

# **THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL**

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**"FLIGHT"**

*Sculpture by* O. V. SHAFFER

collection of

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**TO CATULLUS FOR #8**

Poor horny Catullus you  
scratched at an unendurable  
itch writing to that proud  
bitch Clodia not knowing  
how things would end how  
centuries would dump themselves  
on Rome vanquish Caesars  
slay legions how barbarian  
decades would humble  
the empire tumble it  
into time with marble  
torsos cracked chamber  
pots spent coins

Now

the dust of Clodia  
quicken the sweet  
meat of later sluts and  
we curse lust lusting  
to be free

while Catullus  
in a poem endures  
his eternally aching loins

**Robert Leslie Berner**

**THE THIEF AND (THE CRUCIFIED)***from a painting by Mantegna*

the sudden light  
shines on the thief's body  
under the cloth  
his virility, the sex organs  
hair

    muscles strain  
pushing their force  
against the cross

he is the Christ!

not the grey resigned figure  
with arms flung out  
despite the nail heads—  
death is the same, the agony  
flesh, a certainty  
held

in the open mouth  
    the unaccepting belief  
a bare skull  
lies at the base of the center post  
the legs  
are not yet broken, the side  
not pierced

Besmilr Brigham

## SOUTHERN GIRL DANCING

I slide my beer down the bar  
so I can see perfectly

She starts curving & never  
stops orbs circles arcs  
ovals christ gently undulating  
dead centered dart on pleasure's map  
pointing *here*

wow I'd better think  
of something else I'll think  
of bikes & speed & Trout Fishing &  
huge death & peace &

round O

my god she's turning  
round slowly &

ab-so-lute-ly

well I'd mortgage my house  
if I had one  
leave wife & 5 kids  
if I had any  
sell all effects & goods  
if I had some  
rob banks  
convert to Islam  
disclose military secrets  
slave 14 yrs in South African diamond mines  
for 4 minutes  
if I could last 4 minutes  
in her honeycomb

What a bitch to ruin  
utterly  
a man she doesn't even know

Frederic Young

**EDUCATION OF A SECOND GENERATION  
AMERICAN**

the hero of the piece was  
   listed  
   in  
   the  
   program:  
 a doctor fellegrini savant and scrutable  
 who came with briefcase and stethoscope  
 in search of the solifidian truth;  
 halfway through la donna's cacciatore  
   (she  
   was  
   once  
   queen of denial)  
 the mustard plaster head of john  
 the rapist beckoned in the arbor;  
 when we read it in the daily news  
   behind  
   giacomo  
   (the  
   mad  
   policeman)'s  
   garage  
 we choirboys snickered at the joke:  
 how fellegrini savant  
   and  
   sage  
   discovered act and causation  
 through the instrumentation of marco's  
   knife  
 when the scrutable doctor's bumbershoot  
 was discovered in the lady's avid chute

**Joseph Fioravanti**

## THE BLEEDING OF PENELOPE

*And this whole land shall be a desolation  
and an astonishment . . .*

—Jeremiah 25:11

Two years after Protevyeve tore  
down Penelope,  
ripped open the door-bells,  
the icy steel of the  
Bullshead,

they still sought blood.

Two years after the north fields  
ran barn-paint red  
and the swamps that had  
lain stagnant since the

Pleistocene boiled in  
vicious puberty,  
they still sought blood.

So we hid in the caves,  
fighting the whine of bugs  
driven from the swamp,  
we sought our own kind of  
blood.

Blood to avenge the deeds  
of vicious little bastards  
who opened the mustard kegs  
to suit their sexual thirst.

And most of all,  
as the ancient waters  
dripped minerals far back in  
the bowels,  
where stalactites like mountains  
grew in a quiet men cannot  
stand,  
we fought to stay ourselves.



to the cry of "*Bourgeois!*"  
Or the fairness of war  
is their fantasy,  
and I had time to think  
about it as the water  
dripped down in the back  
of the cave. . .

In the middle of the third year,  
like dust clouds,  
soldiers came riding on great  
black horses,  
snorting white plumes of steam  
on the mountain air.  
And we retreated back into the  
cave,  
where none would find us.

The word came again,  
by another ragged man  
and they all were the same;  
faces the color of old sawdust  
and eyes that looked beyond  
then, or even now  
and their hair,  
gone white by what?  
No one knew how old

they were—  
children of revolt,  
worn-thin men in tatters of  
flag.

One brought, then, the word—  
Delgrande  
had fallen—  
The moon had looked down  
on a black night of

hounds  
 and creeping fog.  
 Listrado, the young,  
 vicious little bastard

who would eat his  
 government's heart,

had taken it to the earth  
 and sown the cinders  
 with rock salt and  
 vinegar—

All saw him coming—  
 with eyes so burned-out red  
 they waited,  
 searching the scrub pines  
 far down the slope,  
 where soil and damp moss

clung to the slate,

until dawn  
 when we went farther  
 into the belly of the cave,  
 to a place where dark had always been,  
 and no man had ever been

before—

and we waited. . .for Listrado,  
 the young.

In the fourth year,  
 while silent snows piled  
 deeper than a man is tall  
 no one came,  
 nor went,  
 save to kill for food  
 or to cough out the germs

of consumption,  
 for which there was no

cure.

And we still knew,  
white-skinned,  
thin-fingered people  
very like the ragged messengers  
who had been this way before—  
we knew  
that Listrado, the young,  
would be followed by  
another and another. . .

Pautoli still stood,  
and Remindo would write

acid words 'til his  
fingers had no flesh left  
to blister—

there would always be a  
cause for flame,  
and caves to die in. . .  
always and always.

Thus in April  
we left the cave,  
five and thirteen,

. . . . .

mind,  
crossed the Fernier  
into the green midlands  
where spring sun was a

armed with rock and

black and dismal eye,

and joined  
Claudien, who said Remindo  
had died  
with a pointed stick up his  
rectum,  
and we pushed north

past the grey remains of  
 what had stood as  
 fair Penelope,  
 and entered the Corlot

in June,  
 dragged down in  
 sludge

and remembering the caves—

There,  
 as the sun burned trees

brown

and the mud baked and

cracked,

we met Listrado,  
 carrying a flag of faith to  
 Protevyev,  
 whose fate had been to

creepin fever a year  
 after the denunciation of  
 the Bullshead.

*Mortende ad infidelandoes,*

he screamed

and we met a grim fate  
 more than had he thought for us,  
 though a bullet fired by  
 Protobo, the magic one,  
 cut him quickly from his  
 saddle.

And we moved

across the lands to the border  
 country,

away from deltas,

away from memories of a

nameless revolution

that called itself  
freedom. . .

. . . . .

And I had time again,  
to think.  
About Listrado with a single,  
bloated strand of gut  
drooped between his young  
legs,  
hung from a hole like  
the cave mouth,  
where Protobo had shot him  
once,  
the only man Protobo ever  
killed,  
for he died, too, there on  
the sun-baked Corlot.

. . . . .

And now it has been  
fifteen years  
and Listrado rots in his  
grave,  
the sullen flag of Protevyev  
marking the spot.  
No acknowledgment  
tells the rest spot of  
Protobo,  
a bitter piece of ground  
somewhere out in the  
fucking Corlot.

They talk of a god,  
these people new,  
but this is a new land  
and a stupid people

these.

They never saw  
Listrado's guts, or  
Protobo, with his eyes, unclosed,  
hurting to be free of their  
sockets.

They did not walk on  
gangrene toes  
across the Corlot or the  
Fernier, where the stones  
are angry knives.

And beyond that, when  
they were young  
and lived with rats and  
the fingers of bitch-winter  
they still saw nothing  
like the bleeding of  
Penelope. . .

And this time they call  
me the *bourgeois!*  
And I'll eat their shit,  
for I'm free now to choose,  
and even this shit tastes  
better than  
a steak off the buttocks  
of a man not long dead.  
I'll not go back to  
the caves  
for their lust or anyone's.  
I've seen it  
and my eyes are tired.  
They ache for sleep.

Jim Smith

**THE GENUINE ARTICLE**

Oh yes, the Acropolis is  
the genuine article,  
made from real stones  
by genuine Greeks  
in a century that is  
traditional.

But if you wish  
to remain closer to home,  
for less cost, an old  
Winchester thirty-thirty  
will do. A piece  
of History, it won  
the West by killing  
guaranteed, naturally-  
toasted Indians. You don't  
have to go far  
from home.

For even less cost, try  
a hot dog. It's  
the genuine article.  
Official American meat  
clapped between airy  
buns. It's almost real.

In fact, sometimes I think  
that we  
are the genuine article  
though all we pay  
to be  
is the loneliness  
we carry around,  
and it comes wholesale  
like the wind  
absolutely free.

**Jonathan Holden**

## VARIATIONS ON A THEME: DAY CYCLE

### 1.

Dawn

Noon

Dusk

Dawn the purposeful morn  
pale as pale riding to the foreland  
as multitudes of birds awake

Noon the engagement of muscles' flex  
soil's thick vapor rises like dust  
a handful of seed breaks the land

Dusk sun in the sea gathers folds of dark  
about itself like loose hands in smoke slowly stroke  
the dinner fire like blankets draw about shoulders

### 2.

Dawn

Noon

Dusk

Dawn impels to activity  
the rider leans from the waist  
the horse flexes in stride  
a green tide of lichens pours across a white rock  
as waterfalls of birds whistle down the dark

Noon salt melts through the skin to muddy  
the hand crumbling the soil that will yield  
stolid force into zealous tendrils of growth

Dusk circle tides of the sea bathe them who sleep  
the moon is a marsh through which the sky seeps  
tomorrow is a promise which keeps

3.

Dawn

Noon

Dusk

Dawn is the pale rider with wheatstraw hands  
who drags this feathered day behind  
with a ruckus and roil of wing and hoof

Noon is a black farmer behind a plow  
breaking long lines into steaming sod  
whose hieroglyphic begins the tale of growth

Dusk is a fisherman of the far side of ocean  
straining wet harvest from a molten sea  
whose draining net holds the sun like a settling  
balloon

T. Cuson

### NARRATIVE

Winter and summer I clung like a peach  
To the branch I was on . . . sun and shade, bird  
droppings,

Rain. Itching from my own skin, I ripened  
To feel horror lurch in the pit, but being  
Unable fully to believe in the murder of anything  
I clutched through the seasons while everything  
decayed.

Who knows what shrieking and singing go on in a  
peach

When wasps might crawl in sometimes, throbbing  
And glistening in the hot dark of rotting pulp?  
Only hope was safe, sure in its seed,  
Faithful to myths of sunlight and of air.  
And when I dropped the seed was all I kept.

Doris Moore

**THE OPEN****The Problem**

Though the sergeant damns them  
in skilled anger,

*You want your ass shot off?*

*Keep off the goddamned trail!*

stalks the woodline,  
works a stick against hard heads,  
retraining the heart; still  
armed, grown men come like children,  
wide-eyed, with shy, sidelong steps  
out of the hanging shadow  
into the open.

**The Reason**

For a man  
will move without knowing  
into thinning bush,  
his straight line as if by the sun  
warped to a curve;

open spaces

open spaces

are near; foretold  
by a dry creekbed running  
a weak stream of light through the vines,  
a chest-wide recess to breathe in.

**The Real Thing**

Until it erupts — a geyser  
of steam, white slivers of shock  
and pain, a choking, then release  
fierce as a boy's wet dream;  
though a dream all air, breathing

from a dozen holes,  
with the light above, unlookably  
bright, blinking in spun blades  
of the Medivac; then up, spinning  
slowly on the long cord of his pain,  
like a pale spider rising, into the light.

Robert Flanagan

### CROSS-EXAMINATION

Should the car  
run over  
him  
    again & again

he'd be lengthened  
somewhat  
& smooth  
like a road

leading  
to where  
you'll be found  
                    (screaming.)

Can you  
    take a joke. Can't you  
see the reason. The mind  
is so made  
that it cannot be  
incoherent

Wong May

**RELEASE****1.**

Sunday, in my office,  
opposite the beige brick church,  
I look up from the blank page.  
The four clocks in the four faces  
of the tower are telling different  
times. Each way I turn,  
the hands of the separate clocks  
of the separate selves  
pose into this and that  
posture, dancers  
test and change their gestures,  
turning four faces one by one  
to me, each face that I fear  
to become or to come out of.

**2.**

There I am  
in the photo  
wearing a saw-tooth beanie,  
throwing a pink rubber ball at the camera:  
1945, the fleet's coming up the Hudson,  
barooming salutes. The Pom...Pom...Pom  
is not the noise I expected,  
not ripping the air.  
I throw the ball at the camera  
which is being held by Mr. Weber  
home from Italy with a wooden leg.

Profile: boy with hooked nose,  
hair curved over forehead and behind ear;  
silver jacket with fur collar.  
Some mistake of the film.  
Strange exposure.  
The boy stares  
at something beyond the frame.

Is that me, fat and blonde,  
held up in my father's arms?  
I clutch the lapel of his pin-stripe suit  
while the roof's  
black tar and open chimneys  
devour the sunlight.

Alice poses on the roof,  
my sister: just  
plump enough  
to swell out beneath  
the edges of her bathing suit.  
TV antennae poke at the sky like broken claws.  
Her English jaw hangs heavy on her smile.

We're sitting in the bright sun  
of Uncle Charlie's backyard  
near the El's spiderweb shadows.  
In short pants,  
propping Danny on my lap,  
I scowl at the camera  
and wonder why brothers cry all night.  
His pug nose defies  
definition.

Nowhere do I find my mother  
married. Another roof picture:  
almost seven years before  
her daughter will be born.  
She's 20: her white dress

stark against the black roofs and open doorways.  
 The turn in her eye is coy,  
 evading the camera's eye.  
 The frills on her short sleeves are pretty.  
 The Depression is still on.

There I am  
 on the beach  
 holding my brother Stevie.  
 He squints at the sun and reflects  
 the scowl of my father  
 who is propped on his elbows in the sand.

Sometimes they all seem dead  
 though they try to pursue me into marriage  
 and my thirty-fifth year and though I often  
 wake with my father in my arms trying to save him  
 from his early death and I still cannot find  
 a picture of my mother married and the coy eye  
 evades me in my dreams and my sister grins on the  
 roof.

3.

Instructor of English, appointed 1967  
 (smiling)

No, this can't be right

*Mr. Allman* shines white on black  
 on the door of 205 Eddy Hall

a trapped hawk claws  
 the back of my eyes

I walk on naked feet  
 from one abstraction into  
 another coughing up feathery bones

diplomas curl on the wall

Married,  
one child, daughter, aged six

4.

For Eva whom I describe  
as the nymph leaping out of the summer night  
into my room:

why should I mark you with words  
like savage tatoos?

The Jerome Avenue El squeals  
in the valley beneath us  
sparking the midnight  
our veins thunder O they thunder  
love's release

all night  
the hollow-eyed white bird  
calls

my love  
my love  
damn these words  
what are words  
what are words  
rags stuffed into a mouth

it seems so long ago  
we married

5.

The future holds her in a box,  
a small woman with hair turning white.  
Even in death, her eye turns away.

The mad don't get madder  
biting the spoons in their mouths  
(tranquilizers steam in the blood  
like fog on a tropical river, the air  
fills with the cries of beautiful birds).

The clocks on the four faces of a tower  
turn their sibling hours into lust,  
meditation, fear, and a blank face:  
the nothing that fills in each minute  
like a sound that congeals in the air,  
a noise that is seen, suddenly, twisting  
into a vapor, a thread, that passes away.

6.

I awaken to the midnight bird  
who ruffles his wings, preening  
(no humans in my dream,  
only the sun here, the bird).  
On the tips of my fingers  
there are tiny photographs  
and my eyes open their lenses  
to let something fly out  
fluttering toward carnival mirror  
camera closeups: gyrating faces,  
big noses, small eyes, rectangular mouths.  
Sudden silence.       The sun's myriad  
bells toll out light  
that beams upward from my cool sheets,  
my wife's hips.       I arise spreading my arms  
like a frail bird running into a thin breeze,  
I'm aloft, above the glinting Hudson River,  
riding upwards on a voice I still cannot hear,  
impelled on its beautiful pure lung force,  
up, up, up, up, my brain softly exploding,

fingers stroking my head, my eyes,  
my beak. There is wreckage everywhere  
washed up on the mud islands, where the sun's knives  
cut through water: beer cans, twisted logs, scummy  
weeds, curled strips of exposed film. I see the  
body of a dog and I scream for joy.

## 7.

The face appears on the blank page:  
my mother's eyes;  
the nose hooked like her mother's.  
The jaw belongs to some Victorian  
Englishman, or a coalminer  
who looks like D. H. Lawrence.

It's me.

The Methodist Church  
turns a paler beige year by year.  
The rectangular tower  
keeping four points of time  
turns in a circle  
and hands on the clocks  
give their gestures  
in the repetition of hours.

I hear the fleet coming downriver  
somewhere, barooming salutes,  
while the tall boats, draped in black,  
carry the dead to sea.

**John Allman**

**THREE POEMS****Decisions**

at a certain time of day:  
the spider stares into the corner  
of its eye  
and sees the snake,

mice watch cats  
dancing around them,

trees lose their balance  
in the wind.

I look into a corner  
of my evening,  
see a thin coiling  
of darkness.

**On the Island**

it's been eleven o'clock now  
for at least three hours.  
still  
no word.

last night I dreamt I was alive,  
in a strange land so distant  
vultures couldn't find it.

the air is thick tonight,  
stars are marooned on a glass plate.

still  
no word.

my head floats  
in a wash basin.  
let it be carried  
to the king.

### **Deep Within the Trees**

this petrified forest knows the long winter,  
it has dozed here for centuries.

now I grow  
older, and feel  
the walls of my arteries wooden.  
I know  
I will never leave.

the stone around me is slowly falling  
asleep.

**Bill Meissner**

## TWO POEMS

## The Web

*"Old woman, old woman, old woman," said I,  
 "O whither, O whither, O whither so high?"  
 "To sweep the cobwebs off the sky!"  
 "Shall I go with you?" "Aye, by and by."*

—Mother Goose

There's something at the door:  
 Knock as soft as grass:  
 Fingers shine like silver webs  
 Threaded on black vestments.

Wants me to come out and talk—  
 Hush, *please*. And go away.  
 All things here "decently  
 And in order . . ."

And he stands like a stone planted by the moon  
 And slowly tunes a guitar.

*Then shoot down the moon and we'll drown him in  
 the dark!*

Rain. Nails of ice and light  
 Curtains beat like wings with the wind

Race for the closet (crates of junk,  
 Crits where mice scratch around in the dark—

Head is stuffed with strings  
 Like old rags shoved in drawers  
 Poke in one place, pop out another

Wads of floppy wiggly things:  
 Knotted tapeworms hooking  
 Down to the floor, slithering off  
 Coiling in corners, crawling in cracks

They ooze under doors, creep along walls—  
 I run with a net scooping them back  
 They eel out and flop down stairs—  
 I swoop like a gull in a sea spewing fish

Yarn snarls tighter hammered into wire  
 Through the coffin in the coalroom—  
 Who's screaming from the fire?  
*Liar!*

Raddling on skidding scales  
 Don't dare touch snap me *zing*  
 Back over there unturned dirt  
 Must mildew earwigs spiders  
 Roaches rats maggots stink

Look out for the witch! She shrieks at the moon,  
 Rides the sky on a bright red broom,  
 Whoever looks with eyes like warm

Light through open doors will surely  
 Die  
 There in the ooze where her little bed lies

(Crouch, cat! Around a rat  
 Snapped like a furry fortune cooky.  
 Claw out the liver, suck the lungs

(Scoop, up, into the sausage  
 For vital organs, the life hiding  
 In the blood—)

And with daylight, when the fit has passed  
 The poor unchewable tendons

Shriveling, like salted slugs

And a sticky soup thickening  
Under my nails, on my bib, in my hair,  
My teeth, vomit clotted to my tongue

And the awful reproach of eyes  
Like white grapes skinned and pitted—  
A house papered with portraits of the dead—

No. I'll

Hide

Back past dirt where fungus flowers toads  
And spores thrive, and sowbugs slive,  
And Old Man Mose with a carrot for a nose  
Giggles sad tunes, says If we  
Keep very quiet, *they'll* never know—  
And then gets drunk from his hat to his toe—

Further back. Up, just under  
The joists where dirt is dry, wood  
Warm—a small  
Thing might  
Fasten, in a cotton shawl  
To a silence where nothing  
Is except

A chain of ants  
Up and down  
A wall, so  
Quietly—some  
Carrying bits of things,  
Traveling sure directions  
Each behind the next—

Do ants have to feel, and try not to feel?  
Do they want what doesn't exist?

Ants are never ridiculous, never  
Queer, so that others might notice and talk—  
They balance easily on polished bricks  
That hold back rivers where tongues wash apart.

Ants don't flinch with the jab of sun  
Possessing a bush by light, don't  
Hear the crunch of spooks climbing trees  
Creeping across the midnight deck  
To press their faces on the glass, whisper  
Lorelei songs like dangled strings—

I'll join, if I may, this small procession  
Up and down a wall

I'll hide in the smallest house but one of all.

### **Pilgrimage**

(Located on the Northern California coast, Ano Nuevo beach has eroded from sandstone cliffs which contain large deposits of fossilized rock.)

The wind at Ano Nuevo  
Still whirls the sand like sense,  
Whips the littered sand like spume,  
And rinds, glass, rotting gulls  
Are gone, until wind shifts.  
Waves still wash in like bridal lace  
Carrying their cargo of weeds,  
Rattling rocks, these antique shells  
And shapes of lost amphibians pressed  
In the symbiotic silt of time—  
Now shards, torn loose, caught, on a strip  
Not water, not land—catching the sun  
Like fool's gold, but never long.

Dragged by plowing surf turned mud  
But never far. Rolled back in  
For sun to touch and tease again  
Before wet fingers reach again  
As the surf turns, and then turns back,  
A hooting chorus of weed-wreathed hags  
Crouched on the sand shooting craps.

So back to this sea where I always come back,  
Like that other where we began—  
Still dragging a bag, the tangled cord  
Half clipped, and cracked like leather with blood,  
These Siamese things inside half dead,  
Hermit crabs fighting for a fossilized shell  
And stabbed on each other's claws:  
A heart beat sounds in my head like surf  
But tough leather membrane holds it in—  
Pounds of water laminate my bones  
But the dark screaming creature won't smother and  
    the other,  
The dear little albino, can't win—  
And the aging sun is fat  
As a pear left too long on the tree—  
At Ano Nuevo earth's gold curve  
Creaks down the western sky, water  
Lunges at my feet and nothing  
Can stop it: the sun will go,  
There is no float strong enough to hold it up  
Nor wing that will dip to grab me  
Before the dark night drops.

Janice Loonie

**MRS. LONGFELLOW'S DEATH**

This is what really occurred.  
H.W. (Household Word) Longfellow  
Carried two brides to the altar;  
One of them burned.

The first girl he married  
Was infirm and died  
On a trip to improve Henry's mind  
(Amsterdam: In eighteen-thirty five)  
Leaving tracks on dry sands of his time.

He took-heart again; he took wife  
Since life was still earnestly sung  
And Psalms needed harmony.  
He'd read her his clerical verses  
His proverbs with kernels of truth—  
—Hearthside rhymes for the times—  
He worked hard on each version,  
Each verb a symmetrical urn  
And his rhythms were  
Burnished.

The Civil War burst but it furnished  
No Paul Reveres. Nothing but Shermans.

Early one evening

After the children's bright hour?

He worked in his study. His wife

Henry heard her

Sealed packages in a far room.

He turned pages. She screamed.

She came whirling, her whole skirt

A red blur of flame

Curling. He jerked the rug

Up and hurled it around her

And watched her unfurl, a wild comet,

Who turned, surged, and flew

Burning! Lit up an infernal hell

In the hall. He pursued. She returned

As a swirling torch. He was

Scorched in her furnace.

The third time he smothered

Her burnt murdered face with his face.

Did he slur one soft curse?

All her last words were screams. They

Were worse. They were worst.

Between that black dark and a daylight

She burned to death. Burned

To death.

Burned.

He never published her death

In a poem while he lived, though

He wrote one (in eighteen more years)

Phrased in paleness and crosses

(Not crucibles), snow, distant mountains

White souls. . . such cool grief

Cooler life, ashen bride

Refined from the great blazing poem that

she died.

**Doris Betts**

AN ARCH OF WORDS  
BETWEEN MICHELANGELO'S BOUND SLAVES  
AND THE SINGING OF A KYRIE

Stirs barely  
and is amazed at his vibrating extent  
which is  
bound to be god, though but unprophesied  
heaving of nothing still, still whole and known,  
as a statue might wholly overcome the stone  
by closing an eye, and therefore was earth,  
and therefore Michelangelo refrained,  
the silence of the stone remained,  
life but through stained-glass windows touched this  
    maze  
of organs, pipes, taut guts and galleries  
through which what now boils and is born?  
until he, at the same loud signal-horn,  
woke, and at last amid the simpler hymns  
brushes the bright dust from his ringing limbs.

Benjamin K. Bennett

**SIMON DOWNS**

Simon Downs lived on garbage  
and a check from Washington  
he cashed and buried  
each month in a syrup can,  
rusting under his weedy porch.  
Children followed his collection  
route of wormy meal and cafe scraps  
to see him absently snatch  
a morsel from the slopping cans  
stashed tight behind his wagon seat.  
Laughing at him belch  
and scratch his pits and grooves,  
the children threw torment  
like a prickly blanket over  
him and his mule, though  
neither was ever seen to frown  
or twitch a ragged ear.

Simon Downs was fun until  
tiny Dilsey Rhodes crying told  
her folks a dirty man had  
touched her smooth, and her  
Daddy and Uncle Rack thought  
right off, "Simon Downs."  
They called him out  
as they shot his mule,  
then flailed him with the  
handle of a broken kaiser blade  
and made him watch his shack  
fired down and smoking before  
they snapped his neck in two.

The County found his cash  
barely scorched and stinking green  
in the can below the ashes,  
and they gave it all to Dilsey Rhodes  
who went to college  
and bought her clothes  
and scarcely thought of Simon Downs  
and the man who touched her smooth.

**Ralph Millis**

### **HORSE AND RIDER**

I wrote a poem about a metaphor,  
Which said I was a soft, compliant beast  
Who let herself be ridden brutally,  
Until she was no use. (All this was true.)

At poem's end, dismounting heavily,  
I cursed as best I could that clubfoot beast,  
That skinny winded walleyed metaphor,  
That swayback nag who made me straddle truth.

**Judith McCombs**