

BPJ

BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL VOL. 53 N°4 SUMMER 2003

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COVER

Robert Shetterly, “Emma Goldman,” acrylic on board, one of a series of portraits of “Americans who tell the truth.” Each portrait is inscribed with a quotation from the subject. Emma Goldman’s is “The greatest bulwark of capitalism is militarism.”

Mary Greene, design



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

EDITOR'S NOTE

Gentle readers:

Since 1954, I have handled (with my husband while he lived) all the incoming mail, including all the business, of the *BPJ*. With Dave's death in 1984, I found myself the sole owner, publisher, and editor of the magazine. Now in my eighties, and close to my fiftieth year as editor, I gratefully and enthusiastically welcome a shift of responsibilities.

On July 1, John Rosenwald and Lee Sharkey will take over as editors in chief of the magazine, in charge of the daily mail and the other hundred-and-seventy-five functions that they will learn by doing. I will remain as member of the editorial board, writer of reviews, recipient of exchange subscriptions, and president of The Beloit Poetry Journal Foundation.

There will be no break in continuity. The present editorial board has a grand total of 190 years on the masthead—extraordinary accumulated experience. John Rosenwald and his wife Ann Arbor came aboard in 1976, when John joined the Beloit College English Department. A poet and translator himself, John has for years taught poetry writing workshops at the college. Three times a Fulbright scholar in China, he edited, just before the Tiananmen Square uprising, our historic chapbook of young Chinese poets.

Lee Sharkey, one of the founders of the Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance, joined the editorial board in the fall of 1987. She also lays out the magazine and manages our website. Lee is the author, most recently, of the poem sequence *To A Vanished World*, and has edited collections of Maine writing and of poetry by adults with mental illness. She teaches English and women's studies at the University of Maine at Farmington—and when she can in the Komi Republic of Russia.

Lee and John are a great team. Indeed, our present editorial board has worked together so long that we are like a family, radically diverse but fiercely loyal. With this dedicated editorial staff, supported by the endowment that many of you helped establish, we can look forward to a long future of discoveries in poetry.

Marion K. Stocking

LUCILLE CLIFTON

blood

here in this ordinary house
a girl is pressing a scarf
against her bleeding body
this is happening now

she will continue for over
thirty years emptying and
filling sistering the moon
on its wild ride

men will march to games and wars
pursuing the bright red scarf
of courage heroes every moon

some will die while every moon
blood will enter this ordinary room
this ordinary girl will learn
to live with it

LUCILLE CLIFTON

mercy

how grateful i was when he decided
not to replace his fingers with his thing
though he thought about it was going to
but mumbled "maybe i shouldn't do that"
and didn't do that and i was so grateful
then and now grateful how sick i am
how mad

KAREN LEE
Faith by Hearing

Soft phosphorescent hum
inherited only from mothers
passes from woman to woman,
source of fires paired and housed
by *ch'uang*, the ideogram for window,
studying books by the light of fireflies,
yin ch'uang, the light organ's inner cells,
filling the cochlear night with heard radiance
yin ch'uang, the light organ's inner cells,
studying books by the light of fireflies,
by *ch'uang*, the ideogram for window,
source of fires paired and housed
passed from woman to woman,
inherited only from mothers
soft phosphorescent hum.

SARAH MADSEN

Pleas

In our princess seams (on our sparkling team), in our French-
twist—
in our French-
cut—
. . .necklines. . .
In our slippery slip-shifts—

With your wicked
wrists and tripling tongues
Blind spot for babies with quicksilver thumbs

In the heat of the dark tinged with girls The dark sparked with girls,
fraught with girls blushing deep in their punishing slums

In the dark of our slumming in the heat of our spark (stop putting me out oh
I know when you're on)

Whirling girls with your wrists like we're swizzling sticks
all hellbent and heeled
In your helmet, your glorious helmet! your whip-and-curl crown

And when I'm crowned (how you crown me)
When you crown me *Swizzle Girl*—
dizzying, delirious, all blizzard and bliss

Here—
here—
Your little warrior, little whimpering whippet

Caught at the corner of Chance & Prospect / Stopped dead on the S-swerve

Boys ran with our spoons (what we covet are knives) but we'd already done it,
scooped deep with our hands, swallowed hard and long the slivering

And where were you when—
And where are you now—

Swivel skirts and knee-deep mudflats later

Behind the curtain below the bloodening sky

MAGGIE SMITH

Psalm (1)

Watch as the girls press
Father's shirts, snapping
each sleeve taut, creasing it

the way he likes. Forgive
the fabric. The girls do
what they can to smooth

and straighten, hissing
the iron's steam. Forgive
the house for its mirrors,

its dark wood that begs
another dusting. Forgive
the mat that welcomes.

It knows not what it does.
Forgive the greedy house
for wanting to keep

those who do its work.
At the end of the day,
lying in bed, they find

faces in the mottled ceiling:
an old man winking, one
shriveled ear cocked

toward them. Forgive
the man who watches.
Forgive Father for wanting

to keep the girls. And bless
the girls for doing his work,
pulling clean shirt after clean

shirt from the rack. Lying
still in bed, chore after chore.
Bless them as they plug

the iron into the socket,
those two eyes. May they
forget what they've seen.

MAGGIE SMITH

Psalm (2)

Let the girls dance,
their white legs, bell
clappers in layers of skirts.

Let them play in the house
that holds secrets under
its tongue, dark lozenges.

Black smoke piping
from the chimney means
the swifts were not

swift enough. Father,
after lighting the fire, runs
outside to watch

the birds not escape.
But let them. Let the girls.
Who knows this song?

It is the East Coast. Apples
turn to wood. The girls,
shut-in, roll them against

the closet walls. Perhaps
they should have minded.
They should have eaten

what was before them.
Slipped the hobby horse
back into its play stable.

Let the girls dance
despite their wrongs.
Let them find a way out.

Push on a bookcase
that revolves into a new
room. Let them steal

down the dark corridors.
Let their skirts ring
faintly in the light.

RANJANI NERIYA

Imagene

Da Vinci's notes, meticulously scripted
Left-handed and backward
Were construed only through a mirror

Imaging. Curvilinear, unequally pulled
Replenished, concerted on illusion
That the hidden is safe

So is the unreadable instant
Till we stand in another's eye
To see ourselves, wait

For the silvery thistles on still water
To release our shape
Pluck our voice from the wind.

The unreflected, what steadies
The fulcrum, imminent with
Revelation, abides, to make

The code manifest, linking
All the while sun-soar to
Seafloor to cave-mouth,

Holds each one in its spell
The ashen flake
The clear green air.

CLAIRE FANGER
Eros in Etherland

In the dreaming Netherlands
A man I've never seen
Writes to me of Levy-Bruhl.
I want him on his knees.

Ille intemeratus est,
Et maculata sum.
His virtue is my wickedness;
It draws me like the sun.

In arguments more muscular
I'm fixed in my release
By words transparent as the air
And salty as the sea;

Attached by what divides us,
Inflexible as grace,
No less the broad Atlantic
Than the unimagined face.

CLAIRE FANGER

Nothing Happening between Two People in Amsterdam

after awhile I stopped looking for still lives
the tulips were too many for me anyway
& desire too strenuous
so we each went strolling our separate ways
seeking something that was not there
among the flowers and the flesh
the butcher shops and fish markets

conscious of how living in Amsterdam
must be like living in a diorama
of the 17th century I paused
before the woman pouring milk
into a bowl

That one
is my favorite

he said coming up
somehow unexpectedly behind me although
I must have been waiting for it
since he had said it before :
the milkmaid was his favorite

so predictable I'd no idea
how it would feel to be gathered up
into that moment of foreknown
accord that mutual yes that pure
fulfillment in the milky stream
forever stopped that instant
slotted into the stereopticon of time
down whose aperture we gazed
through Vermeer each wondering
what would meet the other's eye
love? shadows? conspicuous dust?
but nothing was said & soon afterward
we got our jackets & walked unchanged
out of the Rijksmuseum into what
had once been & probably still was
the afternoon sun

CLAIRE FANGER

Exhibit in the Museum Called Foreverness

inasmuch as the thing that didn't happen in Holland
changed everything that happened after

and everything that didn't happen after
I must keep the memory of myself alive

in the memory of Holland
a small memory of a small country

cathected by an unconcluded argument
that goes on forever and ever

like a bone translated from the grave of one
who might or might not have been a saint

what is important being that it is a bone
not that it is the bone of a saint

being that it is kept carefully
not that it is the bone of a saint

being that it is disjunct with the body it came from
not that it is the bone of a saint

picture the very strangeness of a sacrament
held in the mind alone :

the extreme reaches of pure passion
with no metonymy in the flesh

MARTHA CARLSON-BRADLEY

Extended Family

o

Children on a sloping lawn
roll somersaults, or think they do,

ground sky
 ground sky

grown-ups holding glasses
tumbling, the world, tumbling.

o

Who's here now? for how long?
and in between it's time to play or eat,
to go to bed. And the sun goes down and you lie in the dark,
children doled out to other households.

And all the while birds sing, fruit comes in
and goes back out of season, suppers are cooked,
floors swept clean or made to wait, traces of today left behind—
grit from our shoes, a scrap of newsprint.

o

*If you sing before breakfast
you'll cry before night.*

*Be seen, not heard. Don't lie
but don't tattle—trust me:*

*you can never take it back, words like ink
flung down the length of a nightgown.*

*If you have nothing good to say
say nothing at all. Say nothing*

at all. Say nothing.

o

Voices late at night, laughing,
sometimes even sing.

What do they talk about, downstairs
with their drinks and smokes,
sometimes the pack of cards

divvied out among them, the game
both strategy and chance?

o

Yard and sky, this place on the globe
lock themselves into bone, milk poured from the same bottle

as we sit together, as the same aunts hover, the same aunt
missing, again. The warning signals, pace and tone—
they're angry, getting worse. They've decided to laugh,
to close the door.

Lightly,

they lay their palms on our hair,
talking still to one another
over our heads.

“Weal” is a good word, and especially wedded tight to its alliterative phrase-mate, “woe,” like “thick and thin,” “do or die,” etc. We don’t use it anymore, I don’t know why. It might be something like the physics that we know applies to people: so we can’t gain “wonky,” “dot-com,” “homeboy,” “gravitron,” without the death of “orrery” and “wastrel” and “greaves” and “sillibub.” And call this an economy of language; call it verbal evolution; whatever, *the future* is going to call it —and here we have to leave a blank. Nobody knew my sister’s child would be “Ian” until our father died in her eighth month and she chose to continue the I of “Irving” that way. Now when

■
I think of him—that open, industrious, decent man in his flop-around thrift-shop skivvies—an entire antiquarian world of lost jaw-music surfaces; it’s like the poker banter of Atlantis rising back again into the discourse of the world. “She’s got a face like a horse’s patoot.” “That guy?—a real nogoodnik, a fourflusher. Give him the bum’s rush.” When he’d lecture me on what it meant to be a man, while I was someone clearly past a “pisher” and a “pipsqueak” and yet not the fully capable thoughtful mensch he hoped I’d be . . . his good intentions slid from me “like water off a duck’s—” (as he’d complete it:) “keester,” “poopik.” And although linguistic history allows for the nostalgic resurrection of some words

■
(which I call “reinventing the weal”—ha!), I simply don’t believe his “cockamamie” or his “tootsweet” or his specialty, “bassackwards,” is about to shuffle amazedly out of the graveyard, reelectrified with a new conversational currency. If anything, some doddering vocabulary *needs* to disappear, we have so many words by now. Every one of the six or seven souls that the Inuit say exist “like tiny people scattered throughout the body” . . . has a name. The cockroach breathes through rows of “spiracles.” And “the energy a proton would acquire while being accelerated across a voltage drop of a billion volts”. . .?—this is a “GeV.” So many. More than a googol, I bet. And yet, there’s not a word for what

■

I felt when I entered the hospital room and saw his livid,
cathetered cock; for what vise squeezed my heart
when he opened the bedroom door and caught me masturbating;
for the choking when my penny-ante grade-school prize
elicited a pride in him a rajah's ruby couldn't buy.
In front of these, our tongues recede and fail.
—As after his usual lecture, he would usually sigh
(and here they all, at once, crash through me in a helpless tumult,
paternoster, heebie-jeebies, animalcule, scrip, legerdemain,
malarkey, janissary, antimacassar, poosk, quidnunc)
and observe in a voice so woeful, it kneeled: "Albie,
you don't understand a single word I'm saying."

ALBERT GOLDBARTH

Geese Jazz

And time, that river, erodes away
the banks of the present moment, it carries us
all in its current. God,
did *I* write that? Did I *write* that?
The boy-who-thought-he-was-a-man
in the natty Nehru jacket and love beads (1968),
with Phyllis on his mind (and very elsewhere too)
and poesy's strains like a great storm in his heart
. . . did he write *that*? Needs change.
"Vibes" change. The zeitgeist trembles,
falls a thousand miles, and reinvents itself
on titanium wings. "Great storm in his heart"?
Oh jeez. My Nehru sartorialness was formerly
. . . what? In 1828, a flurry of election campaigning
found Martin Van Buren attired in "a beige and elegant
swallow-tailed coat with matching velvet collar,
pearl-gray waistcoat, orange cravat (with lace tips),
and a fine pair of yellow kid gloves." Now tell me whither
the ascendancy of spats? the suzerainty of the zoot suit?
"Whither"? "Sartorialness"? There are no vows
of faithfulness from fashion.
The neck ruff. And the tight, long (often
fringed) sheath of a flapper's dress, that makes my manhood
arise from its shameful slumber. Yowch: *did* I write that? What
limbo held the poetry of John Donne all those hundreds of years,
before the tastes of the twentieth century lifted it
out of its midden dump, and back into the light
of an empathetic reconsideration? What
a student called, just yesterday, "the zeitgeese"
weren't flying along with Donne . . . then, later (now)
they were (are). Not the six-inch-diameter hot-pink
polka dots on the vinyl skirts of the 70s. Not
Martin Van Buren's grand beaver-fur hat. Time
gargles with these, with *us*, and spits it out.
With *us*! Those sweet-cheeked punk rock women wearing
—and (oh so lissomely) often *not* wearing—
"the vinyl skirts of the 70s" . . . where,
as Villon, in his famous ballad asks us, *are* the snows
of yesteryear? "Lissomely"?—brother, you gotta be kidding, right?
Time that knackers us heartlessly on its chop block.
"Knackers"? Knickers. Pinafores. Bustles. Here's one: "Dungarees."

→

The clothes of yesteryear: -wear; where? We're
 gleaming earrings Time admires extravagantly for a night,
 goes ooh, goes wow, then leaves behind
 in the creased-up sheets or on the edge of the sink
 at noon-sharp check-out. There, by the stand
 with the barrister's wig and the tortoise-shell inlay button hook.
 "Midden dump"? "Clit ring"? "Porkpie hat"? Or:
 "famous ballad"? Huh? Who? Surely to a vein of gneiss,
 the line between "cultural style" and "fad"
 (as when Tahiti's an island but England a continent) is dew
 in the touch of the rosy-fingered dawn, a thing
 I can't believe I wrote, and *barely* a "thing": it's disappearing
 even now into the afternoon light. "When eighteenth-century
 London bookseller James Lackington was a young man,"
 writes Anne Fadiman, "his wife sent him out on Christmas Eve
 with half a crown—all they had—to buy Christmas dinner."
 He returned with a book, Young's *Night Thoughts*. "I think
 I have acted wisely. Should we live fifty years longer,
 we shall have the *Night Thoughts* to feast upon." —A story
 that stirs the blood of the biblio-idiot who lives in me and drools
 for gilded leather spines, but *whoooo*, have you ever
tried to read that book?—the zeitgeese zoomed on down
 and pecked it to death a few cultural styles ago,
 oh Time that sent its insidious basilisks into my mother's lungs,
 oh Time in your *obi*, Time below your masses of pompadour hair,
 come take me, I'm open, I'm yours, I want to be undone
 like a row of real whalebone corset stays
 and ravished. "Stirs the blood"?—I wrote this? Actually,
 no, I wish that Time would leave me alone, immutable, here
 with the "trilby" and "derby" and "bloomers" and "hoop skirt" and
 speaking of Time, "men's moleskin vest
 with oxblood leather-trim fob pocket: LASTS A LIFETIME!",
 the river, the geese overhead.

ALBERT GOLDBARTH

Poet-Spouse Observer-Thoughts

1.

The saddest face I've ever seen—I mean
from no immediate occasion, just a thin and continuous
underbuzz of ill content—is Sammy Shore's, in all four
of the high school yearbooks scattered on the tables
at the 30th-year reunion of the class of 1972
of Argonia High in Argonia, Kansas: site, it seems, of hijinks
worth Homeric recitation, and home
to the dread Red Raiders. Sammy Shore's not here
this night with my wife the guru of junior college Web design
and the other Argonia High escapees (the dentist,
the trucker, the nurse on the cardiac ward: I meet them all)
and yet it's *his* whey-white and restless, skimpy shrivel-of-a-face
—so fully miserable among those halfass smiles—that acts,
at least for me, as symbol: strewn
about this beery low-key joviality.
Wherever he went and is, he's also here in the moon
whose punched-in face appears increasingly clearly in the pool
as evening gathers, and he's here in the awkward silences
between the faces of 1972 and these, their own
implausibly misshaped adult counterparts.
Our yearning for eternity . . . and the drizzle of mortality . . . for a
moment they
uneasily coexist, here in the barbeque line, the way they do
in that famous gaffe from Johnny Logan, shortstop-then-sportscaster,
when he received an award: *I will perish this forever.*
—Those are poet-spouse observer-thoughts. And yet for the reunionees
it's all about the nitty-gritty catch-up: Pat,
whose daughter “has Tourette's, but not the kind where they bark
and say ‘cocksucker’”; Elroy Webb, who worked the lumber store,
and then the plumbing store, and then the dry goods; Anne,
“remember Anne?” who, even though she was “happily married,”
“ran off with an undertaker.”

2.

My friend L., in the hospital . . . I visit her
 on the following day. Her amniotic fluid's started leaking,
 and the IV feed of some thick space-age wonderwater meant
 to still her premature contractions also tends to still
 her lungs. It's not a good time, here amid the vased azaleas
 and the standard-issue Sisters of Innocence pewter Christ on the wall,
 and so I use—I really misuse—Sammy Shore for easy
 levity. Once, the teacher left the room and he immediately
 pulled his penis out and started masturbating—right in class.
 Ensuing gasps and hubbub. Skyler couldn't see from where
 she sat, and when she asked her squirming row-mate Tyler what
 was happening, that shy and forthright guy could only think to say
 "Well . . . Sammy Shore's let his horse out of the barn
 and he's taking it for a gallop." *That's* hilarious
 and sad. And so I add, by way of tempering the latter, a summation
 of the moment when we left the party—earlier
 than most—and I requested (well, why not?) a group performance
 of the Raiders fight song. What came next
 —the fight song, and the Cheer Team song, and the rest, for another
 thirty heartfelt megadecibel minutes—was the evening's whole
 crosstemporal experience condensed: these offkey, choral
 forty-seven-year-olds morphing in and out of kids whose fists and zits
 and dreams and hormones and hiked-high skirts and sheer oomphed-up
 raw spirits
 rocked the Pep Squad bus, once—in between Argonia and East Temple
 County—
 into a ditch. And one's not here tonight because it's noon for her
 in Paris, where she's spending all the money from her chichi runway
 heyday
 as a paparazzi favorite. One's not here because the cancer ate her
 down to a single throwaway bone a decade ago already. . . .
 'Bye to L., and on my way out there's that room of sweetly incubating
 preemies,
 row on row . . . one doesn't say it to the parents, but
 these bundles of joy are dice in a crapshoot
 over the length of lifetimes. That night, Skyler's already asleep
 when I get into bed. So still . . . I need to check, and for a second
 place my fingers underneath the slow and gentle drumming of the paws
 of breath that power her nocturnal engine flawlessly into the dawn.

3.

A *favorite* story: Skyler was having her hair done in some au-courantish coif, and her beautician LaTeena asked her, since a potentially special occasion was implied, what she was doing that night. "Oh," Skyler said, "my husband's giving a reading." LaTeena stopped mid-curl, a look of sudden comprehension washing in delight across her face. "I didn't *know*," she said, and nearly couldn't continue from the excitement, and from the worlds that lavishly opened up in front of her at this news, "your husband's a psychic!"

Yes I am. And I can tell you this:

We're all going to sing. We're all going to meet in what our language used to call the gloaming, as the stars start to appear like some extreme-dimensional musical notation, and the fireflies begin to smear their love-calls on the surface of the dark, and we're going to sing then, crow and cockadoodle and chant our fucking heads off, loud and scratchy-voiced, and showily and shamelessly alive. We're going to yell the hell-and-back, campaigning fight songs of the armies of the world as well as of the territorial jousts of krill and paramecia, we're going to give the rousingest rendition of the cheer songs and the pep songs of the tides of Earth and the gases of Saturn's rings, the night is nigh, you heard me: nigh, and there's no barbershop quartet or nasty gangsta' rap beyond our voices' striving. We're going to yodel and hip-hop and do-si-dodel, and sing our souls like bloomed heat up a flue. We're going to melodize and croon, to shrill our enemies' names and lullabye our honeys'. We're going to shnoogle and canoodle and do the hokey-pokey and eensy teensy spider in a thrice. I tell you: we're going to sing this human song until it's our turn to answer the door, and straighten our clothes, and nod *yes*, and with one last whoop, and one look back, run off with the undertaker.

ALBERT GOLDBARTH

Heart Heart Heart Heart Heart Heart Heart

Oh, many a night my cousins and I spent out fishing and sleeping under the stars—or with the bugs, as we used to say.

—a character in Sean Russell's *The Isle of Battle*

And that's the truth of it, the truth of the far perimeters
—the bugs; the stars—inside of which our little, loopy
human selves get lived; and lost; and led by rival vectors
of attraction way beyond our comprehension. Or not the whole truth,
no; the stars themselves are only showy speckling
on the ever-outward “surface” of an unknowable and invisible
veering-away; the insects? . . . symbolize the last of the apprehendables
before a faceless sub-ness starts, the micro without end.
No wonder we hold with such affection to the sky charts
of astronomy; to even *dilletantish* entomology,
its nets and pins. They make space seem to fit us:
I have a friend we found intoning one word scarily over and over until
she was lost, like a midge in a labyrinth: a mayfly in an oil drum,
out on the ocean, under the blown-open void.

■
“Self-inflicted injuries” as well. So she was locked up. And
she “came along,” “progressed” in there, in finally understanding
how to master fear of what she called, as if it were her nemesis
and so had a campaign to wage, “The Shapelessness.” For her, a certain
level of medication and therapy meditation “fixed her up.”
For others, God: commandments and Heavenly hierarchies.
For others, anonymous serial sex: *anything* to act as a pattern,
anything to serve for rungs up all-too-empty air. And even
after she came home from the facility, she'd sometimes pick a sore
in her skin—her arm or her breast. “You see, the planet
is filled with all of these stunning potential jewels in its veins; but
they need
to be dug out and given a form. That's how it is with beauty: it has
to be formed.” The artful sore on her bosom, mauve and bright from
damp
—in different light it might have passed for a brooch.

■
In early anatomical depictions—ancient Greek or ancient Arabic—
the world is still 2-D, and so we enter the cadaver as if
through opened doors in the thinnest chiffonier, of phyllo or rice paper
—here, our body’s sweetbreads dangle like kindergarten cut-outs on
strings.

By the time of Da Vinci, the tricky, miles-devouring perspective applied
to avenues of columns, or the sea, gets put to use on the sweep of our
own

interior distinctions. The viewer now comes to see what the lover—
spurned

or topsyturvily delighted—immemorially always knew: the heart holds
unlit mystery we float inside like spacemen lost to Earth. (So does the
pancreas

and the intestines . . . although these organs don’t play well in a poem.)
And when I said we found her “intoning one word over and over,”
that was (soon I’ll tell you why) the word, her own nuts *om* of choice,
in which the sexual “tart” and the aesthetic “art” were also repeated
into a nonsense structure she was a gnat inside of, a fizzle of ash.

■
For some, the notion of “family.” For some, to walk all seven of the
Seven

Higher Righteous Paths of the Totem. Others, academic
rank. Creation science [“science”]. The fractal spread
of genealogical trees. If not for these, we’d have no guiding (check one)
)track)map)pole star)passion)overriding moral vision
)[add your own], and we’d be dropping through the nothing both
a major urban metroplex and a sesame seed are, under the rings
of their atoms. In a comic strip today, the phone starts shrilling;
the dog goes “Ruff Ruff Ruff”; the phone stops; and the dog thinks
“See? If you bark long enough, that thing shuts up.” Yes, funny;
and pathetic. In one lovely 18th-century engraving,
the corpse’s muscles from shoulder to butt are opened outward
like the petals of a rose: and we hold tightly to the ladder of ribs, for fear
of falling forever through this. For some, a sonnet fourteen lines.



Xoana, *the shapeless primitive statues of gods.*
—the *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*

And if you ask my friends: the god inside themselves has come unshaped,
like clay after rain. The newspapers say it; the t.v. We
have lost the definition of that part of us. That wonder
is xoana now; that power, that knowledge: xoana now.
Distress over this isn't shameful. "After the lecture, I was left
alone in the autopsy lab. I idly lifted the heart. I started
to peel it: the pericardium came off like the merest rubbery breath.
And then another layer. Another. At the center, there was a tiny entire
mummy, and I unwrapped it. And at the center of that: a jar
the size of a molecule, with a heart the size of a proton inside it,
and inside that was the autopsy lab of a midwest university
where a woman who had just been divorced was lifting a heart
to the light"—the place where everything beyond the stars
and everything below the insects . . . meet, becoming the other.

MARY KANE

Ideas of Departure

In each photograph a long black coat, shot from behind,
its flat black expression going away.

The story in stride and shoulder motion.

Snow on a field. January's angled light. A few
of the details vary. Shadow length. The crow appears
and doesn't from frame to frame in the lower left.

A green coffee mug on a porch railing, now the focus,
now almost too far away to be visible. A newspaper
bagged in plastic, uncollected in a neighbor's driveway.

She shot the photos because of what presented itself.

Because of a coat's dark weight on a wooden hanger.

Sunday. At home. She had been noticing her skin
loosening its hold. She'd too easily wrapped her fingers
around radius and ulna. This is what the body does.

She thought of kitchen chairs with their glue dried out.

She said we've got to go down to the salt pond. The heron's
missing. It's like the end of prayer. She thought,

I can't go on contemplating nothing but food preparation.

The coat reminded her of another time. Doctors and clergymen.

From when doctors made housecalls and everyone dined
with a priest. She saw hushed conversation outside a sickroom,
paned glass fogged by a kettle on an old stove, staid black figures
against the snow, growing large with approach. Arrivals.

Heads down in deep consideration and avoiding cold wind.

A little in the distance, a cove bordered by ice. Sounds of
that ice smashing, an aggressive despair.

She keeps the photos in a drawer by the telephone.

She folds blue dish towels, black socks, turtlenecks
in three sizes. She rinses a coffee pot and wine glasses,
remembers her former breasts. She did not set out
to persuade or justify. She put the camera's small manual heart
on the tripod, set the timer and walked. She recalled
boiled potatoes with parsley and black pepper, the gold trim
on the china serving dish. She is only making images.

CONRAD HILBERRY

Drift

When I took it up to seventy-five,
the Mazda drifted to the left, eased over
into the oncoming cars. The salesman
had them change the tires. He drove it—
perfect, he said. But when I take it north
on 31, it has an inclination,
sniffing around the fender up in front,
eyeing some open road, the purple
loosestrife rampant there in the wetlands.
It fingers the yellow line. I like this car.
I think the drift is welded in, the way
the Japanese design them now. No more
Pearl Harbors. Just a nudge, a dry
wind from the east, with a slight accent:
Please. This way. Slide out of right lane.
Stare arrogant Buick in his eye.

WILLIAM WINFIELD WRIGHT

The Incontinent Burglar

These things don't
matter: rifled drawers,
fingered pictures, grandma's
spoons, strewn plants.
The keys are probably
here in the sugar bowl
or down the disposal.
Those books will find
their own way back
to the library. If
you want to wash
every dish, go ahead,
wash every dish.
Burn some incense.
We'll have a second
housewarming.

The trouble is what
to do with the nervous
and culpable dog,
the children's windows,
the attitude of a toothbrush,
and this 3 AM
vigil with lead pipe
over the one mysterious spot
in the whole carpet.

WILLIAM WINFIELD WRIGHT

The Slightest Wind

If we stumble together
walking or sleepless
in the dark cold
it is out of clumsiness
or comfort
and not for warmth,
for what warmth is left
in three frozen men
or here in this birdless expanse
where even the slightest
wind is terror?

MATTHEW LIPPMAN
Caught Up in the Trees

Sivan said she'd been thinking about Emmett Till all day long
and night long
and the long hours that made up her afternoon in the fourteen degree
wind
the way a young woman can walk in circles around an empty field,
watch the trees and wonder what love has to do with the way bare trees
exfoliate
into blue sky.

She said she could not get the image of his fourteen year old face out of
her mind
when she sat for supper
and then looked up at her brother
and let her quiet chatter fill the desire in her brain
that had nothing to do with desire in her knee.

Emmett Till was such a beauty she said
not knowing two days before that he had polio
and stuttered
and smiled a wide open field of poppies before
he was tossed into the Tallahatchie,
let the catfish do their work,
one eye cut out.

And the wind today was so swollen
Sivan dropped herself to the earth
like a pregnant woman who falls when the water bursts
and the baby's head begins to slide.

It's really the only thing, she says, to have a baby and to fall in love
the way a seventeen year old with long, black hair
can, caught up in the trees,
her young man this side of that car, in repose,

she comes to him in the wind chill below twenty and offers her breath
the earth so solid,
the branches as bare as elephant skin
so tight you could hang a rope from one,
follow its line all the way back to a time before there was a time
before there was a knot.

How could they do that to his face she said
and I couldn't stop thinking about him all night she said
and he was such an angel she said
until she could say no more
and everything was outside
and everything was a breeze.

MARTIN WALLS

Despatches from The Republic of Winter

1.

Maple trees are the embassies of nations
With whom our "relations are strained."

The river grows insurgent. The snow riots.
Dead yarrows on the rail bank raise skeletal fists—

Words lost in the fog of diplomacy.
Nature lays her resolve on the table like a revolver.

Chairs creak. Light goes dim. A crow flies
From sycamore to sycamore, consul & briefcase both.

2.

Looters loosen stars from their constellations.
They fall to earth as snow—frozen, particulate—

Striking cars & iced-over pavement with a hiss
That is the background noise of eternity.

All that's distinct is censored. All that's certain rationed.
The colors are meagre, tin-greys, & the light's thin as stock.

Starlings patrol the streets by day, acting as muscle.
All night long the moon grinds her cutlass.

3.

For currency, we've this freezing, nickel-colored rain.
Difficult to forge, counterfeiters still

Pass off their tears as the higher denominations.
Thus the miserable become the wealthy.

4.

Out-sized snowflakes sift through burned-out trees.
They are propaganda leaflets

Collapsing on my jacket, daring me to question whether they exist,
Or whether they're refugees from another's dream—

Occam was right: it is not only wrong but vain
To consider more than the actual fact.

MARTIN WALLS

1978

At last, a sunny day in Brighton! Glass butterflies go crawling
Over houses in our street, mother throwing open

Leaded lights, latches pop like knees, stiff hinges leaving white scales on
the brick sills—
Outside, rain evaporates to the slow, slow crystals of tea rose & dog rose,

Hydrangeas slaked (they've the thirst of a priest, my father jokes),
The flouncing flowers of laveteria showing like petticoats—

And I'm standing in the midst, chewing a nasturtium leaf, thinking
Of all the ways God finds to say *yes* to us, this is the simplest—

Sweepings emptied in the ash can. Daylight beaten into doormats.
Today, mother says, the sun & his white hair will be our guest.

She hands me a colander to pick lettuces & raspberries for tea.
Behind their nets, vegetables have the gaunt look of prisoners of war.

ELIZABETH TIBBETTS

Sonnet for a Nurse

Sometimes I wash the bodies of the dead,
my warm cloth decades from their mother's hand
that washed slow circles on her baby's skin
to crooning (the lucky ones). Now, instead
of howling, the mouth falls slack and silent:
this room built of teeth, pink palate, and tongue,
home of swears, jokes, groans, and conversation.
Now (ready or not) its words are all spent.
So *I* talk because I'm alive, and it seems
they might hear me. And they look so lonely.
Something to soothe us because there's only
time stretched between me and my own serene
body cooling beneath a stranger's hands.
There, there, I say while I still have the chance.

NANCY WHITE
Man Overboard

Like a dark fish it swims to you and you
resist, do not want to be consumed,
but it's true, and swallows you.
You can see out through smoke-hued
scales overlapping like breast feathers, through
the gills like blood-red prayers blooming
and collapsing in time to your loss and a pulse
you find struggling out from your throat.
You can lean against the flesh of the fish
which possesses you, and the fish does not
object. It swims with purpose. Certain
and transparent as a long evaporation of musical
notes, it contains all that you need. The weeping
creates a flame and you can burn there.
Sheltered brightly. When you tip
to char, a weightless curl, this vessel thins and thins
and you breathe back your regular breaths.
You are released, lift like a lick
of weed again, sweet scat in the current of the sea.

AIMEE NEZHUKUMATATHIL

**Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee around
a Pomegranate One Second before Waking Up**

—after the painting with the same name by Salvador Dali

In one second, three hundred and fifty slices of pizza
are eaten somewhere on this earth. A heart beats just once.
Once, I dreamed you were so near I could smell
your honeyed hair and the damp folds in your blue sleeve.

I woke up and watered my violets. And woke again.
And woke again and again till I could not remember
if the water bubbling out and over the small lips
of the pots was dream water or water real as a pin.

Or the splash of an elephant walking the sea on bony stilts
like in this Dali painting. Here is the mouth of a fish
wide with wonder at the twin tigers leaping out
from it—roaring with ocean salt till they've soared above

a floating pomegranate, a heart full of seed. In twenty-four
microseconds, a stick of dynamite will explode after
its fuse burns down. Houseflies flick their wings once
every three milliseconds. Even that fly is long gone

to the other side of the yard in the time it took to write *flick*.
Giant tortoises and compact discs last one hundred years.
In one million years, Los Angeles will move forty kilometers
north because of plate tectonics. A spaceship zooming along

at the speed of light would not yet reach the halfway point
to the Andromeda galaxy. One billion years: one ocean born.
The time it takes for the last waxy smudge of me to stop loving
you. Only at the bottom do you find anything about a bee.

BOOKS IN BRIEF: GRAB BAG

Marion K. Stocking

I've been accumulating a stack of books and periodicals that have impressed me but that are never going to fit into one of my essay reviews. When I think of my readers—poets keeping an eye out for the possibilities for poetry, librarians sorting out the books their readers will want to see, readers hoping to keep up on contemporary literature—I visualize people who would miss these if I didn't stand up and shout "Lookee here!" So here they are—all in a jumble: a new poetry series from The Library of America; the latest issues in the Random House audio series; a high-spirited anthology of "accessible" poems; issues of two important periodicals; a comprehensive guide to self-publishing; a spectacular album of photographs and anecdotes, many of poets; two books of poetry; plus three volumes that display the range of ways that poets dissolve the traditional boundaries between poetry and the essay and novel.

■
This historic morning (17 March 2003) I've had a couple of phone calls from people asking, "What was that poem Garrison Keillor read on his *Writer's Almanac*?" It was Thomas McGrath's "Remembering That Island" from his *The Movie at the End of the World* (Swallow, 1980). The poem ends

And myself once more in the scourging wind, waiting, waiting,
While the rich oratory and the lying famous corrupt
Senators mine our lives for another war.

I found it in a volume in a new series, the American Poets Project of The Library of America. **Harvey Shapiro** has edited ***Poets of World War II*** (2003, 264 pp., \$20 hardbound, 1-931082-33-2).

This is an important collection, long overdue. I have marveled at how poets in World War I (Sassoon and Owen, especially) were able to write directly out of their experience, producing unforgettable poems, whereas most of us are hard put to name comparably memorable poems from World War II. Only Jarrell's "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner" and Dickey's "The Firebombing" came quickly to my mind. Shapiro has assembled a remarkable collection of "often bawdy, bitchy, irreverent" poems, most of them new to me. He quotes Simone Weil's well-known words (written during World War II) on the subject of the *Iliad*, describing war as "that x that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing." Three other books in this handsome but pricey series are ***Edna St. Vincent Millay: Selected Poems***, edited by J. D. McClatchey; ***Karl Shapiro: Selected Poems***, edited by John Updike; and ***Walt***

Whitman: Selected Poems, edited exuberantly by Harold Bloom, \$20 each—an attractive series. I hope that it will soon become available in paper, with a binding that doesn't require two hands to hold the pages open and a legible spine. The series is too valuable to be so expensive.

■

Would you believe I'd have the nerve to order a review copy of a novel? Well, I did. It is **Albert Goldbarth's *Pieces of Payne*** (Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 2003, 208 pp., \$15 paper, 1-55597-378-7). The genre line at the top of the back cover reads "Essay/Memoir/Belles Lettres/Novel"; a red scribble runs over the first four words, with a circle around "Novel." The front cover announces it as a novel with footnotes—eighty pages of novel, to be exact, plus 110 pages of "footnotes," then fifteen pages of Afterword and Acknowledgments. If you know Goldbarth, our contemporary "library cormorant," eight pages of Acknowledgments won't surprise you. All these sources, astonishingly, interrelate in an unpredictable web of plot and multiple consciousness. Graywolf has done this novel proud. The cover design is gorgeous and seductive; the print is elegant Calisto. To assist in keeping our place as we pop back to the "footnotes," the designers have given us a detachable bookmark. You'll note that I'm putting off describing the novel. Adjectives are easy: enthralling, challenging, encyclopedic, adventuresome, hilarious, unputdownable. But to describe it, whew! Yes, there is a plot. And Albert is the narrator. One of his former students is letting it all hang out. The story is, I think, a family romance. But we get it all through Albert, the compulsive reader of everything, from Ovid to *The Fortean Times*. He quotes John Muir: "When one tugs at a single thing in Nature, he finds it hitched to the rest of the Universe"; so it is with *Pieces of Payne*.

And since Goldbarth is as astonishing as an essayist as he is as a poet and novelist, I'll just mention (a word to the wise) that he has two more books of essays out. The first is ***Dark Waves and Light Matter*** (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999, 177 pp., \$21.95 hardbound, 0-8203-2126-5). If you missed "Square of Light" when it appeared in *Parnassus*, here's your chance. To add to the banquet, we get ***Many Circles: New & Selected Essays*** (Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 2001, 324 pp., \$16 paper, 1-55597-321-3). If you don't know Goldbarth's essays, this is a

good place to start.

■

Goldbarth's protean productions illustrate the contemporary impulse to dissolve the boundaries between genres. The explosion of interest in the prose poem is one obvious example. I recommend two contrasting collections. One is **Ruth Moon Kempher's** deliciously screwball *Always the Beautiful Answer: A Prose Poem Primer* (King's Estate Press, 870 Kings Estate Road, St. Augustine, FL 32086-5033, 1999, 260 pp., \$18.50 paper, 1-888832-07-X). Kempher has cast her net into some wild corners, including one-line poems and one where the title is the prose poem. Many of these poets add their comments on the genre, and a good many editors (myself included) have sounded off on it. Page after page I am lured into argument. I love it. And Steve Hogan's wacky illustrations set the tone. At the other extreme is **David Lehman, *Great American Prose Poems: From Poe to the Present*** (New York: Scribner Poetry, 2003, 346 pp., \$30 cloth, 0-7432-2989-4; \$16 paper, 0-7432-43350-1). Here are 115 poets, from Emerson (Emerson?) to Jenny Bouilly, still in her twenties but weaving as haunting a spell as any of her elders. Lehman provides a solid appreciative taxonomic introduction. Even if you think "prose poem" is an oxymoron, get both of these. You won't find much duplication, will find much delight.

■

And while I'm considering the dissolution of genre boundaries, I might as well mention another book I have enormously enjoyed: ***The Next American Essay*** edited by **John D'Agata** (Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 2003, 488 pp., \$18 paper, 1-55597-375-2). "Lyric essay" is the best description for the contents of this collection. John McPhee's masterpiece "The Search for Marvin Gardens" (1975) leads off, after which we get an essay for each year, right up to 2003, with (watch out!) Jenny Bouilly's "The Body," that poem consisting of all footnotes (no body) that you will remember if you saw *The Best American Poems 2002*. D'Agata provides a brief and engaging introduction to each year. Guy Davenport's 1974 Prologue marks the year the editor was born. Joe Wenderoth's Epilogue: ninety-three "Things to Do Today" launches us into the Next American essay/memoir/prose poem/narrative/research romp/shortshort/belles lettres/lyric.

■ Admirers of the Random House Audio series of poets reading their own work will want to know about the latest releases: Robert Frost, “American Wits” (Dorothy Parker, Ogden Nash, and Phyllis McGinley), and Richard Wilbur. Each follows the format of introduction by the series editor, J.D. McClatchey, a CD of the reading, a well-produced sixty-four page booklet with the texts of the poems read, and a brief bibliography, each set \$19.95. The Frost CD includes some poems from his early 78s plus some late readings never before released. Having heard Frost read off and on through the thirties and forties, and owning his recordings, I especially enjoyed his reading of “The Witch of Coos,” which I can’t remember hearing him perform before. He reads it wonderfully, but strangely omits the ironic final stanza. The Wilbur disc starts with early archival readings, followed by a retrospective specially recorded for this issue, including two new poems. I hadn’t heard him read since decades ago, at the American Embassy library in London, when Cleanth Brooks was cultural attaché, in those days when our embassies were centers for American music, art, and poetry readings. It is good to hear Wilbur’s rich voice, with a hint of Frost in it and a resonance reminiscent of Eliot, but with distinctive “poetic” liftings of pitch. The uniformity of tone and topic over the lifetime of beautifully realized poems impresses and charms me.

■ Being an advocate of self-publishing in this day when much commercial and university press publication depends on one’s winning a contest, I was interested in **Tom and Marilyn Ross**, *The Complete Guide to Self-Publishing*, fourth edition (Cincinnati: Writer’s Digest Books, 2002, 521 pp., \$19.99 paper, 1-58297-091-2). It certainly is a lot of book for the money, and like the other Writer’s Digest books I use (the essential *Poet’s Market*, for example) authoritative and exhaustive. You want a chart of the additional width needed for the spine roll of a dust jacket for a hardbound book? Here it is. The amount of detail may appear overwhelming; nevertheless, I wish I’d had it when my husband and I established our own publishing company, the Latona Press. The Rosses don’t pay much attention to poetry, and were I to publish a volume of my own (non-existent) poetry, I’d put it on disc, find a poetry book I admired for its design qualities and a professional designer who would do everything the way I wanted

and see the volume through the press for me. Of course you (poet) understand that you're responsible for your own marketing and distribution, and for that you'll find the chapter in the Ross book helpful. If you plan to establish your own press to do the whole publication process, you'll find this \$19.99 a bargain. Inquire about the Writer's Digest Book Club before you buy. It can mean significant savings, assuming you really want and need their books. I joined and have had my money's worth three times over.



I was hopeful that **Denise Levertov's** new ***Selected Poems*** (New York: New Directions, 2002, 240 pp., \$24.95 cloth, 0-8112-1520-2) would allow me to make shelf space by retiring to storage my twenty-two volumes of her poetry. I checked in them the twenty bookmarks to frequently-referred-to poems, and found only five in the new collection, so I'll just add this to the shelf. Paul A. Lacey edited it and provides a graceful biographical Afterword, setting the poet in her time. Robert Creeley's Preface is the intimate tribute of a personal friend. I read through the selection, interested by the volume of religious poems (which would not have weighed so heavily in a selection of my own), and grateful for the many others to which I had not before paid enough attention. If you don't have a Levertov library, buy this (I hope it will soon be out in paper). If you have many of her books, you may well find here a fresh reading of an important poet.



Those of us who learned so much and enjoyed so much in **Robert Bly's** magazine *The Fifties*, then *The Sixties* and *The Seventies*, are delighted to welcome its latest incarnation, ***The Thousands***. In issue Number One, twelve pages are by American poets, including a newly-discovered poem by James Wright, and the rest are translations and essays by Bly, including a long "Six Disciplines That Intensify Poetry"; an appreciation of the work of Jane Hirschfield by that pseudonymous critic Abou Ben Adam; and announcement of the Domestic Globalization Award, "given to programs that best embody the principle of globalization, that is, the distribution of identical ready-made articles that result in the destruction of native cultures." This year the award goes to the Invisible College of Graduate Writing Programs, eloquently excoriated. *The Thousands* "is published occasionally by the

Thousands Press, 1904 Girard Ave. So., Minneapolis, MN 55403.
 . . . Please don't subscribe; you'll never receive your issues
 anyway. But if you send \$7.00, we'll send you the next issue."

■

David Godine is among today's publishers distinguished for production of books that do honor to their writers. He doesn't necessarily send me the books I seek to review, but every once in a while a wonder appears, unsolicited. The latest is a splendid collection of color photographs by **Jonathan Williams, *A Palpable Elysium: Portraits of Genius and Solitude*** (Boston: David R. Godine, 2002, 176 pp., 7¾ x 9¾, \$30 paper, 1-56792-149-3). Though Williams has provided for each photograph a personal memoir of the site or the artist, these would be worth our admiration even if we did not know who the subjects were. Anyone who has seen publications of his Jargon Society knows the imaginative excellence of his books, themselves works of art, and his unique (I use that word carefully) flair for discovery of what he calls geniuses—painters, poets, novelists, musicians who have flourished outside the mainstream, such as Harry Partch and Aaron Siskind. Williams includes portraits of creators of Outsider Art and their work; the graves of some of his heroes, such as Wallace Stevens and Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton; and a few garden and architectural wonders. Among the poets very much alive in these pages are Lorine Niedecker, Charles Olson, Michael McClure, Wendell Berry, Robert Duncan, and Louis Zukofsky. Williams claims that it would be pretentious to set up as a Photographer "in the same way I set up as Poet, Essayist, Publisher, Hiker, Bourgeoisophobe, and Dotty Anecdotalist." Ah, but he is a wonder of a photographer. His notes here are wildly colloquial, intimate, sometimes raunchy, always affectionate. I'll give you a little nibble from this banquet of a book, hoping to arouse your appetite. At Rachmaninoff's grave in (of all places) Kensico Cemetery, Valhalla, New York: "Do you know what he said on his deathbed? 'Farewell, farewell, my beloved hands!'"

■

The *Beloit Poetry Journal* exchanges subscriptions with about eighty literary magazines, and once in a while one is so unusual that I want everyone to know. ***The Literary Review: An International Journal of Contemporary Writing*** (Fairleigh

Dickinson University, 285 Madison Avenue, Madison, NJ 07940) has a special issue (Vol. 45, no. 4, 222 pp., \$5 [sic]) dedicated to “The Secret Life of Writers,” guest-edited by **Walter Cummins** and **Thomas E. Kennedy**, who have assembled an astonishing collection of biographical and autobiographical revelations. As Kennedy says, “we have the life behind the words of cities, philosophers, translators, lovers, a poet who drums, a writer who paints, a painter whose work was suppressed because she was a woman, and a writer who survived and prevailed over the secret abuse he had been subjected to as a child.” It begins with personal experience and reminiscence—where they’re coming from, how they earn a living (the duplicity involved), some dramatic, some funny, some horrendous. There is an engaging (that word again) fourteen-page interview with Richard and Charlee Wilbur. Perhaps most valuable are the accounts of and by non-American writers: translator Adam Sorkin’s scholarly account of censorship and poetry in communist Romania, Aleš Debeljak on “My Private Balkan,” Linh Dinh’s “Eight Postcards from Vietnam,” Thomas E. Kennedy himself on “The Secret Life of Kierkegaard’s Lover.” And much more. For writers likely to be unfamiliar to American readers, the editors add samples of their work. I have reread the entire volume, learning more each time. The ravishing cover image of a sculpture by Judy Moonelis forbids me to file this issue; I keep it out in sight where it tempts me to dip back in.

■

Here’s a book of poems that might fall through the cracks if I don’t get in here and shout for it: **Derick Bursleson, *Ejo: Poems, Rwanda, 1991-1994*** (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000, 78 pp., \$11.95 paper, 0-299-17024-1). Alicia Ostriker picked this for the Felix Pollak Prize, and she picked splendid work. Bursleson and his wife Anita Leverich taught English at the National University in Rwanda from 1991 to 1993—Rwanda, that small country in the middle of Africa where over a million people were slaughtered in the explosion of genocide between Hutus and Tutsis in 1994. These richly-detailed, eloquent poems share the teacher’s experience; at the end a Rwandan friend, Remera, escapes to this country and gives his account of the horror. Adam Zagajewski has it just right: “Poetry arrives always too late.” From the ruins of Rwanda comes this outstanding book that saves as much as can be saved: humanity, humor, tender-

ness, poetry.”

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Here’s an anthology I was sure I could get through fast: ***Stand Up Poetry: An Expanded Anthology***, edited by **Charles Harper Webb** (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002, 322 pp., \$24.95 paper, 0-87745-795-6). The title suggests slam poetry. The garish cover shrieks hysterical performance poetry. Now, granted, Webb is a former rock musician. OK. And this started out as a Los Angeles scene collection. But though these poems would be great in performance, they are all written for the page, many by poets the *BPJ* has been delighted to publish: Bukowski, Dacey, Dunn, Edson, Field, Goldbarth, Locklin, Lux, Sholl, Tate, Trowbridge, for example. Damn fine poets. Webb is clear about what he responds to: humor, performability, clarity, natural language, flights of fancy, a strong individual voice (no McPoems), emotional punch, a close relation to fiction, use of urban and popular culture, and wide open subject matter. When I first joined the editorial board of this magazine we were sitting around reading manuscripts before making our selection. I wish I could remember what I was reading when I burst out laughing. What I do remember was founding editor Robin Glauber exclaiming: “Marion is laughing. Let’s take that one.” To this day we cherish a comic spirit when we find it—a spirit expressed with wit and style. Most of these poems are ones I wish had been sent to us.