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COVER: Robert Shetterly, *Glórisia Daisies*, ink drawing, 1981

## THE MODEL

The model is dreaming of vegetables.  
Tomatoes and rutabaga, butternut squash,  
leeks, cabbages spill onto the table  
at her side. Some of the students draw them.  
Some draw her, trying to think of sex as natural  
as vegetables, another set of gestures, an  
*attitude*. They have been studying attitude.  
Their instructor has told them art is attitude.  
They know this does not mean what it otherwise  
means: *She's got an attitude*. Though this model  
definitely seems to have one. The way she never  
covers herself during break, just sips at her Evian  
and reads. The way she leans back so her breasts  
won't sag, her stomach will flatten. They don't see her  
as she sees herself, dressed in a cotton shift,  
her hair pinned up, cooking a harvest feast  
for her family. In this part of the dream,  
the scene never changes: a stone house,  
the sky blue with a cease-fire that's holding,  
goats bleating on the stony hillside,  
the figures around the table laughing and  
talking, words strange to the ear as *rutabaga*,  
*squash*. . . . Then time gets confused. The sky  
pulls apart, there are shells, body parts in the  
street – legs, hands, teeth . . . or bones  
splintered into teeth. . . . Her long wooden spoon  
dips into the pot. . . . They will start with good wine,  
toast the bright moon, Earth's bounty. . . .

Lynne Knight

## KEEP MOVING

What I meant to say was *escalator*,  
 the feeling you have when the movement  
 of the rubber arm rest  
 doesn't match the feet. You adjust,  
 drag an arm forward, then it slides back again.

All the posters of women advertising underwear  
 with chewing gum nipples,  
 chewing gum crotches on silk underpants,  
 all the men with chewing gum penises  
 sticking out of street clothes, sometimes balls  
 drawn in white.

*Escalator*; a kind of emerging  
 or just the opposite,  
 as though you're visiting an underworld.  
 And that's just one example.  
 I might have said *elevator*, waiting endlessly  
 on the ground floor. Getting on with a woman  
 who leaps in the air and yips at each stop.  
 The whole car shakes and she can't stop laughing.

Or *stairs*, the landing of that hotel in Paris  
 where they store the extra beds and mattresses.  
 Always someone in a uniform and apron  
 sweeping each step. *Nous descendons l'escalier*.  
 You're such an intruder walking by.

Every woman is wearing  
 the same blouse, light cloth,  
 white or offwhite, pleated collar, lace edged,  
 a pull-over blouse with ties.  
 I never realized before  
 that every woman wears the same blouse,  
 think, I'll get one,  
 go to the blouse department,  
 make them understand what I need.

(stanza continued)

What's the word for *collar*, for *pleat*?  
There's no direct route to blouses.  
When I try to find a way on the stairs,  
the passage is blocked.

But I remember one dream perfectly,  
standing behind a car, trunk open,  
holding a baby, handing it over to them,  
apprehensive, but it's theirs.  
I might have been the mother. No,  
not mother,  
but you feel a deep connection.  
When one of them reaches for the baby,  
and I go to put it in his arms,  
there's something about the grasp.  
His hands or arms slip. But I keep hold. Beware,  
how close the baby's head is to the trunk,  
and still the word *escalator*,  
I haven't found a better one.  
Quiet sense of inevitable movement.  
Ragged buskers ignore the signs,  
*No Busking*,  
jangle tambourines, beg money.

I love to eat olives, green and black both.  
Bread. A little wine.  
I love the sight of olive trees,  
their silvery appearance, a kind of dusty, moonlit glow.  
And plane trees. The way they look a little wounded,  
skin falling off in patches  
as though they had a condition.

Nothing is ever resolved.  
Urinal-tiled tunnels, *escalator*  
jerks toward a flat surface.  
Chewing gum snot stuck in all their noses.  
Chewing gum growths on their eyes.  
I forget why I wanted to come here.

### Three Poems

#### MIRIAM'S DREAM OF GENESIS

- 1 . . in it, the Ark rolls, swamps in flesh, and the soft heads patter on the decks of gopherwood.
- 2 . . in it, she can see the tall executioner with his abacus, who feels his way down lines of breeding stalls, counting – CLEAN, UNCLEAN –
- 3 The dank cells rock with coitus, the Ark rights itself, the beasts stick and scream.
- 4 . . in it, there is a dark seethe of water that seeps through the knots and mortaring: a muck of ammoniac waste she falls into and gags.
- 5 She is a stowaway, past the age of breeding or not come to it, while he, the executioner, dreams a steaming galley where his sons and their gravid wives slaughter and eat the rude male animals whose mates are quick. He dreams his hidden wife, past her prime now and lunatic, dreams the boys' night cries, the human kelp, the Ark held fast, gross rot outside and in.
- 6 . . in it, he is looking for her to rape. His whole boat is a sex bin and she alone is celibate, grieves, has memory, blue sky in an open field. If the rains stop and if by then her dream wings are big, he may just let her go free to be his dove.

## MIR-YAM IN EXODUS

EX 1.22 Then the Pharaoh commanded all his people –  
Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the  
Nile, but the daughters, you shall let live –

- 1 Small and dark, she wears the rag-shift of a slave in  
mud plates. Silt coats her braid.
- 2 She sinks into the reeds and croaks frog songs to  
bring the Pharaoh's daughter to this mudhole where  
she waits beside the bulrush basket daubed with pitch . . .  
EX 2.3 . . . and daubed it with bitumen and placed the child  
in it among the reeds at the river brim, and [ – ] his sister  
stood [?] nearby to see what would become of him.
- 3 – Why should the Pharaoh's daughter come to this  
common beach to swim? –
- 4 – Because the Lord has ground under her tender  
breasts an intolerable summer itch –
- 5 [Lost Verse]
- 6 [Lost Verse]
- 7 Wreathed in papyrus flowers the small dark sister  
sings the snipe's hunting cry (and the snipe recognizes  
it) to lure in the Egyptian princess savaging her breasts,  
and with her palms slaps the river plain to imitate a  
fish.
- 8 Barefoot and scratching her chest the princess comes:  
a daisy nub  
in a surround of surly eunuchs and maids, eunuchs and  
maids and Nubian  
cross-dressers sweeping the mud lanes with peacock wings.
- 9 [Fragmentary Verse] . . . egrets in the slimy pool alternate legs  
[Lost Closure].

10 [Dubious Inclusion (?) 6th C Interpolation (?)] . . – And  
I shall make you as a king – she says while the small  
river tides drink her as she drinks . .

EX 15.20 Then Mir-yam the prophetess, sister of Moses and  
Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went  
out after her with timbrels and dancing. And Mir-yam sang –  
Praise to the Lord [for] he has thrown the horse and the rider  
into the sea.

### MIR-YAM, CORRECTED TEXT

EX 2.3 And when the mother could hide him no longer she  
took a bulrush basket and daubed it with pitch. And his  
sister stood at a distance to know what would become of  
him.

1 Small and dark  
she wears the rag-shift of a slave  
in mud plates  
that hang from her shoulders to her waist  
like a turtle carapace.  
Noon Song:  
She imitates frog conversations to bring the Pharaoh's  
daughter to this hiding place,  
she cries the snipe's cry and the snipe stoops to see,  
and with her palms,  
slaps the river skin to make a leaping fish, Pharaoh's  
daughter and  
her surly retinue might want to catch and eat.  
She's sunk  
so far down, only her eyes and forehead break  
the river plain  
(and the braid that floats behind her like a snake)  
while beside her lips  
the bulrush basket bobs like bait: in it, the baby  
sails away  
from Pharaoh's soldiers in his little ship.



EX 2.5 Now the daughter of Pharaoh came to the river to bathe, and her maidens walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds.

2 – Why should  
the Princess come to this foul beach to bathe? –  
Boredom possesses her,  
and the Lord has ground under and between her breasts  
an intolerable summer itch,  
a rash of blisters that bleed serum and want poultices.  
In kohl rings  
(powder of antimony) the regal eyes swim with sweat.  
She has  
stripped herself of dress and rank and ornament,  
and dips  
in river muck to the neck while her maidens dance  
and her eunuchs sing,  
and Mir-yam watches from her hiding place. Egrets  
alternate legs,  
the brown waters drink the Princess as she drinks  
beside  
papyrus blossoms, white and pink.

Virginia de Araújo

**YOM KIPPUR, 1978**

My brother's standing at the mirror,  
blue kepeh set on his head  
like a tiny map of the world.  
I can't tie a single windsor  
but Mark's learning, 10, half-  
way through his life. An hour  
before Synagogue. I'm sorry  
for staring that day, sorry for the soft  
backs of his knees, the white  
sheet of his chest. I can't tie  
so I'm watching him dress,  
each button a deliberate process,  
me moving from the doorway  
to the mirror, drawing a silk tie  
through my fingers again  
and again. I'm sorry  
for his brown hair, bowl cut,  
sorry for the fingers working  
his collar, twist and gentle tug,  
the tilt of his head, open-mouthed.  
I memorized this careful loop  
and threading of fabric, the smell  
of English Leather, dark suit coat  
sharpening his shoulders, the fine hairs  
on his cheek. Both our faces in the mirror,  
my clumsy hands copying his.  
I'm sorry for all of this now: his child-like  
humming, bright blue eyes,  
the small knot, taut and practiced,  
rising toward his throat.

## Two Poems

### MEN'S NIGHT

Where did they go  
 – the women? Weren't they  
 just there, around the corner  
 among themselves, peals of private laughter?  
 'God is doubt,' they whispered  
 just loud enough as we fixed things.  
 Content, we rested as they gathered  
 seed in lacquered baskets  
 as if a dream – 'Such forearms!'  
 'such dexterity!' 'such astonishing  
 cleverness and appetite!' – assuring us each  
 first with a brush of breathless lip  
 fingering our eyelids closed.  
 Just a keel groove now, the lap of waves  
 in the sand where their boat was beached.

### BAD BOYS AND FINCHES

Ice into shape notes, divided  
 single panes will tingle in triangles  
 free of rabbits and scab bursts of glazing compound,  
 hardened like the viscous light itself  
 into something less fluid and more antique  
 than Turkish taffy. Stronger and more elastic  
 to a point beyond which the lightest insult  
 of a finger tap will destabilize its tension,  
 tempered glass just dissolves, clouds  
 slowly into equal-crystal granules  
 with a sound of sizzling grease.  
 Tossed bulbs make short taut pops

on barrel bottoms. Bottles, certain types  
of vitreous tile engaging thirty-thirty slugs,  
explode in showers. And cathode tubes  
exfoliate a fully satisfactory  
foomp of pearly shards, discharged  
capacitors, and mercury

dust, said to inhibit blood's  
congealing, gets imbedded in the weave  
of cotton gloves, smells  
of mimeograph ink and incinerating carbons.  
Bad boys, drunks, and finches  
see the absurdity in glass and full-tilt

challenge to its ten-percent reflections,  
magnify the cracks, leave downy stains  
transferring some fledgling surface to a margin  
of intersecting transparency and anti-kinesis.  
Clear, light lacks whole realization  
until tested by formal vector and occupied

by its range of reassembling webs.  
Some starlings, trapped within a skylight dome,  
will critique the unbuilt aspect of this sky  
until their skulls are flat and crimson,  
deriving a suicide's satisfaction from the prevailing  
of propriety over brain's own separations.

**Brian Hubbell**

## Two Poems

## CROWS AT DUSK

Perched on a steep slate roof: four crows.  
The first – God knows what it wants,  
all squawk like it's deaf and has to shout  
remarks about a blonde in short-shorts,  
black & white couple across the street,  
motorcycle revving. The second's got an itch  
it can't quite reach. Head tucked, it bites,  
yanks, wing stuck out like a banging shutter.  
The third can't stand its lousy position,  
hops to the end – no better. Hops back,  
shimmies its tail, drops something.  
More glob than bird, squawker's quiet now,  
like it ran down, fell asleep mid-sentence,  
having made the same points thirty years.  
Preener's calm too, spent, like a sob subsiding.

On the end, the last one just sits and looks,  
turns its head now and then, or you wouldn't  
know it was a bird. You'd think maybe:  
tired bowtie, or black, half-wilted rose,  
not one of four crows on a steep church roof  
starting to crumble – till it flaps off,  
leaving three, & a little girl on a big-wheel  
not answering when her mother hollers  
from an upstairs window, "You're gonna  
get it, I'm gonna whip your butt": three,

& the other on a wire now, call and response  
blacking out those threats, so the child can  
keep clattering down the block. Bad girl birds,  
raspy voices in your head, "Way to go, kid.  
Hot damn" – as if every gripe, every flash

of rage you thought you'd regret takes the stage  
now in a gospel quartet, the four black-robed  
survival sisters – half-hoarse soloist at the mike,  
wailing her been-through-the-fire, got-burnt,  
but-it-ain't-over-yet-honey-good-news.

## SPARROWS

1

My neighbor's tree was simmering,  
a spruce bubbling over with chirps, louder  
than the city garbage truck idling at the curb,

louder than my own mind saying, "Those guys  
think you're nuts." Or my other mind asking,  
"how can you ignore the music boiling in this tree?"

So I shook the long green sleeves of its branches,  
hoping to see that song's belly and wings,  
its little wiry feet, wanting to flush out those notes

jumping through dense staves, those quick  
flickering heartbeats pulsing from limb to limb.  
I know people get struck for this, some wisdom

can cost fingers or eyes. We get sent back  
to some place very old, where things are only  
half-converted, earth clods still clinging to roots,

mouths clotted with beard hair and consonants.  
There a tree is more than a tree, still part-god,  
knowing things, screeching when cut.

Even the cross weeps then, a bitter speech,  
baring its soul. The truck idled, clusters  
of junior high kids made an elaborate ritual

out of snapping zippo's, taking long drags,  
but there was a door I could close on that,  
I could squeeze between branches, press against

the trunk, letting those birds bite – that's what  
I imagined – the birds yanking my hair, the mouths  
that made the music, making music out of me.

2

But I was afraid of that wanting, afraid  
of the way wanting I don't even know I have  
sometimes leaks from my face, so a stranger

out of nowhere will offer a smoke.

Is it just a matter of degrees between him & me,  
and the crazy woman who walks our streets,

gesturing wildly – her arms all leathery tendon,  
as if the desire she's vagrant with is flight,  
her body a semaphore, coaxing down spirits

or fending them off. The birds were quiet now.

I wanted to chase them out, to see how many  
and what kind. I wanted their music all over me

like mosquito bites, swarming the way in sci fi movies  
a sound can make you writhe on the ground.

Maybe they'd think I *was* the tree and get impatient

with hiding – small grayish birds, dozens of them,  
sparrows maybe. I wanted to hold one in my hand,  
its fierce panic fluttering through me.

Isn't the afterlife full of creatures who think like this –  
that fox, for instance, who jumps and jumps at grapes  
dangling just out of reach. He'd probably like

a fat little sparrow, then a rain puddle to rinse  
the feathers from his mouth. And what if God  
is listening right now? What if God is thinking,

“give her what she wants,” so suddenly  
my arms are green, my legs hard and shaggy,  
impossible to move. When does it go too far?



3

Music and desire, that spontaneous combustion –  
I half remember a man crouched in a belfry  
and ringers tugging the heavy ropes:

down they pull, and up they're lifted, as one  
after another, huge bell after lumbering bell  
swings and tolls, and the poor fellow grips his head,

collapses, blood trickling from his ears... One side  
of my mind takes this as proof: "salt, stone,  
straitjacket for you." But the other also threatens:

"you already are stone, if you don't get close  
to that music." So it goes, the yammering debate.  
Meanwhile, the tree frays and sparks like hot wires,

sound spatters and pours. Not ache or longing –  
that's us, pulling the limbs, hoping to be lifted.  
For them it must be all arrival, pure *here here*

*now here*, a flock of tongueless flames splashing out  
like sterno, and nothing's charred. The spruce  
is young, but still it's been standing a long time

with nothing but the usual wind, rain, sun,  
until now. *Nothing, usual* – that was my first mistake.  
And I didn't know how long it could take,

standing, pricked by those branches, trying to see  
the music, or the plump purple light of grapes,  
or the sad eyes of the crazy woman the junior high kids

love to tease – to see and not grasp, but be grasped,  
to stand here whether anything flickers, bursts  
lit and singing from the tree, or nothing does.

**FERTILITY**

Out of my vagina came a dog.  
A puppy, actually. It was Mothers' Day.  
The black nose arrived and the body  
followed out onto this path of mortality.  
I watched the nurse clean her off  
and admire her spots and tail. "But, I wanted  
a girl," I said as I lay back and kneaded  
my slack stomach, that empty sack.

In the night, while the pup lay swaddled  
asleep in the nursery with the nurses  
and their low voices and laughter  
I woke up to a hen pecking at my breast.  
Her feathers as white as the moon  
in my darkened room. "Where is she?"  
I called. The startled hen,  
with a flurry of clucks and dusty feathers,  
flew out my open window to the owls.  
My breasts, full for twenty years,  
let down their silent streams.

Elizabeth Tibbetts

**Six Poems****THE WORDS WE USE**

Today the old man might be driving  
to the veterinarian  
to have his neighbor's tomcat put down.  
("Put to sleep," she says.) He imagines  
that her cat's on the seat beside him.

But not yet, she says, not yet the day  
to put her cat to sleep, the gentle injection  
going into the cat's leg, the cat  
not put to sleep but put to death. Because  
she can't bear to send away her cat.  
It's a matter, she says, of love.  
So not today. Today is love.

Today the old man is alone in the car,  
and he imagines the old cat  
lying on the seat beside him,  
going to the veterinarian with him.

He mashes his brakes – a sudden stop –  
when a high school girl, fussing  
one-handed with her hair,  
puts her red car in front of his,  
and he imagines the old cat  
rolling from its towel onto the seat cushions.

His hand reaches down to keep the cat  
safe, and deep grief rises  
in his throat: Grief, because he knew  
how that girl's breast rose  
when she lifted her arm.

### THE GIFT

I offer requiem this winter's morning  
for an overdosed Ordinary Seaman.

I know he died ashore  
without a ship to go to, sailor  
on the beach, rewarding  
himself with the charity  
of the Seaman's Dog House,  
died in the smallest room of the Dog House, kneeling,  
kneeling in the head, telling himself  
the Dog's truth for the last time, vomiting up  
(eyes wide open) his life that morning.

But now I give him burial at sea – I imagine him  
in canvas, washed  
and wrapped, lying  
like a package on the fantail of his freighter,  
ship hove to without cargo, ship dead  
in the water, with her slab hull and deckload of empty  
containers crabbing her sideways, pushed  
by the grey wind that shoves her  
across the crushed water where the black  
seabirds cross and weave;  
her master coming down from the bridge  
with finger jammed in bible to mark the place.

I make that seaman a present of his job  
this morning. I sign  
him on as a member of the crew, and  
I imagine him safely  
cuddled in canvas, sewn in,  
with the bosun's last stitch put through his nose  
to make sure he never takes back the gift of his death.

The jolt of the ocean and the rush  
of the wind is the requiem I give him.

The ship's bell strikes  
thirteen. The ship's horn throws downwind a trinity  
of blasts loud enough to make seabirds  
lurch away. Shipmates who never knew him  
lift the end of the carpenter's board  
and dump him over, a handout  
to whatever lives beneath the surface  
of the vacant ocean on a windy winter's morning.

**PEBBLES**

At first I couldn't tell the dolphin's carcass  
from sea-wrack. Then the clustered gulls  
sprang up, rotating  
clockwise, scraps of paper blown clockwise.

Crabs were keeping the sand alive  
around the dolphin's body,  
crabs skittering across  
the damp sand, crabs crumbling  
the graffiti scribbled by gulls' feet, crabs acquiring  
small gifts for themselves. Sand flies  
hopped salt-and-pepper between the crabs.

The dolphin's body explicated  
the shadows clockwise spun down by the clamorous gulls,  
the flicker of crabs, the vibration of sand-flies,  
the ripple of small waves scrambling pebbles  
toward my feet, the pebbles clacking underwater.

**NEWS FROM THE FAMILY BIBLE**

The wooden gingerbread  
growing on our house  
extruded itself  
out of Great-Great  
Grandfather's fertile imagination.

Just think of him when the foundations were laid  
in that High Victorian year,  
spending, crowing, ruffling up  
all his whiskers, bullying his builders  
to create his gingerbread house, twined  
all over with one great thrusting creeper.

Oh, that upjutting bedroom dormer,  
those peeping windows  
eyebrow'd out of horny shingles,  
the big round turret  
that bears the lightning rod!

Twice-Great bearded  
Grandfather ordered all that efflorescence  
to burst out of sober  
planks, axed in flowering wood  
by frenzied carpenters.

Think of that hour when Great-Great Grandpápá  
bull-bellowed, "Blossom!"  
and all of his testosterone  
sang in the blueprints,  
and a garden, a labyrinth of apple trees,  
grew for him, amazed, behind the house.

## AT THE GRAVE OF ALLEN TATE

– a reading of the *Ode to the Confederate Dead*

We trudge through darkness over furrows toward the grave,  
swatting at gnats, stumbling between crosses and lumpy  
monuments, moving toward the buried poem.  
The cicadas stop short: too dark for them  
now. Crickets, instead, are measuring the night.  
We hear the dogs across the wall,  
snuffling in last year's leaves and the fallen twigs.

Clustered heads dangle  
beneath a spread of branches, lit from below.  
We hear flashes of the poem, half-understood.  
Moths come to the reader's lantern,  
flitter up to his face, his glimmering eyeglasses. He  
blows a moth out of his mouth, waits  
for laughter to die  
away, begins to read again. We hear  
words; we see moths flicker  
over the page.

I shift from leg  
to leg on the crumbling  
earth, and I tongue  
the words: "Confederate  
Dead," repeating them  
until the clattering syllables compose themselves  
into generations of leaves  
mulched beneath my feet,  
and my mind lurches to my own affairs,  
the schedule of buses and airplanes  
to get me home from here.



I imagine twisting alarm clock hands  
backward against tomorrow's sun.  
I imagine coming back to this grave  
so early that my shadow  
stretches beyond the wall, so early  
that, with luck, I can look straight  
at what I want to see – watch a green  
snake struggle out of its tattered cast-off skin,  
come curling toward me, glistening, across the spawning leaves.

**FRAGMENT OF A MYTH**

Now think of Gilgamesh. His name  
is nothing to us,  
neither is the name of his city,  
nor the names of his gods,  
nor the names of his enemies –  
all those names  
    are a mouthful of river sand  
    from the Euphrates.

Think of his friend  
Enkidu, the untamed man. For us,  
that name of Enkidu is hollow. It rattles like  
    a handful of pebbles  
    thrown against a wall.

We can be like Enkidu goat-foot,  
weasel-tooth, chaste as Adam in the Garden,  
painting the longhorn and the serpent  
on the wall of a cave,  
    breaking  
    the hunters' traps.

But who can be like Gilgamesh,  
King of Uruk, a priest, two-thirds a god (peace  
to our genetics) a man ignorant  
of death? Ignorant of the adhesive  
    bone-dust that clenches  
    him to the earth?

He was Gilgamesh, king of the city  
with a harsh name, worshipper  
of those sandstone gods  
who stand in our museums with bulging eyes.  
A young hero, innocent  
as Adam in the Garden, innocent  
of death

    except when, as King or Priest,  
    he killed.

We reach for him in translation, a gabble  
of twisted shadows: brutal,  
heroic, as ignorant  
of sin or guilt as any nameless infant  
raging in his cradle, red-  
faced, shrieking for the nipple,  
crying out:

    "I want. I want."

The story of Gilgamesh  
is written on shattered clay  
passed through ancient fire; it  
clacks with names that are not  
our names, not the names of Americans;  
it provokes us with bug-eyed  
gods who are not  
our gods, not the gods  
of Americans. The story  
has been trampled under,  
    crunched  
    into landfill.

But remember now; you yourself have seen  
the twisted smoke of Uruk's ancient sacrifices  
coil like dust storms, coagulating into oily haze:  
    the burning wells  
    beneath Euphrates' sun.

Five thousand years of smoke and dust  
and the drizzle of particulate matter  
    burns our eyes. The myth  
    leaves us sneezing.

We've averted our eyes  
from the worm that fell  
from Enkidu's nose. Death's a homeless  
stranger who loiters,  
    spitting, in the waiting room  
    of our hospitals.

And how many years  
have passed since our own twisted cloud  
    flung the shadow of our name  
    over our enemies' cities?

**Charles Muñoz**

## Two Poems

### IN URUK

Gilgamesh, the king, is not different  
 From other men. When Nineveh fell  
 In 612 the walls of Uruk  
 Were a by-word. I have zero  
 Mastery of any of these languages.  
 The gods, who do not die, cannot be tragic.

Uruk is now Warka, it has no king,  
 Its gods have found a place  
 In literature. A fragment  
 Of Tablet VII is in cuneiform.  
 The authorities to whom I am indebted  
 Engraved on a stone this story:

*We must treasure the dream,  
 Whatever the terror.*

Somewhere my Enkidu  
 Is running in the hills.

### ADDRESS TO DRINK

Filler of holes, time-honored anodyne,  
 Memory's angel, asphyxiator of desire,  
 All-deadening grace, aphasia's sap,  
 Time-thickener, discretion's acid, nerve's cement,  
 Dispassionate prophet, artificer of calm,  
 Dispenser of apathy, ever-requested love,  
 Anxiety's simple, compunction's balm,  
 Merciful instrument, death's own bride;  
 Be with me through ambition's leprosy, be  
 Guilt's dread familiar squatting at my side.

**THINKING OF KISSING YOU**

Nothing was like it, which means nothing  
In itself to say, unless as affirmed  
With punishing serenity, It was nothing,  
Please go away. It was something  
Like nothing, like a mistake  
Which got as good as it gave,  
Which seemed like a lot,  
But turned out to be not much,  
Though not for me, for whom  
Something which was like nothing  
Was like the moon on certain nights,  
Stubborn, irregular, lingering  
In eery nakedness, remembered  
Necessarily, though unwillingly,  
Resentfully, making a practice  
Of simplicity, though once  
A huntress and a priestess  
Of solemn madnesses, protected  
By silence and ferocity, a band  
Of friends, dogs, dimwitted  
And murderous, who in glad frenzy  
Thought I was a stag. I was Actaeon.  
It was the forest, and I was lost.

**Kenneth Rosen**

## FLOWER AT NIGHT

Yellow flower with no name,  
flower whose name I have forgotten.  
Six-sided bell, stamen and pistil, orange and black,  
with pollen drifting in the cracks of my hand.

All flowers grow unknown to themselves,  
defying their names – Bittersweet nightshade,  
          bloodroot, fireweed.

You climb as they do, no name for weight,  
wrapping each rung with vines. I think of Jacob,  
how little he knew when he laid his head down  
on a pillow of stone. Or Jack  
who sold his cow for a handful of beans.  
The cow ambled off and Jack remains,  
a boy who climbed the rungs of a giant stalk,  
hand over hand, all the way up and back,  
until only a stump was left.

How far away he is, alive still in some walled castle,  
muddleheaded again because his mother is dead,  
died and gone to heaven, missing the long pompous funeral  
she would have been embarrassed by. The cow  
is also under the ground, and the woman  
whose breasts went dry after her first child  
searches for another creature to give milk to her brood.  
How many stories spin and wander off  
on their own paths this long winding night  
but this yellow flower stays with me in the dark,  
a bell that took a vow of silence  
many years before I saw it.

Tam Lin Neville

## IT'S A PLUM GRAPE FIELDING, BUT I CAN BARLEY TILL RYE

## First Cereal Rights

Since my heroin – mint in the berry hyacinths – in our greener salad days  
 Never humped nor hedged in her melon voice nor pawpawed my clumsy  
 ways,

I now mince no worts – cauliflower a flower – and sencereally wish to  
 show her

Why I tractor alfalfa world around and on what grounds sow clover.

I think it was parsley poppy-clove for this gal who pepsin chives.  
 Myrrh I'vy cedar, my soul nosegay; but when she's gone . . . endives.

Young poppies like to spearmint and waste much thyme on cinnament  
 (All despice the voice of resin, which pines fir passion's fruit in its season).  
 But thistle never nettle more; she's reached marjoram, mustard score!  
 And now the laurel leaf at bay her berry herbbane wish to play.

She sesame, at last, "I cantaloupe but marijuana."

My artichoke, threw caraway, and dreamed a savory drama.

(I garlic dared, but sages too do need the earth's good salt;  
 And though Lot's wife may bane their life, it's not a sour fault.)

So I made bold – though, if truth be told, the mere hope made me pallid –  
 To toss and savor, dress, undress, this fit-for-Caesar salad.

Hence: "Lettuce, when the nightshade's down"

(Bold! As though I'd known herbivore!)

"Disport ourselves from root to crown

Dill harvests yield no more."

Ah, soon we'edtumbled well, for lentil did she know

How mocha in me this seedling wish had long begun to grow.

For of all the tempting cinnsamen, this rose-hipped, mallow bud  
 Does stir a fiery sap in me. . . . "Oh, be my constant cud!"

(And who but herbicides?)

Paul L. DeVore



**Two Poems****I JOKES**

In Nome we say I jokes  
quick and deadpan  
at the end of a joke. I jokes,  
we say, the Eskimo  
English sticky on tongue.  
In Nome we say I jokes  
all right. Could be a cluck or croak.  
Or shyly, mouth covered by hand  
at the end of a joke. I jokes  
is how we poke  
fun at our people and plans.  
In Nome we say I jokes  
because even though broken,  
we've survived, a clan  
at the end of a joke. I jokes,  
we say, our spoken  
coda, our last proud stand.  
In Nome we say I jokes  
at the end of a joke. I jokes.

## SID'S JOURNAL CHECK

Read out loud, Sid ordered, pointing,  
and pulled the chair too close,  
gray eyes widening to some lost  
high. After all, Miriam, he said,  
you told us to write *anything*,  
and you would *love* to read it. I skimmed  
several pages: a young Nome Eskimo  
alone in a dismal Anchorage motel room  
was oiling and re-oiling his gun.  
Suddenly, an ink-smearred, big-print  
final paragraph: the Eskimo met a friend,  
the two followed a woman to a park,  
shot her, carried her to the motel room  
where each took a turn fucking the corpse.  
When the men killed each other, the dead  
woman awoke. As I finished, Sid's whisper  
sputtered like a furnace unable to fire:  
I could fuck you like that, Miriam.

Sid, read your story aloud, I said.  
My student stiffened, eyes gone to dead  
dark bugs. No longer his teacher, Miriam,  
I became one more anonymous white woman,  
to be hated with the rest of the landscape.

Ken Waldman

## PIANO SUITE

1. *Prelude And Fugue No. 2 In C Minor,  
The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I*

She attacks gently. *Pianissimo* sings  
just to me. Hands curve till ivory breathes  
into my ear the clear and private slang  
that each note cradles. As her song bathes

my fever, which I cache within my secret  
book of fugues, I spread pages like thighs to the sleek  
second voice, counterpoint and sweat. Eye sockets  
vibrate a dull electric. Our skins unlock

for the diffusing of soul in C minor.

Her fingers hammer keys, almost frighten  
me. The tempo quickens. Sick from our manner  
of desire, while spaces between notes fatten

against clefs, pulling their key like a tether,  
I drink song, soothing as the croon of a mother.

2. *Appassionata*

Hungry to lose my self, I twist at the dial.  
The sonata makes my window rattle,  
high fidelity speakers buzzing. Defiled  
music, never meant to crash so loud, straddles  
a space that I will not fill between scuttled  
hope for lullaby and buttocks slick with sweat,  
between *adagio* lowing that cattle  
ease to a manger and oil gracing a svelte

haunch, glory on all fours. The sonata swells.  
Fingers clasp sound as though tender ears, urging  
short hard pulls, quick repetitions disfigured  
in high volume, skin prickled by the sweltered  
motif, more lovely than hymns of a virgin  
yielding to abandon, lost in my hunger.

### 3. *We Shall Come Rejoicing*

What does it mean to touch sound? to let song master  
 this most intimate sense? taken, to take in pitch  
 through muscle and bone? I have faced my ritual  
 joy, the introit played by the wife of the pastor.

What chord progression formed her structure of power?  
 I have walked the long aisle. At each step I missed her.  
 The hymnal she submitted distorts to faster  
 form, modulations woven as wild cells flower,

sacrament of union, the rite of last posture,  
 kneeling. To touch God's pleasure, like a nipple rich  
 with blood, knotted by love's perfect heat, to smear sour  
 milk a musician clotted in her worst hour  
 how shall I touch sound? A high-strung flesh, a tight-stretched  
 clay, recites the tumor I stole from her Psalter.

### 4. *Offertory*

This gift I have of hands, of touch, troubles me.  
 I learned it in the school of hymns. The sweet flame  
 she drove like God's breath into piano keys

still arcs knuckle, arcs nerve tunneled through the wrist,  
 arcs muscle strung along the spine, lays its blame  
 in the palm I hold out as though to be blessed,

and I am, but it troubles me, this dense mass  
 I heft. Her common time rippled God's pure name  
 for the body, for the blood, and tasting glass

broken for me brings back salt beaded like oil  
 anointing an ugly head until she came,  
 and the congregation looked away, my toil

in the engine of praise hidden by the same  
 veil that hides my glory-ravaged face, my shame.

### 5. *Cancer Keeping Time*

The time I woke up praying from a dream  
of music laid out in a string of half-notes  
flawless as pearls. The time that time rubatoed  
from adrenaline to incarnadine.

The time a secret metronome flowed low  
through an open wrist. The time I woke up  
praying my darkest truth, caught in the long

slow slide to the black mass, *I want to live*,  
saying my secret, all secrets coalesced  
into one, *I want to live*, from a dream  
of a broken keyboard. The time she blasphemed  
down the staves of my hymn, my life a ransom  
for hers. The time wild cells sowed her desire  
to die throughout her metronome's strict measure.

### 6. *Isaac's Blues*

All music flows out of muscle,  
cartilage, and bone. Each instrument  
mimics voice. This vault, carved in gristle,  
resounds the drone that the supplicant  
thundered up from her hands, ligaments  
strung like hammered wire, a gift given  
skin to skin, in din, in dissonance,  
in exaltation, in salt. Sickened  
beyond my despair, she opened  
herself, God's torn vein, poured out her praise.  
And this gristle drank. Scored and stricken,  
it hid our bruise-dark chord until it raised  
her same livid blade and severed  
my self from I AM's healing pleasure.

### 7. *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*

I am the gentlest person I know.  
 The school of hymns was not all bad. I learned  
*adagio* there, not just hate, slow  
 movement, a dove falling like fire to burn  
 back to life a murdered tongue. I learned speech  
 then, and song, deeper than I took the way  
 to crucifixion. This death rant I preach  
 is just old fear making noise, how I bay  
 at a moon I can't call back and don't want,  
 really, full as a breast heavy with milk.  
 I have love, music, handed like a blunt  
 instrument mother to son, fine as silk  
 thread in a blouse taut with promise, gentle  
 as grunts huffed by stunned and crumpling cattle.

### 8. *War And Rumors Of War*

The time I betrayed her with *I want to live*  
 I became a whore. Jezebel. Cunt. Bad  
 boy! Bad! Deepest seed for the cancer called love  
 and Babylon's violence enter the bed  
 where I barter I AM, stained acrid with bride-  
 salt and feces. The time I betray her beats  
 in me like a metronome. Count each broad  
 wave, systolic, diastolic, that berates  
 in the language of self-loathing. Don't believe  
 want kills the secret the body tells the soul.  
 I believe, kneeling to false worship, bereft  
 of body and blood. I bend over, for sale.  
 But I cannot kill I AM. In part, I choose,  
 I do not choose. I will lose until I lose.

9. *Etudes*

Kneeling is the meat of worship. The body tells the soul. I have entered forbidden land and touched the dark place and beaten common time with my fist. I have returned. I barter stolen tune, secrets.

The body tells. The soul uneasy. She said *kneel* and I got down, hungry and humble as a child. I was a child. The song belonged to me, plundered as she taught touch to my fingers. I mumble my

tumor if No One listens. I let my chills shake me if No One comes near. I trade my secrets one by one, lessening my burden, reclaiming praise. I am glad *I AM* is hungry to hear my prayer.

Everyday I say *I AM*, let thanks cleanse my mouth. A body shouts my fugue in the house of the Lamb.

10. *Counterpoint*

I am the gentlest person I know. Pulpits and pastors' wives. I acknowledge my hatred before God. Drinking from the altar. Puppets and parlor tricks. Piano lessons. Mated pairs. Afternoon relief. I enter belief in No One, fevers, secret matrix of cancer knotting a pancreas into a dense mass. I AM. Whore. Girlchild. She is dead. I heft it again. Her piano is silent. The slaughterhouse echoes. I acknowledge my brokenness before God. And hammer blows. The last of the fatted calf congeals in the skillet. Begin by stealing. Answers. Healing comes without magic and everything is miracle. I still miss her music.

## THE DREAM OF THE COW

I have listened patiently to my dream of the intrusive cow.  
The warm breath at my ankles, I awaken with the fat tongue  
still curling above the lawn mower, trapping me into a corner of the  
garage.

I grew up with cows, cows grazing, cows trampling the barbed wire fence  
and grazing through our backyard. I remember the sound of heavy  
hooves

plunging into winter mud, or clack-clacking of the frozen field.

I was becoming a cow during those nights, the weight of the bloated belly  
against my small-boned back. In the morning there were sun flowers,  
twice my height under the rust-blue swing set. The stalks grew thick as  
my wrist.

I found them snap-trampled: the stunned cow chewing a tomato,  
swinging his tail –

could he really be unaware of his actions? That strange, divine knowing  
behind black-lemon eyes. I used to think it was the cow  
who crawled into my bed during the numb night.

I'm trying to curve this fur edge of anger leading me through my life.  
Your milk still makes me crave loneliness.

Ronald Palmer



## MESSAGE

When is no harm done?  
Mother called. What did she want?  
– the joy noise, put into words.

But I was long gone, I was out herding the dead  
East to their other pasture  
& I nodded off in their bells. The water  
steered us so far abroad in its avenue  
– it was so willing & so mild –  
that we took to bewildering among ourselves;  
we could hear faint praise  
for our lives dispersing grass to grass,  
so we knelt there, leaning our heads  
low among the buttercup bees while it lasted,  
bee visits dusting the pistils  
of our ears,  
until, shifting their several barely  
tenable voids, my charges  
hoisted up on their slight bones again  
& admitted the airs that then plucked  
them off to vanish. They went with the last  
of my name & the names I knew in their mouths.

Maybe sometime will I wade the cool  
humdrum morning prattle from the springs  
down to where it first widens & stills  
& lightly touch a finger upon the clear  
pool shallow there – zero, a vowel, ten, twenty  
unanswerable rings?

Martha Zweig

## BOOKS IN BRIEF

Jane Kenyon, *Otherwise: New and Selected Poems* (St. Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 1996, 230 pp., \$23.95 cloth, 1-55597-240-3).

Jane Kenyon has been one of the most skillful and appealing poets of what appears to be the dominant mode of late twentieth-century poetry: tightly-controlled open-form verses expressing the poet's observation of the life around her and her relationship with it. The geography of this mode has at one pole the minute adjustment of the person or object observed to the language; and at the other, the expansion or explosion or implosion of this observation to the psychological, the historic, and sometimes the cosmic. Jane Kenyon moves between these poles gracefully and eloquently:

A ledge of ice slides from the eaves,  
piercing the crusted drift. Astonishing  
how even a little violence  
eases the mind.

Many of the early and middle-period poems remain snapshots or narrative observations – chapters in the portrait of the full life that this whole volume represents. More powerfully, beginning with “The Needle,” the process of close observation creates, by its own momentum, insights of ironic double vision or moments of transcendence. These may take the form of neat, surprising closures. A miniature example would be “The Shirt”:

The shirt touches his neck  
and smoothes over his back.  
It slides down his sides.  
It even goes down below his belt –  
down into his pants.  
Lucky shirt.

(There are delicious love poems throughout this volume, documenting her twenty-four-year marriage to Donald Hall.) A more representative Jane Kenyon poem is a condensed vignette implying a complex emotional state, containing language that reflects her consistent Protestant faith. She is not without irony: in her remarkable poem on her life-long clinical depression, “Having It Out with Melancholy,” section 3, “Suggestion from a Friend,” proclaims: “You wouldn’t be so depressed/ if you really believed in God.” Kenyon does not need to allude to the book of Job to make her point. Her life work is a testimony of faith. But the most moving poems, for me, are those in which she confronts mortality without the lenses of traditional religion. I don’t have room to quote them; get the book and read them for yourself. One is the eloquent lyric “Otherwise.” Another is the most complex and eloquent of all her poems, the astonishing “Happiness,” which she and her husband placed first in this book, so that it stains the white radiance of the whole volume that follows.

Marianne Boruch, *Moss Burning* (Oberlin, OH: Field Series, Oberlin College Press, 1993, 92 pp., \$12.95 paper, 0932440-63-0).

Boruch has the intense alertness that enables the poetic process to begin. But her observation is from the start sophisticated by metaphor, colloquial immediacy, and the lens of a highly original imagination. Listen to "The Crickets," that

moved their waterworld  
under the piano. All fall I came down at 5 a.m.  
to their sweet mad hundreds, the whole house  
drowning. But each dawn ended the mindless  
pull of that water, one oar and one oar and one oar –  
B flat maybe if I had any sort of ear.  
(My brother with perfect pitch would have turned his head,  
listened like a screw to wood...)

In "The Bog," the whole family sits silently, waiting for moose to appear. "How many bricks of quiet/ make a house of quiet big enough to hide in?" But no moose appear, and the poem ends:

The things  
one thinks of, sitting in a bog, alert  
to happenstance, to marvels – O human vanity – as if  
alertness were enough.

Alertness, though *sine qua non*, is not enough. Boruch adds negative capability ("One teacher doubts herself, and the children/ love that darkness"). She adds a narrative skill, much developed over her earlier volumes (look at the magical poem "The Boy Ghost"). She adds a profound and adventuresome scepticism, expressed in a mistrust of neat closure. Here's the end of "Wind Storm, Late March," in which the gale has taken down a bee tree:

The men were coming, their  
trucks and loud indifferent saws,  
bits of honey and wax  
to flying air. The bees – not even  
angry, soothed almost  
by such confusion,  
                                hovering there,  
hovering. What do we know of anything?  
The roar of men, the same  
storm all night...

Her mind moves in analogies, deepening as it moves. She has, furthermore, a mind that twists and leaps and dances in time and space. Many poems dramatize the process of this mercurial mind. Here's the end of "Up in Air," documenting the wandering imagination of the air traveler:

Below us, by now – Utah.  
Below Utah, molten ore.

(Stanza continues)

And still the plane – that roar is constant,  
 meaning fragile, meaning  
 about to change.

And consider how time swirls in space as the poet gazes through binoculars in “Distance,” which opens:

The boy swimming, barely swimming, holding on  
 to the styrofoam raft, thinking he's swimming,  
 swimming through his childhood like that, thinking  
 he's doing something – swimming –

Now a grown man,

someone else in the lake's  
 calm center, his boat nearly swamped,  
 tipping over. The man barely holds the whole business  
 upright, thinking he's almost there, if only,  
 thinking yes, this is sailing, thinking he's sailing,  
 sailing through his adulthood like that, thinking he's  
 doing something – sailing –

Consider how time and space swirl in the mind as the poet dramatises her consciousness with her rhythmic language and her taut line that she plays like a fly line. Boruch casts out rather differently in “For Emily Dickinson,” having resisted for years reading her seriously or visiting her Amherst home.

Still, once

walking past, I invented flowers  
 for your garden: the dumb, sweet heliotrope, the dull hiss  
 of lupine, delphinium's brooding reach.  
 Among them, you stood right up  
 and squinted. You who noticed everything  
 made nothing of me, one of the stupid  
 and unborn, not even the color  
 of a leaf yet.

**Jane Mead, *The Lord and the General Din of the World*** (Louisville, KY: Sarabande Books, 1996, 82 pp., \$12.95 paper, 0-9641151-1-5; \$19.95 cloth, 0-9641151-0-7).

Jane Mead also forges her poems out of the ores of her experience, but her experience has been more agonized than most, and many of these poems reflect the difficulty of wrestling for order and meaning in a dislocated universe. Her poems are dark, inward-turning, demanding, with flashes of wry humor. They are nearly all epistemological in their questioning. They labor heroically to understand the relationship of body, mind and soul. These are poems of rigorous and searching integrity, unafraid of abstraction, and it is a credit to Philip Levine that he selected this work, superficially so different from his own, for the first Katherine A. Morton Prize in Poetry from the new but already distinguished Sarabande Press.

To give a sense of Mead's achievement I need at least two samples. First, here's one from a wonderful sinuous lyric – not typical of her subjects but evidence of her

command of rhythm and verbal music. "Paradise Consists of Forty-nine Rotating Spheres" begins:

paradise gave me these legs  
     for spinning  
 weep and pray and be joyful  
 paradise gave me these legs  
     to weep and pray and be joyful  
 when I have fixed each corner  
     p l i é relevé spin  
 I start the silky spokes  
     p l i é relevé spin

and the poem ends:

    a perfect circle shakes the stars  
 mine's a pure imitation  
     sung from planets of memory  
     spun from threads of dreams  
 weep and pray and be joyful  
     paradise gave me these legs  
 that's all I need to know  
 paradise gave me these legs  
     for spinning  
 I have spun  
 forty-nine webs of silken threads  
     my window to the sky

While Kenyon and Boruch are both masters of metaphor, Mead works skillfully with extended metaphor, as here, where the dancing spinning spider is a haunting emblem of the poet. "Mapping the Mind" is another extended metaphor, this one post-modern in its self-reflexive process of composition.

Like Boruch, and quite unlike Kenyon, Mead cannot accept the satisfaction of easy closure. The varieties of attitudes toward closure in contemporary poetry take us right to the heart of the matter of form and function. Just today comes a letter from poet William Aiken, commenting on my remarks on closure in the summer issue. Aiken wonders "if the generally adopted stance against closure was not sound on purely philosophical grounds. For me there is closure in music, in emotions, in events which I remember. I recall Yeats saying that the rewriting of prose was endless, unlike the rewriting of a poem, which 'snapped shut like a box.' Yet Yeats' philosophical quest remained open-ended." Yes, perhaps, though Yeats did tend to keep prying open his boxes to remake himself in the poems. Since the poets I'm reviewing here are all at home with irony and paradox, perhaps it would be appropriate to suggest that a poet may convey philosophical open-endedness in a form that expresses a dedication to process through an art that itself paradoxically has elegant closure. I'll end with an example from Jane Mead – more representative of her work than the "Paradise" poem – and appropriately the last poem in her volume:

"Passing a Truck Full of Chickens  
at Night on Highway Eighty"

What struck me first was their panic.

Some were pulled by the wind from moving  
to the ends of the stacked cages,  
some had their heads blown through the bars –

and could not get them in again.

Some hung there like that – dead –  
their own feathers blowing, clotting

in their faces. Then

I saw the one that made me slow some –  
I lingered there beside her for five miles.

She had pushed her head through the space  
between bars – to get a better view.

She had the look of a dog in the back

of a pickup, that eager look of a dog  
who knows she's being taken along.

She craned her neck.

She looked around, watched me, then  
strained to see over the car – strained  
to see what happened beyond.

*That* is the chicken I want to be.

I recommend these three books as testimony to the vitality and diversity of poetry today. In their different ways they are unflinchingly honest, rich in colloquial music, attentive to their immediate surroundings but straining to see beyond them.

M. K. S.

## EDITOR'S NOTES

*The Beloit Poetry Journal* now has a web page, including submissions guidelines:

<http://zinnia.umfacad.maine.edu/~sharkey/bpj>

The editors wish to apologize to Jazmin Aminian de Ferreccio for our error in the spelling of her name in the Summer issue.