

— THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL —

Volume 47, Number 3

Spring 1997

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COVER: Robert Shetterly, *Spring Flora*, pen and ink.

IRISH WOMAN WASHING

Before the mirror of a cement toilet in a trailer park at Doolin
She undresses to the waist, plugs the sink, fills it from alternate
taps.

She splashes water under her arms, lathers soap between her
palms.

I watch her back arc as she bends, her breasts fall, convex –
Two clouds watching from the sky.

The backs of her legs tense when a stream of cold water trickles
down her belly.

She glances up, pulls a washcloth between her legs, rubs her
crotch;

Finished, she checks her face for blemishes.

This is the way women have washed for centuries.

This is the way, in a Degas pastel –
Light catching on the curve of a back,
A rainbow lying in a pool at the feet
The toe dried carefully – the hair tied in a knot –
Combed from the roots.

All of us lined up – cow-eyed, sleepy, hungry at the sink –
Mild, fiery girls, not yet knowing that in a moment the world will
change –

In the cold early morning air, half an hour, alone.

Two Poems

THE SOUND OF LISTENING

for Breyten Breytenbach

I listen to the others' listening:
 Not silence, but a lack, this sound of listening.
 The typical elements: nails, blood, thorns.
 We may lose ourselves in this.

Not silence, but a lack, this sound of listening –
 Attention asked for and granted.
 We may lose ourselves
 Before something momentous:

Attention asked for and granted.
 His baritone weaves through cracks
 Before something momentous
 Renders us impotent, though the feeling

His baritone weaves through cracks
 Builds in our chests. Our arms and legs
 Rendered impotent. The feeling
 That rapture should be out of the question here

Builds in our chests if not our arms or legs.
 Rapture becomes the center of the divine equation.
 That rapture should be out of the question here.
 I'm told I will not die.

Rapture the center of the divine equation,
 The typical elements: nails, blood, thorns.
 I'm told I will not die.
 I listen to the others' listening.

THE JUDGE

(San Diego, 1849)

The Ritual of Doors: the judge chants
Nihil dicit, nihil dicit. Naked beneath his robe
he dances the dance of war. His face
is streaked with clay, muleblood, charcoal.
A necklace of human ears, brittle and black.

Forget the pages at your fingers, forget his language –
he does not speak for you, does not speak your language.
He speaks for the dance, for war,
for the Yumas burned by a river outside Santa Cruz,
for the bonepickers cut by rifle fire,
for the muleherders forced off a cliff near Griffin,
for the boy taken gibbering from an abandoned mission,
disemboweled and dumped, guts in a muddy creek.

*Watch the trajectory, watch the arc, watch the way
the world treats the weak, the stupid, the ones
who cannot see the freedom of birds as the last insult.
Watch what happens when one man understands,
when one has been a witness and been witnessed,
has been an object of rumor and the origin of rumor,
an object of hate and the origin of hate. Watch.*

Watch the judge drop his robe to the floor of the tavern,
watch the whores lead their men upstairs barely conscious,
the dog come from under a table to lap blood from a man's temple,
the bartender back away, back into the dry darkness outside,
the doors, watch the doors. They begin to close, four of them.

North, east, south, west. Watch the judge.
Watch him dance through the west door as it swings shut.
His dance is precise, he knows just where to place his feet.
He is gone and the doors are closed:
the ritual of doors has ended. Another ritual has begun.

Brian Henry

Two Poems

AN ECSTASY

*Our hands were firmly cimented
With a fast balme, which thence did spring,
Our eye-beams twisted, and did thred
Our eyes upon one double string.*

— John Donne

He's there first. Always.
Eases the blue van –
rust nibbling tactfully at the wheelrims –
against the curb,
idles, one long forearm along the seat.

She pulls in, onyx Audi, plates PATRICE,
tail fanned a little from the curb.
Checks for lipstick on her teeth,
constructs a smile.

His place or hers depends upon the day.
The van for frolic Tuesdays, May or June,
the lindens wantoning green pollen,
the neighbors' sheets snapping on the line.
She's best for smoky days like single malt,
November, fog, and rain.

They talk and gaze,
and gaze.
Their eyebeams twist, etcetera,
but mostly they do hair.
He buffs her pageboy like the van,
to bring up the shine. She fashions cowlicks,
twines a lovelock round each ear,
then disarrays it down his face
and kisses out a nose and eyes.

They're vertical, yet angled
at a yearning lean.
It's Tuesday, after all,
a corner lot.

Then she gets out.
She wobbles a little in her shoes.
Her face is lax with joy.
One little golden ball
drops from her lobe and rolls into the leaves.

Around the corner comes the big dim thing
that sweeps the streets,
maybe vacuums, probably just wheezes things
around a little.
The earring relaxes in the gutter.

INERTIA

“Page 26, please: Minor Goddesses.
Yes of course you should take notes.”

- I Worshipped (sp?) – Fertile Crescent
 - A. “Fabled, curved, & fecund as her mother” (26)
 - 1. Tigress Tigris

- II Greeks
 - A. Understood at once it would not do to elevate her to Olympus.
 - 1. Who could see her with Athena?
 - a. “fleet and flashingeyed” (27) etc.
 - b. smart
 - 2. Even Aphrodite
 - a. Worked at beauty
 - b. Worked at love
 - B. Built her a temple
 - 1. Minor.
 - 2. Marble, no rugs, a breeze to sweep

- III Kids?
 - A. Yes.
 - B. Immaculate Conception
 - 1. “Raised themselves,” she said. “It’s quite amazing.”

- IV As Woman of 90’s
 - A. Friend of Can’t. (Used to be friend of Won’t but they split when Can’t moved in.)
 - B. Coat of Arms
 - 1. Bottle (vodka/chardonnay)
 - 2. Comforter (LLBean p.93)
 - 3. Phone
 - a. Cellular.
 - b. Other.
 - 1. Message says: “Inertia. In-ER-she-a. I’ll get back to you.”

- V Quiz Tues.

THE BLUE GAZEBO

1

Gazebos used to face azaleas and circular drives,
or fronted the prairie's smokeless horizon, the bent
acres of wheat; housing in their rafters a squabble
of unfledged robins, the rain a sloped curtain
between private thoughts and mother's long-sleeved
guests lounging in rattan chairs. Gazebos had benches,
to spread open books of poems, and filigree moldings
that mazed the declining sun, and in a steady flush
of darkness, airs of cicadas and crickets passed
through your skin, the moon let down her hair.

2

Other kinds facing the sea:
a rotted lattice taxing the worst
of wind; behind it, a tidal marsh
not so settled as the world: hundreds
of fiddler crabs, their single claw
the weight of ideas lifted more easily
in water, our small brains made buoyant
by eons of emptiness, a picnic cooler's sweat
the labor of unlucky thousands.

3

We're on Brighton's seedy pier
and watch the rolling shale
from Arnold's mouth, and practice
being heard above the roar. A drunk
on the street begs your fish and chips
that burns off two layers of speech
and newspaper cones rub headlines
into your hands. Back at the Grandview,
I look through the telescope in our
sitting room and think, "Nana, I'm here,
you needn't have left. Listen to the music
of the shore!" Imagine if she hadn't

(stanza continued)

taken the steamer, performed in smoky
halls on the Bowery; hadn't tucked herself
into the shade that comes only once
between wars, twitching her ruffled
skirt, her voice slippery as onion domes
and a tenor's lies. If she hadn't sashayed
through a dream of mustaches and slow-dancing
beneath white Imperial tents. I'd be
smoking a pipe, my feet on the hassock,
saying, "Remember the pavilion?"

4

This collapsible one we've bought
is intermittently blue: alternate
triangles of white gash the taut roof
but the plastic hue's the same
as light that filters through dahlias.
Soft mesh walls. Zippered flaps. Who knew
this century would stretch so much,
that one could get 50% off and never
feel diminished?

5

We spend the night in here,
mosquitoes entuning the air
unseemly. Candle flickering.

6

The heavenly ones of course lack
roofs and the streaming cerulean
of God's breath is the frost
along angels' limbs that continually
dissolves as they touch each other
which is forbidden.

7

Squawking crows flap down into our compost,
stabbing black holes in sunken peppers.

(stanza continued)

I remember a city boy picking blackberries,
crab apples dangling from an old man's
tree, just beyond fingers. Sourness
and love. I remember last year's
screen-house torn into by the falcon
diving, a shadow rodent gnawing
his mind as he lay on the gravel
floor, the cats outside watching,
tree toads beginning their song.
How brown the gleam of his eyes
in moonlight, hooked beak and tear-shaped
nostril-hole, wings splayed outward.

8

Let me not die broken-backed
between chrysanthemums escaped
from aluminum edging and a wild
scallion's wavering green hair.

9

January. The roof and attached soft
screens are folded on the workbench
like uninhabited skin, the bird-bath
bowl striated from the scraping
of finches' feet. Outside, the snow
halfway up my study window glows,
reflecting a lit floor lamp
from the Thirties – its fluted brass
stem the shadow of a tree
rooted to sun: azure sky this
pc screen with white words
floating like clouds as I step
into a little transparent house,
all my desire clinging to its walls,
ice artfully tapered, glistening.

John Allman

Two Poems**THE INDIGENOUS HUNGER ARTIST**

the cupboard is empty
but I imagine it full

of salmon
that taste like ocean

salmon, I praise
the salt of your skin

salmon, I feast
on the salt of your skin

praise and feast
praise and feast

salmon, I praise
the salt of your flesh

salmon, I feast
on the salt of your flesh

praise and feast
praise and feast

salmon, I praise
the memory of salt

salmon, I feast
on the memory of salt

still contained
in your thin spine

praise and feast
praise and feast

salmon, I praise
the clean, white salt

salmon, I feast
on the clean, white salt
of skin and flesh
of thin spine and delicate bones
praise and feast
praise and feast
salmon, I praise
the empty cupboard
salmon, I feast
from the empty cupboard
salmon, I praise
salmon, I feast
on the salt
of my skin
on the salt
of my hands

AT THE DIABETIC RIVER

salmon disappear
my father goes blind
he kneels on the bank
close to the river
so I can wash his face
with the sterile water
o, the ghosts of salmon
o, the ghosts of my father's eyes

Sherman Alexie

Three Poems**ELEGY**

for Meyer Kopp

*Death dissolved you sweetly,
grain by hourly grain,
till all that was left was sweetness,
till only your sweetness remained.*

For eighty years, buying time,
you sent ahead what we all send:
your hair, your teeth, the slender ends
of fingernails, not minding
any more than when
it was your dearest moments
you offered to oblivion.
As if the pages of an album
in one final turning, turned
in the currents of a fire,
gave up their scenes for burning – burned
your mother's kitchen, the harness shop
your father kept, head-down his sidelocks
swung to the hammer's tap. A choir
of village children in a line,
voices to whom you sing in answer,

suddenly surrendering
to the time the liveliest of dancers
chose you at a landsleit ball
remembered, remembering.

Forgetting then, forgotten all
the passing things that anger was,
releasing one by one to silence
the words of several languages,

the names you gave your children,
whose tender child at last you were,
taking less than you had been
therefore away from them forever.

*Sweetly, grain by grain,
till only your sweetness remained.*

ISLANDED WITH CHILDREN

I dreamt a palimpsest of beach
written on and waved clear,
a place I stand and teach
from memory a Hebrew prayer.

Islanded, with sons and daughter,
we are escaped alone
sole remnant of a slaughter
till other children come

from islands of their own,
left out of Creation
only in a late account,
across the fringe of tide,

two by two at first,
but numbers do not mount:
some leave as more arrive.
The children chorus like the surf,

song raggedly begun
ends in a partial unison
and starts again. My daughter rocks,
repeating the notes I substituted,

the words I used instead
of those that I forgot,
to others who teach others
to their left the chanted song

in which I just discern my errors
before the singing changes further,
my own part almost gone,
the children almost strangers

until the first one comes
who is, who only knows the sounds
he hears are sounds of prayer, or were.

THE FIND

for my son, Matthias

For days, all day the sounds we could not place –
above us sometimes, sometimes underground,
the smallest fragments of a newborn wail.
No human baby nearby, a kitten somewhere,
lodged in the house's body, we settled on –
and searched, straining at first to hear the cries
but then, now that we had the tune, we heard
its faintest whispers. Even when we didn't
we felt that soon we would, and so we did:
the first day and the second. The third day
was mostly interval, and we reprised
the rounds of everywhere we'd thought to look,
no one more intent than you at going
anywhere the sound appeared to lead.
That summer you'd begun to muster cool
against intrusion, holding yourself apart
from all of us, building over what
you were, that sweetest, most forthcoming child,
in long muscle and silence. Offended when
I kept you from the sloping wooden ladder
to the roof, you brought a flashlight to the basement,
stamping downstairs. You let your interest
resume its technical expression: pleased
at the sub- and super structure of the house,
basement and attic, places of pipes and struts
and wires, finding what offers and disguises
access: hatches, grills, and gratings; inspecting
vents and ducts.

When night came no one had heard
the animal for hours, and I prepared
us for defeat, wanting to hide this one
mortality at least. I said what we thought
weak cries within were stronger, but from outside
and at a distance, that it had been rescued
by its mother. Nobody was convinced.
And then the slimmest filaments of call
did lead outside, behind the house, under
the long porch, which I probed with light.
You took the flashlight and crawled in. We waited,
our shins brushed occasionally by the beams,
listening to the fricatives of crawl –
the scrape and sweep, sent into flurries
by more new pulses of beacon mewling –
followed by another sound, the purest
vocative, halfway between an Oh
and Ah, high-pitched, descending, all trail
and aftersound, wind-down and exhalation,
stretching the time it took to say itself,
to say you, since it was yours, was you,
and is – you constant, Ah covert you,
you heart's cry in answer, you for whom
I didn't know I waited – go in and I
will wait for you again always now,
you emerging suddenly, steadily,
with the bundled life riding on your palm,
already something muted in your pride.

Jason Sommer

Two Poems

THE WILDNESS OF MARRIAGE: MONTEREY OILLIGHT

for Iver

What you'll remember. What God won't,
wipe away casually as the milk glow
haloing your moistening mouth, a baby waiter
praising chicken garlicky in butter, in sauce

on some impeccable white plate, the whole
thrust toward you so how could you
refuse? The shrimp dipped in batter, spitting
golden, crumbling to shards. Muck on your fingers,
the sweet grease I study in oillight yellowing

your face. Eating – devouring – as we swallow
and are consumed: Aristotle clearer than endearments
we've never memorized, chanted, by rote, *The Nicomachean
Ethics*,

how those who rejoice most fiercely in life

are most devastated by death. You can't know, Love.
What I think. Believe. Remember. Pray. Consume
more than a glassful of clear-gold beer and crumbs
suck under my tongue until dissolved.

And if we speak of weather,
a gold wash of dusk shading to purple, weighting
the coastline like a cloud expanding until it lavenders
to a stretch of glorious Elysian gray,
we taste this inconsequentialness, laugh while the darker half

of my mind dissolves, shrugs itself away though you're here,
always, inside it, as it floats me out beyond the gut-
baying sealions, beyond rocks that can crack bodies
to the merest remnant of bone-marrow: inside it while blue-
black waves roil and I disappear beneath, breath pulled

aching, tender, as a baby from pink lungs, and if I drown,
it's inevitable: I've rejoiced most fiercely.

But Aristotle didn't understand, perhaps, the horror of
relinquishings:

in pursuit of self-perfection, in tracking the moral life,

the shell of even my ego can crumble between tightening
fingers.

And Aristotle couldn't understand, perhaps, this simplest of life-
designs:

to eat with you, make love to you, sit with you
on a gigantic, ocean-swept rock

while red-gold water drowns a setting sun,
slide permeable skin over your five finger-bones and pray
that whatever causes our deaths won't seek you out for
centuries,

oh too alive, too beautiful
for an ordinary demise.

THE WOMAN WHO WOULD BE O'KEEFFE

She can't move. Scarcely an inch. The only artificial limb
her mind, which freezes here, keeps her leaning
against a royal-blue armchair, its ragged white stars
sewn perpetually into fabric her thoughts will never penetrate.

A cup of black-skinned cocoa balances in its groove
on a sagging padded arm; she sips it as she reads,
Emerson's "Nature" again, though the cocoa, hours thick,
remains impervious to her sipping. But if she lacks nourishment,

she won't find it in this essay, Emerson's platitudes about
Godhead

more irritating than replenishing

though age hasn't fossilized her. Eighty-one. And the woman is I,
a distant speck, projection, tugged toward some future I can only
imagine,

a battered one-bedroom house, husband dead,
cocker spaniels – the black one, blonde – buried
twenty years ago in the backyard of the shack I shared with my
husband

then. Even now, from this armchair, I can view its ragged glory:

the fake red windmill spinning in a sibilant wind;
the weeds, waist-tall, winding yellow, yellower
over the cocker spaniels' graves; my husband waving
from a smeared kitchen window – it's too depressing to
contemplate.

But in my armchair, I can observe anything.

Sip my cocoa, flatten Emerson on one knee
with the panglorious detachment of a god. Study the gray-
bellied attic spider crawling up a chair side as if it amounted

to more than a speck, as if I couldn't crush it
with a fingernail. And who am I, besides *an unfortunate*,
a porous-boned woman you might pass on a street
hoping not to knock against her, skin her shrivelled shins,

gaze at pityingly as, hunched and humped, she creeps down
the gutter, both feet meandering foolishly away from the curb?
I'm the woman who would be O'Keeffe.

When I was twenty, I was with her in my mind, that artificial device

managing to propel me still. She's limping back
from a bone-hunt with one red-gold chow in tow, a lion of a dog
so ferociously huge that, when his tongue lolls out, pink
as a baby's butt, the surprise splits me quietly as a dandelion

dismantling beside the road. All day she tramps through mountains
ochre-hot, savoring the cracked, broken bones spiralling
into stains toward some distant singing center, the blacker abandoned
marrow. From place to place the bones silently call, each skull

and pelvis individually pitched, so, when she nears, the cacophony
nearly deafens her. And I'm there, wrapping each dried bone-heap
tenderly into a moistened towel, preserving the fragments of a story
I've never learned – except for the most important part: that genius,

according to Schopenhauer, vaults from the will to the world
as idea, the perfect glimmering porcelain of a bone's
particular power to thrill still cupped on a trembling palm.
The woman who would be O'Keeffe fucks the world

for nothing else. In a housedress faded to red flowers and black
cracking rainboots I trail O'Keeffe, minus Hamilton,
back to that house still equipped with its marvelous archway,
door. The cocoa starts to sour. Emerson's example fades though

not completely: every thing outside the soul *is* nature, I discover,
standing behind O'Keeffe as, with a warped serving spoon,
she ladles red beans into shallow white bowls, the chow shivering
beneath the table, knocking his furred crimson head against the
peeling

wood underside. I accept my hot bowl, my tarnished silver spoon,
sit down beside O'Keeffe. Through the smeary, dust-chapped window,
sunset: bloody as an egg. I'm eighty-one years old. My house
is a wreck. My body is destroyed. My husband is dead.

I lap up the beans on white, white bread, push them in their stickiness
deeper inside my mouth.

Terri Brown-Davidson

EATING *BLUMEN*

Pansies, eyelid thin,
garnish the chilled tortellini.
Petals printed with purple suns
trick my tongue, blossoms
like breeze off a milkweed field.
When I hold color
against my mouth's ridgy peak,
blue sweetens, orange nips
my cheek, green
twinges bitter, sublime,
and yellow is the new moon
settling on my lips,
dense as a tongue
thick with crying.

Sara Greenslit

Three Poems by Eugenio de Andrade

Translated from the Portuguese by Alexis Levitin

A PORTA

Porque
por essa porta
sobre a rugosa luz da tarde
terás ainda tempo
de pegar nos pés e meter-te a caminho,
sem raízes
a enredar-te os passos,
pois para a morte
não tens ainda palavras,
ainda não, ainda não, ainda não.

THE DOOR

For
through that door
over the ragged light of afternoon
you will still have time
to get to your feet and take to the road,
without roots
entangling your steps,
since for death
you still have found no words
not yet, not yet.

COROA DE LUME

Oiço-o partir, o sol da mão.
O prazer do ofício,
a paciência de areia
abrindo para os caminhos do verão,
também eles a chegar
ao fim. Foi assim que partilhei
o pão, o tão amado
sopro vindo do sul.
Não tardará o sono: já
começou na fala.
É tempo de atirar aos cães
a coroa de lume.

INCANDESCENT CROWN

I listen to it leave, the sun of this hand.
The pleasure of my craft,
the patience of sand
opening upon summer's paths,
they, too, coming
to an end. That was how I shared
my bread and those beloved
gusts blowing from the south.
Sleep will not be long: already
it's invading speech.
It is time to hurl it to the dogs,
that incandescent crown.

LUGAR DO LUME

Depois de romper a água.
Depois.
Quando o aroma da estrela
da tarde anunciar
a ressurreição do trigo.
Depois da última casa, lugar
do lume. Onde o bastardo
coração recomeça
a cantar com o verão.
Depois do silêncio ter subido
aos mastros, e o olho da cal
se ter afogado.
Depois. Depois.

THE PLACE OF THE FIRE

Only after the bursting forth of water.
Only then.
When the fragrance of the evening
star announces
the resurrection of the wheat.
After the last house, the place
of the fire. Where the bastard
heart begins again
to sing with summer.
After silence has climbed
the masts and the whitened eye
has drowned.
Only then. Only then.

Eugenio de Andrade
translated from the Portuguese by Alexis Levitin

EQUAL AND OPPOSITE

She mentioned the swirl of the sink drain
is seen again in the spiral galaxies and the silk
roses at the hem and the radial starfish and the palms
injected with antibiotics for a blight in the crowns
of their foliage. Form that becomes a huge understanding
can start anywhere with a glance or a small glass of water
on the table at a press conference with uncomfortable chairs
and encompass it all or maybe you're staring at the strawberry
begonia and your eyes refocus on their own a little closer
to the x hundreds of electron midges at one end of the yard
to the other which the swallows if you weren't there would filter
like the straining whales.

A dressmaker her pins like sperm gone rigid in fixative.
Her reaching out with a graceful arm for a black crepe
party dress for shimmy down the street and sequins for emphasis
a little helix up her sleeve. And based on her observations
she proposed like Aristotle the big and the small follow the same
obligations. That given symmetry there might be another band
temperate down south of the belt of the equator like a silk cord
on her chemise. And as in the relation of shoulders to knees
a set of opposite winds nervous to go with it.
Those of the earth she suggested were networked and gelatinous
at the place the sea and sky merge as far as they could see.
And if that isn't a placenta she said I don't know what is.

Allan Peterson

Two Poems

MIME

I do a mime-walk:
moving forward
and more forward,
moving here.
Can I move you with me?

Print
stays.
Pages
stay.

A word in the dictionary stays
in the same place.

I hold my hand out –
an offering to the weather –
rub the sudden surge between my fingers,
and shake it,
dripping,
off.

I turn up my unseen collar,
lower my head,
and huddle into my elbows.

Now the element is pelting:
I must push against it,
leaning forward, slogging.
My shoes are sucked
down into the mud.

Look:

I can hardly lift them.
Nor can I step down firmly.
I squelch.

I must take off these brimming brogues
mid empty them, peel down my socks
and wring them out,
all the while shuddering.

It is cold.

It is raining.

Did you get wet?

I lean forward again
on a bright day,
my face to the wind.
I grip in the air the handlebars
established
thirty inches apart.

I have been pedalling easily,
lifting my knees
to slow pressure.

Now I push harder, lift
higher my muscles, straining;
shove, and shove, inclining
my body up to the summit:
pump

and pump past.

It is easy to coast:
body arched back, feet firm, knees neither rigid
nor returning.

But retreating into
STOP

SLOW

DOWN

I throw myself into each curve,
the handlebars angled
precisely
thirty inches apart.

I *will* keep the shape,
for I *must* hang on,
but Oh!
It has let go
of me!

And I'm down on my rump
with my legs in the air
and the wheels spinning.

And I hope you're
out of
breath.

BLOOD TYPE: B POSITIVE

– like crazy –
 I mean, after the plunge
 and splash at the pumphouse, surge
 of full seething, I do have a grand
 wash down, but in less than a moment
 diverge: in fact, I'm reduced to nothing
 but red thread sliding into a tunnel,
 yet the walls are so thin, I become
 one with division, and afterwards, what does it matter
 for even a flutter of interest pulsing you forward is hardly worthwhile
 if you're out of all oxygen: everything's dark
 and the smell – well, a carbon dioxide cell is really
 no pal to have near in close quarters, but stick around here
 very long and you're sure to be sent to the cleaners,
 and there you get siphoned so clean you're nothing but salt and water,
 a ghost of your former self, without any sin I admit,
 but also without any iron; the guts (you'll excuse the expression)
 are gone, and there's nothing to do
 but draw in hopefuls of air
 the only way to repair
 for running
 around –

 – like crazy –
 I mean, after the plunge
 and splash at the pumphouse, surge
 of full seething ...

Patricia Conner

DRILLS AND INSTRUCTIONS

The winds that blow over India in the northern winter come from the northeast and are called the dry monsoons. They bring little rain because they sweep over the land.

I sat still the day my father died. Don't cry,
I said to my sister who was beginning,
and the dryness rattled inside my chest.

If you have one bushel of apples and take away
one peck, what do you have left?

If you have one pound of green tea and take away
 $\frac{5}{8}$ of a pound, what do you have left?

Why is subtraction so hard? I said. Why does
subtraction always mean fractions and mixed things?
When are we going to get back to geography?

That week the dryness was thick as chalk dust.
It was everywhere. Stop crying, I shouted
all the way to school.

This is a specimen of my Palmer Method of Penmanship,
written naturally, freely, legibly and in accordance
with the drills and instructions in this book.

My ink spilled and went its way down the sloped
wooden desk and into my lap.

It was cool and mysterious as the wet monsoons
of India, and I could say that I was crying
over spilled ink, over new and harder problems
in subtraction or the long-awaited winds
of the northern summer that sweep across
the Indian Ocean, gathering the much-needed moisture.

Julie Herrick White

PHEROMONES

Perfumes, grounded in the anal sacs of deer. Of the civet cat. Of pigs. The chemical language of beasts. Molecular words absorbed directly into the epidermis. Encrypted communication. Humans have misplaced the codebook. Carnal knowledge has been forgotten. Skin=largest organ. Porous body bag.

A woman's menstrual cycle takes cues from the scent of her lover. Biorhythmic fragrance. The vomeronasal organ (VNO), long considered vestigial, is now thought to be the processor of sensuality. Soon human musk will be synthesizable. Attraction will be profound. And costly.

The hides of lovers rubbing together. A curriculum of body juices. Histidine seeps into the follicular canal. The tremoring of the keratin filament. The American preoccupation with bathing=self-defeating. Natural attractants are washed away. Arousal is thrown out with the bath water. Ozone is strongly associated with freshness and rain. Sometimes we make love in the shower. Sex is an alternate means of soap. Wet hair clings to itself and to thoughts. An icon of peptide bondage.

A beaver has no choice but to mate under the influence of its partner's musk. Chemical weapons. The mechanism of delivery is complicated and meaningful. Aerosolization through mastication. Champing at the bit of dreams and impure thoughts. Bacteria have colonized the surface. We find their excrement arousing. Often during love there is an irresistible urge to taste. The tongue's papillae examine the skin. Absorb the flatulence of pores. Vanilla extract is a turn on.

Desquamation leads to sloughing. Skin cells float in the body's stratosphere. A sexy dandruff getting sucked into the VNO. Sometimes we make love in the shower. After the rain, the ozone. Zone of O. Women prefer perfume to smell fresh and natural rather than sensual and arousing. Turning people on can be degrading. The smell of wet bark, moss, and leaves. The smell of topsoil and professionalism. Of empowerment. Beavers and pigs. Many anal sacs are harvested each year. Sometimes we make love in the shower. Soap and water. Sex is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine

(stanza continued)

percent body odor. The B.O.-zone is responsible for the so called 'feminine glow.' Using sex as a weapon is considered unfair. Sleeping your way into the upper levels of the atmosphere will result in a breakdown of theory. Sometimes we make love in the shower. Sloughing is one of the seven deadly means of seduction. Mechanisms of delivery include urination and the U.S. mail. Pores are holes in the self. Humans have misplaced the codebook. Mothers milk is flavored with vanilla extract. Permission has been granted to bottle human sexuality in crystal. Mating rituals are thought to lack a psychological component. The self is now considered vestigial. Her body is sloughed away in snow flakes that drift to the stars.

DANGER: NOSE PLUGS REQUIRED BEYOND THIS POINT.

David Sheridan

BOOKS IN BRIEF

In 1942, when I was studying prosody (we called it versification then), the New Criticism was in full spate. We admired the well-wrought urn and explored the structural implications of irony and ambiguity. We honed our skills in analysing “the musical structure of poetry: meter, stanza-form, rhyme, alliteration, quantity... things any child can point at, draw diagrams of, and count.” These are the aspects of structure that **Randall Jarrell** elected to exclude in an iconoclastic lecture he delivered at Princeton in 1942. Thomas Travisano, browsing through the Jarrell papers in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library, has discovered this lecture, and *The Georgia Review* has published it in the Winter 1996 issue (Vol. 50, #4) under the title “Levels and Opposites: Structure in Poetry.” It is easy to imagine why Jarrell chose not to publish it himself: it was profoundly offensive to his conservative mentors and friends – the reigning emperors of literary theory: Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, Yvor Winters, and especially Jarrell’s respected and beloved John Crowe Ransom.

Today this lecture appears as a milestone in the evolution of critical theory. To evaluate Jarrell’s approach I propose to summarize it and then test it. How valuable is it in helping us to read a strong contemporary text?

Jarrell begins with an essentially Romantic proposition: that twenty-five centuries of regarding a poem as a spacial unit (“those black eternal blocks of ink”) has blinded us to the fact that a poem is “completely temporal, about as static as an explosion. There are no things in a poem, only processes.” He then (apparently borrowing the image of the snowball from Bergson’s concept of *durée* in *Creative Evolution*) describes the reading or hearing of a poem as a snowball rolling down the hillside, accumulating its substance as it rolls. He respectfully rejects the view of his mentors that the poet “imposes unity on his variety, form on his matter, just as mind imposes order on the universe.” In opposition he quotes Blake: “Unity and Morality are secondary considerations in poetry.”

Jarrell's theory supersedes the Classic emphasis on being, space, unity, and permanence (I'm leaning here on Donald Sutherland's classification in *On, Romanticism*). He even exceeds the Romantic's commitment to becoming, time, diversity, and change. His is a Baroque conception of poetic organization: full of strain and tension – intensifying the opposing forces. His model is therefore dialectic – Blake's "Without Contraries is no progression." He recognizes this dialectic in the tension implicit in metaphor, in metrical counterpoint, in drama, in irony and paradox, and in the "struggle and consequent equilibrium" between the Conscious and Unconscious. Poetry, he further maintains, needs dialectical methods to mediate between the individual and the contradictory social order. He attacks the notion that the structure of poetry should be logical; deductive logic is intrinsically static, timeless – of being rather than becoming. Poetry, unlike formal logic, "is interested in communicating extremely complicated systems of thoughts, perceptions, and emotions, which have extremely complicated nonlogical structures." He supplies his own catalogue of structures he finds appropriate to poetry and concludes with this insight: "Anyone who has written much poetry knows how pathetically inadequate our knowledge of structure is; how infinitely more he does as a poet than he knows as a critic."

From Horace to Sydney to Shelley to Eliot, most of the valuable literary theories have been those proposed by the poets themselves, and Jarrell's lecture, sketchy and underdeveloped as it may appear, seems to me a candidate to join that company. Let's see how it applies a half-century later.

Patricia Goedicke's *Invisible Horses* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1996, 164 pp., \$12.95 paper, 1-57131-403-2) meets Jarrell's challenge to communicate "extremely complicated systems of thoughts, perceptions, and emotions." Her subject is no less than an exploration of how the human mind works in the body. Expressing the dialectical tension between perceptive consciousness and the unconscious, her metaphors are mercurial, metamorphosing from physical to mental image and back – from the outer world perceived to the inner conceived.

In shimmering strobic flashes, in the chasm between systole
 and diastole I wake up gasping
 in glittering ice-caves, tumbling across great voids
 with no one to catch me but shapes
 I make up myself, and they keep disappearing.

Goedecke's settings are often oceanic ("the wet undersea flare/ of one thought looming across another"), often dissolving in a question ("Swimming below the world naked// ideas shift, cells press against the spine, rippling/ tentatively onto the tongue// and then out, splashing into sight/ but only in glimpses, what was that?"), sometimes coiling through extended metaphors ("The imagery tries to help").

The adventure is into the subaqueous forests of epistemology: the philosopher's "subject and object and the nature of reality." The truly courageous adventurer presses below the threshold of conscious perception ("In May 1995/ for instance, under the empty eye/ of Cygnus, the Swan that leads us. . ."), beyond "barely traceable constellations/ that exist in the mind only," to the insight that "we are what we are: exploding," paradoxically "*Expanding even as we disintegrate.*" Magically the poems enact the adventure while recording it. And on the very frontier of her exploration the poet confronts the dilemma: that she has tracked ideas beyond language. In a conflagration, the "invisible horses" of the book's title "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
 intracerebral loops

there's no lassoing them.

In "The Word Float" Goedicke commands images beyond the paths of evanescent sensation – "what will not stay" (music of a passing car, imaginary fish, "casual cycles of desire") – and then seeks language "for the soaring need/ having imagined them, somehow// to articulate these vast shimmerings." The closest she can come is the italicised conclusion to another poem:

*O shadowy
trout of consciousness, surely the first link
in the long chain that delivers us is made of more than ink.*

Surely. And surely we must honor those whose calling is to translate these preverbal and subliminal shimmerings into ink.

Goedicke, like Jarrell, conceives poetry as perceiving and realizing "extremely complicated nonlogical structures." (I am certainly awed and excited at her success.) Further, she would satisfy his demand for a Blakean dialectic. The contraries are everywhere. She is intensely self-conscious about the tension between the Conscious and the Unconscious; her poems move delicately back and forth between the two realms, always on the lookout for the border crossings. "For every positive/ a negative"; "chord,/ discord"; "no love/ possible without separation." Many poems wonderfully enact the tensions between objective time and space and subjective. In "Danger of Falling" the poet moves through measurable time and space in an airplane, as her imagination races, divided between "one second fixed" and the wonder of "whizzing across the face/ of an electric cloud chamber" – "the sheer strangeness of it, the extraordinary being-here// or anywhere." On this frontier we encounter a new renaissance of wonder.

The deep structure of these poems, their style in the profoundest sense, is richly baroque. Time and space, being and becoming wrestle endlessly. "Where is the vanished One/ we used to believe in?" the poet asks. One answer is in another poem, "Look! It's Poetry," an argument of self with self, concluding with a vision of wholeness, "monolithic as mountains,"

. . . calm, perfectly untroubled
by ourselves or anyone else,
who would we speak to?
Wordless
with silence ringing in our ears
Listen! What would we hear?

Against this image of static silence Goedicke opposes the wild energy of process. *Explosion* is both her word and Jarrell's. And

she implies also the Bergsonian *durée*: "whatever enters the ears/ hides in us forever." Against this partial determinism she projects the exuberance of the adventure: "earth in its orbit speeds// like an open convertible with you, helpless, standing up in it,/ at the prow of a ship with the wind, telephone poles, stars/ streaming through your hair."

Jarrell's prescient lecture has provided a convenient structure for approaching Goedicke's extraordinary book. But he would have been the last to want his theorizing used (like Aristotle's *Poetics*) as a Procrustean bed. Poetry has evolved in many directions in this half-century, and Goedicke has forged her own poetic. The structure of her poems is absolutely her own. Her thesis and antithesis are more apt to end with a question than with a synthesis: negative capability as an energy source! Another energy source for her is the power of music, not only in the complex orchestration of the poems (Goedicke has a splendid ear), but in the importance of music as subject and object in the poems. The capstone of this volume is the long concluding poem, "Directing Chapultepec Castle (*in Beethoven's Fifth; the Mexico City Performance*)," in which the symphony becomes the correlative of the poet's condition, and she sweeps the reader along in a torrent of transforming metaphor. Jarrell does not demand visionary poetry, but he points the way to it. And here, I suspect, is a poetics beyond his imagining.

Listen to the opening lines of Goedicke's "Under Cygnus":

It is all fire, fire and the reflections of fire;
 long tendrils of flame looking at themselves and leaping
 over water. In the moist tissues of the mind
 we lie on our backs looking up
 at the stars of the hippocampus.
 The limbic system's
 hidden messages scatter themselves through the cortex
 like the Milky Way, yes.

Jarrell lists about thirty-five structural methods appropriate to the poetry he seeks, admittedly omitting the whole repertoire of musical techniques. It's a temptation to illustrate these from Goedicke's work. But I'll settle for just enjoying the cadences of

this passage, the dance of the vowels and consonants. Recall that the hippocampus, at the base of the brain, is associated with memory, that the limbic system is associated with sexual behavior and instinctual emotions, and that the cortex (the grey matter) is the seat of thought – both abstract and concrete. (As in all poetry, the more you know, the richer the feast.) And then envision what Goedicke does superbly – the dissolving from one theater of metaphor to another in these gorgeously layered dramatic poems, “yes.”

More ancient structures

I rather assumed that Gary Snyder's new book would similarly reflect Jarrell's poetic, but close reading revealed that such an analysis would be largely irrelevant. Snyder's prosody, including the deep structure of his work, exemplifies a parallel if no less powerful literary track.

Let me say first that *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1996, 166 pp., \$20. hardbound, 1-887178-20-1) is a beautifully designed book. Counterpoint (formerly North Point) has served the poet well in sewn binding, imaginative endpapers, comfortable dimensions, crisp typography, and a luscious dust jacket. The poems merit this gracious treatment, though the ideal structure would be that of the book's controlling metaphor: a Chinese scroll. In a note to the first poem, “Endless Streams and Mountains,” on an actual thirteenth-century scroll of that name, Snyder instructs the reader: “Unroll the scroll to the left, a section at a time, as you let the right side roll back in. Place by place unfurls.” Forty years of poems, published separately in journals, here unfurl “place by place” in a wandering voyage-sequence – apparently linear in time and space. But only apparently. The dimensions are multiple. Snyder is a scholar, sophisticated in the geologic and cosmic as well as the geographical and historical dimensions of his world. In the “deer-moving dusk” he visualizes “a million years of sniffs./ licks, lip and/ reaching tongue.” In “Old Woodrat's Stinky House” he contemplates

A venerable desert woodrat nest of twigs and shreds
 plastered down with ambered urine
 a family house in use eight thousand years,
 & four thousand years of using writing equals
 the life of a bristlecone pine –

Those four thousand years of writing are part of Snyder's heritage, and Buddhist and Western texts weave through the music of his poems, along with the oral history of many cultures – sermons, tales, chants, songs, proverbs, anecdotes, snapshots, strip-maps, prayers. In "The Blue Sky," a suite of variations on the facts and functions of blue, he sets the language dancing:

Blue. Belo, "right colors of the flames"
 flamen / brahman,
 beltane, "blue fire" –
 Sky.
 [The dappled cloud zone –
 Sanskrit *sku* "covered"
 skewed (pied) skewbald (... "Stewball")
 skybald / piebald] –

and on, to the turquoise horse of healing, "*The Spell of the Master of Healing*," "shining like lapis lazuli," a folk tale about the healing power of azure, from Old French *azur*, from the Persian *lazward*, "lapis lazuli" – "blue bead charms against the evil eye," and more as the lore tumbles out.

One poem will have to serve to introduce the qualities of Snyder's poetry that are most appealing in this latest volume. It has a three-line title: "Arctic Midnight Twilight/ Cool North Breeze With Low Clouds/ Green Mountain Slopes, White Mountain Sheep." A scroll is at one level a travelogue: Snyder *realizes* each episode in a specific locus. Here's the opening stanza:

Green mountain walls in blowing cloud
 white dots on far slopes, constellations,
 slowly changing not stars not rocks
 "by the midnight breezes strewn"
 cloud tatters, lavender arctic light
 on sedate wild sheep grazing

(stanza continued)

tundra greens, held in the web of clan
 and kin by bleats and smells to the slow
 rotation of their Order living
 half in the sky – damp wind up from the
 whole north slope and a taste of the icepack –

First: the intense sense of place – more than five senses aroused. Second: the dynamic and dramatic structure of the narrative. The reader's lens comes in to focus on the – “constellations”? No, Dall sheep. And, third, as the eye follows their movement, Snyder brings the sheep more sharply to life by adding what he knows and imagines about them, grazing in their ancient Order. But what about those “midnight breezes”? Good grief! That's Shelley's “The Cloud.” And snatches of Shelley's poem, both in and out of quotes, sound throughout, creating a magical overlay – not a counterpoint exactly, but a kind of deep harmony. We shouldn't be surprised. Snyder understands Shelley's achievement in condensing everything scientifically known about the hydrologic cycle into a song sung by the water itself. As he weaves the metamorphoses of Shelley's cloud into his meditation on the moving sheep, he adds a whole new dimension of insight to the consciousness of the readers moving with him “at the roof of the planet.” We move with him also in time: in the Arctic midnight, the archaeologist finding a sheep's skull contemplates its evolution, “an offer of the flower of a/ million years of nibbling forbs... Vajra Sheep teaching the Koyukuk waters/ suchness for each – ”. (I never expect to pick up all of Snyder's allusions. For example, the word *dibée* opens and closes this poem, but I have no idea what it means, unless simply *mountain sheep*, or perhaps *song*.)

Snyder's illusion of a narrative in real time keeps bringing the reader back into the action. The second stanza is:

the primus roaring now,
 here, have some tea.

We move from these grazing sheep to the million years of “sheep shapeshifting.” Then we're off to follow an actual sheep trail and to discover and rest in one of their aromatic “hidden sheltered beds.” We then “arise to descend to unbuild it again,” and to

conclude with a Koyukon riddle suggesting that we are perhaps transformed by our observations.

In Snyder's world, informed by his Buddhist discipline, time and space, being and becoming, permanence and change, one and many appear not in dialectic tension so much as in harmony. Snyder and Goedicke, so similar in their successful integration of the knowledge of the scientist with the poet's extravagant imagination, differ significantly in the deep structure of their poems. If *le style, c'est l'homme même*, they are radically different people. How various is the wealth of today's poetry!

Practical matters

Inexperienced poets could avoid most of the mistakes they make in submitting by paying attention to *Poet's Market* (1997 edition, ed. by **Christine Martin**, Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 1996, 588 pp., \$22.99 hardcover, 0-89874-746-2). The new editor continues the valuable tradition of introducing the market listings with a concise course in how to understand the publishing field and how to enter it effectively. She can't help anyone write strong poems. She can certainly be trusted to give realistic advice on how to analyze publications, prepare professional-appearing manuscripts, keep clear records, and deal with the inevitable problems. The one mistake in the 1997 edition is the publication on the endpapers of the winning poems from the latest *Poet's Market* poetry contest. They are (sorry) something of an embarrassment.

M.K.S.