

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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CONTENTS

- | | | |
|----|--|---|
| 1 | KENNETH A. MCCLANE | <i>Now the Wind</i> |
| 2 | UNA THARP | <i>Hide and Seek
in the Closet</i> |
| 4 | OLGA CABRAL | <i>Eskimo Masks</i> |
| 5 | LES STANDIFORD | <i>Circle of the Deer</i> |
| 7 | SISTER PAM SMITH | <i>Tongues</i> |
| 9 | YANNIS RITSOS, TRANS.
BY MINAS SAVVAS | <i>Women</i> |
| 10 | H. JAFFE | <i>Three Sumita Poems</i> |
| 12 | CHAD WALSH | <i>Two Poems</i> |
| 16 | WILLIAM KLOEFKORN | <i>Two Poems from
"Moving On"</i> |
| 18 | SUZANNE GROSS | <i>Epithalamion for a New
Mexican Prelate</i> |
| 20 | ENA HOLLIS | <i>Four Poems</i> |
| 27 | DAVID RIPPER | <i>The Jade Flute</i> |
| 28 | FRANCES HALL | <i>Carts</i> |
| 30 | PHILIP DACEY | <i>Driving Home</i> |
| 32 | JOHN BENNETT | <i>Two Poems</i> |
| 34 | BOOKS IN BRIEF | |

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NOW THE WIND

turns the rich humus

and shows insides
full of origin

I see:

Indians of the hilly shore
girth with hook
and whale

and:

a broken cutlass, length of hair—
rope, still combed with sheen and pliant

Here I see:

someone coming,
his hands slight and open
as if sowing the clouds

there will be plenty,
plenty for all.

Kenneth A. McClane

HIDE AND SEEK IN THE CLOSET

In the closet the lives
hang on wire necks.

I am still
as the two eyes of mice.

The fabrics cover me like huge hands.

The balloons
of my mother's blouses
hang flat. My father's
pantlegs are empty. Old shoes
scramble my feet.

No one can measure
the tale the clock tells,
the minute-march from closet to mirror.

The selves step out
like flat pageants, instant
portraits released from their meathooks.

Here I am in pearls and cotton.
There I go in necktie and shirttab.

I am the twin of my parents.
Everything is buttoned up.
My birthdays will ferret the secrets.

My breasts puff
inside the blouses. Between
my navel and groin, the zipper
sealing my father's pantlegs
feels loose, metallic and cold.

The clothes press moans.
I am seasick, as though
rocked inside an accordian.

The odors become live tendrils.
My heart is the loud
walls beating. Some bird
is born in an eggshell
whose flight will be all masquerade.

The flat clothes walk me away.
I do not know
why. Perhaps
pageants are real
in this closet.

In the midst
of hymns for concertina I am swept
to a luminous wedding.

On my father's
side the clothes tingle. Dust
rises like rayed sunbeams.

I am bathed in this dust.
I am bride.

The grinding of the accordian
goes in and out, in and out, out and in.

My mother's bras
begin to fit me. Before long
a baby is born.

Stronger than sweat and old leather,
the new brown odor of blood.

I count the meanings,
filing the lives across the bar
praying for the garments
and their wire necks.

The ballons of my mother's blouses
hang flat. My father's
pantlegs are empty.

I am still
as the two eyes of mice.

I cannot remember
why I am listening
but I am listening.

The fabrics cover me
like huge hands.

I hear a voice, a child's
voice. Faraway, faraway children . . .
"ally, ally in-come-free-eeeeee . . ."

And I push the clothing back,
push all the meaning back,
push the meathooks, the
motherhood,
and the music.

Then the accordion stops.

The game
begins.

Una Tharp

ESKIMO MASKS

In the palm of my hand
I keep a mountain
black and full of
thunder.
Disguised as a
pebble it
struggles like a small bird.
Sometimes the mountain
gets away and
walks around in the night
full-size.

Olga Cabral

CIRCLE OF THE DEER

High on the bluest of the hills that ring the
town,
at that place where the pines draw back in
clusters
from the ridge and the ancient trail cuts
downward
through the rock, the deer come early, halting,
highstepping the bending grass to watch and
shed the mist:
their stand of rippling shoulders cups the edge.

In this quiet gathering of eyes, a purpose rests,
quick ears lifting to the moving lights below.
The men are falling into lines of yellow
pinpoints,
motors humming upward through the
morning dark.
From each street, all corners, the headlamps
gather,
at last roll out, a solid streaming toward the
hill.

Not until the last car has fallen in do they move,
these deer, down the hidden path that winds
apart
from roadways where the motors strain. Soft
hooved
inside the slope's twistings, the deer curl
quietly
to the manless town, spill silent through the
outskirt fields.

Then, in the valley, as the sun unfolds the
colors,
burns the mist off past the grass, the deer
claim the town

and in turn are taken by it, their wide eyes
this once calm
and careless as they graze the lawns of
children, weave
among the cautious mothers. They feast easy
at the limbs
of nursery shrubs that only yesterday were
planted
through the town by men who now fan across
the vacant
hillside, shout in anger, squeeze off aimless
rounds,
search outside the circle of the deer.

That night, when the motors whine back down
and the deer
have slipped away, the men gather on the
corners,
curl bitter lips and jug fingers, remark the
empty hunt
and the strange silence of their homes. They
crowd into
the cones of yellow light, all corners, looking
drawn,
these men, to curse their luck and each other:

All the while, their talk, this noise, drifts
faintly,
slowly, above the smoke and fences up the line
of blue hill,
where it falls to a murmur as the deer
wind gracefully through their trees.

Les Standiford

TONGUES

mumbling halle ana christe ana
like swami bhaktivedanta chanting hare rama
like a disbelieving priest beginning la la la la
then finding lips and tongue rushing ahead
of him
i broke into a gush of -sh sounds like an old
polack's gossip
and the guttural ch- of a jew's chanukah or
barocha
as i uttered hundreds of words or nonwords
(i remember repeating chora at intervals over
and over)
words or nonwords i never heard before.
it reminded me of a new york city subway car.
somewhere between lao-tzu and McLuhan
my wu-hsin circuits crossed
("unselfconsciousness"; "nongraspingness")
and tao (a way, not god) jammed the global
village's tv set
("Ours is a brand-new world of allatonceness.")
which is to say i went to college, listened,
talked, and halfway read a lot of books.
i lost my faith, taught in public school,
fell in with the freaks and the c.o.'s and went
back to do graduate work,
was converted one summer at villanova and
made a catholic comeback,
dated a formosan and made friends with a
suicidal black feminist,
became poorer and poorer, gave away my car,
studied kiswahili and irish literature,

lived in a \$40-a-month room and shared a
bathroom and kitchen
with my blind wendish landlord and his 92-
year-old yugoslavian uncle,
joined a puerto rican parish and knew that
padre juan was the closest thing to god,
worked in the summer at an old folks' home,
and entered an order of slovak nuns—
all as if i were trying to be a one-woman
melting pot.

so i could easily think that my lessons in latin,
french, spanish, and kiswahili
smashed into dibs and dabs of greek, old
english, lithuanian, or welsh i've picked up
here and there
and came out as this mumbo jumbo;
or i could explain it all away as babytalk and
gibberish,
say that i was making it all up,
that it was as nonsensical as the chatter from
the tower of babel;
or i could simply shrug and observe that it
wouldn't be the first time
i'd been gullible, taken in by a joke, or played
the fool, or kidded myself.
but there was something (i know) that was
neither me nor the two pentecostals praying
with and over me
something else that led me
(something like the i.r.t. third rail that gives
the train wheels on their own two tracks the
juice)
something else that spoke

Sister Pam Smith

WOMEN

Women often seem distant. Their sheets smell
of "goodnight."
They place the bread on the table so that we
can ignore their absence.
Then we realize our guilt. We rise from the
chair and say:
"You must have gotten very tired today," or
"that's all right, I'll light the lamp."
When we strike the match, she turns slowly,
pacing
with inexplicable devotion toward the kitchen.
Her back
is a tiny but bitter hill, carrying the dead,
the dead of the family, her own dead, and
yours.
You listen to her footsteps creaking on the
aged planks of the floor,
You listen to the dishes weeping on the shelves,
and then you hear
the howl of the train, transporting the soldiers
to the front.

Yannis Ritsos
Translated from the Greek
by Minas Savvas

THREE SUMITA POEMS

Sumita's Instinct

Children topple, and
 unless some body's spirit catches
 them, they break.

Then how do
 their bones knit?

The Indian peasant child toddles
 to the Edge squats
 touches his toe to air, then
 turns to play with his burnt matchstick, or
 leaf. His mother's mother, squatting under the
 hut's lee, smoking—watches through rheumy
 child's
 eyes . . .

Sumita's burgher parents powdered her face
 and pushed, where cliff fronted house, house
 bank—Sumita somersaulted, swallowed rain,
 pil-
 lowed the intellectual wind—anything not to
 fall
 from
 grace . . .

Lissom 19 now, wingless,
 quasar-eyed, Sumita slips out of her sandals,
 points her toes at me, and asks me please
 to fetch her a cigarette

Sumita Eating

Not ever not convalescing, he touches
the switch the room is a sudden sea
of light; or opens the door to a broken
dike, as in the silent comedies . . .

He watches Sumita bolt most of North India
spiced . . . "Don't you care what's under
the rice?" No. "Doesn't your stomach some-
times
react?" No. "And you never feel fear?"
Never. Why should I?

He grips the table with two hands and
watches Sumita eat: her mouth is red fur,
her sari whistles as she bends, sucking
her fingers she smiles—

(It won't rain out of season, when it does
watch out for cobras)

my closet—
The bloody lovely teeth of her!

Sumita Washes Her Hair

on alternate days. She is a-
wakened at dawn. She uses British
shampoo and many liters of
heated water . . .

Sumita
begins to brush her hair
at 6:45, as if she were delicately
at work on a loom, and the loom was a harp.
Her hair is golden
black,

nearly as long as Rapunzel's. Her golden
black body lists with each sinuous stroke . . .

Sumita

brushes her hair in the
sun and brushes as the sun goes down—
(the neighbors pass her as they would
any slender coconut palm). Sumita is serious,
though not very: beautiful hair is,
after all,

beautiful hair . . .

She goes to bed directly after dinner
and sleeps till noon the next day

H. Jaffe

TWO POEMS

Our Brother the Murderer

The shambling beast, tottering vertical or
almost,
Was no great oddity among the bear and bison,
The giraffe and tiger. A little naked of hair,
perhaps,
But his brothers had their oddities, like
elongated necks.
He was accepted with neutral indifference at
the water hole,
And they watched without interest his
migration in small herds.

Even when he learned to flash fire and drive
them from cover
And impale them on spears sharper than the
horns of an ox,
It was fratricide, and brothers slaying brothers
are still brethren.
The bear, invading their deepest caves, and
seeing
The black and ochre of bear on the dimness of
wall,
Knew an animal lived here with the smell of
other animals.

And even when the wandering herds settled by
rivers
And built caves over the ground, of wattle and
clay,
This was no more than the birds had always
done;
Nor did the magic of new meadows of annual
grain
And fruit trees uprooted from thickets and
rooted again
Seem dangerous novelties to the beasts of the
steppes and prairies.

Ox and horse, pig, sheep, and goat
Never quite knew the moment when whistle,
call, and goal—
Or wolves and jackals baying the bark of dogs—
Fenced them in. Their food was more certain
now;
The lion and panther sprang less often onto
their backs;
The smell from the wattle caves was an
animal smell.

Even the whirling wheel, the ziggurat of baked
bricks rising,
The king in crown and purple, the priest at the
blood and smoke,
The whipping post in public squares and the
impaling stake,
The rectangular herds marching with leveled
lances and trumpets
Seemed to the ox and cow, pig, sheep, and goat
Less memorable than milking, breeding, or
shearing time.

The wild brothers—tiger and lion, leopard,
bear and wolf—
Indifferently withdrew to prairie, jungle, and
forest
Rimming the square grain fields, orchards,
and vineyards,
And at times, guided by a mixed medley of
animal smells,
Roamed at the fringes, struck, bit, and ate,
Or retreated indifferently from the panic of
blazing torches.

When the cut stones of the aqueduct stole the
water hole
And roads straight as spears bisected, resected
the wilderness,
Their world turned small in the mazes of
menace.
Bear smelled only bear in the caves of memory.
The horse of treason intruded rider and lance,
Axe and plow. And the blood of the innocent.

The net, the rope, the cage, the screaming tiers
Of the Circus, the mad emperor prancing,
The sword sharper and longer than horn or
tusk,

The traitor horse, the ass, dragging with
bleeding tracks,
At the end of clanking chains, the dead
brothers
Of the vertical beast's afternoon of marble-
walled jungle.

Unprogrammed Return

We colonized the earth. We aimed for the
moon.
Why? Perhaps, like Everest, it was there.
And there it hung before us, gray and white,
Sculpted with cruel craters and peaks.
For no good reason we would be landing soon.

A slight seizure, power failing, dials dropping,
A fog of oxygen from unprogrammed leaks.
We circled round the moon of theory
And aimed our arc for the blue-white disk
of earth
Of the temperate continents and rainclouds
dripping.

Into the incredible sea we parachuted down.
Only in sleep do I circle forever in a ring
To breathe each last time the gasping oxygen,
Or on a long ellipse to blaze and fling
My body into the thermonuclear sun.

Chad Walsh

TWO POEMS FROM "MOVING ON"

In the dead center of Cement City
an unlikely smell of sorghum
grabs at something in me
like a moletrap sprung.

O I would like to be
a Red Man ad
on the side of a
South Dakota barn!

I would like to be
the easy heat
inside a moot
Montana roadapple.

I would disappear into the
land-level silo,
close and secure the lid
and there share juices.

But I am merely here,
a left-handed boy
with a pinched nerve
and shit on his Sunday shoes.

Between Kiowa and Dodge City
this world is picked clean.
The clumps of clay near Medicine Lodge
have eaten every brave,
every painted pony.
Further west, a light snow
forms a low and seedless mist
where spills of wheatgrain used to be.

It is cold, and growing colder,
the land as hard as the highway.
I try to imagine the heft
of a soft, hot hamburger,
sweet onions and pickle juice.
But the jaws of the wind
are at them, chewing.

Between Kiowa and Dodge City
this world is picked clean.
The crows alone do not know this.
Maybe that is why,
not so very far above me,
they are circling.

William Kloefkorn

**EPITHALAMION
FOR A NEW MEXICAN PRELATE**

I All is done richly, fittingly so.
Brother and prince, holy with power,
move to lead the ancient public dance,
sharing out to all the sacred meal,
before the bridegroom and the bride dance
secretly together;
before the feast
that none hereafter may share.

The music is simple, openly
glad but not so piercing
or so long in dying
as the overtones that shake
the stricken sinew and nerve;
not so full of wonder
as the cry that fills the throat
with earth.

Upon you the girdle of Venus
is bound, or Vulcan's net; time,
that measures the ardor of men,
and women's honesty,
measures the dance,
and will tell.

Now all the Law has been fulfilled:
who dares say
what the blinded may yet see,
where the dead
may yet lie down to rest.

Now not gloating but solemn
with joy, you pass, and descend
to the windowless center, locking out all
imaginations but your own, to lie
in that bed you have made—Odysseus' bed,
that cannot be unmade,
unless the house be battered down,
stone by stone.

- II Be comforted: it is the shapes
and sculptures of the earth that change
and warp, not the mysterious
ultimate substance. Continents
have drifted halfway round the world,
been shaken apart and rejoined
to make other oceans for you
to dare on and be lost, other
worlds for your discovery, since
this love rose first out of chaos
with the light. And we shall lie down
together in the earth at last,
as you do now in this bed. There
with the passing of a little
time, there shall be no more princes:
we shall be equals, equally
changed, changed after all, an atom
at a time, into each other.
In time we shall become something
else inconceivable: moving
always deeper under the sea,
our unflinching, unbreakable
hearts shall be drawn to the center
of fire, and be molten as one,
stone with stone.

Suzanne Gross

FOUR POEMS

(Ena Hollis, 1934-1970, was married to David Tipton, whose poem on her death, "Millstone Grit," appeared in *The Beloit Poetry Journal* in the Fall-Winter issue, 1971-72.)

A Truce

Wash it away, love,
let it all go,
depressions, guilts,
the tears and my sullen jealousy.
Let the sea take it
like mothering flesh
out to the long arm
of the bay's curve.
And we sit
heaped together
clinging to your image
like deserted children,
watching the frog-kick through
the turning wave,
green glass goblin,
wet glass.
And there you are again
out on the other side,
a seal slick on the rocking sea,
a swimming thing pointed birdwise to the sky.
I collect us together,
baby straddled on hip,
and the girls together.
And we walk to the opposite end of the beach,
we'll watch the fishing boats come in,

collect shells and rescue stranded starfish,
and when you turn back
we won't be there
until you look for us.
And the hills sprawl like soft suede animals,
and the sea smoothes the sand's edge.

Neighbours

Last to bed in a sleeping house
I strip
rubbing a tired body,
look up and see
a face blurred by dark
leant against the opposite window.
We stare
till I pick up my nightdress
and pad to the bathroom
catching a glimpse
of his wife's shadow
hunched against the light of the door.
Next morning she sings
black-haired and beautiful,
cleaning out the cupboards on the balcony,
a smell of rich cooking and coffee
and a row of socks hung out on the line.

Later, returning from the shops,
he catches me up at the door
and we come up in the lift together.
In careful English
he asks me questions
while his eyes move over my tight dress.
Only once
does he look me in the face
and I see his eyes are yellow as a cat's.

At the beach - a sequence

- 1 Face down in the sand
the sun's weight heavy
like the palm of a hand
hard in the shallows of my back
keeps me here
helpless as a beached turtle
eyes snapping after the knife.
Turtles die slowly
throbbing out their blood,
emerald and sweat
in long shadow.
I flip out a feeble wrist
like a failing pulse
for my calm shell,
the sand kneads back
my breasts to bone
and behind my head
the sea menaces
roaring like a pride of lions.
The wind swaggers past
kicking the sandwich papers,
hauls down the cliffs
with ropes of sand
and beyond that
nowhere to rise or walk,
a mist of blown sand
over a lake of sand
lapping the knees
of stone-blind mountains.
- 2 Smoking a cigarette
your eyes claim horizons
from your own acid burrow
of despair;

words are unthinkable,
only the wrists free
scooping the sand
basalt and crystal
quartz for a pale princess;
splintered like sugar
a cockle-shell
black and mother-of-pearl
spirals down into dark.
If you can struggle through
that smooth cold corridor of quiet
the curved gate into infinity
it is a refuge.
I poke it with a feather,
ebb towards flow
like a continuous cavalry-charge,
snap my head round
counting the children
and see for one stopped split-second
my little son
arms raised like an exorcising priest
challenge a monstrous wave
reared like a stallion
above his wet skull.
Jesus! It crashes down
falls fawning round his feet
swilling him harmlessly
like a plastic duck
into the soapy shallows.

- 3 Behind my head
the sea menaces,
roars up and down
like caged beasts,
you cannot turn it off,
it bays distraction.
From the beach-transistors

a variety of programmes
 for each ear
 and here we are
 lolling like a colony
 of basking seals,
 our flesh and bathing-suits
 stretched out for public show,
 a circus act with the audience
 performing,
 lovers hammocked in the sand
 and the sun adorers holding in
 their stomachs,
 us having a good time
 at the beach,
 and still that dammed sea
 roaring up and down.

4 Nowhere to go
 I stare out
 from cool shadow
 into a glare
 of wind-smooth sand
 like a lake
 of cold milk chocolate
 lapping the feet
 of bald mountains
 blurred behind noon
 sun-steam and blue haze.
 Distanced you watch
 the horizon, smoking,
 name me colours to
 paint mountains with
 Amethyst Amarantine
 Periwinkle Plum
 Violet
 Lilac

Lapis Lazuli
Lavender
Indigo Sapphire
Heliotrope and Mauve
Rose Madder
where iron strikes
from the rock,
changes as you approach
as the reality of a face
changes or contracts
when you stare hard at it
nose to nose
in a mirror.
The mountains
are stone-blind.

Strange landfalls - a sequence

- 1 Honey bitter honey
charged with sweet days,
distilled
the comb blackens
wax crumbling,
sugary decay
staining my mouth.

- 2 Three bitter women
carping at my neck
stretch out for my hands
cup upon palm,
and you give me
only your cold quarrels
to sustain me,
your spoiled sugar
to haul away.

3 I need some time
to sit by myself,
time to think in
to listen to the slow ticking
of clocks
the rustle of sheets
and quiet breathing of children
to pace the lamplit passage
and lean my cheek against
the cold wall
time to measure my words,
waiting to float free again.

4 Love has no complexion
to suit you
if you are beggared of it.

5 How to deal with it
to hold and nourish it,
to pass on our truths?
How to say we are all concerned
with the same essential needs?

We cry in our own dark,
make our strange landfalls,
but then how to make maps?

Child, I leave my thumb-print mark
on your forehead's centre.
How you read it
shall be your own prophecy,
tomorrow my yesterdays,
daughter always
searching for a lost mother.

Ena Hollis

THE JADE FLUTE

After the snow finally melted I
found a jade flute sealed
securely in damp brown leaves.
Inside the larger end lay
the skull of a small rodent—field mouse
or shrew; it fit loosely now, but
the troublesome flesh would have been too
much.

Out on the bright lake, Louise
drifted in her white boat, eyes sharp
and glassy as the water's surface, hands
thin and pale, dropping pieces of coarse bread
all around her in ineffective alchemy.
Crunching the skull into the soft soil
with my boot heel, I held the cold wet stone
to warm lips and blew a single
glacial note to her, so far away,
so radiantly and securely dead.

David Ripper

CARTS

Late in the afternoon, with rain pounding
so hard it bounced in a white mist
from empty streets and windshield wipers
hiccupped desperately, I stopped to
pick up things for supper.

That supermarket,
solicitous with speakered music, its aisles
unpeopled, freezers humming; the avocados
glossy; the spices ranged and labeled;
the olives, wise-eyed, waiting—no hand
but mine to reach for them—

Except at the farthest aisle, a shopping cart
with a Hindu wheeling (a student-visa
look about him) his shoulders hunched for
pushing; in the cart four small boys standing,
their stomachs bellied in exuberance, to rush
among the rows of soups, the towers of bread,
the coffee tins, the bastions of paper towels.

Behind, with a second cart, a mother-figure
in bright pink pants and gilded sandals,
hair in a ponytail, exotic as a dancing girl
carved on a temple beam—her plump hand
filled with bargain coupons—doe-eyed
Amid the discount-stamp abundance.

I remember behind the museum in Delhi,
where workmen had left it to be cleaned,
a car of the Juggernaut from ancient Puri,
its sixteen wheels still notched with pebbles,
its sides worn to the grained wood, robbed
of its jewels and hammered gold. Only the
chiseled shapes of gods and garlands showed
Around the wide-lipped upper rim.

I remember light fading in Indian sky,
the dark museum windows; my fingers
seeking
hand-holds; my feet slipping, sliding;
my body wriggling by elbow push and knee
shove
upward to lean exhausted over the car's
high rail,
Gulping the air while parrots cried in darkening
trees.

I remember standing where the god once stood
in the chariot-curve to see the people
hurl themselves beneath his moving wheels;
I remember watching stars come clear in
the sky
and my heart pounding like rain rising
To whiteness against some hard-packed ground.

Frances Hall

DRIVING HOME

You say,
"Why not in the car?"

Married for ten years.
I look for a grin
but you're serious.

I turn off
on a dirt road,
go a ways
and douse the lights.
The moon's
unnaturally low
and large and bright.
Old teenagers,
we climb, badly,
into the back seat.

The heater hums
as we struggle.

An elbow cracks the glass,
a knob impales a back.

"Might as well try
to dance in a sack."

You start to giggle;

I get ready
to accelerate.

The seat springs twang
as if we'd hit
the roughest road.

It's all uncomfortable
and good.

Back up front,
engine running,
I switch on the lights.
In the dark, wooded distance,
two small eyes,
close to the ground,
glow white.

"We've been watched,"
you say, and laugh.

*And the muskrat goes home
to his children, and says,
It was a strange, rocking car
under the moon
going nowhere, and far.*

At the junction,
the sign warns, "Yield."
It's late enough
and I'm tired enough
not to.

As I turn onto the main road,
you're asleep on my shoulder
and the winter's first flakes
dance on the windshield.

TWO POEMS

Smelt Fishing at Black Brook

The game was smelt—if smelt can be called
game.

They were our purpose and they came in
schools

(black shimmer under lanternlight through wet)
into the midnight crystal of the brook.

Out dipnets at the ends of slim fir poles
brought them to squirming silver on the bank.

But the crowd at the brook's mouth was too
much

a human crowd. No fun that way: greed is
purely itself when greased by a fat curse,
a net lunge past a net. Threading through
brush,

each carrying a lantern, pail, and net,
my father and I searched for brook bends where
the smelt were less, the humans nicely less.

At thrust or trail, the net poles tangled with
a whipping alder world. On a swamp's lip,
half-plunged toward lantern burst and leafy
dark,

I caught my balance over the spiking stump
my booted foot had struck and toppled wide.
Poised (half-poised) in a half-poised swing of
light,

I saw a gleam—fishlike but never fish.

Deep in a cave of blackmeal tree-flesh rot,
two salamanders squirmed away from light
and the hard blow that knocked their roof awry.

My Coleman lantern hissed, a crazy sun.

I had not met such midnight sprites before.
With joy I picked their odd odd beings up
and pouched their old perfections in my coat.
And drenched them down to keep them happy
there.

I spent the rest of the night guarding them:
my father grew unhappy with my net
while I learned more than how small fishes die.

**From One of Roethke's Notebooks and My Head
(For Louise King)**

If it burns long enough, straw melts hard stone.
That's Roethke's thought. I steal it for this
verse
to celebrate the man, not straw or stone
burning or melted.

I once learned a thought
much like his thought while I was splitting logs
in snowy woods, a small boy in New Hampshire
whose iron wedges bounced from frozen elm:

"Enough light taps drive Hell a country mile,"
my uncle said, "and if the hard grain curls
three times around inside itself, enough
soft blows will open it to let it burn
inside the singing stove."

A poem's thought
opens toward song, given enough light strokes
while it takes form along the spectral lines.

John Bennett

BOOKS IN BRIEF

It's getting to be difficult to draw the line between a magazine and a book, with some so-called "little magazines" running over 600 pages. I have in front of me a stack of review copies from commercial publishers, many of them thin in all senses, though priced as high as ten cents a page. I have chosen to turn from them to review a volume—a "magazine"—that surpasses them all for real power and real value. It packs over 200 pages solid for only \$2.50. This is issue 30/31 of **CHELSEA** (P.O. Box 242, Old Chelsea Station, N.Y. 10011). In all this issue there is to my mind only one lapse (nine pages of embarrassing prose, nearly invisible among the glories that surround it). Here are a Greek group, with Yannis Ritsos' marvelous "Romiosini" at the heart; four poems from the Eskimo, followed by nine sections from John Fowler's related "The Book of Fishes"; poems in tribute to Stephen Mooney by William Stafford, Frank Steele, Sonia Raiziss, and David Ignatow, and an unforgettable memoir by Robert Bly; two of Merwin's most eloquent fables, knives to the bone, on "com-

municating"; more; more; more. This magazine is really *edited*. A poem or story is at home among family and friends: a group of poems about fathers, for example; a surrealist poem curled up to a surrealist story. Each work, perfect in itself, gives off a light to read its neighbors by. Perhaps only another editor can appreciate what goes into putting out a volume like this, but any reader of contemporary poetry can appreciate the richness and significance of the result.

THE ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE: A THEORY OF POETRY. *Harold Bloom. Oxford. \$5.95.*

It is a great help in reading this intense little book to be familiar with Bloom's *Yeats*. Otherwise one might be put off by the quotations on the dust jacket ("Criticism is the art of knowing the hidden roads that go from poem to poem"), or by Bloom's cast of characters (ephebe, Idiot Questioner, Covering Cherub), or, finally, by the special vocabulary Bloom has adopted for his six "Revisionary Ratios" which are the necessary expression of his original critical theory. But if you approach this book with the cranky but brilliant *Yeats* in mind and bring along also some knowledge of Blake and Emerson and Stevens and—above all—Shelley, then you are in for an exhilarating clamber over the rocks of a strenuous new trail, with a warm and witty pioneer guide.

I decided to take Bloom along as a guide through A. R. Ammons, **COLLECTED POEMS: 1951-1971** (*Norton. \$12.50* and worth every penny). This seemed fair, since Bloom is a profound admirer of Ammons, and the poems are deeply rooted in the traditions of English and American romanticism. Before reading Bloom, I had already romped through the Ammons volume, marking those poems that hit me with a wallop. After reading Bloom, I returned to the poems I'd marked to enquire whether they

seemed to illustrate Bloom's "Revisionary Ratios." It became a game—very entertaining—to guess just which poems by the poet's precursors provided the ground for the present poem. I was astonished at how often I felt confident of my guess, and I produced a tidy list of Ammons poems to illustrate (if I guessed right) each of Bloom's six ratios. The next step, I decided, would be either a nifty grad-school term paper or an all-night conversation in front of the fire (preferably a beach fire) with Mr. Bloom and Mr. Ammons, so that I could test my hunches. Ammons' wonderful "Coon Song," for example, seems at first glance a *clinamen*, or swerve from Eliot and Stevens, but is it, really, a "poetic misreading" of the precursors? I'm not sure. "Body Politic" refers to Frost, and I think I read Frost differently from Ammons. Does that justify my calling that poem a *clinamen* from "Come In," or from the body of Frost's work? I'm not sure. "Corson's Inlet" has the suggestive line "swerves of action," and it seems to swerve, consciously, from Emerson and others. But does it involve misreading of Emerson? I'm not sure. Perhaps the answer is in Ammons' evocative "Precursors," with its ending:

the oldest things freshest,
most in need of being told.

I took great pleasure in reading Bloom and Ammons together, and I hope to return to them together frequently. But finally I decided that however enriching and illuminating and finally sound Bloom's approach is, it still leaves the greatest power and delight of Ammons' poetry virtually untouched. There is richness in it to exhaust any number of critical theories. Those who know Ammons only from anthology pieces should get the **COLLECTED POEMS** and start to get acquainted with the opus of a truly "strong poet," one of the major poets of the English language.

TAKING UP THE SERPENT. *Jerald Bullis.*
Ithaca House. \$2.95 paper.

When I first discovered "Woodland Interior" in *Epoch* last year, I ran around reading it to everyone who would listen. This is *it*. This is what poetry can and ultimately must do: transform the reader's consciousness through the sheer power of the imagination. For this poem and for several others in this excellent first volume I predict a long life and a wide audience, as they move into the anthologies.

Of course a penetrating imagination isn't enough. The poet also needs meticulous honesty of observation (which Bullis gloriously has), a good ear (it's pure self-indulgence to read these poems aloud), and a command of the language. In this last, the poet is still uneven. It seems ungrateful to complain of too much richness, but there are excesses in some poems. Flapping tags labeled *Hopkins*, *Thomas*, *Whitman*, *Roethke* distract me from the real Bullispoem underneath. Sticktogether compounds proliferate infectiously: *vinegar-laced*, *quieteerie*, *bleachboned*. Some I wouldn't part with ("Watertrickle underpurling sucklepurl"). Although I appreciate the effort to force the language to express new perceptions ("Breezewaft richened by onion"), yet I feel distracted by having noticed the effort. The best images seem to come as naturally as the event: "And the hawk plays out the thermals, fletching the dawn with its cry."

I hope Jerry Bullis will continue to write poems in which the reader experiences the imaginative leap, unselfconsciously. I hope he will come to trust his material more, until he feels no need to *tell* his reader what it means. I hope he will continue to ask the good questions (in "Violence": "What is/ The job for poetry/ In

this season"). And I look forward to the new and true and totally unpredictable answers emerging from such poems as "The Night Calling" and "A Place Where It's Cold."

WINDOWS AND STONES. *Tomas Tranströmer*, trans. by *May Swenson*, with *Leif Sjöberg*. *University of Pittsburg*, An International Poetry Forum Selection. Cloth \$5.95; paper \$2.95.

This is an important volume. The poems are intensely dramatic, in the sense that they are dynamically acting out in their constantly shifting images the actual function of a penetrating mind. To quote a passage is to impose an artificial stasis on the process of the poem, even when the subject of the poem is transfixed, as in the already famous three-part poem "In the Clear," which concludes:

The sun blazes. The jet plane glides at low
altitude
and casts a shadow in the shape of a big
cross

that rushes over the ground.

A man hunches in a field and digs.

The shadow comes.

For a fraction of a second he is in the
middle of the cross.

I have seen the cross hanging in cool
church vaultings—

sometimes it's like an instantaneous
photograph

of something in rapid motion.

The translations inspire confidence. May Swenson's first language was Swedish, and Tranströmer has approved the final versions. Both she and her academic collaborator Lief Sjöberg contribute valuable introductory essays.

SHAKING THE PUMPKIN: TRADITIONAL POETRY OF THE INDIAN NORTH AMERICAS, edited with commentaries by *Jerome Rothenberg*. Doubleday. \$3.95 paper; \$8.95 hardbound.

"Unlike *Technicians of the Sacred* this gathering is almost completely a poet's book," says Rothenberg. This means that in addition to "total translations" like Dennis Tedlock's rendering of all the sounds and repetitions of the original Zuni in the fascinating "The Boy and the Deer," so that the reader gets some idea of the pitch, the silences, the rhythms, and even the audience interruptions, we have also a great many "translations" that are really poetic reworkings of transcriptions by earlier scholars. There are purists who will object to calling these translations, but they are interesting and valuable for several reasons. For one thing, they are powerful testimony to the absorption of important contemporary poets in the poetic arts of the native Americans. Merwin's work with the Plains Indian texts of Lowie and Edward Field's renditions of Rasmussen's Eskimo texts are good examples. This makes **SHAKING THE PUMPKIN**, like *Technicians of the Sacred*, a significant document of today's poetry. Furthermore, because these versions are the work of poets, they are in themselves memorable poems, whatever their relation to the originals. And further, this volume does succeed, as far as I can tell, in Rothenberg's ambition to "mark the real emergence of Indian poetry into the consciousness of the non-Indian world." Like its predecessor it is a big handsome book, involving the imagination of the reader on many levels, through many senses, without end.