

BPJ

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NEW WORK
BY WINNERS OF
THE CHAD WALSH PRIZE

Editors

John Rosenwald, Lee Sharkey

Editorial Board

Leonore Hildebrandt, Dawn Potter, John Rosenwald, Lee Sharkey

Editors for this Issue

Leonore Hildebrandt, Dawn Potter, John Rosenwald, Lee Sharkey

Supporting Staff

Ann Arbor, Al Bersbach, Karen Hellekson

Web Manager

Lee Sharkey

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BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

Summer 2010, Vol. 60 N°4, 60th Anniversary Chapbook

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COVER

Karen Adrienne, Pomegranates, charcoal drawings, 2007.

Drawing on title page also by Karen Adrienne.

Mary Greene, design

→

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

Poet's Forum

We invite you to join the online conversation with *BPJ* poets on our Poet's Forum at www.bpj.org. The participating poets for this issue are Jessica Goodfellow (June), Susan Tichy (July), and Karl Elder (August).

CELEBRATING OUR SIXTIETH
John Rosenwald and Lee Sharkey

In 1950 Chad Walsh and Robert Glauber started a little poetry magazine. Marion and David Stocking, Chad's colleagues at Beloit College, soon joined the editorial staff and for many years sustained the journal, which moved with them to Maine when they retired in 1984. At the turn of the millennium, the *Beloit Poetry Journal* published a 400-page anthology, *A Fine Excess*, that showcased its contributions over a half century to contemporary literature.

Seven years earlier, Alison Walsh Sackett and Paul Sackett had approached the editors with an offer to establish in memory of her father the Chad Walsh Poetry Prize, to honor an outstanding poem or group of poems the *BPJ* had published the previous calendar year. At first the editorial board resisted singling out one poem for an all-or-nothing award, but Alison wisely insisted. And, in this vocation which ordinarily requires us to dole out much more rejection than acceptance, we have come to treasure being able each year to bestow upon a poet a significant gift—an acknowledgment of accomplishment and of devotion to the calling of poetry.

As the number of Walsh prize winners grew, we began to nurture the idea of gathering work by them into a single volume. And so we've chosen to celebrate our six decades of publishing poetry that matters with this chapbook of new work by sixteen of these poets—all except Patricia Goedicke, whose absence we feel both in this volume and in American letters more generally. True to our history, the gathering is varied and formally inventive. Collectively, the poems constitute the kind of far-ranging conversation that readers come to poetry to be moved and challenged by.

Over the years, the Walsh prize has gone to poets such as Albert Goldbarth, Susan Tichy, and Sherman Alexie, whom we had a history of publishing, and to others such as Jessica Goodfellow, Sam Reed, and—most recently—Onna Solomon, who were unknown to us until they sent us what became the prize-winning poem. As we like to say, we honor the poem and not the poet. Only at moments like this do we take the time to focus our attention on the writers as well as on their work. We celebrate the poets represented in this volume, and all the poets we have published over the decades, for their contributions to our literary and cultural life.

SAM REED

Garden

Do you see anyone. Where are you. Is there shade. Is a garden made for pleasure, and for whose, at whose pleasure. Brown ants on a white thorn. Slow birds in a tall sky. A purple staghorn cholla, less a plant than a tangled mass of ropes of half-dried meat. Don't move. Is that a rock. Where are we. Rising on the slopes around is an open grove. Mesquites stretched into wild postures of struggle as though they were being dragged back into the earth. Please. We should wait. There's just enough room. Under here. Are you thirsty. Would you. Again. The ants try the air with fastidious antennae. They pour up and out to the extremities of the cactus as if they were looking for a view. As if looking. Is a garden made for looking, and for what, and what then. When are you so stripped as when you hide. Come closer. Can you feel that. Can you feel this. Should we. We should—wait. What's coming. Is something coming. Faint glitters in the dirt. Vanished orioles and quail. If you ever show your back to a lion. If you run.

MARY MOLINARY
If we were birds once

Then fold feather into ready ink
Then a drowsy eye
Then our inconsequential selves
Then *bury them and keep quiet*
Then elegy then apology then what will emerge
Then what is possible resembles free fall or flight
Then that any of this is possible dispels determinacy
Then the hands gone then the thumbs can do no harm
Then strands of continuities
Then prehensile nostalgia
Then what can it mean to be idiopathic & interstitial
Then trade acquaintances & valuable objects
Then *reason and the angel of militancy*
Then the body executes itself
Then take the wind in one mouth & expel it from the other
Then the prohibition of scattered flower petals
Then scatter them
Then beckon with a wing
Then the prohibition of scattered leaves
Then scatter them

MARY MOLINARY

Birds with seeds (possessions)

When wren
fly from a dying

mouth: erasure
but never silence

wingbeat wingbeat
(*pbruu pbruu*) plus

a clearing of tiny
avian throats

(*trill-true-ee*) as
they exit

quick-as-poems
one-by-one

the sternum of
the newly dead & take

their places
in the hearts of sharp

skeletal trees
or clamber onto air

currents they will
ride like eloping lovers

When wren
flee a dying mouth:

what's left is nest
for lucky

passers-by
during a sudden down-

pour who foldnuzzle
into the shelteringmuzzle

while singing
slightly off-

key like a self-
portrait with possessions

The possessions are seeds

I have seen this twice

MARY MOLINARY

Little known bird of the ribcage

Either 2 birds crossed
The blue air
Just in front of you or

Missiles were prepared
& placed on an X-marked border

Either a quiet morning marked
By blossomings-out &
Smallish vegetables or

The political prisoner
Awakes in the same
Cell with the same

First thought as yesterday

The cell we have in common
The target we share
What you believed once

Still holds: the body
Free or imprisoned

Your bird is your secret
A rod of carbon in an arc
Of light infinitely

Before we were fossils
We were merely
Hungry & chattering
Consequently

There is the body
Free or imprisoned there is
Justice or there is not

Prepare the cell we have in common
Sing your secret bird to sleep

*The ribcage is a cage for this
The ribcage is a fine cage for this
Marked little bird of a heart*

MARY MOLINARY

Burial of the new law / bird singing in moonlight

Thus are there but so many bones in a foot or hand
Thus do they break in degrees
Thus did simple moonlight fuel paranoia
Thus were the wrong battles fought
Thus was commerce & trade
Thus did we bury our shame shallow & our dead deep
Thus did *torture* enter the common tongue & pop culture like a yawn
Thus was nevertheless a bird heard unseen in the weeping willow
Thus a cool breeze at precisely 9:22 p.m. on the 8th day
Thus did we number & count nouns & casualties
Thus will the unseen bird continue its song
Thus will a new moon rise
Thus will an unseen breeze
Thus will the hand & foot
Thus will the graves
Thus will the book

JANET HOLMES
Partly hidden poem

The desert borders a sea blue as a hypertext link
yellow-flowered flat-leaved nopal climb the small hills

the cholla balances its bloom at the tip of a thorned branch
like a circus seal's red ball acting all dangerous

colors she mistook in the past for simple, here
so sharp / she thinks Maybe I don't need glasses

She hears him rise and go to the kitchen
slap of the screen door / a dog barking a ways off

Perro semihundido ascends
where the path has abruptly become steep

The grasses bloomed and dry now in the fields
olives and figs form in the trees still ripening

Of Goya's Black Paintings it is the gold one
taken from his house, the door of his attic workroom

She hears birds chipping nonstop and people talking
why is she here her senses redlining

Rough stones cemented together make a wall, a street
He is wakened by the calls of turtledoves

She is wakened by the cries of peacocks
He is wakened by church bells on the hour

No *pulpo* in the restaurants because of the truckers' strike
No gasoline in the village pumps

She is wakened by the sound of a mosquito
They climb to town for: internet connections, news, orange juice

The dog looks a little like Migi from across the way
who hops as he runs

The SPF 70 makes her look sweaty
Freckles from childhood reappear on her arms

She sees his hand tremble pouring coffee
the movement intensely his / it endears him to her

A scrim of heat-haze softens the cityscape
A discussion of cats called the rumpies (no tails)

and the stumpies (just stumps) on the Isle of Man
The strike made the price of groceries rise 18%

with some items 200% over normal or unavailable
He is wakened by a motorcycle

She notices she is noticing her affection for him
Enow, enough: unexpected welling-up

The shopkeeper chases after her to present some sandalwood incense
It isn't paradise because she can't get online, damn it

The whinny of horses / again, she didn't hear church bells
all afternoon when before they were so disruptive

Really, she is meant to leave the house at 4 p.m.
in a winter sunset among the white pines

and snow pocked by wild hooves the previous night
check: hat check: sunglasses check: SPF 70 OK let's go

They watch a show called *Toros Para Todos*
They study the aggressively scarlet bodies of English tourists

white crescents of breast-flesh in their cleavages
someone telling the story of the six-fingered man

She is wakened by dogs whose barks rise into howling
She is wakened by a vivid dream

The strikers suspend their strike to pursue negotiations
petals from bougainvillea eddy in the street

They climb to town for: chocolate, brandy, soap
A fox hunts nearby in the early morning

One thinks: *ritual drumming*; the other: *disco*
They had already wakened when they heard it

The sheep rises and makes his way to the trough
Yes, they had wakened. They were awake.

ALBERT GOLDBARTH

The Clothes

Now listen. Listen up! I want Estrella
to come onstage with weeping all over her, every way
except tears: I want the weeping scurrying
inside her like bees in a rotted-out wall, or water
welling up in the ground that the city authorities categorize
as toxic: *that* kind of underground tears.
And more *squirrels!* Hey, some shmuck-of-a-gofer not doing
nothing—you! do you hear me, skinny?—get the squirrel man
to come to the squirrel delivery door
with a few more cages. Say sixteen. Augoosto:
walk more like a robot. No . . . no . . . *there!*
Maurice: I said mousse in your hair, but not a half-a-year
of cow-gunk from the Ganges River. Estrella: . . . no, wait,
Augoosto: clank clank clank! You got it,
boobeleh, Mr. Method Actor? Good . . . good . . . hotsy totsy!
Estrella, pull at your gorgeous hair
like bell ropes in a tower
of weeping—that would be . . . *emblematic!* I want
to see your hands like rival suitors
crawling up Rapunzel's tumbled-down ladders of tresses.
No—no tears! You *be* the tears! Hey, you there
by the strobe light—get that puffer squirrel, yeah,
that one, good—and make him a little hat to wear
from one of the paper cups at the water dispenser, okay?
Yes, NOW; you're thinking, what, Christmas? One-two-NOW.
Estrella, pinch yourself. That helps the look I'm going for.
What, "where"? On your cheek, on that pillowy ass,
who cares, it should show in your *eyes*, like doleful tenants
looking out of your pupils and contemplating suicide.
You want *me* to do it? I didn't think so. Agatha,
you're the Designated Estrella Pincher whenever she waxes even
this close to gleeful. Now we'll . . . oh great,
stupid, you couldn't think to tie it onto his head
with a string or a rubberband or something? Do I *have* to
tell you *everything*? "Hi, I'm God, I just made you, now
I want you to start to breathe. NO
NOT THROUGH YOUR ASSHOLE STUPID!" . . . okay, see what I mean,
be independent-minded a little, there with your squirrel friend.
Ron, give strobe-light-boy here one of your chartreuse shoelaces
for the squirrel cap, please. Estrella, I . . . Ron,
I *said* "please." Okay. Good. Thank you. Look, I know



what I'm doing. I'd like you all on board with me,
 a . . . "community." On the same page.
 Listen, I'll tell you something . . . Augoosto, stop
 with the Frankenstein clomp for a minute, I'm going to tell you
 a story of how I got here, from when I was . . . oh, nineteen
 about. In college. That summer, I stole clothes from the laundromats.
 Don't laugh! It was easy. People would leave them
 spinning all day in those tumblers that look like
 astronaut training machines. They'd get a latté,
 walk the pooch, whatever, leaving me, *me*
 and their drying, aromatic, susceptible clothes. I said
don't laugh. I'd sit there listening to the zipper-click, gallumphing
 pursuit of a flock of chemise by a pair of painter's overalls,
 I'd look at the lacy what-nots opening up
 like delicate graceful lusty jellyfish: hoo-boy! But I don't mean
 this casual thievery was sexual . . . I'd take a parka
 as readily as a frothy thong. It wasn't economic:
 I could afford clothes of my own. It was . . . well, how can a man
 who has chatted with emirs and Pulitzer cockamamie writers
 put it? . . . it was here a fluffing hoodie, there
 a pair of jalapeño-and-sombrero-thematized boxers . . . and,
 once I possessed them, I possessed the lives
 behind them. I'd scoop them up with a true nonpartisan eagerness,
 I was a Whitman, I was a libertarian, I . . . Maurice,
 if I wanted you idly molding your gooey locks
 into tiny prairie dogs popping out of your head
 I'd have said so. All of you: quit your smirks! That childish snarky
 pinpoint subcutaneous invidiousness will *not* do
 this production a firefly-buttock's glimmer of good. Okay.
 Are we quiet, comported adults now? Well, we'd better be,
 you goosey palookas. Stow the squirrel in that gym bag for now.
 Where was I? . . . Agatha, what?—for chrissake surely
 you'll donate a stinking broken-down gym bag to the cause
 of theatrical history. If there's even a *hint* of squirrel-doo
 I'll buy you a new one, deal? Where was I? . . . okay. One day
 I was at my hobby—not a "fetish," maybe a "compulsion"—and
 after I'd snatched some jeans or a bra or who-knows now
 a-hundred-and-ninety years later, I lifted a woman's jersey
 out of that sweet warm lottery drum, a jersey, tattered and pink
 in the way
 that told you it must have been a cherry-red at some time,



long before the use, and the need for thrift, with grease stains on the front of it that would never erase completely if you laundered it against rocks in a village stream for decades, and I held it, I *imbibed* it, I was a vampire of its warmth, and I knew, I *knew* how the woman who owned it was a version of that pink: worn down from something louder and more attractive earlier. I *loved* her. I wanted to *be* her.

Then you know what?—you, by the rubber rocks, if I catch you rolling your heehaw eyes again while I’m talking, you’re never even serving fries in this city, got it?—anyway, you know what? I was right about her. I say that for sure because oh god suddenly there she was in the door, with a cop she’d brought, and I was caught *red-handed*. Agatha, what? Just say it, if you can mutter it to Maurice you can say it to me. What? Very funny, “pink-handed.” Now may I continue, klutzes and kvetchers? Thank you. I was caught, and the cop was breathing “jail time” all over the room, and I saw my tush in a downtown lock-up mildewing there for lack of friend and finance, and . . . you’ve heard of *inspiration*? Like a million little pickle-forks of lightning from the blue, it came to me, and I said to him, “Officer, I’m directing a school play. Really! I’m sorry! This is what we *do*, we need to understand a stranger’s life, and make it *real*,” boohoo, boofreakin’ hoo, etc. etc., and the woman *bought it*. The woman believed it! She what’s-the-word? She “interceded.” It worked. You know why it worked? Augoosto, clodhopper, put down your hand: this isn’t Blessed Sacrament second grade. You know why it worked? Because (and I hadn’t known myself until that moment) it was True! I *am* a Director, and this *is* What We Do! And you, my dears and doofuses, my mollycoddled darlings, you can stand there in your solipsism impatiently waiting for all of this foofoo jibberjabber to dribble and die, but I tell you there are nights I’ve walked the slipstream and the suckhole of the Sea of Doubt, I’ve gone down to the edge of the Fires, insomniac, crazy for wanting to know about life in its germ, in its animal howl, in its pitiful limited human warranty, and I’ve looked up to the gods we’ve speckled in burning and rumpus across the sky and I’ve *been* them for a drunk unsteady moment, I’ve seen the universe through their omnifaceted eyes, and I’ve looked downward into the Valley where the promise of dawn and the lingering fumes of rush hour traffic commingle, and here I’ve taken to myself the entire

→

wraparound scene of false teeth, gun oil, shining coins
of orgasm as they're flipped through the body, cellphone zap,
Talmudic esoterica, small used-up tubes of anal lube,
our chopsticks and our logarithms,
prom dress, breath mint, carbon footprint, taxidermied wolverine,
kachina doll of the pollen spirits, mistress of contrition
as well as queen of the midnight boogaloo club,
our swarms of hopes as they glitter and either fail or catch
and flame, our tiny turbocharged ambitions and our darkest
nests of intertwining fears, I've taken it all to myself
and been more than myself, or less than myself, directing
the Heavens, directing the Pit, can we do something
about these fucking squirrels in here, they're driving me crazy!
Who requisitioned these fucking squirrels! Estrella,
trust me: lighten up.

SHERMAN ALEXIE

Rest Stop

I pull off the freeway at 3 a.m.
To urinate. It feels good to go
In a dark nowhere, but then I realize,
As my night vision comes into focus,

That I am pissing in the front yard
Of a small church. Is this blasphemy?
I'm sure it is. But worse, I notice
The church is next to a gas station.

And there is a small house behind me,
A playground to the left, and a grocery
Store to my right. This is a little town
And I'm pissing in the middle of it.

But I can't stop. I can only hope
Everybody is asleep. I don't mean
To insult this small town. I love
Small towns. I was raised in small towns.

Sleep, small town folks, please sleep.
But then I realize there is a large deer
Standing on the front porch of the church.
And another deer standing beneath a broken

Beer light on the gas station. And another
Deer on the stoop of the house. And three
Or four deer on the playground. And five
Or six more on the road near my car. *Wow.*

I wonder if this is somehow a town populated
Entirely by deer. What if these deer built
The church and worship a deer, slaughtered
By hunters, but who rose from the dead?

What if these deer built that gas station
But fill the tanks with bark and seed?
The deer, suddenly as bright and silent
As the stars, stare at me. They can smell me,

My human stink, my piss, my predator breath.
I am a dangerous stranger, but then, pop,
A porch light snaps on, a front door opens,
And a large human—male—steps out

Of the house. The deer startle and run.
I zip up my pants and run with them.
I can't keep up, of course. There's no way
Any human can keep pace with a deer,

But then suddenly, I do. I run beside
A deer that looks at me with such comic
Surprise that I laugh and nearly fall,
But no, I run and run and run and run.

ONNA SOLOMON
Wild Dogs of Santorini

We're beaten
even those who've seen some kindness
 especially those
beaten until we're wily
hunched and sniffing
 at each new hope
to be nourished—
 We learn late this generation
there's no safe place—to be safe
is not our right.
 Wild dogs of Santorini
like shadows along the steep white walls
learn not to eat the meat men leave them
in the square at night. Mornings
 shop owners haul out of sight
 what manged bodies remain.

ONNA SOLOMON
I Want to Tell You

I want to tell you: *Be calm.*
I want the world, the moment
in which we conceive
a person we will live for until we die,
to be miraculous. Yes, miraculous, each
concept a mind forms—to move is to seek,
to seek takes desire and it is desire, it is
desire moving us, each alone in this:
your body fit into me. What shape

will the child make in me?
I want it—this thought, *child*—to enter
a house of music, a joyous, gentle home.
It is a horrible place, this place
where everyone lives.
And we, you and I, eat it like quick
dinners standing in the kitchen.

I want to tell you: *Pay attention. We must
do this right.* And yet, and yet
we make images of each other.
Each pleasure, each grievance
adds on to the last until no one
stands before another person
as they are in that moment, as shifting
molecules, dying cells, changed
vision, sense, size—all different, new.

We (not I, not you, but we together) have made
an image of ourselves: we are lovers
we are hurried we are creators we are
articulate well-meaning fussing
about cellulite and receding hairlines—
I want to tell you: *We must let everything go.*
We must let go what we've conceived ourselves.

JESSICA GOODFELLOW

species: empty:

If I mention “perpetual motion” I mean “a body leaning into the wind.”

When I say “endless” I’m thinking “if a species has a memory you are it.”

When I educate the air that I in patience wait for your return clearly I mean “the little yellow birds of your childhood have lit upon my center but you are not among them.”

For “absence” please substitute “finally the birds will have a word for chaos.”

For “empty” please hear “a chronospecies is a species which changes physically morphologically genetically and/or behaviorally over time on an evolutionary scale such that the originating species and the species it becomes could not be classified as the same species had they existed at the same point in time. . . .”

If I whisper “species” I mean “a fugue of bone and clock and wind.”

For “over time” please choose one of the following three: “through a revolving door,” “like a string of even numbers,” “like a string of even numbers caught in a revolving door.”

Please erase “an evolutionary scale” and insert a möbius strip.

When I falter over “could not be classified” it’s because I’m busy pasting our wedding photo over that part of the definition.

The problem with “had they existed” is that it suggests its opposite “had they not existed” the way that “memory” suggests “absence.”

When I repeat “the same point in time” I mean of course “may no longer be possible.”

I’m placing the last known strand of your hair down the center of this page.

If I howl pretend it’s a dial tone.

When I answer “No I’ve had no word” in every possible tense I mean it.

JESSICA GOODFELLOW

clock: rules:

- 4:00 Don't expect one moment to be the same as the last. Don't think they are continuous, like a string. Or riven, like a string.
- 5:00 Do not feed your clock. No matter how it begs. A clock does not need nourishment. Nor can you expect it to give nourishment.
- 6:00 A clock is not a dwelling. Nothing can live there, not even ~~memory~~ language, which tries to live everywhere.
- 7:15 Your clock has an entrance but no exit. In this way it is like a ~~fugue a mirror~~ your childhood home. Before it burned to the ground. And was all exit, empty orbital.
- 8:00 Remember a clock is a trap you enter willingly. Like a ~~shadow~~ marriage.
- 9:00 A ~~god~~ clock is not a ~~clock~~ god. Even if you don't believe in ~~god~~ clocks.
- 10:40 Your clock does not know how to ~~whisper~~ count.
- 11:29 Your clock does not have good hearing. It confuses many similar-sounding words, for instance: fog, fugue, fatigue.
- 12:37 Do not use an invisible clock. It will tell lies, like a visible clock, but you will not know it.
- 1:22 A clock is not ~~gravity~~ sacred. It will claim to be, but any thing that claims to be ~~gravity~~ sacred, isn't.
- 2:48 Your clock has deeply ingrained habits, such as turning clockwise, for example, or staying by your bedside. Don't confuse these habits with desire when in fact they are only habits.
- 3:21 What we call the face of the clock is not really a face. The hands are also not hands. We call the clock's components by body parts because we don't know the names for the parts of ~~chaos~~ desire.

GLORI SIMMONS

Remorse

That night, the woods were haunted chandeliers, *italicized*—

branches glass-gloved,
needles sheerly thimble,

jarred in moonlight.

Captive,
nature captivates

& those of us who stray stray,
touching the edges—

i.e.: it was their shape that drew me to this page, the crystal embrace
of each pine finger's
glistening, the inevitable shimmer

of melt's typography—
a revelation

of what we already know.

This morning, a red fox darted across the pristine snow:

prick,
blood,
sheet.

Overhead, the alabaster spires began to break
—no, that's not it—
they dribbled sappy,
snotty tears.

For days, I've wondered how
—or if—
to tell you.

GLORI SIMMONS

Candor

from the notes of Madame Restell, 1878

TRADE

Advertising is key: *I have something you need.*

I thin the edges so to speak,

meet demand with supply, fill orders, trade that

for this: *female derangement's panacea* at Greenwich 148.

In this case, less is more.

RED

Mercy alone is no motive. I work for red velvet

& a washbasin that is more than pannier.

Gravid, a girl with a familiar accent asks: *What can be done?*

There are no words for red that do not connote blood.

A narcissistic color, it sees itself in everything.

REAL ESTATE (I)

The old parlor game—Marooned on Manhattan Island,
what would I bring? My ledger, my curatives & schemes.

A Plan B. Women ordering from the menu directly.

Certainly, no more physicians, father-types, or masked men.

Over time I've noticed: it's most often the prostitute who pays.

A WORD TO THE OPPOSITION

Minister, what's so delicate about the swinging door,
its ragtag, tenemental ins and outs?

So much birth attracts flies—like flame to kerosene.

All born, there would never have been enough Beethovens
to drown out the ruckus.

WHALE BONE

Whale fat, melted down, burns our lamps & the women
given their bones. We knit them into our hair,

weave them through our ribs like Peterborough baskets.

In torture, the body contains both crime & punishment.

Needlework's answer to knitting booties: a stab in the dark.

REAL ESTATE (II)

Marooned on Manhattan Island, what would I bring?
Born thirsty, I'd bring water. I like the current flowing
Uptown & can hold my head high
above the Pecksniffian stink. If required, Minister,
I will unlock my ledger, name names.

FOR CAROLINE

Of all my critics, I hoped you would finally understand.
I told only sugar pill lies, what they wanted to hear—
Mother Love's invention. You are mistaken
to say I do not love children: think of all the daughters I have saved
from their mothers. If I didn't do it for you, then for whom?

FROM THE TOMBS

I spun misfortune into gold, was called Angel
of the Second Chance. My reward: a moustache
inked beneath my nose, bat wings pinned upon my back.
Now this trickery: a limestone cell & early retirement.
What worried you more? What I took or what I gave?

REAL ESTATE (III)

Who could have foreseen the destitute row
where I first weeded out the kin would grow so
monumental—& then fall?
From my midwifery, I leave Carrie a house she can sell
for a litter's future & for myself a bath the length of my limbs.

BATH

Consider this my letter of resignation.
A girl in a sanguine mood once told me:
There was no one but myself to hold my head under the water.
Who has not taken life into her own hands, pinched her cheeks
to create a blush? Other words for float—

unfasten,

drift.

LUCIA PERILLO

Hokkaidō

War Emblem, the famous stallion,
will not mount a female rump
on the island of Hokkaidō
in a pasture near the sea.
It is hard to imagine anyone not being overcome
by the sight of two dozen mares
surrounded by volcanoes (is the problem
that the metaphors are too direct?) and yet
War Emblem is still not in the mood.

A thousand years ago the courtesan Shikibu
wrote a thousand poems to her lover,
the references to sex made tasteful through concision
and the image of their kimonos intertwined.
Either her heart was broken or it was full,
either way required some terse phrases to the moon.

Was that all it was? Dumb animal hunger?
All those years when I thought I was making Art
out of The One Important Thing?
And how to apologize now for my lack of adequate concision?
Once I was so full of juice and certain of its unending.

KURT LELAND

The Temptation of St. Anthony (1552–53)

after Paolo Veronese

Titian is master here? I'm tired of hearing it.
He's filled the palaces and chapels of Venice.
Even I have to admit his palette, brushwork
rivet the gaze with a brilliance more than mortal.
But watch me do better. Take his famous altar,
St. Peter the Martyr—I'll paint St. Anthony.

See, the bell in the corner shows it's Anthony.
Look how I make his arthritic hand reach for it,
eluding his grasp. A quarter turn has altered
the old man's sprawl, stolen from Titian. Let Venice
marvel at my foreshortening. He stares in mortal
terror at the woman in gold: the devil's work,

which he knows by the clawlike fingernails she works
into his left hand. She lifts it (poor Anthony)
to her one bare breast—marmoreal, immortal
as any on a Titian Venus. They'll all want it
on their walls: Counts, princes, cardinals of Venice
love the erotic, especially on altars.

A nude, bearded, curly-locked brute further alters
the scene, torso dominating, as in a work
of Michelangelo. *Such violence!* Venice
will say as this young hellion strikes St. Anthony
with the severed leg of a goat. Or maybe it's
attached to a shoved-aside Pan-like immortal:

Pagan giving way to Christian immorality.
But the masterstroke's depicting on an altar
this crushed, crumpled bible. The old man clutches it,
trying to hold his place. It's Titian and his works.
And I'm that virile youth beating St. Anthony,
every arm muscle straining to prove to Venice

I'm not merely his successor. There's nothing nice
between rivals. I vie for immortality
and money. And the saints I paint, like Anthony,
are pieces I've played in a game of altering
the city-state's taste. Even when I'm busy, work
feels easy, I keep that goat-hoofed cudgel raised. It's

my brush, Titian. Venice may still love your altar.
Pray as you might, like helpless St. Anthony, it
does nothing. I deal a mortal blow with every work.

JOHN HODGEN

Bootleg

It's a song called "Silver Mantis" that T Bone Burnett sings
on an old bootleg Bob Dylan CD from a Rolling Thunder Revue concert
down in Fort Worth, Texas, over thirty years ago. In the song,
which tells the tale of a lowly servant a thousand years ago
who saves the daughter of a Japanese warlord from a kidnapping,
but who then is thrown into the dungeon because the warlord is jealous
and enraged,
Burnett makes a mistake, a minor one, simply transposing the name of
the servant
for the name of the princess (the rough equivalent of a Shakespearean
actress saying
"O Juliet, Juliet, wherefore art thou Juliet?"). And to the casual listener,
or the uninitiated,
or the drunk or lazy, the moment in the song might go completely
unnoticed, no harm done
either way, but to the devotee, the sentimental, or the lowly servants
among us
(who are always in danger of being thrown into dungeons by our own
rough equivalents
of warlords, jealous and enraged), it makes us love the song even more.

I say maybe T Bone was a little drunk or a little lazy that day.
Or maybe he was caught up in his own moment, maybe playing before
the largest crowd
of his life because Dylan had loved the song too and had asked him to
join the revue
(although even Dylan himself made a mistake, introducing the song with
the wrong title
and mispronouncing the name of the Japanese princess).
Or maybe T Bone just knew somehow, like some silver mantis in his heart,
what all artists know over time, that art is one endless mistake after
another,
that architects sometimes make intentional mistakes, turning the last
piece of tile
upside down in the floor of ten thousand tiles to show no pride before the
face of the Lord,
that the part of the song where the singer loses control is the heart's true
song,
the essence of all that is holy in love, that lovers when they freely exchange
their hearts

→

with the other exchange their names as well, that they know in the room
they make
of their love that each name is sacred and the same, that Romeo is Juliet
and Juliet is Romeo,
that the heart of a lowly servant can be the heart of a princess, that there's
no mistake about it,
that love may be the greatest mistake of them all, that love is the rough
equivalent,
the bootleg version of the perfect song of our lives.

JOHN HODGEN

Look, Look

In the grainy news footage an old woman in a bathing suit standing on a beach.

Overweight. Heavysset. Seen from behind. Suit too small. European. Not the way an old woman should be seen, we say. We look anyway, first with disdain, then dollops of pity, in the way we have come to look.

We say *Cover yourself. You are no longer young.* We say the world is always looking

at our bottoms. We consume her, spit her out, the woman and the others looking out

at the ocean. Then we see it too, what has them up looking, what they must have seen

first as cloudbank horizon, until they saw it truly, until it rushed at them spitting,

tsunami, tsunami, the god of a wave that was coming to kill them.

The image turns over like a bird in a loop, like a photograph tumbling all night underwater,

then come to the light, this old woman on a beach. She is all the old women we have seen

and forgotten, like paintings we have passed on our way to the other, aunts who have died,

Mother Courage, Käthe Kollwitz, relatives distant as trees overseas. But she does not turn,

the woman on the beach, nor do the others. They look at the wave, sun-filled, that is coming

to eat them, bigger, whiter than anything they've ever seen. They do not run, not yet, caught

in the web of their looking, the way shepherds must have looked at the angels above them,

struck dumb, agog, the way we all look sometimes at the world that loves us and kills us,

the world that bamboozles, flimflams, Dick and Janes us again and again, crying Look, Look,

this world that keeps coming, this world we behold even to the cup of our deaths overflowing

and still never fully believe, this fleshy, ancient, crepuscular world, this old woman on a beach

who turns, opens her arms, runs to us screaming, asking nothing but all of our love.

ROBERT CHUTE

The Idea of Order on the First Day of Winter

The sun's rays might be x-rays
and Bill's pine plantation crystalline.
With longest shadows of the year
the solstice sun slants through
pines planted in right angle rows.
On the angled path I'm skiing
order and disorder alternate as,
right and left, trees like soldiers
assembling fall in line, as suddenly
fall out, become a crowd again.

Now I'm passing English orchards
on a train. D'Arcy Thompson reads
from his book *Growth and Form*.
He sees the unintentional
collineations of the trees
as, sleepless in rented rooms, we find
crisscross lines emerging
from wallpaper designs.

We see what we're prepared to see.
Fibonacci's spirit flickers
through the trees and we find magic
in the spiral tessellation
of the pinecone—but red squirrels
that flow like rusty current, tree
to tree, have deconstructed cones
into arrays of scales that play
atonal music on the crusted snow.

In the open field I look back
on ordinary woods while, high along
the ridge top, tangled, bare, disorderly
deciduous trees dissect a cloudless
winter sunset: neurons in brain sections
silver-stained. Nature's deceptive best,
nature deceptively meaningless.

MARY LEADER

To Gaze Is To Think

Wait long enough, and a pattern emerges: the same
Series of light and dark bands that Young saw.

Nothing but moving patterns of intensities: bright
Here, brighter there, dim elsewhere;

Imposed; the sunny mist, the luminous gloom
Of Pluto; even as when I fix my attention

On a white house or a gray bare hill or rather
On a long ridge that runs out of sight each way

How often I want the German *unübersetzbar*
(Untranslatable). The rays long-pale slanting-

Late, conveying loss, nostalgia, an end to
Things (untranslatable). I well know it.

And the face overspread with light, with swimming
Phantom light overspread but rimmed and circled

By a silver thread. The pretended sight-sensation
(Translatable) whether visible or invisible

(Untranslatable): how often I want its intensity;
And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast;

And the sun thick whirling explosive; and
Van Gogh's starry night squeezed into fine tendrils

Of optical fiber, and then perceptual light
From monitor screen, this fair luminous mist,

This beautiful and beauty-making power, light,
And light's effluence, cloud at once and shower;

The use of thin washes applied with a brush
Or thick slabs of paint laid on with a spatula

Or multiple planes of transparent and opaque rock
Color: the velvety whites, the shining blacks,

MARY LEADER

The ambivalent grays, the ghostly undulations;
Light's valleys and hills. A smile, as foreign to,

As detached from the gloom of countenance, as any
I have seen. A small spot of light travels

Slowly and sadly along the top, when all
Below has been dark with the storm. Stupor.

Brow-hanging, shoe-contemplative, strange.
No matter what great distance we measure for any

Voyage of light, to itself it covers no distance
At all. The 30,000 feet from Everest's peak

To sea level, the 3,000 trillion miles
From the red star Betelgeuse to Earth, the twelve inches

That light covers in a nanosecond; all are
One and the same to a traveler on laudanum

Or a photon, who sees the universe approach. At the speed
Of light, at that critical speed, all lengths

Contract to zero, and the traveler sees an infinitely
Thin cosmos. I drink fears like wormwood,

Smell cement of rain and cloth. And what is
Succession with inter-space in the undivided
Indivisible duration? The traveler and
The traveled differ only in their wavelengths,

Wavelengths the distance between consecutive crests.
What is a moment? This I will say: Some

Were brilliant beyond belief, as when the last
Log before dawn would spark into my mania.

KARL ELDER

Ode in the Key of O

Kudos unto the code and to the mind
behind the hand that moved not out of need
but what must be acknowledged as a thought
nonpareil—stone turned wheel no exception—
the crude scrawl (in ashes, sand, and soil
with stick or staff) that which it did not know
to call symbol, yet would bring to recall
the awe uttered as O on the rounded
mouth below the eyes of one fixed upon
the moon's shape, if not in worship, wonder.

Yea, as if a remnant of gods gone ghost
gleaned from the air by the hand of a mime,
like approximation of perfection,
that diminutive orb wholly without
substance rolled from the tongue, made corporal
by yet another eidolon, the line—
call it divine insight when the pupil
of the mind's eye eclipses iris to
highlight, through swift abstraction, the concrete.

Ought it then not be, after the grand span
of five hundred generations, given
the cuneiform-like illusion of form
born of the fact of annularity,
our alacrity to the degree it
has not atrophied to hilarity
at the writ of the clock is—while more
minute each minute—worthy, too, of praise?

For value in its purest form is less
a matter of matter than the marriage
of light and shade, their interdependency
in the sense, say, male and female were one
from the beginning—no little arrow
on the O of that embryo, no foe,
target, cross, or stickman Atlas below.

Lo, behold: lift like Sol's soul *o* from *god*
there's no g. d. (or even dad gummed) thing
to which we cling if not—à la lingua
franca more so than the thing itself, life
buoy or lasso—awe, the ineffable
grasped as we're pulled, gasping, through h. to o.

Thus, as it's said, at the apogee of one's
gestation there is the crowning; there is
as well the splash, and there is the circle
of attendants, the cry, the swaddling,
the mother's embrace, infant to her breast.

Yet, life is birth's twist: in time time doesn't
exist, birth flanked by nothing of the past,
no word of the future when, alas, love's
orismo's most fierce in fear of life's loss.

O, of the holes in the whole of our knowledge
we say miracle, though the miracle,
mother of miracles, is we say it.

As for love's spell—phallic *l*, mellow *o*
vis-à-vis Eve's cleft *v v*. snake eye *e*—

is it not awe to which we owe our awe?

MARGARET AHO
At 95 she says the word

for shy

is *scheu*, a lovely mule,

& slips her hammertoes in this scuff-

syllable—Ed Sullivan's pronunciation for the *really big*;

germane, because she says the word for awe

is also *scheu* . . .

so

two mules:

sterile? useful? should I bracket, brace

myself? This show goes round & round, chafes out a rasping

scheu . . . *scheu* . . . from the grind, awful from the

groove of her shuffle devotion heard

for the first time

mid-

step off-

stage [here] I hear [her] word

for word but mum speechless no logo-gasm no maxim

rising from the rut: just slow slog steps : *minne-*

singers just the flesh of her

foot raying

out

MARGARET AHO

Outside

the high whine of

saplings—bound to be skinned, to be guileless

laminae. *He was sheathed in a skin*

of lucent finger-

nail. Adam? Isaac? [Nail it: the need to be

right] The Book of Brightness?

At the horizon, a tree branches out from east

to west—ten fingers, ten emanations.

Who can tell me today is not

the last day?

The candle is lit:

your face, mother,

with its bruise below your right eye.

MARGARET AHO
Even my weak eyes

can spot the darkly elevated . . .
something smudged & blurry, there on stilts
among the needled limbs, behind the scrim of trembling yellow
aspen in this dusk: a hutch, a
crib for *chi-*
roptera
 . . . *bat is good medicine, is . . .* [this from the mouth of . . .]

Back up this
era that opts for x's. Sign here. Solve for . . . See how we hang by our
heels, gravid with slapdash
exequies?
 . . . *rebirth* [the budding . . .] & already hard-
wired
for reverb, repeat, solely the sound of our own . . .
 . . . *sole mammal*
capable of . . .
 skin-foil? skin-extension? where then is the limit
of the body, stretched out in . . .
 . . . *flight, true flight*

In this twilight
 [remorph . . . remorse . . .] can you see something
volar
volant: palm & sole pinned?

MARGARET AHO

About

the ablaut your mules make

[shy shoe show . . .]

about turns

about plodding to the point of

obsessive

about rounds, sibilant

about post-shh

about vowel-play, leeway, full of give . . .

about latitude

MARGARET AHO

Recite her stretch-

step

her stubbed-out hemmed-in walker-wrestled *s'nuff* . . .

'nuff . . . her soundtrack's recurring

contraction that only grows

more inexact like

this x

brought to her lips in the dark

after the day's [*immer schon*]: always already &

[*ungebund*]: coming unstitched, see? close

your eyes *now* can you hear?

almost mantic: her

mules

her leather flappers

SUSAN TICHY

A Ghost

of rock, deceptively whole
as a wave is whole

at the moment
of its breaking

'dark with an excess of light'
above the trees

stopped in the meadow
'fingering the white quartz

which seamed the granite boulders'
an accurate guide

to conduct among the snows
ravens drift

across the ridge-top dog
or coyote barks in the trees

and 'properly used
danger can have an important meaning'

clear as a stone
on paper 'the pen

should walk slowly
over the ground'

—a task too easily mastered
at altitude

this dead bristlecone, far ridge
quarreling across my line of sight

their 'dark tint passing tenderly'
to boot-on-rock, to stonecrop

a noise half brook, half silence
in the scree flights of fish

in the limestone, pace
of thought from steep

to steep a pipit
flies straight up with its wings still, held

by wind
'and with reference to breathing

I do not say what
it is for'

backwards as forwards
long slopes of debris

'rest your hand on a book
so to hold the pen long'

'dressing the action in gallant attire'
(one hat, searched for

on the second day)
the grieving bring a photograph

'made chocolate sherbet
in the summer snow'

not *summer* snow but *summit* snow
not *summit snow* but *summit*

—it's a verb
trail worn into the white rock

'one had to cross an expanse of sea'
spatter of rain and a gull feather

caught in my jacket zipper
it's far from home and I

surveying distances
'as if they were your whole estate'

say 'jumped from the top of a cattle car
with his clarinet under his arm'

say 'swam into tarns
to fetch out water lilies'

and there, 'just
where the curve of the petal turns to light'

say 'bloom of the scarlet dye
on shining linen' strata

of 'utterly harsh and horrible colour'
strata of 'delicate pen lines' mere

requiring in crossed branches
bound at the root

a wind is captured, illustrated
by 'syllable of a stammerer'

a stumbler stumbling
up hill from the trail

a stone in the bristlecone
—someone has visited—

'guarding the frontier
of heaven and earth'

elk scat here
in the aplily ants

keep rearranging
the ashes

improbable slip
masquerading

as possible granite
drifting across basalt

(my footprints drying behind me)
rolling on landwave

rock-drunk
sprawled where a siskin

talks in the undertow
'to pause within a hair's breadth

of any appointed mark'
and see

nothing a kestrel

hangs where east meets west
the ridge

in both directions
concealing force

and 'no series
without a snap somewhere'