

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

Volume 31—Number 1

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May Sarton, the Guest Editor for this issue, was Guest Editor for our Volume One, Number One, Fall 1950. The Editors are delighted and grateful that she has consented to assemble these poems for Volume Thirty-one, Number One.

Preface

After thirty years in which *The Beloit Poetry Journal* has flourished, I have again been asked to edit one issue, an irresistible invitation.

Last time around I counted on many poet-friends among my contemporaries. This time only a few of the contributors have published a book, and there are seven first appearances anywhere.

I had hoped to present an entire issue of poems using metre and rhyme that would proclaim a renaissance of "form." There are some beautiful examples here, but on the whole I have had to settle for substance and grace without that supreme tension and release.

However, I believe that change is in the wind. Form is not something pasted on. It is organic, as organic as the growth of a plant. If poetry is close to music and mathematics it is because all three stem from and partake in the "fearful symmetry" of the universe.

Nevertheless I consider this a collection of authentic voices and am proud to be their midwife.

May Sarton
York, Maine
1980

INVOCATION

Gray dawn
Gray ground
Gray desiccated
Lichen on
The branch
A time of insufficient cold
And failing heat.
We wait.

As snow
As crystal
Lightener
Of breath
So come,
O Christ,
As whiteness.

Richard Clark

SPIDER

It's winter. A leftover spider
has spun a web between the screen
and the storm window. More than a web,
a caul, a winding-sheet, a gift of silk
through which the weak sun strains,
Except to a weaver, perhaps, his steps
are irretraceable: imprisoned without prey,
still he spun himself out.

Wizened and brittle on the sill,
he left me something beautiful,
a note of sorts, a testimony, a will
written in a weakening hand, a shawl
impractical though remarkable
for its slipped stitches
where dying dimmed his skill.

Dora Sherwood Hissong

WIND AFTER SNOW

New snow going across the road
Like fine sand sliding over sand,
New snow floating up in the field
Like white smoke rising from bushes,
New snow falling out of the pines
Like flour floating down from sifters,
Not like soft sift in an hourglass.

All day, like fine sand, like white smoke,
As unlike flour as hourglass sift,
The new snow stings pedestrians.

Hugh Henney

FISHING THROUGH THE ICE

From shore to shore the pond was a closed book,
its snowy cover arabesqued with tracks
and delicately feather-stitched by mice.

Half of a day it took, with pick-axe and crowbar
to break open; bit by bit as cracks
were hacked into chasms and chips flew, light
from inside the foot-thick binding shone through.
By dusk the surroundings might have been the ruins
of the Ice-Queen's palace — such heaps of shattered blocks

and iridescent splinters, but at the center:
an open eye, a disk of dark water.
We look in and stare: what may appear from that
gunmetal smoothness that wrinkles a little with wind?
The lines are dropped in, the baited hooks plunge
and sink out of sight. Expectancy verges on prayer:

if life in that underwater world survives,
let it emerge from the secret, roofed-over dark!
We crouch at the eye that shows us to ourselves,
imagining fish in every mirrored gesture
till patience makes statues of us. Then, the flash
of a rose stripe, the surface plopping open
and a small rainbow arches into air.
A fingerling (we free him) slithers from our sight
but a rainbow's a promise: the waters are alive.

What proof they send us as the opening swirls
with dappled, color-stippled shapes that curve,
glisten, splash: The water palpitates
with the leaping pebble-shine of trout. We catch,
keep some — whatever in us plumbs the unknown
for clues and glimpses — already richly fed.

Evelyn Ames

ANY APRIL

At the instant —
the very moment you
read these words,
a doe is dropping her fawn
somewhere in a dark wood.
Her tongue licks the new deer
as it untangles its legs
to find her milk —
then lies in the cool leaf shade
to hide and quiet its heart pound.
Where were you when this happened?
What were you thinking
before these words told you of the miracle?
Come June, perhaps at twilight,
you will hear eight hooves
bolt from the undergrowth.
You will know then
that life has taken hold.
Be still now, and think of April,
and the soft light thud.

Cathy Beard

FLIGHT IN ITS TRUE ASPECT

The hummingbird, stunned,
Throbs like a heart in my palm.
It came at the plate glass
With its winged roar
Headed straight for the floral armchair.
Grouse do it too, and doves, and the moths
Battering in blizzards at night
Against our undefended glare.

I'm afraid of its beak
But more fearful of its jeweled death,
Its diminished sheen.
My hands are icy with trying
Too hard to warm
This bumblebee bird, its hum uniquely
Attuned to air; a palpability
Of soul.

Cautious as a novice, I lift
Between fingertips
A condensed rainbow, the slightest
Misplaced pressure
Capable of murder.
I lean close to its secret, when sudden
As a heart's leap
It's free.

Deborah Pease

TWO POEMS

running

(running in rain)

there is something about running
in rain in the damp cold
end of indian summer.
leaves are wetted down under
the repetitive slap of my shoes.
seasons and rhythms
are fending off stiffness,
morning pain.
colors fade from the branches —
leaving trees stark
against the morning sky.
with the rise and fall of air
nothing breaks these rhythms
or mine.
a fretful wind blows up,
tidies the roads with a broom,
leaving mulch to soaking earth.
the season passes, the runner passes.
there is something about running
in the rain in the damp cold.

(spring run)

on this spring morning familiar
marbled cracks appear in the indigo sky
dousing the last star.
i hesitate at the edge, then plunge
into this perfection.

through the chilly april breeze
under the green gauze of newest
growth i run, having abandoned
the other world, i am the earth's.

with each stride my thigh muscles
swell like slow sea waves only
to break with ground contact
and thrust me farther into the wind.

internal rhythms grow stronger
with each passing mile.
flushed and labored at this run's end,
my heart becomes large and open —
beating and wild with joy.

an old woman dying

face lined deep
with shrunken crevices.
sun sinking in yellowed eyes
behind smudged spectacles.
a postlude to blindness;
a prelude to light.

hands trembling with fragile bones
shred into the comfort
of another's presence.

“what is your name?
i am afraid. talk to me.
i don't like being alone
and my name is maisie mary margaret miner
(that's miner spelled with an 'e').
what is your name?
i'll be 80
if i see july 4th,
but i haven't got long.
what is your name?
oh, i'm sick. so sick.
why don't they come?
why do they leave me here
like a rotting vegetable . . . alone?
my name is maisie mary margaret miner
(that's miner spelled with an 'e').

did i ask you your name?”

fear puts itself aside.
fires in sunken eyes
ignite with life
in the setting.
a vivid red silent rage.

“pray for me.
take my hand for a while
and some of my death.”

diane leslie wiggins

THAT SUN WHO'S MINE

My caged sun is home
And I can see her beam again
In light reflecting corridors.

My tethered sun presides
Where in her warmth, a small domain
Amid cascades of color thrives.

My wounded sun is caught;
Her light in bursting showers bleeds
Bright messages across the dark.

My aging sun burns hot
So I must keep her distanced in
The confined orbit of my heart.

Karen Saum

AMONG THE WAVES

In the green gulf water
you are suspended in a perfect space
as flat light slants into late afternoon.

When I speak,
a horseshoe crab sticks in my throat.
It claws at my beliefs
and my verbiage
as the sky is transmuted
into shattered pastels.

Belief is like playing in the ocean
at sunset
while the tormented sky cavorts above you
and the brine mingles with your alcoholic breath.

Your legs stagger under the weight of the sea.
You are battered by the waves
and break into wreckage
long submerged under tons of water.

Looking up through layers of ocean,
you feel yourself breaking
and lying easy
on the ocean floor
to rest there forever.

Herbert S. Guggenheim

TWO POEMS**Avian**

We never went birdwatching
With binoculars, though we stood
Silently on banked shores, parted
Tall grasses and didn't whisper,
Waiting for dawn, wings

We saw indistinctly: color, shape,
Size, eyes and cock of head.
We held hands. We were the same
Height, looking up for what was
Different from stable things.

Did that branch move? The trailing
Cranberry bush sing? How silent we were
In the wind. And now, trying to separate
Each from each, trying
To pull apart and still preserve,

We hop on skeleton feet,
Dragging wings; plumage
Lies all around us; we eye each other,
Cry at the open edge of distance;
The blue sky, a terrible thing.

The Hold

If, in the swirl of sun and chill,
leaves pull anchors to the wind and tip
downwards, coasting with currents known only
to Fall, if they twirl about their drying stems
like ballet dancers turning toward the arms
of partners, yet glide with soundless scuffle
to thin and waiting grasses, what then? Was that
short stream of life, from budded green to blaze of
riding red enough? I've felt breath leave
in a rush as you exclaimed: *More* — reaching
for the warmth slipping between our bodies,
scraped pure as whittled wood and twice
as smooth, as supple
With the race of light, wind carrying
scented crush and lacework veins, a mass of color
fills the sky: red, yellow, orange, brown; green seems
gone but for the needling pines, upright and unyielding
in the breeze of changing season. But let the trees
cling to whatever hold of shape they can. I've seen
you; the arch of spine, tender
shadows beneath shoulder wings, a sheen of skin
fainter and higher, farther away now in moonlight; pale ash
and gone.

M.F. Hershman

FOUR POEMS

"Nature Loves to Hide"

(Heraclitus, fragment 123)

The thing inside that is real is as elusive
 As those horses we once looked for on
 The Rio Grande. Knowing them on the loose—
 Wild horses signing drab topographies
 Of yucca, ocotillo, prickly pear—
 But never actually seeing them for days,

'Til round the river's far-flung bend I came
 Upon one wild horse planted at the edge,
 And on one mirrored image of a horse.
 Two necks arched out to drink,
 Arrested by my presence at their extent,
 The aqua surface as yet undisturbed.

For men, such wildness is so difficult
 That horses are portrayed, often, in a
 Pompeian agony, and valued so.
 The neck a tortured snarl of sinews, head
 Deformed with starts of terror and of strength.
 So "wildness" is a name for frenzy, wild to
 Be mastered, or bent to the hand of love.
 We, drowning men, struggle against our depth.

Not so with horses on the Rio Grande.
 Shaggy, benign, cast off by poverty.
 No art can bind what never strove
 Against the cruel spur. Glimpsed by chance
 And, when swept closer past the recurving bend,
 Bolted, discreet, hidden. The cane is still.
 The creature waits patiently in its blind,
 Its longings borne as *my* thirsts may not be.

I am talking about the horses that are real.
I heard them. In the dark, the wished-for sounds.
Wild horses, nibbling at the scrub, snorting
Companionably. Their hooves clinked on cold stones
And radiant warmth moved with them through thick
darkness

Just beyond the strained limits of sight.

On waking in the morning light I found
Their prints cast delicately in the dust,
Diverging and converging past my bag.
As if a flood rose in the night
Encompassing and sparing this high ground.
To think I slept trusting such dark good will!

And yet I feel such trust inside myself,
The yearning and restraint towards wild things,
The extension of the mind towards its own life
Which, like the horse and water-imaged horse,
Completes itself, two gestures of desire, almost
Almost to touch. But never quite.

Venus 1979

She was riding the waves And this one caught her late.
She felt a driver's lash snap through her spine
Rushing her out-turned face into the storm of lifted
Sand. Eyeless and flailed in every limb
As kelp strands are, twined with her to the length,
She was not afraid but recognized her birth
And she became part of the wave divulsing her,
One shoulder down, the other wrenched, in twain,
So struck the rock full, with a giving will—
Which killed her anyway, by sordid chance.

They had to get someone to clear the beach.
 The lifeguard, muscled ostentatiously
 In Public Health Department trunks, takes charge,
 Sent to write off the still-life in the wrack
 As circumstantial, forces shut the gape,
 Releasing loiterers back to their lives.
 Such dirty work must be an irritant;
 "Why can't we keep these women from the surf?"
 But the *ocean* loved her when it brought her here
 And she will always be part of the wave.

Gauntlet Run

"It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
 As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear"
 Romeo and Juliet I.v. 47-48.

To get to you I had to cross battle lines, picket lines,
 Looks of essential hatred such as captives give,
 Sidelong, as the lordly train proceeds,
 Silver and elegant, through their daily squalor.
 Or I *was* the captive— searched by baffled eyes
 Of naive lady tourists at the glass.

To get to you I had to cross killing grounds, rows
 Of wounded who, unthinkably, outlived
 Their mutilations. Or was the wounded—
 Flinching from medic hands whose touch
 Brings pain they in their wholeness can't conceive,
 Committed to a mercy in excess.

To get to you I had to force my feet
 Where never gentle wish could go,
 Like heroes in grim tales who, given charms

Against illusion, suffer witcheries unscathed—
Yet in myself endured processions
Of all grotesque and murderous fantasy.

All night I seemed to journey in such dreams
Down corridors and histories of wars:
Trains. Battles. Apparitions
You who were the jewel of this night,
At whose desire these old indignities
To either side slip drowsily away,

Can hardly know, I think, on your rich bed
Hearing my shaken step, waiting on all
This rhetoric at which love lightly laughs,
What I have crossed to reach you, or how faithfully
How should you fathom my love, lacking my sight
Long trained by ambient darkness to the light?

Father M., On Wearing the Collar

Because a man can sit out on his own
Back porch, the back porch of his boyhood home,
While heat-bugs drone away all evening long
Rockin' himself in a hundred-year-old rocker
Turned on his great-grandfather's own lathe,
And *still* feel homesick:

That's the reason why.

Karen Hodges

PLUM ISLAND

That singular day
 we climbed the dunes
and followed the wooden-slatted path, suspended
 over the marsh's reflections.
Watched ourselves walk on the still water,
 silently waited for sign of bird or small beast.

We were allied then,
 no jockeying for position, tugging for power;
content to let the boundaries touch, enmesh,
 without the usual screech of heavy metal.

Perhaps our aggression was borne out over the waves
 by the gulls
and dropped with their discarded shells.
The sand-pines' whisperings echo our conversation
 and the sun-baked sand
 remembers our warmth.

Barbara Swett Burt

DUO CONCERTANTE

A graceful curve of melody across the upper strings
of a guitar
outlines the thin, sharp edge
of your body
against the light-soaked paper shoji —
a tablature of intersecting lines
where your form is inscribed —
a sinuous geometrical figure
traced on a grid,
modulating from the node of the ankle
up the slow rise
of the thighs
to the ripe swell of your hip,
the turn of your waist
slurring from the accent of your hipbone
to the scale of the ribs,
echoing the bowed side
of the guitar.

I play from memory:
my eye tears through the gauzy envelope
of your clothing
the way the teeth tear off
the clinging velvet skin
of a peach,
transposing you to another key
afternoons away
when the shuttling of our bodies
wove a keen and subtle counterpoint
from facing sympathetic strings
that sounded together,
sometimes with the discord in the throat
of an animal
sometimes with the harmony
of the human soul.

Roger Finch

FROM THE WINDOW

Sous mex tranquilles yeux vous devenez musique.

Jules Supervielle

The day has changed
from cold gray to pervasive blue;
I watch it deepen over this street
whose dark roofs and white clapboards
take the declining light and reflect it well.

Three thousand miles away
(it is earlier, not yet evening)
you sit at a piano in a room I do not know,
keeping company with Mozart and Scriabin.
I can't describe you there;
yet that room is where you belong.

Thin strands of melody
wind through my thoughts and blur
like the murmurs in a conch shell.
Already, August. Winter will come
as night comes now.

When you have finished playing
and silence holds its gentle palm against your cheek,
you will rest and smoke and gaze out the window
and think of the brash Atlantic as the sun
completes its arc, washing the street in light,
illuminating, for a moment, everything.

Elizabeth Knies

FOUR POEMS

The Case for Love

It is that first impulse
that brings us together again and again
in spite of the barriers, the standing off,
the holding back that trips our conversations
and saddens our silences
and makes us yearn to be alone.
There is under all
an indestructible faith in that first rush,
the fresh start to each other,
though a hundred times come to nothing
there remains the hope that next time
we may stay the impulse longer
and make the case for love a little stronger.

Catechism

What is the cat doing
when he does nothing
but sit softly folded upon his paws?
He doesn't have words to think thoughts with;
does some feline imagery engage his eye and brain?

No. He is immersed deep in his felinity
that takes soft soundings
of things in his surroundings
to which he must attend.
And if not occupied with anything outside
he's content for hours on end
to repose in his divinity:
one cat in a trinity
of knower, known and knowing,
for all within him flows
and feels itself flowing.
The rapture in that!
Is it only for the cat?

The Pine Stand

In this dense wood the sun
is rayed in golden shafts upon
the fallen needled copper hair of trees.

I love the flowering here.
The jack-in-the-pulpit's arching spathe
enfolds the tiny spadix like a hood.

And the lady's slipper
suspends its pouch of velvet pink:
a veined cleft scrotum in the wood.

Whether in limbs or leaves
these soft and delicate forms fulfill
a special role in nature's strategies.

Second Childhood

I have little interest now
in things I once wanted so,
while what I gave up wanting
or silenced with the din of distraction
I want with all my soul.
I don't know if I've grown up
or become again a child,
for to stand in this new place
is somehow to come home
to the vital richness alive in dreams
and children and all natural creatures:
a presence, filled and moving,
innocent lawful and wild,
that continually creates itself
and in which the truthful moment
can at last abide.

Lovers and Poets
do not hang clanging pails down half-filled wells.
They know how to wait
for wells to fill, to brim, to spill;
it is their special talent and their grace.

Jeanne Fitzgerald

TWO POEMS**The New Bed**

Ten years ago at bedtime three school-
children sat at the foot of the bed
of the marriage they were born into.
You'd come to tease or wrestle or be
read stories to or just joke around,
and to be touched in that rumpled warmth
where you made room for my feet to go.

In your far rooms fancy me curled up
tonight beside the spouse you've hardly met
and therefore can't care too much about
day-by-day chance I have left to love
asleep beside me in this new bed
in a room we've altogether changed.

Think of me as a stranger whom you'll
have to decide whether to befriend,
a man changed since he hurried you out
into the damage your lives would do,
a man guilty of abandonment
who's trying to grow a bright new self
that will serve Steadfastness like a nun.

What you think you'd have preferred instead
was for me to maintain the house like
a museum, a dream you'd visit
when you wish. It is no dream but where
the events concerning us took place.
It still is a place, and while it stands
no happy ending will stop its deeds—

or bad ending. There is no plot, but there's a beginning we shared long past during which we settled an island right for our family for a while. We know how it happened. Not one word can change, in which observation lies my idea of Pure Abidingness.

The Walkways

if filmed the way they do a flower while it unfolds—from above, one frame every few minutes during the day—and then projected at normal speed so that we'd be looking down on them, the walkways would open and look brisk like paths around anthills. And the dog on the soundtrack would bark without stop and each door repeat its own hinge sound in the endless squeal as they open

for cylinders of the salt that makes water soft, for milk and packages and laundryman and upholsterer who's brought the sofa back, men at dawn who carry out our trash, people who sell door to door and the paper boy. And the boy who shovelled walks and stands at the blue front door and hefts the brass knocker the shape and size of a hand to collect his pay. And for Leroy the postman who rarely knocks the way he does today and stops to collect 2¢ postage due. And once a month the meter reader lets himself in.

Like the groundcrew that surround a jet,
each crewman doing everyday jobs,
they make safe and ready the giant queen
mother of us all. They hurry up
like Keystone Cops while passengers wait
and the dog goes crazy and you watch,
from an upstairs window, the walkways
you know are there emerge from new snow.

The walkways are racing with workmen
like members of a surgical team
in a film about repairing ills
speeded up to make us smile at ills
and at hale and comic repairmen
and quickness with the hardware of repair:
a ladder with a window-washer
or an eaves-cleaner with a bucket
high up on it, and up on the roof
with his brushes the quaint chimney sweep,
the operator who knows how to
steam-clean rugs behind his fierce machine,
and like chthonic gods the furnace man
going down with his salvation kit
and Frank the plumber who arrives with
instruments that give old pipes new life.
Wrenches, trowels, the electrician's
box that he rattles around in, nails,
wire, wallpaper, poisons for vermin,
saw and sawhorse, a door being planed,
new oven being eased into place,
fabric on the decorator's knee.

They show up. They're like the entourage
of a pretty face whose name has been
a household word more than forty years
and who they ease into place and who
pays her only friends left, the old gang

of them—her designer, her dresser,
her make-up man, her writer, her coach,
director, arranger, manager,
the guys on lights, cameras and fanfare—
an army of friends that make her work.
How she does in the blare and the blaze.
She takes your breath away when she starts
and you ask, “How does she manage it?”
and this is the secret way she does,
no expense spared in the time-lapse months.
And the house—still in her prime—invents
for the first time the routines you saw
and words to the tunes she sang way back
while you were growing up, and you thrill
for a long while that she is just how
you always remember her tonight.

Bink Noll

TWO POEMS**Grandfather**

I hate the grandfather who broke his wife
asleep at the wheel, plunging her down the mountain
much later I would learn of the tears of her life
he broke open her body with eight children

I hate the grandfather who broke them early
each child's will beneath the snap of his straps
one cracked, one married, one ran off to the army
they dreamed rebellions, disguises and escapes

I hate the grandfather who broke me in our play
his hard hands twisting, wetting my wrists
the grandfather who shrugged when I'd cry
who once hit me for crying until I wet my pants

I hate the grandfather who never broke himself
who grew only in his own straight way, visionless,
who, dying, seemed surprised, hurt that he wasn't safe
and, even in his last illness, denied all weakness

I hate the grandfather we wept over at the grave
grandchildren, children, congregation, friends
weeping ignorant or needing the tears for a salve
for wounds too numb to rejoice when the torture ends

I hate the loud grandfather who lives on in memory
of big boys whipped by their strong-armed teacher
the principal's barked word of absolute authority
hell-raising voice of the evangelist preacher

voice of the grandfather that strikes to conquer
quells every protest, righteous and enraged
spells out its power with an unquestioned order
I hate the grandfather in me still, unpurged

For Pain

Pain, I do not love you
or your giddy knife or your tight hand.
Without you, I would not be
sweating the sheets, feeling how
to turn from tooth, womb, heart
pain: I do not love you
as you twist my eye.

You darken me. You teach me death:
Without you. I would not be
human if I did not cry
at this squeezing of my human breath.
Pain, I do not love you—
pulse, so deep inside, you make me see
it's more than love. I know what,
without you, I would not. Be
with me always, even though
you hear me groan *It hurts to hurt!*
Pain, I do not love you;
without you, I would not be.

Melissa Cannon

MY NEW ENGLAND GRANDMOTHER

Grandmother
waiting at home
black silk
Yardley scent
you tucked into your sleeve
a starched square of white
three-quarters lace.
Eyes the color of bluets
hair fresh blown snow—
Oh, you were Easter and Christmas
and a Sunday of bells.
When church let out
you moved through the house
still savoring the psalms
prayers fresh on your face.

When you embroidered
we gathered around you.
We were young
we were old
hoping you'd tell us
how to be wise.
You never told us
but what we needed to know
you stitched like a sampler
into our lives.

Alice Blackburn

MY SISTER

The secret
under the white stone
holds no clue
that does not hurt the mind
with worm and bone.

The stone is cold.
It would not comfort me
to warm it with marigolds.
I could not find her
where she would not stay.

Hortense Roberta Roberts

THE RAMPART

Object of speculation, regret, or grief,
This corpse, satin-cosseted, constructs
A barricade, a bastion of relief
From long farewell, from pain, from life's outflux.

What is this barrier, what elements compound
The invisible invincible defense?
Silence so palpable it bursts with sound,
Detachment three-dimensional and dense.

Douglas Garth

THE CEMETERY

We were sixteen
and hell-bent for Truth.
In the past that shifts
under my gaze,
it was always snowing,
like a paperweight turned over.
Muffled and mittened,
galoshes slapping against our legs,
we weaved among the friendly graves,
while the short twilight raced us
to evening,
and the lake cracked and groaned
just out of sight.
We threw snowballs at God,
recited Teasdale and Millay,
picked up stones, debated the Trinity,
read epitaphs, made up our own,
felt our bones grow longer in our skins.
Our breaths turned ectoplasm in the cold;
hand in hand,
we stomped home in darkness. Later
in the warm room,
we chattered about nothing. Light-
years from death,
we never told
about the snow's colors on the
prismed ground, nor ever mentioned
where we'd been.

Jean Burden

POEM

In autumn seeing wild asters through her eyes
I will remember her who honored weeds—
 blue chicory, milkweed, campion—
 but grappled none the less,
 gardening against the quack grass,
 chickweed, burdock and beggarticks
—tough stems and roots
 that grabbed and clung to earth.

Here with the fallen apples fragrant in the grass
and grapes in cloudy clusters on the vines
she harvested, summer and autumn,
 from many seasons' growth—
coming, not easily,
 but gently at the last,
to her own peace
 with the private devastations
of time and death.

Barbara E. Thomson

ANGER AND I

Anger and I
are friends
of late.
She came
to rage and reform me
to arm and disarm me
forever.
No longer
could I keep peace

when war was waging
its battle
in the hot, holy depths
of the iceberg.
Anger brooded
to break me.
Her blunt, brute beauty
seared through
the frozen world
of obligations
to befriend
tiny tendrils of green
asking for
sun.

Sharon Blessum Sawatzky

DESPERADO GETS HIMSELF TOGETHER

He takes his pain to the woods, to settle down.
Wanting the dark, he shuts the cabin door,
while the town he left lies buried in thick air
he once breathed freely, watching others drown.
Back there, they run like cattle down a chute
to low at those lascivious marquees
or slobber over rubber novelties;
so he carries his pain here to shake it out
away from them. On the gray planks upstairs
old calendars are curling up like scrolls
until all he can see is the painted scene
of a mermaid combing starfish from her hair,
or a flyspecked sunset. Toward midnight he unrolls
his sleeping bag and beds down with his pain.

(After Baudelaire's "Recueillement")

Henry Taylor

TWO POEMS

Holding up the Bridge

The diver under the bay
reports the concrete block
holding up the bridge
is cracked and crumbling.

A narrow road
arches over the water space,
dips towards the shore.
One end of the bridge
goes down on its knees.
Cars and trucks
tumble off like toys.

No.

The diver is lying. Inside
that concrete block
my bones
are holding up the bridge.

*Three times the builder tried
without the sacrifice,
three times the bridge
shuddered and collapsed.*

*And then he knew:
only the bones
of his young wife
could placate the girders.*

*She came, bringing his lunch, singing,
the birds warned her;
that was at Arta,
hundreds of years ago.*

Arrow

The aiming:

you aim at the center of the eye
you gather all landscape around that single point:
 if a bird-ribbon flies across the edge
 if a cloud teases the sun
you gather all to the one point
there is only one

The letting go:

you are let go
you are no longer grasped
empty air surrounds you

you no longer lean against the bow
your hock is free
you are free
you are in danger
remember the center

all of you remembers the center

The flight:

you are moving along an invisible track
(you made it yourself)
straight as your spine is straight

you move forward
air whistles past you
you are speeding towards

 you are gathered
 you are pointed
 you are free
 you are in danger

the center
of your eye

Ruth Whitman

TWO POEMS

Endangered Species

From the fire of God's imagining
They came, flaring out like sparks,
Incense glow, tiny moons, fireflies,
Each one a light, growing.
In the entire stillness,
Motionless, afloat, they came:
Falcon, snow bear, tiger, the great whales,
The cheetah, falling like a meteor,
Even now searing the veldt like a brushfire,
Remembering God's exaltation;
The wolverine, his eyes a dazed glare,
Fiercely, faithfully devouring,
Remembering the great rage of God . . .
All enacting, all remembering, all signatures
Of God, of God within us;

The woodpecker, insistence,
The sea turtle, humility, patience,
The crane, dignity, foolishness,
The snow leopard, subtlety,
The eagle, divine indifference . . .

Everywhere now they are leaving us,
Leaving the earth,
Everywhere now we have almost destroyed them.
Soon the eyes of animals will not speak to us,
Will not tell us, lovingly, who we are,
Will not speak to us, even, of shame,
Of unutterable grieving.
Everywhere, now, they are leaving.

At Saugatuck

Old man fishing on the pier
Catching nothing,
Old man, when will I know your name
That I may begin to cry?

My love, what are my hands for
But to hold you, to be tree roots
That grow from your belly?
What is my tongue for
But to catch the little fish
That swims between your thighs?

Old man, when will I know your name
That I may begin to cry?

The rain tastes of salt,
My ears are filled with a dry light.
There is a city asleep in my throat.

When the sleepers waken it will be
 To find their children carried off,
 Their horses slaughtered . . .

My body is bleached, a fox's skull.
 I stuff it with grass, with moss, with leaves,
 Fill the orifices

And still my eyes see you, see you . . .
 I bury them with a hatchet in the earth;
 Turnips, radishes, they grow again.

I am waiting the long fall into night,
 Stars at my wrists, my throat . . .

Old man, catching nothing,
 When will I know your name
 That I may begin to cry?

Margaret Tongue

INHERITANCE

And God said, Let there be light: And there was
 light. —*Genesis*

There is no sun without shadow, and it is essential
 to know the night. —*Camus*

The bed is small in which I lie,
 my circumspect cocoon,
 designed and fashioned to deny
 the dreadful heat of noon.

Upon a pallet such as mine
 the saints slept, and behold,
 God in His Majesty Divine

rolled back the evening cold
and visited each lonely bed
with ecstasy like fire,
the transcendental recompense
for an unsaid desire—

while I (unlike Penelope)
knot tighter every thread
the long night through, that I may see
no disarray in bed.

And God in His magnificence
has deftly passed me by:
upon my neat and narrow bed
I work while I await the red
and fiery hail the godly knew.

I work the long night through
and never see my knotted thread
burn or be broken by His might
in shining light, in shining light.

Jean Clark Lieberman

TRIPTYCH OF GOSSIPS

(For L. E. B. and C. H. E.)

[Gossip. A. S. godsibb: a sponsor, lit. 'God-relative'; one who answers for a child in baptism; one who contracts a spiritual affinity with another as a sponsor . . .]

I. Incantation

Think of them—

Those trios

Sisterly—

Their secret

Conspirant

Legacy—

Those ancient

Intricate

Triplicates,

Those grand dames

With fine names,

Those witches,

Those bitches,

Those charmless

Spell binders,

Those sponsors,

Those haggard

Stepmothers,

Those gruesome

Cthonic

Reminders—

Their whispers

Now only

Haply heard—

Those victims

Of panic

And bad press.

II. Invocation

The dire ones—

Furious

Megaera, Tisiphone, Allecto,

Who became

The fatal

Closed union

Of weavers—

The spinsters,

Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos.

Those snaky

Stone masons,

Euryale, Medusa, Sthenno.

Their sisters

The aged,

The grey ones,

Eye-and-tooth

Sharing crones,

Dino, Pemphredo, Enyo.

Those winged-

Kidnappers,

Aello, Ocypete, Celaeno.

Those songster-

Seducers,

Ligeia, Leukosia, Parthenope.

Those gallant

Queen-warriors,

Penthesleia, Hippolyte, Antiope.

And later,

The wayward

And weird ones

In nameless

Covenants,

Like those sly

Clever cooks

In Macbeth.

Witch 1. Witch 2. Witch 3.

After the

Transformings,

Banishments.

Beheadings—

The thefts of

Vital parts—

The defeats

At the hands

Of the Greeks.

The hangings.

The stonings.

The burnings.

Re-collect,

Re-member,

Re-count them:

A case of

Mutual

Survival.

III. Convocation

You know them.
They are here—
Within you—
When it's the
Turbulent
Season: at
Quirk o'clock
On weak day
Of bad month.

They are your
Quotidian
Vexation,
The anger
That makes you
Think towards joy,
Your wrath in
The cruel or
Pallid bed.

In disarmed,
Bereft time—
Without tooth
To bite or
Eye to cry
Or look to
Freeze a stone.
They are your
Will-fullness.

In useless,
Listless place—
Parlor of
The petty
Politic,
Fog forum,
Banal hall—
They are your
Clarity.

From islands
Of exile
Their wings churn
Just curses
In the eye
Of your pain.

They spin the
Bold, gaudy,
Unfraying
Thread for your
Intimate
Tapestry.

Their fell songs
Rise from the
Defiant
Impervious
Rocks of your
Inner sea.

At ends of
Lands you know,
The refuge
Of their shields,
Those brave arms,
Give you heart.

Just beyond
Your safe ground,
In the three
Limbed, blasted,
Kinship tree,
Whose gnarled roots
Claw beneath
Callow clay,
They shelter—

The deep ones,
The wild ones,
The dear ones—
Those loyal
Guardian
Oldmothers.

Bless them with
Your fierce, free
Sanity.

Bring them forth,
Give them leave,
Give them voice.