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FIRE STORM

1.

The highways are closed
between Spokane, the city
and Spokane, my reservation.

Fires everywhere; smoke; zero visibility.

The local news interrupts national news
to tell me I won't be going home tonight.

Five hundred years later
and nothing has changed.

2.

On January 13, 1981, my sister Mary and her husband Steve died in a trailer fire. After a long night of drinking, a curtain drifted on wind from an open window, touched the hot plate left burning, and created this ash I gather. My sister and her husband too drunk to hear the smoke alarm, passed out in the back bedroom while the flames grew up and drew swords. Yes. I create cruel images for flames, give them names like Custer or Columbus. I give fire simple life and hate so I can assign exaggerated love and invent acts of heroism. He died trying to pull Mary from the house; her wild pony hair survived the heat.

3.

Crown: to provide with something like a crown.

The fire
crowned
the trees
above my head.

The fire crowned
the trees
above my head.

The fire crowned
the trees above
my head.

The fire crowned
the trees above my head.

The fire crowned the trees
above my head.

The fire crowned the trees above
my head.

The fire crowned the trees above my head.

4.

Often, in this poetry, we steal words, gather kindling, twist newspaper, circle rocks, and wait for the flame. We create metaphors to compensate for what we have lost.

The fire did not crown above my head. The fire crowned above the head of a local news reporter who stopped tape and escaped. I watched the news and they replayed the event: as flames climbed up pine trees just behind him, the reporter detailed the stupid courage of homeowners with garden hoses. The cameraman was already backing up, his disconnected voice shouting out *We gotta get out of here! We gotta get out of here!*

Here, I imagine the reporter saw the flames reflected in the eyes of his cameraman, in the eye of the camera. Here, I imagine I saw the flames reflected in the eyes of the reporter. Here, I imagine I touched the television screen and heat blistered my fingers.

The fire crowned the trees above my head.

5.

FIRES CONTINUE TO BURN OUT OF CONTROL TONIGHT IN EASTERN WASHINGTON AND NORTHERN IDAHO. EQUIPMENT HAS BEEN GATHERED AT PAINTED HILLS. FIRE-FIGHTERS SAY THEY WILL MAKE A STAND AGAINST THE FIRE THERE.

Here, I make my stand. I refuse
fear and anger exploding like flame.

My heart a burning barrel.
My hands dark as obsidian.

Here, I make my stand. I refuse
pain and grief quick like lightning.

My eyes striking matches.
My skin singed newspaper.

Here, I make my stand. I refuse
loneliness and inertia crawling like napalm.

My ribcage a barn fire.
My hair a crown of flame.

6.

SPECTACULAR BARN FIRE SEEN FOR MILES

A fire fueled by exploding barrels of oil and gasoline destroyed a barn in Moran Prairie Saturday night, creating a spectacular display onlookers likened to an Independence Day show.

The barn, a chicken coop and an old car
were transformed
to mounds of charred rubble. Shades

of blue and yellow brightened
the night sky
as the fire reached

inside. "I could see the fire
from my living room."

Above the horizon, the barn

like a workshop contained
oil, paint, paint thinner
and other highly flammable substances.

Firefighters do not yet know what started the fire, but believe it may have been accidentally caused by someone who had been using a cutting torch inside the barn earlier that day. Cause of the blaze is still under investigation.

7.

In this vision, Mary gives birth to flame, a child that flames with its first breath of oxygen and explodes with its first taste of failure.

In this vision, Mary wears a crown of fire; this royalty frightens me into silence.

In this vision, Mary pours her heart across hot rocks in the sweatlodge and the steam that rises is called *Love*.

In this vision, Mary fancydances through smoke and ash, holds her open hand over candle flame and kisses my forehead.

In this vision, Mary is medicine: she is forgiveness and penicillin; she is survival and aspirin; she is courage and cough syrup.

In this vision, Mary is magic: she is a card trick and my protector; she is a mirror and my future; she is a rabbit from the hat and my song.

8.

No one will believe this story, so it must be true.

—Lester Falls Apart

The phone call a cigarette in the dark, my *Hello* shaped like a question mark.

"Junior, don't go to school today. Your dad's coming to get you."

"Why?"

"I don't want to talk about it over the phone. Just get ready. Your dad will be there pretty soon."

I dressed, brushed my teeth, combed my hair into braids. No. I dressed, brushed my teeth, but my hair was too short for braids.

"Joseph, what you doing?" Betty asked. She was the white woman who owned the house where I boarded during the school year.

"Mom called earlier. She said my dad's coming to get me."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

She was in bed with her lover, Don, a thirty-five year old busboy at Denny's. Once, he slapped me hard across the face after I listened to his first edition album of *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* without his permission. No. He punched me hard in the stomach after I scratched his copy of the Stone's *Exile on Main Street*.

The 60s still break hearts.

Betty and Don were in bed when my father arrived, his hair and heart unbraided. He stood in the kitchen next to the coffee maker; I stood by the refrigerator. The house so cold our breath was visible. No. The house was so cold frost formed on the walls. Betty and Don refused to leave the bed.

"What is it?" I asked my father.

"Mary and Steve died last night."

Arrows to the heart.

"How?"

"House fire."

I walked into the bedroom where Betty and Don waited for warmth. The house was fueled by oil and it took an hour or two before anyone could feel heat from the morning furnace. No. The house had one fireplace in the living room that needed a fire built every morning.

Every morning, I lay awake and waited for someone to build that fire. Robert Hayden wrote a poem about that blueback cold of a fireless morning, how his cold father rose to cut firewood and twist newspaper, break kindling and build that austere love.

The morning my sister died there was no fire built.

"Betty," I said. "I have to go home. My sister died."

"Oh."

"Can you call the school and let them know?"

"Sure."

I turned to leave the room and my father was standing in the doorway. He was a large man grown small with age and alcoholism. He possessed neither questions nor answers.

"Goodbye, Betty," I said.

"Wait. Do you think you can build us a fire before you leave?"

The cause of the blaze is still under investigation.

9.

fire sale: a sale of merchandise damaged in a fire.

Here, I offer what I own, change
my references and gather ash
from the roads I've travelled. Heart
lost in a couch fire; heart fallen
to ash after the slight touch
of fear. Here, I offer what I own:
old guitar, pair of shoes, basketball
on fire. I've got asbestos hands
and bare feet walking over hot coals.
I've got three flames tattooed
under my left eye, barn fire
in the living room, and a burning barrel
on the television. Here, I offer
what I own and what I don't own
is the difference between touching
and becoming. My enemies, real and imagined,
are torches, matches, cigarette lighters.
My enemies love me; my lovers burn oxygen
like flame. Here, I offer what I own:
this crown of flame, this skin scarred
and blistered, this sinner curled
like blackened leaves
in the hands of an angry god.
Here, I offer what I own: grief
like a burning bush that shouts
forgiveness and never forgives.

BUDDHA AND THE MOOSE

If Buddha, beset by needling demons,
wheedling angels while lotus-posed
long ago under a Bo tree,
had so much as semi-flinched, almost
itched, changed expression by so much
as a hint of an eye twitch, Nirvana
would've been lost and he'd have had
to reincarnate—as a moose
aswarm with 'skeeters, gnats,
no-see-ums, blissfully chewing
its cud in a roadside Maine bog
of rickety alders, scraggly pine,
a moose standing, staring into space,
up to its knees in a saffron
profusion of nodding jewelweed.

Marty Walsh

ADVICE TO THE FLUTE PLAYER

1

He must hold the flute so that the wind may escape unhindered. He must be careful not to blow at some time into the clothes of those who stand very close upon his right side, since this makes the tone weak and muffled. (Quantz, *Essay of a Method for Playing the Transverse Flute, Accompanied by Several Remarks of Service for the Improvement of Good Taste in Practical Music, and Illustrated with Examples*, 1752)

It is reported that Johann Joachim Quantz wrote 300 flute concertos.

I have examined a mere half dozen
and play one here tonight,
perhaps pick of the litter,
perhaps the runt.
Frederick's anal-retentive personality
engendered this glut,
a program every night at Sans Souci,
and every night the same, year after year.
I choose this one, cheerful, long-winded,
a fine sample of the composer's craft.

Fast-slow-fast,
a jog, a walk, and a run,
in the key of G (one cadenza in the first movement,
contrived by the performer,
based on the principle of many trills).

Old Quantz did not intend a hall as large as this,
 and whether he played or Frederick,
 wedged between continuo and violins,
 this silent flailing at my left
 would not yet have been invented.

(Then there was Lully,
 stabbing his foot with a staff.
 Perhaps I'm not so bad off.)
 Still it's a soft instrument,
 held off to the side,
 out of one's own view,
 a weapon that can't be aimed,
 one which must rather insinuate.

2

If the novice flute player has accustomed himself in his
 prior individual practice to beating time with his foot, in
 public concerts he must refrain from this as much as
 possible. But if he is still unable to keep in time without
 its aid, let him use it secretly, so as neither to publish
 his weakness, nor vex his accompanists. (J.J.Q.)

Wiggle your toe inside your shoe
 in the Baroque concertoo.
 (do-si-doo)

In *this* Baroque concerto, there are
 twenty-three measures of string orchestra
 before the soloist enters.

Yes, the tempo is too slow.
 (What was the rehearsal for?)
 With this small flute I will not stir the tempest.
 I'll play the damn thing as it comes.
 Feet spread, toe wiggling inside its shoe,
 I'll slither through the tempo's glue.

3

If, by much practice, a person has achieved great facility, he must not abuse it. To play very quickly, and at the same time distinctly, is indeed a special merit; as experience teaches, however, it may also cause great errors. These are particularly apparent among young people, who possess neither ripe judgement nor a true feeling for how each piece ought to be played in the tempo and style appropriate to it. Those who do not soon correct this error, which is caused by youthful fire, will persist in it, if not for ever, at least until far into their mature years. (J.J.Q.)

Fat chance.

Yes, yes, it's still too slow.
And now the middle movement,
strings muted.

What must we do now
to calm ourselves, already calm?
Breathe deeply.

That which was long before
must now be overlong,
Yet any flute sounds pretty.

I chose it for its sound
so many years ago,
or was it for those bright silver keys?

I took a screwdriver to it,
brought it to school
rattling in a paper bag.

That was my first flute.
Nickel plated brass.
I have had them silver,
gold, (14k or 9) platinum,
blackwood, cocus,
and some bamboo I made myself.

The bamboo came from Market Street,
Philadelphia. Decorators' Supply. Too green,
bamboo can explode. Split end to end.

In the night. Waking the flutemaker.

Press down those keys, and they spring up again.
(Quantz' flute had only two, the second
his own invention. D sharp and E flat.

In this he had finally outdone Frederick
in fussiness. The notes in question
are essentially the same pitch.)

Mine has too many keys.
The holes have keys and the keys have holes.
My fingers close on nothingness.

Still, it is the breath one draws
into one's self,
near to one's heart,

that comes out spun, or unraveled,
and slow as this is, this music,
it does not sink, it floats away.

4

It is much more advantageous for a musician always to
keep some of his skill in reserve, so that he can give his
listeners more than one surprise, than to display all his
skill at once, so that we have nothing more to hear from
him. (J.J.Q.)

Have chairs scooted cautiously away from us?
Have we danced a bit,
holding that odd thing out of sight
which we barely touch with our lips,
as we sweep from side to side?
Now there is room enough.
And the last allegro is, what—

Presto.

Everyone is warm enough
to run with it a bit.
Even that dangerous baton
is not laboring now.

We're listening.
It happens sometimes.

5

If someone requests him to play, let him do so at once,
without grimaces or feigned modesty. And when he has
finished his piece, he should not insist upon playing
more than is demanded of him, lest we must beg him as
many times to cease as we had to beg him to begin.
(J.J.Q.)

Shake hands with the conductor.
Shake hands with the concertmaster.
Bow to the audience.
(You came within an inch of falling on your head.)
Walk to the wings.
Count to five.
Stride back into your applause.
Acknowledge your colleagues.
Bow without falling on your head.
Walk to the wings.

Repeat one time or more.

Do not. Do Not.
Be caught on stage in silence.

6

Although the approbation of your listeners may serve as
an encouragement, you must not allow yourself to be led
astray by the excessive praise that has become an
unfortunate custom in music, perhaps because some
fantastic dunces among the Italian singers, with all their
crass ignorance, demand it almost as an obligation due to
their very names. (J.J.Q.)

Say thank you, and no more.
Send your reviews only to your mother.
After a few days' rest
resume your daily exercises,
scales, long tones, sixths and thirds.
Various orchestral utterances of birds.

Mention casually to the maestro
that in that same band at Sans Souci
one of old Bach's sons, (C.P.E.)
played keyboard, grit his teeth
at Frederick's bad rhythm,
and wrote several pieces for the flute.

Speak well of Quantz.
Though you hear it in your dreams
and wish it were not there,
still you should speak well of his concerto.
Say of it, you did not know
it would be so,
so difficult.

Charles Wyatt

Two Poems

DEPARTURE

This is not the poem you thought it was.

You thought she'd rise from dinner and sweep
the dishes to the floor, and scream, "Enough!"

And Dad would say, "She doesn't mean it."
But their three children, knowing better, mop milk
and pick the splinters. Janey cries to sleep
with Sis that night. Buddy bunks with Dad.

This poem is different. Yes, Mom slams the screen
so hard the cat turns two-dimensional. Dad knows
she means it, but Sis cannot imagine life
without the one who held her in the womb.

Look. You're not the reader I expected.
You are a Dove, and I am Häagen-Dazs. You are
a fresh-air freak, but I could snore
in Tutankhamen's tomb. There are a thousand
endings to my poems, and finally, it's guess work—
what will shake this page and fly.

Dad's right, and so are you. Mom's back.
She's pulling in their driveway, and dropping
door locks. You want to bet what's in
the paper sack?

HORSEMAN

"It will be," he said, "like passing
from a field of oats, to rye, to timothy."

He might close his eyes and smell
the difference, element to element, or ride
above it all, and see the hoof step
in the stream, and feel the chill ascend
the animal, but never feel
the chill.

My father loved the horses: mustangs, broncos,
cayuses. He loved the glistening
Morgans of policemen, and fine-nosed Arabians,
and thin-limbed Thoroughbreds.

"Timothy is heaven for a horse," he said.

Ross R. Whitney

BY STORY'S END: A POEM FOR THREE READERS

(An elderly high school English teacher struggles to prepare class after having returned from a community theatre production of *LES MISERABLES*, at which he was reminded of a woman he had once hoped to marry.)

READER 1: Tonight when Eponine

READER 2: When the lovely though untrained actress *playing*
Eponine

READER 1: Sang, "If I lose my way, I close my eyes and he has
found me," some sentimentalist

READER 3: *In the garden, on the way to the shelter,*

READER 2: Some rabid sap

READER 3: *He noticed a pumpkin roasted on the vine.*

READER 1: Thought of you. Of *us*!

READER 3: *He and Father Cieslik tasted it and it was good.*

READER 1: And now at home watching skies erupt

READER 2: "God's dandruff," "God's fleecy tears" fall on field
and house

READER 3: *They got out several bags of rice and gathered up
several other cooked pumpkins*

READER 1: This same unsophisticated reader says to himself,

READER 3: *And dug up some potatoes that were nicely baked*

READER 1: As if to a class,

READER 3: *Under the ground.*

READER 1: "O to believe for a moment entirely in love, to be
teary-eyed and impassioned like Pushkin's Tatyana:
blind from too much reading, drunk with too much
longing!"

READER 2: He continues,

READER 1: "Love set against a backdrop of war, of revolution, of fervent ideology! What could be better than to die for a cause? For life to have purpose

READER 3: *The ceiling dropped suddenly and the wooden floor above collapsed in splinters,*

READER 1: For death

READER 2: See the Great Light Knowledge trick them into bloom!

READER 3: *And the people up there came down,*

READER 1: To have meaning?"

READER 2: Each mind a flower rising among the heart's black ruins.

READER 3: *And the roof above them gave way.*

READER 2: The sentimentalist imagines,

READER 1: "Mr. Bodewell will not be in today. He is ill: last month, NIGHT; this month, HIROSHIMA. The words drift on the page

READER 3: *But principally and first of all the bookcases right behind her swooped forward and the contents*

READER 1: Like tanks

READER 3: *Threw her down:*

READER 1: In a boardwalk video game, where time—

READER 3: *Her left leg horribly twisted and breaking underneath her.*

READER 1: The future—is a pocketful of quarters."

READER 2: Listen.

READER 3: *There in the tin factory, in the first moment of the atomic age, a human being was crushed by books.*

* * * * *

READER 1: O how shall I teach my students irony? Shall I drop it on their heads like a *Molotoffano hanakago*? Spray them with it as with gasoline?

READER 3: *On some undressed bodies*

READER 2: Quick! Sound the air-raid siren!

READER 3: *The burns had made patterns—of undershirt straps and suspenders and, on the skin of some women*

READER 2: Please, please call him “Mr. B.”*

READER 3: *(since white repelled the heat from the bomb and dark clothes absorbed it and conducted it to the skin), the shapes of flowers*

READER 1: This morning in class a boy exclaimed, “There’s a face in the mushroom cloud! Look, a face!”

READER 3: *They had had on their kimonos.*

READER 1: And he was right. There was a face, a face I thought I recognized.

READER 3: *As Mr. Tanimoto’s men worked to put out the fire, the frightened people in the park pressed closer and closer to the river.*

READER 1: But you must be wrong, I wanted to tell him,

READER 3: *Among those driven into the river and drowned were Mrs. Matsumoto of the Methodist school*

READER 1: For none

READER 3: *And her daughter.*

READER 1: Shall see the face of God

READER 2: And live!

* * * * *

READER 1: What can he believe? And I?

READER 2: "I?" the moonlighting sap moans, like a charred soldier still manning his post.

READER 1: That the snow will fall as it is falling tonight and efface the earth?

READER 3: *The asphalt of the streets was still so soft and hot from the fires walking was uncomfortable.*

READER 1: That tomorrow I'll wake and have to take a public sledge to work? People grow up.

READER 2: Yes, of course.

READER 1: Tatyana grew up.

READER 2: Yes, of course.

READER 1: She became a better reader, which is to say by story's end

READER 3: *It was so black under the books and debris*

READER 1: She wasn't quite so romantic.

READER 3: *The borderline between awareness and unconsciousness*

READER 1: I have grown up.

READER 3: *Was fine. The pain*

READER 2: Yes, of course.

READER 3: *Seemed to come and go. At the moments when it was sharpest, she felt*

READER 1: I feel

READER 3: *That her left leg had been cut off somewhere*

READER 2: Utterly sap-ient!

READER 1: O Eponine,

READER 3: *Below the knee.*

READER 1: It's late.

READER 3: *All the way he overtook dreadfully burned and lacerated people.*

READER 1: A few hundred tanks remain.

READER 3: *And in his guilt,*

READER 1: My wife

READER 3: *He turned to right and left as he hurried*

READER 1: Has gone to bed.

READER 3: *And said to some of them, "Excuse me*

READER 1: The snow is falling and falling.

READER 3: *For having no burden like yours."*

* * * *

READER 1: How for nourishment we must depend on irony:
gorging ourselves a) like bears before a long winter's
rest? or b) like prisoners,

READER 2: Skeletons finally liberated?

READER 1: As if, as if it were the bread

READER 2: Of strife.

Ralph D. Savarese

The part of reader #3 consists entirely of fragments taken from John Hersey's HIROSHIMA. I am very much indebted to Mr. Hersey for the use of his text and for some of the imagery in this poem.

- * "Mr. B" is the name given by the Japanese to the bombers that rocked Japan prior to the dropping of the atomic bomb.

SEEING YOU IN LACE

Her fingers slid into it like it was a woven Chinese handcuff. The pink, satin sleeve bulged erotically with her probing. "A woman is shaped inside, the way she's shaped outside," a breeder said. "A dog's size is in the paw—a woman's in a finger."

She smiled, becoming my sister, and said, "This cloth bud is from a wedding I attended. I attend weddings—I'm getting married soon." I look down at her happy cupcakes. Her fiance told her, "You would have been married sooner if it weren't for those. You do plan to fix them?"

"At weddings," she says, "these are filled with rice." I watch three fingers push down its throat—seams stretching. After an episiotomy and delivery a woman is supposed to be fulfilled. "We throw rice on the bride and groom to ensure babies." After childbirth, in Iran, women pack their vaginas with salt to shrink them for their husbands' pleasures.

When I became my first husband's third, I dreamt I was different. The others were rich girls; I wasn't. They didn't work; I did. I was marrying forever—I thought. "Your legs are awfully short," he laughed. "Little runticle." I cradled orange day-lilies, ate bratwurst, and drank beer under the July sun

on my wedding day. Sister, I see you in lace
Teddy—snaps everywhere. In heels, you'll stand
tall for awhile. Smoothing your hair, he'll convince you
to let him try it where it hurts, and you'll let him.
If we ever had real mothers, we'd know this.

HARD WATER

I work the river for my living.
Up and down this bank, I search
for the things she gives up. Not much.
Enough. Some days I find clothes.
Shoes mostly, twisted and cracked,
their soles sticking out like some
acrimonious tongue. If they fit
I save them. Otherwise I take
them to the Thrift. They don't pay
much. And I have friends. Enough.
Sometimes there is a jacket (I got
three—one with hunks of white
sheepskin clinging in spots
on the outside, just as if pieces
of clouds came down from the sky
and stuck, I wear that when it's cold).
Two pants I found, both in one day,
and pretty good ones, too. One had
a hole in the pocket, which I didn't know
about until I was saving small stuff,
smooth rocks, shells (the Thrift takes shells
sometimes too, with other things, though
I don't think they pay anymore, just say
they do), a ring, and when I got back
to my place, under the bridge, all I had
left was the ring. Lots of wood. I don't
know where it comes from, no trees here.
Mostly I don't care about the wood. I
don't have any matches. Some of the pieces

(Stanza continued)

are funny shaped. I know a man who
carves. Faces. He likes funny wood, but
he lives across the river, over the bridge.
I don't go across the river. That's other
territory. But if it's real strange, the way
he likes it, I'll put it aside, under a myrtle
or laurel, cause he comes down sometimes.
Last week I found a woman. She was blond,
though her hair was pretty dirty, and her eyes
were bluer than a cat's eye marble I once lost.
She had on jeans and a red cowboy shirt
with frills, but no shoes, so I lent her some of mine.
The police came a couple of days later and
took her away. She was the best thing I ever
got. The river won't give up another like
her. They wanted to know who she was,
where I found her, what I was doing here.
I said working. They wanted to know my
name. I don't have a name.

Michael Seltzer

FIRST WORD

for ALR at year's end

donne he says a thousand times a day
& only *donne*, that one word, *donne*, his first
born, his word to the wise from Martinique,
our daycaring speaker of truths, *donne*
he says, believing that after all these months
he's gotten it straight, this tongue of giants,
donne he says, give, give me, give it here;
that's all there is that must be said,
asking to be given, forgiven, given
back, given to, what the high priest chanted
before the ark in the holy of holies
from the veriest mouth of a babe
so I must try to teach him please,
s'il te plaît, bitte, b'vakasha,
please, if it please you, *por favor,*
but he's beyond & before such grace,
so pleased with himself, so pleased to speak
I can't insist on small civilities
so *donne* it is until he finds himself
wanting more than can be given, struck

by the flashbulb impotence of giants
as he crawls & clammers away from Babble
toward high-rises of badmouthing fools
whose many words are no longer one,
who talk idly on their separate floors
quit of the old esperanto of *donne*,
that perfectly loving language of one
word, one passion, give, be given, & be done.

Hillel Schwartz

WHERE THE WORLD BEGINS

A bird's cry engenders sunrise and makes
the world possible again. We rise from dream,
my wife and I. We've come far, round
the world, back to where we began and begin.
Sunrise lights the curtains in the window's yawn.
The bird is locked in song, harsh and clear
as my early morning dream, in which an earthquake
crumbled a building and I ran down the long
shuddering of a hallway. I heard cries, which I know
must have been the bird's cries translated from one
world to the other. The hallway's opening was filling
with light and dust. Before, this hallway led
darkly to the building the world failed. I stood
in the sudden empty frame before the rubble
asking a name I've never known, repeatedly,
until a living voice said she died. Then I wept
in dream as in waking I've rarely done. Unexpectedly,
we rise from dream to harsh cry. My waking is
complete, the sorrow for someone I've never known
lifted from me as quickly as it burdened me. I feel
foolish, lying beside my wife who rises slowly
from her own other world to this one we share.
But the sorrow is so clear, an echo ringing true,
that I can still hear the voice saying
she died. My wife flexes, arcing her back
up from the sheets, stretch and yawn. I will hear
the voice for days, two words repeating.
The sun drifts up. The bird's cry drifts in
and the bird flits a shadow on the sunlighted curtains.
I lean to my wife and ask what she's been dreaming,
and she says no, no, and tries to pull me
down into her slow rising where both worlds
occur: the impossible that happens, the possible
that is beginning in the arms of the woman I married.

THE HABITS OF EATING*The Ignition Point of Paper*

The first evening of war, an hour
After firemen snatched our dinner
From the oven to fling it outside,
We watched a map of the Middle East
As if it were animated,
Those newsmen doing voiceovers
From countries so sure to suffer
The black blast of cartoon mayhem.

We listened to air raid sirens.
We heard *warhead*, *payload*, *range*, and
Wondered how much those reporters,
Self consciously slow with gas masks,
Would sweat and twitch. And we started
Rethinking dinner, what else to eat
With war because "Chicken-in-a-Sack"
Lay charred and sprawled in our front yard.

I'd opened and closed the oven door.
I'd watched the cyanotic smolder
Through the glass, suddenly saying
"Four fifty-one," remembering,
From school, a novel about books burned
By firemen, the classics flaring
Forty-nine degrees below the heat
Our recipe had set for baking.

I'd felt like a science text, like
Bagging my own bookish body
For the torch. On television
The President stared and told us
"This is no Vietnam," sounding
Like the President who told us
"We'll nail the coonskin to the wall"
The year I learned the ignition point

Of paper. And I left the gospels
Of the President to resack that
Sorry chicken, add it to our week's
Curbside bags. Though, by daylight, something
Had shredded its way inside, scattered
The carcass on the snow, none of it
Retrieved by the garbageman
Who refuses what's not bagged and tied.

Inedia

Fire flares beneath a nearby town. Slime, a state away,
bubbles up through stricken lawns. A week after the war
stories thin, two ruins return like soldiers. Here are
the families shuttled from Love Canal calling their children
in from fresh sludge; here are the relocated residents of

Centralia learning the coal seams are burning their way to the colony. The sequel parents repeat their stalled health, the particular plights of their children. They talk about the hammerlock of property, the eyegouge of ownership. In one parable of industry are the blasphemies of coal barons; in the other are the heresies of the landfill. Such a sampler of sadness, we press our channels like chocolates, using our fingers to find cherries, buttercreams, sweet stories of someone saved like the woman, just found, who lived two weeks without eating, the miracle explained by an expert who tells us she crash-dieted before her voyage to shipwreck. She'd grown used to little food, a sort of cross-training for starvation, and I recall the Woman of Norwich, who lived for twenty years without eating, according to Francis Bacon, who might be Shakespeare, according to someone else.

The Maggot Farmer

Lately, maggots swarm in our garbage
When the bags are carried to the curb.
I make lifting my son's job, tell him
They're only larvae, that we could use
Them for bait to hook barble and bream.
I mention the farmer who showed me
The carcasses of cattle he stored
Behind his house. "For coarse fishermen,"
He explained, while I stared, retreated,
And remembered Aristotle claimed
Maggots were conceived by rotten meat,
What we eat the presexual mother
Of flies. He thought he saw insects birthed
By mud; he wrote it down and landed

On a list of fools, one notch below
 Bill Pickering, the astronomer
 Who said, in this century, the spots
 On the moon are huge swarms of insects.
 Maybe he let his garbage grow wings
 Instead of flushing his cans with spray.
 Maybe NASA filmed the astronauts
 In Nevada as the skeptics claimed
 Because they feared the lunar surface
 Writhed with grubs. And though my son insists
 No one grows maggots for a living,
 We've dropped worms into fouled creeks for sport
 Or something to do. We've examined
 The teeth we've found while digging for bait,
 Thinking, if we studied forensics,
 We might claim discoveries others
 Would believe for as long as it takes
 To turn up something to disprove them.

Don't Let the Moon Break Your Heart

At three a.m., in this B-movie,
 An early Sixties dubbed-in saga
 About Spaniards reaching the New World,
 The Cortez look-alike steps ashore
 Saying, "That's one small step for man."

So he might, in first run, have moved
 Neil Armstrong to tears. Or all along,
 Those astronauts, sworn to secrecy
 In Nevada, were prepped for bogus
 Landings with lines penned for beefcake stars.

David Scott. James Irwin. John Young.
 I need an almanac, now, to name
 The moonwalkers, sleeplessness enough
 To discover crib-sheet dialogue
 In old Conquistadore films.

Early at work, the first year I taught
English to millworkers' children,
I let the night-shift guard say the moon
Just conquered lay fifty miles outside
Las Vegas, that close, as he showed me

A book which proved the earth flat, pointed
Out stars which clustered where heaven lay.
He explained the hierarchy of
Halo shapes, the maintenance for wings.
Some nights, he said, you can see shipments

Of the saved arriving in light—
The Pearly Gates, could I see their shape?
And I stared, two hours before I had
To say a word, mouthing to myself
“Don't Let the Stars Get in Your Eyes,”

Singing like an armored extra in
A foreign musical who's lip-synched,
Later, to show his hands flew apart
For balance, not joy, before he tumbled off
The delicate wafer of that just-claimed land.


The Mayan Syndrome

And now parts of our planet
Are missing. Soil presumed drowned.
Ozone kidnapped and murdered.
Such a pandemic, worldwide,
The rise of the Mayan Syndrome,

Even the ruins abused,
The man in this photograph
Sweeping his patio built
From temple blocks, feeding his pigs
From an artifact altar.

Nothing prospers, the man claims.
Rain's moved elsewhere, the solution
Of sea-turtle sacrifice
To the rain-god Chac proved false.
These swine need to eat, he says,

And I could smirk and imagine
That when their trough catches the sun
At the proper angle, the pigs
Pause to think of miracles,
But this week I've planted stones

Of my own, spreading them from
My sliding door in an ,
what might pass for a symbol,
The spread stones meant to be read
From the heavens to keep evil

From my doorstep, pass it on
To my neighbors—their daughter
Disappeared and likely dead—
Who aren't, in this drought month,
Pleading for rain when they face

Their altar. She won't be dead,
Not to us, they say, until
Her body's found. Like MIA's.
Like the charity bracelet names.
Corporal Connors, I read from

This one in my basement drawer,
And he's still missing somewhere
In a rain forest, immortal
Almost, like the souls of Mayans,
Like ozone and soil and

The woman who may be buried
In our neighborhood like one
Of those bodies cleverly
Hidden in the eye-teasers
Printed in a book of puzzles.

The Habits of Eating

Rabies. Bubonic plague. Now AIDS.
And *Kuru*, the laughing sickness,
Hilarity easy to dodge.
This sure death comes from eating
The raw brains of the dead, gulping,
For prowess, defeated warriors.
So stupid, we scoff, so vain, yet
Stubborn we are, fierce with ethnic
Excuses for the animals
We devour: snake, dog, beetles, ants.
Or *Balot*, the Tagalog name
For one more long-lived recipe:
First, be patient. Wait the number
Of days it take to hatch a duck,
And then snatch that egg, hard boil
That fetus, eat the unborn whole.
Feathers, bill, and bones—you swallow
That unstroked duck down, estimate
The cost of lining the tract-length
Of yourself. "Like veal," you might say,
"Or lamb," like an illustrator
Of books for babies who want smiles
In their barnyards, ear-to-ear grins
On Flopsy, Mopsy, and Topsy.
And probably you've owned a few
Of those toys, and each one has died
Like a series of hamsters who
Quiver with metabolism
So rapid they flare and die like
Filaments. So we float and grow,
Transform from the curled worm common
To us all: Flippers to feet, tails
Retracted, the brain's circuitry
Connected, and, if not boiled,
Set loose by those who could eat us.

MASS AT RATHMULLEN

Through enclosures of cows & sheep
 above & below, climbing stiles or slipping over
stones tumbled from moss-slick & donkey's nosing—
they come, stepping creaky on canes or leaping
 each other across the cattle-guard grate,
solemn converging, caps pulled off, scraping boots—
huge displays of nose-blowing, coughing, wheezing
 & ten minutes late the joking loud then hushed,
mongoloid children in arms, overbig, whining & whooping—
smell of hangovers thick as wet wool,
 old men alone, faces blasted red, never to heal,
young men like kneeling boulders, mumbling whiskey prayers—
muck-pants, unraveling sweaters, gone-at-elbows jackets,
 women with 6-8 children under the age of ten,
shawls unwound, coats steaming, dresses new-pressed &
 rain-slack—
the priest jumbles Irish-English & Latin, forgetting:
 Now this part is the division or multiplication, no
the division. . . the loaves or the fish. . . *and* the fishes—
the frail boy, ears blue, hands & eyes clenched in prayer,
 knees hard on the rail, indented with devotion,
behind him his mongoloid brother kicking & mewling.

BOOKS IN BRIEF

I had about a hundred review copies lined up before me. On a whim I divided them into poets we've published and those we haven't. The lines were about equal. So I decided for this issue to select a handful from poets we've published and give each a brief descriptive note.

Sherman Alexie, *The Business of Fancydancing* (Hanging Loose Press, 231 Wyckoff St., Brooklyn, NY 11217, 100 pp., poetry and fiction, \$10. paper). No poet we publish, with the possible exception of Albert Goldbarth, brings more praise from readers than Sherman Alexie. This twenty-five-year-old Spokane/Coeur D'Alene Indian has so strong and distinctive a voice and vision that we are already getting submissions that imitate his work. The *BPJ* exists to discover poets like this. See his "Fire Storm" in this issue.

The Really Short Poems of A.R. Ammons (New York & London: W.W. Norton, 1990, 174 pp., \$17.95 cloth). This volume is a bit of a gimmick: all the poems are from Ammons' previous books. But it is refreshing to read them all together—a nice (and I mean that in its old sense) balance to his heavier and much longer poems recently in *APR*. Some of the poems selected for this book do not really earn their admission: "Birds are flowers flying/ and flowers perched birds." But most have the sensuous mind-music of the real Ammons:

SMALL
SONG

The reeds give
way to the
wind and give
the wind away

WIRING

Radiance comes from
on high and, staying,
sends down silk
lines to the flopping
marionette, me, but
love comes from
under the ruins and
sends the lumber up
limber into leaf that
touches so high it nearly
puts out the radiance.

David Budbill, *Judevine* (Chelsea Green Publishing Co., P.O. Box 130, Route 113, Post Mills, VT 05058, 320 pp., \$24.95 hardbound, \$14.95 paper). All of Budbill's poems, plus "Pulpcutter's Nativity," his contemporary version of the 1410 *Second Shepherd's Play*, are here in one marvelous volume. Thus assembled, the seventy-seven portraits and narratives of the fictional but intensely real northern Vermont community of Judevine combine in an organic whole—a verse novel, perhaps, or an earthy epic of life as it really is lived in what's left of rural New England. Budbill writes with tremendous authority, high and low humor (some of this is very very funny), and an unembarrassed passion for the community and the individuals in it. Here is everything we are so often told is missing from contemporary poetry: it is rooted in the soil of the community, not the ego of the poet; it is magnanimous in scale and in spirit; it makes a grand music of many voices—crying out to be read aloud; it is academic only as Chaucer is academic. Budbill lives by Camus' injunction in his Nobel prize speech: "It's a part of a writer's duty to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves."

Thomas Carper, *Fiddle Lane* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991, 84 pp., \$10.95 paper). Carper's formal poems (mostly sonnets) give an outward order to inward wounds and wonders. This conclusion of "Paint" (about Van Gogh) exemplifies the quality of his insight and his skillful handling of traditional meter:

The things I see
Cease to have existence of their own,
But mirror my inmost reality;
Even the intimate canvas has become
Strange to me, as if that flat world knows
Nothing except its paint. Not fields. Not crows.

Robert M. Chute, *Woodsbed on the Moon: Thoreau Poems* (Nightshade Press, P.O. Box 76, Troy, Maine 04987, 48 pp., \$9.95 paper). For Chute, reading widely in Thoreau is like Thoreau's travelling widely in Concord: enough space for a universe. Some of these poems are inspired (I use that word carefully) by Thoreau's letters and journals, some by his better-known works, some by a visit biology professor Chute took to Walden with some students. Some rise from the poet's own peregrinations and observations. There is some of HDT's wry humor, as in this, from the field trip to Concord:

I sent the class, one by one, to meditate.
Most cannot wait ten minutes to
Escape themselves. Like the minnows,
Scattered in the shallows, by twos
And threes they come together, school again.

Chute brings to Thoreau many appropriate virtues, not least the scientist's skill in accurate, unsentimental observation: to perceive what Hopkins called the *inscape*—not just the leaf and twig, but the intrinsic form. The eyesight is clear and closely-focused, but the vision goes way in—and way out.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *The Reason for Nasturtiums* (Berkeley Workshop Poets and Press, P.O. Box 459, Berkeley, CA 94701, 72 pp., poetry and prose, \$6.95 paper). From the first line of "The Nishi," this magical book pulls the reader into its seductive music. Divakaruni's ear for English free verse is impeccable, and she casts her story-teller's net wide. The narrator moves about the world—Italy, Mexico, California—but the reader is always aware that the poet's roots are in India, and the poems from her native culture linger longest in my memory. Their authority is commanding, but it is her richness of language and warmth of humanity that make them so enthralling.

Stephen Dunn, *Landscape at the End of the Century* (New York & London: W.W. Norton, 1991, 94 pp., \$17.95 cloth). From his early, more brittle, more comic writing, Dunn has developed a mastery of the plain style. Instead of moving toward Byronic satire, he has become mellower, sadder. Byron would never have titled a poem "Elegy for my Innocence." But accepting the direction he has taken, I find myself charmed by the long poem (13 pp.) "Loves" that makes up the concluding section of this volume. I'll admit I'm sucker for a good catalogue poem, and this one is a delight. It opens: "I love the past, which doesn't exist/ until I summon it, or make it up." And it proceeds through a litany of loves, sometimes recalling Christopher Smart, sometimes Whitman. But really the poem creates its own form and voice, relaxed, confidential, quirky, engaging. I love it—all but one line, which may be the clue to what I miss in Dunn's later work. He writes: "In spite of their lack of humor/ I love Thoreau and Jesus." Jesus, O.K. But no humor in Thoreau! For shame! Back to your *Walden*, Mr. Dunn, with your eyes and ears open to the gusto, the comedy, the mordant wit. Thoreau's bones never got soft, and, damn it, yours shouldn't have to.

David Ignatow has a volume of love poems, *Despite the Plainness of the Day* (Pittsburgh: Mill Hunk Books, 1991, 46 pp., \$10.), that delightfully recount experiences of love, some warmly erotic, some affectionate, some troubled, some fanciful, but all thoughtful and imaginative. Here's one, called "Now":

He's in class teaching
English literature and she
is approaching between the aisles

naked, buttocks flowing,
her legs strutting
their pride in themselves.

No one else but he
sees her, which is exactly
as he wants it. She is
his private memory,
talking of Chaucer.

She seats herself,
crossing her legs,
brown pubic hair
forming a large dot
below her navel. She
looks at him and smiles,
the enigmatic kind,
as if to say, I'm here,
as you have asked of me.
Now are you at peace?

There are real women in these poems as well, and they too enjoy the loving relationships, but ultimately the poet and his imagination and his words seem to suffice, as in the final poem, "The Life," in which the poet is like a water bug on the surface, "swinging to and fro with the gentle rhythm of the tide, then lightly dashing across the surface to catch his yet tinier victim." And what is the prey? "The poem that like the victim of the water bug would affirm my life: to rest in love as on a water bed . . . I'd lose my sense of self in this watery support, the self of hip and thigh, my head, too, afloat. Let this be the life of love." This is a concept of love rather different from the idea of being in love, in which, as Freud said, the psychic energy of the lover is entirely displaced from the ego, the self, to the gratification of the beloved. In some of Ignatow's poems, love is a healing and fulfilling of the self, but here at the end it appears more Eastern and selfless.

Laura Kasischke, *Wild Brides* (New York & London: New York University Press, 1992, 108 pp., \$25. cloth, \$12.95 paper). Medea is the thread that draws together this vivid first book, but the tone is more gothic than classic. Not pitch-fork and church-window gothic, but good old-fashioned romance-gothic, with rats, leeches, fungus, crows, all highly seasoned with algolagnia. The first half is bloody crimson: drapes "red and torn," "red swirling dust," "red-hot flowers," "blood-red hands full of hair" (Salome), "red strings of

shredded flesh" and more. Out of this seething anger emerges a sense of the source: acute deprivation—a child's response to love withheld, love denied, love lost, and the perversion of domestic affection. The result: "the ruined future." The pivotal poem seems to me to be one we published: "After My Little Light I Sat in the Dark," which dramatizes the central action of the volume. Out of the gothic imagination, out of the deprivation, out of the horror, the victim/persona devises a strategy for survival—the strategy of composition. I will watch to see where these formidable energies take her.

Philip Levine, *What Work Is* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991, 82 pp., \$19. cloth). On first reading, Levine's poems seem utterly transparent, as on the jacket of this fine book, in which we seem to look through a clear window to face a gravely beautiful cotton mill spinner of about fourteen gazing out past us. In sharing his experience of what work *is*, Levine creates poems that seem simple as water, but which actually are full of symmetries and surprise returns in the music, parentheses that twist on the reader, and unexpected closures that make me grin and wince at the same time. It's just a wonderful book. And Knopf has simultaneously released Levine's *New Selected Poems* (294 pp., \$24. cloth), for which many thanks. Moreover, *The New England Review* (settled at Middlebury College, but available from The University Press of New England, P.O. Box 979, Hanover, NH 03755-9886, quarterly, \$18. a year) has a commendable policy of engaging a Writer-at-Large to provide a year's essays. This year's essayist is Philip Levine—an inspired choice. The Spring 1992 issue has his "The Holy Cities: Detroit, Barcelona, Byzantium," which explores with grace and candor the soil of international anarchism from which his poetry flowers.

Howard Nemerov, *Trying Conclusions: New and Selected Poems 1961-1991* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991, 162 pp., \$18.95 hardbound). Nemerov's poems mean a great deal to many people, but although I am sometimes delighted by the deftness of his prosody, I am more often than not turned off by the streak of snideness and glib iconoclasm that, I'll admit, certainly did have undergraduate audiences eating out of his hand. Perhaps the problem is all mine: my Romantic tastes admiring but not warming to the shiny Augustan knife-work.

Carole Simmons Oles, *Stunts* (GreenTower Press, Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, MO 64468, 36 pp., \$5.50). These tightly compacted poems maintain a quirky colloquialism in their condensation. In "Bugs," Oles maintains that "the poem considers any hypothesis," and these poems are dense with hypotheses, queries, provocative analogies, acidic ironies, *what ifs*, and *could haves*. Intense, tight, interesting work.

Betsy Sholl, *Pick a Card* (Coyote/Bark, 1991, 32 pp., \$6.95 paper, available from Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance, 12 Pleasant St., Brunswick, ME 04011). It seems to me that through composition Betsy Sholl has developed something I want to call by the old-fashioned name of *moral fiber* — something to help her accept the flawed world, to portray it with courage and honesty, to transmute it into poems. I know of no shortcut to the openness of heart, the bravery on the frontiers of experience, and the command of language she has achieved in this elegant chapbook. Not least I admire her command of the line. Listen to the range: “like a mirthful grasshopper chewing tobacco” and “The boy doesn’t know much, but he can tell by her open face/ that he’s done something well, so he does it again.” Or this:

The doctor doesn’t care how gracefully the blind boy
moves when allowed to walk in his preferred direction,
that is, backward to us: Just don’t let him.
Make him go head-on, tripping over himself
because truth’s not supposed to be pretty anymore.

The truth in Sholl’s poetry isn’t always pretty. No indeed. But the poems are radiant with her vision.

Louis Zukofsky, *Complete Short Poetry* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991, 366 pp., \$34.95 hardbound). Zukofsky is perhaps the most neglected of the great Moderns, probably because the most challenging. I hope this elegant volume will change that. Robert Creeley’s valuable introduction eases the way for those intimidated by the denseness and originality of these poems. He throws the emphasis rightly on the poems as music. One learns to look at them as a score for performance; reading them aloud is the best way in. And then the riches are magnificent. This volume is essential for anyone hoping to understand the whole modern movement, especially the Objectivist branch. Unlike Eliot and Pound, he makes much contemporary poetry seem old-fashioned. I have one small complaint: I wish the Latin originals of the virtuoso Catullus translations could have been included, if only in an appendix. For a real intellectual-artistic trip, the reader must find the Catullus and read the two texts together. There’s nothing quite like it.

M.K.S.

NOTICE

Readers of our Spring issue should know that *Speaking Fire at Stones* with sixty poems by **William Carpenter** to drawings by **Robert Shetterly**, will be published this fall by Tilbury House, The Boston Building, 132 Water Street, Gardiner, ME 04345, 128 pp., \$12.95 paper, \$19.95 cloth.