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THE HIRAM POETRY REVIEW



#58/59

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THE HIRAM POETRY REVIEW

Issue No. 58/59

Spring, 1995 - Winter, 1996

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Editorial

HPR is about to change its publication format to that of a CD-ROM annual for Windows and Macintosh multimedia computers.

The shift will take place in two stages: (1) the next issue, while remaining essentially in the present format, will be a single 1997 annual issue bearing the number HPR 60; (2) the 1998 issue (HPR 61) will be a multimedia CD-ROM, as will subsequent issues.

HPR will honor all current subscriptions, of course; those subscribers whose pre-paid subscriptions extend beyond issue number 60 will receive the new CD-ROM publication. Prices for the new CD-ROM series (both for subscriptions and for individual copies) will be announced in HPR 60 (which will also contain the index for issues 51-60). Prices will not increase substantially; tentatively, we hope to price each CD-ROM annual issue at \$10 to \$15, with savings for subscriptions of three or more years.

Why this change?

This is certainly no “sell-out to modern technology.” The time is simply at hand when we are able to publish poetry in ways that were formerly not possible—and to do so in the best interest of the poems and their audience. Poetry has always been much more than printed matter. Computer multimedia technology can allow poetry a legitimately richer life—not only publishing the poems’ texts, but sometimes (with the poets’ collaboration) animating the words, and sometimes including readings of the poems by the poets, spoken commentary, interviews, and such extras as photos of poets and copies of original working manuscripts. The pos-

sibilities are numerous—and exciting. (Consider what a tool for teaching this new HPR will be!)

What will the CD-ROM HPR *look* like?

The new CD-ROM HPR will be packaged in a 6 X 9 inch folder almost exactly like the covers of HPR issues over the past thirty years. It will stand on your shelf or fit your binders fully compatibly with the issues you've been collecting there. The difference is simply this: in place of HPR's printed pages there will be a CD-ROM disk.

Any samples or previews?

Naturally, we don't have an exact prototype of this future HPR to share with you, but if you wish to obtain samples of our work with multimedia poetry we'll be glad to send you free information about how to obtain it. Simply send a postcard with your mailing address, or telephone us at (330) 569-5330.

Hale Chatfield

Voices in the Dark Say “Go On, Go On”

Voices in the dark say “go on, go on”
in the seeping wood where hides the shale
where pine trees bleed and rabbits stop—
where ferns like sleeping lovers lie—
voices in the dark say “go on, go on.”
Voices in the dark say go on go on
where dreams must wind like trickling drops
down hollow stumps where earthworms slide
where bears ride in an attitude of thunder—
where ferrets flee the foxes in the shadows—
voices in the dark say “go on, go on.”
Voices in the dark say “go on, go on”
for something dark and something good
for mushrooms matted where saplings stood
for a boy unpeaced who can’t suppose
who can only see day but not the rose
voices in the dark say “go on, go on”
voices in the dark say “go on, go on”
voices in the dark say “go on, go on.”

Michael Alter

A Trip to the Moon

In many ways it's just like home,
lunching in the valley between the Carpathians
and the Pyrenees, north
of Central Bay. But the countries are named for dead
scientists, Copernicus, Kepler,
Archimedes, Tycho,
the languages silent and rootless,
the natives wary of travellers
trying to take snapshots of the daylight
and its star-glutted night sky.
Over the Alps and into Archimedes,
you wished for the days spent sailing
the gray dunes named by
poetic astronomers, the clouds
of dust following you from
the Bay of Dews to the Sea of Showers,
taking shelter under your coat
in the Ocean of Storms, and in the distance,
glimmering, the Sea of Moisture.
In the Sea of Clouds you thought of heaven,
how what doesn't live doesn't die,
and in the Sea of Nectar you grew fat
on the fruit of your hope. From the Sea of Vapors
it's a short voyage, one you slept through,
to the sister Seas of Serenity and Tranquility,
and then the Sea of Fertility,
where all you could do was smell,
and all you could smell was your lover.

Arc north again, and
in the Sea of Crises whatever questions
still lie inside you are answered
the worst answers. Trains derail,
diseases bloom in the best people.
Onward to the Lake of the Sleepers,

the weary fish floating belly up,
and the Lake of the Dead, where you see
your mother, too young to know who you are,
back straight and hair dark, lying in a rowboat humming.
The Sea of Cold waits beyond that, but
that's going too far, even for you,
nearly as far as the dark side,
where only the most pragmatic Russians live,
along Cosmonaut's Bay, before
the Soviet Mountains, the waste villages
of the Tsiolkovsky Crater.
Recross the Alps, back to the Bay of Dewes,
where you can wash yourself of
your experience, and wonder how you'd name your moon
if no one had thought to by now,
the stretches of open silt christened the Bay
of Lonesomeness, the Ocean
of Patience, the Sea of Wishful Thinking.

Michael Atkinson

Afternoon Visit

She crooks her
finger—shares with me through
half-smiling lips an urgency:
at night late, when everyone
has gone to sleep except the old
man in the next room who howls
all night, moss grows under her
bed, rolls up when someone comes.
It's not always moss. Sometimes
just bare earth, a field frozen
to dust. She asks me to look
for myself. On all fours I take
my time, know what I'm supposed
to find. It hides when you're
looking, she says. But I see only
ourselves. It's snowing, we're
being wheeled into our shadows.
Who knows what she forgets. We
shift, fall across fields of late
afternoons, and disappear at night.

Robert Bense

Midnight Kitchen

*“ This ‘mysterious power that
all may feel and no
philosophy explain’ . . . ”*

—Federico Garcia Lorca

It’s only for the last half hour
before bed, my problems fall into line
and speed toward solution awhile,
becoming crossword clues. If I
get 29 down, this whole quadrant will blossom
like a pasture open to development.

Would you want to live in an “M,”
if it’s only penciled in? That’s why pencils
and heavy equipment come
in the same shade of yellow, why the
fly just gave up in a blink by the fixture, why 29 down
is a six-letter noun evading my tongue, like a name

to go with the face I clearly recall from college.
If she were in the bedroom now, waiting with dreams, if
I had changed my major to hers, or then if the world
took me into far off lands to find food, tools, solutions
to absolute disaster, and I did, then turned in
to sleep alone on a cot, only letters would escape me.

Jim Bill

Moon

This is the light I will burn in—
the skull's rind,
miles of burning
astronomy in gutter-lights
a voyeur of endless windowpanes,
a mandrake-souled
aphrodisiac
of murder and shrieking wolves

The moon is full of straight-jackets—
jeering behind clouds,
probing me the way
it jerks a hand under lake waters,
under oceans
to drag their puppet
hearts,
punishing the sea in whiplash tides.

Distance cannot stamp the haggard face.
Moon, bending over my bed
with whispers dark and wide as craters.
You dark beard—
old man, nailing me
to my hell of a thousand gravities.
I close like a stone
against your touch—
and my body pours, like a lifeless sea,
to your hands.

I will die in your light
your cold fingers—
the dementia you seal behind sunlight.
You trace an orbit of lunacy,
dead oceans

swinging in your hands.

Daniel Blackston

THE MOON SINGS A FULL ARIA

for Rob

The moon sings one last aria up there.

We had come to guide your life out, to park
the red Lincoln by the curb at the door
and speed inside, to this room. *Mr. Clark's
sleeping now*, the attending nurse said, *so before
I let you in, please do not . . . do not . . . and do*

not, listing attachments like a salesclerk
selling a vacuum, then brought us in. For
months you'd been fighting jaundice and a wrecked
liver—drunk, waking up on its own floor.
We were asked to bring one thing, a book. So

we have only *Goodnight Moon* and the dark
crawling on its haunches across the floor.
We gather around your steel bed, pale, stark
as the sheets that have bound you, poor
mummy with only slits for eyes, narrow.

I note the way your face has lost its spark,
I think of those nights of Jane Olivor,
how much you'd play her tapes, her voice a lark's
warble; you rewound for one song—Run For
The Roses. Your face then was bright, aglow

with passion-fruit rum punch and snide remarks,
the life of your own party now our pallor.
We read pages you've marked: goodnights for clocks
and the old lady whispering "hush"; *Goodnight stars*,
—the moon sings an aria that's borrowed—

Goodnight air, Goodnight noises everywhere.

Larry Bradley

Father Isaac Jacques

Animals, caught in cruel traps,
pass into another state, impervious
to pain, and wait for death
to free them . . . at least so he'd been told.
His black robe would not show
the blood as a lighter garment might.
He did not find it odd The Lord
should use him so: below the pain
that screamed aloud he knew
the chosen must he tried. He held
his severed thumb up
and offered it to God. All pain
was focused there as light through
a lens is bent upon
a single spot. He wondered
whose screams he heard. The thumb
smoldered, blackened, burned:
was tinder for a holy fire.

Robert M. Chute

SUGAR JIM

Jim is
incarnate
Green Man,
nature spirited
and grounded in black earth,
straight talking
sensate
real
and most alive in open sky,
demanding some concession from the wind
to coax more living beauty out
into this concrete world.

Jim is
imprisoned now in mind
alone,
a fragile bloodway blocked
into the center
of initiating acts,
to leave his exits locked.

At dawn I knew
that I had dreamed of him
all through the night,
half-waking into darkness
feeling his mind compact
with thoughts yet to be funneled
through the narrow apertures
of weary eyes.

Jim is
(voice tongue hands feet and all)
locked in
and left with flickers of his lids
and sudden flares
to carry
what acts and arguments
once bore straight out
into the light.

Turning restlessly,
I thought of him
unable to express details,
designs, ideas, plans;
give words to beauty,
smile with love,
harass authority,
or talk good sense
to anyone.

What intercessions can be asked?
What ends desired?

God, give him back his voice
so we can hear him
speaking beauty, sense
or simple cussedness.

He can feel, but cannot touch
can ponder deeply, yet cannot
express his thoughts,
touch planting, trimming,
blooms or fruit.
What is transforming here?

Let there be light in his eyes,
sense spilling from his mouth,
strength and direction in his limbs.
Let him see to the planting of ideas and forsythia,

hostas, peace and dogwoods without end

or let his suchness sail
into the being of All That Is
and scatter into earth.

Let Jim grow beyond constriction
or go home to spirit till he comes again.
What outcome fits this space?
What fits eternity?

Nancy Adams Cogan

Summa

Say that setting out from
New England, when fall's
wet count leaves off and

Winter's light comes on
like a theorem to pearl
and glassine, is like

Advancing, slow as oxen,
toward that Italian port
existing only

In the going to:
in the stepping over
seams in a gray grid,

In attendant vines
and off-brightness
and winter logic;

Yet think how all are
dry, medieval days, where
pale hosannas linger

In marbling, and halftones
are hymns in the whorl
of a child's hair.

Don Cunningham

TUESDAY AFTERNOON AT THE GRAND ART INSTITUTE

This dimmed tracklit exhibit
proclaims him “Prince of Dreams,” sets
next to many of the works someone’s

latest interpretations; words fuzz,
like those blowups of old snapshots
filling a wall, what clean light

used to fall through his windows—
fresh water on the blooms of his eyes,
irises open, nasturtiums

gleaming. Part way through, beside
a woman hoarding even more information,
I take note of her slim redhaired reverie

(weightless earphones cap her), a tailored
calf-length skirt. When she lets out
a long high-pitched fart

it resonates through the gallery.
Across the room another patron
stands stockstill but at ease—

headset pressed upon his talcum-grey
perm, navy jogging togs, the brightest
white running shoes—and lets

his cranked-up phones leak
through the whole space a rock-cassette
rattle: tinny rhythms tint

dozens of canvases Odilon Redon
construed to raise silent wonder.

After the famous off-center vases

I like, the typical two or three frames
crookedly mounted (as if curators now think
we're the kind of people

who like to watch films out of focus),
on to Goya's miniatures, brightly-lit:
the candid flesh of his little faces,

bullfights at noon, lunatics wrestling,
cannibals gnawing the limbs of people
who look just like themselves.

John Druska

THE GARDEN OF BLOOD

The man had been accused of living in tableau,
And it is true he spent many days sitting in his garden
As if he expected the flowers, like animals, to come up and lick his hand.

He did not himself, of course, kneel before the roses.
Caress the blousy head of an aster, but he was their physical intimate—
He did not rebuke the snapdragons for their monstrous name.

I can see him now, steeped in his sensual aura.
As dedicated and immensely forceful in memory and mimesis
As Marguerite of Navarre who kept the head of her lover on an altar.

He looked like a man who had eaten a thousand countries
And retained the geographical appetite of a rampant boy,
The sort who might eat the bait from the hook even when he goes fishing.

Do not, therefore, be quite so quick to tear the gauze
And pull the picture toward you like the bruised viscera of a lifeless thing:
He does not skin so easily, filled as he is with the heavy shot of his adventures.

I want, most of all, the tableau-minded to be on hand
When he sticks his pitchfork into the dung heap by the railing
As if he scattered now the refuse of his recent thought.

In the tremendous quake of the worm-filled matter,
I see much scurrying back into the so-called blood-filled picture
As if a hemorrhage still flowed from the head upon the altar.

Just be careful, that is all I ask of the blood-worm—
These men in their shimmering, magnificent gardens
May know much better how to thread an entrail on an eye.

Charles Edward Eaton

Fertility

You were conceived in April,
At home,
Among the teeming things of the soil,
As I caressed the ground while planting,
Praying to the Earth to share
A bit of its motherhood.

You were conceived again in a ship,
Sailing near the equator,
When I lay only inches from the ocean, and
Felt the moon pulling on the seas
And the salty waters inside me.

You were also conceived in my childhood,
Before I had the words to name you,
But would sit on the grass,
Looking up at golden leaves flashing
Against the brightest blue autumn sky,
Trying to extend my vision
So I could see through time.
We waited together for the future perfect.

You were conceived once more
When I found my wolf-self.
I was compelled to practice
Silent footsteps in the forest,
Develop a sense of detection.
I discovered passions so wild,
I might chew off a foot to be free.
They nurtured you.

You were repeatedly conceived in distant cities

Scented with diesel and spices,
When I had to try not to love so much
The millions and their miseries,
And even so,
You are the size of the world.

You were conceived so many times
That now you have grown too large;
I can no longer contain you.
I give you to the light.

Jeanne Friedman

Eyewitness, or Monopoly Victory

The man across the street came out of his house,
bidding his guests goodbye.

He was dressed only in painter's pants,
which were *very* dirty.

I heard him clearly, as he shouted to his departing guests,
who were riding bicycles. He was saying:

“You should have been the shoe or the hat! It was that!
You were just the wrong piece!”

His guests were riding away rapidly
and did not look back.

Joshua Friend

A Postmodern Displacement

*The “real” is now defined in terms
of the media in which it moves.*

—Neville Wakefield

The young man dreams of being
a great writer—recognized, admired,
even studied. He wants,

sometimes desperately, a little fame. But,
as it often is with dreams, the easy habits
of complacency and unfulfillment lure him

to a safer place: a highly tangible,
brightly lit office-supply superstore,
where he can browse the aisles,

hands in pockets. He takes comfort in pens,
bond paper cotton fiber,
self-adhesive reinforcements, the long-reach stapler—

in the feel of paper clips still in the box,
reams of legal, ink—
in unmailed envelopes of every shape and size.

Joshua Friend

A BIRTHDAY POEM

for Jennifer

All the stars were in place.
It spun perfectly, tilted a bit
to give variation to the days.
It revolved around a warming sun
and all forms of life
were nourished. Stalks and vines
grew from the ground, and fruit
fell from the trees. Through its waters
all manner of fish swam.
Cooling rains nourished it.
Morning birds sang.
But it wasn't quite finished.
An open space waited to be filled.
A fragment of air to be breathed.
And then you were born.

Robert Funge

What Great-Grandma Said

I just got up to use the bathroom.
I touched his hand before I went in there.
He was warm, and breathing.

When I came out,
I couldn't have been in more than five minutes,
he was gone. Everything was set.
The casket, the flowers, everything.

Cheryl Gilbert

SOME WAKES

Think of arteriosclerosis
and how you would never have
rhymed it in your early poems.

Doubt your life's work
from the funeral home back,
starting at death, and

the chapel, mourners and things
so solid in their boxes not even
your best phrase can move them.

Remember the smell of him
or your shared song or the
small motor boat and early

experiments in catching walleye.
Then turn to the ramblings
of your proud musical diary,

how you loved him, how you hated him,
and always with flare. But now,
lower him into the ground

with a pretty phrase and it won't
sweeten a peck of graveyard dirt,
your art no more than a stage

in panic, a fashion show for grief,
a loose leaf from the history of
your abandonment of people for words,

a gruesome face to face
with this someday being you and
everything you've ever done.

But one more time, kneeling at the altar
of the sound of things in your head,
you still can't resist.

Prayer becomes dance. Sorrow mutates
into verse. His silence is what he
would have said so eloquently to you.

You put poetry inside his
mouth so many times,
that could even be what killed him.

John Grey

THE VIEW FROM HERE

Always about love and losing—
pen high above the paper like
an anxious diver, and through
the window, an abandoned van
in my neighbor's yard,
a fallen meteor wedged between
fence and long grass
sulking with last night's rain.

Something finite and rusting
into a billion metaphors and
I turn from it, hating speed
and wheels and mechanics and
anything that ought to get
you somewhere but doesn't.

So love it is, the awkward
aching for hips and ribs,
every bone in my body grinding
against every one of hers,
and then the softness that
expels the hardness of what we are
with wry astonishment,
brief intervals of eyes,
a tongue carrying me
along her lip trail to the
source of her saliva,
an entire life
moving willingly into anything
that could be an embrace.

So much of it though,
none of it will come,
the paper, a walking tour
of blankness, of goodbyes,
the first word, an acknowledgement
that what I describe will
never be again, and then
the van, not mocking exactly
but, having been there before,
locking into the wild-flowers,
the weeds, the unruly growth of
too much time, too much history.

John Grey

Answering Back

My sister calls, all concerned
because her hair is orange. I try to muster sympathy,
but can't, the way I can't feel anything
for the guy in aerobics who keeps tripping
over his Step. She reads me the contents
of the bottle. Her words take shape, brighten
and loosen, then dissolve. I think I was seven
before I realized my mother's accent changed
to match other people's voices. I see
my sister's face, framed by red frizz.
She's saying something about "origin."
She's out there searching for an anodyne.
I do a dance to the phone's static: first
flailing arms, and then the tangle.
I see my mother, drinking it black
because the guests do. I think I was seventeen
before I knew she wanted sugar. What
makes me wonder is what keeps him coming back
only to spill, again, somebody's bottled water:
each time the same tsunami. My sister's trying
to eliminate dark roots. To lose her accent:
breathy tangle of cast-off voices
simply dissolved, sugar in water.

Carol Guess

Of Bones

I watch you enter your face
as you wake.

The corners, like any darkened room,
light up as night retreats to whatever dreams

kept you sleeping until now.
You haven't opened your eyes,

but I can tell you know I'm standing here
like bad sculpture observing you as you resurrect

yesterday's annoyances as if you were a second-hand
messiah stuck with laboring over suicides

who all probably should be left in peace.
But it is your nature, your avocation

to work the light, force it on them
like unwelcome faith then stand back

to let them rediscover the soft surprise
of their bodies, the discipline of bones

which holds us to this world
like a fist clenching, unclenching

Linda Lee Harper

Nickelville Road

The summer I ran away,
we lived in our trailer on Nickelville Rd.,
and my mom and cousin Robbie
were dating bikers, the Avengers.
That night my mom took off
without her glasses (she was putting on
make-up) with some other man
in a Jeep and stayed gone three hours.
I got fed up waiting and decided to light out
(she was reading me *Huckleberry Finn*) on my own.
I wanted to slide through the window,
to make a risky escape and be free,
but the windows were small and screened,
so I just walked out past Robbie.
“I’m running away,” I said. “Okay.”
she said, so I left.
I crawled in the doghouse,
where I often hid,
and my best dog Liz came in,
then we crossed the road
and hid again in the long weeds.
As I was deciding where else to go,
here my mom rode up in the Jeep
with the other man.
Her boyfriend came out and caught them.
He hit her right across her face
with no glasses or mascara on
(that was always her last step)
and dragged her in the house.

I couldn't see after that.
We stayed in the weeds
until she called my name
and I saw her gray shape
lumped against the light
spilling over our dark yard.

Charity Henderson

Words Spit From a Shadow

“You ripped out of there like a Kleenex,
your antacid suit
tasting gray.
Money hunts your blood
and your fashionplate
diagnoses with a diet of sex-rays.
Knife see you,
scissors rasping
the red thread of the fast lane
and the fine line of fate,
shy chaos tongue-tied
to slate-torn chalk’s
astigmatism . . .”

Keith Gabriel Hendricks

When You Went to Class with a Suntanned Soul

the windows leaked me,
in a salty drop, to the grass,
because deep down, you want to be brown,
and not well-read.
When you said "Give me a buzz
Indigo Girls footage
tomorrow at nine,"
I sat in Semonide's karma
and the sunny lawn,
reading a fluff book
to fulfill your desire for light.
The bees disrobed
and blue spilled
in the roof of my eyes,
and there was no need for aggressive truth.

Keith Gabriel Hendricks

Summer House, a Fine Old Family

Waves rush in and out
a froth like spilled ginger ale.
Arcs cross arcs with the wet gleam
of tears.

A froth of spilled ginger ale
on the porch at a family party, the salt
of tears.
Someone has fallen. A cut knee.

On the porch at a family party, the salt
drifting in from sea spray,
someone has fallen. A cut knee
is today's tragedy.

Drifting in from sea spray
the wind carries away the talk
of today's tragedy,
sweets and consolation.

The wind carries away the talk,
brings forgetfulness,
sweets and consolation
soothing as sleep on a cool porch.

Bringing forgetfulness,
arcs cross arcs with the wet gleam
soothing as sleep on a cool porch.
Waves rush in and out.

Judith Kerman

You Took the Movies With You

You took the movies with you when you moved.
Each tommy gun, each magic sword, each breast
Housed in a bra built like a bridge, each test
Of untried manhood, every slim, black-gloved
Hand that beckons subtle death: you shoved
All this in your wagon when you moved out west
And each bright thing I fancied I possessed
In darkness vanished, everything I had loved.

These days, though not much flickers on my screen
But half-hour farces, still, a chance re-run
Of some old series may revive the scene
Of a mounted cowboy bathed in evening sun.
I think of the hero who I might have been
If my dreams and I—my love and I—were one.

Bill Kerwin

VARIETIES OF FLIGHT

for P.M.

walking in the wind that rises from the water you said
the closest we come to flight is the hand
pointing when an object
is released

and I thought of feather and bone the wing I found
intact at Point Lobos in the shadows
of wild iris that flutters
in my fingers

and the ways we speak of Icarus his wisdom innocence
and folly his hope and ours the great leap
it takes just to imagine
feet leaving ground

and to realize that what beckons like an updraft at the edge
of the Pacific is a warm wind that penetrates
the skin and sets
the mind whirling

Christian Knoeller

PRAISING THE NIGHT

From the ragged apple trees
of abandoned orchards
and leafless sycamores that stalk

the river in last light,
blackbirds raise the voice
of their dark congregation,

whistling and trilling,
praising the night.
A heron glides, motionless

as a tree current's undercut.
Cold air reports
limbs snapping

in the distance as vagrants
devise shelter. Cedar
and hemlock outlive

foundations they were planted
to adorn while madrones
huddle in the fields

like old immigrants broken
by the work of breaking
the land.

Christian Knoeller

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SPANGLISH REPARTITIONS
By Richard Kostelanetz
Layout by Erik J. Ringerud

The Visitor

The grandfather lies on the daybed
A man with bristles on his face
And fingers folded like roots
Across his chest. She turns lazily
On the black piano stool, its squeak
In harmony with the wet pattering
From his lips. They've asked her
To guard against death. A bee bangs

The screen beside his head and lights
On the glass of teeth. She counts
The things that move: the bee,
The pendulum on the grandfather clock,
A fish, the curtain, herself, him.
And dust, she imagines, under the radiator
In the breeze. And what could she make
To move? The keys, which she depresses
Slowly. The phonograph.
The marbles in the jar beside the chair.

A toe protrudes beneath the sheet
Like the head of a swimmer in trouble
Among the waves. If he begins to die,
Will his foot collapse, or twitch, or stiffen?
She holds her breath to see how death will feel
And gasps for air, muffling her breaths
In a pillow. But maybe if they kept him up
All the time he couldn't die.
Does death come in the middle of a living moment?
She thought not—it came when you were weak
And nearly dead, like sleeping. She thought

Then to make a lot of noise,
To play the tune out loud, to force
The bee upon the toe to guard against death.
She would move him again, though she didn't think
That putting her mouth to his was possible
If death came into the room, putting her lips
To the dry hole now that sounded like wind
In a distant cave, or the gas going on in a black oven.

Paul Lamar

KIMBERLY, IN WINTER, SPRING

1

Eyes downcast, in shadows trees make
out of their wraps for winter, she stands,
distracted in her breathing, her hands
cupped for balance on the fence-post.
Upstate's lonely to excess this early
into the new year. And the scarce snow,
a paling, thinning, of bruise,
of dry-cleaned fabric. Into this flat indecorous
with the trailings of children
the words come back, through pruned trees,
the white limbs stiff against
a grey-white sky. A noisy similitude of winter birds
shakes out over the cracked asphalt,
scoffs death misdiagnosed, the whimper
undetected in her marrow,
the neighbor child's "cancer so widespread
the catscan missed it." Music's sympathy,
desire's forced hand bitter. A small girl's
gift of self to a slow plunder's
the detail that sticks, the scorched-governed
small girl's song, tossed back upon
her body's mimicry of winter.

2

No late geese wrenching weather back
resolve this tide's rush
from the bottoms of her lungs up. Her death
is not the vinegar I called it.
Her death is not a dough pummeled flat

I might resolve in Christ. Tonight,
stars clicked in place needle these grey words,
this wood-scented grey embrace
in woods soon dark, this chip-pile soon dark
a day worked up to spite her dying.
Rods hush, glide like nightmare, delivering her
to power. No culled steamed greens,
no herb tea swirled in perforated spoons,
heal me tonight, spare me
limbering toward thought, toward this fear
I must refuse though I am afraid.

The child who will be dead knocks.

In shadows outside fallen light
she stands as in tall wood, a purple shawl
pulled over her grey spring coat,
come to me cold out of spring weather,
her kerchief tied in folds around
her thin, paled hair.

She readies nightly the smudge she bears under,

her life's mean kindergarten

speech dubbed in.

3

I listen to them talk, listen to the stern wind
rifle the first morning of her dying,
in a muddy time before full shoots, their voices
like hands rubbing,
the hands of men come in from the outdoors,
that cannot seem to find their fingers.
—After the dead's Mass, after the clinking of glasses
on shined wood, the next mornings

add up weeks of open water and barge horns,
ease the severer chores of making do.
—Now warm through the new foliage, now sunlight
on the copestones: the season stirs forsythia,
and the lilac verge sufficient to her taking,
these lower range vibrations, as of Christ
in a found spring, come, *granted*,
granting.

Robert Lietz

CINDER MELLOW

has gulped seven valium
to not explode at her
bitchy step mother and
the fat slob of half
sisters straddling
their state of the
art Nautilus bikes
that only ripple
their flab and the
bitch of a mama,
stinking of garlic,
all wrinkly, her boobs
down to her belly,
jealous of Cinder's taut
perfect skin that can
fill out a size 5
perfectly. She rubs
the tub that Step Mama
never sees as clean,
as if she herself
has sucked on so much
dirt, swallowed what
she didn't want to.
No lysol or an s.o.s.
can get rid of what
smears, and she spits
that dark juice out
at Cinder who already
dreams of some prince
who'll take her out
to the hard Rock Cafe
and spin her in strobe
lights out of herself,
"his queen," he'll
whisper about to plunge

himself into her, deeper
than the slurs and sneers
so she'll feel like
the queen of a couple
of hours if she can
just stay up, doesn't
crash before the mid
night in his fingers

Lyn Lifshin

THE DAUGHTER I DON'T HAVE

wouldn't blush easily
or bruise if you just
lean near her. She'd
have enough between
her and what's out
side to not go blue
and black at some
thing small though
she wouldn't be so
guarded nothing
gets through. She
wouldn't be missing
any layer of skin,
wouldn't bulge out of
her self, put up a
moat of fat between
who she is and other
skin, no membrane
of concrete. She
would let me hold
her, let me let her
go like hair let
loose from rollers
still holding the
shape of what
held it

Lyn Lifshin

Demands

Just tell me what you want,
he says, as if he would
give anything. As if
he could. Her arms overflow already—
houseplants, books, the telephone;
she wants to hold it all and still
keep one hand free. She wants
a long walk among trees
when spring has turned
hot too fast. She wants
three hours somewhere else.
She wants to be able to tell jokes,
to dance with someone
who understands rhythm,
time to write letters,
a yard overcome with violets,
a house with open windows.
She wants the flush of his gaze,
silk beneath her fingers,
bittersweet chocolate on her tongue,
his words twisting in her ear,
his mouth, there. She wants
a gift for no good reason,
the sharp breath of surprise,
something so unexpected
she cannot name it, much less
ask for it.

Sherry Lee Linkon

the room

1. dimension

cube six gray sides
open door one wall
open window one wall
step ladder one wall
chair one wall
person centered

2. reconnaissance

exhales mist
head shakes twice eyes blink
hands reach up knuckles rub eyelids
fingers comb hair
look at chair turn to right look
 at ladder turn to right look
 at window turn to right look
 at door

3. action

step across floor to chair
step upon chair peer about
jump down hit floor
look at door look at window
stare at door wait
blink eyes furrow forehead
walk to ladder
step up steps glance about
jump down hit floor
fall to knees

4. analysis

gaze at chair
turn to right
gaze at ladder
turn to right
gaze at window
turn to right
gaze at door
turn to right

John Marvin

Triptych Tony Tries Amherst, New York

1. Left Panel

North of Maple Road

Floating overhead on the flying fishes
leering fiend sailing barge canal fishes
turn his back to the pleasure boats
and laden barges no distraction
there the eerie brackish trout
fly Tony apraying

while a floppy, long-eared, red-robed,
cross-billed, funnel-hatted
university president sings and glides,
I skate ice skate skate skate skate
on flying, flaming blades of late
inverted funnel hats within
which daggers, dirks and bodkins bare
from forth fling spindle flare.
A foursome burdens down the 16th fairway.
Three kind men carry an exhausted Tony
a drained Tony; a hooded man, a hatted man
and a bare headed man—two monks and a burgher
carry Tony over a boarded little bridge
over a Corps of Engineers diversion channel,
over trolls and mallards with expendible ducklings.

Funnel hatted professors ply deft sophography within
huddled suburbs. Roof bearing peasants cry,
A door, a door, my asshole for a door.
Come fly with me sweet Tony, says he,
come with me my fly too see.

2. Right Panel

South of Sheridan Drive

Change form to lovely breasts and eggs
hot cakes, rivulets of steaming maple syrup
cascade over the buttermilk escarpment
to pork sausage rocks too viscous to splash.

Tony, check out the phallogentricity
poking erect up toward the blue womb
of the hissing cosmic buzz Buffalo
Country Club Park Country Club, Tony,
turn from the naked suburban ladies
red robe devil dick windmills.

What have we done to the Great Iroquois Trail?
The Treaty of Big Tree Seneca Holland Land
from the heights of the Onondaga Escarpment.
Tony, turn your back on this stagecoach trail
tavern to tavern sword in the bellyface
foot in the jar.

Just look at her, Tony. She's almost knee deep
in the alimentary creek softly stroking the smooth, white
trunk of the long dead tree of knowledge. The kingfisher
on the dry branch can't decide what the fuck to do,
you have to. This is where the creek enters the town
and swerves and winds convolving twists meandering
through cascading down the escarpment down to
the ancient Lake bottom the lake before, deep past
before the Iroquois. Stir up the soil and you'll find
bones of trilobites and those who camped
along these banks these banks. Banks.

3. Center Panel

Between Maple and Sheridan

Which comes first, flaccidness or asceticism?
Seen two in the zoologism fried friday
fresh fishy wishy pecked by red-
winged pig rats laying laying
weighing slaying grackle pack'l
peck your eyes so sighs and FORTRAN pi's

sand moan. Rabbit ova tended
at the Marriott lounge happy hour
turn your back Tony avert your eyes
to all ears horny corny porny
silver spheres allied by falls

balls knives balls knives no no no.
Tony, Tony no baloney
say it to the telephony
stick it in your sanctimony
red hot desert bony stony.

The only way you can turn your back on everything, Tony, is
to turn inside-out in the ultimate sense. Your skin must
surround the universe and your viscera warp outside it.
George Gamow told me this in 1955.

The poinsettia court at the mall is the start.
Its rubric casts the tone, the hue for the rest
of the erubescant village incandescing smoke across
down the wicked wind of the west across the

clover of the Youngman Memorial Highway I-190
and browning browning half the sky. Maybe more.
Mall flames mirrored by strategic church on the forest
big show broadcast public prayer the public wine
casting upon the waters of Ellicott's winding banks
banks banks brown spring soapy foaming ejaculations
of rats and saddled carp prisons as Tony banks the fires.

John Marvin

SWAMP SONG

This warping of the ordinary,
this wefting of song,
these trills and gabbles
threading the night

unravel
as ring-tailed, nimble-handed
managers of margin
fatten on the fringe and have

done
as rain begins to rattle
and raises more
stridently this ruckus of frogs.

Tomorrow the sword-beaked Blue
will hunt them
down. Their death will be
mute

as the stalk of the heron.
But in the dark to come, this
warping of the ordinary, this
wefting of song.

Rennie McQuilkin

Winter's Deconstruction: Bossier City, Louisiana

When I start my car,
a belt sings and screeches and burns under the hood, and then snaps.
Pete, near the huge magnolia in the back yard,
stands laughing.

My radiator is frozen.
Yellow-green icicles dangle from a ruined hose;
yellow-green slush clogs the overflow reservoir.

We clear out some trash and boxes and roll the car into the garage.
Pete fills a bucket from the tap on the hot-water heater.
He thaws the frozen motor. He tapes the burst hose.

This is the way my poem will develop, I tell myself,

sitting on a box of old magazines.
I am reading the September 1964 issue of GOLF USA.
Its cover proclaims "Arnie's Army." Inside,
on slick and slightly yellowed pages Arnold Palmer is
in his prime again. He hitches his pants
at the head of his troops. He lays siege to golf courses.
Millions of reserves watch, via television,
this martial Huck Finn just back from the Territories.

I remember what it was like to believe
a place and a way to live existed, somewhere.
Arnie was a beacon of calm intensity, there, flashing
a wierd American zen of possibilities
to my stultifying world.

I close the magazine and light a cigarette.
Pete, leaning under the hood of my car,
squints, touches, mutters to himself, considers.
He could be a surgeon puzzling over an open abdomen.
He could be a composer rethinking over an old familiar score.

I watch him make his repairs.
A thousand other images, named and unnamed, flood my mind.
None has a thing to do with what is at hand.

Most winter poems are hackneyed and trite, I tell myself,
suggesting old age,

death, demise, change
in a universe ruled by entropy and despair.
A stoic acceptance is required.

Pete slams the hood and grins.
The block isn't cracked, I tell myself.

"It's alright, big bubba," he says. "It's almost perfect."
I lay the magazine down.
Years ago I saw Arnold palmer win the Master's.
He made it look easy, fresh from Olympus, in his prime.
He plays the Senior Tour, now.
Even the gods grow old.

Pete is restless, antsy.
He lifts the garage door.
He drums impatiently on its raised edge.
I figure he needs a ride somewhere, to something, some event:
pro wrestling, a tractor pull, happy hour at the VFW.
Everything is go, go, go, with him. I am always amazed.
I light a cigarette off the lit end of my last one.
Pete is no sad guest on the dark earth, I tell myself.

Bryan E. Merck

Commingling

Not like a snowman melting, or
a vampire shrieking down to dust,

Pete greets the dawn with gladness.
He merges with a sunbeam,

and I cannot bear to watch him
dance. He does this often.
He cavorts into the day. The day is like a mirror.
Nothing shatters. It welcomes his image.
The molecules of himself and the day commingle.
(But his whole genetic code holds only a blueprint of Peteness,
only the comfort of dullness, the sweetness of being Pete.)

The day usually shatters all around me.
I can see its edges.
I seldom just appear into it.

For Pete, there is the high school football game tonight
and wrestling on the tube tomorrow.

His oldest daughter will get a ticket for speeding
next week. Pete will pay it.
Her second divorce is imminent.
He will let her move back home.

Bryan E. Merck

LIGHTHOUSE

Bald Head Island, North Carolina

We climb this tower of wooden steps,
check each board for sure footing,
and push deep into a sky untouched

by lovers for who knows how long.
At the top, we can see the entire circle
of land around us and beyond

to the blue-grey edge of cloud and water.
White caps lap at the low sun.
A trawler heads for distant harbor.

We listen to the breeze cut across stone,
to a few gulls flying away, disappointed,
and to a bee lighting for a moment

in the rusted frame empty of whole glass,
then whispering down to the trees.
When the discoveries of this high, thin air

are quiet, you have only the sound of my voice,
which, too, becomes quiet, silenced
by this journey together to the hem of heaven,

afraid of finding that for which we've come,
of this sudden emptying of desire,
of the echoing rolls of light.

Berwyn J. Moore

THE DEEPNESS OF LEAVES AND LIGHT

They come in to disclaim their lives,
mutter pieces of themselves

that fall across my lap like pared nails.
What they name as sin, they learned

from childhood catechism: I committed
adultery, Father, I slept with a woman

whose name I can't recall. And the distance
they set between flesh and word widens

with each day they can say, I have not
sinned or It is forgotten.

Before I was old, I knew my name
and tried to hide from its sound

in the trees, from its light
that spilled into the shadows

like water. I could not breathe,
could not hear the wind, but only

my name over and over as I fell
into the deepness of leaves and light,

then lay still, until I could hear
once more the hush in the trees.

Now, again, I hear my name
over and over as it becomes

a thousand sins I can never forget,
never disclaim as I circle

towards unresurrected death,
dust visible in this windless half-light.

Berwyn J. Moore

The Poetry of Things (I)

The petty poetry of spiteful things:
the memories of salt and wings,
the fragile gifts that bear, like cankers, hurts
to hearts that now, well trained,
have learned to turn away from thing-based pain.

Cast off all beauty, things that bind.
Immersed in wilderness, no humankind
to sear the heart, no memories to hurt—
a purifying ache that cauterizes hope,
that leaves the mind recalcitrant, remote.

Oh gift and grief, this giving up
of ivory and stirrup cup,
of Roselyn cross and elephants
totemic, pearl and ruby, beads
of turquoise linked with distant deeds;

my Dante in the Burnham Wood, Macbeth
among the witches, toying with his death—
these images, these mirrors to my soul
are shattered. Learn to live with what you do:
the stones, the seaside shore, the merry fool.

Unleash a flood and earthquake, cleanse
the mountainside of brush and turf:
all bone-clean, suppurant with holy mirth.
Confronting tears, the angry, sly pretense:
a welling laughter is the best defense.

Susan Parman

Potpourri

I have watched people come and go
from this revolving chair, planted
here in the old folks' quarters
of my daughter's multi-storied
(and newly-titled) home. These steps are necessary

to separate the generations into visitors
and the visited; grandchildren march
tray-laden up and hurtle care-lessened
down these resonant stairs,
but my knees refuse to bend

and hold at the same time.
My daughter says, let go
and toss them out, the way my mother did
the used-up hip she swapped
for a brand new doodad. I don't need

knees to tell me where the side yard ends
or where the beetled roses begin, there
in the corner of my window. If I lean close
I can see clean down to the spot
where Mama often stood with one

or the other of us straddling her rounded hip
as she tilted to snip off only the wilted blooms,
filling the potpourri jars we held
as lightly as one holds a moment
one never thinks will end.

Norma M. Richardson

THE TONGUES OF TEN THOUSAND SNOW GEESE

Ten thousand snow geese lift off the lake
all at once. Their barking drives
me crazy. It's like your tongue
all over me. Even though
I wear jeans and a sweater,
the sound assaults my skin.
Like I'm in a pack of flying dogs
licking me all over with feathers
just as evening comes.

Elliot Richman

Christmas 1984

Tell the old tales tonight.
Dickens and Dylan Thomas should be right and Blackwood for some chills.
That and a bottle of good brandy will get us through this night
Clotted with memories as it is, and childhood shadows.
In a sweater ravelling at the elbows
Search in a neglected corner of the yard for kindling.
Make a blaze, then, though it be a damp and misty, snowless
Somehow disappointing night,
A fire is more than heat.
It might do to feed the birds that suet and give the cat a treat.
A mouse would do nicely if we had one.
If it should snow tonight while we're asleep, the morning
Will be light-bleached and magical,
The frosted light reflecting upwards on the ceilings,
As on no other morning, no other time of year.
And if the snow is deep a few thrifty men will wrestle chains onto their tires
To chink the sound of sleighs through morning streets
And gather us again into our vision laden sleep.

Betty Schmitt

NOW

ONE

I teach a class at night.
The text says that we see
Alpha Centauri as it was
seven or so light years ago
and not as it is now.

Now—is a mystery.
Anything could have happened.
Alpha blew to smithereens up there—
we wouldn't know it yet.

TWO

Starlight irradiates the face
of a woman I see every now and then:
sparks in her black hair,
flame in her eyes.

She might have fallen in love with me
weeks ago
and I wouldn't know it yet:
my dreams are light-years long,
her eyes are sky-tossed stars.

Lee Slonimsky

A POET HAS SOME GOOD ANGRY SCOTCH ONE MONDAY AFTERNOON

Out of the glass, soothed by the ice, come
the several angers that made me a quiet boy
and man. See how my grandmother,
the one who sewed pockets onto aprons
until she died, felt trapped in the kitchen
at night and raced from corner to corner
speaking a language she had learned
from needles, pans and steam.
See her husband Jay who had fallen down inside
and hurt himself and stayed there
on his inside knees where only the children could see
what had happened.
See after theirs my father's anger
which had the whole outdoors
where it threw axes at birch trees and the barn
and shook with pleasure when the wood talked back.

Dennis Ward Stiles

Grandfather's Mockingbird Returns

Now you come. One at night,
not a sound, suddenly you—
quick, fluttering—sing. *Wheel,*
Wheel. Hit it, chew. Hit, chew.
Churn. Perceive? Perceive?

How long can you live?
A thousand pure adventures surely saw
you to that branch. *Churn, come.*
Churn, come to. I am

lying here, old friend, failing
now, and don't need you to tell me,
you, sounding sure. *Make it,*
make it. Come to! I lie alone, listening . . .

feel my body falling through my body,
falling through a skein of blood and bone
tacked at once to the still air
by your unclad blossoms pitched upon me.
You persist, piece each one out: *Passive.*
Peel out. Passive, peel out. Perceive? My toes,
legs, knees, thighs, balls, pecker,
fingers catch, extend your notes to black, red,
green. Gnarled pinks spiral into orange
stems of trumpet vines. I'll
not look to see myself dissolve
in a bed of flowers. What could you have left

to sing? *Turn, tear. Turn, tear.*
Whip, gone. Whip gone. What's left, life I worked?
My whole life I goddamn worked. How not?
There were days . . . earned, bright, suspended—
garden days. Would you stop? Do
but hear. What would you see? Whip reel. Do,

do but hear. See me. Reel, reel. Now
the night goes on, you exact me—you, vicious,
obscenely jubilant voice, in spite of outer dark.
It's absurd, a mockingbird come to call on a dying man,
wrong to sing so late, so prettily the dead of night.

I have fallen ugly, withered. *Hit it, chew. Peel out.*
How can I forgive this impertinent indifference?
You're officious, worse than a family, doctors, friends,
worse than God. *Passive, peel out.*
Sing what I've become then. Let me be
what you will sing. I may become a simple spare
part of you. I may enter into your foot,
become the flick of your tail, a flash
of wing. You will not deny me yet. None
of me could lie to be disconsolately
sung to, coy, pugnacious, bothering animal.

Do, whip gone. Make it, come too. I can
not yet. Time was I lived right
slowly, after the children. Now my boys,
all my grands, now the heart's gone out, out,
no one comes to know. None
knows I knew you; nobody's fault, really. Why
should it matter? Still I'd have liked
a chance to tell the finding of you,
weak and broken, August, beside a thrown
paper, the handling you with a handkerchief,
the boot box I kept you in, the bit of white bread
soaked in milk, the sunflower seeds,
your first flight across this room;
last, out the window to that holly.
What can I do but hear?

All are gone. All gone. I see
my sons will even at the burial,
standing above my body, privately
check the time, not to feel or know. Who can want to?
But I know that not to show is not to feel—

How terrible this time is. *Reel, reel.* You
measure off your words, keep the night
low, safe, uncomprehended, sing out light.
Cat don't get you, no one will.

Come to, come too. Here then, hear
me out. In your life, O Last of mine,
sing me out, cut night to music, flowers,
words, blades of fire, flanked
or flitting flame to fly by, not
so I may see to pray, not for any
earthly light—Shut that off, shut
that off. Sing me out, don't go, sing me
through the greatgrand sitting in the last
pew (pulling his sleeve across his nose) ere
they circle round the graveside ring.
Teach my family how to sing.

David Y. Todd

Funeral Before My Dead Son's Third Birthday

Not wanting to arrive early for talk
inside that vacuum where all of us are lost,
I stop on the way up the washboard road
in bright October light and listen to
aspens leaves clatter on the half-bare trees
and feel as much as watch them scuttling
lift and scatter in a gust.

Saying good-bye to one
is always saying good-bye to them all.
Her son. My son
I grow old with, framing rooms
that fill with snow.

Stooped, a man arranges greenery thin as breath
around the gold-crockery urn
absurdly small, a wall—the scene quick
as she'd been meticulous, its poverty
belying her generosity . . . though the ashes were,
like her wit, concise.

In a deep night of crickets and quiet
her son Doug and I piss off a roof
laughing as it hits the concrete drive
splattering, echoing like rain; his cousin
Jimmy, disgusted, threatens to tell—
the very same now before me with gray hair
babbling how brilliantly focused his doctor-daughter is . . .

Doug drifts the swollen river
months before they find him
and bring him home.

During the eulogy, she stares at me
on a summer day. I'm stripped to waist,

cutting brush and landscaping,
her puzzling look intensely fixed
and lost—she remarks how high the fire danger is,
how much we need rain.

I know that look in heart now, how she was
conjuring her son's shape and age from mine,
willing him to appear from air
from a plan insufficient in detail,
and how swiftly and enigmatically
he'd vanish, like ripples in current,
her heart silenced against that wall.

Of course, they want to be alone
before leaving, and it's not surprising
how quickly the others slide in
behind windshields, shut doors, and descend
separately as they'd arrived, through leaves and wind
swirling like water, and feed into the tributaries
of the Interstate which carries them at last to air.

I still wander home, coming down,
knowing the pain and power
of that look, which alone
connects the leaves with light.

Rawdon Tomlinson

Memory's Daughter

After six months of her perpetual screaming,
her face a knotted rose, her tiny
body one great spasming contraction,
a flatworm aflame in his brain, when
the doctors said her head wasn't growing,
wouldn't grow, that she would be a sideshow
phenomenon, a freak—*step right up,*
ladies and gentlemen, for just ten cents,
for one thin dime, see the pinhead,
the peabrain, the midway's strangest
attraction, he saw himself
pick her up by her small feet
and whirl her around his whirling head
and smash her repeatedly into the wall
and lock her in the closet
and go on with his life.

He didn't. Of course, he didn't. Not *that*
daughter, anyway, who, despite the doctors'
diagnosis, grew up beautiful and strong.

But his *other* daughter—
the one of his diseased imagination,
the one who, he believed, called out to him
late at night inside his sleep,
or on cold winter mornings before
the wheezing furnace kicked in,
or sometimes during moments of
the most exquisite pleasure—what of her?

Try as he might he could not
keep her secreted forever, could not
save her. She was his deed.

His memory condemned him,
sent her out into the world—
broken, monstrous, pitiful—
with all the evidence against him
that anybody'd need.

Ronald Wallace

Villanelle in Late-September

Though we cross time zones, take the years,
and whoosh, they're gone—see, as we read,
poems give us back what disappears:

stacks of sandstone, sun, a cliff, fire-
weed, thistle seed, and things we said.
Though we cross time zones, take the years

falling like cliffs. Take seed puffs, star
stuff. Take the poems, their words, instead.
They'll give us back what disappears.

Take smoke that curls up from a crater,
jumbles of rock, braided streambeds,
though we cross time zones, take the years.

I see you back the way you were
then: reading, you walked down a street.
Poems, give us back What disappears

is us. I give it back, rock, phosphor,
sun, times we did or didn't meet.
Though we cross time zones, take the years,
poems give us back what disappears.

Richard Widerkehr

Reviews and so FORTH

Walter McDonald, *Counting Survivors*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995; 82 pp. \$24.95 cloth, \$10.95 paper.

In *Counting Survivors* we find always the contrast of two worlds: the world at war and the world of the American Southwest. Each is constantly there, like background music for the other, neither possible alone because McDonald has survived both worlds, accepted the gifts and faced the deaths each has to offer.

Settings alternate throughout, rather like in a war movie where the pilot, in his fighter plane, remembers images of home, and once home (*if* he makes it home) sees scenes of war superimposed on the domestic landscape. Both kinds of scenes come unwilling, appropriate or not. How does a man who has been through war ever know those heights or depths again? For the rest of his life, war must blaze in his mind with images of terrible brightness, both waking and sleeping. His curiosity and concern about war, even as a young boy, hovers in his memory as well when he recalls opening an uncle's old footlocker stored in the attic and finding grisly souvenirs of World War II: ". . . how did uncles learn to kill,/ what would happen when we grew up." ("Digging in a Footlocker")

Hunting, fishing, rodeo, the land itself—always the hard, masculine ranch life where nature (and the bank) often win out, as in "Farms at Auction" when his neighbor, "Three years hailed out [is] quitting,/ enough debt to break his children/. . . all he owns gone twice and sold,/ even the dirt" Images of bones and drought prevail throughout McDonald's work so strongly rooted in the Southwest, harsh images, but always with the poet's sensitivity.

Even desolate scenes are touched by beauty, described in a language of light:

Mirages hover like angels fanning the fields.
We see them in summer, a shimmer of wings.
Our stubborn steers ignore them, wading dry acres.
They hook their horns in invisible robes
(*"Wishing for More than Thunder"*)

This ranch scene follows the opening poem, "After the Fall of Saigon" in which "A mad man aging hard . . . still sees children and old men/

ragged and golden, crawling the base dump/ for scraps of food” The poet has witnessed a friend’s jet fall “spinning . . . out of the Asian sky . . . reduced/ to this, a silver matchstick/ tossed indifferently away.” (“The Gleam of Silver Wings”) Life and death. Light and death.

The folding in of Time upon itself is much a part of these poems, as it is in all of our lives: where did the years between events go? In “What If I Didn’t Die Outside Saigon” the speaker wakes from a nightmare of dying in Vietnam to find himself “an old man . . . a woman a little like my wife/ but twice her age, still sleeping in my bed.”

The dark heaviness of war—Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, World War II—rides alongside these poems of the harsh and beautiful Texas landscape. Juxtaposition of the two kinds of struggle seems a crucial part of the organization of this book. On one page in “Riding Herd,” the poet reconstructs a scene where bulls have pushed through “Barbed wires on rusted nails” to better grass and wishes “there was only a fence/ between us and our heart’s desire.” On the next page he hums country tunes to stay sane during rocket attacks in Vietnam, “cursing an all-clear horn that never came.” (“The Rockets’ Red Glare”)

Rodeo bulls, “wild eyed/ foaming at the mouth/ dying for someone/to crush” (“Rodeo Bulls”), prairie rattlesnakes, old quarrels take their toll, but hovering over the hard life of generations on McDonald’s Texas plains, a recurring theme, like the image of the mirages that appear and disappear in these poems: where are his war buddies now, dead or missing, “Names on the Wrists of Strangers.” Even years after the war, in the vast peacefulness of his ranch and the land around it, he still lies awake counting the “Nights Without Rockets,” and handshakes still mean “Hello,/ hold on, it’s over, it’s okay.” (“To All Friends Fast Asleep”)

But beyond powerful scenes and action, beyond land torn by war and land seared and windblown at home, McDonald has a fine ear as well. In the last stanzas of “Life with Father,” and “The Invention of Courage,” alliteration, assonance, consonance tumble from line to line causing us to pause, read out loud: “When we were kids/ inventing courage, we crouched,/ gouging fire with sticks whittled/ like spears. We listened to brothers/ hiss of witches and wolves” (“The Invention of Courage”)

When one comes back from war to ranching, his notion of death is surely changed. When one is brought face to face with his own mortality in a war with other men, only then perhaps can he see with gratitude that he has now been given the chance to die “the safest death,” as opposed to that other kind. Having survived that, he may now choose “simply to

lie down/ under blue skies and sleep, accepting/ this as the way, not dreading anything.” (“Under Blue Skies”)

For McDonald and his wife in their later years, the prairie is “the peace of dark, . . . the golds and purple on the plains.” (“When the Children Have Gone”) And finally as the book ends, he experiences consummate reality in which he will ride off “someday” not into the sunset but into the “night shining not with diamonds, but real stars.” (“Mesas I Never Took the Time to Climb”)

Walter McDonald, though writing of landscapes his readers may never have experienced, nevertheless makes the truths of these landscapes truth for us all. He channels his images into our realities, makes us see that all events in our lives are related and profoundly affect each other. We could all use fewer diamonds, more real stars, and the wisdom, like McDonald’s, to know the difference.

Grace Butcher

CONTRIBUTORS

A former student at Hiram College, **Michael Alter** presently attends Vermont's Castleton State College, where he is completing his degree in English. His poetry has appeared in HPR, PIEDMONT LITERARY REVIEW, THE PEARL, MIND IN MOTION, and elsewhere.

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Seeking a publisher for his poetry book manuscript "Living Under the Rock," **Larry Bradley** has had recent poetry accepted by THE ILLINOIS REVIEW, PARNASSUS, YEFIEF, ASCENT, and THE JAMES WHITE REVIEW.

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A play, *Wake To It*, by Australian born poet, playwright, and musician **John Grey** was recently performed at Providence’s Newgate Theater. He has

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IN THIS ISSUE:

AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

ABOUT MAJOR IMPENDING CHANGES

IN HPR FORMAT

(We're going to CD-ROM; see the Editorial page.)

Hiram Poetry Review seeks to **DISCOVER** America's poets. All poems in this magazine are selected from manuscripts submitted without specific invitation.