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COVER: *Two Sedges & A Rush*, pen and ink drawing by Robert Shetterly, 1980

“THE ANGELS LAUGH . . .”

And we, who are the vice presidents of creation,
promoted and promoted but only so high,
we, the company's flesh and gristle, sinew
exposed by the slash of the heavenly accountant,
we laugh just like vice presidents charging expenses,
dining in solidarity, displaying
contempt for shame, that overcooked emotion,
we guffaw with bravado, shoulder to shaking shoulder,
like sides of beef displayed in a butcher's window,
we howl so that even vegetables are meaty,
huge heads of broccoli, bulging beef tomatoes.
Red-faced and helpless in our strength, we belly-
laugh at heavenly or hellish curses,
those maleficent wisps, friable chars of language,
until our laughter splinters the floorboards and rafters,
from rib-eye sniggers to sirloin exultations,
we are the marbled flesh and fat of forgetting,
thick with oblivion, moist with amused juices.

Philip Fried

THE BLUE WORLD

There, says the guidebook, they live
in peace all winter: tunnels glowing glacier-blue
in the short afternoons, the worst predators
gone, gone, gone: it's frozen,
but under the snow a paradise
of shrews, thirteen-lined ground squirrels,
deer mice, voles, who feed for months
on the forest floor. There's no
wind. The air warms
in the narrow channels. Silence.
Silence. True, some scabble
up to the crusted surface, discontent
with the crystal walls, the delicate
ice-carved rooms. True, the great grey owl
hears its prey through a three-foot snowfall:
slim weasels negotiate the maze:
dangers, even now. A vole
emerging into the winter trail
surprises a lapdog out for its walk,
whose dormant instincts quicken:
who seizes it. Shakes it dead.
Drop it, girl! Good girl! We pass
the fresh crater a squirrel made, having exited
a high branch –

and its quick prints off to a different
safety. So comic: a pratfall!

Here, my love: something to make you laugh.

No, no, I'm happy. Honestly. Light,

filtered and blue, softened, all afternoon
through the cold walls –

Really I am. See, I'm smiling.

Janet Holmes

POST-EQUINOX SPECTRA

Still weeks to ice-out
in upcountry lakes. Here
on the coast, salt-ice

gets lifted off coves
by gales and steep wave-
lengths. Tides flow hard

between the mainland
and islands. Out in
the Thorofare, two fish-

boats, blurred in thin rain,
march back and forth like
small boys' small toys.

Off Stump Cove, a red boat
and yellow boat slowly
wallow, dragging the bottom

for scallops. Across
old tides, Deer Isle and
Little Deer loom tall as

spruce, dark as deer in
their winter coats. At
the end of whatever day

this still is, a sky
like pleated gray silk
begins to glint with

thin gold caught behind it:
this last day of March
or April Fools' first.

Philip Booth

Two Poems

NERVOUS GEOGRAPHY

The thing in the voice left
spoken sounds,
no simple animal –

Just a telling
made up
like a phrase,
met between
two openings.

This is basic exchange.
It rests in the lip,
the breathing,
each space
parted from me –

my simple current,
my loud strange movement,
my wavering.

SOUNDFORMS

. . . because the limited always finds its limit in something, so that there must be no limit, if everything is always limited by something different from itself.

– Aristotle’s *Physics*

I.

Enough times however,
while the earth’s green skin
swirled, an aura –

Form fought matter and
became sound. The first shape
let loose with a breath’s force.

So the ear became attuned.
Outside that loud rest
heightened by the black stir,

the eye and ear made a pact
so that the thing could move.
It slipped into the clearing.

But the tongue interfered
while the mind caught up,
remembering each of Orion’s belt-stars,

Virgo’s forked tongue
shooting off comets like
insults

steady yet
quite slow –

(how the will
in the first place
named then
hushed)

II.

That was the night
after your wife
gave birth:

I saw your feet for the first time,
I learned you would have done it at home,
and that you didn't name your son for almost
two years.

III.

Everyone around is

We can't see the differences
while being consoled.

(love to you is
jealous)

IV.

Orion's waist got cinched
with 3 loose stars like
buckle-holes –
doom caves.

The first wish
not too deep –
(a treat or a
small gift)
passed then blinked.

The second was a
woman's cave.
The blood swam and
the belt got stuck there.

When the last chose wisdom
a third eye entered,
and sat down where the
prong moved in.

V.

(even
desiring a person
is to desire
knowledge)

I wish to be
wise today –

a sphere or a
small atlas.

VI.

The bed dried up.
The dust on the bedframe told how
need wasn't safe,

and the broken parts
became holy
with the wanting.

You were living in a
fine place, where
emptiness was infinite:

this space

could easily have been the
same space as

this

and we were where the
emptiness could move.
So I left.

That was my excuse
for not having.

Mindy Richardson

THE FOOTNOTE'S RECONNAISSANCE OF THE PIEDMONT

Over there in the trilliums and roofing nails
on that two-bit alpine plain on the opposite page,
the hoplites are off again to a stony war.

From far across this scarp of Palatino fonts
they resemble a *Versace* brush with dance hall legs:
each spear's an argent bristle.

A couple in-fighters are shouting in the alpine echoes for atlatls.
Hearing this I settle on my hips, drop the binocs,
turn to a boulder and say this once:

"The atlatl wasn't a weapon known to Hellenic grunts;
their author knows the Greek, is just playing the dunce –
as Joyce said to Heaney, or maybe Heaney to us,

'the main thing's to write/ for the joy of it.'"

Sometimes certain days leave heavy in the axles
by a low rut-lit road

shining only in the light of the Xerox:

How tiny is the pathos
in these tiniest of fonts:

how from these binocularized outposts

the x's and o's

are axes and oaks in the wind, the commas and dots

are the blinks and tears of scholars stung

by the flicks of meaning. Yet from again

a chapter back I hear

the crash of sonorous kettles

thawumping on imported linoleum:

that French cook again in a fit of rage.

Even from chapter four footnote seven,
I smell the oyster and celery portmanteau.
I remember the loose company of revision,

our long talks – no shop – and the poker:
the cook's a good joe, just can't hold his liquor,
and is tired of his page.

He sounds now like he's hucking goobers,
great loose ones from the dredging hack and lungfurl
of an expert smoker.

I felt best when we abandoned concision,
when like thoughts were paired with bad jokes;
when the author was looser:

I loved his weird incorporation of quotes.

Gabriel Gudding

VALE

I woke with longing from a dream of shoes
Snake-skin with leather soles and green as grass –
Tall, too-tight shoes that bit into my ankles
But walked over hearts like so much marble floor –
Marble veined & polished, the color of meat.
Then I beheld my bruised and naked feet,
The mark the snake strike made still on my ankle,
& I relived the last of my blue-sky moments –
A sudden sharpness in the blades of grass,
Venom mapping rivery veins to their source.
Your friend, red faced with lust and futile pursuit,
Stooped over where I had stumbled and understood,
Unlike you, he could not follow where I fled to.
The current dragging me down grew colder, stronger.
The sky ripened darkly as a plum
& I couldn't remember longing any longer.

The souls, in grey, carrying briefcases,
Glide iron escalators into the ground,
Great escalators many stories deep,
Each story stepping into the earth and silence,
Each soul reading the paper, turning the pages
Not looking back at the sun growing tarnished and small,
But adjusting their eyes to the buzz of fluorescent tubes.
They pay their tokens and line up along the platforms
Where trains approach and sigh and open their doors
And take them to cities of repetitive tasks.
Do you taste an electric bitterness of foil?
The dead have no pockets, must carry coins in their mouths,
Till everything, even saliva, tastes like money.

You crashed the witty soirée of little black dresses
And black tie. Too vivid, you sat at the grand piano
With its snaggle-toothed grimace of ebony and tusk
And tumbled black keys with white, unlocking your music.
Chromatics rainbowed from your fingertips.

(stanza continued)

The hostess turned & lifted her veil of dusk
 And laughed like leaded crystal. The chandelier
 Shuddered beneath its weight of faceted teardrops.

*Drifting down the river Liquor,
 Her blood no longer blood, but ichor,
 Sparkling up each one-way vein
 And down the artery again . . .*

There was silence and an emptiness of glasses.
 The wine that sobbed from the bottle's throat
 Seemed red, till the last tune flew out the window
 On its delicate bat-wings of semi-quavers.

Illuminated in tanks, the cave-fish swim
 So tourists can peruse each skeleton
 Stripped of the modesty of flesh, the scrim
 Of skin, of blush, devoid of melanin.
 This space between rocks is called Fat Man's Remorse,
 Hold onto the railing over the Bottomless Pit,
 This room looks like a Cathedral when it's lit,
 Except without stained glass, or pews, or doors.
 There is no elevator going up
 Only an etiolated fire escape,
 Long and twisted as a wayward weed
 Germinated under rock. Do not look back,
 They told you, don't look down, or fear will run
 Through you like a vein of yellow metal,
 Or subterranean stream, cold, mineral.
 Even should you turn, what would you see?
 That I am slowly gone invisible,
 That love has made me see-through as a cave-fish,
 The heart's shadow, tangled tube of gut,
 Little bruises evolved in place of sight.

I had forgot how bottomless the night,
 White-cold shone through the sky's moth-eaten blanket,
 You held a lantern murderous to moths,
 Which are for me the only butterflies,
 You singed me with the tungsten of your eyes,

(stanza continued)

You whistled, *Memory will turn your head,*
With imitated voices or with silence.
Forever you will see someone slipping away.
 And I fell for it all over again.

Helpless, as in some bureaucracy,
 In a building that hummed like a drowsing machine
 Although there was no sign of ventilation,
 In a basement without windows, with plastic chairs,
 And low walls with their fresh coats of grey paint,
 A table with one antique magazine,
 I went to the glaring counter and asked for you.
 I said: I had done nothing, you'd done nothing.
 They said, fill out this form. They said to wait.
 They said that there was nothing they could do.

Hark, deep in their hives, the Dead are humming
Dancing dizzy maps back to the flowers,
Storing up the honey of rue and thyme
In frail thesauruses of wax and paper,
In hexagons repeating like a rhyme.
Over the shimmering fields, the rest are coming.

I woke in the even measure of light and dark
 We call evening, stumbled into the garden.
 Sunflowers strained for one last glimpse of the sun.
 Bumble bees were swinging their ball-bearing bodies
 Between bright blossoms. Behold the spinster sisters,
 Always humming, at their husbandry,
 Hastening the summer to its harvest.
O slow and ceaseless weeping of the glass
That ripples windowpanes, O showers of dust
From life-bright skin that fall and blanket the floor,
O motes caught in the sunbeam's amber, O
Moon-round face and tidy hands of Time . . .
 Now the dark is whistling to itself:
 The train is climbing destiny's flat ladder,
 The owl is putting her rhetorical question.

Two Poems**THE CROSSING**

Young boys stun their mothers
with Venus' locks
and the enlightened skirts of Graces.

The girl at the corner coffee shop,
bristly as a fighter pilot,
decked in the leather of lost wars.

When she asks for your order,
the voice disarms you:
sweet wine from a bruisey bottle.

The city is ripe with a new crop:
children steeped
in the body's broken mystery.

The boy next door
rings his eyes in black.
His slitted ears, heavy with silver.

He drifts by solemnly –
a goddess. The father mocks:
Cleopatra's home.

When his bedroom door slams,
the whole house shuts like a fist.
The mother smokes on the porch.

In her drab blue dress, she drags
on the cigarette as if for meaning.
Then crushes it under her foot.

Next morning, over the lip-
sticked ends of his mother's
cigarettes, the boy heads for school.

Sometimes, a girl with no hair
marches with him.
They are a city to themselves.

TWIN

If he walked beside me and held my hand,
you would not recognize him, you would not
look from my face to his and say,
Twin, old broken one, now returned. You
would not say, *Brother*, but rather that I kept
bad company. You would not be happy for me.

I imagine, when he arrives, it will be a strange affair.
At night, perhaps, growing long from my hand,
we'd be clutched like a done buckle by morning.
Outside, it would seem a storm had passed: pools of water,
foolish trees will have thrown down their leaves,
even the sturdy ash – down to its timber.

With him, I would lose my clothing and walk lewdly
across the fields – the brother I once lost
dragging me into the green pit
of the forest, where I would lay down my gentle self
so that he might finally inhabit me. From his hand
held on my mouth, I will devour my own breath.

My eyes, what were they? Green, yes – but never
such rinsed limes as this. I'm ready, I'll return
to the kitchen, filthy footed, with a fistful
of grass and blossoms for breakfast.
Even if he took me to a cold north, I know
I could survive on reindeer moss and what's underneath.

When he returns, he will force me
down to the dirt. The lost one, already,
is at my throat, close to my own voice.
What the dead are is everything, he tells me
as he pushes my hands into a shock of brambles,
and I pull up berries, bones, my own blood.

Victor Lodato

GLACIAL PATH/ISLE ROYALE

i

layer upon layer of leaves settles slowly,
moss growing on top.
layer upon layer of lava flow,
minerals rising to fill the veins.
burned bare ridges and parallel bogs.
as we walk our minds
drop through layer after layer
to host rock:
tough, bare, essential.
the wind can't harm us.
the water, all around,
touches, touches,
waiting for the glacier.

ii

I'm scared of the glacier.
It's coming back, I'm sure of it –
It was here before, several times –
It was cold this morning.
I'm sure I saw ice in the cove.
Are all the birds flying away?
Everything seems to have fur.
Is that fog?
Are you sure that's fog?

Gary Lawless

Two Poems**WHAT REMAINS**

The scent of boxwood, bridal wreath, damp brick,
midges in mica light circling cloudless blue,
skies the color of your Japanese iris, your eyes.

The river running north (a contrarian point that pleased you),
shallows smelling of peeled grapes,
day-old ducklings at the mill race,
scrambling slap-footed over the stones.

In your iron chair on the terrace (Diana and her arrows)
I watch the long arms of afternoon
spoon into the bowl of your lawn.
In the must of your leather-bound Jane Austens,
I read your thoughts, your sensibilities.
In the sharp edge of a good vinaigrette, taught me at twelve,
I taste the careful measurement of your days.

We are separating the ingredients of this place,
one by one into piles of three,
fourteen tables, thirteen bureaus, forty-one chairs,
Limoges, Imari, William and Mary,
George the second, George the third.
We vow the weight of things will not sink our love.
You are here, in your children learning to do this:
To love you together as we take you apart.

NIGHT IN THE CAYO DISTRICT

Did a star fall from the swarm of sky
 side across my face
 on points of fur, touching
 so deftly I cry out?
Or did I hear the fumble and tear
 of these small-boned mountain horses
 eating in the dark?
 I start awake, remember
 our swim into the cave,
 beneath the bleating of bats
 in the tissue of limestone walls.

Kate Cheney

TO LET BLOOD

I. Ecclesia

I am going to see my therapist
 but it isn't my therapist it's my lover.
 I smile because we share
 a naughty surprise. Anyway,
 I am going to see my doctor/lover
 and her office has moved to the mall. So,
 I drive to the mall and it is sunny
 and reminds me of ice cream on a stick.
 I have to go up an escalator lined with mirrors.
 I watch myself in the mirror, escalating.
 I like the way my body looks: solid, broad.
 I think I am
 a mountain of a woman.
 But my hair looks like dying fir trees and my face is too
 puffy,
 I can't see my eyes or mouth. I grimace and yawn.
 On the second floor there's an underwear sale and
 I look for some fancy bras to wear for my lover/doctor.
 All of the underwear is black nylon, almost fancy, but
 my size is all flimsy and plain. There is a very tall man,
 the son of a short, pasty, red haired woman.
 She is holding a gown to his chest, leaning away,
 her head cocked. They are familiar like a big mistake.
 I am not afraid they'll see me, but still
 my pelvis shudders like a spring.
 I go between two racks of sports bras
 to the office with an oak door and textured glass transom and
 I know it's the place.
 My lover has her wingtips propped on the desk, on the
 green blotter,
 she is talking on the phone. She looks at me
 from under eyebrows and motions for me to sit.
 She swivels around and plants an elbow on the desk,

(stanza continued)

cradles the phone on her shoulder and pulls a notebook to her.
She puts her index finger in her mouth.

Like pulling off a glove, uncapping a pen,
she pulls the sleeve of skin off her finger.

Underneath, her finger is so black it has no
highlight or shadow: a wand dissolving light.

She scribbles with her finger on the notepad.

II. Deuteropathy

On examination, patient's speech is quite rapid and she jumps
quickly from one subject to another, eating buttered toastesses
and greasing her fistesses right up to her wristesses.

When questioned about the likelihood of achieving her goals,
she becomes irritable. She admits

to auditory hallucinations

that tell her:

"If you should meet a crocodile don't take a stick and poke her.
Ignore the welcome in her smile, be careful not to stroke her."

She voluntarily assumes inappropriate and bizarre postures,
displays flight of ideas, never shuts her eye until the sun is in the
sky.

Patient reports an elated mood, may believe she is endowed
with special powers to sweep the cobwebs from the sky.

Therefore, all hands will be feeble and every man's heart
will melt and they will be dismayed.

She is erotomaniac type: admits delusions that the doctor
is in love with her, the pride of her power, the desire of her soul.
She has an IQ in the bright-normal range and mountains made of
bronze.

She sees the moon and the moon sees major depression,
bipolar disorder that grows at the bottom, grows at the top,
grows till she thinks it never will stop. She is quite likely to be
discharged on

medication: tricyclic antidepressants,
lachesis and lithium,

four and twenty white mice with chains around their necks.

III. Proverb

Note: Do not include a symptom that is a culturally sanctioned response pattern.

IV. Levitical

When a woman

 woe to the bloody city

has a discharge

 woe to the pot whose rust is in it

which is her regular discharge,

the mountains shall drip with sweet wine

from her body and all the hills

shall flow with it. Whoever touches her

shall be unclean until the evening.

Here's sulky Sue, what shall we do?

Turn her face to the wall until she comes to.

She might be a bluebell she might be begonia

biochemical imbalance or physical trauma.

*Blank dark hoisted into columbine,
showy flower for you, girl, you
seething good will. My stink
will make you heady, your head
a growth bulging swollen
from my pollen.*

The mood disturbance is sufficiently severe to necessitate hospitalization during her discharge to prevent harm to others.

There was a maid on amygdal hill and if not dead she lives there still;

(a) whoever touches her bed
shall wash himself
and be unclean
until the evening.

(b) she won't get up
to feed the swine
but stays in bed
till eight or nine.

*To find my own mask
excavated from blinding isolation
is to find the face
that is fierce lies
unusual stare
a spewed and broken totem
in due shambles.*

Bilateral amygdala damage
compromises the recognition of fear
in facial expressions
while leaving intact recognition
of face identity . . . an insensitivity
to the intensity of fear expressed by faces.

She comments she has trouble being a warm friend or lover,
seems not to understand children's symptoms, needs or feelings.

Her prior lovers were "idiots."

If any man lies with her, discomfort
or inappropriateness makes her
unclean in her current sex role.

*I am a seducer, sticky pistils
and a nectar well, well
fed by monsoon, the ointment
I dangle my roots in makes me
a bog lily, peat bog.*

Emotions are inappropriately exaggerated in response to minor stimuli.

V. Chronical

I realize that it drinketh my blood since my last appointment but I know it was less my blood than two months' drink indeed. Seeing as moon cycles greatly affect my mood and I remember my blood I must have an appointment with you, blood and fire, the moon very soon. Since my insurance company has turned to rivers, prey and drink, my pharmacist will not fill a prescription until I purify the woman, the mouth, with you. Please tell the receptionist she opened for kin some time. I am afraid I may lose my job if I cannot contact you. I will drop by in the morning to make sure you hear the voice fountain, the sweat as drops out of the wound.

Please do not tell my new insurance company or they will refuse coverage and you know better than I do what consequence guilt with the flesh of blood will bring.

If she is cleansed of her discharge she shall count for herself

One: stereotypic movement

seven days and after that

two, perplexed appearance

(stanza continued)

she shall take two turtle doves

three. Concreteness.

to the priest to the altar.

Four, ritualistic behavior

The priest shall offer one for sin

five, ritualistic behavior

and the other for a burnt offering

six, magical thinking

to make atonement to the Lord for her discharge.

seven. Special relationship to deity.

VI.

(A) Ecchymosis

And the doctor said to the insurance company, say to the patient and her group, and to all the women of mania, this is the thing which the doctor has prescribed. If any woman of the state of mania feels a seagull or a rainstorm or has a vision in group, or feels it outside of group, and does not bring it to the attention of the mental health department, to offer it as a mania to the doctor before the authority of the doctor, maniaguilt shall be imputed to that woman; she has felt love and that woman shall be cut off from among maniacs. This is to the end that the women of mania may bring their love which they feel in the free world, that they may bring it to the doctor, to the therapist at the mental health center and feel them as confessions of sickness to the doctor; and the therapist shall dictate the mania in the files of the doctor at

(stanza continued)

the mental health department, and pity the patient for a pleasing fee for the doctor. So they shall no more love the lives of the maniac, after whom they play the harlot. This shall be a prescription renewable to them throughout their generations.

(B) Exodus

And the mouse shook the chain, shook the blood in her veins, shook the beads of her bloodfulness: here are the functions that the mouse has demanded. If all the beads of blood rise in her veins or her belly or her brain or rise up around her brain and do not cure the mania of the guilty mouse, to seethe in the mouse a sense of fury for the mouse, exile shall be imputed to that blood; blood has revolted and shall be cut off from among veins. This is to the end that the beads of blood may cure the brain that rises with life, cure the mind of the mouse, the rodent of mania and the blood shall be an organ of peace for the mouse; and the brain shall note the rebellion of the blood in the veins and belly, and restrict the blood to a pleasing pace in the mouse, so it shall no more love the surge of revolt, after whom it plays the harlot. This shall be the condition of the blood throughout its generations.

VII. Haggard

*If I have a craving for oysters,
raven gall, pumpkin seeds, if I order
what is not on the menu and make
my hand tremble when paying, if I*

(stanza continued)

*do not like tight clothing, wear a necklace
and skirt of skulls, count 650 heart beats
in a mouse's minute, have a habit
of putting my tongue out and flicking it,
who will pretend to see a snake*

The priest shall sprinkle the blood of irritable mood and
burn the fat for a pleasing (recurring) odor (urge) to the
Lord.

*pretend to be afraid?
I have a horror of putting words
in my ears, it lets out
expectations of myself to myself,
how long ago I made electrified
weapons of creation,
split off decay that, like a snake,
will strike back. When my throat is dark
purple, I like ginseng, the forked
root resembles human limbs.
But now I want lachesis, the venom
of the bush master, surucucu snake,
valuable when the blood is dark.*

Sprinkle the blood arousing fantasies with his finger
and cleanse it (of tactile)
and hallow it (genital)
from uncleanness (stimulation)
of the woman. Blood shall return to full premorbid
functioning throughout
the land in vessels of wood and stone.

Jennifer Coleman

GIFT

Much later now but not too late. Desert like the absolute
with a shore along it. The foreground coming up
and the background waiting
and coming up after.
I go downtown to the tannery
to put my hands on the skins.
To tell death I'm different now, have aged, am
not afraid to wrap it all around me now.
Earlier in the street I passed three Navajo men
I did not think I knew breathing
out of their pores and waiting for the night
to cool them and sleep. There is the smell of leather
all over my hands, the nauseating wholeness of it.
There is the private age of each dead deer.
It reminds me of breathing in a room with a woman
I had made love to. The hunger,
she said, left her body in strangers.
I am in strangers. This is not sacred.
The old skins are beveled like mud
a few days after days of rain. If you put your hands
along the creases you can feel the naked minutes standing
too long out in an open place.
The young ones are
the color of sand absorbing a sea before the lifting
of the fog. The texture also sand that somehow becomes
inseparable, a body your hand milks through
your hand. I have no idea
how we are given the chance
to love again. I have found a good price on an old machine
and some thread, stepping off the curb with joy

(stanza continued)

thinking of you and a vest to keep you warm
when you come for November. And still
the gloaming laid out along the people and stores
like a murmur. This same light the beauty
ran through. Machine gun of light the doe ran through.
The trees cutting the body into light, the quivering foliate
telling me I am the species of wasted blood, of abandoned
meaty carcasses and the knowledge of it.

Daniel Villasenor

THE BRIDE

Bad weather, bad luck, I still think
 though all that matters is the moment.
 The brassy sky was lost to me
 and the sea took my hearing in a bubbly
 mix, a boil and the ship plunging
 into every swell. My honeymoon voyage.
A captain's duty is to stay, and I didn't
 mind the first wild pitching. So
 he tied me up high on the mast
 to keep me from going overboard. My heavy
 skirts turned inside out like some kind
 of dangerous flower. The stark frill
 slapped my face all day and into the night
 until the sea took it all away. Bits
 of stars turned thin in the black sky,
 the black sea until I didn't know
 if I'd been swallowed or saved. My knotted
 hair clung to my throat. The wind iced
 my voice. Finally, a small ship moved
 on the dim horizon, I was cut down
 from the splintering wood while *The Bride*
 slipped under water. *Goodbye my trousseau*,
 I cried, delirious as the delicate garments
 I'd hem-stitched-feather-whipped-tiny-
 stitched-cut-and-basted disappeared.
Oh, I was safe enough in Nassau
 in a sailor's cast-off lot, praying
 for the good women to restore
 my modesty. *I showed one bare leg, one*
tiny white foot mounting the stone steps,

(stanza continued)

but that was to be expected. Carton
after carton arrived at the St. George Hotel,
each a promise. *Thirteen white silk bonnets.*
That was all. No petticoats, no knitted
gown of practical stuff. Here by the sea,
my skin salt-cracked, the cold still
in my mouth, ears filled with simple sea
rhythms, my body tinted a most becoming
pink, I opened each box, *Thirteen white silk
bonnets to begin this business
of living again.*

Virginia Chase Sutton

BOOKS IN BRIEF

En Avant?

Literary historians in this century have tended to divide our poetry into two camps: the raw vs. the cooked, the Don Allen camp vs. the Hall, Pack, and Simpson crew, the academics vs. the wild men, high art vs. mass culture. Today the divisions are similar, but the shibboleths somewhat changed. I am assuming that anyone concerned with contemporary poetics would want to understand these shifting taxonomies. An excellent starting point would be *Poems for the Millenium: The University of California Book of Modern & Postmodern Poetry*, Vol. I, *From Fin-de-Siècle to Negritude*, edited by **Jerome Rothenberg** and **Pierre Joris** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, 844 pp., \$60. cloth, \$24.95 paper, 0-520-07225-1, 0-520-07227-8). Despite its size, this is easy to read (though not, perhaps, in the tub). It is as fresh and valuable as Rothenberg's earlier anthologies, which have so profoundly affected contemporary writing. To global collections of "Forerunners" (e.g. Blake, Rimbaud), "Futurisms" (Marinetti, Mayakovsky), "Expressionism" (Kandinsky, Trakl), "Dada" (Tzara, Schwitters), "Surrealism" (Breton, Dali), "Objectivists" (Zukofsky, Oppen), "Negritude" (Césaire, Senghor), and "A Book of Origins" (largely ethno-poetics) the editors add informative, readable commentaries. In including three generous "galleries" of illustrative works by individual poets from Stein and Yeats to Octavio Paz, they hope, not for a new canon, but for "a mapping of the possibilities that have come down to us by the century's turning." They emphasize those international movements that "have tried to change the direction of poetry and art as a necessary condition for changing the ways in which we think and act" – a worthy aim. These emphases include: poetry as an "exploration of new forms of language, consciousness, and social/biological relationships"; the breakdown of conventional boundaries between the arts; "experiments with dream work and altered forms of consciousness"; return to poetry as "a performance genre"; visual, typographical aural, and non-syntactic explorations; ethno-poetics; changing relation-

ships with political and social movements; and a sense of “excitement and play.” A second volume will pick up in the 1940s and illustrate the fulfillment of these forces in the last half of the century.

In the meantime, here is a quick look at a few recent discussions of what goes under the general rubric of avant garde or “radical” poetry.

David Milofsky, editor of the *Colorado Review* (24 [Spring 1997]), deplores the disappearance of serious literary works from the best-seller lists and concludes: “The sad truth is that literature no longer occupies a central place in the zeitgeist of America. And short of converting [Oprah] Winfrey to metafiction and post-structuralism, it probably never will.” I also deplore the elevation of block-busters and non-books to the best-seller lists. But I am also more than a tad uneasy at Milofsky’s apparent equation of metafiction and post-structuralism with “literature.”

Marjorie Perloff, in a lengthy diatribe, “What We Don’t Talk about When We Talk about Poetry: Some Aspects of Literary Journalism” (*PN Review* 115 [May/June 1997]) attacks the narrowness of British and American poetry reviewers, writing for middle-class readers, a public that “no longer exists.” Perloff is scathing about the obtuseness of these reviewers (in the *NYT*, *NYRB*, *TLS*, etc.) and quite explicit about the international poetics that she sees as having rendered other modes of poetry obsolete. Here are her criteria for a correct canon: “the materiality of language,” “syntactic disjunction,” “visual constellation,” and especially “the reconfiguration of lyric as speaking, once again, not for the hypothetical ‘sensitive’ and ‘authentic’ individual (‘Here’s a vision I had as I was weeding the garden yesterday’) but for the larger cultural and philosophical moment.” For an example of this international radical movement she cites the “Original Chinese Language Group,” superseding the “Misty” poets (e.g. Bei Dao), for their interest in the “original” meanings that can be extracted from the components of ideograms and for their embrace of the “original” function of play in language.

Let’s look at some of Perloff’s rubrics. What does “the materiality of language” mean? We have a whole book – and a very useful one – to help us here: **Michael Davidson’s *Ghostlier Demarcations: Modern Poetry and the Material World*** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997,

339 pp., \$35. cloth, 0-520-20739-4). Davidson, a Shelley scholar, begins with Shelley's notebooks: the drafts of poems in a matrix of his drawings and various quotations and notations. It is true that once one has seen this poet's verses in the context of his complex manuscript pages, one cannot deny that the material medium enriches the total message. Davidson's best-developed examples of this mode of materiality are George Oppen's richly various manuscripts, alive with notes that extend the implications of the poetry to "the materiality of the social forms beyond the archive," and the text of Thom Gunn's *Moly*, "whose autonomy is challenged by the existence of an unspecified outside or *hors texte*" – in this case by the extensive and sexually explicit manuscript lines inscribed in its margins by Robert Duncan. (*Autonomy*, we learn, is now a dirty word.)

Materiality has many other forms. One is of course concrete poetry, a modern manifestation of shaped verse. Another is Davidson's useful coinage, the *palimtext*, which recalls "Shakespeare's heavily annotated acting folios, Blake's illustrated books, Emily Dickinson's fascicles, and Pound's ideogram-encrusted late cantos," illustrating "a materializing tendency in every writer, a tendency that gets lost in the attempt to establish copy text." The palimtext encompasses: intertextual and interdiscursive readings, "graphic rendering of multiple layers of signification," historical perspectives, collage, and the incorporation of found materials. (Robert Rauschenberg's art comes immediately to mind, but Davidson doesn't do much with the obvious analogies in the visual arts.) I recall Bink Noll's use of a new color of ink for each stage of revision and his reading his poems in a gallery where the multiple versions of his works were matted on the gallery walls. He would have agreed with Davidson that the material artifact "can never be recovered strictly within textual terms," perhaps because "it is the trajectory rather than the fulfillment of writing." All this is accurate and useful.

Some other aspects of materiality of language that Davidson considers are what Perloff refers to in the *PN Review* as "syntactic disjunction" and "visual constellation", as well as "disturb[ed] syntactic and semantic relations," as in Language Poetry; "fragmentation, repetition and montage," by analogy with Picasso and Matisse; the line as physical gesture, in Charles Olson's theory and practice; sound poetry, analogous to concrete

poetry, where the “material properties of language become the subject of the poem” – the elevation of the phoneme; the use of display type and various fonts, stemming from Mallarmé’s *Un coup de dés*, which in turn stems from the technology of mechanical typographical reproduction in advertisements and other print media.

One of the most useful sections of Davidson’s *Ghostlier Demarcations* discusses “lexical archaeology,” related to Emerson’s claim in “The Poet” that “language is fossil poetry” (cf. also the “Original Chinese Language Group”). We see this in a wide range of contemporary lexical archaeologists who trace their words back to the Indo-European appendix of *The American Heritage Dictionary* – some wittily, like Heather McHugh, some clumsily, like Robert Hass in “English: An Ode,” and some discreetly, in the spirit of Wordsworth for whom every word means everything that it can mean. It ir-rupts nowadays in an epi-demic of hyphens to pre-cipitate the reader back to the verbal roots.

Another section which particularly delights me appears in Davidson’s chapter on sound poetry: a section on Laurie Anderson, who brilliantly exploits the available electronic technology in her *United States*. (Readers still unfamiliar with Laurie Anderson’s powerful work – truly radical in form and function – might like to know that, although it is not listed in Davidson’s staggering 307-item bibliography, a cassette of her *Big Science* is available from Warner Brothers Records: WB M5 3674. Most of the examples Davidson cites are on this tape.) Davidson surprisingly gives scant mention to the pioneer of oral/aural art as material medium – John Cage, whose “lectures” were concerts and whose “concerts” were lectures.

Cage is happily the tutelary genius behind **Marjorie Perloff’s *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media*** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, 264 pp., \$27.50 cloth, 0-226-65733-7). Curiously, after a delightful account of Cage’s *Lecture on the Weather*, Perloff makes little use of the radical variety of this artist’s work, and in her concluding chapter, devoted entirely to the Language Poets and to Cage’s *I-VI* (his Norton lectures), she merely summarizes the complex mechanics of that performance text, without much to incite the reader/listener to seek it out. She is much more helpful in her acute and sympathetic readings of works by George Oppen, Steve McCaffery, and Charles Bernstein.

Perloff illuminates the significance of “syntactic disjunction” and “visual constellation” in this volume. Begin with the “word as *thing*,” breakable into its components, either as in concrete poetry or in “lexical archaeology.” Here the currently fashionable René Magritte is helpful, with his “realistic” painting of a pipe, captioned “Ceci n’est pas une pipe.” No, of course it’s not. One step further and one regards each letter not as a phoneme but as ink (McCaffery’s distinction). The result is “calligramme, anagram, paragram, collage, overprint, erasure, found text, mesostic text” and so forth. *Paragram* (in case, like me, you need help), is Steve McCaffery’s term for “that aspect of language which *escapes* all discourse.” By separating the word from the “‘natural object’ to which it ostensibly refers” the artist conceives art as a “made thing” – pure artifice (if not necessarily “of eternity”). This does indeed mark a major paradigm shift, as Perloff dramatizes by reminding us that T. S. Eliot damned Swinburne because it is “the word that gives him [Swinburne] the thrill, not the object.” Perloff’s book is full of ironies, one of the pleasantest of which is this glimpse of Swinburne as an ancestor of the Language Poets.

In her wonderfully sympathetic exposition of Language Poetry, Perloff makes the essential link from this materialist stance to the political theory that underlies the grand diversity of arts and artists she and Davidson present. The “antsyntactical and antireferential” lyrics of the Language Poets offer a radical alternative to junk-mail and “videocoercion” of contemporary discourse. The political agenda of these artists is to frustrate the “institutionalization of capitalist art” by writing so as to preclude the possibility of a work’s being “reified,” i.e. absorbed into the commodity system. (Alas for the proliferation of hermetic jargon in this theory! Why should *reification* be at the opposite pole from *materialization*? And what is that *deixis* of which Davidson so familiarly speaks? More importantly, why must evading the pollution of capitalist “reification” necessitate the mystification of all but initiates?)

Perloff does wrestle briefly with the problem that such “non-sense” verse may be elitist, but she takes heart that this poetry comes through strongest when the reader brings to it the fewest preconceptions, and she rightly reminds us that they are, indeed, “elaborately sounded poems, ap-

cialized, colonialized weltanschauung. Furthermore, I am not so sure that twentieth-century poetry should be considered as two streams, one ancient waterway drying up as the other surges forward on an electronic dam-burst. I see many streams, braided with confluences. The purity of Mondrian's vision is not polluted by its impact on the design of a tissue box. The power of Wordsworth's or Yeats's "natural speech" is not defused or diffused if a poet is not saturated with the electronic media, though Perloff seems almost to assume so. All the same, I'll join her in cheering on all those who seek to discover "a more profound poetic grammar" (Michel Butor); I should hope to welcome the truly radical poet in whatever guise he or she might appear. Perhaps, after all, "radical poet" is a tautology.

Moving Ahead

A. R. Ammons has two new books: *Glare* (New York: Norton, 1997, 224 pp., \$22. cloth, 0-393-04096-8) presenting two long poems, and *Set in Motion: Essays, Interviews, & Dialogues* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996, \$39.50 cloth, \$13.95 paper, 0-47209603-6 and 0-472-06603-X). The latter provides an interesting comparison with the Davidson and Perloff books. Although they do not explicitly say it, I understand them to accept for their subjects Beckett's claim that "All I know is what the words know" and Wittgenstein's "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world." Ammons floats a definition of poetry as "a linguistic correction of disorder," a disorder "sensed as an incongruence between our nonverbal experience of reality and our language reflection of it." The aim is thus to "speak the unspeakable" (and here the difference from most avant garde artists becomes palpable) so as to make "innumerable sensuous events apprehendable (*capable of being acted on*)" [my emphasis]. Thus for Ammons poetry is constantly casting ahead to what we don't understand, endlessly questioning. Simultaneously it invites the reader to consider what way of life any poem seems to be representing and existentially to inquire "Should I behave that way?" As the editor, Zofia Burr, nicely puts it in her Introduction, "These writings construe poetry . . . as both exploratory and experimental, and as ethically chal-

lenging and committed." Ammons deplores the empty-headedness of much contemporary poetry: "I want somebody who can think and tell me something."

Ammons tells an interviewer that his poetry "tries to test out to the limit the situation of unity and diversity" and that he believes in "process and progression." Certainly in rolling the adding machine tape into his typewriter to begin "Strip," the first of the long poems in *Glare*, the poet establishes a medium for exploration of his inner and (inseparable) outer experience, with no apparent limits to the diversity of subject or expression. There are, of course, limitations: the width of the paper demands sensitive attention to lineation, and Ammons's line ends are anything but arbitrary. (Much of the comedy here comes in the enjambments, and I confess to frequently laughing aloud as my eye dropped from line to line.) The arrangement of the lines in couplets lays down a visual and aural procession of railroad ties down which the reader speeds on invisible rails. And the journey is divided, not at all arbitrarily, into sixty-five junctures with rest-stops in between chapters. The result is a rhythmic voyage, moving with a strong momentum.

The second poem, "Scat Scan," allows longer lines and a broader intellectual roadway – less self-absorbed, more varied. "Strip" may well be the most self-absorbed of all Ammons' work, as the poet acknowledges in the last lines of that poem:

. . . do I contradict myself, you
 say: well, I get interested in both
 sides of the argument: I am unhappily
 not an either/or person but a
 both/and: I have more sides than
 two: I have so many they round off
 like a glazed stob or bead of water:
 enough about me: I sure wish I could
 think about something else

“Why should we be interested in your personal problems?” a nun asked Robert Lowell after his reading at a MLA convention. And Lowell fortunately did not have to wait for *l’esprit de escalier*. The right answer came at once: “I like to think I’m human too.” The test of the self-examining writer, be it Thoreau or Lowell or Ammons, has to be in the reader’s recognition, through the writer’s art of language, of their common humanity.

Part of my answer for Ammons comes in my eagerness to turn from one chapter to the next, lured on by, among other things, the variety of colloquial, regional, sometimes parodic, voices; the occasional exuberant hyperbole; the allusions, from highest to lowest culture; the prickly puns and prolific paradoxes; the metaphor expanded to explosion. I kept wishing I had someone to read it aloud to, to share the sometimes heart-wrenching, sometimes hilarious shifts of voice.

Furthermore, I have enjoyed reading *Glare*, but especially “Scat Scan,” in the light of the poet’s own statements about poetry as collected in *Set in Motion*. His syntax, punctuated with colons, exemplifies Ammons’ open-ended philosophy – no full stops. Even with no question marks, a great many of these units can be read only as questions. So the way of life this work represents (recommends) is one of ever-inquiring openness, a life of extravagance and pitiless self-examination, of humility and humor. It is a life in which transforming art and unaltered nature are in constant productive tension. (Most of these engaging properties show up in Chapter 85, too long, alas, to quote. Check it out.) In his attempt to speak the unspeakable, Ammons here writes with a candor extreme even for him of “country matters” and other aspects of the physical body. More significant is his questioning about the implications for daily life of ultimate mortality, even the mortality of the globe.

In signing on for this expedition, the reader enters the mercurial consciousness of the poet, chilling, playful, exuberant, enquiring, raunchy, self-conscious, self-reflexive, self-mocking; radical in its explorations, Shakespearian in its range; homely as a stob (for *stob*, see Regional Note in *The American Heritage Dictionary*). And unlike the bifurcators I referred to at the opening of this review, Ammons, that nature poet of human nature, braids the materiality and playfulness of language with the most metaphysical and ethical of contemplations. *Both/and*, not *either/or*.

“The Best” today

James Tate is the editor, with Series Editor **David Lehman**, of *The Best American Poetry 1997* (New York: Scribner, 1997, 268 pp., \$30. hardcover, \$13. paper, 0-684-81454-4, 0-684-81452-8). Marjorie Perloff, if I'm reading her aright, would not find much grist for her mill in this anthology. “What we want from poetry,” Tate asserts, “is to be moved, to be moved from where we now stand.” And for Tate what distinguishes the poem that stands out from all the other well-made poems is “insight”/ “revelation”/ “epiphany.” Consequently, this tenth anniversary edition of this valuable, invaluable, supervalueable series is one of its best. I take a risk generalizing about so varied a collection, but I can say that of the seventy-five poems Tate has selected, about twenty struck me as outstanding – a high proportion, well worth the modest price of the book. Buy it and find your own twenty – perhaps a different list from mine. Among my favorites are these:

John Ashbery's sinuous “The Problem of Anxiety” is one of his finest and most haunting lyrics.

Marianne Boruch's “Camouflage” opens out spectacularly from “The butterfly is the eye/ of some great creature, if we/ believe the wing,” through the evolution of Deception “since the Ice Age for some./ Secrets in the bones which aren't/ whispers, in the fine/ and serious brain/whose best parts/cannot think.” From there it moves to a smashing, unpredictable epiphany.

Catherine Bowman's “So Sorry” shows how a prose poem is truly a poem, with its incremental rhythms, its intensity of language, its startling insight.

Carl Dennis's “History” plays the old game of “what if” and plays it very well.

Robert Dow's “How Should I Say This” is a war poem that uses incremental repetition to sneak up on the reader with insidious intent.

Herman Fong's “Asylum” is a double-bitted fable on survival.

Albert Goldbarth's “Complete with Starry Night and Bourbon Shots” is one of several generous and eloquent elegies in this year's collection.

Jorie Graham's "Thinking" acts out that act – paying her tribute of absorbed attention both to the sensuous scene and to the process of attention.

Larry Levis's "Anastasia and Sandman" opens dimensions beyond the personal, beyond the political, beyond the current craze for angel poems, to a cosmic vision closer to the bone.

Vijay Seshadri's "Lifeline" is a narrative of consummate authority and power.

Steven Sherrill's "Katyn Forest" gives a voice to the voiceless – one of poetry's most honorable missions.

Derek Walcott's gorgeous elegy for Joseph Brodsky, "Italian Eclogues," is a masterpiece that joins the great canon of the elegy – certainly one of the most vital of contemporary genres. And suddenly the eclogue takes on new life and luster.

Then there are strong poems by Alexie and Ammons, Jayne Cortez and Rosanna Warren, Richard Jackson and Leon Stokesbury, and more. It may be significant that the poets' comments in the appendix are less valuable here than in any of the previous years' volumes. Of course all context can enrich a work, and I commend the series policy of biographical notes and the poet's own words about the poem. But this year's poems seem more (may I use the dirty word?) autonomous than those in previous editions. For a sample of what awaits the reader of this fine collection, here is Denise Levertov's "The Change," complete:

For years the dead
 were the terrible weight of their absence,
 the weight of what one had not put in their hands.
 Rarely a visitation – dream or vision –
 lifted that load for a moment, like someone
 standing behind one and briefly taking
 the heft of a frameless pack.
 But the straps remained, and the ache –
 though you can learn not to feel it
 except when malicious memory

(stanza continued)

pulls downward with sudden force.
Slowly there comes a sense
that for some time the burden
has been what you need anyway.
How flimsy to be without it, ungrounded, blown
hither and thither, colliding with stern solids.
And then they begin to return, the dead:
but not as visions. They're not
separate now, not to be seen, no,
it's they who see: they displace,
for seconds, for minutes, maybe longer,
the mourner's gaze with their own. Just now,
that shift of light, arpeggio
on ocean's harp –
not the accustomed bearer
of heavy absence saw it, it was perceived
by the long-dead, long absent, looking
out from within one's wideopen eyes.

Editor's Note:

We are pleased to announce that A. E. Stallings' "The Man Who Wouldn't Plant Willow Trees," from our Summer 1996 issue, has been selected for the 1997-1998 Pushcart Prize XXII.

The Beloit Poetry Journal is the winner of the fourth Florida International University Poetry Competition, 1996-1997, for publishing Sherman Alexie's "Inside Dachau" in the Summer 1996 issue. This award carries prizes of \$1000. each to the poet and the magazine.

M. K. S.