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THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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An arrow at the bottom of a page means no stanza break.

CAROL HENRIE

Since My House Burned Down

Moon in your black basket
I stepped out
only to cast the net of my hair

Measure the weather
gathered there

The curtain
wavered at the window
friendly and white as a hand

Squashes and tomatoes I had washed
waited on the sink beside the knife

Where the path curves
an oak bucket cradled my share of complication
constellations tame as carp

And roses opened all their doors
sheer as Edo's paper houses

A woman with hands like these
new moons rising on each finger
—she steps out for a moment

The blue vase shatters behind her

CAROL HENRIE

Año Nuevo

So many elephant seals
return from the ocean of extinction
their weight tilts the Pacific

along Año Nuevo. Hieroglyph
of gull, a pebble's impress
—serifs

in a history of agatized bone. We watch
a sooty tern fly
straight into the sun.

Junipero Serra travelled
the leather from his sandals,
bathed gangrenous feet in the Pacific.

Purissima studded with fossil snails. He lit
a candle each morning at the white-
washed window of his room, one star

winking to another over a river
of rising sky. He shaped the fine
black sand of Año Nuevo.

Mere sable brushes and dental picks
chart the coast, a calendar of sandstone cliff
fragile with fossils. Urchins

like sugar-coated thumbprints.
Your upstart paleocosmic hand
twenty-six million years in curving

—under singular whorls
a kind of ancestral memory
traces the limestone braille.

Serra's legs gave out. The bookless
Pleistocene slept at his blackened feet,
the teeth of a bear

in its mouth. Winter consumed one
third of the year, thousands of Ohlones
and fields tamed to grain.

The century closed and opened on
another, and it was also round. The next saint
sent his light to sea.

Tonight the canary
sings and trembles his cage,
goldfish circumnavigate the limitless

repetition of the glass bowl. Looking
through distortions of atmosphere,
of time, how can we tell with truth

what we see there? Against
illimitable space, the abecedarius
of constellations.

Even the lost Pleiad
kindles bearings deep in the skull.
We have the least gull's assignation.

(At the end of his journey,
Serra's shriven bones
are chalk.)

We want to believe
life knows where it is going.
Yet a nostalgia

has found its first breath in us. At last
the years can rest their weight
in our minds.

ELIOT WILSON

Blank Verse for the Forbidden Channel

Freud was right; we are such bad citizens.
Born febrile, remorselessly sexual,
and cut from that one principle we keep.

How he'd love these late-night half-blocked channels.
The vertical lines pinching, contracting
and pulling a "God, yes!" from the scramble,
from this blooming kaleidoscope of skin.

*That's you; that's what you are, a mirrored web,
a body of hands, a small Hindu god.
Everything, everything, your reflection.*

In this filtered field of objects and part
objects appearing and disappearing,
even interference is erotic.

And singularity is taken off.
Manifest breasts of some silver co-ed
warp and curve into two latent pillows.

The mouth of her Daguerrean roommate
throbs like a pulse then quickly vanishes.
The white couch's arm bends into a thigh.

The in-and-out sound of a slow-motion
shower is that same sound of one hand cracking
an egg into the empty face of a pan.
Life consists of such naked suggestions.

Late at night on the forbidden channel
even darkness is not the final dark
just the floating dark of before you were born.

It's true; what's clear and certain leaves us cold.
No other channels. What could replace this?
And turning it off means you disappear.

ELIOT WILSON

Designing a Bird from Memory in Jack's Skin Kitchen

We hated everything below us.
We'd come to hate the ground itself,
to dread the heavy ropes of gravity
drawing us down from blue
to a brooding green
which would billow in tan dust
like waves of fistic clouds.

We'd come to kill
the afternoons, to evade
the blanket heat by flying out of rifle reach
and dropping mortar rounds through the clouds and trees,
our demented resentment entirely non-personal.

I would come to forget Isaac,
our Arab gunner with his shell carton filled with baklava,
and just how mixed he was
bearded, but awash in after-shave,
dropping incendiary bombs and Hershey bars at the same time,
Viet S'mores we called it.
How he could shoot his .50 caliber,
stoned on hash,
as accurate as fate itself.
How he'd shoot children and dogs,
but not women or birds. *Bad luck,*
he said. *Even when they are dead,*
women and birds remember.

I would forget how we found him later in Song Ngan Valley
because it's not remembering that kills you,
it's forgetting, and I started to forget
how we found him
mixed with the ground and chopper,
repatriated, tangled like a lover,
his broken hand up and open
as if feeling for rain,
or patiently expecting some small gratuity.
The visor of his helmet shining the same
blue-black iridescence
as the glass of Chartres cathedral.

*Right here, I tell the tattoo man
giving him my arm,
A blue bird, that certain blue, with black eyes
and rising.*

LOLA HASKINS

Camille

i

When she was five, one rain,
when the grey cottages of Villeneuve
hulked like cattle in the wet fields,
she scraped from the road the sticky
dirt that gummed her Papa's boots
and left the imprints of his soles
across Mama's angry floors, and
leaning, lurched the bucket
into the house. The plopped clay
became a head by the time Mama
returned, with worms for hair,
stones for its poked-out eyes.

ii

For a child her work surprises,
says Boucher. Camille's father
nods, sucks at his pipe. Camille
wants to go. She is thinking of
the arrogant brows of her bust
of Bonaparte. She feels each
hair bristle then fall back as
she strokes it against the grain.
She feels the bone ridge, where
the light concentrates. Boucher
smiles at her. She does not
respond. She is young,
and dreaming with her hands.

iii

She makes Paul twelve,
who is thirty and gone away.
Outside her bedroom window
he perches again, and sings
to the white chalk hills,
to old Madame, who lurches
home in thick black shoes.
For him, his sister stops

→

the shaky leaves, arrests
the apple's fall. She has
put him very high. There is
a smile on his child's face.
He does not realize
he is watched. He thinks
he can still climb down.

iv

She spends the blue sky all
on the muscles of a man's arm,
which she is moulding around
wire, so Rodin can change
the jut of the elbow, the angle
of attachment at the shoulder.
She is making the arm strong
and young, that it may not tire
of moving. She is making it
tight that it may stay half-
raised forever. All day she
feels the brush of fingertips
across her breasts,
Rodin's casual imagination
of her nipples in stone.

v

Today she sits for the Magdalene,
embracing the lump of Christ.
Her left hand seeks a crevice
as if she climbs, but Rodin has
wilted her to the right as if
she falls. Rodin scales the
ladder, measures with his pencil:
breast to knees, neck to buttocks.
He backs down, circles in a
half-crouch. Sometimes she thinks
he will spring on her naked,
where she aches from holding still.

vi

This is how to view him, Rodin says
one evening, of *Despair*. He lights
a candle. The blood-knots darken
on the backs of his cupped hands.
In the small flame, Despair is
trying to straighten his left leg.
He holds his foot in both hands
and thrusts. Rodin traces Camille's
arm. She and the statue are
quivering. You see, Camille,
says Rodin. He cannot finish.

vii

Her fingers bite clay. Momently
she has the sense that she is
gouging out his eyes. She works
deeper. She can feel the back
of the skull. Rodin sits, casual
as if she were cutting his hair.
She pulls fresh bullets.
This time, his eyes glint like
coins, the same flat stare as
the trout she caught once,
whose look glazed precisely as
she snapped the hook to set it free.

viii

Perhaps it is the moth that wakes
her, in its white dress of wings.
She thinks Auguste stands by her bed,
his strong fingers convulsing around
her throat. She has hung her splashed
apron on his nail for the last time,
has banished her tongue from the soft
red bumps inside his mouth, her skin
from the wiry imprint of his beard.
Yet she cannot help herself.
All this April night she has
slept naked, in pretense of him.

ix

She walks the avenues in black
skirts streaked with hairs.
She reeks of cat. Back home,
she molds men arguing over cards,
the fanned numbers growing like
birds' tails from their hands.
Cats seethe around her boots as
she works. She sets the finished
piece aside, by yesterday's matron
leaning on an umbrella, takes up
a fresh lump of clay. She is making
a city she will smash. But not yet.
She begins again. Outside, the rain
comes thickly down. There is only,
in all this world, what she holds
between finger and thumb.

SCOTT WITHIAM

Bait

The dead of one summer my oldest friend and me—
sunk in the middle of his split-level living room.
On the wide screen, some modified cars race around
and around a tiny oval dirt track. It's too loud. Here,
and there. We've got our beers, a big bowl of microwave popcorn,
into which, from our overstuffed chairs, we both can reach,
which we keep doing, reaching, filling our mouths
without speech, and that's where it begins,
putting frogs together with kernels at the bottom of the bowl,
how the bait farm container exploded with leopard frogs
as the owner reached in, because he had to,
that's how he made a living. How I wish
the bowl of popcorn did the same—exploded,
wish that what I ate wasn't camouflaged,
that what rests uncomfortably between us
doesn't have to be heat-flowered suddenly still.
"There will always be something between us,
something beautiful." I could say that; that's my wish.
Or I could say, "That one summer vacation in our lives
we humped everything, didn't we? everything.
We lived like frogs on our bellies; we were like lovers."
But if I did, I don't know whether he'd squeeze
or kill me. It's not so odd then,
that I've gone back to Bud's Bait Farm
that summer before anyone reached in. Somewhere
hidden in the grass is a nozzle completely twisted shut,
yet everywhere behind, everywhere the hoses connect,
fine fans of water shoot. There's the slimy plywood walls
of the pen, the rotted pine stakes barely holding. Inside,
the leopards in their wet bed of cuttings, in their mottled bodies.
The gold leaf dome of their closed eyes—so intent,
such unchecked pleasure that those were worlds slipping
behind their lids. Surely it was like that, but in another world
someone has hit a slick and slid off the track,
and now trying to avoid him, someone else has met the wall,
and bent spinning, throws tires, undefined parts,
mostly mangled body metal. Comes the remark:
"I can't imagine." Then mine: "Sure you can."

TERRANCE HAYES

Ode to Balthus

Old dirty, dirty. Old dirty, dirty handful of skin & motion.
There is a girl in white and girl in green & red and girl in nothing
And each is walking away. Handful of crimson ribbon
Pulled from hair tangled like rain around a girl's face.
Handful of blood & bliss and the pain of blood & bliss.
How long before their fingers curl into questions
Deadly as the scorpion's tail? The studio filled with a virgin's
Ruined smell. O dirty, dirty handful of light & space.
Girl sprawled on a couch, a girl on a horse, girl in a mirror.
The orchid's tender stem in a hipped-shaped vase.
How long before the vessel breaks?

RANJANI NERIYA

Children of War

You know, there is a dream dreaming us.

They were meant to sleep like flowers
curl round a sluice of warmth
skitter a mossy run
but some dream dreams them
through a flare of fear-white nights

In pitchblue light
the children keel over
like broken stars
along the rapier edge of day,
sink like bloodied stones as the elements
that make them whole
begin to separate,
a writhe of severed limb
bullish pain gone so wild
they don't know where
the face begins

The soldier singlemindedly sows another landmine
somewhere, a leader climbs a podium
sets free one more paper dove
into a burning sky

RANJANI NERIYA

Torque

Of seasons awash with field-blue rain
some stilled to memory;
a green-gold bamboo's
lean strokes on rushed gray,
tinkle of teacups in the air
silvern lilt in mother's hair.

In slithery rainwear
we shambled through
laterite spume alongside
the horse-drawn carriage
on steamy macadam,
satchels swilling with
covenanted fancies of
graven desks, smothered inkwells,
trooped a seven-furlong hour
to Miss Miranda's infinitude of verbs.

We tapped boots on culverts
of sunken shale, swung on the
aerial braid of the banyan's
witching root, took time
to pop a barley-sugar twist
into the sleep-stuffed mouth of
the friendly tea-boy who,
palmyra parasol ahoist,
ferried bronze-lathered brew
for the grocer's crew hefting
straw roundels rippled with rice.

The slow-falling structure of life
once in a while aborts
an attic pile, recalls
a torque, pure alluvial strain
the humming well of
a fretted bell-dream.

FLEDA BROWN JACKSON

Southern Man Like Elvis

Your wife shows me your granite name.
So I return to you,
first with my eyes—that grave stone,
which takes back me to our river-stones
on the White River, snake drooping from a branch.

I return to you second with my ears, plopp of bait.
“Over here, babe-uh,” your old suspended,

open-ended vowel, a cave in the side of the bluff.
Like Elvis, too far away to reach.

I return to you, a tourist,
having sharpened my i's, gotten out
of Arkansas, of all that, at least,

where Elvis has been singing all the time
“Baby It's All Right”—the line just before that
one, where he slurs the words
where I've never figured them out.

Sometimes he didn't mean anything,
only syllables, smudges on the sun-washed rock.

We are in the rowboat, in the slipstream
of an otter, your voice a soft bumblebee
climbing into my ear, so natural
this terrible stinging could be inside or out.

MARK KRAUSHAAR

Dear Mr. Whitman,

Vivas for those who have failed.

—Walt Whitman

My husband,
and don't put the blame
there for if you had ever heard
about his life you would wonder how
he has found out enough bad luck
to call him a failure.
As in the case of the Plymouth.
A pleasant blue, decent rubber,
few dents, new door, but he
wouldn't know where
it came from first
thanks to his friends.
To make the point:
he did not apply for bad luck nor
did he ask for it.
What do I mean?
After class last night professor
said you—
may I say Walter?—
work as a nurse so you
would surely see things as regards
to difficulties. Walter, you would go far
to find a man to go bust as much as Mike.
As for the vivas, Thanks
but nevermind, Mike said.
Nevermind and forget it, he said
for he has other feelings that vivas
are of little or no help.

I tried,

Trudy

MARK KRAUSHAAR
Chesterfield Kings

One night at school I see where my professor
is very nice and handsome *and*
he takes a very close notice
of my particulars so therefore
I have put my feelers on.
Now if you would say, Sue Ann,
you are expert in regards of the heart, I
would believe it. If you would say, Sue Ann, you
are foolish in matters of love,
I would believe that.
But what am I getting at?
The next night when he goes to the store
I follow him secretly.
But what does he eat?
Anyone would wonder so
I walk past his basket and back—
jelly, greens, beer, gum, cake
which creates me to realize:
I could be deeply in love in this.
Well, this is honestly beautiful which
on account of it I next wait around down
the hygiene aisle and I next check out—
ice cream, magazine, Chesterfield Kings.
I next walk behind him out of sight to his car,
a yellow Ford, stereo. I next tail him two blocks
to where he's living at which
I next carefully keep my eye on the place until
one day he arrives back as I am watching Donahue.
Yes, I had a snack and, *no*, they was not
my slippers which I was wearing.
Did I ruin anything your highness?
Pandelariun had now broke out.

MARK KRAUSHAAR
Organize a Place to Live

Wake up, leave, shave, coffee, bathe.

Stay alert.

Bring smokes, notebook.

Stay in touch with reality and on the bus.

Ask: Is smoking allowed at all periods?

And how big is it?

How is the condition in it?

How small is it?

The point being is I had added on my right arm

two ladies bathing in a cocktail glass

and behind there four aces spread

in an attractive manner.

The other arm is where the setting sun sits

three-quarters in the waves with a palm on the side.

Why is due to the meaning of my own goal

to get some small enjoyments of this life

as with a couple of laughs or head to the beach.

Would there be a problem in it?

Why, yes, Lola says, and, You can leave out of here now,

for she is finished in my case of talking forever.

Well, throw me down the stairs my coat

for I am gone:

I am complete history.

Next days go by but I next call up

as I realize now where she is right in everything

and I want them off, period, but they don't remove so,

I mention, Honey, as I am out of work

at this period, please help out,

for where the waves was wrong along the edges

they could put an eagle on it.

MARK KRAUSHAAR

The Golden Coin of King Solomon

If you have a testimony that you never have progressed anywhere do not put this message away. If you have made multiple efforts in the lotto and your luck runs bad read along. If it is likely you are a born loser, Hello, my name is Mr. Dick Blondo and THE GOLDEN COIN OF KING SOLOMON is available. I now introduce it to you. It contains all the wisdom of the cosmos contained in it and your problem will be solved for you once and for all.

MR. BLONDO, HOW DOES IT WORK?

Poor as a rat. Lonely as usual. This is foolish. If the coin does not work in 30 days return it in the time allowed for it to and we send it back the money which was invested in the product. But hurry. Start winning right away. Why wait?

WHERE DOES IT GET YOU

Help you to advance definitely—Point spread—The wisdom of the cosmos—A fabulous Rolls Royce automobile—Diamond jewels and stereo—Help you to keep your job—Win the jackpot once and for all.

WHAT THEY SAY

Listen to what Mrs. Ida Colla of France say:

I am very happy. I am down on my last dollar which I win 5 dollars then kept on winning until then since I am rich with more than 250,000 cash money or more at least in my own business in my checking account with more coming in. I got a raise and quit. Thank you. Fabulous.

Here is Don Tookey of Rockaway:

I invested in the coin of King Solomon and that night my uncle left me a million dollars from the lotto he won the same night just before he died. Thank you King Solomon.

But don't believe me, ask Fran Bottoms, Arthur Frazee, Jimmy Jaspers, Donna Cowalski. Ask Yen Chin of China, Nina Bertocelli of Italy. Carlos Jiminez, Rita Budlig of Florida. And much more.

EVERYBODY IN MY FAMILY BOUGHT ONE

In fact, some are incredible. Some are business personality, or the stars, very famous in hockey, or his own service station, or fabulous mayors of government who will not allow us to reproduce them. Be so happy. But don't believe me. Listen to Rudy DeMobley:

This is incredible. I found my stolen car and sued for 100,000 dollars. Eagerly to wish you a large sum at the lotto only if you want to and help you to get somewhere that you can't get to from here. Having the one you desire in a luxurious cruise ship for a penny a day. Pay back rent.

ALFRED CORN
The Bandwagon

A tiny speck on the horizon.

Which doesn't move or doesn't seem to yet
Must be on the move; has enlarged, is now

The size of a thumb, and now still larger, look,
A newly gilded vehicle rocking and racketing
Down the pike. Besides the band—uniformed,

Gold-braided, their brasses aglitter—
A few grand figureheads clutch a post,
They wave and fire off grins at onlookers, who,
The boldest, respond by grabbing and climbing

A ladder dangling from the wagon, dragged
Onto the flatbed by earlier troops and welcomed
As opportune endorsements of their clan,
Another, another and another! And some
Impressive knot of adherents they are,

Arms on shoulders, the victor's strut,
A promo for dazzled joiners farther on,
Who scuttle and jump to swell their ranks.
Each wheel turns faster, revving up
For the straightaway, hickory spokes
A blur like an electric fan at top speed,

Scribbles of gleam smeared across it.
Faster, closer, numbers snowballing
According to an exponent that also mounts.
Yet, nothing daunted, they swing aboard, dying
To be part of it, the A-list, the blue-chips.
Hup! It's party-time, tap this keg and chug
Your suds, we won-won-won, and we're one

*High roller of a club, hotshots all, bigger, louder,
United stumpers we stand, sterling but humble.
Of course we commiserate with you hangdogs
Out there who fumbled the ball, who didn't latch on
Quick enough. But rest easy, we'll help you out
When we get a chance, why, sure. Meantime, ha ha,
Eat our dust! And then—then, like a flashbulb, it's gone.
Sudden stillness. Still here. In open space, morning sun.*

Which toplights the trees and their strange, shining leaves.

ALFRED CORN

Solstice

Black pentacles, brief shadows in flight
wheel across brick ranks of walls
above the back gardens opposite.
Silence, theme-song of the late and early year,
rises from floor level to a half light fallen
among red peppers, garlic, winesap apples.
In the desk drawer, a cache of letters
stamped with heroes, flags or flowers.

Some fourteen hundred miles from here
(best not to think how many decades it has been)
she would take up thread or scissors and begin
sewing together printed panels, each window in turn
provided—or appeased—with curtains. Curtains
opened to let day in, or closed against the night.

ALFRED CORN

After Celan

Suns made of thread
above a waste land of ash and soot.
A tree-
high insight
holds the note the light strikes: there
are still texts to sing beyond
the confines of the human.

PATRICIA GOEDICKE

The Dreams We Wake From

are dams bursting, oceans suddenly swallowed

by seas of blowing sand.

With lizard and jackrabbit skeletons, with cracked satellite dishes revolving
like blisters on the glazed shell of the planet

now all our newsreels are nightmares:

in the latest, a charred hole melts

on a giant screen, brown celluloid

smokes, eats up the heroine's face, the

purple prairies, even Rockefeller Center, even the UN building.

As the cigarette circle smoulders, in its thick sludge I slide
right down into it,

Mother, your mouth is mine

in every photograph album, your lips

which are my lips, open onto an abyss

like the spreading rim of a sinkhole, California

hotels fall into themselves, executive suites,

bathtubs, picture windows plane into swimming pools—

—Here, let me take our minds

off this, let me make up a story.

But I can't finish it, this morning I woke up

still hearing the slow, plot driven

B movie writer I'd been in my dream shouting

as everything fell to pieces,

with no hint of any logical

or even narrative structure to hold it,

each scene dissolved, shattered into bricks, helicopters,

dead body parts and grenades flying straight at us

as they do in Beirut, Belfast, even in Brooklyn.

As Volkswagens blow up like babies, nowadays the old

carefully put together script leaves us

so hungry we gobble up, consume, *appropriate*
everything in sight and then blame ourselves,
blame human nature but who knows
what flexes and valences, what sparks
of strange protoplasm may be starting to hold hands
right now,
speak to each other in new food chains fused
to boiling bacteria shot
from stars we have yet to see?

No wonder she keeps playing pat-a-cake with us, from burned out
projection booths sending us smashed kindergarten treatments
we'd never invent ourselves:
in such impossibly violent
jittering fantasies, what's really going on
was never clear anyway, but ignorant
as infants fresh from the petri dish, we know

Mother, your mouth is ours
always; even as it expands
the pink nipple of the universe drifts us
endlessly outward,
in millions of shattered pieces, specks of light flickering on and off
everywhere on its broad dreaming breast....

PATRICIA GOEDICKE
The Ground Beneath Us

The end of the story sucks. Not air
exactly. Or gravel either. Nothing

to sleep next to. It reams us out like the exhaust
of retreating armies.

But you are a retreating army.

The roof trembles,
and the floor.

The shell around us is cracked

and you're in my arms, shaking. Over the crumbling
excavations beneath us. Where I won't,

I will not drop you.

Our neighbor walks in front of her tottering
mother, leading her on a string. *But not you,*

never you.

My old baby, my balding
word lover, all throb

and fire in my bed, such
razzmatazz!

And we were always equal.

As you took care of me
let me take care of you.

Dear lizard, dear snaketongue,
companion among the dictionaries,

though we thought we could write our way up
out of the battlefields of our lives,

look where we were going.

With your head in the clouds you mutter
we'll never make it, never...

But in and out of the overcast,

snow covered peaks disappear
and reappear in seconds;

like the ghost eyes of portraits

the words you write precede
and follow us everywhere.

The ground beneath us is silent. But the dictionaries
and the libraries are still with us, towering

against the sky, Hellooooooooooooo
up there, yes you are the mountain,

the mountain the poem becomes.

A. E. STALLINGS

Asphodel

(after the words of Penny Turner, Nymphaion, Greece)

Our guide turned in her saddle, broke the spell:
“You ride now through a field of asphodel,
The flower that grows on the plains of hell.

Across just such a field the pale shade came
Of proud Achilles, who had preferred a name
And short life to a long life without fame,

And summoned by Odysseus he gave
This wisdom, ‘Better by far to be a slave
Among the living, than great among the grave.’

I used to wonder, how did such a bloom
Become associated with the tomb?
Then one evening, walking through the gloom,

I noticed a strange fragrance. It was sweet,
Like honey—but with hints of rotting meet.
An army of them bristled at my feet.”

A. E. STALLINGS

Tour of the Labyrinth

And this is where they kept it, though their own,
Hungry in the dark beneath the stair,
And fed it apple cores, the odd soup bone,
And virgins with their torches of gold hair.

When howls were heard, they claimed it was the earth,
Subduction of a continental plate,
Put down their sherry glasses with thin mirth,
Excused themselves, and said that it was late.

But when the earth *did* make a mooring sound
Stones that had been stacked into the wall
Knelt to the embracing of the ground.
Amid the gravity that struck them all

No one thought to go unlock the door.
Archeologists, amazed to find
A skeleton they were not looking for,
Said it was the only of its kind.

They've unraveled the last days of the thing:
It lived a while on rats and bitumen,
And played with its one toy, a ball of string,
To puzzle out the darkness it was in.

CAROLE STONE

Dream of Mrs. Roosevelt

After I descend through mountains
into the anthracite mines like a blind woman,
feeling the pit walls with my hands,

Mrs. Roosevelt, face sooty, turns up
the tiny lamps on our steel helmets,
takes my hand and leads me down

where the air is thick with poisons.
We pass my brother's stillborn
baby, wrapped in her pink receiving blanket,

go into the deepest shaft
where I spy my young parents at FDR's inauguration,
standing in the D.C. cold, drinking in

FDR's words like bathtub gin.
Behind them miners' shapes form.
Tiny yellow stars are sewn onto their jackets

that will be stacked in rows
beside heaps of shoes. The President rolls out
of the black in his wheelchair.

Why couldn't you save them?
I ask. *Why did they die?*
He rolls on into the darkness.

Mrs. Roosevelt hands me a pickaxe.
Dig, she says
and I do.

MARNIE ELLIS

Annunciation

When the couple left the restaurant, neither
could describe the menu; they ate mushrooms,
vanilla, and broccoli carved into topiary;

there was a frittata with angled asparagus cuts.
Glasses leaded like cordials contained the juices
of aloe, guavas, and the ripest apricots. No one

offered them wine; they were happy with water,
since they had never before noticed its potency.
Dessert was coffee in the finest chocolate cups,

slivers of lemon cake and sorbet scooped like berries.
When they tipped the beggar, their coins changed
from silver to gold, growing more heavy as they fell.

They didn't want to return yet, so they wandered
into the corner grocery, where they marveled
at cabbages set in ice like fine jewels,

red bell peppers burnished as fire engines.
And then they knew: they had been set into
the vegetable kingdom only to celebrate

the birth of a small animal just like themselves.
Some light peeled away from their eyes,
but they were still happy.

Small Paintings within Sarah McEneaney's Paintings

Let me tell you about the house I just left—I would not tell you so leisurely if I still lived there—

two silver maples fill the back yard, their roots making it difficult to mow,
and a canal cuts across the yard's edge, below the towpath,
where the geese honking each morning sounded gearlike or archaic.

I worked by a window on the second floor, the plane of my desk high as the maples' branches.

I liked when rain or storms came during the day—the leaves slithered, the early dark was a kind of reprieve.

My desk overlooked a peeling side porch—since painted for the new tenants—

flanked on one side by red impatiens, the other by my garden which I planted this year knowing I was leaving:

three kinds of tomatoes, peppers, marigolds to keep off bugs, petunias, snapdragons.

I wrote down each thing I planted and then let weeds grow up and choke it.

However, as my new friend pointed out, I planted mostly annuals.

She is a painter, she lives alone. I think she has a sense of completeness about her like the interior of one of her paintings that includes even chair rungs and braiding in a rug.

She paints with egg tempera, her colors bright and also soft, like my snapdragons.

I have planted, in other years, lilac, crepe myrtle,

a full-grown dogwood for the man I left, a butterfly bush for the child I aborted.

The summer of the abortion I bought for myself a bougainvillea, which flared and died after summer.

My friend's paintings record small details with a sort of faith, as a child's drawing does:

a calendar page has all its boxed-off numbers, a toy dog's penis has a pink tip, lines of grout wobble between individual red tiles in a kitchen.

In a self portrait, she lies reading in bed

under a tent of mosquito netting. A window showing a moon is open.

She reads on her back, her legs straight, her arms bent and close to her sides.

Her fox terrier sleeps on an oval rag rug, both dog and rug curled similarly.

In a tiny painting on the bedroom wall of this painting, a man kneels before a woman.

Both are nude, he is shown from the back, from the waist up, the woman is sitting.

As he eats her, his thumb and forefinger form a circle at her nipple, and her head, thrown back, shakes out her hair.

Just so, the small metal front of my oscillating fan picked up the opposite of what I saw

when I lay in bed a little too long in the morning,
as it swung from side to side of the flower-curtained room
passing over my head, surprisingly dark on the pillow, like a stranger's

or, when my lover murmured "pretty"—I was bent over the bed straightening covers—

the fan showed my short gown, ridden up, exposing my lower ass,
smudged double curve of vulva, a pale blue length of tampon string, and I bounded shyly off.

My friend did this for a time in her work, adding a small picture unlike its larger picture.

To identify a painting I ask about, she says, "what's in the small painting in it?"

KURT LELAND
from Ambient Noise

1. Ambient Noise

Somewhere the tunes stopped a long time ago.
Roar of traffic, a distant siren, wheels
plowing through a puddle. Somewhere a crowd

murmurs or cheers within echoing walls,
the punches' rhythm now driven, now slow.
Or the couple undressing to Chopin

lets the tape run out. It's eight o'clock.
Love and death have their audiences,
inescapable, not to be counted on.

The soprano takes her place in the crook
of the piano. *It's a job*, she thinks.
It hardly pays. In the near-empty hall

she wonders whether there's only the something
better that never comes, this breathing in,
this pitched sighing amidst ambient noise.

2. Afterlife

Tatters of the blankets we used to sleep beneath
flutter by your porch light. Wherever I
pitch my tent, they open the false eyes of their

wings and stare from the true ones' rose-tinted
emptiness. By your bare bulb, my flashlight,
they die of a brilliance as toxic as

whiskey. Go ahead, play Brahms. Lids narrowed
against your glare, I won't ask why you chose
his *Requiem*. (*Blessed are those who mourn,*

for they shall be comforted.) The cat climbs
into your lap. You stroke its head. As if
sensing the desire to hold, to be held,

it turns, looks at me—eyes wide, retinas
catching the light. Again that rosy blankness
flares, twin tunnels to what—the afterlife?

3. Lines Written in a Bar

I'm here to piece the quilt of grief, sorting
self-pity's faded calico—some small
comfort without the promise of your warmth.

For this a crowd, the smoke of strangers'
cigarettes is best—and music so loud
it hurts, a buzz in my ears like last night's

busy signal. What to make of these smoke-
stained rags, notebook and needle, the pen-prick's
beads of blood, the haze of nostalgia

that leaves a headache in the morning, worse
than wine? Outside, the moon's just risen, turned
from this world, wrinkles etched with city soot,

its own obsessive romance. Each siren
reminds me of the bedside candle I left
burning the night you told me his name.

4. Footprints in the Snow

—*music of Claude Debussy*

Tonight the moon too is white, as colorless
and impassible as the front steps. Both
inhabit the same vacuum: Air that cold

seems absent, unwilling to be breathed.
Though each degree of mercury has its
texture, its music under a tractioned foot,

there must be a less insidious way
of feeling sorry for oneself, Monsieur,
than this: No one walks as slowly in snow

as your *Prélude* makes my fingers falter
over their ivory plain. Someone
without heat or home, slogging through slush, might

stop short at a drift's edge, wishing to surround
himself with blankness—and at the tempo
you require, barely drag himself away.

5. Blizzard

Sparks jumped the gap between lovers, lightning
shut down the physical plant—no light, no heat,
everything canceled, concealed. That evening

our neighbor's candle flames turned chicken wings
to pheasant, varnished fruit and bread into
Dutch still-lives, sowed stars and hourglasses

in the wine. The master of the house played
madrigals on the harpsichord. We sang,
competing with the wind in rising scales,

suspended sighs: love's twisted keys and long-
shut passages, where time is measured not
in moments, but as wholes and halves. The wax

kept shrinking, the snow kept falling. Later,
beneath a heap of rugs, your breath became
the other measure of that winter night.

6. Imitating Angels

Inside the record store it's Easter,
crocuses a chorus of orange tongues.
Garlands of Latin vowels wind around

the registers, neon blues and greens muting
into stained glass. *Miserere nobis*,
the voices plead: They could be singing

of misery, not mercy, in the
dispassionate counterpoint of cherubim.
What does beauty have to do with heaven,

that static chord, eternally prolonged?
Isn't it the clash of angelic voices
come too close, like the wrong ends of magnets—

the twinge of more love than we can bear,
a dissonance squeezed and released, before
our little deaths enlarge themselves, consume us?

7. Rainbow

Sun between clouds like a voyeur peering
through the slats of a Venetian blind—
the way I look into our past, afraid

to interrupt that torrid love scene,
unable to look away. Already,
the violas of Mahler's *Tenth* were playing

the tortured syntax of farewell. How long
since then have I been driving towards this storm,
low pressure zone at the center of longing?

As I approach the limits of rain, color
insinuates itself into the fabric
of clouds, unfurls from mountain to creek

across the road: transparent banner, omen
of neon, advertising the broken
promise that bars the past's promised land.

Wrap

I don't mean when a movie ends,
as in, *It's a!* Nor what you do with tortillas
splitting with the heavy wet of bean.
And I don't mean what you do

with your lavender robe—all fluff
and socks—to snatch the paper
from the shrubs. Nor the promise
of a gift, the curl and furl of red ribbon

just begging to be tugged. What I mean
is waiting with my grandmama (a pause
in the Monsoon) at the Trivandrum airport
for a jeepney. Her small hand wraps

again the emerald green pallu of her sari
tucked in at her hips, across her breast,
and coughs it up over her shoulder—a hush
of paprika and burnt honey across my face.

...where it is quite possible to arrange an elephant ride and see many other wild animals.

—Guide for Traveling Abroad in India

The man yells *Audivaggani!* and smacks the beast's back leg. My saddle is oily and fringed with tassel, all around us a gurgle of magpie, insect, lake. Black monkeys zip through the elephant's legs as we rumble ahead and I lean over to shoo them from their game. There sits a tiger with toes spread into the shoreline, one tooth curling over his lip like a joke no one forgets. In eighth grade, I asked a boy to dance who said *I'm not feeling that wild right now* and would I consider another? Another boy, another song? I did not ask; all night I sipped cola with Sara and wondered when and where I'd find a wild one who dances, who sings, who sees all the reds of a jungle.

BOOKS IN BRIEF
MARION K. STOCKING
Really Brief

I dread writing brief reviews; they can't help but sound like jacket blurbs, and I've been reading the blurbs on well over a hundred poetry books in preparing this review. (And, yes, I really did read the better part of each book.) The blurbs are, collectively, numbing: "breath-taking elegance"—Carolyn Kizer (I won't say of whom); "ravishing...gorgeous"—*Publisher's Weekly*; "wondrous"—Lucie Brock-Broido; "authority...as brilliant as any I know"—Robert Creeley; "go-for-broke gorgeous"—Robert Haas; "better than almost anything else being published"—Donald Justice (oh, that wicked *almost!*). Admittedly I've selected for review only books that I thoroughly admire, but I'll try to avoid writing jacket blurbs here.



Joan Murray, *Queen of the Mist: The Forgotten Heroine of Niagara* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999, 128 pp., \$20 hardbound, 0-8070-6852-7). This poem transports the reader into a not-so-distant era through an intensely interesting real-life heroine. Annie Taylor, a well-educated "older woman," desperate to find a way to support herself in a man's world, was, in 1901, the first person to go over Niagara Falls in a barrel. Murray tells this suspenseful adventure story in Taylor's voice, so that the reader comes to know this courageous woman intimately and to appreciate her character—her courage, ingenuity, and determination. It is disturbing to learn that the society of her day shrugged off her achievement and saved its applause and worldwide honor for the man who duplicated her success ten years later. Murray's poetry reads like a novel and does Annie Taylor proud.



Bruce Cutler, *Seeing the Darkness* (University of Missouri—Kansas City: BkMk Press, 1998, 77 pp., \$11.95 paper, 1-886157-16-2). Here is another book that, like *Queen of the Mist*, feels like an epic. Cutler dramatizes the dark vivid life of Naples, beginning with the Allied liberation of the city in 1943 and documenting individual lives through 1945. These narrative poems, in their heat and appetite and heartbreak and passion and linguistic gusto and shameless gaze, make many of the last hundred poetry books I've read feel pale, cramped, self-absorbed and, worst of all, humorless. No two poems speak in the same voice, the same form, or from the same angle of vision. Alto-

gether they create a multi-dimensional mosaic of a city of survivors.



Albert Goldbarth has two new books: *Beyond* (Boston: Godine, 1998, 104 pp., \$13.95 paper, 9-781567-920871) and *Troubled Lovers in History* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999, 115 pp., \$27.50 cloth, 0-8142-0813-4, \$18.95 paper, 0-8142-5015-7). The latter is a sequence of twenty-five poems on relationships, sexual, marital, and filial. I can imagine it as an enthralling, off-beat text in a sociology course—a powerful antidote to the sociologese infecting many such courses. If, however, you have never read Goldbarth, I'd suggest you begin with *Beyond*, for its dizzying range. It opens with the spirit-raising "Heart on a Chain," ranging all over time, space, and out beyond. Then follow seventeen poems under the heading "Sloughed Bodies," which explore the Goldbarthian landscape of terror and hilarity—pop culture, familial intimacies, marital privacies, Kansas space, outer space, larruping language, virtuosic vision. The book closes with "The Two Domains," the philosophico-fantasy-frolic that received our Chad Walsh Prize and the Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award for the Best Science Fiction Story (Special Category) from the Center for Science Fiction in 1995. All this in one volume!



W.S. Merwin also has two new books: *East Window* (Port Townsend, Washington: Copper Canyon, 1998, 184 pp., \$15 paper, 1-55659-119-5), a reprinting of the four out-of-print volumes of his translations of Asian poems, with a new essay on the impossibility and necessity of translation, and *The River Sound* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999, 134 pp., \$23 hardbound, 0-375-40486-4), a miscellany of new poems. At the weighty center of this volume are three long poems: the odd quest-romance "Suite in the Key of Forgetting"; the valedictory "Lament for the Makers," taking off from the poem of that name by the medieval Scottish poet William Dunbar; and the book-length, Villon-inspired "Testimony," putting the poet's lifetime into perspective.

Surrounding this wealth are forty-three more poems, including the already anthologized "The Stranger" and "The Chinese

Mountain Fox,” two unforgettable parables. To suggest the lyric richness with which Merwin leads the listener through the ear to the imagination, here is one of the shortest poems, “Remembering”:

There are threads of old sound heard over and over
 phrases of Shakespeare or Mozart the slender
 wands of the auroras playing out from them
 into dark time the passing of a few
 migrants high in the night far from the ancient flocks
 far from the rest of the words far from the instruments

Assonance and alliteration send their threads of sound out to weave into the long rhythmic breathings of the lines. Time and space weave in and out; the imagination, easily engaged in Mozart and Shakespeare, expands through the chilly auroras to the vast night canvas across which the diminished flock of migrants flies—far in time from their ancestors, far from “the rest of the words” and the instruments. Far indeed the poet leads the attentive reader, in just six lines.

In other poems Merwin teases us out of thought to “sounds from before there were voices” and to “knowing without knowledge.” In “Clear Water” he dances us through an elaborate lyric network to participate in the mythopoeic act of a child’s imagination. In “Harm’s Way,” he anatomizes the relation of language to “reality,” of *pain* to *patience*. In “That Music” he achieves a little miracle of apophasis (demonstrating something while denying that you’re saying it) by evoking the music of the spheres.

Here is a book that earns any blurb-writers’ encomium—an occasion for celebration.

Editor’s Note

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