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COVER

James S. Greene, photographs from Hong Kong, 1955.

→

An arrow at the bottom of a page
means no stanza break.

KARL ELDER
Demarcations

The Hyphen

Had you a whole line
of them you'd have your own train.
Imagine the freight.

The Colon

Eyes of a dead man
lying on his side, looking
into a bright light.

The Comma

Ah, giant embryo
with tail, what say you—yin or
yang, you little shrimp.

The Semicolon

A Spanish peanut,
a cashew—which's the best fit
for the appendix?

The Question Mark

Eerie character—
he whose lobe of an artist's
left ear is severed.

The Exclamation Point

Dah-dit. A signal
in Morse code turned on end: N,
you must solve for it.

The Period

How we've come to draw
with such sheer economy
the perfect circle.

NANCE VAN WINCKEL

**Circle One: You Have, You
Don't Have, My Full Attention**

I. Holy

Putting the holes in the Pieta
in a poem that's of no account,
and the man I love out of sorts.
He's after clean socks, scolding, *Off,*
aren't you, in your own
little world? The light purple
inside the gown's folds
so there's no use denying it.
Her white spine—a steep,
spotless corridor. Up and down it,
the one wielding the putty knife
used to mop, eons ago,
on her knees for the shine.

II. The Little-Owned World

Going in is lighting a cigarette
then just standing in line with your eyes closed.
The gargoyles, zygotic zombie twins
keep the guard. She waits. Waits her turn.

And a voice calling from far
off, *No, the blue socks.* The echo
of a name to catch her up
on the back side: saying *Sweetie,*
the blue. Saying
Christ. Saying *Gone.*

III. An Egg or Two Shy of an Omelet

Red velvet rope strung between the two
gargoyles. Stepping over it. Letting go
the last of the smoke. Hesitating
on the top step for just a sec
to say No, I don't know where
the chickens' new nests are. We give them
a perfectly good barn, and they just
go on freelancing, nevermind
the horned owls and the wolf-dogs.

IV. My Fullest Intention

Back in. Meaning to patch a gown. Stare
into the Highness's marble eyes.

Lugging a bucket of white goop, and the grief.
Sloth inside. An ugly beauty.
Bite down and hold on.

But having to shout first out the window, Hey
you have to stick your hand in there
deeper, farther under, and just feel your way
around; what else can I tell you,
the eggs are brown, you'll
find them, keep looking.

The white halls, the lush foyer,
and the gold bangles rattle, going
round and round. Still, one must answer
when the voice says, *Fuck, alright,*
give us a kiss then from that world.
The wet mop drops. The bitter
through the bitten-down. And *Ooo,*
the lips say, *ooo. . . sweet.*

JEFF GUNDY

What the Boy Knows

*There's a boy in you about three
Years old...*

—Robert Bly, “One Source of Bad Information”

When nothing is working, hit something hard.

Or just yell.

Except for Mom girls are stupid.

The only good rocks are small enough to throw.

Books are stupid, cats are stupid, dishes are stupid.

Turtles are cool. Ants are cool. Fire is cool.

Flat rocks will skip but not all of them.

The only way to tell is to throw them all.

The best thing is playing in the mud with a stick.

We need a big dog that hates everyone but us.

Not too big a stick.

The more the dog barks the braver we'll be.

JEFF GUNDY

What the Old Guy Says

Ignorance will get you somewhere, but you won't like it.

If the water is way down it makes a new shore.

No matter what the signs say, somebody
will nail a new cleat to the tree.

That thing the waves do? It's a word.

A good rope can hang a long time and still be ready.

You think you know your name, and all the time
the world is sliding through your mouth.

God made the water so you'd realize you're not in charge.

The longer the first skip, the shorter the rest.

It's dark down there and cold, but not dead.

JEFF GUNDY

The Sadness of Women and Water

1.

How many lies can the wrens
and the cardinals try
before they find
the one to save them?

Who wouldn't want to be
the favored son?

In the twists of last year's grass.
In the heavy water sprawled and chill.
In the red and yellow swirls
the leaves will soon crawl through.

2.

Go out easy. Pick the feet up.
Breathe and wait. Is it control you need?

Some praise? A good rest? Tell a story.
Once I told a story. Once

we hugged in the hospital room
and when I left the door locked behind me.

You still don't get it. Who
gets it. Tell your fear. No, show it.

Oh no. Let's have a joke,
an anecdote, let's say how the thin clouds

tip away from darkness, how
the new shoots rub themselves awake,

how the boys yell up behind me.
My friends are all stressed, tired

or crazy but I'm OK, it's Friday,
burgers on the grill.

3.

It's easier to love each other
when the world allows. When three girls
are dancing on the stones. When for years
you've listened to the choir
and known the highest, sweetest voice
was coming home with you.
Then she says *it's just so hard*
out there and you say, where?

4.

What to do when you need something
besides blue sky, ground ivy,

yellow-blue water and crumbs of stone,
when all you know is the sadness of water

and women and your own guilty joy
when the quarry changes color changes shape

everywhere your eyes glance off it
when the nurse comes to say it's time

and the door clicks shut

what to do

declare survive suppose
adjust hush

forty-four degrees
the sun still lying low

the red-splashed duck churns gently off
the heron blank and sober as a sword

hauls its lanky bones at last
toward some other shore

tomorrow the women will still be sad
tomorrow the water will still be blue

STAN SANVEL RUBIN

Ooze

: to flow or leak out slowly,
to disappear or ebb, like time,
or love, or music from
a hidden box whose source
you'll never find, or secrets
slowly lost so that in time they're
not secrets anymore, but slime,
the stuff that covers everything
at last, the bog of feelings bagged
like eggs, the complex mucus,
the visceral fecund night ragged
as a flag—breaking and unbreaking—
from which we came.

STAN SANVEL RUBIN

Summons

When they come, you could be on the island of Paqueta,
its little houses drenched with flowers, the sun-tossed beach
gently breathing the warm bay.

When they ask for you, you might be west of McMurdo,
watching the sun crush pack ice to jewel,
Shackleton's wounded ship a blue shadow

at horizon, waiting to be found. But you
would go blind to see the albatross of yourself
let loose now, so you may want to answer

the voices that insist on what you owe.
The Vista Chinesa shows you everything: Rio
in the palm of a hand, the rocks bone-stark and bare.

This party goes all night. As rich and poor
dissolve in parrot colors, press
your ear to ice. Hear fin whales work

their way to Terra Nova. The cold sea calling.

LYNNE KNIGHT
Wrapped Songs

One thing leads into another or back to its own beginning: it is all the same, wrapping the past inside the future, the present inside the past—wrapping, in other words, time inside its loss.
—Serena Pichou, “The Exile Within”

within

The wind sings in a smaller
language now, winds around
her ankles, twists her hair
She’s inside, window shut,
but the wind slips across
her bed like an old water snake
to feed on the quick fish
of her whisperings
Sometimes she grabs the wind
by the throat to keep it from
swallowing its snake song,
full of pulses and thrust
When attendants bring food,
she never lets on she can’t hold
the spoon because her body’s
too light She just stares
Then she sings, breath
like wind being pulled

stranded

The bed makes a *hih! hiss!*
if she moves More snakes,
these from deep in sand
A dry heat takes her by the hand,
leads her through a space
she might have called Saharan
before so many words left her,
left her voice thin as sand
Dunes Oases A cold moon
shaking its silver down on trees
though there are no trees, just sand—
unending, rootless—
nothing but more of it running
through her fingers
as she holds up her hand,

→

watching light slip
around it, white glove she'll lose
as soon as the heat rushes off
into night, leaving her

forlorn

Someone has brought her flowers
like flowers for the dead,
a big leafy fan of them to wave
the spirit along the path
But flowers have heads, there are
too many, crowding around her
like the dead She screams
for help, but too weakly,
a bleat nurses quiet
with water, words *There, there*
Still she bleats
Gladioli, chrysanthemums
toppling
And the yellow eyes
of the daisies, so

gone

A daughter comes Oh, she's old,
her hands lumpy with veins,
the seam in her head
faded at the root
Daughter looks under the sheet
Little torn sounds: sighs?
Daughter leans closer,
nurse-y-nurse now: *There, there*
But the seam in her head is ashen
The cord that once
held them together is long

taken

They strap her into the chair,
wheel her into the gleam
of sterilized tile
She drops the lids of her eyes
like a lizard, leans back

→

Reptilian creep of her hand
on the chair arm Little *ssssssss*
as she slides forward, trying
to cross to the other side
There, there Someone yanks
the belt tight over her soft
old stomach, pats her hair
She smiles, reptilian *ssssssss*
as her tongue darts out, back
But it's too cold for a desert
Better not to let on
Better to hold still like a rock
in the sun, like someone
trying not to be

them

She's on the beach, sees
her husband farther down,
coming toward her
Hello! hello! but her cries
blend with the gulls, dive into
the waves Her husband's
ahead of her now *Hello!*
Her cries slip inside waves,
rise inside gulls
He's stopped walking
to cup his hand, light a cigaret
It has to be him
But what's that heaped-up
thing behind him, all
barnacled—her mother?
She calls and calls
Nothing but gulls to hear
Her feet sink so far
she can't feel

anything

The one in the next bed cries
Help me! I'm desperately ill!
Blind, calling out where
there are no prophets

→

I'm desperately ill, desperately!
over and over in and out
night and day *desperately!*
though sometimes, late at night
or in the quiet of afternoon
when drugs bring sleep,
the blind one cries
only *des, des, des,*
little one-note rehearsal
she hears as *death*
or the *wrrethhh*
of birds swooping down
She covers her eyes
to hide them from beaks
The dark holds

more

They take the *desperately*
shouting one away, leaving
the next bed empty like the desert
tomb she has dreamed of,
sand drifting its long cloak
over her, but no, there has been
no death, only emptiness
that feels like death when she takes
one hand in the other, sings
Where can I put this?
then lays it on her knees,
strange glove that won't keep still
as she pulls it toward her, licks,
chews, and in this way goes on
waiting for nothing

next

They mash her food
like a baby's to keep her
from choking
She takes, swallows while
inside her skull
everything is
breaking apart,

→

the nerve paths
like bridges torn in half
Still she keeps
trying to get across
all that comes

loose

She's picking huckleberries
from bushes at the farm
The ripest are sweet enough
to eat, so she steals them
to her tongue, eyes
alert for spies Her shoes
are stained almost like
blood so she has to run down
to Long Pond to rinse everything off,
hands, shoes, mouth, tongue
To beguile the fish she begins
a hymn, leaning, till a water stain
blooms, spreads its way up
the cloth of her skirt *She needs
to be changed, the tube's leaking*
a nurse says, pulling it out like
an old seed pod but *oh!* full of
blood while the pond
recedes and the sweet taste
on her tongue comes

apart

She can't find her breasts
She feels in the bed for them,
under her knees
She touches the bony cage
Pigeon breast
she hears a nurse murmur
She traces the jut, the fingery
bones Are there wings?
feathers? punishment?
Why else shrivel her, leave her
in this long bed
where she keeps falling

quietly

She has dark bruises on her legs,
color of blue plums, soft like
plum skin ready to split open
The daughter touches,
halfthinking moths will rise up,
My mother, my moth—
breakage, diminishment
as she lies in her skin
waiting to go
where everything goes

together

It's almost midnight
She's talking to the sweet ones
in her dreams, lullaby syllables
drifting the air, wrapping around
one another before they sink
back toward her mouth
to become other shapes or
wrap and unwrap
her breath full of want
She calls for her best things
Some days the three stillborn ones
come with grown hands and feet
to sit by her side and whisper
Then the two daughters come,
whisper louder
She pulls at the sheet,
smooths it ready Oh, let her
cover them all
while they are still hers, still

TONY TRIGILIO
The Party Turns Fifty

Television is about people sitting in their living room looking at their things.

—Allen Ginsberg

One room
 across the river
 from Boston—a man, woman, their TV.

 Night spills too soon, morning
evening colder now, their summer fades.
 Behind baby blue blazer,
 Dan Rather picks each syllable

 like fish at market, red-eyed carp
left raw, washed clear in mounds of ice.
 No one listens here across the river from Boston—
 a man, woman, TV, blue light speechless.

 Dan Rather says, “The extravaganza in
Tiananmen was the climax of a day
 of highly organized activities.”
 Plaster lips shape the words

 his frozen face has blushed,
each syllable melts ice cubes
 to footage, tanks belly-crawling
 Changan Avenue into the Square.

The man remembers
 that day two weeks past martial law
 they tanned body-to-body, soft ocean stones.

 They met before the bloody common.
He almost stayed at home with his things
 alone, television clean—the news white china
 caught under glass over there.

 She tended bar weekends, days stuffed files
for Harvard Yenching Institute.
 They talked enough that night
 of martial law, visiting scholars,

eyes skipped from peel
bottle wrappings to barroom TV.
Two weeks later they scooped
stone plains of sand in palms.

Now their TV, across the Charles,
the fiftieth birthday of the revolution
and they say no one really died June 4th.

Dan's voice hoses blood
from stone until there's no such thing
as history. He says, "Under the watchful eye
of overhead windows, protestors voiced their anger

toward Beijing." The screen breaks blue shadows
on their faces, September windows chill
the backs of their necks. He touches her,
a moment between two breaths or blinks:

That which appears is good, she says,
and that which is good appears—and touches him back,
secrets they finally understand,
a box for all their things. Two chairs,

two cups of tea, the television, Dan Rather:
"Fireworks in Tiananmen Square today,
but only the festive kind." Half past the hour.
Autumn air gnaws their ears, their living room

grows too cold. Breaths mingle,
with steam from their cups
with blue chill from the screen
then vanish inside the square of these four thin walls.

GEORGE EKLUND

The News from the World

From the sunlit room the body pulls air
into the terrible dream of itself,
the dream it carries, unstoppable,
muted only in light.

The blood chill of the self
held in the dumb pulse of the planet.

The hands become difficult to warm
though the mind is filled
with a confluence of fires.
Burning insects rising from the snow.
Fighting off a swarm with my cold hands,
the shadows of gloves and trees
consume the little flags I'd left behind
to mark the spots where I might be found.

How did our gods die?
The news from the world is still the same.
Get healthy and invest.
Watch this screen; here we go.
But all I see are burning hornets
rising from the snow.

In the ice storm I parked illegally.
The world wants us to keep going.
But the body is a horror to think and talk about.
This is what happens while waiting
for an infection to clear,
for the removal of scattered beings from the highway.
Electrified jewels of blood, all of us.
Maybe I'll be smashed into if I don't move.
When it comes time to kill a god,
any season will do.

The body a miracle of cracking glass in the cold.
And the news from the world is still the same.
Here we go. Watch this screen.
Get healthy. Your god is dead. Invest.
The hands galactic in the chill of self.

Could we pull the cold out of each other
or smother the fires beneath the skull?
As we wonder, the percussion is taken
from the orchestra, then string by string silenced.
Then the cry from the animal, taken.
The news from the world is relentless
and makes itself correct.

I cannot do the math on this latest collision,
another plane dropped into the ocean.
I cannot do the math on the citizens of the globe.
Protect your god as best you can
even as the blood chills, galactic, spreading itself,
pulling at the nerves of the mouth.
Burning hornets rise from the snow
and the news from the world is still the same,
the dream of the self, exactly.
Invest. Get healthy.

JAY ROGOFF

Latin Class

Herschel will be pissed
I know. We missed
last week and have practiced
 exactly once even
 after I cobbled some Van
 Dyke Parks and Steely Dan
 into a fake merengue tape.
In a panic I tell you it's hope-
less but your Presbyterian genes insist
 so we try to look invisible
 among the couples trip-
 ping over each other in the high school
 gym and shrug when Herschel's cool
 skeptical
 eye stares us down.
He seizes Christy his partner by the wrist
 and they whip
 around each other in an impossible
 new step
hips driving like some insane
Caribbean machine
 and the others' jaws drop
 yeah right so I can tell we're all on an equal
 Anglo footing. We walk it through
 fast way too
fast he cues the tape
 and suddenly it's carnival
for spastics screaming out for correction
 Fellas! Fellas! oh
the wrist
 this way the hip
 that and now I'm not step-
 ping on your feet and the planetary whirl
and shift of weight and tension
 in our arms feel
fine
 as I catch
 you in the orbital
 swing and watch
your eyes light up Caribbean
 while Herschel

→

bails out of our lurch-
ing path his smile
I imagine
barely suppressed
at us the Dominican champion
estrellas orientales as we dip
dangerously only to rise up in the East.

LEONARD KRESS
Living in the Candy Store

*Thus a distinguished German naturalist has asserted the
weakest part of my theory is that I consider all organic beings
imperfect.*

—Darwin, *The Origin of Species*

The scent still rose from the cellar's cold marble slab,
large enough to lay out, sponge down, and re-dress
a dead family, years after the last butter cream
cooled down on it. Strangers still knocked on the grated door
even after we trashed the sign and displayed
our own kids instead, in the huge plate glass window.
*Where's old Elsie Ness, they said, that old German Lady,
whose father played the thundering organ?* We sold the pipes
but it didn't help—others came. The man whose pee
trickled in each day from the alley, the Belfaster
who bartered guns for whiskey and passed out
on our stoop, the lady who peeled off her shirt
and revved to the swerving cranked car radios, her nipples
like stogies. She came too, pressing them up
against our window. All that sweetness,
noxious as sewer gas, we wanted it all
for ourselves—the infrastructure
of our longing. Out back, in the bricked-in
walled-up garden, the barren nectarine tree went wild,
overloaded and drooping, dark ooze scaffolding
its branches, and bushels of flaming globules
uncontained, supersweet, inedible.

LEONARD KRESS
Sandy Beach at Crane Creek

There are no cranes in these marshes, there never were,
just grebes and coots and trumpeter swans with long,
thin and tapered necks, rising up to the song
of anxious waves. The stinging shallow water
unchanged since the ice age. There are no cranes,
just short-eared owls trolling the open meadow
and cabin cruisers and jet skis bobbing below
the scorching sun. The name deceived, so now we can

betray each other guiltlessly. There are
no cranes in these wetlands, and thus, no rules,
all misnamed. Into the crushed-shell sand
our children dig, and wade out much too far.
One of us embodies desire, and thus steals
the day—the rest, by the unmanned lifeguard stand.

JANET KAPLAN

None of It

God lists Who'll Live Who'll Die
and the year begins
Grandfather will have none of it
his name on neither list
memory the god/hell
schnapps cutter straight edge
gangrened foot
taunts to his matronly wife
A handmirror? Why don't you go look in the toilet?

o

Love asleep in the next room
the lover sleeping, sanctity of his orderly breaths
I've worked when I should have slept
ailanthus by the window murmuring
cat asleep on the papers, 5:30 a.m.

o

He will trundle cane-first
cane-first but muscular, masculine
in blizzards, any extreme
left shoe laced
to fake foot

Vu gaistu? Away from you!

The wife and granddaughter: his foes in the living room
feel our lives contract a chest pain
and he disappears

o

Lit screen in the here and now
messy desk morning murmuring in the yard
mask placed firmly
over the day, I-mask
setting order upon the day to come *upon the face
of the deep*

o

Trundles out cane-first
and disappears
jays nudging the linden
settling back in the light-dark
love asleep the
sanctity of his orderly breaths
my window going gray-green
(look elsewhere for a mirror)
I should have slept

upon the pain

of the void

Let there be

light

o

Here, now, an exile's roughened face
lucent, caught
here, now, on the screen
mutable on the glass
now the softened frame of infancy, now
of old age, nasal folds deep ravines

Lithuania ca. 1900

Flushing 1979

Away from you!

o

But he turns toward me,
his foe in the living room,
turns
with all the eyes of the grave

A handmirror? Go look

o

in the blank screen *Go look*
in the blizzard
in the desert
in the light-dark
turns
and disappears,
his siblings calling their murdered names
in my throat

JOANNA TRZECIAK

The Joy of Writing

Where is the written doe headed, through these written woods?
To drink from the written spring
that copies her muzzle like carbon paper?
Why is she raising her head, does she hear something?
Perched on four legs borrowed from the truth
she pricks up her ears from under my fingertips.
Silence—even this word rustles across the page
and parts the branches
stemming from the word *woods*.

Above the blank page, poised to pounce, lurk
letters, which might spell trouble,
penning sentences
from which there will be no escape.

There is, in an ink drop, a goodly supply
of hunters, eyes winked,
ready to charge down this steep pen,
circle the doe, and sight their guns.

They forget there is no life here.
Different laws, black and white, hold sway.
The blink of an eye will last as long as I want,
allowing division into little eternities
full of bullets stopped in mid-flight.
Nothing would happen forever here if I said so.
Not even a leaf will fall without my go-ahead,
nor will a blade of grass bend under the full stop of the hoof.

Then is there such a world
where I wield fate unfettered?
A time I bind with strings of signs?
Existence without end at my command?

The joy of writing.
The prospect of preserving.
Revenge of a mortal hand.

JOANNA TRZECIAK

On Death, without Exaggeration

It can't tell a joke
from a star, from a bridge,
from weaving, from mining, from farming,
from shipbuilding, or baking.

When we're discussing our future plans
it's got to get in the final word,
off the topic.

It doesn't even know the things
directly tied to its trade:
digging graves,
assembling coffins,
cleaning up after itself.

So busy killing
it's doing it badly,
without system or skill.
As if it were just learning on each of us.

Triumphs aside
how about the defeats,
the missed blows
and second tries.

At times it lacks the strength
to swat a fly out of thin air.
To many a caterpillar
it's lost a crawling race.

These bulbs, pods,
feelers, fins, tracheae,
nuptial plumage and winter fur
all testify to a backlog
in its slothful work.

Ill will does not suffice
and even our help during wars and coups d'etat
is too little so far.

Hearts are pounding in eggs.
The skeletons of infants are growing.
Seeds are sprouting their first two leaves,
and often even tall trees on the horizon.

Whoever insists that it is omnipotent
is himself living proof
that omnipotent it's not.

There is no life which
couldn't be immortal,
if only for a split second.

Death
always arrives that split second late.

In vain it rattles the knob
of the invisible door.
However much one has gotten done,
that much it cannot take away.

MARGARET AHO
I dream I'm leaving

an island

leaving adults

mulling the ambit, mulling

the waves, wagged.

The children are of one

mind. (push

off) The children have no

bodies; no body.

All around

on every side: thiss ...

this ... lapping spongy ground

lapping what won't give off

heat light some-

thing breathable. The children can't

breathe! (hush ...)

The children are of one mind. (push

off) No

body. But see how they see, with a mind's

eye, thiss

woman with her back to them, turning

→

toe thigh spine tri ceps flexed

finger

circling the calendar touching that

round

where the moon should be?

Feel the hubbub?

Feel the sudden homing of one

mind humming

like a tran-

sept, like a wing-

span looking

for a jagged

pulse

to impale it, trans-

fix it? Find it. Fix

this barbed heart pushed off out

here!

(here ...

here ...)

roosting rocking pierced through breathe

→

under and all around

(this ...

motion of breathing ...

this breathing ...

MARGARET AHO
Between wand and welt

between flourishing baton

and ferule, this

virgule

self-splitting with a hiss below the right

pectoral

slung forward from the pinned

wrists

into which my hand has reached

has wedged itself

MARGARET AHO
When he emerged—

exposing through a bottomless
foxhole the kitchen
carpet carpet glue linoleum linoleum
adhesive ply
wood sub
floor boards
above the cellar ceiling cellar
floor geo
pitch and plates he'd somehow
augered through and
stood there
on his hind legs, drawing on his gloves: chrome
and citron—
I didn't know him. He held a ferule. It was
blue
for music. He was
virgulate
himself, leaning toward me: a rust-red
slash between worlds.

MARGARET AHO
Eye-shaped, mouth-shaped

slot

between the fifth and sixth

ribs, its scourged

lids/lips

probed

by Caravaggio, up to the first

knuckle, dis-

believing ... But say you plunge in

two, three, wedge in four

fingers, say

its almond-shape admits

your unopposable

thumb, your

avid

wrist. Say your whole hand, having

entered,

grasps a complex

clapping ... As if a set

of castanets

were at the heart, here

and improvising

→

something

hot

and catchy, full

of longing ... Say your own heart

catches on, catches

fire, starts

clapping back: a burning

conversation

heart to heart. Say this

is death, this

in your face

flamen-

co

eye to eye, mouth to mouth. Clap

clap ... Your heels

begin to stutter. Please

no

words. Put a rose between your

teeth:

this is life.

BRUCE A. JACOBS

Rush Hour

My Honda drops
steeply as severed sleep
off the gummy lip
of the highway,
swims like a sidewinder
up the stone-dust cut bank
of the hill toward my
house, a cinder block
trapezoid just a shade
less gray than the color of
tonight's world.

The car door closes
behind me, an exit
from time, it being
a hundred thirty years
since my next-door neighbors
gave up their slaves. I am
a black man
stepping from a
black car
onto loose footing that feels
familiar as darkness
here, where farmers grow
sweet white corn
and I pay good rent
for my peace and quiet

—although tonight
the cicadas are out
like God's power saw,
some great unoled ratchet,
their on-and-off friction
jaggedly endless,
a wheel of steel fists
making a hammer of
even each instant's
pocket of silence.

I moved here for this:
a quiet as trenchant
as the thick wall of fluid
around my brain
that afternoon years ago
when, at age 10,
I knelt on the sidewalk
of my father's drug store
and clung to my task
of picking up litter
while three black boys
kicked me in the head,
drove their pointed shoes
into my skull
again and again,
like slow-motion jackhammers
or bullets on springs.

I heard nothing, only
the dull ring of space travel
while they swung away,
struck at my brain
with their calls of
Pussy, Rich Boy, White-Assed
Punk, their boots pounding
upside the head of
a kid on his knees
who had never fought
for a thing that he owned.
I held onto the pavement
with my fingernails.
Like a beetle who could
scale concrete or walk out
from beneath a car's tire,
I waited them out,
watched their thin legs
recede. Then I rose
with the trash.

I moved here for this:
a quiet as inviolable
as wet cotton, like
the airless childhood minutes
I waited, buried beneath sheets
after hearing my father's car
pant into the driveway.
Every night, I rehearsed
the smooth motion: my hand
gliding beneath the bed
for the baseball bat,
feeling how I would
dive like a hawk
if he were to loom over my mother
with just one more threat
about the men he imagined
she traded for his women.

I could almost see it:
how he would hunt me,
scouting the opposition,
how the white light would burn
his shape into my doorway,
how I would square up,
greet his tall glare
with one whistling arc
of my Louisville Slugger,
send his skull
rattling into the bleachers.
I took to going to bed
early, as bait, a decoy,
like my favorite bass plug,
jointed, wounded, barbed.

I moved here for this:
a quiet as clear as the
hard gaps between blares
of pickup-truck horns
toward my windows at night,
a quiet as sharp as the chink
of lofted beer bottles

→

against the brittle fence rails
of this collapsing horse farm,
a quiet as full-mouthed
as a black boy
eating mashed potatoes
in junior high school
the day a black upperclassman
crook-walked to the table
I shared with white friends,
demanded, with irony,
if I was a Soul Brother,
let me stutter, "No," then
pulled snot from his own nose,
smeared it on my plate,
told me softly, "Eat it"
before easing away.

I moved here for this:
Air quiet and thick
as a man's longest swallow.
A thirty-year commute
to five unmowed acres
of every sound the night
might pull from my throat
if I were able
to speak.

BRUCE A. JACOBS

Jeep Cherokee

You've never known
a single Indian
who wasn't painted
onto a football helmet
or branded in chrome
on a tailgate,
but there you go,
off mashing the landscape
like some edge-city explorer,
flinging yourself toward
new worlds beyond the driveway,
Lewis and Clark
with a seat belt.
Go ahead, you trampling trooper,
you goose-stepping little
Godzilla, you shining beast
of raging fashion,
riding the big teeth
of your tires as if you
would ever follow a dirt road
anywhere but to a car wash.
This is America,
and you're free to drive
anything you can buy
but I will tell you:
Hitler would love this car—
a machine in which
even the middle class
can master the world,
purchase their way through peril
safely as senators.
This is a car for
a uniformed strongman,
a one-car motorcade
through a thatched village
of strangers.
This is the car that will
replace Prozac.
This is the car that Barbie buys
with mad money
after the date with Angry White Ken.

→

This the car every KKK member
wants to drive after dark.
This is the car that makes it safe
to be hateful in public.
Go ahead. Climb in. Look
at yourself, way up there
on the bridge of this
thick-windowed ship of enterprise.
Everybody knows
the only way today is to
buy your way through,
be bigger, be better,
be a bully, be a barger,
be sure you're safe from the poor,
bustle your way through
each day's bombardment
with the muscle of royalty.
You've got the power
to bring back the monarchy
four fat tires at a time.
Go anywhere. You're entitled.
You have squasher's rights.
Onward! Accelerate,
you brawny bruising winner,
you self-saluting junta on wheels,
you reclamer of gold-bricked streets.
Democracy is for people
stuck in small cars
and God has never ruled
through traffic laws.
Get used to the feeling
of having your way.
Each broad cut of the steering wheel
is your turn at conquest,
the power-assisted triumph
of the me
in heavy traffic.
You are rolling proof
that voting is stupid,
that the whole damn machine is fixed
before it leaves the factory,

→

that fairness is a showroom,
that togetherness is for bus riders,
that TV has the right idea:
there is just you in a small room
on the safe side of glass,
with desire spread out before you
like a ballroom without walls,
and you will not be denied,
you've got the moves and the view,
you don't need government, unions,
bank regulation, mercy,
the soft hands of strangers.
You've got 4-wheel drive
and a phone, you've got
the friendship of a reinforced chassis,
you've got empathy for dictators
without knowing it,
you've got freedom from rear-view mirrors,
you've got wide-bodied citizenship,
you've gained Custer's Revenge:
caissons packed with children and soccer balls
coasting across the plowed prairie,
history remodeled with one great
blaring of jingles and horns:

Hail Citizen King!
Hail the unswerving settler!
Hail the rule of logo!
Hail Jeep Cherokee!

COLETTE INEZ
Adiocito, Mother Snow

Vamos. Enough.
The red sauce of the sun is hotting up
the sky as dawn fizzles out
like my baby-making eggs.

Snow on the zig zagged roads, gray gutters,
vaya con whoever's in that Rolls,
silver-white like El Norte touching down
where the blue wind blows. Verdad?

What's in my futuro? Get me a reader
of palms. "Your mound's in Venus," she says.
"Planet?" I ask. "Plan what? Ees no problem
I see three kids."

Listen, my eggs are no-shows
and I'm not even Latina.
That "ez" at the end of my "In" name
comes from my padre's paramour

in the Sunshine State. Randyman. Long ago. Aye.
Call me Milagros. I got a lucky vida. Well, maybe.
Could be. Nobody's saying what it's like
to sleep under stones. Where have they been,

the ones who made me? Dondé estan?
Nice to see you, Mother Snow, tending to the rain.

ALBERT GOLDBARTH

A Continuum

Saint Isidore (born c. 560 AD) wrote, according to the *Fortean Times*, “a 20-volume work encapsulating all the learning of the time, from theology to furniture.”

1.

Well I went went went to heaven, baby baby

—There was light in my head

(de DOOP, ba, de DOOP, ba, de DOOP de DOOP)

I say there was glory in my brain and in my breath

And in my heart, oh but instead

(de DOOP, ba, de DOOP, ba, de DOOP de DOOP)

You know I just wanted your fine bodyyyyyyzoop!

Layin’ by me in our bed

(de DOOP de DOOP de DOOP, ba, de DOOP de DOOP)

Well I went to the world of abstractions, baby baby

—I could float in the sky

(de DOOP, ba, de DOOP, ba, de DOOP de DOOP)

I say I was there with Truth and the Infinite,

With Thought, and with the Soul, and I could fly

(de DOOP, ba, de DOOP, ba, de DOOP de DOOP)

But I just wanted to be in bed with you,

Lovin’ in J-e-r-s-e-y!

(de DOOP de DOOP de DOOP, ba, de DOOP de DOOP)

2.

Once you have a chair

you also have a theoretical chair,
an ideal chair, a spirit chair,
afloat at the top of the air,
a chair that can't be proved.
Would you sit in it? Would you

sit in it over the gorge a mile deep?
A chair that requires faith.

It's like the word and its referent:
stone and "stone " for example.
Even "example." This
is a co-dependency we've made of them,
the concept and its anchoring thing.
They need each other
the way that "god" is there

in the icon; there by the chrisma;
there at the altar, nostrils flared,
inhaling our part of the contract.

In the sky, what Plato said
are Forms. And they precede
our world. I suppose a cloud is a Form

for rain that cleans and scums and sinks inside
our own imperfect dailiness.
We might imagine thunder

and the sear of lightning, great celestial fracas,
as if something's being made
up there. A long night,
wet and violent. Then it's morning,
and quiet: we walk out to the fields

and in that great expanse,
where none had been before, from out of nowhere:
a chair.

3.

One tick—one putz's little sizzle of hate—
 and the devotion of over 7,000 years is turned
 to char and splinters. Who *did* bomb
 the synagogue? That's the immediate question,
 once it's ascertained no one was trapped inside,
 thank God. You see?—"thank God." It isn't very long
 before the second question: does one's access to a god
 disappear when the structures of that access disappear,
 the *bimah*, the Ark that holds the Torah scrolls, etc.?
 Well of course not; do we think that prayer
 and revelation require wires, e-screens, sculpted columns?
 No. And yet...the juju
 is the otherworldly spell—the potent,
 disincarnate Mystery itself—and
 is the talismanic hank of straw and tail-hair and grave-clay
 that the disincarnate lives in. There were rabbis
 in our neighborhood as traumatized as any
 of the members of the congregation—traumatized
 and weak—who in the aftermath denied a possibility
 of prayer (or anyway of *efficacious* prayer)
 without the shaping space of an enclosure and its furnishings
 to reinforce the frail, limping singsong of the human voice.
 Let's say a woman's wandering around that sad debris
 before the clean-up crew arrives...as if she needs to see
 how total this destruction is—to bend, and touch
 its edges—to believe
 in anger capable of abnegating this much
 of a city block; *it fit inside somebody's heart!*
 Is there a physics somewhere that makes sense of this disaster?
 Quantum Fester Theory 101. She has the monstrous urge
 to slip her sandals off and run
 barefoot across this plain of glass and shrapnel,
 maybe *that* would make the lesson clear:
 this chaos was *intended* to hurt. She wants to lift
 a handful of these glass shards and these splays of wooden splinters
 to her nipples, which are intensely alive now
 —why? *is she crazy?* (maybe, the situation
 is crazy), why? to ruin her own flesh
 in an empathy with these—the *kiddush* goblets,
 and the cantor's cedar lectern, and the rest—that have been ruined

→

but have no way to cry their suffering? Whatever
 easy spin we give these fantasies of hers,
 the bottom line is: they're intensified displays of what
 would otherwise be normal, steady stewardship
 of objects where her god lives: a *megillah* case,
 the intricate *aron hakódesh* with its seraphim in bas-relief,
 the chests in which the *siddúrim* are stored. Now, is the god
 an equally viable presence in the rubble of these?
 Or is it like Jeremy?—he was in her arms, all
 eighteen years (plus seven months
 of tumor-rampant hell) when, in a silent beat of time,
 his waxy, bubbled breathing stopped
 forever: something—*who knows what, but something*—
 that had been in him, and *was* the “him” of him, was gone,
 and what remained was just a stick of mannikin.
 She tries to puzzle out the linkage: God is holy:
 so the word of God is holy: so the book (we'll say
 the bench on which the word of God abides until called forth)
 is holy:...is it? is the book *as object* holy? isn't that
 idolatry? Yes, but when they close the book
 they frankly kiss its cover. She remembers once when Jeremy was six
 and they were in Georgia during flood time, they
 were standing on a bank and watching couches,
 loveseats, beds, the whole lost stock of someone's luckless
 small town furniture store, go bobbing down the water. “Look,
 mommy,” he pointed, “those chairs are carrying the river!”

4. A Song About Colonial Times

—also chayer, chaier, chaire, cheere, cheyre.

Not that the wealth of variant spellings
meant that their dwellings
were rich in these: most were spare-

ly furnished, “men and women
using stools or a bench ordinarily”;
in the days of the Massachusetts Bay Colony,
after all, “chairs were not common

even in England.” They look so serious
and practical, symbols of pi-
ety made of sturdy wainscot oak. To the eye
of the 21st century, even the most “luxurious”

have the hard lines of severe and
puritanical philosophy. And a large
percent of chairs for which we recognize the orig-
inal owners *were* used by the officially reverend:

Roger Williams, who, in a letter a
congregant wrote, was called “a godly minister”; Ezekiel
Rogers, Reverend and owner of “ten chares”; Will-
iam Penn, our seminal Quaker; etc.

It’s easy to imagine them sitting in wonder
and religious zeal so long, so lost, in such a hu-
man/furnishing symbiosis, that when they *do*
at last stand up, it might seem, in the chair’s under-

standing, to be a kind of astral projection:
its sentience floating away. And speak-
ing of the Reverend Ezek-
ial Rogers...we must add that his selection

of “chares” was accompanied by “quishings” (that
is, cushions); in upholstery, there were velvet, satin,
plush, silk, serge, “and even sealskin”
chairs, *all* idea of comfort not

being completely disregarded as the century went
onward. Still, their sense of lush decor
was never that of the Roman emperor
Elagabalus, who “deposited his excrement

in pots of gold.” No, not this breed; they
sat on wood the way they walked *among* the woods
of their new home, bonding with its amplitudes
and promise through the most everyday

of their objects: “[a]nd betimes I am aware
how the Eternal and the hosts of Heavn
do Speake or flowr or rattel me even
through a milking stoole, or my plain cheayr.”

5.

Also, in 1673, the goodwife Faithine Winterthorpe, who fell asleep while laboring in the cider grove, was visited by an incubus, and it had its lickerish way with her, and despoiled her. And also, Thomas Satterfall, of the carpentry family Satterfalls, who lived with his father Matthias and sister Elizabeth in the house attached to the stables out at Mercy Hill...was attacked in June by a succubus as he slept, which is a fact, because his father and sister heard him cry in alarm, and because the Devil is ever awake and in command of invisible millions, and because his nightshirt evidenced the stain of that impure nocturnal encounter. And these are not the only instances, the histories are replete with carnal linkings in which one of the parties shows no literal carnalhood at all, but is a spirit.

Of the line between these disembodied visitors and the real human bodies with which they have sexual congress—whether this line is imaginary or actual, whether it's permeable or resistant—much has been written in annals theological, psychological, sociological. What's the line between the firing neuron and the thought to which it contributes? What's the line between the mind and the brain? Can we say that the brain is furniture for the mind? That words are furniture for meaning? Surely myth is the table on which a culture's various explanations rest.

A culture/epoch/zeitgeist is its furniture (and is also its dominant architecture); so are the people belonging to that culture/epoch/zeitgeist. It's a Weimar Republic man in a Weimar Republic time in a Weimar Republic chair; it's my friend Cole in the inflatable, transparent lime-green "Lounge-Around" that he bought one day as an afterthought on the e-shop site for Sidekix. (In her book *The Artificial Kingdom*, Celeste Olalquiaga refers to Walter Benjamin's concept of the "furnished man": exterior physicality—of *his own, specific, daily repeated* exterior world—"presents itself to his touch and ends up forming figures inside him.")

"The Wassily armchair, designed by Marcel Breuer in 1925-26... is a structure of bent, chromed-metal tubing...recall[ing] a bicycle frame" (Witold Rybczynski); meanwhile, the honored

parents in *Filial Piety* (China, 1100s, watercolor) easily sit, their legs crossed, on a rug. Bauhaus. Baroque. The cluttered, bric-a-bracked front parlors of Holmes's Victorian London: shells and teacups and paperweights and robins' eggs and framed hair from the family's dead and china cats and taxidermied weasels in their thick, glass-front armoire. Whatever "semen" tells us, "jism" says another thing. Language is the furniture in which a sensibility arranges and comports itself.

The desk in the abbess's office is so plain, with such *intensity* of plainness, that it asks to be not only a mnemonic of her life's renunciations, but (against all hopes of modesty) an honorific one. And then again, as Jean-Luc Hennig claims, Toulouse Lautrec "is said have painted 'fleshy, common tarts on red sofas.'"

And what did the Puritan bed of Thomas Satterfall say, and was its public discourse any different from the nightmare things that whispered in the dark maze at the back of his mind? I don't know. But I know what I see in this statue of an Etruscan couple reclining together—two relaxed, contented parallel lines—atop a couch that's evidently been designed with just such pleasant post-coital mutuality in mind. Among its many lovely implications, this: *there might be hope for all of us.*

6.

The denizens of heaven have no bodies,
unless a “body” of light is a body. I say it isn’t.
They’re greater than human beings, of course;
yet less than vapor on a window,
less than trails of neutrinos. They’re
the answer to the question: Void divided by Holiness equals?
Nothing inferior to this is allowed to stand before God.
And they *do* stand, or they circle
like rosy zeppelins, in Medieval paintings: necessary
artistic convention has given these ethereals a physical form.
And even God, who isn’t “who” in any way
we’d understand that word...yes, even God,
the More-than-the-Universe...He sits on a throne,
with all that implies: stature, image, buttocks.

God, in fact (if we can accept the ancient Jewish apocalypse story
The Ethiopic Book of Enoch as fact),
is far more human in appearance
than his radiant minions: “angels,” I. P. Couliano says
in his study of “otherworldly journeys,” “have no joints.
Only God can sit and the angels cannot.” I used to visit
a basement lounge—the kind out near the shanties,
though the ritz and the cognoscenti were in attendance—and here
we all stood, we were grateful to be standing there,
to be there but also transported *from* there at the same time,
as the jazz pianist T-bone Rogers sat at his keys
with an easy, bluesy mastery of the room. I suppose
notation is a furniture for music. And I *know*
the women there were a sumptuous furniture for my eyes.

As these painters have given Him “arms” and “legs,
our language has given the same to the parts
of our furniture. Also “back.” And “seat.”
These terms bridge worlds,
they begin in our houses and end (*if* they end)
in the hymn-worthy mansions of heaven

→

—and this association was here as soon as the word was here: “chair” comes from the Latin “cathedra,” and counts, as cousin, “cathedral.” Though it’s difficult at times to remember this kinship with the numinous. For example: chairs and even six-person benches made completely from the jointed horns of cattle and goats. Or the way the dominatrixes get paid to use their slaves as human coffee tables and footstools.

The first of the many McDonald’s Happy Meal toys that Jeremy received with his McNuggets was a doodad from a merchandised cartoon called *Bobby’s World*, where the eponymous boy-hero sits in the comfy hold of a purple pillowy armchair, lost enchantedly in a children’s book about astronauts. But look: you can swivel him out of sight on a plastic spindle, and up to take his place is yet another Bobby, this one in the futuristic-silver suit of a spaceman, with a panel of rocket cockpit shown behind him. You can turn the boy and the dream-boy into one another all day, sweetly, seriously, until they blend in the ecstasy of Ezekiel’s flaming wheels.

In the ecstatic visions of Gertrude of Helfta (middle/late 13th century), she was admitted to the level of heaven where Christ waits with his “honeyed mouth,” he escorted her into the “bridal chamber.” This was no apparitional tryst, but conjugal in the fleshiest sense. And Swedenborg’s heaven, five centuries later, is neighborhoods of houses “like the dwellings on earth which we call homes, they have rooms and bedrooms and courtyards,” and a wedding celebration there includes “tables with bread and crystal cups.” That was his idea: that it all went on, a version of physicality went on beyond the grave, like the ditsy waves of *I Love Lucy* through the universe after the television is turned off—only solid, textured. This heaven of his... you can knock for luck on actual wood.

The drippy-nosed parishioners of a British church
in the 13th century likely knew less ease for their anatomy
than did Swedenborg's celestial beings. Even the barest
interior of a church included an altar (stone)
with canopy and frontal, a font (stone too),
a wooden bier, and a number of pennants, candles,
images of the Virgin and saints. "Conspicuously missing
were any benches, chairs, and pews; the congregation stood
[or] sat on the floor." Would any of them
have sprawled there on the cold straw
in a cold draft, looking hard-eyed and begrudgingly
at the silver vessel used to hold the bread of the Communion?
And it might be banded in ivory as well.
Furniture for the body of Christ.

"Angels"—what I read in quickly skimming through a poem
of Linda Pastan's. I'll say now: there are continuums
connecting the most striking pairs of opposites.
Marriage is only the commonest example. Or the body
of a hermaphrodite. Centaurs. Flying fish.
Mermaids. Sleep. Of course Jesus. In-laws.
But in this case it was the voice of my Grandma Rosie,
dead now fortysome years, from when I was six or seven:
"Albie, finish your lox on bagel now. It's
time to go to *shul* and pray for grandpa." Yes,
because *that's* what the word was—"bagels."
Those most shimmering elementals of all of Creation
were given an earthly link. Sometimes I think
I see them cavorting around the rim of that yeasty rink.

7. The Furniture Makers Have Three Patron Saints

Thank you for the shield-back chair and the ladder-back chair
and the shepherdess chair. Thank you
for the look-chair with its padded rail, and thank you
for the warming chair we scoot up to the fireplace
on bitter nights. For the bended-back chair
we offer our thanks. The rocking and the easy.
For the folding, patio, lounge, and wingback,
beanbag, arm-, side-, swivel-,
slat-back, comb-back, fan-back, banister-back,
for hoop-back and for loop-back.
For recliner. For airliner. For those chairs
in the earliest Mickey Mouse cartoons
that dance on festive, rubbery legs,
we beam our thanks your way, for the chair
of the Pope and the chair of the slim-ankled bar girl.
For the golden chair that clinked to the touch
of Midas's golden undershorts. And for the chair
my grandmother died in painlessly,
with the slightly fearful but also expectant look
of someone strapped in to a roller coaster car.
And for the bones in us, that endo-chair
born into a woman, into a man
—we thank you, Saint Victor, Saint Joseph, Saint Anne.

Especially we must thank you
for the interface between the beatific
and the ordinary, even the mundane.
“The first recorded drawers were used to file
church documents”—you see? The realm
of “deity,” of “soul,” and of “transcendence,” here
alloying with an object of practical use. How could we *not*
be agog at that marriage?—how
its evidence is everywhere; how “the formalized dress
of the servers, the incantatory nature of their speech,
and the nearly liturgical cast of the menu” makes
a ritual of near-religious aspect for the congregated
under the sign of the Golden Arches, and haven't we all
presented ourselves for respite
at the Counter and the Booth? And for the seater
in the shape of a duck-billed hamburger
we thank you: let the kids play for a blessed while

→

out of our hair. We thank you for so many variations:
table that's an emptied mega-spindle
of underground telephone cable; cabinet of popsicle sticks
and beer cans. Someone's had a desk constructed
to accommodate her new assistant kneeling in it,
out of sight, to attend to her intimate yearns; somebody
else, a desk from which a gilded, gemmed ceramic statue
of the Virgin Mary pops up at a button's press
as perky as a prairie dog. For these,
and all the "these" they represent, and for the nuptial bed
Ulysses carved from the heart of an oak, its legs
still part of the tree and rooted down into that other
heart in the liquid iron deeps of the planet.
We thank you for ottoman, settee, chaise lounge, divan,
Saint Victor, Saint Joseph, Saint Anne.

There's that story of the evil duke/count/empress
and the evil bed: a guest too short
was forcibly stretched to fit it, and a guest too long....
Deliver us from such horror.
Please protect us from the bed of rancor,
save us from the bed of glacial sheeting.
There are desks of such unboundaried, monstrous power,
with such sheen, that lives like ours
are just the rags by which those surfaces are polished
...please. Deliver us from these.
And from the judge's bench, release us.
From the table in the light of the surgical cutters and probers,
yes, and from the slow chair and its slow time
in the waiting room...deliver us
back to our ongoing lives, and from us
ask for any gift for you or those in your protection.
There are chairs in rooms where the questions are asked
with rope and a rubber hose...please
don't forsake us. From the spy eyes
in the government's sleepless hallways of computer hutches...
please, deliver us. Please deliver us
safe, on time, according to plan.
Movers of the human spirit,
deliver us in your shimmering van.
Haul us, then install us in place,
Saint Victor, Saint Joseph, Saint Anne.

8.

In just a few minutes the clean-up crew,
 and dozens of neighborhood residents, and idle gawkers,
 and shift two from the T.V. news, will break this
 dreamy moment she's been given, of wandering solitary
 around the devastation, of...
 "communing" is the closest I can come to what
 she's doing: every jagged fragment
 seems to hold the screams,
 the psalms, the devotional lilt,
 of over 7,000 years
 encoded in it, like the genome
 woven into every cell. Here, look...
 the pitiful crumbs of the main hall's tile mosaic,
 so tiny and granular: almost the aerosol of a tile mosaic.
 And here...the thick and heavy wooden platform
 where the Torah gets unscrolled is now
 a drift of wooden sand. *Well, what do I know?*
Maybe the dream of a heavy wooden platform is to be exploded
into particles so small that they can ride the wind
like spirits. (Yes, and maybe the dream of a spirit
is thick and nasty: it wants to be a bed.) And
 here...she bends with fevered concentration. Here
 are slivers of that very same Elijah's chair they used
 at Jeremy's circumcision ritual almost twenty years ago.
 (The chair proportioned to an infant, that he'd sit on
 while the cantor intoned and the *mohel* readied the instruments,
 and then he'd be lifted out of it, and—as the specialized blade
 began its work—the prophet Elijah would sit in it next,
 benignly overseeing.) As the chair was sized
 to Jeremy when he was eight days old and living,
 now that Jeremy's dead, is who-knows-where, these
 small remainders of what might be called the corpse of a chair
 seem sized to Jeremy still. She slips one,
 toothpick-light, in her sweatshirt pocket. "Excuse
 me, Ms...."—those others start to invade the scene,
 and she leaves. That's all. I wish there were something
 more melodramatic to end with: that she
 drops to her knees like a tree on fire and raves
 until the flames have eaten her clean. *That*
 would be a good one. Or a weeping

→

that's kept secret inside the cabinet of her sternum.
Even that. But no, she goes home,
and the years pass, as the years do
whether we're vigilant or not. And every Passover,
at the *seder* with Scott and Michelline and Trishie,
at the part near the end where the door
is ceremoniously opened and the prophet Elijah
welcomed into the house, she slips
that sliver from its silver-inlaid memorial box and sets it,

a chair, at their table.

I have always tried to avoid teaching from anthologies, preferring volumes by individual poets. But since my first Untermeyer (fifth edition, 1936. 1204 pp., \$5 at Boston's Old Corner Bookstore) I have cherished for my own library those anthologies that have introduced me to new poets, served as comprehensive reference works, and provided context for the poets and poems. Here are some of the new anthologies that I have been delighted to add to my own library.

■

The Poetry of Our World: An International Anthology of Contemporary Poetry, edited by **Jeffery Paine** (N.Y.: HarperCollins, 2000, 540 pp., \$35 hardbound, 0-06-055369-3). Paine and Joseph Brodsky conceived this elegantly produced anthology to be different from all others. They imagined a collection designed to make "the poem's shining merit the sole criterion"—the pleasure principle. In addition, they would entertain the hypothesis that "poetic knowledge" can be "one of the crucial kinds of knowledge of the world." They would limit the poets to those few who met these high standards, normally one per nation, and would provide their readers with editorial essays that would help in understanding and appreciation. The result is an extraordinarily valuable work.

Since I am far from qualified to evaluate the selections or the quality of the translations, let me simply describe one chapter in some detail—the one on China. Bei Dao and Perry Link edit the Chinese chapter, which opens with Bei Dao's authoritative "How the 'Revolution' Occurred in Chinese Poetry: A Memoir." Perry Link and Maghiel van Crevel provide a general introduction. Bei Dao, himself the obvious choice for the one Chinese poet, prefers to introduce another of the major poets in exile, the bleakly powerful Duoduo. One of Bei Dao's own poems (a splendid new one) emerges in the general Asian appendix, along with one poem each by Hikmet, Amichai, Adonis, Darwish, Balakrishna Sama, Cecil Rajendra, Ho Chi Minh, and Cho Pyong-Hwa.

Most of the introductions and biographical essays in this collection are wonderfully helpful. The impact of world literatures on each other is now a fact of our intellectual life, one that no one seriously engaged in today's poetry can afford to ignore. Jeffery Paine's brilliantly conceived and elegantly achieved

volume enables me to educate myself with profound pleasure. One of its strongest features is Paine's own general introduction, far and away the wisest, most balanced, and most graceful overview of the role of the poet in the last half of the twentieth century that I have seen. He adds a tribute to Joseph Brodsky and quotes from Brodsky's Nobel prize speech: "I am not so sure that man will prevail, as the great man and my fellow American [William Faulkner] once said, standing, I believe, in this very room; but I am quite positive that a man who reads poetry is harder to prevail upon than one who doesn't."

■

Anthology of Modern American Poetry, edited by **Cary Nelson** (N.Y.: Oxford, 2000, 1294 pp., \$45 paper, 0-19-512271-2; \$65 cloth, 0-19-512270-4).

Clearly designed to compete with the Norton anthology as a text and library standard, this is a major enterprise, well-produced, richly annotated, with individual introductions to the 750 poems by 161 poets, aimed at general as well as academic readers. It takes *modern* to be the whole of the twentieth century, plus (as in my 1936 *Untermeyer*) Whitman and Dickinson. For further historical and critical background you may consult its web site: www.english.uiuc.edu/maps.

In his Preface, Cary Nelson announces some of the distinctions and peculiarities of his editorial principles. He presents many long poems and sequences (28 pages for Gertrude Stein's "Patriarchal Poetry," for example). He takes some poems out of chronological sequence (though fortunately every poem is dated). More significantly, he has decided on a case-by-case basis whether to present an overview of the poet's career or to concentrate on a significant period. Thus we get only Jarrell's war poems. Given Nelson's useful work on Merwin elsewhere, it seems odd (and wrong) to include here only his poems from before 1984. *Caveat emptor*.

Another specialty of Nelson's collection is its announced emphasis on "the long American dialogue about race." In addition to the early twentieth-century black poets (most of whom were in *Untermeyer*), there are two other engaging sections featuring poems by 1910-40 Chinese immigrants and Japanese American Concentration Camp haiku (1942-44). One poet handsomely

represented (one not in Untermeyer) is Melvin B. Tolson, whose “Dark Symphony” and “Libretto for the Republic of Liberia” are meticulously edited. (The 770-line “Libretto” requires fifty-two pages to accommodate the fine-print annotations.) Especially distinctive is the selection from poets born since 1944. These final pages are crammed with wonderfully varied high-energy work by poets from Patricia Smith to Sherman Alexie. I would not omit any were I preparing to teach that period.

■

Up to here my job of selection, description, and recommendation has been easy. Now it becomes really difficult, as we enter an era where few if any reputations are established and I am partially blinkered by my own aesthetic. I’ll try to describe what I see, always alert for fresh ways of imagining the language and the universe.

I turn for help to *Poets & Writers* (March/April 2000), where I find two polar directions. One is Scott Herndon’s Youth Speaks program, which offers “poetic training in ‘minor or emergent’ literatures, which lack institutional footing but nevertheless constitute the purest arena for genuine poetic expression.” This is the poetry of “capital-*I* identity”—as Latina, black or gay poetry, an arena Nelson chooses to emphasize in his anthology. At the opposite extreme, *P & W* introduces New Coast writers in Michael Scharf’s column. New Coast here means the globe as seen from space—truly a new perspective. Scharf cites Steve Evans of the University of Maine as a spokesperson for the New Coast, which opposes capital-*I* identity—identity by class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, race, gender, etc. The New Coast abhors identity writing for limiting our ability to interact with each other and for acting as a force for marketing and commercialism, “of the way seeming differences among people are used to sell things” (Scharf’s words). This view connects the New Coast poetic to the political stance of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets. How do we recognize this work? Evans, describing the work of Michael Gizzi, uses such language as “unconstrainable pluralities,” “the virtuoso conversion of proper names to verbs,” “ubiquitous infusions” of many languages, “vintage hip talk, learned lit talk, onomatopoeic and sub-lexical sound effects,” where cadence outpaces semantics. There is no opposition between speech and writing. For more on this movement you

should check out Evans' *Notes*, at www.geocities.com/arras_online/index.html. I'm not about to essay a taxonomy of those avant-garde poetries sometimes referred to as post-post-modern. But I do read collections of new poetry with special attention.

The New American Poets, a Bread Loaf Anthology, edited by **Michael Collier** (Hanover, N.H.: Middlebury College Press/University Press of New England, 2000, 104 pp., \$19.95 paper, 0-87451-964-0; \$50 [sic] cloth, 0-87451-963-2).

Here are fifty-seven poets, with up to five poems each. All are either under forty or have published a first book in the past five years. Each has a photo and a short introduction. Collier says he has aimed for the widest possible diversity. There is no overlap with the poets in Nelson's anthology; indeed, of those only Sherman Alexie would appear to be "new" enough by Collier's criteria. What is the diversity he claims for his collection? We certainly don't look here for poets of *I*-identity in "minor or emergent" literature. There are poets of color here, but Collier does not extend Nelson's selections, except for a few (for example, Allison Joseph, Khaled Mattawa, and Anthony Walton) where race or the "exotic" enters the subject matter, if not the voice, of the poems. (And the poets he does include certainly don't lack "institutional footing"!)

Turn now to the other extreme—the New Coast. Although some half-dozen of the poems in Collier's collection seem at first glance to traffic in discontinuities (the modernist collage of, say, *The Waste Land*, reduced to the linear and syntactic level), none of these poets here displays the idiosyncracies Evans describes. Claudia Rankine's "Proximity of inner to in her" seems to approach this perspective, but the tension between certain discontinuities of style and a linear sub-narrative creates an imaginative coherence:

The moment wakened, awakening soul of, cape to warm herself. in she steps from the swarming arms of her own insides where a ticking sticks to the mind like a drip a room away. urethral resistance lowers, a stream sprays the bowl.

Another poet who leans in the New Coast direction is Olena Kalytiak Davis. In her delicious language play, sounds generate their siblings, so that the sounds and cadences do "outpace

semantics.” Here’s a bit of Davis’s “In the Clear Long After”:

O so—No—too sweet. Intox-icated with permeability. ‘Tis noxious, to eat evanescence. However steadily, however slowly.

They stemmed into heady blows.

In this sound-generated verse, *Intox-* generates *‘Tis nox-*. [*S]weet* leads to *eat*, *steadily* to *heady*. Assonance proliferates, so that the semantics (of *stemmed*, for example) become irrelevant. This playful romp comes as close as anything in this collection to the New Coast idea, linking language to music and performance, free of *I*-identity. This is about as far as Collier goes to represent the new self-proclaimed avant garde. Thus I want to protest the definite article in his title.

That quibble aside, what do we find in his anthology of emerging poets? A few (a half-dozen or fewer) of each of these: prose poems, collages, poems of close observation, colloquial disquisition (and its opposite, Carl Phillips’ “perhaps difficult but/ irrefutable pleasure”), ekphrasis (including film), a scattering of formal poems (Greg Williamson’s sprightly rhymed verse, a few sonnets, and Mary Leader’s elegant songs), a welcome handful of parodies and satires, a few poems with religious diction (but, except for Valerie Martinez, nothing of the so-called New Spirituality). The mode is predominantly lyric, with an occasional hallucinatory narrative (James Longenbach) or riveting realistic narrative (Anne Caston’s “The Burden” and Jason Sommer’s “Mengele Shitting”). Besides Sommer, one other poet, the talented Richard Blanco, writes out of an explicit socio-political context; the lack of depth or breadth of a world view is characteristic of this collection—perhaps of this generation. Indeed, the majority of these poets write lyrics of personal experience or anecdote—still the dominant mode of our time.

In Collier’s collection I find few surprises but many delights. Here, in addition to some already mentioned, are some of the memorable strengths: the anatomy of psychic intensity (Jane Mead); the power of the imagination to create a heightened reality (Mary Leader’s “Portrait, ‘Fritz Kreisler’”); and the post-modern self-reflexiveness that keeps the imaginary and the “real” in a productive tension (Alan Michael Parker’s high-spirited vandal-haunted poems).

I feel closer to that New Coast in a special double issue of the

magazine *Verse* (Vol. 16, No. 3/ Vol. 17, No. 1). Here the young editors Brian Henry and Andrew Zawacki have assembled the work of twenty younger American poets to “reveal developing currents in American poetry.” As editors they are taking “an aesthetic stand” for poets (including themselves) who “work within (or against) the lyric mode; who attempt to reinvigorate language, form, diction, and the poetic ‘I’; who see a poem not as a static artifact but as a site for action; who push the limits of language and utterance, of poetry itself.” In addition to their diversity, these poets seem committed, Henry continues, “to the possibilities of language, demonstrating genuine passion—extraordinary intelligence of thought and feeling—and stylistic distinction.” Four of the *Verse* poets are also in Collier’s anthology: Olena Kaltyiak Davis and Claudia Rankine, whom I’ve already quoted, plus Karen Volkman and Matthew Rohrer. There are no poems of *I*-identity here. All appear toward the New Coast end of my arbitrary scale. The first person, when it appears, is often in the plural and usually in a context that does not invite attention to the “I” as the poet. Here’s the beginning of Matthew Rohrer’s “My Government”:

The history of the world
is the history of rural malcontents
rising up against the capital.

Each night I hear something scratching
to get in my fortress
which can only hold out so long.

And here is the first paragraph of one of Karen Volkman’s untitled prose poems:

Or would triumph scathe her multivoweled heart? That none of its eager ecstasy were more than the unctuous forebear of a dimmer joy. Opaquely blind, unbeneficent bird of the wisps, stoic as the sea’s black silence. So skewedly, dispassionate, one absence destroys its opposite.

There is certainly some diversity of voice among the *Verse* poets, but the similarities are stronger than the differences. For instance, Rohrer and Volkman both create a world (exterior or interior) out of the imagination and hope for a reader’s “willing suspension of disbelief.” (I’m amused at how often this phrase of Coleridge’s is invoked by avant-garde poets. But I don’t see any of them going all the way with Coleridge’s purpose—to

achieve through “poetic faith” an expansion of the reader’s emotional capacities.) Volkman, more than Rohrer, is dedicated to pushing the limits of utterance, closer to the New Coast. In such poems I sympathize with Alice on her first reading of “Jabberwocky”: “It seems very pretty . . . but it’s *rather* hard to understand!” (You see she didn’t like to confess, even to herself, that she couldn’t make it out at all.) “It seems to fill my head with ideas—only I don’t exactly know what they are!” On second reading I understand that ideas are not the point. Language is at least partially liberated from its lexical prison, free to be itself the content of the poem, as the paint itself is the content of an action painting. Still, words come trailing clouds of eloquence, and such language as *scathe*, *unctuous*, *opaquely*, *skewedly*, *dispassionate*, and *absence* create an emotional state that is comprehensible,—a collective consciousness imagined from some outer space and translated into a still, sad music.

An interview with Matthew Rohrer in this issue of *Verse* helps the reader to understand at least Rohrer’s own aesthetic. Following Tomaz Salamun, he praises poetry’s ability to escape the boredom of the material world through acts of the imagination. In one of his own poems Rohrer writes: “When I play close attention to my senses I become immobile./ I’m stuck living each moment/ instead of taking great strides across them” (“Starfish Waving to me from the Sand,” in *Collier*). This is a departure from Wallace Stevens, whose imagination was deeply committed to the world of the senses. Rohrer is liberated by the appearance of a “weird hermeticism” in Eastern European poets like Salamun, though he admits that those poets may have political reasons to disguise their meaning. For Rohrer, there are no hidden meanings—just the fairy-tale joy of conceiving an animistic world, where dried starfish wave. “[M]aybe we need to create these worlds that aren’t real,” Rohrer tells his interviewer, “not [like the political poets] to protect ourselves from people who are monitoring us, but because everything else is boring now. Everything has been said.” The word *boring* didn’t appear in English until the middle of the last century. I wonder when it was first used in poetry. It does seem to be an understandable motivation for the extreme experiments with language, syntax, grammar, and tropes that much avant-garde poetry works (sometimes labors) for.

To go back to Brian Henry's introduction, where he praises the diversity and passion of his poets, I must say that I appreciated many of these poems more the longer I worked with them. I can see that they represent a different aesthetic from most of the recent poems in the other anthologies at hand. But among them I fail to find much diversity of direction. And I also miss what Henry claims to value in them—"genuine passion." There are a few fuckings, a few mentions of eros and love. But passion? Perhaps Henry's definition of passion—"extraordinary intelligence of thought and feeling"—is too narrow for me.

Standing back from the new poems in the Collier and *Verse* collections, and considering along with them the many poems of New Coast tendencies in publications like the *Boston Review*, where Mary Jo Bang (one of Collier's poets) edits a generous supply of challenging poetry, I am disturbed at how *self-centered* the poems are. The personal narratives that dominate Collier's anthology rarely connect to time or space or society beyond the personal. And though I appreciate poetic efforts to storm the barricades of linearity and lexicology and to liberate the language, in the poems of inner consciousness, some very powerful, we enter interiors without intimacy. (Some poets seem to long for intimacy or even passion—Mary Jo Bang, for one—but in their art most keep the longing at a distance.) Eliot and Ashbery may be ancestors of this emotional coolness. When we turn to *Verse's* younger poets, we find parasols, peacocks, and "the penetralia of fire opals," but these details seem to exist as props on the stage of the psyche. (Reader, forgive me all these *seems* and *somes* and *mosts*. In attempting to generalize, I do not want to deny the powerful exceptions.)

When it comes right down to it, the narcissism of so many new poems troubles me. Erich Fromm, in *The Art of Loving*, defines narcissism thus: "Real is only what is within; what is outside is real only in terms of my needs." Judged one by one, the majority of the poets in these two collections seem to embrace solipsism, and more profoundly narcissism, so that I read the poetry-work as onanistic. Of course, the cult of the individual is one of the late legacies of European romanticism, but I think I can understand and even sympathize with the phenomenon as the product of this particular turn-of-the-century society. Part of it is a recoil from the commercial culture and the resultant

debasement of language. Some of it is certainly a sense of belatedness—that everything sayable has been said. Some of it (perhaps the most productive) is an effort to wrench language, and through language art, into the realm of the previously unsayable. Then there is poetry as a flight from boredom—a flight, as Matthew Rohrer articulates it so well, into the individual imagination. My hope is that these individually unique and sometimes hermetic stages may be not only “site[s] for action,” as Brian Henry proposes, but early stages in the development of each poet, and that in years to come we will rejoice that the pool of Narcissus was too shallow to drown in. Walter Benjamin says: “We are bored when we don’t know what we are waiting for.” Boredom, he hopefully imagines, “is the threshold to great deeds.” I sincerely hope so.



Editor’s Note:

Our next issue, Fall/Winter (Vol. 51, Nos. 1 and 2), will be an anthology of about 450 pages of the editors’ selections from the poems we have published in our first fifty years. It will include early poems by Galway Kinnell, Adrienne Rich, Anne Sexton, Louis Zukofsky, Charles Bukowski, Philip Larkin, A.R. Ammons, Patricia Goedicke, and others—many of them not available elsewhere—and ample representation of each decade of the *BPJ*. This book will come as part of a regular one-year (\$18) or three-year (\$48) subscription. To receive it, you should renew or extend your subscription now. We also welcome gift subscriptions. The anthology will be available well before the holidays.