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**WHEN YOU WERE YOUNG**

When I carried you  
into our creekside house,  
across the flagstone steps,  
river-stippled threshold —  
you knew more of water than I.  
You wriggled and turned like an eel.

In the night, as I laid you down,  
your eyes rolled out the window;  
they weren't yet settled in your head.  
They went sailing  
with Pleione;  
like Aldebaran twinned,  
they followed the moon.

Your plaintive whimper  
was the cutting edge  
of night geese flying  
low on the water.  
Your gape was the point  
of their convergence.

We began that night  
to weave your caul  
despite ourselves;  
birth's veil hid nothing.

**Frederick Lowe**

**UNBURYING MOTHER**

**1** with only the tip of the spade  
I probe  
I am  
afraid to push the earth  
there is the possibility  
of worms I don't  
want to cut flesh

when you rocked me  
your fingers stroked  
my forehead  
I watch the earth  
split  
my fingers are white  
gripping the spade  
my fingers are  
white as the flour on  
your hands  
kneading bread  
you rubbed your hands together  
I hear the gritty sound  
this dirt is dry  
there are webs of roots  
I don't recognize  
didn't ask  
while you rolled out the pasta  
or pinched the edges of the piecrust  
I never asked what  
was under the kitchen

2 my weight shifts  
leg to leg  
the veins in your legs  
ink  
spreading wordless  
if I asked you said  
“only at night they throb”  
when I reach you  
I will massage your legs  
you will tell me of  
when you danced those  
Saturdays you slipped  
past your mother’s bed  
without her calling  
Anna . . . Anna . . .  
do you know, Anna,  
if the morning star were  
still called Ishtar-Inanna  
no crucifix would have hung  
on your bedroom wall  
no selfless Mary would have  
smiled at your self’s death  
Anna, how you would have danced

3 I’ve hit rock  
*pacienza, pacienza*  
you would say  
nobody’s born with it  
not like feet arms eyes  
*pacienza*  
useful in prison  
nuns call it a virtue  
  
sometimes at night I think  
I have it I say

now that the sun has set  
I have it  
but my hair sticks out  
and my clothes hang crooked

I'll move these rocks with  
my hands  
rocks heavier than  
your two babies  
dead after birth  
heavy as the doctor  
who would not cut  
who said do it alone  
you'll feel more like a woman  
you'll feel more  
now the earth  
gives under me  
the third time he relented  
after all it wasn't Abruzzi  
it was Pittsburgh  
and 1941 was modern  
was softer than  
the limestone that  
never moves in Abruzzi  
he relented made  
the incision like  
god splitting a mountain  
letting water rush  
spilling over his hands  
my head in his hands

4 now the sun warms  
my shoulders  
the digging is easier  
you rubbed my back  
asked was I  
cold hungry tired sad

did I need  
now I need  
to tell you  
when you left I was  
in the middle of a sentence  
my voice lost  
in someone else's sound  
like a pebble dropped  
into someone else's sea  
now I know  
our words  
the ones you hinted  
with your eyes your hands  
I know our words  
the ones you made into  
bread for supper  
the ones that never  
spoke of your hunger  
I feel the sun on  
my shoulders soon  
we will eat together  
we will have  
coffee and warm anise bread  
and the words will fall  
from your apron  
from your lips your eyes  
from your thick gray hair  
loose and wild  
the words will fall  
and we will dance in them  
and laugh and cry in them  
hand in hand two women  
we will crumble our silence  
like this dirt  
relenting  
beneath my feet

**Almitra David**

**THE CELL**

*Let Simeon rejoice with the Oyster, who hath the life  
without locomotion.*

—Christopher Smart

1 A honeysuckle plucked  
and pressed against  
my tongue and I am sucking  
something not sweeter than a breast  
but sweet  
and you'd probably believe it. No,  
sweeter, I don't know what I'm saying,  
there must be  
two kinds of sweet.

There are magnolias  
and two or three bobwhites  
by the stream  
which hisses like a blacksnake's  
shedded skin  
as it falls down gently  
on the rocks. I hear nothing  
but write it all in this book.  
A good book. There are people  
rushing out of the doors  
of a church  
and they giggle, mow the lawn,  
have a picnic, and undress.  
There's a world out there  
whose ghost  
flaps inside me. I can feel it.  
My arms swing open  
like the hinges on a whorehouse  
and welcome any faint

facsimile of hope— wind, say,  
which hasn't stroked me  
for years  
but I have my own wind  
written in the book.

I have the moon  
alone with each of its gestures  
and not shielding my eyes  
with the leaf  
of a palm I look right at it  
and groan. That's a good groan.  
I know because I groaned it  
even though I'm lying.  
I'd say our lives  
are richer without the truth  
if I was sure I wasn't being honest.

- 2 It seems like years  
since the stinkbeetle paused  
on the wall  
and with the silence of a monk  
went on.

My name is Simeon  
and I am based on facts.  
True facts. I'm taking a little walk  
with a herd of sheep,  
I'm falling to my knees on Mt. Gerizim,  
I'm peeing in a metal cup.  
And the cup is bliss, you see,  
this crotchthrob is bliss,  
this cell  
is my personal fragment of Christ  
and I am whiter  
than a mollycoddle, I think,  
therefore, I am  
the Lord.

The point?  
 Gentlemen,  
 with no one to deny whatever I utter  
 I speak nothing  
 but the truth. Even when I'm lying.

I say: *I am alone*  
 and I begin to feel alone.  
 I say: *The good will be blessed*  
 and the good are blessed.  
 And I am good. And I have hands  
 which I've examined this morning  
 with my tongue,  
 a thousand ghosts of horseshoes  
 carved on my thumb  
 which I press, first,  
 in the soot around the john  
 and then into the book  
 to print. And I print the thumb  
 adjacent to the word "thumb"  
 because I  
 am a sane lover of the truth  
 and know quite well  
 what I'm doing. I say:  
*The steel will melt*  
*into the shape of a tear*  
 and with an asterisk  
 footnote "steel" and "tear"  
 because off-rhymes make me chuckle,  
 truly.

- 3 But the steel  
 doesn't melt into the shape of a tear  
 and you, Sir,  
 peeping from the catwalk,  
 knew all along that it wouldn't.  
 That's why lately

the truth makes me sick, why I am making an effort  
to lie. That's why lately  
my feet seem strange, why at night I tip-toe  
out of my mind  
into a river where the rocks  
are draped with bras  
and the bosoms of washerwomen  
wobble like trout  
and the peachgrove's song is serene.

I haven't forgotten  
the dung-colored mole on the breast  
which one rose kiss turns to snow.  
That's why I lie.  
Because in any white thing,  
any good thing— in the moon  
or the sun-bleached panties of a nun—  
there's one pinhead  
of something rotten. *A beauty mark?* I think

you must be thinking  
if you read this,  
and of course you're not  
because I only made you up  
this morning  
while paper shreds unstuffed  
out of the pallet,  
this morning while I studied my teeth  
in the mirror  
and felt a stanza  
nudging at the roof of my mouth  
as though a mushroom popped  
from the tongue. The hell with it,  
my tongue.  
The hell with you.  
I spoke that stanza  
through which the breastmole rose

like an island  
or punctuation. And I touched my tongue  
to make sure it was mine  
and cried a little bit  
and wrote in the book  
and in the mirror saw someone lipping the sounds,  
not me  
but the better of the two of us.

- 4 I bless the oyster  
whose bog-heart flows against the shell  
and ebbs back lovingly  
inside. I bless the cell.  
I bless the truth.  
I take off my pants  
because there's no one watching  
and hang the crotch across the rusting bunk  
where one bolt  
pokes from the wall.  
I take off my pants  
because all of you are watching  
and stroke myself  
like a harp. *I am standing  
where the bunk is bolted to the wall,  
where the plaster is chipped in a ring.*  
I wrote that once upon a time  
in the book. Yesterday.  
And this evening  
I will write it again  
in the book, and tomorrow  
once I've sucked the cornbread's last crumb  
I will write it again . . .  
and so on. It's easy to predict.  
Someone elsewhere in the cellblock  
is singing  
but I can't make out the words.

5 You are dying  
so I wrote your name  
in the book  
and that "you" could just as well  
be me. Because I'm dying too  
I think  
a little bit,  
slowly. And pretty soon  
the mourners will funnel from the church  
and giggle, mow the lawn,  
have a picnic, and undress.  
Who can blame them?  
Sometimes they're not even sure  
if they're sad.

It is raining a season  
on the tile roofs  
and I can smell the black pond  
I stepped in  
in Georgia. I can hear my heart,  
an ominous frog,  
croak its one, unmitigable song.  
Even the streets  
veneered with a sheet of ice  
are etched with footsteps  
and broken.  
Even these women  
inching beneath the bare trees  
hang their faces into woolen scarves  
that are black,

even I have lived  
in a garment of shadows  
and moved there humbly as a lighthouse  
in fog  
as it makes its steps toward the sea.

I know mourners accept  
that darkness as their fate.  
They want to hurl  
their faces against the ribs of the sun  
and fall into the earth,  
broken. Something ridiculous.  
Something warm.  
The outside of the world  
from the inside  
out. But I want only to kiss  
the nipples of the girl on the jetty,  
to watch her squint  
at the seabirds  
while she unbuttons her blouse,  
while the off-shore wind  
bellows her sleeves,  
while her breasts puff  
out of her chest like dunes  
and are crowned  
as the white blouse takes  
to the wind  
like a kite  
like the ghost of a kite. I would crawl  
on my belly  
through the droppings of seagulls  
to nibble the prayer  
beneath her tongue.  
And you would too, again  
and again.

Again  
and again until we  
each of us  
knew the epitaph by heart  
and lived our lives in the gaboon  
forgetting.

Frank Graziano

**HOW TO STAY SAFE IN THE CITY**

It is best to make this rule:

Keep your door of hard hickory barred,  
No exceptions.

If you should hear the bell sound twice,  
Go to the keyhole and listen. Heavy breathing  
Means two or more people taller than you  
Are waiting. Stay quiet.

If the knocker sounds, it is the pretentious  
Lady in purple wanting your skin color, the amount  
Of change in your pockets.  
Ignore her.

Anyone who calls through your lock announcing  
His mission too loudly is a person  
In robes, clearly fictitious. If you come face to face  
With him, you will be accosted.  
Don't answer.

Be careful, careful. A loud insistent  
Rapping with bare knuckles means someone needs  
Assistance badly. He will be ugly, humpbacked  
And reeking. If you allow it, he will fall  
On your neck and remain there.  
Leave the door shut.

Let no one on the other side see your face.  
Peer from behind curtains, through BB sized slots,  
Cracks by the casement. Gauge your callers  
With mirrors and shadows but stay hidden.  
This is to your advantage.

Beware of dwarves and pygmies, monks,  
Spacemen, young girls with flowers and candles,  
Animals that come alone.

On windy nights push a chair against the knob.  
The clawing and scratching, the whispering  
Of the hinges, the shifting of the door  
On its axis are the sounds of those  
Who have been fed without milk, bearing you no kinship.  
They bring with them their boney cats, bare branches,  
Birds without feet. Stay alert, they will be there  
Until morning.

After a sudden heavy knocking  
Should you hear nothing but the shuffle of boots,  
The clanking of tools, quickly turn off every light  
In the house. Start backing down your hallway  
As quietly as you can towards that small  
Secret door in the corner under your bed  
At which you must begin to tap  
Softly, softly.

Pattiann Rogers

### THE CALL

I look suddenly to the telephone  
As though it might ring.  
Some nights there is a soft  
Violet hue to the storming sky,

The color you might decorate  
The inside of your coffin with.  
I pick up the receiver. The hum  
Is also soft, deeper than I remember.

This is Irene, talking to me  
In the silences the dead use  
As vocabulary. How does she hear  
When I gag and stutter? Where

Do the black bones connect,  
Send their nerves? Oh it is good  
To hear you, I lie. Why didn't  
You call when you breathed

And had the job at the health spa?  
And she says I'm surprised  
You recognized my voice.  
Or something like that.

It's hard to tell. It's really  
a hum, or lightning on a pole.  
Everything metal in the room  
Demands its own light. The scissors.

The needle. The paper clip.  
They burn like baby stars.  
The people partying upstairs  
Yell "Would you turn down those lights?"

We're *trying* to raise a racket up here."  
But there's nothing I can do.  
I'm burning too. I'm scared  
And I'm hot. And moving like

The eight seconds it takes  
To qualify on the bronco.  
My neighbors are upset  
And I am too, and she calls

All the time and I'm usually  
Here.

**THE YACHT: A MEDITATION ON FORM**

- 1 It is a space in the sea's eye; it is  
one gesture among points of light, that sail  
this morning, white laceration of cool blue.  
  
When I think of freedom I think of Li Ch'eng;  
I think of the spirit of things, and the spirit's  
resonance in itself. I think of an old man  
painting, and the self painting an old man  
by his tree. I think till I am old myself  
  
and a woman's shadow pushes a slim brush  
across my face, a mask for the new season  
where we become the events of dawn and night  
  
as a green snake glides into the spring grass,  
becomes the grass: one word, this Tuesday,  
moving among words on a clear page.
- 2 There is so little at the center of things.  
I look through you and there is the air  
whispering from another place, and the earth

around you I have known in its twelve seasons,  
but its form, that is a mirror only.

I am appalled again, entering your eyes,

at the clown's costume wearing my own face.

Unbearable center, only in spring do you  
reveal these fingers, spectacles of light.

- 3 Astonished to be here again, I take off  
my eyes, I walk in alleys of the world  
like a deaf mute, smelling and tasting.

Why do I think obsessively of bodies  
and of the possibilities of night  
as I pass through a tamarack forest hearing

these warblers and looking them up in my book?

Free doctor, psychoanalyst of birds,

I scan their bright derangements for some clue.

To live here is not to be wholly sane.

Poor Septimus was right, everything is alive  
and God is love. I am liable to arrest

by the peculiarities of order.

I am dangerous to creation, fat man  
absurd and ponderous, specialist in time

alone and death, sex specialist, a man intrigued  
with bones, promiscuous invalid, someone  
for one season only, the man of spring.

- 4 It is now time to cast off sophistication  
and become one's final self, as a French painter  
might sell his pet iguana and become

Christian on the eve of his wife's death.

I am a person cutting grass,

one who is still surprised by a young snake

under the machine, the tail severed neatly,  
 the rest whistling into the field. The prettiness  
 of things is like bird feathers; the butcher knows,  
 plucking as he does on weekdays while the kids  
 walk by. He handles the bare bird,  
 the bones. He gives the sad cows' eyes  
 to his own cat, pure Abyssinian.

Scattered upon his block is the truth of it,  
 the significance of flesh, we used to say,  
 poultry without facade, gifts of the heart.

- 5 Over and over. A woman butchers a pig.  
 Bird hearts, a dozen sparrows roasted  
 for a dime; the East Side of New York,  
 when Audubon lived there, a cow path, half  
 a hundred farms, an eagle resting on the wind.  
 It is in all living things, the speed alone  
 distinguishes their dying, the cocktailed wren  
 and the old tamaracks, walking that way together.

- 6 I am at breakfast with three patriarchs  
 this morning: Li Ch'eng, the butcher,  
 and my great uncle that ran the funeral home.

The talk comes round to sausage, a motif  
 I struggled to avoid without success.

It is, perhaps, the real thing truly murdered,  
 the figure of decline since the Sung dynasty,  
 a finished product, stupid, in a age of chance.

- 7 (The butcher himself sings this)

Now and tomorrow, bone and flesh, song  
 in the heart, the knife falling  
 among bones, the bones falling

miraculously apart, something inside  
humming like metal. Beyond ornithology  
I have known birds, I have known  
animals. One or two faces I do  
remember, the rest whistle by  
like geese travelling the spring air.

- 8 Faces are travellers; the body stays  
like a pair of fat trees in the underbrush,  
unplanned and not too beautiful.
- Circling like ospreys above a fact,  
we might find it again and we might not;  
it would depend upon the weather, it would  
depend upon ourselves, it would depend  
upon the status of our preparation.  
I have seen it happen for two people, just  
walking a woods path under tamaracks,  
the first strawberries quilting the damp ground.  
To reach a center, to find it is not air,  
to know that we are there and breathing there  
something beyond air, relinquish and control;  
to wait, to strike at the apt time, to find  
words for that silence, that is a day's labor  
and a night's. It is all a meatcutter could do,  
laying his knife aside, to reconstruct  
his animals, remake their faces, to place  
the brain just so, the tongues in their quiet throats,  
to light the eyes again and give them breath,  
to send them out by rows into the night,  
the new herd finally uttering from his shop  
to low softly and forage the streets for grass.

William Carpenter.

## ASLEEP AT THE CENTER OF A CONTINENT

- 1       Tiik flourishes  
 a switch over the mud bulls  
 he made at the riverbank.  
 They grow huge and move.  
       Yet boys deride him:  
 he has eaten from his mother's bowl.  
 They say: the airplane will come  
 and take you away.  
       He dreams  
 he is younger,  
 sucking  
 the goat's  
 tit.
- 2   An Arab holds a knife to Gaac's head,  
 the white folds of his jelabia a flag  
 of slavery. He raises his arm in defense  
  
 and it is his uncle, cutting the lines of manhood  
 into his forehead, six times across the endless  
 horizon between the ear and the ear.  
  
 Women watch him.
- 3   Nyalual, his wife, hears drums in the distance:  
 a baby's heart to her ear.  
       A dance.  
 Her buttocks bounce under her cattle-tail skirt,  
 mimic the latest American beat.  
       The pulse  
 becomes the pounding of grain; the pestle  
 is a log driven into a hollow trunk. It fades  
 as softly as a white woman pounds. She dreams  
 of a second wife, not too expensive.

- 4 Hundreds of Ret's family dance around him,  
 raising the dust to suffocate him with dignity  
 He tries to rise to his boyhood stance:  
 one foot to the knee, poised as a pelican,  
 but his joints ache so.

He calls out  
 to the cows in their own voice, to the ox  
 with horns curved like the bird's wing,  
 to the bull bright as the moon's hand.  
 Together they bellow as a cow is taken  
 for sacrifice: perhaps someone marries  
 or someone dies.

He wakens,  
 stirs the dung fire,  
 feels for his pipe  
 in the ashes.

- 5 The white one, Mebor, lows.

She has slipped her tongue  
 into the river  
 and sees her nose  
 reflected  
 just as the crocodile  
 seizes it  
 and drags her under.

- 6 Rushing out on my hands and knees  
 through the low door, I say  
 all the right things in their language.

But Gaac marries me anyway,  
 with his 100 cows and one rifle.  
 At the betrothal, my mother does not dance  
 with the other mothers. She stands  
 on my discarded clothes beating off  
 the young girls who take even the hair  
 from my brush.

## TWO SONS

Two sons: Aran and Kyp,  
two years and three months apart.

The worst mistake of my life.

In the hospital,  
waiting to be delivered of the second child,  
(Cesarean: I'm small, and complicated.)  
a television show fluttered at the edge  
of my attention . . . .

A lioness, teeth bared, kept driving away  
her half-grown male cub after the birth  
of her new cub.

Firstborn, grown thin and scruffy,  
cowered, shivering, back to the den:

*Mother? It's ME!*

She snarled, cuffed him away,  
then licked her ivory infant voluptuously  
as if he were an ice cream cone.

I wondered: Did she perceive Firstborn  
as burden? cannibal? contaminant?

Newborn as dangerously delicate?  
abnormally handsome? Guzzling her dug,  
he looked average to me.

Once when she was away, the outcast sneaked  
back and played tenderly with wobbly brother.

Bitch returned, all lunging fury,  
and banished him.

All that humid August night  
the rejected cub whimpered through my sleep.

\*

At dawn,  
my lower half numbed,

I became the beached mermaid,  
belly slit by Neptune's knife.  
I felt the tug tugg tuggg of hands,  
the lift . . . .

There on an opalescent stem  
this lotus!

"What's this boy's name?" the obstetrician asked.

"Kyp," I said. "Hello, Kyp."

—*the most beautiful baby I've ever seen!*

Gliding into drugged sleep, I re-lived  
that same love-at-first-sight rapture  
for my firstborn, Aran.

\*

So focused had I been on my tiny Kyp  
that I was startled by this giant  
leaning over my bed.

My husband's face was a florid mass  
glimpsed through a magnifying lens:  
*the horn-rimmed glasses, like eye rings;*  
*the blackheads in the snozzle, like berries;*  
*the stubble of the shaved cheeks, like thorns.*

Caliban smiled: *a piano in a fleshy pit.*

"Hi, Sweets:" *a reek of toothpaste.*

I allowed the gross lips to taste my  
ethereal ones. "Hi," I whispered.

A memo twinkled:

—*It was exactly the same the day after  
Aran was born. Exactly.*

"Did you eat a good lunch?" I purred.

"Did you praise Aran for potty? . . .

Buy him that yellow dumptruck . . . .

Buy yourself a good *Chablis*—"

A few weeks of this rosy aura  
would melt Monster back to the mild Malcolm.

Mistress to Malcolm all night,  
mother to Aran all day, I had mastered  
the Janus-game.

After Malcolm left,  
I leafed through a magazine  
and noticed in the horoscopes that  
my first son was born in my Sun,  
my second son was born in my Moon.  
*What does this mean?* I asked the sultry afternoon.

A darkness coiled around me.

\*

At the end of nine days  
a nurse wheeled Kyp and me  
down the ramp to the parking lot.  
It seemed more like nine weeks, or nine  
months. The kudzu vine had enveloped  
the picket fence.

"Mommy"

It was Aran, puffed to a Tarzan.

I shifted wrapped Kyp,  
like a sack of fruit, to my left arm.

"Mommy!" Aran yipped:—*flash of teeth;*  
*head big as a basketball.*

"Mommy!"—*green eyes gone foxy.*

"See my yeddow dumptuck!"

Tot and truck clamoured over my fresh  
incision.

In the car, I willed the rosy haze.

"Aran? See your brother Kyp?"

He peeked. "Yup."

—*just a pink grapefruit?*

"Dumptuck!"

All the way home,  
the rancid brown head bumping my right breast,  
the bag of breathing contraband on my left breast,  
Yeddow Beast bumping my belly.

I kept exuding the pink haze:  
“When we get home, Aran, you and Daddy  
can take the dumptruck to the sandbox.”

Something had gone awry with me.  
My progesterone on a rampage?  
My dendrites drenched with this monomania?

—*You're not the lioness*, I chided myself.

\*

In the rocking chair,  
I held both boys in my lap:  
Kyp with his bottle,  
Aran with his cookie.

Aran's narrowed eyes drank in his sibling,  
every fingernail every eyelash.  
Bellyful, he plugged his thumb into his mouth  
and kicked Kyp.

*Rock a bye, my Bully, my Baby.*

*Rock a bye, my Sun, my Moon—*

I laid Kyp in the crib,  
which I jiggled with one hand  
while I rock Aran in my lap.  
I kissed the brown thatch.  
He peed hot protest into my lap.

This was no Janus-game.  
In the kitchen,  
in the bathroom,  
in the yard,  
I, ninety-two pounds of bone  
and nerve and gushing glands,  
wore my sons simultaneously,  
like a humpback and a bulbed hip.

—*A phase. It will pass.*

\*

The worst was the lack of sleep.

Always when I staggered into bed  
from soothing fretful Kyp,  
from patting roused Aran,  
Malcolm, that giant infant, yummied my  
weary breasts . . . pumped my pelvis  
to his paradise.

Those mornings  
sunlight was ground glass on my eyeballs.  
All sounds went SCRITCH

*Rock a bye rock a bye*  
In that rocking chair,  
I, the flimsy fulcrum, kept  
juggling this injustice.  
*Rock a bye rock a bye*  
*Separated by twenty-seven months means*  
*JOINED by twenty-seven months—*  
I hummed to the coiled darkness.  
*My mistake my fault MINE*

\*

Kyp at his first birthday was a charmer.  
*That was the worst.*  
He'd pat my cheek and chirp, "Mommy!  
ball!" "See birdie!" "See moo!"

Aran at three was glum.  
The truck-clever hands had regressed to fists.  
My Big Boy was back in diapers.  
My Chatterbox had turned dumb.  
My pity covered him like the kudzu.

Clumsily, I contrived to balance the equation.  
Days, I played mostly with Aran, with blocks  
and sand and swing, while Kyp, in the playpen,  
watched.

Nights, when Kyp mewed, as he always did,  
I smuggled him to the attic, where,  
on an old couch, we cuddled and cat napped.

Once Malcolm wakened us: "What's going  
on here?"

Once Aran found us in snug embrace.  
He conked Kyp's forehead with his hammer.

I tried  
but could not  
keep my hands off Kyp.  
*My flaxen cherub. My fluffy kitten.*

I tried and tried  
but could not.  
I was like a kid hooked on ice cream,  
or a teenager with the hots.

The rocking chair bulged with its burden.  
*Rock a bye Cain and Abel*  
*Rock a bye my riddle my conundrum*  
*Everything I give to Kyp is ripped from Aran*  
*Everything I give to Kyp is ripped from Malcolm*  
*The morsel I give to Malcolm is torn from me*  
*The pity I give to Aran poisons him*  
*Rock a bye rock a bye*  
*The four of us bonded in this doomed unit*  
*It's not a phase It will not pass*

\*

One day I went haywire.

Why were my fists pounding the wall?

It was Kyp.  
He kept bobbing up from his nap  
like a kitten that wouldn't stay drowned.  
—pounding and pounding the wall—  
My face flashed open like the door of a furnace.  
“I'm going to run away from you!” I roared.  
“I'm going to run *away!*”

Kyp wailed.  
*A jellyfish ablob with sobs.*  
I was about to fling him to the floor  
and stomp on him when a voice spoke?  
“What's going on here?”  
A gruff cop voice at my elbow.  
It was Aran

I fled to the kitchen  
for swig after swig of cooking sherry.  
When I peered into the quiet nursery,  
both sons were behind the bars of the crib,  
hugged one to the other;  
Kyp's face red and wet as a broken heart,  
his torso twitching.  
“Don't cry, Kyp,” Aran commanded.  
“I'll take care of you.”  
Four narrowed eyes glowered at me  
as from twin faces in a sprung locket.  
“Get out of here” the cop growled.  
“You bad Mommy, get *out!*”

I wallowed up the stairs  
to the attic  
to find . . . ?  
a suitcase?  
to flap out the window?  
Why not?  
Leave Castor and Pollux pinned in their Heaven.

No.

I slunk down the steps  
and fumbled through the laundry  
and cooked supper

and waded back into the coiled darkness.

**Karen Snow**

## **COQUINAS**

Coquinas, wide as a child's fingers  
and pale, with hearts at their hinges,  
burrow with their solitary hands  
into the glistening sand.

Sandpipers mark the hard boundary  
with spears and hungry steps  
that turn in flight  
when the next salt stroke relights

the beach. Above, the pelican, his feathers  
the color of an old wooden dock,  
his anvil black and broad head,  
Groucho brow, and bent back,  
wheels over the shadowed fish  
that rise to his diving hammerstroke.

**Michael F. Lauchlan**

## THREE POEMS

Father F. Blanchet S.J. to the Rev. Father Provincial  
F.J.N. in St. Louis

*Dies venit, dies tua,  
In qua refloret omnia,  
Laetemur et nos in viam,  
Tua reducti dextera.*

Night came, burning the prairie to ash.  
Water has ground to a halt in the basins.  
Pebbles that argue the Deluge  
sit in dry sockets in the rock behind us.  
The demonic howls of white wolves large as horses  
keep me awake, while they feast on the bodies  
of wild oxen, whose throats we slit for tongues.

My beloved Flat Heads and Pend d'oreilles  
from whom I expect much are asleep *sub deo*.  
Send more, I beg you, to gather the harvest  
in this vinyard. The Protestants are on the  
*qui vive*. These poor savages are great of heart  
and ardent; they glow for the Truth.  
Here are waiting to be gathered souls  
more numerous than the wild ox that cover  
these great spaces like a blanket.

I write this by the light of a low flame.  
The faces of the sleeping savages all round me  
glow with the fireflies they smeared  
on their faces to frighten their children.  
My fingers gleam with the same wandering fire  
I plucked from the air.

## Stag

Their bodies in buffalo robes were tied  
to the branches of trees. A whole forest  
of the dead. Smallpox was among the last  
ten families. Even the trees seemed  
to rot like beasts. Demers proposed  
introducing a taste for agriculture—  
one method of atonement for the countless  
wrongs this unfortunate race has received,  
and the speediest way to win them  
from their wandering life.

We ourselves were still 200 miles from  
Council Bluffs, and had only a few frozen potatoes left  
when we perceived a beautiful stag gazing at us,  
apparently waiting to receive the death blow.

## Potlatch

My Fathers always said: Look to the Future  
and the present—they were always so busy  
with the Future they never finished the sentence.

The Future. Naturally I agreed. Yes, *that*  
would be worth it. Big winnings from big  
sacrifices. So I brought out what few  
coppers I had, and smashed them. A TV,  
hi-fi, clothes, mirrors, bed, girls  
(*not* books), everything, and set them

on fire, so the flames lit up my face  
like the biggest copper of all. The  
flare went far to putting out  
my eyes. I thought I could see over oceans  
and under clods. The heat twisted  
my mouth. I thought it didn't  
look so bad. Women would go for  
that kind of thing. When I was  
ready. For a while, at the back  
of my eyes, like detached retinas,  
skirts fluttered. Soon, smoke lit  
from beneath began to roll in  
like mist from a Saturday morning  
horror movie. Then, as the Future  
came closer, the flames burnt through,  
redder, hotter, sometimes with the shape  
of a squaw's vulva cut from her  
and hanging from a cavalryman's  
saddle, and darkness like the inside  
of a peepshow settled in, till *at*  
the Future I'd had enough. I called in  
all my chips. Coppers, mirrors, hi-fi,  
and all the rest, started to fall back  
into themselves like objects in a film  
run in reverse. I tried to make the thing  
go forward. This, after all, was a  
*Comedy*. I wanted my last act. But  
objects fell from the screen right  
on top of me, showering me with gifts. Bodies.  
And glass. And limbs. My own body. My own limbs.

Brian Swann

TWO POEMS

Eddic Lament

it would have been better  
if the wolves had eaten me

I should have been burned  
like dry birch wood

a dying fir tree  
I stand  
in an open clearing  
no bark  
no needles  
to protect me

as a goat runs  
filled with fear  
before the wolf  
I drive myself  
over slippery ice

I am like a crippled woman  
on a freshly thawed moor

the geese in the yard cry out  
the laurel weeps leaves

I creep each day  
into the hall  
of the frost giants  
their devils pinch me  
the three-headed troll  
lusts after me

I waste away  
as old wood wastes

I am swollen like the thistle  
I am heavy with yew berries  
a violent noise resounds  
it rages in my womb

### Recurring Dream

*for Doris Lessing*

every night I wake  
with a sea otter in my arms

he's soft & furry  
his nose is wet & cold  
& he's crying

I know what he wants  
he wants me to take him back  
he wants to go home

I get out of bed  
& find my way to the sea

it's dark on the beach  
there are shells & bits of glass  
I keep stumbling on sharp rocks

the sea otter nuzzles me

I trip over some kelp  
step on a jelly fish  
a crab scuds over my toes

the sea otter is squirming

we pass a sand castle  
a dead gull  
& a red plastic pail

foam swirls around my ankles  
it caresses my knees  
laps at my groin

I lower the sea otter  
into the water

& he swims away from me

Alice F. Worsley

### SMALL CONSOLATION

A train stands in the station,  
steam clouding the glass overhead,  
St. Lazare in a dream. I speak French  
or Russian.

I tell them,  
in the hiss of engines,  
how I love them. I say,  
—Make no mistake. I speak  
one language  
or the other.

They nod, my two American sons,  
leaning out the compartment windows,  
averting their eyes.

On their heads, overseas caps,  
each with a silver falcon,  
the braid of foreign wars  
glittering at their shoulders.

One is eighteen, one fourteen; their  
jackets and caps  
fit perfectly.

—Be strong, I say. Think of freedom  
and from time to time  
I will send you woollen socks. Think, my sons,  
that we are Russians (why does it console me  
to insist we are one  
or the other?)

Engines simmer. Compartments flash. I kiss  
each one on the lips,  
Dmitri first,  
then the younger.

—Mother, leave us now. Keep in mind  
how you have taught us  
to stay alert  
and to believe.

—But at the front, I say, look always  
for signs of the familiar: directions  
in our own language, poplar trees, a farmhouse  
once passed in the family car. Remember  
who you are.

—The front of what? the younger asks.  
(I cannot drum up his name.)

—Wear shoes in battle. No soldier  
fights in sneakers. Be on the lookout  
for packages. Befriend the cook. I shall  
send socks also for the cook.

The engine shakes. Steam  
crashes between us.  
I feel the arms of the younger  
sliding from me.  
As the train rushes down the platform,  
a woman  
hurls herself to the tracks.

I understand nothing,  
not the shouts  
nor the screams.  
Soon I force myself to leave,  
imagining the night's obituaries  
in a language  
I cannot read.

Sandra Schor

## BOOKS IN BRIEF

### Native American Poetry and the Ethnopoetics Movement

Good news: Gary Snyder's *Myths and Texts* is now available from New Directions (1978, 64 pp., \$6.50 cloth, \$1.95 paper), in a revised format with a brief new introduction by the author. Since its first appearance in 1960, this trio of lyrical sequences, harmonizing Buddhist and Native American insights with the poet's direct experience on the land, has become a classic of our literature. An excellent companion volume is Snyder's *The Old Ways* (City Lights, 1977, 96 pp., \$2.50 paper), making available the significant essay "The Politics of Ethnopoetics," earlier published in *Alcheringa*, and five other prose pieces, one of which, "The Incredible Survival of Coyote," is sheer delight. Costing no more than a pound of lamb chops, these complementary volumes slip comfortably together into a jeans pocket and ought to slip just as comfortably into new college and school curricula.

Next to the Snyder books you should put **Jerome Rothenberg's** *A Seneca Journal* (New Directions, 1978, 128 pp., \$3.95 paper). Rothenberg "became a beaver" in a Seneca ceremony in 1968. "I got a new name," he explains. "I didn't know if they were serious but the name was great." The poems are great. Wild variety. Seneca journals. Chants with the drum thumps and the smoke smell in them. Landscapes and inscapes. Stories, riddles, jokes. Dreams and visions. And throughout it all is the consciousness of the Polish jew, the scholar. "Impossible to bring it all/ together," he admits, but Rothenberg continues to do the wonderful impossible.

**Ann Stanford**, in her thoughtful introduction to *Women Poets of the West: An Anthology 1850-1950* (Ahsahta Press, Boise State University, Boise, Idaho 83725, 1978, 104 pp.), points to the exact spot in the poetry of Mary Austin and Alice Corbin where the poet's attention to Native American song and chant (reenforced by the emerging Imagist movement) created a new freedom of open form. Mary Austin's versions of these songs (though perhaps suspect from the purist viewpoint of the contemporary anthropologist) have an eloquence and poignance that place them in a world-wide tradition.

We have a plethora now of Anglo versions of Native American poems. These I would judge by one criterion: are the English versions good poems in English? Mary Austin's are. And so are the versions by **Jarold Ramsey** in *Love in an Earthquake* (University of Washington, 1973, 90 pp., \$5.95 cloth), such as the Kalapuya prophecy, in 1852, of the earth beneath us "all black, all black in my dream!" Then the plow of the white man arrived, plowing up "the camas meadows, the little prairies by the Santiam, / and we knew we would enter their dream/ of the earth plowed black forever." There are other eloquent poems in this volume, from the poet's own viewpoint, such as the terrifyingly personal "In the Thicket."

With so much power in the Native American sources, it is inevitable that it would be subject to exploitation (and in a sense all white versions of Amerindian poetry are exploitive). It's harmless, I suppose, but I'm still troubled by such slick productions as **David Yeadon's** pretty

picture-book *When the Earth Was Young: Songs of the American Indian* (Doubleday, 1978, 134 pp., \$5.95 paper). Snippets of translations, mostly from U.S.B.A.E. publications, interlarded with bland black-and-white photographs that bear no direct relationship to the poems. Indeed, they make the poems sound like something xeroxed out of "Hiawatha."

For real sinew, send for the Native American Series Pamphlets, from the American Indian Studies Center at UCLA (Los Angeles, Calif. 90024). These are large (7 x 10) handsomely-printed volumes by contemporary poets, illustrated by Native American artists. **Barney Bush's** *My Horse and a Jukebox* (Pamphlet #4, 1979) follows a man on the road, moving from one rendezvous to another: Keshena, the Crow Fair, Milwaukee Indian bars, Durango, Pine Ridge, Pendleton Roundup, Isleta. The poems move to a steady internal rhythm that weaves the details—fresh empanadas, wind whining, Coors cans, "Whistles, bells and drums/ bustles and buckskins"—into a moving belt of song: "The wind keeps singing/ 'I been out drinking/ all night long, way-ya, hey-he'/ Unlike that night, this night is for sleep."

*Thunder-Root* by Ivaloo Volborth (Pamphlet #3, 1978) presents three dozen short sharp poems, illustrated by powerful lithographs by **Daniel Owen Stolpe**. Coyote is here, and Old Shadow Woman with her painted breasts. Here is a sense of history side by side with the eternal present of "Animal Thirst": "Empty wind,/ milky tit/ in hollow sky:/ my furry reach/ too small."

Unlike the multitude of MFA poets whose interchangeable poems in interchangeable slim volumes defy the reviewer to find distinctive voices in them, these pamphlets maintain unique visions while sustaining, even in a sort of exile, the distinctive styles of their Native American heritage. They provide an energy source of eternal delight.

M.K.S.