

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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LATE MOURNING

The day after they buried Julian,
I took my clothes
and layered them in the dye pot.
Walnut leaves, dress
walnut leaves, dress.
Poured in water
and boiled all day.
I let the bath cool for the night
put in fresh leaves in the morning
and boiled all that day too.
I used autumn leaves just fallen,
makes a fine black
that doesn't wash out.
For three years
I thought never to wear color again.
But walnut leaves gathered in May
make a living yellow,
with a teaspoon of alum
golden green.
Add wheat straw for deep
sea green.

Vine tribe berries
make a dark purple
rich as plum wine
glowing in lead crystal.
They're ripe for picking now.

Candice Cook-Darby

WRITER AT WORK

This is the summer
for painting a house,
for breaking the peace of our days.
Through seven years I have lived with walls
that shed their chips toward
the colors of other lives.
Doors and shutters are crazed and cracked,
the chimney needs pointing,
and rubbish of strangers is heaped under porches.
Up with ladders, the clanking of hooks on rungs,
the angry squeal of scraping
back to raw wood.

Wife and children cannot think,
the windows gape, insects click
their chitinous heads on ceilings and walls.
I cling and tremble at reeling heights,
twist a spine that will not unbend
and eat the flakes from soffits.
Under the porch I crawl in remnants
of lives I think I have never known —
tricycle tires, a skier's glove,
broken lumber, screens, and the headstone
of Sister Mary Bernard. I chuck all this
in a mound, haul away
to leave simple dust.

In dreams I claw the air,
topple and swarm down clapboards,
until I sink deep through layers of tailings.
My hand fits that glove,
those wheels once rolled me through friendless yards,
and Sister, you are my sister,
the woman I might have been.
Again and again I chant old songs,
charms for the new, wet skins of birth.

Then silence. The smooth back and forth
of strokes that heal. Inside
my family hears only the lapping of hands,
a blind man groping his way home.

T. Alan Broughton

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

It's a small class and he stands out:
lavender watchcap, bad skin,
eyes glazed and evasive.
He smells of sweat and stale booze,
says the wrong thing and repeats it.

The women in class ignore him.
The guy downwind says, *What a creep*,
and laughs with the guy on his right.

I try to imagine The Creep as an infant,
all toothless smiles and potential.
I try to imagine his first 18 years.
want to believe he
is not his mother's fault.

I want a future for him
with the quiet blond in the back row;
their lives simple and serviceable
their children, merely plain.

He forgets his notebook and I flip it open,
try to remember his name without looking.
He's been writing a letter,
lists his schedule: *Period 3. Eastern Philosophy.*
Full of fuckable chicks.

Martha Christina

PARADISE

Before the window of the shop
on St. Mark's Square she sits
writing postcards home, drinking
another cappuccino. Behind
the glass the display is halved;
one containing lace, the other,
baby clothes, and you enter
through a single door
that opens easily
into the old choice. The unsigned
bill is on the table.
Up to now everything had seemed
to fit together, as in mosaics
which told, without perspective,
of the expulsion from Eden.
She thought it could all
be understood in the gold
tiles glittering off to the side
and through trees which
by then had lost their shade,
where what had once seemed
something more than a coiled
vine hanging overhead,
as days and nights went on,
lost its scales and became
nothing more than a vine
until in time it raised
its head above the leaves,
dry and rustling, whispering
in the old sibillance
take, eat, follow me
through this door, I will give
you lace and baby clothes, all
you have to do is sign.

Carl Conover

**SING, COLUMNAR MUSE, OF ME
THE LAST IN THIS BIN**

Male ectomorph, extreme, 42,
hazel eyes; soul, light blue
(photo on request, please send
one of important part of you);

currently a well-established
failure in the absorbing concerns
of the dominant culture and
subdominant as well, possible
success in others; ruling class
origins, downwardly-mobile
background (since '29) have
little family, a few obscure
but otherwise charming friends;
unpublished writer, unshown
artist, unschooled teacher,
undiscouraged but unambitious
(expect substantial diminution
of civilization, loss of inventory,
leisure, next 1000 years); value
unconstrained simplicity in all
things, have exquisite taste kept
well under control, not a sybarite,
treat money generously but firmly,
do not define self or others by
external circumstances; extremely
tactful but committed vegetarian;
handy with machinery, pen, shovel,
carpentry tools, rag and broom,
pleased to do mindless tasks for
good people with important work;
treat children as humans, loathe
cutesy poo and all random or
doctrinaire severity; no sociopathic
tendencies (references provided)
except the occasional and harmless

xplicxxi sox rex
rodxx emptxnexx
humx xxyzox hx
thruxx thx tulix

common to all, take a drink
once a week; allergic to tobacco,
most plastics, cheap thrills, expensive
fun, vulgar display; ex-savage
wit, largely cured of intellectual
nastiness, usually decline to
argue, occasional silent brooding
managed in Byronic style, never
petty; enjoy cultural pinnacles
without valuing them overmuch;
attempting hinayana-mahayana
synthesis but easily distracted;
enjoy cultivating a garden,
weeding fields of endeavor,
exchanging books and prophecies;
find most sports and travel silly at
best, have traveled widely in western
civilization, been frightened from
time to time, never bored; have been
through the political woods, keeping
a leaf or two from each tree, would
be a utopian socialist if possible;
find all competition ultimately
destructive; believe the human
capacity for self-delusion to be
infinite; cherish a circuitous
courtship of gentle purposefulness
and play; will modify facial hair
to suit, will improve currently
rusticating manners to the pitch
of current urban sophistication,
will change little else without good
reason developed carefully over time;

considered by very many to be
(this is just a caution) strange;
seek woman desiring househusband
all-rounder.

Thomas Whitehead

SWIM

The woods above the water are dense, pines
and spruce, brush, and yellow birch, but we
pick our way among the branches; the air
cracks with the angry heron's cackle as we
discover the graveyard, abandoned, fenced
by rusted, beaten-down chicken wire, the whole
no more than ten by twenty feet of ground
spitting ferns and firs in a tangle no one
would design. The obelisk before us,
old, mossed-over, pocked, names Richard Adams
underneath, and warns us to prepare
for the Son of Man. The other stones, just three,
are new, and hard to read in the forest
light. "Adams" is all we can figure out.

In the distance, someone pounds nails to make
a house, and we wander off to the shore,
the sharp-cut curve of the beach we'd been looking
for, and take off our clothes, and swim out far.

Eric Horsting

from O'KEEFE AND STIEGLITZ

Flowers

1

larger than the humans who stand in front of them

2

like butterflies pinned open
or lit from within

3

fringed fabric of orchid
exploding with light at the center

4

the hollyhock's black sheen glows with red,
and the larkspur, blue crystals of larkspur!

5

the white trumpet-flower
all its curves are hard-edged

6

the shape at the top of the bleeding heart
an apple dipped in ashes

7

a ribbon of light
cuts through the green corn

the dark leaves' light veins
grasp in opposing directions

morning by morning
a drop of dew slips down the veins
to pool in the sheath's dark center

8

if you think the stamens and pistils are phallic
the lip-shaped petals a vulva
I don't

9

they're cheaper than models
and they don't move

10

the large white flower with the golden heart
is something I have to say about white

11

petals of the white rose unfold
like a drama at Epidaurus

12

the dark spider at the heart of the scarlet poppy

13

purple iris
tonguelike, velvety, purplish-gray petals
uncurling into blackness

14

when the painter is unafraid
the result is calmness

15

stripes of the jack-in-the-pulpit
this time the interior all black
a thin stalk of white rises from the plump candle

the final variation the most abstract
only the jack
against a doorway of white

Stieglitz: A Conversation

No, it would be quite impossible,
we are agreed on that. Hush, my dear,
we need not argue. Our views are identical.
You do not feel the physical craving,
I would not expect you to.
You can see, even more clearly than I,
the practical side, how our life, our two lives,
would fracture, inevitably diminished
by increase. Think of the hours I spend
preparing the canvas, mixing each color with a separate brush.
What infant would respect those hours?
Or even the days I spend without paint,
walking by Lake George when lilacs begin to open,
or simply waiting. Cooking. Yes, I would be diverted.
The poem you wrote for me, about the woman who carries
dawn in her womb. How does that feel, I wonder?
No, love, I do not know. How free, and how wise,
you are, not imagining you need a son
or another daughter. No daughter of ours
would turn away from the light, from her little son,
like your poor girl, or would a child we made
be smothered by us, by a surfeit of life, or art,
which seem to be the same thing. Your photographs
will carry you forward. That is enough.
For me — swirls of azure on stark white?
A shape. That's all, merely a shape. A flower,
oh, a black iris. We will not speak of sacrifice.
Let us end this long conversation. Come to bed.

Judith

She presided over the dining room,
Miss Marblehead, from a fringed scarf
atop the china closet, granting us
the favor of her royal simper
and a breast absent-mindedly exposed.
Heroine of the Hebrews indeed! As if to save her people
she only needed antimacassars for the horsehair sofa.
We dug the hole deep that night.
How the spade resounded in the hard earth,
the sweat cooled quickly on our bodies.
All three conspirators cradled her,
then let her drop.
That's the earth smearing your face, milady.
Let the relatives wail at her absence —
one of their forebears had, after all, purchased her —
feigning ignorance was quite agreeable.
I could have but did not explain:
artists make the best critics.

David Dooley

THREE POEMS

Gunsmoke in Old Tay Ninh

"Round" leaped up on my belly
And begged to be scratched behind her ears.
On the tube, Chester bantered
With Doc as Doc prepared
To cut his legs off. WHUMP!
The 178th's 8-inchers fired
Over our hooch. "Round" whined. The TV
Shifted an inch. Tom opened
His letter. Mac opened a beer.
Tom read. Mac smacked. I scratched.
Another re-up commercial came on.
Someone was sobbing. Mac,
"Round," and I looked up
As Tom stumbled from the hooch
Toward the berm line, sobbing.
Mac looked at Tom's letter
A moment. "Dear John," he said, "Hmm."
"Suppose we should go after him," I said.
Mac stared. "I mean," I said,
"He might walk off the berm
Into the claymores or something."
Mac stared out the door.
"Yeah," he said, "He might do that,
Mightn't he? He just might."

Once There Was a Man

Come on in with your sample case
Jammed with pterodactyl teeth
And don't you have any Mercator projections
Of Possum Hollow it's okay
I never work in this office anyway
But don't sit on my colleague's lunch
Matzoh ball soup

(stanza continued)

The only kind he'll ever have
Turn the lights out okay
Jesus it's getting dark isn't it
You know ten years ago or maybe
It was yesterday Doug bought the farm
Chopper caught fire
You know magnesium burns so quickly
It may be said to explode
They told him to stay out
They'd stay with the wounded
But he chopped on in
Said by god don't tell me that
Somebody here called a taxi

Four Photographs

On a stairway that leads nowhere, she
And he pose in Arnett, in white dress
And dress whites, summer of 1964,
He with yellow stains on his fingers,
She with a puzzled, petulant stare
As his jaw muscles bulge like a dog's
With its teeth half through another dog's
Throat. In a painting behind them, birds
Flee in panic a huge shadow cast
By something high above. Down the steps,
To your left, the best man and groomsmen,
Stiff in their white uniforms, just touch
The bridesmaids' and the maid of honor's waists,
And the young women gaze at something
High above the photographer's head.
Up the stairs, or left to right, the men
Died in 1965, 1966, 1967, 1967, 1969.

After a short honeymoon, the groom
Went to Jump School, and the bride sold cakes
At a little bakery off-post.
Here they are, outside their furnished room,
Squinting into the Georgia sunshine,
Masses of red flowers behind them,
His graduation cake teetering
On the little table between them.
The gold jump wings and paratrooper
Atop the cake were popular — she
Sold a lot of them. He looks leaner;
She is beginning to look pudgy.

In this photograph, you can just glimpse
The Ranger patch it took months to earn.
They are sitting in the living room
Of their duplex, a larger table
Between them. He is almost slender,
There are dark circles below his eyes,
And his nose is broken. She is packed
Into a purple dress as tightly
As their belongings in the boxes
We see stacked behind them. His right hand
Points to the Ranger patch; his left hand
Rests on his orders to Vietnam.

Here, she stares into the camera,
Uncomprehending. Asylum smocks
Hide almost everything, but still you
Can tell she is grossly fat. They've let
Her keep his medals— you can just see
The display case there by the window,
The little bits of colored ribbon,
Some in sunlight, some in shadows cast
By the iron bars outside her window.

Patrick Worth Gray

TWO POEMS

The Confession

Bless me, Father, for I
have not sinned enough.
It has been one day
since my last confession
of nothing at all.

My hands are clean.
I lay them on
the thin screen between us.
You can smell
only fingers, thumbs, palms.

I am thinking
of getting dirty.
I have imagined
a plot of land
waiting to be dug.

I am leaning over it,
flexing my knees,
calculating
the distance. I want
to be sure.

But before I can drop,
the land wavers, heaves —
it's a woman's body
and she's standing up
and I go clean again.

Shacking Up

We built a shack around us
and shacked and shacked
the whole shack long.

Up was only one way,
there were down, and right, and left,
and a way without a name

Jesus took when he went four ways
on the cross at once and his father smiled
and said that was good.

There were no doors or windows,
we saw to that, we built that shack
out of impenetrable sighs and whispers.

Shack me, shack me again
were the words that couldn't escape
except from our lips.

We didn't palace up, or condo up,
or tent, nomadically or outsydoorsy, up,
but only shack, what's falling down,

no status but ourselves in it,
something out back the sleek
world on wheels getting somewhere

has no time for,
warped, a wonder, by nature,
nor made to last, collapsing

over only eons like a star to a black
hole, two stars happy to make
a nighttime spectacle of themselves,
a skyful forming the constellation Shack.

Philip Dacey

all my pretty ones

all my pretty ones, all my little chickens
listen! listen! your blood red quick
is all too palpable.

once there was a girl
who loved her mother, but her father — daddy
sugar'd fled the coop to become a romantic
vista — you dig? now this girl, who was a younger
sister, who sent her mother notes
age five cause she couldn't sputter out her anger,
grew to a lush sixteen. flies around the honey pot.
and soon she was attached, and soon she was attacked,
and he would not detach, and sex was such a recreation
of a primal union that was where she went,
where her body went and after a while she followed. that
wrenched her free but soon a new he followed everywhere
and it was soon, who she could talk to,
where she could be. gradually she forbid him her
word. folded to slip through silent.
then she denied him nothing
and then the lights came on.

my pretty one, you come to me.
Mama will punish me, what does she want of me,
I can't provide it, your look all latency.
when I resee you nascent
from behind my heart bleed tears
with no expression but an attentive eye.
Daddy will not do, you know.
let the words woo you.

Lee Sharkey

from RUNES

Feoh, the letter F, rune of goods, community wealth and
cattle

The old man's stuff was spread across the lawn,
lot-numbered. I was there to buy,
under the green and yellow auction tent.

I never knew him, but those who had
stood just outside the hedge. Transfixed
and dumb, his neighbors waited,
swatting the buzz of children.
Who would've thought his house
held quite so much . . . how much
would all that fetch?

The sprouted easy chair.
The tapestry, Dante beholding Beatrice.
War medals. Pink-perfect linen tablecloth
still in box. The solid maple dresser.
Those things went cheap.

Good things, like theirs.
Outside the hedge, the neighbors stamped
and sighed in unison.

But the old man's
toys! The wind-up, pop-out, hop-hop,
ping and rattle, whiz-bang, chug-chug,
ring the bell and over the bridge,
for a penny see the monkey climb a tree,
the tin mechanicals! The live-forever
teddies and off-eye smiling dollies
and oh, the smooth wood blocks! All those
the auctioneer could bank on. Bravo!
We clapped for winners,
tossed a smile, a word of appreciation.

In the street,
the curious herd pushed closer.
Who would have thought the old man
had such childhood in him?

Hagall, the letter H, rune of disruptive and elemental forces

Allowing the diligent ants
to hollow out a dwelling
in its core, the great tree
quietly went about its pendulous
business of weeping, leaning

over water, littering the surface
with yellow leaves,
as it had for a century,

until its shell
cracked under heavy rains
as easily as a new-laid egg.

It is the nature of a tree
to be hugely humble, the nature
of ants to be over-zealous,

the nature of Nature to corrupt
and recreate, the nature of us
to name her 'Mother.'

Our nature it is to thrill
at the murmuring forest,
to possess each kind
by naming it, and to take
notes on its falling.

I say the tree had a spirit
I revered and mourn. I say
the ants admired its thickheart
strength and took it for
their totem. But what I say
is sign and symbol, not

the seamless, boundless,
ongoing being that is
corps of ants, corpse of
tree, myself and all the world
around, between.

Isa, the letter I, rune of ice and standstill

In the hall of perpetual light,
women in petal dresses glide
through a thousand rows of candles,
touching, with their golden fingers,
wick after wick to flame.

Voices frail as smoke
rise in a chant of praise and courage
to the weak sun of the shortest days.

Wax hot, wax hot, thou quickener.

North wind wails
to enter walls.
The candles tremble, gutter,
almost fail.

Outside the hall,
on ice-encrusted trees,
buds are already formed.
Magnolia's pale green minarets
and beads of unyielding peaches,
all numbered on the branch.

Beneath the slab of frozen water,
fish barely move their rainbow tails,
feeling for a crack of spring.

In the hall of perpetual light,
women have memorized the miracles
word for word as they were told.

Women are turning to their tasks.
Baste the fat goose,
pinch the lip red,
offer kisses.
Keep the sun from going out.

Squirrel, chipmunk, rabbit, mole
are heartbeats in their hiding places.
The world in throbbing stillness waits.
The longest nights have come.

Nied, the letter N, rune of necessity, hardship and the lessons of time

Old things, buffed and distressed by love,
worn to a noble thinness,
so that my hand fits perfectly
where other hands have been . . .

Take a carpenter's wooden plane
polished by generations,
or a thimble when the silver shows some brass . . .
take a blue and white jug set on a sunny table
where sea winds blow the curtains in . . .
this is what we remember
or have never had and desire,
what we have always worked to possess . . .

It's not the things themselves or their age
or usefulness or beauty . . .
it's the maker's grace, the stories of use,
the pride of handing them down . . .

And when all the owners have gone to ashes,
certain old things
still offer themselves to be touched
under a plainly printed warning
on some museum wall.

Take the plump, three-legged iron pot
that stood in Pompeiiian coals,
standing now in glass and ceramic.

Take the turquoise and red beaded slippers
that danced in dusty ceremony,
or the wine jar of Etruria
whose lady of silent revelry
catches my eye, telling me something important.

Take the Japanese courtesan's lacquered writing box,
full of unwritten letters and poems,
escaped through intrigue, plague, disruption, death,
its surface as smooth and glossy as her hair,
its contents undisturbed for a thousand years
waiting for me to mix the ink . . .

Othel, the letter O, rune of home, property, legacy,
retreat and the native land

One morning I miss the train.
I'm standing in the dust of every year
since the station was built.
The red and silver flash of the engine
hits the sun as it races out of my reach.

I know this is the day
the train will run straight through at last
to the incredible, gilded Forbidden City
that hung on my schoolroom wall.

On board, there will be impromptu parties,
incidental music, celebrities,
unscheduled wine, romantic glances,
free cigarettes and toys—
Chinese dolls, I think, will be given out
dressed in embroidered green satin robes.
They will bow and sing in tiny voices
of gunpowder, noodles and productivity.

I wake from the dream,
and the dream goes on without me.

I go home to where the gulls lean on the wind,
wanting for nothing.
The rain has come, as good as any weather.
I admire its softness.
From my window over the bay,
I watch the ships of different countries
pass each other with brief salute,
warily in the mist.

Finally it's too late to begin
making, remaking the world today.
I applaud the escape of light,
the arrival of coffee.
The afternoon is for connoisseurs.

**Wyrd, blank rune of the unknowable, the karmic path, and
faith**

The old dog narrows his resting places
gradually down to one, a vantage ground
for breathing in his world and looking
somewhere just beyond it. A look I've seen
before. It goes to the center of what is known
and finds the hidden blankness that's so easy
to avoid.

The old dog does not avoid it.
Gathering, gathering every scent, listening
for the cats across the street, savoring
long cool drinks of water. This is everything
and nothing, say his eyes. Eyes that are only
translucent balls of flesh, as brains are pale
stuff, not the endless space we feel inside.
But so expressive, eyes so deep in trust, I
cannot reach the end of it— where is the source?
what kindles them? These are the questions
we ponder, the dog and I, in the late
afternoon, companionably.

After he's gone, his
empty place stands out to my sight as if it were
etched in light and full of all his time, full
of running, jumping, joyous presence.

Dolores Stewart

HOW IT MATTERS

For Eric Pankey

A robin who never sang *cheer up, cheerily*
 built a nest in the scraggly juniper
 beside our front stoop, the maples still bare
 as she set to work, flying in tufts
 and wet clumps and red kite string.
 She sat there, in a bush
 as patchy as an old zoo animal—
 with so few berries I could count them all—
 through wind gusts that shook her
 and downpours that drenched her dun coat.
 She looked miserable, slick and matted,
 but never budged.

A single bird was hatched.

In a few weeks, I saw a fledgling
 crushed on the sidewalk. It may have been
 the same bird, I don't know.
 I think of the mother's endurance
 and indifference, patient in her makeshift nest
 with a gap in the bottom.

I think of the boredom
 of doughboys, outposted in muddy trenches,
 not fighting, but waiting for a culmination,
 drops of rainwater trickling off their helmets.
 I don't know, maybe it matters
 that we suffer futility, without any explanation.
 Maybe effacement is our truest self image.
I don't know is my own refrain, which I mutter
 to myself, to others, to no one, denying
 what I believe.

Yet I see the tired soldiers
 cupping their cigarettes in the damp air

to light them, to hide the glow that would signal
their position.

I don't know how weather
holds us in its easy grip, how the elements
trick us into faith, how the seasons take us in.
I don't know how it matters, how it all
makes sense.

"I don't know," I muttered
in a stuffy train compartment
six people were supposed to sleep in.
A long day in Italy. I grumbled to myself
about misfortune, about my failure to find a room,
missing the sights while looking for accommodations.
It was wet and hot, but at the window
a boy with enormous eyeglasses
stood as we pulled from the station,
gazing at the platform,
the grime, the factories, the crooked tenements,
and whispered, almost like a song
I didn't know, "Ciao, bella Milano."

John Drury

POET CLASS

I.

If we didn't have to work for a living
we'd wake up at 10:15 and stretch
the tendons in our arches
back and forth until they felt right
and then swing our legs over
the edge of our beds

(some of us like old-fashioned
feather brass beds; some like
water beds; none of us sleeps
on sealy posturepedics)

and wait for the right moment in space
and time to heave off from our dreams and
putter to the toilet.

(We have full bladders in the
morning because we drink too much
herbal tea/coffee/guana juice/wine
at night. If we drank less
we'd get up at 11:30.)

We watch the sun hit dust that rises
like bubbles and think how like Heidegger
housework is

(circular work that once done
needs doing again and soon)

and resolve we will never be caught
in the trap of neatness.

II.

When breakfast seems right we eat egg/
cold pizza/wheat germ/wine and get dressed
quick before our mood breaks.

(None of us would ever dress
if people wouldn't stare.
We'd get through the day in our
white cotton nightgowns/
jogging shorts/grey sweats
with the name of our high school
slowly wearing off.)

We like bluejeans and blackjeans and whitejeans
and mid-calf to ankle length skirts and
unconstructed corduroy jackets. We wear
plums and blues and pinks and whites and
almost anything that doesn't look finished.

Once dressed, we sit down on the couch,
exhausted, and stare at the crack
in the ceiling and think how like time
that crack is

(it goes along up to a point
and then stops)

and resolve that our line won't stop before
we get our first/next/last book published.

III.

We need music and like all kinds, even
elevator and hold-button music, but
most of us like classical best because
it helps our writer's block and doesn't
make us want to dance. We all love
Beethoven and Chopin and George Winston.
Those with a tendency to melancholy listen
to Shostakovich. Manic poets enjoy Wagner.

(We all like Simon & Garfunkel
but only listen to them quietly,
at midnight.)

Winter is our season because we can concentrate.
Spring and fall are too distracting
and summer is when we experience life
so we can write about it in winter.
We all love the night best because
it offers a canvas most like our poems —
full of things that can't be easily seen.
None of us likes 7:30 am.

We are thinking all the time and thus
are not good-natured
 (because we're always thinking
 that the world's a grave
 or a sewer or too good for us
 although none of us minds having
 what's too good for us).

IV.

On the question of children we are split.
Some of us like children and the rest
pretend to. Those of us who like children
have them, or want them, and those who pretend
to don't and pretend to want them.
There are good poets on both sides.

You can beat us at chess because we think
metaphorically.

We resisted high-tech for a while but
when we capitulated it was complete.
Even the poorest poet has an IBM PC/
Macintosh/Apple/Commodore/Kaypro
and would rip your nose off with pliers
if you touched it.

 (We worry about the relationships
 we have with our computers.
 It seems weird to love them
 like we do but the truth
 is we'd have sex with them
 if we could because
 like all metaphorical thinkers
 we love logic.)

V.

We have higher moral precepts than the general population but will jump off the high road for anything that promises to fill our poetic heart. We should not be blamed for this.

We are left-handed and age in interesting ways. We dream in vivid colors and most of us hate to wake up because our dreams are like *Wuthering Heights* and life is like a psychology textbook.
We collect things.

We love all people in theory and up to ten in actuality. If we stare at you don't be afraid. We send our poison off at dawn with our worst dream and we only want to find in you
 (because we are knitting a sweater
 to fit)
one strand of the fabric of the universe.

Sandra Blystone

TWO POEMS

A Painter Speaks to Possibilities

You'll never see how God made a rose
stripping it petal by petal back to the hip.
Patience. Watch them loose themselves, not in a vase;
in the garden, day by day, efflorescing for the eye
what formed behind the bud's tough veil.
The exquisite abandonment of beauty itself
the beautiful delineation of form.
How? How can the eye bear sometimes
the graceful weight of the world? The scales
not dropped from the eyes but from the world
itself, yet that last shimmering membrane
will not peel away. And praise the Lord, for
that would be too much; the senses crave
a little mystery, though
the glimpses are so furtive, the beauty so much
in the act of peeling, that bare is how it
might be most days.

What would I not
peel away to see? The world itself. All else,
the way Van Gogh hacked off his lobe—
not the eye, remember that — and how
he painted afterward. The calm
madness in those shot blue eyes; he might have
cut it off for that painting alone—
such little flesh, so few drops bled, to reach such
impassioned equanimity. Look in those eyes
and tell me what you see. Fields with crows
scarring the sky. Cypresses writhing from earth
in the ecstasy of rooted dance. Flowers. Flowers
not painted on, despite the impasto—
the brush just exposing form.

I would pare away my life. My children,
yes, though their eyes, like those
who after a life of blindness had the scales
surgically stripped, can see
the trees like living light, the way the sun
gleams down each leaf's slightest vein
to bring the whole to fire, for children
distract, they clutter life, they
anchor us to earth— which is fine, which is
beautiful and necessary lest our eyes
lose themselves in light to the texture of the tree,
but children burden us. Diapers. These hands
in the toilet's cold water constantly.
Getting the older one up around midnight,
or without fail she will piss the bed.
And the quarrels, the whining, mornings
woken by a squalling child who returns
to sleep in two minutes, leaving me
wide-eyed and tense after two hours sleep.
I would cut that tie away
if the art demanded. I would cut
my wife away, loose those years the way
the petals fall, the natural
declension past ripeness.

Look in those blue eyes
and see the way the wildflowers grow
just inside the wall that marks
the edge of madness. The sun has turned
the little wedge of sky hot gold.

I see your brown eyes flecked with gold
burning, the way your hand, a dozen years
firmer than mine, tries to match
the flow of paint to the flow of color,
how it stubs and blunts itself against
its very firmness. As the firmness fails,
the fingers wilt to the shape the color
takes in the eye.

(stanza continued)

Your brown eyes

I would not cut away; they call the cornfields
out of mine, they fill that space with crows,
with blooming reds and blues, with
grotesque trees dancing the joy of stone. My hand
on the brush would take what your eyes see
and paint what your hand cannot,
bridled by youth, quite yield to — it
yields to me.

Why should those points of light
in your eyes move me so? Like stars,
they bend the irises in rings around themselves.
There, at the window, see how the female cardinal's
wings burn with deeper red as she flies.
Let your eyes hold that buried flame
struck to light. The hand might strike
the flurried wings, the blur, in deft
strokes on the page, but the intensity of light
only paint can hold, only so long as your eye can hold
the light. Peel away the line. Peel away
the part of you that would not yield
down to the curve of hip that hidden gives
the rose its form. Look in those blue eyes and see.

Dimies

"My point of bliss is not upward, but here."

—Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*

All semester, before class and in their journals, my students talked about "Dimies" or wrote how drunk they'd gotten the night before, most censoring details and only alluding to what seductions they were party to. The only bar where, though they proofed you, on Dimies nights one legal age or whose ID stood the bouncer's test could buy ten small beers for a buck and pass them back.

"Stay clear of the men's room," Matt, my student Virgil cautioned as we pushed in.

"You don't want to know." Without his help, I'd never find it. I'd passed the bar on afternoons, the door ajar — one hundred people would make a good-sized crowd. That night, five times my estimate had jammed inside, flowing like watered beer to fill the least space between bodies.

We flowed, too, sliding to fill each gap as quickly as it appeared, the crowd closing behind us. He got us beers, and while we tried to talk, the mass sucked us deeper in, tossing us like two who lacked sea legs in a storm. elegant columns of cigarette smoke breaking to chaos above us, the floor strewn with unseen cans and crumpled cups. We shook our heads and mouthed

words, the sound pulled upward and lost in the two-foot space between us. Isn't it Hardy who writes of a church filled on Christmas Eve? — the small nave packed, their bodies shedding cold in the shared warmth of spirit, their voices, harsh, ragged with catarrh, lifted to angelic purity in the familiar hymns. Yet when the music died, the preacher's voice broke on silence.

Here, when the tape deck cued to a song they'd all heard often on their radios or other nights at Dimies, the clamor harmonized to one clear voice; the beat rocked us from Brownian motion to magnetized unity. By the third chorus, my legs no longer resisted and my voice joined in words my tongue seemed to know although my ear never heard them. The song stopped and a sudden surge

dragged me away from Matt and pitched me against a woman whose eyes moved over my face, without a smile, without seeing. What, when the taps ran dry and the neon went dark, would guide her, would guide all of them, back from this ring even Dante never envisioned? Would their shared charge dissipate in the cool night, the visible shimmer of heat, past the halated streetlamps to stars? And how,

swaying with them, could I judge them so harshly? — who at the end of that night would drive, lonely as they would climb onto a bus and wordlessly ride to their dormrooms, to where lights in the motel court would greet me, to strip and slide between cool sheets without a prayer.

Allen Hoey

TWO POEMS

Poem for a Birthday

I have more and more years, less
and less time: what have I gained?
What has anyone my age
gained? We stay poor in a poor
world that no one can live in.
When has anyone ever
really lived in this world? How
has it been possible? When?
How many years must it be
— and how many wars — since I
first feared war? Yet now there is
new talk of war, the same war
as ever, and still we fear
new panic and pestilence,
riot and pillage, just as
of old: we are still that poor,
so how can anyone live
here where we are? Who can say,
“I have lived my life fully;
I have had a rich life” — who
has been given such spaces
of time with such luxuries
of days to hoard or squander
at will? I used to think this
would come, our rewards would come,
but new years came with new wars,
new sores and plagues, new shouters
with stones, new smiters with swords,
and they were always the same
ones, struggling as hard as we
did, with no more time than we
had, demanding our strength, our
time, and they kept returning,
doing what they felt had to
be done, so we spent our time

(stanza continued)

— we spent ourselves — on them, they
claimed us, they took up our time;
and now we have less time, and
there is always no time left
to live in the world. Who has
lived in the world ever? What
fool, villain, liar dare boast,
“Look, I have lived in the world;
see, I have lived out my life”?

The Caves

Beneath these rolling fields
or hidden behind these rocks,
somewhere where no one can find them without effort,
somewhere you might not expect them to be,
they are:

worlds within this world,
worlds you pass by
or step over,
dark worlds, silent,

yet worlds with their own forests and plains,
worlds with mountains, canyons, cliffs,
and cities: there are cities here,
and streets,
streets lined with spires and blocks of towers,

and here are gardens, mazes, ruins
all made by no hands
from drops of water
no eye has seen,

and when you come upon this,
if ever you do,
you bring light to it then,

you behold it and, marveling,
let your sight define it:
this form without design,
this endless creation
perfect and purposeless.

MISSOURI

Lying out in the switch-grass
to feel the ground-echo
of the train eating away
the flat-land dark of Missouri;
Cairo, Paris, Mexico,
county-talk dry
as a locust shell.

At night on a brick street,
I sat on the tar patch
of the roof, rubbing
moonlight into my hair;
hoping to be changed.

Scent of a mud-bottomed river
still on my skin,
born in the wrong town,
born from the wrong family,
given the wrong name.

Going out after midnight,
oak smell in the cool air,
the dry winds shifting,
chaff, the clang
of a silo side, drum-shadow
of a water-tank in starlight.

The thought of other towns,
a city, a bone-change
coming to me, the strangeness
of breasts, the strangeness
of other places, an itch
healing me.

Rita Gabis

from HERETICAL TESTAMENTS

Old Man among Old Men*

Confess that you are a hopeless voyeur,
flattening your nose to our windows,
loiterer and malingerer,
infecting the air and making it scruffy
and your cheek is a lean and greasy scrag
dabbled with dribbles of sweat, confess!
You feed don't you on the sordes
and gurry of our negligent lives
enjoying a meager ubiquity
in alleyways and by outhouses
gesticulating like wash on the line
with audacity and quickened color,
O Emperor of All the Mongrels
and Master of Oily Nebulae
smeared across the rain-slicked streets . . .

With the ommatidia of prayer,
I number the hairs on your helplessly breathing
chest, in meditation I tail
you into and out of ramshackle shelters,
in poetry I array you rib
to tibia and phalanges, because
you are more my father than my father,
homeless old man among old men.

* A Cabbalistic designation for God.

Fragment of a Heretical Testament

At 10^{-43} seconds
into creation God became disabled
by a stroke which separated gravitation
from the strong, weak, and electromagnetic forces
and rendered Him an incalculably brooding old man
though without curtailing His phenomenal growth,
particularly that of the divine beard
whose loops and spirals have continued to tickle,
itch, provoke, and scandalize sundry thinkers
and which as we know began to sprout quite early—

At 10^{-6} seconds
when the universe had cooled sufficiently
for protons to form (God is the only creature
to begin life with senility and then
experience the unbridled growth of a child)
so that some 15×10^9 years later
we are living entangled in that luxuriance
of unclipped whiskers consisting of superclusters
of galaxies, each with 10^2 to 10^3 clusters, alternating
with spherical or elliptical voids, but imagine

At 10^0 seconds
God's cheekbones, measured now in megaparsecs,
fit in the span of a single centimeter,
a nub or nut from which the hum
of probability ceaselessly issued
(a stunned God and all
that ever was or will be, pulsing
in the palm of your non-existent hand)
yielding a universe riddled
with insatiable sinkholes and inexhaustible sources.

Philip Fried

from THE MESSIAH CYCLE

Nathan's Quarrel with the Angels

Better call them rats' or little bears'
skeletons slipped into a leathery
umbrella of wings, an earthly thing battered
and lost in a heavenly and flapping texture—
some of them millions of years wise and blind
in an obscure cave of crusted feces,
princes of black, brown, gray, and red ermine,
resting upside-down, roosting, blood
accommodating the infinitesimal breathing
of inner earth. Often I hear their thin
and sharp teeth reducing some prey to soupy
digestible stuff, or their high-pitched whistle
crackling at the world's solidities.

Celestial machines with the head of a dog,
inhabitants of attics and other high
places of our low dwellings, these
are the angels, diminished, intermittent gods,
tormentors of men, transmitters who receive
the world by millennia and send it by seconds,
needing our ear to lick at and whisper wonders,
insinuating heaven into our narrow
echo-labyrinth of synapse and marrow.

Seeing one dead I said good riddance to all
visionary and fantastical speech,
lifting it by its outsize wings from the rubbish,
a nugget of ridiculously light
bone, and wondered how this thing had ever
twittered a dream of universal justice.

Philip Fried