

CONTENTS

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| 1. Charles Baxter | <i>Falling Asleep in Michigan</i> |
| 2. A. J. Kappel | <i>Our World Without Us</i> |
| 5. Paul Corrigan | <i>Return to the Lake</i> |
| 7. Brooks Haxton | <i>What Would Make a Boy Think
to Kill Bats</i> |
| 8. | <i>Economics</i> |
| 9. | <i>Odd Man Out</i>
<i>Glee</i> |
| 10. Albert Goldbarth | <i>Hunt</i> |
| 23. | <i>Knees/Dura-Europos</i> |
| 32. Dan Stryk | <i>Bird Island, Grey Light</i> |
| 34. Helena Minton | <i>From the Same Cloth</i> |
| 35. William J. Vernon | <i>Swimming a Witch</i> |
| 37. Paul Farmer | <i>The Mango Lady</i> |
| 38. | <i>Drought in Haiti</i> |

Cover: Robert Shetterly Jr.
The Voice of the Fish

NOTICE

As of 20 May 1984,
the new and permanent address of
The Beloit Poetry Journal
will be
RFD 2, Box 154
Ellsworth, Maine 04605

FALLING ASLEEP IN MICHIGAN

This time it's a boy cradled into himself
on his bed, the homework breathing
like a bad pet he can't train
over there, on his desk. This is in Flint,

where outside the boy's window the same car
turns at a corner night after night
with its taillights tied on with clothesline.
The boy never knows

who the strange man with a scar
behind the wheel is, or where he's going.
The boy knows for a fact
there's a girl alive in the trunk,

because otherwise life would be what
his mother has told him it is: hard,
always the same, and no surprises.
The boy wants to doze off and pry open

the trunk and let her out
for the adventure, so he can slick
back his hair and show
something wild, like an earring

and a black shirt with no buttons,
so he can say, "Whatever weird
stuff comes up in this dream,
I'll take it, no kidding."

Charles Baxter

OUR WORLD WITHOUT US

She sat still with the thought of desire.
Hmmm she said, hmmm. Night like no
particular surprize anymore was gradually falling
again. Yet the pavement ahead still rose to meet it,
as if to meet it, as if. She tried a little
to remember that. The black came down and the asphalt
crested at the shore whether night came or not. Oh,
again and again it came, begging for for.
She rarely tried very hard. She preferred to pretend
to forget what she knew she knew, that
falling night is our invention, that the universe
is as it is, light or dark, near or far.
turned to or from a star. We will pretend to forget
as long as we want as we want. Night like no
particular surprize anymore was gradually falling
again. The pavement ahead rose to meet it.
She sat still with the thought of desire.
Hmmm she said, hmmm.
Beyond the closing darkness, a famous river flowed, low
low down in the earth, the wild earth of creation,
ever giving more and more more of itself away
away. Everything the waters touched, every
blessed godforsaken thing had a name and a history.
Everything was disappearing from use and who cared.
Well well well. The man behind the wheel sighed twice
over the shapeless jam of traffic. He sometimes tried.
His eyes met hers on the luminescent numerals
of the dashboard clock. They shared a silent

tick tock. It was late but it was not that late
really, not that late they had to calculate.

Ah, no. Oh, no no. Inches above their heads enormous
girders thrust their straight lengths up into
the soft night air, mmmmm, in the unusual arrangement
of things which is not that unusual after after

all. What did it matter who to whom
did what where. The thought of desire lounged
full-length across the fluffed surface
of her brain across her brain across her brain.

Were it less late or more she would have thought
of him, she would have tried to think of him,

his eyes every color of the seven seas. She would have.
When they were young they went down they went down

to the famous river to swim. He stood
waist-deep in the water facing shore, she stood

tip-toed at the edge looking into his eyes,
the color of the water the color of his eyes.

There was nothing but the promise of depth before her.
Water lapped at her toes, and she leapt,

knelt, leapt, knelt, leapt, knelt and the world
with its waters came alive with all there was

in his eyes, the seven seas of do and be.
She would have tried. She would have, she

would, she would, when something
something seemed to be happening to the world. When something
something seemed to be happening to the world. When something
something seemed to be happening to the world. When something
something seemed to be happening to, seemed to be happening to.
Wait she said, no she said, no. On every side

buildings reduced themselves bit by bit
to the sum of their parts, bulked granite blocks

on blocks blocks, every room just four more walls,
with no windows to look through, just so many squares

of pointless glass. Streets did not lead but lay
cold and flat on the flat ground.

Great iron stanchions stuck in concrete slabs
supported structures of wood, steel, stone, steel, wood,
steel, stone, steel, wood, steel, stone, steel, stone.
Our world! Our world becoming our world

without us. The river flowed free, ignorant
of its fame, only wet and chill at last.

Coarse granite walls amount only to roughness around
The holes of open windows, one bit of nothing after another.

Doorways for coming out and going in, for
continuing to kiss or continuing not

to kiss, stand vacant, inviolate, inexplicable
shrinkages of the space on either side.

The clock displays all its digits at once.
The light of the infinities illumines everything

as if it were anything. The granite the glass
the iron the air, all of it there, it there, it it

there without us, without, our world
without us us us. She looked in vain.

at the desolate streets. Not a soul
to tell who what how when where why.

Her hands, tight-fisted, deep-pocketed,
could not be moved. She could not move them.

He tried. He could not move them.
He tried. He could not move them.

Her eyes swirled in their sockets.
They thrashed through waves of tears towards him and
burst, oh bring bring the body
into the waiting world of things,
bring it, bring it, flesh leaning against
granite and glass, granite and air, hair sweeping
across a chest like black wheat in a wind off
a river whose waters are the color of eyes when
and only when the body is pressed against the world,
pressed tight, she said, and held.

A.J. Kappel

RETURN TO THE LAKE

The loons yodel every night now.
Their songs tingle the granite spines
of the islands. When we were young
we'd fling our voices at them, our cries
rolling off the shoals of the tongue.
I'd almost forgotten their laughter,
those high quivering calls every
child on the lake could imitate.
Their cries are words missing from our speech
that tell of flights to the ice-edged waters
of birth. Nightly they fill our cove,
a volley of voices giddy
with moonlight and summer. Mother
and dad shuffle cards by the stove.

Kidding each other, they speak
the spare idiom of a land of greengrowth
and granite. It flows from their mouths,
as it once flowed freely in me.
I never thought to preserve it.
Like most, I wanted out. Not to
melt nightly into a cloud of millsmoke.
Their words are lakewater lapping
the shores of my ears. No longer
can I find my way through thickets
of sound that come natural to them.
My tongue is lost in the twanging
glades of western New York.
Like a loon I return to drink
from springs where memory
trickles up over quartz-studded sand.
Honing phrases in father's camp
I am almost a stranger, a son
vanishing down a trail of words.

Saying hello to old friends,
I think of the dark lake
of memory we must shout across;
the waters we sounded together
back before childhood was choked
by millwork and sulfur smoke.
Their roots have been tamped down
by the hidden hand of friends and family
but mine are thirsty for the sounds
of a language still alive on their tongues,
for the granite contours of a country
that exists less and less outside memory,
for the far off cry of a loon.

Paul Corrigan

FOUR POEMS

What Would Make A Boy Think To Kill Bats?

I'd always thought I knew how bats caught bugs,
Big mouths opening, spiked with rodent teeth,
But no, they scoop their prey up in midair
By cupping the web between hind legs and tail.
To witness such an act of artistry
Required I-don't-know-what elaborate device,
Computer bug toss, strobe, fast shutter, and fast film—
But watching them in slow motion made me think
How many nightfalls in the failing light,
How many nights in the succeeding shadow,
As a boy, I watched them browse and never saw
How for an instant with cupped wings and tail
They make their bodies into leather baskets,
Or how, in flight, they dip their heads far in
To pluck the catch up out of the bottom,
Sometimes performing a somersault full tuck.

But the original question here was,
What would make a boy think to kill bats?

I did. Once, before their time to graze,
I found them sleeping, dozens draped heads down
Around the walls inside the dairy. Strange,
I murdered them in their sleep with a BB gun.
Some had high-pitched barely audible screams
Which they made with jaws wide open. Others dropped
Without a sign. Why did I want them dead?

I remember the sight of them, how it was
Loathsome: lumps of dark flesh hanging from the wall,

Most of them rabid, I believed, things
 Dangerous to have alive, and above all
 Ugly, waking nightmares, although now,
 When I remember the scene, as again
 And again I do, the bats like warmblooded angels
 Unfold themselves with supple intricate wings,
 With little cries of anguish, and no more
 Can they frighten me, not now, not the bats.

Economics

When it hatches awake in its dark cell,
 A wasp with no confession of remorse
 Eats of the trapdoor spider's living flesh
 Which tolerates this, being paralyzed,
 For torture never was unnatural,
 Not even for the way, to do his job,
 The torturer may cancel that one chance
 Ever to have had a decent life:
 When bees leave entrails dangling from a sting
 To fall and writhe in such pain as bees know,
 Their glory must be like a warrior's death,
 Not that the boy stung cares more than to crush
 Whatever's left of disemboweled bee.
 Our economics of enlightened greed—
 Tired of the pretext of enlightenment—
 Works not unlike a dream worldwide, a dream
 Impervious to the interpreter
 Because it is so nakedly itself:
 The severed testicles crammed into a daughter's mouth.

Odd Man Out

Absolute among all privileges
Is to be. Ask any rock. Ask air.
God and every paramecium
Agree: being's where it's at, for I
Am that I am, they say, and sure enough
They are, so what are we, what they're not?
"I know!" said one, "*homo sapiens*."
But what's *homo sapient* about?
Ours is a wisdom cats can't seem to get.
One brain man's cat napped in the scanning lab
While he worked to unperplex the purr.

Glee

Coons manhandle corn—
Ten stalks down one morning,
Wasted, not a whole ear eaten.
What's a man to do?

Well, coon hunt is one thing,
And if you want to get out at night,
And hold a gun in your lap,
And hearken the belling of Catahoulas,
Blue ticks, and the rest,
Sipping it neat from a flask
While dew drops on your bootlace,
Then, coon hunt may be *the* thing.

Yet hounds at half a mile at midnight,
Haunting glisses and chords,
Reveal, in their elusive beauty, to me,
Nothing of use on a coon hunt
Or even worth mentioning in the woods.

And my poor, poor ignorant stray
Has proven among the pack of experts
Eager and useless as I.
She was the one
To follow the scent alone,
Whooping and yapping with glee,

“That must be your bitch,” said Martin.
“Yeah? What do you think?” That unpropitious
Note of pride not hidden.

“Ain’t none of mine.
She picked up a cat.” He meant bobcat.

And she followed the scent in her frenzy
Farther into the hardwoods
Up the winding moonlit creek bed
On bright sand and gravel
Up the gulley bottom of clay
Into the dark brush
Giving tongue
On through briars and through green thorns
Till at a faint, faint distance
Her hysteria doubled.

“She seen him.”

And she held that tempo
Into the pine hills
Up to the pasture
Where she doubled again.

“He’d stopped now
And she gone to circling him.”

Ah! That faithful stray still calling
Far off, calling me,
Fearless after mistaken prey
Until we heard her cry.

Brooks Haxton

TWO POEMS

Hunt

A sheaf of some. Some (like Mrs. Browning's)
 in the lavish concentrics of Moorish design.
 George Washington's is a single fraying bangle.
 Some are fish lures, in their thickness and gaudy loll.
 Others, a minimal sprig of baby's-breath.
 There are broomheads, and eddies, and elegant,
 skaterly, bubble-chamber spirals

of hair. And Milton's occasions a sonnet
*(There seems a love in hair, though it be dead.
 It is the gentlest, yet the strongest, thread
 Of our frail plant . . .)*. And sour Dean Swift is given
 double entry (*His hair when old, and his hair
 when young*). Also two locks from Keats. And each
 appears with an engraving of the head where it first took
 luxuriant root; and each is lovingly labeled
 and dated in hand-done print as regimental as type;
 and each, its history: Napoleon's, *Obtained
 from his hairdresser by Mrs. Leigh, who gave it to
 her brother, Lord Byron, who gave it to*

Leigh Hunt. Whose collection it is. Bound richly
 in burgundy leather, with his likeness on the cover,
 and sturdy, floral decoration intertwining
 with the letters COLLECTION OF HAIR.
 As we see him, he's going over his Milton sonnet, again,
 again—almost, we want to say, “combing.” *It*

*lies before me there, and my own breath
 Stirs its thin outer threads, as though beside
 The living head I stood . . .* The candle
 glimmers off the pearl of his undone collar,
 off his untouched wine. He's been in there hours.
 He wants it ringing true.
 He runs his hands through his hair.

These were the days of collecting.
 Beetles. Fossils. Bottles. Oriental
 sex prosthetics (ivory, lovely
 eel-bodied and bullheaded things).
 The yellowed slivers of saints. Hair. There,

they all arrived—the would-be great, and great—
 in Leigh Hunt's study, and stayed
 to talk of immortality, in one way or another.
 Lamb was there, and Hazlitt. Jeremy Bentham
 praised "the elephant's trunk, which lifts
 alike a pin or twelve hundredweight." Byron

unwrapping the packet with Napoleon's few sad strands.
 Coleridge. Wordsworth. Keats. The Shelleys
 donated a lock apiece on 3 December 1820,
 hers a particular beauty in its bountiful roundness.
 These were the cast, or some of the cast, and as he collected
 their minds in his editorial endeavors, he collected

odd personal bits: lace tatters, a vase, this straggle
 snipped from Johnson's scalp *two days after death*.
 Although at Shelley's cremation, Hunt
remained in the carriage. Byron asks for the skull—"but,"
 Trelawny says of it, "remembering that he had formerly
 used one as a drinking-cup," the poet is refused.
 "The brains literally seethed, bubbled, and boiled
 as if in a cauldron." Trelawny snatches the whole fat

heart from the ashes, and later presents it to Mary.
 These are the pins. As for the hundredweight,
 Jeremy Bentham

“is preserved entire” at University College. To touch him.
 Like stroking the fitted, mineral-black back
 of a beetle, a something

out of its time, in our time. To touch him,
 or any of them. Pinned in their cases,
 bound in their books.
 In the days of collecting, death
 is only the last of the many anthologies.

To get it; to touch it; to bring forth from it
 breath, or spark, or marrow,
 in communion and possessorship.

And Milton they disinterred, some
 necrokleptoretentive antiquarian ratsasses,
 knocked the teeth out with a stone, then twisted
 off a leg as if tearing small wood for the fire, and took
 “a large quantity of the hair, which lay
 straight and even, just as it had been combed and tied
 together before interment.”

To get it; to risk to get it; to get in the pit of it,
 the yolk, the neural sanctorum, the pulse-dot, the sexual x;
 to revere it; to brand your initials.

And Pope is composing a note in request of another
 “hogshead of scallop shells.” By night,
 in the earliest days of its construction, he enters
 his Grotto and dances, hunched back
 in a stuttering candle, dances like a wild thing
 through his wild collection: petrified moss,

marble from Rome, doves' eggs, gold and silver
 in egg-sized workings of ore from Peru, "the usual
 fossils and gems," "small stones, incrustated over,
 out of the river Thames," flints, winter-hardened
 animal tracks, bloodstones, snakestones, "two stones
 from the Giant's Causeway," busts and urns
 around the wall, "large clumps of Cornish diamonds,"
 "Plates of Looking glass,"
 heaped crystals, corals, pelts and claws, a hummingbird's
 nest.

"I must add, to my shame, I am one of that sort
 who at his heart loves bawbles better (than riches) . . ."

To get it; to know it; to lay yourself along it
 face to face; to name it; to place it; to be with it
 atom attuned to atom, drug to bloodstream, stone to flesh.

And Shelley is worrying over where he's collected
 the best of himself on paper. We'll know it as "Ode
 to the West Wind." Here, today, the manuscript page
 is titled "Octr 25." He scratches out *loose locks*
 and now it's *bright hair*—this, so *The hair*
of the approaching storm can be *The locks*. He says it
 aloud. He sings it. He taps it, to see if it finds a
 concomitant tap of approval
 from deep in the meat of his brain.

To get it;
 but then to get it right.

In the days of collecting I searched
 for the proper material, something,
 anything; the albums of love,
 the bright figurettes of the holy.

And in upstate New York, Mel Birnkrant returns
 from whatever muddying up of a person the world can do

in a day, and opens the door on that recleansing he calls home: it's Eunice Birnkrant and "more than two thousand separate pieces of Mickey Mouse memorabilia." What does he see, and become, staring out of the windows of that world? Some nights the moon must touch the fringe it makes of itself in the delicate verticals of the Fingerlakes falls, must touch the sharp white breakage it places in tamarack tops, must jewel the lawns, with perfect satiation. And he looks up, and the face he sees in that fullness is his secret.

And Emanuele Litto Damonte, the Pope Valley Hubcap King, holds court in a "hubcap ranch" of over 3,000. He's 91. "I just did it. People bring 'dem, and I hang 'dem up. I'm Litto. I'm here. 'Dis is my place." And

Grandma Tressa Prisbey, 87, lives in Bottle Village: 22 buildings done, in their entirety, of bottles set in cement. She walks with a cane now, and she can't much keep the shining up. One building is called the Little Chapel, one has goat skulls over the door. And why did she pour her life in these bottles, these landfill castoffs saved by her for infrastructure? "I did it to house my pencil collection. I have more than 10,000 pencils, you know."

I know. By such vicarious accumulation, mice in felt and iron, everyone knows, and in the days of collecting we walk with the burn of wanting our own unbearable heaviness lightened by itemization. The hill was a good place to stop, so I stopped. The moon was a good thing to want, so I howled. Or not the moon exactly, no, but some idea of how a calendar could be made from brightness's phases. And I didn't exactly

howl. I made the small, high sounds of wanting
to be touched by wanting—something,
anything. Hubcaps. Hair.

“I can remember that I was afraid of being left alone,
and that I was comforted by sitting in a Mickey Mouse
chair
that was there . . . I love the innocence of that figure. I
want

to see it restored to an active place in our lives.”

By now the sky was green, a deepening
emerald-green, and he knew the storm was nearing.
He knew, as well, a half-smashed squatters' shack
lay an hour ahead, where they'd welcome him with their
empty-handed open-armed generous ways (as he
was welcome, in fact, at some of the best of the tended
estates in the colonies—even Mr. Custis once,
whose widowed daughter-in-law would marry
George Washington, hosted this “downright plain
country man” and they stayed up talking the cultivation
of mountain cowslip all night). But the shack
would be undulant in vermin; his horse
would mind the downpour less than an hour-more run;
and so he leisurely finished the last of the wood rat
(in honey and sour orange pulp: “a relishing morsel”)
and rode out slow, to meet the rain with whatever
acceptance he'd learned from the wild greengrowing things,
seed and shoot and blossom, of his collecting

—John Bartram, that farmer from the banks
of the Kingsessing, who traveled two weeks for a few new
willow-leafed acorns. Who traveled the Dismal Vale,
the Endless Mountains, the Impenetrable Mountains,

the Rattlesnake Mountains, Flying Hill, Licking Place.
 Up to Canada. Down to Florida. (And once, "as I was
 walking in a path an Indian man met me and
 pulled off my hat in a very great passion and
 chewed it all round—I suppose to show me that they
 would eat me if I came in that country again.") Who
 came in that country again, who smudged himself his life
 long

in the natural mulch of that—his, ours,
 this—country. John Bartram, collector

for Peter Collinson, London merchant and amateur
 botanist. England crazy for New World flora. Bartram
 by inches through its hills. "Pray send a root or two
 of the glassy leaves that bear little blue flowers, that's
 good against the obstruction of the bowels; and a good
 root

of Swallow-wort, and hop tree, allspice,
 wild roses, and if thee observes any freshwater shell fish
 or land snails . . ." He observed. He sent.

In glass jars filled with camphor. Or wrapped in damp moss.
 The beetles and smaller animals crammed into jars
 filled with rum (though sailors sometimes drank these).
 Nuts were waxed. Tortoise-shell snuffboxes varnished
 air-tight. In 40 years he introduced a full
 one-fourth of the 600 native American plants
 known in Europe. John Bartram. Collected

shooting star, white osier, bittersweet, steepleshub,
 arrowroot, river birch, witch hazel, sassafras,
 dogwood, sweet gum, hickory, hemlock, buttonbush,
 sand myrtle, mayflower, cucumber, butterflies
 arriving "a little torn," a box of turtle eggs
 that hatched upon arrival "and then with their forefeet
 scratched their eyes open," redwood, canewood,
 life everlasting, "a monkfish having
 a hook like a friar's cowl," wasp nests, and a tipitiwichet
 that "does

trap flies for devouring." Knew them. Loved them.

Collection

shipment to shipment. And Collinson gave
some American seeds to "a universal lover of plants" and
eventual patron, Lord Petre,

whose father

had clipped a snippet of hair off the head of his kinswoman
Arabella Fermor, thus inspiring
Pope to write *The Rape of the Lock*.

Something, anything. Rosebay. Laurel. Maple.

The mosses we now call *Bartramia*.

Hubcaps, Hair.

To have it. To touch it. Jeremy
Bentham, say. The long-dead pemmican meat
and slowly browning bones of Jeremy Bentham on display.
To touch it, to love it, Aladdin
to lamp. How long did it take
for a genie? To touch it, to buff it, to bring it
to life, or a semblance of life, through attention.
I walked and I wanted it,
something . . . I often thought of a woman
asleep beside me. How I'd simply stroke her
hair, her hair like oceanwaves off the glaze
of a Japanese plate, such stylized ringleting, yes just
stroking it in the darkness, stroking a spark
alive in the oils of the interior, stroking a cobalt
crackle of lightning down the dark, to have it,
to touch it, to love it, to bring it to wholeness,
to stroke her awake.

On the 5th floor of the U of Texas Special Collections

Library

is the "vertical file"—miscellaneous

junk-cum-exotica storage. What is it, that asking for Leigh Hunt's catalogued compendium should encourage an offer of being toured through this mess of lesser literary curio-detritus:

John Masefield's teddybear "Bruno." Two cigarette butts of John Cowper Powys's (June 7, 1939) and a swatch of his hair. "Cuttings from Shaw's beard." Whitman's hair (1890-92) and a gold pin with a lock of his hair at its heart. Stein's waistcoat. Carson McCuller's nightgown. *All, both pellingings at once: re-, com-*. Poe's glasses. The Coleridge family hair. And Arthur Conan Doyle's cuesticks and golf clubs and hairbrush and socks with a note: "The socks which were on my Beloved's feet—put on by the nurse after he had passed on—Which I took off and replaced others with my own hands." *I don't want to know.*

I want to know. Robinson Jeffers's hair. Poe's hair in a brooch "of spiral gold," you can see it coiled tensely inside like a watchspring. Compton Mackenzie's rubber toilet cushion and kilt. And "Clarence E. Hemingway's first 3 white hairs." Earle Stanley Gardner's

brass knuckles and credit cards and his photographs of 2 views of a skunk and his "Oriental bamboo sleeve gun with blood-encrusted darts" and the tapes of him learning Spanish. *This is all true.* And the hair, almost always the hair, that most supremely voodooesque of the body's various flotsam mnemonics we pick up tangled and beached on an alien shore and with it recall the whole life. Hair. A bottle village. 10,000 pencils, "you know." Iron mice.

The candle's final stutter. And so our last view of Hunt. He floats in front of the bubbled, leaded window glass, an intermittent orangeish flicker himself from the flame, like something vaguely autumnal that's been pressed inside these pages for preservation. Now he finishes labeling Washington's packet—the birthdate,

1732. That year, Pope is "engaged in building"—the garden, its nooks—and planning his Grotto. The garden will have a "trumphal arch," "shell temple," and "a hot-house for ananas." (Foreign blossoming is all the rage.) In 1734, the year Pope sketches, for a friend, advisory plans toward garden ornamentation, Collinson is down at the London docks, is on his knees like Midas pouring through a treasure chest, at this initial of Bartram's shipments, *arrowwood*, *staggerbush*, *hellebore*, *alder*, *honeysuckle*, *lady's slippers* . . .

The storm is a lulu. A ringtailed king 'coon lulu of a boulder-whomper. He ties a rag of the rat-bag over the horse's jittery eyes, and in that band of relative calm, the horse calms. Bartram, though, is excited past containment. Every atom of the air's seems individually rinsed and charged. A little ways over, the hills look like the First Day out of Genesis; and he firms up the knot in the horse's tether, once more pats her slobbery muzzle, then walks out from under their overhang, into rain like scrapers at work on old paint. The hell with the lightning. He's getting old, he hasn't that many more gathering-trips left in him, and this is his adopted atavistic family out there, tree

and bird and lizard, and he's going to lay on the crown,
the nipple, the wizard's-cap tip, of that highest hill
and sing in celebration of the creatures of Creation.
John Bartram. "A very proper person to gather seeds."

In his writings, he played with strange ideas that Egyptians
or Carthaginians had landed once in America,
and he surmised some land bridge linking his country to
China.

What he knew best of China was one impressive half-
handful
of aster seeds, from the Jesuits there to France
and then to London, when Collinson thought to ship them
over

as a gift to his backwoods procurer. What Bartram
thought exactly of all that Chinese land mass spinning in
a night

that was forever our day, I don't know, if he dreamed
the flora of Mars and the Moon, if he itched to trade shoots
with a gardener of the Khan's, if the call of the stars was
drowned (or wasn't) by the nearer clamor
of anthers, rattlers, bee buzz, sap and bud . . . He
said of the cosmos, "Orbs beyond orbs, without number,
suns beyond suns, systems beyond systems, how
can we look on these without amazement!" Because
he said it, a man on a hill in a storm, with his back
on the rain-splattered grasses of North Carolina and
his face to the sky, I think of him

on my own night walks with the fire of wanting
down to the seedgerm and up to the stars
alive in me and leaping. I have
a woman I love, and the 1921 *Poetry* (October) with Stevens's
strict and flinchless *The Snow Man* inside, and it's
never enough. In the days of desire, impossible
numismatic lust for the coins off the eyes of the great dead
fills our nerve-ends. Something that may be coins give the
face

on the shroud of Turin an open gaze, I
 want them, give me the sinewy vault
 of Shelley's heart, the spiral filaments of wood that twisted
 delicately at the last from Paul Revere's devoted whittling
 of Washington's false teeth, let me have the names of every
 flaming body on the star chart
 that's tattooed to be the pattern of our retinal plates
 as surely as nubile hula girls and burning skulls are
 tattooed

on the biceps of half the drunk bikers in World's End,
 Oklahoma, let me know who cares to carry it on
 and start an album off with a curl of Leigh Hunt's, and
 hand me just one sketch of a plant that Bartram did,
 or one leaf of the sketch, or a single green vein
 where he lavished exactment and wonder . . . The storm

is over by now. He's drained—as if his taking in so
 much of the world is reciprocal this once, and the world
 has absorbed him. The clouds thin. The first stars faintly
 come forward. He thinks the band of night has arrived
 here at last from China, and now it will calm things
 like the rag around his horse's eyes, and then it will pass
 on

schedule back to the Orient, and then return . . . And so
 he sees,

John Bartram, who "cast my eyes on a daisy
 with more curiosity than common country farmers are
 wont,"

he sees his Earth is one more night-striped weather-
 marbled

sphere of a collection, countless, spinning in the ineffable
 ordering

system of the heavens. The moon shows up by now as a true
 blood orange fully come to ripeness, and a man on a hill
 is howling for it. Or not the moon exactly, but some
 idea of time and how to use it. And not exactly
 a howl. At speed and with details both

too immense to imagine, the planet turns over and
over and somewhere a man is always making a salvager's
small
high sounds of wanting.

This is what you know, John Bartram,
isn't it: every day the whole planet turns upside-down
without disrupting our passions

a hairsbreadth.

Knees / Dura-Europos

1. 255 A.D.

This is what's happening now: it's raining, mean
thick arrows of rain, on the swollen,
purple Euphrates side of the Roman garrison town
Europos, and a thinner, bitter, blue-gray taste of it
billows in, over the workers. Soon they're drenched.
They keep on anyway. Not that the sun would be kinder.
The siege is expected soon—the horsecuntsucking
Sassanians, coming out of the west, the desert, and so
the whole walled western frontside of this
fleablown frontier post is being filled with a buffer
of rubble. It'll be watery pig's-ass soup and endless
crotch-itch once the siege begins, and little
better now: the commander, the trundles of rock,
the rain starting in like a cat-o'-nines. And now this
crazy Jew in the downpour, running around them in circles,
wailing with each pick swung at his synagogue's stones.

*

This is what's happened before: on the site of their old house of worship, the Jews of Europos, tolerated benignly under this Roman regime, have had constructed the current tile-ceilinged, wall-bemural'ed House of the Glory of God. There isn't a one who didn't shoulder brick—and tithed, or more, his hidden saving's-pinch for this. The "this" is simple, and in its simplicity lovely: the 4 walls have been painted completely in warm-tone tempera—rose, sienna, butter, blush, rich garnet, plum, buff, saffron—and the depth of color substitutes emotional repletion for perspective, in these flat rough workings-out of the Bible. Jacob dreaming angels. An Egyptian princess, shamelessly, nakedly, umber-deepened pink, retrieving Moses from the Nile. Ezra reading the law. Esther saving her people. The building is a picture Bible. —The spirit of which might best be here, in The Binding of Isaac, done in a few clear lines against a cerulean blue above the Torah shrine itself. The boy is a scroll-like long, limp bundle on his altar. The ram is already come out of its thicket—really one shrubby tree. And awestruck, with his back to us, facing the bound boy, Abraham stands with his knife, upraised and sees the Hand of the Maker-of-All float low in the heavens, human-shaped but huge, with the signal *desist*. It's the Hand of a strict, but compassionate, Maker-of-All With a little courage, and Jacob's ladder, a man might climb to shake it.

*

This is what's happening now: a man is running in circles, around the bottom-rung Roman soldiers on wall-fill detail. Shmū-el ben Yedaya, The *Cohen* (priest), is running wailing around the synagogue, his synagogue and his people's, past

the colonnaded forecourt, around the study rooms
and back, in the rain, to the jeers of the crew,
is running a little crazed, is running knowing
this destruction is inevitable and to the common good,
this wedge- and batteringlog-destruction
of his synagogue and his people's, and though this is long
before the invention of anything truly a watch, he's running
in circles as if time might be wound
this way, now that it's running down, and by
his circles he might start it
at the beginning again.

*

And this is what's going to happen: the Sassanians
will arrive, and be successful. The Jews,
like everyone else, will either be slaughtered
or taken for slaves. The lucky will simply be
cut down, maybe raped and then cut down,
maybe forced to see a daughter raped and then
cut down, but anyway quickly. Others will be
unlucky, made to play with their own unraveled
bowels first, made to climb the pole and sit
with anus centered on its sharpened tip while
weights are piled on . . . And it's the same Hand,
of the same attentive Maker, that will allow all
this.

2. 1982-83

When Emily died—my sister-in-law, at 34,
of her lungs filling up with the self-drowning watery
mucilage
of cystic fibrosis, all night under the respirator and finally it
just tore through the delicate cell-wall of her breathing . . .
It was bad. For months my wife held conversations
with her in sleep. "And when she was dead I
combed her hair a last time." Who all her life was brave
in her array of apparatus, and worked in the ward with the
children

first having that nightmarish rubbery stuff pulled
 out of their lungs. And every day the paper says some
 goon politico celebrated his 90th birthday with high-fly whores
 on either arm and a platinum magnum of rum. On the night
 of condolences, I needed to run. My leg (again) was bum
 and the rains had started, but this was an hour of working
 everything out, in tens of thousands of sour pore-sized quanta,
 that I needed—so I left the house of formal black,
 in running shoes, and gave myself to the zigzag macadam
 trails

of Richardson, Texas. Now whenever I run
 in rain, or with that deep complaining returned to my knee,
 I always spend some terrible,
 mnemonic minutes running through Richardson, Texas
 —in Iowa, even, in St. Louis.

Grief

is never lonely. Any grief is every grief all
 over again. Is any aching bone
 joined unto bone joined unto bone in you and
 out of you, down all the bones, till all the buried make one
 smooth-joindered skeleton of which you're just the most
 recently

fleshed appendage. Morrie who
 hugged his own chest, once, like a mother her dying child.
 And then did die, his chest having stopped.

Sylvia's grandmother. Leslie my student a package
 of leukemia. She was only 19. She wrote sweet
 unaccomplished

verses about "tinkling brooks." And no prayer,
 imprecation or vial of Holy Water brought back taped
 to a gilt-edged card with the story of Lourdes in calligraphy
 stops it, ever. I'm a man in Austin,
 jogging tonight, and the city is wet in the same
 allotment of rain that drenched Europos once, that's been
 our share bounced back between the Earth and Sky from
 long

before the Romans, long before the geese
 in the mud of Imperial Rome—before the mud itself.
 A night like this, a man can see the cycle of vapor
 and cloud-completion taking place as if in giant textbook
 arrows,
 making a great,
 relentless wheel, large enough for the grinding
 of all those bones.

 I jog through the neighborhood park
 —and the floral darkness, cleaned by the rains
 like black glass freshly squeegeed, tells me: History
 is only Time's way of washing itself,
 of putting on new lemon scent
 each spring and starting over.

 I jog by the corner
 downtown where the hookers are out in laminated makeup
 even this weather can't smear, are out there
 packing like carousel horses in lurid lavender manes
 —they tell me: History is a whore's life
 told to 20 johns a night. She lies and no
 two of them get the same story. Although the basic
 bonework's always there: some good times,
 then pain, then abandonment.

*

It was Dura first, an Assyrian name, at its founding.
 When it fell to the Seleucids in 323 BC, they
 named it: Europos.
 Then it fell to the Parthians: Dura.
 Then the Roman emperor Trajan took, and
 successive Roman rule renamed, it: Europos.
 Then the Sassanians won it: Dura. Archeologists
 simply call it Dura-Europos, to avoid confusion.
 No wonder, though, a man is confused.
 No wonder a man runs circles. In 1921
 the British and Arabs are fighting in the desert.

When the British dig trenches in preparation for Arab
attack,

they come upon ruins . . . “The Sassanians
occupied Dura-Europos for only a brief time, very
soon abandoning it to the elements.”

Crazy, running, wailing as he runs.

*

The Earth says: vapor.

The Sky says: rain.

There isn't any wisdom from this.

And if pain has a use, it's as part of the
cycle of pain. Like any self-contained system,
it feeds on, and leads to,
perpetual self.

3. Anytime

Listen: another story of during a war—so faceless,
so accurate in its hyperbolic approximations of daily life,
it could be any time or -place or -people.

They

found their synagogue destroyed, and what the arson hadn't
damaged the axes and mallets did. (And a baby girl
had been trapped in back; on her, the fire
fed itself so greedily, they couldn't tell if here too the
mallets had been at work.) The heart of a whole
community, in pieces. And reconstructing it would mean fire
again, axes again, the police at the door past midnight.
So: you give up, right? Let someone else go worship
Yahweh-Who-Let-This-Happen. Right? Right
horseshit. Here's what you do:

You go to work,

you come home in the purple thick of evening, you eat,
you go visit friends. And each of you brings a flute with,
a flute for a little stupid peasant after-dinner music,
a bone flute.

It takes seven of those for her body to be
 refastened as a menorah. And by
 its light each night, abbreviated, silent, while
 a few of you tootle on cheap tin flutes divertingly
 near the windows, service
 still ascends past the witnessing roofs of this city
 as it has for generations.

This

took planning. Resumption always takes planning,
 argument, a graph. Though first it takes a while
 of mournful circles, confused and cathartic,
 run in the moment's version of pummeling rain, around,
 around, before
 the springwork mechanism of time is wound back ready
 for setting again to the proper, ongoing tick. You've
 felt him in you, haven't you? —Shmū-el ben Yedaya,
 rounding your heart's bruised corners, maybe
 for something so small as the getting
 up to face a day. Then

you got up. When Jennie Burns
 his wife of 17 years was lost to cardiac failure, Burns spent
 12 months grieving; 12 more mothering each measured
 beat of
 his sensitized own: walked soft, moved slow, in bed by 8,
 until the doctor said his care was killing him, prescribing
 go out and get laid. If he's circling this
 hookers' corner with each fist on the wheel a little crazy, I
 wish him, finally, a resurrectory night; I wish
 the spirit of Jennie be calm and forgiving, out there in the
 overgoverning
 circuitry of pi-mesons and suns.

Listen: late in the 19th century, maybe
 into the 20th, mummies from the digs and market hucksters
 grew so numerous, railroads used them instead of coal.

Whole

family burial plots were fed to the locomotives. Now the
 standard

response is supposed to be oh, what a loss to science or oh, the sacrilege. Yes, there's that; the sacrilege.

But

stand on the edge of the desert in that brief retrieving season when the fires die down and a small cloud hints a whole sweet, green, revivifying sky is on its way. One day we'll curse the rain, its chill, the yellow phlegm. One day we'll curse the sun's ordained return. But every year we stand here, thrilled, our skin so open and hopeful, as a man might stand in one of a million Duras, and with the rising piquant breeze from out of the long, fierce, leafless wastes

we understand: that the dead must be used to power the living.

That sounds a little grand. And when I run, it's such a trivial circle traced on the face of it all. Another taking up an hour. Another guy out, working it off. But still, it's a circle. And Shmū-el ben Yedaya must be one more orbit, must be necessary according to the most primordial formula, must be one more added balance here, where we live, on our level between the revolutions of subatomic particles and the system-spin of stars. Come on: I'm tying my shoes. Come on already,

I'm jogging

through the blind moon's white cane tapping about a lush black stand of liveoak, past the laundromat's blather of hum and slosh, around the pond, by the caryard, to hell with the pinch when the leg bends wrong, come on. I don't know what fake name the whore gave Burns or what her story was this thousandth time with some new yokel

curious and hesitant at the edge of the bed, but I know it must have ended like anyone else's autobiography,

I'm here, and more often than not that's a version of
triumph.
And I don't know the colloquial gripe-and-fuss-words
someone mumbled
in reverie, painting the synagogue plaster (now
the Red Sea's being split like a loaf of heavy, red bread)—
that,
or the formal language with which he labeled
some of his simple figures standing in their simple
Biblical narratives of what travail
becomes. But I can give you a rough translation,
in the cut-and-dried no-nonsense one-line oratory
my doctor sometimes uses at the last when jargon seems to
be beside
the point:

The heart is more
important than the knees.

I'm keeping on jogging despite my pain.
I'm keeping on praying despite my God.

Albert Goldbarth

BIRD ISLAND, GREY LIGHT

We row again to the "bird island,"
wife sketching on the bank
above, obscured in the grey fog.

His small hand pink & white
with chill, gripped to the oar
that shudders downward

through the waste-choked
foam, springs out in spray
with every awkward thrust.

But he must row there
with me—awkwardly against my pull—
so we founder like two pirates

from his stories, in the fog.
October's done. I'm thirty
in three days. Deep autumn gold

pools solidly beneath the island's
willowed edge. We enter
its mute bound—the golden mirror

shattered by our bow, we enter
grey & golden flickering near the shore.
The sluggish birds—coots, gulls,

the myriad ducks and geese—
are there. We rouse them
from their balled, neck-hidden
rest. There's sudden life
among the trees, and from patched
autumn grass, the lovely feathers
rise, a few go tense, the wary
leaping in. It's this he loves.
The rhythm of our rowing
and their sudden leaping in.
And even his dad's rowing, our slow
getting there again, has made him proud.
"The Bird Island," encroached upon
and left, the two of us
thump slowly back to tell
his mother how we roused
them from the fog, how we entered
autumn's willowed caves,
their secret gold,
where she sketches in the grey light
near the shore.

*The Serpentine
Hyde Park, London*

Dan Stryk

FROM THE SAME CLOTH

**for the mill girls,
Lowell, Massachusetts, circa, 1840**

The city fathers dreamed these girls
the way they dreamed the town:
to scale, pale colors on a map, dolls
bending at looms by day, reading
the Classics by night. Now I imagine them
as they rise to bells, break ice
in washing bowls, file at dawn
to the mills, their breath pouring before them.

All day they stand, each girl
at a different task: to guide raw
cotton through the spindle, blend dye
for yellow calico, count each bolt
for dish towels, sheets, their future husbands'
shirts, their own petticoats.
They hear machines roar the way the river
roars, breast-wheels turning.

Do they whisper sonnets to themselves,
or think of Cleopatra on the Nile,
clay banks where men lie sleeping?
Do they dream of being loved like that?

Each time a girl writes home, part of her
follows the letter across the border
to New Hampshire, growing damp
as it passes the sea, then safe,
unfolded by her mother's hands.

When she places her cheek on cold cotton,
she sees the years ahead
like yards of undyed linen,
and yearns to watch a warehouse
full of dimity catch fire.

She wants to walk past the row
of beds, down to the river's most
seductive bend, to lie on the grass,
wet blades staining her nightgown,
feeling the hush, the sound
of nothing being made.

Helena Minton

SWIMMING A WITCH

Her long black hair billows, bubbles,
then follows her down. "Try her, dear
Lord," I implore. "Make thy decision
clear to thy servants." Then her aged
father yells, "God bless thee!" and swoons.
The Lord's will is hard, I think, but
He provides The Way.

After five
days in gaol, she finally screamed,
"Resurrect me!" That blasphemy
suggested guilt. We needed proof
so I marched her here. The holy
meek came from their houses and paled
at the wood edge. She smiled at the dark
shadows we'd entered, this evil

green place. I had to suspect her for that. Who but the devil likes the untamed wild? Her biceps burned my palm dragging her to the pond. At her refusing confession again, I prayed stripping her. She laughed as my aides eagerly bound her left thumb to her right big toe, right thumb to her left big toe. She stood bent, arms crossed, and submitted. Leaning forward, I felt her lips touch my fingers kissing even as I prayed. My muscles jerked. How brazen! "Throw her in!" I ordered the faithful. "Give thyself to the Lord," I said as she hit the water.

They splash cool liquid on the father's face. He shivers waking up. "You were right," I soothe him. "Innocent. She was perhaps possessed by the humours is all. It is apparent to us that the pure spring flows through and accepts her sweet body. She must be God's daughter, one of His own." The old man does not comprehend. I have him led back to the village distraught still, unaware I am posting myself and another to guard through the night, knowing we can't leave quickly. She may yet prove she's a witch and surface alive.

William J. Vernon

TWO POEMS

The Mango Lady

for her children

We see, curving sharp up the mountain
the beginnings of a carpet of mangos
in the road, narrow children gathering them.
Something's wrong (this from Ophelia, hearing
the nervous tin chatter of a wake).
Then the truck, tipped, its too many mangos
in fixed cascade, upturned baskets and women,
some silent, some recovered, the vendors
of mangos, some green, some already turning
the safe color of children's aspirin.

We stop, not wishing to crush the fruit.
A policeman comes to us, exhibiting
three goldframed incisors and a bought badge.
Oui (to Ophelia) *une dame est morte*,
the wounded dispatched to Port-au-Prince,
the produce only bruised. He smiles now
as if this immolation were routine
as if baskets were beginning to fill,
another camion pulling up the grade
to load up women desperate for a sale.

We start, eyes drawn reluctantly back
over baskets, to the dead mango lady
stretched stiff on her bier of tropical fruit.
She is almost covered with a cardboard strip.
Like the flag of her corrugated country,
a flimsy strip too thin to hide the wounds.
This is not the brown blood of the dead:
it is not yet brown. Ophelia says nothing
but lets go the nervous tin laugh of a wake,
which I know has nothing to do with funny.

Drought in Haiti

From this balcony, corrugated tin roofs
shimmer down to shore. Rain is not there,
over the dirty strand where the brine licks
where empty shells and tourists wash up.
In the grit, scraps of chitin skeleton
are trampled by children, foragers
with only the wind in their tripes.
Haiti's naked spine is fetus-curved
around the lapping bay. The trees are burned
under belching pots of rice and red beans.
Their soil slips down to choke the coast
leaving pecky bone, hot and white and barren.

Thunder might be drowned in the cacophony
of misery welling up from the slums.
A palm frond falls dead. It slithers down
the stiff bole. It flops weakly into dust.
Forenoon tradewinds make no new bargains
but her stale vapors into the Passage.
The dry complaint of narrow curs, goats yammering,
a thicktongued *merchande* selling brooms:
midday, the *blancs* crawl into glass cases.

perfused with rum punch, leaving the others
to the buzzing anaesthesia of a parched noon.
Noon. The enemy of all urgency.

Mountains go sepia as the sun dies
dull in a watercolor wash.
Night is not like rain. There is thirst in darkness,
crops wither still under the quickdead moon.
Lips will crack and rest, hung on dry teeth.
In the conch on my bedside table
I might catch an echo, faint, of the storm
muffled by the souvenir sea, I might
conjure the wet to slake this angry thirst.
Now a house is burning in Port-au-Prince,
fever-tonguing the new night.
In a drought, the fire goes unchallenged.

Paul Farmer