

**THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL**  
**Volume 24 - Number 2 Winter 1973 - 74**

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*Cover Design:* PAULA PERLIS

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## LE SQUARE DU VERT GALANT

Descending the stone steps of the Pont Neuf  
to the bushy little park in the Seine  
between the opposing flanks of Paris  
is like going down to the sweet sex itself  
of the Queen of Europe.

However, it's no use. I can't have her.

She moves only among Parisians,  
the lucky ones, the citoyens,  
the lovers, strollers, fishermen  
who love Lutetia and are of her.

As for me, I make my pilgrimages,  
my devotions to this puissant triangle,  
having only once come close to bliss  
and that was when a Frenchman from the south  
approached me at the point, saying,

"Pardon, Monsieur, mais c'est la Seine?"

and in a dazzle of belonging I replied,

"Ah, oui, c'est la Seine,  
c'est la Seine, Monsieur!"

George Bogin

**THE COLONIZATION OF CANADA  
A FILMPOEM IN TWELVE PARTS**

*"I did not see a cartload of good earth. To be short, I believe that this was the land God allotted to Cain."* — Jacques Cartier (1534)

1.

Begin with Quebec.  
Iroquois land, Iroquois name: kebec,  
a narrowing of waters. A ship.  
French ship heaving up  
out from under the ice-sheeted  
St. Lawrence. ENTER PROTAGANIST PACING.  
Jacques Cartier thinking hot & heavy  
about his future. Never mind now.  
It's November 1535.

O l'homme pauvre. Fat, forty-three,  
brown-cloaked & hawk-billed,  
entrusted with the treasury  
of the bastard King Francis.  
Cartier, burdened with the vision

of the pirate & the pilgrim, fearing  
what those critics of his  
are writing about back home.

Mamma, Mamma, you should see  
your only son . . .

2.

Thick wind ripping through the whitewashed  
hall.

In the back of the boat,  
a hundred & fifty sailors  
sit shivering & wind-torn  
around harsh red coals.

Each the others true source of heat.

Layers of rumsmoke hover  
in the air and burn through the lungs.

Sailors sucking on mahogany pipes      CLOSE-UP  
One man gags on his solid snot.

On the quarterdeck,  
it's bizniz as usual. Jerkinoff,  
gambling for uncertain gain, the boys  
bid & bet against the cold. Bones pop  
like snow-stiffened twigs.  
Time unshyly stacking the cards.

3.

White, white. The continent  
cleanses itself of conscience.  
Scurvy chooses sides  
and fifty French seamen  
go down for the count.

STILL PHOTO

Cartier on deck  
contemplating French cuisine

like a golden hood-ornament  
on a crushed limousine.

Twice he spits through the rails,  
lifts a fist, curses the ghostgrey sky,  
He plucks an icehair from his beard,  
wipes his mouth and grins.

From beneath its heavy disguise  
the fertile land chides him, laughing,  
calling, "Jacques, you're impotent & crude."  
Jacques sloppily pulls down his pants.  
ZOOM IN ON KNEES.

#### 4.

                  Drifts climb as high  
as the narrow slits  
in the walls where the sentries stand  
all day on guard against  
Cartier's paranoiac visions.  
The snow transforms the trees  
into slim white wigwams  
when it does not  
bank them over & hide them.

#### 5.

AERIAL VIEW  
Damagaya & Taignoagny, oldest sons  
of the chief, singing  
& dancing, copper-skinned  
in the reflection of fire.  
The Iroquois know the snow  
is their brother and Cartier a bother.  
Cassee Kouee! Go Away!  
Whiskey-lipped Cartier,  
under the caravel, caresses

4 protruding black-muzzled guns.  
 He whistles and watches the ritual.  
 He hums and hallucinates an enemy.

6.

FOCUS IN ON

The first night of the full red moon.  
 Hale & healthy, the captain walking  
 on the snowbanked surface  
 of the river. Meets Taignoagny.

C: My men are dying with disease

T: My people live under the weather forever

C: I mean scurvy

T: I know what you mean. Listen  
 to me, the bark & leaves  
 of the white spruce tree  
 when mixed & boiled in kettles  
 is sure to cure your boys.

Cartier takes the secret sans thanks.

On May 3, 1536

a beggars banquet

(one of Cartier's new tricks)

is to be held on the Grande Hermine.

Donnacona, the old chief, & 10 friends  
 will attend to celebrate

the cessation of scurvy.

Meanwhile: The Spring-sprung ice,  
 churning & roaring down the great river,  
 dissolves like tiny chunks  
 of sugar in a warm cup of hemlock.  
 Bottoms Up!

The mouth of the river  
 opens wide for escape; the anchor  
 sucks back into the ship like a tongue.

7.

CROWD SCENE. AUDIO: WHOOPING  
& TINKLING GLASS

The Iroquois come aboard  
bringing friendship & a hoarde of presents.  
The sun sinking slow like an island.

Cartier in a white suit,  
smoothskinned, sabre at side,  
smiling ear-to-fat-ear.  
Embracing Donnocona, sober & sincere.

8.

After hors d'oeuvres, canard & muscatel,  
the French bring out the chains.

9.

PORTRAIT SHOT

A shriveled fetus  
in the belly of the ship,  
the old Iroquois, tied hand-to-foot  
by ropes & steel links.

Cartier coming down to take a look.

FLASHBACK. BLACK AND WHITE

The medicine men, 3 dusty magicians  
in dog skins, froth at the mouth  
& fill the woods with loud incantations.

The horns on their heads  
loom up flat against the sky.

FADE BACK TO THE SHIP

D: The cruel god Cudragny declared  
directly to them that the white man  
will die if you harm me

C: Your god Cudragny is a fool & a noodle  
The God to Whom all white men pray  
promises me safety

## 10.

Cartier marching to the village  
with 88 madmen armed-to-the-teeth  
11 helpless hostages  
stones shackled to their feet  
& a lie on the lips of his smile.

Damagaya & Taignoagny, loyal sons  
of their father & tribe, clench  
their fists & wade into the river.  
The water tasting like cheap cologne,  
the Iroquois have no choice.  
They accept the Frenchmans' bribe.

## NOON SHADOWS &amp; WHISPERS

Gold goes first,  
the diamonds au suivant,  
the silver, the stones that the sailors  
have never seen. All food  
for King Francis' royally fat ego.

On the shore of the St. Lawrence,  
Cartier & the others are erecting  
a 30 foot monument.

## 11.

On the crossbeam is a shield  
engraved with the words:  
VIVE LE ROY DE FRANCE

Cartier stands now with palms  
in his pockets, saluting, almost sad.  
The fleur-de-lis in his eyes is alive.  
Across a continent pushing outward,  
reaching and spreading

## 12.

RUN THE WHOLE POEM BACKWARDS

**Thom Swiss**



**CABIN ON PORCUPINE RIVER**

bucketing the rapids  
crawling the mountains  
hacking their way  
branch by branch, almost  
three thousand miles, through the forests

the two prospectors, partners

    frozen rock-solid  
    beside a stew kettle dangling  
    over a long-dead fire  
    (the kettle contains  
    a pair of moccasins, partly-cooked,  
    embedded in a cake of ice)

have held these attitudes  
through the slow ooze & drip  
three-quarters of a century

What will they do  
in some cryonic future  
at the moment of thaw  
on the day of judgment?

will all that pent-up hunger  
drive them to the steaming stew  
or to the gold pan  
the rough caress of gravel  
the bright cold river's treasure?

moment by moment  
imperceptibly  
a decision is forming  
a decision is forming  
in the slow glaciers of their consciousness

**Mike Doyle**

**THE SKIN AND ALL**

**Songs for the Cruellest Months**

**March**

I watch you in sleep  
to soothsay the slightest tick  
of the face that someone else  
is wearing now

cuneiform writes itself  
in the corner of your eye  
and then wears smooth

the windows are closed  
on the passage of birds

how can I keep  
appointed hours or days  
when you do not decree  
the calandar of your heart

how can I fix  
the movable feast?

**April**

I thought to flay you  
wear you over my scars  
as if that outer skin  
could make me new

I wore you nights  
and daily took my pride  
for walks encased  
in the sense of you

now you leave me  
stripped my own flesh  
stinking from long  
enclosure

my skin tender  
and cells unused  
to even the touch  
of light.

### **May**

Outside they bear  
the victim on their shoulders  
up to the place of knives  
the carving of hearts  
and you by the window  
stare as if you know  
which one of us sits  
astride the beam  
his oiled locks shorn

I hear the mockers  
prancing behind  
their soft canes  
laid in jest across  
each stranger's neck  
and the tooting  
of rank horns rude  
with hints of rutting nights

You turn with a raised hand  
high in shadow  
which one are you  
priest or reveler?

### June

This morning you sent  
the small girl with flowers  
the one with the withered arm  
she stood in the light  
wrinkling in from sea  
eyes dumb with the shade  
of my house and would not enter  
but scattered cut heads  
at my feet and ran  
her wan voice spreading once  
like wind Omen I cried  
and black wings beat  
the wall where I crouched  
unable to cross your gift  
or face the sea-burned air.

### July

In a green bowl  
you bring some gift  
your face beyond it  
does not speak  
your arms stretch  
and the gait of your feet  
has dignity of stone

In a green bowl  
I have not seen before  
in your house or mine

by bedside or table  
there is neither light  
nor the weight of sound  
and your hands do not tremble

I walk to your stance  
cruel hieroglyph  
your eyes the milk of stars  
your lips the bent moon's sickle  
harvesting darkness

In a green bowl  
you bring the black sun's mirror  
my own lost blood.

### **August**

The first child's heart  
beat weakly but  
the mountain was refreshed

we started with  
the highest peak  
and worked down slowly

slicing through gay feathers  
the toils of preparation  
and when they wept

we laughed at the thought  
of rain of rain  
of rain

they have no thoughts  
are too young and not  
human yet

and distantly  
growing louder as we came  
we could hear

their mothers on the wheel  
churned by the loving  
knives.

### **September**

You were tied to that stone  
and then we came  
four of us one  
from each direction  
and how could you cover  
all the points  
compass gone wild  
the lodestone in each of us  
making a hack  
of ordinals  
at your flesh

you fell we dipped  
our hands to you  
each in his cut  
and smeared our faces  
blessed in the way  
assured of the new sun's  
rising.

### **October**

This was the prince of dawn  
who had his fill all year  
this was the wild grain's king  
whose flesh was rubbed with oil

my body tumbling to you  
step by step  
whose heart is strung above  
  
is yours now limb  
by limb and you  
who brought the dainty slice  
the peeled grape kneel  
to the fattened meat  
and toast the coming rain  
  
tomorrow I'll name you queen.

### **November**

We were on our way  
to pick reeds why  
had no one told you  
to stay home or at least  
out of sight but  
you stood by the wayside  
your body swaying  
to our flutes  
your pale face full  
of the finger stops  
and when we threw you  
whistling in your ears  
and forced the music  
home you still believed  
there was some holy  
purpose to such  
groveling in earth.

**December**

As I took  
the last stair  
my flutes of the year  
broken one by one  
and their tunes spilled  
behind me      the nightrides  
when our hips plunged  
and you were like  
twenty maidens each  
in her new flesh untouched  
whose small cries were birds  
netted at last  
I turned to the landing  
dark and stretched  
to the bed where  
one by one your presences  
departed  
wind through holes  
and only the fierce  
priest of the head  
left to grope  
for the cringing heart.

**January**

We found you tall enough  
root woman      scatterloam  
whose arms were for light  
and cut you down  
to emblematic size  
now that we've stood you  
long in the courtyard



weathering in our eyes  
we lower you gently  
to tie the ribbons  
over your knots

you decorate  
our ceremonies  
stand upright  
still as the center  
we touch  
but never tame.

### **February**

After you left  
I spread sand  
on the doorstep  
then turned my back  
to sit and wait

twelve days I have dozed  
and chased my dreams  
and still there is  
no footprint.

**T. Alan Broughton**

**TWO POEMS****Dry-Wall**

Those big, buoyant slabs that come taped  
back-to-back look light until you edge  
your shoulder under them.  
That weight's so dead, every wobble  
in it makes you weak. Watch out  
when boosting it. If you flop its grey  
belly up too fast, its skin pops  
along this wrinkled fault, the whole  
bowed sandwich buckles in the middle.  
You have to handle it like crockery.  
The stuff chips off, it's all make-up.  
Each sheet's a mummy made of chalk  
compressed and caked between its bandages.  
The stuff is dead. It won't tense up  
like wood against a nail. Good wood  
clenches steel. Nails just soar through  
sheet-rock as through air, seeking  
strength and sap somewhere behind.  
The only virtue that it has, it's cheap  
and you can cover up mistakes with it—  
the edges of those studs you splintered,  
those nails whose necks you broke,  
then crucified in rage. I always feel  
ashamed when using it. Everything you do  
is a cover-up. You tape the joints,  
smooth make-up on the tape, then plaster  
over it. I've seen more houses done  
like that—flues, joists, posts, even  
the whiskery grain of rough-cut beams  
boxed in—as though whoever lived there

thought he could blot out the fact  
that warmth and water ran inside his walls,  
as though by putting enough make-up on  
you could deny the fact that we have bones  
that break or that the lines deepening  
in your face are who you are.

### **Zeno's Paradox**

That absence of imagination sprang  
from fear which for years let any man  
who swung an ax do the impossible—  
clobber the log he aimed at every time.  
Even though his ax-head had always  
half the distance to the log to go,  
it would negotiate this space,  
manage somehow to flatten the packed  
differentials that remained. It was  
a wonder a body could walk across  
his room and touch the wall when,  
logically, a moving arrow didn't move  
at all. But because we're a little  
braver than Zeno was, we now know why:  
we can face infinity.

When I start out upon this sunlit  
floor to cross my room, I'll never  
fail. With each stride I take  
I perform a commonplace—straddle  
the infinite—I cross the infinite  
to reach the kitchen wall.

**Jonathan Holden**

**TWO POEMS****Rhododendrons**

The thick mosque  
of rhododendrons  
shields the house,  
bends over us  
with gaping pink blossoms  
and leaves lacquered green as wet slate;  
twisted, curdled branches  
overhang us,  
yearning and bending in arcs  
making small caverns with the ground  
where in the dark  
a child, courteous  
and unassuming as that moment before dawn  
when the sky is merely there,  
a still greyish plate of unbeamed light;  
this child is taken by another  
to the dark spots  
beneath rhododendron arcs  
where someone questions  
and questions  
and watches her eyes.  
The lights from the living-room

burn my eyes  
and my throat is pinched  
as the sides of an hourglass  
when I shake my head no,  
knowing and not knowing  
what can happen in those curving, dark spaces  
where the pollen from a bulbous  
inner blossom  
is thick as talcum  
and the leaves with their gummy leaf-veins  
reach out and downward,

caressing furls within furls.  
From behind a lighted window  
I watch this drama of the high-arched  
twisting greens,  
heavy with overgrowth of blossom  
as if the house-high bush  
were yearly seized  
by a shuddering wish  
to gulp back all its juices  
feeding those monstrous flowers,  
like choice geese,  
to make them fat.

So now they dangle,  
red and pink and lustful,  
right beyond my window  
whose cool glass  
only  
separates me  
from this annual mania  
when the sap runs high  
in the dipping, heated blooms.

### Going Home

To drive  
down the long River Road  
is to see  
well back, a white house,  
shuttered and pillared and huge,  
spread its glossy lawn  
like parsley butter all around;

or a gray stone house,  
turreted like a church,  
gaze with slotted windows  
over fields green and vacant  
as the sea;

and always the horses  
fishing and snuffling around,  
muff-diving in the grass,  
in fields slit by  
nameless private drives.

At home, at last,  
the air smells of honeysuckle  
and horse; the collie jumps me  
until I throw my arms around her neck,  
dig fingers into her thick ruff,  
and croon

compliments into her twitchy  
cups of ears —  
such a good dog, so lovely  
to see her — and Sam the cat  
shifts his weight, purrs,  
and pulls a burr from his tail.

Dinner is (always) at 8:30,  
but Daddy makes Old-fashioned at seven;  
my sister's horse, a roan,  
has had a nervous breakdown:  
he walked right into trees,  
cut his forehead up, and shook and  
fell in his stall;  
it seems though

he's merely too-well schooled,  
so the vet recommends  
emotional outlets;  
now he can be ridden again  
within shouting distance of someone else.

**Evan Zimroth**

**THE WATERS****i. The Flood: An Overture**

Let there be rain.

It fell all day and night,  
dripping even into our dreams.  
You woke up with the thunder,  
frightened.

Let there be rain,  
hard hail, peachstones on the driveway,  
breaking windshields and glasses,  
tearing down houses. Swell, rivers,  
glut yourselves with blood;  
spill eels in doorways  
while townspeople sleep.

Rain

bring them fear  
to bring them together.

Rivers

wash through their streets,  
run blind in their houses;  
let them know terrors  
as never before.

Lakes, rivers, springs and streams,  
come hunting the streets.

Well-water, erupt, bury basements,  
strangle cellar-holes.

This is the flood,

come in fire of lightning  
to burn. No, if not that,  
then simply the waters, rising.



The night of the flood  
 is pregnant with waiting  
 for darkness. Tear it open  
 like a bedsheet or blanket.  
 Don't hide its swollen belly.  
 The waters flow in it like blood,  
 thick gush of arteries,  
 thin whine of veins. Bring salt  
 for the wounds. Bring rags,  
 boiling water and scissors.  
 Something is about to be born.

ii. **Taiwan:** *The Descent*

Breathing, boiling springs  
 stream hot down the mountains.  
 We came to the plain of Hwalien  
 and the ocean.  
 The bananas were in bloom  
 and the tea heavy with leaves.  
 But the guards closed the road,  
 so we returned on the East-West highway.  
 Brimstone water,  
 mountains weep  
 where men blast roads.  
 We wait above Toroko Gorge  
 where waters out of the rock  
 cut a gash in the pumice.  
 The Bernardines have gardens there,  
 and a rope bridge leads  
 to the Buddhist shrine.  
 Hell-water,

forced release  
from ferrous-nickel core  
here, at ten thousand feet.

    This is prime water, never rain—  
    how old we seem . . .

    Here, too, the Bernardines  
    and their dogs; the silent Buddhists  
    are wind playing between mountains.  
    A storm gathers down on the coastal  
    plain,

    stretches twelve thousand miles home  
    to the heart.

    Men come back here to Toroko.

These tears  
tear the land  
down to the gray bones  
of the mountains.

    We descend to Hwalien  
    when the road is open.  
    After the mountains,  
    the bananas bloom gummy, maudlin reds  
    and the tea sick-heavy,  
    thick and brown. So soon  
    we tire of life again.

### iii. **Flight Homeward:** *Two Women*

Taipei International,  
Tokyo, San Francisco—  
at thirty-five thousand feet  
it's all the same. Five meals  
in twelve hours. Light

and dark and light  
and dark again. I sleep  
the spastic sleep of a man  
in time's centrifuge. The geisha  
unfolds a blanket,  
a light kiss on the cheek.  
At last I sleep.

There are two women.  
The first is my wife.  
The other,  
a friend who carries  
my son or my daughter  
inside her. She will not abort.

I wake up  
over Northeast America.  
Who will come to meet  
this blank side of myself?  
It is 3 AM in my pulse.

**iv. Excavation: *Repair***

Bring the witch hazel switch,  
cut in a fork. Trust me.  
The dry land can bubble,  
can bleed and feed itself.  
You have to trust, and grasp  
the switch in your fists.

Apple or plum, swift-running fruitwoods  
are good, but this astringent shrub  
draws the water, shrivels

matters that do not matter. Cut me  
my wand, cut at the crotch  
high up on the shrub where it's supple.  
To bend with the pull,  
give like bamboo—  
this is important. Trust me.

See the rod bend? Here  
there is water, fast-running  
out of your hands in the ground.  
You drained the land;  
here you can dig. I only  
show you the place.

You must dig—  
you can't live in the drought  
of sand and baked clay.  
You must dig. Trust me.

v. *Opening Windows: A Matter of Choice*

I am up all night  
at the table. The teapot  
is boiled sick on the stove.  
Outside is the smell  
of dawn cleaving the river.  
So close.

It is time to open the windows.

All night I have sat here,  
a bare skull debating  
which ghost to walk with.  
The matches are gone, the tobacco

is gone, and the liquor.  
Every excuse is passe.  
Let guilt one way or the other  
be damned.

Here mother  
of my son or my daughter,  
take all my money,  
my boots, my guitar  
and my clothes.  
This is all I can offer.

**vi. Loon River: *Love, the Laughing Child***

Another child is being born.  
And this, she said,  
What's this?  
Blue baboons chatter  
in the trees  
above still pools.

Stop the light and the night;  
pull down the moon.

Here  
    and nowhere else  
    we've come together.  
Laugh like a loon and come,  
    under the water,  
    under the water like eels—  
    fire pools and fountains.  
The night sings like razors.  
Fat-bellied perch  
swim up my thighs.

This sway-bellied night  
bursts with our child of the waters:  
this fierce-toothed child,  
winter rain. Hard and wet child,  
they all call you soft  
who don't know you,  
don't know you come,  
hard and wet,  
stripping off past snows  
of bad drams and regrets.

Floating still rivers  
(below blue baboons whispering  
    this, what's this?),  
sink, catching mud in your toes;  
cut clean to the bank of the river.  
Burn hail, scream rain  
down between bamboo and the bank.  
Come, crazy child,  
sing in the limbs of your parents,  
your mother and I.

**David Lyon**

### A LESSON IN CALLIGRAPHY

*"The bombing pattern of the normal cluster of three B-52s is more than a mile and a half long and half a mile wide . . ."*

New York Times, Dec. 24, 1972

A period signals the pause where the new takes shape.

It drops from the old like a seed into silent soil,  
Like a kiss on the white cheek of sleep.

But here, where your hand was careless on the pen,

The blot has spread and spread until the page  
Is black with the ragged stain.

The stain obliterates the sentence, becomes the sentence.

What have you said? What is there left to say?  
This is beyond comprehension.

The period marks a momentary poise,  
A point of balance. Relax, in the heart and the hand;

Practice, practice control.

**Charles Pratt**

**BLOOD RELICS**

A day I had placed in the world  
returns as if someone had troweled  
backwards into my skull where I turn  
the faucet to cold & freeze  
beside piss blackening the drains  
with flies at the Vic Theater men's room.

A whole field opens down  
My eyes & I am lying here, naked,  
she beside me, bodies tucked  
in sweat, the wind-hot grasses  
tossing about us their small flies  
swarming around us in a tent,  
a shimmering net of death-juice,  
& wind- beats like the flutter of love  
stretching its delicate wing & tentative  
before the final pounding down.

Beside me, the curbstone & evening,  
she turns her eyes, pulling the bones  
behind flesh-masks to ask me  
"What is the ant? Is he my sister?"  
stirring the ant hill with a stick,  
"Does his house have many rooms?"  
Till I tell my daughter, let's grow smaller  
together over his castle, hold our breath  
out of his domain & listen:  
the *shau shau shau* of black troop feet  
shunting eternity in these grains  
down their suck-hole to the dark.

You were a long time dying  
from the child you shrank into



your china doll insides, grandma.  
Now, propped here, you wear that girl  
across your skin you kept alive,  
a violet pall. I'm seventeen,  
My aunts & uncles, toys you squeezed  
or dropped, are at my tight sleeves, swarming.  
Not one cared when your breath quit,  
you had so many years before.  
At twelve you should have been  
my taffy-colored mut, or little cousin,  
Louise, they shut in the state hospital.

Mother, that was the summer  
I began to die.  
Admit I was quiet about it.  
The doctor laughed you took me to.  
Under those eaves I lay  
with hornets at my window  
dreaming the swarming of a list  
you never guessed could drive  
a thirteen year old sick  
from tearing at his body  
till he fell in love  
with death & felt it stinging  
out of himself each night  
growing harder, longer.

The face of the woman clears  
suddenly before my poetry class  
on Emily Dickinson's death fly  
at the mental hospital & says,  
taking the poem into her voice  
as if coming from someplace  
she had walked before,  
"I feel this. This moves me."

I hold your skull to the light,  
the moon, at night walking you,  
daughter, little death kit, I see clear  
through to the other side in the soft  
nuzzling we go to, you & I  
in time to my humming this song:  
till we will lie down with others  
I leave you for your life framing  
the accident I came for, leaving my own.

I cup the water into my hands  
at the faucet of the theater,  
I bathe my eyes, my ears,  
my nose & lips, I anoint my head  
in the holy tongues of memories  
walking backwards out of themselves,  
holding my life against this mirror  
crying like one of the women I call up  
until I shake down to my feet  
dancing the blessing, the blessing.

And leaving memory & this poem  
under my feet, going out the door  
of the Vic, sweat, popcorn, the sunlight  
splicing my eyes with the street of people  
running to take up life again,  
the benediction, one foot at a time.

**Peter Cooley**

**THE GIANT RAT OF SUMATRA**

*"Matilda Briggs was not the name of a young woman, Watson," said Homes in a reminiscent voice. "It was a ship which is associated with the Giant Rat of Sumatra, a story for which the world is not yet prepared."*

Poor Watson, you never met him?  
Befuddled in foggy London  
you wandered the labyrinthine streets.  
Down by the docks you found a violin  
floating in murky waters,  
waters blue-black and bruised by  
too many nights. Later,  
in your stuffy room,  
you prescribed cocaine—  
cocaine for the brain!—  
but your prescriptions were intricate and  
indecisive, like bad philosophy.

Days passed, days and days.  
You were always lonely.  
Medical metaphysician,  
you could never figure anything out.

But Watson, dear Watson,  
all the time, there he was!  
There he still is!  
The leaves part,

they're purple, they rustle.  
The jungle moans with excitement.  
The natives are restless tonight.  
They have drums fiercer than violins,

their heads glisten like horsehair sofas,  
heads on stakes.

Another hour and he'll come out.  
Already the ceremonial fires are lit.

And Watson, he's so much bigger  
than the ship Matilda Briggs.  
His great fangs are taller than masts,  
his tail is a sail heaving him along,  
he walks like twentyfive earthquakes.  
Sumatra bows before him.  
Tomorrow he'll swallow the Thames,  
he'll gobble Big Ben,

Westminster will cower,  
Her Majesty will shudder,  
and then—and then—  
Ah Watson, don't you know him?

He's gray and massive like the fog.  
His eyes gleam like copper kettles.  
His ears are dark, so dark,  
and his tongue so elementary.

**Sandra M. Gilbert**

**THE NEWFOUND LADY**

While my Mother worked  
I was kept by  
a young Seminole woman.  
On quiet mornings  
we would sit in her trailer  
and look out upon  
the grass river, Pa-hay-okee,  
her eyes bright drops  
of green blood.

Once we walked through  
a sugar cane field  
to a cold blue pond  
where strange clouds gathered  
amid sunfish and white flowers.  
Our toes played hide and seek  
dangling in those dark waters.

She made sassafras tea  
and baked wild oranges  
in a small electric oven.  
As she spoke of her Grandfather,  
Billie Whitdeer,  
I listened to cool rain  
blurring the burnt remains of huts  
which lay among the Glades  
like old bruises.  
I grew toward her in silence  
my bones stretching  
to rise past the tide  
of their waters.

One day  
a cloud swallowed the Sun  
like a giant frog  
and moved across the swamp  
into its leaping shadow.

I saw her in a pine grove  
hanging clothes with her fingers  
on the metal clothesline  
strung between two trees,  
when antlers of lightning shook down  
a silver garland around her head,  
burning the roots of her sight,  
her touch, the dust of her feet  
into thinnest echoing air

**Francis Poole**

**WORK IS GOOD FOR YOU**

We spent high school summers stooping  
to paint endless guard rails  
on the county roads.

The beach-bound cars whipped by your thrust-  
out rear;

Up front, the white paint dazzled so  
the bosses warned us to wear shades—  
I did of course, some didn't.

In time I came almost to disregard  
the humming cars,  
though on a two lane highway 60 was  
the rule,  
and there was always the conceived  
indignity,  
plowed into and your ass wrecked,  
bending over with a face in paint.

More things remembered:

Slipping on a bank behind the rails, ridiculous,  
I soaked my hand and arm, watch, ring, my  
shirt and pants, in paint,  
a whitewashed man  
(the hazards of the job—I did my duty).

Simple Dim, who'd played away his life in  
minor leagues,  
swung brushes like a bat (we ducked)  
told dirty jokes, loafed, doubled any  
push-ups,  
managed to perfect his tan,  
and painted with a sheer reluctance,  
to the foreman's frowns  
(who warned us all to "watch it"; I  
would shrink).

One day we watched Dim stand uniquely still,  
a pace into the road,  
and as the cars charged boldly by  
he dignified himself, bent back,  
and thrust his paint brush forward from  
the waist.  
He decorated cars,  
one clean white stripe (the purest art).  
They fired him of course,  
and most were largely pleased—  
the work goes on.  
But I still dazzle at that silly brilliance.  
Dim strides tight  
through life  
Kissing no ass, nor letting tools of death brush  
his.

**James McGowan**