the planet's;  
 for the flake, yes, for the hundredth flake  
 of snow the Eskimaux categorize  
 so accurately, the face it reflected  
 when water  
 is still frozen, perfect, inside;

## 2.

for the wavering layer (thin  
 as the acid in limes, flecked with white  
 gloss as is a spread of menses, and pocked  
 by black breves above a sestina  
 of freshwater fish) the sun  
 blazes onto the laketop as it sets,  
 a blinding of liquefied light

\*

*we have no word in English.*

## 3.

The last dog eaten, so raw  
 its eye still blinked at the touch of blue hands  
 on its liver; the last stick of sled  
 now splintered, a spray of straw, no good  
 for beating his cheeks till they warmed  
 at last with bruises; and the brick-built Mission  
 still days away on the outer side  
 of the snowstorm:

the Eskimaux tusks a poem  
 in a block of ice, then tips his head  
 to that last transparent word. The tongue sticks  
 in punctuation.



4.

The language thinks of the shape of air  
in my nostril, and weeps.

The language licks up a woman's leg  
and weeps in a runnel of FSH.

The language says rhizoid,  
glyptodant, buncombe, pellicle,  
tamandu, furbelow, wherry,  
and weeps, salt in lakewater.

Rains, and weeps.

5.

I open my mouth in a cloudburst,  
no matter how cold, and let my tongue absorb  
one drop. Perhaps the best poem  
ever written was done a century ago  
by a seal-hunter, on ice, in language  
melted and vaporized high  
above anything I've ever said in my life  
or read in America. Its word  
could fill the eye, could rinse the throat,  
could pry the lips with a rush  
of the body's percentage of water.

### **For The Day**

Alan, I dreamt we were impressed.  
We sat in a room, maybe two of fifty  
guys focusing on a tv set  
as if to teleport it, when a rifle butt cracked  
the door down, soldiers poured in almost  
as if from a hydrant, in full bayonet  
regalia, and to a man we were shanghaied  
into the Lithuanian Army. This is  
the truth. Some parts are fuzzy but others  
gleam with portraits of you and me

against a tintype background, and it's this alternation of lapse and clarity I think convinces me the dream could be honest biography; a full account I'd mistrust. The time: indeterminate: an 1890 capital or 1970 hamlet; lots of wood, buildings shingled and citizens straight as planks though some still apple-cheeked rather like two-by-fours not yet given up blooming; pushcarts, derbies, and there we were, privates on patrol. I guess we passed basic training, and none the worse. Our uniforms were dun, but the buttons shone like small suns against a dusty plain, and made enough show. We were confident and swaggered, and reached the high apples for the little girls, proffering them with a polish of our starched cuffs, and winking assurance to the greengrocer; all the while we bantered urbane witticisms and never doubted we'd soon escape through the quarry forest, maybe dressed as charwomen or smudged dung-boys out to pail a good day's fuel; and this lark, this small vacation, this comedy of errors simply spiced our usual repartee. We were strolling the promenade with a Hans or Lars —I can't quite remember— a smiling ox-shouldered lout we must have met in goose-step class, and trading our metropolitan buffoonery among the shops, when Hans or Lars leaned on the door with a sign in Lithuanian reading DON'T LEAN ON THE DOOR; it was brutal. Who knew? or knew to know; but a sergeant bloodied Hans's face with a huge meat-cleaving fist

out of nowhere, and he emptied like a sack  
on the ground; it made a vein of the gutter.  
This is the truth. And I'm not proud:  
but we kept walking on, as if our backs  
could lid our eyes to the scene; we had our plans,  
you see, important plans; we had a place to get  
home to. And we said by the silence  
between us that we knew now we were watched,  
and just two buttons on a starched Lithuanian  
uniform so huge it basketed the nation  
in its stiff sleeves; and we couldn't sweat  
if the rule-book said it was cool outside,  
or ever impersonate officers for a frolic,  
ever again; or grimace, or limp, or carol.  
But though I'm not sure what happened  
over the next few years, only that we were good  
soldiers —and scenes of lavishing bear-fat  
on boot-toes for hours on end come to mind—  
I do know we never gave up the hope  
of escape; I don't see us planning escape,  
and perhaps we didn't —we never forgot  
Hans or Lars— but a feeling permeates  
this dim-lit decade, much like an itch  
while sleeping: not bad enough to wake you  
but, under the monsters and rose-tit courtesans,  
there. Maybe it's all that kept us going.  
Or maybe we did scheme while peeling potatoes  
and add one line a day to a plan passed  
secretly in a hollowed spud; I don't know;  
but, whether any lieutenant recognized it,  
a subtle nuance of North Side Chicago  
clanged like frosted trash can lids  
through our Yessir, No sir in Lithuanian.  
There were good days, and bad days;  
equal, I guess. Exercise was no joy,  
or war games. But I see us sometimes lounging  
at an outdoor cafe, a carafe of white wine

on a cream-and-red-checked tablecloth,  
slicing cheese beneath a wicker awning  
and bartering garrison gossip for news  
of town goings-on with the waiter. Saturdays  
were our days off, and we saw two plump  
town shopgirls; surely they minded their dress,  
bobbing like cork above whatever neckline  
was in fashion; yet I see them always in bright  
peasant garb, with scooped necks smiling  
under a fleshy expanse of breast, and heavy  
drape  
dresses a lightweight man  
could hammock in; they were always laughing,  
and we were always telling jokes. Eventually,  
one Saturday, we married, the wine more white  
than ever, the cheese more sweet —a desert  
cheese.  
They were good to us, and one Sunday when  
we woke  
up middle-aged we hardly noticed; and all  
distinguishing us from any two parasol'ed  
couples  
snoozing Sunday in an arbor shaded  
from the great Lithuanian sun was the eye  
I'd open, or you'd open, much like a knot  
in a panelled wall through which can be seen,  
for a second, the forest  
it grew in and put forth fruit from.  
And then we'd wink shut.  
The lopped-off limb still itches; that's medical  
fact; and this is the truth. And then of course  
I woke from my dream,  
and scratched myself wide-eyed,  
Alan, alone in bed,  
and buttoned up for the day.

**Albert Goldbarth**

**SISTERS**1. *The one*

has a head of curls  
orange & intricate as a new Brillo.  
Perfect white half moons gleam  
at the tips of her fingers & toes  
& rise out of her placid bodice.  
Her cheeks are pink as fever  
& when she thinks, when her little  
round mind forms words,  
her cheeks swell & swell, deepening  
her dimples as if a witch finger  
had poked a muffin, & her red mouth  
tightens to a candy heart.  
Just when her chlorine-green eyes  
begin to protrude & a gagging  
noise gurgles in her throat, suddenly  
a fat rose bulges her lips apart,  
a dozen pearls splatter around  
the room in a volley of coughs,  
& a hummingbird pops out of  
her face, officious as a cuckoo,  
mumbling gibberish with its wings.

*2. The other*

used to spend each day  
somersaulting in the grass  
with the frogs & intricately decorated toads  
she could let out of her mouth at will  
as easily as some people can belch,  
as easily as telling a joke.  
She filled classrooms & laps with her jokes  
while her sweaty orange hair yelped  
with laughter like a pack of foxes.  
One day as she stared into a mirror  
(green eyes wide in the streaky dirt)  
to see if it was true, what the boys whispered,  
that her swelling front shook when she jumped,  
something wormed out between her lips  
& drooped down on her chin,  
something with bristles that made her bleed.  
It was the stem of a rose.  
She crushed its fat head between her teeth  
& spit it in the toilet. She tried  
to hawk up a frog but nothing came.  
Opals drooled out at the corners of her mouth  
& even hung from her nostrils.  
Under the dirt her cheeks flamed & puffed  
but she had no fever, she was toad-cold.  
The sharp-smelling hair of her head,  
armpits & crotch curled tight as Brillo,  
& though she shaves her body  
bald as a frog once a month  
it keeps growing back that way,  
& her pets have not returned.  
She can't believe what she sees, but  
look, there she is now, big as life:  
the breasty one, the fat-faced one,  
the mute one in the mirror.

Clarinda Harriss Lott

**THE BIG CITY/a footnote**

Three dreams on a broken balcony  
 And one pitcher of lemon juice and gin,  
 Black raincoats and pale green women  
 Slung over wicker chairs; Manhattan  
 Below a mix of yellow and grey snakes.

To these eyes, after oracles and divinities,  
 Come three frozen exhalations, clouds  
 With features caught in white altitudes  
 Moving to the east; rivers all around  
 Have banks of jeweled mud and light.

Piles of dust and puffs of smoke,  
 In the trainyard the leaning man  
 Blows dust off his white sleeve,  
 Directs actors who paint their faces  
 With letters. From high windows  
 The sun is a continuous curve, but not a circle.  
Nicholas Christopher

**CHICAGO, LORCAN**

My final slag evening in Chicago, Lorca.  
 She walks me through the iron winter  
 down the leafless concrete pathways  
 to Lake Michigan, tamed tubercular lion,  
 encaged by heavy railings like cold shackles,  
 then asks me to write poetry,  
 to find words that unlock the rusty sunset waves.  
 And the park branches open  
 And the winds rattle and unlock the stiff fences  
 And the waves grate against the icy shore  
 casting up old baby carriages

and small fish dead on their sides  
frozen upon each ripple  
fuzzed black at the gills like cankers.

So she tells me he did it.  
Lorca stood on the beaches and whistled once  
until the waves crept over his feet loving him  
rubbing their green manes against his bare toes.

You great green Catholic sonuvabitch,  
    Holofernes  
    Holofernes  
we have seen her at the gates  
seen her face cast like the marble  
seen the palms hung dry with dates  
    Holofernes  
    Holofernes  
while your neck bleeds in the tent  
your head brought to her elbow  
from blind guards upon the gates.

    I say Judith  
    I say Judith  
here the shackles here the cage  
here the dead fish lap the concrete  
here cement scratches waves  
    but she softer  
    she says softly  
see the moon high with the clouds  
past the beach sand past horizons  
where whitecaps wear no shrouds

She asks of beyond.  
Dressed in your deep green,  
her hair died the silver of your spurs  
roped and tossed free like winds across the sierras,  
she still believes in gypsies  
healing your bullet holes with water



dissolving the rope burns,  
 the hard blood cobblestone of Granada with song.  
 But I, cold beside Lake Michigan, must look here,  
 listening to your broken guitar  
 singing through the spokes of a dead baby's  
     wheels  
 played to the dead fish in a dead lion's eye.

R. Michael Benson

#### BOOKS IN BRIEF

**THE OSPREY SUICIDES.** *Laurence Lieberman.*  
*Collier. \$1.95 paper, \$6.95.*

For density of detail, perceived as freshly as by a naming Adam, Lieberman has no equal. The nine undersea poems of the section "Skin-Flying into the Storm Center" would alone proclaim this poet superb. His poetry sounds like nobody else's. He has his own sense of the poetic line, and he plays it, tightening and relaxing, dramatically, as though playing some great precious fish. Whether this metaphor applies to the subjects of the poems or their readers, I'll leave to each reader to decide.

Sometimes a book is worth buying for one wonderful poem. **SOMETHING TUGGING THE LINE**, by *Roderick Jellema*, *Dryad*, \$1.50, has one of my crazy corny favorites, "On Vacation, Teaching Bass." **HALF LIVES**, by *Erica Jong*, *Holt Paperback*, \$3.95, has the enchanting "Egg-plant Epithalamium" and lots of other fine sex poems and food poems and wild and witty poems. But on the whole this collection is more brittle, more self-conscious, than her first, the gorgeous **FRUITS & VEGETABLES**.