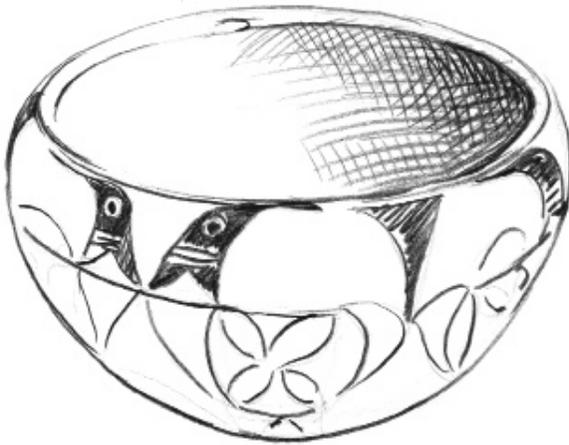


BPJ

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Marion Stocking 2009

Rb & Shetterly

MARION KINGSTON STOCKING, JUNE 4, 1922–MAY 12, 2009

Letter to Herself at Twenty-Eight: Diary Excerpts, New Year's Eve, 1940

You will never be happy too far away from the hills and the tumbling brooks where the cardinal flowers bloom, where there are trails for weary feet. Right now a life without trails seems pretty dull. When tired and care-worn, and sick and disillusioned in a world where ideals are on a cross, there is always poetry to soothe the aching mind in the winding of a forest trail. There is a knife in the wind on a mountain top that burns and cuts all impurity from a breast bared to it. Thank God for hill winds!

I hope that you have found a life full of poetry. You have always loved it, written a little, cherished much.

As I write this, the world is in a pretty awful mess. China is being invaded by Japan. Spain, her wounds of civil war unhealed, is being ripped around in Europe. Germany & Italy are fighting England, having conquered France and most of Europe. Russia wavers between each side as bombs smash Britain. America is arming at top speed. A draft has been ordered, & every week more men are poured into the Army. I hope you are living in a world at peace, with no race or country prejudice.

Roosevelt has just been reelected for a third term. There is a new party rising, the Socialists, that seem to be extreme idealists. Perhaps they are in power as you read this. Some great change has probably been wrought by the great war. Perhaps the tired world is still struggling.

Somewhere, now, the shadows are slipping beneath the pointed firs, and a thrush is singing alone in the deep woods. There are pine needles waiting for your feet, and a tall sky full of stars waiting for night. Find them—for they are truly yours—this is what you are living for. This is what you were born to love. It is here, standing on tiptoes reaching for stars, that you can rise and float away above the sordid, the filthy, the common and dusty level of life. You were born to stand on hilltops with the wind blowing stars through your hair. Never forget it.

Perhaps you are still scatterbrained. In the deep, low song of the pines you will find poise, in the bending of the birches—grace. You will only be happy with the people who love you that way—starry-brained & excited and full of the love of just living.

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COVER

Mary Greene, design

Robert Shetterly, "Rescuing the Tree," drypoint etching, 1991.

Robert Shetterly also sketched the Ancoma pot (p. 1), collected by Marion Kingston Stocking between 1951 and 1954, and the portrait of MKS (p. 2).

→

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

Poet's Forum

We invite you to join the online conversation with *BPJ* poets on our Poet's Forum at www.bpj.org. The participating poets for this issue are D. E. Steward (September), A. E. Stallings (October), and Jeff Crandall (November).

CHRISTOPHER WOODMAN
He Mistakes Her Kingdom for a Horse

He heard horses
when she meant writing,

he heard sweat,
the creamy lather where

the taut skin
works against the leather.

He heard writing
when she meant

riding her journal,
the words a broad back

beneath her, pressed
up and caught between

her long phrases and the
need to be heard by him,

the naked verb,
the taut joy ridden

but prepositional,
the taut thorn,

a word, a horse
working between them.

A. E. STALLINGS
The Prince of Crete

*He ought to have been exposed at birth, they said,
And even more darkly, Or never been born at all.
And when I slurped my soup, Nurse would mutter,
Forgetfully, What were you, born in a stable?—
Then giggles suppressed until milk went up somebody's nose.*

At first I took to mooning about the garden
(Go ahead and say it—*moon calf*—) with its paths
Hedged round with ornamental shrubberies,
A place to lose yourself in, and to walk
Aimless through the corridor of days.

When they imported the foreign engineer,
He simply erected dry stone walls
Around my circular meanderings.
A relief to hide at last—this oubliette—
And she would come sometimes with a bowl of wine

As dark as blood, and a joint of leftover meat.
I longed for these visits, though they always disturbed me—
(For then I would dream of the sea and its white foam
And the salt sweat on the white flanks of the sea
And a temblor of hooves pawing the black shingle).

Half-sister, yes. And I am her half-brother!
That is, of course, a favorite joke between us.
Just yesterday, I was helping with her knitting—
I lower my horns to wind up tangled skeins on—
And she mentioned you would come—new visitor—

As she stroked my muzzle, and I stood amazed.

A. E. STALLINGS

Another Bedtime Story

One day you realize it. It doesn't need to be said—
Just as you turn the page—*the end*—and close the cover—
All, all of the stories are about going to bed:

Goldilocks snug upstairs, the toothy wolf instead
Of grandmother tucked in the quilts, crooning, *closer, closer*—
One day you realize it. It hardly needs to be said:

The snow-pale princess sleeps—the pillow under her head
Of rose petals or crystal—and dreams of a lost lover—
All, all of the stories are about going to bed;

Even the one about witches and ovens and gingerbread
In the dark heart of Europe—can children save each other?—
You start to doubt it a little. It doesn't need to be said,

But I'll say it, because it's embedded in everything I've read,
The tales that start with *once* and end with *ever-after*,
All, all of the stories are about going to bed,

About coming to terms with the night, alleviating the dread
Of laying the body down, of lying under a cover.
That's why our children resist it so. That's why it mustn't be said:
All, all of the stories are about going to bed.

HAYDEN SAUNIER

Gone

The red tip of your cigarette neons my sister's name
through the bedroom's thick dark:

three elegant loops
and a flourish as you dot her *i*.

Then my name blazes—
its ladder, its rolling hills of liquid fire

safe in your unseen hand.
How we begged: *again, again*. . . .

We never wanted you to leave
then either.

SUSAN LAUGHTER MEYERS

Dear Missing Piece,

Here's the gray shape of you,
where you're supposed to be
while off somewhere else.

Colorful and jigsaw,
but loose—I could say useless—
as a hat on a headless mannequin.

A hen clucks come morning,
the egg gone, the nest
pressed to the curve of egg.

Rare, the prodigal returning, tired
of being apart—
adjoined: O body, O heart.

Diagnosis

Statistics shuffle and split
each mother's frantic mornings—
Mourning. More. Mire.
As in to mourn. As in more. Admire. As in mire. Shit
smeared in the bathroom, screeching
joy at the vent fan's mechanics.
Take the survey—I *feel sad: Most of the time*
Some of the time Never. How many words
does he know? How many words is he
saying spontaneously? Each day at the clinic
families shocked, embarrassed.
The doctor's dictation: *a significant history*
delays . . . problems . . . behaviors.
It is my opinion . . . a (mild/moderate/severe)
disorder. Studies show. Studies show. The show
rewound, reversed, the scene repeated. The repeated scene.
A six-month wait to be seen. We can put you on
the cancellation list. Tissue boxes
in every room. A battery of assessments.

Theory of Mind

Those I'm not
think
things I don't
think

I know you know
things I don't
think thoughts I don't

Those I'm not
think things
I don't think

I know you
know things
I don't think thoughts I don't

Those who are not me
think about things
I don't think about those things

You don't think
what I think
You don't think
I know what I think

Metaphor

The soul is a house:
the whole
what resides within the walls

of one life.
What a life holds,
what it's built around.

Let me repeat myself:
The soul is a house, the whole
of what resides within the walls of one life.

What a life holds, what it's built around.

Without the house
what does furniture matter?
He can learn to make the bed,

flush the toilet, say "hello"
into the phone,
but if walls are missing
or unsound,

no sure boundaries in which to reside,
who could know
how to invite any of us in?

If the walls of the house
are missing or unsound,
how could he know
to invite any of us in?

Treatment I: Developmental

To wait.

Allow the child to be as he truly is—
let him wander, let him flap, let him break
the silence with his strange utterances—

There will be time for your own cries,
your own wailing—imitate *his* rocking.
Hum his intolerable hum for him.
Far from purposeless

he moves in continuous response
to sensation. Enter the water
through which he wades,
brook his gestures that seem
at each turn to reject you.

Definition: Inward (adj.)

In reference to situation or condition.
Situating within. That which is
the inmost part; belonging

to the inside: turned in,
turned in on himself—
a physical act, turned his back.

Of the voice: uttered so as not to be
clearly heard, muffled, indistinct.

Said of the heart as a material organ
possessing an interior part—

and so, figuratively, of the heart,
mind, or soul: as feeling and thought's
intrinsic secluded home.

Treatment II: Applied Behavioral Analysis

Say I want cookie please

I want cookie please

Good boy

Touch your nose good boy

Touch your mouth. Your mouth.

Touch your mouth. Good

boy.

JEREMY VOIGT

Digression on Fatherhood

All is from wreck, here, there, to rescue one—
—G. M. Hopkins

The neighbor boy found the gun
when out front to kick his blue ball.
The same evening, I sit on the porch

steps with my son, my wife cutting
our hair, the human fur of us falling.

A man down the street shot in the face
someone trying to burglarize (the wall,
the window have the holes) the church

whose bells rang as I crouched crawling
in dirt, in dark under the home. Flashing

his flashlight, my boy tried to guide me
as I plugged the drafty places of this old house.
Showered, tired, scrubbed pink we sit

below scissors' snip, the mother sculpting
us into familiar forms. I feel the binding:

the *they*, the *I*, the *we*. A day with a three-
year-old is a day's work and now no mouse
can steal our seeds. Light grows less, that

is the returning line as I scrub foundation
dust from my face. The police talk retaliation,

or of the curd of chaos, in their serious tones.
In the myth of this city, one drops a weapon,
and we sleep working the dark we sleep upon.

JAMES DOYLE

The Bridle Path in Central Park, 1901

Hotels around the park, buildings
bent forward in the morning, lose
their doorways to green light.
Arbors out of dawn's wobble, steam
off the grates, milk carriages,
the fleck and curry of prim
hooves trotting the needle's eye
between skyscrapers and trees.

The riding whips smart, seamless
at their sides. The custom-made prance,
the bows in passing. The lords and ladies
of New York train that instant
between civilizations into civilization
itself. These are the lines drawn
whole, abstracts, sketches, buildings
that will sway above us a century later.

The grandchildren of the spotless grooms
drive taxis for a living. Hansom cabs
line up at the Plaza for a brief
romantic passage above the subway
lines. On my way to work, I grind out
the old bridle path on an expensive
bicycle. Race I can never win, breath
of 1901 visible in the cold morning air.

SAM TAYLOR

Suits of Men

At 2 a.m., a plane. At 2:15, another. At 3 a.m.
What if we all were jumping,
skydiving at night in our sleep of green bottles
thrown out of duvets and covers by men
in gorilla suits, or gorillas dressed in suits
of men? Wouldn't the cities then
aglow with the burning marrow of the earth
be beautiful, so beautiful
some of us would forget to pull the cord?
And the ads the gorillas played for us
on the movie screen of the earth's face
as we fell, wouldn't they too be beautiful?
Commercials for skydiving at night,
for bigger parachutes, for ripcord training
classes to refine and perfect our timing,
for outfits that would make us sexier
in the darkness as we fell,
for fancy watches that would lift our arms
at the precise moment to pull the cord
of our retirement; commercials that
played, sensually, over each other's skin
for portable music players so we wouldn't hear
the sound of our falling through space
or the murmuring *aahs* and cries of terror
of our fellow fallers. Ads for modular screens
like individual pan pizzas in front of each face
so we wouldn't have to see each other
or reach out to hold one another
as we plummeted through the saffron-reamed
darkness, as we lay in bed falling
into a nightmare, saying I am
only sleeping, I'm only sleeping,
as the earth leapt up toward us, gigantic, becoming
our body, as the earth burned.

SAM TAYLOR

History

I will never know what it's like
to open my legs and receive him
to receive history
rampant, weedy spear
inside my body.

To let him into the world
so that his sap flows
out to the last branches
of the elms, the leaf tips,

or the more common form,
to open while clutching shut,
half-open, or afraid of a gun,
or needing food,
or with a fist rising

to open to the one who murdered
my husband, the conqueror
triumphant in my cunt
to open at the command
of law, of armies, of racks
prying my legs apart

and his furious seed
dripping from me
his juniper seed, his boastful
murderous seed
spilling from me, and growing
in me, inexorable
light and birdsong
pouring through the window.

I will never know what it's like
to open my legs and give birth
to history. My child, his story.
I will only know what it's like
to be that child of sorrow.

SAM TAYLOR

Song

Look, Lord, we are here in the middle of a snowflake
circling the Kaaba, praying five times a day.
Look at us here in the heart of a riverstone,
swirling, dizzy, gazing up into the flowing sun,
squinting. Lord, we are here in the square of taxis
and falafel stands, like drunken chess pieces,
reading newspapers, talking into cell phones,
stopping to pray in the midst of somebody's shoe.
We turn round and round the Kaaba, we turn round
the broken key in the register at the hardware store.
We turn round the curtains in a second-storey window
behind which a woman lifts her legs into the air,
shouting, of course, your name. Name of presence and absence conjoined.
Everywhere, the Kaaba. Everywhere, the blind man's left eye.
Lord, fill our tables with turkeys and cows.
We are so patient, in your black cloud, turning.
Our faces reflect the moon, the stars, the porch lights,
the streetlights, the police lights, and ask for nothing.
Almost nothing, nothing and a wide-screen TV.
We walk round and round your loaf of bread, we kneel
here in the middle of an eggplant, wondering
if we can really hear a world outside the purple skin.
Look, here in the middle of a snowflake
where we have been falling so long, the cars honk
at each other, though it's clear there's nowhere to go.
And we do nothing, though we know we are turning
snow to flame. And we ask for nothing,
nothing but a hot bath and a deft tongue on our chest,
no more. OK, and love blazing in a human being,
and Lakers tickets, and World Peace, but that's all. Really.
Look, I am honking, Lord, stuck in traffic,
just like yesterday. We ask for many things,
but you can keep your snowflake.

SAM TAYLOR

Monopoly

On the monopoly board of our days, I bought up sorrow and grief
thinking I would make a killing, but no one came.

The car went to the movies, and the doggie went to the park.
So I bought up joy and laughter, I bought up ecstasy.

But no one came. With sorrow and joy, I thought
I had the market cornered, but no one landed on a single square.

So, I sang to the statues and fountains. I sang to the uninhabited air.
I opened my mouth to the rain sliding off oak leaves

and the lies sliding from emperors. A salty whore, I opened
my mouth to anything: octopus legs, cow balls, the national anthem!

Testing the hypothesized theory of the American male.
Testing the hypothesis that history and fire.

I dreamt her crawling over the earth dripping milk.
I removed the lid from the compost and watched

the eggshells and spring onions steaming in awe.
In my dream, I sang to myself as bodies of the fertile crescent

burned in white phosphorus, burned to white bone.
I fretted that to be singed sounded so close to singing

but worried more that I had forgotten my original cause
of worry. While my guitar. While my eyes and my moon and my eggs

and my Toyota Corolla. And each day in my monopoly, I grew more broke
in vacant tenements of joy, in empty palaces of grief.

Yael Shinar

Ingredients for History

The work happens
within the hands of the people, like hands clapping,

a phenomenon
not in the body alone.

So when the plow
moves the aching man along the furrow

he is made stronger
(the marbled world has shown its egotistic edge)

he is sound,
threaded through physical laws,

sewing soil to a house of sky,
he is safe.

And this, the problem of the soldier,
made in the same way,
with the same indifference,

his anger and his blood and his human
hesitation
all counted as ingredients for history.

And the war makes him,
his speech,

each utterance of his mouth,
corollary to that day.

NICK COURTRIGHT
Destinations, VI.

Even after I died, I could not close my eyes
as the tiny empires

pile up their bodies. Four quarters for a dollar, the playground leaves
make small tornadoes of possibility, and at the waterfront
the poor are music as they wash
their pants. Their song and the wind, their song and the wind.

At the waterfront, the slovenly boat comes in and on its side
scrawled in stenciled block letters
is the name of our understanding—seven black-faced laughing gulls call out
the ship's name in staccato, and it's true

the water is cast-iron deep and the groan it makes
sounds like what it is: children.

Even after I died I could not close my eyes, not even after I died.

The weather makes crude maps of our emotions, the currents of the sea,
but only for so long. Sometimes, wind moves
so quickly across the bay it's as if it's holding it down.

JEFF CRANDALL
The Glassblower

1. Glory Hole

—A high-temperature chamber used for reshaping glass on either a punty rod or blow pipe.

—In a men's room, a hole between two stalls through which one may give or receive a blowjob.

This vessel has curves
pleasing to the eye, a soft lip,
a flat foot to rest on. I want to cup my palms
over the glowing color of its cooling,
but later. . . .

Now my eye is caught in the heat
of its final fire polish.
What dripped from the pipe
—radiant, thick as semen—
achieves fulfillment in the motions
of my own turning.

The amorphous, the malleable
awakens. There is a taste to the air here.
Steel. Iron in your mouth.

What formed at the glory hole
delicate as an adolescent
reflection in a mirror
cools in the first few minutes from that heat,
cools to the rigid shatter state.

If I hold this cup
suspended in the lit gas heat
I can watch it slump. I can let the thin walls
collapse and tear
back to a puddle of clear:

I wipe saliva from my chin.
I anneal myself with hugs.
I contain the polarized stresses.
I return to the cold of the holding shelf.

2. Pulling Cane

The first dip clear as candy
and then the deep blue tongue
eases on like a slug and relaxes.
I grab the molten tip with the diamond shears
as Jim's nimble fingers roll the pipe.
I walk, slowly, backwards, trailing
before me a thin, single tendril glistening like water.

I want to run with this scintillating ribbon.
I want to wrap the earth translucent with glass.
(Not even the Indo-Malayan Python
emerges so clean, smooth, and straight.)

But I keep retreating. I've learned
how one hot touch—
urged in a moment of tantalization
when the heart beats hard and the mouth
dries—follows like a bullet to the gut.

Welts and blisters. Small bruises in the back
of my mind reveal their own truths.

Thirty feet long and a quarter inch round—
we run out of room before the glass gives out.
We set our ends on the concrete floor
and grab our jacks and hammers
to break the thing apart.

3. Cullet

Old mayonnaise jars, plate glass,
clear shards of shattered cups,
these are the pieces of one impossible
puzzle we shovel into the back
hatch of the furnace.
Respirators guard our breath
against the float of hairlike filament
that, embedded in the lungs,
will cut a blower's life in half.
I think of the age of these motions—
shoveling a steam train boiler's coal,
hay to a horse, or shoveling shit from the stable.
Fifteen years ago I dug trenches in a park.
An overweight man in a gray-green jacket

walked by.
Looked back.
Minutes later
we found each other
in a room marked MEN.

(He gripped my neck so hard
I couldn't breathe for all his flesh.)

There is comfort in cullet—
watching how our sum of ugly mistakes,
our failed attempts—tragic and tossable—
return to the cauldron
where cracked edges meld
and pool in union, to be drawn out
in strands and buckets
and poured and pulled
and shaped again and again toward
something utterly, undeniably beautiful.

4. The Rake

After the hours of calm melting,
the comfortable grumble of the furnace rises
to a shaking roar—in minutes the temperature flares
hundreds of ergs hotter
to force the diamond bubbles
up and through the batch.
What's left is foam on a great glass lake.

What good is it to pull a weed
growing beside the onions?
Root snaps off in the hand
and all that buried energy merely
thrusts itself to new green life
hardier, more insistent than before.

There are days when I'd come home from the park
empty, needing to vomit, needing to scrub
the musk of another man from my face.

Pull or poison, the root remains.
I cut and crush the fingerlings
rising between carrots and cabbage.
I keep up appearances. Jars in the basement
expose their proof of my good harvest.

Even the gardens of hell need tending
and hold their shacks of torturous tools.
I lift the iron rake, its one flat blade
hanging like a plow. I slide open the furnace door
and balance the weight in every tendon of my arm, my hands

burning. My face
burning. My eyes
stinging. Into that searing light I touch
metal to glass, purge
the unbreathable scum from the surface
and turn from the fire clean.

SANDRO PENNA

[Al primo grillo, quando l'aria ancora]

Al primo grillo, quando l'aria ancora
è tutta luce, io rinnego il lungo
arido elenco die ritrovi a sera.

From *Poesie*, by Sandro Penna. ©1989 Garzanti Editore. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

SANDRO PENNA

[Hearing the first cricket, when the air is still]

Hearing the first cricket, when the air
is still lit through, I cast aside the long
dry list of places I haunt at night.

translated from the Italian by Adam Giannelli

ROBERT SHETTERLY

Hum

On a still day
a man sits on a hill above
a black pond. In one corner of the pond
a cluster of small white stones surrounds
itself with fine white concentric hoops,
as though the stones are humming, maybe
humming out the last of the sun's heat, a pulse
only the water can hear, the hoops a little
amphitheater of applause.

He thinks the stones also resemble
a cluster of spider eggs, the embryonic spiders
already envisioning webs, stitched
in the shape of sound waves,
an idea they have caught from the air,
from the humming of stones, an idea
more nutritious than any mosquito.

The man thinks one needs to
conjure and taste the flavor of a barely
heard idea, the idea, say, of a maple seed,
that one-winged angel who can only whirl
downward, whose sole intent is not
to escape heaven or visit earth on a
mission of comfort or warning
but to bury itself in darkness, flutter there
imperceptible as a small tongue,
like the tongue of a brook trout or a child
after four months' gestation, a tongue
wanting only to speak by slow acting,
humming to itself politely,
saying, excuse me, pardon me,
excuse me, becoming a little trowel to
lever and wedge a conduit,
imagining being pierced
to the xylem and phloem by a cardinal's call,
and tasting rain in April in its splitting buds.

Domestication

When we failed to prune the old apple tree,
the boy moved in. From the ponderous, horizontal
limbs dense suckers sprouted, constructing a treehouse,
a fortress of leaves, a perfect hiding place. At cats
and dogs he lobbed stones like mortars; he parted the leaves
and waggled his little penis at us—arching his back
to better arc his brilliant stream. If we tried to climb
up, we were confident he would shit in our face.

One day the old tree was ecstatic with bloom,
white and pink and heavenly. *That will teach him,*
we said. *The nasty kid will suffocate in bees and sweetness.*
Then a stone cracked the kitchen window. *More symbol*
than substance, we scoffed. *Acting out. More lonely*
than aggressive, we said. Then the tree bristled with
hard green apples. Obviously too dangerous for
peace talks now. We stayed inside.

Barely, it seemed, a day later, after a week of frost,
overripe apples were splitting and splishing, spitting yellow jackets.
At night we heard him singing bravely through
his chattering teeth. We said, *Nature has turned*
hostile. We were sad and afraid. The apple leaves curled
and fell. His sanctuary now a cage, the boy
shook the suckers and barked. We sharpened the pruning
shears. We wouldn't make that mistake again.

ROBERT SHETTERLY

Torture

Any atrocity can be carved into a face,
skin flayed, bones splintered, nose knocked sideways,
teeth swallowed, but if the eyes remain intact,
even one eye, deep, soulful, you won't look away.
The eyes will pull you in, as though eyes
invented gravity, insist on the wordless
transmission of history. You see in this dim
light the edge of the collarbone illuminated
like a thin gold necklace, Egyptian or Assyrian,
funereal. And it occurs to you that this necklace
is a halo that has slipped down, and the
history you must learn is its progress,
how, maybe, the man grabbed it himself
with both hands and worried it down over
his head like a woman shimmying into a tight dress.
But the eye blinks and tells you, no, it was
done for him, to him—someone deriving a pleasure
equal to his pain.

On his forehead is a black discoloration in the shape
of a medieval castle with turrets where,
you think, some ancient scrolls are hidden
and the last survivors of a decimated tribe
are peering out, weaponless, witnessing,
writing it all down. You begin to speak your name,
think better of it. You cannot hold the gaze.
Instead you study the shadow you took for
blood under the crooked nose, and then the seam
of the mouth, lipless, whose last utterance, a scream,
exhausted the need to ever speak again.

The face is stronger than you are. Without
irony or intellect, its colossal memory
is full of indictment, the escapeless gravity of
the unspeakable. And you are bent in its orbit,
its dense consciousness outside of time, a gravity
that resembles fate, resembles original sin,
but is darker, more unknowable, and begs you
to name it at the same time it tells you
not to try.

MIGUEL MURPHY

The Vulnerable Datura Vampire Blossom

It must be lovely to sleep in you, Eye Flower, opening deceitfully
tendrils in the night. I call your color Wolf Scruff, your blindness
hypnotic as a wound's purple fringe, torn, burning slenderly.
White Violet, releasing exhalations. Ah, your sigh

released in the moondawn while you quietly untwirl, Little
Lightning Mouth, unfurling & turning slowly in
soft, electronic seductions, speak to me. Say to me words
lovers risk in twilight, promising endlessness, caresses

victorious as shadow upon the flesh. Your cold heat speaks
to no one, Snow Neon, floating alone. Alive at night
a heart must tremble at the window & talk to the failures
it knows. What summer. What year. In the cactus garden, Glittering

Quartz, I hear a night moth eaten by an owl. Bats cartwheel & radar
the blood-warm crickets. The white leather of your neck has its charm,
but your thirst is a silver radiance. Poisonous Angel, the night is long,
too long to whisper without promising the repetitions

of the pulse under your skin to another nude & listening being.

MATTHEW SMITH
Elegy with Bradford Pear Trees

Athens, Georgia

The crooked boughs in bloom almost to rupture,
pear trees shudder the length of the street.

Our windows are down and swallowing
facefuls of warm damp twilight air

ripe with the trees' uncanny stink.
How stupid I felt when you told me

semen—it was semen they smelled like!
How could I not recognize my own reek?

And again I felt stupid slowly grasping
of course, of course it would be you.

A little rain or breeze is all it takes
gently to stipple sidewalks, cars, and skies

white in blossoms enough we might
not recall whole surfaces of earth

naked as they were before the spill.
We might not, but we do.

Remembering is why you've left
down the windows and twirled up

the college station, scattering conversation.
Even before I knew what else it meant

come was the best of all possible words—
at once suggesting *you* and *here* and *I*

want you to. Even then. I want you to
speak with your good sulking mouth

again to me. Simply to make your lips part
I ask for the single best word you know.

You say *part*. And nearly twist the knob off
the radio, where Jeff Mangum's ghost is

singing: *Semen stains the mountain tops*.

Once, and then again as if explaining:

Semen stains the mountain tops.

Briefly convincing me something

even as obscene as what my body makes
peacefully gleams, maybe, in another world.

Although he wrote those words in Athens,
here in the piedmont. Here in the lowest

rank of mountain there is nothing
lofty to speak of. No pinnacles. No snow.

Even here. Though maybe far enough away
anything's simple enough to seem lovely:

the night iconic only in hindsight, the kiss
good luck at the end of our quiet drive,

the pear trees quaking at rumors of the wind.
Scentless in memory, still, the clustered petals

quicken at the tip of every branch. Even now
they quicken and come beautifully apart.

ANNE SHAW
Thoreau Dying

In the last year of his life, Thoreau was stricken by consumption and confined indoors. His friend Ellery Channing reported that he never again mentioned the fields and woods of Concord.

1

The fevers come again, a hundredweight of stone
crushed across the holy wheels
of breath. Lungs, the bronchial snow.
Language comes, and objects, in my room.
Faces housed in caution. I keep on stealing sticks
to store for the birds' nests building
just the other side of glass, keep
spirits in my pocket. I believe
in pockets of spirits, believe in sparrows
flickering in pools. How brown shapes
like the robes of monks still glide around me
at the cusp of sight. Like hawks they are,
attendant. How they wait.

2

I remember derivation. The logic-animal. Brown
spring water at the base of trees. Remember seep
and breakage. Mildews in the cellar. Mold
veins shot through loaves of bread, root hairs shot through the chink.
I remember the stanch of fingers. Cool cloth,
the clucks of birds. How a small thing squeals in terror,
plucked from its ruse of grass—

3

I swallow the brown elixirs.
They are neither more nor less. We are equally
mammal and angel, there is equal
manna and poison in our blood.
Listen: the Great Mechanic
cares nothing for the self. His one eye
is immaculate, a quick
and shiny gear. A gear so tiny
it cannot be seen.

4

In the mountains, heavy draperies of snow.
Copper dome, gray cloud-churn
wrapped in the early falling, cuticle light of sun.
I remember rooms of bedsteads,
shoes on the wood floor turning, forcing spoons—

5

Permit an absence. Transience.
The stark, divisible moments, threads of sunlight
piercing through the leaves. I know I will not view again
the lambent cataract, the streambed lithe
as a muscle, braided light. Nor will partake
of thickets, my window edged and meting
out the sky. Hush now, you thousand
silvers of my pulse. You are not
what you thought you were. How
hot these fevers turn and rise. Speak
to me, Radiance, speak.

for my father

One can hear it clearly at the beginning
of the 1988 recording of the Rachmaninoff
Étude No. 2 for piano, Opus 39 in A minor.
It is so slow that it took me over a hundred
hearings to notice, then distinguish
this delicate sound, not a noise but a
sound, and realize that it had to be
the breathing of Sviatoslav Richter.

Each movement of in- and exhaling
spans one measure of *lento assai*, and belongs there
like a whale in waves of water; it made me think
of whale, surfacing, blowing and going on, whale
breathing and going at a wholly different tempo,
something to do with size or width or *envergure*.
Or reach. It is a man breathing, though, a seven-
foot man, most exact and precise. But is it

the breathing of Sviatoslav Richter?
I started to wonder where exactly the
microphone had stood back in 1988.
One should go and look for images of the event,
a tape, search the BBC archives and look
for the mike, its position, or find someone
who was there; the technician, the sound engineer,
and ask the man. Investigate this to the bone

(I imagine it stood on top of the Steinway).
One should do it now before it all slides even further
into the past to become completely irretrievable
(the moment receding even as I am thinking this:
a rug pulled from under me slowly floating off
in darkening folds of night with every wool
thread in the fringe waving farewell and getting
lost like some most precious childhood

object; me lying on the old thing of faded
red and green Persian patterns and tufts
listening to him on the piano).

→

Are any of them who were there at the time
still alive? The assistant, the older woman,
(the tall one with the heavy glasses and
the graying hair who closely resembled
Dian Fossey)? The man from Olympia?

When these notes were on the verge
of tumbling down the score and tumbled down
the score, and went through the stunned studio air,
and all there, and we, filled with anticipation and
oblivious of people passing thus, when my cup
ran over in the gentlest of rains, and every note
was moving and tumbling and on the verge
and we barely recognized our changing face.

When the notes started falling and fell fell
fell like drops of rain from trees and parapets
or drops from wettest hands on enamel
and fell to the living room floor and
fell like hands or trees or people falling,
when the light grew dim and the nights
to come merged into one single note, the white
of the washing bowl strangely went magenta.

One should not wait to make sure
that it is the breathing of Sviatoslav Richter.
Detail will slip off like that, like a dream at dawn,
and petrify, to end up as another era, a stone age.
On the rug, the box set of LPs with the picture of Richter
in his prime fully at ease in an ecru cashmere turtleneck
and a simian pose, slouching over the piano
like over a large rock all his own, smoking, and looking

away, the eyes deeply set under the weary brow
that bore the solitude of genius, and the front
that would coldly insist upward and with age
grow straight through the tree line like the Mont
Chauve or the hard north face of the Eiger.
It is my Chalk Period, when I was nine, from which
I now hang suspended in mid-air like young
Toni Kurz, frostbitten and blue, and gasping

for the breath of life, hanging there rather umbilically
from a piano snare, like a minor note, and all around
me these specks of a particularly promising past:
tiniest forms of life caught in amber; an ammonite
in the chalkstone we chipped off Cap Blanc Nez,
a stone out of our antiquity; Poseidon's marble pate
rising from the Gulf of Corinth in 1982; the Shure
diamond gliding through a mirror of aqua distillata

that you used to pour on the vinyl by the gallons
to counter static and dust. Should one simply
let it go, the breathing of Sviatoslav Richter?
We two on the bottom of the barge of *elfenbein*
that Richter, large and erect and all power
and momentum beside us, rows, taking us
across the ink-black stream of the Acheron,
the only music of rolling and rippling water

and the breathing of Sviatoslav Richter.
He with the stone cold front to the fore,
the hands not on the keys but at rest on the oar,
though, is you, breathing through the nose
as you carefully put on the record. You,
bowing over the Dual Pickup in search of
the *extra* for me (and you knew where it lay hidden).
You, breathing until last April.

D. E. STEWARD

Augustos

Clouds like Montana, the Transvaal, Chihuahua, over the bicycle
countryside from the high pressure of a cold front bumping an
East Coast mass of South Atlantic heated air

Random distant lightning from soaring cumulus

Brassical swelling lifting in piles ridiculously lush and soft-
textured with brilliant fringes backlit by evening sun

Dust clouds like these off in the Lesser Antilles exploded from
the Soufrière Hills, Plymouth on Montserrat destroyed and
mostly buried in 1995 as the broken caldera lifted to 3,000 feet

Expanding gray doom-laden volcanic clouds

Cumulus towers with their white and gold heavenly aspect beguile

Under Sakurajima off Kyushu, the muttering orange-red flashes
occluded by dust clouds threatened all night like an angry dog
behind a flimsy fence

In the morning volcanic dust covered everything

Twelve time zones on around the world a lone spotted sandpiper
feeding, preening, teetering on a gravel bar along the river, a
week into August at the start of fall migration

A huge and brilliant robin moth, the cecropia, under a lightpost
along a farther maple lane from the night before

Honey is a dark grayish yellow lighter than olivesheen

Climb the first Piedmont ridge the morning after and ride toward
a full moon at sunup, with low humidity, just under 70°, still air

Perhaps the best bicycle morning of the whole summer

In the best bicycle month of all

Sun-warmed back, full self-shadow laid out ahead, pedals, crank,
feet, trunk, helmet, knee lift, and whirring wheel weave song

The quiet mornings arrive in a processional chain

August, the serene month

When many things come clear through maturity in nature

The rowen month of second and third cuttings, of shortening
days, meteor showers, and shorebird migration

An adulthood month

The rasp of cicadas comes already in August's first week. Their
ancient sound to last until the first deep chill

A profusion of cottontails, some summers they are everywhere

The small ones take weeks to learn when to freeze in place and
when to run

Until they do, usually from a charging dog or stalking cat, they often sit a few yards away from quiet humans and old sleeping dogs thinking they are unseen

In the windless evenings they cut around gleefully in twos and threes on the edges of lawns and natural meadows

Just as they will if the lawns, roads, and asphalt disappear, and natural meadows grow again among the hardwoods, the wind-falls, and the brush

In quieter times that will come down the line

A fledgling crow at the edge of the woods, just from the nest, squawk, squawk, a kind of throttled gurgly call

Ponder bringing it in to domesticate in the way Indians tamed crows to be high-perspective lookouts

An immature Carolina wren at noon gleaning on the woodpile

At mid-month the first fall-red Virginia creeper

First hint of color in the maples the next day along the road near a huge gang-mown forty-acre plain that's more like an environmental piece celebrating the Great American Lawn than a battle site memorial

Left that way since hayfields were mown with sickles and scythes

Spurtles, fleams, and snaths

The pre-machine ergonomics of the stir, pierce, and heft eras

Sail by such old fields through banks of warm August ground fog

That condenses on forearm hairs

Drops lift off to fall back on the sweaty arms' skin in tiny super-cooled blips

As if it is baraka hanging in the summer air's shoals from those who worked here long past

In their linsey-woolsey smocks and cowhide brogans

Who had fine skills of adjusting, assembling, and repair with hand tools like spurtles, fleams, and snaths

And the high sky and oak-green hills go on and on

The mildness of sensation on tingling arms is the same awareness

Through August mornings

A ground cricket, gryllidine bounce and energy racing up through shin hairs, move it to hand and it courses around fingers and thumb

Gold-green carapace, mocha brown around its head, extremely long and thin antennae

Black crickets and Jerusalem crickets are out and about now too

All crickets often seem to rest head down on vertical surfaces

Cricket black against a melon yellow wall

Melon a moderate orange yellow, redder, lighter, stronger than deep chrome yellow

Bright chartreuse yellow varies, most often is a strong greenish yellow, lighter and stronger than chartreuse yellow

The piles of cumulus in the heat of sunny afternoons are lit dramatically across this horizon and beyond the curve of earth

They rise before the awesome, ringing welkin, and then darken as the sun drops to dusk

DAN STRYK

Boatman

What chance luck to have lost
an oar in the bankside
weeds (though, *first*, you'd
cursed, as always) . . . to have
scavenged the shore for
a solid branch, ceasing
all activity—as late sun
ruddied the lapping foam—
but *this*. So you waken
now by that whittled pole
you'd fashioned with
an untried skill, crouched
among moist ferns through
darkness, like a nested
fawn. Slip back, in mist,
to your bobbing skiff, as the sun
lifts pink from the other
bank, unloose coarse
rope you don't remember
tying. At last push off,
with a careless laugh,
freed like dream from
the constant slap of both
oars on the water . . . that
glistening circle round
your pole, with each deep
thrust, growing
wider, wider

EDITORS' NOTE

Marion Kingston Stocking

Marion Stocking, who died this May just shy of her eighty-seventh birthday and her hundredth review for the *BPJ*, offered us a home in poetry, as she did for hundreds of others—students, contributors to the journal, and devoted followers of her reviews among them.

For us, that home consisted of a welcome—in 1976 and 1987—as full participants into the workings of a journal whose rituals had already been well and amicably established when Marion joined the staff in 1954. One of those rituals was a weekend-long quarterly editorial session during which everything flowed in abundance—most particularly, poems to read, comment on, and finally choose in a marathon session in which we recited all poems still in contention. We took meals at Marion's table, which filled with two or three different soups, breads with crust and texture, cheeses, Marion's dilly beans or cucumbers sliced thin and marinated in rosewater, and homemade pies. The table talk—about poetry, politics, birds, opera, teaching, blueberries, cattle-breeding in Australia—also had crust and texture. Like all good conversation it began in one place and ended up, surprisingly, in another. For these occasions, Marion was the welcoming host—discerning, attentive, and appreciative of every passion her guests offered up. Her capacity for delight seemed inexhaustible. She licked the whipped cream from the bowl.

For thirty years, Marion and her husband, David, did most of the day-to-day work of the journal; after Dave's death in 1984, Marion assumed full responsibility. She kept track of subscriptions and finances, ferreted out cover images, negotiated with the typesetter and printer, read every transcript that came in over the transom, and corresponded with poets. All the while, Marion kept up with dozens of other journals and the books that poured into her house for possible review. Between 1968 and 2009 she wrote ninety-eight reviews for *Books in Brief*, including almost every review the journal published from 1978 onward. When the two of us took over the bulk of the editorial tasks in 2003, just after Marion's eightieth birthday, we learned by doing just how heavy a responsibility she had been carrying. Or call it rather Marion's—now our—devotion, a life in poetry that cycles poetry back into the world.

That devotion had its methods and guiding principles: Read manuscripts as soon as they come in, out of respect for the poets and to keep the piles from becoming mountains. When reading, stay

open to surprise. Be demanding and meticulous—keep the reference books beside you, and catch the poet who mistakes the wood thrush for the hermit thrush (she'll thank you). Proofread until your eyes cross, then proof again. Above all, be generous—with your time, your attention, your decision-making power. Marion edited the journal, but her home in poetry was a democracy. How many times, when the decision about publishing a poem went against her wishes, we heard her say—"Oh well, trust the process."

In the weeks since Marion's death, we have found our grief giving way to the joy of realizing how fully Marion's spirit lives inside us—her cry of delight that rose and fell like a warbler (we won't name which one lest she rise from the dead to correct us) when we telephoned or walked unannounced through the unlocked door of her house looking out on Frenchmans Bay and across to Bar Harbor, her refusal to sentimentalize her own or anyone's death, and her admonition to get on with the business of living. We have much of that to do, including preparing the Marion Kingston Stocking Library, which will house her 30,000-volume collection of poetry published over the past sixty years.

The notes and letters received since Marion's death have shown us how capacious her home in poetry was. Many wrote to remind us that the *BPJ* had published their first or very early work or to tell us how important their communication with Marion was to their growth as writers, teachers, and scholars. We have posted on our web site, www.bpj.org, a selection from these appreciations of Marion so our readers can trace the authors' unfiltered voices. In addition, our full-text archive makes accessible all of Marion's reviews.

Because Marion graciously passed the editorship of the journal to us six years ago, the day-to-day operation of the *BPJ* continues uninterrupted, and nothing will visibly change in the journal itself except for Books in Brief, which will remain a place for discussion of poets and poetry. The process of defining its features will be gradual, and we welcome feedback on what you would like to see there. With this issue, we enter our sixtieth year of continuous publication; sustaining the journal as a home in poetry is the best tribute to Marion we can think of.