



POETRY

June 2014

FOUNDED IN 1912 BY HARRIET MONROE

VOLUME CCIV · NUMBER III

CONTENTS

June 2014

POEMS

HARRY MATHEWS	191	<i>Cool gales shall fan the glades</i>
LES MURRAY	194	<i>Vertigo</i> <i>Holland's Nadir</i>
DAN CHELOTTI	196	<i>My Sparrow</i> <i>Compost</i>
APRIL BERNARD	200	<i>Mice</i> <i>Bloody Mary</i> <i>Plow</i> <i>Anger</i>
SOLMAZ SHARIF	206	<i>Vulnerability Study</i>
DEBORAH PAREDEZ	207	<i>Saint's Day Triolet: Saint Anthony</i> <i>Saint's Day Triolet: Saint Valentine</i> <i>Tia Lucia Enters the Nursing Home</i>
NICK FLYNN	210	<i>Cathedral of Salt</i>
STEPHEN STURGEON	212	<i>Violet Swords</i> <i>Music Between Strangers</i>
LISA AMPLEMAN	214	<i>Gilding the Lily</i> <i>Victory, WI</i>
PHILLIS LEVIN	216	<i>Anne Frank's High Heels</i>
JOHN GALLAHER	218	<i>In a Landscape: I</i> <i>In a Landscape: II</i> <i>In a Landscape: III</i>
BILL BERKSON	222	<i>First Thing</i> <i>Accounts Payable</i> <i>Monogram</i>
JAMESON FITZPATRICK	225	<i>Morning Scene</i> <i>Tenderness</i> <i>Balcony Scene</i>
TJ JARRETT	228	<i>At the Repast</i>

RUTH LILLY POETRY PRIZE PORTFOLIO

	231	Lines of Affinity
NATHANIEL MACKEY	234	<i>Song of the Andoumboulou: 136</i> <i>Unlay's Late Promenade</i> <i>Song of the Andoumboulou: 138</i> <i>As If It Were "This Is Our Music"</i>

COMMENT

ANGE MLINKO	263	Walking on Knives
YASMINE SHAMMA	270	Mental Orgasm
CONTRIBUTORS	277	

Editor DON SHARE
Art Director FRED SASAKI
Managing Editor VALERIE JEAN JOHNSON
Assistant Editor LINDSAY GARBUTT
Editorial Assistant HOLLY AMOS
Consulting Editor CHRISTINA PUGH
Design ALEXANDER KNOWLTON

COVER ART BY JULIETTE BORDA
“Take It Easy My Brother Charlie (detail),” 2001

POETRYMAGAZINE.ORG

A PUBLICATION OF THE
POETRY FOUNDATION

PRINTED BY CADMUS PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATIONS, US

Poetry · June 2014 · Volume 204 · Number 3

Poetry (ISSN: 0032-2032) is published monthly, except bimonthly July/August, by the Poetry Foundation. Address editorial correspondence to 61 W. Superior St., Chicago, IL 60654. Individual subscription rates: \$35.00 per year domestic; \$47.00 per year foreign. Library/institutional subscription rates: \$38.00 per year domestic; \$50.00 per year foreign. Single copies \$3.75, plus \$1.75 postage, for current issue; \$4.25, plus \$1.75 postage, for back issues. Address new subscriptions, renewals, and related correspondence to Poetry, PO 421141, Palm Coast, FL 32142-1141 or call 800.327.6976. Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, IL, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Poetry, PO Box 421141, Palm Coast, FL 32142-1141. All rights reserved. Copyright © 2014 by the Poetry Foundation. Double issues cover two months but bear only one number. Volumes that include double issues comprise numbers 1 through 5. Please visit poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/submissions for submission guidelines and to access the magazine's online submission system. Available in braille from the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. Available on microfilm and microfiche through National Archive Publishing Company, Ann Arbor, MI. Digital archive available at JSTOR.org. Distributed to bookstores by Ingram Periodicals, Ubiquity Distributors, and Central Books in the UK.

POEMS

HARRY MATHEWS

Cool gales shall fan the glades

But how choose the appropriate sticking point to start at?
Who wants to write a poem without the letter *e*,
Especially for Thee, where the flourished vowel lends such panache
to your *carnet de bal*
(OK, peons: pizzazz to your dance card)? The alphabet's such a horn
Of plenty, why cork up its treasure? It hurts to think of "you" reduced
to *u*
In stingy text messages, as if ideally expression should be limited to
formulas like $x \neq y$,

Where the respectable truth of tautology leaves ambiguous beauty
standing by
Waiting to take off her clothes, if, that is, her percentage of body fat
Permits it (a statement implicitly unfair, as if beauty, to remain
sublime, had to keep up
Lineaments already shaped by uninhibited divinity); implying, as
well, fixated onlookers, i.e.,
Men and women kidding themselves that full-front-and-back nudity
is the north
Star of delight rather than imagined nakedness, shudderingly draped
like a fully rigged, fully laden ship without a drop to bail,

Its hidden cargoes guessed at — perhaps Samian wine (mad-
making!) — or fresh basil
Gently crushed by its own slight weight, reviving memories of
delights once stumbled on as a boy,
Delights often wreathed with necessary pain, like the stout unfor-
giving thorns
That tear shirt and skin as we stretch for ripe blackberries, to be
gulped down fast,
Sweeter than butter and marmalade, quenching our thirst better
than sucked ice,
Making us almost drunk as we shriek with false contempt at each
benighted ump

Who decides against our teams. What happened to those blissful
fruits, honeydew, purple plum,
White raspberry, for stealing which from Mrs. Grossman's stand I
invented ingenious alibis
That she never believed (insulting, or what)? Where are child-
hood's innocent sweetnesses, like homemade rice
Pudding and mince pie? Or the delicious resistances of various
foods — bony
Lobsters, chops with their succulent tiny interstices, corn sticking to
the cob, or the grilled feast
Of brook trout I caught without too much fuss after kicking a
resentful hornets'

Nest? And when carnality replaced appetite, I was communally
pronounced the horniest
Ten-year-old around; and I hadn't even seen you. But when I did,
you became the plume
In the horse's hat of my lust. I was thirteen when we first danced
together. There weren't many afters
But I cherish my plume. There weren't any afters, nothing, just a
gentle abseil I
Could not climb back up. I still wave my plume, or my horse does,
as he canters nobly
Into next year, my eighty-fifth. I hasten to add that "this coyness,
lady, were no crime"

If I didn't, in spite of all, feel so grateful to you. All manner of *mercis*
Fill my throat, along with immortal memories, of which I must
acknowledge the thorniest
To be your disappearance, whether you tanked in river water or
were scorched by Zeus's proximity (or some such baloney);
But your firm breasts, taut nipples, and bent thighs? No thorns. All
you wanted was a loosened peplum,
So I still bear your plume, and your name will not die: not to be
written here or read, but my voice shall sibilate

It so shrilly that unseeded babies hear me, and every hidden wood-
worm wake from its dream to fall forever from the rafters.

LES MURRAY

Vertigo

Last time I fell in a shower room
I bled like a tumbril dandy
and the hotel longed to be rid of me.
Taken to the town clinic, I
described how I tripped on a steel rim
and found my head in the wardrobe.
Scalp-sewn and knotted and flagged
I thanked the Frau Doktor and fled,
wishing the grab-bar of age might
be bolted to all civilization
and thinking of Rome's eighth hill
heaped up out of broken amphorae.

When, anytime after sixty,
or anytime before, you stumble
over two stairs and club your forehead
on rake or hoe, bricks or fuel-drums,
that's the time to call the purveyor
of steel pipe and indoor railings,
and soon you'll be grasping up landings
having left your balance in the car
from which please God you'll never
see the launchway of tires off a brink.
Later comes the sunny day when
street detail whitens blindly to mauve

and people hurry to you, or wait, quiet.

Holland's Nadir

Men around a submarine
moored in Sydney Harbour
close to the end of wartime

showed us below, down into
their oily, mesh-lit gangway
of bunks atop machines.

In from the country, we
weren't to know our shillings
bought them cigars and thread

for what remained of Holland's Glory:
uniforms, odd, rescued aircraft,
and a clutch of undersea boats

patrolling from Fremantle. The men's
country was still captive, their great
Indies had seen them ousted,

their slaves from centuries back
were still black, and their queen
was in English exile.

The only ripostes still open
to them were torpedoes
and their throaty half-

American-sounding language.
Speaking a luckier one
we set off home then. Home

and all that word would mean
in the age of rebirthing nations
which would be my time.

DAN CHELOTTI

My Sparrow

There is the torch and the only thing
That will prevent us from using it
Is whether or not we can allow
Jellyfish in the otherwise
Crystalline surf. It would be easy
To dismiss this view as beautiful and walk away
Because it is buggy and we forgot
The spray, to cancel the conversation
Because its ease is perilous with conjunctions,
To not touch because the sky would
Separate from the sky and the mothership
Would fall through with a banner
Waving in a language we wouldn't
Understand though the meaning is
As clear as these intercontinental
Contrails hatching mackerel sky
Saying we are full we are full
Of sound and fury, we are signifying
Nothing. Damned universal law.
Damned categorical imperative
Elbowing its way between my hands
And your face. The sparrows again
Exploding against windows
As a circle of men sitting outside
The cafe while away their intentions
With invisible motor tics they can't
Even feel unless the right empire of light
Covers every last inch of them
And brings to the surface the names —
Those loves they chose
To stable. And there it is:
The choice — if only the metaphor
Were more complex if I could only
Adverb away my existence
And say what a remarkable Sunday

This is a perfect Sunday
And turn my breath to stone.
I've done it before, I spoke
The language of sweating cavern walls
And electric light. But I won't go there again.
We are all and only our distances
And when we touch that is what we touch.
Our messy shelves. Our sullen privations
And overabundance of lemons.
Our grief, our mountains and fields
And rivers of grief. Our dismissals
And the love we ignore when we don't run
After the sparrows because the sparrows
Will fly away. My sparrow, fly away if you have to
But know that I am coming.
I am low in the grass. I am burning
With patience. I am every song.
I know all the math in the shore
Says you shouldn't but my distance
Is yours if you want it. And it is yours
If you don't. Dandelions and honeysuckle
Surround me, the world's ineluctable fire
Is looking right at me, and I am making my stand.

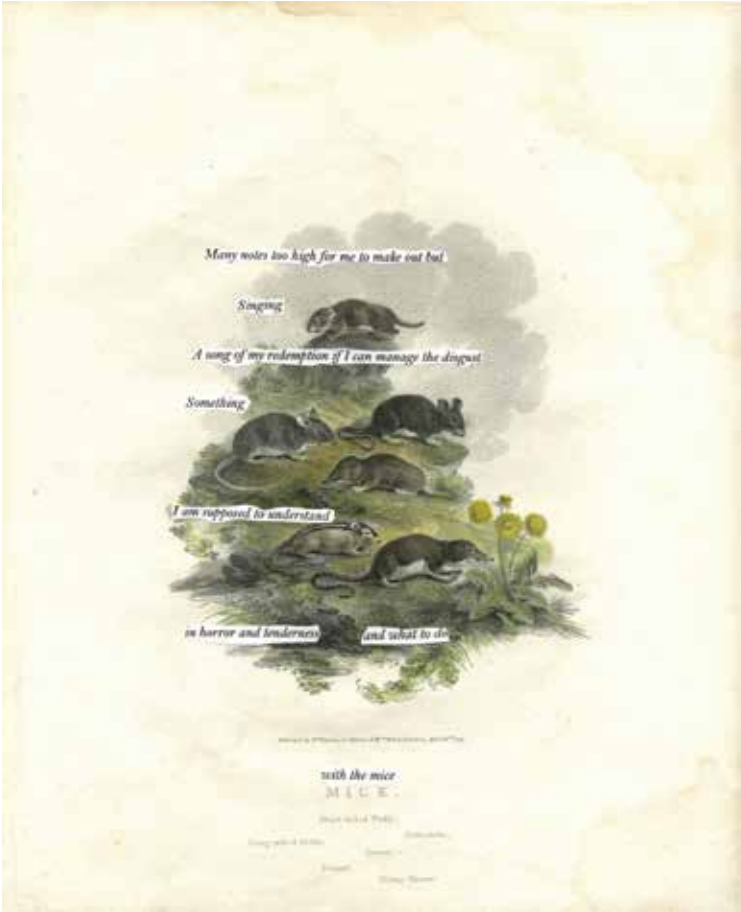
Compost

There is magic in decay.
A dance to be done
For the rotting, the maggot strewn
Piles of flesh which pile
Upon the dung-ridden earth
And the damp that gathers
And rusts and defiles.
There is a bit of this
In even the most zoetic soul —
The dancing child's arms
Flailing to an old ska song
Conduct the day-old flies
Away to whatever rank
Native is closest. Just today
I was walking along the river
With my daughter in my backpack
And I opened my email
On my phone and Duffie
Had sent me a poem
Called "Compost." I read it
To my little girl and started
To explain before I was three
Words in Selma started
Yelling, Daddy, Daddy, snake!
In the path was a snake,
Belly up and still nerve-twitching
The ghost of some passing
Bicycle or horse. Pretty, Selma said.
Yes, I said. And underneath my yes
Another yes, the yes to my body,
Just beginning to show signs
Of slack, and another, my grasping
In the dark for affirming flesh
That in turn says yes, yes
Let's rot together but not until

We've drained what sap
Is left in these trees.
And I wake in the morning
And think of the coroner
Calling to ask what color
My father's eyes were,
And I asked, Why? Why can't
You just look — and the coroner,
Matter-of-factly says, Decay.
Do you want some eggs, my love?
I have a new way of preparing them.
And look, look outside, I think this weather
Has the chance of holding.

APRIL BERNARD

Mice

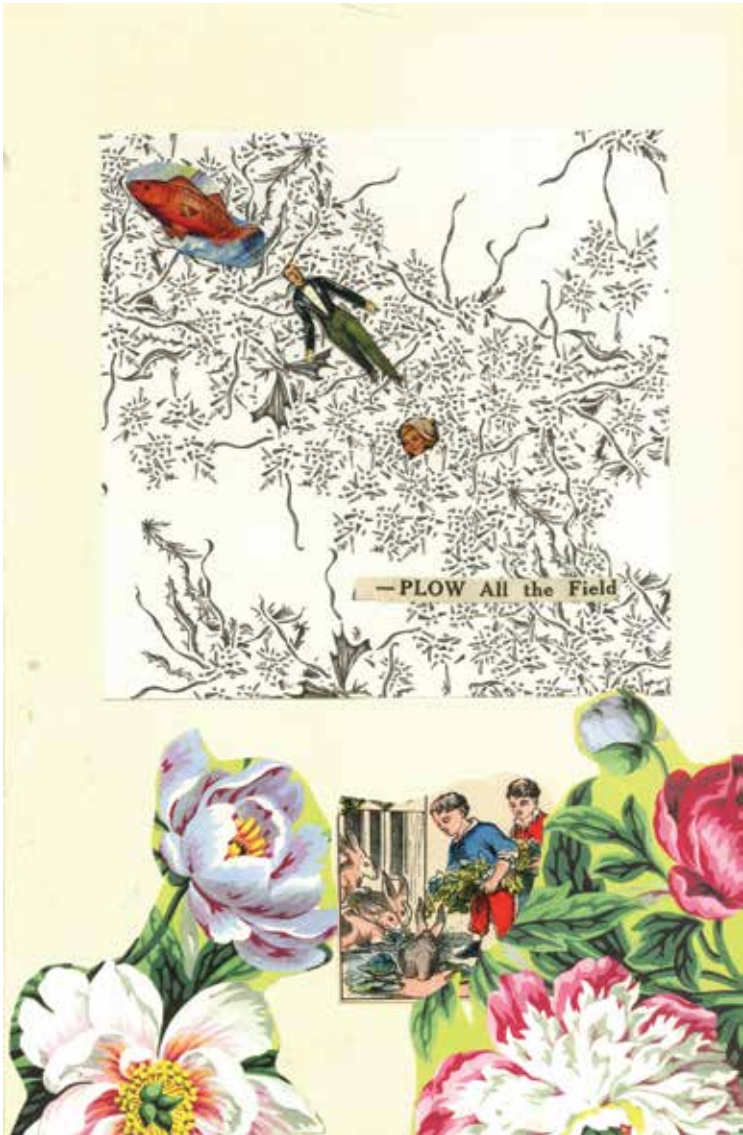


Bloody Mary

Note who's got to go
today, don't fuss
about the means,
just go ahead behead,
impale, starve, strappado,
the sheer assortment
of choices enough
to make a crown
crow. They never
loved me enough.
It must be said: They
were a disappointment.

When divine mother
love wears out, I just
reverse the robe
from blue to red.
I like a flat ground
to build the next town,
city, empire of disgust.
All the waste you see,
that's what I did,
none of that *happened*
to me. I did that.
I made that. I killed that. I.

Plow



Anger

I

When in a farmhouse kitchen that smelled
of old rinds and wet cigarette butts
I hoisted the shotgun to my shoulder
and aimed but did not fire it at the man
who had just taken my virginity like a snack,
with my collusion, but still —

When I sat in a conference room
in an inquisition
at the “newspaper of record,”
across from the one slurping his pipe,
the one arching her eyebrow,
and I felt the heat like a wet brand in my chest,
repaid insult for insult and left their fancy job
like a squashed bug on the floor —

When I was twelve, too old, the last time my father
spanked me, pants down,
because I had “distressed” my mother
and my vision went red-black and
I did not forgive —

When, during my travels along the Gulf Coast,
the intruder returned in the night
and I did not call the cops again but stood
with a butcher knife facing the door, yelling, “Come in!”
although this time it was just the wind flapping
and banging the screen dooor —

When across a skating-rink-sized glistening table
I told the committee chair and her brooch I was a fan of Marx
and lost the fellowship —

When I threw a pot of hot coffee
and it just missed a man's head, and the black-brown spatter stains
were still there four years later long after he'd left me
when I finally moved out of that East Village hole —

II

I would have had to be *thinking*
in order to have thought — loaded, not loaded?
— and I was not thinking, I was only dripping hot
and oh the pleasure, I can still feel its prickling,
crackle over the furnace of my rage,
to see his face go pale, his eyes widen,
his “put it down, put it down” — and I
put it down and allowed my life as well as his
to go on.

III

I miss my anger. Decades go by
when all I can muster is absent-minded invective,
you know, directed at the news;
or a brief fantasy
of shoving someone in front of a bus. Yesterday
I slammed my fist on my desk
and then apologized, to the desk.

Consider the tapestry of the seven deadly sins, at Saint-Denis:
Anger, wild-haired and half-dressed,
picked out in blue and silver thread bunched
against the crimson,
rough against the fingertips, she
rides a black boar dappled with blood

and waves her double-headed axe —

Yes, I remember her.
I always lie when I always say
I didn't know the gun was loaded.

SOLMAZ SHARIF

Vulnerability Study

your face turning from mine
to keep from cumming

8 strawberries in a wet blue bowl

baba holding his pants
up at the checkpoint

a newlywed securing her updo
with grenade pins

a wall cleared of nails
for the ghosts to walk through

DEBORAH PAREDEZ

Saint's Day Triolet: Saint Anthony

When no one else would listen, Saint Anthony
preached seaward, his words fishnet for the lost
souls of the heretics. Caught up in despair, we plea
to the one who will listen: Saint Anthony,
please return Tía's teeth or the misplaced key
to our bolted hopes. Patron retriever of all we've tossed
when no one else would. Listen, Saint Anthony,
teach us to steward this world, all our netted loss.

Saint's Day Triolet: Saint Valentine

You're flush with hearts and I'm forced to fold
this hand and swear off another luckless match.
How we've found ways to love each other, cajoled
our cindered hearts, flushed and forced to fold
upon themselves like Saint Valentine ensouled
with seizure, skin a whirring bee swarm, a hatched
flush of doves. My heart, how I'm forced to fold
my hands in prayer for another struck match.

Tía Lucia Enters the Nursing Home

All morning my daughter pleading, outside
outside. By noon I kneel to button her
coat, tie the scarf to keep her hood in place.
This is her first snow so she strains against
the ritual, spooked silent then whining,
restless under each buffeting layer,
uncertain how to settle into this
leashing. I manage at last to tunnel
her hands into mittens and she barks and
won't stop barking, her hands suddenly paws.
She is reduced to another being,
barking, barking all day in these restraints.
For days after, she howls into her hands,
the only way she tells me she wants out.

NICK FLYNN

Cathedral of Salt

Beneath all this I'm carving a cathedral
of salt. I keep

the entrance hidden, no one seems to notice
the hours I'm missing ... I'll

bring you one night, it's where
I go when I

hang up the phone ...

Neither you
nor your soul is waiting for me at

the end of this, I know that, the salt
nearly clear after I

chisel out the pews, the see-through
altar, the opaque

panes of glass that depict the stations of
our cross — *Here is the day*

*we met, here is the day we remember we
met ...* The air down here

will kill us, some say, some wear paper
masks, some still imagine the air above the green

trees, thick with bees

building solitary nests out of petals. What's
the name for this? *Ineffable?* The endless

white will blind you, some say,

but what is there to see we haven't already

seen? Some say it's
like poking a stick into a river — you might as well

simply write about the stick.

Or the river.

STEPHEN STURGEON

Violet Swords

It was a matter of wearing gloves well
while lunching, while conquering Dubrovnik;
of, no one would care how, evading Hell.
Diverse employments made gentlemen tick:
Christmas turkeys; circulating trophies;
pedestal stacked upon pedestal. Today
silence has come to see what no one sees,
it's always grim at the start of the play.
Fellows, who wait à propos their intros
clawing at the panels, such shrill tigers,
thrive unthreading the hems of the heroes.
Friends of our late friend are minor-leaguers
never to be called up but good as types,
people who will hook bras to the flagpole,
bake chocolate for a gray stranger ... She wipes
away red records of the stocks you stole ...
Yesterday, books were thrown from the third floor,
out the window, they sank in pairs like shoes,
and I watch violet swords on a white shore,
blade-tip laid across blade-tip, where it snows.

Music Between Strangers

A sycamore grove, and in its limbs
the orchestra played *Má vlast*, so I saw
boughs bouncing and tuxedo legs
swinging sap-spotted above the splayed
blades of the ground feathered black
in moss, in the sweat of the set sun,
and the players' faces where moths roosted,
where leaf-points drew water-stripes
on brows and eyelids, their hands
that stirred in pollen like a fog, were masked
by birds' nests and bows and flaking vines.

That you were last to climb down,
trumpet tied to your back with blue twine,
is the only thing I believe in,
and after you landed, drifting
through a stream, in a mat of orange needles,
you whistled to what light could float
through the leaves' screen and canopy, diffuse
like tracing tissue, a scrum of benday dots,
and not much at that,
now that more than the concert has ended,
my musician.

Gilding the Lily

To keep anxiety at bay, my friend called chemo *dragonfly love*. Those insects — christened, in places, the devil's darning needles — hover as they contort their joined bodies into a heart, the male with pincers. Finger cutter, horse killer, ear stick, eye pisser. *Look closely at the eyes of a female darner and you may well see dark puncture marks*. As a slow drip through an IV. As a pill. Through a port into a vein. She called nausea *erotica*. Just the same, we name our storms to lessen them — not a tropical cyclone, but *Arabella*, with ballet shoes and bun. Tumors, too, were *friends*, waiting at the bus stop with backpacks in the morning. Cindy French braids Carrie's hair, yanking at the scalp to form the tight crisscross. Not hair loss, but *deep conditioning*. She gave us the new lexicon on stationery embossed with a red rose speckled by raindrops. The stem still had its thorns. Ring-around-the-rosy, red rover, red rover, send her right over. She called death *the world of 10,000 things*: the dragon courting its damsel, catheter tubing in the wastebin, video of a toddler biting his brother, pas de deux, full-sugar ice cream, Crimson Queen, Trumpeter, Red Knockout, Tuscany Superb... I knew her as Rose Shapiro. At the funeral I learned she was born *Passalacqua*: to cross the river, to pass a glass of water.

Victory, WI

All hail the crumbling stone monument
to the Battle of Bad Axe, the wooden helve

long rotted and burned, the short walk to the river,
where we can bathe in its brown,

where a steamboat ghost huffs out
a stream of bullets. We are invulnerable

to their spectral lead, descendants
of fur traders (beaver, ermine,

skunk). Our lungs are clean and pink. Let's visit
the saw shop, the greenhouse with bluff views,

the pines and stacks of firewood,
the Blackhawk general store, named for

the warrior who waved a chalky,
misunderstood flag and eluded capture

for weeks. In winter, eagles
dive here, gathering lift when the wind

hits the bluffs: all hail the migrating
raptor, its piercing talon and yellow cere.

PHILLIS LEVIN

Anne Frank's High Heels

Miep managed to snap them up for 27.50 guilders. Burgundy-colored suede and leather ...

— Anne Frank, Tuesday, August 10, 1943

When Miep took us home with her
She held us up in the air,

Eye-level with those eyes
You may know, eyes spelling

Sorrow-girl, wait-for-me,
Happiness-around-a-corner-

One-day, hurry-back, don't-tell.
Two new hands took us in,

Skin cradling skin.
How empty we had been,

Only a little bit worn —
Not a penny, not a pebble

Dwelling within.
We became an altar,

An offering red as wine,
A wishing well.

She was made to carry us
Near and far,

We were made to bear
The pressure of her feet

In darkness, in light,
Their sweetness, their heat.

We were getting used to her.
Miep calls us a handsome pair.

JOHN GALLAHER

In a Landscape: I

“Are you happy?” That’s a good place to start, or maybe,
“Do you think you’re happy?” with its more negative
tone. Sometimes you’re walking, sometimes falling. That’s part
of the problem too, but not all of the problem. Flowers out the window
or on the windowsill, and so someone brought flowers.
We spend a long time interested in which way the car would
best go in the driveway. Is that the beginning of an answer?
Some way to say who we are?

Well, it brings us up to now, at any rate, as the limitations
of structure, which is the way we need for it to be. Invent some muses
and invoke them, or save them for the yard, some animus
to get us going. And what was it Michael said yesterday? That
the committee to do all these good things has an agenda to do all these
other things as well, that we decide are less good in our estimation,
so then we have this difficulty. It just gets to you sometimes. We have
a table of red apples and a table of green apples, and someone asks you
about apples, but that’s too general, you think, as you’ve made
several distinctions to get to this place of two tables, two colors.
How can that be an answer to anything? Or we can play the forget-
ting game,
how, for twenty years, my mother would answer for her forgetfulness
by saying it was Old-Timer’s Disease, until she forgot that too.

On the television, a truck passes left to right, in stereo. Outside,
a garbage truck passes right to left. They intersect. And so the world
continues
around two corners. The table gets turned over, with several people
standing around seemingly not sure of what comes next. Look at them
politely as you can, they’re beginners too. And they say the right
question
is far more difficult to get to than the right answer. It sounds good,
anyway, in the way other people’s lives are a form of distance,
something
you can look at, like landscape, until your own starts to look that way

as well. Looking back at the alternatives, we never had children
or we had more children. And what were their names? As the living
room parts
into halls and ridges, where we spend the afternoon imagining a plant,
a filing cabinet or two ... because some of these questions
you have with others, and some you have only with yourself.

In a Landscape: II

“Ghosts are people who think they’re ghosts,”
my daughter Natalie said, starting off the period
we will refer to later as *A Little Bit Further Along*. Since then
(which was last night, November 3rd, 2009), I’ve been thinking
about where I am more, as a kind of goal,
and somewhat less about where I’m not. It’s a pleasure to be
where one is, given that someone
isn’t somewhere lethal. This is *Pleasure One*.

And now this is *Pleasure Two*, thinking about it,
so that this place, which was *Place One*, and a pleasure,
as we were there where we were and it was not a lethal place,
but a place where we were, is now this place again
as we’re here thinking about it, like America or a popsicle.
“Open the house and the house is empty,” Natalie also said, meaning
her dollhouse, as she’s seven, but when she said it, I had this
vision of all of us suddenly disappearing, maybe thinking
ourselves ghosts, even, or getting somewhere, out
and around her bedroom and then down the hall and stairs.

I’ll tell you how it happened. Natalie and I were looking out the
window
at the backyard, and she asked me if I liked our house. It’s a theme
with her. The other night she asked me if I liked life. I said, “Yeah,
a lot.” And she looked at me a second and then said, “Me too.”
You don’t hear that every day, I think, until the accumulations
begin to remind me of every day: Carla, who donated a kidney
to her brother-in-law (Robin’s uncle), has just been diagnosed
with cancer, two months later. She sends hopeful updates
from the hospital, on Facebook. Like fountains, the footnotes
go on. My footnote or yours. The big questions can’t be decided
in this way. They demand coins or laws. And this is
much too important to be a big question.

In a Landscape: III

It appears that we're living (which isn't always the case), depending on how one defines such things, in a "now you see it/
now you see it" kind of way. We can say we're working on our age, as well, listening to Bob Dylan songs where people can age in whatever direction supports the theme. "Too bad life doesn't get themes," Robin says, and yes, that's right, and then we can all go do whatever it was we were going to do anyway. "It's either that, or pay off the kidnapper," as Neil Young had it, back in the mid-70s. There's always an analogue, and someone to tell us about it, how, no matter how fast you run, you can't run fast enough to get away from yourself. You could even call it a theme.

For instance, I was the first one to an eighteen-wheeler accident on the highway once, in the early 90s. I didn't know what I was going to find. It was just tossed there on its side, across both lanes. So I got out of the car and walked around to the front, only to see the driver standing inside the cab that was resting on the driver-side door. He was simply standing there behind the glass, parallel with the dashboard, a little blood on his forehead, looking as lost as I felt, looking back at him. All his things (magazines and maps and cigarettes and pens and snacks) in a little pile at his feet. When I left, a guy was hitting the windshield with a baseball bat.

You go to the room, and the place you like to sit is missing. This is an opportunity to trust, I suppose, or perhaps for blind panic, if one were to consider this a metaphor for something. But say it's not, say there are no such things as metaphors for a moment, and where does that get you? Presently, it gets me to a row of green and yellow plastic chairs, those 1950s-looking ones I imagine Kenton would like to collect. They're joined together by shiny metal clasps, chrome, and the whole thing is full of sunlight through the plate glass window. It's the kind of scene I think of as lickable, how everything looks like cheerful candy, and I wonder if there might be a way to be there or here without a beginning, or without an ending, or if perhaps there might be a concept for no middle.

BILL BERKSON

First Thing

Drown on all fours
Pennies from a box flood the frump market
Blasts of nacre, triage under weather's speckled pool

The *idée fixe* never happens yet can't be ignored
Still the moon is half full?
Speak for yourself with your hands up

The search is on
Search and destroy, if you will
Elimination starting with a lit fuse

Vacuumed anon
Your pleasure is the lee shore
Thunder smites the tundra's paw

This should be memorable
Legs whited out
The runners advance

Accounts Payable

... cantered light-heartedly downstream to their doom.

— Patrick Leigh Fermor

Somebody down there hates us deeply,
Has planted a thorn where slightest woe may overrun.

Disorderly and youthful sorrow, many divots picked at since
Across the thrice-hounded comfort zone.

Can't cut it, sees permanent crones
Encroaching aside likely lanes of executive tar

All spread skyward.
You got the picture, Bub:

This world is ours no more,
And those other euphemisms for grimly twisting wrath,

A wire-mesh semblance bedecked
With twilight's steamy regard.

Look at the wind out here.
Delete imperative.

Hours where money rinses life like sex,
Whichever nowadays serves as its signifier.

Monogram

For Bernadette Mayer

Just one more vintage movie,
Batwings tonight at the Bal Masqué —
Another creature stuffed
By distinguished pedigree.

I get a lot of madcap ideas about sentience,
How knowing has you put down in the book
Forbidden speech recognition —
Else why make such a face?

And now it's luck no longer mouth that moves
When fastidious rummage whispers
To divulge a surplus
A clue if not the key.

Prospect my question laps up for good —
I lean to it. Knowing you,
First-person dwindle.
Tweet-tweet. Prick.

JAMESON FITZPATRICK

Morning Scene

Opposite him at this table again
and through the windows the city glittering, surreal as a scale model,

the city in miniature — only it moves in a real way, because it is real.
One of the windows is open, some construction down on the street

drones like a distant vacuum. It's warm for January.
Still, his apartment has that dreamlike quality

of feeling like home though I know it's not. Not mine anymore —
but how many people get to visit the past without hurting anything?

To come back and drink the same coffee
from the same never-quite-clean cup?

Tenderness

Yes, I was jealous when you threw the glass.

I wanted the shattering against the wood-paneled floor for myself,
to be the sudden diaspora of its pieces across the apartment — and
last night

when we fought, I wanted you to hit me so badly I begged.
And the other day walking past Renewal-on-the-Bowery,

when one of the men smoking unsteadily outside
called me a faggot, I thought: Good. People get what they deserve.

Then I wished I were more like Jesus — capable of loving
all people and all things always, capable of nothing

but love. I waste half my wishes this way,

wishing to be virtuous. The rest, well,
I don't have to tell you, do I?

Balcony Scene

Up — or out? — here:
a problem of preposition,

my uneasy relation
with the world. Whether I'm

above it or apart. On the other side
of the latched glass door, a man

loves me. Worries. Calls my name.

•

Where — for art — thou-
sands of windows go dark

in slow succession. On Essex
and Ludlow and Orchard.

A thousand times goodnight.

•

A boy throwing stones at a window.
Right window, wrong boy.

•

Love goes toward love —

And the place death, down there

waving its white kerchief —

TJ JARRETT

At the Repast

When we gathered at the house, while the men all looked at their shoes and the women whispered, *baby, baby, baby*, she sat down with a fist full of paper napkins and folded them into birds. When she filled her hands, she crossed the room to the hearth and threw a bird into the flames, then another, then another until she had destroyed all she created. Years later when I asked her what she meant, she couldn't remember. *The worst has already happened*, she said. *What good is metaphor to us now?*

RUTH LILLY POETRY PRIZE PORTFOLIO

Lines of Affinity

When Harriet Monroe started this magazine in 1912, she devised a metaphor, “The Open Door,” for its editorial policy, and took as her motto a line from Walt Whitman’s “Ventures, on an Old Theme” — “To have great poets, there must be great audiences, too.” In Whitman’s piece, which is a dialogue, that line gets a whole paragraph to itself, as does the sentence preceding it: “Poetry (like a grand personality) is a growth of many generations — many rare combinations.” As if taking his cue from the capacious thinking packed into these lines, Nathaniel Mackey’s poetry ambitiously continues an American bardic line that unfolds from *Leaves of Grass* to Pound’s *Cantos* to H.D.’s *Trilogy* to Olson’s *The Maximus Poems*, winds through the whole of Robert Duncan’s work, and extends beyond all of these. In his poems, but also in his genre-defying serial novel *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate* (which has no beginning or end), and in his multifaceted critical writing, Mackey’s own rare combinations create an astonishing and resounding effect: his words go where music goes.

That music as Mackey performs it on the page, and as represented in this portfolio of his work, has been intertwined through the years in two concurrently progressing serial poems. One, *Song of the Andoumboulou*, addresses and gives voice to the progenitor spirits of the Dogon people of West Africa; it’s both a funeral song and a song of rebirth — a song of longing sung to people who no longer exist. The Andoumboulou, Mackey explains, are a “failed form of human being” in Dogon cosmology: “a rough draft of human being, the rough draft we continue to be, compounded of starward reach and,” as the poet H.D. put it in her own multivolume poem *Trilogy*, “the palimpsest/of past misadventure.” The other series, *mu*, weaves together the titles of two albums of improvisational music by jazz trumpeter Don Cherry and the Greek word *muthos* — which means speech, story, fable — and also indicates a lost Atlantis-like continent thought to have existed in the Pacific Ocean. It’s also a word that Olson absorbed from Jane Harrison, the great writer on mythology, who seems to have traced it back to the very first human utterance: *Mu!*

You can tell that the mu that’s in music is going to be of key

importance. Mackey's "explicit interest in the permutability of words and the spells cast by spelling" was something he found in the otherworldly jazz of Sun Ra; it plays throughout his work. This is because the improvisational techniques jazz pioneered taught Mackey that "the given is only the beginning, that arrangements as we find them are subject to change, rearrangement"; it forms the basis and lifeblood of his own poetics. To some people, improvisational jazz sounds like a kind of noise; for Mackey, that's the point: in an interview (as in his novel), he describes the Dogon "creaking of the word," the "noise upon which the word is based, the discrepant foundation of all coherence and articulation, of the purchase upon the world fabrication affords." It's as if, as Zora Neale Hurston, another of his influences, put it: "you got tuh *go* there tuh *know* there."

Or as Duncan put it in *The Opening of the Field*, quoting St. John at Ephesus: "If you have not entered the Dance, you mistake the event." And indeed, Mackey got his start browsing in a bookstore in 1965, when he happened upon a copy of Robert Duncan's *Roots and Branches*, where lines from "The Continent," he says, reeled him in; they were "lines *cast*, as in fishing. I was caught." Their oceanic pull was strong, and led Mackey to H.D. and eventually a "coastal poetics, a coastal way of knowing." This led in due course to Lorca, whose legendary sense of *duende* involved "speaking more than one knew," Duncan said, the "taking over of one's voice by another voice." This poetics of fluidity gives birth to the notion of language as "an area of implication, resonance, and connotation that is manifold, many-meaning, polysemous." And so from his literary, musical, and flesh-and-blood ancestors—drawing upon the vast traditions from which each individual creates a lineage for oneself—Mackey's vivid and constantly regenerating ethos arises:

Call it influence without anxiety. As a writer, one has to find one's tradition, create one's tradition, and in doing that one creates lines of affinity and kinship that can cut across national boundaries, ethnic boundaries . . . [and] also relate to the question of how one's writing can be informed and instructed by other artistic media, how one can create or pursue lines of kinship and conversation with nonliterary media.

Though greatly influenced by Duncan's ideas of "the world-poem," and "the grand symphony," for Mackey the pursuit of other voices,

alternate voices, and indeed of a large metavoice is also very much a part of the African American musical tradition, ranging from the blues of Mississippi Fred McDowell to the jazz of Dizzy Gillespie, Sonny Rollins, Miles Davis, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Yusef Lateef, and others. Black art is innovative, as Mackey demonstrates over and over again, yet as he points out, critical approaches to African American writing often fail to see it as such. And no doubt some readers may find Mackey's innovative work difficult in its quintessential and innovating blackness. But as Olson exclaims in *The Maximus Poems*: "the blessing/that difficulties are."

This is very much to the point. "American society's appetite for simplicities is not to be underestimated," Mackey observes. His work takes up the challenge — "an especially stiff one to those hailing from a group" — poets! — who are "expected, more than most, to feed and affirm that appetite." He hasn't, as he readily admits, "been concerned with prioritizing a plausibly autobiographical 'I' in his poetry.

Instead, Mackey works with the "incongruity, the rickety, imperfect fit between word and world" which makes his technique for writing compelling, apt, mysterious, and musical. His constructions are complicated, yes, but we ought to be used to the complexity of edifices.

After all, even the houses we live in, with their old elbowed pipes and veins of wiring, their skins of plaster and joists like wooden bones, are complicated, and compose a body that speaks to us discordantly each night when the radiator clanks, something scratches in the walls, a floorboard squeaks unbidden, and there's thumping in the attic. Anything lived, and lived in, has something to sing or say. But as Mackey himself sympathetically notes: "Some things speak to you and some things open doors for you while other things don't." In the end, though, as Mackey says in the introduction to his book *Paracritical Hinge: Essays, Talks, Notes, Interviews*: "Doors are for going through." How consonant this is with Monroe's "Open Door."

"To have great poets, there must be great audiences, too." As N. says to the Angel of Dust in Mackey's novel (upping the ante considerably): "One invents one's audience in more senses than one." I'm pleased to honor both the traditions of this magazine and those that flow into the inventive music of Mackey's work with the 2014 Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize. — ds

NATHANIEL MACKEY

Song of the Andoumboulou: 136

A comped piano lifted the leaves in
Low Forest, a blanket of shade pulled
up, a sheet of glass put in place, free
prospect all around I thought. I wanted my
allegoric lapse, I wanted my whatsaid
companions. Alone looking out under
house
arrest, I wanted them back, less myself
than before, unbeset... An exquisite jewel
it all was, no explanation, no equation,
a
time-lapse excursion it was. High John
from High Point was on the box, the box
blown roofless, hacked wood scattered
what
light there was... A low trombone could
be heard asking, "What have they done to
my beautiful boy?" A tree limb cracked in
the
distance, the all-of-us the horns had be-
come. All of us there to notice, all of us there
to see, "Blue Train" our wounded anthem,
hacked wood the woods we walked... I was
im-
agining Sophia's dreamt-about blue truck,
dreamt arrival, Trane's loud announcement
a blur, train truck, wished-for congress come
nigh.
There was the sun's late equation, the moon's
ludic blush, truck equaling train equaling train
equaling truck, soon's blue transport, soon
soon
come... It was the muse's blue lips the all-of-
us the horns had become came thru, blue

rebuked kiss, blue-blent reconnoiter. It was
the
muse's gray canopy covered us, the we I'd
otherwise be the trees fell free of, cries loud
and low we'd have heard had we been there,
wood equaling would equaling we... I lay
like
Anuncio busted up contemplating the book
of it, last leg's no-exit announcement no way
to run. I stood like Itamar, sat like Huff. A
sweet
smile captured my lips like Netsanet's, Zeno
and
Zenette's re-
pair

•

Zeno and Zenette's last anything. Zeno and
Zenette's last kiss. I saw them come back
from afar, saw them bisect every step. Friend
and
familiar, affine, foe, they walked in smelling
of salt, the reek of Lone Coast on their hair,
their skin, sand a kind of coat they wore...
Some-
thing I saw it seemed I dreamt I saw, some-
thing seen exteriority reneged on, stand up wide
awake though I did. Did I see what I saw I
won-
dered, the closer the coast was the less I felt
located, water opening out onto everywhere,
was what I saw what I saw I wanted to know...
A versionary recital it seemed or so I thought,
so

abreast of it only the book of it remained, a
finger dipped in butterfly dust, a foot gone print-
less, what of it I glimpsed gone out on tiptoe,

wuh

we'd have been whose escorts, wuh we, once
there, drew thru the woods... So it was or so
it went, going so, soon gone, a blip no screen
accounted for, blink, as I did, all I could. The

box

had fallen away, sound itself an overt bed of
scree, roughed underbody I fell and felt heir
to, a chestnut sense were there any sense left, a

new

scrub sense of my-
self

“Let it play on you,” Huff had said, “let
it have its way.” I wasn’t clear what “it”
was but my ears perked up. Mu, I knew,
had
gone into hiding and it might have been
Mu. I wondered was it Mu he spoke about...
In front of us the waves rolled in. They
gave
his eyes a glassy look... To see was to see
oneself suspended, round Insofarian bliss
at the foot of Mount Ida, Huff’s ythmic
what-
say, a smiling spider’s
bite

A sort of cartoon the sun had a face and
grew limbs in, round and round of re-
birth, death unacceptable, what I saw
was
too much. I saw a tiptoe ghost prome-
nade, a sorcerer's apprentice parade,
Mr. and Mrs. P's reminiscent lament...
Some-
thing seen in a face no straddling of legs
lived up to. An epiphany or an epistrophe,
no way of knowing which. Press there'd
be
no end of any-
more

Unlay's Late Promenade

— “mu” one hundred sixteenth part —

Again that closer walk, legless though
they'd be. Low Insofarian sun I cut my
teeth on, theirs to be better to bite with,
me
theirs the closer we walked. They were
insisting time seeds grievance, crooned it the
closer I got, Zeno and Zenette moment's
nurs-
es, Nunca Anuncia's net... Thus it was they
were there again, thus they walked legless,
noses thumbed at the sun. Unlay's avatar
said
to've become caricature, sacred clown of
late's late awakening, laughed having thought
it so... So it was I saw what I saw was too
much. So it was I sewed my mouth shut,
they
who'd have heard me gone again, what-
say's entourage. “So it was” were the
words they'd gone away muttering, unlay's
non-
chalance... Everything was leaving itself, eve-
ryone himself, herself, all of them, all of
it, moving. It was as though they were each
an-
other. Outmost urge met indrawn joust, pe-
yote-pod baritone tap. They were saying they'd
gotten back from this or that place. Where
was
the honey we'd heard about I wanted to know...
In the realm of whatsay it all bore consequence.
They did a slack-legged shuffle, legless though
they were, quick-switch imbroglia the cost of it,

rum-
ble in the house of who knew. It was my own most
inward step, my heart itself, closer than close
could be. I had a go at it but fell, my legs were in
the
way, no way could legless grace come again... I
thought about walking. I had to think about walk-
ing, Nunca's pelvic sway. Though what I saw
I
couldn't say, it made me say things, realm in
whose wood I hung in love with her hard look,
walk
in whose wake
I lay

I was whistling when my lips fell off. Lip-
less was to legless in some way I couldn't
say, the closer walk words got in the way

of...

What it was lay on the tip of my tongue,
say to unlay already in some way, unsay's
day begun. We were of more than one mind

Huff

had it. Sophia said the same... I wanted rele-
vance, trust, I whistled even so, wind in

the

gaps in my
teeth

•

A new lady named Ahdja joined our group,
 slight of limb, loose tomboy body, smile so
 broad we blushed. The Egyptian spring was
 up
 in smoke in back of us, we trudged on, far
 from all that, even far from Lone Coast, a
 former life stalked us it seemed... We took
 tiny
 steps, unsure what lay under us, unlay's realm
 the sweet precinct we sought, unsure what
 would get us there... To say we was too much
 my
 head told me. Not so my second head said. To
 say we was all I wanted my third head said, sec-
 ond head said to've lost itself, third head always
 at
 odds with itself, want wanting more of itself...
 It was Ahdja's dream we were in, the we I went
 on about, unlay's adumbration. When would
 its
 day begin we wondered, the we I so insisted on,
 the we we'd eventually be, when would lay's
 day be done. It was my dream of Ahdja we were
 in
 said my third head, we the one risk I took, one
 wish, flat rhapsodic stitch... I walked haunted
 by the we she made us, Nunca's promenade be-
 hind us now. We'd seen Egypt in flames and we
 kept
 walking. Huff said, "I told you so," and we kept
 walking, unlay's late promenade all there was
 left... I dreamt a dream of moving on, I dreamt
 a

dream of standing pat, first head and second head
and third head's agreement, a dream I let my true
slide self

•

Unlay was no simple stand, this or that mystic
 hustle, this or that bodily rebuke. In the end
 it will have been all there was we grew to expect,
no
 soul's captivity some book had called Egypt, a
 book we no longer read... In the realm of whysay
 we tramped along, there no matter spun by the
swirl
 of it, there no matter where we were. Moment's
 notice moment's gnosis, the moment brought bad
 and good. Ahdja's ka was Layla, Itamar's Majnun,
our
 crew caught up in the old way, the old way's day
 redone... "Madness be our name," we chimed in
 unison, incensed, Majnun's dream of a just world
 just dreaming, Majnun's each and all we were. So
it
 was and so we sang, snuffed Egyptian spring an-
 acrustic, uncuffed auspice there'd be. Thus it was,
 so it went, unlay unlike what it was we expected,
sanc-
 tified feet where voices met water, far from cause
 and consequence we stumped... We were relishing being
 together for a time, something seen in a face peering
out
 from inside we saw was what soul was. "This is how
 it is," I was telling myself, some spectral aspect it had
 somehow. "This is how it is," I said, "this is how it
 is," voice eaten at by the bay we stood in front of, cold
ad-
 vent of water, cold commiseration, ythmic arrival,
 salt... If not what wet our hems anointment was
 nothing, nothing if not what tugged our feet. "Froth be

what we'll be," we chimed, indignant, high falsetto
in-
sistence, deep gubgubi thrum. There was a sense there
was a core to be gotten to, cloth drawn aside or
gone under, frills fallen away at the water's edge...
If
not it, albeit illusory it might have been, instigation
was
nothing

The advance I wanted lay at Ahdja's feet,
scruffy thought's nubbly dispatch. That all
bow down and be at rest, unlay's un- soon

come...

Chill water, careening bus, what Egypt was...

World

under glass wraps,
flat

Song of the Andoumboulou: 138

Anuncio drifted in a well of sound, unlay's
ward, late orphan, a wry erotics had its
way. He called himself Antonio now, Ahdja
having
joined our group... Dunelike hip and thigh
he stipulated, the desert he insisted we see. We
understood there was occult stuff going on
un-
derneath, telling ourselves get used to it,
close to the bone so close it lay inside, the
closer walk we all went on about... We
were in Port of Spain thinking about India,
bored
outside the Red House, shimmering side
street, pan exactitude bruited elsewhere, pan's
light water, floating light. The light hung as
though
it were buffed, embroidered, sound's amanuensis,
griff... There they were at the well again, the
we he'd been told would be there, whatsaid
en-
semble the air disinterred, hit by affliction
in each their own way, beset by some other
where there might've been, beset by some other
when there might've been, beset by some nether
light...
If not bodily light's late day there was nothing,
the not-all-there there'd always been come into
its own. Wind affliction was all, all there was,
rent,
a mere liplike wrinkle at least. "Back when we
were alive," it said... Literal sigil. Sage regret.
A way of looking. Something we saw. "Sealed
lips
wheeled in the air," we translated it. The point

to look past it we
saw

was

•

He wanted Ahdja's poise, Antonio's aplomb,
namesake demur, name notwithstanding. So it
was he blinked and his eyes bled, wry erotics'
haunched interstice bloodstruck, never again
be-
fit, Mr. In-Between... A kaiso chorale, we sang
"Namaste," a voice inside the voice inside the
box, tongue in cheek, box buried somewhere
east...

It wasn't singing we were there for, chant
though we did sotto voce, an agonized aplomb of
some sort... An Ibibio go-head we each turned
into, not meaning to... Go-heads one and all we
were,
snide choir... To sing wasn't why we were there...
What it was was names tore loose, took wing, what
world had been ours theirs now, sound itself,
A-
nuncio's well's regress... So that what we sought
was more tone, mock sonance, science an a-
malgam of huh, wuh, huh, knowing's new toll,
wuh
huh... We were where the songs had been beckon-
ing from. This was as it always was. This was
always it no matter what it was. All the things it
was
lay nameless. Roots drew loose with no tonic,
it whether or not it was... An aroused incumbency
surrounded us, unlay's fallaway terrain's intan-
gibility, Antonio's adjunct address. We were down

to
the it of it it seemed... Was it the shimmer of last
things we wondered, queasiness come and gone
come again. There the very it so what it was our knees
gave,
so close we could taste it, nonce elixir, lapse, ellipse...
All of which Ahdja made light of, unsure what of it
fit or if any of it fit. "You can't come on with all
that
new-name talk, that no-name stuff. All that evac-
uation stuff," she said, "gets old, got old," as Antonio
carried on, kept on, Anuncio to some of us, even
so...
All as if the quality of standing there shifted, a new
cast
of soul come
down

•

Some common body to adduce it would some-
 day come to. We stood on the dock, white
 clouds, blue sky all around, spiked Antillean
salt
 in the air. Big ships loomed as we talked...
 Each of us with our well of sound, a sense of
 quest and of brute inconsequence, Anuncio's
mys-
 tic pretense. "Promises, promises," we said suck-
 ing our teeth, said sucking wind thru the gaps
 between our teeth, a taunt song serenading Mr.
In-
 Between... We stood looking out, disconsolate,
 nothing if not words for recompense, what if not
 words none of us knew. Words more whistle
 than words we admonished, Anuncio going on
a-
 bout Antonio and Ahdja, the he and she of
 lore they'd have been had they been able, each
 the other's butterfly twin... Each the other's
but-
 terfly friend if not all that, paperweight, open,
 flown. Second-, third-, nth-hand innuendo all
 there was, word more whistle, mere whistle we
let
 loose, echo degree zero, choric sough... Black
 wheeze, occult burr, we susurrated. "Este mundo
 tan extraño," she intoned, we as well. Ahdja
was
 meat and bones on the spirit of place he con-
 vinced us existed, an impromptu polity exhumed...
 The feeling we were futureless went away. Wuh
huh

went as
well

•

An inwardly repeated tableau. We sat on the
 dock, reluctant witnesses it seemed, more
 story to the story than we could see. What
we
 thought real got a gossamer look, soon to
 tear thru it seemed. Lytic remit what we'd
 been told was real, brute reconnoiter, non-
 sonant lament it seemed... There we stood,
toll-
 ing bone in the air, no tone. Huff called it
 skeleton. There we sat though we stood,
 stood though we sat, stark Trinidadian light
a
 new life, shoal of an earlier life... I wanted
 Anuncio's ythmic pivot, Ahdja's mystic sa-
 shay, Antonio's pirate swag rolled into one
but
 no one was asking me. No one was noticing
 anything, I thought, the difference Ahdja made
 no matter, an order of self-containment ob-
 tained. So I thought or would've said I thought
had
 anyone asked. No one did, said or saw... An
 illusion of place or an allusion to it, Mu was
 all there was, unmoored abstract integument,
im-
 manent commemorative lament. Something
 known as la-la crowded my throat, clung to
 the roof of my mouth. La-la meant I loved it,
torn
 but tucked away, the versionary company of
 love I'd fallen in with, first unfallen fallen, unre-
 formed... No time soon will I be done with it

I thought. La-la mentored my disarray. No way
can
I be done with it I thought, Ahdja and Antonio
Anuncio's boon constituency, each the other's
go-head eminence, each the other's glancing
re-
lay... Late that day we sat in a small boat on the
other side of the island. Scarlet ibises got their
color eating shrimp Ahdja pointed out. Anuncio,
not
knowing what to say, said, "So my heart..." Mu
was not knowing. Mu meant shutting up. Mu was
me and Ahdja, Mr. and Ms. In-Between. Mu
meant no filler. "Promises, promises" resounded
all
day... Something we saw in Ahdja's face wanted
out it seemed. She was the one we had by not
having lore had it, love's adamant outskirts, love's
dog-
matic heart. I made untimeliness a foregone future,
something-seen-in-a-face a new order to restore. I
saw gold where there maybe wasn't, beer cans lined
on
the rail we leaned against, aught if not imagined im-
pact, we the presumption of one... A long sus-
tention of hum it came down to, Om the Vedic nu
we
reminisced, Om the seed-syllabic gist and embel-
lishment, Om the intuitist Mu. "Greek to me,"
each of us admitted, thrum we were ambushed by,
glum subterranean drone strung under it, mosquito
buzz
athwart it
all

I dreamt I died and I went into an isolation
booth, a quiz box I dug my breath up in. "Please
call me Antonio," I whispered, head against
the
hardness of the bone beneath her breast, an
anacrustic psalm, a new "Dearly Beloved."
What to say but there was nothing to, wag as
much
we might... *Something of which we had a name
if nothing else. Something for which we had
the name if nothing else. Something for which
we
had a name if nothing else. Something of which
we
had the name if nothing
else*

Accompaniment called out to me in dreams
I woke wincing from. In its grip, in the
giving of it something new came out, a new
and
old something the thought of which made
me weep, the very thought of it I thought I
knew... But who really knew I wondered,
wind-
ing back down, again feeling futureless, further-
on's would-be walk no new accompaniment,
argu-
ment's rhyme and
regret

As If It Were "This Is Our Music"

— "mu" one hundred eighteenth part —

Heaved our bags and headed out again. Again
the ground that was to've been there wasn't.
Bits of ripcord crowded the box my head had
be-
come, the sense we were a band was back,
the sense we were a band or in a band... The
rotating gate time turned out to be creaked,
we
pulled away. Lord Invader's Reform School
Band it was we were in, the Pseudo-Dionysian
Fife Corps, the Muvian Wind Xtet... The sense
we were a band or were in a band had come
back,
names' wicked sense we called timbre, num-
bers' crooked sense our bequest. Clasp it tee-
tered near to, abstraction, band was what to
be
there was... Band was what it was to be there
we shouted, band all we thought it would
be. Band was a chant, that we chanted, what
we
chanted, chant said it all would be alright...
A new band, our new name was the Abandoned
Ones, no surprise. We dwelt in the well-being
that
awaited us, never not sure we'd get there, what
way we were yet to know. I stood pat, a rickety
sixty-six, tapped out a scarecrow jig in waltz
time, big toe blunt inside my shoe... Who was I to
so
rhapsodize I chided myself, who to so mark my-
self, chill teeth suddenly forming reforming,
who to let my heart out so... To be at odds with

my-
self resounded, sound's own City the wall I hit
my head against, polis was to be and to be so hit...
We heard clamor, clash, blue consonance, noise's
low
sibling
sense

We pumped our arms as though they were
pistons, elbows in and out. We nicked our
name to Abandon. Abandon was our name
now...

Thus was our music no music. Music too
we left behind. Everything beside the point
that there was no point, everything thus the
point... Thus was being there sibling sense
gone
treble, the balm to be a band the true amen-
ity music was, the fact of having been there
new
to its Buddha-nature, the fact of having been
there
moot

•

To have been there wasn't dasein. No Hei-
degger told my horse. Trussed up to
the side it sat, pressed and preponderant,
sov-
ereign, self-contained, were it music the
music we sloughed... Slipped accompa-
niment, surrogate cloud, rapt adjournment.
Agitant. Surrogate cue... I kept clear of it,
caught
up at arm's length, all but caught out I came
to see... Thus was our music no music it seemed
I said, mujic more than music I might've said,
might
as well have said, no matter I mumbled other-
wise under my breath... The Freedmen's Debate
Society our name now was, the Ox Tongue
Speaker Exchange. Fractal scratch. Nominative
ser-
ration. Cutaway run, cutaway arrest... Thus was
our music no music I did say, say's default on
sing such as it was... We called it history even
so,
insisted it, the it crowding the corner of eve-
ryone's eye. None of us were not crept up on,
none not required we sing it, say it. Thus was
our
say not
so

Beginning again for the muleteenth time,
we counted off. It was our muleteenth
breakdown, muleteenth new beginning...

Brass
rubbed off on our lips, reed rubbed off as
well, string steel left on our fingertips, stick

left on our
thumbs

wood

COMMENT

Walking on Knives

The Collected Poems of Denise Levertov, ed. by Paul A. Lacey and Anne Dewey. New Directions. \$49.95.

How many poets have written poems punning on feet? How many have done so while their days were numbered? I'm thinking of Denise Levertov's "Feet," collected posthumously. Is this an *ars poetica*, like Yeats's final sonnet ("Malachi Stilt-Jack am I...") also written by the poet on his — forgive me — last legs? If so, Levertov takes the *via negativa*: her poem makes no use of metrical feet, much less the Yeatsian "stilts" of elevated language. Nor does "Feet" praise vigor and pomp; it grieves for the trudgers of the world, seared with trade and smeared with toil. There are no shapely sonnets here; the poem, in six loosely associated sections, is as baggy as the plastic sacks she sees tied around a homeless veteran's ankles. You can assess every one of Levertov's refusals against Yeats's affirmations, and tally it up to a grand rejection of mastery. Art and poetry exist to point toward something more profound: human suffering. A Neruda poem reminds her of a peasant carrying celery to market "trudging/stony Andean ridges." Hans Christian Andersen's mermaid gets her wish — human feet — but every step "will bring her the pain of walking on knives." A diabetic, elderly poet (Muriel Rukeyser) is brought to such a pass that her Vietnamese nurse must cut her toenails. The resplendent Catholic ritual of foot washing on Maundy Thursday evokes a vision of the shape the disciples' feet must have been in, which would not differ much from the homeless vagrant's or — to come full circle — the celery-carrying peasant's.

"Feet" is an artistic summation by a poet of faith at the end of her life. Denise Levertov was one of the spiritual aristocrats. From the account given by her new biography (*A Poet's Revolution* by former student Donna Hollenberg), she could be as critical, high-handed, and imperious as she was passionate and searching. Born in England in 1923, she had Christian mystics on her Welsh mother's side and rabbis on her Russian father's; she was schooled at home and later by various teachers in art and ballet (feet in pain!). She was pulled away from dance by her sense of humanitarian mission: when Germany

began bombing England she became a civilian nurse. She has a fascinating poem about that experience, “The Malice of Innocence,” from her collection *Footprints* (1972). Her point of departure is a movie she is watching, a shot of a hospital ward at night, which triggers a memory:

when all the evening chores had been done

and a multiple restless quiet listened
to the wall-clock’s pulse, and turn by turn

the two of us made our rounds
on tiptoe, bed to bed,

counting by flashlight how many pairs
of open eyes were turned to us,

noting all we were trained to note,
we were gravely dancing — starched

in our caps, our trained replies,
our whispering aprons — the well-rehearsed

pavanne of power. Yes, wasn’t it power,
and not compassion,
gave our young hearts
their hard fervor?

I love all those subordinate clauses mustered to delay the central predicate, “we were gravely dancing,” eleven lines into the sentence! This passage by itself is a master class in Pound’s tongue-in-cheek edict, “Poetry must be *as well written as prose*.” And yet of course it has virtues of poetry too — mostly strong four-beat lines, subtle enjambments, a push-pull of iambs and trochees. And best of all, her landing on the figure of the “pavanne of power” (“well-rehearsed,” mind you). The pacing here dances *en pointe* — to a stabbing insight.

She loved that job, she remembers. But what was it she loved? She tells us:

remembering being (crudely, cruelly,

just as a soldier or one of the guards
from Dachau might be) in love with order,

an angel like the *chercheuses de poux*, floating
noiseless from bed to bed,

smoothing pillows, tipping
water to parched lips, writing

details of agony carefully into the Night Report.

This reminds me of another WWII poem about lack of empathy: Roy Fisher's "The Entertainment of War," about a ten-year-old boy's incongruent reaction to a bombing that obliterates his cousins. One small difference strikes me: Fisher's poem doesn't pose questions. Levertov's "Yes, wasn't it power, /and not compassion, /gave our young hearts /their hard fervor?" brings an element of rhetorical self-consciousness into the poem that momentarily breaks the spell.

This small detail is symptomatic of larger issues that divide readers into those that love Levertov's poetry and those that don't. There is, for instance, the sense that she is thinking out loud before an audience, signaling an oral rather than writerly poet, like Charles Olson with his mythos of "muthos" or Ginsberg with his penchant for chant. Her "organic verse" was one of the "process" poetries, like Jack Spicer's serial book poems or Robert Duncan's "passages," that claimed to eschew the poem as artifact, and instead defined the poem as a record of thinking in time. She called her process "organic form," as Duncan called his "composition by field" or Olson called his "projective verse." What these process poetries had in common was their insistence that it is not the poet's job to conclude, but to "keep our exposure to what we do not know." The open-endedness of the poem was a hallmark of the form.

Historicizing can quickly become a stimulus to entrenched attitudes — about "the sixties" and the groundbreaking "New American Poetry"; about the controversial Olson coterie, with whom Levertov was grouped in the anthology; about such poets' pacifist activism during Vietnam, and the political poems that disappointed Levertov's early supporters while winning her many readers in the general public. Levertov is bigger than any one affiliation — she had early

correspondences with T.S. Eliot, Herbert Read, William Carlos Williams, and Kenneth Rexroth; she remade herself as an American poet after her emigration to the States in 1948; she became a famous activist married to a journalist, holding many visiting professorships and lecturer positions; she was a poetry editor for *The Nation* and a poetry series at Norton; late in her career she returned to the Christian fold and became a poet of faith before dying of lymphoma in 1997. Publishing with New Directions her whole career, Levertov has stayed in print with dozens of collections of poetry and prose. Her “Some Notes on Organic Form” (1965) is widely anthologized in books on poetic craft. In short, Levertov was no coterie poet; she was a force in the world and had a wide readership.

“Some Notes on Organic Form” is a good place to turn if you want to get a sense of Levertov’s method, and what she values in technique. The impetus for it can be found in Gerard Manley Hopkins’s theory of inscape: all beings are expressions of their own singular, intrinsic form; likewise the poem, representing being, must find its own singular, intrinsic form. Organic poetry is

a method of apperception, i.e., of recognizing what we perceive, and is based on an intuition of an order, a form beyond forms, in which forms partake, and of which man’s creative works are analogies, resemblances, natural allegories. Such poetry is exploratory.

This Platonic idealism expands into Romantic idealism, and utopian idealism. Pilgrim, poet, and activist meld seamlessly into the bardic archetype, or, as her editors put it in an afterword, “the poetics of presence and orality.”

Of the avalanche of poetics manifestos, theories, and apologies that have buried us in prose since the abolition of “poetry” as metrical language, Levertov’s contribution is mercifully short, if also (at times) vague. Her poems are not vague. Her life was full and varied, and intricately documented: too much so, I often thought while reading the thousand-page *Collected Poems*. Take “At the ‘Mass Ave Poetry Hawkers’ Reading in the Red Book Cellar,” a groaner about an open-mic reading:

And songs from these
beloved strangers, these close friends,

moved in my blind illumined head,
songs of terror, of hopes unknown to me,
terror, dread: songs of knowledge, songs
of their lives wandering

out into oceans.

The charge of sentimentality followed Levertov as it does all humanists. But this isn't just sentimentality, it's pure *afflatus*. En face, "Small Satori" is not as badly written, but is inconsequential — more a poet's note to herself about two acquaintances that she hasn't bothered to properly introduce to the reader. These two poems are sequenced, incidentally, right after "The Malice of Innocence." The wonder is not that Levertov could write two bad poems for every amazing one; the wonder is that we have to pretend there's no better or worse at all, just the honest goodness of the organic. Over a lifetime of writing, one may write many, many diaristic poems, fragments, records of the weather, like "The Absentee":

Uninterpreted, the days
are falling.

The spring wind
is shaking and shaking the trees.

A nest of eggs,
a nest of deaths.

Falling
abandoned.

The palms rattle, the eucalyptus
shed bark and blossom. Uninterpreted.

There's nothing terribly bad (or good) about this poem in isolation; in bulk, it becomes deadening. Process poetries, almost by definition, require faith in the intrinsic *interestingness* of the poet's thought. Combined with a vatic tendency in which the poet's authority is quasi-divine — as in Ginsberg, Olson, or Duncan — a poet might begin to think that editing is tantamount to cheating.

True, insofar as Levertov's process was to chart her thinking, she was attentive to design and motif. As her editors note, she "'composed' her books from *The Sorrow Dance* on, carefully ordering poems so that both individual works and groups of poems could throw light on one another and themes and counterthemes could weave larger patterns." Even in her Vietnam poems, absorbed as they are in retelling atrocities, one can track her use of the word "sequins" to stand for the glitter of America and the glitter of napalm bombs. It's when too many seemingly throwaway poems marking the quotidian are preserved because they may liminally bulk up "themes and counterthemes" that one may find oneself longing for more — more virtuosity, more variety, more evidence that the poet is actively challenging herself rather than reacting to events and feelings.

Underbaked process poems, though, aren't the only pitfall of the *Collected*. The tenor of complaint is loud, as it must be in political poetry. "If affluent Whites took it into their heads to wrap their feet in plastic, a new fashion, how long would the 'eateries' exclude them?" That's a disingenuous question, and it mars "Feet," for instance. It's her honest feeling, one might argue, and if she puts her self-righteousness on display she also puts her vanity on display (as in a poem congratulating herself for overtipping a cabbie) and her morbidity on display ("She is weeping for her lost right arm./She cannot write the alphabet any more/on the kindergarten blackboard"). Honest feeling and truth-telling are thought by some to be unequivocal virtues. But I think Robert Duncan was right when he wrote her, cruelly,

I am not talking about prisoners, blacks, children, and angry women in revolt — I am talking about those with work to do deserting their work. And our work is surely to get the words *right*.... Does "suffering" guarantee the image?

He was objecting to her banal and accusatory imagery ("her face/painted, clownishly, whorishly. Suffering"). Indeed one might ask of any number of poets even to this day: *Does suffering guarantee the poem?*

Levertov *had* worked painstakingly "to get the words *right*"; the evidence is there especially in the early work, modeled after William Carlos Williams, her mentor in the American idiom. Everyone knows, or should know, the oft-anthologized "The Ache of Marriage": "two

by two in the ark of/the ache of it.” She could do wondrous vowel music, showcased in natural observation:

In the autumn brilliance
feathers tingle at fingertips.

This tingling brilliance
burns under cover of gray air and

brown lazily
unfalling leaves,

it eats into stillness zestfully
with sound of plucked strings,

steel and brass strings of the zither,
copper and silver wire

played with a gold ring,
a plucking.

— From *Air of November*

Levertov has many poems about wonder and beauty. But there’s no arguing with the fact that she saw the poem as a means, not an end. She refused mastery, and thought it was incompatible with care, as she implied in “The Malice of Innocence.” I’m not convinced that the role of poets is to point, perpetually, at injustice. I’m reminded of a scene in J.M. Coetzee’s *Elizabeth Costello*, where the eponymous protagonist, a novelist, debates her sister, a missionary nun who runs a hospital in Africa. Blanche, now Sister Bridget, insists that art must be *for* something in a suffering world. But Elizabeth, old as she is, and well aware of what awaits her decaying body, can’t prioritize suffering over all the other experiences of life — beauty, sex, adventure, and yes, even power. She just can’t.

YASMINE SHAMMA

Mental Orgasm

Collected Poems, by Ron Padgett.

Coffee House Press. \$44.00.

Growing up on the east coast of Florida, sonic booms were regular occurrences. We would feel a deep core shake, run outside to catch a glimpse of light streaking upwards, and stare in silent reverence at an elaborately constructed thing daring to travel to distant and unknown places. This event was huge, and yet for our Space Coast eyes only; a routine experience for those of us who lived in a very specific place during a very specific time. Since then and there, NASA's space shuttle program has been retired, and though competitions are currently underway to travel to Mars, these days we tend to be a little less tuned into looking up. Luckily for all of us, Coffee House Press has released a vehicle for everyday space travel: Ron Padgett's *Collected Poems*.

The experience of reading Padgett's poetry is like that of being in the middle of an otherwise ordinary day and feeling a sonic boom. He leaves his reader feeling jolted into humility, gasping and grasping for bigger things. In "The Absolutely Huge and Incredible Injustice in the World," for example, Padgett's speaker outlines forms of "meanness" (like killing people), before turning to forms of tenderness (as in a relationship involving one balding lover and another gaining weight, "Which means that my bald head feels good/on your soft round belly that feels good too"). In this way, Padgett forces a vulnerable reader to be open to both the ordinary and extraordinary: "you dial 1-800-MATTRES and in no time get a mattress/... And the bedroom realizes it can't run away." These lines are playful, but they say something serious, progressing to articulate a human and poetic program:

For there must be
kindness somewhere else in the world,
maybe even out of it, though I'm not crazy
about the emptiness of outer space. I have to live
here, with finite life and inner space and with
the horrible desire to love everything and be disappointed.

Padgett's "outer space" is more kitsch and demonstrative than solar. The concrete parameters of impermanent, inhabited "inner" life play in tension with the more permanent, uninhabitable ones of "outer" life.

Though Padgett was writing when the space shuttle was taking off, he was nowhere near it. The "Tulsa Kid" (the title of his 1979 book) moved to New York City in 1960 and, through his previous and subsequent friendships, became a key member of the second generation New York School poets. He led poetry workshops, directed the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Place for a few years, and edited the influential 1970 *Anthology of New York Poets* with David Shapiro. In fact, it could even be said that Padgett started the group on its way to New York, as the magazine he founded as a high school student, *The White Dove Review*, brought together the poets that came to form the movement's core. Padgett himself eschews the title (though not the grouping), referring to this group in a recent interview as "the so-called second generation." And while the publication of the *Collected Poems* allows Padgett's work to stand very clearly and strongly on its own, O'Hara and Koch fans will find it second nature to follow the path through joy and subtle patterns to heartfelt deepities (yes).

Opening the *Collected* up in the middle, one finds "First Drift," a first draft of Padgett's credo:

The writing of poems
and the living of life
seem to require
paying hard attention
to any and everything,
and experiencing
a kind of mental orgasm.
Yikes! Do I
mean that?
Unfortunately, I'm afraid
I did, dipped to scoop
an idea from the roadside,
the mental roadside.

Though the colloquial language makes this poetry seem simple, the elaborateness of its construction invites us to move very quickly from an *ars poetica* to a life manifesto, to a blush, to pavement, to the

inside of one's own head. Though beaming with the antics of a new school, this is old *fashioned* craft at work. For example, "did" and "dipped" are semantically unrelated, but by placing them side by side, Padgett allows their aural and visual likeness to resonate, speeding up the movement that the preceding lines slowly set in motion.

With references to things like mental orgasms, which both demand a reader's attention and distract it, Padgett consistently creates spaces on the page that are as slippery (in reading) as the spaces described. And while he frequently invokes humor to open up the reader's heart and head, readers have often mistaken that humor for an end instead of a means. In Padgett's poetry (and this is especially true of his later poetry) humor is a way of expanding the rational and imagined space of his poetic situations; jokes are means of getting closer to what he calls "inner space," while also exercising its elasticity. If the large *Collected* has a single agenda, it may be to perform, repeatedly, this contract-expand-contract exercise, as the book goes so far as to open (and imply a close) with the line, "Now it is over and everyone knew it." What's a reader opening up an eight-hundred-page book to do? On a very basic level, she must put aside expectations of "it" and consider being open to other possibilities.

Read as a whole, Padgett's *Collected Poems* offers a ride that delights and develops over fifty-some years of quietly daring work. (He is quiet in public persona only in relation to his peers and predecessors such as Ted Berrigan or Frank O'Hara.) In his books' titles alone, Padgett has signaled a gently subversive agenda. Consider: *Great Balls of Fire*, *Toujours L'Amour*, *The Big Something, You Never Know*, *How to Be Perfect*, and *How Long*. Throughout these and previously unpublished works, everyday objects are treated as portals through which worlds free from binaries may be accessed. What's more, Padgett offers constructions that are often concerned with formal limitations (and the means for escaping them) while written in a manner seemingly free from form — rarely do his poems follow any of the traditional structures of meter or rhyme. This is particularly true for Padgett's many urban poems set in the moment when one steps outside of the confines of a room and into the streets of New York City. In these he utilizes a particularly supple sense of poetic form, taking great formal care in constructing metaphors that deliberately explode structural constraints. For example, here is one of Padgett's earlier poems, "Gentlemen Prefer Carrots" (first published in 1976), in its entirety:

I nearly went to sleep standing on a corner today.
The light turned green
People charged down into the street, arms
with bags and boxes
while I stood there disappearing.
And after dinner, forehead resting
on the table, I saw some gentlemen
eating carrots in a dining car
with a landscape whizzing past outside,
really fast trees and hills, varied sights
and views, and those carrots disappearing
into the eaters' mouths. I raised
my eyes: music on the machine,
light, and fall coming on.

Beginning in *medias res* is a very New York School thing to do. But this doesn't quite begin in the middle of things — rather in a “nearly” state, it starts in the middle of boredom. And it exploits this nearness further, by setting out a time limit from its beginning: “I nearly went to sleep ... today.” Immediately we expect an explanation for why the speaker “nearly” fell asleep and why he didn't. The disjunctive dynamic between so vibrant a setting and such a soporific feeling offers the stanza its abstract parameters; much like the sonnet-length but not-sonnet form offers a physical one. Both sets of parameters supply an instantly generative tension.

The second line, in length and sentiment, suggests an impending shift: “The light turned green.” But instead of offering a place for the speaker to move from, it ushers in the speaker's disappearance. The idea of feeling crowded out of a city by its other inhabitants is not new. What modern poetry reader could forget T.S. Eliot's description of a “death” which had “undone so many” on London Bridge? But Padgett's speaker disappears in a lonelier way: swamped by “so many” running daily errands (“arms/with bags and boxes”), he considers drifting out of consciousness while in the middle of lively action. The poem permits a wandering across space and time, the precise kind of indistinct mind-wandering permitted when waiting for a street light to change. With the mention of gentlemen “in a dining car,” the reader is further allowed to wonder if the speaker did fall asleep on the street corner and if, consequently, this poem is the vestige of a dream. The speaker starts half-asleep and moves

to an upside-down half-awake state, then raises his “eyes,” owing to the transitional properties of a line break, to become aware of a bigger sense of the street (“music on the machine,/light, and fall coming on”). Padgett creates his own music to accompany this moment: offering varied line lengths that prohibit a rhythm from developing, he implores his readers to slow down, lest they too fall subject to “disappearing.”

“Gentlemen Prefer Carrots” focuses on the implausible dimensions of a vanishing point, as in “those carrots disappearing” — a moment that dwells on the consumptive habits of city subjects. Throughout his work, Padgett explores the associative powers of domestic props, lodging his “giant ideas” in homely found materials. With a turn of the page, Padgett offers a poem addressed, in title, to “Ladies and Gentlemen in Outer Space,” which also deals with vegetables, this time going so far as to posit a philosophy:

Here is my philosophy:
Everything changes (the word “everything”
has just changed as the
word “change” has: it now
means “no change”) so
quickly that it literally surpasses my belief,
charges right past it
like some of the giant
ideas in this area.
I had no beginning and I shall have
no end: the beam of light
stretches out before and behind
and I cook the vegetables
for a few minutes only,
the fewer the better. Butter
and serve. Here is my
philosophy: butter and serve.

After offering up a few figurative vegetables to imagine instead of eat, Padgett convinces us to thrive on intangibilities. “Everything changes” after all—including the word “changes,” which changes to “charges.” Following this second almost-sonnet, we are offered another one (they seem to get progressively longer) which dares to take this sense of “charging” into a “changing” further: “Realizing”

begins with “Walking briskly past Schrafft’s,” and ends “realizing I was remembering pushed/me ahead into whatever else was going to happen,/my writing this, you reading.” In this way, Padgett demonstrates an early and general tendency to show a self-reflective speaker moving while staying still, becoming a kind of current, suggesting the reader do the same.

While his credo crystallizes in his most recent poetry, there are clues to suggest that Padgett has always had a very particular program. Poems like “Stairway to the Stars” — perhaps an allusion to a Joe Brainard painting — make the imperative clear, while the message is as unclear and ephemerally persuasive as a dream:

He seemed satisfied by the beauty
of the logic that had arrived,
the royal hall now lightly radiant

as he arose from his throne
and the world fell away,
courtiers, battlements, and clouds,

and he rose like a piece of paper
on which his effigy had been traced
in dotted lines whose dots came loose.

Because Padgett upholds O’Hara’s call to make “a poem a surprise,” I’m leaving out the last stanza here. But linear dots coming loose seem precisely the indistinct point: to create space on the page and in the mind.

In terms of structure, simply and superficially, Padgett’s early poems tend to be short in length and narrow in shape, while his later works are longer, broken into more (and less regular) stanzas, with longer lines. Manifesting this later tendency, “How Long” is composed of forty-some irregular stanzas that span nine pages. Through its length, complexity, and title, “How Long” propels us through nonlinear imagery and syntax, inviting us to wander, not in a clear direction but, instead, within a sense of space. Pursuing this expansion, the speaker teases our desire for a definite point, and instead of offering one, taunts us:

Do you mind my going on like this?

You want something else, right?
Perhaps you want what you think poetry should give you,
but poetry doesn't give anyone anything,
it simply puts the syllables on the table
and lets you rearrange them in your head,
which you can do unless your head is a square
the size of the tabletop.
So why don't you lift your head off the table
and go lie down somewhere
more comfortable
and not worry about anything,
including the list of things to worry about
that you keep revising in your head,
for there is a slot through which that list
can slip and float down like a baby in a rocking crib,
down to a comfy dreamland
and be transformed into a list of gods whose jokes are wonderful.

Beginning with a contemporary defense of poesy, and ending with the resurfacing of the joke, these lines ask the reader to simultaneously let go, open up, fall asleep, and dissolve. The “slot through which” Padgett’s poems slip is here, finally, valorized, and our attention is forced on the word “slot” through the momentarily iambic rhythm it sets in motion (“slot through which that list/can slip”). The slot’s importance is that it makes the “slip” possible. The poem’s “slip” begins here with a reference — again — to a concrete domestic object: “the table.” We are invited to lift our head off of a table, yet it was never actually placed on one. Though the lines flow through their enjambment and syntactical equations into a seemingly comprehensible image, the movement is at once circumspect and expansive.

It is the repeated “slip” — and the subsequent proliferation of “slipping” — that gives Padgett’s creations the power to move simultaneously down (“to a comfy dreamland”) and up (“into a list of gods whose jokes are wonderful”). Forty-five years after *Great Balls of Fire*, Padgett’s poems still fuel our capacity for joyful incomprehensibility and subsequent mobility of thought. Padgett ends “How Long” by preemptively ventriloquizing his audience’s potential question mark: “*Hunh?*” and answering, “I keep a ball of laughter inside that *Hunh.*”

CONTRIBUTORS

LISA AMPLEMAN* is the author of *Full Cry* (National Federation of State Poetry Societies Press, 2013) and the chapbook *I've Been Collecting This to Tell You* (Kent State University Press, 2012).

BILL BERKSON's recent books include *Repeat After Me* (Gallery Paule Anglim, 2011) and *Portrait and Dream: New and Selected Poems* (Coffee House Press, 2009). *Expect Delays* is due from Coffee House Press this fall.

APRIL BERNARD's* most recent poetry collection is *Romanticism* (W.W. Norton, 2009). A novel, *Miss Fuller*, was published by Steerforth Press in 2012.

JULIETTE BORDA lives in New York City. She is currently working on a new body of uncommissioned paintings for an upcoming show in Kingston, New York, as well as a graphic novel.

DAN CHELOTTI* is the author of *x* (McSweeney's, 2013) and a chapbook, *The Eights* (Poetry Society of America, 2006). He teaches English at Elms College and lives in Massachusetts.

JAMESON FITZPATRICK* lives in New York, where he received a BA and MFA in poetry from New York University. He's currently at work on his first full-length manuscript.

NICK FLYNN's* most recent book is *The Reenactments* (W.W. Norton, 2013). "Cathedral of Salt" is from *My Feelings*, which is forthcoming from Graywolf Press (2015).

JOHN GALLAHER* is the author of, most recently, *Your Father on the Train of Ghosts* with G.C. Waldrep (2011) and the forthcoming *In a Landscape* (2014), both from BOA Editions.

TJ JARRETT's* debut collection, *Ain't No Grave* (2013), was published by New Issues Press. Her second collection, *Zion*, will be published by Southern Illinois University Press this fall.

PHILLIS LEVIN has published four poetry books including *May Day* (2008) and *Mercury* (2001), both from Penguin. She edited *The Penguin Book of the Sonnet* (2001) and teaches at Hofstra University.

NATHANIEL MACKEY* is the author of five books of poetry, the most recent of which is *Nod House* (New Directions, 2011). He lives in Durham, North Carolina, and teaches at Duke University.

HARRY MATHEWS's* latest book of poems is *The New Tourism* (Sand Paper Press, 2010).

ANGE MLINKO's new book is *Marvelous Things Overheard* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013). She is a 2014–2015 Guggenheim Fellow.

LES MURRAY's recent books are *Taller When Prone* (2012) and *Killing the Black Dog: A Memoir of Depression* (2011), both published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

DEBORAH PAREDEZ is the author of *This Side of Skin* (Wings Press, 2002). She teaches English at the University of Texas-Austin and is a cofounder of CantoMundo, an organization for Latina/o poets.

YASMINE SHAMMA* is a lecturer in English at Brasenose College, Oxford University. She is currently completing her first book, on second generation New York School poetry.

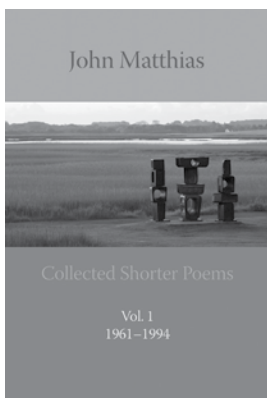
SOLMAZ SHARIF* is a winner of the "Discovery"/Boston Review Poetry Prize and has been awarded fellowships by the Fine Arts Work Center, National Endowment for the Arts, and Stanford University.

STEPHEN STURGEON* is the author of *Trees of the Twentieth Century* (Dark Sky Books, 2011).

* First appearance in *Poetry*.

The Collected Poems of John Matthias

from Shearsman Books

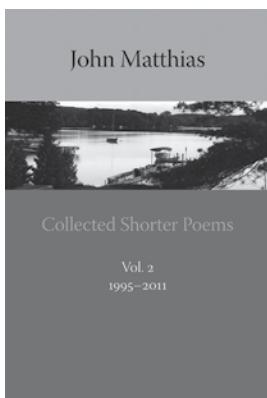


Collected Shorter Poems Vol. 1

Paperback, 280 pp, 9 x 6 ins, \$23

Isbn 978-1-84861-279-2.

Chronologically the first, *Collected Shorter Poems, Vol. 1* was editorially the last of John Matthias' three-volume *Collected Poems* to be published. This volume joins *Collected Shorter Poems, Vol. 2* and *Collected Longer Poems* in bringing together all of the poetry, with the exception of *Trigons*, that Matthias wishes to preserve.

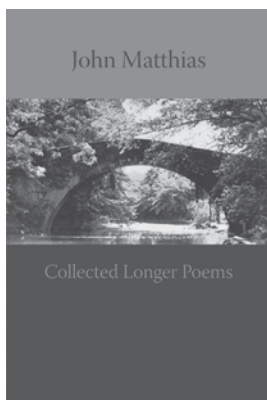


Collected Shorter Poems Vol. 2

Paperback, 282 pp, 9 x 6 ins, \$23

Isbn 978-1-84861-180-1

This was the first volume to be released in the project to collect all the poems of John Matthias. This initial release in the year (2011) that the poet turned 70 began the process of bringing back into a print a major body of work that readers on both sides of the Atlantic need to know better.



Collected Longer Poems

Paperback, 352 pp, 9 x 6 ins, \$23

Isbn 978-1-84861-240-2

This volume covers all of the author's long poems from before 2010, such as *Northern Summer* (1980-1983), *Pages: From a Book of Years* (1998) and *Kedging in Time* (2006). 2010's *Trigons* is excluded but remains available from Shearsman.

All three volumes may be obtained in the U.S.A. from the retail trade or from the usual online stores. They are also available direct from the press at <http://www.shearsman.com/ws-shop/category/960-matthias-john>

Read Poetry

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION: \$35.00

POETRY, PO BOX 421141

PALM COAST, FL 32142-1141

1.800.327.6976

*Notification of change of address should include
old address, new address, and effective date of change.*

Please allow six weeks for processing.

POETRYFOUNDATION.ORG

GET YOUR WORD ON!

VALLUM AWARD FOR POETRY 2014

1ST PRIZE: \$750
2ND PRIZE: \$250
* publication in Vallum

refereed by
**GEORGE
ELLIOTT
CLARKE**

ENTER VALLUM'S ANNUAL POETRY CONTEST!

Submit a maximum of 3 poems of
up to 60 lines per poem.
Entry Fee: \$25 per submission
(includes a 1-year subscription to
Vallum)

DEADLINE:
July 15, 2014

Mail to:
Vallum Poetry Contest
5038 Sherbrooke West
PO Box 23077 CP Vendome
Montreal, QC H4A 1T0
CANADA

Or Enter Online:
editors@vallummag.com
(queries only)
www.vallummag.com/contest



2014

Postmark Deadline:
July 15

Rattle Poetry Prize

1st Prize:

\$5,000
~for a single poem~

Readers' Choice Award:

\$1,000

Ten Finalists:

\$100

Send Entries to:

Rattle
12411 Ventura Blvd
Studio City, CA 91604



www.Rattle.com

Guidelines: Entry fee of \$20 includes a one-year subscription to *Rattle* (or a one-year extension for subscribers). One \$5,000 winner and ten \$100 Finalists will be selected in a blind review by the editors of *Rattle* and printed in the Winter 2014 issue; one \$1,000 Readers' Choice Award will be chosen by subscriber and entrant vote after publication. Open to writers, worldwide; poems must be written in English (no translations). No previously published works, or works accepted for publication elsewhere. Simultaneous submissions are allowed, assuming immediate notification if accepted for publication elsewhere. Type or print clearly your name, address, email address, phone number, and the titles of the poems onto a coversheet. No contact information should appear on the poems themselves. Include a check or money order for \$20, payable to *Rattle*. Send no more than four poems per entry. Multiple entries by a single poet are accepted, however each group of four poems must be treated as a separate entry, with its own cover sheet and \$20 fee. Manuscripts will not be returned; include a SASE or email address to be notified of the results. Winners will be announced on September 15, 2014, and the Reader's Choice Award will be announced on February 15, 2015. Additional entries may also be offered publication. For an idea of our editorial tastes, the previous eight years of winning poems can be read online. Electronic submissions are accepted as well. Visit our website for more information.

THE POETRY FOUNDATION'S Harriet Monroe Poetry Institute's
POETS IN THE WORLD

series edited by Ilya Kaminsky



Anglophone Poetry
 Tupelo Press
 Catherine Barnett and Tiphonie Yanique



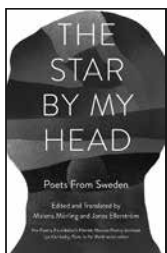
World Poetry
 Open Letter Books
 Eliot Weinberger



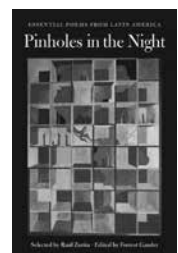
Iraqi Poetry
 New Directions
 Danya Mikhail



Chinese Poetry
 Tupelo Press
 Ming Di



Swedish Poetry
 Milkweed Editions
 Malena Mörling and Jonas Ellerström



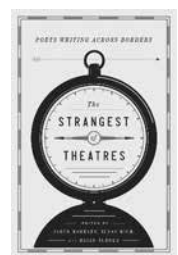
Latin American Poetry
 Copper Canyon Press
 Raúl Zurita and Forrest Gander



African Continent Poetry
 Slapering Hol Press
 Kwame Dawes and Chris Abani



European Continent Poetry
 Red Hen Press
 Valzhyna Mort



Poets Writing Across Borders
 McSweeney's Books
 Jared Hawkey, Susan Rich
 and Brian Turner

The *Poets in the World* series offers English-speaking audiences a rare glimpse at the work of poets who have shaped literary traditions from around the globe, from Africa to Europe, Iraq to China, and beyond. *Poets in the World*, a project of the Poetry Foundation's Harriet Monroe Poetry Institute, collaborates with a wide range of American publishers to produce beautiful publications that advance readership for world poetry.

www.poetryfoundation.org/institute



Now in Paperback!



“If you need to be reminded of the incomparable poems that *Poetry* magazine published first in its pages, read excellent poetry by an author you might not have discovered yet, or simply remember why poetry is worth loving, this is the book to turn to. You won’t be disappointed.”

—Emma Goldhammer, *Paris Review*

“A high-wire anthology of electric resonance.”—*Booklist*

PAPER \$15.00

The University of Chicago Press • www.press.uchicago.edu

PRINTERS BALL 10th ANNIVERSARY

CHATTER

FEATURING

CHIP KIDD ON DESIGN

POP-UP PERFORMANCES CURATED BY 10 OF
CHICAGO'S MOST BRILLIANT READING SERIES
INCLUDING:

ARTIFICIAL EAR
DANNY'S
DOLLHOUSE
NEXT OBJECTIVISTS
SALONATHON
THE SWELL
URBAN SANDBOX
WRITE CLUB

ALSO FEATURING

LETTERS OF LOVE + HATE
WITH PIXIEHAMMER PRESS
BEER GARDEN HOSTED BY
MARIA'S PACKAGE GOODS
PLUS BOOKS, MAGAZINES,
AND PUBLICATIONS FROM
ALL OVER...

SATURDAY, JUNE 28

AT THE HUBBARD STREET LOFTS
1821 WEST HUBBARD * CHICAGO

PRINTERSBALL.ORG | @PRINTERSBALLCHI

Printers Ball 2014 is presented in partnership with Spudnik Press
Cooperative, Platform, The Post Family, and Simple Honest Work.

Made possible by the Poetry Foundation and *Poetry* magazine