

# THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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## A VISITATION OF PEACOCK FEATHERS

What is it they want?  
These eyes on stalks,  
These nocturnal ferns  
Swarming before me, these eyes  
That swim against my window,  
The wind splaying their million feelers on the  
    glass —

What do they ask?  
Their indigo and gold, their emerald  
Lights shine like oil on dark water,  
They glimmer in the changing air;  
Still there is a steadiness, staring, and color  
    enters the room  
Like the sun through funeral panes.

What should I do, what should I say?  
Already I have shown all my card tricks,  
I have wiggled my ears, discussed my politics,  
And the eyes only stay. I turn up my hands at  
    last,  
And a rose blooms in either one, a pulse of  
    brightness —  
Outside the eyes multiply like cells, becoming  
    the night.

**Beth Horning**

**SWORDSMITH**

The Saracens of Damascus and Spain's  
Toledo blademakers  
approach a delicate truth  
of steel and their swords bear  
the river's temperament in battle,  
yielding at stress, yet keeping  
the ravenous edge.  
I've only heard this recently  
from one who's seen their work.  
I'm sure, however, none can equal  
our ancient mastery for loving  
ore into life.

After fasting, robed in purity,  
we dwell with the anvil and consider  
the forge whose heart pumps molten islands  
through our trust  
and we hand-fashion its gift  
as sea gods our world before us.  
Still, we fold generations  
of metal into every blade, weld  
and hammer continuously until air  
dances with flesh,  
then, on the final day, at sunrise  
as the white heron fishes  
amid its reflection and stones  
flower in first light,  
we kneel among shadows to pray  
before delivering the birth-stroke  
from fire to water, Hachiman,  
the sword god, seething his praise.

Held upright in a running stream,  
an inferior blade may shave each  
dead leaf in two that drifts

against its edge, but ours own  
the souls of leaves  
and all will circle avoiding the touch.  
Here, without question, is proof  
we are unsurpassed.  
I thank you for coming  
and pray the gods grant you a son.  
As she sleeps,  
please lay the sword beside your wife.

**Barry Sternlieb**

### MIRROR SONG FOR THE UNSATISFIED

I stare and stare:  
Is anyone there  
Under the hair?  
Anyone home  
For borrow or loan?  
There's something numb  
At the root of this tongue—  
In a shifty eye  
The flecks slide by—  
A place in the head  
Where words go dead  
And the blanks repeat  
*Sleeps and eats*  
*Sleeps and eats—*  
Oh body, oh breath,  
You've caught your death.

**Judith McCombs**

**PIG-HEART**

—Overweight? the ad read, —You're breaking  
your heart.

And there it sat, fat little pig on a platter,  
that pinkest of pork, that pump . . .

I had almost missed it, passed it off  
as another testimonial to mom's apple cooking,  
but went back, focusing on the o-holes  
of glory and blood and drew my breath:  
a heart.

Floated on white, white page as white  
as the Thanksgiving plate, it kept my eye  
blind as a butcher's knife.

Pig-heart; Beelzebub bulb in the garden of lies;  
the lord of the flies; the christ of my mother  
served up for the holy day in its robe of syrup  
and its thorn of cloves . . . this heart was

not at all like the rest of the body, not at all  
like the lungs — those twin balloons,  
identical cherubs, the angel of breath and  
the angel of death with their hushed, holy  
wings . . .

this heart was magnificent, common;  
mouth-watering heart — good enough to eat  
and grow thin.

**Priscilla Rhoades**

**THE NEAR WOODS****A Winter Letter to My Mother**

Behind my house a wood of birch,  
Pin-oak, white pine, tamarack, swamp alder,  
A thick underwood of fern and ground-pine,  
Angles down to a brook, then angles up to a  
field

Edged by another wood, then further  
Fields and river.

I know those distances, the shifting planes  
Between my rooftop and the riverbed in spring  
When cinquefoil threads the field-grass, and the  
first

Red-winged blackbirds harangue the brackish  
inlets  
Of the river, and the green hills westward float  
In the expanding light.

In winter now the nearest wood is all I know,  
Foreshortened angles from a white path in a  
white

Declivity, the path so newly strange in new snow  
That only the dog can find the way. The wood  
Itself is strange, turned on an axis vertical,  
Inhabited by silences.

Once each winter, always in snowfall,  
The same barred owl has shown himself in a high  
Branch of pine. Aloof, unmoving save for one  
Slow pivot of his head, he takes our measure  
As we pass, moving beneath him through a  
white

Ring of stillness, bent to the narrow path.  
A tension in the air suspends and wavers  
Like a struck chain.

Beyond him, in an upland clearing where we  
    pause  
To rest, the hieroglyphic of a rabbit's leap — a  
    frozen  
Mark of flight riddling the snow — dazzles  
My dog, dazes my own contracted sight,  
My glimpse of vacancies contained, containing:  
A weight of presence in the small triadic hollow.  
Somewhere away, havened, perhaps in the  
    brush  
Of a fallen birch, invisible, silent,  
The quick heart beats.

Where birch cluster at an edge of the clearing  
The thin light of a winter sun gathers to focus,  
    grows  
To a pure radiance in the white bark as if the  
    sun,  
Snow-masked, had need to show itself some-  
    where  
And chose the least of trees to burn in, to say:  
This fragile lamp will hold my light in the dusk  
Noon of the year: I am contained to show you:  
*I am here. I am here.*

From the low branch of a near birch a bright  
Racketing of chickadees scatters on the cold air.  
We hear them homeward, fluting and calling,  
Subsiding echoes contained in stillness.  
They live with the owl and hare and man  
And know the winter silences, making  
A casual music out of fear and joy  
Struck from the sounded chain.

**Sarah Youngblood**

**CIRCLING**

November is a month designed to mourn;  
so windswept, bleak and leveled are its days  
lamenting sunlight wears a veil of haze.  
Sky's greyness helps to hide the aging forms  
gone rigid—soon to snap and break in storms.  
It's time to fill the hearth and watch it blaze  
and not too long upon the backwoods gaze,  
regretting seasons which we can't transform.  
I take my last walks on a silent path  
hushed like a patient patiently near death.  
I muffle thought and let my feelings flow  
toward this stoic death-hour trance; then wrath  
seeps into frosty quick-drawn bits of breath  
as three loud crows fly overhead in snow.



As three loud crows fly overhead in snow  
the black-white season comes into its own.  
Extremes: wild windwhipped frozen leaf alone  
upon the branch, fierce heat from fire's glow.  
Love and hate implant their winter crops, go  
bright and cold through frozen soil sown  
for need of human food to fill the groan  
of year-end emptiness, together grow  
sometimes like bark entwined with bittersweet,  
the berry-studded vine a choking band  
of brilliance braced upon the sturdy tree.  
Hate's relish adds more flavor to love's meat,  
keeps lovers' dinner from becoming bland,  
like lemon added to the sweetened tea.

Like lemon added to the sweetened tea  
our tongues slip into acid dialogue;  
our brilliant conversation cuts the fog  
of living most days somewhat lost, at sea.  
We carve our wit with sharp-edged simile,  
pile thoughts to an impressive catalogue  
of mental merchandise. We fear the clog  
of silence soon might make words' magic flee  
out to the cold mute loneliness of night.  
We dread the wind that threatens to break in  
and interrupt our nervous tête à tête.  
Our talk is tinder kindled to ignite  
such warmth as needed to keep winter's kin  
beyond the door, the raw, dark thoughts at bay.

Beyond the door, the raw, dark thoughts at bay  
swirl into spider shapes against the moon's  
chill breath and crawl the cloudy island dunes  
of sky on covert webs for starry prey —  
touch, grasp and gobble up the Milky Way.  
The frightened lunar face falls all too soon  
into arachnid forces, is consumed.  
Black, black, the spider night holds sway,  
swelled legless, round as earth burst all through  
space —  
a perfect victory of nothingness.  
Black, black beyond beyond's beyond —  
black black blank and faceless face —  
so do dark thoughts expand and coalesce.  
From threatening black can one dare hope for  
dawn?

From threatening black can one dare hope for  
dawn?

In bleak midwinter Christmas comes to set  
the heart to hope, the mind half to forget  
another year is very nearly gone.  
Up from the snow spring reindeer on the lawn,  
lights in the windows, wreaths, the silhouette  
of Santa in the shops. Cheer piles like debt;  
it's thin bright tinsel ice we're skating on.  
But still the cardinal whistles cherry notes,  
the steel-cold day bejewels the blue jay's wing,  
and greedy grosbeaks yellow sunless scenes.  
Stark starlings most embroider winter's coat  
however, and dull sparrows mainly sing  
a cheerless chirp as part of grey routine.

A cheerless chirp as part of grey routine —  
I take the long-neglected sweet pipes out  
to practice with an effort more devout,  
keep sound aflowing till song forms again.  
Practice wears two faces: the scowling mien  
of concentration, repetition, doubt  
of ever catching all Telemann's about  
in nimble notes out of a long breath clean  
and clear; the other look the sudden joy  
of a perfect passage blown pure, effortless,  
birdfree: the ease of hard-won mastery  
when instrument and player make alloy,  
music, the magic consequence of stress  
surmounted, fused, and formed to melody.

Surmounted, fused, and formed to melody,  
I sing no matter what the seasons bring —  
myself at source an ever deep-kept spring  
athirst to live released, to flow and be  
a magnifier of reality.

I spy close up the dull wool coats that cling  
to once rich goldenrod; I feel the sting  
of wind unwrapped, see shaking robins flee;  
meet mockers in the grapes, squirrels at walnut  
trees, taste the smells that brought us to each  
gift;

hear death's dry rattle as the leafy swarms  
rise up to dance one final stiff-stem strut.

I sing what is and will sing even if

November seems a month designed to mourn.

**Mildred J. Nash**

**STORM-WATCH**

After all these days of early heat  
the summer's first storm knifes  
through the Bitterroots

Forests smolder to the south  
days of smoke cradled  
in their valleys

In my living room sparks leap  
from the socket as sirens sound  
west to some certain disaster

I go to the porch gaze at the sky  
filling with ozone and light  
watch the thermometer's steady fall

Later in the garden I am alone  
with the tangle of peas and kohlrabi  
endive lathered in mud steam rising  
to a sky rinsed clean as river stone

**Andrew Grossbardt**

**THREE POEMS****So Speaks the Dust to the Spice**

*For they that say such things declare  
plainly that they seek a country.*

—Hebrews 11:14

The Dove that dive-bombed through God's  
fissured skies  
Evaporates, only an ordinary bird  
Coos in towers, nests in the eaves of wells.  
You lower baptismal buckets: no angel's cries,  
No wild, divine remarks, only a mortal word  
For you, the tapping inside speckled eggshells.

You've spent your whole life digging: now in  
your brain

A hole twenty feet deep and twenty square  
Is dug, in it you cast debris, rocks, sticks,  
Hitting your image — it yanks at the chain  
Around its neck, yanks like a lumbering bear,  
And on that chain dangles a crucifix.

This is the night when Christ hears stories of  
The head, and whose it is, on Herod's platter;  
He fasts, He wonders which men He'll nourish  
With dark crushed grapes like purple words of  
love,

And which will break away, as bread crumbs  
scatter,

And covers His rage up like a steaming dish.

Time is the little classroom where we're taught  
That Zero is the year of Judgement Day;  
That in God's House each makes his bed and sets  
his plate  
Or, before the abstract throne, things could get  
hot;  
The Hand will pass across the Milky Way,  
A wet cloth rubbing symbols from black, black  
slate.

God is a strange woods where you've trailed  
crumbs  
That birds have eaten from the forest floor.  
You're lost, your heartbeats shudder like  
avalanches,  
You spot fat shadows on the boughs, like plums,  
But those nightbirds flap off seconds before  
Your flashlight beam floods through the empty  
branches.

### **Last Words**

I heard a voice. I hope I heard a liar.  
A smile smiled and asked me from the tree,  
"What is it you desire, zire, zire?"  
To make the words I make mean what I mean.  
"Suppose that, on a lawn, Alice is dreaming.  
Suppose that, after the wonders come to pass,  
She wakes — wakes and forgets. This is your  
meaning.  
Your word is her impression on the grass."

**Advent Vigil**

The Child who grabbed the sky in His red fist  
Grows ready to be born again. Blue Hell,  
Blue shadows on the television tell  
This hour and age when men do not desist  
Cursing the dark while shutting out the light.  
Bombs bursting in the Bloody Tower's face  
Fracture the night, the violence of the race  
Is my violence, all crime my crime tonight:

A tiny devil runs screaming up a ridge,  
Enters me like a bullet, shattering my past,  
Reminding me that no sin is the last.  
If love were fire, Lord, it would burn the bridge  
Spanning my small life and Your holy cry,  
*Father, forgive them*, for I know what I do,  
Shutting You out; but I must think of You  
At midnight when the screen's images die,

Shadows collapsing to a starry point,  
A pin-hole in Heaven's floor — it leaks  
Small light into this room of one who seeks  
In human sweat the oils that would anoint  
Your precious feet; who prays in this cold season  
To come at last to love we can believe,  
A constancy of light that will relieve  
The sheer dullness of our groping reason.

In the tremendous dark, Christ's streaming star,  
Glisten more violently for each lost daughter.  
Lord, I am one. Oil on mind's water,  
Suffuse with what can't be the things that are.

**Gjertrud Schnackenberg**

**DISC**

Vines, wasps warm in, up the side of  
the house sun clears first. Legging  
over the unborn in cells paper  
shapes, out of the reach of  
children. Day now, the dogs  
return to, played out at  
night in clay, on  
creek edges.

Coming over stalks, boned-weary, in  
big running under the shed, to  
naps. Grass knits, drying fray  
along the edge of the yard,  
of hens. Houseward, in  
a chair, pins creep the  
lower back down, of the one  
rubbed skin won't ease.

But fired deep, in fatherhood. A long  
way off the drone coming of  
the chain-saw, of someone else in  
health. Over the biting down  
resin, further through the pine  
heart, until the tree gives,  
splitting. Flat-bedded in  
stacks then, over the  
cab of the truck, in height.

Stuck-in clothes, in the black-fired  
kettle, his wife stirs, out to the  
wire fence where they dry. Always,  
with a little of the sand  
wind kicks. Under the  
muscles hard in his back,  
bone speaks to bone  
through his face, shrilly.



Red-clayed, soil bound in plank, the house  
the edge of the field comes to, in  
crops. Thick around with  
woods, pine-ready for the gas-  
powered saw, in slash and  
loblolly, in rows. From  
his chair, plushless,  
of cane.

Powerful hands as ever, grip the short  
length of a smoke. As before him  
his father, in darkness almost as a  
youth in death, borne out,  
with the tautness  
left of the early-on  
breakers of wood. The  
son in him, gives lineage to.

Yellow, the bus-hulk bringing home his  
children from school, like a moon  
through leaves, stops. Coming the  
ruts up to the house, barefoot,  
faces like his, tenderly,  
wagged out on the dry  
road of the pine  
stand, marked,  
for cutting.

Larry Lanier

**WISCONSIN: SEPTEMBER**

The long legs turn slowly in the water;  
that is it,—the long legs;  
the way they turn  
leaving the water the way it was.

They say sleep; they say stroke  
smoothly; they say soft and shiny.

Over the flat red water where  
the pines have bled their resin,  
the arch of iced sky stayed cold  
all summer. The water does not  
move, nor the wind. The clouds  
are stationary, granite, gray on gray.

The land falls slowly,  
giving in to the water leisurely.  
The stairs rot; the boat-hoist rusts,  
warped by the storm onto the shore,—  
a sculpture that says dying is slow.

There is one boat motionless  
in the southwest quadrant  
where the sun will not go down,  
and the legs have disappeared.

**Peg Carlson Lauber**

## THE BRAZEN HEAD AND WYRD

### I

#### The Brazen Head

Friar Bacon is reported to have made  
A head of brass.

  It would have been intricate  
With ratchets, precise locales of poised weights;  
Ingenious with balancings and frictions  
And noisy bellow valves of different pitch.

And there within it, tense and implicit,  
Necessitated within time to come,  
A point, one point set like a future clock  
To an exactitude when activity  
Fulfilled pre-measured temporality;  
A juncture where the interactions joined  
And the gears and the head collapsed in waste.

For when the ratchets were machinated  
The head said, "Time is." Following a pause,  
"Time was." An interval and, "Time is past."  
Which said it fell and self-destructed.

## II Wyrd

The three Norns water the World Ash:  
Urth and Verthandi and Skuld,  
Become, Becoming and Shall Be

The dead  
to phosphoresce in middens where the  
goddess  
the cocks and serpents — voice and coil —  
wind in one  
the slaying boar and the groin-torn king

The three Norns once were one, called Wyrd —  
Out of *weorthan*, "to become, to be" —  
And Wyrd was entelechic Doom:  
To become dead necessarily

But the dead  
like equinox are dead into the Spring  
as if they were the kine and boar  
roaring and wheeling in ashy orchards

## III A Wavicle

"Time," lexicographers have said, is the most intransigent word, the most difficult to define.

This poetry has been reductive: analysis to antinomial conceptions of time.

Louis de Broglie wrote: "... the electron is not merely a simple corpuscle; in one sense it is at once a corpuscle and a wave ... Matter,

as well as Light, consists of both waves and corpuscles . . . consider corpuscles and waves simultaneously . . . to reach a single theory . . . ”

Wave and particle are fused into an imaginative, self-consistent one: in Eddington's word, a “wavicle.”

Experient abstracts experiences.  
Time shimmers like a wavicle transmutes  
Into its obverse.

#### IV Orion

Prehension of time, then, is dual.  
Or: Time's elemental self-presentments,  
If fused to make one image on the stars  
Would be Orion, rising treading setting:  
The clocking hunter; mortal too — stars die;  
Yet until his configuration ends,  
Betelgeuse and the others shed all form  
And all Orion becomes somewhere else —  
Or he, as time, dims into entropy —  
His course upon the sky is like the Ash.

The clock is readily extrapolated:  
The tusked boar began in its dam's oestrus,  
Then tick-tocked seasonably accurate;  
Fed and watered; roared in rut; mounted  
Rut-mate, then watered where the gun-sights  
aim.

Aiming head fires gun to dead conclusion.

But how resuscitate the boar or kine  
Dead to the heady abstraction? And dead  
They are.

**The Kine and Boar**

Keep time in cycles, die no more than moon.  
Orion is a seed and like a serpent

Wyrd waters dry, not ticks clock-carnage.  
Clover thick the elvers leave  
Origin in the Sargasso  
Where weeds transform the ships in calm.

Where detritus is delta  
The girl sees terns suffuse the sea,  
The feeding dying fish-crept sea  
Where mammal dolphins talk and breed.

**V****The Experient**

Orion, that conjoining,  
seasonal constellation  
doesn't have a heart-beat.  
He fails as a fusing image.

The experient is lacking,  
The moment

                  eye-wide who comprehends  
dense stars constellated (illusorily)  
into Orion

The moment

                  who comprehends  
that an arrangement  
is not a constellation  
in the void and elan of space  
as the moment  
believes space  
and its material cramps  
the stars, are

The moment

aware (it believes)  
 of the trompes d'oeil  
 of apparent patterns  
 who ratiocinates  
 to concept "wavicle"

The heart-beat  
 times time as if  
 he were alone.  
 In an image  
 where is any one? Where  
 the man who experiences and dies?

ii

Werner Heisenberg distrusted and rejected mental images, pictures for the ultimate physical world. And he introduced the inextricably participant observer into the rigorously abstract world of the stuff of all things in its essence.

Forever — by the nature of things itself, not our deficiencies of either senses or instruments — it is impossible to know precisely both the velocity and the position of a particle/wave at the same time. So Heisenberg's "indeterminacy" or "uncertainty principle." *Even in imagination* we are forever unable to measure position and velocity with exactitude. Measure one, disturb the other. The act of observation itself alters the observed world, making impossible the perfect realization of the state of the stuff of things.

Neither we nor the world are free from each other. There is no "state of the stuff" minus us.

iii

Then as for Orion,  
an image valid from Earth to Pluto  
He may be, but he is hardly human;  
And Earth has to offer one live image,  
On Earth as common as the color green:  
A pregnant woman dying.

To Plutonians she might seem bizarre,  
So we'd conduct our ontological  
Discussions by each pointing out the stars.  
On Earth, the stars aren't necessary now.

"Mother dies; infant lives; father survives."  
Subjects with these verbs are ancient humans,  
Frequenting Babel in a desert tent  
Pitched to the lee of camels, or polar  
On black floes of ice beneath the crackle  
Of the cold Aurora. The mother dies,  
The baby lives and the father survives  
On Earth, in jungles lush with giant sloths  
And wart hogs; on patriarchal steppes  
Where chariots roll their iron fellies;  
In white clinics of clapboard Vermont towns,  
Time ends continuing  
And understood without a thought of stars.

VI

**Toward Quiddity**

For now, at any rate,  
here in an autobiographical milieu —  
i.e., who and when and where I am —  
I can go further only  
by suggestions to myself.



**ii**

Named individuals have been introduced:  
de Broglie, Eddington, Heisenberg.

Names insist

Every presence is as startling  
as yourself astonished at yourself  
by being here not there.  
Of course. Now realize it:  
the *Ding an Sich* of uniqueness,  
the "thing-in-itself,"  
the quiddity of each.  
("Why do you love that girl?")

**iii**

"Quiddity" is the Word of all words magic.  
Essence and eccentricity.  
The essence of a thing,  
the answer to "*Quid est?*" What is it?  
And "cavil; quibble" (splendidly praiseworthy!)  
"a subtle distinction" —  
the eccentricity of anything at all.

**iv**

Orion was a suggestion, but he could not become substance and sustenance; a felt experiment, conjugating into one image two experiences of time.

"Named individuals" suggests something further: Imagery here *must* fail — *de rei natura* intransigent — in the end. The image of an experient must fail. We bring Orion down to earth, use the image of "pregnant woman dying." The

stars and the abstractions are gone; the most practical mind understands. The quiddity is lacking.

However "real" Orion grows; however immediate the image of "dying mother/infant" is; however immersed, even if as one drop of water is with any other, the experient is made — nothing can be that living "thing-in-itself" that an image of Time-as-complementary-processes attempts. There *cannot be an* — one — image-experient of time convincing us: "I am Time/Time is thus generalized."

*De temporis natura* —  
concerning of time its nature —  
Time is not a *Ding an Sich*.  
Time is the quiddity of *each* quiddity  
therefore is always plural also:  
Quiddities of quiddities.  
*De facto*, Time is singular plural.

## VII

### To the Sargasso Sea

The brass ship's clock and compass are aboard;  
The sail, canvas sewn cunningly, is hoist  
To trammel wind from continent behind,  
Or spume-raising breeze from the sea itself.  
Voyage aweigh.

  Simultaneously  
Fresh-water eels leave grounded ponds and  
wells,  
Find the streams to rivers, then the ocean

and deep ways to the Sargasso Sea;  
 Migrating not to voyage but complete  
 Origins all and once upon a time  
 They knew and new elvers know in their past.

There in the Sargasso Sea it is  
 As if beneath the weeds the moon phases  
 In a helix, and small, shedding serpents  
 Renew themselves waxing in marine light;  
 Then turn on on-coming moon and sea  
 Back up the rivers, to the ponds and wells.

There the ship calms, the flaccid canvas numb,  
 Pointless as the finger of the compass,  
 And the hour-hand metronomically runs  
 Along as the cabin grows stuffier,  
 The deck-planks warp. The crew hallucinates  
 Many weedily-chimerical monsters  
 And thirsty and insane its members die.

ii

“Once upon a time a voyage . . .?”

No, it wasn't.

And the crew-members are lacking.

Well, say three are  
 de Broglie, Eddington and Heisenberg  
 (born 1892, 1882 and 1901).

“Salt and pepper as you please”  
 to make up the remainder —  
 as long as you stick  
 to time's reality principle:  
 They must be contemporaries  
 for they share a real time.

## iii

The unvoicable reality of time  
Is within the facts of dated temporalities,  
Within birthdays and names.

Louis, Duc de Broglie, was  
an oosperm like any other once;  
A causal order of phenomena  
Upon a paradigm.  
And if that explains "him," it misses Louis  
Who was Louis, not  
His parents' daughters.

The brazen head, and Wyrđ  
An entelechic verb "to be,"  
Are human real extrapolations,  
As is the concept of a voyage.  
But "voyage" — whether  
As infallible mechanic  
Proceeding to the weeds;  
Or lunar neap and spring  
Of source form-fruitful as a fire —  
"Voyage" is a subsumption  
And "Time" is not, but is  
Every subsumed quiddity lost  
In the diminishment  
Whatever is inclusive makes.

Here the necessary first notion  
Is that of "contemporary  
Within a locale."  
By the natures of the beasts  
Who walk contemporaneously,  
Live coetaneously marking  
Birthdays, name-days, calendrical graves,

Who speak to each other in the present tense,  
The personally specific  
Is necessary — each one —  
To the definition:  
Singularly in present multitudes  
Is how time happens.

The koan "Time" is answered "Time"  
In dialects in accents in vernacular.

The aspirant mystic  
May find in his own connotations  
Unutterable wonder at and of  
Discrete immediacies.

**Bernard Mullins**  
(for Jean and Derith)

## TWO POEMS

### The Thing

rubbing her neck and legs  
he raised sparks of rapid breath  
and beads of moisture deep within her.  
everything in the car was soft with dew,  
their mouths falling into each other.

they lost their minds in adolescent desperation.  
it was natural then that, the radio being off,  
they would not have heard  
of the thing's glowing arrival,  
its landing in a nearby forest,  
of reports of unspeakable horrors,  
its thirst for bread and flesh.  
when the car began to rock  
he thought it was her sixteen-year-old  
happiness moving below him; the odor  
he gave to her as well, feeling  
he had tapped a deeper well  
of musk and dark oil.  
she thought, upon seeing it  
all at once framed in the passenger window,  
that it looked desperately like his mother;  
he, that it bore a ferocity  
akin only to her father.  
their final seconds together  
were spent in wild fright and passion,  
locked together, lipless,  
the horror breathing their own passions  
upon the wet windows, part of something  
no one could stop.  
it would be left to someone else  
to call out the army,  
the wise men in white coats  
who would try to kill this thing  
with electricity or bacteria or fire  
or kindness; they lay together  
in the dark belly of a piece  
of night sky, stilled for all time,  
out of the picture, safe again.

### The Farmer

“now here’s the latest  
from Porter and Dolly,” he lisps.  
he broadcasts daily from station WRFD.  
crouching down low  
on a three-legged stool,  
gripping his mike  
like the dugs of an udder,  
he breathes out five-minute  
weather reports, testimony  
on religion and tractors:

“I run my John Deere  
on the power in the lamb’s blood.  
each green shoot shouting  
in my contoured fields  
praises the name  
of Jesus and his Daddy.  
my corn walks about  
in the holy wind, strutting  
with joy and wonder;  
soybeans speak in tongues;  
pig weeds roll over dead  
when they hear the Holy Word.  
my chickens die of happiness,  
their necks rent in two  
by the marvelous power.  
Black Angus somersault  
into air, click their hooves,  
bellow ‘Lord God of Hosts.’  
in my orchards grow apples,  
untasted, moaning for the worm.  
it’s good to be a farmer.”

David Citino

**I WOKE UP FROM A DREAM**

I woke up from a dream  
 and saw these bloodless spiders.  
 we had had rain.  
 they came inside and sat  
 by the fireplace:  
 (transparent things seem to be always chilled.)

a pale group:            they fingered nervelessly  
 at the guitars of my singing flames  
 then shook off,    one by one,    their hairy  
                                  burning legs;  
 which they later reassembled  
 into hex signs    on the hearth.  
 it was a nightmare.    a nightmare.    a  
                                  nightmare.  
 I    fled.

in the yellow  
 of the following morning  
 I swept up their charred leg tips  
 and my burned down logs;  
 and set healthy,    fat-fleshed roses  
 in a    VITAMIN-D-ENRICHED milk carton  
 right under the chimney draught.  
 the wind blew down,    clean;  
 the evil sight died from my mind.

still,  
 it may be that bloodless creatures are never  
                                  really destroyed:  
 now I find their jellylike    filmed eyes  
 often staring up at me    when I walk on a wet  
                                  morning    beach.

**Charlotte A. Raines**



**WAKING THE WATERS***for Dennis & Cynthia Ellman***1**

Thin morning sun stretches our shadows  
 toward Japan. We are still longing  
 to be somewhere else, someone else.  
 Yet, anxious as rind-skinned toads  
 still looking for a mate,  
 we have begun to recognize amphibian calls  
 from the island-scarred sea, the loud mystery  
 of California, of water and land's end.  
 Our destiny seems manifest:

I am come back  
 after long journeys  
 where transition seemed the only permanence  
 to meet you here again —  
 the freshly hosed streets of Venice,  
 the sheen of salt on the penny-skinned girls  
                     glittering up from the beach,  
 the shadow of water folding into itself.  
 Once more we stand together  
 on ungathered stones  
 cast up by the rough Pacific,  
 hurling pebbles like failed poems  
 toward the waves. The wind and water  
 rob our voices of the weight we need.

**2**

How long have we tottered here unbalanced  
 on this rubbled hatchery of stone?  
 Transparent waves coast in  
 to bathe the heap of ballast at our feet.

In the strange Galapagos the Spanish pirates  
 filled their holds with tortoises,  
 live weight to right their thieving ships.  
 The Eskimo, paddling his pointed drum

through cold Aleutian straits,  
steers by the thrust of his own flesh.  
Their slave-driven craft erect above a load of  
island stones,  
the Greeks navigated by the sun  
and perfected rhetoric with a pebble  
balanced underneath the tongue.  
We need a kind of ballast, too,  
pointing us steadfastly  
toward the center of the earth.

## 3

Neither of us has a son, still,  
further down the beach a boy  
who might be yours or mine  
is breaking open rocks. We listen  
for the ping his hammer makes  
to halve the egg-shaped stone.  
You flinch to know that chips  
may blind the eye that seeks  
the structured color locked inside.  
His face, and mine, are dazzled  
by the spittle-coated hearts of ordinary rocks.

That ought to be our business, too —  
using saliva and the human breath  
not to erect, but to reveal  
the ballast of our life:  
and, finally, not even that transfiguration  
but a coming to love,  
the knowledge and acceptance of what is.

All men are islands in their minds.  
We have assigned ourselves the role  
of ships that link  
that lonely archipelago, waking the waters  
that support us as we sail.

Jack W. Thomas

**ARCHAIC WORDS DESCEND**

My Dave is dead,  
Agent of his end.  
His note said:  
"He leaves me, no man lives  
Unless He send  
Breath."

Dave, your logick grew aslant.  
You sliding by, each  
Twisted phrase abrupt.  
Any song will reach  
If He mend  
Death.

Archaic words descend.  
The poet's footing gone,  
Haze returns  
For healing. Dave discerns  
That I will rend  
His wreath.

**Gerald E. Sacks**

**MIRANDA AND THE PIANO**

The burned piano, legs up  
In the orchard, yolk-bright  
Weeds swaying where swallows

Pick worms in trickster time  
And Miranda examines  
Her breasts on a rock.

The house a blasted patch now,  
Early-american rubble and ash,  
Firemen returned to town:

Volunteers after all,  
No more could be done,  
Half the piano saved,

The keys a uniform black,  
All sharps and flats  
And Miranda buttons her shirt,

Approaches me barefoot  
Making it look as if the field moves  
While she is stationary;

Smoke is still in the wind,  
Stuck like dried fish  
In an old net.

A last neighbor appears,  
Offers rote condolences, leaves;  
Miranda stops, pirouettes twice,

Continues towards me,  
Her legs striped white,  
Hair gold and dry as snakes,

Scraps of a bedspread  
And charred letters in hand.  
Lithe, level-eyed through fumes,

She passes me to circle the piano,  
Finger the remains of a chord  
And put a match to her hair.

**Nicholas Christopher**