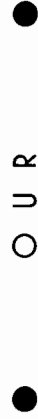


CELEBRATING



FORTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY



**BELLOIT**

*poetry journal*

CHAPBOOK 22

VOLUME 45 ■ NUMBER 4

SUMMER 1995

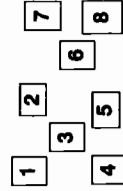
## CHAPBOOK 22

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*Cover and end sheet design:*  
Mary Lu Greene

- 1- Gu Cheng (1956-1993) whose poetry appeared in the chapbook of *New Chinese Poetry*, Winter 1988/89.
- 2- Detail from "Freddy" cartoon by Robert G. Baldwin, Spring 1991 cover.
- 3- Female Chippewa medicine doll, Summer 1993 cover.
- 4- William Carlos Williams, honored in a memorial chapbook, Fall 1963.
- 5- Japanese painting from special issue of poetry of Kaoru Maruyama, Summer 1972.
- 6- Chad Walsh (1914-1991), who with Robin Glauber, founded *The Beloit Poetry Journal* in 1950.
- 7- Detail from drawing by Robert Shetterly, from Spring 1992, featuring poems by William Carpenter.
- 8- Editor Marion Stocking and friend in a recent photo.

## INTRODUCTION

Here's a chapbook to celebrate the completion of our forty-fifth year. So successful was our fortieth anniversary chapbook, for which we invited new poems by poets we first published in the fifties\*, that we decided to assemble this one with poets from the sixties and the beginning of the seventies. We present them here with profound gratitude for their generosity in sending us their poems back then. We are doubly grateful to those among them who have remained friends of the magazine, submitting regularly and irregularly since the sixties. We appreciate, too, those poets who for one reason or another did not have work available for this issue: Amiri Baraka, Nicholas Christopher, Linda Hogan, Erica Jong, X. J. Kennedy, W. S. Merwin, Joyce Carol Oates, Gjertrud Schnackenberg, Derek Walcott, and Jonathan Williams. We are proud to have published them when we did.

With our next issue we return to our regular policy of publishing the best poems that come in "over the transom." We have every confidence that among these new poets will be the lyric voices, the visionaries, the poignant satirists, the unacknowledged legislators whose poems will enchant and unsettle us in the years to come.

M. K. S.

\*Dannie Abse, Philip Booth, Gwendolyn Brooks, Charles Bukowski, Hayden Carruth, Robert Creeley, Cid Corman, Richard Eberhart, D. J. Enright, Daniel Hoffman, Edwin Honig, David Ignatow, Elizabeth Jennings, Galway Kinnell, Maxine Kumin, Philip Levine, Howard Nemerov, Adrienne Rich, May Sarton, William Jay Smith, William Stafford, May Swenson, Peter Viereck, John Wain, and Theodore Weiss (and also in our pages in the fifties: John Ciardi, James Dickey, Langston Hughes, Philip Larkin, John Logan, Archibald MacLeish, Josephine Miles, Charles Olson, Gil Orlovitz, Anne Sexton, Louis Simpson, Richard Wilbur, and William Carlos Williams).

DECEMBER STARLINGS

A sheer loops in and berries bead  
the oak's sticky lofts: twittering  
blooms a dense stippling, a burn  
that eases off with settling, but  
just then before dusk's blurs,  
a loaded twig snaps and the whole  
sheet ripples in report;  
the black sheer unfurls and swirls  
away to fold into night elsewhere.

A. R. Ammons

*("YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN")*

I think of Gloucester, blind, led through the world  
To the world's edge by the hand of a stranger  
Who is his faithful son. At the cliff's edge  
He flings away his life, as of no worth,  
The true way lost, his eyes two bleeding wounds —  
And finds his life again, and is led on  
By the forsaken son who has become  
His father, that the good may recognize  
Each other, and at last go ripe to death.  
We live the given life, and not the planned.

Wendell Berry

## Two Poems

## WINTER AFTERNOON BY THE LAKE

*For Owen*

The air is thick between snow and black trees.  
No one nearby, five o'clock, below zero,  
Late January. The background is sober. Not a breath  
Of wind. You look, and your life seems stopped. Perhaps  
You died suddenly earlier today. But the thin  
Moon says no. The trees say, "It's been this way  
Before, often. It's cold, but still." We've seen  
It before, among the messy Saxons putting back the hide  
Flap. It's old. You'll never see this air again,  
The way it is now, because just today you sensed  
That someone gave you life and said,  
"Stay as long as you like." The black and white  
Ground pauses, to see if we're ready  
To re-enter that stillness. "Not yet."

**THE GIANT WHO KNEW ARISTOTLE**

Childhood is like a kitchen. It is dangerous  
To the mice, but the husband gets fed; he's  
An old giant, grumbling and smelling children.  
It's a place where you get smaller and smaller.

Or maybe you change size everyday. In general  
You become preoccupied with this old lady  
In the kitchen. . . . She putters about, opens oven doors.  
The thing is the old woman won't *discuss* anything.

The giant will. He's always been a fan of Aristotle,  
Knew him at school. It is no surprise to him  
That the Trojan War lasted ten years, or how it  
Ended. He knows something you don't.

Your brother says, "Say, what's that in the oven?"

**Robert Bly**

## Two Poems

## PROGNOSIS

... *approximately 40%-50% of MS patients develop  
a subcortical dementia* ...

S.M. Rao

What are the odds in this struggle  
between what I'll never know  
and what I know or might discover  
but will come to forget?  
An endurance race, stroking  
through the Sea of Dementia.  
On days like this I fear  
I've already begun to sink  
from the weight of virus and gene  
and myelin sheathing flaking  
from cells of spinal cord and brain.  
I could pray to be saved  
at the last moment by early death,  
or even — why not say it,  
considering the miracle  
of fundamentalist proportion  
it would take, in spite of  
the Calabrian ancestors who warn  
that to say a hope is to sink it —  
a cure. But will I know when?  
Well, yes. No. I don't know  
whether or not I'll be aware  
of the incremental loss of knowing.  
Godel's Incompleteness Theorem  
insists that a system — even one

as cocksure as the brain can be —  
needs a space beyond itself  
to know. The Grand Unified Theory,  
were we ever to discover it,  
would need something outside —  
an element beyond all things,  
as it were — to prove it true,  
keep it floating. Can I think  
what it would be like  
not to be able to think,  
or even to think less well?  
The ideal, it occurs to me,  
would be to grow more demented  
at the exact rate at which  
the physical features of the disease  
progressed, an equilibrium of sorts,  
though on a downward scale,  
as if a swimmer's fatigue,  
accelerating slowly, were matched  
by a corresponding progression  
in the intensity of the storm,  
so it wasn't until slipping  
beneath the mad waves for good  
that he noticed a difference  
in what he'd felt had been  
a steady progress toward shore,  
and thus his last strokes,  
as spastic and spasmodic as  
they might appear to those watching  
helplessly from the beach  
as the storm came up, dark  
and confusing, nevertheless  
caused him no panic,  
no desperate regret for all  
he'd had to leave undone, but

a bliss blossoming like morphine,  
benign, mind-humming ignorance  
like the belief that every day  
in every way he was getting  
better and better, which

would be preferable, I think  
now — having just come  
from an appointment with  
the bright young neurologist,  
her eyes averting mine,

who seems to know so much  
of the future we share —  
to the sorrow and shame  
I might have felt thrashing  
about for the sake of the ones

who'd pulled for me and prayed  
all along I'd make it  
as whole and sound as the one  
they'd always known, ones  
I've known less well, I know now

or think I do — though I may come  
at last to change my mind  
or have it changed  
for me — than they were owed  
for the wager of their love.

## TO ROBERT

What was the difference between us,  
beyond my passion for women?  
We both held quaint notions of respect  
not that far from a *paisan* father's  
or his peasant father's, a chivalry  
that meant opening doors  
and walking between a lover  
and the street, but a certain night  
I actually went down on one knee  
to propose to the one who  
in fierce dancing would make  
other souls, and you, dear friend —  
it drove me mad — would cruise  
bus stations in Cleveland and Athens  
and on your knees open your mouth  
to men you didn't know. Beautiful,  
you called some of them, so lonely  
you'd want to make them sigh.  
A mystery, the different ways we went,  
so close we were in everything else.

The night that, weeping about some Marine,  
you came home to the apartment  
with crabs, I screamed *Goddamn it,*  
*How could you?* How could you not?

The ways a body dreams itself,  
we taught each other — that, and something  
about fate, of course. Now other lives  
tangle sweetly with my own,

and you're under the grass alone,  
the plague having picked you up like  
some homicidally beautiful maniac  
getting off the bus and looking around

with dark eyes that fix on yours  
like the sweet beckoning of night  
and both of us too grateful  
for the ways of human love

to pray him somewhere far away.

David Citino

**SOLVING THE PUZZLE**

I couldn't make all the pieces fit,  
so I threw one away.

No expectation of success now,  
none of that worry.

The remaining pieces seemed  
to seek their companions.  
A design appeared.

I could see the connection  
between the overgrown path  
and the dark castle on the hill.

Something in the middle, though,  
was missing.

It would have been important once.  
I wouldn't have been able to sleep  
without it.

**Stephen Dunn**

**CHICKENS**

Chickens have poor memories. The past? Forget it, it's too theoretical. Besides, there's so little one can do about it. They're not even sure yesterday is possible . . . Few of them ever become historians.

And it follows that the past is like all the unlined tomorrows reversed. Empty mirrors staring into each other from the opposite ends of time.

They come to this, tomorrow doesn't exist.

They are left with only an ever-present-now. But where is it?

They need philosophy. But in this case philosophers are as rare as hens' teeth.

The center of gravity is suddenly too high. Giddy, they need a few pebbles for ballast. Perhaps a few more to be sure. It gives their gizzards teeth.

Now they are ready to think again . . .

**Russell Edson**

## Three Poems

## MY MAPLES IN JULY

Clatter of the leaves  
they clap  
but not for joy  
or any reason  
but the thickness  
of their growth.  
Is that no reason  
for applause?

## STILL LIFE — ABANDONED HOUSE WITH TABLE

Tabula rasa and swept clean bare  
of all its artifacts even the dust  
hesitates alone a place of emptiness  
place to begin or not the wind  
beyond it working the eaves in a warning  
it is not malign the light  
speaks not from use it will pick up  
nothing in a shadow reflection cannot stay  
deep pool in which to cast a sigh  
within no answer no regret.

**MODERN MATURITY**

Shakespeare knew the ash did best near water  
Linné named plants from where they grew  
not only plants it was a common heritage  
and speech that honored it.

To break that speech has been a common wont  
and no one knows or cares for commonness.  
The language leaves us and the common life  
is withering. Old men and words  
are dying. What is synthetic burns awhile  
there is a loneliness in ashes so few turn back  
to nurture few so few the common graves.

Theodore Enslin

## ST. PETERSBURG, 1918

*In memory of the USSR*

You were sitting on a grassy hummock  
in the river as the children  
played around you. The water  
was flowing lazily.

It was spring,  
a perfect day.

I hardly knew who you were,  
my mother or what,  
it didn't matter.

Across, on the other bank,  
young athletes leapt from heights,  
resilient, practicing for the games.  
You said you wanted to burn all our money.  
I knew it was not so much from idealism  
as despair, and I held you  
and asked you not to.

It was before everything happened.  
The purges were still to come.  
How we believed in the revolution.  
That was our youth.  
Foolish tears ran down my face.  
My house of love  
would never be so full.

Edward Field

## Three Poems

THIRTY YEARS LATER I MEET YOUR 17-YEAR-OLD  
DAUGHTER THE POET*for R.I.S.*

## 1

Would I know her anywhere, this child  
who never knew *you* except in photographs?

She has your high clear forehead of polished granite — but  
“No, my sister has his dimple, his cleft chin —”  
Tight curly hair (like yours) drawn back,  
and your face, thinned, refined, to a girl’s —  
you in a girl’s body, you who were  
thick, muscular, tempestuous,  
now slight, polite: you in a neat  
print skirt, loose black blouse.

Now a 17-year-old classicist —  
“Latin’s my favorite” — you translate  
Catullus, write neat sonnets, envy the sister  
who remembers the dead father,  
but (as you always did) adore your mother  
and walk with your head thrown slightly back  
as if the weight of thought were hard to bear.

I rock in my teacherly chair.  
She’s shy, constrained.  
“I don’t want to read my father’s poems,  
they’re all in tatters in the closet,  
they scare me.”

I tell her

I’m a kind of long-lost aunt, tell her  
about the photo of you as (you said) “the young Shelley” —  
about your huntsman’s bow, opera, baseball,  
endless games of chess in the dorm parlor with you  
boasting about your prowess.

And she's embarrassed,  
*you're* embarrassed, living in her blood,  
 to think you ever acted like that!

## 2

When you were a man, a 37-year-old,  
 long after our last fight, last kiss,  
 you O.D.'d on morphine  
 and disappeared into the blankness  
 that had always held the edges of your mind.

But she's sent me two poems, a thank you note,  
 and her handwriting — yours — hasn't changed.  
 "It meant a lot to me to talk about my dad,"  
 you scribbled with your new small fingers.

I want to believe this, want to believe  
 you really are starting out again,  
 and that this time you'll get it right.

Do me a favor,  
 I tell her in my head.

Forget  
 Catullus, Horace, love and hate  
 and surrender. Think instead  
 of the epic cell, the place  
 where the chromosomes are made and made  
 for a moment perfect.

## Translate

those lines from Virgil some of us once liked to chant,  
 the ones about beginning, about those who first  
 left Troy to seek the Italian shore.

## THE MALL

Let me tell you about the mall. Right now  
no one's screaming in the middle of the mall,  
no one's trying to kill herself,  
no one's fists are showing.

Above the mall, there's a great tipped-over goblet of air  
through which we all move like motes of dust, but more  
purposeful,  
as the steep calm escalators glide up and down,  
oblivious of us.

Along the wide tiled corridors of the mall,  
there are benches and potted palms, where young mothers  
smoke and gossip, rocking strollers, and old impatient men  
wait for their wives to buy "housewares."

Sometimes small bands play where two vast passages meet.  
Sometimes people with bells and boxes ask for coins.  
Along this wall, you'll find beads and rings.  
Along that one, robes, soaps, spices.

From nine AM till midnight you hear a scuff and sidle  
wearing away the floor. From midnight till nine,  
you hear the slide of mops, the sigh of escalators,  
the hiss as airconditioning changes tempo.

Believe me, this poem isn't going to be ironic about the mall,  
this poem remembers the *souk* and the *marketplatz*,  
the bonfires that lit the settlement in Idaho.  
This poem promises to think about daffodils and spotted owls  
tomorrow.

Right now this particular poem is pouring its beaujolais  
all over the shuffling yawning mall,  
where the salesgirls are just locking up their cash registers,  
where the cleaning people are wheeling out their heavy carts,  
where the fluorescent streetlights are buzzing  
above the mostly empty parking lot  
and the decorative red cabbages in concrete planters  
are closing, closing into their own still cores.

## GOING TO CONNECTICUT

*for J.R.*

More than a third of a century later,  
meeting for the first time in almost all those years,  
we face each other's still somewhat familiar faces  
across a table in a California restaurant,  
and wonder why we did it, why we suddenly said  
that night in July in Greenwich Village  
"Let's go to Connecticut," and got on a train  
and ended up at midnight in old Greenwich, Connecticut,  
holding hands on an empty road that wound past  
serious grownup sleeping houses. . . .

Well, I was fifteen, you were nearly twentyone, we were  
experimentally

"in love," and I guess it must have seemed  
like "something to do" — better than Remo anyway,  
or the coffee houses, or the Eighth Street Bookstore,  
even, in that scratchy heat,  
better than Jones Beach: the long low  
sober train boring into a wall of black, the alien  
townships spurting past on either side  
(nothing was very "built up" then),  
each with its deserted, oddly brilliant platform  
waiting for the next day's passengers, the *real*  
people who really needed to ride that train.

How dusty and cindery the windows were,  
and spooky with scattering moths outside the glamorous  
yellow of the club car where we sat with our sodas  
on itchy plush reclining seats!

And how the crickets simmered in the dark  
where we descended, dizzy and vaguely drunk on 7-Up!

Remember the hedges — lilac and honeysuckle —  
along the way, as we walked toward  
we didn't know where?

We kissed a little  
under one, tasting salt and 7-Up  
on each other's tongues, not sure what next  
or where, then peered bemused  
at the shadows on lawn after lawn, the dim  
bulk of chimneys, shapes of shutters,  
with here a barbecue pit and there a child's rubber pool,  
and couples dreaming or snoring, mysterious,  
behind those tall white walls,  
until we got embarrassed, still not sure what next,  
retraced our steps, boarded another train,  
and were hurried back to where we came from,  
feeling like voyeurs, like trespassers.

Sandra M. Gilbert

## Five Poems

## BEFORE DAWN

Cowbells in mist. Scooped, clotted  
wooden coughs trail off into the distance.

Or church bells like empty bowls  
tangled against each other in chains.

What lonely sounds  
the mind makes, collecting itself.

Gongs clank. slow buckets  
hailed by ignorant ropes climb up  
on heavy copper footsteps over the lake,  
then stumble away.

So we count the hours. To keep the flock  
from straying.

The spaces between us are caves,  
silences trembling like air  
in the house of the cupped hand, the slight puff  
of warmth on the skin as someone touches us  
or just before:

One. Zero. Something  
and its opposite.

In hollow chunks, mute  
stones when the water dries up.

These lie around in the head  
like birds in their feathers, or forks on the table sleeping . . .

And then the first A.

Vibrations ripple like a breeze  
through the trees of the instruments. A green stain  
rises up over the fields  
at the first whiff of it, something about to be made  
out of nothing.

For a moment the A only hovers  
bodiless, on the threshold,  
not swinging from raw  
staggering hemp, or slung from the necks of animals  
but tentative, feeling around in the underbrush  
with invisible fingers asking  
is this it, is this?

Then one note answers. And another.

And another after it, drifting from curtained wings  
as the ropes slowly tighten.

On stage maybe only a single, brief  
cry, or a low rustle in the bushes

as the fine, quivering  
flutes nod to each other  
and then begin:

delicately picking their way  
along trails that know where they're going  
because we invented them, gathered up bits  
and pieces of meaning like kindling

for public bonfires, over every loudspeaker crackling,  
language getting ready to pour itself

into longer and longer sentences, into cities  
we thread together ourselves, with throbbing hammers  
poised

for the first strike, the sudden rush of air  
around the clapper that creates it;

from the shapes of silences we feel  
but cannot touch, sound

out of no sound, almost before we can stop it  
let alone control it, civilization's astonishing

full orchestra comes roaring into the hush.

## THE JELLY BETWEEN THE EARS

sparkles in its cup. Jiggles. Imaginary giant waves,  
tiny sugars and salts flicker against each other,  
sweep back and forth, protected  
as milk in a bowl:

yes, but

not for long. Flattening, over the years  
like the rubber heel of an  
old shoe.

Or bubble gum, or a nearly worn down  
eraser: what does it erase, itself?

The jelly between the ears  
hardening.

But still soft to the touch, the  
toes find their own nooks. Nuzzle into them  
as before, a

few lights bobbing  
low down on the interior concourse.

Flights from Africa. Mars. Memory jets  
that keep arriving and departing  
sometimes on command, sometimes  
not.

Engines sputter and twist  
back on themselves. In old grooves. ghost  
patterns burned into a computer.

Synapses

freeze in their tracks. Refuse to fire or won't stop  
stuttering, repeating themselves like rifles:

let me tell you

the story I told you yesterday: how  
boring. Except for one or two red hot  
hollering matches,

chances to warm up

*stanza continued*

the old arteries with a few shots  
of adrenalin,

lob a couple of Hawkeye  
missiles into the breakfast nook, the I.Q.  
testing lab, the country next door, why not?

Each one of us  
stumble-footed, heading the same direction  
into the ground.

Like lumps in a saucepan, stiffening  
clumps of selfishness. Raw, glistening  
knob stuck in the cracked  
leather of the head's  
shoe pot.

So, what should we listen to,  
the young before they harden? Inside  
clever spelunkers with their lamps  
must come.

The ghost you thought was yours  
exhales itself into cinders,  
evaporates up the smokestack.

Each brain  
melts into earth's stews. Slides, then crawls  
out of the steam into new  
species never tasted.

Ugly? Worse than before? Too long coagulated  
in here without knowing. The slow ooze of matter  
stops up all the exits.

With dwarf hummocks. Baby booties  
cast in bronze. Where did I put  
my last idea?

*stanza continued*

The moths are everywhere,  
eating. The guns of the world cough up  
the thick phlegm, the choked rattle of the dying.  
Over the slumped acres of the dead  
what does it matter? Outside all the cities  
there are sacks of forgetfulness heaped up,  
lost shoes scattered among the graveyards.

After the battle the scavengers:  
at midnight, one or two stray children, curious.  
With their brand new flashlights.

## IN BEAR COUNTRY

She has to write an essay.  
Or a letter. Say "I need you"  
and why. She reaches out for the words  
and there they are, pouf.  
Like an ant trail, picking its way among bread crumbs  
with a mind of its own?  
Forget what the words refer to  
or don't refer to. She inches herself  
right along with them, over the sliding  
talus slopes in her head.  
Whenever she needs them they turn up  
like stepping stones in the wilderness;  
who put them there?  
She thinks she chooses them carefully.  
From pitons left on a rock face,  
cairns full of dried berries.  
But the minute she stops walking,  
in the quiet after her own footsteps, hush!  
What's that crackling  
in the huckleberry bushes beside her? In bear country  
she never stops talking, to warn the bears away.  
But if all she can hear is herself what are the bears doing,  
ahead, on the narrow trail  
what if one of them should rise up  
right in front of her with its hairy jaws open.  
its raw, dish faced snout  
towering over her, and snarling?  
Well, nothing. It's all in her head  
for the moment. Still, what is this other  
irritable static that starts up  
at the same time, is it only the drizzling hiss  
between her ears of extra low frequency  
intracellular transmission?  
Like popcorn, filled with air and fast

*stanza continued*

or slow as lava. Woozy purple amoebae. Fat blueberries with the silver lining of some storm clouds. Or jellyfish. Floaters, she calls them. Almost intelligible torn shreds of meaning. Not bears

really. But still frightening to think about. Over the lost yips of wolves, the pebbles grating underfoot across the night, deep down in her brain sky, is it only chemicals firing? Sparklers splash the dark. In spicules of flaring light they write their names on the air and disappear even as she tries focusing on them, can't. So she goes back to scribbling. In short stabs or in long leaning sentences, thin snow fences shivering

"I want, I need . . ."

something. The bears are waiting for her; what else can she do?

She'll never make it. But high in the mountains, on a white glittering snowfield, from the shifting valley floor what is it? Every once in awhile she can see far above her, a tiny line of black roped together human figures where there were none before.

## IN THESE BURNING STABLES

And yet you can't catch them. Even peering inside  
as hard as you can, stumbling around in this hodge podge  
of jolts, shivers. Enzymes digesting themselves, muscles  
relaxed or jerking,  
head keeping time, noticing and not noticing  
each whirl of the clock  
especially when it stops: whenever you look for them  
it's like mayflies swarming,  
in the thronged  
brief hustle of the mind what are these transparent  
puffs of air, ideas forming out of nowhere?  
Battalions of tiny hooves. In thin sheets trampling,  
sweeping across the cortex. Like leaves whipped by the wind  
they keep disappearing, like the deep cherrywood sound  
of the piano you heard last night. Or the vanishing  
muffled oranges of sunset, the color  
of peaches inside a refrigerator, the wash of chocolaty gray  
silks no one has ever seen, none of them touchable.  
The neurosurgeon can't know what you're thinking  
until you tell him, but already it's too late,  
the long faces of thought slide  
into each other like layers of purple and brown oil  
in a portrait by Rembrandt, muffled  
dim highlights drift  
like berries in the woods, pieces of cottonwood fluff.  
With no warning, suddenly  
you come upon them in clusters,

little gusts leap up  
like grasshoppers, all around you  
from second to second changing, but watching over it,  
who knows when, exactly, water will decide to boil  
or wood finally ignite, or how,  
precisely, ideas take shape, materialize, open the gates?  
Whiff of stallion on the air.  
The hair on the back of your neck bristles  
where you can't see it, fire  
where there's no fire but the taste of it,  
ozone sizzling in the mouth  
like a memory but what is that?  
Invisible horses churn  
like roiled smoke in the corral.  
You try to lead them out  
with the halter of the word *like*,  
but even with the tiniest stitches, the most delicate  
intra-cerebral loops  
there's no lassoing them; in these burning stables  
silhouetted against the flames  
with calm eyes, with magnificent  
tall shoulders, shadowy  
gigantic haunches pass  
and re-pass each other in the dark.

**TEN BILLION BLACKBIRDS**

Slowly, with all that glittering  
intelligence beginning to cloud over,

shadows plunge their long fingers  
everywhere into your thinking.

So you insist, but what tricks  
you still play on us!

Trills, perfect  
thrush music from the bushes.

Who cares about a few  
lost keys, connections  
missed?

As if anyone could contain  
all of you!

Not to mention the attached

body. Legs dangling. Miles  
and miles of arterial highways, the

head, the heavy head  
on its trunk,

boughs humming with the complicated

high speed intercellular  
exchanges of ten billion

tiny blackbirds packed into one square millimeter  
of branching brain matter and jiggling

yes, jiggling. Though the pie's shrinking, for all of us  
everywhere into crumbs, vaguely remembered

names, faces, a nursery rhyme or two

the mystery of it's still trembling  
beneath each crusted skull

and you know it:

in the battering raids of gap toothed  
scattershot absences,

crows falling from a brain sky  
full of holes

you keep after them,  
in the mind's archipelagoes wandering  
even among towering waves

you can't be toppled,  
with the rest of us you escape  
from atoll to distant atoll

as gannets on the ocean sleeping  
at the slightest touch rise up  
ring after fluttering ring

the engines that power us wait only  
to be discovered, axons and dendrites rustling  
inside everyone, billions and billions of them  
shaking their tiny wings.

Patricia Goedicke

## Two Poems

## CREATURES OF THE ABYSS

*I found her biography sandwiched in between that of a  
Hebrew rabbi and that of a staff-commander who had  
written a monograph upon the deep-sea fishes.*

— Watson, in one of Doyle's Holmes stories

Not for me, the easy loves and death-throes  
of the surface, of the here-it-is, the sunlit,  
where the silver blare of anchovy shoalings  
shouts like polished fenders, and a lone black skimmer  
shears his meal out of the water as delicately  
as needling a sliver out of an infant's skin,  
here, in the visibly accessible, where Audubon  
"kneeled delightedly in the shallows  
and grabbed a porgy from its element twohanded  
— a foppish, mandarin red," no,  
not here, not this: lower go, and darker, even  
to and past the middle ranges of shark-in-its-cave,  
of eel-like fish with linguini-flexuous spines,  
of the swimming sea cucumber, and the rat-tail fish,  
no, go below this, into the famous Trenches  
like Marianas and Tonga, seven miles' descent  
below the floor, there are no words for this,  
"stygian," "jet-black," "inky," none comes close to this  
inhuman moonless darkness and the denizens  
we predicate in such a world. In such a world, a window  
opens. A form climbs out — another,  
then another. They can only meet at night  
like this. They need to be invisible.  
"Surveillance squads" are everywhere, they know, and  
they know of a room, a whispered legend,  
the "interrogation room," from which you're eventually

delivered back home with your soul beaten into  
a sour curd. And so the surreption. They meet  
to plan, to pray. Even in the cellar  
of the boarded-over schoolhouse they conduct themselves  
in whispers, though they risk a candle each on leaving  
— weaving through these deep streets  
with a small light dangling in front of them.

## HEART ON A CHAIN

"The spirits of the dead" — it's important to specify, there are *so* many others. Among the islands, spirits of water and coral. For the mountain tribes, the wind is a spirit, it bombasts as it polishes the high passes. But it's the risen spark and semblance of the dead that rides us intimately, that squats with us inside whatever's the privatest hole of our day. They can offer advice — the gone, the revenant-ones — or terrify: in Chaco tribes, the kin of the newly dead take new names, hoping so to sidle from the specter's wrathful notice. In the oldest caves we habited are painted rounds of the wall rock that were interdimensional talkspots, where we asked and where the ancestors answered. / She

---

presides over "detail lab" for Cave A-32. Somebody else unearths — a shovel and a sifter. She unparticles that earth — sometimes refining it to one resilient donkey hair she'll work across a shard of human bone, dislodging 30,000 years of burial grain by grain. Her task as the grant defines it is this exactly and only: "initial detail rendering of osseous finds." But how *not* to refit them in her mind? — to string the butterflies of bone they duly bring her, into vertebrae again; and then enflesh the life, its woes and thrivings, back around that recharged chord. They all have highbrow Ph.D.'s; and even so, she knows their secret pleasure is that of the parlor séance: saying yes to ectoplasm. / This

---

is the couple she oftenest reconstructs: the hunt is done for the day, a last fresh axe-head hafted with the clan's last pliant vine . . . and now they rest on a ledge together, these two, and watch the limestone distance darken gradually . . . this "proto-us," and their various proto-yearnings and -uneases, -suspicions, -sweetnesses . . . see?: we can't escape recasting them familiarly, the baleful shades of Homer, as well as the homier conjured spinster aunts and prelates of Victorian mediums, all are necessarily envisioned in a version of the tropes we live out daily; and the truth is, we're *their* archeological study in a way, the past they're drawn to, visit, sift, and even speak to, in their former language: throat and tooth and tongue . . . / She

---

*'ooga!* she *'ooga!* — the weekly mail-&-sundries jeep  
pops all of them out of their Paleolithic reveries, with  
Thrilling Goodies From Home to thin the thickly solitary  
drudge of fieldwork. Well, not for her this week  
or the last or the one before. Her first month here, he sent  
an antique locket — tiny heart tipped with a breath-thin chain —

or

*someone* had: no note. This absence follows her  
through her days of caves and tagged shin fragments  
so outrageously faithfully, it *is* a presence, one  
the very blankness of which prohibits hurt or disappointment:  
these require detail. Is she comforted? — yesno.  
One day behind the quonset hut she saw two bugs attached  
in fucking; *no*, she saw, she looked again: one was dead,  
a husk, and the other was stuck to it, was dragging it. / He

---

walks the pier in Portland, *ambles* really, breathing-in the ocean air that so revivifies his soul but can corrode a U.S. battleship. Now this is his life, his therapy: and every breath, on better days, erases the faces that, hobgoblinlike, torment his sleep — his parents ringed in fire like some hellish circus act; as for the ex-wife and the kids and what once happened, well . . . enough of that. And as for Miss Bones Digger-Upper, he *hopes* she understood the love in making a gift of his grandmother's pendant. One day he'll be "fully in the present tense again," then he'll get on with "the flow of the moment." For now . . . so many ghosts to lay to rest.

Albert Goldbarth

## FALSE DAWN

*Wellfleet Harbor*

Awake before waking, to what, a slow brimming  
Of toneless light, a flurry of thirty-second notes  
Descending, gone . . . a cat bird? Almost dawn.

You try not to stir. A blanched word  
Floats in a distance resembling, you think, Claude's  
Horizon, blue diminished to blue no longer

A color but a longed-for escape or return, where the sea  
Turning inland is a winding stream wrapped  
To the bank, where you are the pensive figure saying

*False dawn.* Whether to elude or embrace,  
Hopelessly, the mind chimes in response, *false-*  
*Vaulted casemate*, which is, what, the name

For a sleight-of-hand to feign an arch, a word  
You found near Mycenae one bright morning.  
How lucid and intact it is: the Aegean spangles

Gold-on-green. At Tyrins the tan, beveled  
Stones unfold their ruled crenellations, stately,  
Across the hills, a shapely text unveiling

Secrets. How one loves the impassioned drudgery  
Of names, uncoding a bunker, a mosque enjambed  
With Venetian stone, the world demystified.

It's already hot this morning on the roof garden  
Of the Hotel Paradise. The waiters remember Farouk  
And his babbling retinue, their tubs of oysters,

Their hundred dollar tips. Tutored Spartans  
Thrum on waves plated with Nestor's gold.  
Within the passage at Tyrins, its hollow walls

Roofed with an elegant solution, the false-vaulted  
Casemate, you see, framed in a narrow embrasure,  
The "political prison" rise like a dream. Its white

Walls flake and blaze. Shadow-figures  
Climb in the tall, barred half-moon windows  
Keening their eerie, unintelligible songs.

Hopelessly, I think of a morning when ice-gray  
Half-light spread across the snow and floated  
Thinly like a hovering tone through a bubble window

Set in the angled "cathedral ceiling" down  
To an improvised bed, our rapt mindless gestures  
Thrown together, dissolved, gone. Sunlight

Blazoned the house, dispelling, what, those pale  
Legs, a flash of orange hair (your ludicrous secret),  
A sudden flurry of small quick cries

Rising in the high room. In a blank incandescence  
The too-rapid notes of unidentified song  
Drop away. We sleep in our outward selves,

We dream of waking again. . . . Each morning  
When the gray-blue horizon is webbed with the wide  
Vaporous sea, a globed question rises

To the place where you wait, listening on the edge of  
waking.

You try to avoid proposing an answer, an actor  
Easing across the stage in dream-like evasions

As slowly as he knows how to move, who lifts  
His words in pantomime, passing along  
The swift, sheer, opaque elisions of air.

Robert Hahn

## THE SHOALS BETWEEN RED POINT AND THE SISTER

islands whiten the mid-channel  
darkline:  
foreground poplar coins  
rattle the fog flannel  
sky. Add  
wild roses and the lost gold mine  
near Black Point.  
My view  
is chartless, lean  
in my fifty-ninth year. The shoals,  
fifteen feet  
down, anchorpoint  
the sailless sailboat's dream.

Donald Junkins

**FIRMAMENT**

*From a photograph by Mary Randlett*

Fish in the sky of water — silverly  
as travelling moon through cloud-hills —  
down current whisks, or deeper  
fins into depths, to rise or sagely  
wait in the milky mist of  
disturbed sediment, wheeling briskly  
at least whim, at one  
with the aqueous everything it shines in.

Denise Levertov

## URN BURIAL

Elise, seated in a dingy  
candle-lit corner of her family crypt,  
more a storybook dungeon  
or torture chamber to her eleven years  
than holy tomb (housing  
remains of four generations of her Papa's  
Dutch clan), cradles  
her Granddad's exhumed skull in her lap.  
She stares into these scoured-clean  
eye sockets,  
entranced. . . . Franz, busily transferring  
his disinterred Siré's  
bones from the first-burial coffin  
to a knee-high ceramic urn:  
secondary urn burial a custom  
of the Caiquette Indians on his mother's  
side of the family tree,  
he would make room in the elegant  
hand-carved coffin  
for his elder sister Melanie's corpse,  
three days dead, a stout ample woman  
to the last, and, as always,  
needing her space. . . . Elise chants,  
in low murmurs,  
while Franz, noting she ticks off  
numbers with fingers of her right hand,  
then the left, and back again  
through the cycle, supposes she counts out  
the lapskull's twenty four  
afterlife years, mostly years before the day  
of her birth. A child who  
never met her Granddad before this death-in-life  
tryst in gloom

*stanza continued*

of the family vault, she seems to brood  
     her elfin spirit further back in time,  
         numbering the years,  
 months perhaps, on the abacus of her hands'  
     small knuckles; much as she  
 likes to count backwards from one hundred  
     to zero, and far into the minus  
 column when she jumps rope after hours,  
     a prayerlike ritual begging her mom to extend  
     her bedtime a few last jumps,  
  
 staying up for dear life, forestalling,  
     ever, the last minute's  
     pre-sleep countdown. . . . Tonight, Franz diverts  
 himself with fitting his father's  
     long bones — paired femurs  
     & tibias, radii & ulnas —  
     around the urn's  
     high concave neck with utmost care,  
 vigilant to leave room for the rib cage,  
  
 and consecutive vertebrae of the spinal  
     still intact, wide hip bones  
     column; saving for the last  
     a near-spherical gap in the urn's top, dead  
     center, for the Crown Jewel.  
  
 Franz puts off to the last possible instant  
     the sad onus  
 of barging into his daughter Elise's  
     silent colloquy with the skullbones  
     propped between  
 her knees: still, she rattles off computations,  
     now tapping the numbers,  
 finger by finger, on the loose jawbone,  
     that faraway look in her eyes  
 the transport of one who augurs  
     beauties, or horrors, in the years to come.  
     Her father bids her to pass

him her prize, the hallowed vessel  
 of her ancestor's  
 razed brain, for reburial. And as she lifts  
 that bone case to him with both hands  
 cupped, gingerly, beneath  
 the erstwhile chin (now missing  
 those puffy jowls  
 she'd once perused in the family  
 album), he risks a joke about her math

jugglery: is she counting,  
 he asks, the long tally of her forgotten  
 male and female progenitors;  
 or keeping tabs on the sheer number of bones  
 he'd shifted from coffin  
 to ceramic vase? *Finger & toe digits, small  
 as snail shells.*

*Hip & shoulder bones, round and curled  
 like the Chambered Nautilus.*

*Much quantity  
 of spinal vertebrae, knobby and antlered  
 as elkborns of finely  
 graduated sizes, small to large to small,  
 tracing the scale from neck to seat . . .*

"Oh no, Papa," she replies. "I was  
 counting Granddad's teeth, every one in place,  
 not one molar or Wisdom Tooth

lost, in all his eighty six years, while you,  
 but half Granddad's age,  
 retain no more than four upper teeth, six  
 lowers." "Aha!" yelps Franz. "My father,  
 schooled in local plant lore,  
 cleansed his teeth, from babyhood,  
 by chewing fresh-

picked branches of the Stockie Tree."  
*Poor child-age Franz was jinxed by dentistry.*

## GRAVE GOODS

*I did not blaspheme,  
 I did not kill,  
 I did not lie,  
 I did not diminish the food offering in the temple,  
 I did not stir up strife,  
 I did not alter the size of the grain measure,  
 I did not talk too much,  
 I did not commit adultery*

were some of the lies, perjurious,  
 found by the graverobbers  
 in the graves.

The Declaration of Innocence  
 it was called  
 and it was nailed to the wall  
 of the tomb.

The dead sat in chairs  
 or were laid in their beds.  
 On shelves were their goods,  
 what they chose to take with them,  
 or their relatives would consent  
 to let go: dried beans,  
 a sword, statuary, a sandwich,  
 some money to bribe  
 the gatekeeper, fresh socks.

No one knew the distance,  
 nor the hour of departure,  
 or if they'd take a train or boat,  
 or would they just float  
 to the other side? — although they did  
 seem to understand  
 they would be dead  
 a long long time.

## Two Poems

## THE LONELY JOB

(*newspaper headline — EXECUTIONER'S  
WORK: A LONELY JOB*)

It is beautiful, gas billowing up in a room.  
Electricity is beautiful,  
and braided rope. The trap door  
is lovely as a problem in Geometry.  
Even the squad has beauty, if you think  
of trajectory, and the word *Fire*.  
But it's a lonely job, like murder, such lonely work,  
no one to stand with while you wait in the light or the dark,  
like the job of one far from a place who will push  
the button to destroy that place —  
at either end of creation, the job is lonely.  
The way God's job was lonely, making everything,  
and at this end of history  
God's job of being the only one left.  
It is work one might want to shirk. Have you noticed  
that God is trying to get into everything  
lately? God wants to die with us.  
Have you seen the way the earth is stuffed with the sacred,  
not even the trail of a garment, or a tail, hanging out,  
each thing  
jammed full  
and shining? — the curved, globe-like cheek  
of the executioner's child, each cell  
of that worker's hand.

**THE ORDEAL**

When our son gets braces, the next day he gets poison ivy. His mouth is like a catch a retriever carries back, in its jaws, and then they start to form, the welts on his chin, ears, throat. Each hour, gluey bubbles rise to the surface and break, a soft fountain slowly pours from his ear-lobe, his body weeps from its thousand eyes. He sits steadily facing the television, watching what's inside it from within the scored and fluted hive of his head. He has gone through depression, through despair, through worry, past scratching, he has entered a calm state, I look at him down along a slant, the tiny world playing rapidly and glossily on his eyeballs — and there on his upper lip, through the facial down, through one bead of a weal of poison ivy, above a tooth being slowly torn loose in its socket, a single, thick, white whisker curves out into the air.

**Sharon Olds**

## TRAVEL: A WELCOME

*for Annalisa*

## 1967, SOVIET UNION

Intourist took dollars, we took what we were told.

On the subway, a grandmother asked directions  
of my scarf, black raincoat, Slavic bones.

One man threw down a gum wrapper, recoiled  
when the policewoman followed him upstairs  
boxing his ears with her official *nyets*.

A teenager whispered English on Nevsky Prospekt  
and sneaked to our hotel room to play guitar.

At Friendship House, lifesize posters condemned  
U.S. aggression. We swallowed hard.

Old women crossed themselves before locked doors;  
Saint Basil's gyroscope gave man instruction.

Meanwhile mallard ducks patrolled the Neva,  
lovers hid, and women groaned in labor.

\*

You must have been conceived and born that year —  
November, October, I'm reversing you to March —  
that electric instant you began your push  
into identity. Did we see the building where  
your parents lived? Were they at the restaurant  
where we lost entire evenings getting dinner?  
Married just three years, we didn't want  
our baby yet. I packed my pill container  
and dialed it every day. When you arrived  
your drunken father stayed absent. What else  
do I know? Only the outside, false  
bottom, travel notes. White nights

lit Leningrad that spring. At midnight, parks  
bloomed Russians. I passed you in the never-dark.

\*

I travel, building roads from me to you,  
the red-scarfed schoolgirl smiling from a frame.  
In Greece I dumped the Ortho-Novum  
and chose to be your mother-in-law.  
The tidal wave of shifting hormones hurled  
me hard against a castle wall in Norway,  
I couldn't surface, had to sleep right then, or die.  
Big news was happening: I was with child —  
him you'd wed a quarter-century hence.  
While lean masts bobbed in Bergen harbor  
and while I slept at noon, he anchored,  
to become the one aboard a Tolstoy train  
into that future where you'd turn to meet him,  
your mouths would open on each other's names.

\*

### 1989, AMERICA

At Dulles I recognize you from the photos  
snapped in spring at L.S.U. —  
that's Leningrad State University.  
I know the Russian for *truth*, *goodbye*, *hello*.  
We've hours alone before the one we wait  
for inches over geologic rifts.  
Thanks to the State you know more English. Yet,  
we're flying dumb — on flickers, browlifts,  
wisps of breath. You photograph toy collies  
in the gift shop. While I drink coffee  
you unpack your meal from Aeroflot,  
the polished apple upturns a brown spot.

You'd leave your bags outside the bathroom stall,  
until I nix it. Property puts trust in jail.

\*

He's here. You hide behind the door  
to leap, surprise him with your arms, and words  
that I don't understand. Six months, two coasts,  
six states, two holidays your visit lasts.  
Long enough, you tell me, not to want  
mere things you craved at first. Your crossings aren't  
done. He'll travel back and forth to Leningrad,  
you'll both get visas, meet In Finland, wed,  
then part again to finish school. You're due  
to emigrate in August. Revolt intrudes.  
There goes your future. Lovers in the bad times  
waited decades for a toad to stamp a form.

The worst, miraculously, doesn't happen.

Your papers queue with thousands. You pass in.

\*

*Do you too dream of houses, transportation?  
Do stairs lead to a single door you open,  
must you walk on air, or drop eight  
storeys down? Is your red cat  
howling to your empty room,  
your mother whispering your name  
like children's prayers? Do bones sit  
at the kitchen table drinking vodka,  
cursing leaders, rotten crops, and emigrés?  
Does the Neva thaw while you still skate?*

\*

Roads, I thought, for travel. But knitting's how  
we move: hand-making warmth, or as flesh  
closes on deep cuts, the cells re-mesh.  
Your mother's letter to me calls you *orphan* now

*stanza continued*

bereft of family, home and land. You've wed  
a man whose home left him, gates shut  
between his parents. *Such is fate* . . . she writes  
*we cannot help* . . . and flesh keeps blood  
from staining every promise, every view.

So dears, for you a feather bed to float in.  
Chianti, basil pesto from your garden.  
A shawl and tea, a fire, sunlit rooms  
large with cello suites and Mandelstam.

Stranger's child, let love make strangeness plums.

Carole Simmons Oles

## Three Poems

## THE GULLS

Sometimes they'll rise in a flock,  
Wheeling and tending one way, then another,  
Rising and circling in their hectic  
Unleisure, contract and scatter  
And contract, frightened from where  
They were feeding on something dying  
Or wounded and bleeding, or dead,  
And sometimes one rises higher than others  
On stronger wings, opens his yellow bill  
With the blood dot and pink tickler  
Of his tongue to the raw high air  
And caws with cold scorn, cold anger  
For everything, everyone, *tout-le-monde*,  
Or sometimes a sullen one lags  
Beneath the flapping, whining mob as if  
Cynical, untouched by panic and imagining  
A swift solo run at the site  
Of abandoned plunder, the doe  
Open like a pomegranate, the swollen dog  
Or basket cast of dead pollack  
Iridescent and ammoniac. Another  
Will have an idea and strike out  
Away from the pack toward the sun,  
Away from the sun, or parallel  
To the horizon's track, which means  
Either option, life or death,  
Day or night, us or them. The gulls  
Will wear themselves out and calm down  
And sit on a rock or beach and play  
Territorial hopscotch, protecting eggs  
And babies and sexual access, mindful  
Of the sea, the night, the sun, the folly  
Of the weak, the fury of uncertainty.

## PARADISE LOST

"I love you," said God, and there was a garden,  
And we were naked and sweet, without a single  
Hungry need. Of course there was a forbidden tree,  
And a supine vein of our animal nature  
That called itself modesty and called attention  
To the tree's fruits and juices a necessary bravery.  
The idea was to hold the apple in your lips  
Without breaking its skin with your teeth  
Or eating its meat. Even the Devil  
Said eating the meat was death and madness.  
The trick was to flirt and tease forever for paradise.  
Eve ate first. God was watching. Did we want Eden  
Or reality? Was there ever a choice? Not after  
Eve began to bleed. Now it was up to Adam.  
Would he go along with her travail and woe,  
Or take a walk and lie down awhile under  
A more innocent bush? "Pass me the apple,"  
He told her, "I'm going with you," and together  
They left the lovely garden of our origin  
And entered the good and the badlands  
Of our history. In another version  
Of their story, Adam eats the apple first,  
And says, "Look at me and hold still  
In your heart and body." Eve resisted wildly,  
Laughing and dancing, acting crazy, and then  
She yielded, out of breath, taking the air  
From his mouth and his tongue, and everything  
Became real. "I love you," I said,  
And I saw an angel with a sword of fire  
Barring our path. Sometimes it happens  
That way too, and Eden or earth, Heaven  
Or Hell, we never can tell where we are.

## SALMONELLE

The salmon is a vicious fish. Its instinct  
Is cruelty — it's its *lingua franca*. Show it  
A desired kindness and its contrary path

Is instantly fierce and clear.

It is necessarily selfish

And laughs with a cold eye on pity.

Study the downcurved lips of its grin,

But don't be fooled. It is neither happy

Nor charitable. Its flesh is pink

And oily. Sweet when hot. Eat it

Sauteed with lemon. Eat the peel

And eat the silver speckled skin

And the white belly, though it's fishy

And slimy. Its diet is flies and worms.

If a worm doesn't stiffen with *rigor mortis*

For it to swallow, it bites it and eats it

In pieces. It defies gravity. It copulates,

So to speak, in gravel. It has a mindless,

Slutty way of scattering its eggs and sperm

As if in a fever after a fury. Its enemies

Are the bear and eagle — it can see sideways

But doesn't have eyes at the back of its head —

The northwest Indian who spears it with knives

Tied to sticks, or the patrician who tricks it

With hooks hidden in feathers — wet flies, dry flies,

And streamers — hauls it from its riverbed

Pool or froth, fingers its body

And hurls it back with a torn lip

And another traumatic memory, the matrix

Of its madness. Its weakness is its own

Headstrong momentum. It thinks it's smart,

But it's terrified of pain or a pause,

So what passes through its' head is not

Exactly thought. It is more pure

Horror alive and knowing, which may be

The essence of nature one can enjoy

But never understand. It's distracted

By gaudiness, indifferent to grandeur.

It never learns from its mistakes.

It just gets worse and older. It grows

A funny moustache and chin whiskers,

And smells. Anadromous, it is ready

For its last run upriver and to die. It adapts

To fresh water and to salt. Its arc

Is theatrical, but its medium

Is the noise of its surroundings, therefore

Dead silence. It looks normal flat on a platter,

Or smoked, the inner lips of a bagel. Expect

Nothing from it but its drama and its body.

Wild ones are full of bones, and sometimes poisonous.

You can catch it with the right combination

Of cunning and flash, which is a thrill

And a gamble, but you're best off

Tossing it back, glad for your moment

Of luxury, that wild wet muscle

In your hand, which is as close as one can get

To insight, and not safe from regret.

**Kenneth Rosen**

## THE FOREST WALK

Today we took a walk in the forest.  
There we met a couple walking with eyes closed.  
The forest is a temple, they said to us.  
We whisper and the forest whispers back.

It was true. The leaves made us think  
Of a letter trembling in someone's hand.  
In fact, many letters in many hands —  
And then they no longer did.

There where the forest was like a scary fairy tale,  
A twig broke angrily each time we took a step.  
And when we didn't,  
The silence shrieked at us to start running.

We were hopelessly lost, perhaps?  
Night would come soon  
And the wild animals  
Would smear their teeth with our blood.

Don't look, you said, but I did anyway  
As you raised your skirt behind a bush to pee.  
Now, you were not going to  
Speak to me as long as I live.

We were to sit side by side till my beard  
Had grown to the ground,  
And you had taken a bear as a lover  
And were nursing one of the sleepy cubs.

Out of the forest, to our surprise, it was still light.  
A lone child flew a kite on a meadow,  
The whispering couple stood with their thumbs raised  
Kissing by the side of the road.

Charles Simic

## READING

*“— this polite and unpunishable vice,  
this selfish, serene, life-long intoxication —”*  
*Logan Pearsall Smith*

From his carrel he watched her wander, anomalous as a Luna moth, among the stacks until she gravitated at last to his glowing bifocals for guidance out of the maze.

The honeymoon was hardly a honeymoon his myopia coping with highways her linen lap crushed beneath travel books and road maps.

The house was hardly a house — entrance a mammoth mailbox central maw a library rear exit a heap of gleaned journals.

The civil service was his rock pile.

“Lucky you,” he’d groan,

“You get to stay home with the books.”

Actually it was two babies who held her.

Her reading seldom strayed beyond Beatrix Potter and Doctor Spock.

Evenings all the tots saw of their father was a clerestory-forehead above newspaper or tome. All they heard was an occasional curse for kitsch and grunt for esoteric joke.

“Is your daddy sick?” whispered a little visitor.

This man did not mesh with the mundane, so wholly was he hooked into the hal-  
lowed page of print.

No problem existed — foreplay, dry rot, sibling rivalry — until he'd brought it into being via *Encounter*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New Yorker*, and then he became its Solomon.

At breakfast one morning he crooned behind *Barron's*, "We're incredibly wealthy."  
"Wonderful!" she warbled. "Can we buy a cottage on Cape Cod?"

"Silly goose," he snapped  
"the money's on paper."

The worst was the winter he bedded down with *The Magic Mountain*. Such whining for massages, puffed pillows, meals on a tray. . . .  
"Look!" laughed the patient, "I've signed our tax form 'Hans Castorf.'"

After the grown progeny had departed — warped, she worried, from the paper paternity — she sank to the sofa with a book.

Oh.

Punished lavishly for Raskolnikov's crime she was too limp to fold the laundry.

The weekend as Emma Bovary left her too clammy to crawl into her nightie.

Thumped through Mississippi mud in Addie's coffin, she's too dead to cook dinner.

*The Merck Manual* in hand, Solomon advises,  
"Have the doctor check you tomorrow for hypothyroidism and Lyme's disease."

Her appointment's with an ophthalmologist.  
Fortified with bifocals, she'll sleuth with Proust through labyrinthian liaisons, share a cottage with Thoreau on Cape Cod.

**TEDIOUS, THE AFFAIRS OF OFFICE**

Tedious, tedious, the affairs of office  
meetings and papers every day.

We leave it all for the mountains,  
a tiny kettle, lightweight food,  
walk up to rock and snow –

Catch no fish but climb a peak,  
see the Inyo Mountain ranges,  
shimmery Mono Lake.

a storm from the south brings summer rain.  
We walk to the edge of glassy lava,  
stand by a pine and breathe the delicious smell.

My son comes down from the flow  
a giant chunk of obsidian in his arms,  
says, we'll save this for the future –  
several thousand arrowheads  
when all the rest is gone.

Gary Snyder

## Two Poems

## THE SHAKESPEARE SEMINAR TERRORISTS

Chris, cherubic, destined  
to look forever sixteen  
in the remnants of her baby fat,  
graduated from the Shakespeare course  
into the Irish Republican Army.

Her job, courier,  
her last cryptic postcard implied.  
Impenetrable as runes, she probably thought  
but any student critic could read between the lines.  
They took her because of her American passport  
and because she looked so innocent.  
No one would give her a second look except  
perhaps to wish their daughter  
might turn out like her and  
that was all. Not another word.  
Five years now and the State Department  
is still looking into it.

Besmah, in one year learned to write English  
like an angel — her mind broad and rich, complex  
as the taste of huge baking sheet of baklava  
she brought still oven warm  
to the seminar's last meeting.

We saw her one time again, two years later —  
a twenty-second bite on the national news  
standing behind Arafat in Western dress  
reading for him between the lines  
of the reporter's American questions.

About her, we know a little more.

For the PLO, she lasted a long time —  
three and a half years before she went down —  
masqueraded as a man and  
killed by a Syrian irregular who later went mad  
over the guilt of shooting a Moslem woman.

Who cares, he thought, about her AK-47.

Who cares that her head was wrapped in a black scarf  
only the eyes peering out  
through the slit in the bunker she had become.

Several months later the Syrian took his own life.  
Too bad. If he'd asked us we could have told him  
she'd have shot him down in an instant  
if she'd seen him first — cut through him  
without mercy, as if he were a too-famous critic  
spouting some half-baked idea about Othello.

In Shakespeare, people died all the time over ideas.  
The men and women of Beirut would understand, fighting  
over a few square yards of burnt-out apartments,  
defending a shell-pocked wall for no reason  
but that it is still standing.

When I heard the news  
a taste seeped into my mouth  
from out of nowhere —  
like honey and pastry rolled infinitely thin  
sweet and complex and more than  
you could ever eat.

The taste some angelic poet's next tragedy  
might have had  
had it not been stolen by death.

## TATTOO

It is the end of the millennium and still  
we can't keep children from falling.  
But some progress at least —

these days, by law, the school yards are spongy  
beneath the slides and high swings,  
three inches deep in cedar bark.

Half a lifetime away

I remember our school yard where nothing was soft,  
an expanse of hard red clay, a wire fence  
to keep the woods at bay, and each spring  
shoveled out over the clay  
a layer of coal cinder, tons of it  
from cleaning out the school furnace.

What ever could they have been thinking of?

The rain washed the dust away. The black cinders dug in.  
Some were round and shiny, little hard blisters  
the size of lady bugs, the others looked like  
cut-in-half flies, but sharp  
and ragged no matter which way they lay.

Who knows? Maybe nobody wanted us to tumble  
hands first out of a swing, but in those days  
if you fell, you fell.

And if you did, you had to report it —  
your meaty black palm, your gravely knee,  
all the hot specks that bore  
into your wound like shooting stars.

The school nurse was ready  
with her bottle of iodine and a wire brush.

But, if you could keep still, keep it to yourself  
the blood would dry and eventually flake away;  
in time the skin would knit together  
and then, they would be yours — a firmament of  
gritty stars beneath your translucent skin —  
burning with a cold blue light, forever.

Once, a very long time ago,  
a meteorite crashed through the soft earth  
of New South Wales. It imbedded itself in a seam of coal  
which immediately caught fire and began to burn without air.

Even today, after three hundred years,  
it is not hard to find that place.  
It is still burning.

Anthony Sobin

## UNFOLDED MAPS

1. Upstairs at the end of a narrow room, the boy once had a bureau with a pair of shallow top drawers. He pulled one out and turned it over, and with red crayon drew on the underside a box, and from the box a dotted line along a stream beside a tiny house with one red line of chimney-smoke toward a stubbed tree with a hole in it. There he thought to hide whatever it was.
2. Some days I travel more in time than space. These faint blue lines are paths to where I rode one summer, waiting for a horse to land beyond the third fence of an in-and-out and turn toward the water or the brush. The course was charted on a posterboard beside the entrance gate. I'd studied it, but couldn't call it back for anything. Some days I rode off course, and some days, on.

3.

Even a topographic sheet could never capture what it is to travel from your collarbone elsewhere by way of points of interest not to be denoted on a dry table of conventions, though "Legend" might be a title fetched just far enough from where we started to place above the story we tell now, here beside this fire, which I mark X.

Henry Taylor

## THE EMERALD BOOK

First it was a ring,  
its stone of green glass  
like an empty wine bottle  
and on her finger, the watercolors  
shaping the brush in large teardrop shapes  
of sable, splashing even with colored juice, like  
raspberries, the stain of coffee cup rings  
adding to the paper's authenticity.

In China  
she would have failed  
with her bound feet and sharp tongue  
like a rooster's beak, like a fighting cock  
she would have driven everyone away.  
Writing in the book, she would record  
the ingredients for soup, and never listen  
to the telephone ringing, calling with messages  
of cancer or floods. In Poland

she would have eloped with Chopin  
gone to the desert of Las Vegas where  
they would have gambled

for music and  
the chips would be orchids, growing on the green felt  
of blackjack tables. She would have avoided  
nothing, the pansies, the snapdragons, the chocolate  
torte,  
and violence wouldn't have blown in like sand.

You search her room and there isn't a trace  
of the Emerald Book. But she has it,  
you know she does. Sometimes you watch her  
dealing cards and see the green glass-stoned ring  
flashing on her marriage finger.

It's all "a movie,"  
as some dead poet said,  
"at the end of the world."

## Three Poems

## THE GARDEN OF STONE CABBAGES

Elephants knelt here, I thought,  
and under the white pines I admired  
the round prints of their reverence  
till the old man said, "Sea cabbages,"  
and told me how the whole blessed field  
sank into coral sleep when the warm sea  
that shimmered from Albany to Detroit  
took back its green gifts. The land  
buckled on its armor of new ice.  
The glacier sharpened its knives  
on the mineral heads of cabbages —  
roses disappointed in love,  
shucked them and planed them down  
to hubcaps for emeralds, oysters, orbits  
freckled like trout or fawn,  
thrown from the wheel of a potter  
who learned his art from the sleep  
of tortoises. Nothing sees you.  
Nothing knows you are gone.

## UNINVITED HOUSES

The houses kept coming into her paintings, though she tried to stop them, though she asked the two barns, one male, one female, who stepped from her mauve sky, "Who are you? What country sent you?" So many begged her to make them visible; a silo packed with the sawdust of twilight, an ark sent to deliver the morning, after her father died clutching his Star of David and his Crucifix.

He is the guardhouse with a red roof and a gate to the city of steeples. He is the sky peeling itself to glory. While her friend was dying, she painted many safe places for her to be glad in, tents stitched from the silks of riders who raced hard and won. The last house was a shadow of itself, the ghost razed to sight on the wall after a demolition. When it opened a window, someone left a blue plate on the sill. What shines so? The bright hem of the door answers: *open all night.*

**THE WISDOM OF THE JELLYFISH**

The moon sheds its skin, knitting  
halos and casting them off.

On the beach, how they shine

and pulse and glisten

like the fontanel of the newborn.

What is it to be a lens

focused on the feathery star

of your own life,

fireworks trapped

in a bruised sky?

As you shrink to a coin

minted in lace, you dry

to a chalky spill. The sea

smoothes things over.

Look inward, says the jellyfish.

I am all eyes, God-sighted.

I peacock the land. When I died,

I showed you the whole galaxy.

Nancy Willard

## ABSTRACTION

They came that morning, in gowns of pale green and white, sliding through the slim trees like slants of an unsparing light; they were noiseless in their coming, and faceless, except for their eyes, and behind them came a noise, a clinking, light touch of steel on steel, wind chimes in the corridors of bone; it followed them, the sound, as a wake follows a ship, that ruffled disturbance of what had been even and seamless, a placid surface, so unperturbed in being what it was. And when they came, as a wave parts, everything fled before them, had fled hours, days, before they came, having sensed their coming from a long ways off, the way snakes know before the seismographs that the earth will move, and even the mountains will break, slide in great sheets of mud and rubble, and swallow the valleys, the inhabited hollows whose houses were crammed with the unsuspecting, living like dogs in the dumb incomprehension of the habitual. The morning was torn where they came, riven between the slim trees, which were rooted and could not flee from their own forest nature like the birds and the insects, the raccoons, opossums, deer, and the rodents, who had vanished before, leaving only the stillness behind, and the tension of waiting which kept even the leaves from stirring, and the wind held its breath, fearing that the least movement would shatter the leaves like glass. Every space that once was the passage for air and light, and the small scurry

of squirrels, became a wound as they entered there, a legion in the gowns of their office. They were the priests of postponement, their gifts were subtraction, pain and extension of days. They had their rituals, their instruments, their secret language and passwords; the forest was not their home, and they had never heard its secret language, for it always fell silent before them, and what they came to was only a vacant room, like the shell of a village that had fled at the news of an army approaching. And from the edge of the scene, so composed, and so silent, except for the strange clink clink of the steel, the trees so straight in their dark lines, the trunks an abstract study in stripes, rows of harsh light between them, the figures gliding into the foreground — from vision's periphery, something begins to seep, slowly at first, like the oozing of sap from a tree, and then faster, until it is pouring, a tide of red flooding out from the edges of vision and swallowing what might have been, covering whatever it was that was hiding out there, everywhere, since they came to the forest whose spirit, a fugitive, unprovisioned and naked, had fled.

Eleanor Wilner