

# THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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## **MICHAELIS THE MAGICIAN**

took off the hood,  
unhitched traces,  
said:

Go twenty paces,  
walk twenty more,  
lift the earth,  
and what you see,  
report.

Grateful for release  
the beast reported:  
I saw something  
that over a hairshirt  
wore silk.  
Another that,  
over lace,  
wore nettles and stone.  
Another, the harder I looked,  
became bare, and the last,  
as I looked away,  
became cloth.

Michaelis the Magician  
struck him hard between the eyes.  
He shuddered,  
and became man.

**Brian Swann**

**ORPHEUS**

## 1.

I have a story to tell you, lady, some  
old lie about a poet. You  
will not believe it.

We sit here waiting  
for something extraordinary to happen,  
something to blast us out of the polite  
restrictions of a proper conversation,  
something big. I have a story, lady,  
that will raise your hair,  
a calculated bomb to blow you up.

Listen:

Orpheus charmed trees  
and the waves of the sea  
with his improbable melodies

(being Greek, his profile  
was extraordinarily handsome)

## 2.

*(Chanson Blanche D'Orphée)*

On this hill, lady,  
I play my lute,  
enchancing birds  
till they sit stock still  
while ants  
dance  
and my words move mountains.

*(Chanson Noire D'Orphée)*

The cave is dark  
and hot as hell.  
My baby's there,

there on a slab in this god-forsaken place

I sing, then, sing  
out of the bitter fury of my veins.

3.

Walt Whitman walks on the harbor, watching  
sea-gulls scatter, his beard full of lice.  
There he goes, with his body electric,  
chanting his chansons in the morning,  
never shaving.

Walt eyes the sailors, with their bodies electric,  
electric to him, Walt Whitman,  
chanting his chants in the morning,  
never shaving.

4.

Garcia Lorca chants Walt Whitman—  
Orpheus in the saddle,  
his beautiful eyes are gleaming.  
Never will there be an Andalusian  
as handsome as he.

Now the worms eat him,  
now the worms chew up Garcia Lorca  
shot in the head for political reasons.

5.

I don't understand this at all.  
Think of Tennyson,  
of Longfellow.  
*They* were poets.

Why must you be so unpleasant?

## 6.

Consider Orpheus, then :  
 old & bald & lonely  
 (with an eye for the ladies)

he goes on singing, singing  
 in a city run down by barbarians

(on the high & honeying hill  
 the lovers—)

Jack Foley

### THE WILL TO FIND

I now begin exploring all you are,  
 I enter tangled moods that veil your bones.  
 I came as I have come to all unknowns,  
 Cautiously, beginning from afar,

Approaching slow, like a storm-turned trader ship  
 That tentatively scouts an unmapped shore  
 Before it ventures in, riding the roar  
 That breaks against a narrow, rocky strip.

I came like Leif the Norseman: long at the helm,  
 His bloodshot eyes straining toward rising rock —  
 Did months of northern waters overwhelm  
 His rigid dream? Did he for an instant balk?  
 With all the cold Atlantic in his mind  
 Did he, one moment, fear the will to find?

Paul Smyth

**TWO POEMS****Widow**

Another night unfurls its million leaves of shadow.

Cars go by on the highway, one and another:  
faint hiss of the lights against my skin—  
white lights, colder than steel.

I lie so still I am only another leaf.  
I lie alone in my bed. I feel no grief.

My bed, still charged with summer,  
is hot like a body, hot like sunstruck earth,  
hot and flowering around me  
with darkness.

**Accident**

Accept the fact, the tire is going to blow:  
there on the highway the car will begin to sway;  
for a moment things will wobble, an unsteadiness  
will take possession; then the veering, then the  
incoherence,

and the invisible wolf who lives inside  
will come howling out.

**Sandra M. Gilbert**

**SHADOW AND STONE****1.**

Your shadow twinned you to the garden wall  
Before your final going. Now, at will,  
The wall recites your shadow to me still  
As, stone on mortared stone, your outlines fall  
Exactly into seeming. I stare  
At nothing there  
and see it all.

**2.**

Polished, chiseled, piled,  
Beautifully abused,  
The stone at its core remains  
Undisturbed, unused.

Strung gems, the heavy anchor  
Leashed to the convict's chain,  
The Sphinx—each tightly sings  
The selfsame hard refrain:

“Unfeeling, I endure.”  
Just so the pebble lies,  
Aloof in soaking rain,  
Indifferent to the skies.

Such bleak placidity  
Of ever-smoothing skin  
Never lets a drop  
Of caring enter in.

**3.**

Skin-deep, your shadow stirs, but cannot lure  
Its author back; nor can my mind release  
Its fancies yet, unclasp a myth, police

The wayward hope. I turn to stone, endure  
The trickeries of light, and face  
My shadowed place  
In stony peace.

**Eliana Beam**

## **WINDOW**

As a teenager I spent night after night driving  
lead-footed through the plowed heart of Ohio,  
in my father's truck going some other place  
past dark farms, each with its white house  
and a front window framing an easy chair  
and the head of the family reading  
or dozing in the lamp's warm oval.

Ten years of driving into tonight,  
coming alone back home to Delaware  
and wife and children past white houses  
still with a dreamt fear; the road turning,  
the car slowing and now, inside, in the chair,  
in the soft, eventual circle of defining light,  
myself glancing up as the headlights flash past.

**Robert Flanagan**

**THE ENCHANTMENT**

Sweet Merlin, searching that red book  
 as if the quick orange fox and the green tree  
 and the whole earth swung from it—  
 will a dragon seize you,  
 grapple and roar and eat you,  
 or a goblin spring at you,  
 if you don't know the right rune?  
 don't you ever tire  
 of cobwebs in moonlight  
     and bending and staring  
     and spiders and pouring  
     and crouching and muttering  
 over what wasn't and can't be?

No, Madam. I never tire.

But do you know moonlight  
 only when it dusts the ragged pages  
 overspread with your beard?  
 so many things like moonlight—  
 webbed casement, silver tower,  
 spring leaves and winding rivers,  
 an eagle's wings and maiden's hair—  
 even the beard of a dour old man  
 sitting here muttering and scowling.

Ah, Merlin, doesn't the moonlight ever  
 creep through your door,  
 circle you, tug at you  
 with its small hand?  
 have you never thought—

Ah, Merlin—

In the meadows of the moon  
 beside a shining sea,  
 each bush becomes a silver rune,  
 an enchantment every tree.

I know the uses for moonlight,  
Madam.

But Merlin, why so cross?  
I've only come to amuse you!

Nimue, I would not be a great magician  
if I could not read hearts,  
hearts and the maze of minds.  
I know yours, see the web,  
know you intend my death.  
but you are just another face,  
another face—with lines—so—  
and angles—so—nothing more.  
I am weary.  
let an old man study.

But how can you accuse me  
who stands waiting at your door  
as at none other—  
waiting only to please you  
in an idle hour?  
it is hard to be rebuked  
for such intentions.

I only thought that,  
in all your life,  
you have never seen

moonlight on grass  
and silver showers  
through golden hours—  
never have these passed  
hard door of your tower!

Can't one say these things  
who has come dancing

along the moonlight  
by the river?

I am too old for dancing.  
choose someone younger  
to dance along your river.

Merlin, it is hard  
to stand at your door,  
as at none other—  
hard for a proud heart  
to have to ask again—  
only that you talk to me  
and not growl.

Only that you would come,  
come an hour just to see  
moonlight on the grass  
and silver showers  
and the moon's white flowers—  
will you not look  
from your high tower?

Nimue, I am a strong man,  
high, high in counsel,  
the thought behind the Table.  
a man with never any need  
but for his books  
and his own counsel.  
never have I needed idle talk  
of flowers and rain  
to rest my heart upon.  
never have I needed a young face  
to make me happy.  
for I am a strong man.  
would you have them say  
that Merlin at the last was vanquished?

But a strong man too needs rest.  
you cannot think to always stand  
stubborn as an old tree  
striving against the wind?  
what harm to think of a place  
where there is no labor  
and no need for strength?

Nimue, I am a wise man.  
I have studied long seasons  
all the world's turnings—  
seen the stag run and the grass spring  
and the snow melt and the planets turn.  
I have seen the earth  
from a great distance  
and therefore know it well.  
and I have seen the heart  
from a high, high distance  
and therefore know it very, very well.  
would you have them say  
that Merlin proved a fool at last?

But surely a wise man knows  
a man may be so wise  
as to miss everything—  
the hart's grace  
and the hart's speeding,  
the grass springing  
and the earth laughing.  
surely a wise man knows  
that to miss these things  
is to make his mind a cage?

For the heart can take no rest  
when vanquished by the mind,  
for then whatever its quest,  
it always seeks, it cannot find.

Nimue, I am an old man,  
have seen many seasons.  
my sun is not young now  
as it once was.  
its rays will not linger.  
I have learned to accept  
wind and snow and rain  
and my time's ending.  
would you turn me now  
against myself with your pleading?  
would you sing of spring  
to one who sees only winter?  
do not turn an old man against himself--  
would you have them say  
that Merlin showed a child at last?

Nimue, I know what you intend.  
but stand here a moment.  
I would say your face is fair  
if I've remembered how to judge.  
just the face to beguile an old man  
with songs of spring.  
I wonder . . . .  
if I could remember . . . .  
when have I looked last?  
when have I ever looked, I wonder?  
I wonder?

yes, your face is fair.  
when have I really seen  
what angles, lines  
that formed a face  
were really doing?  
your eyes could sparkle  
eternal bright stars  
or be the cool well  
which has no ending.  
so could many another's eyes,