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**Jacques Hnizdovsky**, "Zebra," 1970 (front), and "Zebra II,"  
1972 (back), woodcuts

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**Mary Greene**, design

**KIRUN KAPUR**  
**Chapter and Verse**

*Now the man knew his wife Eve. Only fools call me  
A rebel. The rebel was my mother. Like every rebel*

*She was irresistible to anyone with privilege and without  
Authority. She only half knew what she was doing,*

*But she knew she was right. She loved right  
More than she loved contentment for my father.*

*How could he help but want her and the fruit.  
How could he help but hate her. That garden verse*

*Is the complaint of lovers who wished to be loved better.  
And she conceived and bore Cain and said*

*I have gotten a man from the Lord. Next she bore his brother.  
But here the words just leap ahead without the story.*

*My father learned and changed into what follows rebels.  
Government, I mean, if you're lucky.*

*We became a family: what follows after  
Love, I mean, partition.*

**KIRUN KAPUR**  
**At the Tiki Lounge**

You've got a pretty face, he said.  
I thought he meant I seemed likely

To listen. Thought he might explain  
The way he lost half his friends and leg.

Instead he's on to market day in Basra. Sweet  
Apples there the size of knuckles. Curtains made

Of Chinese lace for sheikhs' car windows.  
Then, this old guy asks us in, he says,

The granddaughter serving up behind his shop.  
It was disgusting. Hot stringy meat, some gritty

Sauce. Worse even than our army shit.  
But you don't piss the locals off.

Hearts and minds, you know.  
And hospitality's a bitch out there.

So we keep eating. The granddaughter's just piling  
servings on. You have the look of them, he says,

I mean, you look a bit like her. Our drinks are up.  
I'm free to pay and go. I don't have anything to say to this.

Then, the old guy—shit—the old guy starts in laughing. I sit  
to hear the end. I don't know what I owe or who I owe it to.

He's busting up. We don't know what the fuck to do.  
It might be camel balls or some real toxic shit.

Lt. keeps asking, but the bastard won't shut up.  
Everyone gets nervous. Everyone starts shifting around.

I thought J.B. was maybe gonna pop him one. Then,  
The girl just throws the spoon. She hits Lt. and runs.

Here, he leans toward me, gently pinning my wrist.  
Next day, one of our guys is sick.

Some skeeb starts joking that the old guy fed us  
Parts of kidnapped journalists. That made J.B. get mad.

He pauses as he pays the bartender for both our drinks.  
And then, he says, the CO showed and broke it up.

I let my breath out in a rush. Turn my hand so it's palm up.  
So nothing happened? Nothing really happened that day?

I feel his forearm tense, tendons tightening fingers and wrist.  
I'm telling you what happened, he says, pushing my hand away.

*after Chopin's Nocturne in B-flat minor*

Hands progress across the keys as dust  
rooms the afternoon's globe of light.  
You'll learn to trace—jaw, breastbone—  
so the body in the bed will turn. Where  
your head should press—near, not over  
what you seek. Against another chest  
give half notes. The moth that brushed  
the naked bulb—over and over—  
rose away intact. You'll know  
when a man can take no more gentleness.

The strike is low. The chord played  
like a fist into the spine. And though  
the pang will force you upright, the one  
who breaks a thing must hold what snapped—  
you're not alone for one whole measure.

Some cries you can repeat—the bird  
that from the sky begs any answer—higher  
and higher—until the need that drove  
becomes all flight and run and flourish—  
your own voice trilling in space  
sounds like a separate call. So the height  
of love is echo—you've reached  
vertigo—when the off note needs to break  
the melody to keep the sweet  
from choking the throat. If you don't  
know where to end, realize when to rest.

Come back to pedals and frets. Breath  
can be stretched—mouth open for the note  
to come. At sea, anticipate the interval  
between flat of trough and sharp of crest.  
You won't be blessed with the necessary  
resolving tone. You'll have to guess,  
even after the change of key,  
a rescue ship may haul you from the cold.

**ERIN MALONE**

**Story**

A sunspot, at first a floating dart, it grew  
a pair of ears. In water  
it replaced the water until it filled the jar.

I was its diminishment.  
It smiled like a melon: I lived  
on the doughnut rungs laddering

its wrists. Too soon  
too big for its britches, it takes that tone  
& jabs up, waving its arms

while its jeans fall down. It flies from side streets  
scaring pigeons & scooters.  
It never sleeps

or else only sleeps with its feet on my back.  
There are holes  
in its alphabet, it can't remember

the numbers between 12 & 16  
but it's working  
on the question of God.

Meanwhile, it hates cheese. Won't eat.  
When it shows its teeth, I worry  
it's spoiled. I worry: too much,

not enough? When it clatters, starts to fall apart,  
I set it on a stool with a spoon & a pot.  
Let it ring & let the ringing be.

**ERIN MALONE**

**Suspect**

*A body is a place missed specifically.*

—Brenda Hillman

Curtains float

& the house

docks, all its clocks

poker-faced, blank. Dishes:

done. The day's

animal is down. Boy sleeps

on his shelf, husband

on another

like the same two doors

to a dream—

The house settles

but the night, let in, listens

like a guilty twin

to my out-loud wandering.

Lately a line drawing, a wire

I live in air—

Where's my fill, my plush

other, illustrated life?

That I tired of

& traded, willingly

it seems & still

I would,

I cannot solve it, yet now, now

I miss my love

am ruined by the loss

of mouth & tongue / *his*  
mouth / *his*

tongue / & my  
wants

washed &  
folded away! My-

self aproned, pocketed!

Mind,  
what have we done?

Tell me where the body is.

The moon's small

mercury clings  
to the handle & drain.

**ERIN MALONE**

**Praise the Present Tense**

& the invisible boy who hides, hands over his eyes, in the center  
of the room.

Praise evidence: mouth prints on windows,  
his tongue's snail on the long glass doors

I've told him not to lick.

Praise the cup that breaks because

I've told him not to break it.

Praise socks in the hallway, socks in every corner  
& shoes flung in four directions

in spite of just two feet.

Praise scattershot pocks on walls, the damn toy hammer that  
made them.

Praise spackle & paint.

Praise the balloon losing air & tulips floating, open as baskets.

Praise an aerial view, the partly clearing day.

Glory now.

Glory to what's small & undone.

Bless him & keep him where he stands,  
with me seeking, pretending not to see.

**LIZZIE HUTTON**

**The Yard**

Then returning to my yard my boy I  
saw for the first time how  
the silver maple's trunk's rivulets

Run up in spiral like Trajan's  
Column, as if, could we follow,  
we would reach the point or triumph

But my tree, tree of my nest, of my  
nativity, my breath, instead  
it branched and it leafed into a thousand. And

With my boy there in his ride I  
mean my boy not his father I  
saw for the first time from that outside

The trunk *giving* pattern, *holding*  
pattern that dispersed, it was real,  
not like Donne's will, which attaches

"Resurrection" to direction, "west and east"  
to "touch" as "one"—I saw relation  
more concrete than what I loved or thought I held

In thought. I pushed and walked I  
pushed and walked as if around, into  
that tree, tree of my sex, that tree of my midsummer's

Thousand moves in the high breeze,  
and this boy in his ride now he's  
no longer mine, my mindful, not the way he was

inside—

**LIZZIE HUTTON**

**The Follow**

What was it let my mother  
let down her reading matter,  
her sharpened pencil when  
I would come into the kitchen

or the bedroom

or even where she sat, so tightly  
focused at the music opened  
just above the keyboard,

shoulders squared  
and high, leaning like not even breathing  
at the radiating quiet of her Steinway—

even those run notes  
she dared press into its densely

strung center, its solitary thinking,

even they were eminently  
interruptible, her fingers curved, held  
just above the chord.  
She turned away.

It's like the so-called Virgin  
in the manuscript perhaps. Although her mind  
is on that premise, that resistant inner premise

of the self, what she'll become, she keeps

one narrow, pointed  
foot in the material. Hands crossed  
beneath her belly, she toes

the frame, the page's border of  
more ordinary stuff: the fat  
butter churn,

the hugely landed fly.

Or the body  
of this instrument my mother doesn't quite control. So

was that what let her let it down, it all  
so easily? I'm waiting  
still age ten

in the doorway of the widening

circles of this solitariness  
before it breaks,

as the music drifts back earthward

and she turns and says my name—

**MARGARET YOCOM**

**First Wash**

Wires hum with snow melt.  
Crows and a west breeze  
call from spruce and fir.  
One patch of soil pulls  
down sudden March sun  
to the near garden.

Our house has become  
small, his words too wide.

Outside—apricot,  
turquoise, lavender,  
lemon. Steam rises  
from towels. With clothespins  
I craft northern lights.

No one asks a thing.

If I open my coat  
I am the shape of wind.

**YOUNG SMITH**

**Two Flowers**

The white orchid blooms and gives its dampness,  
gives the loose shadows of its petals, gives its sheen,  
its beaded stem, the reaching softness of its clutch.

Her mind is a flower as well, no longer circumscribed.  
She breathes as the orchid breathes,  
and lends her watching to its shapes.

With the white flower of her mind, she makes  
the pooling shadows on the soil, the dripping stem,  
the opal sheen, the weightless fingers of the petals.

She gives as the orchid gives, reaching softly  
in wet shadows—another gentle pulse of evening  
in this white garden safe from thought.

**ANNIE BOUTELLE**

**What I Learn**

*Columkille, Donegal, AD 535*

The priest doesn't like lumps in his porridge.  
Everything is a message blown by desire. Who  
reads the prints of birds? The alphabet can be  
written on a bannock and eaten. Jellyfish ride  
on waves, learn betrayal from the tide. Inside  
my skull are doors, stiff hinges, and each  
leads to a larger room, another door, no  
end to them. God lives in the grain, bread,  
belly, the steaming manure. Most men  
are blind, most women deaf. Mice yearn  
for the cat's embrace. God lives in the quill  
and inkhorn, and dances in the psalms. Sea  
monsters dwell in the loch's green depth.  
I am a deer running on the hills of God's  
mercy. I am a dove tossed in his tempest.  
I will never be like other folk, the priest  
told me. I will be only what I am, a tool.

**ANNIE BOUTELLE**  
**Llangybi**

*St. Cybi's Well in North Wales, March 1776*

They followed the streaming pilgrims across the field,  
her son cursing as he pushed the clumsy wheelbarrow

through the mud, and she bit her lip till it bled. Despite  
the yammering jostle, she knelt on the stone causeway

and prayed for mercy. Inside the stone hall they lowered  
her and the crutches into the well, and she tucked her skirt

high, chill water bubbling round toes and legs, and  
“He’s coming,” a boy shouted, and the head of the great

eel surged out of the underwater cave, black, knowing,  
and he had chosen her alone and was coming in all

his slippery glory, pure muscle and blood, and he  
wove his quick way past the weeds—her head felt

so light it might sail off—and circled her, sunwise,  
three times, and she felt something in the water, tiny

needles pricking, rushing straight to her heart, and  
“Jesus,” she cried, “Jesus,” and as he curled his long

wavering body back through the weed tangle, her cry  
was lament, and she no longer knew if she was herself

or him, or why she felt so empty, standing there, filled  
with him, and losing him, and nothing by her choice.

**ROXANE BETH JOHNSON**

**Prudence Finch Remembers Her Slave, Clea**

This is my slave. Her hands on my piano are dark feathers  
dusting bones. She does not need music to play it.

Inside my head I keep true boxes clean (calendar days) and push  
what is pitiful to the black outlines (mother and father).

In my slave's heart are secret rooms and furniture I have not  
seen. She sits on a chair in herself and watches. Red at birth and  
red at death is the color, but what in between?

I want to know what she thinks of me, her secret scenery of  
opinion. I keep myself like a clock. She knows music like a  
mother, how to lean against it and learn its smell.

I am poor in myself, strange tree without fruit the Lord withers.  
My slave is a spoon of honey. Mother's eyes scald milk and  
sharpen knives. I was whipped for saying she is sweet.

*These are the bones of elephants*, I tell my slave. *Tusks*, she says.  
When she breaks glasses and plates, she buries them. I like  
dirt's ability to hold what we wreck.

*The definition has gradually been expanded to the point where almost anything . . . can qualify as early music.*

—Henry Haskell, *The Early Music Revival: A History*

**1. Early**

First we try the door. Nothing, the latch  
so cold it strikes a noise from you, spark  
from flint. One stone against another is hard  
polyphony; all twelve bells turn

tight with frost. Here  
on this continent they don't heat  
the churches: inside is only a stone  
tray, a cube of air. I will refuse to drink

the cross, the gilding, the galley  
of pews, the oars. The bibles will dip  
up and low into the smooth  
afternoon until we're off, forward,

an arrow through the chink of the town,  
straight into the sea's eye. Thirteen  
days: the journey will be fat  
and sleek, will open at a touch. Pull,

I say. Harder. You spread your fist  
like a stone I scoop to skim  
over the water. No, I keep it  
near my throat. There's no way

in. The sexton's keys  
are a fine, crimped song. Gray skin, fingers  
snug as irises; he'll pitch us a laugh  
and we'll swallow it.

## 2. Early Music

Couperin explains:

*The harpsichord is perfect as to its compass  
and is brilliant in itself.*

*But it is impossible*

*to swell or diminish its tones, so the sound  
is a garrote, a fine wire set*

to the neck. Yet  
the compass, as we know, is perfectly  
round. This means: North

is a freezing rain; South is a slow  
indrawing of air; East, the lip  
carefully bitten; West, the snapping

wind. North,  
one hand in another; South, the brilliant eye;  
perfect East; the West's soft rise

and fall. We use original instruments:  
the arm, the leg, each careful bone  
of the foot. The windows swell in western wall.

East is the door. In the South the dust dances  
in the brilliant light. North is the audience;  
watch for the progress of the wire, the swiftly  
diminishing cut.

**3. Inside, Early, Music**

Winter's white voice: the long,  
bright bay of the turning  
of the blood, the sluggish  
vein, heart's plow. Over in bed you turn;  
you furrow the sheets. You open the breath

like ground and all thirty-two pearly  
seeds come loose. Why, growth  
is sharp. Outside is only the whine  
of the sap. It's music here:

one shift, two breaths, minuet.

**CHARLES WYATT**

**Variation 4**

Heart of the heart of the harpsichord.  
Hands arched from nearly below the keyboard.  
Strings plucked but there is an element of touch.  
You can hear it.

Moths on the window bellied up.  
A four-note figure crowded upon itself passing in parade.  
This is not the first time.  
There is no first time, no once upon a time, or twice beneath.

All those moths dreaming of flying, each one a note.  
You're waiting for one, but which one?  
The train is passing—you wait, ignoring the signal bell,

your basket of hacked hands and gouged eyes on the seat beside you.  
If the world would only let you be on time.

**CHARLES WYATT**

**Variation 9**

*Canone alla Terza*

You're riding the back of something not a horse,  
something with a gait of eight steps, undulating the while.  
It's always night in the score, among the waiting strings,

and only the struck strings are visible, like vines.  
There's always a moonlit sheen to the visible and to the invisible—  
a feeling, like felt or deep moss.

The moon will rise in the cadence and you'll see the creature  
which seems to be a very large milkweed caterpillar  
and it's a leaf you're sailing on,

very much like a smooth sea.  
Say there are three daughters  
and two have already been hacked to pieces by the evil sorcerer.

But the story will be in that third daughter.  
Begun in the canon at the third.  
The caterpillar, already enormous, is growing,

but the fine saddle you have been provided  
is causing it no apparent discomfort.  
The cadence is coming and you realize

the pitches have been bells  
and that there is something keener than pitch  
just as the moon heaves up

and the world is a harpsichord.

**CHARLES WYATT**

**Variation 20**

Sparrows now, and hands crossing,  
a ringing rain in which two voices become one—  
there in that wall of ivy, dozens of them,  
gregarious, combative, a square dance  
of sparrows, bar brawl, swooping and unmusical,  
and the ivy wall, not straw, or twigs, but brick,

windy sparrows,  
and the wolf beneath wandering from story to story,  
hunting, hunted, swallowing  
whole variations and coughing them like a cat—  
returned, they are faster, more compact,

keener, sparrows now bees in a world of triplets,  
the wolf driven away, dingo, jackal,  
serpent, limping fox, buzzing string,  
ringing silence.

**CHARLES WYATT**

**Variation 22**

Here the struck sound / which is:  
light through the gnawed leaf. And again.  
Every bird of the wide places:

jay, sparrow, lark, swallow, and again,  
scissors shaping the cloth, and again, of air.  
From the language of gnawed leaf,

struck sound, and again,  
strike it until its first meaning has flown: and again,  
crocodile, anodyne, porcelain, and again,

and again, light flaring its waves and particles,  
take a steely tempo, lively but stately still (and again)  
and the leaf dissolves in light, look into the sun

(not for the tied halves but for the struck edge of an eighth):  
the third sister become the magic bird has left a skull  
adorned with jewelry and flowers grinning from an attic window

to welcome the sorcerer to his wedding feast.  
Bird to sorcerer: she has swept the house and awaits you:  
look : here : and again.

The air confused by yellow butterflies  
and a scattering of jay, sparrow, lark:  
once in a universe of grass and cornfield

some bird light (and again)  
gleamed and the wind took up  
the scent of gnawed and broken leaf,

spun it past the cadence in D, began again,  
now all meaning beyond the yellow,  
the white butterflies, just tied

to the edge of sight by coincidence (coincidence)  
the struck and spinning (and again, again)  
sound hard and fast like that stiff stalk

stuck in the meadow under all  
(and again) the air,  
all its light, its butterflies, and again.

**CHARLES WYATT**

**Variation 27**

*Canone alla Nona*

A step after the octave, a week from tomorrow.  
The mailman visits the tiny cottage in the wood,  
stepping over the cat on the cobblestones,  
deaf to the sounds of breaking sticks from within,

or the clanking of thin blades.  
And what does he bring?  
Not mushrooms or moon paint,  
not the empty envelopes sent by deer or the tomes of owls—

each week then, a single letter—  
just that, inside the envelope, a single letter—  
this one is *J*.

“What does it mean?” asks the left hand.

“What *does* it mean?” answers the right.  
Is it simply that hooded bird? That hooded bird?  
The witch (who need not be old, but this one is)  
tears the envelope with arthritic fingers.

She is wise now, having given up her beauty and youth,  
served herself to time (herself to time),  
reads, ponders, understands.  
Ponders, understands.

The buried moon will rise like a vine.  
The crooked letter leans, teeters, falls.  
Crickets.  
Crickets cover the moon’s thin song

with their own.  
With their own.  
What does it mean?  
Their own song.

“Watson, come here. I want you,” Bell said, and Watson came  
running like a boy. What son  
wouldn’t come to a father like that, ringing with delight, his acid  
tongue turning into sound?  
And Sherlock’s boy Watson came running as well, dim bulb, sure  
thing, everything  
elementary except to him, the watts on his fixture lower than  
the norm. He took joy at being  
called, simple as that, the sea of questions, demands, each one  
hounding him, swirling  
like a thousand Copley sharks. It didn’t even matter what it was  
that he was called for.  
As if Holmes, all his what’s and why’s, his withering condescension,  
which was uncalled for,  
was where the heart was. As if Watson were some winsome college  
boy from Whatsamatta  
U., some wind-up cosmic toy, some budding Lou Costello running  
through the abattoir  
of his father’s laughter to answer every hello with what he knew  
about *What’s on second*,  
*Who’s on first*, the Watson family crick in his neck, his DNA,  
the queries growing louder  
 (“What, Son? What, Son?”), the tom-tom golfing, clubbing in his  
head whenever anyone  
acidulously said, “What’s on your mind, Son? What is it, exactly?”  
 “Nothing,” Son said,  
though he came to wish that everyone would hold the phone,  
would just drop dead,  
or that, finally, at wit’s end, Holmes would buy a clue, put a bullet  
through his head.  
What is it fathers want? Someone to be in on it with, a co-  
conspirator?  
Someone to be included in insubstantial joy? Someone to be  
lorded over?  
Or just someone so as not to be alone, spirit descending, to  
abandon, deride—  
what son of a bitch? what son of mine?—some white sun day,  
some Whitsuntide?

A man I know named Waters commanded riverboats during  
the war in Vietnam.  
He drilled through the heart of the Mekong. Now he teaches  
peace studies to wide-eyed kids,  
the arc of his life having turned him this way, as if by design.  
They stare at him,  
silent as fish. He says he is casting his nets on different waters.  
He says power corrupts,  
peace through strength. He says MIRV, SEATO, NATO, MAD. He  
says new submarines,  
launching platforms, multiple warhead killing machines, Ohio  
Class (Ohio so centered, so far  
from the sea, except in the Ice Age, the glacial moraine), the new  
Ohios under icecaps again,  
circling the world predictably, again and again, smoothly, almost  
silently. He says there are  
some things he cannot say. He says *expiate*. His eyes fill up. He  
turns away. And this man  
with whom I am comfortable kayaks in the summer all over  
the world, in Alaska,  
the Aleutians, where Inuits since the Ice Age have hunted whales  
the size of submarines.  
And now he has married a woman from Ohio. And he loves her  
more than he can say,  
even loving her name, Edith, a name that doesn't sit well among  
the popular women's names,  
a name she herself doesn't like, but the one that he loves just  
because it is her name. I tell  
him he is the only man I know who can have his kayak and  
Edith too. Like a fish out of water  
I tell him, like Onitsura's haiku. He smiles. He says sometimes  
he flips his kayak deliberately  
over and over in the Bay of Fundy, turning the world on its axis  
again and again, predictably,  
world into water, water into light from the sea.

**JOHN HODGEN**

**Upon Reading that Abraham Lincoln Spent His Summer Nights as President at a Cottage on the Grounds of the Soldiers' Home on the Outskirts of Washington Rather than at the White House, and that He and Edwin M. Stanton, His Secretary of War, Spent the Better Part of One Evening Freeing Two Peacocks that Had Become Entangled in a Tree**

Father Abraham and Stanton on their hands and knees, climbing trees, the war weighing on them heavily, as if the sky itself were pressing down upon them, even denying birds their right, the peacocks, cock robins, sky fallen, their feet tied with jute strings to wooden blocks to keep them on the grounds, now tangled in the trees with the soldiers, the coffins, the earth itself opening up again and again.

You can see it sometimes, a homestead family pulling up in a station wagon with Illinois license plates at Walter Reed some night, good people. And you know they've driven all day, sandwiches in the car, and they're getting out of the car the same way they would if they were going to church. They're like brightly colored birds in the dim shadows of the evening with the jute strings of their grief around their feet, as if they were dragging wooden block coffins to keep their hearts from flying away, as if they've tried to fly away so many times that their hearts are permanently tangled in the trees now, each day growing more frantic, more alone. Here in Washington the president is sleeping. It is past nine. But Lincoln watches from his armchair, the white stone of his eyes, his heart untangling them, emancipating them, setting their bird hearts free.

The plane went into the bay, like a rock, simple as that.  
It dipped, plopped, chunked, like a sheep somehow dropped from the sky.  
Or like the Golden Fleece lifted out from the dock, high over the Argo,  
then the winch giving way, ergo, the way a star goes out, a faulty indicator light.  
The pilots must have gone blind in the swarming fog, the camisoled night,  
each one just before impact, smithereens, like the two boys they used to be,  
each having gone into his parents' closet in the dark, into the mystery,  
each trying on the long coat of the father, wide-eyed. Each passenger  
on the hook as well, bloody ignorant (of so much, the bright arc of their lives,  
the ocean's blinding swell), before they went in, sluicing like a cormorant,  
before they were poleaxed, bollixed, Pollocked to the underside.  
Look at them. One in the midst of wiping the mote from his eye, fully engaged.  
One popping her ears. One finding her shoe. One coughing, mid-sentence,  
mid-litotes, his company, his high hopes sadly in arrears. One gazing, dully,  
at a travel magazine. One blissfully asleep, mouth open as the sun's.  
Another hung over, hammered, hands to his head. All of them, fore and aft,  
like shepherds sore afraid amidst angels floating above them, regal and daft,  
none of them knowing what their lives had come to, each breath a permanent  
fatal error, a malfunction of surprise and demands. None of them knowing  
they were made from the stars, none of them knowing how remarkable you are,  
what you mean to me (Lover, Dear Reader), how you hold this poem like my face  
in your hands, each of us drifting through the fog to the sea.

PAUL GIBBONS

Fugue: *In Medias Res*

A goat stood in the wish of crickets.  
Lichen blighted the rocks in moonlight.  
Sleep was walking the sun back to morning.

Isabella wouldn't bathe until the Moors left Spain.  
Stay with me now: it was not an unusual night  
until, out of the darkness, the goat,

tired of being still, put its back into it.  
Isabella stopped walking, in the middle of the goat's bray  
beginning. At the city's center, the fountain was inviting. . . .

Centuries later, there were goats chained  
to the deck of a battleship. A voice  
counted backwards. Men shuffled on goggles.

This was not a drill. Crowds of photons  
were busy deciding: *wave* or *particle*?  
Then, out of the darkness, they put their backs

into it. On the ship, some goats were separated like a series  
shaken from *The Interpretation of Dreams*.  
Others flowered as though through a kaleidoscope,

which is to say, not unlike Isabella staring at the moon  
and contemplating her God's plan.  
There was the question of how a body will react

to such light. Of how cosmos blossoms inheriting dusk  
can go unnoticed. Of freshly opened scents drifting  
first from an orchard, then through the colonnades

of *L'Alhambra*, where the Catholic queen stood  
drying her calves. Her attendant paused under the orange trees,  
one hand holding linen, the other soap.

It is the same two-handed pose a man will strike  
in a shower near the Bikini Atoll in 1946  
where the distance knocked orange and violet.

He'll have seen the rising brain expanding its ripe folds  
lit like dirty twilight above the horizon.  
But this man who *was there* would remind you

you only have to find the door and you're home,  
you only have one more river, one more angle  
of incidence to prove that there's reflection.

Watching light come apart in his beer glass.  
Or through the hide of a goat. His cancer  
has spread like the blight of lichen

on the rocks in moonlight. He is so tired no night  
is unusual. Each morning walks sleep  
back into him. It's how he stays with you.

He has stepped into a river that  
Heraclitus said is never the same one twice.  
In the middle of things.

And the goat that stood out on a night during a siege  
in Granada sired generations of gloves,  
milk, and then test subjects

for a derelict ship in front of light so strong it tore  
their bodies cell by cell. And to my friend  
who recently named his second child Isabella,

*It is not the same river.* He bathes her with his brain fiery,  
his hands steady as rocks. Stepping lightly  
around her coos. Never tired of being,

he puts his back into it. He thinks the next time  
he will add a spur of lavender to the water.  
Perhaps a new sweet soap that runs

the hands without a second thought.  
He'll put a kaleidoscope to Isabella's eye  
and the crystals blown and fused from sand

will not be a drill. The light will wrestle down the tube  
to the child's eye, will strain through the retina  
and run separated shadow from color, or nearly so,

and then will dash through the optic nerve  
to the visual cortex to mix again as  
*oooh* and *aaah*. Which is what a man with cancer

is reduced to. I'm sure he loves  
the clean whistle of her skin, of Isabella's skin  
after the siege, still the middle of things beginning.

CHRISTINE MARSHALL

Apostrophe to What's Still Here

Three brilliant pinpricks  
to delineate the belt he wears  
across his waist. Barracks

of black for roaming stars,  
the sky's a dizzy wreck  
of half-formed forms, the tears

of light suggestions merely  
of the universe behind. See  
what you can. Orion first:

mostly darkness, shadow to the glint  
of bow and arrow in his fist,  
an intimation of his spleen. *Light*

equals *promise*. Don't suggest  
that I'm unstable—my patent  
is the world, its drama,

mystery's womb. The schema  
of the sky's a perfect fit:  
black everywhere, a yawning coat

stitched with its opposite,  
hysteric thread. See all that's not  
there in this strident rite

of anti-moderation. Give me night,  
mooding, staring at stars. Orion. Lit  
with flair. His darkling body split.

**BETSY SHOLL**

**A Song in There**

To stave off trouble, the old bluesmen are singing,  
without a doubt, singing—on doorsteps, in bare yards  
with folding chairs tipsy on tree roots. No tape rolling,  
no old rattling film, no spotlight, gold tooth, big car.

Forgive me, my heroes, for thinking this tragic,  
that a front porch with crickets and night fog  
isn't enough, a dusty juke joint with straw-strewn floor  
buoyant under sore but dancing feet.

I want to believe that even books burned to ash  
were worth the long nights of their making, that a song  
drifting on invisible waves still exists somewhere  
however faint, washing an unknown shore.

You who were not recorded to be touched up  
and played back later, did you love the raw world more,  
love the shy songbird's refusal to be seen?  
Oh my mentors, you who'd hear a minor chord,

a blue note struck two fields away, and amble over  
to swell the sound, joining the blue breakup, break down,  
the song talking back to the battered life, forgive me  
for even once wanting to sit in the sleek car

airbrushing through town. In its wake the world  
resumes, briar and dust, heartbeat and sky, nest  
squalling with hunger. And there, broke or flush,  
blind or sighted, you sang. Traveling by hay wagon,

boxcar, jalopy, fingers like knotted sticks, a thicket  
in your voice, on unpaved corners for spare change,  
you sang. Over you the clouds would bundle and shred,  
the night send out sparks. Then earth closed over.

Now the air's full of echo and remix.  
Still, in my mind's graveyard, I am laying flowers  
at your unmarked feet, fingering the braille  
of a tree's lichened trunk, all splotch and ridge—

your monument, bearing wounds where limbs were  
cut off. I know the music's in there, somewhere  
rising, root thirst and bent note, a song in there,  
clotted or crooned, heart strummed and rising.

**BETSY SHOLL**

**Double Portrait**

*after a photograph by Luis Poirot  
of Neruda with figurehead*

He looks pensive, perhaps sad, facing us.  
Behind him, she leans out from the wall—  
her new prow—with a gaze that even on land  
is glassy, lost in its own inner sea.

Drunken sailors might have pocked with cigarettes  
such delicate beauty if she had entered  
their dockside taverns in the flesh, asking  
for coins to feed her child, willing to dance,

desperate enough to do whatever else  
their slurred tongues and cold stares demanded.  
But clearly he, by his pose, has declared himself  
son of her glazed eyes and broken beauty,

offspring of the sea-cracked and refurbished face,  
as if he too could look through water's  
endless hues into its ruins of salt,  
into the sleeping fire within those tides

that grief swells over anyone who tries  
to hold them back. His brows, like hers, are raised,  
but thicker. The flesh at his throat sags,  
while she remains creaseless and mild

with the sad astonishment of a mother  
who has seen too far past the late night cradle  
into some harder rocking of her child's life.  
The camera's nothing to her, who was made

to sail undrowned through time, while he knows  
the power of film, and allows himself  
to be swirled through darkness and red light,  
so he still might live in two dimensions

when the third is gone—pressed into words  
that depth-charge the soul and raise from its sea floor  
cargoes of mangled bells, granite roses,  
blue cruets rancid with the dregs of stars—

and all those storm-tossed women and men he loved,  
those bright songbirds blown off course by rough winds,  
their yellow flames a long way from revolution,  
but fueling it just the same.

**IOANA IERONIM**

**Personaj secundar**

un sentiment pășește în cerc

deși pare a căuta o ieșire  
el este orb  
el poartă pe globul galben al ochilor  
un peisaj cu palmieri și savane  
e absorbit de mecanismul lăuntric

el urlă în vis  
feroce  
urlă învingător  
în vis

hainele de plasti aderă la corp  
revolta aderă la pereții tăcerii

**IOANA IERONIM**  
**Secondary Character**

a sentiment paces in circles

although it seems to search for an exit  
it's blind  
it wears upon its yellow globe of eyes  
a landscape of palms of savannas  
it's absorbed in an internal mechanism

it howls in dreams  
it howls ferocious  
victorious  
in dreams

plastic clothes stick to the body  
the rebellion sticks to the silent walls

**Translated from the Romanian by Carrie Messenger**

**IOANA IERONIM**

**Pace**

cufundați în mълul verzui al sinelui patru funcționari la patru birouri  
patru pixuri rulând ochiul minuscule  
tuse foșnet respirații *piano-pianissimo*

dosare în stivă despart liniștea / șiruri verticale  
portrete în lemn vinețiu uzat de vreme buze vinete noduri cearcăne

multe alte dosare umplu dulapuri de fier de jur împrejurul odăii  
acolo stă scris totul despre toți toate

planta agățătoare a făcut înconjurul odăii s-a ajuns din urmă pe sine  
frunze cerate pline de praf au crescut la distanțe egale

funcționarul de la fereastră socotește discret pe colțul de ziar  
banii de pardesiu locul de veci să nu-l piardă  
prima nemărturisita acasă

brusc o filă se desface din maxilare de fier  
funcționarul roșește imperceptibil

dosarele cresc și pe ultimul raft liber  
în lada verde cu pământ  
vegetează măciulia unui cactus

Da.

E pace demult

**IOANA IERONIM**

**Peace**

you're sinking into their greeny marsh four functionaries at four desks  
four pens roll their minuscule eyes  
coughs rustling piano-pianissimo breaths

files in a heap split the silence / vertical streams  
portraits in aged purpled wood purple lips round knots

more files stuff the metal cabinets encircling the chamber  
there everything that has been written about everyone and everything  
waits

a vine has made a turn around the chamber to reach behind itself  
at equal intervals dusty serrated leaves are growing

the functionary at the window calculates discreetly on the corner of  
a newspaper  
to see if he can save up money for an overcoat for a cemetery plot  
a bonus that won't be witnessed by those at home

suddenly a page detaches itself from the iron jaws  
the functionary blushes imperceptibly

the files keep growing and on the last free shelf  
in the green crate filled with earth  
a knob of cactus vegetates

Yes.

For a long time now there's been peace

**Translated from the Romanian by Carrie Messenger**

**MATTHEW RAYMOND**

**In Failure of the Furtherance of Complex Achievement**

In failure of the furtherance of complex achievement,  
aspirations in remission, leaning into an idea  
as into an empty house, the flashlight so contemporary  
in my hand, the light from it contemporary as well,  
altering the look of things, I go on.

Tell about the house. It was easy enough to live there,  
smoking grass and being still, tilling some earth of the mind  
until time made us grow, no longer blossoming but  
struggling with roots, for this poem is about you,  
not caring who you are, but about you just the same.  
Tell about the tears you made, right there in your own head,  
as if the ground were thirsty and you'd read its mind.  
I was there, I remember, although I never went  
back to find out what grew on that spot afterwards.  
So much of what we want is buried, or else suspended in the ripe air.

And the car, everyone had a car, ours was just like theirs,  
we could all relate to it, no matter the strange words  
written on the side: disquisitions of effects of secret disciplines  
known only to a select few and thrown by us out the window  
against the wind so we could watch the sunlight tinker with them  
for a moment, to achieve in passing what once took years  
to amass along the side of the road, the city practically nature at that point,  
though many animals wouldn't go there.

But is it enough to remember? The contemporary light is just a tool  
to help you pay attention. This is not my house, these are not  
my furnishings, though they are usable, having been  
flung down the generations to us in need of them here.  
I know time passes slowly, but still the past seems one infinite instant,  
perusable at leisure, the great family of man sitting around  
picking their asses like apes while the meaningless fireworks  
go blazing overhead. Tell me, Jacques Cousteau,  
what is it about the sea that makes us all Frenchmen?

Knowing is not enough, we have to doubt.  
The contemporary light helps us, rendering everything  
so perfectly what it appears to be. Matches would be better, I know,  
the light of flames leaping across dark passageways,  
and afterwards we'd have our burnt fingertips as some kind of proof,  
whereas the contemporary light is harmless.

Still, we see what we mean. And in the morning the light is better,  
more hopeful after a night fuming with our dominance of it,  
training our eyes against the glare of city lights scattered like burning  
seeds over the hills, as though the stars would be inexplicable  
without us creating our own. You must differentiate when you  
make your wish.

## EDITORS' NOTE: *BPJ* POET'S FORUM

John Rosenwald and Lee Sharkey

As of June 1, the *Beloit Poetry Journal* web site will host a blog called Poet's Forum. Each month one poet with work in the current issue will post a reflection on that work—its genesis, the aesthetic or formal challenges its composition presented, the larger project it forms a part of—and make her- or himself available to respond to questions and comments posted by readers.

The Poet's Forum poets for this issue are:

June 1–30, Erin Malone

July 1–31, Paul Gibbons

August 1–31, John Hodgen

A link from the home page of the web site, [www.bpj.org](http://www.bpj.org), will take you to the forum. The process for posting comments is straightforward.

We think the forum will foster lively poetry dialogue and thereby strengthen the poetry community the *BPJ* has helped to shape for almost sixty years.

**On another note:** Those who have missed Marion K. Stocking's Books in Brief in the spring and summer issues will be happy to know it will resume with the fall issue.