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A MACHIAS GHOST STORY

An information leak from a cracked urn
upset the calendar and fogged the night
with ghosts. Singly, half the townspeople,
vaguely restless, unable to sleep,
took to the streets all of which
ended at the cemetery with its
no trespassing sign. Singly, they walked
over the chain and lost themselves
among the trees and tombstones.
No one heard a sound above or below
the Spring Peepers that had lingered
into the tailend of summer; no one
knew he was not alone tracing
his particular ghost, half aware
and vaguely frightened now. Each
found the stone whose shape stopped
him, each stopped and stared
while the frogs took over the night,
while the fog curled his hair.

Morning never came again. Or say
the cemetery has been walled in
by those deaf ones who slept
that night through and rose
to make coffee only to discover
half their lives were missing.

Walled it in, so weird a change
had come upon it: before each stone
another stood, identical; face to face
they settled in to stare down time.
Death doubling its hoard that way
upset even the sleepers who find
the sun, invariably, each morning
and drink coffee alone if they have to.
Someone has to carry the mail, they
mutter to themselves; someone
has to bring in the laundry.

They found the urn, by the way,
and filled in the crack with epoxy.
The mayor says whatever was in there
still is, but the local witch who brewed
bats' eyes to keep herself off
the street that night hears the Peepers
in the deep of winter and knows better,
but says nothing. Bad for trade, she
tells herself. And to what
purpose alarming those who would find
nothing if they wandered every night
of the year? Someone has to watch
the wall, someone has to stay to tell
the difference between sleeping and waking.

Myrna Bouchey

SESTINA: DIALOGUE

For Donald Hall

Emery:

Hang it all, Donald Hall, there is only the one Ezra Pound,
why not let him roost happy, on old Altaforte?
You yourself know that writing your halfscore
of sestinas won't give you the one perfect hit.
Your audience determines what produces a real charge.
Except as you turn people on, you haven't written a line.

Donald:

Oh, yes, and might I ask what you call writing a line
nowadays, when brilliant lines are all but sold by the pound?
We poets write clear English, okay. But as for any charge
from a Muse that I sell, I must say my forte
never was to lick wounds if it's below the belt I'm hit.
Muses and poets keep having to settle the same old score.

Emery:

Don't misunderstand me, Donald. Of course, verse is no score like a symphony, where to orchestrate but a single line of music, you about have to be prepared to hit the same idea thirty different places. There you pound melody home fortissimo, forte, mezzoforte, piano. The poet has his own battery to recharge.

Donald:

Which is language, Emery, poetic diction, the electric charge being meaning. That's a far subtler task to underscore. Orchestration is denied one, unless the effect of forte be achieved by sheer energy in the monodic line. Remember the battery metaphor? It comes from Ezra Pound. In practice his simplest pieces made the biggest hit.

Emery:

True. But we latterday troubadours too have a right to hit nails on heads. Critics have no good reason to charge that our poetic intentions are not sterling as the pound. Perhaps there is an analogy between a text and a score, after all, namely, that the verse shines like a musical line. Have you ever tried a sestina on a pianoforte?

Emery George

Donald:

If *you* have, you ought to know the range piano to forte doesn't begin to suggest our genre as the smash hit. Fortissimo to tender is how you must play that line, that way no hour it may take need seem to you an overcharge. Our batting average may be low. But perhaps a baseball score is not the best metaphor for the sort of ball we pound.

Emery and Donald together:

If old man Pound insists on perching on Altaforte,
I too will find engraved scores and redhot iron to hit.
I'll hear the command *Charge!* and move to the firing line.

Emery George

Emery George

PORTRAIT OF WILLIAM EVERSON

The poet, tall, vital,
Strong in his early sixties,
Working with a bow-scythe,
He shears lush weeds
By the edge of the dirt road
At his retreat on Big Creek,
A glade amidst redwoods,
An old fire station in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

A large, gaunt man,
The white mane of hair and full beard,
Intense, distant eyes,
Methodical sweep
Of the long-handled scythe,
Its rusty, curved blade
Honed to a fine edge
And singing a swath through tall grass.

Odor of buckeye in blossom,
Morning sunlight,
Sea breeze, up through the canyon,
Through redwood and fir,
And as from a great distance, flute music.

Car on the road above, coming down.

The poet leans on his scythe, waits.

A bird sits on the fence.
We crouch. We rush.
The bird flies off.

But hunger is upon us.
The eyes of my cat
point to a palsied wing.
I forget the birds I have loved.

I forget the pain of the scent of dying.
Blood wets my lips.
The breastbone yields.

We search for clean soft earth
scratch open the hole and squat.
It is good to shit under the sky
under the March clouds.

We avoid shadows.
We roll on warm bricks.
Stretching our bellies to the sun
our paws open.
Wind runs across us.

Our eyes fall together.
We nod with our noses
rubbing against the ground.

As we drowse in the sun
I do not know what to call my cat.

There are no words for us.

Virginia R. Terris

AUTUMN CRICKET

—Basho and His Friends

Ash-water from the pail
 dripping dripping, stops —
 sound of crickets *Boncho*

autumn, scrape the oil —
 go to bed with the dark *Basho*

green tatami
 level
 in the moonlight *Yasui*

happy to set out
 ten wine cups *Kyorai*

thousand year things
 by the thousands —
 the Day of the Rat *Basho*

the nightingale singing
 thin snowflakes *Boncho*

the rider bends forward
 arms too weak
 for the spring horse *Yasui*

at the top of Mount Maya
 a clash with clouds *Kyorai*

evening
 eat pike
 and smell the wind *Boncho*

after the water leech
the pleasant scratch *Basho*

love —
forget it!
it's the day off! *Yasui*

summoned home
by the impatient lord. *Kyorai*

they call me "gold knife"
sword
for special advisors *Basho*

hot bath freak?
enjoying the moon *Boncho*

in this neighborhood too
autumn escapes
empty villa *Kyorai*

transient as dew:
anything we see *Yasui*

the flower falls
and like Sainen
we wear Buddhist robes *Basho*

the end of spring
and of turnip pickles at Kiso *Boncho*

going home
flying north along the mountains —
chickadees *Yasui*

along the ridge of the roof
the farmers reinforce the thatching *Kyorai*

- in the winter sky
 the coming storm —
 north wind *Boncho*
- set meal at the inn
 and the all night light *Basho*
- extraordinary
 woman's wisdom
 short-lived *Kyorai*
- bellflowers love potion
 and the wolves howl *Yasui*
- miscanthus
 in the moonlight
 someone guards the emperor's tomb *Basho*
- in the forgotten well
 rusty water *Boncho*
- the story teller
 starts to boast
 free afternoon *Yasui*
- and now the sushi
 should be served again *Kyorai*
- seen from the high bank
 dense rice plants
 cool energy *Boncho*
- the Kamo shrine:
 what better! *Basho*
- the hawker's voice
 up and up ... and
 clipped off *Kyorai*

out of the rain but ... change and death ...	<i>Yasui</i>
the wild heron sleeping: undisturbed nobility	<i>Basho</i>
lap, lapping of water perceptible stir of water grasses	<i>Boncho</i>
the weeping cherry open flowers in full force	<i>Kyorai</i>
spring in March — early morning sky —	<i>Yasui</i>

Translated by Lenore Mayhew

NOTE. The Renga (or Renku) is a sequence of 36, 50, or 100 verses alternating seventeen and fourteen syllables, composed by several poets in turn.

The first verse must have in it a seasonal word or 'kigo,' and it must be a complete poem in itself, a haiku. The next verse must be closely related in subject and must refer to the same season, but the third verse must be so different from the haiku that it could not possibly follow it, and it must be linked to the second verse by association of image or atmosphere ... and thus through the poem. When printed renga papers were used there were additional rules as certain verses were called 'seat of the moon' or 'flower poem' or 'love poem.' All rengas end in a hopeful mood as the last verse must be about spring.

AUTUMN CRICKET, with 36 verses, is a 'kasen renga.' It was first published by Basho and His Friends in 1691 as part of a two-volume poetry anthology, *Monkey's Raincoat. Back Roads to Far Towns* was published in 1689.

THREE POEMS

In & Under:

His Fanfare for Elopement

The hushed pump purred and chuckled
outside the shack, and sucked in air
and geysered continuous drops of water,
foul tasting spray unless the wind was still.
Behind it anyone who knelt
lost his tally of numberless pools,
two under each one slipping off
the drain-slopes under Georgia.

But the pump
purred and chuckled, purred and chuckled
as it sucked heavy, or spat out its spray.
So everything had come together:
sunrise was a long hour off.
You were afraid I'd ask, "Pretend it's night,"
to steal the short hour's sleep you get
when men don't push your belly open.
But the child had come already.

In the spray
of our hushed playing, it bred
in a coiling chain of cells,
by metaphase through anaphase
up pool after pool of becoming more.

Everyone scoffed at the thought.

“Such nice
young people. Running away to get married!”
But something, more, a child was there;
and that began it. Something to live with.
And they, the scoffers, who had not covered you
at night, or if they had, had forgotten
to leave their names with yours, they are boxed
into Georgia, sleeping apart from you:
limp and rounded, your head on my shoulder
as our car runs steadily north.

Out & Over:
Her Coda on Divorce

Hung up on air as certain
as this Seven-Forty-Seven,
that night the well-bit hung
and siphoned flakes of clay,
then spread the sheet of water out—
the sheet you rushed to bed in.

It was warm enough, that night,
to let you roll me slicky in the clay
spread over dirt as white
as brand-new high school pom-poms.
I sure enough was willing;

I wanted
your head to lock tight on
our wallow before sunrise; so you'd
remember forever the night I took you
like another tampon, too gentle
to injure the baby.

You'd never been
so bare; so it was kinda sweet
the way you bobbed and worried,
coming, was I 'safe,' that night, as if
another kid would grow on the head
of the baby you couldn't have known;
as if your drop in the water
was going to plumb my life.
But you remember this, you do:
how you bent and fizzled in me, farther
from me than you'd ever know.

"A bad, strange girl," your family
had muttered at my back in church;
but even then my child was there,
and when you rode her body, in riding
my own, it's *you* were the strange one
taking me out by the well-house
as if I wasn't good enough
to hold you in the bedroom.

So now I'm out and over, flying
first-class. Wrapped in fur and vinyl.
I'm sitting lofty like a lady
divorced and perfectly proper, still
holding your name and my daughter,
flying south to Miami.

**Over and Under:
Her Elegy as Daughter**

Like a hippie from the 60's, a usual pickup
for truckers, commuters, & ass-men, I hitched
down the tight road south from Miami.

Another dead dog by the roadway
lies at my ankles. Its entirely big
and faithful face dug tooth down in the highway shoulder.
It's a big dog. Black. And humped as if sleeping.
A duffel bag of bone & meat. It's too new
for the ants. If I stand too close to Faithful,
who would stop to take me on; I'd say,
"Hey, Mister, take my friend. He's happy
& still hungry, really; and we travel
everywhere together."

So I move off down
the highway, closer to Key West, where dirt
fades out, and the bridge joints over humps
of coral. The road lies white & jerky. Clean.
A pilot angling down to Miami,
slanted high from the whole Bahamas,
would see it a jitter of shallow plates
cracked from the back
of a white crustacean, running eighty miles
south from the marsh of Miami, where sewage
geysers up in the sun-slick, like a new Atlantis.
The road I walk down skips over pilings,
islands, over the gap from the mainland to Key West.
My thumb hangs out in the air. It tests
the cooling at sundown, wet, feeling
for the wind's direction, feeling
the wallow

of water tight on the bridge posts;
 so the guard-rail where I clutch and stand
 is moved as tide is shifted by the dark moon
 shifted undersea, but pulling water down.

The bridge and guard rails jitter
 as the truckers grind on by
 my tricky beaded body.

Even the islands
 drift too little to be seen
 in the wallow of constant surf.

Tonight

I'll stalk the pilings like a lady
 wrapped in a rosary, my fingers not even up
 for a ride. Where the road heaves
 up at Oyster Pass, under me the channel
 flushes the Keys from side to side, and I bob
 on the cancelled slick of their waters,
 looking north,

as if

I'm moving with the pilot, luffing
 too high for a stall of landing; I
 can feel the whole coast's wastage
 draining south:

the winter slush
 of Carolina spindrift
 pooling into Georgia
 plasma of water reddening
 down beds of clay
 in thick cascade of runoff
 towards the Pensacola
 coastline where sun engulfs the water
 skewing heavy rain
 south along the coral reefs,

sucks it over into phosphate acid clouds
 that inch their edges southwards
 over orange groves
 into trailer parks and marshlands,
 weak acid rain to etch
 in windows far south as Miami.
 My eyes are burning and the trucks don't stop.
 Salt water takes my forehead
 like a giant tear; it stings and slithers
 jello down my rib-cage, bare as a trucker's
 daydream, under the roadway, wavering
 like a whiteline

 on their windshields
 I am a slither of beads and brain-stem born
 in the drain fields south of Georgia dropped in Miami
 and true as the undersea moon pulls currents down

I'm bleeding Georgia southward into sun-flat water
 rounding the coast to Miami and jointing south,
 my brain-stem like a white crustacean to creep
 and jitter under bridges,

 the waste of someone's love-night, me
 about to surface, breathing water,
 me about to grow my full hard scales
 about to
 weight my final armor.

A. McA. Miller

TWO POEMS

Washing Hands

This is not the last time
I find a trace of each
effort in the dirt of my hands.
Cement seemed so worn
and clean where I retrieved
a fallen coin spinning its
ring like a mirror for
the blind, yet
here the smudge of concrete
dust illuminates thumb and
finger, always stung or
kissed for being there first.
And the left hand plunged in
earth to find which way
mole's burrow led, careless
of old star-face, hand wanting
to live alone so, a miner
of sacred ground. Palm
of the strong one is spread with
rust by the gate handle,
latch slowly locked by neglect.
The yard beyond is gone to thistle,
each stone clenched in its glove
of moss, numbers and name.

Where a chuck-hole on the
dead-end road caught rain
hands meet to share their
touch with earth. In water
hands know their trade, embrace
then divide, leave enough
dirt to protect the skin, and
under each nail a dark
crescent to carry from here.

Somewhere the light moon
waned and creation waits
for a wanderer with such a gift.

A Gypsy's History of the World

before sunrise hides all stars
reach to learn by braille
the single turning constellation
dewfall in the grass

*four-cornered circle spins
without a sound
four-cornered circle
not one made by hand*

in sleep a silent bird has
deepest song a tree's heart still
a flower's rainbow root-held
not to be

*four-cornered circle seems
right perfect round
four-cornered circle
not one made by hand*

who owns this restless earth
the nation of the dead and yet
unborn we who walk here now
take care

*four-cornered circle turns
all over this dark ground
four-cornered circle
not one made by hand*

step into the spreading shadow
the cave in what we know
colors are less than the crow
who wears them

*four-cornered circle grows
in the island mound
four-cornered circle
not one made by hand*

a leaf remembers its form
seed after seed with every
constellation of fingertips
a hand recalls the world

*four-cornered circle spins
without a sound
four-cornered circle
not one made by hand*

"At Barstow"

Midway through the Sixties the English poet,
Charles Tomlinson, was benighted in Barstow,
California, that used to be my home town.
He had his car refuelled, he took a quick walk and
A look around; he had a taco at a taco stand;
Then being a rather tired poet
Stayed overnight at a motel.

He remembered the air, how he could smell
The gasoline; he heard the big trucks throb in the night;
He remembered how neon looks from afar.
Yet to him it seemed 'a placeless place,'
Not European, and at the same time
Not English; to him the north star
Seemed lower than it ought to be;
He didn't speak with anyone, and though
He read the reports of four senses
He didn't notice much. Memory and fancy
eked out with irony, he composed
a poem for his fans: "At Barstow."

In the morning,
"Up rose the sun, and up rose Tomlinson,"
and on he went.

Tomorrow the world.

EUREKAS

The archaeologist's pick splits
 stone voraciously, with the jabs of the great
 gray pileated —but clumsier, huger, a
 bird's search blown to human scale. It's
 hungry, it wants this metal insect
 chrysalis, this squat little cling, that the
 archaeologist lifts and later labels
2nd millenium B.C. —Safety Pin, bronze.
 His eyes dance. He strokes his find as if knowledge
 transmitted itself through fondness, as if to build
 up a charge. This could be the first, the very
 first, point in the world that married
pierce and *painless*. Someone cared. Someone
 invented caution. /And

there's a worm that's dreaming a stomach
 around it, the host's good bellyslops both
 provender and home. It needs the organpipes
 of cow or the cool dank tubes of salmon, maybe
 an infant's spongy digestions will do. This
 explains the boiling of water, the mineral
 residue chalking our pots that says *safe* —the
 invention of sized, domestic
 excitations to purity. /And

in the dark an 8-year-old, we'll call him
 Albert, wakes from the familiar
 world of dream and patchquilt, crawls all
 fours to where the bathroom spills the house's
 only light, and watches at that strange hour,
 in that suddenly ugly wattage, as Daddy
 Irv —grown secret, and fierce,

from this newness— studies a glass finger
 filled with urine turn blue. Much later,
 he'll understand: diabetes, the splotch of cow
 circling Grandma Nettie, holding her up, the
 pill that dyes sugar —blue's
 okay. Then, though, he cried
 at it all, that whole
 malignant transforming. He remembers
 Daddy dropping the vial, the placating
 hug, the croon, "The Old Man
 'll fix it, The Old Man'll make it all right."
 He called himself The Old Man. A thousand times,
 it must have been, he made it all right. But
 that night Albert
 invented time travel and, in a flash, for
 a flash, was older than anyone, than
 Grandma even, in his
 understanding of how complex and inherited
 the grief gets. And so he
 wept, with his oldness, that Daddy Irv could
 cradle him and feel in
 control of some small troubling. /And

Gutenberg cranks one hundred pounds
 of Bible through obstinate air; its
 shadow inks the room, a moment, then lifts.
 Galileo's armlong tube shoots vision
 farther than cannonry, for all its
 mass, shoots wreckage; his eye, the
 first launched satellite. Leonardo
 sketches. Pervasive: hydraulics
 in every marital pumping; every sun
 he squinted at, a gear. There can't be
 cellophane. Then Brandenberger makes cellophane.

MaryhadaLITtlelambLITtlelambLITtlelamb: first
 phonograph. The
 little known stories. Always, some man's falling,
 screwdriver gripped in teeth, and
 when we look again, afraid of how wide his
 blood will pool, there's this cocky grin and a
 fuck-you finger thrust from between two huge flapping
 steel wings. Of course steel can't fly.
 Too heavy. He unwraps his tuna-on-rye
 from its cellophane, rings for the stewardess. Pretty. /And

it was dark. Tom Edison
 frowned at a tin strand, tweezed it
 from the apparatus, and flung it on a pile of gold,
 aluminum, silver, and copper strands. It was
 still dark. Alexander walked in and said hey
 jeez, Tom, why don't you light a candle or
 something? Later, after the black eye, he
 thought twice about in-person visits and
 invented the telephone. Bell. The little known stories.

/And

yes it's dark. Yes Albert's 8 and adventures
 alone, through the sleepblanked house, to
 make sissy. His kid's arc
 misses the bowl, spreads a warm, then cold,
 red pool on the tiles. Just like
 Grandma's, colored something
 for worry. *I-feel-okay-so-it-doesn't-matter*,
I-feel-okay-so-it-doesn't-matter, "Daddy,
 I think I sissied blood." Then the whole house will startle
 up, with faces unbottomed like shopping bags... Dummy
 Albert's pissed on a red sheet of newsprint. "It's
 okay," he's *not* sick, just drowsy and stupid,

the air's gauze-thick with assurance of how he's okay. And maybe he is. But he knows matriculation, no matter how unofficial, for what it is. The degree in susceptibility. The lesson, through failure, in keeping self-esteem. Fear, Familial Warmth, and Interdependence, each takes claim for this discovery. /And

Immanuel Nobel invents plywood. Generations, too, though distinct, are close-pressed laminations. The son, Alfred Nobel, announces dynamite: 1867. *Con, de, struction* —the differences, the links. /Look, this example of Josiah Wedgwood's expertise, in bufftones and chalkblues, *the Noblest English potter*. He worked in earths. The son, in light. The difference. Thom Wedgwood. The link. Lived all his 34 years *in disability, and continual, increasing Pain in the stomach, as if some beast of my own totemic persuasion sharpened its Claws in my Vitals* —discovers the action of sun ("photo) on silver nitrate, reproduces a picture (graph. The first surviving print is of a kiln and pot.") Generations. /Listen, "I am descended from Robert Fulton. I can't say my small contribution will take as great a place in History's hall of fame as his steamboat, but..." and Mary Phelps Jacob, 1914, breaks with sinuous grace from her whale plating, bends her best to pink ribbon and two tied pocket handkerchiefs, and shocks the night's soiree in what she'll later patent as a brassiere. "I believe that my ardor for invention springs from his loins." /And

the archaeologist's pick's
 framed —gilded walnut
 border, black velvet backing —Museum
 of Cultural Artifacts. Thin, and pitted —now
 less a hard swung arc to crack
 bones out of the planet, more a pterodactyl
 by Giacometti. 1948: utilitarian. 1976:
 decorative. The invention of art, of
 context. Across the hall, the Bronze Age
 safety pins clasp air to air behind glass.
 Once they were fasteners. Now they're forerunners,
 "...line of descent" "...quaint" The invention of
 the past "...damn nicer'n *our* pins." /And

 molybdenum! molybdenum! It's *got* to be
 molybdenum. Edison fiddles with fifteen attachments
 and, one
 hour later, feet asleep
 in the thickening dark, removes a strand
 of molybdenum with the queasy touch of an ailurophobic's
 hefting a whisker. It
 wasn't. It's still dark. It wasn't nickel.
 It's still dark. It wasn't sonofabitch zinc. /And

 we risk the dark. Knowingly
 willfully. Or it's no use being the first
 shambling *Homo erectus* to howl
 from the lowest pit of the cave with the
 invention of fire. Every evening we walk under stars
 where they burn on their black plain like foundries,
 each
 the first, in some legend we've socketed into the sky, to
 fuse sand to glass, solder legs on the astrolabe, roast
 a shank —or, later, after that bull's been cranked on
 the spit

to crisp perfection, one of those fires will burst light
enough for the seeing, and sterilization, of
Grandma's insulin. It's brilliant. But it
needs the night. We require, like the
stars, darkness. And we want
to be stars. We each want to be, out of
family, out of *hubris*, the one recognizable
gene in most monumental has relief
to turn its blunt, patriarch's, features
toward the light. From the plasmy sameness,
toward light. /And

so, in his last 1896
dawn, Otto Lilienthal dangles from two mechanized
beating wings —wood/metal/fabric. He hears the old
nighttime creaks of his parents'
house above him —glides —the sky: sheer rush —gasp
—crashes. His 2,000th flight. To the ground. We
call this humus. We call the flowers Orville,
Wilbur. Wright. For every pilot, a boutonniere, for
every stew a corsage. For the astronaut. To the stars.
And from the stars back down to Galileo, walking
that tightrope he called his line
of sight. It frays, eventually —we come to his blindness
to give him a flower, who like a flower
also followed the sun. But a rootend's a
fist gripping darkness: Thom Wedgwood
discovered that light on silver resulted
in a photo/graph yet
couldn't fix
the image. And, later, after
the terrible pain,
couldn't care. They fade,

flowers, pictures, Thom
who? You know, this is almost
 not funny: Francis Bacon died
 of a chill caught experimenting with freezing
 techniques.

He was trying to stuff a
 chicken with snow. Let me chip this
 bouquet from the icebox
 and set it, here, by these metaphorical graves.
 Stuffing chickens with snow! —correlative
 for the grand,
 damned, idiot, brave, sage, necessary
 seedbearing gesture. /And

Grandma dies.

We huddle about her pancreatic failing.
 In each of us, one bone becomes more vulnerable, it
 dreams of a surgical blade, of
 archaeology, and shivers. Like a motor it keeps us
 trembling at night. *Flash*: a pill boiling
 Nettie's pee blue. *Flash*: Nettie over the stove, the
 chicken
 cached full with lard-sparkled bread, and her whole
 hand
 in it a moment then sewing shut. My
 sister spills over my arms. The invention of comforting.
 She wants to know why. Daddy Irv sits like the
 t.v. clicked off. Why. Grandma's wrist is as thin as her
 cane.

Why. We beat against that question, *flash*: Galileo
 bruising his eyes on the sky. We go farther
 than that. She cries why again. And
 so we invent heaven. /And

one night you arrive, say, in Salt Lake City.
Around the edges of muscatel, dungflies are darning
the holes in the night. On one block, the girls go
down for twenty; akimbo
chopstick legs. Their skirts, the size of a cagecover,
bring the animal with, wherever. Next block, the
church —a step inside
a sugarcube. The choir's angelically
white, but solid —milkbottles
singing. It's
all here. And so you
make a friend —this evening, laboring over, say,
guitarstrings
like fat black garters, one chord's the code for your
entering
somebody's life. Or you hurt a friend,
bad, your messenger Sneer comes to tell him how he's
gratuitous as a mousse. This is the
map of your travelling: a matchstick and sodastraw
Salt Lake streetplan dangling in your car, the invention
of cochlea, of gyroscope. Sometimes, you sleep —the
mind's
black mourningband. You wake in a fever. Or
in a woman. You're the king and queen
flush in a house of cards. This is the wind in the flue.
Here's the roses, the snipewounds. The knife
brings a stone angel
out of stone. Or a poem about an angel
out of language. South, the desert's many
vulvate arroyos; cactus
tridents the flats. Here, copper refineries: panpipes
playing nuances of smudge in the air. Here, the
Great Salt Lake: even hope, for once, floats. Your

match-map hangs like the star over last year's creche,
you
don't need it. You've learned these ways, and
the orphan Grief on your doorstep every morning, and
the rare
kinks and perforations of Joy in an otherwise bland
line.

One night you arrive at a mirror. Your name's, say,
Albert. You say your name
to the mirror. You're a long
way from home. Or you're home. A mirror's only
as deep as its room. This is your
face, from nothing, your
everything that the days made. /And
a worm is dreaming a stomach
around it. I mean sex, sex
as assertion of self. It wants to be a pen
autographing her darkness —*Albert*
in foxfire semen, those ol' stars-in-the-night. Her
too: as if the rough nuptial tumble were for rubbing
off the last few flakes of matrix that keep her
silhouette ill-defined —remember the angel
from stone. It's not
wrong —/like a worm's not "wrong"/ except
in special context —/like
a host/. Then any marriage feeds a parasite. No
wonder sexual passion's so
transcendent, sometimes, we say blood "boils" —our
cleansing
love, temporarily, of
inventors' requisite solitudes. /And

it isn't iron not plaster not horsehair not
 cobalt not leather not knock
 knock, Hey Tom you should open the curtains in here
 hey
 you wanna go out for a sandwich or something?

"Madame.

Curie. get. the. hell. OUT!" /And

they're chic. Antique, pre-Greek
 safety pins —she sees them, in their
 Museum cases the ornamental hull and slim bronze
 tusk, and

reproduces them by the thousand: her
 Nik Nak Shoppe. Now doing, undoing,
 a diaper, repeats

not only motif but artifact; and two seemingly
 disparate moments /4,000 years apart/ are
 congruent. The invention of
 looped time. An infant waddles off, the pin a
 closure that catches dusk's only light. We
 make, of chronology,

a ring. As if a man could wed his ancestry. Grandma,
 whose husband's name was also Albert, I
 have my sugars checked too, in a strange way
 I thee wed. /And

Daddy Irv, whose father was also Albert, I
 hurt you. Every Passover, I was the bitterest herb.
 You stood in your prayershawl, high on the
 cliffs of disappointment, and watched my sputtering
 craft grow small. I wanted to wave, but was small;
 so twisted it into a nonexistent fly's death-swat.
 Remember softball? *swat!* at the Company picnic,
 loud shirts, loudspeakers. Remember Duke

fetching balls? I've a photo: you're pretending
 to swat me once on my pouty face and dumbass
 Duke (seems big as a Shetland pony) leaps to defend:
 you're
 the hit of the party, wedding
 waltzing the livingroom with a dog. It was fun, you
 were

loud, it was embarrassing. I was hit.

At the party. I wouldn't say the *amen*. I wouldn't
 bring home friends, I made you nonexistent, you gave
 Duke away and hugged me even in may hate. In *shul*
 you *davened*. In the hospital bed your lips moved. Old
 Man, don't climb the stairs. A mugger, okay, but a
 heart's attack's no picnic. *Let* the Company twist

Chicago's

tenement walkups into the world's largest treadmill
 —for younger feet. When I heard, my own heart folded
 in like kleenex. Something's there. The difference. My
 woman, Ellen, cried tonight, I heard myself whispering
 Albert'll fix it. The Old Man'll make it all right.
 The link. I go every year, the doctor says safe
 blue, it's okay. The urine. This
 connectedness —a deviant, but
 strong, sweetness. /And

*"I stood before that mirror in a trance
 of joy," he wrote to his wife. "I have got
 it!*

Our future is made."

A 40-year-old salesman, King Camp Gillette,
 from Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, spasms, eyes
 in a wild roulette,
 ecstatic with his visionary blast. He's
 thought up the safety razor. /And

really, that's it, isn't it? The loneliness
 we need, the Other we need to
 write it home to. That pin. To make the future.
 The link. Ellen,
 Roentgen: fumbling till things click. It's
 1895, the year of Gillette's dream and, here
 in the Rhineland: effluvia so mysterious, they're "x"
 rays. Roentgen's wife submits her hand; brave; and
 her private, living
 olduvai's exposed. The fingerbones: japanese
 bamboo, gray brushwash. A brutal
 beauty, what supports the flesh. And here, on
 one finger, here where she submitted her hand
 originally, years ago... a hard, impervious circle... The
 ring. That link. The
 past. The pin. The infant.
 Generations. The difference. The blood-deep
 wanting-to-be-different, and the future,
 and the click. I don't know: one book says it
 may have been carbon, or cotton. One says "a
 carbonised strip of bamboo cane" from "a lady
 friend." The giving. I don't know. My account
 may have been too bombastic,
 spurious. Maybe I wasn't 8
 in those terrible,
 processing, darks. 8's the difference
 between us —20, 28— like a living being sometimes.
 Ellen,
 come here, Edison screws that
 final filament in... Simple,
 poof, and it's light. /And
 we walk into day. Sholes sits at his typewriter,
 playing, transported, for a moment what
 music was to Tchaikovsky. A cloud, in the sun a

loaf of bread, passes over. Old
 Man, I tried. Like Nobel: the Peace Prize, that one
 calm

following so many years of explosion. A day so
 clear, each thing's been
 thought by someone and wears that
 thought for a halo. Carl Magee: the parking meter.
 Old Man with your leatherette sales case, Old-Man-
 Daddy

sugaring bootleg cherry brandy in gallon jars. Red
 fern: today as finely-twigged as capillary
 burst in the eye. Pasteur: up, past
 the elbow, in that adamant tub of milk. Today,
 the lake so still, it's Microscope Lens
 and Bacterial Cathouse in one. Old-Man-tobacco.
 Old-Man-wait-up-on-my-dates. We
 walk into this lucid day. A mirror
 makes of a room the padding in a box, and this
 my face: the gift that's offered. Stone
 from the motherlode, worked
 and polished. Jenner: vaccination. Henry
 Archer: the perforating machine. Old Man, my
 compost, Old Man my stain on the sheets, we
 invent ourselves every morning. /And

to walk out the wheel fire the wedge
 into night where stars the lever the gear
 the sextant to walk out under stars the
 pulley under stars to take a breath the pendulum stars
 to walk out and breathe the windmill the battery
 waterpump stars to be transistor laser to walk out
 under stars the night to breathe the pin the stars to
 be alive, and instrumental.

Albert Goldbarth

ANTARCTIC WINTER

(after Richard Byrd)

April

The summer light dies slow. I sense
A timeless patience, infinite care. Even when it's gone,
From under the horizon, sun
Casts up green glow. Cold kills the breeze, my breath
Freezes, and hangs above me like a cloud.

Now dusk prevails.
The serpentine aurora eats the stars.

Silence grows palpable, as if
An angry critic brooded in the gloom,
Always about to speak.

I will keep order here.

Outdoors I promenade from flag to flag,
On the water side of Beacon Hill in spring. For a week,
I walked with Polo to Cathay, so lost
In wonder that I lost my path. Sometimes
I drop through time to watch
The slow-pulsed Ice Age ebb, and earlier yet,
A wave of ice still heavy on New York.

May

Today I found
Some snow as light as down, let it blow
On my breath.

Still, these dark moods. Why? The evenness?
Body rebelling against lack of touch
And sound? I wind the phonograph, the music leaps
And blends with the aurora on the night.

Sudden rocketing pain and nausea.
I'm a thin flame stretched between two voids.
Only cold's real. For months I've been breathing
Fumes from the stove. My fort
Has ambushed me, and the worst cold yet to come.

June

Horizon line, a heavy slash of blood.
My life's an emergency, the emptiness
That comes when the engine of a plane cuts out.
Always this.
My muscles always tense, even in sleep.

July

It must be a queer business, freezing to death.
Simple absence of all pain,
Agony beyond words,
Enfolding flame.
Sky's coursed by a great blazing stream
Spinning itself to green petals of light. Whatever comes,
I know that I belong to this, alive
With solitary harmony.

My eyes freeze shut. When I thaw them, my fingers
freeze.

So ends July.

Sixty-one days of pain have passed, I'm still

Alone, the other men

Far off. Ice covers everything.

Yet there's gain. The day

Heaves ponderously south, firing

Its gorgeous signal pots. The sun's but a month away.

August

They are coming, the men, the light.

Joan Malory Webber