

*THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL*

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**SMALLER ELEPHANTS**

In the Land  
off the Bluffs  
they use pairs of tusks  
on the backs  
so that as you  
the rest  
like a ton  
may crash  
through your  
it is then  
of  
(the uncertainty  
the not too distant  
you may sweat  
that mini  
or even Mari  
can sometimes  
than a sauna  
a sauna

**COOLER POEMS**

of Kalevala  
of Beowulf  
for tog hooks  
of bath house doors  
sit entranced  
of the elephant  
of recollection  
at any moment  
fragile privacy  
in such a state  
untranquillity  
of steam —  
trumpeting)  
the inspiration  
ature elephants  
anne's real toads  
prove more useful  
full of ivory  
full of gold

A. L. Lazarus

### THE ENCHANTED ISLES

Amazing Galapagos! Encantadas! Enchanted lava!  
 Here ring the bells of broken seas, out of ages  
 Breaking its water like broken bells. Hurling on  
     beaches  
 Where silence basks and bathes—basked and bathed.  
 Only the moon. The  
 Absorbed stars. Silence in the eyes of Actaeon.  
 O stag of islands. Orphans of Ecuador.  
 No Venus reclining here, who Paphos prefers,  
 Mild in her scudding. Jagged. Bare. Sprung  
 Jets of lava. Hardened. Razor sharp.  
 No man. Only moon. Only  
 Sun. Only the tongues of iguanas. The sleek  
 Seal. They ride the oncoming fresh surge of wave  
 As if they were slick surfboards under boys. They  
 Are whiskers in the belling spray. They ride, leaping  
     in abandon  
 Their blaze. Their black blaze. Supple  
 As flame. In the furious beautiful easy  
 Wave. Oncoming. Abandoned. Bleak. Bare.  
 The bare-backed wave—the heave of the sea.  
 The way it forms on the many shapes. Rocks. Cliffs.  
 Small basins. Inlets. Broken volcano cones making  
 Marvelous marinas. Lizards bask or slither. Iguana  
 Waddles toward water. Swims

With an easy sway, weaving his sinuous body,  
 Leaving his hindlegs dragging limp.  
 O playful seal! Coming  
 To clamp his mouth on the tail of the iguana! As if  
 to say,

Come, old ancient Galapagos friend! Come,  
 Old Basilisk, old Falstaff! And tumbling him over.

Loosing

Him. Swimming away—then returning with great  
 surges

Of his slipperiness to pounce on the slow swimming  
 Only lizard on earth who works in water. Great  
 Tortoises. Prey of whalers. Stumbling clumsily.

Whose

Plated ancestors, steeped in sun and moon, wallowed  
 and waddled.

Listen now! Be still. The Galapagos mockingbird!  
 Loving and quick. Coming to dip his beak in coffee  
 cup. As

Darwin said it did. Darwin in his Pacific ship  
 Hull down. Wallowing and young. The seas  
 Brilliant with evolution. O Galapagos! Some  
 Model, mayhap, he wrote, of incunabula. Nostril.  
 Thigh-bone. Darwin said a mockingbird  
 Dipped its beak in his drinking cup, singing  
 Outrageously. Bells of bird-note. Bells of the sea.  
 Bells that rang in Ishmael's ears.  
 Shaking loose seals from its endless surge.

O Galapagos! Enchanted isles!

Brilliant with mutation, hull-down, home  
 Of sun and moon. Haven.

Bells of broken waves abrupt on stone. Bells  
 Breaking. The surge slippery and thrilling with seals.

**Jack Crawford, Jr.**

## LETTERS FROM SIBERIA

## I

. . .

And I have seen nothing but prisoners  
these four months. The Siberian spring  
is cruel to men in leg irons.  
They are indistinguishable from mud.  
It is as though the earth lay under lava  
except that there is no flow,  
only this sliding back and forth.  
I have filled six notebooks in as many weeks  
though with what, I cannot say.  
It is difficult to talk here,  
and one finds little to read.  
The mentality of the prisoners  
quickly becomes that of the guards.  
Curiosity about the struggle is met  
with intolerance, so that one must assume,  
in the absence of knowledge,  
an air of having taken sides already.  
I have often asked myself why I am here.  
They will of course say he was guilty,  
that this was his atonement.  
This will satisfy them.  
Yesterday, I saw a guard beating a prisoner.  
Though the man lay lifeless in the mud, half naked,  
the guard continued beating him.  
Each time he hit the man,  
he fell upon him, and getting up,  
flung himself down again.  
Each time, I heard a noise  
such as I have heard only at night

in the blank forests of my dreams.  
Forgive my poor attempt at elegance.  
You see what my mind has come to here.  
I called to the man, but he did not hear me.

## II

I have been dining with the director.  
He wont say it, but he wants to know  
what I'm up to, thinks I might work  
for a newspaper in Moscow or Kiev.  
The innkeeper tells me I should be flattered  
since it is not everyone who dines  
in the director's company.  
Except once a year when he invites the villagers  
and those from the surrounding countryside  
to drink vodka and eat roast pork.  
It is said that the director's feast  
is made up from the prisoners' stores  
and that the prisoners go hungry for a month  
afterward.

I have also heard that the feast takes place  
on the wide field before the prison gates  
and that the prisoners are forced to watch  
long into the evening when the revellers themselves  
lie like broken sacks or stagger  
under the night's invisible load.  
Once, in a private moment after dinner,  
when the other guests had drifted into the parlor,  
he showed me his decoration from the Czar,  
unbuttoning his shirt front and holding it open,  
silent for several moments,  
as though he knew I would not see it at once,  
small and dulled by contact with him,  
in the dense hair of his chest.

. . .

## III

Yesterday, I took a walk in the forest.  
It lies in every direction for hundreds of miles  
on ground which rarely bothers to notice.  
They say it is the best guard of all,  
and that the prisoners fear it less  
for its endlessness than for its emptiness.  
Even in its midst, miles from camp,  
I came across a small unguarded group of men  
cutting and stacking wood,  
each of whom knew his task precisely  
and performed it, limb by limb,  
muscle by muscle, in measured silence.  
I passed through them in equal silence,  
and even now I cannot be sure  
they knew I had been there.  
I am hardly sure myself, any longer.  
They keep their secret in the open,  
whatever it is. To them,  
I am one of "them", one of the trees  
they tirelessly cut and stack.

## IV

You must not mention it to him  
but Petrov is terribly sentimental.  
I admire the man, God knows.  
He has been trying to tell us something  
for years, something we refuse to hear.  
His painted peasants are most pathetic  
and undoubtedly bring a tear to the coldest eye.  
But I would not have the matrons of Moscow weep  
or the court counselors shake their heads,  
for that is their luxury, their moment of being moved  
which, to them, proves them human.

Petrov rescues them from doubt,  
which I, in my anger, could not do.  
Neither the Moscow matrons nor the court counselors  
nor, as I sometimes think, even Petrov himself  
knows how far the forest reaches.  
I hope you never have to do this, my dear,  
but the trip across Russia,  
which even I have not completed,  
would teach you more than you were bred to know.  
I have looked hard at Petrov's paintings  
to see if he had this knowledge,  
for I can understand the man who has it  
but cannot find in him the justification for saying it,  
some undertint to the sky or marginal detail,  
but I cannot find it.

...

## V

...

As to your repeated questions about my return,  
I can only say that I will.  
You must indulge an old man his mystery.  
It is all an old man has,  
unless he have the misfortune to lose that, too.  
I write with the window open.  
The breeze is fresh even at midsummer,  
and it brings with it the smell  
of that strange flower whose name I forget  
which blooms only in the dark.  
I have not smelled it since my childhood.  
I had forgotten I had a childhood until now.  
What a terrible place to come upon it  
and to realize, for the first time,  
that it, too, blossomed in darkness.

...



## VI

The street is empty now, or nearly so.  
The last horsecart has clattered home  
through the hardening ruts.  
The curfew keeps everyone but the soldiers off the  
street.

Even I must be in my little room by nine  
unless I dine at the director's,  
in which case I am escorted back to the inn.  
The soldiers are lonely, and no one trusts them.  
Most come from Georgia or the Ukraine  
and they do not understand the Tartar peasants  
whom they are here to protect.

They look down upon them,  
and the peasants naturally resent it.  
Many are arrested on suspicion of aiding the  
prisoners.

Only last night they entered a peasant's hut.  
They found him in bed asleep.  
Tonight, soldiers will sleep in his bed  
and his wife and daughter must cook for them.  
One cannot hate the soldiers.  
They do what custom and the laws permit,  
which in these days is a great deal.  
I saw the daughter today buying eggs in the market  
place.

She cannot be more than thirteen.  
Ludmila was no prettier at that age,  
but this girl is nearly a woman.  
In five years she will be thick everywhere.  
She inspected the eggs closely

and knew at once the good from the bad.  
All eyes watched her and many  
said comforting things under their breath.  
The memories of her father and the uncertain future  
surrounded her. She was gracious to all  
so that no one saw how quickly  
she found her eggs, bought them and left.  
I almost said something to her myself,  
but I would have only frightened her  
and, almost certainly, she speaks no Russian.

## VII

Tomorrow, my promised visit to the prison.  
I have had to work hard for this  
and to convince the director of intentions  
which are not rightfully mine.  
But, I am no longer as eager as I was.  
Six months under its walls among those  
who are a permanent part of its shadow  
have made the prison like my own shadow.  
I no longer trust my motives.  
I have had a lifetime of random interests,  
followed my nose wherever it led.  
Now it has led me here, and I am afraid, frankly.  
Yes, my dear, this is your father,  
who has always explained everything.  
Tomorrow, for the first time,  
I enter one of my explanations.  
I put myself into its clear configurations.  
You might say, I touch thought.  
I will let you know how it feels.

## VIII

I have just returned from Irkutsk,  
a twelve days' journey by carriage and open cart.  
They are building a railroad station in Irkutsk.  
It sits alone on a wide piece of ground.  
One day the tracks will come creeping up to it,  
all the way from Moscow.  
I thought about touching something  
which at its other end touches Moscow.  
It was raining the day I was there  
and work was suspended.  
Rain entered the unfinished roof  
and the windowless windows. I stood looking  
westward over a plain of stumps.  
Perhaps you will show this to Ludmila.

. . .

## IX

No, my dear Ludmila, I am not dead.  
But then I do not know what I am,  
other than a silly old man  
who has given up the company of his daughter  
and who has not kept his promise to her,  
so many promises. A melancholy fool  
moaning over his uselessness,  
trying to make his insignificance work.  
You are kind to think of knitting mittens for the  
prisoners,  
but believe me, were they to reach them,  
they would go unnoticed. Frost is nothing  
to the man who has no name,  
who cannot look straight ahead of him,

whose gaze has been permanently bent.  
In the prison, I asked a man who he was.  
I can no longer be sure what I saw there  
It seemed to be more than the mind was made for,  
children folded into briefcases.  
But, lying in his straw, he said,  
after a long pause, "I will not know".  
Knit mittens, if you must. They will be worn.

## X

I have moved out of the inn,  
with many apologies to the innkeeper.  
The company had become too noisy, too Russian,  
imperial prisons inspectors, travellers,  
merchants and railroad speculators,  
looking for neatness and new markets,  
God's eyelash and something to chase.  
Now I am living in a small hut, very snug,  
with an old peasant widow to look after me.  
She knows only about ten words of Russian,  
but happily they are the ten words that count.  
You could not tell it from her behavior  
but she is only three weeks a widow.  
I am what keeps her from begging.  
I would thank God for letting me do so little  
did I not suspect that I am also  
the wind of her memories.

. . . .

## XI

You must not think of coming here.  
The distance is too great, more than miles,  
and already the wind is unfriendly.  
A stuffed sheepskin crowds our view.  
Some say that glass will not come till spring.  
The village is crowded with people  
who, like myself, merely loosen its dust.  
And, nightly, indescribable noises  
float on the treetops, I do not know  
whether of the tree's bearing or not.  
The wind is seven days' long,  
its pressure from the west constant.  
Some say it has circled the earth  
and passes us a second time.  
My housekeeper says it is filled  
with the ashes of sunsets.  
When we step outside,  
we bow to it.

. . .

## XII

I have been to the forest again,  
this time at my housekeeper's heels.  
She is a creature of mosses, smokes them and eats  
them,  
makes tea and dirt-colored soups of them,  
saves the dampest to dry her gout.  
She could pick them at night, her hands are so sure.  
Rock crevices and the backs of branches  
yield themselves to her.

She seemed to pick some passing on the air.  
The wind blew everywhere, filling our ears,  
but among the branches it did not touch us.  
We rode inside.  
At home, her apron bulged with pockets  
I had not known were there.

## XIII

This morning I woke, as I often do,  
to the clanking of leg irons,  
the sun breaking icicles out of its beard.  
One rarely sees the work parties,  
off before dawn and back after dusk,  
a single line surfacing now and then  
into silhouette  
before sinking again,  
a herd that one never tends,  
a broken-backed monster boring out of the earth  
and, stung by the air, nudging its way back,  
a cheese worm or maggot  
momentarily cheated of fetor,  
sluggishly returning to its slaughter.  
One morning, when the mist hangs rags  
over my erupting dreams—  
But I do not know what I am saying.  
Dear Lidia, remember to send some salts.

## XIV

I have stopped writing.

One must know when to stop writing.

It is good, sometimes, to stop writing,  
to take a look around,  
to submit to the lash,  
to chain oneself to a wheelbarrow  
and carry the air around for a while.

The barrow creaks,  
there is so much air.

**Roger Mitchell**

**THREE POEMS**

**Anti-Memoir**

*(The poet makes a hopeful statement  
concerning the validity of his work.)*

in 1993  
when i      me?  
      was      am      to be  
sixty three  
  
i  
see      saw      have seen  
      will      would      could  
      did  
here      there  
      sat      sitting  
now      then  
  
wrote      write      wrought?  
shall was writing  
  
this      that  
same  
      was      to be      other?  
poem



**kindergarten, 1935**

kindergarten  
was brooklyn  
    not new york  
near parma  
    not italy  
ohio  
where the tall honkeys grow  
you were  
the first one  
    not saw  
    saw them before on streetcars  
i knew  
    dont know where you lived  
    nothing but honkeys there  
we acted out  
little black sambo  
i was the tree  
four honkey kids  
tigers  
she let you be  
sambo  
hey man  
i wonder if  
you remember  
    how you  
ran those tigers right into butter

**The Game**

Summer, 1944:  
Rome,  
Normandy Beach,  
Philippine Sea,  
Paris.

Fourteen,  
knowing it can't last,  
trying to make our peace,  
we invent  
the game.

Barechested,  
we six  
crouch together on the hill,  
arms stiff against the sky,  
bows braced in fierce arcs,  
nocked shafts between taut fingers,  
waiting command:

"Ready . . . Aim . . . *Fire!*"

Strings twang,  
arrows speed straight up,  
still we crouch,

watch  
out of sight,  
strain to see  
faint golden sunlight glint  
atop the fountain of our ejaculate  
as shafts reverse  
and  
start  
down.

We flinch  
beneath the many-fingered sky,  
accelerating fear,  
seconds from probing skewer points,  
until one breaks and runs . . .

*"Chicken!"*

. . . we scatter wildly  
out, out, away  
from the  
slick-whisper-shock  
of sudden stiff-stemmed flowers  
that bloom obscene among us in the grass.

Cyril A. Dostal

## BIRTH

*(after the Chinook, American  
Indian of the west coast)*

A woman swollen with child  
does not sleep she wakes  
opens her door moves in sunlight  
She approaches the creek  
drops her blanket and jumps  
twice across the water  
She wears no necklace  
for fear the navel string  
will sever the baby's neck  
She does not look at the dead  
*It is forbidden*

She does not cast her glance  
at the otter or racoon  
She fears the child soon  
to worm its path into the sun  
would suffer the struggle  
of the otter all his days  
If she singed a seal  
her child would run from the womb  
burning into the sun  
*It is forbidden*

The child creeps from his cave  
A hunting knife cuts his cord  
The woman heats five stones  
and for five days five nights  
steam bathes over the stones  
Then she places the stones  
with her coat tongs her belt  
in the hollow of a tree  
A taboo falls upon the parents  
They eat nothing for ten days  
*It is forbidden*

Then in the glorious time  
the passing of all evil  
they dance everyone dances  
Everyone knows that the land  
of children is the sunset  
Everyone dances they are happy  
for the child sad for themselves  
Old people never return  
happy from the dead  
clothed in the body of a child  
*It is forbidden*

**Douglas Flaherty**

## THE KITE

*The sky was blind and blue and focused like  
cataracts on Plato's cave, clamped  
like stained-glass garbage lids on spectacles . . .  
sighted on a sun that had slipped its string, a  
kite—*

*but steady since he could not see beyond  
the glaring maw of the Minotaur—  
a lozenge of light melting in the mouth of the  
labyrinth,  
soaking the mazes with sunlight to relieve the sore,  
the lockjaw against light that would make him  
see—*

*if not accept—the medicine of meaning in the  
phrase, "to be". . . .*

*It was a good day for flying kites—if  
only I could escape my squalling son and willing  
wife, slip the tugging mooring lines that tied  
me to turf as placenta, plasma-colored beer as  
amniotic brew. . . . "To be" intends to try; there-  
fore . . .*

I grabbed the lumpy bobbin of string and fled—  
as fast as my middle-aged legs could carry me across  
the tufted field—fled the rising wail  
standing skyward out of his widened mouth like  
a stretch of string hypnotized by a fakir with a flute:  
that mouth was mere mirage, I knew, but the wail,  
ah, the wail and the flared face and brat brain  
were real, and I fled the bristling blond head and  
blue eyes blurting anger and greed—loping,

I fled and the kite jerked from her hand and leaped like a goosed gazelle, like a buckshot bronc, staggered at the peak of its crazy climb, tugged frantically for string—and plummeted to earth in a paper-crackling crash.

Panting, trying to laugh and call it fun, I stopped and stared back at the sorry sight. My lungs burned, my cheeks tingled, my knees trembled from the frantic

pressure my hyped-up heart was making to keep pace with the needed blood supply:

the sorry

fact was, my heart had forgotten how to fly.

(What Plato called exile from the Empyrean, now we call cholesterol.) A sorry sight, indeed,

I saw, when my head stopped spinning:

shattered—

spent as a piece of flak, as a spot of sperm which had missed its target—the kite lay as slack as my sleepless sex, its crumpled rag tail curled like a sapless snake. From far away, I could see—I could feel!—the kite twitch, for the tremors raced along the string like an electric spark:

a sudden gust of wind scooping the ground caught and lifted, flipped it like a flapjack, and, for a second as it skittered across the skillet, I thought it would take

off and fly—skim like a skeet, escape like a flying saucer into the Martian mirages of longing which haunt the human mind. . . . But the wind

died and the frying fish flopped back into the pan, the kite sank down to French fry in its own fat, cook over the nuclear fires cooling at the earth's

core:

it settled like an ear listening to a heart beat,  
for the cooling earth is sclerotic to its soft  
center—or will be when that molten clot is dry.  
(The planet is a cherry-filled lump of chocolate,  
a bonbon filled with pus like a boil. The galaxy  
is a candy box God gave himself to keep from being  
bored:

Narcissus nibbles his own necessity.)  
What happens when rock cannot pump out  
through volcanic veins, fertilizing earth  
with Krakatoa fires?

There wasn't time to think:  
anxious to help, she was racing to the stricken kite,  
hoping to hold it aloft at the tail-end, encouraging  
a cleaner launch, giving the headstart needed  
to get it off the ground. But he was racing  
her to the kite—so much fury would shred the flimsy  
shield caught in a tug of war—and it looked  
like he would win:

chunky legs churning, three-year-old  
rage pumping adrenalin through sleek, smooth-bore  
veins, his arms flailing in fury and his fisted  
face scratching me with screams, pleading for a  
chance

to fly. I panicked and I fled. Again—confronted  
with the face of fury, the fearless thrust to fly—  
I fled. As he reached to grab the graceless form  
of strings and sticks—for a kite is a solid sieve  
until fleshed out, inflated with fat wind—  
I jerked the cord in my hand with all my might  
and ran, fled before she—a few steps behind  
him—surely would have ripped the kite from  
his fingers, tearing it from his infant confusion,  
helpmate overtaking me with offers of help  
I'd rather not have.

Jerked, the kite scraped  
 the ground, skittered beyond their clawing fingertips,  
 snagged on a hillock until the string was taut  
 enough to snap—and then sprang free, leaping like  
 a marlin,

beautiful and fierce, shaking its head to cut  
 the tugging cord, wild falcon hooded  
 by world as a womb, unwilling to see the cord  
 as a tie to life, a buttonless umbilical grounding  
 the bird to the source of its lifeblood, earth:

leaping,

the kite soared from the surface I was racing over  
 to keep my fish informed with flesh—reached  
 a peak again and staggered, tugging for string  
 stronger

than I could pay it out—and dived to earth  
 again, its tail fluttering frantically, terror  
 making its tissue skin shiver at the prospect of  
 plunging

back among the preying sharks, especially tethered  
 to my stick-axeled reel. . . .

Frantic the kite  
 would crash, I raced across the storm-tufted turf,  
 hillocks booby-trapped with gopher holes, squalls  
 of grass camouflaging mosquito swarms, chiggers  
 and ticks churned up by my pounding feet. Squalls  
 of fire sear my esophagus, knots grip  
 my guts, my halfway-to-hell heart flutters  
 like a sail caught in a crossing wind, bangs  
 like a hatch loose in a head beleaguered by lashing  
 winds:

my head is light and I am floating free  
 although I stumble and fall, feet snag in the surging,  
 wind-roughened surf. . . .

Gasping, light-headed from lack  
 of space and air, I race on nonetheless, determined :



to make my sluggish kite soar, to fly despite sagging muscles and a will weakened by too much sleepy sex:

bursting, I make one final surge before turning back to see my kite climbing into the sun couched on my cupped shoulder like a dazzling block of ice I am delivering to hell:

bursting—bribing myself with the belief that I am Phidippides bringing the news of victory at Marathon—I make the final assault and then turn back to see my kite sink and soar—soar straight into the sun! It's glorious! Coughing, spluttering to catch my breath, chest heaving, I simply stand and pay out line—not even that—more simply still, just let the line slide through my fingers as I watch the kite catch wind and sea-gull to the source, swoop and soar like a hunting hawk released from its hood, sent

to slash liver from the sun. Sic 'em, boy! Let slip the dogs of war! Unleash the hawk to rip the liver from the rock-bound sun, prey on heaven as mankind preyed on Prometheus! Magnificent!, I cry, but inwardly, sweat pouring down my face and sides, my swimming eyesight clearing now, my heart beat steadying as I watch the string unspool in a clean smooth slide . . . I wonder why I feel tied to this kite like Prometheus to his rock, the string in my fingers short-circuiting blood, transfusing life from my liver into a stillborn ballet.

The string burned through my fingers as it slipped away,  
pulled by the climbing kite stabbing, slashing upward to be free. . . . Once having pierced a ceiling of dead air surrounding the earth, it seemed

the kite was free to soar, unhindered by dead skin packed by atmospheric pressure into callouses, membranes—earth's crust like a hymen starving the stratosphere into sterility—pierced by the kite like a surge of sperm, now watch the spirochete wriggle to conceive the sun!

But  
as I paid out line, my wife and son caught up to me, she with her prideful hand on my shoulder, congratulating my accomplishment, he with his whine, shirttail-tugging demand to fly the kite too—my turn, my turn!

Swiftly, the kite  
had stretched out all the string, unreeled the whole spool,  
and now was frolicking like a mutt on a mile-long leash,

still tugging to be free. What was there left to do? I toyed with the notion of cutting the cord, seeing if the fish I had hooked could live on its own, swimming free in the stratosphere. Could it survive without air to feed from, forage in to keep afloat? But for a while I gripped the stick—wife and offspring

by my side—as if I were water-skiing behind a powerful air-borne motor boat . . . and then I imagined myself as Franklin waiting for the storm to strike. . . . But the truth was that I was breathing regularly now, the sweat was drying on my skin and boredom had returned. The sun was high and fierce, and even with a rising wind, I knew that lightning could not strike. I shrugged. What good would it do to cut the cord? The thought seemed fanciful, at first—I tried to imagine the kite caught up, swept into the holocaust at the center of the sun, my kite—flimsy as a snowflake—

transformed  
 into a cinder in the eye of God, perhaps even causing  
 a tear to hiss. . . . Squinting (I could barely see  
 it now), I spied the tail-less diamond spread-eagled  
 against the sun—and shrugged, although the sharp  
 rays and sparkling surface stung and made  
 my eyes water:

wiping the tears away, I shrugged again—  
 although I watched a while, there was nothing to do  
 but wind

it back. Cutting the cord would only make  
 the kite flutter, panic and plummet to earth far  
 out of sight . . . another Daedalus dead in a foreign  
 land. . . . And why should he be different from Icarus,  
 I thought, handing the naked stick to my pleading  
 son, tugging at my shirttails, stamping his feet,  
 frantic with frustration, fighting me for a chance  
 to fly? Why, indeed, I thought, passing him the  
 stripped

stick, since one day I, like Daedalus,  
 would also die? . . .

My wife's turn next to latch  
 onto the leash, walk the dog across the sky,  
 watch the capricious kite water lawns and trees  
 of the stratosphere, wagging its rag tail all  
 the while. And watching her reminded me of the  
 myth

of Ariadne, the cunning lady who unwound string  
 from the mouth of the labyrinth which made the  
 Minotaur,

lining out the birth-trail which had to be retraced like  
 a white line down the center of the road. (Were U  
 turns allowed? Suppose the plumb line pointed one  
 way? How deep into the cave could Ariadne go?  
 I bobbled to his air hose, how deep can the diver  
 plumb?

Watching her, I wondered how high the kite could get through her guidance:

how high can you get  
on amniotic beer?) So watching her walk the dog  
made clear why the cord could not be cut:

each animal anchored the other, seesawing  
through time,  
so the kite was fed by the stake it was tethered to,  
mouth of the cave was connected to the anus open  
and groping for bottom at the end of its rope. . . .  
Standing there watching, a spasm of pride and fear  
struck as my son—a blue-eyed blob with a face  
unformed by the strains of flight—stuck his sticky  
hand into mine and squeezed. Together, beside  
the woman who had been the bridge, the conduit  
between us,  
who had keyholed flesh down from the sun-riven sky  
and shaped lightning strokes into a son with sticky  
fingers and a candy craze, we stood and stared.  
We shared neither comfort nor community.  
Nostalgia and a sense of loss we shared, a sense  
of sorrow because we could not regret  
a sense of caring we could never know:

love  
is inherited like the color of hair, eyes and skin.  
Thickening, paunchy, weighing to the grave with  
each  
ingrained fungus-growth of fat, widening my grave  
with each gravy-stain cell of girth added, I watched  
a while longer—all three feigning interest in  
watching the kite fly—and then we reeled her in,  
and, dazzled from squinting at sunlight—without  
seeing the sun—trudged home, blindly. Wound  
around a dead stick, the ball of string felt  
fat and sleek:

the stick was splinted, stuffed

by a taxidermy of wound spider webs. . . . In my  
 other  
 hand, I gripped the kite at the cross-sticks  
 like an African shield:

the motto on the face was a tiger  
 rampant, tail coiled, eyes glittering and lips a-snarl.  
 The paper crackled and flapped on its skeleton of  
 crossed  
 sticks like loose skin, the dewlaps of old  
 age, of kwashiorkor. From behind, the kite looked  
 as if someone had skinned its bones bare, the cross  
 section  
 of dead flight crucified . . . trudging home a trio  
 of discontent. . . .

Delirious, at night he had  
 dreams, confused with the act of making love . . .  
 confused with contorted arms and legs, lips  
 sucking tight and tongues gripping like tentacles,  
 lashing legs and knotting knees, kisses  
 clotting like blood and dissolving in sighs, in spasms  
 of wonder and savagery, of doubt and delight, that  
 sperm and spit could flash the spark and leap  
 the space from *he* to *she*, from pole to spar,  
 transfuse the sweat of day into  
 the plasma siphoned, bled from sex—humankind's  
 remotest star:

drowning, splashing in  
 uncertainty and suffocating in the fight, confused,  
 he asked himself, *Is this my dream? Now  
 am I dreaming of flying kites? Or did I fly  
 the kite today that I am dreaming of flying now?*  
 Delirious, nonetheless he strained to pass  
 the lump clotted in his loins, he prayed to pass  
 the stone of gall he was rolling now like Sisyphus,  
 for sex was the struggle—oh sesame!—to reopen  
 seeds when the stone slipped away at the crest of the

distant  
roll, spasms shook the rock free:

*Am I dreaming now,*  
*or was I merely awake this afternoon?*

Straining,

he struggled to keep the kite aloft, racing  
as hard as his mattress-mired muscles would allow—  
the bed pitching and rolling like a raft in a storm  
livid with soaking lightning sheets—he worked  
to roll the rock up the greased slope, straining  
to keep his grip, with short stabs and long  
lunges like an easy lope and keeping his eyes  
fixed on the rising, storm-ridden kite the while:

*Will it shred apart in this storm of sweat? Or  
will the lightning flash and travel sooner, sped  
on a conduit soaked in clouds, slashed by sun?*

He lunged and saw the kite soar, leap for the sun  
and disappear against the brutal glare, engulfed—  
except for its flapping tail. . . . Against the glare,  
he heaved and the kite leaped and the last of the  
string

suddenly slipped away and once again he was holding  
a naked stick, anchoring a tugging kite  
and finally convinced that he could not cut the cord:

*for wouldn't the kite sag and simply fall away,  
unsocketed, pulled from its roots like a watermelon  
plug,*

*unfed, raped to test the ripeness of the seeds  
inside?* He sagged with relief when the last of the  
string

spurted off the spool. For a while, he sailed the kite  
calmly,

relaxed, content to let the rock teeter on the brink  
of coasting clouds—but toying with contentment, he  
soon

became bored. Tugging, diving and leaping, the kite

resisted, but he soon released his grip and the empty stone rolled away, the string re-reeled as fast as a rock clattering downhill. . . .

Now he lay back, drifting quietly, listening to her quiet breathing fill the room with begging questions, large and dark, questions they refused to ask because they already knew the answers they feared to face, felt were better smothered beneath the covers of bedding

and the equal dark of the quiet room. The smell of sweat and sperm seeped into the sheets, rose like smoke in the sunless space. *Am I dreaming now, or was I earlier when I flew my kite? Or was I kiting in sex, just now? Either way, there is only so much string, I see, so much weight the kite can carry in measuring its climb. . . .*

Depleted, loathing myself for accepting the emptiness of loveless sex—the cowardice in convincing myself that pity was not a substitute for expedience—I sneaked out of bed (pretending to be considerate, expecting silent congratulation since I knew she was not asleep—in fact, was disturbed

by more than the prospect of my absence or creaking mattress springs, crouched down into her own womb of worry)—as stealthily as my trembling legs would allow, I slipped from bed, and, dragging on a dressing gown, forced myself—step by step—through stages of depression as steep as walking in sleep,

rolling a rock up a hill of hate—I forced myself into this room I call a den (a barren bedroom with a shaky table where the bed had been), a lair where I might lick my wounds and lie, write this poem, I mean. *Lie or dream? Force*

myself—insist—that art is an affirmation of  
the will to live, a record of man's past  
power to recuperate from life's power to punish  
him. I'm having trouble convincing myself,  
however, that the old cliches can still make me care:  
    maybe they lack force, for now I'm really being  
forced to feel. . . . The trouble is that I do  
believe:

    art is the healer—but only if  
it is confrontation and not escape—truly  
a mystic wonder and springs from the death-deep  
    wish

to live, subconscious or otherwise—lodged  
in Plato's sunlit state of dream. . . . But what  
does it matter, if sex is simply a way of scratching  
chigger or mosquito bites? Pulling off ticks  
picked up flying kites in an open field?

My son—the time-bombed lump from my loins set,  
anchoring me to earth and ticking to explode in  
    death—

and what of my legacy to him? The tock's  
head bores into the blood and ticks off the stream,  
deposits poison to whiten tissues out of blood  
cells too rich to rot, creams pus boiling  
to a head to burst, in time. Ripened, is the core  
of my legacy a kite? Then what does it matter if the  
    rickety

contraption I tried to ride on the lion winds of March  
    cannot

weave pelvic lamb's wool of sunlight into  
magic carpets loomed in any laps of time to soar?

**L. C. Phillips**



**THREE POEMS****Night**

I have my own  
circle  
of darkness  
here  
like any  
field mouse  
who burrows  
breathing  
on rocks  
and roots  
down  
into night  
and fits  
her small body  
to its  
curve.

In another house  
you sleep  
with arms wide  
and hands  
open.

Night  
has to fit  
itself to  
you,  
not you  
to it.

**Love, fat circle, round O**

Not *fat*.  
Not womanfat.  
That's  
not it.

It's  
more  
a plump  
certainty,  
a  
feeling  
of being

round  
as  
quail  
sound

round  
as the  
O's  
of the moon  
or of  
frog song

round  
as suns  
as figs  
as a seed pod  
swollen  
with ten thousand  
pale milky seeds  
and full  
as an ocean  
folding

unfolding  
folding  
its fish

yet  
larger than these

all things  
contained  
complete  
at ease.

Because  
my legs encircled you  
and your wild sweet juices  
sang  
I learned

to breathe  
slower  
than  
hills breathe.

Now  
I lie  
sprawled  
over the valley  
stretched out in  
the sun.

You  
can't  
tell me from  
the hills  
whose breasts and bellies  
cast shadows  
over all  
other days.

I move  
when  
the  
hills  
move.  
Fat  
fat  
with  
love  
I'm  
bursting with flowers

But  
when you  
leave me  
I'll be  
a stick  
again  
thin  
as a  
twig  
a weed  
as sharp.

### **Lizard in the patio**

He has  
a fierce blue  
turquoise  
belly  
a belly so luminous  
so flower blue  
so dragonfly blue  
so strangely sorcerer's eye blue

you'd think  
he'd turn it up now and then.

You'd think  
he'd show  
blue to the sun  
blue to the mountains  
blue to the quail in the oleander

instead of  
only pressing  
blue to the sand  
blue to the hot white rock  
where he passes  
the afternoon  
blue to the gnat  
his tongue entangles  
blue to the grass.

To me  
he shows a scaly dull grey tail  
half closed blinking evil eye.  
I lie  
as still as he  
oiled and gleaming in the sun  
turning  
once an hour.

If any part of me were blue  
I'd turn it his direction  
for him to lift one leaden eye to  
and be filled with lizard joy.

As it is  
he sees my browning belly rise  
and stares with old astonished eyes  
as I oil my legs again

and sing a witch's song  
known for its power  
to evoke  
a ripple  
from his  
blue  
glorious  
underside.

B. Byrd

### AMERICAN HERO

Silhouetted against the ledge  
that galactic beast known in local legend  
as the Vanilla Gorilla.  
My posse falls down like dominoes.  
They moan and rub their college rings,  
then slide away like shingles off a roof.  
I flex, 98-pound weakling snapped sand mad.  
I take my chrome bow off my shoulder,  
lift a matching arrow out of my furlined  
attaché case, set it in, and vissst!  
My arrow snips him off, punctures his little ear  
so bulbous red it looks inside out.  
He avalanches off the ledge and jellies on the ground.

Later, a scientist tells me, at that very instant,  
a tooth appeared in the mouth of the world.  
But I have no time to ponder the meaning  
of murder. It's done and anyway,  
the press has roped off the beast as evil  
and the government has declared a national holiday.  
I am a banner of hope, they say.  
They wave me and grin me in a parade.  
I love these gals, each one was a cheerleader  
in high school, and they still have  
that jump-huff-grin down pat. They cartwheel by  
in their tight whites. I flick them a wave.

And here comes Cubs, Brownies, Lions, Elks,  
and there's Miss American Aphrodite  
drinking warm milk with nuns and the DAR  
at a coke stand, and past them rolls  
a railroad flatcar of fish-eyed little girls  
dancing to syncopated pneumatic drills.  
They swirl into a nursery school graduation  
and melt like popsicles into summers of exhaustion.

I'm whisked up to the reviewing stand  
where that retired WAC called Sizzles,  
Miss Memo Pad of way back,  
proclaims me 'Hero' and an X-Ray machine  
rolls up against my chest, swelling.  
My beat is recorded for the country.  
My heart rockets up to the number one song.  
Millions thumb in dimes to hear it thump.  
Everyone is beating. Everyone is in television.

I tear myself free and fly into the open.  
My fists are like hot cereal, but I'm free.  
I pound across the night,  
playing the bars like a golf course.  
Dawn starts punching out all the eyes of the night,

but I'll have another bar.  
My feet feel like galoshes,  
my eyes ring with all the flavors of jello,  
I slosh into another mahogany trough.

There's Miss American Aphrodite.  
She's girl next door, girl in the next room,  
girl with parents, girl with other guy.  
She stares into her drink, her ice is melting.  
I nail my elbows to the bar  
to batten my brain down into darkness.  
I feel as big as a ranch.  
Her eyes boil like phosphorescence.  
She's from the deep. She's coming up.  
I hear her bubbling, see her spinning.  
Her face is a swimming pool.

I want to be a helicopter.  
I hover a glance over her, dangle  
my arms to her. The landing is soft.  
I lean back on her real leather upholstery  
and we go for a spin in her automatic shift.  
We run every light and go the wrong way  
on a one way. Faster. Faster. Spinning.  
Water running down a sink. Grab for the soap.  
Save the soap. Forget the soap.  
We hit the drain with the sound of a kiss.

**Peter H. Sears**