

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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FOG, BRIDGE, FLUTE SONATA

Nothing but fog ahead of the car
In the back seat my two daughters
On the radio a flute sonata

I remember my old notions as a child
riding in the fog or the dark
The feeling that the road will never end

As we reach the long bridge
I try out an idea on my daughters
They're old enough not to believe me

I ask if the river has a far bank
We see only fog yielding to fog
and may ride the bridge forever

Margaret tells me not to be silly
"There has to be another side
or what's holding up the bridge?"

Ah, how can she be so skeptical
when she plays the flute herself
her lips never touching the mouthpiece

Bert Almon

IT IS A MOUTH, THIS DAWN

It is a mouth, this dawn,
a gaping promise,
the open doors
of a strange barn.

Bees throb their
thick aching against
a sheetmetal sun
and draw out survival
like an ingot
from the forge.

All the maples wear
new brash green helmets
the springsmith
hammered out of winter.
One of them,
stripped by ants,
is numbed in its roots
by recollection
and leans into history.

For the first time,
at least for my listening,
the geese, sprung from
a southern bow,
heading home to
Ottawas, Crees, Blackfeet,
marshes and reed grasses
still frozen
in the backyard on the earth,
are silent,

as a hammer rests
between strikes,
perhaps arched
as the silent horseshoe
at its apex
coming to be
a noisy ringer.

Thomas F. Sheehan

EPITHALAMION

for T. deB. and R.M.

We drive through
the ambered shade of beeches.
Across the highway
a wall of trees is flaming
in the sun's open light;
the sumac stabs at my eyes
particularly.

Up ahead
a line of cirri
herds the hill-row north
into more somber empurplement;
but three upright filaments,
set apart,
exclaim blazingly, dancily
against the rigorous indigo.

How astonishing!
Out in this bright, unstable air
the two of *you* dare
to make vows!

Frederick Lowe

FOR J— AGE EIGHT

Sitting on the floor in knee socks
she builds a block city
to the rug's end: the edge of the world,
although she knows it's round.
She wants to live in that city,
feral and crouching, with matted hair,
inconspicuous as a creature. Caught,
she won't speak lest anything she says
be held against her. She puzzles them:
is she animal or man?
Any minute she'll stand
up and declare herself a woman.

She drifts on a lake
deep as the Planetarium dome
and pretends to be Columbus as she dips
oars into dark ripples.
Near shore a pregnant woman floats
belly up, a cartoon whale.
The child wants to have a baby someday
but not a big belly with people in it
like her grandmother's Russian dolls.
Her mother taught her about sex
when she was five—"every man
has a little woman in him
and vice versa." For a year
she worried how if she wasn't pregnant
she could have a little man inside.

She crouches in the rubber boat,
feels her knees fill up her arms.
A strange man plays guitar on the shore,
his eyes poke at her. She waits
for a woman's face
to petrify the brute.
If she drifts too far to row back
her mother will wade out and tow the boat in.

The bead pattern on her brother's playpen
disturbs her; she kicks in the rails.
No creature wants a sibling
yet they all want children.
If she were a stone she wouldn't have babies.
She would live forever.
She does not want to be a stone, though.
She prays to read minds
and pitch a perfect game
but her parents are atheists—
"Jewish atheists," her father says.

Like a sailor on the ship
that exploded accidentally off the coast
she's not even a hero.
Imagining it at school she becomes
blond and Anglo-Saxon, one of "our boys,"
unlike herself at any rate.
"He never forgot," she writes,
"how his shipmates blew apart. The pieces
whooshed by" like her mother's pneumatic sigh
when she stands up after scrubbing the floor.
It never occurs to her that women are weak.
"He thanked God."

She's afraid to take the story home,
certain her parents will think
she's put her own words in the sailor's head
and not the other way around.

She crosses out his religion, writes in
a bland "he felt lucky."
They are so proud of her,
they think she's perfect.

She's just read that the universe
is infinite. The lake fills her up.
Or rather, she fills it, as given a hand
she can make a fist and make that
into a talking puppet.
She sings along with the guitar, a song
in which after years on the lake
she bursts the boat's rubber side,
tumbles out, and swims
like a grownup.

Joan Joffe Hall

TWO POEMS

Retorts

Not till the first report of
April thunder drew itself some
Planet backtalk did one catch
On to its winter absence,
Nor miss the scratch-blue fork
Flickering from a cloud until
The greening churchyard stuck
Through the match-struck night
A hundred tongues of granite
Satanically back at it.

Flying Foreign

*“Once you’ve tasted Europe at 30,000 feet, flying
in the U.S. will never be the same” —Airline Ad*

Lasagne over Los Angeles;
Cinzano over Cincy;
Truffles over Buffalo;
Quiche over Quincy.

*American the city where
You sign your flying tour up;
But whoosh into the upper air,
And nosh in Europe.*

Mozart over Missouri;
Saint-Saëns over Salt Lake;
Gounod over Juneau;
Scarlatti over the Snake.

*American the airport where
You pick your flying tour up;
But settle back into your chair,
And listen. Europe!*

Fellini over Fargo;
Reinhardt over Racine;
De Sica over Topeka;
Lean over Moline.

*American the cabin where
You start your flying tour up;
The cabin darkens in the air;
The dark is Europe.*

Ernest Kroll

DEDICATION:**for Jane**

For months we have lived together, you a blond
light under my dark skin. And when you tell me
stories, they are dreams I had before I was born,
and I am saying, "Yes. This is how it was."
The trees cast such complicated shadows
on our dirt floor. On my lap is the orange jar
Winston brought you from Richmond, the one
you kept filled with hickory nuts. But now
your voice trails off, like a dusk bird
vanishing into deeper woods. You are leaving me.
Your gold warmth is fading in my arms
and Jane, I want you to stay. But the sun's
too low, and we live in different times.
No matter what we do, the cold comes in.

May 13, 1980

I may not yet write, for you are too lately
lost, have no place now where an envelope
might find a home. Yet there is much to do.
I must wake my pen from its long dry sleep,
must walk the round words, like babies,
across my page, must nurse them for
the hard tasks which will be their lot
too soon, for they must learn, before
they are grown, how to keep a man alive.
And there are things I would have them
tell you: how our new child grows, happy
and swelling in his sisters' house.
And there are things I would have them
never say: how your bayonet sliced
my eyes today as it shone, bright
as a woman in the morning river sun.

October 5, 1861

Today you have been five months gone
and this day, my dear, we are nine years wed.
And so I slide this blue morning on your
marriage finger, remembering always how
it began: with clouds white as paper
from which rose the tops of trees, with
pillows cool against our cheeks. Yet
by the time we left our beds, the sky was
clear and every green leaf tight with heat.
In this we gathered. When Ruby asked
the blessing, our baby startled, sudden
under my folded hands. Afterwards we prayed,
asking God for your soon and safe return.
Then Becky drew this house for you.
When your mouth fills with dust, you must
go inside and close the door. We are waiting.

March 5, 1862

Surely there must be others, other wives
whose men wear grey and have been long
from home, others who wake flushed as I.

Surely somewhere a Margaret rubs, as if
by chance, against the spindle at which
she works, her skirts pouring blue
to the floor. And somewhere surely,
a Mary lies alone, her thighs pressed
tighter to the sheets than if she slept.

I have kept silence with my heart before,
folding it like a bird into a locket
snapped shut. But this silence is
some other. It flies through gold.

In the cold night the clock strikes
four. Even the roof moans in the dawn wind.

April 9, 1862

Becky's in the sweet corn running.
Here and there I glimpse her yellow
dress between the rows, parted neatly
as a Negro's head. Now she calls out:
Hide and Seek!

We can hear the guns.
Ours or theirs, we cannot tell,
nor who may come marching
over the planted hill.

(Dream, April 1862)

My fingers are mending. Yellow mouths
close in Becky's hem as the thin
lady flies, weaving her hair into
the cloth.

My lap is the place,
the valley for hurt dresses, a home

for socks that cannot go on.
Here come garments, like petitioners,
and are made whole with the only thread
there is. We all go about these days
bearing white puckered scars, yet
still we say Good Morning and,
at length, Good Night.

In my head

I am writing this down. In my
head, I am taking my new nightdress
out of the box, and my dear,
it was quite the perfect present.
It takes the light whitely
and shines like needles.

May 25, 1862

I am kneading raisins into the dough—
I fold and lean, lean and fold.
Now they stare from the loaf
like the black eyes of animals.
I cover them with a towel, and
feed the stove for baking.

Waiting,

I wash dusty cups,
lift them from the bucket
clean as girls. You write
that you have grown fat, that
your uniform cannot hold your breadth.
Do you understand my dear,
it is not the food you eat which
fattens you. It is the waiting to die,
the heavy days when orders do not come,
and your stomach spreads
like unbaked dough. And still
you will not think of coming home.
Still you would fight.

I slide
the risen loaf into the oven,
and with a poker push the fire
where it belongs, but a spark
jumps.

I plunge my arm into the
bucket. The wet spreads darkly
up my sleeve.

July 4, 1862

Robbie coughs blood roses in his crib.
I grease his shaking chest with salve,
but fear I can only ease his going,
for hourly he slides away. The day
shines blue in the window. A little
breeze does the best it can. I mind
th. child. In his wrinkled face
his death blooms slowly.

November 13, 1862

There are days now you do not write,
days when the undersides of birds' wings
are opaque, and a frost lies silvery
on the ground at noon. And sometimes,
when the house is still, I hear torn
coughs, as if you could not sleep.
And sometimes I see a dead man
in your chair. But not you. You
I see in a stained uniform, sitting
alone. You are staring at a blank
paper which, finally, you crumple
and throw outside where it lies,
white on snow, like the wing of
a buried bird. Outside my window,
the fence you built lets in the cold.

December 18, 1862

Winston, you were wrong to dance in such a place. Since the news came to my ears, I have pictured you countless times, a cavorting great bear, with her rouged hand in yours, and she flinging up her skirts. And that Belle standing by the while, her fat arms folded. And then, slurring, you turn your pockets inside out and hand your pay to Belle's red smile. This is a reproof I do not deserve. You may say I was not there, you may claim that it was otherwise. But I will tell you this: I will withhold my bed from you and if you approach me there, I will wake the children that they may see what kind of creature they call Father, I am sending this by Alan. He says you go to battle soon.

January 3, 1863

I have asked the wet sun in. It lays its hands on each of us: Ruby, Becky, Sarah, Prue, we all go dressed in beads. And as I write, "You are forgiven. What you have done is forgotten now between us," the sun our guest melts the words. How your uniforms must bind in such weather! You should fight them naked, make the enemy run from you by the courage of your bodies, that you dare approach them so. And yet it matters not. No cloth can stop the thrust of strange entry, no buttons refuse the gifts of lead and steel. The time passes slowly. No birds sing. Only a turtle moves, ponderous in the loud grass.

April 18, 1863

I have grown plump and settled these months,
domestic as the white chickens that peck
outside, whose smooth eggs our children
gather in baskets. Yet I must tell you
what I have learned. Inside each egg
is a yellow scream. At night sometimes,
when all the chickens are asleep under
the blue moon, the eggs shriek in
their shells, wanting something. When
I come from my bed and pick them up,
they quiet as I rock them in my skirt.

May 1, 1863

My dear, today we sold the last pig, and who
knows when we shall get another. But collards
crowd the garden, hurry into bloom faster than
we can pick, and onions, round as babies' heads,
swell daily. So much abundance have we here
that every seed we plant springs eager from
the ground while I sit, for a moment alone,
writing brown lines to a dead man. When I
tell you, "The children have not forgotten
your name," my fingers scratch against the page
like live things, and the mockingbird that
has been all day singing in the trees, stops.
His wings rustle in the leaves. Then
there is a dark settling, and a quiet under
the branches, where the light never comes.

May 15, 1863

These poems were inspired by letters written by Octavia Stevens to her husband Winston during the war between the states. Jane, however, though she lived in Palatka, Florida as did Octavia, is quite herself. The author would like to thank the Fine Arts Council of Florida for support during the period in which this sequence was written.

Lola Haskins

from **POEMS WITH TITLES FROM
PAINTINGS BY PAUL KLEE**

“Dance You Monster to my Soft Song”

In the wall that's hollowed out
scrub oak and lines the horse pasture,
our orphaned raccoon holes up. He's
up there on the lookout for an evening
ration of doggy biscuit and kitchen scraps.
Back here, close by the farmhouse, eleven
nervous hens roost in a pair
of squat maples. How much they resemble
ring neck pheasants, skittish,
when corn comes down and only the smallness
of weedpatches is left behind. Between

these two points, raccoon and treed hens,
a henhouse floor with smashed carcasses
like clay tiles in a bed of feathers.

I walk out toward the scrub oak kicking up
a restless crowd of leaves along the way.
Under each tree I rattle his tin food can,
calling him in my soft and familiar *kiss*,
kiss sound he's learned over the summer.
From somewhere in the roof of limbs
he watches me, knowing my heart wears
a change of work clothes: brooding,
accusatory, dangerous as dog.

Terry Savoie

THE CLAMMER

I move silent as a clam itself,
Foot pulling in front of me,
Balancing the slow sun
On my back like a shell.

Folding down for a long moment,
I huddle like a mollusk on the bay's
Bottom, cling to eel grass
Summer thick against my skin

As my hand climbs down along
My heel, finds the clam and extracts it,
Neat as a tooth.
What have these shells to do with me?

They collect in the pail like tiny skulls.
Brainfood, some voice within me rings,
Aphrodisiac. What of it?
I clutch one now like a stony

Heart and think: What ease to
Wear all this hardness on the outside,
No awkward intrusion of bone,
To lie in the mud and wait to be

Plucked up by just the right hand,
Pried open and devoured.
Along the shore a jogger has slowed
In his tracks

And is waving to ask if my mad
Dance is the drama of some crippled
Swimmer. I turn my back on him
And continue the work I have been

Doing for twenty years,
Letting myself sink again
And feeling the hardness of earth
Built bone dissolve like salt.

I sink once more, deeper still,
Toward the place where the heart
Shell shape is enough
And emptiness, a black bucket, begins to fill.

James Murphy

LIBERTY

Manhattan Beach, 1945

At noon, the navy
twenty men abreast
surged up the street
in one rambunctious wave,
their caps, like condoms,
bobbing on the swell.
I watched them, chaste
behind my window-sill
and dreamed my long hair
floating on the wind.
At which, my mother's hand
took tight control
of window-frame and glass:
slammed that brittle membrane
back in place.

Robyn Supraner

EXILES IN PARADISE BAY

It is like a migration. From everywhere they come to this rind of sand, salt and blackberry vines, this wild edge that rims America's concrete like a green blade. They arrive some Indian summer day that glows like a pearl out of the dark ages: a day on fire with an inner light that etches everything in the blood.

Harvard, Paris, the Ganges, they have been everywhere, they have seen everything, and want only one thing: a little land, a small homestead, where they can search for the unblemished interiors of themselves. It looks like this, they believe, like the blue heron hunting in the tangled mirror of upside-down reflections—mountains, firs and blackberry thickets floating on tidewater. His patient head, hewn like a primitive axe, waits, waits, as he watches some shadow that lies below the surface where soft, white clouds float. It looks like the heron, and it smells like the rich mudflats, the sperm and decay and salt in the wind. Yes, and it sounds like white explosions of breakers, and above that the toll of a bellbuoy.

They smile, then for a moment shiver as something passes darkly over the sun. They smile again as far out at sea the white cumulus clouds turn to fog, and the fishermen, glancing over their shoulders at the gray wall, run for home.

The first delicate, wet wisps curl around their feet as they spoon clam chowder and decide. This is our place, the place to start over, they say, forgetting that the heron still studies himself, reflection upon reflection, after ten thousand years.

John Noland

SYLVIA IS GRINDING

Sylvia is grinding them out in the kitchen
and he sits, quiet as velvet, chewing a pencil.
Where came this all?, he wonders, What manner of
monster devours her lips in our bed at night?

The folding chair collapses. He falls,
like a man surprised in a photograph.
The shutter clicks; she has closed the window
and is folding and filing her papers for the night.

He sprawls silly on the Persian rug—
extends an aged arm to capture a button
which has unleashed itself from his sweater.
Moving quickly, he attempts to right himself.

The chair now re-assembled, he examines his find.
Sylvia's monster appears to him in the form
of a loose thread hanging from the button's eye.
Her voice stops him like a camera.

Ted, she spits, Come to bed; it's time.
His pupils dilate.
He is hypnotized by a hopping green dot—
something like impotence, but not quite.

Jan Heller Levi

TWISTING THE DRAGON'S TAIL

(In the 1940's at Los Alamos, scientists first determined the amount of uranium needed for an atomic bomb: two pieces of uranium, each too small to fission were slowly pushed toward each other. Close enough, they acted as one large piece—a sudden burst of radiation indicated if the two, together, were large enough to produce critical mass. Brought any closer, they would begin a nuclear reaction.)

Blue as the sky of an ancient fairy tale
is the blue sky of New Mexico.
The brick schoolhouse at Los Alamos
stood empty by the mesa junipers,
but now we've come with magic: cyclotron,
counters, generators, nuclear spells,
and long boned Louis Slotin, Section Chief,
confident and blue-eyed sorcerer.

We crowd around him in the make-shift lab.
"I held Hiroshima on this table."
Showman, he points, "Watch! Two uranium disks:
I prod them toward each other, with screwdrivers
along this rod." Precise as sculpting jade
he slides them. "Close enough, they'd act as one
large chuck, and fission—here no atom blast,
but metal melting in auras of killing rays."

His swift hand sets the geiger counter near.
"Listen! A burst of radiation will tell
we're at the rim of criticality.
We stop just there, and power bows, tamed for us."
His smile is awed. "We call this 'twisting
the dragon's tail.'" The meter ticks slowly.
He prods the disks; the counter clicks like claws
on stone. Another tap; a rising, hissing
chatter. He poises for a final touch
and coughs. The screwdriver slips.

Like a blue sun dawning on the metal rods,
radiance streams on our ashy faces, on violet bricks,
the blue sparkle of his still smiling teeth;
our shadows are cut with a crystal blue knife;
I feel the dragon's breath, my skin becomes
transparent air . . .

Barehanded

Louis rips apart the spheres
and blue fades to dusty yellow. He sighs.
Five hundred radiation units kill;
to save our lives, his hands have seized
a thousand. He has nine days left to live.
We leave that room, and join him as he waits
for the medicos, who have no magic.

Before me are the schoolrooms of Los Alamos,
by my feet is black sage, lizards
hiding in its shade. But all I see
is a radiant light at Bikini,
reactors, clean as stone, breeding light,
and something big inching closer—I can't tell what.
And I see the eyes of Louis Slotin
already paling into legend,
and pale, above the mesa, alien gray sky
extending toward the perfect black of space.

Grace Morton

FIVE POEMS**Memory**

Whenever I'm out before dawn
I taste reveille
at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Wisdom

Years before my birth
I knew all there is to know
about oblivion.

Birth

When my eyes had cooled and cleared
I saw a path through the tenderness
and slipped away on my own.

Grandmother

"All day that poor woman in the red coat
is trying to sell her newspapers
and nobody buys," said my grandmother
looking out the window
at the red fire hydrant.

Father

My father lay in his coffin
no longer a man
but a fact.

George Bogin

RUDICH'S DEMON

For Lynn

Our tenth-grade chemistry
class believed in Mr. Rudich's
demon with all our hearts.
He exerted an irresistible
force, explained by a law you could bank on
like conservation of mass. We gazed
with grave humor as the begloved

Fluttery hands erected the impossible
contrivance—swaying, coloring,
bubbling—on the slate desk
till the moment of consummation,
which was always to be our utter
improvement, but the final
element was faithfully lacking:

Liquid that missed turning green
or gas that escaped hissing,
the right one perversely disguised
as Chlorine, and we bolted
in disarray like hilarious Brownian
molecules from the classroom,
as the Babel of beakers, crucibles,

Burners and retorts came crashing,
we ran away into our lives,
but Mr. Rudich still loiters
in memory, his frantic hands—
accelerating, independent
of a body—illustrating the unstable
atomic orbits of disaster.

Philip Fried

EVE NAMES THE ANIMALS

To me, *lion* was sun on a wing
over the garden. *Dove*,
a burrowing, blind creature.

I swear that man
never knew animals. Words
he lined up according to size,
while elephants slipped flat-eyed
through water
and trout
hurtled from the underbrush, tusked
and ready for battle.

The name he gave me stuck
me to him. He did it to comfort me,
for not being first.

Mornings, while he slept,
I got away. Pickerel
hopped on the branches above me.
Only spider accompanied me,
nosing everywhere,
running up to lick my hand.

Poor finch. I suppose I was
woe to him—
the way he'd come looking for me,
not wanting either of us
to be ever alone.

But to myself I was
palamino
 raven
 fox.

I strung words
by their stems and wore them
as garlands on my long walks.

The next day
I'd find them withered.

I liked change.

Susan Donnelly

SEPTEMBER

Cast-concrete weights, five to the ton.
The front-end loader stacks them on the sledge—
it is the month of the ox-pull.

It looks like a contest for bellies—
men swollen with children, with bills,
swollen with biscuits and Bud.

Oxen wait and wait.
They have no place to go, no reason to go there,
shriveled scars for balls.

All afternoon the weights are added to the sledge;
the oxen strain, lurch forward past the stands,
the Ford-dump gears down and hauls it smoothly back.

Hoofprints and treadmarks in the dirt,
oxshit and oil.

In the stands, ice-cream and polite applause.
They wait all year for this, and then all afternoon.
There's something here I can't make out.
No thin man owns an ox.

Sylvester Pollet

THE SONG OF IRON GEORGE

(after a 1980 interview of a former SS warrant officer arrested and tried in West Germany in 1959 for war crimes and sentenced to life at hard labor)

from the specifications

- 1) *that, while serving as a guard at Buchenwald KZ, he did cause or contribute to the death or grievous bodily injury of numerous inmates by beating, shooting, strangulation, drowning, suffocation, stabbing, and other means, as well as by willingly helping operate instruments of mass homicide housed at said camp.*
- 2) *that, according to sworn testimony of surviving inmate-witnesses, he was one of the "most dreaded and bestial characters" among the guards, "often dispensing his 'punishments' to the blare of martial or gypsy music."*

You will notice that I do not deny,
have never denied any of these acts
of which I am accused. All the things
written on those papers, I could have done.
At my trial some spoke dully, some
stood up, uncovering puckered scars,
and bayed for my hide. I believed them all.

In the schoolyard, I was called Iron George,
a fool's name, no doubt, but what was I
to do? When my mother and my father left me
in Silesia with my Polack aunt, I had
only the name and my father's good coat.
She sang hymns in the Polack tongue
and skinned rabbits on her kitchen wall.

On winter nights, the wolves padded
boldly from deep in the forest and snuffled
the snow that drifted beneath my window.
Their scent seemed to rise from between the floorboards.
One morning I found a lamb by the footpath,
its private parts gnawed away,
its bowels naked and frozen to the ground.

So there was Breslau and my mad uncle, a street thug
but a master huntsman, who clothed me like himself
and showed how a wolf, stripped of his coat,
looks as pitiful as any rabbit.
But I still had dreams of the skinned wolf,
its nails clacking on the pane,
my drained face reflecting from its eyes.

Why speak of Hitler? Where were the judges,
15,000 of them, when he tore away
the lawful state? Where were they
when Papa Eicke showed us how a hose

jammed down the gullet of an upstart
can burst his guts in thirty seconds
or thirty minutes, depending on the pressure?

And there were secrets, state secrets.
We were shown new maps of the Sudetenland
and Poland, marked like sides of mutton
ready for the butcher's saw. So how
could we resign, knowing so much?
And how could we betray the uniform? Who
would take you in after such betrayal?

They were mannequins, of course, and clowns,
Himmler and the rest, poisoning themselves
like women. But how could we have guessed
after the runes and the heroic toasts
and the silver Death's Head shining on our caps?
I wore mine till the Russians took it.
Bormann, I heard, fled as a Hebrew granny.

At Buchenwald I saw soft guards gassed,
looking, when stripped, like all the rest,
sheepish, eyes wild in the sockets.
Then I knew there was only the uniform,
that and my name to keep me from feeding
the stink that clung even to my blankets.
Duty was life there, sympathy a disease.

I will tell you, I was not well-suited.
I should have gone to Koch and told him
I was a simple man, not cut out
for such work. Yes, sick with sympathy
and fear. You have seen the lampshades perhaps,
but not the unscraped flesh and not the Bitch
watching it peeled away from fat and muscle.

And the thing that's left—God, what would
you call it. My mother taught me the Commandments
but I could not face the others glaring
at my nakedness. And, after all, Iron George
had volunteered, so Iron George stayed
through it all, vicious as a feral hound.
How they moaned when they heard my music.

Did I say Jews? There's a joke for you!
We had no special feelings toward the Jews
till orders came down to hang everything
on the Jews. Such foolishness, when one looks back.
They say Eichmann himself had Jew blood.
Oh yes, I read all about his trial, the poser,
slinking out to leave us to the Russians.

They were soldiers, from tunic to bone.
They were not like us; there was good order
in their camps, and they were fair: no random
selections, no flayings, no night rousts.
They gave me good wool clothes for winter.
I was a model prisoner, they said,
and still am, as you will notice in my official dossier.

William Trowbridge

MOVING TO THE COUNTRY

She learns the names for vetch and chickweed,
the first—purple tiers on a stalk
with leaves like mimosa, ragged looking,
growing in patches in the high grass—
chickweed with its ten diminutives,
a white starfish.

One evening, she sees a deer.
It looks up, suddenly, where she walks,
its form so long sought,
the air seems tangible around it.
Llama shaped, it turns, leaping,
lifting its hind quarters above the vetch.

Last night they met Nick and Robert.
Before supper, Nick rubbed her back,
finding the separate bones in her spine,
showing her new places along her neck.
She had fallen against his palm
as he held her forehead.
She opened her eyes; her husband smiled
standing in the doorway.

So easy, she thinks, finding
the difference between spruce and fir
in the shape of the needles.
One flattened, the other rounded,
following the shaft of the twig.
The difference between shafts
of hair, her husband's flat, curling up
Nick's a thread that falls straight.

Across the empty field
spruce and fir hide the deer again.
From a distance,
she cannot tell them apart.

Tina Barr

KONA WEATHER

for Chester Mahelona

. . . during the cooler part of the year the trades are occasionally interrupted by winds from a southerly direction. Sometimes these interruptions may extend over a period of several days, giving what is known as Kona Weather—probably the most unpleasant type of weather experienced in the area. Increased humidity, and sometimes heavy general rains occur

Thrum's Hawaiian Annual

The dull south wind backs mist
off the ocean into high valleys
where the bones of your ancestors
lie scraped and polished in caves.
Your father's bones are ashes.
You have come home, shaken
down the black silk sleeve
of the Pacific night, to cast them,
this grey morning, on deep water.

Sails flag, useless as words
I rehearse on swept sand
while you labor through surf
that glare and distance have silvered
to a line like the hard edge
of the world. You cross it,

disappear. And I wait
among the oiled white bodies
of strangers desperately laid out
for tans.

They'll only burn,
these dim tourists living a week-
long dream that sets no time aside
for death. I offer their blistering skins
in tribute.

When you return, sea-flecked,
winded from your long pull past the reef,
you say the empty rigging chimed,
the opaline swells—the color of ash
made luminous—rose to meet you.
He was gone leaving your hand.

Tonight you too will be gone,
sealed in a whining plane above
dark water. Alone I'll feel
more island-bound than ever,
knowing tomorrow's Kona wind
will make for salt in my morning coffee,
brine in the pores of black rocks
even in high green valleys.

Don Johnson

BOOKS IN BRIEF

A.R. Ammons collects his recent shorter poems in *A Coast of Trees* (Norton, 1981, 52 pp., \$4.95 paper, \$12.95 hardbound). Poetry, like all art, succeeds most transcendently when there is a simultaneous process in the image, in the moving mind of the poet, and in the consciousness of the reader. Giving over our superficial mind patterns to the guiding mind of the poet, we find ourselves perceiving more accurately and responding more profoundly than we had thought possible. Yeats writes about this process in "The Long-Legged Fly." Ammons makes it happen in poem after poem. His "Givings" may be the most completely flowing poem in the language, yet by the brilliance of its imagery and the delicacy of its cerebral motion it somehow achieves the impossible while declaring that it is impossible:

and not even in the midridge of the overspill
 an island to stop on and consider in stillness time
 passing.

This volume holds human and non-human in perfect balance. In a few poems that observe other people in the context of the natural environment and in the poet's and reader's minds, there is a liberating perspective on the suffering that is uniquely human. Consider the man with the cancer:

he is like a rock
 reversed, that is, the rock has a solid
 body and shakes only
 reflected in the water but he shakes
 in body only,
 his spirit a boulder of light.

There is an extraordinary interview with Ammons by Philip Fried in the Fall 1980 issue of *The Manhattan Review* (Vol I, no. 2, \$2.50, from editor Fried, 304 Third Ave., Apt. 4A, New York, N.Y. 10010). In it Ammons speaks of how the prehistoric henges and stone circles "allied impermanent man with the eternal structure of things," and he says: "if you think of the pagan societies as rather carefully paying attention to what the natural forces were around them and then trying to identify with

and, as it were, listen to what that force was and appease it, and know something about it, learn its nature, then science does precisely the same thing today." In sharing that stoic and committed attention through *A Coast of Trees*, the reader will know that at its very best poetry also does precisely the same thing today.

There is something like this same quality of passionate rapt attention in the poetry of Seamus Heaney, as in the opening lines of the title poem of *Field Work* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979, 66 pp., \$8.95 hardbound):

Where the sally tree went pale in every breeze,
where the perfect eye of the nesting blackbird
watched,
where one fern was always green

I was standing watching you
take the pad from the gatehouse at the crossing
and reach to lift a white wash off the whins.

One can have the four early Heaney volumes now in one, *Poems 1965-1975*, (Farrar, 1980, 228 pp., \$12.95 hardbound), and also *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (Farrar, 1980, 226 pp., \$15. hardbound). These three beautiful volumes should be at hand wherever contemporary poetry is alive. Like Ammons, Heaney fixes the observed moment with such loving accuracy and brings to his observation such a wealth of unsentimental knowledge about where we are in time and space that the language obeys his call and transforms our sense of ourselves and our feverish world. Both poets demand readers as attentive and deliberate as they.

William Carpenter's *The Hours of Morning* (University Press of Virginia, 1981, 74 pp., \$7.95 hardbound) is a first volume by a poet of extraordinary accomplishment. Some of the poems are already underground classics: "California," for example, taped at a Maine poets' festival, reappears at unpredictable intervals to delighted listeners of Maine Public Radio. Then there are the translations from the poems of Anasim Miscjek—translations without originals in the great Rumania of the poet's imagination. Bill Carpenter also has a language for whales, deer, owls. His poems go out of himself into the seasons and the caves and the frozen lakes and carry the

enthralled reader into new worlds. I can't remember a first volume with more vitality, assurance, and fertility of invention.

Donald Finkel's *What Manner of Beast* (Atheneum, 1981, 65 pp., \$12.95 hardbound, \$7.95 paper) also explores the blurry margins between the human and other beasts and plants. Many of these poems dramatize the play of the poet's mind over the studies of communication with chimps, dolphins, whales. Lucy and Washoe are translated here for us, and we prowl with Finkel through the imaginations of various eskimos and early explorers. The book is very much of a unit—one large poem, really, exploring the frontiers of art and language. It's a worthy and affecting achievement.

Another book to lead the reader into unfamiliar and thoroughly absorbing realms of poetry is *Leaf and Bone: African Praise Poems, An Anthology with Commentary*, by Judith Gleason (Viking, 1980, 226 pp., \$14.95 hardbound). You'll just have to get this book and see for yourself: it's indescribable. Gleason ranges over much of sub-Saharan Africa, through many languages and cultures, tracing the tradition of the *amazina* (literally "names"), explaining, telling stories about the research, dramatising, providing maps, drawing analogies with other cultures, drawing the reader in. It is an exemplary volume, and all poets, from whatever cultures, have much to learn from it and much to glory in while reading it. It's an artesian well of art and imagination.

One of the most welcome of the new small presses, in the movement that is seizing the initiative for poetry from all but a few of the large commercial publishers, is the Countryman Press, Woodstock, VT 05091. Particularly impressive is the way they design each book to reflect the unique power of each poet. Frederick Feirstein's *Manhattan Carnival: A Dramatic Monologue* (1981, 37 pp., \$6.95 paper, \$10.95 hardbound) is a thoroughly contemporary, witty, endlessly diverting short fiction in (dare we mention it?) polished heroic couplets. We'd like to nominate it for inclusion in the next *Norton Anthology of Short Fiction*. Admirers of David Budbill's high-spirited

Vermont characters will want to order his *Pulp Cutters' Nativity* (1981, 51 pp., \$6.95 paper, \$11.95 hardbound), a salty New England version of *The Second Shepherds' Play*. Like its medieval counterpart, this play is designed for uproarious production and ought to go a good way to retrieve the Christmas season from the red-nosed reindeer, wherever there is a company gutsy enough to perform it.

Handsome, moving, and gutsy in a different way is Countryman's elegant production of *Pig Dreams: Scenes from the Life of Sylvia*, poems by Denise Levertov and fourteen full-page pastels, many in color, by Liebe Coolidge (1981, 48 pp., 7 x 11, \$12.95 hardbound). I have only one quarrel with this enchanting volume, and that is that Levertov's little essay on Sylvia, "a brilliant animal, in the tradition of the Learned Pigs of the 18th and early 19th centuries," appears only on the dust jacket.

M.K.S.

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