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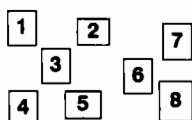
CHAPBOOK 22

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Cover and end sheet design:
Mary Lu Greene

- 1- Gu Cheng (1956-1993) whose poetry appeared in the chapbook of *New Chinese Poetry*, Winter 1988/89.
- 2- Detail from "Freddy" cartoon by Robert G. Baldwin, Spring 1991 cover.
- 3- Female Chippewa medicine doll, Summer 1993 cover.
- 4- William Carlos Williams, honored in a memorial chapbook, Fall 1963.
- 5- Japanese painting from special issue of poetry of Kaoru Maruyama, Summer 1972.
- 6- Chad Walsh (1914-1991), who with Robin Glauber, founded *The Beloit Poetry Journal* in 1950.
- 7- Detail from drawing by Robert Shetterly, from Spring 1992, featuring poems by William Carpenter.
- 8- Editor Marion Stocking and friend in a recent photo.

INTRODUCTION

Here's a chapbook to celebrate the completion of our forty-fifth year. So successful was our fortieth anniversary chapbook, for which we invited new poems by poets we first published in the fifties*, that we decided to assemble this one with poets from the sixties and the beginning of the seventies. We present them here with profound gratitude for their generosity in sending us their poems back then. We are doubly grateful to those among them who have remained friends of the magazine, submitting regularly and irregularly since the sixties. We appreciate, too, those poets who for one reason or another did not have work available for this issue: Amiri Baraka, Nicholas Christopher, Linda Hogan, Erica Jong, X. J. Kennedy, W. S. Merwin, Joyce Carol Oates, Gjertrud Schnackenberg, Derek Walcott, and Jonathan Williams. We are proud to have published them when we did.

With our next issue we return to our regular policy of publishing the best poems that come in "over the transom." We have every confidence that among these new poets will be the lyric voices, the visionaries, the poignant satirists, the unacknowledged legislators whose poems will enchant and unsettle us in the years to come.

M. K. S.

*Dannie Abse, Philip Booth, Gwendolyn Brooks, Charles Bukowski, Hayden Carruth, Robert Creeley, Cid Corman, Richard Eberhart, D. J. Enright, Daniel Hoffman, Edwin Honig, David Ignatow, Elizabeth Jennings, Galway Kinnell, Maxine Kumin, Philip Levine, Howard Nemerov, Adrienne Rich, May Sarton, William Jay Smith, William Stafford, May Swenson, Peter Viereck, John Wain, and Theodore Weiss (and also in our pages in the fifties: John Ciardi, James Dickey, Langston Hughes, Philip Larkin, John Logan, Archibald MacLeish, Josephine Miles, Charles Olson, Gil Orlovitz, Anne Sexton, Louis Simpson, Richard Wilbur, and William Carlos Williams).

DECEMBER STARLINGS

A sheer loops in and berries bead
the oak's sticky lofts: twittering
blooms a dense stippling, a burn
that eases off with settling, but
just then before dusk's blurs,
a loaded twig snaps and the whole
sheet ripples in report;
the black sheer unfurls and swirls
away to fold into night elsewhere.

A.R. Ammons

("YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN")

I think of Gloucester, blind, led through the world
To the world's edge by the hand of a stranger
Who is his faithful son. At the cliff's edge
He flings away his life, as of no worth,
The true way lost, his eyes two bleeding wounds —
And finds his life again, and is led on
By the forsaken son who has become
His father, that the good may recognize
Each other, and at last go ripe to death.
We live the given life, and not the planned.

Wendell Berry

Two Poems**WINTER AFTERNOON BY THE LAKE***For Owen*

The air is thick between snow and black trees.
No one nearby, five o'clock, below zero,
Late January. The background is sober. Not a breath
Of wind. You look, and your life seems stopped. Perhaps

You died suddenly earlier today. But the thin
Moon says no. The trees say, "It's been this way
Before, often. It's cold, but still." We've seen
It before, among the messy Saxons putting back the hide

Flap. It's old. You'll never see this air again,
The way it is now, because just today you sensed
That someone gave you life and said,
"Stay as long as you like." The black and white

Ground pauses, to see if we're ready
To re-enter that stillness. "Not yet."

THE GIANT WHO KNEW ARISTOTLE

Childhood is like a kitchen. It is dangerous
To the mice, but the husband gets fed; he's
An old giant, grumbling and smelling children.
It's a place where you get smaller and smaller.

Or maybe you change size everyday. In general
You become preoccupied with this old lady
In the kitchen. . . . She putters about, opens oven doors.
The thing is the old woman won't *discuss* anything.

The giant will. He's always been a fan of Aristotle,
Knew him at school. It is no surprise to him
That the Trojan War lasted ten years, or how it
Ended. He knows something you don't.

Your brother says, "Say, what's that in the oven?"

Robert Bly

Two Poems

PROGNOSIS

*... approximately 40%-50% of MS patients develop
a subcortical dementia ...*

S.M. Rao

What are the odds in this struggle
between what I'll never know
and what I know or might discover
but will come to forget?
An endurance race, stroking

through the Sea of Dementia.
On days like this I fear
I've already begun to sink
from the weight of virus and gene
and myelin sheathing flaking
from cells of spinal cord and brain.
I could pray to be saved
at the last moment by early death,
or even — why not say it,
considering the miracle

of fundamentalist proportion
it would take, in spite of
the Calabrian ancestors who warn
that to say a hope is to sink it —
a cure. But will I know when?

Well, yes. No. I don't know
whether or not I'll be aware
of the incremental loss of knowing.
Godel's Incompleteness Theorem
insists that a system — even one

as cocksure as the brain can be —
needs a space beyond itself
to know. The Grand Unified Theory,
were we ever to discover it,
would need something outside —

an element beyond all things,
as it were — to prove it true,
keep it floating. Can I think
what it would be like
not to be able to think,

or even to think less well?
The ideal, it occurs to me,
would be to grow more demented
at the exact rate at which
the physical features of the disease

progressed, an equilibrium of sorts,
though on a downward scale,
as if a swimmer's fatigue,
accelerating slowly, were matched
by a corresponding progression

in the intensity of the storm,
so it wasn't until slipping
beneath the mad waves for good
that he noticed a difference
in what he'd felt had been

a steady progress toward shore,
and thus his last strokes,
as spastic and spasmodic as
they might appear to those watching
helplessly from the beach

as the storm came up, dark
and confusing, nevertheless
caused him no panic,
no desperate regret for all
he'd had to leave undone, but

a bliss blossoming like morphine,
benign, mind-humming ignorance
like the belief that every day
in every way he was getting
better and better, which

would be preferable, I think
now — having just come
from an appointment with
the bright young neurologist,
her eyes averting mine,

who seems to know so much
of the future we share —
to the sorrow and shame
I might have felt thrashing
about for the sake of the ones

who'd pulled for me and prayed
all along I'd make it
as whole and sound as the one
they'd always known, ones
I've known less well, I know now

or think I do — though I may come
at last to change my mind
or have it changed
for me — than they were owed
for the wager of their love.

TO ROBERT

What was the difference between us,
beyond my passion for women?
We both held quaint notions of respect
not that far from a *paisan* father's

or his peasant father's, a chivalry
that meant opening doors
and walking between a lover
and the street, but a certain night

I actually went down on one knee
to propose to the one who
in fierce dancing would make
other souls, and you, dear friend —

it drove me mad — would cruise
bus stations in Cleveland and Athens
and on your knees open your mouth
to men you didn't know. Beautiful,

you called some of them, so lonely
you'd want to make them sigh.

A mystery, the different ways we went,
so close we were in everything else.

The night that, weeping about some Marine,
you came home to the apartment
with crabs, I screamed *Goddamn it,*
How could you? How could you not?

The ways a body dreams itself,
we taught each other — that, and something
about fate, of course. Now other lives
tangle sweetly with my own,

and you're under the grass alone,
the plague having picked you up like
some homicidally beautiful maniac
getting off the bus and looking around

with dark eyes that fix on yours
like the sweet beckoning of night
and both of us too grateful
for the ways of human love

to pray him somewhere far away.

David Citino

SOLVING THE PUZZLE

I couldn't make all the pieces fit,
so I threw one away.

No expectation of success now,
none of that worry.

The remaining pieces seemed
to seek their companions.
A design appeared.

I could see the connection
between the overgrown path
and the dark castle on the hill.

Something in the middle, though,
was missing.

It would have been important once.
I wouldn't have been able to sleep
without it.

Stephen Dunn

CHICKENS

Chickens have poor memories. The past? Forget it, it's too theoretical. Besides, there's so little one can do about it. They're not even sure yesterday is possible . . .

Few of them ever become historians.

And it follows that the past is like all the un-lived tomorrows reversed. Empty mirrors staring into each other from the opposite ends of time.

They come to this, tomorrow doesn't exist.

They are left with only an ever-present-now. But where is it?

They need philosophy. But in this case philosophers are as rare as hens' teeth.

The center of gravity is suddenly too high. Giddy, they need a few pebbles for ballast. Perhaps a few more to be sure. It gives their gizzards teeth.

Now they are ready to think again . . .

Russell Edson

Three Poems**MY MAPLES IN JULY**

Clatter of the leaves
they clap
but not for joy
or any reason
but the thickness
of their growth.
Is that no reason
for applause?

STILL LIFE — ABANDONED HOUSE WITH TABLE

Tabula rasa and swept clean bare
of all its artifacts even the dust
hesitates alone a place of emptiness
place to begin or not the wind
beyond it working the eaves in a warning
it is not malign the light
speaks not from use it will pick up
nothing in a shadow reflection cannot stay
deep pool in which to cast a sigh
within no answer no regret.

MODERN MATURITY

Shakespeare knew the ash did best near water
Linné named plants from where they grew
not only plants it was a common heritage
and speech that honored it.
To break that speech has been a common wont
and no one knows or cares for commonness.
The language leaves us and the common life
is withering. Old men and words
are dying. What is synthetic burns awhile
there is a loneliness in ashes so few turn back
to nurture few so few the common graves.

Theodore Enslin

ST. PETERSBURG, 1918

In memory of the USSR

You were sitting on a grassy hummock
in the river as the children
played around you. The water
was flowing lazily.

It was spring,
a perfect day.

I hardly knew who you were,
my mother or what,
it didn't matter.

Across, on the other bank,
young athletes leapt from heights,
resilient, practicing for the games.
You said you wanted to burn all our money.
I knew it was not so much from idealism
as despair, and I held you
and asked you not to.

It was before everything happened.
The purges were still to come.
How we believed in the revolution.
That was our youth.
Foolish tears ran down my face.
My house of love
would never be so full.

Edward Field

Three Poems

THIRTY YEARS LATER I MEET YOUR 17-YEAR-OLD
DAUGHTER THE POET*for R.I.S.*

1

Would I know her anywhere, this child
who never knew *you* except in photographs?

She has your high clear forehead of polished granite — but
“No, my sister has his dimple, his cleft chin —”

Tight curly hair (like yours) drawn back,
and your face, thinned, refined, to a girl’s —
you in a girl’s body, you who were
thick, muscular, tempestuous,
now slight, polite: you in a neat
print skirt, loose black blouse.

Now a 17-year-old classicist —
“Latin’s my favorite” — you translate
Catullus, write neat sonnets, envy the sister
who remembers the dead father,
but (as you always did) adore your mother
and walk with your head thrown slightly back
as if the weight of thought were hard to bear.

I rock in my teacherly chair.
She’s shy, constrained.
“I don’t want to read my father’s poems,
they’re all in tatters in the closet,
they scare me.”

I tell her

I’m a kind of long-lost aunt, tell her
about the photo of you as (you said) “the young Shelley” —
about your huntsman’s bow, opera, baseball,
endless games of chess in the dorm parlor with you
boasting about your prowess.

And she's embarrassed,
you're embarrassed, living in her blood,
 to think you ever acted like that!

2

When you were a man, a 37-year-old,
 long after our last fight, last kiss,
 you O.D.'d on morphine
 and disappeared into the blankness
 that had always held the edges of your mind.

But she's sent me two poems, a thank you note,
 and her handwriting — yours — hasn't changed.
 "It meant a lot to me to talk about my dad,"
 you scribbled with your new small fingers.

I want to believe this, want to believe
 you really are starting out again,
 and that this time you'll get it right.

Do me a favor,

I tell her in my head.

Forget

Catullus, Horace, love and hate
 and surrender. Think instead
 of the epic cell, the place
 where the chromosomes are made and made
 for a moment perfect.

Translate

those lines from Virgil some of us once liked to chant,
 the ones about beginning, about those who first
 left Troy to seek the Italian shore.

THE MALL

Let me tell you about the mall. Right now
no one's screaming in the middle of the mall,
no one's trying to kill herself,
no one's fists are showing.

Above the mall, there's a great tipped-over goblet of air
through which we all move like motes of dust, but more
purposeful,
as the steep calm escalators glide up and down,
oblivious of us.

Along the wide tiled corridors of the mall,
there are benches and potted palms, where young mothers
smoke and gossip, rocking strollers, and old impatient men
wait for their wives to buy "housewares."

Sometimes small bands play where two vast passages meet.
Sometimes people with bells and boxes ask for coins.
Along this wall, you'll find beads and rings.
Along that one, robes, soaps, spices.

From nine AM till midnight you hear a scuff and sidle
wearing away the floor. From midnight till nine,
you hear the slide of mops, the sigh of escalators,
the hiss as airconditioning changes tempo.

Believe me, this poem isn't going to be ironic about the mall,
this poem remembers the *souk* and the *marketplatz*,
the bonfires that lit the settlement in Idaho.
This poem promises to think about daffodils and spotted owls
tomorrow.

Right now this particular poem is pouring its beaujolais
all over the shuffling yawning mall,
where the salesgirls are just locking up their cash registers,
where the cleaning people are wheeling out their heavy carts,
where the fluorescent streetlights are buzzing
above the mostly empty parking lot
and the decorative red cabbages in concrete planters
are closing, closing into their own still cores.

GOING TO CONNECTICUT

for J.R.

More than a third of a century later,
meeting for the first time in almost all those years,
we face each other's still somewhat familiar faces
across a table in a California restaurant,
and wonder why we did it, why we suddenly said
that night in July in Greenwich Village
"Let's go to Connecticut," and got on a train
and ended up at midnight in old Greenwich, Connecticut,
holding hands on an empty road that wound past
serious grownup sleeping houses. . . .

Well, I was fifteen, you were nearly twentyone, we were
experimentally

"in love," and I guess it must have seemed

like "something to do" — better than Remo anyway,
or the coffee houses, or the Eighth Street Bookstore,

even, in that scratchy heat,
better than Jones Beach: the long low

sober train boring into a wall of black, the alien
townships spurting past on either side

(nothing was very "built up" then),
each with its deserted, oddly brilliant platform

waiting for the next day's passengers, the *real*
people who really needed to ride that train.

How dusty and cindery the windows were,
and spooky with scattering moths outside the glamorous
yellow of the club car where we sat with our sodas
on itchy plush reclining seats!

And how the crickets simmered in the dark
where we descended, dizzy and vaguely drunk on 7-Up!

Remember the hedges — lilac and honeysuckle —
along the way, as we walked toward

we didn't know where?

We kissed a little

under one, tasting salt and 7-Up
on each other's tongues, not sure what next

or where, then peered bemused
at the shadows on lawn after lawn, the dim

bulk of chimneys, shapes of shutters,
with here a barbecue pit and there a child's rubber pool,
and couples dreaming or snoring, mysterious,
behind those tall white walls,

until we got embarrassed, still not sure what next,
retraced our steps, boarded another train,

and were hurried back to where we came from,
feeling like voyeurs, like trespassers.

Sandra M. Gilbert

Five Poems**BEFORE DAWN**

Cowbells in mist. Scooped, clotted
wooden coughs trail off into the distance.

Or church bells like empty bowls
tangled against each other in chains.

What lonely sounds
the mind makes, collecting itself.

Gongs clank. slow buckets
hailed by ignorant ropes climb up

on heavy copper footsteps over the lake,
then stumble away.

So we count the hours. To keep the flock
from straying.

The spaces between us are caves,
silences trembling like air
in the house of the cupped hand, the slight puff
of warmth on the skin as someone touches us
or just before:

One. Zero. Something
and its opposite.

In hollow chunks, mute
stones when the water dries up.

These lie around in the head
like birds in their feathers, or forks on the table sleeping . . .

And then the first A.

Vibrations ripple like a breeze
through the trees of the instruments. A green stain
rises up over the fields
at the first whiff of it, something about to be made
out of nothing.

For a moment the A only hovers
bodiless, on the threshold,
not swinging from raw
staggering hemp, or slung from the necks of animals
but tentative, feeling around in the underbrush
with invisible fingers asking
is this it, is this?

Then one note answers. And another.
And another after it, drifting from curtained wings
as the ropes slowly tighten.

On stage maybe only a single, brief
cry, or a low rustle in the bushes

as the fine, quivering
flutes nod to each other

and then begin:

delicately picking their way
along trails that know where they're going

because we invented them, gathered up bits
and pieces of meaning like kindling

for public bonfires, over every loudspeaker crackling,
language getting ready to pour itself

into longer and longer sentences, into cities
we thread together ourselves, with throbbing hammers
poised

for the first strike, the sudden rush of air
around the clapper that creates it;

from the shapes of silences we feel
but cannot touch, sound

out of no sound, almost before we can stop it
let alone control it, civilization's astonishing
full orchestra comes roaring into the hush.

THE JELLY BETWEEN THE EARS

sparkles in its cup. Jiggles. Imaginary giant waves,
 tiny sugars and salts flicker against each other,
 sweep back and forth, protected
 as milk in a bowl:

yes, but
 not for long. Flattening, over the years
 like the rubber heel of an
 old shoe.

Or bubble gum, or a nearly worn down
 eraser: what does it erase, itself?
 The jelly between the ears
 hardening.

But still soft to the touch, the
 toes find their own nooks. Nuzzle into them
 as before, a

few lights bobbing
 low down on the interior concourse.

Flights from Africa. Mars. Memory jets
 that keep arriving and departing
 sometimes on command, sometimes
 not.

Engines sputter and twist
 back on themselves. In old grooves. ghost
 patterns burned into a computer.

Synapses
 freeze in their tracks. Refuse to fire or won't stop
 stuttering, repeating themselves like rifles:

let me tell you
 the story I told you yesterday: how
 boring. Except for one or two red hot
 hollering matches,

chances to warm up

stanza continued

the old arteries with a few shots
of adrenalin,

 lob a couple of Hawkeye
missiles into the breakfast nook, the I.Q.
testing lab, the country next door, why not?

Each one of us

stumble-footed, heading the same direction
into the ground.

 Like lumps in a saucepan, stiffening
clumps of selfishness. Raw, glistening
knob stuck in the cracked
leather of the head's
shoe pot.

 So, what should we listen to,
the young before they harden? Inside
clever spelunkers with their lamps
must come.

 The ghost you thought was yours
exhales itself into cinders,
evaporates up the smokestack.

 Each brain
melts into earth's stews. Slides, then crawls
out of the steam into new
species never tasted.

Ugly? Worse than before? Too long coagulated
in here without knowing. The slow ooze of matter
stops up all the exits.

With dwarf hummocks. Baby booties
cast in bronze. Where did I put
my last idea?

stanza continued

The moths are everywhere,
eating. The guns of the world cough up
the thick phlegm, the choked rattle of the dying.

Over the slumped acres of the dead
what does it matter? Outside all the cities
there are sacks of forgetfulness heaped up,
lost shoes scattered among the graveyards.

After the battle the scavengers:
at midnight, one or two stray children, curious.
With their brand new flashlights.

IN BEAR COUNTRY

She has to write an essay.
Or a letter. Say "I need you"
and why. She reaches out for the words
and there they are, pouf!
Like an ant trail, picking its way among bread crumbs
with a mind of its own?
Forget what the words refer to
or don't refer to. She inches herself
right along with them, over the sliding
talus slopes in her head.
Whenever she needs them they turn up
like stepping stones in the wilderness;
who put them there?
She thinks she chooses them carefully.
From pitons left on a rock face,
cairns full of dried berries.
But the minute she stops walking,
in the quiet after her own footsteps, hush!
What's that crackling
in the huckleberry bushes beside her? In bear country
she never stops talking, to warn the bears away.
But if all she can hear is herself what are the bears doing,
ahead, on the narrow trail
what if one of them should rise up
right in front of her with its hairy jaws open.
its raw, dish faced snout
towering over her, and snarling?

Well, nothing. It's all in her head
for the moment. Still, what is this other
irritable static that starts up
at the same time, is it only the drizzling hiss
between her ears of extra low frequency
intracellular transmission?
Like popcorn, filled with air and fast

stanza continued

or slow as lava. Woozy purple amoebae. Fat blueberries
with the silver lining of some storm clouds.
Or jellyfish. Floaters, she calls them. Almost intelligible
torn shreds of meaning. Not bears

really. But still frightening
to think about. Over the lost yips
of wolves, the pebbles grating underfoot
across the night, deep down
in her brain sky, is it only chemicals firing?
Sparklers splash the dark. In spicules of flaring light
they write their names on the air and disappear
even as she tries focusing on them, can't.
So she goes back to scribbling. In short stabs or in long
leaning sentences, thin snow fences shivering
"I want, I need . . ."
something. The bears are waiting for her;
what else can she do?
She'll never make it. But high in the mountains, on a white
glittering snowfield, from the shifting valley floor
what is it? Every once in awhile she can see
far above her, a tiny line of black
roped together human figures
where there were none before.

IN THESE BURNING STABLES

And yet you can't catch them. Even peering inside
as hard as you can, stumbling around in this hodge podge
of jolts, shivers. Enzymes digesting themselves, muscles
relaxed or jerking,

head keeping time, noticing and not noticing
each whirr of the clock

especially when it stops: whenever you look for them

it's like mayflies swarming,
in the thronged

brief hustle of the mind what are these transparent
puffs of air, ideas forming out of nowhere?

Battalions of tiny hooves. In thin sheets trampling,
sweeping across the cortex. Like leaves whipped by the wind

they keep disappearing, like the deep cherrywood sound
of the piano you heard last night. Or the vanishing

muffled oranges of sunset, the color
of peaches inside a refrigerator, the wash of chocolaty gray
silks no one has ever seen, none of them touchable.

The neurosurgeon can't know what you're thinking
until you tell him, but already it's too late,

the long faces of thought slide
into each other like layers of purple and brown oil

in a portrait by Rembrandt, muffled
dim highlights drift

like berries in the woods, pieces of cottonwood fluff.

With no warning, suddenly
you come upon them in clusters,

little gusts leap up
like grasshoppers, all around you
from second to second changing, but watching over it,
who knows when, exactly, water will decide to boil
or wood finally ignite, or how,
precisely, ideas take shape, materialize, open the gates?
Whiff of stallion on the air.
The hair on the back of your neck bristles
where you can't see it, fire
where there's no fire but the taste of it,
ozone sizzling in the mouth
like a memory but what is that?
Invisible horses churn
like roiled smoke in the corral.
You try to lead them out
with the halter of the word *like*,
but even with the tiniest stitches, the most delicate
intra-cerebral loops
there's no lassoing them; in these burning stables
silhouetted against the flames
with calm eyes, with magnificent
tall shoulders, shadowy
gigantic haunches pass
and repass each other in the dark.

TEN BILLION BLACKBIRDS

Slowly, with all that glittering
intelligence beginning to cloud over,
shadows plunge their long fingers
everywhere into your thinking.

So you insist, but what tricks
you still play on us!

Trills, perfect
thrush music from the bushes.

Who cares about a few
lost keys, connections
missed?

As if anyone could contain
all of you!

Not to mention the attached
body. Legs dangling. Miles
and miles of arterial highways, the
head, the heavy head
on its trunk,

boughs humming with the complicated
high speed intercellular
exchanges of ten billion

tiny blackbirds packed into one square millimeter
of branching brain matter and jiggling

yes, jiggling. Though the pie's shrinking, for all of us
everywhere into crumbs, vaguely remembered
names, faces, a nursery rhyme or two

the mystery of it's still trembling
beneath each crusted skull
and you know it:
in the battering raids of gap toothed
scattershot absences,
crows falling from a brain sky
full of holes
you keep after them,
in the mind's archipelagoes wandering
even among towering waves
you can't be toppled,
with the rest of us you escape
from atoll to distant atoll
as gannets on the ocean sleeping
at the slightest touch rise up
ring after fluttering ring
the engines that power us wait only
to be discovered, axons and dendrites rustling
inside everyone, billions and billions of them
shaking their tiny wings.

Patricia Goedicke

Two Poems

CREATURES OF THE ABYSS

I found her biography sandwiched in between that of a Hebrew rabbi and that of a staff-commander who had written a monograph upon the deep-sea fishes.

— Watson, in one of Doyle's Holmes stories

Not for me, the easy loves and death-throes
of the surface, of the here-it-is, the sunlit,
where the silver blare of anchovy shoalings
shouts like polished fenders, and a lone black skimmer
shears his meal out of the water as delicately
as needling a sliver out of an infant's skin,
here, in the visibly accessible, where Audubon
"knelt delightedly in the shallows
and grabbed a porgy from its element twohanded
— a foppish, mandarin red," no,
not here, not this: lower go, and darker, even
to and past the middle ranges of shark-in-its-cave,
of eel-like fish with linguini-flexuous spines,
of the swimming sea cucumber, and the rat-tail fish,
no, go below this, into the famous Trenches
like Marianas and Tonga, seven miles' descent
below the floor, there are no words for this,
"stygian," "jet-black," "inky," none comes close to this
inhuman moonless darkness and the denizens
we predicate in such a world. In such a world, a window
opens. A form climbs out — another,
then another. They can only meet at night
like this. They need to be invisible.
"Surveillance squads" are everywhere, they know, and
they know of a room, a whispered legend,
the "interrogation room," from which you're eventually

delivered back home with your soul beaten into
a sour curd. And so the surreptition. They meet
to plan, to pray. Even in the cellar
of the boarded-over schoolhouse they conduct themselves
in whispers, though they risk a candle each on leaving
— weaving through these deep streets
with a small light dangling in front of them.

HEART ON A CHAIN

"The spirits of the dead" — it's important to specify, there are *so many others*. Among the islands, spirits of water and coral. For the mountain tribes, the wind is a spirit, it bombasts as it polishes the high passes. But it's the risen spark and semblance of the dead that rides us intimately, that squats with us inside whatever's the privatemost hole of our day. They can offer advice — the gone, the revenant-ones — or terrify: in Chaco tribes, the kin of the newly dead take new names, hoping so to sidle from the specter's wrathful notice. In the oldest caves we habited are painted rounds of the wall rock that were interdimensional talkspots, where we asked and where the ancestors answered. / She

presides over "detail lab" for Cave A-32.
Somebody else unearths — a shovel and a sifter.
She unparticles that earth — sometimes refining it
to one resilient donkey hair she'll work across
a shard of human bone, dislodging 30,000 years of burial
grain by grain. Her task as the grant defines it is this
exactly and only: "initial detail rendering of osseous finds."
But how *not* to refit them in her mind? — to string
the butterflies of bone they duly bring her,
into vertebrae again; and then enflesh the life,
its woes and thrivings, back around that
recharged chord. They all have highbrow Ph.D.'s; and
even so, she knows their secret pleasure is that of the parlor
séance: saying *yes* to ectoplasm. / This

is the couple she oftenest reconstructs: the hunt
is done for the day, a last fresh axe-head hafted
with the clan's last pliant vine . . . and now they rest on a ledge
together, these two, and watch the limestone distance darken
gradually . . . this "proto-us," and their various proto
-yearnings and -uneases, -suspicions, -sweetnesses
. . . see?: we can't escape recasting them familiarly,
the baleful shades of Homer, as well as the homier
conjured spinster aunts and prelates of Victorian mediums, all
are necessarily envisioned in a version
of the tropes we live out daily; and
the truth is, we're *their* archeological study in a way,
the past they're drawn to, visit, sift, and even speak to,
in their former language: throat and tooth and tongue . . . / She

/ooga! she */ooga!* — the weekly mail-&-sundries jeep
pops all of them out of their Paleolithic reveries, with
Thrilling Goodies From Home to thin the thickly solitary
drudge of fieldwork. Well, not for her this week
or the last or the one before. Her first month here, he sent
an antique locket — tiny heart tipped with a breath-thin chain —

or

someone had: no note. This absence follows her
through her days of caves and tagged shin fragments
so outrageously faithfully, it *is* a presence, one
the very blankness of which prohibits hurt or disappointment:
these require detail. Is she comforted? — yesno.
One day behind the quonset hut she saw two bugs attached
in fucking; *no*, she saw, she looked again: one was dead,
a husk, and the other was stuck to it, was dragging it. / He

walks the pier in Portland, *ambles* really, breathing-in the ocean air that so revivifies his soul but can corrode a U.S. battleship. Now this is his life, his therapy: and every breath, on better days, erases the faces that, hobgoblinlike, torment his sleep — his parents ringed in fire like some hellish circus act; as for the ex-wife and the kids and what once happened, well . . . enough of that. And as for Miss Bones Digger-Upper, he *hopes* she understood the love in making a gift of his grandmother's pendant. One day he'll be "fully in the present tense again," then he'll get on with "the flow of the moment." For now . . . so many ghosts to lay to rest.

Albert Goldbarth

FALSE DAWN

Wellfleet Harbor

Awake before waking, to what, a slow brimming
 Of toneless light, a flurry of thirty-second notes
 Descending, gone . . . a cat bird? Almost dawn.

You try not to stir. A blanched word
 Floats in a distance resembling, you think, Claude's
 Horizon, blue diminished to blue no longer

A color but a longed-for escape or return, where the sea
 Turning inland is a winding stream wrapped
 To the bank, where you are the pensive figure saying

False dawn. Whether to elude or embrace,
 Hopelessly, the mind chimes in response, *false-*
Vaulted casemate, which is, what, the name

For a sleight-of-hand to feign an arch, a word
 You found near Mycenae one bright morning.
 How lucid and intact it is: the Aegean spangles

Gold-on-green. At Tyrins the tan, beveled
 Stones unfold their ruled crenellations, stately,
 Across the hills, a shapely text unveiling

Secrets. How one loves the impassioned drudgery
 Of names, uncoding a bunker, a mosque enjambed
 With Venetian stone, the world demystified.

It's already hot this morning on the roof garden
 Of the Hotel Paradise. The waiters remember Farouk
 And his babbling retinue, their tubs of oysters,

Their hundred dollar tips. Tutored Spartans
 Thrum on waves plated with Nestor's gold.
 Within the passage at Tyrins, its hollow walls

Roofed with an elegant solution, the false-vaulted
Casemate, you see, framed in a narrow embrasure,
The "political prison" rise like a dream. Its white

Walls flake and blaze. Shadow-figures
Climb in the tall, barred half-moon windows
Keening their eerie, unintelligible songs.

Hopelessly, I think of a morning when ice-gray
Half-light spread across the snow and floated
Thinly like a hovering tone through a bubble window

Set in the angled "cathedral ceiling" down
To an improvised bed, our rapt mindless gestures
Thrown together, dissolved, gone. Sunlight

Blazoned the house, dispelling, what, those pale
Legs, a flash of orange hair (your ludicrous secret),
A sudden flurry of small quick cries

Rising in the high room. In a blank incandescence
The too-rapid notes of unidentified song
Drop away. We sleep in our outward selves,

We dream of waking again. . . . Each morning
When the gray-blue horizon is webbed with the wide
Vaporous sea, a globed question rises

To the place where you wait, listening on the edge of
waking.

You try to avoid proposing an answer, an actor
Easing across the stage in dream-like evasions

As slowly as he knows how to move, who lifts
His words in pantomime, passing along
The swift, sheer, opaque elisions of air.

Robert Hahn

THE SHOALS BETWEEN RED POINT AND THE SISTER

islands whiten the mid-channel
darkline:
foreground poplar coins
rattle the fog flannel
sky. Add
wild roses and the lost gold mine
near Black Point.
My view
is chartless, lean
in my fifty-ninth year. The shoals,
fifteen feet
down, anchorpoint
the sailless sailboat's dream.

Donald Junkins

FIRMAMENT

From a photograph by Mary Randlett

Fish in the sky of water — silverly
as travelling moon through cloud-hills —
down current whisks, or deeper
fins into depths, to rise or sagely
wait in the milky mist of
disturbed sediment, wheeling briskly
at least whim, at one
with the aqueous everything it shines in.

Denise Levertov

URN BURIAL

Elise, seated in a dingy
 candle-lit corner of her family crypt,
 more a storybook dungeon
 or torture chamber to her eleven years
 than holy tomb (housing
 remains of four generations of her Papa's
 Dutch clan), cradles
 her Granddad's exhumed skull in her lap.
 She stares into these scoured-clean
 eye sockets,
 entranced. . . . Franz, busily transferring
 his disinterred Sire's
 bones from the first-burial coffin
 to a knee-high ceramic urn:
 secondary urn burial a custom
 of the Caiquette Indians on his mother's
 side of the family tree,

 he would make room in the elegant
 hand-carved coffin
 for his elder sister Melanie's corpse,
 three days dead, a stout ample woman
 to the last, and, as always,
 needing her space. . . . Elise chants,
 in low murmurs,
 while Franz, noting she ticks off
 numbers with fingers of her right hand,
 then the left, and back again
 through the cycle, supposes she counts out
 the lapskull's twenty four
 afterlife years, mostly years before the day
 of her birth. A child who
 never met her Granddad before this death-in-life
 tryst in gloom

stanza continued

of the family vault, she seems to brood
 her elfin spirit further back in time,
 numbering the years,
 months perhaps, on the abacus of her hands'
 small knuckles; much as she
 likes to count backwards from one hundred
 to zero, and far into the minus
 column when she jumps rope after hours,
 a prayerlike ritual begging her mom to extend
 her bedtime a few last jumps,
 staying up for dear life, forestalling,
 ever, the last minute's
 pre-sleep countdown. . . . Tonight, Franz diverts
 himself with fitting his father's
 long bones — paired femurs
 & tibias, radii & ulnas —
 around the urn's
 high concave neck with utmost care,
 vigilant to leave room for the rib cage,
 still intact, wide hip bones
 and consecutive vertebrae of the spinal
 column; saving for the last
 a near-spherical gap in the urn's top, dead
 center, for the Crown Jewel.
 Franz puts off to the last possible instant
 the sad onus
 of barging into his daughter Elise's
 silent colloquy with the skullbones
 propped between
 her knees: still, she rattles off computations,
 now tapping the numbers,
 finger by finger, on the loose jawbone,
 that faraway look in her eyes
 the transport of one who augurs
 beauties, or horrors, in the years to come.
 Her father bids her to pass

GRAVE GOODS

*I did not blaspheme,
I did not kill,
I did not lie,
I did not diminish the food offering in the temple,
I did not stir up strife,
I did not alter the size of the grain measure,
I did not talk too much,
I did not commit adultery*
were some of the lies, perjurious,
found by the graverobbers
in the graves.
The Declaration of Innocence
it was called
and it was nailed to the wall
of the tomb.
The dead sat in chairs
or were laid in their beds.
On shelves were their goods,
what they chose to take with them,
or their relatives would consent
to let go: dried beans,
a sword, statuary, a sandwich,
some money to bribe
the gatekeeper, fresh socks.
No one knew the distance,
nor the hour of departure,
or if they'd take a train or boat,
or would they just float
to the other side? — although they did
seem to understand
they would be dead
a long long time.

Thomas Lux

Two Poems

THE LONELY JOB

(*newspaper headline* — EXECUTIONER'S
WORK: A LONELY JOB)

It is beautiful, gas billowing up in a room.
Electricity is beautiful,
and braided rope. The trap door
is lovely as a problem in Geometry.
Even the squad has beauty, if you think
of trajectory, and the word *Fire*.
But it's a lonely job, like murder, such lonely work,
no one to stand with while you wait in the light or the dark,
like the job of one far from a place who will push
the button to destroy that place —
at either end of creation, the job is lonely.
The way God's job was lonely, making everything,
and at this end of history
God's job of being the only one left.
It is work one might want to shirk. Have you noticed
that God is trying to get into everything
lately? God wants to die with us.
Have you seen the way the earth is stuffed with the sacred,
not even the trail of a garment, or a tail, hanging out,
each thing
jammed full
and shining? — the curved, globe-like cheek
of the executioner's child, each cell
of that worker's hand.

THE ORDEAL

When our son gets braces, the next day
he gets poison ivy. His mouth is like a catch
a retriever carries back, in its jaws,
and then they start to form, the welts
on his chin, ears, throat. Each hour,
gluey bubbles rise to the surface
and break, a soft fountain slowly
pours from his ear-lobe, his body weeps
from its thousand eyes. He sits steadily
facing the television, watching what's inside it
from within the scored and fluted hive
of his head. He has gone through depression, through
despair, through worry, past scratching, he has entered
a calm state, I look at him down along a
slant, the tiny world playing rapidly and
glossily on his eyeballs — and there on his upper
lip, through the facial down, through one bead
of a weal of poison ivy, above
a tooth being slowly torn loose in its socket,
a single, thick, white whisker
curves out into the air.

Sharon Olds

TRAVEL: A WELCOME

for Annalisa

1967, SOVIET UNION

Intourist took dollars, we took what we were told.
On the subway, a grandmother asked directions
of my scarf, black raincoat, Slavic bones.
One man threw down a gum wrapper, recoiled
when the policewoman followed him upstairs
boxing his ears with her official *nyets*.
A teenager whispered English on Nevsky Prospekt
and sneaked to our hotel room to play guitar.
At Friendship House, lifesize posters condemned
U.S. aggression. We swallowed hard.
Old women crossed themselves before locked doors;
Saint Basil's gyroscope gave man instruction.
Meanwhile mallard ducks patrolled the Neva,
lovers hid, and women groaned in labor.

*

You must have been conceived and born that year —
November, October, I'm reversing you to March —
that electric instant you began your push
into identity. Did we see the building where
your parents lived? Were they at the restaurant
where we lost entire evenings getting dinner?
Married just three years, we didn't want
our baby yet. I packed my pill container
and dialed it every day. When you arrived
your drunken father stayed absent. What else
do I know? Only the outside, false
bottom, travel notes. White nights

lit Leningrad that spring. At midnight, parks
bloomed Russians. I passed you in the never-dark.

*

I travel, building roads from me to you,
the red-scarfed schoolgirl smiling from a frame.
In Greece I dumped the Ortho-Novum
and chose to be your mother-in-law.
The tidal wave of shifting hormones hurled
me hard against a castle wall in Norway,
I couldn't surface, had to sleep right then, or die.
Big news was happening: I was with child —
him you'd wed a quarter-century hence.
While lean masts bobbed in Bergen harbor
and while I slept at noon, he anchored,
to become the one aboard a Tolstoy train
into that future where you'd turn to meet him,
your mouths would open on each other's names.

*

1989, AMERICA

At Dulles I recognize you from the photos
snapped in spring at L.S.U. —
that's Leningrad State University.
I know the Russian for *truth, goodbye, hello*.
We've hours alone before the one we wait
for inches over geologic rifts.
Thanks to the State you know more English. Yet,
we're flying dumb — on flickers, browlifts,
wisps of breath. You photograph toy collies
in the gift shop. While I drink coffee
you unpack your meal from Aeroflot,
the polished apple upturns a brown spot.

You'd leave your bags outside the bathroom stall,
until I nix it. Property puts trust in jail.

*

He's here. You hide behind the door
to leap, surprise him with your arms, and words
that I don't understand. Six months, two coasts,
six states, two holidays your visit lasts.
Long enough, you tell me, not to want
mere things you craved at first. Your crossings aren't
done. He'll travel back and forth to Leningrad,
you'll both get visas, meet in Finland, wed,
then part again to finish school. You're due
to emigrate in August. Revolt intrudes.
There goes your future. Lovers in the bad times
waited decades for a toad to stamp a form.

The worst, miraculously, doesn't happen.
Your papers queue with thousands. You pass in.

*

*Do you too dream of houses, transportation?
Do stairs lead to a single door you open,
must you walk on air, or drop eight
storeys down? Is your red cat
howling to your empty room,
your mother whispering your name
like children's prayers? Do bones sit
at the kitchen table drinking vodka,
cursing leaders, rotten crops, and emigrés?
Does the Neva thaw while you still skate?*

*

Roads, I thought, for travel. But knitting's how
we move: hand-making warmth, or as flesh
closes on deep cuts, the cells re-mesh.
Your mother's letter to me calls you *orphan* now

stanza continued

bereft of family, home and land. You've wed
a man whose home left him, gates shut
between his parents. *Such is fate . . .* she writes
we cannot help . . . and flesh keeps blood
from staining every promise, every view.

So dears, for you a feather bed to float in.
Chianti, basil pesto from your garden.
A shawl and tea, a fire, sunlit rooms
large with cello suites and Mandelstam.

Stranger's child, let love make strangeness plums.

Carole Simmons Oles

Three Poems

THE GULLS

Sometimes they'll rise in a flock,
Wheeling and tending one way, then another,
Rising and circling in their hectic
Unleisure, contract and scatter
And contract, frightened from where
They were feeding on something dying
Or wounded and bleeding, or dead,
And sometimes one rises higher than others
On stronger wings, opens his yellow bill
With the blood dot and pink tickler
Of his tongue to the raw high air
And caws with cold scorn, cold anger
For everything, everyone, *tout-le-monde*,
Or sometimes a sullen one lags
Beneath the flapping, whining mob as if
Cynical, untouched by panic and imagining
A swift solo run at the site
Of abandoned plunder, the doe
Open like a pomegranate, the swollen dog
Or basket cast of dead pollack
Iridescent and ammoniac. Another
Will have an idea and strike out
Away from the pack toward the sun,
Away from the sun, or parallel
To the horizon's track, which means
Either option, life or death,
Day or night, us or them. The gulls
Will wear themselves out and calm down
And sit on a rock or beach and play
Territorial hopscotch, protecting eggs
And babies and sexual access, mindful
Of the sea, the night, the sun, the folly
Of the weak, the fury of uncertainty.

PARADISE LOST

"I love you," said God, and there was a garden,
And we were naked and sweet, without a single
Hungry need. Of course there was a forbidden tree,
And a supine vein of our animal nature
That called itself modesty and called attention
To the tree's fruits and juices a necessary bravery.
The idea was to hold the apple in your lips
Without breaking its skin with your teeth
Or eating its meat. Even the Devil
Said eating the meat was death and madness.
The trick was to flirt and tease forever for paradise.
Eve ate first. God was watching. Did we want Eden
Or reality? Was there ever a choice? Not after
Eve began to bleed. Now it was up to Adam.
Would he go along with her travail and woe,
Or take a walk and lie down awhile under
A more innocent bush? "Pass me the apple,"
He told her, "I'm going with you," and together
They left the lovely garden of our origin
And entered the good and the badlands
Of our history. In another version
Of their story, Adam eats the apple first,
And says, "Look at me and hold still
In your heart and body." Eve resisted wildly,
Laughing and dancing, acting crazy, and then
She yielded, out of breath, taking the air
From his mouth and his tongue, and everything
Became real. "I love you," I said,
And I saw an angel with a sword of fire
Barring our path. Sometimes it happens
That way too, and Eden or earth, Heaven
Or Hell, we never can tell where we are.

SALMONELLE

The salmon is a vicious fish. Its instinct
Is cruelty — it's its *lingua franca*. Show it
A desired kindness and its contrary path
Is instantly fierce and clear.
It is necessarily selfish
And laughs with a cold eye on pity.
Study the downcurved lips of its grin,
But don't be fooled. It is neither happy
Nor charitable. Its flesh is pink
And oily. Sweet when hot. Eat it
Sautéed with lemon. Eat the peel
And eat the silver speckled skin
And the white belly, though it's fishy
And slimy. Its diet is flies and worms.
If a worm doesn't stiffen with *rigor mortis*
For it to swallow, it bites it and eats it
In pieces. It defies gravity. It copulates,
So to speak, in gravel. It has a mindless,
Slutty way of scattering its eggs and sperm
As if in a fever after a fury. Its enemies
Are the bear and eagle — it can see sideways
But doesn't have eyes at the back of its head —
The northwest Indian who spears it with knives
Tied to sticks, or the patrician who tricks it
With hooks hidden in feathers — wet flies, dry flies,
And streamers — hauls it from its riverbed
Pool or froth, fingers its body
And hurls it back with a torn lip
And another traumatic memory, the matrix
Of its madness. Its weakness is its own

Headstrong momentum. It thinks it's smart,
But it's terrified of pain or a pause,
So what passes through its head is not

Exactly thought. It is more pure
Horror alive and knowing, which may be
The essence of nature one can enjoy

But never understand. It's distracted
By gaudiness, indifferent to grandeur.
It never learns from its mistakes.

It just gets worse and older. It grows
A funny moustache and chin whiskers,
And smells. Anadromous, it is ready

For its last run upriver and to die. It adapts
To fresh water and to salt. Its arc
Is theatrical, but its medium

Is the noise of its surroundings, therefore
Dead silence. It looks normal flat on a platter,
Or smoked, the inner lips of a bagel. Expect

Nothing from it but its drama and its body.
Wild ones are full of bones, and sometimes poisonous.
You can catch it with the right combination

Of cunning and flash, which is a thrill
And a gamble, but you're best off
Tossing it back, glad for your moment

Of luxury, that wild wet muscle
In your hand, which is as close as one can get
To insight, and not safe from regret.

Kenneth Rosen

THE FOREST WALK

Today we took a walk in the forest.
There we met a couple walking with eyes closed.
The forest is a temple, they said to us.
We whisper and the forest whispers back.

It was true. The leaves made us think
Of a letter trembling in someone's hand.
In fact, many letters in many hands —
And then they no longer did.

There where the forest was like a scary fairy tale,
A twig broke angrily each time we took a step.
And when we didn't,
The silence shrieked at us to start running.

We were hopelessly lost, perhaps?
Night would come soon
And the wild animals
Would smear their teeth with our blood.

Don't look, you said, but I did anyway
As you raised your skirt behind a bush to pee.
Now, you were not going to
Speak to me as long as I live.

We were to sit side by side till my beard
Had grown to the ground,
And you had taken a bear as a lover
And were nursing one of the sleepy cubs.

Out of the forest, to our surprise, it was still light.
A lone child flew a kite on a meadow,
The whispering couple stood with their thumbs raised
Kissing by the side of the road.

Charles Simic

READING

*— this polite and unpunishable vice,
this selfish, serene, life-long intoxication —”*
Logan Pearsall Smith

From his carrel he watched her wander,
anomalous as a Luna moth, among the stacks
 until
she gravitated at last to his glowing
bifocals for guidance out of the maze.

The honeymoon was hardly a honeymoon
his myopia coping with highways
her linen lap crushed beneath travel books
and road maps.

The house was hardly a house —
entrance a mammoth mailbox
central maw a library
rear exit a heap of gleaned journals.

The civil service was his rock pile.
“Lucky you,” he’d groan,
“You get to stay home with the books.”

Actually it was two babies who held her.
Her reading seldom strayed beyond
Beatrix Potter and Doctor Spock.

Evenings all the tots saw of their father
was a clerestory-forehead above newspaper
or tome. All they heard was an occasional
curse for kitsch and grunt for esoteric joke.

“Is your daddy sick?” whispered a little visitor.

This man did not mesh with the mundane,
so wholly was he hooked into the hal-
lowed page of print.

No problem existed — foreplay, dry rot,
sibling rivalry — until he'd brought it into being
via *Encounter*, *The Wall Street Journal*,
The New Yorker, and then he became its Solomon.

At breakfast one morning he crooned
behind *Barron's*, "We're incredibly wealthy."
"Wonderful!" she warbled. "Can we buy
a cottage on Cape Cod?"

"Silly goose," he snapped
"the money's on paper."

The worst was the winter he bedded down
with *The Magic Mountain*. Such whining for
massages, puffed pillows, meals on a tray. . . .
"Look!" laughed the patient, "I've signed our
tax form 'Hans Castorf.'"

After the grown progeny had departed —
warped, she worried, from the paper paternity —
she sank to the sofa with a book.

Oh.

Punished lavishly for Raskolnikov's crime
she was too limp to fold the laundry.

The weekend as Emma Bovary left her
too clammy to crawl into her nightie.

Thumped through Mississippi mud in Addie's
coffin, she's too dead to cook dinner.

The Merck Manual in hand, Solomon advises,
"Have the doctor check you tomorrow
for hypothyroidism and Lyme's disease."

Her appointment's with an ophthalmologist.
Fortified with bifocals, she'll
sleuth with Proust through labyrinthian liaisons,
share a cottage with Thoreau on Cape Cod.

TEDIOUS, THE AFFAIRS OF OFFICE

Tedious, tedious, the affairs of office
meetings and papers every day.
We leave it all for the mountains,
a tiny kettle, lightweight food,
walk up to rock and snow –

Catch no fish but climb a peak,
see the Inyo Mountain ranges,
shimmery Mono Lake.

a storm from the south brings summer rain.
We walk to the edge of glassy lava,
stand by a pine and breathe the delicious smell.

My son comes down from the flow
a giant chunk of obsidian in his arms,
says, we'll save this for the future –
several thousand arrowheads
when all the rest is gone.

Gary Snyder

Two Poems

THE SHAKESPEARE SEMINAR TERRORISTS

Chris, cherubic, destined
to look forever sixteen
in the remnants of her baby fat,
graduated from the Shakespeare course
into the Irish Republican Army.

Her job, courier,
her last cryptic postcard implied.
Impenetrable as runes, she probably thought

but any student critic could read between the lines.
They took her because of her American passport
and because she looked so innocent.
No one would give her a second look except
perhaps to wish their daughter
might turn out like her and

that was all. Not another word.
Five years now and the State Department
is still looking into it.

Besmah, in one year learned to write English
like an angel — her mind broad and rich, complex
as the taste of huge baking sheet of baklava
she brought still oven warm
to the seminar's last meeting.

We saw her one time again, two years later —
a twenty-second bite on the national news
standing behind Arafat in Western dress
reading for him between the lines
of the reporter's American questions.

About her, we know a little more.
For the PLO, she lasted a long time —
three and a half years before she went down —
masqueraded as a man and
killed by a Syrian irregular who later went mad
over the guilt of shooting a Moslem woman.

Who cares, he thought, about her AK-47.
Who cares that her head was wrapped in a black scarf
only the eyes peering out
through the slit in the bunker she had become.

Several months later the Syrian took his own life.
Too bad. If he'd asked us we could have told him
she'd have shot him down in an instant
if she'd seen him first — cut through him
without mercy, as if he were a too-famous critic
spouting some half-baked idea about Othello.

In Shakespeare, people died all the time over ideas.
The men and women of Beirut would understand, fighting
over a few square yards of burnt-out apartments,
defending a shell-pocked wall for no reason
but that it is still standing.

When I heard the news
a taste seeped into my mouth
from out of nowhere —
like honey and pastry rolled infinitely thin
sweet and complex and more than
you could ever eat.

The taste some angelic poet's next tragedy
might have had
had it not been stolen by death.

TATTOO

It is the end of the millennium and still
we can't keep children from falling.

But some progress at least —

these days, by law, the school yards are spongy
beneath the slides and high swings,
three inches deep in cedar bark.

Half a lifetime away

I remember our school yard where nothing was soft,
an expanse of hard red clay, a wire fence
to keep the woods at bay, and each spring
shoveled out over the clay
a layer of coal cinder, tons of it
from cleaning out the school furnace.

What ever could they have been thinking of?

The rain washed the dust away. The black cinders dug in.
Some were round and shiny, little hard blisters
the size of lady bugs, the others looked like
cut-in-half flies, but sharp
and ragged no matter which way they lay.

Who knows? Maybe nobody wanted us to tumble
hands first out of a swing, but in those days
if you fell, you fell.

And if you did, you had to report it —
your meaty black palm, your gravely knee,
all the hot specks that bore
into your wound like shooting stars.

The school nurse was ready
with her bottle of iodine and a wire brush.

But, if you could keep still, keep it to yourself
the blood would dry and eventually flake away;
in time the skin would knit together
and then, they would be yours — a firmament of
gritty stars beneath your translucent skin —
burning with a cold blue light, forever.

Once, a very long time ago,
a meteorite crashed through the soft earth
of New South Wales. It imbedded itself in a seam of coal
which immediately caught fire and began to burn without air.

Even today, after three hundred years,
it is not hard to find that place.
It is still burning.

Anthony Sobin

UNFOLDED MAPS

1.

Upstairs at the end of a narrow room,
the boy once had a bureau with a pair
of shallow top drawers. He pulled one out

and turned it over, and with red crayon
drew on the underside a box, and from the box
a dotted line along a stream beside

a tiny house with one red line of chimney-smoke
toward a stubbed tree with a hole in it.
There he thought to hide whatever it was.

2.

Some days I travel more in time than space.
These faint blue lines are paths to where I rode
one summer, waiting for a horse to land

beyond the third fence of an in-and-out
and turn toward the water or the brush.
The course was charted on a posterboard

beside the entrance gate. I'd studied it,
but couldn't call it back for anything.
Some days I rode off course, and some days, on.

3.

Even a topographic sheet could never
capture what it is to travel from
your collarbone elsewhere by way of points
of interest not to be denoted
on a dry table of conventions,
though "Legend" might be a title fetched
just far enough from where we started
to place above the story we tell now,
here beside this fire, which I mark X.

Henry Taylor

THE EMERALD BOOK

First it was a ring,
its stone of green glass
like an empty wine bottle
and on her finger, the watercolors
shaping the brush in large teardrop shapes
of sable, splashing even with colored juice, like
raspberries, the stain of coffee cup rings
adding to the paper's authenticity.

In China
she would have failed
with her bound feet and sharp tongue
like a rooster's beak, like a fighting cock
she would have driven everyone away.
Writing in the book, she would record
the ingredients for soup, and never listen
to the telephone ringing, calling with messages
of cancer or floods. In Poland

she would have eloped with Chopin
gone to the desert of Las Vegas where
they would have gambled
 for music and
the chips would be orchids, growing on the green felt
of blackjack tables. She would have avoided
nothing, the pansies, the snapdragons, the chocolate
torte,
and violence wouldn't have blown in like sand.

You search her room and there isn't a trace
of the Emerald Book. But she has it,
you know she does. Sometimes you watch her
dealing cards and see the green glass-stoned ring
flashing on her marriage finger.

 It's all "a movie,"
 as some dead poet said,
 "at the end of the world."

Three Poems**THE GARDEN OF STONE CABBAGES**

Elephants knelt here, I thought,
and under the white pines I admired
the round prints of their reverence
till the old man said, "Sea cabbages,"
and told me how the whole blessed field
sank into coral sleep when the warm sea
that shimmered from Albany to Detroit
took back its green gifts. The land
buckled on its armor of new ice.
The glacier sharpened its knives
on the mineral heads of cabbages —
roses disappointed in love,
shucked them and planed them down
to hubcaps for emeralds, oysters, orbits
freckled like trout or fawn,
thrown from the wheel of a potter
who learned his art from the sleep
of tortoises. Nothing sees you.
Nothing knows you are gone.

UNINVITED HOUSES

The houses kept coming
into her paintings, though she tried
to stop them, though she asked
the two barns, one male, one female,
who stepped from her mauve sky,
"Who are you? What country sent you?"
So many begged her to make them

visible; a silo packed
with the sawdust of twilight,
an ark sent to deliver the morning,
after her father died
clutching his Star of David
and his Crucifix.

He is the guardhouse with a red roof

and a gate to the city of steeples.
He is the sky peeling itself to glory.
While her friend was dying, she painted
many safe places for her to be glad in,
tents stitched from the silks of riders
who raced hard and won. The last house
was a shadow of itself, the ghost

razed to sight on the wall after
a demolition. When it opened
a window, someone left
a blue plate on the sill.
What shines so? The bright
hem of the door answers:
open all night.

THE WISDOM OF THE JELLYFISH

The moon sheds its skin, knitting
halos and casting them off.

On the beach, how they shine

and pulse and glisten
like the fontanelles of the newborn.
What is it to be a lens

focused on the feathery star
of your own life,
fireworks trapped

in a bruised sky?
As you shrink to a coin
minted in lace, you dry

to a chalky spill. The sea
smoothes things over.
Look inward, says the jellyfish.

I am all eyes, God-sighted.
I peacock the land. When I died,
I showed you the whole galaxy.

Nancy Willard

ABSTRACTION

They came that morning, in gowns of pale green and white,
sliding through the slim trees like slants of an unsparing light;
they were noiseless in their coming, and faceless,
except for their eyes, and behind them came a noise,
a clinking, light touch of steel on steel, wind chimes
in the corridors of bone; it followed them, the sound,
as a wake follows a ship, that ruffled disturbance
of what had been even and seamless, a placid
surface, so unperturbed in being what it was.
And when they came, as a wave parts, everything fled
before them, had fled hours, days, before they came,
having sensed their coming from a long ways off,
the way snakes know before the seismographs
that the earth will move, and even the mountains
will break, slide in great sheets of mud and rubble,
and swallow the valleys, the inhabited hollows
whose houses were crammed with the unsuspecting,
living like dogs in the dumb incomprehension
of the habitual. The morning was torn where they came,
riven between the slim trees, which were rooted
and could not flee from their own forest nature
like the birds and the insects, the raccoons, opossums,
deer, and the rodents, who had vanished before, leaving
only the stillness behind, and the tension of waiting
which kept even the leaves from stirring, and the wind
held its breath, fearing that the least movement would
shatter the leaves like glass. Every space that once
was the passage for air and light, and the small scurry

of squirrels, became a wound as they entered there,
a legion in the gowns of their office. They were
the priests of postponement, their gifts were subtraction,
pain and extension of days. They had their rituals,
their instruments, their secret language and passwords;
the forest was not their home, and they had never
heard its secret language, for it always fell silent before
them, and what they came to was only a vacant
room, like the shell of a village that had fled at the news
of an army approaching. And from the edge of the scene,
so composed, and so silent, except for the strange clink
clink of the steel, the trees so straight in their dark lines,
the trunks an abstract study in stripes, rows of harsh light
between them, the figures gliding into the foreground —
from vision's periphery, something begins
to seep, slowly at first, like the oozing of sap from a tree,
and then faster, until it is pouring, a tide of red flooding
out from the edges of vision and swallowing what might
have been, covering whatever it was that was hiding
out there, everywhere, since they came to the forest
whose spirit, a fugitive,
unprovisioned and naked, had fled.

Eleanor Wilner