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THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL
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COVER

José Ángel Rodríguez

Postcard copy of photograph, “Al Rio Jataté.” © José Ángel Rodríguez. For further information about the photographer’s work, go to www.laparedmexico.com/fotos.htm.

→

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

JAMIE ROSS

Postcards from Mexico:

Triangle

I never smoked until today—
not until the dog came.
One, two, three. That was us.
Then the dog came, in from the edge.
Not a whole dog, mind you,
but the front of something,
like a train from Guatemala
or weather moving through.
We've never seen its tail.
We've never seen the full dog.
One, two, three. We keep counting.
I roll tobacco.
Without smoke,
nothing would appear.

JAMIE ROSS

Postcards from Mexico:

Celebración de la Carretera

Because you see my daughter and she is sound.
Because I bought this chair this tiny chair
for thirty pesos, took it from the luggage rack
behind the plaza, the basilica. How I sit so
wide like this, my big sombrero green-spread
wings. Because the celebration for the road, today
is for the road. Because the ribbons all the girls
will cross the street and back again, a thrill
of ribbons, and the band from Las Colimas, priests
and dignatarios, speeches, black micrófonos. Because
it is the old way with the stones before the time
of Vasco. And before the furniture. Because it breathes
the babies and tamales, the carts of yellow chickens
mangos rolling on the stone, the street is empty
and the woman rising. Because we sit like this. The
hummingbirds.

JAMIE ROSS

Postcards from Mexico:

Al Rio Jataté

First it was me, with the pail. And
I went to the stream, looked in the water:

Voilà!—Another woman
with a bucket on her head!—Just

like mine. Just like me. On Tuesday
we went back, together like this, to gather

from the river. And...Just like that!—Two *more!*—
each like me. Each in a bucket, with *her* bucket!

Now, in just two days: *Four of us!*—Each
with a bucket, a woman in each bucket, each

one with a bucket on her head.
As above, so below. All

the men can do is drink.

→

T. P. PERRIN
Spellchecking Chaucer

(Wife of Bath's Prologue, lines 142-157)

I nail inveigh no virginity.
Lat hem be breed of pirate whitey-seed,
And lat us wolves haitian barfly-breed;
And yet with barfly-breed, Mark tollway koan,
Ogre Lord Ghost refreshed many a man.
In swish aesthete as God hath clipped us
I woo persevere; I numb gnat pricks.
In whiffhood I wail use mayan instrument
As frailly as my Moocher hath it sent.
If I be dungarees, God ivy me sore!
Mayan husband shill it have bother eve and morse,
Wham that ham list come forth and peewee his ditto.
An husband I wail have, I wail gnat lewd,
Which shill be bother my dieter and my thrill,
And have his tribulation withal
Upon his flush, whale that I am his whiff.

T. P. PERRIN

Finale by Ives

Approach the oracle. Appropriate awe.

(Nagged even here despite the splashiness

By a wisp of tune that refuses to let us be . . .

Not so much a tune as a notion, a tinkering

Coming to mind only from time to time

Like a cigarette laid behind the ear.)

Then rise above it! Epiphany is autocratic.

But our blood seeks more than voodoo,

It seeks its nationhood,

With its own wars to go to, and dances,

Yes dances, yes dances dances:

The only clefts allowed in the soul are those

Between hunting and wishing

And eating and thinking

And reading and rioting . . .

Myth can be deacon, let all that's quick be priest. O I have parted

From my body to be joined instead to landscape;

My veins are over there somewhere

Running up the insides of trees.

O motion in small burrows—

O taking shape. I am rash.

I kindle upward like driftwood, easily,

Eagerly, pumped by helper wind, see my flame get complex,

See it bloat, spurn resolution, willing show and blow,

Ostentation, cadenzas, seven kinds of lusting for having—

Tear up your doilies, Hattie, unpot your sulking succulents,

The whole of the globe is ascending in swooshes;

No utterance left will make any sense

Except an amen built out of thunder.

This time it's planetary, women and men;

Plagal, unforgiving as granite, severe:

Our just deserts writ huge.

(The tune-scrap in our attic still persists though . . .

Though as a buzzard-chick, that little sucker.)

(First Piano Sonata, fifth movement)

T. P. PERRIN
Artist's Material

1

Taking — taken

Shaking — waking

Woken to grieving — grieving

Breaking — broken

Breaking — bereaving

Bereft and leaving — left

Years from leaving — weaving

Weaving, speaking — weaving, speaking

2

Cantilevered, that racking sliver of time,
To cast an extended stretch of shadow. Shadow with teeth.

“Let it go.” Advice of the sane.
“Seek closure.” But sane is puny, I,
Wild-hearted, nigher the brink,

Impelled by hollow-eyed hundreds lodged
In recollection to house them in works, no two
The same in face or body but for silence,
I know my errand: lend them voice;
Will them rest. I can whirl

As headlong into a concourse of sursum cordas
As any of you for the onset of spring. I know
The good things. I know alongside them the shadow

Won't loose its grip nor may my witnessing.
“Get on with your life.” I do.

3

Earth, pack-animal,
Never balking, bearing all,
Your pelt molts time along the trail
For scroungers—us—to scavenge,
Card, spin, wear.
Brown, color of blood shed long before.

*You may cut it into napkins,
You may wipe a thousand brows.
I will.*

*You may drape it as a curtain,
Keep at bay the rabid sun.
I will.*

*You may bundle fields of ash
Till you cannot hoist the hoard.
Your fabric will not ravel.*

I will try to be unequal
To nothing I attempt to shoulder.
The unendurable is in the station,
Already disembarked. I cannot help but meet it.
In portions of our sky the stars are thorns
To tear the chief musician's throat.
The clouds would cancel rain; I'll gather time around me
Closer. Close. And be enabled.
They will be woven. They will be spoken.

And sung?
They will be sung.

MICHALLE GOULD

The Architects of St. Basil's Cathedral Address Ivan IV

When your men came, our eyes ran from them
like spoiled eggs, down to the spectacular floor
we ordered built for you. Ingratitude does not become
a king. Still less a czar. History may not recall our names
but neither should it forget what you have done here.
Or ordered done. It does not matter.

What *we* will not forget is the tenth cupola
you ordered joined to our cathedral, spoiling
the compass point symmetry of our design
enjoyed from a bird's eye view.
All this for Basil, that *holy fool*, who wandered
naked through the streets of Moscow,
as if this memorial, this addition placed over his grave,
could somehow implicate you in his goodness.

Instead, you have merely destroyed our only pleasure,
in looking downward. Yes looking, yes downward.
For we have gone above where we never need to
fear to see you or your men, to take the sight
the angels have returned us, their hot tears welling
in the empty caverns below our foreheads,
cooling into crystal buds of eyes.

But we too may destroy *your* pleasure,
bind ourselves to you in a trinity enshrined in myth,
a blemish joined to the history of your rule,
like the extraneous dome attached to our cathedral.
Onion-shaped domes, who coined that phrase?
As well to call them breasts tasseled by crosses.

In history, no one gets the name they choose.
Our legacy not our craft but the removal
of our eyes so we could not practice it
for another. Our cathedral, inaugurated
Pokhrovsky, now evokes not the words
mother-of-god, or *fool-for-Christ*, or *czar*,
but Basil, called *saint*, and Ivan, called *terrible*.

MICHALLE GOULD

A Classical Scene from Late Childhood

Tree bark is a grandmother's hands Summer
air lickable and melting Light chocolate delicious
in a shadowed hollow The green hours of morning
Noon yellow lemon-smelling The sun an egg yolk
Afternoon pink fading The disappearance
of a thumbprint on skin A dull cheek Moon
mother time The hollow is become a wintry
place for bears and other restful creatures A
falling star lights the way home Some day
I will learn planets in a binary system approach
each other cautiously The wind of one passing
knocks the other from the sky

MICHALLE GOULD

Hamlet

All the dead in *Hamlet* die on stage,
but one: even the dead king, the old ghost,
although not in person, having breathed
in deep, contracted still slippery flesh,
and eased out of this mortal coil, those
curls of cobra, those dusky handcuffs
without a key (a magician's parlor trick
and hasn't royalty, throughout the centuries
half torn fragmentary pages history
and fairy tales, conducted itself as magicians do,
the emperor in a suit of air, and Herod,
who made his three sons disappear).

But one: Ophelia, whose father, invisible
Polonius, behind a tattered curtain arras
errant blow directed rat-ward, rodent
or human left for later determination, but
let him have *his* final cry, *oh, i am slain*,
he moans, theatrical, and clutches at his throat,
back of the other hand against his forehead,
eyes rolling up into his head, for whom,
and him behind a curtain, perhaps the rats?
Ophelia dies unobserved and unapplauded,
on the way to remove her costume, halfway
between the wings and the make-up room.

The water has her up against the wall Ophelia
never will see a nunnery, but chants old hymns,
as one who never read the book and doesn't know
the way the story ends. The water lifting her skirts
to fill them, as Hamlet never did, to hold her aloft
in a fist half drawn to mercy, as if regretting
the dirty work left to be done, so by the time
her final moments come, the final scene onstage
has already begun, and the water spits Ophelia out,
like half chewed meat too tough to swallow,
leaves her a heap of sodden rags careless discarded
to the theatre floor, trash by the river's shore.

As for the rest, the water sweeps onstage and takes
them one by one, extends wet fingers along the coast
to England, embraces even minor characters, as
poems so often fail to do, takes as an extra prize
Horatio too, so no one is left to greet young Fortinbras,
prince of Norway, who although a soldier, took lessons
with military precision, knows both Shakespeare
and old English myth ur-Hamlet, memorized
his lines, takes in the floating carnage on the stage,
and says, as planned, *Where is this sight?*, then waits,
and waits, and says, *There is no line for this*, and though
the audience bids him speak, is still, and will not speak again.

SOPHIA TEKMITCHOV

Who First Spoke

Why do you ask who first spoke the name I speak of—
gave it to the night grass
root-bound and unbound under
the glass sheath of this moving river;
look how water leads like wind pull wind pull willow willow how she loved
the weeping cherry trees an orchard he planted for her, sister
she was to them, their beauty bent by prescience of passage;
and who spoke it first will I tell her face
down turned and rooted, her hair the night grass she weep
willow willow cherry tree

I will say

fly

swallow

swallow

and begin again there—I who named this night-
grass of river
Ophelia's hair.

ELISA SPINDLER

Jane in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Her face, which he says is the perfect oval of the skating pond.
Snow baring on branches, a paperweight on her father's escritoire.

Quill scrape of ice and sludge; the imposition of tire tracks
and the whole factoryed world of it—steam engine,
Crystal Tower, tenement Manchester stacked with mills;

the lines of period corsetry drawn. She knows the strictures
and how to exploit them. Her fierce yelp on the night of the ball.

The girl who will always be poised by the lakeside,
wishing she were in Moscow, Germany, she unravels
the British empire waistline. Her first consumptive
pants of freedom, and one last burning, glacial plea for it—

a lightning rod, strung up, in that field.

MAGGIE DIETZ
Speaking for Andrew

In Memoriam A.G., 1972-1999

In the woods I found the mouth that made the voice—

calling back all the way, some six hundred days,
to Vancouver, where I'd parked my Jeep and realized
I had no plan, but friends already in Portland,
a screened-in porch and good zoning laws that gave
everyone a vista of the mountains. I hadn't seen them yet
or coursed their veins:

*O beautiful land where the mouth
that housed that voice bent down, engulfed me.*

So then I had it: informant, teller, the big old talker.
I had it and I went to work landscaping. Dug it.
One night I walked away from the table where we were eating,
yucking it up, bought a beer at the bar, poured it,
didn't drink it, walked out onto the gray street
and up and up into the trails and off the trails.
Next morning, I found my car in the driveway. I took
a few things and drove to L.A. without stopping.

The way I told it later I lost my wallet and my mind
on the same day. That was when I could still joke about it,
before the voice took up with crows and fence-posts,
before it found my own throat and spoke through me.
In the city of angels, I heard a number, dialed it—
How many days then on the street?—I heard a voice,
lovely, clear and open, one that had reached me long ago
through another cord: the voice of an angel. I said,
"I think I'm your son."

In North Carolina, they set me up
with a good shrink and some numbing drugs, good ones.
My mother prepared hearty meals for me, smoothed my hair
when she passed me watching TV. After a while, I got a job
at a bakery, got baked a lot with the Mexican guys
who worked in the garden. I started planting trees again.
I wrote to my friends and got my own apartment,
where the voice didn't seem to find me even in dreams.

■
Around Thanksgiving, I buckled, but not weakly—
tenderly, as if someone had kissed my ear. I surrendered.
Some front from a northern wind blew you back
down to me, from Vancouver, from the greater North,
further, from the oldest pilgrimage, the other side
of sky, you the voice of millions, like echoes from
the recess of a cave, compounded, fragmented,
sacred and sacrilege, speaking in tongues. I heard you,
everywhere, I joined you. And no one understood,
could see how big it all was, how old how deep.

■
One night, in the snare of my vision, I caught a dark man
with joints of light brandishing the moon like a hatchet.
Great Orion, wounding the sky, make a clean hack for me.
And I thought that the sky was black liquid, the stars
silver fish and shells.

I left my car in the woods,
not hidden, a good car, a good find, and found my way,
now farther South, to the water, using a broken stick
and the daylit image of my starborn father. The birds
were singing alleluias and the canopy illumined
like a halo in the hollowed woods. It was not a dark day,
it was not. Even when night came, the dark, thick as oil,
was mysterious and not frightening.

When my guide arrived at the pond, he shone in the water,
shimmering from the belt and elbows. Now the frogs
spoke of origin, material, the mud we come from.
I threw a stone to provoke him and, seeing my signal,
he moved. The moon, a perfect scythe, flinched in his arm.
My opening. And through it rang a chorus of every voice
that ever was. I heard them each and all and in that moment,
knew, for just a moment, please believe me, what it means
to love and suffer, what it is to die and live.

JENNY FACTOR

Song Beside a Sippy Cup

In the never truly ever
truly dark dark night, ever
blinds-zipped, slat-cut,
dark-parked light,
you (late) touch my toes
with your broad flat own
horny-nailed cold toes.
Clock-tock, wake-shock.

In the ever truly never
truly long long night, our
little snoring-snarling
wild-child mild-child
starling-darling wakes every
two, three (you-sleep) hours,
in the never truly ever
truly lawn brawn fawn dawn.

RANJANI NERIYA

Husk

Our trundle-tail, Begum,
nosing into every leaf pile
alerted our mood
for woodnotes, far from
baying commerce, only treetops
churning a lapis sky,

romancing Shelley between
sips of thermos tea and
yeasty shags of bread, sour-sweet,
from Lizzie Coutinho's bakery.

At the base of the brain there was
this delirious ticking
like the bruise of husk on
pearly sheaths of
amorphous grain,
the blink of nascent dew
on the growing grass of our lives,

zest of hibiscus, screw-pine
silk-cotton splurge
a clear dream of water
no boulder big enough
to halt the rivering of
Periclean weather into
an Indian summer haze.

JOHN LATTA
Fork of Witch Hazel

Broken-in, unsecured, it
Points to wild spurge

The way the will
Will dequiver an arrow,

Fetch up a longbow
And aim out beyond

The door, opening doors
To what is nigh

Impossible to find hereabouts.
—*Not much shakin' today.*

Piecemeal injunctions, worn-out
Bonanzas, all the spotless

Stopped-light occasional industry,
Some frugal amour, some

Ruse stoking the fire.
Joblot of old sermons,

Serenity and ink spoilage:
A siren adding its

Odd audible lustre to
Wild skepticism, bespook'd, bespoke.

GLORI SIMMONS

Graft

i.

The third way of grafting—

Go to a smooth apple or pear in April

When the trees get liquor

& seek a branch

Which has green eyes of less than a finger.

& tear it from the tree.

(Notes from The Expert Gardener, 1640)

(

I am forgetting the body's female liquor. Once I poured it into pear contours, starched bowls, lighting my face red. Now I plant it inside an architecture of trellis and trouser like an old woman who separates her toes with cotton—her toes refigured by a century of pointed boots.

What narrow roads did she balance herself upon? What hills did she climb?

She will become small in the end, the scar of light that ripples across walls and wakes the awake. She is the molecule in the pill that teaches my body to take its new wooden shape.

(

Pear.

In the lover's hand, a pear.

In the hysteric's hand, a pear.

In the Virgin's hand, sometimes a pear beside the angel and olive leaf.

Beside the son.

We've named them Bartlett and d'Anjou—
names that speak of the incision of their limbs and the healing that
followed.

The perfect cut and lace of two opposites to make it right.

They've taken on lovers' names, fathers' names, the botanists' names.
The fruit reminds me of running until I could not breathe among the
leaves.
The pear in my father's hand was a trophy.

(((

ii.

(The grafts have been named as well,
determined by the cut,
the angle, the union.)

(

I am searching for a silent place, a quiet stretch of skin with no sex
mark—the stomach flesh that pulls to bandage burned limbs or form a
penis where there was none.

In a hillside orchard, a girl water fills each moat. Sun freckles her
back, tightening the flesh around her bones. She becomes more than
fair, other than girl.

Not knowing which fruit will bulge from the random blossoms, she
reads their tags—their latinate titles—to speak to them. They become
what she calls them.

(

This is not a dream. It is the end
of the French dynasty,
a foggy morning

and woman's husband is her malady.
She hides his list beneath
her cloak, then steps

from the convent room
for what he calls *her idiotic ramblings*.
His request: a prune-colored redingote,

salmon pate, madeleines.
And a dildo
of dark mahogany,

waxed smooth as a child's arm.
The more real, the better,
he tells her. *Test it in your mouth.*

(

Margaret on men.

When I touched the male body, it felt wooden.
Like a puppet, the fingers were pinned to fold.

The torso was a tailor's mannequin draped in white oak.
They lay across my body like sleep.

Mostly I closed my eyes.

(((

iii.

The fourth way of grafting is—

How buds are transported
& bound upon another tree
Like a plaster is tied

To a man's body:
This sort of grafting is called
In Latin *Emplastrum*.

(

Always the old woman's deformed toes brought me to ask: *what is perfection?*

I imagine how my body would feel if I could touch it once as a stranger or a god; if I could touch it as male: my cheek, my thigh. *In what form, I ask myself.*

(

Still life.

A pine table set inside Rembrandt black.
Someone has left unexpectedly, spilling the silver platter
of fruit. The candle almost burned out.

The lives are still illuminated:
a grape cluster, trout's head, dewy mum.
And two pears.

One standing, the other on its beckoning side.
The knife blade just there.
The pear reflects the shades of Holland's

deciduous regions, a late bruise—
the tint of repair and wound. Cold lips.
I am searching for a silent place.

(

Myself on dressing.

Sometimes when I pour myself
into the fabric, I spill.

This is my other self:
a nude woman
dancing in front of a window.

I desire her.

(((

iv.

(Cleft graft, whip graft, bud graft.

They are names of beauty marks, small tattoos.
Games played in dominance
and submission.)

(

The Marquis finds so many reasons
to slap her cherry tart face. Still she returns
with the key to her room, her orifice.

Mythology's sad helper, she is a tattered
book to be read with one hand. Her pain
is dog-eared, a placeholder

to find her way back to love's
core, delivering gifts to fulfill him
in his prince's cell, his stone turret.

(

My body will become a house
Margaret cannot enter.

I will lie beside her
like a puppet she cannot move.

I love her body beside mine,
yet not mine beside hers.

(

In the orchard, the girl folds up her sleeves, takes off her boots, freeing
her ripening toes. She runs her lips along her arms, sucking in the
warmth of her cheeks like a hard kiss. She calls herself Boy.

(((

v.

How apples & other fruits are made red—

If you graft upon a wild stump
Put the sprouts in Pike's blood prior.

(

The mahogany stalk
was once a single tree
in a Rouen field.

Then the ax came down
to cut it into a gentle thumb.
The carpenter polished it

into a smooth root.
She understands its thirst,
its hollowed vein

that could contain a map.
She is the ridiculous shopper
scarf covering her basket of bounty.

The Marquis, writing that
the stoic holder
is once again too narrow

for his continents,
will accuse her of spending
too much on herself.

(

I will take from the inner thigh, hip, abdomen and wrap my skin
around itself, grooming it into a new limb, ordering doctors to do what
nature did not. I will wake inside my father's trophy form.

(

The garden.

So often I return to the garden, the orchard tree
and stand beneath it.

A woman is offering up a fruit
botanists have yet to name, painters have yet to paint.

Does it have thick, pocked skin or is it varnished smooth—
what trees would you graft to create the forbidden?

I am searching for a silent place.

ROBERT NAZARENE
The Chicago Land
& Title Guarantee Company

I.

*Beginning in the southwest corner
of the Southeast Quarter of the Northeast Quarter
of Section Twenty-Nine, Township Thirty-One North,
Range Three East:*

is a flock of Hampshire sheep—

folded into a wooded hollow of fragrant clover & Timothy grasses—
attended

by an ancient grove of sugar maples:

afloat—

above a rugged tangle of woven wire stretched from tree-to-tree
connecting a broken spine of stave-bolt fenceposts: all bound together

by a handshake.

II.

A handshake.

Gentle Reader, if you please...the brakes. Stop. *Stop!*
Do I make my point?

Nonetheless. Proceed.

III.

All this & more—beside a winding dirt-packed road
once teeming with legions of WPA workers & REA men—*real*

men, courtesy of FDR,

who raised the poles & fired the lines
which lighted the night
& caused the stars to dim—& wonder,

Why?

The lines which
yawned & stretched—then yawned & stretched again
all the way to Chicago/where so many sons & daughters fled

by rail

& thumb
& *Scenicruiser*/into the metal mouth of the city.

Where adding machines whirred & clicked...
& sheaves of paper
were shorn
from giant rolls...

in factories made of brick
& bone...
swept along
into the stone precipice
of Michigan Avenue...
to this very building, here, (Yes...*here*)
where we stand—
office of:

The Chicago Land
& Title Guaranty Company,
where,
(with white-starched civility),
all who seek
shall find
assurance

(Subject to any conflicts, encumbrances, rights-of-way not disclosed in the public records, easements, facts of survey, reservations, mineral or otherwise, any statutory lien(s), or other conditions or effects of law unbeknownst to the company...)

that:

IV.
together,

with enamel eyes,
we gaze upon the starless night: flabby, bald, lobotomized,

adrift—

in a sheepish

calm...

BEN LERNER

**God Is The One Who Comes In The Night
To Slit The Throats of Those Who Long
To Slit The Throats of Horses**

When the secret you take to your grave
is a punchline, that is the punchline.
When they save you the trouble
that is the trouble. And when a starlet
likens a tear to a diamond
a starling smacks into her window. It isn't
a starling. It's a baseball. And I am the one
who threw it, a zero
just like my old man. Mother
try as she might, is dead. To settle her debts
I've missed meteor showers, trains
that might have kept my black and white dream
of a small parade from recurring. Something
like spume plastered her wig
the night she was hyphenated. The result
is this ursine mug I keep showing
all over our boomtown. 'Nighttime
provides the radical interpretive charity
required to love you' she told me
the morning they sent me to study
cigarette smoking with widows
at Casa Feliz. Whenever I drink
I remember the obese, eloquent
hooker they hired to teach
me to ash. Other than that
I recall only a sequence of pleasing
sensations resulting in scars
and suspension. If Doctor Boneshine
hadn't converted my trendy hemorrhaging
into a profitable Rorschach industry
I would never have made it to Cali
in time for the 'big one': As I was tending
my crop of commas in the moonlight
a starling lit on the exposed nerve
they call my 'tongue.' It wasn't
a starling. It was a locust
husked from the 'Y'
in the Hollywood sign. Whether by fate
or design, my lung-shaped tent
collapsed into a dust that blanched

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my hair. I swear I meant to share
the grain and grapeshot with my critical
companion, but my plot of turf
 opened like a siren in the dark. Yes
her teeth were just so many sparks
against her scurvy blackened gums. Yes
her fingernails detached like plectra
from her slowly burning hands. But if
her heart became undisciplined
it was because no man competes
with sleep. I buried her beneath
sheaf of music. I wore my suit
of photographs. Her cenotaph
stuck to my sole like gum. 'That
 is gum,' the thanatotic cobbler
deduced in his lugubrious bazaar.
Regardless, I admire from afar
how, in death, her breasts achieved
the heft she sought in life through surgery.
From my unauthorized autobiography:
'It was raining gauntlets when I left
the marble canton of the favored sex.
I only took my dampened pack of fags
and six aesthetic principles of
silence. It was then I realized the *American*
 is more of a practice than an essence
and hope's maladaptive schema underpins
our every gesture west. Or something.'
Later, in Königsberg, as I sold
my bouquets of data door to door
I wondered if the frontier dreamt
itself. At night from my hotel
I'd watch the clippers hazard whitecaps
with sails so keen, so categorical
that my swank animism became
both a source of onus and of fame:
 here I'm pictured with Herr Boneshine
on the cover of the *Aufklärung Gazette*
angling my martini toward Berlin
with fatidical abandon. If I sketched
the dialectic of a mushroom cloud

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on a napkin back in disappearing ink
if I packed my starling-skin satchel
with charred books and gold teeth
if I gallivanted with the deaf
starlet of Prussian pornographic film
it was because as Professor Emeritus
 of Silence, with my swollen technology
of quiet, I could detect the coming hush.
I remember how I used the ruts
the sun avoids and other metrics
to orient myself when I decamped
through the inverted forest. I hanged
myself repeatedly, but each
root failed to bear the deadweight of
my speech. My speech:
'I discern no difference between pleasure
and reconnaissance, between the sensate mirror
 and the pink cicatrix
called *horizon*. I have no memory of Reagan
but I recall the Reagan era films
with great precision:
how heroes' reappearances are marked
by disrupted feasts. Villains
teach us how to put our dreams
to sleep, that many screens
ensconce a dearer screen
on which the cogitations of our pets
philander with an ease
 our mentholated logic lacks.' With that
I'd fix the perfumed noose, the root would snap
the laugh-track taped in labor-camps enwrap
the forest in a chorus of dark chortles. I take
that back: it was only I who laughed. I laughed
the laugh I save for crippled clowns
for Uncle Boneshine when he nearly drowned
in a puddle of vomit, in a thimble of light
the night we toasted our reunion
with absinthe in the cellar
of the Louvre. By then I'd proven
 the danger of the fiction 'innocence'
and so was delivered

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from my penal tutelage
under Mrs. Meta-Hunger
into a more blue-blooded form
of penance: Vietnam. I peppered
the jungle and moved on
to less reflective surfaces, to bombs
so brief they constitute a flurry
not a blitz, not wars, but incidents
that nag like accents

at the singed end of the flag. If a fist
can't both be tender and be black
it's no mystery why the majority
of stillborns still prefers
white dolls. In my heart's damp stalls
I knew that it was wrong
to lynch, even in effigy
but the very verb made birch boughs flinch
and made the granite sheriff drag
my pond. From my nuptial sod
I read the night sky's fiery errata. I belonged

I thought, as much as any absence
can belong, to the unspeakable
parking lot of God. 'Beyond
the future,' I was fond
of saying to my bitches
'lies another past in which
you costarred.' Armed with this
theodicy they learned to work hard
harvesting dice and leeches
from the bone yard. To retard
one's growth is not a question

I then believed, of morals
but to retard the growth
of autonomous hormones
implicates the Law
of Phosphor: 'What glows, glows
by grubbing on the difference
at the heart of difference
on the delicate velvet guts
of coffin pillows.' So billowed
my sense of beauty became silly

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dangerous, I drew
attention to attention, drew
rumors from mattresses, and drew
the precious final decibel from schools
of bullshit, schools of brass
impregnating what I painted
and painting mainly portraits
of myself. This spelled
the death of the 'original'
spelled it in Braille
the only alphabet that doesn't
echo, doesn't spill. Around this time
ignorance was first described
as a veil, which implied
that it was bridal wear. Accordingly
I divorced Mademoiselle
Boneshine and prepared to wed
my own elephantine head. Vegas spread
out before us like the mindscape
of a child murderer. We abjured
and corked our phalli in the Elastic Chapel
prayed for the sublimation of the egg
then exchanged our golden staples
and our vows. 'Do you, Saint
Silence, promise to undergo
continuous deformation
without rupture?' 'Do you
fungal, liberated pate, promise to resist
the temptation to imagine the terminus
of imagination?' We did. The stuttering
priest pronounced us univocal
and my husband kissed a negative
of his lips. But when, that night
my paper hymen ripped
the faggot fainted at the very sight
of ink. They displayed our blotted sheets
in the casino lobby while I played the slot
machines. Of all possible jackpots
I won a heap of miniature slot
machines. Needless to say
I went ballistic, plunking fetal starlings

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into coin-holes, 'winning'
ever tinnier starlings, which I stuffed
into my satchel and took off
for Argentina, land of émigré
 war criminals in adult diapers, land of lost
fulcra, where comets track
the night sky with ellipses. In those days
before public spectacles were perilous
they'd bathe the streets
in ketchup, limelight, anything playful
once a month. I know some people claim
to have seen blood, searchlights
but I myself rehearsed
the confabs that they've since dubbed
massacres. August evenings I would roll
 Obersturmbannfuehrer Boneshine
to the plaza in his wheelchair
so he could bet on cockfights and down jugs
of blackened wine. With what pomp
his death arrived! svelte, tuxedoed, blondes
on both arms, bejeweled stopwatches dangling
from his belt loops. He carried a hunting crop
rigged with an 4 shaped lash. I reckoned that
was hackneyed but I held
my tongue and watched him husk
mine Boneshine's dome. Beneath his face
 there was, praise God, another visage
this one sentimental
and nothing, I mean nothing, frustrates death
like simulacra. How this relates
to the extra-textual
to the abyss between the labial
tissue of signs, was the riddle
that I pondered as I biked
across the blasted gaucho country
where hornets stung the other hornets only
and where, beyond the field, objects were slowly
 coming into focus out of view. I never knew
that the opposite of 'true'
was 'corporeal' in auctorial
cultures. As a result, I was deported

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for claiming to have tongued
the governor's furred lacuna. Among
the thirteen forms of exile
to be banished from the dreams of mustangs
is most cruel, but to be ejected
from the very stars that image you
is more disorienting. I moved
 to New York but New York had moved
to Boca. Umbrellas opened
somewhere on the margins
of my future, maybe graveside
so I quit smoking, hoping
to inseminate myself by breathing only
jasmine and the fissile fumes
of glue. Whatever logic grew
inside my logic soon
outgrew it, causing me to vomit
the tufts of effervescent cilia
 they call music. Like all my gifts
I learned to abuse it
traveling around the south and getting paid
to swallow okra and regurgitate
Wagner. I pitched Wagner
like a parasol of pain
over the Appalachian graves
of bloodhounds, their disembodied
sense of smell flushing the game
from chestnut thickets
flushing out the ducks that nested under
 duck blinds, flushing starlings
from the silver manes of mustangs
mustangs I would dream
insure, and burn, dream
insure, and burn until I'd filled
my mattress with the cash
their ashes fetched. The funny thing
is that I couldn't shed the stench
of burnt steed, no matter if I bathed
in moonlight or the gasoline
it rained all May. It's been suggested
 that this is why I stayed

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despite the brisk approach of hurricane
Boneshine, that the reek
embarrassed me, it's been suggested
that they identified
my body by the smell. I believed
that the children were taller than the poplars
in hell, but no amount of reading could prepare
me for their vacant orbits or gray hair. To tell
what I saw there requires blinding
the reader, requires that I line
the reader's womb with billiard felt: I felt
the shadows in my mouth foreclose
my tongue. Death has skunked
enough mnemonics one would think
that a single spontaneous technique
snared in cerebral mud would lend
credence to our blueprints and the gin-
thinned ototoxic blooms confused
for song. But the motile poles of love
aren't long enough to probe
the inviolate anus of the lord. Not lust
but phototaxis damns
the pliant to the second circle
where proximity to limbo
accents Paolo's madcap spooning
of Francesca. The corpora
callosa bridge each nervous annulus
until the core
curricula of underworlds
adorn the heavens' hemispheres with scores
of jacklights. And there
where angels meal
on the rinds of night the shades discard
He naps. Where the syntax
of the sand suggests
a more responsible paralysis
He suns. And where the unborn long
for the garden of longing
He puns his teeth into a powder
they can sniff. 'If language
is a function of the fall

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then what the fuck is this,' I questioned
tugging at my nametag. He claimed
it was the foreskin of the soul. 'If only
the enraptured aspect's legible
than how can you decode
and sort a corpse?' He explained
the holy choreography of rigor
mortis. I guess I stored
the lexemes that He shat
inside my skull, because
when I awakened I was full
of shit the sacerdotal
bureau of the hospital
was eager to procure and expurgate
before my transfer to the leftist
wing. Rabbi Boneshine
helped me edit dreams
I had of my pet starling
barking up a cross
of pork. Medication? Mainly
just for sport: I'd harvest gellcaps
from the orchard of shakes
and snipe arboreal tremens
with my 12-step gauge.

When our ward staged
Eichmann in Jerusalem
as our summer play
I was chosen to portray
Jerusalem. My monologue
concluded: 'Even the antebellum
firmament was spanned
by turnpikes of cloud
by charcoal nimbostrati that appeared
to pipe the Nile's bile back and forth
between the mouths of hostages
like prayer. To build a ventilated temple
or replace the linen tallisim with mesh
requires that the rabbinate invest
in the lipstick hives of jezebels or sell
my onyx prepuce to the Muslims. Perhaps
my father's abusive use of

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pronouns helps explain
the generic nature of my pain. Even now
a hundred years after the wan
mustachioed philologist proclaimed
His death, His name remains
 unspeakable, the sacred
caesura of the West.' Our success
led to tours of choicer clinics
where Gucci glasses
corrected patients' parallaxes
by refracting every theory through the praxis
of the spleen. In the Chateaux 1963
a home for those with infirm temporal lobes
each night's production
was interrupted when the lone
gunman Boneshine picked off schizos
 claiming to be president.
It was there that I developed
the dramaturgical technique
of presenting all my dreams with actors deep
themselves, in dream. Because Americans believe
nictitation presages our decease
Broadway fancied the unblinking eyes
I painted on my troupers' lids to be
worthy of the theater's highest honor:
a new TV. From my acceptance speech:
'To dream within a play about a dream
 is to fulfill the mind's jealous fantasy
about the muscles. And of my muscles
I would like to thank these three:
the erratic contractile fibers in my lips
that opportunely limited the scolding
I delivered like a pizza to the angel
Gabriel, whom I mistook in Munich
for a mirror; the oneiric pump
fastened to my liver
that has rushed a certain carbonated serum
to my heart in times of need; and the wreath
 of stretch receptors in my retina
that distends my field of vision like a snake jaw
when I spray for rabid starlings in my coppice

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of radical signs. Least of all
I'd like to thank my dad
for lowering his anchor in mom's black
magician's hat. To commemorate her suicide
I'm expunging every vowel
from my bad name.' The resulting
cognomen could not be uttered
except by dashboard statuettes of Cyril
so I assumed and patented
the acronym 'TM™. Suspicion
that my name had been 'The Man'
caused me trouble everywhere
save Washington, where I sipped rum
and serotonin stolen from the bar
association. Sundays I would stroll
across the mall, ogling the state fata
morgana and the digital memorials
for Mammon. To disarm
my drunken declamations

I donned habits of corrective glass
designed to resize and hide
my penetrabilia. Nevertheless, good old boys
dipped their brandy soaked cigars
into my mind, enkindling my archive
of centerfolds, leaving me devoid
of nude platonic models at the time
I needed them the most:
my Bar Mitzvah. At my Bat Mitzvah
my water broke
across the bema in mid-chant. I claimed
my soul decanted, but the cantor
began to sing the Kaddish. If I had one wish
I would bring that tiny baby back
further back than birth, back before the first
single-cell starlings stirred
in the primordium, back before
on account of love, the earth
began to die. I scattered half
the fetus's minim of ash
over my train set's plastic tracks
and half among the actual tracks of bone

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that decussate the *volkloser Raum*
where nursing mercenaries roam
the steppes in party hats. I grew old again
this time by picturing a zephyr
of blood drifting over the grasslands
detaching the eyelashes of children
the abdomens of lightning bugs, the bulbs
of porch lights and onions. Hovering above
the silos and grammarians, I watched
a crimson drizzle delay
little-league games, stain and animate
cash crops, which began to fuck
and faint in the fields below. What can I say
if my lumbering brain conjured
Rio Boneshine, rapid of platelets
to carry away my salad days? What can I say
if the bladders of housewives
were heavy with pearls? Can I say
when I unhooked the orphan's bra
beneath the stars I found
another bra, that when we touched
we touched under the supervision
of the water? Not according to the jury
that sentenced me to be
her father, a sentence they suspended
above me like a halo
of vultures. I was expected to peel
the foil from her baked potatoes
but not to scan her glyptographic
pubes. I was entrusted
with her education
but told I couldn't use
the nominative, velvet case in which
my swabs of pollen grew
into high cultures. Her chores were
few but formal. I requested that she light
the back deck's potted fraxinella
in her sleep, dance the ignis fatuus
for my buddies, take her lignin pills
with breakfast, and dehisce
on camera when she reached

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maturity. Instead she pissed
all over me, pissed long
and thoughtfully, until my screen
 memories dissolved from the acidity
revealing scenes of boredom so extreme
my psyche had supplied the sequences
of images called 'history.' Believe you me
I wanted experience to be criterial
to store humiliations in the humidior
of the subconscious and to sell them
to the barbate pre-pubescents
of Topeka. But how could I be sure
if it was my dream
from which I was awakening
 and not a dream that I'd first seen
some rheumy starlet in a movie dream?
Or in a movie about the making of that movie?

BOOKS IN BRIEF:
REVIEWING REVIEWS
Marion K. Stocking

Ah! So you like to read reviews. So do I. Here are two magazines you ought to know about.

Harvard Review (Poetry Room, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, MA 02138. One year, 2 issues, \$16). The Fall 2000 issue (#19) devotes seventy of its 185 pages to its regular "Harvard Book Review," with a generous thirty-six crisp poetry reviews. *Harvard Review* has some shrewd and classy reviewers, such as William Doreski and Tony Hoagland. A few fall into blurbspeak ("enriches us all," "an essential poet for our time"), but all quote enough examples to help us decide whether we want to read more. What's more, *Harvard Review* includes with its poetry and fiction some critical articles of real distinction. In this issue, Daniel Donoghue's essay on Seamus Heaney's translation of *Beowulf* represents for me one ideal of what a scholar/critic can do. He brings a double depth to his reading: critical familiarity with the whole body of Heaney's writing as well as a scholar's grounding in the Old English text. After a graceful survey of the problems of any translation, contrasting the "mechanical" versus the "creative" poles, Donoghue provisionally accepts an alternative: "the possibility of literal accuracy" wherein "faithfulness" can be "as innovative as the most radical reinterpretation." He proceeds to illustrate how significant elements of Old English verse already distinguished Heaney's own poetry long before he undertook the translation of *Beowulf*. These elements form a logical sequence: from compound-making to apposition to catalogues to parallelism of syntax to sequences of episodes that require inferential judgments by the reader. In this presentation Donoghue carries us from the most exotic characteristic (compound-formation) through to the sequences of superficially unrelated vignettes so fashionable today. All this he does gracefully, with rich illustration, increasing our appreciation of both Heaney and *Beowulf*, while dramatizing how poetry and philology "inform one another." We come to appreciate Heaney's voice as a dynamic inheritance, not only from the Old English, but from Shakespeare, Hopkins, Auden, and Larkin: this linguistic gold-chock is our inheritance too.

If this sounds good, you should look into Herbert Leibowitz's **Parnassus: Poetry in Review** (205 West 89th Street, Apt. 8F, New York, NY 10024-1835. One year, 2 issues, \$24). Like *Harvard Review*, *Parnassus* publishes poems, fiction, essays, and art work

as well as reviews—and very good they are. But here the critical essay is queen. The current issue (Vol. 25, nos. 1 & 2, 612 pp., \$15) celebrates the magazine's twenty-fifth anniversary. In his introduction, Leibowitz, editor and publisher from the beginning, sets a high standard for the art (his word, bless his soul) of poetry criticism. He requires "airtight argument, a passion for style, and even an entertainer's wit and timing." A reviewer should, he adds, "be erudite and intellectually nimble, but also unintimidated by reputation and quick to point out such flaws as boring syntax and arbitrary line-breaks."

It is the critical essay and review that provides *Parnassus* with its distinction. Each critic is an expert, with authority in both the poetry and its context. Eric Ormsby draws us into the world of classical Arabic poetry in a sort of essay/anthology, in which he seduces the reader into the desert culture of the pre-Islamic and Islamic world and the poetry that "with its passionate accents" is still "composed, collected, quarreled over, elucidated, cherished, recited, declaimed, and sung . . . not merely by critics and academics but by ordinary readers with no credentials beyond a fervent and seemingly inexhaustible affection for words."

Then David Barber, in "Rumi Nation," responding to the torrent of recent translations of the verses of Jelaluddin Rumi, takes on the "expanding universe of the Rumi boom"—perhaps the result of the "big bang" that occurred when Coleman Barks "held court in that fateful year of 1995 with PBS minister of culture Bill Moyers." Barber hilariously anatomizes the Rumimania sweeping the land, setting it in the context of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century orientalism and its history in America from Emerson to the present. He recalls the tsunami of enthusiasm for FitzGerald's *The Rubiyát of Omar Khayyám* (skewering in passing Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*) and surveys the hagiographies of Jelaluddin Rumi and his shadowy soul-mate Shams, then tops it off with a critical analysis of recent translations. Barber wonderfully meets all of Leibowitz's criteria for a reviewer, and I'd have gladly purchased this issue for the iconoclastic wit of this one essay.

But there's much more. This anniversary volume, reflecting Leibowitz's concern for global culture, presents substantial chapters devoted to critical essays and exemplary poetry from

Arabic, Hebrew and Israeli, Persian, and Pacific Rim poetries and offers intensely interesting new essays and poems in English as well. In addition to the Ormsby and Barber, David Beispiel contributes a personal recollection of Yehuda Amichai that is both a farewell to the poet and an introduction for those not yet acquainted with his work. Dick Davis introduces a banquet of classical Persian poetry in his survey "Spells to Fascinate the Angel Gabriel." John Derbyshire examines translations of medieval Chinese poetry, comparing Witter Bynner and Jiang KangHu, Arthur Waley, David Hinton, and Burton Watson. To mention a few others among the ninety-four items in the table of contents: Ian Bamforth's discussion of the poet/essayist/scientist Miroslav Holub; Seamus Heaney's eloquent appreciation of Nikolay Zabolotsky (oh, you hadn't heard of him either? oops!); Tom Disch on New York poetry; Roger Shattuck on the importance of Gerard de Nerval; William Logan mercilessly reviewing the first two volumes of the Library of America anthologies of *American Poetry: The Twentieth Century*; Marjorie Perloff on William Gass's *Reading Rilke*; Helene J. F. de Aguilar on a century of Latin American poetry; Gyogyi Voros on Attila József; Elizabeth Frank on Osip Mandelstam, and, yes, more, more, more. "This Explains His *Adam and Eve*" may be Albert Goldbarth's very best essay yet, and I can only wish enviously that Carmine Starnino had sent his linguistic skylarking "Cornage" to us.

I value *Parnassus* for its depth of authority, its global range, its catholicity of subjects, its cleanliness (sometimes hilarity) of style, and, therefore, its contribution to my ongoing education. We owe all this to the extraordinary vision of its editor and publisher Herbert Leibowitz, for whom editing is a fine art—and obviously a joy.



Editor's Note

For the Spring 2002 issue we plan a special selection of poets under twenty-five. We invite submissions, which should note "for poets under twenty-five issue" on each poem and must reach us by October 1.