

## THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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Cover: Einar Lundquist, *The Three Halfbreeds* and *Mother and Daughter*, lithographs, 1931, from the Beloit College Permanent Collection, Theodore Lyman Wright Fine Arts Center.

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### ISLAND SUNDAY

edges of paper burn blue  
in the stove of his mouth  
the boy's tongue quivers  
trying to tell *Papa I love you*  
Papa turns the paper over  
to read the other side  
Mama licks the end  
of a blue thread  
points it through her eye  
hemmed in together  
they think about snow  
bitter as salt  
and the black channels  
where men fish and die  
the boy sits by the stove  
admiring Papa's beard  
*it's good to be safe at home*  
Mama says with a deep breath  
that forms an invisible cloud  
and stops short of the man  
behind their son's head  
the daily accumulation of ice  
grows slyly on the panes

Sonya Dorman

**TWO POEMS****Heartland**

## I

## The Almond Irrigated Vegetable Area

Bull Junior Creek

Does not irrigate the Almond Irrigated Vegetable Area.

Monstrous mantis waterspreaders

Hook their feet in this deep earth and fling

Bright arcs of rain on beans.

Bull Junior Creek goes its brown untroubled way.

## II

## New Non-Fiction

*The Country Journal Woodlot Primer*

*How to Raise and Train a Doberman Pinscher*

*All About Breeding Cockatiels*

*Festive Breads of Christmas*

*Hair Techniques and Alternatives to Baldness*

*Pouring for Profit: A Guide to Bar and Beverage Management*

*The Interstate Gourmet: New England*

*The Interstate Gourmet: Mid-Atlantic States*

*The Interstate Gourmet: California and the Pacific Northwest*

*Learning Games for Threes and Fours*

*The Parents Book of Toilet Teaching*

III

The Studs on 51

The studs on 51  
Drive black RAM vans or beater pick-ups,  
Red, with plates A-1, Top Dog, Bert 39.  
They're in Country Heaven: WLUV, Loves Park, Illinois.  
At stoplights, they eyeball  
Whatever's there, and switch their tails:  
"Honk If You're Horny"; "Curl Up With a Hairdresser."  
Cuddledice swing from their mirrors.

IV

Heartland

Out here the long grass blows green and shining.  
The sky burns thunder blue.  
Where shall we find what's pure?  
Move among calm horses browsing the long grass,  
The sound of your breathing soft and fierce as owls  
Feathering down under the first stars.  
The smell of water  
Throbs in the heart like hope.

V

Simple Gifts

The secret is perfect attention  
To the task itself.  
First, close the cool third eye,  
The yellow-lidded one who stares and stores.  
Breathe deep. Now place your quiet hands  
In earth or dough,  
On shoulders or in other hands.  
Imagine wings  
In August, monarch wings on Queen Anne's lace.  
Your lazy golden hands will open.  
Now begin.

**Jellyfish**

Imagine water

Bewitched to a gell, then domed and daubed  
With cinnamon jam.

Inside are sixteen perfect points,  
An inner crown of thorns.

Four bright ribbon tentacles listlessly lift  
With each sea breath.

Shy, I touch it with a shell.

It sighs a little.

Touch again. The right edge throbs.

This thing, curled in its hard sand nest, is dying.

They sting.

Waveblown or flung by their own swimming

They wrap an arm like an electric cuff

Till you unwrap them.

This one stares, great rosy stoic eye,

At that annihilating other eye.

The hard white sun, the waves contest.

Not long.

**Judith Kotary**

SPENDING THE NIGHT NEAR MATADOR

Deep in the game preserve,  
night coming on, I sit in the car  
cursing a battery that crawled out here  
to die. Did it think to find dignity  
dying far from its kind, miles

from the nearest town, no way to call  
for help? The wind has gone away.  
I haven't heard a shot since noon.  
Thousands of mesquite trees do nothing  
but stand around pretending to be

flamingos, their single skinny trunks  
supporting the ugliest warped branches  
I expect to dream about tonight.  
All day they did nothing but scratch  
themselves, jerking about in the wind,

cackling like crones. Dove breasts  
I cleaned at the stock tank  
are bunched on ice in plastic  
like a bag of hearts.

I would cook them, but I have no  
skillet, no fire but the car lighter,  
and the battery is dead,  
I would eat them raw  
if it were dark enough and I weren't  
mad and didn't need the breasts

to buy off wolves tonight. I've done  
nothing but hunt in season. I consider  
flashing my license to the nearest tree.  
My sixteen-gauge is empty, but there's  
no need to load it, not under a moon

this full. I would try the battery  
again, but I never disturb the dead  
this time of night. The trees are closer  
than they were at dusk. Above the haze,  
the stars are perfect crystals of ice.

My windows are tight. A hawk swoops over,  
or an owl, watching for mice. After awhile,  
a scream. But like a cat. The last cougar  
I saw was in Colorado. Nothing is out there  
that shouldn't be.

Walter McDonald

#### MR. RHIZOR'S GEESE

The dogs got the geese. Enclosed in the glass house  
that night, they must have hissed and wept  
as the first dog nosed through  
the warped door — a fat fury of feathers  
and growl, and then the swift six of those dogs were  
out, unconcerned for trophies. The houseful  
lay plastered to the floor.

After the burial the next morning in the damp quiet,  
Rhizor brought a new head on his ax, and no drink,  
to the chickens. Oscar, the king gander,  
with the hard white wingspan of a swan  
and that glazed thump and automatic chase  
of women, was not with him,  
his stitch-step waggle dead-still.  
Rhizor might have cried; Oscar was his own shadow  
and Rhizor always yelled delight past his pipe  
when Oscar skimmed the clotted spring field  
to pinch the thighs of the child next door.

Rhizor was sudden; he snatched  
the first hungry brown hen  
and laid her with a flinch of light in two  
pieces on the stump, and when he set his left hand  
down, she ran, distracted, chicken little, round  
and round the mulberry stump. Rhizor was too big  
a weasel, his belly dead-heavy and tight as grain-sacks.  
He lumbered and loomed.  
The chickens went to stump and down,  
one exhaustion after another.

“Mr. Rhizor, were they bad?”  
the child said, from the gate.  
“No, were you?” said Rhizor, raising his dark ax.  
She fled, feeling the ghost of Oscar’s  
pinch and whistle, her heart wild  
with the running, not the blood.

**Kathleen Atkins**



## FOUR POEMS

## Joukahainen

(Harbor market, Helsinki)

This fur covered stall of yours  
looks like a patchwork mammoth  
sleeping on wheels.  
The stare leaping out is cautious,  
long hair falls in straight lines.  
Without a word you show me  
a card trick that evolves in your hands  
like an ancient play  
whose language has been lost.

In fur cap with ear flaps askew,  
you begin speaking German  
to sell a pair of gloves  
and switch quickly into Swedish  
for a child's pocketbook of silver fur  
that's tasseled in rawhide of red and gold.  
The sign carries a dozen languages —  
in English, you call yourself simply  
"The Reindeer Man." After the sales,  
you claim territory by telling me  
that everything worth knowing  
was hidden away by animals  
when they saw they couldn't stop  
the invention of words.

For an instant, the sun backlights  
your head as if in full eclipse,  
and coronas branch out as antlers  
that leap in quick, calcium strokes.  
From high inside the left calf  
of skin boots topped in fur,  
you pull a bone-handled knife out

into sunlight glinting steel.  
I tell you that any tool carved  
from the bones of the animal to be cut  
carries a sharpness like no other.

When winter goes all black  
in the continual night at Kultala,  
you claim to fly on unscheduled flights,  
taking raven's name behind the moon.  
You say these things are possible  
where the earth as carousel  
is pierced by the axle of the pole star  
spinning the stars as horses.  
I am invited along, if I will learn  
to dream awake and build a home  
in the hearts of animals.

We look up at a chandelier of ice  
turning slowly above us  
in lightest blue Helsinki sky.  
The different facets of our myths  
are melting before anyone else can see them.  
Fur and child, deer and home, raven  
and woman, fox and fire —  
the words of separate territories  
begin rubbing together until the sky  
catches on fire and leaps  
into our hearts, or is it only rain falling  
as cold fire raining down  
on all of us. We stare at one another,  
each locked in his own myth  
these many years turning always inward  
with blind eyes that burn for life.

Joukahainen: a Lapp magician in the *Kalevala*

Kultala: a town in northern Finland, i.e. in Lapland.

## Skálholt

1. There is brightness to the day,  
the energy of blue rides in patches  
behind shadowed clouds  
that grow and fold to the rise of air.  
A lone fisherman casts yellow streamers  
over the heads of salmon.

Skálholt, a white church trimmed in black,  
lifts a square and uncrossed steeple  
above low volcanic hills  
spined east-west on a treeless plain—  
the Icelandic flag shakes  
its red and white cross against the sky.

Long-wooled sheep are working  
unfenced acres of short brown grass  
that is sprinkled with pale yellow weeds—  
there is nothing else for miles.

2. On a low platform rising in lifted stone  
before a blue and gold altar  
harsh for all its color, two women play  
the allegro from a Bach sonata.  
One is seated with her back toward me,  
the other is angled away and swaying  
while her flute rides over and under  
the harpsichord. It is a performance  
without eyes, and as I listen in the coolness  
of the morning church, I remember  
that Islam forbids the viewing of the form of God—  
the trouble comes with the details.
3. From the entrance, your face is clear,  
splashed over the wall behind the altar,  
yet as I walk down the central aisle  
you leave me a step at a time,  
receding into bits of flesh-colored strokes  
that are crossed with a blue that intensifies

against the blank whiteness of the wall.

*I have heard of cold and dying men lost  
in the whiteout of a blizzard  
who on being rescued have remembered  
bright blue visions of returning to the sea.*

Bach spoke of writing his cantatas  
to the glory of God, but it seems  
more like trying to pull in waking  
the face of an unremembered name  
out of dream. For this, I name you  
The Great Eluder, god of middle distance.

4. I enter the underground passages  
which ran beneath the nave of an earlier church  
that went flaming into the night,  
the music and light fade, your face  
is gone, there is dampness and stone,  
the smell of earth unturned to sun.  
I wonder if you are not more of air  
and water, a god only for the living,  
and if perhaps the dead inhabit the earth  
and the stars on their own,  
howling through all time for your face  
as fire turns to dust and dust to fire  
in the relentless expansion and collapse  
of all that ever was and is yet to come.

Yet somehow the urge to dance  
suddenly runs through me and hits my feet  
now dancing over the medieval bones of scholars.  
They walked these passageways in silence  
before breaking bread at matins  
as the day broke upwards  
over glaciers east with its own stories  
begun in silence. Here, as in the dance itself,  
the greatest leaps occur when no one is watching—  
as we pass from day to night,  
we dance best who dance alone  
and dance in the dazzle of unknown light.

### Agnus Dei

1. Codfish on ice, strawberries, turnips  
and blueberries graced your doorstep  
alongside the ordinary milk.  
This was often the only cash known  
to your Cape Verdean clients tangled  
in the language of this alien law.

When you remarried at seventy,  
they tied cans along your bumper  
with tarred net twine, and painted  
the shiny black of that forty-nine Chevy  
with the awkward signs of another love.  
Revved up, you headed north  
toward the mountains, your clutch half out.

In later years, shuffling easily  
along Main Street to your office,  
you still lifted your hat to all women  
as you held on to the brim  
of another century. The humblest  
of men, your only claim in life  
was that you would die  
in your study with your shoes on.

2. The death rattle gathers low  
to the ground, like any gourd,  
but in unlikely ascent falls uphill  
in a small avalanche of sound  
that rushes past the throat  
on the gust of the final breath.

The sepia owls, long faded,  
that had lined your walls for decades  
flew from picture to picture  
on silent, hunting wings,  
and the compacted fur and bones  
of a long life fell from their yellow beaks.

My lamb, my lamb, she cried,  
apologized and cried again my lamb  
as I fingered your quiet wrist  
through the starched French cuff  
that opened behind a silver link.  
You left no will — you practiced  
your brand of law for sixty-two years  
and never found the time.

Before the two black cars arrived,  
I went back into your study  
and polished your shoes, now loose  
around the gathered flesh of death.

967 A.D.

(Reykjavic, Iceland)

All it did was rain that year  
through the whole half moon  
spent in the camps at Þíngvellir.  
The smell of damp wool and fur  
covered the time of parliament  
with an animal fog  
that carried too deeply into the brain.

I will see your naked body  
with its small touch of light fur  
through all the years of the sea.  
You should not have asked that of me,  
even though your husband  
was my friend and long drowned  
hunting the narwhal in spring ice.

Now, his sons and my son  
are brothers, and it is not good  
that mine has taken your daughter  
on the moss beneath the solstice moon.  
I fear the strange blood may come  
and flow freely in our children's children,  
draining their faces into cold snow.

Ted Bontinen

## RAGTIME SOLO

At the boat house on The Bronx River  
near West Farms subway station  
a man sits on the bench reading Friedrich Engels.  
He is told love comes from the heart  
but he's not sure; his own's crowded  
from shrinking into cramped love affairs  
and doomed by a sense of failure.

He takes off his straw hat, scratches his head  
and thinks about a Valentine box of candy for my mother.  
He wants a large one for he is a small man  
and knows, although he has never admitted it before,  
that he must offer her a real way  
out of her father's house with dignity.  
And he'd love to imagine being the man to do it.

The man in The Bronx hears a ragtime solo  
inside the boathouse. It reminds him that she  
plays left-hand duets on the piano. In fact,  
she's a left-hand duet player and he knows only  
a little right-hand music.

So it's one of those risks a young man takes  
when he's sitting by the river  
and his hand stretches as if to span  
an octave he knows he cannot play.



## LITTORAL

The tidemark of clothes  
and a teasing breeze,  
a zephyr which burns  
pate, shank and shoulder.  
Sun's silly-ass grin  
has everyone stripped;  
rites of surf and sand.  
Kites ripple, rattle.  
Offshore the thud, bounce  
of a blue speed-boat.

Observe this woman  
prising pliant breasts  
into a swimsuit;  
another's flop free  
with an almost gasp.  
That man's past caring;  
his pear-drop paunch lolls  
over pink-striped pants.  
Far down the fried strand  
toddlers a-wobble.

Grain by grain the dunes  
are trickling inland,  
countless voortrekkers  
heading for golf links,  
margins of salt pools.  
Dusk: a mustering  
of stumps and sogged dogs.  
Litter-lout sea drops  
carapaces, kelp,  
bones, condoms, dead shags.

## THE LIFESAVER

for Gail

Easy in the kitchen, you stirred spaghetti sauce  
and talked, thoughts as quick on your tongue  
as the ouch! when you touched the skillet.

You told of the incident at the pool:  
how someone screamed your name and you moved  
like a reflex. Listening, I saw your long brown body take  
the pool in a fast crawl, plunge to the bottom  
where nothing moved but the child's hair.  
I saw two bodies rise — one limp, the other  
sure and fast. I watched you roll her over,  
belly down, straddle the still back and push,  
wait for one choked breath, a gush of water  
from the lungs. I saw you hug her, scolding  
like a mother, then turn to joke with the silent crowd  
who half expected you'd step surefooted as Jesus  
across the water.

You poured my wine and set the table—  
long dark hair swaying on the seat of your shorts,  
lanky legs as competent here as in the water.  
Oh, daughter-in-law, how lucky my son is,  
married to someone who gets to the bottom fast  
and brings things back to life.

Sherry Solomon

## CREPÚSCULO

Always at this sated color time,  
In every slack twilight,  
The Indian lays cactus bones to burning.  
The dog claws his yellow eye  
Over the naked brambles to the sea  
And dies as a day.  
Indian smoke like a dry snakeskin  
Winds through the ancient forest,  
Renewing incense  
From his ancestral cup of fire.

Dog-eye yellows darken to red gold,  
Nothing changes except the absence of sunglare.  
Enclosing ridges melt benignly,  
Passive as sleeping women.  
A bat twists loose like ash from fire.  
The owl floats across to his stand.  
Snake silently seeks rat heat,  
And ravens go black into darkness.  
Like lace over the round window,  
Stars ripple. The cardon's uplifted  
Arms implore now, lost in shadows,  
Confused in the turn of stars.

Each night invisible smoke of the Indian  
Seeps from the cup of his hands,  
Dried herbs' remembrance, raven skull,  
Rat tooth, coyote brush, footprints,  
A scent of volcanoes,  
The boiling dry of seas,  
Touching bones of Indians  
And their children  
Curved inside the sleeping women.

## FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS

The watchers wade and wait in the water,  
half hidden in rushes and cattails,  
binoculars aimed at the sky  
which is, for the untrained,  
a lidless blue, blank and unoccupied.

Bird at 1 o'clock  
they cry, as a mote appears,  
a speck of brown.  
Could it be a crested dowager?  
                                an olivaceous private?  
                                a hooded academic?

No, it's a northern snitch—  
                                see the buff rump,  
                                the dark moustache,  
                                the spectacles.

We who have no field marks,  
who lose flight patterns  
in our scopes,  
who haven't learned the breeding range,  
stand dumb in the mud,  
no checks on our life lists,  
tone deaf to the twitters around us,  
the ethereal flutelike tones  
of farthingale,  
                martinet,  
                quark.

**TWO POEMS****Two Men Can't Run A Town This Small**

One of those small-town nobody-right quarrels  
finally flared up: dust  
and a few sharp moves. It seems like no town  
is so small that there aren't two sides to a line  
and finally a line, a meeting, a time.  
That night you could almost hear someone say,  
"Pit your birds": everybody tense,  
hunkered down, waiting for what's over  
in a flash, all but the crowing.

The loser's waving traffic around the culvert job  
on Ox Cove: no spit, no polish, no badge, no gun,  
just a guy in overalls, with Steve on the backhoe  
yelling, "Okay Chief, move 'em through."  
I watch the dust settle in my mirror.  
It's tough, the last line is the bottom line,  
a subtle bond on us all;  
there's no place to hide your bloody feathers  
in a town this small.

### On Gaining A Name For Wisdom

Accumulate scars. Attend to the message of the lower back,  
the ankle, the sciatic nerve.

Observe the ducks, rafted up at the head of the tide  
or in the shelter of the islands. Seabirds,  
on fine days, fly out early and far; rise  
with the sun. This is only the beginning: see

Is the moon waxing, is it tipped and spilling  
water, has it a ring? Are the cows lying down?  
When did the hens go to roost? Do the robins sing rain?  
Know how to say:

"The last time the milk soured in May was in '33;  
that was the year the beans shriveled; we had hail in July  
that year, big as a duck egg, lightning too, it was that  
killed old Spot and her calf under the maple." Above all:

Take this seriously. Be not exuberant or partial  
or hasty. Be modest but proud. Speak of your elders  
with respect; remember how when you were very small  
they showed you the leaves turned up in the wind,  
and the stars falling, and the red moon. Never say  
*isobar*; hold your finger in the wind and say, thoughtfully,  
"yes, yes, it might be a good day to mow."

Nancy L. Nielsen

## STOCK

For years we have hacked the heads off fish,  
swept them into barrels of salt or ice,  
emptied them out again onto wooden troughs,  
crushed them to a slurry of lips and eyes  
and plowed them under New England.

So that here in the rain, on a path through Gilson's Field,  
an eye staring up at me just ahead of the toe  
of my boot should seem almost plausible,  
historical, risen out of the centuries of heads  
ground down through the soil into the stone.

My mother's mother preparing the Sabbath fish  
dug out the eyes like rock candy  
and popped them in her mouth, sucking  
as she stood over the range stirring the broth,  
cutting the carrots in as I watched

for the eyes to appear when she spoke,  
tucked in the folds of her cheeks,  
lolling on the sides of her tongue,  
caught between her lips and her gums.  
I watched for hours, patient as a lipreader,

so that now in the rain I look for the other  
eye, also regenerate, for there were always two  
in her mouth, crossing and recrossing,  
silent Ben Turpins agog and chasing  
after each other every weekend afternoon.

My mother shouted and plucked them out  
when I tried for the same effect, two marbles  
clicking in my mouth, two small cat's eyes,  
lime-green ribbons twisted inside the glass,  
bobbing smooth and tasteless on my tongue.

But I could not stomach the eyes themselves  
circling like pike beneath my palate,  
slippery as aspic, tasting of medicine,  
and I would always spit them out  
seconds later as my mother's mother laughed.

So they must have returned for me,  
the two eyes, and I dig for the one still hidden,  
scooping into the mud as if I were planting rice  
or washing on the banks of a sacred river  
or gathering clay for a deathmask.

There is only one. The other has not washed up  
or has already washed away. I am too late  
or too early. The one in my hand glistens  
even in the October rain, and I lick at it,  
the tip of my tongue over the slick eye,

an improbable suspicion of oil, a hint of salt.  
Now watch, she would say, coming close,  
and my mother's mother would swallow the eyes,  
two invisible confections sliding down her throat,  
something, still, entirely alone —

no child watching from a kitchen stool,  
no fishheads, sockets hollow, turning  
transparent in the huge stockpot,  
no fish broiling under the hot white oven —  
something, still, for the life of me, I cannot do.



**CALLING-PEOPLE**

The president is walking in his sleep.  
At the ends of his arms  
air-flicking fingers thrum  
dreaming of turning on a light.  
Sleep, surrounded by switches  
is iridescent in the Dark House.  
His sleepy hand fumbles and reaches,  
cheerful. Numb. Near.

The rest of us in variegated costumes  
wearing shoes with holes  
cluster in the streets,  
calling-people stepped into the darkness  
from the ordinary houses  
where we dunk our lives  
and leave our sleepy babies  
with the future pulled up like a quilt.

We wake into the night  
with our arms around  
a sentence:  
'I am in a strange place  
(that is to say, the World)  
longing for home.'  
while quietly  
on the relentless soles of his slippers  
the president is walking in our sleep.

Alice Ryerson

**OLD MOTHER OF MOTHERS**

Old mother of mothers of mothers of more  
Old being what never before has been  
Old jet your way whitely too far to hear

Old pale as you turn old dumpling of hair  
Old wobbler over a salt flat land  
Old mother of mothers of mothers of more

Old touring the walker old shawl old stare  
Push your way shopping up aisles of lawn  
Old jet your way whitely too far to hear

Old light in the den whatever the hour  
Old name the children's children's children  
Name mother of mothers of mothers of more

Old goer old doer old chin how far  
Then rest old dizzy like wash in a wind  
Old jet your way whitely too far to hear

Old go your way bravely old hand on the door  
Old speller in stove-dust pollen and down  
Old mother of mothers of mothers of more  
Old jet your way whitely too high to hear

## TWO POEMS

**Irma**

Transformed from Good  
Fairy, round and amiable  
small and bready  
by your arrogance

as a goy daring pluck away her son  
daring invite her to the ceremony  
non-ceremony to that end performed  
by a Congregational ex-military  
chaplain who sermonized on  
—of all things— the American Gentile  
Community of Jesus Christ, Irma was not  
about to love you or forgive. Her smile

held in its intact reserve  
a vengeance to wreak: she'd simply not  
reveal to your inane, to your young  
impertinence the smallest part  
of son Alex's odyssey in-and-out  
on-and-off psych wards up-and-down  
his native Israel of the West  
where he was known as schizoid prince.

Well, things come  
to their crux at last  
as you artfully  
remove his virginity

Had Irma hoped you'd do that well which she  
was least fitted to do for him herself?  
But not even that warm, long-drawn  
second circumcision between the sheets  
favored either lover with a cure  
What you had then was . . . Here, he stalks  
Here, fitted out with new weaponry, he slays  
(so this is what the other boys had meant,

so these were the penile victories  
he'd hidden from so long in Irma's skirts!)

Here, he ravages Boston's Back Bay,  
his semen surge bringing seizures on  
that rivaled his own recorded worst,  
and by a bare inch your own life escapes  
but not your heart intact, nor your womb  
Gravid, you watch his Exodus

You, the failed  
therapist, display  
meat in your belly  
stripes on your back

## Newscast

... THE ARAB BOY                      streams blood, drops in the  
political

mêlée to his martyrdom

on the stone and tile mosque floor. His blood  
runs Palestine. Mohammed lives in him. His father's  
eyes brim, his mother cracks her waterjar,  
and the doe-faced sisters of the boy

see and believe

his naughty warrior soul ascend to

—God is One

... AWASH OFF FLORIDA                amaze in the  
exclusive

breakers, the Haitian baby  
swings in the exchange of high and low, her black skin  
gray with Death-is-cold: an old rag, hand-  
towel, diaper picked new by the nondescript  
sea-bass, shrimp, jellyfish:

seabirds peck

livid her blank stare, no new worlds to win

—immigrant

... DESPAIR OF THE                      Welfare, the  
six children in five years,  
she takes the bent

unbent, bent coathanger to herself, and inserts  
 it, and breaks the uterus. Blood like hers  
 from the pulp, the warmed layered cavity,  
 spills over the gray Goodwill

cover onto the  
 stained mattress ticking—babies' wail—is  
 a truth serum

. . . FROM JESUS' SIDE

—is sharp pain in those  
 three hours,

and in the world tonight  
 where an inept Mongoloid moon shines gibbous,  
 tapes ticker, change is rung, kissing mouths kiss,  
 hillsides shift in the excess of Spring,  
 floods start, birds nest,

the roulette  
 wheels of the cathedral rose-windows world-wide  
 spin.

Virginia de Araújo

**THE HOLY MEN OF LOVELADIES**

By midnight the pier is filled with them  
bumming beer and chowder,  
evangelizing. They sit at the heading  
tables, pinching the heads off shrimp  
with hands brown and gnarled as ginger root;  
then eat them raw in the spume and drizzle  
while hard clouds clog the sky like gargoyles.  
Inside, we watch them with that rare  
curiosity reserved for saints and lunatics.  
They have given us the folly of this port.  
If one of them should get tangled  
in the surf lines and drown  
while exhorting the tide—as one missing  
a leg did only yesterday—then  
there would be neither misery nor  
obituary in the port of Loveladies.  
He would simply be found flopping in the breakers  
like the wall-eyed, half-dead mackerels we  
watch the true fishermen drag across the pier,  
leaving the blood to the boards.  
Tonight as grey sick moon  
augurs blue typhoon and the pale

green tide melts further into ocean,  
these prophets spread their fevered word  
in lifted dirge to tear the clouds from the sky.  
But it is sky which descends in a rage of liquid  
wind and boulders.

In the morning, we see them  
scattered among other beach detritus.  
As we make our way through them,  
they do not wake, but burrow  
deeper into their blankets of newsprint;  
their eyes,  
within which is sealed death's limelight,  
unreasonably opaque.

Joseph Bathanti



## FREUD IN THE WOODS

Putnam's Camp, New York, 1908

In full daylight  
he looked like a small-town jeweler  
who'd taken a wrong turn.  
He'd sailed west wanting to change minds  
and to see a porcupine.  
The food was so wretched  
he fasted one day in three,  
and the Falls everyone shouted about  
were crowded with gawking newlyweds  
who thought him a very old man.

Now, briefly, the mountains:  
"Ah, Sophie," he wrote home,  
"air almost like the Alps."  
That little could he find to cheer him.  
The cabins all had foolish names.  
His was Chatterbox, but he even let  
Jung win the arguments.  
At night, at least,  
standing in his own smoke,  
he saw stars just as at home,  
old friends not afraid of cities.

The one porcupine he found  
they could smell half a mile off,  
rotten, slick-backed. He strode up  
and investigated with his walking-stick,  
scattering quills at a touch.  
"Dead," he diagnosed, in his best English;  
and with it what promise there was  
in this shapeless country so proud  
of having no reminiscence to suffer.

They turned back to camp.  
Next morning he was the first packed,  
eager for the voyage to a home  
waiting like an overstuffed chair  
in a room crowded with things and memories,  
and so many books twenty years from burning.

John Hildebidle

#### BOOKS IN BRIEF

On New Years Eve a poet in the party asked me suddenly what I thought the strongest books of poetry had been in the past year or two. I am attempting an answer in this group of reviews.

Queen of the volumes not yet reviewed here is *The Complete Poems: 1927-1979* of **Elizabeth Bishop** (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1983, 288 pp., \$17.50 cloth). This is a true "desert island" volume, one I'd always want to have nearby. In addition to the poems in the 1969 "complete" edition, we now have fifty previously unpublished or uncollected poems, including translations, juvenilia, six new to us from various periods, and crowning them all the four beauties that appeared in 1979 right after her death. Many a reader will recall being still numb with loss at the news of her death and opening the *New Yorker* to the shock of delight at discovering her "Sonnet," ending:

Freed — the broken  
thermometer's mercury  
running away;  
and the rainbow-bird  
from the narrow bevel  
of the empty mirror,  
flying wherever  
it feels like — gay!

Another volume I would not be without is **A.R. Ammons' *Lake Effect Country*** (Norton, 1983, 60 pp., \$5.95 paper). Regular readers of my reviews won't be surprised; they will know I have long held him to be one of the most powerful living poets. A colleague at Beloit College brilliantly selected his "Mansion" to be read at the memorial service for David Stocking in November, and dozens of Dave's students have written to say how indebted they are to him for introducing them to Ammons. These recent poems have the same qualities of humor (as the affectionate mocking of the ego in "Retiring"), of unsentimental accuracy of observation (in "Buttermilk Falls" and "Nature Poetry"), of Emersonian wit and wisdom (see "Apologetics"), and of metaphysical conjecture (in a really major poem, the gorgeously orchestrated "Singing and Doubling Together"). There are several understated and profoundly moving poems on death: on the death of another ("Helping Hand"), on one's own mortality ("Laces"), and on the response of the survivor, in the whimsically-titled "Songlet":

Death, unduly undoing,  
kisses us awake into  
the new world and leaves

us pre-empted and unsteady:  
oh, here we go, we say,  
another adjustment as usual:

light appears to be the leader  
here: we turn to where  
a beam forms and set out

Among the major publications of the last year or so is **Richard Hugo's *Making Certain It Goes On*** (Norton, 1984, 456 pp., \$25. cloth). I recall Hugo just a few years ago, meditating that after all those years of bitching about the Goddamn Eastern Literary Establishment, he had suddenly realized that as the editor of the Yale Younger Poets, he was a member of the GELE. He moved his beer glass an inch to the left and chuckled incredulously. Rereading this huge embracing volume reinforces the impression that Hugo was never any more Establishment (let alone Eastern) than Whitman. Although he always

focused on the local habitation and name, from the very first he saw the leaky flowers, the "wilting whips" of kelp, the Skykomish and Kapowsin in their global perspective. He was and remains a brother to poets everywhere and an ambient joy to readers of poetry.

I asked the poet who raised the question of strong publication what his nominee would be. He suggested **Stephen Dobyns'** *Black Dog, Red Dog* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984, 84 pp., \$7.95 paper). The poem I immediately recalled was "Dancing in Vacationland," a pounding, funny, ironic poem, a poem that takes off, like many of Dobyns' poems, from a dry journalistic base, and soars in a sweeping arc into the purest metaphor. Without intruding an "I" or "you," without underlining his satiric message, without abandoning his literal vision, he transforms his dancing dock workers and chicken processors through a charge of creative energy. (Perhaps it isn't a coincidence that this volume, like Carolyn Chute's *The Beans of Egypt Maine*, is dedicated to Ken Rosen.) All the poems in this excellent volume have an appealing narrative line — for example, the chilling and evocative "Night Swimmer." But many of the poems, however arresting each by each, tend to replicate rather than enhance one another's impact. The openly journalistic poems at the end may possibly have been written earliest, since they suggest a writer working hard to transform the raw material of the reporter's assignments by systematically asking questions that force the writer and his reader to exercise their imaginations, to move through discipline to empathy: "When this man was growing up, what plans/did his father have for him?" This questioning recurs throughout the volume, sometimes introspectively: "Where was the hawk in his own life? Why can't he/heave from himself this blanket of self-complaint?" In each separate poem, the devices, the images, the language work together beautifully; collectively they suggest a formula. I'd like to conjecture that the powerful early poems in this book (e.g., "The Gun," "Dancing in Vacationland," "General Matthei Drives Home Through Santiago") are the most recently written and that Dobyns' next poems will be less self-absorbed, more spontaneously imaginative — like the best in this collection.

M.K.S.