

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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TWO POEMS

Castles

I built a castle in the air,
High and lonely I lived there:
Only gods and demons came
Grinned and stared, and asked my name.
Alas, I had no name to tell,
Castle Firedamp quaked and fell.

*How one fares when pride is gone
They know well who dream alone.*

I built a castle undersea,
Only fish might visit me.
Through my window crept a star
Tentacled, a man o' war
Groping, blind and poisonous:
Castle Fury I call this.

*How one fares when hope's unbuilt
They know well who treasure guilt.*

I built a castle by the tide,
May it stand till I have died.
Open to the wind and sky
Sometimes drenched and sometimes dry,
Agile as a sanderling
I watch what the waves bring in.

*How one shifts in shifting sand
All the salvaged understand.*

A Song for Electra Mad

I am a caverned beast to you
 Banging a nightlong drum;
I make a bloody feast of you
 And while I eat I hum:
Oh take me and I'll come for you,
 Oh take me and I'll come.

My walls are piled with bones of you,
 They line my slimy cell;
My love's a knife I hone for you
 The while I chant a spell:
I'll go down quick to hell for you,
 I'll go down quick to hell.

My raddled talons splay at you
 Spread-eagled in the wild;
My long lean nighthounds bay at you
 While I sing sweet and mild:
I'll bear my father's child to you,
 I'll bear my father's child.

My love's a spade shall bury you
 Some brazen dog-day noon;
My mother's ghost shall marry you
 And corpse-light tell my rune:
I'll whistle down the moon for you,
 I'll whistle down the moon.

I am a caverned beast to you,
 Behold my abattoirs;
I make an endless feast of you
 Till light betrays my scars
And death goes off in stars for you,
 Oh death goes off in stars.

Joanne Turner

TWO POEMS**Verboten**

Days west of Tristan da Cunha and my yawl
Beached at the Chico's mouth. Two hundred years
Had gone since Darwin paused, then pondered, here
And the Beagle's crew rowed toward the western
wall.

This day the cirrus curled the sky and all
That red horizon on the eastern ocean
Was fire across a prairie, quick with motion,
Unquenched by the ancient breakers' rise and fall.

It had begun (I wondered to recall)
At Hiroshima on a landlocked sea.
More desperate forces for eternity
Unleashed themselves on a vanishing atoll.

I wish I could forget, but truth forgotten
Is the madness that put flame to prairie grass.
North, the sun swung west, in darkening glass.
"Verboten, gentlemen, it is verboten!"

Forbidden, yes. To Paulson was forbidden
The saving life that he himself uncovered,
While rat-tailed gentlemen, self-loved, discovered
The better life were better wizard-ridden—

The last-ditch witch or wizard—prostitute.
Lest I should remember more I stepped ashore.

A great stone rolled away from a hidden door
And a man came from the cave, blinking, hirsute,

Gray as the mare that whinnies me awake.
He peered at me as if his peering made
Me real, who for that hour had been a shade.
"Whom emperors would destroy they first make

Mindless as snakes and soulless as the sow.
Within the hand of man was man himself,
But gentlemen, were-wolves for pelf on pelf,
Spit on my knowledge, never asking: how?"

"Hermann," I said, "the very air's in flame.
The stinging asps drip venom from our sky—
The final rain. We two, about to die,
Are leaving Earth a planet without a name."

Two men, long-bearded, gray, with rheumy eyes
Watched the pre-Cambrian breakers beat the shore.
Not with a whimper, but the great sad whore
Dies with a shriek, and curses as she dies.

The Genes Remember

The genes remember what the mind forgets.
They speak a language beyond the urge of words.
Rain falls today. Each tiny unit dots
the gutter water and the sounding boards
along the eaves blur the staccato notes.

I think it is the curve along your arm
that tells me things only the genes recall,
of fire between the rocks to keep us warm,
when all the leaves beyond the cavern wall
loosed splashing raindrops in a pattering swarm.

Your youngest was asleep as ours is now.
The woods were wet. The hunt would not go on,
and suddenly you looked to me to know,
as you look now. As if you hadn't known!
The genes remember rain. You always knew.

Richard Ashman

LULLABY 1969

We got to the moon
but babies are dying
babies that never asked to be born
too many children and more coming soon
is there space on the moon . . .
they are crying and dying
yelled at and shelled at
is there space on the moon?

Frances Hamerstrom

THE DAUGHTER OF HER HOUSE

1.

She has been hanged and comes back now
for vengeance, I thought. No blood left.
She will brood forever twisted in that chair.

Once she was twenty-two and sang in streets,
read medieval history, walked five miles
each day. She washed in sun and silly lotions
bought for flawless skin. Guaranteed. Her skin,
despite the lotions, bloomed peach and almond
on her fine bones. Only the mind was flawed.

Her dowry was a curse, so Hawthorne said,
standing at the curtain of his Sunday window,
having seen the aunts—the supple aunts
and fathers of Brook Farm—stumble blind
from their Utopia. Weeping for their vision
and their cold gray eyes, he drew the shade.

She brought her dowry and her wide gray eyes—
soft then as deep water, warm with love—brought
her singing and her books and bones, lived
happily ever after. For a year and seven months.

Then the inquisitions started. "The truth.
Do you love me? Or not? I want to know."

"Yes, I love you," he would say and laugh
that she could think herself unloved. Later
he grew tired.

"Do you really? I want to know.
I **have** to know."

"O for God's sake, yes,"
he said, passing his hand before his eyes

where the pain began; and then, "I'm sorry. Yes, I do." But his heart darkened bit by bit. She brooded, lonely, certain no one loved her.

Finally, of course, she had her way. He ceased to love her. Or perhaps he loved her still but was deprived the right to give—one cannot give what is demanded—and gave no more.

Her hard gray eyes grew hot with madness and she scratched the almond from her skin when she awoke and found him gone.

2.

In the eighth summer, the year she strangled on his heart and died whispering, "Can't it ever be beautiful? Can't love ever be beautiful?" he found his mind had torn down the middle.

He missed his heart, but grieved for his torn mind. He dreamed of window shades frequently and finally when he saw the doctor—who urged he take a rest and find a hobby—he knew the shades were drawn for good and realized he had died. Death, he had thought, was more expensive. No matter.

That year he spent by the water.

"Taking the baths," he said to friends, smiling wryly at the pity of their eyes. They could not see his heart returning.

The mind came later. He set about repairs in winter of the second year. He read some books on art, on love, on arts of loving, on sex. Sex books were the best, proposing an aesthetic of the loins he recognized as funny. And with laughter came release.

He dated time then from her death. "It is three years now, years of the Lord, since the eighth summer," he wrote on postcards. "Three and a half years. I am writing an obscene novel." He never finished. He met the elderly madonna who rumbled to the waters with sunrise, back again at night to her parrot and geranium, and found himself in love. "But I'm safe. I know that gambit." He packed and left, returned again to the uncomplicated warmth of friends who never risked the word of love, left him, so he liked to think, free.

His mind is mended now and his heart is strong enough; it seems to flourish in our warm wet climate. He thinks of her rarely: gray eyes devouring his own, an almond branch in rain, a young voice singing. But he is free.

"Peace means not to be involved," he says. And he is busy. He reads and keeps up on things in general.

3.

She, in dreams, had wandered in a jungle:
all the flowers folded inward, petals
bending back upon themselves to hide
the groping heart. Leaves of metal clinked
upon the wire stems. Carefully she crushed
the fleshy blossoms in her hand, tore them,
knelt in anger to rip hard roots from earth,
but then the earth exploded and she found
herself trapped among familiar mirrors.
Her face, her haunted eyes, bloomed
like evil plants. Hands, thrown up to shield
her from her eyes, attacked. She ran,
and stumbled on herself.

Waking, she thought
she saw them at the gate, blind and foolish,
groping from the garden one late fall afternoon.
Smoke was wisping in the leaves, the smell
of burning would remain with her forever.
They turned to watch the fire and she saw
their eyes grow cold; they did not look
at one another. The vision done, she found
she could not weep.

She strangled finally.
Her blackened lips still formed the "beautiful"
that was her last complaint. Unwilling
to accept the gift with grace, she chose
her self, the holy cell of the determined damned.

In her red wig and willful lovelessness
she sits forever brooding in the antic chair.
Her wide gray eyes look in, appalled, staring.

John L'Heureux

TWO POEMS**The Zenith And After**

He was sitting in front of the fire, looking out the big picture window and watching the deer browse on the short green grass that grew up through the snow. In the other room his beautiful children were playing quietly.

He sipped his drink and breathed a huge sigh of contentment.

When he heard a woman's laughter, he walked to the front door and looked out. There he saw his wife sprawled in the back seat of the station wagon. Except for one tennis shoe she was nude.

Starting at the door on the driver's side and leading down the driveway for a few yards was a short line of men:

two college kids in fraternity sweatshirts, one short man with a Corsican bandit's mustache, an Episcopalian minister and an ice cream man sucking on a popsicle.

All of them had their pants down around their ankles and were chatting amiably.

When he heard his children start to scream he turned, and as he sprinted through the living room he noticed that the deer were gone, too.

Going Out

It was this morning that the gypsy woman took one look at my palm and fainted dead away, this afternoon that the mailman glanced at the return address and got white as a sheet, this evening that the delivery boy refused to get out of the truck because of the shape of the package.

At 9:00 I went out anyway to meet the girl who called from the dating service. She wore black, was thin, used a strange scent and drank like there was no tomorrow. You couldn't say she was pretty but she knew what she wanted. About midnight she looked at me and said, "It's you, babe."

By that time I was almost too numb to care and besides, she was different. God knows I'm sick to death of the other kind, the gloomy virgins with the crying and the crummy promises. So I finished my drink, took her across the street to the park and laid her on the ground.

Under the dress I found the winding sheet and under that the loamy flesh: Believe me I didn't know what to do. I wasn't scared that stiff.

Finally she grabbed me and I started to swell with the nothing I had to give.

When I rolled off her it was dark and I was cold and tired but she came back for more — fleshless lips stabbing at my neck, breath rattling in her throat, racket of the naked bones, till I filled my ears with earth to stop the clatter of her wooing.

Ronald Koertge

THREE POEMS

Alice: dans le métro

“Did you see the rabbit here?” she asks,
 then pays: a coin of Victoria. The cashier’s
 recognition comes too late. She is down, pursuing,
 a rush past posters, drawings, lines
 she can’t begin to understand. “Does that mean
 that we should dine in restaurants?”

No matter. The doors almost catch her dress
 in closing. The car is empty but for one drunk,
 asleep, a naked crone, and two men in spats.

The men approach her. “Madam, are you aware
 of the dangers riding here alone?”
 They smirk. I wish I had my cat, thinks Alice.

One begins to take her hand, drawing his thumb
 along her life-line. She’s forgotten what she came
 here for.

“Do you two gentlemen know the game called
 Snark?”

They disappear. The subway stops at 95th.
 Exit: one flight down. The rabbit leaves
 his watch behind, the face reads “You tell me.”

At the street, Alice sees a pumpkin market,
 billboards: MR HERRMANN IS A VILE
 ATTORNEY, two

dogs flying around some brick. “Who is here?” she
 asks.

Alice: sitting in the park

The only benches, a likely guess,
are giant toadstools that complain
when sat on. Nonetheless, Alice (out
of food, and tired) sits down, waits out
the groan, and sighs. Here is the view:
a building labeled STANN'S CHURCH,
owls flying through the glass. The ocean is suspended
half-way up, where rays and eels can either fly
or swim. The cars go whizzing by without their
drivers.

Another child jumps through a burning hoop, on her
back

a sign, "I am the king of beasts." Just then, a man
sits down nearby, reading a book on Euclid. "Dear
sir," she asks, "could you tell me where
we are? I'm quite confused."

"I've thought that through myself," he says.

"Imagine, if you can,
a parallelogram, or else
a trapezoid. Inscribe in it a circle, decked with leis
of flowers. Climb inside these lines, and take an ax.
Swing hard and wide,
and watch the sides
collapse. Gather all straight lines and hack

them into bits. Confusion everywhere. But you'll still
see

the blossomed sphere
not anywhere, exactly,
just around, like air. Well, a pleasant chat. *Q.E.D.*"

"A thoughtful man," she thinks. A bell
reverberates. Alice gazes up and notes the time.

Alice: into space

alice, led into the amusement park,
has nothing left. she lays her book and hairpins
down as last collateral for one ticket
to the giant wheel. a calliope tunes up until
alice is safely on. the moustached attendant
half-circles down the protective bar and warns her
not to look. "how will I find . . .?" she starts.
but now she's off, the carriage swinging as her hands
reach to brush away the wisps, before her eyes
have opened she feels her stomach drop. blood rushes
as though a pit were down below, below the round-
about, the shooting gallery, house of mirrors, here,
at just this point, the rabbit, mouse, and cat
appear, led by attendant lords. "oh, sir," mouths
alice as she drops back lower, "you may let me out
now, I'm at home," he misunderstands, or
falls, the throttle stick goes down to full.
at once gears clash, the wheel speeds (though at
her bottom swoop, alice tries again: he, moustaches
wide, and no expression, strolls away) then alice sees
the ground enlarge and shorten. a muffled "hit
the brakes!" lost on the crowd assembled. negligence
(the half-closed bar) prepares the rest: as when
the argentine draws hoops with stones and flings
them,
the stones quite free of orbit, flying straight, or
(as we know) david with the circled shot. so:
alice flying off the wheel, in space, the park
a dot, then the earth, alice floating past

the huntress, past andromeda, the crab. into
 her now the owl and turtle, eel and dog together
 rush. herself museum-like, the final change
 to landscape accommodation. alice turns to each of
 these,

her limbs now glass, or water, all the animals
 seen inside her, in a caucus race from one side
 to the other. she seems, as other fauna come,
 (including rabbit, mouse, and cat) to expand as fast

as stars on edge, THE UNIVERSE ITSELF
 AS SHE, her aunt comes in to join the track,
 no one excluded, the lines all bent, her friends:
 alice turning end on end.

Charles Baxter

YOUR FLY'S OPEN

Your fly's open, she whispered.
 My what flies open? I asked.
 Your whole fly's open! she said.
 What hole flies open? I demanded.
 No! she screamed. Your repulsive
 fly's open and I can see everything!
 I don't have a repulsive, I snapped.
 Stop teasing me or I'll show
 you a thing or two.

Rolf McEwen

TOBY TOBIAS DOG**1.**

Twenty pounds
of shaking mongrel
smelled through the metal
the 15 tigers each in cage
towed by an oversize
golf cart up Lomas

Our tires
slushed through
elephant shit
Lubricated we slid home
The dog shook and whined
Tigre Whamba Tigre

Above
all the fumes
the baking New Mexico heat
the mongrel smells proud
pampered Barnum tigers
an old ancestor
heading for the circus
and foul display.

2.

At night
by extinguished light
Toby slid beneath
the bed waited for morning
Beneath love making quarrels
the talk about a world
ready to blow its brains out
he forgot language slept

In absolute quiet

my wife pulled into dream
The dog burrowed
in his dark cavern
forgetting death

Let some lean crew cut
pimple face kid
take a false bullet
in the gut Killing
was his business of state
Dog lies innocent alive

3.

In the yard
with a bone of leftover
he whines softly
He trots firm and proud
until a path is worn
in the new sown grass
He tries to tell
himself about bone about
marrow and moisture

He is young
and his live balls
slowly
begin to drop
in their spring sack

Finally he pounces
growls and digs his
fine teeth into the bone
His tongue licks wildly
the hole of marrow
He enters the hardness
and tastes the throb
of the once living

4.

Later in evening
as purple light
touches down on the Sandias
he forgets in celebration
of the burial bone
the dark speed of the street
A shadow of metal falls
The life is crushed
in his marrow
His blood flows hot
on my hands

His head is crushed
The jaws open and close
five times as if
telling me something
We have both moved
in the length of a day
beyond all language

Douglas Flaherty

THE CHESSMEN

playing chess re- quires the deep- est concentration.	I heard once of two crusty old Russians, who,
	while the shells thundered and trees screamed
with Nazi flame, sat on stone benches deep in	a strangely green park, fingering bushy white beards
	and watching each other's eyes and hands intently,
and who, when screamed at by a tow-headed	young infantry- man for the way to their Moscow
	looked around with vaguely cold disdain
and laughed at him, wheezing, go march away	and play with your guns young blond kraut, you
	won't like our Moscow, the weather's hell
this time of year; leave us to our game	for the world championship of Pushkin St.
	so he left them peaceful under the gnarled oaks.

David Vander Meulen

LUNAR TEXT
UPON THE DEATH OF AN OLD GENERAL

20

For the thirty days following his death
the moon was a more deliberate
marker of time.

Several of the more sedate citizens
I know, noticed its uncertain light
to be more flesh colored
in the Lunar Month, concurring with the mourning period
after his expected death ; its yellow rays streaming out
over the country in places
where the stagnant missile sites lie
in the dark, classified middle
and western valleys across the land.

These visages of the moon during this period
were verified
by some of the more inebriated and haunted
citizens habitating the military districts.
They bore further messages
of inverted iridescent ciphers
rising like liquid from the tips of trees in the city

JIM HAWKS

and the grain silos, stark and isolated
on the immense plains at night.

It was further relayed, this time in the national media,
that an epidemic of barking dogs
broke out
in the suburbs of large cities
on the 30th day after the General's death,
when the new moon began to rise in the East.

And so there grew into being an invisible company
of lunar visionaries.

As Custom has it, Women
are the more affected.

They pass it on
to the men. These men soon realize
they live with witches.

I first noticed it
on the way to work with
my wife—she began pleading with me

to stop the car and pick up
all the desperate hitchhikers

lining the vortex of roads
that sucked us in and out
of the City.

Later on the children in the early spring mornings,
waiting for school buses among the chaotic white crocus beds,
began to take on a faint countenance
of 19th century ventriloquists, fortune tellers, gamblers . . .

Even then we could hear the elaborate preparations
for his death. After long intravenous feeding
the idea of a heart transplant for the old man
was hotly denied on the air waves

while an operator in a distant city readied the immense
apparatus.

When the authorities finally allowed his death
the invisible fellowship grew
apparent

at lunch hours
in the speechless way men began to gather
near the National Flag in its twilight
life at half mast.

And at night
where we gather to view the Broad Cast
And Myth of the Old General's life on earth
and death into another world
dwelling in the iridescent rainbows
flickering in the hunched shoulders of my wife, myself and
all the others, inside our quiet television lit
living rooms
glowing like silver
gray astral bodies . . .

He is after all this nation's first presidential
war hero
from the world wars.

There will be others
of which he is the first
in a long line of aging super stars.
He is pictured looking grim among white crosses.
And later after his generalship
and presidency

he is the old form leaning
in his chair
 the wise political Edison
a product of 99 percent effort
with the last 1 percent cogitating over: some important symbolic periodical
 lost at sea
and somehow involved with nerves, insects, behavior of
 wood pulp—his heart leaks

off into the closed cosmos
 dreaming of new methods for de-inking
 waste newspaper

 & preserving the nation's forests.

But we know better.

We know he is the Peer of our Realm,
 ill but at ease in his body
 waiting for his coffee to cool
 in a cracked white saucer,

 declaring in his gentle old man's voice
that someone has stolen the holy water.
But we know
 the fluid of which he speaks
 gleams on the teeth of our young wives.

And now in the period of grace
after his death, in the predawn world
of 30 days and nights,

We can applaud
in the mechanical and electrical senses

His beautiful death
dancing in the local pine grove
behind the air field

in our minds
He is symmetrical like the two halves of a starfish,
the octopus, hydra, double bladed
ax, hawk in flight
and swastika.

And he floats
like iridescent minerals relating dense
historical notations.

But caring little
who he becomes in history
with his kind gray eyes
and light wisps of hair, and slightly

crooked grin
he continues to project astrally
into our fellowship of women
& indirectly into their husbands and perhaps several generations
of stray dogs. But he remains firm
in his purpose to haunt our first wives
for they are this nation's last
true wives
in the wilderness.

Jim Hawks

GRAPEVINE

Intruders, muscat leaves, were peeping through
My oriental tree's exotic fans:
A few transparent spirals, like sweet peas
Or like the fingers of a baby who
Clings for a moment to his mother's hands.
But when I twitched a tendril, I could see
Great shudders passing through the ginkgo tree.

Grapes are not orchids, cannot feed on air;
Unnoticed hitherto, a wooden stem,
Scaly and thick, was crawling up the trunk
And forking through the branches; in a month,
Like pride or jealousy pervading men,
The grapevine would be strangling the top,
Reducing all that beauty to a prop.

Removal of the younger shoots would not
Preserve the ginkgo long from insolence;
I took a saw and furiously cut
Into the rootstock swagging off the fence;
Gritting my teeth, I gashed it anyway,
With gnats and sawdust burning in my eyes.

The cut went deeper as I dogged the work;
The root divided with a sudden crack;
Like any peasant harnessed to a plow,
I hauled that tangle loose behind my back.
The ground was hummocky, my hands were sore,
But when those hateful ropes came trailing free,
I was a giant who bestrode the sea
Towing a hundred captured men-of-war.

Celeste Turner Wright

FOUR POEMS**The Break: Metaphor and Commentary**

The blow
Fell on my back, straight down, across the spine,
As from an ax swung blunt edge down,
To stun. No break. No blood.

When women choose
A metaphor for sexual hurt,
You'd think they'd pick some place in front, or
something soft,
Not bone, to take the brunt.

Or is it Vronsky's mare
I am, in this real dream?
And you, are you the careless, smiling mounted man
Who looses grip mid-air, but keeps his poise,
And breaks the back of that compliant beast?

A likely dream.
And secondhand. But where you turn on me,
It is my back gives in. And backs are most upright,
And hardest to set straight again.

How strangely metaphors
Incarnate theme! Both like and not alike,
As someone learned said. Once broke, I can still walk
Away from you—I don't, but know I can—

Instead, my clever limbs
Bear you erect, or leap, or amble by—
You need not even ask, just touch me, spur me,
And I please, as I once did,

Just barely stiff
Or shaky in the knees. But that's O.K.,
You have me taped. If not, just add a splint.
I'm trained, I will hold still.

You couldn't call it pain,
Or free will gone. Just falseness here or there,
A cutting up, a little strain,
Around the bit. Or just a lover's bruise.

I don't buck now, you see;
I'm getting good at going through the paces
One of us, at least, must need.
I hope it isn't me.

Aesthetic Distance

This space
Is easy to create. And virtuous.

Observe
The curves of flesh where a scalpel sinks:

How the live
Divides, silently, weightlessly

How the freed
Flesh cleaves, released from skin. Symmetrically

Two halves
Loll back, like risen divers floating free

Or like
The spreading hemispheres between the thighs

Two petals
Where a little stamen rises red.

The clean
 Space between (slightly salt and slightly warmed)
 Is called
 Aesthetic distance, dear, by those who hover there.
 A pleasing
 Space. Maybe. For those who feed on taste.

Games Mammals Play

1.
 I was a giraffe,
 Small of head,
 Timid of hoof,
 Sticking my soft neck out
 To nuzzle your smile.

You were a giraffe,
 Oh tallest of mammals,
 Remarkable tongue.
 Just nibbling,
 Thanks for the taste.

2.
 Cameleopard is the classic term
 For a giraffe, and you, improbably,
 combine the sandbag brute, the lithe tall prowler:
 How you wheel, how you bound, all touching and
 danger,
 When I reach without fear for the innocent, sinuous
 cat—
 But why am I holding this handful of camel,
 Flaccid old hump, unbudgeable sawdust and felt?
 Why do you eye me with dry camel spite?

3.

What one menagerie could house you both?
 None on this beastly earth, I ask, I answer,
 As you browse my hair, as my body sways
 Tiptoe with yours. Shy amber eyes, you're gazing
 For some further green, some lush mirage—
 Oasis there, maybe! You duck your head,
 You nuzzle me, Goodbye, my meek giraffe.
 You're free to gallop in slow motion off,
 Your long limbs drifting proudly in the sun.

Three Gambits in Search of a Game

1.

I had this lover who hoped that he was Christ.
 I mean, I didn't have, I only loved,
 But he, well, he would rather have been Christ,
 In any case. I wrote him these. Feel free
 To eavesdrop, reader dear. He will not hear.

2.

You think you're Christ?
 Oh Christ, come clean.
 All right: *I* think
 I'm Magdalene:
 Bring on your feet
 And let *me* savior you.

3.

Or shall I be that humble, spaniel dame,
 From Canaan, was it? the one who garners crumbs
 That you let fall from your love's liturgies,
 And hoards them in her robes, next to her heart,

And gets rebuked, and answers cunningly
That even bitches have to eat?

And you, you'd cock an eye, theatrically,
Like David Niven playing Christ,
And let me keep the pieces you don't want,
And say, It's quite all right, in any case;
Your love has made you whole. Go, in peace.

And me, I'd go, bundling my crumby robes
Like bandages, and saying Thank you, please.
And oh, how greedily I'd stuff your gifts
Into that bleeding bitch, that hole, my heart.

Judith McCombs

THE BOX MAN

A man who lives just past the fork
Makes little boxes out of pine,
Hexagonal, or square, about
The size of a closed fist, using up
Three months or so to finish one.
He does each step by hand, even

Cutting out and shaping the brass
Hinges he screws on the lids with,
And paints them all the same flat black,
Though each is ornamented with
A different painted common flower.

A hobby, so I thought, to make
Some extra change, and very nice
At that, though not too lucrative,
So, "How much do you sell them for?"
I asked one afternoon; the set
Reply, "A hundred dollars each."
Embarrassed silence on my part
While he tapped in another nail,
And then, "Where do you take them?
Gift shops?" "Nope, to five-and-tens,
Or hardware stores; I've even got one
Up to Vandie's supermarket
With the toys. I get the managers
To let me put 'em on their shelves,
They take so little space."

Not till the season changed did I
Run into him again, this time
Right in a hardware store in town,
And with our last exchange
Still stirring in the bottom
Of my mind, smiled sheepishly.
He didn't offer back a word,
But made a sideways motion
With his head, and so I glanced
In the direction indicated
In time to see a customer
Pick up a box of his, eyes
Alight and handling it

Appreciatively, until he turned it over
Where the price was pencilled on
A sticker. His eyebrows shot right up
And as he put it back he looked round
Furtively, as though he'd somehow
Gotten in the wrong store by mistake.
But then he bought a saw and left.

At this I heard a "How d'ye do,"
And turned once more to find the box man
At my side, looking at a plane
He held in both his hands.
We talked a bit, and then I asked
If I could drop him off, to which
He said, "Why, thanks," and so we got
Into my car and started out.
He sat hands folded, looking straight ahead,
Till finally I ventured with,
"D'you sell many of your boxes?"
"No," he answered evenly, "never
Sold a one." Too far gone now
In common curiosity to stop,
I asked how come the price, the stores
He chose to place them in. "Well, now,"
He said, "that customer we saw
Makes four I've seen myself
Go through that rigmarole — they're all
About the same. What did he think
To find my box there on that shelf
Among those mass produced doodads?
Will he remember? And will it bother him?
Would I rather sell 'em off just over cost
And know they'd gone to bric-a-brac
In homes within a year? No, sir. Well, then."

Richard Aldridge

THE POET AS A YOUNG MAN

My body is thin,
except for the shoulders, which are
straight and broad
as a shelf. I seem to be carrying
a yoke, but in reality, I carry
myself.

One friend of mine tap dances
when he walks, speaks
in radio static, waves arms
to catch pieces of himself
which ricochet to tree crown, cirrus cloud,
sun. His mother lives
in a wheelchair unbottling
spasms. He tells no one this.

He is weight of my yoke;
He is eye of myself.

My grandfather is thin,
except for his hands; they have
the span of fields. He guides horses
that scar his hands, tractors
which shake his hands, a woman
he can no longer feel.

My grandfather lives with this plight: he has
lost the sense of touch from touching so much.

Ellen Cantor

WEATHER/MAN

for Alice

Is it the snow making so much noise,
the cloud-clogged wind shuffling in
and out of doors?
Or is it my ears that close
in this early, early dawn?

Waking to the first snowfall:
visible gusts in the stiff
telephone lines,
cars waltzing to a stop
at the frosted traffic light,
Christian Science reading room
nearly hidden under a white
cold morning glory.

When the phone rings
the icicles shatter to the street.

The otherwise tame
cedar bough outside our window
filled to its fingertips
with snow
is King Kong's heavy hand
moving in slow motion
and Fay Wray's dead.

On the skinny highway
a million cars slide home
in victory,
deer bodies writhing
on the fenders,

blood freezing all evening,
turning the chrome brown.

The year's gone bald,
bright as a bone,
dead as the moon's become
with footprints on it.

O moon that sucks the sea to sleep.

Danny L. Rendleman

FIVE A.M.

The headless mouse has soft brown fur
Licked sleek and warm just before,
Arranged up snug around the lungs
Poked out like two raw thumbs.
He waits in his blood crouching.

There was a russet setter once
Ran eager in the romping grass,
Learning how teeth go round a stick,
Barking love at any milky pod,

Till poison came and caught him quick
All almond and acid and howling in his gut.
It licked his walls, dissolved his cry,
Confused the golden lenses of his eye.

Not all a small boy's cradling care
Had any efficacy there.

Bloodied coat and bitter herb
Call forth this answering word.
Rhyme time to death ; in measure, breath
Rises to a flame.

May I not wake in darkness
To a numb tongue, the suck
Of tubes in nose and throat,
The long paralysis with no release.

But let it be at evening on the lawn.
And let my head nod once above my book.
And let the match, just lighted for my pipe,
Fall, its bright ash break loose then—
Rocking upward toward the night.

May my last spark flare and fade
Far beyond scythe and spade.
And let all things that live find ease
(The mouse intent on new seed schemes,
The old dog dreaming young bone dreams)
In that elemental peace.

Spencer Eddy