

BPJ

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COVER

Jacques Hnizdovsky, "Ram Profile," 1969 (front), and
"Herd of Sheep," 1964 (back), woodcuts

© 2007 Stephanie Hnizdovsky

Mary Greene, design

→

An arrow at the bottom of a page
means no stanza break.

KATHRYN UGORETZ

The Drought

The faucet's brass curves to an open
mouth, water streaming to the deep
of our bath. We have only so much—

even shopkeepers pray for rain.
In the factory, workers huddle
on stools with the whirling

of knives. Their wide backs curl as they craft
the metal's swan dive,
brass speckles glimmering on

their goggles as I enter
the bliss of an afternoon
bath. Their eyes never drift

from the intimate work—only ten
fingers and not one to sacrifice.
I have failed to love you like this.

ERIN MALONE

Lament for Seven Minus Some

If one pound gone, then where?
To the folds of his blanket,
the sails of his out-bound cries?
A shred, a hair's-
 breadth, *a small, small loss.*

I find moths, flies'
asterisks on the sills
& sweep them out with October's leaves.

Above the eaves, a thin-lipped moon.

(One-tenth of his body's weight
 is whose fault but my body's?)

Normal for a newborn, this vanishing.
A spare minute, too-light print
on rice paper, end of a sentence
I forget. A pinch, a peck,
 the sock that's slipping off—

My imagination
 curls, quickens.

ERIN MALONE
The Winter He Is One

Near the stables
a trough

An iron bathtub
iced—

Like a horse he had to
break me

his hand the star
between

my lowered
eyes

my lowered
eyes lord

& bring me back
broken

Here the fence
There the field

ERIN MALONE
Boy in Red Shorts

Because there's no snow my son lies down in sand
to make his angel. Sometimes

he is human: how surprised I am to find
his mouth

swearing *Jesus!*
when he bumps his head, *dammit!*

when he tries to reach the tap. It's almost
funny. What does he know

about angels? He who crushes cars, he who dinosaurs
& pirates—

Yet here his print, arms fanned.

Now a kite unwinds a kind of window.
Beach grass leans. When he stands I shake him out

keep him
on his shadow's hinge. He ruffles &

I dig my feet into the dents he made.

ERIN MALONE

Directions

Stranger, one whole side
of my face is sliding.
I can't smile right. A hillside, this body

isn't what I thought. Like a foreign country
it demands instructions: *Lay out and identify*

all parts. Who am I to drive
its unknown, ingrown roads? The waxy
nasturtiums closed against orange

parking lights, all the blind curves. My map
won't fold & I need even simple things
spelled out, the words

for house, the room that means
a kitchen. *Unwrap before cooking.*
Cook before eating. Until now I've avoided

eye contact but like the flowers
my flame is low. Please will you offer

your assistance? Here I don't know how to say
my name, but am learning to read
the smallest gestures.

MATTHEW RAYMOND
A Room Full of Water

And what of

the rooms we stood in, as even now this
windows us against the world of everyday things,
or of us in them, as whales to water,
a seamless unbreaching, a singer to the song he sings?

Clayed to the footings, or against the dripping
eaves, all manner of red rivers subsumed
in the quiet flood, the room full of water where
once we stood in dogfeet, newly exhumed

from night, listening to the rain ask the earth for its mother
and the earth never answer but mud. Some crescendo
was falling in the distance, of oboes or crushed pianos.
A flight of birds assumed the window

and we let them, the ripe underpinnings laid bare,
nothing uttered. How dawn rose like a cheek,
tearstained, what could I say? And the sky was pink,
though I wouldn't describe it that way, the weak

light merely captured. Did we hold hands? Did we
clutch animals, spirited things, creatures
out of myth, sleep leaking from their heads like sand?
Or had we aged, sober in our ragged sutures

and solemn to the endless surface, scant mention
of solitude, the water lapping at the boards? Those rooms
we stood in, as even now we are complete,
what of them? See how the wall blooms

and grows and contains the world around. Nostalgia
doesn't come any cleaner, the hammered-together silence
arching over grown beings, the swept floors.
Of the many things to consider none was our purpose,

nor was the separateness of each thing made clear,
only the wilderness of a moment in which what mattered gave way
to matter, and matter then to tenderness,
everything having prepared us for today.

MARILYN McCABE

Raw Psalm

With what frequency I fall
to the dark, its
flesh, savor of must,
of game, the blood-
wine its complement.

It surprises me, this gout,
inflamed, this
excess of acid.
Taste for meat and vein
so close to bone.

DAWN POTTER

Peter Walsh

1

One might make a start today, *this* day, to tell the story of a life.
For a life must begin somewhere. Peter Walsh was his name;
and someone had written that name in thick white ink
beneath the image of a child in short pants who looked down
at his cupped hands, and in his hands sat an egg:

a goose egg, was it? or perhaps the egg of a large duck,
or perhaps simply a hen's egg in a small boy's hands?
And behind him, was the sea rolling? or was it a field of ripe
hay? And why had someone dropped a spotted scarf at his feet?
In the doorway, his mother tormented herself with dust and disarray:

yes, look at these photographs, waxy with dirt; piano filthy
as coal. And yet there was Peter. And yet there was herself.
A mother brings forth a child and calls him by name;
but what, in the story of his life, does her travail signify?
Merely nothing, perhaps. A signpost to wander away from.

Curtains spoke to wind; a fly complained. The parlor was empty
now but not silent. The kitchen intruded: click of china, rattle of steel.
Voices. On the pianoforte the snapshots smiled, or did not,
each fenced in its solitary room: once he was this age; then
he was that tall. His mother had scattered them with no particular intent.

She rarely saw them, for she saw her child every day as he was.
He rarely saw them, for as documents they had no meaning.
They were objects only, settled on the piano as dust also
settled there. Sometimes they shivered, gently, when Peter
struck the keys. But he did not watch them tremble.

2

One might make a start today, *this* day, to tell the story of a life.
For a life must begin somewhere, birth or otherwise,
and Peter's life (as much as he thought of it) might thus far
have never begun at all, except as explained by its regalia
of framed smiles and comic punch lines, the shabby

trousers and terse adventures trapped in the snapshots
lining the dusty pianoforte (the soft-loud, he named it in his mind
and sometimes he struck out the words, *soft-loud-soft-loud*
on the stained keys, like a password or an incantation,
for no one else seemed to notice them at all, these sounds

distracting him, sucking him away from the nothingness
of childhood: of chewing rhubarb and running haywire
across a stubbled field, of pissing against a tree and watching
his own hot stain leak down the bark runnels, quenching the dirt).
One might call life a tale of noticing: a span of intensities,

moments when we suddenly attend to eye or hand or ear;
more, they exact our attention, like an internal command:
Now you are alive. On the pianoforte Peter struck out the words
soft-loud-soft-loud in a sort of dream idleness,
fingertips against keys, muscles contracting, each pitch,

each duration, a subtle, unintended chant, and all the while
bees shimmered in the bright air outside the pocked
window, motes danced in the streaks of sunlight resting
like calm hands on the chairs and carpets, and Peter
lived it all, lived everything: in the parlor, in the unseen

rooms beyond, in the long, low gardens stretching
toward field and forest; and yet he lived none of it:
for life, the richness of earth, sought him out,
claimed his open eye, his voluntary ear, as he lingered
at the piano, striking *soft-loud-soft-loud* on the stained keys,

idle and untutored, shirttail thrust into his frayed
belt, a smear of green willow on the seat of his shorts.
In the kitchen his mother half-heard his *plink-plonk-
plink-plonk*; more, she felt it, like a tremor, an emanation,
safe and dull as a drip down a drainpipe:

a comfort, in truth; for now and then she faced
the facts of tedium with a sort of satisfaction,
a release from this everlasting hunt for bliss
that seemed, to her surprise, to have been her task
all these years of her life: chasing down the next

thing and the next, and was it squalor or success,
her plans for dinner and the garden and the fruits
of her own mind? She half-heard Peter's *plink-plonk*
and half-felt the chimes of her own future clang
in step, then out of step with his idle fingers, uneven

as a ticking clock on a crooked shelf. On the porch rail
two jays sparred; new potatoes bubbled on the stove;
she was making salad, her hands tore lettuce; her hands
were red and worn; they were her grandmother's hands.
How strange! She watched her grandmother's hands tear

lettuce, the jays quarreled on the railing; a sparrow
cried, *Oh, Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody*; Peter played
two notes on the piano, and would he ever stop, would
they ride on and on forever, two notes clanging in the summer
air? It was unbearable, and she cried out, *Stop it! If you're*

going to play the piano, play a song, for God's sake!
and at the sound of her voice, the notes crumpled up
on themselves and vanished, as if they had never lived at all,
as if there were no such notes in the history of the world.
Somewhere a screen door snapped open, and shut.

3

Peter never thought to love his mother less because she interrupted these small commas, these accidental obsessions, which were not knowledge but merely time stopped in its tracks, no more vital than sleep. His bicycle lay on its flank in the dooryard, dead as a shot horse; he scooped it up,

he shook it back to life; he mounted and cantered down the ragged lawn: sedate robins burst into flight, horrified; he drove the bicycle harder, grinding into mole-holes, through humps of weed; wind snatched at his hair; the bicycle lurched and galloped under his hands and the forest rose up from the distance

and became tangles and trunks and shadow, and with a flourish of tire, Peter pulled up his horse and threw it to the ground and threw himself onto his back beside it and stared at the clouds, which leapt in the air like starlings and swallows, until his eyes shut of their own accord and he stared at the magic swirls

behind his eyelids that also leapt like birds, and it was not sleep, not at all like sleep, but like gangster movies, in a way, and also like getting sick on the merry-go-round; but it didn't matter, nothing mattered: there was not one thing more important in this world than another, unless it was his knife, which had

three dull blades and a fold-out spoon. One might make a start today, *this* day, to tell the story of a life; yet a life is the story of nothing, the story of Peter on his back in the grass, squirming a hand into the right hip pocket of his shorts, curling his hand around the hidden lump of knife

that his mother had given him for his tenth birthday; and nothing ever happened because of it: he never killed anything with this knife; he never even cut himself; and when he was sixteen, riding a wooden roller coaster with his cousin, it fell out of his pocket, vanished into the salty

mud, and he never missed it, not once, for the rest of his life;
but a life is also the story of noticing just now, just at this moment,
what we never notice again: and just now the knife lay curled
in Peter's palm and he caressed it blindly, with thumb and palm
and fingertip; he lay with his eyes closed and leaf-speckled sunlight

stippling his cheeks. A life is the story of nothing, yet once a watcher
believed a moment meant something more than nothing,
believed in the story of a child named Peter Walsh. It began,
that story, and ended, and no one ever knew what became of him,
the child who carried an egg in his hands, beside the sea.

EMILY FRIDLUND

Storm

Girls are drawing hearts in the snow
on the windshields of cars. There is
barely enough snow to cover the glass,
but the hearts stay, dark and black, like something dug up
from soil. I don't know what everyone's waiting for:
the snow flies up instead of down. Because there
was a storm last week in this town, fathers stand around
with red plastic shovels. They scrape at the asphalt
a little, staining their shoes with salt. The snow
will not come back. The storm, as I said, came last week,
shuffled like a vagrant into town and died unexpectedly.
The whole thing was dirty, white, and embarrassing. People
stood under umbrellas, whispering. The old women swept and
swept their stoops. When cars started going off the roads,
the children were called in, stripped of soggy clothing, and
sent to bed. On the radiators, our mittens were heavy as
caught fish. The next day when we put them on, the wool was stiff
as death. We saw a woman outside in her bathrobe pulling
a garden hose from a drift, the thing coming out slow,
ceaseless, emerald.

MARY MOLINARY

Buoyancy

Turns out the early fetal tibia and foot are equal in length with a slightly divergent toe, reminiscent oh, of a typical primate grasping foot. Turns out a talus from the South African cave site, Kromdraai, provided the first look at the Australopithecine foot. Turns out *Olduvai* taken literally is the *place of wild sisal*. Semantic footprints moving backwards toe-to-heel through the morphemes. To measure the human voice in feet because phonemes feel too precious. To measure sisal as for a lineament or tincture for the relief of bunions, perhaps. Because, turns out, toe-bones have their own strange ideas of turning-out. Minimum wage may be the best way to understand the semantic footprint here. Turns out, this is a matter of proportions & the theory of definite proportions states that bodies unite to form new compounds in proportions that are invariable for the same compound. Intentions aside. For instance, I had every intention of telling you about all the parts of water. Turns out I want to talk all night about feet—how buoyant they are in what we mean by water.

MARY MOLINARY

Here is the woodcut. Simple palette of dull blue rain, a metonymy of branches.

Here are the puddles like scales collecting morning's waters. A weeping? Here is the toss of stones, the cross of sickles and wheats. An earnest *to and fro* of boughs. Here is *The Book of Where and How*. An imported nostalgia. A mono-cropping. Here is the commerce of war. A shiny thing. Here is the area of containment. A false yolk in no egg at all. Here is the great word briefly muttered. An ear. A retrieval. Here is the dying body's attending thought. *A turning. An earnest mouth.* Here is the old assumption in preparation for war. A sweetened condensed milk.

There each one puts on leafless trees the glass bottles. Not a tone wasted to a wind. There sweeps peoples their people's bones into corners. Hardly noticed rhythms. There rain soaks beds to the wet. They rise. There rains come and go go and come. A wandering. There enters make-believe rooms a strong wind on fanciful legs. A song. There under umbrellas ancient musics. Figures in the rain.

MARY MOLINARY

The Object of Study in a Time of War

One brief late afternoon rain and just like that: lightning bugs (fireflies peeny wally) appear and of a sudden hydrangea equivocating shaking *come-hither* heads in predictable shades of yellow-greens (green-blues blue-purples) a mere lavender and I pretend to understand the languages of dusk: the inflections and between of seasons: a rusted nail stuck in the ground and its communion with the unseen—its tiny iron-tipped hand in the whole matter. Then a ball of gnats revolving in the air like a dark sun quite simply disappears and I pretend to understand rain: its certain slant of purpose: its aftermath.

MARY MOLINARY

Watery Shapes

we all see strangers we all see shapes
coming over the horizon on thin-legged
horses

FADY JOUDAH

In the Calm

In the calm
After the rain has bombed

The earth, the ants
March out of their shelters:

One long frantic migration line

They hit the concrete floor
Of our dining and living

Space then turn into the shadow
The wall makes: a straight angle

Is the surest compass
To the courtyard wreckage of dirt and gravel.

Did they know the wind
Would airdrop

New rations their way?
Because always two or three

Lock their horns
To the acid end

Over nothing
It seems more

Than an impulse, the debris
Plenty for all.

FADY JOUDAH

This Child

This child
Wears its skin like spandex on the bone.
There's a dry lake fontanel.
Fontanel or *foramen*
Isn't the aesthetic alone, so what
If you threw in Greek or Latin,
Both are openings in the head. One
Is a lack of closure:
This child has a mother
Whose husband was recently killed,
A nascent narrative:
This child was an old man once.
This child billows its ribs, its eyes
Are cholera eyes, pennies a day
On a glossy screen, image
Is a black hole mirror. It's time
I came off it and told the truth:
I don't feel good today. . . .

DAVID CAMPHOUSE

Jeremiad for Spring

Consider the slagheap seeping
below the county's tanned hide—

below the trampled pastures,
the leafless beans, the very clay

sighing as it subsides. This is summer
leaching away. Floodlit at shift's end,

the prison smolders like dawn
on the horizon. Bleared headlights

rill along the highway toward
a sign strobing a beat against

the dark, slurred fog of empty fields.
Overhead, nighthawks snag

and pitch in the neon half-light.
Inside, men drink beyond

remembering the roads home—
crumbled blacktops snaking

creek bottoms past homesteads
burnt or rotted to chimney-framed

wallows. They drive through flurries
of cottonwood leaves fluttering

like ash from the listing trunks
of Baptist churchyards, the stained

glass patched with plywood. The lane
peters out into a derelict barn-lot

swamped with honeysuckle, full
of rusted moldboards and harrows

that say in deep shadow *this is nowhere*
you belong. This is the corn-belt

DAVID CAMPHOUSE

in the age of AIDS, of erosion—
whole histories gone in a wash

of acid rain and crystal meth. How long
until the mud blooms green again

with the burn of anhydrous, until the soil
shifts in slow sheets across the road?

LESLIE McGRATH
Of Providence: A Racial History

It was as if Providence
had again been a pair of hands
clasped atop New England's coastal belly;
as if earth's lungs had just begun to move
and the warm surface of its skin undulated
with the tides, and all the fields still pushed up
their crops of stone.

It was as if the clank of chains
had not become the music of our noon
and our afternoon had not stretched
from greeting to occupation.

If history had not yet yawned, turning
in sleep to the wall, what would we be?
Your back an onyx cabochon
in the setting of my four limbs, as if
on the finger, on the hand, of Providence.

LEONORE HILDEBRANDT

The Second Thought

When they revisit the print room, see the assorted letters
in shallow drawers, the cramped machine, its metal

rollers and levers still attached to ink, to engagement,
and how the furniture—a mere placeholder for characters—

still welcomes subversive applications—*stand up for your right*—
the rebels, thinking out loud, understand so little.

Pressure has brushed and turned the sheets,
thin and dear, time taken away their fearless pamphlets—

but in finer print, in correspondences, they still find
Go forth in peace, the longer version, the work outspread.

SHELLEY PUHAK
The Führer's Girls

Mitzi, 1927, Rope

In our dress shop across from the Deutsche Haus
we didn't sell it, only cord, piping, braid—

the gilt cord I used to trim his Christmas gift,
cushions with swastikas embroidered in silk,

the yellow piping on his tweed armchair
where he refused, the second time, to marry me,

the gold braid on his cuffs my first Party meeting,
where he fed me lemon cake with his fingers.

My woodland sprite, he named me once,
with necklaces, but no rings.

Around my neck, this last—running knot, scaffold knot,
strung loose enough he has time to find me

as he found me first,
among the Berchtesgaden firs.

Geli, 1931, Revolver

He's tiresome, he twitches, he
breaks things—my bisque piano baby
figurines, for example.

Carpet Biter, Emil calls him, when he falls
frothing on the floor—
no voice lessons in Vienna,
no cinema with my school chums,
no calling him Uncle Alf when we're undressed.

Scrubbing his back, I count
his moles (seven); squatting over him, I count
the two years, the days left
(six-hundred and ninety-four) until he says
Emil and I can marry, once he's sure I've matured.

While he takes Eva, that bitch,
riding in the Mercedes, I stay home.
Who will interrupt with brown-shirts
posted at the door?

Uncle Alf's Walther eight-caliber
against my chest,
Emil, Emil, I whisper,
until my nipples clot up, hard.

Eva, 1935, Sleeping Pills

Frau Schaub came as ambassador,
with flowers and telegrams,
so my whole office is a flower shop,
smells like a cemetery chapel,

same as my suite at Berghof,
where I wait out the dinner parties,
away from the diplomats.

Wolf keeps his Lugers locked up, after
last time, but keeps me stocked up—
Veronal, Luminal, Phanodorm.

Thirty-five this time, and I'll lay
my Rolleiflex next to me
so I might emerge from the developer bath
fixed as they will find me—
barefaced blond,
chrysanthemum blossoms,
black sheets.

Renate, 1937, Out the Window

Our first date, he started with the details,
Gestapo techniques. After this warm-up,
he undressed, expected, yes,
but then begged me to kick him, yes,
better than he deserved, yes,
he was not worthy, yes, kissed
the palms of my feet.

The morphine muddles, I know,
but the sound my skirt makes, full of air,
same as the whip's bite,
the pavement quickening the same gray
as the wool uniforms
of the four S.S. rushing up—
why wait? to wake to light
refracting off anything but insignia.

Eva, 1945, Cyanide

Married in my black silk,
champagne in the sitting room,
and after, a glass ampule,
jerky wedding dance,
bitter almond air.

LAURA COYNE
Market Fictions

The bottom line begins the story
I was told. That is the first of the
secrets, the quick mist descending
on the page, either way lies truth,
for the moment

this is where the risk is, the
storm of the adventure, when
the rigged ship's balance may
not hold. One scenario explains
this, a dip, a fall, an ending
pirated of treasure are all
disclosed, but then a story is
fashioned that I tell. And
empire is gained.

MELISSA TUCKEY

Doing Hegel's Laundry

He said not to worry about separating
the darks from lights at the end of history
everything would be pink But still

I worried about the ones that said hand wash only
And what about the delicates
lingerie that so heightened his imagination

he spent hours gazing into the lace
Did he really want me to throw it all together?
The end of history will come but not

the end of laundry Saturday morning
and the clouds fold above the snap
of one-two one-two

By afternoon the clothesline will be full
of flapping mouths If I pin them correctly
I can contain their enthusiasm

MELISSA TUCKEY

Silent Night

Deep in sleep, we heard the call, abstract at first, then a ceaseless bickering. In between day and night in those national years of disaster, we strained to hear instructions, but could not make out a single word.

Around the corner came a fire truck, its wide lights sweeping the black street. We clutched our hearts and looked for flames. It was then we saw a fat man in red waving from the truck like a store-bought mannequin. Beside him a white-haired woman tossed candy to an empty street. On the speakers a scratchy rendition of "Silent Night."

IRJA BONAFEDE
Star Trek Save Us

Two teenagers were found dead in a storage locker and Officers' Spouses' Club had a bake sale. Everybody's having babies. It's a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) at the Base Exchange (BX) and ROTC household goods are delivered F/A-22s shoot up the Wild Blue. The Air Force almost 360 Thousand Congressionally mandated. A little child died and here's a picture of the parents. Many military spouses are nurses, they deliver at the base hospital Temporary Duty (TDY) finger sandwiches, at the ladies' luncheon, like people 50 years ago never saw Star Trek. Four hours on the phone to not be AWOL for the funeral. Air and Space Basic Course, that's for Lieutenants.

Military spouses burst with babies. I read Local section of the paper PCS to Dyess AFB, Abilene, Texas PCS to Edwards AFB, in the California desert. Second Lieutenant, First Lieutenant (always mix up) then Captain, Major, Lieutenant Colonel, Colonel, General, etc. A Star Trek Captain is a Full Bird Colonel. A Star Trek Admiral is a General. The ID has both Socials and your birthday on the back. A man poured gasoline on his wife and set her back on fire the fire burned the house down and burned the man right back. I saw the Base Commander's wife in the Commissary yesterday. Sunrise, 9/1/45, Sunset, 7/8/02. We miss you, Darling, without you our days are blue, it's true, and babies pop out all over the place like F-4 Phantoms shot up TDY to space. They're all busy learning something at Maxwell AFB,

Montgomery, Alabama. Air Force Space Command is in Colorado Springs at Peterson. 18-year-olds enter the Air Force Academy, 22-year-olds graduate, in Colorado Springs, a man charged he took the girl out the window while her parents were asleep. TS-SCI, Top Secret-Sensitive Compartmented Information, Cosmic Top Secret, secret secret secret Top Secret Cosmic, A One-Star (Brigadier) visited the base today and spoke to the ladies 9 AM on a Monday, PCS the Commissary to the BX. The teenager radioed an SOS but still drowned, authorities say Squadron Officer School is for Captains, they went TDY to Ohio to Wright-Patterson

and that one woman's pregnant again, due in December, Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) is how they pay KC-135s flying away to Red Flag it. The U-2 and the B-2 and the B-52, it's a boy and it's a girl, the F-15 and the F-16, and somebody PCSed to

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Randolph AFB, San Antonio, TX, take her name off the mailing list. When an officer dies they send a Mortuary Affairs Officer, Air Command and Staff College is the one for the Majors. Up the Chain of Command and down again. Could bring the spouses to my house for Star Trek and cucumber sandwiches (Lt Col's wife), 73 Thousand Officers, Jane Doe, 56, went to be with Our Lord and another Jane was born, 276 Thousand Enlisted and everywhere civilians, babies and civilians, someone retired and became a civilian contractor, and that one wife her twins (they died). Force Protection Condition Alpha was Threat Con Alpha or Bravo or Charlie or Delta, in Star Trek they're in the Quadrant Alpha or Beta or Gamma or Delta

and the Delta Quadrant is bad, and so is FP Con Delta.

Fighter pilots turned astronauts look up past the sky. The man who raped the 12-year-old girl was sentenced to six. They say a tour at the Pentagon means a heart attack, nervous breakdown, or divorce Aim High. All politics is local. Lieutenant Colonels coin challenge each other at the Pentagon a 23-year-old man died today when his motorcycle overturned. A Chief of Staff of the Air Force was on Stargate SG-1 wrote Officer Performance Reports (OPRs) and Meritorious Service Medals (MSMs) and other various awards. Guards at the gate think I'm his trophy wife, under the Arch of Swords we walked, at the Military Ball, Lieutenant Colonels diligently study Air War College while they give out Global War on Terrorism Medals and two-year-long deployments

Commanders Commanding Space Command Supreme Commanders commanding command Come See the Commander in Chief say something and lead New Year's babies on Star Trek bottle fed.

SETH ABRAMSON

Lullaby

At the store I bought
two stories, the one true and the other
almost true. Almost true: the way it goes is
she wears a red hood ostensibly for riding
as she tramples the darkest peat
on her way to Grandmother's house. In fact
as she arrives she realizes it is not the house
she knows but the house her

cloistered god lives in,
where the overgrowth is blooming high
and the door is, natch, locked. Her great sobs

and tiny raised fists and tiny flutter of a heart
scare an entire cloakroom of bats

from the forest canopy.

The way it goes—and this is almost true—
is a boy and a girl in green Bavarian jammies
follow the same well-trampled peat
into the same bat-dark overhang of branches.
There (but to the west of Grandmother's
house) is a cottage made up entirely of treats
and lucky for them the door is *unlocked*. Yes—

unlocked. Inside this too-true-to-be-good
candygram dwelling is the witch, oven, et al.
So goes that version. The truth is uncanny
because everything one might think false
is *true*—

jammies, gingerbread, wizardess, kitchen.
It's the oven, you see—owned not by a cult
which menus out children from the bark
of a forest headquarters, but a famished,
shambling god who requires a sacrifice a day.
The witch is terrified but she knows

the score: in go the children. So nothing no
nothing will ever get the girl to God's house,
or keep the boy and girl from God's oven.
Nothing will evict a woman and her young
from God's old shoe, or return to God that
tuffet he lost. There is a wood and only one

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wood for too many
millions of stories to count. A supernatural

and only one supernatural in the same peat-
trampled wood every red hood
ostensibly for riding has ever bobbed inside,
and every mewling kid goes the same way in
and the same way out, every doting mother,
every lady laid out vulnerable to elements,
 all of them traveling toward
that same boarded storehouse of well-being
none will ever arrive at, enter into, consume,

inhabit, their stories told in the shape of a lie,
because they are lived, too, in the shape of a lie.

STEVE LANGAN

A Pact

Let's make a pact, a blood pact, that whenever
referencing the "old worlds" or the "new worlds"
we will designate them "the worlds" or "otherwise
known as the worlds" or "otherwise" or "O.W."

And while we're at it, with the sun at half-mast
and the moon and the gentle stars, when and if
they arrive, tipped so as we are dogs again
lapping what little light remains from bowls
lashed to the dirty earth, let's make a pact
in reference to "love" and one concerning
"time" and one more in honor of the soldiers
of the most recent war—in their brittle panic—
as if remembering facing down the enemy,
gaining a foothold, a flank, and a front.

Let's make a wish, too, and let's not cry
at all, not one tear, even though the darkness
has arrived, you remember light, don't you,
and being moved to rapture by the singers,
their birdlike pronouncements in the final movement—

(shaking water from our hair beside the inlet)—
the glorious undisguised all at once *tweet*.

STEVE LANGAN
I Was Young Then

I had no idea your heart was sick
or that you were reputed to be
a number of sinister things,
a reptile soaking in privilege
and spitting out desire, for instance.
I was building a platform from which
I could speak of the holy phantoms.
The orchestral background frightened
and soothed. Sorry for being touchy:
the slightest movement could have
thrown off the entire system.

One morning a bird carrying
instructions rolled into its talons
landed on the bank of the river
I could see from the window by
which I sat to drink my coffee.
Beneath me my faithful dog rose,
howled, and scratched at the door.
I let him outside and—his trainer
and master—motioned to the trees
and the water and demanded *Kill—
or don't you come back here again!*
The air went with him, and the night,
and the night after that and the moon.

SUSAN TERRIS

Ruskin's Advice to Charles Dodgson

What we like determines what we are. . . .

—John Ruskin

Flowers all. Crocus its head barely raised above ground.
Tulip nodding, soft skirt petaled on the hillside.
Lilac, a seductive scent. You breathe it in
Before you see it.
Pansy and sweet alyssum, riot and pallor
Entwined together in the shade.
Daffodil—early and bright yet quick to fade.

Never the rose or peony whose lushness fills summer
Nor waxen water lily, still life open to sun
And closed into darkness.

Trust the delicate bouquet of the woodland:
Buttercup, bluebell, meadow foam.
Don't ask them to grace your parlor or tea
Where they will droop and wither.
Blossoms should be left
Innocent in their beds, as nature intended,
For us to admire. Ever part of the wild undefended.

MARION K. STOCKING

BOOKS IN BRIEF: Five Inside Views of the Art of Poetry

Whole courses of my formal education have dissolved in my memory, but what continues to nourish me are the hours I have spent with artists talking about their own and others' art—walking the Tate Gallery with painter Wendy Kindred; a quarter hour's conversation with poet, musician, and composer Ted Enslin about the Shostakovich 7th String Quartet we had just heard the Vermeer Quartet perform. Likewise, the most illuminating engagements I have had with texts about poetry have been, starting with Sir Philip Sidney's "Apologie for Poetrie," with those by poets. Since many people crave assistance in riding the wild range of today's poetry, I hope my personal response to the truly excellent works I discuss below will prove helpful. From the many such books I have recently read I have selected this handful for their deliciously written insiders' insights into poetry.

David Lehman brings his personal authority and engaging style to *The Last Avant-garde: The Making of the New York School of Poets* (New York: Doubleday, 1998, 434 pp, \$27.50 hardbound, Anchor \$16.95 paper). In Part 1 his account of the four principals in this "school"—John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, and James Schuyler—reads so engagingly that it's easy to overlook how tightly Lehman has organized his discussion of the individual histories, the poets' relationships with each other, and their associations with major artists and musicians. Lehman integrates the biographical research and reminiscence with the most illuminating discussion that I know of the writing of the New York School. He combines his scholar-critic's thoroughness and perspective with his personal familiarity with the poets and his poet's authority in his own art when he writes that "today the impulses and strategies of the school have less to do with the specific geography of New York than with a state of mind in which the capacity for wonderment is matched by the conviction that poems are linguistic engines rather than repositories of felt experience." How much baffled misreading that one sentence precludes, with its delineation of the poem as a verbal artifact rather than as Wordsworth's "spontaneous overflow" of emotion, which has served as the primary aesthetic model for poetry during the past two centuries. This volume was especially valuable for me, for I had tried to review John Ashbery's *The Tennis Court Oath* in 1962 but was then in no way ready for it. With Lehman's book, no beginner today should have that

problem. *The Last Avant-garde* makes the work of these poets, for whom he has such joyous admiration, not only accessible but also thoroughly appealing.

In Part 2 Lehman explains the reaction of New York School visual artists and poets to the repressive climate of the 1950s—especially the bankruptcy of religion and of politics, both left and right. For these artists, the vitality of art filled the vacancy within these other spheres. Another component of his analysis, his discussion of Koch's emphasis on "the comic as part of the lyrical impulse," also helped me appreciate one source of the imagination and technical virtuosity of Lehman's own poetry. The author includes as well a brief but graceful discussion of Larry Rivers and Fairfield Porter, *in* but not exactly *of* the school. In an epilogue he introduces some Second Generation New York School poets and provides a wonderfully crisp and useful account of the Language School poets as they differ from a true avant-garde.

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Like David Lehman, **Marianne Boruch** gives us readings that carry us into the hearts of poems. Her book is ***In the Blue Pharmacy: Essays on Poetry and Other Transformations*** (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2005, 218 pp, \$40 hardbound, \$17.95 paper). Unlike Lehman, who despite his intimacy with the poets of the New York School never abandons his impersonal role as critic-historian, Boruch appears on stage *in propria persona*: we share her personal encounters with poetry and poems. Mid-volume come eight short essays on individual poems by Edson, Neruda, Roethke, Hopkins, Jarrell, Levertov, Bishop, and Tom Andrews. Grateful for the introductions, I blush to confess that many of the poems she has selected were unfamiliar to me. With the intense attention of a painter addressing a painting, Boruch presents each poem complete, then takes the reader dramatically into the depths of the work. Like the poetry, each essay resonates in every word, shimmering with her passion for what her fellow poets have achieved. If only for her exploration of Gerard Manley Hopkins's astonishing "Epithalamion" (brilliantly titled "Becoming 'Epithalamion'") I would have needed to have this book.

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 Lehman mentions **Ann Lauterbach** as a poet influenced by the New York School. One of the most engaging of the books by poets I have read recently is her ***The Night Sky: Writings on the Poetics of Experience*** (New York: Viking, 2005, 262 pp, \$29.95 hardbound, HUM/Penguin, \$18 paper). I confess I have had my difficulties with Lauterbach's much-admired poetry. (Guided by the explication de texte by another poet, Christine Hume, in *American Women Poets in the 21st Century*—reviewed in *BPJ*, Spring 2003—I can follow and think that I understand a Lauterbach poem, but I have yet to make it there by myself.) I therefore come to *The Night Sky* with keen anticipation and recognize immediately how much ground we share:

Good poems absorb into their formal and imaginative resources new questions which are as difficult to answer as they are to raise. Or put it this way: *the poem is an answer to a question or questions no one, including the poet, had thought to ask.* . . . It is the critic's job to ask the question or questions which the poem elicits in its answering. As long as editors and critics are blindsided by the myopia of pre-existing conditions for good, better, and best (the latter a test only time can take), as long as they mistake subject for content, content for meaning, and form for that which is what *was*, much of the best of the best will remain invisible, and the real questions to their answers will go, as Shelley foretold, unacknowledged.

Without, for now, going back to Lauterbach's poems, let me encourage my readers who hope to gain access to the cool verge of the contemporary avant-garde to read *The Night Sky* and explore the "poetics of experience." Experience, like experimentation, can be an open field. In comparing language to a garden, "as if the garden were a sort of language with a syntax of its own," she explains that it works "the way any language works, by contingency, so that meaning takes shape (takes its shape, is shaped) only through the accumulations of the proximities of each individual choice and decision." To move a plant in a garden or a word in a stanza changes, however slightly, the meaning. And the moral imperative is *choice*. Since language is the "linguistic matrix that binds us to each other and to the world," there is no room for "self-absorbed narcissism" in this poetics, nor, indeed, in this "moral, mortal universe."

It helps to understand Lauterbach's vocabulary. For her, the convergence of raw subject matter with the writer's choices (form) produces *content*. Meanings arise from the reader's apprehension of this content. The wider implication is that readers, delighted at the choices the artist has made, are inspired with the freedom to make their own choices—to see themselves as “agents in the world,” to understand that not only artists can “*choose to make forms* that imbue experience with experiment.” This is indeed an ambitious and intellectually challenging poetics, rooted in Emerson and existentialism and blossoming in the richness of language.

The reader will relish the abundance of Lauterbach's commitment to the dynamics of language. Her inclusion of great chunks from the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* dramatizes the wealth of “meanings” of words such as *literal* and *find*. A whole page for the nouns and verbs of *sense*. Two little two-letter words exemplify the moral freight language carries: the American soldier who refers to one of the Abu Ghraib detainees as “it” and Bill McKibben's answer to the student who asked “What makes humans human?” that “we are the only animals for whom there is a decision to make when faced with desire; we know the word ‘no.’ No, not as an order from another, but from the inner self, the part of the self that says ‘You have had enough’ or ‘Don't do that’” (Lauterbach's summary).

To read *The Night Sky* is to take a privileged walk with a beautifully intellectual poet through the garden of poetry. Now I'm heading back to give her own poetry a fresh try.



C. D. Wright's *Cooling Time: An American Poetry Vigil* (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2005, 104 pp, \$15 paper) honors us with an insider's view of the imagination's work: a great bouquet of commonplace book, philosophical inquiry, literary criticism, personal essay, and prose poem, with a few verse poems for good measure. Wright tells us right out who she is and what she lives for. She is an artist of the paragraph, and here is one:

I am fortunate to be from the Ozarks. My family is there. My original family. I am glad for that. The trees are there. The trees true me. I hear from journalists in the state of Arkansas

that the present policy of the national forestry service is to chainsaw the redbuds and dogwoods in the forest, then to poison the open stumps to create a more uniform woodland. The poison then runs off. Uniformity, in its motives, its goals, its far-ranging consequences, is the natural enemy of poetry, not to mention the enemy of trees, the soil, the exemplary life therein.

Wright is blessed with both wit and humor and is unabashedly opinionated, as in: "Poetry is like food, remarked one of my first teachers, freeing me to dislike Rocky Mountain oysters and Robert Lowell." Words are her first life, and like Lauterbach she connects the use of language with politics. Here's another shipshape paragraph:

Poetry and advertising (the basest mode of which is propaganda) are in direct and total opposition. If you do not use language you are used by it. If you do not recognize the terms *peacekeeper missile* and *preemptive strike* as oxymorons, your hole has already been dug.

Throughout this volume, Wright's dedication to the calling of the poet manifests itself in the range of poets she quotes with passion. I had long valued Mary Austin's *The Land of Little Rain*, so I am especially pleased to learn of her 1923 book *The American Rhythm*, in which she draws from a study of Native American song and dance a theory of a physiological basis for New World art. And I appreciate Wright's penetrating account of how the art of W. S. Merwin's epic *The Folded Cliffs* moves the reader into this major work.

Wright poses the critical question of whether poetry is "mutable, profound, sentient, resplendent, intense, stalwart, brave, alluring, exploratory, piercing, skillful, percipient, risky, exacting, purposeful, nubile, mirth-provoking, affective, restive, trenchant, sybaritic, nuts enough" to survive. If not, she asks, "with what then will we hail the next ones, the ones who have to pick up around here long after we've been chewing the roots of dandelions?" Her answer is her response to "so much wildness of heart, so much fury and hilarity, such language" in poetry she is reading.

In rare but invaluable passages Wright lets us in to the process

of her own composition. She takes *perception* in its essential meaning—becoming aware directly through the senses. “Perception leads to further perception. *Perceive. Perceive.* ‘See what the grass would see if it had eyes,’ writes Oppen.” This instruction gives insight into the source of the electricity in her own poetry (and her prose, as in “My clawless cross-eyed cat adhered to my side, loudly idling”). And are you tired of disputations on “the line”? Wright has a field-fresh paragraph on it, including, “the only thing that seems clear to me about line, is that the melody of the language can be made visible,” and concluding, “The poem discovers the line or the line goes blind trying.”

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Baron Wormser and **David Cappella’s** *A Surge of Language: Teaching Poetry Day by Day* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004, 230 pp, \$24 paper) takes a radically different (indeed radically original) approach. The authors have invented a high school teacher, “Mr. P,” who teaches poetry every day in, we assume, every class. This book is his journal, recording the poems he chooses (from Fulke Greville to C. D. Wright’s *Deepstep Come Shining* and a dozen poets new to me) as well as the prompts he employs to get discussion going. He has each student keep a poetry journal for both in-class and outside writing. Sometime students write original poems from a structural model (which almost seduced me into trying my hand). He records a confrontation with a parent who complains that this isn’t going to help her daughter get into the college of her choice and another who accuses him of promoting “godless homosexuality” by introducing a passage from Ginsberg’s “Kaddish.” The responses of the students—all named characters in the fiction, some smart-ass, some withdrawn, some on the edges of their seats—make up a solid proportion of each discussion. As a professor, I rarely had such articulate students—but then, I hadn’t read this book.

I have to confess being humbled when, despite my decades of teaching exactly what Mr. P hopes to teach, I found myself identifying with the students, prowling my way into a Fulke Greville sonnet as though I’d never studied early Renaissance literature. I confess to scribbling my arguments with Mr. P in the margins. I checked out new poets I’d somehow overlooked. I went back and reread Arnold’s “Scholar Gypsy.” I penciled sound

patterns and recurring diction on the printed texts. I hauled out my dictionary and pondered why he'd asked his students to check out the etymology of *wolf*. I like that a range of dictionaries is always available to the students in this class. The poet's choice of words, in all their depths, is the heart of this teaching.

When I was teaching, I worked to get students to pay close attention to everything the poem does—as an act, as an event. But how to get them to pay that attention? Here's the Wormser-Cappella game plan: the teacher dictates the poem of the day for the students to enter in their poetry journals, sometimes stopping after the first line to ask what words they don't know, what words grab them, what they think this is leading to. Then another line. The physical process of writing the poem requires attention, mimics the process of composition, and, by the act of writing, begins to make it theirs. Here's how the authors put it in their introduction:

They like experiencing a poem for the first time and not knowing what is going to happen next. It brings them to the primal level of experiencing literature—sheer curiosity. They like the incredible variety of poetry, how every day can be a fresh day as they experience a poem that is new to them. The oral approach and dictation slow the poem down so that they experience it fully and deeply.

I'm speculating that, as in their earlier book, *Teaching the Art of Poetry: The Moves*, Wormser did most of the writing here and Cappella developed the explicit apparatus for teachers. That apparatus seems to me unusually useful—no nonsense about what a poem means, just techniques for getting into it as a work of art. A “Profile of a Poem” provides an outline of “Elements” (e.g., Organization), “Strategies” (e.g., Line, Stanza, Form, Structure, Turns), and then a column for “What I Noticed/ Experienced.” Noticing and experiencing are equal. We even get twenty-one “*What If Questions*” as prompts to revision. The more than fifty full-length poems are supplemented by a list of worthwhile and essential anthologies.

I recommend this book to anyone who cares about poetry or would like, at least, to know how to read it. For anyone who teaches or might consider teaching poetry, it is a wonder.

A Footnote

One subject touched only lightly in *A Surge of Language* is political poetry. For a consideration of poetry in the political domain, the reader might well turn to Wormser's essay on political poetry, focusing brilliantly on Robert Lowell's "For the Union Dead," in the *Manhattan Review*, 12:2 (Fall/Winter 2006–7), 108–117. Quoting James Baldwin's "People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them," Wormser addresses how Lowell inhabits "the frightening fullness of history." His penetrating reading of the poem "puts poetry at the center of the society." That is, I am convinced, exactly right. In a nation that Gore Vidal has dubbed "The United States of Amnesia," we have never needed such poetry more.