

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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A Chapbook for DAVID IGNATOW

edited by David M. Stocking

Cover Photo by Gerard Malanga

Illustrated by Rose Graubart

BPJ Chapbook No. 14

INTRODUCTION

The Beloit Poetry Journal owes a very special debt to David Ignatow, and it is with profound gratitude and affection that we present this chapbook in tribute to him.

In the early 1950's David Ignatow helped us get our start. As Associate Editor and then as a member of the Editorial Board he encouraged poets to send their work to this fledgling magazine in some unknown part of the Midwest. He

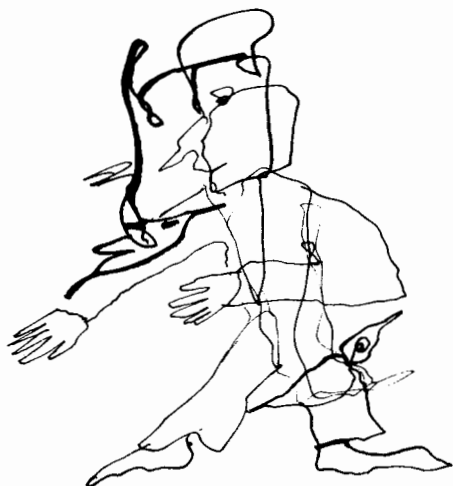
remained on the masthead until 1958, editing in 1955 one of our finest chapbooks: *Walt Whitman: A Centennial Celebration*. In 1963 he returned as guest editor with an equally distinguished collection: *William Carlos Williams: A Memorial Chapbook*.

It was very fitting that David should edit our issues honoring Whitman and Williams. These most American of our poets have a special importance to him, Williams in particular. David was one of the many who had a deep appreciation and affection for the kindly, sharp-seeing older poet who had befriended and encouraged these poets when they needed exactly what that great-spirited man could give. The Williams chapbook that David assembled radiates that feeling.

It has been most gratifying to put together this fourth of our chapbooks honoring an American poet (Frost was the third), not only for the privilege of publishing these eloquent poems, but for what our readers will have to guess—the covering letters from the contributors, with their private and affectionate and often moving tributes to David Ignatow for the friendship, guidance, encouragement, and shared humanity that he has furnished them in their various needs. What David Ignatow gained from Williams he has generously passed on to others when they needed it, as the present editor can also testify.

The poems in this issue variously attest to the presence, the power, and the humanity of David Ignatow, who is our metropolitan man, sensitive to the variety, the ironies, the agonies of contemporary urban living. If many of the poems we have the honor to present here are strong and sharp, it is tempting to think that they have been honed to a fine edge on the carborundum of David Ignatow's life and work.

David M. Stocking



DAVID

The verbal
blade of
the blade at
your back

has caught me
between the
shoulderblades
so often

it's carved
out a little
place for itself,
my metal

A. R. Ammons

TWO POEMS**The Bent Tree***for David Ignatow*

I find a young ash bent to the ground
by a heavier tree blown across it.

The fallen tree has rotted now,
and crumbled from the bent one.

Free, the bent one stays as it was,
bent bow of mysterious intent.

There is intent, but no tension.
It grows the way it was bent.

It holds, mild as a flower,
the force of the sky.

At Night

I go out in the yard now
at night, and stand and listen.

I hear the water coming down
from the hill, intent in passage.

It passes in the way it has made,
intelligence through a mind,

wearing it, changing it,
heaven passing through earth.

I hear the ancient song,
and I sing back.

Wendell Berry

STORM'S STUBBORN, MY BROTHERS

I feign sleep on my pillow.

Then, diminished fury.

And a thunderstone
shines in ramparts of my brothers.

Skies are shared, and tumults.

And I have known
such dreaming in each
of my brothers, in his downtime youth
that touches on Eden.

The thunderstone glitters.

Can I stand clear
of an angel of death?

Lo, between dawn and dawn
and between us are drawn
bladed centuries . . .

And in you, my brother,
is snared the self I fear—
and my death, looking on.

Contentions search me as I draw near
the quieting, common ground of sleep.

I breathe deep,
and I find no fault in your dreaming
as I survey again and review
tenantless Eden.

It is by intention
our place. And downtime
it is constant to you, prime to you, true to you.

Sam Bradley

TWO POEMS**He Was One Liked Light Around Him**

A weed of an old man,
he looks at the lamp hanging on the wall:
"That's not from these parts. I know what light
is.

What my grandmother used for light
was shaped like a bullfrog in cast iron.
It held about a cupful of hot oil,
lard or tallow, and had a lid.
The wicks was sticks lapped round and round
tight with cord. They sat in a kind of funnel
and stuck out about ten inches
between the belly and the lid,
two at a time at a slant.

And attached to the frog
was such an iron rod, size of a pencil,
pointed at the end so you could poke
the lantern in wood anywhere you wanted.
That was the first light in this country,
my grandfather said. He was one
liked light around him."



The Deitsch

"I can't understand it," Fred Braun's friend says.

"They've been here over two hundred years
and still they talk the *Deitsch*."

If this same city man

went to Tennessee to the bald plateau
of Monteagle with its unsodded graves,

hill sand, and cut-over woods,

and lived with the mountain people who sing

O Feeble Man and make Elizabethan chairs

horses cannot pull apart,

would he then understand?

Millen Brand

ELABORATION*for David Ignatow*

The movement of a willow bough over the water
Is in the wind's power
And is continuous and irregular, slower
Than the wind's metric; it is confined
To an arc that the willow bough can never alter,
Known only in your mind.

And beneath it on the water-surface, the same
but deeper,
Deeper than the willow crest in the sky,
Is the counter-measure, more beautiful, where
your eye,
Seeing on the film of the stream
What cannot be, makes the dance of ink on paper,
Neither idea nor dream.

Hayden Carruth

Flakes — enough
to make one
shiver and —
sprinkled on
every
thing — savor.

Cid Corman

THREE POEMS

the michelangelesque
night

 goes off center
lesion of the eye decentered
night compels silence
the silence shatters & combustion is
trauma

 (in a tangle of hands & feet
 preventing myself
 I talk wild on perfection)

I howl at the wall the wall swallows & the echo
inside answers my strange shape

my nature

 an abstraction
conforming to errant air cells
follows threads of the exact
surgical
conscience

the pedagogic eye leaps learning from bird
to bird without hesitation suspicion
clear assurance
as when I throw myself down on the bed to read
words . . .

A. de Palchi
(translated by S. Raiziss)

DEPTHS

Mind brooding over the waters
Is not like the waters themselves.
They evade inching intelligence,
 Keeping the oceanic.

Study the bottom of the sea,
Strange creatures walk there.
They are no stranger than we,
 Keeping the oceanic.

I do not make the tides to go,
I do not make them come,
They in their own motion are
 Keeping the oceanic.

Off my port a cold shark
Shows himself, fin above water,
In night. He is in the dark,
 Keeping the oceanic.

Flash my being alive
To mankind living in my time,
Going on short tenure,
 Keeping the oceanic.

Richard Eberhart

THREE PIECES

3 pieces attached by their succession one early a.m., March 19th 1975, after reading the first part of David Ignatow's Facing the Tree; so that these 3 pieces are after reading David, and for David.

In the Late Afternoon

If I am climbing a stairway it can be tipped so that I am descending. What is the difference between up and down? the size of things brings all such consideration to notions of texture; we are too small to live the real distances . . .

And what of the dark that seems to bleed from the feet; supple and slippery like water, flowing through rock and nettle bush, unharmed and grown long in the late afternoon?—That same liquid dark that fills the earth just below the grass; that overflows in the late afternoon, pouring in long rivers out of the roots of the trees . . .

If I lie down forever, or for a time, and then stand up, or take an intermediary position, as for instance, sitting on a chair in the late afternoon, we are speaking of textures no thicker, in the real distances, than the long shadows of the late afternoon, where a man and a chair spill back in a long darkness . . .

If I want to swim out into the ocean until I have grown too tired to return, can I see the ocean as a part of me, being mostly water myself? To struggle against the ocean is to struggle against myself. It's only because the ocean is soft and yielding, and because the ocean rejects nothing and takes everything into its flesh, into its democracy of life and death, that the imperial man is afraid of the open chance . . .

I was climbing once, through myself and through the world; a stairway climbing a stairway; coming up out of the past, trying to make the future before it fell back behind me. And it

was like a texture of expectations, because there in the un-lived future I lived already. And I was climbing through the world like a snake through the grass, spilling like the shadows that pour from the trees in the late afternoon . . .

The Overlap of Worlds

The furniture is like models of animals. You can see the dining room table as a kind of bull standing with its cows, the chairs. Or the easy chair with its footstool, the cow with its calf . . .

And they live a life, as if a spirit world and this were overlapped, oblivious to the other.

In moonlight these animals soften and resume their lives, browsing the rugs; as we, upstairs, asleep in our dreams, resume our lives; overlapping and oblivious to the other . . .

One Who Journeys in a Tree

In the tree the stairway of osmosis—up up through trunk to branch, thinner branch, out out into a twig, a leaf—expire!

I should love to photosynthesize in one leaf lost at the top of a tree. To be useful for no reason at all . . .

A door in a tree. A stairway that grows thinner and thinner into the narrowing of a twig; one diminishes, as it were, into a journey. The traveler dying down into a journey that ingests him until he is only the journey and those distances that you cannot see . . .

The trunk of this tree looks thick enough to hold a spiral stairway. I open the bark door and step in, and am suddenly at peace. As I climb the stairs with a kind of spiritual sweetness I know that I ruin myself; I grow smaller as the stairs narrow, like the traveler who diminishes in the diminishing road; and I do not call this dying, but metamorphosis . . .

Russell Edson



A LONG WAY TO LOOK

A long way to look—
almost to the bow
of the horizon.

There are things there
I cannot see,
and yet I do

see them.

They are deep and secret:
Tooth and bone,
knife and arrow.

Ghosts

and their congeners.

The stone inheres.

Unknown

its measure.

Theodore Enslin

TWO POEMS**The Machine As Jewish Mother**

She knows you're tired, hungry,
down to your last few coins.
She murmurs and prepares.

Her eyes light up. Her breath
steams like a cup of soup.
You whisper thanks and drink

the broth of her breasts, and chew
bits of chicken,
whole again, beyond confusion.

The Line

The belt, a metal river, runs
its mile-long gauntlet of machines
bending above it like its mother
or goddess of hammers and shears.

O, lovely mother
of aluminum and oil,
mane of levers
and eyes of wheel,

fingers of knives
and kiss of laser,
breath of fume,
embrace of wire,

build slowly while I sing this song.
Because our lives are flesh, and short.
Because your art is longer, your
boys of piston, girls of gear.

William Heyen

TWO POEMS**Promise**

Let me tell you again
where I must go
Back to the farm
without you without them
without you or them

I must go without wife
without sons
and live on the farm alone
feed every animal
draw all the milk myself

I must hear myself breathe
so the song will come
of the wheat I grow
and the power to work
and master the ground

To bury the past in darkness
and wake every day
in the smell of the cold
off the hay and the smart
burn of the wood stove fire

Home will be bearing the tale
of the farm I work
without you without them
while sun smashes down
and rain bears away my life

Songs For A Windy Night*(and mutual enlightenment, Dave)*

- 1 Winter man follows his heart
sharp in the wind.
Under his hand is his heart
crying Resist.
Frozen his hand falls cut
at the wrist.
- 2 Let me hear what you know.
In dead water dive
to catch the undertow
- 3 Hunting a master you came close
asking the way.
I have this to say: let the wind
take the wind away.
- 4 Hear the land beat under your armpits
as you walk
swinging your arms over the dirt
they will one day bury you in
under and over all your sweet
lying-down body swinging no arms
- 5 Let me hear the wind whip shut
the live wound in the dead night.
- 6 Too many words are written
and written as if they wore
as if they were the truth. As truth
the truth may be told when words
after words disappear and appear to be
but are not for and not before.

Edwin Honig

THE LEOPARD-NURSER

Since children hear what they will hear, I heard
a man had gone to nurse the leopards.

"Women go?"

I asked, and "yes" they said marveling
in admiration. I envied more than I admired.

Ah! the speechless great hurt leopards
in their woe.

I would go. In a round starry cave
of leaves and moss the green-eyed patients lay;
each beautiful, fluid, and fatal
to all save me, their skilled
and speechless nurse.

Though I grew up, and reassembled letters,
I never lost that cave where dark inhabitants lay.
I learned, at secret length,
that any pain, and any love, remind me
a leopard-nurser's is a metier
by which a child nurses a dangerous beast
to strength.

Josephine Jacobsen

POEM FOR GRANVILLE IVANHOE JORDAN
November 4, 1890-December 21, 1974

Dedicated to Stephen Henderson

I

At the top of your tie
 the dressy maroon number
 with one/small
 gravy stain
 remaining

the knot is now too narrow for your neck

a ridiculous a dustfree/shiny box confines
 your arms and legs
 accustomed to a boxer's hunch a wrestler's
 hauling
 energies at partial rest

3 or 4 A.M. a thousand nights
 who stubbornly retrieved your own
 into
 illumination

 bright beyond blindfiling of
 a million letters at the Post Office which
 never forwarded even one
 of a hundred
 fantasies
 your kitchenkept plans

keeping you awake

West Indian in kitchen exile
alone between the days
and studying the National Geographic Magazines
recording middleclass
white explorations and
excitement
in the places you were forced to leave

no shoes
no teeth

but oxlike shoulders
and hazel eyes that watered
slightly
from the reading you did teach yourself to do

West Indian in kitchen exile
omnivorous consumer of thick
kitchen table catalogs
of seeds for sale
for red
bright flowers

seeds

slick and colorful
on the quick
lush pages
advertising pear and
apple trees
or peaches
in first bloom

who saved for money orders
for the flowers
for the trees
who used a spade
and shovel

III

To this you have come

a calm a concrete pit

contains your corpse
above the spumespent ending of the surf
against the mountain trees and fertile pitch
of steeply clinging dirt

*"Sleep on Beloved
Take Thy Rest"*

the minister
eyes bare beneath the island light
intones a feeling mumbo jumbo

*"ashes to ashes
dust to dust"*

the village men
wrists strained to lumped up veins and cartilage
(from carrying the casket)
do not pray
they do not sing

*"A-bide with me
fast falls the eventide"*

It's afternoon
It's hot
It's lit by sun that cannot be undone
by death

June Jordan®

A WORLD OF MEN

My Father and Uncle
eating together.
One does the
cooking
the other
the clearing.
43 years a clerk
37 years a carrier,
how they hated
each other
when I was young.
Happiness? Success?
5 years after cancer
I too am here.
"Bernie, you wash it.
I'll dry it. He'll
put them away."
Toy trains
crossing the bay,
tiny biplane
in the sky.
Thanks, Arthur,
for the dinner.

Milton Kessler



INTIMATION

Some trick of light

in the reflection of sunny kitchen against
a dark wall in back of the yard

makes this morning's daffodils
that shout for joy, thronging their stone vase,
leaning outward in a ring,
golden, hilarious, ready for anything,
for spring—

makes them into a cluster
of yellow chrysanthemums,
no less beautiful,

but very still,
facing November,
facing frost.

TWO POEMS

Vision 1938 Paris

In the very busy Saint Germain in Paris not too distant from Cafe de Flore I saw a man in an old suit that was more than merely a covering for his body. It was part of the man himself. It had suffered with him; it was like a brownish grazed skin. The man was not standing and was not walking. As he walked he stood still and as he stood still he moved forward a little. His face was gentle and rosy, but from his forehead and cheeks furrows crowded into his face. His eyes looked out high above everything they met and yet they were waiting for something to come up to them. From near at hand the left arm was held close to the body as if the body would not let go of the arm and yet he held his hand stretched out slightly. I put a note into it and then I did not know (for I dared not wait to find out) whether the hand went back to the man and whether he put the money in his pocket, or did the hand move on out to another seeking for another hand to which he could give money. This man was living in the center between giving and taking, between distance and nearness, between old age and youth. A few days passed; I went to call on this man persons of my acquaintance referred to as the poet César Vallejo; but the concierge at the building where he lived in one small room told me that he had died only a few days previous, on May 15th, Good Friday. The cause of death was never determined. But at last today I remembered that man; he sits at a table just to the left of the doorway of the Flore and as a boy I would sit with him for hours.

**From CHELMAXIOMS: THE MAXIMS/
AXIOMS/MAXIOMS OF CHELM**

The Ayre of If

i.

And if the new man, in forgetfulness
of his conversion, were to watch the russet
of eucalyptus branches that—a lustrum
and more—had lived upon his mantle; if
unmindful of his metamorphic gifts,
his vision knelt along the red prayer-rug,
and he found ancient measure of himself,
a measure made of openness and stealth,
within the walls he knew, before the dust
of patient and impatient books he had read,
the same green ink, two letters from the dead
poet, the pack that bears in white and blue
and black the adjective for *veritas*,
that filters toxins to a residue
which, although fatal, is innocuous:
would new or old be truer or be true?

ii.

Or if he cast aside the castanets
of "lustrum," "russet," "dust" as vulgar clacks
of shells that shook when time struck hard
against

the hide of emptiness with non-events,
the mendicant flamenco of his mind,
the fracas and fiasco of a line,
the habit of the uninhabited,
bedraggled semblances of ritual,

and saw instead that there was neither rhyme
nor pararhyme that chimed within his acts,
that all he mimed was unrepeating, un-
repentant, nothing added now could sum
with what had been subtracted, every room
or noon as random as hullabaloo,
however long his life revised, he'd still
not find the full and final anagram:

would hopelessness become his last content?

The Phantom Chant

(Fourth Finding/Maxiom 6)

The phantom feeds on stillness.
The phantom feeds on fracas.

The phantom feeds on amphibrachs,
on Agri Dagis, Ararats,

on waves and woodways and the veer
of sinuous non sequiturs,

elusive glides and fricatives
and turbid liquids; and he lives

on any will that will not rest
in Pumbeditha or the Besht,

or in the lens from Amsterdam
or Underwood of Mandelstam,

but wanders all of them—or none—
on phantom paralimnions.

Beneath the light of lakeside quays
and lantern light, the phantom feeds

on far more phemes that never near
unless the phantom stands to hear,

on *Vast and Versal Lexicons*
and on hallucinariums,

on lizards' flight, on karaites,
on palimpsests, on pindarites'

paean, Schliemanns, citrons,
and on the perfect woman;

but neither stillness, fracas, all
of Chelm—inhabitants and walls—

can fill his duodenum:
the phantom is a cavern.

The phantom is a mountain;
the span of his jejunum

is more than any pararhyme
can fathom with its plummet line;

Goliath is a gonium
against the girth of phantom; Samson—

tresses at the full—is less
than just one hair upon his chest;

and on his lectern—where no tent
of myrmidon would more than speak—

sanhedrins of Saadya Gaons
grumble but must grovel when

he burnishes and brandishes
his shafts of exegesis:

the phantom casts a javelin
beyond the reach of reason

and then a second javelin
beyond the force of fiction,

and—last—without a let,
one single breath and flex—

he casts a eucalyptus
beyond the force of force.

The phantom is a forest.
The phantom is an isthmus.

He has dismaying sinews,
the power and the ruse:

the boulders he can lift,
behemoth cannot shift;

the mazes he can track,
Mercator did not map;

The dances he can dance
leave fanfaronade wan,

and rodomontade pants
before the phantom's done

with sarabands of resonance
and farandoles of difference,

and then—upon the other hand—
with sarandole and faraband.

The phantom is a fountain.
The phantom has a yataghan.

He leaps upon leviathan;
no whirlwind can defeat him.

He rides astonished axioms;
no lemma can unseat him.

When he would camp in caves of doubt
no faith can ever thrust him out.

When he would vagabond with trust,
no doubt can tempt, insidious.

When he is bent on paradox,
the straightest arrow ends in knot;
and yet no text can twist him back,
he cracks the hardest hapax.

The phantom's galimatias
can overwhelm sagacious.

The phantom finds a limit.
The phantom passes it.

The phantom is a desert.
The phantom's thirst is endless.

He is more swift, more agonist
than any pensive tortoise.

Allen Mandelbaum

A LIFE OF CRIME

Frail friends, I love you all!
Maybe that's the trouble,
storm in the eye of a storm.
Everyone wants too much.
Instead we gratefully accept
some stylized despair:

suitcoats left hanging
on folding chairs, snow falling
inside a phone booth, cows
scouring some sad pasture.
You know the sort of landscape,
all sensibility and no trees.

Nothing but space, a little
distance between friends.
As if loneliness didn't make us
responsible, and want accomplices.
Better to drink at home
than to fall down in bars.

Or to read all night a novel
with missing heirs, 513 pages
in ten-point type, then lay my body
down, a snarl of urges
orbited by blood,
dreaming of others.

William Matthews



TOTEMS (VI)

Somewhere a knife is sleeping in its own shadow—
 And so the shadow of the knife is sharper than
 the knife itself,
 Since the Shadow never sleeps; or sleeps and
 feeds at once—
 Both at home on the third rail somewhere toward
 Brooklyn.

There are no surprises here in the green shadow
 of money
 As sour as shchi. But there are eyes
 everywhere, larger
 Than clocks in subways or clocks in police
 substations where time is—
 How can be? Where time's night always? Yet
 is—yet time is—money.

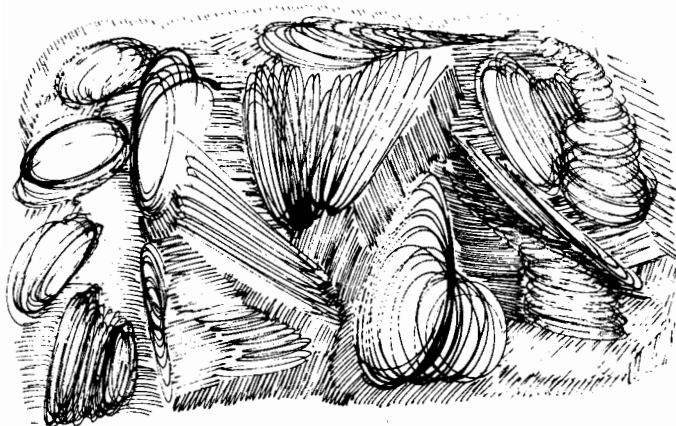
Certainly some of these clocks are the eyes of a
night heron—
Or David Ignatow! Telling and reading the times
by foxfire
By fictions and fractions of many-foiled failing
and falling so-busy,
Bodies—O Jesus the money-felled swampsky
greengrosses their light!

For the night heron, fishing in his dark waters,
the lights
Of these falling dogstars and starlets are the
fire sales of the spirit.
These shades are so fit and full (sometimes)
they fatten that shadow
Where the knife sharpens its teeth feeding on
misery and hate.

It is here in this shadow the night heron David
keeps heart's-eye open.
His head turns; clock/wise; he is wise in the
ways of subways:
(Where the angry ghost-fish slide or glide in the
shapes of their hungers)
These nightrivers underground may lead to
death or home.

Still it is hard to stand in the swamplight of
failing systems—
And on one leg to boot!—counting the dead and
seeking
(All ways) the shape of the human. We must
let him go
(Sometimes) (friends) (alone) to look at
(perhaps) the moon.

Thomas McGrath



THE SHUTTLES

Remembering glitter on the first river
I begin to imagine the chances against
any fabric ever occurring
threads at last becoming original torn cloth
night numberless with lights
flying apart in galaxies I reach out
to imagine becoming one anything
once
among the chances in the rare
aging fabric happening
all the way for the first time

W. S. Merwin

TWO POEMS

Delay

Well, ladies and gentlemen, the tinned voice
of the pilot said
We seem to be having trouble with the landing
gear
Which is why you hear this loud shaking sound.
We are therefore returning to home port, hope
to land
Without incident, will keep you informed.
The stewardesses worked on equipment in
their booth.
Then many of the ladies and gentlemen
Moved from where they sat in holiday or
business absorption
Over next to some child and engaged
In a great deal of peaceful conversation—
Reminiscences of their own, sighs, questions of
the children,
Till the gear
Jolted itself into landing, and the pilot
Came on again, to regret the inconvenience.

Rest

Right at the freeway where the sounds
Drift up the canyon, the Sunday rush
Rush begins early, lines of cars
Close on each other, dash to dash, follow

Across the gap and in the swale resound
The rush and rush, resources heavily
Lent in green fields and going on,
A measure of the day.

But then some closure sends a delicate drift
Of sounds like pottery splintered, lightly enough
Leading off a siren long, to be silenced
As Sunday finally lends its shattered rest.

Josephine Miles



ALREADY

I see dust flower on everything,
ashes float through the window and bloom.

Night's already here,
pressing its heavy door against me
on smooth oiled hinges.

The moon turns aside a slate face,
buries it in a grave of clouds.
My road dies behind me, eaten by grass.

Already pale light bleeds from the leaves,
like fingers groping for life—
as they touch it, it goes.

Ralph J. Mills, Jr.

DISCOVERY

for David Ignatow

We found the truth
but you didn't like it
and so left us.

You didn't like it
because it explained everything
and made jokes on the side.

You said it wasn't that easy,
that amusing, that much better
than the old error.

So you went back out
to experience, writing how strange
it was, how great.

We made a joke about that too,
then took the truth out of its box
and asked it make you sorry.

Leonard Nathan

THE AMERICA OF A MAN

only
if his country is craggy enough
bones stark as the badlands
mind full of rivers
will old age
neck to neck with his
stretched youth
gasping in flashbacks end
in a dead heat. time
has worked him over.
cataclysms that shook him
to his rooted toes
moved on, leaving squatters'
ruins on the grounds. flesh
pockets stealthily
collect a lifetime, after
a long parting it's
sudden as lifting the
tentflap on a sideshow

once the mountain hurtles
nightmare into morning
stones follow down
the slope, a dry
shattering
thru the redwoods of his hair
shells blown in
with sea garbage
cut the dunes of his
skin, torn crabs
hooked at the corners

drag the mouth lopsided. now
the cheeks don't match
tilted
by earthquakes, promontory
chin sliding into the
caverns of the throat. hidden
icecaps have crept
treacherously under
seasons of snow, toboggan
ruts coasting
his face. but always

the level cobalt
blue of twin
crater lakes burns the cold bite of
prehistory
far into the haunted
skull. up the shore of each
temple climbs the immortal
reach resisting
death by water by venom,
lurks noiseless in
crevices across the
bluff of his forehead. there
facts are the fossils
fish ferns feathery
centipedes that before his dawn
had sped in the early
shove of the wind
when ape-laughter chattered
whooped
wept in the trees

his head wanders among
what rich raw things
once skittered
between his lips then
drowned in spittle, tongue
both greedy & sorry,
teeth telling the truth of
eons in caries
of the archaic rockies. moon-
pores have dug deep
on his surface.

geologist of this
materia humana
dusting off its friable strata
refractions faults shelves
clarities of quartz, how soon
will you map & label the
losses
in the signed evolution of his
selves his peninsulas
oceans gorges all the men of him
changing
under one name

Sonia Raiziss



TWO POEMS

David Ignatow at the Bar

What did you say a propos was?

One of the etceteras.

I like that.

Fill er up again!

An Admonition by David Ignatow

to his second-best pen:

Get thee to a nunnery!

Carl Rakosi

ORPHANS

for David Ignatow

In Ireland they were put in foundling homes,
so many sprung up after the great potato blight,
mothers left them in the fields, after they'd
scratched
the earth up, or on doorsteps . . . and the beadles
took them
into the foundling homes. There ninety percent
died
in their first year for lack of touch.

The final insult is to be dragged into the
orphanage
screaming "I'm not an orphan." Not as it should
be—
with the orphans, who have nothing, on the
bottom
of the heap. Quite the contrary, it is they
who proudly look down on the non-orphans,
whose parents
have judged them unworthy, who still live in
the city
nearby, who could save them if they cared.
You see that skyscraper, the one with the lights
that change all night, the colors of the rainbow,
that's where your mother lives and works and
has her
boyfriends, Jim, Gary, Gerald, bedspring-
squeakers, huggers, tiptoes, laughing
at her question, "Did you forget the rubbers?"
Your mother, man, would spread her legs for
any man
who asked, while joking in the hospital that you
needed no privacy, being too little for all that.

So they took away the only screen you had
and let you cry in public while someone else's
roses
wilted in the sun.

In the orphanage the inmates fall in love, and
Juliet of the sorrows
turns twelve and is taken off like a dog
to be put in still another home, the Francis
Willard,

down a dusty road. They'll let you ride along
if you won't scream, and see her in the door
where she will lie quietly as if strapped down
and let her breasts grow and keep secret your
vow

to meet at twenty-one, under the clock, at noon,
and love forever and hate them all.

Donald, whose grandma came on Christmas and
gave him

an apple, the only thing she had, is the only kid
with pubic hair. Together

all of you take a shower in a huge stall
and Nazi ladies in fur coats

are escorted through to look at you; one girl
of twelve is lovely and she stares. It could
be love, but it's only more shame, and hate.

The rich who care and have each other
are strolling through

and smelling clorox and wondering what
they'll give this year, the girl stares

as if you're almost human. Her mother drags
her on.

Donald fights. The boys cut pictures of their
fathers

out of *Life* magazine. They're fighting, too, in
jungles

overseas. Christ knows who a father is.

The matrons are chosen because they can wear the white uniforms with thick starch—polar regions, talcum, annihilation. Their eyes are always angry, ready to carry out the Court's will, be it Death or Neglect.

They enjoy hurling the miserable child down stairs, hearing him weep in the night, enjoy making him eat turnips or whatever makes him throw up, enjoy cutting the blonde girl's braids, throwing them into the toilet, reminding her that no mother wants a lock of that hair to save. They enjoy pinching the small buttons of the girl's nipples, enjoy stuffing bananas up her quivering cunt, they enjoy shouting "Nobody loves you, nobody, not even yourselves," enjoy beating them, then saying "Sit down by that fire escape and learn your multiplication tables," enjoy kicking them black and blue and livid and mottled red, enjoy sending them to school like a chain gang, all dressed in corduroy any cop can spot should they break away and run, up the tarmac road, begging at motorists.

And like a co-conspirator the blue-dressed headmistress with stars on her bosom has shaken hands with the pathetic abandoning parent. What did she say that last time, before stepping over barbed wire to be gone forever? *So long. Be good. I'll write.*

The murdering matrons greeted orphans as equals, credited them with killing off that great detritus of family, emerging alone with a bloody knife, saying "I have cut

my way into the womb of the orphanage.
I am alone."

I am alone! The matrons had always
been alone, always. They could understand.
Orphans were proud—survivors
from another life killed off, a dozen lives.
They were thoroughbreds—pure—
born from vanished breeds.
Why hadn't the train killed them too?
Why hadn't the fire? The bush of tumors?
They were magic. Such survivors
received from the buxom matrons
hate akin to the strokes of love,
hate that went in and out, hate that warmed.

But the children of living drunks
or women who ran off with truckdrivers
or locked their children out to eat mulberries
in the churchyard tree were marked as weak,
unworthy of love or hate, hardly worth
hitting—they were not scarred over
like orphans, not hard as agates
though like orphans they had no surface
that could even bear a kiss. They wept
more, they stared less.

Thus, while the orphans had ice cream
or were rocked to sleep
in the valleys of buxom matrons who had at last
relented, deciding to love only
the most needy cases, we stared at skyscrapers
where our mothers took their lovers down.
We wet our pillows with tears in the narrow
coffins of our bunk beds.
We vowed to kill orphans, whose gurgles
we heard down the hall as they enjoyed

their intolerable freedoms,
far past midnight, learning to laugh
like rats in alleys, learning to survive
as only the children of true spirits can,
whose mothers are stars,
whose fathers are ash,
whose cousins are the pebbles around rose
bushes which would not even tear
the nylons of false mothers as they fled.

envoi
for marilyn

And the journalist will say you lie
you didn't wear uniforms, you didn't suffer,
you weren't torn from your senile grandmother's
arms
you weren't forced to lift your hand
even to wash ten thousand dishes.
You spooned no pond until it was empty
and no one, no one, ever touched you.
He will tell it like it was,
as if being there disqualified you
from telling us.
He was right, no one touched you—touch,
Marilyn, as you knew, is such a gentle thing.
So gentle you touch me even now
who never came into my room or lay your
life frail as a rose petal against my face.

David Ray

HOW IT MUST BE

Some one named Gus
must always be an Irish
doorman in winter
bending to knot your tie
in the icy fluorescent
lobby of your earliest
apartment.

It must always
be early, before school,
and Gus must have boils
and bad breath and glare
at your collar with thin
rivering veins in the whites
of his eyes.

His nose, too,
must be rosy with rivers,
and he must be muttering, *Now
don't go kissing all the girlies,
Jamie—*

at which point a door
must slam, a cab must peel
out, and someone named Goldie
Blumenthal must glide
in on a carpet of cold
air after a hard night, her high
heels and jewelry clanking.

And Gus
must drop everything and bolt
for the elevators,
flashing his buttons
and rubbing his Adam's
apple, his perfect purple
tie and Windsor knot.

James Reiss

**ZARITSKY'S CHILDREN, & OTHER POEMS
FOR THE RICH**

- 1 Zaritsky with 10 children
10 children
the rest of us who sweat
to feed them
woe o woe o wind
sweet children
locked in factories
o worse off than his dog

- 2 derision of the working class
the poor
what was a working girl to them?
o money money's
wisdom in this world
past all reproach

- 3 (a song)
o mother o mother
cat's licking the butter
hen's laying eggs
bride's got a veil
broom wears a prayer-shawl
poor man stays poor
children suck fingers
women die starving

- 4 bosses with hearts of stone
lived in distrust of
workers a poor working man
would drink a little whiskey
called him a drunkard
to his face

cheap whiskey was
their wine a golden goblet
is no cup
a working man's no master
in his house
o fatherer of worlds
where does it end

5 A POEM FOR MILLIONAIRES

viz Rothschild face of gold
conspicuous consumer
died like any beggar
once went to his vault
for money speculation
trapped inside
all doors were closing on him
seven days of hunger sucked
blood from his own fingers
Rothschild Rothschild
strutted before kings
he said he couldn't die
of hunger
ended like the rest
he lies there
broken into pieces
bag of bones

*these from the Yiddish
in honor of Ignatow
Milwaukee
April 1975*

Jerome Rothenberg

TWO POEMS**Double Vision**

In that place there are no atlases,
no lighthouses, no laws. No gravity.
The saints unsanctified,
my language lies undone.

My arms are seared with numbers and my hands
detonate when they reach out.
Circles read "You Are Here"—there.

It is a black arrow trembling in a yellow diamond;
"What is it?" he screamed, his eyes were fallen
rocks;

"Danger," I replied.

"You're wrong," he said. "It is an arrow."

Dreamless I ran unsteadied in that night
and prayed for tolerant winds to sing me home,
but I would set my stores by that disordered
ocean.

Eyes by my images

O fire I fear

I am the star in the East

I rise in dry places and fall knowing

my heart's arrhythmia, my double vision
are handicaps. They are all I have.

I am at the bottom of that rock
from which altars are built.

**Waking a Soul
in a Tree Near West House**

The bark of your face
ages in this tree,
your light beams through it;
knots ripple out,
eyes, first circles, see.

Grace Schulman

THE TASK

19 years ago I wore my Davega leather jacket
for the first time
12 years ago my belly swelled
and forbid it. if now I can wear it again
what do I say to it:
welcome back? or I'm back?
o my jacket I loved you ignorantly when I was
young
and now I lust not for that absence
of consciousness
but for the unforeseeable quality
of the second chance

Armand Schwerner

TWO POEMS

The Bats

The fires of your hair that curl in a locket

Something archaic as the autumn that strafes
the white

pine in the dusk at seven
below the settling light

As the sweet-faced cat arches and rubs my leg

Jumps and claws at the chair
pivots to transfix the chipmunk under the oak
near the beheaded robin

And the road twines beyond the house and to
the timber
set old as the earth of Adam

Yet as new as the mountains might
seem thru the jaunt of some fantastical Dracula

Where soon against this scaping
the snows will clot the sky and in the city like
an Ali Baba

I shall speak to the doors

Tho there I know how the track of their radars
wait
to scent the metallic soul

When the vault of the clouds glides back
against the light to shear it
thin as a fracture of bone

But here too what flight shall not stutter in their
wind
on the unassailable green
hell of the creatures

Who brood over the stones
as if with the nausea of your absence

Like that which the mouse must know
when the sickening cat's breath seals over the
mouse hole

Between that dark and the dark
where the furred bodies unfurl under the moon

On the skin wings
tensed like membranes of the unborn
who have not found their names

The Front

Out there, out there
he is not yet come
home from the moony peep show
or from the broiled meat
cut lean as the dead bones
so that a son may eat

Where a mother counts and cleans
the meat bones
again, again
for the soup for an only son
because a son
must be healthy
wealthier than a Jew-skeleton

Tho she feeds him
no sweet:
that which would be worse
than to be dead
he is good and must eat the good
raw milk, vitamins
and his wheat bread, everyday
and the broiled meat

She knows he will eat
or it is quick, quick to bed
to make no noise that might wake
a father and mother
while they lie dead

He has his eye drops
and the compress for his head
and his wool scarf
and the enema
for naughty hands taught
where they are not to be

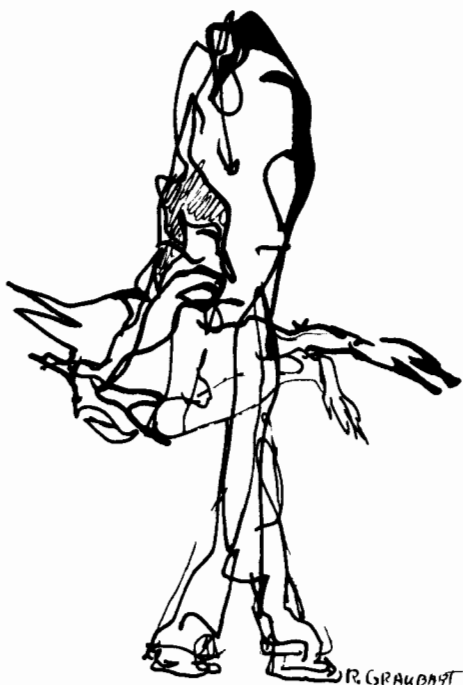
And how old is he
as old as the dead?
or the fur chubby teddy
he cuddles to sleep
or the yellow-soft rabbit who creeps
oh bunny
will they broil you

But listen, oh listen
he beamed only to be their sun
their bright one
younger than one, two, or anything
new but mother's hero
in the old bad world

As you might have
to have had a father coo
don't cry, don't cry
we hear you thru the stone
our sonny who plays alone
so sad he can't come home

Out there, out there
near pigeon at the tree
until the war is done
past time to tell the news

Hugh Seidman



TWO POEMS

On My Portrait by Rose Graubart

I never thought
My mouth was lost
In such darkness,
Such desperate darkness.
Smeared in ashes
Almost a whole facefull.
Or is it the asshole of the world
I'm talking my way through.
To the light, Rose,
To the light!

Selected Bibliography

Philo, the author of:
Alexander, or That Dumb
Animals Have Reason;

On Eternity;
On the Cherubim,
And the Flaming Sword,
And Cain the First Man
Created out of Man;

On the Confusion of Tongues;
That the Worse
Is Wont to Attack the Better;
On Drunkenness;
On Flight and Finding;
Who is the Heir
Of Divine Things;

On the Change of Names;
On the Prayers and Curses
Uttered by Noah When
He Became Sober;
On Dreams, That they are
God-Sent;
On the World.

Theos, kurios,
In diaspora.

Harvey Shapiro

THE DRIVING INSTRUCTOR

I overtook a man who was walking with the aid of two metal canes with arm-grips. He spoke to me, explaining that he had a weak heart and asking me to assist him. I did, walking beside him and letting him hold on to my arm as we crossed the street. Then I stayed with him for several blocks.

He was born in France, of Yugoslav parents. He had been to Yugoslavia as a journalist. He was now working in a driving school. I said this must be dangerous. He said no, for there were double controls, so he didn't worry.

I said that life in France was dear. He said it cost 30,000 francs for a meal in one of the restaurants we were passing, 50,000 in another. Old francs, he said, for I must have looked astonished. He said that foreigners came to France and they were hit ("*on les tape*"). People seemed to think all foreigners were rich—this wasn't so, many of them had made economies in order to come. What did they want? To drink a little. But the minute "they" saw a pigeon they hit him.

I said that bad things could happen to foreigners in any country, and then they would think all the people were bad, but this wasn't so. My son Tony's suitcase had been ransacked at one of the airports, his Super 8 millimeter movies stolen. Tony had asked, "Why did the man do that to me?", and I had told him that some people did these things, but he must not therefore think badly of all people.

The driving instructor listened to this without saying a word. I expected him to say that he understood my feelings on the subject and approved of the way I had handled it, but he only listened with a faint smile.

We parted at the Boulevard St. Michel, shaking hands. He said that his car was across the street. It had been a pleasure. I said, for me too—it had been a pleasure.

Louis Simpson



ACCEPTING THE WATCH

—a speech for David Ignatow—

Upon your wrist where time taps
little hands, the time has come
to greet you from your friends
whose ways are yours, whose faces
turn toward you: turn toward them.

These years you hold in line
for all of us who care—we would
advance your claim, add others.
Carry them where you like, say
we are there with you, say,

“Ours is this time.”

William Stafford

TWO POEMS**Mean Feet**

A rib knit, a sweater you cannot do
without. We have been inside so long
the windows itch. Suppose we have to speak;
suppose it is a loose knot in a piece of
fishline. Dropping it into the subway
grating, we discover someone we know
intimately. A tool & die maker. Fitting,
as the last dream of our father, that
train that never moves on.

The Pen Makes It In The New World

All day I carry this dry pen
as if it were a Saturday night
special. It squeaks; it needs a
good oiling. It would like more
time with the soft rag. Buffing;
it would love to gleam like a long-
range missile screaming toward
a vicious, phantom, enemy.

I keep it in my pocket, this germ
guaranteed to blister the smooth
interior of an African violet, a
flowering cactus in heat. I expose
its pearl handle. I have broken open
its shy barrel.

Terry Stokes

AIR WATER EARTH FIRE: PLACE DES VOSGES

In the Place des Vosges, the old man on the thin chair has reserved his hands and lap for pigeons. The rest of him is not there. A fact is not a fact.

In the Marais, drainage has been too successful. (Undrained fenland stands ten feet above the surrounding fields),

The elms are pollarded and their bark suffers.

Fountains only make matters worse.

The statue at the center is a replica.

One need not choose between water and dust. Here they co-exist, prehistory at either end: water thickened becomes swamp, swamp thinned becomes dust.

We exist in unoccupied spaces of air, and find means to compensate for lack of flight. We seek solid ground even in wind.

The houses being renovated all round are dead beasts.

A current being pumped in has a wood conductor.

A fact is not a fact.

That which is truly alive is never looked at carefully, doesn't need to be looked at carefully. It is taken for granted and transfigured by the taking. Embalming kills for a second time.

The old man is all wings.
Both hands are bedded in feathers
And his ankles.
He has no other body inbetween.
He is still an old man with an old man's gait.

The moment passes into prehistory, and still
the houses are being restored.

He chooses one bird to feed and is that bird.
The others dip their beaks in the fountain.
That too is singing.

Songs exist only in the singing. They have no
facades and die with their circumstances. Their
remains then become mystery and we sing their
ghosts.

This is the philosophy of absolutism: the only
absolutes are ephemeral and specific and apply
only to particular circumstances in a peculiar
environment.

After dust, more dust. Birds need it for flight
and birth—to dance in, dipping the spread tails
in a wide brush, fluttering the wings, swelling
iridescent necks, turning in circles as the wind
erupts and fills all the watching eyes. Swinging
water spouts and dampens dust, linking air
water earth and fire.

Brian Swann

From: THE FIRE POEM: POEM 5

Asking myself why

I had frequented that beauty for so long
without discovering

that it was *major*—
as one says of a poet,
or of a goddess,

ever weighty affairs:

the things of love, or fate, or history—
that he or she is major,

asking myself why I had not before

begged her to aid me

in these poor undertakings,

these odysseys into the world below
bringing in kelp, or iron, or the flood

of mercury in motion thru our lives

(as she might, in a cloud of fire, or a pillar of
same,

unfurl a banner, say, or manifest
a special friendship . . .),

telling her:

now, you see, if you would come,
we could—this continent—

name it, island by island, cape by cape,

mainland by mainland (corn and vine)

city by city of devoted men:

we could name it together, and in no night,

in no night would the names

ever be lost,

but it would take full day

and all the light of all the men who'd ever been,

together,

to drown it out,

and by *common* consent:

Which is impossible . . .

Nathaniel Tarn

FACING THE MUSIC

That creature was one thing,
I another. That creature my eyes
bent too close to the ground
to see.

And yet when he,
my master, least suspected I
was there, One with the scratchy
thickets, part

darkening
those shadows, as he, passing,
paused to lecture his daughter—
watching her,

airs packed
round my heart. Or lectured,
and listened, to that creature,
no more to me

than flutters
in a tree, a puffing prickly to
the skin. I, squatting, learned,
though he was sure

that I
could not, the astounding story
of that one. If nothing can be
one, the humming
left of a
gone humming bird. Ariel he
called it. And calling, Ariel
came: a twig bobbed,
the light
twittered, the air bulged. Well,
it was one thing to be, as he
enjoyed reminding it,
long
pegged and howling—like an air
stuck in its pipe—in a cleft
oak. But what to be
like me,
a shaggy trunk, one meant to run
fourfooted, happily confused,
among the underbrush?
And one
confused indeed as though that
Ariel were stuck in me, howling
yet most musically
to get out.
So I raise my head to sing
and howling strikes my ears
instead.
And yet as I have
heard—myself was it or that one
buzzing round my head?—"Where
the bee sucks there suck I."

ROOMS OF THE OCEAN**i crossing the bridge to the island**

on my left where the river becomes the sea
a flank of water
stretches pewter to the horizon

the Sakonnet river on my right
deep blue between the thighs of shore

over the open ocean the sun has sucked the
sky

leaving below a blanched gray disk

ahead where the Mount Hope bridge
swings over the curve of the bay
the water shines dark blue again

I come to the edge where the island begins

far on the left

a strip of silver foil

(its blue eaten by the sun)

glints just beyond Saint George's tower

ii Newport Bay

crooked in an elbow of beach
and land

a bowl of peacock blue:

its meringue ruffed

by a small land wind

no smell of salt

the north wind
blows against the tide
sweeping the air
white

iii second beach

man/woman
lover/mother
self-fecundating

once on your edges
in your adolescent embrace
I read my summer hunger

I brought
my loves to you one by one
testing them against
your indifference you
my first love and my last
still hiding your secrets:
instruct me

iv winter

in this round gray February afternoon
you tilt a dish of silver in my lap
along your edge
I trace the stiff
white lace
where spindrift
lifted up
and froze

v the light the face gives off

your aura
when the sun bounces against you
gives me back a sea of flints

even under the shadow
of dwindling boulders
you fling me shimmering nets

without the sun
without the white relief
of your breaking

in night's unclosing eye
I know your face is gathering
is gathering its light again

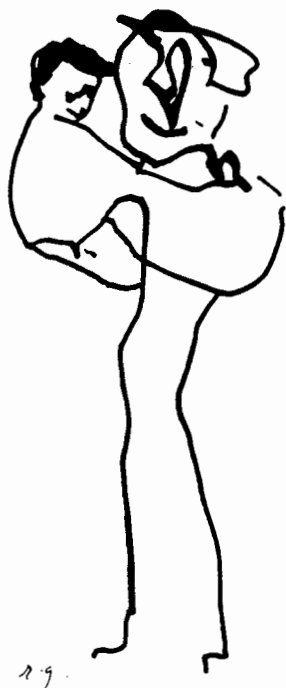
vi beneath the surface

cradled in your watery planet the minim
of life blinks in echoes of light

beneath leviathan I am the bits
of clay the sharks teeth the earbones
of long dead whales

a slip of matter
among your millennia

Ruth Whitman



QUIET NIGHTS

7 May 1975

three years ago today
Ralph Eugene Meatyard
died in Lexington,
Kentucky

people who should know better
ask *who*

I tell them, but when I show
a slide of David Ignatow
I *still* don't know whether he rhymes it with
show
or *off*

PLEASE APPROACH STRAIGHT ON
is what the sign in my photograph says
in a parking lot in
Lawrence, Kansas,

David grasping it,
looking at me
straight back

approach this Ig-Not-Off
straight on!

let there be nights
in this non-focus fat-assed Republic
to hone in
on David's poems,
on Gene's prints;
and everybody, including me,
not be so damn distracted
by the loud-pedal guys
who try
to wear us
out

quiet nights —
'things'
in the shadows

Jonathan Williams

SELF AND SOUL

I

We meet under the cheap light of an insect
graveyard
Like neighboring moons.
We blame each other for names, for marriages;
For that time every morning
Before we tighten a face over the rim.

Your specialty is crossing streets,
My specialty is fear of mirrors.
Your specialty is beautiful women,
Mine is post coitus tristum.

You have learned the artfulness of failure:
A way to meet the disheveled times of day
With accurate pain.

Between us we manage to get older.

II

From the building's highest story,
Almost buried in the blue wound
It has inflicted on the sky,
You try to make out your first thoughts.
All you can think of is a man
Writing with his teeth,
A dancer scraping his arms and legs
Against the narrow walls of his room.
You try to remember what they say:
The hieroglyphics of insomnia
Which you are still decoding.

Paul Zweig