

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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EXPLORATION WITHOUT TENURE

They could never explain to outsiders
that summer in the Galápagos.

Days they spent stewing cacti over small fires
& pushing boulders of quartz into the sea;

at night, the awkward groaning of the tortoises
illuminated their dreams.

They scanned the skies for helicopters, rainclouds,
portents, alike in vain,

& argued over the taste of salt,
the meaning of Beckett, horses versus dogs,

whether it was better to breathe in or out,
which should die first.

By the time Darwin discovered them
they had pitched separate tents

on islands divided
by seas of shattered crystal.

They had become two
remarkably distinct species.

Anthony A. West

GARRETTSVILLE, A TRESPASS VISION:
ANNOTATIONS TO A LIFE OF HART CRANE

*...slid on that backward vision
The mind is churned to spittle, whispering bell.
—from "Voyages"*

1. morning

These mornings the wind
sharpen itself on the eaves,
sparrows shake
rumors of snow from their wings.
Inside, there's not much left—
the cold congeals on a pane,
a shaft of light from a lamp
impales this yellow mattress.
At times the room seems to dissolve
beneath your vagrant touch—
Still, there are things that hold you here
as a winter wasp
alive behind the blinds—
The shoes of another month
drop like those of a late lover
and there are hopes, fears, etc.

You watch as the early hawk rises,
tucking a shadow beneath its wings.

Here, where the wind deposits
the first cries of crow and coot,
there are no roads but the dark—
These things you have: *a withered hand,*
dim eyes,
a tongue that cannot tell.

You think: next spring in
that stream beyond the house
the salmon will begin to change—
mouth starting to hook,
skin turning cankerous,
falling off as they spawn to death.

Now, nested in these depths,
what dreams hatch? what loves
squat like bloated toads?

Beyond, a small darkness
stirs in the attic of a tree,
The doors of the wind edge open.
You remember the boy you saw once—
syphilitic, selling violets—
his eyes—like crutches
hurtled against glass,
falling mute and sudden.

Now, this man on the bed beside you
limps awkwardly through sleep.
You watch as the sky reddens,
its light hardly legible

beginning to change the names for shadows—
sycamore, cedar, tamarack.
No hiding places are left in
the empty spaces of those words.

2. evening

The leaves flaked with rust,
milkweed drying, beginning to curl,
you poke through the wreckage of last light.
The dim moon lurks in a ravine.

Overhead, an osprey
scours the vague stars,
its frayed wings filling with shadow.

You remember the bits of fur
you found once in a sprung trap,
imagine the mink, the torn shadow
he drags behind like a paw.

He shifts carefully now—
his barbed eyes cut through darkness,
poke through the scraps of this dream.

And so, you return again to
this vacant shell of a cabin
waiting for the first drift of star.
Where for months swallows began their nests
bits of distant fields

cling to the eaves like wax droppings.
Here you remember the arthritic songs of
crickets, the rush of rabbits
through the mesh wire of the underbrush.
You lean back now, the
flesh tightening on your bones.
At the edge of swamp, the damp
tunnels of muskrats begin to contract.

Somewhere, beyond these ridges,
late deer click through snow
stubble fields, searching for roots.
Quietly, as they pass, they brush up
small clots of sod, blackening the snow.
You enter those spaces now,
entering the broken spaces of these words.
If only they might hold you to this dark.
Here, the air is scratched
by paths of migrating geese—
the sky is pink as a lung
and against it, the branches of a tree
have spread wide as bronchia,
emptying a voice, our own.

Richard Jackson

MY CHOICE, MY RESPONSE

on all fours
where beach sand turns
jagged pebbles, abandoned shells,
I could be described in right angles:
arms / trunk, thighs / shins, calves / feet,
a series of orthogonal paths
leading from fingers to toe nails,
and, how neat, even the beach
spreads perpendicular—
if you overlook its slope,
and the sweep of chest
and slumped back, how the head
rounds like fungal clusters,
and suddenly there are no
right angles and I'm staring
into the withered ovoid
of a dead lake smelt.

1.
the eyes, everywhere
under foot—to pick a step
almost impossible
in this annual mosaic
of smelt strewn sand.

the eyes, black
precisely round
and somehow unwilling
to join their silver bodies
in deflation and rot:

lying twisted, poured out
from a rush of Spring rain
percolated through the vineyards
and valleys and general slope
this lake spreads up to for states,
and further still: into clouds
heavy with the water three greater lakes
sweat, or the gulf flings northward,
and that cold Canada condenses,
with all of these stirred
by the planet's subtle tilt;

but following a week-gone current's trail
by the dead smelt grouped
in three's and five's
up a rising beach ridge,
I find the whole force abuts
the rock wall of a terraced lawn
and ends.

2.

sometimes I know you right,
Corbu, culture is
an orthogonal state of mind,
does just like a stylized knuckle's
sharpness, and the arm's full force
behind it, or
say a semi, backing in,
the long smudged solid blocking
all street light as it rocks
through the gate on twelve wheels
groaning at their brakes, its metal
revved, smoking, echoed

until every dock eye waits:
waits for it to slam
the rubber molding of the concrete bay,
waits for the sputter
waits for the last forced hiss
of engine and brake,
waits—too long,
they are all about something else,
even my fellows, those paid
to watch for trucks, slide off
in tangents
missing the grace, the easy tension
this latest trailer
swaggers in.

3.

the eyes, the eyes
their hard blackness
turned smoke
in the neighbor's fire,
become a bad smell
with driftwood and lake weed,
that I wanted to tell her
how important debris,
beached carp
rotted to their yellow skeletons,
or the dimples a clam will bubble up
(as the day, at water's edge,
a spent shell sent me due west
looking for just such a mark:
skirting wave ends
and a curious type of humped vine

designed to catch a foot
at its laces, I strolled unsuccessful
as a novice, which I was,
until I jumped up a wet rock
and for the first time that hour
lifted my eyes from moist sand:
the entire beach suddenly
bowed to the right, curved inland
and glaring bright as the waves,
right before me, right
where I had no expectations,
where I stood,
breathing,
alive.

Timothy Cohrs

WINTER SALVAGE

What I dreamed
was mushrooms—all
the beauties so foreign
I don't know their names
nor who's a poison,
who a prince.

They grow beyond the bare ground
junked cars,
chairs springing out of their upholstery
like weeds;

beyond the woods cleared
for the next block of neighbors
at our back
(star-moss still intricate
in out-of-the-way holes;
the last fireweed
disheveled on the lot lines);
beyond the felled spruce
gamey with sap as a battlefield
burning off its dead.

I dreamed the mushrooms
to names: bullfrogs
warted and wide as my hand,
the old brown men
slouched under their caps,
the white buttons, crimson
dangerous roses,
dusky ruffles and blunt spears;

dreamed the whole
dwarf forest,
how the first snow of November
would pack it under,
deep and safe
as a forest under a dream.

Taylor Graham

TWO POEMS

Tim Broderick of Youghal

There's danger to research.
He came at me like lightning
out of a book in a cellar,
and I looking for somebody else:
a respectable uncle in ice-cream—
and here's Tim Broderick
come over me like a fit
with his damn pack and whistle,
making me cry on my notes;
making me put the shoes off my feet
and feel the world
warm beneath me to the throat
and myself to the roots at my eyes.

I don't know more about Tim
than myself: it's what I am
getting but old lets me guess
how he'd be. We don't know all
that's going on down in the genes
surely: there's some excuse for me
to be making up poetry,
but none at all for being
crazy as I am.

We've all of us read about heroes
and kings seeing swords in the sky:
it's not many are mad enough now
to be saying they've seen them.
He'd be like the Arab horse,
that brightens whatever he crosses.

There's how my great gael
was coming with me
from Youghal of Corcaigh
where the vikings sat down,
where His Honor the Mayor Walter Raleigh
failed with his spuds while the Spanish
God help them heaved over the bay,
and men of Youghal are at fishing still.
He'd be a hundred and forty-nine
years old when I met him,
and I've seen his grave,
but it's never him buried in it,
he's walking into me too strong.

For he was a walking man, too
poor to be having a horse
and wasn't at work for C. M. & St. Paul
with the most of the Micks there at home;
maybe he hadn't a tongue to the English,
nor heart for it neither.

Ten years he walked to his death
from Janesville to Beloit and back
through Rock River's kind valley
hilled and green, shaggy from trees,
and he sleeping wherever
the starry dark came down the road
to meet him: a small man,
with a skin like an apple's inside
and the wing of a raven to his hair,
all the western ocean in his eyes,
bearing me among the trifles on his back.

Nor his songs
nor his whistle nor pack
came down to any of us,
but I've got his trade,
peddling sundries fancy or needful;
and his need to ease the way
with liting on my own.
At that, he taught us all to play.
Wasn't it his son-in-law
Harry my granddad that was,
nearly killed himself trying
to drink at the Irish God love him.

Out of the holy hunch on him
 I get a stake in the pain,
 and fierce relish of defeat;
 a place behind Ferdiad at the ford,
 and sense to see him kissing the man
 would be killing him's Irish;
 rooted faith that words make be,
 living powers of the elder world
 blessed by Jesus and Mary His Mother,
 Saint Brendan and the Pope;
 a knot in the soul
 I can't get by for Culann's hound
 tying himself to the stone
 so he'd die on his feet and the grey
 horse at his breast of blood;
 how any morning of the world a man
 may be walking out to die about it;
 the hearing their horns
 yell over the hills I'll not see.

Or what am I doing at him
 with my bones and my breath,
 stodge of a Kraut that I am,
 half bloody English what's more.
 How am I riding his loins
 and my name as it is
 when there's kings in his own.

Whatever, he's there,-
 like a dolmen astride of my heart.

An Leannán-Síodhe

I'll take shapes at you,
wise young girls, old girls to turn your head,
heroes on crutches and smiling grave boys,
hare in the hazel, hind over your road,
round-legged proud-necked small-hooved red-eared
horse blowing my name down your back.

You'll not fear bad fame,
the names they'll put on you,
two for death and two for sorrow,
borrowing dread each from another,
brother at back and beck to needle you,
wheelde you over their hags' path:
wrath is all they'll be for you, and rack.
Black blood clot in their mouth,
droughth to their big fancy loins.
It's not any one of them
I would ask for their life or send my own.

I'll lay my tongue to you
the way you won't bear it.
I'll put my tongue between your teeth
that you'll feel yourself scream
and they hearing the tune you don't know
reeling out of your mouth.
Deer's cry, hound's cry,
hunting over and out of your heart
I'll gnaw to the ends of your fingers,
I'll carve it in the lintel of your lips.
I'll drink the blood back of your eyes
out of your skull and you living.

I'll mint your pain,
and they spending the money of your mind
for kind red cows and wheat on the hill,
still rain falling all the night,
white ships leaning long down the waves,
navies of the clouds and the holies on board,
lordly beards blowing over the wind.

I'll foot you like an owl.
I'll twist it into you,
I'll twist it out of you,
I'll be at you whatever.
With the comb of my hands
and the comb of my teeth
I'll comb you out the way you'll curl.
I'll be at your mouth
and the backs of your knees,
at the valves of your ears
and the roots growing under your tongue,
I'll be into the nooks of your teeth
and the twelve hinges to your ribs,
I'll walk at the heels of your hands.
I'll have my horses of your two round sides
and I driving them days and riding them nights
till the sweat of them shines like the sea
with the white bird of the moon standing still in it.
I'll be the first and last friend
of your two friendly thighs
and your slow, horse-helping hands.
I've made friends with your mouth
the way I'll be at you whatever
among them of hell or them of heaven.

I'll coin your tears,
and they spending the hoard of your heart to buy
wry tunes twining into them then,
when one at last with looking lips
slips between their aching legs and arms,
charms to break a spell that walks,
stalking a father over his grave,
brave days in hell with god king and harper,
a sharper sword and bruter bones.

I'll lie along your side,
I'll breathe in your breath
the way you'll be breathing in mine,
I hearing you cry in your sleep and call
the silkie to come to you out of the sea,
that's myself only looking for you
over the backs and manes of the waves,
and you not knowing it ever.

I'll put eyes in your heart
that you'll look into stone,
see the hearts beating in trees,
trees of blood in the antlers of deer,
deer in the dark rising like stars,
stars behind the morning sun,
the sun's white horses pace the sky.

Me only you'll not see,
though you're looking me long in the eyes
of horse, hind or hare,
hero that's wading the fords of your blood
or girl at the bone of your breast.

You'll have yourself,
no more than I give you,
and peace be away from you surely.
I've seen you, a cuisle mo croidhe,
going on down your own road alone,
I riding your head like a crow,
ten claws in your wolfhound hair.

Suzanne Gross

MELAKWA HUCKLEBERRIES

Back bowed with sunlight
both her hands working
She nurses and heals
into pails the tart berries
While hikers in red
their Sierra cups
rattling
slowly pass by.

Her fingers grow blue
with the stains of the Salish;
Ripe fruit of the rich tribe
shamed in the Potlatch.

Deep in the bushes
she stalks the dark berries;
Squaw aching and bleeding
the dust from the trail.

The tip of one finger's so
colored she plucks it;
Face purple with streaks
where her hand's smeared
the sweat off.

Far back, ever searching
in bushes head-high
She watches the red lines
move ghostly by.

Weary, she rests on a
moss-rotted nurse-log;
Rich juices alive in her
ringing-full pail.

Tsimshian Coppers dance to the fires.
Spirits of Salmon bless the bird-blankets.
Bees sleep in her hair as
the hikers pass by.

Tom Moore

TWO POEMS

Curriculum Vitae

- 1 Nature poetry: don't tell me about it, you'll make me think you think there's something else—Man poetry, Woman poetry in the failure of our divisions: tell me about the pettifogging flipsysquiddlums lawyers have abstracted from the goings-on of partridge & periwinkle, imitative, egregious with the wealth of their evolvment

& I'll smile in more than mild accord:
tell me about the gathering of committee members from their separate flights

like the congregating of waxwings to shore berries
in June, & I'll be happy that we share a knowledge of where we are:

- 2 we've been building ourselves up for so long that a come-down might not be debilitating.—I want to tell you about where I'm from: Henry Rowe Schoolcraft got uplifted in 1818-19, according to his journal, by the "barren magnificence" of the Ozarks:

what he found there hadn't yet been worked into what we have to offer:
feuding hillbillies! clandestine stills! ragtoed barefooters!
(black & white) potatoes planted in the dark of the moon!
—cliches keep the land

backward: leering outhouses embellished
with lean crescent moons! stump jumpers who would give their eyeteeth,

- 3 if they had'em, to cornhole a city-slicker! women so wild the buck wolves back off & the he-goats limp on the hogbacks stoical-eyed with success! warts so bad only a black she-wizard can cure!

I come from the only extensive elevated area
between the Appalachians & the Rockies: I read it is a fair land
that has kept

its essential wildness through three centuries of
moneylusting rapscallionism: I don't mind being
identified with something that withholding: there are not so many
places left you can go to to fish & hunt & come back from refreshed—

4 the first streams I walked beside were the cold hollow waters
of hill country—I'd never seen real mountains then
and so could be joyous with the heights I could get to the top
of: if you find what I'm saying plain

it might have something
to do with where I come from—one person who has apparently been there
calls it "generally an undistinguished forest of oak, maple, hickory
and pine"; but "on the other hand," he says "no plain hills ought
to be so

steep, so shot through with remarkable caves, so
flush with even more remarkable crystal springs, some of them boiling

5 out hundreds of millions of gallons of pure cold water every day"—
such clarity, overweeningness & constancy

I'm pleased to be a part of
even when I'm not there, every day—for I remember the rocky
thin-soil glades Rusty wandered in the wandering times of his need
and came back from with something un-yardlike in the amber of his eyes,
and sometimes I grow bluff with the north-facing bluffs
spring-seepage cools the fern falls of

something of what I've grown
with makes it easier to turn away from the shallow insistences
of occupation to hollows shadowy with their bedrock-carving waters—

6 the region was uplifted (I'm here to tell you) but never subjected
to the violent, distorting upheavals more pinnacly-mountainous
places were infrabuckled by: Ozark rasures are the remains of once
continuous layers of sediment the dissection of rivers & creeks
has shaped to mountains roughly

democratic in their heights—
the hills I hunted squirrels on were laid down as sea-bottom
during the Paleozoic era—they darkened into light
when the seas withdrew: I wandered the heights of the sea's depth
before I ever saw the North Atlantic (my first ocean)—

7 sandstone & limestone laid down in layers, long & slow: horizontal
rock: that's my heritage—so if you get an orogeny out of this
be surprised.—In the Ozarks you never forget that the earth is made
of rock

bare bones, plainness itself, tough & permanent-
looking

is there to bother the onlookingness of those
who prefer to place eternity elsewhere; but then one
ought to remember that every rock's parentage is fluidity—
no matter how you get laid
down (or otherwise intruded)
as if to stay, your ancestry is irremediably flow: so

Let The Earth Be Earthy

- 1 As when a bald eagle cuts loose with a tail wind off the hill
down over the lake, its wings strung-out level so you know it
isn't a buzzard or an osprey, as you watch from your desk window
with a view of the lake, and
just as it pleaches song
from the birds in the suburb-reaches of the cove point

arush

tall-pine high over the water
where lilies, sunk brush, & pikeweed make fine coverts for fish, it
drops its landing gear like a heron alighting, gawking
its legs down & out as if they were long enough to stalk a frog,

- 2 fans its tail white-spraddling
sunlight-impearlant brakewise,
back-pedals with its wings
& tries to stoop fast
but actually loses altitude like a maple seed,
in a kind of conic-comic amblesome descent, which
terminates in a talon washing but not a fish: so
my head & tail are free, white, & I often mish.—
I don't want to want sense: if I can't sing I yet would like
to talk poetry to you, for I've given up on song
in favor of a rougher similitude in dissimilitude—

- 3 these ragged stanzas are the hazardry I interpose for metre, &
I am not too careful about whether they are svelte versos or not—
as the wise say in the country

if you want something kinky

go to church: poetry's constant subject is immortality—
its highest rage screams against the ruinage of days—
poetry calls what is forever done for in its passing
into the luminescence of a staying: it introduces the what not
that will never come again to the divine strumpet that
is ever coming: so nature's our mother, & we shall not want

- 4 for clay

for stone to obtrude our want in the wilderness
ever lasting: I do not know better than to be
intervenient to the motions that move me as well,
as well as they move the periwinkle & the bushmaster—
I am a pupil, often

in awe of the peccadillos of the master—

I accept the lesson as it is given, giving my acceptance to

the melt's roil in the mountain passes
where the ravine-hung nests of early nesting birds are swamped amuck
by the released ravin of the unknown—let the earth be earthy

- 5 yet sometimes come divine: let the primrose be simply
a yellow primrose

I have no analytic rock garden
to admire it in; I would hang my sayings in their manyness
from the scrannelly manifold antlers of the red willow
and stand there a while in the willow patch the spring floods redden,
admirant of all my emulative botched spangling: the snows
have seeped & risen away

& April's soggy & brown in this region—

the weather's changing, but nothing more apocalyptic
than the return of the geese is passing over hereabouts.

THE DEATH OF ARCHIMEDES

Archimedes drew his tangents
in the gravel of Syracuse.
The Roman dragoon,
unsure
stupid as a clot of blood
appeared.

The intersects complete
despite the wind.
The furrows ran, the field,
of thought,
deeper than the ploughshare.

The trooper
could put a rook in play.
The legions' ranks,
his lineage,
the port of call
and point of home,
the logic of the Appian—
these lines,
these constructs between
two points
he understands.

Archimedes plucks
with his walking stick
Betelgeuse
and stretches it through
the center of the earth
to the nave of procyon.
The Roman, with his own walking stick,
touches Archimedes to the core.

Mark Murdaugh

FROM UTAH APOCALYPTIC LETTER TO MY FRIENDS

I have spent the morning helping Charlie Potts fix his accelerator cable. For two full days everyone's been waiting for the giant winter storm that's supposed to hit town and I was supposed to get to Charlie's early to avoid the rain-mixed-with-snow but was late due to the plumbing which backed up all over the kitchen floor.

Sharon was up all night reading and has been napping since four this afternoon. The Mormon Church just ended its big conference and made a final plea for the faithful to store enough food to last seven years because all the signs are saying that the Day of (You Know) is almost upon us. The prediction was for frozen rain tonight changing to snow beneath the 3,000 foot

level. That's 1,600 feet below the streets of this city and I'm seriously wondering if the Mormons could possibly have buried their food that low.

Egypt and Syria are trying to beat the invincible Jews again, and may win, and by now, the second morning of war, hundreds are dead from mortar rounds dripping straight down into their bunkers on the Golan Heights overlooking the Sinai Desert.

And tonight, here in this back room in Salt Lake City, Utah, I am trying to decide whether to exercise my true powers and trade them all to buy Pablo Picasso one more year and I'm wondering if the cable I patched could possibly last Charlie all the way across the Nevada desert night before making its fatal bone chilling snap.

There's no humidity at all in the Wasatch Heights overlooking the Great Salt Desert. I had to take a second shower today to get the car grease out of my hair and it's dried me out badly. Sharon set up a vaporizer in my room just before her nap. Droopy-eyed and nude, her breasts miscolored purple by the florescent light of the bathroom, she slipped Johnson's Baby Oil over my back and shoulders and for no reason I felt sure I'd never see her again.

The sun's been missing all week and the mid-evening light that's now outside is very white because it's tinged slightly with blue. In it I am reading from the *Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara* standing up close against the door-sized window and in that light I can't get over how beautiful the black type looks on the exceedingly white page. But black clouds have really begun to move in now and to finish I have to move under the tungsten ceiling light where the paper turns the ugly color of yellowing newsprint.

But in consolation the vaporizer's working extra right. Humidity is building fast and droplets of water have appeared on the cold glass; beads of sweat pop up from each pore in my bare oily back which doesn't itch for the first time in two months. With the side of my hot face pressed really hard against the wet, freezing glass, I think I can see frozen rain falling outside—almost straight down like slow bullets, but there are no spots on the cement of the patio.

A cloud, I swear, has formed against the ceiling and there is a rumbling somewhere, more felt than heard. Either Sharon is awake on the other side of the wall and is sliding open her closet door, or it's mortar fire moving down the valley, or it's thunder from the storm—but before I can check the pavement for holes there are pot and pan noises coming from the kitchen.

She comes in without letting the cloud out the door and offers me a piece of caramel that's been getting harder and readier the whole time she slept. I must take it from her teeth with my teeth. A tiny blue-white spark jumps the centimeter between her wet lips and mine. The snap it makes, a miniscule piece of thunder, loosens from the ceiling a single icy drop which falls to a direct hit on my wet steaming spine, thousands and thousands of feet below.

A. G. Sobin

NIGHT HOWL

1

It might be a hunger chorus,
this howl, in the inner zoo
whose keeper's deep asleep.

Or strangulating terror.

You fix it outside, though.
Lassoing you by the ear
it drags you through no-man's land.

No sooner tugs you into consciousness
than it heaves you like a lead line
into the waking dream of what is done.

You're at sea again. December '44.
Off Cochin China, swimming armadillos
prowl for merchantmen, fishing boats, junks.
The howl is typhoon wind.

You hear water, gargle of sea and rain,
within the air rush, feel spray,
almost a wave, sting what's exposed
of your face, cowed in oilskin.

2

Here holds your eye.

Through the north dormer window
you watch a slender elm it seems you own,
healthy to the sight but doomed you know
in your heart by that blight imported from
the nether land of Europe, see it yield
to wind's rape, then measure through dark
but visible sky the arc of its acquiescence
against the anchored mullion of the window,
French—Europa again.

3

Now eye leaps after ear:

the oscillating elm trunk turns
upside down—or you do—
becomes the clinometer's pendulum
which you, now manning phones inside the shelter
on the flag bridge, watch with bugging eyes—

27° starboard, 25° port, 28° starboard. . .

Hull over stacks you go at 30
the chief has told you.

Though scarcely salted, still
you'd think he's yarning, but. . .

4

Through the passageway outside
they've slung a life line

that's burned some skin from your palms.

Lean full weight against the wind,
it keeps you vertical.
At first it was fun.

After learning from TBY
that the storm wolf's breath
has huffed a seaman off
the flight deck of the *Intrepid*,
then watching a destroyer,
more vulture-like than savior,
circle his liquid grave,
even old hands grab stanchions,
hug and clutch the inboard bulkheads,
shy of more than dumps of chamber pots.

Maybe because your flesh weighs leaden
you feel you've lost all spirit.

5

Word trickles down the chain:
worst blow the old man's had to weather
in thirty years afloat. For the old man
or for the 64,000-tons of steel he drives
you wouldn't give a rusty piss.

Fright has shriveled your penis,
shrunk your testicles to
February's prunes. Nobody jokes.

6

Then three DD's, unwitting kamikazes,
are swamped, a thousand men at a swallow.

Gray ghost ship riding the gloom
yards off the starboard bow—
that one you saw mere minutes
before it plunged, a half-trip submarine.

Unfathomable.

The rest of you survive
to deal more death.

7

Here you must sidestep yourself,
your ongoing life, your children,
must take a position somewhere outside the terror.

You ought to go down,
three thousand men aboard,
each at the least acquiescent,
deserve to feed the sea.

Little more than sport,
blowing the junks, the unarmed fishing boats
out of the water like whales.

Oh, that gorgeous, never-to-be-forgotten sunset,
blood down blue over the sea of peace,
when two parachutes proclaiming "we surrender,"
mushroomed out of the smoking "Betty."

“Aye, aye, sir, I am watching. . .”
through the mounted long glass,
screwing a face into focus when
pffft . . . a 20 mm shell renders him flesh shreds
that still go riding softly down the sky.
Even after the unmanned chute hits water,
collapses, bobs like plankton, the Achilles gunners
riddle it, mere fabric, for a countable time of horror,
as if it were the body Hector’s breath divorced.
Frenzied to eat raw flesh.

Dead ahead loom
the firing of their tinder cities,
the quaking of their precarious island earth,
the cremation in two blinks
of a fifth of a million souls.

And after all of them, ungunned, unnerved, unwilling,
will cry “enough,” our grand old man will steam, flank speed,
his bristling wagons to the very shadow of
their sacred mountain—dark through dark—
will lob those sixteen inchers,
100,000 foot-ton energy at the muzzle,
till false dawn shows, bombarding
for the glory of the service,
Academy ‘07, their mother soil.

8

You’re back in bed. Clock hands,
two phosphorescent fish floating
the wine-dark sea, tell ten of four.

Sire of the West, Agamemnon,
raping Eastern Troy, altering
its altars for the worse.

How many pounds of elm falling
at such a rate from such a height
can rafter 2x6's stand against?

You see your broken self
pinned upon a tree trunk
upside down.

9

We victors warred
for the white god, righteously.

The vanquished strung themselves
a necklace of atrocities
with which we choked them black.

10

No peace in sleep.
Finger-like the elm
accuses, threatens tormentingly.
The howl crescendos.

Alive you must have plunged
to Round One, Circle Seven, Hell.

John Wheatcroft

PICNIC

We saw Edgar Poe on Tuesday, in a balloon.
There was a party on the Wordsworths' lawn, and Sam
Saw a tiny face, all eyes, hair and collar,
Peering through the fragile guy ropes
Of a white balloon, a soft and wavering cloud.
"Which way is eastsoutheast?" —Voice hesitant,
American, mustache quivering. I want to go to Paris"
"Ah, *that* way." Sam pointed to a clump of trees
Somewhere toward Cadiz, but was stopped by Keats
(Who knew directions — he'd been to Scotland and
Safely back, in the rain.) Brown and healthy,
Panting from a race with Shelley,
Keats moved Sam's inky thumb up the horizon,
But stopped — "Have a drink with us." Poe gulped,
"I have to go to Paris", but there was the sun,
Too hot for England, and his tight linen stock.
He clambered out, left his *Blackwood's* on the seat,
And stood shyly on the lawn.

Lamb blinked into the hot blue day, balancing a tray
Of glasses. Never an outdoor man, he'd been playing
Whist with Dorothy. Tired as she was
From copying William's lines, she'd beaten him.
Keats brought Edgar to the crowd. "All here but William—
He's weeding out the roses—old fusspot."
Poe turned, gasped and nearly spilt his wine
And strawberries. Keats guessed and grinned.
"Yes, that's George. Shelley dared him to a race."
Another glass, they scattered, and Poe met Mary Lamb.
She watched the sheep, all friends of Blake's, told jokes,

And softly sang in French. "Je suis une jolie bergère."
Poe gave back the chorus in a husky tenor,
"Et ron ron ron, petit patapon." The party flew to evening.
Poe told Texas stories in outrageous drawls to Byron
Who returned the pleasure, giving tales of border abbeys,
Bleeding ghosts and monstrous fishes in a voice like winter mist.
Blake caught the wool of the calmest ram
And rode him round the roses. Laughing, crumbs in his
Mustache, Poe let the balloon go waving,
A blossom in its own breeze, as the New York air
Sighed out among the green and running mountains.

Deborah Burnham

FRIENDS

for John Barnie

That cold fall day
when we were first together
walking across an empty field,
we saw a wave of sparrows
crash against the grass.
That was beautiful, we said;
and final: the field stood
dead still again
except for our walking.

Yesterday
I was thinking:
now that we must say goodbye,
I would like to leave you as slowly
as a grey winter day.

But I wouldn't
know what to say,
sitting there
thinking I should say something
about parting,
my throat coked,
my mind stuck,
the passing time
tearing words
from the corners of my mouth

I would like to say:
Today
I saw a wave of sparrows
crash against the grass.
But they leapt up again
above the houses and trees
and for an instant
in the upper air
caught fire.

F. Richard Thomas

ODYSSEUS AND HIS SIRENS

for Picasso and his painting

1 Noise

"After the Second World War, at the time when he was attracted to Francoise Gilot, Picasso became interested again in the myths of the Greeks. . ."

My ears are bolted
but the cochleas multiply
in pitched black
a labyrinth rings

I am lashed
to a ship's flanks
my legs running away

My head is
sacked with visions of fisharms
and flukey legs overrun with honey
of generations of bees

I realize
it's no use bolting
an other world of jeweled
barbarity greens my wrists

I am prize
litter of shells
my eyes as bone
white as theirs

2 Faces

“The enormous triptych, ‘Odysseus and His Sirens,’ is undergoing rapid deterioration. . . Picasso painted it directly on wood, and the painting has been constantly exposed, in the Museum of Antibes, to the salt air of the Mediterranean. . .”

Fleshtone runoff.

In the Midi where sun and salt
adore color a film
goddess is cooked in a week.

Even the cloth goes. At the museum
a sort of blood appears,
a flowing oak. Finally the stone
is a god weakly cooked.

Ah, but it's summer! Time
for the artist to seize
ripeness. . . but they quarrel:
as if this goddess is specially cookable,

his anger ringing like ears,
he cigarets his woman's cheek
She is flesh, she burns, she wonders
if short-order cooks are gods,

if ripeness wells
nothing but impulse,
if agony of care is always
cooked like a goose without prayer.

3 Sleep Walking

"He would wander along the beach at night, who knows where he would end up, or how his work might be affected afterwards. . ."

Gristle and scale are paint
that multiplies in this cellar joint
with its sign out front: The After Burner.

Shades of smoke are spectacles
of myself. A thick bass humps
a pretty thin liquor.

Cronies are here. Bone
and battleshit, McManus trees
the Army jeep again and we laugh.

A woman smiles, tells me
she's Circe. Fine, I answer, and I'm
a purple heart. on Zeus.

If you were sailing, I ask her,
past music ravenous as goddesses,
would you strap on your guns?

You're always aprowl for a shootout,
she says. You can't see
your fleshworld yet? how it teems

with over and underspirit!
and you piddle with your plan-buildings.

My heart is stung: I want to ask her

What was your name again, but she raises her voice:
Look at this place! these carbonated
tongues! Look at your knuckles' contraction

(she touches a finger). Let your hands
go: blind as a Greek
oar! Walk in your sleep.

4 Honeysong

Blue legs
kick at a green sea and escape
from nothing,

the same bister of sirens,
are they real, these voices that rattle
eustachian throats

with meadowsong, the poet
described them, honeymusic that knows
all things

as bees do, suddenly we
are attacked, they muster
a thousand golden

torsoes
chanting in tongues as they needle
my sails collapsing,

The fountainous queen
flutters me off to combland where she hums
and furs with affection

but no, I
decline, until she weeps and removes
her black-gold things,

a bare
bee-woman splendor before me, I give
in, say Yes,

for my crew
were petty revulsions, scattered
now like clothes,

anxiety
dropped like the noise of parties, I am
like you, bare and alone.

5 Fish Story

"It is a short distance from the museum at night down to
the shore, where with the artist's colors still reverberating
inside you might gaze at the starred Mediterranean
sky. . ."

Under this water
I am caressed by knuckles
of eels, nightfish creak
like zodiacals

where I cast new eyes
like hooks up to the surface
now a sky. To love each one
is impossible. . .

necessity:
every axil of finger and fluke
that trebles the ears,
bluefish who reel as they hit

all the joints in Scorpio,
bowhead whales tilting
Polaris, the rare male
seeing with eyes

of a fishgod:
Pisces who knows
he can allow no one
to get away,

catching each elbow of pike
that twangs Lyra,
and old Antares winks
at each slip,

winks at each human
child and fish
child who is lost
and found to the naked eye.

Edward McCrorie

THE EXO-JONAH TENT

The ribbed, rubbery
underside of the whale
wrinkles not so much
with age as with
mapmaker's clarity.
Clutching the abdomen,
I stare up and read out
the veins that branch to
exactly where I go.

My face brushes the cavernous

Fingers, my digging deep,
breathing like the crown
of remora, skull-
suction cup, itch, and
scratching, I pull
down stretched fold
upon canvas of whalebelly:
this taffy.

My ride wobbling with resistance,
I hang from a baggy balloon
over the sea that already
holds my slowing
beneath the surface.

Helium voice sputtering,
the balloon upends.

Harrison Fisher

TWO POEMS

Tit for Tat

Nature made a mistake—or so it seemed—
when it drove a force through flesh
like a torpedo through mild waters.

There was Anne, dainty blonde,
with lullaby-voice and rock-a-bye walk.

And there was Margaret, rawboned redhead,
with rusty voice and what-the-hell stride.

These two met in high school.
Vehement gaze shot into cupped gaze,
and brimmed. Wool hand grazed silk hand;
sizzled, caught, clung.
Sudden summer scorched their skins;
nipples budded through blouses.
In the darkened locker room, kisses burrowed;
tongues clove like snakes copulating.

The gym teacher blew her nose.
Then she blew her whistle.

A music mightier than a whistle
kept swiveling every cell of their flesh
into a rhapsody of opposites.
Yin invited yang;
yang explored yin.
Dazzled by their magic, they took
secret names: *Wella* and *Wand*.

All these implosions made them luminous.
They glided about like a pair of lamps
propelled by a gyroscope.

Anne's mother phoned juvenile court,
where a new clerk filed her complaint
under "Vandalism." When Margaret's
mother was notified, she said:
"Shit! It's tit for tat!"

Their fumbling fathers shook hands.

Sweating boys prowled after them.
"Put a hotdog in her locker." "No, a big
carrot." "two coke bottles."
But when the boys met up with them in class,
all their acned faces just said "hi."
The boys stopped short of peeking into
their windows, as planned, or following them
into the woods. What they really expected
to find was murder.

Slyly, silently, in corners all over the school,
on stairways, in parked cars, other girls
adhered in pairs. It was like a courtship of
snails.

"My daughter was raised in a Christian home!"
Anne's mother yipped. "That other girl's a
witch!" Margaret's mother said, "Shit"
and went on with her divorce.

Then Anne's mother would not leave the house:

—just when I'm going through my Change of Life!"
Anne's father ducked his worrybird face into
The Bible and came up with "Oh, Sisters!
We are living in The Last Days!"

But on the whole, this was sensible place:
the midwest; a sensible time: 1940. A lot of
people were trying hard to overcome their
narrowmindedness. One by one, after school,
the teachers had talks with Margaret and Anne.
The psychologist gave them inkblot tests.
The blushing clergyman invited them to Youth Night.
The Girl Scout leader told them about Sublimation.
Listening with her lapfull of Love, Anne wept.
But Margaret hauled her off with: "Why in Hell
sublimate The Sublime?"

That hurricane walloped all rescue-efforts.
Then it lashed back upon itself, and stopped.
"Kill me!" Anne pleaded. Margaret smuggled
her belladonna and razor blades and a pearl-
handled pistol. "Lily Liver!" she sneered.
"Kill yourself!" They remained knotted,
plus and minus, in that cold equation for
a very long season.

Something gave. Margaret bounded out and grabbed
a wounded war veteran. He was grateful for her guts.

Anne seemed stunned. Like a flower, she waited
for a kind man to transplant her.

He came: His smile was sunshine.

“What a poignant little face!”

His voice was rain.

He transplanted her.

She did not blossom.

His Kindness turned out to be sugar-water.

It did not nourish her; it just preserved
the poignancy.

He consulted books. He came up,
smiling, with clichés: “But you
couldn't be —you’re so *feminine*—”
“Just pretend it never happened.”

She did not blame him.

She blamed herself: She had
married her fumbling father.

For many years, her Rage was wrapped
in Pity.

Then something wand-struck in her
flashed like a Loch Ness monster
through the sugar-water.

He rushed her to a hospital,
where this tale was born.

Messages

Plants talk.

Else a spirit speaks through them.

One Sunday last month
 in a greenhouse,
 a glamorous plant all but beckoned to me.
 I walked over to this pink flamboyance
 that rose like a flamingo from a nest
 of silver-brindled leaves,
 and under my gaze, it flashed
 into a crossbred *presence*—
 pink cheeks, multiple blue eyes, tutu, feathers—
 such as Picasso might skewer
 and label “Ballerina.”

This label, though, said: “*Aechmea fasciata*, \$25.”

—*You Beauty*, I thought.

I wish I could afford you.

“IN THREE WEEKS,” it whispered.

It was a voice, but not a voice. . .

more of a mist. . .

and something opened like a smile in me
 to let it in.

“IN THREE WEEKS,” it insisted,
 and a light bloomed above me.

—*wishful thinking*, I warned myself.

Light and voice followed me out of the greenhouse

. . . “IN THREE WEEKS!” . . .

encapsulated me like a bubble.

A few days later, Malcolm, my husband
 fell ill, and for many days I was too busy nursing him

to think of talking flowers.
The doorbell rang. It was his colleague,
holding in his arms— yes, the aechmea.

Sunday. Three weeks, to the day.

Sitting here now with the aechmea
and our secret, I confess this is not
the first flower that has spoken to me.
I remember when I was four, a big red zinnia
kept chanting. . . *chanting? well, wafting*
a word: "JENNIE."

Then a woman appeared at our door.
Her face was round and rough and rosy,
like the zinnia.

"Come meet your Aunt Jennie!" my mother called.

. . . . Afterwards, I announced:
"Mamma, the zinnia told me Aunt Jennie was coming."
That Calvinistic finger wagged at me:
"I don't wanta hear that kinda talk."

Thus that part of me sank.

One hot, humid August afternoon,
when my husband and I were strolling along the canal,
a huge white mallow whispered to me from its
jelly-red center: "THE TREES ARE CLAPPING THEIR
HANDS."

Stunned, I kept walking, and the red mouth called:
"THE TREES ARE CLAPPING THEIR HANDS! TELL
MALCOLM."

I kept silent. I dared not risk it.
Minutes later, Malcolm halted: "Look!"
Beside the towpath, about three feet above the grass,

two small limbs were "clapping."

Still afraid to risk it, I said "Maybe a spider heard us coming—or some bees."

Malcolm replied, "No, it's not like that."

The two limbs went on clapping. Sumac, I think, with leaves like fingers.

"Maybe a snake—" I offered.

Malcolm mused. "No, it's not that kind of movement."

He looked all around: "Not another leaf is stirring."

We stood watching the two little limbs.

It was not the random bouncing, the *bobbing*,

as from a retreating creature, but a *deliberate* action:

The two limbs were tilted out of their normal

horizontal position into the vertical,

and were patting together, regularly, like hands.

Exactly like hands.

As we watched, I was all but aware of

a smile above the limbs—

and a foamy white beard. . . .

I turned and lurched down the towpath. . .

that smile scorching between my shoulder blades.

Stones talk, too.

A schoolgirl, roaming one summer day on Civil War grounds, I came upon a shambled stone chimney.

"PLACE YOUR LEFT HAND ON ME," it entreated.

I did, and my fingers siphoned the message:

"I'M DANIEL THE DRUNKARD. PRAY FOR ME."

I was so nonplussed that I stumbled on without praying.

—*Forgive me, Daniel.*
I prayed when I got home

Street signs suffer.

Last year the big black letters
of the SAGMORE PLACE sign stared so mournfully
that I had to detour.

Two weeks later, in the newspaper,
the cause confronted me: *Young mother murdered.*
Baby cries to death in crib. Neighbors did not
want to interfere. . . Sagmore Place. . .

My heart cracked. Grief gushed, and still
gushes for that baby.

Repeatedly, at Seminary Road,
the street sign seemed to sag with sorrow
. . . seemed to moan, "FOURTEEN."
Week after week, when we passed it,
that sag, that ache, that moan: "Fourteen!"
A year later, on television, it came:
. . . *apartment building under construction*
at Seminary Road collapsed. . . Fourteen
men trapped. . .

SUTTON PLACE shuddered,
then signaled and signaled like a desperate
deaf mute. A month later, news came that
our friend, Paul Sutton, had been killed
in a car crash.

Sagmore . . . Seminary . . . Sutton.
Why all these S's? I'm an S.

Are we all ticking together through
 a kind of compassionate computer?
 Have I already been shunted towards my exit?

Buildings speak too:
 Or a spirit summons from them.

In May of 1964,
 when I was trying to write a eulogy
 for the May-born Jack Kennedy,
 driving past the Department of Justice,
 I saw—no, *felt*—someone waving to me
 from that window to the left of the entrance.
 Malcolm said, “What are you looking at?”
 “The lovely trees,” I lied.

A week later, the same thing happened:
that waving, so frantic, so urgent!
 The impact must have jolted me because
 my small sons asked: “What did you see, Mom?”
 “The magnolia trees,” I lied again.

. . . .
 Four years later, Robert Kennedy
 was assassinated. . . and on television,
 I saw the Department of Justice. . . saw the pointer
 placed on the window—*the very window where that*
SOMEONE had waved so frantically—
 heard the commentator say: “Office of The
 Attorney General, Robert Kennedy—”

In May 1972, when I was still struggling
 with that eulogy, The Watergate, which I
 passed occasionally, kept tugging at my attention.
Ship of Fools, I addressed it, (which is what we
 Democrats called that sumptuous building where

so many rich Republicans lived) —*what's with you?*
 In my mind's eye, a face appeared,
 big as a billboard, ruddy, white-whiskered,
 gray-eyed.

Santa Claus? I mused, and the face evolved
 into clarity: *Walt Whitman.*

“ . . . *I stop somewhere waiting for you. . .*”

and before I could fetch up the preceding lines
 of his poem, a voice, like telepathy, intruded:

“DEAN . . . GEMSTONE.”

In the ensuing weeks,

The Watergate wore Whitman's face
 like a figurehead.

Names “—MITCHELL CAULFIELD COLSON—”

were beamed carefully, letter by letter,
 as from a radio.

All summer, prophecies drifted—

“DEAN NIXON RESIGN L. KING WILL BE
 PRESIDENT—”

like vapor from something brewing.

So insistent the hum from that caldron
 that I wondered if The Watergate stands
 on the spot where one hundred years ago
 the May-born Whitman sat under his favorite
 apple tree. . . looking out over the Tidal Basin
 . . . dreaming of us Americans yet to be born.
 . . . Wondered, too, if, earlier, that Waver
 at that window was Whitman, who had worked for
 a while as a clerk in the Office of the
 Attorney General. . .

So sure my reception that I wondered
 if the heat of my concentration on the

May-born Kennedy had melted the membrane
that let these messages through.

Flowers trees stones
streetsigns buildings. . .

And Whitman has returned, as he said he would.
"The Spirit bloweth where It will."

Often in mid-May, a week before my birthday,
It nudges me. . . breathes a malaise. . .
It finds that sunken deadpan part of me;
then like a yeast, It proliferates.
Through those soggy summer days and nights,
It pummels my wits. . . depresses me like mild flu
. . . swells and swells until It pushes up a cloth. . .

I've never even hinted of it to Malcolm:
There's a coldness about him. . .
I'm too timid to mention it to my sons.
But now that it's surfaced into fashion,
I'll slip these fragments to you, Stranger.

"Talk to your plants," say the current faddists.
I say: *Keep still. Listen.*

Karen Snow

TWO POEMS

An Afternoon On Millinocket Lake

A silence is wrapping around
all the lake sounds:
The two fishermen speak of their luck
and their words sit easy
with the watered distance,
the space moving freely
about their soft-spoken syllables.
Those birds up there in the pines
have a song with a swaying sound,
like the motions of a swing,
a rhythm coming sharp and clear
to the wharf where the people sit.

These rhythms remain fresh,
unaffected, in the piles of soft air.
Even the great fish
rising to suck up a slug
from a floating stick
cannot snap the lull
from this air.

Crossing The Booms In The Fall

We move down to where the river bottlenecks
and begins to slide cold and dark
through the throbbing jam of chained pine.
I follow as you cross,
the frigid water twisting under your feet
like a mink slithering its smooth body.
The long logs creak and roll and nose under slowly.
You walk the dry streak of their knobbed backs
unflinching, on these oldtimers
heavy with their watered years.

When I hesitate you call back,
"I don't have time to play nursemaid."
But I'm thinking of the girl of seven
who tried the early ice near here
and found that narrow swath the current undermines.
Later when they cut frozen blocks for summer
they had to haul her from her sleep with tongs.

Finally you coax me over
and I step nervously from log to log
beyond the point of strongest flow.
Then, while the afternoon dies around us,
we pause on the other bank
and I hear the current talking up to us
loud and steadily,
the sound pervading all the indistinct shapes of twilight.
Paul Corrigan

TELL IT TO THE RIVER

You left a ring on every wall
at the level of the eye,
on the floor an inch of oily silt
to snowshovel away,
stirred brown gravy in the cupboards,
rippled all the books,
ran your nose on all the kleenex,
wiped your bottom on the linens,
licked the stamps and watermarked the paper.

You left the drunken furniture
against the downstream wall,
veneer unbuttoned.
The piano, toffee'd
into permanent mistune,
sold for peanuts to a decorator.
Worse, you shorted on a burner
like a spiral harvest moon
that could have shone the house down.

Inconsideration. But considering
the silting of the arteries,
the rising water in the lungs,
the stroke's triumphant crest, to be expected.
And we knew just who had dumped on us.
Outside at dusk the leaves were grey
with a dust not even rain disturbed,
and we saw you leaving, or at least
the pair of rats that shod your feet.

Harry Stessel

THE KILL

The gun was left
to me by my father
who brought it back
after the war and stored it
in a closet

 old sliver
of his life

 but never
taught me how
to use it

 so
I learned on my own
in the backyard
Saturdays.

Come hunting season
and I was ready
red-jacketed
and boots with warm
insides.

 The license
cost me and my wife
was angry I would
leave her for three days
go with the car
to mountains

 but
I promised her meat.
They laughed me off
son and daughter
at the windows of
our house.

Never mind.

I got lost the first
day

 spent the night
in the woods alone
and often I heard
deer

 their whining snort
and the falling apples
in the old choked orchard
stomped on my dreams.

The second day
by accident I found
my car again

 looted
the side window busted
open and the farmer
down the road said
"out-of-staters"
and clucked.

Never mind.

I slept in the back seat
that night and an owl
dropped into the elm
over my head and
barked at its distant
mate.

 I was out
by dawn

 loaded
my weedy face mean
with want and without

knowing how
I found my way
back to the old
orchard

and saw
the buck on its hind
legs lean and full
of lust for the fruit
and crosshatched him
and fired.

Quickly
he touched ground
bleated and leapt
coughed and was
into the spruce before
I shot again
uselessly.

I followed
and could hear the cough
of the maimed lung
but always out of sight
and met the same farmer
by a clump of
poplar out for his own
kill

who laughed
and said yes
he'd heard and figgered
I'd best give it up
they could go on
with a bad lung
for days
before they dropped

“but that’s a long time”

I said

and he shrugged

“never mind
the dogs will eat.”

I kept on after the trail
and the sun got
caught for a moment
in the branch of
a dead hemlock

then

fell into the ridge.

I hunched

by a rock all night

listened to

a porcupine grind

his teeth at me

then clatter off

and followed the old

stain in the morning

thinking now only

of the rising saltwater

in his nostrils

slowly

drowning on land

staggering somewhere

in field or furrow

and suddenly

at noon there was

no more sign

no trace

and I circled out

from the last splotch
and back

but

there were only the leaves
newly let go
in a fresh south wind
and I knew I was lost
again.

They found me
three days later
I'd stopped walking
lost my gun
started to see
a troop of all
the people I knew
in the trees hanging
and flapping in the wind
forever and once
a wounded stag
lowered his horns
and pawed the leaves
blood flung in the spittle
of his swollen tongue.

My body
healed in two weeks.
It was
my father's gun
that I lost
a splinter
traveling the blood's path
inward
to the heart.

Ictalurus

Some four hundred ninety-three restaurants and diners in Illinois rivertowns specialize in Mississippi River channel catfish. At last count, forty-five of these owe their names to the whiskered delicacy; i.e., **The Channel King** (Quincy), **Tony's Catfish N Pizza** (Collinsville), **Miller's Kat & Keg** (Rock Island), and **Bullhead Haven** (R.R.2,Gulfport).

—Wallace Harmon
Fenceline Omnibus, 1963.

When they built the Burlington Bridge, years ago,
they caught one on a crane hook that was so big
ev'rybody thought it was a sunk log. Weighed
two full ton. They had to cut the cable 'cause
it weren't no use tryin' to get the hook back.

They was gonna cut it for steaks at the saw
mill, but it was too tough for dog food. Some big
timer bought it all up and ground fertilizer
outa the meat, carved walkin' sticks and gun stocks
from the ribs, and sold the skull to a musim
in New York City.

I heard once that there's a
fancy house in Springfield with a big window
cut from that same old cat's blue tailfin, but
I don't 'spect that's true.

Cowtowing

Someone put the first prints here, turned
up the first mud, first clay; there was a
day when this cover of short grass first
tore under clipping feet along a place bare

enough to be called a path. It could have
been Charlie, or one of the Krimplers, who
owned the place before; or maybe it wasn't
human—a dog after rabbit, a buck scent-

ing the big pond. More than likely it
was one of these acrid cows, one of their
great great cowmothers or hornless cow-
fathers, but whoever it was, if they could

turn around, they'd see quite a column
behind them: farmers, livestock, rabbits,
deer, and dogs, generations going to the
pond—with me at the end of the line.

Dragonfly

The heat is buttoned up
around the pond, like flannel.
The mud cracks into cobblestones before the eye.

I sit in the spanish needles all day
and watch the sun sip green tea
from an earthen cup.

High in the sweet-sour air
across the field of red clover
silent zephyrs of flies kick up, foretelling rain.

Circling the pond, a dragonfly
puts the young frogs back in their place.
The pond, with a shudder, is all eyes.

Steve Fay

TWO POEMS

The Circle

Three children gather on a hill
To sit, hugging their jackknife knees,
In wait for the right wind.

When it comes they board a three-wheeled
Coaster with mast and sail
For a wobbly wagon ride downhill.

Off, the boards hum like fiddle strings,
The wheels run a raw egg's course
On the slope, zigging left then right,

Yoked to loose hubs, Unbelievably,
It speeds their fledgling, excited screams
Near a quarter mile before the sail

Flattens and the wagon sighs to a halt.
Again, they plod uphill as if knee-deep
In marsh. With a pony's pique,

All the stubbornness of a stone,
The wagon balks at each step
Until they've made the top.

How swift a downhill flight on the heart's
Spinnaker, how slow and bitter the sure return:
A round route run in the grip of gravity.

Digging Radishes

Digging compliant earth I uncover
under an avalanche of topsoil,
last year's clump of radishes
still blindly taking root.

Nearby, like handfuls of peas,
clusters of maggots, grubs,
after a season of winter go on
with their underground lives.

Slowly, I turn the wet ground
making it ready, and without
elegy pull up by the roots
what has lived for so long

without me, in a dark
and a dream I can enter
but briefly, with the strength
in my trespassing hands.

The radishes, cut-off from their
comfort, drown in my hands,
in the foreign substance of air,
as I carry them home,

wiping their red from my fingers,
the juice like a thin gauze
staining my jeans. I am told
of a man, a native of Bangkok,

a gardener by trade, ancient
black-belt master of karate,
hands swift as shrikes when
they forget their rakish trilling

and dive from the treetops,
pinning their prey to thorns,
who in a final test of skill
was forced to pluck from the damp

chest of a live bull its restless,
still beating heart. Like a plow
his hand dove into a startled
cloister of ribs, turning aside

mats of hair, splitting flesh
from bone. Then, closing
around that rooted heart
he jerked it free

from a tangle of veins
to beat, auricle and ventricle,
aorta forked as candelabra,
in his hand like living fruit.

His point made, he forsook
all further demonstrations to settle
back to his life as a gardener
in the king's expensive gardens.

I am sure he had learned
from his one act, enough
of crime and glory, to bear
on his tongue the wild taste
of winter's bitter radishes.

Richard H. Nester

THE KUTZTOWN HALLOWEEN PARADE

Ghosts dress up in this Dutch county.
Bands from thirty different schools
Play songs similar as their uniforms,
Majorettes wearing bras
That point towards the future
Throw batons above the four stories
Of the tallest building in town.

Floats lumber by dragging
Their skirts, and beauty queens
Wave from the backs of pickup trucks.
Even the girls on the sidewalks
Have bodies glowing with confetti:
Girls from the college, ones from town
Who smell ripe as apples.

The sidewalks are jammed beyond
The curbs with local populations.
Families awash with children
Cheer more children parading past.
Farmers have been hard at work
Through long sequestered winters,
Their phalluses hardy as sausage
And wives like homemade pies.

Tonight the leaves come racing
Furled in their dry, veined laughter.
The terrifying thighs of cheerleaders
Come stomping by,
Horse chestnuts cracking like teeth
Beneath their marching feet.

There will be parties later,
And dancing. Lovers will grope below
The soaped windows of cars,
Holding out as long as possible
Against the coming of November.
When they drive home they will pass
Under trees strewn with toilet paper,
Hanging in their headlights
Like Spanish moss.

Robert Gibb

FOUR POEMS

Quantum Mechanics

1

What is the angular
momentum of the sun?
Or of the various
particles leaving the sun?
Or of the particular
particle that
having left the sun
strikes the asphalt
roofing of the barn
with no apparent
effect? The sun itself
is the color of
a yellow oak.
Struck by something like
the autumn wind
it shakes out
its own leaves
over the ground.

2

If I know where
the reddish cat is
among the maple
leaves can I also
know how fast
she moves toward
a particular shrew
frantic in the hard
ground by the barn?
In the shrew's eyes
the cat achieves
the speed of light.
Her mass is therefore
infinite as she strikes.

After Eadweard Muybridge

1

The woman hops on one foot
through half a dozen photographs,
her hands held at head level,
the shape of her bare breasts
changing from frame to frame.

At the end a faint smile
may come over her face
before she turns and hops through
six frames facing away.

2

The bald man in the singlet
stands, steps, leaps with
both feet, sails above the ground
for the space of one photograph
shot behind an abandoned
barn, lands and again stands still.
He is severe, as if such sailing
is no game.

3

The horses walk, canter, gallop or trot,
their fine hooves no longer blurred
with dust. The horse of the moment
extends a polished hoof; the next
horse picks it up; it is carried
from frame to frame, gleaming.
The speed increased, in one instant
the horse folds all four legs
to its chest and flies.
It can hang there, folded
up like a spider.

4

The cat, stopped in mid-leap,
is flying. The naked man
bunching the muscles of his back
flexes secret wings. The woman
lifting her skirts lifts herself
bodily from the earth. If the eye
connives, she may hang there forever.

The Boat Room at Blue Mountain Lake

The Adirondack guide boat,
the Rushton canoe, and a Turkish
water-taxi live together
in the same room with
El Lagarto, champion
speedboat of the Thirties,
humpbacked and studded with brass.
Ancient Lake Champlain bateaux,
lifted from the mud by divers
armed with balloons, lie
in pieces near dugout
and birchbark canoes.
The Sairy Gamp, the Osprey,
the Water Witch, the Skeeter,
and the huge St. Lawrence skiffs
that crossed the lakes
on Sundays only
rest here with the spruce
and white pine kayaks
of men who somehow paddled
from Philadelphia

to Montreal. The paddling
itself is not so surprising
as the spruce knees
carefully carved out for ribs,
the quarter-sawn pine
siding, the brass boot-
plates neatly shaped
to protect the bottom,
the two sets of iron
oarlocks, the polished cane
seats with their
octagonal pattern.

So much buffed wood and old
brass is intoxicating
until you come across
Eakins' "Max Schmitt in a
Single Scull." It is Max,
in ginger mustache and racing suit,
squarely inserted into his craft
like a brass screw himself,
who, floating on Eakins' smudged
water with wing-like oars
aslant, restores the balance.
The boats are only awesome empty.

The Monterey Cypress

Gulls huddle in the gray
mist; cormorants are hunched
in the craters of the cliffside.
The ocean is slowed

by the weight of kelp,
by wood too heavy to toss
past the rocks. Photographers
circle the warped cypress,
the old tree tied by cables
to the cliffside and supported
by weathered boards.

There is no light for
the cameras; the mist already
renders the cypress in black
and white. It appears
as it does in the famous
photographs, the hair-line
fractures painfully distinct,
the grain curving in a way
that suggests the flowing
of clean hair.

On the beach below lost
wood is drying: the doors
of old cruisers, smashed
crates still studded
with nails. The cypress is already
dead and destined for the seaweed.
What curved the grain once
no longer flows. Photographers
keep it on the cliffside.
By platinum print it is arrested
at the top of a fall.

Michael North

TWO POEMS

Halfway To Oregon

West of Seward cicadas shout.
Pigs whale through muck
and moon up
at the Interstate. Farms spatter
the windshield: cabbage leaf,
horseblood. Nebraska,
like a loss of will, lies down.

The radio is unclear. Already
the Lincoln station sinks back
in the skywaves. Twisting
the dial I pick up
thunderheads jabbing lightning.

If we could see coming what is
coming nothing would budge us.
We'd cut the engine
and tap a rootbeer bottle
on the steering wheel forever.

I would have married Maine.
A dozen times since Chicago
I have driven up on myself
rolled and burned.
Not the Pacific.
Not all the miles high
mares' tails and blue Cascades. Not Oregon.

The Church At The Corner
Of Winter And Elm

Watch it.

Turning this corner might land you plump
sheepish in the teeth
of someone's wedding, or underfoot
his funeral procession,
a stranger in either case.

You must resist the desire to disappear.

Impersonate

the rebel son slunk back from Amsterdam
to watch the coffin hole plugged;
see if they don't touch your elbow,
commiserate: every family has one.

In organ thunder

people are ready for anything:
a mysterious lover,
lean as a pickerel slipping
through bridesmaids' willowy arms.

Today it's another man's undertaking.
You'll get your chance shortly.

In the meantime, listen:

someone hauls down the bellcord,
then gives it back
into the steeple.

The bell metal rings spread
exactly as calm water
grazed by a swallow.

Again he pulls the cord.