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**WOOD**

Wood is the sleep of fire,  
fire the hunger of wood for air,  
a hunger we share.

Woodlot people, we cannot sleep.  
What we should not know  
takes us by the throat,

we can't forget to breathe  
for long. The air is full of voices  
we can't refuse, the field

full of walking shadows  
that can't help drawing the lightning  
to our standing firewood.

## BLOODLINES

Fishheads on the fence  
in East Texas legend  
whisper *incest*,  
*idiots inside*.

Snagged on rusted fencewire  
by the upper lip,  
yellowed catfish heads  
yawn, mouths big enough  
to swallow a thermos of whiskey in one gulp.  
Smaller heads hang  
with dying crusts of skin.

Flesh spilling like dough  
from her sleeves, Grandma Frazier  
rocks on the porch swing, stabbing her words  
with a toothpick.

She tells of kin who spread west from Georgia  
like kudzu, herding hogs to chase snakes,  
how men with my name  
squatted by ponds and dropped hooks,  
then slaughtered the Hampshires.  
Bacon grease fried the fish,  
and chunks of fat lured  
crawdads from creekbanks.

A catfish caught  
on a trotline of stories,  
I fight deep currents of mossy lakes,  
struggle against the hook  
lodged in my gill.

From white-bellied uncles,  
double cousins  
hang gape-jawed on the fence,  
and I gasp for air,  
feel swamp water sliding off my skin,  
the slow haul of the line.

Janice Whittington

## CAROLYN

I            **Plague**

I was imagining that far out at sea  
a convulsion in the wave revealed a whale's head  
yawning, and Venetian blinds flashed like fish-shredders,  
like a shining trap. And it seemed like a type  
for all the other different kinds of trap:  
dark, dry, threaded ones for moths,  
for the newly moistened bodies of many insects  
soft shock cushions. And deep hives  
of irregular, unseen motes in the blue,  
creatures that swallows strain from the clear air —  
silent commonweal, fulfillment: the food supply.  
Even the lion's breath is said to numb.  
It's frightening, but surely it's not a plague.

## II Carolyn

Carolyn has a green curtain  
To her bedroom  
A little yellow light inside  
Sit on the bed

Black face is so sleepy  
I woke her up  
She sleeps all the time now  
She has the virus

I'm the food stamp man  
And I almost  
See in this weak little light  
Her neck curve

Down might just be pretty  
Or have sores  
Might have bad veins but  
I bet it's nice

### III      A Smoking Party

It was a No-Smoking hospital, but down by the basement door, under the hot pipes, we had a smoking party:

Joey Cleveland in his wheel-chair, all wrapped up, a full-blown case but cute, his voice and moustache.

He needed to have his back rubbed in the worst way, but he wanted a cigarette, and he hung around with Carolyn.

And Henny, my partner. After she got to know Joey she began to cry. She was a big smoker herself.

And Carolyn, of course, wearing a golden jacket.

She let me light her cigarette. There was an attendant she couldn't get to go out for more smokes

and with him a tall thin man I didn't know followed by a tall apparatus with fluid and tubes.

He was the gentlest man, and he smoked two cigarettes at once because they said he couldn't stay very long.

The second cigarette was apparently Carolyn's idea. I wasn't smoking. I told Carolyn I still drink a good deal.

"I'm not pure," I said. "Nobody is," said Carolyn.



IV      **Imagining Carolyn's Death**

How did you get sick if it wasn't from needles?  
Crime and the force of crime radiated out  
Even from the self-destruction of the Lord.

I suppose you weren't alone when you were at it.  
People? I don't want to hear about it,  
What happens in the park between rest and criminality.

How you glowed! I imagined it.  
You became shiny because there was warfare in the sky,  
And you were an issue, just as the Lord was an issue.

I wanted to tell you that you were especially beloved,  
But I was afraid of your disdain.  
I would have said it was because of some particular quality.

I couldn't, after all, say I loved you.  
There were crisis tubes all over the place,  
And you kept opening your nightclothes by mistake.

I am ready now to open my arms to crime.  
I shall be a serial killer. A travelling man.  
Dear God, as the trees are full of blood, take care of Carolyn.

**V           The Suffolk County Jail at Nashua Street**

At Nashua Street you kiss your hand and touch the glass.

If you push the wrong button nothing happens.

If you push the right one the elevator comes.

Then the attendant looks up through the duplexed

    bronze windows and sees you,

your visiting-room number, notifies the friend,

who comes pretty soon and you kiss your hands and

    touch the glass.

Nashua Street is not like Hell, which is a colorful place,  
full, I trust, of human cries.

God, I went outside on a day of such colorfully flickering  
    fragrance,

Saturday afternoon, the streets empty, and there was a  
    recessed place

where I put my hand up on a metal fence and wept,

not in a very satisfactory way, and off I went

with my friend behind in the slammer. I am completely  
    helpless.

The point of all this is that pane of glass.

I have to be able to smell somebody.

You can't block the olfactory if you want to say goodbye.

She's black, which I am not, but I dream deeply

that they are one vast people who smell each other,

and I want to do some smelling. And there is that great  
    bronzed pane of glass!

## VI      Angel Food

The soft burnt air has drops in it.  
Look, there are burnt orange clouds on the blue,  
Sunday night, garbage take-out time,  
and in all the soft orange, burnt blue —  
it's almost dark — is there any place  
for visitors? I mean one particular Angel.  
Blossoms! They are improper and unending,  
the flowering trees planted by our citoyens  
and citoyennes, this delicate Cambridge venue.  
Sweet, sweet, beyond sweet! White, pink  
for the pure and saucy, dolorous lilacs  
for the old ones, serene now and horny,  
distilled into an intolerable sugar.  
Now where is the Sugar Angel, the Carrier  
of drying barrels of sugar-off, this good  
goo, afar, where it will do some good,  
to Brighton, to Mattapan, my hand pauses,  
to Nashua Street, where Carolyn enjoys her birthday  
wrapped in glass?

**VII      The Second Pneumonia**

She's pretty darned thin, this old girl.  
"Skinny but good-looking," that's what I said,  
because black women wear lipstick better,  
diamond-nostriled, head propped, a *domna*  
talking a certain soft narcotic hooley  
about how good I am. She doesn't care.  
She'll buy me lunch soon. No she won't.  
Not persuasive her plans. This second pneumonia  
won't do it. Maybe the next. Or not.  
She was too weary to ask me for money,  
so I left her dreaming and went off  
into the little chapel, which wasn't empty.  
Praying done, I looked around and saw  
my companion was bowing to the East.

Rodney Gove Dennis

**THREE METAMORPHOSES****Loro**

Loro felt a great burst of energy  
when the termite queen entered his body.

She constructed a cavity in his groin  
and laid her first eggs, waiting for the  
white workers to emerge and feed her.  
She heaved and settled her immaculate

long abdomen, the soft flesh pulsing.  
The children of her ambition hatched,  
constructed a network of tunnels through  
Loro's abdomen and legs, chimneys to his ears.

They planted spores of mushrooms in his colon,  
harvested the fungi, fed their host his dreams.

In the wet spring they moved outside,  
divided Loro's apartment into zones,  
played video games, watched insect dramas  
on his VCR, closed the blinds, cooked, sewed,  
kept house for Loro while he went to work.  
In the summer they moved back into the cool

intestines of his longing. He had missed  
the patter of their half a million feet  
and felt the burden of living by himself  
was lifted on the day the queen came back.

## Garden Wall

Because her husband lavished his time  
on building a wall around the garden,  
Thisbe transformed herself into a  
section of that wall. He was a mason,  
he cut and dressed the stone. She offered  
her breasts to be squared and polished.  
He filled the chinks with mortar; she closed up  
her desire for sex. He bought sheets of glass,  
shattered them, set the broken glass atop  
the wall; she gave him pieces of her mirror.  
He admired his work, took pictures of his wall  
to the office. Tom cats lined themselves against  
it, sensing Thisbe immured within the stone.  
They sprayed the rock, marking it with lust.  
Dogs pissed against it, squirrels clambered  
over it, screeching at the world, in her ear.  
Everyone used her. Only the children  
did not love her; the glass punctured them.  
They could not perch on her stone shoulders,  
kiss her mortared face, walk along the  
circumference of her love. Thisbe endured.  
Her husband came every day and ran his hand  
along the wall, admiring his handiwork.

### Greyfuhr

Greyfuhr had an obsessive passion  
for his office desk. He liked to sit  
in his padded swivel executive chair,  
running fingers over cool mahogany,  
caressing it like a lover. He hated  
the papers that obscured the enticing desk.  
Greyfuhr perched with his soft-leather wingtip  
balanced on the bottom drawer, static  
electricity exciting the small hairs  
on his calf and thigh. He sat on the corner  
of the desk in his designer, wool-blend suit,  
fantasizing his secretary, laying her  
across the desk, her legs arched around his neck,  
using her body to rub down the wood.  
But the desk seemed jealous; he fired her,  
let no one enter the sanctum of obsession.  
He stood over the desk, his face reflected,  
blond hair above red tie, eyes glazed.  
He sat coatless underneath the varnished sleekness,  
knees pressed to chest, listening intently  
to the echoes of his systolic pulse. He stood,  
leaning his quadriceps against the molded edge,  
and masturbated on the waxed surface, massaging  
his semen into the polished grain.  
One night he stripped off all his clothes,  
abandoned them, sprawled face down across  
the warm, erotic smoothness of the wood  
and waited till the eager desk absorbed him.

Alvah K. Howe

### Three Poems

#### FIRST SONG

Oh, when the sun goes down,  
I want to walk far out from town:  
to walk with my love when the sun goes down,  
to walk with my love far out from town.

Now when the wind dies down,  
I want to lie in the leaves gone brown,  
to lie with my love when the wind dies down,  
to lie with my love in the leaves gone brown.

And when the stars burn down,  
I want to call my love my own:  
to call my love when the stars burn down,  
to call my love my own, my own.

#### FIRST NIGHT

Breathing the wonder. Easing  
to breathe. Breath by breath, each  
with each other: timing the rise,  
floating the fall. Together, together,  
letting sleep come.

Keeping and  
keeping, dreaming such sleep.  
Sleeping to wake: letting light  
wake you, letting the daybreak  
hold and behold you, self and  
other, together and each.



## SEVENTY

Zero out the kitchen  
window. Up 2° from  
noon. *Too cold for snow*

we used to say. The radio  
says flurries. Our bones  
know better now, our noses

smell the metal sky.  
By three, a big low  
off the coast; we know

its January weight.  
Power lines down. Whorls  
of horizontal snow.

At iron dusk, the white-out.  
No other house in sight.  
Drifted beyond compass,

we light two candles, bank  
the woodstove, move up stairs.  
In this barely anchored bed

we let our legs warm up  
our feet. Which mingled, heat  
the rest of us against

the deep old dark. All night  
the constant roar: as we once  
dove from rocks to swim, we

let old waves wash over us,  
waves like this storm,  
fetched from a far shore.

### Three Poems

#### AGAINST ROMANCE

The moon has rebuilt the boats below the water  
and now recreates herself, floating  
as the tide laps out over mud flats. The wind  
lifts salt smells, first perfume of fallen apples.

Young, I was in love with absence, centers  
of wedding rings left on nightstands.  
Now I listen to sibilants of retreat, watch  
a family of swans swerve into view.

The white pen, romantic as a folly, then  
three cygnets, brown with a silver sheen.  
The cob floats close. Stale  
as the denouement of fairy tales.

Charmed by the scene, my brood gathers  
at the end of the dock. The swans,  
mute as they must be, proceed  
toward vast salt marshes.

Thinking of you on a nearby island,  
surrounded by friends, family, wife, I search  
for my likeness in dark water. And I am silent,  
because I will not speak your name,  
will not become a ghost in my own life.

## FUCHSIA

Remember that August in Ireland, the music  
of fuchsia, their blood bells red  
in the hedgerows, a tangle of green, then these  
red sparks in the thicket's darkness.

How have we become the companionable  
lovers of this summer? Coffee in bed, and now  
wisecracks as we draw up wills leaving everything  
to each other in the lawyer's office.

Standing at his window, I see Corinthian capitals,  
town hall surrounded by police cars, mail boxes,  
historic markers. Classical as a temple angled  
against a pale blue sky. I want to tell you

only what is wild in us survives, but my life with you  
says otherwise, says what is wild survives  
in us — the way the potted fuchsia trills and blooms,  
primal, in the dining room.

**PROMETHEUS AT ROCKEFELLER CENTER**

Power comes from the knees, my teacher says,  
and I believe it. Power, power, power  
my blades say as they send me speeding.

Behind glass, at the edge of ice, eye level,  
businessmen at lunch both wave and smile.  
I watch them sip white wine as I flash past.

Pale crumbs tumble from baguette to table.  
One touch can change the known world into ash —  
The cherry in my wood stove proves it.

Be still, flames whisper, wait, and it will pass —  
I will survive desire or will lose it.  
My body thinks, curves backwards on one blade.

My arms embrace the circle that I've made.  
Balanced on an edge of tempered steel,  
I spin in place. And gravity is not my enemy.

The truth is, I have stolen what's not mine.  
Annealing fire makes metals far less brittle.  
I practice becoming supple.

Grace is not freely given. Grace is won.  
Or taken. Then bestowed on those who need it.  
The bells of St. Patrick's ring. My heart is wrung.

Their metal tongues are telling: don't believe it.  
Up on Fifth Avenue, wearing a sandwich board,  
bearing Corinthian epistles, the man screams out again.

*Fornicators will burn. I destroy the wisdom  
of the wise. Repent, repent. Ice is the sanity in me.  
I return to the rink's center.*

Stretch my arms toward Prometheus' golden image.  
Bend my knees and rise and turn again  
to face facts as others face the altar.

Let men make their large gestures.  
I am not powerless, or innocent.  
Am not compelled to place a losing bet.

And short of a park view room, a flawless lover,  
the brut iced, the Beluga bursting, this  
is as close to bliss as I can get.

Margaret Ryan

THE MAKING OF *T. CLARKSON PREACHES AT  
THE ANTISLAVERY CONVENTION*: SUNDRY  
DISCOURSES BY THE PAINTER, B. HAYDON

Dedicating the New Canvas 10 x 12

Felt my heart quicken,  
the effect of all large bare space,  
a clean sea sky,  
a pair of white shoulders

new each time!  
as two men, balancing the great blank  
between them, tilt it carefully  
up the narrow steps  
where, amidst a clutter of brushes  
and paintpots, it breathes  
the delicious light  
edible as this plate of pears  
whose white flesh glistens on my tongue.

It is mute, let me give it voice.  
Scentless now, but not for long.  
I will drench the Academy  
in the stink of piss and pule,  
hum it the dim croon  
of the mother, tender in the  
crowded hold, who rocks  
her stiff child  
though the day comes and  
the day goes.  
I will *make* the onlooker hear his words.  
Where is the power of paint  
after all, but in the incitement  
to repentance or revolt, Art  
as high in the heavens as a sun!

**Clarkson**

He'd a bottle of ale by his bed  
besides a fine watch, some pills  
(marked S for Sedative and A for  
Aperient), and some letters from  
America which he insisted I read.  
When I came to sketch, he summoned  
the maids — six servant girls and  
a washerwoman, it being washing day.  
I am determined they shall witness  
the first stroke, said he. And  
suddenly a muddled angel entered  
his face, the same that had plucked  
him from sleep those years ago  
saying, You have not done all your  
work. There are slaves in America.  
I felt it swell his old man's body,  
and when he had done I felt it leave,  
as paint fails the hands at the end  
of the day. He studied my cartoon,  
and pronounced it like. His eyes  
followed me from the room, their  
dark centers widening. Blue-black  
and marglyp for glaze, I think.  
For his zeal, that dull sweet fire.

### Inspired

Worked all morning. My brushes  
seemed to sing, sometimes volupt,  
heavy-headed with paint,  
at others rasping, each single hair  
stiff and scant. Labored all afternoon  
at the chiaroscuro round Clarkson's  
shoulders, spreading his brown coat  
to the dried-blood walls. The  
massy breadth one sees in Teniers!  
Yes! Oh I am ablaze, though my own  
shoulders ache. The moon's light  
shivers on the cobbled street.  
Over the way a woman is loosening  
her hair. How her long arms shine!

### On Immortality

Put among the spectators a dear friend,  
a man gone thick-necked and fat who,  
dining in town one day, ate twice  
as much as he could hold, as usual,  
then was seized vomiting blood,  
and died. I thank heaven I saved  
his cartoon. Today makes fifty  
heads which leaves me twenty more.  
It occurs to me that this painting  
will have heads all over, like a  
peacock's tail. Finished Clarkson's  
breeches then went out for a basin



of mock turtle. There is nothing  
equal to being *in the middle* of  
some great work. Returning to my  
painting room I noted an overcool  
space. For remedy considered umber.  
Settled finally on burnt sienna.  
Heard Mary mewling from her poor  
damp bed. Remembered I had a wife.

### On Narration

How difficult it is to tell a story  
when the faces of the excited are seen  
but the object of excitement not.  
Two disciples awed. At what?  
Christ bewailing. What?  
Whereas if the object be perceived  
and the faces not, how the imagination  
rests content which otherwise  
fidgets like a boy at school.  
To no avail the poor painter, who  
insists, brushes dripping, *But you  
do not understand. Inside that circle  
lies a man in chains, and his gasps  
are little screams and his soul is  
escaping!* Imagination strays to the  
red-haired woman, notes the appearance  
of a bit of ankle as she turns to mount  
the stair, curious of the second floor.

**Calling on a Well-Known Patron  
to Whom the Painter, Unfortunately, Owes Money**

“Once Wilkie grew convinced that Titian mixed white with asphaltum, and sailing before that wind, muddied a fine picture. This, following his insistence that the old masters shunned models and his own failed attempts to do the same. And now he buzzes of the Holy Land. This should suit the portraitists who would love nothing more than to see our young men neglecting drawing and dissection, rushing pell-mell to Jerusalem, all ablaze with romantic fervor, and longing to die of the plague. While meantime, no doubt, Wilkie will have decided that the only true direction for the rendering of light must be the magnetic pole, and will have set all his easels according. It’s really too amusing, though he is my friend.” And I went on for several further miles before I reached the loan. And then I said if he could keep patience but a few months more his consideration would surely be returned, for debt speeds the painting hand. At which my knees refused, and I sat sudden down, knowing this a poor glaze, seeing the cracks begin in fine net across his cheeks, his eyes.

**The Work Complete, The Public Visits the Academy**

They stop before a Stroebel, small  
and poorly framed. What a color  
is that turnip! they exclaim.  
How delightful that cabbage!  
And look at that balance, how the  
painter has made it catch gold!  
And what is it they praise?  
The mind of the painting perhaps?  
Its incitement to revolt? High Art?  
No. The Dutch part.

As a gentleman lifts his eyepiece  
and walks over the room to a Jan  
Miers of a hausfrau, some potatoes,  
and a cat. And nothing's for it  
but it must be lifted down.  
And then if you please, my lord  
and my lady and young master  
and miss must crowd in upon it,  
near faint with admiration. While  
in an empty chamber poor Clarkson  
takes his stand. In vain his hat  
has tumbled to the floor, in vain  
his blood's asurge, the wild sea  
rolls, the stolen Africans toss  
in their chains, their children go  
beaten and caged and starved. We  
know what to praise. How compelling,  
we gush, that well-turned herring!  
How charming the ivory smile  
of that domestic and empty cup!

## AT THE HOME FOR RETIRED PIANO TEACHERS

To see them toothless, rocking absently,  
Crocheted coverlets on knees, you must ask  
How they ever could have been your childhood's  
Most enduring terrors. Endearing in  
Their sudden sleeps, their lengthy silences,  
Wisdom like a wimple simply wrapped, they  
Could be the muse's perfect messengers.  
"I whacked their knuckles with a ruler," one  
Confesses. The others wrinkle noses  
In distaste. "Old school!" a second declares.  
"Pennies on the wrists are best!" Between sips  
Of tea a third says: "Nuns were my favorites —  
So meek and well-behaved." "Not like children!"  
Spits her neighbor. "I made them clean their nails!"  
"My bane was bubble gum!" chimes in the first.  
"Show me a student who can play and chew  
In counterpoint!" The most grandmotherly  
Speaks up: "I gave them stars: gold, red, blue; for  
Perfect renditions from memory, Chopin's bust  
In plastic." "Spoiled," the sour one says.  
"When the smallest ones asked 'Do you love me?'  
I told them: 'Sit still!'" "Why, that's nothing!" her  
Companion crows. "I made boys give up  
Football for fear of breaking their fingers!"

"I can do better yet," says the woman  
From Russia. "I made them smell cabbage one  
Hour each week, and pinched them for every  
Mistake!" Not to be topped, the arthritic  
Hungarian raises her gnarled hand: "I  
Made my beginners close the piano,  
And practice finger push-ups for a month;  
Then started them on minuets by Bach,  
While reciting the begats." "But you can't  
Mean the Bible," the tea drinker counters.  
"Oh no," she replies. "Beethoven begat  
Czerny, begat Liszt, who begat Thomán.  
And Thomán begat Bartók, begat me."

Kurt Leland

## Two Poems

### THE CRANE IN FLIGHT

The diaries, fat and satisfied, roost low on a shelf.  
While close to the table a clutter of scissors  
snapped shut like heron bills, a frail tape dispenser;  
pens, slender as legs, rise from cans and cups.

A body might take the legs aloft, they uprightly suggest,  
land them somewhere they can stretch, walk out  
the pale distances, lids bobbing like birds' heads.  
The table spreads flat as the lake ducks splash onto, wings  
thrust out to brake, webbed feet smacking what had been calm,  
contemplative. A lake will early loose its mists;  
they slip off like dustjackets, leaving the surface  
dark, unlettered. When cranes pass low

the lake wrinkles, as handprinted words mark a page,  
or as words spoken ripple air  
in a room formerly still. Flight feathers  
brush your cheek; you sit back,

touch yourself, as someone is going to touch you,  
come right up close and kiss you; a kiss  
that tumbles like an accident not yet happening,  
a surprise that waits over you, quietly hovering.

## KING OF THE MOUNTAIN

Every afternoon  
the snows falls until the teabag in the teacup  
is completely covered up.

Sometime during the night  
the snow quits.  
Come morning two burly courtiers with pickaxes  
crack the dome of ice that crowns him.

Every afternoon  
before the tea kettle is lifted from the wooly cozy  
and tipped so the tea  
darkens the white cup,  
the snow starts up again like a fanfare  
and no one can see anything.

He drinks it while it's hot.  
The boy with the towel over his arm  
takes the kettle on its tray back down the slope.

Sometime during the night  
the snow quits.  
Come the dawn there's a dome of ice  
and the dutiful courtiers in their ski jackets.

Glenn Ingersoll

## Two Poems

### WEIR FISHER

Flowing out of green foothills  
the shallow stream enters the sea.

It began its winding course  
long before these banks were cut;

before Raven stole the stars and moon,  
when no village stood along the shores.

Below the stone weir, an old man waits  
like the hills along the creek

for what the stream will soon bring,  
or what it will take away.

Once they arrive, he will lift a thin spear  
while gray clouds slow the speed of light.



## RITUAL

The moose moves as silently as falling leaves.  
Its muddy hooves blend limbs and earth  
like uprooted trees — tall saplings that dust the woods  
and brush the forest with their passage. Fog  
fills the sky like tribal smoke rising before me.

I sit, collar turned to the wind and cold,  
breathing out fire that stalks within me. My  
breath conjures up my father who sat in this very spot  
holding the ground in place — hunter  
cradling a rifle between his arms.

I hear branches snap in my chest; twigs that break  
into green bones still alive with sap. Inside  
my breast, a flame flickers against winter.  
September licks at my numbness  
as my father's hand curls around my finger.

John E. Smelcer

## EXODUS

### I. Making the Enemy

Our herds rushed to stagnant water;  
many died, gaunt carcasses scattered  
by the edge of the pool.

Soon after, our babies  
and our elders began to whimper.  
Wind whistles where their skeletons  
still mark our trail;  
none of us had strength to bury the dead.

Hungry, we tore gold from the necks of women.  
Our priests graved images in precious metal.  
Hungry, we slaughtered rams and spilled  
their entrails. We ate  
none of the flesh.

While hammers rang and knives sighed  
through skin, we watched virgin daughters  
bend in ritual copulation.

The smoke of sacrificial fires  
no longer stings our eyes.  
Grain eaters no longer stone  
us at the mouths of valleys.  
Our flocks are vast, the hills  
shimmer with their movement.

Now our children sing songs we have never heard before.

When I come to my wife  
I keep a dagger near at hand.

## II. A King's Meditations

Let us sharpen our swords.

When the wildman spoke of seraphim  
we laughed.

Then some one embraced him, I think,  
or struck his cheek; it's hazy now,  
I was drunk. I still chuckle at his ravings  
of smoke and thunder and an ember  
searing lips.

I think that, when next the moon  
burns full, we shall add to the walls of the city,  
perhaps immolate a baby near the main gate.

As for the wildman: have  
one of the women  
scrub the lice from his hair.

### III. Freedom

Rites of terror seem over.  
Nameless, we wander treeless regions.  
Wind whickers among columns of basalt.  
We have no chisel hard  
or sharp enough to cut this stone.

Such is the land of milk  
and honey, the broken, promised-  
land. Where are the tumbled  
blocks of our city's walls? Here the weight  
of a condor's shadow is enough to crack  
a single, green sapling twisted  
by the wind, its ramparts  
of leaves stunted.

And here, on harsh ground  
where stone grinds our enemy so we dwindle  
to grit underfoot, we hear  
the name we have searched for, a name  
we each take for ourselves.

•  
Peter Munroe

THREE POEMS

she comes back —  
the ocean drips off  
every part of her

half heard rain —  
page after page  
of family photos

time to go —  
the stones we threw  
at the bottom of the ocean

## BOOKS IN BRIEF

*Every Shut Eye Ain't Asleep: An Anthology of Poetry by African Americans since 1945*, edited by Michael S. Harper and Anthony Walton (Little, Brown/ Back Bay Books, 1994, 320 pp., \$24.95 hardcover, \$12.95 paper) presents thirty-five poets, born between 1913 and 1962, selected by the editors for the artistic quality of their work. It appalls me that we have had to wait until 1994 for this collection. Now that it's here, everyone who cares about American poetry should have a copy. Arranged by the birthdate of the poet, it provides a survey of the diverse history of this rich half-century of poetry by African Americans (more than a third of whom, I'm proud to say, have been published in this magazine).

I got to thinking about the inspiring power of the rhetorical poetry of the young black poets who read on campuses in the sixties and early seventies. I wondered then whether the driving repetitions, rooted in traditional pulpit rhetoric, could maintain their force on the printed page. Not much of this oral power makes it into these pages, though one splendid example survives in the heart of Haki Madhubuti's "Gwendolyn Brooks" (he was still Don Lee when I heard him declaim his pyrotechnic prosody of pounding parallelisms, scathing sarcasm, and ingratiating colloquialism).

I am grateful that the editors are generous with long poems, including Robert Hayden's eloquent "Runagate, Runagate," a substantial selection from Gwendolyn Brooks' "Winnie," Derek Walcott's "The Schooner *Flight*," Sherley Anne Williams' "Letters from a New England Negro," Rita Dove's "The Passage," and "Narrative: Ali" by the young and extraordinarily talented Elizabeth Alexander.

Admitting the limitations of my experience, I'd say that Harper and Walton have fairly represented the range and the vitality of the poetry they had to choose from. This collection is splendid.

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Some of our most powerful contemporary poetry is rooted in the West Indies, and a Canadian scholar with long acquaintance with the Caribbean and its writers, J. Edward Chamberlin, has written a strong introduction to it: *Come Back to Me My Language* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois, 1993, 336 pp., \$44.95 cloth, \$15.95 paper). Although he discusses about forty poets, from Bob Marley to Grace Nichols, his major emphasis is on Derek Walcott, Edward Kamau Braithwaite, and Lorna Goodison. Chamberlin's primary interest is, properly, on the glorious richness of the language, the means by which the poets and song writers have grasped their true independence. He is generous in his quotations, so that the volume serves almost as an anthology. Moreover, his own style is extraordinarily graceful.

Walcott is of course a Nobel laureate, and the University of Michigan Press brought out Lorna Goodison's *Selected Poems* in 1992. The scandal is that, with fifteen earlier volumes and a global reputation, Kamau Braithwaite has not found a U.S. publisher before now. New Directions has at last produced a retrospective volume of his work, *MiddlePassages* (New York, 1993, 128 pp., \$8.95 paper). Born the same year as Walcott (1930) Braithwaite went from his native Barbados to England, where he took his degree at Cambridge. He is a distinguished historian, now teaching at N.Y.U. But his poetry is anything but academic. It reflects the impact of his post-graduate work in Ghana, where for eight years he was an education officer, deepening his sense of community and bridging his Atlantic homeland to his African heartland. On a later visit to Ghana he received the name *Kamau*, and in this latest book Braithwaite has dropped the *Edward* from his name.

*MiddlePassages* gives us revised versions of fourteen previously published poems. With headings and some text in the poet's own "Sycorax video style" of computer type, the book is an eye-opener. The poems are pictures, some flush left, some flush right, some centered, some boldface, some boldface italic, and in a range of type sizes. But more important, I think, is that each poem is a score to be performed. The typographic arrangement provides instructions for the voice.

My initial excitement with Braithwaite's poetry was that he, more than any other poet I know, has found ways to commun-

icate through the printed page the inflections, the intensity, the music, and the drumbeat of the African American voice. Listen to a few lines from “Stone: for Mikey Smith 1954-1983 stoned to death on Stoney Hill, Kingston”:

de itch & ooze & damp a de yaaad  
 in my silver tam. bourines closer & closer  
 st joseph marching bands crash. in & closer . &

bom si. cai si. ca boom ship bell. bom si. cai si. ca  
boom ship bell

Braithwaite’s periods, like musical notation, control the syncopation. And what’s more, he uses them to syncopate the meaning of the words.

Which brings us to this poet’s extraordinary command of language. I’m sure that from my own linguistic cage I am missing much of what goes on in these poems. Braithwaite and his editors make no concessions (through, say, a glossary) to those of us who do not have in our experience or dictionaries such words as *yabba* or *lucumi* or *cumfa mashramani*. But rereading and rereading clarifies much. I learned to expect words to have multiple meanings — often puns highlighted by spelling or punctuation or by breaking a word at a line-end:

with your soft ringing patience with your black.  
 lash of wit.

A few more examples: “wives and sleephearts,” “a sweetend trip,” “cymbell children,” and “turblethumb thimbleprint journalist.” The range is from the most delicate wit to the most disturbingly complex multidimensional language. Always the sound is wonderful, wonderful:

the sun. light morning washed the choral limestone harsh  
 against the soft volcanic ash.

Although some of the wit depends on the eye (“choral”), the reader is always hearing the rhetoric — vernacular/sophisticated — of the poet’s voice. I cannot think of a poet who could not delight in this virtuosity and learn from it.

And I cannot think of the reader who could not learn from what these poems are about. Of course they are about the language — the liberation of a people through a recovery of and



gusto for their richly resonant tongue. But these are profoundly committed poems: for Nicholas Guillén in "Word Making Man," on the "dis/covery" of Columbus, on Duke Ellington and Bessie Smith, for Kwame Nkrumah and Nelson and Winnie Mandela. And a wonderfully funny and mordant computer letter from Caliban to his mother Sycorax. The false distinctions between poetry and polemic, between tragic vision and comic insight, between anger and tenderness, here disappear. At last a major poet of our troubled history and troubling time is available to readers in this country — and in a language for the ear. a. My congratulations to New Directions.

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### Beauty and the Book

Most of the books that come to me for review look pretty much the same typographically. There seems to be little effort by commercial publishers to create book design that reflects the uniqueness of the individual text. I'd like to mention three extraordinary books where the artist/designer and the poet work in perfect harmony.

(1) One way to achieve this ideal is self-publishing, and since I wrote to endorse this route (Winter 1992/93), I have received several beautifully-achieved volumes of self-published poems. Among these, outstanding for imagination and beauty is Lacey Kellett's *Dream Fishing* (Steamboat Press, P.O. Box 46, Brooklin, Maine 04616, \$19.95). Kellett's seventeen poems are elegantly printed on loose 8½ x 11 sheets, gathered into a folder printed with one of the poet's own watercolors — all protected with a plastic slipcase. The beautiful folder and the poems reflect a quiet attentiveness to the natural world, accurate in observation and language, equally rich in visual imagery and melodious to the ear. I also like the way these poems cast light back and forth among themselves.

(2) Some poets are fortunate enough to have an edition by a fine art publisher, so that the volume itself is a work of art. Constance Hunting's *At Rochebonne* (Theodore Press/Sarah Books, 58 Highland Avenue, Bangor, Maine 04401, 16 pp. \$100.) represents not only exquisite bookmaking but the kind of marriage of poem to paper that most poets only dream of. The

poem, in nine sections, is a meditation on a sojourn in a healing sanctuary — a stone house on a mountain, providing a perspective in both space and time above the “yellow plain/dissolution of cities/at the edge of a rubble sea.” The poem itself is such a sanctuary: a “nest of words,” in a deep stillness of respite. The pages (8½ x 11½) are on handmade laid paper from Quebec with soft magenta flower-petals randomly embedded. The rosy cover paper is handmade in the Auvergne. The designer and bookmaker is the distinguished artist Michael Alpert.

(3) An “Artist’s Book” is yet another category — paper art, often “conceptual,” in which the text, if there is one, is secondary. I’d like to share news of an Artist’s Book in which text and format are enchantingly married: Margaret Kaufman, poet, and Claire Van Vliet, artist, *Aunt Sallie’s Lament* (Chronicle Books, 275 Fifth Street, San Francisco, CA 94703, 1993, \$17.95), a trade edition of a limited artist’s edition. The poet who gave me this book insisted on sitting beside me as I turned the “pages,” so as to enjoy my reactions. The square book unfolds in squares of various sizes and colors as the story “Aunt Sallie” tells unfolds. The narrator is quilting as she speaks, and the squares combine as the “pages” turn to create a complex quilt square. The poem is a wry and affectionate love story, and its achievement is in the way the format — and the reader’s involvement in the turning over of the squares — works to dramatize the colloquial, ironic voice of the narrator. The poet who gave me the book was rewarded by my little yips and yelps of surprise and delight as “Aunt Sallie’s” story literally unfolded.

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*The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, edited by Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan and others (Princeton University Press, 1993, 1434 pp., \$29.95 paper, \$125 cloth).

First: to describe this new edition of what has since 1965 been an invaluable companion to poets, teachers, critics and scholars. There are 951 entries by 379 contributors. Of these entries, 162 are new topics, with 445 new subentries. Over 90% of the entries in the previous edition have been revised or, in many cases, rewritten by different hands. Each item has an

extensive (often overwhelming!) bibliography. In addition the new work has a useful index of the contributors and a table of contents listing all entries. The amount of work that the editors have done is staggering.

What do we get? Discussions of poetic terms from *adynaton*, *anthimeria*, and *Arzamas* through *Zéjeh*, *zeugma*, and *Zulu poetry*. (One hundred and six national poeties are described.) The accounts are ample (27 columns on the epic, 28 on the lyric) and include thorough histories of each term. The editors, like good lexicographers, are sensitive to the evolution of words and do not inscribe their definitions in stone. Brogan concludes his 30 columns on *meter* with a note on the lack of any comprehensive account of the subject: "at the turn of the 21st c., pretty much everything still remains to be done."

The editors have not confined themselves to description and history. One of the most interesting sections is on *prosody*. Replacing the 18 columns in the last edition, Brogan has written 23 columns, including a list of nine requirements for a unified field theory of prosody, recognizing that no such theory now exists.

This encyclopedia will be especially valuable to readers like me who need help in understanding the recent revolutions in critical theory. The entry on *Twentieth-century Poetics* is by none other than Paul De Man with Claudia Brodsky Lacour. Full essays on *structuralism*, *deconstruction* (with chapters on it as philosophy and as criticism), *textuality*, and *criticism* are ample, readable, and usefully historical in focus. The valuable essay on *criticism*, by Hazard Adams, ends with a challenging observation: many of our essential critical documents have been either by the poets themselves (Sydney, Shelley, Eliot) or in response to literary texts (Aristotle to Socrates as well as Plato). "Virtually absent" from critical/theoretical writing at the end of this century, says Adams, has been "any discourse by an artist defending or promoting a practice, or by a critic concerned with the special nature of lit., with specifically literary value, or with the particular excellences of a given literary work." Now there is indeed a challenge. Poets today, when they venture into prose (see Merwin, Hall, Levine), do tend toward the autobiographical essay rather than to defenses of poetry or prefaces to their own lyrical ballads. Time will tell whether those poets who have

essayed theory and criticism (consider Bly, Rich, and Levertov) will maintain the authority of a Wordsworth or a Dryden.

Obviously my review is based on a spotty sampling of the riches of this magnificent encyclopedia, and each reader will find his or her own passages to praise or blame. I find very little of the latter, but one cavil may be suggestive. *Syllabic verse* is not in the earlier editions, except as a subdivision of *meter*. Brogan contributes such an entry for the new edition, but an uncharacteristically narrow one. He traps himself in his identification of *meter* with *pattern* and doubts that an auditor could identify syllabic verse as *verse*, except by exaggerated line-end pauses. He therefore questions whether syllabic verse is "metrical" (his quotes) at all, and "if not metrical, and not free, one may question whether 'verse' at all." In free verse, he does acknowledge, lines have "rhythmic shape." I am baffled as to how he can deny this to syllabic verse. The explanation, I suspect, is one that may indicate a limitation to this work as a whole: editorial ignorance of what is going on in present day poetry. The reductionist treatment of syllabic verse could hardly have been written by one who was familiar with the variously brilliant poems in this form by W.S. Merwin and Donald Hall, to name but two. Indeed, it does reinforce Brogan's claim that a comprehensive theory of prosody does not exist. And to quote another poet-theorist, Pound in a footnote to his essay on T.S. Eliot: "Prosody is the articulation of the total sound of the poem." I hope that the brave soul who undertakes to formulate such a theory will write it in a style as lucid, graceful, and even humorous as the editors and most other contributors to this valuable volume have displayed. No one concerned with poetry will want to be without it.

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### More Briefly

Jody Gladding, *Stone Crop* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, 50 pp., \$16. cloth, \$9. paper). It's a treat to read a poet who touches lightly while penetrating deeply. Oxymoron? Perhaps, but Jody Gladding accomplishes it. For lightness, here's one:

the heron is  
 my patience

my thoughtfulness  
 the loon

the kingfisher  
 my nerve

but the osprey  
 I am wholly

the osprey's

That would sound more slight than light were it not for the title: "Fish Song." I wish I had space to quote "The Eight Difficult Situations," on the eight circumstances, according to Zen, in which it is "difficult to see the Buddha or hear the dharma." It would give you a better sense of this fine poet's range and richness. (James Dickey picked her to be a Yale Younger Poet. Good choice.)

Larry Rottman, *Voices from the Ho Chi Minh Trail: Poetry of America and Vietnam 1965-1993*, with photographs by Nguyen Trong Thanh and Larry Rottman (Event Horizon Press, P.O. Box 867, Desert Hot Springs, California 92240, 1993, 224 pp. 11 x 8½, \$19.95 + \$3.50 shipping). This is the most balanced book on the war that I have yet seen, and I have been recommending it to teachers and librarians for students who know nothing about our "adventure" in Vietnam. But it's not a children's book. It's a volume of lucid, colloquial poems — really good poems — matched with the poet's own photographs and those of his North Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Trong Thanh. The result is a documentary that takes the reader through the war, from "Greetings!" beginning: "Lastname firstname middlename/ Bendover and spreadyourcheeks," to "Song In The Moonlight," with a photograph of a young Vietnamese woman playing a cello in a bamboo shelter. The poem begins "You play a tune/ and suddenly the light of the moon becomes immense" and ends:

And we — the children — we hold our breaths,  
 we listen with all our ears,  
 as the shade of the palm tree spreads over the  
 instrument,

passing like a hand  
 to erase the hateful sounds of war from our hearts.  
 Leaving only the song,  
 and it alone,  
 as fresh as a stream at its source.

The war's effects will not be so easily erased from those who suffered through that dark chapter of our history, but this book should, by its unflinching truthfulness, by the poet's skill in projecting a great variety of voices, by his even-handedness in representing both sides, help heal the psychological damage, the anger and guilt, and provide for following generations some insight into this tragic chapter in world history.

Lawson Fusao Inanda, *Legends from Camp* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Coffee House Press, 1993, 177 pp., \$11.95 paper). This book is another kind of documentary: the witness of an American interned fifty years ago by the U.S. government by virtue of his Japanese ancestry. Like Rottman's, and like the other books I'm reviewing in this section, Inanda's is extremely accessible — not, as he says, just for “poetry people.” It is divided into six chapters, with photographs and introductory autobiographical essays, carrying Inanda through his life to the present. A sense of humor and a sense of community connect the poet directly to a large audience. Although all his poems work through music (frequently jazz), the last section is entirely performance scores, lifting the reader off the page. This is an extraordinarily appealing book.

Luci Tapahonso, *Sáantł Dabatał: The Women Are Singing* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993, 112 pp., \$19.95 cloth, \$9.95 paper). Weaving poetry and stories together, Tapahonso transforms her life as a Navajo from Shiprock, New Mexico, into art that preserves and shares the wealth of a singing and story-telling culture. The music of an oral tradition informs both the poems and prose — informational, informal, informed — a music that rises from deep roots.

M.K.S.