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**WHIG ROSE**

**from QUILTS**

*In which the black-centered flowers signify  
sympathy with the abolitionist movement. There  
were undoubtedly Tory husbands who slept under  
them unknowingly.*

Bonds never put asunder  
left us to our secrets.  
When we couldn't fight  
or speak, we fashioned things.  
The roots always underneath,  
ceaseless fingerings of loam.

There was a moaning in the air.  
It said my brother's keeper.  
There's a dusky stream  
that is mine alone.

Look into the black  
center of a rose, where  
we married,  
each to other:  
a window where  
trainwhistles stopped.

**Estelle Milligan**

**CENTIPEDE**

Geophilus electricus is blind.  
It is generally conceded  
that its luminescence  
has some purpose  
other than lighting up the cracks  
and undersides of rocks  
that it inhabits.  
It may be that it glows  
to lure its prey,  
although it is a little difficult  
to see the need  
to dazzle grubs and earthworms,  
who would be sufficiently overwhelmed  
by the racial memory  
of a hundred whiskery legs or so  
trilling rapidly in their direction  
in perfect sync.

And there are those who've said  
that this centipede  
glows to attract lovers,  
although its sexual habits are remote,  
including, rather inevitably,  
as they do,  
a hint of copulatory feet.  
Glowing, in this respect,  
would seem to serve  
as an ironic variation on  
the blind leading the blind,  
and nothing more.  
This surely is a case of  
amorous overkill,  
since a hundred legs  
would know a hundred legs anywhere.

Faultlessly elegant,  
golden geophilus electricus  
doesn't resort to violence in the kill.  
Exuding the classic scent of almonds,  
it dispatches its victims with cyanide.  
This self-sufficient centipede  
moves through its darkness in perfect confidence  
that when its great jaws (relative to its size) snap,  
something will be in them,  
and that all those feet  
will cover more than distance.

**John Ratti****from DEATH SEGMENTS****for Buddha's claws**

a whisper of not-asking  
in the quest  
for the perfect jewel

the reach  
of the climber  
along the sharp face  
of the highest mountain

arms too short  
a ledge

a song about  
a broken rope

**John Price**

**TWO POEMS****Story of the Youngest**

I would draw the alphabet in milk for her  
when thirst is written on her lips  
but then she steals the cup & empties it.

She chants "NO!" between the nods of others.  
There is a chorus of women in slips  
yet the straps slide

from her shoulders as she hunches,  
coiling in her spine  
like rope.

Silently her blood ripens  
& descends  
to paint her thighs.

Her hands are rough, their lines  
are splinters driven in, or roads  
started then abandoned.

Like rain on glass, she patters  
down the hall, her ankles  
strengthen.

She never finds the mirror  
though her hair is like a cat's  
fur, thick with light.

She cannot sleep.  
The wings of her sheets come together  
beating endlessly.

Until the moon strikes twelve  
she must repeat herself  
& this clock has no pity & no mouth.

**The Nettle Spinner's Brothers**

Their wings are buttresses against the forest.  
They huddle by the reeds, drink from the soiled cup  
of the pond. At dusk I gather  
the paths they shed, step by step, wooing ashes.  
The fireflies slip past like drops of blood.

The dragonflies are blue, and sharp as needles.  
I could use them to stitch across bruises  
and hem wounds. Perhaps I could complete a quilt  
and smuggle my brothers back under cover of darkness and  
sleep.

They would veil the moon's eye with their tailfeathers.

My fingers dip into the purple nettles,  
armoured blossoms almost unapproachable as princes.  
I win my thread from them and spin it  
to unravel an enchantment. The shoulders of young boys  
nudge each other on the growing cloth.

The buttons have fallen from my hands like dice.  
I am saddened by these shirts, completed  
and folded in the shadow of my fallow wheel.  
I wash them as if they had been worn and pin them up:  
billowing, white as flags of truce.

I let the wind fill out their sleeves, the bees  
dot their cuffs with pollen. I suspect my brothers  
hide behind the green dome of the meadow,  
hesitate before this landscape mild as grazing cows,  
mute, their temperatures descending toward the human.

**Deborah Woodard**

**WHAT IT WOULD**

It would stay;  
would make marriages,  
burrow in the bedclothes  
as if to root there.  
In dreams of biding  
it tastes still  
the milk-warm tit.  
It would have children  
and hold them,  
fix them with dots of glue  
in black-leaved albums  
to stare over the birthday candles.  
It would tread with regularity  
a deepening groove  
to lie down in when work stops.  
It would take ease  
under old rafters.  
To prolong the habit of living  
it would snuggle,  
make marriages.  
It would stay.

It would go,  
nosing the wind,  
snapping strings and fingers,  
a tickle in the instep,  
and at every tip and orifice  
unreachable itches.  
In dreams of levitation  
it stretches  
for impossible legsplits.  
Won't stop for weddings  
or narratives.  
It would pursue

elegant variations.  
It would roll from embraces  
and leave, like a snail,  
a wet track over stones and twigs.  
It would be pulling up tentpins  
like carrots  
and be unexpectedly absent.  
It would make love  
against the habit of dying.

It would roar,  
would amplify its voice  
to a heavy cry  
for the lost nipple,  
the spiderweb on the lintel,  
the early warning signs  
clustered like mermaids  
on bare rocks,  
the curled snapshots,  
the high tors of divorce  
and attenuation,  
the rafters crushed,  
and the campfire broken  
that it would have pissed  
to clouds of smoke  
sour in the dark.  
It would abuse mirrors  
and send envelopes,  
stamped, self-addressed,  
containing threats.  
It would organize.  
It would kill.

Down in the street an incision  
lays open a fat intestine.  
Diviners in yellow hats

pray over the entrails.  
One rides a jackhammer  
without love.

Across the way in a blind building  
two windows wink open.

I am the one who is writing.  
It writes nothing.  
I don't know how to conclude.  
It would know.  
It waits for me to conclude  
so it can take over.  
It would take over.  
But I would only begin again.

James L. McPherson

### FIRST BORN

We shall not die.  
Here, in sheets,  
sleeps our joined eternity.  
To this parturitioned head bend  
generations  
not yet seed, sprung in earth  
still to be laid down  
on granite, slowly breaking  
underground.  
We are of things  
which we will never see; such  
flowering,  
such fertility.

Susan Hand Shetterly

**FOUR POEMS****Pests**

Even if President McKinley couldn't,  
the elderly could hear the cat's breath of indian children,  
they dream of tubercular children  
purring like flies under their palms,  
like whiskers on the spilled, blue milk of their skin.  
Indians prattle at the feet of beds  
like houseflies, like children who don't realize  
how sick grandmas are; they sting  
and sting; when the old wake  
they show us their hands, "See?" they whisper.  
Ghosts of indians filibuster  
like summer flies. In their sleep the old twitch  
as if a cat were smelling the milk  
on their lips. "Do you see that child there  
at the side of my bed, at my fingertips?"  
Elderly women itch as if cat-hair were in the linings  
of their housecoats. Even the elderly gentleman  
who fought in the indian wars  
thinks he hears oglala sioux children  
inside the television like bees  
dying inside a bottle. Sixtyeight years ago  
windows were sealed shut,  
indians died along the sills, there was a loud humming  
like flies make just before they die.

This is what it is like to live in a town  
where a tribe has died.  
I remember the blue certainty of shadows,  
a thick, bluewhite snow on my wall,  
three men crossing it, two with axes,  
they killed the third.  
In the morning I touched the place on my wall where he  
died.

**April 9, 1945/Bewahrung**

From my house I was sure I could hear everything,  
I could tell between channel buoys  
like bells of different churches,  
I could hear the sea mumbling its low mass,  
elderly priest hurrying the gospel,  
mending the same dark clothes for the poor  
it had been saving for years,  
I could hear each wave arriving late, sliding into its pew,  
I could tell between each piece of change,  
dropping into the collection plate.

From my house I could hear everything else if I was quiet,  
churches tugging at their moorings,  
I could tell between them like old boats in the harbor  
I had closed my eyes so often I knew —  
whose hulls took waves like doors closing in empty factories  
the hulls of which fleet rattled  
like windows being shut all through a house —  
I heard each church drift to tether's end and pull at its  
slack,

from my house I heard the churches creak  
as they were tugged back.

From my house I could hear everything — if I did not move  
I could hear everything else in the world  
that did not move — the groaning of wharves,  
of the dark-brick buildings of institutions  
whose roofs I clung to like wharves,  
looking down — I could tell between buildings like wharves  
by how far they sunk down,  
which was Harvard, which my mother's state hospital,  
from my house I heard waves rise over its wards  
and mother once again drown.

From my house I was sure I heard everything else in the  
world,  
when I was still enough,  
all the countries in Europe shifting at their moorings —  
eyes closed, I could hear Germany move  
among them like a freighter in a harbor too small for it,  
I knew its cargo by its wake,  
I could hear millions of small stones being scraped back,  
from my house I heard the waves rise again  
like bordering countries,  
their feudal, cresting, holocaustial surf break.

### When Are You Going to Grow Up?

My oldest boy wants to know if we are returning  
to the age of the dinosaurs,  
he is afraid of the monsters they are dredging lakes for  
like stolen cars. My three year old lies on museum floors,  
“you can’t touch me, I am dead,”  
death gives him power over us.

My sons bring me skulls from the water company’s woods,  
spiders, dead bats, lizards  
like old murder weapons in cases still not solved.  
I write this because I am too tired  
to remember anything but being a child  
because I am bad at names

I still cannot name things I remember,  
the three black plants  
beside the sunken garbage pail that was only an excuse  
to cover the hole  
that went straight into the middle of the earth

These ugly plants  
like words spelled so badly you can’t look them up,  
black whiskers knotted like bibs  
around chins of pirates clambering up the sides of houses,  
every night boarding our becalmed house

Three stiff beards, three silent uncles  
lifted out of the ground  
by their chins — huge bodies rooted underground, corpses,  
whiskers still growing  
after death — and their nails?

Three tramps always outside our kitchen door.  
I remember an old black man chalking our gate,  
grabbing my brother and me, shaking us,  
telling us our mother was vicious,  
was crazy, mother shrieking from the porch.

I was sure there was a hole  
that went straight down to the middle of the earth,  
I could never see the bottom,  
I used to lift the pail in and out of the dark  
or rush out, push open the lid with my foot and run off,  
I loved to hear the iron rim ring behind me.

Mother tried to show me there was a bottom to everything,  
an end if I reached far enough in  
I could touch. She tried to make me touch what I feared,  
these three ugly nameless plants  
outside our kitchen door like dead rodents,  
old muskrats that would not decompose.

I would not touch anything,  
I always took the long way around.

### **Town Beach**

Mother hammering your head against walls,  
you rushing out screaming, "She's killing me, she's killing  
me"  
mother staring at her hands  
as if they had crawled out of shells  
as if they were crawling up her arms, trailing slime over  
her,

over us. We used to lie in bed  
whispering about madness, about going mad as her,  
secreting madness, making it spiral over us,  
its lips curling, narrowing  
into even more delicate chambers that would harden over  
us.

You liked to swim over your head, pretend to drown,  
only your feet out of water,  
plucked white roots. Convinced again, I curved my body  
around me  
shoulders rounded, tightening  
as if I were trying to pull the ends of a bow together.  
I wanted you back, near me  
as if you were part of a collection I had been saving for  
years,  
moonshell, lady's ear, chinese alphabet.  
I wanted us always to be left  
early mornings, carrying blankets down from the  
bathhouse.

To be beginning another long day together, testing the  
water,  
making war before anyone else,  
to bunker in the deep billowing shade under lifeguards'  
boats,  
to feel the beach slowly taken back from us,  
to dab blood off of our feet in the dunes,  
to pull rose rugosa burrs off terrycloth,  
to unwrap waxpaper off sandwiches softened by the sun,  
to tie towels around our waists  
and let our bathingsuits drop to the ground like parts of  
bodies  
we could not use anymore.

To dress in the dark, salt boxes of the bathhouse  
in compartments we had to share,  
to feel them hold their shadows around us like fathers  
while we dressed, each spanking  
his own bottom, cool and soft as white sand under  
bathhouses.

You curved my hand around tillers,  
held it there, taught me to steer our herreshoff through  
jetties,  
that wide white house being moved.  
I want to lie on wet sandy towels, shivering  
from having tried to please you.

I want you to put your hands under me again,  
teach me again the deadman's float.  
I think of you at nine, secreted inside the tip  
of your rancor, growing furiously  
more beautiful, more adamant.  
When they put mother away, you beat your head against  
the wall  
pulling out of our arms, pulling back to the wall  
with the steadfast magnetic fury  
of dogs hurling themselves against locked, cellar doors.  
I want your ruins back,

I want the staircases you spiraled down,  
the grand entrances, vestibules and corridors, turrets and  
eaves,  
friezes you chiseled out of wet sand  
you made me mold into cornices for you,  
the columns you weakened, foundations you shaved.  
I want the slowly emptied cuffs and sleeves of long  
afternoons,  
I want to crawl back into the cold white sand

under the bathhouse and listen to showers  
gasp and drowse off like old men,  
water seeping and filling through spaces between  
floorboards.

I want to lie under men's rooms  
and smell their dark politics, to listen to sounds of  
bathingsuits  
being squeezed through the wringer,  
slits opening in its cracking rubber,  
I want to be four and afraid to touch the rollers,  
you letting your hand ride up them.  
I want to lie with you on late afternoons and look up  
through floorboards, needing only slants of light  
and skin to imagine women dressing above us,  
to listen to them whisper like voices from the future.

Christopher Bursk

**OF NIGHTMARES AND WHITE CANES**

Like the sky remembering whiffs of cumuli  
— a dream: A choked voice in a men's room  
calling out, "Hey, fellow I broke my glasses  
... where are the goddamn urinals?" I awake  
trembling. Had that been *my* voice?

I recall sitting in the john of the Memorial  
Library, all the locks broken as usual, when  
the door is suddenly yanked open and a tall  
student enters, coming straight at me. My gasp  
... his recoiling flight... the door slamming shut...  
I hear him bustling about in the next cabin...  
I have to laugh. The fucking nerve of the guy!  
My colleagues are greatly amused.  
A week later, I meet him in front of the Library,  
carrying a thin white cane.

How many years ago was that? Not many.  
I enter rooms warily now.

The young black boy with the white cane  
circles frantically around himself, a lopsided  
top spinning out of control. His stick scrapes  
the asphalt in search of a sign, an obstacle, an  
object, a wall, a step... He looks grotesque,  
like a clumsy ice-dancer attempting a pirouette,  
like a crazy drunk, or a clown. He hears my  
steps and veers toward me, panicky,  
stammering, "Where am I? Is this a parking lot?"  
It is. In front of an abandoned gas station.  
"Where are you headed?" He is still shaking, the wild

carousel still turning in his brain, but slowing down.  
"To the post office," he mutters. I lead the way.  
His bitterness, his shame, his envy of me, the seeing,  
grazes my face like wind. I open the door for him,  
walk on. The wind hurls a rain of leaves  
against my eyes.

Felix Pollak

#### FOUR DAYS WITHOUT FOOD

Four days without food  
and the thought snaps in the open claw.  
Everything now unbearably beautiful:  
the perfect machinery of my body,  
the windtalk, the fierce kiss  
of tendril and stone.

I move through grasses  
bent into the forms of sleeping monks.  
Sunlight coats my hands.  
Silence, with its transparent wings,  
settles on the branches of my lungs.

At noon I curl up inside a hollow tree  
and sleep; against the bonewhite sky,  
memories sailing up  
like tattered leaves in a windspout.

John Witschel

**TWO POEMS**

**Thimble**

Hemlines can rise and fall without her.  
Socks gape now and stick out our toes at us.  
The scraps she kept will never be quilts.  
Her lids stitched tight

She's made it through the needle's eye  
and seems content to hold her empty hands  
and let the family pass.

Tomorrow her heavy daughter

will water the african violets  
and pause to open the lid of the fruitcake tin  
and sort through buttons and spools  
for the silver thimble.

But it will slip, chime once  
on the treadle of the old Singer,  
and tumble into a corner near  
the back leg of the rosebud chair.

Down on her hands and knees,  
reaching for it, she will marvel how  
already the rug is soaked with dark  
spilling from its tiny mouth.

**Lot's Wife**

Messengers of God, the two strode like torches  
into the hills. The town was tinder,  
a fuse they'd lit. Dust, small stones, their steps  
in the scorched grass asked too much of her.  
She winced at the flames that were their wings.

The narrator has pace to consider  
and the fate of the Chosen. In a single line  
he turns—as she turned—away  
leaving her on the brow of the hill  
where she squinted to read the few words of the verse  
her doorposts added to the great black scroll  
unrolling above the plain and wept herself  
empty. The hot wind sweeping past  
fixed her in the crust of her own salt.

Through Zoar and beyond, evening, as it had to,  
sifted down. Scrawny mountain cattle came.  
With many soft carvings their tongues took  
what was left. They do not forget. Each night they come  
home,  
their delicate mouths bearing her grief.

Edward Wilson

## TWO POEMS

### **An Interview with God**

I'm in paradise asking God questions.  
He seems to have a lot to answer for.

Splendid summer afternoon, perfume of flowers.  
We drink China tea, not ambrosia,  
On a terrace overlooking the Thames.  
Neat lawns beside a Tudor facade  
Recall film-set decor, unashamedly bourgeois.

I twiddle the knobs on the Time Machine.  
The Thames fades, changes to a steaming marsh.  
Mesozoic times. A dying Megalosaurus,  
Forty foot long, carnivorous,  
Gazes at us from black, pleading eyes.

Its pain spreads out across uncharted years.  
In spite of myself, I assume a voyeur's role,  
Sip tea behind the armour-plated screen.  
The mind that made this must have been insane.  
God, wild-eyed, jabs at the controls.

Back on the terrace I ask him to explain.  
God replies by fetching in Wordsworth.  
"Darwin led you astray," he informs me;  
"Your generation wallowed in sickness,  
Bereft of joy, fearing my simple words."

He lifts his hand. The garden breathes and sighs.  
The living universe of twig and leaf  
Floods my imagination like a sea.  
All around us voices of silence sing  
Of Nature's peace and grace and harmony.

The show over, Wordsworth withdraws to his Lakes.  
My turn. I choose a tableau of pestilence.  
The Black Death kills uncounted millions;  
Bodies stuck to the floor of the lazar-house  
Raised by iron hooks for burning in the street.

We watch a boy racked on a tumbled bed.  
Dark patches on legs and groin, buboes  
Under the armpits. A thin scream of protest  
Breaks from his fever-crustled lips.  
We slip back horror-struck to the present.

Once more on the terrace we eye each other.  
Neat-suited, mid-fifties, mild and soft-voiced,  
God resembles those English dons  
So self-effacing they almost disappear.  
He tries to break the news gently.

"We have granted you a brief respite  
In this bourgeois Eden of your dreams.  
You made this heaven, you made me in this shape  
To share your comfortable retreat.  
It seems you have a lot to answer for.

“You ask for justice; there is none.  
You must renounce the Christian heresy  
That I created all things, even pain.  
The war with evil, unredeemed by time,  
Spans the whole universe without end.”

We embark on a last pilgrimage  
Across Europe to St. Peter’s in Rome.  
God flinches from the baroque altar,  
Thrusts himself forward, transfixed, elate,  
Before the Pieta of Michelangelo.

A youthful Virgin nurses the stricken Christ.  
Tenderness so flows in folds of marble drapery  
All beholders feel embraced.  
I’m suddenly nervous, out of breath,  
Faintly hearing God’s final words:

“Between grief and nothing I choose grief.”

### **Mr. Parker**

Harvest festival at Queen’s Street Mission.  
Behind sheaves of wheat forty scrubbed children,  
Impossibly cherubic,  
Faces red like heaped plates of tomatoes,  
Sweat their way through seasonal hymns.

Framed by dangling bunches of grapes,  
My feet hidden by a huge marrow,  
Ten year old soloist,  
I tell serried ranks of adoring parents  
Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy.

In the dark vestibule, Mr. Parker, treasurer,  
For whom pederast is an unknown word,  
Counts the offering.

Lean, prim, with sparse canary yellow hair,  
He fears to cross boundaries.

For twenty years he's taken little boys  
On tremulous outings to the sea-side.  
By trade a bricklayer  
He scrubs his fingers white for week-ends,  
Likes clever children, middle class.

Next day as we picnic in sandhills  
Mr. Parker's neat black shoes, trim grey suit,  
Strike discord.

Too casually his hand drops on my shoulder,  
His only desired form of embrace.

I shrug him off, run through the dunes,  
Past the rotting breakwater, out of sight.  
In a warm hollow  
I burrow into the sand as Mr. Parker  
Slips and puffs in uneasy pursuit.

I watch his approach from my hiding-place  
Behind tussocky, spiky marram grass.  
He passes beyond me,  
Stops to gaze across the desolate foreshore,  
Salt bitter wind on his lips.

Moment of stillness, water in his eyes,  
Memories of unrequited love.  
I feel guilty,  
Reveal my presence by singing quietly  
Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy.

**THIS MAN I CARRY ON MY BACK**

**I**

He squats at the edge of me,  
my face in his hands.  
I'm counting the beats of his heart  
and stretching back into my body  
for the long walk through this dark.  
I'm thinking of the wife he goes home to  
as faithful as Joseph.  
I try on her clothes,  
but they don't fit.  
I borrow her scent  
and rub it into my skin,  
but the face in the mirror is mine  
and nothing alters it.

I carry him on my back  
like a burden I can't be rid of.  
In a year he'll be dying  
and I'll remember the weight of him  
rocking to sleep  
in the pouch of my pelvis,  
how I listened at his ear  
and heard the wings  
of migrating birds  
still miles and months away.  
I'll try to forget  
the nest we made for a child  
who couldn't be born.  
And when I'm dying, too,  
then none of this will matter  
except that once  
my face was at rest in his hands.

## II

Anonymous as a nurse,  
I sit by his bed,  
his pulse in my hand  
and a bundle of prayers  
in my right arm.

In the air I breathe the odor  
of the cancer blooming  
like a rainbow in his belly.  
The roots are creeping  
nerve by nerve through his spine,  
growing their slow way toward me.  
I smooth the sheets  
that press him thin.

For an hour I'm his bride,  
helping him to enter  
the bony chapel of my thighs.  
A priest is knocking at our door  
with a sprinkle of holy water,  
but I refuse to let him in.  
All morning I stand in the way  
of light breaking  
through this stained glass window,  
where Christ looks out from the cross,  
beseeching me to pull him down.

## III

I carry a man on my back.  
We're going where we've never been before.  
When I stop to rest,  
I hold his face in my hands,  
and the shadow of my face over his  
is brown and curled at the edges.  
In his eyes I see myself in miniature,  
close enough to enter his mouth  
and take his song into mine.  
He's singing the lullaby  
his mother rocked him with.  
I'm picking him up again  
to walk the road that never ends.

By evening his arms  
are a yoke around my neck.  
We breathe as patiently as oxen,  
our bodies ebony and sweat.  
The moon rises red behind us  
and a stranger calls us in from the dark.  
His table is spread with bread and wine.  
After dinner he gives us  
a room with a number and key.  
We lock the door  
before we bend down together  
to make love on our knees,  
our faces in each other's hands,  
both of us supplicants  
asking the way to the Kingdom.

Lynne Carol Rose

**BIN** a narrative*for KSD*

Bloodpaint, straight  
 from the slaughterer's runnels —so  
 old barns are red.

Tony's over  
 a mealbin, "maybe 1840," scraping  
 intervening layer. The day's 1977  
 light and shadow work too, alternate  
 like precision tools at this wooden  
 hunk the undercolor  
 of horse, of ox. Light and shadow, mimetic  
 of Tony's first broad refurbishing swipes —till finally the  
 animal color comes out in its fullest,  
 bloodpaint!, bloodpaint!, and  
 all of the day's repetitive attentions  
 to this chest seem  
 a currying.

—!!SALE!!—

Geezers rid it cheap, what's  
 broke, what's buckled. Their rude hands dump  
 their sheds' long, antique, storage  
 into sun. There's some haggling. And someone  
 whose hands trace grain with understanding  
 of root; whose hands champ in impatience for the little  
 attendant gestures of bringing back  
 lustre and use; whose hands  
 dote —truck, say, a mealbin  
 through Wichita's dun streets, past  
 the junkyards and butcherhouses,  
 here  
 to the garage, its blades and brushes  
 of mending.

"Shit-Christ! ...I'll show you something. See this chest of drawers? It's a mealbin. Just to keep the feed in, the goddam *feed* in a smelly corner of the *barn*. But look, someone cared enough to handtool fake drawers and even fake keyholes. Fake *keyholes*. And who would ever even *see* it? Somebody fucking looooved his work." Tony cottonswabs tincture on.

And I've come west, to Wichita, for similar ministrations.

For lately, *I've* painted in blood but not with proper benediction.

— Little storage boxes,  
each the size of the smallest peck of flesh that still relays greatest pain, boxes retina-, prostate-, sized. And each its moment packed and labelled:

*Ellen Laying Naked With H-i-m*  
*their legs together like dovetail joints*  
*building her a new bed*

*Ellen And Albert Discuss "Breaking Up"*  
*what some people cherish: heirloom*  
*others consign to the hatchet*

Ellen and      Ellen and      Ellen and  
I dyed

each slammed box with a single red cell  
broken over it, saying *Oh my little curséd moments*  
*I caulk you      I set you to float in my veins*  
*At the rate of the heart      As many times as the heart*  
*meters*  
*You will circle through my brain*



Lidded basting pan  
 in the mealbin's upper-left corner: Tony finds a  
 perfect specimen, each buff wing  
 the width of a spread hand —no,  
 wider, and The Great Moth Invasion of Wichita! that  
 preceded me here by a month: doesn't make, in my mind,  
 so stupid a  
 face anymore.

...Nor is it *buff*, not really; marbly  
 swirls of russet blend through, and the tentacled ivory  
 of cream just let in coffee. Tans the color,  
 shape, and size of the delicate closure  
 of a hen's lids... Ocher, eggshell, indian orange  
 pastilles: detail. Tony drops his lacquers, dances  
 gogeyed with his find. "HooEEY! And these antennae...!  
 An inch!"

"Thoreau," I say, "says  
 that's the difference between a man's art  
 and Nature's. The world can afford to bring the full  
 largesse of its genius to bear on the leastmost atom,  
 even if it's never to be seen, even an underside,  
 even in darkness. He says..."

"Lordy, lordy,  
 an inch!" That is all we can say. A bristled inch,  
 cut clear as a trout's scales. And we can dance  
 in the face of the scrupulous.

This morning, reading  
 a narrative poem, the early 1800's, a *bellow*  
*so emphatic, such poundage and damp, it stuck in the air*  
*like the lung itself turned inside-out*, the shack  
 beyond the pens, and a carcass  
 hung by the hindlegs to drain. A farmer  
 positions his bucket below  
 the pouring throat, looks up once (sees a turkey vulture  
 seemingly



a wine out, their own-grown plums, a stain up  
 past the elbow tonight for next year's sweeter drinking,  
 plums, their own damp patch of the planet, licking  
 purple stain up their arms, each other, sweet,  
 their own hands, crush to the pit, their tongues,  
 the sweet fruit fleshes

I understand

a little, a very little, but something, of family  
 subsistence butchery. One man,  
 one ineffable movement, one month's  
 cycling of other-blood into his love-blood ... Different  
 from stockyards/freightcar/supermarketfreezer,  
 different the way  
 my life's whole clutter is different from this  
 1840 cabinet, pigeonhole desk, or  
 mealbin:

shaped, tree  
 to shellacking, by hand for hands  
 it knew —shaped true, to take the waxes  
 of use through generations and bring out  
 fuller color with each. I stand here  
 threshing the dark in Tony's garage with my eyelashes  
 —infinite task! I see

that farmer  
 twisting that neck-muscle  
 hard in the pan methodically  
 for its last splat  
 of blood of bloodpaint

And all through *hurt*, and all through *throes*,  
 which are also states,  
 from New York, through this, through all this, into  
 Kansas,  
 landscape  
 flashed past —at 65 miles-per-hour, wiped

bland of all detail. This is a stand  
of trees; its dapple; its moire excrecence of bark;  
slow central thrum of sap; colonial insect life...

*Let the rag of speed erase all feature.*

This is the body's great trunk and the brain, branched  
ever-finer into remembering, flashback, more  
remembering...

*Let the rag of sky and road, at 65 miles-per-hour,  
erase to the least convolution. Let it be stroked and stroked  
and stroked and stroked and stroked and  
stroked*

*glossy, and small —a seed.*

And wake

one morning, driving Wichita —every block  
its Antique Shoppe or Joe's Junk. Every family,  
somewhere, once, pawned a ring. And the trees, the  
circles about their hearts... appear, today, here  
in these barterhouses of castoff and reclamation. Maple  
bureau, tooled rosettes along its borders, and fishscale  
dragonsclaw feet. A spinning jenny. Ebony spicerack  
hatched in a geometric motif of mountainside flowers.  
A mandolin. Pine heartshaped memorabilia box, the name  
Melissa cut with delicate, bramblethicket, flourishes  
then stained and highlighted in mother-of-pearl. A  
hickory rocker. And decorative whorls on the hickory  
rocker,

fine as fingerprint. Dust collects through the sun, seems  
almost to settle in air, on shoulders. Almost,  
the hickory rocker... the furniture holding its lineage, the  
ring

its laminated story of marriage ...almost, a ghost  
in the hickory rocker. Almost, a hand  
in hover at the mandolin, a single eye like a floating  
opalescence

over the memory box... A kind of instruction  
on What was made with love, once and How

to use it in its new life. / Detail,  
 detail, detail, detail, detail  
 's limitless enfoldings unloosed!

The old wood,

flowering. Wichita. Wichita rocking. Wood used,  
 well-used, as: a family in winter  
 and the hearth gives all its cordage into a first great  
 kinetic blossom of fire. The hands  
 warmed. Back and forth. The kinds of marrying. And  
 in The Round of Energy,  
 energy leaves  
 from specifics, transforms, and returns.  
 A ghost... Wood used. Back, forth. The  
 rocker at the firescreen; ashes; winter then  
 suddenly marigold.

tonight	a vision	they rise
in different bodies, yes		but nonetheless they rise
in the round	in the total cycle	of energy

the moths from the flame

this morning	misreading a poem
the page said	
	<i>wound, slash</i>
my eyes stitched the words up	
	<i>wash</i>
as if already	
	cleansing, grown whole

*Chez Theodora, 1976.*  
 The three of us, sitting  
 in a 1977 circle, dandelion wine

from their own garden, year  
to year: "A little bitter  
aftertaste, but worth it. A full  
sweet body."

Then he's  
back to the garage, antiquing. "C'mere,  
it's incredible. See?" The bin,  
its ruddy presence, our own bloods  
carried through light and shade...  
"Here, the grain of the wood." Such  
delicate swirls! "Look closer..." The  
grain. "It's *painted* on. Whoever  
he was, he stood there eleventyhundred  
hours extra, painting the grain in  
black on the bloodpaint. Somebody  
cared for this cheapo chunk of carpentry  
like crazy, all right!" A thousand  
thousand hairline swirls. "Crazy! What  
a life!" Tony's hands  
trace the paintwork, wine  
in my taste, in my own life, having come  
through to this. The grain  
through his hands. A life,  
my blood, the richness of grain run through our hands,  
"Somebody cared."

Albert Goldbarth

### BOOKS IN BRIEF

Two major events in poetry: Elizabeth Bishop's *Geography III* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976, 50 pp., \$7.95, hardbound) and A.R. Ammons' *The Snow Poems* (W.W. Norton, 1977, 292 pp., \$12.50, hardbound) — two volumes radically different in vision and technique, but comparable in their power to transform the vision of the reader who is prepared to enter these worlds.

Within the neat little Bishop volume are ten perfectly polished poems illustrating the diversity of this poet's talents as well as the range of her humanity: wiry autobiographical, "In the Waiting Room"; dramatic monologue, "Crusoe in England"; visionary lyric, "Night City"; witty game in "12 O'Clock News"; translation, Paz's "Objects & Apparitions"; and five more. Of the five more, the one that has made the most indelible impression on me is "The Moose." For six stanzas, in one steadily-traveling sentence, we ride along with the poet on a bus coming down from Nova Scotia, seeing through her loving eye the "lavender, rich mud" of the sunset flats, passing the neat churches, "bleached, ridged as clamshells," waiting patiently for a new passenger giving "kisses and embraces/ to seven relatives" while "a collie supervises." The poet enters briefly but affectionately into each detail, uniting in one harmony of consciousness the landscape, the architecture, and the people of the land. Eight stanzas later we ride on into the "hairy, scratchy, splintery" moonlight of New Brunswick woods and drift toward sleep comfortable in the pillow-talk of our grandparently fellow passengers.

—Suddenly the bus driver  
stops with a jolt,  
turns off his lights.

Then we all—driver, poet, comfortable passengers, the "impenetrable wood," and a towering cow moose—share an encounter of spell-bound mutual attention, compounded of respect and child-like curiosity on both sides, and—in the bus at least—joy, inexplicable joy. The poet involves us in this joy and then, as the bus finally pulls away, leaves us, with a "dim/ smell of moose, and acrid/ smell of gasoline." I am in awe of what Bishop has done in those last lines: her restraint in not "making" something out of the encounter; her delicate enjambment that mingles the "acrid" of both bus and moose; and the precise culmination of a poem that starts out "From narrow provinces" and joins all in the wider world where the man, the beast, and the machine can exist without threat to any.

*The Snow Poems* demands a different set of expectations for poetry than the elegant and accessible poems of Elizabeth Bishop. But Ammons acknowledges the same roots: "though the pentameter's heaved we're/ splinter

assertions of the great iamb." And both poets present a world where the Forest of the Night is invaded by dented fenders.

To read Ammons without bafflement and/or frustration, one needs to adopt the assumption that in art as in the more literally organic world evolution proceeds through constant random variation. In his *Tape for the Turn of the Year* (which now looks like one of the really revolutionary works of our time) Ammons typed away every day on his roll of adding-machine tape, discovering as he went along what-all there was to discover, about his world and himself. Such composition requires an act of faith in the raw *process*, and this is an act of faith the reader must share. When the mind of the poet is as highly-informed, as honest, as playful, as *interesting* as Ammons', the result commands respect and conveys rewards.

*The Snow Poems* result from the *Tape* technique, apparently, but in both form and content they are much more complex. Right away the poet lets us participate in the finger exercises by which he keeps the writing moving: play (word-play, the play of the fingers on the machine, the play of the line, playing out line, casting for the striking energy). And up from the stream of the poet's consciousness the big energies do promise to appear. Ripples spread from tantalizing rises. And once in a while (sometimes free and clear, sometimes shooting off from the midst of another poem) there surfaces as perfect a complete poem as any anthologist could ask for. As we move on through this big book, we discover that the real object is not these trophies, frequent and engaging as they are, but the stream itself, with tributaries feeding in and braiding themselves into the muscle of the current. Finger exercises become less important as

cold  
currents settle  
from polar ice  
bottomward  
like falls

In these falls are great rages, great loneliness, and the metaphysical rebellion against the cosmic forces that express themselves in the trivial and disgusting. An act of will accepts the flotsam, the detritus, tensing against the yearnings that rise against the will.

There is a great deal in this generous volume about the poet's awareness of what he is doing *as a poet*. You could extract a contemporary Defense of Poetry from it, and it would be worth your while, because the struggle of the artist, trying to tell the truth in language that never before had *this* knotty (notty, naughty) truth to work on, is the Constant Symbol of Ammons' angry integrity. The last poems in the book reveal the complex, unsentimental vision that has evolved through the process of the composition of the Snow Poems. The book as a whole is very strong indeed.

Jerald Bullis's *Adorning the Buckhorn Helmet* (Ithaca House, 1976, \$3.50, paper) suggests some of the ways Ammons has opened doors for a new generation of poets. This volume contains two long poems: the title poem, full of rich natural images but sprawling somewhat self-indulgently, and the much more powerful "Field and Stream," in 36 sections. Like Ammons, Bullis commands a wry, distinctive voice, and like Ammons he permits the reader to enter into a dynamic and interesting mind. But Bullis's voice and mind are profoundly different from the older poet's. His sensuous awareness is deeply ingratiating; he draws the reader into the natural world by his own unique power.

Here are two splendid books that somehow escaped my attention when they first appeared. Both are by master craftsmen and men of great warmth and humanity. The earliest is John Ciardi's *Lives of X* (Rutgers University Press, 1971, 118 pp., \$9.75, hardbound). This is a series of autobiographical poems, a chronicle of the poet's growing up in Boston and vicinity, a first-generation Italian in a largely Irish society. In this rich and comic palimpsest of times and places and levels of memory, Ciardi has reconstructed the forces that made him the person he is, and he has achieved this in a blank-verse style as distinctively his own (wry, colloquial, sinuously flexible) as Keats's is Keats and Frost's is Frost. Now that I have found this volume I shall treasure it both as a significant American poem and as a valuable social document.

David Wagoner's *Sleeping in the Woods* (Indiana University Press, 1974, 79 pp., \$6.95, hardbound) is my second belated discovery. There are three kinds of poems here, and examples from each should be in any anthology

of contemporary poetry. Some are West-coast poems, with such fine ones as "Slow Country," "Sleeping in the Woods," "Snake Hunt," and "Song for the First People," ending:

Let me become Water Dog, Bitterroot, or Shut Beak.  
Change me. Forgive me. I will learn to crawl, stand,  
or fly

Anywhere among you, forever, as though among great  
elders.

There are poems out of European civilization, such as the wonderfully witty "Beauty and the Beast." And somewhere between these poles is a quiet world where a personal myth is growing: "The Man Who Spilled Light" and "The Singing Lesson" (a masterpiece). The exquisite "To Be Written in Braille" suggests that this whole volume should be transcribed for the blind. It is a compendium of various ways of "seeing."

Ted Hughes' *Season Songs*, with pictures by Leonard Baskin (Viking, 1975, 79 pp., \$10.00, hardbound) is large (8 x 11½), with 20 pp. of Baskin illustrations, most of them in rich color. It looks rather like a hybrid between a coffee-table book and a children's book, and although it could serve as either, don't be misled. It is indeed a pleasure simply to turn the pages, but the poems (24 of them, arranged by the season) are masterworks: powerful rhythms, highly-colored sound patterns, language thrusting and swatting and sweating. What other poet today has such a gusto for words and the energy in them? The swifts return:

"Look! They're back! Look!" And they're gone

On a steep

Controlled scream of skid . . .

He describes the failed nestling: "He bat-crawled on his tiny useless feet, tangling his flails." Other poems have deep folk-song rhythms, incremental repetitions, throbbing images, dazzling chromatics, all in the service of the wealth and variety of the natural world. This is a first-rate book on all counts.

**ANNOUNCEMENT:** a first book by former *BPJ* associate Tim Cohrs: *The Erie Shore Letters*, a poem-series, handsomely "designed, set, printed, & bound by Dikko Faust in a limited edition of seven times seven copies on his handmade papers; numbered, & signed by both the writer and the alchemist-printer." \$10. from Cultural Custodial Service, Purgatory Pie Press Div., 505 N. Maple, Prospect Heights, Ill. 60070.