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**COVER:** Leni Mancuso, *The Trees, The Trees*, brush and ink drawing, 1996

The Editors  
of  
**THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL**  
are proud to announce  
the winner of the fifth  
**CHAD WALSH POETRY PRIZE**  
of \$4,000  
to  
**Mary Leader**  
for her poem  
"For the Love of Gerald Finzi"  
in the Summer 1997 issue.



This prize, awarded annually,  
is the gift of  
the friends and family  
of the poet  
Chad Walsh,  
co-founder, in 1950, of this magazine.

**EXACTITUDE**

October. Bach and Scarlatti are building harpsichords from kits, hardwoods cut from virgin copse to boards – king’s stags, queen’s harts looking on – and planed by singing men in leather jerkins. The plans arrived in pipes in folio, sealed with red wax, tooled in gold, bound with twisted cords of flax. Through New Haven winter it is pianissimo work well-tempered to storm and snow, to blackbird and nuthatch: a silent oratorio of pins and dowels, a cantata of L-rules, C-clamps, and tea towels, baroque duets of Roman numerals and matching numbers. Bach is tall, blond, quiet, studious, slender, a flyfisherman intent upon Thoreau and simple lives. Scarlatti is dark and muscled, as is his working wife who drives him to a desperate perfection. Whoever finishes first, Bach or Scarlatti, will buy the other a six-tiered Chinese kite to lift off from the arms of the Sleeping Giant in the tenured wilds of Sleeping Giant Park just beyond the city, where now it grows dark and Davis Bach threads wires with the calm of a clerk at his abacus or Henry David sorting vines of peas. I cannot see Jonathan Scarlatti, but I know that he’s bending to veneer or sanding edges in the front room that has become his music chamber, fount of beauty and denial, where men kneel and hide from proposals, papers, theses, and qualifying exams. The true test is the cleanly mitred corner, the absence of second thoughts, the certain sure handling of distress, the perfect plumb. In Yale seminars exactitude keeps the dumb

*(stanza continued)*

from speaking; they know better than to say  
what lies in the heart – but here the lay  
of the grain must come to fortunate expression,  
the tempering, the tuning, the turn of the pin  
to fugue and quickness of pulse, the beat  
of the blood.

May. Each sands and polishes the seat  
but Scarlatti cannot sit still:  
everywhere eighth-notes grace notes trills; on the sills  
orioles sing through the sawdust; above the yawning hills  
of Sleeping Giant Park hawks and thrushes soar.  
No one cares who has won. At the same hour  
of a Sunday afternoon David and Jonathan touch  
the keys, the jacks respect their plectrums, pluck  
the strings, and we have runs in thirds and sixths,  
oblique and contrary motions, grand skips  
and original ornaments. Hands will cross, a kite fly  
in the spring currents, and Bach will say it was simplicity  
itself as Scarlatti dashes into the south winds.  
O for the life of the mind.

**Hillel Schwartz**

**Two Poems****SONG OF MYSELF**

[The traveler dreams of a once  
familiar place and time.]

I am a stubborn ox dreaming  
of rain as the drover's fingers drum  
around my eyes. But no: the wet  
hum of flies distracted me,  
and now the plow has drifted from  
the line I meant to follow. See  
where the damp leather of the reins  
has worn the callus on my left  
forefinger raw? Or was it the dry,  
ash handle of my hoe? I can hear  
the steel head singing as it strikes  
rocky ground, the fresh-turned earth  
swallowing showers of sparks. The tip  
of my tongue goes dry. I touch my lips  
to the soil as I once touched you, here  
and there. A single knot of dirt  
crumbles slowly in my mouth  
with the taste of sweet butter dripping  
from your thumb. This ground will raise  
a heavy crop. I am the wheat  
that flowed around your waist like water.  
I am that lonely knot of earth.

## THE NINTH MONTH (for HMKH)

[After a dusty day of driving through  
the desert during Ramadan, the  
traveler stops at a roadside mosque.]

“This is the book in which there is no doubt.”  
The imam’s nasal certainty enthralls  
the faithful, and I mimic their delight,  
touching my forehead to the frayed prayer rug  
until the oils and unguents of my brow  
shine like an offering on the clotted wool.  
He might as well be calling, “Simon says . . .”  
and me slow as an insect dipped in honey.  
Everything I do or think seems backwards.  
I wish I had not stopped here, however much  
the mosque sashayed oasis-like on the rough  
volcanic plain, its pale-blue, blistered walls  
limpid and trembling in the liquid heat,  
a concrete mirror of my thirst. But when  
the muezzin’s muddy call came laboring  
from a loudspeaker balanced clumsily above  
the door, I longed to hear Muhammad’s voice,  
swollen with holy words, his syllables  
slurred by the fermented honey Gabriel  
had poured into his ears. The thought of such food  
sent tremors through my belly, which had gone  
empty of everything but breath all day.  
How does the saying go? In Ramadan,  
the fast begins when white thread can be told  
from black. So, like a tourist in this house  
of hunger, I put by food to savor words.

*(stanza continued)*

Or should I say, their sounds? Or the idea  
of what escapes me when I hear them spoken?  
“*Hamdullilah*” – Thanks be to God – I know  
enough to echo unfamiliar sounds and not  
to eat left-handed, hold a holy book  
below my belt, or pray with unclean feet.  
Stiff-necked, I raise my head. The imam’s words  
flutter their chitinous wings in my empty gut.  
I open my parched mouth and hear, or think  
I hear, a kind of song, like the glacial drip  
of the fouwara in the mosque’s courtyard:  
a song, indeed, after the dust of sight-  
seeing among the Caliph’s desert castles  
where the wind shrills through narrow windows keen  
as locusts humming on the Baptist’s tongue.  
Here, on the verge of milk and honey, nothing  
grows as plentifully as words. Even the goats  
and camels speak more often than they feed,  
or so I fancy in this long ninth month  
of taming my own capricious appetite,  
imagining their gossip by the manger,  
never doubting their mouths are full of seeds.

John Canaday



**RATE OF EXCHANGE**

we do it for  
love and hope  
money will follow  
we bloat we starve  
we survive

a few years in  
we are hooked  
we do it for free

in the end  
it is food it is god  
we cheat we rob  
we kill ourselves  
to do it

**THE OLDEST MAP WITH THE NAME AMERICA**

1.

In Martin Waldseemuller's woodblock, circa 1507,  
the New World is not all there.  
We are a coastline  
without substance, a thin strip  
like a movie set of a frontier town.  
So the land is wrong and it is empty,  
but for one small black bird facing west,  
the whole continent outlined with a hard black edge  
too strictly geometric, every convolution squared.  
In the margin, in a beret, Amerigo Vespucci  
pulls apart the sharp legs of his compass –  
though it should be noted that instead of a circle  
in the Oldest Map With the Name America  
the world approximates that shape we call a heart.

2.

The known world once stretched from my house to the scrim of trees at the street's dead end, back when streets dead-ended instead of cleaving into labyrinths of other streets. I was not one of those who'd go sailing blithely past the neighborhood's bright rim: Saturdays I spent down in the basement with my Thingmaker and Plastigoop . . . Sunday was church, the rest was school, this was a life, it was enough. Then one day a weird kid from down the block pushed back the sidewall of that edge, spooling me like a fish on the line of his backward walking fifty yards deep into the woodlot. Which was barely wild, its trees bearing names like sugar maple, its snakes being only garter snakes. Soon the trail funneled to a single log spanning some unremarkable dry creek that the kid got on top of, pointed at and said: You fall down there, you fall forever. And his saying this worked a peculiar magic over me: suddenly the world lay flat and without measure. So that when I looked down at the dead leaves covering the ravine they might have just as well been paint, as depth became the living juice squeezed out of space: how far *could* you fall? Then the leaves shifted, their missing third dimension reconfigured into sound: a murmuring snap like the breakage of tiny bones that sent me running back to the world I knew.

3.

Unlike other cartographers of his day,  
Waldseemuller wasn't given to ornamenting his maps  
with any of Pliny's pseudohuman freaks  
like the race of men having one big foot  
that also functions as a parasol.  
Most likely he felt such illustrations  
would have demeaned the science of his art,  
being unverifiable, like the rumored continents  
Australia, Antarctica, which he judiciously leaves out.  
Thus graced by its absence, the unknown world  
floats beyond the reach of being named,  
and the cannibals there  
don't have to find out yet they're cannibals:  
they can just think they're having lunch.

4.

My point is, he could have been any of us:  
with discount jeans and a haircut made  
with clippers that his mother ordered  
from an ad in a women's magazine.  
Nothing odd about him except for maybe  
how tumultuously the engines that would run  
his adult body started up, expressing  
their juice in weals that blistered  
his jaw's skin as its new bristles  
began telescoping out. Stunned  
by the warped ukelele that yesterday had been  
his predictable voice, the kid  
one day on the short-cut home from practice  
with the junior varsity wrestling squad  
came upon a little girl in the woods,  
knocked her down and then did something . . .  
and then wrote something on her stomach.  
Bic pen, blonde girl: the details ran  
through us like fire, with a gap  
like the eye of the flame where you could  
stick your finger and not get burnt.  
By sundown the whole family slipped –  
and the kid's yellow house hulked  
empty and dark, with a real estate sign  
canted foolishly in its front yard.  
Then for weeks our parents went round  
making the noise of baby cats  
stuck up in trees: who knew? who knew?  
We thought they were asking each other  
what the kid wrote with the Bic –  
what word, what map – and of course  
once they learned the answer  
they weren't going to say.

5.

In 1516, Martin Waldseemuller  
draws another map in which the King of Portugal  
rides saddled on a terrifying fish.  
Also, the name "America"  
has been replaced by "Terra Cannibalar,"  
with the black bird changed to a little scene  
of human limbs strung up in trees  
as if they had been put up there by shrikes.  
Instead of a skinny strip, we're now  
a continent so large we have no back edge,  
no westward coast – you could walk left  
and wind up off the map. As the weird kid did,  
though the world being round, I always half-expect  
someday to intersect the final leg of his return.

6.

Here the story rides over its natural edge  
with one last ornament to enter in the margin  
of its telling. That is, the toolshed  
that stood behind the yellow house,  
an ordinary house that was cursed  
forever by its being fled. On the shed  
a padlock bulged like a diamond,  
its combination gone with all the other  
scrambled numbers in the weird kid's head  
so that finally a policeman had to come  
and very theatrically kick the door in  
after parking one of our town's two squad cars  
with its beacon spinning at the curb.  
He took his time to allow us to gather  
like witnesses at a pharoah's tomb,  
eager to reconstitute a life  
from the relics of its leaving.  
And when, on the third kick, the door flopped back  
I remember for a moment being blinded  
by dust that woofed from the jamb in one  
translucent, golden puff. Then  
when it settled, amidst the garden hose  
and rusty tools we saw what all  
he'd hidden there, his cache  
of stolen library books. Derelict,  
lying long unread in piles that sparked  
a second generation of anger . . .  
from the public brain that began to rant  
about the public trust. While we  
its children balled our fists  
around the knot of our betrayal:  
no book in the world had an adequate tongue  
to name the name of what he did.

7.

Dying, Tamburlaine said: Give me a map  
then let me see how much is left to conquer.  
Most were commissioned by wealthy lords,  
the study of maps being often prescribed  
as a palliative for melancholy.  
In the library of a castle of a prince  
named Wolfegg, the two Waldseemuller maps  
lay brittle for centuries – “lost”  
the way I think of the weird kid as lost  
somewhere in America’s back forty, where  
he could be floating under many names.  
One thing for sure, he would be old now.  
And here I am charting him: no doubt  
I have got him wrong but still he will be my conquest.



8.

Sometimes when I'm home we'll go by the house  
and I'll say to my folks: come on,  
after all these years it's safe  
just to say what really happened.  
But my mother's mouth will thin exactly  
as it did back then, and my father  
will tug on his earlobe and call the weird kid  
one mysterious piece of work.  
In the old days, naturally I assumed  
they thought they were protecting me  
by holding back some crucial  
devastating piece. But I too am grown  
and now if they knew what it was  
they'd tell me, I should think.

**Lucia Perillo**

### Three Poems

#### THE MAP OF BETRAYAL

We were in bed, talking about betrayal, naming different kinds of it like minerals or kingdoms, slowing down once we had a dozen or so, as if we were coming to the ones we ourselves were guilty of, or that's what I was thinking, so mostly to distract myself, I said, *And death, death's probably the biggest one of all.* But he, with lawyer's logic, said definitely not: If everyone knew from the get-go that death would come, then how could death betray? No, death was part of the code, whereas betrayal involved breaking it, slipping it to the enemy – some violation or trespass that the blood would know forbidden – not mindless obedience to a bound-to-be end. *Listen, I told him, if you died tomorrow, I'd feel betrayed. It'd be like losing you to a thousand women.* He stared past me while the night sky filled with stars, a half moon. *The stars are dying,* he said. *And we're the stuff of stars. So if death were betrayal, that would make the sky betrayal's map.* He often deflected things this way, by way of conceding impasse. It was reason enough to dread losing him, I thought, turning out the lights to study the map better. In another millennium, people would be buying package tours to Orion, the Pleiades, living in space colonies. Making room for more betrayals, which would still come one by one. *Like death,* I whispered while he slept.

## PENITENT

I used to sit watching him thinking  
it was wrong to have married him  
because I loved him the way I loved  
what was wounded. I'd think back to  
birds I'd watch as a kid, flying headlong  
into our plate glass windows, snapping  
their necks, so many dead that pretty soon  
I'd just scoop them up and toss them  
down the bank. No more spoon-dug graves  
or twig crosses, and if they weren't dead,  
if I saw them twitching on the shale,  
I'd go on with my game or climb higher  
into the maple, skinning the heels of my palms  
though I wouldn't have called this penitence,  
as the nights I lay awake beside his snores  
weren't penitence, just refusal to do what I had to.  
It took so long. I kept walking away from it  
the way I did those birds, until the day

I found the bones of one intact, the  
feathers still on it, so phantom, a bone  
bird, and when I tried to slide it onto a leaf  
it came apart like air. Afterwards I thought  
I must have imagined it. I was always seeing  
God in moss or standing water, his long cloak

pulled to his neck in a rush of rebuke.

*You spend too much time dreaming*  
my mother would tell me, but when I finally  
said it, said what I had to, I got through it  
by imagining my words as birds,  
flying into the invisible

wall between us.

Crows or starlings. Black, a greasy sheen.  
Nothing pretty about it. Nothing penitent  
in the way I said I was sorry,  
said it over and over,  
my words coming apart like air.

## WANT

Somewhere in the night a Mommy shape.  
Maybe it's the rocking chair shadow.  
Maybe the shadow with a life of its own,  
come from nothing but child terror  
that spills like cloth on the floor.  
Because the Mommy shape isn't always safe.  
How could it be when it fills the world  
with *Oh be afraid of.*  
With *Don't* and *Don't* and *Don't*

until you have to put your hands over your ears  
to keep from going crazy, even now,  
while you're supposed to be sleeping,  
when you're years older, a mother yourself,  
the Mommy shape climbs right on you,  
pressing her lips to your lips,  
wanting your breath  
to be hers again –

then it's morning, and you think *Oh!*  
– it was the rocker, the afghan  
thrown across its back bunched a little  
like a shoulder – *Don't die*  
you cry, not so much to stop  
what cannot be stopped but to keep  
breathing –

and you reach for the Mommy shape,  
you don't care who sees you, a grown woman  
snivelling and carrying on, you reach  
the way you did as an infant, again, again –

So little in your grasp –

Lynne Knight

**ABSENCE**

*for Peggy*

Gnats dance, seen  
in the absence that follows  
their leaps, in the unblotched  
halo around the pine.

I could count the gnats  
as an abbess would angels  
on a pin head, unseen except  
in the gleam of brass.

Is this how I see you?  
– archaic, a riddle  
schooling a disciple  
in the spirit's holy way.

In absence, the gnat's  
unreflective mass  
becomes the shine;  
in absence, I see

you. Yes,  
clear. Not here.

**DRAWING A V**

The child draws a V near the top  
of the paper, in the blue streak  
she says is sky,

a V whose tips curve outward –  
leaf, tendril, crest of wave –  
a gesture toward growth beyond order.

*Bird!* she calls out, and it soars  
into the playroom of meaning,  
a chevron. Flight.

## DEDICATIONS FOR THE 8TH WARD CLINIC

To the block which lights up bright pink  
in tongues of flame, to the glorious white  
building where the mothers  
went in and came out  
not mothers – goodbye.  
To the high school girls  
in the hushed carpool  
across parish lines:

think good things  
of the souls and they will forget  
your address and next-of-kin  
you left behind. In the fire  
the smiling black  
nurse repeats  
your good-enough age.

Goodbye to the sick  
month when you walked  
the hallways with math books  
stabbing your navel.  
Goodbye to the blocked  
calendar marked in blank  
code and the phone call  
you made in the night. All  
is unrecorded, your looped  
signature sings from the registry's  
cracked skin. Shhh.

The bomb is ticking  
in the pen held  
in the receptionist's gripped hand,  
her quiet white sneaker naps  
in the driveway. Shhh.  
The traffic whispers on Poydras street  
the television where the reporter  
notes pieces of the clinic

*(stanza continued)*

pieces of her white uniform  
pieces of the red child  
you knew for three months  
the bomb is ticking  
in your belly counting  
the days counting the pills  
escaping memory  
you recognize the blue  
tile in the streets  
is your first memory  
coming to  
and coming  
to that decision you left  
that block  
empty as a shoe.

For the daughters who  
will wake to the sick  
visit of other clinics' pills,  
for the mothers who  
scoop food off their  
born children's mouths,  
for the women who  
watch the guests of their histories  
push  
through that revolving  
door

it is a dangerous thing  
knowing  
what we know  
we haven't named.

**Susan B. A. Somers-Willett**

**Four Poems****BOLLOCKS BY THE THAMES**

This is what I saw:

Condoms starring the river path, all the  
blow jobs gone home with dawn. Some boys  
come walking along this walkway talking of  
“Seals?!” – “Well, they say it’s the cleanest  
metropolitan river” – “But, seals??!” and away  
beside the slightly jolting green gray river  
and then just one drunk woman left  
bulling around in the flower beds, slopping  
her beer all over the irises, coughing, calling,  
contempt-filled, triumphant, to the boneskinny man  
struck silent with her and wine, hollow  
bottle two-hand clutched, tapping the bench  
with it, his throat torqued out like a heron’s, sometimes

shh-shhshing her, wincing. A cop-type coming  
out of the back there from the shed, peaked  
hat, hands not swinging, held out  
inches from his uniformed hips, him clearly  
firm about her getting out of there,  
her shouting “fucker” and “wanker” and “bollocks”  
and still him firmly waiting and her head shaking  
doggishly as if to shudder off her face-flesh.  
Beer on the flowers, down her shirt, slapping  
up out of the can-hole, cop-man pushing her  
from his garden though never laying on  
his hands. They’re like two repelling  
magnets, her backing from



his push, shocked, stunned, electrically separate,  
her halting her bigness over his small  
self, her screaming. "Yeh only 'ave  
one loife. Enjoy it!" Her wino boyfriend  
skinking off after her between some  
trees. "Bollocks!" Her call coming back  
into the garden. And the cop-type coming  
over, sheepish, laughing that his mother  
said "bollocks" all the time: "all  
bolloxed up' she said," he said, "and no  
idea it meant 'testicles'," rolling that last  
off his tongue like a chitter of curly birds,  
blushing: "Shite, sorry, I don't even know you."

That's what he said to me.

### **SHE DIDN'T MEAN TO DO IT**

Oh, she was sad, oh, she was sad.  
She didn't mean to do it.

Certain thrills stay tucked in your limbs,  
go no further than your fingers, move your legs through their paces,  
but no more. Certain thrills knock you flat  
on your sheets on your bed in your room and you fade  
and they fade. You falter and they're gone, gone, gone.  
Certain thrills puff off you like smoke rings,  
some like bell rings growing out, out, turning  
brass, steel, gold, till the whole world's filled  
with the gonging of your thrills.

But oh, she was sad, she was just sad, sad,  
and she didn't mean to do it.

**WHATEVER WORKS**

“I never was much good at blow jobs,” she says, driving. “Couldn’t get the right amount of pressure. Or maybe it was him. He just didn’t like them. He said so: ‘maybe it’s me’, he said. After awhile I just stopped worrying about it, and here we are.” I’m sitting in the back to keep an eye on her baby. I nod, thinking what I know, what I don’t know. Old music. Turn off that old radio music. The baby’s crying. More night inside the car than out. The baby’s crying despite she pulled over at the rest stop to feed it just ten, twenty miles back. I keep on pushing its rubber nipple at its mouth; it takes it a moment then goes on crying. Finally, entering the bridge, she reaches her arm back over the seat, finds the baby’s mouth with her finger. It knows her skin by taste. Mouths that finger, sucks it, chews it, falls asleep. “Whatever works,” she says, and keeps on driving fast and crooked around that way.

**ABOUT LIGHT**

When these winter darks fold far and farther over  
the borders of our days, and I wish to sleep the  
sleep that doesn't cease – or when nights are like long crawls  
through brown fog – that is when I think of the light that  
lasts so long, and want it. I think of the story  
of the child who kept watch through a Northern winter,  
watched all the long hours of long months, then stood among  
the people gathered on the day when the sun at  
last broke the horizon, broke out its orange beam,  
just a blink, then fell off again and the people  
danced for joy in the snow in the new-defined dark.  
(Regarding light, you can tell if a fish is stale  
by how light plays on its scales. Color for fresh; black/  
white's no good) (To bring up light, an artist lays down  
shadows) (First light hits garbagemen heavehoing open  
the day) I remember the school pal who said stand  
ground when they call you "jerk," and recite: a jerk is  
a tug, a tug is a boat, a boat floats on  
water, water is nature, nature's beautiful,  
thank you for the compliment. It doesn't really  
work. Breaks around "floats." I did not care. She, a jerk  
herself. This kid left me this like a tank fish or  
gob of shiny spit on a pavement. So began  
my love of mistakes: gaps which require faith. Now I  
crave those gaps; I love what I crave, love the craving.

**Daisy Fried**

**Three Poems****O-ZONE**

And oh the **O** of this zone with its loosed  
scent of green  
sound for sore ears! **O**  
Words! So green, blinds thwack up, each  
thwack incising, here, on the polar  
plains of our brain, a new  
groove, sastruga, while onion-skin-  
thin conceptuals (like  
baklava bitten  
into) sigh. Sigh and finally  
buckle, fold up, commit  
origami, exit  
while other mother-of-  
pearl aurals, like scalpels,  
enter our ears, circumcising our delicate  
drums. Hoods/lids/caps  
off, then, oh **O**  
remember our eyes and mouths  
full of effacement, full now of  
sprachgefühl  
for the tongue-tied.

## VOLANT

Outside the Post Office in La Grande, a girl  
waits for chalky canted  
slats to thwack  
up, for glass doors (mirroring her shorn lank-  
iness, her apple-green  
tank tucked into tattered levis) to unlock their dead  
bolts. And when  
they do, when she enters with the others, three  
ahead of me, when she lines  
up, parcel-  
less (waiting with her hands hasping her heightened  
elbows in the beveled  
light), she starts to rock, shift her taut weight, os-  
cillate from one black snub-  
toed blucher  
to the other. So that her knees take turns un-  
locking. And the hibernaculum of her  
hips unmistakably  
sways now. As if to egg on some encapsuled yellow  
pricking, pecking;  
as if to lull the attrition of this.

**WHEN I WAKE I REMEMBER**

his head:  
crested, like a scythe's blade, but  
pearly, pelucid: a  
long lick of blue white.  
So: His head. With its geyser  
of margarite. Eidetic. This, and the shell  
he hefts. Ear-shaped. With its row of respiratory  
holes he holds his fingers  
over, then lifts, fits the whole thing  
like a muff  
over his left ear. Closing his  
eyes. (This correlation of motion – shell up,  
lids down – I  
remember.) Head. Shell. Hand. Eyes  
lidded. And  
his mouth, when he finally speaks, doesn't  
open: splendor  
squiggles from his throat. A vermiculate  
halation. Glow worms. Signaling.  
Hailing my most abhorred  
self.

**Margaret Aho**

**FISHING RIGHT**

I move through my death.  
Each moment, I move through my death.  
I move through my death each moment  
like a shrimp imitation darting along the edge  
of an eelgrass bed. Like a shrimp imitation  
darting a steel barb on the margin of a lair,  
I move through my death, bait  
luring bait. As bait lures prey  
I dart through my moment  
to death I move through my salt.  
Like a mallard breast feather  
hackled around the down-turned eye  
of a long-shank hook, I flex,  
I flare each moment of movement through my death.  
I move through my moment, prey, bait,  
a lure luring death to a steel barb,  
darting along the fringe of the dark  
like a moment, a movement,  
a sudden flash of silver.

**Peter Munro**

## Two Poems

## CALLING OUT A MENTOR

*Here was a castoff widely hunted king  
 convinced these commoners would not climb down  
 shale scared gray by the roar.  
 They see him clawing moss spun out in foam  
 and the fern snap off in his hand.*

*—Richard Hugo,  
 “Ballad of the Upper Bumping”*

I place you in the town I never had as home.  
 The one with one good river cold enough to sting.

Against its bank you teach me how to smoke  
 and say the things worth dying for are small:  
 girls with slight hands, rivers that forgive our town.

Because of you waves are arguments.  
 Dead sailors toast the wind that broke them and laugh through gulls.  
 We double-back across the beach and watch our footprints fade.

Then try to say a word like *order*. Might as well spit into the wind.

We talk women against the bank as well.  
 You get me drunk on words like *curve*.  
 Say you can know a woman’s body quick,  
 especially on drink. It’s all about the steady hand.

We defend our water and our poems.

But Dick, the problem is that we were never there.  
 I know no river well, no beach, no woman.  
 Mayor of nonsense, bullshit, and brass.  
 I’m not sure you ever loved.

I think your hands were shaking all your life.  
 I think you spit the whiskey out but claimed the drunk.



## FICTION

1.

When Lindsey's big breasts move, everyone feels alive in the dull night. Like a child we feel alive. Her large lips are always wet. Her tongue is quick. Her mind is blank

As the night is blank. She asks, her breasts move, her quick tongue licks her lips, she asks, and we listen because we are suddenly alive, she asks, "What is fiction?"

(Shut your eyes. Your mind is too lazy to make shapes. But something bounces and falls against the black back of your lids.) Ask me any question. Ask me

What Lindsey looks like when her breasts move. Ask me what she looks like on top of me. Ask me how she moans. Ask me and I will answer both questions

At once. I tell Lindsey she has something on the corner of her mouth. I take one finger and rub it across the outline of her lips. She licks them and smiles

The dumb smile. The delicious smile. She is so happy I think. I almost bend to kiss her and then occur to myself. "What's fiction?" "Fiction is when

2.

you rub two things together. Like two sticks  
making fire. Like wheels on Oakley Avenue  
where Lindsey lives.

( Some things still fall from  
the sky, but only when your eyes are closed.)

This is fiction, I say:

My son gets teased about his weight.  
At noon he skips pebbles off the family car.  
One night he walks into the kitchen  
where I, an old man, am dealing with  
my pills. He squeezes my hand. He  
squeezes until it hurts. "Take that."  
he says.

Lindsey isn't listening. She sucks on a cheap  
beer her boyfriend bought. I watch her mouth  
around the tip. I love her breathing.

The dumb smile. The blank night.  
(Let your eyes relax until only form  
not detail is recorded.)

3 .

Lindsey washes dishes and her breasts  
have lost their firmness. In fiction  
we often talk of breasts. It's called foreshadowing.

Lindsey, fiction involves a process called  
foreshadowing. That's when the author  
provides an image or a tone that hints  
at some event, often catastrophic, sure  
to come.

example:

“When Lindsey’s big breasts move everyone  
feels alive.”

Lindsey washes dishes and her breasts have  
lost their firmness. Once when Lindsey’s  
big breasts moved . . .

Her fingers are fat and the nails worn,  
her eyes relaxed from fatigue.  
A kitchen fan hums. The floor  
is cheap tile.

Lindsey, detail adds flavor to our fiction.  
For instance, not one of your plates is white.

not one of the plates is  
white. I sit at my table  
dealing with my pills.

(for a second I shut my eyes.  
Lindsey sucks her beer.  
Her lips are full red.  
Lindsey’s lips are pale.  
She washes yellow plates.)

On Oakley my ride pulls out and the tires steam on the  
wet pavement.  
It's just Lindsey and me.

Our son enters.

I am eighteen and therefore not remembering.  
This is my diary.

4.

In her diary her "i's" are dotted with circles.  
Her slim fingers write the names of boys  
carefully. Her letters are fat and happy.  
Most pages are blank.

(light blurs and makes you  
think you're crying. you see something  
fall but when you focus on it  
you forget what you're looking for.  
squint.)

Lindsey, in fiction the author often puts a little bit of  
himself in each character,

example: ". . .her eyes relaxed from fatigue."

5.

In your diary the letters are thin. Your fingers  
are fat. You write while I sleep. Or you think  
I'm asleep.

Sometimes I watch your tired breasts  
sag in the half light.

**Benjamin Lerner**

**TEN MILLION MONKEYS,  
TEN MILLION TYPEWRITERS**

“Chase them out,” said  
the Boss of Petshop Garden:  
“They’ll never write Shakespeare.  
Call the TV.  
Say the monkeys escaped:  
A photo op. A story.”

So off they go, ten  
million monkeys, pushed  
into the world, chittering  
west to the waterfront.  
Their random banging on ten  
million typewriters forgotten.

They hippety riverward  
in pierhead jumps, jabbering  
onto ships as if  
they think the world welcomes  
monkey stowaways  
exiled from the Petshop Garden.

Up the masts they go,  
swinging in the rigging, bopping  
out of the crow’s nest,  
circumnavigating the stack  
and fornicating in the fiddley.  
A photo op. A story.

But hunger brings them skidding  
back to their ten million  
typewriters and their food dishes,  
still looking for monkey  
fame. Hear them now,  
yacking on every page.

**DUMB DOG**

1st I'm in, snout in trash,  
trash spread on kitchen floor,  
when he storms in, lands shoe  
sharp in ribs, sprawls me *crash*,  
scrabbling toenails slashing  
tile, thunders DUMB-ASS GOD-  
DAMN DOG, scruffs me, drags me  
whimper-yelp 2 back door.  
Then I'm out.

Back yard good, so clear. Bark  
@ fence, catch & eat 3  
lizards, woof up, lick slick  
scraggy goo. Scratch a flea,  
eat a few. Nose nutless pouch –  
ouch – purely lonely. Nibble  
my paddywack, give the dog  
a bonely. Good, but gulled  
sky tangles calm,

plexor drizzle dampens  
fur. Hole dug in hedges  
(godDAMN dog) good 4 now  
but leaves tremble, pelting  
pour, flash & wheeling crash,  
send me yelp yelp yelping,  
clawing @ scarred screen door:  
help help help. Door slams  
wide, grounds me,

windless. JESUS, DUMB-ASS  
DOG. I choke, stand, shake, &  
lightning flashes foot in  
chops, canines *clap!* DOWN, he  
rages, DOWN, rampages,  
DOWN, DOWN, DUMB MUTT. Bellied,  
I worm nearer, breathe mud,  
scent jut of loafer: sheathed  
teeth turn to leather; sheared  
tongue tastes blood.

Pat Rushin

## BOOKS IN BRIEF

Poetry workshops, I hear tell, often concern themselves with that slippery concept of voice. As I hear it, *voice* expresses a style distinctive, even idiosyncratic, to the individual. My *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* does not recognize this usage but suggests some other approaches, which I'm going to try out on the stack of books I've assembled for this review.

### The audible voice

We don't seem to need the term *voice* when discussing, say, eighteenth-century poetry. But in this century it may be that the ubiquity of poetry readings, going back at least to Vachel Lindsay and reenforced by the popularity of readings and recordings by Frost and Thomas, has influenced the poet's oral/aural awareness. Certainly Charles Olson's insistence on the breath as the organic poetic unit has had its impact. **Alice Notley's *The Descent of Alette*** (New York: Penguin, 1996, 150 pp., \$14.95 paper, 0-14-058764-0) provides a challenging instance: a four-book Dantesque first-person narrative of the fictional Alette's progress through a contemporary underworld, her defeat of a shape-shifting Tyrant, and her triumphant emergence into a transformed city. It is an ambitious and imaginative enterprise, one I would like to applaud. I would like also to applaud her insistence that the eye-reader not rush over the poem's surface, but read it, as though aloud, at the strictly measured pace the poet has created for it. Instead of the customary spaces to separate breath units, Notley surrounds each foot with quotation marks. This certainly has the effect of slowing the reader down. Here's one of the quatrains that represents the 139 page-long subdivisions of the four books:

one down—' "she swallowed it [*a scripture scroll*] —" "‘Good,’ she  
said" "‘Otherwise’"  
"I'm imperfect," "you know the way" "a baby's crazy," "I said I  
didn't know" "what she meant" "‘Yes,’" "you do,' she said" "‘Once  
they're all down," "I wake up'" "She smiled" "& disappeared" "into  
the

The feet, you will notice, run across stanza and line ends. They break in the middle of syntactic units. They have an indeterminate number of syllables and stresses. Despite this arbitrary-appearing "meter," they do establish a sort of breathy music, and the text appears to be a score for performance. It certainly has a *voice* in the strictly aural sense. I don't want to go as far as T. S. Eliot, who proclaimed that "one *Inferno*, even by a Dante, is enough," but I have to admit that Notley's idiosyncratic notation made me long for permission to let the phrases "rush by," exactly what the poet works so hard to inhibit.



### Eliot's three voices

I happened on that Eliot dictum while rereading "The Three Voices of Poetry" (1953) in his *On Poetry and Poets*. The three voices, as modernists will remember, are 1) the poet's own voice to no audience – the private endeavor to realize the true poem; 2) the voice addressing an audience, of any size; and 3) the poet speaking through a dramatic character (Pound contributed the useful term *persona*, from the classical actor's mask). It is usual for a poem to express at least two of these voices. The distinction between the first two seems clear when one compares Dickinson and Whitman, but the ultimate authority for where to draw that line abides with the poet. Notley goes out of her way to make it clear that she intends the second and third voices – the presentation to the audience and the persona of Alette. More interesting to me is the question of a private voice, underlying the narrative. This would be *voice* in the deeper sense that distinguishes a poem by Albert Goldbarth from one by Jorie Graham or by one of the Ashberries. Is there a coherent perceptible voice that under-rides Eliot's three? This is the sort of question I intend to explore in reading five mid-career poets with new books – all books that I find intensely interesting.

**Baron Wormser's *When*** (Louisville, KY: Sarabande, 1997, 106 pp., \$20.95 cloth, \$12.95 paper, 1-889330-03-5, 1-889330-03), was chosen by Alice Fulton as the 1996 winner of the Kathryn A. Morton Prize in Poetry. As usual, Sarabande has done an exemplary job. The painting by Wendy Kindred on the cover shows the "man in charge" in a gesture of authority, while on his tee-shirt is the face of a woman, mouth open, clearly speaking forth. This is a brilliant image for the book, in which the poet's own voice (Eliot's #1) is dedicated to moving an audience (#2), often through the expression of a wide range of personae, male and female, human and (in the "Diary of an Ant") other.

Wormser does have some splendid poems primarily in Eliot's second voice: memorable performance pieces, like "Single-Life Blues" and that natural-born anthology piece "A Quiet Life," which begins

What a person desires in life  
is a properly boiled egg.  
This isn't as easy as it seems.  
There must be gas and a stove,  
the gas requires pipelines, mastadon drills,  
banks that dispense the lozenge of capital.

It works out the other requirements, including political peace, and concludes:

It should be quiet, so quiet you can hear  
 the chicken, a creature usually mocked as a type  
 of fool, a cluck chained to the chore of her body.  
 Listen, she is there, pecking at a bit of grain  
 that came from nowhere.

Even in the autobiographical poems Wormser maintains an often ironic distance from himself. In "My Wife Asks Me Why I Keep Photographs in a Drawer" he replies that he leaves these photographs of his young parents there "as I stutter through/ My slice of time – from semi-hippiedom/ To that middle-age wariness/ That signals a flagging of mortal belief," because

Photos tell you that people can smile at  
 The dark eye of oblivion. Albums and walls are  
 Too insistent. What's part of every fumbling  
 Morning is closer to the fleeting mark.

I think I hear this gently self-mocking, meticulously discriminating, intellectually rigorous voice underlying the chorus of various dramatic voices throughout this book. The poet, Eliot insists, should "sympathize profoundly" with all his characters, even as Shakespeare with Iago. The result, if this proves so, will reveal a sub-liminal, a metaphorical voice – something like Aristotle's *ethos* – the foundation of the poet's mature work. Alice Fulton, in her excellent introduction, identifies it here, as in Wormser's three earlier books, as "a moral intelligence that recognizes the personal and political intertwinings of American culture." Yes, that, plus a compassionate out-going imagination, to encompass the voices of the children in their cancer ward, the dying woodcutter, the black maid of his childhood, the insurance man, the teaching nun, Beethoven's maid, and that ant. To realize this various pageant requires the poet's excellent ear, his healthy sense of humor, together with his selfless ability to pay attention. Whatever I mean by voice, it has to include all that.

**Betsy Sholl's *Don't Explain*** (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997, 72 pp., \$17.95 cloth, \$10.95 paper, 0-299-15720-2, 0-299-15724-5) was Rita Dove's selection for the Felix Pollak Prize. Here are Eliot's first two voices, inseparably harmonized in a chord that is distinctively this poet's own. First there is the exposed speaker (the I/eye), with no visible mask, she too paying attention, getting it right, and relating her observation to her own deepest experience and profoundest needs. Then there is the second voice, reaching out to the reader, engaging me, drawing me in: "Remember the curtains....," "Imagine – those frail Velcro [butterfly] mouths...."

At the heart of this extraordinary book is one poem that for me pivots the whole: "The Tiny Gate." The very subject is *voice* – the poet in the library, recollecting the agony of

a stammering child, an engine chug  
that couldn't get started, who only spoke alone  
under the blankets, or along the riverbank practicing

plosives, fricatives. She'd poke the shallows with a stick,  
murmuring stories from an overdue book of *Saints*  
*Every Child Should Know*: Joan's one phobia, fire,

and the liberating moment in the saint's story when Joan's "voices which had left her flew back . . . a plunge into fluency, / the dream of a hesitant child." Returning the book weeks late, its spine cracked, the child faces the accusing librarian:

"What have you done?" – stammering, stammering.

Her mouth a tiny gate. To pass through, the words  
broke themselves again and again, so even now I feel  
the weight of that child, wishing for the drunk's smooth tongue

at the front desk, demanding yesterday's paper.  
And when he kneels down to beg, it's the soldier painted  
in my old book, dropped to his knees, finding Joan's heart

still beating in the ashes, the ecstasy I never had:  
this fellow in frayed tweed, enjoying every second of his plea,

of the librarian flapping her arms, crying "Out! Out!"

All those years of logjam, afternoons leaning over the bank,  
wishing I could just give myself to that river – and now I see  
the river was giving itself to me.

This poem opens like most of Sholl's, in the voice of the poet as attentive observer of persons and situations she remembers or observes. She is always up front as the first-person narrator – our emotionally and intellectually reliable guide. Her empathy and her skill in engaging the reader vicariously in this child's frustration still did not prepare me for the shock of that "me" that appears at the end, where I discover that the poet herself is the child that I have been identifying with. I can't think of a more eloquent instance of the fusion of Eliot's first and second voices.

When I listen for the metaphorical voice that underlies these poems – what I'll agree to call the *ethos* – I find as in Baron Wormser's poems the courage to gaze steadily at the often painful realities of contemporary life and the

emotional maturity that allows an openness to passionate involvement – through memory, empathy, commitment, and (when appropriate) anger. Both poets have the ripeness of achievement to be able to address their personal histories with unsentimental insight. In their different ways, both command the verbal power to communicate the vision and the response (“I just wanted to tell...”). They vary in their temperaments and consequently in their styles. Sholl, especially in the last poems of this book, extends her courageous openness to several levels of transcendence: through natural beauty in “Redbud,” through music and breakage in “*Don’t Explain*,” through “music and desire, that spontaneous combustion” in “Sparrows,” which leads to the wisdom “to see and not grasp, but be grasped.” Here grammatical *voice*, active to passive – astonishingly carries the deepest revelation.

**Marianne Boruch’s *A Stick that Breaks and Breaks*** (Oberlin, Ohio: Oberlin College Press, 1997, 107 pp., \$22.95 cloth, \$12.95 paper, 0-932440-79-7, 0-932440-80-0) is, like Betsy Sholl’s, a book of one consistent voice. Unlike Sholl, Boruch speaks in a private voice, almost as though exploring each experience on some inner quest. I hear Eliot’s first voice most strongly here: a sensibility seeking out form and significance through the process of composition. The power of the poet’s attention – to memory or to immediate experience – leads the reader off the page to abstraction or inward to an insight into the very process of observation and thought. In “Aubade” the counterpoint of images and consciousness is delicately choreographed. Here’s the first stanza:

Rain. And the birds – one  
 sings as an acrobat might  
 fake a fall  
 downstairs – every seasick turn  
 graceful unto  
 the farthest landing. But rain  
 carries its weight  
 straight down, as sadness does,  
 falling through a thought  
 to flood a room.

No third-voice dramatic characters intrude on this anatomy of consciousness. The reader stays within the consciousness of the speaker, but that consciousness is not self-indulgent. Boruch in the process of poem-making is exploring the power of silences and testing the limits of what language can do. Three poems in the middle of the book dramatize these forces most poignantly. In “The Dove” the poet’s fourth grade son comes home from school and explodes with his revulsion at his schoolmates’ tormenting a barred dove and driving it up into the rafters of the lavatory, where the rest of

the day they could hear it beat its “bloody zig-zag” there. He hurls himself into his mother’s arms, not

anything he’d done for a while, being older,  
 the world mostly amusing  
 or amazing –  
 And it flew then, a circling  
 tight in both of us. Soundless. A descent.

In “Bird Passing” Boruch, suffering from an earache, immerses herself in an account of the passenger pigeon and discovers that “The dream of the past/ is addictive.” After recapitulating the historical facts, and recalling an encounter with a mounted specimen in a museum, she proceeds:

I keep rubbing my ears at night,  
 like the baby books all say  
 is a sign of an infant’s  
 infection. *Because, poor things, they  
 can’t tell you.* But past  
 the faint, witless buzzing I make out  
 dark’s quiet, open window,  
 rustling of leaves. Another turn  
 is coming up. I can hear the roar of years  
 falling, a crushing, hopeless momentum is about to slip  
 into whatever’s next.

In the face of this ominous insight (the lead poem in this volume is “Omens”), the poet turns to what non-verbal resources she has against irremediable loss: a dream of the past, the “great beech forests of the middle west,” then a shift to reverie, “the way/ a room dims in twilight and the eyes/ give up and turn/ backward toward the brain.” And then, in a formal appeal to verbal magic, an incantation of the various tribal names for the bird. Finally, she can visualize, not the mourning dove, “whose black spot accuses us,” but

the cousin who  
 stayed behind, and in the old engravings still  
 darkens whole slow pages  
 with its flight.

The progression is outward to reality from the wish-fulfillment of the dream. It can not suffice, but it is all that language and the poet’s informed imagination can do for her and for us.

The third of these strong central poems is “I Paint My Bad Painting,” one of a group of poems from Hawaii. Here if anywhere I hear the voice that resonates beneath all of Boruch’s work. The beach scene is luminous and

detailed, accurately observed. The tone is modest: "I have /hopes, not many." She traces the progression of her attention: the beauty of the scene recalls a friend she had loved, now dead. "The *no* in every beauty/ is half delirious, half/ a blinding door." She stares and stares, except in the early morning dark, where she merely records the sounds of the garbage collectors and then the silence when they leave, a silence which recalls the "quiet/ the dead own as we own air." This chain of association leads to a magical anecdote about liberating laughter at the death bed of her great-great grandmother (the book is plump full of memorable vignettes and anecdotes). The poet's meditation then moves into a musical memory, of a youth orchestra tuning to *A*, tone that continues to resonate

somewhere in the body, in its  
 moonless night. How many times have I turned death  
 backwards in just this place? And heard  
 this sound? And wanted nothing  
 but the slow-motion  
 each memory makes against that *no* and *no* and *no*.  
 That a certain laughter does it – how?

The poet turns back to her paint box and tries unsuccessfully to paint what the eye sees. Failing that

there's the pure instant  
 when brush hits, and the paper  
 drinks and drinks until the blue-green  
 rests there. What I mean is  
 so many things unsaid.

There is an implied poetic in these poems that is Boruch's own: inquiring, unhurried, open to the smallest outer or inner movement, unwaveringly honest, and deriving its profoundest insights from the artistic act itself. She does not force her materials to conclusions. She explores the wonders of consciousness and human affections and the creative process, while recognizing the mysteries they contain.

**Louise Glück's *Meadowlands*** (New York: Ecco Press, 1996, 80 pp., \$22. cloth, 0-88001-452-0) is significantly different in its voice and voices from these other books, and different in many ways from her earlier work. It has a complex structure: the forty-six poems weave together twenty with (usually updated) versions of the story of Odysseus, Penelope, and Telemachus; twenty-two monologues and dialogues of a contemporary suburban husband and wife, including a subset of three "Meadowlands" poems (referring to the New Jersey football stadium); and nine "Parables." Some of these categories

overlap. The "Parables" are especially interesting; some relate to the Greek poems, some to the suburban poems, and some, like the "Parable of the Dove," are set in some imaginary time and place. All have a "lesson," seemingly a distillation of the poet's view of life and art. The first, "The Parable of the King," ends ominously:

Who could have known  
that wasn't the usual sun  
but flames rising over a world  
about to become extinct?

"The Parable of Flight" ends with the young lover's words about the migrating flocks:

You must learn to think of our passion that way.  
Each kiss was real, then  
each kiss left the face of the earth.

The *ethos* in these poems reverberates farther into darkness than that of any other poet in this group.

I wouldn't presume to identify the poet's own private voice in the *Meadowlands* poems. But perhaps we come closest in "Nostos" (homecoming), referring not, as one might think, to Odysseus's but to a subjective return in the poet, a reversion that suggests an epistemology and a poetic. The poet/suburban wife begins with a reverie about the apple tree that was in the yard forty years ago when it flowered every year exactly on her April birthday. She considers the mental process: "Substitution/ of the immutable/ for the shifting, the evolving./ Substitution of the image/ for relentless earth." Four short phrases/sentences conclude the poem:

Smell of the tall grass, new cut.  
As one expects of a lyric poet.  
We look at the world once, in childhood.  
The rest is memory.

But *Meadowlands* is an opera of many voices. And frequently they are seductively comic. Here's "Telemachus's Detachment," which sets the tone for much of the book:

When I was a child looking  
at my parents' lives, you know  
what I thought? I thought  
heartbreaking. Now I think  
heartbreaking, but also  
very funny.

The arguments of the contemporary husband and wife are hilarious theater, written by a poet whose ear for the cruel interchanges of today's society is exquisite. The couple is perfectly balanced: torn between wanting the other off the face of the earth and wanting the other with a compulsive possessiveness. I wince, but I cannot resist laughing, though the laughter is bitter and shameful. Eliot's second and third voices twine together here. I'd rather not think too much about the dark *ethos* that underlies them.

**Mary Leader's *Red Signature*** (Saint Paul, MN: Greywolf, 1997, 72 pp., \$12.95 paper, 1-55597-255-1) was Deborah Digges's choice for the National Poetry Series. It is a humdinger! All of a sudden Eliot's categories, so useful up till now, fade in relevance. Leader's fertile imagination flashes out in so many directions it defies easy analysis. Flip the pages and the diversity is apparent: no two pages look at all alike. Some are shaped poems. One, "Girls' Names," witty as a concrete poem, looks like an oriental carpet but is more likely a seminar table, with real poets on and around it, all patterned with computer symbols. Another, "Both," displays, *en face*, an elegantly-spaced lozenge-shaped epitaph for Mary Walsh Webb Haddox (1898-1988) and a chain of three tightly-spaced lozenges for "A Mary (1948- )", presumably the poet herself, with two more lozenges shadowed in with dots below the rollicking three.

This is a musical book. Not only is the prosodic music eloquent, but "Chromatic Scales Against Impossible Loves" marches down the page in successful scoring of the notes, ending like BACHlikeBachlikebachlikebachlikeBachlikeBACH. Elsewhere, if we are to hear an actual song being sung, the actual notes are there ("Lulling"). We get a poem that is a march, another a ditty, and pure verbal lyrics like "Middle Daughter's Song." There are documentary poems, including one, "Probate," that appears to be one long found poem: a catalogue of the effects of one Clara (Mrs. Everett R.) Hake. I cannot guess how much is the invention of this astonishingly inventive poet, but I can say that the four pages of accumulated items produce a poignantly real Shawnee County woman.

Leader combines a playfulness with a keen eye and ear for character in many of these poems. "Trimmed with Eyelet Lace" is in the voice of a girl ironing a nightgown and arguing in her mind with her mother. Thirteen lines give us all we need to know about the young woman, including her fantasy life that lends significance to the ironing. This poet has a true narrative gift. As a bonus a row of computer symbols down the left margin creates a border of eyelet lace. In the many portraits in this book, in all their diverse voices and forms, Leader combines compression with the evocation of implied story. The story can be almost a play. Here's a sample of "They Cruised the Rappahannock Early in the Spring." One voice complains that she's always



being asked "The direction, please."

"You mean of the river?" "No. The direction of hooks."

"Well...It depends on how you hold it!" "Of course, Silly, how *do* you?" "Hmmm. I don't have a hook. Took it

*Somewhere...* But I lost my wedding ring. And my horse, Too. Hal went and sold my horse Red Wing. Back in Ohio." "Which direction? Up? By the way, have you seen Lars?"

"I'm sorry. I don't know a Lars." "You don't know Lars Johnson? Well, I'll swan." "I know a *Cynthia Johnson*." "Oh? Is Arlene Johnson your wife or your lover?" "No!

I mean neither. I'm a *woman*." "You say you're lonesome?" "Yes, but that's not –" "Did you remember your Lithium?" "No, but that's not –" "Is Arlene Johnson handsome?"

"No, I'd say pretty. She's a *woman*. Except it's Cynthia, Though. You keep saying Arl –" "WATCHIT!!" "That rail Doesn't always hold." "Oh, *look!* Japonica! Forsythia!"

It would take much more space than I have to catalogue the range of Leader's mercurial imagination and technical virtuosity. Let me just say that in all the seemingly infinite variety of voices, there are several unifying forces at work. One is a drive to find form in the welter of observed and lived life. Under the rippling humor is a keen organizing intelligence. Leader has an almost classical impulse to symmetry. Poems often come in pairs. Here are two that illustrate her ability to enter into the consciousness of another, somewhat like Betsy Sholl's: "Boy Unobscured on the Highest Riser," a tribute to the fantasy life of the boy with "mimeograph ink" spilled across his face before birth, and "Girl at Sewing Machine," in a Hopper painting, a fat girl, not pretty and without prospects, who in the art of her sewing makes a "lovely shape." Later is a pair of poems, one for the poet's daughter, one for her son, both about to leave home, but tenderly addressed.

The only poem that wanders on the page in open form is "To a Girl with a Satchel," and the subject of that poem is the wandering the girl will be free to do as soon as she gets her car. It begins lightheartedly with excursions in the four (symmetrical) directions—a tribute to the Oklahoma landscape. But within the poem the voice changes. The poet's voice pours outward at the end to where the girl

Will write Grass, like Ocean,  
Because it's Full of Sound moving all around  
And there

Will see the red-tailed hawk, will watch him soar  
 And when, in empty air, you hear his high high cry  
your heart!  
 your mate!

Will feel a body could die  
 Here is my wish – May someone know  
 To bury you there when you do really die  
 Or scatter your ashes

Which will it be? Which will you need  
more –

A moment flying in wind  
or an eon laid down with rain

Even in this poem of flinging outward, this poet's mind seeks out a symmetry.

Beneath all this fertility of invention, there is a unifying *ethos*. It can be heard most clearly in the openly autobiographical poems at the end, but it sounds through the entire book. It eludes definition – complex, humorous, affectionate, engaged, designing, dreaming, yearning. There is a haunting archetypal figure who emerges in various forms – a woman with a satchel, a boy with a birthmark, a plump girl, not pretty. All these figures have rich inner lives; some are artists in the broadest sense. All have the discipline to accept the fact of inevitable disappointment and to go on. Discipline and yearning – a curious symmetry, but a splendid one.

Each of these poets is a unique chord of voices; each alone is a power. Combined, they are an amplitude.

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The 1998 *Poet's Market* (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 1997, 604 pp., \$22.99 paper, 0-89879-796-9) has a new editor, **Chantelle Bentley**, assisted by **Tara A. Horton**. It lists 1,800 poetry markets, as well as conferences, workshops, writing colonies, organizations and publications useful to poets, contests and awards, state and provincial grants, and this year a glossary of poetic forms and styles. Also new this year is a chapter on internet opportunities for poets, with an informative overview of electronic resources – websites of interest to poets and publications accepting e-mail submissions. There are also expanded interviews with ten poets and editors.

**M.K.S.**

## EDITOR'S NOTES

We are grieved to hear of the death of David Ignatow on November 17. He was a good friend of *The Beloit Poetry Journal* and a personal friend as well. From 1952-1958 he served on the Editorial Board, wrote many reviews, and edited for us distinguished chapbooks honoring Walt Whitman and William Carlos Williams. In 1975, on the magazine's twenty-fifth anniversary, David Stocking expressed our gratitude and affection by editing a chapbook of poems honoring David Ignatow himself.

Here I'd like to reprint one of his poems from our Summer 1956 issue:

### ELEGY

In every beautiful song is a promise of sleep.  
I will sleep if you will sing to me,  
but sing to me of sleep.  
When the bells have hushed in the towers  
and the towers are hushed from their sounds,  
sing to me, strolling on silent streets.

David Ignatow

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An **Index** of the first 25 years (1950-1975) of *The Beloit Poetry Journal* is now on line on our web page:

<http://zinnia.umfacad.maine.edu/~sharkey/bpj>

The index is searchable by author. We hope that poets and scholars find it useful.

M. K. S.