

*THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL*

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## APOLLO TAKES CHARGE OF HIS MUSES

They sat there, nine women, much the same age,  
The same poppy-red hair, and similar complexions  
Freckling much the same in the summer glare,  
The same bright eyes of green melting to blue  
Melting to golden brown, they sat there,  
Nine women, all of them very quiet, one,  
Perhaps, was looking at her nails, one plaited  
Her hair in narrow strands, one stared at a stone,  
One let fall a mangled flower from her hands,  
All nine of them very quiet, and the one who spoke  
Said, softly,

"Of course he was very charming, and he smiled,  
Introduced himself and said he'd heard good things,  
Shook hands all round, greeted us by name,  
Assured us it would all be much the same,  
Explained his policies, his few minor suggestions  
Which we would please observe. He looked forward  
To working with us. Wouldn't it be fun? Happy  
To answer any questions. Any questions? But  
None of us spoke or raised her hand, and questions  
There were none; what has poetry to do with reason  
Or the sun?"

**MARY LAMB: THE MURDER**

*On Sept. 22, 1796, Charles Lamb came home from work to find his sister, Mary, 33, holding a bloody knife over her mother's dead body. The next day, a jury returned a verdict of Lunacy.*

I remember a swift beveling  
at the rim of my mind, motes  
flying, then nothing. Brother Charles  
is shy on his visits to the asylum. Doctor says  
Charles found me, knife in hand, Mother  
splotted and slumped. That morning,  
Coleridge's post had arrived with news  
of their first born son. As I straightened  
the bed sheets, Sarah's form swam up. She was holding  
the tiny boy, her breasts sweet with milk  
and sudden flesh. Better air these linens,  
I thought. Mother had been sleeping with me  
for weeks. Easier to tend her, she said. Still,  
I missed the soft contours of solitary dreaming.

I had every intention  
of sending Sarah greetings  
that morning, but Father called, demanded  
I wipe his nose, refill his pipe. Aunt Hetty begged  
for me to read the scriptures aloud. Her sight  
is gone, yet she insists on books. She nods, wakes,  
wants someone, usually me, to read the passage  
open in her lap. I can forgive  
anything. Mother's attentions to John  
and Charles. The times I've tried  
to hold her hand or kiss her hair  
and she's pulled back or somehow twisted.

One day, about two weeks ago, she knew  
as well as I the boy had brought fresh cod  
that morning. Still, at tea, "What's this?"  
She sniffed her soup. "Mother,"  
I said, "you know it's cod. You saw the boy."  
She shoved her bowl. "Not fit,"  
she said, then sat picking at her bread.

Hourly, I go over each event.  
Rose, my apprentice, came late  
that day. We'd never finish all the cloaks  
on order, even if we stitched our fingers  
to the quick. I longed to sew  
through tea, but what if Charles burst in,  
starved? He might pace or, worse, begin  
to stammer. We put aside our work, went to lay  
the table. I handed Rose clean spoons.  
She dropped one. I bit my tongue. A knife  
went clattering. Who's hurling silverware?  
Who's shrieking? *Mother?* For God's sake, stop! *Stop!*

"Hush, Sister," says Charles. "Don't  
think." Here in the asylum, I can go for days,  
then the screams return. When I wake  
to the mad cawing all around, I am not afraid.  
Mother will keep me safe. Her spirit hovers near  
the bed. "Sleep, Mary," she whispers  
soft. "When you wake, love your life. I'll see you  
in heaven." She never twists. She never pulls away.

Dannye Romne Powell

### Three Poems

#### LOOKING ONLY FOR "YES"

(courtesy of Suraphong Kanchananaga's  
Practical Thai)

My watch is fast. Your watch is slow.

Don't take that bag. I'll carry it myself.

May I look at your driving license?

Be careful, don't drive too fast.

Where are you taking me?

Do you know where you are going?

You have charged too much for this.

I am sorry, I cannot eat that.

This curry is too hot. This butter is rancid.

This cup of coffee is tasteless.

The tablecloth is not clean.

The spoons and forks are not clean.

The sheets are not cleaned. They must be changed.

Can you buy imported cigarettes for me?

Wait a moment.

I want to enjoy myself with a woman.

Can you get one for me?

Can you take me to see a woman?

You'd better bring her here.

I shall give you some commission.

You are such a pretty girl and your name is beautiful too.

I love you very much. Can you be my wife tonight?

Turn off the light please.

Shut the door. Lock it.

You misunderstood me.  
You are mistaken.  
You're talking nonsense!  
You shut up! You're a damn liar!  
It doesn't make sense.  
That's all wrong.

Where is the American embassy?  
Don't drive so fast.  
Hurry up! Watch out!  
I wish to take the shortest route.  
I don't know the city.

**FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES,  
A 19-YEAR-OLD PHOTOGRAPHER  
DOUSED AND BURNED UNDER PINOCHET**

The Chilean authorities  
allowed Mr. Rojas' mother  
to return to be with him  
as he lay dying, burned  
over 65 percent of his body.

Swathed in bandages and hooked  
to a respirator, he could not  
speak, she said.

"He could touch me with his feet,  
the only place he didn't have burns,"  
she said.

"He tried to hug me, turning his toes."

## THE PORNOGRAPHY OF RECENT TIMES

What did the rainwater taste like  
in the middle of the Atlantic  
on an explorer's ship centuries ago?

In a paneled room  
the insides of trees are  
facing you down

(the tree equivalent a wallcovering of our sagittal sections)

What you require to thrive –  
soap needs water, we need everything and time –  
wears you down.

If only this world were a black-chinned hummingbird's nest,  
a flaxen cup that expands and flattens  
as the young ones grow.

Purple martins are dying.

As the summer ages,  
a breast usually plump is bony.  
If only we hadn't sprayed, the bird wouldn't shake so.

Stares you down –  
Tigers are happy when well-fed and won't mate unless happy.  
This one was born here

(he'll mount his mother so they put her on The Pill)

Pacing up and down  
the right angles of cages  
in a square damp city.

What would your song sound like  
if you'd never heard music before  
and wanted to use your voice?

Tina Kelley

**BIRD MARKET**

Fifteen-year-old boys flutter around me  
as I come into the square  
from Taman Sari. One boy leads me by the hand  
to the small jailed whistlers. I see bronze,  
green-purples, purple-blacks, blue-greens, blues and reds  
behind the wooden spits, one flash fire  
of bright enamels. They flit  
incessantly or stall at one point,  
not moving, their heads unscrewing to watch us:  
bulbuls, forktails, drongos, sunbirds, shrikes.  
The kings, the game cocks, are under bell housing; they flaunt  
and flare between the wicker. The queens,  
the turtledoves, fawn on us  
in babytalk. In one cage hangs the antipode  
to all this fluttery: a great brown fruit bat,  
fans folded in military correctness,  
gold cat's-eyes knowing my face by soul  
perhaps, or reason. The boys twit  
and pitter-patter at the bat. Only one  
hangs back, half-naked, dark, not flowery with shirt,  
not given to wings. Across the bright heads  
he gazes from half sun, half shade, man to man.

Roger Finch

**MADAME TUSSAUD REMEMBERS:  
MARIE GERSHOLTZ FORGETS**

*The young sculptor in wax, Marie Gersholtz, was sent by her Uncle, Dr. Curtius – a master craftsman of life masks – to live at the Court of Versailles as art teacher to the Princesse Royale, sister of Louis XVI. Escaping the Reign of Terror with the death masks of the Ancien Regime, she became Madame Tussaud, whose famous wax museum still stands in London. She lived to see Victoria's reign and died at the age of 93, though the original masks were melted in the Wax Museum Fire of 1925.*

The old lady looks back; she remembers: *This was my dream:*  
"The wax was mine by birth.

My uncle first did me –  
the cast and mold – then mother.  
He displayed our faces  
at the summer *Foire Saint Laurent*  
in a little booth we draped  
with tulle and paper roses.  
I was eight  
and made to stand on boxes by my face  
to show the perfect mirrored image  
wax could fabricate –  
or, to say precisely,  
Uncle's skillful fingers.

*I am standing beneath  
the guillotine;*

*They want the pretty  
toy. They want to  
break her as if they  
were jealous children;*

*They do not understand  
her perfection.*

The rage that warm July  
for *haut coiffure* was birds in straw baskets,  
so uncle put a lovebird in my hair.  
It was the first time I was powdered –  
eight decades ago and still my heart lifts  
to remember:

I was proud, proud even then  
(a quality I needed  
to attend the royal family  
when faces were commanded).

I can tell about the court –  
nothing lasted or exists  
(this English court is vulgar  
by compare)  
to signify the way Versailles was  
in the years before  
the Terror:

neither before nor since  
such splendor.

I saw it all – the precipice  
from which they fell –  
I still wake in the night  
with their faces before me, their faces  
swimming up through pails  
of formaldehyde  
waiting for the death masks to be made.

*Zut allors!*

I run ahead of my story  
(old folks are not slow, as they say,  
but hasty to tell their tales  
before their ends).

I was eight,  
with lovebirds in my  
curled and whited hair,  
and *Maman* had swags of laurel with  
of pouf of silk and feathers

*This was my dream:*

*I stand beneath  
the guillotine  
in my canvas apron –  
stiff with blood –  
I hold it out  
like a girl with a lap  
full of flowers.*

*"Jump, Madame!" I cry  
I extend my arms*

*as if to a child  
terrified.  
She kneels  
with her small white  
wrists behind her.*

*In my dream  
she wears her pink  
sprigged gown  
of lawn and roses,  
underskirt  
of alençon,*

*green kid slippers and  
a jaunty pouf of silk  
and feathers*

*with swags of laurel  
and a lovebird in her  
curled and whited hair.  
"Jump madame!"  
as if the whole of her*

*(Stanza continued)*

costing sixty livres –  
all my uncle's savings.

Provincials

could not sell to gentry, Uncle said;  
we must be *a la mode*.

We stood among the vendors  
we saw the mighty ladies  
and their courtiers trip by –  
their lovely skin so white,  
like paraffin already –  
yet the novelty of wax  
was much too new,  
too daring.  
Who had blood so blue  
to risk a *faux pas*?

In those days  
all was fashion, fashion –  
the trick was to be second:  
swift but safe,  
not risking first,  
for what if no one followed?  
Everything was at stake –  
one's place at court, one's living.  
Oh, they paused to see our heads,  
with dainty cries  
at Uncle's cunning powers,  
perfect duplications.  
But did they buy? No, no;  
not one commission  
did Uncle make that night,  
waxes softening in the candlelight.

It was the Comte de Saint-Germain  
who saved us

*could jump  
into my waiting apron.*

*Now time is very  
slow – the light is faded  
through the night,  
as if night will fall with  
the blade.*

*Her ladies wait,  
Mahammet, her  
favorite boy  
in his white livery,  
their faces poised  
in the simper  
of courtesy.  
They could be at a levée.*

*It races swift and  
deadly,  
and I think:  
it will ruin  
the artificial hair which  
covers her neck –  
so dear, so dainty.  
Uncle and I could live  
for a year on that single  
artifact:  
I feel a certain  
pleasure as it flies to  
me: her face,  
her lovely face.*

*Could it be,*

He was a scientist beyond  
 the tyranny of style,  
 since he believed himself to be  
 two thousand years old, and  
 to have known the warriors and  
 kings of history. Nobility paid  
 many golden louis to hear  
 the Comte recount his talks with Caesar –  
 he was *tres, tres de la mode*.  
 When he sent a boy  
 to Uncle's suite next morning,  
 we shrieked with joy to think  
 a lion of the aristocracy  
 might buy a face!  
*Tout Paris* would follow!  
 Uncle wore his only satin suit, birds-  
 egg blue with silver furbelows  
 and fine jabot.  
 He hired a cab for thirty sous  
 and a valet for his portfolio  
 and *accoutrements*.  
 One must preserve one's face,  
 he said, and spare one's shoes  
 (the streets of Paris, then as now,  
 were paved with excrement).  
 When he returned that night,  
 purse full of louis –  
 it was the start of everything  
 for me: *Tout Paris!*

*as they say, the face  
 of tyranny?  
 Her vanities seem  
 so frivolous – harmless –  
 myriads earn their  
 livelihoods and  
 gold louis supplying  
 the aristocracy with  
 the exquisite.*

*In my dream  
 the face in my lap  
 speaks to me –  
 "Marie. . ." she says  
 (we are both  
 Marie)  
 "it isn't me,  
 mon petit professeur –  
 they have the wrong  
 pretty girl –  
 It is you!"*

*I scream and seize my  
 neck.  
 Her head falls,  
 face down,  
 at my feet.*

Sharon Cumberland

## TESTIMONY, APRIL 14, 1986

"We're not going to sit around and do nothing. . .  
The frustrating thing is knowing what the real answer  
is down there."

Congressman John McKernan

*"¡No Pasaran!"*

Nicaraguans defy the President of the United States,

and anger swells to cold metal,

bristles with whirly-birds and missiles.

What the President wanted was \$100 million

to bomb Revolution back to compliance,

to bomb sovereignty into dependence.

Three hours we filed through the congressman's office,

giving testimony for the people of Nicaragua,

words for the heart against metal.

What we wanted was an armada of hearts

to circle the cannons of contradiction.

Two at a time we entered

and gave the names of murdered Nicaraguans:

campesinos, nurses, teachers, children –

each a story, each a candle on a small boat.

We lit their names on boats of words,

and Juan Francisco, farmer, killed by the Contra

and Isaac Chavarria, infant, killed by the Contra

and Lucia Valdez, grandmother, killed by the Contra

and Candelaria Espino, coffee worker, killed by the Contra

and Maria Adela Rodriguez Centavo, student, killed by the Contra

*(Stanza continued)*

and Carla Reyes, with child, killed by the Contra  
and Maria Jose of Matagalpa, killed by the Contra  
and Paulino Velasquez of Leon, killed by the Contra  
and Juan Flores Alanzo of Zelaya, killed by the Contra  
coursed our veins for justice, burned on our words.

Congressman, what moves you?

Is there no word to overthrow metal?

No heart to command the hand?

No harbor for the heart?

•

**Martin Steingesser**

## TO THE MAN

1.

I want to know what you whispered into my skull.  
You must have been thirty then.  
You had finished with my eight-year-old body,  
your forearm was still across my mouth.  
I had not called out on the hardwood floor.  
My mind could only clamp on to the particular:  
your toes closing around the ball of my foot,  
your lips against my scalp,  
and when you wept, your breath  
spreading across my hair.

2.

One day beside the laundry room, we found a dead rat  
in a lump of dryer lint and balsa wood.  
I had never seen a rat.  
You thought this was funny.  
You plucked it up by its tail, swayed its chewed body  
like a pendulum in front of me.  
A woman passed – you held up the death for her  
and said reasonably: “We found this.”  
Later, you dropped the rat into a grave,  
shoveled dirt over that bone which gleamed from a hind leg.

3.

Finger-hook at my belt-loop:  
this is how I remember you best –  
prying, belly-sweat  
not yet seeping through your T-Shirt:  
Smiles, smiles, the wooden hominess,  
the dead paneling behind the glass shelves  
from which you pulled the crystal animals  
and, gently riding them,  
singing over my stomach to my zipper  
like an army.

4.

Was I to be like you, begging,  
turning a rosary in my pink fist,  
licking the corners of the postcard of Jesus,  
a quaking and sweating naked man?

I wanted to rise like a wasp  
off the back of my own neck,  
poison your head above me,  
but I could not rise.

I could only lodge in your grasp  
the way a bullet lodges in a chest.

5.

If I had risen and stung you,  
nestled at your nape and bored in,  
or wrenched open your hands perched  
on my knee, those skinny featherless hawks –  
I might have killed you.

One afternoon passing me a cake slice,

You told me we *shared love*.

I always listened closely to you.

You liked that.

I never tried to hurt you.

6.

I thought you would kill me. On your doorstep  
when you squeezed my chin  
with one hand, saying *Cute! Cute!*

I could not see my own blood  
flushing my skin below my mouth  
where you held my face and shook it,  
looked at my fear and shook it,  
caressed my head, pulled me inside  
where we changed  
each other.

## THE BRIGHT CLAY FOREST

Sinister. *Gauche*: my left hand crept from its nightsleeve  
to touch twenty or so starved, twisted trees  
I'd shaped from clay: red and violet oaks,  
birches the smoke-yellow of San Francisco smog,  
trunks I'd slicked whip-thin and boughless on Father's blotter  
where, before the blackouts, a pocket watch lay  
Father'd slide light over like a blinded face  
to laugh at my startlement. Red refracting from the flashing dial,  
that watch scared me most those nights forests I'd made  
crept from the blotter to wrap and smother me.  
1942, breasts budding pink from my chest,  
1942, the first red-smearred underpants,  
1942, our rooms whirled dark behind shades as we sat, huddled,  
for a plummeting plane  
or a bomb to flash flesh silent from our bones.  
1942, the forest bluelit in Father's den, Mother limp in his arms.  
1942 – I couldn't abandon my "sculpting left"  
or the shocked freedom of wetting the bed,  
my heart soured mornings I woke to soaked sheets,  
dragged them to bury beneath Father's dirty workshirts.  
Though I never fooled her,  
Mother never told, only washed, dried, smoothed sheets  
on the bed before nightfall. I never fooled anyone  
but, hauling body-sized bedding to the hamper,  
wadding blood-stained underpants into balls to press to the botto  
where, I prayed, no one would see,  
I wanted to, oh, I wanted to even as I wanted to  
clasp my own deceitful mornings close when, before dawn,  
I crept to his den to caress my trees in the hushed blue stillness

(*Stanza continua*)

of Mother's sanction, wet them with my thumbs  
to the glistening dampness the most beautiful autumn trees  
in San Francisco have though the idea was absurd  
because I never saw red and violet trees with slicked-slim, spiralling  
tops,

not even in California, where, at twelve, it seemed  
all beautiful things existed. California, blackest  
when blackouts came in that no-light livingroom,  
Mother's head on his shoulder, hand  
crawling into his vest to lie flat against the heart. There were  
and could be no lights in the den  
but, trembling with delicacy, I molded my trees,  
grew in spurts doubling overnight the length of my bones.  
While the world shrank, I expanded,  
touched myself there and *there*,  
both parents coiled on sofa and foam splintering to bits,  
trunks rising slim to replicate my joy  
or hunching lower as if to thrust themselves  
into that dark fear spot burgeoning in my chest  
like a cancer. In the livingroom my parents huddled for a siren  
that would never sound. "Anything," whispered Mother, kneading  
Father's hand, "is better than this waiting." In the den  
I brought another line of trees to completion. Dog-keen  
with instinct, Mother sensed invasion just as she knew  
who dangled that blinded face, absolved himself of bedwetting,  
menstruation, left-handedness, the messy evidence of my humanity,  
who crept into my bed each night. I think of her half-lying  
in Father's arms in the livingroom black as a bomb shelter,  
her coppery hair dead-gray in shadows, and when I think of her,  
she's swaddled in silence, an invisible gag  
stretched across her lips so I see them move soundlessly,  
whisper to Father her terror and hate as, above,  
another soundless plane angles toward our roof and implodes.

Terri Brown-Davidson

## RAIN IN MALLORCA

My friend who loves Chopin  
Has been with me today  
Speaking of rain in Mallorca.

The rain in Mallorca seemed never to end.  
It drives a man desperate,  
Says my friend of the damp,

The furry walls, and the way  
A monastery cell is a slumber room  
To what a body can't cast off.

He has never been to Mallorca.  
But he thinks of the island,  
My friend, melancholy and wintry,

Thinks of the man who never weighed  
More than a hundred pounds  
Before or after a hemorrhage.

My friend has quarreled with his daughter today.  
She stormed to her car, he told me,  
To screech from the drive

Calling her unsheathed teen-age anger out  
In a wail the neighborhood might hear.  
He sat in the driveway to stop her, the glare of the local

Upon him, the sun in the open sky.  
He felt, crosslegged, precarious as a monk  
Who's doused himself with gasoline.

Time's peace failed Chopin in Mallorca.  
What failed in the rain of Mallorca  
Was unmendable spirit and flesh.

She simply waited till he moved.  
Can you hear the summer silence?  
Can you hear the winter wind?

My friend who loves Chopin's an uneasy man.  
The driveway is empty.  
The rain in Mallorca seemed never to end.

Lewis Horne

**Two Poems****MATTIE TRANSLATES THE SEASIDE FLOWERS OF CHILE**

She looks out for them as we pass,  
who might not notice  
as we climb above the selvedge of land  
where the rocks grow,  
and between the rocks, the flowers.  
When she finds the fly-trap vine,  
dark trumpets, spiky mouths,  
bulging bases, Mattie leans in low:  
“feed me, feed me,”  
she tells us, ominous,  
and stops to watch a large striped beetle  
which that way comes.  
At a stand of lirios del campo,  
delicate in the wind,  
Mattie sings from the Marriage of Figaro.  
A length of common malvilla,  
blowsy lavender: Mattie says  
“look what I picked for you, Mommy,”  
and laughs, “like dandelions.”  
Mattie is hoping for mineros  
and when their many-petalled  
full white skirts show up,  
the call is clear:  
“Pick me! Pick me!”  
Turning, she apologizes  
for their insistence,  
listens again.  
“I may have to dig up the whole clump,”  
she explains.

**MATTIE AT THE OPERA**

Luciano comes out onto the stage  
and Mattie rises in her seat;  
she sighs, she sweats,  
che gelida manina,  
sings along beneath the hand  
clapped over her own mouth  
to keep herself inside.  
His voice invades.  
Throw everything into the fire,  
Luciano, here on the balcony  
Mattie holds a candle for you to blow out,  
her key is in your hand,  
it is in your throat,  
how to open the Bohemian heart  
of Mattie, no longer a girl,  
death stands behind her in the frozen room,  
Luciano, pretend not to notice,  
sing to her as she was,  
every girl you ever loved  
was Mattie behind her hand,  
beating the small cold embers  
of the winter stars  
into a bonfire of applause.

Robin Sheckman

## Two Poems

### I WOULD LIKE TO

People have written a lot about childhood  
but it's hard to say exactly what it was like,  
the furnace of childhood.

When I was six or seven, a boy named Gardener Moon  
(that was his name) came to court me  
from his aunt's big house up the block. He  
came in summer, in white knickers, his  
hair combed back with water. He brought me  
a honeycomb. "Blueberry honey" he said  
though the honey wasn't actually blue.

Or maybe it was.

It's blue now, in memory, dark blue  
misted over by a wax-work of bee cells  
like a geometric net sealed over  
the thick, loose stuff of the honey.

Gardener Moon – capped now  
in his fragrant moment – standing under  
a big cottonwood on a sidewalk in Illinois.  
Light humming on our children's faces,  
beating down on us, with something like ferocity.

Which is what I meant by furnace.

Nothing painful, only the unconscious intensity,  
the completeness with which we engaged with things,  
one thing at a time. Like  
the spur of an old railroad track  
which I walked once with a brave friend.  
We didn't know the track was abandoned.  
The rails sang under our feet,  
trains thundered past in the smoke,  
windows lit with the white faces  
of all the people we would never meet.  
We felt a curious communion – like  
touching both ends of the earth at once.

*(Stanza continued)*

Maybe we did. At any rate  
we both jumped off the tracks at once,  
terrified by the premonition of a real train behind us,  
rolled over and over down the cindery embankment.

Maybe we just can't take it anymore, that is  
the intensity of things, and meet all the  
obligations piled up in the name of maturity.  
We live like tourists now. Always  
a part of us that isn't there, no matter  
what's happening.

Only this morning my neighbor came to the door –  
white face, glasses smudged, hair  
caught in her bathrobe – her husband  
had died in the night. I wanted  
to throw myself on the woman,  
the broken tree of her life. Pull  
her down on the porch floor  
where we could weep together, knock  
our heads on the boards, get splinters  
in our knees. Raise our voices  
against loss, injustice, the  
incomprehensibility of grief.

I didn't of course, nor did she give me any sign  
that she expected such a thing.

One must go on, after all.

I would like to shed it all. Get up  
one solitary morning and look one leaf  
in the face, one fact in all its splendor –  
hear one cicada bringing down the roof  
with its harsh, archaic rattle.

There's nothing the cicada doesn't know,  
nothing we don't. For instance  
that we will meet everyone, in time.  
That everything the day proposes  
is exactly what it means.

Experience, a bread in our mouths,  
to be eaten.

**WHAT WE WANT**

Nothing is quite intense enough  
for our incorrigible souls.  
An irritable hunger like a  
curse, an uninvited guest,  
travels around with us –  
wherever we go, whatever we do.  
It's as if we couldn't accept  
just any old experience – simple,  
coming all by itself, complete  
in its brown package. We want  
more, even more than that,  
spreading destruction  
in our passage. For instance  
the little, green, solitary hill  
at the end of the park  
where we walk on Sundays. It  
delights our eyes, or used to  
before we wrapped it in a hundred  
layers of nostalgia – every shade  
of loneliness we could evoke  
from childhood up. Now it gives  
us a startled look. We hardly  
recognized the simple, green hill  
we saw that first Sunday, moving  
toward us full of fresh talk,  
tipped with sparrows and burdock,  
every kind of crazy, inventive weed.  
Wasn't it enough, that little hump  
of a kingdom – candid, lacking  
nothing, planted perfectly  
on the earth just as it was?  
It seems not, and this is only

*(Stanza continued)*

one example. At a table  
seated with pleasant liars  
who are merely making casual conversation  
we crave deeper lies – the salt  
of an irrevocable lie that will  
crack up the whole company, bring  
them to their feet,  
flashing outrage. What an  
incredible lie! Someone  
has finally told a lie  
that will tip the gold earth  
out of orbit, send it spinning  
forever in horrified space.

Then there's rain. Consider rain  
pelted straight down on bricks  
and happy pavements, happy  
to be wet all over after  
a long, dusty day, why  
not leave it alone? But  
we don't. It has to be converted  
to something else. To a sea  
perhaps. A fisherman far out  
there, on his knees  
in a tiny, incompetent boat,  
struggling to haul to the surface  
some intangible, implacable thing.

Maybe secretly we all want  
to be prophets, something like that.  
Find an ultimate, intimate desert  
which will echo the longest  
cry we are capable of. Belting  
it out above the loud locusts  
to a vibrating rock  
sitting hundreds of miles away  
on the horizon -- To be  
used up entirely, nothing

*(Stanza continued)*

left over, wander into oblivion  
on bare feet, rejoicing in  
our consummate rags.

And for moderation, take love,  
the biggest cruncher of them all,  
torturing one ordinary, abject  
human face into a blazing  
constellation. One helpless face  
marred by every kind of fear  
and weakness, perhaps blubbing  
at the moment with impotent tears,  
into the one face of the stupefied world.

Barbara Moore

## A SHADE FROM "GLORY"

*Charlottesville, 1990*

As credits rolled, the bit player strode  
out of the wings, still dressed in Union-blue.  
"Any questions?" he asked. His audience – late twentieth-  
century brew of red-clay Confederates, Virginia regulars,  
Yankees light-years from home – froze: ultra-slow motion.  
This was the real thing, wasn't it? the outrider who'd come  
for us. If we didn't reach automatically for rifles  
or jackets, didn't charge the exits, didn't string him up  
or chain him down – well, it was certain the *others*  
would follow: the good white soldiers, spruce in gray  
or blue, bayonets ready, taking the gleam of the sun –  
they would come, right foot, left foot, legions! down;  
and the bad white soldiers, they'd come, too, swearing,  
bantering – battle-scarred elders, the brutally young;  
and the brave dead soldiers, black in the theatre's dark –  
those who fought nobly and were blown apart, those who lived  
to see the war finished but not to be won – they, too,  
would stand here; and even Colonel Shaw, that death-pale  
boy, color-bearer for the unfinished sequel – maybe Shaw  
himself would come. Maybe if we kept asking questions,  
they would all stroll out, would fill the screen  
of our minds again – screen of our hearts. And that would be  
*it*, wouldn't it? wasn't that the one question we cared  
to have answered: to know, after thousands of stuttering  
flicks, thousands of spliced tellings, if real life  
could finally overtake us, horse unseat us, bullet waste us,  
our own ghosts greet us – to know if tragedy or triumph  
might embrace us, uniform of any side grace us . . .  
In this after-light of glory, we would wait for hours:  
as long as he was speaking, we would listen.

Charles Fishman

## OF MIST NETS AND MIS-IDENTITIES

Stepping out of the woods  
behind the camp I catch Uncle  
pissing out the back window.

"You only saw the first foot  
of it girl," he tells me.  
I hold up a small sharp-

shinned hawk in my hands.  
"A male" I tell him. "That's  
a female," he answers.

"Not me, the bird," I say  
which makes him look up  
and laugh: "I'm not that  
old yet." But I watch as he  
unfurls the wing, feather  
tips between his fingers  
and I hope the ruler will lie.  
But there it is and I'm glad  
we are alone in the camp  
so others can't see his  
disbelief, as if he has  
forgotten his own name.

"I guess you were right  
girl," he says, a right  
not resolved by a kiss  
although that's what I give  
him as I catch his arm  
swinging around for a squeeze.

"I love you girl," he says.  
"I know you do Uncle, I know"  
I whisper as I leave him  
for the nets in the woods,  
the twisted path. He sits  
by the open window: an empty  
bottle of rum at his feet,  
his empty hands in his lap,  
and his eyes on me.

Susan Johnson

## EXPOSURE

It will satisfy me to send  
female friends and relatives,  
this print of me  
posing  
on my last birthday isolated  
among tiers of lantern light  
in a Shinto Shrine.  
They will die of jealousy;  
look, forty pounds of me  
has already disappeared.  
Every thing I eat:  
every bite of bamboo root,  
pod, strand of seaweed,  
sliver of fish, curling tentacle,  
devours me.  
My male doctor said: no medicine  
for this, eat everything, get sicker,  
then maybe better.  
But it is good for this photograph,  
for the dark circles around my eyes,  
the green-gray of my skin, the 50-year-old  
creases hardening at the corners  
of my mouth, good to be  
shrouded in tapering candlelight.  
And when I print "Obon Festival  
Fukuoka Japan" on the cool white back,  
the envious will read  
beer booths and couples lithely dancing.  
They will not know

these paper lanterns have been  
reserved to ferry a thousand dead  
souls to heaven, relatives  
having duly paid passage money.  
But surely there are always vacancies.

You can see vacant lanterns hanging,  
one on either side of my head,  
one near my heart, five crowding  
my stomach.

And my envious will never know  
that monks in unruffled white  
swooped from temple doors,  
to reach around me gravely  
brushing last minute names  
on lanterns, while shrieking flutes,  
a drum, a dark circle of summer-robed dancers  
swayed close on the dark ground.

When the shutter finally clicked,  
I let go of my smile.  
In a moment all lanterns  
would come down, would  
be launched in the hungry ocean.  
Slowly next year's passage coins  
began to wrestle in my husband's pocket.

Judy F Ham

## BIOGRAPHED

That night my daughter never mentioned in her journal  
(unable, at six, to spell the darkness of it,  
thinking, perhaps, in the morning that she had dreamed it)  
but hoarded instead for sixty years to talk about  
later, later – and talked about, when I was gone,  
to you:

that black midnight I dragged her out of bed,  
carried her in one hand like a bird, a pistol  
in the other, down to the cold farmhouse kitchen,  
told her to choose who should die, her mother or me,  
and, when she couldn't make up her little mind,  
raged out and fired a volley at some late crow—  
there was my side of it too, you know.

You think you know it all, have the last word,  
the lines justified, pages trimmed and sewn  
like well-attended lacerations. I am bound to become  
a scholar's morning stint, or an insomniac's  
companion, harmless between boards, you think.  
And you, like a father  
who never loved his child enough to know him,  
his wife enough to stay, move on too soon.  
You ought to wait a bit. Listen. I know  
where I was that week you thought I was in Boston  
and what the inscription on the flyleaf said,  
the missing flyleaf. Listen to me. I know  
what I did, alone in the house, when the doctor's letter came  
and how I felt

*(Stanza continued)*

once the echoes had died and the dark bird  
flown scoffing to a further tree and left me,  
bare ankles scraped with broken snowcrust, and a wind  
flapping my pajama bottoms, and the heady scent of powder  
fading, and at the window my two women staring.

I wouldn't tell you if my life depended on it.

David Marshall Smith

## SETTLING IN

"The Tyrannosaurus," I tell him,  
though my boy already knows by rote,  
"was the largest predator of all  
when the huge creatures ruled the earth."

Claws, daggerlike teeth, and some catastrophe  
wrote the history  
I'm reading to him again tonight.

I'm yawning,  
my belly full of red meat  
here at the end of the evening  
after a long day in the fields  
where the sun beat down on my leathery skin.

I'm bigger than my child, so,  
when the pages have all been read,  
this agile little runner obeys me,  
lies down for the night.

Ignoring the heavy plates on the table,  
I grab more meat, tear it from the bone,  
and bring it all to my terrible jaws.

My head is heavy.  
I move on my two legs  
to my stereo from the Stone Age  
and then to the sofa  
where my bones begin to sink  
under the layers of rock  
the way they will sink until that day  
when I will disappear from the face of the earth  
for reasons no one now knows.

## BOOKS IN BRIEF

## The Eye, the I, and the Icon

I have just received an extraordinarily pretty book: *Art & Nature: An Illustrated Anthology of Nature Poetry*, selected by Kate Farrell (New York: Little, Brown and Company for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992, 176 pp., 145 color illustrations, \$17.95 cloth). The nature in Farrell's selection is *natura naturata*, "nature passive," as Emerson puts it, nature as the object of delight, artistic inspiration, and, quite simply, love. You will find "The Tables Turned" here, not "Tintern Abbey"; "God's Grandeur," not "Inversnaid," and certainly not "No Worst, There Is None." For *natura naturans*, "the quick cause before which all forms flee as the driven snows" (Emerson again), we must look elsewhere. And despite Coleridge's "We receive but what we give,/And in our life alone does Nature live" as epigraph, this book does not take us very deep into Hopkins' mountains of the mind, those "cliffs of fall/Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed." Still, it's a lovely book, pleasant to the hand in its squarish format, organized seasonally, crammed with good words and delicious reproductions from the Metropolitan's collections.

For readers who are ready for more of a challenge, here are four to consider:

Mary Oliver, *New and Selected Poems* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992, 258 pp., \$20.00 hardbound).

Denise Levertov, *Evening Train* (New York: New Directions, 1992, 128 pp., \$17.95, cloth).

Jorie Graham, *Region of Unlikeness* (New York: Ecco Press, 1991, 144 pp., \$17.95, hardbound).

John Haines, *New Poems: 1980-88* (Brownsville, Oregon: Story Line Press, 1990, 93 pp., \$9.95, paper).

Because I have so few pages, I'm limiting myself to discussing these poets in their relationships to nature, taking *nature* as broadly as I have to. Needless to say, there are many other approaches I might have chosen. I regret so little space to praise these four for their distinctive musics. Had they not in their

radically different ways enchanted my ear I should not have selected them. All deserve to be read aloud, repeatedly.

Because she is best known as a “nature poet,” Mary Oliver is good to start with. *New and Selected Poems* opens with thirty new poems and proceeds in reverse chronological order back to her 1963 volume. Partly because I find some of my favorites missing from this retrospective, I’ll confine my comments to the new (1991-92) poems. Begin with the eye – with her powers of observation and her expertise in finding fresh language for what she sees: goldenrod “in rumpy bunches,” the kale’s “puckered sleeve.” But there are no poems of pure reporting. All are heightened by the poet’s emotional response, much of it openly exclaimed, in the tradition of Millay’s “Oh world, I cannot hold thee close enough!” Oliver’s response is often couched in religious language: lightning “as authoritative as God is supposed to be,” “happiness/ when it’s done right,/ is a kind of holiness”; an owl is “god’s bark-colored thumb.” Oliver does hear sermons in stones and, like Duke Senior, see “good in every thing.” In “Gannets” she writes: “still I think/ that nothing in this world moves/ but as a positive power.” (Specifically, the fish “rise from the water inseparable/ from the gannets’ wings.”) She is not afraid of sounding homiletic. Of the mud that grows rice:

I want you to stand there, far from the white tablecloth.  
I want you to fill your hands with the mud, like a blessing.

Neither is Oliver afraid of projecting her subjective response onto the object of her observation. Of a waterfall: “truly it seemed/ surprised by the unexpected kindness of the air and/ light-hearted to be// flying at last.” She stops short of pathetic fallacy by saying “it seemed,” but she does not always stop short of the sentimentality that forces sentiment past what the language (or even a friendly reader) will bear. Consider the goldfinch hatchlings that every year “wake in the swaying branches,/ in the silver baskets,// and love the world./ Is it necessary to say any more?” At this point I’d say “NO! Not necessary.” But the poet goes on to conclude: “Have you heard them singing in the wind, above the final fields?/ Have you ever been so happy in your life?”

All poets exploit their subject, whether it’s “nature” or their

own inner nature. *Exploit* isn't necessarily a dirty word. And Emerson's transparent eyeball is as an ideal, even if desirable, unachievable. Every poet sees through lenses of religion, history, art, theory, geography, and the thick laminated lenses of personal experience. One of the critic's jobs is to identify those lenses. When a reader shares or willingly accepts these screens and when the poet's powers of observation, language, and mind are equal to the matter (or spirit), the poem succeeds. I admire Oliver's discipline of opening herself to the experience of the natural world. I respect and largely share her attitude toward it. The opening poem "Rain" is wonderfully varied in angles of vision and form, and it does not excessively impose a human viewpoint on the rainy world. Of a black snake rubbing forward to slough his skin she acknowledges, in pulsing lines: "I don't know/ if he knows/ what is happening. I don't know/ if he knows/ it will work." She does project into the snake her experience that "life has no purpose/ and is neither civil nor intelligent." But she leaves him at the end shivering forward:

He begins to bleed through  
like satin.

It's a fine poem, and there are many others. "Alligator Poem" is exciting and funny and true. "October," like "Rain," is a mosaic of short lyrics adding up to her appealing credo:

Look, I want to love this world  
as though it's the last chance I'm ever going to get  
to be alive  
and know it.

Denise Levertov has moved from a crowded Boston suburb to the expansive vistas of Seattle. *Evening Train* reflects this obviously salutary move. In an exquisite sequence of twelve poems under the title of "Lake Mountain Moon" she simply opens herself to the new world. Listen to the modulation of the vowel music in "Abruptly":

The last warm day, I caught,  
almost unnoticing,  
    that high shrilling like thin  
wires of spun silver, glint  
of wheeling flight – some small tribe  
leaving.

That night  
the moon was full; by morning  
autumn had come.

Not that Levertov is a transparent eyeball. Her language, like Oliver's, reveals a religious response. But instead of saying how happy she is, she ends a description of a quietly dynamic scene with a cry from the Psalmist: "*This is the day that the Lord hath made, / let us rejoice and be glad in it.*"

But Levertov is more at home in the human world than Oliver. Her nature, like Wordsworth's, includes the "still sad music of humanity." Like Oliver, she does not eschew homily, but she is both more comic and more tragic in her vision. In "Ancient Airs and Dances," with disarming humor she succumbs to erotic impulse and then lectures herself on her failure to practice her lessons of stillness and quiet learned, she had hoped, from the heron, the "mists of fall," and the mountain. In the "Evening Train" section she celebrates family and friends, herself as a child, her tenuous but precious ties to history. In sixteen eloquent protest poems in a section called "Witnessing from Afar" Levertov dissects and indicts the evils of present history. Nature she acknowledges is gravely threatened by man's dominion. The moral menace of slovenly language, of children sharpening their skills for war with electronic "games," of domestic violence as synecdoche for global battering – all are strong icons of life-threatening illness. One found poem, "News Report, September 1991: U.S. BURIED IRAQI SOLDIERS ALIVE IN GULF WAR," is, without a word from the poet, powerful polemic. I am profoundly grateful to the poet for entering this arena to protest the end of nature.

The last section is "The Tide," largely intellectual and meditative poems, in which the poet contemplates *natura naturans*, a mocking nature, to use Emerson's words again, that "leads us on and on, but arrives nowhere," nature Protean, of "undescribable variety," teasing and frustrating the eye. In a penetrating poem "After *Mindwalk*," she confronts the implications of recognizing Pascal's "infinite spaces" in our own flesh, "within our own atoms, inside the least/ particle of what we supposed/ our mortal selves (and *in* and *outside*,/ what are they?)." Her vision of nature admits what,

even through eyes not naked but robed  
 in optic devices, is not perceptible (oh,  
 precisely is not perceptible!): admitted  
 that 'large' and 'small' are bereft  
 of meaning, since not matter but process, process only,  
 gathers itself to appear  
 knowable: *world, universe*—

Levertov's magnanimous view of nature includes not only the shiny hairless multipede ("Not cute, not cute") but the void where imagination falters.

Jorie Graham, too, has the courage to push perception to its limits. Her whole book, *Region of Unlikeness*, is an exploration of the realm where the plea for unmediated authenticity is doomed to remain unanswered.

Said Moses show me Your face.  
 Not the voice-over, not  
 the sound track (thou shalt not thou  
 shalt not), not the interpretation – buzz –  
 the face.  
 But what can we do?

In one of her epigraphs Ahab murmurs: "*Swim away from me, do ye?*" So we know to read this new book (slowly, thoughtfully, aloud if at all possible) for the process of the investigation. The viewpoint is the detached but persistent observer. The eye of the "I" watches itself watching (another epigraph, from Nietzsche: "*It is a sad, hard but determined gaze – an eye that looks out. . .*"). The aim is epistemological; the irony is that there is nothing to stand on. The nature under observation and the mercurial mind are constantly changing places. The adventure (first for the poet in the process of writing the poem, then for the reader re-enacting the process – alas, at one remove) is in the drama of this interaction. It's hopeless to talk about this. You, gentle reader, have to plunge in and experience it. Here's the end of "Immobilism." Try it, savoring if you can the intellectual theater of it – the internal dialogue, the stately dance of the phonemes, the astonishing changes of pace, the counterpoints of rhythm, the delicacy of the humor, the dazzle of the mind passionate to comprehend matter, and the strangely satisfying surprise of closure frustrated. If you find my language

and my suggestions impossible, you will simply know you aren't ready for Graham. But for those who are exhilarated by this expedition on the frontier of poetry, this is a wonderful book. Here you go:

Something sits on the table down there. What?  
 The little warrior darts – electric –  
 out to the very end of the line – snap –  
 casting forward for  
 the annunciation –  
 for the swift change into *thought* –  
 Out, across the yard, past the arbor,  
 down to the withered table, gray in the low spot near  
 the appletree,  
 down, to the manufacturing, *what* –  
 darker grays perhaps separate from the lighter grays? –  
 shadow of the empty elm across it – *what* –  
 that the eye of God still holds  
 unless I seize it, what,  
 in its doom unless the quickness lights upon it –  
 a loaf? no, how can it be a loaf?  
 entombed in being unless I can make it  
 out,  
 trying to find the front now, the face –  
 Shall I take thee?  
 Shall I take thee to the word?  
 It darts, it stretches out along the dry hard ground,  
 it cannot find the end, it darts, it stretches out –

Don't ask me why *warrior*, why *manufacturing*. I may need the rest of my life to contemplate this kind of poetry. But I trust it, learn from it, find it exhilarating. The process. *Natura naturans*.

With John Haines' *New Poems: 1980-88* we move even farther out from *natura naturata*. Those who know Haines as a poet of the Alaskan wilderness know that, as in his much-anthologized "If the Owl Calls Again," he has the imagination to fly with the owl. To read this book they had better be prepared to accompany him to even colder landscapes: the realm of

cosmic dust and the crystal skull. When we gaze with the poet into the icy pool, "Intelligence is what we find." This line could be an epigraph for the whole book. As Dana Gioia says in his introduction: "When the wilderness appears in the new poems, it is as universal as Dante's dark wood." Haines' icons are largely (I mean *largely*) from pre-industrial society, and when he turns his eye to "the forest without leaves" of contemporary mechanized culture, it is to excoriate it with withering contempt. Like Levertov, he sees not just the birch and the ash, but ashes – the tree of life about to be "crushed to a smoldering knot." But the book is not all *dies irae*. "Rain Country" is a moving elegy for friends and times past – "all that we loved," for "all /that we knew, and everything/ but for me forgotten." The burden on memory is almost unbearable, as Coleridge's "in our life alone does Nature live" takes on a chilling new meaning. But memory is mother of the muses, and the poetry is strong.

I find Haines' conclusions more difficult even than Graham's, since they envision extinction almost beyond where my imagination is willing to extend. They put Shelley's words to the test: "to hope, till Hope creates/ From its own wreck the thing it contemplates." One poem ends:

In place of the lamp  
that was lighted  
a drop of blood inside the sun.

How does one *think* about this image? To experience these powerful, compellingly-cadenced poems, one has to be willing to risk exposure, in the mountain climber's sense. The abyss is there, we can't deny it, even if we aren't look down. But there is a rope, and a loving hand on it. An intelligent loving hand. These are poems that launch the mind into that region where outer and inner space open out. The eye and the "I" are quiet but intensely alive. The icon – the potent image – carries the reader through Pascal's silence of infinite space while remaining rooted in beloved earth. The last lines of the book speak of a birch tree:

If and whenever we come again,  
I will know that tree.

A birch leaf held fast  
in limestone ten million years

still quietly burns.  
though claimed by the darkness.

Let earth be this windfall  
swept to a handful of seeds –  
one tree, one leaf,  
gives us plenty of light.

Taking these poets together, we get most of the stages of response to nature that Wordsworth catalogued. Oliver wonderfully exemplifies the poet with an almost erotic love of nature, in which “the sounding cataract/ Haunted me like a passion.” Levertov has learned “to look on nature, not as in the hour/ of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes/ The still, sad music of humanity.” Graham, like Wordsworth, draws on nature but takes the human mind as “my haunt, and the main region of my song.” Haines follows Wordsworth in *The Prelude* in attacking “that false secondary power/ By which we multiply distinctions” and displaying like him that “visionary power. . . embodied in the mystery of words” where “darkness makes abode, and all the host/ of shadowy things work endless changes.” But neither Haines nor any of the other three goes all the way with Wordsworth to the mystical state in which “we are laid asleep/ In body, and become a living soul.” The body and its multiety of senses are for these poets as for Blake inseparable from the consciousness, even say the soul. And the word *soul* is crucial to Oliver and Levertov as well as Haines – a shadowy word of great potency. What can it mean? I like best what Robert Dana quotes C. K. Williams as writing (*North American Review*, September 1990): “Poetry is the mode of language experience. . . , which enacts in its music the primal movement from . . . silence to the endless song of thought which is soul.” And now I have stretched *nature* about as far as it will go.

Vanity, vanity. . .

Stacked at my elbow are twenty-tree books of poetry from Vantage Press of New York, one of the larger of the vanity press publishers. Since I am often asked about vanity publication, let me explain how I see it and report on what these books are

like. A vanity publisher will accept a manuscript with little or no regard for the quality of the writing and for a substantial fee see it through the press and handle distribution. The poet gets a contract, should go over it with a lawyer to be sure to understand all rights. Usually the poet will not own the books, except for the few free copies the contract may allow. Vantage does send out review copies (and I do consider every one, knowing that once upon a time there was at least one book from a vanity publisher that merited critical attention: A. R. Ammons' first volume, *Ommateum*). I personally have never seen a review of a vanity press book, and I have never before been tempted to review one.

Here's a random sample from the stack before me: "When in a crying spirit you weep,/ Just seek the Lord for you to keep." Here's another: "Oh, sweet Salt Pond, so dear you are,/ You fed our children in times not far;/ Long may thy fruitful waters flow/ By many a dam 'front each door . . .". And finally: "Cloudy mountain dowdy/ Soils are examined/ Mouth of Zen skin/ Deliciousness south/ Beginning to begin the beginning." Please don't laugh. I truly picked these to be representative, not to ridicule. I feel an affection for these poets – the impulse to consolation, the love of nature, the playfulness. I rejoice that poetry means so much to them; I respect and cherish their impulse to find words to express what they respect and cherish. But I do feel that the vanity press is exploiting their work. A contract to handle distribution is meaningless if reviewers and bookstores have no reason to expect quality from vanity books.

Let me immediately say, however, that there is some really interesting poetry in a vanity volume by Cherry Cheadle, *On May Morning and Other Poems* (New York: Vantage, 1992, 28 pp., \$6.95 hardbound). Try this: "Up the airy mountain/ Down the rushy glen,/ We dare not go hunting/ For fear of little men." or this: "Piping down the valley's [*sic*] wild,/ Piping songs of pleasant glee,/ On a cloud I saw a child,/ And he laughing said to me . . .". or, from another: "And all the lamentation of the leaves/ And on the instant clamorous eaves," which concludes: "What sweet thoughts are thine,/ I have never heard the praise of divine." "Miss Cheadle," the jacket flap informs us, "is currently the executive director of a lady's fashion gown shop in Ravenstall, owned by her father." Furthermore, "this is a combination of elegant poetry and light verse, rendered by a

poet of wide learning and erudition." Well, perhaps so. But each reader will have to form his or her own opinion of a publisher who cannot recognize the work of Allingham, Blake, Yeats, and, I might add, G. W. Longford, William H. Davies, Robert Frost, and others. Miss Cheadle seems to have written these poems down from memory, and when her memory faltered, she filled in with her own "sweet thoughts."

With excellent, established poets going begging for publishers, what is the unknown poet with a book manuscript to do? One answer is to self-publish or organize a publishing cooperative with like-minded poets. Self-publishing is an honorable route, with distinguished precedent. It is much less expensive than vanity publishing; you have control of the appearance of your book; and you own the whole press run, no strings attached. The big problem is distribution, but I assure you that you can do a better job of that than any vanity press I know of. Many poets, even with commercial presses, have to do much of the publicity and distribution if they are to get many sales. There are good books to tell you exactly what to do. The one I know best is L. W. Mueller, *How to Publish Your Own Book* (Harlo Press: 50 Victor Street, Detroit, Michigan 48203). I'd suggest that, since you won't get the professional editing a reputable press would provide, you should get someone you trust to go through your manuscript to check such things as spelling and grammar and to give you an opinion on possible weak spots to revise. Then you may if you wish establish your own press, which may mean no more than inventing a name for the spine and title page. Study a book like Mueller's carefully. Then find a book of poems that pleases you visually as a model of what you want your book to look like. Take it with your typed manuscript to your local printers and ask them for estimates. You may not realize that most local printers are set up to produce books, but in my town of Ellsworth (population under 6,000) there are at least two first-rate printers with excellent design staff to help you with layout and see you through production. This way you will have your book exactly as you want it. Don't expect to make money – or even to repay your investment. But it will be your book, not a vanity press's, one you can give proudly to family and friends, sell at readings, send to reviewers, and offer to local bookstores.