

# THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

Volume 36 — Number 4

Summer 1986

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## CONTENTS

1. Barry Wallenstein *At Ground Zero*
2. Tom Hansen *Accept Whatever Words Come*
3. *Chopping Down the Bodbi Tree*
4. Thomas Reiter *Piney*
6. Curtis Derrick *The Palm Reading*  
*Eugene Smith, bluecollar mute*
7. *Surrendering Arcady*
8. Kathleen Spivack *Chicken Dinner*
11. Rennie McQuilkin *Cecropia*
12. *Burial*
14. Theodore Deppe *Altenbrücken*
15. Fleda Brown Jackson *Rabbits*
16. Robyn Supraner *A Time To Live*
17. *Vermont Frieze*
18. Richard Chess *What To Say When You're  
Depressed*
19. Ann Douglas *Without Distinction*
20. A. McA. Miller *Foreclosed, It's*
22. Lola Haskins *Over the Dark Fishes*
30. Anthony Sobin *Drunk in a Boat*
31. *Ode*
32. Joanne M. Riley *Farmwife Describes the Accident*
34. Alice Ryerson *Jester*
36. Diane Fahey *Lullaby*
37. Gary Fincke *The Merge Arrow*
39. *Books in Brief*

Cover: Robert Shetterly, Jr. *Shrimp*

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### AT GROUND ZERO

Far outside the warren  
where rabbits cuddle around their paws  
and a myriad of insects tick and intuit  
the chemical change,  
a rumbling crash comes down:  
A tower falls, from old age  
earthquake or detonation?  
Some terrible spreading timbre  
no one knows.

Inside, where they breathe  
close to the animals  
hear the tiniest sweetest coos and sighs  
and the hard rubbings of fur.  
But step back from the creatures  
and your antique mouth  
is dropped by the booms  
constant and nearing  
old age falling down  
hearts stopped  
by the giant flares  
coming at last to the heart  
to the snug places  
where even toward the final hour  
fresh droppings flavor the soil.

Barry Wallenstein

## TWO POEMS

## Accepting Whatever Words Come

One should lower his standards until there is no felt  
threshold to go over in writing. It's *easy* to write.

— William Stafford

This is the first line. It offers itself.  
Take it. Go where it leads.  
That was the second. And now here we are  
(And there we were) in the third—  
Which by now is the fifth.  
Forget the fourth. It's already the sixth,  
Dying into the seventh.  
Word upon line upon stanza, it grows:  
A glib little likable babble.

Next comes white space—  
The stuff that keeps stanzas apart.  
It wants you to listen. . . .  
*Something above is over and something*  
*Is waiting below to begin*  
*And together the two dream a poem.*  
*It can't wake up, and sleepwalks in circles,*  
*So lost in this forest of words*  
*It can't find its voice.*

That was the second stanza  
Supposing what white space might say.  
And so, in its turn,  
This third stanza supposes it knows  
What the second one thinks.  
Meanwhile above: a new white space blooms.  
Below: a great silence yawns.  
Words die into it. Then there is nothing. . . .  
Then something begins to be born.

### Chopping Down The Bodhi Tree

See the little Buddha sitting  
Underneath the Bodhi tree—  
Never moving, never speaking,  
Still as still as still can be.

Still, there's room enough for two.  
Walk on over. Take a seat.  
Maybe you can find out something  
Sitting at the Buddha's feet.

Never moving, never speaking  
You're a little Buddha, too.  
Still as stone, you hear them coming:  
Thoughts you never knew you knew.

Little stone, you sit there sweating,  
Half-baked in the summer sun.  
Drop by drop, you shed your body:  
Going, going, going—gone.

Now we see you. Now we don't.  
You don't seem to be all there.  
Little Buddha stone is learning  
Something lighter than the air.

Listen, little Bodhi sitter,  
When you reach that yonder shore,  
Will you laugh as you discover  
It's a place you've been before?

Then you'll find your journey's over  
Sooner than you could have guessed.  
You'll come back to where you started,  
Then find out you never left.

No one ever used that ticket.  
No one took that ferry boat.  
Words of thanks you give the captain  
Seem to rise from no one's throat.

No one has come home from nowhere.  
No one plans to stay for good.  
No one seems to be the same  
As people say that no one should.

No one smiles and washes dishes,  
Slops the hogs, and shovels shit.  
No one finally knows the news:  
That this right here, right now is it.

Tom Hansen

## PINEY

One day towing a fishing shanty  
from lake to lake across a bewilderment  
of rivers and marshes in the Barrens,  
you find him. He knows you first  
by your Ski-Doo, then  
by your license pinned like a security pass.

He got here by forcing a foot route  
through scrub pine and pepperbush.  
He's running traplines and crossbow fishing  
always now on posted land—  
Why else would anyone be  
a tenth-generation Piney?

Spring to fall he works wild cranberry bogs,  
and when he climbs into waders  
to steer a thresher like a garden tiller  
bobbing on pontoons, you'd want to be him  
just to make that water blaze  
and vacuum it black again.

Ask the way back and he'll tell you  
where the last narrow gauge  
of the old Pine Barrens Railroad lies  
that hauled bog iron for Union shot,  
or the site of ponds so rich in tannic acid  
any one might stare you down  
with the face of the Jersey Devil, that  
13th child of a 13th child,  
drowned at birth.

Right now you're merely  
someplace between Speedwell and Tabernacle  
where springs and currents keep the ice  
thin enough for arrows.  
He cocks the crossbow and releases line  
spooled at his waist. He knows how any April  
the crosshairs of surveyors  
could sprout from landfill,  
and how midges could be sawdust dancing on a plank  
as a rip saw passes through it.

**Thomas Reiter**

**THREE POEMS****The Palm Reading**

Hold near, gypsy lover, the palpable  
cosmology of me and read. Read  
what Fortune veils in my killing hand. Trace  
with warm, pale finger where star-paths etch  
their hazardous mobilities of life,  
prosperity, and love. Then fold my marks  
and vanish them in yours, like crude roads  
made voluptuous with snow. Our blizzard's warmth  
enduring for its season. Then on leaving,  
tell me: What more than snow-of-my-Self-falling  
can fill this wayside emptied of our light?  
What more can I unfill, then fill again  
with ground bone and the heart's soft pith  
to last alone in the moon's cold hands?

**Eugene Smith, bluecollar mute**

I am the son of Acetylene  
begotten by some ovum sparked  
by cool-blue heat  
a body made to lust  
for speech, and so  
I come to public readings to measure  
my voice, to steal a listen  
like fruit from a banquet.  
For one must be about conversing  
know the sweet festivity of words  
immune from the body  
and so I come like a blindman  
to a crowded dance  
to sense their presences

feel them tap against me  
stir their fellows trapped  
as in a mine disaster, doomed  
to smother beneath my hissing.

### Surrendering Arcady

Dangling from the web of wisteria  
the boy cries out  
caught in the ligaments of his father's dreams.  
Go higher, the man shouts.  
I'm scared, says his son.

Homesteaders cut boughs with saws  
make a hollow among the branches  
throw up bright hammocks, rope ladders,  
and swings for their children  
who soar complacent in a veil of sweat  
content with imitating angels, pumping  
further into the vault of leaf and limb.  
Careful, Gabriel, a mother warns,  
Not too high.

Three girls probe a robin's nest  
touch the speckled smoothness of eggs  
feel the oval's fair enchantment  
call their brothers and make them thieves.

Nearby, a couple prepares to leap  
for a different tree. It is a man  
with another man's wife. Swaying  
single file to their jumping place,  
knowing in love's complicity  
the color of volition is thin as air  
the fittest medium for falling through.  
Singularly, they crouch and spring.

Above, the canopy of trees taps rain.  
Runoff dapples like the rumor of a flood.



**CHICKEN DINNER**

After supper  
her guest  
sits close to the  
round brown body  
of the woman, hands  
strumming the kitchen  
table. He is sucking  
his teeth. Her children  
sleep in their beds  
upstairs. He pretends also  
to need to sleep:  
out of his glinting  
half-closures, eyes,  
he watches her  
for motherly reactions.

"You have a beautiful  
body," he says, "so round,  
just shaped for the  
mouth." But she sits  
at the table, still  
solid: she does not say anything  
yet. "Ooh," he continues,  
"how I would like  
to take you in my mouth.  
I can taste you now."  
A muscle is twitching  
in his jaw. On their bare plates

the chicken bones  
like folded thighs of crickets  
fiddle with each other.  
There is not even  
a chunk of potato left  
stuck to the rim  
for decency's sake.

But she is too tired  
to push away her chair  
and clear up. So they sit  
by the arroyo of *having eaten*.  
"It was a lovely  
dinner," he says.  
He sucks his cheek in  
and out. The bones  
on the plates  
speak quietly  
like guitar strings:  
while the man tries to sing  
the woman's  
heavy body  
into a stand-up,  
leave-the-table mood.

Once on her bed  
he goes for her nipples  
first off, taking them  
in his teeth but playing,  
not clamping down hard.  
She spreads herself out  
as on a plate, she  
who would give him anything,  
while her flesh,  
its ripe brown softness,  
creeps delicately  
away from his mouth.

She remembers her children  
as babies, sucking and sweating,  
fastened on breasts.  
How when their new gums sharpened,  
testing their first blue-white  
teeth, she cried "No! That hurts!"  
to them, quickly  
moving away, inadvertent,  
startling them out of their  
milk-dream. It was then  
in their eyes she saw for the first  
time *Intelligence*: that is,  
they understood "No"  
but were bent on their biting  
anyway.

How irritated she has become  
with everyone, setting herself  
like a table for others.  
"You taste good," the man moans.  
Already he seems impatient.  
He licks the appetizers  
from her body, the sherbet,  
his jaw muscles clenched.  
He presses his mouth upon her  
in the other parts.  
He is rooting and searching  
for something more.

She puts thin  
protective hands  
in front of her body  
like chicken bones; her breasts,  
baked potatoes, her nipples.  
She wants to take  
this plate of herself  
and dump it in the sink.  
His teeth  
are starting to grind.

She is afraid of offending  
him, arching her back.  
For it is an honor  
to be picked clean.  
And now her own carcass  
starts thrumming:  
a high clear tension-like whine.  
“I don’t like noise  
while I’m eating,” he says,  
“You’re making me nervous.  
Lie still.”

Kathleen Spivack

## TWO POEMS

### Cecropia

Now don’t get me wrong—it wasn’t butterflies  
I went for,  
those daytime flirts,  
but moths, the shy ones furred and thick froned,  
pale green, lavender, umber and rose-mottled giants  
with the thumb prints of God on their wings,  
Polyphemus, Cecropia, Promethea, Luna, Io...

Molasses was a trick to make them stay  
I tried one night, painted on a grove of pines—  
it was something to do  
besides the wedding of the girl across the street.  
Well, nothing came of it.  
And there, beyond the trees  
the bride moon-white, bridesmaids pale green, dancing  
in the blue and silver night.

That was when I was twelve. By fifteen  
I was professional, let the silksack of a Cecropia  
cool among the rutabaga and potatoes.  
All winter I waited for May, the cocoon growing firm  
as my own birth day approached.

Also waiting  
was the Ford Victoria, two-tone tan, cow-horned:

When the day came, you can imagine the rubber  
I burned, The Yellow Rose of Texas blooming vastly  
from the speakers  
and the hundred or more I did on N.Y. 96  
and Ruth Waymoth hair spanking cheerleading  
drumming our song on the roof  
and when we took Elmwood on two wheels Ruth  
half out the window both arms in the air in a vee  
and her fingers vees and the plunge of her two-piece  
oh lord.

When I pulled in, late,  
the Cecropia was out  
and with a sound like the rustle of underthings,  
half eaten by ants.

They blackened the new tan fur,  
the sockets where eyes had looked for some way  
out of this, the pink and umber wings, too wet to fly,  
the thumbprints—what little was left of them.

### **Burial**

A boy is in the field, digging,  
whose father has been stunned  
by the sledge of time  
and doesn't know enough to drop  
or try again.

A boy is in the field, digging  
a hole which is perfectly square,  
whose father gets nothing straight,  
not his swayback barn, his bending  
past, his pretty wife.

A boy is in the field, digging  
a hole which is perfectly square,  
knowing all,  
whose father will never know  
whose mother it was  
skirt up in the mow with Ben Stone.

A boy is in the field, digging  
a hole which is perfectly square,  
knowing all  
he can do is build these walls  
as straight as squinting eyes allow,  
whose father left Abraham out  
in a two-day rain  
to bloat himself on half-ripe oats,  
couldn't find the slugs  
to shoot the horse  
and had to use a maul.

A boy is in the field, digging  
a hole which is perfectly square,  
knowing all  
he can do is build these walls  
as straight as squinting eyes allow  
and high enough  
for more than a stiff-legged horse,  
whose father once carried him high  
as the Morgan,  
whose mother once swung him flat out  
in the dangerous air,  
and said she'd never let go, ever.

## ALTENBRÜCKEN

In the bookstalls along the river  
I find the girl of my dreams selling  
old gravestones stacked in wood bins,  
white marble inscribed in Gothic script  
and smooth slate markers, the names  
forgotten. I sort them out, my grandparents  
and great-grandparents, and count  
the generations, one stone upon the next.  
Taking my hands she teaches me to deal  
the stones like Tarot cards, shows me  
how they point towards dusk.

That night I dance with her  
outside the Hotel Holderlin beneath  
chestnut trees and Chinese lanterns.  
We waltz among gaily dressed couples  
who draw no breath—sometimes  
they stop to stare at me, wondering  
that the living come so close.  
Later, beneath the old bridge, she  
offers me the mist rising as the river  
breathes. I learn that she died  
in the camps and has waited long years

for love. Passing through her lips  
I find myself in a small room playing violin  
for those who have ears, bringing them  
gifts from the dead. For those who weep:  
spirited dances. For those who laugh:  
Trauermusik, so in the strain of the bow  
they hear their passing. I shape the notes  
this woman gives me, here in her bed  
with the river set above us like a canopy.  
For a thousand years I'll be this music:  
sound of water passing over stone.

## RABBITS

Saturdays, he drove in from his partly burned-out trailer west of Clifty. I caught the memory of fire in his hair and shirt, and the faint animality, which I later knew as rabbits.

He was learning to waste nothing of what God gave him, eating even the cores of the small, bitter apples he gathered in the fields. He hauled water from the creek in gallon pickle jars.

His wife couldn't wait for his promise of better, since he seemed content with his rabbits and Revised Standard Version. Often, he said, she would call him gently to bed but he stayed by the lamp, praying against lust.

Maybe she left because of that, he said.

*Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward.*

He came back in his truck from buying rabbit feed to find her gone with her clothes and the radio.

The people at church tried to fix him up with various Christian women, but when he brought his father, the retired preacher, to meet each one, the cold light of God's will stopped them in their tracks. Before I met his father, we had one long afternoon hiking the fields. Two donkeys ate grass from our hands. From the rises, we could see ten miles across the Ozarks with the mist lowering against the summer trees. Moved by this, he kissed me over and over with a kind of fluttering regularity. Then we went back to the rabbits hunkering in their cages. He sacrificed one with a quick blade and skinned it like undressing a baby. He wrapped it in a brown bag and gave it to me, its forlorn life already soaking the paper. I kept its terrible body in my freezer like a stone. It was six months before I threw it out.

Fleda Brown Jackson



## TWO POEMS

## A Time To Live

*Barbara Cantor: 1932-1941*

*Capt. Arthur Rubenstein: 1928-1955*

Green is not  
in the dying sound  
in the rotten wound  
in the neutral ground  
which takes  
its just exchange.

Green is not  
in the gutted thigh  
where the pike shot through  
and the fence too high  
and a gate  
swings off its hinge.

Green is not  
where the aircraft keens  
and a breastbone groans  
into smithereens  
and valor  
picks the crumbs.

Green is not  
where the darkness seeps  
where the shovel scrapes  
where the dead child sleeps  
and silence is  
deranged.

In the scarlet crush  
in the empty bush  
in the cyclone rush  
of loss, of loss,  
green is not  
at home.

**Vermont Frieze**

There would I sit  
all day and write  
  
there would I sit  
and write all day  
  
and you would  
bind the dying light  
  
arrest  
the catastrophic spray ↘  
of shadblow leaves  
across your lens  
  
and hold the emptying boughs  
at bay.

**Robyn Supraner**

## WHAT TO SAY WHEN YOU'RE DEPRESSED

Instead of "my meal's cold"  
Say "the ocean is the purest cold,  
Even in Minnesota," and rather than calling  
Night "my unlucky companion,"  
Say "I purchased these  
Handsome shoes on sale."  
If the room is deserted, as it must be,  
If the curtains billow with wind,  
Call it "a gathering of close friends."  
And if the lamp by which you measure  
Your evenings is too bright or too dim  
Say "our team is strong this year  
And could go all the way."  
"Our team is strong and the ocean  
I purchased is the purest cold,"  
You tell the close friends  
You've collected, a poor man's hobby,  
Over the years. But don't say  
"A poor man's hobby," for if you say that  
The glasses in the cabinet will rush  
To say "we're empty,"  
The windows, "through us you see  
What's to be seen." If you can't say,  
Before the candlelight tapering down,  
"I love sailing with you  
On nights like this," say nothing at all.  
"We could go all the way  
To Minnesota on this ship"  
Would only make you happy  
Which is more than you could bear.

Richard Chess

WITHOUT DISTINCTION

Not to be gone,  
not to be anywhere else  
and not returning,  
soon language itself is soil.

Then the small red planes  
that scoop off the surface of Lake Union  
disappear without me.

I am home  
finally and it is all  
only ordinary, a fir  
being a fir in the procession  
of firs welcoming me back

as the earth does  
in plots at their roots.

The old luxuries  
no longer exist.  
It's hard to speak  
no further  
than the yellow  
of the finch, say, or louder  
as it lights  
briefly in the limb over my head.

How will I—a kind  
of orchid—live  
without distinction  
in this air that isn't distant?

Ann Douglas

## FORECLOSED, IT'S

up for auction. Runs of bright  
change down the coin-slot, silent. German roaches  
shadow the oven. *Hath no man a house of good  
pizza?*

The cheesy crumbs are gone, but shadows  
scurry: their small flanged legs churn  
milk-crust into powder in the sinks.

*ubi sunt and oobie doo*

Where is the mouse-clad wimp who sweated  
through his felted fur and sang *la ballade des bières  
pendues?* Where are the flop-eared padded girls who  
scurried on brown tennis shoes from table to table  
tickling kids for minimum wage?

*o, oobie doo and ubi sunt*

Where's Clarissa, the marvey  
mechanical cow, who smiled with four short  
solenoids and sang out  
strong contralto through  
the voice-coils of her throat?

*o, soobi, doo and ubi moo*

Who pulled the plug on Pizza Time? Who left  
old Chucky Cheese impaled on his inside ironware  
framework,  
and leaning his loose arms out from the stage, his jaw  
hung down to his open heart?

*et O ces voix de scroobie doo*

No birthday parties. Not no  
more. Bankrupt all  
and up for auction!

*ubi sunt* the chalky milkshakes?

*ubi sunt* the bubbled tepid beer?

*ubi* the overworked, the underpaid, the high-school  
kids who (years  
and years) from now are gonna retch  
at the thought  
of a Chucky Cheese pizza?

*et ubi sunt*

those six-year-olds who knew that here,  
brand new, was a portal  
of heaven?

*o, scoobie dee, old Ubu's suit*

They're gone to the block, sure as the chunk  
of a headman's axe. Ah, gavel it  
all away.

Black rats curl beneath this floor.

What they carried off underground, nestled down  
sideways, is rancid. Smell this damp.

*screw this oobie, sue*

so where's the mild retardate  
ten-year-old who really found  
this trashy place such heaven?

*what's new*

Five months, I haven't seen him.  
He really wants to change his name  
to Smith because he thinks the man  
who fucks his mother must be Daddy.

A. McA. Miller

## OVER THE DARK FISHES

## i

Crazed Colón, I am called by my enemies,  
those fine gentlemen to whom the Supreme  
Being weighs less than dress, or the proper  
turn of a moustache. *Allí viene Colón*  
*con su falta de luz*, they whisper.  
And *bámonos*, whose wine breath hangs  
between them like the air on a dead sea.  
What can they know of weathers,  
these men who stink in their frumpery.  
What can they know of the floating  
weed that signs land. What can the wind  
mean to them, that will blow me past  
their silly dragons to Chypango and Cathay.  
But I, I know. And so the queen extends  
her small cold hand to me, which flutters  
from its lace sleeve like a bird  
rising through fog: the hand I kiss,  
and ask for ships.

## ii

In Palos this hot and starless night  
we drift, with the dark surging  
against our bows what people toss  
into the sea, the wormy bread,  
the rinds of fruit. And Pinzon  
shouts from the Niña's deck,  
and I, messenger of God, reply.  
How fitting it is, I think,  
that our crews be either criminals,  
our Maker's pardoned sheep, or  
relatives, as are we all under any  
moon. For this the crowns of Aragon  
and of Castile spill their jewels,  
that I, Colón, may sail across  
their childish maps and splashed  
ink of seas to safe harbor  
in the East and may return,  
low with gold, to shake the grip  
of the Saracens, who fester like wounds  
in Jerusalem. A gull pauses on  
my deck, then spreads wings, gray  
as my hair, to soar across my bow  
into such a dawn  
as only seabirds and sailors know.

## iii

Three glasses into the evening watch  
and we are running before an ash  
breeze slowly, through a sluggish  
yellow sea which the men fear,  
and say their prayers lest Spain  
be lost forever. They dream  
the tiller frozen, tangled in  
matting meadow weed, sleep fitfully  
on their planks below then rise,



as the grumet sings, to take  
their turns, with eyes red-rimmed  
for land. They cannot comprehend  
what lies ahead, though I have tried  
countless times to conjure them  
the hills of spice and fruit, the  
heavy cliffs of gold. And so, as  
I know my men, I have begun to shave  
my reckonings each day, so many  
leagues the less, to blunt the  
jabbering Basques, who glance askew  
at me, and jerk their thumbs, when  
they think I do not attend. And deeper  
West we sail, deeper than they think,  
with every glass the grumet turns.  
Of voyage end, there is no doubt.  
Let us arrive, on whatever wind.

## iv

The weed, and the appearance yesterday  
of two reed-tails bode land, the brooding  
cloud ahead perhaps a shore. Luis  
recites his Arabic on deck, our Jew  
interpreter of little other use.  
When all the rest are occupied, he  
huddles with his books. The men,  
chattering through garlic and sardines,  
believe we have arrived, and demand  
the dipsey lead. I give it them,  
and they toss it into the sea,  
the sun just up, the smell of dew  
still strong on the decks. But  
the dipsey yields no bottom, dangles  
loose two hundred fathoms down.  
On the horizon, the cloud broadens,  
like a woman stretching her arms,  
wide and dim in invitation.

## v

As the dog-watch slides to the rising star we begin the *Salve*. And, as we divide the four winds into thirty-two, so we carve the music, which each sailor hears differently. *Ad te*, sings Orlando, in his high thin voice and, according to our lights, we follow. We are all singers here, for we all have a throat. And tonight, which ends twenty days without sight of land but two false falls, I think we all ask the same as we stand on the decks of our flying pigs, these ships which let in sea water to mix with wine, but not too much, whose grace has carried us over the dark fishes to this place where we cannot say "here" on anyone's map but on the charts which we ourselves pen, which unroll before us as we sail, whose ends men fear and dream.

## vi

*Oeste* calls the pilot in the wind. And *Oeste* echoes Juan, whose thick hand takes the helm. And salt from the wash-bucket filagrees my cheeks a fine dry silver as I step outside, where the *Niña* beats her course hard-by, and the *Pinta* too, which I did not expect. And comes *Martín*, and *Bicente* too, off their two ships, their hair wind-roused, their beards as ruffed as grouses' necks. They take my arm. We have come too far, says *Martín*. By your own reckonings

we are days beyond. Where can this  
Chypango be, if Polo did not dream it.  
Some other place, we think. Look.  
The morning breeds a southern wind  
which, if we do not seize it,  
may be the last. We must start for  
home. And Bicente nods the same,  
and a chill enters my bone which I  
have not felt since I was a boy,  
waking in a stone house in winter.  
I have been here another time.  
It is not I who says:  
*Three days señores. Give me these,  
and if we do not strike land,  
I swear to you that we will turn around.*

## vii

There is a moment in each man's life  
which, once passed, will not return.  
Many times he may see it falsely,  
as a navigator peers at a far lip  
of cloud or coast, and from those  
sights too many times may say:  
I have come too far, am lost,  
cannot find the course again, will  
die first, tossing in a salt wind.  
The moment may slip by unseen,  
as a wife stirs curd in the late  
afternoon, or a grandfather leaves  
with the words still in his mouth.  
And yet, once found, the land blooms  
against the water, the house  
opens the door seen in dreams.  
And a man knows. As I know to follow  
the southwest flights that come  
by moon tonight, the black honkings  
cast faintly down, for the wind

is light. As I know to stretch  
the long necks of our sails  
this way, as birds spread their  
feathers in the night air, on a  
course bitten in the bone, to seize  
my destiny with one tight turn.

viii

Through the dark I think I see  
a small light, as of travelers going  
from house to house. I call Diego,  
who thinks he sees it too. And yet,  
there is a ghost-dance which moon  
can do over water, a woman shimmering  
by her bed that is no more real  
than Beatriz I saw in sleep, opening  
her arms to me again, and her white  
thighs. If this is not land, then  
tomorrow we must turn. And doubt  
gleams, a candle carried in the hand  
that rises and falls. I see that  
glow, and wish it gone. Now Pedro  
calls from the tangle of my thoughts,  
*Lumbre, señor, and Tierra*, and a lombard  
barks from the Pinta. And something  
shuts in me, as flour is sealed  
in a barrel, white powder closed  
in wood. You have said nothing new,  
I say. I saw and spoke of the light,  
which is on land, some time ago.

Coda  
Valladolid, 1506

Any small shift shakes the bed  
and, in rough subsidence, pains.  
Before I think I cry out, and Diego  
comes, new Admiral of the Ocean Seas,  
my dearest son, then fades away,  
his candle vanishing down the stairs.  
It seems centuries ago, that night  
we jogged off and on a lee shore,  
our three ships' breaths held,  
so that for the first time we heard  
the creaks and groans the timbers  
made, breaths never again held  
in the same way.

I asked only to reach  
the known, and, seeking it found lands  
so terrible it had been better  
they sank into the sea. If I had not  
gone back... But, gulled by my own rapture  
I sailed again, swollen Viceroy of all,  
looking for the paradises I described  
before. And I saw my men, becalmed,  
eat worms. Some waited til dark  
to spoon them down. Others simply ate  
the porridge as it came, ignoring  
the writhings in their mouths  
as the cooks, who could not pick  
everything out, threw the live flour  
instead into the pot. And I found bones,  
where I had left carpenters and wheelwrights  
and smiths. Doing only what savage women  
must have known before, they were murdered  
in their throes. This was told me by  
Alonso, who ran away.

How innocent I was,  
believing their childish offers of parrots,

thinking their gamboling in our red caps  
to mean welcome, they who later stole  
our clothes, pretending safe passage  
across a river, who cut our soldiers  
down as they scrambled, naked, to the  
banks. Treachery, I learned from them,  
promising peace but meaning death.  
These were animals after all. So we  
netted them, or hooked them in their  
mouths, and packed them for Spain.  
But they were not even good slaves.  
As they would not live long, their  
prices dropped.

And the gold I sought,  
no better than a teasing woman with  
a lock on her crotch: a bright trickle  
on the sea, a gleam in river rock  
that vanishes as the rock dries.

And, in the end, what use. My sons,  
quarreling with our Spanish enemies  
over nothing—not Chypango after all  
but islands that could starve, sharpening  
their settlers' bones to weapons.  
Islands which taste in my mouth  
like dead coins. But I *believed*.  
And was I wrong? I can truly say  
I do not know. When I cry out, as  
I did before, my son comes. And  
if I lie afterwards alone, while rats  
run in the walls, as they ate my sails  
when they could, I can still prick  
the chart to say "here," here I am,  
and may not the pinholes, like a  
trail of stars, point to some new country.

## TWO POEMS

**Drunk in a Boat**

The fish in the water—  
I want to buy them a beer!

Their little round faces all filled with sorrow.

Ah brothers  
all these years  
how blind I've been—

how you must hate those happy assholes the stars  
tramping around all night on your ceiling  
always winking down at you

to say nothing  
of the sad, guffawing men  
drunk all night, keeping you awake  
with their awful singing  
their rowing in circles  
throwing you the empties!

Ah, forgive me.

Here, take mine!  
Let me pour you another  
and another!

Forgive me my silver  
bullets hovering there my  
    little meteors  
    my tear streaks  
across the night's soft black cheek.

## Ode

O pressed duck, cock-eyed comedian  
of the Chinese grocery  
frisbee with a crooked neck

how serious you look—  
as if we'd just sailed you  
through the troubled air of all our minds.

Is it just that you miss your feathers?  
Or is it your bones  
sucked so miraculously from you  
like a lost twin you still hope to find?

Do you imagine seeing him one bright morning  
paddling on a sea-green pond  
a hundred feet below you? And

is it hard, little cripple,  
when the children laugh?  
Do they stare? Do their eyes bug out

in simple disbelief  
imagining themselves perhaps  
pressed babies? Pie plates  
with diapers and cloudy eyes?

And how do you stand it  
once in the soup

your oils spreading out across the water  
like a rainbow spiral—a galaxy  
which a snickering and  
semi-literary chef  
calls "Celestial Duck Ophelia"?

Ah, webfoot, my pal  
you never had a chance,  
run down in the prime of life  
by a steam roller—



that cliché sucked out  
of ten thousand matinee cartoons,  
your flat beak, your upside-down smile  
your goofy eyes turned inward  
flying forever into yourself  
O delicacy  
O suitable for framing.

Anthony Sobin

#### FARMWIFE DESCRIBES THE ACCIDENT

I lost a daughter once myself, so I know  
What it means to hold a limp, blue body  
The way the earth holds it.  
I knew the minute I heard it that it wasn't hail,  
But gravel flying. I was home  
Alone and I knew when I heard the screams  
That it was more than tires squealing  
And that the metal was hugely twisted,  
Contorted, wrenched all out of shape  
Like that one boy's body. And though it was  
Too dark to see the blood, I knew that it was more  
Than oil spilling and spilling out into that field.  
And when I saw the leg, I knew it had to have come  
From another boy, so I walked around for awhile  
Picking up the pieces and trying to decide  
How many.

And when the sheriff got there, I apologized  
For being in my robe with my hair up in pins,  
But he didn't seem to notice.  
That was when they found the girl,  
Slammed into the ground like she was buried already,  
And she must of hit real hard, cause that dirt  
Was frozen solid. And I was ashamed that she wasn't  
Wearing panties, but they wouldn't let me close enough  
to cover her. And then I remember it started raining  
Softly, like somebody crying who didn't really  
Know them well at all.

And I went back the next day after they had  
Cleaned it up some and I found all that they  
Forgot: a chrome door handle, a finger—I guess  
It was a finger—pieces of blue cloth, glass, a  
Barrette from her hair. I put them in a  
Shoebox, all except the finger.

And every summer the corn there brings up some new thing:  
Piece of glass lodged in an ear, an all-red ear,  
Silk the color of her blond hair, little shreds of cloth  
Like flags. And at night you can sometimes  
Hear voices laughing and then a crash. My husband says  
It's nothing but wind, but in the morning, corn's all  
Trampled down right where the bodies landed.  
That's such a sharp curve, they should put up a sign.  
I hear a baby crying; it's starting to  
Hail.

Joanne M. Riley

## JESTER \*

The dilly silly court  
on diases of raw silk  
smirked at the dwarf  
toddling. Oh, the milk  
spilling down his chin!  
Even the Imam laughed  
as the eyes rolled  
in the lolling head.

They tied a thin rope  
around his jiggly tummy  
and dunked him in the well.  
So funny! They rocked back  
on their little thrones  
roaring with glee  
while he did his fine mime  
of terror, repeatedly  
dripped and begged  
holding out his hands to the king  
between dippings  
"Oh Holy Imam!  
They will drown me!" he jibbered  
amusingly.

After the last dunk  
they pulled him up  
limp and pitiful  
as a wet doughnut.  
Quite dead.

They left quietly  
carrying their diseased hearts  
in their old bodies  
while the king fell into a fit  
of mourning.

In his harem  
the kohl-eyed children  
were allowed to cry  
for their stand-in  
the small mis-shapen corpse  
laid out in gold clothes  
and silent bells.

The youngest prince  
looked once quickly  
and just stopped talking  
forever.

Alice Ryerson

\* This story was taken from the diary of a French doctor working in North Yemen in the 1930's.

## LULLABY

For Kyle

May nothing and no one be a cage to you  
while you sleep or when you wake—  
not sleep itself, not dark, not light, not fear,  
not any of us sitting out here hoping  
you will fall and settle like a feather  
into sleep, not needing our eloquence  
to convince, our cunning to outwit you.

May your journey through dreams be that  
of a young hero, uprighting himself after  
each fall, not suspecting yet the dragons  
behind rocks, nor the power he carries  
into that small casket slung across his breast—  
containing sorrow, love and hope,  
magically concentrated.

May you hear through your sleep the birds  
at dawn, but not be woken by them. Their songs,  
like their flight, connect earth with air,  
air with water, but cannot express  
the fourth quadrant, fire.

The rising sun lighting their wings is fire,  
which brings warmth, and the beginning of shadow.  
From shaken wings, a bright dew falls.

Diane Fahey

**THE MERGE ARROW**

Sometimes the car radio  
fails at dusk, the AM stations  
of small towns reducing power  
until static measures the night  
like a geiger counter for distance.  
This time there was nothing left  
but one fundamentalist sermon,  
so I was alone with belief,  
the scare tactics of brimstone  
shored up all week by Chernobyl  
melting toward the earth  
like a kind of "Satan's pus,"  
the final phrase I heard  
before even the evangelist  
scattered behind the car  
where the trucks flared before  
they shuddered me sideways,  
passing at seventy-five  
while I tensed and cursed.  
Finally, the road was broken  
a half mile ahead, and I could feel  
the timing of truck lights  
turning me dry-mouthed,  
the merge arrow flashing  
fifteen seconds from there, ten,  
both ways to dodge immense  
with lights until I braked  
and hoped there was something

to the right besides one of those  
perfect cut-outs of cement,  
the sheer-wall drop to the bedrock  
for speed, and when that arrow  
was close enough I could have counted  
its warning bulb by bulb,  
I was stopped and spared,  
the trucks turned to red,  
the road black all the way  
to where the Bible's warning  
had ended, something like prophecy,  
like luck, one of those spots  
where people park and expect  
significance to soak straight  
through their skin. So I imagined,  
asking that arrow's bulbs  
to blink and extinguish,  
another sign before I swung  
back into the skeptic, open lane.

Gary Fincke

## BOOKS IN BRIEF

**Miodrag Pavlović**, *The Slavs beneath Parnassus* (Angel Books, London, and New Rivers Press, St. Paul, MN, 96 pp., \$7.00 paper). Pavlović's work, published between 1952 and 1971, emerges as powerful poetry in English and ought to be an inspiration to any writer depressed by the shallowness of much contemporary poetry. Bernard Johnson has selected and translated these poems from the Serbo-Croatian and has provided an illuminating introduction to the long history of poetry in what we now know as Yugoslavia.

**Faye Kicknosway**, *Who Shall Know Them* (Viking Penguin, 1985, 84 pp., \$15.95 hardbound, also available in paper). Kicknosway's narrative poems conjure up the people in Walker Evans' photographs as if they were alive before us. The poems are, miraculously, as profound and moving as the photographs.

**Carol Oles**, *Night Watches: Inventions on the Life of Maria Mitchell* (Alicejames Books, 1985, 72 pp., \$6.95 paper). A true joy: language, imagination, and scholarship flare up together to share with the reader the passion and the significance of this pioneer astronomer.

**Seamus Heaney**, *Sweeney Astray* (Farrar Straus Giroux, 1984, 85 pp., \$13.95 hardbound) and *Station Island* (F S G, 1985, 123 pp., \$11.95 hardbound). Read these two together. They are lighthouses, illuminating each other in flashes. Sweeney, the artist in agonized tension with his political and religious environment, has moved into our literary mythology; Heaney, in his latest poems, has expanded our vision of what poetry in our time can be.

**Lorine Niedecker**, *The Granite Pail* (North Point Press, 1985, 128 pp., \$11.00 paper). We are grateful to Cid Corman for reminding us of this valuable poet and to North Point for producing these selected poems so elegantly. Each poem distills an experience to a verbal crystal, and the effect of reading is a sensation of boundless mental and physical health.