

# THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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**CUCUMBERS**

Little hairs on tiny fruits crowned  
by yellow

                  flowers little  
pimples each  
with one tiny hair on each

little green fruit and a grand  
yellow flower imitating no one sprouting from  
the tip of

                  each tiny fruit and  
the hugest  
brown bee in usually each

yellow flower making moon  
honey and the green

                  stalk covered with  
little lighter green  
hairs for bees to walk bruiseless on

and the leaves are ever so  
dark the color of grown  
                  cucumbers where one  
heavy as the moon has  
dropped

**Sanford Weiss**

**INCIDENT**

The bank foyer is plush. People pass through pulsating gauze curtains and black mirrors, glittering with sundrops. Dazzled, I stop at one of the desks and ask for the use of a phone. "Right over there, Sir", a pleasant girlish voice says, "at the second desk."

I touch white and dark shiny objects, a plant, the keys of an adding machine, the frame of what must be a desk calendar. I hear a

suppressed giggle and the girlish voice whispering, "Hey, Bob

—look at that!" I brace myself, my hand sliding across the desk. "Warm. . . no, cold . . . the *white* one . . . *hot* . . . there you go!" My finger slips off the push buttons. A male voice at my side says, "Dial 9 for outside, Sir. May I help you?"

When we played *Blinde Kuh* in the park, blindfolded,

dizzily spun around, groping for arms, backs, bellies,

still too innocent to try for a budding breast, but already strangely enticed by the different smell of long hair, tottering, clumsily clowning and laughing out of breath, it was fun without fright.

We tore off our handkerchiefs, the world instantly

in place, our balance restored, as we eye-gagged our

victim and teased him into a lamp post.

The hush cold on my skin, I stride towards the exit,

through glittering gauze and lightshafts sharp as

knives, pretending swiftness and sureness as I  
steer  
into the rectangular frame of light and feel the  
door give  
as I push. Air! Noise! The street!

How I used to hate the emerging out of the long  
tunnels  
on the trains that took us to Marienbad every  
summer,  
to grandparents and the two goats I loved. I was  
too proud to hold on to my mother's hand as I  
sat in the  
delicious darkness filled with  
anything-can-happen,  
the blood-curdling cry, the sound of a passionate  
kiss,  
the suicide of the lean black man in the corner  
who looked like a spy — o how I hated the  
flickers  
of daylight returning through the windows and  
the triumphant  
whistle crying, *We've made it!, we're back to  
normal,*  
*now everything will be safe again, and dull!*

I stand on the street, and there's no time to lose,  
this is the moment to join the group that is  
crossing  
the street. Wherefrom the sudden insane  
thought,  
as I wait for the bus: *Is the skin of my face  
growing  
over my eyes?!* I resist the impulse to look into  
the mirror of a store window. I know there  
would be  
no reply.

Felix Pollak

**FROZEN DOG**

Not quite spring, still cold,  
and there it is, half buried  
in a mush of crumbled leaves  
and melting snow: the pale white body.

Caught in a blizzard? But look at the round hole  
in its side. Some hunter, drunk, did this?  
Am I supposed to hate the moron  
who blasted the mutt with his deer rifle?

Or maybe it was rabid? Bit a kid?  
I prod the carcass with a booted foot. No  
it does not come back to life, does not explain.  
Sorry, its entrails offer no sudden hints  
on how to rearrange our lives.

This is not the place to ask my questions.  
I ask them anyway, we poets are trained to do  
this,  
but I won't get answers from this former dog,  
this future insect feast.  
I must have better things to do. As I move on  
I notice: all skulls smile when stripped of skin.

This is wrong. I do not expect dignity  
in this small mammal, I'm not that crazy,  
but the next time I walk in the woods  
I'd like to see at least a phantom snarl  
on what remains of a lip.

I won't see that either. When I visit  
this place again I will find more garbage  
and less dog. This is called rotting,  
which is not a terrible word, it just means  
taking a trip in all directions at once.

**M.T. Buckley**

**AMULET, from SONGS OF SEBYA**

before me  
the small blue smoke dances  
the knife and bone  
turn in my hand  
it is the night for carving

wind enters my hut  
shakes the mane of my small horse  
rides a mournful song  
song of winters without chant  
song of winters without shaman  
crying crying they are crying  
small children are crying

in fire light  
the bone glows into amulet  
my short knife  
frees the small ears of the kind bear  
the great paws

the strong legs will stand  
in the wooden cradles  
will defy sickness  
will bar the door to that black spirit  
all the howls of winter denied  
and the bear of spring  
must waken this time  
with our children at his side.

**Wladyslaw Cieszynski**

**TWO POEMS****Red, White, Brown**

When I was young  
I hunted rabbits  
in the winter woods  
and understood many things

How the winter moon  
lies on a crust of snow  
and under the crust  
and under the broken stalks  
of the corn

I understood exactly  
how they lay  
with a hole the size  
of your fist  
over the top of each neck

I understood exactly  
how they would not run  
until the arrow blade  
jumped through the soft skin

And then  
how they burst  
through the crust of the snow  
snow crust and blood  
scattered between uneven rows  
of the broken corn

**Through the Wall**

And how can I follow that darkness  
into that darkness beyond which  
we are all utterly lost

And here comes a mouse  
on that road beyond which  
he is coming with his little lantern

Gary Hulbert

**GALILEO'S TELESCOPE**

A fine March night, let's say,  
clear, and Venice swaying around him.  
He leaned back in the gondola,  
he lifted the starry tube to his eye—  
and saw, coming toward him, very fast,  
an Oldsmobile!

*"Questa cosa che è,"*

he muttered (or maybe Latin)  
*"Quid est,"* and looked again.

This time a Chrysler and three TV dinners  
spinning out of infinity.

He leaped in terror, overturned  
the damned gondola  
and dived for his life, down,  
down to the center of the still earth  
towards the Pope, towards the whales,  
towards Ptolemy . . .

Sandra M. Gilbert



**CRAWFORD NOTCH: THREE VOICES**

In 1778 Nancy Barton, deserted by her lover, set out after him through the notch 20 miles away; she perished in a sudden snowstorm after passing most of the way through the notch. In August 1826, the Willey family, which operated a wayside station in the notch, perished in a mudslide as they fled from their house which ironically remained intact. The notch was discovered by Timothy Nash in 1771 who inadvertently spied it from the top of Cherry Mountain while searching for a Moose whose trail he had lost.

*I Hardening Into Air, 1778*

As before me the blue mink  
 carrying its young by the scruff  
 fingered its way through upturned roots,  
 the barbed branches of fallen hemlock,  
 seeking a barren burrow to nest,  
 so, I dreamt, the heart could move  
 Now, dusk, shadows are  
 tiny as pelts, light  
 tightens around the woodfern. I know  
 a winter's waste behind my eye:  
 how the graceful mink, its young  
 the size of pea-pods, will  
 destroy, spitting and squealing,  
 whole colonies of muskrat.

I can remember last Spring how I lay  
 on coral root beneath the red maple,  
 watching, after love, the erratic motions of  
 the Cooper's Hawk as it sifted through brush,  
 how I turned again to this boy,  
 the pink stains on these breasts  
 beginning to spread and harden,  
 the thighs wet and struggling  
 as a new born calf's, though, for him

all motion dissolved into a sound, and  
we heard only the rasping of toads,  
the shrill stars, as he lay soft and  
limp as a mallard's neck.

Somewhere north of here  
the men are setting wolf hooks, long  
fish hooks coated with cotton and tallow.  
And here where the wind tears down the  
walls of this notch like a rock slide  
no pain is left to lean upon.  
I want to be a useless thing,  
the mica surface of rocks  
light wrinkles across,  
the young racoon, blind for days,  
or the snowshoe rabbit  
stripping bark from saplings.  
Beside me, a horned owl has fallen,  
its ear tufts frozen to daggers;  
hardening with the granite air,  
I want to grip those brittle  
wings, and eat it raw.

*II Mrs. Willey, 1826*

There is, I suppose, a wildness  
beyond the cliff of these trees;  
higher than we can reach  
rock falls have streaked the walls of  
the notch like playful otter slides.  
But here, all winds are bridles;  
the cow grazes at the low spread shrub  
of a fledgling apple tree,  
the osprey skims sightless as a midge.  
On the abrupt banks of the Saco,  
where the careful racoon washes his haul,  
only the sedge which elbows down

beneath the weight of quail,  
the deer mouse husked in a stump,  
the hushed odor of carrion-flower—

One morning I watched the changes of  
a dragonfly nymph as it rose  
from a mudbank, clung to the stem  
of a cattail over water,  
twitched from its own split skin,  
shrugged for its wings to dry. Now  
from this window I see the tree swallows  
loop wildly about  
wrapping with dizzy patterns  
what air they think they own.

Silence, the tapping song of the nuthatch,  
the queer purr of the blue heron,  
thatches the roof over my head.

Here, each thing repeats itself:

I can see the hummingbird as it whirrs to  
the thimble feeder at the sill,  
its wings blurring so fast they  
seem opaque as the wings of the dragonfly.

Some nights, alone, I dream  
I trace the path of the loon  
kicking along the water  
until the wings are mad with flight,  
baring my white breast to the dusk,  
yodeling wildly above towns where  
small flames root themselves in darkness,  
then slipping down ledges of air  
to a pond, diving rods  
beneath the surface for trout,  
my body becoming a fish itself,  
rising again to the tease of hunters.

So, I suppose, our fears confuse us.

Some nights I dream I rise  
on the forked tail of a nighthawk.

*III Descending Mt. Cherry*

Springs, down this ravine  
the water gnaws a wider vein,  
Spews branches like grappling hooks,  
drowning muskrat, chipmunk, squirrel,  
dropping behind it upturned stumps that  
claw the air like crabs,  
rocks wedged in roots  
or crotch branches of trees.

Yet now, there's a stone's quiet to  
the woods; the cold hush of the bittern,  
the squirrel frozen erect.

Beyond, I can see the red tailed hawks  
skim across the rim of  
the notch flat as stones.

Below here the earth slants  
toward wetlands where the flat,  
webbed antlers of moose  
have turned into scrub oak—

Somewhere south, the mountains  
split wide as a claw trap;  
it is a place the heart stalks with  
the fleet fisher, the savage wolverine.  
But now, moonlight has broken the  
marsh apart like skeet,  
and there are things I almost hear—  
the bats' slapping air,  
the wind's drone through pine needles,  
the distant drone of stars.

Once, beyond here, I found  
a gnawed mink's paw in my trap.

Now, I follow the path  
it must have whined across  
the crusted snow to the notch.  
I have listened for that awkward step.  
Once there, will I know the deep

musk scent of its anger?  
Will it know me? Will it know  
the steel odor of this flesh? The walls of  
the notch rise silent  
as the blackened ribs of a dead animal.  
I inherit the abandoned sounds of the mink.  
Everything is beyond. If it lives,  
can the tracks of the mink be listened to?

**Richard Jackson**

### **BARN RHYTHMS**

Open below, without walls  
against the mild Mississippi  
winters—that building, the barn:  
post after post under oak beam,  
shadow beyond shadow and board  
upon board about the small stalls  
where the black calf stands  
bawling, and the chickens pick  
at the rich, rich earth;  
where the horse snorts and turns  
in his stall—saddle, bridle,  
blanket nearby, on a haybale;  
where the rolls of wire rust,  
tangled together in a far corner  
beside the ladder to the loft.  
Up the steps, through the dark  
opening, the air is dark and dry  
as the oak rafters that rise,

one after the other, a rhythm  
slanting to the shadows of the ridgepole  
where the wasps winter,

frozen within an inch of mud  
welded last fall to the wood  
or to the rippled tin roof,

high above a floor sagging under  
the weight of haybale stacked upon  
haybale, summer stored high

in the barn, deep into winter:  
a volley of rhythms, or  
one rhythm held steady—

building, like the barn.

**Michael Pettit**

**UPON APPEARING IN A POETRY MAGAZINE  
IN WHICH GREG KUZMA AND ALBERT GOLDBARTH  
DID NOT ALSO HAVE POEMS**

It has happened, maybe  
for the first time.

I feel a marvelous loneliness  
as if an abdication had taken place  
in a country in which  
I was a tiller of pebbles and fields.  
Yet, already, in this single issue  
the white space  
surrounding these unfamiliar names  
has begun to fray and grow dark.  
Something ecological has happened,  
something profound as the morning  
saying No  
to some of its most beautiful birds.

**Stephen Dunn**

**YAMPA**

The Utes named this place for bears,  
but no bears live here now—  
there is only the empty rangeland  
pintoed by orange buckbrush  
and patches of snow, and here and there,  
like ruined tombstones, jagged red rocks  
biting their way out of the earth.  
Close to the wet, blue macadam  
a few cabins, their logs dried grey  
by fifty winters' winds, squat into the cold,  
tatters of tarpaper flapping in the rain  
like blackened Indian blankets.

My father was born on these high flats.  
I don't know where. Here  
begins the river that winds  
past my own birth, widening  
to join another current and another  
until it bleeds out of itself  
in the California sea.  
It, too, was named for the bears  
which were hunted out long ago.

Rain gathers its fractured body  
in marshy grass beside the road.  
Struck by lightning that killed his horse,  
my great grandfather got religion  
in such a storm. When he awakened,  
his skin a different color,  
he rode his daughter's horse  
into his own saloon (the whorehouse was  
upstairs)  
to preach his first sermon  
holding the congregation at gun-point.

The drainage by the highway widens  
to a creek, its flow the only indication that the

land  
still falls away, the creek stilling above the falls  
then  
rushing to become a stream  
fed by springs the Utes believed  
could heal. Before they killed the Indian agent  
who made them cut the earth with plows,  
they used to race their stolen ponies here,  
showing off as though Medicine Springs were  
a woman  
to be courted, competed for. Before I was born,  
in vengeance for some game they'd lost,  
my halfback uncles and their friends drove up  
one night and filled the spring with rocks  
until it chugged no more:  
I never heard the sound  
that gave the town its name.

Below Steamboat  
the river twists through screens  
of cottonwood where cattle browse,  
black mud sucking at their hooves.  
Hayden appears, too small  
to believe its powerplant, its airport.  
The hospital where I was born  
—alone on the last hill before you miss the  
town—  
still looks like a reformatory.

This is my blood's country—  
the erector set bridge  
above the muddy whirlpool where my cousin  
almost drowned,  
broken heads of fenceposts  
dressed in magpie feathers and barbed-wire,  
tin-roofed farm sheds  
guarding yellow John Deere combines,  
blistered motel advertisements



arguing the distance to Craig,  
a sudden flash  
of jackrabbit startled across the road,  
and, always, like a repeated dream,  
the river. The first Spring rain  
has brought it to its banks.

The river brings me home.

**Jack W. Thomas**

### **PRIORITIES**

Forget the rest.  
It's the teeth that count,  
surer than thumbs  
or strawberry birthmarks.  
Value what lasts;  
let go what easily burns.

At first there are none.  
Then the bulbs push up,  
punctual as desire.  
Their second chances  
allow for the eating of words.

Forget the flesh,  
that Mae West, that old falsie.  
Nourish the teeth.  
Let them go down full-house,  
a necklace of smiles.

**Carole Oles**

**EPICS OF AMERICA LXI: TIME FOR BED**

Time for bed.  
He tries to lie in the six  
feet of plot. He twists and turns.  
Every two years he buys land.  
Moving his possessions he sets up  
body and soul in someone's backyard.  
He sleeps in sight of the house.  
Waking he fights with the desire to enter the  
house,  
breakfast with the family,  
listen to the radio. He turns himself down.  
He rolls over slowly,  
humming. Then he goes into town.  
He plans a trip. Taking his tent  
quickly from his pocket he shows it to the agent.  
I'll just stay in this, he says to the agent.  
They write him a ticket.  
He tucks the tent in his pocket,  
packs a suitcase, and heads for the plane.  
He grows a network of beards.  
He stays til he is very old.  
Then he comes back to visit.  
He spends a day with the family.  
He lies on the plot, turning and twisting,  
until they notice he is there.  
Then he waves and yells.  
He shouts until they can almost hear him.  
Then he passes before them  
withered and fiery, burning like a matchstick.  
He grows very hostile.  
He waves his thunder on his wrist.  
Then he explodes it,  
casting a backward glance at the kitchen  
window.

**Frederic Will**

**TWO POEMS****Mosquitoes**

To keep them from you,  
paint yourself  
red as the natives.  
They will not drink  
blood exposed to air  
only pure blood  
embedded deep in flesh.

If you hate them,  
hum D minor, the breeding song.  
They will be drawn to you,  
forgetting to mate  
and loving only the sound  
of your voice.

Or when one lands  
drinking at the rivers of your arm,  
make a fist, clenched and  
pulsing blood into the thin needle  
of mosquito until it swells  
with your life and bursts  
red into air.

I will not sleep with nets,  
burn a yellow light  
or citron candle.  
When one hums silently  
around my ears,  
bends its knees upon my arm,  
I will be as still as a stone  
at the edge of water,  
watching my blood carried into air.  
I will not scratch the white welt  
that grows where one has fed.

**After Fish**

Between gills  
I stabbed the knife  
spilling eggs from catfish bellies  
masses of pearl  
emptied before eyes  
going cold.  
The cats come from nowhere  
come on the road of fish smell  
and they are as strange in this dry place  
as tulips growing among dead weeds.

The sun bakes and bleaches the land  
fish belly white.  
Night is a blessing  
and the moon passes over thirsty ground  
like a star over fire.

The fish are gone now  
driven by summer,  
having worked their silver bodies  
into mud, caked  
and waiting for rain.

Hooked on old habits  
and seeing the moon  
float by in daylight,  
I catch the knife  
and slit the pale crescent.  
Its bowels trail down.  
The sun beats with blades of fire  
glinting over metal.  
The heat throbs my temples.  
The cats come from nowhere.

**Linda Hogan**

## THREE POEMS

### The Calculation

“Given a constant velocity and the exact location of two points on a continuum, the time required to traverse the distance between them may easily be calculated as may the absolute time at one point provided the same for the other is known”

—Kurt Hauptmann *Astronomy* 1797

It is touching that I don't know for sure  
whether today is Saturday or Friday.  
I'm sitting at my desk *early* in the morning  
biting my nails and blowing the chips  
against the landlord's wall.  
I am crying softly because it is, for sure,  
not Sunday and there is, for sure, no NFL game  
until at least tomorrow—and even then this  
miserable Salt Lake City T.V. doesn't broadcast the Redskins

(Will my aging father back in Washington who watched with  
me through twenty lean years of Sundays, screaming at the  
picture tube “Put in Bukich—why won't they ever put in  
Bukich!” when even as a child I knew that Eddie LeBaron  
was doing as well as any quarterback could given *that* lousy  
team, live to see the Washington Redskins win a Super Bowl?)

but rather lets the signal from the East just zoom by overhead  
to disappear forever in space. In the sky this Sunday, only a few  
hundred feet above my roof, the plays of the three-hour game  
will stream by like weather—the line-backers red-dogging  
through breaks in the clouds like horses in an apocalyptic painting  
and I'll be sitting down here not knowing a thing about it  
until the films are shown on the news, hours late.

I think about yesterday hard for any clue to its identity  
so that by an Eighteenth Century process I could make  
a definitive deduction about this one Late Twentieth Century day.  
I cry harder and wish for snow to fall from the charged clouds  
to freeze all that motion out the window and deaden things  
like a shot. The powerful stadium-shaped dishes on the planets  
of distant galaxies are at this moment still picking up  
the Redskins of the fifties and sixties. A lot they know.  
If it should happen that today is Saturday, then right now  
Eddie LeBaron is fishing on the Chesapeake Bay, retired and  
growing old. His hand is poised behind his head, about to make  
a *long* cast. The speed of light being a universal constant,  
one of the super-sensitive antennae Out There is at this moment  
receiving the Redskins-Browns game of Sunday, Jan. 15, 1959  
and all their Redskin fans are plenty worried in the last quarter  
drinking their kind of beer fast and if I knew exactly where  
the signal was right now, then today would be a simple calculation.

At this very second, Eddie's arm is cocked, about to throw the game-losing interception, and is frozen in that pose forever like a painting—hurtling past planet, planet & planet; a painting of the only believable life after death.

**The Museum, The Hands**  
for Albert Goldbarth

I.

The darkened *Sixteenth Century English Room* floated stone by stone across the Atlantic then fell back into just the right shape dead-center U.S.A. The entire length of the long board and eight oak chairs are cold and still waiting in front of the carved stone fireplace (with false plywood back and sides) for the scullery maids to come with a coal from a peasant fire to rekindle the flames that we allowed to die this exceptionally long night.

I focus on the dents and furrows of the table, evidence for what must have been centuries of brawls and platters sliding under heavy English meals of forest game. Everywhere the signs are telling us that we cannot run our late 20th Century hands even lightly through the old scars or across the medieval tapestry's

---

images of fragile people looking happy and afraid in a garden—their long gothic fingers made from single brown threads.

I hold out in front of me this image, this evidence for a hand and I watch as my thumb skims across what must be my fingertips, one by one. Any touch and my own marks—my heraldry—would give me away; my name would slip down the swirling lines into a summoner's ear and I, like everyone, would be betrayed by my own hand.

II.

In *Archeology*, a half-yard deep in the wall and behind thick glass, is the gift from Sweden: the deep brown human hand taken from the body of the Woman of Windeby Bog, found perfect in Scandinavia, A.D. 1947, clad only in the last traces of what must have been a short linen tunic, reddish hair curling to well beneath the waist—

“This statuesque young woman of 18 or 19 years, who was clearly beautiful in her time, was divided carefully after this photograph was taken and shipped across the Atlantic to several North American museums. It is thought that the iron of her belt, bracelets and jewelry dissolved in the bog water and preserved her intact—giving away her exact appearance at the time of her death, quite early in the Iron Age.”

Today, her fingertips would leave clearer prints than my own, pressed against the glass—solid evidence

for an entire body, a life, clearer to me than my own.  
The half-inch thickness of cold glass protects the hands  
from one another like the span of two thousand years—or the width  
of the Atlantic Ocean before there were boats able to cross it.

III.

On display in *Paleontology* is the great slab of petrified sea floor  
separated carefully and carried away intact from a fossil ocean—  
“Each half-inch of strata represents roughly two thousand years.”  
Clear impressions offer solid evidence for the lives of the extinct,  
the curling patterns in the mud of burrowing sea worms,  
the death masks of trilobites like fingerprints of the paleozoic.  
In the dents and furrows we can focus on the outlines of their bodies  
just as they appeared at their deaths, before there was an Atlantic Ocean.

Last year's student, a woman who will always be too young for me,  
stands intensely watching the display as if something  
were going on in it—as if it were the movie at the drive-in  
complete with plot and action; I have hope for her. But she looks up  
and sees me and last night's dream flashes by—the one that ends,  
as always, with Queen Bess ordering me beheaded and quartered—  
but which begins cloudy, with me watching intensely,  
as if through a half-inch layer of bog water,  
tiny worms curling under my fingernails like thin brown threads,  
their trails beginning to fall into just the right patterns—  
my own hands beginning to give me away. She is happy to see me,

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and tells me all about her European summer, her new car and lover  
and art history paper she's in the middle of—the one concerning  
Michaelangelo's "Creation" far out on the Sistine Chapel ceiling.  
We talk about how "unpainterly and statue-like the figures are  
yet how they nonetheless seem real, in spite of that look  
of being frozen there in stone." Only I am uneasy. It's cold she says  
and jokes about wishing they'd start a huge fire in the English Room.  
I focus on her hair and her hand curling the bracelet at her wrist.  
I measure with my eye the hard transparent space between us and hear  
her asking if I know the statistics—the ratio in a lifetime—  
of the things we can see to the things we can touch.

### **Survival Of The Fittest**

“Drawings from the Ninth Century show, almost for the first time, that the horsemen  
have stirrups, and the people who like mechanical explanations for historical events  
maintain that this is the reason the Frankish armies were victorious.”

Perched at the distal end of a knifelike guava branch  
in the naples-yellow northern jungles of British Guiana  
a tiny, blue-necked Amazon sparrow moves its eye  
through a slow forty-degree arc, leaving a vapor trail

clearly outlined against the dark emerald background of waxy leaves and cobalt blue oceanic sky.

The beam stops on a limestone outcropping and burns in with a bright burst of mist. A violet-eyed squirrelish animal (the earliest human ancestor, previously only theorized by science) comes out with a Pop!—alive & hungry. Eight thousand miles away, an Australopithecus, hunched over and eating something on the dusky African tundra, winces and turns abruptly around scanning the northern horizon.

In the Prado, a quick-witted museum guard hears a dry noise and turns around in the nick of time to catch some movement in a painting of a puffy harvest by Breughel. A peasant, propped against a tree, has quaked in his sleep due to the intense feeling in the back of his head of being stalked. As proof of the event, the guard points to the paint of the peasant's outline which is cracked, blistered & peeling.

Meanwhile, in my livingroom in America, all my friends (each a featherless biped) are happy around a large square table drinking, talking, watching T.V. and playing monopoly. The east wall is entirely covered by an immense eccentric painting of a surprised and flinching late 20th Century man which the painter has caught in the process of opening champagne. The cork, in a bright burst of mist, floats in mid-air,

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an inch from the lip of the bottle and is headed directly toward a real mirror which the artist has glued into the painting and which is presently filled with the back of the blond man's head. Deeper in the mirror, beyond the head but obscured by it, is the dark and sexy blond man's wife holding a vodka Collins in a tall, cold, lime-green, frosted and very thin glass.

The tall man who seems to be El Greco points to the T.V. where "National Geographic" has been on for some time without sound. The camera pans 360 degrees of barren arctic wilderness before dollying-in slow, fashionably slow, through stunted snow-decked pines to a frozen-over creek. The enormous lens finds a hole in the ice and focuses down through it right to the sandy stream bottom, then locks onto a highly magnified hydra, undulating gracefully there in watery slow motion. The plant and/or animal tenses up as something invisibly small sweeps by in the lime green liquid. We flinch as five cold arms snap out and suck it in. "One of our last hopes," mumbles the dark-haired woman rolling the dice; they strike the board with the sound of a telephone ringing a little too loud.

The red-haired man runs to the kitchen fast to catch the phone before the second ring while the others discover in conversation that they were all lounging in bathtubs that morning, at different times and places, and looking down—saw monkeys' bodies—and caught their breath. By this time, the man in the kitchen



has answered a long distance call from Madrid. "Yes," he says, "this is the Center for Short-Lived Phenomena at the Smithsonian; yes I can hear you; please go ahead—I'm taking it all down . . ." The background of the evening has passed from mars violet to manganese blue to deep chromium oxide green. The game, now stalemated, may go on until dawn because the thin man with glasses, who could have ended it all, refuses to collect his rent on Boardwalk.

The red-haired man returns from the kitchen. "A wrong number;" he says, "the curator at the Prado with a long funny story for some people at the Smithsonian. I told him we'd get right on it." "Ha ha ha," says the tall man who seems to be El Greco, hunched over eating something dusky spread with guava jelly. Only then we all titter because we realize at exactly the same moment and for no reason at all, we've all just said "Yassboss!" real loud like Negro servants used to say in silent movies. Everyone remarks upon how they seem now to feel stronger because of it.

But the terribly uncomfortable feeling that has been growing in the back of the blond man's head gets suddenly unbearable and just in time he jerks his head violently down and forty degrees to one side with a dry noise. The tall lime green glass in the dark sexy woman's hand bursts with bright mist and a loud Pop! slicing her right thumb. The thin man with glasses quickly presses to the wound a pink kleenex which the blood turns bright alizarin crimson.

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The tall man who seems to be El Greco has turned around just in time to note some movement in the painting. As proof of the event he points to the outline of the blond man's head which is cracked, blistered and peeling, and to the vapor trail slowly dissipating in the mirror. The red haired man's bird-like wife will say, "The evening has made us more like ourselves than we have ever been."

A. G. Sobin

**LINES OF FORCE**

When the staircase burned  
It was only  
Wood that went to ash.

The spiral, disembodied  
From mitre  
And brace

Twisted away  
Above the smoke

Whole, intact,  
A whorling energy of line  
And curve,  
Floating at tree level past our lives.

There are accounts of how, in its  
Loneliness, it dips back  
To earth, grafting its pure voltage  
To the threads  
Of an occasional wood screw

Which, suffused with this  
New power,  
Rises from the shed floor, spinning,

Longing in its disuse  
For the wild odor  
Of freshly burrowed pine.

**Thomas Johnson**

## TWO POEMS

## But Never A Picnic

Under the ceiling of blue firs  
you say: I'm going  
to turn to stone if you don't  
pay some attention to me.  
& say: I thought  
this was going to be a *picnic*.  
A tree-crab prays on a branch,  
cylindrical eyes jutting,  
curled claws.  
By the Chemi-John  
an old camper shakes his head,  
poking at the fir carpet  
with his walking stick, looks  
at the ground, then at the stick,  
then back at the ground. You  
are saying: I didn't make  
pickled eggs for *nothing*.  
Through the blue weeds  
an angel shark shimmies,  
its rough snout alive with  
the smells of dozing picnickers,  
slicing through smartweed  
with its razor gills.  
You are saying: Can't we  
listen to the radio?  
when you feel a gentle touch,  
like a mosquito on your arm,  
& you turn, ruthlessly  
possessive of your picnic,  
toward a comb of white teeth  
& a flat eye fixing you.

**Hitch-Hiker**

With your yellow hive of hair & your green  
toreadors, you sprout by the road like a  
sunflower

Always wanted to see one of these cars, you  
say, dabbing the rose of your kiss in a  
kleenex—the kind without foot controls for  
the kind of man without feet

& say, blowing over butterscotch-luned  
fingernails, I'll bet you have very pretty  
handwriting don't you?

I squeeze the accelerator, nearly fly through  
Excelsio where housewives hang up  
threadbare ghosts in backyards; I dangle my  
own laundry, an empty sleeve, out the window;  
steer with my belly

Damn! you say, the wind running bright fingers  
through your hair, That's amazing

When we take off, when bunches of yellow  
trees bob under the car's windows &  
geldings look up, snapping porcelain teeth,  
your foot stamps at where the brake should  
be & you grab for the wheel

Have a heart, you plead; I say, Have an arm,  
have an ear, have a nose after my mother's  
side

& just as you notice that the fields below are  
like quilts, warm patch-work blankets you  
could draw up to your chin, comfortable &  
lovely as the dead, you find you've lost  
your driver

He's given himself away: part by part, though  
several parts shy, seceding to your science

of mascara & pearl teeth, immelmaning into  
a long shout that unravels upward  
Ahhh, you sigh, slipping behind the wheel, I  
always wanted to get to drive one of these  
cars, operate the widgets  
You take the horn in your teeth & bite down  
hard  
Sifting over billboards & cool macadam, I hear  
you I hear you

**Philip Pierson**

### **MENNONITE FARM WIFE**

She hung her laundry in the morning  
before light and often in winter  
by sunrise the sheets were ice.  
They swung all day on the line,  
creaking, never a flutter.  
At dusk I'd watch her lift each one  
like a field, the stretches of white  
she carried easily as dream  
to the house where she bent and folded  
and stacked the flat squares.  
I never doubted they thawed  
perfectly dry, crisp,  
the corners like thorn.

**Janet Kauffman**

**THE STAR LESSON**

My daughter came with me when I left  
the house for the night and the star-rise  
of spring. Above us the Dipper poured  
darkness into the cottonwoods' bare  
red branches and us. See, I said, there  
is the Big Dipper. We call it that,  
but in England its name is the Plough,  
and Charles' Wain; the old Roman men  
called it Ursa Major, the Great Bear.  
Look, and I will show you. Do you see  
the star at the tip of my finger?  
that and the next are the tail; those four  
like a box are the body and legs.  
I see it, she said, I see it now,  
but the bear is lying on his back.  
Someday, I said, we shall find the crown  
of Ariadne. Turn around now:  
see, Orion the hunter is here.  
One by one I touched her two shoulders  
and feet, and traced on her the body  
of the swimmer betrayed in the west.  
I moved my hand slowly then over  
her waist, and reached into the darkness.  
There, I told her, is his belt of stars,  
and see, he wears a sword of light, here,  
at his thigh. Never before have I  
seen it shining so clearly, so bright,  
as it is. Me too, my daughter said,  
turning beside me as I turned to  
let my vision go free through the crypts  
and candescent arches of the night.

Cassiopeia is there, I said,  
sitting in her chair. My little girl  
laughed. But I don't know where to find her,  
I said. Oh look all around: we live  
in a heaven of flames; what you see  
burn through the night is our galaxy,  
this blaze in the dark is our home.  
The stars are not sparks nor diamonds;  
they are not the souls of the dead, nor  
the campfires of angels, nor fireflies  
in the wolf-willow groves of the moon.  
Each is a sun immenser than ours,  
a measureless fire revolving,  
a world, a word, of elemental  
breath that has burst into flame. The more  
that we learn how to look into this  
burning lens, the more we see there are  
countless stars beyond the stars we know,  
whirlpools of fire we cannot see  
from here, there are ecstasies of light,  
there are brothers of this world, it is  
all effervescence of the justice  
of God. All at once my daughter hid  
her face against my thigh crying Stop!  
Please let's go inside now. I want to  
be cozy and safe inside the house.

**Suzanne Gross**

**THE EGG POEM**

the oval days  
fall from their high shelf,  
split and stain.

Crews come with mops and bleach,  
but this is beyond them, this  
is nowhere in the contract.

Tough and yellow as old wax  
the days confound my scraping.  
A trash of razor blades and fingernails collects  
on them.

Then I read how termites pile their woody dung  
pellet on pellet  
to columns arches towers palaces!

I kneel  
and pick bits of shell, new-moons of fingernail,  
I shape trembling an oval

warm it breathe on it

Something  
fierce and delicate  
begins to be born.

**Judith Kotary**



## BOOKS IN BRIEF

The presence of Charles Olson stays very much with us. His immense vitality and awareness charged everyone who encountered him. The fractured syntax of his prose and the dense thicketry of his poetry cry for explication. *Boundary 2: A Journal of Postmodern Literature* has served Olson well in a huge double issue devoted to essays on the prose and the poetry (Vol. II, No. 1-2, Fall '73/Winter '74). The writers almost all are people who responded to the magic of Olson's talk, and who now expound various aspects of his thought and writing in prose that is less difficult than Olson's own, though at times only barely. *Boundary 2* is an exceptionally well-edited journal, worth continued attention.

**THE AWFUL ROWING TOWARD GOD.** by Anne Sexton. Houghton Mifflin. \$5.95 cloth. \$3.45 paper. "I am torn in two/but I will conquer myself" writes Anne Sexton in "Civil War," one of the courageous poems comprising her eighth and final volume. Sexton's God is the stream of her acutely controlled consciousness in which she recoils with the waves of truth in order to flow with the current of life. In turning from each other, brutality and sensitivity create a polar affinity, an honesty leading the poetry beyond depression to a positive acceptance of an unbalanced existence. The world of the poems ripens as human nature filters through shocking diction in subtle progression. There is humor, even solace, in Sexton's description of defeat. But her failure is only that she cannot be God, but can only state with perfect determination that "This story ends with me still rowing." No poet could do more than that.

**SPHERE: THE FORM OF MOTION.** A. R. Ammons. Norton, 1974. Cloth \$6.95. Paper \$1.95. The form of Ammons' spherical motion consists

of 155 sections, each with four three-line stanzas. Not at all like a sonnet sequence, however, for the syntax flows on, and on. The 68 page poem is a single sentence, or statement, with the ever-present colon serving to remind one of the curvature of the thought. It is not a new form for Ammons, but he has expanded it to new dimensions.

It is far easier to describe the form of this variegated ball of sturdy yarn than to delineate the brilliant play of Ammons' mind. Like a spectacular lightning display it illuminates the most disparate perceptions, analogies, saliences. The sphere is the universe, as conceived by the scientist, perceived by the total human being, transformed by the shaping movement of the poet. It is tempting to turn his words back onto him, the true storm:

if raindrops are words, the poet is the cloud  
 whose  
 gathering and withholding overfills  
 generously and unmissed  
 from a great keeping: (depression, low  
 pressure area): the

false poet is a white wisp that tries to wrest  
 itself into  
 a storm: but the true storm moseys on with  
 easy destructions  
 like afterthoughts: how else but by greatness  
 can the huge

presence exist between the gifty showers,  
 twists and blow-outs:

A few lines later Ammons is off on a comic romp on the word *repodepo*. *Play* is the word, play in all its twenty senses, for what Ammons performs in this dazzling poem. We will want to replay it many times.

In addition to the long **SPHERE**, this volume includes a one-page dedicatory poem of elegant simplicity, self-contained as Stevens' jar and poignant as Shelley's skylark—and related to both in its penetrating view of nature and art.

**With this issue we conclude our twenty-fifth year.**

To begin our second quarter-century, we shall present for the Fall 1975 issue a Chapbook of poems in honor of David Ignatow, in celebration of his early support of our magazine and his editorship of two of our earlier chapbooks. Forty-two poets, from Ammons to Zweig, have sent new poems in honor of Ignatow, and in gratitude and affection.

Also in celebration of our completing twenty-five years of publication, we are preparing an index of that period, as a separate extra issue, available to all subscribers without cost, on request. Extra copies and copies to non-subscribers will be \$1.50.

All but nine of the 100 issues to date are still available, and a file of these is on sale for \$81.00. Xerox copies of the nine o.p. issues are \$2.50 each. The complete file is available on microfilm from A.M.S.

There is no way we can avoid raising the price of the magazine as we move into the next subscription period. Beginning with Vol. 26 (Fall 1975) subscriptions will be \$4.00 a year, \$11.00 for three years.

We are indebted to the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines for a second grant of \$1,000. to assist with ongoing expenses.

We would also like to express our appreciation to our worthy printer, Wayside Press of Beloit, Wisconsin, and to our national distributor to the retail trade, B. DeBoer, whose service to us over the years has been exemplary.