

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL
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CONTENTS

- | | | |
|----|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 | GEORGE BOGIN | <i>Le Square du Vert Galant</i> |
| 2 | THOM SWISS | <i>The Colonization of Canada</i> |
| 8 | MIKE DOYLE | <i>Cabin on Porcupine River</i> |
| 9 | T. ALAN BROUGHTON | <i>The Skin and All</i> |
| 17 | JONATHAN HOLDEN | <i>Two Poems</i> |
| 19 | EVAN ZIMROTH | <i>Two Poems</i> |
| 23 | DAVID LYON | <i>The Waters</i> |
| 30 | CHARLES PRATT | <i>A Lesson in Calligraphy</i> |
| 31 | PETER COOLEY | <i>Blood Relics</i> |
| 34 | SANDRA M. GILBERT | <i>The Giant Rat of Sumatra</i> |
| 36 | FRANCIS POOLE | <i>The Newfound Lady</i> |
| 36 | JAMES MCGOWAN | <i>Work Is Good for You</i> |

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LE SQUARE DU VERT GALANT

Descending the stone steps of the Pont Neuf
to the bushy little park in the Seine
between the opposing flanks of Paris
is like going down to the sweet sex itself
of the Queen of Europe.

However, it's no use. I can't have her.

She moves only among Parisians,
the lucky ones, the citoyens,
the lovers, strollers, fishermen
who love Lutetia and are of her.

As for me, I make my pilgrimages,
my devotions to this puissant triangle,
having only once come close to bliss
and that was when a Frenchman from the south
approached me at the point, saying,

"Pardon, Monsieur, mais c'est la Seine?"

and in a dazzle of belonging I replied,

"Ah, oui, c'est la Seine,
c'est la Seine, Monsieur!"

George Bogin

**THE COLONIZATION OF CANADA
A FILMPOEM IN TWELVE PARTS**

"I did not see a cartload of good earth. To be short, I believe that this was the land God allotted to Cain." — Jacques Cartier (1534)

1.

Begin with Quebec.
Iroquois land, Iroquois name: kebec,
a narrowing of waters. A ship.
French ship heaving up
out from under the ice-sheeted
St. Lawrence. ENTER PROTAGANIST PACING.
Jacques Cartier thinking hot & heavy
about his future. Never mind now.
It's November 1535.

O l'homme pauvre. Fat, forty-three,
brown-cloaked & hawk-billed,
entrusted with the treasury
of the bastard King Francis.
Cartier, burdened with the vision

of the pirate & the pilgrim, fearing
what those critics of his
are writing about back home.

Mamma, Mamma, you should see
your only son . . .

2.

Thick wind ripping through the whitewashed
hall.

In the back of the boat,
a hundred & fifty sailors
sit shivering & wind-torn
around harsh red coals.

Each the others true source of heat.

Layers of rumsmoke hover
in the air and burn through the lungs.

Sailors sucking on mahogany pipes CLOSE-UP

One man gags on his solid snot.

On the quarterdeck,
it's bizniz as usual. Jerkinoff,
gambling for uncertain gain, the boys
bid & bet against the cold. Bones pop
like snow-stiffened twigs.
Time unshyly stacking the cards.

3.

White, white. The continent
cleanses itself of conscience.
Scurvy chooses sides
and fifty French seamen
go down for the count.

STILL PHOTO

Cartier on deck
contemplating French cuisine

4 protruding black-muzzled guns.
 He whistles and watches the ritual.
 He hums and hallucinates an enemy.

6.

FOCUS IN ON

The first night of the full red moon.
 Hale & healthy, the captain walking
 on the snowbanked surface
 of the river. Meets Taignoagny.

C: My men are dying with disease

T: My people live under the weather forever

C: I mean scurvy

T: I know what you mean. Listen
 to me, the bark & leaves
 of the white spruce tree
 when mixed & boiled in kettles
 is sure to cure your boys.

Cartier takes the secret sans thanks.

On May 3, 1536

a beggars banquet

(one of Cartier's new tricks)

is to be held on the Grande Hermine.

Donnacona, the old chief, & 10 friends
 will attend to celebrate

the cessation of scurvy.

Meanwhile: The Spring-sprung ice,
 churning & roaring down the great river,
 dissolves like tiny chunks
 of sugar in a warm cup of hemlock.
 Bottoms Up!

The mouth of the river
 opens wide for escape; the anchor
 sucks back into the ship like a tongue.

7.

CROWD SCENE. AUDIO: WHOOPING
& TINKLING GLASS

The Iroquois come aboard
bringing friendship & a hoarde of presents.
The sun sinking slow like an island.

Cartier in a white suit,
smoothskinned, sabre at side,
smiling ear-to-fat-ear.
Embracing Donnocona, sober & sincere.

8.

After hors d'oeuvres, canard & muscatel,
the French bring out the chains.

9.

PORTRAIT SHOT

A shriveled fetus
in the belly of the ship,
the old Iroquois, tied hand-to-foot
by ropes & steel links.

Cartier coming down to take a look.

FLASHBACK. BLACK AND WHITE

The medicine men, 3 dusty magicians
in dog skins, froth at the mouth
& fill the woods with loud incantations.

The horns on their heads
loom up flat against the sky.

FADE BACK TO THE SHIP

D: The cruel god Cudragny declared
directly to them that the white man
will die if you harm me

C: Your god Cudragny is a fool & a noodle
The God to Whom all white men pray
promises me safety

10.

Cartier marching to the village
with 88 madmen armed-to-the-teeth
11 helpless hostages
stones shackled to their feet
& a lie on the lips of his smile.

Damagaya & Taignoagny, loyal sons
of their father & tribe, clench
their fists & wade into the river.
The water tasting like cheap cologne,
the Iroquois have no choice.
They accept the Frenchmans' bribe.

NOON SHADOWS & WHISPERS

Gold goes first,
the diamonds au suivant,
the silver, the stones that the sailors
have never seen. All food
for King Francis' royally fat ego.

On the shore of the St. Lawrence,
Cartier & the others are erecting
a 30 foot monument.

11.

On the crossbeam is a shield
engraved with the words:
VIVE LE ROY DE FRANCE

Cartier stands now with palms
in his pockets, saluting, almost sad.
The fleur-de-lis in his eyes is alive.
Across a continent pushing outward,
reaching and spreading

12.

RUN THE WHOLE POEM BACKWARDS

Thom Swiss

CABIN ON PORCUPINE RIVER

bucketing the rapids
crawling the mountains
hacking their way
branch by branch, almost
three thousand miles, through the forests

the two prospectors, partners

 frozen rock-solid
 beside a stew kettle dangling
 over a long-dead fire
 (the kettle contains
 a pair of moccasions, partly-cooked,
 embedded in a cake of ice)

have held these attitudes
through the slow ooze & drip
three-quarters of a century

What will they do
in some cryonic future
at the moment of thaw
on the day of judgment?

will all that pent-up hunger
drive them to the steaming stew
or to the gold pan
the rough caress of gravel
the bright cold river's treasure?

moment by moment
imperceptibly
a decision is forming
a decision is forming
in the slow glaciers of their consciousness

Mike Doyle

THE SKIN AND ALL

Songs for the Cruellest Months

March

I watch you in sleep
to soothsay the slightest tick
of the face that someone else
is wearing now

cuneiform writes itself
in the corner of your eye
and then wears smooth

the windows are closed
on the passage of birds

how can I keep
appointed hours or days
when you do not decree
the calandar of your heart

how can I fix
the movable feast?

April

I thought to flay you
wear you over my scars
as if that outer skin
could make me new

I wore you nights
and daily took my pride
for walks encased
in the sense of you

now you leave me
stripped my own flesh
stinking from long
enclosure

my skin tender
and cells unused
to even the touch
of light.

May

Outside they bear
the victim on their shoulders
up to the place of knives
the carving of hearts
and you by the window
stare as if you know
which one of us sits
astride the beam
his oiled locks shorn

I hear the mockers
prancing behind
their soft canes
laid in jest across
each stranger's neck
and the tooting
of rank horns rude
with hints of rutting nights

You turn with a raised hand
high in shadow
which one are you
priest or reveler?

June

This morning you sent
the small girl with flowers
the one with the withered arm
she stood in the light
wrinkling in from sea
eyes dumb with the shade
of my house and would not enter
but scattered cut heads
at my feet and ran
her wan voice spreading once
like wind Omen I cried
and black wings beat
the wall where I crouched
unable to cross your gift
or face the sea-burned air.

July

In a green bowl
you bring some gift
your face beyond it
does not speak
your arms stretch
and the gait of your feet
has dignity of stone

In a green bowl
I have not seen before
in your house or mine

by bedside or table
there is neither light
nor the weight of sound
and your hands do not tremble

I walk to your stance
cruel hieroglyph
your eyes the milk of stars
your lips the bent moon's sickle
harvesting darkness

In a green bowl
you bring the black sun's mirror
my own lost blood.

August

The first child's heart
beat weakly but
the mountain was refreshed

we started with
the highest peak
and worked down slowly

slicing through gay feathers
the toils of preparation
and when they wept

we laughed at the thought
of rain of rain
of rain

they have no thoughts
are too young and not
human yet

and distantly
growing louder as we came
we could hear

their mothers on the wheel
churned by the loving
knives.

September

You were tied to that stone
and then we came
four of us one
from each direction
and how could you cover
all the points
compass gone wild
the lodestone in each of us
making a hack
of ordinals
at your flesh

you fell we dipped
our hands to you
each in his cut
and smeared our faces
blessed in the way
assured of the new sun's
rising.

October

This was the prince of dawn
who had his fill all year
this was the wild grain's king
whose flesh was rubbed with oil

my body tumbling to you
step by step
whose heart is strung above

is yours now limb
by limb and you
who brought the dainty slice
the peeled grape kneel
to the fattened meat
and toast the coming rain

tomorrow I'll name you queen.

November

We were on our way
to pick reeds why
had no one told you
to stay home or at least
out of sight but
you stood by the wayside
your body swaying
to our flutes
your pale face full
of the finger stops
and when we threw you
whistling in your ears
and forced the music
home you still believed
there was some holy
purpose to such
groveling in earth.

December

As I took
the last stair
my flutes of the year
broken one by one
and their tunes spilled
behind me the nightrides
when our hips plunged
and you were like
twenty maidens each
in her new flesh untouched
whose small cries were birds
netted at last
I turned to the landing
dark and stretched
to the bed where
one by one your presences
departed
wind through holes
and only the fierce
priest of the head
left to grope
for the cringing heart.

January

We found you tall enough
root woman scatterloam
whose arms were for light
and cut you down
to emblematic size
now that we've stood you
long in the courtyard

weathering in our eyes
we lower you gently
to tie the ribbons
over your knots

you decorate
our ceremonies
stand upright
still as the center
we touch
but never tame.

February

After you left
I spread sand
on the doorstep
then turned my back
to sit and wait

twelve days I have dozed
and chased my dreams
and still there is
no footprint.

T. Alan Broughton

TWO POEMS**Dry-Wall**

Those big, buoyant slabs that come taped
back-to-back look light until you edge
your shoulder under them.
That weight's so dead, every wobble
in it makes you weak. Watch out
when boosting it. If you flop its grey
belly up too fast, its skin pops
along this wrinkled fault, the whole
bowed sandwich buckles in the middle.
You have to handle it like crockery.
The stuff chips off, it's all make-up.
Each sheet's a mummy made of chalk
compressed and caked between its bandages.
The stuff is dead. It won't tense up
like wood against a nail. Good wood
clenches steel. Nails just soar through
sheet-rock as through air, seeking
strength and sap somewhere behind.
The only virtue that it has, it's cheap
and you can cover up mistakes with it—
the edges of those studs you splintered,
those nails whose necks you broke,
then crucified in rage. I always feel
ashamed when using it. Everything you do
is a cover-up. You tape the joints,
smooth make-up on the tape, then plaster
over it. I've seen more houses done
like that—flues, joists, posts, even
the whiskery grain of rough-cut beams
boxed in—as though whoever lived there

thought he could blot out the fact
that warmth and water ran inside his walls,
as though by putting enough make-up on
you could deny the fact that we have bones
that break or that the lines deepening
in your face are who you are.

Zeno's Paradox

That absence of imagination sprang
from fear which for years let any man
who swung an ax do the impossible—
clobber the log he aimed at every time.
Even though his ax-head had always
half the distance to the log to go,
it would negotiate this space,
manage somehow to flatten the packed
differentials that remained. It was
a wonder a body could walk across
his room and touch the wall when,
logically, a moving arrow didn't move
at all. But because we're a little
braver than Zeno was, we now know why:
we can face infinity.

When I start out upon this sunlit
floor to cross my room, I'll never
fail. With each stride I take
I perform a commonplace—straddle
the infinite—I cross the infinite
to reach the kitchen wall.

Jonathan Holden

TWO POEMS**Rhododendrons**

The thick mosque
of rhododendrons
shields the house,
bends over us
with gaping pink blossoms
and leaves lacquered green as wet slate;
twisted, curdled branches
overhang us,
yearning and bending in arcs
making small caverns with the ground
where in the dark
a child, courteous
and unassuming as that moment before dawn
when the sky is merely there,
a still greyish plate of unbeamed light;
this child is taken by another
to the dark spots
beneath rhododendron arcs
where someone questions
and questions
and watches her eyes.
The lights from the living-room

burn my eyes
and my throat is pinched
as the sides of an hourglass
when I shake my head no,
knowing and not knowing
what can happen in those curving, dark spaces
where the pollen from a bulbous
inner blossom
is thick as talcum
and the leaves with their gummy leaf-veins
reach out and downward,

caressing furls within furls.
From behind a lighted window
I watch this drama of the high-arched
twisting greens,
heavy with overgrowth of blossom
as if the house-high bush
were yearly seized
by a shuddering wish
to gulp back all its juices
feeding those monstrous flowers,
like choice geese,
to make them fat.

So now they dangle,
red and pink and lustful,
right beyond my window
whose cool glass
only
separates me
from this annual mania
when the sap runs high
in the dipping, heated blooms.

Going Home

To drive
down the long River Road
is to see
well back, a white house,
shuttered and pillared and huge,
spread its glossy lawn
like parsley butter all around;

or a gray stone house,
turreted like a church,
gaze with slotted windows
over fields green and vacant
as the sea;

and always the horses
fishing and snuffling around,
muff-diving in the grass,
in fields slit by
nameless private drives.

At home, at last,
the air smells of honeysuckle
and horse; the collie jumps me
until I throw my arms around her neck,
dig fingers into her thick ruff,
and croon

compliments into her twitchy
cups of ears —
such a good dog, so lovely
to see her — and Sam the cat
shifts his weight, purrs,
and pulls a burr from his tail.

Dinner is (always) at 8:30,
but Daddy makes Old-fashioned at seven;
my sister's horse, a roan,
has had a nervous breakdown:
he walked right into trees,
cut his forehead up, and shook and
fell in his stall;
it seems though

he's merely too-well schooled,
so the vet recommends
emotional outlets;
now he can be ridden again
within shouting distance of someone else.

Evan Zimroth

THE WATERS**i. The Flood: An Overture**

Let there be rain.

It fell all day and night,
dripping even into our dreams.
You woke up with the thunder,
frightened.

Let there be rain,
hard hail, peachstones on the driveway,
breaking windshields and glasses,
tearing down houses. Swell, rivers,
glut yourselves with blood;
spill eels in doorways
while townspeople sleep.

Rain

bring them fear
to bring them together.

Rivers

wash through their streets,
run blind in their houses;
let them know terrors
as never before.

Lakes, rivers, springs and streams,
come hunting the streets.

Well-water, erupt, bury basements,
strangle cellar-holes.

This is the flood,

come in fire of lightning
to burn. No, if not that,
then simply the waters, rising.

The night of the flood
is pregnant with waiting
for darkness. Tear it open
like a bedsheet or blanket.
Don't hide its swollen belly.
The waters flow in it like blood,
thick gush of arteries,
thin whine of veins. Bring salt
for the wounds. Bring rags,
boiling water and scissors.
Something is about to be born.

ii. **Taiwan:** *The Descent*

Breathing, boiling springs
stream hot down the mountains.
 We came to the plain of Hwalien
 and the ocean.
 The bananas were in bloom
 and the tea heavy with leaves.
 But the guards closed the road,
 so we returned on the East-West highway.
Brimstone water,
mountains weep
where men blast roads.
 We wait above Toroko Gorge
 where waters out of the rock
 cut a gash in the pumice.
 The Bernardines have gardens there,
 and a rope bridge leads
 to the Buddhist shrine.
Hell-water,

forced release
from ferrous-nickel core
here, at ten thousand feet.

 This is prime water, never rain—
 how old we seem . . .

 Here, too, the Bernardines
 and their dogs; the silent Buddhists
 are wind playing between mountains.
 A storm gathers down on the coastal
 plain,

 stretches twelve thousand miles home
 to the heart.

 Men come back here to Toroko.

These tears
tear the land
down to the gray bones
of the mountains.

 We descend to Hwalien
 when the road is open.
 After the mountains,
 the bananas bloom gummy, maudlin reds
 and the tea sick-heavy,
 thick and brown. So soon
 we tire of life again.

iii. Flight Homeward: *Two Women*

Taipei International,
Tokyo, San Francisco—
at thirty-five thousand feet
it's all the same. Five meals
in twelve hours. Light

and dark and light
and dark again. I sleep
the spastic sleep of a man
in time's centrifuge. The geisha
unfolds a blanket,
a light kiss on the cheek.
At last I sleep.

There are two women.
The first is my wife.
The other,
a friend who carries
my son or my daughter
inside her. She will not abort.

I wake up
over Northeast America.
Who will come to meet
this blank side of myself?
It is 3 AM in my pulse.

iv. Excavation: *Repair*

Bring the witch hazel switch,
cut in a fork. Trust me.
The dry land can bubble,
can bleed and feed itself.
You have to trust, and grasp
the switch in your fists.

Apple or plum, swift-running fruitwoods
are good, but this astringent shrub
draws the water, shrivels

matters that do not matter. Cut me
my wand, cut at the crotch
high up on the shrub where it's supple.
To bend with the pull,
give like bamboo—
this is important. Trust me.

See the rod bend? Here
there is water, fast-running
out of your hands in the ground.
You drained the land;
here you can dig. I only
show you the place.

You must dig—
you can't live in the drought
of sand and baked clay.
You must dig. Trust me.

v. *Opening Windows: A Matter of Choice*

I am up all night
at the table. The teapot
is boiled sick on the stove.
Outside is the smell
of dawn cleaving the river.
So close.

It is time to open the windows.

All night I have sat here,
a bare skull debating
which ghost to walk with.
The matches are gone, the tobacco

is gone, and the liquor.
Every excuse is passe.
Let guilt one way or the other
be damned.

Here mother
of my son or my daughter,
take all my money,
my boots, my guitar
and my clothes.
This is all I can offer.

vi. Loon River: *Love, the Laughing Child*

Another child is being born.
And this, she said,
What's this?
Blue baboons chatter
in the trees
above still pools.

Stop the light and the night;
pull down the moon.

Here
and nowhere else
we've come together.
Laugh like a loon and come,
under the water,
under the water like eels—
fire pools and fountains.
The night sings like razors.
Fat-bellied perch
swim up my thighs.

This sway-bellied night
bursts with our child of the waters:
this fierce-toothed child,
winter rain. Hard and wet child,
they all call you soft
who don't know you,
don't know you come,
hard and wet,
stripping off past snows
of bad drams and regrets.

Floating still rivers
(below blue baboons whispering
 this, what's this?),
sink, catching mud in your toes;
cut clean to the bank of the river.
Burn hail, scream rain
down between bamboo and the bank.
Come, crazy child,
sing in the limbs of your parents,
your mother and I.

David Lyon

A LESSON IN CALLIGRAPHY

"The bombing pattern of the normal cluster of three B-52s is more than a mile and a half long and half a mile wide . . ."

New York Times, Dec. 24, 1972

A period signals the pause where the new takes shape.

It drops from the old like a seed into silent soil,
Like a kiss on the white cheek of sleep.

But here, where your hand was careless on the pen,

The blot has spread and spread until the page
Is black with the ragged stain.

The stain obliterates the sentence, becomes the sentence.

What have you said? What is there left to say?
This is beyond comprehension.

The period marks a momentary poise,
A point of balance. Relax, in the heart and the hand;

Practice, practice control.

Charles Pratt

BLOOD RELICS

A day I had placed in the world
returns as if someone had troweled
backwards into my skull where I turn
the faucet to cold & freeze
beside piss blackening the drains
with flies at the Vic Theater men's room.

A whole field opens down
My eyes & I am lying here, naked,
she beside me, bodies tucked
in sweat, the wind-hot grasses
tossing about us their small flies
swarming around us in a tent,
a shimmering net of death-juice,
& wind- beats like the flutter of love
stretching its delicate wing & tentative
before the final pounding down.

Beside me, the curbstone & evening,
she turns her eyes, pulling the bones
behind flesh-masks to ask me
"What is the ant? Is he my sister?"
stirring the ant hill with a stick,
"Does his house have many rooms?"
Till I tell my daughter, let's grow smaller
together over his castle, hold our breath
out of his domain & listen:
the *shau shau shau* of black troop feet
shunting eternity in these grains
down their suck-hole to the dark.

You were a long time dying
from the child you shrank into

your china doll insides, grandma.
Now, propped here, you wear that girl
across your skin you kept alive,
a violet pall. I'm seventeen,
My aunts & uncles, toys you squeezed
or dropped, are at my tight sleeves, swarming.
Not one cared when your breath quit,
you had so many years before.
At twelve you should have been
my taffy-colored mut, or little cousin,
Louise, they shut in the state hospital.

Mother, that was the summer
I began to die.
Admit I was quiet about it.
The doctor laughed you took me to.
Under those eaves I lay
with hornets at my window
dreaming the swarming of a list
you never guessed could drive
a thirteen year old sick
from tearing at his body
till he fell in love
with death & felt it stinging
out of himself each night
growing harder, longer.

The face of the woman clears
suddenly before my poetry class
on Emily Dickinson's death fly
at the mental hospital & says,
taking the poem into her voice
as if coming from someplace
she had walked before,
"I feel this. This moves me."

I hold your skull to the light,
the moon, at night walking you,
daughter, little death kit, I see clear
through to the other side in the soft
nuzzling we go to, you & I
in time to my humming this song:
till we will lie down with others
I leave you for your life framing
the accident I came for, leaving my own.

I cup the water into my hands
at the faucet of the theater,
I bathe my eyes, my ears,
my nose & lips, I anoint my head
in the holy tongues of memories
walking backwards out of themselves,
holding my life against this mirror
crying like one of the women I call up
until I shake down to my feet
dancing the blessing, the blessing.

And leaving memory & this poem
under my feet, going out the door
of the Vic, sweat, popcorn, the sunlight
splicing my eyes with the street of people
running to take up life again,
the benediction, one foot at a time.

Peter Cooley

THE GIANT RAT OF SUMATRA

"Matilda Briggs was not the name of a young woman, Watson," said Homes in a reminiscent voice. "It was a ship which is associated with the Giant Rat of Sumatra, a story for which the world is not yet prepared."

Poor Watson, you never met him?
Befuddled in foggy London
you wandered the labyrinthine streets.
Down by the docks you found a violin
floating in murky waters,
waters blue-black and bruised by
too many nights. Later,
in your stuffy room,
you prescribed cocaine—
cocaine for the brain!—
but your prescriptions were intricate and
indecisive, like bad philosophy.

Days passed, days and days.
You were always lonely.
Medical metaphysician,
you could never figure anything out.

But Watson, dear Watson,
all the time, there he was!
There he still is!
The leaves part,

they're purple, they rustle.
The jungle moans with excitement.
The natives are restless tonight.
They have drums fiercer than violins,

their heads glisten like horsehair sofas,
heads on stakes.

Another hour and he'll come out.
Already the ceremonial fires are lit.

And Watson, he's so much bigger
than the ship Matilda Briggs.
His great fangs are taller than masts,
his tail is a sail heaving him along,
he walks like twentyfive earthquakes.
Sumatra bows before him.
Tomorrow he'll swallow the Thames,
he'll gobble Big Ben,

Westminster will cower,
Her Majesty will shudder,
and then—and then—
Ah Watson, don't you know him?

He's gray and massive like the fog.
His eyes gleam like copper kettles.
His ears are dark, so dark,
and his tongue so elementary.

Sandra M. Gilbert

THE NEWFOUND LADY

While my Mother worked
I was kept by
a young Seminole woman.
On quiet mornings
we would sit in her trailer
and look out upon
the grass river, Pa-hay-okee,
her eyes bright drops
of green blood.

Once we walked through
a sugar cane field
to a cold blue pond
where strange clouds gathered
amid sunfish and white flowers.
Our toes played hide and seek
dangling in those dark waters.

She made sassafras tea
and baked wild oranges
in a small electric oven.
As she spoke of her Grandfather,
Billie Whitdeer,
I listened to cool rain
blurring the burnt remains of huts
which lay among the Glades
like old bruises.
I grew toward her in silence
my bones stretching
to rise past the tide
of their waters.

One day
a cloud swallowed the Sun
like a giant frog
and moved across the swamp
into its leaping shadow.

I saw her in a pine grove
hanging clothes with her fingers
on the metal clothesline
strung between two trees,
when antlers of lightning shook down
a silver garland around her head,
burning the roots of her sight,
her touch, the dust of her feet
into thinnest echoing air

Francis Poole

WORK IS GOOD FOR YOU

We spent high school summers stooping
to paint endless guard rails
on the county roads.
The beach-bound cars whipped by your thrust-
out rear;
Up front, the white paint dazzled so
the bosses warned us to wear shades—
I did of course, some didn't.

In time I came almost to disregard
the humming cars,
though on a two lane highway 60 was
the rule,
and there was always the conceived
indignity,
plowed into and your ass wrecked,
bending over with a face in paint.

More things remembered:
Slipping on a bank behind the rails, ridiculous,
I soaked my hand and arm, watch, ring, my
shirt and pants, in paint,
a whitewashed man
(the hazards of the job—I did my duty).

Simple Dim, who'd played away his life in
minor leagues,
swung brushes like a bat (we ducked)
told dirty jokes, loafed, doubled any
push-ups,
managed to perfect his tan,
and painted with a sheer reluctance,
to the foreman's frowns
(who warned us all to "watch it"; I
would shrink).

One day we watched Dim stand uniquely still,
a pace into the road,
and as the cars charged boldly by
he dignified himself, bent back,
and thrust his paint brush forward from
the waist.
He decorated cars,
one clean white stripe (the purest art).
They fired him of course,
and most were largely pleased—
the work goes on.
But I still dazzle at that silly brilliance.
Dim strides tight
through life
Kissing no ass, nor letting tools of death brush
his.

James McGowan