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SHIRSHÅSANA (THE HEAD STAND)

Walking on air
feet in the clouds
rocket aimed to nowhere
counting down
past the bloodthrob of engines
needling north
into the cool forever of the void

meanwhile back at the pad
my swollen head foreshadows
my come down and comeuppance
so to lie
colossally disjointed
like Ozymandias
yogi manqué

Ann Deagon
HALÂSANA (THE PLOW POSTURE)

Heels over head
toeing the line
a universe turned backward on itself
in static whirl
my thoughts swarm cluster
about the same old hive
I greet my arching body like a lover
its weight against my heart
and concentrate
to free the mind by harnessing the flesh

but my team plows
the carnal furrow still

Ann Deagon
SHAVÅSANA (THE CORPSE POSTURE)

Dead to the world
like Socrates the silence creeping
up from the feet the legs the torso
ah slow fuse burning
out of the charred extremities
kindling the mind into infinity

imploding radiance
where colliding sparks illuminate
intransigent my phoenix flesh
a ghostly opening of thighs

Ann Deagon
THE NEW LOOK

The soles of my feet have turned to leather
the veins of my legs are patterned stockings
my belly has bagged into a skirt
my breasts lap over
I can button my nipples
my neck is turtle-necked . . .
I have put on the garment of righteousness
and me only forty.

Ann Deagon

CLASSROOM

The girl in the second row
had your
same length and curl
of hair same dark
torment of eye.
I needn’t have winced.
You wouldn’t look the same
for twenty years,
When women die
their hair grows on
till all their juices dry.
It lengthens quietly
even when like you
they go on living
at another address.

Ann Deagon
MUSHROOM

Below the shagbark hickory
whose nuts
spatter like heartbeats
puffballs swell
deep-fleshed, voluptuous
in pallid waiting,
I turn one up to feed
eyes on the netted filaments
the tracery of life that underlies
its swollen sphere.

So in my dream I turn
your slow sweet hips, uncover
that dark-veined labyrinth
where I go gladly lost
and in my mouth
the taste of god
like stolen scuppernongs.

Ann Deagon

AESTHETICS

I wonder why it hurts
so much more
to put a cardinal underground
than a sparrow
or lose a girl whose breasts
were like singing

Ann Deagon
LA FEMME MOYENNE SENSUELLE

Regarding this tabloid whose unprintable name is printed in bold type and examining the sexual parts of a woman spread across this page already yellowing, I have to admit that I cannot discern any expression there. My experience has been limited. The women and children of my family, the girls in the locker rooms of my growing up I have seen naked, though seldom so exposed. I am not offended, for I cannot detect the glint of malice or leer of invitation in that blurred expanse of expressionless flesh.

Opposite me the lady from the woman’s club observes me, panting, speaks of decency. Her lips drawn with disgust expose her dentures, her tongue slithering with indignation. I feel the hot flash of shame the twinge of complicity, watching the unutterable obscenity of her mouth.

Ann Deagon
POLICE

After you get back from the orthodontist,
   a man named Archie
   who wears mod coats,
      you say, opening your mouth
    before falling into the bin of sleep,
        that the teeth are like police
       that rush out of the throat
    in clean uniforms and assume perfect order,
        themselves restrained by golden bars
       before the courthouse,
           disperse

the unruly crowds,
   but some, weeping, turn back
    to wail over the graves
        of those who are struck
        and instantly disappear,
            their fallen comrades.

Peter Wild
THE BRINKS ROBBERY

Ninety miles away in Boston
the back wall blew out of a bank
spreading bricks over the wharves,
over the surprised fish
looking out of the grey waters
and we living in our forest of maples
delicate as aunts, who knew
that at times stray bears roamed
the mountains—

I saw my father
running up the sidewalk from the paper store
as if a President had been shot,
the wounded armored trucks spinning
around the commons like tanks in a battle
some years later a policeman
was machinegunned through
the door of his car in Keene, New Hampshire,
a stray tornado drowned wild Oscar
swimming in the middle of town—

we pictured
him swirling down the green curve lost
among a spiral of boats, while
other boats sucked from shore
raced toward the funnel.
all that Sunday afternoon
he never took his white shirt off
but sat in the sofa leaning forward
in a world filled with speculation—

my father,
a good carpenter who built shelves
for books, houses
of oak that sighed beneath the turning stars
like nervous horses penned in a corral.

Peter Wild
A BAG OF BEANS

People say that beans are good
that they speak like a girl
on wooden legs with a loud voice
leaning at them from a stage,
that going out they feel the
protein restoring their fibulas.
but I have never seen a bag of beans
leading a blind cowboy home through a blizzard
frozen in his sheep’s coat,
I have never seen a bag of beans
stand up like a policeman,
blow his whistle
and rescue a puppy from a pond,
or rushing into a crisis like a
brave locomotive that knows what it’s doing
carry off those starving in Africa in its cars.
have you seen antelope standing
in snow, when they really speak,
mouth wisdom in a language more sensitive
than cold, a soft light, a tongue
piercing the blue gelled air,
or a fireman trained in granite work,
in his coat with the copper buttons
curving over his stomach from chin
to toe climbing above a burning church,
up his hypotenuse leaning against the spire,
as the parishioners below claw and waver
like candles at the windows,
carrying the child who
sucks its thumb,
moans and kicks in its nightclothes,
to the end of the yellow ladder and beyond.

Peter Wild
TRANSPARENCY OF DISEASE

Will it house itself
in glass?
or bronze?

It takes a crisis
to build up the fire
to cook the goose.

Sow's head.
Preacher.
Love of Living.

We put things
to our own use.
Gliding like swans, or bleeding like stuck pigs.

I revision a pair of purple hose
freshwashed, hanging in the nocturnal kitchen
by clothespins, over a chairback.

They never notified my next-of-kin:
It was a chimera, mere transparency.
Came thru, & I vow

This morning
the junipers are so thick
the whole tree is blue.

Lynn Strongin
THE ITALIAN POEMS WITH FACING ENGLISH

are faithful as mirrors
but I cannot concentrate—I pray I were back
in child-hospital
two languages always being spoken
that silent one which we spoke with our hands to the birds
on our windowledge.
& the crisp one of the nurses, gliding.

Translate me back
that would be an act of homage
the light would tuck us in, turning blankets back
as sunset does roofs, in ranged rows.

A truer correspondence:
as if boys in the choir loft
let their voices drift down
answering the heavy golden organ in its light-burden below:
that were two languages faithfully sung
even though the answer
threw a heaviness about the heart
anchorage black chain
which would outlast the four-chambers beating

Lynn Strongin
OUR HOSPITAL GOWNS ARE CANDLE-COLORED LINEN

but we see Him
walking on waters.
Brighten up our gear to coat of many-colors

till it’s vivider
than the tattered coat of blood
which Joseph wore.

Lynn Strongin

RETURNING FROM A GRAVE ILLNESS

is like riding a white horse
very seriously into sunlight.

Flowers are Hebrew archangels
heralding in the light.

This is joy—and nothing else is joy.
colors, pristine
sounds clear again.
The lake in which you bathe
is purest, sharpest silver—but not cold:
chill only as to the body after a brutal burn
the envelope of air, like a caress, comes on.

Lynn Strongin
DIAMOND, BLACK SWAN, BLACK SUN, DRIFTING

Senses rubbed out
one by one
candles in a house,
sight harrowing:

    Colors lessened ten shades,
sounds muffled in cotton.
I visioned all black windows
hung like crocuses, crosses
caverns.
Within, mirrors in these deep rooms
reflected:
    diamond, black swan, black sun drifting
    the residue remains of mind.

Lynn Strongin
AFTER WINTER RECESS

Black Russian cigarettes with gold cockades
are strewn about
soldiers, a dead army

Truth is the only star I follow
cold one, climbing sky.
It is (in my mind) a long, Italian evening
as the newscaster’s grey face looms, a bulb
“Congress drifts back after winter recess.”

And what do they decide?
A murmur rises from the stage-wings
Under a new, heavy snow
it is only the pinebranches cracking, like bone
their gold sap
will make resin
for my sister’s violin
    I hear the first notes across her bow drawn.

Lynn Strongin
GOOD—BYE

It’s time to say good-bye

Good-bye
to the sea urchin’s dried up test, the fossil fern’s
white spine embossed on grey shale

to the railroad spike
to the mantis egg-sack stuck in an orange pot

good-bye to all my desk loves, good-bye

to the spider, real spider moving on Sarah’s painting
of ‘nothing, a treasure map’

good-bye to Jennifer, my wife, who is beautiful
and who will not understand
my beautiful daughters who will not understand

to the walls of my room, walls
of our narrow house
in a valley made by a river and blue mountains

There are other loves, good-bye to the others.

It’s time
I become Archimedes’ man, the total outsider, moon-man
going away

in a rocket
like a lighted car across Kansas at night

to the real black hole
through to the last blackness where the roots are
where the words’ roots are
resplendent

each a light, the words wear suits of light

each assembly of letters
recuiced to splendid bones and tendons
reduced to their ‘ordinary life’

until the secret parent appears.

Then I will be guided
to their bright particular music, flute and bell music
which is magic

It is Tamino’s, Papageno’s music
It is the root words’ music.

And less than words, the roots
themselves separate
a few notes in a few minutes, 4th of July flares

ar is laborer, is ἄρω, are, to ear,
ἐργα, are, work
and to earn.

I am no more than the careful workman

The roots combine, words’-
music defeats the queen serpent darkness
lighting the searching son’s way
back to, where my loves are

Such is my trust
Good-bye, good-bye.

John Taggart
Rub Her Coke

Clothe the hand
Subject it.
Scratch its back

Rub Her Coke/2

'Swallow give . . .'
'. . .her, give her '
'Give her . . .hair' !

Rub Her Coke/3

Peeled coal

Substance, her's.
Carbon hot

John Taggart
LOVESONG TO SCORPIO IN JULY

to sing to you
a waking song

the olive-sided flycatcher’s
‘quick-three-beer’

in the ponderosas
before sunrise

to sing
three older notes than hers

& pipe
red-blond Antares

into my throat—

light
tips the mountain

the canyon
loosens
its watery hair

Jane Augustine

from The Woman’s Guide to
Mountain Climbing

22
GHAZAL FOR THE FIRST OF OCTOBER

1) Write the rent check   2) don’t listen for the phone.
In the meadow one aspen has begun to yellow.

A woman steps over a smashed coke bottle,
warning glitter on the path laid out for her

Do you see the blown spider, trusting his thread?
You’re nervous, can’t just take off like that, solo.

Marianne Moore never married, she observed
the armored pangolin, the self-sufficient jerboa.

I choose the mountain lion as my totem. She ranges
alone, wide paws support her on the trackless snow.

Jane Augustine
TENT

(i) two-man tent
larger than I need
& weighs too much
haven’t gotten
a one-woman tent yet
still think someone
always has to be with me

(ii) dayglo orange nylon
doesn’t need trees
to tie to—
it has interior supports
yet is highly visible
to warn hunters, they say
& in case
rescue must be sent

(iii) seams plastic-sealed
to keep rain out
with flaps fastened
it’s watertight
but breath condenses
overhead & drips
down your cheeks
either way
you get wet
(iv) don’t store food in a tent especially bacon, bears will rip open the nylon to get it. food stored outside will attract small animals. don’t wrap it in a poncho, they’ll nibble through. keep food in plastic bags on a rock & cover them with a cookpan. still, in the morning you’ll find holes in the corners of the bags.
	small losses are unavoidable

no protection foolproof

(v) at nightfall I untie my boots & slide into the tent feet first
time to undress for bed only it’s not a bed

no room for undressing & it’s freezing cold —old habits

break— boots make do for pillows
(vi) the tent has two poles—

polarized
you might say

between head & foot

(thinking & acting)

the head pole
a little bent

often needs straightening

the foot pole slips easily

out of line

but if one falls the other holds up

stronger than expected while I walk

this unmapped valley looking

for a greener & more level
campsite

Jane Augustine
from The Woman's Guide to Mountain Climbing
FIREWATCHING

campfires:
more than cooking fires
fires for warmth
fires for light
fires of scraps & leftovers
when green fires die
driftwood fires
deadfall fires
dry stump fires
clearing fires
old letter fires
old love fires
blood fires
bone fires
fires masking faces in hot copper
fires creeping toward tents
fires that watch
fires that mutter
fire walls
the shaky firegate
switchblade fires
firelogs collapsing
nightfires
encircling fires
fires you can’t escape
fires that have gotten out of hand

Jane Augustine

27
KEN BLUFORD:
book review

After Our War, by John Balaban. University of Pittsburgh Press. $2.95.
Presentation Piece, by Marilyn Hacker. Viking Press. $2.95.

As our idea of poetry explodes with the latest brain storms, our expectations of a poet’s first book scatter and mutate. Transmute this year’s lead into that year’s gold. A premature preciousness into precocious atrociousness.

Both the blandness of Balaban’s After Our War and the delicate violence of Hacker’s Presentation Piece received the Lamont Selection. Until this year, the Selection was bestowed upon a first book. From now on, a second book will get it. Balaban obtained the last award conferred on a first book. It’s what the shoemaker threw at his wife.

It’s also the second award-winning first book detonated by Vietnam. Following Michael Casey’s Obscenities, which won the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award. But Balaban does not fulminate. He fumigates. He has not been struck by lightning. He has been struck, instead, by lightning bugs.

War poetry presents certain problems that Balaban has disregarded. Arising not only from particular distinctions between wars, but from the general distinction between life and art. The irony of art is that the artist can achieve a coherence, order, an equilibrium, a balance in the work of art, a resolution of conflicting impulses, which he cannot achieve in life. Yet works of art are about life,

and to the degree that life, in its radical imperfection, is represented in a perfectly articulated form, life’s inadequacy is revealed. The representation of life in art, however magnificently portrayed, is a representation of failure.

War poetry presents a difference in degree. And in degree only. Form in poetry is in itself an ethical analysis of society. Form in war poetry comes into possession of an almost total moral dimension. A formless war poem is a contradiction in terms. A capitulation before the collapse of discrimination and sensitivity in the world around us. So that the shapelessness of Balaban’s pacifist poetry is a declaration of war.

Vietnam presented certain further problems that Balaban also disregarded. Several poets—notably Robert Bly and Allen Ginsberg—observed that the language that the government used to talk about Vietnam obscured what was going on. This is true enough. But paradoxically it might have been the clarity and simplicity with which the war was discussed by both the mass media and the antiwar movement that made the war attractive to so many people.
With the development in the United States of postindustrial monopoly capitalism, which brought with it an occultation of the class structure through the techniques of mystification practiced by the media particularly by advertising in its enormous expansion since the start of the Cold War, most Americans were unable to connect the concerns of their private lives in the confines of an affluent society with the structural projections of the system in the outside world in the form of neocolonialism, oppression and counterinsurgency warfare. As a service economy, America is so far removed from the realities of production that most Americans inhabit a dream world of artificial stimuli and televised experience. On the psychological level, this inability to connect manifests itself as tedium vitae and self-alienation.

The seeming simplicity of the conflict in Vietnam gave a false sense of the closeness to great metaphysical preoccupations, fundamental questions of being and the meaning of life and death that normally eludes the average American. Thus a poem written against Vietnam had to be carefully shaped and deepened by a descent into the materiality of language that made ordinary notions of clarity and fluidity inoperative. An effective anti-Vietnam poem would demand real thought, not speed-reading. Balaban comes close to this in the delight in design and the density of his title poem:

To market they came from land and sea, the air:
"A mighty fine place," one General agreed.
They reined in their horses and looked down to find
an old beggar woman sneaking by in their shadows.
"Call in the Doctor," barked the Seal from the Sea.
A Fourth Horseman reined up, brandishing a smile
for half the lady's face was a red hanging bag,
one eye a wart strudel, her chin a grainy sac.
She begged. The Doctor-General proffered a pin,
"My Lady, in our hour of need." He pick-pricked a node.
A yellow milk-water splashed her blouse, spurted
curdles on the Horsemen's boots, streaked to the gutter,
filled up the streets and gushed against the doorsills.
The old lady cackled; the four generals beamed,
and summoned a palfrey for Their Lady to ride.
They had found Home, were Active. As they rode off
the hoofs of their horses spattered the walks.

At that the fat bullets started to jump;
some whined to splice the prism of an eye, others
bled the marrow from a rib. Windshields spidered;
the Spiders ran off, eight-legged, fast, with money,
more than you can guess, stuck to the hairy legs.
Spontaneous Generation: the Bore-Flies sang,
"Every wound has two lips, so give us a kiss."

29
Then a two-headed cow jumped over the moon,
kicked over its lantern. Fire caught Straw.
The cow burst like a 500-lb. bomb. Everyone
came running—all the old folks—Slit Eye
and Spilled Guts, Fried Face and little Missy Stumps.
They plaited a daisy chain. This necklace. For you.

Even in this shaggy doggerel story, Balaban does not scrutinize the
war with the fierceness he seeks. The ghosts of prayer, biblical myth,
popular legend, nursery rhymes and so forth are too cruelly invoked
to be as exquisite and intense, as terrible as they are meant to be. Too
often his images are merely cheesy, as with the yellow milk-water and
the two-headed cow. But at his best, and this is certainly his best, he
achieves a deceptive simplicity, capable of illuminating twists and
turns. At his worst, the contrast between the blight of war and the
vitality of peace is almost pastoral, and, as such, self-defeating. The
language is dull, clumsy, unnotative, full of stereotyped expres-
sions, and unnecessary words and phrases:

Standing in a soybean field,
on a rocky scarp above the sea,
the two of us, in dispossessed thirties,
scan nude bathers on the shore below,
as gulls, winged flesh all salt,
might scour for shellfish.
Angry and red on Erhart’s belly
the football stitch stings with sweat
where they cut into his cancer.
But look at him here today.
climbing cliffs, getting his peek,
dismayed only that the naked man below
who sidles into a tide-cut cave
lures not a girl, but another gay.
As I watch him watch a girl in the surf,
Erhart remarks that “birds have nests;
foxes have their holes, but the Son of Man
hath nowhere to lay his head.”
“Birds have nests,” I add. “Men have ancestors.”
Erhart’s father died manic and alone.
A whore-child gave birth to Erhart
at 27, in Asia, across the Pacific
that glints on these bathers and defies our stare

“Dispossessed” thirties? A twenty-seven year old “whore-child”? How many prepositional phrases can you find hiding in this picture? If you have two dimes for each one you can afford to buy Balaban’s book.
Compare Balaban with Hacker:
We face embankments of cement with dynamited doors. From catacombs under fake hills, an army watched the sea. We stagger through a passage in the dark, around a corner, toward a gap of light, a two-foot hole. We crouch and clamber out. Here were gun emplacements. On the walls around the rift chalked, SURFERS SUCK DICK JOHNNY AND MICKI. And the shifting hills held with rooted tongues of red and green. Below, the city falls away white on slopes under the seamist. There is a poem in touching or not touching. The poem defines the tension between skin and skin, increasing, decreasing, rhythmically changing the space it defines. This puts us on the edge of the cliff crunching iceplants underfoot. Between camouflaged gun-turrets, two boys cruise each other. How much of the poem is about touching or not touching? Fifty feet below in the giot of waves through mist, a naked man with a wristwatch and walking-stick approaches, but will not reach, two horses spurred through the foam.

Like Balaban, Hacker is on the beach. More important, she is on edge. On edge between an extreme or order (the army) and an extreme of disorder (the ocean). The voyage or journey through extremes is Hacker’s fundamental metaphor. She returns from hallucination and obsession with new insight. A new perspective and a new vision. In her insistence on the shapeliness of her art, she asserts the authority of this vision. Almost half the poems in Presentation Piece use rime to elicit our complete attention. But all the poems insist on it. Often with obscenity and double-entendre (presentation piece, get it?). Even the lighter pieces expose the vertigo of her sensibility in a world of terror. “She Bitches about Boys”:

Girls love a sick child or a healthy animal.
A man who’s both itches them like an incubus,
but I, for one, have had a bellyful

of giving reassurances and obvious
advice with scrambled eggs and cereal;
then bad debts, broken dates, and lecherous
onianistic dreams of estival
nights when some high-strung, well-hung, penurious
boy, not knowing what he’d get, could be more generous.

Most attempts at communication are scrambled. By the ménage à
trois of “The Navigators” and of other poems in which, sometimes, two
women are involved, sometimes two men. Or by death, as in her savage
elegy to Janis Joplin. The bestial precision of which plunges poetry
into life. But Hacker’s alertness has its tender, responsive phases as
well. In fact, it is her assent to life even at its most painful (even canni-
balism), her sense of pain as an instrument of transmutation, that
accounts for her joy. She knows that in most exquisite pleasure, pain is
a subtle ingredient. That to delight in this world, we must cultivate a
certain taste for cruelty. To learn the natural language. To get beyond
terror and pity. To be, at last, ourselves the joy of becoming:

It is a privilege to learn a language,
a journey into the immediate
morning, leaf yellow
filtering the white sill,
shaping the building outside,
the place of human wonder in a structure,
the living figure in the windowpane,
the invocation of the possible
moment demanding this motion:
perception,
placement,
praise.

Each time it is necessary
to relearn the entire
process, not to remember but
re-enter the wrench
of seconds on contracted
muscles, the foam tingling
capillaries, that pulse
beating that vision
on the turn of the light-shot
river, below the double-height
mahogany lintel, under the ecru
stucco spilling dawn.

I crushed privet leaves
for the green sap and bitter smell
and learned on broken weeds
the pain of fire and water
which is as real as any other language.

reviewed by Ken Bluford
ALICE NEEL:  
a portfolio
POEM IN AWE OF W’S

bat swoop and cat claw
the wintered brow of woe
furrows widen shadows
between wolverine eyes

dthis is widow’s work
hawking and wailing
winnowing the picked bones of her nights
fallow ground beneath a wizened moon

Natale Polly
FETISH SONG

O delicious dangling
before me  O
the joy
  O but
  why
  this
as if / anything else couldn’t
provide the punch
(but it’s true)  really  Yes  I could be
elsewhere  up in the air, be gay, receptive,
even resourceful
but when I come home to this (You)
and when I am not afraid, We
alone
dance in time  out of time  Who cares
what time
  and who
cares what lives behind the out side of the locked door (not
me baby)  O
You speak my language
I nuzzle the words

Jack Albert
COUPLE

—whatever you want
whatever you want—

Jack Albert

DISGRUNTLED VILLAGE

I. the ringer
died

II. what we got now
is a tinkler

compared to the old ringer

Jack Albert
FUCKING ZERO

It's fucking zero out there!
My fingers froze

and so did the hairs
in my nose.

I should have worn my long underwear
—the ones that droop,

But now I don't care,
Gonna fix me some hot soup

Gonna ease under the smooth white sheets,
Press my pores to your pores

and share some of that amiable heat,
Clutch my toes into yours

Jack Albert
WHERE SHE HAPPENED

Dorothy moves through grass
in a casual blue house

or at pasture along a pond
Dorothy listens
to reflections deeper than water
I see her neck down a tan horse
silky at noon

at night
in the shadows a lamp casts
feverish trains jerk
mercurial in her mouth
where does Dorothy go?

Dorothy slips into the flowered rug
fingers first

night's deep breaths are left
where she happened
or blue beads scattering
or a needle in your lapel

that's a waterfall under her skin
also fiords
whose closed eyes forget their color
her heart feels
nearly moon

because night wears a liquid dress
and sings softly
later, Dorothy might dance

Carolyn Stoloff
WAKING EARLY

Waking early
I lie in bed hearing house sounds
Light bursts open I feel it
through closed eyes,
gather the cover for one last moment
against honey-colored day
I picture the commonness
of pillowy clouds,
bright streaks on the breakfast table
The children squabble The baby cries
They unfold their napkins
We cut the sandwiches, find the milk money
Over my head I imagine your first stirrings
now moved to the middle
body still hidden, holding the bed
hibernating
from a hard-loving life

Louise Simons
BRIDE 1949

Even the hatbox bartered flamingoes.

Paul Grillo

SPIDER AND SQUIRREL NIGHTFALL CONSTRUCTION

Turn the fingers into spiders,
turn the tongue into a squirrel.
Start to crawl-lick

a. the windowpane/inside
b. the windowpane/outside
c. the Western sky.
d. the small-of-the-neck of last year's love.

Paul Grillo
A POSTCARD FROM WILDFOOD

The moon collects the scattered clothes of the sea
The windchimes chirp a puddle of silence.
I skip ghosts with your seer-sucker doubles

Paul Grillo

OIL FOR THE LAMPS OF CHINA

You’ve gone to the drugstore to shoplift mascara
and lipsticks and cheekgels and . . . .

Paul Grillo
GOODY KUNIGUNDE AND HER TRIANGLE

It isn’t all synaptic, though traces of extinction,
permutations worked into every twilight
found here in the dull face of a child
or the moon’s intentions in any city.
long shadows kill leftover footsteps
and all is suddenly intuition or inclination.
Even when the wind scruffs fallen leaves
and an oakbranch seems to design a code
that all gauntness alludes to something else
and nothing more . . . O Goody taught me
all I need to know.

I had always begun with the assumption
that complexity excludes good manners,
anything passionately explained will prevail
by repetition, the explanation more telling
than the problem. Let envy encompass each gesture
even while it strengthens, and kinship be
the perfect start and stop
Then someday surely all music in the world
would be full and round
and perfect in the morning sunshine.
Until Goody with her dark and spiteful
an open end lets sound go
sent the dime store tone charmed and unresolved
down a street where there are no trees.
How does the wind then?
or the uncomplicated rain?
for the gods are harm, just so,
and they come to teach
the propriety of deceit
but never tell us who’s involved
our breath warm upon the angled bar
with one end open to chance

W. S. Di Piero
FULGURITE

If someone has stolen
my thunder
there is still
the lightning
captured in sand and
fused into glass

Though all my logic
argues against
a petrified spark
this hollow
branching
silica tube
holds
the bright blinding
mystery
that lights up my mind

It strikes me
that liking takes a
shape like this
Flash
grown familiar
given weight
Everything else
burns out
or melts
Only liking
lasts

Maralyn Polak
NEVER TO BE BURIED

You read these words with casual glances
Flipping the pages, feeling the paper.
You could collect all these words
To show around the town of your choice
I bet you like to read words
Written just for you, all about you,
But you never say too much.
Do you read about pain
The same way you read about joy?
"Today she smiled," you must say.
"Today she cried." "Today she died."
All in the same tone of voice,
All as you calmly turn the page,
Reading about a you
That quite possibly doesn’t exist
Except on these pages
Never to be buried, never to be burned

Joan Henry
NOT CHANEL NUMBER FIVE

When you turn your soft places
Toward me in sleeping,
Round shoulders, folds of skin,
Some softer than these,
When you settle slowly into sleeping,
The back of your neck sighs
Where hair just begins to travel,
You let go a little at a time
And you are warmly gentle
Until you are as soft
As any woman might be.

When I move awkwardly clumsy
Restless in my slumber
Or stand defiantly in the world,
My boyish chest no longer disguised,
My shaggy hair growing everywhere,
No more the paint, no more the powder,
Nothing to hide any longer,
I am as lean and lithe
As any man might be.

The softness I see in you now,
More in sleeping, more in waking,
Becomes you so
In just such ways you are more beautiful
Than ever you were before.
So my new found strength
Here beside you, alone with myself,
Gives me a loveliness I never felt
This in itself is not confusing
We are creatures of the earth,
Androgynous beings, learning yearning.
Strange instead is the simplicity
Of this age-old knowledge about ourselves
Making me more a woman, you more a man.

Joan Henry
SIMPLICITY

It's not that I cannot attain it, but that it cannot attain me.

Why should I always have to take the initiative? If a quality
wants body it will have to be more than passively attractive.

Whatever I go out to find I can usually locate. If I go out
looking for the smallest and organically simple organism I
can find it, stuff its wild silent protest into my pocket.

But if it comes looking for me to invest with itself? Then the
situation becomes much more interesting.

It is the simple and I the complex. How can it tell me from
millions of others? It cannot even see my face. If it is truly
Simple it won't know what to look for anyway, or it will give
up before it starts.

Anyhow, just to encourage Simple I sometimes lay myself
out like a bouquet, and invite Simple, moseying by, to take
his pick, showing that I'm really not as complicated as I look.
Of course, no one believes me. They think there's a trap,
that the whole bouquet is a fiendish contraption of trip-wires
and Venus Fly Traps. Simple just gets confused and discou-
raging and leaves me to find my salvation elsewhere. So, for
the most part, I find that my simplest actions are those
fraught with the most suspicion. In mock-desperation I
again try baiting myself for a simple feeling, that Simple of
myself that has to come out of hiding sometime and cure me
or at least nibble away like acid at all the extra layers and
accretions of the years. So, trawling for marauders, I set off
at full steam. But the waiting becomes too much. You can't
set up a surprise for yourself for then where's the surprise? I
end up by saying What the hell, grabbing myself by the back
of the neck, shaking a good deal to make things if not simple
then settled into a more compact mass, and this I call Simple.
Everything seems to come from within, so the simplest thing is to indulge in a little simple sophistry. This mass of thoughts and feelings that is me is so persistent and packed-down solid that it cannot be further reduced. That leaves us with Simple, (as usual, I’ve had to do all his work for him).

The simple is not to be found by invasion, no more than salvation. It is to be found in the turns and cheats of the mind, like salvation. The more daring the cheat, the more spectacular the simplicity.

Brian Swann
13 EPIGRAMS

1. what did the chickens
do to you
that you don’t want
to eat them?
terrifying question
from a child
eat
I answered
idiot
and no more
questions†

†In Italian Universo uses an archaic form, a quotation of a famous
line from Dante’s Inferno spoken by Virgil to Caronte (Charon)
what party
do you belong to?
the mumbled altercation
still goes on
we are like
medlars in winter
on a bed of straw

veni vidi
video
et I stayed
literally
shit

the intellectual loves the swift
action of thought
but is sedentary
incapable of movement
pedant
on the stagnant crest of the revolution
he bestrides an ideal steed
along the difficult path
of the cerebral circumvolution
rath the rape
carnal violence
to monuments
four-legged love
or that celestial
total impotence
torture rather
than an hour of conjugal love
between worn sheets
usual stinks
hypocritical modesty
dignified orgasms
indifference
the usual decorous
respect
belch
TV

6 the month most hostile to you
Sereni†
is the dearest to me Universo
especially this year with wood costing more
I already risked
chilblains in autumn
living motionless for days
at the window
waiting for your answer from Milan
the mailman passed
the fruits of the season
the weeks the months
I aged visibly
but you
damned if you ever answered me

†A poet, and editor of a famous poetry series at Mondadori
7 on the elegantly
laid table
between one bottle
and the other of good wine
the broiled fish
didn’t know
it was being eaten
to make the whole family
observe the fast.

8 with me you play the Soviet-lover
with others the America-lover
when you’re alone what do you play at loving
melodramatic Danilo
who ashamed of being Slovene
call yourself Daniele
boasting that you’re Italian
the sad role you play
in the Trieste café doesn’t suit you
I picture you rather
in a Franz Lehár parody
waltzing with a sailor
merry widow
with the sprightly glance
in a large beer-parlor in Marsovia
among sparkling Bohemian crystal
toasting the downfall of Moravia

9 Exult at the anthem
jump with joy at the flag
rave about the nation
Trieste big shot
you have only the smoke
of export Nazionales †

† Brand of Italian cigarettes.
10 Sandokan\(^1\)
from the Appenines
to the Andes
your heart\(^2\)
no longer responds
to the call
of the forest\(^3\)
London\(^4\) DeAmicis
Salgari\(^5\)
shadows of your smiling
kindergarten
now you wander about
in the tortuous metropolis
convinced you’ll make millions
like in Monopoly

1 Actually Sandokan, hero of adventure stories for teen-agers, most widely read for at least two generations.
2 A reference to another popular story, of a very different sort, CUORE by DeAmicis
3 The Italian name for CALL OF THE WILD
4 Jack London
5 The author of the adventure stories

11 not to keep on
in this perpetual
apotheosis of the heart
to let yourself go
in stately sentiments
Homeric gestures
unique orgasms
that graze collapse
calm is what’s needed
keeping in step
with the times
even love
is now
legendary
12 high-altitude brute
granite obtuseness
Alpine ignorance
feather nailed in the brain
ski-boots
salute to the Duce
when he enters a tavern
he sings “Giovanezza”¹
despite his advanced age
attends the rally
of the Alpini²
veteran
prick
stubborn man from Cadora
only one thing in his favor
the wine

¹ “Youth”: the Fascist anthem
² Alpine troops

13 some day I’ll rise again essential
between the paws of some female paleoanthropologist
then maybe they’ll tell me who I am
in a scientific way

Paolo Universo
from ALMANACCO DELLO SPECCHIO
Issue No. 1

translation by Brian Swann
FROM THE CITY

for Tim Corbett

we learned the movement of hands
to hips
    the ballet of street words
when hanging out on corners
in December, became refined
in our eating habits—holding potato chips
well above our heads,
    cupped the cigarette
in school halls, found aristocracy in faces
of workers—fathers, brothers—
coming home from work,
    came to know
the class distinction of chuck taylor
tennis shoes,
    the absolutely fine attraction
of bodies in summer,
    tank tops, legs apart
inviting us to stand upright
against police cars, big wheels
from the suburbs

Child, we were coming out
long before we knew it!

    Ed Cox