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Cover: Robert Shetterly Jr., Susan's Chicken.

YELLOW BIRCH HILL

From this place
one can see rows of trees
where bobcat lead
parallel lives.

Here the birch
wear fungi patches
on their shoulders
like rank . . .
this one's just a private
but this one's a lieutenant
of forty-nine winter storms.

Women are among them too
with their legs spread
dangerously in the air,
inviting all manner
of nesting birds
and seductive glances
from the clouds.

And way off
a foghorn blows
as the sound of the ocean
faintly comes in
like someone tuning a bass
with a bow.

Kris Larson

TABOO

Ossabaw Island, Georgia

“ . . . any wrong deed committed by the expectant mother will injure the unborn child. She must not walk alone, sit alone, dance alone . . . ”

Margaret Mead
Coming of Age in Samoa

I'd like to think our house is made of grass,
that we'd coax the baby out with food,
beat my belly with a stick;
I'd squat and he'd fall
onto a pile of leaves,
We'd wear the wind for clothes.

But he floats inside his salty tank,
no larger than the hermit crabs
racing across the beach.
Some are being born as I stand here.
Lizards breed along the banks.
Petals drop from the magnolia's
egg-shaped blossoms.

You are far up the coast among maples.
If only the sea didn't separate us . . .
Do you hammer sheet rock preparing his room?
I study the Spanish moss like a picture
in which your face is hidden,
looking for an eye, a cheekbone.
In a dream a stranger fathered the child.

I lie awake, the mother of twins,
the one inside me, the other
I stopped from growing ten years back.
Windows open onto a terrace
where people talk into the night
about the fires started on this island
during the Civil War, black women

dying in childbirth,
taking with them infants
who only breathed an hour.
Their bones lie under snakeskins
in neglected cane fields.

If you were here we'd follow
roads through cabbage palms,
brushing past tung trees and wisteria,
walking carefully, knowing everywhere
we stepped might be a grave.

Helena Minton

SIDESHOW SESTINA

For 50c at a County Fair sideshow once
I got in line to touch the dick
of the only known, live hermaphrodite
in the world. For another 50c
we were allowed to feel her breasts.
So I can testify that such people do exist.

It was as a woman she preferred to exist
and could function that way because once
a son had been nurtured by her breasts.
The kid had a normal little dick
and stood at the exit where for 50c
he sold a 6" rubber hermaphrodite

modelled after the mama hermaphrodite.
I have one of the few that still exist.
It was a bargain for only 50c.
In fact a local collector once
offered \$100 for it because of the dick
and the humorously functional breasts.

You can pinch the doll's breasts
and make the world "HERMAPHRODITE,"
which is printed lengthwise on the dick,
stretch out and come to exist
just as the act in the hot tent once
continued for still another 50c.

Of course by now nobody cared about the 50c.
She closed her eyes and rubbed her breasts.
The crowd was stunned silent at once.
All eyes were on the naked hermaphrodite
who nobody any longer doubted to exist
as we watched a hardening, lifting dick.

We saw the pulse pounding in the dick
risen like a charmed snake. Then for 50c
she offered to make another kid exist,
mingling her breasts with other breasts
in a love act possible only to a hermaphrodite.
A shapely blonde volunteered at once.

We all volunteered 50c at once.

We saw the dick thrust in and tightening breasts
as the blonde, to exist, cried "O Hermaphrodite!"

Roy Hazlewood

LICHENS
(Winter 81-82)

(I)

The lichens continue under
deep snow. In a winter
of earthquakes and thunder,
snowfalls, and journalists' banter:
new ice age—the lichens take center.

The spirit, impending, quickens.
Slow flesh like a sickness,
all hunchbacks and chickens,
holds fast. An immanence thickens.
Cold blood shrinks the planet's poor pickings.

My acre, exceeded, numbers
dumb stone for the chambers
of Bluebeard and slumbers:
Rose White or paraclete. Climbers
stand stark, wind and rattle dead members.

I'm waiting, unfeathered, counting
cold years to a canting
of bluejays. Our mountains'
blank weight is memory, squinting—
deep, slow, dumb as Vega: cold lantern.

The lichens continue. Shovel,
stiff broom could uncover
them: starfall or devil's
rent hoof, the rescuer's liver,
mad queen's food, the witch's sweet hovel.

(2)

The green stuff, alga, invisible
 as Mab's ruff, aura ubiquitous,
 hovers everywhere over plant life,
 mountaintop or sea-deep fathomed Ariel,
 Gobi powderpuff, polar Queen Maud.
 The first seed, Adam adaptable
 as Eve's greed, scatters educible.

A moist sleeve, fungus elaborates
 the loose weave: ghostly, immaculate
 thallus—habitat, living land tap,
 bandersnatch and gnome-cot luring trillion,
 trolling hallow'seve. Hyphae suck air
 and wait. Quick, spongy mycelia
 like brains seek fairy inhabitants.

The biological anomaly called symbiosis
 has tropological analogy: old psychomachy.
 Body and spirit meet: a *lusus naturae*
 (see Swift), uniquely human, shakes dust.
 Fungus and alga merge: the lichen emerges,
 a metamorphosis. Uranian muse, inspiration,
 or whimsicality insatiate, coins: *dispsychosis*.

The botanists couldn't conceive it, then couldn't believe it.
 The elderly Pliny supposed that the lichens, *Usnea* and
Roccella, were mosses. Linnaeus called them trash.
 Acharius thought them polyps like coral and sea anemone.
 Schwendener saw double, considered host and house
 a parasite. Bary perceived, but he wasn't believed for
 a century. Reinke confirmed then: the lichen, unbound, is
 a classifiable absurdity. O symbiosis!
 Do Polyhymnia, Melpomene, bright Calliope
 hover at winter's lip in gardens, inhaling
 green ice? Erato shiver mute stone?
 Clio her comfort shed? and stinging Euterpe
 with ineluctable Mnemosyne wing sublimation?
 An imperceptible inanity sings immanency.

In deep snow, lichens, indifferent
 as wind, slow etchers, excruciate
 granite, crystalline mica schist, gneiss.
 Oberon: a footprint; Robin Goodfellow's
 passage echoing silent down stone
 to pine root. Minstrel! remembering
 the lace boot lichens commemorate.

My cold rock garden perpetuates
 the jay flock, daily elucidates
 morning: evergreen. Norway pines keep
konigskind and Snow Queen. Garden, wildering—
 Garden, winterbound—whisper. Old wind
 and pine top answer subliminal
 as snow whip. Lichens attenuate.

(3)

The typical fungus
 that cooperates in the creation of lichens
 is not discovered living independently
 but can be made to grow alone in laboratories
 like people in the cities of the enlightenment.
 That which is green is guest, unharmed, and stimulated
 to the production: lichens, existentially
 and remarkably, are a synthetic third party,
 the rustical pauper.

Anomalous to botanists, the lichens seem
 icons of the Hegelian triad, resolutions
 of the conflicts of opposites: thesis, antithesis—
 synthesis. From good and evil, angel and animal—
 something new,
 wonderful. From muse and poet—poem: the marvelous
 and the surely most alien scion. Hegelian
 spirals out of primordial tensions: *Amphiloma*,
Parmelia, or *Vernia* with mummies found.

When I was seventeen, the French brat said,
Je m'encrapule le plus possible
à me rendre voyant
par le dérèglement de tous les sens.

O ruptured apothecium! The green words filled me.
 Down the infirmament I bathed in blood
 of thieves, filthy, alert
 and indiscreet, the lush ensemble
 of my best decadence. I worked quite hard.

Howl like wolves: it really was funny
 and terrible—and deep. In my senior year
 I read Comus: “Love virtue. She alone is free.”
 It seemed a bit late to be a lady poem.
 Good and evil, however, grow up together
 as twins in the world: go—watch the heavens fire
 the pine needles each sunset: snow, remote and blue
 as seraphim that fall at my bitten feet—
 then slow stars that darken the garden.

“What in me is dark illumine,
 What is low raise and support.”
Mais je ne beurre pas ma chevelure.
 Milton. Rimbaud. Saint and filthifier.
 Poet. Poet. O celestial song.
 Poems reclaim us so variously.
 The host and house is no parasite.
 Let the spore fly and ignite
 in the word the world's confusion.

Man is man and poet is poet:
 take Dickinson and Poe or some other. What
 does it matter? Take lichens—they alone are free
 who have their own time and their own Eden weather.
 Blake? or Chaucer? Erratic muse can unnature
 us still from the dead, the dumb, the naked winter
 of the climbers' cold rattle. She alone can sing

earth, prophesy and, green as a mother, know
green is all: the spirit is spirit.

Some have said mockingly: these men are drunk.
So scandalous the speech prophetic
when tongues slander Babel
and the calamity of clay grows quick.
O Joel! Apostolical! Old man—I dream me
a fine eternity of earth, the bloom
and stone, cloven accord
of pentecost on tongues assembled.
the new leaf mimicking the old green flame.

Irrelevant with Garrulus I rattle here,
clucking to an impertinence: winter epigrammists—
O the bluejays are apposite. Lichens extenuate—
emptiness? I stand, an aging novice: my shivering
gooseflesh shrinks—
wonderful. I know the garden under my sensible
heel lies waiting for—calories? Distant, impeccable
fire. Like a diaspora, winter, transubstantial,
empirical and tyrannous, stands over us.

A terrible winter—
nice apocrypha for the reporters of doomsdays:
the news. Enormous winter—paradoxical:
we have now heard the snow thunder. Old dormitories
have shuddered and old mountains have got seismatical:
earth shook where earth has not before. It's gratifying
that an infernal winter, unintentional
as Methuselah, should have extended this pilgrim
a fiftieth circle.

(4)

What lured the poet to spend three springs and
summers building a wall and garden plot of rocks?
Admiration became appetite and appetite became ecstatic,
sweating compulsion: as the blood engorges the phallus,

the king's guests crowd the palace, the gonidium fills the thallus with new purpose and something gets done.

Sweat pebbles
the dusty barrow.
One more rock—

The background: After thirty years in cities, I found myself, awkward and resentful, transplanted among fields and mountains: *rustici pauperini*.

Roadside:
dead raccoon—
three crows.

Then I married. Then we had two sons. One day, in the hedgerow of sumac and raspberry edging our acre and the farmer's corn, I came upon a large stone—reddish in a bed of milkweed—and, on impulse, lugged it down the long slope of our lawn to a place of honor beside the front door. Then I had to pass, narrowly, between death and imbecility: addict—and I passed. Thus I stood, new—at the age of forty, raw—

Red dragonfly
swoops to consider
a child's skinned knee.

"Flower!"
says the toddler:
green treetoad.

Having resided ten years in the country, I had to discover the country. Having resided forty years in this body—

Driving to town I had admired ruins of stone walls: one rambled over with pink roses, one in a shade of willows. I brought home some fallen marble blocks found behind the unitarian-universalist church where we rehearsed a melodrama: I was the villain and my wife, the vamp. I took to exploring dirt roads. A line of rocks already

straggling down the drive, I decided a low wall was requisite to keep the gravel off the grass. So gradual grew earnest. The neighbors chuckled.

The second spring, a student—who had inherited an incongruous Roman name and a mountain from his grandfather—brought me a granite ploughshare. That summer, another young friend whooped in on a truckload: boulders. He sweated in the sun an hour and wondered—"It swallows them," he said, glistening like fish. It was August,

Sandhill Road:
a morningdove rises
with the dust—

the third summer, I decided the wall was done and I must make a garden where my sons had played in the sand under the pine. I dug and shaped the ground: a plot. You see, it wasn't so much the wall or garden. It was the rocks, each separate, eccentric, enigmatic, humorous, speaking to eyes and fingertips and muscles. The rocks are Sirens.

Asterisk—
a raindrop: the hot
rock sings.

Need becomes pleasure and sweating pleasure becomes knowledge. Earnest grew compulsion then: for seven days, two in a drizzle, five in hot sun and humid shade. I hauled sermons from shallow trout river, dusty field. My muscles spoke to each other and my brain. Sweat stung my eyes. When it was accomplished the neighbors came. "You are artistic," they said in the way people do say that nodding like a sunflower when the bluejay lights.

A garden and a wall require planting. Shrubs and perennials: flowering quince, juniper and barberry, hydrangea, rose and lilac,

hibiscus syriacus.

A bee investigates. A breeze
riffles my *Frankenstein*.

Honeysuckle, columbine. Hens and chicks. Violets and lilies of the valley, wild strawberry. A chipmunk takes up residence. And snakes. Butterflies and hummingbirds arrive.

A clouded sulphur
sips the wild strawberry blossom:
distant thunder.

A breeze brings
bell sound, hummingbird
to columbine.

Japanese beetles: a whorehouse on a leaf, Trimalchio's feast. And weeds, I'll tell you about weeding: how the spine sings! Gnats and mosquitos teach. The fingers learn mortality snaking down the loosened earth, hunting the livid crabgrass root.

At the heart
of the pussywillow
ladybug nest.

Likewise, pulling some stray and unwanted waif away from stone, I discovered lichens (Gk: licking with tongues): skin cells of imp and Oberon who, more manifest, do not show themselves. It's just as well.

The day of rest, the season of sleep is sometimes hardest work.

The nuthatch:
acres of unbroken snow
await his signature.

Bluejay
flashes across the hedgerow.
"Sky is falling."

At breakfast coffee I meditate the bit of forest across the road: pines and the arthritic reachings of maple, shad or elm. The flash of the bird through that stillness stirs me like advent. Perhaps I have said enough about the winter. Early arriving, long staying, the tongue-tied guest brought with him temperatures and precipitations exceeding custom. Scientists' speculations about an ice age made the press, became gossip. Snowmen bled dye of paper roses, pilgrim offerings. At new year a fly crawled up the picture window. Opaque casements of the stormered porch beyond glittered with ice.

A car passes.
Tracery of dogwood
skates the frosted panes.

In the dead
of winter: a bluejay
raps—

Winter of jays—a tribe adopted our pines and windowpanes. At first we couldn't think what that rapping could be. We traced it to my sons' room, saw the bluejay tapping the window. Then we couldn't think what this could signify. He wasn't asking to come in: at sight of us he flew away. But he returned. At last I observed he was chipping the ice off the glass to drink.

In February one resorts to poetry (Horace's odes are sunny)—the colors of seed catalogs from Burpee, Gurney, Harris, Stark, Spring Hill. O the Persephone bargains they offer! I also own *The Art of Audubon* (Times Books). I have been told he cooked and tasted every bird he painted (*à me rendre voyant*). I enjoy the Latin names. Garrulus cristatus is apt. I wait for Orpheus polyglottus to mock married men. Eurydice's not here. I've my encyclopedia: volume *elf*. I contemplate *dispsychosis*. Ambiguous *dis*, meaning double or twice, apart or to pieces, the bottom of hell. Alga and fungus

make lichens. We make poems. Lichens make acids which loosen rock through passing centuries: a speck of sand occurs, a bit of organic duff. A tree can grow.

Three is the liberating number. Poems turn winter to spring I think, stone to good earth (though some will always call it dirt). A courage comes of knowing, however erratic, divinely slow, the lichens grow unconscious and unhindered by the seasons. After the gossips' ice age, *Rinodina*, *Ochrolechia* will be here as they were before.

April rain
weaves down the mountainside.
I stand at the mailbox.

After my forty-ninth birthday, two days before the vernal equinox, we will be here.

(5)

Let April illumine, flushing
earth slough to our passion,
the red rock, the rushing
creek bed be catalyst, fishing
bird break fast, the lifted spawn flashing
like rainbow, amusing robin
pull worm out of rabbin.
My pulse beats a bobbin
seaward down cataract, throbbing
bough, bright bud and bawdy, side-stabbing
spring. Morning, elusive, teases
good flesh as the breezes
like trout tug the grasses,
still brown. The paraclete crosses
new greenland. The lifted foot passes—

Tom Smith

DOUC LANGUR

"an unusual leaf-eating monkey of Indochina"

at birth, almost not
there, thin as cinnamon
sticks, wet with light
the newborn passes through
the low trees, from mother
to the next to the next
and back around until
each female has held it
to her breasts, licked it,
stroked it, saying no matter
what there will be arms
to hold you, breasts and backs,
fur, chatter, song, then
the mother takes the newborn
to herself, almost careless.

at this zoo, falling out
of the womb into cages,
the newborn do not hear
the snatter of guns, do not
smell the trees burning,
do not see what I see
standing behind the rail,
all the arms breaking
their unusual promises
in the crossfire, men
angry at their own
war scattering the cinnamon-
grey bodies of these others,
mistaking them for Charlie.

the keepers, conscious or not,
have named this newborn
Charlie, and all the children
behind me are whispering Charlie
Hi Charlie Hello Charlie
and some at the back are shouting
Charlie!! Charlie!! celebrating
this bag of cinnamon no
larger than two fists.

nervous at the explosion
of names, the mother drops
her newborn into other arms:
the long rounds of covenant.
she swings up through the last
leaves of a thin unrooted tree
and sits at the top, closing
her precise quiet features
against the noise. the newborn
sleeps from breast to breast.

children gone, I reach
for Charlie. please, I whisper,
let me hold him, lick him,
press his head into my soft neck.
I too am part of the fullness
of this awful widening circle.

Hillel Schwartz

BLACKBIRD

I was stomping
dirtclods down the Nebo
washout and you caught me
quick as a snake with your
shutter eye. All summer
you were there.
When I shot baskets in the barn
with Jamie, I could hear
you in the rafters,
thumping the sides of your
thick cocoon.
You brought me cherries
and I took them with my teeth,
and some you dropped
into the lap of my Sunday dress.
At Hungry Mother Lake
I felt a starry scratching underwater—
your feet against my floundering legs.
Each night your feathers
ruffled with the junebugs at the window screen,
your shadow
brushed my moonlit sheet.

I still awaken
to the startle of your circle eye,
the black seed from the yellow peering.
You jitter to the pillow
and your wings
become my eyelashes,
your tongue
my beaky kiss.

Christine Ferreira

TAKING IT ON FAITH

between strings of rain
tying his earth
to the sailing cloud
the boy looks out on secrets
of an invisible afternoon

for all he knows the two cedars
at the garden's edge
have signed on as masts
and gone to sea

his faith follows the rain
down into the sand
he's too young to dive
to bring up in his teeth
a green wet weed
yet his heart leans out
toward the mysteries

gathered on the wind's arm
the great cloud
carries its buckets away
there are the cedar trees
leaking at every needle

earth's brown dove
comes back to his hands

TWO POEMS**The Black Porsche**

The black Porsche with blonde hair whipping
out the window
the black Porsche that just passed me
will get there sooner than I will.
She is already there now.

Going past the guard house, a smile sends up
the barricade.
She is already beside her pool
taking in a drink I can't even afford to say aloud.
She has just pulled in the mooring lines
and her boat is skating out into the green sea
out to where the wind is cooler than silver.

Now she is four cars ahead.
But the stoplight can't stare her down.
It blinks and she's off. Lawlessly fast,
with things to do and more things
to leave undone.

She's up there now, the ocean set like a banquet
thirty stories below.
She's eating delicately,
lobster, stone crabs, baby shrimp, melon.
No bones in any of it. All pink.
It all goes down so easy into her.

I keep her in sight, endangering my passengers,
straining the gaskets of this old tub.
I know I can't keep it up long enough. I must drop
back with the safe ones, the ones with eyes going bad,
the ones who've never known anything beyond the limit.

She stands at her window, watches us ooze home from work
across her causeway. She can't imagine what makes us
go on. What propels us through this jam.
She wonders if there's one of us, just one,
who deserves to suddenly stand with her, his breath seizing,
his eyes bright, his blood worthy.
Yes! I cry. Yes, there is one. Down here.
He just passed by. In a white Firebird,
going faster than conditions permit.

For Years

For years we trusted
only lumps
with weight and odor.
If we couldn't hammer
on it,
it was no good.

But now the shadows
make sense.
Those whispers that come
when there is no one
there to whisper.

We lie awake
and listen to the vast
balloons, dark worlds
wading over the house.
Untethered
from the merely physical.

Jim Hall

SHEPHERD'S PURSE

"To be loved to madness—such was her great desire. Love was to her the one cordial which could drive away the eating loneliness of her days. And she seemed to long for the abstraction called passionate love more than for any particular lover."

Thomas Hardy, *Return of the Native*

*"The enemy has stretched out his
hands
over all her precious things."
Jeremiah 1:10*

Preface:**The Ballet Master's Daughter**

I did not like my mother; she wasn't pretty, though
she kept pretty things
in our house above the gilt bay—the red vase from Corsica,
plates with rabbits from Belgium—and she
would brush my hair for hours, the way the thin-limbed
man at the ballet
brushed it before each performance, my father clicking
his heels,
ignoring those who were bitter because he had cast me as
Clara.

I did not care what they thought. I was
beautiful. My head would grow hot—I thought of lamps
swimming to me, of Clara as flame burning the
Nutcracker's teeth. A woman
rubbed snake oil into my skin; my face became light,
my body
watered silk. You move too slowly,
my mother had said, but they watched me then,
as I watched myself, my raised hands holding the
Nutcracker
making arcs in the air—the perfection
of the single bourbon rose in its blue bowl of water.

All Hallows' Eve

All afternoon, berries boiled
and thickened. I counted sheep beneath black pines
and watched, far above, the monks
burning elm branches—white sails
rising against stones, the dark habits lurching
like lures in rough water.

Tonight, the rose
and gold saints on the walls
of the town cathedral
will be loosed and walk, children will rattle like dice
down the streets, grandmother will watch
in the window and whine. All day her feet crawled
toward her shoes, all day
the sparrows hung stained socks in her head, all day she
dreamed of being sealed in the church mural, of walking
only once
a year, of light in her stopped limbs.

In glass jars the berries glaze.

If I am patient, the pines
will undress me. I will unlock the fire on the hill.

Clocks will kneel.

November

Sundays are bad—the endless
fall of grandmother's
face toward her cup of camomile tea; the church
a great split clock, nuns skittering
below in black—wearing death like eau de Cologne. But
today, while Brother Timothy was picking among
the blanched leaves and stems of grandmother's dying
roses, he told me that Mrs. Old's son, James,
has come home: the leaves of the acanthus
turned to coins in
my hands. I pulled my skirt above my ankles, sparrows
spattered water across my knees, and Timothy—who is a
fool
for beauty—promised to introduce me in exchange
for an hour's walk with him, the chance to hold my hand. A
small thing. Light lifted
the porch railings, and across the street, where school-
boys walk slowly with their lunch pails, the white
leaves of the elm sprayed
out like rice.

Advent

Beneath the dome
of St. Cyprian's head, glazed
with hoarfrost, I waited, my feet
cold through my thin boots, the iced
holly clicking, as Timothy fled like a rabbit
through the pines. The moon was a ram's horn—
one stiff note, and a rattle of hooves,
and James, who will take me away from here, came
to me.

He is more than a clock or a fiery wheel, more
than the pages of those gilt books
the nuns bend over as if to devour the red
and black words. He is the brandy my father
let me drink against my mother's
protests—a fist of blood in
my throat, the assurance
that we are not
contained.

March: St. Cyprian's Graveyard

Here, where the rye grass sifts
and knots around our legs, waterstained
cupids click stiff wings above
the smashed grave of Julia Sumner and blue
moths scutter in the cold wind; but
James' hands are slow and hot. His eyeglasses
burn and then darken as he lowers
to me.

In the distance, the abbey's
wet fields roll under lines of snapping
cows and socks. Black as the dead
wisteria in the glass jars propped against
these statues is that earth that James, cupping
lilac cones in his hands, says he will farm.
He will not farm. Though his mother
with her long chin hates me for it, I will not see
his fine hands soiled.

Far as the sky, these glassy fields,
church bells and ship's horns, the gathering
swell of my skirts
that will carry us out.

Summer Solstice

Queen Anne's lace rots. Scum
thickens over the cistern. We will never
leave here now. All day James slops mash
for the monks' pigs and cattle, he touches
me with sour hands, prattles of diseased udders, of the cow
intestine that had to be shot full of holes before it
would sink into the pond, of the ewe dead two weeks—
 how the limbs
came unsocketed as easily as arms slip from sleeves:
 the monks
shovelled it onto a truck. Cabbages
molt, rabbits flap through the fields, his mother's hate for
 me
deepens. While the monks say
the afternoon office—*I will bring the destroyer in broad
 daylight—*
my husbands sleeps in filthy clothes on the floor
in front of the window.

*Howl shepherds,
roll on the ground—there is no escape.*

I am made worse than I am.

September

The clock clatters—pieces
of the dark startle
and scatter. Pipes pound. A heron elbows the raw air.

*His mother came to visit. I
would not let
her in. And now she is
dead.*

And if someone dies
because of your
fear and anger—those things you have prided yourself for?

Once
at a fine restaurant, glass and tea
against my full lip, a man leaned
forward outside the window,
and through the Belgian lace, I watched
him blow from his nose
a thick rope of mucus onto the lawn.

From the dead acanthus, a crow
shoots skyward. Mother, mother, my husband
will not see me.

All-Saints' Lament

Outside apples rot, yellow
and black. Bees
cluster in their dark
cells. Sparrows spit rocks. In
the other room grandmother
sleeps; she no longer walks, she cannot
see me, nor does she care.

First Fridays the faithful
file up the hill to St. Cyprian's
to confess, carrying
their cups of bad water. The priest's
hand is a sieve.

If only the eyeglasses were lit
matches, and the clock were the wheel
of a mill that could drive
through this lace-
shrouded room.

The neighbor's bonfire spirals
and dies beside his shed; strawberry fields blacken; by
the cistern small frogs grow still.

When first snow falls, I will walk where the nuns walk.

Briget Pegeen Kelly

RIG-SITTING

On the derrick, I twist this wrench tight
as if the oil pipes of the world depended
on it. I clear myself and signal,
and down below, the clang
and rattle of chains begins,
the drill bit biting miles through bedrock.
Now it goes on without me, nothing to do
but watch the black shaft turning.

Hardscrabble cactus grows a quarter
of an inch each decade. All afternoon,
mesas pretending to be mountains
bump into clouds from another county.
They scare them away. The only rain
all month was rumor. Like waterbugs,
antelopes in the distance
wade the mirages. Living on air,

hawks ride out the drought, dipping
and staring. I sit up here and wonder
how many times they can circle,
how many angels dance in a whirlwind,
how many times a bit goes around
before breaking.

Walter McDonald

THE BLIND-WOMAN AT FOURTH OF JULY

The companion whispers in my ear,

It's nearly dark:

the ocean is drawing in the last

orange breath of sunset,

exhales a purple air so transparent

I can see the stars.

The moon has risen

(it's full tonight)

over three tall palms.

I know the companion is lying
about all but the coming darkness:

I heard the explosions begin

even while it still was light—

the restless children couldn't wait.

The booms came like the cries of warfare,

the popping of corn.

Some rockets whistled, incredibly sad,

then died away.

The air grows cold where we
stand on this hill—

The companion nudges my ribs.

Ah! she says, followed, dully,

by a boom, as if underwater.

A silver fountain, like

drops of rain shot through with light,

tied together like a bouquet.

Boom.

*A lone red bird flying to
escape the hunter's arrow—
then pierced, its heart explodes.
A golden angel comes raining down
God's glory—
then both disappear into night:
Only the arrow falls to earth.*

What lies she tells—
Even so, my heart is thudding.
It's the smell, I think,
the smell of gunpowder
like a rare spice in the fog.
Perhaps God feels like this,
excited, just so, over the
incense of human sacrifice.
Not the companion's god, but mine,
who grimly placed me here.

I take the companion's arm
(we are both trembling slightly)
as she leads me down the hill.
All around us other people
are leaving, too.
Crowds of people who have come out
into the night;
strangers who only gather
in darkness.

Barbara Tritel

MOTHER DATING

Here it comes again, lumbering
up the stairs, as clumsy as Cousin Connie
lugging spring up from storage
and no one can tell me it's a dream.
Not Uncle Morty refusing
to drown again in the Pacific
just a page and a half before an Island woman
will wave her breasts at him,
hungry after the wreckage.
And not Aunt Cis smoking by the pool
while skimming scum off the surface.
Out of reach, my blue plastic boat waits
to rescue me. But here it comes, clanging
as if it were all hatchets
swinging into one another,
such a strange music shivering down my ears.
Oh I dance all right, a razor dance
while Mom steps into stockings
in this house full of her brothers and sisters
and one stranger unleashing tiny earthquakes with every step.
Why doesn't Uncle Morty stop brushing his boxer
and tackle the beast approaching the hallway?
Or Aunt Cis burn its eyes out with her glowing butt?
Three squirts and Mom's drenched
in perfume as the whole house pounds
like the guts of a kettle drum. Suddenly,
silence.
A bell rings. A door opens. I'm five again,
trapped inside my room forever.

Rick Chess

THE MOTHERS

The wind shakes strange music
from the trees tonight,
pulse of branches gripped in ice,
frozen laughter of lost years.
I cannot enter this inhuman
whiteness of moon and snow.
They are out there waiting—

Helen stirring somnolent thighs,
Mary leaning backward into her shadow,
Kali wearing her lovers' heads as jewels,
Diana giving her breast to the moon,
Cybele gripping the lion between her legs—
these strangers that once were I.

I don't know you, I tell them.
I am myself, not a myth.
I play the roles, but I am not the part;
I am the whole.

Laughter of cracking ice.
We are your mothers, they whisper.
You lived in us; we died in you.
Tonight, daughter, you sleep out of the wind,
but tomorrow you will come with us
into the ice-age of the mothers
and a stranger will lie in your bed

Barbara Lucas

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Greg Kuzma has edited *A Book of Rereadings in recent American poetry: 30 essays* (a triple issue of *Pebble*, 18, 19, & 20, English Department, Lincoln NE 68588, 494 pp., \$7.98 paper). In each essay an appreciative poet or critic writes on a modern or contemporary poet. Paul Christensen's "In Cold Hell, In Thicket" is the best introduction to Charles Olson that I have yet seen. Hugh Luke's "Gestures of Shape, Motions of Form" is similarly valuable in sharing the author's appreciation of the extraordinary riches in the poetry of A.R. Ammons. Many of the essays are close readings of a single poem. Among these, I most enjoyed Anne R. Newman on Elizabeth Bishop's "Roosters" and David Robbins' well-informed and beautifully-balanced explication of Gary Snyder's "Burning Island." This is one of the few critical volumes I'd recommend for any library—public, academic, or private—where there are readers of modern poetry.

Limited to one word to characterize Gary Snyder, I'd choose the rare virtue of magnanimity, in its broadest sense of largeness of spirit. New Directions has produced a volume that serves two functions about equally: to illuminate the writing of Snyder by illuminating the poet's world view, and to provide a text (like Snyder's earlier *Earth House Hold*) for those working toward healthy standards for living in a "postrevolutionary" world. With his profound generosity and good humor, Snyder discusses the positive values in poetry, science and technology, oral tradition, the family, the landscapes of geology and consciousness—and even of English Departments. The book is called *The Real Work*:

Interviews & Talks 1964-1979 (New Directions, 1980, 190 pp., \$4.95 paper). Congratulations to editor Wm. Scott McLean, who collaborated with Snyder in making this an extraordinarily readable and useable book, with an expanded table of contents, crisp introduction, informative headnotes to the interviews and talks, an index (bless his soul!), and references to and excerpts from interviews not included in this volume. At this low price New Directions expects large sales and deserves them.

Snyder's first volume of poems since *Turtle Island* (1974) is now out, elegantly designed and printed on acid-free paper as it should be (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983, 128 pp., \$12.50 cloth, \$7.50 paper). This deceptively limpid little book is wonderfully rich and complex. Blake's "fourfold vision" is not enough for it. Its "single vision" is not "Newton's sleep" but translation into language of the world of the senses ("soaked drooping bamboo groves/swaying heavy in the drizzle"), complicated by memory ("the up and down of it/stays in my feet"), enriched by imaginative penetration of past and future, and illuminated by wonder. Snyder's "double vision" is the awareness of the kinship among creatures, human and non-human, through parallel experience: the deer's pleasure in licking soy-sauce soaked wood and the poet's recollection, through smell, of "Shinsu miso,/the darker saltier miso paste of the Nagano/uplands." Blake's sort of "double vision" is here too: the perception of the human in the non-human: "the Ancient Ones, each one/anonymous." But Snyder goes way beyond Blake in his awareness of the place of each organism or mineral in the web of the universe: call it his "fourfold vision." Too tightly-worked to quote from, "Old Rotting Tree Trunk Down" celebrates these cycles of interrelationships. The "five-fold" vision is perception of analogies as bridges to fellowship, both through metaphor ("I am an axe/and my son a handle"), simile ("young breasts like the *mulpu*/mushroom/swelling up through sand"), and more formally ("As the crickets' soft autumn hum/is to us,/so are we to the trees/as are they/to the rocks and the hills"). At the sixth level is symbolism: the river starts "in threads in hills," but also "is all of it everywhere,/all flowing at once,/all in one place." There is a seventh and visionary level, too—both in the ghost poem (an affectionate parody of "Joe Hill") and the visionary dream that persists into waking consciousness, of the

"Three Corn Maidens in green . . . walking by," and the poet "glad for once I knew/Not to look too much when/*Really there.*"

Axe Handles is many books in one. There are domestic poems (as the masculine "Changing Diapers"), a good many political and economic poems, often ironic, such as one on "the pain/of the work/of wrecking the world." There are many comic visions here, not all of them wry, from an imagination that can invert the customary ways of looking at things. There are delicate parodies here, of folk song, of Williams, of Basho. There are the expected poems of ceremony and ritual (including "True Night," a marvelous poem that leads the reader through the ritual of coping with a raccoon in the kitchen). There are poets' poems of naming and, like riddles, not naming. But ultimately Snyder circles back again and again to two themes, both rooted in insight that grows out of intense observation and both looking to the future: first, "Seeing in silence:/never the same twice,/but when you get it right,/you pass it on"; and second, in the words of the ghost of Lew Welch: "What I came to say was,/teach the children about the cycles./The life cycles. All the other cycles. That's what it's all about, and it's all forgot." In *Axe Handles* it's all rediscovered. And generously shared.

The limitation of Blake's vision is that he ultimately reduced all creation to the range of human imagination. Although all of us are ultimately condemned to the cell of our own limits, in the work of the few powerful poets of our day—Gary Snyder preeminently—we encounter slings of words to shoot us out beyond our own limitations, to a perspective from which we can see ourselves as we are—a small part of the web of the cosmos, frequently destructive, but capable of a vision that transcends our selves.

Auden's "If On Account of the Political Situation" serves as epigraph to the issue devoted to "Writers in the Nuclear Age" of *NER/BLQ* (*New England Review and Bread Loaf Quarterly*) 5 (Summer 1983), Box 170, Hanover, N.H. 03755, 225 pp., \$4.00. Forty-one writers, including Seamus Heaney, Amy Clampitt, David Ignatow, and Leonard Nathan, contribute. Louise Erdrich has a funny lovely story, "Nuclear Detergent." William Carpenter speaks for many when he writes: "It's

pretty difficult for most poets to participate in the nuclear protest with their work—it's just not a time for propaganda in poetry—but I do think that most good writing at this time must show at some level the urgency of this historic context." There is little "protest poetry" in this excellent collection, but much thoughtful consideration of what it means to be living in this unprecedented historic moment. At only \$4.00 this volume should be in every library, public and personal.

The name conspicuous by its absence in the *NER/BLQ* volume is that of Carolyn Forché. For readers of the *American Poetry Review* for July/August 1981, her "El Salvador: An Aide Memoire" marked a turning point in our ability to imagine what is happening in Central America. Two reviews, by Sharon Doubiago and Larry Levis, in the January/February 1983 *APR* place her among "world-class" political poets. Her audiences as she has traveled about reading and speaking have been transformed by the power of her language, equal to the power of what she has to say. It is as a poet that she is electrifying her audiences and providing a humane vision.

For the Romantic Poets, struggling to express the revolutions of their day, Milton was the supreme political poet—not so much for the politics of his poetry (though one could then and can now learn much about the functioning of cabinets from the politics of Pandemonium) as for the tremendous authority of his life and its political impact in works like "Areopagitica." Because of her two years as an observer-poet in El Salvador and the power of her prose and her personal witness, Forché commands this kind of authority. Although there are only eight poems of the El Salvador experience in her latest book, *The Country Between Us* (Harper Colophon, 1981, 60 pp., \$11.50 cloth, \$5.95 paper), most of these (like "The Colonel," "San Onofre, California," and "The Visitor") are already so well known as to need no quotation here. They gain their power from the poet's ability to pay attention, to go out of herself imaginatively into another, and to command the language that can take the reader out into that other. At this level the poet is, as Shelley said, profoundly moral and philosophical. Shelley loathed "didactic poetry"; the poet-philosopher did not preach. The great secret, he explained, was "a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists

in thought, action, or person, not our own." This is the power of the imagination, through which "the pains and pleasures" of our species become our own.

Reading back through Forché's first volume, *Gathering the Tribes* (Yale, 1976, 58 pp., still in print at \$4.95 paper), we can trace her apprenticeship in developing this "creative faculty" that Shelley describes. Though retaining the observing "I," she enters into the spirit of her Slavic grandmother (in the section titled "Burning the Tomato Worms") and into the lives of Spanish and Indian people of the New Mexico mountains. When we come, now, to her latest book, we find this faculty grown, so that the observer becomes almost transparent, and we enter through her into the life observed. We lack, Shelley reminds us, the power "to imagine that which we know." We knew what was going on in Viet Nam. We know what is going on to the south of us. But this knowledge merely numbs us unless we have the power to imagine it—and it is to the poets that we turn for this power. They cheat us if they write merely "didactic poetry." One of the reasons Forché has emerged as such a force in our time is that she is a true poet, sharing the "faculty to imagine that which we know." At this level poetry does cause things to happen. But they would not happen without the poet's other power—with language. Forché's poetry is not the chopped-up prose that we see so much of today. It has a lyric grace and rhythm and order that act like incantation and aria. In "San Onofre," we know what might happen to us if we crossed the border and went south, so we stay north and listen

to the wind jostling lemons,
to dogs ticking across the terraces,
knowing that while birds and warmer weather
are forever moving north,
the cries of those who vanish
might take years to get here.

It was her translating of the poems of Salvadoran poet-in-exile *Claribel Alegria* that led Forché to that country in 1978. Her translations, *Flores del volcan/Flowers from the Volcano* in a bilingual text (Pittsburgh, 1982, 88 pp., \$12.95 cloth, \$5.95 paper), raise lyrically and eloquently the question: "who raised up this prison's bars?" and suggest in evocative images and echoing voices possible answers to this "smoking question."

M.K.S.