

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

Volume 31—Number 2

Winter 1980-81

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Cover: Emilio Cruz

RELIC

We sat near the hearth
the cross between us
its chain of worked flowers
caught in my hand,

Grandmother's cross
an emblem adorned
with beaded rosettes
praising the light
each silver sphere
a starred flame.

From Jerusalem, she said.

I asked, when you die
can I have it, then caught
my breath and prayed
for coals to brand
and temper my tongue.

I memorized logs
tarnished by flame,
Dresden dolls
smiling from the mantle,
the shape of her hands
as she poked ember to blaze.

A gift from a pilgrim, she said
and willed me the cross
in the presence of fire
rain on the roof
gathering night.

Chris Hauck

THREE POEMS**Acorn**

Here is a tough acorn in my hand.
I hold it with uncertainty, its one crack,
but I am going to keep it. There must
be something sweet in its core,
something or someplace too close to name.
Perhaps it is a poplar leaf alone
at the roadside, a young girl, a
kind witch lifting the frame from a torn painting,
the silverware clattering
between the urn and the book
of charms. And the color of the shell, this crack,
says other things: there is a stained
saint in here, turning
around a cable made of cotton and wool braided
like bronze hair or two strands
of music edged with honey
in a house of paper frail enough to lift stones.
It's a root, a brown star, I bite in-
to, two sides made of dust, light, and morning.

Paying Attention

We told Phil about the whores on the island, how you have to be faithful and stay with the same girl every night you're on shore, but he wouldn't listen to us by God and dropped the girl he had the first night, saying she was lousy anyway, and went off with a younger-looking chick the second night of liberty.

So there he was in a booth with the new girl when his number one from the night before came into the bar. No glance at the new girl, she slid into the seat with Phil, all lovey and cozy, her arm around him as if to say no hard feelings or maybe to try to lure him away from her rival. She smiled and pulled him to her for a kiss of reunion, and, at the last second, opened her mouth too late for him to see the razor blade held in her teeth.

She shook her head back and forth like a dog playing with a rag—four swift passes—and she was off the seat and gone out the door.

Who knows quite when he realized? When he saw those red drops hitting the table, sinking and spreading into the amber beer? His number

two girl ran shrieking like
a terrified rodent. He sat there,
fading into shock, unable
to raise his hand to his mouth—
now ribbons, bloody leeches hanging
from his face, and Frank screaming, “God
damn it, Phil, we tried to tell
you! Don’t you ever listen?!”

The Child

These eyes, blind since the fire
in my mother’s womb, show me
apple cores still
in the seed and the swift light broken
from glass on my tongue. I see
the carcasses of giant squid slide
into a hole at the bottom
of the sky and the entrails
of birds arranged in cryptic figures—
the songs of desert lizards.

I thumb the cold skin
of my face and the trees dance like ice
splitting rock. Rainy weather
and sugary flies glaze my
dreams. I swim all night in a room
carpeted with roots and buzzing
with dry insects. My eyes turn
beneath my fingers like stones
buried under the back of the sleeping sea.

Malcolm Glass

AFTER READING *THE TALE OF GENJI*

In ancient Japan the ladies
draped their souls out of the windows
in silks of acacia yellow, plum blossom-red,
wisteria blue, and the ivory of chrysanthemums
that have faded to perfection.

The ladies themselves were hidden
behind blinds, behind screens, behind fans.
And when the silks were folded into their boxes
it was impossible to know
which soul belonged to which woman.

For a woman's soul is like wind
and may only be known by
what it touches
(and so you see I lied—
it was not their souls at all
but only wind-rippled silk).
The men riding by on their horses
were, however, impressed.

In ancient Japan a sword was judged
by how precisely it might slice a flower
without disturbing the plant
from which the flower came.

Once there was a river with no bridge.
On one side, screened by bamboo,
there walked a lady with a flower,
on the other a man with a sword.
But his horse would not cross the water
and disgusted he threw his sword into the river.

For a woman's soul is like water.
It is futile to try to slice it
with even the finest of swords.

In ancient Japan the man
would throw the image of his beloved
into the river
hoping the gods would find it
and deliver her to him.
But the water would wear the image smooth
by the time it had reached the gods
and so the gods were confused
as to who was the beloved.

At the bottom of the river
a sword lies rusting
and over the river the willows hang
like grieving ladies-in-waiting.
For a woman's soul is like water
and may only be known
by a drowning.

Stephanie Sugioka

FLOCKING

For weeks I had felt their coming.
Even in August there were spirals of bugs,
a few leaves swirling by cornfield or wheat.
Now they are here, part of the blue

Above Kittatinny or Schuylkill.
All week long they spiral,
rise and fall by bare walnut and hickory,
or land abruptly in the weeds.
When they stream past at evening,
there's the innuendo of ice in the small hearts.

In this morning of wet grass and fog,
a friend is dead, his machine still,
the tree that struck him
bent and swaying in the breeze.

I can see the rigid Vs of minnows,
the rows of late turnips.
I try to enter such precise wheeling
of brown honeysuckle and aster,
though when I stand near them,
there's only grief snapping near my face.

It's like this always
when I think of the fractures
of season after season,
the telephone calls at dawn,
the ancient words,
and then one evening,
a warm room, stiffness of face
and collar, stiffness of love,
stiffness of brass and dark wood.

And in a week or two,
a few soft zucchini on the porch, an empty jar,
a child's toy, the roadside bare.

And everywhere,
the hard night coming on,
and by the chilly windows all the darknesses flocking.

Harry Humes

1. 山 川 之 流 旋 轉 而 止
 2. 山 川 之 流 旋 轉 而 止
 3. 山 川 之 流 旋 轉 而 止
 4. 山 川 之 流 旋 轉 而 止
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 18. 山 川 之 流 旋 轉 而 止
 19. 山 川 之 流 旋 轉 而 止
 20. 山 川 之 流 旋 轉 而 止

This poem is one of a cycle of hymns in praise of Amun, the pre-eminent god of Egypt during the New Kingdom, and in praise of Thebes, his city. These hymns are preserved on a papyrus now in Leiden (I 350) which was written on no later than c. 1240 B.C., and thus they date to the reign of Rameses II or earlier. They employ the conservative structure and vocabulary characteristic of Egyptian religious verse. The poem had a literary inspiration and was not part of a liturgy or ritual. It is the hymn of an unknown poet to his god.

J.L.F.

THE LEIDEN HYMNS XX

How splendid you ferry the skyways,
 Horus of Twin Horizons,
The needs of each new day
 firm in your timeless pattern,
Who fashion the years,
 weave months into order—
Days, nights, and the very hours
 move to the gait of your striding.

Refreshed by your diurnal shining, you quicken,
 bright above yesterday,
Making the zone of night sparkle
 although you belong to the light,
Sole one awake there
 —sleep is for mortals,
Who go to rest grateful:
 your eyes oversee.
And theirs by the millions you open
 when your face new-rises, beautiful;
Not a bypath escapes your affection
 during your season on earth.
Stepping swift over stars,
 riding the lightning flash,

You circle the earth in an instant,
 with a god's ease crossing heaven,
Treading dark paths of the underworld,
 yet, sun on each roadway,
You deign to walk daily with men.

 The faces of all are upturned to you,
As mankind and gods
 alike lift their morningsong:
"Lord of the daybreak,
 Welcome!"

Translated by John L. Foster

TO THE MILLER'S DAUGHTER

It was cold that night, I remember
the sky fragile with stars.
I leaned from behind a thick elm,
watched for your light to come on.
Hours passed. I heard only the sound
of the mill's water wheel
lifting pieces of the black stream
up to moonlight. No wind.

Then a light, I remember, a light
came on—first floor,
the wrong floor, not yours. A screendoor
slammed. I started running
north, hoping to lose myself
in deep woods. The old man,
whiskey on his breath, a steak knife
in his hand, your father
was right behind me, the powerful
beam of his flashlight
X-ing my back in rhythm with his stride
and his bellowing snorts & curses.

It was ages ago, all this, you
remember. The water wheel has long since
popped off its shaft and rolled
with a wooden clatter down the streets
of our village, to the city.
There it serves as a glass-topped
table in the home of some rich widow.
My face has changed, yes,
but I'm still here, still
trying to accept this life. And I want
you to know your father and I
have become friends—he's gone mad,
some say, because he's content
to sit by the stream in a lawn chair,
swat bees with a Reader's Digest
and drink gin. I bring him apples and snuff.
He has forgiven me. We talk
often of you. I have forgiven him. Why
don't you come back? I know our past
is dead; I want to see the child.

Jeffrey Skinner

TWO POEMS

Taughannock Falls

Dwindled, the high
 falls just
 rims its caprock,
 and, infolding, turns
 part alien
 takes motion off
 its precipice,
 and white as
 galactic
 dust in a night sky,
 drops deep
 through a well
 of air.
 It wavers,
 thins to diaphanes,
 and almost spirals
 down. Whatever
 the cause, I know
 there's distance in
 the self. It can
 make action
 afterthought, and fear
 a consolation.
 It can make
 love seem the relief
 of a cold
 passion thawing

out. But whatever
 else this means,
 it means
 I'm called into
 attention as
 the falls,
 caught in a breeze,
 is swayed against
 the rock,
 fractured, splashed,
 then let go to
 rehang in air,
 while the cliff-face
 smokes with light
 falls spilling
 out of sight as they
 extend to in-
 terfinger
 the main motion of the fall.
 Now its spiral
 broadens,
 perhaps spreading
 toward a sine-wave,
 the body
 language of all flow.
 Dropping almost
 like a wing,
 it flares off stones
 at bottom, while
 I stand thrilled
 by its marvel of
 continual
 descent.

Fever Meditation

Hauling a virus up
the hill, I
sweat like heated
wood. My eyes
lag on
maple leaves slicked
flat
on drying pavement.
For every step,
I see a leaf's
damp halo on cement.

Cayuga Lake
shimmers
a vast
imagery of raincloud,
mainly polishing its
gray. In
the ripple-crease,
I sense a
capillarity,
a mesh,
a surface force that
traps me
in the belly of
the world.

This curable disease is like
vacation in
purgatory, and I have
plenty of time
to meditate on whatever
made me sick.
Have I impacted the

natural vigor,
perhaps sealed too much
in the self?
I think how maple sugars
get sealed in a
maple leaf, first driving
it to tincture,
then leaching out after it falls.

Day workers file out from
Ithaca Gun,
where each man, crafting
his separate part,
lets the factory form
the whole. I meet
six pairs of eyes, and
though none of us
offers greeting,
our faces meet
like masks in a ritual
of fatigue.
I think this
nightmare has a history
from which each
of us should wake.

I sweat like heated wood,
or chilled, I shake
like curdy foam.
What the self can
know of spirit
must somehow heal
past this, these aches
in the timeless
moments where I've claimed
my body should live.

Rory Holscher

BLOWN AWAY

The letter falling to the sidewalk
that autumn morning, scooting this way
and that, always just ahead of your fingers,
finally rising, whirling into the busy street
and gone; the sycamore leaves
marching along the spotless, wind-blown
asphalt, parading with a clatter
so loud it wakes you
dazed at the kitchen window,
your hands limp in the soapy water;
the starfish from summers before
still drying on the shake roof above,
lifted and blown end over end
by the tropical gusts
passing your house today.
Blown away,
what they said about your son—
the men standing around the cooling heap—
what they said about his hand,
yards away, as they kicked dirt over it:
empty, no longer clutching the rifle
it carried that day.

And even now, years later,
you see it blowing along the trails,
a five legged spider, army star,
scrambling on its finger tips
through the Asian Jungles.
Right hand, trained in the arpeggio
and curve ball, hand that finally
tried to reach back with a letter
as you stretched across the ocean,
fearful mother
begging him to come home; hand
that crawls the shores of the Pacific,
crab-walking, tumbling with the waves
but always thrown back still bloody
and unwashed. Drying starfish
out of water, knocked end over end—
orphaned child trying cartwheels
as it trails like a stray dog
behind hungry columns suspended
between battles.

Today in the wind outside your house,
in the leaves passing by
and the starfish he found
the summer before shipping out,
in the letter he wrote
that arrived after his body,
it reaches again
across the lines of country and state,
across gas lines, checkout lines,
and picket lines before the wasteful reactors,
across your shoulders, slumped from the scotch
and tranquilizers—wall you've built
against his still filled room—
and gently turns you west
toward the helpless, empty hand
hungry on jungle trails.

Ernie Benck

HOW TO MAKE *BABA GHANOUSH*

It takes the youngest eggplants
still oval, the size of a newborn infant's skull
with the whitest flesh, the sweetest taste.
For a large batch, several of them
are baked in the oven, until
the skin blackens into bitter flakes.
Then the oval is pricked, the sack torn open
with a sideways movement of a large fork,
the loose beige pours out steaming,
the steam curling, crying softly to be eaten alive
before it's too late.

What is left after the steam
is mixed with tahini, for body,
now that the young seeds, like sprouts of bones,
have baked alive, until
there is no possibility
they will ever run sturdily, or grow
to the original purple state of their ancestors.

Finally, a sparing amount of mashed garlic,
lemon juice and salt is needed
to replace the flavor of the steam.
The *baba ghanoush* is ready to be served
scooped on bread,
sucked away.

Jane Birdsall

TWO POEMS

The Sunbather

*after Ray Metzker's "Sand Creatures," an exhibition of
photographs taken on the beach at Atlantic City*

The man's legs, heavily furred
with blond sand, and the way the great
boiled egg of his belly sags
into the zebra blanket—both
say he is dead to the world.

Short of a rifle butt, what
could wake him? Not the thunderous
transistor at his ear. Not gulls
hovering overhead,
screaming their trash claims. Certainly
not the drowning child's cry,
"Save me or feel guilty!" No,

his chest rises under the sun's
auspices, his chest falls,
gleaming wetly, a delicate salt
fruit the afternoon peels.

Hypothesis

If bicycles could negotiate
the spaces between hairs,
we'd all comb furiously,
then stage a race on the tabletop.

The Lilliputians pedal, grown
still smaller for the occasion,
and God protects them, they don't crash
into the sugar dish. Still,
we scratch our heads, we wonder,
"How can these things happen?"

They can't, and we know it. Let's retire
down to the creek for some fishing.
Our lines hang from the quiet boat
all afternoon, but we just can't get
to sleep. There's this soft, persistent
knocking underneath us,
as if fish needed to feel wanted.

Edison Dupree

THE WOMAN AND THE WATERHORSE

His shoe, his shoe,
his silver shoes,
four shoes on the sod of my death.

Eels have eat the grassy veils
sailing out of my eyes
and I'm the blind, that ever stepped
between the best of horses and the sea
and he playing out on the hills
with the moon through the blood of his ears.

The bridle, the bridle, the bit,
the bit in his mouth and his mouth
kind in the cool of my hand.

Oh he moved like the music
and I riding songs of the foam on his back
by the high lonely ways
out of sight or the sound of the sea.

Deep sea, the bright ice of his eye
and the swell sliding under his skin,
the cry in his throat and the head of him ever
the trumpet and shriek of the wind
flying over the waves and the sod of my death.

The bridle, the bridle, the bit,
the bit in his teeth and his teeth
keen through the house of my soul.

Oh he dove like the lightning
and I crying out in the flame of his mane
with the dread of my arms around his neck
and the sea splitting open my spine.

The fish have led my flesh away
from the horn of his hooves
and his sharp silver shoes,
four shoes on the sod of my death,
his shoe.

TWO POEMS

For One who Received a Chainsaw as a Wedding Gift

It makes sense,
too obvious
sense: the cutting down
of dead wood, the making
of clear spaces in the wild
dark, and use the wood
for something good,
a fire, a fence.

I think the saw's
because the buzz
irritates:
it is the buzz of marriage
in the ear. The honey
of the easy
countryside and then
the howl of that most
unnat-
ural work.
And what a dangerous
machine! Who dreamed it
up? Some devil for the fun
of mutilation?
Or angel fond
of muscle put to task.
Only, no,
it isn't right,
give it back. It's too
fast:

there's nothing
slow as marriage, a nail
a year if you would build,
or drip of maple. How
inefficient, Love, and knows
naught of speed.
Whittle, wondering,
or just watch.

The Condom Salesman Tries Them on Like Shoes

The condom salesman tries them on like shoes.
He boasts a large and varied stock to show.
He'll find the size and style you can't refuse.

Of course, it's finally up to you to choose.
He just advises, with a con, a pro.
The condom salesman tries them on like shoes.

Since this is all he ever did and does
And will do for more years than we can know,
Don't doubt he'll find the one you can't refuse.

His practiced hand is kind. No one who woos
Encourages complete surrender so.
The condom salesman isn't selling shoes.

He means, this experts' expert, to interpose
Between the viral world and you a No
To end all no's, a skin you can't refuse.

Surely you haven't anything to lose.
Whatever such protection's price, it's low.
The condom salesman tries them on like shoes.
He'll find the size and style you can't refuse.

Philip Dacey

FLOUNDER

I like it when the cold winter
Chills the hunger out of me
And I settle deep into the sand.
For a time the youngsters flutter to the top after morsels;
But soon they too are seduced by that torpor
And nudge and muzzle their way in.
Sometimes I don't move for days,
The sand packed around my body,
And I am all turned inward.

And then to wake to the flying love-circus,
Halloo the others and join the dance.
Circle of smooth white bellies, clap
Fins, hosanna, and dosido,
Pinwheeling sparks of egg and milt,
Fucking, fucking, fucking.

Whoo-ee!
Next comes the easy summer,
Plenty of time for talk,
Just in and out on the warm tides,
But, careful, not too warm,
Or it's time to ship out deep.
But in close you have all the succulents under the sand.

And what of the Past?
The Change.
I remember it only dimly.
I can't recall what it felt like to swim like a minnow.
But when I see one, it rings a bell.
I watch the little ones flopping over for good on their
bellies,
Turning into pancakes.
And the eyes!
Whenever the eyes think no one's looking,
They creep over a millimeter or two.

The Great Migration.

The period before is blank.

But while my eyes were on the trail,

That, I can tell you,

That was a time of strange visions:

Phantoms of the sea, monsters of the water's imagination,

Lobsters with shark heads, tangles of kelp with scales and
cold eyes,

The fingers of drowned pianoplayers, swimming in
schools.

Those moving eyes drilled through the seafloor to the
fireball beneath,

And the top of the water, that too became a bright
window.

Cities I saw, elevators and miniskirts,

Bargain basements, dictionaries, and hotdog stands.

And above them, stars zoomed in upon me;

I plunged into the dark between them.

I gaped into the secrets of the universe.

I looked out on creation from a Black Hole;

I saw the universe from the viewpoint of death;

Pots and terriers, it was all rushing toward me.

And I turned around and saw out the other side

A second universe issuing forth,

New forms and colors flowing out of my own eyes.

Then one morning I blinked and saw flounders,

Algae, snails and beercans, rusty old anchors,

Scallops clapping their shells and squirting themselves
along.

My eyes were firmly in position.

It's been like that ever since.

What else is there to say?

O yes,

Let me tell you about my proudest talent.

I can turn myself different shades and colors to fit the
seafloor.

I can be tawny and sandy.
I can be dark and rocky.
I can be spotted with waving clumps of seagrass.
Sharks and bluefish have sailed inches over me
Just admiring the scenery.
In all my travels
I never saw a bottom I couldn't imitate.
But listen: this is more than a matter of safety.
It is a kind of desire.
For when I see something I love,
I want to change myself into it.

Now comes the saddest moment of my life.
Once, in the Block Island Sound,
I came across an old tablecloth,
Red and white checked, draped
As neatly over a couple of boulders as if it were waiting
for dinner,
And it made my gills tremble.
I never wanted to change myself into anything that badly
before or since.

I settled down on it and started to go.
But nothing in the old repertory worked.
This wasn't sand; this wasn't rocks or eelgrass.
I stretched my capacities; I invented;
I uncovered new colors and patterns; I became a genius.

The others told me I never got close.
At most, I looked like a pitiful caricature
Of a flounder—not even of a tablecloth.

So I was left with my self,
That residue, the uncamouflageable,
And had to swim away.
Fortunately it was just about time for winter.
And it took a winter,
Deep in the sand, deep as I could go,
To learn to live with that.

Thomas Frosch

TAXIDERMISTRY

I think when I die I want to be stuffed:
to be rid of internal organs
only rumored to exist,
and to be mounted.

On what I haven't decided.
Maybe a man, but that would shock the kids
and unhinge my husband.
Maybe a horse, but my sense of delicacy
prevents my saying how.
Maybe on my own two feet,
shod in those blue sandals I like so well.

The family probably wouldn't notice
as long as the house stayed clean:
they would want to put me in the living room,
holding a green sponge,
looking like I'm still on the job.

But my ambition is greater than this:
I would like to stand in a museum
with my eyes open, looking back
at the elevated, surprised observers.

On the other hand, maybe I'll be cremated.
At least I wouldn't have to clean up the ashes.

Barbara Hawk

FOR MY MOTHERHOOD**1.**

When my mother died
A friend was called
To play with me. We dug up

The bricks that held water
Around the flower bed
And lined them up

For soldiers to march on,
One long road
Across the yard.

We marched our men to the end.
I stood trembling. Seeing me
Dumb like that

My friend said, "March back!"
If there's anything
Close to dreaming awake

I was doing it.
I took the order as willingly
As I took his hand

When I held my mother's
Cold hand in mine;
For the first time

I understood—
The body of a giant
Would not be laid in Earth,

But the body of my mother.
And this was dirt.
And this my friend.

2.

What I remember most as a kid
Was being watched. It could be
A Card's exhibition game

Or an Isaac Stern recital
And damned if every minute
My mother's eyes weren't on me.

I had the notion if I was happy
So was she.
It was so easy to pretend

It was wonderful.
So when I dreamed I was a drunk,
The next to last thing

Any mother
Would wish on a son,
I could hardly imagine disappointing

Her more. Still,
As I lay under the piano
She crooned like Lady Day:

"As . . long . . as . . I
Have . . you . . ." There's no accounting
For a mother's

Blindness. How I wish
For my own son. Not
The kind any man can have,

But to be morning-sick
With him kicking
Through me to get out.

Boyer Rickel

TWO POEMS

Acadia

I am walking inside a forest
of wounded fir trees
that have learned the art
of suffering. They do not care
if I enter or leave. They do not
see themselves as a national park
on an island in the Atlantic.
The trees are thinning out
like particular birds, each flying
south in a pattern of its own.
The gate is closed, two logs
simply braced across the road,
blocking off old presences of the night
where nothing is blacker than the bark
of the deep, charred forest.
The land remembers the horror of flames
that represent pain like puffins
returning year after year
to the same barren island in someone's
memory. Nobody knows for sure
why we remind ourselves of history.
No one is thinking of us
that way, this public park
has its mind on future summers,
the forty deer that will die
through the inescapable winter,
frozen in the light of oncoming cars.

It's a small thing
to drive away from death,

the flashing red lights that scan
the woods for a trail of blood.
I am the figure in the middle.
A woman's white hands, trembling
and the man beside her, steady
and reassuring. A game warden
is asking for her name, her license
number, a permanent address.
And policemen circle her car
as if the damage could be estimated
in the dark. The woman believes
that stepping into a raging forest
fire is like utter darkness
The man is beyond sorrow.
They are both learning
about remorse, which doesn't mean
the flames can't touch them.
How could I say her body
is a tree hollowed by fire?
Meanwhile, we are stepping
over the gateway to the park.
The two logs roll away like boulders
exposing the entrance to the cave.
Two mammals could sleep here easily
through the invisible winter
like a smoldering fire,
intimate, in the last light.

The Woman Adrift Over San Francisco

1.
I am floating over a city
in a painting by Chagall,
ignoring the frenzied arms

of crane operators waving me down
from their aerie perches. Somehow,
I squeeze through the narrow gate,
spread like a fog above the bay,
and condense, dissolving the city.

Engulfed, urban,
wrapped like a fish in newspaper,
I am no longer the woman
I thought I was. My body
is flapping out of water,
gold in the chill, Pacific air,
rising to this occasion.

2.

Season of the insurgent
sardines: elsewhere
the midnight sun is gleaming
above a distant harbor
where a lady is always looking
out to sea, Scandinavian
icy stare that guards
the water she was born in.
A fisherman presses a herring
between her breasts, and raises
his eyes to the endless stars.

3.

An old Goodyear blimp
hangs in the August air, a ship
above the gold-flecked city.
A woman peeks into every porthole,
her image quivers in the glass,
reaching to touch the one hand
that rises to the window.

The blimp moves off, crawls
in its trail of helium
like a barge or a dazed snail.
It will only come down
when the sun steps out, a woman
finning the narrow line of the horizon
on a propeller of water.

Kathleen Lignell

TWO POEMS

Back Roads By Night

A need for it grows—not the white-knuckle stuff
With second-gear rubber, racing for a case of beer,
Dusting some kidface with a hot Chevy. I mean:
That first time I solo-ed in my father's car
I drove for hours, slowly, through state forest—
A gullet of darkness ribbed out with trees.

A deer sprang from my lights, its tail bouncing
Waving like a handkerchief off in the dark.
Wherever I've lived I've driven at night: beach-
Roads in Maine waves burning white; one-lane
Bridges, the ridges and hollows of West Virginia.
I've got to mail a letter, I'll say. And slip out.

Glide on back roads where I'll meet no other cars.
 Roll by darkened houses, safe as graves, and think
 I'm the only one in the whole county awake. Then
 Eyes ignite green in my lights. A white tail waves.
 One night, in France, in the Alps, a wild boar,
 A *sanglier*, stood in the road, all tusk and bristle.

I stopped. White peaks gathered behind him.
 He stood there carved by my lights, a mad
 And necessary thought, then ran from the road.
 I watched him in a small silver field, turn
 Run at the dogs, break through a thicket. Finally
 I drove on with those white tusks flashing.

Sometimes, for fun, I'll let a radio preacher yell,
 Tell me how easy salvation is, how to "get saved."
 It's as simple as the past tense. You only touch
 The dial . . . mail in the tithe to Brother Sid.
 Tonight what I need is that boar, the magic
 Of *sanglier*, a word full of blood; but even

As he breaks thickets in the mind, I see
 The pork-butcher, *bon bourgeois*, string him up,
 Hang him from an ancient hook in front of his shop.
 He turns slowly in the wind and into a small box
 Of sawdust under his snout drip the last drops
 Of that wild blood, gone, already absorbed.

Meat

1.
 In his old — country beard, your grandfather
 Blessed himself, a steaming tub in the background.
 You see the barn-beam, the pulley and rope,
 And the eye-level pig twisting before
 That autumn knife shaped like a ritual squeal.

2.

The cowpoke squints (his cheek a tumor of tobacco)
And electrically prods the endless steers
Up a wooden ramp to the first specialist
On the disassembly line of this long factory.
They call him "the killer" and armed with electrodes,
He shocks the bellowing beast to its short knees
And the metal door flings open and end over end,
It falls into a hot red light where a hoister
Chains a hindleg and up kicking, wide-eyed and
Upside-down, it takes a clanking overhead tram
To the gum-chewing throat-cutter. See
How he uses that special tool to get that bright
Spurt and spray on rubber boots and apron. See
How the white-suited slitters joke and wait
For bellies while stropping their blades. See
How the cavity-men lean in to unpack that
Hot rank case, root with a sharp right hand
And turn with armfuls of gutflop: lungs and
Liver, kidneys, glands, and the still-wincing
Heart, mucus, silver plop and slither. See
How the conveyor-men, earphoned against clank and
Roar, watch football in four tubes along the line
And let their hands go down and out and in—
A pattern of cut and lift, sometimes a squint
At the tripe, a wish for the gold watch
That might have been swallowed. But on to the saw-
Men who make the sides (with a high motorized whine),
The skimmers, drapers, heavers and haulers, inspectors,
Heapers of hides, boilers of gristle, packers and
Shippers—God loves them all, as He does the ears
And tails, boilings and try-outs, crimson tides,
The drain-suck, the bone, the shit, and the bristle.

Peter Makuck

SATORI ON SUMMERS STREET

dog nosed snowflakes nuzzle the Chuck Wagon windows
 as I too settle down in a booth
 fillings shrunk lungs full of frost
 where the home fry pilgrims are already gathered
 round the One Great Thing—
 the frizzy haired girl with a crumbcrazy plate
 bug-eyed over a Harlequin romance:
 the skinny religious nut raving to a woman
 “God didn’t say ‘human’ in the *Bible* . . .
 he said ‘human *beings*’ . . . that’s what nobody
 understands!”:
 the pure lost lover in a leather-looking jacket
 smoking and fiddling with his saucer
 eyes rolled up to the blinding lights:
 and as Lucille arrives with my order
 I find a paperback of Buddhist wisdom on the seat
 and the page I turn to has a wise saying
 and on the opposite page
 the huge enlargement of a flame
 and in the white of the flame
 in neurotic ballpoint stick letters
 who
 cares
 who
 cares
 and suddenly I’m kicked back
 to a tilted script like Queen Elizabeth’s navy
 on a letter I threw out
 how it said the story around Pennsboro is
 my husband is in a mental yeah! a booby hatch
 how it broke—and vividly—a wishful thought in two
 when it said: “Wish—”
 and then a long long twisted hyphen
 “—who *cares!*”
 and slop bam alley kazam I pop through the snowblind
 void hyphen fire

and the frizzy haired girl wishes—who cares!
and the religious nut wishes—who cares!
and the pure lost lover wishes—who cares!
and the waitress, yes, the waitress,
I look at her and say
“If you utter one word of Zen I won’t kill this egg!”
and she says “Go ahead and kill it anyway, honey.
I reckon it’s dead already.”
and all of a sudden
I’m thinking neither good nor evil
drinking that good good morning heartache coffee
still here living again today

Bob Snyder

THE BOOK

That time, rowing
you across the river, I thought
of the book and how I wanted to drop
it in the water, let it sink
to the silt.
Then, my hands blistered
and you wet from the ropeswing,
you pointed to the heron
and the awkward blue-grey way
the shape tried to find water.
It tried one shore, then the other,
and finally skittered into the reeds
not far from our boat.
I was thinking about words
and how they can skip off the water, and you
were tanned and splashing your hand—
the two of us, father and daughter,
afloat in something we created
and believe in.

Gary Thompson

EMPLOYMENT

Every day I suck a little marrow.
I can feel my bones hollowing.
Sometimes the empty places ache
like missing limbs. Sometimes
the air gets in and I cannot stop
the tune it sings.
I am doing the best I can.
I know the fine hairs that grow
along my arms are not feathers yet.
But I never sleep without saying
the prayer, never forget,
even in dreams, what I am to be.
And I practice, lifting the right
muscles, doing wind sprints,
everything you say, understanding
all this time that my pay can be
no more than you own,
which is nothing more than my light self,
surging in the air, then going down.

Lola Haskins

BOOKS IN BRIEF**A Couple of Bouquets**

Congratulations to Sierra Club Books for establishing a poetry program. And congratulations for inaugurating it with this enchanting anthology: **Robert Bly's *News of***

the Universe: Poems of Twofold Consciousness (distributed by Scribner's, 1980, 320 pp., \$15.95 cloth, \$7.95 paper). Bly introduces each of his six sections with an argumentative essay, contrasting the anthropocentric "Old Position" (i.e. "The proper study of mankind is man") with the human acknowledgement of the consciousness of the non-human universe, as we find in early cultures and in an important strand of Romantic and contemporary poetry. I found myself arguing with Bly all through his essays. Surely he does profound injustice to the English Romantics in elevating Blake, the most extreme of all humanists ("Where man is not, nature is barren," indeed!), and ignoring Shelley, whose "Mont Blanc" and "The Cloud" would seem to be supreme exemplars of the awed respect for the vital energy of non-human life and of the joyous cosmology that Bly is promoting. I wanted to argue, too, with some of his translations, which he appears to have manipulated to make them closer to what he wants them to say. Admittedly he disarms this criticism by acknowledging the difficulty and urging us to read and listen to the originals. But where do we go for the originals (or even more translations and information) for some of the most compelling poets in the anthology, Mirabai and Rumi? All the same, the book is a joy, Whether you agree with Bly or not, his taste is superb, and the poems he presents are delicious and together make one glorious super-poem of praise and wonder. The danger of "Twofold Consciousness" is pathetic fallacy, and there is not a whiff of it in this rigorously unsentimental collection. And I wouldn't necessarily have enjoyed the essays more if I'd agreed with every word.

The Poet's Choice: 100 American Poets' Favorite Poems (*Tendril*, Box 512, Green Harbor, Mass. 02041, 1980, 176 pp., \$10.95 cloth, \$5.95 paper) is the successful result of an interesting experiment. George Murphy, editor of *Tendril* magazine, asked a hundred poets to contribute their favorite among their own poems. This attractive volume is not only a delight for the general reader but an excellent text for the study of the contemporary American scene and potentially a valuable resource for scholars. The range is wide: Ai, Ammons, Appleman, Baraka via Merwin to Wilbur, Wright, and Zweig. The book is full of surprises: most of the poets avoided anthology pieces, and since the oldest of these poems is from 1976, the result is a great flight of new arrows launched by master-archers into the immediate future.

In a Class by Itself

The line between poetry and fiction, like the line between fiction and historical essays, has been recently dissolving, liberating all three genres into new fields of creative energy. At the growing-point where all three fields merge is Albert Goldbarth's novel/poem *Different Fleshes* (Hobart & William Smith Colleges Press, Geneva, N.Y. 14456, 1979, 110 pp., \$7.95 cloth, \$4.95 paper). This innovative book is appropriately and auspiciously the first publication of a new press. It draws us into the life of "Barbette," the very real person who as a spell-binding female impersonator electrified the Paris of Cocteau and Monet, of Joyce and Hemingway. Barbette began and ended life in the world of the outlaw Sam Bass, the world of Round Rock, Texas. Goldbarth's well-known mastery of poetic language and form, his ear for the precise words and rhythms of speech, his practiced skill in making the historical detail immanent and significant, equip him splendidly for this virtuoso performance. In its intensity of image and orchestration of language it is altogether a poem. It certainly does what one asks of a novel: transports us to another world in which we may live for a while at a more intense level of reality than the quotidian. It would, as a matter of fact, lend itself to production as a radio play. To create this immediacy Goldbarth draws on scholarship, acute observation, empathy, and, occasionally, incantation:

Where the man will change his face
/Let me waken in that place.

Especially for Libraries

The Gale Research Company (Book Tower, Detroit, Mich. 48226) is producing volume after volume of exemplary reference books. Donald H. Reiman's *English Romantic Poetry, 1800-1835* (Vol. 27 in the Information Guide Series for American, English, and World literatures, 1979, 294 pp., \$26.) scrupulously annotates the basic editions and all the important secondary sources for this period. Symbols designate works of primary value for purchase and consultation, works for the advanced

scholar, and works of general interest. Librarians should find these guides invaluable. Students will find the Preface graceful and witty, the annotations crisp and candid. If all the volumes in this series achieve this standard, no library and no serious scholar can afford to ignore them. Considering the comprehensiveness and authority of this volume, I'd say the price tag should not deter any scholar of the field, beginning with serious graduate students, from owning a copy.

Another Gale series that librarians should pay attention to is *American Poets Since World War II*, ed. Donald J. Greiner (Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 5, 1980, xxii + 866 pp., in 2 vols., \$108. the set). Fifteen major poets (such as Ammons and Bishop) receive "master essays" of about ten pages each, and 118 other poets receive substantial coverage. The biographical essays appear accurate and adequate, although the extended summaries of poems make me uncomfortable. Most students will welcome such assistance, which is several cuts above the "masterplots" level, and since critical evaluation is generally subdued, each reader will have to go to the poems to formulate an idea of what they are really like. These attractive volumes are generously illustrated, and I'd predict heavy use for them in any library that acquired them.

We asked Brian Dibble, Head of the English Department at the Western Australia Institute of Technology, to evaluate Gale's *Modern Australian Poetry*, ed. Herbert C. Jaffa (1979, 241 pp., \$26.). He reports:

This is a very valuable book, despite a few shortcomings. It brings together in one place more bibliographical information on more modern Australian poets than any other book. Further, although Jaffa uses Australian critics extensively, his own American point of view is one that must cause Australian critics to reconsider some of their earlier evaluations — for example, the entries on William Hart-Smith recall early, now forgotten, complimentary estimates which affirm the worth of that aging but often overlooked poet. However, it misunderstands some as well: there is no way that 44-year-old poet/critic/anthologist Tom Shapcott can still be called a spokesman for a "younger group of antiestablishment poets in their twenties." An important book for anyone interested in Australian poetry (their numbers are rightly increasing), one that should prompt Australian critics more quickly and thoroughly to compile sound bibliographical information on their writers.

Completeness and Light

For us, W. S. Merwin and Galway Kinnell have been the poets who, like Shelley's Prometheus, could confront the darkest visions of the furies, could imagine as well as know the worst, without becoming numbed or cynical. Their books of nightmares give us courage to "pity those they torture not." In their most recent books both poets have come through to gentler climates where "familiar acts are beautiful through love." Merwin's previous volume had been packed with images of suspended animation and held breath. In *The Compass Flower* (Athenaeum, 1977, 94 pp. \$4.95), he has entered a world of motion bright with images of beginnings and reunions in rich autumnal light. In the heart of *The Compass Flower* are love songs so fresh and limpid they change your pulse. In the image of the person who comes down out of the "solid dark clouds . . . With no rain in them" to live "as one blade of grass," the poet seems to have learned to

know how to spend the day and night
climbing out of myself
all my life.

In one word, the poems in this latest volume are luminous.

Galway Kinnell's *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words* (Houghton Mifflin, 1980, 72 pp., \$8.95 cloth, \$4.95 paper) is also a book of love poems. There are longish elegiac love poems for his mother and brother, but for me the glory of this volume is in the first half — the poems of what would once have been called "domestic affection." The first three poems: "Fergus Falling," "After Making Love We Hear Footsteps," and "Angling, A Day" stand with Snyder's "The Bath" — all celebrations of family life. There is much laughter and play in this new volume. Play with the Hawaiian names for lava, delighted laughter in "Saint Francis and the Sow." There is loving attention to the natural world, in "Daybreak" and in the perfect lyric: "The Gray Heron." One song sounds like an epilogue to *The Book of Nightmares*: "Brother of My Heart," for Etheridge Knight.

Now that we have had to face the fact that there will be no more books from Elizabeth Bishop, we have these two radiant volumes from poets who, like her, have the power to transform our day. As Kinnell says at the end of his wonderful little poem "Kissing the Toad,"

to love on, oh yes, to love on.