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Cover: *Columbine*, by Robert Shetterly, Jr., pencil drawing, 1988.

MAKING THE CHOICE

How often when marriage is on the tapis and the
happy couple are discussing the question of ways and
means will the natural query arise, What about a piano?

—John Brimsmead and Sons, advertisement 1902

A piano to wear on her finger.
A piano like a bouquet of flowers,
babies' breath and daisies,
held behind the young man's back
as he stands at her door.
What about a piano, he murmurs, dear?

In the dim-lit store a Chickering
draws her eye. Herman stands behind.
His hands ache for her shoulders,
for the hidden knee that rises and
falls. Maud leans over the keys.
A breeze teases across her mouth

a soft brown strand. Her parted
lips grow moist. She can hardly
see in the bright whip of air.
She leans out, over the keys.
Suddenly, everything she thought
was fastened, comes undone.

Three Poems

WHO KNEW

She was crying in the kitchen.
I didn't want breakfast.
She hadn't made breakfast,
just a half frozen lump of juice
in my glass and a spoon.
"He's cheating on me."
I knew and knew with whom.

What dishes would break,
what pills would she take,
why would she write such a long note
then snip it and snip it
into the kitchen pail?
I drank the juice then ran to school.

Tire marks through my hopscotch grid,
all the doors unlocked, she'd left
my two suitcases unpacked,
untouched under my bed.
Who knew when she'd be back?
Who cared if she was dead.

She called when he got home,
when I was in my room,
her letter, pages of blurry tears
pasted together in my drawer,
his voice, a drunken palm
begging at my door.

DREAMING OF FLIGHT

I thought she was dead. Father buried Flight.
But there she is in the corner of my dream,
vicious as the day she ate my rabbits.
I thought she was dead. Father buried Flight,
dragging her past the empty rabbit hut
then rinsed his bloody shirt in the muddy stream.
I thought she was dead. Father buried Flight.
But here we are in the corner of my dream.

INSIDE FATHER'S POCKETS

I was sticking my hands into his pockets
changing jacks for quarters
and spitting one wet marble
into each shirt pocket
so he'd look like a woman.
I was making him nervous.
He sat me on the couch across the room.
I climbed down twice.
When he ordered me to sleep, I lifted
for a kiss, my arms
around his neck and pulled him down
and pulled him down, he breathes
You always want more, don't you?
Don't I.

Martha Rhodes

THE FOX

Out the garage door,
out to the trapline path
where I met Tony, smelled his bait
stained parka. We walked
a quarter mile wood
into the papered field behind Long Island Bank.
We usually caught possums, an occasional coon.
This morning only a rabbit
curled hard around a waxed spring.
Tony never said "dead," only "finished,"
or "frozen stiff."

I didn't want to tell him.

An hour ago Aunt Lil burned eggs to the pan,
my father drank coffee
with the policeman.

My mother died in the night and I was the only
one dressed for December.

On slow days Tony would say
"this is where she was,"
remembering the shock of red, black legs pulling
chain from the snow mound where we
buried a dove. A year ago, our only fox.
One stroke cracked to the brain.

Leaky-pink teeth, steam, urine. The tail
brushing against my neck
as I carried it home.

"Jesus, it's beautiful," my father said.

But my mother went wild
screaming into the garage where it hung.

She never stopped. Hysterical, suddenly before dinner,
stroking my head, telling me to promise
"for the fox, the brilliant fox."

Dad said "no trapping this winter,"

but we went out, Tony and I, every morning.

This morning, looking for the pointed tracks she made,

Stanza continued

planting birds to lure back
that soft hair,
those thin-faced nerves
across the exhausting highway.

Henry J. Hughes

midsummer day

noon, midsummer day, and in the sun
all the birds have fallen silent as
if the woods, too, were taking a nap,
the only sound the rumble of dreams
like one of those heavy semis out of
canada, that muted, distant, highway
thunder, prophesying this evening's
storms, a voice from where the clouds
are building, darkening, deep inside.
and nothing can stop it, this thing
as natural as the ox-eye daisies
blinking open in the wilderness
of uncut grasses circling the house.
every dream's a bullet in the brain,
the bullet of an assassin, muffled
by a silencer, just one small sound
at impact, the skull splintering
when there's no one left to hear it.
not even a bird flies up to disturb
the silences of noon, midsummer day.

22 june 1987

Alvin Greenberg

Three Poems

COPULATION

In the horse's neck are muscles
stronger than all the muscles
in a strong man's body.

And I love the muscles in a strong man's body.

The part of his weight he carries
on one hoof can crush
a man's head and sometimes
does in a moment
of carelessness and grief.

Though mostly he's known for the miracle
of avoiding bones and grief.

Unlike what has replaced him he
must eat. And unlike what has
replaced him he can move
up hill through timber and hardly
bruise the petals of columbine
and flax.

I speak of the bruising of petals,
the way they darken and
release their heart.

He takes me with him by consent, and he
consents not because of intelligence
or the fine web of nerve that isolates
even a single hoof; he consents because
his heart, his ears, his stride, his lip
belong to others, to every
other in what we hear ourselves call
the herd.

I hear another enter me —
whisper of pollen,
revolution of root through rock.

I know the way, and we take
each other by consent
into the world of thunderstorms
and little-red-shooting-star.
He looks toward danger
and I look too.
We see the arm
of light and agree to fly
through rock wall and loosestrife
and one-flowered-wintergreen . . .

Why a girl wants a horse —
that limiting lie.

A woman rides
alone into a wilderness
and is not alone.

Strength and trust.
Forms of power.
Knowing that what
you hold in your hands
is a mouth.

AFTER A CONVERSATION ON RILKE, DARWIN,
AND REMBRANDT'S SELF-PORTRAIT AS AN OLD MAN

Suzanne, in your room the vast worlds
appear as the homes of reptiles
and their close cousins, the birds.
At night the crickets you feed them with
sing, as from the streetlights, shadows
fall through leaves so huge
they dwarf the mind, a heavy
flesh in mid-air, arc
of the stem expressing grief.
It's here you see. But you do not see
with the eyes of your animals,
nor with the eyes of the great
biologist, sailing into a world
that began at the edge of himself.
In the gothic dark of your paint box
are all the turns and openings —
fear to love, and fin to feather.
Yet even as you paint these forms
you write: *there is no pure
endurance of forms. They adhere
to life* I think of the parrot
pressing himself against your face
for warmth. I think of the perfect skeleton
of a baby rabbit I found
in the decomposing stomach of an owl

Last night, as I dreamed in the shade
of mercury and palm, I was in these worlds —
no story, just a hand
that felt its way up a wall
of wet, uneven stone, able to grip, unable to raise
the body. It seemed it would hang on
forever, like the cricket's song, like the balanced
fear of speech and silence. Through it all
you slept, body in bed, head on the damp
floor of the toad terrarium. This
was a peaceful dream, maternal.
They were as careful of you
as you are tender, adding a blush
to the neckless, swimming, whiskered thing
that breathes mauve air from your brush
Forgive me. If I seem to be talking
with rocks in my mouth, I am. It is not easy
speaking of this. It is not easy praising
an act of conscience, a painting in which
the heart lies on a table, and the table
stands in a garden, so we cannot see its legs.
Just dark cloth, the simple cloth,
and light he placed so wisely
on the beautiful wreck of his skin.

NIGHT TRAVEL

Then you happen to see a fetus,
with its transparent eyelids, floating
with arms up near its head.
And the red red placenta,
like a heart.

You forget good reasons.
The history of earth is a tree
of fossils and capillaries.
Extinction and bleeding —
on these things happiness rests.

Later on, you might try an image like this:
water on the tongue, deer on the mountain.
But begin with a day of envy for the grass.

Moss is what grows the bone.
It carries blood, then sheds away
like the glove inside a womb.
Much can be understood
in terms like these — the antlers fall,
you pick them up, preserve them. And though

the thing floats forever in twilight
it's the same twilight from which deer spring,
their small feet sounding
on grass, gravel, grass . . .

They don't hold still,
but your mind holds them, feels their weight.
And the life that carries them, the shock.
Of nothing. There. Nothing.

THE VERANDAH

*

From a neighbor's house, my daughter's laughter carries
Over the darkening water, and the deeper
Tones of the boy I tell her she'll someday marry,
Though she tells me she's known him forever,
No chance of romance, while solitary
On the verandah I watch the Necco-wafer-
Pink sun sink (oh, sentimental hour)
And from boat to boat the wrinkled water hurry
Whispering, *Temporary, temporary.*

*

Full moon high tide, the harbor brimful, quivering.
The evening quickens with the passionate cries
Of children, *Come on, come on,* and *Coming, coming,*
To kick the can or chasing fireflies
Or lighting firecrackers on a string
To throw them from a float and get a rise
From pogies and dark watchers-from-verandahs,
Who bark a few clichés about the young
And then subside, ashamed, remembering.

*

My mother had a sort of swinging divan
On which she glided through decades of summers
On the verandah, out of the mad-dog sun.
From it one day she watched her youngest plummet
Down from the sky like an angel heaved from heaven
Or sun-singed Icarus plunging from his summit.
Silent I fell—into a fortunate privet.
Silent she glided. The roof I knew forbidden,
And I knew myself neither condemned nor forgiven.

*

No running on the pier or horseplay on the float;
An hour after meals before you swim;
Bait your own hook; no standing up in rowboats;
Never half-hitch the main sheet on the wind;
Voices carry over water, so don't shout.
Such were the laws, sensible and simple,
And from verandahs on the harbor's rim
Binoculars kept every child in sight
And registered what we did wrong or right.

*

All day on the verandah my mother swayed
Like a sailboat from its mooring swaying,
Watching the sunlit stage on which we played
(Darkness lurking always in the wings,
For shimmering surfaces and friends betray)
And finding cause for praise in everything
But outboards, barking dogs, and children whining.
So with the easy tether of her gaze
She moored us in the casual drift of days.

*

Sunset verandahs? Cocktails and philandering?
Not on this one, since I can remember.
Pandering, yes; verandah-sitters scanned
The stars and brought my wife and me together
One Sunday afternoon on the verandah.
A nice girl, a nice boy, and nearly neighbors,
You might have thought that we'd been friends forever
As we drank iced tea and shared a tuna sandwich
And began to ponder what our fates had planned.

*

Night and day on the verandah, Love,
We hear the foghorn sounding from the Bay;
A mourning dove, you say, a warning dove,
Dark undertone to our complacent days.
What does it mourn, what does it warn us of,
Alone there in the middle of the waves,
Unmoving center of their mirrored maze,
Until our thoughts and dreams seem woven of
That sound as lonely as the loss of love?

*

A summer house: a house of many rooms
Where the dead, the living, and the still unborn
Mingle like jigsaw-puzzle pieces from
The box marked *Some are missing* that entertained
My family through the annual three-day storm.
They brush against each other at each turning,
Presences familiar and unknown,
And on the verandah now a shadowy form
Seining for ghosts with his loose nets of rhyme.

Charles W. Pratt

Four Poems**WHAT SHE COULD DO**

I took a wrong turn and the midwife got mean.
You don't trust me, she said.
I didn't, so she reached up to the bag
and turned my labor up some more.
I bit my tongue clear through.

She had tea after she broke my waters,
rocked in the rocker, flipping quickly through
to the article on what she could do
to transform her home with merely one yard
of inexpensive red ribbon.

DEBBIE LOUISE IN ODESSA TX

My Mexican mother-in-law says,
if I don't give in to my cravings
the baby will be born, eyes too big
a little bird, open mouthed and begging.

No to ice cream. To chocolate ice cream, to coffee.

Maybe I'll take this big ol' belly of mine,
part the beaded curtains, and go dance again
in the tittie bar. That would turn them off.
Make them laugh. Oh, you've gotta laugh.

No booze. No cigarettes.

My only job now is to mind the Mexican waitresses.
They'll close us if they find them girls doing
five dollar blow jobs in the back stalls. I can't
imagine doing it for so little.

No job. No money.

I know how it is to feel hemmed in but
Jeez, those girls haven't got any morality. They
say: Babies are born pitiful. Crying pitiful.
Ice cream or no ice cream. Those girls are hard cases.

FARM CORNERSTONE

Wishing again to hear willow branches scratching the roof,
I know the place has been sold to an airline pilot.
This man may tear down the heavy synthetic curtains
In my father's back-bedroom, where my mother lay.
A golden light came through the curtains; always closed.
Her own eyes, closed, took in a light filtered by willow leaves,
A somber, shady light she never tried to fight, asking only
A supply of whole milk and berries, out of season, before we left.

She was sold with the place, along with failed hopes
For a family single-minded in its work. These go with house,
Are tightly bound, as her white feet were bound,
And hurting so badly. Each family must make its own contribution.
I am sorry. What will the new man think . . . all alone;
when his wife takes to bed wanting only the dampened light?
A somber light she will never try to fight, nor will she
Call out as her husband rolls the stone before the door.

MISS AMERICA

Just to say something about willow branches
Blown down by fall winds.
Of how I gathered them on one arm,
Like a bunch of roses,
Stood waiting at the pasture fence
And eyes still on the mountains,
Thank you, thank you,
Threw them over to the horses.

THE BLINDS

I remember sitting
with you one winter day,
you in bed sleeping,
you smoking in your gray
armchair, and I nearly
empty of everything I feel
or know now, looking intently
out into a veinwork, a snarl
of branches, our hands
and eyes behind the bars
of half-drawn Venetian blinds
underlining the sky a dozen
times; and through it all, sun
-shine spilled over the sill,
bringing us at least one
more day. What I will
never forget, I am afraid,
with the trees turning their
bark to silver, the radiance
in my lap and in your hair,
the lines of light and shade
silently ruling the short
time left, is when you said
you never thought your
life was of much importance.
I was unable to explain my
speechlessness, then
as now, and certainly I
never dreamed I would devote
half a life's poetry to
showing you — can you see it
yet? Look at it through

my eyes now, each bit
of dust shining so brightly
for a moment as it
crosses the path of light.

Margaret Holley

TUGGING

The things I'm talking about have nothing to do with love
so it doesn't matter if I sound loud, impatient, angry,
self-assertive—I'm all of those things, about things,
about myself if I had the courage to be fair-minded.
But fair-mindedness is not what I'm talking about either.

I'm going to get an old dog from the pound
to fetch my slippers, the ones (slippers that is)
I plan to buy for him to feed on
with shaggy hair (the dog's now), not too long,
rumpled a bit, and he will love me cautiously.

There's too much tugging to love. Not just arms
which way they reach, or feet which way they walk;
he'll (dog again) tug on worn knotted socks
that move me only when I myself reach down
to hold one end; chase when I throw; return; do
battle easily at my bidding, on my side.

Yet all the while I'll know the game's pretending:
he'll know too ours is invented love:
slippers I never wore, socks I discarded,
tugs I let go of when the front door rattled, its
lock clicked to your key.

J. B. Satterthwaite

PURIM SPIEL

The elder, alter older —
a tree
alone with its thoughts

Of kings, of Isaac snatched
by the ram's horn
again
the thorn
burning for Rivka by the well

Between them wide as an ocean
white wake foaming
a cormorant with flaming tail

Fuming from the waves
its signature of white on blue
a warrant sent

Against the world
 but wait!
the story changes . . .

Back track
the firebird on its flume
red tongue panting like a dog
In heat. Esther. Queen
of Persia prancing for her idle king

A worshiper of things
he lays his power down
upon her ceding haunch

And she, she rollicks in her duty
rolls his Majesty
about the gilded room

Until a tree
grows in his mind the Alter
Elder is at stake
its point

Can touch the heart and
stop it

Cold, a twitching stick
with eyes wide

As oceans, as the
desert city
on the desert's edge He sees.

Taking in at last
breath
the Jews dancing
for their lives
their purled queen
the sequined

Rider blossoming like snow
like the bloom of the dark
crocus below

The bruise under that white
skin, a king's passion
pressed against her breast
the alter

Of his lust, her love
but not for him — the world

Lays itself before her
renews the pledge To her

As with each morning
clouds mount
the skies and ancient trees
will come again to crown gray mountains with new green.

PICASSO'S SNAKE LADY SINGS THE BLUES

She's in profile, withdrawing
behind a chemise of light,
but he wants a snake —
full-faced, two eyes full of spite
and a sinuous blue body. He paints
her cobalt — cheekbones, top hat,
strapless gown, leaving her breasts
the color of canvas.

I want some sugar

With a swipe of yellow,
he highlights her hips,
poking a cigarello
into her savage red smile.
some sugar in my bowl.

Hot as flame, ears erect,
a fox curls from her shoulder
down her breast to the nipple.
Her eyes are sequins.

I want a little sweetness

She slices the air over his head
with a sharp fingernail,
blue snake thrashing, hissing.

. . . a little steam

He jabs her with his brush.
Too much blue. He whites out
her face, and with his raging
palette knife he scrapes off
her top hat, her gown.

on my clothes.

Closing one of her eyes
he turns the other into a light bulb
and takes a wedge from her face,
flipping it over.
One breast floats in upper air.
The fox sinks into canvas.

I want a little

He squeezes oily black
midnight straight from the tube
on her hair. Then he moves her smile
to her navel,
surrounding it with green.

... sugar

All he sees now
is his own savage smile,
all he needs to see.

... sweetness.

Jacqueline Moore

Three Poems

YOU WANT ME WHITE

You want me white.
You want me foam.
You want me mother-of-pearl.
That I be a white lily,
chaste over all others.
Faintly fragrant,
a closed corolla.

That not even the moonlight
would filter me.
Nor a daisy
call herself my sister.
You want me white.
You want me snow-white
You want me chaste.

You, who once
had all the cups
at hand,
your lips, purple
with fruits and honey.
You, who covered with vines,
left your flesh
at the banquet
celebrating Bacchus.
You, who dressed in red,
ravaged yourself
in the black gardens of Deceit.
You, who keep
your skeleton intact
by I don't know what miracle,
you fancy me white
(God forgive you),

Stanza continued

you fancy me chaste
(God forgive you),
you fancy me dawn.

Run to the woods;
go to the mountains;
wash out your mouth;
live in huts;
touch with your hands
the wet soil;
nourish your body
with bitter roots;
drink from the rocks;
sleep on frost;
repair your fabric
with salt and water;
talk to the birds
and rise with the dawn.
And when your flesh
is restored to you,
when you have given it back to
your soul —
which was left
all tangled in bedrooms —
then good man,
pretend I'm white,
pretend I'm snow white
pretend I'm chaste.

DEPARTING

High gates of gold
close a path
to the borderland;
deep galleries;
arcades.

The air has no weight.
The gates are swinging
in the void,
flapping to and fro;
they disintegrate into golden dust,
go down to the graves
of seaweed,
rise burdened with coral.
Rounds,
there are rounds of columns;
the gates are hidden
behind the low blue walls;
the water spills into fields of forget-me-nots,
gives off deserts of purple crystals,
hatches great emerald worms,
braids its innumerable arms.

A rain of wings:
Now,
rosy angels
stick themselves like
arrows into the sea.
I could walk on them
without going under.

A path of figures:
submerged,
number columns
for each step.

I am carried away:
invisible climbing vines
stretch out their hooks
from the horizon:
my neck creaks.
I start walking.

The water does not yield.
My shoulders open into wings

I am touching with their edges
the edges of the sky.

I wound it:

The blood of the sky
bathing the sea . . .

Red poppies, red poppies
— nothing but red poppies.

I become lighter:
the flesh falls off my bones.

Now.

The sea rises up my spine.

Now.

The sky rolls through my veins.

Now.

The sun! The sun!

Its last threads
wrap around me,

prompt me:

I am a spindle:

I am turning, turning, turning, turning . . . !

TROPICAL

A white gravestone,
the scorching sky
spreads over the dry earth.

The woods ignite
in red patches.
Curtains of smoke
swallow the landscape
and dry up the towns.

No longer running,
the waters wedge
their opaque surface
deep down into the river bed.

Demons,
their wings afire,
cross the fields in *zaraband*.

Up on the limestone bank
the brazen train
sizzles across.

Dragging myself
through this white hell,
my ovarian plant,
restored,
will grow roots
of jungles,
not of men.

And from my breast
no milk
will spring:
sharp stone
of the mountains.

Alfonsina Storni

Translated by
Margaret Hanzimanolis and Carlos Garcia-Aranda

CROSSING THE RIVER

Mother drives a ferry across the water.
I'm going for the kittens, she murmurs.
Her dark hair, loosened from its braids,
blows backwards, and the spray wets it.
But those are fox skins around her neck,
blowing back, with real teeth and glass eyes,
like the lost kittens we found that I named
Francoise and Francine, but she called
Dirty Nose and Cockroach, the ones
she cuddled on her lap and hand fed.

Little girls look down from the bridge
we pass under, shouting: Mother,
I'm Francine! Mother, I'm Francoise!
Poor babies, whispers Mother, and hands me
Dirty Nose and Cockroach. I carefully
drop them over the side into the dark river.

Mother's hair blows back in the wind,
though it's really the veil from her hat,
her hair is already cut and permed
and awful. Mine looks great at last,
blond now and wavy, almost perfect.

THREE ANSWERS IN SPRING

1 Resurrection

The corpses rise and challenge, coaxing me
To rise, and, though I like spring, I hate this
Constant rotting and rejuvenation
Of flesh. The roots of the apple tree grip
The long buried heart, and when the bees buzz
Around the buds, it's like flies feeding on
Carrion. I've accepted the formal
Attire of trees, so quiet and neat
At the parties in December, and now
This loud leafiness and those birds shacking
Up and singing, from dawn till dusk, about
Lust. I've been happy inside and alone.
Now my heart begins to beat visibly
And I must let it out, to find more room.

2 Dumb Animals

A cock pheasant has been staking his claim
On my turf with a harsh voice that wakes me
Each morning at 6:15, and if my foul
Mood continues, he'll not mate, but meet his
Maker after a shotgun wedding, twelve
Gauge style. Yes, it's spring and the animals
Are courting, mating, building homes with such
Ease, so naturally, it makes me think
If I was a muskrat, there'd be more love
More luck, more lust in my life. I'm so smart
I've talked myself out of suicide ten
Times, but I wish I was dumb, mute, primal.
I wish it was all in the eyes or in
A shake of tail. I'm the muskrat; love me.

3 Spring Profanity

The day I saw two foxes copulate
On the beach, I noticed the grass, at last,
Was turning green. Rosehips, pecked to broken
Shells, hung like thin, wrinkled skulls, mute remnants,
Husks pillaged for seeds in the war of the birds
Against the slow drying, slow dying fruit,
The war fought always in winter for love,
For the simple trophy of making love
In spring. Those robins there on the lawn fuck
In a flurry of feathers, and the word
Fuck feels right on the tongue, against the roof
Of the mouth. My hard teeth rest on my soft
Lip, and I write to you asking how your
Battle is going; when will you come home?

Douglas Woodsum

THE GIFT

They are singing the wedding song
of the good woman. Firecrackers
explode like hearts across a blind
and wheeling sky. In this bedroom
already emptied of my girlhood, I stand
in front of the mirror. The heavy red
of bride-silks weighs me down, gold
pulls at my wrists, my ears. I open
the box. Against worn black velvet
the pearls are globes of fire,
my mother's gift.

*A good woman is a lamp
brightening her mother's name.*

Light from the candle shudders on the pearls,
each strand a rope of shining. Outside,
a shehnai shrills as the groom
steps over our threshold. I picture
his kurta, the starched silk
color of bone, the face I have seen
only in pictures.

*A good woman is known
by her silent, serving hands.*

Hard, white, the pearls press
into my face, chill
as her wet cheekbone night
after splintered night. Mornings,
she hid in the folds of her sari
the blotches, yellow, purple,
erupting under the eye.

*A good woman regards
her husband as her god.*

Incense from the wedding fire
is thick, eye-watering. It is time
for me to walk behind him
around the sacred flames. Time
to speak my wedding vows, to put
my hand into his.

*A good woman leaves her husband's home
only for the cremation grounds.*

They are knocking on the door. The air
is full of drums, crushed jasmine,
cries like birds. Someone
calls my name. Mother, I clasp your gift
around my throat. See how well it fits,
each beautiful, burning strand.

Chitra Divakaruni

Three Poems

NORTHWEST FLIGHT #1173

We guessed your silent passage
by the phosphorescence in your wake.
At dawn we found you stranded on the rocks.

Kunitz

We sit on the tarmac in Indianapolis,
four hours, five, punctuated by coffee
and too small cakes on miniature trays.
The rain taps at the rows of little windows —
the only recognition from the outside world
that we are there — while we,
like the ark on drizzling Ararat,
wait for the levels to go down: the generators
to work. I read poetry and dream of whales.
A beached body, its grunts and squeaks,
small tracks like the flashing instrument panel
that measures the dying of a great interior.

I remember last August when I saw one
trailing phosphorescence off Provincetown:
the long languorous arc of the body dipping
in and out like a needle hemming the seas,
while circling birds above the blowhole
announced the repeated baptism of tonnage,
the metamorphosis of breath to rainbow.

Transferred to another plane, rocking at last
on the runway, all windsocks go, the great wings
spread out over their humming eggs of energy,
we lift, shuddering through fog, to where the sun
pumps above our small geometric lives, and I
wonder as we climb, buoyant in our blindness,
if we too want — like a silver needle freed
of thread — entrance into insubstantial air.

THE BLUE ORANDA

We bought her because she was blue-
silver as my wedding dress
and beautiful two months ago
holding roses to my face
with you so happy
we were sure they'd never fade.

Today she's dying.
We stand over her bowl.

Round and around the bottom shells her veils drift,
sheeting silver off as did my grandmother's
silver-plated spoon I keep to remind me
how it once held honey and glanced through tea.

We cheer her efforts to right herself,
adjust our breathing to the panic of her gills.

More is at stake here than
another Pisces daughter going down in veils.
We are afraid of omens:
a rose-hip fortune read from faded cups,
or worse, much worse:
the glancing silver, the turning spell —
the head brought in on Wednesday's common plate.

ARCHERY LESSON

When they dug them up in Thessaloniki
the men were buried pointing west,
the women, east. Dressed for travel,
the splintered bone still wore
a best bracelet, the gold clasp at the waist.
The luggage too remained — boxes
of brass, a stash of silver and in filigree cases
all that is required: bronze greaves, necklaces of blue
glass, amber and shell.
Only the flesh was gone, shot like an arrow, east
or west, from its poor bone bow.

How we are drawn to these cases of last things
clustered around their bone,
waiting for the flesh to come back
and fill in the spaces,
much as your shoes stand
all a black night empty, their usefulness
yearning to be filled, to be
walked down any street once more
by your notched and targeted flesh.

Alice Friman

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Hayden Carruth's new book has a wonderful title: *Tell Me Again How the White Heron Rises and Flies Across the Nacreous River at Twilight Toward the Distant Islands* (N.Y.: New Directions, 1989, 96 pp., \$8.95 paper). The title is two and a half lines from a poem entitled "Of Distress Being Humiliated by the Classical Chinese Poets." Most of these poems (elegiac and mortality-minded though they be) have the swing and bite of rap poetry. The voice is sardonic, self-deprecating, meticulously accurate, infinitely ingratiating. "A Post-Impressionist Susurrations for the First of November 1983" ends:

Hence I became eventually, gradually, unashamed of my mind's
incapacity, just as I had once written
Poems to be read many times, but what was the use of that? Now
I write poems to be read once and forgotten,
Or not to be read at all.

Well, I've read and reread this book with increasing delight, and, gentle reader, I suggest that you do the same.

David Lehman is the general editor for a new series of annual anthologies somewhat misleadingly titled *The Best American Poetry: 1988, 1989*, etc. (N.Y.: Collier/Macmillan, 1988, 1989, etc.) The first two volumes (250 and 294 pp., \$9.95 paper) are what John Ashbery and Donald Hall, respectively, consider the best verse of the year. They are definitely worth purchasing, and certainly every library should have them. The ground rules are sound: each year a different

guest editor selects no more than seventy-five and no fewer than fifty poems published in the *preceding* year, including one by the guest editor, and no more than three poems by one poet. Most poets contribute a note or short essay on their poems. I don't see how these principles could be improved. Hall has followed Ashbery in picking 75 poets, with one poem each. Considering the contrast between the editors, I was curious about the overlap. It's twenty: in addition to the two editors there are Ammons, Coolidge, Crase, Creeley, Fulton, Greger, Justice, Koch, Levine, Merrill, Palmer, Perelman, Pinsky, David Shapiro, Simic, Snyder, Wilbur, and Williamson. Thus in two years one gets to sample 130 poets, from two radically different viewpoints of what is "best." Ashbery has selected more poems than I need from what I tend to think of as the "Miss American Pie" (or even Ern Malley) school of verse, but there are some powerful poems here (for example, by Hall, Hass, Heaney, and Hecht). Hall selects, as one would expect, more poems with a narrative line. I am glad that he does not shy away from long poems (Bob Perelman's "Movie" takes twenty pages). Even though this series presents only one person's judgment of "best," it provides an outstanding service, particularly since most of the poems are from periodicals, some with very small circulations. I assume that Lehman will continue to look for variety in his guest editors, and I'd expect the next editor to be a woman.

Terrence Des Pres, *Praises and Dispraises: Poetry and Politics: The 20th Century* (N.Y.: Penguin, 1988, 246 pp., \$8.95 paper). Des Pres takes off from Wallace Stevens' statement about the function of the poet: "to help people live their lives." He examines the work of Yeats, Brecht, Breytenbach, McGrath and Rich, in the broader context of *Antigone* and *King Lear*, to illustrate how they meet their obligation "to behold and witness, praise, denounce." This carefully researched and gracefully written book draws to this conclusion:

the importance of poetry has never been greater. As the age of information spills over us, as ships of state drift and list in the nuclear night, the old anchor holds. A solidly imagined story, a fiercely felt poem, still tells us where and who we are, discovers the world and us in it, gives us a sanity the "competent technicians" don't lay claim to.

Constance Hunting, *Between the Worlds: Poems 1983-1988* (Orono, Maine: Puckerbrush Press, 1989, 96 pp., \$8.95 paper). These elegant, luminously-polished poems sing right up off the page in their polyphonic harmonies. Their resonance is complex: in the richness of cultural allusion, the melodious voices, the marriage of humor and wonder, of the colloquial with the mythic. These are substantial poems, and it's hard to excerpt. Try this, one section from "Exiles":

All over Ireland in the sweet, dank night
bedroom window sashes are gently raised to permit
souls of the newly dead.

The language is mercurial: *dank* coupled with *sweet, permit* used in an oddly appealing sense. The reader will most enjoy the poet's mastery by reading these poems aloud.

Rita Dove, *Grace Notes: Poems* (N.Y.: Norton, 1989, 73 pp., \$16.95 hardbound). In a recent interview Dove explains that grace notes in music are the embellishments to the line that "can almost knock you out," but that her title also refers to "those moments of grace we get in life, those moments in which something is given to you or something opens for you." This describes precisely the accomplishments of these forty-eight splendid lyrics. Many are childhood epiphanies; some are political, some intimate, some ironic; all are wonderfully explicit and musical. Dove is one of the most accomplished and appealing of contemporary lyricists.

May Swenson's death has ripped a hole in the fabric of our poetry. Who else has her playful spirit, her quirky angles of vision, her amazing scalpel of language, her easy virtuosity of technique, her pyrotechnic imagination, her throbbing feeling for subjects in the natural world where no one else would think to look? Still, she has left us a glowing book: *In Other Words* (N.Y.: Knopf, 1987, 134 pp., \$16.95 cloth). Consider "Blood Test," celebrating a phlebotomist ("Alien, the male, and black") transformed through his warmth and expertise into a great protective spirit; "A Thank-You Letter," in which the 174" of strong soft cord knotted about the parcel is such a delight that, cat-like or childlike, the poet feels it to be present

enough; and "Goodbye, Goldeneye," a lament for the wild shore sacrificed to flapping plastic, predatory bulldozers, and barrels of garbage. Here also, in twelve chapters, is the ultimate minimalist post-post-modern novel — "The Giraffe." And she has a long poem, "Banyan," almost a book in itself, in which an articulate monkey and a library cockatoo named Blondi explore the universe of a great banyan tree and, simultaneously, the "purpose of life." This is an altogether wonderful book. In its vivid particularity it suggests Marianne Moore; in its virtuosity of formal invention, Elizabeth Bishop; but May Swenson's voice and vision are like no others, and never has she been more exuberant and enchanting than here.

Vital Signs: Contemporary American Poetry from the University Presses, edited by Ronald Wallace (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, 502 pp., \$29.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper). Not only is this a readable collection of poems from the twenty-six university presses, with selections from two hundred of the nine hundred volumes published by them since 1950, but it is a valuable documentation of the output of each press, with a substantial and thoughtful introduction by Wallace, surveying the history of university poetry publishing. He examines some of the myths about the position of the poet in our society, the relationship of academic publishing to trade and small press functions, the influence of the rise of poetry readings and creative writing programs, the charges against "academic poetry," the democratization and the cronyism of American poetry, the role of the presses in canon formation, and the various "schools" of poetry that have arisen in this half-century. Although he writes from within the academic publishing world he anatomizes, Wallace is open-minded, undefensive, and uncombative.

Here are six books that have given me a great deal of pleasure by inviting me into an "especial scene," a region (of space or ethnic tradition or class or time) with an integrity of its own — a region from which I would otherwise suffer exclusion. Each of these strong poets shares not only an especial geographical/cultural world but — generously — a distinctive landscape of the mind.

Derek Walcott, *The Arkansas Testament* (N.Y.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1987, 118 pp., \$14.95 hardbound). Although this volume has a section entitled "Elsewhere," revealing Walcott as widely travelled in the world of letters and the world, it is in the first section, "Here," that I find the most memorable poems: in the West Indies universe, transported, in "The Light of the World," to the beat of Bob Marley on a bus ride into the interior — the poet's interior — and through limpid lyrics like "To Norline," in which some other person in another time will come to the edge of the surf "to memorize this passage/ of a salt-sipping tern,/ like when some line on a page/ is loved, and it's hard to turn."

Daryl Ngee Chinn, *Soft Parts of the Back* (Orlando: University of Central Florida Press, 1989, 72 pp., \$14.95 cloth, \$9.95 paper). These openly autobiographical poems chronicle in eloquent, finely-detailed lyrics the experience of being an American-born Chinese son, husband, and father — "ten thousand years/ of history, tradition, and family,/ What a drag." And yet it is exactly those ten thousand years that provide the depth of insight and integrity, as well as the tension and ambivalence, which make this account so moving and valuable.

Toi Derricotte, *Captivity* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989, 70 pp., \$16.95 cloth, \$8.95 paper). What Chinn does for the Chinese-American, Derricotte does for the upper-middle class black woman. Both are slightly offset from mainstream American society not only by their ethnic consciousness but by their extraordinary powers of observation and language. Both are sensitive instruments recording the waves set up by their differences from the stream flowing over and around them. And those differences — ethnic, intellectual, as well as personal — provide the vividness in their writing. They are what make Derricotte's poems so sharp and memorable and therapeutic: the bitterness of "St. Peter Claver," the empathy of "Christmas Eve: My Mother Dressing," the depth of "Before Making Love." And then there are poems that come from "Elsewhere" but are wonderful in their own way, such as the sublimely comic "Allen Ginsberg." This is one fine strong book.

Wesley McNair, *The Town of No* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1989, 86 pp., \$9.95 paper). The world of McNair's poetry is back country New England. The poet is observer and recorder, rarely allowing himself the indulgence of the vertical pronoun. The voices of the people are usually quiet and colloquial, so the impact is all the more stunning when the reader recognizes the great pressure of the anger or terror or exaltation that underlies the restraint. Listen to the mother, after a paralyzing stroke, discovering she can lift her arm: she "spoke only to herself/ in her small voice/ about the mysterious power/ she'd found to raise/ it up, asking again/ and again, "What do you/ know about that?" " Lest the quiet voices and the silences in these poems deceive a reader into missing the condensed energy in them, let each one sight-read aloud "The Abandonment" to appreciate the muscular control of the dramatic action, the shifts in tone, and the physiological power of the turning lines in this poem.

Jimmy Santiago Baca, *Black Mesa Poems* (N.Y.: New Directions, 1989, 114 pp., \$8.95 paper). The immediate world of this book is the barrios and dry farms of New Mexico. "From Violence to Peace" (a simple title for a complex poem) comes as close as any one poem to giving the impact of the book as a whole: the saga of a calf, raised to a magnificent bull, then shot by a neighbor; of the narrator's setting out to avenge the killing of his beloved bull, and the revelation of the significance of the bull, of vengeance, and of community. Ultimately, community is the true subject of this fine book. As the poet says in "Sanctuary" (as in the Sanctuary movement): "I could not disengage my world/ from the rest of humanity."

Roger Mitchell, *AdiRonDak* (Kansas City, MO: BkMk Press, 1988, 64 pp., \$8.95 cloth). This book has a great page of epigraphs which help to define this genre — a rendering into poetry of the primary sources about an era/area. E.g.: "He will tell you history and no lies," says Homer. "We have failed to live up to our geography," says Roethke. Mitchell gives us a history of the Adirondacks, with the Indian languages, travelers' accounts, songs and dances, diaries, museum artifacts, and the poet's own deeply-rooted personal experience. It is a book that scholars will respect, poets will admire, and general readers who care about our wild history will cherish.