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ONE DROP SPILLED FROM PSYCHE'S LAMP

Your throat
by dawnish windowlight,
the purple bloodwell
throbbing in your sleep
toward hidden thought,
these eighteen years
since dawn first showed me
in your sleep
how beautiful you are,
again I see, and turn away,
these few years being
my young manhood, gone.

I hate and love,
a young man cried,
great Latin guttering
in his blood,
and if you ask me how,
he said, or why,
what I can tell you is
I feel it burn.

Brooks Haxton

Two Poems

MAIL ORDER STOMP

The values that determine human behavior are vastly more complex and varied than they were when the concept [of Economic Man] was developed. It has been shown that man has many interests other than his interest in money; that he desires security, leisure, independence, justice, and freedom in many forms. The virtually unlimited human wants and the efforts expended to satisfy them from limited resources is a much broader concept than conceived by the classical writers.

— John Fred Bell, *Economic Man**

CRAFTED, painted figurine
 Stenciled with pastoral scene,
 Oil of lavender, tangerine,
 Toll-free phone.

Pair of plushiest polar bear,
 Polypropylene underwear,
 Bisqueware, folk art angel hare,
 Stone, ecru, bone.

Engraved keepsake apple plaque,
 Snappy tramper fanny pack,
 Olive, crimson haversack,
 Flask for schnapps!

Hand-crafted breakfast basket,
 Coeur d'amour, bomber jacket,
 Side pocket for squash racquet,
 Ratchet strap.

* Encyclopedia Britannica

Enameled tin biscuit box,
Soft and springy rubber socks,
Blast-resistant, new mailbox,
No more moles!

Breakthrough! Hands-free head strap lamp,
Trademark vise-grip locking clamp,
Hinged steel lightweight traction ramp,
Five quart bowls,

Classic diner coffee mug,
Bobbin lamp and whiskey jug,
Variegated braided rug.
Anjou pear,

Wine or taupe, mahogany,
Expedite delivery,
Uses six 'D' batteries,
Keep some spare.

Fifteen-minute highway flare,
Zircons, rhinestone solitaire,
Prove you love her, buy a pair!
Porcelain pig.

Carries wallet, change and key,
Unconditional guarantee.
Ripe bing cherries, bosc and brie,
Stir-fry pan,

Savory and sage, anise, chive.
Jet-a-way broom hoses drive,
A dollar two ninety-five,
Keyless chuck.

Almond cream, chocolate truffle,
Forest green overstuffed duffel,
Pillow sham, twin dust ruffle,
Eider duck.

Aqua rubber octopus,
Turquoise hippopotamus,
Signed by artist — just for us!
Dog-eared page,

Chocolate puppy, tortoise comb,
Kitchen cubbies, garden gnome,
Christmas pickle, toll-free phone.
Dishwasher safe

Terra cotta berry jar,
Lunar phases calendar,
Pocket-sized monocular,
Three-tiered box.

Quilted dove embroidery
Chickadee and chicory,
Optional rotisserie,
Bright-eyed fox,

Hand knitted kitten sweater,
Shoulder strap seeder/spreader,
Guaranteed, ours are better,
Made by monks.

Orange earmuff, safety visor,
Lucite hardware organizer,
Three-way circuit analyzer,
Plaid, jade, check,

Softest, thickest English chamois,
Oriental origami
Or Thuringian salami.
Credit card, check

Patchwork tree skirt, baking tile,
Cut glass, blown glass, flower vial,
Hand-cast bird bath, brass sun dial,
Please don't touch!

Shaker maker secretary,
Candelabra topiary,
(May exchange if necessary)
Wallet/coin clutch.

Polished Vermont marble coaster,
Threatened northern wildlife poster,
Telescoping wiener roaster,
Drawstring pouch.

On the mantle, chalkware cats.
In the foyer, welcome mats.
Out in backyard, house for bats,
Santa on skis.

Beaujolais and Côtes du Rhone,
Perugina panettone,
Napkins, linens: ecru, stone,
Teal, taupe, maize.

Arctic salmon, nectarine,
Baggy, pleated, stretch waist jean.
After supper, plump praline,
Scented log,

Fireside tongs, hand carved handles,
Patented rose, beeswax candles.
Mirth and cheer, frustrates vandals,
Faithful dog,

Painted egg, sheepskin slipper.
Privately, nose-hair clipper
Stowed away, nylon zipper,
Bristle hair brush.

Current resident, just for you,
Any three for price of two,
Cobalt, fuchsia, azure blue.
Phone, fax, rush.

MEASURING E. B. WHITE'S BOATHOUSE

Does the over-blown graveside crock
of dust-spattered striped silk lilies,
the withered linden transplant,
the brusque kiss of the grass trimmer
against frost-fractured lichen-stained Carrara
spook among the dead some tedious unutterable ache
of transience and of missed regard?

Is their disposition soothed (*as surely ours is*)
by the seep of borrowed water, in the shade of slate,
stealing through the roots of a lone begonia,
its deadheads lovingly pinched?
. . . or amused by the pageant near the chain-link fence
where, in July sun,
tomatoes in pots set fruit?

Do our erratic trespasses, uninvited
across their haunts, ripple their
glassy dreams like a buzzing fly
tickling a sleeping dog's ear?

And is the author pleased
(*He must be — say, he must*)
to flicker on in strangers' thoughts,
as echoed verbs, escaping the choke
of dust-smudged boards, darkened leaves split
open in a crack of light, ignite,
with a snap of aptness, a quick
twitch of cheek, a sudden mis-rhythm
of expelled breath, an awkward
irritation in the corner of one eye?

Or does he weary, marionette
at our synapse strings, sapped
by reprise, footnoted prisoner
behind the filamental webs
of images set fly, for him, too long ago,

(*Stanza continued*)

the juice of truth now dried?
And if so, does he wince to see us, map,
biography and tape measure in hand,
winding up the two-track garden path?

What shadow of lyric
spirit, perennially abstracted
in April's pipping promise, now shies
behind the baleful black unblinking
glare of the windows of that empty house?
(Someone else's now — and, either way, not ours!)

Yet, outside the confine of the pickets,
beyond the regimented apple trees — crutched,
grown old in service — through the tamed fields,
where a kingbird perches, leads the way
(quick, to escape that black, black glare!)
down into the soothing unmowed cool
and green of woods, balsam, tamarack,
black spruce, to the curve of cove,

where by the rip rap, there, conserved,
sits the weathered shingled shack
(just like in the picture!)
compact island on salt glazed lawn:
. . . seventeen foot ten by thirteen four.

Two south six-over-sixes let in
dusk across an absent shoulder, left,
gone from the southeast corner seat.
Through an in-swinging awning, east
light diffuses on a narrow table,
without typewriter, from which unspooled
one man's faith in freedom, predication, and the egg.
The door, . . . unlatched.
(but who could dare?)

Three Poems

A TENDENCY TOWARD ORDER

Beyond physical laws,
she thought,
balanced on a branch,
tossing out an apple;
descending,
captured the red sweet shape
out of thin air,
 round and fresh.

She startled herself by
drifting, a gradual fall
across the table of periodicity.
Once light,
electronically slender,
now she entered groups of metals,
numbered, solemnly,
 by increasing weight.

“Positions are assigned
according to mass and configuration.”

Shifting, she slid,
slipping numbers;
particles travelled
to the shell beneath.
She had formed endless bonds;
now they diminished in a
doubtful equilibrium
 punctuated by loss.

“Periods are horizontal,
groups are vertical.”

. . . numbered irrevocably
from one to eight.

The final column is zero:
inert (or noble) elements,
reacting
 with great difficulty.

Now she loves by the
eightfold way:

by diameter,
by common valence,
 melting and
 boiling points,

 density,
by her eccentric orbit;

for her dark companion star,
 her distinct types of magnetism.

A rare earth
in three flavours,
she is

 up
 down
 strange.

SITE SPECIFIC

Beneath a lichenous crust,
glacial boulders stand,
silent under the high trees,
stiff rock faces turned away.

A black rubber tube
runs through the white pine forest,
its matte skin stencilled,
at intervals, with

Triangle 1 and 1/4"
100 PSI
Hi-flexible pipe
D 2239
7J4.

The pipe juts out of a
clapboard pumphouse,
receives two metal collars,
runs into a rigid white plastic elbow,
reappears, is fitted with two
stainless steel bands, ratcheted on tight,
and proceeds with

7J4
Triangle 1 and 1/4"
100 PSI
Hi-flex
D 2239,

runs over pine needles,
across flat rock,
disappears down the slope.

There is very little to be said
in such a still place.

The only conversation is among
the swarm of white dots in dim air,
bright blue bodied insects
with black-strutted wings
and plume-y white tails
that disintegrate in my hand.

LOVE SONG

*"The enormous waxflower has a labellum over
a foot long and attracts a moth with a tongue
of equal length."*

Highly specialized,
"curiously modified" in form,
the petals,
swollen sepals, present
a conspicuous lip,
honey wet.

Exotica: cattleya,
vanilla,
habenaria,
dendrobium (with its pendant clusters),
epidendrum,
odontoglossum.

Domestica: pink-blossomed
slipper of Venus ("common"),
fringed twayblades,
bearded swamp rose,
grass pinks,
pearl twist (or "lady tress"),
rattlesnake
plantain.

Your slippy sweetness
glistens on wooden
saint's toes; in
sacred dark, candle
and sweat scent.

At night, I pull you
over my head like a snug hat
and wear your waxy pollen
on my hairy wings,
a golden coat.

THE WATER BEARER

Damn. He was here and now he's gone.
Follow that trail and I think you'll find him
down by the old spring, where the cold water
never stops unless he wants it to.
He'll be hunkered in some ferny place
between two mossgrown trees, with that bucket
he dips the water with, and the air around
all quivering green. But listen: If his back
is turned, and likely it will be, better wait
till he turns again and takes time to see you
and his light fades down to normal brightness.
Otherwise you might not know you're there.

Frank Conaway

GRASSFIRE

Here it comes again, drenching sweet grass in flame —
like a conduit, the traction of a deep breath
sucking in every air like undertow from here to there,
untangling from the undergrowth, fast and hard and high.
Here the fire, hurtling like a boulder hurled through space,
hurting molecules, ripping apart atoms, exploding
like a blurted secret. There is the taper, the point, the coil:
what it all comes down to: unraveling,
blowing up into vastness. Arrow of fire, wounding.
Red surge weeping and more redness swept
over this injury, this blame, this absence of grass.
But look, I think I could be
swimming, diving down defying the element
that would consume me, turn me smooth as clay, burn me
to tender ash. I could wade in to these waves
and float through that color, that heat.
And perhaps with my hands I could draw the thunder
of this wild grassfire through the field, urge it on,
entice it on to the pond for its denouement where it hisses
its one last sigh. Our eyes are filled with small black wings.
Let the wind rage, let us now come clean.
Yes the grass is singed; let it grow back, bright green.

Alice B. Fogel

SET DESIGN FOR THE CITY

for David Dawson

Each year, when one end of the football field
was transformed into an opera set, my friend's father —
a chamber musician — played viola in the orchestra,
his annual concession, he said, to bombast.

The summer I was fourteen I went with them
to rehearsals for Aida. With the first
updraft of strings I closed my eyes,
saw oblique streets climb through a walled city.

A girl with a leopard showed me a footpath
lined with lady slippers and poppies,
smooth petals sliding against us
as we ascended to her garden baths.

The singers, knowing they could look ahead only
to separation and death, lingered
in this hill town, unwilling to leave
through any of its seven gates.

The night of the opera I compared my sets
with the arch of Thebes a chorus of slaves
lugged into place and the temple
the conductor seemed to summon from the turf
as the king's retinue approached on weary elephants.
Splendid, all of it, but uninhabitably grand:
I longed for the intimacy of my hanging gardens
where orchids rustled over perfumed water.

One night that summer, after we knew my friend's father
was dying, we listened from our beds
as he practiced Beethoven. Eyes closed, head bent down
over his bow, he kept rehearsing as if one last concert

had not been canceled. I imagined him
performing in a twilight garden,
a place of fountains just inside the city walls,
colors softening into blues, hills, night.

But when I woke later and found him still playing
I was in the presence of something too wild
to fit into my imagined city. Watching from the stairs,
I saw how he had stripped to his waist —

playing without a score, he assaulted
each phrase so savagely that at times
the notes could no longer be heard, pressed up
into whatever country he alone fashioned.

Theodore Deppe

SEA BRAIDS

I pick up hair along the beach,
green strands
with pods.

I braid it into my own hair
shells dangling
like earrings.

I walk along tile sand's hips
where the water's
tongue stops,
great sea braids trailing down my belly,
like furry
arms loving
the dome that rose unwanted.

The curve
of the coast
mimics the shape of my shadow,
bending female
bursting wide.

There are ribs in the waves that
rise like
smooth bones
inhaling the earth, drawing my body with it
into its
blue belly.

I have my baby on moss-covered rocks
and gently
release her

into the arms of the night nurse, wrapped in

sea braids
and shells.

Tenaya Darlington

Two Poems

MOUNT ST. PETER, MAASTRICHT

Neither so ruminant nor so placid the cows
 astray in the caves of St. Peter
 butt and bellow and heave against the marl.
 These then must be the nether lands,
 dark and tunneled, as the cows grow certain
 of their mistake, sea serpents, centaurs, crabs,
 salt-mouthed clams, jawbones of catamount
 and dreadwolf edging out in high relief
 from walls hewn with charcoal daemons,
 goat-beards, monkeys, cunts, pricks, sacred harts,
 burnt regiments of beasts of prayer.
 The cows whinny; they bray; they snarl;
 they howl beneath the Mount, wanting nothing
 to do with fossil, psalm, or subterfuge,
 blue men in masks once smuggled past rhino,
 behemoth, Mauser, back again across the Channel.
 Ten thousand passages, scores of caverns, hundreds
 upon hundreds of scarred initials, arrows
 through hearts black, brown, white, cleft, scraped,
 stamped, and the cows stamp too, how they stamp
 hoofprints, hoofprints deeper than impatience: horror,
 and befoul themselves in these close quarters,
 wanting but their green fields, polders
 to graze in the light of day.

Four pieces of silver

to follow the childguides through the ancient maze
 of the Southern Labyrinth a rainy Sunday afternoon
 when sixty of us, all eyes, come upon the cows.
 Our lanterns throw their great trembling shadows,
 paleolith, up onto the walls, their round eyes blinking,
 their heads bowing in gaunt chalk circles,
 their bodies shaking with our unsteadiness.

I'd been to the Perigord, in whose huge caves
ochre hands sign for the deaf we've come to be,
and the aurochs run with signatures of spear,
and woolly mammoth sink their tusks into the lime.

But the cows are more implausible,
as if fallen four-footed from a Calvinist grace,
unsanctioned and at a loss for innocence,
beating their prints into the tunnel floors
with sound and fury, speaking in tongues,
snorting, bleating, growling, groaning, hissing,
amazed in the wrong place at the wrong time,
encumbered by the unfamiliar heat
of so many strangers, queered witnesses
gathering in stone pastures.

Now a cow begins to calve,
shuddering, and the caves become ineluctably animal,
rank and sweet with afterbirth licked and eaten,
intimations of milk, solitudes of blood.

A man spasms. A woman sucks for air. A couple weeps.
Shielding their lights, the childguides watch closely
for signs of panic among the cows, who however have
been calmed
by the calving and stand still half-lit upon the walls
watching as quietly over the twin calves
as over us.

Later we will lead them out,
the calves in all our arms, shared from one
to the next from hall to hall, up stone ramps
and down, through the tunnels and arches,
past horned men and dark-hipped women,
into the rain and the green fields above
the river Maas, a November day, gray
and cool and unremarkable.
Selah.

RANCHO COASTAL HUMANE SOCIETY THRIFT
SHOP SUTRA

Light green as lotus leaf at Benares dawn
 the Buddha sits before the albums, Petula,
 Mahalia, calypso, mambo, samba, raga, limbo,
 blue paper dot pressed to his forehead. Beyond,
 dots dance the mandala of the fourteen
 indeterminates, where blue is a single buck.
 The Buddha is small as a beggar's cup, felt
 bottomed, Mexican jade, heavy as a hand
 full of rice, still as abandoned temple bells
 beneath the Stones, the Doors, the Grateful Dead.
 The change, the eagles, the four quarters
 click and ring in the pocket of my sweats.
 This must be the original, Gautama, Sakyamuni
 Buddha, bo tree hanging from wires above,
 embossed with Greenpeace: doe, fawn, stag grazing
 through a deerpark of shelves, stiff, ceramic;
 disciples in dhotis meditating upon cases
 of *Once Is Not Enough, Looking for*
Mr. Goodbar. Is there ever an afterwards?
 they asked. Yes, until the end, said the Buddha.
 What end? they asked. Aluminum walkers? Handwarmers?
 Bifocals? Rubber sheets? The Buddha sits silent
 as an empty Walkman before Country Joe & the Fish,
 the Four Horsemen, the Tabernacle Choir. What end?
 they asked. Armless bears? Headless dogs? Legless
 tables? Spineless chairs? You break it you take it —
 dharma and karma of the second hand. Do Time Steps
 with Tony, Sing Along with Mitch, Stretch with Bonnie,
 Carol with Andy, Pray with Jim and Tammy. What end?
 they asked. Wax fruit? Wooden fish? I lift the Buddha
 up: no visible imperfections. Satchmo, the Duke, Dizzy,
 Brubeck, the Bird lie below, all the worse for where
 they are, hoarse and scored under the weight of 78s,
 sleeves black with praise, astonishment, and high
 fidelity. To what shall we trust? they asked.

To the Eightfold Path, he said. Spoons, bowls, forks,
knives, stoneware plates, teacups, tumblers,
napkin rings. I am moving with him through the aisles.
Are we thus enchanted? they asked him.
Must all be illusion? Look, he said. Cameos,
bracelets, scarves, hairpins, candlesticks, golden
anniversary watches — look but do not desire.
Half-Price Day today: four bits a Buddha.
That's the last of them, the lady says. Gone fast,
those. Is there a fatedness to things? they asked.
There is a wheel, he said. He sits behind
in the hollows of my blue pannier, on the back
of my eight-speed, as I pedal down Santa Fe, west
toward the Pacific, then north on 101.
He sits within two days' news inside a Safeway
bag to keep him whole. Is there any hope,
they asked, of permanence, of wisdom and permanence?
He pointed to a squawking parrot in the pipal.
A ring-necked parrot, emerald and scarlet,
like the one beside him in the paper bag,
swaddled in sports and editorial. Fired
clay, Guadalajara perhaps, for the tourist trade.
The parrot remembers, he said, and to what avail?
Is there then no meaning? they asked. We are home
now. The Buddha sits intact above The Lady
Sings the Blues and smiles. He will sit there
in my house ten or twelve years and then,
moving to another state, I will lose him.
The parrot I have to this very day, on this very desk.

Hillel Schwartz

EQUINOX

The night of the first day of spring
I was walking across our dogturd of a campus
With a cramp in my foot and suddenly felt like
I stepped on a spike — iron, not crocus —
And danced on one leg in podiatric agony.
This shouldn't have happened at all,
Wearing the shoes with my storebought
Metatarsal pads I thought fixed me for life
Before the ban, before A.P.A.,
The American Podiatrists Association
Sued Doctor Scholls for practicing foot medicine
Without a license and Scholls folded,
Yanked my metatarsal pads in supine
Acquiescence. What self-defeating shame,
As if those mauve unwholesome and adhesive
Little valentines stuck toward the upper
End of your arch were not merely the color
Of ox tongue but somehow swole
In their attentive and supportive caress of this
Secret, tender portion of the sole,
As if the nearby ball of the foot were Eve's
Equivalent of Adam's apple in place
To tease and torment a serpent. What did I care,
Spiked in the hoof. I'd been teaching Yeats,
Making fun of Yeats, the young people smooching
All over the place, so he's going to sail
To some perfect Byzantium of the mind
And become a totally golden cuckoo.
I had not thought he'd so confessed himself
A raging idiot. Or that ugly sonnet,
Full of lurid, dirty-old-man fascination
With the swan's "feathered glory"
Forcibly entering Princess Leda,
Asking if she put on airs of grandeur
After her adventure with the Olympic tickler,
The whole thing pulsing with envy:

Why doesn't God clutch me with black webs
And ravish my head unto eternity?
I hurried home and ate a banana for my foot,
For the phosphorus — I mean potassium,
The last thing I need is to glow in the dark,
For what I was now calling a muscle spasm,
Though I could have anything, warts,
Stress fracture, tendonitis of my plantar fascia.
That stab in my foot's sore ball was spring
Sending me a signal of my mortality
And I was sad. There would be aches,
More and more, until the convulsive finale,
That great mindlessness of the last black
Equinox, wrapped in petals of breathless
Pain like a bee drowning in a flower,
Until Cuchulain, patron ghost of Ireland
According to foolish, furious Yeats,
Could wreak oblivion on all merely
Fatuuous friends and fatuous enemies.
Welcome to cold hell, he will whisper,
And then slash and stab us with his claymore
As the swan did Leda, again and again and again.

Kenneth Rosen

A WALK AT THE END OF THE CENTURY

Last night in the southwest quadrant of the sky, a light, low and yellow, too bright for planet or star, besides it glowed. It lit the clouds. I said it was the moon reduced — the last dot phase before dying. You laughed. A new astronomy for a new age. And we both thought of the fat-cheeked face of our old comfort peeking in the car playing now-you-see-me-now-you-don't through trees, forgetting who in its high white wig of bone points *f'accuse* through our bedroom window. We walked.

And except for talk of strange light where the moon's last crescent should have been, we spoke of news and the French doctor's face in East Africa who knelt holding his hands over a huddle of bones like a boy scout feeling for fire in an arrangement of sticks—this pencil, an arm, this, a thigh, and that swollen knob, the skull, eyes drilling from its holes. I know. It goes on goes on, something about cycles. But tell me —

When Death's head is screwed onto a child, easy as a light bulb, how do beginning and end come full circle and not add up to zero? And how can a body, eaten down to laser or probe of light, be bright enough for conscience but not cure?

Alice Friman

**BEFORE I BECAME LIKE EVERYONE ELSE . . .
AND THEN DECIDED TO STOP**

Scott Thomas is not too OLD and not too YOUNG,
but he has

BLUE-LEMON EYES

that are THICKER than Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and
DEEPER than the part of the POOL with the
DARK "10" STENCILED beside it . . .

It always feels like I'm gonna' be
EATEN by them, or all of a sudden I'm gonna' see a
BIG, OLD BULLFROG
HOPPING LAZILY from and to each
LILY PAD.

Scott Thomas is not too OLD and not too YOUNG,
but he has

SUN-SCENTED, CHESTNUT HAIR

that is SOFTER than my GRANDMOTHER'S
bedding (she didn't ever use DETERGENT) and
sometimes when he lets the
SUN get a GOOD, HARD LOOK at him, each
HAIR, each and every LOCKE will turn the
COLOR of BRANDY (he DRINKS it sometimes,
you know. . .)

Scott Thomas is not too OLD and not too YOUNG,
but he has

DAWN-PINK LIPS

that are LARGE, but not too BIG to
SCARE me. Sometimes when he POUTS, his
BOTTOM HALF looks like a PLATFORM, a DIVING
BOARD, but I couldn't JUMP . . .
I'm too AFRAID of HEIGHTS!

SHARP

Poet of Parris Island

"Cock crows, wolf bays, caterwauls, eldritch sounds ringing
out and echoing

Back from the escarpment, weird screams meant to
terrify, crazily

Announcing attack across fogbound spiderwebs of
barbed wired

Terrain. Then the poop of mortars, the red spit of burps,
A flare, shedding chartreuse in its lazy swaying gravity fall,

Beautiful tracers burning out in air, phosphorous
grenades making

Small midnight suns. . ." Buck Sergeant Robert E. Lee Sharp of
Macon read

To his captive audience of Marine recruits his poems of
Korean

Conflict — recruits who had, night before, waded the blind-
dark swamp of the

Sea Island called Parris, shitbirds and turds up to their
chins in

Swamp gump, whipped on and kicked by water moccasins,
Mae-Wested

In the dark by boa constrictors, or so they believed.
All but Clover,

Descendant of Sea Island plantation slaves, cursing the
mouthfuls

Of swampwash in gurgling Gullah, the islands' lingo,
who knew the snakes

Would be scared off by such commotion as this — two
hundred-some farm

Boys and city slickers scared spineless in the snakes'
swamp — knew

(stanza continued)

It was drowning to be feared, in the slippery dark,
burdened with

Fifty-pound packs rifles helmets cartridgebelts canteens
bayonets and night-

Blind eyes, under a starproof vegetable roof of shingling fronds
and fans.

Clover stretched his neck like a turtle above the din of
clanks

Splashes and shouts of terror. And always above any din
Sharp's mellifluous

Georgian, urging, commanding a motley crew of shitbirds
and turds to become

Marines, who himself was Poster-Marine, whose men thought
him perfect

But for the fact that he was mad as the hatter, perfect,
but for

His constant, barely-submerged violence, which was the song
behind his words

Now, as he read with great beauty, vivid clarity, his martial
Poems of nightmare mayhem on Bunker Hill and Snipers
Ridge, where

He won a chestful of medals, a seemingly mad hero
Marine poet

Drill instructor, angrier than God. At what? War, the poems told,
at war,

At human nature, at himself, filled with his own violence;
at us, too,

But to save us, always to make us triumph over what he had
endured, cried:

"Coming! Outposts in! The sand-bagged weight of the
bunker collapsed

Under artillery — a full barrage — pf-f-f-f BOOM — and the
Reds slid

In on us. Got one under my arm and slit his throat. *Now
tell me about*

(stanza continued)

Mao, I said; *I'll tell you about freedom, you two-mouthed bastard!*" Sharp scanned

Us, in our skivvies on the squad bay floor, across the little table he

Brought to his recitals. "Unnerstay-end," he growled, "Mr. Kennan in

Washington has devised for America a policy of containment. The Reds

Cain't continue to eat if they don't swallow up other countries.

They don't

Create wealth, they re-dis-tri-bute it. Get me? They are an empire.

Unnerstay-end what that is? They gotta eat up their neighbors

Or else they collapse. Unnerstay-end? Do you dumb shitbirds

Unnerstay-end what it's all about, what Bunker Hill was about — either

One? About FREEDOM, you dumb turds, FREEDOM! You eat enough 'gator-

Doo, you'al'll learn. One o' them Reds shoots your balls off — Non

Emasculatatum est —" Off in another reality field, Sharp whispers, "My

Best buddy, from Valdosta. . ." Back. "You gonna priss like girls when you march.

We gonna win the base ensign. I don't care a fiddler's bitch if the

Red flag goes up at a hunnerd-ten degrees. You gonna priss like girls.

You gonna look PRETTY. Get me? And you know what you gonna be? Do

(stanza continued)

You? You gonna be God bless America Uncle Sam's most
perfect killers.

Now what you gonna be?" *SIR, killers, SIR!* "Makes my
heart sing.

And if the army and the navy ever get to heaven's scene. . .
What, dammit?"

*They will find the streets are guarded by United States
Marines, Sir!*

E. M. Schorb

Three Poems

I WANT

I want
nothing I made
made happen
nothing, god forbid, I earned.
I want
something wicked:
black pigroast wanton with juice,
royal-colored raspberries swooning in cream,
opals to twine their fiery light
like knives,
ah, you
here, now.

THE CATFISH SONG

Bring the war skillet
heavy enough to kill,
black as the silky spot under the tongue,
the secret stomach squeezing in the dark.
Heat it to throbbing
over open fire
past smoke to ash.
Toss ball of butter,
flesh of peppered fish
o red white black
o lush black sizzle
fiery catfish song
for all the greedy places
light never goes.

DAFFODIL

Quick —
think something not daffodil.
That girl
tasting the first blithe air,
her hair a rich black knot.
See
how the light
gentles the yellow bell of her shirt,
how her head lilts
on its green stem.

J. Cordary

ANOTHER WHITE CLOUD OF MOTHS

Listen! The sound you hear
is not the straining of pale green buds
presaging spring. It is the rustle
of twenty million jaws of dust
tilting upward like speechless poppies.

Listen! The sound you hear
is not the scratching of field mice
making their home. It is the rasping
of busy pens redrawing the map
of Europe. A different kind of claws.

Do not deceive yourself. The fireworks
from the mountain are not in celebration of your right
to live in peace among your neighbors.
The face of evil looks out from the mirrors of Europe.
No one can claim they did not know.

TODAY I WASTED MY LIFE

for Thich Nhat Hanh

I did not delight in the drag of the spoon through the soup,
the slow dissolve of the edges of the bouillon cube,
the taste of salt.

I hardly noted the airy dryness of the ferns as I lifted their
fronds,
nor stayed a moment
watching the water I'd poured
seep into the soil at the edge of the pots.

I did not savor the mist, the cold coming on,
nor revel in the hard lift, the forward press of the
shoulders,
the heft of the wheelbarrow, heavy, burdened
in the slosh and slick of the mud,
the grass plastered against the clay.

Night came down with all its constellations
turning, and the whippoorwill sang his name
from one tree
and then another.

Ryland Bruhwiler

Two Poems

LIGHTING THE LAMP

Long ago on the open prairies, nights
stretched out full and heavy
like black bears sleeping
oblivious to the sting
of the high mosquito stars.

And even in the Kansas of my boyhood,
for miles the night's hide lay unpunctured.
Our chores and milking finished,
we sat under the cedars,
waiting for the house to cool,
while jet blotted the barn
and inked away the west.
Cicadas and crickets had already
polished the dark to a sheen
before we found our way lightless to bed.
We slept quietly in its deep black hand.

It was altogether different in winter,
when early dusk frightened us
to the kitchen where Mom worked on
in a darkening house; we hungered
wordlessly for the lighting of the lamp,
for the flare of the sulphur
match and the leap of shadows, her own
looming on the wall behind her
as she touched the wick aflame.
The smell of kerosene, and the long wait
for the Aladdin mantle to warm,
before she eased the flame up
and a glow pushed outward into the room.
Like chicks to a hen, we drew
under the skirt of our mother's light.
Now the dark could only crouch

(Stanza continued)

behind the wood box. Upstairs
it waited, though, in a cold room
where later we would have to climb,
lifting high only the candle's
tiny trembling umbrella.

When we were older, a greater fear
was the winter dark that hunkered outside
where we might be called upon to walk
with swinging lantern alongside
our huge striding and scissoring shadow
to a barn full of beasts and cats' eyes.

A hundred kinds of Kansas dark
taught me all the stories of light.

Which I forget. Now. Here. Almost.
Under this fluorescent glare.

Tonight, at the edges of cities, darkness sniffs
like a snail furred animal, hesitates —
and dreaming only a thin ghost of itself
forward through the alleys, it cringes
in yard corners and cowers under cars waiting
to mewl with a slight and domesticated dark
tossed out from the houses with the flick of a wrist.
Hounded by instant incandescence, it breeds
nervously, is nearly extinct. Reclusive
and odorless, no one has noted it for years.

Having lost touch with darkness
we ourselves grow shadowy and weightless.
Taking the light too lightly
our bones grow birdlike, and we threaten
to float unmoored from the earth.

But the gravity that pulls me back, like weights
in my shoes, is memory, and how the immense dark
backed from the bright circle spreading
from my mother's hands on the lamp.

WATCHING MY MOTHER'S BREATH

for Regina Mersmann

(born Oct. 15, 1899; died Aug. 28, 1990)

For hours after the stroke
you were like a house being closed;
one after one the blinds came down.

Now on this high bed, your face
says death, but your heart clings
to an old habit; you
have not been here for days.

You sleep and sleep, as if to sleep
for all those nights waking
with children in the cold house.

I put drops in your eyes, swab
your dry, gaping mouth with a sponge,
say to you the few things we would not
have known how to listen to together.

Beyond washboard and breadboard now,
your thin body is pulled
into the sheets by an immense
and eloquent fatigue. Will you
have to sleep for years
before you can go on ahead?

In unmistakable stages your breathing
alters; sometimes stumbles, and stops —
then, comes again, weaker
from a deepening cave.

Ninety years of sand hurries from the hour-
glass, back toward its first ocean.

In you now breath backs slowly away
bowing towards the wings; the flame
wavers smaller and smaller,
re-entering the ember.

All those years of gardens
arrange themselves in the palm
of your hand.

In the root cellar, potatoes
settle shoulder to shoulder;
the rock weighing down
the plate on the kraut jar falls
more deeply asleep.

In your ears, violin cases wrap themselves
shut over the gleaming wood;
chairs are being stacked
and leaned against the wall.

In your mouth the table is cleared
for the last time, the floors
swept and shining.

Time moves away down the walk, waving goodbye.

Your sleep slides deeper,
your breath rocking you lower
and lower into your self, back

through the rings within rings
to the hut in the woods where
the master takes your head in his hands
smiling at your perfection;
and leads you to the hearth
where you crawl into the fire,
and the sky opens its hand,
full of stars, and the wren's eye
looks out bright from the hole
of her small house.

James Mersmann

IMMUNITY

Sue Hubbell, new to the woods
of Missouri, rolled up her sleeve
and gave her arm to the bees,
let them lodge their splinters in her,
increasing the number of bees each week until
her body learned, till antibodies
to the poison built up in her blood
and the bee stings left no mark.
Then she could walk among them
in ordinary clothes, her open face
exposed to them, and touch
their honey with her hands.

Maybe sometime when the front door closes again
and I watch my father
eradicated again by the door,
I will find nothing
but my body, smooth
as Sue Hubbell's after she became
immune to bees, when she sat on the floor
checking her arms and back for stings.

Ann Keniston

AFTER THE ATTACK

I hinge one of my ribs
to either side of the doorway.
I stir my father's muscles into mortar.
I carry my mother's eyes in my palm
for setting in stone above the entrance.

I am building a house for Joanna, my youngest sister,
designed to protect her.

I regret its late construction —
I had thought, *She is only thirteen*,
believing she had a few more years of safety.

I walk to the nearest hill and look back.
There is no house, there is no sanctuary.
There are bricks I want to heft.
There is a sharpened pole
where I want to place his head.

Carrie Etter

BOOKS IN BRIEF

Heather McHugh, *Broken English: Poetry and Partiality* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England, 1993, 152 pp., \$35. cloth, \$14.95 paper); *Hinge & Sign* (same publisher, 1994, 240 pp., same prices).

As if in response to Hazard Adams's complaint, in the *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, that our era lacks discourse "by an artist defending or promoting a practice," or by a critic concerned with specific literary values, here appear Heather McHugh's companion volumes of critical essays and new and selected poems. Together they offer insight into a significant aspect of poetry in our time.

Back when I was first reading and trying to write poetry, we assumed we could identify a "poem" by such criteria as meter and rhyme.

Liza Grapeman alre mindus
Weaken maker, Liza Blime,
Andy Parton, Lee B. Hindus,
Footbrin Johnnie sans a dime.

Whether it made "sense" or not, measure and rhyme defined it as poem. What, today, takes the place of these conventions? Cadence, surely, in the musical sense. And for many of our finest poets, an intensity of language, including a sophisticated knowledge of a word's etymology and its layered nuances. Each word is a prism, rewarding the reader who knows to turn it in the mind for fresh flashes of sense and senses. Until well into this century, most poets absorbed philology with their classical educations. When Frost contrasts sex with "grex," he assumes a reader who knows or knows how to learn the root of "gregarious." When Elizabeth Bishop writes, "and looked and looked our infant sight away," we need to know that the original meaning of *infant* was one incapable of speech. Heather McHugh goes farther than this. She deconstructs words to aerate their roots and encourage their branching. She quotes Creeley, "Position is where you put it," and adds, "Given the fire of language, exposition is (etymologically speaking) where you put it *out*." The wit in this writing is exhilarating, and the insight into poetry is moving. Poetry is no analgesic; it "requires you to face the difficulty, the unfathomability, of your life." The

implication for McHugh is a "broken language," enabling a poetry of two minds. "In poetry, by definition, the making of lines is the breaking of lines. . . . Poetic language is language in which meaning refuses to be single-minded: the transitivity of meaning splits, as we mean more than we intend. More like evidence than judgment, the well-created poem can present several versions at once; it is the site of possibility." Every line-end, every margin, breaks open. "It is a framer's art, and the frame is a part (not apart), a way (not away)." In her essay "Broken, As in English: What We Make of Fragments," McHugh makes a metaphysics of fragmentation. Even more I enjoyed "A Genuine Article," a veritable Versailles fountain of liquid juggling of *a*'s, *an*'s, and *the*'s. And on top of that, I relished "What Dickinson Made a Dash For: Interpretive Insecurity as Poetic Freedom," opening with the challenging sentence: "It is no accident that book, sentence, and pen are the terms not only of artistic profession, but of penal containment." Here she supplies what Hazard Adams has called for: discourse by a critic concerned with "specifically literary value" and with the "particular excellences of a given literary work." Her readings of Dickinson are delicate and illuminating. It pleases me that she reads Dickinson's fragmentations and ellipses as extending the ambidextrousness, the ambiguities, the ambivalences in the words to the protean possibilities of syntax. The prosody is the necessary clew/clue leading the poet to the "barely dictable, certainly not predictable" vision. I also value McHugh's presentation (her present to us) of the poetry of the Yoruba people of western Africa – a celebratory analysis.

McHugh confides that both as writer and reader, and as a "student of phenomena" and a "sensual being in nature," she works to "study and then remark patterns: occurrences, recurrences, currents." To see how theory and practice have evolved since the first half of this century, one could profitably compare Frost's essay "The Constant Symbol" and his poetic practice with Heather McHugh's essays and works. (There's a nice master's thesis for someone. You're welcome.)

As I turn to McHugh's poems, I carry with me not only the theoretical insights from her essays but this statement: "To my eye and my ear, the poem has always been a graphically and score; and to my mind, mind's meat." Most of her poems are too

long to quote here in their entirety, but here's one from the new poems that open the volume:

Curve

Freezeburn forms whirlpools and bearfur has curve.
My line is gravity's
sheer vertical.

Memory's the same
seme. Sail a memo
down: there's the spooled

real: plunge into simul-
cast. Caught up in the network is
a blue planet, spinner par
excellence.

It's too small.
Throw it back.

Now I'd say this was classy poetry if I didn't know that anyone who says *classy* isn't. But it surely does have class. Polished, elegant, poised. Very well-educated. In eras past, a classical education defined one's class. One had one's *semes* straight. Today, such class has the smell of the classroom. What Coleridge and Shelley took for granted, McHugh self-consciously patterns in a literate dance. (I'd classify McHugh as an intensely self-conscious poet, though by no means do I mean self-absorbed.) We initiated readers (we fit audience though few) know ourselves to be a privileged class. Others may have to go to school to learn in the classroom how to follow and delight in such delicious scores as "Curve." With the right class of students, what a joy to discuss it line by line! The slithery cadences, the jaunty alliterations and assonances, the surreal images in the double nouns! The effrontery of the punning. The little shocks of surprise as we bound off into white space at each line-end and then rebound into an unpredictable per- or concept. The exuberant infectiousness of it! The shock of the ending. Then the rewards of rereading, after the sneaky metaphor has revealed itself. The re-rereading for all the patterns of sound and sense and dramatic movement here compacted. And the final open question (the bait) concealed in

the misleadingly solid statements in the last stanza. The poem is indeed a class act.

Many of my readers are at home in this post-modern classroom. Some, I know, are not. To these latter I had better say quickly that in a way I pitched you a curve in picking this small poem as my example. Even among the twenty-seven new poems in this collection, there is a rich variety of voices and patterns. One of my favorites, "What He Thought," is a limpid first-person narrative in the simplest colloquial language, telling a story that I would not presume to describe for fear of preempting your own private privilege of experiencing this profound and moving poem.

Let me pick a more representative poem to examine: "Some Kind of Pine," another of the new poems. It begins almost flippantly: "Mid-leap in her escape, the nymph/ is bushed." Aha! Daphne pursued by Apollo and turned to a laurel. It continues, "one hand turns out in/branches, tropes turn/helio." Well, you have to know what *beliotrope* literally means. And you have to know what a trope is. But at this point the trope of the poem could be anything. Still, the "graphicality" of the poem is established, both in the image of the myth and in the overall pattern of five short "movements," each divided more or less into four or five couplets of widely varying lengths. Our eye begins to read the "score," and our ear has already picked up the bounding *ps* in the first line, slowed to the *bs* of *bushed*, *bursts*, and *branches*. Each phoneme appears to cast itself ahead down the path to seek out its companions. Watch this musical pattern develop:

The hapless god

has suffered some comeuppance, too:
he's stuck for good in his own stalking.

Hand anticipates *hapless*; and the sequence of *s* and of *u* sounds (two in *comeuppance*, five in the couplet) lead to the play in *stuck* and *stalk*. We should not be surprised that the next line begins "The maker's a remarker." Not only the sculptor of this particular statue (more explicit in the next "movement"), but of course the maker of the poem. She takes us, movement by movement, to the villa where the statue is, then to a literal tree

outside her hotel window, in a very explicit "now." The poem evolves in clear steps from the brittle wit and slangy diction (*bushed*) and the outward gaze of the beginning to an inner and personal space. Of the conifers she continues:

I'm moved
by them, now that I've come
to rest, from so many thousands of
words (numbed space, named time). I stand
*
at planet-speed, struck dumb
before such patiences as these, that surge for years to
crown
in great calm altitudes, in starful prongs. How did they get
so far? They leave us to our babbling, they ignore
the running reasons of the human stream; they pour
into the sky. That's what they're standing for:
for standing fast. They are a sign
We shall not overcome, except
in undergoing more . . .

That's the end of the poem – an ellipsis. The trope has established a time/space continuum and developed great depth and altitude. The music has also deepened and become more lofty, with, in the final movement, conventional rhymes, internal and external, and the lines – to the ear in counterpoint to the eye – moving in cadences of traditional iambic pentameter, trimeter and tetrameter. The wit is still there, but become more structural and more serious: "standing for" / "standing fast"; "overcome" / "undergo." Is is, then, "to my mind, mind's meat," or, as Frost put it, the poem begins in delight and ends in wisdom.

M.K.S.