

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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Cover: Robert Shetterly Jr., *Day Lilies*, ink drawing, 1981, from the Stocking family collection.

NOTICE: We are pleased to announce that our next issue, Fall 1985, will be Chapbook Number 18, a sequence of four story poems about detective Chuck Wade. This 72-page special issue, entitled *Wade's Wait*, is by Jonathan Aldrich. It will come as part of every regular subscription.

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SNAKES DO IT

I've always wanted to know how snakes do it.
Make love, you know.
I mean, they seem all of a piece.
It's hard to imagine a protrusion or a hole.
I asked a vet from the zoo. He didn't seem to know,
just said, "they do it, don't worry,"
in a smart-ass, knowing way, as if to show
he was superior to my question.
I asked another vet, this one does research
on animal reproduction at a major New York hospital,
and he didn't seem to know either,
just muttered something about a cloaca.
I looked that up in the dictionary:
"The common chamber into which the intestinal,
urinary and generative canals discharge."
Also a word for sewer.
He seemed to think that would satisfy me.
It didn't, of course. I was longing
to imagine the scene. Two snakes, you know.
Then while I was reading Cosmo at the gynecologist's
I came upon a fascinating article on love
in the animal world. Not only, it said,
not only does the male snake have a penis,
he has two penises. It seems one's a spare,
in case he loses one, or goes over a pothole, or something.
No wonder those guys didn't want to talk about it.

Anne-Marie Levine

SPEECH PROBLEMS

*Then shall the tongue of the dumb sing: for
in the wilderness shall water break out.*

Isaiah

I

I hurry my son through the black and blue
racket of crow calling to crow,
caws pelting sharp as rain
drops. Hand in hand, we pass
the tall spruce, and
are swallowed into the school.
The doors croak behind us —
escape now would be useless.
High windows at each landing
on the stairs face the shrinking
spiral of the spruce. We
Seem to be climbing the tree.
When we've reached the top, a room
where chairs and table are dwarf
size, one crow flaps and jeers
soundlessly from pine's peak.
Smiling, my little son
points at him and speaks
in voice liquidly sweet
but no more human than a bird's.
I cannot understand a word. His face
falls blacker than the crow.
He clamps his jaw, then turns away.
In perilous silence, we three
balance on the point of the tree.

II

In my own childhood, a boy I knew
climbed up a pine and caught a fledgling crow.

I clamped its head, while he forced wide the beak
to split the tongue so it might learn to speak.

The crow screamed at the knife, but cowed, grew tame
enough to beg, to swear, pronounce its name

a name I have forgotten, though I still can see
blood welling from that slice, green hatred in its eye.

III

A speech instructor lines
her blackboard with veins
of trees, tangles, snakes,
mapping the jungle of the brain.
A reptile curls beneath the hemisphere
soundless, but swift to react; among vines,
parrots and monkeys chatter, trying to ape
the explorer meditating from his lookout.
The roof of his hut hums with words
meaningless to animals:

Time, Memory, I Am....

My small son listens fiercely
hoarding wordlessness. Turns away
when spoken to, watches the crow.
What snake inside me has betrayed
some sworl, blocked a path
in the brain of my child
engendering silence and fury?

Kissing his face, I taste
salt of unsounded tears
and escape into the rain
past naked trees
whose fingers jab nowhere.
Crow screams warning
dumb things of my running.

IV

One day, brighter, I'm back in the treetop
lookout, still refused a word from my son.
But Teacher springs open a pine box, home
of "Jim Crow" — black bird-puppet in a tophat.
This buffooning Mistah Intolocutah shocks
me, though delights my child; his treble
replies to dumb questions hold each word a pebble
balanced smoothly on his tongue. I eavesdrop,
amazed that this monster out of nightmare, who tries
to mask menace beneath banter, can free speech. Back
into the box drops Jim Crow, and we walk home.
Slowly, Spring thaws out: though still bare, trees
are clenching new green fists. Somewhere, a black
bird's warble whorls like water over stones.

V

Summer has come: the puppet, outgrown,
is no more than a rag inside his black
box now. My son and I stroll, hand in hand,
talking beneath the pine's sharp-tongued shadow
whose branches still jeer us in the voice of the crow.
"Mommy, what does he say?" my child demands.
I don't know. We've lost the feel for its moods. My boy
shouts, "Fly away, birdbrain!" and crow flaps heavily
towards the middle-distance to lose itself among
greening humps of leaves that to my eyes
form a pale cerebrum, tangles burying
voices that twitter and warble in strange tongues.

Phoebe Pettingell

STAGHORN FERN

Think of us as antlers. Our green thoughts
horn their way out of kidney-shaped fronds
the way a deer or caribou's young nubbins
break through cranial bone, taut tawny hide.
We too would rub off the peach fuzz of youth
against rough bark and standing dead heads.
Epiphytic, spatulate fronds; notched,
gnarled, twisted as only antlers twist;
our broad leaves suggest nothing so much
as the fine rack of a full-grown bull moose
come upon suddenly in some primeval swamp
of your dim imagining. Ours is the prehistoric
twining of tree bark and root, the doctrine
of symbiotic bliss; interpenetration of godhead
and host. We proliferate like fungi or books
on a shelf; mutter genetic imprecations to ourselves,
while you hang us like overgrown epidermis from one
of your special curlicue plaques: a wall trophy
bragging of the big ten-point silhouette you bagged.
Do you forget so soon the characteristic brow ridge
of other hominids: Or is this spot in the bisected
pot you keep flush against the wall above your
fake fur, plush-covered toilet supposed to conjure
up dim memories of our sphagnum moss and cedar bogs?
Squat and stink then, fart-sack. We dream the
cartoon that grows hindquarters right through the wall.

Richard Stevenson

HAKA

(after the Mauri war chant)

the insult

Hey, you, Bart, Lefty, Slade,

I see you in my mind's eye, you off-duty module-men
bellying up to the salad bar, dairy bar, singles' bar

And you there in the shadows, Lash,

you sneaky fast, cost-effective, penny counter
easing your red, felt-tip derringer
out of your plastic pocket guard,All you clock punchers, number crunchers,
paper pushers,
time-study men.

I know you

know your names, your little games
know all your haunts and habits,

I know you

Knosher, Fresser, Juicer, Doper,
Martini luncher, Trail-mix muncher,
Bench Presser, Iron Pumper, Boober Tuber,
Golfer, Gulper, Goofer, Gofer,
Tax-dodger, Fraternal-lodger,
Jogger, Flogger,
Hiker, Biker,
Fast Track, Laid Back,
Headhunter, Hatchet Man
Hit Man, Miss Man.

the boast

Watch out, boys, I'm Slim Slingslanger,
fastest fingers in the Middle West,
I worked my way up haking on the old Daisy Wheel spread,
but I'm all laser printer now,
and my ROM's as big as my RAM.

I'm lean, mean,
a green-screen word machine
I'm big brain,
hardwired to the main frame,
I'm white hatted, formatted,

In a small work space,
I global search and replace;
I hunt and I peck
Only when I spell check.

I'm megabucks, megabytten,
I'm a fifth generation, self-replicating,
double driven,
inspiration riven,
justified and
dedicated word processor now.

Michael Holstein

THE ULTIMATE RESOLUTION OF π

In mathematics, it is easy to pose questions which will probably never be answered, like, "Does the decimal expansion of π contain a string of ten zeros?"

sometimes the figures were revealed to him, sometimes he dreamt them, or they condensed out of the air like dew on a watering can originally, a Van Eyck canvass, the Mary's at the tomb of Jesus in the Boymans museum in Rotterdam: robes red, blue, green — three of them, "3" — but that digit everyone knew next there was the sunrise on the Grand Canal: he saw one all-engendering sun, presiding over everything that day a "1" was entered in his diary then he dreamt he was fishing and on his line, shuddering as their eyes congealed with oxygen, four trout, "4" — "1 5 9 2 6 5 3 5" — sometimes they came double or triply or even in a flurry, like ledger sheets being tossed about by a crazed accountant and so subtly the moment of arrival was imperceptible, like the affirmation of constellations at dusk diary after diary was filled and was retired, each figure obediently checking against the known soon the tables were exhausted: he was being led where none had gone before a surprise sequence of 10 zeros appeared on an arctic dreamscape, graved in the hoofprints of starved migrating herds another nine digits he found in a newspaper photograph: the tattooed wrist of a Buchenwald

survivor he sometimes wondered: was he creating
the number as he discovered it? was he the
sun? or was he the instrument, the
windharp, the arctic waste — defined
only by doomed beasts in their
final passage north?

Jet Wimp

TWO POEMS

Coming In

Williwaws chew the flesh of sea
white as powdered bone;
our boat, like a valorous lover follows
her deepest plunge —
we cling to the johnboat, cold hands join
with nippers on
praying for a lull in the snowdrift wind:

Sweet God a dally comes!

Swift as gull to shore, a tunnel of whiteness
opens
to a tickle, narrow throat,
single strait from sea to land.

In sucking crush of combers
 we see a solitary flirrup winking
 over water,
 stroutes shaking
 the long gray wooden finger of the wharf;
 familiar smell of salmon on the flake,
 on to the kindest sight of all:

Old Cozzo, belly rolling in his bloody barbel
 (fisherman's apron stiff as sailcloth)
 Old Cozzo, ankle deep in scod, lantern
 in one saltbitten hand, his bottle of Madeira
 in the other
 like a friendly uncle on a porch swing
 waving us in.

The Garimpeiro: A Translation

*. . . The prospector —
 along the Rio Madeira River rushing
 below the Brazilian shield called
 the long cemetery . . .*

Sun, a suturing surgeon splitting a thousand s's —
 stench/stuporous/servitude/a thousand *gurimpos* —
 (prospectors, *Señor*)

a thousand sons-of-bitches housed in dark jungles
 roofed in green
 listening to atabrine-yellow parrots
 squawking *bamburrado!*

(we struck it rich, *Señor!*)

Radio's relief. Snooded against the sun snake. Daily fix
 of London gold, all watched over by *Curio*

(beautiful black bird of destiny, *Señor*)

amused by theft, murder, claim-jumping,
 sitting in skittish light

branching to sweetsmelling darkness, tumescent overseer
 of domed scandals
 not unlike the city's cycle of birth, dying, decay . . .
 a whore flown in with an aircompressor,
 she sweats, works hard as the *garimpeiro* on his rafts,
 gravel pumps —
 someone to quiet earthmovers in the brain.
 A world of flaming *formigas*
 (we are like ants, *Señor*)
gurimpos wearing greenstone belts of volcanic rock,
 washing gold from navels, always scouring,
 scourging, searching for *fococo*
 (fresh gold, *Señor*)
 like a French pig taught to sniff and snout out the truffle —
 deep in the swamppit after *fococo*, in the dark hole
 where corpses remain to the end of shift,
 taming the smoking cobra filling the sluice box,
 brains seeping earth, mined pits washing the *Serra Peloda*,
 babbling *lost gold, lost gold* . . .
 Curio knows. She knows where it all goes, *Señor*.
 Perhaps to a banker — or a bum on the bowery of your
 New York City. Poof! Lost gold. Plucked
 from empty wire
 crowning stumps on an old alcoholic's teeth —
 but, what the hell, that's life, *Señor* —
 would you like to own one percent
 of a good *barranca*?

Señor?

Ray Clark Dickson

ACADEMIC LIFE ON AMERICA'S BRANCH CAMPUSES:
AGAIN THIS YEAR, ESTELLE AND HARRY GO TO THE
OPERA IN SANTA FE

1.

Last year, women in the audience
wore Indian jewelry on orange and pink
hand-embroidered Mexican gowns.
The men dressed in blonde silk jackets,
pale ties. Intermissions
they arranged themselves in the courtyard,
bunches of tropical blooms
displayed in a lighted hothouse.

Estelle in her tan summer suit, Harry
in his navy blazer and camel slacks
said to each other, "We came
for the Rossini," and (privately) felt
like Ms. and Mr. Dowd, like
faded milkweeds in a flower shop.

2.

In December, after grading exams
Estelle orders a Mexican dress
from Imports Internationale.
Christmas, Harry gives her
turquoise and silver beads.
Spring Break, he logs off the Vax,
buys an apricot jacket and tie.

3.

July. Estelle packs her Indian jewelry,
her hand-embroidered orange dress
(never worn) for Santa Fe.
Harry takes his silk jacket,
ecru shirt, and tie.
They look forward
to *The Magic Flute*.

This year at the opera
women dress in natural fibers:
beige linen skirts, unbleached undyed
cotton coats. The men all wear
twill jackets and olive shirts.
Intermissions, they group themselves
like stones laid on raked gravel.

Estelle in her orange Mexican dress,
Harry in his apricot coat and tie
say *they* came for the Mozart
and (secretly) feel
like Ms. and Mr. Garish,
like K-Mart peonies
in a Japanese garden.

4.

Traveling north from Santa Fe
Estelle thinks she'll buy
a khaki shirt and linen coat
from the summer-sale catalogues.

Harry plans (to himself)
to shop the August sales
for a twill jacket and grey pants.

Harry and Estelle talk
about the limits of the Mozart.
They have hopes for the Verdi
next year.

Janice Hays

OVERTURE

When I raise the baton I consider
how silence might be extended.
How long would those poised violas
wait, how long will an audience
settle for merely breathing, the music of heartbeats?
But someone coughs, a chair seat slaps
in the balcony; the restless body continues.
Does my father in the front row
lift his head or is he still sunk
in his evening depression?
Listen, old man, let this allegro
enter your bloodstream.

No one else in our family would have him,
too far away or full of their lives.
He can't be left alone, I told them,

and the mocking silence of distance,
that hissing of space came back through the phone.
Well, what can we do? they would cry,
and follow with cadenzas of justification.
My wife rocks her cello, her bow sweeps cleanly.
My eyes trace her line's syncopations,
and only the three of us matter.
What do you hear, old father, hands in your lap?
When you sink beyond us,
even beyond eighty years of living,
is memory only the turning of pages
where photos come unstuck
to flutter and pile at your feet?
Last night we woke when you stood by our bedside,
a stark form staring down with hands loose
by your sides. Your glasses had slipped
on your nose, tufts of hair were the crest
of wild headdress. But your face when I led you
into your lamplit room was mild.
What did he want? she asked me later.
We whispered in dark like children.
I could not speak, my grief
like his, that weight without words
because nothing explains it.
I listened to night turning and turning
in treetops, I listened in pauses of wind
for an answer. *He said he came to see
if he knew us.*

We leave the exposition in a tangle
of woodwinds. We'll come to such strange
transformations of themes we thought we knew.
When I told my friend the flautist
something about this despair he said,
*I read about a mental disorder
where you lose your memory backwards
starting from where you are, and once*

*an old man wandered back to the age
of nineteen and had no idea he was sixty-seven.
They tried to shock him forward again,
stood him up to a mirror and said,
'Look, if you're nineteen why
is your hair gray, your face so lined?'
But he only wept and said to them,
'Something dreadful has happened to me.'
When they took the mirror away, he forgot.*

I bring him to all my concerts,
hoping Mozart or Brahms will fill the woods
of his enchanted isle before once again
it all turns to stone. He has taught me
not to expect more than what we are living —
quick moments of grace. We return
to old themes, but the instruments differ,
and we won't go as far from home anymore.
In this brief coda hear how the phrase
we thought was a useless scrap is lifted
and shimmers, descends into unbroken light
of a cadence. I hold my hands still
for the final beats, giving the silence
its due. Last notes are never sounded.
A rest fills the measure.

T. Alan Broughton

THREE POEMS

Exteriors

I. Mexico (Oils 1969-1971)

Here is the street, the way the heat
settles in the dust.
If it rained now, the first surge
would be lost, would puddle
then hurry up and dry, as though
it never came, the way the bride
does not remember her wedding night,
how her new man unzipped black legs.
She has forgotten
the strange dripping weight
like the oppression of withheld rain.
She looks out the window.

A thin child
hops in the avenue. Over a dust line
into a little cloud, and back again.

Avenida

He keeps his arms tucked to his sides,
and she thinks of the thousands
of small singers at home, jittering
among the crowded leaves.

They came
to the capital for Juan's work.
All day he hammers copper into suns.
When he comes from the market,
the din comes too, clings in the folds
of his shirt, lingers in his fine
cheek-hair. She turns warm tortillas
into a basket. He pulls her around.
There is a hint of metal on his tongue,
as though he had licked money.

You can

just see her face at the edge of the
third window. She has hung a blanket
over the hole, to keep out the dust.
I never intended to paint her.
I wanted only the street,
the child with the dry mouth.
I meant all the windows to be dark.

*

Mercado

The blank sockets of devilfish, hung
drying to the light,
watch me down the aisles of heavy
papayas like full breasts,
follow me into the tight hearts
of onions, into the mouths
of ollas, with their damp clay air.
I rub them gone. My view clears
to the stripes of a serape,
braids itself down the back
of an old woman, who squats
behind red pots,
which nobody buys.

Her eyes, black as rain fallen
in a cenote, meet my eyes.
My skin rises. My brushes lift
in their box. I take her home,
carry her, wrinkled and light,
over my threshold.
I buy all the red pots.

*

I choose a brush to make the thick
streak of the sun behind the factory.
Juan is leaving. I steal the jacket
from his shoulders, and its umber

migrates to the smokestack
and fades into the air.

Fabrica

Pepe pays
no attention, he has a woman
to get to who wears a print dress
and high heels and can cook arroz
like no one in this world.
He is the one I want. I have put
on his face what he feels,
entering her door.

*

Viuda

This is the bus station.
This is the viuda who waits in line.
She wears black, she wears thick shoes.
I have frozen her with ten counted pesos
under the grill of the ticket window.
In her purse, which she has set down,
is a pension card, a tarjeta from her
soldier son in Mazatlan, and her mud hut,
with its magnificent marriage bed,
its Virgin, and its eight white hens
closed in because she fears dogs.
Under the bed are three blood-stained
eggs. She will find them tonight.

Untitled

Lately I have noticed a change
of palette. There are oranges
which are brighter than life,
hansas and chromes, seasoned
like tourists' toys. There is
a crimson which has grown too bold,
demands not to be mixed.

I can
no longer paint what hangs in shadow.
Is it this bright air, blinding me
of boyhood Gloucestershire? Or

is it that I paint now with closed
 eyes, paint what I see, rubbing
 the lids, gay fireworks
 even a hungry child can own.
 How deep can they fly into the night
 before they fall, little rainy
 sparks, and the sky afterwards,
 darker than it was.

II. Interlude (Watercolours 1972-3)

Sky, Mazatlan

I am learning to say no
 when a beggar pulls at my trouser leg
 with his three-fingered hand.
 I am learning to hold my own brushes
 and sometimes I come home
 after painting, and my fingers
 do not ache at all. There is
 the illusion of ease these days
 in the way the sky opens
 its white breasts of cloud,
 and sometimes I even think I could
 paint them, before they change
 into something else.

*

*View of
 Dzibichaltun*

I make my softest brushes from the hairs
 of my own head. Only these understand
 to wash so faintly
 that the shadow hand which cups
 a cheek can be rendered private,
 safe from those who look,
 then go.

There is a sky
 in my View of Dzibichaltun that recalls
 the slow violet light of bruises.

For this, and for the river, I used
such brushes. They sold none there,
and my case held nothing so lost.
So I tied my own pulled hairs,
and from their tips water began
to move over my stippled paper,
burying the false starts underneath,
the botched heads, the jumbled bones,
heaped so high the ferry sometimes
scrapes, and the boatman swears
to the Virgin between rotted teeth
until his pole catches deeper,
and his flat boat slides on.

She
was not with me then. I sat alone
on the damp grass, finishing the water,
beginning to wash in the sky.
And I put into the picture what I
did not paint, the fading pastel houses
of the rich, who do not come from
Veracruz any more, the unglazed pots
of the poor, who sling their hammocks
in the big rooms, the bird-eyes of
the old woman, who killed her one
chicken for a guest, then gummed
the claws, refusing more while he,
I, ate all the rest.

You say these
are not there. She found them. She
looked into the river, then turned
silent, staring across the London
dark, through the rain.

III. London (1974-1979)

Night Cove
(Watercolour)

I scrape the thin black line
off a shrimp's back
and clean my knife on paper
which, opened, explodes with
star-bursts of entrails.
There is a pile of heads and shells.
There is a heap of boneless embryos.
Shrimp curl inwards, like her asleep.
She is so pale that the veins shine
in her breasts. Her hair spreads
faint strands, like feelers, over her
pillow. Her lids are ghost eyes,
like the eyes of cave fish
who do not need light. I think
she would gleam in the moon,
like something swimming.

I have
painted her like this. She is
the white glow that hovers under
the little boat in the night cove
where a father has taken his son
to fish, these two who go
so that the man can touch
the boy's shoulder in a way
he cannot, unless they are alone,
and the boy can understand
how he is loved. The moon
is making them a path over the
dark water. She is the pale streak
they do not see, finning past
their unbaited hooks as a woman
shifts in sleep, with this grace.

*

Night Watching
(Pencil and
Watercolour)

She leans nude into the Chelsea night.
There are no stars or moon,
only the wet splash of streetlamps
and the glowing bars of zebra crossings.
I have put out the lights.
I am drawing her by feel, the arch
of one leg as she settles into
the windowseat, like a white neck
rising from the Ness.
Earlier, we tried another kind
of love. We thrashed and surged
in the sheets. I could not reach her.
She turned away, the sad damp trailing
along her thighs.

I am drawing her in
the dark, because if I see what my hand
is making, I will never finish it.
I will never again lie all night
by the lake, staring into its
black waters with such craving.

*

*Piece of Man,
With Park*
(Oil)

She sets out plates.
The eternal bubble-and-squeak,
a sludgy mass that catches,
going down. Behind me, canvases
lean, so many that I cannot shift
my chair. Dull parks, huge looming
trees, dog litter, wrappers,
leftovers from other hungers.
The people are beginning to disappear.
In the last there is only a man's
arm. I thought he fell, struck
with a pain in his chest, which
tightened under his tatty coat
until his walk became a lie.
She smiles across the table.
I tell her that a bit of kale

is caught in her teeth. She
 scrapes at it. It is still there.
 Suddenly I am afraid.
 It has left the canvas,
 this dark and creeping green.

IV. New York (Oils 1980-)

Gold on Gold
 (Unfinished Oils)

I am working a new series: Gold
 on Gold. Each, over an old
 canvas, erases what was.
 I never thought gold so subtle,
 the bit of dull at the edge
 of an eye, a moneyed leaf,
 worthy of the gleam heart
 of Angelico. My first depicts
 my bald head on a serving tray.
 A dark pool, the dim of treasure
 underwater, spreads from the chin.
 My second is a steamer trunk.
 What is inside does not matter.
 I wanted the patina of its surface,
 curved gently as a woman's cheek,
 with its fingerprints, too smudged
 to be identified. I am starting
 the third. It is the moment
 leaves catch wind, just before
 the odd yellow light breaks.
 My pausing brush bleeds onto
 the floor. Of a sudden, the
 ochre sky swirls around me.
 Whole trees twist
 from their roots, and rise.

The Daily of Alma Lind

New Upsala, Florida November 1880

The taffy turned to sugar
at the pull, and stuck to our fingers
in grainy loops which we all licked off
except Emanuel, who rubbed his
on Eva's nose, and she honking like
a goose, whether for joy or aggravation
I couldn't tell. I have got the part of
Stepmother in "Cinderella," and
I shall be very hard on Jenny,
who is to sit among real cinders
we're to bring from home.
My poor blind hen is sick today.
Mamma has given her pepper and vanilla.
Eva swears she will stop writing
journals. I can understand.
A dozen would tire anybody out.

*

In big recess the boys built a fire
and we all popped oranges in it.
I poked one with a stick
and it collapsed, round and dark
as the smoke in Pappa's mouth.
Then we played Blind Man's buff,
and Tommy Mayhew touched me
in the breast. I thought it was
not accidental. I saw his head
bend as his hand reached down,
but I let him blindfold me

and spin me three rough times.
I found Eva out by her giggle.
Her braid felt like the woven
tie Mamma wears around her waist.
Eva's name day is soon. She
will be thirteen. I do not want
to be twelve, though I am promised
a fichu of lace, and a fan
of real feathers.

*

Today a new girl came to school.
Her name is Ingeborg, and she
brought in a sponge tied to her
slate along with her pencil.
And all the boys nudged each other
then Tommy whispered, What's
the matter with your fingers,
girl? Eva and Emanuel and I
thought it was funny of her,
so prissy, but we kept still
and at recess we saw her bury
that little sponge in the yard,
and she went home with dirt
under her nails. She scratched
her name on the top of her slate:
Ingeborg, in fancy letters,
then drew vines around.
I think she has a stupid hand,
and she isn't pretty, either,
not a bit, for all her yellow
hair and flounces. The way
she tightens up her lips
before she spells a word
reminds me of Beth, our cat,
how she looks just before
she is sick on the rug.

*

Today we buried Sarah.
I read service over her
while Eva scattered grain
over her grave. She looked
so forlorn, like a petticoat
forgotten in a drawer, all
except for her horny feet.
On the way home from school,
the palm trees seemed like
huge chicken legs, as if
Sarah had grown to the sky.

*

We are having an ice cream social
and we won't ask Ingeborg.
They're bringing in real ice
from Jacksonville on a barge.
I remember the first ice I saw.
I was five, and up early,
and there was a thin white glass
on Mamma's washtub. I put my hand
flat on it, just to see, and oh!
a surprise burn! I was so startled
I sat right down on the kitchen
floor. We've been saving up
our cream all week and yesterday
Eva and I picked berries, a full
pail all from one bush. Mamma
flutters about the house
anxious as a bird, tutting over
our purple fingers as she sweeps
and dusts. Four families are to come
at noon. I and Eva will wear
our new lawn dresses and Eva
is to put up her hair.
It will be her first time.
Sometimes I don't understand Eva.

Once when we were alone, I asked
her how they felt, the monthlies,
I just wanted to know, but she
would never answer, just looked at me.
I can almost taste ice cream now
such a hot day it's been,
and the sun's finally going down,
all purple in the sky's throat,
and the crickets are starting
to sing, and the sweet frogs,
down in the swamp
where we girls may not go.

*

Eva and I came home from the Chautauqua
with red and fidgety skin.
Pappa said tiny spiders prefer
little girls and hadn't he told us
not to sit under the trees.
Pearlina gets us in the tub
and scrubs. She scrubs so hard
her whole front bounces and Eva
complains that she is thirteen,
and can wash herself but Pearlina
rubs away, mumbling something
about little girls who think
they are ladies in a hurry.
When she lets us out, the itch
stops to think, then starts again.
But I have a wonderful idea.
I pull an eyelash out, and
set it on my fist. Then I blow.
The eyelash disappears. Somewhere
across town, Ingeborg's skin
begins to move.

*

Ingeborg is back in Sweden!
Eva and I sit straight
and raise our hands high.
Together we enjoy Emanuel's
sulk. We are model pupils.
We tell Miss Lindbaum
we want to be teachers too.
Pearlina says they barbecue people
down to the hospital.
They lay the poor souls out on tables
and they have Sally heat water
in the big wash pot and all
the kettles, until it starts
to spit. Then they tie a rag around
the people's heads so they can't
see what's going on, and then
they scald them like hogs.
Then what, Pearlina couldn't say
because they send Sally out,
but folks carry on something fierce
when it's over, and their skin
just as red. Sally knows that
for sure, because she has to tote
them to their beds. I don't think
I like the way the roast's
bleeding into the corn,
and I'm not going to eat it.

*

Mamma has read my journal and says
that my Swedish spelling's no better
than a kitchen maid's. I think
that was bad of her. I have
a fever every day and will not
be allowed to eat Easter eggs.
I made such pretty shells,
all silver and blue, but Pappa

has thrown them to the chickens.
And Eva has washed all her dolls'
clothes, but I will not be allowed.
They hang my bedsheets in the sun,
but they keep me in the dark.
I am pretending I am blind.
Raggy letters trail across the page
like children, who have been
turned from their houses,
and must come a long way alone.

*

Here is a story. In 1835, Miss
Lindbaum says, a company of soldiers
was chasing some Indians deep in Jessup
Swamp. And the light failed, so
the soldiers had to camp. They set
Orlando Reeves on watch, and through
the dark he noticed that a log,
just to his left, had moved.
And then many logs began to shift
position, as if the ground itself
were shifting under his feet.
And he knew that if he called out,
it was his life. Today, Miss Lindbaum
says, we may see his grave, a cross
nailed to a cypress, deep by the lake.

We are to make a pageant called
"Orlando's End." All the boys
practice falling, clutching at
their chests. I have asked to be
a log. And I am practicing.
Say when you see me move, I tell
Emanuel, and now, when he says,
now, it is too late.

Now Eva, if you read this you
mustn't laugh. There is something
that I know. I was the one
who shot first. It was my cane
shaft, fire-hard, that brought Orlando
down and set his blood to oozing,
slow and patient as leaves in which
the foot sinks, until he died.
And I will not rest
until the white man is gone,
with his pale women who die of fevers,
and his children who break our laws
reading what sticks scratch on paper
and chanting charms against us
until we hear them no matter where we are,
and there is no living in peace any more.

*

Whispering Bill Weir sold Mamma some roses —
two Ducks of Luxembourg and one Rainy Henrietta.
And Mamma set the bare sticks in the ground.
She believes in flowers the way she prays.
I think they will stay sticks.
Last night I had a dream:
I was standing in my Sunday clothes
in a plowed field, all bare horizons,
and which way was home
I knew was lost. And a voice came
selling across the dirt sea
and it said: Young lady, do you know
what you have bought? And I said, No,
and the voice hissed: *Roses*.
Then women's arms started up from
the ground, every thin arm
with thorns on the flesh.
Then the arms leafed
and hearts of buds came creeping.

And then everywhere roses opened,
and out of their red mouths
pale insects flew until
the air itself shook with wings.
Then there was only silence,
and thorns, and petals bleeding
from their stalks, and
the voice: *This way.*

*

Pappa is home from the survey.
He has abandoned slum-gully
for Mamma's stew. He has sent
his crew away. He has put
his chains to bed. They lie
sleeping in their dark coils.
And he has brought us a gift:
a small plant he calls
Midshipman's butter. He says
it will bear heavy fruit
one day. Waking this morning
came a low feeling that spread
over me like unfolding leaves.
Mamma says I may not speak of it
so I do so here, only hope
she will not see. Pappa has come
in, and sets his hand on mine.
His fingers are so heavy,
and every knuckle yields
its black crop of hair.

*

1883

They have shut Eva up so she will not bite.
I can hear her crying, begging
for the water they put through the door
but which is never enough. She has
thrown the glass. I can feel it break,
feel the fractions of her life
shatter, against the painted wood
which hides its grain.
The truth, I cannot stand its eyes.
Eva's squirrel scratches, somewhere in the trees.
There is a froth to boiling milk
which Mamma spoons away. I look down,
see the full white moon in the pan.

*

1884

Last night, Eva, the leaves chattered
in the camphor tree, and a branch
began knocking against the house
until, finally, I opened the front door
to the dark blowing air and the rain.
I have grown into your lawn dress,
the one with the blue sash.
I will have your ribbons to match.

After a storm, the bright sun pains,
and I must shade my eyes to see
a green blur, fearful and vague
as the chance shape of clothes
on a chair, or the continent of
tears I left on Mamma's breast,
which smelt of sachet, the
lavender and roses we picked
and put to sleep together.

Do you remember, Eva, how
we saved the best flowers
to be hung upside down until
their fading petals dropped,
pink and yellow and violet,
staining the white sheet below.

*

1886

I would like to be like thrown-off grass.
It does not give up, but collects
its roots and reaches down again.
Like all the men piled in their graves
in the war, not alone they say
but in their hundreds, there were
so many and the flies so quick,
and the needs of battle greater
than any one. Like the men
who with their dead hands scratch
deeper, I want to spread in earth
so that even if you pull at me
with both fists it will not matter.
Mamma kneels in the sun.
Her hat casts a shadow on her face,
but her skirt is as luminous
as a dove's breast, as her gloved
hand pulls from out the flowers,
the stubborn grass.

TWO POEMS**Hide and Seek**

Dingy yells out "My turn!" gets to be
It. Gram calls "Supper! I know you
hear me, Stephen." Then Dingy's ma,
"Right now, Dingy, right now!"
We play in the fading woods until
everyone's been called. When finally
we quit, the night feels cold.

All Fall at our house Sunday nights
it's oyster stew. Gram loves oysters
makes mine disappear. Dingy's ma
telephones while we eat —
"Is Dingy there?" "No," Ma says.
"No!" After the Ed Wynn Show
Dingy's father calls to ask
where I'd seen Dingy last. "Was he
wearing that Lone Ranger shirt?"
Going to sleep, I feel small.
Wind whispers, "Dingy, O Dingy."

Next Spring they make us play
in light, at school. Whoever wants can be
It. Once we sneak off to the woods
and play where Dingy hides.

Independence Day

(for Buffy)

Driving west, to launch a child
 we stop in Redwood Falls. We wake so late
 we see the Independence Day
 parade go by. The PA says, "Miss Liberty
 Rides Bud Hanks' Mare. This Horse
 Was Best of Show at Iowa's State Fair."

Then last year's queen waves to us
 from her pickup, red-white-blue.
 She reminds us of Elizabeth
 at ten, rocketing past on her 2-wheeler
 both hands off the bar
 even though she speeds so fast her hair
 trails sparks, like a comet's tail.

*Poke a hole the size of a pea
 Through this poem. Press your eye
 Against the hole. Look beneath
 This page. We love this child.*

Elizabeth! She makes us stay to watch
 sky rockets bloom, hear fireworks
 speak Chinese. Then night brings ghosts — Ma
 broke off slick as a bone. But this girl sticks
 as taffy stretches out until
 it parts, settles like threads from a web.

*Now hold this poem
 So through the hole you see
 Elizabeth's face and lips.
 See her say, "Good bye."*

Stephen Dunning

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Geopoetics and dramatic monologue

The representative poem of our day is the lyrical transformation of autobiography; the major genres of narrative and dramatic poetry and the dramatic monologue are (temporarily, I hope) in decline. I'd like to celebrate here some of the poets who are able to adventure out from their egos into the imagined consciousness of others. Through acts of energetic empathic imagination, they penetrate and inhabit other persons, times, places, and perceptions of reality, and they are able to create voices for those personae. They are working in the tradition of Browning, and in theory at least the great late Romantics. Poetry, for Shelley, "defeats the curse that binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions," and Keats' chameleon poet is "the most unpoetical of any thing in existence," having no "self," no "identity."

Readers of this journal, and especially this issue, will be aware that we value the work of **Lola Haskins** for her power of spiring the reader into the consciousness of other persons in other times. In her *Castings* (Woodstock, VT: Countryman Press, 1984, 66 pp., \$6.95) she introduces us into the lives of Florida pioneer Julia O'Halloran, Civil War wife Jane Marshall, and Patsy, slave to John Sherman (1816-1856). In addition, Haskins gives us something remarkable in concept: eleven poems headed "Castings: Some Definitions," elegant, sophisticated, thoughtful plays on eleven meanings possible to the word *cast* as they relate to the poetic process. The definitions appear in italics at the foot of each page. *Cast* in the Scottish sense of help, assistance, for instance, is illustrated by "Speaking With Lucy (d. 1736): Her Answers":

When I was eight.
 The fever.
 Leeches. Ugh! Flat grey mouths against my stomach.
 The doctor held me down.
 I screamed for you.
 Because you had not been born.
 Because I would not grow up to say what mattered.
 Because you can.

Haskins condenses into this poem no bigger than a child's scream a significant concept of a function of poetry.

Robert Peters, who has performed this imaginative act for Mother Ann Lee, Ludwig of Bavaria, and others, has just added a volume written in the persona of Hawker of Morwenstowe (*Hawker*, Greensboro: Unicorn Press, 1984, 111 pp., \$7. paper). Robert Stephen Hawker (1802-1875) Vicar of the remote parish of Morwenstowe above the 450-foot cliffs of Cornwall's notorious shipwreck coast, is known today, if at all, for his eccentricities. In his own day he was an important poet, author of the famous Trelawny ballad and of the monumental Arthurian epic "The Quest of the Sangraal," admired by Tennyson. Peters has the range of poetic skills, the intensity of language, and the vivacity of imagination to present a Hawker as interesting as one of Browning's creations.

Readers who cherish this function of poetry will want to obtain *An American Anthology: A Geopoetics Landmark* (Vol. I: Pre-Columbian to 1860), edited by **D. Clinton**, **Tom Montag**, and **C.W. Truesdale** (joint publication of New Rivers Press, Salthouse Press, and Wisconsin Writers Publishing House, 1983, 158 pp., \$6.). These poems take events from western hemisphere history, some important, some obscure, "newly imagined in an idiom that is, for the most part, natural to us." *Geopoetics*, according to Clinton, is the "fusing history and geography to language." The *geo-*, says Montag, refers to content, the *poetics* to form. The scope of the anthology is sweeping — Central and South America, Canada, and the thrust of U.S. western expansion. The poems are fresh and strong; the volume is appropriately dedicated to the memory of Millen Brand, whose *Local Lives* is a classic of geopoetics.

The Literary Magazine

I'd like to call my readers' attention to a double issue of *Chelsea* (42/43, 1984, 474 pp., \$9.), a twenty-fifth anniversary retrospective, 1958-1983. I do not know where else one could find a more comprehensive and eloquent overview of the intellectual and artistic achievement of this quarter-century. It opens with Jacques Lipchitz (in interview) and Alan Schneider's personal chronicle "Waiting for Beckett" and goes on to include a global array of poets, fiction writers, dramatists, and artists whose work defines our age. In addition, **Sonia Raiziss** has provided an exemplary 14-page history of the magazine as well as a complete index to numbers 1-41.