

THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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*

All the huskies are eaten, my knuckles
reek from gangrene, the sled beds
have their limits and the nurse
leans as if I could read the chart
would turn back and the scented ink
only flames make legible

—I'm running hot, low on oil
and the ladderlike thermometer
half slush, half a cross between
the way mechanics test
and constant tightening

while she unwraps the badly dented tray
tells me calm down, use my strength
for sleep the way lovers
are always unfolding some note
kept secret till stars, little by little
and before their eyes evening begins
and lasts forever — it takes time

though she uses a fountain pen
twisting its cap
and whatever's not strapped tight
squeaks — time and the fires

grouped just so, so not yet asleep
fingerprints show up on my deft, soft hand
slowly, slowly and her breasts
almost visible, her mouth already opening
and the whisper there's still time.

Simon Perchik

Three Poems**BONE MOUSE SINGS A SKELETON SONG**

In the Australian grain belt
every four to seven years
our celebration gets away and
Bingo! An epidemic of mice.
In the fields, 80,000 per acre.
Oh, the quadrilles! The two-step!
The hey derry derry down!

My great-great-great-great-
great-great-great-grandfather
on me mother's side
was Minister of Agriculture
and Population Control,
the two being so closely related,
as you know.
"Bumper crop this year!" he said,
and they,
I mean mainly the riff-raff,
squealed with such delight and
danced with such abandon
they failed to hear
his final words.

So it happened
that many of them
forgot to put their little
mouse rubbers on their little
mouse penises and wear their little
mouse diaphragms.

The Minister of Defense

(no relation — one of our short-tailed mates who emigrated during the great Malaysian defection of 1970) said, “Ha! What’s one mousetrap per million mice?”

Nurtured on the fat grain
our sex squealed to higher pitches
theretofore unknown.

Fires set in one field drove
the first 5,000 across the road,
from which place 10,000 escaped
a later fire to meet 10,000 more.

The last census recorded 80 thou’
per acre — per acre, not per field,

as I have said. That winter,
eighty thousand skeletons per acre,
nearly. Their calcium replenishes
the soil.

Toward the end
we chewed the hide from
our neighbors’ skeletons,
our parents’ bones,
our children
we ate as they were born.

I address you here today
as new Minister of Agriculture,
but before my first announcement
I have some little packets
the ushers will distribute.

WHITEY GOES LONG

Dusk bore down on us at six,
blurring our white thermals stiff with frost
dotting the east side of the Collins field.
On the west a line of leafless trees
etched their names on a corpse-gray sky:
chinaberry, tallow, mimosa, tallow, tallow, fig.
And the elm that last year intercepted T-Boy
for fifteen stitches.
The skins had the south goal, a two-lane blacktop.

It was the last play of our last day as children.

"This is it, whimps," Lambchop said, fingering patterns
on his palm. "Tripper, you and Five Nickels
take down Heavy, clip him if you have to. Crane,
spamonti special, then buttonhook and sit.
Bobbles and Rooster, cross in the middle
to jam up the zone. Whitey, you'll be wide open.
We're staking our lives on you. Go long."
He traced the route off his hand.
"I mean *long*. In the road if you have to."

"Thirteen! Sixty-four! Huppity-HUT!HUT!"
Lambchop faded back, Heavy went down, the sky
brightened as the sun dropped below a cloud.
The ball whipped from his hand, wobbled a moment,
and straightened out. At the edge of the field,
Whitey looked back, up, then out beyond the street
where he would meet the ball
that sailed above the highest highline
with no thought of coming down.
He jumped the ditch like a deer.
Two cars scissored as he crossed the yellow stripe
and came out in the clear, opening his stride.
"Long!" we hollered as the ball shrank to a dot.

Both teams ran to the ditch where even the shirts,
hands cupped to their mouths, screamed,
“Long, Whitey! You gotta go *long!*”

Somewhere, in fluid concentration,
he is still running.

Someday, fifty or so years up the road,
the ball will spiral down into sixth grade.
To be there, I'd give away my best year:
to hear the speed of the spinning ball
kiss to a stop in his outstretched hands.

THE WEIGHT OF OLD COINS

for Charles Steib, numismatist

While in line swapping paper for food,
my neighbor's groceries intruding on mine,
I drop a dime in the quick exchange
and it doesn't ring true. Impatient
with all cheapness and hustle, I leave it
where it lies and go home to my rolltop
to traffic in the old coins.

I pull out Saint-Gaudens and admire her at rest
on the velvet. I place uncirculated Morgans
at her feet and wonder at their frosty luster.
Then I think of my children handling
plastic slabs immune to human breath
and the tarnishes of time.

Knowing they will have no comfort in Proof Sets
or numerical precision (MS-65, PF-66),
a grief wells up in me
and I long for the feel of worn coins.

My boyhood coffee tin spills
its musical store, the gray tones
recalling the tragedy of clad.
I sift through war nickels, steel cents,
lady dimes. I pause at dateless buffaloes
and set them aside. Liberty walks in grandeur
on my palm, the aroma of silver is upon me,
and for a while I find release
in the smooth weight of tired coins.

Norman German

FOR THE PIPING PLOVER

What do the disappearing know?
Are they more fierce
in the fight for their young? Do they
in their sparse numbers
hide until time
brings them a safe lover
or a place where they won't be stepped on?

Can they change fast enough
with the few genes they have left
to make themselves more seen
in the sand? Will they learn
what hides them
has become a clever enemy?

Can we read answers in their eyes
as they lead us away from their babies, piping
between flat beach stones piping
the same smooth recorder notes they piped
when no feet or jeeps
smashed their last eggs?
What can they know of a final going?

They have always been frantic
before their possible end.
Theirs is a pretty dance any thing might do
fearlessly trying to fool huge mouths or feet
away from tiny offspring.

Will we lay our blankets down over them
in the sun?

and will they continue to try
to conduct trucks away
because it's the only way they know how?

As if any truck could hear that song,
that piper in its low haunt,
the possible dirge
of an almost invisible bird.

Bob Vance

Two Poems

12,000 BONES OF FROGS AND TOADS

1. *You have to believe what's there. It's all there is.*

And there's another line I've always liked in that poem by William Carpenter: ". . . *a book can make sense of a human life.*" Yes, that I believe. I say it. I say it so often I think I wrote it. I repeat it in the light of noon, that zags off traffic's fenders like a raygun fight in a sci-fi movie, and I repeat it at night, in the quiet, here, the minds of my neighbors become as unthinkably distant as Mars's umlaut moons. If I say it a minute longer I'll wear it into meaninglessness, pure mantra-fizz, some figurine rubbed lovingly smooth of the detail it was loved for. Yes, *a book. . . a life. . .* I say it as if rehearsing for its moment of need, like CPR. And even so, when the phone explodes at my bedside at horribly 4 in the morning —the friend grenade— and Barbara's "not sure *where* my life is going" and the pieces of that antiknowledge float us both to the rims of ourselves, where the view out is a landscape of chance so dizzying, there isn't any reason for the atoms of the next day to cohere. . .

I have nothing to say. If there's a book its text is foreign. If there's a book its language is dandelion chaff.

2. *In the ages of faith, people believed that . . . everything meant something. Every possible article in the world, and its name also, concealed a hidden message. . .*

—T.H. White, *The Bestiary*

And so the Panther, of the “variegated colour,” is Christ, “of so many colours that he is the Apprehensible Spirit, the Only Wise, the Manifold, the True, the Sweet, the Suitable, the All-Seeing.” And, if you “accept in your ear the seed of God’s word, but put it away in the wrong place,” you are like unto the Weasel, “for some say they conceive through the ear and give birth through the mouth.” The Crow means love of children. The Hedgehog, prudence. Even stones: *the mightie yron, Fortitude; Virginitie, the ruby*. Real whales, real worms, are words defining an abstraction. Any oblong of the world an open door defines, is open encyclopediacally — and a man will exit, labor, and return to sleep at the end of a day of each least sliver of cedarwood, each cattle louse, instructing him.

And the man who wakes illiterate to this. . .? Who hangs up wearily from Barbara but keeps on calling himself with impossible questions, falling into jittersleep, and thinly at that, an hour. . . For him, the text of the planet will be an unrosetta’d pictographic squirm. . . I

blearily stare
at the bleary-eyed stare in my mirror, pressing
slow and resolutely at the bone beneath my face, just
to be sure of something. Maybe
a statement of destiny really is
encoded grainily in fish skin, in the script
a peach pit mazes over its surfaces,
maybe all of the moral virtues, and a strength whereby

(Stanza continues)

to incorporate them, and the luminous
 faces of Glory, are doodled
 casually but clearly in the veining of anything
 grown from this Earth — maybe,
 if only we'd recognize them.

Hawthorne's

note toward a story:

"Some moderns to build a fire on Ararat
 with the remnants of the Ark."

3. *Archaeologists had even named some (Paleolithic people).
 There was the Frogman of Veyrier, found near Lake Geneva
 with 12,000 bones of frogs and toads...*

—John J. Putnam, article in
National Geographic

And "the Petersfels children" are so named,
 who were found in their West German forest
 "with fox paw bones." "Romito 2," a dwarf,
 "from a cave in the Calabria region of Italy."
 —That's it; the rest is decontextual
 murk, the fox paw bones "suggesting fur wraps,"
 but we'll never *know*.

And Barbara the Friend

—the name means what, and who is she? Don't
 ask *her* tonight: the pop-psych phrase
 "identity crisis" floats on a darkness
 older than she is; one by one
 the letters of her name slip off her self and
 bobble over the horizon. . . I can feel
 my own name tugging, and you. . . ?
 —you'd better hold hard to yours.

Tonight,

who's anyone? For instance: here
 are color cephachrome photos of happy wisecracking tourists
 at Nazi death camps 40 years after,
 taken by photographer James Friedman

(*Stanza continues*)

—they lounge at the outdoor cafe with a Bass Ale awning,
 that overlooks an “execution area”; the grass
 gets mowed as in any national park;
 nearby the basement room
 where “a human dissection table” is still intact,
 a cola delivery truck purrs up to a concession stand . . .
 There are distances here more vast
 than in that sci-fi movie, where intergalactic
 adventurers return to Earth from hyperdrive in light-years,
 and their greatgreatgreatgreatgrandchildren greet them
 unintelligibly. I have cousins
 whose names are forgotten, burnt to ash and buried
 in West Germany not far in either lateral *or* horizontal distance
 from those Paleolithic children who appear
 named in the archeological literature,
 and
 what does it mean, and no wonder we dial
 the people we care for and ask who we are. Tonight,
 with sleep a worn-through one-ply mental layer
 anyway, I’m going to wait for the sunrise
 by saying the names of my friends and
 asking you to say them and adding your own if you’d like,
 yes Barbara, and David, and Jimbo, and Jeanmarie . . .
 whose lives are messages we need to tell each other
 count, whose bodies are books of beautiful
 calcium litanies: the crazy bone,

the sanity bone, the fletched sexbone in its ecstasy bullseye,
 the meatgrinder bones, the thumping warchief pestle-bone,
 the joy bone, the woe bone, the midden-dump bones
 in the memory centers, the sweet bone, the salt bone,
 the dwindling frog bone corridor of our ontogeny,
 the bone bridge back to the bone germ plasm,
 the *ur*-bone,
 the babysbreath bones of the soul.

LULLABYE

sleep, little beansprout
don't be scared
the night is simply the true sky
bared

sleep, little dillseed
don't be afraid
the moon is the sunlight
ricocheted

Albert Goldbarth

MANSPIDER

The Army tent so long ago in Puerto Rico
When the world sensed itself tentatively
Dreaming in a semi-tropical morning haze

Reaching beneath the sagging damp canvas
For a pair of bedraggled mud-caked boots
To slog through rainy season mire again

The right foot goes in easily enough but
The left stays adamant and will not enter
As if opting for laziness this gray day

A whole fumbling hand is inserted finally
Where it encounters a soft clump yielding
Fuzzily like an old half-forgotten glove

Then hot stabbing pain when the tarantula
Leaps out bristling from disturbed sleep
And glares at me with ample high dignity

Telling me not to push my luck buster in
This time and this space where it is the
Master of my foot and captain of my sole

Fifty years later in a crappy hospital ward
Trembling from the corkscrewing pain as the
Young intern fumbles an intravenous needle

While an even younger student nurse stands
Gripping the handrails of the cast-iron bed
And absently making the sign of the cross

I grit my teeth and desperately seek strength
When suddenly the intern is in quick-freeze pain
As I erupt from bed, asnarl, bristling, glaring.

Two Poems

THE ANOREXIC

It's only the attic I miss.
 No need to think of the bright kitchen
 or the dinner table
 buried in food.
 In the shadows it was always dusk there.
 I built the dolls' house
 of cardboard and rags:
 my dolls lived where no one could see them.
 They mustn't be seen, you see:
 each was missing a limb — an arm, a leg.
 These losses were obvious
 though I'd done my best to disguise them.

Momma was always in the kitchen:
 when I came in from school
 she made me taste her sauces.
 When Poppa came home,
 he'd ask if I'd been a good girl.
 But I had always failed at
 something.

*

In the biology textbook,
 the picture of the organs all salmon-colored
 empty and waiting —
 waiting for food, waiting for seed to grow.
 That's where the hunger is. I am here.
 And the hunger is there. I went into the bedroom.
 I looked at my body in the full-length mirror
 and I could see it was open.

*

Sometimes, boys circle around me
 after class: I see what they see:
 the black jersey slipping

from my left shoulder,
the tattoo of a heart there.
Once I met my lab partner below the grandstand.
I drew him there, my body
controlled him. But I never did it again —
my flesh stuck to his flesh,
his hands on my breasts.
What was he searching for?
Couldn't he tell they were empty?

*

One day when I was 5
I went into my father's study.
He looked up from his writing and smiled.
He said, "Come over here, skinny,
let's see if you have grown,"
then, "Come along now, lift up your skirts."
I was ashamed, but I went to him.
I tucked my dress around my waist
and held it there. When my panties
were around my ankles, he made
me turn my back. I shut my eyes
tight. I heard him say, "Ah." My flesh
puckered, it touched his fingers. Why
was it doing that?

*

In the philosophy class,
we were reading the *Symposium*.
I liked Aristophanes' explanation best:
"after the division
each desiring his other half,
they came together and throwing their arms
about one another, entwined
in mutual embrace, longing to
grow into one, on the point
of dying of hunger."
Sometimes I feel that,
like that time with the boy
beneath the grandstand, my body
going off, my body
fucking a boy without me.

*

After a while,
every time Poppa gave me a caramel
I said I would save it for later.
I put them in the toilet:
I flushed them down.
It made me sad to do it.
They stuck in my teeth, I loved
to suck them. I mustn't want them.
All I could think of
was the way he sat at the table
stuffing himself, his jaws
pumping up and down, up and down,
like their bed at night,
the springs creaking.
Later when he said I used to be pretty,
I said, "You just like fat women.
You can do what you please
with fat women."

*

Hunger — Incubus — Engrossing flesh — Disgusting —
there is something
flowing into me, into my mouth,
into the vagina — maddening —

*

In my dream,
I'm under the grandstand, crawling
in mud, covered in mud.
I look up through the seats.
A brightness is there, in the heavens.
If I can touch it, it will be sweet.
But it is unfair, unfair — Then
I take off my body and drop it.
I stride onto the field,
my legs long and gleaming.
I spread my arms and brightness
bends down to me. A light with no wings.
It lifts me above the grandstand,
where cheers rise from the empty bleachers
again and again, though
I am like a cloud by now, like vapor.

ANNIE PARKER

*I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way
which thou shalt go. I will guide thee with Mine
Eye. Prudence. Justice. Temperance. Fortitude.*

Embroidered on a sampler signed "Annie Parker. Done by her with her own hair June 1882," stitched during the needlewoman's 50th sentence for drunkenness to Bedford Gaol.

You're new to the place. I know all the regulars. There's Abigail Crook against the south wall, and next her, she in the linsey-woolsey cap, is Martha Jencks. She worked in the Ayrshire factory since she was four, twenty years of stem-stitched leaves and garlands. See, she's blind. You've the look of a lace-worker. It's in the hunch of your shoulders. You're young to be here, a babe in your arms. Come into the light.

There's little enough of it. My eyes are good as poked with pulling out this feather-stitched border. I've come right round to where I started and the edges don't match. Somewhere back there I've miscounted. Who could help it in a place so dark? Not three hours of light a day to stitch by, the window small and streaked and so high up you might be at the bottom of a well. Let me see the child. Her skin's hot as a hearthstone. You want to mind their fevers. A fever'll lose you hours of work tending it, the cloth in a heap without a stitch in it.

That your work in the hem of her gown?
You've a neat hand. My mistress said
she'd never had a girl could stitch a robe
for christening or burial as fine as I.
She took me from the charity school,
needing someone just to mark the linens.
The school had taught me that. Years
of alphabets in simple cross stitch,
till I thought I'd spelled out my whole life
in little x's. But I was always a doodler.
Even in the shadows of the common room
my eye would see all the ways a thread
can weave among the warp and weft. Turn
your back, I'd filled the cloth with lacy eyelets,
feather stitches like the wings of angels.
At the school, they beat me for it. But when
my mistress found me one evening covering
a scrap of cloth with queen-stitched strawberries,
she gave me for a ground the softest Scots
linen and shiny silk thread from France.
I worked in colors you've never seen,
colors you have no names for.

Look at me now,
squinting, threading my needle with this dull
brown hair that was rich and warm as mahogany.
My own baby lost me the place. My mistress
said she blamed herself and all the lily
pots and peacocks she'd spurred me on to stitch,
someone of my low station plying so much
color and tracery. Oh, I know, many
a girl catches the master's eye. He soon
looks somewhere else, and if she's conceived
she knows some granny who'll give her the herbs
to bring it off. She keeps her place.
I meant to have the child. I found work
with the Ayrshire factory. At night I lay
in my cot, my eyes stinging from the whiskey

I'd had to splash them with to eke out
another hour's stitching, and thought how
if it was a girl, I'd teach her to keep
her tension so the cloth shows never a pucker,
I'd show her how to couch her threads with gold,
and make a lace so light and full of air
you'd think you'd wrapped a cloud around
your shoulders when you wore it, and someday
we'd have a shop and light in every window
and do fine work for all the fine ladies.

I see your look. You're thinking I'm a dreamer.
Still I might have done it. Even now, even here
in this black place, when the light's gone and all
the rest are sleeping, I sometimes dream it.
But you see my baby daughter sickened, and
they'd dropped the wages. I had to stitch
into the night just to buy the candles that gave
the light to stitch by, and she was screaming
with the fever. The opium quieted her. I buried
her in a christening robe of some Irish linen
I'd taken from my mistress. Pure white.
I sprigged it with lilies and cinquefoil.

There. That's the last stitch ripped.
And here's a pile of my own hair, broken
and split till it's no use to me. No matter.
Tomorrow I'll begin again. The border
done I'll put my name above these hearts
of satin stitch. But look close before
the light goes. There's not a cross stitch in it.

Ruth Anderson Barnett

ANTHOLOGIE D'UNE MANIÈRE TYPIQUE

Dispirited Poet

When in disgrace with,...with,...well
 With, you know...THEM....But why
 Am I telling you?

Precocious Poet HIV Conscious

Wee, sleekit, cow'rin', tim'rous breastie,
 Wouldst lea'e us nought but grief an' pain
 For promis'd joy?

No Frills Poet

Thirteen ways to prepare lutefisk;
 But I was of one mind: No.

Philosophical Poet

April is the cruellest month, breeding
 IRAs from the once glad hand.

Poet Passionate but Refined

Where, like a pillow on a bed,
 A bank, *enceinte de sept mois* swell'd up, to rest.

Poet of Social Conscience

I will arise and go now
 And go to Chappaquiddick.

Metrical Poet

blam Blam blam Blam blam Blam blam Blam blam
 ... ? WHAT! One damn *blam* SHORT!

Innovative Poet

e(Ye)!
)NO[s]
 awwwWWLLLLL (

Confessional Poet

Morning again and the plaque's
Grown thicker now. But, so?

Poet Conservationist

I nearly caught a tremendous sort of fish
And had it almost to the boat, when with one
Last, frantic flip it freed the hook and scooted
Away. Relieved to see it go! Probably
Could have got my finger on the hook, besides!

Noncommissioned Poet

Today we have naming of the Arts. Never mind
What we said yesterday of being impartial:
Today we have naming of the Arts, Martial:
T'y'lobp! tohp, tray, fob-b-b, D'y'lobp!

Infatuated Poet

I saw the best behinds of my generation,
My generation, verily! My veneration!
God! I mean, you should have seen them!
Playboy's like *nothing*, compared! Jesus!
Yes, and Buddha, too! Christ, what behinds!

James Hiner

Two Poems

FOR LÉON DAMAS

1. *No Need to Fear Fire*

No need to fear fire:
 it eats the soft heart hollow.
 No need to fear fire:
 it eats the pulpy center empty.
 No need to fear fire:
 it eats the heart to hollow the drum.
 No need to fear fire:
 it eats the center to empty the cup.
 No need to fear fire:
 it eats the heart to hollow the bell.
 No need to fear fire:
 it eats the center to empty the heart hollow.
 Fire made the boat for far
 voyage to the note of the drum
 voyage to the note of the bell
 voyage with the empty cup
 to fill.

2. *Elegance*

Elegance of Manhattan, the lost island.
 Elegance of neon through green glass.
 Elegance of children riding the subway
 braced hand in hand with the rocket and racket.
 Elegance of the green vine snaking
 along the gold anklet and instep
 among yellowing Sunday papers.
 Elegance of the first dance, her Indian
 eyes and citron tongue,
 and the night of her hair my starred fingers burned in.

Elegance of her arch and lean,
bend of her citron breast to my palm.

Elegance of the switchblade saxophone
filigreeing the lacy smoke over
coconut wine glass splintering the piano's
plink. Eating up salt peanuts, salt peanuts.

Elegance of the banjo: brass,
mahogany, rosewood, ivory,
mother-of-pearl, the perfect lie
against hand and belly, the perfect line
of the black and brass neck,
the perfect moon mask. To make the music,
the sharp pulse: skin and steel.

3. *Hommage*

These poems of skin and steel
of bone
fanged with fire
with the taste of blood
of the dance of death
with the life of music
patient for our arrivals
patient beyond our departures
these poems we move through
unchanged but burning
now with their light.

No need to fear fire.

Whatever is done equally to all
in the eye of the heart is magnanimous.

Those who will not go to the moon
have gone farther than the moon.
Those who will not go to the moon
have held the moon in their hands.
Those who will not go to the moon
have tossed the moon aside like a stone
and turned to the night from which, serene,
she still defines the world's bones.

SECRET FAMOUS NAMES

1

You meet the Spider People at their P.O. box.
Go out to their steel hole in the rain.
They put you in the back seat
to watch their occipital bones
and the flux of opaque windshield.
The Spider Woman handles your merchandise.
They know what they want.
You know what you have.
Anything could go wrong.

The Spider Man turns on you
opaque lenses: we said
— he says the unsayable
number, one of the secret names
of the god. The flash of sudden
money tells you the universe is full of love.
You stick out your hand, shaking
only inside.

Out of steel you float in thick rain.
All you see are halos. You beam
at scatterers under umbrellas.
You wait damp in a doorway, dancing
to the tune of long distance and late night flights.
The world is painted on the globe
of each raindrop.
The world is green in your pocket.

2

In the back room back booth,
the Old Friend and the heart stopping
New Woman. Your hard choice.
You pick sitting next to the air
next to her so you won't stare.
You drink and smoke with both hands,
talk to the Old Friend.

Someone comes up to say
a friend of mine is in a band that
might want to use your songs.
OK, have I heard of this band?
Yeah, maybe, then names
a blinding famous name.

You become there for everything.
The air between your upper arm and hers flares white
flame. Then there is no air
between your upper arms.
Her hot kohled eyes
x-ray your hands'
next move.

Possibility becomes indistinguishable from desire.
Life becomes indistinguishable from living.

David Kresh

Two Poems

SHOES

Let's say.

Let's say he was walking down the reservation road.

Let's say he was walking down the reservation road with no shoes and he's drunk.

Let's say he was walking down the reservation road with no shoes and he's drunk and it's three in the morning

and the pickup truck with no headlights hits him hard, lifts him into the air, carries him over the pine trees and HUD houses,

knocks his head against the big dipper, scrapes his feet on the bright moon, blackens his eyes with a night cloud,

throws him clear across the Spokane River until he's lying still in the grass, listening to his own body cool, waiting

for that first bold insect to come along and claim a piece of his flesh.

Let's say he gets broken down piece by piece.

Let's say he gets broken down piece by piece and somebody finds the body.

Let's say he gets broken down piece by piece and somebody finds the body, and makes it into another roadside attraction

and tourists on cross-country drives can stop in, look under the big tent

and see the entire freak show, the oddity zoo:

"Ladies and gentlemen, come and see Jo Jo the Dog-Faced Boy, wonder at the strange gifts a human can be given, come see The Fat Lady,

The Bearded Woman, come see midgets and dwarves, come see The Snake Boy, come see The Man with Four Legs, wonder at the abominations

God has placed upon the earth, come see the Indian boy who was hit-and-run and rotted in the roadside grass for a week

before anyone bothered to stop their goddamned car and check his pulse."

How do you explain it?

How do you explain the survival of all of us who were never meant to survive?

How do you explain Bobby Sherwood, reservation pinball champion, 1974, dead in a car wreck on Ford Canyon Road that same year?

How do you explain Michael Sherwood, Bobby's brother, 250 pound offensive lineman, dead in a car wreck on Ford Canyon Road in 1986?

How do you explain Tony Sherwood, Mike and Bobby's brother, soon-to-be-Marine, hit-and-run, dead in the grass beside Ford Canyon Road?

How do you explain it?

I'm waiting.

I'm waiting for someone to tell the truth.

I'm waiting for the clap-trap, backtrack, flim-flam, Viet Nam, fried Spam, Green Eggs and Ham, Grand Coulee Dam, sacrificial lamb.

I'm waiting for the big time, lemon-lime, mountain climb, uranium mine, orange rind, *the tumor's benign*, capital crime.

I'm waiting for the football team, sugar and cream, blue jeans, cross beam, 95% lean, enlarged spleen, 24-hour wet dream.

I'm waiting for the fry bread, hydrocephalic head, U.S. government bed, underfed, unhappily wed, sandwich spread.

I'm waiting for the Christmas Day, hairspray, breakaway, Chevrolet, Cassius Clay, Milky Way, photoplay.

I'm waiting.

I'm waiting for a new kind of shoes.

I'm waiting for a new kind of shoes that can cover your mouth, can cover manholes and Grand Canyons, can walk over bridges and broken insects, can tapdance on skulls and kitchen tile, shuffle over sand and diamonds, stomp on grass and briefcases, tiptoe through minefields and bedrooms.

I'm waiting.

I'm waiting for a better pair of shoes.

I'm waiting for a better pair of shoes than I got now, no more basketball shoes, no more dress shoes, no more Jesus shoes, no more *Damn these are comfortable* shoes, no more high-heeled shoes, no more red shoes, no more blue shoes, no more black shoes, no more green shoes, no more, no more, no more, no more, no more, no more, no more, no more shoes.

Do you remember?

Do you remember when you were a baby sticking your bare feet into your mouth, sucking on your own toes?

Do you remember all that simple joy?

BREAKING OUT THE SHOVEL

*Sometimes it is better not to know
How far the digging needs to go
Or if someone will come out and help*

—Alex Kuo

Beginning somewhere near the reservation
I took shovel in hand and dug, expected
no help with the geography and distance
between first slice into earth and the last.
How the need to believe the childhood story
of digging all the way to China forced my hand
to shovel, heart to a terrible dream. Friend,
I was amazed to rise from 500 years of digging
to find you halfway across your own dreams,
shovel in your hand, digging from Beijing
straight down through the globe, never knowing
exactly where you would surface next:
in Buenos Aires; at Forbes Field leaning
over the rail to grab Clemente's last foul tip;
at a battered piano stunned by the *Goldberg Variations*.
How was I to know drums were never enough

music to fill the silence of children left
and dreams put quietly to bed?

Friend, this is a strange journey, digging
for hours, then days, through generations of need

and it is better not to know how much farther
the digging needs to go, but I want you to know

I often stop for rest, ask directions,
gauge distance and how much I need help

with this digging, this life, measured
meter by meter. I move through history

and my story and your story, gathering
into our warmth, this heart changing by halves.

for Spike

Sherman Alexie

Two Poems

AUNT ANNE PUTS THE CAT OUT
FOR THE LAST TIME

She stood on the door rock
of granite hand quarried
two generations back.
Only the cat's white tail tip
shows as it goes
through uncut grass
to the barn.

She hesitates just
as the breeze pauses,
tipping her head to hear
the sigh of yard trees
relaxing. One cricket
of the chorus starts too soon
and, embarrassed, stops.

Sound so soft the scuff
of carpet slippers
on stone drowns them.
Her constant cough's so small
the pendant ash of the cigarette
pinched in her thin lips
still won't fall.

Her hands, spotted, knobbed
and veined, are quiet.
Hands no longer need
to even find each other
to be at rest, no longer
pick at the faded flowers
on her cotton dress.

MOONLIGHTING

The house, weathered free of paint,
the tilted barn, sway-backed ell, sheds,
all nested together on the ancient
alluvium of the river that now
curled and seemed to sleep behind
a screen of trees, deep in its
moon-shadow channel twenty feet
below the field and garden plot.

Inside they'd moved Alonzo's bed
into the new family room, which was
the old white posted porch closed in
with pine boards and miscellaneous
windows. The picture they captured
of the moon was black and white TV or
color with controls all wrong.

A chalky, lifeless landscape where
the spidery luna lander seemed
animate in contrast. The astronauts,
faceless in their space suits, moved
as automatons so it suddenly made sense
for Alonzo, with his eighty years
of hands-on experience with life
to say "They're never on the moon! They do
any fool thing they want to on TV!"

He would die in a day or two. He turned
to watch the real moon. He didn't want
to think there'd be footprints there.
When he rose from his bed he'd not go up,
but down to the river; down where moonshine
quivered on the long reach below
the gravel bar; down where trout grow
like moonfish in the shadows. He'd slip in
and let the moonlight swallow him.

SILKBY TO KELBY

The green-road runs
between fields
to a cross
with a sign tilting
toward Kelby church.

A pony turns
curiously
from the mounds
of a shrunken
medieval village,

Silkby. Gas guns
fire randomly
over the valley,
scaring the crows,
a lazy war.

One can walk
from Silkby to Kelby
in an hour
and see no one,
be seen by no one.

If not for the pony,
this borrowed coat
could as well
hang on its hook
as go empty here.

William Bridges

Two Poems**WEATHERVANE AND BUTTERFLY**

Some poets have lived to be very old:
Auden looking, year after year, more
reptilian — old sea turtle;
Sophocles, one of those
fortunate in being born
before the invention of photography.
They sang Icarus falling, Oedipus rising,
and they lived to be very old.

My garden sleeps in the snow, waiting. Lone
cherub, blowing its trumpet, swings low,
rapscallion wings' green copper
blackening in the cold.
Nakedness and angels dream
away the creation or apocalypse.
I wait. Icarus falling, Oedipus rising
blind, we wait for our billy goat

and, wanton, Bill springs from my random sleep's
skittish girlond. Wing over wing rolls
vermilion as the yellow
butterfly blows and falls
staggering. The swaggered sky
dispels such infusions as — fantastical
mad clouds, credulous willows; Benjamin pulling
him from the red and yellow wreck.

So, dreaming, we bend to a movie screen
 watching blossoms burst, sudden flame balls,
 explosions, that are always
 shattering — not the plop,
 actual, of piper cub
 behind brown hydrangea and delphinium.
 We stood wondering whether rational creatures
 ought not — well, ought not, maybe, to

do something. A fact comes down awkward, strange
 after fancy: their content, though same,
 abrasive. But the poet,
 nattering, grows old, his
 family and wounded friends
 around him. Illusion and reality
 grow glum equally. Yellow butterflies shadow
 Bill come, one-eyed and limping, through.

SUBMARINE

Bill is the boy with wounded eye
 and ankle. Bill is the boy hardly: he's
 forty: forty-three? Twenty years have
 unraveled (brain cells scaling,
 mackerel, down the drain:
 history, sir) — twenty years
 unwound since, untrousered as eternity,
 bare-foot William rattled everyone's cracker

at our door, sweet youth crashing a
 dull party: new year's eve, the drunken host
lbude wagging punch ladle, the French
 professor and her husband:

(Stanza continues)

animus, dead beat. Bill,
hardily and fallen, is
(hurrah) the unfathomed boy, amphibian,
frog and butterfly, ghillie submarine hawker

since bear shit bore god, wily wag,
a dilly. Once Bill in his yellow cub,
yellow piper, dropped into our field's
thanksgiving furze and stubble
crazily. We all ran
busily. The rescue squad
arrived *ex machina*. Dead rudbeckia
stood by bodily, framing competent frenzy.

Where was he while we hovered at
his coma's edge? He says he floated on
willow, willow waves, willow waves. There
distended the dark tunnel
shimmering toward bright Mab
beckoning or, maybe, just
above the horizon, mad Titania
ill-met: lunacy — glowing fireflies whispered

in her hair. Rose White harkened, Rose
Red darkened, and the door stood open: come.
Willy Nilly chose trouble. Now he's
promoting posh and portholed
submarines. Shall we search
Indian deeps, Bering, a
remote and Atlantic past? Impertinence
silts. A braceleted ankle, tremulous, tangles.

Tom Smith

VOYAGER

Riding the solar wind,
beaming back a signal so weak
it could not spark the bulb within
a refrigerator, Grandmother
blasts toward interstellar space,
strapped and tube-tied to a hospital bed.

The decaying heart directs what energy
it can muster to her withered sensors:
cataractous lenses detect rings of light
around bodies that she scans and then
leaves behind, the one functioning ear
records a faint and erratic bleep.

She feels the pull of a moon, pink
as a nipple, cool as a ball bearing.
It dissolves on her tongue and she swallows.
A wave of ohs and ums follows,
human binary code born deep
beneath the mesh of her hairnet.

What type of velocity will carry her
out of earshot? And when the pulse fades
do we decide that the craft ceases to exist?
Or do we reprogram the flesh to ash and sense
a familiar shape soar past, as she approaches
the blinding speed of darkness?

Stan Friedman

BOOKS IN BRIEF

I've been reviewing the Samuel French Morse prize volumes since 1983 when the English Department at Northeastern University established this award in honor of Sam Morse, a dedicated teacher, fine poet and scholar. This year's winner, **George Mills' *The House Sails Out of Sight of Home*** (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991, 69 pp., \$9.95 paper) is especially appropriate, since Mills' literary father is Wallace Stevens and Sam Morse was one of Stevens' earliest and most loyal supporters. But Mills, however he may have been empowered by Stevens's vision, has found his own voice and sees the universe in his own light. A note on the author engagingly reports: "Many years ago he decided that poets know something the rest of us do not. He's doing his best to discover what poets know." Mills' poems reveal a world sharply sensual, wryly comic, shadowed by ancient civilizations and shuddered by a visible future. Like Stevens, he has wonderful titles, such as "Poem That Depends Entirely on Its Title." But the language is dryer, more colloquial: "That man caught in the mirror/ is the man after my own heart;" or, from "Fundamentalist," "Imagine his surprise when he heard the Sphinx/ shout *wrong wrong wrong*." Here's the last stanza of "The Late Great," a poem about the assassination of a President (Lincoln, to be exact):

The story veers off into the fabulous,
 taking the bullet with it.
 My eyes were moving up my arm.
 You know the way the eyes creep up
 as high as they can go and linger there.
 A little higher and you vanish into yourself.
 People ask where were you when it happened.
 That's where I was—halfway up my arm.

I love the way this poem inveigles me into acting it out with my own eyes, and repeatedly, even in the dream poems, I find myself moving to a physical response as the words get to my somatic imagination. This is a tightly-integrated book, every poem enriched by the reading of every other poem—not an over-ripe word or limp line in it. Perhaps one can learn "what the poets know" only by the gut-wrenching discipline of composition, but anyone can savor the fruit of that knowledge in these hard-won poems. (And let's thank the judge, Philip Booth, who discovered this strong poet.)

"It has sometimes been said that contemporary poetry, however technically brilliant, lacks statement or vision." The editors of *The Mississippi Review* invited a lot of poets to respond to this preposterous proposition cobbled out of T.S. Eliot. An amazing 106 poets—from Ammons to Wormser—rose to the bait, and in Vol. 19, #3 the first 128 pages contain these replies. I found much to argue with, much to applaud, as well as an interesting catalogue of those poets to whom their colleagues turn for vision and technical brilliance. And several times I found myself howling with appreciative laughter. If this sounds like something you'd enjoy, send \$12. to the *MR* at the University of Southern Mississippi, Southern Station, Box 5144, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-5144.

With rave reviews in *The New Yorker* and *Poetry* Albert Goldbarth doesn't need another from me. But his *Heaven and Earth: A Cosmology* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1991, 120 pp., \$20. cloth, \$9.95 paper) has arrived, and I want at least to announce that it is here and it is well-named. This poet's capacity for comprehensiveness/comprehension is astonishing. Take a poem like "*Mishipasingham, Lumchipamudana*, etc.," structured like a funnel opening broadly: "Some days, anything is wonderful." He is wondering at the language of the Quechua in Peru, with a thousand words for "potato." The funnel narrows to the word *peynisht*, for the place political prisoners are sent. And failing to translate this into what is "hellish" in our culture, he narrows the course of the poem until we too comprehend what the poet in his courageous imagination understands: the "literal place and the literal spirit-deadening effort/ going on there." The narrower, more compressed, the focus of the poem, the greater the intensity of human compassion in both poet and reader.

Any Goldbarth poem rewards reading aloud and the closest prosodic analysis. I love the passion for language ("ripplefoliate fish") and the crazy chords of sound ("seminal vents" and "buttery ducts"). I love the geysers of metaphor ("at the burr-end, the tar tail-end, the shitty piggy corkscrew tail-end of a day like that"). I love exploring the steely intellectual structure of each poem, supporting the surface glitter of the sprung pentameters and tetrameters, the cascading catalogues, the slippery synchronicities and the batty humor. For one poem alone I'd want to own this book: "12th Century Chinese Painting with a Few Dozen Seal Imprints Across It." As often as I've read it, it still works as a sling-shot to catapult me laughing out of my daily orbit. And then there's "Homage." Four stanzas, each rhymed aabcdedcbaea, in lines from one to seventeen syllables. It begins:

In
 the fin-
 icky world of that small bright-
 colored attendant
 of the sides of trout,
 the cleaner-wrasse, an interscale precision
 means everything . . .

And we're off on a Goldbarth roller-coaster, to the tune of his vowel-magic (listen to those pizzicato *i*'s). The arcane facts that we have come to expect will connect to the most intimate details of his personal life and to the spiraling forces of the universe. Nothing, finally, seems random, no matter how much randomness participated in the process of natural selection that evolved the astonishing sexuality of the cleaner-wrasse, the power of the poet himself, and the poem in all its ultimate glittering precision.

By my count, this is Goldbarth's twentieth volume, and the kid's just over forty. Isn't it time for a *Selected*?

Although I was raised in the old New Criticism, I have always understood Yeats' statement that the poet's life is "an experiment in living & those that come after have a right to know it . . . that we should understand that his poetry is not a rootless flower." So I sometimes read biographies. Now there is a new approach to biography, a useful one: *Gary Snyder: Dimensions of a Life*, edited by Jon Halper (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991, 452 pp., \$17. paper). Halper has assembled seventy-five accounts by folks who have known Snyder and arranged them in chapters to form, first, a biographical sequence and then clusters on "Poetics," "Dharma," and "Culture and Politics." The writers range from Snyder's sons to anthropologists and such fellow-writers as Ursula LeGuin and Allen Ginsberg. The book is handsomely produced, rich with photographs and other illustrations. The accounts are mostly short and are wonderfully entertaining. But I particularly appreciated the book as a whole for its portrait of an important era of our cultural history: Snyder appears rightly as one of the pioneers of the environmental movement, and he moves through a series of communities firmly rooted in particular places and the history of those places. The poems grow naturally from these soils. Like Wordsworth's skylark, Snyder is "true to the kindred points of Heaven and Home." Such a book is of course warmly partisan and can never take the place of a thorough objective biography, but, unlike such a biography, it need not wait till the poet is gone but rather gains from being assembled as early as possible, while the sources are still accessible.

Last spring **Judson Jerome** discovered he had cancer and in late summer died. We had published Jud regularly in the fifties and profited for forty years from his thoughtful support for little magazines. Michael Bugeja, who is taking over his poetry column in *Writer's Digest* and the editorship of *Poet's Market*, has inherited an enormous job. Jud's *Poet's Market* was more than an encyclopedia of where to send poems. He evaluated the publications (1,700 of them in the 1992 edition) and wrote sound clear advice on how to get published. As an editor I was often comically aware of his influence. If he gave a sample cover letter with a paragraph of personal information, I immediately started getting cover letters telling me about the poets' high school awards, their pets, marital status, and favorite sports. I didn't always agree with Jud (I don't need a cover letter, and I am intolerant of simultaneous submissions), but there is no better place for an inexperienced poet to learn about how to send out poems. Bugeja will bring his own experience and judgement to bear on future editions, but most poets will want to have the 1992 (7th) edition, with 450 new markets, and with Jud's wealth of experience and his very personal approach (Cincinnati: *Writer's Digest Books*, 1991, 522 pp., \$19.95). Every library should have a copy.

M. K. S.

TO OUR READERS

When someone asks why we don't print Contributors Notes, we discuss the policy once again and always decide that we agree with the original concept of this magazine: to put the emphasis on the poem, not the poet. We choose to use that space for one more poem. And if the poet is married, with two children, has an M.F.A. from the East Nevada Writer's Workshop, teaches at State College, and has published in *The New Nation*, *The National Poultry Review*, and *Garb-Age*, well — I guess we'd almost rather not know. So there you have it. If you enjoy a poem, 1) write us, and we'll pass the word along, or 2) write to the poet in care of the *BPJ* and we'll forward your letter. If you want to write directly, send us a postcard, we'll share the address. If every reader did one of those things every issue, we and our poets would feel well rewarded. Go ahead. Do it.