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Cover: Robert Shetterly, "Spruce with Two Trunks," drypoint etching, 1984.

THE UPSTAGING OF A COASTAL SUNSET

Even before the poor day retires
that full harvest moon
is launched up
just behind the pines,
as if to expose
what we all took for the finale
as simply one more overture.
And it is.
The blue heron turns archangel
and flies home. Dusk
darkness deepens.
Splinters of mica blink
from the bluff at the stars.
And when it doesn't seem possible
the dumb earth could dispense
one more spectacle,
the tide rises swallowing
all but one haunch of stone —
folding it under
and baring it,
folding it under
and baring it, like a woman
lying out under moonlight
taking her blouse off
again and again just for pleasure.

CREATING MULTITUDES, REPEATING

...the creatures from this single quarry in British Columbia probably exceed, in anatomical range, the entire spectrum of invertebrate life in today's oceans.

– Stephen J. Gould, *Wonderful Life*

How are we to take this loss, this one precambrian cloudburst which loosened the earth to decimate the oddly elegant *Opabinia*, a creature of the Burgess Shale so unique, it should only be found in our dreams?

Whose life has not been as contingent as the spelling of Palouse loess, where twice in one article it became “loses,” so that Eastern Washington became fertile, not for wheat, but language, another Indo-European root devastating proper nouns until we’re unable to name ourselves.

At Biggs Junction, five Hispanics walked down the shoulder of the road as though going to a matinee. The Border Patrol swallowed them like liquid basalt. From the Bronco windows was it them, or me, or *Opabinia* staring into this black momentum? When you say, “I miss you,” what could we possibly say, if you mean this one chance for love before our hearts spin down a current frozen in time?

I once read that for our heart to beat,
the electrical pulse must be mildly chaotic,
repeating, yet not repeating exactly —
that the desire toward regularity
is our move toward death.

Maybe contingency creates its multitudes
to keep us from turning toward accident,
so that of all the selves
which walk away from this moment,
at least one will turn again toward you.

Dan Clark

THE SCHOOL

Tincture. Aura.

There were spiders there, witnesses.

What was his last meal? Look up,
at the window. A small hand
sweeps dust from the sill.

General Fritz Katzmann, SS, started a kindergarten.

He hadn't caught enough. Parents built
hiding holes under the floors, in stoves,
in false walls inside closets.

Hide and seek.

The boy lifts his fingers to his mouth.

Back to the windowsill. Up to his mouth.

Dust.

Tincture of bread, called breadcrumbs.

Tincture of breadcrumbs, called dust.

Begin here. A small puddle,

to drink. Across the street

a man dying of starvation.

Four children with toys in hand, kneeling,
serious, like old people working.

Remember the family table, the dishes of food,
the large, finely crafted bowl of wine.

Don't touch. It's for Elijah, protector of children.

The boy opens the door. Elijah will come.

He never drinks more than a tear.

Eli was a child in Lemberg.

His parents built him

hiding places.

Birds fly over the wall seeking crumbs.

Eli prays: leave some.

Engels from the Gestapo is sending
tins of milk and cocoa. These are the rooms.
Spiders are there. Parents with work cards
are gone from the ghetto all day, working.
SS patrols used to hunt their children

but now they're going to start a kindergarten.
The Red Cross will visit.
An International Commission. The story
will reach the outside.
They'll send in food.

Sunflowers murmur among themselves
carrying the summer's news
down into soil.
What did you sing in school today?
Did you forget, just for a moment?

Gesture. Persuasion.
There's a woman running it. Food.
Parents, not many at first, have been
leaving their children there each morning.
Daily, gradually: more.
When I close the doors and windows,
careful not to wake him, the noise of cars
passing in the street
like whispering
old men

stops.

His fingers
brush against my ear as softly
as mothwings or a whispered name.
When I stoop to
unplug the refrigerator, I almost drop him.
The waterfall noise stops.

I remember my grandmother's even voice
quieter than

sounds that move among burning coals,

asking me her questions.

I take him out sometimes

dusk they'll walk
barefoot in the ruins there
where spiders left old language
they'll rise

the hollow shirts
the empty holes, a voice
with no articulating flesh
the meatless air
swallowed in the afternoon bazaar,
this is how the body leaves,

this is the basin where they washed,
these are the cups they used,
chipped, mostly. Some handles broken off.
This is where they stood to sing,
away from the windows.

He tried hard to remember.
He knew it was important, a piece of news,
a phrase from Radio Moscow. Or the sunflowers,
whispering.
Don't go to school today.

A soldier crouches down to
look under the bed. Hide and seek.
The boy's face is intimately close,
just below the wooden floor. He can
hear the soldier breathing.

*He's stirring on my shoulder.
Still asleep.*

*I carry him
into a closet, close the door.*

*I wedge us
together between old dresses . . .*

These are the blocks that one of the fathers made,
secretly. This is a car. And the dolls,
there are nineteen dolls. They began
to talk each morning, when the children arrived.
Those empty cocoa tins became a town.

This is the broom,
for dust and spiderwebs.
This is the music stand.
Here are some sheets of music.
They were singing when the soldiers came.

Eli watched the ghetto streets.
He was five or six. He watched
birds. He found food
where they found it.
Other children told him of the school.

There was no International Commission,
no Red Cross visit. Parents went
to the school that evening, as usual,
for their children:

what would I have done?

We lie awake in a snow-draped house,
candles where our thoughts wander
down to the sea, the frozen droplets sparkling
from stiff abandoned nets. You begin
by reaching behind your neck to unclasp pearls
sharing your undersea smile.

Owls share their claws with prey
in a world of snow and animal tracks
as quiet as a child, curious
after a pageant has passed him by.
You would have stood beside him in the flurries
just as quiet.

*I hold him
close. Hold my breath.
Between heartbeats
I listen
for the sound his breathing makes.*

They were as thin
as the bones of a lamb.
Threads of smoke etch the sky.
Sleep has touched this house.
It waits in dust and darkness.
I can hear trains. If the boy is dreaming,
let shapes hold no more
ambush than clouds or your touch
unclenching, as though
something has settled in a billow of sand
roiling up from the ocean floor,
as though the dead could stand,
shake the snow off, jog away
through the winter evening under trees.

Jonathan Daunt

CLASS EXERCISE

He's almost done now. His precise tools shiver from gear
to gear
like insects flitting from blossom to metal blossom.
It's cold, this winter's morning in the 18th century,
and the King's clockmeister, Herr Braun, is going cuckoo.

He has so many plans, so many ideas:
scribbled on mouse-gnawed scraps of paper;
heaped in mounds of little mechanical ephemera;
manufactured in the gears ceaselessly turning in his
imagination.

He wants to do a clock of Icarus and Daedalus —
on a ceiling painted celestial, no less —
and when the gears mesh and high noon clicks into
place,

he sees an aperture shuttering open
to reveal a carefully angled mirror,
dazzling Icarus with a beam of sunlight.

Icarus would then spiral down,
reliving his fabled fall day after day.

That would be noon all right!

And he wants to do Adam and Eve,
frolicking round and round in the Garden by day,
but replaced by dark-eyed Adam and Eve doppelgangers
hidden in the back of the clock until nightfall,
lustily apart for still more knowledge.

And he wants to breathe life into a clock that strikes time
with brass cherubs

while also plotting the Ptolemaic harmony of the universe,
his mechanical faith propping up that artificial construct
the way the devotions of sequestered monks
hold back the fall of the Long Night.

And he could do it. He really could, and wants to, but —
the King also wants.

A clock.

A clock of St. George (his self-declared ancestor, though not even the Queen believes that).

A clock of St. George slaying a dragon who in turn chases a maiden.

By Christ's Mass. No Later.

Therefore, he's here, this frigid morning better warmly spent in bed

with his roly-poly rooty-tooty, his decadent little dumpling.

And the resentment clouding his mind is made tangible with every breath.

Just a few more parts to fit, though, and

Here, in our ordinary, everyday now, some CPA is tired of balancing Old Money Grubber's books.

He'd rather be prowling after new prime numbers at the end of the mathematical rainbow.

He imagines himself so fully immersed in the pure world of numbers

that he becomes heroic, almost, the Prime Surfer, catching waves of bunched up, virgin primes,

heading toward the boundaries of numbers,

toward the outer, whitecapped edge of imagined numbers.

Or maybe it's some red-eyed wedding photographer wanting to snap his lens-cap shut forever

and view the world instead from the driver's seat of a Formula 1.

He wants things to blur, to stay deliciously out of focus at 200 plus miles per hour.

It's happening everywhere, this wishing for and wanting, and this wishing for and wanting, but

And if the CPA and the Photographer know the simple, the easy to live with,

there's also the harder:

Somewhere even now,

some guy, his luck so hard it knots his stomach,

is rooting through the trash of a just-closed McDonald's.

(Stanza continued)

He's muttering, tossing aside fist-crumpled wrappers and crushed cups,
 searching for, wishing for, wanting only
 a plastic container, just one, that will open up like a lovely oyster
 to reveal its chimerical Big Mac of a pearl
 still whole, still steaming, still greasy-sweet.
 But instead, like clockwork, he gets the assistant manager bustling
 up,
 wielding the words "Corporate Policy" like a night stick.

Compared to that pungent disappointment,
 some poor schlep of a technical writer
 really does have it good. And he knows it, too, but
 also knows how it could still be different.
 He wants to get away from the relentless gears of his vocation,
 wants to trace the conduits of something other than the ordinary
 circuitry
 of his ordinary job, and so signs up for a poetry class.
 He thinks this poetry workshop is his new wings, man, his
 unshackling.
 He'll be the Beat-Master, the Strange One with the Wild Eye and
 Tousled Hair,
 piercing through the cant, the lies, the archeologic buildup of
 society's bullcrap
 to find the Truth like a Rose Aflame or Hear the Hidden Music.
 No more will he count himself serf in the kingdom of the fuse-
 box.
 He'll be soaring high now, stratospheric! until —
 "Write a poem incorporating these nine words:
Braunschweiger, pool, ovary, quark, knee-jerk, udder, taint,
bronze and monkey-wrench.
 Integrate these words into the poem so completely that an
 outsider
 could not guess which ones were from the list."
 Even here, there's no escaping. His newfound wings?
 Dull wax again. He should have known.
 But even if there's no escaping, there's still . . .

a means of satisfaction. The last sprocket clicks into fine-tuned place
and the clockmaker sighs. The children will like this, he thinks.
The dragon's eyes roll, his tongue shoots out like a crazy loaf of
summer sausage,
and the maiden seems to be laughing and skipping, yes, she's
moving up and down
as she carousels around, the dragon nipping playfully at her
heels.

Until St. George appears. (The clockmaker chuckles.)
St. George marches stiffly out with the visage of his would-be
descendant, the King.

But darker, and, compared to the lighthearted dragon and
maiden,

with an almost comic seriousness.

St. George than proceeds to spear the dragon
and his spear bends like a Hong Kong knockoff against the
dragon's scales.

(The clockmaker titters.)

Then the dragon, in its scripted death throes,
brings up one betaloned claw to its snout
in a gesture that today we would say is a thumbing-of-its-nose.

Maybe this isn't much, but Herr *Braun schweigers* and smiles.
He's *pooled* one *ovary* on the King.

No, it's not a *knee-jerker*.

Yes, there most likely was an *udder* joke
that would have been even better.

But it's all he could *taint* of, this *bronze* cheer.

It's just his little *quark* of defiance that says you win,
but not everything, not the most important thing.

And that even the most imperious commands of Kings and
Queens

can be *monkied* with,
and out of those same
some small degree of pleasure
can still be *wrenched*.

Two Poems**A SONNET FOR PHILIP GLASS**

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drankdrankdrankdrankdrankdrankdrankdrankdrankdrank
drangdrangdrangdrangdrangdrangdrangdrangdrangdrang

DIPTERA

what is it about fly is his loop-
iness swoop-goof-zoom-zip til
he kips into some harbor arbitr-
arily

long pause then dozey

dive
in
to

my eye

backstroked whirligigs
on the sill, all six swimming

unkill-

ability til he makes me murderous
yet a little startled when asked to
leave



so call me
a compromiser —
I don't fear
perdition
sterility or
static cling —
but what
keeps me on
the straight and
narrow
is knowing
come karma
I'll be back
as a fly



buzzbomber-, bristletail-, drosophila-, deer —
waiter, what's this tsetse- doing in my beer?
horse-, house-, shad- and dragon — why're they all in here?
Voici les pattes de mouches!

gadfly, madfly, fruit- and fire-, flee!
get out of the ointment and back to your debris —
find a purpose for a kite, it's all the same to me —
Voici les pattes de mouches!

gall- and robber-, pop- and bottle-, caddis-, crane- and gnat-
off the handle or on a tangent, in the face of, at —
in my next life, if I'm worthy, may I be a bat!
Voici les pattes de mouches!

Jim Kacian

ELIZABETH AND SALLY

*Black-and-white man-of-war birds soar
on impalpable drafts
and open their tails like scissors on the curves
or tense them like wishbones, till they tremble.*

from "The Bight" by Elizabeth Bishop, 1948

Elizabeth and Sally were standing at the edge of the Bight. The water, as we all know, was the color of a gas flame turned down as low as possible. Both of the women were still young but Sally was six years behind Elizabeth, who turned to her and said,

"I don't know if I've ever really said anything about this before. If I seem on edge, it might be because I've got so far behind on sleep. I haven't slept for three nights, you know." They were silent. The sea opened before the two young women, A kingdom into which they could gaze down

but never particularly far down.

"I've been working on a poem," Elizabeth said, "about the Bight. I must be one of the slowest women alive who is writing. I find it hard to get over a certain edge. I think this might be something you already know. As a painter, do you sometimes feel you're behind

all the others in their work, as if you got left behind a long time ago? And then your spirits sink down so low that —" Sally broke in then, "Yes, I do know or at least I think I know the feeling you mean," she said. "In any art, it's hard to find the moving edge and then there's the fact that we both are women

who want to be taken as artists, not just women.
That's where we feel ourselves trailing behind
the men. They seem to have a natural edge.
I suppose it's inevitable for them to put us down
without even thinking about it." Elizabeth said,
"What I was doing for three nights — if you'd like to know —
was looking for one missing word. So now you know
what women do who stay up all night, at least women
who are trying to write poetry." Sally laughed, and said,
"Don't those sharks' tails make an interesting shape from behind?
I've been drawing them lately but it's hard to get down
the truth of the effect." The two of them looked over the edge
of the wharf. There was something else they might know,
something behind
the things women could say. They both looked down
into moving water. Neither said anything. Then they drew
back from the edge.

Kate Barnes

Two Poems

PROBLEM PERFORMED BY SHADOWS

Where the mind's eye comes together with the world
a woman is sleeping with her girlhood, the memory
of a dream dreamed by a stranger — by mistake
on a sunny afternoon in the back of his mind.
Mostly, he's shooting blue jays: when their shadows
meet their bodies, mind meets dream.

And the man who now cuts loose her dream
is the stranger from her woken world —
his headlights stain her bedroom wall with shadows:
deer heads on the woodpile mixing with memory,
shadows on a wall mixing in the mind,
two worlds intersecting as a single mistake.

She wants the blue jays to be killed by mistake.
She wants the shadows of deer heads to be dream.
She wants a world unstained by the mind —
but the world of shadows shadows the world
and the dream of the man is a man-made memory
and the memory is as simple as the shadow

of a man beating a woman, their single shadow
falling on the bedroom wall like a mistake.
She tells herself it is only a man as the memory
of a man, falling through the world to a wall in a dream.
The place where the shadow breaks in two is the world
she wants to get to, a place with space for the mind.

How they break, how they come together in the mind
is the problem performed by the shadows.
How it continues is the problem performed in the world.
In the house of adulthood she repeats the mistake
of jays from her girlhood who die when she dreams.
They enter their shadows with a thud — just a memory.

She thinks, *this the world, that the memory.*
She says *that the shadow, this the mind.*
The man drops his car keys on the dresser—*not a dream.*
Without headlights, the deer heads cast no shadows.
She pulls the years up around her, this mistake
is of her making — how he comes out of the world
into her dream could be a memory — a shadow
her mind let happen in the world by mistake.
She tells him she's been dreaming of the world.

IN THE PARKING LOT AT THE JUNIOR COLLEGE
ON THE EVE OF A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

I've been sitting in this parking lot
for a long time — thinking
about nothing. The bumper sticker
on the car next to mine reads
BORN TO SHOP, and makes me wonder
why I can't laugh too — why I
can't laugh with the best of us.

There's a small New Testament,
bound in calf, on my dashboard —
someone I love has died and left me
with it, a cryptic trail guide
to some foreign land.

Once upon a time there was
a man named Abraham. (At first
he seemed like an ordinary man.)

*He begat Isaac who begat
Jacob who begat Judah and his brethren.
Then Perez and Zerah of Tamar.*

And the song on a radio blaring past —
Talking about the wonder
of the Hoover factory —
I know that you'd agree
if you could see it too.

*Hezron, Ram, Amminadab,
Nabshon, Salmon, Boaz of Rahab,
Obed, Jesse and David the King . . .*

Five miles out of London
on the Western Avenue —
must have been a wonder
when it was brand new.

Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jechoniah —
Jechoniah of the time
of the carrying away to Babylon.

And what might there be for us
now that Babylon has been blown
all the way to Coventry?

What might there be now for us?
Some small prayer — some bold
giving over of what remains?

*And Jechoniah begat Shealtiel
who begat Zerubbabel.*

I, like you, am tired
of names. There are so many
names, and we are so impatient.
We are so important!

Yesterday my fat student Marty
announced that his favorite pastime
was hanging out at McDonald's.
The whole class laughed
as if they have always known
the world was about to end.

*And Joseph the husband of Mary
of whom was born Jesus,
who is called Christ.*

But who must have been,
after all, just a man.
Right?

Abraham. We could, perhaps,
have an Abraham among us.
And if it were possible
to wait for forty-two lifetimes
we might have been able
to come to something better.

Abraham. Abraham —
I'm talking about the wonder.

Jane Mead

Four Poems from *JACK'S BEANS: A FIVE-YEAR DIARY*

CYCLING OUT (stanzas from April 1950)

The other freak
at school is Laura.
We have been rocking
toward each other
on the wind of shared abuse.

Laura stumbled on me in the stacks.
She sprawled on the floor,
hugging some books
to clean knees,
& chattered at me.

On Uncle Skunk's bike
I pedaled out to meet the family:
Toad Hall.
Where do we come from?
Changelings.

"Now that I've learned
the facts of life
I do believe
they found me
under a cabbage."

We cycled out.
The countryside met us on shared breezes.
All seemed one spunky toss & tumble:
spinning
hills & knees.

“My dad says
you’re a damned fairy.
Are you a damned fairy?
What is a fairy?
Oh.”

Mab & Oberon:
she climbs a tree
& shoots me from above.
Now we are playmates
& such stuff.

PROMENADE (stanzas from May 1950)

We sit on the cobble bridge.
She chases a city mouse across the road.
Gay breezes catch my breath.
"Blowing is only an expression."
We talk about my sex life & the prom.

"Laura, the fact
is you're dying
to go to the prom
& I can't
understand it."

"I'm not hot to go
but I want to be taken."
Two for the show?
"The droll show."
Troll, I won't say no.

Miss Shrimp calls Laura
childish & just right
for Jack Candle.
"Quick, Laura,
what's the feminine for prick?"

"Princess of course."
Exit Miss Shrimp.
Hermes only wonders:
"Why you're so thick
with that girl."

She's had her hair cut short,
wears knickers & a newsboy's cap.
She calls me Mary
& I call her Mike
& I will take her to the prom.

BUGGING (stanzas from April-June 1951)

Laura takes me bugging
by St. Panther's pond.
We're friends again.
I couldn't hold a candle
to a dragonfly.

She wore her newsboy knickers & fat cap.
The sun was a slow barge like her sensible shoes
sucking through mud & sky.
I tripped like Lady Slipper in the wake.
The haunted pond hangs with bright carp.

I admired
the precision
of her little murders.
Who'd guess those pudgy paws
could be so nice?

We played a game of toss.
The sun was our ball.
"Clap hands, clap hands,
hie Jack Dandy."
How well she knows her rhymes!

The seventh-grade teachers
sent Laura to an analyst.
She barked at them.
She barked at him.
"Nobody barked back."

Denver takes up Listerine.
She is too good for him.
He's no different from the rest:
a girl is just a rag
& a rubber to brag about.

Laura made supper
for the four of us
after the movies.
Denver & Listerine
fell to "heavy necking."

We might have sat apart
appraising their skill
unlikely as Twa Corbies
awaiting the kill:
“Where shall we gang & din?”

I kissed her opened mouth,
charging the dragon in its moaning cavern;
handled her breasts & lay my ear between them.
I could hear the princess beating to be freed.
My little seal stood barking on the rocks.

She seemed a sweet bird singing in my hands.
How dear! How fierce!
How clumsily she groped Excaliber.
O sword. O stones. Girl,
leave me a piece of that.

Today I can not tolerate
her warm hand on my arm:
“Go sharpen your claws
on the woodwork.”
Pussy willow.

Laura explains
to Denver & Listerine:
caterpillars have no sex.
“But spiders do,”
says Jack.

Laura always chatters at passing dogs:
remarks on the weather, asks about
their health & families & where they've been,
compliments their tails or muddy paws.
They look a little shy.

SIGNS OF LIFE (stanzas from August & September 1951)

We pass a bakery
breathing the fresh
warm smell. "Laura,
you should catch yourself
a regular fellow."

We agree to share our lives
in a platonic marriage.
I may have lovers,
so may she.
We will be true to one another.

We tell the Pimpinels
we expect we'll marry someday.
We're both surprised to hear us tell.
They're busy over films of Sissysue
on ice.

They plan for Sissysue
to become a competition
figure skater. I don't know what
their plan has been for Laura.
Possibly it had to be abandoned.

In biology I learn
the signs of life are digestion,
growth, respiration, excretion,
motion, reproduction, irritability.
It does not seem enough.

Irritability
is reflex.
Reflection
is something else.
Life exceeds nature.

After biology,
after history, psychology,
after all the textbooks,
Laura, for instance,
remains.

Tom Smith

THE PERSISTENCE OF ZACHARY

for my son, age 7

Sometimes he's under his bed, or in the bathroom closet,
or wedged between the red couch and the wall.
He doesn't want to go to the dentist, doesn't like
his piano lessons or swimming class,
crouches behind the lush geranium, or poses
on the stereo speaker like a small statue.

Zachary, we say, we know where you are,
we've begun thinking like you, the space
under the coffee table, the dark hole
of the clothes hamper, how can you elude us?

Still he keeps trying, nabbed
in the kitchen cupboard among the brooms,
hauled off to school from out of the toy chest,
stoical, every disappearance
a brief rebellion against *have to* and *ought*.

What can we possibly tell him
that won't make us seem unbearably
correct and old-fogyish, betray
our love for this wild persistence?

Zach, boy, we call out hopefully
into the bureau drawers, the third-floor
crawl space, the shower stall,
reconfiguring the house in our minds,
all the good corners, the quirks, Zach, boy.

And tomorrow, late for an appointment,
how we'll threaten, cajole, and hate ourselves
as we force him out of the cellar perhaps
as though from an occult darkness
into the tamer light of our world.

It's bed time now and, mercifully,
he's under the right cover.

We read him a story, kiss him
goodnight, sweet dreams, we say,
then lumber downstairs to collapse
on the couch, our legs draped heavily
over each other, and each of us thinking
how much our lives predictably will change
as *he* changes, or wondering how long
this incredible whimsy of his will go on,
or whether we want it to stop at all.

Gregory Djanikian

Three Poems

ON THE BLUE WIRE

On the blue wire,
taut as the shallow v of a
plucked string,
the left foot bears down, is bare and
scale-clasped at the ankle
like the sequined-banded
wrist of a lizard, sleek as troutskin.
This snug cuff
gathers the black-cloth-with-gold-thread
of seraglio pants
which billows around the balancing left leg,
sidles up
to drape the left shoulder, cross the bare back
like a boa, sleeve the right arm.
The right foot
bare, too,
inches out into space.
Uncuffed, its leg
has the gaping hem of men's
loose, light green
pajamas
or rather
there is the *outline* of green like a verdant
aura
though the cloth is white and abruptly
stops at the waist
exposing the right pectoral from which a child's
nipple looks at me
like an eye.

WHEN DID THE DREAM SCROTUM DARKEN

to maroon
and swell to such smooth hard
resemblances of egg-
plant

(should I sing rue
o rue my roe)?

When did my milk grow
milt-like
and not dispense from tender
pink spigots

but vent in sheets from my
spleen's
slot a
squirming currency, a phalanx of minute

men with spears
fibering this silty almost
fifty year

solution, these swam-to
waters
confounded at their source.

TWO BURNS

Of the first

I have no precise memory, only the six inch
keloid like a clear rubber hinge on the side of my
knee connecting my thigh to my
calf, and

scattered narratives of

being diapered. So that in my mind I have explained it
to myself like this: above me a
bulb, pendent, suspended like a dazzling
breast just

out of reach. And mother

also above me, momentarily called away from the
room. And as if it is she who keeps this boon
at bay, the cord, in her brief

absence, could now let down its white
potlatch, go suddenly slack with
gift-giving

so that this fragile globe,
like a fulgent fire-opal missing my
mouth, could

sear, seal the foetal-folded
white wax of my leg and claim me:
flawed, belonging.

Of the second

this: I'm
 seven, have
 seven siblings now. We
 move from the east
 to Nambé, below the high mesa where my father goes to
 keep books
 on a blinding *white . . . then yellow . . . then
 orange*; this orb's
halo of blue light he's to price, post,
 balance, is
 top secret, a world at his neck's nape, a lethal
 limbo. In the village
 we're *gringos*. In the kitchen, behind
 three foot thick mud walls
 mother serves us soup. We approach
 with our bowls. She ladles out cream of tomato, Campbells,
 with its red
 label which my aunt says is a dead
 giveaway, says we
 shouldn't buy, says *it's Communist
 food*, which our large shared supplings
 prove true. On my way to the table
 jostled by those on their way to the stove, the bowl
 empties itself on my midriff
 and the scalded skin, rising like bread, forms a huge pale
 intact blister. I'm
 hopping, hopping,
 hoping to shed my skin. Turned toward me
 my father's face is a mirror, his
 eyes are
 wild. I say, "Daddy, quick get me a
 fan." He charges off, dashes to
La Moderna where a few things

(Stanza continued)

can be bought between trips to the city. While he's gone
I imagine the fan he'll bring back: a
round living thing, armless, trunkless,
sprinting toward me,
pumping three plump thighs like blades
to cut the heat at my ribs. When he returns, when he
rushes in, he looks
like the doll our bitch shook and shook
between her teeth until the seams
split, and the disgorged
wadding
mingled with the flying cotton
of the trees. He says, "They didn't have
a fan." He holds out awkwardly instead a rare
Hershey bar. And here you have it, the
split in me: my father, pure, enthused,
simple as every hero, simply
off to tease the Dragon, seize
the cure; my mother, wordlessly transmitting
through the salve of butter: there is
no cure for this, no
explanation, you must bear it.

Margaret Aho

CLASS REUNION

from *The Stripper in The Mojave*

Identical plates of chicken on patched tablecloths,
name tags with yearbook photos of old cheerleaders,
a five-piece band in thin renditions
of Miller and Dorsey, and Dixie's blue,
remembering last night's cable skin-flick,
wobbly music, bodies lurching across the screen
like an inept chorus line,
then a bed squirming, acres of flesh,
all climax, and no promise.

The band fluffs the end of "Stardust,"
then scatters, anxious for a smoke.
Through the door to the second-class casino,
Dixie hears the metallic whir and click of the slots.
For five years, men streamed in,
she was their dream of flesh
unspooling forever down a straight runway.
You get good at a thing
and it traps you, then one night,
the eyes beyond the footlights
crave a crassness you can't give.

She stubs out her cigarette in the whipped potatoes
and heads for the door.
She can't complain, she had her run of luck.
But who could have predicted Dixie,
threading a maze of plastic tables,
no light in the sky but neon, a few murky stars?

Ruth Anderson Barnett

**BOOKS IN BRIEF:
FLORILEGIA**

Although when teaching I preferred to assign complete books by individual poets, I have always been grateful to anthologists. I'll first mention briefly four collections I gladly recommend and then examine three others in more detail.

Ray González has assembled poems from Chicano and Puerto Rican poets writing today in the United States – a rich feast: *After Aztlan: Latino Poets of the Nineties* (Boston: Godine, 1992, 224 pp., \$24.95 hardbound, \$15.95 paper).

Beneath a Single Moon: Buddhism in Contemporary American Poetry is excellently edited by Kent Johnson and Craig Paulenich, with a substantial and wise introduction by – naturally – Gary Snyder (Boston: Shambhala, 1991, 338 pp., \$20. paper). This is what the word anthology historically means: a gathering of flowers. It arranges the fresh and graceful poetry with photos and biographical notes on the poets, supported by valuable autobiographical essays.

Dissident Song: A Contemporary Asian American Anthology is actually number 29/30 of the literary magazine *Quarry West*, edited by Marilyn Chin (poetry) and David Wong Louis (fiction), and available from Porter College, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA 95064 for \$12. Louis, in an eloquent introduction, excoriates the mainstream publishing industry for lumping/stereotyping “Asian American” writing into a somewhat exotic category and overlooking the dazzling diversity of literary styles and concerns. This anthology, with its wide range of excellences in poetry, fiction, drama, and art, deserves wide circulation.

Dancing on the Rim of the World: An Anthology of Contemporary Northwest Native American Writing, edited by Andrea Lerner (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990, 266 pp., \$37.50 cloth, \$15.95 paper) is Vol. 19 of Arizona's fine Sun Tracks Series. This beautifully designed book displays the work of thirty-four writers (mostly poets) whose inspiration and power spring from the land they inhabit – from Idaho and western Montana through Alaska. Buy it for the strength of the writing; you'll also get photographs of the authors, biographical

sketches, a bibliography, and an introduction by Elizabeth Woody and Gloria Bird.

Poems for a Small Planet: Contemporary American Nature Poetry is the fifth Breadloaf Anthology edited by Robert Pack and Jay Parini (Hanover, New Hampshire: Middlebury College Press/The University Press of New England, 1993, 302 pp., \$35. hardbound, \$16.95, paper). Let me fantasize how this one came about. (I'm just making this up from the internal evidence.) Robert Pack is an English professor at Middlebury, and I imagine that he has been focusing his classes lately on the ways that poets envision the environment. He has perhaps asked his classes: What do we know today that Wordsworth and Thoreau didn't know? and he's drawn blank stares (students loathe those "What am I thinking of?" questions). So he works up the necessary lectures (I'm extrapolating here from my own experience). He also collects contemporary poems that deal with that oft-discussed but rarely-defined topic "Nature." Now Professor Pack is also a poet, and he finds himself writing poems informed by his environmental insights – derived from Rachel Carson and Bill McKibben and those excellent environmental organizations we all support. The proper home for Pack's new poems is in an anthology of new "Nature Poetry," and here they are, nine pages – more than any other contributor. And as an editor Pack also gets to conclude his volume with a twenty-three-page lecture on the treatment of nature in poets from *Genesis* to Williams and Stevens. If he couldn't find for his anthology the poets who articulate these issues, he could at least supply the deficiency himself. I am sympathetic. His message is one I always hammered at my students in my own teaching:

The burden was not given to [the Romantic poets] as it is to us today, to consider the replacement of natural power by human power as the primary determinant of evolutionary change, both biological and social (p. 282).

Amen. Pack's own poems, little lectures in formal verse, remind me of Erasmus Darwin's enormously influential versifying of the new biological knowledge at the end of the

eighteenth century. I welcome them. I do, however, have one problem. Darwin knew his science, was even ahead of his time. But Pack, just once, slides into the pit yawning for most "nature poets" – of slipping from informed observation and right-minded sentiment into sentimentality. His "Mountain Ash without Cedar Waxwings" assumes that the waxwings no longer brighten his autumnal trees

because their southern habitat
has been deforested at the dumbfounding rate
of eighty-two square miles a day.
And watching their not dwelling here a while
watching the silent way
the orange berries seem to cry out
for the yellow blur of flurried wings . . .

But enough. I hate to say this, because I wholeheartedly support Pack's thesis, but cedar waxwings are not rain forest birds. Wandering flocks winter quite comfortably in Maine and Southern Canada.

I suspect that Pack and Parini were disappointed that so few of the poems assembled for an anthology entitled *Poems for a Small Planet* revealed much awareness of the threats to our environment. A great many poems, some quite good, are just How I Feel Looking at a Turtle or poems with nature as stage set: Tom Sleight's moving "Shame," or J. D. McClatchy's "Chott." Many are in that lineated cadenced prose that goes over so well at poetry readings. Some few are really extraordinarily bad.

But let me applaud some of the triumphs: A. R. Ammons and Amy Clampitt exquisitely adjust their language to their observations and to the articulation of the poet's mind with the nature observed. The result in Ammons' "Standing Light Up" and "Somers Point" and Clampitt's "Green" and "Seed" is ravishing. Some poets' observations transport the reader through their private vision to a cosmic theater: Mark Jarman's "Wave," John Frederick Nims' "Understanding the Universe," and Philip Booth's "Navigation," for example. Some few – surprisingly few – celebrate the natural world, as does Donald Hall in four splendid lyrics and Gary Snyder in the dancing music of "Raven's Beak River at the End." One, Gary Young, in four little

prose poems, pays tribute to the healing power of nature. And a few do write real poems informed by our bitter knowledge of what McKibben calls "the end of nature." Joy Harjo's fable "Wolf Warrior" is unforgettable. William Heyen's lyric editorial "Canary," Carol Simmons Oles' "The Radioactive Ball," William Matthews' "Names" (one of five strong poems), and William Stafford's "Gaea" and "Entering a Wilderness Area": this half dozen illuminate Pack's academic "Afterword." But too many, for my taste, are satisfied simply to record the poet's passing reflection, as in the ending of Marvin Bell's wry "Pulsations": "One/thought how birds are so little bother considering their numbers."

It's that time again: time for *The Best American Poetry 1993*, this year edited by Louise Glück with series editor David Lehman (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1993, 268 pp., ca. \$13. paper, and N.Y.: Scribner's, \$25. hardbound). This annual anthology is the closest thing we have to a collection of poems rather than of poets. Glück is wisely uncomfortable with the idea of "best," considering her choices as a sort of journal of magazine poems which appeal to her either for their "absolute freshness" or for their being by poets whose oeuvre she already knows. She defines the agenda of contemporary poetry as "not, or not simply, to record the actual but to continuously create the sensation of immersion in the actual." There are, consequently, a good many process poems, some of them approaching automatic writing. I found myself jotting down for each poem a word or two (often from the poem) that expressed its spirit. Here is an unedited sample: "improvisation," "drool," "incoherence," "helpless ruminations," "blank and glazed," "revulsion," "loathing," "paradox," "futility," "uneasiness," "banality," "empty-headed," "degeneration," "shallow and gushy." Then when I hit the G's, what a change! — with Tess Gallagher's "One Kiss," Albert Goldbarth's "Life Is Happy," Jorie Graham's "What the Instant Contains," Allen Grossman's "Great Work Farm Elegy," Thom Gunn's "The Butcher's Son," and Donald Hall's "Pluvia." Six good poems in a row! And a scattering of memorable verses before and after them. Enough, I guess, for one year. And let no one misunderstand: "improvisation" by a master (Ammons) can be spell-binding;

"paradox," deeply moving in the hands of a master (Carruth). But I have to be honest: most of the poems in this year's collection I had read in the magazines when they originally appeared. And I'd totally forgotten them. And now, alas, I've forgotten most of them all over again. Even the poets' comments on their poems, one of the most engaging features of this series, more than before include either no comment or a commentary that goes on and on, sometimes longer than the poem. I have to ask myself whether I am just jaundiced or whether there is in poetry something akin to the mannerism of death, decay, violence and sex that Adam Gopnik finds dominating the Venice biennale this year ("Death in Venice," *The New Yorker*, 2 August 1993). Surely there is reason for bitterness, anger, and an ulcerous sense of impotence at the local and the global horrors we cannot ignore. Perhaps many poets have internalized this frustration and rage into a rhetoric of depression, paradox, and self-contempt. Ruth Stone's "That Winter" projects this atmosphere into 1943:

You know by now there
isn't much to live for
except to spite Hitler –
the war is so lurid
that everything else is dull.

I am pondering the implications of this hypothesis, perhaps more appropriate to an anthropologist. Meanwhile I rejoice in the number of poets here who confront the dragon head-on (Denise Levertov, Jane Kenyon, Wang Ping), create haunting fables to dramatize the paradoxes of our nature (W. S. Merwin, Susan Mitchell), make language do magic (Lawrence Raab), and make it make love (Adrienne Rich).

Now I come to an anthology that seems to me exemplary in every way: Carolyn Forché's *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness* (New York: Norton, 1993, 812 pp., \$35. cloth, \$19.95 paper). Forché has assembled the work of over 140 poets, from five continents, who have themselves experienced the extremity of social and political cataclysm in this century. She divides these into fifteen chapters, beginning with the "Armenian Genocide (1909-1918)" and ending

(prematurely, as it turns out) with the Chinese struggles for democracy since 1911. In between are chapters on World War I, "Revolution and Repression in the Soviet Union," the Spanish Civil War, World War II, The Holocaust (The Shoah), "Repression in Eastern and Central Europe," "War and Dictatorship in the Mediterranean," the Indo-Pakistani Wars, War in the Middle East, "Repression and Revolution in Latin America," the struggle for civil liberties and civil rights throughout the century in the U.S., the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and "Repression in Africa and the Struggle against Apartheid in South Africa." Each chapter has a concise but comprehensive historical introduction, and each poet has a biographical sketch. There is a substantial bibliography of works in English.

I would ordinarily not review a book before I finished reading it, but I must make an exception here because of the great scope and richness of this volume. I am going to be reading it for a very long time. I find myself starting a poem after lunch (George Oppen's "Route," for example) and still marking it and meditating on it three hours later. Also, the intensity of the content, the appalling power of the poets' experience, makes a heavy demand on the reader. This book requires and deserves slow and attentive concentration.

I am reading this collection with a personal absorption: this is the narrative of my lifetime. I was one of the children still admonished, if I left a dollop of cole slaw on my plate, to "remember the starving Armenians." That they were starving I did know; that they were being systematically exterminated, including the entire population of Anatolia, I did not. Forché's introduction recalls Hitler's rhetorical question to his military cabinet in 1939, days before his invasion of Poland: "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?" Nothing more clearly dramatizes the importance of this well-titled volume.

Forché's anthology not only recalls the history of our tumultuous century; it leads the reader to live vicariously through the individual human consequences of dehumanizing political processes. Though each poet's unique voice speaks out of its specific historical nightmare, the overall impact is of a common humanity expressing the agony of individuals in

extreme situations everywhere (tonight in a Beijing prison or a Bosnian ditch) and in all years to come. Here's a sample, Miklós Radnóti's "Forced March," written shortly before he was shot and tumbled into a mass grave in 1944 (translation by Emery George):

The man who, having collapsed, rises, takes steps, is insane;
 he'll move an ankle, a knee, an arrant mass of pain,
 and take to the road again as if wings were to lift him high;
 in vain the ditch will call him: he simply dare not stay;
 and should you ask, why not? perhaps he'll turn and answer:
 his wife is waiting back home, and a death, one beautiful, wiser.
 But see, the wretch is a fool, for over the homes, that world,
 long since nothing but singed winds have been known to whirl;
 his housewall lies supine; your plum tree, broken clear,
 and all the nights back home horripilate with fear.
 Oh, if I could believe that I haven't merely borne
 what is worthwhile, in my heart; that there *is*, to return, a home;
 tell me it's all still there: the cool verandah, bees
 of peaceful silence buzzing, while the plum jam cooled;
 where over sleepy gardens summer-end peace sunbathed,
 and among bow and foliage fruits were swaying naked;
 and, blonde, my Fanni waited before the redwood fence,
 with morning slowly tracing its shadowed reticence
 But all that *could* still be — tonight the moon is so round!
 Don't go past me, my friend — shout! and I'll come around!

Against Forgetting should provide the basis for courses in every college and university and for reading groups in public libraries and private workshops. The poets in it should become household names, worldwide. I know it is going to enlighten, chasten, disturb, and inspire me for a long time to come.

M.K.S.