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AT GROUND ZERO

Far outside the warren
where rabbits cuddle around their paws
and a myriad of insects tick and intuit
the chemical change,
a rumbling crash comes down:
A tower falls, from old age
earthquake or detonation?
Some terrible spreading timbre
no one knows.

Inside, where they breathe
close to the animals
hear the tiniest sweetest coos and sighs
and the hard rubbings of fur.
But step back from the creatures
and your antique mouth
is dropped by the booms
constant and nearing
old age falling down
hearts stopped
by the giant flares
coming at last to the heart
to the snug places
where even toward the final hour
fresh droppings flavor the soil.

Barry Wallenstein

TWO POEMS

Accepting Whatever Words Come

One should lower his standards until there is no felt
threshold to go over in writing. It's *easy* to write.

— William Stafford

This is the first line. It offers itself.
Take it. Go where it leads.
That was the second. And now here we are
(And there we were) in the third—
Which by now is the fifth.
Forget the fourth. It's already the sixth,
Dying into the seventh.
Word upon line upon stanza, it grows:
A glib little likable babble.

Next comes white space—
The stuff that keeps stanzas apart.
It wants you to listen. . . .
*Something above is over and something
Is waiting below to begin
And together the two dream a poem.
It can't wake up, and sleepwalks in circles,
So lost in this forest of words
It can't find its voice.*

That was the second stanza
Supposing what white space might say.
And so, in its turn,
This third stanza supposes it knows
What the second one thinks.
Meanwhile above: a new white space blooms.
Below: a great silence yawns.
Words die into it. Then there is nothing. . . .
Then something begins to be born.

Chopping Down The Bodhi Tree

See the little Buddha sitting
Underneath the Bodhi tree—
Never moving, never speaking,
Still as still as still can be.

Still, there's room enough for two.
Walk on over. Take a seat.
Maybe you can find out something
Sitting at the Buddha's feet.

Never moving, never speaking
You're a little Buddha, too.
Still as stone, you hear them coming:
Thoughts you never knew you knew.

Little stone, you sit there sweating,
Half-baked in the summer sun.
Drop by drop, you shed your body:
Going, going, going—gone.

Now we see you. Now we don't.
You don't seem to be all there.
Little Buddha stone is learning
Something lighter than the air.

Listen, little Bodhi sitter,
When you reach that yonder shore,
Will you laugh as you discover
It's a place you've been before?

Then you'll find your journey's over
Sooner than you could have guessed.
You'll come back to where you started,
Then find out you never left.

No one ever used that ticket.
No one took that ferry boat.
Words of thanks you give the captain
Seem to rise from no one's throat.

No one has come home from nowhere.
No one plans to stay for good.
No one seems to be the same
As people say that no one should.

No one smiles and washes dishes,
Slops the hogs, and shovels shit.
No one finally knows the news:
That this right here, right now is it.

Tom Hansen

PINEY

One day towing a fishing shanty
from lake to lake across a bewilderment
of rivers and marshes in the Barrens,
you find him. He knows you first
by your Ski-Doo, then
by your license pinned like a security pass.

He got here by forcing a foot route
through scrub pine and pepperbush.
He's running traplines and crossbow fishing
always now on posted land—
Why else would anyone be
a tenth-generation Piney?

Spring to fall he works wild cranberry bogs,
and when he climbs into waders
to steer a thresher like a garden tiller
bobbing on pontoons, you'd want to be him
just to make that water blaze
and vacuum it black again.

Ask the way back and he'll tell you
where the last narrow gauge
of the old Pine Barrens Railroad lies
that hauled bog iron for Union shot,
or the site of ponds so rich in tannic acid
any one might stare you down
with the face of the Jersey Devil, that
13th child of a 13th child,
drowned at birth.

Right now you're merely
someplace between Speedwell and Tabernacle
where springs and currents keep the ice
thin enough for arrows.
He cocks the crossbow and releases line
spooled at his waist. He knows how any April
the crosshairs of surveyors
could sprout from landfill,
and how midges could be sawdust dancing on a plank
as a rip saw passes through it.

Thomas Reiter

THREE POEMS**The Palm Reading**

Hold near, gypsy lover, the palpable
 cosmology of me and read. Read
 what Fortune veils in my killing hand. Trace
 with warm, pale finger where star-paths etch
 their hazardous mobilities of life,
 prosperity, and love. Then fold my marks
 and vanish them in yours, like crude roads
 made voluptuous with snow. Our blizzard's warmth
 enduring for its season. Then on leaving,
 tell me: What more than snow-of-my-Self-falling
 can fill this wayside emptied of our light?
 What more can I unfill, then fill again
 with ground bone and the heart's soft pith
 to last alone in the moon's cold hands?

Eugene Smith, bluecollar mute

I am the son of Acetylene
 begotten by some ovum sparked
 by cool-blue heat
 a body made to lust
 for speech, and so
 I come to public readings to measure
 my voice, to steal a listen
 like fruit from a banquet.
 For one must be about conversing
 know the sweet festivity of words
 immune from the body
 and so I come like a blindman
 to a crowded dance
 to sense their presences

feel them tap against me
stir their fellows trapped
as in a mine disaster, doomed
to smother beneath my hissing.

Surrendering Arcady

Dangling from the web of wisteria
the boy cries out
caught in the ligaments of his father's dreams.
Go higher, the man shouts.
I'm scared, says his son.

Homesteaders cut boughs with saws
make a hollow among the branches
throw up bright hammocks, rope ladders,
and swings for their children
who soar complacent in a veil of sweat
content with imitating angels, pumping
further into the vault of leaf and limb.
Careful, Gabriel, a mother warns,
Not too high.

Three girls probe a robin's nest
touch the speckled smoothness of eggs
feel the oval's fair enchantment
call their brothers and make them thieves.

Nearby, a couple prepares to leap
for a different tree. It is a man
with another man's wife. Swaying
single file to their jumping place,
knowing in love's complicity
the color of volition is thin as air
the fittest medium for falling through.
Singularly, they crouch and spring.

Above, the canopy of trees taps rain.
Runoff dapples like the rumor of a flood.

CHICKEN DINNER

After supper
her guest
sits close to the
round brown body
of the woman, hands
strumming the kitchen
table. He is sucking
his teeth. Her children
sleep in their beds
upstairs. He pretends also
to need to sleep:
out of his glinting
half-closures, eyes,
he watches her
for motherly reactions.

"You have a beautiful
body," he says, "so round,
just shaped for the
mouth." But she sits
at the table, still
solid: she does not say anything
yet. "Ooh," he continues,
"how I would like
to take you in my mouth.
I can taste you now."
A muscle is twitching
in his jaw. On their bare plates

the chicken bones
like folded thighs of crickets
fiddle with each other.
There is not even
a chunk of potato left
stuck to the rim
for decency's sake.

But she is too tired
to push away her chair
and clear up. So they sit
by the arroyo of *having eaten*.
"It was a lovely
dinner," he says.
He sucks his cheek in
and out. The bones
on the plates
speak quietly
like guitar strings:
while the man tries to sing
the woman's
heavy body
into a stand-up,
leave-the-table mood.

Once on her bed
he goes for her nipples
first off, taking them
in his teeth but playing,
not clamping down hard.
She spreads herself out
as on a plate, she
who would give him anything,
while her flesh,
its ripe brown softness,
creeps delicately
away from his mouth.

She remembers her children
as babies, sucking and sweating,
fastened on breasts.
How when their new gums sharpened,
testing their first blue-white
teeth, she cried "No! That hurts!"
to them, quickly
moving away, inadvertent,
startling them out of their
milk-dream. It was then
in their eyes she saw for the first
time *Intelligence*: that is,
they understood "No"
but were bent on their biting
anyway.

How irritated she has become
with everyone, setting herself
like a table for others.
"You taste good," the man moans.
Already he seems impatient.
He licks the appetizers
from her body, the sherbet,
his jaw muscles clenched.
He presses his mouth upon her
in the other parts.
He is rooting and searching
for something more.

She puts thin
protective hands
in front of her body
like chicken bones; her breasts,
baked potatoes, her nipples.
She wants to take
this plate of herself
and dump it in the sink.
His teeth
are starting to grind.

She is afraid of offending
him, arching her back.
For it is an honor
to be picked clean.
And now her own carcass
starts thrumming:
a high clear tension-like whine.
“I don’t like noise
while I’m eating,” he says,
“You’re making me nervous.
Lie still.”

Kathleen Spivack

TWO POEMS

Cecropia

Now don’t get me wrong—it wasn’t butterflies
I went for,
those daytime flirts,
but moths, the shy ones furred and thick froned,
pale green, lavender, umber and rose-mottled giants
with the thumb prints of God on their wings,
Polyphemus, Cecropia, Promethea, Luna, Io...

Molasses was a trick to make them stay
I tried one night, painted on a grove of pines—
it was something to do
besides the wedding of the girl across the street.
Well, nothing came of it.
And there, beyond the trees
the bride moon-white, bridesmaids pale green, dancing
in the blue and silver night.

That was when I was twelve. By fifteen
I was professional, let the silksack of a Cecropia
cool among the rutabaga and potatoes.
All winter I waited for May, the cocoon growing firm
as my own birth day approached.

Also waiting
was the Ford Victoria, two-tone tan, cow-horned:

When the day came, you can imagine the rubber
I burned, The Yellow Rose of Texas blooming vastly
from the speakers
and the hundred or more I did on N.Y. 96
and Ruth Waymoth hair spanking cheerleading
drumming our song on the roof
and when we took Elmwood on two wheels Ruth
half out the window both arms in the air in a vee
and her fingers vees and the plunge of her two-piece
oh lord.

When I pulled in, late,
the Cecropia was out
and with a sound like the rustle of underthings,
half eaten by ants.

They blackened the new tan fur,
the sockets where eyes had looked for some way
out of this, the pink and umber wings, too wet to fly,
the thumbprints—what little was left of them.

Burial

A boy is in the field, digging,
whose father has been stunned
by the sledge of time
and doesn't know enough to drop
or try again.

A boy is in the field, digging
a hole which is perfectly square,
whose father gets nothing straight,
not his swayback barn, his bending
past, his pretty wife.

A boy is in the field, digging
a hole which is perfectly square,
knowing all,
whose father will never know
whose mother it was
skirt up in the mow with Ben Stone.

A boy is in the field, digging
a hole which is perfectly square,
knowing all
he can do is build these walls
as straight as squinting eyes allow,
whose father left Abraham out
in a two-day rain
to bloat himself on half-ripe oats,
couldn't find the slugs
to shoot the horse
and had to use a maul.

A boy is in the field, digging
a hole which is perfectly square,
knowing all
he can do is build these walls
as straight as squinting eyes allow
and high enough
for more than a stiff-legged horse,
whose father once carried him high
as the Morgan,
whose mother once swung him flat out
in the dangerous air,
and said she'd never let go, ever.

ALTENBRÜCKEN

In the bookstalls along the river
I find the girl of my dreams selling
old gravestones stacked in wood bins,
white marble inscribed in Gothic script
and smooth slate markers, the names
forgotten. I sort them out, my grandparents
and great-grandparents, and count
the generations, one stone upon the next.
Taking my hands she teaches me to deal
the stones like Tarot cards, shows me
how they point towards dusk.

That night I dance with her
outside the Hotel Holderlin beneath
chestnut trees and Chinese lanterns.
We waltz among gaily dressed couples
who draw no breath—sometimes
they stop to stare at me, wondering
that the living come so close.
Later, beneath the old bridge, she
offers me the mist rising as the river
breathes. I learn that she died
in the camps and has waited long years

for love. Passing through her lips
I find myself in a small room playing violin
for those who have ears, bringing them
gifts from the dead. For those who weep:
spirited dances. For those who laugh:
Trauermusik, so in the strain of the bow
they hear their passing. I shape the notes
this woman gives me, here in her bed
with the river set above us like a canopy.
For a thousand years I'll be this music:
sound of water passing over stone.

RABBITS

Saturdays, he drove in from his partly burned-out trailer west of Clifty. I caught the memory of fire in his hair and shirt, and the faint animality, which I later knew as rabbits.

He was learning to waste nothing of what God gave him, eating even the cores of the small, bitter apples he gathered in the fields. He hauled water from the creek in gallon pickle jars.

His wife couldn't wait for his promise of better, since he seemed content with his rabbits and Revised Standard Version. Often, he said, she would call him gently to bed but he stayed by the lamp, praying against lust.

Maybe she left because of that, he said.

Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward.

He came back in his truck from buying rabbit feed to find her gone with her clothes and the radio.

The people at church tried to fix him up with various Christian women, but when he brought his father, the retired preacher, to meet each one, the cold light of God's will stopped them in their tracks. Before I met his father, we had one long afternoon hiking the fields. Two donkeys ate grass from our hands. From the rises, we could see ten miles across the Ozarks with the mist lowering against the summer trees. Moved by this, he kissed me over and over with a kind of fluttering regularity. Then we went back to the rabbits hunkering in their cages. He sacrificed one with a quick blade and skinned it like undressing a baby. He wrapped it in a brown bag and gave it to me, its forlorn life already soaking the paper. I kept its terrible body in my freezer like a stone. It was six months before I threw it out.

Fleda Brown Jackson

TWO POEMS

A Time To Live

Barbara Cantor: 1932-1941

Capt. Arthur Rubenstein: 1928-1955

Green is not
in the dying sound
in the rotten wound
in the neutral ground
which takes
its just exchange.

Green is not
in the gutted thigh
where the pike shot through
and the fence too high
and a gate
swings off its hinge.

Green is not
where the aircraft keens
and a breastbone groans
into smithereens
and valor
picks the crumbs.

Green is not
where the darkness seeps
where the shovel scrapes
where the dead child sleeps
and silence is
deranged.

In the scarlet crush
in the empty bush
in the cyclone rush
of loss, of loss,
green is not
at home.

Vermont Frieze

There would I sit
all day and write

there would I sit
and write all day

and you would
bind the dying light

arrest
the catastrophic spray ↘
of shadblow leaves
across your lens

and hold the emptying boughs
at bay.

Robyn Supraner

WHAT TO SAY WHEN YOU'RE DEPRESSED

Instead of "my meal's cold"
Say "the ocean is the purest cold,
Even in Minnesota," and rather than calling
Night "my unlucky companion,"
Say "I purchased these
Handsome shoes on sale."
If the room is deserted, as it must be,
If the curtains billow with wind,
Call it "a gathering of close friends."
And if the lamp by which you measure
Your evenings is too bright or too dim
Say "our team is strong this year
And could go all the way."
"Our team is strong and the ocean
I purchased is the purest cold,"
You tell the close friends
You've collected, a poor man's hobby,
Over the years. But don't say
"A poor man's hobby," for if you say that
The glasses in the cabinet will rush
To say "we're empty,"
The windows, "through us you see
What's to be seen." If you can't say,
Before the candlelight tapering down,
"I love sailing with you
On nights like this," say nothing at all.
"We could go all the way
To Minnesota on this ship"
Would only make you happy
Which is more than you could bear.

Richard Chess

WITHOUT DISTINCTION

Not to be gone,
not to be anywhere else
and not returning,
soon language itself is soil.

Then the small red planes
that scoop off the surface of Lake Union
disappear without me.

I am home
finally and it is all
only ordinary, a fir
being a fir in the procession
of firs welcoming me back

as the earth does
in plots at their roots.

The old luxuries
no longer exist.
It's hard to speak
no further
than the yellow
of the finch, say, or louder
as it lights
briefly in the limb over my head.

How will I—a kind
of orchid—live
without distinction
in this air that isn't distant?

Ann Douglas

FORECLOSED, IT'S

up for auction. Runs of bright
change down the coin-slot, silent. German roaches
shadow the oven. *Hath no man a house of good
pizza?*

The cheesy crumbs are gone, but shadows
scurry: their small flanged legs churn
milk-crust into powder in the sinks.

ubi sunt and oobie doo

Where is the mouse-clad wimp who sweated
through his felted fur and sang *la ballade des bières
pendues?* Where are the flop-eared padded girls who
scurried on brown tennis shoes from table to table
tickling kids for minimum wage?

o, oobie doo and ubi sunt

Where's Clarissa, the marvey
mechanical cow, who smiled with four short
solenoids and sang out
strong contralto through
the voice-coils of her throat?

o, soobi, doo and ubi moo

Who pulled the plug on Pizza Time? Who left
old Chucky Cheese impaled on his inside ironware
framework,
and leaning his loose arms out from the stage, his jaw
hung down to his open heart?

et O ces voix de scroobie doo

No birthday parties. Not no
more. Bankrupt all
and up for auction!

ubi sunt the chalky milkshakes?

ubi sunt the bubbled tepid beer?

ubi the overworked, the underpaid, the high-school
kids who (years
and years) from now are gonna retch
at the thought
of a Chucky Cheese pizza?

et ubi sunt

those six-year-olds who knew that here,
brand new, was a portal
of heaven?

o, scoobie dee, old Ubu's suit

They're gone to the block, sure as the chunk
of a headman's axe. Ah, gavel it
all away.

Black rats curl beneath this floor.

What they carried off underground, nestled down
sideways, is rancid. Smell this damp.

screw this oobie, sue

so where's the mild retardate
ten-year-old who really found
this trashy place such heaven?

what's new

Five months, I haven't seen him.
He really wants to change his name
to Smith because he thinks the man
who fucks his mother must be Daddy.

A. McA. Miller

OVER THE DARK FISHES

i

Crazed Colón, I am called by my enemies,
those fine gentlemen to whom the Supreme
Being weighs less than dress, or the proper
turn of a moustache. *Allí viene Colón*
con su falta de luz, they whisper.
And *bámonos*, whose wine breath hangs
between them like the air on a dead sea.
What can they know of weathers,
these men who stink in their frumpery.
What can they know of the floating
weed that signs land. What can the wind
mean to them, that will blow me past
their silly dragons to Chypango and Cathay.
But I, I know. And so the queen extends
her small cold hand to me, which flutters
from its lace sleeve like a bird
rising through fog: the hand I kiss,
and ask for ships.

ii

In Palos this hot and starless night
we drift, with the dark surging
against our bows what people toss
into the sea, the wormy bread,
the rinds of fruit. And Pinzon
shouts from the Niña's deck,
and I, messenger of God, reply.
How fitting it is, I think,
that our crews be either criminals,
our Maker's pardoned sheep, or
relatives, as are we all under any
moon. For this the crowns of Aragon
and of Castile spill their jewels,
that I, Colón, may sail across
their childish maps and splashed
ink of seas to safe harbor
in the East and may return,
low with gold, to shake the grip
of the Saracens, who fester like wounds
in Jerusalem. A gull pauses on
my deck, then spreads wings, gray
as my hair, to soar across my bow
into such a dawn
as only seabirds and sailors know.

iii

Three glasses into the evening watch
and we are running before an ash
breeze slowly, through a sluggish
yellow sea which the men fear,
and say their prayers lest Spain
be lost forever. They dream
the tiller frozen, tangled in
matting meadow weed, sleep fitfully
on their planks below then rise,

as the grumet sings, to take
their turns, with eyes red-rimmed
for land. They cannot comprehend
what lies ahead, though I have tried
countless times to conjure them
the hills of spice and fruit, the
heavy cliffs of gold. And so, as
I know my men, I have begun to shave
my reckonings each day, so many
leagues the less, to blunt the
jabbering Basques, who glance askew
at me, and jerk their thumbs, when
they think I do not attend. And deeper
West we sail, deeper than they think,
with every glass the grumet turns.
Of voyage end, there is no doubt.
Let us arrive, on whatever wind.

iv

The weed, and the appearance yesterday
of two reed-tails bode land, the brooding
cloud ahead perhaps a shore. Luis
recites his Arabic on deck, our Jew
interpreter of little other use.
When all the rest are occupied, he
huddles with his books. The men,
chattering through garlic and sardines,
believe we have arrived, and demand
the dipsey lead. I give it them,
and they toss it into the sea,
the sun just up, the smell of dew
still strong on the decks. But
the dipsey yields no bottom, dangles
loose two hundred fathoms down.
On the horizon, the cloud broadens,
like a woman stretching her arms,
wide and dim in invitation.

v

As the dog-watch slides to the rising star we begin the *Salve*. And, as we divide the four winds into thirty-two, so we carve the music, which each sailor hears differently. *Ad te*, sings Orlando, in his high thin voice and, according to our lights, we follow. We are all singers here, for we all have a throat. And tonight, which ends twenty days without sight of land but two false falls, I think we all ask the same as we stand on the decks of our flying pigs, these ships which let in sea water to mix with wine, but not too much, whose grace has carried us over the dark fishes to this place where we cannot say "here" on anyone's map but on the charts which we ourselves pen, which unroll before us as we sail, whose ends men fear and dream.

vi

Oeste calls the pilot in the wind. And *Oeste* echoes Juan, whose thick hand takes the helm. And salt from the wash-bucket filagrees my cheeks a fine dry silver as I step outside, where the *Niña* beats her course hard-by, and the *Pinta* too, which I did not expect. And comes *Martín*, and *Bicente* too, off their two ships, their hair wind-roused, their beards as ruffed as grouses' necks. They take my arm. We have come too far, says *Martín*. By your own reckonings

we are days beyond. Where can this
 Chypango be, if Polo did not dream it.
 Some other place, we think. Look.
 The morning breeds a southern wind
 which, if we do not seize it,
 may be the last. We must start for
 home. And Bicente nods the same,
 and a chill enters my bone which I
 have not felt since I was a boy,
 waking in a stone house in winter.
 I have been here another time.
 It is not I who says:
*Three days señores. Give me these,
 and if we do not strike land,
 I swear to you that we will turn around.*

vii

There is a moment in each man's life
 which, once passed, will not return.
 Many times he may see it falsely,
 as a navigator peers at a far lip
 of cloud or coast, and from those
 sights too many times may say:
 I have come too far, am lost,
 cannot find the course again, will
 die first, tossing in a salt wind.
 The moment may slip by unseen,
 as a wife stirs curd in the late
 afternoon, or a grandfather leaves
 with the words still in his mouth.
 And yet, once found, the land blooms
 against the water, the house
 opens the door seen in dreams.
 And a man knows. As I know to follow
 the southwest flights that come
 by moon tonight, the black honkings
 cast faintly down, for the wind

is light. As I know to stretch
the long necks of our sails
this way, as birds spread their
feathers in the night air, on a
course bitten in the bone, to seize
my destiny with one tight turn.

viii

Through the dark I think I see
a small light, as of travelers going
from house to house. I call Diego,
who thinks he sees it too. And yet,
there is a ghost-dance which moon
can do over water, a woman shimmering
by her bed that is no more real
than Beatriz I saw in sleep, opening
her arms to me again, and her white
thighs. If this is not land, then
tomorrow we must turn. And doubt
gleams, a candle carried in the hand
that rises and falls. I see that
glow, and wish it gone. Now Pedro
calls from the tangle of my thoughts,
Lumbre, señor, and Tierra, and a lombard
barks from the Pinta. And something
shuts in me, as flour is sealed
in a barrel, white powder closed
in wood. You have said nothing new,
I say. I saw and spoke of the light,
which is on land, some time ago.

Coda
Valladolid, 1506

Any small shift shakes the bed
and, in rough subsidence, pains.
Before I think I cry out, and Diego
comes, new Admiral of the Ocean Seas,
my dearest son, then fades away,
his candle vanishing down the stairs.
It seems centuries ago, that night
we jogged off and on a lee shore,
our three ships' breaths held,
so that for the first time we heard
the creaks and groans the timbers
made, breaths never again held
in the same way.

I asked only to reach
the known, and, seeking it found lands
so terrible it had been better
they sank into the sea. If I had not
gone back... But, gulled by my own rapture
I sailed again, swollen Viceroy of all,
looking for the paradises I described
before. And I saw my men, becalmed,
eat worms. Some waited til dark
to spoon them down. Others simply ate
the porridge as it came, ignoring
the writhings in their mouths
as the cooks, who could not pick
everything out, threw the live flour
instead into the pot. And I found bones,
where I had left carpenters and wheelwrights
and smiths. Doing only what savage women
must have known before, they were murdered
in their throes. This was told me by
Alonso, who ran away.

How innocent I was,
believing their childish offers of parrots,

thinking their gamboling in our red caps to mean welcome, they who later stole our clothes, pretending safe passage across a river, who cut our soldiers down as they scrambled, naked, to the banks. Treachery, I learned from them, promising peace but meaning death. These were animals after all. So we netted them, or hooked them in their mouths, and packed them for Spain. But they were not even good slaves. As they would not live long, their prices dropped.

And the gold I sought, no better than a teasing woman with a lock on her crotch: a bright trickle on the sea, a gleam in river rock that vanishes as the rock dries.

And, in the end, what use. My sons, quarreling with our Spanish enemies over nothing—not Chypango after all but islands that could starve, sharpening their settlers' bones to weapons. Islands which taste in my mouth like dead coins. But I *believed*. And was I wrong? I can truly say I do not know. When I cry out, as I did before, my son comes. And if I lie afterwards alone, while rats run in the walls, as they ate my sails when they could, I can still prick the chart to say "here," here I am, and may not the pinholes, like a trail of stars, point to some new country.

TWO POEMS**Drunk in a Boat**

The fish in the water—
I want to buy them a beer!

Their little round faces all filled with sorrow.

Ah brothers
all these years
how blind I've been—

how you must hate those happy assholes the stars
tramping around all night on your ceiling
always winking down at you

to say nothing
of the sad, guffawing men
drunk all night, keeping you awake
with their awful singing
their rowing in circles
throwing you the empties!

Ah, forgive me.

Here, take mine!
Let me pour you another
and another!

Forgive me my silver
bullets hovering there my
 little meteors
 my tear streaks
across the night's soft black cheek.

Ode

O pressed duck, cock-eyed comedian
of the Chinese grocery
frisbee with a crooked neck

how serious you look—
as if we'd just sailed you
through the troubled air of all our minds.

Is it just that you miss your feathers?
Or is it your bones
sucked so miraculously from you
like a lost twin you still hope to find?

Do you imagine seeing him one bright morning
paddling on a sea-green pond
a hundred feet below you? And

is it hard, little cripple,
when the children laugh?
Do they stare? Do their eyes bug out

in simple disbelief
imagining themselves perhaps
pressed babies? Pie plates
with diapers and cloudy eyes?

And how do you stand it
once in the soup

your oils spreading out across the water
like a rainbow spiral—a galaxy
which a snickering and
semi-literary chef
calls "Celestial Duck Ophelia"?

Ah, webfoot, my pal
you never had a chance,
run down in the prime of life
by a steam roller—

that cliché sucked out
of ten thousand matinee cartoons,
your flat beak, your upside-down smile
your goofy eyes turned inward
flying forever into yourself
O delicacy
O suitable for framing.

Anthony Sobin

FARMWIFE DESCRIBES THE ACCIDENT

I lost a daughter once myself, so I know
What it means to hold a limp, blue body
The way the earth holds it.
I knew the minute I heard it that it wasn't hail,
But gravel flying. I was home
Alone and I knew when I heard the screams
That it was more than tires squealing
And that the metal was hugely twisted,
Contorted, wrenched all out of shape
Like that one boy's body. And though it was
Too dark to see the blood, I knew that it was more
Than oil spilling and spilling out into that field.
And when I saw the leg, I knew it had to have come
From another boy, so I walked around for awhile
Picking up the pieces and trying to decide
How many.

And when the sheriff got there, I apologized
For being in my robe with my hair up in pins,
But he didn't seem to notice.
That was when they found the girl,
Slammed into the ground like she was buried already,
And she must of hit real hard, cause that dirt
Was frozen solid. And I was ashamed that she wasn't
Wearing panties, but they wouldn't let me close enough
to cover her. And then I remember it started raining
Softly, like somebody crying who didn't really
Know them well at all.

And I went back the next day after they had
Cleaned it up some and I found all that they
Forgot: a chrome door handle, a finger—I guess
It was a finger—pieces of blue cloth, glass, a
Barrette from her hair. I put them in a
Shoobox, all except the finger.

And every summer the corn there brings up some new thing:
Piece of glass lodged in an ear, an all-red ear,
Silk the color of her blond hair, little shreds of cloth
Like flags. And at night you can sometimes
Hear voices laughing and then a crash. My husband says
It's nothing but wind, but in the morning, corn's all
Trampled down right where the bodies landed.
That's such a sharp curve, they should put up a sign.
I hear a baby crying; it's starting to
Hail.

Joanne M. Riley

JESTER *

The dilly silly court
on diases of raw silk
smirked at the dwarf
toddling. Oh, the milk
spilling down his chin!
Even the Imam laughed
as the eyes rolled
in the lolling head.

They tied a thin rope
around his jiggly tummy
and dunked him in the well.
So funny! They rocked back
on their little thrones
roaring with glee
while he did his fine mime
of terror, repeatedly
dripped and begged
holding out his hands to the king
between dippings
"Oh Holy Imam!
They will drown me!" he jibbered
amusingly.

After the last dunk
they pulled him up
limp and pitiful
as a wet doughnut.
Quite dead.

They left quietly
carrying their diseased hearts
in their old bodies
while the king fell into a fit
of mourning.

In his harem
the kohl-eyed children
were allowed to cry
for their stand-in
the small mis-shapen corpse
laid out in gold clothes
and silent bells.

The youngest prince
looked once quickly
and just stopped talking
forever.

Alice Ryerson

* This story was taken from the diary of a French doctor working in North Yemen in the 1930's.

LULLABY

For Kyle

May nothing and no one be a cage to you
while you sleep or when you wake—
not sleep itself, not dark, not light, not fear,
not any of us sitting out here hoping
you will fall and settle like a feather
into sleep, not needing our eloquence
to convince, our cunning to outwit you.

May your journey through dreams be that
of a young hero, uprighting himself after
each fall, not suspecting yet the dragons
behind rocks, nor the power he carries
into that small casket slung across his breast—
containing sorrow, love and hope,
magically concentrated.

May you hear through your sleep the birds
at dawn, but not be woken by them. Their songs,
like their flight, connect earth with air,
air with water, but cannot express
the fourth quadrant, fire.

The rising sun lighting their wings is fire,
which brings warmth, and the beginning of shadow.
From shaken wings, a bright dew falls.

Diane Fahey

THE MERGE ARROW

Sometimes the car radio
fails at dusk, the AM stations
of small towns reducing power
until static measures the night
like a geiger counter for distance.
This time there was nothing left
but one fundamentalist sermon,
so I was alone with belief,
the scare tactics of brimstone
shored up all week by Chernobyl
melting toward the earth
like a kind of "Satan's pus,"
the final phrase I heard
before even the evangelist
scattered behind the car
where the trucks flared before
they shuddered me sideways,
passing at seventy-five
while I tensed and cursed.
Finally, the road was broken
a half mile ahead, and I could feel
the timing of truck lights
turning me dry-mouthed,
the merge arrow flashing
fifteen seconds from there, ten,
both ways to dodge immense
with lights until I braked
and hoped there was something

to the right besides one of those
perfect cut-outs of cement,
the sheer-wall drop to the bedrock
for speed, and when that arrow
was close enough I could have counted
its warning bulb by bulb,
I was stopped and spared,
the trucks turned to red,
the road black all the way
to where the Bible's warning
had ended, something like prophecy,
like luck, one of those spots
where people park and expect
significance to soak straight
through their skin. So I imagined,
asking that arrow's bulbs
to blink and extinguish,
another sign before I swung
back into the skeptic, open lane.

Gary Fincke

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Miodrag Pavlović, *The Slavs beneath Parnassus* (Angel Books, London, and New Rivers Press, St. Paul, MN, 96 pp., \$7.00 paper). Pavlović's work, published between 1952 and 1971, emerges as powerful poetry in English and ought to be an inspiration to any writer depressed by the shallowness of much contemporary poetry. Bernard Johnson has selected and translated these poems from the Serbo-Croatian and has provided an illuminating introduction to the long history of poetry in what we now know as Yugoslavia.

Faye Kicknosway, *Who Shall Know Them* (Viking Penguin, 1985, 84 pp., \$15.95 hardbound, also available in paper). Kicknosway's narrative poems conjure up the people in Walker Evans' photographs as if they were alive before us. The poems are, miraculously, as profound and moving as the photographs.

Carol Oles, *Night Watches: Inventions on the Life of Maria Mitchell* (Alicejames Books, 1985, 72 pp., \$6.95 paper). A true joy: language, imagination, and scholarship flare up together to share with the reader the passion and the significance of this pioneer astronomer.

Seamus Heaney, *Sweeney Astray* (Farrar Straus Giroux, 1984, 85 pp., \$13.95 hardbound) and *Station Island* (F S G, 1985, 123 pp., \$11.95 hardbound). Read these two together. They are lighthouses, illuminating each other in flashes. Sweeney, the artist in agonized tension with his political and religious environment, has moved into our literary mythology; Heaney, in his latest poems, has expanded our vision of what poetry in our time can be.

Lorine Niedecker, *The Granite Pail* (North Point Press, 1985, 128 pp., \$11.00 paper). We are grateful to Cid Corman for reminding us of this valuable poet and to North Point for producing these selected poems so elegantly. Each poem distills an experience to a verbal crystal, and the effect of reading is a sensation of boundless mental and physical health.