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CONTENTS

PAGE

Lola Haskins	<i>Sleep Positions</i>	5
Gillian Martin	<i>Rookwood</i>	6
	<i>Equinox</i>	7
Bob Russell	<i>Millennium's Orphan</i>	8
Mary Leader	<i>For The Love of Gerald Finzi</i>	10
Charles Wyatt	<i>Prelude</i>	16
Martha Carlson-Bradley	<i>The Grimm Brothers' Nephew</i>	17
Jacqueline Lyons	<i>A Few Lesotho Traditions</i>	18
Bruce Cutler	<i>The Fifth Gospel</i>	20
Charles Muñoz	<i>A Beacon for the Darkness</i>	25
	<i>Little Jack Horner, Grown Old, Prays for One More Plum</i>	26
Meg Hill Fitz-Randolph	<i>Body and Soul as a</i>	
	<i>River of Molecules</i>	27
Susan Tichy	<i>Moon, Colorado Snow</i>	29
	<i>Explication</i>	31
	<i>Banishing the Suitor</i>	33
Daniel Bourne	<i>Spoon River Deli</i>	38
Gary J. Whitehead	<i>Trephining</i>	39
	<i>Boustrophedon</i>	40
	<i>Sisyphus</i>	41
Mark White	<i>On a Felluca One Evening</i>	
	<i>In The Aegean, A Felicific Rite</i>	
	<i>Is Performed</i>	42
 Books in Brief		
	<i>Golden Ecco Anthology</i> , ed. Mark Strand	44
	<i>100 Great Poems by Women</i> , ed. Carolyn Kizer	44
	<i>Earth Took of Earth</i> , ed. Jorie Graham	44
	<i>Lament for the Makers</i> , ed. W. S. Merwin	45

<i>The Poet's Notebook</i> , ed. Kuusisto, Tall, Weiss	47
Neal Bowers, <i>Words for the Taking</i>	48
Alice Fulton, <i>Sensual Math</i>	48
Stanley Kuntiz, <i>Passing Through</i>	48

COVER: Heidi Daub, *Crows*, 1992, acrylic on paper

SLEEP POSITIONS

This is how we sleep:

On our backs, with pillows covering our chests, heavy as dirt

On our sides, like wistful spoons

Clenched, knees in-tucked, arms folded

Wide, like sprawling-rooted lotuses

In Iowa on top of pictures of Hawaii, huge white flowers on blue

In New York on black satin

In China on straw.

This is how our dreams arrive:

As hot yellow taxicabs;

As sudden blazing steam, we who have been pots on a stove,
looking only at our own lids;

As uninvited insects, all at once on our tongues.

O hairdresser, auditor, hardknuckled puller of crabtraps, you
who

think poetry was school, you who believe you never had

a flying thought,

lie down.

Two Poems**ROOKWOOD**

(i)

Fresh-cut curls uncoil under the glass
of a mourning brooch.

The widow draws down her veil.

At Mortuary Station, the black-plumed train
slides slowly through allegories:

seven pillars, fifty-two arches;
past portent of acorn and fig,
rectitude of pelican, acquiescence of the lamb,
and from two clarion angels
the last trump sounds in stone.

(ii)

Salt effloresces on verse.

Sea breeze erases the pinions of angels.

Warm sand trickles into sockets;
fingers disarticulate, fall

tinkling through the keel of ribs.

Jaws burst their bindings – open wide to sing
of coral and countless shells,
of foraminifera, diatoms –

to rejoice
in the calcareous fellowship of bones.

EQUINOX

Nothing mellows:

 only a hiatus
between the perfumed mouths of apricots
 the brusque righteousness of quince;
and in the mornings a thin wind blows from inland.

Children are called home

in short afternoons;
a woman gathers in the washing,
pausing in her harvest rhythm
 to touch a shirt-sleeve to her cheek,
to take the measure of a sheet along her arm.

Something presses down:

some old obligation to posset and store;
some prudence of salting and drawstring,
 a need to crouch,
 to go to ground.

The horizon tilts. There is nothing to fear

 in the pale wide sky,
the darkening headland, the thud of windfalls.

The earth turns

and these seem right –
 the gravity of ruminant
 the relevant of midge.

Gillian Martin

MILLENNIUM'S ORPHAN

First a grandfather goes. Then you forget
how a pretty aunt followed "before her time."
But you vaguely remember how uncles collapsed
into nothing but money and unheard prayers.

Still it is hard to be heard in the din.
Someone has to be asked to ask
a stranger to pass the gravy and,
the moment you pick up the distant thread
of your cousins' conversation, the gravy arrives
and you find yourself nodding your head at your wife's
cousin's husband, telling him, no,
you don't understand what a stock option is

and yes, it was you who wanted the gravy.
He shimmers, disappears – but who
are these boys who duck their heads when they walk
in the door? When did the beautiful women

come in and where, again, is the gravy?
Why did the cousins leave early and not
say goodbye? You feel empty, although you've been
eating forever, moving from time to time

to another chair. You can't get enough –
so you call to your sister, "More pie! More pie!"
But she's gone from the kitchen, gone with your wife.
The potatoes are gone again too. Your dead dogs

bark and beg. The horseradish passes
right through them. This laughter's great –
and these faces resemble a woman you love,
the one in the kitchen a moment ago,

who looks like this woman whose hair now brushes
your cheek, who puts pie on your plate,
who caresses the back of your neck when you say,
“You’re late. Where were you?” And who kisses you then

for no good reason you can think of. So again
you say, “Where? And why are you kissing me now? And when
did you dye your white hair brown? Your skin
is soft and I smell soap. Did we bathe with the children?”

You suddenly want a drink on the rocks, some gin
in the bathtub to share with this woman who is shaken,
not stirred when you ask her. So you shout to the kitchen,
“Bring out the candles – we’re taking a bath – and gin

on the rocks,
for two,
too.

Hold the children.”

Bob Russell

FOR THE LOVE OF GERALD FINZI¹

SPIDER MUMS

Not these, I think, stroking
 with my forefinger the outermost petals
 of the individual I have selected, I think: *Not these splayed
 phalanges,*

*cream and smooth, first out, now
 farthest apart, sculptural...* Rather, it's the
 innermost petals that intrigue me, those in the formative stages:
 something in

the way they minutely
 grip, curl, they're preparing for something later,
 they're enduring the tension, the desire to do something, somehow make
 the part that

feels the desire obtrude:
 a young girl in her skirts squats to pet the cat
 who lies on his side for her, a kind of girl: lonely, adult. Often
 I address

figures I feel close to,
 sketching under titles like "Girl in Full Skirt,
 With Cat," addressing in the second person feelings I know: "You wish
 your legs were

stems of such slenderness,
 you could twine them together, tighter, tighter,
 tight almost to the bursting point, tight as silk cord twisted into fringe
 for velvet

cushions, or draperies
 like those at "Grand-maman's." *Something needs to squeeze
 or be squeezed to extinction, doesn't it...* [I name her] *Julie?* She says:
Yes! And, and

¹ British Composer and apple grower.

*“it’s nothing to do with
my talented mother or with my mother’s
talented men-friends, nothing to do with my pastel chalks, or with my
violin*

either!” “No,” I confirm,
“it’s wholly outside those things, but it’s something
to do, to do with gripping/squeezing/pleasure/pain, *like* talented men,
like the chalks

themselves, like the very
paper, whether cream and toothy, or slick and white
to soothe the sharpest pencil, like the rending violin itself.” Still
chartreuse, these

Not-yet-tendrill-like... I
ply them, these inward petals, with my left thumb
away from the center’s minuscule round yellow rug, I feel their urge
to go right

back where they were, so tight,
so inside-gripping. But I could tell them what
they better face: even the most secret vulnerability is
obvious.

THIS MUSIC THIS DRINK

Is melancholy
or rather
strong, sweet

SPIDER MUMS, IN MAJOLICA PITCHER

Story
Story
Story

“IT OPENS”

“ ... a strong outburst from the orchestra, the bass line constantly rising to twist the harmonies in new directions. The first entry of the clarinet

pays little heed to this introduction, the solo part rather preferring to move things along in a more pastoral way. Two more attempts by the strings

to add tempest to the movement fail to stir the clarinet, which calms the orchestra down to a rippling accompaniment, so reminiscent of

Finzi’s songs... ”²

WATER

In whose motions children dance,

I wish you had prepared me.

Water, in whose several bodies wanderers wash,

I wish you would heal me too.

Water, in whose extremes, of steam, of ice, pain forms,
why didn’t you cauterize, immobilize my infant heart?

Now, you had better warn your best friend, the earth,
better warn each vessel made of earth or shaped like earth,
“This woman may well abandon you.”

You should enlist the aid of your enemy, sun-fire, saying
“This woman half wants you to blind her, obscuring
all manifestations to which she cannot but cling.”

² Alun Francis, in the Program Note, to the Compact Disc, CDA66001, Hyperion Records Limited.

Dear Water, How I wish you would gather yourself
together and rise,
gather yourself together with thunder and together
overpower my sole lover, the air,
commanding him:
*"Send this woman this hour no barrier,
rain on slurry-gray waves."*

PAPER

The novel that isn't getting written.
Or that is, with glacial slowness.

I imagine you.
The eyes that weary
windowward
the rain blues
the highway mists
the headlights that speed.

The sheets look whiter
under the black-metal desk lamp
with its skullcap and its elbow
crane
the machine
the watermark
the white bird flying
the poet Hart
the verb
I imagine you.

In January, clarinet concerto.
Opus 31.
In white January.

The novel that isn't getting written
not one letter.
Inchoate pen.
Ink marrow.

The little box the pen-nib came in says
Osmiroid.

The flat little bottle of black ink
says Osmiroid.

The box the pen came in
said Don't
shake your pen.

But it's hard not to shake your pen

the story that isn't

the story that is.

Tenacity.

I imagine you.

A shiver.

A tapped furnace.

The bed where one doesn't lay oneself down.

The bed where you don't lay yourself down.

And then you do.

RIDDLE

Tending to squatness,
my bottom is broad.

On top I offer
his hand a curve.

Both flat and round,
I spread heat,
marry what he draws
with what he breathes.

Curious, he lifts
the part that covers
my opening, his fingertips
encircle its knob.

He picks his time
by his own thirst

(stanza continued)

*but too, by the sound
then doth he grasp me*

*I make losing pressure:
up altogether and pour.³*

MAJOLICA PITCHER, MORE OF THE WORDS

“It’s late.”

THESE FUSE

Whether their quiet lamps darken or burn, fuse
doubly, if only once, surely

desire must twin, span the single night, link
the two horizons – radiant – black –

desire must bevel the moment these vanish
into a shared dream –

alert trees, and moon-on-glade, reflections.
There – these are pulled

toward each other, toward
fusing forever his bellow, her scream...

if only on paper

ON PAPER

Paper, smooth, and cream, as
the longest oldest petals of the spider
mum I glide along my lips . . . not despairing till made-up “Julie” asks:
“Doesthatcount?”

Mary Leader

³ Possible solution: A tea kettle

PRELUDE (IN MEDIAS RES)

even some music like a sudden sharp or a sudden
flat or a flatsharp but just that long note
that starts like a weed pulled out of itself
out of its own sheath the slick part
you can nibble off then throw the weed away tender
as any rabbit could want that white green slip
of a note growing like water just outside the cove
rippled and finally falling to another note
in l'apres-midi it's the most remote augmented
fourth and the wind ruffles there a smudge
for the smooth water in the back of the cove and follows
it little by little, poco a poco e crescendo
into the waves and then perhaps there is
an overhanging bluff and a bird swoops up from drinking
and lights on an overhanging branch which dances under it
for a moment and the eye flows away to sink slowly
into the darkness there an underhang or a cave
or something like that at the edge under the bluff
and it's dark in there you can almost see follow
into it an old bullfrog or what too dark
to tell then the harp comes in and sweeps everything
rescatters the molecules the waves wipe over the waves
and the water must begin again there's always something
under it you see and it may ignore what's above
but not every day some days it might look up
and spit in your eye oh don't come to the end
of this or the end of anything because the silence
will flow up to its edge sure of itself as ever
as always just touching what almost wasn't said

Charles Wyatt

THE GRIMM BROTHERS' NEPHEW

In the tales, old women lust
for a taste of young boys,
while maidens palm the warm eggs
left in their safekeeping,
stained now with blood: adults
out of sight upstairs
muffle their voices.

*

We are well says Karl, his mother
recuperating in her bedroom,
bitten he says *by the stork,*
and beaten by its wings –

*

He slept, incorporated
into dreams the footsteps
pounding down the hall
and the screams, a woman
transformed – savage –
a sudden blast of silence
before the infant's cry.

Martha Carlson-Bradley

A FEW LESOTHO TRADITIONS

SCARCITY

Two spoons for me and a guest,
one knife to share. Only one red pen
per teacher, traded in when its spine
is empty. A newspaper travels
the row of neighbor's kitchens
gathers thumbprints and coffee rings
becomes cigarette paper for the man
who guards my house.

But it's water that teaches me
Greed – saved in every bucket, kettle
and wineskin, it hauls me out of sleep
when it begins its slow dripping.
Keeps my tomatoes small, sunflower
faces clenched, my dirt yard
packed hard as bone.

PATIENCE

I wait, stand before the empty
produce rack, next to the cardboard tray
empty of eggs. I shake my head like the
women shake their heads saying *Hey-ey*
the eggs are *finished*. We wonder where
a woman can buy eggs this week with all
the chickens old or slaughtered, the new
layers not yet arrived, no one knows why.
Well, I say, My friend that *'Me* who we
all know told me I may find eggs *here*.
While they shake their heads, cluck
their tongues and wonder what to do,
I still don't leave. One woman wanders off,
returns, asks How many eggs do I want
to buy? I take not too many because
ka nete it's a problem, no eggs anywhere,
put them carefully in a brown paper bag.
I wish the women to *Stay Well* and greet
my friend that *'Me* who we all know,
they wish me to *Go Well* and now I can
go home to bake my cake.

SUPERSTITION

I believe what the old women tell me
about not sweeping after dark,
in keeping my floor full of its humble
charms. I see the day's fall-out
as a web of protection for the night –
that postage stamp might make a stranger
keep walking past my door, the spices
save me from a scorpion, small stones
mean my house won't be struck
by lightning, and confetti that fell
from a letter might bring sweet dreams.
After light drains from the sky,
slips under the rug of night, nothing
passes through my doorway. I save
everything until morning, leaving these
talismans in their own arrangements –
constellations – and I walk barefoot,
carefully, in the dust of my luck.

Jacqueline Lyons

THE FIFTH GOSPEL

The Seeker

“Dory!” my best friend says to me, “only faith is perfect! When the storms rage – if lightning strikes – !” I interrupt: “Not on your life! Thinking – that is perfection!” He laughs. “Thinking! Here?” “Here, in Gadara!” I exclaim. “We’re not in Tarshish, this is no end-of-the-world outpost of sand and salt, we’re perched on the loftiest throne in the world –” (I was going to add “the Empire!”) but he interrupts: “Perched on our own behinds – that’s where we are!” Tell me, where can a thinker go from a line like that? We’re in my garden, in an hour another friend will join us, failed dialogue will become failed triologue.

I’ve been to Athens,
I’m learning algebra. I can assert two things
that can’t be proved, unite them, form a third
assertion, go on and on to unspeakable benefit!
I’ve become a mental gymnast, training for truth!
Lost, on my fellow Gadarenes. They’re long on nothing
but the headlong. And all you hear about is feelings: “happiness,”
“unhappiness” – the town’s awash in pathos! Life
of the mind? Somewhere else, not in Gadara.

Ah, but in Athens! Say a carver sees
a rough old cedar tree: his soul’s aglow
with shapes he senses slumbering in its raspy heart.
Which shapes, however: riches of a statue of Apollo
or riches of a table for milady’s entry hall?
Riches of the art, or riches of the purse? One wood,
two ends: beauty up against spondulics,
admiration of the few squared off against the chatter
of the many (“local boy makes good, interiors
deluxe, by appointment only!”). To choose
the one you must look the other in the eye
and laugh. The world is riven at the moment of your choice!

Or would be, in Athens. In Gadara, the carver sees – a tree trunk! He tears off the bark, forget the table, there’s rain to pray for, he works it down to form the image of a man. Or is it a beast? No one can tell, so he paints it: white for man, red for beast. Now, whatever it is, he shoves it in a niche in the temple wall, bolts it down with iron, calls it “wonderful,” “a vessel made for the service of man’s living” – well, isn’t that what’s scratched on it at dedication time? And people pray to it! And the praying isn’t beautiful, it’s just getting what we want, our health, our goods, our wives, our children, journeys, prospects, from a painted piece of log (“white,” for human!). You can’t tell Apollo from an apple, save by the color! No wonder Wisdom says “The invention of idols is a travesty of faith.” When you deal out solemn holy names to painted logs you’re conceiving brutes that forever must be dumb. Why? Because they’re ugly! No one with half a mind would think to worship them! “It’s hard to find a connoisseur of terra cotta Ashtoreths!” When I say this to my best friend in the garden, he looks aghast. “What is it you’re talking – idolatry or art?” “You fool!” I say, “it’s both! It’s lifelessness! There’s nowhere more true feeling and more bad taste than in an idol’s niche!” He blinks. Then says, “You mean *good* taste – ?” and stops. Does he take my point? He doesn’t say.

I’ve heard it taught that small rooms discipline the mind and large ones just distract it. As for me, small rooms, small minds. I prefer an airy atrium, a cunning compluvium to catch a bit of sun plus all the rain, and a cool impluvium to hold my piece of the watery firmament, all done with tiles, reflecting pool, a neat parterre, and gardening – the greatest of perfections and the most consoling. What minds fail to perceive, gardens retrieve!

(stanza continued)

I know, contemplation comes off pricey,
 but if you're doubtful of dinner and careworn by creditors,
 how can you be disposed to think? The thinker
 needs an artful refuge for his complex mind.
 It wants plan, protection, succor. And that was how
 I conceived my answer. A Gadarene academy!

And how

I came to ruin. Ruin? Oh yes! Because
 of a wedding, a necessary wedding: my academy, and spondulics.
 It was an orangutan trying to play the violin.
 It was the consonance of sometimes I think, sometimes I am.
 It was pouring troubled oil on stolid waters.
 How? In the form of pigs. "Did you say pigs
 or figs?" you ask. Pigs! The Roman legions love them,
 chops and loins and sausages. They eat them, right down
 to the squeal! They were the bestial logos of my building
 project. Myself, I don't go near them – others
 do it for me, and where's the harm in what
 one's conscience won't object to? Take military service:
 I'm exempt. Worship of the Emperor: exempted
 also. That's my conscience; I live in mine and let others
 live in the contours of their own. Except when the map
 of conscience for a moral and examined life begins
 to seem more real to you than life itself.
 Then, land of unlikeness! Daedal land of make-believe!

But I anticipate. My pig herd project prospered,
 the foundations of my academy were laid. It was more
 than I'd dared to dream – there were days when you could see them
 rooting away on the slopes above the city,
 charming little pink-and-olive melons.
 Profits flowed like water down that slope,
 hog to handler to drover to butcher to happy
 centurion to me to steward to mason to mortar –
 lifeblood of the one, quicklime to the other.
 Then one day it happens. No sign, no word,
 a healer just appears. Gets out of his boat

(stanza continued)

in Gadara and wants to – what? “Be perfect in his faith,” as my best friend says. But this one comes in tandem with some lunatic who lurches out of the depths of a tomb he’s been squatting in. He wants his faith to make him whole, bundle off an unclean spirit.

Or spirits, as it turned out, later. As I get the story, madman waylays healer, the next we hear the deadbeat lunatic is singing psalms, the restorer of his sanity is praising God and the madman’s beastly cacodemons are thronging out. And where? Into my piggies! They’re possessed! Even from my garden I can see: where once were shoats are bobbing, dodging, swirling whirls of pixilated porkers, they’re dancing with each other, they’re hooking tails, they’re playing crack-the-whip, they’re climbing rocks, they’re sailing off in space like ballista missiles. One by one their carcasses roll down the slope. Like lifeless stones at Jericho, they’re tumbling down – my building project, my academy!

Oh, had that been
the end of it! But now the centurion’s 5000 rations
short – not one, not five, but five triple-0!
Do you know what centurions do when they’re so short-
rationed?

Forget philosophy, forget atrium, compluvium, impluvium, reflecting pool, neat parterre and garden. Centurions are loggers. They cut down a tree, they trim it up, they fix a horizontal bar, they hoist you up. They tie your feet and hands and you’re there forever! Break your faith, lose your life!

Count on it!

Bruce Cutler

Two Poems

A BEACON FOR THE DARKNESS

On a warm night in autumn,
when the full moon, rising,
loomed behind the pine trees,
a new light, low in the cornfield,
began to flash on and off
as if it came out of a hand
that opened, closed, opened.

It was light that my own eye
created with each thud
of my heart,
flashing as the tissue of my eye broke down,
my own occulting beacon, open,
closed, open, more closed than open,

a blinking signal from the optic nerve as cold
as the moon on pine needles, a light
that made the coming darkness more than dark.

**LITTLE JACK HORNER, GROWN OLD,
PRAYS FOR ONE MORE PLUM**

Used to be, Lord, I got plenty
of Christmas pies. With plums.
I think about those pies
all the time, plum pies engorged
with juice for Little Old Jack.

I know you keep right on baking
those dear little pies, Lord,
plums and all.

But nowadays it's hard
for me, hard as horn,
to get sweet pies into my corner.
Does God really
want Jack to go hungry
for the rest of his little old life?

All I pray for is just one
more of those pies.
One more sweet, folded,
fertile pie for Little Old Jack Horner
to escort back to his corner

so he can find out,
just one more time,
if he's still a good boy.

Charles Muñoz

BODY AND SOUL AS A RIVER OF MOLECULES

The riddle persists, looping in grass
 (not a snake, or the entrails of rabbit)
 but the same up and down
 flick from the wrist, announcing each
 bully hit, its next god-given
 location.

I'm not going to write another poem about death.
 Instead, I'll write that other thing –
 goes by different names, keeps changing.

In sixth grade science I fall in love with the notion
 of molecules. Better than clay, more scientific
 than metaphor. This was the *real* world, making and unmaking,
 streaming in rivers, changing and not
 changing a thing. My first metaphysical enchantment.

From the beginning there was loyalty.
 There was that making the ear's commitment,
 that sentencing of sound
 to grammar, and then to everlasting form.
 Her mouth, like mine, made the pledge
 to structure. Then did she have to die?

From the structure of things, she did.
 Lu Chi's *Wen Fu* says, "Each finds a new way into the mystery."
 Another poet writes, "The journey of longing is the poet's journey."
 She was, in her heart of hearts, a poet.

How do you know when you're ready for the maiden voyage,
 when it's time to seal yourself up in your own box,
 and push off, – letting the blue waters take you wherever?
 All the people gathered on their narrow docks
 are lifting up their snow white handkerchiefs and crying,
 "*Farewell*" and "*Farewell*."

The question then becomes can they manage to let you go?

The rabbit found in the morning was just like that, a plank of ginger fur, stretched soft & cold towards the window at the back of the plywood hutch.

But her eyes remained open to what might have been, or what was –
her last awful strain of breath.

The bat with wings arched over her, like sails in the grass, alive but partially eaten, signaling for help, thinking the blank stare of a nearby tree trunk must be her mother. When someone finally comes she is still praying, emitting wondrous clicking sounds, stretched for dear life out of her wide dying mouth.

My sister, too, left her body lying there, a spilled vase on the grass, all her flowers flown.

I wasn't going to write about death, the way it ended.

How she had no choice, but greeted it as if she did.

Let this poem be about a small defiance, in the end an act of grammar. Let it be about the body's mouth, how hers stayed open, and I did not close it.

I chose not to put the end stop
to possibilities, – science or religion:

she might re-enter, yes?

she might still speak?

Poets work like that – leaving then coming back,
a kind of loyalty, after all, to form.

Meg Hill Fitz-Randolph

Three Poems

MOON, COLORADO, SNOW

Horn Creek Lake, 10 p.m.

out of sight

 under branches
my hands know the knots that
bind the horses
 inspect their turns
come away gnarled
 with sap.

I let them hang
on my knees squat still
in snow-dust.

 Three feet away
moon gilds each quill
of a porcupine hunting oats
where they fall from a horse's lip.

Snow is not bewildered
by where to land on this complicated body.

 (And the horse
is no fool either. He does not offer
to shove it aside with his tender nose)

So quiet –
 horse breath
 and mine –

Each horse stands on three legs resting one.
Each horse breathes a sweet, white cloud.

Her legs in tall grass Angel herself
is a sweet white cloud

And Nimbus though I can't see his gold
shines like a whale in moonlight –

He turns his head at a sound but nothing.

Should evil approach I know
it would not smell like him.

(Although his teeth tear small worlds
up into oblivion.)

– Cold, and the ropes harden to perfect forms.

– Cold, so hemp creaks when the horses move.

My hands numb my neck so warm
snow melts almost before it stings –

Like a porcupine who has no surface
but leaves mortal tracks.

I bow my head to this animal
to world without edge Amen.

And smell wet rock.

Rock from which the walls of prisons are made.

EXPLICATION

When I was reading about the Indian wars, going there, to that sky and that handwriting, a man came into my room one night. I thought I was dreaming and comforted myself, said, "This is a dream." But the mud on his clothes was wet and the blood on his clothes was wet, and on his eyebrows and his hat, and a long smear down his face of that yellow mud. And he said I must tell you. He said I must tell you he did not desert he was faithful. He was standing in front of the chimney and I could have touched him from where I was sitting, on the edge of the bed, but I did not touch him. He kept his distance. He was not tall and he was not old, and I wanted to find his name and his grave, but those records are gone from the archives. A grave could be any part of that field, it is, but I had to tell you I tried, that I was faithful.

I was reading about the Indian wars, going there, to that field, where the butchering was and my uncle, either allowing it or unable to stop it, either rejoicing or vomiting somewhere in the wet underbrush, that vomiting, that butchering in the rain and the mud, and I was so wet and the lightning maybe a mile off striking the butte. I was walking in water and walking in darkness, into the overgrown ravine, breathing rain and placing my feet exactly where each one died, where a family now grazes cattle and wants to be paid by visitors, wants history to bribe them there for its life, I was walking and promising not to return, not to pay.

I was reading about the Indian wars, on that field, where the butchering was, and the preservation, my uncle no more than a single heart, in the darkness way back with the mules and the extra horses, and down in that place I

saw nothing but sky, nothing but sky and the grass overgrazed by cattle, the blue dragonfly that stayed at my knee, and the hours it took, on that field, for the sky and the weeping, the dragonfly comforting me in the sun-lit darkness.

I was reading about the Indian wars, going there, that blood and that handwriting, unable to stop the magnificence of that butte and its pastel battlements. I was there where the storm had blown over and left me, wet but returned from that field, alive in the center of light, a steam rising up from the badlands at my feet, and the pines and the stones and the bird that flew four times around my head, that sound of wings and the smaller sound, the peeping I understood to be protection.

When I was reading, going there to that handwriting, so often rain and the poor light of preservation, I learned to hold my heart a uniform distance from the page. I was going and must survive it, must walk and the field again in a solitude. I was going into the Indian wars, overgrazed by cattle, the butchering over and grazed by cattle and sky, it did not take long. It took hundreds of years, it was all one heart, my uncle vomiting wet in the pastel beauty, the mud, the bird all covered with blood and the man who was telling me. I was walking, so dragonflies and faithful to embrace me. He said I must tell you. He said in that field the writing hand, and the blood and forgetting and the yellow mud and the walking.

BANISHING THE SUITOR

*(strength of white beach,
rock of mountain land,
forever to you, Artemis, dedicate) – H.D.*

In order to perform this, I must have all the animal
and vegetable in place: feather on head, smoke in nose.
And mineral, and chemical: the stars, the green
that breathes, the protoplasmic taste.

And distances: a coastline heard by birds at night,
low-pitched like artillery. That swerve.
No other way to conjure you, who have
been broken like an iceberg from the shore.

When birds migrate they bring me what I need:
dead this, dead that, live branch, old sack.
You only have intruded here, you and my owl,
you and my weasel. Whose company I keep
like faith.

Still you complain: I have not been concentric.
I have been cold, and animal and vegetable by turns.
(Put feather in hair, smoke in nose.
The tender neck is its own noose.)

Unable to see, or to stop imagining, this room
that seems dark while you face the fire,
you put stars in my eyes, your heat on hold.
The protoplasmic taste, that could be cunt, or the
head of your
magnificence, is only mouth, my own. Fear keeps us both
polite,
afraid my mountains will roll your mountains
over and under like waves.

(Though always you are beautiful, fire-lit, your eyes
 run blue and brown as tides.
 I find you clever, too:
 if I leave my house

acres and acres of yellow flowers
 assault me beside the road. But I
 am older than beauty, older than roads:
 I yield, but keep the fire.

* * * *

You think because I keep the fire that I am fire,
 destined to excite you, destined to consume.

I am more like wind.
 Not afraid to sit with my knees apart.
 Not afraid to lick
 the flame in its shallow dish.

 You will not find a temple in my eyes,
 but only storms, and drought years,
 and small birds tearing wide the heads of grass.

(I close them when you come too near.
 I make myself a summer day, a dove.
 Put feather on head, smoke in nose.
 The tender neck is turned loose
 to grapple with your lips, and lose.)

– Get back! before I turn your beard
 to an owl's nest on my rock chin.

Get back before I nail you up to rattle in my wind.

This makes you wild. You draw your knife,
 you draw your gun, and color them
 with every shade of rage. But you are afraid to ravage me.
 What if you are no more than my imagining?
 What if my fall collapses you, like ice in sudden spring?

* * * *

And so you start your own song.

– I beg you, no.

Be good! or I will let the fire die down, the vision fade.

Put birds in flight down long nights.

Make rage or fog or sleeplessness

to weary us, like wings.

Make anarchy wake up within its sack.

But do not sing to me, as you used to do,

shaping your voice to slip between

my hardest rocks, my densest trees.

It was then I almost yielded, then coastlines withheld from me

their low-pitched artillery.

I could not breathe. You held me so

emphatically, like prize or child or dead thing whose

magnificence upheld

you...

– Oh all right, then. Guitar is safe.

The number six, perhaps, or the warmly female shape.

(I know when you get the words wrong.

I stop looking over my shoulder, because

I know then I am alone.)

Lute or guitar? It was an owl
plucked gently from a tree limb inserted into my chest.

I listen, but the distance now

is more like earth than wind.

*

*

*

*

So the song dies down, becomes the taste
 of snail, or moss, or loneliness
 coughing in a damp cell.

Why? Why?

– after a time it was your only note,
 like the heartbeat of my weasel, the wingbeat of my owl.

Dead owl. And as it wore away, beneath the tree,
 the skeleton emerged – not only bird, but rabbit, small,
 with folded legs that might have kicked
 had not the neck been broken.

Inside the rabbit,
 grass blades. Inside that grass, the
 sun

that kills this voice, this *Why, why*
 perched in the smoke's branches.

I have not been concentric.

You cannot find my center with your tongue
 as if I were a fig or common star.

(Take clams and trees and roses
 if you would have a star.

One neat slice through the heart and they
 are yours.)

Besides, my mountains roll your mountains over and under like waves.

Put birds in flight and long explosions.

Make night or fog or sleeplessness to buoy us like stars.

Make anarchy die down within our darkness.

I must see waves, the curled white hair of coastlines.

And birds at night must hear that low-pitched drum.

It is how they navigate, and what I am.

* * * *

You left your gun on the red table, your knife
with lizard body on the red, red cloth.
Do not come back for them, for they are ash,
as you, within my memory, are ash.

What did you think? That flame can feed
on nothing?
Unable to see, unable to stop imagining,
if only once, once you had turned
your back on the vaginal fire –

But never mind. You would see nothing but a winter day,
a dead bird,
a coastline in the solitude of weasels.

No blue here now except the sky. No red except the leaves.
Even the animals change themselves
from brown to white before your eyes.

And I am old. My ankles are of wind. They twine
with yours and you retreat
as if from cold, or granite, or chagrin.

Susan Tichy

SPOON RIVER DELI

Shipped fresh from Chicago
a roe squid –

Each egg you eat
a town under one thousand.

Each tentacle
an exit ramp from the interstate.

Two beady eyes
part the ink.

Corduroy roads.
Abysmal plains.

Daniel Bourne

Three Poems

TREPHINING

I thought that what they were doing
with that thin spike
was getting ready to sculpt something,
chisel out a new altar, or a new god.

There was nothing in my head
that needed to come out then.
I was as hungry as everyone else.

I thought the pathways had all been discovered,
every cave already opened to the world.

What did I know of demons?

I had gathered in the woods,
helped keep fire.
I had learned to open myself when the men asked.

There was talk of a strange light
that had of late burned in my eyes,
that an infant had died,
and that moths with wide-eyed wings
had plagued the night fires,
only to fall like stars, anoint with ash.

When they took hold
I thought I would be opening for the old man,
a kind of sacrifice,
but instead they held my legs closed,
tied my arms while he drove the spike,
a violation like no other.

Then the blood in my hair turned to ice.

BOUSTROPHEDON

a small storm of swallows follows where the tines
scratch – pack winter the – earth thawed up turn
of a hard scabble time – and so I turn and I turn
black thoughts become acres long so sometimes

as loam – I plot and I plot for squares of land –
– rail and post as long as ties forget I – women
I forget myself for miles – days – and plod from
bones brother's my of secret the on end to end

– the blade dulls against the stones – the heart
– hemispheres its of weather strong the against
here in the greening valley spring lambs dance
from out calls wall a – mothers their from apart

a pile of stones – there is this to be said of wind –
it'll now from world a but away it send can you
come back – hungry as ten wet kittens from a
hymns in profit there's but – sack hemp drowned

the wind makes of a cairn or in the line a wall
about is this then but – men between draws
plowing – it's about knowing what follows
turning – turning about it's – back your at full

SISYPHUS

Here in this hard place, my face to the gales
amid the crags the past sculpts,
I search the glacial slope for my father's
loping form and for the proud boulder
dropped like a briefcase on a kitchen floor.
What more is there at the end than the harsh wind
of words to recall the climb, the myth a burden
drives into bones as deeply as a life of work,
the falling and the gathering up, the falling
and the gathering up of hope and always
something farther beyond the topmost rock,
so that now I can see my indefatigable father
high above the sea of apathetic faces
with his tie loosened and his hair gone gray
fathering thoughts of letting the stone roll
from his tweed shoulders, and down on his knees
nearly relinquishing optimism the way these
stunted trees, regaled by wind and thin air, collect
themselves into themselves yet remain ever green
and alive even this high, even this untouched?
I have known the withering and the giving in,
the withering and the giving in to weakness
always and the breath that comes easier after
rolling back down into valleys, and the fog a child
loses himself in purposely for the need to be unguarded,
what I grope through even now, blindly downward,
scrambling with the balding weight I carry for a time,
drop and let roll, carry for a time, drop and let roll.

Gary J. Whitehead

**ON A FELLUCA ONE EVENING IN THE AEGEAN,
A FELICIFIC RITE IS PERFORMED**

He claimed to be a simple fellah from Syria.
Could he help it if Allah in His merciful humor
had given him the same face as the well-known
Perugian felon whose countenance was stapled
to every telephone pole in southern Italy
where I had just spent fifteen million lire
searching with my felsic-mad brother
for the ancient Faliscan Temple to Aphrodite which,
I am now firmly convinced, never existed?
It was a fallacious assumption on my part to believe
that the long-forgotten Codex of Firenze could be
believed.
“It was long forgotten for a reason,” my brother reasoned
as he boarded his flight for Finland where there was
rumored to be
a soccer-field sized pit of pure felsite. So there I was
alone, or so I thought, floating in the Aegean,
engaging myself in the sophomoric ritual of drowning
out one’s sorrows, when this boy, in quite the Greek
fallalery,
appeared on the prow out of nowhere to offer, he
claimed,

(stanza continued)

his felicitations for my “noble reading” of the Codex.
Pouring a third glass from my second fifth, I suspected
Faustian intent and was about to inquire of him how he
could
possibly know of my textual forays when, from his knees,
his fervent engagement in an eximious Etruscan ritual of
supplication
that only a fastidious practitioner of the Codex’s Sixty-
Nine Rites
could so felicitously undertake, filled my throat and
mouth
with the frenetic F#s of a flock of bacchanalian fringillids.

Mark White

BOOKS IN BRIEF

In 1994 The Ecco Press produced *The Golden Ecco Anthology: 100 Great Poems of the English Language*, edited by **Mark Strand** (Hopewell, New Jersey, 192 pp., \$15. paper, 0-88001-433-4). In a brief Preface Strand explains his criteria for selecting among his favorite poems: technical accomplishment, accessibility, and brevity. I of course read for evidence of Strand's predilections as well as for my own discoveries. His predilections are strongly for poems of melancholy, madness, mortality, and memory. Most of the poems are familiar, and Strand includes many of my own favorites (Hardy's "Afterwards," for example). I am grateful to him for introducing me to A. D. Hope's "Observation Car" and Robert Penn Warren's delicate "Birth of Love."

I also admire the handsome squarish format and clean layout. Thus I am delighted that *The* became *A* with *100 Great Poems by Women: A Golden Ecco Anthology*, edited by **Carolyn Kizer** (1995, 198 pp., \$22. hardcover, 0-88001-422-9). Most of the poems here are new to me. Unfortunately, most are anything but "great." Indeed, Kizer in her Preface admits that "This collection is full of memorable lines, not the least those included in 'Delilah,' by Ella Wheeler Wilcox, a poem so exquisitely awful that it never can be quite erased from the mind." Attempting to contradict the stereotype that women's "true subjects are 'love and loss,'" the editor favors poems of social concern; thus I welcome Gwendolyn Brooks's "We Real Cool" and Carolyn Forché's chilling "The Visitor." But among the best here, it seems to me, are the powerfully-felt and exquisitely realized lyrics of the inner life evolving from the outer, such as Lorine Niedecker's "Seven Poems" and Jane Kenyon's "Let Evening Come." I am also delighted to find Charlotte Mew's "The Trees Are Down," which in form and content demonstrates that, though this underappreciated and reclusive poet appears to have been familiar with Hopkins, she developed her own unique and timeless voice.

The third in the Ecco series is *Earth Took of Earth: 100 Great Poems of the English Language*, edited by **Jorie Graham** (1996, 300 pp., \$24. hardbound, 0-88001-432-6), and it is in my opinion the first of the series to earn the designation *great* (though the sentimental piety of Lydia Sigourney and the melodious opacity of Thomas's "Altarwise by Owl-light" seem to have had greatness thrust upon them). This collection is very strong in fresh work from the 16th and 17th centuries, but more than

half the book presents modern and contemporary poems, and here Graham is a splendid guide. Moreover, she departs from her predecessors, who give only two-page prefaces, by using Shakespeare's Sonnet XLV as her Preface and ending her volume with a valuable ten-page Introduction. There she says she has made her book "in the most literal sense, for my own use – as a reader, as an American user of the English language, as a teacher." Indeed this elegant volume would be an appealing text for a course in anglophone poetry. "I wanted variety," she tells us. "I wanted to represent thrilling and useful and unsettling tensions." And it turns out to be a book about "the nature and force of Poetry itself," free to tell the story of "how that force has rippled, burned, danced, clenched, raged, argued, persuaded, and generally exploded through one remarkable language over a thousand years of its usage." Graham takes her title from an anonymous thousand-year-old lyric (an epitaph?) that was new to me:

Erthe Toc of Erthe

Erthe toc of erthe erthe wyth woh,
erthe other erthe to the erthe droh,
erthe leyde erthe in erthene throu,
tho hevede erthe of erthe erthe ynoh.

(Earth took of earth earth with ill;/ Earth other earth gave earth with a will./ Earth laid earth in the earth stock-still:/ Then earth in earth had of earth its fill.) This series has no editorial apparatus, and I approve, except that I should have liked to know the source of the material out of copyright, such as this haunting verse.

Just as Mark Strand's anthology provides an illuminating introduction to his own work, Graham's extraordinarily wide-ranging selection enriches our insight into her contributions to the tradition. I congratulate the Ecco Press on the series and urge the editors to continue it, *ad infinitum*.

Another anthology that I welcome is **W. S. Merwin's *Lament for the Makers: A Memorial Anthology*** (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1996, 96 pp., \$19. cloth, 1-8871-51-1). The imaginative editors at this exemplary press commissioned the collection after hearing at the Folger Library Merwin's reading of his poem with that title – a poem meditating on the swift passage of his life and the passing during that lifetime of poets who have been important to him. This handsome square volume includes

Merwin's poem and his selection of one poem by each of the poets he has named, with a photograph and brief note for each. Again we have a poet who, in his selection, illuminates his own tradition and practice. There are twenty-three poets: Auden, Berryman, Bishop, Eliot, Frost, Graves, Jarrell, Jones, Lowell, MacNeice, Merrill, Moore, Moss, Muir, Nemerov, Plath, Pound, Roethke, Stafford, Stevens, Thomas, Williams, and Wright.

Merwin's "Lament" is roughly in the form of William Dunbar's familiar sixteenth-century lyric beginning:

I that in heill [*health*] was and gladness
 Am trublit now with great sickness
 And feblit with infirmitie.
Timor mortis conturbat me.

Dunbar meditates on universal mortality and then laments the passing of the great "makers" – poets – of his day, beginning with Chaucer. The intimately disturbing refrain echoes down every stanza, as it has echoed down the centuries, and Dunbar's penultimate stanza acknowledges: "Sen he has all my brether tane,/ He will nocht let me live alane;/ Of force I man his next prey be/ . . ." Merwin does not need to quote the refrain nor repeat the conclusion. Dunbar's voice is the descant above all his lines. But there are significant differences. Instead of the meditation on mortality, Merwin provides an autobiographical narrative, recounting how by skipping a grade he was always "the youngest on the block," until

my youth by then taken for granted
 [I] found that it had been supplanted
 the notes in some anthology
 listed persons born after me.

The body of his poem, like Dunbar's, is a tribute to one after another of his masters as they have departed. The prosody is rougher than Dunbar's – both in meter and rhyme – rough enough to trouble me in spots. A stanza on Merrill moves melodiously:

now Jimmy Merrill's voice is heard
 like an aria afterward
 and we know he will never be
 old after all who spoke to me

but the next, to my ear, stumbles in its making:

on the cold street that last evening
 of his heart that leapt at finding

some yet unknown poetry
then waved through the window to me.

Merwin does not exactly echo Dunbar's pious ending: "Best that we for Death dispoñe,/ After our death that live may we." Instead, we have his testimony to the voice of each maker being heard "like an aria afterward." And the first poem in the anthology is, most appropriately, Dylan Thomas's "A Refusal to Mourn the Death by Fire of a Child in London." Not every poem Merwin selects sustains the graveyard theme, but many do. Thanks to his selection I have been paying fresh attention to poems like Elizabeth Bishop's "The Imaginary Iceberg," Marianne Moore's "A Grave," and Theodore Roethke's "Meditations of an Old Woman." And I am delighted to be introduced to David Jones's powerful *magna mater* poem "The Tutelar of the Place."

As presses like Ecco and Counterpoint continue (and new ones like Sarabande arise) to fill the vacuum created by the literary bankruptcy of many of the publishing Goliaths, every library and every reader of poetry should seek out these beautifully conceived and elegantly designed books. The reward to the reader will be manifold.

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Norton is one of the few large old publishing houses that continues a tradition of strong well-presented books by and about poets. Very briefly, let me call attention to a sample from their impressive list.

The Poet's Notebook, ed. by Stephen Kuusisto, Deborah Tall, David Weiss (New York, 1995, 306 pp., \$25. hardbound, 0-393-03866-1). Here are extracts from the notebooks of twenty-six poets – all interesting, sometimes most so when they serve as commonplace books: Simic quoting Paz, McClatchy quoting Thoreau. Each reader will highlight his or her incandescent passages. Here's one of mine – Heather McHugh on 25 April 1985:

Individually we die out and it's not the *moment* of dying that's intolerable, it's the *endlessness*... No one with a mission or a big hope helps. What helps is humble: a gratuity, not a salary. On the bus, a woman smiles and asks am I all right; in the fast food place the man offers extra coffee; I mean happy is only lucky (I used to say I was lucky and mean for life! Characteristically lucky! But hap *is* chance). Happy is lucky like that, only for a relative second, before the second splits...

Neal Bowers' *Words for the Taking: The Hunt for a Plagiarist* (New York, 1997, 143 pp. \$17. hardbound, 0-393-04007-0) has had so much publicity that it hardly needs me to say that it is spellbinding reading – his account of his relentless detective work, pursuing his plagiarist for the sake of his own integrity.

The range of Norton's poets shows dramatically in their publication of the poems of two radically different poets, **Alice Fulton** and **Stanley Kunitz**. Fulton's *Sensual Math* (New York, 1995, 113 pp., \$12. paper, 0-393-31445-6) is (for all its rooting in Dickinson and Ovid) a book very much of its day. Her flexible poetics conjures a free new form for each poem. The fertility of invention is engaging. Fulton's vision is of this febrile moment in our history. If these strong poems make it into some Norton anthology of 2050, they'll need headnotes as well a footnotes. Or will the targets of her satire persist (terrible thought!) into the next midcentury? Will commercialism still tyrannize over gender? Will readers still know how to respond to Mr. Ed People, Wonder Bread, Elvis, real Dynel? (One of the ethnological verbal artifacts has already escaped. The "Quick, Henry, the Flit" of my childhood appears here as "Quick, Charles, the Flit.") Nevertheless, the satire bites sharply today, the language sparks like an acetylene torch, and the vision is both clear-eyed and complex.

Kunitz's *Passing Through: The Later Poems, New and Selected* (New York, 1995, 176 pp., \$18.95 cloth, 0-393-03870-X) is contrastingly ageless. The language I believe will appear as limpid in 2050 as it would have in 1750. What notes are needed, Kunitz provides. There are only nine new poems here, but they are all strong and moving – about equally divided between poems of personal insight ("My Mother's Pears," "Touch Me") and poems in which Kunitz follows his imagination into other consciousnesses ("Proteus," "Hornworm: Summer Reverie," and "Hornworm: Autumn Lamentation"). In some ways the two tomato hornworm poems are the most endearing and the most mordant.

M.K.S.