

# THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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Cover: Wendy Kindred, *Man Reaching Out*, woodcut, 1985,  
from the Stocking family collection.

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## LETTER FROM ADDIS ABABA, 1967

By day the tops of eucalyptus brush the sky.  
Dchassa crouches in the shade beside the house.

He does not move, not for me, not for you.  
He will not wait in line for doctors anymore.

He does not look at us, or speak. We ask his brother  
Does he sleep? Does he eat? Does he hurt?

In our village is a woman who will cure him,  
the brother says. I will take him. Give me money.

Some days later he returns alone. We ask How is  
Dchassa? Is he better? When will he come back? Soon

we forget to ask. One day the brother says Dchassa  
died. I will stay, he says, and do Dchassa's work.

By night the tops of eucalyptus become sky  
and cast their seamless shadow on the house.

Wendy Kindred

## TWO POEMS

## Eve

*Romanesque Art (Early 12th Century). Musée Rollin, Autun*

Only in stone could this let-down matron  
 languish the way she does. From knee to elbow  
 she is as sturdy as a Roman aqueduct;  
 given that span from armpit to patella,  
 only the breasts, strapped on the way the breastplate  
 of a Wagnerian Valkyrie is strapped on,  
                   but tugged sideways, as though the faked

                  bulk beneath the skinny guest soprano's  
 armor were slipping, would tell you this is a woman.  
 Her face reveals nothing. Her mouth, kissed apart  
 by time or vandals, has dissolved into a small  
 sour moue; her eye, opening its shell to gulp  
 something, might be lewd, greedy, knowledgeable.  
                   It is her body, inert

                  but eloquent, that we listen to;  
 draped on the shrubbery of a petrified  
 manuscript, its shape reminds us of the twined  
 capitals at the chapter's head. Somewhere near  
 the fanged gut must be slinking, issuing his craft  
 into her ear, for urgently, but almost by chance,  
                   one pomegranate joins her hand.

Studies on Arden's *Tamil Grammar*

Chapter IV: Conjunctions

“The Water Sports of Krishna”

There are two moons tonight.  
A gold moon is bobbing on the river;  
a silver moon is bobbing on the sky.  
Sleek and supple and sly, I glide  
from the gold moon out among the womanly  
statuary. Breast-high in water, they stand  
holding the vast jasmine-vined  
vault of the darkness  
on top of their heads. Each one wonders,  
*If he comes, what shall I do*, afraid  
suddenly, although ‘Some have run  
off in the middle of their dinner’. He does come,  
silver sheeting his body from the back, faint  
gold sheeting it from the front,  
by the riverbank  
a nearly-perfect alloy. His gaze  
falls magically in every woman’s eyes  
at the same time; each one dreams  
he will love her. I dream only that I will swim  
under him, his legs straddling the waves I raise  
as I glide between his thighs.

Roger Finch

## THE DARKENING

Whipping up alfalfa, vetch, wild carrot,  
the hayrake  
and now at the lively heart  
of a shrinking field, the Shepherd  
loose.

*Watch out you mice, chucks, milksnakes  
if not for the whirling rake, the dog.  
And the baler still to come.  
Get out, get out  
before it folds you into slabs of grass—*

sweet stuff  
to break out months from now in the cold  
halfdark of dawn  
  and find a fist  
sized rabbit flat as last year's flower.

I cut the engine.  
A low sun colors in the small life—  
this perching on long waves of first-cut,  
this flickering, burrowing  
yellow, salmon, orange, amber.

That's it for the day.  
Between dark rows of seasoning grass  
the meadow seems to glow  
and the first fireflies,  
all things which aren't going in  
coming out. A single star.

Heading home I breathe more easily.  
Not the dog—  
his muzzle worries the damp night air  
and sudden, a thrashing in the hedgerow  
too heavy for anything but this  
that lands on the crown of the road,  
finds us  
amazing.

Nothing moves. Until the dog  
does. And the fawn, but not fast enough  
and neither makes a sound.

It's done.  
This thing whose long hard breathing  
is through a gap in the throat  
and red  
is meant for me. I look away  
in time to see a doe take the road  
in a single white-tailed, neck-out leap.

The dog holds.  
And all around, the night  
relents, the fireflies resume, the stars,  
the field

except for the rows, the long windrows  
as dark as stone.

**Rennie McQuilkin**

## TWO POEMS

## The Day They Shot Sakharov

not against the wall: strapped down in a clinic.  
 he watched the approaching needle  
 potbellied with fluid                      it is nothing

said the whiterobed doctor  
 with redstitched star  
 over pocket of fountain pens  
 lined up like soldiers  
 in an execution platoon

it is an antidepressant

drug only, Comrade Sakharov

as far as I know  
 I don't have a biochemical imbalance — my depression,  
 if any, comes directly from the politburo

shhh, babble —

listen to me, Comrade Sakharov—  
 you have a severe clinical depression

proclaimed by the state for my dissidence

shhh, Sakharov!

this will take but a minute . . .

in five seconds, Sakharov, who knew his brain  
 better than any man  
 felt the slow worming of the neurological changes

barely time to will himself  
 into the arms of Mother Russia, whom he loved & trusted,  
 rocking in her arms above fresh snow on the birch trees  
 outside his window.

## Uncle Voychek's Vodka

— to Marysia Maziarz

It is said that Uncle Voychek  
kept clear glass bottles of vodka (that strong  
Polish word)

in the stone house by the well.  
Frozen in four cakes of ice, elegant necks  
painted red (the bachelor uncle said)  
like ladies' lips, exposed, open,  
tipping down for a kiss in the half-dark.

On a blue day with light snow  
Uncle chose *Cytrynówka*,  
sweet and lemony as a peasant girl he once loved  
in a damp sweet-smelling haystack  
warming in a cold barn to the temperature of one's desire;  
yes, like snowflakes dancing, troika bells melting  
in the ear of time.

The second bottle—what a triumph!  
Tasting of *Wielkanoc*, the Easter season. Uncle framed  
the iced bottle with catkins of pussy willow poured  
golden-brown,  
color of springtime skins of village girls, infused  
with leaves of fruit trees  
(and to propel passions)  
fortified with brandy and port wine. (uncle's white hair  
swirling over shoulders  
like overripe wheat following the sun)

*Krupnik*, vodka of fire, his third bottle—  
flavored with ginger, cloves, tasting of spiced honey  
lending a subtle sting to lips dreaming whiteness, whirling  
white cores of whiteness—  
known also as Hunter's Vodka—for was he not a hunter  
stalking dreams? —  
of mature women, fabulously formed, city women, sweet-  
natured  
women of the salons,



plucked eyebrows, shaved underarms smelling faintly of  
cologne—  
legs without stubble, dark silk underwear—  
no coarse flour-sack shorts worn by circus bears, rough to  
touch,  
bursting with stolid energy like plodding drayhorses  
on the cobblestones of the groin's despair.

Uncle's fourth vodka held no sensual talents;  
he drank it Thursday after Easter (the day for remembering  
the dead)  
called *Pertsokova* in Russian, it burned with the taste  
of three kinds of pepper—  
cayenne, cubit and capsicum—  
gliding like a death-dancing skater on glycerine ice.  
Uncle Voychek called *Pertsokova* his whore,  
reserved for getting deeply, silently, despondently drunk.  
A stomach stoked with *babki* and *pierogi*  
could not stay her relentless power. *Pertsokova*  
was for bolting the door, sloshing, sousing  
to near decomposure, for leaching madness, the furies,  
taught treacheries of life  
(this fickle fiddle string strung to breaking!)

Uncle had only to unbutton her blouse, taste her erect  
nipples (cold as icicles sucked on as a boy)  
resent her swollen silence  
as he struggled with two repeating visions:  
his favorite milkcow found frozen standing up against  
a fence, and  
grandfather on the horse-drawn sled (entire body  
marked with tanktread)  
holding a bent pitchfork in his arms like a flag standard,  
two walnut-sized rocks to hold his eyelids down—  
shuttering, as if for a moment, those accusing,  
eaglefierce eyes.

Ray Clark Dickson

## A SUMMER SHOWER

— after the painting by Edith Hallyer, 1883

In that century's slow fuse, here is clean cool burn,  
careful, a man pouring lemonade only for himself,  
remote, a stopped tennis ball. So the game  
is strangled by rain. Now they placidly  
bore themselves under rich wood beams, still—some  
of them—holding their rackets  
like picked ferns. It might be all afternoon.  
Light puddles languidly  
over the patterned floor. The world outside  
as it finally is, simply absent, details  
war and death, fogged as memory. They have no names  
these five, but wealth and leisure  
and years ago. Dreams divide perhaps for the woman  
leaning blankly against the mahogany wall. Over her, a man  
angles himself casually as if she might be pulled up  
like some fish, gleaming into dull air. What  
remains to be said outright is the woman  
at the window, the one too big  
under the massive black umbrella. So what  
if it's raining, she says  
with her splendid indifference. I like her. How she  
chats anyway with someone inside whose posture  
is too good to be believed. And no, she will never  
never come in. *Thank you very much.* Nor will we.

Marianne Boruch

## FIFTY-TWO

Mirror, turned Traitor;

Husband, you've fled my whine.

College sons, stay away this summer.  
It would curdle you to see your mother  
gone so jagged.

— a hand, please, Someone.  
I've drifted down into myself  
and cannot climb these slippery walls.

Psychiatrist, sit here beside my insomnia-  
couch. Acknowledge, after these dozen years,  
your method was addictive.

Bygone lovers, wherever you are:  
Does a stricken gray stare lately trouble your dreams?  
Does a numb blonde lie on your electric loins?

Ben, who lifted me to his ceiling, laughing,  
"You're light as the terrier I had as a boy—"  
then married big-boned Barbara.

Sean, who kissed me and crushed me to soaked  
craving. . . then married The Church.

Trin, who was betrothed to ambivalent Nancy,  
and came, swollen, to me for comfort.

Sam, Jew who fled Hitler; Sam, my silly nibbler,  
my backseat clown. . . who married stately Claudia.

Who of you is most needy now, return my visit.

— a hand, please, Someone.  
I've sagged into a cell where solitude  
is blurred and buzzed.

Editor, unscramble the scribblings I sent you;  
maneuver them into my meaning.

Art teacher, draw me a mandala.  
My design has gone all wambly.

Daddy, tell me the bedtime story about Betty,  
lost in the blizzard and rescued by Rover.

Sister, make me a circle of hollyhock dolls.

Mamma, stay away. Your best intentions are toxic.

— a hand, please, someone.  
I've sunk through my spine into a stratum  
where toys no longer buoy me.

Snake, inject me with sleep.

Mallows, masquerade me as Ophelia.

Frog, belch me an elegy.

River, rock me to my ransom.

— I've lain trapped beneath myself  
too long. . . far too long.

Oms of the meditators, wheel  
and descend as breath for this wraith.

Prayers of the still-religious, rise  
and descend as fungus for this starveling.

Chants of the—

This warmbroad hand I knew  
and this sharp-stubbed cheek  
but this?      stiff collar?

Sean

**Karen Snow**

## BLACK MARKET

1944

*from The Book of Naples*

In a shack, in a field of mud. That's where she is.

\*

Before, in a building. On the ground floor, with a window.  
And a door, how nice. A little moving wall to keep the in in  
and the out out.

\*

Then the bombers came. Over Angri, over Portici,  
airplanes with two tails. With women driving them.  
I know. By the wreckage of the one that fell we found two  
blondes. The bodies were not broken overmuch.  
They were nude. They were marvelous to see.

Those teeth glinting in sunlight.

\*

Anto, my friends said, you ragpicker,  
you junkman, you dummy, you just stood there and looked?  
And yeah. They came out of the sky.  
Airplanes with two tails, with women driving them.  
Out of the sky, see?

\*

After the bombing, Maddalena and I, we built our shack.  
Pieces of tin. Broken beams. Old drapes and blankets.  
A duet of chairs.

We were found by cats.

\*

Radio said, Italians, resist the Germans.  
Don't sell, don't work, don't give,  
just take. Take the food, the tools, the wire,  
the pieces. Take anything from the Germans.

The junkman is the star of this show.

\*

When the Americans came, the white soldiers painted  
their faces with pomades the colors of earth,  
of night.

The black soldiers  
didn't paint themselves, not with white or anything.  
They sat for hours in the sun. When  
they got up, they could speak your language  
perfectly.

\*

Then the *goumiers*.  
When they raped mothers they liked to have  
the children watch. They liked  
to see the mothers comfort them  
repeating how the *goumiers* had saved them from the  
Germans.

Then they would take one of them, and slowly cut its throat.

\*

I hid my Maddalena.  
Stay, stay in the shack, I said.

A cave of cats.

\*

The firm of Antonio Quercia. A cart without a horse,  
a frame without a mirror, a bed without a spring.  
Rags without bones.

Lovely wire for telephones.  
Pieces cut, and cut again. Resist-the-Germans pieces.  
Little copper snakes. Scotched. Nesting in my cart.

\*

Trade, trade, nothing to eat.  
The Allies bring us  
nothing. We never called  
their market Black. We called it  
The American Market.

Money.

\*

It began to rain.  
Maddalena took a fever, then a cough.  
Blood.

The cats' eyes, little moons.

\*

We began to see these marvellous tins.  
The British had them. Inside, not tomatoes but sweet  
cakes, chocolate, marmalade.  
Can you remember, marmalade...

There was a sergeant selling them.  
Money.

\*

From the Americans there were little grayish tablets.  
They looked like chalk.  
Swallow one, you won't be hungry for a week.  
Your dick will grow.

\*

Who will buy my rags?

\*

American MPs.  
They stopped me in the morning.  
They took apart my cart.  
They found my wire, they held it up.

Patriotic wire, I said.  
Thieving bastard, the sergeant said.

\*

They shackled me.  
I have to go to my house, I said,  
my Maddalena!

You got no house, the sergeant said.  
Your house is Poggio Reale.  
Your house is seven years, on the inside.

\*

You say, the Allies won?  
Good luck to you.

That wire was German.

\*

It keeps on raining.

In a shack, in a field of mud. That's where she is.  
The cats, gone.  
Under a heap of rags  
and beams and sodden  
blankets

little rainbows  
of excrement.

Not a sound.

**Bruce Cutler**



### THE BEE STING

The bee flickered at my wrist, a golden capsule poised in the periphery of my vision. Three days, my arm stiffened; the swelling crept up toward my shoulder. Nights, I woke to knife points, imagined myself turning inch by inch into a golden statue. The mark of the sting burnt for weeks, a bull's eye over the vein.

The afternoon the weather changed, the sky touched the lake's surface, strata of grey mist. In a boat among lily pads, a man fished for bass. Across the lake, his children bickered in their boat, three life jackets shifting like flames. I swam between the boats while lightning lurked behind clouds, waiting to sheet the water with quicksilver. My goggles colored the sky almost blue.

The first cold night of September I dreamed of Sachiko. She offered me baskets of lemons and laughed. In ninth grade in her kitchen, she told me she loved the fair-skinned left-handed girl in our gym class. My thumbnail in a tangerine, I peeled the skin, picked the downy veins off the fruit and broke it into sections, each one a tiny goldfish. Then popping them in

our mouths we began to laugh till tears and  
tangerine gagged our throats. Four years later,  
she loved a boy who played soccer and I  
packed my suitcase with summer and winter clothes,  
my swimsuit a crumpled orange ball.

You,

Mother, were to be a Sachiko but a woman  
met your mother mid-way to the city  
office, said it was unlucky to name  
a child Sachiko, child of luck. The name  
they gave you, Takako, reverential child,  
did you no good. You revered nothing in  
the end except your freedom.

Tonight,

cooking for company I grieve for you. Our  
windows are misted with silver. In the yard,  
chrysanthemums and daisies still flower  
though morning glories have withered. I wish  
you were coming to dinner. Even the greens  
in the colander remind me of you, that  
time you put out a fire in a pan with  
a handful of spinach, how we laughed, coughing  
from the smoke. In the early dusk of  
September, memories swarm to me, golden  
bullets.

**Kyoko Mori**

## THREE POEMS

by Jia Dao (Chinese, 779-843 A.D.)

## Early Start

Arising early, I go to start my journey;  
 The neighbor's rooster's not yet crowed.  
 I take leave of my host under lamplight;  
 My lean nag walks into the darkness...

Treads on stones slippery from fresh frost,  
 Threads the forest way, startling perching birds.  
 A distant mountain bell strikes — then  
 Dawn colors gradually become distinct and clear.

## Touched by Autumn

Talking of weather: Gusty winds have already come,  
 Stripping and flinging away the season's splendor.  
 Dawn clouds veil mysterious peaks;  
 Evening rain scatters fitful drops.

A few cicadas hide among the cold leaves;  
 Some crickets remember a dark wall.  
 The setting sun slants into my empty house,  
 And thoughts of my far-off jade-blue peak return.

In days gone by people were deeply touched by Autumn;  
 Nowadays how can people be different from then?  
 The four walls crumble away in a hundred years;  
 Black hair while you sit becomes white.

The clamor and hubbub that follow fame and fortune  
 Create a nuisance like the ruts and tracks of carriages.  
 If you don't cherish society above all,  
 Go lie down on a rock under a pine tree!

On the passion to “improve” a garden pavilion

You destroy a thousand nests to make one pool.

You don't plant peach and plum trees, but plant red roses.

Autumn winds rise, and rose petals fall;

When thorny bushes fill the courtyard, you'll begin to  
understand.

**translated by Miles W. Murphy**

### **GOOD AFTERNOON**

It was all done without design:

the afternoon was quiet,

the sun warm, and she kind,

needing nothing desperately,

simply came and reached through my shirt

to touch my unfamiliar chest,

stooped to unlace my boots, unbuckle my belt,

and, amazed, I bulled into that day,

swayed on her elastic bones,

tightening with joy in her play,

surrounding her winged and bubbling spine.

**Marion Hodge**

## TWO POEMS

## Pond

When the water scalded in the shallows  
and the mud closed on our anklebones  
while sunken leaves gave up the gas  
of their long rotting underwater,  
in a cow pond, horse pond, full of the flop and urine,  
we would swim even when August  
raised steam rank as the ripening of a body.

After a dry spell when the clay red surface  
sank in and the deeper green tinged  
water oak and live oak leaves reflected,  
when the torso of the cottonmouth behind the stob of  
head wedge  
curved twice into the zero visibility of one foot under,  
turtles tilted in their disks of darkness  
in and out of sight,  
the elegant slider with red ear marks, stink pot, cooter.

Cat with wide head narrowing into body,  
largemouth big as a newborn, bluegill, punkinseed,  
the minnows everywhere, the tadpoles,  
gnats in tall clouds, cruising dragonflies,  
the damselflies adrift and horseflies circling,  
skaters, striders, over the water scorpion's slow motion,  
plunge of the diving beetle, giant waterbug (that prowler,  
one-fanged, forelegs built to spring their deathtrap on a  
fingerling),  
bullbats striking the double trail across still water with  
their wingtips —

into this the pack of us boys went splashing, laughing,  
shrieking curses,  
down the bank where Zion's congregation  
sanctified these waters with baptizing,  
sang hymns, preached waist deep with white robe floating,

where in worship children of my mother's father's grand-  
father's slaves' children  
still on that same bank stood witness, witnessed also  
by jackmule, jenny, bull, and steer,  
mare and foal, and turkey buzzard miles up circling,  
witnessed by the little bossman in the congregation,  
witnessed fear struck in a child's eye when the large hand  
closed  
on mouth and nose to pull her under.  
"No!" the eye said,  
but she went down backwards, bending backward at the knee,  
the waist,  
resisting, stiff, she could not swim,  
but gave herself into the preacher's hands,  
she clutched his wrist, hands bound, was taken under,  
and the congregation did not speak,  
the preacher looked down at the surface,  
and O Lord we saw where she was gone  
into the mud cloud in the water. Gone.  
Her mother wept. I wept. I did not know her.  
Gone too long. Gone one whole second. And another  
second. Second. And the congregation went down  
in our souls we went down in broad daylight  
where we could not breathe  
we held ourselves too long  
too long till she rose up again and all saw  
she was shaken  
O Lord  
by the Power  
all stood shaken by the Power  
which with first breath broke among us  
into the sung praises.

Down that same bank now in cut-offs, tearing into the water,  
rousing cattle egret, killdeer, kingfisher,  
and green and great blue heron,  
watched by the indifferent mule and mallard,  
by the suspicious goose, we  
hedonists of twelve, of thirteen, fourteen, fifteen,  
came to swim.

We the guilty children, smokers of cross vine, trumpet vine,  
dried corn silk, coffee, smokers of the bad cigar shoplifted,  
keepers of hidden knowledge,  
we cult worshippers of forbidden pictures,  
car thieves, kleptos, came, unbridled,  
watched by draft horse, by beef cattle, watched  
by nanny goat with two weeks' kid for our next Cajun cookout,  
cut loose from our parents, came to swim,

where, Fafa warned us, one boy drowned when they were little,  
died not understanding in the eighteen hundreds what  
occurred

was for the sake of stories to be told us lately  
although none of us would drown or ever die  
so that the boy's death had been truly pointless  
which would ever be incomprehensible to elders  
more so the more serious the Presbyterian  
until the world was lost on deacons  
such as he  
who said interminable grace at breakfast.

So we listened  
and tore straight down into the pond  
where we would dive for bottom  
where the dead boy was  
my now dead grandfather's lost friend  
inhabitant of the cold  
that gave us gooseflesh even in the heat of August  
keeper of the soft mud melting from the hand  
before it made the surface  
child mired where the oak limbs snap that dull snap  
under the drone of engines worked into  
and over the near country  
under the hot world cold in an impenetrable darkness.

**Walking Home in the Dark**

Across the enormity of the doomed  
Universe last night under the doomed trees  
Doomed in expiring moonlight on cracked sidewalks  
Worn by wearing this doomed pair of boots,  
I walked the mile between my job and home  
Toward certain yet not only toward but from  
And through and into certain what? well, doom,  
Walked in early dark in early autumn  
Early into manhood walked home late from work  
Among the summer's worth of dismissed leaves  
Turned brown, left broken, drowned, and trampled,  
Driven-over pride of summer, walked  
In this green body aging my way home  
Past houses renovated or in ill repair  
And thought of you my friend and our friends  
Of their friendships broken by the blow  
Of starlight by the season's crowbar by the moon  
Dismantled, thought how friends in anger  
Hurt may choose disjunction, how from disappointment  
They may get them strength to be spent only  
Working damage, thought of us, of our doomed love  
Here among others among many walked  
And thought among the walkers-home last evening  
Down among the loves of many thinking walking home  
How every person's thinking was an emanation  
From dark earth an answer was an echo  
To ferocious starlight thought think still  
Of my good fortune to be doomed and walking  
Moved again to turn these steps these thoughts toward home  
Toward you, however dark it is, with love.

**Brooks Haxton**



## HANDLING THE PYTHON

The surprise of it,  
the skin warm and dry,  
the subtle scales  
weaving iridescent silk

A man hung it  
around me, a colossal  
necklace, tense  
live rope

I don't know if its earth  
eyes saw  
me, or just angles  
of arms and back

but it seemed to  
like people —  
they were a species of small,  
unsteady trees

I thought it would hang  
slack, an odd  
decorator piece,  
but it continued its glide

I didn't understand how it  
moved, except that it flowed  
through my hands  
like muscular water

a body made of  
motion: reaching forward, downward,  
as if it wanted to enter  
the embroidery of leaf shadows

I felt its enormous strength  
pull itself through me,  
the progressive red  
diamond along its center

There was no  
stopping it:  
I could only shift it,  
redrape it

I couldn't by myself contain  
this ceaseless  
heavy jewel, I had to have help  
to hold the liquid

animal that kept flowing,  
an unending footage,  
as if playing games  
with infinity

At last we let it down  
on the ground. It went on  
sliding slowly, carefully, touching  
all of space.

**Joanna Warwick**

## FIREFLIES

In the early twilight  
they come on like radar blips,  
rising over the blank fields  
to show me what I'd miss otherwise:  
the small, lucid moment  
when insects give birth and die.  
Of course, I know each ecstatic arc  
is just the green and gold wink of electrical impulse,  
and I know if not for the near dark  
and the smell of the just cut summer grass,  
they would not seem so elusive to me,  
nor, as they extinguish themselves,  
so beautiful. But I like the story.  
Even physicists are saying  
some particles are only "virtual":  
they come into existence out of nothing  
and return to it so fast  
they're more afterimage than reality.  
But for however brief a time,  
they say they do exist.  
As the fireflies fade  
I try to follow their trails across the dark field,  
and see in the distance a jogger,  
a young woman caught for a moment in a soft cone  
of yellow lamplight, one arm raised,  
ponytail stilled, strong thighs  
poised against her own shadow.  
Then the cone is empty again,  
the afterimage of the girl like the green and gold wink  
which keeps taking me from here to there,  
even when there is nothing there.

Keith McClure

**TWO POEMS**

*Forced March To The Front: Poland, July 19, 1919.*  
**A Photograph by André Kertész.**

Sinuous khaki caterpillar bristles  
with bayonets, fills the dusty road  
between the grain fields.

Come at harvest time. You'll see  
how we reap the grain, how  
fat flies glean these fields.

**The Convalescent**

The old man stands by the mailbox  
extends a hand to touch it  
turns away empty handed  
shrunken into his overcoat

The air is free for now  
of the odor of urine  
and disinfectants  
as he turns back to the door

His feet test earth for solidity  
at every step  
arms held out to brace  
against the air

**Robert M. Chute**

**BECOMING AMERICA**

Before bedtime, by the sink  
you lovingly accuse our children  
of Idaho, of cultivating potatoes.  
No heart-of-palm or papaya will ever  
flourish in our babies' ears.

You carry your native-born weight well,  
but I am out of shape with becoming American,  
gaining that roll of personal territory  
I can't diet from around myself.  
In Brasil, lack of privacy fit me  
in buses, on elevators better,  
got me home to family faster. Now,  
in my lateness you suspect every man  
of rubbing his crotch against  
my plump zone of air.

My lips are only allowed  
to move in love here;  
no foreign kisses aimed either side of a mouth  
out of friendship. Husband,  
your ear's also a dark drain  
one side of the equator;  
gravity can't help dragging my words  
down the opposite direction from  
yours down my own.

Catherine Sasanov

**THE GREEN BIRD OF 1982**

Late that night  
a greenish, unprepossessing bird  
fluttered to the pantry sill  
and sang a reedy, plangent song.

I called it an ovenbird,  
because I stood by the oven  
and because the night was an oven of feeling.

Then I said it could be a phoebe  
(I hoped it might be a phoebe),  
since it came as the vast moon came,  
green-girdered and stark,  
into the fir outside the window.

We looked in our guides  
and couldn't find it,  
so we never learned why  
it came to accompany the melancholy sheen  
from the green shade on the kitchen lamp,  
that danced so plaintively, late that night,  
on the enamelled metal ceiling.

**Frederick Lowe**

**THE TIRE TRACKS BEHIND THE HOUSE**

This unexpected  
quick grey snow  
that falls this morning  
like dusting powder  
on an unsuspected fingerprint  
shows the double lines  
of tire tracks in the mud  
where you and I know  
not to drive in winter  
showing that someone  
has approached us  
by the unused back road  
and I think I understand  
the sudden chill  
that has fallen on your shoulders  
and the reason this house  
has taken on the coolness  
of a public waiting room,  
empty but for the two of us  
and the hard politeness  
of travellers to places  
unwanted but unavoidable  
somehow, holding today's news  
hard against our chests,  
news of air and rail disasters  
somewhere in the frosted lands  
to the east, until  
with a blow of warmth

from the kitchen  
you burst in laughing,  
a towel in hands  
white from recently delivered  
bakery goods, and slipping  
your arms around me  
as the snow covers  
the tracks in the yard, say  
what's the matter with you.

**Gurudain Singh Khalsa**

#### **TIEDOWN**

they tie my father's hands and feet  
to stop him from pulling his tubes out  
he punches the nurse and kicks her  
and they tie him tighter  
the body will get better  
no matter how they have to hurt it  
sitting up in his chair, he  
sees only the top of a bare tree, its  
wild fingers stick up like  
sutured hairs

**Toi Derricotte**



### THE FOOD OF FAIRYLAND

They told me, they showed me, it's eat  
or be eaten, big dog eat small dog.  
And so I came to believe that the only  
flesh I could trust  
was flesh I could buy and eat.

When I was a young girl going to church,  
I'd pray, I'd imagine, that everything around me  
had turned by magic into rich desserts:  
prayerbooks with covers of soft  
black licorice, pages of baklava  
gilt-edged with honey,  
a pulpit molded out of pure white chocolate.

If I had the power to wish  
water into wine, stones into bread,  
I wouldn't be sparing!—  
I'd conjure pine-cones into caramel, ants  
into caviar, rain into cherry liqueur.  
When I start my feasting, I'm drugged and blind,

I bolt the door to everything else.  
I'm sailing in an ark filled with beef loins  
and chicken breasts, frog legs and foie gras,  
syrups and sausages.  
The ride's as smooth as creamery butter.  
But then, it turns rancid. Stormclouds swell  
with a rumbling of belches and farting, the air  
grows thick as suet, rank as bleu cheese.  
On the shore, bloated birds squat, their feathers filthy  
with oil and blood.  
The boat falls apart like sodden bread.  
And soon I'm struggling, grunting in mud,  
my stomach a black plum  
ready to split...

I remember reading a fairy tale:  
A boy was warned by a beautiful spirit,  
*Beware of the food in Fairyland!*  
Yet the Fairy Queen's banquet smelled delicious,  
the goblets of mulled wine glowed like garnets.  
So he took one bite. And soon he forgot  
who he was, and how to return  
to the world of his friends and their simple hungers.

Here, I know people try to steal from me,  
leaving me empty and bitter.  
If just by lifting my hands to my mouth  
I can make myself full and sweet,  
why should I hold back, why should I share?  
Like the Emperor deceived by his lying tailor,  
I believed that these bright clothes  
could hide my shame  
from the stares of all those scrawny peasants.  
In the market, small children point at me  
and ask their pregnant mothers  
if I'm going to have a baby, too.

But no, there's nothing alive in me,  
though I'm swelling and sore, praying that someone  
will come to deliver me soon.

Behind it all, there's a terror.  
There's a wall that cracks, bit by bit,  
a sound like ripping cloth.  
And I eat as though spreading plaster sloppily,  
frenziedly, over that shabby wall.  
But the cracks grow longer and wider, and something  
glistens through them, whispers, forcing me  
to stuff and chew, so I grow  
more sluggish, more silenced, day after day.  
Oh God, if I get much heavier, how  
will I ever lift my arms  
to defend myself?

Lawrence Russ

## BOOKS IN BRIEF

Although Galway Kinnell has produced his works at pretty regular intervals, it always seems a long wait between books. Now at last we have *Past* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985, 57 pp., \$13.95 cloth, \$5.95 paper). The title might even better have been *Time*, the true subject of most of these poems. Many, indeed, do recreate moments from the poet's past, especially in Vermont and Rhode Island, but in poem after poem the past flowers in the dramatic present and precipitates a flash of vision into the future — whether it is the escape of the sow piglet or the white flash that sparkled at Hiroshima. Thus we have here a powerfully unified book, in which the bleak prospects, be it for piglet or farmer or the human species, impart an almost unbearable weight of value to the laughter and loving of the present and the cherished epiphanies of the past. The opening poem exemplifies this dance of time and space: a Whitmanian catalogue of the past events recalled as the poet travels “The Road between Here and There.” It begins:

Here I heard the terrible chaste snorting of hogs  
trying to re-enter the underearth.

Here I came into a curve too fast, on ice, and being  
new to these winters, touched the brake and sailed  
into the pasture. . . .

The poem ends:

Here I arrive there.

Here I must turn around and go back and on the way  
back look carefully to left and to right.

For here, the moment all the spaces along the road  
between here and there — which the young know  
are infinite and all the others know are not — get  
used up, that's it.

(Parenthesis: We all know the story of how Pound talked Yeats out of ending “News for the Delphic Oracle”:

Foul goat-head, brutal arm appear,  
Belly, shoulder, bum,  
Flash fishlike; nymphs and satyrs  
Fuck in the foam.

He insisted, rightly for his time, that no one would read the poem for what it was, but merely because it was the poem with *that word* in it. Nowadays, when a reviewer for *TLS* writes

about "the effing Ph.D.s," the word is in danger of losing its force by becoming just another intensifier, like *bloody*. Anthony Burgess, in his recent book on Lawrence, makes an etymological case for *fuck* having been always, as Yeats used it, a word for a foul, brutal, depersonalizing act. Well, language has a way of reversing itself, and Kinnell in *Past* has a long poem called "The Waking" which linguists may use as a pivotal point in the redemption of the word, both from the vernacular that would obliterate its primary meaning and from the traditional usage that would label the act itself as aggressive and ugly. In a book otherwise haunted by the inexorable obliterations of time, Kinnell in this poem goes for a vision of transcendental harmony through a process of loving that reconceives language and flows out to the street corner and the stars. End Parenthesis.)

It was time for a Goldbarth retrospective, and here it is: **Albert Goldbarth**, *Original Light: New and Selected Poems 1973-1983*, (Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 1983, 132 pp., \$12.95 cloth, \$7.95 paper). This is an important gathering of some of his strongest poems. In lines that could be the epigraph to the whole volume, the poet concludes "The Importance of Artists' Biographies":

The whole air around him is pictures,  
the light is a gallery. Nothing, he sees, can be lost.

Nothing, it seems, is lost to Goldbarth, who casts his net as widely as any poet living and generates the light that draws the most disparate forms into organic relationships. He can start with the most outrageous analogy: "What encourages our belief in the screw as a diagram/ of a tornado is: it's rusty." Confused? Read on; the comparison soon seems natural, even obvious, and leads to deeper and stranger analogies.

In the neat lyric "And," the poet appears to start with simple conjunctions, but a Goldbarthian alchemy at once begins to fuse and transfuse the images. Perhaps the closest we can come to understanding the process is in the quite amazing poem "The Form and Function of the Novel," in which we enter into the operation of the free-wheeling imagination as it goes to work on its closest subject — the poet's own life. The master piece of the volume is "A Sanguinary," which ought to begin appearing in anthologies, along with other works by this poet who is sure to be counted among the top writers of the end of the century.

Amy Clampitt's *What the Light Was Like* (N.Y.: Knopf, 1985, 110 pp., \$14.95 cloth, \$8.95 paper) opens with a short poem, "A Baroque Sunburst," which we may use as a lens through which to read the rest of the volume. The sunburst "sheds on the cove's voluted/ silver the aloof skin tones/ of a Crivelli angel." The poem concludes with the lighthouse

like a Venetian campanile, from whose nightlong  
reflected angelus you might suppose  
the coast of Maine had Europe  
on the brain or in its bones, as though  
it were a kind of sickness.

These are the poems of a deeply-read and widely-travelled woman, whose perceptions are colored by the associated language of Homer, Eliot, Coleridge, the whole pantheon, and especially, in this volume, Keats. And not only verbal language, but the other languages of Crivelli, Wagner, the Elgin marbles. The tension I sense in this excellent, ambitious volume is between the desire on the one hand for unmediated response to direct experience, which must, in a way, invent its own language, and on the other an indulgence of the "disease," if one will, of perceiving everything through a palimpsest of all the languages of a poet's experience. After posing the problem in her opening poem, Clampitt develops it most powerfully in "Losing Track of Language," which draws the reader into a train ride into Italy during which a craving for the language of poetry, first erases boundaries of time and place, then becomes a wild inebriation, and then moves on down, by way of myth, to the "dark bedroom" beyond language. This passionate and original poem is one of the triumphs of the volume. In other poems she plays with traditional forms and quotations, making witty and dazzling pastiches almost as if to mock her own memory-anthology with its famous phrase for any situation.

Although I enjoy the spot passage poems, including the long sequence of biographical studies of Keats, I find most memorable those poems in which Clampitt's own responses dominate the language. Among the urban poems I relished the exuberant "Ringing Doorbells" and "Townhouse Interior with Cat" (except for the intrusive "headlamps"). Above all, I treasure the first section, eight poems on "The Shore," for the absolute accuracy of sight, insight and language of "Low Tide at Schoodic" and "Cloudberry Summer," and the delicate play of analogy in "Gooseberry Fool" and "The Spruce Has No Taproot." Finest of all is the moving (in all senses) elegy "What the Light Was Like."

There are openly satiric poems in this volume, such as "A New Life," with its yuppie heroine Autonomy, and there are political poems, such as "The Cooling Tower," with its strong twisting conclusion:

O Abendland, astral  
 insomniac, prophetic hulk of the  
 unuttered: by whom, should your  
 hot hour arrive, will all the dreams  
 of Adam be remembered?

In this poem, language staggers with the weight of expressing the unutterable horror of the tower and resolves the tension by moving through Keats' great trope to a suggestion of the values threatened by the nuclear plant. We owe a debt of gratitude to this poet, who takes great risks, on our behalf, in great causes.

### Something Else

I've had trouble hanging on to my copy of **Jerome and Diane Rothenberg's** *Symposium of the Whole: A Range of Discourse Toward an Ethnopoetics* (University of California Press, 1983, 528 pp., \$25. cloth, \$12.95 paper). Everyone wants to borrow it. Most people who have dipped into it want to own it. Ethnopoetics, the Rothenbergs say, "refers to a redefinition of poetry in terms of cultural specifics, with an emphasis on those alternative traditions to which the West gave names like 'pagan,' 'gentile,' 'tribal,' 'oral,' and 'ethnic.' In its developed form, it moves toward an exploration of creativity over the fullest human range, pursued with a regard for particularized practice as much as unified theory and further 'defined,' as in this book, in the actual discourse," xi). The first section, "Preliminary Moves," provides twenty-two texts chronologically, defining principal themes and introducing major predecessors, such as Vico, Blake, Thoreau, Fenollosa, Tzara, Lorca, Levi-Strauss, and Snyder. The second section, "Workings," deals with "operational descriptions of poetic and related linguistic forms," such as Ruth Finnegan on African drum language and literature. Section three, "Meanings," is conceptual, with selections from such theorists as Jung, Whorf, and Eliade. The fourth, "Doings," provides samples from rituals and theater, including the performances of shamans and sacred clowns. The final section, "Contemporary Moves," presents twenty contemporary writer/performers, relating

new to traditional modes of poetry. Much of the material is enthralling, and there is also a valuable fourteen-page bibliography.

Judson Jerome has done us all a real service in his *Poet's Market: 1986* (Writer's Digest Books, 1985, 374 pp., \$16.95, hardbound). Unlike the parent directory, *Writer's Market*, where the complete entry is provided by the listed publication, this volume reflects Jerome's experience and judgement. First, he identifies four market categories: publishers very open to beginners; the general market — selective and respected; the prestige markets — overstocked and not looking for new names; and specialized publications. Since well over half the poets who submit to us (we're in the "general market" category) should be sending to magazines in the first category, I hope beginning writers will respect Jerome's classifications. They should also pay strict attention to his introductory remarks on writing and publishing poetry, which I consider exemplary. I appreciate his undogmatic first-person approach, which carries over into his descriptions of the magazines (sorry, I can't bring myself to call them markets). Many periodicals have provided brief samples of the sort of poetry they like to publish; sometimes Jerome has made his own selection. When requested to, I was unable to select such a sample for the *BPJ*, finding that no excerpt gave any idea of the integrity of the poem from which it was lifted, nor, even worse, of the great variety of the poems we publish. I'm relieved that Jerome didn't do it for me, and I have to confess that most of the published quotations appear to me risible out of their contexts. I understand, nonetheless, that these quotes are one of the most popular parts of the directory; they are certainly entertaining. In future issues I hope there will be more standardization of the information presented. For example, several poets have complained to me that our sample copy price was not listed.

### Briefly Noted but Strongly Recommended

Louis Coxe, *The North Well* (Boston: Godine, 1985, 72 pp., \$12.95 hardbound). Each of these sharply-cut poems is like a coal of anthracite: hard-edged and clean, resonant of the deep past, dark, but gleaming with hidden colors. These are compressed poems, and the compression creates a sparkle of wit and a bitter power of form emerging under great pressure.



**Pablo Neruda**, *Art of Birds*, translated by Jack Schmitt, with illustrations by Jack Unruh (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985, 87 pp., \$14.95 hardbound). An astonishingly lovely book, in a format that honors its content. Thirty-eight actual Chilean birds, named in Latin, Spanish, and English, are the principal subjects, with framing poems on migration, flight, and "The Poet Says Goodbye to the Birds." And there are a dozen imaginary *rarae aves*, like the Hieroglyphic Bird (*Turdus alphabeticus*). Neruda's poems conjure up each species in turn, caught in his imagination in some characteristic behavior. More even than a vivid experience of each species, the reader develops a cumulative feeling for the environment — the richness of the Lake District rainforests, streams, ravines, and cordilleras. This book is a jewel.

**Brooks Haxton**, *The Lay of Eleanor and Irene* (Woodstock, VT: Countryman Press, 1985, 80 pp. \$7.95 paper). The *lay* is of course a pun, both Breton and sexual. This narrative poem is a literary and sensual romp: neatly plotted, lusciously erotic, intellectually interesting, twisting luxuriously toward a recognition and reversal that is, perhaps, not completely realized, but is so exuberantly written that I am inclined not to quibble.

**William Carpenter**, *Rain* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985, 72 pp., \$6.95 paper). Unlike the first winner of the Samuel French Morse Poetry Prize (**Susan Donnelly's** *Eve Names the Animals*), which introduced a fresh and graceful but still uneven young poet, the second year's winner, *Rain*, is by a master who holds his audience in the palm of his hand. This, Carpenter's second book, develops extensively one of the modes that he has made virtually a trademark: the colloquial, realistic, down-to-earth narrative that slides almost imperceptibly into a fantasy of wish-fulfillment or terror. Many are very funny, even when the implications are grim. A few poems evade this formula, and by retaining their literalness to the end have an especially scary effect in the context of their more surreal neighbors. Carpenter has evolved a voice for his poems that is absolutely his own: flat, wry, mischievous, excruciatingly explicit — the very tone for launching his skyrockets of fantastic imagination. I have only one question: has Carpenter settled into a sure-fire technique for writing irresistible poems? Or will his next book break new ground?

M.K.S.