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Cover: Haku Maki, Untitled Japanese woodcut, 1959.
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A DREAMLESS WINTER

For Margaret

This is a dreamless winter
The rosetree is shook by stone.
Everything is a careful white.
The rose bleeds a quiet red.
The sky cleanses itself with ice.
Can speech thaw a frozen thing?
The rosetree is locked in ice.
Stillness is the voice of snows.
A chill knocks on the earth.
The earth opens wide.
The chill enters.
Silence is a careful white.
Look how the rose bleeds black
This dreamless winter.

Herbert Woodward Martin

CROSSING ALTAMONT

—for Sheldon Hatlen, 1931-1983

1.

Coming out of
Oakland, into the
hills, driving
toward your death,
I wanted to tell you
that the poppies
have come back to
the Coast Range,
splashes of orange
across the green
hills, there and
there, pulling at
the edges of my
eyes and then
THAT one, burning
beside the road
—and gone as the
hiss of tires, the
rush of freeway
traffic sucks me
on toward home.

2.

“Poppies,” the first
Yankees called
them, looking up
at the foothills,
scored by irongreen
smears of liveoaks
in the draws, but
the hillsides bare,
brown from June to
January, greening in
the winter rains, then
in April suddenly
bright orange with
“poppies,” they
said, thinking of
another flower, a
flagrant Asian
flower, growing in
New England door-
yards, blind men,
dreaming of home.

3.

But what we cannot
see we kill, and
so the poppies

passed from these
hills. Already
they were for us,

fifty years too
late, only a story
of the days when
one morning you
woke and saw the
hills transfigured,
aflake with flowers.

Yet each spring I
watched as the hills
faded from February
green to summer
brown, hoping that
this year, maybe,
the poppies might
come back to us.

4.

And here they are,
lighting my way
toward your death,

“a little flame, a
little, little flame,”
said Lawrence,

dying, and I want
to thank you, my dead
brother, for setting

these flowers here
to lead me through
the hills, as the

darkness gathers in
the creek bottoms
and in this cleft

carved by men for
our passage, the
earth scarred forever,

poppies clinging to
the roadside rubble, the
naked, aching rocks.

5.

The poppies have
come back but you're
gone, Sheldon,

gone, and the slow
spring rains won't
bring you back,

gone, the lonely
grey thighs, the
wrinkled belly,

naked at last,
stretched out on
the iron bed, the

slicked-down hair,
eyelids, fingers,
lips, cracked yellow

toenails, the sad
cock in its nest
of curled hair, all

gone, blazing in the
gas jets, shrouded
in flame, gone.

6.

"Alas what boots it
with uncessant care
to tend the homely . . ."

We eat, we work, we
dream of the backyard,
summer afternoons,

baseball on the TV,
a sixpack, hamburgers
hissing on the grill,

we wonder where we
took the wrong turn,
was THIS all we wanted?

And then we die,
feet rotted away with
festering ulcers,

arteries clogged,
hearts swelling until
they burst, your heart

or mine, hammering now
in my chest, laboring
on against time.

7.

At the end, Linda
told me on the phone,
you couldn't sleep,

all night you would
shuffle through
the house in your

canvas slippers
—and I see you,
the green carpet

of the hall, the dim
bathroom light,
eighty-five clocks

chiming around you,
calling the hour,
none of them right,

pausing at doorways,
as your children
sigh in their sleep.

listening to your
heart beating,
beating in the night.

8.

So we shuffle on,
waiting for the
dawn, as the night

swallows us one by
one—oh, we cannot
bear it, sometimes

in our sorrow and
our rage, we want it
all to go, roaring

up in the final fire
—and so Livermore now,
the silver towers of

the Radiation Labs
hovering beside my car,
and the rows of neat

redwood houses, where
the men live who build
the bombs that will

burn clean the earth
of this crust of grass,
flowers, children running.

9.

"By fire and sword,"
yells the evangelist
on my car radio,

"Jesus, Jesus," he
shouts, "come back
to us now, take us

home to your kingdom,
and strike down these
mockers, destroy

your enemies with
sword and with fire,
Communists, adulterers,

men who love men, all
who lust after the flesh,
come now in thy wrath,

burn away the filth
of this earth," and in
their quiet bedrooms,

the children of the
men who build the bombs
tremble in their sleep.

10.

But it's your dreams
I want to remember
now, Sheldon, because,

dying, you loved our
dying earth, as the
evangelist fades

in static, and we
start the long grade
toward the summit,

Altamont, and beyond
the Central Valley,
home still for me

(gone twenty years),
here I am always a
boy, here you are

growing beside me,
always a little
bigger than me, a

little darker, quiet,
puzzling over a
mystery of your own.

11.

Two boys in love
with Saturday night
baths, the rush of
water into the tub,
mirrors fogged with
our breath, soapy
limbs squirming, and
fresh washed sheets
against warm skin
—two boys slinging
boxes of apricots
up onto the back of
a pickup truck, driving
to the loading dock,
through the heat haze
of July rippling over
the road—or spreading
trays of peaches to
dry in the August sun,
in love with our sweat,
the endless valley sky.

12.

Two boys in love
with this valley,
but we've ruined
it all, you said
as we sat, men
now, drinking beer
in your backyard.
The native valley
grasses, you told me,
are all gone, choked
out by bermuda, foxtail,
and the antelope are
gone too, that ran
free here, before
the farmers came.
Sometimes, you said,
you dreamed of the
antelope, of running
with them, on and on
through the shoulder-
high valley grass.

13.

Sheldon, I want to
dream with you now,
for a while, of the
white-muzzled antelope
as they walk, twenty
in a file, through
the grass, browning
under the July sun,
it shivers a little
as they pass on,
down among the
dusty cottonwoods
toward the riverbed
(the Tuolomne maybe
or the San Joaquin),
only a few salty
puddles left now,
from the April floods,
and the buzz of the
horseflies and everywhere
the cicadas shrilling.

14.

For some things pass
and never come back
as the antelope have
gone forever, run now
only through our dreams,
and the valley grasses,
gone, for the farmers
came to sow their
Eastern seeds, forage
for their cows, and the
weeds came too, seeds
caught in pants cuffs,
the seams of dresses,
and the poppies died,
as the cows cropped off
the sweet, green shoots,
and all that passes
mourns for you today:
antelope, hillsides
ablaze with poppies,
shaking fields of grass.

15.

Yet the farmers too
loved the sticky
brown soil of

this valley, as you
loved it, fenced
your suburban

backyard to make
a garden, tomatoes,
chard, and planted

peaches, cherries,
plums (I pruned them
all last winter,

you too weak to
hold the shears),
and an apricot

in memory of our
father, that quiet
Norwegian farmer,

tender of fruit-trees,
children, all green
and growing things.

16.

And here are the
poppies, come back
to us, not a sea

of flowers on the
hillside, but one
here, one there,

seeds waiting under
the rocks, on the
steepest slopes,

where the cows can't
go, patient, until
the long rains come,

and so the seeds you
have scattered, my
brother, will wait,

will bloom in your
children's dreams,
and they will see

again an apricot tree,
white with blossoms,
beside the fence.

17.

So I guess it's time
 to let go of my
 tears, to let you go
 on into the night,
 quietly, quietly,
 as you let the world
 go, voice cut from you
 by the surgeon's knife,
 only your hands to
 say goodbye, touching
 the leaves of the
 lemon tree one last
 time, or Britta's
 pale, shivering arm,
 or trying to hold
 forever in your eyes
 THIS olive-tree
 twisted in the valley
 winds, or THIS flash
 of sunlight off the
 high Sierra snows.

18.

And ride with me,
 Sheldon, teach me
 how to hold in my
 hands, my eyes, all
 things that pass,
 as now I hold you,
 dream you back,
 the valley opening
 before us, already
 deep in shadows, a
 V in the hills, then
 a scatter of lights,
 Tracy, Stockton, and
 I ease into the right
 lane, toward Route 5
 and south along the
 foothills, your body
 stretched beside me
 across the valley floor,
 burning in the night,
 to light my way home.

A DREAM MAKING MANY THINGS BETTER

My father sent flowers to my mother
the day before he died, but they did not arrive
until after he had gone. He wished
to express his appreciation,
it was as simple as that. His illness
had lasted very long. My mother was frightened
when she saw the messenger standing
in her doorway holding a glorious bouquet.
The boy offered her the flowers, a Redon fantasy
of peonies and roses and tiny violets,
but she could not move to take them
from his hands. The doctor had just left,
she had not phoned the children
far away, had not yet cried.
Who could have sent flowers so soon?

My father, when he called the florist,
could barely hold the phone
with his thin hands. It kept slipping
while he steadied it with chin and shoulder,
his breath raspy, louder than his words.
“What I want is a big old-fashioned bouquet.”
He was very weak—replacing the receiver
was hard. Soon she would come with his pills,
hold his hand, offer water through
an accordion-pleated straw. (Did he remember
to say he wanted baby’s breath and lots of foliage?)
Closing his eyes he drifted, dreamed
of flowers in the park when he was a boy,
of flowers growing wild in the fields near
his parents’ birthplace, which he had never seen.

Dori Appel

THE MAN WHO SAW THE ELEPHANT

There was a farmer who had heard that a circus was coming to town. Now, this farmer had never in his life seen an elephant, and as the day of the circus approached, he grew progressively more obsessed with the prospect of catching a glimpse of one. The day the circus was due, he loaded his wagon for market and lingered along the road to town. Presently, the circus wagons careened through, knocked the farmer off the road, broke all the eggs he had brought to sell, and left the wagon useless, and the farmer himself bloody. But he leapt up and shouted: "I care not a fig for all of this, for I HAVE SEEN THE ELEPHANT!"

—Joke, current in the late 1840's

i

Dear Rosa, what mattered the expense,
for I am here, and soon we shall all be rich.
This is a city of some six thousand souls
and now, under half a moon,
a town of magic lanterns, of canvas tents
transparent as hands held up to light.
I have rented a box in which to sleep.
We are several under this shed, which
is airy as a revival at a dollar a day,
and full of dirty angels with their heads
on their boots. Tomorrow I will book my way
to Sacramento, and then to the prospect,
where every pick and flying rock may find
our fortune. Give Aaron a kiss for me,
and tell him that he is father now.
Your loving Jonathan.

ii

This is a wide and muddy river.
Flat valleys blur from its sides
like the pages of a dull book.
A hundred fifty miles to Sacramento,
the boat as heavy as may be with men and gear.
Some have brought incredible machines,
which they believe will part the gold
from its rock. I saw such tools
rusting the docks we left.
I have brought a pick and bowl.
Upriver, the nights turn cold.
I am smoking my last cigar now,
sending frosty clouds of smoke into
the dark. I hope I have brought
blankets enough, for the mountains loomed
suddenly this afternoon, like forebodings.
And I remembered the time you had the dream,
and walked in sleep to the window,
and next day told me how you imagined your fall,
how for hours you were dying through the air.
How can it take so long, you were thinking
as you fell in your white gown
towards the black teeth of the fence below.
Rose, I am afraid.

iii

Boiled shirts cover black hearts, they say,
and I believe it, for yesterday I saw
a faro game whose gambler shot a man
who lost his stake and claimed a cheat.
Whether it was so, I could not tell.
The soda was a jack, a queen faced up
to win, which result enraged a knickerbocker,
who swept her from the table, together with

his stake of dust, spitting out between his teeth—"That pot is mine. I saw you slide your greasy fingers under the deck." If he'd have drawn, who can say. The gambler's mouth went thin, and the knickerbocker fell. Some bystanders carried him away, for he had no friends, and the game went on.

This is an odd town. I am writing from the city hotel, which I will presently describe, but you mustn't imagine for long, for tomorrow I and Bill, a Piker with whom I've taken up, will provide ourselves and try our luck near Hangtown.

We are lodged in a large room built of ramshackle board whose cracks the men stuff with newspaper. Around its sides rise tiers of bunks, our opera seats you might say, and in the center stands what passes for a dressing table (the way fandango girls pass for ladies here, as there is no one else) with a hairbrush, chained, and a toothbrush, free. Across the way, a boy is trying "Money Musk" on a fiddle missing, by the sound of it, at least one string. Someone else reads a letter aloud. Bill has engaged the bed by mine, and we have been making plans, to the annoyance of a man named Hank, who was trying to sleep. We have just shut up, as this letter must if it is to get to you. I have trusted it to a Hoosier going east, going lucky I would add. He says he will put it into your hands. I kiss those hands. Your husband, Jonathan.

iv

Last night Bill was telling me of his journey west, how one day he'd passed an ox which had died by a hot spring, how its body was swollen past eating, but for one leg, which extended into the spring, and was white bone and tendon as high as the water had influence. And I was thinking of that floating meat, and how it might serve travelers in days to come, water being scarce on that trail, and what choice would they have—the thickened tongue that comes of thirst, or a fever from the drinking, building rooms in the blood that kill, quick or slow. What thirst can drive us to! To California, I suppose. In any case, we've come. You would not believe, Rose, the price of vegetables in the camps—a dollar for an onion, if you can get it, and no fruit at all. Our lucky meals are of jerked beef, otherwise, beans and pork, and lumpy flour full of ash. Bread takes a woman, we've learned that, and there are none here, and nothing female but fandango girls, and these use their hands for other things. But never mind. Luck is in the air. This very morning, we passed a miner whose pal took out a thousand in an hour.

v

In the morning, we'll be there. We've packed our mules with simple gear, and your face hangs in the point of honor at the front. It is so dry

that our every step stirs a little cloud,
but when it rains, the rivers will be
too high to work, so we do not complain.
We are living on rumor, Rose, you cannot
imagine it, how the stories fly, and
we miners gather to believe. It is almost
as if that were enough, the belief in gold,
though the lord knows there is plenty here.
They carry it about in pickle jars—dust,
nuggets thick as teeth. I have even seen
a fist of gold, all one piece—a whole farm
with land and cattle as far as you could
dream. And me safely home, taking off my collar
as Sunday ends, and you loosening your hair,
which falls dim down your back. Oh Rose.
For a moment you were as real to me as if
you were here. You must have turned to Aaron
just now and said, "It is your father.
He is imagining us." For I can see the
heavy plates on the kitchen shelf,
and the way your slim wrists peer from
your sleeves as you reach to take
our three plates down. You are wearing blue,
and the sky is falling through your eyes.

vi

We have pitched our tents under pines,
whose ooze serves for salve in the camps
where there is nothing else. Night
is falling, and the wolves have begun
to bark. Sometimes they come close
outside our fire's circle,
their dog faces flickering in our light,
waiting to snap at what we leave.
Sometimes we throw them scraps, minded
of our own dogs.

A small thing happened last night, which had no bad end, yet has continued to disturb me, the way a bite can fester underneath the skin. I woke suddenly, to find lines of ants crawling over my face. It was such a sensation, Rose, as though I'd come alive, in a horrible way. And I screamed for you, which woke Bill. What stopped me then was the tiny click of his revolver in the dark. Finally, we both fell back to sleep, but differently. The moon seems closer here than at home. We have both said so. It lights our papers as we write our wives. Bill married no Rose, to hear him talk. He says he hopes the old woman dies, and all of her kin, before he comes back. And yet he continues to write to her, as I to you, and I suspect all may not be as it seems. Enough domesticity. You will be wondering how we fare. Today we took in two dollars each, all in little flakes like fishes' scales. In the morning we are pressing on. There was a strike, we hear, near Ragged Ass (forgive the name, my dear; we men, left to ourselves, turn crude), and if luck holds, I'll be soon home to buy our farm—the white hill house, the fields that fall away. Kiss our son for me. I love you. Jonathan.

vii

How many letters can I write beginning:
We took in thus and so today, as though
that were the count—twenty dollars,
two hundred—all my life is worth. And
yet, the gamble drives me on. I thought
I came for land, but I have learned
I lied: I came for gold. But even gold
is not enough. There is a hunger
lives in me that I cannot name.
It howls in the dark like a wolf, but
it is no wolf. It can ache like
the throat of a dry wash, but it is not
dust. Sometimes it coats my tongue
with a mold so thick, that when I try
to speak, nothing comes. It is a hunger
which holds back. It would watch a feast,
and starve. Coming here, I tried
to name it “woman” but I was wrong.
When I’ve stood waist high in ice water,
early to late, no matter what the pan,
while the sun changed from red to white
to red, and burned, it is the same
as sometimes, waking with you,
even in our first days—
that there was a hunger in me so strong
it could tear my pores apart to escape.
And then, as now, I craved to be somewhere else,
to emigrate to the farthest point of light,
to find something strong enough to penetrate
and make me whole.

viii

Forgive the diversion of the last letter, my dear.
You will think it means that I do not care for you,
because I had not spoken before, or because

there are dark openings in me through which
we both rush backwards, though you did not know it.
But it is not so. And if one day I tell you,
You are not enough, you must be consoled,
understanding that no woman is ever enough,
nor any man, that there is a third force,
sought by both, that makes the storm,
with its lights that laugh at fences,
and its driving hungry winds.

ix

Six months gone, and no stake. What we pan,
we eat. Beans and fat, fat and beans.
Seventeen cents today, and where's the use?
We've moved our tents from Bedbug to Ragged Ass
and back again, We've picked at salted claims
for days, and in the end someone says—Thanks Pals,
and moves on. I have seen men's eyes roll up.
I have seen their legs curl, like something burned.
I have seen them cry for letters that came,
or did not come. I have seen them grow rich,
and gamble all their gains away, the loneliness
was so strong. I have seen rivers of ale disappear
down desperate throats, dribble down stubbled
chins. I have seen men dance with each other,
and fall in love. I have seen a man lose an ear
over a pair of evening shoes. This letter,
I cannot send.

x

We have found a claim which promises, and our four
sticks warn off the ragged men that pass us by
in their dirt-stiff shirts and stinking hats.
Bill and I work til dark, taking out the quartz,
with its crumbles and yellow streaks. We took
three hundred dollars worth in the morning,

and six hundred in the afternoon. Our hopes are building, like the thunderclouds which grow over the mountains as I write. If it rains, we will have to move, for we are camped in a gully which would fill faster than a dance hall which rumored girls, and quickly, for last week three men died in just such a flash of water, whole trees came careening down before they could even turn. Bill has our beans, so this is all tonight.

(A fancy has plagued me, which I will not send, but will write that the words may calm it, by their very absurdity. *Bill screams, Look out! and I stuff my pouch into my pants as the tent collapses and I fight free. And comes a roar, bigger than the dark, more than the shout of air through the needles of pines, and there's mud in my mouth, water boiling my legs backwards, a treetrunk's bearing down on me, faster and faster through the torrent, and I'm swept away.*

xi

Der Missus Farlow, her is som male he rote to you. He wuz a fine man. I thot youd like to no he died quik, ther was a flud com thro and that wuz all. If you see someon going to Clinton Mass, tell them to tell Missus Poke ther, who lives in the whit hous by the klok, that Bills giving up and starting hom as soon as he can get ahed. If your feeling to sad, Missus, remembr—yor Jon was a good man, and he wuznt kild by no enemy, but by luk. Yours, Wm Poke

Lola Haskins

SPINOZA, I LOVE YOU

It is this delicacy in ritual I can hardly stand,
Each syllable balanced by poets in the desert,
The dignity of each letter stalking down to us
To form these simple songs of praise to the One,
To Life, to the World around us that we know—
Where every morsel means like the songs we sing,
Where parsley in salt water is the tears of sadness,
Horseradish is bitterness, apples are bricks of toil,
Unleavened bread and a shank of lamb are liberation
We consume together in our holy family.

Candlelight.

And now the fine contralto of her voice raises
Our five-year-old in lavender up, out of her chair
To dance and swing and pump her wild little arms,
Pulsing like kibitzniks or bedouins under god's sky—
On our linoleum as I join her and we partners circle
The floor faster and faster within the archaic words
That are within us now as they spoke to our forebears.
Genealogies rise up in Silesia and Lithuania and Alsacia.
Even my Sephardic Jewish, bankrupt mother's father's
father

Lives with us on this Passover Seder in a family kitchen.

Paul Friedrich

BAG LADY: A PART OF HER POEM

just remember I'm the one
who left I said
I will not touch your hand
or your ear or play little
circles on your neck I
will not move on
your voice the way a gull
rides the air its
wings still

I said I'm
going to my own
side of the
streetlights stars
broken glass dogs
wheels stuck in shit I
built this cart
myself

when the elevator
opened they wheeled my
mother out
melting in front of me as
though the sun had burned
through the hospital roof
look at my fingers if
you're not afraid honey
they've been in that pool

do you
think I should have cut
my fingers off I
did in fact have one
amputated the doctor
put it down to frostbite
now you accuse me of
friendlessness

I tell you I wouldn't
have walked out if
we had begun with colors if
the lectures had been
orchid and chartreuse like
Empress Carlotta's rug if
we had begun with oils
instead of charcoal

oh my hat
you appreciate the
wide purple of it do you
wonder at its power to
stop you even here on
40th Street where you
rush clutching keys are your
hands used to that tight grip

when your keys don't work when
they don't hold back the
August fear that
breathes hot against your
door will you
toss them will you
book one only one
voyage sea days

tea afternoons
cress sandwiches
strawberry tarts with Devonshire cream
will you decide to
be an actress at the Schubert
when the old woman in
Chelsea reads your face
will you believe her

I didn't want to know
of bombs in Spain only
Lake Como Carlotta's bedroom
guarded there as though I
would have stolen that
orchid sold it
traded it for whatever you
think you want

here on 40th Street honey
what do you want
I had keys then too you
know the big brass
ones for trunks filled with
dresses and scarves and
art books I
like Watteau the man playing

the violin under
trees a man small in
the enormous forest
I think he was a
clown dressed as
he was in my colors
in the woods do you
like wood

do you like to
hold a piece of it and
run your hand over
the grain until there is
no more roughness oh
I have been called tough
but I'd rather be called
resilient

what did he ever make of
wood the man who
called himself carpenter and
said he loved me
after the hospital I
went with him
his asthma so bad
he couldn't breathe

we ate doughnuts and coffee and
his plans to build a house
he left in the rain with
his heavy breath
sometimes I check the
station but I'll tell
you this honey if a
train ever does come in

I hope
my mother's on it I
have a ruby ring for her
and beads from the
woman of Xochimilco her
prayer beads
healing beads she
holds to

keep sickness away the
hospital had no color
there my carpenter built
his stories my
mother will
come in September when the
leaves are
copper and orange

when the boys knock
over my cart and
laugh while they
steal I say
it's raining it's lightning
it's an earthquake in Peru
it's a famine not far away
it's the wind let loose between skyscrapers

your raincoat is ugly honey
it's parched for color
like sand you need a
purple sash a scarf like
this one I'll sell you for
a dollar and here's an
embroidered drawstring pouch
you can carry your keys in the

way Japanese carry pearls
let's move on two
hours here two
hours in another place
are you afraid to
sit still your
fingers on your knees
not holding not

keeping cats or
birds alive I know
how to wait and
I decide when
to move
mother says I will
be an actress if
I have discipline

do you have that
 when you dress in the
 morning do you have a
 plan with hours and
 weeks does it
 fit you
 do you like its color
 if you alter the
 seams too often
 edges come apart but
 you can save remnants this
 sash is from a gown that
 reached to the floor and
 it's yours for
 a dollar you see I am
 brilliant with remnants

I know what to do with
 leftovers my nightmare
 is not the half-ruin
 it is that clear day when
 no adjusting will help
 they will have finished
 there will be nothing for
 a quilt or a stew

listen
 I'll recite my knitting piece

I want to
 unravel what you've
 done pull
 everything apart like
 a badly knit scarf
 unbuild your prisons
 unbloody your battles
 un-invent your schemes
 oh you lovers of

strategy you players
 with words and guns
 you carriers of statistics

stand up

I want to
 measure what is
 here and
 what size you are

a lament is a long *oh*
oh for the ghosts kissed
and the time spent to
make them real *oh*
to blow out the candles
oh like your eyes
when you saw your father
oh open as the sores on my legs

close your eyes look away
I'm still here you're still
here touch your leg how
easily the skin would
open how many years would
gush out as though
you'd never tried to
hold them back never
locked a door

I was watching the
Florentine sun glint off
marble muscles I was
in a battlefield so stark I
had to close my eyes
I was under him
on my back looking up
like a child searching the
clouds for a familiar face

have some blueberry muffin
I like them with more berries
old Clara gives me
one every Friday Nick gives
me kabob on his good days
I buy my own coffee when
they let me in the store when
I say let me in they look and
I'm too big for them

my hand look at it honey
 it won't sign papers for
 bed and a bowl of soup
 a fishbowl of fish oh
 the goldfish is really a
 great green carp a
 loose wet scaly hungry
 fish too big to live
 in a glass or a bag

or the hospital hallway
 so white so white
 I cut myself to see the
 color to smell if
 I was still there
 honey why are you still here
 what happened to your hurry
 if I read your face
 will you believe me

I believe in the
 woman of Xochimilco and
 blueberry muffins this
 small gold hand from a
 Yucatan temple and
 luck la buena fortuna
 what do you do to
 keep devils away your
 keys won't work

oh let's sing about work
 I worked in Macy's not
 fast enough to pay for
 the theatre I worked
 in a bank a cafe and a
 school not fast enough
 to pay for theatre not
 fast like your legs when
 you rush along 40th Street

let's sing about work
 outside in July outside
 in December on the
 outside on the sidewalk
 hot steam ice wind
 snow in the wheels
 push in the wind
 when it rains I
 could kill you

get the
 fuck off my street
 the night here is
 mine I
 grab it with
 both my hands it
 shakes me I
 hang on it
 pushes me to the
 pavement I
 sleep with it I
 know how to
 sleep hanging on
 the night here is
 mine when it
 crawls on my skin
 I scratch
 my blood comes after
 sunset I am
 the color
 I vomit I cry
 the night takes it all
 it tries to

shake me to
 pick me off and
 fling me over the
 edge I
 hold on when the
 edge is Xochimilco
 I hold on when
 it's 40th Street I
 hold on when the
 rain is called Tlaloc
 hold on through
 all the nights of
 the Wise Women I
 hold on while you
 turn in your bed
 seeing me in your sleep
 seeing us both against
 black
 our colors the
 only light oh
 run run the
 fuck off my street
 the night here is
 mine

or stay
watch the water with me
watch what
rises from the lake
and sleeps crumpled in
the doorway like that
tissue in your hand do you
have an extra my
nose is running

keep on running honey how
long are your nights how
long before morning
saves you with its
list of
things to do to do
things to do
them fast enough to
pay for the theatre

what do you do first in
the morning I
piss in the street water
to water I
like that better than
dust to dust if it's
a dusty day let's
have a beer
watch me part the

crowd watch when I
walk to the bar and
spread my elbows we'll
drink to another
dividing of the sea
and what will you find when
we go to the sea honey
what will you look for
do you know yet what

you've lost have you felt
it next to you like the
absence of a lover like
a ring with
gold prongs and
no stone do you
remember what to
look for when we
go to the sea

and what will you bring
I love picnics honey let's
make it a feast bring
oranges the kind from
Tampico the kind that don't
fall apart I know their
skins I can tell
where they came from even
when I find them

against this curb do you
doubt it do you say
nothing because you're
hungry or because you
are remembering the dead why
are you walking away from
me honey are you looking for
a curtain something to
close here this cloth was

woven in Chimalpa the
purple and green from
Carlotta's bedroom hang it
across your window honey you'll
need the color you'll look for it
when the lake laps at your bed
and here's a bag to
keep your things in if the water
gets too high

Almitra David

TU FU: MASTER TRAVELER

He kept falling into holes.
Not large holes,
not even visible to the eye cleaning wells
or the eye filling potholes,
not even to the eye drilling teeth
or the eye lifting from bacterium its nucleus;
yet his foot got stuck in these holes
and he began to pull the world
with him as he walked,
as others ran on ahead
wondering why he never kept up
with whatever they were doing.

Douglas Blazek

CHAMPAGNE

The glass is a candle-lit chandelier
Whose memory of the wind makes it undress
And undress a few lace bubbles at a time.
You come down to the pool to drink as if you were
A whole tribe approaching a water hole.
Your lips tint the autumn with twilight
Of parrot fish spitting coral and the late
Andrew Oerke is undone, swallowed soul
And body, bubbles and both, holes and all
Down the pipe of your flute to where
I wouldn't care. The candles keep on winking
Like daggers flashing in a dance, and blinking
Like the tall thin eyes of wheat at harvest
And your lips return to their facial roost
But my eyes sink like sailors through white cap tiers
Of golden tears in a sea no one could cross at all.

Andrew Oerke

A PUBLICITY PHOTOGRAPH

Butch. You are no poet, you are not
sweet Thomas Chatterton blacking out
limply at eighteen across his bed
in the chiaroscuro of his attic,
you are Butch, neighborhood bully, whose threat

'I'll beat you to a pulp' simply because
I was the neighborhood sissy almost
came true, his thumbnail inside my cheek,
his teeth clamped on my earlobe so hard
it must have been passion. You, at least,

have an easy smile and easy eyes.

But look, you have the same wire-haired terrier hair,
the same brutal brows, the same bull neck.
And why are you wearing that black leather
jacket and that black T-shirt that from where

I am standing reads ". . . lgar . . ." or ". . . dgar . . ."
in white? You are threatening me. I touch
my ear, believing your strong white teeth
made the scar there, I touch other parts
of my body, believing your hands can reach

me from where you are sitting in that white
kitchen chair, intimately. Your words
are full of subjected women who moan
as they twist around you but I believe
I could teach your body to lie still on the floorboards

or the moss-softened rocks as I lower
myself in the attitude of a cross
upon you, the fluttering white wings
of my chest beating against your chest.
I want that first real surreptitious kiss.

Roger Finch

VISITING WITH PETE

My uncallused palms get skinned raw
as we swing around for ten more rows.
Cramped together in the high cab,
we pull roller, disc harrow, seed drill.
Hundred horses couldn't work like us,
you say, slamming the gears with a smile
struggling past your cigarette.

Drilling wheat, you drill me with what
grows wrong with the way you spend days—
industry feeding on acreage,
weather bad and prices worse,
pesticide festering your lungs.

You still plow through two packs a day
because the state hates farms, lays down
highway and law. Under the same sky,
the tractor's dak dak dak accents
your shouts happy-slapping me hard
about goddamn huge potatoes, dead
groundhogs, noble dogs, Australian dreams,
the goodness of sons and rich soil.

You gamble your guts each year for what
works out to nothing and a half
per hour. Nothing I do for cash
could smell so damn pure. To puncture
the earth, plant your honest life.

I admit envy, my desk job
waiting west like a patient slug.
You nod and evenly harvest
my words, lean over to instruct me no
job's perfect, cousin, should keep it—
furrows eat more money than they grow
and the financing spooks your pants off.

Seed's leaked out behind us. Territory.
Tomorrow we'll auger soybeans
into the silo. From the road,
phonies burying tires to Atlantic
City toss at us their empty beers.
You turn wheels toward an able wife.
I celebrate a dust-streaked face
in the pickup's rearview mirror
and sing, bumping home behind your Deere
with its discs latched back like clipped wings.

Keith Moe

Brevity is difficult with four recent books by W.S. Merwin, because they merit major attention. The two volumes from North Point are profoundly different from the two from Atheneum, as though we were blessed with two Merwins—a blessing indeed.

First from North Point is *The Peacock's Egg*, love poems from ancient India translated by Merwin and Sanskrit scholar J. Moussaieff Masson (1982, 224 pp., \$8.50 paper). Masson's scholarly and graceful introduction, notes and ten-page bibliography are exemplary but do not overshadow the exquisite translations, one to a page, with Sanskrit text and annotation *en face*. The poems glow with qualities rare in English-language poetry—intimately erotic, colloquial, each a small drama. Their tender and passionate tone is a contrast with the hard-boiled, sardonic proverbs, riddles, and aphorisms of Merwin's translations in (*Asian Figures*) (Atheneum, 1977), but share their "urge to finality of utterance . . . to be irreducible and unchangeable."

Merwin's *Finding the Islands* (North Point Press, San Francisco, 1982, 88 pp., \$11. cloth, \$6. paper) appears to be the flowering of his work with Asian texts. Each poem is composed of three-line stanzas, interconnected, but each stanza with the interior life and self-containment of a haiku. The first section, "Feathers from the Hill," shares with us his intense observations of the natural environment, including the human:

Knothole looks out	Cropduster-pilot goes
through a branch	home and washes his
that has come and gone	hands his hands

I love old Knothole—a real survivor. And I love the image of that crop-duster, a sort of Lady MacBeth of the environment.

The second section, "Turning to You," is a series of love poems, in the voluptuous erotic mode of the Sanskrit translations. If they are individually less memorable than their Indian counterparts (and I'm sorry, but they are), it is because they are more discursive in their language and—being all in one voice—less dramatic. I think they could have been more concentrated, but still, taken as a whole, they are a remarkable expression of human devotion, rare in American poetry, and often delicious in detail:

we are what we waited for all the dry time
 the valley sighing
 water trickling through the grass

The second pair of Merwin books, from Atheneum, is radically different. First is *Unframed Originals* (1983, 236 pp., \$14.95 cloth, \$8.95 paper), six prose "recollections" of strong people he has known well—mostly from his childhood in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. No matter how bleak these lives may have been, Merwin's passionate engagement with them draws forth humor, tenderness, prickly individuality. The reader enters this world as one enters the world of a novel: to live a different life, more richly observed and therefore potentially more meaningful than one's own. "Over and over again," the narrator reminds us, "we are told, and then discover, that when you go back it is all smaller. But each time there appears to have been a mistake. There is nothing to measure by, and whoever might know is not there." Merwin accepts this dilemma of all autobiographical writers as one of his subjects, and although he rarely appears as a character in his own stories, he resolves the dilemma by creating a world that carries its own scale of miles, where the only measurement that matters is that of the poet's own compassionate imagination.

Opening the Hand, Merwin's latest volume of poems (Atheneum, 1983, 86 pp., \$13.95 hardbound, \$6.95 paper) is an important event in American poetry. It makes a fine companion volume to *Unframed Originals*, as the opening poem, "The Waters" illustrates:

I was the whole summer remembering
 more than I knew
 as though anything could stand still
 in the waters.

Many of these poems have a new shape on the page: long lines divided by a visible caesura, with rich but not absolutely regular alliteration, each line balanced on its pause, but with varying lengths. Merwin uses it for an astonishing variety of effects, such as urban colloquial narrative:

Right in midtown walking in broad daylight
 people around and everything
 all at once this guy steps out
 in front of him and has a gun . . .

("Happens Every Day")

and the brilliantly satiric "Questions to Tourists Stopped by a Pineapple Field." But this form is particularly appropriate to the meditative, reflective, affectionate tone of the memory poems—those memoirs, sketches, fables, and snapshots that express loss and the refusal to accept loss, silence and the refusal to sink into silence. The very symmetry of the verse music seems to work to conjure through composition the dialectic renewal. Consider these opening lines of "Son," and then, when you have your own copy, consider how the rhythm of the whole adventure is implicit in the form:

As the shadow closed on the face once my father's
 three times leaning forward far off she called
Good night in a whisper from before I was born
 later through the burial a wren went on singing . . .

In addition to these line-balanced poems, *Opening the Hand* offers many poems that once read will not be forgotten, such as the haunting "Unknown Forbear"; the glowing album of New York poems, including "The Cart," almost like a folk song; and "The Shore," a hymn to the blue whales. And this is the volume that has the reminiscence of Berryman, ending with the message:

I asked how can you ever be sure
 that what you write is really
 any good at all and he said you can't
 you can't you can never be sure
 you die without knowing
 whether anything you wrote was any good
 if you have to be sure don't write.

Looking at these last four volumes from Merwin, I am impressed at the range of forms as well as the power and scope of the insights. Merwin is growing in complex ways—as a satirist, as an environmentalist, as historian of his own roots and branches, and as a translator and transmitter of the poetic history of humankind. The poems today are much more immediately accessible than many of his earlier works and deserve an immediately enlarged readership, including much richer representation in the major anthologies. The brand-new third edition of the influential *Norton Anthology of Poetry* devotes more space to such writers as A.M. Klein, Charles Bukowski, and Leonard Cohen than to either Kinnell or Merwin. Something is wrong.

M.K.S.