

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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A VISITATION OF PEACOCK FEATHERS

What is it they want?
These eyes on stalks,
These nocturnal ferns
Swarming before me, these eyes
That swim against my window,
The wind splaying their million feelers on the
 glass —

What do they ask?
Their indigo and gold, their emerald
Lights shine like oil on dark water,
They glimmer in the changing air;
Still there is a steadiness, staring, and color
 enters the room
Like the sun through funeral panes.

What should I do, what should I say?
Already I have shown all my card tricks,
I have wiggled my ears, discussed my politics,
And the eyes only stay. I turn up my hands at
 last,
And a rose blooms in either one, a pulse of
 brightness —
Outside the eyes multiply like cells, becoming
 the night.

Beth Horning

SWORDSMITH

The Saracens of Damascus and Spain's
Toledo blademakers
approach a delicate truth
of steel and their swords bear
the river's temperament in battle,
yielding at stress, yet keeping
the ravenous edge.
I've only heard this recently
from one who's seen their work.
I'm sure, however, none can equal
our ancient mastery for loving
ore into life.

After fasting, robed in purity,
we dwell with the anvil and consider
the forge whose heart pumps molten islands
through our trust
and we hand-fashion its gift
as sea gods our world before us.
Still, we fold generations
of metal into every blade, weld
and hammer continuously until air
dances with flesh,
then, on the final day, at sunrise
as the white heron fishes
amid its reflection and stones
flower in first light,
we kneel among shadows to pray
before delivering the birth-stroke
from fire to water, Hachiman,
the sword god, seething his praise.

Held upright in a running stream,
an inferior blade may shave each
dead leaf in two that drifts

against its edge, but ours own
the souls of leaves
and all will circle avoiding the touch.
Here, without question, is proof
we are unsurpassed.
I thank you for coming
and pray the gods grant you a son.
As she sleeps,
please lay the sword beside your wife.

Barry Sternlieb

MIRROR SONG FOR THE UNSATISFIED

I stare and stare:
Is anyone there
Under the hair?
Anyone home
For borrow or loan?
There's something numb
At the root of this tongue—
In a shifty eye
The flecks slide by—
A place in the head
Where words go dead
And the blanks repeat
Sleeps and eats
Sleeps and eats—
Oh body, oh breath,
You've caught your death.

Judith McCombs

PIG-HEART

—Overweight? the ad read, —You're breaking
your heart.

And there it sat, fat little pig on a platter,
that pinkest of pork, that pump . . .

I had almost missed it, passed it off
as another testimonial to mom's apple cooking,
but went back, focusing on the o-holes
of glory and blood and drew my breath:
a heart.

Floated on white, white page as white
as the Thanksgiving plate, it kept my eye
blind as a butcher's knife.

Pig-heart; Beelzebub bulb in the garden of lies;
the lord of the flies; the christ of my mother
served up for the holy day in its robe of syrup
and its thorn of cloves . . . this heart was

not at all like the rest of the body, not at all
like the lungs — those twin balloons,
identical cherubs, the angel of breath and
the angel of death with their hushed, holy
wings . . .

this heart was magnificent, common;
mouth-watering heart — good enough to eat
and grow thin.

Priscilla Rhoades

THE NEAR WOODS**A Winter Letter to My Mother**

Behind my house a wood of birch,
Pin-oak, white pine, tamarack, swamp alder,
A thick underwood of fern and ground-pine,
Angles down to a brook, then angles up to a
field

Edged by another wood, then further
Fields and river.

I know those distances, the shifting planes
Between my rooftop and the riverbed in spring
When cinquefoil threads the field-grass, and the
first

Red-winged blackbirds harangue the brackish
inlets
Of the river, and the green hills westward float
In the expanding light.

In winter now the nearest wood is all I know,
Foreshortened angles from a white path in a
white

Declivity, the path so newly strange in new snow
That only the dog can find the way. The wood
Itself is strange, turned on an axis vertical,
Inhabited by silences.

Once each winter, always in snowfall,
The same barred owl has shown himself in a high
Branch of pine. Aloof, unmoving save for one
Slow pivot of his head, he takes our measure
As we pass, moving beneath him through a
white

Ring of stillness, bent to the narrow path.
A tension in the air suspends and wavers
Like a struck chain.

Beyond him, in an upland clearing where we
 pause
To rest, the hieroglyphic of a rabbit's leap — a
 frozen
Mark of flight riddling the snow — dazzles
My dog, dazes my own contracted sight,
My glimpse of vacancies contained, containing:
A weight of presence in the small triadic hollow.
Somewhere away, havened, perhaps in the
 brush
Of a fallen birch, invisible, silent,
The quick heart beats.

Where birch cluster at an edge of the clearing
The thin light of a winter sun gathers to focus,
 grows
To a pure radiance in the white bark as if the
 sun,
Snow-masked, had need to show itself some-
 where
And chose the least of trees to burn in, to say:
This fragile lamp will hold my light in the dusk
Noon of the year: I am contained to show you:
I am here. I am here.

From the low branch of a near birch a bright
Racketing of chickadees scatters on the cold air.
We hear them homeward, fluting and calling,
Subsiding echoes contained in stillness.
They live with the owl and hare and man
And know the winter silences, making
A casual music out of fear and joy
Struck from the sounded chain.

Sarah Youngblood

CIRCLING

November is a month designed to mourn;
so windswept, bleak and leveled are its days
lamenting sunlight wears a veil of haze.
Sky's greyness helps to hide the aging forms
gone rigid—soon to snap and break in storms.
It's time to fill the hearth and watch it blaze
and not too long upon the backwoods gaze,
regretting seasons which we can't transform.
I take my last walks on a silent path
hushed like a patient patiently near death.
I muffle thought and let my feelings flow
toward this stoic death-hour trance; then wrath
seeps into frosty quick-drawn bits of breath
as three loud crows fly overhead in snow.

As three loud crows fly overhead in snow
the black-white season comes into its own.
Extremes: wild windwhipped frozen leaf alone
upon the branch, fierce heat from fire's glow.
Love and hate implant their winter crops, go
bright and cold through frozen soil sown
for need of human food to fill the groan
of year-end emptiness, together grow
sometimes like bark entwined with bittersweet,
the berry-studded vine a choking band
of brilliance braced upon the sturdy tree.
Hate's relish adds more flavor to love's meat,
keeps lovers' dinner from becoming bland,
like lemon added to the sweetened tea.

Like lemon added to the sweetened tea
our tongues slip into acid dialogue;
our brilliant conversation cuts the fog
of living most days somewhat lost, at sea.
We carve our wit with sharp-edged simile,
pile thoughts to an impressive catalogue
of mental merchandise. We fear the clog
of silence soon might make words' magic flee
out to the cold mute loneliness of night.
We dread the wind that threatens to break in
and interrupt our nervous tête à tête.
Our talk is tinder kindled to ignite
such warmth as needed to keep winter's kin
beyond the door, the raw, dark thoughts at bay.

Beyond the door, the raw, dark thoughts at bay
swirl into spider shapes against the moon's
chill breath and crawl the cloudy island dunes
of sky on covert webs for starry prey —
touch, grasp and gobble up the Milky Way.
The frightened lunar face falls all too soon
into arachnid forces, is consumed.
Black, black, the spider night holds sway,
swelled legless, round as earth burst all through
space —
a perfect victory of nothingness.
Black, black beyond beyond's beyond —
black black blank and faceless face —
so do dark thoughts expand and coalesce.
From threatening black can one dare hope for
dawn?

From threatening black can one dare hope for
dawn?

In bleak midwinter Christmas comes to set
the heart to hope, the mind half to forget
another year is very nearly gone.
Up from the snow spring reindeer on the lawn,
lights in the windows, wreaths, the silhouette
of Santa in the shops. Cheer piles like debt;
it's thin bright tinsel ice we're skating on.
But still the cardinal whistles cherry notes,
the steel-cold day bejewels the blue jay's wing,
and greedy grosbeaks yellow sunless scenes.
Stark starlings most embroider winter's coat
however, and dull sparrows mainly sing
a cheerless chirp as part of grey routine.

A cheerless chirp as part of grey routine —
I take the long-neglected sweet pipes out
to practice with an effort more devout,
keep sound aflowing till song forms again.
Practice wears two faces: the scowling mien
of concentration, repetition, doubt
of ever catching all Telemann's about
in nimble notes out of a long breath clean
and clear; the other look the sudden joy
of a perfect passage blown pure, effortless,
birdfree: the ease of hard-won mastery
when instrument and player make alloy,
music, the magic consequence of stress
surmounted, fused, and formed to melody.

Surmounted, fused, and formed to melody,
I sing no matter what the seasons bring —
myself at source an ever deep-kept spring
athirst to live released, to flow and be
a magnifier of reality.

I spy close up the dull wool coats that cling
to once rich goldenrod; I feel the sting
of wind unwrapped, see shaking robins flee;
meet mockers in the grapes, squirrels at walnut
trees, taste the smells that brought us to each
gift;

hear death's dry rattle as the leafy swarms
rise up to dance one final stiff-stem strut.

I sing what is and will sing even if
November seems a month designed to mourn.

Mildred J. Nash

STORM-WATCH

After all these days of early heat
the summer's first storm knifes
through the Bitterroots

Forests smolder to the south
days of smoke cradled
in their valleys

In my living room sparks leap
from the socket as sirens sound
west to some certain disaster

I go to the porch gaze at the sky
filling with ozone and light
watch the thermometer's steady fall

Later in the garden I am alone
with the tangle of peas and kohlrabi
endive lathered in mud steam rising
to a sky rinsed clean as river stone

Andrew Grossbardt

THREE POEMS**So Speaks the Dust to the Spice**

*For they that say such things declare
plainly that they seek a country.*

—Hebrews 11:14

The Dove that dive-bombed through God's
fissured skies
Evaporates, only an ordinary bird
Coos in towers, nests in the eaves of wells.
You lower baptismal buckets: no angel's cries,
No wild, divine remarks, only a mortal word
For you, the tapping inside speckled eggshells.

You've spent your whole life digging: now in
your brain

A hole twenty feet deep and twenty square
Is dug, in it you cast debris, rocks, sticks,
Hitting your image — it yanks at the chain
Around its neck, yanks like a lumbering bear,
And on that chain dangles a crucifix.

This is the night when Christ hears stories of
The head, and whose it is, on Herod's platter;
He fasts, He wonders which men He'll nourish
With dark crushed grapes like purple words of
love,

And which will break away, as bread crumbs
scatter,

And covers His rage up like a steaming dish.

Time is the little classroom where we're taught
That Zero is the year of Judgement Day;
That in God's House each makes his bed and sets
his plate
Or, before the abstract throne, things could get
hot;
The Hand will pass across the Milky Way,
A wet cloth rubbing symbols from black, black
slate.

God is a strange woods where you've trailed
crumbs
That birds have eaten from the forest floor.
You're lost, your heartbeats shudder like
avalanches,
You spot fat shadows on the boughs, like plums,
But those nightbirds flap off seconds before
Your flashlight beam floods through the empty
branches.

Last Words

I heard a voice. I hope I heard a liar.
A smile smiled and asked me from the tree,
"What is it you desire, zire, zire?"
To make the words I make mean what I mean.
"Suppose that, on a lawn, Alice is dreaming.
Suppose that, after the wonders come to pass,
She wakes — wakes and forgets. This is your
meaning.
Your word is her impression on the grass."

Advent Vigil

The Child who grabbed the sky in His red fist
Grows ready to be born again. Blue Hell,
Blue shadows on the television tell
This hour and age when men do not desist
Cursing the dark while shutting out the light.
Bombs bursting in the Bloody Tower's face
Fracture the night, the violence of the race
Is my violence, all crime my crime tonight:

A tiny devil runs screaming up a ridge,
Enters me like a bullet, shattering my past,
Reminding me that no sin is the last.
If love were fire, Lord, it would burn the bridge
Spanning my small life and Your holy cry,
Father, forgive them, for I know what I do,
Shutting You out; but I must think of You
At midnight when the screen's images die,

Shadows collapsing to a starry point,
A pin-hole in Heaven's floor — it leaks
Small light into this room of one who seeks
In human sweat the oils that would anoint
Your precious feet; who prays in this cold season
To come at last to love we can believe,
A constancy of light that will relieve
The sheer dullness of our groping reason.

In the tremendous dark, Christ's streaming star,
Glisten more violently for each lost daughter.
Lord, I am one. Oil on mind's water,
Suffuse with what can't be the things that are.

Gjertrud Schnackenberg

DISC

Vines, wasps warm in, up the side of
the house sun clears first. Legging
over the unborn in cells paper
shapes, out of the reach of
children. Day now, the dogs
return to, played out at
night in clay, on
creek edges.

Coming over stalks, boned-weary, in
big running under the shed, to
naps. Grass knits, drying fray
along the edge of the yard,
of hens. Houseward, in
a chair, pins creep the
lower back down, of the one
rubbed skin won't ease.

But fired deep, in fatherhood. A long
way off the drone coming of
the chain-saw, of someone else in
health. Over the biting down
resin, further through the pine
heart, until the tree gives,
splitting. Flat-bedded in
stacks then, over the
cab of the truck, in height.

Stuck-in clothes, in the black-fired
kettle, his wife stirs, out to the
wire fence where they dry. Always,
with a little of the sand
wind kicks. Under the
muscles hard in his back,
bone speaks to bone
through his face, shrilly.

Red-clayed, soil bound in plank, the house
the edge of the field comes to, in
crops. Thick around with
woods, pine-ready for the gas-
powered saw, in slash and
loblolly, in rows. From
his chair, plushless,
of cane.

Powerful hands as ever, grip the short
length of a smoke. As before him
his father, in darkness almost as a
youth in death, borne out,
with the tautness
left of the early-on
breakers of wood. The
son in him, gives lineage to.

Yellow, the bus-hulk bringing home his
children from school, like a moon
through leaves, stops. Coming the
ruts up to the house, barefoot,
faces like his, tenderly,
wagged out on the dry
road of the pine
stand, marked,
for cutting.

Larry Lanier

WISCONSIN: SEPTEMBER

The long legs turn slowly in the water;
that is it,—the long legs;
the way they turn
leaving the water the way it was.

They say sleep; they say stroke
smoothly; they say soft and shiny.

Over the flat red water where
the pines have bled their resin,
the arch of iced sky stayed cold
all summer. The water does not
move, nor the wind. The clouds
are stationary, granite, gray on gray.

The land falls slowly,
giving in to the water leisurely.
The stairs rot; the boat-hoist rusts,
warped by the storm onto the shore,—
a sculpture that says dying is slow.

There is one boat motionless
in the southwest quadrant
where the sun will not go down,
and the legs have disappeared.

Peg Carlson Lauber

II Wyrd

The three Norns water the World Ash:
Urth and Verthandi and Skuld,
Become, Becoming and Shall Be

The dead
to phosphoresce in middens where the
goddess
the cocks and serpents — voice and coil —
wind in one
the slaying boar and the groin-torn king

The three Norns once were one, called Wyrd —
Out of *weorthan*, “to become, to be” —
And Wyrd was entelechic Doom:
To become dead necessarily

But the dead
like equinox are dead into the Spring
as if they were the kine and boar
roaring and wheeling in ashy orchards

III A Wavicle

“Time,” lexicographers have said, is the most intransigent word, the most difficult to define.

This poetry has been reductive: analysis to antinomial conceptions of time.

Louis de Broglie wrote: “. . . the electron is not merely a simple corpuscle; in one sense it is at once a corpuscle and a wave . . . Matter,

as well as Light, consists of both waves and corpuscles . . . consider corpuscles and waves simultaneously . . . to reach a single theory . . . ”

Wave and particle are fused into an imaginative, self-consistent one: in Eddington's word, a “wavicle.”

Experient abstracts experiences.
Time shimmers like a wavicle transmutes
Into its obverse.

IV Orion

Prehension of time, then, is dual.
Or: Time's elemental self-presentments,
If fused to make one image on the stars
Would be Orion, rising treading setting:
The clocking hunter; mortal too — stars die;
Yet until his configuration ends,
Betelgeuse and the others shed all form
And all Orion becomes somewhere else —
Or he, as time, dims into entropy —
His course upon the sky is like the Ash.

The clock is readily extrapolated:
The tusked boar began in its dam's oestrus,
Then tick-tocked seasonably accurate;
Fed and watered; roared in rut; mounted
Rut-mate, then watered where the gun-sights
aim.

Aiming head fires gun to dead conclusion.

But how resuscitate the boar or kine
Dead to the heady abstraction? And dead
They are.

The Kine and Boar

Keep time in cycles, die no more than moon.
Orion is a seed and like a serpent

Wyrd waters dry, not ticks clock-carnage.
Clover thick the elvers leave
Origin in the Sargasso
Where weeds transform the ships in calm.

Where detritus is delta
The girl sees terns suffuse the sea,
The feeding dying fish-crept sea
Where mammal dolphins talk and breed.

V**The Experient**

Orion, that conjoining,
seasonal constellation
doesn't have a heart-beat.
He fails as a fusing image.

The experient is lacking,
The moment

 eye-wide who comprehends
dense stars constellated (illusorily)
into Orion

The moment

 who comprehends
that an arrangement
is not a constellation
in the void and elan of space
as the moment
believes space
and its material cramps
the stars, are

The moment

aware (it believes)
 of the trompes d'oeil
 of apparent patterns
 who ratiocinates
 to concept "wavicle"

The heart-beat
 times time as if
 he were alone.
 In an image
 where is any one? Where
 the man who experiences and dies?

ii

Werner Heisenberg distrusted and rejected mental images, pictures for the ultimate physical world. And he introduced the inextricably participant observer into the rigorously abstract world of the stuff of all things in its essence.

Forever — by the nature of things itself, not our deficiencies of either senses or instruments — it is impossible to know precisely both the velocity and the position of a particle/wave at the same time. So Heisenberg's "indeterminacy" or "uncertainty principle." *Even in imagination* we are forever unable to measure position and velocity with exactitude. Measure one, disturb the other. The act of observation itself alters the observed world, making impossible the perfect realization of the state of the stuff of things.

Neither we nor the world are free from each other. There is no "state of the stuff" minus us.

iii

Then as for Orion,
an image valid from Earth to Pluto
He may be, but he is hardly human;
And Earth has to offer one live image,
On Earth as common as the color green:
A pregnant woman dying.

To Plutonians she might seem bizarre,
So we'd conduct our ontological
Discussions by each pointing out the stars.
On Earth, the stars aren't necessary now.

"Mother dies; infant lives; father survives."
Subjects with these verbs are ancient humans,
Frequenting Babel in a desert tent
Pitched to the lee of camels, or polar
On black floes of ice beneath the crackle
Of the cold Aurora. The mother dies,
The baby lives and the father survives
On Earth, in jungles lush with giant sloths
And wart hogs; on patriarchal steppes
Where chariots roll their iron fellies;
In white clinics of clapboard Vermont towns,
Time ends continuing
And understood without a thought of stars.

VI

Toward Quiddity

For now, at any rate,
here in an autobiographical milieu —
i.e., who and when and where I am —
I can go further only
by suggestions to myself.

ii

Named individuals have been introduced:
de Broglie, Eddington, Heisenberg.

Names insist

Every presence is as startling
as yourself astonished at yourself
by being here not there.
Of course. Now realize it:
the *Ding an Sich* of uniqueness,
the "thing-in-itself,"
the quiddity of each.
("Why do you love that girl?")

iii

"Quiddity" is the Word of all words magic.
Essence and eccentricity.
The essence of a thing,
the answer to "*Quid est?*" What is it?
And "cavil; quibble" (splendidly praiseworthy!)
"a subtle distinction" —
the eccentricity of anything at all.

iv

Orion was a suggestion, but he could not become substance and sustenance; a felt experiment, conjugating into one image two experiences of time.

"Named individuals" suggests something further: Imagery here *must* fail — *de rei natura* intransigent — in the end. The image of an experient must fail. We bring Orion down to earth, use the image of "pregnant woman dying." The

stars and the abstractions are gone; the most practical mind understands. The quiddity is lacking.

However "real" Orion grows; however immediate the image of "dying mother/infant" is; however immersed, even if as one drop of water is with any other, the experient is made — nothing can be that living "thing-in-itself" that an image of Time-as-complementary-processes attempts. There *cannot be an* — one — image-experient of time convincing us: "I am Time/Time is thus generalized."

De temporis natura —
concerning of time its nature —
Time is not a *Ding an Sich*.
Time is the quiddity of *each* quiddity
therefore is always plural also:
Quiddities of quiddities.
De facto, Time is singular plural.

VII

To the Sargasso Sea

The brass ship's clock and compass are aboard;
The sail, canvas sewn cunningly, is hoist
To trammel wind from continent behind,
Or spume-raising breeze from the sea itself.
Voyage aweigh.

Simultaneously

Fresh-water eels leave grounded ponds and
wells,
Find the streams to rivers, then the ocean

and deep ways to the Sargasso Sea;
 Migrating not to voyage but complete
 Origins all and once upon a time
 They knew and new elvers know in their past.

There in the Sargasso Sea it is
 As if beneath the weeds the moon phases
 In a helix, and small, shedding serpents
 Renew themselves waxing in marine light;
 Then turn on on-coming moon and sea
 Back up the rivers, to the ponds and wells.

There the ship calms, the flaccid canvas numb,
 Pointless as the finger of the compass,
 And the hour-hand metronomically runs
 Along as the cabin grows stuffier,
 The deck-planks warp. The crew hallucinates
 Many weedily-chimerical monsters
 And thirsty and insane its members die.

ii

“Once upon a time a voyage . . .?”

No, it wasn't.

And the crew-members are lacking.

Well, say three are
 de Broglie, Eddington and Heisenberg
 (born 1892, 1882 and 1901).

“Salt and pepper as you please”
 to make up the remainder —
 as long as you stick
 to time's reality principle:
 They must be contemporaries
 for they share a real time.

iii

The unvoicable reality of time
Is within the facts of dated temporalities,
Within birthdays and names.

Louis, Duc de Broglie, was
an oosperm like any other once;
A causal order of phenomena
Upon a paradigm.
And if that explains "him," it misses Louis
Who was Louis, not
His parents' daughters.

The brazen head, and Wyrd
An entelechic verb "to be,"
Are human real extrapolations,
As is the concept of a voyage.
But "voyage" — whether
As infallible mechanic
Proceeding to the weeds;
Or lunar neap and spring
Of source form-fruitful as a fire —
"Voyage" is a subsumption
And "Time" is not, but is
Every subsumed quiddity lost
In the diminishment
Whatever is inclusive makes.

Here the necessary first notion
Is that of "contemporary
Within a locale."
By the natures of the beasts
Who walk contemporaneously,
Live coetaneously marking
Birthdays, name-days, calendrical graves,

Who speak to each other in the present tense,
The personally specific
Is necessary — each one —
To the definition:
Singularly in present multitudes
Is how time happens.

The koan "Time" is answered "Time"
In dialects in accents in vernacular.

The aspirant mystic
May find in his own connotations
Unutterable wonder at and of
Discrete immediacies.

Bernard Mullins
(for Jean and Derith)

TWO POEMS

The Thing

rubbing her neck and legs
he raised sparks of rapid breath
and beads of moisture deep within her.
everything in the car was soft with dew,
their mouths falling into each other.

they lost their minds in adolescent desperation.
it was natural then that, the radio being off,
they would not have heard
of the thing's glowing arrival,
its landing in a nearby forest,
of reports of unspeakable horrors,
its thirst for bread and flesh.
when the car began to rock
he thought it was her sixteen-year-old
happiness moving below him; the odor
he gave to her as well, feeling
he had tapped a deeper well
of musk and dark oil.
she thought, upon seeing it
all at once framed in the passenger window,
that it looked desperately like his mother;
he, that it bore a ferocity
akin only to her father.
their final seconds together
were spent in wild fright and passion,
locked together, lipless,
the horror breathing their own passions
upon the wet windows, part of something
no one could stop.
it would be left to someone else
to call out the army,
the wise men in white coats
who would try to kill this thing
with electricity or bacteria or fire
or kindness; they lay together
in the dark belly of a piece
of night sky, stilled for all time,
out of the picture, safe again.

The Farmer

“now here’s the latest
from Porter and Dolly,” he lisps.
he broadcasts daily from station WRFD.
crouching down low
on a three-legged stool,
gripping his mike
like the dugs of an udder,
he breathes out five-minute
weather reports, testimony
on religion and tractors:

“I run my John Deere
on the power in the lamb’s blood.
each green shoot shouting
in my contoured fields
praises the name
of Jesus and his Daddy.
my corn walks about
in the holy wind, strutting
with joy and wonder;
soybeans speak in tongues;
pig weeds roll over dead
when they hear the Holy Word.
my chickens die of happiness,
their necks rent in two
by the marvelous power.
Black Angus somersault
into air, click their hooves,
bellow ‘Lord God of Hosts.’
in my orchards grow apples,
untasted, moaning for the worm.
it’s good to be a farmer.”

David Citino

I WOKE UP FROM A DREAM

I woke up from a dream
and saw these bloodless spiders.
we had had rain.
they came inside and sat
by the fireplace:
(transparent things seem to be always chilled.)

a pale group: they fingered nervelessly
at the guitars of my singing flames
then shook off, one by one, their hairy
 burning legs;
which they later reassembled
into hex signs on the hearth.
it was a nightmare. a nightmare. a
 nightmare.
I fled.

in the yellow
of the following morning
I swept up their charred leg tips
and my burned down logs;
and set healthy, fat-fleshed roses
in a VITAMIN-D-ENRICHED milk carton
right under the chimney draught.
the wind blew down, clean;
the evil sight died from my mind.

still,
it may be that bloodless creatures are never
 really destroyed:
now I find their jellylike filmed eyes
often staring up at me when I walk on a wet
 morning beach.

Charlotte A. Raines

through cold Aleutian straits,
steers by the thrust of his own flesh.
Their slave-driven craft erect above a load of
island stones,
the Greeks navigated by the sun
and perfected rhetoric with a pebble
balanced underneath the tongue.
We need a kind of ballast, too,
pointing us steadfastly
toward the center of the earth.

3

Neither of us has a son, still,
further down the beach a boy
who might be yours or mine
is breaking open rocks. We listen
for the ping his hammer makes
to halve the egg-shaped stone.
You flinch to know that chips
may blind the eye that seeks
the structured color locked inside.
His face, and mine, are dazzled
by the spittle-coated hearts of ordinary rocks.

That ought to be our business, too —
using saliva and the human breath
not to erect, but to reveal
the ballast of our life:
and, finally, not even that transfiguration
but a coming to love,
the knowledge and acceptance of what is.

All men are islands in their minds.
We have assigned ourselves the role
of ships that link
that lonely archipelago, waking the waters
that support us as we sail.

Jack W. Thomas

ARCHAIC WORDS DESCEND

My Dave is dead,
Agent of his end.
His note said:
"He leaves me, no man lives
Unless He send
Breath."

Dave, your logick grew aslant.
You sliding by, each
Twisted phrase abrupt.
Any song will reach
If He mend
Death.

Archaic words descend.
The poet's footing gone,
Haze returns
For healing. Dave discerns
That I will rend
His wreath.

Gerald E. Sacks

MIRANDA AND THE PIANO

The burned piano, legs up
In the orchard, yolk-bright
Weeds swaying where swallows

Pick worms in trickster time
And Miranda examines
Her breasts on a rock.

The house a blasted patch now,
Early-american rubble and ash,
Firemen returned to town:

Volunteers after all,
No more could be done,
Half the piano saved,

The keys a uniform black,
All sharps and flats
And Miranda buttons her shirt,

Approaches me barefoot
Making it look as if the field moves
While she is stationary;

Smoke is still in the wind,
Stuck like dried fish
In an old net.

A last neighbor appears,
Offers rote condolences, leaves;
Miranda stops, pirouettes twice,

Continues towards me,
Her legs striped white,
Hair gold and dry as snakes,

Scraps of a bedspread
And charred letters in hand.
Lithe, level-eyed through fumes,

She passes me to circle the piano,
Finger the remains of a chord
And put a match to her hair.

Nicholas Christopher