

BPJ

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COVER

Mary Greene, Design

Carolyn Guinzio, "Cocoon," photograph, 2015.

carolynguinzio.tumblr.com

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An arrow at the bottom of a page indicates the stanza does not break.

The Chad Walsh Poetry Prize was established in 1993 by Alison Walsh Sackett and her husband Paul in honor of Ms. Sackett's father, Chad Walsh (1914-1991), a co-founder in 1950 of the *Beloit Poetry Journal*. An author and scholar, Walsh wrote several books on literary history, notably on C.S. Lewis, and published six volumes of poetry, including *The End of Nature* and *Hang Me Up My Begging Bowl*. He was professor and writer-in-residence at Beloit College in Wisconsin for thirty-two years, serving for many of those as chair of the English Department. He also taught as a Fulbright lecturer in Finland and Italy.

Editors' Note

When Alison Walsh Sackett, daughter of *BPJ* founding editor Chad Walsh, approached editor Marion Stocking in 1993 with an offer to fund an annual prize for a single outstanding poem from among all the poems published by the journal within the calendar year, Marion and the other members of the editorial board were initially somewhat skeptical. How were we to weigh the merits of a pitch-perfect lyric against those of a broad-ranging meditation or a searing narrative? Our impulses were inclusive and egalitarian; we saw all the poets we published as part of the *BPJ* family and their poems as in conversation with each other. Selecting a single poem for recognition, we objected, would put the poems we published implicitly in competition with each other. Might we at least divide the prize (which as proposed would carry the single largest cash award given for a single poem by any literary magazine) among several outstanding poets, or at least two?

Alison, however, was insistent and, it turned out, wise. She foresaw more clearly than we how in honoring her father, a scholar, poet, and beloved teacher at Beloit College, this major award would keep the *BPJ*'s contributions to shaping the course of English-language poetry before the eyes of the literary community and draw new poets and readers to the journal. It would provide an opportunity to recognize the accomplishments of established poets and affirm the aspirations of gifted young poets for whom the cash award might fund a semester's sabbatical from teaching or a trip to research a writing project.

We also failed to anticipate the pleasure the Walsh Prize would afford the journal's editors and editorial staff. An editor's job is to winnow so that readers have access to the best of what's being written. That work can be demoralizing. Saying no day after day to poems in which writers have invested the best of themselves may be necessary, but it is no fun. The Walsh Prize has given us the chance to step back and reflect on the memorable poems we have ushered into the world year after year and to celebrate one poet each year in a way that poets are too seldom celebrated.

The process for choosing the Walsh Prize recipient is much like the journal's regular selection process. Each editorial board member rereads the four most recently published issues and nominates one poem (or, on occasion, a group of poems by a

single poet) for the prize. The nominations have rarely been unanimous, as they inevitably reflect the aesthetic and other predilections of individual board members. Marion Stocking advised us regularly to "trust the collective wisdom," and we continue to believe that our deliberative process results in better choices that any one of us would make alone. We read aloud all poems with significant support to listen for their music, feel their power. Over and over, we find ourselves spellbound by their formal invention, deftness of thought, and insight into the human condition. We discuss each poem and our response to it frankly and at length. Asked to defend our choice, we grope toward articulating what we find irreducibly valuable in the poem . . . and in poetry itself. Sometimes our arguments sway others. We work toward consensus, looking for the poem we will want to return to again and again.

This anthology, twenty-three years' worth of Walsh Prize poems, is the proof of the pudding. Reencountering them, we are struck by their vitality and the originality of their vision, undiminished by the years. We exult as Walt Whitman encounters Indian boys ("Every body is brown!") on the basketball court in Sherman Alexie's "Defending Walt Whitman," enter the heart language of Margaret Aho's "I dream I'm leaving," "the sudden homing of one // mind humming // like a tran- // sept, like a wing- // span looking for a jagged // pulse." We delight in the intersection of random numbers and an all-American road trip in Jessica Goodfellow's "A Pilgrim's Guide to Chaos in the Heartland" and dance with Jenny Johnson through her contemporary rendering of a crown of sonnets in "Aria."

In the early years, the Walsh Prize poets were largely long-term contributors to the *BPJ*; some, like Sherman Alexie and Mary Leader, had been our "discoveries." Though their publication history in the journal was not a factor in choosing their poems for the prize, we were and remain grateful for how their work in the aggregate has sustained the journal. More recently, to our delight, the prize has gone to poets at the threshold of their careers, an affirmation that the *BPJ*'s legacy as the first or early publisher of such poets as Charles Bukowski, Galway Kinnell, Anne Sexton, Sharon Olds, W.S. Merwin, Philip Levine, and many others persists in our continuing discovery of poets who

Editors' Note

speak tellingly to our times and will contribute to shaping our literary future.

This year's Walsh Prize recipient, Graham Barnhart, who is on deployment as a medic in Afghanistan as we write this, brings us news we need to hear from America's distant war zones. In his paired lyrics "Pissing in Irbil" and "Call to Prayer," an American soldier tracks the dissonance between his expectations and the alien culture he has been thrust into. Carefully observed and vividly rendered, the poems offer indelible moments of revelation. In "Call to Prayer," Barnhart writes:

I did not expect the song to be lamb smoke wandering
paper-thin between the furrows of sunset-hammered

rice and poppy—a drifting current of lemon through red wine,
a ribbon sometimes

touching the lips—obliging the lips to touch the hands,
the forehead the ground.

The distance between Barnhart's vision of a historically layered Iraqi culture and the bellicose stereotyping of Muslims and Middle Easterners that runs rampant in this season's political spectacle is one measure of our need for poetry, of words that hold the body in the grip of truth. We hope *This Barbed Heart* and the *Beloit Poetry Journal* offer many such essential words to you, now and in years to come.

KURT LELAND

Remedies

—after paintings by Remedios Varo

1. Hairy Locomotion (1960)

*Dear Remedios: My husband seems to lack
ambition, motivation, drive to succeed.
Can I help him overcome his lassitude?*

Tell him to grow a beard and moustache.
He'll have to learn to levitate but
only after he's able to use the colored
wax that will stiffen his handlebars.
How else would you expect him to steer?
When the beard is long enough, starched
to support his weight, he'll be so high
above the ground that clouds may begin
forming around his head. It will be your
job to make sure they do nothing more
than cover his bald spot. What could
possibly be worse than having achieved
such heights, only to find that your
vision is blocked by its own eminence?

2. Woman Leaving the Psychoanalyst (1961)

*Dear Remedios: My wife recently began
seeing a therapist, and I just don't
understand her anymore. She used to be
so willing to please, but now she never
cooks my breakfast, and rarely supper.
Sex? She refuses all advances, no matter
how tender as if she's ceased to care
whether I'll get a good night's sleep.*

Dear Disgruntled Husband: It seems to me
that you have little comprehension of
the psychoanalytic process. Your wife's
engaged in an intense inwardness of focus,
whose purpose is to help her drop the head
of her father in the nearest well. Next
to that, the three minutes required to
poach an egg, not to mention the nine

→

months necessary to hatch one, have taken on new significance. She should be allowed to keep silence, since the sins of the fathers are visited upon the sons-in-law even unto the twentieth anniversary. Don't be surprised if a hairbrush and a watch turn out to be the keys to her malaise: the moon in her cares nothing for minutes, and when the tresses are the same color as its face, the mask will fall away: her beauty will be no longer anything you might possess but full self-possession.

3. Creation of the Birds (1958)

Dear Remedios: I'm concerned about the dwindling number of songbirds that visit my back yard in the spring. Scientists think this has something to do with the deforestation of the Amazon, as well as environmental fragmentation in North American suburbs. What can a retired homeowner in Iowa do about this tragedy?

You'll need proper alchemical apparatus. Garden hoses simply won't do although you could perhaps set up a drawing table in the garage, as long as there's a window. The distillery should be no different from the one you'd use for corn squeezings, but you should adjust it to produce pigments from the sound of falling rain. Don your cloak of feathers. Hang a lute around your neck. Tie the brush to its central string, and begin to paint by moonlight. Audubon should be your mentor, as you model wings and downy throats. Then, when you refract moonbeams through the prism mounted as a magnifying glass, every bird you've drawn will emerge from the flat page and fly.

4. Portrait of Andrea and Lorenzo Villaseñor (1957)

Dear Remedios: I once had the dubious honor of baby-sitting the children of a prominent family in Mexico City a boy and a girl with diabolical penchants for mischief. One evening when their parents were out, I received a phone call from my fiancé. After I'd hung up, I was mortified to discover what they'd done to the parlor. Andrea was holding the strings of a kite cut from the drapery. Lorenzo's toy sailboat was floating in a pool pried from the floor tile.

A wind had sprung up, strong enough to support him on the back of the kite, while rain from a tiny cloud filled the boat's miniature sea. Planets and spiral galaxies hovered everywhere I nearly tripped over a pile of shooting stars that lay like marbles on the floor.

How was I to explain to my employers that their children were brujos? I fled and never returned to that ensorcelled household. But I wonder, did I do the parents a disservice by keeping silent?

Dear Mortified in Mexico City: I've visited the house in question, painted a portrait of these demonic siblings. I must say that I found their games delightful. It saddens me to think that soon you too may be a parent unable to observe or enter the gale of your children's imagination as it billows the edges of physics: a mantle of invisibility where every law has its own unheard of, impossible variations.

5. Celestial Pabulum (1958)

*Dear Remedios: I just can't seem to find
the proper formula for my baby daughter,
who cries and cries. Should I try another
brand of milk, a different temperature?*

How I wish that people would sign their
letters *Endless Wit*, not *At Wit's End*.
But then if it were true, I suppose
that no one would need the artist, high
in the tower of her Renaissance, forever
grinding the mill that turns the stars
to baby food. Yes, my dear, your child
too is caged: a crescent moon behind
the body's silver bars and her attention
to duty will wax and wane as yours did,
and still does. Mother's milk won't help,
nor any substitute. We're all crying for
the warmth that never comes, or is never
warm enough. There's nothing to do but
grind whatever comes along into the
soul's food, that celestial pabulum.

6. Harmony (1956)

*Dear Remedios: My husband is a composer
who spends so much time in his workshop
I almost never see him. So few repairs
get done around the house: the floor
tiles have buckled, roots and tissues
are reaching from beneath them to grasp
the feet of unsuspecting visitors. Birds
are nesting in the chairs; paint peels
from the walls. I fear for his sanity,
he spends so much time alone and what
of me, left to do the dishes in silence?*

Only Mozart could write music in the midst
of domestic brouhaha. Any art requires
solitude which is its bliss, its exacting
punishment. And if your husband chooses

→

to sleep not by your side but in his studio,
understand it's not because he doesn't love.
He must stare at the peelings on the wall
until they become the tutelary spirits
who help him arrange carnations and shells,
ivy, crystals and carrots, octadecahedrons
like quavers, semiquavers on the five wires
of his musical staff. They'll vibrate, each
according to its amplitude within his heart,
whenever he purses his lips, blows through
the mouthpiece of his trumpet's treble clef.
You mustn't mind the messiness: his drawers
are full to overflowing with tuneful kitsch,
the bric-a-brac of daily life that becomes
unbearable until it sings. You're there too,
the muse he turns his back on. Don't ever
think he's forgotten you. He'll return, but
guiltlessly, as if from the arms of a lover.

7. The Useless Science (1953)

Dear Viewers: I'm tired of hearing how
depressed you are, how often you think
of suicide. You ask me over and over
whether there's some way to deal with
loneliness, divorce, a two-timing beau.
Perhaps you too were born in Spain to
parents who never understood you. Maybe
you fled to France because of Civil War,
surrealism a kind of politics, unpopular,
possibly deadly. How soon until Paris
would be overrun by Nazis and you were
condemned as a spy for recording dreams?
Until an American decided whether you
and your poet-lover were of sufficient
intellectual importance to save? How
many husbands later would you realize
that even in Mexico, where they spoke
your native tongue, you were still Woman
and there were rites of sacrifice both
foreign and familiar, equally intolerable?

→

KURT LELAND

If art is the useless science, whose only
warmth is poverty the floor you've wrapped
around your shoulders like a cloak of tiles
there'd be little comfort in cranking the
winches of your willingness to be here,
trying to distill dejection until it
begins to seem like hope. Bells, flags
in the wind, a funnel for collecting rain,
warning sirens, the crucible of your
private alchemy: you must learn to bottle
the things of this world and the next, to
watch while others pop the caps and drink.

ALBERT GOLDBARTH
from *The Two Domains*

overture

A heavy, violent sky:
ironmongery and smithy forges.
A night for murder. Then it settles
out of its kettledrum drama,
into zitherstrings of drizzle,
into a morning of drizzle, a noon
of after-drizzle, and a dusk of thick long fog.
A day for ghosts.
The year is 1888. The subject is
Samuel and Liza Ruby Williams,
dead on their honeymoon night
of random rifle-fire from a feud they aren't part of,
in a gabled hotel near the seacoast shingle.
That's all we know. The rest is fog,
is salt air eating up details.
Generations pass. It's now,
we're here. Hello.
A poem is about to begin. The sun
appears above the horizon, limited at first, like someone
matter-of-factly entering a warehouse, with a flashlight.
Then the overheads get turned on.
Time to start. The sun is taking its daily
inventory, shining with impartial force on every row
of what we know
and what we don't know.

We don't *know* if the Yeti really
stomps its great splayed cinquefoil prints
up icy goat-paths at the Top of the World, though
there are over seven decades of photographs,
and spoor, and depositions
taken somberly with the breaths of the testifiers
afloat like lovely, ivory jellyfish in the Himalayan air.
Yeti. Sasquatch. Nessie. The Surrey Puma.
The thirty-foot Tatzelwurm of the Alps.
Iffy fellow creatures of an ecosphere beyond
Linnaean tagging. We don't know what improbable
vehicle spun like a pinwheel for Ezekiel,
or didn't, in the desert's shimmervision,
we don't know if the boggling monologues that so
stirred Joan of Arc were in- or exterior, or
what transcendent gizmo (or quintessence) (or infinitessence)
speaking
at the heart of the Bush on the Mountain—what
Rosetta Fire—deciphered the thought of the Lord Almighty
into the language of wandering tribesman. We don't know.
Kaspar Hauser: who? Amelia Earhart: where?
The Shroud of Turin: how? and even: what?
The sky folds open over the otherwise unremarkable
village of Cam-at-Wye, and a minutes-long fall
of ibises and cormorants—hundreds, dead but spookily perfect,
as if killed by a look, and then preserved in salt—
heaps up the gutters and thunks on top
of the fish-and-chips carts. O we never tire of this
unending catalogue of what-we-don't-know,
of Tut and Bigfoot and Jack the Ripper: maybe they
distract us from more intimate not-knowings. There are strange
beasts
at the back of every brain, and there is burning inside every heart
but, lo! the heart is not consumed, the heart is not consumed
but burns with want and fear unceasingly, and
why we're who we are, and how to get through any day of it,
we don't know—so,
“I have seen the tracks of mountain bears on numerous occasions.
Believe me: *these* are not tracks of a bear in snow.”

But we *do* know, assuredly, SLIPCOVER TOP
TURNS ANY BROOM INTO A MOP! (its "Fleecy Head Grabs Dirt!")
and EASY STRIPPER ZIPS OFF PAINT
WITHOUT STRENUOUS SANDING, SCRAPING, OR DANGEROUS
CHEMICALS,

fourteen-ninety-eight. The age of the fishes and loaves,
of the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, is long, long gone,
and a day is an irksome, crummy thing, but still we know that
in our darkest hour
MIRACLE KLEEN and MAGIC SPONGE and MIRACLE CAR BRUSH
work "in a snap" and that their snazzy confrere,
Mr. WASHABLE, REUSABLE LINT-OFF ROLLER, consists
of "Space Age Material"—"Great . . ." (if that's not
understating it) " . . . Stocking stuffer!" Yes! And
SUPERKEGEL HELPS END INCONTINENCE and
AUTOMATIC CARD DECK SHUFFLER is "Great for Arthritics,"
and CORDLESS ELECTRIC SAFETY TRIMMER
NEATLY REMOVES UNSIGHTLY NOSE, EAR, BROW HAIR
QUICKLY, PAINLESSLY, with the merest of swiveled insertions.
We *know* this. It uses one double-A battery, and it fits in purse
or glove compartment, and comes in vinyl carrying sheath,
and if it tumbled out of the heavens
onto the ziggurat-dotted Babylonian plains, the peoples
there and then would build it a golden altar of wingéd bulls
and never again let it touch the defiling ground.
A day is a burdensome thing. A day is an entropic, burdensome
thing,
and moves to the random piping of Chaos,
a multigalactic organization represented on Earth by the firm
of Mess and Clutter. But still we know that
OVERSIZED FOLDING LAUNDRY RACK OFFERS OVER
79 FEET OF DRYING SPACE, and here to help
in that valiant effort are SLIDING UNDER-SINK ORGANIZER
and TILT-FRONT WICKER HAMPER and UNDER-BED
STORAGE BOX and COMMUTER SHOE TOTE and
OVER-SINK SHELF and DISPENSE-A-BAG, o *everything*
is accounted for, and CEDAR TOOTHPICK TOTE
"Keeps Toothpicks Always Handy and Sanitary Too!"
The sky is endless, the world of particle and wave by definition
is unknowable, the sky will swallow the grandest plan
and shit it out ulcered in fungus. Still, we

→

ALBERT GOLDBARTH

lattice the sky with recognizable pattern, Cup, Bear, Throne.
And so we rung a day, we give ourselves
these handholds to climb through a day, and
I'm happy to say some come in decorator colors,
I'm pleased to announce that polypropylene
"will not rust, dent, or chip," and I'm delighted to know
that I know these things, these sweet dependable things
that are yours, and mine, and come in our sizes,
and are affordable.

The invisible, ectoplasmic stitch by which
the worlds attach—I mean this world
of human interplay and baskets of radish
and airport paperback spinner racks; and
the other world, of otherbeings
living out the terms of other spatialness—
is a perilous place to be, if “be”
is even vaguely accurate, if modes of concentration
can be places. You see?—I only have the language
of the world of human interplay, and it is,
I’m sorry, insufficient. Let me try this:
when a friend of mine goes bow-hunting deer,
he wears the colors “tree,” and clambers into a tree
where he waits all day, unmoving and scented
in deer pee. Me?—I
“ghostify” myself, I go a partum-epidermis closer
to *that* world. It isn’t a visible change
(although I might start in a trance), I’m not
translucent in a moment. I don’t begin
to fume like a block of dry ice. But
mentally I *do* flimmer a receptivity—a willingness—
toward the plane of ghostly presences
(I think of it as “the twixtworld”) and I don’t exist
right then so much as *transist*.
Sometimes nothing happens. I grope my way
like a mole’s starred snout
through empty psychic goop, and
nothing happens. There are other times . . .
they come, with their various grievances and signs.
And we start talking.

In *Landscape in the Style of Ni Tsan*

by Wang Yu (dated 1690), the fisherman/scholar
seems to glide in his sketchy one-man craft
on breath, from out of breath, and into an endlessness
of breath, like a gnat
into billows of stiffened eggwhite—no,
the eggwhite has more substance, more
interior geography, than this

→

ALBERT GOLDBARTH

suffusion of mist-and-void
we lose ourselves in, looking. I'd go
ghostified that way, into the spectral realm,
and sometimes *so* successfully
be a part of its acorporealness,
the way back wavered like smoke, and started
blowing away like smoke, past
my reclaiming. I was always bad
at the things of *our* world: income tax
has left my mind as well as my desktop
something like the rubble after a bombing raid,
and studying the absolutely untranslatable
zeppelin rudders and robots' bungs and metal lasagna
under my car hood leaves me
ineffectually giggling—I'm up-front about this
with clients—but set me to parley with a wandering spirit,
and I can cross the border
speaking spiritese in a jiffy. There have been times
when only the serendipitous squeal of outside traffic,
or a jackhammer's clamor, or a baby's squawl
—some tendril of Earthly interconnection suddenly
beseeching—served to rouse me, and bring me
hand-over-hand up its length, back
to the body.

In that, I'm somewhat like a ghost.
They have a tendril yet
that ties them to the world of the living.
The tendril's the problem.
There's no such thing as a ghost without a problem,
a ghost without a request.

You can't tell from the photographs.
Under the sepia administered like a ham glaze,
everyone's uniformly grim
or uniformly pitching smiles at the camera like softballs.
Some, though, will die

→

with a quiet acceptance, wanly waving
one last time,
as if for the nailpolish to dry.
While some . . . the air
inside the air is torn, is stained, with the violent, struggling
reluctance of their going. Maybe a vow
is unfulfilled, maybe a love is sundered, it could be
even a hate is sundered—a tendril,
an anchor, that keeps them from becoming
elementary again. And all I do
—it's usually simple—is help them snap
that tie. I once delivered up
the cloth bag of a stillbirth buried for twenty-nine years
behind the back porch steps,
so someone dead for twenty-seven years
could offer a humble prayer of goodbye
that she'd been too ashamed to make at the time.

This case! This wonderful case! You know
the clanking chains, the creaking chair, the clouded mirror.
Last week I was called to a warehouse:
hundreds of mirrors, ladies'-purse-sized compact mirrors,
flying through the air like jet maneuvers on the Fourth,
then crashing like supersonic kamikaze lemmings into a wall!
Ten gross of plastic parrots (purple and yellow residua
from some out-of-business cake-top decoration company)
swooooping through the room, and making this chowdery
seacoast building
(an abandoned hotel) the tropics! Of course,
as is typical, I followed the police,
five university professors from geology and physics,
a priest, and—obviously—the media, though
my client seems proficient in keeping those video vultures
mollified and away. Weeks passed.
The factory-reject hiball glasses continued to soar and dive.
So now it's my turn. It isn't that these
specific spirits are any more troubled than most
—but what fine props they've been given! Ah, but
my client! She's driving me crazier than nosediving rosebud vases

→

ever could. I need to sign in. I need to sign out.
I need to file receipts each day in some elaborate
color-coded accordion-like case with a microchip lock.
She doesn't believe in what I'm doing, and she *tells* me
she doesn't believe in what I'm doing, even while telling me
how to most efficiently do it
(using her Sleep-Eze White Noise Hum Machine for trance states
was her yesterday's suggestion). After an hour
of her overlyorderly fussing, I finally
ghostified myself . . . the world turned fog
so thick I could grab it like bolls of cotton . . .
there were shapes in the fog . . . the first
faint feeling of contact . . . and
her fucking beeper watch sounded.
I told her: it only takes one pinhole
in the darkroom wall to ruin things—right?
I told her there was liable to be one
more ghost here before the day was out.

On the way home, in a deserted stretch
of rocky coast, with rain coming on,
the car died. And after my panic attack,
I did, I admit, take out the pamphlet
she'd pressed on me insistingly this morning,
Car Survival Step By Step, and in the pitiful flicker
of light remaining, I did plug wire one
to wire two, and the car did start again,
I admit it. And now I also own the voluminous pleasures
of *Income Tax From A to Z*.

interlude

time: 1888

place: a seacoast hotel / room 18

He: I'm a simple man,
I'm a steak-and-potatoes man.
My brother Silas and your sister's husband Dell
have kindly sponsored this honeymoon night
at a hotel that pretends to a kind of homespun
ritziness, and I appreciate this generous sign
of their blessing our union, but even so
I'm not a man for terrapin nor the mango chutney
that quivered on its white plate
like the pudding-meats of a squirrel
when I first chuck it into the gutting bag; and
so we've made our excuses and returned
to our room before the third course, and lit
the candles you brought, that are scened of fennel.

She: Is that why we left the dinner table?
Really (*shyly*) is that why we left the dinner table?

He: No. I'm so simple a man,
I'm still a boy. I'm a steak-and-potatoes boy . . .

She: I love that in you.

He: . . . and I didn't know how to say it,
but I say it now, and to your face
that opens and closes and opens again in the candlelight
with the complicated shadows of a rose or a lettuce:
we've come back to the room because we couldn't wait
another slurp of prawn-and-pumpkin-consomme longer
to consummate our love!

(falls to his knees before her)

I haven't wept since I was ten, and Festus died.
I placed my lucky penny inside his jaws
and we buried him out near the wild columbine.

She: I'm weeping too! The candlelight

→

licking the corners of the room, the heirloom double-ring quilt
that my Aunt Teodora gave us and that I packed
in the leather satchel below a layer of lilac sachet,
your own enormous passion I can see is exploding
deep inside you like fireworks bursting forth in a foreign country . . .
everything is alive with an animal beauty!

I'm so glad we waited. Even when your tongue discovered
a nerve at the base of my neck that made me feel
as if my body stretched to the moon and back
and contained the heaving Atlantic, even then
we waited, my agitated muscles-flexing boy/man
kneeling before me in your brand-new nankeen trousers and
suspenders
(and only that), and I in my sleeping gown
with the delicate shell-pink ribbon trim (and only that)
—this is what we have waited for.

He: Oh I wish at this moment
I had the gift of golden-tongued expression,
like that wild-eyed Professor in the room below,
who we met yesterday in the whist room,
and whose speechifying left the ladies
intoxicated on language—*then*
I would come to you with the proper words of endearment,
lust, and fidelity.

She: You ninny. That Professor
is a gassy fossil. And, as you know, your tongue
may not be gold, but it can mine
my treasures exquisitely. Come
(*she opens her arms*)
the stars are sprinkled across the night
like the angels' own bijoux, and this is our hour,
and this is its first impetuous minute.
Come—

(*noises*)

He: There's some commotion below in the corridor.

She: Let's peek out and see.

ALBERT GOLDBARTH

*(They open the door an inch, peer out. More noises,
shouting. They look at each other questioningly,
and they both step gingerly into the hall:)
(some seconds of silence; then:
blam! blam! blam!)*

October 3

Well! Nobody's going to see *this* entry!!!

Last night made it easier.

Though, in its own crazy way, it was easy enough.

We met at the warehouse, at 9 p.m. He'd already "cleared the ethereal bridge," as he put it.

It seemed to me that the dim-lit air of *The Gull*, and the merchandise on the shelves there—rustled. Barely, but rustled. As if in expectation. That was the only sign.

We used what equipment the shelves could provide. That was part of the physics, part of the aesthetics, of this transaction, he said—we needed to use what was there, in that building, ghosts "are very cosmos-bound to their buildings." Okay with me. We'd gone over this rigamarole before, I knew its outline. And it's not as if just then I had anything better to do with my unused stock.

He took a funnel, he placed it into a vial of Holy Water. That was for Samuel Williams. He did the same, right after, for Liza Ruby. There was more of his trance-like mumbojumbo. Mr. Abracadabra. Two scented candles. Fennel, he told me. The air was—pressure air, as if before a storm.

I'd found the hospital hypodermics (what was left of the original shipment, after some fanciful aerial loop-de-loops). He injected himself from his vial. Then he injected me, from mine.

It was easy enough. On the floor of *The Gull*, by fennel-light, we made love.

And at last, after one hundred years of waiting, love was being made *through* us.

Long after the candles guttered, we lay there heavily in each other's arms. The air was still. The air seemed to say to me, OPEN FOR BUSINESS. Ribbon cutting. Champagne. Reporters.

The air was calm, and I was calm.

Untenanted by restless spirits.

October 4

Questions:

Can they return? No (he says)

That's a written guarantee? Yes (he says)

Is any of the damage tax deductible? No (Samantha says)

Should we continue to "see each other"? No (we both say)

then Yes (we both say) so who knows?

Aren't we married already, in some strange way, for a century?

He gave me, with gestures that seemed to attach a vast importance to it, an old-time rhinestone men's lapel pin. I imagine my eyes said: *So?*

"It's a token," he told me. (*Of what?* But I think I know.) "It was my first—" then he searched a minute for *my* terminology—"intercom system."

poet's diminuendo, with quotes

*Most of these poets do not seem to be as informed
or well-read as some of the best poets who immediately
preceded them; but each of these poets feels that he
knows one big thing: what it is to be, in a particular skin
and at a particular time and place.*

—arranged from

James Dickey's introduction to Paul Carroll's anthology
The Young American Poets

It's a nothing-sky over Wichita, Kansas.
Invisible cloud, and a few barely-visible stars.
The poet's out for a walk, with nothing to distract him
from himself, his spitting flame-of-a-self
he's brought out to the dark streets of his city
at the close of a poem. Whatever light we give to,
or withhold from, one another—whatever
burning we do—we're larger than the stars,
when it comes right down to our own necessary
perspective. He's been up all night
—it's 5 a.m.—to write, been
“counting wolves,” he calls it, forcing himself
awake and—hopefully, anyway—aware.
But then the imp-voice in him rises and asks
who's *he*, to believe his rippled thoughts
and windblown words should be set down on paper?
He knows—what? himself? his wife
asleep upstairs in her familiar sweetcream skin?
But . . . in the opium den, at the drear start
of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Dickens shows us
people, and maybe by implication everybody,
harboring (as the pop-psych texts would implausibly
nautically phrase it) a secret, inner life, unknowable
except through such extreme release; and even
objects: the opium pipes are made
“of old penny ink-bottles, deary.” Everything
drifts in a smoke-gray, purplish *else*. Is it
because of this that Dickens loves his lists
of what's been safely mapped and captioned?
—so, of somebody's almost museumly larder: “The pickles,

→

ALBERT GOLDBARTH

in a uniform of rich brown double-vested coat,
announced their portly forms, in printed capitals, as
Walnut, Gherkin, Onion, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Mixed
The jams announced themselves in feminine calligraphy,
to be Raspberry, Gooseberry, Apricot, Plum, Damson,
Apple, and Peach Lowest of all,
a compact leaden vault enshrined the sweet wine
and a stack of cordials: whence issued whispers
of Seville Orange, Lemon, Almond, and Caraway-seed.”
These hasty notes he’s taken from that same erratic,
incomplete novel. We’ll never know
its intended end. Our poet
mumbles some 5 a.m. frustration over this thought.
He’s in that awful state of being simultaneously
sleepy and jazzed-up. He’s
—me, is who he is. And: *So?*, as one of his characters
recently put it. She walks the beach now
in her own contemplative mutter (although
for her it’s afternoon) and idly watches the lapping
cover and uncover the sand—a lace mantilla
peekaboo game. That’s all so far
from landlocked me in Kansas, it isn’t
a smear of brine, it isn’t
even the ghost of a smear of brine, on my horizon.
But I’m off-and-on reading a fantasy novel,
Fletcher Pratt’s ornate *The Well of the Unicorn*, and
its shipdeck-and-fishing-village scenes
persuasively offer a second-hand touch of the coastal.
Of a river meeting the sea:
“ . . . from the left hand brown Vålingsveden swept
to slip his waters almost secretly into the blue.”

And so it goes—the great length of what we know,
into what we don’t know.

SHERMAN ALEXIE

Defending Walt Whitman

Basketball is like this for young Indian boys, all arms and legs and serious stomach muscles. Every body is brown! These are the twentieth-century warriors who will never kill, although a few sat quietly in the deserts of Kuwait, waiting for orders to do something, to do something.

God, there is nothing as beautiful as a jumpshot on a reservation summer basketball court where the ball is moist with sweat, and makes a sound when it swishes through the net that causes Walt Whitman to weep because it is so perfect.

There are veterans of foreign wars here although their bodies are still dominated by collarbones and knees, although their bodies still respond in the ways that bodies are supposed to respond when we are young. Every body is brown! Look there, that boy can run up and down this court forever. He can leap for a rebound with his back arched like a salmon, all meat and bone synchronized, magnetic, as if the court were a river, as if the rim were a dam, as if the air were a ladder leading the Indian boy toward home.

Some of the Indian boys still wear their military hair cuts while a few have let their hair grow back. It will never be the same as it was before! One Indian boy has never cut his hair, not once, and he braids it into wild patterns that do not measure anything. He is just a boy with too much time on his hands. Look at him. He wants to play this game in bare feet.

God, the sun is so bright! There is no place like this. Walt Whitman stretches his calf muscles on the sidelines. He has the next game. His huge beard is ridiculous on the reservation. Some body throws a crazy pass and Walt Whitman catches it with quick hands. He brings the ball close to his nose and breathes in all of its smells: leather, brown skin, sweat, black hair, burning oil, twisted ankle, long drink of warm water, gunpowder, pine tree. Walt Whitman squeezes the ball tightly. He wants to run. He hardly has the patience to wait for his turn. "What's the score?" he asks. He asks, "What's the score?"

Basketball is like this for Walt Whitman. He watches these Indian boys as if they were the last bodies on earth. Every body is brown!
Walt Whitman shakes because he believes in God.
Walt Whitman dreams of the Indian boy who will defend him, trapping him in the corner, all flailing arms and legs and legendary stomach muscles. Walt Whitman shakes because he believes in God. Walt Whitman dreams of the first jumpshot he will take, the ball arcing clumsily from his fingers, striking the rim so hard that it sparks.
Walt Whitman shakes because he believes in God.
Walt Whitman closes his eyes. He is a small man and his beard is ludicrous on the reservation, absolutely insane.
His beard makes the Indian boys righteously laugh. His beard frightens the smallest Indian boys. His beard tickles the skin of the Indian boys who dribble past him. His beard, his beard!

God, there is beauty in every body. Walt Whitman stands at center court while the Indian boys run from basket to basket. Walt Whitman cannot tell the difference between offense and defense. He does not care if he touches the ball. Half of the Indian boys wear t-shirts damp with sweat and the other half are bareback, skin slick and shiny. There is no place like this. Walt Whitman smiles.
Walt Whitman shakes. This game belongs to him.

SHERMAN ALEXIE

At the Trial of Hamlet, Chicago, 1994

Did Hamlet mean to kill Polonius? Diane and I sit at a table with the rich, who have the luxury to discuss such things over a veal dinner. The vegetables are beautiful! I am here because I wrote a book which nobody here has read, a book that Diane reads because she loves me. My book has nothing to do with Hamlet. My book is filled with reservation Indians. Maybe my book has everything to do with Hamlet. The millionaire next to me sets down one of his many forks to shake my hand. He tells me the poor need the rich more than the rich need the poor. Abigail Van Buren eats corn at the next table. I read this morning she has always believed homosexuality is genetic. Finally. Dear Abby can have all the corn she wants! I'll pay. She wears a polka dot dress and is laughing loudly at something I know is not funny. Did Hamlet really see his father's ghost? Was there a ghost? Was Hamlet insane or merely angry when he thrust his sword through that curtain and killed Polonius? The millionaire tells me taxi cab drivers, shoeshine men, waiters, and waitresses exist only because the rich, wearing shiny shoes, often need to be driven to nice restaurants. A character actor walks by with a glass of wine. I recognize him because I'm the type of guy who always recognizes character actors. He knows that I recognize him but I cannot tell if he wants me to recognize him. Perhaps he is afraid that I am confusing him with another character actor who is more or less famous. He might be worried that I will shout his name incorrectly and loudly, transposing first and last names, randomly inserting wild syllables that have nothing to do with his name. Did Hamlet want to have sex with his mother Gertrude? Was Hamlet mad with jealousy because Claudius got to have sex with Gertrude? When is a king more than a king? When is a king less than a king? Diane is gorgeous. She wears red lipstick which contrasts nicely with her brown skin. We are the only Indians in Chicago! No, we are the only Indians at the Trial of Hamlet. I hold her hand under the table, holding it tightly until, of course, we have to separate so we can eat our food. We need two hands to cut our veal. Yet, Diane will not eat veal. She only eats the beautiful vegetables. I eat the veal and feel guilty. The millionaire tells me the rich would love a flat tax rate. He talks about interest rates and capital gains, loss on investments and trickle-down economics. He thinks he is smarter than me. He is probably smarter than me, so I insecurely tell him I wrote a book which I know he will never read, a book that has nothing to do with Polonius. My book is filled with reservation Indians. Maybe

→

it has everything to do with Polonius. A Supreme Court justice sits at the head table. He decides my life! He eats rapidly. I want to know how he feels about treaty rights. I want to know if he feels guilty about eating the veal. There is no doubt in my mind the Supreme Court justice recognizes the beauty of our vegetables. Was Hamlet a man without logical alternatives? Did he resort to a mindless, senseless violence? Were his actions those of a tired and hateful man? Or those of a righteous son? The millionaire introduces his wife, but she barely acknowledges our presence. Diane is more gorgeous, even though she grew up on reservations and once sat in a tree for hours, wishing she had lighter skin. Diane wears a scarf she bought for three dollars. I would ask her to marry me right now, again, in this city where I asked her to marry me for the first time. But she already agreed to marry me then and has, in fact, married me. Marriage causes us to do crazy things. She reads my books. I eat veal. Was Hamlet guilty or not by reason of insanity for the murder of Polonius? The millionaire tells me how happy he is to meet me. He wishes me luck. He wants to know what I think of Hamlet's case. He tells me Hamlet is responsible for what he did, insane or not. There is always something beautiful in the world at any given moment. When I was poor I loved the five dollar bills I would unexpectedly find in coat pockets. When I feel tired now, it can be the moon hanging over the old hotels of Chicago. Diane and I walk out into the cold November air. We hail a taxi. The driver is friendly, asks for our names, and Diane says, I'm Hamlet and this is Hamlet, my husband. The driver wants to know where we're from and which way we want to go. Home, we say, home.

ROBERT CHUTE
Heat Wave in Concord

*Dancing and laughing along the beach
came the twenty-ninth bather . . .*

I

Farmers working the fields quit early,
as much for ox or horse as for men
one old man had already died; exhausted
by heat, wrung out, wrinkled
like dried fruit.

Their women, buttoned, laced, strapped
under petticoats, skirts, sleeves,
sit and work, work and sit
in the dim, dead heat
of parlor, kitchen, and shed.

But one, an exceptional one, in
a windowless storage room, stands,
naked and white in a wash tub's cold ring.
Her cast off clothes spilled
like dried discarded flowers.

The tinned dipper lifts water, still cool
from the well, again and again. The water
passing over her body like
unseen fingers and back
to the tub again.

Perhaps one of them also dreams of the river,
of young men who float there,
pale bellies tempting the sun.

II

From houses on opposite sides
of the elm-roofed main street Henry
and Ellery, leaving dishes and scraps
of cold dinner behind,
meet, retreat to the river.

A man stands in a barn door, his shirt
stained with sweat, hat hanging slack
in his hand. A woman in the shed's
dark cave churns the morning's milk
the heat would soon sour.

They shake their heads. What beside envy
do they feel as these renegades slip away?
Do they imagine how it feels to peel
close, sweaty clothes away,
let the waters have their play?

At the river Henry explains that banks have
a gender; this one, for example, being
convex, alluvial, gradual, and
feminine; the opposite, concave,
undercut, and masculine.

Ellery makes some comments that
Henry's Journal will never repeat.
They strip and wade in.

III

Soon, by the opposite, masculine, shore, up
to their chins, they face the current.
The heat of the day is carried
down, away. They wade upstream,
wearing their hats against the sun.

They hold their bundled clothing high.
From deep holes to shallows
the water falls, rises again.
Chest, ankle, knee, belly,
chest, and down again.

Rounding a bend they see the plank bridge.
Boys, their work done, race and strip
and plunge. Boys breaching
and splashing; marble boys riding
imaginary dolphins.

On the bank one boy sits, lifting a foot
to examine some bruise, fixed
in an instant as an engraving in
an antiquities book; but subtly
colored, sunburned, bare.

The two men put on shirts now, feeling the sting
of the sun. Bridge rails bleed pitch,
the planks shrink.

IV

The drying tails of their shins stick
to their buttocks and thighs. Perhaps
because of the shirts they feel undressed,
retreat to the water. The water, like
unseen fingers, passes over them.

They wade on into a shaded, shallower reach
of late afternoon, hear the clang
of a distant bell. Some farmer's wife
signaling an early supper. They climb out
on the feminine side.

They wait for the air to dry them. How long
this single mile of fluvial walk
has seemed, passing from present
to pastoral to classical,
back to the present again.

They dress, turn toward the world of women
where mother, sister, or wife waits. The day
slides toward evening and the moon.

N.B.: Thoreau records his "fluvial walks" in the journal for 1852. He read Whitman's *Leaves Of Grass*, including, we assume, the song of the "twenty-ninth bather," in 1856. His comment: "As for the sensuality in Whitman's 'Leaves of Grass,' I do not so much wish it was not written, as that men and women were so pure that they could read it without harm."

MARY LEADER

For the Love of Gerald Finzi

SPIDER MUMS

Not these, I think, stroking
with my forefinger the outermost petals
of the individual I have selected, I think: *Not these splayed
phalanges,*

*cream and smooth, first out, now
farthest apart, sculptural . . .* Rather, it's the
innermost petals that intrigue me, those in the formative stages:
something in

the way they minutely
grip, curl, they're preparing for something later,
they're enduring the tension, the desire to do something, somehow make
the part that

feels the desire obtrude:
a young girl in her skirts squats to pet the cat
who lies on his side for her, a kind of girl: lonely, adult. Often
I address

figures I feel close to,
sketching under titles like "Girl in Full Skirt,
With Cat," addressing in the second person feelings I know: "You wish
your legs were

stems of such slenderness,
you could twine them together, tighter, tighter,
tight almost to the bursting point, tight as silk cord twisted into fringe
for velvet

cushions, or draperies
like those at "Grand-maman's." *Something needs to squeeze
or be squeezed to extinction, doesn't it . . .* [I name her] *Julie?* She says:
Yes! And, and

*"it's nothing to do with
my talented mother or with my mother's
talented menfriends, nothing to do with my pastel chalks, or with my
violin*

MARY LEADER

either!" "No," I confirm,
"it's wholly outside those things, but it's something
to do, to do with gripping/squeezing/pleasure/pain, like talented men,
like the chalks

themselves, like the very
paper, whether cream and toothy, or slick and white
to sooth the sharpest pencil, like the rending violin itself." Still
chartreuse, these

Not-yet-tendril-like . . . I
ply them, these inward petals, with my left thumb
away from the center's minuscule round yellow rug, I feel their urge
to go right

back where they were, so tight,
so inside-gripping. But I could tell them what
they better face: even the most secret vulnerability is
obvious.

THIS MUSIC THIS DRINK

Is melancholy
or rather
strong, sweet

SPIDER MUMS, IN MAJOLICA PITCHER

Story
Story
Story

"IT OPENS"

". . . a strong outburst from the
orchestra, the bass line constantly rising
to twist the harmonies in new directions. The first entry of the
clarinet

MARY LEADER

pays little heed to this
introduction, the solo part rather prefer-
ring to move things along in a more pastoral way. Two more attempts
by the strings

to add tempest to the
movement fail to stir the clarinet, which calms
the orchestra down to a rippling accompaniment, so remi-
niscent of

Finzi's songs . . ."

WATER

*In whose motions children dance,
I wish you had prepared me.
Water, in whose several bodies wanderers wash,
I wish you would heal me too.
Water, in whose extremes, of steam, of ice, pain forms,
why didn't you cauterize, immobilize my infant heart?*

*Now, you had better warn your best friend, the earth,
better warn each vessel made of earth or shaped like earth,
"This woman may well abandon you."
You should enlist the aid of your enemy, sun-fire, saying
"This woman half wants you to blind her, obscuring
all manifestations to which she cannot but cling."*

Dear Water, How I wish you would gather yourself together and rise,
gather yourself together with thunder and together
overpower my sole lover, the air,
commanding him:
*"Send this woman this hour no barrier,
rain on slurry-gray waves."*

PAPER

The novel that isn't getting written.
Or that is, with glacial slowness.

MARY LEADER

I imagine you.
The eyes that weary
windowward
the rain blues
the highway mists
the headlights that speed.

The sheets look whiter
under the black-metal desk lamp
with its skullcap and its elbow
crane
the machine
the watermark
the white bird flying
the poet Hart
the verb
I imagine you.

In January, clarinet concerto.
Opus 31.
In white January.

The novel that isn't getting written
not one letter.
Inchoate pen.
Ink marrow.

The little box the pen-nib came in says
Osmiroid.
The flat little bottle of black ink
says Osmiroid.
The box the pen came in
said Don't
shake your pen.
But it's hard not to shake your pen

the story that isn't
the story that is.
Tenacity.
I imagine you.

MARY LEADER

A shiver.
A tapped furnace.
The bed where one doesn't lay oneself down.
The bed where you don't lay yourself down.
And then you do.

RIDDLE

Tending to squatness,
my bottom is broad.
On top I offer
his hand a curve.
Both flat and round,
I spread heat,
marry what he draws
with what he breathes.
Curious, he lifts
the part that covers
my opening, his fingertips
encircle its knob.
He picks his time
by his own thirst
but too, by the sound
I make losing pressure:
then doth he grasp me
up altogether and pour.

MAJOLICA PITCHER, MORE OF THE WORDS

"It's late."

THESE FUSE

Whether their quiet lamps darken or burn, fuse
doubly, if only once, surely

desire must twin, span the single night, link
the two horizons—radiant—black—

desire must bevel the moment these vanish
into a shared dream—

MARY LEADER

alert trees, and moon-on-glade, reflections.
There—these are pulled

toward each other, toward
fusing forever his bellow, her scream . . .

if only on paper

ON PAPER

Paper, smooth, and cream, as
the longest oldest petals of the spider
mum I glide along my lips . . . not despairing till made-up "Julie" asks:
"Doesthatcount?"

Gerald Finzi—British Composer and apple grower.

"IT OPENS"—quotation from Alun Francis, in the Program Note to the Compact Disc, CDA66001, Hyperion Records Limited.

RIDDLE—Possible solution: A tea kettle

LUCIA PERILLO

The Oldest Map with the Name America

1

In Martin Waldseemuller's woodblock, circa 1507,
the New World is not all there.

We are a coastline

without substance, a thin strip

like a movie set of a frontier town.

So the land is wrong and it is empty,

but for one small black bird facing west,

the whole continent outlined with a hard black edge

too strictly geometric, every convolution squared.

In the margin, in a beret, Amerigo Vespucci

pulls apart the sharp legs of his compass—

though it should be noted that instead of a circle

in the Oldest Map With the Name America

the world approximates that shape we call a heart.

2

The known world once stretched from my house

to the scrim of trees at the street's dead end,

back when streets dead-ended instead of cleaving

into labyrinths of other streets. I was not

one of those who'd go sailing blithely

past the neighborhood's bright rim:

Saturdays I spent down in the basement

with my Thingmaker and Plastigoop . . .

Sunday was church, the rest was school,

this was a life, it was enough. Then one day

a weird kid from down the block pushed back

the sidewall of that edge, spooling me

like a fish on the line of his backward walking

fifty yards deep into the woodlot. Which

was barely wild, its trees bearing names

like sugar maple, its snakes being only

garter snakes. Soon the trail funneled

to a single log spanning some unremarkable

dry creek that the kid got on top of,

pointed at and said: You fall down there,

you fall forever. And his saying this

worked a peculiar magic over me: suddenly

the world lay flat and without measure.

→

So that when I looked down at the dead leaves
covering the ravine they might have
just as well been paint, as depth
became the living juice squeezed out
of space: how far
could you fall? Then the leaves shifted,
their missing third dimension reconfigured
into sound: a murmuring snap
like the breakage of tiny bones that sent me
running back to the world I knew.

3

Unlike other cartographers of his day,
Waldseemuller wasn't given to ornamenting his maps
with any of Pliny's pseudohuman freaks
like the race of men having one big foot
that also functions as a parasol.
Most likely he felt such illustrations
would have demeaned the science of his art,
being unverifiable, like the rumored continents
Australia, Antarctica, which he judiciously leaves out.
Thus graced by its absence, the unknown world
floats beyond the reach of being named,
and the cannibals there
don't have to find out yet they're cannibals:
they can just think they're having lunch.

4

My point is, he could have been any of us:
with discount jeans and a haircut made
with clippers that his mother ordered
from an ad in a women's magazine.
Nothing odd about him except for maybe
how tumultuously the engines that would run
his adult body started up, expressing
their juice in weals that blistered
his jaw's skin as its new bristles
began telescoping out. Stunned
by the warped ukelele that yesterday had been

→

his predictable voice, the kid
one day on the short-cut home from practice
with the junior varsity wrestling squad
came upon a little girl in the woods,
knocked her down and then did something . . .
and then wrote something on her stomach.
Bic pen, blonde girl: the details ran
through us like fire, with a gap
like the eye of the flame where you could
stick your finger and not get burnt.
By sundown the whole family slipped—
and the kid's yellow house hulked
empty and dark, with a real estate sign
canted foolishly in its front yard.
Then for weeks our parents went round
making the noise of baby cats
stuck up in trees: who knew? who knew?
We thought they were asking each other
what the kid wrote with the Bic—
what word, what map—and of course
once they learned the answer
they weren't going to say.

5

In 1516, Martin Waldseemuller
draws another map in which the King of Portugal
rides saddled on a terrifying fish.
Also, the name "America"
has been replaced by "Terra Cannibalar,"
with the black bird changed to a little scene
of human limbs strung up in trees
as if they had been put up there by shrikes.
Instead of a skinny strip, we're now
a continent so large we have no back edge,
no westward coast—you could walk left
and wind up off the map. As the weird kid did,
though the world being round, I always half-expect
someday to intersect the final leg of his return.

6

Here the story rides over its natural edge
with one last ornament to enter in the margin
of its telling. That is, the toolshed
that stood behind the yellow house,
an ordinary house that was cursed
forever by its being fled. On the shed
a padlock bulged like a diamond,
its combination gone with all the other
scrambled numbers in the weird kid's head
so that finally a policeman had to come
and very theatrically kick the door in
after parking one of our town's two squad cars
with its beacon spinning at the curb.
He took his time to allow us to gather
like witnesses at a pharaoh's tomb,
eager to reconstitute a life
from the relics of its leaving.
And when, on the third kick, the door flopped back
I remember for a moment being blinded
by dust that woofed from the jamb in one
translucent, golden puff. Then
when it settled, amidst the garden hose
and rusty tools we saw what all
he'd hidden there, his cache
of stolen library books. Derelict,
lying long unread in piles that sparked
a second generation of anger . . .
from the public brain that began to rant
about the public trust. While we
its children balled our fists
around the knot of our betrayal:
no book in the world had an adequate tongue
to name the name of what he did.

7

Dying, Tamburlaine said: Give me a map
then let me see how much is left to conquer.
Most were commissioned by wealthy lords,
the study of maps being often prescribed
as a palliative for melancholy.

→

In the library of a castle of a prince
named Wolfegg, the two Waldseemuller maps
lay brittle for centuries—"lost"
the way I think of the weird kid as lost
somewhere in America's back forty, where
he could be floating under many names.
One thing for sure, he would be old now.
And here I am charting him: no doubt
I have got him wrong but still he will be my conquest.

8

Sometimes when I'm home we'll go by the house
and I'll say to my folks: come on,
after all these years it's safe
just to say what really happened.
But my mother's mouth will thin exactly
as it did back then, and my father
will tug on his earlobe and call the weird kid
one mysterious piece of work.
In the old days, naturally I assumed
they thought they were protecting me
by holding back some crucial
devastating piece. But I too am grown
and now if they knew what it was
they'd tell me, I should think.

JANET HOLMES
Partch Stations

Harry Partch, 1901-1974

I. He Appeareth Before the Audience, Is Condemned

You only put that music on to annoy people, she said.
—I've forgotten who. Friend of a friend, some party,

but a thrill roils from it: when Partch sets Li Po

*I heard someone in the Yellow Crane House
playing on the sweet bamboo flute
the tune of falling plum flowers*

he doesn't score a flute's song, but a man
reaching to describe his memory of it
with a vocal imitation,

his *who-hoo-oo-oo*s in a high voice,
higher than he would usually use;

a man telling a story about something
he *heard*

and wants you to hear, too . . .

*Much of that which is man-made we ignore, such as
the music of speech. Well, I'm not ignoring it.*

The plucked viola like a long-legged insect
picks its way around the fallen petals.

Nobody likes this, she said again.

II. He Filleth to Be Born in China

Forgive him in his wishes and delusions: he is beset.

Chinese lullabies (the only ones she knew) from his missionary mother;

Mandarin from his gone-atheist father, faithlost in Shantung Province;

furniture of black bamboo, Sung Dynasty paintings they'd bought there;

*more books in Chinese, accordion-folded, with ivory thongs, illustrated
by gory colored lithographs of the beheading of missionaries, than books in English;*

these he remembers from childhood:

they so stamp their impress that he claims he, too, sparked to life
in China—conceived in a Boxer prison camp—or later, at sea,
learning in the womb for all time his mother's queasiness as they fled—
but no:

alone of his siblings he is Californian, all.

He would have accepted that from his parents: birth in China
(perhaps *only* that).

It would have explained many things—

Occupant is a Heathen Chinee, the note on his last door sang.

III. He Consigneth His Music to the Fire

*". . . in pursuing the respectable, the widely accepted,
I had not been faithful."*

He has been unfaithful,
and thus does he purify himself:
the piano concerto
the string quartet
the symphonic poem
the popular songs
everything he has written

hideously unsuited to his needs

ash in the depths of a pot-bellied stove.

Take that, self.

And here too the sinning arm, which wrote it: burn.
And both transgressive ears.
Ambitious heart—
All burn.

*As late as 1960 I was still pulling out bits of ideas
from that pot-bellied stove, ideas stored away
in memory—
that mysterious structure of cells and spirit—*

Everything must be proven in the fire.

Here spark a few live cells—

What is tempered? What dies?

IV. He Heareth the Voice

*I see little evidence that poets have studied
the sounds of their own voices . . .*

He liked to cite the Emperor Chun (from 2300 BC):
Let the music follow the sense of the words.

The unborn listen for months
to their mothers, and born,
they turn for that one song
conducted through bone,
through fluid and dark:

it's different now—harsher—
and the world all glare—

and some search years
for that wordmusic,
the mother's filtered tone
speaking inward, to *one*—

Harry insists *all* speech
holds melody and rhythm:
not hers alone.

I needed other scales and other instruments.

Li Po speaks unaffectedly;
and Hobo Pablo in his letter, the newsboys
crying through the fog of San Francisco:

he heareth the voices, that we may hear.

V. He Stretcheth a Viola by the Neck

Partch is peevish.
There isn't room on this fingerboard
to find all the notes.

Should be 43 in each octave:
they all mush together.

(People are already laughing somewhere.
Forgive them—)

Edward Bentin helps him:
fixes a cello fingerboard to the viola
and Harry marks the stops with fractions and brads,

cradles the soundbox between his knees
gingerly, to calm it.

Two over one: the diapason,
the octave. Greek first, then the Latin.
Three over two. The diapente.
Sesquialterate.

In just intonation, a "perfect fifth." And so on.

Translation:

First he hears the Beloved speaking low.

The song comes.

To write the song down
he must invent notation.
To play it, he must become
a carpenter, building new instruments
that respond to the melodies he hears.

To perform the song
he must teach all the musicians
and all the singers who will ever present it
the notations, the instruments—

You see where this is leading.
You have been there.
He is a long time alone—

VI. He Dreameth the Kithara

Old woman copied the kithara from a Greek vase in the British Museum he wanted it.

She found someone to build it for her during the war, there was no wood, the guy
used an orange
box somebody threw out it got a good tone.

She let him examine.

Partch was thinking, *I could get an orange box.*

She figured out the tuning, being an expert on auloi and Greek harmoniai, but he
wanted his own
tuning and more strings arranged in chords and wanted it bigger.

I must have one. Also the design could be improved.

Plectra on every finger—

He awakens in Anderson Creek with a redwood timber from the wrecked bridge,
thinking *a base*
for the kithara—

Thinking *that dream was so real I could smell taste touch it.*

VII. He Wandereth as a Hobo

Getting a ride in California: could take days,
counting the gone cars slash by slash in pencil
with a rail through for the fifth

like this railing preventing the cars from diving
down from the asphalt, wrecking, their drivers thrown
and dead, the bum still stranded

in Barstow, California, still without prospects.
February 1940: cold, waiting.
He fingers the smooth rail: reads

two months' worth of hobo graffiti inscribed there—
where handouts are good, where someone is headed
if only a ride would stop;

or who wants a husband or a wife—*eloquent*
in what it fails to express in words. Music
hides in this everyday speech:

Harry is homeless when he hears its lost singing,
one voice, the tradition of China, of Greece,
India, Arabia,

the words matter, guiding the music; the singer
accompanies himself on an instrument
like an ancient Celtic bard.

He rideth the rails all through the Great Depression;
he dishwasheth, picketh California fields,
readeth proof for newspapers—

a week, a month at a time. In the Wilderness
he hones his theories, he dreams his new works
unhindered. And moves along.

VIII. He Buildeth the Chromelodeon

*A six-2/1 harmonium from which the old reeds were removed and into
which reeds of the forty-three degree Monophonic scale were placed,
in sequence, so that the new 2/1 covers a much wider keyboard
extent—three and a half octaves.*

All along he had heard it in his head,
never aloud.

Now *you* can hear it.

your hand can't make an octave on these
multicolored keys

(not that *octave* means anything anymore—).

All the surfaces in his room covered, you notice,
with pill bottles.

He's on a weird diet, too: he mentioned it.

Bowles, attending an early performance, wrote
The audience

convulsed, asked for it again, whereupon the piece,

*which had given one the impression of being
an inspired*

improvisation by a group of maniacs, impossible to reperform,

*was repeated
as exactly as if it had been a playback.*

At the verge of the room, with its striped keys numbered,

it beckons you. *Go ahead and try it,*
he says.

IX. He Wandereth with His Instruments

Wisconsin	Two tons of instruments on his back,
to El Centro	the hobo in him can't settle
to Gualala	just anywhere:
to Oakland	needs
to Mills College	space
to Sausalito	and isolation
to Urbana	for rehearsing musicians,
to Yellow Springs	proper storage conditions, cheap rent.
to Chicago	Fifty—
to Northwestern University	five times he
to Urbana	relocates his private and fragile
to CoEd	orchestra. Fifteen times in sixteen years,
to Springfield	he counts up on a scrap of paper (why?).
to Petaluma	As a hobo, he carried a viola case:
to Del Mar	for viola and
to L.A.	clothes—

X. He Playeth the Marimba Eroica

The instrument requires a player with robust shoulders, back, arms.
If he possesses this equipment, and is also something of a percussionist,
the playing of the instrument is not difficult . . .

It is his *visual* aspect that the Eroica player must cultivate.
He must give the impression of a sure winner.
In exciting and furious passages
he must look like Ben Hur in his chariot,
charging around the last curve of the final lap.

XI. He Hangeth the Cloud-Chamber Bowls

Or, he taketh a turn toward percussion.

As in, he maketh many marimbas

from bamboo, pernambuco wood, hormigo,
padouk, rosewood, redwood, and Sitka spruce.
Sands them to tune them.

He has already rejected electronic possibilities.

Prefers his harmonium to an electric pump organ
for its deferent response to the performer.

We observe here his moment of crossing-over:

a temptation of Pyrex carboys
from the Berkeley Radiation Lab.

Let he among you who could resist, etc.

Besides, they were a gift.

Sawed in half they made the most
delicious gongs
(deep bells).

When he stands behind them, playing,

their curved transparencies surround him
like so many noisy haloes . . .

XII. He Vieweth the Gourd Tree

The future needs the sensuality and corporeality in music of the same kind that Walt Whitman gave to poetry.

Literally in a trashpile.
A eucalyptus branch
scavenged, dragged home dead:

he made a base for it, made
a tree of it, with fruit
of Chinese temple bells

hanging ripe—*like papayas*,
he thought, *the smallest*
at the top . . . It looked

almost alive, colt-awkward,
gangly. Oddly passive.
Conceived

in dynamic relationship
with a human body—
who glides around it

and strikes.
Dance and song
and an instrument

accompanying:
an Ancient, come back,
would recognize.

XIII. He Speaketh to the Audience

The creative artist acquires a shade of anarchism

that after several decades of weathering, begins to bear
the strange patina of the recidivist, the unregenerate criminal.

We as a people give loving attention to details of individual crime
from a perfectly logical envy of the criminal: crime is one area

where individuality is taken for granted.
This is hardly the case in the creative arts.

I am a profound traditionalist, but of an unusual sort.

We are trapped by our own machines,
which tend, progressively, to remove us from nature.

My instruments are absolutely primitive.
They are visual, as are those at a Congo ritual.

The players move in a way to excite the eye.
This is not an abstract communication

but something that will agitate our Cro-Magnon genes.

XIV. He Wandereth After His Death

*Tell me Ulysses, you say you've traveled around the world,
have you ever been arrested?*

Nobody likes this music, somebody says—

there's less

conviction in her voice

His vagrancy gone chronic,
the ashes tumble piecemeal to the Pacific.

Here at the last station you can barely
make out his white hair.

The instruments, without him, travel
familiar patterns of eviction: they circle.

*Let not one year pass—I now say to myself—when I do not step one
significant century, or millennium, backward.*

There are rides on the highway at Green River, but they go right on by. There are
rides on the
freights at Green River, too, but the Green River bull says:

"You exclamation mark bum! Get your semicolon asterisk out o' these yards, and
 don't let me
catch you down here again, or you'll get thirty days in the jailhouse!"

In Petaluma, the tune of falling roses
and camellias
echoes eighth-century China, vibrating
the steel strings.

I hold no wish for the obsolescence of our present widely heard instruments and
music.

I feel that more ferment is necessary to a healthy musical culture.

I am endeavoring to instill more ferment.

Harry Partch (1901-1974) was a composer whose microtonal works were largely performed upon instruments he invented. He was homeless for about eight years of his life; his hobo experiences during the Depression are reflected in several of his works. Sources for the poem include *Genesis of a Music* (Harry Partch, U. of Wisconsin P.), *Bitter Music* (by Harry Partch, edited by Thomas McGeary, U. of Illinois P.), *Enclosure 3* (edited by Philip Blackburn, The Composers Forum), and *Harry Partch: A Biography* (by Bob Gilmore, Yale Univ. P.). Instrument names (Chromelodeon, Cloud-Chamber Bowls, etc.) are Partch's own.

MARGARET AHO
I dream I'm leaving

an island

leaving adults

mulling the ambit, mulling

the waves, wagged.

The children are of one

mind. (push

off) The children have no

bodies; no body.

All around

on every side: thiss . . .

thiss . . . lapping spongy ground

lapping what won't give off

heat light some-

thing breathable. The children can't

breathe! (hush . . .)

The children are of one mind. (push

off) No

body. But see how they see, with a mind's

eye, thiss

woman with her back to them, turning

toe thigh spine tri ceps flexed

finger

→

MARGARET AHO
Between wand and welt

between flourishing baton

and ferule, this

virgule

self-splitting with a hiss below the right

pectoral

slung forward from the pinned

wrists

into which my hand has reached

has wedged itself

MARGARET AHO

When he emerged—

exposing through a bottomless

foxhole the kitchen

carpet carpet glue linoleum linoleum

adhesive ply

wood sub

floor boards

above the cellar ceiling cellar

floor geo

pitch and plates he'd somehow

augered through and

stood there

on his hind legs, drawing on his gloves: chrome

and citron—

I didn't know him. He held a ferule. It was

blue

for music. He was

virgulate

himself, leaning toward me; a rust-red

slash between worlds.

MARGARET AHO
Eye-shaped, mouth-shaped

slot
between the fifth and sixth
ribs, its scourged
lids/lips
probed
by Caravaggio, up to the first
knuckle, dis-
believing . . . But say you plunge in
two, three, wedge in four
fingers, say
its almond-shape admits
your unopposable
thumb, your
avid
wrist. Say your whole hand, having
entered,
grasps a complex
clapping . . . As if a set
of castanets
were at the heart, here
and improvising
something

→

MARGARET AHO

hot
and catchy, full
of longing . . . Say your own heart
catches on, catches
fire, starts
clapping back: a burning
conversation
heart to heart. Say this
is death, this
in your face
flamen-
co
eye to eye, mouth to mouth. Clap
clap . . . Your heels
begin to stutter. Please
no
words. Put a rose between your
teeth:
this is life.

GLORI SIMMONS

Graft

i

The third way of grafting—

Go to a smooth apple or pear in April

When the trees get liquor

& seek a branch

Which has green eyes of less than a finger.

& tear it from the tree.

(Notes from The Expert Gardener, 1640)

(

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

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

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

(

Pear.

In the lover's hand, a pear.

In the hysteric's hand, a pear.

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

Beside the son.

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

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

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

(((

ii

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

(

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

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

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

(

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

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

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

→

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

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

(

Margaret on men.

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

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

Mostly I closed my eyes.

(((

iii

The fourth way of grafting is—

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

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

(

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

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

(

Still life.

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

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

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

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

(

Myself on dressing.

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

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

I desire her.

(((

iv

(Cleft graft, whip graft, bud graft.

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

(

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

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

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

(

My body will become a house
Margaret cannot enter.

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

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

(

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

(((

v

How apples & other fruits are made red—

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

(

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

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

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

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

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

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

(

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

(

The garden.

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

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

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

I am searching for a silent place.

PATRICIA GOEDICKE

Hole

Glares up at us like a black
graffiti covered

stone the day after
the execution.

Birds like heavy cigars, coffins
wheeling overhead.

If this be corpse

or grave. If this be tooth or cavity
or dry lake bed. Or spewed

vomit of self pity or howl, no tongue left
to speak with: if there be the same

killing fields from the start:
the gallows in the playpen.

If there be cracked eggshell
and no egg. Neither yolk nor white

nor whole-Baby-live-forever. Hah!

If there be no kernel. No core
to the applehead. If there be love

when love is dead.

If the outer firmament be arched
skin only. If the noose embrace nothing

but cold ore and bowels,

*where is the high famed convexity
of which this is the concave?*

For this is not a private. Not a personal
crack in a sealed container.

PATRICIA GOEDICKE

No this is not a single

lost shoe: on the nation's highways the owner
is long gone.

And whether this be outer
or inner rot, murderous

aimed or innocent kick, here

is an end to it, a hollow
depression which has no bottom

and no top.

MARY MOLINARY
from Eve's Epistle to Lilith

At one point . . . the traveler stops, pauses, turns to the left to glance at some possible threat or irregularity, then continues to the north. This motion, so intensely human, transcends time. Three million seven hundred thousand years ago, a remote ancestor—just as you or I—experienced a moment of doubt.

—Mary Leakey

Headstrong and striding as only upright bipedal creatures can

I stop pause and stand on the edge of the gorge in the darkened
part of night as though perched upon a single strand
of DNA searching for a sound that I can track as easily as a strange
footprint in these sedimentary layers—one that (like me) mourns

sheds tears undulates on such a moonless night muttering *us us us*.

Binomial Nomenclature echoes back names for a near perfect
leg bone fragments of skull—precise but once removed: how
our husband-my-father reads history with fingernails of perfectibility
flips page after page asks the same question of the same residual
night.

Australopithicus afarensis only begins to tell the story: Ours:
undaunted double helix numinous matrix inexact hands humbled
& holding Adam our root feet braided in *origin* misshapen under
country. (Dear polygenesis peals of nightfall kind surgery of stars
graft the cleft

palette of difference between and among things?) And here we are: sad
little
epistemes apocalyptic poems (& I'd promised you a letter)

Dear Lilith there's another: she has two names times the two of us
times geography times cacophony—
seems she has no script, no devil to pay.

She is called Lucy, her African name is Dinknesh
and I want to be illuminated by reason comforted between the nations
of Homo and sapiens but I'm not a simile—like part white
like life black like girl under. No. Say sun and hot and day—then say
Home ludens: at play, I am a nuance: these feet this hair these weak-
ened

→

MARY MOLINARY

knees that mole on my belly the ringing in my ears what I dream what I
say.

But I'm not telling you anything you don't know—fortunate one:

born part dust part Medea wearing your exile like necessary
injunction never showing—in any version—a moment of doubt in
haircut cuttings or apples left to hang or your role in
the Earth's perpetual fear. Identity is not an issue for one
who comes from dust—that one goes through the world alone.

I'm learning: that one is free to see things in relation:

So then, *all becomings are molecular: the animal, flower, or stone.*
The only difference is sound I think: in things waking
or preparing for sleep. . . . And through it all in all the muck
I find time and again an incredulous and naming part that plays back
like a recording teeters on the edge of evening stripped to its
barest bones.

I, at Olduvai. And I don't know which sounds more gorgeous:

To take one's place in the gorge or to take pause, refuse to.

MARY MOLINARY

Ashes of burned manuscripts adrift in the wind, so

wind down. Mind your time around the limb,
then limn toward lemmings eating lemons at noon:
No one dare *susurrus* us in florid orb of day—
Decorum! *Nostra culpa*, but we're just sounding
sonnets in un-sonic ways—all twang and timbre.
So timber calls us home with a mute click.
Crack. Split. Yet, stronger than fricative,
fricare and friction for sure, if not fully bang. Boom.

Without adumbration, beckoning, or embrace,
I can understand the yearning, I'll admit, to tear
all of it asunder! Down the crass brick, the smooth
scatting stone, the rustling nouveaux porticoes,
screeching moldings. Even vacant lots—all this
blathering history—replace it. With hang. With haunt.

JESSICA GOODFELLOW

A Pilgrim's Guide to Chaos in the Heartland

1. Road Trip

*It's a good idea to collect as much entropy as possible
before using a system.*

—Jon Callas, cryptographer

Because the horizon is not a number line,
because distance is an absolute value,
I use the atlas as an *I Ching*, a rune,
my calculations point to the Midwest,
as good a place as any.

Here in the disappearing prairie
I finally understand
how some infinities can be larger,
others smaller; how certain endless
quantities move closer to no end
faster than others.
Aleph Null—countable though infinite:
grass, sun, treelessness.
Aleph One—
uncountable and infinite:
dust, wind, fire. The distance
between here and God.

And this I did not expect,
that the loneliness would be countable.

My son wants a tumbleweed for a pet,
now one is buckled in the back seat.
What a clever boy, choosing to love
a thing already dead and rootless.

At the motel, he watches me
lower the blinds against
the white noise, the presence
of all possibilities in the night.
“It's such a lovely dark, Mama,” he says.

2. Devices of Chance

*Definition of Randomness: an inexplicable misfeature;
gratuitous inelegance.*

—www.gopher.quux.org: 70

Two Definitions of Randomness, Each Necessary but Not Sufficient:

Numbers in a string are random if they cannot be expressed in an2y shorter form.

But that is just poetry.

Numbers in a sequence are random if there is no patte6rn to them.

Is that unbel5ief or its absence?

Ways to Generate Randomness/Pseudorandomness:

throwi2ing dice, casting lots, flipping coins, d9rawing balls from
hoppers, drawing straws, picking num0bers from 1 to x, playing rock/
paper/scissors, consulting random number tables, spooling
algor9ithms through computers

getting out of bed in the morni7ng

A Short History of Dev7ices of Chance:

Casting lots (ancient and beyond history): object1s, cast to the earth, or
into a recepta0cle and then drawn out—pebbles or die, nuts or
barleycorn, tw9igs, bones, coins, cards, yarrow sticks, precious gems.
Once believed to reveal the will of god(s).

D3ice (circa 2750 BC, ancient Mesopotamia/the Indus Valley):
fashioned from clay and passed through fire, dotted with pips mu8ch
as today's.

The astralagus (earlier than 1320 BC, Egypt): dice-like bones with
four fac9es, each different in shape.

The quincunx (1823-4, Sir Francis Dalton, cousin to Darwin): the
theory of errors m3odeled by pellets, dropped through a vertical
maze of pins, landing in a bell shape that echoes the no9rml curve.

*The ancients, too, wanted to live as though there wasn't enou1gh random-
ness in live, as if it had to be sought out like a buried fam3ily secret, or
something feral; as though it wouldn't come looking for you in the night.*

These days we know the sources of pure randomness are few. We measure cosmic ray flux, light emissions from trapped mercury molecules, thermal noise from resistors, the decay of radioactive material.

Trapped. Resist. Decay.

3. Grasslands

And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for the scapegoat. . . . And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited; and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.

—Leviticus 16:8, 22

We haven't passed another car all day,
just the grasses undulating,
the winds ululating,
oceans of air drowning us.
In every direction
the startling sameness—
easy to get lost,
impossible to be lost.

Here in the New World
everyone wanders.

39787637

Fold the nation in half
lengthwise, endwise,
and the intersection,
the pivot point, the spot
where the map would crack first,
dead center, black hole,
is not far from here. 0

Perhaps from that spot, southwesterly,
a tornado is headed this way—
a conical tumbleweed,
a vortex, an altar,
a lot cast on the plains

5touching down here, ta9king
this one, leaving that one.
The sky turns briefly gre07en,
e9xplodes with missi9ves of ice,
the soun9d of ten thous58and waterfalls,
white noise, maskin7g our sounds,
chaff in the whirlwind40440.

Enter pure ran1ldomness:
708015impossible to be
lost; where pointle7ssness
is the po36int.

4. C7ounting Backwards

White noise frequently isn't.
—Jon Callas, cryptographer

05181261

The Tall08 Grass P5rairie States:

Nebraska, th0e Dakotas, Oklahom3a, Texas, Wisco5nsin, Missouri,
Kans1as . . . Starting that the para6llel rows of parallel 01 cornstalks,
I remember that over h14alf of all Americans liv7e in the state in
which they were born640.

Behi3nd me, my son begins co8unting backwards.

Co2mmon Uses for Counting Bac3kwards: 9684996263
to test for a6ging-related declines, dyslexi6a, and, in Texas, drunk
901272dr3iving; to increase concentrat4ion, to fa9ll asleep, in meditation;
to hei8ghten anticipation, as in annou9ncing beauty pageant
winner8s or rocket launches
to connect w7ho you are with where you are

17683

How to Dis6tinguish a Child from 6an Adult:

For a child, countin06g backwards is as easy as counting
for76ward9s.

An adult says5, "Anythi3ng could happen," but is surpr7ised when
it does. Or doesn't; the future as 8unsure as the past. 7173
Co4unting backwards is impossible: betw10een any two number4s
there are infinitely 07many more. 097

Counting forwards is worse.

How to Tell If You Are a Mathematician:

If you think randomness is desirable and too rare, like rubies; if you chase entropy, like a butterfly once thought to be extinct, you are a mathematician.

86357

If you think randomness is as ubiquitous and welcome as dust, the common cold, tract housing; if you would run from entropy if only there were anywhere to run, you are not a mathematician.

Over half of all Americans are not mathematicians.

73548768095909

1173929274

1705

5. Crop Circles

There are several ways not to walk in the prairie, and one of them is with your eye on a far goal.

—William Least Heat Moon

Left, right, straight—

each crossroad seems momentous
yet insignificant. I

69572

have long since lost

0699

the atlas, let go fistfuls
of yarrow sticks out of the window
of the rental car, like dandelion
dander in the dry wind, cosmic

5116877121

ray flux, light

Radiating from something trapped.

128

I am coming to the American midpoint,
the epicenter,

ground zero, the calm

76867

at the eye of the storm.

Collecting entropy as I go.

6. 015Random N6umber Tab8le

We know what randomness isn't, not what it is.

—William A. Dembski

813398851119929170310601080545571824063530342614867990743923
 403097328526977602020516569268665748187305385247186238857963
 573321350532547048905535754828468287098349125624737964575303
 529647783580834282609352034435273884359852017767149056860772
 109405586069093433505007399811805054313980827732507256824829
 405242015277567851834529963406288980831374670078184754061068
 711778178868540200865075840136766679519036476493296091106299
 594673488751764969918260892893785613682 *It* 347834113654811
 741746850950580477697473039571864021816544801243563517727080
 154531822374211157825314385537637435099817774027721443236002
 104552164237962860265569916268036625229148369368720376621139
 909440056418098932050514225685144642756788962977882254382145
 989149914523684792768646162835549475089923370892004880336945
 982694036858702973413553140333404205082341441048194985157479
 5432979 *is* 26575576004088122222064131255073742111000204012
 074697966448943928707258156360649329165053448440219525634365
 177082072073179061196904462645747774519243372965394595934258
 260527154744526695270799535936783848823961011833211594669455
 728573678975438154622444319119042592929274597342481162139734
 408721168684876703071120592570146670235237831 *a* 7732088983
 893591416262522966305522825620449352494752463382445862510256
 196279335653371247200549976546405188159961196389654692823912
 32872 *lovely* 952935963153072689809354333513546277974500249
 033933359808083914542726842836094970013021248927856520106460
 9092286772814407793910836477 *dark* 061742588523601394132179
 597873792524105567070078674317157853941183869234614062011745
 204159566000187439242397118963381956541430017587537940419215
 856667436806849628520745155149381947607246436679454359047900
 332082669541948643199436168108516488881553015403545605014511
 769808624826452402840444999088963909473407354413188033185162
 324194150949894354858188695419943754873043809510040696382707
 742015123387250162529894624611717975249140719612829669861025
 917485220539003845957918633325379814606571310102467405455614
 277793891936740294390277557322709779017119525275802180814517
 485417845611809933714305335129695612719255360409032411664498
 835207984827503817153909973334408846123356483247792831249647

Br12eathe.

KARL ELDER

from Z Ain't Just for Zabeceдарium

American Bovary (The Cosmetician)

Zip code sans abode: for one, one won one
yet lost all heart in Cleveland, where Madam
X, one's spouse, made it big to then make off
with a dollhouse manufacturer from
Versailles. "Forsooth," her lover crooned to her,
"you learn how false true love when you face the
truth," truth being the manufacturer
sooner than later would fracture his skull,
ramming headboard to topple wall, crying,
"Qui vive!" over his living doll, her rouge
powdered cheeks, those coarse, horsehair lashes
open suddenly, as up she rose, too
nonchalant just for lust, but wantonness
more blind than a pair of glass eyes combined.
Looking down, she loathes her frog prince's drool,
kit, and caboodle; knows she ought haul tail,
jiggle and cleavage, to Cleveland; recant
in grand style to an emasculated
husband; then don her own wand for love of
green bred of her black magic, instead of
funds bled pure white, the spit and miss of spite.
Economics masked in histrionics,
dogged with life in a mirror, poodle turns
cat staring back as if groomed to scratch the
bitch, her itch gone south, home, to her own kind
à la KY, where, for one, one ate one.

A Disappearing Act

Zowie, word in a hummingbird heard—gone.
“Yikes!”—what it seems to say with its lofty
exit, its scaredy cat, peek-a-boo play.
We the peephole to hell, perhaps, remain
virginal in terms of maiden flight to
unparalleled heights, but on unchaste chase
to unearth heaven here, I say, “Holy
scat, no angel if not Tinkerbell’s soul
rates wings like those.” Still, should time come for res-
cue—fire or ice—would I kowtow? Does the
pope in his garden clamor for ladder
overhead, that bee-line and blur in the
noise of the hummingbird, thin rope of hope
more like from a toy helicopter and
less a flying saucer? I don’t *think* so.
Kaput means kibosh, ash for balderdash,
je ne sais pas. Dare one stare dead in the
eye of the beholder seeking beauty
here with mirrors, or does one shudder,
gnostic who pictures black behind the glass?
For fortitude—out of fortune, fear or
egress—is faint ally to existence,
dawn the round nemesis of time’s eclipse,
cyclical as it is, as is the coy
buzz, the quick charge, the discrete retreat of
all muse, that, game won, song sung, vanishes.

Love in the Time of Quantum Mechanics

Zircon cons, but not even a pendant
yea long cons like a diamond—Saks or Brand
X—carbon hardly being forever.
Water, more genuinely speaking, *is*—
vaporized ice. Hold a glass to the light.
You shall possess insight, shall partake of
the spirit world of diamonds, two rungs of
separation from the nether world of
raucousness that is the nesting grounds of
quarks, of squarks, of leptons, of sleptons, of
photons. Photinos? Photons you've seen. Say
"Hola" a Los Photinos, new to the
neighborhood. It's no surprise that with a
million million million atoms known to
live in a teaspoon of water there are
Kilkenny cats, that quarks are quirky, that
just as there are sleepers there are leapers.
It's the whang on Yang that makes for squarks.
Here he lies in the oral embrace of
good time Yin, the marriage's darker half,
for which its design is homologous,
each of two embryonic states of grace,
deaf to our deft imaginings: Is this
cosmology or numerology?
Be it two, three, four dimensions or ten
a cosmos of sparticles is no gem.

Making History

Zero gravity or depravity,
yogi or yokel, Roman numeral
X or I, you think you've got a shot and
what you've got is exactly that—one shot.
Victory? Nowadays it's victors' vice,
underwritten by Nike, and we're not
talking goddess but stylized "V," that
"swoosh" so ubiquitous as not to be
read as logo, symbol, or word but a
quip on equipment that doesn't bear it—
phantom confetti. What we need is an
old-fashioned future where what is won is
now to be earned. "You wanna fat loan? Give
me a lien," Nature says, witch that she is.
Likewise, if you want a forest, plant trees.
Keen on poetry? Read. One whose action
jives right with carpe diem sees the day
in his sleep, before which the sheep he counts
have profiles less of lambs, more like mountain
goats, and a proper number of iambs
for that climb to a dream of the sublime.
Every good boy does fine, scales his way back
down inclines where history's his story,
crescendo or no. Absent plot it could
be you: airy obit writ by Mort at
Acme Mortuary, who came up short.

The Rookery

“Zero-zero,” says the tower to the
yo-yos, their flight plans in hand, those junior
execs who, through windows of palm pilots,
weather the lousy weather in want of v
isibility. Similar’s the tale
untold of those flown-to-never-return
tiers of grounded angels in which entire
squadrons took refuge, that sanctuary
rank with a darkness so plumb one cannot,
qua imagination, let alone thought,
perceive to what grave degree is less than
obvious: no unbound limb, no free hand,
no crowbar to pry open a hymnal,
much less concordances to Bibles as
likely squeezed unreadable with all knees
kowtowing to appease the word within.
Justice? It turns out she’s one of them, an
interloper who, feigning to right her
halo, undoes the knot of her blindfold,
goes gray as a ghost at a vision of
fowl most foul she cannot tell from feathers
everywhere—condors’, vultures’, ravens’, crows’—
decomposed, no hint, even, or glint of
coal, no diamond shaft, no gravity, this
black hole where the soul goes, sold on itself,
as if, in the first place, there was mercy.

Urban Denouement

Zombie on the left. Zombie on the right.
You know you're no scarecrow, let alone Christ.
X, nevertheless, marks the spot, the cross-
walk where you stand on the median, that
vicissitudinary attitude
undomesticated creatures are known
to show, perhaps a tooth bearing snarl, when
shit of the pigeon targets the skull and
runs down the nape of the animal's neck,
quietus, as if flesh chose not to crawl,
poised, posing as if for a photo of
one impervious to it all, although
needlessly so, already part of the
mural on the tall glass wall across that
looms in this necropolis such that a
Karloff—Boris, that is—spine erect and
jolly well asleep, bores us, you and me,
I see, with me being the third here who
halts and, like Frankenstein's monster there, stands
glued to shoes tucked in his lead galoshes
for now and in perpetuity,
erstwhile the light turned green, turning us dumb,
dullards in a stinging rain of hail hell
casts up like cinders at our shins for sins
born of omission—player and no part,
auteur and no art, hero and no heart.

The Watchers and the Watched

Zeitgeists like this mean more museum heists,
yule logs the size of toothpicks, and a Rol-
ex on all our lists instead of Timex,
which, as Christmas wishes go, is not as
vain, not as opulent, oddly, as it sounds
utilitarian, the greatest good
the grandest goods for the greatest number.
Somehow somewhere sometime something almost
rococo burrowed in the soul not to
quaff from an empty vessel but, like a
psychological corkscrew, take hold, pop
open the bottle to release from its
nascent state the desire to be fulfilled.
Meanwhile, there are culture's accoutrements,
like rescued tapestries of the past or
K rations in the form of film cans for
Johns and Janes Doe, who, in contrast to an
infinite number of names for numbers,
have not known nor sought the dignity that
goes ink in pen with an identity.
Face it, with film as the mirror of our
era, only the faceless can save face,
drawn to both sides of the proscenium,
characters like actors actors portray
benighted with pseudonyms for a blind
audience that cannot tell them from them.

Shining

for Joanne Lowery

Zapped in the back with a Rayovac beam's
yards of teeming mist, this live planetoid
X (that might as well be light years from us)
wedged in a fork of paper birch (inert
victim of blind, benign voyeurism,
unfazed by the likes of us lowlifes) lies
the cub porcupine, whose guise at dusk, a
scrub brush turned up (sans any chance in a
race from us, tortoise, or tamest of lame
quadrupeds), but with a gorgeous hue of
pewter so rare as to be the sheer form
of itself that (in urgent fervor to
name in order to more perfectly re-
member) a Plato might call angelware—
light the gown angels wear, their gossamer
karma aura's alloy in the ideal—
jerry-built, as is always the human
idea of the beautiful, when our
history has yet to happen on some
godforsaken, lopsided moon on the
far edge of the farthest galaxy, where
eons from now sparsest particles rain
down in a mist of emptiness here sensed,
coveting the porcupine's seeming o-
bliviousness to angst and bliss alike,
as hid in its caterpillar crawl—wings.

SAM REED

from The Book of Zeros

0

Zero came to the first heart and saw that she was missing
So she went inside it
The heart felt this and said what are you
But there was nothing that she was
Nothing that she wasn't

So she said I am what comes next
And she made the future and went to wait for the heart there
All she left was a glinting
At the edges of objects and air
Something taut and intending the heart could feel in it
A wind that gathered and would not blow

0

Before they knew division the numbers entered each other freely
Eleven went into two as many times as they wanted
Each accepting the other like a thin sheaf of water on stone
Does light

But Sumerians craved the numbers and so calculated bodies for them
The skeletons were trapped in a reed
Who was made to speak to a tablet of mud
The bones tumbled out
One by one
Sunlight with its great knuckles was called on to set them
And their muscles were the tongues of Sumer

As if ceasing some dream or commencing it the numbers
Discovered they were not light or liquid but flesh
Six saw ten and called to him come
I remember you
But the tongues and the mud said divide
So she passed through him once before his body became locked
And ten to be enfolded in six
Had to break himself

The numbers were sundered and chafed in their numerals
Except zero
Who was then floating to the east in the snows
The reed that knew how to name her
Was the only one no one could find

SAM REED

Zero saw how the numbers in their solitude
Were like seas with holes in the bottom
So she made herself into a river
To divide the world and carry the answer to the seas
And when they felt her they recalled how it was
To never end

0

No one goes out to buy zero fish
Though once no one went to the market and was surprised
To find there weren't zero fish

So she went to a bakery to get what she needed
Which had neither fish nor ox nor moth
Nor scent of hard passage eroding off a hide
No sand and no leaves and upon them no rain
No stars and no dark thing striding among them
Nor across us

She asked for no bread and the baker refused
What do you want it for anyway
A sort of ark she said
I need what my hands or my head
Can't hold
When she'd gone the baker looked down into his table
The flour looked up from the wood
All that night he prepared hollow loaves
Arranged on their racks they made a sound like seasons

0

The verbs wanted to know how to conjugate
Themselves when nobody was doing them
So they went to ask zero
Who directed them to the rain

They found her in the dark
Feeling with her hands for something she had lost
When they asked her she didn't look up
When did anyone ever rain me
So they listened

SAM REED

And they heard how rain is made of abandoned verbs
And while some among the pilgrims like *burn*
And *effloresce* were suddenly
Required elsewhere
The others conjugated themselves into water
And took up the work of rain
Which is searching for those who remember how to speak it

And a way of reminding the cedars where to grow
Who think if the rain has a birthplace
They will reach it

0

On the tundra winter is convoking
The ghosts of departed quantities
Swans bears light what is certain
Their husks grow brittle and shatter into snow

And the zeros emerge like a herd of throats
Craters unslackable knots like suns
Shining backwards
Whose every orbit names them

If they are a blindness no bedrock has plumbed it
If they are a gesture it was always over
If they are a speech it is
Undecipherable

If they are a thing
She is waiting inside it
Already gone

We are her footprints

Italicized passages in the third and fifth sections, respectively, are from Alfred North Whitehead and Bishop George Berkeley.

SUSAN TICHY

Stork

'May I live long enough to face my ruin'
I copied the words

Except, it looked like *rain*

Thirty-eight dead on the river boats
Three hundred elk on a snowy curve

Everything in abundance

Your nights on the river a radio
If I wake in the night a radio

A hill beyond the glass a glass of water

On the altar, medals for bravery unjust word
Raven feathers, bone of a sea turtle

Litter of fox pups playing on a paved road

It was two a.m. they were chasing moths
I don't remember why we were on that road

We were on that road

Awakened by
Artillery or

Its silence

Artillery or its silences
A taste of garlic metal taste of rain

On the Golan I lived in a shack on a hill or say
I slept on a cot in a locked compound

Eight miles from the tracer fire

On the river you slept between gun mounts
In the pools of shit and fear

SUSAN TICHY

On the river you called
For blank for blank for peace and it never came

There were helicopters battering the air there
Were jets taking off and landing

Outside just now a Great-Horned Owl
Is measuring the silences between them

It's a drought year sound is malleable
It's a drought year wind

Has the patience of its kind
It smells of fire and the book says now

There is no higher desert
On sleepless nights I climb it

On sleepless nights life simplifies
To a round of terrible questions

Will I lie on my left side
Or will I lie on my right?

The helicopter lifting you but not you your body
Your body lifting toward me in a telescoping panic

At dawn we rode out cowboy style
To find the Golan's wild indifferent cows

They had swept for mines, but mines say
You must ride in line like an ant

I can count the cows, or a line of ants
That crawl up the coroner's arms

His headlights in the driveway
Your walking stick beside my bed

Your face illuminated by tracer fire
Jets pass overhead at the moment they say

SUSAN TICHY

No jets pass overhead
This is my primary education

This is how I must learn to describe peace
A white stork down by the fish ponds

And a blond man in a bathing suit
With an Uzi propped on his hipbone

After an hour it wasn't that
Fox in the road it wasn't that

A bat flutters open stars
Small jet follows its own sound fear

Of its riding lights cut straight through the side of the hill

You stood in the yard with a black pony
I waited for you with an armored book

We shelved our books on the face of the mountain
Our books were stones and we built two cairns

One at the summit one at the lake
On the path between them the road to Baghdad

Crosses the Cai Rang Bridge
Crosses your body which body

Training jets pass over our house
So low the windows buzz

That armor-piercing said word said

If a child's arm flew toward you through a window
If you came back crazy came back taller

Came back wearing a white scar
I wrote down the middle of your face

SUSAN TICHY

If you bent to tell me bent to lift
A drowned sailor out of the bath

At moment of waking don't look down
Knife-ridge ice-ledge don't look down

Rain-wet sailor nothing now
Vicarious it ends here

Sand-colored armor sand-slick rock

Fox barks fear in the night
A wren wakes up and chatters

JOHN HODGEN

Watson

“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?

JOHN HODGEN

High Tide

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.

JOHN HODGEN

Poem To Be Read at 30,000 Feet

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.

ONNA SOLOMON

Autism Suite

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.
Situated 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.

CHARLES WYATT

from Thirteen Ways of Looking at Wallace Stevens

It is like a boat that has pulled away.

From the boat we see the land recede
and the harbor turn in a slow gesture
as our wake unfolds and we turn away—

And from the land we see the boat
become truer to the landscape, lakescape,
seascape, there a gull, there, the setting sun—

And cries of astonishment and applause
as it leaves behind one bright slice
broken free, sun bite, floating helplessly

until overtaken and lassoed by the boat,
and the boat, turning, steams or diesels
or sails toward shore where, waiting, we

stretch out our arms to the floating sun,
still yellow as gold and soft as a canary,
hissing and knocking sweetly as a boiling egg.

When, suddenly, the tree stood dazzling in the air.

Sometimes a wind, ignoring the other trees,
tousles the extreme upper branches like a hand
reaching down to pet a dog's head—a loose wind

rattling about in the heavens, lifting the birds
out of their trajectories, sifting through
the categories of birds, through all the bird

metaphors, word for word: a bird drank
at the stream, a bird struck its beak on the dead
branch, sound of sword, of struck branch,

but dazzling? The dazzling girl, my dazzling
thumb, a dazzling brace of trombones
hung from the branches of the tree, sudden

in their effect, chiming affably in the wind,
that loose French-speaking wind, scrambling
about the paper clips, the debonair trombones.

CHARLES WYATT

A sovereign, a souvenir, a sign.

The way morning rules its moving light
leaves nothing to remember—birds
fly through it. Large and solitary bees

climb it carefully—there is no taste of bee,
nor bright sheen of sting, nor visitation
of spirit (angel, perhaps) equal to

the relief of sleep—toll it, then
sleep, bell—let it rock and bay,
give tongue to the rule of silence

and then slip away, past the growing
beanstalk set on revenge,
pot metal goose, tame ogre.

There were ghosts that returned to earth.

All the ghosts of grasshoppers climbed the same stalk
and there made ratchet music one by one.

In a story, then, someone to listen, perhaps the third sister,
who took one in her apron, big as a cat, and home

with her the ghostly grasshopper ratcheting some
nonsense about a spell and a second sister, but

I am the third sister said the third sister, and
the grasshopper climbed down a stalk and down

its root into the ground and down and down he climbed
until he came to the shores of an empty sea and

was transformed into a prince or a bear the third
sister can't recall as she sits at the kitchen table

sipping tea made from magic beans, weedy tea,
fragrant as the inside of an old euphonium.

The wind had seized the tree, and ha, and ha.

And up with its roots, hey ho.
And off with its leaves, squirrel ho.
Why should we say the wind knows a tree,
blind wind, blundering, entangled

in its own brash and billowing song?
There's wind in a river and wind in a stone.
There's wind in the last burnt bell,
in the night, in the word that names the thing.

Take the sword or swing the stick.
Break the sword and break the stick.
And *ha* and *ho* say the song through.
The dogs will play and the wind will bray,

and the tree in stony silence lie fallen
feeling no calling to sing a *ha* or *ho*,
and the wind, long gone, has forgotten
the tree, neither flute nor guitar.

A crinkled paper makes a brilliant sound.

There is the sound of rising fifths on fifths.
The birds gathering over the whaleboat.
Its colors are blue and green *poco a poco*
crescendo.

There is the sound of pages turning by themselves.
All those sentences speaking to the empty room
until a single page holds still, giving a story *al*
niente.

And the room you've never visited, a passage somewhere
you've never followed, an indifferent door
which, opened, lets you hear the quiet fluttering
(andante)

of a thousand butterflies, mute, save for their wings,
which beat the air into a frothing cloud, and
there you stand, transfixed—from God's mouth . . .
(fine)

CHARLES WYATT

Even our shadows, their shadows, no longer remain.

The narrow stairway
turns on its turns,
and the light from upstairs,
the room with dancing

and airs sung lightly,
follows only faintly,
the stairs dim
and the walls dim,

and the scale, *l'escalier*,
descends until those bass notes
so far away and dark,
lap about our knees,

and the shadows that swim
there peer up, reminding
a music to turn itself around—
the steps ascend

like so many things,
a melody at once remembered—
there at the top,
like a bare branch—

and one bird
which will not sing,
and the door to the lit room
is stuck and will not open.

Silence is a shape that has passed.

In a procession, horses, elephants, the wagons
colorful, and the wheels spinning, it would seem,
backward, the little man with the broom

following, applause, acrobats, candy flung
and falling, children scrambling after
marching music, all the several shapes

of brass bells mouthing rhythms heartier
than these—and then the sidewalks empty,
even where a tired child sat down in revolt,

wanting to be carried high above and who
would not want such a thing even when silence
comes last, marching in close step

with paper blowing, the sky a single
unmoving cloud, drained of color—who
would not want to march in step,

to follow, and then around that distant corner
where the lamp post stands under its unlit globe,
vanish like a lizard running on the wall—

JENNY JOHNSON

Aria

1

Tonight at a party we will say farewell
to a close friend's breasts, top surgery for months
she's saved for. Bundled close on a back step,
we wave a Bic lighter and burn her bra.
At first struggling to catch nylon aflame,
in awe we watch as all but the sheer black
underwire melts before forming a deep
quiet hole in the snow.

Sometimes the page
too goes quiet, a body that we've stopped
speaking with, a chest out of which music
will come if she's a drum flattened tight, if she's
pulled like canvas across a field, a frame
where curves don't show, exhalation without air.

Then this off-pitch soprano steals through.

2

Then this off-pitch soprano steals through
a crack that's lit. A scarlet gap between
loose teeth. Interior trill. We're rustling open.
Out of a prohibited body why
long for melody? Just a thrust of air,
a little space with which to make this thistling
sound, stretch of atmosphere to piss through when
you're scared shitless. *Little sister, the sky
is falling and I don't mind, I don't mind,*
a line a girl, a prophet half my age,
told me to listen for one summer when
I was gutless, a big mouthed carp that drank
down liters of algae, silt, fragile shale
while black-winged ospreys plummeted from above.

3

While black-winged ospreys plummeted from above,
we were born beneath. You know what I mean?
I'll tell you what the girls who never love
us back taught me: The strain within will tune
the torqued pitch. In 1902 the last
castrato sang "Ave Maria."

His voice—a bifurcated swell. So pure
a lady screams with ecstasy, *Voce
bianco!* Breath control. Hold each note. Extend
the timbre. Pump the chest, that balloon room,
and lift pink lips, chin so soft and beardless,
a flutter, a flourish, a cry stretching beyond
its range, cruising through four octaves, a warbler,
a starling with supernatural restraint.

4

A starling with supernatural restraint,
a tender glissando on a scratched LP,
his flute could speak catbird and hermit thrush.
It was the year a war occurred or troops
were sent while homicide statistics rose;
I stopped teaching to walkout, my arms linked
to my students to show a mayor who didn't
show. Seven hundred youth leaned on adults
who leaned back. We had lost another smart kid
to a bullet in the Fillmore, Sunnyside,
the Tenderloin. To love without resource
or peace. When words were noise, a jazz cut was steel.
I listened for Dolphy's pipes in the pitch dark:
A far cry. Epistrophe. A refusal.

5

A far cry. Epistrophe. A refusal.
A nightingale is recorded in a field
where finally we meet to touch and sleep.
A nightingale attests
as bombers buzz and whirl
overhead enroute to raid.
We meet undercover of brush and dust.
We meet to revise what we heard.
The year I can't tell you. The past restages
the future. Palindrome we can't resolve.
But the coded trill a fever ascending,
a Markov chain, discrete equation,
generative pulse, sweet arrest,
bronchial junction, harmonic jam.

6

Bronchial junction, harmonic jam,
her disco dancing shatters laser light.
Her rock rap screamed through a plastic bullhorn
could save my life. Now trauma is a remix,
a beat played back, a circadian pulse we can't shake,
inherent in the meter we might speak,
so with accompaniment I choose to heal
at a show where every body that I press against
lip syncs: *I've got post binary gender chores . . .*
I've got to move. Oh, got to move. This box
is least insufferable when I can feel
your anger crystallize a few inches away,
see revolutions in your hips and fists.
I need a crown to have this dance interlude.

7

I need a crown to have this dance interlude
or more than one. Heating flapjacks you re-
read "Danse Russe," where a man alone and naked
invents a ballet swinging his shirt around
his head. Today you're a dandier nude
in argyle socks and not lonely as you
slide down the hall echoing girly tunes
through a mop handle: *You make me feel like . . .*
She-bop doo wop . . . an original butch
domestic. The landlord is looking through
the mini-blinds. Perched on a sycamore,
a yellow throated warbler measures your
schisms, fault lines, your taciturn vibrato.
Tonight, as one crowd, we will bridge this choir.

ELIZABETH T. GRAY, JR.

Albania

On Sunday I went to Albania.

No one understood, clearly, at first, why I (or anyone) would go to Albania. Except my father, who knew at once: "Because, before, you couldn't go to Albania."

It had never occurred to me, before, to actually go to Albania. For years it was there, a Mars, the ultimate hole in the atlas: Albania.

Our government said you couldn't go to Albania.
Passports self-vaporized, I thought, if you went to Albania.
The Middle Ages with Missiles, over there in Albania.
And somehow also China, Albania.

But then it was suddenly Sunday, forty years later, and it was right there. I was right next to Albania.

There's a thin strait, with small islands. You pay a ferryman to cross to Albania.
Before, people who tried to swim away were shot by men in trenches and towers guarding Albania.

Everyone was surprised when I left, alone, for Albania.
"Given her history, were you worried when your mother went off to Albania?"
"No. Well, maybe a little," they said. "She had never mentioned Albania."

When I came back everyone asked about Albania.
They said, "What did you see in Albania?"
I began to reply but that was enough of Albania.
Perhaps it was hard for them. The idea of Albania.
Maybe they never had an Albania.
They weren't panicked. They didn't ask, "What will we do, now that we can go to Albania?"

It's been a few days now. It's as if nothing happened. As if I never went to Albania.
The chart shows two ports and several small harbors but from this far offshore there are no lights anywhere on the coast of Albania.
As we move north, somewhere to starboard, steep and with snow, is Albania.

OCEAN VUONG

Telemachus

Like any good son, I pull my father out
of the water, drag him by his hair

through sand, his knuckles carving a trail
the waves rush in to erase. Because the city

beyond the shore is no longer
where he left it. Because the bombed

cathedral is now a cathedral
of trees. I kneel beside him to see how far

I might sink. *Do you know who I am,*
ba? But the answer never comes. The answer

is the bullet hole in his back, brimming
with seawater. He is so still I think

he could be anyone's father, found
the way a green bottle might appear

at a boy's feet containing a year
he has never touched. I touch

his ears. No use. The neck's
bruising. I turn him over. To face

it. The cathedral in his sea-black eyes.
The face not mine but one I will wear

to kiss all my lovers goodnight:
the way I seal my father's lips

with my own and begin
the faithful work of drowning.

FIONA CHAMNESS

Choreography for Ensemble

—for Bob Fosse, Pina Bausch, Nina Simone, and J.

1. Sweet Charity

Your cigarette will never leave your lip
though it dangles on the edge of falling,
caught between the smolder and the slip—
your legwork isn't fucking, but it leads
to fucking, stillness meant to make you beg
the bones to grind, and stop, and groan, and grind
until you've sucked the ashes from your griefs
and stubbed the husks against the railing;
a whole life limned in burnt and broken lines,
the sour heart that went off like a bomb
with years of powder waiting in the keg
almost as though it didn't think you gone;
a molten substance coiled in your core,
the red slick your footprints leave on the floor.

2. Rites of Spring

The red slick your footprints leave on the floor
is paint I've spilled, or let's pretend it is;
I spent so much of high school on the stage
I might not know the difference anymore.
Oh ugly body, up there even now
with no way down. Pina's young dancers writhe;
the girls flinch toward the boys; the cellos rage
and crumple into heaps, not knowing how
to stop. And who does? Not you, gray-haired queen
who taught me my first steps. I mimicked yours.
You told me I was gorgeous, and I tried
to hide how much I needed what you'd seen.
Oh dead man. I remember that first dip,
the sleek pop hidden in your left hip.

3. Cabaret

The sleek pop hidden in your left hip
is all the lust I wished I'd learned to wield;
nine, I kissed a boy on his left shoulder
to stop him jumping off the stairs; thirteen,
my tongue untied, sweeping a girl's mouth clean;
six, my father saying my bare skin
would harm the leather of his chair; older
schoolgirls asking why I wouldn't shave
or wear a bra; my next-to-nothing slips
at parties where the women pulled me in
to look like rebels, then turned boyward, safe,
my softness both a weapon and a shield,
and I went home to finish, like a chore,
left, and leaving hungry: give me more.

4. Pastel Blues

I'm left, and leaving, hungry. Give me more.
Blues has a language for this too. Fishtail
and shuffle, jelly roll and drunken braille.
The needle drops, the record spills its guts.
I sway and lean against the kitchen door,
come here, come here, and press my eyelids shut.
If this is shame, the flooded well of breath
she stirs in me, then give me shame, and play
the thing again. I learned to dance to sounds
like this in basement rooms, in strangers' arms;
we held and left, and held, and spun, and left.
No blues on earth can make the living stay.
But ask me anyway. Lull my dreams dumb
and then some. I want some more and then some

5. More

and then some. I want some more and then some,
then flip the vinyl to the other side,
and this is church, where we pray for the dead.
But my dead are drunk queer lunatics,
my dead slugged vodka, groped and slapped and cried
for Judy Garland, knelt to cock and clit,
so spare me psalms, give me the wine and bread
and blood. Sinnerman, where you gonna run.
Piano acrobats the river down
to dust. I'm through with soloing. Get up
and crush my bones, my friend, teach me the ground;
there's still a film of red left in my cup,
and floor enough to spin, so might as well.
I want a dip so low I can see hell.

6. Café Mueller

I want a dip so low I can see hell
though I'll be blind when I turn back. These chairs,
all over the damn place, nothing to do
but stumble, shove, and stagger toward the wall
only memory can tell us is still there.
A woman trembles as she struggles through
to clamp her arms around the first man's neck.
He holds her tight before the second man
steps in, manipulates their limbs, a lift
they can't maintain, and so she drops, then back
to clutching him, again and then again,
faster and faster, desperate in their grip.
This room's a dark sea. I'm a piece of jetsam.
Hold me for a measure, then for ransom.

7. A Snake in the Grass

Hold me for a measure. Then for ransom
take this dusty footage of a serpent
becoming a bald man in a black hat.
Fosse's last captured performance: dancing
as the Little Prince's snake. A desert
and a thirst, of course, the dry temptation
and dream of death. A budget musical
no one with pride would cop to watching, much
less more than once, but here we are again,
because the body still believes there's such
a thing as going home, a faith as dull
as skin he tries and tries to shed, but can't.
So sting the child, as though you wish him well;
then wind right round the body, sad old shell.

8. Ein Trauerspiel

Wind right round the body. Sad old shell
on a hospital bed at fifty-eight,
a stroke; Fosse was sixty, heart attack;
Pina, sixty-eight, lung cancer; Nina
seventy, and if you try to tell
me about how she never choreographed,
I'll dash your eyes against her fingers, sharp
as they became from leaping on their own.
Too, go ahead and tell me they were straight,
as if that means anything to a corpse.
To be queer is to make your need an art
and try to meet it anyway. The hearse
your dressing room. The streaking lines of makeup
and then the water. Get yourself naked.

9. Run to the Rock

and then the water. Get yourself naked
for once, peel off your fifty layers of cloth
and own up to the cipher left inside.
When they dress your body they won't know
what uniform to give you, you makeshift
carcass, home-repaired cocoon, the moth
that only knew to flutter toward the light
burned out inside your eye's white bulb. A simple
drive: to notice things that blaze, and go.
As if directed on a stage built from the dark,
glare blinds all your lenses and heat crumples
down your armor, leaves your case a charred
black scrawl no one can read, but let it stay.
Say what it was you had to say.

10. Kontakthof

Say what it was you had to say
for breath and growth, the heart as it expands
its catacombs and trailers (then balloons
to bursting? combusts above its basket?)
When the theater is empty, one light stays
for ghosts. I used to climb to the dark room
below the catwalk where the costumes hung
and whisper blessings till the curtain rose;
the cloaks muttered at the floor. Prop casket,
empty as a long-abandoned lung—
and what of that desire, that death suspend
its hold and give me back your obscene jokes?
Queer too, how superstition seemed so dated
before you imploded and turned sacred.

11. All That Jazz

Before you imploded and turned sacred
we flirted in the back of choir practice
as only a young dyke and an old flit
can; I said I'd marry you for your money
and you agreed I would, and then you died
not three days later, lover at your side;
I've told this story twenty times. Service
in the movie theater. A found clip
of you in tap shoes, humble, shuffling, wicked
in brief flashes of eyes and teeth. The choir
director asked your limp expanse, "Am I
supposed to teach the dance myself, buddy?"
You started kicking. Senseless muscles splayed:
the strangest turn your back has ever made.

12. Orpheus und Eurydike

The strangest turn your back has ever made
came in a dream I had before we held
your main memorial. I wandered up
the stairs at a gay bar and found you, no
shock, obviously, except that you had
died. I told you I was afraid I might
forget the dip and how it worked. You smiled
and said you'd teach me again. As you cupped
my back your age reversed. You swept me down,
then back, then said goodbye. The service showed
slides of you as a young man: my blood stilled.
I can't explain what happened, how I'd known
how you would look, but here's as close as truth:
your ghost taught me to dance, taught me to prove.

13. Who's Got the Pain

Your ghost taught me to dance, taught me to prove
these things do happen. I never forgot,
and every time I let my body drop
the weight's a conversation with the void:
hello loves, I'm still thinking about skin;
how do you fare without it? How's it feel
now everything that is can be your clothes?
Are you the shoe that fucks the ground, the sun
licking the steel, kiss of the chalky pill
against my throat each morning, the barbed voice
that murders me against my speakers, groove
as deep as grave, to keep me living? Those
are the ghosts we need, their tender shove;
pain's the only place where we can move.

14. The Red Shoes

Pain's the only place where we can move
as though we mean it. Pleasure is that too,
of course, a sea of vast and deep allowance
laced with teeth. Blood is as blood does. Ghosts
are as ghosts did. These are the steps. Come now
and learn them over. Remember the girl
whose shoes forced her to dance until she died
and begged an angel for forgiveness? Be
too proud to beg. Move faster than the tide
that slices at your ankles as it grows,
your spine the long horizon's swooning curve
behind which there is nothing we can see.
Smoke in a bottle, tossed against the ship;
your cigarette will never leave your lip.

15. Ensemble

Your cigarette will never leave your lip.
The red slick your footprints leave on the floor
and the sleek pop, hidden in your left hip,
left and leaving, hungry. Give me more
and then some. I want some more and then some.
I want a dip so low I can see hell.
Hold me for a measure, then for ransom;
wind right round the body, sad old shell,
and then the water, get yourself naked,
say what it was you had to say
before you imploded and turned sacred,
the strangest turn your back has ever made—
your ghost taught me to dance, taught me to prove
pain's the only place where we can move.

GRAHAM BARNHART

Pissing in Irbil

Behind me an old Kurdish woman
holding cherries in a plastic bag
rustles gravel

the way you might clear your throat
if you caught a foreign soldier
pissing in side-alley rubble

that had been the walls and ceiling
and staircase of your home. Even rocks
drag shadows away from me.

Old men beneath the street
squat in catacomb cellars,
drinking chai, selling rugs:

Turkish, Iranian, Persian woven
patterns: old maps, unforgotten
transgressions, borders made soft,

reassuring to bare feet so that color
might bloom crimson in the pattern
pressed by a hundred thousand steps.

Irbil is like Rome in this way,
it is like Athens, each city suturing
new skin to the skeleton.

And this is what passes
for ablution: splattering dust from rubble.
The woman coughs her black shoe

in the gravel again. Laughing, she offers
a cherry and slow Kurdish

This was an Arab's house.

With cherry seeds
and the hem of her dress
she disturbs the dust.

GRAHAM BARNHART

Call to Prayer

Closer than a church bell's dismantling. A stillness
reveled rather than torn. I expected violence

brought forth upon good rust and megaphones,
upon command wire, unfastened earth, and buried yellow jugs.

I expected old men around gas-fed heaters
to turn their faces away from me, and children to throw stones,

but not the young girl at the hand pump water well
kneeling beside her bucket to kiss the dirt.

Even the sun arrests its tilting, shade pools at the minaret's base
like thawed ice run out from the stones.

I did not expect the song to be lamb smoke wandering
paper-thin between the furrows of sunset-hammered

rice and poppy—a drifting current of lemon through red wine,
a ribbon sometimes

touching the lips—obliging the lips to touch the hands,
the forehead the ground.