

# THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

Volume 26 - Numbers 3-4

Spring-Summer 1976

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## **EXPLORATION WITHOUT TENURE**

They could never explain to outsiders  
that summer in the Galápagos.

Days they spent stewing cacti over small fires  
& pushing boulders of quartz into the sea;

at night, the awkward groaning of the tortoises  
illuminated their dreams.

They scanned the skies for helicopters, rainclouds,  
portents, alike in vain,

& argued over the taste of salt,  
the meaning of Beckett, horses versus dogs,

whether it was better to breathe in or out,  
which should die first.

By the time Darwin discovered them  
they had pitched separate tents

on islands divided  
by seas of shattered crystal.

They had become two  
remarkably distinct species.

**Anthony A. West**

GARRETTSVILLE, A TRESPASS VISION:  
ANNOTATIONS TO A LIFE OF HART CRANE

*...slid on that backward vision  
The mind is churned to spittle, whispering bell.  
—from "Voyages"*

1. morning

These mornings the wind  
sharpen itself on the eaves,  
sparrows shake  
rumors of snow from their wings.  
Inside, there's not much left—  
the cold congeals on a pane,  
a shaft of light from a lamp  
impales this yellow mattress.  
At times the room seems to dissolve  
beneath your vagrant touch—  
Still, there are things that hold you here  
as a winter wasp  
alive behind the blinds—  
The shoes of another month  
drop like those of a late lover  
and there are hopes, fears, etc.

You watch as the early hawk rises,  
tucking a shadow beneath its wings.

Here, where the wind deposits  
the first cries of crow and coot,  
there are no roads but the dark—  
These things you have: *a withered hand,*  
*dim eyes,*  
*a tongue that cannot tell.*

You think: next spring in  
that stream beyond the house  
the salmon will begin to change—  
mouth starting to hook,  
skin turning cankerous,  
falling off as they spawn to death.

Now, nested in these depths,  
what dreams hatch? what loves  
squat like bloated toads?

---

Beyond, a small darkness  
stirs in the attic of a tree,  
The doors of the wind edge open.  
You remember the boy you saw once—  
*syphilitic, selling violets—*  
*his eyes—like crutches*  
*hurtled against glass,*  
*falling mute and sudden.*

Now, this man on the bed beside you  
limps awkwardly through sleep.  
You watch as the sky reddens,  
its light hardly legible

beginning to change the names for shadows—  
sycamore, cedar, tamarack.  
No hiding places are left in  
the empty spaces of those words.

## 2. evening

The leaves flaked with rust,  
milkweed drying, beginning to curl,  
you poke through the wreckage of last light.  
The dim moon lurks in a ravine.

Overhead, an osprey  
scours the vague stars,  
its frayed wings filling with shadow.

You remember the bits of fur  
you found once in a sprung trap,  
imagine the mink, the torn shadow  
he drags behind like a paw.

He shifts carefully now—  
his barbed eyes cut through darkness,  
poke through the scraps of this dream.

---

And so, you return again to  
this vacant shell of a cabin  
waiting for the first drift of star.  
Where for months swallows began their nests  
bits of distant fields

cling to the eaves like wax droppings.  
Here you remember the arthritic songs of  
crickets, the rush of rabbits  
through the mesh wire of the underbrush.  
You lean back now, the  
flesh tightening on your bones.  
At the edge of swamp, the damp  
tunnels of muskrats begin to contract.

---

Somewhere, beyond these ridges,  
late deer click through snow  
stubble fields, searching for roots.  
Quietly, as they pass, they brush up  
small clots of sod, blackening the snow.  
You enter those spaces now,  
entering the broken spaces of these words.  
If only they might hold you to this dark.  
Here, the air is scratched  
by paths of migrating geese—  
the sky is pink as a lung  
and against it, the branches of a tree  
have spread wide as bronchia,  
emptying a voice, our own.

Richard Jackson

## MY CHOICE, MY RESPONSE

on all fours  
where beach sand turns  
jagged pebbles, abandoned shells,  
I could be described in right angles:  
arms / trunk, thighs / shins, calves / feet,  
a series of orthogonal paths  
leading from fingers to toe nails,  
and, how neat, even the beach  
spreads perpendicular—  
if you overlook its slope,  
and the sweep of chest  
and slumped back, how the head  
rounds like fungal clusters,  
and suddenly there are no  
right angles and I'm staring  
into the withered ovoid  
of a dead lake smelt.

1.

the eyes, everywhere  
under foot—to pick a step  
almost impossible  
in this annual mosaic  
of smelt strewn sand.

the eyes, black  
precisely round  
and somehow unwilling  
to join their silver bodies  
in deflation and rot:

lying twisted, poured out  
from a rush of Spring rain  
percolated through the vineyards  
and valleys and general slope  
this lake spreads up to for states,  
and further still: into clouds  
heavy with the water three greater lakes  
sweat, or the gulf flings northward,  
and that cold Canada condenses,  
with all of these stirred  
by the planet's subtle tilt;

but following a week-gone current's trail  
by the dead smelt grouped  
in three's and five's  
up a rising beach ridge,  
I find the whole force abuts  
the rock wall of a terraced lawn  
and ends.

2.

sometimes I know you right,  
Corbu, culture is  
an orthogonal state of mind,  
does just like a stylized knuckle's  
sharpness, and the arm's full force  
behind it, or  
say a semi, backing in,  
the long smudged solid blocking  
all street light as it rocks  
through the gate on twelve wheels  
groaning at their brakes, its metal  
revved, smoking, echoed



until every dock eye waits:  
waits for it to slam  
the rubber molding of the concrete bay,  
waits for the sputter  
waits for the last forced hiss  
of engine and brake,  
waits—too long,  
they are all about something else,  
even my fellows, those paid  
to watch for trucks, slide off  
in tangents  
missing the grace, the easy tension  
this latest trailer  
swaggers in.

3.

the eyes, the eyes  
their hard blackness  
turned smoke  
in the neighbor's fire,  
become a bad smell  
with driftwood and lake weed,  
that I wanted to tell her  
how important debris,  
beached carp  
rotted to their yellow skeletons,  
or the dimples a clam will bubble up  
(as the day, at water's edge,  
a spent shell sent me due west  
looking for just such a mark:  
skirting wave ends  
and a curious type of humped vine

designed to catch a foot  
at its laces, I strolled unsuccessful  
as a novice, which I was,  
until I jumped up a wet rock  
and for the first time that hour  
lifted my eyes from moist sand:  
the entire beach suddenly  
bowed to the right, curved inland  
and glaring bright as the waves,  
right before me, right  
where I had no expectations,  
where I stood,  
breathing,  
alive.

Timothy Cohrs

## WINTER SALVAGE

What I dreamed  
was mushrooms—all  
the beauties so foreign  
I don't know their names  
nor who's a poison,  
who a prince.

They grow beyond the bare ground  
junked cars,  
chairs springing out of their upholstery  
like weeds;

beyond the woods cleared  
for the next block of neighbors  
at our back  
(star-moss still intricate  
in out-of-the-way holes;  
the last fireweed  
disheveled on the lot lines);  
beyond the felled spruce  
gamey with sap as a battlefield  
burning off its dead.

I dreamed the mushrooms  
to names: bullfrogs  
warted and wide as my hand,  
the old brown men  
slouched under their caps,  
the white buttons, crimson  
dangerous roses,  
dusky ruffles and blunt spears;

dreamed the whole  
dwarf forest,  
how the first snow of November  
would pack it under,  
deep and safe  
as a forest under a dream.

Taylor Graham

## TWO POEMS

## Tim Broderick of Youghal

There's danger to research.  
He came at me like lightning  
out of a book in a cellar,  
and I looking for somebody else:  
a respectable uncle in ice-cream—  
and here's Tim Broderick  
come over me like a fit  
with his damn pack and whistle,  
making me cry on my notes;  
making me put the shoes off my feet  
and feel the world  
warm beneath me to the throat  
and myself to the roots at my eyes.

I don't know more about Tim  
than myself: it's what I am  
getting but old lets me guess  
how he'd be. We don't know all  
that's going on down in the genes  
surely: there's some excuse for me  
to be making up poetry,  
but none at all for being  
crazy as I am.

We've all of us read about heroes  
and kings seeing swords in the sky:  
it's not many are mad enough now  
to be saying they've seen them.  
He'd be like the Arab horse,  
that brightens whatever he crosses.

There's how my great gael  
was coming with me  
from Youghal of Corcaigh  
where the vikings sat down,  
where His Honor the Mayor Walter Raleigh  
failed with his spuds while the Spanish  
God help them heaved over the bay,  
and men of Youghal are at fishing still.  
He'd be a hundred and forty-nine  
years old when I met him,  
and I've seen his grave,  
but it's never him buried in it,  
he's walking into me too strong.

For he was a walking man, too  
poor to be having a horse  
and wasn't at work for C. M. & St. Paul  
with the most of the Micks there at home;  
maybe he hadn't a tongue to the English,  
nor heart for it neither.

Ten years he walked to his death  
from Janesville to Beloit and back  
through Rock River's kind valley  
hilled and green, shaggy from trees,  
and he sleeping wherever  
the starry dark came down the road  
to meet him: a small man,  
with a skin like an apple's inside  
and the wing of a raven to his hair,  
all the western ocean in his eyes,  
bearing me among the trifles on his back.

Nor his songs  
nor his whistle nor pack  
came down to any of us,  
but I've got his trade,  
peddling sundries fancy or needful;  
and his need to ease the way  
with liting on my own.  
At that, he taught us all to play.  
Wasn't it his son-in-law  
Harry my granddad that was,  
nearly killed himself trying  
to drink at the Irish God love him.

Out of the holy hunch on him  
 I get a stake in the pain,  
 and fierce relish of defeat;  
 a place behind Ferdiad at the ford,  
 and sense to see him kissing the man  
 would be killing him's Irish;  
 rooted faith that words make be,  
 living powers of the elder world  
 blessed by Jesus and Mary His Mother,  
 Saint Brendan and the Pope;  
 a knot in the soul  
 I can't get by for Culann's hound  
 tying himself to the stone  
 so he'd die on his feet and the grey  
 horse at his breast of blood;  
 how any morning of the world a man  
 may be walking out to die about it;  
 the hearing their horns  
 yell over the hills I'll not see.

Or what am I doing at him  
 with my bones and my breath,  
 stodge of a Kraut that I am,  
 half bloody English what's more.  
 How am I riding his loins  
 and my name as it is  
 when there's kings in his own.

Whatever, he's there,-  
 like a dolmen astride of my heart.

**An Leannán-Síodhe**

I'll take shapes at you,  
wise young girls, old girls to turn your head,  
heroes on crutches and smiling grave boys,  
hare in the hazel, hind over your road,  
round-legged proud-necked small-hooved red-eared  
horse blowing my name down your back.

You'll not fear bad fame,  
the names they'll put on you,  
two for death and two for sorrow,  
borrowing dread each from another,  
brother at back and beck to needle you,  
wheedle you over their hags' path:  
wrath is all they'll be for you, and rack.  
Black blood clot in their mouth,  
droughth to their big fancy loins.  
It's not any one of them  
I would ask for their life or send my own.

I'll lay my tongue to you  
the way you won't bear it.  
I'll put my tongue between your teeth  
that you'll feel yourself scream  
and they hearing the tune you don't know  
reeling out of your mouth.  
Deer's cry, hound's cry,  
hunting over and out of your heart  
I'll gnaw to the ends of your fingers,  
I'll carve it in the lintel of your lips.  
I'll drink the blood back of your eyes  
out of your skull and you living.



I'll mint your pain,  
and they spending the money of your mind  
for kind red cows and wheat on the hill,  
still rain falling all the night,  
white ships leaning long down the waves,  
navies of the clouds and the holies on board,  
lordly beards blowing over the wind.

I'll foot you like an owl.  
I'll twist it into you,  
I'll twist it out of you,  
I'll be at you whatever.  
With the comb of my hands  
and the comb of my teeth  
I'll comb you out the way you'll curl.  
I'll be at your mouth  
and the backs of your knees,  
at the valves of your ears  
and the roots growing under your tongue,  
I'll be into the nooks of your teeth  
and the twelve hinges to your ribs,  
I'll walk at the heels of your hands.  
I'll have my horses of your two round sides  
and I driving them days and riding them nights  
till the sweat of them shines like the sea  
with the white bird of the moon standing still in it.  
I'll be the first and last friend  
of your two friendly thighs  
and your slow, horse-helping hands.  
I've made friends with your mouth  
the way I'll be at you whatever  
among them of hell or them of heaven.

I'll coin your tears,  
and they spending the hoard of your heart to buy  
wry tunes twining into them then,  
when one at last with looking lips  
slips between their aching legs and arms,  
charms to break a spell that walks,  
stalking a father over his grave,  
brave days in hell with god king and harper,  
a sharper sword and bruter bones.

I'll lie along your side,  
I'll breathe in your breath  
the way you'll be breathing in mine,  
I hearing you cry in your sleep and call  
the silkie to come to you out of the sea,  
that's myself only looking for you  
over the backs and manes of the waves,  
and you not knowing it ever.

I'll put eyes in your heart  
that you'll look into stone,  
see the hearts beating in trees,  
trees of blood in the antlers of deer,  
deer in the dark rising like stars,  
stars behind the morning sun,  
the sun's white horses pace the sky.

Me only you'll not see,  
though you're looking me long in the eyes  
of horse, hind or hare,  
hero that's wading the fords of your blood  
or girl at the bone of your breast.

You'll have yourself,  
no more than I give you,  
and peace be away from you surely.  
I've seen you, a cuisle mo croidhe,  
going on down your own road alone,  
I riding your head like a crow,  
ten claws in your wolfhound hair.

Suzanne Gross

### MELAKWA HUCKLEBERRIES

Back bowed with sunlight  
both her hands working  
She nurses and heals  
into pails the tart berries  
While hikers in red  
their Sierra cups  
rattling  
slowly pass by.

Her fingers grow blue  
with the stains of the Salish;  
Ripe fruit of the rich tribe  
shamed in the Potlatch.

Deep in the bushes  
she stalks the dark berries;  
Squaw aching and bleeding  
the dust from the trail.

The tip of one finger's so  
colored she plucks it;  
Face purple with streaks  
where her hand's smeared  
the sweat off.

Far back, ever searching  
in bushes head-high  
She watches the red lines  
move ghostly by.

Weary, she rests on a  
moss-rotted nurse-log;  
Rich juices alive in her  
ringing-full pail.

Tsimshian Coppers dance to the fires.  
Spirits of Salmon bless the bird-blankets.  
Bees sleep in her hair as  
the hikers pass by.

Tom Moore

## TWO POEMS

### Curriculum Vitae

- 1 Nature poetry: don't tell me about it, you'll make me think you think there's something else—Man poetry, Woman poetry in the failure of our divisions: tell me about the pettifogging flipsysquiddlums lawyers have abstracted from the goings-on of partridge & periwinkle, imitative, egregious with the wealth of their evolvment

& I'll smile in more than mild accord:  
tell me about the gathering of committee members from their separate flights

like the congregating of waxwings to shore berries  
in June, & I'll be happy that we share a knowledge of where we are:

- 2 we've been building ourselves up for so long that a come-down might not be debilitating.—I want to tell you about where I'm from: Henry Rowe Schoolcraft got uplifted in 1818-19, according to his journal, by the "barren magnificence" of the Ozarks:

what he found there hadn't yet been worked into what we have to offer:  
feuding hillbillies! clandestine stills! ragtoed barefooters!  
(black & white) potatoes planted in the dark of the moon!  
—cliches keep the land

backward: leering outhouses embellished  
with lean crescent moons! stump jumpers who would give their eyeteeth,

- 3 if they had'em, to cornhole a city-slicker! women so wild the buck wolves back off & the he-goats limp on the hogbacks stoical-eyed with success! warts so bad only a black she-wizard can cure!

I come from the only extensive elevated area  
between the Appalachians & the Rockies: I read it is a fair land  
that has kept

its essential wildness through three centuries of  
moneylusting rapscallionism: I don't mind being  
identified with something that withholding: there are not so many  
places left you can go to to fish & hunt & come back from refreshed—

4 the first streams I walked beside were the cold hollow waters  
of hill country—I'd never seen real mountains then  
and so could be joyous with the heights I could get to the top  
of: if you find what I'm saying plain

it might have something  
to do with where I come from—one person who has apparently been there  
calls it "generally an undistinguished forest of oak, maple, hickory  
and pine"; but "on the other hand," he says "no plain hills ought  
to be so

steep, so shot through with remarkable caves, so  
flush with even more remarkable crystal springs, some of them boiling

5 out hundreds of millions of gallons of pure cold water every day"—  
such clarity, overweeningness & constancy

I'm pleased to be a part of  
even when I'm not there, every day—for I remember the rocky  
thin-soil glades Rusty wandered in the wandering times of his need  
and came back from with something un-yardlike in the amber of his eyes,  
and sometimes I grow bluff with the north-facing bluffs  
spring-seepage cools the fern falls of

something of what I've grown  
with makes it easier to turn away from the shallow insistences  
of occupation to hollows shadowy with their bedrock-carving waters—

6 the region was uplifted (I'm here to tell you) but never subjected  
to the violent, distorting upheavals more pinnacly-mountainous  
places were infrabuckled by: Ozark raisures are the remains of once  
continuous layers of sediment the dissection of rivers & creeks  
has shaped to mountains roughly

democratic in their heights—  
the hills I hunted squirrels on were laid down as sea-bottom  
during the Paleozoic era—they darkened into light  
when the seas withdrew: I wandered the heights of the sea's depth  
before I ever saw the North Atlantic (my first ocean)—

7 sandstone & limestone laid down in layers, long & slow: horizontal  
rock: that's my heritage—so if you get an orogeny out of this  
be surprised.—In the Ozarks you never forget that the earth is made  
of rock

bare bones, plainness itself, tough & permanent-  
looking

is there to bother the onlookingness of those  
who prefer to place eternity elsewhere; but then one  
ought to remember that every rock's parentage is fluidity—  
no matter how you get laid  
down (or otherwise intruded)  
as if to stay, your ancestry is irremediably flow: so

### Let The Earth Be Earthy

- 1 As when a bald eagle cuts loose with a tail wind off the hill  
down over the lake, its wings strung-out level so you know it  
isn't a buzzard or an osprey, as you watch from your desk window  
with a view of the lake, and  
just as it pleaches song  
from the birds in the suburb-reaches of the cove point

arush

tall-pine high over the water  
where lilies, sunk brush, & pikeweed make fine coverts for fish, it  
drops its landing gear like a heron alighting, gawking  
its legs down & out as if they were long enough to stalk a frog,

- 2 fans its tail white-spraddling  
sunlight-impearlant brakewise,  
back-pedals with its wings  
& tries to stoop fast  
but actually loses altitude like a maple seed,  
in a kind of conic-comic amblesome descent, which  
terminates in a talon washing but not a fish: so  
my head & tail are free, white, & I often mish.—  
I don't want to want sense: if I can't sing I yet would like  
to talk poetry to you, for I've given up on song  
in favor of a rougher similitude in dissimilitude—

- 3 these ragged stanzas are the hazardry I interpose for metre, &  
I am not too careful about whether they are svelte versos or not—  
as the wise say in the country

if you want something kinky  
go to church: poetry's constant subject is immortality—  
its highest rage screams against the ruinage of days—  
poetry calls what is forever done for in its passing  
into the luminescence of a staying: it introduces the what not  
that will never come again to the divine strumpet that  
is ever coming: so nature's our mother, & we shall not want

- 4 for clay

for stone to obtrude our want in the wilderness  
ever lasting: I do not know better than to be  
intervenient to the motions that move me as well,  
as well as they move the periwinkle & the bushmaster—  
I am a pupil, often

in awe of the peccadillos of the master—  
I accept the lesson as it is given, giving my acceptance to

the melt's roil in the mountain passes  
where the ravine-hung nests of early nesting birds are swamped amuck  
by the released ravin of the unknown—let the earth be earthy

- 5 yet sometimes come divine: let the primrose be simply  
a yellow primrose

I have no analytic rock garden  
to admire it in; I would hang my sayings in their manyness  
from the scrannelly manifold antlers of the red willow  
and stand there a while in the willow patch the spring floods redden,  
admirant of all my emulative botched spangling: the snows  
have seeped & risen away

& April's soggy & brown in this region—  
the weather's changing, but nothing more apocalyptic  
than the return of the geese is passing over hereabouts.



## THE DEATH OF ARCHIMEDES

Archimedes drew his tangents  
in the gravel of Syracuse.  
The Roman dragoon,  
unsure  
stupid as a clot of blood  
appeared.

The intersects complete  
despite the wind.  
The furrows ran, the field,  
of thought,  
deeper than the ploughshare.

The trooper  
could put a rook in play.  
The legions' ranks,  
his lineage,  
the port of call  
and point of home,  
the logic of the Appian—  
these lines,  
these constructs between  
two points  
he understands.

Archimedes plucks  
with his walking stick  
Betelgeuse  
and stretches it through  
the center of the earth  
to the nave of procyon.  
The Roman, with his own walking stick,  
touches Archimedes to the core.

Mark Murdaugh

## FROM UTAH APOCALYPTIC LETTER TO MY FRIENDS

I have spent the morning helping Charlie Potts fix his accelerator cable. For two full days everyone's been waiting for the giant winter storm that's supposed to hit town and I was supposed to get to Charlie's early to avoid the rain-mixed-with-snow but was late due to the plumbing which backed up all over the kitchen floor.

Sharon was up all night reading and has been napping since four this afternoon. The Mormon Church just ended its big conference and made a final plea for the faithful to store enough food to last seven years because all the signs are saying that the Day of (You Know) is almost upon us. The prediction was for frozen rain tonight changing to snow beneath the 3,000 foot

level. That's 1,600 feet below the streets of this city and I'm seriously wondering if the Mormons could possibly have buried their food that low.

Egypt and Syria are trying to beat the invincible Jews again, and may win, and by now, the second morning of war, hundreds are dead from mortar rounds dripping straight down into their bunkers on the Golan Heights overlooking the Sinai Desert.

And tonight, here in this back room in Salt Lake City, Utah, I am trying to decide whether to exercise my true powers and trade them all to buy Pablo Picasso one more year and I'm wondering if the cable I patched could possibly last Charlie all the way across the Nevada desert night before making its fatal bone chilling snap.

There's no humidity at all in the Wasatch Heights overlooking the Great Salt Desert. I had to take a second shower today to get the car grease out of my hair and it's dried me out badly. Sharon set up a vaporizer in my room just before her nap. Droopy-eyed and nude, her breasts miscolored purple by the florescent light of the bathroom, she slipped Johnson's Baby Oil over my back and shoulders and for no reason I felt sure I'd never see her again.

The sun's been missing all week and the mid-evening light that's now outside is very white because it's tinged slightly with blue. In it I am reading from the *Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara* standing up close against the door-sized window and in that light I can't get over how beautiful the black type looks on the exceedingly white page. But black clouds have really begun to move in now and to finish I have to move under the tungsten ceiling light where the paper turns the ugly color of yellowing newsprint.

But in consolation the vaporizer's working extra right. Humidity is building fast and droplets of water have appeared on the cold glass; beads of sweat pop up from each pore in my bare oily back which doesn't itch for the first time in two months. With the side of my hot face pressed really hard against the wet, freezing glass, I think I can see frozen rain falling outside—almost straight down like slow bullets, but there are no spots on the cement of the patio.

A cloud, I swear, has formed against the ceiling and there is a rumbling somewhere, more felt than heard. Either Sharon is awake on the other side of the wall and is sliding open her closet door, or it's mortar fire moving down the valley, or it's thunder from the storm—but before I can check the pavement for holes there are pot and pan noises coming from the kitchen.

She comes in without letting the cloud out the door and offers me a piece of caramel that's been getting harder and readier the whole time she slept. I must take it from her teeth with my teeth. A tiny blue-white spark jumps the centimeter between her wet lips and mine. The snap it makes, a miniscule piece of thunder, loosens from the ceiling a single icy drop which falls to a direct hit on my wet steaming spine, thousands and thousands of feet below.

A. G. Sobin

## NIGHT HOWL

1

It might be a hunger chorus,  
this howl, in the inner zoo  
whose keeper's deep asleep.

Or strangulating terror.

You fix it outside, though.  
Lassoing you by the ear  
it drags you through no-man's land.

No sooner tugs you into consciousness  
than it heaves you like a lead line  
into the waking dream of what is done.

You're at sea again. December '44.  
Off Cochin China, swimming armadillos  
prowl for merchantmen, fishing boats, junks.  
The howl is typhoon wind.

You hear water, gargle of sea and rain,  
within the air rush, feel spray,  
almost a wave, sting what's exposed  
of your face, cowed in oilskin.

2

Here holds your eye.

Through the north dormer window  
you watch a slender elm it seems you own,  
healthy to the sight but doomed you know  
in your heart by that blight imported from  
the nether land of Europe, see it yield  
to wind's rape, then measure through dark  
but visible sky the arc of its acquiescence  
against the anchored mullion of the window,  
French—Europa again.

3

Now eye leaps after ear:

the oscillating elm trunk turns  
upside down—or you do—  
becomes the clinometer's pendulum  
which you, now manning phones inside the shelter  
on the flag bridge, watch with bugging eyes—

27° starboard, 25° port, 28° starboard. . .

Hull over stacks you go at 30  
the chief has told you.

Though scarcely salted, still  
you'd think he's yarning, but. . .

4

Through the passageway outside  
they've slung a life line

that's burned some skin from your palms.

Lean full weight against the wind,  
it keeps you vertical.  
At first it was fun.

After learning from TBY  
that the storm wolf's breath  
has huffed a seaman off  
the flight deck of the *Intrepid*,  
then watching a destroyer,  
more vulture-like than savior,  
circle his liquid grave,  
even old hands grab stanchions,  
hug and clutch the inboard bulkheads,  
shy of more than dumps of chamber pots.

Maybe because your flesh weighs leaden  
you feel you've lost all spirit.

## 5

Word trickles down the chain:  
worst blow the old man's had to weather  
in thirty years afloat. For the old man  
or for the 64,000-tons of steel he drives  
you wouldn't give a rusty piss.

Fright has shriveled your penis,  
shrunk your testicles to  
February's prunes. Nobody jokes.

6

Then three DD's, unwitting kamikazes,  
are swamped, a thousand men at a swallow.

Gray ghost ship riding the gloom  
yards off the starboard bow—  
that one you saw mere minutes  
before it plunged, a half-trip submarine.

Unfathomable.

The rest of you survive  
to deal more death.

7

Here you must sidestep yourself,  
your ongoing life, your children,  
must take a position somewhere outside the terror.

You ought to go down,  
three thousand men aboard,  
each at the least acquiescent,  
deserve to feed the sea.

Little more than sport,  
blowing the junks, the unarmed fishing boats  
out of the water like whales.

Oh, that gorgeous, never-to-be-forgotten sunset,  
blood down blue over the sea of peace,  
when two parachutes proclaiming "we surrender,"  
mushroomed out of the smoking "Betty."



“Aye, aye, sir, I am watching. . .”  
through the mounted long glass,  
screwing a face into focus when  
pffft . . . a 20 mm shell renders him flesh shreds  
that still go riding softly down the sky.  
Even after the unmanned chute hits water,  
collapses, bobs like plankton, the Achilles gunners  
riddle it, mere fabric, for a countable time of horror,  
as if it were the body Hector’s breath divorced.  
Frenzied to eat raw flesh.

Dead ahead loom  
the firing of their tinder cities,  
the quaking of their precarious island earth,  
the cremation in two blinks  
of a fifth of a million souls.

And after all of them, ungunned, unnerved, unwilling,  
will cry “enough,” our grand old man will steam, flank speed,  
his bristling wagons to the very shadow of  
their sacred mountain—dark through dark—  
will lob those sixteen inchers,  
100,000 foot-ton energy at the muzzle,  
till false dawn shows, bombarding  
for the glory of the service,  
Academy ‘07, their mother soil.

8

You’re back in bed. Clock hands,  
two phosphorescent fish floating  
the wine-dark sea, tell ten of four.

Sire of the West, Agamemnon,  
raping Eastern Troy, altering  
its altars for the worse.

How many pounds of elm falling  
at such a rate from such a height  
can rafter 2x6's stand against?

You see your broken self  
pinned upon a tree trunk  
upside down.

9

We victors warred  
for the white god, righteously.

The vanquished strung themselves  
a necklace of atrocities  
with which we choked them black.

10

No peace in sleep.  
Finger-like the elm  
accuses, threatens tormentingly.  
The howl crescendos.

Alive you must have plunged  
to Round One, Circle Seven, Hell.

**John Wheatcroft**

## PICNIC

We saw Edgar Poe on Tuesday, in a balloon.  
 There was a party on the Wordsworths' lawn, and Sam  
 Saw a tiny face, all eyes, hair and collar,  
 Peering through the fragile guy ropes  
 Of a white balloon, a soft and wavering cloud.  
 "Which way is eastsoutheast?" —Voice hesitant,  
 American, mustache quivering. I want to go to Paris"  
 "Ah, *that* way." Sam pointed to a clump of trees  
 Somewhere toward Cadiz, but was stopped by Keats  
 (Who knew directions — he'd been to Scotland and  
 Safely back, in the rain.) Brown and healthy,  
 Panting from a race with Shelley,  
 Keats moved Sam's inky thumb up the horizon,  
 But stopped — "Have a drink with us." Poe gulped,  
 "I have to go to Paris", but there was the sun,  
 Too hot for England, and his tight linen stock.  
 He clambered out, left his *Blackwood's* on the seat,  
 And stood shyly on the lawn.

Lamb blinked into the hot blue day, balancing a tray  
 Of glasses. Never an outdoor man, he'd been playing  
 Whist with Dorothy. Tired as she was  
 From copying William's lines, she'd beaten him.  
 Keats brought Edgar to the crowd. "All here but William—  
 He's weeding out the roses—old fusspot."  
 Poe turned, gasped and nearly spilt his wine  
 And strawberries. Keats guessed and grinned.  
 "Yes, that's George. Shelley dared him to a race."  
 Another glass, they scattered, and Poe met Mary Lamb.  
 She watched the sheep, all friends of Blake's, told jokes,

And softly sang in French. "Je suis une jolie bergère."  
Poe gave back the chorus in a husky tenor,  
"Et ron ron ron, petit patapon." The party flew to evening.  
Poe told Texas stories in outrageous drawls to Byron  
Who returned the pleasure, giving tales of border abbeys,  
Bleeding ghosts and monstrous fishes in a voice like winter mist.  
Blake caught the wool of the calmest ram  
And rode him round the roses. Laughing, crumbs in his  
Mustache, Poe let the balloon go waving,  
A blossom in its own breeze, as the New York air  
Sighed out among the green and running mountains.

Deborah Burnham

## FRIENDS

*for John Barnie*

That cold fall day  
when we were first together  
walking across an empty field,  
we saw a wave of sparrows  
crash against the grass.  
That was beautiful, we said;  
and final: the field stood  
dead still again  
except for our walking.

Yesterday  
I was thinking:  
now that we must say goodbye,  
I would like to leave you as slowly  
as a grey winter day.

But I wouldn't  
know what to say,  
sitting there  
thinking I should say something  
about parting,  
my throat coked,  
my mind stuck,  
the passing time  
tearing words  
from the corners of my mouth

I would like to say:  
Today  
I saw a wave of sparrows  
crash against the grass.  
But they leapt up again  
above the houses and trees  
and for an instant  
in the upper air  
caught fire.

F. Richard Thomas

## ODYSSEUS AND HIS SIRENS

*for Picasso and his painting*

## 1 Noise

"After the Second World War, at the time when he was attracted to Francoise Gilot, Picasso became interested again in the myths of the Greeks. . ."

My ears are bolted  
but the cochleas multiply  
in pitched black  
a labyrinth rings

I am lashed  
to a ship's flanks  
my legs running away

My head is  
sacked with visions of fisharms  
and flukey legs overrun with honey  
of generations of bees

I realize  
it's no use bolting  
an other world of jeweled  
barbarity greens my wrists

I am prize  
litter of shells  
my eyes as bone  
white as theirs

## 2 Faces

“The enormous triptych, ‘Odysseus and His Sirens,’ is undergoing rapid deterioration. . . Picasso painted it directly on wood, and the painting has been constantly exposed, in the Museum of Antibes, to the salt air of the Mediterranean. . .”

Fleshtone runoff.

In the Midi where sun and salt  
adore color a film  
goddess is cooked in a week.

Even the cloth goes. At the museum  
a sort of blood appears,  
a flowing oak. Finally the stone  
is a god weakly cooked.

Ah, but it's summer! Time  
for the artist to seize  
ripeness. . . but they quarrel:  
as if this goddess is specially cookable,

his anger ringing like ears,  
he cigarets his woman's cheek  
She is flesh, she burns, she wonders  
if short-order cooks are gods,

if ripeness wells  
nothing but impulse,  
if agony of care is always  
cooked like a goose without prayer.

## 3 Sleep Walking

"He would wander along the beach at night, who knows where he would end up, or how his work might be affected afterwards. . ."

Gristle and scale are paint  
that multiplies in this cellar joint  
with its sign out front: The After Burner.

Shades of smoke are spectacles  
of myself. A thick bass humps  
a pretty thin liquor.

Cronies are here. Bone  
and battleshit, McManus trees  
the Army jeep again and we laugh.

A woman smiles, tells me  
she's Circe. Fine, I answer, and I'm  
a purple heart on Zeus.

If you were sailing, I ask her,  
past music ravenous as goddesses,  
would you strap on your guns?

You're always aprowl for a shootout,  
she says. You can't see  
your fleshworld yet? how it teems

with over and underspirit!  
and you piddle with your plan-buildings.



My heart is stung: I want to ask her

What was your name again, but she raises her voice:  
Look at this place! these carbonated  
tongues! Look at your knuckles' contraction

(she touches a finger). Let your hands  
go: blind as a Greek  
oar! Walk in your sleep.

#### 4 Honeysong

Blue legs  
kick at a green sea and escape  
from nothing,

the same bister of sirens,  
are they real, these voices that rattle  
eustachian throats

with meadowsong, the poet  
described them, honeymusic that knows  
all things

as bees do, suddenly we  
are attacked, they muster  
a thousand golden

torsoes  
chanting in tongues as they needle  
my sails collapsing,

The fountainous queen  
flutters me off to combland where she hums  
and furs with affection

but no, I  
decline, until she weeps and removes  
her black-gold things,

a bare  
bee-woman splendor before me, I give  
in, say Yes,

for my crew  
were petty revulsions, scattered  
now like clothes,

anxiety  
dropped like the noise of parties, I am  
like you, bare and alone.

## 5 Fish Story

"It is a short distance from the museum at night down to  
the shore, where with the artist's colors still reverberating  
inside you might gaze at the starred Mediterranean  
sky. . ."

Under this water  
I am caressed by knuckles  
of eels, nightfish creak  
like zodiacals

where I cast new eyes  
like hooks up to the surface  
now a sky. To love each one  
is impossible. . .

necessity:  
every axil of finger and fluke  
that trebles the ears,  
bluefish who reel as they hit

all the joints in Scorpio,  
bowhead whales tilting  
Polaris, the rare male  
seeing with eyes

of a fishgod:  
Pisces who knows  
he can allow no one  
to get away,

catching each elbow of pike  
that twangs Lyra,  
and old Antares winks  
at each slip,

winks at each human  
child and fish  
child who is lost  
and found to the naked eye.

Edward McCrorie

## THE EXO-JONAH TENT

The ribbed, rubbery  
underside of the whale  
wrinkles not so much  
with age as with  
mapmaker's clarity.  
Clutching the abdomen,  
I stare up and read out  
the veins that branch to  
exactly where I go.

My face brushes the cavernous

Fingers, my digging deep,  
breathing like the crown  
of remora, skull-  
suction cup, itch, and  
scratching, I pull  
down stretched fold  
upon canvas of whalebelly:  
this taffy.

My ride wobbling with resistance,  
I hang from a baggy balloon  
over the sea that already  
holds my slowing  
beneath the surface.

Helium voice sputtering,  
the balloon upends.

Harrison Fisher

## TWO POEMS

## Tit for Tat

Nature made a mistake—or so it seemed—  
when it drove a force through flesh  
like a torpedo through mild waters.

There was Anne, dainty blonde,  
with lullaby-voice and rock-a-bye walk.

And there was Margaret, rawboned redhead,  
with rusty voice and what-the-hell stride.

These two met in high school.  
Vehement gaze shot into cupped gaze,  
and brimmed. Wool hand grazed silk hand;  
sizzled, caught, clung.  
Sudden summer scorched their skins;  
nipples budded through blouses.  
In the darkened locker room, kisses burrowed;  
tongues clove like snakes copulating.

The gym teacher blew her nose.  
Then she blew her whistle.

A music mightier than a whistle  
kept swiveling every cell of their flesh  
into a rhapsody of opposites.  
Yin invited yang;  
yang explored yin.  
Dazzled by their magic, they took  
secret names: *Wella* and *Wand*.

All these implosions made them luminous.  
They glided about like a pair of lamps  
propelled by a gyroscope.

Anne's mother phoned juvenile court,  
where a new clerk filed her complaint  
under "Vandalism." When Margaret's  
mother was notified, she said:  
"Shit! It's tit for tat!"

Their fumbling fathers shook hands.

Sweating boys prowled after them.  
"Put a hotdog in her locker." "No, a big  
carrot." "two coke bottles."  
But when the boys met up with them in class,  
all their acned faces just said "hi."  
The boys stopped short of peeking into  
their windows, as planned, or following them  
into the woods. What they really expected  
to find was murder.

Slyly, silently, in corners all over the school,  
on stairways, in parked cars, other girls  
adhered in pairs. It was like a courtship of  
snails.

"My daughter was raised in a Christian home!"  
Anne's mother yipped. "That other girl's a  
*witch!*" Margaret's mother said, "Shit"  
and went on with her divorce.

Then Anne's mother would not leave the house:

—just when I'm going through my Change of Life!"  
Anne's father ducked his worrybird face into  
The Bible and came up with "Oh, Sisters!  
We are living in The Last Days!"

But on the whole, this was sensible place:  
the midwest; a sensible time: 1940. A lot of  
people were trying hard to overcome their  
narrowmindedness. One by one, after school,  
the teachers had talks with Margaret and Anne.  
The psychologist gave them inkblot tests.  
The blushing clergyman invited them to Youth Night.  
The Girl Scout leader told them about Sublimation.  
Listening with her lapfull of Love, Anne wept.  
But Margaret hauled her off with: "Why in Hell  
sublimate The Sublime?"

That hurricane walloped all rescue-efforts.  
Then it lashed back upon itself, and stopped.  
"Kill me!" Anne pleaded. Margaret smuggled  
her belladonna and razor blades and a pearl-  
handled pistol. "Lily Liver!" she sneered.  
"Kill yourself!" They remained knotted,  
plus and minus, in that cold equation for  
a very long season.

Something gave. Margaret bounded out and grabbed  
a wounded war veteran. He was grateful for her guts.

Anne seemed stunned. Like a flower, she waited  
for a kind man to transplant her.

He came: His smile was sunshine.

“What a poignant little face!”

His voice was rain.

He transplanted her.

She did not blossom.

His Kindness turned out to be sugar-water.

It did not nourish her; it just preserved  
the poignancy.

He consulted books. He came up,  
smiling, with clichés: “But you  
*couldn't* be —you’re so *feminine*—”  
“Just pretend it never happened.”

She did not blame him.

She blamed herself: She had  
married her fumbling father.

For many years, her Rage was wrapped  
in Pity.

Then something wand-struck in her  
flashed like a Loch Ness monster  
through the sugar-water.

He rushed her to a hospital,  
where this tale was born.



## Messages

Plants talk.

Else a spirit speaks through them.

One Sunday last month  
 in a greenhouse,  
 a glamorous plant all but beckoned to me.  
 I walked over to this pink flamboyance  
 that rose like a flamingo from a nest  
 of silver-brindled leaves,  
 and under my gaze, it flashed  
 into a crossbred *presence*—  
 pink cheeks, multiple blue eyes, tutu, feathers—  
 such as Picasso might skewer  
 and label “Ballerina.”

This label, though, said: “*Aechmea fasciata*, \$25.”

—*You Beauty*, I thought.

*I wish I could afford you.*

“IN THREE WEEKS,” it whispered.

It was a voice, but not a voice. . .

more of a mist. . .

and something opened like a smile in me  
 to let it in.

“IN THREE WEEKS,” it insisted,  
 and a light bloomed above me.

—*wishful thinking*, I warned myself.

Light and voice followed me out of the greenhouse

. . . “IN THREE WEEKS!” . . .

encapsulated me like a bubble.

A few days later, Malcolm, my husband  
 fell ill, and for many days I was too busy nursing him

to think of talking flowers.  
The doorbell rang. It was his colleague,  
holding in his arms— yes, the aechmea.

*Sunday. Three weeks, to the day.*

Sitting here now with the aechmea  
and our secret, I confess this is not  
the first flower that has spoken to me.  
I remember when I was four, a big red zinnia  
kept chanting. . . *chanting? well, wafting*  
*a word: "JENNIE."*

Then a woman appeared at our door.  
Her face was round and rough and rosy,  
like the zinnia.

"Come meet your Aunt Jennie!" my mother called.

. . . . Afterwards, I announced:  
"Mamma, the zinnia told me Aunt Jennie was coming."  
That Calvinistic finger wagged at me:  
"I don't wanta hear that kinda talk."

Thus that part of me sank.

One hot, humid August afternoon,  
when my husband and I were strolling along the canal,  
a huge white mallow whispered to me from its  
jelly-red center: "THE TREES ARE CLAPPING THEIR  
HANDS."

Stunned, I kept walking, and the red mouth called:  
"THE TREES ARE CLAPPING THEIR HANDS! TELL  
MALCOLM."

I kept silent. I dared not risk it.  
Minutes later, Malcolm halted: "Look!"  
Beside the towpath, about three feet above the grass,

two small limbs were "clapping."

Still afraid to risk it, I said "Maybe a spider heard us coming—or some bees."

Malcolm replied, "No, it's not like that."

The two limbs went on clapping. Sumac, I think, with leaves like fingers.

"Maybe a snake—" I offered.

Malcolm mused. "No, it's not that kind of movement."

He looked all around: "Not another leaf is stirring."

We stood watching the two little limbs.

It was not the random bouncing, the *bobbing*,

as from a retreating creature, but a *deliberate* action:

The two limbs were tilted out of their normal

horizontal position into the vertical,

and were patting together, regularly, like hands.

*Exactly like hands.*

As we watched, I was all but aware of

a smile above the limbs—

and a foamy white beard. . . .

I turned and lurched down the towpath. . .

that smile scorching between my shoulder blades.

Stones talk, too.

A schoolgirl, roaming one summer day on Civil War grounds, I came upon a shambled stone chimney.

"PLACE YOUR LEFT HAND ON ME," it entreated.

I did, and my fingers siphoned the message:

"I'M DANIEL THE DRUNKARD. PRAY FOR ME."

I was so nonplussed that I stumbled on

without praying.

—*Forgive me, Daniel.*  
*I prayed when I got home*

Street signs suffer.

Last year the big black letters  
of the SAGMORE PLACE sign stared so mournfully  
that I had to detour.

Two weeks later, in the newspaper,  
the cause confronted me: *Young mother murdered.*  
*Baby cries to death in crib. Neighbors did not*  
*want to interfere. . . Sagmore Place. . .*

My heart cracked. Grief gushed, and still  
gushes for that baby.

Repeatedly, at Seminary Road,  
the street sign seemed to sag with sorrow  
. . . seemed to moan, "FOURTEEN."  
Week after week, when we passed it,  
that sag, that ache, that moan: "Fourteen!"  
A year later, on television, it came:  
. . . *apartment building under construction*  
*at Seminary Road collapsed. . . Fourteen*  
*men trapped. . .*

SUTTON PLACE shuddered,  
then signaled and signaled like a desperate  
deaf mute. A month later, news came that  
our friend, Paul Sutton, had been killed  
in a car crash.

*Sagmore . . . Seminary . . . Sutton.*  
Why all these S's? I'm an S.

Are we all ticking together through  
 a kind of compassionate computer?  
 Have I already been shunted towards my exit?

Buildings speak too:  
 Or a spirit summons from them.

In May of 1964,  
 when I was trying to write a eulogy  
 for the May-born Jack Kennedy,  
 driving past the Department of Justice,  
 I saw—no, *felt*—someone waving to me  
 from that window to the left of the entrance.  
 Malcolm said, “What are you looking at?”  
 “The lovely trees,” I lied.

A week later, the same thing happened:  
*that waving, so frantic, so urgent!*  
 The impact must have jolted me because  
 my small sons asked: “What did you see, Mom?”  
 “The magnolia trees,” I lied again.

. . . .  
 Four years later, Robert Kennedy  
 was assassinated. . . and on television,  
 I saw the Department of Justice. . . saw the pointer  
 placed on the window—*the very window where that*  
*SOMEONE had waved so frantically—*  
 heard the commentator say: “Office of The  
 Attorney General, Robert Kennedy—”

In May 1972, when I was still struggling  
 with that eulogy, The Watergate, which I  
 passed occasionally, kept tugging at my attention.  
*Ship of Fools*, I addressed it, (which is what we  
 Democrats called that sumptuous building where

so many rich Republicans lived) —*what's with you?*  
 In my mind's eye, a face appeared,  
 big as a billboard, ruddy, white-whiskered,  
 gray-eyed.

*Santa Claus?* I mused, and the face evolved  
 into clarity: *Walt Whitman.*

" . . . *I stop somewhere waiting for you. . .*"

and before I could fetch up the preceding lines  
 of his poem, a voice, like telepathy, intruded:  
 "DEAN . . . GEMSTONE."

In the ensuing weeks,  
 The Watergate wore Whitman's face  
 like a figurehead.  
 Names "—MITCHELL CAULFIELD COLSON—" were  
 beamed carefully, letter by letter,  
 as from a radio.

All summer, prophecies drifted—  
 "DEAN NIXON RESIGN L. KING WILL BE  
 PRESIDENT—"

like vapor from something brewing.

So insistent the hum from that caldron  
 that I wondered if The Watergate stands  
 on the spot where one hundred years ago  
 the May-born Whitman sat under his favorite  
 apple tree. . . looking out over the Tidal Basin  
 . . . dreaming of us Americans yet to be born.  
 . . . Wondered, too, if, earlier, that Waver  
 at that window was Whitman, who had worked for  
 a while as a clerk in the Office of the  
 Attorney General. . .

So sure my reception that I wondered  
 if the heat of my concentration on the

May-born Kennedy had melted the membrane  
that let these messages through.

Flowers trees stones  
streetsigns buildings. . .

And Whitman has returned, as he said he would.  
*"The Spirit bloweth where It will."*

Often in mid-May, a week before my birthday,  
It nudges me. . . breathes a malaise. . .  
It finds that sunken deadpan part of me;  
then like a yeast, It proliferates.  
Through those soggy summer days and nights,  
It pummels my wits. . . depresses me like mild flu  
. . . swells and swells until It pushes up a cloth. . .

I've never even hinted of it to Malcolm:  
There's a coldness about him. . .  
I'm too timid to mention it to my sons.  
But now that it's surfaced into fashion,  
I'll slip these fragments to you, Stranger.

"Talk to your plants," say the current faddists.  
I say: *Keep still. Listen.*

Karen Snow

## TWO POEMS

## An Afternoon On Millinocket Lake

A silence is wrapping around  
all the lake sounds:  
The two fishermen speak of their luck  
and their words sit easy  
with the watered distance,  
the space moving freely  
about their soft-spoken syllables.  
Those birds up there in the pines  
have a song with a swaying sound,  
like the motions of a swing,  
a rhythm coming sharp and clear  
to the wharf where the people sit.

These rhythms remain fresh,  
unaffected, in the piles of soft air.  
Even the great fish  
rising to suck up a slug  
from a floating stick  
cannot snap the lull  
from this air.



### Crossing The Booms In The Fall

We move down to where the river bottlenecks  
and begins to slide cold and dark  
through the throbbing jam of chained pine.  
I follow as you cross,  
the frigid water twisting under your feet  
like a mink slithering its smooth body.  
The long logs creak and roll and nose under slowly.  
You walk the dry streak of their knobbed backs  
unflinching, on these oldtimers  
heavy with their watered years.

When I hesitate you call back,  
"I don't have time to play nursemaid."  
But I'm thinking of the girl of seven  
who tried the early ice near here  
and found that narrow swath the current undermines.  
Later when they cut frozen blocks for summer  
they had to haul her from her sleep with tongs.

Finally you coax me over  
and I step nervously from log to log  
beyond the point of strongest flow.  
Then, while the afternoon dies around us,  
we pause on the other bank  
and I hear the current talking up to us  
loud and steadily,  
the sound pervading all the indistinct shapes of twilight.  
Paul Corrigan

## TELL IT TO THE RIVER

You left a ring on every wall  
at the level of the eye,  
on the floor an inch of oily silt  
to snowshovel away,  
stirred brown gravy in the cupboards,  
rippled all the books,  
ran your nose on all the kleenex,  
wiped your bottom on the linens,  
licked the stamps and watermarked the paper.

You left the drunken furniture  
against the downstream wall,  
veneer unbuttoned.  
The piano, toffee'd  
into permanent mistune,  
sold for peanuts to a decorator.  
Worse, you shorted on a burner  
like a spiral harvest moon  
that could have shone the house down.

Inconsideration. But considering  
the silting of the arteries,  
the rising water in the lungs,  
the stroke's triumphant crest, to be expected.  
And we knew just who had dumped on us.  
Outside at dusk the leaves were grey  
with a dust not even rain disturbed,  
and we saw you leaving, or at least  
the pair of rats that shod your feet.

Harry Stessel

## THE KILL

The gun was left  
to me by my father  
who brought it back  
after the war and stored it  
in a closet

                    old sliver  
of his life

                    but never  
taught me how  
to use it

                    so  
I learned on my own  
in the backyard  
Saturdays.

Come hunting season  
and I was ready  
red-jacketed  
and boots with warm  
insides.

                    The license  
cost me and my wife  
was angry I would  
leave her for three days  
go with the car  
to mountains

                    but  
I promised her meat.  
They laughed me off  
son and daughter  
at the windows of  
our house.

Never mind.

I got lost the first  
day

    spent the night  
in the woods alone  
and often I heard  
deer

    their whining snort  
and the falling apples  
in the old choked orchard  
stomped on my dreams.

The second day  
by accident I found  
my car again

    looted  
the side window busted  
open and the farmer  
down the road said  
"out-of-staters"  
and clucked.

Never mind.

I slept in the back seat  
that night and an owl  
dropped into the elm  
over my head and  
barked at its distant  
mate.

    I was out  
by dawn

    loaded  
my weedy face mean  
with want and without

knowing how  
I found my way  
back to the old  
orchard

and saw  
the buck on its hind  
legs lean and full  
of lust for the fruit  
and crosshatched him  
and fired.

Quickly  
he touched ground  
bleated and leapt  
coughed and was  
into the spruce before  
I shot again  
uselessly.

I followed  
and could hear the cough  
of the maimed lung  
but always out of sight  
and met the same farmer  
by a clump of  
poplar out for his own  
kill

who laughed  
and said yes  
he'd heard and figgered  
I'd best give it up  
they could go on  
with a bad lung  
for days  
before they dropped

“but that’s a long time”

I said

and he shrugged

“never mind  
the dogs will eat.”

I kept on after the trail  
and the sun got  
caught for a moment  
in the branch of  
a dead hemlock

then

fell into the ridge.

I hunched

by a rock all night

listened to

a porcupine grind

his teeth at me

then clatter off

and followed the old

stain in the morning

thinking now only

of the rising saltwater

in his nostrils

slowly

drowning on land

staggering somewhere

in field or furrow

and suddenly

at noon there was

no more sign

no trace

and I circled out

from the last splotch  
and back

but

there were only the leaves  
newly let go  
in a fresh south wind  
and I knew I was lost  
again.

They found me  
three days later  
I'd stopped walking  
lost my gun  
started to see  
a troop of all  
the people I knew  
in the trees hanging  
and flapping in the wind  
forever and once  
a wounded stag  
lowered his horns  
and pawed the leaves  
blood flung in the spittle  
of his swollen tongue.

My body  
healed in two weeks.  
It was  
my father's gun  
that I lost  
a splinter  
traveling the blood's path  
inward  
to the heart.

Ictalurus

Some four hundred ninety-three restaurants and diners in Illinois rivertowns specialize in Mississippi River channel catfish. At last count, forty-five of these owe their names to the whiskered delicacy; i.e., **The Channel King** (Quincy), **Tony's Catfish N Pizza** (Collinsville), **Miller's Kat & Keg** (Rock Island), and **Bullhead Haven** (R.R.2,Gulfport).

—Wallace Harmon  
**Fenceline Omnibus, 1963.**

When they built the Burlington Bridge, years ago,  
they caught one on a crane hook that was so big  
ev'rybody thought it was a sunk log. Weighed  
two full ton. They had to cut the cable 'cause  
it weren't no use tryin' to get the hook back.

They was gonna cut it for steaks at the saw  
mill, but it was too tough for dog food. Some big  
timer bought it all up and ground fertilizer  
outa the meat, carved walkin' sticks and gun stocks  
from the ribs, and sold the skull to a musim  
in New York City.

I heard once that there's a  
fancy house in Springfield with a big window  
cut from that same old cat's blue tailfin, but  
I don't 'spect that's true.



### Cowtowing

Someone put the first prints here, turned  
up the first mud, first clay; there was a  
day when this cover of short grass first  
tore under clipping feet along a place bare

enough to be called a path. It could have  
been Charlie, or one of the Krimplers, who  
owned the place before; or maybe it wasn't  
human—a dog after rabbit, a buck scent-

ing the big pond. More than likely it  
was one of these acrid cows, one of their  
great great cowmothers or hornless cow-  
fathers, but whoever it was, if they could

turn around, they'd see quite a column  
behind them: farmers, livestock, rabbits,  
deer, and dogs, generations going to the  
pond—with me at the end of the line.

### Dragonfly

The heat is buttoned up  
around the pond, like flannel.  
The mud cracks into cobblestones before the eye.

I sit in the spanish needles all day  
and watch the sun sip green tea  
from an earthen cup.

High in the sweet-sour air  
across the field of red clover  
silent zephyrs of flies kick up, foretelling rain.

Circling the pond, a dragonfly  
puts the young frogs back in their place.  
The pond, with a shudder, is all eyes.

Steve Fay

## TWO POEMS

### The Circle

Three children gather on a hill  
To sit, hugging their jackknife knees,  
In wait for the right wind.

When it comes they board a three-wheeled  
Coaster with mast and sail  
For a wobbly wagon ride downhill.

Off, the boards hum like fiddle strings,  
The wheels run a raw egg's course  
On the slope, zigging left then right,

Yoked to loose hubs, Unbelievably,  
It speeds their fledgling, excited screams  
Near a quarter mile before the sail

Flattens and the wagon sighs to a halt.  
Again, they plod uphill as if knee-deep  
In marsh. With a pony's pique,

All the stubbornness of a stone,  
The wagon balks at each step  
Until they've made the top.

How swift a downhill flight on the heart's  
Spinnaker, how slow and bitter the sure return:  
A round route run in the grip of gravity.

### Digging Radishes

Digging compliant earth I uncover  
under an avalanche of topsoil,  
last year's clump of radishes  
still blindly taking root.

Nearby, like handfuls of peas,  
clusters of maggots, grubs,  
after a season of winter go on  
with their underground lives.

Slowly, I turn the wet ground  
making it ready, and without  
elegy pull up by the roots  
what has lived for so long

without me, in a dark  
and a dream I can enter  
but briefly, with the strength  
in my trespassing hands.

The radishes, cut-off from their  
comfort, drown in my hands,  
in the foreign substance of air,  
as I carry them home,

wiping their red from my fingers,  
the juice like a thin gauze  
staining my jeans. I am told  
of a man, a native of Bangkok,

a gardener by trade, ancient  
black-belt master of karate,  
hands swift as shrikes when  
they forget their rakish trilling

and dive from the treetops,  
pinning their prey to thorns,  
who in a final test of skill  
was forced to pluck from the damp

chest of a live bull its restless,  
still beating heart. Like a plow  
his hand dove into a startled  
cloister of ribs, turning aside

mats of hair, splitting flesh  
from bone. Then, closing  
around that rooted heart  
he jerked it free

from a tangle of veins  
to beat, auricle and ventricle,  
aorta forked as candelabra,  
in his hand like living fruit.

His point made, he forsook  
all further demonstrations to settle  
back to his life as a gardener  
in the king's expensive gardens.

I am sure he had learned  
from his one act, enough  
of crime and glory, to bear  
on his tongue the wild taste  
of winter's bitter radishes.

Richard H. Nester

## THE KUTZTOWN HALLOWEEN PARADE

Ghosts dress up in this Dutch county.  
Bands from thirty different schools  
Play songs similar as their uniforms,  
Majorettes wearing bras  
That point towards the future  
Throw batons above the four stories  
Of the tallest building in town.

Floats lumber by dragging  
Their skirts, and beauty queens  
Wave from the backs of pickup trucks.  
Even the girls on the sidewalks  
Have bodies glowing with confetti:  
Girls from the college, ones from town  
Who smell ripe as apples.

The sidewalks are jammed beyond  
The curbs with local populations.  
Families awash with children  
Cheer more children parading past.  
Farmers have been hard at work  
Through long sequestered winters,  
Their phalluses hardy as sausage  
And wives like homemade pies.

Tonight the leaves come racing  
Furled in their dry, veined laughter.  
The terrifying thighs of cheerleaders  
Come stomping by,  
Horse chestnuts cracking like teeth  
Beneath their marching feet.

There will be parties later,  
And dancing. Lovers will grope below  
The soaped windows of cars,  
Holding out as long as possible  
Against the coming of November.  
When they drive home they will pass  
Under trees strewn with toilet paper,  
Hanging in their headlights  
Like Spanish moss.

Robert Gibb

## FOUR POEMS

## Quantum Mechanics

1

What is the angular  
momentum of the sun?  
Or of the various  
particles leaving the sun?  
Or of the particular  
particle that  
having left the sun  
strikes the asphalt  
roofing of the barn  
with no apparent  
effect? The sun itself  
is the color of  
a yellow oak.  
Struck by something like  
the autumn wind  
it shakes out  
its own leaves  
over the ground.

2

If I know where  
the reddish cat is  
among the maple  
leaves can I also  
know how fast  
she moves toward  
a particular shrew  
frantic in the hard  
ground by the barn?  
In the shrew's eyes  
the cat achieves  
the speed of light.  
Her mass is therefore  
infinite as she strikes.

## After Eadweard Muybridge

1

The woman hops on one foot  
through half a dozen photographs,  
her hands held at head level,  
the shape of her bare breasts  
changing from frame to frame.

At the end a faint smile  
may come over her face  
before she turns and hops through  
six frames facing away.

2

The bald man in the singlet  
stands, steps, leaps with  
both feet, sails above the ground  
for the space of one photograph  
shot behind an abandoned  
barn, lands and again stands still.  
He is severe, as if such sailing  
is no game.

3

The horses walk, canter, gallop or trot,  
their fine hooves no longer blurred  
with dust. The horse of the moment  
extends a polished hoof; the next  
horse picks it up; it is carried  
from frame to frame, gleaming.  
The speed increased, in one instant  
the horse folds all four legs  
to its chest and flies.  
It can hang there, folded  
up like a spider.



4

The cat, stopped in mid-leap,  
is flying. The naked man  
bunching the muscles of his back  
flexes secret wings. The woman  
lifting her skirts lifts herself  
bodily from the earth. If the eye  
connives, she may hang there forever.

### The Boat Room at Blue Mountain Lake

The Adirondack guide boat,  
the Rushton canoe, and a Turkish  
water-taxi live together  
in the same room with  
El Lagarto, champion  
speedboat of the Thirties,  
humpbacked and studded with brass.  
Ancient Lake Champlain bateaux,  
lifted from the mud by divers  
armed with balloons, lie  
in pieces near dugout  
and birchbark canoes.  
The Sairy Gamp, the Osprey,  
the Water Witch, the Skeeter,  
and the huge St. Lawrence skiffs  
that crossed the lakes  
on Sundays only  
rest here with the spruce  
and white pine kayaks  
of men who somehow paddled  
from Philadelphia

to Montreal. The paddling  
itself is not so surprising  
as the spruce knees  
carefully carved out for ribs,  
the quarter-sawn pine  
siding, the brass boot-  
plates neatly shaped  
to protect the bottom,  
the two sets of iron  
oarlocks, the polished cane  
seats with their  
octagonal pattern.

So much buffed wood and old  
brass is intoxicating  
until you come across  
Eakins' "Max Schmitt in a  
Single Scull." It is Max,  
in ginger mustache and racing suit,  
squarely inserted into his craft  
like a brass screw himself,  
who, floating on Eakins' smudged  
water with wing-like oars  
aslant, restores the balance.  
The boats are only awesome empty.

### The Monterey Cypress

Gulls huddle in the gray  
mist; cormorants are hunched  
in the craters of the cliffside.  
The ocean is slowed

by the weight of kelp,  
by wood too heavy to toss  
past the rocks. Photographers  
circle the warped cypress,  
the old tree tied by cables  
to the cliffside and supported  
by weathered boards.

There is no light for  
the cameras; the mist already  
renders the cypress in black  
and white. It appears  
as it does in the famous  
photographs, the hair-line  
fractures painfully distinct,  
the grain curving in a way  
that suggests the flowing  
of clean hair.

On the beach below lost  
wood is drying: the doors  
of old cruisers, smashed  
crates still studded  
with nails. The cypress is already  
dead and destined for the seaweed.  
What curved the grain once  
no longer flows. Photographers  
keep it on the cliffside.  
By platinum print it is arrested  
at the top of a fall.

**Michael North**

## TWO POEMS

## Halfway To Oregon

West of Seward cicadas shout.  
Pigs whale through muck  
and moon up  
at the Interstate. Farms spatter  
the windshield: cabbage leaf,  
horseblood. Nebraska,  
like a loss of will, lies down.

The radio is unclear. Already  
the Lincoln station sinks back  
in the skywaves. Twisting  
the dial I pick up  
thunderheads jabbing lightning.

If we could see coming what is  
coming nothing would budge us.  
We'd cut the engine  
and tap a rootbeer bottle  
on the steering wheel forever.

I would have married Maine.  
A dozen times since Chicago  
I have driven up on myself  
rolled and burned.  
Not the Pacific.  
Not all the miles high  
mares' tails and blue Cascades. Not Oregon.

The Church At The Corner  
Of Winter And Elm

Watch it.

Turning this corner might land you plump  
sheepish in the teeth  
of someone's wedding, or underfoot  
his funeral procession,  
a stranger in either case.

You must resist the desire to disappear.

Impersonate

the rebel son slunk back from Amsterdam  
to watch the coffin hole plugged;  
see if they don't touch your elbow,  
commiserate: every family has one.

In organ thunder

people are ready for anything:  
a mysterious lover,  
lean as a pickerel slipping  
through bridesmaids' willowy arms.

Today it's another man's undertaking.  
You'll get your chance shortly.

In the meantime, listen:

someone hauls down the bellcord,  
then gives it back  
into the steeple.

The bell metal rings spread  
exactly as calm water  
grazed by a swallow.

Again he pulls the cord.