

# THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

Volume 18 - Number 2      Winter 1967-68

---

## CONTENTS

- |                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| 1 HAROLD WITT             | <i>Picasso and Freud</i>                         |
| 2 BETTY HASKELL HOUSE     | <i>To My Husband</i>                             |
| 3 KAREN SWENSON           | <i>The Complacent<br/>Wife</i>                   |
| 4 SAMUEL HAZO             | <i>Two Poems</i>                                 |
| 5 KENNETH CAMERON         | <i>Two Poems</i>                                 |
| 7 CELESTE TURNER WRIGHT   | <i>Three Poems</i>                               |
| 9 FRANK ORIN SADLER       | <i>The Final Obsession<br/>of Julio McGruder</i> |
| 12 STANLEY NELSON         | <i>Two Poems</i>                                 |
| 18 JOYCE CAROL OATES      | <i>Three Poems</i>                               |
| 25 JEAN HARPER            | <i>Death of a Dog</i>                            |
| 26 CARROLL ARNETT         | <i>They</i>                                      |
| 27 OTTONE RICCIO          | <i>Medicare</i>                                  |
| 28 DAPHNE ATHAS           | <i>The Bell and the<br/>Turkey</i>               |
| 29 HERBERT SCOTT          | <i>Two Poems</i>                                 |
| 34 JUDITH JOHNSON SHERWIN | <i>The Prospector's<br/>Complaint</i>            |
| 36 JAMES NEYLON           | <i>Parkers</i>                                   |

Cover design: I. K. ANDERSON

# THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

Volume 18 - Number 2      Winter 1967-68

---

## PICASSO AND FREUD

*"Love is the most important thing in life."*

—Picasso at eighty

*"The obsessive thought, 'I should like to murder you,' means  
... 'I should like to enjoy love of you.'"*

—Freud, "A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis"

Young as he felt, and feeling what was young,  
Picasso butted bullish with his brush—  
like Zeus of the curling forelock, wasn't above  
god disguised exposures of his lust—  
as late as eighty, still believed in love.

Whereas, past forty, Freud had given it up—  
those children, all those patients, lectures, books—  
the bearded old Jehovah knew too much  
of latent murder in flirtatious looks  
and double edges in the human touch.

If only we could fuse them into one  
as the excessive artist liked to do,  
and paint two moving points of view at once—  
put more lightness in the morbid Jew,  
and in the Spaniard's glance, dark consequence.

Harold Witt

**TO MY HUSBAND, DISGRUNTLED BY MY LOVE  
POEMS, NOT WRITTEN TO HIM**

Having fumbled your features for years,  
having mislaid the essential,  
somewhere among the God-damn years,  
I do not live from one moment in your arms  
to the next.

(It is longer than a moment  
and not in your arms exactly—  
that lively juice and laughter—  
but you know what I mean.)

No, I do not love you.  
We rest against each other,  
head across neck,  
like two old horses in a field.

Sometimes I hate you,  
seized by that frustrate fury,  
because you do not know,  
you do not know what I mean.

I live in multiple directions  
and you taste my airs,  
gale, gust, and variable.  
But I do love you: you know what I mean.  
And it is the prevailing wind,  
You old weather cock.

**Betty Haskell House**

**THE COMPLACENT WIFE**

You, sleeping with your shoulder turned to me,  
Hairy as a molting bear rug,  
What goes on at the other side of your eyes?  
You spend more time there than with me.  
Have you a wife behind your lashes?  
I hope she is a soft brunette  
With meat between her ribs,  
A gentle jaw and small hands,  
No nag, no bitch, a housekeeper.

But then what would she have done  
With a drunk husband in Florence  
To be staggered across the square  
Under unhelping eyes of police?  
And she six months to mother.  
True, she would not in the hotel  
Staring at crisp hairs on her big toe  
Have said, "God a whole damn litre."  
While you retched pink into the bidet.

Being a member of her race  
I know what she'd have done,  
Wept and brined you did not love  
Her or the bellied child,  
Until you brought your sour mouth  
To negatives of comfort and remorse.  
I think you'd better leave her there  
Knitting behind the conscious curtain.  
She does not have the grit for daylight.

**Karen Swenson**

**TWO POEMS****Twilight in St. Petersburg**

Octogenarians from York,  
Poughkeepsie, Cleveland, Baltimore  
and Broken Elbow, South Dakota,  
littered their canes, carts and wheelchairs  
on the porch of the Ponce de Leon  
Hotel. Turning from jigsaw puzzles  
spilled on tables set for solitaire,

they watched the stone angel in the lobby  
pee eight quarts of Tampa Bay  
per minute in an everlasting stream.  
Only the lobby cat ignored  
the splash. He slept St. Peter's sleep,  
inverted on the stairs, his paws outspread,  
his nine lives purring in the dying air.

**Framed by the Wavy Mirror**

I am all head like a trout observed  
straight-on. This fish-face has mooned  
at me before from polished doorknobs:  
Cyclops—single-eyed but double-nosed.

"Advance." My head soars gothically  
until it mushrooms where the glass bends:  
atomic Hazo. "Retreat." Cyclops again.  
"Face right." My head shrinks to a bean  
on trousered stilts. "Face about."  
I sprout a ball-belly, rocking

like a balloon that will always land  
on duck-feet. To hell with tricks.

Give me a flat glass that lets me count  
my whiskers, preen and pat myself  
with talc and stare at eyeballs staring  
back. I spot it like an old assurer

on a globe that bowls a thousand worlds  
of bubble gum. "Grin back, old twin."  
What lives in wonderland dies fast.  
The bubble of the world is waiting.

Samuel Hazo

## TWO POEMS

### Jonah

I speculated there  
three days within the crocodile  
awaiting enzymation, sure  
that patience, the act of will

my guru taught, was sought;  
I, who work colonic irrigation  
without tools, can stop my heart,  
can hoard my urine:

I decomposed there, thinking God.  
For that the monster threw  
me out, or up; I plod  
to Nineveh, smelling fierce, to crow

about a doom He won't allow.  
Now he sends this pumpkin plant  
which he will blast tomorrow  
doubtless, gesture significant

of majesty. Would to man that He, for change  
would show his work in ways of modesty.

### **Aphrodite from Lake Erie**

Seaweed-stranded, algae-tendriled  
the randy arouser rose  
(biologically dead, they had called that lake)  
Borne upon the backs of lampreys to his  
beach.

Each finds her, his own ocean  
(blaming lack of oxygen, excess of nitrogen,  
and the city of Cleveland)

His own voluptuary's notion  
of life-water in woman's matter,  
somebody's daughter, thinner or fatter,  
Botticelli all the same  
(and even the mud-sucking carp is gone)  
Whom he will tame to his own uses,  
frequently marriage.

In church, her gown clung like drowning.

In the motel, her skin was too white.

Her fingers were one knuckle too long.

She had six toes on the left.

Her tongue was disced.

(Unable to cleanse itself, the lake is now  
polluting the waters emptying into it.)

He was dead in the morning.

**Kenneth Cameron**

**THREE POEMS**

**Buckeye Honey: A Fable**

The laboring unselfish bee  
That summer month she is alive  
Makes half a golden teaspoonful  
Of contribution to her hive.

Along the hills today I saw  
Poisonous honey-plants delude  
Bee nations into storing up  
Death for themselves and for their brood.

**Tricho-Nympha**

The termite tapping underneath  
Is seeking wood he may devour  
And yet himself cannot digest  
My kitchen flooring, turned to flour.  
Fermenting it, he needs the sly  
Assistance of a firm ally.

Unlike a youth whose diamond lens  
Beholds a nymph in drops of dew,  
The famous Joseph Leidy once  
Studied a termite through and through—  
A gut like freeways when they vex us,  
As crowded as corrals in Texas.

The protozoans herded there  
Are swollen, bell-shaped; and the goody  
They manufacture for their host

Is pickle-juice, no longer woody.  
 All hail to such cooperation,  
 Which antedates the human nation!

Our scholarly anatomist,  
 Although Victorian, had seen  
 Burlesque; and since those flagellates  
 Recalled a many-streamered queen  
 Whose dancing gladdened him somehow,  
 Their name is *Tricho-nympha* now.

### Lecture Near Nottingham

Where collieries and farms are interknit,  
 En route to Hucknall, you have viewed the shabby  
 Cots of the miners, each a definite  
 Contrast to Byron's flower-gardened Abbey.  
 The Sexton spent his boyhood in the Pit,  
 But now for decades he has been a gabby  
 Guide to Avernus at the parish church,  
 Giving the benefit of his research.

His narrative, an aitch-less masterpiece,  
 Includes an agèd grandmother's descriptions  
 Of how His Lordship came embalmed from Greece  
 With an arrangement common for Egyptians  
 Laid in the pyramids: at obsequies  
 The heart and other notable exceptions  
 Followed the mummy in a little urn,  
 Walked by a mourner several yards astern.

The one word *Byron*, with his dates and wreath,  
 Adorns a panel like a manhole cover  
 Set in the floor to mark the vault beneath,  
 Where all his haughty relatives are over-  
 Looked (like the tombmates of Elizabeth),

Besides encountering a second bother:  
The Byron family's coffins, neatly stacked,  
Have telescoped as leaden sheets collapsed.

"Some queer professor, an American,  
Doubted Milord was 'ere; so came an order  
The vault be opened, and they made me stand  
Close as I am to you while some reporter  
Looked at 'is foot; I patted Byron's 'and;  
You'd know 'im, though 'e's shrunk eight inches  
shorter."

The Sexton's farewell clasp is putting you in  
Touch with the quill that scribbled off *Don Juan*.

Celeste Turner Wright

### THE FINAL OBSESSION OF JULIO MCGRUDER

At the end of all these final days,  
The olive (and the day, a long hot day  
Opened by the thaumaturgical activity of the sun)  
Was a thousand miles away: as travelers, we found  
In a wilderness of rocks, snakes, thirst and cacti,  
Fleshy stems hung with the bits and tatters of calico,  
Blood, ribbon, and the bones of a poem.

Identification from the wallet

Did not give us the needed explanation,  
Though the layout was this:

Mr. Julio McGruder  
*PURVEYOR OF FINE WOMEN'S CLOTHING*  
Portobelo Panama

Communication by radio  
With the nearest ecclesiastical authority  
Told us little, except a missing person's report  
Had been filed some time ago.  
Further consultation with brother Christopher  
Informed us he would join us shortly.

In the square, the steps of the church  
Were stained with the dried blood  
Of fanatical tongues: tenemental, the statue  
Of a black Christ obscured the nave.  
In the central regions,  
The dream lay heavy with Portobelo.  
Antoninus, poet, priest and sometime lay-citizen,  
Harangued the bones of the city.

As travelers in the bones of a poem,  
The desert was hot. The rocks (and the day,  
The day existed in the mouth of a magical square)  
Surrendered to the horizon the frail image  
Of an olive from the dying mesquite.  
Anyone could have seen the Suguaro,  
But the wind was hot! The rocks were hot!  
And the eyes, our eyes, twisted with snakes,  
Thirst and cacti, were only irritated by the situation.

The result was, as to be expected,  
Not altogether pleasant.

Though, Madame, we discovered

Julio McGruder <i>PERVERTER OF FINE WOMEN'S CLOTHING</i> Portobelo                      Panama
--

However, recognition of myself  
 Left only the hope of a poem, the disillusionment  
 Of blood, ribbon, bone and calico.

In the church, Julio McGruder  
 Lay peppered on a cross of fire.  
 Antoninus administered the sweetened cup,  
 Harangued the unconcerned crowd,  
 And in general, made things of a woman's cloth.  
 On the apse, she languished for her son:  
 In the bones of a man, the dream took shape.

And now, after the final obsession, the illusion  
 Of a traveler in the desert (and the day, the day  
 He stood in the heat of the square, gazed into the  
 mouth

Of a church and saw the black Christ)  
 Hung with the bits and tatters of calico, blood,  
 Madness and the bones of a poem, he appeared  
 In the frail image of a mirage: as Julio, we found  
 In a wilderness of rocks, snakes, thirst and cacti,  
 The reason for poet, priest, and cloth.

The discovery was not without its faults.  
 It cost us much by the way of pain,  
 Though the result was this:

Mr. Julio McGruder <i>MAKER OF POEMS AND FRAILTIES</i> Portobelo                      Panama
--

Frank Orin Sadler

## TWO POEMS

## Frost, I would

Love to come to these

Pines

aspirant

Pines

like a farmer

who leaves his fields in the evening

After a good day's work

to saunter

And loaf in the forest

Among thistles of pine and sun.

Discovering

Also near the roots

Of your birches and maples the

Red

three-leafed

Flowerings, seed and husk and thorn

Clinging to my cuffs

as I pause just long enough

To watch the water-thrush

totter again

on the brook the

Stone

Then, with a casualness that comes  
Only from ritual,

Saunter back to the farmhouse  
To dream of the woods,  
Keeping watch  
Over darkening  
Tree-crests at my window.

Or like

The naturalist

who comes to a suburban field  
or slumlot

And with dispassionate  
Precision

gives

Name (o magic!) to the curious

Indeterminate weeds and midges.

Neither countryman

Nor scientist,

I come to the woods with an urban

Lumbering

and make of each innocent

Fieldtrip an event to be written down. Breath

of woods at night

Fills my throat

With animal pulsing;

even a long drive alone

When the shadow of trees

Hover on dirt roads

Makes me yearn for the light

of luncheonette or gas

Station.

Babel

Recalls the Russian who taught him

Birdsongs

Names of

Leaf and bush





In a patrician  
 Garden near  
                   a Connecticut beach a mingling  
 Of gull and  
 Goldfinch  
                   I knew the natural world  
                   had wounded me, Frost, for good.  
                                   Every morning and evening  
 I went to those woods:  
 Sometimes, like the naturalist,  
 Noting the exact procession  
 Of bird and flower  
 And sometimes with a  
 Vaguer,  
                   more poignant sense,  
                   feeling how night comes with a sound  
 Of chimney swifts and swallows of  
 Swifts  
 And barn  
 Swallows.  
                   But now the wound  
 Has almost healed. The forests  
 Are expunged. The woods  
 Become more distant.  
                   At cocktail hour  
                   My blood heaves with  
 Universal arrhythmia;  
                   in the pressurized  
 Jet  
                   the salt liquids clutch  
 for swamp and tidal flat;  
                   Rivers  
 Receive my urine  
                   and carry my decay  
                   to the open through black  
   Hills

Sea  
     dark  
 Praise dark  
     oath cannot alter  
 The slim  
     Spray  
         of a colt's  
             neck as he grazes

**O blabless blue-lipped**

Bullshead  
     of Sumer  
     your smear  
     is your  
     curly-locked  
     Beard  
 hanging in tresses o'er  
             the soundbox of the lyre  
 You decorate with horns  
     like Accadian half-moons  
                     tipped with purple  
 Mergent from a time    a time  
 A time when men  
     with square black beards  
                     and votive-eyed women  
 Worshipped with  
     mosaic, gold, silver, lapis lazuli  
     shell, red limestone

Bitumen  
 Stanley Nelson

**THREE POEMS****Mother to her Child**

Don't cry, don't cry, because at my touch  
you bubbled into life.

I'll begin now the work of education  
the charting of limited vein

And intricate web of civilization

In a child's brain—

Bricked-up doorways of ancient rhyme  
Shall fall to our excavation.

My child, don't flinch from the sting  
of a simple needle!

How will you ever learn anything?

And don't look so dumb!

You're a white kid and your hand  
has four fingers and a thumb.

What reason to snivel?

No whimpering, little friend. Hold onto this sail.

Tight go a kid's muscles with that first

Terrible jerk: then off!

It is a gothic flight and for God's sake  
raise your knees . . . .

Easy like butter surrendering to the knife.

To please me, straighten that back bone!

The X-ray showed an ordinary bone, a spine  
branching out like surprise.

Straight, straighter! Your little wing bones  
could do with a brace of  
Leather or steel. Cry, kick, what you will  
Nevertheless you clutch the sail and your  
Chicken muscles cry: Watch us, watch!

I who have borne you follow with my eyes  
in grudging approval.  
The string around your scrawny throat  
will guide you back to size  
And Mother's affection. All right, good.  
Back to earth. In my arms a panting  
Angel with scum on your front teeth.

Are you a boy or a girl?—let's see—  
Not sure yet. No matter.  
I'd have you either way.  
My nails are long and deft and thirsty  
For the bit-blood of fleas  
So here, down on your knees  
Bow your head to me. Afterward let's pray  
In unison, mother and child, our  
Song stumbling and wild but in tune  
In tune . . . . What do you say?

Yes, sing your song of love, of love, of  
careful careful love  
A song of plotted graphed and charted  
love  
O love, perennial love—  
Steel buckets and huge tonnage  
Great canal barges  
Heaped of Love like grain—  
From frowning clouds of cheeks  
Rain love upon us, rain—  
Immense boiling test tubes molten  
A delicatessen of love's parts—

Now you've done it, now you're sick.  
What a bore, this twist and flickering  
of a kid's life—

Off and on and off again and on again  
Like simple summer lightning!

And now it's off again—

Here's the mirror. We'll check your breath.

Alive. Heart in my hand a limp obscene  
organ, very small.

Anything else inside?

Up and around so fast! Sickness never lasts  
in the giddy tunnels of a kid's veins.

Roller coasters dip and soar

Japanese aircraft sink with a shriek

In that hollow rubber tubing of  
a kid's arteries.

So open your eyes to a mound of toys!

A meadow of junk beneath a Christmas tree.

Untie the paper bow and stare

Into a box of blond human hair—

Knucklebones that proved deciduous

In another human's use—

An eyeball to bounce on its own  
elastic string—

And, my baby, a library of books

All of which I've written!

Education begins with History.

It's the most educational toy.

Fairy Christmas trees dotting the snowbound sea

Of history's corpses, with stars for lights

And empty manger for empty manger—

Turn to page one of *Human History*

And get busy with your own long story.

Stop gnawing at your thumb.

*The corpse est sur la table.*

Ringless hands and handleless rings  
American G.I. arm with fourteen Germans' watches  
    slid upon it, for souvenirs.

And the arm itself is now a souvenir:

Hang it up in your room.

Corpses, corpses, an Alps of corpses  
Corpses in valleys and under tables

In uniforms mothers have sewed

Their stricken arms turned ladles

In vast bubbling vats of time's stew.

*History est corpses.*

Sheets of Swiss snow are sheets uncovering  
    blue-white boys' toes.

Stampede before all wise men, kid; never hesitate.

The shampoo they'll sell you will turn  
    your scalp blue and your bones white.

Take hold of that sail, kid, soar  
    and keep up the fight!

History is corpses and nature is

Corpses, the combed-out hair of quiet corpses

The decalcimated teeth of old

Corpses become pebbles again

And their eyes back to jellyfish.

Grass is people embalmed with

Chlorophyll.

The roach that ran out of your shoe  
    last night

Will creep back again some other night—

Use thick lenses to protect your eye.

Don't cry, don't cry, because history

Is a too-personal story

And you don't like it.

A Europe of corpses isn't my idea either  
of any great order.

But no, we can't start over.  
Shut up, sit still. Forget. Time to eat.  
Time to bathe. Time for vaccination  
And Easter vacation—  
Time for kindergarten's wars  
To test your paralyzed leg.  
Start kicking—

Will I who have created you call you  
stranger one sad day?  
What's this tragedy, this secular mystery  
What's this business of kids running away?  
Up and down the Alps of bodies  
Kids are running and howling.  
They howl from their mothers' bodies  
And from their mothers' love.  
Little bastards shrink from mothers' kisses  
And the great indexed kingdom  
We've prepared.  
I have claim to a little wisdom.  
I made over my wedding dress for your nightie  
And my suffering entrails for your brains.  
Look this way, memorize my name.  
There's no one in this universe but me.

### **Numberless Girls**

I ran away at fourteen and all the bus world  
Was witness to my sin. It was a shabby Greyhound  
Roaring from the house of nativity, hurled  
Sullen and panting with exhaust; and all the world  
Marveled at such feat. There's no mild October dust

Except to remind me of that birth of a flight  
The origin of gods in the tepid vessel of lust  
The carpenter's nail driven as it must  
Into the skulls of such girls.

At the height  
Of the day we paused at a diner by a bus station.  
A billfold grimy with fingers of years' wear  
Opened to strangers' eyes; see, no inflation  
Of interest, no interest, no care!  
It is a world of fake velvet seats and plastic stools.  
It is a pay-your-way trip and when men stare  
You do well to ignore. Behind are fools  
Of women, mothers pregnant again and again  
And bent to the earth like willows: away! The tool  
Of your escape is a shrewd frightened brain  
And manageable looks. So good luck. You do well  
To understand your general doom and ordain  
Yourself lost. Conscribed to men's hell  
Beneath the waist you rush upon the road  
And fluff up hair and liven cheeks to sell  
A soul anxious for selling.

### **The Ride**

The boundary line whips past.  
Signs point backward to home.  
Daddy drives along ricky-tick  
and we kids cling to the seat.

O wild wild ride!  
Heartbroken are untapped  
hotdog stands aroused in the wilderness;  
neon signs lit up for kids.  
We rush and haven't got a minute!

Lions, deer, good gray elephants  
stumble and careen outside our car.  
It's a parade of good animals  
and what a bustle of legs and tails!  
What a rush, rush to keep up with us!

I'm eight, you're four. Brother's  
almost six. We're almost late  
you'd think, the way he drives.  
Daddy's face glimmers in twilight  
and his teeth are fixed in a smile.

Daddy, what's this, where's this,  
what place, what road, where's that  
river you promised  
the roadside park you promised?  
(Promises are like clouds  
grinning themselves out of shape.)

Strange father, foaming with hurry!  
Your keen hard foot is harsh  
on the pedal, pumping gas.  
You pump gas into this groaning  
wreck and we cling to the seat  
and cling to the wreck  
crying "Hurry! Faster! What a rush!"  
A plumage of chestnut hair  
crowns your bony forehead;  
I can see the crease in your skull.

To dash in faith upon a clanging  
wreck is mad; to rush like a whistle's  
shriek down rocky hills is a doom; but  
we bounce on the seat and laugh to  
the zoom of air outside  
in a foreign dark.

Joyce Carol Oates

**DEATH OF A DOG**

He had dragged himself into the tall grass, alone, away from the driveway and the stationwagon that had roofed a shelter from the summer heat, a rectangular shade that threw a cool quilt over a sleeping dog. There was no warning. The starting motor and the rush of motion were too fast—as the dog stumbled to his feet he was struck. Wheel or axle or fender—which? He could not tell us, but we saw the rough marks of mechanical violence on his short-haired coat. Mute brown eyes focussed on inward pain accented with breaths that gathered in knots in his quivering belly. The injured dog lay in the timothy and the summer daisies away from the hurt and the human voices, apart with his unexplained, sudden affliction for which he made no complaint. Perhaps—perhaps, head resting on his shaking paws, perhaps the pain will be gone in a little while. Violence had the answer, unqualified.

**Jean Harper**

**THEY**

I do not know  
 who they are  
 by name but  
  
 they are very  
 big in numbers  
 and have to  
  
 answer for  
 nothing  
 to no one  
  
 because they  
 are learning  
 more and more  
  
 about you so  
 that having  
 killed you  
  
 they can then  
 kill you and  
 you and  
  
 you too again  
 and again,  
 and this is  
  
 no game, this  
 is serious,  
 believe you

me, this is  
 for keeps  
 and if you  
  
 get a laugh  
 from this you  
 are a nut  
  
 because they  
 want to  
 help you  
  
 more than I  
 do—what  
 can I do  
  
 with a dead  
 person—which  
 is why I  
  
 have come  
 here alone  
 to say this  
  
 and whether  
 you listen  
 or not you  
  
 have  
 been  
 told.

Carroll Arnett

carmerde cardemir demicare rimecade ecademir  
carmedim credamir medicarm recadeim edimecar  
carmiden crameder MEDICARE redamice emicader  
camereda dramakey medcarem ramedice armedico  
cardimed damncare mediocar ridamece adamerde

Ottone Riccio

**THE BELL AND THE TURKEY**

The hung bell lolloped,  
Dropping a tone upon the fat ground.  
A fillup sprouted there,  
Spilling loaves.

The fractious turkey, astrut with beak,  
Taut to the seams, game, wicked and gravelled,  
Coughing, struck deep into the bread,  
Showering crumbs and scowling.

His face was a scar,  
His beak a spear.  
His gizzard was tough with whipsnard,  
His box full of stones  
And his greed shrieking.  
"What you hunt for, Tassel Brain?"  
Asked the bell  
Round of mouth,  
Tongue wagging.

The turkey looked and saw the moon  
And heard the tone,  
Squawked,  
Spat infamy,  
Shot his skittles into bread,  
Cursed,  
And shook the pebbles of his face  
Until they rattled.

The hung silver laughed  
In its urn of dew.  
But the sound of the bell was as nothing  
To the curse of the turkey's chew.

**Daphne Athas**

### House Hunting

“He died last week. She’s here alone  
and wants to sell. You know the way it is.”  
The realtor pushes in the door, we step inside.

There is a sudden stench that rakes us now,  
not death, but death’s remains, a smell  
that airwick couldn’t hide of stale belongings,

unredeemed beginnings left behind.  
The woman sprawls against the couch, her blouse  
untucked, an empty glass between her thighs.

We nod and turn away. She doesn’t rise.

“Please note the central entry hall.”

A gallery of pictures lines the wall.

This one must have been the family, long ago,  
the man is lean and young, the woman on his arm  
must be the woman on the couch,

but smiling then, her children at her skirts.

And here we see him older, striking  
a meditative pose. He’s looking at some distant spot

beyond the scope of what the camera shows.

“There’s lots of room. A closet for your coats.”

His coats are tightly pressed, like flowers in a book,

unfilled reminders of his form in blacks  
and olive tweeds, dark browns. They waft  
a rank return of body smells, unbodied ghosts.

He's dead; the closet keeps his clothes alive.  
"I'm telling you, I wish I had a house this nice."  
The master bedroom, rich brown rug,

an unmade bed, pajamas draped across a chair,  
reminds us of a movie set from which  
the occupants have left at night, quite suddenly,

in great distress, a pipe and tie-clasp  
on a chest, loose change, a ring, some keys.  
"He died last week, was sitting in that chair,

I understand, munching on potato chips."  
We look for crumbs beneath our feet.  
We note his presence everywhere.

A portrait on the bureau shows  
the children almost grown, her hair  
gone gray and his grown thin.

We see the dissipation setting in.  
The back porch holds his golf clubs, fishing gear,  
a plastic wreath in pliofilm, a case of beer.

"You like this place? There's room to grow."  
Some mud-drenched boots. We'd feel too crowded  
here.

And how can we explain his death

would haunt us here, that in his absence  
he would become a member of our family  
whose empty place would beckon us

to follow him? Our dreams would fail,  
become his dreams gone wrong.

"I'm telling you the truth, this house won't last.

You're close to shopping, schools, and church.  
This is an all-white neighborhood."

We live too close to death to move in here.

"Right away, you ought to let me know."

We step outside. The fresh air beats  
into our lungs. We nod our heads and go.

### Notes For A Daughter At One And A Half

#### *Bless the Child*

Your clothes,  
unclothed before me,  
naked in their emptiness,

are where they fell  
when I removed them  
half an hour ago.

You left reluctantly,  
said NO to sleep,  
but slept **before**

I nestled you **in bed**.  
Our friends have **said**  
you look like **me**,

have my chin,  
my disposition.

I know your *mind's*

**your own**  
as you resist  
my mild administration:

You have my stubbornness.  
This dress of printed  
cotton cloth,

before,  
was turning  
as you turned,  
was learning dizziness,  
and how to fall  
by falling down.

These stockings  
poised like doves  
about to fly

were white  
this afternoon,  
in fact were new.

They've learned  
the feel of dirt,  
the touch of dew.

Lately, we've started  
training you,  
with no success.

It didn't fit into  
your master plan  
of what we can  
and cannot do.  
But you have mastered  
how to swing,

the meaning of  
a goodnight kiss.  
You know

the softness of a cat,  
the shadow of a leaf,  
how silence cannot keep.

Your shoes have found  
a silence.

Their mouths are open  
shapes you gave to them  
and dare not speak  
until you fill them in.

Tomorrow we will begin  
to fill you in.  
But I can never teach

what you must learn.  
Almost everything I know  
I've learned too late.

What can I give you?  
These clothes you've shed,  
this house,

some words I've found,  
my body's warmth,  
a way to choose.

The rest  
you will discover  
as you must,

and you will wear  
the shapes *your* life will spin,  
its colors in your hair.

Herbert Scott

**THE PROSPECTOR'S COMPLAINT:**  
**HAPPY JACK'S ROCK\***

mine, better tell no man  
 what a don't care deep down rock ribbed stubborn  
 what a cold fish tight fisted underhanded punch  
 drunk son of a butter fingered bitch you were  
 let it all go for him  
 wouldn't let me in

better tell no man  
 you spit-tinkled me out like a beer drinking river  
 slag wash down the mountainside  
 of the twenty lives i dug for you

happy jack mine  
 better tell no man  
 how you rolled right over on your rockbottom  
flapjack  
 buttered side for those memo-dripping stickpin  
 eyes in a two button suit with computer ears  
 and a twenty-four carat ruby red ringtailed ass  
and a tennis  
 playing pool swimming soft corporation  
 attached you could drown in and never even  
know it

better tell no man  
 in your fat cat song purring sharpy rocktoothed  
 mouth what a river pissing goldfishing  
underground  
 played out dug up gold gone bad  
 ore washed up copper mined out silver  
snaggle teeth  
 pulled out assets frozen act you put on  
 for me and then came  
 for his kitchen magic

and the drowning A-frame  
houses and the fireball dustcloud burnt up world  
rocking down to the toothroot shaken bones  
of the flick built villages sang  
out don't hand it over don't hand  
it over baby earthworm grub-hatching rainbow  
grit boweled  
man-eating harbor of all of us don't  
lay it all down right on the dotted line  
high-priced spread  
out wide open for him  
in a beautiful milk white porcelain polished  
industry wide grin  
with a cashbox rattling stock splitting mashed  
potato dancing shiver built in.  
happy jack you golden chock full of fucks  
bullseye of the golden west  
no one ever tell you better to go  
down dignified  
for no man  
than this worldwide  
twitch of the limbs for death  
that shuts us out most when it takes us in?

**Judith Johnson Sherwin**

**PARKERS**

I came down on their car  
hard with my headlights  
and they fell off the  
petal of themselves  
luminous, unraveling  
under the cracked back  
working like a scissors  
the silken underthings  
of a glazed beetle  
maneuvering a half-  
imagined axis. I have seen  
them snap on the porch floor,  
and spin with minute rage  
on the point of take-off.

**James Neylon**