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OSSABAW, TRYING TO SEPARATE

Three warnings of disaster
are posted in each room

TIDES — SNAKES — GETTING LOST
ARE EVER PRESENT DANGERS

As if each were the label
we should attach to ourselves
warning of all the misfortunes outside.

But there is another line, typed
in small letters beneath
these bold-faced lies

"This is important. Please
inquire of the person in charge"

In the rational light of morning
I believe in such things,
children lost in the woods, snakes
dropping from branches, the tides
waiting for unwary beachcombers
I can allow the oak trees, burdened
with moss, to be simply decoration

But as evening encroaches
they take on an ominous light.
Walking outside, I realize.

There is no person in charge,
no cause to affect
those we advise or the ones who carry
our names with them
Whatever waits for us to appear in the future at some ordinary place where we expected only to transfer from one destination to another that is terminal.

That place will give us no warning. No names to arm ourselves with.
A LETTER HOME

"One Waits. One Waits."
—Weldon Kees

The island was not what I had imagined, beach, trees, all sand and sun ready to be walked, made into objects for poems. Arriving in the fog, all I could see at first was the shape of water, but the fog lifted as we docked and I saw marshes and grass, a white flickering of distant birds. But then they were gone.

We drove for a mile, palm trees lined the dirt road. Beyond that, wilderness. Came through the gates to the one habitable house with the clearing around it. Another view, a place where civilization is accidental, requires constant attention.

At dinner, the conversation avoids these topics. We dress as survivors might, with a sense of relief, wearing items which can be commented upon, pieces of jewelry brought from exotic vacations, what we were before we came. This permits us to remember names, to remember, at least for now, what is not with us, what we did not bring.
dining room, Main House, Ossabaw Island
ANOTHER LETTER HOME

To love what is not there; to create it.

Outside the azaleas are blooming, pink, coral, the color remains in the mind long after the flowers drop and are lost in the pine needles. For a few days, perhaps a week, they are the focus of all that is Georgia.

I turn from the bright water, the ocean which renews itself, and become aware of what lies inland. How can I show you these flowers, share the milky pink that retreats inside itself to the dark center? Everything lush, unbalanced.

Japonicas everywhere. They have gone wild. One bush holds a profusion of all colors, white, striped with red, a pure dark tangerine. Even the tulip tree outside my window has forsaken formality; it calls attention to itself with so much heady fragrance I think of a woman lost in her own perfume.

I want to give you all this, this house with its yellow bedroom and carbon blue rug, to the white bed in which I sleep fitfully, overwhelmed by the heavy dark as the midnight air rises with the thick flowing smell of flowers, flowers, sensual as your body which sleeps in the thin California air, distant, untouchable.
Sometimes, sitting in a room, sharing confidences, we tell ourselves nothing can happen twice. We presume, mistakenly, to construct events that tell us we’ve learned from the past what went wrong, then think we can somehow instruct our future, which remains inconceivable, and later, equally foolish and done.

As one foolish person to another maybe it happens this way

a mutual interference, like the turning on of a single green lamp which, for one moment, holds everything there is, together, in a pale, necessary circle

Beyond that is the familiar darkness. It holds the future like weathered names, swinging, above thankfully distant and intolerable doors. We cautiously make our way toward them, thinking each decision takes us someplace new

But those places we fear which will blind us with irreversible sight, or those we have left, stumbling, behind us, sharp edged, painful and alone, are all equidistant.

For now, there is only the present A small circle of light which holds two agreeable voices. Then darkness. Then not
"A fish from the Amazon which usually remains on the surface has eyes which are divided into two parts. The upper section enables it to see in the air, the lower to look under the surface."

—Philippe Diole, "The Undersea Adventure"

Opening the lens wide, the shutter at a thousandth of a second, I take photograph after photograph, trying to separate lichen from the limb of an oak tree. Finished, I move back, reset, but am unable to find a place to stand, get one good shot without lopping off a limb, part of the trunk. "Impossible," you say, "to get it all." I laugh, agree.
We walk further down Cane Patch path. The palmettos and oaks give way to long beige savannahs. I decide to take your picture, tell you where to stand, then I move in, focusing on your face. In my lens the savannahs weave and blur behind you, they are the color of afternoon, the duplicate color of your face as you are momentarily commanded. Smile. Hearing my shutter release, you relax, look away. "One more," I say and I have caught you, serious and quick.

We begin to walk again. "The light isn't as good as yesterday," I remark. My other eyes, the ones that can see what they wish to remember as perfect light, reframe. An afternoon, blue, reverses to silver, hung from low clouds turning the ocean into a cold mirror where neither horizon nor sky separate.

My mind records this past. The present is instant, fixed in my lens. But in the dark chamber, where, emulsion without light, the film lies still rolled in its metal container, your absence is already recorded. In these frames you will have left Ossabaw Island. But that is another kind of seeing.

Now, as we watch the birds in their agreed direction rise out of the marshland, take flight over the savannahs to where they are going, we see only what is here, unfocused possibilities.
A LOVE POEM FOR BECKY AND SIDNEY

“We see more than what we see . . . . the world is physical and requires a physical interaction.”
—Alan Gussow, N.Y. Times, March 14, 1976

What can I say about waiting?
Today, being separate, I attempt
the transparent magic of words
Absence is tangible as distance.
I want to say, here I will make
you both a love poem

But the world is physical. And
this island of trees and bright
sun is a constant reminder of how
fragile we are. Even the afternoon
is longer than the slanted light.
But you know that already. O’ how
something slim as a letter or wish
flies across water, air, becomes
the moment’s measure of exchange
We read and re-read the hand’s
offerings until the envelope
of night conveniently closes the
distance by which we all live

How much can one promise another
All this a landscape rich as
the mutual colors you dream,
a language invulnerable as
the gift of love charging the
air, making language
unnecessary

Be together. Love is not a polite
word. Want, have and touch are
risks. We all fail in our good wishes
never to hurt what we cannot
help hurting.

Together, think of a room
in which two people touch,
turn into possibilities, into
each other, into love.
POEM FOR FEATHERS, BEADS AND OBOE

Her favorite things, she once said, referring to objects, were feathers, beads and the oboe. Out of these, she maintained, she could create any landscape.

Morning comes over the island. What will she do with the flute bird who tries his best, running up and down a scale of perpetual promise, giving his throat to the sun and the top branch of the palmetto? Does the sun hear? It shines mellifluously, and the bird assumes from his uncritical heaven of trees and air, this place is first chair. He sings, soprano and flute, his own accompaniment, and she is content, thinking of oboes.
Or about flying, an idea that lifts out of the underbrush, wind stoking the wings of a hawk changing tILT, or herself, the counterpoint, walking clumsily over fallen branches. It will rain soon, she notes, coming into the clearing just in time to see a dark wedge of birds, low profiled, shape themselves against the sliver afternoon, completing one last pattern before the storm breaks.

Not to leave here, she thinks. The island where she collects seashells and beads, three fragile sand dollars. They are arranged on her dresser and she touches them each evening. She remembers what she has left—a winter heavy as obsidian. But that seems far away. It is spring on the island, and she has walked through the woods, walked on the beach which lies empty on her dresser. Is it silence she is collecting? There is a voice in the pale convolutions of the shell, she holds it to her ear, hearing the distant dark roar of wind. Not oboes, she thinks.
ONCE UPON A TIME THIS WAS
A RESPECTABLE OCCUPATION

The young man on my right, having finished lunch, says, "Don’t take things so seriously. Your work, I mean. I write, too, but it’s not all that hard."

He writes, too. And words fall for him as winter falls in Siberia, complete, without transition from snow to snow. He knows all about skiing, having written a book on it, says the terrain lends itself quite easily to a certain sliding maneuver.

"Have you ever skied?" he asks.
"No."
"I’m walking on lethal ground, caught between the rock and the landslide. "I’m not coordinated," I explain, skirting the edges carefully.

Later, stumbling from letter to halting letter, I see my language has resentment built right in. I move uneasily as one who spells out step by step a fatal alphabet. Each word, I think, becomes its own terrain or wilderness. I begin again.
The old books read
over again, I lie down
in the yellow room, running
the film clips through Vintage moments
Here's one which starts

On a hot afternoon
thousands of miles away Summer in Buffalo
She smiles, daydreaming, as someone
enters the room His face blurs pleasantly
as he leans down, placing his tan briefcase
on the table beside the bed, as he asks
if she was asleep She wakes up, unsteadily,
reaches for him

Or Night San Francisco Damp with fog
she enters the hotel room Hours later
she walks again to the door, thinking
she has just heard his light tap Fumbling,
she opens it, finds an empty hall
She goes back to the dressing table where
his comb and brush are neatly arranged
Touches them, lovingly. She sits down
before the mirror which gives her back
her own face, an empty, centrifugal room
Is she thinking of leaving?

No That is another room in San Diego
in which she hastily packs, reaches
for the black telephone, then slowly,
mechanically, places it back, undialled

Countless scenes of airports, train
stations, lobbies of hotels In each one
she is there, waiting. Hours of watching
the safe arrivals of other people. Transient,
she is only there for a day.

I watch her in the yellow room
edit her life, wishing for sleep or fiction,
or her part over For the film to end
VOICES LEAVING OSSABAW

There are no more days left to bend into place. The last one. Where will I go from here? Water and sky, a double faced question

Someplace called home waits in the mind. It rebukes me, tells me how absent I am. What does it want of me?

COME BACK it whispers in all its grey and resentful voices. WE MISS YOU

Once, returning from work in the city, I saw the last bus pull away, leaving me late, stranded. The panic where should I go, how should I get there? A double faced answer
SOMEONE IS LIGHTING THE FIRE
SOMEONE IS COOKING THE MEALS.
SOMEONE IS SLEEPING IN YOUR BED

I learn the value of punctuality
And the house, busy, transforms
itself into new, complex arrangements,
rooms of light furniture, fresh
flowers on the hall table

WHY HAVE YOU LEFT US?
COME BACK. YOU WILL LOSE
YOUR SHAPE TO WATER, SKY IF YOU
ARE GONE TOO LONG, it cries
HERE HERE REMEMBER THESE
ROOMS YOU HAVE MADE US.
WE ARE WOOD, SKIN

Sudden as responsibility, I
nod my agreement I am the sum
of these voices. I am
my rooms

Adrianne Marcus
INDIVIDUAL CHANTING is listening to the self while making breath & voice sound. The feedback loop of sounding & observing carries one along.

One is normally in a world trance, a continuous perception of the world learned from childhood. This is snappèd by creating continuous and often repetitious activity focuses, such as long time chanting, long distance running & swimming, meditation, as well as rituals of transformation.

COMMUNAL CHANTING is group activity. In some forms everyone individual-chants while also observing others. In other forms the group serves to support individual processes. In yet others, as in daily life, everyone mainly individual-chants (with the breath, humming to oneself, dialogue in speech, etc.) in a group context. A curious extraordinary case is enormously popular singing or speaking in unison with pre-established material.
The Breath

Breathing is universal language. The careful observer can read the breath of another person, the mood of a crowd, the state of a sleeping person, the weather, the condition of other breathing animals, thru breath radar we discern the size & nature of surroundings.

The first recipes are concerned with using breath language to synchronize bodies & minds, to get deeper into other beings, and to explore the foundation of communication in body music. In musical terms these are ways to “get in time.”

The later recipes heighten sensitivity to breath language and define its vocabulary. In musical terms these are “tunings.”

BREATH LANGUAGE
A person can go thru the whole range of emotions, from depression to despair to exhilaration by breathing differently. Once the breath is focused on, the continuity of breathing carries the mind along. Unlike singing, which can stop, the breath goes on even if the breather doesn’t want it to; hence the persistent testimony of the breath.

The whole range of emotions carried by the breath is readable by other people and perhaps other creatures.
Recipe 4
Many-Way Syncing Up

A COMMUNAL RITUAL

Sit in a circle.
One person begins as leader, breathes audibly in any pattern:
dramatic, peaceful, fancy, simple, etc. The group sync-breathes with
her or him. Usually leading is easier eyes shut. Following is easier
with eyes open. Everyone in the circle must have a turn. Go
around the circle at least twice, each pass deepens the experience.

NOTICE
It’s possible to control the sync’s tightness. The leader can be
tricky and evasive or very open. The group should always be
supportive

Sync breathing is like composition & performance in one—no one
is an amateur.

At first some people take short turns as leader. It’s important for
someone to be a strong positive presence to overcome inhibition.

It is just fine to talk between people’s turns.
Recipe 5
Filling Out the Breath

Just like an accordion or mouth harp, the vocal apparatus can sound in two directions: in & out. The bowed instrument term "up bow" & "down bow," and perhaps question & answer derive from this in & out. Most sound is made on exhalés. Inhaled sound making is usually associated with the sigh or gasp, but there are other meanings.

INDIVIDUAL
Sit or stand comfortably. Breathe "silently" and regularly thru open mouth, with jaw relaxed, neither clenched nor held open. The tongue is resting in the bottom of the mouth.

Concentrate on breathing. Settle into this for at least a minute. The breathing is still "silent." Allow just the beginning of an exhale to be heard.

On succeeding exhalés & inhalés let the breath make itself audible in increasingly longer portions until finally the entire exhale & inhalé can be heard.

COMMUNAL
Help each individual in exploring this recipe by sync-breathing with her or him in such a way as to expand the journey; for example, silently or softly if someone is shy, strongly if someone needs a push.
Recipe 9
Breath Combative Drill

Use only breath language, unvocalized sounds, hisses, Bronx cheers, unvoiced roars, whistles, etc.

Sitting or standing, form a circle with one person in the center.

Person A in the center tries to draw or provoke anyone (Person B) into the center for physical & sound dialog. The whole group comments ad lib. The action in the circle—fighting, jeering, taunting, flirting, etc.—is always in pairs. When Person A feels done with Person B, Person A goes back into the circle. Person B repeats the procedure inducing Person C etc. Play until done.
Recipe 10
Whispering

Unvoiced language is an aperture into the substance of voiced
soundmaking. It rings the body gently so as not to jar the per-
ceptive process. It corresponds to many gentle voices in nature.

"Whisper until it rains." —Jerome Rothenberg

TALKING MIME is talking without voice while silent-breathing.
It is neither whispering nor voiced talking.

TALKING & READING SILENTLY are other related states.

INDIVIDUAL
Whisper a monologue ad lib or from text. Whisper just on exhales.
Gradually add inhaled whispering.
CONTINUOUS WHISPERING ensues.
Gradually lower exhaled whispering until just whispering on inhale.

transition
Repeat with TALKING MIME.

transition
Repeat with THINKING.

transition
Repeat with SILENT READING.

transition
Repeat while LISTENING TO SOMEONE TALK.

transition
Repeat while LISTENING TO ANYTHING.

transition
Repeat while LISTENING TO EVERYTHING.

EXPECT
The transition from whispering to talking mime is a gigantic change
of mental gears.

Charlie Morrow
THREE-NOTE CHANTS FOR CHARLIE MORROW

Chants to be sung on the full breath cycle.

The modes for the two chants may be any sequences of three notes, ascending for the Opening Chant, descending for the Closing Chant. The mode may remain constant within each chant or it may evolve, its intervals expanding or contracting almost imperceptibly throughout.

Two “phonemes” are used, one (“vowel”) formed with mouth open, the other (“consonant”) with mouth fully or mostly closed. The symbols used, O and N respectively, should be taken as suggesting not particular phonemes but merely contrasting vocal sonorities. The phonemes, like the modes, may gradually change throughout the chant.

The mode is sounded once in each of the sixty-four phrases. It is distributed on the breath cycle as indicated by lines above (inhale) and below (exhale) the phoneme symbols. The succession of phrases is left to right, top to bottom.

Sound is continuous within each phrase, with only the necessary articulation caused by changes in the breath cycle. Pauses may be made between phrases by holding the breath, no extra (silent) breaths are taken.

Either or both chants may be given on any particular occasion; but they should appear only at the beginning and/or end of a performance, reflecting in their rhythms, tempos, and energy qualities the chanter’s sense of the event to come or the event completed.
OPENING CHANT

mode: ㅇ-ㅇ-

Closing Chant

Paul Epstein
A BONDED AFFAIR

A love all paper,
the pages float
drifting in goose
feathers over your
chest, the pages
flutter at the ceiling
green luna moths
dry and furry
with antennae that
want to tickle.
The breasts of paper
doves tremble with cooing
This snow melts
as soon as it
touches your brain
insensible yet per-
sonal as hair, falling
forward to brush
your shoulder as I
leaned to you, once,
there. White
love sealing
the morning
like mist, then
thinning so that
hard blue day
slaps through.

Marge Piercy
It is a birthday present
that comes in the mail
with no sender you can guess,
only the opaque
company name, that could sell
jewels or long underwar

It is a dream you almost
remember on waking, and then
in midday it crosses,
a bird flushed from cover
streaking through a clear ng
too fast to see the color
but yes, you know it.
It cries now, deep
in the woods

It is a sunrise flush
warming my breasts
under the shirt, and the constant
effort not to jump up and down
and splatter questions
when your name is said

It is knowing I do
not know you but I will.

Marge Piercy
I HAVE OFFENDED

Mocking my quibbles with beetle 
flights of laughter you have slammed 
and flung open the doors of the mind 
these five nights, mother of wolves 
and words, lady of the green lightning. 
You have kicked my ribs as I slept.

You gave into my hands 
something I scrupled to take. 
I swaggered to find there was 
some lust I’d blink at, I polished 
my weird little virtue 
like a glass eye

Now in my palm it is yellow as a wasp, 
open, unblinking and furious, 
the owl’s eye whose hunger 
is thwarted with the rich smell 
of blood tightening her throat

Yes, it was respectability’s glass 
eye, blind and heuristic, an 
academic virtue stuck uneasily 
on my peasant head like a mortarboard 
on a pumpkin. My own virtues 
are gamy and fierce coyotes who slink 
now cunning with want. 
Shortly they will run amok 
in the sheep, gone wrong through 
an overdose of caution and somebody 
else’s morals like poisoned bait

Marge Piercy
ANOTHER COUNTRY

When I visited with the porpoises
I felt awkward, my hairy
angular body sprouting its skinny
grasping limbs like long mistakes
The child of gravity and want I sank
in the salt wave clattering with gadgets,
appendages. Millenia past
they turned and fled back to the womb
There they feel no fatigue but slip
through the water caressed and buoyed up
Never do they sleep but their huge brains
hold life always turning it like a pebble
under the tongue, and lacking practice, death
comes as an astonishment

In the wide murmur of the sea they fear
little. Together they ram the shark
Food swims flashing in schools
Hunger is only a teasing, endured
no longer than desired. Weather
is superficial decoration, they rise
to salute the thunder, romping their tails
They ride through pleasure and plenty
secure in a vast courtesy
firm enough to sustain a drowning mar
Nothing is said bluntly.
All conversation is a singing,
all telling alludes to and embodies
minute displacements in epic,
counter-epic, comic opera, or the four hundred
forty-one other genres they recognize
as current. Every exchange comes
as aria, lyric, set piece, recitativo,
and even a cry for help is couched
in a firm brief and terse,
strict as haiku.

Greed has no meaning when no one
is hungry. Thus they swim toward
us with broad grins and are slaughtered
by the factory ships
that harvest the tuna like wheat

Marçe Piercy
WHERE THE TREES STOP

The glint of dragonfly’s wings,
a rosy star in the grass
on the lava bed
where the sun bored
into my skull,
the taste of water cold
as buried stone
running into cupped hands,
the red of the hawk’s tail
as it scudded below
me on the wind
off the cliff face,
the scent of alpine
flowers in the meadow
where the hummingbirds
hung in the air
to dance their mating,
the grip of a hand
hard on me saying
goodbye, seizing hard
because you thought I
did not see you
I have returned
from your coast to mine,
your mountains to my
salt marsh I withheld
myself and now I am
shaken by a wind
breaking off branches
and casting up dust
I saw more than you guessed,
more than I was willing
to know, wanting now
not just to touch
you but to loosen
your voice, to free
strange faces for each
of us from that meeting
like a totem animal
encountered at the timber
line, the blunt snout
rising suddenly from the grass

Marge Piercy
Poetry on the Buses
The next time it is
"I see you".
I'll need you more
and change a space where you say
There is a space that spans change.

Transom
Clemente (1934-1972)
no olvidaré
su nerviosa
costumbre de
alzar la
cabeza muy
alta
como un
caballo de raza

poet
Tom Clark
artist
Nicki Adler
Danced on a table of ivory stone—

Ten tall ballerinas of bone

Clothed like blackbirds warbling home—

And their shoes were like windows,

And their shoes were like bone.

A Riddle-Song for Duke Ellington

poet
Craig Williamson

artist
Nicki Adler
each day
the stone sits quietly
and the sunflower
moves with the sun
each day
the wave comes and returns
Dog
Smart
In the front—One strong
In the middle—Idiot dogs
In the back—Steady dogs
Eskimo shed
The dancers of hope.
The Race Between the Women and the Indians

The Pushcart Prize. Best of the Small Presses. Editor Bill Henderson
Pushcart Press. Hardback and paperback.

You can lead your hobby horse to water, but you can’t make him
National Velvet. A point to be absorbed from the frantic jockeying
for position in Bill Henderson’s hefty anthology, The Pushcart Prize:
Best of the Small Presses (selections from published work of 1975)
Henderson did an enormous job in creating, organizing, compiling,
and publicizing this volume. Nearly four hundred editors from small
literary presses sent up to six entries each for Henderson as editor,
H L. Van Brunt as poetry editor, and a panel of judges. Moreover,
the judges made their own separate selections which, by the results,
weighed heavily. Of prose works in the anthology, all but six were
selected by judges. In poetry, about even-Stephen between editors
and judges. Since several of the judges have establishment reputations,
it follows reasonably that their choices tended to come from the most
impressive names.

In the end, many political decisions won out. The book is worth
buying and reading even though the lesson for women editors and
writers is clear. We are not going to get anywhere by sitting back and
hoping for honor among judges. Most of the anthology space is given
to prose works by twenty-eight writers, twenty-four of them men.

Special thanks to Gravida magazine’s editor Lynne Savitt for permission to print
this review.
The four women: Cynthia Ozick’s essay is the best entry in the whole anthology. It is from *Confrontations*, but I can’t find her or her publisher listed in the section of Notes on Presses and Contributors. Since the editor is unable to alphabetize (Henderson L comes before L, honest) and sloppy about capitalization (What have you got against poor Michael Hogan(s)?) I scoured that section for her. She’s not there. Anne Tyler has a short story chosen by Reynolds Price from *Southern Review*. And Mary Gordon (from *Virginia Quarterly Review*) and Joyce Carol Oates (from *Chicago Review*) are the ONLY two authors nominated anonymously. How strange. The Oates short story is terrible. I just can’t see anyone’s selecting it (and publishing one’s own name as the culprit), so I wonder if she did it herself (All right, said the Little Red Hen) since she is one of the judges, the most active woman judge. Or else the editor “needed” women.

As for the poetry. Forty-three poems included, only ten by women and most of these were nominated by their publishers. Well, the poetry editor must bear the Van Brunt of everyone’s criticism. The selections are a political butterscotch pudding.

Let’s look at the poetry entries first. “The Griots Who Knew Brer Fox” by Colleen J McElroy was picked by Ishmael Reed (he is a judge, it’s true, but as a judge he nominated a poem published in *Yardbird Reader*, his own magazine). This poem is the most experimental in language use of all those by women in the book, but not all that unusual by reasonable standards. About old black men, vagabonds, story tellers (or “griots”), it goes:

They grind old tobacco between scabby gums
like ancient scarabs rolling dung from tombs

in their

mother country

Marilyn Coffee’s “Pricksong”, nominated by Aphra, is okay but is perhaps bland compared to other poetry we see in women’s literary periodicals. *It is the token woman poem of this book*, the only entry from the women’s literary magazines.

Laura Pershin’s untitled poem from Cosmic Information Agency is another “grandparents” poem, a theme recurrent in this volume (see Howard Zimmon’s “Grandparents” from Seakmark Press, chosen by Paul Engle, for a better poem, same subject).

Jane Bailey’s “Late Track” from *Montana Gothic*, judge Hugh Fox, is a short poem on the death of a family man characterized by the oddly irrelevant adjective “sly” among other word plays. Evidently the man’s “art” lay in dying (cross ref William Faulkner, I guess). There are definite thematic arrangements in the anthology. Thus, all in a row, we have Laura Pershin’s “My grandfather died in a nursing home”, Michael Hogan’s “Silence” (Unicorn Press), ending
The house was always quiet
and the ambulance
rolled up without a sound.

Jane Bailey’s “Late Track”, in part

Sly, he sank behind
an intricate
network of beer cans, bad jokes.
A bit sick
In good spirits, so to speak
—No need for a doctor.
Certainly
no clean mint green
hospital.
Coughed up his red life
at home.
In triumph

Clarence Major’s “Funeral” from Barienmir House, as the most hard-edged and precise of this little portrait gallery, doesn’t belong with its company. Excerpts.

But my stepfather dies. And they have his face
propped up in the casket. Powdered,
he is neatly tucked in a suit
There is this quiet hysterical laughter we all share.

... Now morning again. Here we are in Alabama
watching the body descend into the earth
at a grave site near a bright park. Mother’s face
does not know what expression it should hold

As we drive back I hold the airline tickets and Mae.

Last of these is Tess Gallagher’s “Black Money” from Penumbra Press, judge Paul Engle, a poem about another family man, this one works in a sulphur mill—“His lungs heaving all day in a sulphur mist”—which then leads into the next very fine prose selection, “Steelmill Blues” by Steve Packard (Liberation Magazine), a moving and authentic account stamped with the awkward grace of youth.

Two other poems by women are grouped: “Veteran’s Head” by Diane Chapman from Xanadu and “The Pilot” by Naomi Lazard from Hudson Review. The latter was nominated by Henderson himself; why? To add a woman, to add The Hudson Review, not otherwise included,
both? Each of these poems has craft aplenty: Chapman’s begins

Parents and kid brother meet him at the airport
The veteran’s head nods
bends for kisses
the mouth smiles

Lazard’s ends

Then you sit there, your mouth locked
in the open position, looked like your plane
zooming down with the throttle all the way
forward, in order to ride with the plunge
through the sound barrier

Because of all this I want to make it easy
for you. This is the way it works.
It isn’t necessary to say anything.
With this code I’ve invented,
if you love me, just tap one time
with a finger or a foot.

The problem is placement. Seen alone, either would be interesting.
Together, they’re a parody—of each other and of our heavy war guilt.
I was most impressed with the beauty and precision of Sheila
Nickerson’s powerful, self-contained “Song of the Soapstone Carver”
from Thorp Springs Press. Excerpt:

Follow, fingers, the slow terrain
Of dreams within a rook.
Cut away the dark forgetting,
A geology of loss.

Come, ptarmigan or Fox released,
And know the loving knife

Disjointed tension is set up by Adrienne Rich in her poem “Power”
from The Little Magazine, judge Joyce Carol Oates. At least here’s one
poem that actually made it into this anthology by a woman that deals
with a woman (in this case Marie Curie). Such a common ground
among women writers today that it wouldn’t bear comment, except
for the persistence here in selecting women who write men’s experi-
ence. Rich says

She died a famous woman denying
her wounds
denying
her wounds came from the same source as her power
Examination of what was included helps to understand why other material was rejected. *The Painted Bride Quarterly* submitted nothing about death or about the man-who-hacks-it-all-day-in-the-mines-and-then-comes-home-to-a-stony-wife (as Patrick Worth Gray of *Blue Cloud Quarterly* says, “And my wife is wearing her Harrassed Look”); we sent one poem, in fact, by Allan Kornblum that is a lovely and unusual affirmation of continuity and life.

And how about those poems so painfully personal to women that I have learned a new literature from them. Absent in this anthology Missing sinew, muscle that would have added balance to this venture. Here is part of a rejected poem by Ellen Marie Bissert of *13th Moon*:

```
everyday
the story seems the same
everyday
a wife is beaten like a dirty rug by her husband
everyday
a woman is found headless
peeled down like a banana in her bedroom
everyday
a woman is cut & scattered like litter in her apartment
everyday
a woman is thrown in some alley
a broken coke bottle shoved up her vagina
everyday
a woman dies in tubular pregnancy with her IUD
everyday
a woman is murdered by despair
everyday
women’s breasts, buttocks & legs are measured for a joke
they are hung to dangle
in men’s minds like cuts of meat in a butcher’s
women starve, shave & smile
anointing themselves
with the pearly whiteness that shoots
potent as money
```

There are other problems in this collection. We are given Saul Bellow, *The Ontario Review*, crying all the way to the bank in a really distasteful dialog with himself. One highly ironic quotation from Bellow, considering its present residence, “There are only a few literary journals left and those are now academic quarterlies.” Reprinted straight, in a book that received thousands of submissions from literary journals, many truly alternative.

“Is Don Juan Alive and Well?” by Arnold J. Mandell M.D. (sic), again *The Ontario Review*, is an overwrought autoblog of one individual’s compulsive involvement with symbols in an overly-symbolic society. Writing through one’s problems doeth not a writer make.
However, there are some especially fine selections that I want to include. "Style Three" and "Style Five" by the late William Wanting from Second Coming Press, judges Len Fulton and Leonard Randolph, have got to be every writer’s high. Brief quotes:

the first three rules of writing:
CHOP Chop! chop
.
.
.

waste not, the poet sd, &
gibbered on. . .

Morris Dickstein’s "Fiction Hot and Kool: Dilemmas of the Experimental Writer", Triquarterly, judge Nona Balakian, dissects problems of writers that interest me very much, but with examples of men most definitely not from small press publications. Writers need critics, especially such articulate and discerning ones as Dickstein, who is perhaps misplaced in this volume. Most small press fiction writers are not "experientially vacuous", it is the experience of being lionized that leads to paralysis of forward locomotion in one’s writing.

The transcendent entry is by Cynthia Ozick who combines mastery of language with passion derived from intellect. It would be a pleasure and relief to come across "A Liberal’s Auschwitz" in any publication anywhere. No sense in quoting overly from an essay sprinkled with "the dust of the cosmos, and other divine sweepings", I leave it to the reader to find Ozick’s work in its entirety. Her starting point is a quarrel with reflections by William Styron (published Op Ed NY Times) after he visited Auschwitz. Some of the “divine sweepings” here are the statements, as in "the liberal is also an egalitarian—which is to say, he is a leveling: like death.” Something about the presentation at Auschwitz has stamped out a whole cookie sheet of people with the Styron-reaction, to which this essay is a very moving rebuttal.

My own favorite is "The Death of Sun" by William Eastlake, San Marcos Press, judge Leonard Randolph:

"Sigmund Freud," the Medicine Man said, "said—more in anguish I believe than in criticism—'What does the Indian want? My God, what does the Indian want?'"

"He said that about women."

"If he had lived longer, he would have said it about Indians."

"True."

"Why?"

"Because it sounds good, it sounds profound, it tends to make you take off and beat the hell out of the Indians."

"After we have finished off the women."

"The women were finished off a long time ago," the
Medicine Man said
"But like the Indians they can make a comeback."
"Who knows," the Medicine Man said, "we both may be a
dying race"
"Who knows?"

This work seems one of the most honest ones here. Eastlake, like
Ed Sanders, whose "The Mother-in-Law" from Center, chosen by
Center and Ben Pesta, can bring across a dazzling effect while writing
with bedrock wisdom. No quotes from Sanders because he has the
felicitous gift of simplicity and I'm not willing to stomp around on
his story. The deft touch and toughness/gentleness of Eastlake and
Sanders are found also in "Father of the Bride" by Jack Pulaski of
Goddard Journal, in "Like a Good Unknown Poet" by Art Cuelho of
Holmgangers Press, and in Karl Kopp's opening of "Cloe Morgan"
from The Smith Press.

From one of the better essays of the Pushcart anthology, Robert
K. Martin has written in "Whitman's Song of Myself: Homosexual
picks his own magazine)

One important consequence of his homosexuality is
that Whitman, unlike so many male poets, does not see
women as sexual objects even in his ostensibly
heterosexual poems. Freed of the need to enslave the
opposite sex, the homosexual is free to see women as
human beings.

In general Martin is a careful reader, and this is a formidable critical
study. However, I differ with his interpretations in some areas including
the one just quoted. Whitman supported vigorous, intelligent, literary,
courageous women throughout his life. But not because of his sexual
orientation. Because he was an unusual person, above even his own
claims for himself. There's plenty of hostility towards women among
gay writers, straight males, women, choose your own category.

This review could be endless (if actually there are any readers still
with me, you may feel it has already gone to "endless") and include:
1) The problem of interlocking directorates of judges, which was
badly resolved by dopey inclusions from the judges themselves and
their own presses. And even their co-editors, as with The American
Poetry Review where one editor (who is one of the judges of this
anthology) is picked by Bill Henderson and the other editor is picked
by H.L. Van Brunt, but their poetry—"gonna take a sentimental jour-
ney"—is the same trip.

2) The problem of dominance by the biggest—"It's been many moons
since Partisan Review was a little mag/small press operation." This
became a two-fold problem when the reviewers stuck to the safety of
superstars. I'm a William Gass fanatic, but the Gassman & Company don't belong here.

3) The desire for respectability on the part of Henderson. This may explain the rejection of a good fiction work by R.A. MacAvoy as well as all manuscripts from gay literary presses.

4) Racism. The major gesture is a review, "Five Black Poets: History, Consciousness, Love and Harshness" by Eugene B Redmond, *Parnassus*, judge Ishmael Reed. This compendium is not equal to space up front. Our magazine submitted two essays by a black writer, I don't know what the others did.

5) Sexism, which gave us only Mary Gordon's "Now I Am Married", a fine, fictional multiportrait of women, and Adrienne Rich's Marie Curie. Concern, anger, frustration by women editors, voiced about this anthology during a conference at Temple University, generated this review. Women are underrepresented numerically with only fourteen writers out of seventy-one selections. Women are even more underrepresented experientially.

And something else in the book that is less definable because it is more subtle is exemplified by the anti-woman feeling achieved with the juxtaposition of the first two stories. The opening story from David Kranes, *Triquarterly*, choice of Gordon Lish, is definitely an arresting piece of fiction. The married woman/main character is having an afternoon's affair while at the same time spontaneously aborting a pregnancy that doesn't "show" because "She was anatomically (author's favorite word, by the by) thin and had managed to conceal the fact for well over seven months, with a regimen of boiled turnips and cold consommé".

... ...

"She felt the zipper on her dress move down, slipped her arms out, felt the dress fall around her hips. She felt her water break. "David," she said, and pulled him in.

... ...

"She couldn't help it. They were somewhere between twenty and thirty seconds apart now, and the pain and pressure was too much. She grabbed the collar of his shirt and tore, ripped it down, spread it, snapping all the buttons in a line. They landed, light as crickets, on the rug. "Fantastic!" David was moaning. "Oh, fantastic! Wow! . . ."

... ...
“...She found a wastebasket and slid it beside the bed. She moved against him, kept his hands on her back, pressing her whole anatomy (!) hard, violently down, against, trying to create hard enough pressure to displace some of the pain. She screamed. She dug in...”

“...When the baby came, it came easily and she was able crudely to slice the cord, get everything in the wastebasket and cover it with the bedspread without really losing much of the rhythm of the foreplay. . . .”

_Foreplay!_ This may be the “steamy” stuff Victor Navasky mentioned in _Newsweek_. No doubt about it, she’s a monster. The husband-castration scene is second place to this episode (what wouldn’t be?). Just your typical anatomically thin suburban wifey whose son goes to Hotchkiss. What else could one expect, the bitch.

Well, one could expect, for example, the drop-out, the “long-haired girl in a floor-length gingham dress” of the second story, fiction by Anne Tyler. This Mary certainly seems the perfect antidote to Lynne of the first offering. But, as luck has it, she is an even greater man-killer than the first. She (and her daughter Samantha) entered the life of the hapless hero, a marriage took place, and

“...Toby’s study became the center of the apartment, and every evening while he read Mary sat with him and sewed and Samantha played with cut-outs at their feet. Mary’s pottery began lining the mantel and bookshelves. She pounded in nails all over the kitchen and hung up her saucepans...”

“...how could he refuse anything to Samantha? With him, she was never disobedient. She shrieked with him over pointless riddles, she asked him unanswerable questions on their walks home from the lab; she punched at him ineffectually, her thumbs tucked inside her fists, when he called her Sam. New opportunities for fear were everywhere, now that he was a family man. Samantha’s walk from school seemed long and underpoliced, and every time he called home without an answer he imagined that Mary had run away from him and he would have to go through life without her...”
One day she leaves, the note reading only "I've gone." As this anthology conclusively proves—you shan't trust a woman.

Or a man either. Because Anne Tyler's story was a strong one, and it's a shame it fell victim to editorial propagandizing. Tyler writes a neat episode.

"For Easter, Toby bought Samantha a giant prepackaged Easter basket swaddled in pink cellophane. . . .Mary didn't like the basket. "How come you bought a thing like that?" she asked him . . .She reached out and touched the cellophane, which shrunk beneath her fingers. "We never used to buy baskets. Before I've always hidden eggs and let her hunt for them in the morning, and then she dyes them herself."

"Oh, I thought people had jellybeans and things," Toby said.

"Other people, maybe Samantha and I do it differently."

"Wouldn't she like to have what her classmates have?"

"She isn't trying to keep up with the Joneses, Toby," Mary said . . . Then Mary, who could never be predicted, said, "All right," and stopped the argument. "It was nice of you to think of it, anyway," she said formally, taking the basket. "I know Samantha will like it."

Work on the forthcoming edition of The Pushcart Prize: Best of the Small Presses is already underway. What does all this mean for next time? Bill Henderson may have gone into this like a dreamy kid with a guitar who is confronted by the reality and siren of Motown; the great American star system causing his formula to harden. For certain, to publish the two most recent Nobel Prize winners—Eugenio Montale (translated by Jonathan Galassi) from Ploughshares, with the longest poem of the volume tacked on at the end by its judge Henderson himself, and already-mentioned Saul Bellow who won subsequent to publication—is a heady situation.

On the other hand, often it is argued that certain concessions are necessary originally to establish the publication's readership, but NEXT time . . . oh, how swell things are going to be next time. And that's when we will continue this discussion.

reviewed by Louise Simons
TO JANE

I cried in class today
reading "Asphodel"

It was embarrassing

one boy annoyed at my performance
(he writes poems himself)
slammed book and pencil down

the others the girls
were astonished and of course moved
one dabbed at her eyes

embarrassing

I thought of you
in yellow yellow roses in your hands
trembling
next to me before that seedy judge
comedy saved me then
your buying me a shirt
that morning to be married in
the sleeves three inches short
how the judge hair over his collar
and obviously hungover
got our names wrong
and left out words
(“take this man only in sickness”)

and you trembling there ready
to break down

the roses shook in your hands

Is it any wonder “Asphodel”
does that to me?
made the book shake made me
apologize?

I wonder though
that he found fault

I could understand
if you were not
beautiful

so many poems today
without mind or measure

without love

Kar Kopp

59
JANUARY, 1974

Driving west on I-40
I should be home
chopping wood
       the cherry stump how easily
it splits
       the sweet pink smell
of cherry-wood
when it burns

and yet

les bouches du Nil

       how many years ago
was that?

all sick
but me and the Vietnamese
cook    we made salad
in one big bowl
tomatoes from Port Sa’id
lettuce with lots of
salt
    sponged salted oil
    with white bread making for
the Straits of Messina
I should be home there’s snow	onight and I know where the road goes
bones and flesh

the shock of plunging bow thrill of an axe
on wood
smell of wood-fire and the sting of salt
on tongue and skin

Alma Van Buren Fort Smith
Marseilles

my gloved hands steady
on the wheel

Karl Kopp
WILLIAM HEATH:
from Kick Off, Catullus

THE MAD TRANSLATOR TALKING

Listen, reader, I never
learned a lick of Latin.
But this guy, Catullus,
can whip off a wicked poem,
and I never could resist
being a copy cat.
All I remember from my
high school Latin class
is how we all harassed
our poor teacher. Miss Graves
was her name, may the gods
bless her. We stole the chairs
from the room and passed
cigarettes under our desks,
the smoke winding up
through the ink well holes.
Whenever we were threatened
with a surprise quiz, Jim Lewis
would climb out on the ledge
of our third floor windows
and threaten to jump.
During final exams we all cheated
like crazy, assigning everybody
a tiny part of the translation
and then passing our papers around
That was fifteen years ago
Now suddenly I find myself
reading Catullus with terrific excitement
and firing off wild imitations
like there's no tomorrow.
Catullus died when he was my age
Furius and Aurelius, my trusted friends, you would gladly travel with me to India just to hear the rhythmic roar of the eastern ocean.

Or to the mild wilds of eastern Arabia, home of treacherous barbarian archers, or to the coast of Egypt where the Nile sticks her seven muddy tongues into the salt sea.

You would follow me along the path that great Caesar went, up into Gaul all the way to the Rhine then across the sinister straits to the horrendous end of the world—Britain.

I know I could trust you both on any of these dangerous missions but all I ask is that you take this curt note.

Tell my sweet that I hope she’s happy humung hundreds every night, botching every job so that they all have limp dicks and burning balls.

Tell her not to wait up for me because I won’t be coming back. I feel like a flower at the edge of a field that’s been nicked in the nuts by a plow.
How many kisses
will satisfy me? Lesbia,
is that what
you want to know?
Count all the sands
on every shore,
add every bit of dirt
in the vast desert,
multiply that by
the number of stars
that spy on lovers
on a cloudless night,
and you’re still
not even close.
Why so many? Because I
want every spiteful ass
in the whole world
who envys our love
to try to keep track
of all our kisses
and choke on his tongue
I ran into Varus at the Forum
He had his new chick with him
She's a cute little trick
with a touch of class.
She started right in quizzing me
about Bithynia, wanting to know
if it was a plush place
and if I was in the money
I said, "Baby, Bithynia is nowhere
Nobody out there even knows
what money looks like. The dump
is run by one crooked sonofabitch
and his gang of thugs."
Next she asks me how I
got around "No sweat,"
I said, acting real cool,
"I had eight big guys
who lugged me around
in a padded basket." What
a joke! There aren't eight guys
in that hell hole who can even
find their feet let alone
lift a stick. But this chick
takes it all in. She even
wants to borrow my boys
for a quick trot down
to the temple. "Hold your horses,"
I sez, talking fast, "Those guys
belong to Cinna. He lets
me use them like I owned them,
so what's the difference?
But don't bug me, I'm busy
digging this rap."
You’ve ruined me, Lesbia,
you’ve brought me down so low
I’ll never get back up.
This is what I get
for loving you without letup
for all these years
Now all is lost
I couldn’t love you
even if you turned pure,
and there’s nothing
you can do to stop me
from still wanting you.

Caesar, I don’t
give a shit
who or what
you think you are
Go get somebody else
to lick your boots, etc.
O fair Juventius,  
let me kiss the honey  
of your eyes forever  
I will kiss them,  
with permission, three  
hundred thousand times  
and still not  
neither be satisfied  
I would kiss them  
more than all the sun-  
kinned leaves of grass.

Catullus, hang it up.  
That walking contagion, Nonius,  
has landed in the money,  
and Vatinius, that cancerous pus,  
thinks he’s got a hook  
on the consul’s seat  
Kick off, Catullus.
After nine years
of inspired hard work
my friend Cinna
has finished his poem.
Meanwhile Hortensius persists
in dashing off endless poems
at breakneck speed.
Who's better? Listen
Cinna's poem will spread
across the world,
while the Annals of Volusius
are an abortion that aren't
going anywhere except
to the fish market
where they will be used
to wrap dead fish.
I celebrate my friend,
his immortal lines already
sing in my veins
Let the rabble
drool over the doggerel
of that crass verse-burper, Antimachus
Nobody can stop Suffenus
from blurring out his verses
While the rest of us poets write
on any spare scrap we can find,
he fires off poems by the thousands
on nothing but the finest paper,
polishes them off with pumice,
binds them up in vellum,
wraps them in red ribbon,
then publishes them in neat books.
Think of all the dainty craft he puts
into cramming his shit between covers.
Because that's what it is—shit
This guy is elegant at the table,
but he writes like a wallowing hog
chinning himself in the muck,
and he's just as happy.
Yet we are all as self-blind as Suffenus,
putting on airs we never earned.
Nobody can see the pack
on his own back

Catullus
translations by William Heath
R. E. SEBENTHALL:  
book review

Cloth, $6.00; Paper, $3.00.

This second collection of Sonya Dorman’s verse “stretches fence” around an impressive area of life and experience. The physical terrain ranges from her native New England to the ice chines and great bone peaks of Newfoundland. And whether she is mountain climbing, dragging firewood home in winter, or reflecting on the history of civilization, she finds the eloquent detail, the incandescent phrase, the rich kernel of meaning that launches a poem into flight. Seldom soft or diffuse, she excels at the sharp pictorial image, as in “at night the Wolf Moon / blunts its fang / on the ice / while someone snarls with hunger”, or “ragged as zinnias the parents / wilt away in sedans and station wagons” after depositing their children at summer camp.
This is by no means to define Dorman as an imagist. It is, in fact, difficult to categorize her at all, to fit her into any of the currently fashionable voices and modes. She rejects the flabby conversational tone as well as the syntactical posturing that covers so much poverty of content. Above all, she avoids the fragmentary notations that are meant to illuminate, but too often merely dredge up slushy clots of undisgested experience. Each of her poems has a firm intellectual spine; each employs that unique blend of thought and feeling, of realism and intuition that probes most deeply into the human condition.

Half a dozen poems dealing with marriage and woman's role point up Dorman's ability to work with both irony and compassion. In CARRYING THE MORNING: A NEW ENGLAND BIOGRAPHY, the housewife rises early to walk outside before her family wakes. "It was her own hour, stolen / from yesterday's brown envelope / to pay for tomorrow", and she stands in the yard enjoying a brief respite from a life that is "harnessed to the men's voices, / leather reins holding the day / down to a plod," while "light's power, August after August, / smoked her dry, strong, like a cod on a rack". And she concludes that "one marriage is enough, one day at a time / poured out, one death for a stopper".

But perhaps the best of this particular group of poems is the strong and beautiful THE WOMEN OF TOWN STREET. Here, the housewife sweeps her doorstep, gardens, shops, feels "the children wear down my sill / with their hungers as they enter". The lines glance from facet to facet, from mood to mood of this Town Street world. There is the contentedness of "the cat snores / nothing darkens my horizon / rain is welcome." There is the time-pressed urgency of "wearing my shroud I rush from room to room / each window / a bell ringing in the sky". And there is the wry acknowledgement that dreams are richer than life of "also at dawn / I lie in ditches like a piece of water / in my still form / I'm dazzling".

Other poems turn to wider themes. THE MYSTERIOUS DR MOURNING arrives "beset by the neighbors' little dogs / one yap at a time", and of him the poet says: "We called you, and waited hours. / Now your reminiscences / at our bedside are terrible." And in WALL PAINTINGS: A SHORT HISTORY OF CIVILIZATION, subway graffiti remind the poet of ancient European rock paintings—"Six stops. How many shamans / this tribe has, and so many temples"—and atavistic terrors overtake her in that twentieth century cave where, as in the caves of earliest civilization, "the marks scream: worship and fear me".
To sum up, several poems in this collection strike me as too slight, or perhaps simply not fully-realized. But most are of a remarkably high order, and half a dozen accomplish that most difficult feat of all: they soar from the specific into the universal. For an example of Dorman at this highest level of achievement I can do no better than quote in its entirety the poem SECRETS:

The wounded soldier, drab guts
spilling from his opened side,
whispers his secrets to the universe
His cold lips continue to move
as his bowels fall folded and quiet.

The woman lying with her feet
in the stirrups describes our poor
mystery in explosions of blood
and the cannon ball of a baby’s head.
She screams, nothing is private,
the doctor stitches up the torn mouth
to keep fresh news from pouring out.

In a sunken bed the old man
becomes the guest of his bones;
they hold all he is tight, tight,
as a cherishing fist; little flesh
left but the lips’ purple membrane
that spills a last trickle
from his stopped spring

The hiss of energy must be the universe
talking back over the erased tape
of soldier, mother, old man, a giving
and taking of secrets which are not,
which are broadcast through the black
barrel our mote illuminates

Dorman’s first collection (Poems, Ohio State University Press, 1970) was a National Council of the Arts selection. Without question these poems should bring her even wider recognition.

R.E. Sebenthal