

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

Volume 39 — Number 3

Spring 1989

CONTENTS

1. James Sullivan *The Dissolution of Memory*
2. Margaret Hanzimanolis *To an American Abroad in America*
3. Glyn Maxwell *True That I Lie*
4. *Prospectors on Cherry Mountain*
5. Allan Peterson *Decoys*
6. Theodora Todd *The Elgin Marbles*
9. Robert Lord Keyes *Old German Wives' Tales*
10. Albert Goldbarth *The Nile*
16. *The Dazzle*
19. *Sensitivity*
23. Lola Haskins *Spelunking*
Scaling Bacalao
24. Michael Cadnum *Pigeons*
25. Edward Locke *Mediterranean Tour*
From Michael Straight's Autobiography
26. Paul N. Silas *Pieces of Night: from Poems from*
Prison
27. Kitsey Ellman *Hazy*
29. Dorothy Nimmo *For Annekate Friedlander*
30. Tomasz Jastrun,
trans. Daniel Bourne *Guardian Angel*
31. *The Last Days of My Guardian Angel*
32. *Books in Brief*

Cover: Robert Shetterly, Jr., *Studies of a Pitcher Plant's Pitcher*,
etching.

THE БЕЛОIT POETRY JOURNAL

Volume 39 — Number 3

Spring 1989

THE DISSOLUTION OF MEMORY

A picture of a boy with dirt on his face appears
Against a page, blocks out a paragraph. Try to remember.

Now try to read again. A picture of a boy,
A picture of a woman leading a boy toward a station wagon:

Begin again. "The dissolution of memory over time..."
A station wagon distant in the next yard, by a lake.

Try to remember his face. Next door to a house,
At a lake one summer, at a picnic.

"...repressed, or even imagined to be repressed"—what?
Back again: "The dissolution of memory..."

Of the toys taken away, that game never
Played again. And over and over again, trying to remember

A picture of the boy with dirt in his face,
With hands in his eyes, screaming. Dirt in his eyes.

Jumping around the corner. "If anxiety can obstruct such
conscious interpretation yet still allow assembly and retention

of saliencies, then..." Got him. Fill it in with dirt
And then they shoot like real shotguns. Now,

Try to remember. Taken away, watching through the fenceposts
The woman leading the boy away. Then, in the car, riding home,

Forgetting. A blind neighbor. Or remember mention
Of a neighbor's blind son by a lake. Behind a fence.

Or suddenly around a corner, laughing. Got him.
Pay attention. "...which may help establish false associations."

No. Back to the top:

James Sullivan

TO AN AMERICAN ABROAD IN AMERICA

If you come across
 a voice
 that occupies the territory
 between hunger and the hand that reaches for the bread,
 pay with attention.

You don't say
 the word RUBBER
 to the tribes along the Orinoco
not even in jest
 not even if you mean condom
or the material a small life boat is made of.

You must understand something.
 Each time the world
 is re-populated
 by the descendants of bitterness
bitterness grows

—not a flower
 not a cancer
 not an iceberg
 nor a houseplant.

Even trees, who used to be so sweet and natural,
 have gone evil
 from having eyes and ears
 and no say.

Have mercy as you walk among these bitter trees,
 the Ceiba, the Naked Indian, the Banana Palm —

bear in mind what ambushes
 they have witnessed
 and how their blackened feet
 will never rest,
 recovered, in some mild, Connecticut soil.

Margaret Hanzimanolis

Two Poems

TRUE THAT I LIE

1. In the need for truth (our affair) and sudden shock facts of love (in our affair) began at last our love, yes
2. yes our love-affair. And needing lies I kill it. I kill it this way and that.
3. I kill it this way:
Making the silence mean something like, say, (killing it this way) We have nothing. Or,
4. I kill it (our affair of) kill it that way: making Hello, Your Love, My Body, Hands, Waists, the First Time mean
5. mean (yes I'm sorry) nothing. So, wound back (press this) stopped (press that) yes I'm sorry too. (Lie One.) Lie Two:
6. there's no-one else. Whole wide world. There's
7. there is. A mile away. In a field I met her. (Lie Three, the lie I love) in a picnic field she (what picnic field)
8. fills up the silence with the need for (what field) Hello, My Love, Nobody Else at hand, my how she, oh my how she
9. lies with me, while you (I still love) you (the silence, a lie cannot lie)
10. you (needing truth and love and time and getting only me, my love) Goodbye.

PROSPECTORS ON CHERRY MOUNTAIN

The mountain had the minerals and we
had the right tools. It's good to see

the earth and us co-operate that way
as if perhaps there's still

some possibility we really were
made for eachother, a chance

we really were, and when the sun's shining
it's saying yes, isn't it. Of course

it rains a good deal too, but
that's just compensation, isn't it. Of course.

The mountain had the minerals,
the farmer had the mountain,
but we had

the right tools, as we told his
cherry daughter, to whom we wouldn't say

No, no matter how often she did. It's
good to see her growing, under-

standing that in spite of a cruel father
who said he had the mountain, *we*
had the right tools

and soon we had the minerals

and a friend of mine had cherry sons

who danced and said yes in the rain and

it's good to see

it's good to see the gold leaf on
the swampside and the search for

new minerals, the sun saying yes and the earth
warmer, making us guess some more and you,
my cherry friend, naming

naming our triumph after the
good dead farmer.

Glyn Maxwell

DECOYS

Boats attempting to haul in the sea
like soup on a comb
catch only fish and never notice
the holes in their nets
We may have to eat all the fishes
in the sea till they do
We are always looking for something
in the wrong place and now we are
eating the mountains with trucks
and there are fish of all things
swimming in the rocks beautiful
with their dead leaf bones
There is something wrong here
they are decoys distracting us
from something important

Allan Peterson

THE ELGIN MARBLES

Here in London
stone moves. The nostrils
of Selene's horse, exhausted
by the sheer weight of night,
flare with breath. It is as if
the robes of the unidentified Gods
brought a breeze with them from Athens,
from 432 B.C.,

when the perfectly carved deltoids of the Dionysos
reclining on the temple's pediment
were placed too high
to be seen
by the officials
who came to the yearly celebration,
for Athena, Goddess of War.

The first of Lord Elgin's acquisitions
was found in the Dardanelles: a base and stele,
on which was inscribed a message in Attic
and Ionic. To the illiterate peasants
that filed by through the centuries
the letters seemed to hold ancient
spells that would cure. So many sick bodies
rubbed against the magic words
the what Lord Elgin tried to read
was like the words
of a man shouting from too far away,
the wind in his face.

In London, in the long hall,
the procession
to deify the heroes of the Athenian-Persian war of 490 B.C.
is always beginning,
always ending. A tangle of 192 men on horses,
dead soldiers all,
follow the charioteers
who follow old men playing double pipes and *kitbara*
who follow boys carrying sacrificial sheep, water, offerings.
The Gods — Hermes, Dionysos, Demeter, Ares, Iris, Hera, Zeus —
await the soldiers who will join their ranks.

In Washington, D.C., bones they say
are Private First Class Joseph Ferelli,
Corporal Moses G. Washington
still arrive from Vietnam.

Along the opposite wall,
lusty Centaurs fight the Lapiths of Thessaly.
In each grapple, one fighter
is about to lose. But here
they remain forever at that moment
each soldier remembers as infinite,
as immortal.

An army of master artists, craftsmen
had carved these bodies; each
formed a letter in the word.

But from this long war
no statue has emerged whole. Each
has lost anatomy — a hand, leg, penis,
head — that if not crushed in the battles
and bombs each century has brought,
have been retrieved from the temple's rubble
and used in the stone foundations
of the burgher's new house
or sold to tourists,
who then sold them to dealers in New York.
What is left seems to hold a message
that could cure.

To the exhausted soldier,
nostrils flaring breath,
each day is a century. The right way of life
he learned as a child
is like the remote, silent stars. Life
depends upon the suggestive noises
in the infinite night jungle. In the end,
it's his own skin
thin over a muscle of stone
that he saves
or doesn't.

If not, his name will be carved
in black marble,
in a procession of names,
and the nation of thousands still living,
waiting for a cure,
will file by and rub their fingers
over the letters that shout his name
from so far away.

Meanwhile, each night is a century
that arrives exhausted in the east.
Each brutal night
a new war.

Theodora Todd

OLD GERMAN WIVES' TALES

- I. Helen checks on Holly in the blue
bathroom while the warm water
is filling the tub. Helen puts
her hand on Holly's stomach
and asks her how she's doing. Outside
the dark snow is beginning to drift
and all the hidden roads leading to
the moon have suddenly become visible.
- II. Lisa climbs up the stairs to the
loft of the old barn to find her man's
root growing in their bed. She takes
her hand and places it into his dream. Inside
an hour, warm milk is collected
in a pan and left out on the sill.
Any kitten who ignores this meal
curing in the moon, goes hungry tonight.
- III. Sleeping in the same room, the two sisters
open their mouths simultaneously
to take a breath. Turning on their shoulders
together under blue covers like waves,
they miss what would be the other's kiss
in the syncopation. Their lips close
on their pillows lit by moonlight, their eyes
open with the sun having no memory at all.

Robert Lord Keyes

Three Poems

THE NILE

Elijah this.

The Children of Israel that.

And Moses. Moses in the bulrushes, Moses

blahblahblah. The doors closed

and the dark, fake-woodgrain paneling casketed us

away from the world for an hour and 45 minutes every afternoon
in Rabbi Lehrfield's neighborhood Hebrew School. Here, as one,

the pious and the derelict chafed equally. The vehicle

of Rabbi Lehrfield's narrative drive was Obedience,

all the wonder in those stories was run down methodically

and left behind like so many roadkills. Methuselah

something. Somethingsomething Ezekiel. And Pharaoh

set the infant Moses in front of a crown and a plate of embers,

testing if this was the child it was prophesied

would steal his reign. And Moses

did reach for the crown. But the Lord set an angel to guard him,

who now did guide that hand to lift an ember, and so did Moses

thereby burn his tongue and lo would stammer all his life long.

Did I care? *His speech limped, but he lived.*

Did I listen? Every night I'd read another chapter

in those actionful schlock-epic books by Edgar Rice Burroughs,

the ones where Mars (Barsoom, the natives call it) is

adventured across by stalwart Terran John Carter, *Jeddak*

(Warrior-King) and husband of the gauzey-saronged and

dusk-eyed Dejah Thoris, Princess of all those red-duned climes.

It made more sense to me

than God is a great bush of fire. All the while

Moses stuttered in front of the Living Flame, I

silently practiced Martian. It was Rabbi Lehrfield's

Martian School for me the whole lackluster time.



Out of what we've learned to call
 "deep structures," Lindsay Nichol, my niece, is pursing
 the first of her organized sounds. They're... oh,
 no words; but they take sure place in a pattern
 as repeated as the crib bars, with a little
 occasional lingual fillip
 as decorative as the headboard's gnomish carving.
 Slurp and gurgle, out of whatever
 increasingly subatomic deliveryline of chevals
 flashes the message of neural language-wiring on up
 from meiotic gel unbroken to this 9-month-old
 soliloquizer, Lindsay Nichol
 is wailing, gooing, composing juicy musics, here
 on the quantifiable, witnessed edge of a process that
 starts somewhere magic. —Someone
 pointing to a tree, and saying: "tree," a heart, and: "heart,"
 the first time; being with a word so new it's glass
 not fully hardened yet, it's going to be a tree soon, or a heart,
 but now it's rainwater, and the morning sun is living
 yolk in its skin...

In Moccasin County,

once, the night a full moon orb'ed the giant crosshairs
 of a steeple, and any spirit-commingling was possible, and the line
 between the Trinity and 3 tossed shots of cornmash likker
 wavered in tremulous hoochiecoo veils of feeling... I could see
 such language settle out of the air. They spoke in tongues. A woman
 frenzied like a telegraph key on the sawdust-clumped church floor.
 Galvanic bluebolts straight from Heaven twitched her limbs.
 A man was shaking like sheeted foil. What they said was
 clearly speech, although I didn't know the words
 /M'lash k'HAB chebawby HEI-HEI-HEI ZH'BO/ was clearly
 not a sloshy gibberish, but something
 from the templates in the brain that give us English, only
 singular and more shimmering with its source: a kind of
 manna spangled over their tongues. If anything
 I've also seen comes close, it's in films of some early
 jazz guys jamming through the thirties, with the drapes
 of cigarette smoke in those backroom clubs befuddling the stage,

(Stanza continued)

and joy and concentration being the same thing, and between their rumpled and utterly brotherly selves a field I can only call "vocabulary" occurs and unites and they play, in great asyncopated waves, where the cells of the blood are notation, where the nerves of the body are staves...

I have this

daydream: squares and circles and triangles floating out of the sky. My friends are lifting them. Licking them. Taking intimate oral pleasure off of these perfect lines. And after that, nothing is ever the same. We're marked. We've nursed on the "high structures" Plato says precede the smutched units of Earth.

In my family, stories are normally softened over the years. —As if a tragedy, or even marrow-wiffling celebration, any abandoning of the blandest mean, was shameful. By the time my life is second-hand or third- explained to Lindsay, I'll be anyone, and flatter than the nondescript stone marker. Once I met my cousins Izzy and Rebecca, only once—they'd come in for a wedding. They were in their middle-70's then, 2 crease-faced German Jews from when a Jew in Germany meant you wore a number dyed into your arm. And so I heard some stories directly. "They were after me," he says. "I wasn't afraid from their fists. But some had broken bottles. See." He lifts his shirt. "I hid in a barrel. A barrel of pigshit. Yes, really. It covered my head. In this, even they didn't search. The worst part was the burning against the cut, this pigfire, filthfire, eating my skin. But then they gave up and I crawled out. It's a blur then, really, until Becka and America." She says, "My mother begged my sisters not to get into the truck. One was 15. Meeseleh, she was only 12. The driver told her 'You

(Stanza continued)

think you'll miss them so much, you get in too.' She did, without a second's hesitation. In part, I think, to get them all on their way before I was discovered in the haypile. Well of course—they went up the chimneys, in the Camps. Who knows what went on in those places? 20 years later, we were in New Jersey then and settled, a neighbor gave me a little set of scented soaps, and I saw on the box they were made in Germany, and—Izzy will tell you it's true—I threw up. For a week after that, I threw up." To reach America, they "did things" too—"not so nice, if you want to know. These were not pretty times." There are anecdotes of innocent German countryside couples clubbed for their clothes. The irony is, they reached their haven, Liberty lifting her torch high, just when anti-German sentiment reached its peak. "And so our accents—you know? For years Americans beat us up in the streets." He shakes his head as if the past could be shooed like a fly. "So, anyway. Everyone's here for the wedding, a happy time, now let's be happy." He hooks his arm around Rebecca's arm. *His speech limped, but he lived.*

God doesn't speak in the language of people
or need to. God speaks out of what first hurt us.
So of course, on the mountain, Moses understood
what was said by the fire.

I'm 40. I know, by now, my life, my friends' lives...
we will never wake to face some all-consuming
deific announcement. But I also know: hurt is inevitable.
Then: so is some Godtalk, sized to that hurt.

Now Lindsay's asleep, and quiet, quiet...
Finally the long dark river of night
will deliver her crib to its tanglement
in the first pale reeds of the morning.

"The more you're meat, the less they treat you human," Kendall says amid the general beer-tone party brouhaha. She's just been hired as a hospital's Emergency Unit desk clerk. "If you come in with a broken leg they'll talk to you while setting it, explain things, chat. But someone comes in mangled from a tractor toppling over and he's just bloodied-up parts to assemble." This is all new to her. She ledges out her lower lip in concentration. "I suppose there are reasons." Later,

an hour maybe, I

see her hazily through a window. She's left the gaudy talk and rock-&-roll, and walks by herself in the midnight yard, around the substantial base of its guardian tree. She's talking softly—to herself—or to some self-of-her that's taken form invisibly out of the molecules of the night, and walks beside her. Kendall's musing. She's "working things out." Whatever infinite hallways of pain and laboring tissue she's seen opened in the bodies wheeled past her for the last week, these are first inventing words to hold small conversation with her. Moonlight's whittled by the bough to a handspan conical shape; and Kendall halts as if to press her ear against this hearing-trumpet floating in the blackness, and be privy for a moment to the murmurstuffs the electrons of Earth exchange with the protons of Luna.

Soon

she's back: she's wagging ass to some sperm-powered shout in an early Rolling Stones hit. What I come to understand, though, is that everyone—these friends o'mine, my tender lads and lassies—needs some time outside, alone, by the tree, in its Whispering Zone. Now Casey leaves the very public hubbub for this quiet domain, now Rita... Some of them touching the bark that's textured like the rope sole of an espadrille, and some of them simply moving their lips in silence, under stars that must be Cosmic Esperanto's

(Stanza continued)

punctuation. "Albert, YO!"—I'm
back in Stonesville,
avocado chip dip, argument, flirtation. When I look
next time, a 14-year-old boy is in the yard. He's...
a translucent 14-year-old boy. So shy.
So pained by anything in this world. No wonder
he's practicing Martian. "Thark," I hear him say
in a familiar cracking voice. "Tars Tarkas. Jasoom."
No wonder I love these friends I have now. When
I start to say a word of encouragement to him, he
distorts into a mist, he's air now, and my single gasp
inhales him...

No wonder I love my people. We're
all woozey-eyed with partying by now, we're tired
empathetic heaps lounged out on the pillows...
My sweeties, my grownups who have come so far, what are we
here in midlife, but
the scars of healing from where we once burned
our tongues on the Other Language.

THE DAZZLE

"Dare ya." This was Kansas,
 he remembers, and a field
 the color of something
 leaked out of a steak.
 He was—who remembers? 13? And
 his cousin maybe 2 years more.
 The color of the sky was
 it had been washed too many times.
 There was the wire fence of course.
 A fly catscradled his head.
 The rest he can't remember

without remembering 2 things. First,
 the Sistine Chapel ceiling. There
 it was, the postcard of itself
 become itself its real size.
 Besides the glory and the silliness of all
 that cherub-pink and curded cumulus,
 the wonder still remained in how
 invisibly the vivifying ur-spark of that charged space
 in between the facing fingers
 leaps, and how it leaps—despite
 so many centuries of parody—with something of a jolt
 the clay-besculpted Adam
 must be grounding, channeling
 down the walls, then up the flesh of the gathered
 spectators: not
 unlike the way the generating fires of Godhead really
 must have flickered,
 Michaelangelo thought, through the waiting
 null-zones of Creation.
 That,

and this, then: in a photograph
a fancily labsmocked man bends to a glass tank
not much larger than a medium suitcase.
In it, the physical universe is beginning,
again, *in vitro*, in miniature: this
ammoniac, murky cosmos-in-the-making could be
hefted to a check-in line at the airport and
the porter never blink once.

But it's impressive, *attempting to replicate
original conditions under which* etc etc. Is it
the moon?—no, it's the man's face.

This is before the moon. Is it night?—no.
It's absence.

Clouds are forming though, clouds like Japanese fighting fish,
like weather's raggedest camisoles.

And the camera has caught a snake of lightning
shining as a vein might

in the negative

closeup of someone's face during sex,
one temple gorged with it.

Maybe

under such inches of brilliance

looking for a home, a planet

the size of a marble is spinning

into being in that rich progenitrix broth.

And on it, somebody

sized to that planet will shortly be out for a walk,

it's night, and he or she is alone

with the night, the hands in their pockets have folded up

like caravan animals, the stars

have never been more the Muse's nerve-knots

in resplendent neurological display,

then clouding over, heavy air, and he or she

remembers

Randall Jarrell on "the poet": somebody
walking around in the rain, in hopes
of being struck by lightning.

Often this person will think of traveling
exactly that way across the darkened space
inside the monster's skull
that Frankenstein, with all of his doctorly expertise, has
just clamped to the slab.
Such country!—mysterious, like fields after sunset,
with those soft black shapes that could be hay or huddled cattle,
nascent things
of vast potential
waiting for their spark. —How
even in this 3rd-hand and slightly ratty
parody of creation, every gasp
that greets the dazzle is deserved...

The sorghum is a far-off russet doodling.
The same, but finer, and green, for the milo.
He's 13. And: "*Double*
dare ya." The weave of every visible thing is arrows
pointing at him, and so:

he really is peeing

on the electrified fence.

This fuse.

Its burning.

Smackdab noon, and only a moment,
but to his bones, oh to his bones: forever

lit and turning circles
like a ferris wheel by night.

SENSITIVITY

The princess felt the pea

(as if, bringing consciousness down
through all the ferniform fossil-impastoed
coal-and-magma lasagnalayer
mattressing of Time, to the prediluvian, something
about the size of the first protozoan
waited to goad the insomniac mind)
and all night she tossed and turned in her silks.

*

When my father died a time-zone away, I
didn't even feel the last white ectoplasmic spasm
fight its way out of his mouth.
Nothing registered. I was working, and I kept
on working. Nothing seismic traveled through
that piffling sixty minutes. And I'd prided myself
on understanding the passions of porchlight midges!
—of milk teeth, silt, the molecular jacquardwork
the -ness in any thingness is weaved from!
Dead. The phone call came 24 hours later.
Dead with that fine-grained field of liverspots
stippling his skin. His overdole of melanin. Dead,
in every particular, while I was busy priding myself on feeling
how the live line of an ice floe's turning
back to water is only its version of
people we love, and age.

*

A vulture. The first really bad fight
 C. and I had was over the vulture. The vulture
 was over a roadkill armadillo,
 those perfect hammerclaw talons steadying it while the beak
 stretched something, blood-bright phlegm it looked like,
 with its gummy piece of meat,
 from out of the broke-open bands. C.
 looked away. And, later, gave me hell for looking
 deeper in. To the wands of the body,
 its shredded red curtains, its bent but
 glistening tracks. The cathodes. The skeins.
 The bowel topiaries. "You're so
 insensitive"—I remember, that was the accusation
 exactly. And maybe I was. Not to the kill,
 to her. I remember, her weeping over the wheel, and me
 a world away on the the seat beside her,
 up past my eyes in that alien meat.



To measure the sun. To measure a candle.
 To measure a candle across the equator, glimmering
 off a broth of boiled pampas rat.
 To measure the aura encircling a saint,
 in Buddhist Thermal Units.
 To measure the wattage
 below which, one night, spark and other spark,
 you were conceived. The human ear
 "is so sensitive, it can pick up sound waves
 with an energy of only one ten-quadrillionth of a watt."
 And I'd prided myself on hearing daybreak
 knock against the window like an alpenstock!
 To see ourselves, to develop the talent of seeing ourselves,
 as a 4-dimension universe's
 stick-figures.
 Drawn by firelight on these walls.



To learn to see the people we love
 from the eyes of next century's archeologists.

Dead. Whatever a poet might call
"the flowers of the flesh"—already
petrifying. And this was my father. And
what did it mean, now, "sensitive"?
There wasn't any tremor in his cheek for any
richter scale, no matter how sized to an individual
neurological flutter. He
used to kiss me on the forehead
when he thought I was asleep, this bundle
good now for radiocarbon dating.



Sixty miles out at sea are "gossamer-spiders." They
ride air on filaments, almost something out of storybook
faery lore, but are out of a natural history text.
Fluff. With eyes, and guts, yet little more than
cotton candy pinches. They could be the totem creatures
for C.'s sensibility. Rainbow decals on her windows,
calico bunnies. I remember saying "A person can be
'sensitive' to *this* too," and, unfaithful to her feelings, even
willingly opaque to them, I kept on studying cut-and-probe
below the vulture's ratty wingspread bunting. So that
was the end of us. We got together a few more times, but
really that was the end. I know I cried.
There was a long empty stretch. And I'm seeing a C. now,
curiously. A different woman. A hard C.



In the night sometimes, in bed, it seems
a plow of moonlight is bringing her
into this dark world on its silver surface.
I'll listen to her in sleep. Some blurry words...
That mole the color and size of a raisin
at the back of her neck, its two attentive hairs...
To learn to see, to learn
to really see, the people we love.
My whole life now: a gauge
of my father. The gauge never has a choice in this.



There's a child who looks like a large eggplant-black gourd
 because of the way he's curled and his stomach distended
 from hunger; and the trickle of river beside him
 reeks of shit, and is that color; we might wish
 (after wishing him food) that stink
 from half-a-planet away would hit our faces
 like the plank-whack of a skunk just inches off,
 so the hairs in our nostrils get soaked...might
 wish we could be accepting of that, and still
 go on, still enter a day, and see how the wings of a jay
 are a book (both deckled and marbled) it opens
 to fly, might still feel something inside us do
 a *czardas*-leap of joy at how
 a tree mills light, might still remember
 the cool in the wood of a father's casket and be allowed
 our misery over this one loss in a galaxy of losses, might
 be open to this, to all of this, in the vestibules
 one cell wide in the mind, might
 let it shake us like dice, might
toss and turn, as in the story, *all night*.



A pea, it says, can do it.
 Then certainly stepping over a grave can do it:
 a chill shoots through your heart. And then
 the next talent: seeing the Earth is only
 grave on grave and, really, stepping anywhere
 you'd carry around a permanent sterling
 thimble chilling your breast.



C. sleeps. She tosses. I want
 to feel that shadow between my cheek and my pillow
 I'll never see, light or no light.

Albert Goldbarth

Two Poems

SPELUNKING

Our flames reach very short.
Only the thinnest of us pass
the squeeze. Dark is rising
up our legs. We are off the
map, and cold. The one who
holds the clearest light is

Emily. We see the lengthening
fingers of rock, how water
makes its slow difference.
Her arm falls to her side.
The moving beam glistens
on Emily's white dress.

SCALING BACALAO

for Hernan

Peel the sticky silver thumbnails
against the grain.

Some cling to the knife like skirts.
Others fly.

In the Plaza Mayor the mothers weep.
In the dark fincas

whispers scatter, like water off
shaken hands.

Lola Haskins

PIGEONS

There was a man in our village
who made birds out of dirt
and turned them into real pigeons.
It's hard to say
how this is an improvement
over the usual method of making pigeons,
and it can be argued that all pigeons
come, in a way, from dirt.
But think of it—

the dirt in his hands kneaded
with a little spit, shaped like a bird
as a shoe is shaped like a foot,
bird-like and in no way
like a bird. And then the iridescent,
wide-eyed cock tossed
collapsed and discovering
his flight and then: like any
living bird, there.

Perhaps one day he sat
as we sit and tossed dust into the heat
and saw it suspend and thought:
birds. He could have raised the dead,
or made a stallion from a pebble
but being without imagination
he made these stupid

flurries at our feet,
too slow to find the crumbs
the sparrows steal in a world
of vacant miracle,
this green preen of sycamore,
this blue wing of sky.

Two Poems

MEDITERRANEAN TOUR

We sleep in the same direction
Even those toward Allah sleep—
East or west, our limbs awry on wrinkled cottons,
And toes
Like small hyraxes that peek across the plains
Of ruined Knossos. The shards of Linear B are we that waken,
Decoded, and rise and speak
Of jumping over mad bulls' horns
Acro-
Batically, and bow to applause. Our muscles
Relax and fall into our bodies
Like a child expecting to be kissed goodnight, who is.
And in the evening, ah,
Our fresco-lashes fade and suddenly
In dozing off we're Linear A, intriguing,
Unilluminated, and as ancient as brittle ash
Around us. All the same direction,
The sleepers point to the undecipherable.

FROM MICHAEL STRAIGHT'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

When Straight lived in his Cambridge flat,
His friends stayed late at night
And made such ugly racket that
The man upstairs took fright.

He'd knock the pipes with feeble arm,
With feebler breath would curse
The students who, not meaning harm,
Made difficult evenings worse.

The news said Housman died. The boys,
Absorbed, turned records high,
For upstairs no one whined of noise.
Never ask me why.

PIECES OF NIGHT: from POEMS FROM PRISON

123

This is our room I have never seen.
This is our marriage bed I will enter
When seven months married. This is the bureau
With the two drawers already emptied
And the one drawer already filling
With poems and letters. This is the pillow
Where you practice waking, alone
No more. This is the photograph
Where you look over at my pillow
And my dog looks back at you. And this
Is ourselves, reading this poem
At last together. You walk to the window
And open a hole with your breath
And a circular movement of the finger.
The air outside is the aftermath
Of an enormous pillow fight. But it is August.
The blizzard we imagine has stopped
Traffic in Argentina. The woman
At the window rubs the nubbins of frost.
They remind her of her husband's scars
Until her fingertip goes numb. He tells her
Something but I am not good enough at Spanish.
She remembers the night the soldiers came
And the probe-probe of their bayonets and how
The truck had already left with him
Before the feathers stopped falling.
She turns. You walk
Across the room. She sits
On the very edge of the bed, her back to him,
Crying. A photograph of yourself 30 years
From now looks at you from the dresser,
Trying to tell you something. The soldiers
Break into the room again and again.
It is 30 years from now. The woman still remembers
That morning at the window whenever she touches
His scars. We have only the photographs
Of the dogs. It is night.

(Stanza continued)

The man and the woman stand at the open window,
Smelling the late February blossoms. You call me
To the window. All the clocks in the world
Have stopped and nothing, nothing is moving
But the weather.

Paul N. Silas

HAZY

When the sun crosses the river,
first thing, there's a dazzle,
a place you could walk into forever.

I should be glad, I'm lucky
I still have my purse.
We were all the way downtown
when he finished, told the driver to stop,
pushed me out of the cab.
He was sorry for me, he said.

When he promised last night
that he could help me, I knew
he couldn't, but I went

to meet him anyway.
We'd been talking on the phone
for hours. He was a wrong number,
but he'd said, *no, don't hang up,*
you have such a pretty voice,
and started asking me all these questions.

I ended up telling him
about the men in the park,
how sometimes I'll find myself

walking there and I don't remember
deciding to go. I said how it hurts.
How hipbones leave bruises for days.

He asked me how it felt and I tried
to explain: it's something you want
but you have to think of nothing,

hard, to talk it away.

A different kind of darkness hung
before dawn, hazy in the east,

but walking home by the river
reminded me of nights in the park,
those men. Some mornings I can still feel

their jackets lumpy under my back,
the way sometimes I pull my skirt
over my face, just watch

streetlights through the cloth.

Kitsey Ellman

FOR ANNEKATE FRIEDLANDER

(If I forget thee, oh Jerusalem, may my right hand forget her cunning.)

Annekate's spine's so bent she can only see the floor
and her own feet shuffling in front of her.

Doubled up, her bones crumpled
under their own weight, like an old turtle
pushing her walking frame over the parquet
she finally makes it to the grand piano.

Transfers her weight from the frame, cautiously
leans on the instrument. Shifts, laborious,
knees bent, nose almost touching the keyboard.
Is ready. Only the slow movements, she confesses,
it is in the shoulders and I can no longer
practise four hours a day. Nevertheless
there is a repertoire. *Molto lento* these days
but *sostenuto*.

Always in her mind
sunrise from a flat roof overlooking a garden
where women lay out washing. Stray dogs. Oranges.
Off the Via Dolorosa a sandal maker
would fix them while one waited. From the baker
one bought chollas for the Sabbath, eggs
from a woman who sold bitter herbs
in spring and lilies in their glory.

Sunlight, silence, singing. The stones
still standing one upon the other.
Brilliant passages, golden blessed city,
milk, honey, olives, fig trees, ailanthus.
Annekate knows it in her bones.

She remembers Jerusalem.
And the slow movements are still possible.

Dorothy Nimmo

Two Poems**GUARDIAN ANGEL**

I felt his hot breath
On my neck
As I ran up the narrow staircase
Flight after flight

But then he tripped
And fell

As far as Icarus
With a dagger of sunlight
In his back

Today all that remains
Is his body dried in a schoolbook
A giant butterfly
With the twisted face of an injured child

Today the ones who follow me around
Have walkie-talkies instead of hearts
The small change of their humanity
Rattling in their pockets
From what kind of heaven did they fall

THE LAST DAYS OF MY GUARDIAN ANGEL

Out of the blue my guardian angel dropped by
He wasn't daunted by my age
Or my skeptical smile

As he sat across from me in silence
I noticed that his wings were gone
He was breathing too quickly
And stunk of vodka and cigarettes
He was old and living on borrowed time

He sat across from me in silence
But I didn't need words to understand
That the heavens outside my window were empty
That the only sound left was the murmur of stars
The dying bees of the universe
Still going about their work

Tomasz Jastrun, translated by Daniel Bourne

Tomasz Jastrun, born in 1950, has won awards for his poetry from both official and underground Poland. His major books include *On the Crossroads of Asia and Europe* (written while hiding from the authorities during the early stages of martial law in 81-82) and *A Time for Remembrance and Forgetting*, from which the two present poems are taken. He currently lives in Warsaw, and is an editor for the cultural journal *Respublica*. He spent 1985 in the U.S. on a fellowship from the Kościuszko Foundation.

"In pain and in hope"

W.S. Merwin, *The Rain in the Trees* (N.Y.: Knopf, 1988, 84 pp., \$8.95 paper), and *Regions of Memory: Uncollected Prose 1949-1982*, edited by Ed Folsom and Cary Nelson (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois, 1987, 364 pp., \$24.95 cloth).

In his aim to purge his images of "referentiality," Merwin has sometimes abstracted them beyond the grasp of his audience. But at a symposium in his honor at Beloit College in 1981, he gave a reading in which he succumbed (as he later confessed) to "a moment of weakness and friendliness" and explained some of his references. I respect his concern that this dilutes the impact of the poem, but I left that reading with a new confidence that I was responding appropriately to his work. Later, in generous and open conversation with Folsom and Nelson, he further discussed his interests and his work. This wonderfully illuminating interview, expanded, is a bonus at the end of *Regions of Memory*, and it should be all any reader needs to feel at home with the poems. Furthermore, Merwin's new poems are so brilliantly lucid (though subtle and complex) that they should be on any person's short list of books essential to our survival in this dark time.

The Rain in the Trees is not divided into the conventional subject/theme chapters. It is like an open ocean, through which great swells of concern surge. The reader comes to anticipate the resurgence of each of these: the poet's wandering away, in imagination and in fact, from a repressed and restricting family; his awareness of languages—pre- and post-alphabetical, preverbal and non-verbal; his anger at the arrogance, the solipsism, the deification of things and money that are massacring innocence and rendering our planet uninhabitable; the sorrow (not unmixed with rage) at the mindless obliteration of the earth's richness—physical and cultural—and the numbing of the capacity for sensuous attention essential to its preservation and restoration; the solace of love; and the memory of the sacred. These concerns reappear throughout the book in complex interconnections, like waves intersecting and merging off a headland. They are all familiar from earlier Merwin poems, but they appear with a breathtaking freshness in this new book.

The more we recognize the irreversible losses on our planet, the more we will value our elegiac poets. Merwin's "Chord" parallels the life and death of Keats with the synchronous destruction of the sandalwood forests:

while the song broke over him they were in a secret place
 and they were cutting it forever
 while he coughed they carried the trunks to the hole in the
 forest the size of a foreign ship.

And the imperialism that converts the rich forests into sterile pastures and instruments of further destruction devastates not only the environment but the diverse and eloquent cultures that were inseparable from it. To will them back is futile. In "Hearing the Names of the Valleys," the poet says:

Finally the old man is telling
 the forgotten names
 and the names of the stones they came from
 for a long time I ask him the names
 and when he says them at last
 I hear no meaning
 and cannot remember the sounds.

This is a hard review to write because I want to quote poem after poem. Let me just mention a few interesting pairs. First are two that chronicle the devastation of the mountainside on Maui where the poet and his wife have built their home and are encouraging the return of the indigenous flora and fauna: "Rain at Night" and "Native." From the former:

after an age of leaves and feathers
 someone dead
 thought of this mountain as money
 and cut the trees
 . . .
 but the trees have risen one more time
 and the night wind makes them sound
 like the sea that is yet unknown
 the black clouds race over the moon
 the rain is falling on the last place.

Then there are two respectful and attentive poems on "the elders"—the insects who preceded us here and who will very likely supersede us when we have made the environment uninhabitable for vertebrates: "To the Insects" and "After the Alphabets." And some of Merwin's most moving love poems are here, among them two at the heart of the book—two virtually perfect lyrics which almost succeed in stopping Time's winged chariot for the space of the poem: "Sight" and "The Solstice," both too tightly constructed to excerpt. There is also a curious pair of poems that project the image of a network against the sky. One, "The Invisible Lightness," I quote complete:

The roads and everything on them fly up and dissolve
a net rises from the world
the cobweb in which it was dying
and the earth breathes naked with its new scars
and sky everywhere.

The other is the clear but cryptic final poem in the book, "The Rose Beetle," which I leave to each reader to ponder.

And don't overlook the prose volume, *Regions of Memory*. There you will find Merwin the writer of haunting fiction, of spell-binding memoirs and autobiographical narratives, and of quietly moving political essays. It is clear that Thoreau is one of Merwin's great mentors. And you will also find the 41-page conversation between the poet and his editors, which Carolyn Kizer has called "the best interview I've ever encountered."

Sharon Olds, *The Gold Cell* (N.Y.: Knopf, 1987, 98 pp., \$8.95 paper). Every once in a while a book appears that seems to epitomize the best of poetry in its day. This is one such book, and everyone concerned about the main stream of poetry today should read it and be heartened. The first section is a chain of brilliant short narrative poems, each compelling the reader's empathy with someone who represents the human condition in an age of starvation, violence, and self-violence. They remind me of the pageant of horrors the furies produce to torture Prometheus in Shelley's great prophetic drama. And the voice of Olds recalls the response of Prometheus: "Thy words are like a cloud of winged snakes/ And yet, I pity those they torture not." Like Shelley, Olds

demands that Hope survive, even when it means survival into pain. Her second section is of brutally candid autobiographical poems—the poet's home movies run backwards to her conception, speeded up, in powerful vignettes, telephoto shots of astonishing clarity and candor. The third section is about learning to make love—more contemplative than erotic. And the final section is about life with children, children who are often sick, sometimes lost, who must go out into a world where the menaces are real. Olds has, as poet and parent, a discipline for coping:

I am doing something I learned early to do, I am
paying attention to small beauties,
whatever I have—as if it were our duty to
find things to love, to bind ourselves to this world.

The organization of the volume reflects this wisdom: Olds does not pontificate (indeed, her pontiff, in "The Pope's Penis," is endearingly human). She casts a cold and passionate eye on the bitter realities of life on a sick and probably doomed planet and concludes:

When love comes to me and says
What do you know, I say This girl, this boy.

Pablo Neruda, *Late and Posthumous Poems: 1968-1974*, edited and translated by Ben Belitt (N.Y.: Grove Press, 1988, 288 pp., \$21.95 cloth, \$10.95 paper), and *Stones of the Sky*, translated by James Nolan (Port Townsend WA: Copper Canyon Press, 1987, 80 pp., \$15.00 cloth, \$9.00 paper).

Because it is important that we always be dissatisfied with reading in translation, I am pleased that both volumes have the Spanish *en face*. Little as I know Spanish, I often want to argue with Belitt's translations. And this is good, driving me into the poems themselves, which are astonishing. Anyone who has not caught up with the later Neruda should get these volumes.

The selections in the *Late and Posthumous Poems* are from the nine books the poet composed in the last years of his life. I especially cherish the poems in *Las manos del día* (*The Hands of Day*), especially "28325674549," indicting the tyranny of numbers, and "Esto es sencillo" (*This Is Simple*), shaming the human arrogance of language with the

eloquent reserve of trees, roots, and grain. These are poems of the utmost clarity. I am nourished in a different way by *Libro de preguntas* (*Book of Questions*), with each poem composed of four two-line questions that explode old concepts of metaphor: "Dime, la rosa está desnuda/o sólo tiene ese vestido? (Tell me, is the rose really naked/or does it just dress that way?)" and another: "Quién oye los remordimientos/ del automóvil criminal? (Who hears the penance/of the criminal automobile?)"

Ideally one should have each of these nine volumes complete. The one I do have is *Las piedras del cielo* (*Stones of the Sky*), supple penetrating lyrics, all entering imaginatively into the life of stones. *Quarry West 25* (Porter College, University of California, Santa Cruz CA 95064, \$7.00) has a valuable section on "Pablo Neruda and Contemporary U.S. Poetry." In it Alastair Reid reminds us that

the constant in all of Neruda's work is his unwavering sense of having a *deber*, a poet's obligation. His often-declared function as a poet was "to be a voice for all that had no voice," and that included the inanimate physical world as well as the oppressed human one. (p. 57).

In his last years Neruda's voice sounds close to the resonance of sky-stones, stones singing in streams, gems glowing through time, and the luminous energy of "the only star that is ours."

Brad Leithauser, *Cats of the Temple* (N.Y.: Knopf, 1986, 72 pp., \$7.95 paper). These poems are for the reader who is tired of abstract expressionist poetry and wants to savor the inventiveness of the *maker*, to linger over the patterns delicately but formally reticulating the stanzas. O.K., call it the "New Formalism." It has its pleasures. Marry Marianne Moore to Herrick and enjoy the company of the playful progeny. Each stanza is a newly-minted form. Rhymes giggle and scamper: *rabbit, inhabit, elaborate, rabid*. The rabbit suitor, "who's sharp on fundamentals" is enjambed with a caper, in a courtship "flushed with piquant/concupiscent/satisfaction." Words twist as they double: "he waits/for the desire/to mount to mount." These snippets from "Rabbits: A Valentine" suggest the divertissements that await the reader. But it's not all on the surface. One sub-text of the volume is a wry self-portrait. See especially "On the Lee Side (Cape Breton, Nova Scotia)," in which the narrator finds "the site—and seat" for which he has been looking and settles in to "a hip-sized hollow/on the lee side of a

low/but broad-boled pine, above a blue-gray,/fretted inlet," and with "eyes/closed wide on darkness" opens the senses (his and the reader's) to an approaching storm, and from his "all-/but-absolute sense of shelter" finds it hard to censure his "queer/but predictable inner companion" who craves only instant gratification and who's "neatly, snugly sure"

just how this splendid
show of weather's to be accounted for:
ingenious exhibitions exclusively intended
to entice and entertain him here.

Another of Liethauser's delicious travel poems. "The Tigers of Nanzen-ji," invites the reader into a place "of tumbled boundaries/and whetted penchants." These grounds are the preserve

of a rare, ferociously
playful mind. Enter. You are free
from harm here. There's nothing to fear.

De te fabula, Mr. Liethauser; these lines elegantly describe your volume.

Mekeel McBride, *Red Letter Days* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie-Mellon, 1988, 80 pp., \$14.95 cloth, \$7.95 paper). The title promises pleasure, and the first lines of the poems confirm it: "Strictly off the record, officer...," "Chair, you are somewhat like me...," "In walks this lady, seventy-five, maybe...." Comical, sunny poems, witty and well-made, poems of the fancy, in the best sense. In my favorite, "How Spring Appears This Time of Year in New England," every line pops a surprise, and the whole poem, like the whole book, is enough to make February grin.

Alfred Corn, *The West Door* (N.Y.: Viking Penguin, 1989, 76 pp., \$17.95 cloth, \$8.95 paper). Corn is a prosodist of distinction. He is also capable of the meticulous accuracy of observation that can somehow or other transform an ordinary or random act into a luminous epiphany. "Naskeag" accomplishes this little miracle. But the scary heart of this book is a long Frostian narrative, "An Xmas Murder." It is one of the memorable narrative poems of our day, and an analysis of the metrics will prove fruitful for anyone curious about how blank verse has evolved since Frost.

Garrett Hongo, *The River of Heaven* (N.Y.: Knopf, 1988, 70 pp., \$16.95, cloth). This is a rich book, from its luscious cover, its elegant binding, and its creamy laid paper, to its lavish imagery, its warmth and generosity of shared experience, its breadth of humanity. Part One is an evocation of Hongo's Hawaiian background, not just local color, but deep in human history. Part Two is largely from the poet's later, mainland life—more urban, but still the vision of a unique participation in a moving life that is profoundly rooted in ancient cultures. The final poem in the book, "The Legend," tells of the random shooting, by a kid who's just robbed a package store, of a nameless Asian pedestrian on the streets of Chicago. It ends:

Tonight, I read about Descartes'
 grand courage to doubt everything
 except his own miraculous existence
 and I feel so distinct
 from the wounded man lying on the concrete
 I am ashamed.
 Let the night sky cover him as he dies.
 Let the weaver girl cross the bridge of heaven
 and take up his cold hands.

Olav H. Hauge, *Trusting Your Life To Water and Eternity*, twenty poems chosen and translated by **Robert Bly** (Minneapolis MN: Milkweed Editions, 1987, 54 pp., \$6.95 paper). Limpid poems with the "country Norwegian," printed *en face*, so that even I can sound out the music of the originals. Here are the first lines of one poem:

Before I go to bed I open the curtains.
 When I wake up I want to see the living dark
 and the pines and sky. I know a grave;
 if you're there you do not see the stars.

The first line is "Eg dreg ifra glaset fyrr eg legg meg," a wonderful dragging line. The last is "som ikkje har glugg mot stjernone," which opens out in the throat as in the mind.

Daniel Halpern, *Tango* (N.Y.: Viking Penguin, 1987, 88 pp., \$10.95 paper). Most of these quiet poems are like thoughtfully refined journal entries—polished so as to be gracefully colloquial, honest as well as accurate, fixing significant spots of place and time in an album into which a stranger is invited to look. All are rewarding, and a few, like the brilliant recollection "Pound," are unforgettable.

Susan Tichey, *A Smell of Burning Starts the Day* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan, 1988, 72 pp., \$18.50 cloth, \$10.95 paper). When in Tarlac, Central Luzon, Tichey discovered that a relative had been in command of the brutal army of occupation there at the turn of the century. This volume of poems has the extraordinary richness of sensitive personal observation, informed by the knowledge of the historian, and colored by the moral and political responses of a true poet. Those who have read individual poems in the journals can only guess at the richness and wisdom of the book as a whole. Tichey avoids polemic; with integrity and imagination she gives a voice to the voiceless.

Sandra M. Gilbert, *Blood Pressure* (N.Y.: Norton, 1988, 128 pp., \$15.95 cloth). These are sharp, strong poems—but chilly! From the Snow Queen poems at the beginning to the "cold braille" of the rain at the end, this is a volume dedicated to "the ways of the ice," "narrow, delicate." Only in the Sicilian poems of "The Summer Kitchen" does the language of love simmer and steam. But even there the "oiled, dyed" eggs in the Easter sonnet contain: "Inside each one something cold and hard." In the tension between the loves that inspire these poems and the intelligence that composes them Gilbert's imagination simultaneously flares and crystallizes.

Denise Levertov, *Breathing the Water* (N.Y.: New Directions, 1987, 96 pp., \$16.95 cloth, \$6.95 paper). Many of the poems in this volume are questing, seeking, and exploring sacred texts. Rilke and Julian of Norwich haunt the pages. There are some clearly political poems, and several of these, though explicitly didactic, are nonetheless eloquent. "From the Image-Flow—South Africa 1986" with its vision of "Africa, gigantic slave-ship, not anchored yet not moving" transforms its subject and troubles the imagination. "Making Peace" responds to those who demand of the poets an "imagination of peace." The poet wisely replies:

But peace, like a poem,
is not there ahead of itself,
can't be imagined before it is made,
can't be known except
in the words of its making,
grammar of justice,
syntax of mutual aid.

Willard R. Espy, *Words to Rhyme With* (N.Y.: Holt, 1988, 660 pp., \$19.95 paper, large format). This ought to be the most comprehensive dictionary of rhymes, since Espy admits that an associate compiled it from all the other such works he could lay hands on. It's BIG all right. There is an amusing glossary of some unusual words, and Espy lards the volume lavishly with examples of his own light verse. If that's what you want, you'll get your money's worth. But beware the introductory *Primer of Prosody*, which is disfigured with typos (such as *storage* for *storge*), inconsistent use of metrical symbols, inaccurate scansion, and a good deal of downright misinformation. Espy confuses quantitative and qualitative verse. He blurs rhythm and meter. He defines English heroic couplets as iambic hexameter. And — well, *caveat emptor!*

M.K.S.