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Lee Sharkey, photograph, "Gable, Forbidden City," 2002

Mary Greene, design



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

CONRAD HILBERRY

Path to the Cabin

I know the way to the cabin. But this moonless night the dark's so thick you breathe it, brush against its dense black fur. The path curves, but which way? I stumble into a hemlock limb, some thorny bush. The other way then. Roots. The muttering of a stream I had forgotten. A couple of rocks to cross on, but where are they? Where is the stream itself? Cicadas shout from the trees. Frogs chunk. The creek's here somewhere. Looking up, I see a thin strip of sky between the trees. If I could follow that ragged map—looking straight up while I walk—would I find the path? I fall on a stump and catch myself wrist deep in its rotted center. At the lodge, fifteen minutes ago, I played ping pong making a few good shots, scooping the ball almost off the floor or leaning in and slamming it to the far left corner. I lost to the supple woman who kept returning everything, but some of the old technique came back. Here I shuffle, hands out, blind except for the fireflies, each waving a quick goodbye as I turn to look. Katydid call now, inviting someone, and still the undertow of crickets—a night of creatures steering by pheromones through the sexual dark. Down here on all fours, I'm asking for a whiff of where to go.

CONRAD HILBERRY

Rising

Three buzzards circle,
three snorklers having a look
at the shadowy reef

down here, our curious shapes refracted,
wavering, three circlers rising slowly,
sucked up by the sun.

A curl of smoke wanders
above a chimney, twisting and
gone. On my bike I lean back,

do wheelies, pedal up the steep air
into a purer region,
detached for once, where Plato's sun

can warm my back and neck.
Perspective. Or else just cowardice,
another suburb up here

above the trees, so genteel
all the roads are curved and nothing
may be built of body parts.

Late morning. Wood smoke,
air so thin that grief drifts up
into the idea of grief. The idea

of longing. Of lust.
The updraft lifts me under the arms
and, looking down, I see

what sends the wind this way: asphalt
streets and parking lots catching
the sun—me poised between the hot

geometry below and cumulus
condensing up above. Not bad.
I circle on the broad V of wings,

CONRAD HILBERRY

adjusting for the currents, watching
cowbirds, like blown seeds, swirl
and settle. I'm weightless

in the sun, and rising.
But somebody endowed us buzzards
with a downward eye.

A heavy smell rises and now I sight it,
entrails tangled in the vetch—
fresh road kill. Socrates,

here's to your bulbous nose,
your boys. My circles narrow.
I feel it already, the muscled shadows

jumping under my claws.

ANDER MONSON

Slow Dance with Icarus

Not so much the myth, as all the beauty
defined by hips and glitter caught in hair,
a finger etch-a-sketching collarbone and lip-
gloss smear in the school gymnasium
that doubles as a dance floor (thanks to helium
and crepe streamers) in the building
that will be torn down come winter.
*We could be levers or lovers in some
mechanism, I mouth into his sliver
of an ear. I don't know what I mean by this.*

*Or gears, he says, glimmering. By this he means
why is he here under a crappy disco ball
bought from Spencer's Gifts in a Green Bay mall,
four long hours away by car. Grease scent
murmurs up from the auto shop
that abuts the room that holds the boiler
like a hand does when it wants to check a pulse
as we learned in Health.*

I scratch my name in wax along his shoulder
blades so he will take it back with him.

*More swing than wing, he whispers,
and I say I won't include that cheesy line
in my post-dance-to-friends report. If you say
cut a rug, I say, I'm leaving you
alone out here with no one to hold on
to you.*

My friend Rob hit a trout with his car on prom night.
It was wrapped in paper in the center of the frozen
road, and his steering adjustment saved it from a ruder
route to fate, but he skidded through a snowbank
and that evening's fault, collapse, just shy of the canal
with its frozen beacons.

I ask Icarus what that might mean and he
says, *Mean, baby, shush.* A streamer tears
and dangles down. *This is not a lesson,
and I don't know and haven't learned or stayed
in school no more than him or you.*

MICHAEL CASEY

sssssss

keep in shape
use to run in the woods
behind the OJT barracks
but I had to stop
I kept on seeing snakes
and then I start hearing rattles
then one time I think
I even step on one sleeping
that type of snake not that friendly
and every body in the orderly room
impressed like oh wow
or cautionary like you be careful now
but Boddoms don't say nothing
and I look at him and he's smiling
imagining my getting hurt
oh I been here a while
I know what he like
I can read his iced up mind
smiling and if he shows
any kind of emotion
at all it's kind of like
a spirit leaving a pit
I firmly believe
he is the subject that
stole Urbi's jelly beans

HARRY HUMES
Trout Are Moving

Past midnight they slip free
of pools and deep runs, they rise

above thistle down and meadow dew,
hover in eddies of slate roof and chimney,

a drifting through window and hallway,
gill flare and eye sweep

above pillow and comforter
and over the gravelly dark,

here and there a run of moonlight,
a swirl of pale mayflies

as if risen from a sleeper's easy breath,
and all that time holding steady,

crimson side spots, once in a while
a slow shiver of backbone,

a shimmering, until in the first
up-welling of light through maple and ash,

suddenly a trail of bubbles
along a fin edge, not even

an easy turning around
nor that quick back and forth panic

when a trout is startled,
just a sinking away

through the ordinary morning stillness
of the house.

ERAN WILLIAMS

Between Troy and Rome

Memories carry their men like Aeneas
between home and some not yet invented city,
undaunted by Dido who calls to the ship
in which we are born. Not sated by the smell
of onions and burning meat, they bear us.

Men carry their memories like a city
full of rampant avenues and leaden shrines,
pointing forward, leading on in the great sack
of the past. That place to rest our fathers
is just beyond the prow, past these wars.

Remembering the city before the ruin,
he carries on, away from the wooden horse,
past the known arc of the earth. And Dido weeps
that Aeneas left for this ruin and labyrinth
but not for love. But not for love.

Men carry their memories like a city
whose name is forgotten, whose streets
are awash in absence. Dido is the guide.
In the ruin a whisper, "Follow this path
of blood and crumbs past the forest to the ships."

Our cities are built over oracles, their wisdom
rises as steam from the cracks in the streets.
Where is Cassandra? The gods have killed or blinded
all the seers. The cities of yesterday
are dismembered, and it is too late to run.

We memorize our promises to the past
on old artifacts and hearth gods whose arms
have broken off. What is dead and buried
will survive but what is left uncovered
and given no shrine will besiege the city.

ALMITRA DAVID

Io Drinks Coffee

1

Faintly at first your call to me, *Io, Io*,
insistent as the muted tapping of one trapped.
This has become your ritual,

the daily return to the same small table,
the careful placement of objects,
notebook, pen, cup,

the repetition of your litany,
questions that are prayers,
prayers, questions.

Your fingers circle
the rim of your cup,
you come here to breathe

to catch your breath
while on the run
while the running goes on.

When you ran from your house
on *Calle de las Flores*
you left with nothing,

you had to move fast,
your poems had become
cries of warning.

If you return
will the street be there?
the house? the piano?

Who will live behind
doors through which
souls were dragged into

the world of the disappeared?
Is this a myth?
Who will lead them back?

Write that my father
taught me to read the river,
to see what passes and passes,

yet how could I know
the white form suddenly before me,
wavering on the water?

We are coming to the heart of it:
how you changed before you fled,
how you did not recognize

your reflection as you ran,
how your eyes looked back at you
from a face not human.

2

If you return
they will be there,
the mothers in the plaza,

the pictures of the vanished,
the circling, the wheel of prayer.
Or stay, they are here

on the walls of New York,
the pictures of the vanished,
the circling, the wheel of prayer.

Towers have crumbled
more times than your calendars tell,
beyond number your

sons and daughters,
yet you examine the earth
as though that maze

of scratches in the dirt
were a map, a marker for
the beginning of madness.

How you have read their faces,
listened to their breath,
sung and rocked

sometimes quietly, soothing,
sometimes alarmed,
a messenger with bad news.

If the light confuses them and
the darkness terrifies them,
and if eating and not eating

cause them pain,
and if the sky and earth
close into a cauldron of rage

and you stand at the center of it,
what can you do then,
mortal mother?

and their blood?
The woman sweeping
debris from the step of

her ruined house in
her ruined city, which
daughter is she?

Which sons fly overhead,
neither eagle nor vulture,
hurling fire?

3

A hundred eyes watch you,
you feel their vigilance,
they will not drowse

no matter how
mesmerizing your story,
how sweet your song.

The guard has more than one head,
and the gods have finished
with the starry fan of the peacock's tail.

4

You stand by day, sorrow exposed,
that little by little
it might be lessened,

that the gods might take pity,
that at least the air
might consume an edge of it,

but by night it is restored
and you awaken,
grief whole and intact to begin again.

You call to me as I have heard you
call to the owls,
heard them answer

as though they knew
the part of you
that lives with them.

I am not an oracle; I read in your eyes
only what you allow to appear;
your guarded fear will remain so,

and the grief you have painted rose
for your children will continue to be
mistaken for the sunrise.

5

You want to talk of dreams,
a clear day, river over stones
wild grass, narcissus.

Write that my mood
was the river, the current,
the rustling willow branches.

Remember and understand
that when I saw the clouds
sudden and thick

close in on me
I thought it was simply
a change in the weather.

You ask about dreams,
What of them?
A virgin dreams of love,

of a god's entreaty.
What she knows in sleep
is faint or forgotten

in the afternoon walk to
the meadows, the gathering
of flowers for Hera's altar.

You have heard other stories,
tales of threats and thunderbolts.
No.

I tell you I sat peacefully
on the riverbank until
startled by the heaviness of the mist.

6
I did not say *Why the clouds?*
Are you afraid to be seen with me?
though I have heard you

ask that question more than once,
each time unaware
that your words slipped out

ill-positioned,
breech-birthed,
unaware that the fear

would be yours, rising in your throat
leaving you unable to speak.
(would you have said):

It was all so sudden.

He took me by surprise.

I didn't have time to think.

I thought he was a god.

He said he would protect me.

I couldn't believe the change.

7

Around the rim of your cup
your finger circles, a tethered heifer.
How long, you ask,

restless with my response: that I
counted the shades of green in the
gray-green leaves of the olive tree,

the swirls in its trunk,
the marks I made on the ground
until finally I wrote my name.

You call me to your table,
your protected corner,
you want to talk about today, *this day,*

because you single it out,
because you set it aside
like a chosen pebble

as though it were not of the same ground
over which I ran,
hounded by flies,

over which you are running,
the same ground that is
itself on the move.

You write of flight,
exhaustion, a final lying down
in field, ditch or sea.

Will you reach your Egypt,
recognize your face again
and rest?

The image of a tree is not a tree,
you say you know that,
What then, of the image of time?

This is not an altar,
though today you have placed
a small bouquet of

wild violets
in the glass beside your cup.
I know they are for me.

BECKY DENNISON SAKELLARIOU

Math Is Beautiful and So Are You

If n is an even number
then I'll kiss you goodnight right here,
but if the modulus k is the unique solution,
I'll take you in my arms for the long night.

When the properties are constrained as well as incomplete,
I'll be getting off the train at this stop.
However, if there is some positive constant,
then I'll stay on board for a while longer.

When it says that the supremum deviates from the least zero,
my heart closes off.
But if all moments are infinite and you can hear me,
I will open out for you.

This sequence satisfies the hypothesis of uniformity,
and because we know that approximation is possible
and that inequality is an embedding factor,
come, let's try once more.

ROBERT FARNSWORTH

Middle Age

Too early to fetch my son from his lesson,
I pull under the pines by the reservoir,
to find on the radio that most rarified
contrivance, opera: scheming, swordplay,
sorrowing song, pageantry, misapprehended love.
Something addles that tenor's heart. That
soprano's prayer is burning. Under a sheen
of top melt, the white lake is developing
a treacherous map of spring. Uncertain borders,
and for cold chambers locked below, random
spotlights. Lost in their own sufferings
or joys, even when briefly twined in duet,
the voices seem so isolated, abstract, pure.
Yet they sing about marriages, about love
that would swim or soar past the conventional,
the bleak. New happiness, new health. Heart
truth, refracted out of so much artifice.
It's almost spring—time again to wonder
if I can still believe in not knowing better,
in marriages of metaphor, in the sudden, wild
plunges love demands, in beautiful causes
punished toward triumph. O gamuts of the spirit
so extravagantly voiced! Listen. But just
as words defeat the quest for the absolute,
so melody dazzles as much as constitutes
a passion for essence. It's opera.
And that's ice turning back into a lake.
Twenty years I have believed my work in this
world is to sing it back, believed. It's too
late to know any better. But I don't plunge
anymore where it's forbidden. I listen only
from a distance to love's wild credos.
This, now, this is too much, this entombed aria,
that we cherish most because it's too late;
she won't be saved, hauled up hand over hand
by an ardent angel, into the light of spring.
Once, years ago, in the presence of a woman,
I wept, as was my wont then, over some piece
of music, what I don't recall. But if she
remembered that moment now, I wonder if
she'd suppose it just theatrical, or a souvenir

→

ROBERT FARNSWORTH

of some zeal she'd once loved in me. Almost
as old as I once thought I'd ever be, I'd like
to live quietly now beside this lake the law
forbids me to swim, listen hard to the owl-
haunted darkness of the pines, and in spring
to the creak and drift of this empty stage,
as it melts into bright dishevelments of wind.

KURT LELAND
Museum Pieces

1. Precolumbian Room

Rows of red clay figures without waists,
two finger-
squeezed points for breasts,
a small slit at the crotch.
Square-faced,
with unpupiled grooves for eyes,
how they watch
some horror with stoic,
blank-notched mouths.
The warrior
carved from black granite is no portrait,
but a theme:
helmet, club, genitals.
He also has no waist,
no muscles,
an existential stare.
The priests' taste,
if not the artists',
is for death masks,
skulls that seem
to emerge from freshly flayed skin,
a laughing god,
one-toothed and mindless—
the universal infant?
an ancient the wisdom's been squeezed from,
too distant
for prayer?
On painted vases,
life-like priest-kings prod
their sacrificial victims,
who *won* the ball game:
What high honor to die with their notice,
a name.

2. Traveling Exhibition

Everywhere such muscular hands.
A force reaches
through them like the will of God:
Let nothing human
be alien to me.
Those of a naked man
in thought,
a woman embraced.
The pair that preaches
without arms the supremacy of shape.
The eye's
nothing without the hands' having mapped a thing's space:
the folds of a gown,
the athlete's erection.
Grace
as a greedy service of surface.
How one tries
not to touch the cold metal that still flows with such
sensual curves:
Balzac's potbelly;
lesbian
lovers fleeing both from hell's gate and the stricken
glance of a matron who turns to look at me,
clutch-
throated,
as I read the placard.
So serene they are,
entwined in flight;
in her frightened stare,
so other.

MEBANE ROBERTSON

Subject Body

A subject body was he and he was Subject Body.
He was born and things happened. He piled things
In places. People unpiled them.
But also good things sometimes. Knuckle deep in candy corn,
He'd have polished off the whole. *Me am lithper;*
No, me am lisper. Subject Body the Younger stepped
On the heroic scale and measured up not. Doctors made
Special shoes so the little fellow who tumbled
Could stride. *Unga! Me am lithper.* And the rides
Spun sometimes too fast. And legs smooth
Were of ladies. And the grown ups swung their arms just so.

Sylvan was young Subject Body, chubfishing.
All in a flow of stream. He turned slates upways
For lanky baitworms. Chricket whirred the young master to sleep,
Hoppers spat. Dough ball, porkrind,
Blue spoon, and bucktail. Young Subject Body sank
Barefoot trough silt, and he prayed
The monster should not choose him, for he was small and mostly bones.
And alone in a shalebed, shadowed by a cold mountain, he once saw
A little trout and loved it. And he threw a clod in to show his love.
And when the ripples had all rung out,
Flat in the glass he spied a face. And it was his very own.

"Your mummy's not your mummy," said Chip the Boy
Who lived across the street. Words were exchanged.
Little Subject Body came home covered in noseblood.
And so many tears he couldn't cry out them fast enough. And who
Was this woman who wiped the snot from his face?
Something in him tore itself away and rattled, but not too loudly.
Not loud enough for anyone to hear.
Besides there was still summer left, and sometimes birds
And sometimes colored stones. And one evening at a cookout,
A man he'd never seen before laughed
And laughed and picked him up and called him son.

Hello golden rule and the redwhiteandblue flag he pledged to,
And the candy he lifted from the shop. Head on his desk, he pondered
Chalkdust and cursive and the ankles of a young crush.
Yes. Subject Body was mostly in Mrs. Tennant's homeroom, but Africa

→

MEBANE ROBERTSON

Was calling, and off he went, lamenting as he waved good-bye.
Africa was calling, The King required the young Subject's service.
The Fastest Boy Runner In The World, whose once lame feet
Had outstripped during recess all others.

ROBERT M. CHUTE

Sailor's Lament

Why does it always end this way
with the devil to pay and
no pitch hot? Never quite finished
when the lights go dim. One
more line—when your head nods
and you drop your pen.

Here we are, careened on the mud
in Quoddy Bay. A twenty foot tide
and the tide's at flood
at Quoddy Head while we've
still got the devil to pay
and no pitch hot. Must it
always end this way?

All hands working the pumps
all day just to keep our hulk afloat,
giving the whole damned ocean
a ride, through our bilge,
back over the side, with
everyone thinking: Is this really
better than sinking? It ends
this way. Careened in the mud
in some strange bay, the devil
to pay and no pitch hot.

ALBERT GOLDBARTH

27.000 Miles

These two asleep . . . so indrawn and compact,
like lavish origami animals returned

to slips of paper once again; and then
the paper once again become a string

of pith, a secret that the plant hums to itself. . . .
You see?—so often we envy the grandiose, the way

those small toy things of Leonardo's want to be
the great, air-conquering and miles-eating

living wings
they're modeled on. And bird flight is

amazing: simultaneously strength,
escape, caprice: the Arctic tern completes

its trip of nearly 27,000 miles every year;
a swan will frighten bears away

by angry aerial display of flapping wingspan.
But it isn't all flight; they also

fold; and at night on the water or in the eaves
they package their bodies

into their bodies, smaller, and deeply
smaller yet: migrating a similar distance

in the opposite direction.

ALBERT GOLDBARTH

Vacation: Carolina Coast

Maybe it's because we're all born into this world
on a wing of blood, that we can't stop from seeing our lives
in sunrise on the water.

Of course enough of us leave
in violence, that sunset is also powerful
metaphorically. Enough of us sink out of this world
still burning, still believing
that the night is long, but passes.

■

One day a distracted gull got into the beach house,
through the front door, as if it were a rightful tenant.
That was its attitude, in fact, for the whole
two-hour comic opera chase: that somehow *I*
was the one who simply was renting this space
for a little while.

■

date: the late 1770s

Unable to secure financial backing
for his telescope, and undeterred, the avid
William Herschel made the necessary molds himself
from horse shit. With that finished apparatus,
he could see "the farthest stars,
the highest, and most angelically rarefied
aerial show." As with this gull:

picker of offal,
eater of gutter dung, that rises
into the clear empyrean,
this garbage feeder,

■

J. phoned today. Among the news:
that D. and M. are separating.
"Look, these things happen. It's difficult,"
she said, "for poet-and-poet marriages."
Yes, I suppose. Although you might think,
to look out my window, that water and water
are easily—are perfectly—water.
What better formula is there?
You might think . . . well, anything you or I

→

or A. or Q. or T. or K. might think
in our glib metaphors isn't the point
now anyway. And sometimes out my window, they say,
there are storms that can drive a whole house apart.

■

I must have been standing in front of a scrap
it desired, because the gull looped down
in front of me, eye level—we were truly
nose to beak—and, by some avian magic,
hovered there immovably without needing
to scull the air at all. One of us had
to yield the way and, after some rapid thinking,
it was me. I wasn't out there to make
a living; the gull had greater claim.

■

And Herschel saw “a magnitude of stars,
in such array beyond our counting, I was lost there
like a child in a strange land.” What we do is make of them
a throne, a swan, a cup to dip with; even a dragon
is something relatively familiar.

On the intercoastal
waterway, the surface can be calm enough to see
the sky—the way a lover bends to the face
of a lover, and sees a version
of his own face there. That must be a thing we do
for each other: make ourselves seem somewhat
comprehensible.

“The anus, the urethra, and the vagina
were once called ‘the other face’: an appropriate name
for mock eyes, noses, and mouths”
(James Elkins). —Constellating
the terrifying and wondrous into something we know.

■

Ooo yumyum, food. Ooo, zero-in, food.
You have to live around them a while
to truly understand the etymology:
gull: gullet.

■
At one point, shore becomes a stony tendril
extending into the ocean. Follow this, eventually
you're standing on the dot below a question mark
—just you, a rock beneath you,
and an endlessness of blue that goes down to Atlantis
and up to the coalsack black of outer space.
It ends here; there's no further step to take.
Except . . . it sometimes seems there *is*. I don't mean
drowning; or astral projection; or anything that
dramatically metamorphic. But: isn't there an inch
beyond, that's still you . . . but a fog of you,
a foam of you . . . a you that isn't beat every day
by the whisk of waking up human. . . .

■
Of hundreds of luscious and nearly naked
nineteen-year-old tanners on this beach, the one
whose poses take my wildly roving fancy
deepest into her is a woman with an arrogantly careless
squat, her ass become the reckless cleft
a fuchsia thong's slim, spandex grip accentuates . . .
ooo, yumyum: girl; ooo, zero-in: girl.

Is *this*
what happened to D. and M.?—this common greed
monogamy won't tolerate. Or could it be more
complicated?

—one of them *did* get within reach
of stepping into a fog-self, into a foam-self,
and (so often the case) was frightened by it,
or bored by it, was faced with a self
too alien, and so there was no antidote
but running back to the messiest part
of being human again.

■
*Now Spring has returned, enticing boats
to dance upon the waves once more. . . .*
—Antipater of Sidon,
in *The Greek Anthology* [X:2].
Here, they're lined up in the marina:

→

*The Atomic Balm; Tight Tooshie; Tax Break;
Big Dix; Sea Slummer; Elvis Lives.*

Spring has returned, and the boats are enticed,
and a tang of eternity spices the harbor.
Maybe Elvis *does* live. This is the same and patient
algae that coated the pilings when the *Argo* gave weigh.

■

*And was it my father who called to me,
into my sleep?* No, it was a boat's horn
in the drizzling distance; my father is even farther
than that, farther, farther, farther than that.
*And was it myself, from when I was a child,
yelling through my dreams?* No, it was only another
squawking gull on the jetty, one of hundreds.
*And then it wasn't the ancestors? it wasn't the muses,
wasn't the Otherworldly Powers advising me
through wind, and the boards, and the rigging?* It was
wind, and the boards, and the rigging.
And yet. And yet, on a day that follows a night
of such wide-open supposition, a man can walk the pier
and see his thousandth cliché gull of the season,
only a speck in his peripheral vision, and somehow
none the less be zapped with the thought
—it might be a wind, or a distant horn—
that something important is always folding
into itself, is dough into dough, eggwhite into eggwhite,
cloud into air, storm into silence,
life into cloud, death into rain, egg into a rising dream of waking.

■

Out, one brisk azure afternoon
with Mark on his boat the *Misty C.*
The churn of water behind us
breaking, and healing; breaking, and healing;
splitting, and wedding, and breaking, and healing.

ALEXIS LATHEM

The Skate

The sea was asleep that day. We could have sunk
our nets and dragged in whole nations of fish
without a sweat. Followed a noreaster
that blew for days thrashing the seas
against our decks, waves crashed,

foamed and slammed us against the rails.
Crests sent us flying, troughs swallowed us
whole, up to her mast. The sea slopped over us
and we were maggots to God that day.
Twenty-eight days at sea, from stringer

to stringer we pulled up torn nets and waterhauls—
Gone were the times we reeled in miles and miles
of mesh stock full of jack mackerel
like we were pulling in the moon. We'd be
sloshing up to our calves in guts and gurry.

Now we would head back with our holds empty.
We were sworn to silence about that day.
We dragged up our trawl swelled with water, nothing
but green sea water and its stinking catch:
a few yellowtail and squid and not more

than a bucketful of scallop, rocks and a great,
flapping skate. Bob—I'll just give him a name—
was raging. He pitched the sprawling gray mass
like a wave across the deck. *Fucking cunt*,
he called it. Jim struck back, saying, *Bet*

you can't. Bob froze. His eyes
boiled. Jim stared back, stared hard.
We pulled away, all of us, and there he was
standing before the fish, lying
with its useless wings pinned back.

You could see her soft white underside
with its baby-bottom flushed with pink,
the vulva exposed like an over-ripe rose.
Its little, animal eyes. He was stripping down
his oilers and unleashing his belt. He

dove. The gray tips of her wings curled around him almost lovingly. He rose and fell on her like a lashing. He beat her, he beat her down, the sea beneath them in an astonished calm. When he was done, she was so lifeless

I thought he'd killed her, and the sea beneath us, too. We were silent as if we'd formed a circle of the drowned. The silence pressed down on us and we were slowly going down. And then, he sprang to his feet, pulled up his oilers

and turned—thought twice and turned back, reached down and lifted her by her tail, hurling her through the air and over the rail: *She flew for a moment, tilting her wings, then wafted*

down, the water folding over her, first one wing, then the next, the crease in the sea's surface, then the delicate dark hole closed down like a pupil, and she was gone. The sea swayed and heaved

as if fatigued, the skate sinking, falling heavily from another world, down pillars of light and dark, sinking in perfect camouflage with a wave.

JASPER BERNES

Thinking

in the elevator, how thought in small compartments, increments,
swells, inverse to space and time, under limits,
under definition: long complexes of events
served up whole between floors of the clinic,
two-sided polemics in shorthand
while she checks her watch, decides and re-decides,
her parents talking over each other, over years
she has rehearsed this moment, its variations and fictions,
the wanting to turn herself in, over, up, to herself
and out of the sliding steel doors
she imagines opening in four, five seconds
onto a series of more doors and choices
she has already made and remade, the hermetic
interior empty and therefore heavy
with a lack of anything to distract her
from thinking how she has
risen and descended, shaken hands, gesticulated
mentally already so many times she imagines
she is still in bed imagining
this moment in the third-person
listening to the phone ring no one, comma,
she wants to talk to. The hand-worn
walls, however, confirm that eventually
she will have to imagine everything
and not just a pair of thick spectacles
at rest on a *Physician's Desk Reference*.
When the doors open, she's trying not
to think about it, she's thinking of her friend
at work on the water-mains
twelve-hundred feet under Manhattan,
the light on his helmet, where it ends,
where normally a wall of whatever is.

JASPER BERNES

Chiasma

Halloween and I'm a man sorting recyclables,
thinking how matter is mostly emptiness in drag,
insipid newspapers and pouting olive-oil bottles
and the little coffins eggs come in.

In the end, wrote Hegel, there are several bins:
carbon and nitrogen; rich, poor, dead;
glass, paper, scrap-metal and plastic.

But tonight everything's jumbled or decussated,
the fear is candy, the vandals just kids,
my downstairs-neighbor's five-year-old daughter
dressed as the color yellow, the fallen leaves
dead wasps gusting across Buffalo St.

Tonight everything needs to get put
back in proper categories, the way,
when cleaning, one must first make a mess,
the way for months this pile of refuse
has intimidated the furniture but now
my friend—who thinks I am a lesbian woman
masquerading as her lover—is here to help me
with the morass of my consumer lifestyle.

While we work I plan what I'll wear
later on, to the party, which I fear deeply.
She suggests a blank nametag, such that
at midnight I will be a bell, at the party
a wall. Outside, I can hear the senators
begin their benders, disguised as winos,
collecting taxes in person, the town a mausoleum
and a hospital in every house, massive oaks uprooting
and trampling through middle-income
housing developments, drunk with wind, while I work
with speed and zeal, trying to get everything
organized before my friend turns into my mother
or I say, thinking it, another's name
in place of hers, old love recycled by new
like the Chinese proverb says
though I fear it all ends up
in the same stomach: molten glass
and mashed memoirs, photocopied forests,
composting cosmetics. My friend and I finish up
and haul the bags out and leave, dressed
as staying home.

JASPER BERNES
Warrant for My Arrest

Yes I have the right to remain a problem,
the right to rapt captivity, the right to be
feasted upon by raptors, the right to plead
prone to the terror in towns with my name
in adjacent states tonight.

Yes my name has a problem. Yes my problem's
name is this overkill of second-person
pronouns: you that I love, you I have run from,
you with no name, you me. Yes I want to tell you
No we are not falling

asleep in a burning library. No, sadly,
we are not two umbrellas tumbling down
the obscure beach in a balmy nap. No
the problem is not lots of problems, not
the cigar-smoke back rooms

where our futures are plots, not a ticket.
Yes you must learn now to fall down stairs, your
ticket, rights, learn the problematic
names of the known solutions like I don't
exist. Yes I heard you. No

you don't know me either. I said I heard you.

ALAN BROOKS

The Translator

She sat next to me, reading
La Neige Tombant sur les Cèdres
the whole flight, east coast to Seattle,
except for a meal, a nap or two,

her book filling the dry cabin
high, high above the parched nation
with mystery, with green and solemn light.

I felt then the cedars I was leaving
and those towards which I was passing,
how cool they would be, even in summer,

and how in winter the snow off Fundy
or Puget Sound would hold the half-light steady
in its moist fingers, weaving a story, the same and not the same,
among the branches over my upturned face.

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Marion K. Stocking

Donald Hall stops reading a poem as soon as he encounters the pronoun *I*—or so I read recently. That makes me smile; I recognize someone who—as editor or teacher—has encountered too many lineated journal entries. Or perhaps he was reacting to poets whose popularity depends to some extent on their much publicized private lives. I prefer his assertion in a *Paris Review* interview: “I don’t believe poets when they say ‘I,’ and I wish people wouldn’t believe me.” I talk, he says, through a mask I invented. “*Je*,” we recall, “*est un autre*.”

On the other hand, when I once told Robert Frost I was reading Shelley he exploded: “Shelley! That liar! ‘I fear thy kisses, gentle maid; thou needst not fear mine.’ The hell she needn’t.” *Pace* Frost, we all know, don’t we, that every poem, first person or not, is to some degree a work of fiction (from *ingere*, to form). The act of forming a poem creates a new reality. The person writing is, moreover, altered by the process of composition, consciously—by choice of subject and by surrender to the needs of the poem—or unconsciously. Frank Bidart, in *Music Like Dirt* (the first in Sarabande Books’ new Quarternote Chapbook Series) writes “Teach me, masters who by making were/ remade, your art.” What I want to do here is examine the relationship between that actual composer, of whom we may know much or nothing, and how he or she appears in the poem. I hope, on the way, to explore what that relationship means to the reader.

■

David Lehman, *The Daily Mirror: A Journal in Poetry* (New York: Scribner Poetry, 2000, 160 pp., \$16 paper, 0-684-86493-2) and ***The Evening Sun: A Journal in Poetry*** (New York: Scribner Poetry, 2002, 160 pp., \$16 paper, 0-7432-2552-X). I was bed-ridden when Garrison Keillor on his *Writer’s Almanac* read a Lehman calendar poem every day for a week. I recognized these as Real Poems of that endangered species, light verse, and so dove gleefully into the two volumes of his “daily dispatches from the front.” Lehman explains that despite the journalistic format of the daily poem, “the desired end is an aesthetic product that asks to be read as a poem” and must “transcend the occasion of its making.” In the good old days the *New Yorker* welcomed excellent light verse. It could do worse (and doubtless will) than publish such verse as Lehman’s every week. I particularly enjoy the lines in which he invites the reader to watch the poet at

work. Here's an excerpt from *The Daily Mirror*, "June 9":

I think I will write a one-line
 "Language" poem here it is
 it's called "Syntax" and the line
 is "Sin tax" and now you may
 ponder the example (formerly ample)
 of a dime on every cigarette.

I enjoy the irreverent playfulness, the bouncy dance of the lines, the unembarrassed self-consciousness. Or how like you this: "Do I still like to think/ of myself in the third/ person? I do, I mean,/ he does"? And off he bounds in pursuit of a delicious fantasy female. (Some poets are always ready to eff the ineffable.) I have no idea what "the real David Lehman" is like, but the poet he introduces in these poems—as *I*, *we*, *you*, or *he*—is canny, funny, irreverent, playful, a whiz with the language. Someone, in short, I'd be delighted to encounter daily.

Hayden Carruth, *Doctor Jazz* (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2001, 140 pp., \$20 cloth, 1-55659-163-2). One of my former students wrote asking why contemporary poetry had to be so difficult. She had discovered a poet to whom she responded powerfully, but since the poems were not obscure, she wondered if that meant they were not significant. The poet was Carruth, writing straight out of a lifetime of passionate experience, and speaking straight to the heart of a reader. I agree with her: This is a wonderful book. In Part I, modestly titled "First Scrapbook," the poems are largely autobiographical, as in the high comedy of "Because I Am," about the poet/maker in his relationship to the jazzman Sidney Bechet. Some are playful and some mordant, and one explodes in metaphysical "rage/ Enraged, terror self-terrorized." Carruth makes no effort to hide behind the "poet" writing these poems.

Part II, "Martha," is a heart-wrenching account of the first day of Carruth's daughter's death. The poet moves between vignettes of her life and clips of himself, moving, movingly, through the present/presence of her death. "The immensity of what should be said/ defeats me. Language/ like a dismasted hulk at sea is overwhelmed/ and founders." Part III, "The Afterlife," has nine outspoken poems on the certainties and mysteries of existence, written in a voice from beyond the grave. Part IV is fifty-four

quick little faxes to a “William”—sparks from the fireworks of a blazing imagination. Part V, “While Reading Basho,” begins with “Comparative Literary Economics”:

Basho, you made
 a living writing haiku?
 Wow! Way to go, man.

Many of the poems in Part VI, “Second Scrapbook,” are what the name suggests, memory pieces. But not all look back. “Senility” and “Turning Back the Clocks” are very much of this moment. The book as a whole is an astonishment of generosity—140 pages exploding with sensuous candor, imagination, and energy—with, from, by, in and on music recalled and verbal music newly composed. By using colloquial language and creating an appearance of shameless honesty, Carruth puts no scrim between himself, his writing, and the reader. These poems are nonetheless artifacts shaped to a music of wit and elegance—in language that lures us through and beyond the poet to the joys and despairs of the human condition. Anyone who closes the book at the first *I* impoverishes herself.

■
 Now to the opposite extreme—poets who hide in the wings as they present center stage a character they have conjured. If the poet disappears into the character, we know that poet by the choice of subject and the qualities of the poem.

Sharon Chmielarz, *The Other Mozart* (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2001, 98 pp., \$21.95 cloth, 0-86538-101-1). Of the seven children born to Leopold and Anna Maria Mozart, only “Nannerl,” the fourth, and Wolfgang, the seventh, survived. We know a great deal of the *wunderkind* brother. Now we can imagine what it was like to have been his perhaps equally gifted sister. Chmielarz carries the reader chronologically through the life as though in Nannerl’s own mind—wry, intelligent, passionate, sharply comic. Some poems are in Nannerl’s voice; in others a narrator portrays what her subject is thinking. In “Where She Is: Nannerl Mozart in the Hinterland,” the poet creates a dialogue between the desperate Nannerl, prisoner of a marriage of convenience, pleading with her father for repair of her clavier, and a narrator supplying the gist of Leopold’s replies to his daughter. Chmielarz provides some sense of context by inserting,

rarely but tellingly, poems in the voice of the father, mother, brother, and others (see the wonderfully self-dramatizing “Leopold Mozart: On the Cross”).

Where is the poet in this? She reveals herself in many ways. First, her choice of a subject—a woman. Further, a woman of great talent stifled by the patriarchal conventions of her day. Even more, a woman with a passion for her art (perhaps every poem is an *ars poetica*). The poet has a mission: to give this neglected woman, belatedly, a voice—to make her a voice for all women artists subdued by circumstances. To do this strongly, the poet needs to command an artistry appropriate to her subject. Here is a bit of a letter from Nannerl to her scatologically-inclined brother:

Enclosed lie two intimate
thoughts for my donkey monkey, the little A-hole
in a cherry red suit, the great *Wunder Arse* at the keyboard,
der Herr Dr. Wiggly Butt in the parlor but not the boudoir
(or? yet?), the twin to my own brown braying heart.

Chmielarz courts invisibility so successfully that even the poems that seem to be spoken by a third person narrator maintain the wry, envious, longing, sarcastically joking voice of Nannerl. Nonetheless, the poet reveals herself in the depth of her research into “smoke-gagged streets,” “Kachelofen,” and “camomile with eggwhite” to create the daily life of an eighteenth-century Austrian *hausfrau*. I willingly suspend disbelief and read as though I were exploring primary sources. Chmielarz’s analytical imagination enables us to gaze through her apparently transparent lens to share the life of this difficult, profoundly appealing woman. For all its research, *The Other Mozart* is still a work of fiction that draws us into a time and place from which we can see our own age, our own creative artists, including Sharon Chmielarz, more clearly. As we follow Nannerl’s narrowing career our lives are, paradoxically, emotionally and intellectually expanded.

Natasha Trethewey, *Bellocq’s Ophelia* (Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 2002, 64 pp., \$14 paper, 1-55597-359-0). Early in the last century E. J. Bellocq photographed women in the famous New Orleans red-light district Storyville. Trethewey selects one of these portraits and imagines three years in the life

of a woman she calls Ophelia. Unlike Chmielarz, she opens with a poem about her personal encounter with the photograph (happily reproduced on the cover). Then we enter Ophelia's life and voice with a 1910 letter from New Orleans to her teacher back home, betraying her panic at failing to find a job that would allow her to use her education in literature and writing—and to pass as white.

Ophelia's letters home, in various verse forms, make up the first half of the book, which closes with an account in Bellocq's voice of the relationship of a viewer to the photograph (the reader to the poem?). The poet then imagines passages from Ophelia's diary—all in fourteen-line stanzas—flashes of autobiography followed by entries on her work as a model for Bellocq as he teaches her the art of the photographer. Like Chmielarz, Tretheway has composed a *bildungsroman* about the struggles of an artist. Except in the introductory and concluding verses, her poems in their varied forms appear transparent: the reader gazes right through them to Ophelia, who is candid, direct, eloquent, but never "poetic." The final poem in the volume, as an afterword, envisions the actual taking of the photograph on the cover. It ends

Imagine her a moment later—after
the flash, blinded—stepping out
of the frame, wide-eyed, into her life.

That "parting shot" may not be necessary, but it serves to remind us that we have been watching three creative spirits at work—the poet and her Bellocq and her Ophelia.

■

Janet Holmes, *Humanophone* (University of Notre Dame Press: 2001, 88 pp., 2001, \$28 cloth, 0-268-03054-5; \$15 paper, 0-268-03055-3). Many musics sound through this book—whistles, trombone, theremin, and the poet's own verbal music. But the weight of the volume is in two long poems. The first is the title poem, about an instrument invented by the father of George Ives and performed by singers, "each of whom sang a single tone, and only/ when called upon by the music." Though the poet remains hidden behind her subject, she reveals her closeness to him by composing two verbal scores for the humanophone. "Partch Stations" documents the career of the experimental musician/inventor Harry Partch. Although the first person in these poems

is always Partch, like him Holmes takes risks: in her choice of subject, in the antique language of her titles (“He Hangeth the Cloud-Chamber Bowls”), and in her structuring the poem on—of all things—the stations of the cross. Although in these two poems the poet herself is invisible, in the first section of her book there are a few first-person poems where there seems to be no veil between Janet Holmes and the reader. I especially enjoyed her “Reading Dante,” a subject not often handled with high humor. The book is full of various delights.

Glori Simmons, *Graft* (Kirksville, MO, Truman State University Press, 2001, 70 pp., \$14.95 paper, 1-931112-03-7). Like Holmes, Simmons includes—together with graceful *I*, *we*, and *you* poems—a powerful biographical portrait: “The Bookbinder: *Mary Louise Reynolds, 1881-1951*.” Reynolds was an expatriate bookbinder, intimate and collaborator with Marcel Duchamp, who worked for the French Resistance during World War II. Like Chmielarz, Simmons remains concealed behind her subject, mixing letters and poems in Reynolds’ own voice with sympathetic narrative passages. Elsewhere in the book Simmons employs first person to call up the voices of other women, wide-ranging over the centuries.

Choice of subject, as we’ve seen, is a significant way for a poet to appear in her poems. Holmes as a poet/prosodist is drawn to experimental musicians—fellow artists inventing ways of exploring frontiers. Simmons adventures out into the characters of women in many ages, many cultures. Unlike Chmielarz and Tretheway, both Holmes and Simmons append substantial bibliographical and explanatory notes. But all four have launched themselves through research and imagination into other selves and enlarged our understanding of the human condition. To be greatly good, Shelley said, one “must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own.” This is surely still one of the high missions of poetry.

■

Maurice Manning, *Lawrence Booth’s Book of Visions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001, 80 pp., \$25 cloth, 0-300-08996-1; \$12 paper; 0-300-0898-8), Vol. 95 in the Yale Series of

Younger Poets, selected and with a Foreword by W. S. Merwin. Here too the poet seems invisible in his poem. Indeed, the author's name almost disappears from the jacket, in dull red type under a snapshot of a red dog. The eponymous Lawrence Booth, nicknamed Law, is the one who has the visions. The poet remains behind the curtain, except as an omniscient narrator. All we learn of Manning himself is from jacket blurb: he has a conventional academic career and like Law is a Kentuckian. The whole book could be either enhanced autobiography or fiction. But what I really do know about this new poet—and all I need to know—is that he has created a book-length poem that knocked me off my shelf with the energy of its linguistic imagination. Merwin says in his splendid Foreword, "The visionary cast of the whole work holds one part after another up to the light and shows the planes of time back-lit, one behind the other." I wish I'd said that.

Here are some of the ingredients:

Place

a Kentucky farm, thirty-seven acres, with a Great Field.

Time

the boyhood, adolescence, and young manhood of a boy born about 1966, plus a quick history of the seven generations that preceded him in this territory. The poems depart from the chronological, with some boyhood scenes appearing late in the book with a significance we'd have missed had they appeared earlier. On first reading I experienced a series of little shocks as I suddenly understood something that had seemed cryptic or visionary when first introduced.

Dramatis Personae

(1) Black Damon, Law's "pastoral comrade," a "baby-faced black boy" who, in seven "Dreadful Chapter"s, acts as chorus to the drama. These are in a dialect that may well be authentic but sounds to my Yankee ears like an echo of minstrel-show lingo, recalling Berryman's "Mister Bones." Here's a sample of the first "Dreadful Chapter":

Red Dog barkie echo plum back to de house,
Rooster Strut Daddy pissin off de porch,
Mama fevered up in de pregnit bed,
all skeered bad cause Sissy comin soon.

(2) Mad Daddy (Stagger Lee Daddy, Bad Gamble Daddy, Ninety-Proof Daddy, etc.), Law's gambling, hard-drinking, violent father.

(3) Red Dog, "the sure-fire antidote to the devil."

(4) The devil and God, walk-on parts.

(5) The Missionary Woman, introduced as almost certainly "an exquisite work of Booth's imagination."

Law's visions

Many Walter-Mitty type fantasies conjured from his reading (at one point he is Hopalong Booth), drawings that disturb his teacher and classmates, sexual flights of fancy, and one allegorical dream (that he is a tree) that suggests Merwin's influence.

Law's character

From the bliss of a boyhood in his own country, to the wild sexual longing of adolescence, to the Oedipal clashes with Mad Daddy (who calls Black Damon a coon), and to rage at the white boys who run over Black Damon, where Law's native brotherly love comes in conflict with an impulse to vengeance. Finally the boy emerges into young manhood, his idealistic imagination surviving, though somewhat darkened:

Oh,
the vulnerable Self, the Self in collusion
with the ransacked natural world! Oh,
the archetypal knick-knack paddywhack
dolorous process of becoming!

This is by all my definitions a poem of vital romanticism.

The form

The narrative language suggests Law's, but the poet reveals himself in his diction (*collusion, archetypal, dolorous*), in his need to find words for Law's consciousness. The disparity between the poet's language and that of his subject suggests Faulkner. And the versification is dazzling. No two of the fifty-six poems are in quite the same verse form (e.g., Black Damon's dialect Dreadful Chapters are all sonnets of one rhyme scheme or another, from strict Italian to virtually unrhymed when the family it describes seems to be self-destructing).

The spirit

Despite his portrayal of a world prone to violence and destructive of the natural environment, Manning comes through as a comic

spirit. A playfulness keeps erupting throughout the book, especially in poems that are cheerful parodies: a classified ad for Law's female partner, a geometry textbook proof of the existence of Hell, a distraught teacher's letter to Law's parents, a mock court order of the Blueblood County Daughters of the Confederacy against Lawrence Booth. As Merwin says, "the writing's unfaltering audacity is equaled by its artistic control." I too want everyone who cares about poetry to sit up and take notice. Like *Bellocq's Ophelia* and *The Other Mozart*, and like all strong fiction and drama, *Lawrence Booth's Book of Visions* allows us access to another spirit, drawing us beyond the self, enabling us to comprehend the world more richly.

■
 Finally, I want to present two radically different poets who have arrived at a place in our literature where their writing has something like the effect of Biblical prophecy. Both are visionaries, not in the sense of indulging fantasies as does Manning's Lawrence Booth, but as poet/makers exploring the human condition in relation to the largest forces in our universe. These lines from Albert Goldbarth's "Glass" suggest the scale of their vision:

If it's true, what the neurocartologists
 claim—the brain is the densest field of interconnection
 in the cosmos—then these symbols of personal suffering say
 a pain can be mapped out to coincide with the whole of the
 universe.

"Glass" is in **Albert Goldbarth, *Saving Lives*** (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001, 128 pp., \$35 cloth, 0-8142-0871-1; \$19 paper, 0-8142-5073-4). You may have heard Susan Stamberg on NPR interviewing Goldbarth when this volume won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry. She quoted a critic who had compared his work to some effervescent soft drink. He responded quietly that he hoped the poems were more substantive. The word struck me as just right. I checked it in my *American Heritage Dictionary*: "Substantial, considerable." "Independent." "Real." "Essential." "Having a solid basis." And then a grammatical definition I hadn't known: "Expressing or designating existence." Exactly! One has only to look at the title, *Saving Lives*, and the cover photograph of a blood-traced masculine arm reaching down a stone wall to clasp the wrist of a

woman hanging on below—a potent implied narrative.

Goldbarth's organization acknowledges his consciousness of the role of the poet in the poem. First comes a chapter titled "Other Lives," followed by "A Continuum," an eighteen-page poem emulating Saint Isidore's "20-volume work encapsulating all the learning of the time, from theology to furniture." (If Saint Isidore hadn't existed, Goldbarth would have had to invent him.) The last sixteen poems are enchaptered "Mine," where Albert Goldbarth the man appears to appear in person. Ah, but most of us, he observes, are many different people: "So long as the brain is a living thing, we're smugglers,/ of uncountable alternate *us*, across the border// and into the lives of other people." As he roams the cosmos, the then-and-now streets, the lexicons and libraries, the bars and barns and Barnums and Bobby's Ballz poolrooms of the planet, he is smuggling them into alternate Alberts.

In the midst of a catalogue of "Second Thoughts" we watch him switch from fiction to presumed fact:

"My pet,
your wiles have altered my earlier obstinacy,
and the vision of you in your luxury stateroom beckons;
I *shall* join you for your voyage on the Gigantic

—what? oh. Titanic"—is a tragic second thought.
A happy one: when Skyler and I decide to try again
to "save the marriage."

In a big/little two-part poem, "Astronomy," he condenses all time to a crystal. His lens here zooms from the farthest out (time and space) to the closest in:

It dies. And a gazillion years in the future
the sight of its dying reaches Earth.
—Computed in dinosaur years, that's three days
from the brain's death to its being recognized as dead
in the far frontiers of the tail.

—————

Night. A party. "Come out here for a minute."
Dina told me: she'd miscarried. But
her body hadn't registered that yet, it kept
preparing for a birth. And so we sat on the porch
in silence for a while, in the light of that star.

The next step in the exposure of the artist at work is the self-reflexive voice that we associate with post-modern fiction. Jane Austen pioneered it at the end of *Northanger Abbey*, where the writer breaks the theatrical fourth wall. David Lehman self-reflects deliciously. In Goldbarth's "Zenith" (remember the radio?) the poet strips the curtain from the wizard and reveals the writer in the process of creating. Early on in the poem his immigrant grandmother falls to her knees before the miracle of the radio. Ah, but toward the end the poet confesses:

I lied. I thought it "sounded good"
 for a poem. She *didn't* fall to her knees
 in a mystified awe. In fact,
 by then she'd already seen
 what the point of a saber can do to a sister's belly.

Some lines farther down, the wooden box "meant nothing to her,"

just another American *tchotchke*. Right;
 as if *I* know. As if my single photon
 of imagination can burrow through death
 to reveal her life.

And finally:

The more we're here, the more we lose
 our contact with the primacy. And then
 what's left?—"a general sense of things,"
 a secondary level, something like this poem:
 nostalgia. Once, I asked Dan Nussbaum
 if he knew what "pinnacle" was, and he
 corrected my pronunciation.

"You don't know? It's a card game."

Twist that epistemology in the light, and it reveals more and more facets of a comic-heart-breaking view of the human condition, not to mention a poet who doesn't take himself too seriously while taking his calling seriously indeed. Strike through the mask of the writer on stage composing before our eyes and we find—not just Albert, husband of Skyler, but the artist who wrestles the language to give us a complex insight into the humility of the artist ("my single photon/ of imagination"); the self-tweaking comic spirit, the compassion of the man for his family (what "she'd already seen"), the impulse to go beyond the self into another's life, and above all the awareness that language is metaphor and that an image "serves/ for what I want to

say.” Thus the lines about the neurocartologists that I chose as epigraph for this section expose the foundation for the artifice of fictions and analogies that support the splendid architecture of Goldbarth’s work.

W.S. Merwin, *The Pupil* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001, 112 pp., \$23 hardbound, 0-375-41276-X). Merwin’s life and work are so well-known that to discuss them separately is impossible and certainly irrelevant; we cannot “know the dancer from the dance.” He has moved on, book by book, to pioneer new territories, balancing his passion for the natural world with his anger at what we are doing to destroy it. He rages at what human beings inflict on their fellow creatures. He pioneers at the frontier of the capabilities of mind and language.

The Pupil, in its double meaning, implies both the ongoing process of learning and the mechanism by which light transports images—enabling meaning—to the brain. The line is tau(gh)t from eye-vision to visionary. On first reading, Merwin’s new book appears seamless—seventy-eight poems not divided into chapters. But the poet has arranged them so that the reader moves from one level of consciousness to another through what I count as eight permutations of memory and vision. The introductory poem, “Prophecy,” is the most mysterious of all: an invisible poet tells how the Sibyl sings from beyond time back to “[a]ll the white days that were brought to us one/ by one that turned to colors around us// a light coming from far out in the eye/ where it begins before she can see it// burns through the words that no one has believed.” In what I take as the first section (through p.29) the poet speaks of light and darkness (including blindness), of moving time, of memory and of meaning, of feelings without words and then “words for the feelings of those who are not/ there now and words we say are for ourselves.” Some poems are of great immediacy, as though the *I/eye* were writing while observing. Some seem to be memoirs, but escape into imagination. In “Mid-Air” the voice shifts from *I* to *we*, expanding the insight to include all of us. Some poems have no pronouns but create an immediacy so acute we are aware of the poet himself recording the event for us. In “Migrants by Night” he carries us with him into the night flight of plovers.

Next, four poems about father and family put the poet in person

before us. Then Merwin gives us a section of twenty-seven poems moving (in both senses) in seasonal sequence. There are spring poems that out of context seem simple description. In context, time moves, erasing stasis. The memorable “Once in Spring” explores the power of memory implicit in words. In summer we find presence in silence (“The Black Virgin”), in the connection of art to nature (“The Source”), in change and memory (“First of June” and “Unseen Touch”). Autumn brings visionary poems, from sensuous immediacy to the chance to “waken backward” out of forgetting (“Under the Day”) and forward into “Simon’s Vision”:

all his life
 looks to him like the stars at noon
 though all is what it was before
 blood of trees sugar in the dark
 the idea of leaves in sleep
 birds flying over an airport
 finally turning into clouds
 before we can really see them

In winter there is a moment after a storm when “it seems to me/ that there has been something simpler than I could ever believe/ simpler than I could have begun to find words for.” A subtext of many of these poems is Merwin’s exploration of the limits of his medium, language; all art, as they say, is about art.

Then follow four poems for old friends, segueing through a surreal lyric invoking blind white lemurs (!) to five poems of outrage at human inhumanity—our “denying existence to most suffering/ while living off it,” though we manage to “pardon ourselves because of/ who we are the earnest belief/ that we have a right to it from/ somewhere because we deserve one” (“Good People”). Here we find the witheringly satiric poem for Matthew Shepard, “The Fence,” and two disturbing poems on the mistreatment of animals. When he uses first person, singular or plural, the poet includes himself in the species that countenances cruelty while eloquently expressing his revulsion from it.

The final section of this multitudinous volume returns to childhood and light and hope and wildness and music and language and listening and hearing and memory and forgetting. I want to quote whole handfuls of poems. I’ll settle for “This January,” the concluding poem. Here it is, complete—with its

darks and lights, its time infinite and finite, its space vast and immediate, its sensuous perception of knowledge, and its lyric dance through all this to the eloquent and unexpected last word:

So after weeks of rain
at night the winter stars
that much farther in heaven
without our having seen them
in far light are still forming
the heavy elements
that when the stars are gone
fly up as dust finer
by many times than a hair
and recognize each other
in the dark traveling
at great speed and becoming
our bodies in our time
looking up after rain
in the cold night together

Here the speaker of the poem is visible, but in the plural. As we soar out into time and space the poet becomes, briefly, an invisible reporter, then cycles back to the speaker "in our time," and, explicitly, his companion. The brain, indeed, coincides with the whole of the universe, and the poet has words to take us all that way.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The editors would like to congratulate T. Alan Broughton, whose poem "Ballad of the Comely Woman" from our Spring 2001 issue appears in *Best American Poems 2002*, edited by Robert Creeley and David Lehman.

After nearly 50 years of carrying the day-to-day responsibilities of the *Beloit Poetry Journal*, including correspondence, bookkeeping, and initial screening of manuscripts, I will turn those duties over to John Rosenwald and Lee Sharkey next summer. I will continue to write reviews and to participate in our quarterly editorial board meetings. I hope this leaves me time to complete my book of reviews and to do other writing that I have long been contemplating.

As of July 1, 2003, the editorial office will move to Farmington, Maine. Please address all correspondence *after that date* to *Beloit Poetry Journal*
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