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A SONG FOR DAVID, MY SON

With hands that trellis air
David plays a harp of sunstrings.
His luminous eyes
Read notes in dustmotes;
His delicate hair revolves
The light in soft volutes.

What ancient song,
What Israel lament
That whispered soft
From Saul's great tent
Flutes to his delicate ear?

In this pale shell
The blood still sings—
So far from sandy shore
Where Moses struck—
New testimony
To the old sweet moan.

Hard against his chest my ear
Can hear only the throb
Of my own heart, or its young echo,
While David hears the song
That I have lost,
And translates in the yellowed air—
The color of old manuscript—
The trembling song
From age to age.

Sy Kahn

TWO POEMS

Post-Mortem Freedom Song

(For poets who could not ignore)

With "underground" one's most precise
 definement of one's rabbitwise
 condition—presently or late—
 how may one lift one's squeal in great-
 phrased liltings, visioning such dark?

Suffectly scurry rhyming-park
 beside stern-metred graveyard walls,
 and even flourish banners, palls
 to wrap spelled selves against "red" soil
 when leaping optionally (mind—moil-
 sharp instrument again—no lance)
 which warren each may chased-there chance.

Ah, happy furless fish, we sing
 while water fills these holes to bring
 scanned foot-leap. Accent's bullets passed,
 no metaphor's equivo-cast!

Not merely dampened, speedy-drowned . . .
 and every ingress aptly found
 holds *assurément* what we'd all
 this time unvaguely feared: our call
 to final anonymity—
 our seepage-prospect, unity
 with loam, enriched therewith by our
 unwitting carcasses, to flower

into another spring upon
bright graves, within which we anon
lie not. We “safely” found which we
preferred, and dove to bliss quite free.

And who can argue now? No stone
is carven telling who'll atone
because we didn't *leap* that wall
and chisel boldly, disregarding all.

James Boyer May

The Abstract, Briefly Defended

A quibble could—and nicely, by
some nicely-nasty juggled word-
definements—so enwrap *abstract*
in gauzed semantic fluffiness,
that pages might be inky-spit-
ted eye-destroyers. But the word
the critics use is plainly vague
by comprehension—taking off
from rocky, red-hot spires to neu-
tral atmosphere, there hung in space,
condemned because intangible,
they cry.

Now, wait! They say they see
it soaring, feel its gassy draft . . .
and even angered by its hue,
they charge it's unspecific, when
it calls to mind all difference
amongst the buyers of escape.
Now, could it be the user had
in mind the same result? That word

comprising most meant best to him?
 And do objectivists surpass
 the inward-dreamers conjuring
 without such color-taste-and-sound
 exactitudes? And must the last
 and only meaning always be
 the shaft-sharp one *mot juste*? Or may
 not tolerance concede both mul-
 tiplex intentions and some joy
 to those quick-bored by easy arrows?

James Boyer May

KNOCK, AND IT SHALL BE OPENED

When I went south the northbound cars, driven
 By appearing men of faith who knew the worth
 Of north, asked one question over and over,
 "Wishing which wish?"

I was blessed
 With time, knowing that those who asked were given,
 Those who sought, found.

I headed north.
 Which? Which wish?

I tried the east.
 A lover
 Of absolute directions, I drove west.

I am afraid it is rather late to switch
 To diagonal routes,
 wishing which wish,
 which wish wishing.

Hollis Summers

PORTRAIT: A CONTEMPORARY

When mothers at last grown weary with cancer, die,
They bequeath to their sons prosecution of letters,
written

From college (*Love, Son*). Collecting in layers that lie
Like griefs heavy pressured, the notes beside them,
chill

With circumscribed words, ridicule her will.

When you, a friend, wander dumbly into drawers
Alone at night, these will remain intractable
By previous definition, held exterior.
Your fingers will fumble desperately for a fault
In stratification so infractable.

After selling the house (the father hotels) and he
moves

To apartmented transience, continuing beyond gradu-
ation

In this school, awaiting the Army
Or some worthwhile thing to do, it behooves
You to deplore his improbable sense of direction.

When unpaid bills and reminders of classes cut
Litter the desk top like shavings, you'll listen
To her recordings, among her furniture, moved,
And later at three descend in silence the stair
To the burner, with beer cans in a collection.

When stumbling on insecurity he will be caught
Between the sexes, you will love him piteously well.
Should you read someday of his death in the war
In Hungary, it will explain perhaps the fought
Imponderable thing that was hidden in his mother's
will.

James Land Jones

FOUR POEMS**Totem**

Some kind of swirl—and I was born,

Confederates among the animals
catching my loss in scales or fins
and starting with it up the path again;

A Jericho whistle through early mist—
my cousins were talking with the other quail,
hunting the perfect hedge to call.

In a pasture minute of any day
I will go like the drop of rain on a thorn.
Some animal will touch a paw with its tongue,
Some kind of swirl—and again I'll be born.

A Hudson River Vista

A pride of Mohawks, their scalps all whiskied,
leaped at their hour, dawn-light, to the carving.
By noon the farms were smoke.

No use to call this evil, nor yet fate:
a certain forest the Colonies tormented
matured and brought forth fruit.

Men on the Hudson, I have watched your rings
flash good and evil on the train to work,
and heard your papers rustling.

Each dawn the headlines whisper Mohawk names.

Long Distance

Sometimes when you watch the fire
ashes glow and gray
the way the sun turned cold on spires
in winter in the town back home
so far away.

Sometimes on the telephone
the one you hear goes far
and ghostly voices whisper in.
You think they are from other wires.
You think they are.

Deer Stolen

Deer have stood around our house
at night so still nobody knew,
and waited with ears baling air.
I hunt the still deer everywhere.

For what they heard and took away,
stepping through the chaparral,
was the sound of Then; now it's Now,
and those small deer far in the wild

Are whispers of our former life.
The last print of some small deer's foot
might hold the way, might be a start
that means in ways beyond our ken

Important things. I follow them
through all the hush of long ago
to listen for what small deer know.

William Stafford

THE EAGLES

Came the first, a great eagle with great wings,
Long wings streaked with colors and wide to wind,
Soaring, coasting, spiralling height of sky,
And exulting in his swift, fearless flight.
A lone contender of the sun, without
Equal or rival, he screamed his proud
Defiance at the earth beneath his feet,
Then horizoned out to the highest peak
And placed his nest among the stars, a king.

His might unchallenged, he cropped off the top
Of the tallest twig and carried it down
To a land of traffic, where it would be
A symbol among the lower and the weak
Of his great power, pledging to protect
Them with his wings, to comfort and defend
All within reach of his talon and beak,
His rule their only hope and guarantee
Against fellow creatures, their enemies.

Then boldly he took the most promising seed
And had it planted in a fertile field
Where it grew and became a worthy wood
Whose branches turned toward him because their
 roots

Were under him—and the eagle's shadow
Was part of the trees, as gentle shadows
Gave way to struggling shoots and ambitious
Boughs, until they spread so thick, so lush,
And there were so many more birds to clutch

That a second great eagle with great wings
Appeared, with lust as strong and vision keen
As he who had fulfilled his dream too well.

And now the trees swayed, the branches trembled,
The woods shook as in a storm, birds and leaves
Fluttered in the darkening wake of siege,
While the roots twisted and turned, threatening
To rise and split the ground in two, if these,
Their masters, could not covenant a peace.

Long the eagles circled, pondering each
His own intentions and weighing his speed
Against the other's force, to make assault
Swift and sure and secure a victor's score;
But twinned as they were in fierceness and design,
The two took secret council: to unite
Their likenesses, that together they might
Set the land at ease and between them bind
Its blessings by this oath that both despised.

With banners raised, calmly their shadows merged
And they returned, brothers by blood and word
To all the small and humble birds they shared
For the common good. And now the roots veered
Their branches to the new allegiance, made
The soil drink from new streams, so that they gave
More and better fruit than ever before,
And the woods prospered in having two lords
Who sheathed their claws with cautious greed and
scorn.

Slowly they moved apart, making their truce
Extend as far as they could spy and swoop
On the first mouse to cross and scout the field
In the belly of a snake, sign and seal
Of eagle's war. When it came, both flew up,
Poised for the strike, the bloody kill, the skull
Of hated adversary—but neither one

Came down. Caught by invisible nets, they plunged
Into their own snares with their hearts unstrung.

Then the fowls of the heavens and the beasts
Of the earth gathered. What ruins were these
From which there was no deliverance or escape?
And they went out and scattered the remains
Toward all the winds, until the eagles' dust
Had drifted and settled, bringing green shrubs
To the desert, tall cedars to the hills,
Young meadows into clearings and a finch
To sing of other summers coming in.

Elizabeth Bartlett

THE ANNIVERSARY

It was five years ago tonight, she thought,
Standing outside the house that she had kept
In order since the death, that on that hill
I rose furious and fell sobbing, and heard
The bleating of a goat my virtuous grief
Had not kept from danger, that some demon
Had seen fit to hinder on my husband's hill,
That when I stared in the deep trench I thought

The poor beast dead, but it has been my grief
Since, limping to my hand, and what I've kept
Is more than goat-friend, or my husband's demon-
Passion to help all whose faint cries he'd heard,

And five years ago tonight came the demon
Who I thought then could not have known my grief,
Who so tended the goat, who may have heard
Some sign of my impatience, filled the hill
My husband loved so with sorrow for beast kept
Instead of shot, that then I had but one thought

Which was to voice in a harsh tone my grief,
And even before I, he on the hill
Seemed to know that grief was not my demon,
No, not of that kind, husband- or goat-thought,
So much as wonder, after all he'd heard,
Over how long the lie of love I'd kept

I'd kept as love itself, and what he heard
He was discreet about, even as a demon
Playing cat and mouse, by silence kept,
Until the goat's bleating stopped and grief
Turned to embarrassment in every thought,
And then, he stood facing me on the hill,

Telling me how a husband's friend had kept
Faith with the departed and all he'd heard
About his widow's beauty, whose main thought
Was needing a man to tend the goats, with demon-
Skill proving where we stood upon that hill
How well he knew my each way and true grief

Of all those hard-kept years, and on that hill
I heard rasp and sigh left me no room for grief
Or thought whether he was god, man, or demon . . .

David Galler