

# THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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**NOW THE WIND**

turns the rich humus

and shows insides  
full of origin

I see:

Indians of the hilly shore  
girth with hook  
and whale

and:

a broken cutlass, length of hair—  
rope, still combed with sheen and pliant

Here I see:

someone coming,  
his hands slight and open  
as if sowing the clouds

there will be plenty,  
plenty for all.

**Kenneth A. McClane**

**HIDE AND SEEK IN THE CLOSET**

In the closet the lives  
hang on wire necks.

I am still  
as the two eyes of mice.

The fabrics cover me like huge hands.

The balloons  
of my mother's blouses  
hang flat. My father's  
pantlegs are empty. Old shoes  
scramble my feet.

No one can measure  
the tale the clock tells,  
the minute-march from closet to mirror.

The selves step out  
like flat pageants, instant  
portraits released from their meathooks.

Here I am in pearls and cotton.  
There I go in necktie and shirttab.

I am the twin of my parents.  
Everything is buttoned up.  
My birthdays will ferret the secrets.

My breasts puff  
inside the blouses. Between  
my navel and groin, the zipper  
sealing my father's pantlegs  
feels loose, metallic and cold.

The clothes press moans.  
I am seasick, as though  
rocked inside an accordian.

The odors become live tendrils.  
My heart is the loud  
walls beating. Some bird  
is born in an eggshell  
whose flight will be all masquerade.

The flat clothes walk me away.  
I do not know  
why. Perhaps  
pageants are real  
in this closet.

In the midst  
of hymns for concertina I am swept  
to a luminous wedding.

On my father's  
side the clothes tingle. Dust  
rises like rayed sunbeams.

I am bathed in this dust.  
I am bride.

The grinding of the accordian  
goes in and out, in and out, out and in.

My mother's bras  
begin to fit me. Before long  
a baby is born.

Stronger than sweat and old leather,  
the new brown odor of blood.

I count the meanings,  
filing the lives across the bar  
praying for the garments  
and their wire necks.

The ballons of my mother's blouses  
hang flat. My father's  
pantlegs are empty.

I am still  
as the two eyes of mice.

I cannot remember  
why I am listening  
but I am listening.

The fabrics cover me  
like huge hands.

I hear a voice, a child's  
voice. Faraway, faraway children . . .  
*"ally, ally in-come-free-eeeeee . . ."*

And I push the clothing back,  
push all the meaning back,  
push the meathooks, the  
motherhood,  
and the music.

Then the accordion stops.

The game  
begins.

**Una Tharp**

### **ESKIMO MASKS**

In the palm of my hand  
I keep a mountain  
black and full of  
thunder.  
Disguised as a  
pebble it  
struggles like a small bird.  
Sometimes the mountain  
gets away and  
walks around in the night  
full-size.

**Olga Cabral**

## CIRCLE OF THE DEER

High on the bluest of the hills that ring the  
town,  
at that place where the pines draw back in  
clusters  
from the ridge and the ancient trail cuts  
downward  
through the rock, the deer come early, halting,  
highstepping the bending grass to watch and  
shed the mist:  
their stand of rippling shoulders cups the edge.

In this quiet gathering of eyes, a purpose rests,  
quick ears lifting to the moving lights below.  
The men are falling into lines of yellow  
pinpoints,  
motors humming upward through the  
morning dark.  
From each street, all corners, the headlamps  
gather,  
at last roll out, a solid streaming toward the  
hill.

Not until the last car has fallen in do they move,  
these deer, down the hidden path that winds  
apart  
from roadways where the motors strain. Soft  
hooved  
inside the slope's twistings, the deer curl  
quietly  
to the manless town, spill silent through the  
outskirt fields.

Then, in the valley, as the sun unfolds the  
colors,  
burns the mist off past the grass, the deer  
claim the town

and in turn are taken by it, their wide eyes  
this once calm  
and careless as they graze the lawns of  
children, weave  
among the cautious mothers. They feast easy  
at the limbs  
of nursery shrubs that only yesterday were  
planted  
through the town by men who now fan across  
the vacant  
hillside, shout in anger, squeeze off aimless  
rounds,  
search outside the circle of the deer.

That night, when the motors whine back down  
and the deer  
have slipped away, the men gather on the  
corners,  
curl bitter lips and jug fingers, remark the  
empty hunt  
and the strange silence of their homes. They  
crowd into  
the cones of yellow light, all corners, looking  
drawn,  
these men, to curse their luck and each other:

All the while, their talk, this noise, drifts  
faintly,  
slowly, above the smoke and fences up the line  
of blue hill,  
where it falls to a murmur as the deer  
wind gracefully through their trees.

**Les Standiford**

## TONGUES

mumbling halle ana christe ana  
 like swami bhaktivedanta chanting hare rama  
 like a disbelieving priest beginning la la la la  
 then finding lips and tongue rushing ahead  
     of him  
 i broke into a gush of -sh sounds like an old  
     polack's gossip  
 and the guttural ch- of a jew's chanukah or  
     barocha  
 as i uttered hundreds of words or nonwords  
 (i remember repeating chora at intervals over  
     and over)  
 words or nonwords i never heard before.  
 it reminded me of a new york city subway car.  
  
 somewhere between lao-tzu and McLuhan  
 my wu-hsin circuits crossed  
 ("unselfconsciousness"; "nongraspingness")  
 and tao (a way, not god) jammed the global  
     village's tv set  
 ("Ours is a brand-new world of allatonceness.")  
 which is to say i went to college, listened,  
     talked, and halfway read a lot of books.  
 i lost my faith, taught in public school,  
 fell in with the freaks and the c.o.'s and went  
     back to do graduate work,  
 was converted one summer at villanova and  
     made a catholic comeback,  
 dated a formosan and made friends with a  
     suicidal black feminist,  
 became poorer and poorer, gave away my car,  
 studied kiswahili and irish literature,

lived in a \$40-a-month room and shared a  
bathroom and kitchen  
with my blind wendish landlord and his 92-  
year-old yugoslavian uncle,  
joined a puerto rican parish and knew that  
padre juan was the closest thing to god,  
worked in the summer at an old folks' home,  
and entered an order of slovak nuns—  
all as if i were trying to be a one-woman  
melting pot.

so i could easily think that my lessons in latin,  
french, spanish, and kiswahili  
smashed into dibs and dabs of greek, old  
english, lithuanian, or welsh i've picked up  
here and there  
and came out as this mumbo jumbo;  
or i could explain it all away as babytalk and  
gibberish,  
say that i was making it all up,  
that it was as nonsensical as the chatter from  
the tower of babel;  
or i could simply shrug and observe that it  
wouldn't be the first time  
i'd been gullible, taken in by a joke, or played  
the fool, or kidded myself.  
but there was something (i know) that was  
neither me nor the two pentecostals praying  
with and over me  
something else that led me  
(something like the i.r.t. third rail that gives  
the train wheels on their own two tracks the  
juice)  
something else that spoke

**Sister Pam Smith**

## WOMEN

Women often seem distant. Their sheets smell  
of "goodnight."  
They place the bread on the table so that we  
can ignore their absence.  
Then we realize our guilt. We rise from the  
chair and say:  
"You must have gotten very tired today," or  
"that's all right, I'll light the lamp."  
When we strike the match, she turns slowly,  
pacing  
with inexplicable devotion toward the kitchen.  
Her back  
is a tiny but bitter hill, carrying the dead,  
the dead of the family, her own dead, and  
yours.  
You listen to her footsteps creaking on the  
aged planks of the floor,  
You listen to the dishes weeping on the shelves,  
and then you hear  
the howl of the train, transporting the soldiers  
to the front.

**Yannis Ritsos**  
**Translated from the Greek**  
**by Minas Savvas**

### THREE SUMITA POEMS

#### Sumita's Instinct

Children topple, and  
 unless some body's spirit catches  
 them, they break.

Then how do  
 their bones knit?

The Indian peasant child toddles  
 to the Edge    squats  
 touches his toe to air, then  
 turns to play with his burnt matchstick, or  
 leaf. His mother's mother, squatting under the  
 hut's lee, smoking—watches through rheumy  
 child's  
           eyes . . .

Sumita's burgher parents powdered her face  
 and pushed, where cliff fronted house, house  
 bank—Sumita somersaulted, swallowed rain,  
       pil-  
 lowed the intellectual wind—anything not to  
       fall  
 from  
           grace . . .

Lissom 19 now, wingless,  
 quasar-eyed, Sumita slips out of her sandals,  
 points her toes at me, and asks me please  
 to fetch her a cigarette

### Sumita Eating

Not ever not convalescing, he touches  
the switch the room is a sudden sea  
of light; or opens the door to a broken  
dike, as in the silent comedies . . .

He watches Sumita bolt most of North India  
spiced . . . "Don't you care what's under  
the rice?" No. "Doesn't your stomach some-  
times  
react?" No. "And you never feel fear?"  
Never. Why should I?

He grips the table with two hands and  
watches Sumita eat: her mouth is red fur,  
her sari whistles as she bends, sucking  
her fingers she smiles—

(It won't rain out of season, when it does  
watch out for cobras)

my closet—  
The bloody lovely teeth of her!

### Sumita Washes Her Hair

on alternate days. She is a-  
wakened at dawn. She uses British  
shampoo and many liters of  
heated water . . .

Sumita  
begins to brush her hair  
at 6:45, as if she were delicately  
at work on a loom, and the loom was a harp.  
Her hair is golden  
black,

nearly as long as Rapunzel's. Her golden  
black body lists with each sinuous stroke . . .

Sumita

brushes her hair in the  
sun and brushes as the sun goes down—  
(the neighbors pass her as they would  
any slender coconut palm). Sumita is serious,  
though not very: beautiful hair is,  
after all,

beautiful hair . . .

She goes to bed directly after dinner  
and sleeps till noon the next day

H. Jaffe

## TWO POEMS

### Our Brother the Murderer

The shambling beast, tottering vertical or  
almost,  
Was no great oddity among the bear and bison,  
The giraffe and tiger. A little naked of hair,  
perhaps,  
But his brothers had their oddities, like  
elongated necks.  
He was accepted with neutral indifference at  
the water hole,  
And they watched without interest his  
migration in small herds.

Even when he learned to flash fire and drive  
them from cover  
And impale them on spears sharper than the  
horns of an ox,  
It was fratricide, and brothers slaying brothers  
are still brethren.  
The bear, invading their deepest caves, and  
seeing  
The black and ochre of bear on the dimness of  
wall,  
Knew an animal lived here with the smell of  
other animals.

And even when the wandering herds settled by  
rivers  
And built caves over the ground, of wattle and  
clay,  
This was no more than the birds had always  
done;  
Nor did the magic of new meadows of annual  
grain  
And fruit trees uprooted from thickets and  
rooted again  
Seem dangerous novelties to the beasts of the  
steppes and prairies.

Ox and horse, pig, sheep, and goat  
Never quite knew the moment when whistle,  
call, and goal—  
Or wolves and jackals baying the bark of dogs—  
Fenced them in. Their food was more certain  
now;  
The lion and panther sprang less often onto  
their backs;  
The smell from the wattle caves was an  
animal smell.

Even the whirling wheel, the ziggurat of baked  
bricks rising,  
The king in crown and purple, the priest at the  
blood and smoke,  
The whipping post in public squares and the  
impaling stake,  
The rectangular herds marching with leveled  
lances and trumpets  
Seemed to the ox and cow, pig, sheep, and goat  
Less memorable than milking, breeding, or  
shearing time.

The wild brothers—tiger and lion, leopard,  
bear and wolf—  
Indifferently withdrew to prairie, jungle, and  
forest  
Rimming the square grain fields, orchards,  
and vineyards,  
And at times, guided by a mixed medley of  
animal smells,  
Roamed at the fringes, struck, bit, and ate,  
Or retreated indifferently from the panic of  
blazing torches.

When the cut stones of the aqueduct stole the  
water hole  
And roads straight as spears bisected, resected  
the wilderness,  
Their world turned small in the mazes of  
menace.  
Bear smelled only bear in the caves of memory.  
The horse of treason intruded rider and lance,  
Axe and plow. And the blood of the innocent.

The net, the rope, the cage, the screaming tiers  
Of the Circus, the mad emperor prancing,  
The sword sharper and longer than horn or  
tusk,

The traitor horse, the ass, dragging with  
bleeding tracks,  
At the end of clanking chains, the dead  
brothers  
Of the vertical beast's afternoon of marble-  
walled jungle.

### Unprogrammed Return

We colonized the earth. We aimed for the  
moon.  
Why? Perhaps, like Everest, it was there.  
And there it hung before us, gray and white,  
Sculpted with cruel craters and peaks.  
For no good reason we would be landing soon.

A slight seizure, power failing, dials dropping,  
A fog of oxygen from unprogrammed leaks.  
We circled round the moon of theory  
And aimed our arc for the blue-white disk  
of earth  
Of the temperate continents and rainclouds  
dripping.

Into the incredible sea we parachuted down.  
Only in sleep do I circle forever in a ring  
To breathe each last time the gasping oxygen,  
Or on a long ellipse to blaze and fling  
My body into the thermonuclear sun.

Chad Walsh

## TWO POEMS FROM "MOVING ON"

In the dead center of Cement City  
an unlikely smell of sorghum  
grabs at something in me  
like a moletrap sprung.

O I would like to be  
a Red Man ad  
on the side of a  
South Dakota barn!

I would like to be  
the easy heat  
inside a moot  
Montana roadapple.

I would disappear into the  
land-level silo,  
close and secure the lid  
and there share juices.

But I am merely here,  
a left-handed boy  
with a pinched nerve  
and shit on his Sunday shoes.

Between Kiowa and Dodge City  
this world is picked clean.  
The clumps of clay near Medicine Lodge  
have eaten every brave,  
every painted pony.  
Further west, a light snow  
forms a low and seedless mist  
where spills of wheatgrain used to be.

It is cold, and growing colder,  
the land as hard as the highway.  
I try to imagine the heft  
of a soft, hot hamburger,  
sweet onions and pickle juice.  
But the jaws of the wind  
are at them, chewing.

Between Kiowa and Dodge City  
this world is picked clean.  
The crows alone do not know this.  
Maybe that is why,  
not so very far above me,  
they are circling.

**William Kloefkorn**

**EPITHALAMION  
FOR A NEW MEXICAN PRELATE**

I All is done richly, fittingly so.  
Brother and prince, holy with power,  
move to lead the ancient public dance,  
sharing out to all the sacred meal,  
before the bridegroom and the bride dance  
secretly together;  
before the feast  
that none hereafter may share.

The music is simple, openly  
glad but not so piercing  
or so long in dying  
as the overtones that shake  
the stricken sinew and nerve;  
not so full of wonder  
as the cry that fills the throat  
with earth.

Upon you the girdle of Venus  
is bound, or Vulcan's net; time,  
that measures the ardor of men,  
and women's honesty,  
measures the dance,  
and will tell.

Now all the Law has been fulfilled:  
who dares say  
what the blinded may yet see,  
where the dead  
may yet lie down to rest.

Now not gloating but solemn  
with joy, you pass, and descend  
to the windowless center, locking out all  
imaginings but your own, to lie  
in that bed you have made—Odysseus' bed,  
that cannot be unmade,  
unless the house be battered down,  
stone by stone.

- II Be comforted: it is the shapes  
and sculptures of the earth that change  
and warp, not the mysterious  
ultimate substance. Continents  
have drifted halfway round the world,  
been shaken apart and rejoined  
to make other oceans for you  
to dare on and be lost, other  
worlds for your discovery, since  
this love rose first out of chaos  
with the light. And we shall lie down  
together in the earth at last,  
as you do now in this bed. There  
with the passing of a little  
time, there shall be no more princes:  
we shall be equals, equally  
changed, changed after all, an atom  
at a time, into each other.  
In time we shall become something  
else inconceivable: moving  
always deeper under the sea,  
our unflinching, unbreakable  
hearts shall be drawn to the center  
of fire, and be molten as one,  
stone with stone.

Suzanne Gross

**FOUR POEMS**

(Ena Hollis, 1934-1970, was married to David Tipton, whose poem on her death, "Millstone Grit," appeared in *The Beloit Poetry Journal* in the Fall-Winter issue, 1971-72.)

**A Truce**

Wash it away, love,  
let it all go,  
depressions, guilts,  
the tears and my sullen jealousy.  
Let the sea take it  
like mothering flesh  
out to the long arm  
of the bay's curve.  
And we sit  
heaped together  
clinging to your image  
like deserted children,  
watching the frog-kick through  
the turning wave,  
green glass goblin,  
wet glass.  
And there you are again  
out on the other side,  
a seal slick on the rocking sea,  
a swimming thing pointed birdwise to the sky.  
I collect us together,  
baby straddled on hip,  
and the girls together.  
And we walk to the opposite end of the beach,  
we'll watch the fishing boats come in,

collect shells and rescue stranded starfish,  
and when you turn back  
we won't be there  
until you look for us.  
And the hills sprawl like soft suede animals,  
and the sea smoothes the sand's edge.

### Neighbours

Last to bed in a sleeping house  
I strip  
rubbing a tired body,  
look up and see  
a face blurred by dark  
leant against the opposite window.  
We stare  
till I pick up my nightdress  
and pad to the bathroom  
catching a glimpse  
of his wife's shadow  
hunched against the light of the door.  
Next morning she sings  
black-haired and beautiful,  
cleaning out the cupboards on the balcony,  
a smell of rich cooking and coffee  
and a row of socks hung out on the line.

Later, returning from the shops,  
he catches me up at the door  
and we come up in the lift together.  
In careful English  
he asks me questions  
while his eyes move over my tight dress.  
Only once  
does he look me in the face  
and I see his eyes are yellow as a cat's.

**At the beach - a sequence**

- 1 Face down in the sand  
the sun's weight heavy  
like the palm of a hand  
hard in the shallows of my back  
keeps me here  
helpless as a beached turtle  
eyes snapping after the knife.  
Turtles die slowly  
throbbing out their blood,  
emerald and sweat  
in long shadow.  
I flip out a feeble wrist  
like a failing pulse  
for my calm shell,  
the sand kneads back  
my breasts to bone  
and behind my head  
the sea menaces  
roaring like a pride of lions.  
The wind swaggers past  
kicking the sandwich papers,  
hauls down the cliffs  
with ropes of sand  
and beyond that  
nowhere to rise or walk,  
a mist of blown sand  
over a lake of sand  
lapping the knees  
of stone-blind mountains.
- 2 Smoking a cigarette  
your eyes claim horizons  
from your own acid burrow  
of despair;

words are unthinkable,  
only the wrists free  
scooping the sand  
basalt and crystal  
quartz for a pale princess;  
splintered like sugar  
a cockle-shell  
black and mother-of-pearl  
spirals down into dark.  
If you can struggle through  
that smooth cold corridor of quiet  
the curved gate into infinity  
it is a refuge.  
I poke it with a feather,  
ebb towards flow  
like a continuous cavalry-charge,  
snap my head round  
counting the children  
and see for one stopped split-second  
my little son  
arms raised like an exorcising priest  
challenge a monstrous wave  
reared like a stallion  
above his wet skull.  
Jesus! It crashes down  
falls fawning round his feet  
swilling him harmlessly  
like a plastic duck  
into the soapy shallows.

- 3 Behind my head  
the sea menaces,  
roars up and down  
like caged beasts,  
you cannot turn it off,  
it bays distraction.  
From the beach-transistors

a variety of programmes  
 for each ear  
 and here we are  
 lolling like a colony  
 of basking seals,  
 our flesh and bathing-suits  
 stretched out for public show,  
 a circus act with the audience  
 performing,  
 lovers hammocked in the sand  
 and the sun adorers holding in  
 their stomachs,  
 us having a good time  
 at the beach,  
 and still that dammed sea  
 roaring up and down.

4 Nowhere to go  
 I stare out  
 from cool shadow  
 into a glare  
 of wind-smooth sand  
 like a lake  
 of cold milk chocolate  
 lapping the feet  
 of bald mountains  
 blurred behind noon  
 sun-steam and blue haze.  
 Distanced you watch  
 the horizon, smoking,  
 name me colours to  
 paint mountains with  
 Amethyst Amarantine  
 Periwinkle Plum  
     Violet  
     Lilac

Lapis Lazuli  
Lavender  
Indigo Sapphire  
Heliotrope and Mauve  
Rose Madder  
where iron strikes  
from the rock,  
changes as you approach  
as the reality of a face  
changes or contracts  
when you stare hard at it  
nose to nose  
in a mirror.  
The mountains  
are stone-blind.

### Strange landfalls - a sequence

- 1 Honey bitter honey  
charged with sweet days,  
distilled  
the comb blackens  
wax crumbling,  
sugary decay  
staining my mouth.
  
- 2 Three bitter women  
carping at my neck  
stretch out for my hands  
cup upon palm,  
and you give me  
only your cold quarrels  
to sustain me,  
your spoiled sugar  
to haul away.

3 I need some time  
to sit by myself,  
time to think in  
to listen to the slow ticking  
of clocks  
the rustle of sheets  
and quiet breathing of children  
to pace the lamplit passage  
and lean my cheek against  
the cold wall  
time to measure my words,  
waiting to float free again.

4 Love has no complexion  
to suit you  
if you are beggared of it.

5 How to deal with it  
to hold and nourish it,  
to pass on our truths?  
How to say we are all concerned  
with the same essential needs?

We cry in our own dark,  
make our strange landfalls,  
but then how to make maps?

Child, I leave my thumb-print mark  
on your forehead's centre.  
How you read it  
shall be your own prophecy,  
tomorrow my yesterdays,  
daughter always  
searching for a lost mother.

**Ena Hollis**

**THE JADE FLUTE**

After the snow finally melted I  
found a jade flute sealed  
securely in damp brown leaves.  
Inside the larger end lay  
the skull of a small rodent—field mouse  
or shrew; it fit loosely now, but  
the troublesome flesh would have been too  
much.

Out on the bright lake, Louise  
drifted in her white boat, eyes sharp  
and glassy as the water's surface, hands  
thin and pale, dropping pieces of coarse bread  
all around her in ineffective alchemy.  
Crunching the skull into the soft soil  
with my boot heel, I held the cold wet stone  
to warm lips and blew a single  
glacial note to her, so far away,  
so radiantly and securely dead.

**David Ripper**

**CARTS**

Late in the afternoon, with rain pounding  
so hard it bounced in a white mist  
from empty streets and windshield wipers  
hiccupped desperately, I stopped to  
pick up things for supper.

That supermarket,  
solicitous with speakered music, its aisles  
unpeopled, freezers humming; the avocados  
glossy; the spices ranged and labeled;  
the olives, wise-eyed, waiting—no hand  
but mine to reach for them—

Except at the farthest aisle, a shopping cart  
with a Hindu wheeling (a student-visa  
look about him) his shoulders hunched for  
pushing; in the cart four small boys standing,  
their stomachs bellied in exuberance, to rush  
among the rows of soups, the towers of bread,  
the coffee tins, the bastions of paper towels.

Behind, with a second cart, a mother-figure  
in bright pink pants and gilded sandals,  
hair in a ponytail, exotic as a dancing girl  
carved on a temple beam—her plump hand  
filled with bargain coupons—doe-eyed  
Amid the discount-stamp abundance.

I remember behind the museum in Delhi,  
where workmen had left it to be cleaned,  
a car of the Juggernaut from ancient Puri,  
its sixteen wheels still notched with pebbles,  
its sides worn to the grained wood, robbed  
of its jewels and hammered gold. Only the  
chiseled shapes of gods and garlands showed  
Around the wide-lipped upper rim.

I remember light fading in Indian sky,  
the dark museum windows; my fingers  
seeking  
hand-holds; my feet slipping, sliding;  
my body wriggling by elbow push and knee  
shove  
upward to lean exhausted over the car's  
high rail,  
Gulping the air while parrots cried in darkening  
trees.

I remember standing where the god once stood  
in the chariot-curve to see the people  
hurl themselves beneath his moving wheels;  
I remember watching stars come clear in  
the sky  
and my heart pounding like rain rising  
To whiteness against some hard-packed ground.

**Frances Hall**

**DRIVING HOME**

You say,  
"Why not in the car?"

Married for ten years.  
I look for a grin  
but you're serious.

I turn off  
on a dirt road,  
go a ways  
and douse the lights.  
The moon's  
unnaturally low  
and large and bright.  
Old teenagers,  
we climb, badly,  
into the back seat.

The heater hums  
as we struggle.

An elbow cracks the glass,  
a knob impales a back.  
"Might as well try  
to dance in a sack."  
You start to giggle;  
I get ready  
to accelerate.  
The seat springs twang  
as if we'd hit  
the roughest road.  
It's all uncomfortable  
and good.

Back up front,  
engine running,  
I switch on the lights.  
In the dark, wooded distance,  
two small eyes,  
close to the ground,  
glow white.  
"We've been watched,"  
you say, and laugh.

*And the muskrat goes home  
to his children, and says,  
It was a strange, rocking car  
under the moon  
going nowhere, and far.*

At the junction,  
the sign warns, "Yield."  
It's late enough  
and I'm tired enough  
not to.  
As I turn onto the main road,  
you're asleep on my shoulder  
and the winter's first flakes  
dance on the windshield.

## TWO POEMS

## Smelt Fishing at Black Brook

The game was smelt—if smelt can be called  
game.

They were our purpose and they came in  
schools

(black shimmer under lanternlight through wet)  
into the midnight crystal of the brook.

Out dipnets at the ends of slim fir poles  
brought them to squirming silver on the bank.

But the crowd at the brook's mouth was too  
much

a human crowd. No fun that way: greed is  
purely itself when greased by a fat curse,  
a net lunge past a net. Threading through  
brush,

each carrying a lantern, pail, and net,  
my father and I searched for brook bends where  
the smelt were less, the humans nicely less.

At thrust or trail, the net poles tangled with  
a whipping alder world. On a swamp's lip,  
half-plunged toward lantern burst and leafy  
dark,

I caught my balance over the spiking stump  
my booted foot had struck and toppled wide.  
Poised (half-poised) in a half-poised swing of  
light,

I saw a gleam—fishlike but never fish.

Deep in a cave of blackmeal tree-flesh rot,  
two salamanders squirmed away from light  
and the hard blow that knocked their roof awry.

My Coleman lantern hissed, a crazy sun.

I had not met such midnight sprites before.  
With joy I picked their odd odd beings up  
and pouched their old perfections in my coat.  
And drenched them down to keep them happy  
there.

I spent the rest of the night guarding them:  
my father grew unhappy with my net  
while I learned more than how small fishes die.

**From One of Roethke's Notebooks and My Head  
(For Louise King)**

If it burns long enough, straw melts hard stone.  
That's Roethke's thought. I steal it for this  
verse  
to celebrate the man, not straw or stone  
burning or melted.

I once learned a thought  
much like his thought while I was splitting logs  
in snowy woods, a small boy in New Hampshire  
whose iron wedges bounced from frozen elm:

"Enough light taps drive Hell a country mile,"  
my uncle said, "and if the hard grain curls  
three times around inside itself, enough  
soft blows will open it to let it burn  
inside the singing stove."

A poem's thought  
opens toward song, given enough light strokes  
while it takes form along the spectral lines.

**John Bennett**

## BOOKS IN BRIEF

It's getting to be difficult to draw the line between a magazine and a book, with some so-called "little magazines" running over 600 pages. I have in front of me a stack of review copies from commercial publishers, many of them thin in all senses, though priced as high as ten cents a page. I have chosen to turn from them to review a volume—a "magazine"—that surpasses them all for real power and real value. It packs over 200 pages solid for only \$2.50. This is issue 30/31 of **CHELSEA** (P.O. Box 242, Old Chelsea Station, N.Y. 10011). In all this issue there is to my mind only one lapse (nine pages of embarrassing prose, nearly invisible among the glories that surround it). Here are a Greek group, with Yannis Ritsos' marvelous "Romiosini" at the heart; four poems from the Eskimo, followed by nine sections from John Fowler's related "The Book of Fishes"; poems in tribute to Stephen Mooney by William Stafford, Frank Steele, Sonia Raiziss, and David Ignatow, and an unforgettable memoir by Robert Bly; two of Merwin's most eloquent fables, knives to the bone, on "com-

municating"; more; more; more. This magazine is really *edited*. A poem or story is at home among family and friends: a group of poems about fathers, for example; a surrealist poem curled up to a surrealist story. Each work, perfect in itself, gives off a light to read its neighbors by. Perhaps only another editor can appreciate what goes into putting out a volume like this, but any reader of contemporary poetry can appreciate the richness and significance of the result.

**THE ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE: A THEORY OF POETRY.** *Harold Bloom. Oxford. \$5.95.*

It is a great help in reading this intense little book to be familiar with Bloom's *Yeats*. Otherwise one might be put off by the quotations on the dust jacket ("Criticism is the art of knowing the hidden roads that go from poem to poem"), or by Bloom's cast of characters (ephebe, Idiot Questioner, Covering Cherub), or, finally, by the special vocabulary Bloom has adopted for his six "Revisionary Ratios" which are the necessary expression of his original critical theory. But if you approach this book with the cranky but brilliant *Yeats* in mind and bring along also some knowledge of Blake and Emerson and Stevens and—above all—Shelley, then you are in for an exhilarating clamber over the rocks of a strenuous new trail, with a warm and witty pioneer guide.

I decided to take Bloom along as a guide through A. R. Ammons, **COLLECTED POEMS: 1951-1971** (*Norton. \$12.50* and worth every penny). This seemed fair, since Bloom is a profound admirer of Ammons, and the poems are deeply rooted in the traditions of English and American romanticism. Before reading Bloom, I had already romped through the Ammons volume, marking those poems that hit me with a wallop. After reading Bloom, I returned to the poems I'd marked to enquire whether they

seemed to illustrate Bloom's "Revisionary Ratios." It became a game—very entertaining—to guess just which poems by the poet's precursors provided the ground for the present poem. I was astonished at how often I felt confident of my guess, and I produced a tidy list of Ammons poems to illustrate (if I guessed right) each of Bloom's six ratios. The next step, I decided, would be either a nifty grad-school term paper or an all-night conversation in front of the fire (preferably a beach fire) with Mr. Bloom and Mr. Ammons, so that I could test my hunches. Ammons' wonderful "Coon Song," for example, seems at first glance a *clinamen*, or swerve from Eliot and Stevens, but is it, really, a "poetic misreading" of the precursors? I'm not sure. "Body Politic" refers to Frost, and I think I read Frost differently from Ammons. Does that justify my calling that poem a *clinamen* from "Come In," or from the body of Frost's work? I'm not sure. "Corson's Inlet" has the suggestive line "swerves of action," and it seems to swerve, consciously, from Emerson and others. But does it involve misreading of Emerson? I'm not sure. Perhaps the answer is in Ammons' evocative "Precursors," with its ending:

the oldest things freshest,  
most in need of being told.

I took great pleasure in reading Bloom and Ammons together, and I hope to return to them together frequently. But finally I decided that however enriching and illuminating and finally sound Bloom's approach is, it still leaves the greatest power and delight of Ammons' poetry virtually untouched. There is richness in it to exhaust any number of critical theories. Those who know Ammons only from anthology pieces should get the **COLLECTED POEMS** and start to get acquainted with the opus of a truly "strong poet," one of the major poets of the English language.

**TAKING UP THE SERPENT.** *Jerald Bullis.*  
*Ithaca House.* \$2.95 paper.

When I first discovered "Woodland Interior" in *Epoch* last year, I ran around reading it to everyone who would listen. This is *it*. This is what poetry can and ultimately must do: transform the reader's consciousness through the sheer power of the imagination. For this poem and for several others in this excellent first volume I predict a long life and a wide audience, as they move into the anthologies.

Of course a penetrating imagination isn't enough. The poet also needs meticulous honesty of observation (which Bullis gloriously has), a good ear (it's pure self-indulgence to read these poems aloud), and a command of the language. In this last, the poet is still uneven. It seems ungrateful to complain of too much richness, but there are excesses in some poems. Flapping tags labeled *Hopkins*, *Thomas*, *Whitman*, *Roethke* distract me from the real Bullispoem underneath. Sticktogether compounds proliferate infectiously: *vinegar-laced*, *quieteerie*, *bleachboned*. Some I wouldn't part with ("Watertrickle underpurling sucklepurl"). Although I appreciate the effort to force the language to express new perceptions ("Breezewaft richened by onion"), yet I feel distracted by having noticed the effort. The best images seem to come as naturally as the event: "And the hawk plays out the thermals, fletching the dawn with its cry."

I hope Jerry Bullis will continue to write poems in which the reader experiences the imaginative leap, unselfconsciously. I hope he will come to trust his material more, until he feels no need to *tell* his reader what it means. I hope he will continue to ask the good questions (in "Violence": "What is/ The job for poetry/ In

this season"). And I look forward to the new and true and totally unpredictable answers emerging from such poems as "The Night Calling" and "A Place Where It's Cold."

**WINDOWS AND STONES.** *Tomas Tranströmer*, trans. by *May Swenson*, with *Leif Sjöberg*. *University of Pittsburg, An International Poetry Forum Selection.* Cloth \$5.95; paper \$2.95.

This is an important volume. The poems are intensely dramatic, in the sense that they are dynamically acting out in their constantly shifting images the actual function of a penetrating mind. To quote a passage is to impose an artificial stasis on the process of the poem, even when the subject of the poem is transfixed, as in the already famous three-part poem "In the Clear," which concludes:

The sun blazes. The jet plane glides at low  
altitude  
and casts a shadow in the shape of a big  
cross

that rushes over the ground.

A man hunches in a field and digs.

The shadow comes.

For a fraction of a second he is in the  
middle of the cross.

I have seen the cross hanging in cool  
church vaultings—

sometimes it's like an instantaneous  
photograph

of something in rapid motion.

The translations inspire confidence. May Swenson's first language was Swedish, and Tranströmer has approved the final versions. Both she and her academic collaborator Lief Sjöberg contribute valuable introductory essays.

**SHAKING THE PUMPKIN: TRADITIONAL POETRY OF THE INDIAN NORTH AMERICAS**, edited with commentaries by *Jerome Rothenberg*. Doubleday. \$3.95 paper; \$8.95 hardbound.

"Unlike *Technicians of the Sacred* this gathering is almost completely a poet's book," says Rothenberg. This means that in addition to "total translations" like Dennis Tedlock's rendering of all the sounds and repetitions of the original Zuni in the fascinating "The Boy and the Deer," so that the reader gets some idea of the pitch, the silences, the rhythms, and even the audience interruptions, we have also a great many "translations" that are really poetic reworkings of transcriptions by earlier scholars. There are purists who will object to calling these translations, but they are interesting and valuable for several reasons. For one thing, they are powerful testimony to the absorption of important contemporary poets in the poetic arts of the native Americans. Merwin's work with the Plains Indian texts of Lowie and Edward Field's renditions of Rasmussen's Eskimo texts are good examples. This makes **SHAKING THE PUMPKIN**, like *Technicians of the Sacred*, a significant document of today's poetry. Furthermore, because these versions are the work of poets, they are in themselves memorable poems, whatever their relation to the originals. And further, this volume does succeed, as far as I can tell, in Rothenberg's ambition to "mark the real emergence of Indian poetry into the consciousness of the non-Indian world." Like its predecessor it is a big handsome book, involving the imagination of the reader on many levels, through many senses, without end.