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Cover: Robert Shetterly

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WHIG ROSE

from QUILTS

*In which the black-centered flowers signify
sympathy with the abolitionist movement. There
were undoubtedly Tory husbands who slept under
them unknowingly.*

Bonds never put asunder
left us to our secrets.
When we couldn't fight
or speak, we fashioned things.
The roots always underneath,
ceaseless fingerings of loam.

There was a moaning in the air.
It said my brother's keeper.
There's a dusky stream
that is mine alone.

Look into the black
center of a rose, where
we married,
each to other:
a window where
trainwhistles stopped.

Estelle Milligan

CENTIPEDE

Geophilus electricus is blind.
It is generally conceded
that its luminescence
has some purpose
other than lighting up the cracks
and undersides of rocks
that it inhabits.
It may be that it glows
to lure its prey,
although it is a little difficult
to see the need
to dazzle grubs and earthworms,
who would be sufficiently overwhelmed
by the racial memory
of a hundred whiskery legs or so
trilling rapidly in their direction
in perfect sync.

And there are those who've said
that this centipede
glows to attract lovers,
although its sexual habits are remote,
including, rather inevitably,
as they do,
a hint of copulatory feet.
Glowing, in this respect,
would seem to serve
as an ironic variation on
the blind leading the blind,
and nothing more.
This surely is a case of
amorous overkill,
since a hundred legs
would know a hundred legs anywhere.

Faultlessly elegant,
golden geophilus electricus
doesn't resort to violence in the kill.
Exuding the classic scent of almonds,
it dispatches its victims with cyanide.
This self-sufficient centipede
moves through its darkness in perfect confidence
that when its great jaws (relative to its size) snap,
something will be in them,
and that all those feet
will cover more than distance.

John Ratti

from DEATH SEGMENTS

for Buddha's claws
a whisper of not-asking
in the quest
for the perfect jewel
the reach
of the climber
along the sharp face
of the highest mountain
arms too short
a ledge
a song about
a broken rope

John Price

TWO POEMS**Story of the Youngest**

I would draw the alphabet in milk for her
when thirst is written on her lips
but then she steals the cup & empties it.

She chants "NO!" between the nods of others.
There is a chorus of women in slips
yet the straps slide

from her shoulders as she hunches,
coiling in her spine
like rope.

Silently her blood ripens
& descends
to paint her thighs.

Her hands are rough, their lines
are splinters driven in, or roads
started then abandoned.

Like rain on glass, she patters
down the hall, her ankles
strengthen.

She never finds the mirror
though her hair is like a cat's
fur, thick with light.

She cannot sleep.
The wings of her sheets come together
beating endlessly.

Until the moon strikes twelve
she must repeat herself
& this clock has no pity & no mouth.

The Nettle Spinner's Brothers

Their wings are buttresses against the forest.
They huddle by the reeds, drink from the soiled cup
of the pond. At dusk I gather
the paths they shed, step by step, wooing ashes.
The fireflies slip past like drops of blood.

The dragonflies are blue, and sharp as needles.
I could use them to stitch across bruises
and hem wounds. Perhaps I could complete a quilt
and smuggle my brothers back under cover of darkness and
sleep.

They would veil the moon's eye with their tailfeathers.

My fingers dip into the purple nettles,
armoured blossoms almost unapproachable as princes.
I win my thread from them and spin it
to unravel an enchantment. The shoulders of young boys
nudge each other on the growing cloth.

The buttons have fallen from my hands like dice.
I am saddened by these shirts, completed
and folded in the shadow of my fallow wheel.
I wash them as if they had been worn and pin them up:
billowing, white as flags of truce.

I let the wind fill out their sleeves, the bees
dot their cuffs with pollen. I suspect my brothers
hide behind the green dome of the meadow,
hesitate before this landscape mild as grazing cows,
mute, their temperatures descending toward the human.

Deborah Woodard

WHAT IT WOULD

It would stay;
would make marriages,
burrow in the bedclothes
as if to root there.
In dreams of biding
it tastes still
the milk-warm tit.
It would have children
and hold them,
fix them with dots of glue
in black-leaved albums
to stare over the birthday candles.
It would tread with regularity
a deepening groove
to lie down in when work stops.
It would take ease
under old rafters.
To prolong the habit of living
it would snuggle,
make marriages.
It would stay.

It would go,
nosing the wind,
snapping strings and fingers,
a tickle in the instep,
and at every tip and orifice
unreachable itches.
In dreams of levitation
it stretches
for impossible legsplits.
Won't stop for weddings
or narratives.
It would pursue

elegant variations.
It would roll from embraces
and leave, like a snail,
a wet track over stones and twigs.
It would be pulling up tentpins
like carrots
and be unexpectedly absent.
It would make love
against the habit of dying.

It would roar,
would amplify its voice
to a heavy cry
for the lost nipple,
the spiderweb on the lintel,
the early warning signs
clustered like mermaids
on bare rocks,
the curled snapshots,
the high tors of divorce
and attenuation,
the rafters crushed,
and the campfire broken
that it would have pissed
to clouds of smoke
sour in the dark.
It would abuse mirrors
and send envelopes,
stamped, self-addressed,
containing threats.
It would organize.
It would kill.

Down in the street an incision
lays open a fat intestine.
Diviners in yellow hats

pray over the entrails.
One rides a jackhammer
without love.

Across the way in a blind building
two windows wink open.

I am the one who is writing.
It writes nothing.
I don't know how to conclude.
It would know.
It waits for me to conclude
so it can take over.
It would take over.
But I would only begin again.

James L. McPherson

FIRST BORN

We shall not die.
Here, in sheets,
sleeps our joined eternity.
To this parturitioned head bend
generations
not yet seed, sprung in earth
still to be laid down
on granite, slowly breaking
underground.
We are of things
which we will never see; such
flowering,
such fertility.

Susan Hand Shetterly

FOUR POEMS**Pests**

Even if President McKinley couldn't,
the elderly could hear the cat's breath of indian children,
they dream of tubercular children
purring like flies under their palms,
like whiskers on the spilled, blue milk of their skin.
Indians prattle at the feet of beds
like houseflies, like children who don't realize
how sick grandmas are; they sting
and sting; when the old wake
they show us their hands, "See?" they whisper.
Ghosts of indians filibuster
like summer flies. In their sleep the old twitch
as if a cat were smelling the milk
on their lips. "Do you see that child there
at the side of my bed, at my fingertips?"
Elderly women itch as if cat-hair were in the linings
of their housecoats. Even the elderly gentleman
who fought in the indian wars
thinks he hears oglala sioux children
inside the television like bees
dying inside a bottle. Sixtyeight years ago
windows were sealed shut,
indians died along the sills, there was a loud humming
like flies make just before they die.

This is what it is like to live in a town
where a tribe has died.
I remember the blue certainty of shadows,
a thick, bluewhite snow on my wall,
three men crossing it, two with axes,
they killed the third.
In the morning I touched the place on my wall where he
died.

April 9, 1945/Bewahrung

From my house I was sure I could hear everything,
I could tell between channel buoys
like bells of different churches,
I could hear the sea mumbling its low mass,
elderly priest hurrying the gospel,
mending the same dark clothes for the poor
it had been saving for years,
I could hear each wave arriving late, sliding into its pew,
I could tell between each piece of change,
dropping into the collection plate.

From my house I could hear everything else if I was quiet,
churches tugging at their moorings,
I could tell between them like old boats in the harbor
I had closed my eyes so often I knew —
whose hulls took waves like doors closing in empty factories
the hulls of which fleet rattled
like windows being shut all through a house —
I heard each church drift to tether's end and pull at its
slack,

from my house I heard the churches creak
as they were tugged back.

From my house I could hear everything — if I did not move
I could hear everything else in the world
that did not move — the groaning of wharves,
of the dark-brick buildings of institutions
whose roofs I clung to like wharves,
looking down — I could tell between buildings like wharves
by how far they sunk down,
which was Harvard, which my mother's state hospital,
from my house I heard waves rise over its wards
and mother once again drown.

From my house I was sure I heard everything else in the
world,
when I was still enough,
all the countries in Europe shifting at their moorings —
eyes closed, I could hear Germany move
among them like a freighter in a harbor too small for it,
I knew its cargo by its wake,
I could hear millions of small stones being scraped back,
from my house I heard the waves rise again
like bordering countries,
their feudal, cresting, holocaustial surf break.

When Are You Going to Grow Up?

My oldest boy wants to know if we are returning
to the age of the dinosaurs,
he is afraid of the monsters they are dredging lakes for
like stolen cars. My three year old lies on museum floors,
“you can’t touch me, I am dead,”
death gives him power over us.

My sons bring me skulls from the water company’s woods,
spiders, dead bats, lizards
like old murder weapons in cases still not solved.
I write this because I am too tired
to remember anything but being a child
because I am bad at names

I still cannot name things I remember,
the three black plants
beside the sunken garbage pail that was only an excuse
to cover the hole
that went straight into the middle of the earth

These ugly plants
like words spelled so badly you can’t look them up,
black whiskers knotted like bibs
around chins of pirates clambering up the sides of houses,
every night boarding our becalmed house

Three stiff beards, three silent uncles
lifted out of the ground
by their chins — huge bodies rooted underground, corpses,
whiskers still growing
after death — and their nails?

Three tramps always outside our kitchen door.
I remember an old black man chalking our gate,
grabbing my brother and me, shaking us,
telling us our mother was vicious,
was crazy, mother shrieking from the porch.

I was sure there was a hole
that went straight down to the middle of the earth,
I could never see the bottom,
I used to lift the pail in and out of the dark
or rush out, push open the lid with my foot and run off,
I loved to hear the iron rim ring behind me.

Mother tried to show me there was a bottom to everything,
an end if I reached far enough in
I could touch. She tried to make me touch what I feared,
these three ugly nameless plants
outside our kitchen door like dead rodents,
old muskrats that would not decompose.

I would not touch anything,
I always took the long way around.

Town Beach

Mother hammering your head against walls,
you rushing out screaming, "She's killing me, she's killing
me"
mother staring at her hands
as if they had crawled out of shells
as if they were crawling up her arms, trailing slime over
her,

over us. We used to lie in bed
whispering about madness, about going mad as her,
secreting madness, making it spiral over us,
its lips curling, narrowing
into even more delicate chambers that would harden over
us.

You liked to swim over your head, pretend to drown,
only your feet out of water,
plucked white roots. Convinced again, I curved my body
around me
shoulders rounded, tightening
as if I were trying to pull the ends of a bow together.
I wanted you back, near me
as if you were part of a collection I had been saving for
years,
moonshell, lady's ear, chinese alphabet.
I wanted us always to be left
early mornings, carrying blankets down from the
bathhouse.

To be beginning another long day together, testing the
water,
making war before anyone else,
to bunker in the deep billowing shade under lifeguards'
boats,
to feel the beach slowly taken back from us,
to dab blood off of our feet in the dunes,
to pull rose rugosa burrs off terrycloth,
to unwrap waxpaper off sandwiches softened by the sun,
to tie towels around our waists
and let our bathingsuits drop to the ground like parts of
bodies
we could not use anymore.

To dress in the dark, salt boxes of the bathhouse
in compartments we had to share,
to feel them hold their shadows around us like fathers
while we dressed, each spanking
his own bottom, cool and soft as white sand under
bathhouses.

You curved my hand around tillers,
held it there, taught me to steer our herreshoff through
jetties,
that wide white house being moved.
I want to lie on wet sandy towels, shivering
from having tried to please you.

I want you to put your hands under me again,
teach me again the deadman's float.
I think of you at nine, secreted inside the tip
of your rancor, growing furiously
more beautiful, more adamant.
When they put mother away, you beat your head against
the wall
pulling out of our arms, pulling back to the wall
with the steadfast magnetic fury
of dogs hurling themselves against locked, cellar doors.
I want your ruins back,

I want the staircases you spiraled down,
the grand entrances, vestibules and corridors, turrets and
eaves,
friezes you chiseled out of wet sand
you made me mold into cornices for you,
the columns you weakened, foundations you shaved.
I want the slowly emptied cuffs and sleeves of long
afternoons,
I want to crawl back into the cold white sand

under the bathhouse and listen to showers
gasp and drowse off like old men,
water seeping and filling through spaces between
floorboards.

I want to lie under men's rooms
and smell their dark politics, to listen to sounds of
bathingsuits
being squeezed through the wringer,
slits opening in its cracking rubber,
I want to be four and afraid to touch the rollers,
you letting your hand ride up them.
I want to lie with you on late afternoons and look up
through floorboards, needing only slants of light
and skin to imagine women dressing above us,
to listen to them whisper like voices from the future.

Christopher Bursk

OF NIGHTMARES AND WHITE CANES

Like the sky remembering whiffs of cumuli
— a dream: A choked voice in a men's room
calling out, "Hey, fellow I broke my glasses
... where are the goddamn urinals?" I awake
trembling. Had that been *my* voice?

I recall sitting in the john of the Memorial
Library, all the locks broken as usual, when
the door is suddenly yanked open and a tall
student enters, coming straight at me. My gasp
... his recoiling flight... the door slamming shut...
I hear him bustling about in the next cabin...
I have to laugh. The fucking nerve of the guy!
My colleagues are greatly amused.
A week later, I meet him in front of the Library,
carrying a thin white cane.

How many years ago was that? Not many.
I enter rooms warily now.

The young black boy with the white cane
circles frantically around himself, a lopsided
top spinning out of control. His stick scrapes
the asphalt in search of a sign, an obstacle, an
object, a wall, a step... He looks grotesque,
like a clumsy ice-dancer attempting a pirouette,
like a crazy drunk, or a clown. He hears my
steps and veers toward me, panicky,
stammering, "Where am I? Is this a parking lot?"
It is. In front of an abandoned gas station.
"Where are you headed?" He is still shaking, the wild

carousel still turning in his brain, but slowing down.
"To the post office," he mutters. I lead the way.
His bitterness, his shame, his envy of me, the seeing,
grazes my face like wind. I open the door for him,
walk on. The wind hurls a rain of leaves
against my eyes.

Felix Pollak

FOUR DAYS WITHOUT FOOD

Four days without food
and the thought snaps in the open claw.
Everything now unbearably beautiful:
the perfect machinery of my body,
the windtalk, the fierce kiss
of tendril and stone.

I move through grasses
bent into the forms of sleeping monks.
Sunlight coats my hands.
Silence, with its transparent wings,
settles on the branches of my lungs.

At noon I curl up inside a hollow tree
and sleep; against the bonewhite sky,
memories sailing up
like tattered leaves in a windspout.

John Witschel

TWO POEMS

Thimble

Hemlines can rise and fall without her.
Socks gape now and stick out our toes at us.
The scraps she kept will never be quilts.
Her lids stitched tight

She's made it through the needle's eye
and seems content to hold her empty hands
and let the family pass.

Tomorrow her heavy daughter

will water the african violets
and pause to open the lid of the fruitcake tin
and sort through buttons and spools
for the silver thimble.

But it will slip, chime once
on the treadle of the old Singer,
and tumble into a corner near
the back leg of the rosebud chair.

Down on her hands and knees,
reaching for it, she will marvel how
already the rug is soaked with dark
spilling from its tiny mouth.

Lot's Wife

Messengers of God, the two strode like torches
into the hills. The town was tinder,
a fuse they'd lit. Dust, small stones, their steps
in the scorched grass asked too much of her.
She winced at the flames that were their wings.

The narrator has pace to consider
and the fate of the Chosen. In a single line
he turns—as she turned—away
leaving her on the brow of the hill
where she squinted to read the few words of the verse
her doorposts added to the great black scroll
unrolling above the plain and wept herself
empty. The hot wind sweeping past
fixed her in the crust of her own salt.

Through Zoar and beyond, evening, as it had to,
sifted down. Scrawny mountain cattle came.
With many soft carvings their tongues took
what was left. They do not forget. Each night they come
home,
their delicate mouths bearing her grief.

Edward Wilson

TWO POEMS

An Interview with God

I'm in paradise asking God questions.
He seems to have a lot to answer for.

Splendid summer afternoon, perfume of flowers.
We drink China tea, not ambrosia,
On a terrace overlooking the Thames.
Neat lawns beside a Tudor facade
Recall film-set decor, unashamedly bourgeois.

I twiddle the knobs on the Time Machine.
The Thames fades, changes to a steaming marsh.
Mesozoic times. A dying Megalosaurus,
Forty foot long, carnivorous,
Gazes at us from black, pleading eyes.

Its pain spreads out across uncharted years.
In spite of myself, I assume a voyeur's role,
Sip tea behind the armour-plated screen.
The mind that made this must have been insane.
God, wild-eyed, jabs at the controls.

Back on the terrace I ask him to explain.
God replies by fetching in Wordsworth.
"Darwin led you astray," he informs me;
"Your generation wallowed in sickness,
Bereft of joy, fearing my simple words."

He lifts his hand. The garden breathes and sighs.
The living universe of twig and leaf
Floods my imagination like a sea.
All around us voices of silence sing
Of Nature's peace and grace and harmony.

The show over, Wordsworth withdraws to his Lakes.
My turn. I choose a tableau of pestilence.
The Black Death kills uncounted millions;
Bodies stuck to the floor of the lazar-house
Raised by iron hooks for burning in the street.

We watch a boy racked on a tumbled bed.
Dark patches on legs and groin, buboes
Under the armpits. A thin scream of protest
Breaks from his fever-crustled lips.
We slip back horror-struck to the present.

Once more on the terrace we eye each other.
Neat-suited, mid-fifties, mild and soft-voiced,
God resembles those English dons
So self-effacing they almost disappear.
He tries to break the news gently.

"We have granted you a brief respite
In this bourgeois Eden of your dreams.
You made this heaven, you made me in this shape
To share your comfortable retreat.
It seems you have a lot to answer for.

“You ask for justice; there is none.
You must renounce the Christian heresy
That I created all things, even pain.
The war with evil, unredeemed by time,
Spans the whole universe without end.”

We embark on a last pilgrimage
Across Europe to St. Peter’s in Rome.
God flinches from the baroque altar,
Thrusts himself forward, transfixed, elate,
Before the Pieta of Michelangelo.

A youthful Virgin nurses the stricken Christ.
Tenderness so flows in folds of marble drapery
All beholders feel embraced.
I’m suddenly nervous, out of breath,
Faintly hearing God’s final words:

“Between grief and nothing I choose grief.”

Mr. Parker

Harvest festival at Queen’s Street Mission.
Behind sheaves of wheat forty scrubbed children,
Impossibly cherubic,
Faces red like heaped plates of tomatoes,
Sweat their way through seasonal hymns.

Framed by dangling bunches of grapes,
My feet hidden by a huge marrow,
Ten year old soloist,
I tell serried ranks of adoring parents
Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy.

In the dark vestibule, Mr. Parker, treasurer,
For whom pederast is an unknown word,
Counts the offering.

Lean, prim, with sparse canary yellow hair,
He fears to cross boundaries.

For twenty years he's taken little boys
On tremulous outings to the sea-side.
By trade a bricklayer
He scrubs his fingers white for week-ends,
Likes clever children, middle class.

Next day as we picnic in sandhills
Mr. Parker's neat black shoes, trim grey suit,
Strike discord.

Too casually his hand drops on my shoulder,
His only desired form of embrace.

I shrug him off, run through the dunes,
Past the rotting breakwater, out of sight.
In a warm hollow
I burrow into the sand as Mr. Parker
Slips and puffs in uneasy pursuit.

I watch his approach from my hiding-place
Behind tussocky, spiky marram grass.
He passes beyond me,
Stops to gaze across the desolate foreshore,
Salt bitter wind on his lips.

Moment of stillness, water in his eyes,
Memories of unrequited love.
I feel guilty,
Reveal my presence by singing quietly
Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy.

THIS MAN I CARRY ON MY BACK

I

He squats at the edge of me,
my face in his hands.
I'm counting the beats of his heart
and stretching back into my body
for the long walk through this dark.
I'm thinking of the wife he goes home to
as faithful as Joseph.
I try on her clothes,
but they don't fit.
I borrow her scent
and rub it into my skin,
but the face in the mirror is mine
and nothing alters it.

I carry him on my back
like a burden I can't be rid of.
In a year he'll be dying
and I'll remember the weight of him
rocking to sleep
in the pouch of my pelvis,
how I listened at his ear
and heard the wings
of migrating birds
still miles and months away.
I'll try to forget
the nest we made for a child
who couldn't be born.
And when I'm dying, too,
then none of this will matter
except that once
my face was at rest in his hands.

II

Anonymous as a nurse,
I sit by his bed,
his pulse in my hand
and a bundle of prayers
in my right arm.

In the air I breathe the odor
of the cancer blooming
like a rainbow in his belly.
The roots are creeping
nerve by nerve through his spine,
growing their slow way toward me.
I smooth the sheets
that press him thin.

For an hour I'm his bride,
helping him to enter
the bony chapel of my thighs.
A priest is knocking at our door
with a sprinkle of holy water,
but I refuse to let him in.
All morning I stand in the way
of light breaking
through this stained glass window,
where Christ looks out from the cross,
beseeching me to pull him down.

III

I carry a man on my back.
We're going where we've never been before.
When I stop to rest,
I hold his face in my hands,
and the shadow of my face over his
is brown and curled at the edges.
In his eyes I see myself in miniature,
close enough to enter his mouth
and take his song into mine.
He's singing the lullaby
his mother rocked him with.
I'm picking him up again
to walk the road that never ends.

By evening his arms
are a yoke around my neck.
We breathe as patiently as oxen,
our bodies ebony and sweat.
The moon rises red behind us
and a stranger calls us in from the dark.
His table is spread with bread and wine.
After dinner he gives us
a room with a number and key.
We lock the door
before we bend down together
to make love on our knees,
our faces in each other's hands,
both of us supplicants
asking the way to the Kingdom.

Lynne Carol Rose

BIN a narrative*for KSD*

Bloodpaint, straight
 from the slaughterer's runnels —so
 old barns are red.

Tony's over
 a mealbin, "maybe 1840," scraping
 intervening layer. The day's 1977
 light and shadow work too, alternate
 like precision tools at this wooden
 hunk the undercolor
 of horse, of ox. Light and shadow, mimetic
 of Tony's first broad refurbishing swipes —till finally the
 animal color comes out in its fullest,
 bloodpaint!, bloodpaint!, and
 all of the day's repetitive attentions
 to this chest seem
 a currying.

—!!SALE!!—

Geezers rid it cheap, what's
 broke, what's buckled. Their rude hands dump
 their sheds' long, antique, storage
 into sun. There's some haggling. And someone
 whose hands trace grain with understanding
 of root; whose hands champ in impatience for the little
 attendant gestures of bringing back
 lustre and use; whose hands
 dote —truck, say, a mealbin
 through Wichita's dun streets, past
 the junkyards and butcherhouses,
 here
 to the garage, its blades and brushes
 of mending.

"Shit-Christ! ...I'll show you something. See this chest of drawers? It's a mealbin. Just to keep the feed in, the goddam *feed* in a smelly corner of the *barn*. But look, someone cared enough to handtool fake drawers and even fake keyholes. Fake *keyholes*. And who would ever even *see* it? Somebody fucking looooved his work." Tony cottonswabs tincture on.

And I've come west, to Wichita, for similar ministrations.

For lately, *I've* painted in blood but not with proper benediction.

—Little storage boxes,
each the size of the smallest peck of flesh that still relays greatest pain, boxes retina-, prostate-, sized. And each its moment packed and labelled:

Ellen Laying Naked With H-i-m
their legs together like dovetail joints
building her a new bed

Ellen And Albert Discuss "Breaking Up"
what some people cherish: heirloom
others consign to the hatchet

Ellen and Ellen and Ellen and
I dyed

each slammed box with a single red cell
broken over it, saying *Oh my little cursed moments*
I caulk you I set you to float in my veins
At the rate of the heart As many times as the heart
meters
You will circle through my brain

Lidded basting pan
 in the mealbin's upper-left corner: Tony finds a
 perfect specimen, each buff wing
 the width of a spread hand —no,
 wider, and The Great Moth Invasion of Wichita! that
 preceded me here by a month: doesn't make, in my mind,
 so stupid a
 face anymore.

...Nor is it *buff*, not really; marbly
 swirls of russet blend through, and the tentacled ivory
 of cream just let in coffee. Tans the color,
 shape, and size of the delicate closure
 of a hen's lids... Ocher, eggshell, indian orange
 pastilles: detail. Tony drops his lacquers, dances
 gogeyed with his find. "HooEEY! And these antennae...!
 An inch!"

"Thoreau," I say, "says
 that's the difference between a man's art
 and Nature's. The world can afford to bring the full
 largesse of its genius to bear on the leastmost atom,
 even if it's never to be seen, even an underside,
 even in darkness. He says..."

"Lordy, lordy,
 an inch!" That is all we can say. A bristled inch,
 cut clear as a trout's scales. And we can dance
 in the face of the scrupulous.

This morning, reading
 a narrative poem, the early 1800's, a *bellow*
so emphatic, such poundage and damp, it stuck in the air
like the lung itself turned inside-out, the shack
 beyond the pens, and a carcass
 hung by the hindlegs to drain. A farmer
 positions his bucket below
 the pouring throat, looks up once (sees a turkey vulture
 seemingly

a wine out, their own-grown plums, a stain up
 past the elbow tonight for next year's sweeter drinking,
 plums, their own damp patch of the planet, licking
 purple stain up their arms, each other, sweet,
 their own hands, crush to the pit, their tongues,
 the sweet fruit fleshes

I understand

a little, a very little, but something, of family
 subsistence butchery. One man,
 one ineffable movement, one month's
 cycling of other-blood into his love-blood ... Different
 from stockyards/freightcar/supermarketfreezer,
 different the way
 my life's whole clutter is different from this
 1840 cabinet, pigeonhole desk, or
 mealbin:

shaped, tree
 to shellacking, by hand for hands
 it knew —shaped true, to take the waxes
 of use through generations and bring out
 fuller color with each. I stand here
 threshing the dark in Tony's garage with my eyelashes
 —infinite task! I see

that farmer
 twisting that neck-muscle
 hard in the pan methodically
 for its last splat
 of blood of bloodpaint

And all through *hurt*, and all through *throes*,
 which are also states,
 from New York, through this, through all this, into
 Kansas,
 landscape
 flashed past —at 65 miles-per-hour, wiped

bland of all detail. This is a stand
of trees; its dapple; its moire excrecence of bark;
slow central thrum of sap; colonial insect life...

Let the rag of speed erase all feature.

This is the body's great trunk and the brain, branched
ever-finer into remembering, flashback, more
remembering...

*Let the rag of sky and road, at 65 miles-per-hour,
erase to the least convolution. Let it be stroked and stroked
and stroked and stroked and stroked and stroked and
stroked*

glossy, and small —a seed.

And wake

one morning, driving Wichita —every block
its Antique Shoppe or Joe's Junk. Every family,
somewhere, once, pawned a ring. And the trees, the
circles about their hearts... appear, today, here
in these barterhouses of castoff and reclamation. Maple
bureau, tooled rosettes along its borders, and fishscale
dragonsclaw feet. A spinning jenny. Ebony spicerack
hatched in a geometric motif of mountainside flowers.
A mandolin. Pine heartshaped memorabilia box, the name
Melissa cut with delicate, bramblethicket, flourishes
then stained and highlighted in mother-of-pearl. A
hickory rocker. And decorative whorls on the hickory
rocker,

fine as fingerprint. Dust collects through the sun, seems
almost to settle in air, on shoulders. Almost,
the hickory rocker... the furniture holding its lineage, the
ring

its laminate story of marriage ...almost, a ghost
in the hickory rocker. Almost, a hand
in hover at the mandolin, a single eye like a floating
opalescence

over the memory box... A kind of instruction
on What was made with love, once and How

to use it in its new life. / Detail,
 detail, detail, detail, detail
 's limitless enfoldings unloosed!

The old wood,

flowering. Wichita. Wichita rocking. Wood used,
 well-used, as: a family in winter
 and the hearth gives all its cordage into a first great
 kinetic blossom of fire. The hands
 warmed. Back and forth. The kinds of marrying. And
 in The Round of Energy,
 energy leaves
 from specifics, transforms, and returns.
 A ghost... Wood used. Back, forth. The
 rocker at the firescreen; ashes; winter then
 suddenly marigold.

tonight	a vision	they rise
in different bodies, yes		but nonetheless they rise
in the round	in the total cycle	of energy

the moths from the flame

this morning	misreading a poem
the page said	
	<i>wound, slash</i>
my eyes stitched the words up	
	<i>wash</i>
as if already	
	cleansing, grown whole

Chez Theodora, 1976.
 The three of us, sitting
 in a 1977 circle, dandelion wine

from their own garden, year
to year: "A little bitter
aftertaste, but worth it. A full
sweet body."

Then he's
back to the garage, antiquing. "C'mere,
it's incredible. See?" The bin,
its ruddy presence, our own bloods
carried through light and shade...
"Here, the grain of the wood." Such
delicate swirls! "Look closer..." The
grain. "It's *painted* on. Whoever
he was, he stood there eleventyhundred
hours extra, painting the grain in
black on the bloodpaint. Somebody
cared for this cheapo chunk of carpentry
like crazy, all right!" A thousand
thousand hairline swirls. "Crazy! What
a life!" Tony's hands
trace the paintwork, wine
in my taste, in my own life, having come
through to this. The grain
through his hands. A life,
my blood, the richness of grain run through our hands,
"Somebody cared."

Albert Goldbarth

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Two major events in poetry: Elizabeth Bishop's *Geography III* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976, 50 pp., \$7.95, hardbound) and A.R. Ammons' *The Snow Poems* (W.W. Norton, 1977, 292 pp., \$12.50, hardbound) — two volumes radically different in vision and technique, but comparable in their power to transform the vision of the reader who is prepared to enter these worlds.

Within the neat little Bishop volume are ten perfectly polished poems illustrating the diversity of this poet's talents as well as the range of her humanity: wiry autobiographical, "In the Waiting Room"; dramatic monologue, "Crusoe in England"; visionary lyric, "Night City"; witty game in "12 O'Clock News"; translation, Paz's "Objects & Apparitions"; and five more. Of the five more, the one that has made the most indelible impression on me is "The Moose." For six stanzas, in one steadily-traveling sentence, we ride along with the poet on a bus coming down from Nova Scotia, seeing through her loving eye the "lavender, rich mud" of the sunset flats, passing the neat churches, "bleached, ridged as clamshells," waiting patiently for a new passenger giving "kisses and embraces/ to seven relatives" while "a collie supervises." The poet enters briefly but affectionately into each detail, uniting in one harmony of consciousness the landscape, the architecture, and the people of the land. Eight stanzas later we ride on into the "hairy, scratchy, splintery" moonlight of New Brunswick woods and drift toward sleep comfortable in the pillow-talk of our grandparently fellow passengers.

—Suddenly the bus driver
stops with a jolt,
turns off his lights.

Then we all—driver, poet, comfortable passengers, the "impenetrable wood," and a towering cow moose—share an encounter of spell-bound mutual attention, compounded of respect and child-like curiosity on both sides, and—in the bus at least—joy, inexplicable joy. The poet involves us in this joy and then, as the bus finally pulls away, leaves us, with a "dim/ smell of moose, and acrid/ smell of gasoline." I am in awe of what Bishop has done in those last lines: her restraint in not "making" something out of the encounter; her delicate enjambment that mingles the "acrid" of both bus and moose; and the precise culmination of a poem that starts out "From narrow provinces" and joins all in the wider world where the man, the beast, and the machine can exist without threat to any.

The Snow Poems demands a different set of expectations for poetry than the elegant and accessible poems of Elizabeth Bishop. But Ammons acknowledges the same roots: "though the pentameter's heaved we're/ splinter

assertions of the great iamb." And both poets present a world where the Forest of the Night is invaded by dented fenders.

To read Ammons without bafflement and/or frustration, one needs to adopt the assumption that in art as in the more literally organic world evolution proceeds through constant random variation. In his *Tape for the Turn of the Year* (which now looks like one of the really revolutionary works of our time) Ammons typed away every day on his roll of adding-machine tape, discovering as he went along what-all there was to discover, about his world and himself. Such composition requires an act of faith in the raw *process*, and this is an act of faith the reader must share. When the mind of the poet is as highly-informed, as honest, as playful, as *interesting* as Ammons', the result commands respect and conveys rewards.

The Snow Poems result from the *Tape* technique, apparently, but in both form and content they are much more complex. Right away the poet lets us participate in the finger exercises by which he keeps the writing moving: play (word-play, the play of the fingers on the machine, the play of the line, playing out line, casting for the striking energy). And up from the stream of the poet's consciousness the big energies do promise to appear. Ripples spread from tantalizing rises. And once in a while (sometimes free and clear, sometimes shooting off from the midst of another poem) there surfaces as perfect a complete poem as any anthologist could ask for. As we move on through this big book, we discover that the real object is not these trophies, frequent and engaging as they are, but the stream itself, with tributaries feeding in and braiding themselves into the muscle of the current. Finger exercises become less important as

cold
currents settle
from polar ice
bottomward
like falls

In these falls are great rages, great loneliness, and the metaphysical rebellion against the cosmic forces that express themselves in the trivial and disgusting. An act of will accepts the flotsam, the detritus, tensing against the yearnings that rise against the will.

There is a great deal in this generous volume about the poet's awareness of what he is doing *as a poet*. You could extract a contemporary Defense of Poetry from it, and it would be worth your while, because the struggle of the artist, trying to tell the truth in language that never before had *this* knotty (notty, naughty) truth to work on, is the Constant Symbol of Ammons' angry integrity. The last poems in the book reveal the complex, unsentimental vision that has evolved through the process of the composition of the Snow Poems. The book as a whole is very strong indeed.

Jerald Bullis's *Adorning the Buckhorn Helmet* (Ithaca House, 1976, \$3.50, paper) suggests some of the ways Ammons has opened doors for a new generation of poets. This volume contains two long poems: the title poem, full of rich natural images but sprawling somewhat self-indulgently, and the much more powerful "Field and Stream," in 36 sections. Like Ammons, Bullis commands a wry, distinctive voice, and like Ammons he permits the reader to enter into a dynamic and interesting mind. But Bullis's voice and mind are profoundly different from the older poet's. His sensuous awareness is deeply ingratiating; he draws the reader into the natural world by his own unique power.

Here are two splendid books that somehow escaped my attention when they first appeared. Both are by master craftsmen and men of great warmth and humanity. The earliest is John Ciardi's *Lives of X* (Rutgers University Press, 1971, 118 pp., \$9.75, hardbound). This is a series of autobiographical poems, a chronicle of the poet's growing up in Boston and vicinity, a first-generation Italian in a largely Irish society. In this rich and comic palimpsest of times and places and levels of memory, Ciardi has reconstructed the forces that made him the person he is, and he has achieved this in a blank-verse style as distinctively his own (wry, colloquial, sinuously flexible) as Keats's is Keats and Frost's is Frost. Now that I have found this volume I shall treasure it both as a significant American poem and as a valuable social document.

David Wagoner's *Sleeping in the Woods* (Indiana University Press, 1974, 79 pp., \$6.95, hardbound) is my second belated discovery. There are three kinds of poems here, and examples from each should be in any anthology

of contemporary poetry. Some are West-coast poems, with such fine ones as "Slow Country," "Sleeping in the Woods," "Snake Hunt," and "Song for the First People," ending:

Let me become Water Dog, Bitterroot, or Shut Beak.
Change me. Forgive me. I will learn to crawl, stand,
or fly

Anywhere among you, forever, as though among great
elders.

There are poems out of European civilization, such as the wonderfully witty "Beauty and the Beast." And somewhere between these poles is a quiet world where a personal myth is growing: "The Man Who Spilled Light" and "The Singing Lesson" (a masterpiece). The exquisite "To Be Written in Braille" suggests that this whole volume should be transcribed for the blind. It is a compendium of various ways of "seeing."

Ted Hughes' *Season Songs*, with pictures by Leonard Baskin (Viking, 1975, 79 pp., \$10.00, hardbound) is large (8 x 11½), with 20 pp. of Baskin illustrations, most of them in rich color. It looks rather like a hybrid between a coffee-table book and a children's book, and although it could serve as either, don't be misled. It is indeed a pleasure simply to turn the pages, but the poems (24 of them, arranged by the season) are masterworks: powerful rhythms, highly-colored sound patterns, language thrusting and swatting and sweating. What other poet today has such a gusto for words and the energy in them? The swifts return:

"Look! They're back! Look!" And they're gone

On a steep

Controlled scream of skid . . .

He describes the failed nestling: "He bat-crawled on his tiny useless feet, tangling his flails." Other poems have deep folk-song rhythms, incremental repetitions, throbbing images, dazzling chromatics, all in the service of the wealth and variety of the natural world. This is a first-rate book on all counts.

ANNOUNCEMENT: a first book by former *BPJ* associate Tim Cohrs: *The Erie Shore Letters*, a poem-series, handsomely "designed, set, printed, & bound by Dikko Faust in a limited edition of seven times seven copies on his handmade papers; numbered, & signed by both the writer and the alchemist-printer." \$10. from Cultural Custodial Service, Purgatory Pie Press Div., 505 N. Maple, Prospect Heights, Ill. 60070.