

# THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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### LATE MOURNING

The day after they buried Julian,  
I took my clothes  
and layered them in the dye pot.  
Walnut leaves, dress  
walnut leaves, dress.  
Poured in water  
and boiled all day.  
I let the bath cool for the night  
put in fresh leaves in the morning  
and boiled all that day too.  
I used autumn leaves just fallen,  
makes a fine black  
that doesn't wash out.  
For three years  
I thought never to wear color again.  
But walnut leaves gathered in May  
make a living yellow,  
with a teaspoon of alum  
golden green.  
Add wheat straw for deep  
sea green.

Vine tribe berries  
make a dark purple  
rich as plum wine  
glowing in lead crystal.  
They're ripe for picking now.

Candice Cook-Darby

## WRITER AT WORK

This is the summer  
for painting a house,  
for breaking the peace of our days.  
Through seven years I have lived with walls  
that shed their chips toward  
the colors of other lives.  
Doors and shutters are crazed and cracked,  
the chimney needs pointing,  
and rubbish of strangers is heaped under porches.  
Up with ladders, the clanking of hooks on rungs,  
the angry squeal of scraping  
back to raw wood.

Wife and children cannot think,  
the windows gape, insects click  
their chitinous heads on ceilings and walls.  
I cling and tremble at reeling heights,  
twist a spine that will not unbend  
and eat the flakes from soffits.  
Under the porch I crawl in remnants  
of lives I think I have never known —  
tricycle tires, a skier's glove,  
broken lumber, screens, and the headstone  
of Sister Mary Bernard. I chuck all this  
in a mound, haul away  
to leave simple dust.

In dreams I claw the air,  
topple and swarm down clapboards,  
until I sink deep through layers of tailings.  
My hand fits that glove,  
those wheels once rolled me through friendless yards,  
and Sister, you are my sister,  
the woman I might have been.  
Again and again I chant old songs,  
charms for the new, wet skins of birth.

Then silence. The smooth back and forth  
of strokes that heal. Inside  
my family hears only the lapping of hands,  
a blind man groping his way home.

T. Alan Broughton

#### SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

It's a small class and he stands out:  
lavender watchcap, bad skin,  
eyes glazed and evasive.  
He smells of sweat and stale booze,  
says the wrong thing and repeats it.

The women in class ignore him.  
The guy downwind says, *What a creep*,  
and laughs with the guy on his right.

I try to imagine The Creep as an infant,  
all toothless smiles and potential.  
I try to imagine his first 18 years.  
want to believe he  
is not his mother's fault.

I want a future for him  
with the quiet blond in the back row;  
their lives simple and serviceable  
their children, merely plain.

He forgets his notebook and I flip it open,  
try to remember his name without looking.  
He's been writing a letter,  
lists his schedule: *Period 3. Eastern Philosophy.*  
*Full of fuckable chicks.*

Martha Christina

## PARADISE

Before the window of the shop  
on St. Mark's Square she sits  
writing postcards home, drinking  
another cappuccino. Behind  
the glass the display is halved;  
one containing lace, the other,  
baby clothes, and you enter  
through a single door  
that opens easily  
into the old choice. The unsigned  
bill is on the table.  
Up to now everything had seemed  
to fit together, as in mosaics  
which told, without perspective,  
of the expulsion from Eden.  
She thought it could all  
be understood in the gold  
tiles glittering off to the side  
and through trees which  
by then had lost their shade,  
where what had once seemed  
something more than a coiled  
vine hanging overhead,  
as days and nights went on,  
lost its scales and became  
nothing more than a vine  
until in time it raised  
its head above the leaves,  
dry and rustling, whispering  
in the old sibillance  
take, eat, follow me  
through this door, I will give  
you lace and baby clothes, all  
you have to do is sign.

Carl Conover

**SING, COLUMNAR MUSE, OF ME  
THE LAST IN THIS BIN**

Male ectomorph, extreme, 42,  
hazel eyes; soul, light blue  
(photo on request, please send  
one of important part of you);

currently a well-established  
failure in the absorbing concerns  
of the dominant culture and  
subdominant as well, possible  
success in others; ruling class  
origins, downwardly-mobile  
background (since '29) have  
little family, a few obscure  
but otherwise charming friends;  
unpublished writer, unshown  
artist, unschooled teacher,  
undiscouraged but unambitious  
(expect substantial diminution  
of civilization, loss of inventory,  
leisure, next 1000 years); value  
unconstrained simplicity in all  
things, have exquisite taste kept  
well under control, not a sybarite,  
treat money generously but firmly,  
do not define self or others by  
external circumstances; extremely  
tactful but committed vegetarian;  
handy with machinery, pen, shovel,  
carpentry tools, rag and broom,  
pleased to do mindless tasks for  
good people with important work;  
treat children as humans, loathe  
cutesy poo and all random or  
doctrinaire severity; no sociopathic  
tendencies (references provided)  
except the occasional and harmless

xplicxxi sox rex  
 rodx emptxnexx  
 humx xxyzox hx  
 thrux thx tulix

common to all, take a drink  
 once a week; allergic to tobacco,  
 most plastics, cheap thrills, expensive  
 fun, vulgar display; ex-savage  
 wit, largely cured of intellectual  
 nastiness, usually decline to  
 argue, occasional silent brooding  
 managed in Byronic style, never  
 petty; enjoy cultural pinnacles  
 without valuing them overmuch;  
 attempting hinayana-mahayana  
 synthesis but easily distracted;  
 enjoy cultivating a garden,  
 weeding fields of endeavor,  
 exchanging books and prophecies;  
 find most sports and travel silly at  
 best, have traveled widely in western  
 civilization, been frightened from  
 time to time, never bored; have been  
 through the political woods, keeping  
 a leaf or two from each tree, would  
 be a utopian socialist if possible;  
 find all competition ultimately  
 destructive; believe the human  
 capacity for self-delusion to be  
 infinite; cherish a circuitous  
 courtship of gentle purposefulness  
 and play; will modify facial hair  
 to suit, will improve currently  
 rustivating manners to the pitch  
 of current urban sophistication,  
 will change little else without good  
 reason developed carefully over time;

considered by very many to be  
(this is just a caution) strange;  
seek woman desiring househusband  
all-rounder.

**Thomas Whitehead**

## **SWIM**

The woods above the water are dense, pines  
and spruce, brush, and yellow birch, but we  
pick our way among the branches; the air  
cracks with the angry heron's cackle as we  
discover the graveyard, abandoned, fenced  
by rusted, beaten-down chicken wire, the whole  
no more than ten by twenty feet of ground  
spitting ferns and firs in a tangle no one  
would design. The obelisk before us,  
old, mossed-over, pocked, names Richard Adams  
underneath, and warns us to prepare  
for the Son of Man. The other stones, just three,  
are new, and hard to read in the forest  
light. "Adams" is all we can figure out.

In the distance, someone pounds nails to make  
a house, and we wander off to the shore,  
the sharp-cut curve of the beach we'd been looking  
for, and take off our clothes, and swim out far.

**Eric Horsting**

## from O'KEEFE AND STIEGLITZ

## Flowers

1

larger than the humans who stand in front of them

2

like butterflies pinned open  
or lit from within

3

fringed fabric of orchid  
exploding with light at the center

4

the hollyhock's black sheen glows with red,  
and the larkspur, blue crystals of larkspur!

5

the white trumpet-flower  
all its curves are hard-edged

6

the shape at the top of the bleeding heart  
an apple dipped in ashes

7

a ribbon of light  
cuts through the green corn

the dark leaves' light veins  
grasp in opposing directions

morning by morning  
a drop of dew slips down the veins  
to pool in the sheath's dark center

8

if you think the stamens and pistils are phallic  
the lip-shaped petals a vulva  
I don't

9

they're cheaper than models  
and they don't move

10

the large white flower with the golden heart  
is something I have to say about white

11

petals of the white rose unfold  
like a drama at Epidaurus

12

the dark spider at the heart of the scarlet poppy

13

purple iris  
tonguelike, velvety, purplish-gray petals  
uncurling into blackness

14

when the painter is unafraid  
the result is calmness

15

stripes of the jack-in-the-pulpit  
this time the interior all black  
a thin stalk of white rises from the plump candle  
  
the final variation the most abstract  
only the jack  
against a doorway of white

**Stieglitz: A Conversation**

No, it would be quite impossible,  
we are agreed on that. Hush, my dear,  
we need not argue. Our views are identical.  
You do not feel the physical craving,  
I would not expect you to.  
You can see, even more clearly than I,  
the practical side, how our life, our two lives,  
would fracture, inevitably diminished  
by increase. Think of the hours I spend  
preparing the canvas, mixing each color with a separate brush.  
What infant would respect those hours?  
Or even the days I spend without paint,  
walking by Lake George when lilacs begin to open,  
or simply waiting. Cooking. Yes, I would be diverted.  
The poem you wrote for me, about the woman who carries  
dawn in her womb. How does that feel, I wonder?  
No, love, I do not know. How free, and how wise,  
you are, not imagining you need a son  
or another daughter. No daughter of ours  
would turn away from the light, from her little son,  
like your poor girl, or would a child we made  
be smothered by us, by a surfeit of life, or art,  
which seem to be the same thing. Your photographs  
will carry you forward. That is enough.  
For me — swirls of azure on stark white?  
A shape. That's all, merely a shape. A flower,  
oh, a black iris. We will not speak of sacrifice.  
Let us end this long conversation. Come to bed.

## Judith

She presided over the dining room,  
Miss Marblehead, from a fringed scarf  
atop the china closet, granting us  
the favor of her royal simper  
and a breast absent-mindedly exposed.  
Heroine of the Hebrews indeed! As if to save her people  
she only needed antimacassars for the horsehair sofa.  
We dug the hole deep that night.  
How the spade resounded in the hard earth,  
the sweat cooled quickly on our bodies.  
All three conspirators cradled her,  
then let her drop.  
That's the earth smearing your face, milady.  
Let the relatives wail at her absence —  
one of their forebears had, after all, purchased her —  
feigning ignorance was quite agreeable.  
I could have but did not explain:  
artists make the best critics.

David Dooley

## THREE POEMS

## Gunsmoke in Old Tay Ninh

"Round" leaped up on my belly  
And begged to be scratched behind her ears.  
On the tube, Chester bantered  
With Doc as Doc prepared  
To cut his legs off. WHUMP!  
The 178th's 8-inchers fired  
Over our hooch. "Round" whined. The TV  
Shifted an inch. Tom opened  
His letter. Mac opened a beer.  
Tom read. Mac smacked. I scratched.  
Another re-up commercial came on.  
Someone was sobbing. Mac,  
"Round," and I looked up  
As Tom stumbled from the hooch  
Toward the berm line, sobbing.  
Mac looked at Tom's letter  
A moment. "Dear John," he said, "Hmm."  
"Suppose we should go after him," I said.  
Mac stared. "I mean," I said,  
"He might walk off the berm  
Into the claymores or something."  
Mac stared out the door.  
"Yeah," he said, "He might do that,  
Mightn't he? He just might."

## Once There Was a Man

Come on in with your sample case  
Jammed with pterodactyl teeth  
And don't you have any Mercator projections  
Of Possum Hollow it's okay  
I never work in this office anyway  
But don't sit on my colleague's lunch  
Matzoh ball soup

*(stanza continued)*

The only kind he'll ever have  
Turn the lights out okay  
Jesus it's getting dark isn't it  
You know ten years ago or maybe  
It was yesterday Doug bought the farm  
Chopper caught fire  
You know magnesium burns so quickly  
It may be said to explode  
They told him to stay out  
They'd stay with the wounded  
But he chopped on in  
Said by god don't tell me that  
Somebody here called a taxi

#### Four Photographs

On a stairway that leads nowhere, she  
And he pose in Arnett, in white dress  
And dress whites, summer of 1964,  
He with yellow stains on his fingers,  
She with a puzzled, petulant stare  
As his jaw muscles bulge like a dog's  
With its teeth half through another dog's  
Throat. In a painting behind them, birds  
Flee in panic a huge shadow cast  
By something high above. Down the steps,  
To your left, the best man and groomsmen,  
Stiff in their white uniforms, just touch  
The bridesmaids' and the maid of honor's waists,  
And the young women gaze at something  
High above the photographer's head.  
Up the stairs, or left to right, the men  
Died in 1965, 1966, 1967, 1967, 1969.

After a short honeymoon, the groom  
Went to Jump School, and the bride sold cakes  
At a little bakery off-post.  
Here they are, outside their furnished room,  
Squinting into the Georgia sunshine,  
Masses of red flowers behind them,  
His graduation cake teetering  
On the little table between them.  
The gold jump wings and paratrooper  
Atop the cake were popular — she  
Sold a lot of them. He looks leaner;  
She is beginning to look pudgy.

In this photograph, you can just glimpse  
The Ranger patch it took months to earn.  
They are sitting in the living room  
Of their duplex, a larger table  
Between them. He is almost slender,  
There are dark circles below his eyes,  
And his nose is broken. She is packed  
Into a purple dress as tightly  
As their belongings in the boxes  
We see stacked behind them. His right hand  
Points to the Ranger patch; his left hand  
Rests on his orders to Vietnam.

Here, she stares into the camera,  
Uncomprehending. Asylum smocks  
Hide almost everything, but still you  
Can tell she is grossly fat. They've let  
Her keep his medals— you can just see  
The display case there by the window,  
The little bits of colored ribbon,  
Some in sunlight, some in shadows cast  
By the iron bars outside her window.

Patrick Worth Gray

TWO POEMS

The Confession

Bless me, Father, for I  
have not sinned enough.  
It has been one day  
since my last confession  
of nothing at all.

My hands are clean.  
I lay them on  
the thin screen between us.  
You can smell  
only fingers, thumbs, palms.

I am thinking  
of getting dirty.  
I have imagined  
a plot of land  
waiting to be dug.

I am leaning over it,  
flexing my knees,  
calculating  
the distance. I want  
to be sure.

But before I can drop,  
the land wavers, heaves —  
it's a woman's body  
and she's standing up  
and I go clean again.

### Shacking Up

We built a shack around us  
and shacked and shacked  
the whole shack long.

Up was only one way,  
there were down, and right, and left,  
and a way without a name

Jesus took when he went four ways  
on the cross at once and his father smiled  
and said that was good.

There were no doors or windows,  
we saw to that, we built that shack  
out of impenetrable sighs and whispers.

Shack me, shack me again  
were the words that couldn't escape  
except from our lips.

We didn't palace up, or condo up,  
or tent, nomadically or outsydoorsy, up,  
but only shack, what's falling down,

no status but ourselves in it,  
something out back the sleek  
world on wheels getting somewhere

has no time for,  
warped, a wonder, by nature,  
nor made to last, collapsing

over only eons like a star to a black  
hole, two stars happy to make  
a nighttime spectacle of themselves,  
a skyful forming the constellation Shack.

Philip Dacey

## all my pretty ones

all my pretty ones, all my little chickens  
listen! listen! your blood red quick  
is all too palpable.

once there was a girl  
who loved her mother, but her father — daddy  
sugar'd fled the coop to become a romantic  
vista — you dig? now this girl, who was a younger  
sister, who sent her mother notes  
age five cause she couldn't sputter out her anger,  
grew to a lush sixteen. flies around the honey pot.  
and soon she was attached, and soon she was attacked,  
and he would not detach, and sex was such a recreation  
of a primal union that was where she went,  
where her body went and after a while she followed. that  
wrenched her free but soon a new he followed everywhere  
and it was soon, who she could talk to,  
where she could be. gradually she forbid him her  
word. folded to slip through silent.  
then she denied him nothing  
and then the lights came on.

my pretty one, you come to me.  
*Mama will punish me, what does she want of me,*  
*I can't provide it, your look all latency.*  
when I resee you nascent  
from behind my heart bleed tears  
with no expression but an attentive eye.  
Daddy will not do, you know.  
let the words woo you.

Lee Sharkey

## from RUNES

Feoh, the letter F, rune of goods, community wealth and  
cattle

The old man's stuff was spread across the lawn,  
lot-numbered. I was there to buy,  
under the green and yellow auction tent.

I never knew him, but those who had  
stood just outside the hedge. Transfixed  
and dumb, his neighbors waited,  
swatting the buzz of children.  
Who would've thought his house  
held quite so much . . . how much  
would all that fetch?

The sprouted easy chair.  
The tapestry, Dante beholding Beatrice.  
War medals. Pink-perfect linen tablecloth  
still in box. The solid maple dresser.  
Those things went cheap.

Good things, like theirs.  
Outside the hedge, the neighbors stamped  
and sighed in unison.

But the old man's  
toys! The wind-up, pop-out, hop-hop,  
ping and rattle, whiz-bang, chug-chug,  
ring the bell and over the bridge,  
for a penny see the monkey climb a tree,  
the tin mechanicals! The live-forever  
teddies and off-eye smiling dollies  
and oh, the smooth wood blocks! All those  
the auctioneer could bank on. Bravo!  
We clapped for winners,  
tossed a smile, a word of appreciation.

In the street,  
the curious herd pushed closer.  
Who would have thought the old man  
had such childhood in him?

**Hagall, the letter H, rune of disruptive and elemental forces**

Allowing the diligent ants  
to hollow out a dwelling  
in its core, the great tree  
quietly went about its pendulous  
business of weeping, leaning

over water, littering the surface  
with yellow leaves,  
as it had for a century,

until its shell  
cracked under heavy rains  
as easily as a new-laid egg.

It is the nature of a tree  
to be hugely humble, the nature  
of ants to be over-zealous,

the nature of Nature to corrupt  
and recreate, the nature of us  
to name her 'Mother.'

Our nature it is to thrill  
at the murmuring forest,  
to possess each kind  
by naming it, and to take  
notes on its falling.

I say the tree had a spirit  
I revered and mourn. I say  
the ants admired its thickheart  
strength and took it for  
their totem. But what I say  
is sign and symbol, not

the seamless, boundless,  
ongoing being that is  
corps of ants, corpse of  
tree, myself and all the world  
around, between.

**Isa, the letter I, rune of ice and standstill**

In the hall of perpetual light,  
women in petal dresses glide  
through a thousand rows of candles,  
touching, with their golden fingers,  
wick after wick to flame.

Voices frail as smoke  
rise in a chant of praise and courage  
to the weak sun of the shortest days.

Wax hot, wax hot, thou quickener.

North wind wails  
to enter walls.  
The candles tremble, gutter,  
almost fail.

Outside the hall,  
on ice-encrusted trees,  
buds are already formed.  
Magnolia's pale green minarets  
and beads of unyielding peaches,  
all numbered on the branch.

Beneath the slab of frozen water,  
fish barely move their rainbow tails,  
feeling for a crack of spring.

In the hall of perpetual light,  
women have memorized the miracles  
word for word as they were told.

Women are turning to their tasks.  
Baste the fat goose,  
pinch the lip red,  
offer kisses.  
Keep the sun from going out.

Squirrel, chipmunk, rabbit, mole  
are heartbeats in their hiding places.  
The world in throbbing stillness waits.  
The longest nights have come.

**Nied, the letter N, rune of necessity, hardship and the lessons of time**

Old things, buffed and distressed by love,  
worn to a noble thinness,  
so that my hand fits perfectly  
where other hands have been . . .

Take a carpenter's wooden plane  
polished by generations,  
or a thimble when the silver shows some brass . . .  
take a blue and white jug set on a sunny table  
where sea winds blow the curtains in . . .  
this is what we remember  
or have never had and desire,  
what we have always worked to possess . . .

It's not the things themselves or their age  
or usefulness or beauty . . .  
it's the maker's grace, the stories of use,  
the pride of handing them down . . .

And when all the owners have gone to ashes,  
certain old things  
still offer themselves to be touched  
under a plainly printed warning  
on some museum wall.

Take the plump, three-legged iron pot  
that stood in Pompeiiian coals,  
standing now in glass and ceramic.

Take the turquoise and red beaded slippers  
that danced in dusty ceremony,  
or the wine jar of Etruria  
whose lady of silent revelry  
catches my eye, telling me something important.

Take the Japanese courtesan's lacquered writing box,  
full of unwritten letters and poems,  
escaped through intrigue, plague, disruption, death,  
its surface as smooth and glossy as her hair,  
its contents undisturbed for a thousand years  
waiting for me to mix the ink . . .

Othel, the letter O, rune of home, property, legacy,  
retreat and the native land

One morning I miss the train.  
I'm standing in the dust of every year  
since the station was built.  
The red and silver flash of the engine  
hits the sun as it races out of my reach.

I know this is the day  
the train will run straight through at last  
to the incredible, gilded Forbidden City  
that hung on my schoolroom wall.

On board, there will be impromptu parties,  
incidental music, celebrities,  
unscheduled wine, romantic glances,  
free cigarettes and toys—  
Chinese dolls, I think, will be given out  
dressed in embroidered green satin robes.  
They will bow and sing in tiny voices  
of gunpowder, noodles and productivity.

I wake from the dream,  
and the dream goes on without me.

I go home to where the gulls lean on the wind,  
wanting for nothing.  
The rain has come, as good as any weather.  
I admire its softness.  
From my window over the bay,  
I watch the ships of different countries  
pass each other with brief salute,  
warily in the mist.

Finally it's too late to begin  
making, remaking the world today.  
I applaud the escape of light,  
the arrival of coffee.  
The afternoon is for connoisseurs.

**Wyrd, blank rune of the unknowable, the karmic path, and  
faith**

The old dog narrows his resting places  
gradually down to one, a vantage ground  
for breathing in his world and looking  
somewhere just beyond it. A look I've seen  
before. It goes to the center of what is known  
and finds the hidden blankness that's so easy  
to avoid.

The old dog does not avoid it.  
Gathering, gathering every scent, listening  
for the cats across the street, savoring  
long cool drinks of water. This is everything  
and nothing, say his eyes. Eyes that are only  
translucent balls of flesh, as brains are pale  
stuff, not the endless space we feel inside.  
But so expressive, eyes so deep in trust, I  
cannot reach the end of it— where is the source?  
what kindles them? These are the questions  
we ponder, the dog and I, in the late  
afternoon, companionably.

After he's gone, his  
empty place stands out to my sight as if it were  
etched in light and full of all his time, full  
of running, jumping, joyous presence.

**Dolores Stewart**

## HOW IT MATTERS

For Eric Pankey

A robin who never sang *cheer up, cheerily*  
 built a nest in the scraggly juniper  
 beside our front stoop, the maples still bare  
 as she set to work, flying in tufts  
 and wet clumps and red kite string.  
 She sat there, in a bush  
 as patchy as an old zoo animal—  
 with so few berries I could count them all—  
 through wind gusts that shook her  
 and downpours that drenched her dun coat.  
 She looked miserable, slick and matted,  
 but never budged.

A single bird was hatched.  
 In a few weeks, I saw a fledgling  
 crushed on the sidewalk. It may have been  
 the same bird, I don't know.  
 I think of the mother's endurance  
 and indifference, patient in her makeshift nest  
 with a gap in the bottom.

I think of the boredom  
 of doughboys, outposted in muddy trenches,  
 not fighting, but waiting for a culmination,  
 drops of rainwater trickling off their helmets.  
 I don't know, maybe it matters  
 that we suffer futility, without any explanation.  
 Maybe effacement is our truest self image.  
*I don't know* is my own refrain, which I mutter  
 to myself, to others, to no one, denying  
 what I believe.

Yet I see the tired soldiers  
 cupping their cigarettes in the damp air

to light them, to hide the glow that would signal  
their position.

I don't know how weather  
holds us in its easy grip, how the elements  
trick us into faith, how the seasons take us in.  
I don't know how it matters, how it all  
makes sense.

"I don't know," I muttered  
in a stuffy train compartment  
six people were supposed to sleep in.  
A long day in Italy. I grumbled to myself  
about misfortune, about my failure to find a room,  
missing the sights while looking for accommodations.  
It was wet and hot, but at the window  
a boy with enormous eyeglasses  
stood as we pulled from the station,  
gazing at the platform,  
the grime, the factories, the crooked tenements,  
and whispered, almost like a song  
I didn't know, "Ciao, bella Milano."

**John Drury**

## POET CLASS

## I.

If we didn't have to work for a living  
we'd wake up at 10:15 and stretch  
the tendons in our arches  
back and forth until they felt right  
and then swing our legs over  
the edge of our beds

(some of us like old-fashioned  
feather brass beds; some like  
water beds; none of us sleeps  
on sealy posturepedics)

and wait for the right moment in space  
and time to heave off from our dreams and  
putter to the toilet.

(We have full bladders in the  
morning because we drink too much  
herbal tea/coffee/guana juice/wine  
at night. If we drank less  
we'd get up at 11:30.)

We watch the sun hit dust that rises  
like bubbles and think how like Heidegger  
housework is

(circular work that once done  
needs doing again and soon)

and resolve we will never be caught  
in the trap of neatness.

II.

When breakfast seems right we eat egg/  
cold pizza/wheat germ/wine and get dressed  
quick before our mood breaks.

(None of us would ever dress  
if people wouldn't stare.  
We'd get through the day in our  
white cotton nightgowns/  
jogging shorts/grey sweats  
with the name of our high school  
slowly wearing off.)

We like bluejeans and blackjeans and whitejeans  
and mid-calf to ankle length skirts and  
unconstructed corduroy jackets. We wear  
plums and blues and pinks and whites and  
almost anything that doesn't look finished.

Once dressed, we sit down on the couch,  
exhausted, and stare at the crack  
in the ceiling and think how like time  
that crack is

(it goes along up to a point  
and then stops)

and resolve that our line won't stop before  
we get our first/next/last book published.

III.

We need music and like all kinds, even  
elevator and hold-button music, but  
most of us like classical best because  
it helps our writer's block and doesn't  
make us want to dance. We all love  
Beethoven and Chopin and George Winston.  
Those with a tendency to melancholy listen  
to Shostakovich. Manic poets enjoy Wagner.

(We all like Simon & Garfunkel  
but only listen to them quietly,  
at midnight.)

Winter is our season because we can concentrate.  
Spring and fall are too distracting  
and summer is when we experience life  
so we can write about it in winter.  
We all love the night best because  
it offers a canvas most like our poems —  
full of things that can't be easily seen.  
None of us likes 7:30 am.

We are thinking all the time and thus  
are not good-natured  
    (because we're always thinking  
    that the world's a grave  
    or a sewer or too good for us  
    although none of us minds having  
    what's too good for us).

#### IV.

On the question of children we are split.  
Some of us like children and the rest  
pretend to. Those of us who like children  
have them, or want them, and those who pretend  
to don't and pretend to want them.  
There are good poets on both sides.

You can beat us at chess because we think  
metaphorically.

We resisted high-tech for a while but  
when we capitulated it was complete.  
Even the poorest poet has an IBM PC/  
Macintosh/Apple/Commodore/Kaypro  
and would rip your nose off with pliers  
if you touched it.

    (We worry about the relationships  
    we have with our computers.  
    It seems weird to love them  
    like we do but the truth  
    is we'd have sex with them  
    if we could because  
    like all metaphorical thinkers  
    we love logic.)

V.

We have higher moral precepts than the general population but will jump off the high road for anything that promises to fill our poetic heart. We should not be blamed for this.

We are left-handed and age in interesting ways. We dream in vivid colors and most of us hate to wake up because our dreams are like *Wuthering Heights* and life is like a psychology textbook.  
We collect things.

We love all people in theory and up to ten in actuality. If we stare at you don't be afraid. We send our poison off at dawn with our worst dream and we only want to find in you  
    (because we are knitting a sweater  
    to fit)  
one strand of the fabric of the universe.

Sandra Blystone

## TWO POEMS

## A Painter Speaks to Possibilities

You'll never see how God made a rose  
stripping it petal by petal back to the hip.  
Patience. Watch them loose themselves, not in a vase;  
in the garden, day by day, efflorescing for the eye  
what formed behind the bud's tough veil.  
The exquisite abandonment of beauty itself  
the beautiful delineation of form.  
How? How can the eye bear sometimes  
the graceful weight of the world? The scales  
not dropped from the eyes but from the world  
itself, yet that last shimmering membrane  
will not peel away. And praise the Lord, for  
that would be too much; the senses crave  
a little mystery, though  
the glimpses are so furtive, the beauty so much  
in the act of peeling, that bare is how it  
might be most days.

What would I not  
peel away to see? The world itself. All else,  
the way Van Gogh hacked off his lobe—  
not the eye, remember that — and how  
he painted afterward. The calm  
madness in those shot blue eyes; he might have  
cut it off for that painting alone—  
such little flesh, so few drops bled, to reach such  
impassioned equanimity. Look in those eyes  
and tell me what you see. Fields with crows  
scarring the sky. Cypresses writhing from earth  
in the ecstasy of rooted dance. Flowers. Flowers  
not painted on, despite the impasto—  
the brush just exposing form.

I would pare away my life. My children,  
yes, though their eyes, like those  
who after a life of blindness had the scales  
surgically stripped, can see  
the trees like living light, the way the sun  
gleams down each leaf's slightest vein  
to bring the whole to fire, for children  
distract, they clutter life, they  
anchor us to earth— which is fine, which is  
beautiful and necessary lest our eyes  
lose themselves in light to the texture of the tree,  
but children burden us. Diapers. These hands  
in the toilet's cold water constantly.  
Getting the older one up around midnight,  
or without fail she will piss the bed.  
And the quarrels, the whining, mornings  
woken by a squalling child who returns  
to sleep in two minutes, leaving me  
wide-eyed and tense after two hours sleep.  
I would cut that tie away  
if the art demanded. I would cut  
my wife away, loose those years the way  
the petals fall, the natural  
declension past ripeness.

Look in those blue eyes  
and see the way the wildflowers grow  
just inside the wall that marks  
the edge of madness. The sun has turned  
the little wedge of sky hot gold.

I see your brown eyes flecked with gold  
burning, the way your hand, a dozen years  
firmer than mine, tries to match  
the flow of paint to the flow of color,  
how it stubs and blunts itself against  
its very firmness. As the firmness fails,  
the fingers wilt to the shape the color  
takes in the eye.

*(stanza continued)*

Your brown eyes

I would not cut away; they call the cornfields  
out of mine, they fill that space with crows,  
with blooming reds and blues, with  
grotesque trees dancing the joy of stone. My hand  
on the brush would take what your eyes see  
and paint what your hand cannot,  
bridled by youth, quite yield to — it  
yields to me.

Why should those points of light  
in your eyes move me so? Like stars,  
they bend the irises in rings around themselves.  
There, at the window, see how the female cardinal's  
wings burn with deeper red as she flies.  
Let your eyes hold that buried flame  
struck to light. The hand might strike  
the flurried wings, the blur, in deft  
strokes on the page, but the intensity of light  
only paint can hold, only so long as your eye can hold  
the light. Peel away the line. Peel away  
the part of you that would not yield  
down to the curve of hip that hidden gives  
the rose its form. Look in those blue eyes and see.

## Dimies

*"My point of bliss is not upward, but here."*

—Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*

All semester, before class and in their journals, my students talked about "Dimies" or wrote how drunk they'd gotten the night before, most censoring details and only alluding to what seductions they were party to. The only bar where, though they proofed you, on Dimies nights one legal age or whose ID stood the bouncer's test could buy ten small beers for a buck and pass them back.

"Stay clear of the men's room," Matt, my student Virgil cautioned as we pushed in.

"You don't want to know." Without his help, I'd never find it. I'd passed the bar on afternoons, the door ajar — one hundred people would make a good-sized crowd. That night, five times my estimate had jammed inside, flowing like watered beer to fill the least space between bodies.

We flowed, too, sliding to fill each gap as quickly as it appeared, the crowd closing behind us. He got us beers, and while we tried to talk, the mass sucked us deeper in, tossing us like two who lacked sea legs in a storm. elegant columns of cigarette smoke breaking to chaos above us, the floor strewn with unseen cans and crumpled cups. We shook our heads and mouthed

words, the sound pulled upward and lost in the two-foot space between us. Isn't it Hardy who writes of a church filled on Christmas Eve? — the small nave packed, their bodies shedding cold in the shared warmth of spirit, their voices, harsh, ragged with catarrh, lifted to angelic purity in the familiar hymns. Yet when the music died, the preacher's voice broke on silence.

Here, when the tape deck cued to a song they'd all heard often on their radios or other nights at Dimies, the clamor harmonized to one clear voice; the beat rocked us from Brownian motion to magnetized unity. By the third chorus, my legs no longer resisted and my voice joined in words my tongue seemed to know although my ear never heard them. The song stopped and a sudden surge

dragged me away from Matt and pitched me against a woman whose eyes moved over my face, without a smile, without seeing. What, when the taps ran dry and the neon went dark, would guide her, would guide all of them, back from this ring even Dante never envisioned? Would their shared charge dissipate in the cool night, the visible shimmer of heat, past the halated streetlamps to stars? And how,

swaying with them, could I judge them so harshly? — who at the end of that night would drive, lonely as they would climb onto a bus and wordlessly ride to their dormrooms, to where lights in the motel court would greet me, to strip and slide between cool sheets without a prayer.

Allen Hoey

## TWO POEMS

## Poem for a Birthday

I have more and more years, less  
and less time: what have I gained?  
What has anyone my age  
gained? We stay poor in a poor  
world that no one can live in.  
When has anyone ever  
really lived in this world? How  
has it been possible? When?  
How many years must it be  
— and how many wars — since I  
first feared war? Yet now there is  
new talk of war, the same war  
as ever, and still we fear  
new panic and pestilence,  
riot and pillage, just as  
of old: we are still that poor,  
so how can anyone live  
here where we are? Who can say,  
“I have lived my life fully;  
I have had a rich life” — who  
has been given such spaces  
of time with such luxuries  
of days to hoard or squander  
at will? I used to think this  
would come, our rewards would come,  
but new years came with new wars,  
new sores and plagues, new shouters  
with stones, new smiters with swords,  
and they were always the same  
ones, struggling as hard as we  
did, with no more time than we  
had, demanding our strength, our  
time, and they kept returning,  
doing what they felt had to  
be done, so we spent our time

*(stanza continued)*

— we spent ourselves — on them, they  
 claimed us, they took up our time;  
 and now we have less time, and  
 there is always no time left  
 to live in the world. Who has  
 lived in the world ever? What  
 fool, villain, liar dare boast,  
 “Look, I have lived in the world;  
 see, I have lived out my life”?

### The Caves

Beneath these rolling fields  
 or hidden behind these rocks,  
 somewhere where no one can find them without effort,  
 somewhere you might not expect them to be,  
 they are:

worlds within this world,  
 worlds you pass by  
 or step over,  
 dark worlds, silent,

yet worlds with their own forests and plains,  
 worlds with mountains, canyons, cliffs,  
 and cities: there are cities here,  
 and streets,  
 streets lined with spires and blocks of towers,

and here are gardens, mazes, ruins  
 all made by no hands  
 from drops of water  
 no eye has seen,

and when you come upon this,  
 if ever you do,  
 you bring light to it then,

you behold it and, marveling,  
 let your sight define it:  
 this form without design,  
 this endless creation  
 perfect and purposeless.

**MISSOURI**

Lying out in the switch-grass  
to feel the ground-echo  
of the train eating away  
the flat-land dark of Missouri;  
Cairo, Paris, Mexico,  
county-talk dry  
as a locust shell.

At night on a brick street,  
I sat on the tar patch  
of the roof, rubbing  
moonlight into my hair;  
hoping to be changed.

Scent of a mud-bottomed river  
still on my skin,  
born in the wrong town,  
born from the wrong family,  
given the wrong name.

Going out after midnight,  
oak smell in the cool air,  
the dry winds shifting,  
chaff, the clang  
of a silo side, drum-shadow  
of a water-tank in starlight.

The thought of other towns,  
a city, a bone-change  
coming to me, the strangeness  
of breasts, the strangeness  
of other places, an itch  
healing me.

**Rita Gabis**

from HERETICAL TESTAMENTS

Old Man among Old Men\*

Confess that you are a hopeless voyeur,  
flattening your nose to our windows,  
loiterer and malingerer,  
infecting the air and making it scruffy  
and your cheek is a lean and greasy scrag  
dabbled with driblets of sweat, confess!  
You feed don't you on the sordes  
and gurry of our negligent lives  
enjoying a meager ubiquity  
in alleyways and by outhouses  
gesticulating like wash on the line  
with audacity and quickened color,  
O Emperor of All the Mongrels  
and Master of Oily Nebulae  
smeared across the rain-slicked streets . . .

With the ommatidia of prayer,  
I number the hairs on your helplessly breathing  
chest, in meditation I tail  
you into and out of ramshackle shelters,  
in poetry I array you rib  
to tibia and phalanges, because  
you are more my father than my father,  
homeless old man among old men.

\* A Cabbalistic designation for God.

**Fragment of a Heretical Testament**

At  $10^{-43}$  seconds  
into creation God became disabled  
by a stroke which separated gravitation  
from the strong, weak, and electromagnetic forces  
and rendered Him an incalculably brooding old man  
though without curtailing His phenomenal growth,  
particularly that of the divine beard  
whose loops and spirals have continued to tickle,  
itch, provoke, and scandalize sundry thinkers  
and which as we know began to sprout quite early—

At  $10^{-6}$  seconds  
when the universe had cooled sufficiently  
for protons to form (God is the only creature  
to begin life with senility and then  
experience the unbridled growth of a child)  
so that some  $15 \times 10^9$  years later  
we are living entangled in that luxuriance  
of unclipped whiskers consisting of superclusters  
of galaxies, each with  $10^2$  to  $10^3$  clusters, alternating  
with spherical or elliptical voids, but imagine

At  $10^0$  seconds  
God's cheekbones, measured now in megaparsecs,  
fit in the span of a single centimeter,  
a nub or nut from which the hum  
of probability ceaselessly issued  
(a stunned God and all  
that ever was or will be, pulsing  
in the palm of your non-existent hand)  
yielding a universe riddled  
with insatiable sinkholes and inexhaustible sources.

**Philip Fried**

## from THE MESSIAH CYCLE

## Nathan's Quarrel with the Angels

Better call them rats' or little bears'  
skeletons slipped into a leathery  
umbrella of wings, an earthly thing battered  
and lost in a heavenly and flapping texture—  
some of them millions of years wise and blind  
in an obscure cave of crusted feces,  
princes of black, brown, gray, and red ermine,  
resting upside-down, roosting, blood  
accommodating the infinitesimal breathing  
of inner earth. Often I hear their thin  
and sharp teeth reducing some prey to soupy  
digestible stuff, or their high-pitched whistle  
crackling at the world's solidities.

Celestial machines with the head of a dog,  
inhabitants of attics and other high  
places of our low dwellings, these  
are the angels, diminished, intermittent gods,  
tormentors of men, transmitters who receive  
the world by millennia and send it by seconds,  
needing our ear to lick at and whisper wonders,  
insinuating heaven into our narrow  
echo-labyrinth of synapse and marrow.

Seeing one dead I said good riddance to all  
visionary and fantastical speech,  
lifting it by its outsize wings from the rubbish,  
a nugget of ridiculously light  
bone, and wondered how this thing had ever  
twittered a dream of universal justice.

Philip Fried