

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

Volume 29 — Number 3

Spring 1979

CONTENTS

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| 1. Elizabeth Crom | <i>Midnight Poem</i> |
| 2. Warren Woessner | <i>Two Poems</i> |
| 4. James M. Rawley | <i>Ryder Runs</i> |
| 5. T.A. Denning | <i>A Football Injury</i> |
| 7. Thomas Carper | <i>The First-Born</i> |
| 8. Edward Hirsch | <i>A True Account . . .</i> |
| 10. Margaret S. Benbow | <i>Two Poems</i> |
| 12. Dolores Stewart | <i>"Whales Are Out . . ."</i> |
| 14. Lois Carrier | <i>Mesquite</i> |
| 15. Joan J. Hall | <i>The Stories</i> |
| 16. M. Ekola Berberick | <i>The Swamp Doll</i> |
| 18. Timothy Cohrs | <i>Two Poems</i> |
| 22. Susan Weston | <i>Falling in the Dark</i> |
| 23. Wendy Anderson | <i>Holiday</i> |
| 24. Leslie Schenk | <i>Set Off by Two Words in a
Novel</i> |
| 26. Virginia de Araujo | <i>Last Child</i> |
| 27. John Berry | <i>The Pied Hunter</i> |
| 28. Dori Appel | <i>Two Poems</i> |
| 30. Jim Hall | <i>Two Poems</i> |
| 33. Betsy Sholl | <i>Spring Fragments</i> |
| 35. Bettie M. Sellers | <i>The Morning of the
Red-Tailed Hawk</i> |
| 36. Keith Taylor | <i>The Holy Dance</i> |
| 37. | <i>Books in Brief</i> |

Cover:

Frances Hamerstrom

MIDNIGHT POEM

When you open a book
I am the whiteness of the margin.
When you speak
I am the pause after a comma;
And when the wind stops its hurrying
I can be heard in the silent leaves.
I require no space and no sound; no breath and no body.
When the train pulls out
I am on the empty track, following.
When the conductor has called to the last passengers
and the shuddering cars have left in a finger of smoke
I am the sound the whistle makes
when it is too far away to be heard.

Sometimes at night
when the moths hover around the street lamps
and papers scratch softly in the gutter,
I make a small sound, like a child breathing.
But when you turn your head,
sensing movement behind you,
the dark stares back— eyeless—
and there is nothing there—
only a silent whirlwind in the city street
with a few dead leaves circling in the center
and a cat opening its mouth to cry soundlessly.

Elizabeth Crom

TWO POEMS**Looking at Power****1. Nuclear Generating Station, Salem, N.J.**

Miles away, the dome
rises over the marsh grass
like a huge, dull moon.
We get as close as the Visitor Center
where a pretty girl hands out "Second Sun" buttons
and comic books that say it's safe:
the happy muskrats and fish don't mind hot water
and "trace amounts of radiation."
An exhibit shows the hard way:
spin a crank and barely light one bulb.
A child shoots a silver raygun
and a chain reaction spreads out forever
on the screen. We get the message:
anyone can split the atom
and heat up toasters clear to Newark.

2. Power Units 1 and 2, Colstrip, Montana

Custer's men carved their names on Medicine Rock
then died. The Cheyenne knew they would,
and still wedge prayer sticks in the cracks
hoping for rain,
or a job, and peace at home in the trailer.
Twenty miles north, the twin stacks
of the power station's boilers shimmer
in the August heat, strobe lights flashing.
We crouch in the shade of Medicine Rock.
Everything else fits in with no room to spare:

jay, magpie, coyote, even a few men
who stayed long enough to learn the rules.
Now the land's stripped for coal
then dumped back in the pits like trash.
This is whiteman's land now—
we close wire gates when we leave.

Buffalo Cliff

For Bill and Jean

The white sandstone and rabbitbush
blend into the gray-green hills across the valley.
Here the last V of hunters leapt up
shouting, waving blankets, throwing spears.
The buffalo never saw the edge.
They stampeded fifty feet straight down
where the women waited with stone knives.
Dog teams dragged the meat away
on wooden sleds.

We know we've found the place
by the bone chips eroding
out of the wash.
I find a bigger chunk
that won't move when I kick it.
Suddenly we are digging
with flat stones, sticks and fingers.
Man, woman, and dog
working hard.
Salt sweat and pine tree sweat
mix again in the hot gully.

Warren Woessner

A FOOTBALL INJURY,
A MOURNING HAZE

Smell this room! silver and white.

I cannot—

only sweat's terror—

but there can be no perfume or shit
on these flesh masked green gods.

It feels like love's

clammy hand

on my shoulder

this alcohol on my body.

She's wicked—carries a sack for her lover's penis.

"Man is an animal," she claims.

I know, Black Widow.

The animal that I am

wants to lower its ram-head

and burst through those silver doors,

doctors and patients scattering like a shotgun blast

in green and white

before my full curls

and panicked hooves,

but can't because my knee.

Fire oozes from a silver sliver

up the blue string,

across my chest all the tiny veins

into my lungs

into my heart.

Father comes to me

in this morning haze,

"Mike is dead

dead from divorce.

Lights pass overhead—
white lines on a highway night.

People stare as I roll past,
a grimace under white,
two integral parts lost.

“God-damn-it, I’m alive!
What more do you want?”
They pretend not to hear,
I am, after all, delirious.

T.A. Denning

THE FIRST-BORN

With mother in bed, calling it “Doctor’s order,”
But flat out, really, to curse him, play in the yard
Is hourly more aimless. Making water
On her petunias, which he’d do when hard
Pressed for revenge, gives no relief. They paste
Their leaves to the ground, and warmly smell
When blasted by the jet. But still the taste
Of exile from her odor seems to dwell
Upon his tongue. Inside, a negligee
Covers the breasts he thinks of, while below
A bulge hills up the sheet. This is the way
Exquisite punishments are fashioned—slow,
Absolutely certain to arrive.
He kicks a stone, hating to be alive.

Thomas Carper

**A TRUE ACCOUNT OF THE FABULOUS ASCENT
OF A UNICORN WITH A RETARDED GIRL IN
NEW YORK CITY LAST NIGHT**

*“The whole traditional character of the unicorn
as the antagonist . . . of the lion.”*

DeQuincey

“The Unicorne, whose horne is worth halfe a City.”
Dekker

It was as if she had always been waiting
but without knowing it, like a heart
in the chest of a dead saint,
or a clock that had never once been set.

Imagine a lamp extinguished in the rain
and never re-lit, or a girl walking out on her body.

Often she would claim there were voices
flapping around in her nightshirt, like moths
searching for a single wick in the unlit
oven of her chest. And perhaps,

like a target, she was right.

Everywhere in her body there were doors
that had never been opened, rooms
that were stifling hot, and walls tipped
over on their sides, like floors. Butterflies
threw themselves outwards in her lungs
but the sky was a plaster ceiling and
their limp bodies fell backwards in the mud.

Not that it mattered much to her, of course;
a young girl smothering her face in a pillow.

But one night she felt a summer wind
nuzzling under her skirt like the warm nose
of a horse nudging her for sugar, or
a wild dog sticking its paw

through an iron cage. Later, she slept
and dreamt of a steel lock clicking shut
around her waist, and a dozen wings crumpling
on her legs. And when she awoke
there was a strange horse
laying a golden spike across her lap
like a new rifle, dazzling her
with the brightest colors she had ever seen.

She could already hear the panting in his side
and the deep pounding in his chest
after a long run, and she was not afraid.
She even imagined that he was lonely
and she could already feel her hands
roving across his face.

She did not know,
of course, that he had once been extinct
or that he had traveled across several centuries
of desert that very night. She only knew
that he was there now for her as a lover
and after a little while she could
no longer really tell if it was
her palms or his neck that was sweating.
And she didn't care, either.

And that was how New Yorkers looked up last night
and marveled at an ancient artery of stars
shining through the smog, and a solitary
wing rising from the river
like a girl bending over a strange horse.
And somehow it

was almost as if they had always been waiting
for that single blaze of light
scrawled like a wish over the entire city.

Edward Hirsch

TWO POEMS**The Tumble**

That March the rich and thin other woman
went skiing and took a fall.
St. Bernards carried her eyes, those snowblind goofballs,
tenderly home. Surgeons swarmed up the glass mountain.
(I dared to dream of spiral fractures, casts
to the waist.) She was prayed over
by priests in chasubles
and shepherds of the more sinister synods.
She was in shock, stunned by her golden pratfall,
crazy in the head.

Finally we heard that she was getting better, and then
that she'd been born again. I got a postcard:
**YOU HAVE NOTHING FURTHER TO FEAR FROM
ME,
NO MORE DIRTY WORK AND MONKEY TRICKS.
I HAVE ALWAYS WANTED TO BE YOUR FRIEND.**
I thought: *You beanbrain, you silver dollar baby.*
Rave on.

Deadlines*For A.M.*

You would have loved that wake. There was a
life raft of food, and a casket
which cost the earth. The widow wore black
slashed down to here, and black
stroked the ten little piggies of her toes,
each with its clear red eye.
The corpse had died in her arms
for the last time. Now that you were
down for the count, she'd come on strong
and stuffed you into some
gigolo's zoot suit. I hardly knew you.
You looked ready to begin the beguine
with a chickenfat biddy,
to fight with your nails.
She kissed you, and kissed you, and cupid's-bows
riddled your pallor.
The frills and dubious fur of her heart
lay pulsing in your hand, she'd
"never look at another man."
But passion never goes out of fashion,
and you wouldn't have believed a word of it.

We all danced in a steam of boilermakers.
Your brother, sweating bullets,
did the dog, the monkey, the mashed potato,
oh, you would have been in stitches. Yellow flowers
lay in your fine Italian hand, but I remembered
your hammy tongue, fast and loose, never content
until it brought the house down, and your goldshot
pupil dilating as you scared us with war stories,
bottomless black puddings.

Around midnight a wag toasted you.
 Here's to you, kid. Wake up. Look alive.
 But you did not look as though you were sleeping.
 We could all have screamed bloody murder
 and still you would lie
 dead beat, feet first,
 not even a speaking likeness.
 They spoke of the stroke
 that rifled your showy braincase,
 robbed you blind.
 But the blow only seemed sudden. Two steps forward,
 one step back, the clincher always comes
 in its own sweet time.

Margaret Savides Benbow

“WHALES ARE OUT, CATS ARE IN . . .”

Curled in the ink pot,
 crouched in the paint tube,
 quiet as enemies, as mice . . .

cats

have been secretly poised
 for this leap into fashion.

And now, the cat's meow,
 smirking on linens,
 pouncing on counters, on cradles,
 stealing the baby's milk breath,
 they are In.

The Year of the Cat.

Delectable celebrants,
as thick as cream, as thieves.
Their collars are jeweled,
no bigger than bracelets
curved to the bone.

Meanwhile,
having swum in the right circles,
on posters, on stickers,
having dived in theaters,
netted by profit,
the whales, the dolphins, even the sharks
rejoice in their release
from likenesses,
from silver and brass.

They are Out.

Describing an arc of joy,
they escape to the blue
waters of extinction.
Cool, after the fever,
this deep anonymous thrust out of time, out of mind.

(The fancy cats are dining,
minced tuna on a silver tray.
The fat cats.)

Dolores Stewart

MESQUITE

He walks deliberately in his own space and time:
Craig, Colorado. A Sunday afternoon fading
into another work-a-day week.

Cowpokes and families staving it off in the Golden Cavy.
A shaft of light moves across the people sitting in red-
glowing
darkness. He bends his head to get under the lintel.
Conversations stop. His foreman stumps along behind.
Voices pick up where they left off, furtively.
They want to keep him out of range.

Eyes return to the darkness now that the door has eased
shut.

His face, a crude wooden sculpture with the straight edge
of cruelty cut into it for a mouth, a thin and colorless line,
painful, as if the lips had been cut away, as if no mobility
for speech or laughter remained. A crease runs like a fault
between his nose and mouth. Aztec eyes droop, the small
dots

of iris riding intermittently out like a snake's tongue.
Under the leather pitted skin, vulnerable white bone:
Peel back the leather and lay open the skull,
it would be fine and white and humanoid.

He keeps his Stetson on, shifting it to one side.
The girls watch him. He says he'd like to have
a go at that one. The fresh, fatted calf
waiting table. He'd kill her. I know he'd kill her.
She, too, feels the weight of his vision,
flusters as she folds checkered napkins.

I go quickly before another human sacrifice occurs,
Leave gratefully behind the votive smell of kerosene.
I turn back once. Looking at the menu taped to the window
My eyes slip round the edges, seeking his face in the dim
interior,
that face that could geld a pony.

Lois Carrier

THE STORIES

While he takes a long distance call she begins
a story on his typewriter. He can hear
the sound of the machine and then the door click
as she goes home just before he hangs up. He's lost
his glasses and has to hold it close,
puzzled to see someone else's work
in that familiar type.

He recognizes them
in the story. The man is not as nice as he himself
would like to be. The woman is indecisive,
not like her. The woman says
the man sounds like an educated rabbi.
The story will not end happily for these characters.

He tries to make out what she's telling him,
his own words twisted and re-aligned. What right
has she to remind him of things he's said?
Where's his side of it? When she says
she's his *lover*, a word he thinks is male,
he feels smack on the wrong side of the generation gap.

He sits down to write her an angry note.
It's a long time coming so he phones her,
says he's standing in the doorway in his underpants,
needs a hug.

"Do you mind appearing in my stories?" she asks.
"No," he replies, "just don't mention the freckle
on my penis." And as she describes exactly where
she's putting her hands he remembers
how when they make love
she always folds her clothing.

Later she shows him another story.
He finds it depressing too.
"Oh, so it moved you," she says.

Joan Joffe Hall

THE SWAMP DOLL

It was early spring the day
I found that old doll
on the edge of the swamp.
Just one hand stuck up
out of moss and muck.
I pulled gently but long
until I had her freed.
I washed her off

in the irrigation ditch
dried her with bracken ferns
then walked awhile
cradling her in my arms.

I sang old Finnish incantations.

When I got to Mrs. Clement's
back pasture
I saw a stump with ant tunnels.
It was a castle
but all askew
like maybe Gaudi had designed it.
I put her on the stump.
I put arbutus blossoms on her head
a rabbit's thigh bone in her hand
then turned and ran
as hard as I could until
I was deep in the aspen grove
where I knew she couldn't see me.

That was the reason we had
so many blueberries that summer.
Everyone else thought it might be
the plentiful rains
or the absence of late frost

but no, it was the swamp doll.
I went back, later, to that silver stump.
She was still there.
She was still holding the rabbit's
thigh bone in her hand.

M. Ekola Gerberick

TWO POEMS**Election Day**

got up an hour early
and voted at the courthouse—
cold, cloudless, and November.
crossed into Illinois and drove
again the 18 miles of
country that I slice toward work
(I write commercials
and I'm underpaid—

even the dumb cows
with their faces iced, chewing
on the stubble that was this year's
corn, know that a man who sells an
hour of his brain
for \$2
90¢, is foolish—

I agree

the writers that I schooled with
would agree, if they knew,
and laugh— though all the
time they'd think of morals

I think of 3.50,
how little of my week
would go to gasoline, and
I brake before the next slight
rise anticipating Owen Center, its
three white buildings
on a right-hand turn

town hall, parsonage, church

but today
alive with Dodge and Chevy
clustered on the gravel lot—
POLLING PLACE— and two young
girls in plaid jackets,
blue jeans, blur this sign
in legs and noise as I
take the turn
and leave

 them all
to the tattered fields
to the bloated cattle
to the county roads that rut
through the open like abandoned hogs—
 lost
to the sheer gray prairie.

I honk my horn across the
empty air, at nothing—
how would it be, I think,
if for one thin day our choices
were the equal of, the match for,
money—

I listen to my snow tires
smack the clean pavement,
all the way to work.

The Escalator / Birth Poem

my mother stands at the
 edge of the floor and her hand
 floats back for me and the grey
 and the black lines slip
 from her feet and crack
 into blocks that
 tumble

into this world I squeezed head first at that hour when the
 clock's hands rise as if greeting a champion; and the butt-
 slapped first sputter of breath hinted I might be one. but as
 they descended, nadir-joined at the clock's throat, a cold
 purple rose through my flesh and what little air I needed to
 billow out my lungs lingered thick and warm above the
 hospital crib— and I was drifting

out of sight
 as I tug at her arm and
 car keys compact lip-
 sticks spit into my
 face I scream NO
 NO she's on the black lines
 on the blocks shouting
 over the Christmas packages
 TIMMY TIMMY she's
 going away

to weld me onto this world the doctor sighted through my
 left eye and under its cheek into the too-cramped tube of
 throat with a daily X-ray burn. so, strapped to a metal
 slab, my head squeezed motionless by steel, a sharp electric
 hum ground through the room; and a slap of flesh,
 touching eyelash and jaw, bubbled off its pigment like some
 rare gas

her legs her arms
all of my mother disappears
in one smooth gasp
and I grab at the black railing
with both hands but it won't
slow— none of it at all
at all will slow

inside my face the electric hum twisted again and again like
a rag tugged through a hole. and the finger's width of air
that could not enter, but had poked and probed and
persisted as my body turned a shade of bruise, began to
slowly press the gland-gone-wrong aside. and my lungs
lunged, clasping this trickle to themselves as if they were

hands
I do not know
lift me high to nestle
in a shoulder and way way
down the black blocky slide
I see my mother
picking up the pieces
of her purse and I
have never been this far
this high this much
alone—

Timothy Cohrs

FALLING IN THE DARK

Walking from the party into the dark
I staggered, arms crooked,
ready to break a fall,
and slid in the mud.

There was no one there, no voice or arm
to make my falling comic;
if I went back, stood in the door and said,
"I'm afraid of the dark and cannot get home
to take care of my children,"
I would be funny and foolish
and no longer afraid.

Once when I spanked the baby, he rushed
from me around the table
and back
flinging himself
into the punishing arms.

I know this wet asphalt road;
I need no one to make it familiar.
Step on the crack, break your mother's back.
Stay on the line, everything is fine.
I head into my cone of light
trusting the white line fed like a rope
into the light
though just ahead it soars
over a void
no road
but a rope of light
and the car too clumsy to balance.
No breath to hold me up,
no applause.
"Mother, mother, the wires are down in the wind
and I'm afraid to come home."
The live wires switching their tails
in the gusty dark.

The house is thick with the children's breathing.
You have been gone a week now.
To fill it
I sleep on your side of the bed,
my arms flung
over the place I should be.

Susan Weston

HOLIDAY

- I. Wings throb,
dotted red
from the sudden splitting
of neck and head;
a high-pitched screech
like a bird tormented
flies from my round eyes;
the man
built like a tree stump
spits tobacco,
leans on his axe,
grins.
- II. turkey in the suburbs
and an old black maid
who scrapes our plates
and says to me,
"That's right, honey.
You go on and
have some mo' sherry,
play the game.
It don't matter none,
long's you look
cool."

Wendy Anderson

SET OFF BY TWO WORDS IN A NOVEL

Poetry is propelled by externally inexplicable yet real internal combustions of language.

Mere lists, catalogues of words in measured lines, with or without rhyme or meter, cannot add up to it.

Why today's compulsion, then, to count down and add up, in tailored lengths of ambling prose?

Here are feet which have climbed the Acropolis, Borobodhur, Gunung Agung, Stromboli and Chartres

Poetry must be true, and all of this is true, but who cares? Why bother?

When these feet rooted into the Pont des Arts and I wondered which plane carried my lover from Paris, there was poetry, but none in telling it now.

Here are hands which have held a beaker of Samos wine—or was it Mavrodaphne?—up to the setting Aegean sun well, no.

Here are fingers which have explored the flesh of more bodies than would be decent or appropriate to recall, so why start?

(I wonder if da Ponte's catalogue libretto for Leporello would constitute poetry without Mozart's music?)

Here are eyes which have seen Picassos, etcetera; here are ears which have heard Mahler, and so on.

My lists would be different from your lists, but a list is a list. *Here is a nose which has smelled citronella and also shit.*

Poetry is concentrated, short, and holistic, whereas lists somehow contain less than the sum of their parts, are long, fragmented, prosy, and boring.

*Here is a mind which has grappled with Bergson and
American income-tax forms.*

*Here are memories, hopes, illusions, disappointments,
ecstasies, mistakes, good and hard luck, affinities,
and three enormous loves.*

*Here are genitals, lungs, heart, oh what the hell, here
am I, alive, encumbered, rewarded, described by—
inflicted and bequeathed with—all that's ever
happened to me.*

Propelled these fifty years by externally inexplicable
yet real internal combustions of a living body,
battered by events, plumbing gone rusty, sagging here,
wrinkling there, all in all knowing less than when
I began,

I myself am the catalogue of my own events, the tally
of my parts and history, after a line drawn, the sum.

*Here I stand, therefore, accumulated, sorted out, mulled
over, what I wait for least decidedly what's sure most,
that lists do end.*

Here begin the "declining years", writes Henry James, a
time for lists indeed, as we lunge toward *the final item
in all our catalogues,*

*whenever it comes, too soon; however it comes, too hard;
wherever it comes, wrong.*

Leslie Schenk

LAST CHILD

A new child from fear's jaws,
he invests the table with his dignity.
No shapes. No negligence
registers on the eyes that bide
behind his puckered eyelids, miniscule
vaginas that fold shut in fatigue.

A nurse chirrup at his genitals.
Balled sheets at his mother's crotch
bloom alive. The roadway he ran
stung him like the kiss of a jellyfish,
a Portuguese Man-O'-War whose tentacles
now wound him, bound him, now

let the choked torso speed past
suddenly free to lash out limbs
into the nonsense air, terrified. Bundle,
Bundle up the dirty little thing, the nurse
says, blanketing him. In waves, the rain
makes ovations on the window glass.

It's got to have been a mistake.
Flawed joy; she wasn't sure she wanted
anyone else to raise and caress, any
more soft crosses on her crucified
middle years. Is he complete, she asks,
Is he the one complete one here?

Virginia de Araujo

THE PIED HUNTER

Now let me tell you,
she has a wealth of
coarse black kinky hair,
that was her downfall.

I had been hunting crocodiles, when I
saw a movement of leaves and
two bright eyes glinting at me.
I pretended not to see.

Taking my heart out
deliberately I consulted it,
boxed it, held it to my ear,
stood there winding it.

Intrigued, she crept closer.
I lunged, grabbed a foot, a
kicking calf, a knee. I pulled her
down out of her tree.

She gibbered, yodeled, yowled,
hung on to a branch. I had to
peel her fingers away from it
one by one, then she

clung with her toes till I
cracked her foot with a stick.
Holding her by the thumb, I
inspected my trembling prize.

What good fortune!
I had always wanted a big
kinky-haired female just like this one!
She was much bigger than I.

I made up my mind to train her,
and did — I still bear the scars.

For some time I feared she would
escape back to her dear jungle,

but by the time she learned to pick the lock,
she had acquired a taste for radishes.

Sometimes I look at that photograph
of me with my elephant gun
proudly standing with my foot on hers.

“All in the Day’s Work,”
reads the motto under it,
although it was my high point.

What hunter can truthfully say
the hunted wanted it that way?
Yet my quarry instructs me:
“Tell them I would not go back.”

John Berry

TWO POEMS

Bread Line

I am the bakery woman working fast
and faster to feed the old children
calling me by the names of their dead parents,
clawing with cold fingers at the latch.
From my steamy shop I can see them
at the glass, banging their bowls
against the door. Sometimes

I dream that the latch opens like
a cough in some thin chest,

spilling the sharp-toothed children
into my ovens, still warm from baking bread.

"Come out come out," I cry
offering up my pastry fingers, "Come out
and I will feed you all!"

Out they creep, eyes bright as coals,
Hansel and Gretel reprieved,
and roll me on the table like a long bread,
and eat, their hands kneading,
kneading. Hours I lie there

after they have gone, the ovens cold,
my floured apron shrouding me.

Alter Ego

There is a nun with a great bird headdress
who trails me through the streets
relentlessly: white wings pursue me,
black robes whisper at my back. On the heels
of my taut step I sense
her modest glide.

She does not speak, offers
neither prayers nor comforts,
attempts no hindrance to my worldly round
as she sails with me on the concrete sea,
her godly gown unfurled.

As my step quickens, she moves
faster, black brushing my footprints
on the busy street. I feel her gaining on me,
wings flapping furiously; I check
my watch and hear her
singing psalms.

TWO POEMS**My Acceptance Speech**

This won't take long.
I just want to thank everyone who has made success
so impossible.

Especially my piano teacher, Miss Lula Berry,
who believed we are all pianos.
And who kept a skeleton in her closet to show us
how the fingers are worked by muscles in the back.
And how nothing we do is done as simply as we thought.

And Mother, who when I asked her if I was OK looking,
said, there's more to life than looks,
with that microscopic smile which was her one way of
telling
the truth.

And thanks to each of the horrible half marbles
which turned blue and tender on the side of my nose
making everything normal
impossible.

And I have to thank Coach Vic Waggoner
for teaching me how to grab face masks in a pile-up
and execute that certain twist.
It has helped. It has helped no end.

And while I'm on the subject,
here's a warm appreciation for the guttersnipe
in Country Club tennis whites, the one who I thought stood
between me and Wimbledon.
He outlasted me, and outblasted me, one sheer afternoon,
stubbed it all out.

And met me at the net to shake hands.
I usually charge for lessons, he said.

And last, there is the hag in a blue dress
leaning on the bar in New York when I was only 22.
Thank you for telling me your drunken life story,
thank you for telling me I looked like a born winner.
Thank you for shouting at me across the haze as I
was getting the hell away from you,
but winning don't have a damn thing to do with it.

Maybe Dats Your Pwoblem Too

All my pwoblems
who knows, maybe evwybody's pwoblems
is due to da fact, due to da awful twuth
dat I am SPIDERMAN.

I know, I know. All da dumb jokes:
No flies on you, ha ha,
and da ones about what do I do wit all
doze extwa legs in bed. Well, dat's funny yeah.
But you twy being
SPIDERMAN for a month or two. Go ahead.

You get doze cwazy calls fwom da
Gubbener askin you to twap some booglar who's
only twying to wip off color T.V. sets.
Now, what do I cawre about T.V. sets?
But I pull on da suit, da stinkin suit,
wit da sucker cups on da fingers,
and get my wopes and wittle bundle of
equipment and den I go flying like cwazy
across da town fwom woof top to woof top.

Till der he is. Some poor dumb color T.V. slob

and I fall on him and we westle a widdle
until I get him all woped up. So big deal.

You tink when you SPIDERMAN
der's sometin big going to happen to you.
Well, I tell you what. It don't happen dat way.
Nuttin happens. Gubbener calls, I go.
Bwing him to powice, Gubbener calls again,
like dat over and over.

I tink I twy sometin diffunt. I tink I twy
sometin excitin like wacing cawrs. Sometin to make
my heart beat at a difwent wate.

But den you just can't quit being sometin like
SPIDERMAN.

You SPIDERMAN for life. Fowever. I can't even
buin my suit. It won't buin. It's fwame wesistent.
So maybe dat's youwr pwoblem too, who knows.
Maybe dat's da whole pwoblem wif evwytin.
Nobody can buin der suits, dey all fwame wesistent.
Who knows?

Jim Hall

SPRING FRAGMENTS

*Like a hyacinth in
the mountains, trampled
by shepherds until
only a purple stain
remains on the ground*
Sappho

1 There is a look some girls have
freckled and hard, suspicious of women.
Now, in front of the library
they flash it on me.

Sappho, everything changes.
The wood blouses into petals
like a shy girl beginning to speak.
Now I too have children.

Almost blinded by the shimmering
of uncut grass at sunset, we talk
in clusters on the library steps
watching our daughters
drift down the street
toward the hurts that mellow.

I translate from longings
thick in my blood.

Dogwood, japonica, the soft
electricities of forsythia—
Forsythia, like the name of the girl
I might have chosen to be.

2 On a narrow road crossing the mountain
I enter a lavender wood.
Everywhere, stretching around me
purple buds gleam on dark wet trees—

the strange dreams of my grandmother
coming to a place of absolute transformation
dozing on the couch at noon.

It is too beautiful.
I need a new body.

Two girls push each other, laughing
into a ditch. They run wet-footed
then stop to whisper, absently pulling off
whole branches of flowers.

Green tears fall from the elms.
I stand in the wind holding them back.

- 3 O Dogwood-woman, how lovely and full
how endangered you are. Forsythia,
you should not laugh at the brown petals
slipping away from your mother. Japonica,
your last buds just opened this morning
and already you're nervous.

Apple and Plum alone are unafraid—
have your mothers prepared you well?
From their gnarled wisdom do they teach you
there is a fruit that comes
when our first skirts are soiled
and fallen away?

- 4 I translate from the dreams of old women.
Drifting through lavender forests,
climbing with ease the yellow mountains
where you can lie down lost in forsythia—

coming to the end of spring
my grandmother kicks off her shoes,
she steps out of her faltering body.

THE MORNING OF THE RED-TAILED HAWK

In holy books, in church, I hear curses,
see stones hurled at bodies caught in acts
that spurn the law of Moses and of Good. I,

like Saul, have judged, held coats in hands
washed clean in the blood of a Bible-belt Lamb.

But, from my window now, I follow the red-tailed
hawk, gliding, imperceptibly adjusting
to turbulence, scanning his territory
for unwary rodents in the tall marsh grass.

I too cruise, needing emotion, words to write.
Today, I intercepted a man's glance, saw his eyes
smoothing the light hairs on another man's arm
as they walked the beach.

These two are lovers in some sheltered cove,
where my claws could intrude, sharp
as the red-tailed hawk, his talons sunk in flesh.

I will not write their names. Deeper than books,
than church, I have caught some ancient pain,
accepting it to cup, as in a chalice,
between my trembling hands.

Bettie M. Sellers

THE HOLY DANCE

We hear they've opened
an old folk's home
in her name. We're proud.

We remember her black dresses
shining like bibles, her old hand
moving lightly over our backs and arms,
her prayers, long and touching
everyone (I timed her once—
sixteen minutes of grace before supper).

Only an old man
in Nebraska remembers
how she moved

and the hard burning
behind her
at the barn dance

where she turned,
fast,
spinning,

her white dress swirling out,
quicker, until everything
pulled in, even light.

Keith Taylor

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Maxine Kumin's *The Retrieval System* (Penguin, 1978, 70 pp. \$3.95 paper) has a five-poem section on "Henry Manley" that is sharp, salty, and memorable. Although I enjoyed the rest of the volume while I was reading it, I find that many of the poems fade quickly in my memory. My thanks for Henry Manley, who lives.

Linda Pastan's *Five Stages of Grief* (Norton, 1978, 62 pp. \$8.95 cloth, \$2.95 paper) does not tempt me to pick and choose. This is a tight reticulation of poems, organized by the five stages (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance). Each poem transfigures its central image or event (an egg, stone soup, an academic act), and the volume as a whole transfigures the stone into nourishment.

Felix Pollak's *Subject to Change* (Juniper Press, 1310 Shorewood Drive, La Crosse, Wis. 54601, 1978, 36 pp., \$3.50 paper) is a small masterpiece, an elegant volume of polished poems, various in their skills and insights, lustrous in their textures, some as sharp and witty as folk-sayings, others as complex and melodious as the scherzos, etudes, and noctures that provide the section headings. All these poems are rich with the humanity of our contemporary Teiresias, who—as literal sight fades—becomes a seer.

From Robert Bly's *Seventies Press*, a Norwegian poet of great appeal: **Rolf Jacobsen, *Twenty Poems*** (Odin House, Madison, Minn. 56256, 1977, 76 pp. \$5.00 cloth, \$3.00 paper). The spaces in these poems draw the reader in and hurl him out simultaneously:

The morning paper is opened out on the 7:35
and suddenly provides all the men with white wings.
They fly off inside a room inside the train
their faces strangely stiff
a procession behind glass
as if to a restricted and private funeral on some star.

Bly provides the Norwegian text, so we can hear "faces strangely stiff" as "besynderlige stive ansikter," and appreciate the poetic success of the translation.

The reader who finishes **Norman Dubie's** *The City of the Olesha Fruit* (Doubleday, 1979, 76 pp., \$6.95 cloth) is not quite the same person who opened the book. That reader has participated very sensuously and intensely in the lives

(and sometimes the deaths) of men and women of many civilizations. The title poem provides the map:

In the city of the Olesha fruit

A citizen never dies, he just wakes

One morning without his legs, and then he is given

A city of his very own making.

These cities of the imagination are appallingly real, and for as long as a poem sustains its narrative we inhabit its reality as though hypnotized. How can one poet know so well what it is like to be at an Elizabethan bear baiting, in a Pilgrim blockhouse, in a cell at Dachau. Some poems dissolve out of photographs, to be sure, and others conjure familiar names: Poe, Kierkegaard, Chekov, Kafka. But the quality that has made Dubie one of the most cherished and influential of young poets is his gift for snapping us awake in a city of his making.

Some Small Press Triumphs

There are two sad sights in a reviewer's world: powerful and important poems (like Dubie's) printed on coarse paper, fairly reeking with acid, and at the other extreme trivial verse exquisitely hand-printed on paper made to last forever. The press that celebrates splendid poetry with splendid book production deserves our gratitude and support. The Graywolf Press is one of these. John Haines' *In a Dusty Light* (Graywolf, 1977, 46 pp., \$5.00 paper) has resonant images from Montana and points west and north, such as "The Eye in the Rock," which ends: "They who believed that stone,/ water and wind might be quickened/ with a spirit like their own,/ painted this eye that the rock might see." Carol Frost's *The Salt Lesson* (Graywolf, 1976, 36 pp., no price listed) has poems of epithelial sensitivity and shadows dense as flesh. David Wagoner's *Travelling Light* (Graywolf, 1976, 28 pp., no price listed) contains nine of this strong poet's best poems: "Breaking Camp," "Meeting a Bear," "Walking in a Swamp," "Tracking," "Missing the Trail," "From Here to There," "Being Shot," "Waiting in a Rain Forest," and the astonishing white-out of the final poem, "Travelling Light." It is hard to imagine that poems of this caliber, printed so lovingly and in such small editions, could still be in print. But it's worth a try. For a price list, write Graywolf Press, PO Box 142, Port Townsend, Wash. 98368.)

Another publisher who honors powerful poetry with handsome production is David R. Godine. One of the most remarkable books from Godine is **Allen Mandelbaum's *Chelmaxions: The Maxims • Axioms • Maxioms of Chelm*** (Godine, in association with the Jewish Publication Society of America, 1977, 172 pp., \$10.00 cloth). Between the "Preface of the Hoarse Savant" and the "Song of the Colophon" are Gatesongs, Findings, Cesurasongs, Aftersongs, and Scoriae. Enter this amazing volume and take it on faith: its constantly varying harmonies, its sensuous catalogues, its soaring excursions of the imagination, its embroideries of elegant footnotes, its geographies of inner and outer continents, suggesting a universe and university of scholarly density—playful and profound.

Rescued from the Past

Robert Peters has arranged passages from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *American Notebooks* so that they magically appear as vivid contemporary poems (*Hawthorne*, Poet-Skin/Red Hill Press, 6 San Gabriel Drive, Fairfax, Cal. 94930, 1977, 88 pp., \$4.00 paper). Emerson and Thoreau (sic) are here, and the Concord landscape, flora and fauna, in a bright new light.

Ruth Whitman's *Tamsen Donner: A Woman's Journey* (Alicejames, 1977, 76 pp., \$3.50 paper) is an imaginary journal of the wife of George Donner, who shared the fate of her husband at the pass that bears their name. Tamsen was a poet and a diarist, though most of her writing has been lost. After tracing her footsteps literally, Ruth Whitman has reconstructed this journal that the poet Tamsen might have written, day by day in her fateful journey. It is a very beautiful and powerful book.

From Britain

It must be difficult for the reader who encounters the poems of **Ted Hughes** only in anthologies to imagine the impact of these comical, violent, atavistic poems as they appear with **Leonard Baskin's** drawings. Baskin-and-Hughes have a new book, *Cave Birds: An Alchemical Cave Drama* (Viking, 1978, 62 pp., \$14.95 cloth). The Baskin drawings are among his most fanciful and raunchy. The Hughes poems were first given in oratorio form in 1975 at

the Ilkley Festival, and they are great poems for the ear, with their "snickety nick" and their "flare, fluttering," their "vulture's gullet" and "hoof-churned hole." The Hughes energy of language is as strong as ever. The shamanistic fusion of animal (bird) and human consciousness appears as the product of the bleak ritual. In this book the human dominates over the animal, and in "Something was happening" the human narrative shimmers on the surface, and the leap to the image of the eagle-hunter seems like a desperate plunge to cope with the deeps beneath that surface.

Another British poet who extracts from British earth and legend the ore for a time-defying ethnic mythology is **Martin Booth**, whose *The Knotting Sequence* (Elizabeth Press, 1977, 70 pp., \$16. boards, \$8. wrappers) conjures up an ancient genius loci, Cnot. Booth's feeling for his Cnot is wry affection, quite in contrast with Hughes's more powerful and hilarious cartoon-creature Crow, or the more formidable beast-divinities of *Cave Birds*.

M.K.S.

Peter Porter's *The Cost of Seriousness* (Oxford University Press, 1978, 55 pp. \$5.50, paper) rises like a precipice of energy from his previous poetry, and crystallizes in the cover photograph of the face of an angel. Both the Blythburgh angel and the poems reflect a contemplation of life's penetrating pain, and the artist's endeavor to express it:

Real pain

it aims for, but can only make gestures,
the waste of selling-short, the "glittering."

Porter incorporates progressive themes. He plucks the creative garden concept from "Sunday" (1970), exemplifies it in "An Australian Garden" (1975), and synthesizes it in "The Delegate" in this latest work: "even my death / is a chord among the garden sounds."

"The Delegate" is one of a few manifestly autobiographical poems in a volume in which the poet's despair over his wife's death sounds contrapuntally throughout—a strand that amplifies the quality of this moving poetry. This is a matured Porter, sophisticated and more secure in his art. Life's potpourri of hope and despondency, and the serious business of perfecting one's art are aptly illustrated: "The dead may pass their serious burdens to the living." This is Porter at his best.

Arlene Higar