

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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CONTENTS

- | | | |
|-----|--------------------|---|
| 5. | | <i>Introduction</i> |
| 9. | Dannie Abse | <i>Anti-Clockwise 1</i>
<i>Anti-Clockwise 2</i> |
| 11. | Philip Booth | <i>Hey, Bro</i> |
| 12. | Gwendolyn Brooks | <i>Jane Addams</i> |
| 14. | Charles Bukowski | <i>credo</i>
<i>the only life</i> |
| 16. | | |
| 18. | Hayden Carruth | <i>Pray You Young Woman</i> |
| 19. | Robert Creeley | <i>Chain</i>
<i>Shadow</i> |
| 20. | | <i>Skin</i> |
| 21. | Cid Corman | <i>There Are No Others</i>
<i>The Four-Letter Word</i>
<i>The Shuffle</i> |
| 22. | Richard Eberhart | <i>June 22</i> |
| 23. | D. J. Enright | <i>Primitives</i>
<i>Hearts</i> |
| 24. | | <i>Paradise Retained</i> |
| 25. | | <i>And</i> |
| 26. | Daniel Hoffman | <i>Speech</i> |
| 28. | Edwin Honig | <i>Grave Gods</i> |
| 32. | David Ignatow | <i>Imagine</i>
<i>The Manacled Youth</i> |
| 33. | | <i>Aesthetics</i> |
| 34. | Elizabeth Jennings | <i>Springtime for Louise</i> |
| 36. | Galway Kinnell | <i>The Cat</i> |
| 38. | Maxine Kumin | <i>On Visiting a Friend in Southern
California</i> |
| 39. | | <i>The Porch Swing</i> |
| 40. | Philip Levine | <i>The Gift</i> |
| 41. | | <i>The Fast</i> |

CONTENTS

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------|--|
| 43. | Howard Nemerov | <i>August</i> |
| 44. | Adrienne Rich | <i>Marghanita</i> |
| 46. | May Sarton | <i>December Moon</i> |
| 47. | William Jay Smith | <i>The Players</i> |
| 50. | William Stafford | <i>Learned at the Weavers' Barn</i> |
| 51. | | <i>Snow</i> |
| 52. | May Swenson | <i>A Tree in Spring</i> |
| 53. | Peter Viereck | <i>Freed from Superstition, Hurrah</i> |
| 54. | John Wain | <i>Your House</i> |
| 56. | Theodore Weiss | <i>Quartet</i> |

Designer of this issue: Mary Lu Greene.

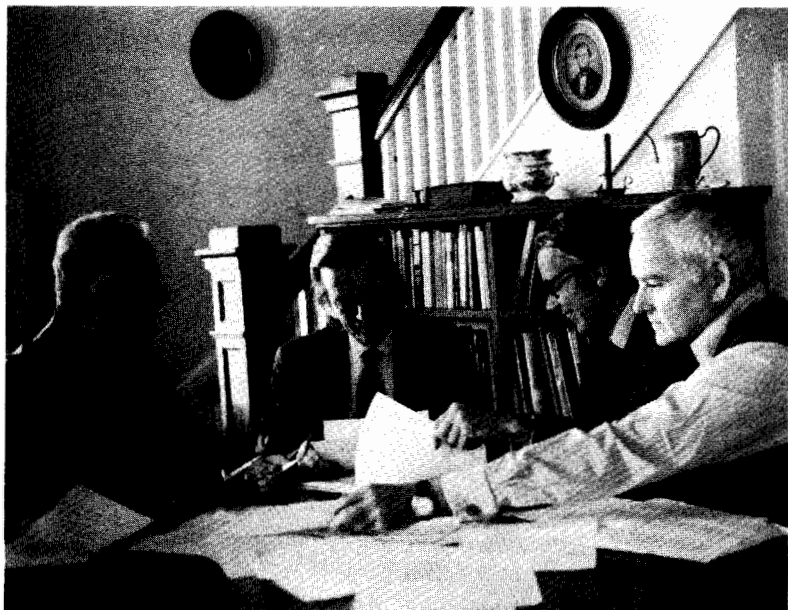
Cover : A contemporary version of a 1953 photograph of an Editorial Board meeting. Left-to right: Editors Robert Glauber, Chad Walsh, and David Stocking, with Associate Editor Lou (Bink) Noll.

INTRODUCTION

With this issue we complete our fortieth year. And to mark the occasion, we're departing from some of our most hallowed traditions. Instead of choosing from what comes in over the transom (our "transom" being a slightly battered RFD box on a gravel road in Maine), instead of looking for new voices, we have asked a few of the poets we published in our first decade to honor us with examples of their new work. And it is an honor indeed to present here these new poems by men and women we recognize today as some of the strongest voices in twentieth-century poetry.

Most poets, like Josephine Miles and James Dickey, came to us by way of a transom in Beloit, Wisconsin, where the magazine was founded in 1950 by Chad Walsh and Robert Glauber. Others, like Louis Simpson and Richard Wilbur, received invitations to submit from one of our guest editors. A few, like Adrienne Rich, had already achieved recognition before we published them; others, like Galway Kinnell and Anne Sexton, were truly our discoveries. Most, then and now, come unsolicited, and about half, over the years, have been women.

The aims of the magazine as Chad and Robin drafted them in 1950 have served us well, and we have never thought to change them: "*The Beloit Poetry Journal* considers itself independent in its editorial policy, publishing the best poems it receives without preconceptions as to form, content, length, or allegiance. It also tries to keep its readers abreast of new directions in today's poetry." Diversity has always been an aim. Only one of the founders was in academic life, and of our present staff of eight, only three hold college or university positions, and of those, one is in China and one in Australia. I doubt there is any other magazine that has published Philip Larkin and Charles Bukowski in the same issue. To celebrate the diversity of contemporary poetry, beyond what volunteers itself in the daily mail, we have had chapbooks as part of the regular subscription, starting with Langston Hughes's translation of Lorca's *Gypsy Ballads* in 1951. We published the first U.S. anthology of concrete poetry (1966) and most recently John Rosenwald's collection of new work by poets under forty in the People's Republic of China, published in 1989 on the eve of the fatal uprising



1975: A reunion of the 1953 Editorial Board (left to right) Robert Glauber, Chad Walsb, and David Stocking, Editors, with Lou (Bink) Noll.

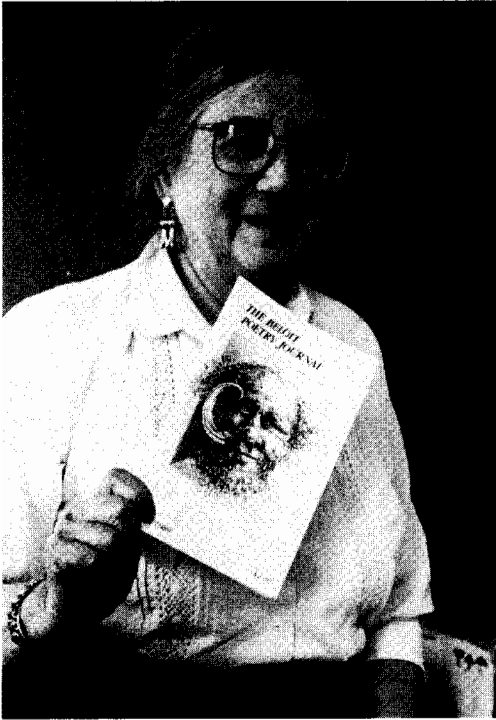
in and around Tienanmen Square. To further expand our readers' horizons we have steadily extended our review section.

Interviewers usually ask for "the secret of our success." I don't consider longevity in itself success, but I can say that our longevity has been due to our keeping the production little, so that one person can, if necessary, do all the work and pay all the bills. In my thirty-five years as an editor, we have enjoyed support from an ever-changing but always imaginative and diligent editorial board which assembles four times a year to make final decisions on content. This year we took a major step to insure future continuity: we changed from a private magazine, owned and edited by one person—myself—to a publication of The Beloit Poetry Journal Foundation, a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation, with a board of directors. I remain the Editor; I have a stable Editorial Board; and the editorial staff varies as usual from issue to issue, as our new masthead records.



1984: *Editors David and Marion Stocking, at the time of the move to Maine.*

But what true success we have had and hope to have in future decades is harder to evaluate. Certainly we have been fortunate in the quality of the poetry that has come to us. When I open an envelope and find a poem that transforms the way I see the world, I enjoy a microcosm of the magazine's true success. But final decisions are almost never mine. The achievement of the magazine is in a real way the success of the editorial process that Chad and Robin established: a diverse board screens submissions, and at the quarterly meetings we read aloud all the poems that have engendered enthusiasm. Our emphasis is always on the poem, not the poet. We don't recognize the names of most of the poets we accept, and we normally don't print notes on contributors. As the current issue demonstrates, time will make such notes unnecessary. New poetry by strong poets is our primary goal. In this we do think we have achieved some distinction, and considering the richness of the poetry world today, all over the world, I see no reason that this success should not continue.



1990: Editor
*Marion Stocking on the
fortieth anniversary of
The Beloit Poetry Journal.*

(Photograph by David Walker,
courtesy of *Preview*)

I'd like to dedicate this issue to Chad Walsh and to the memory of Robin Glauber and of David Stocking, who joined the editorial board in 1950. And I'd like to thank from my heart all the poets who gave us our start in that first decade.

Marion Stocking

And with grateful recollections of:

John Ciardi
Langston Hughes
Philip Larkin
John Logan
Archibald MacLeish

Josephine Miles
Charles Olson
Gil Orlovitz
Anne Sexton
William Carlos Williams

Two Poems

ANTI-CLOCKWISE I

'Nothing to do with sex, doctor.' Her voice dies.
In the consulting room's firegrate, no fire.
Last summer's dried flowers, sweet lies, nest there.

Now if through her eyes I could slowly pan,
with ophthalmoscope, would I blunderingly
light up single beds in separate bedrooms?

Whispers and sighs. I cannot say, 'What?' again.
So observe her mouth's theatre, how she turns
and turns her wedding ring, anti-clockwise.

•

ANTI-CLOCKWISE 2

Before breakfast, from my bedroom window,
behold jogging Des, our grey-haired neighbour,
conspicuous in vest and shorts — how he
puffs and blows past our railings.
Rejuvenation therapy, he says.

I think of Abishag the Shunammite,
that most beautiful girl — sheer dynamite —
she ministered to the aged King.
Disaster: he knew her not. Soon was dead.
And Hermann Boerhaave, that Dutch physician,

(13th century) sweet buttery girls failing,
thought he would undo the mortal lock
by placing, instead, two untrousered youths
each side of the prostrate burgomaster.
With what results nobody knows. Don't mock,
only the young don't wish to be younger.
Some, credulous, still receive intramuscular
drug-muck, testicular extracts; some just
eat yoghurt. Once some blithely feasted
on viper-meat or drank youthful blood (cheers!)
from freshly opened veins—and not always
volunteers. So I suppose it's better
that my cock and cardiac minded neighbour
this bright and bloody early morning
(his doleful wife still staring at the ceiling)
should run anti-clockwise round the block.

Dannie Abse

HEY, BRO

my bro-in-law said as
we shook, *How's it goin'?*
Me, I'd driven a thousand,
down the coast corridor,
I-95, 65 all the way, to
my Mom-in-law's 90th.
Come from where sailors
win by the cost of their
spinnakers to where golfers
score by the wealth of
their clubs; come from where
property once was land to
where suburbs grow on top
of old farms, to where barrier
islands are filled with wall-
to-wall condos. *Hey*, I said
to my bro-in-law, *it's goin*
all right. And the rest of
them all came at me,
putting familiar hands out,
as I continued to shake.

Philip Booth

JANE ADDAMS

September 6, 1860 — May 21, 1935.

I am Jane Addams.

I am saying to the giantless time —
to the young and yammering, to the old and corrected,
well, chiefly to Children Coming Home
with worried faces and questions about world-survival —
“Go ahead and live your life.
You might be surprised. The world might continue.”

It was not easy for *me*, in the days of the giants.

And now they call me a giant.

Because my capitals were Labour, Reform, Welfare,
Tenement Regulation, Juvenile Court Law (the first),
Factory Inspection, Workmen's Compensation,
Woman Suffrage, Pacifism, Immigrant Justice.

And because

Black, brown and white and red and yellow
heavied my hand and heart.

I shall tell you a thing about giants

that you do not wish to know.

Giants look in mirrors and see
almost nothing at all.

But they leave their houses nevertheless.

They lurch out of doors

to reach *you*, the other stretchers and strainers.

Erased under ermine or loud in tatters, oh
moneyed or mashed, you
matter.

You matter. And giants
must bother.

I bothered.

Whatever I was tells you
the world might continue! Go on with your preparations,
moving among the quick and the dead;
nourishing here, there;
pressing a hand
among the ruins,
and among the
seeds of restoration.

So speaks a giant. Jane.

Gwendolyn Brooks

Two Poems**credo**

always fighting not to die in
life,
digging in again as the overwhelming
darkness looms —
always in some new form, a
changing shape
to trick you into
submissiveness, to
take you out,
finally, to
finish you
damned good and
well.

always fighting not to die in
life,
not to become what you see everywhere,
not to become them,
it,
nothing.

always fighting not to die in
life,
it's worth whatever it takes not to
look like the president
not to speak like the actor, not to
be the hero in the stadium, not to
be the rich man, not to
be the smiling teeth of everlasting
joy
or
the last bitter dregs of the
sage; not to
be ever so many things.
not to
become but to
remain.

always fighting not to die in
life.

if anything makes sense,
let's call it
this.

the only life

I was like one of those nuts from centuries past, I was
Romantically mad with my fixation — ha, ha, to be a
writer, I wrote night and day, I even wrote when I was
asleep
and most often I wrote when I was drunk, even when I
wasn't writing.

ah, those dozens of cheap rooms, my belly flattened to
my asshole, I became 133 pounds on a 6 foot
frame, I STARVED, haha, so I could write.
(this is a true story) (aren't they all?) and
all my writings came back and I finally had to
throw them away because
there was more space of paper than there was space of
me
and I continued to write new works which continued to
come back and I thought
Schopenhauer, Van Gogh, Shostakovitch, Celine, Dos-
toevski
and I continued to write and it came back
again
and I thought
Villon, Gorky, Turgenev, Sherwood Anderson
and I wrote and wrote
and still nothing happened
and when I finally did EAT
you have no idea how
BEAUTIFUL FOOD CAN TRULY BE, EACH BITE LIKE A MIRACLE OF
SUNLIGHT TO THE STAGGERING SOUL, haha,
and I thought
Hamsun, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot
but nothing happened —
all my typewriters to hock and gone I
printed the pages in ink
and they came back

(Stanza continued)

and I threw them away
and wrote some more and starved some
more.

oh, I had an apprenticeship, I did, and now I've had a bit of
luck, some are beginning to think that I can write, but
actually only the writing is the thing, now as it was then,
whether yes or no or in between, it's only the writing, it's
the only go when all else says stop
and some of it still comes back now and I think
Nietzsche, e.e. Cummings, Robinson Jeffers, Sartre, Camus, Hem-
ingway
the sound of the machine, the sound of the machine, words
biting into paper, there is nothing else, there can be nothing
else, whether it comes back, whether it stays and when
it ends, ha
ha.

Charles Bukowski

PRAY YOU YOUNG WOMAN

Pray you young woman come to my bed clean
And that your lover's dregs be drained away.
Come not quickly but leave time in between.
I'm old and waitful, I can stand delay
Better than that too clearly you'd betray
My doting. True. Sweetie, you must be mean
A little, devious and deceitful, and not say
You come from him — I know. Just go, obscene
As you may wish, and play the long bright day
With his and your young bodies; then the screen
Of night draw over us that my decay
Be hidden. For your hands can touch gangrene
 And make it seem it were green springtime still
 In perjury and mercy if you will.

Hayden Carruth

Three Poems**CHAIN**

Had they told you, you
were "four or more cells
joined end to end," the Latin,
catena, "a chain," the loop,
the running leap to actual
heaven spills at my stunned
feet, pours out the imprison-
ing threads of genesis,
oh light beaded necklace,
chain round my neck, my
inexorably bound birth, the sweet
closed curve of fading life?

SHADOW

There is a shadow
to intention a place
it comes through and
is itself each stasis
of its mindedness ex-
plicit walled into
semblance it is a
seemingly living place
it wants it fades it
comes and goes it puts
a yellow flower in a pot
in a circle and looks.

SKIN

You are too didactic
and your phoney hair
loops unattractively
like the black smoke
and the neat fire fools
no one nor luck of prophetic
daisy atop the bone
saves this day you'd have
the three logs three
flames be the invitation
come to the fire! orange
paled horror I see as myself.

Robert Creeley

These three poems are from a sequence of eighteen written to complement pastels by Francesco Clemente. The complete sequence was printed by Bruno Bischofberger Editions in Zurich to accompany an exhibition of the pastels in May 1989.

Three Poems**1/ THERE ARE NO OTHERS**

There are no others —
only you your selves
the original

individual
none. Together is
the occasion you —

as I — have come to.
What choice is there — here —
but to share the breath?

**2/ THE
FOUR-LETTER WORD**

Whatever it means
is its meaning — what
it feels like when it

isnt there. I — you —
the binding word — the
preposition — verb.

**3/ THE
SHUFFLE**

Like coming out of
tomorrow finding
it yesterday. Where

did today get lost?
How can now be so
different from this?

JUNE 22

If you were a tree you would have no words.
How could you say what you have heard?

It is the longest day of the year.
Is the coming shortest day something to fear?

Sumptuousness is now, toward evening's richness.
There is no word that will rhyme with richness.

A long moment of nature's silence
Blots out any idea of violence.

The time is rich with moveless trees and flowers.
The thought about it is uniquely ours.

We fit into the present as if it were eternity
When it is only the longest day of the year we see.

Full summer is here with lavish insistence,
Our history due to our two-legged persistence.

Richard Eberhart

Four Poems**PRIMITIVES**

'Warn Wójcik the place on Długa Street is hot.' There is still a place for ink and paper, despite our super technologies. A piece of paper can be burnt; flavoured with ink, it can be swallowed. Unlike the tape of a phone call or a video cassette. The missive (cognate with mission) is the message.

Did Wójcik keep cool, did he escape the clutches? One day paper and ink will tell us. As they have told us so many of the things we know, including some we would rather not (but had better).

HEARTS

He is a hard man, he brooks no opposition
His will shall be done.
His creatures rush to implement it
(More thoroughly at times than he intended).
They read his mind, as they reckon
For their eyes are sharp.
In their hearts they may not favour
Everything they do
(In private they wring their hands softly)
But they do it.

How he must despise his creatures!
Us he must surely respect, we are honest
We are men of conviction, like him.
He must surely admire the likes of us
In his heart of hearts.

Don't bank on those hearts of hearts
My friends. They lie buried deep.

PARADISE RETAINED

It is only proper that we should wonder at such perfection
Unused though we are to what would be termed imperfect,
This being in essence a place of perfect equity and concord.
Some say the blacks see the white people as totally black
And the whites see the blacks as white through and through,
Others that such is the climate we are all equally bronzed.
Those first proportions have been preserved, and thus
Fish and fowl and beasts of the field outstrip us humans.
We are vegetarian by nature, animals in plenty range happy
And unactive, forms of ophidia (since you ask) among them.

Someone of late has fashioned a story of how we were forced
Out of this world, under a mysterious threat from the skies.
It's a horrible affair. The things that happened afterwards!
He calls it 'science fiction', a foolish tautology.
There was talk of banning it. But all of us are sinless,
And hence the writer and his book must be so too, it seems.

We have no 'death' here, a fancy of that scribbler, who made
Everybody in his story 'die', a lazy way of ending it I thought.
Not even a mayfly falls, yet our expanding earth is ample
To sustain the growing numbers, vacant possession still the rule;
Plants there are to prune, delicious fruits to pluck, until
(As legend tells) our bodies may at last turn all to spirit.
The Lord provides, he always has. He so loves the world.

Yet 'death' darkens my mind as I stroll beneath the trees (one is
Best eschewed) and play with the creatures or my unreluctant mate:
Our Maker calls for increase. This alone makes 'death' unseemly,
Even for elephants, although they do impede one's walks
(We understand their tongue, they have so little to convey).
And yet, and yet, mightn't it at least discourage the devising
Of such sick displeasing stuff? Strictly as a last resort.

AND

And God said, Let there be dark: and there was dark.

And God said, Let there be darkness in the firmament of the heavens; and let it be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.

But there went up a mist from the earth.

So God created man in his own image, more or less, male and female created he them.

And God said, Be fruitful, and multiply, and subdue the earth, and have dominion over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it, and on the seventh day God rested from all his work which he created and made.

Now the serpent was more subtle.

D. J. Enright

SPEECH

It's hard to tell which
of his cluckings and gnashings
are consonants for sure.
Not easy, though you try

To make out his vowels
from the slurps, to distinguish
among noises, words.
But the fellow wants to communicate,

he has things on his mind to say.
So wherever he goes he carries
an alphabet on a folding board.
You'd think it was chess or backgammon

and if he'd sit still for a minute
and keep his head from lolling
it would seem he is wild about games.
He has stumbled onto the bus,

he's sprawled in an empty seat.
Now he points a twisted finger
to one, then another letter.
The woman beside him looks around her.

He thrusts the board before her.
His limbs have lives of their own.
Should she move to another seat?
Strange gurgles come out of his throat.

Everyone's looking at her.
Why does he want her to look
as his forefinger gropes toward the J?
Of what is it that she is afraid?

Now his finger crawls back to the box
containing the E, and stops.
She watches it lunge to the S
while the skin around his mouth

stretches in sideways smile.
His thumb seems screwed on backwards
but the forefinger jerks back and forth
as she sits perfectly still

to U and returns to S
and lurches away and returns
to S and the woman beside him
has all this while been bemused

to know what he was doing.
But that's not the problem now.
She can guess what he's trying to say
but not what she should reply,

or how to address a creature
in such a case — should she speak
with especially slow
and clear enunciation

so he could read her lips?
She knows she has only the time
he takes to fumble and find
the A, the V, then E

and S to make up her mind.

Later she will recall
she wasn't afraid at all.

It was like talking to someone

who is wearing a strange disguise. 'Yes,
that's true' — her easy words once out,
his body for a time is as still
as is one who is eased of his burden.

GRAVE GOODS

Near Woodbridge in Suffolk
where the tidal estuary of the Deben River
runs roughly north and south
six miles from the sea
there lay an empty stretch
of sandy heath covered with turf and bracken.

(The land had recently been cultivated.)

There in 1939 on a grim gray morning
common to the region,
a sizable group of ancient barrows
were discovered.

At that time
before the land was cultivated
and the escarpment was bare
overlooking the tidal waters
from the rest of a one-hundred-foot contour
were found fifteen barrows:
mainly a great ship barrow
jutting out on a spur of land
between two coombs.

Noticeable in the seventeenth century
from the sea but now at high tide
all the barrows are at least half a mile inland.
Before sea walls were built
around the sixth and seventh centuries
the barrows must have been
only six hundred yards from high water
a good long haul for any large boat.

Of the two barrows containing cremations
one was apparently intact
the other ransacked.
The third contained an inhumed burial
apparently deposited in a small boat.

But the burial had been ransacked
and the boat virtually destroyed.
Only seven rivets out of forty recovered
were found undisturbed.

*The finds
though sparse and fragmentary
showed unusual regard for the dead.*

A sampling follows:
the tip of a pattern-welded sword
an ornamental fragment from a shield
one huge drinking horn made of auroch's horn
some pieces of a blue glass bowl made in Kent
an imported hardstone plaque
of Classical or Early Byzantine origin
finely carved
part of a winged figure possibly a Victory
a small bronze bowl lid
of some imported vessel
from the eastern Mediterranean
of Byzantine or Roman origin
an iron axe head
a small plain bone gaming counter
flat on one side
convex on the other.

In the plainly vanished ship
were dead men's finger rings
pendants pins thongs gold thread
from shoes and clothes or shrouds
swords jewelry and the like.
All reveal themselves intact
but show no body laid in this grave
nothing to which one might say
these remnants these ornaments
were particularly attached.

*Say where the body is
that warmed them.*

Acid soil eliminates
all traces of a body
even teeth.

Then say the body is absent.

On the other hand the presence of
some cremated bone leads one
to conjecture
that perhaps not long before
a few centuries say —

*Any body is only a few years
and many tears old.*

of course it's impossible to say
the source of which
— only some casts and chemical residues remain —
were animal or human
and therefore to speak
of a funeral feast of sacrificed animals
is totally conjectural.

There is of course the Anastasius dish.

What's in the Anastasius dish?

A base ring and four control stamps
but no fragments of grave goods
such as one normally finds and gathers up
from funeral piles.

*What body ate from that dish?
Who was it lived there and where?*

No trace at all exists
at least nothing identifiable
as human residue.

*Say if someone was burnt there
or were his remains lost
or bit by bit taken from the ship
or burnt inside the ship.*

The issue is complicated.

Then what was in the char?

The chemical traces point
only to cremated bone
and if so
you see
the ship itself is a genuine cenotaph.

*But where are the slaves
the servants and the wives?
Where are the animals
the horses and the sheep?*

The white phosphate matter
recovered from the interstices
between shield and helmet -
have still to be analyzed.

Are you speaking of any body?

Of a set of bone draftsmen
perhaps.

Then what's the upshot of it all?

Further excavation
might reveal —

*Good God, the whole world
is a graveyard!*

Three Poems**IMAGINE**

Imagine picking up a gun
and after fitting that crow in your sights
you pull the trigger. He bounces,
to your delight. Contact.
You have the most friendly feeling:
he now knows you are here.
You let him know
and he responded.

• • • •

Just one day without a killing
and already everyone's upset
looking high and low in the papers
to see if it is true
that we no longer have news
to comfort and excite us
at the same time. We are
in bed safe, thrilled
it was the other guy.

THE MANACLED YOUTH

He walks briskly between two cops
towards the courthouse to be judged
for an act to which he was disposed,
without a home, without a father,
without money, without help or sympathy —
whose mother cared even less because
her lover gave her more.

Judge him for the murder of his friend
whose home was what his own had been,
where dope was plentiful for kicks.
It was murder by impulse.

He is a curious being, searching out
the springs of life. In his face
is freshness to learn of the meaning
of murder, now that he has learned absence,
neglect, hatred and abuse and last now
about death. He looks forward to it
with that same curiosity, as he approaches
the courthouse with brisk step
between two cops stolid and slow.

AESTHETICS

I want a poem that tells itself what to do:
go and meet people, talk and convince them
you desire their friendship in a house together.
Poem, be my love, be their patient standby
when they kill or curse themselves.

SPRINGTIME FOR LOUISE

Child of no sex or sense
Of time, set me aside
Hidden in shadow which
You do not know. Your wide
Eyes see a world so rich
It dazzles you in your
Still almost — innocence.

I say “almost” because
You are a little stained
Like every one of us
But you look outward and
Revel in a preened
World where sunlight pours
Like words we understand

Because their shine is great,
Spring is upon us and
You live in that kind of state
Which glows and wonders at
Such flocks of flowers, such birds
Of purest song which set
Aside my stumbling words.

Child of long looks of grace,
You read the papers, then
Turn to a world you've made
Not out of self but of
Tall women, princely men.
You feel a selfless love
You'll never know again.

Selfhood will shadow you
And halt your steps and make
Your awed imagination
Open to all heart-break.
But now you learn each sound
For the sweet singing's sake
And walk on holy ground.

Elizabeth Jennings

THE CAT

The first thing that happened
was that somebody borrowed the Jeep,
drove fifty feet, went off the road.
The cat may have stuck a tire iron
or baseball bat into the steering wheel.
I don't know if it did or didn't.
I do know — I don't dare say it aloud —
when the cat is around something goes wrong.
Why doesn't our host forewarn us? Well,
he tries. He gives each guest on arrival
a list of instructions about the cat.
I never was able to read mine,
for the cat was watching when I got it,
so I stuck it in my pocket to read later,
but the cat saw, leapt at me, nearly
knocked me down, clawed at the pocket,
would have ripped my clothes off
if I had not handed it over.
The guest book contains the name
of the young woman who was my friend,
who brought me here in the first place,
who is the reason I have come back,
to find out what became of her.
But no one would tell me anything.
Except tonight, my final evening,
at dinner, the host says, "There is someone. . .
someone. . . a woman. . . in your life. . ."
I know he means her but why the present tense?
"Whom you have in. . ." The next word
sounds like "blurrarree"
but it could be "slavery."
"Well, yes," I say, taken aback,
"Yes, but where is the cat?"
"It is an awful thing you are doing,"

(Stanza continued)

he goes on, "Quite awful." "But who?"
I protest, "What are you talking about?"
"The cat," he says, "When you lock her up
she becomes dangerous." "The cat?
What cat?" I remember I saved a kitten
out of the burlap sack when I was seven,
I was fathering or mothering her, my father
or mother said, 'Stop smothering it.'
Suddenly an electric force grabs my feet.
I see it has seized the host too —
he is standing up, his hands are flopping
at his sides. "What is it?" I whisper.
"I'm washing the dishes," he says.
"O my God," I think.
"I'm washing the dishes," he repeats.
I realize he is trying to make the cat think
he is not in a seizure but washing the dishes.
If either of us lets on about the seizure
I know for certain the cat will kill us both.

Galway Kinnell

Two Poems

ON VISITING A FRIEND IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

From the messily fecund trees she rejoices in
that arc and droop across her rooftop,
my friend estimates her head count runs
a thousand avocados a season.

Lemons as casual as acorns scatter
on the pavement, and oh the loquats raining
and the stain of superfluous persimmons . . .

In the eyes of a New Englander
God appears here a forgetful sloven
rotund and careless with cotyledons,
strewing the land with seed as if in mid-yawn,
letting a little of every unplanned
good thing trickle from the Almighty hand . . .

But who could overlook her favorite,
an elm brought overland in 1898
as a hopeful twig, now grown into a massive
Midwestern exotic that has outlasted
the rush for gold, the freeway toxins,
surfboards, fast foods, lotus-eating?
It holds on with a taproot deep as
the hellfire sermons of John Wesley,
wrestling the devil in soil and water
to go down sin-free into the hereafter.

THE PORCH SWING

We embarrass each other.
He tells the assemblage at dinner
that he is my much younger brother,
a teenager who lost his hair
early, this cinnamon-toasted
bald squinting barrel-chested
man ten years my senior
who resembled sidelong the square
shape of our progenitor

and I am his none
too secret mortification,
a writer, a species of liar
thinly disguising the whereabouts
squabbles, sexual habits
of people we lived with, namely
those voices and mirrors, our family.

Old orphans, our three middle siblings
dead, we look death straight
in its porcelain teeth, daring it
to squeeze onto the porch swing
where we rock away half a century

past Pop's mustache, his cubeb cigarettes,
his cap and squire's cape for Sundays,
the taffeta swish of Mama's best dress,
the maiden aunts stained from grating beets,
lifeguards rowing the breakers at Cape May . . .

We back once more in our private sun,
the known astonishments of what has been.

Maxine Kumin

Two Poems

THE GIFT

for Aaron

Wrapping the myrrh and frankincense
their hands must have shaken
so badly they could barely fold
the paper or blow the ribbons into bows.
They had not even seen the child
whose eyes (in spite of all those
warehouses of paintings) must have been
deep and mysterious with the wonder
of first being a child. They had not seen
the new formed star that would guide them,
or the long road studded with billboards,
truck stops, car barns, caravansaries,
much less the final destination,
which would not be magical, starbright,
expensive Los Angeles where the continent
dips down like a drainage pipe and spills
itself into the ocean, but a dead end
in a small town miles east of there.
A light glows above the scene, the baby
sits by himself, already used to being
stared at by passing senators and unorganized
day laborers. I step forward out
of the darkness of the dividing centuries
and present him with a genuine harmonica
exactly like the one my wife gave Aaron,
our grandson, whose eyes also contain
the wonder of his one year. Yes, she
and I give the same gift of breathy music
for a real life with a real beginning.

THE FAST

At thirteen all I did was not eat, which in my house was not difficult. I wondered seriously if my seriousness showed, if — as in a movie — my hair had darkened, my eyes grown deeper, and for that reason I spent the whole long afternoon walking the streets merely to see and be seen. Of course no one paid any attention to me. No, I was not disappointed, for I had become slowly aware of a gift of absence within, an emptiness that went unfilled. A chill rose from the quiet streets, the sun dropped behind a cloud and then behind the buildings, and the day of my atonement was almost done. The dead remained faithful to their silence, and I turned back for home knowing no more than when the day began, except that I had done all I could do and done it also in silence, telling no one. Have you ever been to Detroit? No one talks about the maples, the old elms that guard the boulevards, the duck pond at Palmer Park, the river darkening at dusk, catching the lights of Canada, the lights of moon and stars and giving back an unearned radiance. No

(Stanza continued)

one says to be born here is
to be blessed with the beauty
of what is here and what
is not. At thirteen, drawn with
the hunger of my own choosing,
I saw my life and for once
did not choose to trade it
for another. Yes, I ate
that night, I sat beside
my brothers and did not complain
because the chops were fat,
the canned peas mushed into
green slag, the bread was
stale, for I chose only
a few morsels that tasted
of metal and dirt, little
burned segments of fallen bodies
or risen fruits, gifts of
the vanished to a hungry man.

Philip Levine

AUGUST

The bow of the sun by now less strongly bent,
Summer's retreat along the Zodiac Line
Has plainly begun, but still the drought and heat
Of its holding action keep up the hopeless fight
With unforgiving fire which we endure
Because we must and cannot but, like troops
Entrenched, who, told of an armistice to come,
Keep their heads down and shelter in the lines
And sullenly resent, sometimes refuse,
An order into action — so do we
Cower indoors and try to keep our cool
And undertake no novel enterprise
Till better times, as promised, be at hand;
Each one of us thinking what a fool he'd be
To be the last one killed before the peace
With Summer is signed, before the Fall.

Howard Nemerov

MARGHANITA

at the oak table under the ceiling fan
Marghanita at the table counting up
a dead woman's debts.
Kicks off a sandal, sips
soda from a can, wedges the last bills
under the candelabrum. She is here
because no one else was there when worn-to-skeleton
her enemy died. Her love. Her twin.
Marghanita dreamed the intravenous, the intensive,
the stainless steel
before she ever saw them. She's not practical,
you know, they used to say.
She's the artist, she who got away.

In her own place Marghanita glues bronze
feathers into wings, smashes green and clear
bottles into bloodletting particles
crushed into templates of sand
scores mirrors till they fall apart and sticks them up
in driftwood boughs, drinks golden
liquid with a worm's name, forgets
her main enemy, her twin;
scores her wrist on a birthday
dreams the hospital dream.

When they were girl and boy together, boy and girl
she pinned his arm against his back
for a box containing false
lashes and fingernails, a set of veils, a string of pearls,
she let go and listened to his tales
she breathed their breath, he hers,
they each had names only the other knew.

Marghanita in the apartment everyone has left:
not a nephew, not a niece,
nobody from the parish —
gone into hiding, emigrated, lost?
where are the others?
Marghanita comes back because she does,
adding up what's left:
a rainsoaked checkbook, snapshots
razed from an album
colors ground into powder, brushes, wands
for eyelids, lashes, brows,
beads of bath-oil, tubes of glycerin
a dead woman's luxuries.

Marghanita will
take care of it all. Pay if nothing else
the last month's rent. The wings of the fan
stir corners of old paper,
light ebbs from the window-lace,
she needs to go down and eat. And so
hating and loving come down
to a few columns of figures,
an aching stomach, a care taken, something done.

Adrienne Rich

DECEMBER MOON

Before going to bed
After a fall of snow
I look out on the field
Shining there in the moonlight
So calm, untouched and white
Snow silence fills my head
After I leave the window.

Hours later near dawn
When I look down again
The whole landscape has changed
The perfect surface gone
Criss-crossed and written on
Where the wild creatures ranged
While the moon rose and shone.

Why did my dog not bark?
Why did I hear no sound
There on the snow-locked ground
In the tumultuous dark?

How much can come, how much can go
When the December moon is bright,
What worlds of play we'll never know
Sleeping away the cold white night
After a fall of snow.

May Sarton

THE PLAYERS

In May 1840, during the Second Seminole War, the players of a travelling Shakespearean troupe left their baggage unattended near St. Augustine, Florida, and a band of Seminoles made off with it into the swamp. The following March at Fort Cummings the Seminole Chief Coacoochee (“The Wild Cat”) and his followers appeared to discuss a treaty with General Walker Keith Armistead, Commander of the United States forces. Coacoochee came forward wearing on his brow the ostrich feathers of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, and his followers were ornamented with the spangles and bright-colored vests that form the basis of the present-day costume of the Seminoles, who withdrew into the Everglades and never surrendered. Hamlet’s headgear became the badge of the Seminole Medicine man.

A curtain of green divides — and there they are:
the Wildcat Hamlet, black-caped, plumed, and nodding,
Horatio at one side, and on the other,
in silken turban, an opal at one ear, Othello —
or is he the slave who fled the Georgian whip? —
then Richard, grim and brooding in his royal purple,
together with the Fool, whose cap and bells
capture the faintest breeze like wind-chimes
and slowly they advance toward you, General,
seated before your table in the clearing.

Stiff-pleated, soldiers gape;
a bugle sounds; the drummer taps his drum
as if for the cortege of a fallen comrade.

The curtain divides, but, General, for you
dream and reality converge; and reason slumbers.
Your nightmare surfaces; your enemy has risen from the swamp.

And with the drum-beat, rain that you have heard
 these many months upon the barracks roof,
 a steady tap-tap-tap-tap, then stopping . . . tap . . . tap . . .
 tap . . . and then again tap-tap tap-tap,
 as unending as the oratory on the Congress floor
 to justify an unjustifiable war, to round up
 a few Indians, burn their crops and bribe them
 to be herded onto ships at Tampa
 and carried westward to a barren dust bowl . . .
 You hear the constant sloshing of your troops
 through ever-present water

. . . and lifted to your steady gaze, the swamp's black mirror,
 cut by alligator-blade and skeletal palmetto,
 swathe of egret feathers, the heron's bony legs,
 dainty stag hoof, dank panther paw, the seething saw grass,
 the fangs of water moccasins, the smear of glutinous eggs,
 a swarm of black flies circling the even blacker water
 like a convocation of Jesuits,
 croaking frog-chorale that kept you company at midnight,
 the fret and freckle of the water round the grass-fringed hammock,
 the woodpecker's crimson vest, the spider's velvet net,
 all the sequins and the spangles of that savage light,
 the rich, wild, ranging necklaces of root,
 green, unfolding fans, striped scarves, and spotted feathers,
 the stately live-oak trailing grey Spanish moss
 (the shredded rags of Lear upon the heath),
 the cypress knees protruding from the water
 (the knuckles of your fallen dead
 whose ghosts have grappled with the mist),
 the purple cape of sunset dragging its ermine edge
 across the mangrove thicket, —
 all are mirrored here before you, General: your enemy
 has come in the nightmare clothing of the swamp.

Tap . . . tap . . . tap . . .

Hamlet advances,
 holding in one hand a skull —

(Stanza continued)

or is that only a piece of coral from the reef
with all the perforations of the human brain?

You watch it crumble, General, at your feet,
while your euclidian table projects into the waning light,
and the paper beneath your eagle-talon
rests, a white, fallen feather.

— A wild wind rakes your fort, a hurricane
across the tense peninsula . . .

and in the silent eye
a voice that cleaves the quiet water:

“There will be no surrender, General. There will be no peace;
only the murderer who waits, only the poetry that kills.”

William Jay Smith

Two Poems

LEARNED AT THE WEAVERS' BARN

"You can thread heddles from the center—
keep some extras on your reed, and just
start threading, harness one, harness two."

"For every weaver in the world there's a different
selvage — you can just scrunch the edges.
It's something you play with when you thread."

"Not all looms have castles — jack looms
don't have a castle. Irene's loom, unlike
the Swedish, doesn't have overhanging beaters."

"You can still be a purple person, but the young
people have just about taken that style.
You're scared to wear your arty things."

"The snake of the warp you handle near the cross;
if it snarls you are lost. You need a good
light, but no need to be exact at first."

"Once you get going, you're silent,
and the rain comes down. Inspiration
comes up from the way materials form."

"Some stuff by other stuff gives you ideas."

SNOW

Without a word I arrive quietly. A random stranger,
sometimes I appear at a farm window and look in.
They panic, I don't know why. Will I quell
their fire? I tap to enter, to embrace them.
Why do they struggle so? Surely their lives
have a place for this gift I bring.
I turn with my millions, unroll a robe constantly
offered, and go where my limber fate invents
itself, always different and always the same.

I try a new farm, to be a stranger again;
at the schoolground I try to heal the children,
to muffle their screams. Where earth is torn open
I fill it in. Nobody can escape this embrace;
nobody will be left alone. In the cemetery
every grave has its decoration, reverently
placed. On even the littlest grave I trace
each word and carefully spell the names.

William Stafford

A TREE IN SPRING

Now, while that tree just past bud, the leaves
young and small, a pale green haze the morning
sun sifts through; its trunk and limbs, its grasp
of branches, the tendencies of twigs, the whole
shape of its craving like the shoot of a fountain
passionately rising to overflow (but so slow,
so secret it is invisible as motion); the main
limbs from their division low on the trunk
reaching up and out to stab in three directions;
(to stab for the light, the light that shifts);
just now, behind its scrim of stippled mist
the solid body of that tree, the whole shape
of its craving is plain to see; while millions
of leaves bud to increase, enlarge and hide
the reaching limbs, the forks and branches, all
the stubby-fingered twigs, thickening quickly
to eclipse remaining slits the morning sun sifts
through; before the leaves' opacity, before
eyelids of the light entirely close, now see,
seize with hasty sight an instant of vision.

May Swenson

FREED FROM SUPERSTITION, HURRAH

To launch a garden, flap a leaf —
Blip, blip — where raindrops drop.
Before, we used to have to think
A gardener up.

To launch a nightmare, flap a moth —
Hish, hish — at window screens.
Before, our night-sweat used to blame
A demon prince.

We're free now, freed from either spook.
For what? To be tortured more:
Stretched on the rack twixt gardens and
Bad dreams . . . like before.

Peter Viereck

YOUR HOUSE

The house that shelters you shall have my thanks.
The walls, the floors, the chimneys and the roof,
the windows and the spaces to sit down,
the hearth that warms you and the stove that feeds:
these are my friends, because they minister
to you, who light a lamp of peace in me.

If I could give you anything I chose,
my gifts to your house would all be precious stones,
or objects fashioned from the precious stones:
not for their price over a shiny counter
in rustling notes dead as November leaves
heaped in a sodden ditch, but for their magic.

Your house must hold you in a heart of peace:
and so I give you jasper, which cures fever,
and beryl, which wards off quarrels: also a diamond,
for the use of diamonds is to discover poison,
and all strife has a poison in its pulse.
And I bring you a gift of jacynth, against sadness.

Your house must be lit by the clearness of your eyes
and be held steady by your grip on truth.
So I will bring you coral and carbuncle:
coral to keep you safe from sorceries,
carbuncle to shine for you in the deepest nightfall.
The rest your mind will do, and your clear eyes.

The rest your mind will do, and your true heart.
There is no real need to bring you chalcedony
to guard against ghosts and against death by drowning,
or amethyst, to ward off intoxication.
And as to sapphire, conferring the power of prophecy,
I see that power already shining in you.

Yet I will bring you these stones among the others.

Why? For a game? No — or if game at all,
a game that plays out truth, no idle pastime.

These are the vestiges of an ordered world,
one that saw mutualities everywhere:
a thought-out universe chiming like a clock,

where each bright planet was assigned its metal
in the live earth, and in living human hearts
a temperament that danced to its kindly music:
and if a planet can charm a stone to magic,
should that, dear heart, seem strange to you and me,
who have so long been planets to each other?

John Wain

QUARTET

Work

Yes, I'm a sculptor.
Or at least I was until
this frozen shoulder hit me.
You see, I can hardly move
these fingers.

The cause?

I guess a project I was
working on I grew to hate
but couldn't stop for money
put into it.

And my bright
daughter who had to have
a mohawk and the trimmings
that go with it.

At last

I had to realize the project
wouldn't work. The material,
no matter what I did, refused
to collaborate.

Two things,
come along, staved off total
disaster.

I took a poetry
class, for I have always been
intrigued by writing. Work
it did. I now can use
my fingers.

Yes, it may have
proved successful because I
didn't expect so much of it.

The other? One afternoon
our whole street broke loose

(Stanza continued)

and, for the sewer below, fell
six feet.

Now day and night
men have been trying to fix it.
But it grew worse when they
broke into the sewer and water
started spouting out of it.

Lying in the night sleepless,
I'm delighted to have that
company, all of it working
out there for me.

For the Failures

(to John Berryman much later)

John, are we so different then?
Often at dawn, but other times
as well, I wake to find — had I,
after all, hacked them up and hid
the pieces where they can't be found? —
many missing, you much among them.

And even as I try to go over
everyone, my parents, relatives,
close friends, and those like you
who, unable to wait for the dreary,
agonizing end, made a quick, jagged
close, more of them now — a more
terrible missing — than accountable.
This age's crop of corpses too,
in their jumble nameless, faceless,
like a mountain of stripped lumber,
that burnt child, this once a woman,
again and again resurrecting in me,
icy terror keeping them, tear salt.
And all the years of them, of you,
not here heap up inside that breath
becomes a chore almost too heavy
to bear, the heart gone crazy,
battered drum, this for a sigh,

a shadow maybe, a sudden blink,
no more than the light shifting,
and there the night surrounds me,
flooding night, when the eye winks
accusingly, "What have you done,
not done, that these so many, once
so dear, are gone, gone as if
they'd never been?" At that I cry
to grip the rest around me, shudder
out blood in desperate hope it may,
if not appease or ease them, give
me reassuring sense that those long
disappeared are near, forgive me
a little for the failures, follies
I have served. In me, no matter
what you say, I listening, you must,
like green things breaking through
the earth, give — ear forging — tongue.

A Crust

(to Eugenio Villacana)

With hordes of groaning mouths
in you, mouths ground in mouths,
and you here alone to feed them,
should I be surprised that you
could little heed outsiders?

Did those mouths, no longer
ready to put up with hand-outs,
finally, despite your many ruses,
for you were — having had to learn
to be — a wily one, devour you?

Now, belatedly, I extend
these crumbs of breath, not
to feed you or to bring you back
to that interminable gnawing
you made the pinioned center of,

but to say I understand,
much more than I then could,
when you, to my irate rebuke
of laziness and worse, replied
with a wistful smile, "Why, Ted,

I have many generations
of runners to rest for." Avid,
breathless, naked men, each one
passing the torch to the next,
each, well past death, going on.

Now I see their ragged,
famished ghosts, biting at air.
However, I hope, rather than
joining them, you sit somewhere
in easy, well-dined amusement.

Ugolino had nothing
on you except that you had
to do it — including the betrayal —
all by yourself and inside you.

Such a crust I nibble on.

The Due

(for FD)

You saw this day
was extraordinary, not only
for its midsummer warmth
after days on days of wind
and snow, and not because,
like a hound tugging
at his leash, you strained
to see, sniffed after scents
of, swiftly growing things,

but because the sky
in its clarity, especially
as it honed its azure
through the branches, naked
still (and still startling
to your English eyes,
with English trees by now
already far in foliage),

reminded you of another
such prize day in Washington.
You, shortly after noon,
walking pleased two blocks
from the Capitol, abruptly
two, come up behind, hit you
on the head, they dragged
you into the prickly bushes,

and as you lay there,
expecting to be stabbed,
your eyes smitten with all
the beauty of that sky
brimming through the trees,
you thought how good a moment
this would be to die.

Expertly they picked
your pocket, then sped away,
you much richer than before
in what they'd brought you to.
Terror and beauty, you now saw,
could be each other's due.

Theodore Weiss