

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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Cover: Robert Shetterly, Jr., *Abab*, dry-point etching, 1986.

The Beloit Poetry Journal

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APPRECIATION FOR CITY MUSIC

These pleasures are learned
like a very fine pulling down
of a caribou, by some wolves

In the cool night air
wafting in my window
a man is screaming and sobbing

It is possible to hear
the sound of baseball bats
as they come down on him

Now he is quiet
making the sound
of the baseball bats seem

just a trifle, perhaps,
more resonant

Gary Hulbert

TOPOGRAPHIA

A cloudless sky. A tiny Boeing 747 flies west northwest over the continental divide. Inside the plane I, even tinier, sip wine, watch clouds. The stewardess carries a basketful of honey-roasted peanuts, each two ounce package sealed for my safety. To each of us she offers peanuts. My totem animal is bear. Will eat anything. Bee shit, grubs, a maggoty carcass. A bear loves an anthill, plays for hours poking the tunnels' pore-like doors, pushing over the peak of the hill. Bear plays like an eight-year-old girl who has discovered a new map, a topographical map. She runs her huge finger across the peaks of mountain ranges, penetrates remote gullies and canyons so small only humans or deer can walk there. It's better than a globe, this kind of map. The plains are like a badly patched coat, the wild mountains like teeth, the foothills like an old woman's sagging breasts. In her daydream she pushes her hand splat into wet mud in Utah; the impression fills with water, becomes a lake like a jack o'lantern's carved eye, always blinking with light. She traces a river, watches a tiny man in a canoe catch a few rapids, then relax in the river's calm wideness. Trout jump upstream. The world smells of salt. She traces a rugged coastline, sees a cloudless sky, one planet among planets. A plane

circles the Great Salt Lake. I am older now, a
business traveler among so many business travelers,
munching peanuts. Down there I see roads entwining
the foothills, from the most remote peaks to the houses
in rows, towns and cities in circular patches
growing together,
colonies on agar.

Theodora Todd

MUD HOLE TRAIL ON GREAT WASS ISLAND

Trees die in plain sight. Their skeletons grow
from the bottom up around a hidden
marrow, the flesh that lives despite the dry
death sheathing it, that taps a wet root
in the bog, that flames out green near the top
until something decides it's enough. A tract
can seem to go together, making a gray
web of moss and laced twigs the trailblazers
leave alone. Such mystery deserves
circumvention. And burial comes
as it may, when the upright neighbor
corpses allow the inches required
for a free fall. Otherwise, unless a man
with a chainsaw comes, it'll be years
before the fibers disintegrate in snow
and rain, and sun, to the flakes we see now,
on this trail, just barely different
from leaves; or grains of earth; or seeds.

Eric Horsting

TWO POEMS

The People Who Come to Save Me

They walk down the street
past blank windows,
pants' legs pressed,
briefcases heavy with good news
like salesmen from the 'thirties.
Their wingtips shine as they pass,
hinting of commerce,
the Lord's brisk business.
That they come on foot implies a friendliness
from a time when I was told
to mind my manners.
Their smiles rebuke me,
as though however rude I was
they'd still speak gently,
turning the other cheek.
They seem to have walked
out of my mother's childhood,
across the cold midwestern plains,
where, when a storm blew through,
friends brought food
and helped repair the house.
Even their idea of heaven
presumes a gathering,
lemonade in the parlor,
the children sitting still.
I had not imagined grace
as orderly, arriving
so sensibly each week.
I thought I'd be caught
off-guard, alone,

by angels crashing through the roof,
shaking plaster off their wings
as they order me to leave my house
for good, then fly away
without further instruction.

The Wall

I've lost the passageway between our yards.

The new neighbors have filled it with stones,
making one wall, low enough
to hop over, but still, a wall.

Sometimes I sit in the dark
and watch them in their kitchen drinking beer.
I wonder if they felt a need for order,
roaming their property
in search of holes.

Scattered in the yard the stones meant nothing.
I carry them everywhere now.

At lunch a friend pushes them toward me,
casually, with her spoon.

I notice how a shoulder turning away
is like a stone, smooth, that fits in the hand,
or the weight of your head on the pillow.

I have not forgotten rocks can shatter glass.

These stones arrived so quietly
like snow piling up while I slept,

like the neighbors chatting now behind the window
as if they had changed nothing.

MYTHS

The tips of my fingers tremble whenever
I touch you there where the bone's caved in like sodden
wood under a woman's fist. My mind puzzles
what neither eye nor hand can grasp. What happened?
I ask you again and again. I am afraid
someone has done you violence. Afraid you've been starved
as a child. It's no secret we meet
ourselves in each other. I love the hardness
of your bones under my hands, the face
ancient and savage that leans down open mouthed,
hungry for water, salt, all that the sea feeds
and wracks.

It is as difficult to trace the spaces
between your ribs as it is those between the wetted
boards on a boat's hull. But I keep trying,
like Sedna clawing at the gunnel, threatening
to upset everything, the family rocking
wildly on the icy ocean, the bereft husband
barking like a dog from the beach, shrieking
like a hawk in the air, no more desperate,
surely, than she, thrashing in the water,
than her mother and father, brothers and cousins, hale
and shaking in the rollicking hull. Who is it
draws the ivory knife from his clothes and lays it,
weeping, surely weeping, there where her hand is weakest
and most flexible?

It's no secret. We meet each other in ourselves.
You lie at night imagining the breadth of my back,
the straight nape of my neck, my legs spread
in welcome: *alas*. Feather. Flame. I imagine you
imagining me, how you feel my flesh, hot and soft, give way
no easier than earth under your firm hand.
I imagine the sanity of your desire, the madness
of my own fear of the ivory blade, the ocean
dark as this solitary room, as those bloodied and invisible
ribs my hands slip from, as the terrible plea
that never leaves my mouth.

The hawk shrieks and dives. Someone draws a knife
from their wet clothes. Like the mind, the hand shatters
most easily in the act it was made for: grasping.
This is the cost of the survival of the tribe.
Weeping, surely weeping, we subscribe.
I need you, I say, but I can't imagine
what's gone on between us. I can only imagine you,
lying there, miles from me, making me over
and over in your imagination, while I,
miles from you, let go of the gunnel, drop
into the dark that is no wetter than our breath,
no deeper than sleep, and, recalling you at last,
kiss by kiss, rib by mysterious rib, feel you grasp
my hand in yours and drag it to your mouth,
crying, *Come* with me. Come *with* me.

Heather Tosteson

TWO POEMS

At a Place of Ambush

Philippines

There is no map
that's accurate. The one on paper
has wrong angles, too few roads,
and names the people living here
don't use. The one in our heads
has too much of one color: red.
It's a color we don't see much of
in the dust-drenched trees. In trees
beyond the sugar cane, a bird repeats
like blades in slow revolution—
clock, clock—
as air the choppers must have cut
like flesh hangs still..
We drive slowly, wave back to boys
on top of a load of hay.
It's the time for drying rice.
Women pause from work
to watch us weave between neat squares
of grain spread in the road.
A few protect the crop from birds
with old sacks, sewn together
in a heavy net. The rest use children,
naked, or almost naked, armed
with sticks. And pigs must be prodded
out of sleep and to their feet—
for ours is the only car. Our jeepney
sports three chrome horses
on the hood, two more on the long roof,

window fringe in four colors,
and several dedications to the saints;
but it's us they stare at, grinning,
or laughing out loud at the very idea—
Americans, here. Lines of huts
with their bare dirt yards,
their laundry and tethered chickens,
wander from high ground to low
like a sluggish stream
from which a dozing carabao
might blunder to its feet like a god..
Along that river, a child
once carried another child,
shielding its eyes from light
glinting around the bodies
turning like slow propellers dressed in rags.
“What are you looking?” a woman calls.
I can't say, “At what we see.” I shout,
“Just looking. To say hello.” She laughs
and covers her mouth with her hand,
maybe because of my answer, maybe because
she has spoken English, and we have understood.
Return everything you borrow.
Do not take a single needle or thread
from the people.. Trees at the bridge
grow dense as hair, shielding
the tarmac face. Here in the damp
men went naked, but wrapped in cloth
the metal of their guns. Small boys run
beside the car, pounding the fenders, trying
to touch our dangling arms.
Their feet and legs are pale with dust,
their shouts loud, their fingers sharp.
We are sixty miles from Manila,
three from the smooth North Road.
And how beautiful are the red flowers
blooming in rusted Crisco cans
on the steps of the poorest houses.

Letter from Palestine*for Salim*

In the cool evening
the breeze moved under your open shirt,
soothing the child that lived in your man's body.
We were too poor to be drinking. We were sitting.
And I can still see your lips moving,
the eucalyptus branches
drawing across your shoulders with their pure scent,
their promise that we would live.

I can still hear you saying,
They hurt us because they are hurting too.

I was stubborn, and I made you dance,
your feet and grin as unrelated
as your language and mine. We let them laugh,—
your cousins, the other foreigners,
and that one Egyptian Jew.
I can still feel your body, rigid as a soldier's,
the bubble of my own laugh breaking,
telling you my age, and the sharp sand
that blew against our legs when we went walking anyway...

Now it is six years.
You are as old as I was then.
Whatever I knew of the big bright world
has long been covered by the sound
of near and distant battles
as by a coating of dust. Yet the wind,
when it brings the sharp smell
of white sage to my window, brings your voice:
its soft accent still falls
on the wrong syllable of my name.

So, in this spilled ink,
in these strange, backward letters,
I see your fingers tense
to write the simple tactic:
They beat us up on the eve of our exams.
And yes, I can imagine the police:
It's nothing serious. No one died.
I can imagine you walking at night
straight out from the university,
walking a line that never bends
left or right for hours.

With dawn at your back
you pass a woman stooped in a field.
She might be your mother. She might be the girl
your mother asked you to marry.
Already the sun is hot.
She works and doesn't speak.
To her, even the grass smells
of battle. She sees it, clear as dust
on her bare feet, on your shoes.
You tell her, *Once I danced!*
But she won't answer. You say,
I'm an engineer! And she won't look.
Then the wind is heavy
with sand and noise, but you don't hurry,
neither toward her nor away.
You hang back, shy as a soldier
unused to reporting the dead...

Yet all must be reported. Once,
where trees made us drunk and waves
made it safe to talk you told me,
It is all only a matter of the heart.
How heavy the heart when the child is dead,
tumbled inside the man's body, irretrievable
as a corpse in heavy seas.

TWO POEMS**When**

When you build under an oak tree
squirrels cross your roof

When you build under an oak tree
a bear comes at dusk
stays till dawn
raking the leaves with his claws
while you sleep,
leisurely raking,
eating acorns like peanuts

When you live under an oak tree
you come to know the bell that
tolls the seasons
each time an acorn pings
off the cap of your stainless Metalbestos
rolls down the long slope of your saltbox
to the raingutter, rusting in its own sweet time

Thaw

Long before conceptual Aprils,
April of memory, literary Aprils—
Chaucer's with its Zephyrus and floures
Herrick's Brooks, Blossoms, Birds, and Bowers,
Even Eliot's unwelcome lilacs unwilling to stay dead
(Not that lilacs ever bloom in April here),

Long before *any* April
Come days with the sun suddenly warm,
When the air, softened, seems from another place and time—
Warm morning air when a night that promised snow
Yielded to warm rain as the wind backed to the
South/Southwest.

We walk out without a hat and coat for once,
Into the sunshine with a morning cup of tea—
Feel the sun on our faces, and learn
We too have our smale foweles—
The chickadees calling the phoebes back,
Borrowing two notes for a mating song.

Sipping tea in the warm sun we see familiar things
Beginning to emerge, right where we'd left them—
A quart of bar oil placed carefully by a beech stump
Around Thanksgiving, and forgotten in the first big snow;
A bag of apples caught by frost,
Abandoned by the steps and somehow never moved.

Long before April, comes something in the days of thaw
Maybe less hopeful than Chaucer's,
Surely less hopeless than Eliot's
Conception of rebirth—
A simple return of ourselves like objects to the light,
No longer buried in snow, and not yet sunk in mud;
Survivors without epiphanies, just here, absorbing sun
Like bar oil by a stump.

Sylvester Pollet

TWO POEMS**Double**

Just because I wear a beard
two women at a bar, neon
with drink and age, won't believe
I'm not the guy on the jukebox,
it's so good for somebody
to be there from the other world.

And now and again on a dim stair
this: a man catches himself
in mid-sentence talking to me—
"You're not Charlie, are you"—
as what he looks for disappears.

So I should expect it.

But once a door opened and a woman
I had never seen began to cry
and wave her hands, staring at me
through her fingers. She backed away
then leaned as if to touch. She was
getting old, her hair dyed copper-black.
"Come in," she moaned. "I'm sorry,"
guessing I had come about the ad.

She took my arm and led me—
making the kind of sob that doesn't
care who hears—to his room.
Everything exactly as he left it—
the mother's tidiness restrained except

(Stanza continued)

for dusting—waiting for his return.
Tennis shoes half under the bed, easy
to find, just the way you'd want them.
His combs, lighter, set of keys by the mirror
she herself stood in. It had been twelve years.

Once in a restaurant a waitress had cried—
I was her brother killed in Viet Nam.
And there I was again in the waiting place
asking if she had any faith to get her through.
“In what?” she said, shutting me up, making
me know myself the stranger, but strangely
more certain for her sad love that I am.

Match-Up

Fifteen now, eye-to-eye
with the world, he shoulders me
around the living room.
I bump his nose by accident—
it riles him, makes him charge.
I am fat with supper, laugh
and choke for him to stop,
but he's behind me, buckles
my knees in and I fall hard.
He's going for the pin.
So, as always, before I can think
pain is gone and I reverse him,
knocking over a table.
Then he gets his legs,
lunges and a chair goes down.
He has me on all fours,
but then he tries to muscle me,

(Stanza continued)

telegraphs everything. So I
coach him from the bottom, remind him
it's the tricks, but he has
to throw me, and heaves my shoulders.
He rides too high, chops my elbow—
too soon, too soon. I simply flatten,
use my weight, and think
"should I let him win?"
He's never gone this far before,
tries to kick my knee out,
butts me. How I love him,
but is this the time? Holding on,
I decide against his recklessness
and tell him "I'm going to switch."
He drives again and I sit out quick,
smash a lamp, and because
he goes so easy with me
I lock his head to mine and roll,
his body following fast to keep
his neck from breaking—it's learned
enough to save itself—old instinct moves.
Then I'm on him chest to chest,
wondering if I've won or lost—until
he arches, yelling muffled "you've
only got one shoulder." I fall
aside and laugh. My knee throbs,
my back may be sprained.
If he were five I'd hold and
kiss him, but now say "bullshit"
even though he didn't give in.
He's not smiling, gets up,
holds his neck and looks at me.
In the basement his mother listens,
wondering if it's over yet.

INSURANCE

In California, sitting on the edge
of a cliff overlooking the Pacific,
legs dangling, I drank wine
and thought of freedom in the
immense blue movement as ocean.

That day an insurance agent
with the gospels in his eyes
sat down beside me, spoke the beauty
of ocean and its likeness to God,
and man the sand, the water life.

He couldn't help himself to save me,
but insurance is where you least expect
sometimes, and sometimes it comes
when you've had the sense to look down
before looking up, or out, or around.

I wish I was making this up,
but that man sat right next to me
of his own blessed will
on a mound of dog shit. I knew,
since I'd been thinking

about the kind of dog
that would want to squat so near
the Pacific, that would think itself
dog enough to rival such water,
and about the change in wind.

THE CAT CEMETERY

“Booboo won’t go to heaven. He’s got no soul.”
Mama smiles. She likes hurting me for my own good.

Cheeks blistered from tears, ears flooded, shoulders, ribs, belly sore from sobbing, I will spend the next six years—all of elementary school—butting this barricade. Booboo’s my cat, a half-grown gray tabby with white bib and socks. Found dead on the doorstep.

Solemnly my dad digs a grave under the cherry tree, and I wrap doll-stiff Booboo in a blue-blanket. Prayers lodged behind my wishbone, I lay him in a shoe box. While Dad is trimming the edge of the lawn, he hands me two tufts of grass, then a clump of pansies, which I tamp into a rectangle on the grave, and I find a white stone. . . which I put aside that evening for a smoother gray one streaked with white.

Every day after school, I remove twigs and cherries and wilted blooms. Sometimes with my sewing scissors I snip the grass, and sprinkle it, always purring the same secret prayer. From the kitchen window Mama cackles, “Did you see Bertha Hookendoorn take that terrible spill on her skates? She got up, laughing. Oh, Boy! There’s the daughter for me.” Born with a caul into a church-shy clan, I believe IT was sent to shield me from this woman—that God, who is always watching, always listening, may yet lift special sufferings—

Almost a year later, I find Nanna, Booboo’s plain gray replacement, dead under the porch. Maybe poison, Mama thinks. I scarcely cry. One by one, Nanna’s eye dropper-fed kittens stiffen, and I make them a row of small graves alongside hers, as if nursing. In the blue autograph book the teacher gave me for Best Behavior, I draw their pictures, print their names, dates of births and deaths, and wrestle with rhymes. Eyes downcast, I walk to school, through recess, home from school, searching for the right stone for each soul.

"Stubborn! Stubborn!" That's Mama screeching through the screen at me, hunched over my task. "Stop! Please!" That's Mrs. Hookendoorn dashing towards our door. Through the murmur, I make out Mama's "No one will ever know how I worry about that girl—" then a flutey "She's so tender-hearted. . . so frail." There's the mother for me.

About a week later, when I'm kneeling in the cemetery, puzzling the pile of less-than-perfect stones into a wall, Mrs. Hookendoorn and Daughter come floating towards me. "Mina? Our old bulldog died last month, and we were wondering if you'd help Bertha make him a memorial in your—park?" Beaming as if she's said Let's have a picnic. Bertha beaming, too: "Just something plain—like these." Her sandals gaping at the graves. The worried window watching. (On the way to school, a damp muzzle hoisted my hem. *Old Pal won't hurt you* boomed Dominie Hookendoorn.

He has no teeth.) Now I'm smiling so fiercely the watery gray slits in my burning face are blurring Bertha's sunny bronze gaze. "Sure!" my mouth is squeaking. My prayer spot purring: *Never mind, Sweet Sleepers, the body's been put someplace they don't care to mention.* My heart clopping—*no teeth but gripping gums red-rimmed eyes stump tail like a stuck turd.* My mouth simpering, "Poor Old Pal."

Thirty years beyond is the summer my brain will back-lash, and I'll be licensed to leave Society.

Meanwhile, hooked to a chain of Dutch Reformed prayers, watched by the window witch, I must trudge beside Bertha, bearing sods from her greener lawn to the spreading sham in my cemetery. . . must coo tender concerns. . . must take my turn treading this doormat size patch. . . and gingerly tamping. . . . Where oh where will I find the stone big enough bumpy enough grizzled enough and red-rimmed? How oh how will we haul the rock heavy enough to hold down this demon?

MOTHER

When I heard my father
was becoming a "great
grizzly bear"
I was stunned for a moment
of course, and not
completely relieved,
as I am now. Mother called
so late at night
I thought it was the cancer.
I had already panicked.
I was all packed
so I could drop everything
and fly home to console her.
Miracle of medicine!
Will he grow taller?
I asked her. Of course.
Will he smell? Will he smell!
And he'll have a temper.
We'll have to move into
the country, she said,
because of his temper
and smell, and I'm uneasy
in the country, she said,
all those domestic

animals and wild nights
full of stars, and friendly
people in hats.
Will I wear a hat?
Bring a hat when you come.
They dried up his cancer

the only way they could
and I'm thankful, she said,
although he'll soon forget
who I am, will remember
nothing, will be
a grizzly bear.

Bring tools when you come.
We'll build his cage together.
We'll make him a fine home
out there in the country.
We'll learn to adjust.
He'll probably outlive us all!

Michael Hettich

SHAPING UP

1- The Hustlers

It's summer, 6:30 a.m. walking down 14th street to the union hall as the neighborhood gets up for work every morning for a month. Sweet Lady smiles, her rouged cheeks a dark sunrise, offers me a kiss, asks me if I want a date. Nervous, I say no thanks it's too early for me.

It's never too early, she says, for a good time.

But I am young and keep on going, two dollars in my pocket for tokens and lunch—

hey man, Hey Man, HEY MAN as I'm walking by.

His skin brown-burnt and shiny, his arms flying around like long-sleeved jets, flapping his hands as his sweet-dirty odor hits my face.

I need some money man, Sweet B'jesus man, just a touch, a taste, and he sweet B'jesuses me out of my two dollars. And Jesus! at the hall I get the nod from the guardian-angel delegate who calls me in and gives me a job in the Bronx.

I borrow a dollar and catch the IRT and make the shift and pull and push my donkey-hoist levers

(Stanza continued)

hoisting mortar and blocks to the top of the scaffold, making more money in a week than my grandfather made in a month when they used Irishmen to haul bricks up ladders before replacing them with gas machines.

There is something that is hard to talk about, hard to get at, but it keeps pressing me, lifting me to the tops of buildings where I throw myself off every day of my life as I piss away my nights drinking beer at college pubs, looking for a girl who will hold me till I drop. Winter comes before she does and the jobs slow and stop coming, and I never move out of the hall where grey men in coveralls with the news in their laps, talk and smoke and drink endless cups of coffee looking at the fat men in business suits in the inner office wait for the phones to ring and I quit because there isn't enough work to keep me going.

2- Eddie

I get a job fixing things at a night club and work with a guy named Eddie who is ancient, simple, has little hair and fewer teeth and is too pickled most days to notice how shitty his job is. We drink beer all day as he stands in one spot washing the same acre of floor for an hour. He can't read and can't write and one day I send him, as a joke, to the bank next door with a stick-up note. The teller touches a button and silent alarms go off but the guard knows Eddie for years and brings him back and gives me hell for trouble and for laughing. Eddie, drinking another beer in the back room,

(Stanza continued)

grabs his mop and swabs his floor and squabbles through toothless anger how I ain't ought to of done that, how he ought to quit, how it ain't right when a man's trying to make a living, to make a fool out of him where he works. Eddie wants to open his own bar in the neighborhood and call it "Cocktail Lounge" and draw the tap to a keg of never-ending beer and have someone else mop up after him every day.

I get to work one morning, my head blocked, my skin yellow from vodka, my tongue swollen, choking me, making me want to throw up at the smell of the sweet liquors on the gantry behind the bar. I call for Eddie to get some coffee. He doesn't come, unlike him to hesitate for get yourself a cup and keep the change, probably shuffling his mop through his liquid stupor as I sit through mine. I find him collapsed in the back room with his head red-sticky like a broken bottle of grenadine syrup, the burglar gone, too frightened to know he killed an idiot. I call the boss and the cops, then puke myself sore and I can't get up to unlock the door to let them in. Later, after a shot or two of vodka, my stomach settles and the hell in my head freezes over.

3- The Dancer

I work my way out of the day shift, out of repairs, and work the bar at night and the customers and a girl or two as well, but not as many as you'd think. We meet in another bar when I bump her with my drink, and she gets pissed and pours hers on my head, she tells me later. Thick thighs and small breasts she

(Stanza continued)

gets from ballet, gymnastics—she is choreographed crazy as a child into an addict released from Creedmore with half a liver. She dances topless in go-go bars where guys buy overpriced beers and watch her kick and spin and move in ways that get them hard. She dances on the bar with an air-conditioned mirror image above the outstretched hands of the men holding their stiff dollars, pushing their rolled-up bills into her bikini bottom that glitters all night long, even as they remember her movements in bed with their wives at home.

We live together and she's sleeping around I know, but never catch her, never get her to admit it. And one morning I'm called to Bellevue to pick her up. She's raped crazy—some guy she meets the night before. I leave her every week for good, but she says love, and I think this love is terrible, hardly better than none at all. So I stay another week, each week, and drink vodka as clear as water and scentless on my breath so I don't know. And sometimes I lose a day—once almost a week—Go out for a drink after hours and wake a few days later, exhausted and yellow, not knowing where I'd been, what I'd done, who I was with. A drink in my hand—then blank—I wake up naked in sunlight out on a neighbor's lawn grinding my penis into the earth. I can't come and can't walk and drag my pale legs through the grass, hoist myself over the edge of the knee-high kiddie pool, scraping my belly, spilling water till the metal lip springs back, reforming itself as I lay beneath the chlorine cold which burns my eyes and my nose till I gag and rise above the surface.

(Stanza continued)

4- Jasmine

I leave finally, and leave the bar and leave the country and go to Wales for a week or two, to see where I was born. I stay a year and live in a Cardiff rowhouse with Welsh kids who sign on every week for the dole, pick up their pounds and trade them in for drugs, and sit in laughter and stupor and crashing out listening to "Wishbone Ash," and "Retribution" and "I can't ball 'cause I got the clap..." We sleep in shifts, three bedrooms cramped with the crashing and the dead, all with lice and crabs and DDT from the clinic where they shave our pubics and give us flyers on hygiene and V.D.

One night there is a riot when Gypsy Blood freaks on a girl named Jasmine and too much acid and smashes windows with the electric guitar he plays for hours without plugging in. Crazy Steve gets hurt getting in the way, and I feint and block the guitar and knock Gypsy down and sit on him all night while Charlie and Trevor and Twiz talk him down, bring him in, and he lands. Jasmine is 16, run away from Arab brothers who promise her to a desert husband she's never met. The brothers are slim-sharp like switchblades and know we have her and come around questioning and dangerous.

I smuggle her out to another part of Cardiff where we sleep one night on the floor of the house of a friend. His mother smiles, thinking

(Stanza continued)

we are lovers and tells us of her love for men
now dead and brings us blankets and hot tea
and leaves us alone for the night. I have a cold.
My nose drips like acid and I sniffle. My head
is clogged with mucus and with smoke lying with
Jasmine on the winter rug in front of the coal fire,
her dark voice and dark hair heavy in the air
like soot. I keep repeating myself, I realize,
the same crap over and over, each time a different
girl, a different drink, vodka or beer. I want
her fiercely and see myself swinging guitars,
breaking windows in my mind, and bleeding, and
falling to the ground. She knows she's
leaving, knows I'm not going with her and touches
my arm and turns away. I listen to the coals
hiss hot all night till the cold comes up out
of the ground in the morning and rises into the sky.

5- Shaping Up

For months I try not drinking so much,
not getting buzzed every day, and get a job
on a Welsh construction site drilling holes
with a jack-hammer that later makes me shiver
all night, sitting in a chair listening to music,
watching the electric fire. The police park
outside the door of the house teasing us every
day about the bust they're going to make, and
I've had enough.

I leave the house and Wales, thankful for the
breath, and return to New York, and try to stay
straight. I go to meetings where people tell
me how it is now they believe they are connected
to themselves, and there's talk of God
that makes me hesitate, but it can't be worse
than all I've believed in.

I go back to shape the union hall and wait around for weeks to get sent out on a job, to hoist things, to make something grow. And now in this Brooklyn neighborhood I walk past early morning step-sitters flourishing in Spanish, dark people waiting for a bus, eating fish outside bodegas. The neighborhood is under renewal and I feel like I'm being re-made from the inside out. The street by this site is slit and gutted like an eel, stuffed with pipes and wires, the arteries of this building, paved over, driven on by trucks which haul away the old bits and carry in materials for construction. And now I have the arms of this machine in my arms and we're moving in a rhythm I could get used to. The bellman rings me from these dreams. I move the throttle, the gears engage and somewhere above me, out of my sight, a platform of bricks and mortar hurtles toward the top. I watch the cable wrap itself around the drum, powered by an engine that makes more sense to me now than it ever did before.

I know where every bar is in this neighborhood, every store that sells beer, and sometimes I climb to the top of this building which next week will have another story above it, and look down and wonder if I should fly. Some nights driving home I squeeze the wheel and start to cry for the taste that's stronger than the salt that runs down from my cheeks and turns cold above my lips, and I keep on driving.

Peter E. Murphy

OUTSIDE YET ANOTHER NEW WINDOW...

Outside yet another new window in life a fir-tree is rising;
 On this snowless drizzling night, having opened the window,
 I will reach out and feel the wet branch; in a faraway country,
 Fallen into a long winter sleep, under the weight of the snow
 The branches are bending and now on the ice you begin
 To push off with impetuous leaps—direct into speed—
 And very soon, on a third or fourth leap you arrive
 At the rhythm; the skin of your temples is red,
 Is on fire, is cutting the wind, as your skates—just before
 Sharpened well—are dissecting the ice under foot; and
 now surging
 Forward, pressing yourself to the earth over which
 The circles turn out to be easy, and skilfully tensing
 Your knees, having opened your mouth to breathe, you begin
 To work with your arms, as you're striving, excited and free,
 To the turn, with your eyes on the track... In this winter night,
 To be faster than life, far away you are running from me.

Eugene Dubnov

За еще одним в жизни окном возвышается ель.
 Ночью этой бесснежной, дождливой, окно распахнув,
 Я дотронусь до ветви; за тридевять с лишним земель
 В этот час, зимним сном протяженным уснув,
 Ветви гнутся под тяжестью снега и ты на катке
 Начинаешь разбег стартовой с напряженных бросков -
 Прямо в скорость - и где-то на третьем-четвертом рывке
 Входишь в ритм, докрасна раскаленной кожей висков
 Ледяной режешь ветер, как лед под ногами - коньки
 Хорошо перед тем наточив - и подавшись вперед,
 Приклонившись к несущей земле, над которой круги
 На поверку нетрудны, пружиня колени и рот
 Для дыханья раскрыв, начинаешь работать легко
 И свободно руками и зорко за трассой следить,
 К повороту стремясь... В эту зимнюю ночь далеко
 Ты бежишь на коньках от меня, чтобы жизнь упредить.

1984

Translated from Russian by the author and Chris Newman

TWO POEMS

On the Pine Mountain Trail

I went to the woods
knowing dead certain
that strong as I am
I could haul a hundred miles
of rootlocked vertical trail
in less than ten minutes
with time to rough-cut
a post-oak spoon
for eating the stars.

but a hundred feet
from last light,
quartzite caught my boot,
hauled me down,
wrapped me in smilax
as long as my life.

as I was briar-blind
in the poison oak,
was wet in my own blood,
I recalled the Creek belief
that the night has hands.

I believe
in blood.
I believe
in dark old Indian songs.
but for times of night
in the winding threads
of briar,
the song needs sex.

I kissed the dark.
I felt of its crotch.
the briars unwound.
the musk of the forest
was sweet on my tongue.

My Soul, Escaping

the moon is a curl of my hair
I am sick and looking for my soul.
there is a screech-owl on the night.
I pull his call,
but no soul dangles from it.
I am fevered.
I am looking for my soul.

there is a many-fingered leaf,
a maple hand, red with autumn,
floating on the spring-hole current.
in the slime beneath this glyph
I seek my soul;
it is not there.
my brow is fire.

behind a bush
is the bat-wind hole.
its breath is cave.
in the stink of beast
I hear a sick soul singing.

I find the cave turns inward
through my eyes,
and there amid the bats of mind,
the fevered singing of my soul.
I call its heat
to sleep among the pages
of my magic book.
it lies among the leaves,
is cool as cave air.

the magic words have done their work.
my soul has found the steady iamb of my heart.
it sits in the seat of my chest;
it inhabits the home it always had.
only now it chants to be there.

FROM THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

1

I was nine when we lived in Camp Lejeune and I knelt
 beside you to hear
 About the son of the Colonel pursuing the thief of his
 father's mare;
 And I was the son of a colonel who chanted Kipling to me
 In the camp of the young, from an amber-leaved book that
 was falling apart on his knee.
 It paced like the falling pine-cones, like the heels of your
 drilling battalion,
 It cantered like waves of the sea; it beat till I dreamed I
 was more than your son:

*They have taken the Oath of the Brother-in-Blood on fire
 and fresh-cut sod,
 On the hilt and the haft of the Khyber knife, and the Wondrous
 Names of God.*

2

In 1950
 you were a captain under Chesty Puller
 and because of your Navy Cross he let
 your company take the point as you entered Seoul.
 I can hear the snuffies say, "Some fucking honor." Still,
 it got you in the fatter histories. What isn't in
 the books, though, is the house
 where you kicked in the door to find yourself
 standing across the room from a North Korean.
 He shot first. The round bit through
 your Naval Academy ring, destroyed your knuckle,
 and drilled your forearm, passing out

(Stanza continued)

above the elbow. You aimed for center mass
and found it. "I blew
his belt-buckle out his back. It felt just fine."

I know my Wilfred Owen and Jarrell
enough to know
there are no fair fights in a modern war.
Just like you to find one.
Everything you taught me
subverts my education.
I'd still rather read
Kipling any day
than poetry.

3

Why should an old man have to woo his son?
At dinner I'm embarrassed for us both.
I feel like you're eighteen and I'm a girl
You want so much you're frantic to pretend
You care about her "interests." So you ask
How New York is these days, what Jan and I
Do on the weekends. Oh, I mumble, brunch,
A walk across the park to roam the Met.
What sort of paintings do I like? Oh, Christ.
I want to say: Look, Dad, you can't come in.
Your life's a gallery I know by heart.
Mine is a tight apartment you can't see.
It always works that way. I'd rather you
Just told me one more time the story of
The toothless whitewashed hag the Japanese
Officers gave you at the geisha house—
You thought it was a joke against the *gaijin*
Till they disclosed the honor: this indeed
Was Admiral Togo's geisha when he sank
The czar's invading fleet in nineteen-five.

Israhel Van Meckenem's Engraving of *The Presentation*
at the Temple (c. 1495), after Holbein, Ripped
 to Shreds in the Twentieth Century

"Here, take this out of the frame, Jim."

— R. Stanley Johnson

The floated paper, quietly lifting
 Away from the glass, clings at a corner,
 Tightens at an edge and strains
 Against my gentle pull from behind the mat.

I hear

A tiny sound. The Virgin's habit
 Wasn't swishing through the temple, handmaids'
 Dresses didn't brush the angled pulpit, and
 In priestly hands, a page was curled in middle turn.
 The infant didn't cry. Inside the frame,
 I hear a little sound—a horrible,
 Screaming, quiet hissing sound.

And in my very bones

I feel the paper tearing, feel the tear
 Destroying close cut detail, ripping
 Careful lines a steadier hand and eye—
 Than my dull, dumb, destructive thumbs,
 Bum, blind, myopic eyes—once had loved
 And lingered over, once had fashioned
 With a passionate patience.

Cautious and scared, I touch the tear;
 I feel the feathery inches cross
 The Circumcision (inset upper right),
 My ragged lines run through the straight ones,
 Break the knife, snap lines that link
 One fissure to another, cut to cut,
 And so on, back to the original:
 Raggedy paper, graven copper, severed foreskin.

Delicate handling of delicate paper,
The careful strain of tool on plate,
Reverent care of softest baby skin,
Flutter out, ghost through me.

James Sullivan

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Albert Goldbarth is one of the most generous of living poets; there seem no limits to the wealth he is able to comprehend and share with his readers. His new volume, *Arts & Sciences* (Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 1986, 110 pp., \$17.95 cloth, \$8.95 paper) includes some of his finest poems yet. *Generous* implies generation, and Goldbarth's primary appeal is in the generation of utterly arresting images. In "The Poem of the Praises" he imagines — that is, *images* — the six children Whitman claims to have fathered, so that they may "sing his praises" and, in a tumbling concatenation of images, sing the praises of the Whitmanian cornucopia of the universe.

Goldbarth's second strength is the one Aristotle saw as the sign of genius — the perception of analogy. The deep form of a Goldbarth poem is the overlaying of parallel strata of human behavior and experience in seemingly unrelated times and places. In "Cathay" we encounter Columbus, but also the 1492 Chinese artist Shen Chou, the Jews exiled from Spain in that year, the Taino Indians hauled back to Spain by Columbus, the poet's own adventure with an "Indian," and a swarm of other contemporaries of the poet and Columbus: "we're always halves of something larger than any one life."

A third strength is something larger than generosity — magnanimity, in its oldest sense. Goldbarth is prepared to engage the largest questions that have tormented thoughtful humanity, certainly since Plato, such as the relationship between virtue and suffering, between art and “reality.” Goldbarth’s three-stanza poem “The Elements” begins in quiet intensity of observation:

The cool, dusk-blue of the shadows of these Dutch plums
is mixed with a quarter-thimble of gray that matches
glints in the skins of the pears...

The “quarter-thimble of gray” tells us that we are looking at a painter’s work, responding to the sensuousness of the images while admiring the skill of the artist’s hand. The stanza ends with a wondering:

I wonder if this still-life exists in the universe
and the eye drops to the second stanza, which begins:

of a wormy handfull of rice. I wonder what the sense of time
in which it was painted has to do with a year
in the dog cages.

After pivoting the poem on the three senses of time, the poet goes on to examine the life of the prisoners being released after a year in the dog cages, with the same steady intensity of observation as he has lavished on the still-life. The poem develops a refrain: “I wonder.”

I wonder, in all of science fiction, if there have been
two universes this discordant.

And the third stanza wonderingly explores the dilemma of esthetics and ethics that leads into the torn heart of the human condition. It is a master poem by a master poet.

Brooks Haxton’s second volume, *Dominion* (N.Y.: Knopf, 1986, 110 pp., \$14.95 cloth, \$8.95 paper) takes its unifying theme from Burns’ lines beginning “I’m truly sorry man’s dominion/Has broken Nature’s social union.” Each section dramatizes a kind of alienation — political, ecological, domestic, personal. Most of the poems are anecdotal; Haxton is a born story-teller. The most striking of his accomplishments is “Breakfast Ex Animo,” a narrative of about 400 centered lines in which the reader shares, moment by moment, the narrator’s alarm, suspense, surprise, and ambiguous resolution of a dawn ruckus in the hen-house. It would be mean to spoil the story for a first-time reader by giving away the plot; that first reading is a spell-binding experience.

Subsequent readings reveal the exquisite craftsmanship that effects the reader's participation in the action. Watch the inner and outer drama of the red-tailed hawk

Who recalls,
Miles down, on some hillside,
Some fool avenging himself on nature
With his pump-action twelve-gauge,
Me.
Taking flight with a pounce towards me,
She veers low into the close growth of the gully
With slow strokes
Maneuvering
Through thickets where no bird could fly . . .

Then re-read the lines to savor the sure command of the shifting rhythms, the skillful manipulation of line length, the muscular verbs, the evolving sound patterns, the wry self-mocking humor, the movement from the past—suggesting in a dozen words the evolving awareness of both bird and man—and the final glide beyond the mind's logic.

Mary Oliver's new book, *Dream Work* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986, 90 pp., \$14.95 hardbound, \$8.95 paper) has some truly stunning poems. "Banyan" wonderfully justifies the book's title, a magical poem that is both a dream and a concept of dream, beginning:

Something screamed
from the fringes of the swamp.
It was Banyan,
the old merchant.

It was the hundred-legged
tree, walking again.

Even more memorable than the dreamscapes are poems like "Starfish," with its willed attention to the natural object. The language is sharp and sensuous: the "gritty lightning" of the starfish's touch, for example. Perhaps the strongest poem in the volume is "Stanley Kunitz," a joyous celebration of the process of learning to be a poet. This is one of the really splendid poems of the eighties and should have a wide circulation and a long life.

Reading the work of Goldbarth and Haxton and Oliver and thinking about the majority of poems that are submitted to this magazine day after day, I have been contemplating the tendency of the amateur poet to what Ruskin calls "pathetic fallacy." The temptation to read human responses into inanimate creation too often traps the unwary poet into what Ruskin called "morbid" writing and I am more inclined to call sentimental, although M. H. Abrams (*Glossary of Literary Terms*) is inclined to be indulgent and consider the pathetic fallacy today no more than "a neutral name for a common phenomenon in descriptive poetry." Ruskin does not object, of course, to metaphor, where the poet clearly understands the distinction between vehicle and tenor. But he firmly objects to what Helen Vendler has referred to as "a foisting of our sentiments onto an inert and indifferent scenery" (epigraph to Goldbarth's "Reading In").

Some poets self-consciously address the problem head-on, as Frost does when he concludes a poem about an abandoned farm: "One had to be versed in country things/ Not to believe the phoebes wept" ("The Need To Be Versed in Country Things"). Albert Goldbarth goes further than Frost in his contemplative "Reading In," which opens with a photographically accurate description of a Chicago snowstorm and expands at once to a projection of Keatsian joy into the crystals:

It shone,
it was happy snow, some landed on your tongue
and that was happy happy snow.

The poet continues:

Then why do we cringe at the world of willows
bent in bereavement, mercury rising slim and
passionately up thermometers . . . ?

and answers atavistically:

There were
cultures where the wind in the bough was your future.

We have always read our profoundest needs into nature, the poet implies, with some elegant linked examples, and

at last we read our needings so
emphatically and crosshatched
into the sky, we call it heaven, and
our reading ends in
translating ourselves.

In this thoughtful and moving poem, Goldbarth opens up a way of approaching the broader issue of subject and object in poetry than Ruskin's discussion of the "pathetic fallacy" allows. We do still cringe at the willow that weeps, the muskrat that sees the returning geese and hurries

to the secret lodges to tell everyone
spring had come,

(as Mary Oliver writes in one of her rare lapses). We do indeed insist that the poets *translate* themselves, to accept Goldbarth's valuable word, as Shelley translated himself into the cloud. Shelley and Keats valued what we have come to call empathy: the imaginative power to go out from the self into the consciousness of the other. The Buddhist poet contemplates the bamboo until he becomes bamboo, and can write the poem. Kinnell has written the contemporary manifesto of this poetic process in "The Bear."

In a poem perhaps indebted to Kinnell's, Mary Oliver succeeds beautifully in her "Driving through the Wind River Reservation: A Poem of Black Bear," in which she unsentimentally enters the consciousness of the hibernating she-bear and translates the experience into a mythic vision of winter and spring. To experience and inspire empathy is one of the highest functions of poetry. It is certainly the energy behind much fine political poetry, such as Brooks Haxton's "Beans," which begins:

Three beans' worth of the brew in my coffee cup
Came from an equatorial mountainside
Down which the man whose hand had plucked them fell.

It is the struggle of the poet's disciplined imagination toward truth—the direct opposite of the pathetic fallacy.



I should like to commend two very different volumes in which the poetry and the art work are in beautiful balance—models of publishers' taste and vision. One is *What Shall We Do Without Us? The Voice and Vision of Kenneth Patchen* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1985, 112 pp., 9 x 12, 37 full-color paintings, \$25. cloth, \$12.95 paper). In these Blakean

pages the text and paintings are inseparable. The power and poignancy result from the marriage of the bitter, apprehensive texts, haunted by the unnamed terror of nuclear disaster, with **Kenneth Patchen's** vivid round-eyed wistful creatures. The volume has a substantial and eloquent memoir by Patchen's publisher, **James Laughlin** of New Directions. Altogether this is a richly glowing and moving book.

The other happy wedding of visual art and poetry is *Sketches After "Pete's Beer,"* with drawings by **Joe Shannon** and poems by **David Kresh** (Lubec, Maine: Stone Man Press, 1986, 28 pp., \$5. paper; order from the press, Crow Neck Road, Lubec 04652). Joe Shannon's wild and wonderful painting "Pete's Beer" glows in full color on the cover of this book, which brings together eleven of David Kresh's poems inspired by the painting. Finally, there are eight stunning new drawings by Shannon to complement the poems. The result is a jewel of a book, with a sharp diversity of forms and tones. There are dance tunes, fiddle tunes, and free lyrics like "Fisherman's Advice," with its energy under pressure. "Disorderly Conduct," a parody courtroom scene with the artist on trial, is profoundly funny. "In Shannon's Studio in Stereo" is a spooky surreal villanelle, suggesting the violent and the sinister always lurking on the edges of the dance.

M.K.S.

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John Hulme's *Guillaume Chèquespierre and the Oise Salon* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1986, \$10. hardbound) presents with a straight face selections in presque-français of a putative metapoetic group in France — Jean Quittce, Thomas Gris, A. Lefrette d'Enisonne, et al., including A. Nonimousse. The English counterparts appear at the back, but you must know how to pronounce French (sometimes with a German or Italian accent), so "Jus Liasse Six Ares" ("A Wad of Gravy for Six Acres") becomes "Julius Caesar." A literal tour de force, like a poetic trivia crossword puzzle in another language. Sample: "Tue moraux, Anne, tue moraux, Anne, tue moreaux!" Erudite fun.

B. D.