

CONTENTS

		PAGE
Anthony Sobin	<i>Wichita</i>	5
Forrest Hamer	<i>The Calling</i>	6
J. Cordary	<i>Something Shy</i>	10
	<i>March</i>	11
	<i>Beets</i>	12
Brian Hubbell	<i>Certain Aspects of Descent</i>	13
	<i>Autobiography of an Egg</i>	14
	<i>To a Woman of Many Houses:</i>	16
Kurt Leland	<i>Entrance</i>	18
	<i>The Garden Sibyl</i>	20
Margaret Renkl	<i>Rat</i>	22
L.R. Berger	<i>Sightings</i>	23
A.E. Stallings	<i>Aeaea (Circe's Island)</i>	27
Michael D. Piscal	<i>Discovering the Right Words</i>	28
Mark Solomon	<i>Visitation: Lower Manhattan</i>	30
Lisa Coffman	<i>Romeo Collision</i>	32
Linda Allardt	<i>Waked to Listen</i>	36
	<i>Ask Her</i>	38
Margaret Kaufman	<i>Fortunate in Death</i>	39
Robert Farnsworth	<i>Anniversary</i>	40
Alice B. Fogel	<i>Which Way the Winds Blow</i>	42
 Books in Brief		
Pablo Neruda, <i>Odes to Common Things</i> , trans. by Ken Krabbenhoft		45
Kate Barnes, <i>Where the Deer Were</i>		45
Nils-Asiak Valkeapää, <i>Trekways of the Wind</i> trans. by Ralph Salisbury, Lars Nordström and Harald Gaski		46
Philip Booth, <i>Pairs</i>		47
Donald Hall, <i>Death to the Death of Poetry: Essays, Reviews, Notes, Interviews</i>		52

CONTENTS, *continued*

	<i>PAGE</i>
<b>Books in Brief</b>	
Albert Goldbarth, <i>Great Topics of the World</i>	52
Philip Levine, <i>The Bread of Time: Toward an Autobiography</i>	52
Robert Bly, <i>Gratitude to Old Teachers</i>	53
Ioanna-Veronika Warwick, <i>No Longer Mine</i>	53
Sylvia Griffith Wheeler, <i>Counting Back: Voices of the Lakota and Pioneer Settlers</i>	54
Loren Graham, <i>Mose</i>	54
Neal Bowers, <i>Night Vision</i>	54
Alfred Corn, <i>Autobiographies</i>	55

*Cover:* Robert Shetterly, Jr., "Onions," drypoint etching, ca. 1986.

WICHITA

*"In this 1868 photograph, uncured buffalo hides  
piled higher than a man's head line both sides  
of Douglas Avenue, fourteen blocks, from the  
Arkansas River to the railhead"*

Shaggy brown clouds roll in over Kansas  
neck humps soaring to 40,000 feet  
bellies full of thunder and electricity.

It is their revenge. The woolly clouds  
that go twisting up the rivers, snorting fire,  
hooves falling where they may.

The sirens are wailing.  
The church bells are ringing.  
The Buffalo, the buffalo!

They are taking off their robes!

They are coming out fighting!

## THE CALLING

1. Text: A slave ship sinks in the Atlantic, 1749.

There must have been a great noise: the drumming and slap  
of limbs against wood, ankles fit slack in shackles.

Children, there must have been a trembling violence,  
bodies once more roused from a lumber of days, drunk  
from the odor of shit and stilled in middle dance.

And, yes, there were terrible voices, the holler  
wresting itself out, shouts silencing what babies  
would tell, silencing even the goodness of God.

Don't you know there was a joy? that revenge came down  
upon the men who chained them, who chained and locked  
them,  
who would not look at them closely, not in the eyes;  
that revenge had come from the body's dark water  
to claim them all, even those who rendered feeling,  
who swallowed and swallowed, swallowed deeply, then  
died.

And there must have been a moaning song that the land  
heard about the deep grief of ocean, toward sky,  
the brashness of resisting winds. Quiet  
moves us to the edge of land and we lay ourselves  
on it to listen; or, we lay ourselves inside.

2.

Aside from spirits, I was alone there,  
and after I had cut the grass, put the mower back in the car,  
I lingered at my grandparents' graves.

The sun settled while the air cooled itself off,  
and dark trailed the oldest parts of the cemetery  
in full skirts. As I heard her slowly approach,

I imagined a hand come through the ground  
as if the ground were as weightless as water,  
and the hand calmly closed itself at my ankle,  
my Mama Emma asking, Stay, son  
    even though I could leave if I would  
my Papa Willie said, Yes. Stay, son

    I was soon going North  
to college, I told them; I was excited. I talked  
about Mom becoming saved, Dad retiring from the Army,  
my sister and the boy she secretly loved, my brother and how mean  
    we were to each other without meaning to be,  
    my dead brother whose grave no one had visited much.

And I told them what I had not been wanting to tell them –  
that I had not been called to preach.

    I'd decided I was feeling relieved, no longer worried  
    about ignoring an unmistakable voice,  
daring then to live in defiance of a terrible holy command  
    to surrender and surrender again.

The dark stopped and nothing else moved,  
    not even the waters of the ear, not even the heart.  
And when my grandparents finally spoke,  
    they spoke with voices I have not yet recognized,  
    reminded me to pray and to be good  
    to people and to come back and sit with them at dusk.

    The dark moved on again, and clouds watched  
me leave, the whole night smelling  
suddenly of the saltwater roaring in my nose.

3.

A story my grandfather used to love to tell had to do with his own baptism. The preacher walked him into the muddy Neuse River and they stood in there for a moment, both of them dressed in white, both of them light. And as my grandfather, a boy, really, folded his arms across his chest – the way dead people sometimes do – the church members sang Just As I Am. When the preacher embraced him, and my grandfather began to fall easily into deepness, a snake swam near enough for them both to see. My grandfather threw himself out of the preacher's arms, ran to land; and the chuckling preacher called him back, for he had seen many snakes in that river and this serpent was not one to fear.

In my swimming class, I am chuckling at my fear of snakes in the pool. I hate the term Dead Man's Float, but trust the teacher when he says I will later feel calm and forget what I am doing. What I am doing is what I have tried to learn twice before – how to breathe underwater, how to trust that water entering my one good ear will leave again, how to let water embrace my body into descent. At the moment, it is hardest to let my hips dance in that deep space; the teacher has told us that men's trunks sink our legs below the surface of water, and this seems easily like sex. Yet, the serpent waiting low in that water is probably unconcerned with sin. What is really making me feel naked in this class is the presence of another black man.

4.

They walk in backwards.  
They cover Noah.

Noah wakes up with a hangover.  
Noah blames Ham.  
Noah curses Ham's son.

The children are cursed to serve their uncles.

Ham tries to forget what he has seen.  
Ham tries to forget

that his father has only a man's body  
His father is no God

Ham tries to forget the bending, the scars, the whiting hair

Ham tries to forget the penis, its shape and size

He tries to forget the shoulders gone round, the dragging chest

To forget breath, his craven let breath

And Ham tries to forget a prophecy  
of his own short life which is now shorter than before  
because his own body sometimes bends,

voices beckoning

Forrest Hamer

## Three Poems

## SOMETHING SHY

*"I do not want to express only what other people have felt; I want to rip something away and show them what they have never seen."*

– Dylan Thomas

Maybe the plum branches  
laced over this piece of sky between the curtains,  
the curtains white,  
the sky a silky wash of lavender,  
the branches black, unflowering.

As if something shy had spoken,  
a low bell in another room.  
It wants to give itself.

It is what springs out of the earth  
when we clear sticks and rotting leaves from its throat.  
How can what comes so far,  
through such distractions of dirt,  
be so clean?

Or, say, some twitched and grievous night,  
turning and turning in the worry bed,  
we smell sleep,  
enormous snowy owl with golden almond eyes.

Something bounteous,  
something shy.  
It wants to give itself to us.



**MARCH**

A woman  
in a field.  
Wires, her arms,  
stretched and crisped to black knots  
sparrows sometimes decorate.  
Under the sun, the swoon of snow,  
the silky seethe of sleet,  
the terrible dun spring, mud and ice  
like rotting lace,  
she's wood.  
Nothing looks out her eyes.  
Someone listening  
would hear  
the borrowed voice of a shell  
far inland  
dreaming  
always  
of water.

**BEETS**

Kneebones dug from some unholy dark.  
Dirt still thickens the roots, crusts the sides,  
smears the collars like grime on a neck.  
The draggled greens are brown.  
"You want those off or on?" He hacks and hands me  
beets.  
I lavish them with delicacies:  
cool princely beans,  
seraglio tomatoes swollen to gleaming,  
roses with dew still in their throats.  
They doze in the sacktoe  
patient as mud turtles.  
But when the peel scrolls back  
oh red, such royal  
red  
nuanced as agate, glossy as jade.  
Hands shriek red, the counter pools.  
The cutting board sucks red into its grain.  
How does such lumpenstuff  
hold ruby rain?

J. Cordary

## THREE POEMS

## CERTAIN ASPECTS OF DESCENT

In dreams I lack a certain weight,  
unnoticed in the midst of conversations  
until I plunge softly down the shaft  
of some steep stairwell winding,  
slowing my descent by only  
an occasional centripetal handhold  
on the passing rail.

It's not that I have lost it all.

I cling to some aspects of mass  
– momentum mostly, and some sense  
of what's up and down – as stubbornly  
as a drunken man retains his rectitude.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN EGG

*"Why do you sit out here all alone?" said Alice, not wishing to begin an argument.*

*"Why because there's nobody with me!" cried Humpty Dumpty. "Did you think I didn't know the answer to that? Ask another."*

Land, I was born, open and well,  
a spark skimming skip-shot, a coal-red berry  
borne beak tip to beak tip,  
a genius of locus, focus forever to chance,  
the ovule unhatched, unconsumed, and alone,

Yet, with the moonlight right,  
in the steep of night, no one knows, . . . can say why  
alone, one remains, bone-white against day-black sky,  
a scarp-fixed face – still as the surface of an Archean sea,  
floating blue-green dreams tasting of ozone and precipitating  
grit,

an analytic lick of nickel, a tang of cooling iron,  
the sting of fulminating chlorine, – unperturbed,  
and swelled to joy,

rim disk as whole and undisturbed, as if  
never rippled by proterozoan waves,  
nor racked by radiating scuttling plots,  
riots of locomoting mud-schemes spun  
in the mad circus of needling tracks  
which stitched up beds of clayey ooze,  
here at the outer end of things.

And with the moonlight right, on the still warm night,  
you may say everything serves a purpose  
but I, I don't know.

Here now, land is quiet, and has been  
for so long. Here, the kiss of the setting sun  
rumbles across the smooth soft stone.  
Here, smug-snug in this red-bed,  
an unconforming hoodoo of Coconino sandstone, I dream,  
think of things as never were,  
and without waking see as current  
and foreshortened all the eroded silent  
shapes and shades that ever have been,  
a gift of geographic vision from my father,  
who was a hawk, I think, or at least a hawk's idea  
and my mother, who was a round smooth hunger,  
I think, for life, or at least for being.

Time bowed slow (reverberated, you might have said,  
with a groan, though it wasn't really)  
as upwarps rose, then wasted down – shadows,  
as I said, and shades eased into relief,  
swelled in on one breath, subsided in a second,  
like tides, only slower, much, much.

And, in the sky – only recently, and so briefly, blue  
(you don't say, . . . you knew?) – there are, no, were,  
only as many stars as you could count  
and none, as yet, had twinkled. There was so much,  
too much, else to do, too many black and virgin valleys  
sucking at the starlight, the world, as yet,  
too thirsty black for reflection, or – what do you call it?  
– scattering, and too busy for diffusion. Comb-fingering fields  
in a sweep of match snaps, light then was hungry,  
and evangelic, concupiscent in its cause, fingering  
every surface, colonizing all crevasses.

Reflected, still it is, but the frontier, . . . the frontier is closed  
and each photon moment-seeping since foreshadows chill,  
which now, you see.

And so. And so, you go.  
That much I know.

## TO A WOMAN OF MANY HOUSES:

Long time it's been since this began, this work  
which makes the neighbors stare  
    or would – for who can gauge  
    the progress of such a thing, a house  
built so largely of fire and air?

For stretches, I know, the place seems still, derelict  
but for a few inspecting tracks after each fresh snow  
or, after dusk, from deep within, the escaping echoes  
of a single hammer ringing. Then, almost overnight,  
    whole wings appear, impetuously incomplete,  
    more soaring beams subsumed by higher towers,  
new escarpments capped by pennants.

The scaffolding, weathered silver, rising matchsticks to the  
    clouds,  
each spun brass fitted sleeve a glinting emblem  
in the twilight, has – in earlier configurations – three  
times collapsed:

    once due to insufficient anchorage,  
    once due to rot, and once  
scattered like pick-up sticks by an out-of-season tornado.

But always, you should know, I have kept on building,  
piece by piece, and making in places for you alone,  
what I take to be a few improvements:  
    expanding, where seems fit, a certain exchange  
    of day and starlight, extending  
    certain cantileverings of space,  
adding a few lights of ruby-colored and cobalt glass  
and, in between, some tiny mirrors,  
    though I can't remember now  
    how long its been  
since our last meeting.

Your last directions and the contract, of uncertain date,  
they're around here somewhere, I'm sure,  
under some yellowed transmittal sheet,  
behind some sticking file drawer,  
rolled up along with the misplaced plans.

But, no matter.

Haven't I always known your wishes  
as if they were my own?

I would have written sooner, but always there's much else to do,  
and so much undone has left me wakeful. Preoccupied,  
into the night, with clipboard and a canvas bag of tools,

I make the rounds, tripping  
over spools of wire, banging my shins  
against the gangboxes the ironworkers left, tongue clicking  
at so many regretful uncorrected errors,  
and ever a vision burns overhead in crackling plasma,  
a shifting iridescent shape of surprising detail,  
though others claim not to see it.

You know it too, I know, for I've sometimes seen your  
footprints,  
faint as a cat's but unmistakable, through the stone-dust  
and leading surely in the moonlight up across the open girders  
to where the view is best and, there,  
above the crane hook's ball, sometimes your voice  
sounds in the wind-bowed ropes and reeving.

Sister soul, know this my blood:  
in time, I would have it ever  
done so each time you sleep here,  
the tracings of these, my shaping hands,  
linger through your dreams.

Brian Hubbell

## Two Poems

## ENTRANCE

By the door, a flayed man looking, among other things, like one of old Vesalius's studies in anatomy – no clothes, no skin, his virtue concentrated in a glance: the slightest touch rings through his nerves, almost a violence, this near-trance fixed by the sculptor's plaster white-washed, shaping hands: ready – but for what? From the wall another hand reaches, not the artist's. Marble-smooth, some other intelligence, perhaps – at the glassed-in entrance offering apples to any taker. Study the wall's remaining dependencies: a wide-ringed eye, nose, an ear, soft lips, all womanly virtues, the flayed man as witness, and for touch. By virtue of the *senses' magic crossroads* (Rilke's so handsome phrase), they're married, not through an exchange of rings, but their desperate need for completion. What other message could the artist have conveyed – these studies, these fragments assembled with purpose, the entrance to bed, board, and studio? He must have entranced his wife with brilliance, a reward for virtuous behavior, or a promise of his own. Study the scene visible through the door's wide window: hands (real) in sight, carton of orange juice with other paraphernalia of breakfast, the bronze ring



of apples falling from a sculptured sack – a ring  
of immortalized domestic moments, shared, trans-  
figured in the sharing. His art. Hers is other:  
the performance of difficult tasks whose virtue  
lies not in their difficulty, but in the hands'  
devotion. Sewing, the stirring spoon – these studies

incidental to life's long work of studying  
his fickle moods, embarrassments, and joys – hearing,  
but then insisting that he heed her own handful  
of disappointments, acknowledge their need for trans-  
mutation. Flayed, he pulls her close, skinning's virtue  
being the chance of permeating each other,

the chance to ring with the resonance of such trans-  
cendental studies, an even-handed virtu-  
osity of kiss, caress, and otherness.

## THE GARDEN SIBYL

*she moved*  
*With a sad splendor, beyond artifice,*  
*Impassioned by the knowledge that she had*  
*There on the edges of oblivion.*

*O exhalation, O fling without a sleeve . . .*

– Wallace Stevens

Accidental sundial, the lawn's hours unmarked,  
 she's the first thing you see after you've parked the car,  
 culmination of the garden's distances: Throne,

Power, or faceless Dominion, a violin  
 poised on her shoulder – or is it a pear's golden  
 haunches, another angel's hips? You hardly dare

imagine the figure all this drapery hides:  
 flayed skin of the past, tomorrow's unmarrowed bones,  
 bow arm thin as a hangman's noose, slack, unknotted.

Worse than Medusa, whatever she surveys turns  
 to bronze, or disappears: the bald man, bodiless,  
 his bearded companion's bust perched on a boulder,

and Venus nothing but a hand dancing around  
 Doric columns, dropping apples. More mutable,  
 the garden's other realm will not be spared

the usual witherings: purple irises  
 to wrapping paper, day lilies to cardboard horns,  
 these roses unfolded origamis, creased, torn.

*O fling without a sleeve* – that can't be right: a sleeve  
is all there is, its stillness the opposite of  
fling. If anything's been flung from her it's something  
sung, roar beyond the range of your too-human ear,  
but hinted at in the splash of the fishpond's falls.  
No matter how many naked girls have fallen  
asleep in the foliage, patina instead  
of petticoats, grass tickling their nostrils, the dead  
keep their watch from the sculptor's glazing shed,  
    shadows  
of lips and eyelids the light unloosens from metal.  
Scintillant irony: they know that their maker  
proved to be less permanent than they, that behind  
the Garden Sibyl's drapes is only air. *Still Life*  
*with Fruit* was all she was meant to be: to his wife,  
nudity of the garment whose wearer is absence.

Kurt Leland

## RAT

Speak of the loveliness of paws,  
each delicate grey toe, soft  
as bunting, each arch lifting  
finely in its practiced way.

Notice the pink cupped ears,  
thin, translucent, glowing  
like light between our fingers held  
to flame, soft ears ruffling  
as leaves at the slightest  
breath of something not its own  
and not its own heard stirring.

See how the nose will lift then, testing  
the warm brown night for sound,  
each whisker ending in a point of light  
from fire burned low enough for sleeping,  
each eye a wet black stone.

We sleep lightly, worlds away  
from what is yielding grace  
behind our bureaus, between  
stacked logs, wherever night  
permits the secret showing-forth.

Margaret Renkl

SIGHTINGS

1.

Crows skim over a page of snow  
behind the house  
as if one sentence were enough.

Did I tell you how everything  
counts?

Shingles tiered on the barn  
mimicking rows of wing feathers  
stained the color of that burgundy  
he passed with a late night kiss  
from his mouth filling mine.

2.

Have I already said their daily  
arrivals

were compelling  
as their inevitable  
disappearances?

Their day to day work  
exposing us

to weightlessness?

Our bodies are the splintered stakes  
we're tied to.

Everything counts.

Nailed over the bed  
of my earliest childhood friend,  
the cross was a sparrow  
with stiff wings  
the first time I saw it.

3.

Had I mentioned the storefront  
door stood open,  
that starling trapped inside one room  
full of homemade dollhouses  
and miniatures?

It flew like that store was on fire –  
from roof to roof, tiny  
kitchens to parlors, toppling a cradle,  
against a wall of glass, the owner  
shrieking as I walked in  
at her only customer.

Remembering how, I threw my green  
sweater over it, carried that heart beat  
wrapped in my hands  
across the threshold,  
where it did what I counted on,  
flew off into a sycamore without us.

4.

At Long Lake the heron was camouflaged  
right there before our eyes.

Then, smack of wings, shot out,  
our canoe barely rocking  
that acre

of pickerelweed  
and waterlilies.

We fly without wings in our dreams,  
break into morning  
through the bulrushes of sleep  
where we find what we'll count on.

5.

I woke to a beady-eyed titmouse  
drumming at a seed between its feet,

to one day unfettered  
by the small  
or greater sorrows  
always here to choose from.

I woke to the nose-dive  
dips of chickadees,

to the choir of birds,  
unaccountably happy.

6.

Have I counted on them  
for companionship? Yes.

And when there weren't birds  
I turned to wind.

Wind, too, can turn air  
from vacant space  
into some live element.

7.

Remember how gestureless  
we felt on the banks of the Delaware?  
No fluttering anywhere.

It was a day we couldn't account for,  
the air and river breathless –

even the ducks became stones on stones  
so motionless we nearly believed in it.

8.

Our world's total avian population  
was last reckoned at about 100 billion –  
give or take some hundreds of millions.

Do you wonder what makes us count?

How many have passed overhead  
casting their passing shadow over you?

There were some fifty swans in the bay,  
but only one pair bill to bill,

framing one setting sun  
within the window they made  
of two necks.

9.

At the crest of the hill  
before the orchard,

a weathervane  
bent by countless storms

back almost off its perch –

copper rooster and arrow  
aimed now  
accidentally skyward.

10.

How I woke with the word  
ceaseless in my mouth.

Ceaseless, ceaseless,  
ceaseless –

like a bird dealt one phrase  
among all others for a lifetime.  
Then counting on it.



**AEAEA**

(Circe's Island)

Less an island than a cry  
Dumb animals might howl or sigh.

By dumb, I mean not, voicelessly,  
But denote, "without syntax," free  
From consonants' civility:

The "no hard feelings," the "goodbye,"  
The (wh)y in you that is not I.

## DISCOVERING THE RIGHT WORDS

One day my daughter came to visit at the office. She came to show me her newly dyed orange hair, its close cropped cut. I pretended not to notice. I talked heroically in my most serene voice. I typed over and over a poem and said secretly a prayer for her long blond locks. She hovered around me reading a little over my shoulder and whispered, this is what happens to the daughters of men who spend too much time revising their poems.

The next day my daughter came to visit at my apartment. She came to show me her newly pierced nose. I squeezed on my nose and made funny talk, but my daughter did not laugh. I am not mocking you I protested, well, maybe just a little. I offered to cook her dinner, but she said she wasn't hungry. I offered to make her favorite, but she said she only ate rice and beans once a day. I even offered to re-marry her mother if only she would partake of some frozen lasagna I had right there in the frigerator defrosting, but she knew as I did her mother's cold sayings, her adages of dislike, and that my promise was an empty one.

A week later my daughter came to visit me again. This time I sat at my computer in silent dread. She wore a tank top that revealed her perfect midriff and her navel punctuated with a new gold earring. She came to show me something else though. She had a cotton patch taped over her upper left arm. She took a chair across from me at the table, and looked me in the eye, frightened and brave. It is a heart she said with "father" printed on it. I saw one on a sailor in an old movie, of course, his said mother. I thought how appropriate, I'll get my father a heart. Suddenly fearful,

*stanza continued*

I looked for my daughter under her orange hair  
behind her pierced nose and navel, under her new  
tattoo still covered that bore a heart for me, her father.  
She was still there, my beautiful daughter.

She said again those words that I always  
understand and to which I always answer,  
so this is what happens to the daughters of men  
who spend too much time revising their poems.  
Yes, she replied. I thought that maybe it might  
be my golfing you objected to. No.

My republican way of living which you  
find incongruous with my rich imagination?  
No. My lack of a radical past? My posturing?  
My churchgoing? My inability to write meaning-  
fully in meter? No, no, no, and no.

I just think it's time you started acting like a father.  
I think it's time we talked in a different language.  
Okay I said, if that is what you want. I will begin now  
with these words: I find your rebellion childish and  
degrading. You are like a modern monk punishing  
yourself  
with a hair shirt. You are a condemned woman selling  
tickets

to your own execution, promising all the profits will go to  
some worthy cause, that it will save the whales, purify the  
earth, the air, and the water, that it will help desperate  
mothers to keep their babies or put them up for adoption,  
that it will end hatred, racism, dismantle nukes in Russia,  
Kazakhstan, and all the other worthwhile causes.

This I promise you against all my selfishness,  
against all your gestures at self-destruction.  
Nothing you do from now on will shock me.  
Nothing you do will make me love you less.  
Nothing you do will make me love you less.

Michael D. Piscal

## VISITATION

## LOWER MANHATTAN

I walk with your voice in my ears from the P.O. at Canal and  
Wooster  
into lower Soho, east along Grand Street into Little Italy, into  
Chinatown where it spills up Mulberry, overflows  
The Bowery. I cross Allen Street into the neighborhood of hold-out  
Jewish dry goods merchants and discount retail clothing  
shops,  
their signs bilingual, Spanish and Yiddish. I turn down  
Essex to the G & M Glatt Kosher take-out place where I hang out  
with the mobs of widows, the kvetchedicke remnant of  
old-time Jews  
still living in the Grand Street Co-ops, still keeping  
Kosher, still keeping Shabbos, still wondering how come THEY  
didn't get  
a son-in-law who could make it in the suburbs and have the  
heart  
and the cash to set them up nice someplace in Florida.  
I walk with your voice in my ears, your entire mouth – throat, jaws,  
tongue, lips, teeth – while I order “a roasted chicken,  
a quart of soup, a half dozen kreplach and I'm here  
already  
so you may as well give me a nice piece of whitefish and for my son  
just one stuffed cabbage. One will be enough. And a small  
lokschen  
kugel. Not sweet. Salt and pepper. You don't have a small?  
OK, I'll take a medium.” I hear your radials whirring  
on the mountain roads. I hear your animals poking their  
muzzles  
in your face. I hear your printer clattering away  
like mine does while your voice, your heart, your mind, your  
moisture  
breathe into my ears where I stand in the bakery waiting my  
turn

but it's been my turn already and the lady that came in behind me has taken the counterman's attention. Which is fine.

I'm not in any hurry. I know what I want, smelling the braided challahs, the mandelbroit, the yeasty babka, the sticky mohn-cake thick with a paste of prune and poppy seeds. I want your face.

I want your body. I want a week with you. I want the seashore, the mountains, the riverbank, the room in the harbor. I am walking back along Canal street, listening to everything you say, buying seven different kinds of tea in Chinatown, scallions and watercresses from the stand that sells live turtles and gigantic carp from a big brown tank. I'm buying lichees from the shop across the street where half a pig, a dozen ducks, and ropes of barbecued intestines hang from shining flesh hooks, dripping fat into the wooden basin. Lunch time. The garment workers gather. The man hacks off a clump of this or that and chops it to bits on a stump then packs it over rice, some slippery greens, in a paper pail with a wire handle. Oh, when will we two ever come together in our bodies, the taste of cake and gravy flavoring our crazy love? When will the places where we eat and wander and the worlds in which our souls rejoice become the same? I love the way you penetrate the mundane veil we call reality. Why can't we both just fly and meet at the frontier? But how could we return? Oh, why does what we have and love and live with seem the price for what we still must long for?

Mark Solomon

## ROMEO COLLISION

## I.

Say there are two emotions, love or fear,  
 one casting out the other like the winner  
 in rock-paper-scissors. Some mornings (this one)  
 fear takes up the bed and windows, takes up  
 my human shape and walks it room to room –  
 when I'm alone, so later can't be proved.  
 Related subject: X let her husband's girlfriend,  
 who boasted to beforehand, begin  
 to make love with her. Some party guests looked on.  
 Of the two asleep, feet touching, their pattern,  
 hips cupped, or opening opposite, sweat  
 strong on the sheets by morning – we have let  
 their habits shelter us, shoulder or bureau  
 in outline, nights. X knows. I know.

## II.

*See where the weeds are pink*, I show the child,  
 her chin dug in the seat back. Outside Newark  
 the Meadowlands swung, heavy-tipped, between track  
 sections, car glass, canisters. Your good eye  
 assembled what I love: a pelt-  
 colored land cut by bridges, cracking tower's  
 fire. Or found one afternoon, in a bar  
 a child's shoes thrown among petals  
 of a shredded rose. The fish, huge,  
*with two great dead rotten eyes*  
 you came running to report, stride  
 mismatched, a tall man's, two kinds of music.  
 Unlike you, I can sit and stare,  
 for hours, see nothing, like a passenger.

## III.

Take the char taste of fight to bed,  
 or better, defer till morning with beer, rum,  
 then throw it up. Not that I slept.

(Recall the acres near my parent's home

ruined in fire, the dead trees like knives  
 upright for years.) One night while I burned,  
 wanting the house still, the last lights  
 in the kitchen out, I heard father and son

go over lessons, the deep voice first with *walk*  
 or *blue*, the other, soft, as in question,  
 answering *azul . . . jugar . . .* they seemed to talk  
 like two long familiar, who didn't listen,

spoke when the other stopped, but at a peace,  
 one asking *will you*, the other *yes*

## IV.

"Better dead than in some basement." The locksmith  
 shows how the bolt will fit. To sleep, I use  
 left-over medicine, locks that take keys  
 both sides of the door. The alleged stayed with

his mother, not two months out of prison  
 when he *raped a city* (read: black) *woman, beat*  
*her with a pipe* The next woman, white,  
 made headlines for the dailies, Page A1.

I begin to think she was mine. Leaflets  
 aging on store fronts show date missed,  
 her eyes and hair, REWARD FOR SAFE RETURN.  
 Police with dogs search the Raritan

for the published coat *last seen*  
 for the form *female, matching description*

## V.

Speak of the peace, its strangeness, a country  
seen first at dusk. Of the plane tree  
not taking its shape back from the dark yet.  
Speak of the wet pad spots tracked to the bed  
and the wrung towels thrown and the two soup bowls.  
And of the chests and hips, slightly apart, to cool.  
And of the great, great quiet, the wordless lips  
shaping only the different shapes of kisses.  
And the slackened legs and back stroked for their work.  
And the near-sleep shiftings, and lone work  
steps of the first on the sidewalk. Then daylight came  
the way a dancer will begin lifting her arms  
and lift them without any music. I kept  
one hand on your chest, whether I woke or slept.

## VI.

I squat beside a crate that stays buried  
in what won't go elsewhere: notebook  
I bought in '88 to hold my worries,  
slides of the Rhineland (borrowed). Near work  
I took this pamphlet: *The First Nine Months*  
with photos. Barricaded, rubbing prayer beads  
one shrieked *she rips babies from their mothers*  
To the near-girl, going in *miss, please miss, please*  
At school, one child less: Miss Charlene sent  
the oldest (reads the note) to foster care.  
She's taken three in from her children,  
writes here *too much with this one more*  
I study the paddle hands, mud bit of eye,  
gauze sac across the face. And want that child.



## VII.

The title's Brooklyn's, of thin floor and wall,  
of Sunday's *hate-you-fuck-you-listening?-I'll  
leave* They didn't. Not the new ones down the hall,

the landlord and wife who'd kept it up for years.  
Mid-block, ROMEO COLLISION could repair  
what broke an auto body. The title's yours:

Quick step across the stoop, quick look up  
to see if I looked. Fear or love?  
Which is it moving us who move

the way the tamer steps in the cage, alone –  
(In the air above your coat you drew cartoon  
hearts, great bursting ones. Then came in.)

who say *Beloved*. Lay out the wrapped  
pears, two colors of flowers. Who accept.

Lisa Coffman

## Two Poems

## WAKED TO LISTEN

The back door creaks  
as though it's trying to open.  
It's early morning,  
the dark just going.  
I have been waked to listen  
to what I have heard  
and not heard, sleeping.  
Husband and father talked  
as though they both were dead,  
as though they both were living,  
and I slept deeper.  
No wind blowing,  
the deadbolt shot,  
but the door is trying to open.  
Whoever struggles to reach me  
must still sleep –  
the hands of a falling dream  
slip off the knob

*stanza continued*

before I can get it open –  
but I am awake  
and cannot let him in.  
His shape is vagrant,  
I cannot see how he comes –  
in camouflage, face blackened,  
weapons concealed?  
a graffiti artist who'll ransack the house,  
scrawling his name in paint  
on mirrors, walls, books,  
sleep itself defaced, the house  
dark with his rage?  
Or suppose I turn a corner and confront  
a finished canvas, his hand at last able,  
out of the stiff body's still-life, to paint  
what opens everywhere into his color,  
deep into his carmine, his cobalt?  
I wrench the back door open  
and let full morning in.  
Silence dogs my footsteps  
from room to room  
but I have been waked to listen  
and I do.

**ASK HER**

It's crow dawn, half light  
full of doubts, her room  
shifty with shadows of crows  
wheeling outside.

At dusk the trees were so black it seemed  
darkness had its source there,  
and a river wind, or the sound  
trees make breathing out.

But dusk has an undertow,  
she swam for her life  
rough water between rock walls,  
river of blind fish, hers the only eyes.

At dawn the crows' derision  
erodes the record. It doesn't matter.  
Enough doubt persists  
to survive day in the open

and reach the river.  
Don't ask her which is more dangerous,  
the blind fish or the crow.  
She doesn't know

and that's the wrong question.  
Ask her  
if underground rivers run in her family,  
if they spoke crow at home.

Linda Allardt

**FORTUNATE IN DEATH**

Lucky, we remark of those demises  
not visited with drawn out grief and crises.  
Indignities of detail, which for art we feast on,  
in life are less than salutary, at the least, borne.

And so has Nixon died, without heroics,  
luckier in death than in his life, self-willed stoic  
to die in three days' time, deep in a coma,  
opprobrium's whiff replaced by the aroma  
of recognition from advisors, heads of state,  
who found in sheer endurance something great,  
re-capped with admiration or hypocrisy  
his forays on behalf of the democracy  
through which a flawed man nonetheless attains  
if not removal, lightening, of his stains.

Margaret Kaufman

## ANNIVERSARY

Through a varnished doorframe  
the lights in our rooms concur.  
From the couch, I watch her  
instead of my pages: tired  
shoulders, bowed head, one  
idling hand are all I see above  
the counter. Thought looks like  
pain on her face, or prayer,  
wavering and swelling in her,  
then ebbing as the pen moves.  
Her hand rakes her hair, falls  
to her brow, then the cheek – no  
more classic pose of affliction.  
My heart goes out, then returns,  
shrugging – what could it do but  
hover and distract? Let it keep  
a tactful watch over this labor.  
All our years together seem  
convergent in the doorframe's  
bright angle. Seventeen years.

*stanza continued*

A wave tilts and tilts in me.  
In the speakers, hushed violas  
stutter: our old dog thumped  
down beside that record when I  
taped it fifteen years ago. Long-  
dead, beautiful dog, beautiful,  
happy needle, who would run  
between us, when we would  
rendezvous after late working  
nights, to walk home together.  
Remember how he shuttled  
there between us, stitching us  
together, celebrating our approach  
toward a kiss. Oh, thoughtful  
stranger there in the door, hand  
in your hair, let the faint smile  
I know so well return to your face,  
so I can rise and return to you  
across the lamplit, drifting years.

Robert Farnsworth

## WHICH WAY THE WINDS BLOW

What hand opened the door, I don't know. No one  
lives there in winter. And I don't know if it was for  
entrance

or for exit that the piece opened itself, or was opened,  
though I do know what boundaries  
were broken. The lake lay frozen, the sky  
still as folded wings. And everywhere snow

blown into the rooms, strewn across the braided rugs  
and knotty boards, under chairs, creeping  
like a slow cold tide, white and silent, out of its element  
with greed. Then I remembered the photograph,  
black and white, as old as me or older. What eye  
watched that scene, taking it in, shameless, I don't know,  
though I do know that boundaries were broken:

A woman, her grey dress blowing toward land,  
lost on the shore in the dim light of her long day's end,  
and a man, farther up the beach, alone. The sea –  
mute, infinite entity – taking in its borders hungrily;

and the stolen child it drank up when each  
entered the other in a moment  
of dropped vigilance. In this kind of world no blueprint

instructs us how to house what we love  
against the winds of loss. The woman, the man,  
their child gone – slipped from the safe home of their love,  
swallowed whole. I am not going to try to feel

what that woman felt, or to speak with her voice. I don't  
know

what she did next or how she did what she did next.  
She is the mother, my fear, all the love ever lost to grief.  
Her pain is an ocean vaster than planets, a diaspora



of longing flung to all four flogging winds. In her life,  
I am sure that time drifted past her, with her, within her.  
I know that that summer, like all summers, moved on  
through the fall into winter, that the shore closed up,  
abandoned, cold. And that the thing lost  
still blows through us, the swollen door no longer shuts.

Alice B. Fogel

## BOOKS IN BRIEF

As editor and reviewer I swim in a sea of incoming poetry: in submitted poems, in the fourscore literary magazines I receive, and in the books that pour in for review. Much of what I am seeing is in the broadest sense clinical: displaying and diagnosing the diseases of our current society. Child abuse, what we clumsily call "substance abuse" (tox and detox), environmental outrages, domestic and public violence, bigotry, literal and metaphorical viruses, all are legitimate and necessary subjects of our writing today. It seems that we live in the world of Yeats's "Second Coming" where "The best lack all conviction, while the worst/Are full of passionate intensity." I cannot avoid contemplating how clinical depression has undone so many of our strongest poets – how many of my generation lost the mental and physical health to survive beyond their middle years. (David Wojahn has a thoughtful and sensitive article on this in the Winter 1995 *New England Review*: "The State You Are Entering: Depression and Contemporary Poetry.") I'm baffled by the causes, appalled by the losses. I cannot know the cost to the poets of so many powerful poems. But I do know that while we gratefully appreciate what the Lowells and Roethkes and Plaths achieved in the face of chaos and terror, we must cherish and honor those poets who have been blessed with the health – the sanity in all the senses – to confront and survive the horrors of this lifetime with courage, to learn and teach and enjoy, and to write for us the poems from which we may learn how to survive in love.

Faced with six-foot shelves of review copies, I usually go for the ones that present a challenge to me. Readers sometimes ask me to help them with strong but difficult books, and complying has provided me with some of the richest rewards of reviewing. But this time I'll begin by sharing news of four books that should be immediately accessible to any reader of poetry, books that should delight and enlighten with their music, their clarity, and their vision. And above all their healing sanity.

I'll start briefly with three that have been honored by their publishers with book design worthy of their poetry – books grateful to the hand and eye as "La ci darem la mano" is grateful to the voice. Then for the fourth I'll allow myself the luxury of elaboration. After that I'll conclude with very short mention of a few of the books that have arrested my attention.

Pablo Neruda, *Odes to Common Things*, trans. by Ken Krabbenhoft, selected and illustrated by Ferris Cook (Boston: Little, Brown/Bulfinch Press, 1994, 152 pp., \$22.50 cloth, ISBN: 0-8211222-2080-2). This richly elegant book presents twenty-five of Neruda's odes to such "common things" as the spoon, the onion, a bar of soap, a pair of socks. Much of Neruda's voice comes through in translation: the drama and the humor, the affectionate overtones and the political undertones. Some of the music is in the syntax and lineation, and that comes over well. But the deep music of the Spanish phonemes evaporates, and every reader – even one like me who knows little Spanish – will want to read the original text, fortunately printed *en face*. What can poor English do with the rich man's table, "encaracolada/ y refulgente." "Scrolled and shining" can't touch it. A violet's "metalicos pedunculos" are more than "silvery stalks." When I read "I want us to bite into an apple," I'm grateful that I can look across and mouth "mordiendo una manzana." Three lines from his "Ode to the dictionary" describe Neruda's own style accurately: words

opacas e sonoras  
fecundas en la fronda del lenguaje  
cargadas de verdad y de sonido

(opaque and musical/fertile in the foliage of language,/laden with truth and sound). The book is in addition a joy to hold: exquisitely illustrated by Cook's luminous pencil drawings, on rich heavy paper, sewed and cloth-spined for a long life.

Kate Barnes, *Where the Deer Were* (Boston: Godine, 1994, 96 pp., \$20.95 cloth, ISBN: 0-87923-984-0), with woodcuts by Mary Azarian. Though I rarely review a book by a friend, I want to include this one as another instance of a beautiful harmony of poems and presentation. Printed letterpress and graced by Mary Azarian's woodcuts, this is a treasure of a book: poems of a countrywoman, a woman who has elected to stay close to the land – to the waterlilies, the farm animals and the wildlife, but also to family roots and to neighbors. These poems draw profound health from the natural world and the rural community, and they transmit it to the reader. A friend going through a difficult time has described them as "a cool hand on a hot brow."

But they are anything but naive. Consider the title poem:

It's always hard to form a true picture  
of what is happening, isn't it?  
Difficult to know what's what.

For instance,  
 the moving tenderness of the desiring man,  
 the gentle vanity of the desired woman  
 sliding their bare arms and legs together  
 in the grass across the stream.

It's late summer,  
 a misty day, but warm.

I can't see their faces.  
 So what is happening, really?  
 Perhaps they are fighting – very evenly.  
 Perhaps these sounds are groans of pain.

Now the mist  
 closes my eyes.

When it lifts once more,  
 I see nothing over there  
 but a hollow in the long grass  
 like the places where deer have been lying,  
 and the only thing I hear  
 is shallow water making excuses to stone.

I recently heard a poet open a reading with this poem, saying that it was emblematic for him of all the ambiguities of perception and conception that are at the heart of the poetic process. The strongest poems here have this quality of transcending the occasion that inspired them. In others I wonder whether what is “divinely ordinary” for Kate Barnes may have less resonance for those who have no roots in country soil. Those who have been reading her poems in *The New England Review*, in this magazine, and elsewhere have seen some poems darker and deeper than these. *Where the Deer Were* largely selects poems that connect us to a world where life draws its strength and health from the fruitful interplay of the inhabitants with the land. They are a great gift.

Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, *Trekways of the Wind*, trans. Ralph Salisbury, Lars Nordström, and Harald Gaski (Uddevalla, Sweden: distributed by The University of Arizona Press, 1230 North Park, #102, Tucson, AZ 85719, about 350 pp., unpaginated, \$20. cloth, ISBN: 82-90625-21-9). Valkeapää is one of the Samí people, an indigenous ethnic group (formerly called Lapps) of northern Scandinavia and Russia. He was born to a reindeer herding family, but left to become an artist. The breathtaking drawings and the dazzling jacket and endpapers are his. The temptation may be to

keep it on the coffee table and browse, but one should first read it page by page to experience the turning of the seasons, the wanderings of the poet, the loneliness of his schooling, the intimacy of his love, his pilgrimage to Inuit and Plains Indians peoples, and his fellowship with them. The drawings often continue seamlessly over the edges of the pages, so that a single line across a double page turns, as the page turns, to a horizon line, following the lines of the poetry. Across the lower half of seventy-eight pages is the score of a work, "Bluethroat, Twitter, Sing," for baritone, cello, and piano. Above the staves are lines of poetry, and an otter gazes at the reader, a Blue Tit fixes you with its bright eye, turnstones go on the alert, and a weasel rises up, while a ptarmigan stands erect, muscles tensed for a takeoff. Then, as the poetry announces time for migration, flocks take to the air. Valkeapää's poetry is available to us only in translation, so I am uneasy judging it, as I am uneasy judging Chinese poetry. It is clearly, very clearly, lyrical, expressing an organic relation to the natural world. Here is a sample:

When darkness fell  
 you became visible  
 in the lines of the mountain

Until I no longer knew  
 was it you  
 or did my eyes delude me

Valkeapää also enters the canyons of the city to indict what the natural world is being converted to. He visits indigenous peoples in America, celebrating solidarity with them as "civilization" crowds their traditional self-sustaining culture off the planet, as the Samí culture is also threatened by the culture of consumption.

Philip Booth, *Pairs* (New York: Penguin, 1994, 96 pp., \$12.95 paper, ISBN: 0-14-058724-1). This, one of the most beautiful books of the year in its contents, has not been honored by its publisher with comparable production. The soft matte cover is uninviting and vulnerable to wear; paper and design are merely adequate; and Viking has shamefully eliminated hard-cover editions from its entire Penguin line. (Moreover, there is no poetry to speak of in the regular Viking catalogue, a sad sign of the times.) The deficiency is especially irksome in this case, because *Pairs* is far and away the most handled of the current books at my house. It is the one houseguests take up to bed with them, copy out poems from, and carry out on walks. It is not just that the poet is a friend and neighbor; there is a real hunger for these poems.

To account for the work of this poet with deep roots in the puritan tradition I am drawn to that arch-puritan, John Milton, who described poetry in "On Education" as "simple, sensuous, and passionate" (and by "simple" John Milton assuredly did not mean simple-minded). These are not adjectives I'd apply to many of our most distinguished living poets – certainly not the currently fashionable post-moderns. Nor do I think they are qualities most canon-makers are looking for. I do believe however that they are qualities many readers are starved for. So with Milton as our guide, let's start by erasing the common stereotype of puritan as self-repressed and repressive, obsessed with perfection. Booth understands that temperament (perhaps from the inside out), and he deals with it, devastatingly, in "He's Half," "Prepositions," "Self-sentence," and "Judge." That stereotype is a pole away from Milton.

As the title *Pairs* suggests, this is a book largely, very largely, of love poems, dedicated to "TWO/everywhere,/who know love,/their arms/round the griefs of the ages." The griefs of the ages do twist their knives in some of these poems. Although one of Booth's organizational principles is Blake's "In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy," his poems acknowledge that learning can be wrenching ("Words"), a harvest may fail or be bitter ("Sentences," "Talk about Walking"), and the approach of an unnamed fourth season shadows our keenest enjoyments, altering them while sharpening their savor. The intimations of mortality appear early ("Jazz in the Garden") and become truly intimate in "All-Night Radio" and the bone-chilling "Outlook." Moreover, the social, political, military, and environmental ills of our day come home to infect our marrow. The most eloquent contemporary anti-war poem I know is "Places without Names," in this volume. "Sentences" and "After the First Death" allow us no escape, require our response and responsibility. But even Booth's bitterest satire springs from an indignant empathy with the abused and the suffering.

Like a contemporary "Marriage of Figaro," *Pairs* is a condensed encyclopedia of love. One of its organizations is chronological, so one can follow the stages of love evolving from the boy in "First Storm" who "holds on to/himself, until after," through the lyrical adolescent longing to possess the beloved in "First Song," on through the "self and/other, together and each" of the deliciously erotic "First Night," to the mysterious transformative love of "Chances."

(What is it that creates the climate for great love poetry? After the glories of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century love poems came the drought of the eighteenth, followed by the lyric revival of the Romantic

Period. But in this matter the Romantics, curiously, did not immediately cross the Atlantic. There is astonishingly little love poetry in the great flowering of the American Renaissance, though there may be more in the poems of women, which we are just starting to explore. Only with Whitman and Dickinson did an American tradition of love poetry truly begin. Who can account for its flourishing today? I'll settle for celebrating without trying to account.)

The pairs in *Pairs* are lover and beloved, husband and wife, father and daughter, wife and father, person and self, grandfather and granddaughters, son and mother – and not irrelevantly: an affectionate respect for a variety of folks in the poet's home community. I choose to examine here one poem that undertakes to conceive love, not as a personified abstraction, as an earlier century might, nor as an individual instance, as most contemporary poets would, but as love in general:

#### CHANCES

As whitecaps ride  
mid-ocean swells, and  
tumble on themselves,

love's moved to love:  
love praises love, proud  
of its quick gravity;

love loves to spend its  
gifts, gives silence  
time, lets hummings

turn to music. Love takes  
its chances, touches lightly,  
dances to the tune it just

invented. Unannounced  
love pounces on its luck,  
lives in eyes alive with

its grave levity. Various  
in word, in deed, love,  
countless times a day, says

yes. Love knows the names  
the other loves, reads  
the other's sense of every

tree, cove, sky; in its  
flurries, even furies, love's  
transformative; while waves

reshape the beaches where they end,  
love remains the mystery  
love, in us, informs.

First, you should read this aloud, just for the music of it. Enjoy the little silences that suspend you a fraction of a breath at the end of each line. These establish the cadences against which the poet will play his syntactic syncopations and counterpoints. Enjoy how the first end-stopped stanzas give way to enjambment, where the breath between stanzas suspends the narrative and creates little surprises. Hear the way the poet "gives silence / time." And because the content forms and informs the sound as the sound forms and informs content, pause and consider how many ways one can understand "gives silence / time." And listen for how the poem "dances to the tune it just // invented." I hear something sinuous and delicate as Telemann's Fantasy for Solo Instrument – perhaps an oboe. Hear, and feel in the mouth and throat, how the *i* of "whitecaps ride" modulates back, vowel by vowel, to the top of the throat, where it "tumbles." The next stanza moves that *u* sound into the first of many verbal and phonemic repetitions that spiral down through the poem: *love, touches*, then *humblings* resonating with *tumble*. Now continue down the double helix of the poem, moving from alliteration and assonance to the harmonics of *unannounced* vibrating under *pounces*. Then whole phrases coil together, especially the elegant "quick gravity" to "grave levity."

Inseparable from its music, the idea of the poem evolves organically. The mature lover is no longer self-absorbed; his ego is engaged in the beloved's sense of everything. This love is various and resilient – surviving flurries and furies. It is dynamic, living and moving through time and space in a dance of discovery. The image that opens and closes the poem, progressing from the mid-ocean swells to the intimate relation of wave and shore, unites the subject with the processes of the natural world. (Though existential in its dynamic, Booth's poem is at the opposite pole from what I have always thought the weakest link in Sartre's chain – the alienation from nature.) And its imagery does more: it provides a metaphor for the processes of the mind; it *informs*. Still more: from the surface play of whitecaps it deepens through the swell to the unsayable but profoundly erotic and spiritual sense that Freud called the oceanic.



Let me say a word here about Booth's diction. It is exactly what Wordsworth called for in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*: "a selection of the language really spoken by men." Thus the lovely accessibility of Booth's poems to the general reader. But it is also what I think of as "deep language," words aware of their history, aware of all the ways they may be taken. Coleridge wrote of Wordsworth that his "words always mean the whole of their possible meaning." This multiplicity within language led to the ripple of puns in Shakespeare, Donne, Thoreau, and the best of our contemporaries. I hear it here in "moved to love," in "quick gravity," but most of all in the final word, "informs," which vibrates with multiple meanings. In his diction, as in his music, Booth extends a lyric tradition that goes back in English at least to Caedmon. And it is here, in the quick language, that I find the cutting edge of contemporary poetry, where it is most finely honed and, in this poem, most mysterious.

Obviously I respond strongly to this poetry, and not just because it so delights me in its verbal dance. For Coleridge, as for Dante and Milton, for Hopkins, and certainly for Eliot and Pound, I necessarily (and willingly) suspend my disbelief in some of their world views. But in the best of our contemporary writers (for me such poets as Ammons, Booth, Merwin) I have no such need. We are riding the same time-wave; as Booth puts it in "Heading Out" (*Selves*), "Beyond here there's no map./How you get there is where/you arrive." For me this is Romantic in its most permanent sense: dynamic rather than static, open instead of closed, concerned more with becoming than being. The Romantic connects the processes of the mind with the processes of nature (see Shelley's "Mont Blanc"). In all these respects I find Philip Booth's poetry moving and most likely to survive its day.

---

### Some Prose by Poets

Donald Hall, *Death to the Death of Poetry: Essays, Reviews, Notes, Interviews* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995, 160 pp., \$39.50 cloth, \$13.95 paper, ISBN: 0-472-06571-4[8]). For those who (like me) treasure Donald Hall as one of the strongest voices in poetry today, this volume will be a treat. The title essay is the place to go for a ringing declaration of the lasting power of today's best poets and the vitality of their audience. Amen! cry I.

Albert Goldbarth, *Great Topics of the World* (Boston: Godine, 1994, 192 pp., \$22.95 cloth, ISBN: 1-56792-017-9). Well, I guess you could call these four items prose. The lines go out to the right margin. But I've read a lot of "prose poems" a lot less poetic than what we have here. Goldbarth really has created a new genre, a complex tapestry of fantasy fiction, pop culture, family history, globe-galloping scholarship, giddy comedy, gorgeous language, and a seasoning of sardonic self-analysis. Here's how "Worlds," my current favorite, begins: "In 1907 my grandfather landed on Mars, he'd come so far from his village in Poland. The water lapping the pilings: that was Mars, the wharf itself was Mars, the mongol rampage of rats was Martian rats that led, by alley shadows and vats of impossible stinks, to the jammed, flat broke and flash-o'-diamonds flush, fat, flammable, wholly contradictory and madcap heart of New York: the capital city of Mars." If you want to know how this fits cozily into a web that contains George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*, the Lowell dynasty of Boston (especially the astronomer Percival and the poet Amy), Navajo "Hoshonji" songs, Keats, the Armory show, the great white ape of Barsoom, the flora and fauna of Arizona, and "Mrs. Kwakk Wakk, she of duckly mien," well, you'll have to read "Worlds."

Philip Levine, *The Bread of Time: Toward an Autobiography* (New York: Knopf, 1994, 300 pp., \$23. cloth, ISBN: 0-679-42406-7). If you care for Levine's sinewy poems, as I certainly do, and care about the man who imagined them, as I surely do, then you will want to read this book. If you're drawn to it by the delicious dust jacket, nothing inside will disappoint you. These elegantly-written essays/stories draw us into the writer's world and share with us his education in "the holy cities" of Detroit, Barcelona, and Byzantium and in the presence of great mentors – especially Yvor Winters and John Berryman. The Berryman essay is a gift to any writer, for Levine quotes lavishly from the poet's advice to students. One instance: "he was able to convince us – merely because he believed it so deeply – that nothing could be more important for us, for the nation, for humankind, than our becoming the finest poets we could become." And "we were never to forget that men and women of the greatest intellect and imagination had for centuries turned toward poetry to fulfill their private and civic needs." For me one of the most valuable essays is "Living in Machado," Levine's account of a sabbatical spent with his family in Catalunya and his exploration of the country and poetry of Antonio Machado. This deliberately-paced narrative gives the reader the enormous privilege of working with the poet into this poetry that is so deeply rooted in the Catalan soil and still so eloquently universal. He provides as an extra gift a small anthology of his translations of Machado.

*The Bread of Time* should nourish and inspire anyone who cares about poetry.

## Two Chapbooks

Robert Bly, *Gratitude to Old Teachers* (Brockport, New York: BOA Editions, 1993, 22 pp., \$7. in wrappers, ISBN: 1-880238-01-2). A bouquet of very appealing poems in honor of some of Bly's mentors and colleagues, including William Carlos Williams, James Wright, Wallace Stevens and Donald Hall. The title poem sets the tone:

When we stride or stroll across the frozen lake,  
We place our feet where they have never been.  
We walk upon the unwalked. But we are uneasy.

Water that once could take no human weight –  
We were students then – holds up our feet,  
And goes on ahead of us for a mile.  
Beneath us the teachers, and around us the stillness.

Ioanna-Veronika Warwick, *No Longer Mine* (Abingdon, Virginia: Sow's Ear Chapbook, 1994, 34 pp., \$5. paper, ISSN: 1066-3444). These sixteen poems are the fruit of Warwick's return visit to her native Poland after twenty-seven years. Perhaps they are just "dilated anecdotes," but the cumulative effect is richer. The details are clear and telling: the jet overhead "like a white shark," "speech full of drizzle and wet birches." But most telling of all are the human voices, Polish and Californian, questioning, toasting, dogmatically asserting. They all add up to an action: the realization that the poet can no more be at home in the old country than the pigeons of her childhood memory can return to their home sills, now that they have been exterminated by the government.

Sylvia Griffith Wheeler, *Counting Back: Voices of the Lakota and Pioneer Settlers* (University of Missouri – Kansas City: BkMk Press, 1992, 128 pp., \$12.95 hardbound, ISBN: 0-933532-85-7). Wheeler has "translated" these poems from records in the South Dakota Oral History Collection at the University of South Dakota, and BkMk Press has presented them handsomely with a chronology, bibliography, and with shadowed quotations from contemporary sources – all for the price of a paperback. I can't guess at the scope and condition of the archives Wheeler used, but I do know that as they appear here the voices of the

settlers and the native Americans have been so edited and arranged that they are indeed poems. Here is Ella Deloria on learning English:

In our mission the minister read in Dakota,  
then we had to put the stories into English.  
Some of the words were so euphonious  
they interested me right from the start.

One of the most beautiful was "riotous living,"  
Another was "in the company of harlots." Harlots!  
And then there was "famine" and all the rest.

Like Ioanna-Veronika Warren's *No Longer Mine, Counting Back* grants us access to another world – this one a world we need to understand if we are to understand our own history.

Loren Graham, *Mose* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England, 1994, 64 pp., \$22.50 cloth, \$10.95 paper, ISBN: 0-8195-2215-5/1220-6). Here is another book that initiates the reader into an otherwise inaccessible world. I'd call it a verse novella. It introduces us to a convict named Mose, serving time in a Texas prison. The page headings are the number of days he still has to serve: from 1741 to 1594. In that time the reader slowly learns who he is and what he has done – the revelations carefully dealt out by a skillful narrator. At the same time, Mose is learning something about who he is and what he has done. Italics denote letters he is composing to Gracie, the woman he loves. Boldface type introduces external sources. An omniscient narrator observes and records. Flexible three-line stanzas carry the varying music and musings. So powerfully is the story unfolded that the reader becomes submerged in Mose's character and predicament and emerges at the end chilled and changed. This is a remarkable accomplishment.

Neal Bowers, *Night Vision* (University of Missouri–Kansas City: BkMk Press, 1992, 68 pp., \$9.25 hardbound, ISBN: 0-933532-87-3). With its black endpapers and its photograph of the half-smiling poet staring at the camera over the decidedly unhumorous gaze of a large cat, this wittily-designed book prepares the reader for an unblinking look at the last things. It opens ingratiatingly with the much-admired and very funny "Notes from the Morticians' Convention" – nine sections with headings like "Consoling the Bereaved: A New Methodology." Here's a sample:

*12 NOON, Box Elder Grill/ Lunch (Buffet Style)*

Imagine a pharaoh rising in his pyramidal tomb  
to eat the food left behind for his dark voyage  
and finding kraut and weiners, green peas,  
a gelatin salad, and a thermos of hotel coffee.  
What better argument against an afterlife?

None of the other poems in the book is so jokey; all are lucid and elegant. In "Cryptology" Bowers begins: "We learned early/that the dark scroll of the world/called for a language we didn't have,/words beyond our words." It is one of a poet's most honorable callings to seek those words.

Alfred Corn, *Autobiographies* (New York: Penguin, 1993, 112 pp., \$10. paper, ISBN: 0-14-058690-3). This volume, too, begins with a playful voice and moves into the unsayable. Corn has an extraordinarily good ear for the language of the tribe. "My Neighbor, the Distinguished Count" begins in a dreamy, reminiscent voice – the voice of anyone's ordinary neighbor. Slowly the reader picks up the clues ("I told myself I had pints/To spare, so why refuse a simple favor?") that the Distinguished Count is Count Dracula. As the narrative plays itself out, the tone deepens relentlessly to a chillingly convincing conclusion. "Contemporary Culture and the Letter 'K'" follows a similar pattern – kapering creatively for two pages from "Kubla Khan" to "Amerika," and on to K-Mart and (ouch!) "Kuntry Kitchen." Dr. Kaposi sneaks in almost unnoticed, but the rhythm of the poem segues from there into these remarkable last lines:

A sense of helplessness is not in the repertory  
Of our national consciousness, we have no aptitude  
For standing by as chill winds rise, the shadows gather,  
And grey light glides into the room where a seated figure  
Has taken up his post by the window, facing away from us,  
No longer bothering to speak, his mind at one with whatever  
Is beyond the ordinary spell of language, whatever dreams us  
Into that placeless place, its nearest image a cloudless  
Sky at dusk, just before the slow ascent of the moon.

In "1992," the major poem in this volume, Corn in seventy-five pages does something for this era analogous to what Byron did for his in "Don Juan": documentation of the spirit of the age. But the tight organization of this mini-epic is entirely different from Byron's multifarious sprawl. Nineteen episodes, beginning in 1949, record the narrator's peregrinations. In each is a long parenthesis in which the poet imagines

the life of someone he has encountered in that day. At the end we learn what has become of each of these sympathetically-conceived people. I would not have missed it for anything.

---

#### Editor's Note:

In reply to my query about the ending of his poem "Autobiography of an Egg," in this issue, Brian Hubbell submitted the following, which I am pleased and amused to share:

"The apocalyptic conceit behind the penultimate stanza is supposed to be physics made meta: For eons, you have this steady flow of light from the sun – radiating shimmering fields, pulsing, complementarily regenerating at right-angles by snapping between electric and magnetic phase, etc., etc.

"Then, in one moment of temporal high theater, it dries at the source, like a suddenly shut off spigot, leaving in the lurch only the light already on its way. (In flight for a full eight minutes; I checked it out. ...plenty long enough for a poem.)

"The question is: if everything else were stilled, would you sense the diminished pressure, a sudden strange easing of a previously unnoticed background crackle? I say you would. It might even bring the mute to sing. I don't know. But there it is. Or was supposed."

---

The next issue (Volume 45, #4) will be a special chapbook in celebration of our completing our forty-fifth year. It will present new poems by some of the poets we first published in the sixties and the beginning of the seventies.

M. K. S.