

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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RIVERS

(for Wilson Harris)

They roll as deaf as logs through foliage swollen
With elephantiasis to the screeching of macaws;

This is their second death, and they have fallen
All over, overboard, swirling like oars.

Do clouds of pirhai shred them of their flesh
Again, boiled in the tide-race,

The scaly cayman heaves its hulk and flash
To halve their limbs in the original place?

On that vague expedition did their souls
Spawn, light as butterflies, in resurrection,

Or the small terrors multiply like tadpoles
Below a mangrove root or a headstone?

Stillborn at death, their moment is not ours
In whom the spasm of birth

Begets oblivion: to chart endless savannahs,
Rivers, even with a guide, conceives an earth

Without us, without gods: Guiana or Guinea,
The aboriginal fear, like Orinoco

Debouching from a mouth brown with tobacco
Deaths that cannot discolour the great sea.

Derek Walcott

TILLAMOOK JOURNAL*

1. I have come here
From Chicago, packing
A sleeping bag, a pan
To melt snow for drinking,
Dried apricots, tea,
And a great boiled beef-
Heart for gnawing on.

Two loggers drove me
As far in as they could get,
They were two of the gunnysack loggers
Of the Burn, owning a truck
And a dozer, a few cables
And saws, who drag out
The sound heartwood for money.

They turned around
Where a rockslide had dumped itself,
One got out
And reached in the erosion.
And showed me a handful
Of earth, it was
More black ashes than it was earth.

*Editors' Note: the Spring 1956 issue of the Journal carried the original version of this poem. We now print this revised version because we feel it is of considerable interest to show how a poem evolves—how it can be, in the author's word, "very changed, yet very the same."

2. A few years back,
They said, there'd
Been a prospector here,
An old man past seventy
Who believed the land,
Being otherwise worthless,
Should yield precious metal.

They used to run across him, they said,
A little, swaying heap of gear
Traipsing across
A logging road, or thrashing up
Avalanching gravel, or
Mumbling about metal while staggering
From some vegetable gulley.

A full year
He hunted uranium or gold,
His Geiger-counter lashed on
Like an extra heart,
Around January he'd have
Settled for anything at all,
When spring came he disappeared.

3. I set out walking
From where they turned,
Underfoot the terrain spews
Loose rock and gravel,
Every step rattles and gives way,
Gigantic tree trunks
Barricade all the directions.

I wondered that a man
Of seventy-odd years had been able
To put up with one of them
On this breast, the ear

Pressed to the metal heart hearing
Only his bloodbeat
And that getting fainter.

As the hill grew steep,
Up to my ankles in gravel
And grappling at roots and rocks
I traversed and wound along,
At last I came climbing up
On my hands and knees
As though I'd come here begging.

4. On top of Cedar Butte
You can see the whole compass:
To the west the Pacific
Lies flat and shiny,
Everywhere else there are
Only hills
Plunging across a saw-toothed country.

I looked back south
Where the hills have been logged off:
Except for a few clumps of snags
Out of reach
Or too burnt
Or decayed for profit
It is a total shambles

White stumps,
White logs washing
To the valleys, eroding scarps,
Lopped spurs, old streambeds,
The whole land split and cracked
Under the crisscross of logging roads
And oozing down its ravines.

5. It is twenty-five years
 Since the first blue-white puff
 Kited up the wind:
 The Douglas fir is an intolerant tree
 Potent only in fits
 And likes to breed
 In the open, such as the aftermath of fire,

 Convicts have put saplings
 By the coast, schoolboys
 Have planted by the highway,
 Rain and sun continue falling.
 Nothing catches.
 A little fireweed, vine-maple, grape. . .
 Ants, skinny black spiders. . .

 To the north
 On hills the loggers can't reach
 The great virgin stands
 Of nothing except snags,
 Burnt clean and bleached,
 In the distance keep
 Appearing as motionless smoke.
6. All day the big,
 Immaculate flakes of snow
 Come down, melting
 On touching. All night,
 Wet through, trying for sleep,
 I had to hear Kilchis
 River grinding the stones and boulders.

 The ravine is a mass
 Of slash slippery
 With rain and snow. Uprooted
 Trees cross and lock each other

Blocking the water,
Tan, beautifully
Grained rims for the waterfalls.

At last a little
Mule-deer joined me,
Leading like a scout,
When I turned off and climbed
He stopped, and sadly,
It almost seemed, watched my going.
Some birds began wrangling and chirping.

7. At the sound of surf
I scramble to my feet
And climb again—from where I sat
Under the last knoll,
Gnawing the heart,
Looking back at the Burn
As it went out in the twilight,

Its crags broken,
Its valleys soaked in night,
Just one more of the
Plundered breasts of the world—
And hearing my heart
Pound in the air
I come over the last summit

Into dark wind
Blasting out of the darkness,
Where before me the tempestuous ocean
Falls with long triple crashes on the shore
And where behind the snow is putting down
A thin, saprophytic blossoming.
It is only steps to the unburnable sea.

Galway Kinnell

THREE POEMS**Old Bachelor**

Twenty-odd years of teaching taught him nothing.
True, he could gloss a text, index his lectures,
Footnote and file, smile past a rival's strictures,
Retire into his balding dome, sit tight
Behind thick glasses and a sort of learning.

His voice, too, seemed to have deadened. In spring,
he noted

The classroom murmur spread, echoing laughter
Break out beyond his study door soon after
The tousled bowed-down boys and girls, mute
In his cadaverous presence, had departed.

One girl he avoided as much as, he thought, she did.
And yet her downward smile drew his dull gaze—
He found his gestures aimed at her, his eyes
Grappling for hers. He told a joke or two,
And when she laughed he found that he was needed.

Twenty-odd years of teaching, all so even.
Senior lecturer, man of many committees,
How can this unschooled girl whose only wit is
A smiled-down murmur quell your practised speech?
But when she accepted him the world became heaven.

"Withdrawn" old friends say. True, from words and
meaning.

"Finished" some say. But not, he feels, with life.
In a fresh-painted maisonette his wife
Shapely in slacks breathes a perpetual summer
Betraying him from learning into learning.

Philip Hobsbaum

Bulldog Drummond Fights Again

Huge, often swathed in black, cheerily shouting
 "Come on, boys" as you crash through the closed
 windows

Into the drawing-room packed full of crooks,

See how you seize two Chinese by their pigtails,
 Smashing their yellow skulls together, then
 Duck mysteriously a knife from behind.

"Not done to fight with knives," you say, and so
 You lash him to a chair, then with a whip
 Chastise him till he weeps. Justice is done,

Is done, and done again. Caught on dark stairs
 Arms of prodigious length around your throat
 You slash an artery somewhere—that's all right,

The man's a chink or wop or wog or boche.
 The jews are worst. "What are these Hebrews here?"
 (A henchman comes and whispers.) "Is that so?"

Out comes the whip again. They squeal with fear,
 Not unnaturally. **You** don't, of course—
 Batter you into the mud, you'd come out singing.

And how you'd hate me! Intellectual Jew,
 Reading books, disliking sport and games,
 I couldn't join your club, you'd brain me with it.

You're an old has-been now, dust on your shelf.
 Time was they'd crowd around the letter S
 On the off chance of Sapper coming in.

We've other things to give our hate release.
 The TV Marlowe, pulped and broken-toothed,
 Peter Cushing torturing young girls,

And, of course, our own science fiction. We've a
device

Would scorch you up worse than Carl Peterson.
Even you never filled the rain with death,

But your sons are trying hard. The bruisers' faces
Of young M.P.'s, those puffy brigadiers,
Voices deceptively mild, assure us we

Can give the Enemy worse than he's got.
Who is the Enemy? They hardly care.
I read to numb my uttermost despair

Till Bulldog Drummonds us from off the earth.

Philip Hobsbaum

In London

In London again, my nostrils seal with soot,
My clothes afflict my skin, my hair my scalp.
Crowds jostle my Northern unimpeded walk,
A man treads down heavily on my foot,
Doesn't say "sorry", merely curses me.

Old friends seem older, lined brows growing through
Their well-groomed greying hair. Their talk, too,
seems
More full of themselves—their jobs, their pals, their
schemes.

The films are poor. I thought I'd see a show,
But seats have gone up. And the beer tastes worse.

When I got home a bus-conductor picked
My case up for me, didn't kick it off.
Tied up and blindfolded, a plane could drop
Me dead in London streets, I'd know my pitch.
Those hurrying feet would trample me to soot.

Philip Hobsbaum

ELIMINATIONS

1.

A book with pale green covers is always a reminder
that Death is a delicate matter.

Leave no street or square unturned until you find
the statue you have been longing to destroy.

Remember that large insects wear very heavy armor,
if you are thinking of attacking them.

Virgins are like civic buildings. They have no
ramparts or means of defense.

Never use scissors on a flower. Break it with your
hands.

Elegance is a by-word for deformity.

Do not overlook the insidiousness of small bells.

Take advantage of your moments of clarity to kill a sparrow.

When you are feeling depressed, remember that a brain is only a chestnut covered with small hairs.

All men have invisible tails to which some troublesome object is attached; the object is usually an old-fashioned alarm-clock.

No zoo is complete without the poet who has, a few minutes ago, enjoyed public disfavor.

Suspect all dictionaries.

2.

There is no reason for the birth of Man, unless cruelty could be considered a reason.

Do not be more kind than is necessary.

Dying for love and the love of dying are no longer valid; why not fill an ashtray with wine?

Abandoned houses are the best places to chain dogs.

3.

A dying man asks for something sweet to smell.

Roses are bitter because of their indecisive odor.

A glass tumbler is not necessarily a mirror.

The spaces between the lines of a poem are what the blind man's eyes reflect.

The soft astrology of the blind man's eyes is the furniture he enjoys touching.

A blind man has an entire sky in his grasp.

Do not burn yourself on the stars.

4.

It is the eyes that arrange festivals, the mouth that rides on a silver stair-case.