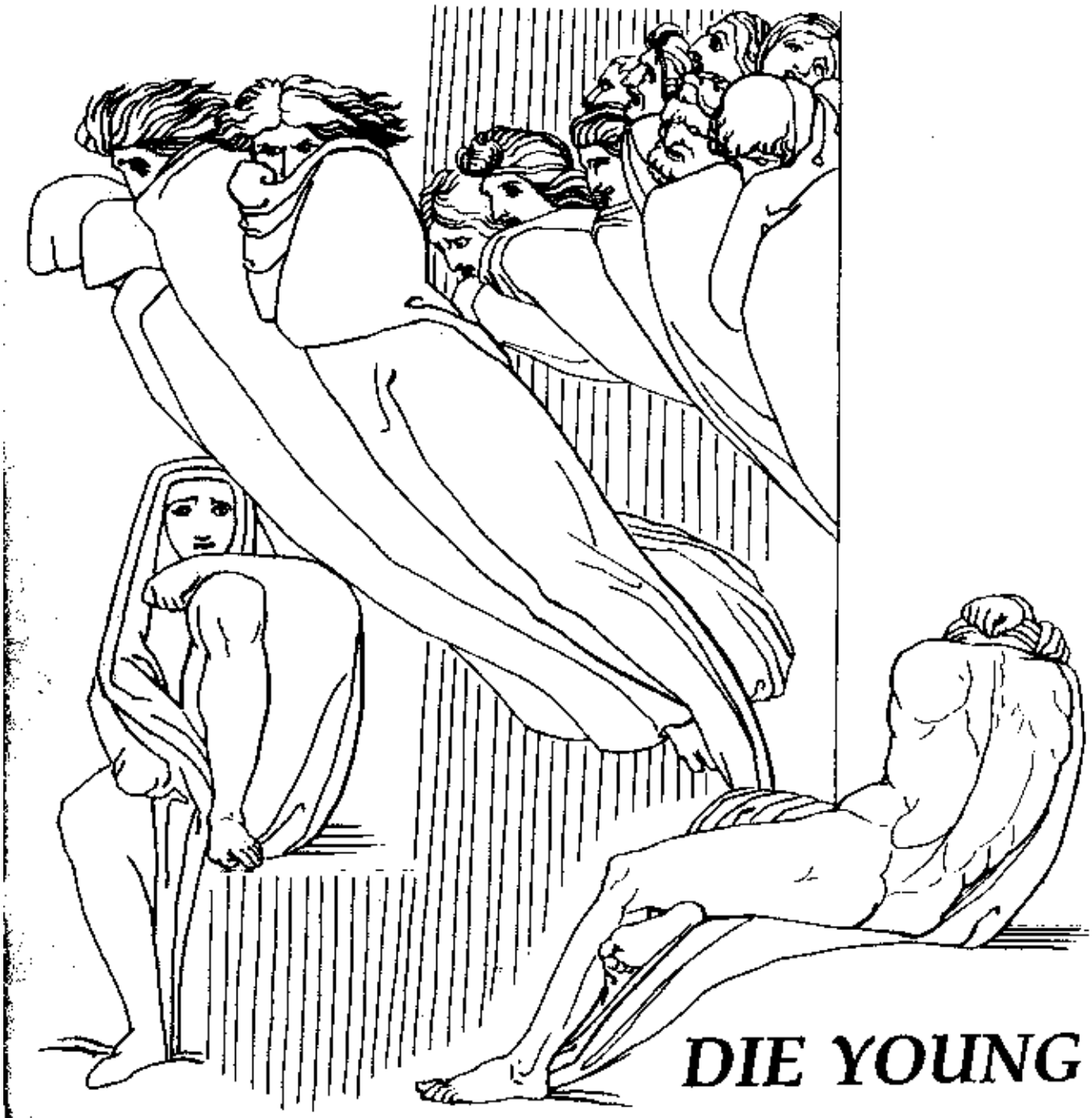

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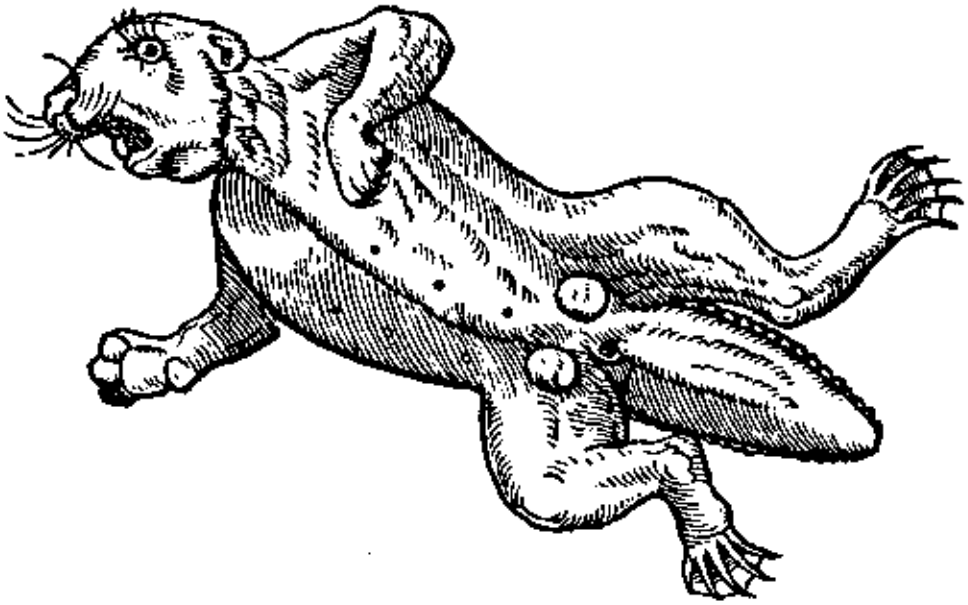

August 1991

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Villanelle at the End of Time

"It's a great journey to the world's end."

As we were winding up, the clock unwound.
  The spring was set—until we felt the fall,
The flailing hands of fall, the scyther's wound.

We put down roots upon the shiftless sand;
  We felt the glass turn, heard the nightwatch call
As we were winding up. The clock unwound

And sprang us into chimes of the yearsend.
  We watched the pendulum against the wall,
The flailing hands of fall. The scyther's wound

Appeared upon our flesh, and on the ground
  There lay in swathes the crop that could not fail.
As we were winding up, the clock unwound

And filled the autumn air with autumn's sound:
  We marked the hours, felt the moments coil,
The flailing hands of fall, the scyther's wound.

And in the stillness now our pulses pound
  Minutely, till we hear them not at all.
As we were winding up, the clock unwound
The flailing hands of all the scythers wound.

Lewis Turco

a song for dogs and angels

no one waited no one waits
the last entry in the log book
read "and so I spoke too
soon / the birds I had mistaken /
them for have flown out / into (what
had I ever / known) the unknown" one

can save something of its flavor
the merest echo pressed between your
palms are paper thin as paper opaque
and imposing these remembered limitations
he spoke he speaks of
you are the darkening tones his voice reflects
you are watching you leaving
behind the cooler shades of April and May

these travelogues like scripts of evening
newscasts headlines and (cue
laughter) the softening drama wears
on through pillows and darker rooms

the next-to-last entry reads "I have
discovered / a new song it is / just
beginning and it / has no name" only

a sustained vowel sound a lulling
transparency behind which we wake
in the odd disquieting silence

Dean Taciuch

there as though they were

a flight of bells the last
of the wind the children
cold in the crosswalks
"have you noticed" they said
"there are so few children here"

hiding behind corners and boarded-up
shopwindows "we must find out where
they are taking us" by
surprise phrased as a question

Union Station 3 degrees Chicago's
remnants real in the yellowing
low light as the fantasy of Tennessee
in train windows long before
dawn renders placid in visible
breath mixing with exhaust and red

with cold faces of commuters
all with somewhere inconceivable
to go this city's rush the unhurried sleep
on benches where it's warmer and wake
in this cathedral to hand out leaflets
detailing religious conspiracies in
comic-book black and white someone steps into

the foreground and hands me
an excuse "wait here" he says
and they're gone (the angel too
who I would've mentioned here
hears only the bells from
the hillside) remaining long
after the celebration

Dean Taciuch

This Fellow I Met on the Beach in Greece

turned out to be a psychiatrist from New York.
We had dinner together, a few drinks.
Naturally I tried to pump him
for a bit of free advice, wisdom about life.
It wasn't easy to get mental health, there on the island.
"What about marriage?" I said.
"Jesus!" He almost jumped out of his skin.
"I'd never try that–an impossible relationship,
hopeless. Most of my patients, that's their problem."
And then he launched into a lecture, just as his girl
showed up, smiling, in her blonde wig.
"Maybe someday the times will change," he concluded,
while she gazed at him with admiration, her porcelain
head propped on her hands. "But, frankly, I doubt it,
at least not in our times." The he got up, led her
out to the dance floor, this stewardess from Munich
he had met on the plane on the way down, in the clouds.
The three of us got drunk together, broke plates,
joined in the circle there by the loosely moored boats
in the harbor, where the colossus had stood once, alone.
We danced through the night, and the next night
when I came back alone I was surprised the waiter had ouzo
and saucers enough to shatter my head all over again.
But they were gone, both those friends, free
as the breeze that had pushed sails home for Odysseus.

David Ray

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David Ray

morning windows
full of fog leaves & lines the lower length
of trees that have no limbs below the fire burns
with old oak making
the kettles hum

lamps full of kerosene woods full of birds
in the face of the fact i am unfit to be domestic

wings beat the chicken
outside the door the rooster curses
the hens cock their heads & look straight
sideways the oak fire lowers the lamps lower as the day
begins to brighten the vows braking the fear
breaking vows brings

the urge to write
the urge to
wrong

§

the beech tree finally drops
its nuts
        cotyledons
        then silky two leaved
beech trees
        cots turning
        white & over
hollow cups
        coterminal

the line running down
all four tiers to the barn floor is made of tension running down
our tired legs & arms hold us in the one
place we can stand & hit on
time to get down
the line later

or sooner
thank you for this rainy
day alone in the morning i cant
stand on the slippery barn or dig post
holes or dig mikki & lily gone to town the
chickens under the house me at the desk & so
much to come out & out & out the window tall thin
gray rain & hickories combined on the forest green back
ground bellflower cohosh & phlox

§

Blackbirds on the move
sun south and the snakes head
for the hills

new house working
room by room to give it dwell
the ability to live anywhere productively
that measure* distance over speed equals

elapsed time sitting on
the big ball moving east

*Charles bouncing
the basketball down
the lane as he passed
the barn sound of the ball
hitting the ground hit my ear just
as the ball hit his hand minus

the time
it took to see it

blue rag come
scum & snot stained
burnt motor oil tied around
the babys neck

drink of water
keeping her bodice dry on a breezy day

§

busting beech for goldie
for another jar of sauerkraut she insists on
paying for

services rendered
she invites us in for
instant folgers & cremora 90° & no

oxygen or light army
blankets over the doorways & windows
buckeye full of the last coal in town
a hundred years worth

of photographs
grandparents
mother ernie melvin everett & her
behind myriad nieces & nephews
they're kids & then
their kids

goldie is too
lumps on her breast
& thigh she showed gayle while ronny & me
saw & split outside
in the beautiful air below

freezing since christmas

she thought she was death
scented first her mom the chain saw
mechanic of cancer the man she knew
who pulled the .22 action

no stock or barrel beneath the seat of the chevy
he'd just bought "look here son" & shot him leaning
out to look between the eyes while she watched

the nice guy who'd loved her
mom & shook his head
about the one who shot his son

slipped along the side of her
son's house he was siding & fried in the high tension
wires in front of her when she was one
day home from receiving

§

girty the renegade
reneging on the choppers & diggers
behind him buffalo elk & panther backing
toward the mississippi the ohio was
fat with spring & flatboats

§

vespers

catbird on a creek bank
seven cats on drop lines high
wind off the mouth of the river the biggest
one came to the surface rolled once and snapped
the braided nylon cord

isos

clear & warm midnight
saturn straight up
rings out
            turning north like kepler
would have (epicyclical
circling against the equators
circle
supreme fortune
the planets springing

venus & jupiter
conjoined she smiles brightly -3.4 over-
lording him as saturn lies
between castor & pollux

§

mikki materia

            what can it destroy to try all the ways of being in
you i have to recount how you have variously surrounded me your lovely
three lobed liquid center on my mind & my mouth & yr mouth breathing
around for the rhythm that makes us, ripe, there are times when all things
are immediate as they enter the mind, in shapely profusion finding
room the way your wet hole gapes inside to something a babys head or
a fist could squirm around in but now just this, slim probe & the
way you fold around it the way words in my unlocking mind or yr
orgasm suspending my body like a poem about to collapse into being.
words are an implosion of resources & fucking with you moves outward until
like that we are pulled inside, yr center ripe fruit poem & nebula
growing brighter & falling together to no event but the drying hole,
yr black hole, inside our sleep.

Brian Richards

The Ten Best Things

1. I hoot and you come out from
   your hilltop house
   hooting the air
   hurling each/other around
   the front yard

2. That heart click
   when I've made a
   mating net

3. The shake my knees make
   when we're headed home
   to fuck for the first time

4. Wedging more wood
   on a warm winter
   wood stove

5. Wending the way back roads
   Oysters in Opp, Alabama
   cooler of brew
   on the back seat

6. More even than eating
   the garden gone green
   goes golden
   Scarlet Serrano, Ruby Cayenne
   sew necklaces then
   to hang in the sun

7. Coming to an old text expecting
   I know not, yet
   get this:
   "future readers will also want a sweetheart
   I wish to be transformed into such a sweetheart to
   keep them company on a frosty morning

or a rainy night.
Unfortunately, I have no control
over metamorphosis
and do not know myself
what I may end up as
perhaps a rat's liver
or the thigh of a cricket"

8. Often we think to put it
all down when we talk
life's mysteries
but save it because
talk is love to us
not wanting fame
or next year regret
what we wrote
this year what we said
what we meant to say
what no one will understand any
way when we die

9. Not the first time through
though that too, but
remembered song, the way Ray
Charles sang "I can't stop
loving you" brings lost love
back from its careless time
her precious smell

10. The *Vox Dei*: four A.M.
the bell
in the cold white corridors
and the Monks marching to Matins:
Gloria in excelsis Deo

Joe Sheffler

Mongolian Proverbs/Elizabethan Tune

It's good luck to piss on a thistle.
Candles make good the laments of mosquitos.
A good word to an angel never reaches God's Ear...
Good can never come of a rotten paragraph.
It isn't any good to spindle a spool
dreaming is one manner of drooling
the further hills are pale with air-borne water,
the near fields are shaded with the shadow of clouds,
the children have grown to be soldiers and tyrants,
they clatter on armored horseback, aloof to our salute,
oh my God how green the woods this evening

The larger the tree, the more it enjoys some bit of
human contact: one touch, a friendly slap, or arms
encircling--like children they stay rooted and won't
come to be hugged, tho they love as they complain of hugs.
Some women have large breasts that seem to shrug as they
hop curbs, and I put them in the category of the large trees,
like the elms and the tall beeches, that seem to turn their
heads and gaze whenever the wind blows hard. The unreadable
glance, and the tossing branch, are some of that mother-sway,
they'd no reason to be elsewhere so they came to me
and oh my God how green the woods this evening.

Stephen Petroff

Writers

A writer friend of mine told me about
another writer an old man sleeping
with a young girl
in a story by Bernard Malamud
he wakes up in the middle of the night
she is giving him a blow job
it is exquisite it is still sleep
when it is done he opens his eyes
and asks her: What did you
do that for?
What did she do that *for*??
Ingrate old man! Old men everywhere,
should you be graced with such luck!
Indeed, indeed, above the sushi and the steam!
The kind of writer I am would be singing.
But I do understand the old man,
he's another kind of writer.
Bliss so amazing & so sudden
must have words to go with it,
he fears that
if she does not say something
he will die
because he is an old writer man
moved now to want a phrase
out of her mouth to take with him
the way she has taken
him out of himself.
I don't know if she said anything. My friend
didn't say. I never read the story. But clearly
there is a kind of writer
that gets old thinking this way.
Me, I'm just jealous.

Andrei Codrescu

The Flyting of Unferth and Beowulf

Unferth, heady with the bright, sweet ale, watched as the Geats settled onto the benches. His voice stopped the singer. He had never wanted to meet Beowulf. "Aren't you the one who tried to out-swim Breca? And damned near drowned? You swam out to sea, right into a winter storm. Seven nights some say you swam (I'll credit you with seven hours) and he beat you fair, just as he said he would. Swam through the storm that threw you back. And I tell you, if you try Grendel as you tried the sea, he'll throw you back in pieces. What he doesn't eat."

Beowulf looked at him, his eyes caught in the memory of that race, and his voice rose: "Unferth, I see you've had your fill of ale tonight, and you've gotten things quite mixed up. The truth is, I was stronger than Breca in the waves, as I am stronger than any man." His eyes passed over the crowd of Geats and Skyldings. "We were boys when we did it. We stripped down to a vest of mail, our swords strapped to our backs--for there are terrible things waiting in the sea--and we swam together, side by side. For five days and nights it was so, and then a storm rose up and whipped the spindrift white, the north wind turned battle-grim, and the waves were like savages. The storm stirred something from the deep. Breca had been blown away when a great mouth grabbed me hard and pulled me under. It held me dire, but I reached that sea-beast's heart with the point of my sword, and when it died, I rose. I'd killed bad things before, and many since, and when another tried to swallow me, I killed it too. All night I fought them, and my sword brought them sleep. At dawn, the storm had passed, and I could see the distant headlands. Nine I killed, and don't believe another man might have killed a single one. The storm, the fight, the swim, had worn me out, and I headed back to land. Ashore, I found myself among the Finnish folk. Even in their tales I heard nothing the likes of which I had accomplished with my sword. Certainly I've never heard that you've done anything except kill your own brother treacherously--something you'll roast in hell for, no matter how glib you may be--"

There were a few smiles at that, as Unferth glowered. Beowulf went on. "What really tells me that you lie is that Grendel still lives with *you* about. He's not afraid of you at all, but comes as he will, slicing, killing, taking what he wants. You've never even slowed him down. And now I'll make my boast—when he next comes I'll offer him a battle that will see him off to sleep, and see a sun dawn bright on this good house.

The Skyldings rose, and beat their mead-cups in a din.

translated by Howard McCord

Love Poem

Every woman who has loved you, every hand
that pressed, caressed, shaped the man
you've become; every female--mother, child
who claimed, tamed, calmed or drove you wild;
every woman in your life I bless,
thanking them for this happiness.

Whether redemption or temptation to your soul,
whether she pulled apart or made you whole,
everyone you've loved I love from your past,
everywhere you've walked, every shadow cast.
But I can't promise to care for (if there should be)
a successor. Let her love me.

Diana Der-Hovanessian

Joining

as when
meeting
it gets
this
pioneer/inversion
which is
that snow
upon edge
,unfrozen
:we never doubt
it will melt
nor do we fear
gardens will feed
us serpents any-
more/than

keeping loved ones
together is the same
bond that kept the rage

vicious then a ceremonious
parting to enhance civilization
leaving her at the sink & he drove

their old Buick
into the leafpile
while their hall lights
protected the neighbors

Martin J. Rosenblum

Stone Girl

He pushed rocks into me.
The shape of a girl is
Standing, stone.

I kicked her down
And thrust open the gates
Panicked, frantic, slamming
Against the crashing bars.
The water flowed in over her broken body.

I climbed and clung to the gates,
The ocean roamed in;
Deep and strong in. I felt it surging
While I hung there.

That stone girl is still there
Retaining her collapsed shape.
I see her hair of vines,
See the curved rocks of her vagina.
Flooded, outstretched.

I listen closely to the water.
Those stones stayed so deeply inside me.

My face of red coals against this
Night's blue ashes.
I can't look.
The water, the rock, crash in the air
Yet they have no voice.

It's me again, alone.
I press my thighs together and open them.
I can still feel her.

I can't
Look at that crumbled mountain
That he built
That won't go away.

Kalliopy Paleos

Days Are Getting Shorter

I don't know how
Day ends so absolutely
Purple silently into black
Leaving, it takes everything with it
My stomach drops into the darkness.

Day abandons me,
Goes to hell
And takes everything I have.

Kalliopy Paleos

I heard she burst again from the same Philadelphia
Fever that hit her on the way out

on those long Philadelphia straight streets
even during being distracted by the
Philadelphia conversions
(houses with godawful aluminum siding
making a 70's aluminum construction
Joke
of columns of aged brick)
Nevertheless crying
and crying (*That*
Philadelphia Fever)
(the one that came after she laughed
one too many times
Each one though Each one though
For Real
I say For Real
I mean At Wit
At a queen's court's special scent
walking two rows of
two abreast
talking to street litter
making it part of the gang
  with the team's code words
Nevertheless)
It gave her the Fever
(the kind she cried
and cried with
even as she goes away
trying to make things
salt heavy again)

Nancy Bonnell-Kangas

Way way
Way
Way down at the vanishing point
Where the gray tips over
where asphalt's yellow stripes
leave the rolling greens
that love to frame it

Far down below that
Where I don't see it
where it is distance
where I have been
It is kin

It is
Left to gather faintly
in a tight polite pile
I left before I knew for sure
what was owed it
I meant to stay
but left

Kin I said
I shed thee
Shrink said I and
Left until it was
buried beneath the pinpoint it is
muzzled flat under rising hot air

(Far)
Far have I drug
this string of heated gum
a line along the gravel
to be at this mathematically
perfectly strung azimuth.

Nancy Bonnell-Kangas

My Mother's Right Foot

i

In the photograph with your three oldest children
your auburn hair is pulled neatly over rats.
Your blue gabardine suit is unwrinkled.
The lapels lie perfectly on your breast,
the embroidered piping around the cutwork in them
almost lost in the camera's differentiations of light.
I imagine the seams in your nylons curved
along your calves only as slightly as the curve
in your carefully made eyebrows.
Your feet are slim trout in your black pumps.
The child on your lap holds your hand
in her lap. Slightly opened, it could be
a hand holding an orb in another century.
I sit lower than you are, but I touch
your right knee. The child on the left
is the only figure touching no one.
She is already the serious child.
Her play clothes have already been passed down
and she will never get them back.
She is the imploring brown-haired maiden
in Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, leaning to the favored
one who thinks she is princess, not maid,
who lets her sister hold her hand, but barely,
who turns her blond face away from her sister's words
where are my things,
where is our mother now.

ii

Today, your right foot hangs from the wheelchair.
It won't stay on the footrest like the other one,
curls inward like the feet of chickens hanging
on nails on the back porch waiting to be plucked,
like the freak chicken in our yard dragging a third foot behind her.
Without drawing too much attention to yourself,
you carefully slip your hand under your knee

and lift. You bring it to the metal rest
where it stays for a while, then falls, hangs
again, takes back its curl just off the floor.
On most days it's all no more than brushing
the hair from your eyes, but on other days
that foot brings worse weather than we've had
in years, brings each day more pain than you've ever had
before, and when I lean to kiss you goodbye it whispers
I want to talk to you about your faith.

iii

This tongue is an ancient tongue.
Calling itself, at least once as I heard it then,
the mangled remnant of the queen of heaven.
The rest is litany or accounting, I can't tell which.
Like my great-grandmother on her knees
in the middle of the afternoon in the center of the house
praying aloud *Mère de la reine du ciel, priez*
pour nous. Bonne Sainte Anne, prenez pitié
de nous. Mère de la reine du ciel, priez pour nous.
Then it says something about a bull or bulls
in the back pasture. I am coming home,
the knees of my pants blood-soaked.
We have spent the afternoon dehorning cattle,
holding their heads close to the ground,
those heads they kept throwing to us as we threw
small pads of baled hay from the back of the truck.
Holding their heads close to the ground
as the men placed long-handled shears
to the base of the horn and snipped,
releasing the first rush of blood onto the straw-covered,
shit-covered ground. When we let them go,
they shook their dazed heads back and forth
sending blood in arcs. Over their heads
and over ours, a rain we were caught in
over and over again all afternoon. We, starting it.
We, cursing it. We, befouled. We, amazed, ourselves,
the arcs going each time away from us

until we so wanted it again that without prompting
from the men we took the next animal to the ground,
held the head there.

I am in the same dehorning yard
and the animals are smaller this time.
We throw the young bull calves to the ground,
cleaner, quicker work. Getting the belly up, working
our hands and knees, spreading the hind legs,
reaching down into the lower belly for the small, hard knots,
holding everything up for the man snapping
the thick rubber ring in place
and then letting the young one go.
To get at the new feeling the young bulls begin high
in the haunches, their skin like rippled water
moving down and in to this new, tight nerve.
Black hooves pull to the tight nerve, too, each calf
an old vaudevillian tap dancing his way
into the back pasture. Like the good audience,
we punch at each other and try to fill the yard
with the laugh of a whole choir of castrati.

I am in another yard. We are cutting still.
In the morning, our fathers and our uncles
held perfectly the knives on the stone wheel.
Here they are quiet and gentle. Like lovers they take
the pig's scrotum in their hands, bring the hardened masses
to the surface for one quick slice and then another.
They know the sharpness of their knives and put them down
as I take the piece of sheeting to soak the wound.
Only then the sound of blood and steel and coal oil
tearing the air.

Under the oak my mother is telling me about chickens
with the pip. She points them out, tells me of crust
in the throat and on the mouth and what must be done.
I am tying them upside down, hanging them from a low branch.
She didn't tell me how. I am trying to bat their heads off.
I know something is wrong here but I do not stop.

iv

I am wearing necklaces of heads and horns.
I am gathering bull nuts and pig testicles.
I have more than twelve baskets full.
I see the bull from the back pasture from the beginning
of this dream.
I see the contest designed for me.
I know never to call a woman's tongue the mangled voice of anything.
I am in Crete dancing.
I am going over the bull's head.
I am a young Roman woman. I am Perpetua.
I ask again and again *When are we to be tossed?*
I am in Mesopotamia. I may be the king's lover.
One of us will not come out of this thing alive
and the other will tell of it.
I am trying to find the talking foot.
I am trying to say *beloved*.
I am trying to keep the baskets from spilling.
I am trying to keep my necklaces on.
I am saying I know this story.
I am saying I know these people.
I am calling beloved the curves of my mother's arch.
I am calling blessed the arcs of blood.
I am saying this story is not about to end.

Darrell Bourque

Still Life with Lamb

Winter and the ewes
squat open with lambs.

I'd stay up late
shivering crisp barn air
in suspense of birth.
Ewes stood their ground
hurdled into cubes,
heat lamps dangling over
like marionette suns.

Sometimes birth would panic,
try coming sideways or backward,
refusing the ritual somersault
onto straw.

The vet
answered my father's call
out of sleep,
come in with his glasses crooked.
Soothe her
like a human woman
until he had no choice
but to reach for the womb
past the elbow in a bullseye
of matted wool,
unscrew the lamb
choking infantile bleats out
in the January barn.

Once
a pregnant ewe got stick.
Groaned and bloated
until we thought she'd erupt.

This time
the vet reached a darkened tomb.
His hand came out with a corpse
fitting his palm,
more like puffed oyster
than lamb.

The flock went dumb,
knowing in their blood
what a held-tongue birth means.

Our astonished faces
surrounded that hand,
heavy with the ewe's infection,
imagining excuses for a miracle
gone awry.

Jon Lavieri

Emergency

The moon has hatched,
and from the broken shell
a dark velocity hurls
itself at us.

Star-sheen glints
off talon and beak.

Twinned comets
stare.

We need each witch
we ever burned

and charms we did
not learn.

I can say: "How
get an elf out
of a closet," "make
butter sweet from old
milk," and "woman open
her thighs."

But this howl in descent
heeds not the Pope's
prayers, or the frenzied
smiles of nihilists.

Its gullet is darker
than the caves we seek,
or old Romantic scores
it most resembles.

Wagner's dream I call
it while I may,
Nietzsche's maddened
shit, a pogrom
of the entire air.

Howard McCord

Antiperistasis

I want certain simple words
quince, what the saying cannot
do, the wet, cleaning up,
the plastic put in cowboy hats,
draft beer that tastes like a gut
has blown somewhere in the system.
The equivalent of working
the fingers against the shadow
of an imaginary harpsichord.
I'm nervous, pomegranate,
catalpa, and the lights flick
from off to on with a gesture
simple as the tandem mating
of dragonflies.

Howard McCord

The following poems are from the manuscript ***A Smoky Treatise: The Late Poems of Ebenezer Bim-Bob, An 18C American Planter****, found and edited by DeWitt Clinton.*

Melancholic Thoughts

Would that I could only See
This leafy Plant deeply
Into Thyself allow
Dark smoky
Things to go Below
For There Be
Little Instruction
How Thy Smoke may Do
To Perk thy Blood–
Oh to know a Rolled Cigar!

E. Bim-Bob

Awakened on the Plantation

I awake to Bach's Fugue in C
As the Seaboard welcomes a
New Day & I do Slumber
With Thy Wife & We have Ten-
Der Moments of Affection
as we Listen to Each Other's
Odd Dreams then the Morn-
Ing's rays doth beDazzle
Our pliant Members
Drawn in Dreaming
Holy Stuff.

E. Bim-Bob

Schedule Operandi

Arise.
Say a Prayer for Seedlings,
Look upon thy Wife.

Hot Cajun coffee,
French Toast, razorbacks,
Prunes for Digestion.

Financial whizzing
In-town.

Lunch, bowls
of cold Jumbo shrimp,
Hot sauce.

Afternoon–
Equitation, Verse
Conversation, Early Grey
Tea: a Summation of the Day.

Evening–
Correspondence,
Familial attendance

Night–
The BBC Hour,
Dreams,
18c. Sex.

A Complete Day here
as Noted,
Oct., 18th 1754; Age, A
Wiser
31.

E. Bim-Bob

Wet Fourth of July Fire Cracker

We didn't go kill and die in slippery
blood of old men and women, their smell
like rusting sweet plums, to
come home and reminisce.

This is a wet Fourth of July fire cracker, man.
Cool ale house music hums in the bandanna
around the insanity in my cloth circled skull
from death in ankle deep water and helicopters
clucking like spent weapon chambers... killing
children because we feared they'd explode in
our embraces. Sun and breezes fanning us

as we slaughter. Blood pours out of rain
washing wounds. We got missed in the
rat tat FFF-boom! and home
sure we had picked all the blood sucking leaches
off us but there is a wet Fourth of July fire cracker
at Gettysburg....

It's even written in the New York Times...
.... "After their 'victory' today
Union horsemen paraded a captured Confederate
banner in front of Federal ranks...."

And I didn't come home for this, man!
"Confederates breached the Union line
then fell back... as they did Yankees ran after
them trying to snatch a Rebel battle flag"....

No, not home for this... on my
Fourth of July, too, man! Adults caught up in
enduring fascination of imagining
killing and being killed. We cannot stand
peace and life... We are going to die
and hurrying it is relief.

But the youngsters here barely graduated
out of their high schools into a world that
explodes, are disgusted. I can go into
McDonalds in Gettysburg wearing a
Civil War uniform and people will ask me
which side I'm on where Pickett's charge
north that might have won for the South
was stopped at Cemetery Ridge.

The still agitated Southerner comes here to look
at where resentment and fury is deep in us at
loss of our slaves. The Northerner
comes here because John Wayne would. Ike would.
George Patton would... "th're-ul Amuricans!"
... either oblivious of or blanking out our Wiscasset, Maine
mansions built of wealth earned Sea Captaining slave ships.

No, man, today real Americans are screaming nightmares.
Now the Draft Dodger and free ride Colonel, fat office boys,
teachers, lawyers who weekend in fatigues for the money,
cocky in exhibitionism and out of the side of their mouths commands
never ever intended to really go somewhere like
we did, hoping not to be bamboo impaled, inured to dying...
.... Then, poor farmers joined up just for the money
lonely, hungry, nearly starved, ate rats...Slaughter, death
Colonel Higgins strangling for the world,
not some game to reenact.

.... "Yesterday a fist fight broke out on the
battlefield when somebody dressed up in a
Union uniform unhorsed a man dressed like a
Confederate who seized the Stars and Stripes...."

Leo Connellan

Bukavu, Zaïre, The Word Love

Today I admit you are gone.
"Muzoki," I call in my foreign accent.
"Muzoki," I shout. For weeks
I have been looking wherever I go--
in the market among the Mamas,
guardians of groundnuts and rice
and glowing smoke, that disappears;
around the men's plaza drinking
from long reed straws plunged
into fifty-five gallon drums
of banana beer, or sorghum;
hunched in a doorway, drunk
with soldiers, with cripples,
with blind children, with some
whose minds are dim, insinuating
your name; at the Catholic Relief stall
sniffing buttons and soaps,
torn blouses and dirty shirts.
I poke my fingers in places
from which they'll never return.

There is a stink of dead animals.
In the market always this stink of dead animals.

Away from that we walk through eucalyptus,
the smell in our hair and on our skin.
For a moment we dance barefoot
in the pungent leaves.
I push my face deep in the curve
where your shoulder becomes your neck,
where the eucalyptus becomes you.

We both breathe deeply and the sun
pours down through the leaves,
mottling our skin with pools
of dark and light.

David Romtvedt

Chihuahua, One Meteorologically Strange January

It's ten degrees out in the capital.
In my room it's 36. If it'll burn,
we burn it--wood, kerosene, garbage, oil.
The earth under a white sheet, the sky
is the only brown thing left. At midday
I'm in bed fully dressed, six cotton blankets
over me, my clean shirts over that.
I open the shutter and look out, squinting
into the pearl light, snow still coming down.

There walking is a Tarahumara woman,
down from the Sierra, alone in a place
whose language she does not speak.
Shoeless, the white soles of her wide
brown feet slap the slushy stones.
On her back, eyes wide open, her baby
is tied in a bundle of white cloth.
In the cold wind, her flaring layered skirts
whirl--yellow and green and rose.

David Romtvedt

When the Eyes Glaze Over

The eyes are the wettest part of the body.
I understand that when my room swims
in the water of solitude.

It is said when the eyes glaze:
"Oh, you're seeing guests
who are on their way."

Perhaps. But if this superstition is not
self deception it is optimism
born of wretchedness.

My eyes are glazing. But I know you won't be
coming. You cannot.
My room swims, trembling with the word
"loneliness."

It reminds me of that other belief;
"Men leap because ravines open
in front of them."

Did the ravine open in the earth
only for that? Only to swallow man?
How could that happen to us?

We are neither vase nor pitchers.
We are, I am, the breaker of pitchers.
We do not break. I do not break.
I get pulled apart.

That is what tires me.
Just as this paper must be tired
of the burden of my long-
distance messages which have as
much chance of succeeding as the chicken
has of communicating with an airplane.

There are lies in this world
that are as good as truth.
And I believed in the lie we concocted
that we could not lose each other.
There are fears as strong as death.
And my fear is that life will win
and I will remain a chronicler of grief.

There are steps as fast as flight.
And I pull myself out of my thoughts
the way a bad dentist extracts healthy teeth.

So weary
I feel no pain, I am wishing all the while
I did not know that the eyes are the wettest part of the body.

Barouyr Sevag
Translated from the Armenian
by Diana Der-Hovanessian.

Black Banner

I

The emblem of hypocrisy,
a two faced, chameleon stone,
a black banner over Submission Hill,
where Napoleon waited for welcome in vain,

a black banner expected welcome,
expected to capture the hill and rise
as our country's sign.

Mediocrity's brilliant design,
a petrified memorial of red granite that turns
black in the west-looking eye,
double standard for double dealing times,
black bird, I scared you off.
But your shadow remains a stain on my heart.

II

During times of doubt
the black banner enters my home
like Pushkin's stone guest,
Mozart's "commandatore," colossus
with a handclasp of forty tons.

In its shadows meshing the skies
I see Khrushchev's reddened overcast
face. Khrushchev who opened
prisons and stayed a slave, howled
at me and pounded his fist, dark
as this eclipse.

Spirits were broken. Dump trucks came,
Those against the sun claimed this banner
as theirs, its black edge kissed
by the blind children of the land.

Give us back to the hill, said the stones.
The light has gone out of Pompeii's kitchens.

–I am the black flag, the spirit of the times.
–Don't think this brawl is for me or mine.
The banner is pushing in your door too,
inside you too, idiot.
That is you buried under its rubble.
It's you who will be killed by this stone
they raise.

III

Morning came.
Phones ring all over Moscow with Hurrah!
Every Muscovite joins the march
as if from one neighborhood.
Crowds, column after column
rush to the hill that was saved.

–We stopped it! There is no banner!

But where is the hill?

Andrei Voznesensky
Translated from the Russian by Diana Der-Hovanessian with Dr. Sonia Ketchian.

The government proposed erecting a World War II monument (78 meters in height) of red granite excavated from the famous mountain on which it was supposed to stand, the elevated place where Napoleon waited in vain for the keys to the city of Moscow.

Because the monument would have been an offense to the eye, costing the country millions of dollars, its construction was stopped by protesters led by the poet. The huge red stone banner would have looked black against the westward sun.

Tour de Police Force

The population explosion
blew my mind
blew my cover
blew the manhole right off my asshole!
The Ambiguities glared
& promptly turned the other cheek . . .
Attention Shoppers!
Yet another thinking American,
I have always enjoyed the office atmosphere . . .
white knuckled,
corrosive
the tension mounted
the stamps were mounted
hell, I mounted!
But the thing is, I have no usage for this sausage . . .
even though
I dream incessantly of Sigmund Freud
smoking his penis . . .
Yikes!
Drag out the mental floss!
Sober the geese!
Yes! It's time for fundamental reappraisals
select-a-phobia
administrative palsy on a stick!
I was jailed for being overt
for being subtle
for reclining on the dandy chaise-lounge wedged between the 2 . . .
Chloroform all uniforms!
forthwith
& with froth!
I'm the one who found Wayne Newton's biography to be inspiring!
Welcome to Mental Alertness Week!
Have a chair
Have a dining room set
Have lifetimes of matching luggage . . .

O paranoid humanoid!
Just in case you're wondering, wandering, dialing 911
let me explain:
I'm with the Temporary Contemporary School!
Want to see my badge?
My badger?
Want to see my collection
of Joe Friday
windup dolls, bite-sized, individually wrapped?
I just adore avoidance behavior,
don't you?
As I said in the midst of spiralling earthward
I'm going away
to the duckblind of my mind
blond yet bland
Dawned, spawned, all purity pawned

Joel Dailey

Your Father's War Stories

Where did the wind get our names
if not off those graves in France,
or from the wounds our fathers wore
when they danced the docks in '46?

So the litany goes, as it's always gone,
Loss and Loss, then Victory or Slavery one.
Either way, the story's
some Sisters' song's Soldierboy's.

Then the medic morphines the brown
burn of his gaze into pools the sky,
any given night, might remember its own
moons by.

Harry Brody

Soft Goods Sale

As they cart the used cashiers,
skirts as stiff as cups, legs
like the bangers of bells,

in and out the gates of Kress,
you feel like one of those flies
that harden in the overheads

and ululationless undress
a dune of tuna on a scroll of lettuce
Ritalin Rita of Red Oak unravels

as she sells your fist its fingers, gem
from no Jerusalem and all. Revlon reds
demarcate the aisle down which she disappears.

When the amputees upstairs impose their pegs,
you romance the dimestore's diadem
for a darkness that deterges merchandise.

Harry Brody

A Conversation with Joel Oppenheimer

The following conversation between Joel Oppenheimer and Marcia Hesselman (in italics) occurred in the winter of 1984 in preparation for Oppenheimer's reading in Milwaukee at Woodland Pattern Book Center.

Would you comment in general on what you consider is the poet's importance. In other words, why should we bother with poetry?

Because, well let's see. My tendency is to say because they're the only ones who stand a chance of explaining the universe. But I suppose that won't do.

That seems like a pretty good reason to me. What else would you add?

It seems to me that I can stand by that and I can add to it that the poets are the people concerned with connections and consequences when no one else is.

I'm at a small college, and even the journalism majors seem, very upsettingly, to want one answer. They don't care if it's true or false; they just don't want a lot of answers. So that for instance when Grenada went down, one of my classes voted 27 to 0 in favor of the first amendment, and 21 to 6 in favor of keeping the press out. And one of the reasons was that the reporters would just confuse the issue by telling them things they didn't want to hear. That seems to me to be equally an avoidance of any kind of a sense of the real world. It disturbs me both as someone who writes for a newspaper and someone who writes poems. As a matter of fact, as someone who's alive!

It's like people don't want to make choices or decisions, so their lives will be simpler.

Yeah. Clearly, it's a logical response to being battered. Finally you just say, "Stop already, and whatever it is, make it easier."

So what do writing programs and universities have to do with all this?

You want me never to work again?

No, wouldn't want that.

It depends on the writing teacher. I don't trust writing programs. I think writers ought to be people who are developing interests in a lot of areas and coincidentally learning to perfect their craft. And a good writing teacher will work primarily both on opening people's minds to other things and on developing their craft, rather than narrowing them down. If you have a teacher like that, you have a great writing teacher. Provided they know a little bit about what they're doing. If you set up a ritual program that grinds out official poets, then I don't think you've done very much, except contribute more to the closing off. And we know that there are schools in the country which are committed to grinding out official poets.

It almost seems that once writing programs become a part of the curriculum that that is the natural process.

Yeah, because certainly the college or university wants to be able to say to their students, "You're guaranteed a job when you take our writing program," just as they want to be able to say to their engineers, "You're guaranteed a job."

And no one who goes through the programs writing poetry is guaranteed a job because there are no guarantees with poetry. What about working and being a poet then?

I think it's something you better learn to do early in your life. I mean, you have two choices. Either you scrabble all your life, which some people do. Or you figure out a way to support yourself on some level and you accept that as a fact of life, which is basically the road I took. I worked in a print shop for fifteen years and then found easier ways to do it. I suspect that if you want to teach you ought to be out for a while banging your head against the world or you run real risks of having your poetry swallowed up by the academic world. When you're out, you may be hungry, but you have a chance to work on your own. And then you can come back in and the teaching won't interfere with it, the academic moil won't interfere with it.

As an academic, I suppose it's easy to forget what it's like to work eight hours a day and be exhausted when you get home and not be able to write.

And to somehow find the energy to do it.

Does teaching make that easier?

For now it does. Coming into it late in my life, I didn't start teaching until I was forty, and by that time it was a relief to say, "Well, is this all I have to do?" Whereas, if I had started in straight out of my masters having spent my entire life in school, I think I'd be going crazy now. It's just very difficult, it seems to me, to maintain the energy level you need to write poetry if you're in this life all the time and you've never had a chance outside. I think it also gives you a limited view. I mean, I love those novels for instance about harried English professors because they're fun to read and I know a little bit about the world. But gee, there really is more in the world!

I'd like to ask about a biographical note which you included in one of your books. "He has made poems and children much of his adult life and also a living." That addresses, I guess, what you were just talking about. What prompted such a statement, I think the last bit is especially puzzling.

Well, because people sometimes are astounded to find out that I've raised kids. In fact, I've single parented two for the past seven or eight years. They are also astounded to find out that I was actually willing to go out and work because they have this perception of a poet as someone who is disconnected from the real world. It seems to me it's always important to keep yelling at them and to say, "Here, I'm right here with you!"

Isn't it true that some poets foster that notion though, that poets are somehow above it all?

Yeah, and I think that's when they become more and more inaccessible. I learned from some people like William Carlos Williams, who spent his life delivering babies and making people healthy when he could and who never lost sight of the fact that he was a poet and a doctor, and a human being, and a citizen of a small town in New Jersey, etc., etc. That's always been a model for me. I certainly wish I'd had sense enough to get a profession so I could have an IRA now, or something! But you know it's always been that notion that one ought to be in the world doing something useful at the same time that one is trying to write poems. And not closed off.

That is apparent in your language and in your choice of topics. It's a relief coming to poems like that, poems from the real world.

Thank you, but I don't know any other way to do it. It seems to me that that's what my business is, to talk about many different things. Now, it doesn't always work, and sometimes they're just bad poems. Sometimes they're off the mark; sometimes they just seem silly. But on the other hand, that happens when you're writing unconnected poems, too.

That reminds me of Shelley's comment. He said that poets are the "unacknowledged legislators of the world." Is that generally what you mean?

Yes, sort of like that. It's also like Pound was saying, that poets are "the antennae of the race." It seems to me that if a poet does his or her business, the business is to try and figure out who we are and where we are, and what it is around us in some sort of way that makes sense. In a way that can be grasped. Now, that doesn't always mean, in fact it rarely means, on some abstract level. In fact, it usually means on a very real level. Williams Carlos Williams looking at that dear old red wheelbarrow. You know, until you see the red wheelbarrow and the chickens, you're not going to see the world. Or me screaming to my class semester after semester, "First of all, Moby Dick was a whale!" Then we move on from that. That there is a reality around us, and we better know what it is.

That's apparent in your writing. It seems that more than anything else, your poetry is accessible. As a reader I appreciate that.

If you were a literary critic you would ignore them!

Perhaps! But I'd like to say that I find it interesting that you write about absolutely everything. Everything is included, and you write all different kinds of writing, novels, short fiction, poetry, non-fiction . . .

Yeah. I don't have many novels, but I do have short stories, plays, journalism. It just seems to me that poetry is the driving force, but it seems too that a writer ought to be a writer. Certainly, that was one of my inheritances from Charles Olson. One ought to know one's craft, and be able to practice it in a number of ways, that some kind of stupid specialization, not because you choose it but because you can't do anything

else is crazy. To say, "Oh gee, I couldn't write a newspaper column because I'm a poet," or "I can't write a short story because I'm a poet" is crazy. Sometimes I think of poets as decathlon people; that that discipline means that you really have to figure out how to put things together. You ought to be able to write almost anything. Except termpapers!

That comes back to what you mentioned previously about poets and connections and being able to see it all. Why is it important for poets to make those connections?

It seems to me that we live in a world where we're being inundated with facts. Too often nobody sees the connections between the facts. Too often nobody sees the consequences of the facts. We get lost. Either we turn off, as so many young people these days are doing, just say, "Screw it!", like I'd much rather play the latest game, or hide, or get high, or get numb. Or all of the above. Which is not to say that I was any more attracted by the world when I was a student. But it seems to me it was a little easier to say, "Hey, it's out there, and maybe I ought to maybe once in a while pay attention. Even if it's to scream at it." I've seen this disquieting thing in my journalism classes.

What directions do you think poetry is taking for the future?

Well, I'm very encouraged by the growth of what used to be called regionalism but which is a much different kettle of fish these days. It just means that people have discovered that they don't need to be living in a garret in a large metropolitan art center. It means you can write a poem wherever you are, and you can find an audience for it. The audience is spreading. There's been a long period of twenty years of a sort of a disconnection between all those little areas, but they're growing and people are starting to talk to each other. I'm hopeful about that. I see people using poems now in a way that they haven't for a long time. You know, as a real part of their lives.