Special thanks to:

Gerry Givnish and Frank Vavricka  
The Painted Bride Art Center

Patricia Nelson Silver, Graphics

The Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

The National Endowment for the Arts

The Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines

Painted Bride Quarterly, Inc., is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization. Contributions made payable to Painted Bride Quarterly, Inc., are tax-deductible.

ISSN 0362-7969

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<th>Subscription</th>
<th>$5 regular</th>
<th>$10 library</th>
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527 South Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19147
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ITEM: ME

The air is sticky as hot asphalt. I sit in a room shuttered against the hammering August sun, amber light in which I am trapped, a fly in resin, petrified in mute struggle.

Elsewhere my hash is settled, elsewhere a yes or a no is patted into a lardy compromise by four sweating hands, elsewhere I am an item on an agenda near the bottom, whose pension will be fixed by the roll of earlier business and what happens to be left at the yawning end.

I do not think meetings should be held on my life in which I am the table, the coffee, the real slate blackboard. I will not take this lying down or hanging up.

Marge Piercy
ARCHIPELAGO

_for Jonny_

Seasonal, like a plant
that blooms in a desert.
For months nothing stirs
on baked cracked hills,
discards from a kiln.
Then after the soft rains
you can’t see the ground
for the tangle of succulents
lush and twining.
Crowding gold cups gape
wide for the wind
scattering pollen
till the air shimmers.

We meet like dry sticks
scraping. A little sawdust,
claim grinding on claim,
the bang of hard ideas,
the rasp of opposing needs.

We meet like travellers
on an escalator in the busy
subway, one riding up
while the other is lowered.
They set down the luggage
each is carrying and semaphore
wildly.
We meet like angler
and bucking bass and for
a moment before the line
snaps and the hook is
spat out in a cloud
of blood, a baleful
glancing look is exchanged.

We meet like Stanley
and Livingston deep in the heart
of darkest fantasy, and as
one approaches brooding
on death and the other
on lecture tours and headlines,
the first words are spoken:
Did you pick up the mail?
What, you mean, you didn’t
bring my pills?

Yet always we do meet
as we grow older and more
ourselves, we meet and meet
again flashing in and out
of trouble, we meet
as the decades swell and buckle,
openly in cafes, clandestinely
on corners, at apartments
camped in overnight
scattered through ramshackle cities
we meet and always
you are one of the friends
I think of in my life.
Yes, sometimes we meet
and it bursts into our own
season, fierce spring just born
butting, the sun young
and standing high and fiery
at the equinox, unscreened
by leaves, the buds still closed
but swelling, the wind strong
and salty. The dead
grass is pushed aside
by new blades coming
and every dusk the spring
peepers chorus joy from popping
throats deep in the marsh.
Season of plowed furrows, at night
the hunting owl, of seeds and mud,
the time of the hard wind
that quickens, the weightless
rapping caress of the wind.

Marge Piercy
ARRIVING

People often labor to attain
what turns out to be entrance
to a small closet
or a deep pit
or sorrow like a toothache of the brain.

I wanted you: I fought you
for yourself, I wrestled
to open you, I hung on,
I sat on my love as on the lid
of a chest holding a hungry bear.
You were what I wanted: you
still are.

Now my wanting
feeds on success and grows
like a cowbird chick in a warbler’s
nest bigger by the hour, bolder
and louder, screeching and gaping
for more, flapping bald wings.

I am ungainly in love as a house
dancing, I am a factory chimney
that has learned to play Bach
like a carillon, I belch rusty
smoke and flames and strange music.
I am a locomotive that wants
to fly to the moon.
I do not yet believe how
you love me, but I am quite
willing to be shown. Prove me,
prove me again. I am
thirsty for demonstration.

Without the periodic missing,
without the lacks and the longings,
without the weekly partings
like amputations, how could I
live? Happiness frightens me,
I think I should wear black
on black like a Greek village woman,
making signs against the evil eye
and powder my head white. Though I try
to hide it I burn with joy like a bonfire
on a mountain, and tomorrow
and the next day make me shudder
equally with hope and fear.

Marge Piercy
MY MOTHER'S NOVEL

Married academic woman ten
years younger holding that microphone
like a bazooka, forgive
me that I do some number of things
that you fantasize but frame
impossible. Understand:
I am my mother's daughter,
a small woman of large longings.

Energy hurled through her
confined and fierce as in a wind
tunnel. Born to a mean
harried poverty crosshatched
by spidery fears and fitfully
lit by the explosions
of politics, she married her way
at length into the solid workingclass:
a box of house, a car she could
not drive, a TV set kept turned
to the blare of football,
terrifying power tools, used wall
to wall carpeting protected
by scatter rugs.

Out of backyard posies
permitted to fringe
the proud hanky lawn
her imagination hummed
and made honey,
occasionally exploding
in mad queen swarms.
I am her only novel.
The plot is melodramatic,
hot lovers leap out of
thickets, it makes you cry
a lot, in between the revolutionary
heroics and making good
home-cooked soup.
Understand: I am my mother's
novel daughter: I
have my duty to perform.

Marge Piercy
WHAT SHE TELLS HERSELF
BEFORE DIALING THE NUMBER
SHE NEVER HAS TO LOOK UP

All through the fall I would say, I love him more than he loves me. I know it, I acknowledge it, but he does love me somewhat, he loves me sometimes, he loves me somehow and that has to do. Besides, loving is the better part of it, the richness is in the loving and I choose to do it freely, I choose. Anyhow I couldn’t bear not to see him, I couldn’t rise in the morning if I did not know I would be fed eventually with his presence. Moreover it’s not important, it’s trivial that I love him, it’s just a sidecar to my wheeling life, I can afford the folly, I work hard, I can afford the silliness of loving him passionately. Anyhow maybe he’ll come to love me, he has to come to love me soon or after a while, and besides, I can’t help it.

Marge Piercy

12
WILL WE WORK TOGETHER?

You wake in the early grey
morning in bed alone and curse
me, that I am only
sometimes there. But when
I am with you, I light
up the corners, I am bright
as a fireplace roaring
with love, every bone in my back
and my fingers is singing
like a teakettle on the boil.
My heart wags me, a big dog
with a bigger tail. I am printed
with your face like
a new coin. My body wears
sore before I can express
on yours the smallest part
of what moves me. Words
shred. Poems
are refuse. I want to make
with you some bold new
thing to stand in the marketplace
like a statue of a goddess
laughing, armed and wearing
flowers and feathers.
Like sheep whose hair makes
blankets and coats, I want
to make from this fierce sturdy
rampant love some useful thing.

Marge Piercy
painting by Colleen Browning
LYNN LONIDIER:
book review


A Chinese friend called this morning to tell me that when Charles Olson was staying in Campeche, twenty-five Mayan women came around to use his well. His, the only well in walking distance. Coincidence that the morning I start this book review on Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time*, my informer calls to tell me she woke to Olson’s voice uncoiling from the radio, drifting in and out of her waking. Coincidence also that I happened to be reading the *Popol Vuh*, sacred book of the ancient Quiche Maya when I started the Piercy book for the first time. Twenty-five Mayan women wind around a well, and four hundred Mayan soldiers are hurled into the sky and become stars—friends to two brother heroes who have just turned into the sun and moon. Piercy’s protagonist Consuelo (Connie) is of Mayan extract. Such wonder that my Chinese friend recently ventured to the Yucatan, after my own trek, after all the Midwesterners, after Olson. (The greyhound buses roar through the middle of Mayan villages.) The landmarks of her slide show were not the pyramids but her encounters with Mayans; where she picked up a conch shell from the sand; a close-up of the avocado sandwich that slipped from her fingers and was floating away on a red tide; the market place where, with a camera slung around her neck, she got mysteriously hit in the head by a Mayan fruit pit. *Her Yucatan! Woman on the Edge of Time* is a kind of bible of our future. Piercy has the Mayan (Chicana) woman Connie living in a contemporary New York City barrio. Connie gets recommitted to a mental institution by a pimp because she strikes out at his brutality. Enter the future which seems a projection of her fantasies: actualization of Piercy’s alertness to societal change and her resulting research into what might happen in the 21st and 22nd centuries.
The institutionalized woman begins to connect with a group of people who speak English differently than we, but you can follow what they say because of the slow drift of tongues that words are always evolving from. It is like dropping in on your own language a hundred years later. As you are introduced to how people live in the future, you get used to, familiar with, even fond of the way they talk. What seems strange at first becomes endearing to Connie and to the reader: people gathered together to make the self-determining ordering of their villages workable. (They hold a great number of meetings.) There are aspects to their lives agreed upon by the society at large. Adolescents have a time to serve in isolation for which they've been in training all their lives.

"Innocente will be dropped into one of the wilderness areas we use," Luciente said. "This is how we transit from childhood to full member of our community."

"Drop her in the wilderness? Alone?" Her [Connie's] voice rose.

"Fasure I'll be alone," Innocente said with indignation. "What point would there be at now? I've been in the woods plenty."

Connie turned to Bee. "Does she stay out there overnight?" They had to be crazy.

"For a week. Then the aunts person selected—advisers for the next years—return for her. Not us." Otter adjusted her elaborate hair.

"But they won't be able to speak to me for three month when I come back," Innocente sounded gleeful. "They aren't allowed to."

"Lest we forget we aren't mothers anymore and a person is an equal member. Three month usually gives anyone a solid footing and breaks down the old habits of depending," Otter went on.

Thus, children in Piercy's future learn how to survive and take responsibility for their well-being. They are removed from the fantasy of access to adulthood in order to experience adult activities alongside the adults:

In one of the spiderweb gardens an old man with a bush of white hair and a gnarled face, arms like driftwood scoured by salt and wind, was picking peas into a basket and weeding into another, with two kids of nine or ten working on either side.

"How come they aren't in school?" she asked. "Is school out already for the summer?"

"That is school," Luciente said, drawing Connie nearer to them.

"This one is lamb's-quarters, no?" one kid was asking.

"Can you eat it?"

"Fasure."
Piercy is unfolding a whole possible likely cooperative society that is no utopia and certainly more workable than our own. A place for any woman to become more than what she was in Precolumbian/Mayan times: whore, fertility goddess, childbearer, tortilla grinder, facilitator of male activities; and certainly, a more appealing place than what the options are now for many low income third-world women: prostitute, childbearer, sole bread earner for an extended family, drug addict, guinea pig for medical experiments.

Piercy stands the present up for scrutiny and looks in both directions, past and future. With the Mayans, every day was a special day out of a designated span of celebration, similar to the observances of the people of Piercy’s conceived future:

“We have tens and tens of holidays,” Jackrabbit boasted, “For famous liberators. For important events, like the domesticking of corn and wheat. The turning of the sun north and south....”

Utilizing what I call a “jump paragraph”—a flashback but more economical of word—Piercy thrusts her protagonist not only into the future but into times past. One moment Connie is in solitary confinement:

. . . . The room stank of old shit. She did not look around for fear of finding it. She barged on the door, hoping they would come and let her use the bathroom, but no one appeared.

In the very next sentence, new paragraph, the author plunks us elsewhere:

She was sitting in the Boca de Oro, Comida Chinas y Criollas, a small Cuban-Chinese restaurant with family-sized booths on 116th Street.

I like that paragraphs do not need to be linked together by She remembered when or She fell asleep and dreamed she was back at the Boca de Oro. The reader can make the gap as we often jump in our thoughts to entire other areas of thought. Transitional sentences at beginnings and ends of paragraphs can become a tired mode, without relief.

My Chinese friend senses she’s related to Mayans by way of epicanthus and Mongolian birthmark. It is conjecture on my part that Piercy has researched the Mayans thoroughly in determining them as progenitors for Consuelo/Connie—the “woman on the edge of time.” If not, then by way of the flamboyant Spanish language, the Mayans have affected Piercy invisibly. Glimpse such influence in Connie’s description of her own daughter as she encounters her in the future, as prototype of “. . . any brown-skinned girl child of seven or so with golden-brown eyes.”
... She will love her own brown skin and be loved for her strength and her good work. She will walk in strength like a man and never sell her body and she will nurse her babies like a woman and live in love like a garden, like that children's house of many colors. People of the rainbow with its end fixed in earth, I give her to you!

Though Connie is turning over the daughter she lost to the people of the future, in such giving she could as well have been addressing the cerebral, ancient Mayans—the Mayan rainbow hierarchy who clothed themselves like rainbows and spoke in rainbow volutes, their transcendence of language evidenced in glyphs translated by Donald J. Wiseman as quoted in von Hagen’s *The Ancient Sun Kingdoms of the Americas*. “The fan of heaven shall descend, / the wreath of heaven, / the bouquet of heaven shall descend.” Cartoon glyph characters with rainbows coming out of Mayan mouths: so formalized, so obsessive in tropic bird forms of repeated patterns. The mollusk shell assigned to represent the figure zero. Volutes again! And so destructive, the blood letting—it’s enough to make twenty-five Mayan women draw the source of their own worth up the spiral well.

Marge Piercy conjures an implied synchronization in *Woman on the Edge of Time*—Consuelo’s ennobled Mayan heritage/Connie’s denigration as a third world woman in contemporary ghetto America—the past and present combine into something better: the future as compromise:

“Circulating luxuries pass through the libraries of each village—beautiful new objects get added and some things wear out or get damaged. Costumes, jewels, vases, paintings, sculpture—some is always on loan to our village. And always passing on. Some are for personal wearing, at feasts and rituals. Some are for enjoyment in the children’s house, the meetinghouse, the fooder, the labs, the diving gear factory. Outside as we walk around.”

“But you have to give them back. You don’t get to keep anything for yourself! It all belongs to the government?”

“We pass along the pleasure . . .”

What pleasure that Piercy’s future is on milpa (corn-planting) schedule:

“Why isn’t anybody in a hurry? Why are the kids always underfoot? How can you waste so much time talking?”

Jackrabbit waved his arms windmill fashion. “How many hours does it take to grow food and make useful objects? Beyond that we care for our brooder, cook in our fooder, care for animals, do basic routines like cleaning, politic and meet. That leaves hours to talk, to study, to play, to love, to enjoy the river.”

reviewed by Lynn Lonidier
EDITH NEFF:
portfolio of paintings

"Figures in the Park, With a Passing Shower"
"Portrait of my Family, Not Far from Where I Grew Up"
"Figures in a Landscape of the Mind"

paintings by Edith Neff
DARWIN DID THE AUTOPSY

the gypsy queen
died like a tortoise
while her followers
waited in the lobby
like a week-long
documentary on the
Galapagos Islands.

Stephen Burke
DIANE DEVENNIE

SPEAKING IN CODES/ATRICK OF THE TRADE

sending flowers to the cemetery in order to communicate was not a rare occurrence in fact it had become quite a habit in later years it was an enjoyable code, a pleasant deviation from the normal boring codes i much preferred; posies meant attack and roses meant knives and black-eyed susans meant don’t spare the women and dandelions meant males under 13 could be useful and bachelor buttons meant beware of molotov cocktails and chrysanthemums meant no need to respond and the number of flowers would tell you the time and the date and a few violets thrown in on the side meant i love you and i wish retiring meant something other than death and a lily.

Diane Devennie
THE REST OF THE TIME

Old spoons and knives keep history
eating 3 square meals a day, fortunately.
Otherwise socialism might not finish
the dance, and look, the orchestra
doesn't seem a bit tired.
Good bye isn't really good at all
especially with this rotten weather we're
"having." With a fantastic collection of
kicks and jabs, the Rock Island Line
goes bankrupt, so there, Nikita, you won't
bury us, we'll just co-opt you. No doubt
you are being entertained by Ledbelly now
in the energy pool of the afterlife,
soon to be joined by my mother.
My parents turned me on to folk music
and as they sing it in the mountains,
I hate to see her go.
Will the circle be unbroken
In the sky, Lord, in the sky?
Personally I think the circle is too
simple a geometric shape for governments
or for the afterlife. Everybody knows what
they say about bread, so I'll just
slide it on into the oven at 360º,
then wait an hour.
Sometimes it's easy to wait,
the rest of the time history does it for us.

Allan Kornblum
THE POSSIBILITY OF BEAUTIFUL WALLS

1

Sheer, means one
can see through the
door to the sheer backyard
or, turning 180°, the
steep front slope.

2

And there's the rake.
O rake, I did not mean
to let you rust although
I saw you in the grass
and did not pick you up.

3

There is a possibility of beautiful walls.
In fact I am running my
fingertips over the surface of a
few tv programs about a bid, the wind, and a piano.

Allan Kornblum
ONE SOCK OFF, ONE SOCK ON

but Jews don't name their
their sons "John"
one sock off, leg in a cast
oh mother, you nursery rhyme

one sock off, one sock on
once poets took up the pen
but i flick a switch
my typewriter buzzes

my heart appears on a page
falling down stairs
like the crazy greek myths
i get up and forget my other sock

fix a dripping faucet with hal
light up a joint
for my unborn children
a toast, l'chaim!

does life begin with
the first sock,
then end when the second
is finally remembered,

and slowly pulled past
the toes, up and around
the ankle goes the second sock
the second person is marriage
is sex, the embrace
thrashing excitedly
then separate, butt to butt
they sleep to face the next
day and the next
one sock off, one sock on
what else did i forget to do,
these potato chips on the floor!

parties can be rough
on an old house
that drip was driving
me up the wall, and soon

the other faucet will
leak, like cancer
there's always another leak
even now,

my mother has slipped
out of her body
still, we make our
home repairs as best we can

Allan Kornblum
Mother Tongue, by Barbara Mor, Athena Press, 
P.O. Box 9779, San Diego, CA 92109. $3.00.

Soulscat, by Harvey Mudd. Second Porcupine Press, 
P.O. Box 548, Santa Fe, NM 87501. $5.00.

These two poets, both born in California but living now in northern New Mexico, are unusual in having produced first books that are substantial (they really are "books" and not pamphlets) and whose structural and thematic integrity deeply pleases.

Barbara Mor's collection is really one long poem, in eleven sections, that takes off from and answers these lines from Gary Snyder's "Praise for Sick Women":

The female is fertile, and discipline 
(contra naturum) only
  confuses her
Who has, head held sideways
Arm out softly, touching,
A difficult dance to do, but not in mind.

Mother Tongue demands concentration and involvement from the reader such as few poems do nowadays. It demands intelligence. And, as I've said, it satisfies, it pleases.
In the first four sections of *Mother Tongue* the reader is made to realize and accept the “I” of the poem as far more than that of a single, female, fragmented “self.” It’s not fashionable to speak in tongues these days, to identify with and give voice to archetypal or elemental forces. But this Barbara Mor does.

Silence
the ancient clout
was put on me
by love whistling all his swords
across the sky one night
Silence he said
to stop the stigmatic flow
of bright red oracles
from my woman’s mouths
Silence
to let the sun sing
and the moon swallow darkness


For me the most immediately gripping section of *Mother Tongue* is the longest one, in the middle of the book, where Mor gives ballast to, or anchors, her mythic superstructure with some very specific examples drawn from her own sexual experience with boys, men, Man.

& when I was 7
pulling school doors
clutch & scrape of their weight
at noon
opening the dark hall
where jimmy jones stood
the redhaired fierce boy
everyone hated
his hand grasped my chest
squeezed what
did not exist
his face against my face
he said
& you give milk
& that place burned like fire
with the shame
of animals
years before womans breasts
grew there
but i did not answer
but kept on opening
the heavy door into me
like an iron lover

This section is full of such questions—all aggressively posed by boys
or men (“have you ever been screwed” “hey you got a cunt?” “do you
come slow or fast/ & can i fuck yr ass” “& how do you like it/ & do you
do knob jobs/ & do you give head . . .”):

& a job interview
a few days later
fat man leaning across the counter
of a So. Hollywood
quick-knit
sweater factory
clutching my left breast
with a hairy fist
chewing around his cigar
are you firm?
he asked
as he jiggled my flesh
& pushed in my nipple
with his thumb
like a button on a soft
machine
& i stood silent
& got the job
typing invoices
$1.25 an hour

Silence, “confusion,” is indeed the response, until she realizes—in
the process of the poem—“where/the real power was/your obsession
with my anonymous/fact.” And until, in section nine, where the real
“statement” of the book emerges, “the time has come/to make a noise/
as loud and strong/as silence was.” And here it is:
the world is always
born from my mouth

and man
like a hired clerk
writes it down

creation
like an ocean
flows from me

and man is a clever fish
in the flood

I will hear my shout
from another flesh

I bellow
until the echo
knows my name

I am power
I am original
I am woman

I push
into the white and silent air
my bloody poem

*Mother Tongue* is a tremendously strong book. It challenges and
stimulates the memory and the mind. And, like all good arguments, it
provokes a deep and thoughtful response.

Harvey Mudd’s *Soulscat* is subtitled “Poems 1960-1973,” and is al-
most three times as long as Barbara Mor’s 60-page *Mother Tongue*. The
poems are divided into eight sections—with each section focusing on a
particular subject or theme—and present a clear, though somewhat
muted, autobiographical line. Mudd insists that he speaks in *personae*
and that his poems are “anatomy” and “complaint” as well as “auto-
biography.”

...the organization of this book will give no clue,
chronological or otherwise, to the nature of the
author’s *personae*. The organization of the book,
in fact, runs against that grain, searching out
themes as opposed to selves.
Be that as it may, to read this book straight through, in sequence (and it is essential to do so), is to receive a strong and deep-felt sense of one man’s life against a background of war, violence, political nightmare, and the increasing rip-off of the earth. Whereas Mor sees her problem in archetypal terms (how to give voice to a Self against cruel and ignorant odds), Mudd speaks from a more familiar existential viewpoint. We start with ourselves, he would say (“autobiography”). And—through a more and more determined effort at consciousness (“anatomy”)—we may arrive at where we started.

And thus, inescapably, Saul, who, while voyaging toward Port Damascus, saw extraordinary light, saw himself the sinner bound for hell, saw the bruised god resurrected and in heaven, who then became himself, Saint Paul.

Thus destiny, perhaps: we become who we are.

But the book ends with no such resonant conclusion, nor with one qualified even by that important “perhaps.” In an “epilogue,” in a single poem entitled “The Fool,” he realizes “That I am ambulatory still/in this age of propulsion/rage, and mega-yield/is statistically/astounding....And that I create myself/carefully/with words/amidst so much horror/and confusion/is simply idiotic ....” Idiotic or absurd, the effort must be made. And in this book he begins it.

In a biographical note to Soulscoat we are told that Harvey Mudd has “worked as a public interest lobbyist.” Several of his poems, particularly those in the third section (entitled “I sense the continent diminish”) carry on this work. Mudd, like Peter Wild, is an active environmentalist—meaning that his body and mind (and not merely his sympathies and pocketbook) are engaged in trying to conserve what he loves. We feel this especially in poems like “Mount Tamalpais, Poem About the Water,” and “I Weep for Whales.” But—again existentially—a sense of frustration, a sense of being helpless to destroy the larger absurdities of ruthlessness and greed, prevails. Who in our time is immune to this feeling? Even in middle-class America we know too well the desperation of these lines, from Mudd’s fine poem “The Near Sierra” (a full version of his work reprinted from the anthology Far Neruda, For Chile):

34
... and tell again
what happened when Neruda died:
how the black guardia came,
as in his dream,
and broke through the doors
of his empty house;
how they, the deaf men
of steel and mule skin,
the librarians of death
and gasoline...

And they are burning
the rain
and the sea
and the wind.

So why read him? To know this—the voice of another strong, compassionate poet who makes song from the desperate crazy smug bleakness of our time (“Father, it’s a bad age we’re in, but you deny it./ You remain the optimist, a kind of virgin, religiously ignorant./ But listen, can’t you hear the wind rising in the ass end of your golden calf?”) These poems, carefully chosen and arranged, will move you. And some of them (“Magdalene,” “Near Sierra,” “The Unborn Father”...) are magic.

Finally, both books are handsomely produced. Mother Tongue is richly and intelligently illustrated with photographs (Helen McKenna) and drawings (Kris MacDonald). And Souls at is one of the finest printing jobs done by a small press that I’ve ever seen.

reviewed by Karl Kopp
TIME IS LIKE A SMALL PIANO

Sitting down is sometimes just as hard as standing up
Moving into a space more difficult than leaving one
Or
Remaining in the same position
Coming into a room
Action, or
Being in a room, inaction
The molecules of water and alcohol interpenetrate, thus
Starting with two equal portions, mixing them
You get
Less than twice their amount
Charlie did this with cheap red wine and as a result
Got less than twice as high
In more than
Half the time
No one liked him particularly
Anyway
He was short and always trying
To move around
In tall spaces.

dotty leMieux
INERTIA

when albert einstein came to lecture at my high school, he was 105 years old and in good shape, he refused to die because, as he said: i am a body in motion; it takes more than old age or a brick wall to stop me. i am molecular man. something like a rain of dogs.

my mother hated housework because she didn’t have anywhere to go. i love it because there are so many other things i could be doing.

boring. i used to sit on top of my desk and look off at nothing. there was no one else in the room. sometimes i would stand on one foot on the clothesline in my mother’s backyard. it was tied between two sturdy trees. i would climb one of the trees and step out onto the line, not far enough away from the tree to be unable to reach it if i started to fall, but not leaning against it either. i made sure that at no point was my body in contact with the tree. and there i stood. unmoving.

in this book when you step through the window something very scientific happens and you land on solid air which lets you down easy, then you get your legs back and you are like anyone else, moving under your own power.
i was going somewhere, on a long trip. i was on a greyhound bus with richard and ahead of us was this old guy who drank most of a bottle of whiskey and then never got back on the bus after the rest stop. we rode on for two whole days with that whiskey bottle rolling on the floor, bumping into things. the other passengers pretended not to notice any of this, that someone was left behind or that his bottle was still partially filled and hitting against the seats as the bus moved through utah. i wanted several times to reach for it and help myself, but what if the old man had a disease?

i like driving at night when you are still hundreds of miles from where you are going. the road takes over and all you have to do is keep the car pointed straight ahead. you are in your own country. no, you are a celestial body and you wink at other celestial bodies who pass through your universe like a comet greets a falling star.

i wonder what it's like to be a universe.

roads at night are like pages that once you are on them you continue along until you come to the end of them, or in this case a cross road, a traffic light.

no matter what you are doing, sooner or later you have to pause. i was always better at the pausing than the doing, once i had a job in an office and they said did i want to become a secretary with higher pay? and while i was there with them saying it, yes, i did. but when i left on my vacation, i thought about all that getting up in the morning, and i just never went back.

racehorses that you have to walk after the race until they are cooled off enough to go to their stalls.

my mother was a mother who probably should have been something else, but she couldn't stop. sometimes when you stop it takes everyone by surprise. it is usually easier for fathers to stop than it is for mothers.

work. my first job in the bookstore, smoking dope and making the hours go by very very slowly. sitting in my booth answering the phone. when you are somewhere you can't
leave, you are not responsible for your time. hours and hours of answering the phone, getting up later and later in the morning, then they fired me because i was having too good a time. on their time.

isaac newton under the apple tree. when the apple fell on him, it was like singing, oh don’t sit under the apple tree, with anyone else but me . . . and yelling eureka, all at the same time.

nobody likes to be taken by surprise.

then i sold ladies’ garments in filene’s basement. every body was like every other body, the store was full of bodies in motion. bodies and bodies and more bodies. apple flesh. i stayed behind my counter and when they were especially rude or demanding, i pretended not to hear them. this made them furious, but i was only following newton’s first law of motion.

you can sit in front of a typewriter for three or six hours and not write a single word and you say to yourself: what was i doing all that time? and the answer is: nothing.

if you want to have no responsibilities for a long period of time, ride the trains. you have less responsibility in airplanes but for a shorter time. buses are still my favorite, however, because it seems as though on buses fewer people want to talk to you than on trains. but buses are so slow and so boring that you often find yourself wishing you had arrived, and that defeats the whole purpose.

when i was very young, five or even younger, i used to go for walks. long walks, as much as a mile, all by myself. always in a straight line. i would walk out my front door and make one turn to the left. then i would walk until i came to a cross street, and sometimes i wouldn’t come to a cross street at all, and so i’d say to myself: i will walk until i come to a driveway, only there wouldn’t be any driveways either, i had walked so far from my own neighborhood. finally, i would come to the gates of the cemetery and that was as good as my driveway, so i’d turn around and head for home. one of the houses i passed on my walks always had a purple jewel
delivery truck parked in front of it; it was a regular landmark. one day i met my mother on the way back, and she said: don’t you ever go off like that again young lady; you had me worried to death.

nancy gave me five valium when i took the train cross country, one for each night and then some. i would stay up late in the club car and then go to my seat, pop a valium and sleep through two or three states.

when i think about that train ride, it was only for three or four nights, but it seems like an era.

when you talk on the telephone it is like being in two places at the same time. i am here and i am in boston. i am here and i am in new york. i am here and i am across the street with nancy. the only difference is: she is drinking brandy and i am not.

these people were all young volunteers in the peacetime army. the fat girl wore her dog tags on the outside of her tee-shirt. three of them had made it out of the car and up the embankment. the fourth was trapped inside the car. we kept telling them they had better turn off the ignition switch. the fat girl said: i have glass in my hand. he was drunk. i don’t suppose it would do any good to say i told you so. we did all the things you are supposed to do when you haven’t a flashlight or knowledge of first aid, we gave them our coats and let them sit in our back seat until the ambulance came. when they got the man out of the wreck, his body was a little mixed up. he had tried to go through empty space when his path was blocked with solid objects. the man was living proof of isaac newton’s life work.

even when i am lying down with a good mystery novel, things keep happening in my stomach. sometimes i can hear them and they distract my attention. in school i had an easy time sticking to the subject. as i grow older my mind comes to rest more and more often. just now i lost a good thirty seconds’ concentration staring into my lap.
when you fall through empty space, you are not aware of the sensation of falling. Einstein said: gravity has no effect on falling bodies. if you put a handkerchief and the Washington monument into a bell jar, they will hit the ground at the same moment. if you put them into empty space, they will hit nothing at the same moment. that is: they never will.

In political demonstrations going limp is a form of passive resistance. in daily life it can be a hindrance to accomplishment. the vacuum halted in mid rug, the bread risen until its glutens will no longer support it. the poem hanging poised over the page forever.

and when you can’t sleep at night. those restless feet. those pictures behind the lids that aren’t dreams. those sounds that are neither in the house nor in the ear. the time i took acid and tried to explain it all: the express train of thoughts, headless images, a rushing off in all directions, changing. like a body in perpetual motion. i said: i think that life is a very elaborate rube goldberg machine.

dotty leMieux
THE BACK SEAT

everything that has gone wrong
accumulates in the back seat
of the auto we abandoned
because it refused to run on lust.

it sits in the backyard
of your childhood home
a place for the dog
to confirm all his fears.

the neighborhood vandals occasionally
try to dayglodesecrate the corpse
& stumble away without spirits
their heads filled with white noise

i'd like to tow that heap away
& dump it in the sea
a singles bar for fish & crustaceans
but there is something in the back pages
of Road & Track
which warns me against
defying the dictates of Detroit:
A car has been left to rot
& all America
shall zero in on it
depositing the remnants
of abrupt wet dreams.

the next time i catch you
in the back seat
stewing in my own juices
it will be all over between us.

Larry Zirlin
SOLILOQUY

I was born of a woman
sweeter than her mother’s
whispered words.
I imagine
they slowly tugged me
into the light heat
of a ten o’clock Carolina
Sunday morning.

Sometimes I can almost hear
the Baptist hymns
that surged at the house;
hear them tearing
through the screens,
feel them washing me
in the blood
of the sanctified lamb.

At times
I have come very close
to remembering
how the midwife smelled
as she held me close
and breathed
her warm woman’s breath on me.

I grew up
in the anciently human love
of women
whose barely audible conversations
drifted through shady rooms
and tucked me into afternoon sleep.
And I would dream
of people walking to church,
shoes in hand,
their feet hushing
across the dry earth
where the fine red dust
mushroomed up,
clinging to pants and scorching
the hems of long cotton dresses.

Often I have visions of girls;
the bibliography of my race etched
in shades of mauve and ochre,
in their beautiful, fluid faces.

There are flashes of smiles;
dibs and dabs of teeth, lips, dimples
and eyes
so full of the pain and pride
of being young and female
they danced.

I learned to love
in the wet/heavy heat
of August evenings
when “I love you”
was whispered
like the beginning
of a holy ritual.

I wrote my love
on telephone poles,
cut it into
the sun-softened asphalt,
declared it openly
and internally.

I loved everyone,
the faces blur
but now and then
the names,
Mary Grace Edna,
wander through
my semi-conscious.
But when the girls
in their cotton dresses
vanished into the women
they always were,
I was sucked into
the vacuum left
by the little women of my summers.

We all know
that the years
have a way of burying themselves
under a soft fluff
of their own making
and what with growing older
I almost forgot
how wild, hot, cinnamon cider
sweet and easy
loving was;

I had forgotten
how tenderly
a woman could reach
into your mind
and touch your soul.

Forgive me,
I forgot briefly
how to care.

Frederick Johnson
A MATTER OF UNDERSTANDING

"Quot homines, tot sententiae"
—Terence

So much depends upon
The tightrope walker's feet
Sliding along the taut wire
Meters from tragedy
There is no net and the sun
Stabs at his eyes.

As his shadow self
mimes from the valley floor
One cardboard leg scissors forward
The other follows until
He couples with the other side.

Now the crowd gathers
One transfixed eye demands
What awe/ful power drives him
To waver between heaven and hell
He answers only
Glory
In their minds
Glory nudges memory and desire
Stirs the dull aches
of faded dreams
of fame of money
They have need of those
And claim their reasons
As his own.
He senses their mistake
wishes he could tell them
No—it is not that
I never wanted/money
I never chased/fame
What I do is an act of . . .
But they have disappeared.

So much
depends upon our ability
To explain ourselves
pursued by unicellular phantoms
Along the red clay banks
Of the Euphrates
But most are dumb to tell
The impatient host
Their lives are controlled
By that same falling stone
And most are unable to respond
"I have felt your soul
Clap hands and sing."

So
Much depends on
So little
Of what we actually say
And once uttered moves on
Decaying more and more
Until it can no longer pierce
These silent ears.

Frederick Johnson
A triad in 3 or 4 parts moves (every voice moves up) to the nearest chord tones of the triad which is a half step lower . . . and so on (or vice versa)

it is an expression of contrary motion in which two forces of different kinds are pushing in opposite directions simultaneously.

(voice leading)

(or vice versa)

(root movement)

There are many realizations of CHORD PROGRESSION—and many variants—or complex mixes of this idea with others
one realization: in a 4-part texture, one of the voices (either the lowest or the highest) goes to the 7th of the next chord \textit{if that} is the nearest tone in the progression. An interesting phenomenon occurs: \textit{that} voice ends up an octave further away from the other 3 voices than it started, after one complete cycle of 12 chromatic triads. So in addition to contrary motion (above), there is oblique motion within the voice-leading phenomenon.

with a mixed grouping of instruments: when all instruments have entered on the first chord, move anytime during a breath (wind instruments) to the next chord tone, play that tone (any number of breaths) till you hear that everyone has reached the chord you are playing, then anytime during your next breath, move on to the next chord tone, waiting as before till everyone else has arrived before moving on. All other instruments: use your own full breathing in a like manner: as a measuring device. Phrase your chord-change notes melodically: use dynamics, timbre, articulation to realize this.

Choices to be made: triads with major or minor 3rd's;
7th's either major or minor: leave to performer choice or schemes of alternation (e.g. every other 3rd major.....)

Shape of piece: one cycle of 12 changes: \\
or going back down: \\
or always starting from bottom: \\
or . . . .

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STAMPING IN THE DARK

for a group of people (as few as 2)

close eyes

count out loud in unison at a slowish tempo up to 12 (try out other numbers) and from then on repeat the counting silently to yourselves at the same tempo. On the (silent) "1" of each grouping stamp one or both feet.

Try to find a common tempo from the way the stamping coincides or fails to coincide, for example if you find yourself stamping ahead or behind most other people, slightly alter your tempo of counting.

Keep eyes closed throughout. After a while, move slowly in the room, perhaps seeking to group yourselves by sound (e.g. getting closer in space to those whose beat you are in close tempo with—or some other idea of spatial arrangement. Determine beforehand how to end the piece.
Cage's "DREAM" dreamed

choose durations - play singly or form clusters
on these notes... repeat softly

moderate, flexible, soft, pedal ad lib

choose randomly from among these lines

sometimes add

don't repeat a line until you've played at least one other
gradually let them break into smaller phrases and
coaalesce into each other

add occasionally some very slight variants of your own.
...continuing from before......

area 1 . . . low register . . . one or two tones: first . . . . . . pulses, regular
a minor 7th below tone of
area 2; second tone any-
where between those two
tones

area 2 . . . middle register . . . one tone, always two players . . . dynamics static
overlapping on that same
or very gradual
long tone
changes

area 3 . . . high register . . . glissandi and modulated . . . . free tempi
tones emphasizing upper
and dynamics
partials of any of the lower
tones; non-melodic.

for 3-6 players who can produce tones in all 3 registers; begin with 2 players in area 2; no more than
2 players in an area at one time; move circularly through areas 1, 2, 3, 1 . . . area 2 must always be
sounding; the first entrance into area 1, if it has been empty, should always be the lower of the two
tones (i.e. the minor 7th below area 2)

Daniel Goode
Glass' *Music in Fifths*, which has no harmonies other than parallel fifths, is appropriately dedicated to Boulanger, the last bastion of common practice harmonic etiquette. *Music in Fifths* consists of two lines a perfect fifth apart. The upper line articulates the 5th c-g and the lower line the 5th f-c. The repetitive structure is used to define the perfect fifth melodically and harmonically.

In later music, beginning with *Another Look at Harmony* ('75), repetitive structure is used to define the cadence. The cadence is traditionally treated as a return to or celebration of the tonic, or as a means of modulation to establish a new tonic. Glass treats the cadence as an entity. The main theme of *Harmony* is the progression f – D-flat – B-double-flat/A – B – E. Both halves of this formula are traditional cadences, with the B-double-flat functioning as an altered subdominant. This displacement and the ensuing I – V – I in E major can be seen as leading back to the f minor, forming a cadence with built-in repetitive tendencies. The cadence, which is the epitome of linearity in traditional music, is merely an everpresent element in nonlinear music.

The harmonic emphasis in Glass' music consists of sustained pedal tones and the use of center-key-related harmonies. Harmonic and tonal plateaux are reached and then sustained for a long time. When there is chord movement, it is as if the whole tone of the music shifts arbitrarily to another plateau, which is then also sustained. Glass has said that he uses familiar harmony because his pieces are very long (up to four hours) and he wants the sound to be accessible.

While in Paris, Glass worked for Ravi Shankar, orchestrating a film score. From Ravi Shankar, Glass first discovered the rhythmic concepts found in Indian music. After spending six months in India, Glass went on to study with Alla Rakha, Shankar's tabla player, in New York. It is from Indian music that Glass learned the additive and subtractive rhythmic structures with their implied counterparts—augmentation and diminution. *Music in Fifths* demonstrates Glass' use of these elements. The piece is made up of groups of ascending and descending eighth notes within a perfect fifth. The first module (repeated section) is grouped as follows:

4 up 2 down 4 up 3 down.

The following module is:

4 up 2 down 4 up 3 down 4 up 4 down.

The third module is:

4 up 2 down 4 up 4 down.

The respective rhythmic cycles are 13, 21, 14. The musical material is virtually unchanged except for the addition or subtraction of eighth-note groups, or even single eighth notes.

*Music in 12 Parts* is a catalog of Glass’ rhythmic techniques. Each of the individual parts describes a specific technique. Parts 1, 3, 4 and 7 use divergent and overlapping figures to produce new patterns. Parts 2, 5, 6 and 8 explore augmentation and diminution within fixed rhythmic cycles. Part 9 features augmentation harmonically as well as rhythmical-
ly. The 3rd, 7th and 6th scale degrees are progressively altered. This ornamentation leads to a highly chromatic texture. The organ line ascends as the melodic minor and descends as the harmonic minor. Four simultaneous key systems are thus implied—that of the root, the 5th above, the 5th below, and the 3rd of the 5th above. The choral music of Einstein on the Beach verbally describes the rhythmic process. The libretto is not composed of words, but rather of solfège syllables (do re mi) and the arithmetical names for the beats. When the pattern is 4 3 2 the singers sing “one two three four, one two three, one two.” The harmonic structure of Einstein is analogous to the additive/subtractive process. The opera is based on the series 5 chords—4 chords—3 chords—2 chords—one chord. The 5-chord theme is the f minor/E major progression of Another Look at Harmony. The 4-chord sequence is a rhythmic expansion f—E-flat—C—D. The f and C harmonies have identical rhythmic patterns, as do the E-flat and D harmonies. The 3 chord sequence sets three key centers (A, e7, B-flat) around a central key of D. Initially, each of the key centers has its own rhythmic identity—dotted quarters for A, half notes for B-flat and eighth notes for e7. All are played over a common 6/8 pattern. As the music develops, the key centers exchange rhythmic characteristics and the original associations are superseded by an overall texture of harmonies and meters. The 2 chord sequence is an alternating arpeggiation of A7 and G7. The figures go through a process of rhythmic fragmentation similar to the additive/subtractive process in which small increments of the original figure are added. Initially, both key centers develop equally, retaining a symmetrical relationship. Gradually, they begin to differ until they are totally different, creating an asymmetrical figure. The two successive asymmetrical figures then mirror one another, forming a doubly long symmetrical figure. The 1 chord music is an A7 harmony undergoing a simple additive process by eighth notes, gradually expanding. Later the figure undergoes the subtractive process returning to the original form.

The formal structure of Glass’ music up to the last part of Music in 12 Parts has been the succession of similar modules, each repeated for a period of time, with a simple transformation from one section to the next. The 12th part of Music in 12 Parts differs in that the principal figure is in fact two distinct harmonic and melodic fragments. Each develops independently, the first harmonically with the introduction of a strong, chromatic bass line, the second rhythmically with a 32-note figure expanding to 214 notes.

In Another Look at Harmony, Glass sought to explore how the evolution of the harmonic material could become the basis for an overall structure. This was to be done without changing the moment-to-moment experience of the music. Expansion and repetition of harmonic gestures, similar to the earlier treatment of pitches and melodic cells, serve this function. Harmonic entities are allowed to exist Their dura-
tions vary but no new chords are added once the vocabulary is estab-
lished. Each chordal structure is an entity, not part of a master har-
monic plan. In traditional music, a set of chords is seen in relation to an
overall harmonic scheme or language, each chord having its implicit
weight as determined by the tonality. Glass allows chords and gestures
to exist for themselves, creating an internal resonance through expan-
sion and repetition. The “isness” of harmony. The music of North Star
is a group of pieces, each less than four minutes long, articulating a sin-
gle rhythmic and harmonic pattern. A harmonic and rhythmic tone is
established, not a progression, which would imply motivation.

Glass’ earliest modular pieces of the mid-sixties would feature two
or three musicians playing figures with different subgroupings of a com-
mon meter. An 18-beat cycle would be divided into: 5 5 8, 6 6 6 and 9
9. By 1967, the music was monophonic (using only octaves and unin-
sions). Emphasis was placed on the rhythmic structure, all of the other
parameters remaining minimal. During this period the Philip Glass En-
semble performed regularly with original members Dickie Landry, Jon
Gibson, Art Murphy, Steve Reich and Glass. The sound of the music
was defined and was loudly amplified into a single fused timbre. In
Music in Changing Parts, the orchestration became extremely dense,
with winds and voices sustaining tones as they appeared in the continu-
ous organ line. As the group became proficient with Music in Changing
Parts, Glass began to notice how different halls create different counter-
melodies by combination of the ensemble’s sound with the resonance
of the hall. His attention shifted from the formal structure of the music
to the phenomenon of sound. Glass’ harmonies are a reinforcement of
the overtone series, with many octaves and fifths. The ensemble is a
mixture of instruments with a predominance of odd-numbered harmon-
ics (organs and saxes) and pure sounding flute and voice. The whistling
melodies in the upper frequencies could be either the combination
tones of lower organs and reeds or flute lines. By 1971 it became clear
that a sound engineer was needed in the ensemble, and Kurt Munkasci
joined the group.

Munkasci amplifies the ensemble by using direct-line outputs from
the organ and close miking (Shure SM57) for the winds. A Neve mixing
board and Altec speakers are used, with a separate monitoring system
for the musicians. A wide spectrum is desired, so Munkasci compensates
for the ear’s preference for mid-range by boosting the upper frequencies
and the lower organ bass lines. The organ levels remain fairly constant
during the performance but Kurt rides gain on the winds. This is due to
the variability of wind sounds depending on the reeds, the mood of the
player, or the density of the part. The voice is blended into the com-
posite sound so as to not give the impression of a lead singer, but the
flute is kept a little louder because of the purity of the sound (absence
of higher harmonics). The chorus in Einstein on the Beach was miked
with stereo pairs of microphones, panning across the stage. Each hall has different acoustics, so the music will differ from performance to performance. The reverberation times of the hall will vary as do the locations of the nodes in the standing waves. The upper frequencies are especially susceptible to differences in the material of the wall because of the shorter wavelengths. A curtain may absorb a high frequency and reflect the lower one. A lighting fixture or a picture frame may leave the bass tones unaffected but reflect the upper partials. This creates variability in perception of the upper frequencies depending on your location in the hall.

The Philip Glass Ensemble is an economic unit, a small business managed by Performing Artservices. Rarely has a composer of contemporary music maintained a working band for as long as Glass has, almost ten years. Because of this he is enabled to write music that takes a great deal of time to be learned. And the music can be properly realized under his supervision. Glass does not allow other musicians to play his scores.

Philip Glass is representative of a new group of independent composer/performers. When writing *Music in 12 Parts*, Glass worked as a plumber, taxi driver, and assistant to sculptor Richard Serra. He is now able to support himself composing music.

To be a composer is to be concerned with time. Composers have stretched time, shrunk it, and made us oblivious to its passage. In the early 50's John Cage showed us that music could be pure time with 4'33". The writings of Stockhausen and the serialists equated sound with time. Pitch is an aspect of frequency which is an aspect of time. Warhol's films Empire and Sleep challenged the cinematic compression of time by letting the film last as long as the real experience. American culture went through a reevaluation of time with interest in Eastern thought and the time-sense distortion experienced under hallucinogens. Ever since radio, and particularly since the development of television, the contrast between the clock time we experience in our workaday lives and a more subjective psychological time has been strongly felt. Composers often reflected these new perceptions. Pauline Oliveros, La Monte Young, Phil Corner, Rhys Chatham, and Charlemagne Palestine among others wrote music featuring very slow, almost unchanging sounds or events. During this period Glass reached his musical maturity.

Classical music is an inherently hierarchical and narrative structure. Dominant ultimately leads to tonic with elaboration in between. Romantic composers prolonged the process through chord substitutions and modulation but ultimately the music could be reduced to what Heinrich Schenker called arline, underlying stepwise structures. Serial composers tried to evade this hierarchy by making each pitch equally...
important and placing emphasis on the intervalllic weights of the tone row. The serial structure, however, had to be unfolded through parametrical transformations, with intelligence of the piece gleaned through an accumulative experience. Glass' music is concerned not with the unfolding of a narrative or the accumulation of parts but with moment-to-moment experience. Each module is self-explanatory. There is no preparation for or anticipation of subsequent modules. Through repetition, the listener is drawn into the sound without being given a specific path. Rich sonority and polylinearity offer numerous options. the listener structures the linear unfolding of the piece.

DISCOGRAPHY

Music in Similar Motion/Music in Fifths Chatham Square Records* (stereo LP 1003)

Music in Changing Parts Chatham Square* (stereo 1001/2)

Solo Music Shandar 83 515 (import)

Music in 12 Parts, I & II Virgin Records, Ltd. CA2010 (import)

North Star Virgin/CBS 34669

*these are available from
New Music Distribution Svc., 6 W. 95th St., New York, NY 10025

Peter Gordon

This article is part of a longer essay written for the book, Music With Roots in the Aether, edited by Robert Ashley, to be published by Schirmer Books in 1978
FIRST RAIN

In the rustling corn
the first rain takes you by surprise
the tractor-driver pulls his sack
over his shoulders
the horse dips its head
hind-quarters smoking
put your old raincoat back on
the tablets in the pocket
are to counteract nostalgia
the rain is deaf in the dust
your beret streaks with blue

Simonotti Manacorda
OUT OF CHINA

I saw the Hopei countryside again
in a dream where a young girl
was gathering the teeth of the dead,
scrapping her small fingers
against the earth’s bright clay.
"These were the ancients,
poor creatures," she said.
"Come visit us again
if you are still alive,
come back when we sow them,
when we have our harvest feast.
And we will eat."
Like someone saying goodbye.
Then she looked at me
for a long time.

Franco Fortini
AUBADE

My dreams change abruptly from wind
in the grass to wheels of a dump truck
grinding up dust.

I wake up nauseous.

My son stomps across the kitchen floor
in hard leather shoes wanting breakfast.

I was dreaming of my mother
standing in a light April rain among
the greening beach plums—young, uncertain
as in the photograph just after her wedding.

I reach across the bed and close the door,
letting my son’s noise fade back like traffic
in the distance, behind the dunes.

My mother tells me for the first time
about her marriage—the feelings
of sadness and loss swelling within her
as she smiled across the table
at my father eating breakfast.

She touches me deeply. For the first time
feelings of hers bloom and illumine mine.
I am sliding back into her, standing
on the dune, eyes slightly disturbed
by the rain falling on waves in the distance
where she stares, the curl of her stomach
barely hinting the unborn child.

The downstairs neighbors bang on their ceiling.
My son hurls himself
against the heat-swollen door.

He crashes it open, explodes me into pieces
like a barn full of hens roosting
on delicate shells—through which a truck
with my own name on its hood
in elaborate script, has run wild
shattering feathers and boards
up through the light April rain.

Betsy Sholl
REFLECTIONS OF THE YOUNGEST DAUGHTER

As I feel my life expand
like circles on the water
where a stone has dropped

my mother's life grows small.

I row to the other side of the lake
watching the distant edge grow
rich and detailed.

She stands on the shore
turning into a speck.

I leave her there shivering
the flesh on her arms loose and rippling
as mine grows firm with each
pull of the oars.

If I had asked her to come
we would have talked, our voices
rising on the water, growing
tense against each other's
till the turtles drifted
away from us like a vision
we did not want.

They are beautiful.
They swim in the darkened water
10 or 12 of them—red lines crossing
the black shells, soft wrinkled flesh
along their sides. They float slowly:
turtles propelling up, down, turning
their backs, their bellies, suspended—
turtles rubbing the side of the boat
as they surface for air.

My mother came here herself once
also rowing alone against the wind
that was so strong she had to
dig the oars like crutches
into the mud and push off
against the shore, docks
the wind driving her
into this same glass-like cove.

She looked down, saw her face
bloated by the water, snagged
among the stems of sea plants,
covered with scum. She slapped
the oar down and shattered it.

If I had brought her with me
I would have asked her questions,
been too full of her life, the wind
blowing wisps of hair on her forehead,
her face mottled by the light coming off the water.
I would not see the plants jiggle and sway
as the turtles pass through.

My own face lies under the leaves.
It takes all evening to come back.
I row quietly, watching for the glow
of windows, the outdoor light flickering
its silent tongue across the water.
I did not mean to worry her,
to make her tighten the curtains
against the mist rising off the lake,
against the ways water changes things.

If I had taken her with me
we would have stayed close to shore
touching the trees that hang down
across the water, pulling ourselves
back by them in the wind
before it faded with evening.

I would not be walking up this path
arms shaking, seaweed still in my hair
startling her into memories
she did not wish to share.

Betsy Sholl
SIMPLICITY  THE GIFT INDEED

The Gift to be Simple, by Robert Peters. Liveright.  
Hardbound $6.95, paper $2.50.

Poetic expression on such subjects as life, love, sex and religion is,  
when handled from an intellectual point of view, commonplace. I have  
rarely, however, seen the same subject matter handled well (if indeed  
handled at all) from the point of view of the simple.

Thus I became nervous at once as I read in the dust jacket of Robert  
Peters' The Gift to be Simple that "Peters becomes Ann Lee, Mother  
founder of the Shakers" and that Ann Lee "born in Manchester, Eng-  
land, in 1736, had no formal education," worked for a hatter, etc. Find-  
ing also that she was regarded by her followers, a sect of simple, unedu-  
cated people, as the Female Christ, several questions entered my mind.

In what terms, I wondered, would the simple Shaker see such things  
as life, sex, religion? How, if compelled to do so, would he or she ex-  
press there convictions in poetic terms? Could a Shaker, in fact, possi-  
bly do such a thing? And, finally, if one did make the attempt, could  
the product be regarded as poetry? Or would it, more than likely, take  
the form of a simple narrative attempt at true verse?

Before getting into the book I decided to take these questions a step  
further, examining my own convictions as to what constitutes poetry.  
Most important, I decided, were such things as: profound metaphor,  
physical imagery, precise rhythmic use of language, simplicity and some  
sort of form, be it loose or restrictive, with which to hold these quali-  
ies together as poetry.

For the uneducated to accomplish this, I decided, would be one of  
two things: coincidence (and therefore unsustainable) or physically  
impossible.

Thus my questions were answered. The Gift to be Simple was sus-  
pect before opening the cover; simply because it was recorded in poetic  
form.

With this in mind I began to read. It took all of two or three pages to  
bring the problem with this theory to light. For Ann, even in the begin-  
nig as a child, is hardly the common simple little girl. Sitting alone in  
er her (and her sisters') bedroom she says—
... The seat is wicker, the
rounds are oak, I sit for hours
rocking, staring at the flickering
candle on the brown shelf.
I see such splendid faces
looking down: angels, fairies, and
the face of Jesus, loving me.

The premonition of her gift is thus implanted. It is firmly estab-
lished immediately thereafter, when, running across a field with a
wounded rabbit, Ann stops at a spruce tree—

... a flame

with light, green fire hovers
over a tree, a ball. A voice
in a strange tongue, an angel's:
Bless!

Ann is indeed gifted; destined eventually to lead the Shakers out of
England to America. Is it reasonable to assume, then, that such a girl
might also be gifted with a means of expressing her story in poetic
form? Not only reasonable, but having completed the book, I now feel,
essential.

The story of Ann Lee, besides being an account of her growth,
religious confirmation and eventual journey to America, is a finely wo-
en mixture of delightful chants, frightening as well as beautiful visions,
a dominant revulsion (even in childhood) towards sex, and above all, the
belief in God. As celibacy seems to play a major part in her convictions,
perhaps it is fitting to explore this aspect of the book a bit further.

Ann's first experience with sex is traumatic. Her brothers chase
“Claremont” into the wheat where she begins to fondle them, urging
Ann to do likewise. Ann watches as, among other things—

: one brother pumped
betwixt her legs, another
breached her chest.

Returning home, she sits by the fire, unable to eat her dinner. The
revulsion remains with Ann throughout childhood and (though she later
bears children) into womanhood and marriage. The full intensity of her
disgust for carnality, though “popping up” throughout the book, is
finest wrought in two of the volume's longer poems. The first is “Abra-
ham Stanley,” an account of Ann's husband (who, incidentally, unable
to handle celibacy, eventually left Ann and the Shakers); her under-
standing of his need for sex; her nearly uncontrollable fear of it. For
lack of space I quote only the final part—
The bed shakes as he doffs his clothes,  
He climbs in. I feel his hair. His
member pushes against my thighs,  
I whimper. He raises my gown. Muscles
along my legs tighten and burn, my
buttocks are taut, my toes cramp. He
plies me apart. "Be quick," I plead,  
"Be quick." I stifle moans in the pillow.

I am dry. The hurt! The hurt!  
He strokes my neck, bites as he pumps
to a pitch. As he falls, there is a
luminous angel: his feet are curly
and he blows a horn. His hair
is silver, his wings are rainbow-
stained. He loves me! He loves me!
My angel loves me!

The second is "Ann's Vision of Eden," an incredibly vivid account of Ann (an invisible spirit, unable to turn away) watching as Adam and Eve make love in the garden of Eden. "Sex," incidentally, is probably a more concise term in this case, as what Ann witnesses can hardly be called love. The poem opens with a string of beautiful images, a sense of peace deep in the luscious paradise. Adam and Eve are as beautiful as their surroundings until they lie beneath the tree. After sex—

The woman rises, eats an apple
from the tree. The tree withers,
struck with blight, pronged,
suited for a desert.

Now come toads, human skulls, a parade of "numerous wailing miniature/humans, hiding their privates with/their hands." The woman walks to the tree and urinates. Blood—

becomes a rivulet of maggots
on the ground, it sucks debris
and flows, surrounding the re-
cumbent man.
The sky darkens. Steam rises. Wasps swarm from the tree and engulf the woman’s face. “. . . she blares. The sour hole of her mouth. Her green teeth blister.” When the wasps disappear, her face is eaten to the skull. She lies again with the man in sex and—

An angel bearing a sword

waits. “Doomed! Doomed!”
A wail of fire. A roar.
Clanging iron
defines the hideous air.

I sense, mainly because of the repetition and intensity of Ann’s nightmare-like experiences with sex, that Peters is somehow deeply involved with this aspect of her life. Has he himself been at some time “tortured” and perhaps “driven out” or “abandoned” (as Ann is) for reasons having to do with sex? Does he admire Ann’s obsessive belief in celibacy? The answers to both these questions, I suspect, would be interesting reading in themselves.

But enough for carnality.

Ann sees the vision of Eden while imprisoned in a madhouse dungeon. Her spirit, however, also ascends. In contrast, I quote in full one of my favorites in the book. The poem is untitled.

I have desired grapes
before the frost cleared from the earth.

I have desired clusters
of blue grapes, the fruit
plumped with juice and
sweetness, dark. I have
desired grapes in this prison,
the singing of thorns against
me, the time of angels awash
in Lamb’s blood, the time of
angels steeped in blood.

The best of my watchmen are
thorns brushed with ambergris,
the stab and pierce, seeking
uprightness and truth: I
blaspheme—my imprisoners say,
I do not keep the Sabbath Day
in the approved way. I preach
the crucifixion of spring
before the gates of summer

open. I desire grapes knowing
that the frost yet eats the bowels
of the mountains.

The only issue I would take with these poems is Peters’ occasional choice of words and phrases which seem not to fit in tone with their surroundings. In “Ann’s Vision of Eden” for instance, as the woman walks to the tree, Peters tells us “She pisseth standing.” If “pisseth” is a word actually used by the people of Ann’s time, the fact that it sounds manufactured makes it nonetheless a wrong choice in this instance. Its false, comical ring detracts from the fearsome power of the majority of the poem. In “Abraham Stanley” we are told that Abraham, while having “sex” (I shall not again make the mistake of using the word “love” synonymous with “sex” herein) with Ann, “pumps to a pitch.” The word “pumps” and its alliteration here are a bit too much for my blood in such a grim situation (Ann is at this time utterly frozen with pain and fright.) Also, it too borders on the comical.

These problems, however, are few. For the most part The Gift to be Simple is a profoundly vivid exploration of a woman’s soul, focusing on its constant trials at both her own and the hands of society. Peters’ style is, as always, shockingly simple; never adorned, never gaudy. Ann herself is revealed. We find she is a wonderfully delicate woman, always alone, and capable of the most intense emotional experiences, be they profoundly beautiful or frighteningly gross. At times she appears mad; at times more sane than you or I.

Another admirable aspect of the book is that Peters has had the professional insight to simply lay the facts before us, letting us, the readers, decide. No doubt for each of us Ann Lee will be something else, and that (for I am sure she was many things) is as it should be. The important thing is that here, in The Gift to be Simple, both she and Robert Peters are indeed a single living spirit.

reviewed by Raymond DiZazzo
ROSEMARY DARKCHIL

RIVER

in my apache memory
i hear legends of my own lifetime:

i am riding across a blackman unearthed
in my father's land

i call him River

in my apache memory
an old woman goes into the forest singing
buffalo-man in my womb
buffalo-man in my womb

i take my mother's blessing from
my apache memory, i take River
between my legs

i am no longer desert

rise
River
rise

Rosemary Darkchild
WHITE WALLS

White walls, one whiter than the next
towards windows in a railroad apartment.
Unfinished white walls, ceilings,
worn wooden floors. To be poor
and to love light. A way to live.
White, and the color of wood.

Sinikka Laine
NO SUPERLATIVES

I have no superlatives for you.  
I bring for you the passing  
of lights along the highway, the sun  
halfway across a graying platform.  
Across horizontal timber  
broken by shadows I see the future.  
Walking along the wooden boards  
the lit portions I steal for you.  

I laminate the straw-hued wood, slivers  
of flimsy wood with glue, bringing  
for you the faintly left scent of wood fibre.  
A railroad terminal light slips through  
steel beams, beams becoming pellucid  
like the sheer strips, transparent  
from sharp electric lights. These lights  
I want for you, but I have no words.

Light columns fall on the wooden boards  
forming a glorious gallery  
in which time stands still.  
I follow the colonnade's processions  
of sunlight and silence to all brilliant  
beginnings of thoughts and promises.  
I follow you to the tips  
of your fingers, but I have no words.

Sinikka Laine
STRING

for Joshua

Ordinarily
I don't like knots
square or double—
they're tied.
Why else is Houdini marvelous?
why else do I say
“no strings attached?”

I'm grateful
to a rumpled boy
whose hands sculpted
air with a mobius
strip of string—
as simple and profound
an art of making

as the roper's in Rome
the potter's in Egypt
the poet's—whoever ties
knots in string
to make an alphabet
for the blind.
I have meditated on string
and found it good—
the bowstring of taut
release, the bowstring
of resounding harmony,
the humility of string
in a string of pearls.

I'll tell this fable: once
the dome of night
shone with stars aligned
on cords of light,
a web like the spider's
symmetrical, tensile
vast.

Whose careless hand
swept through it
no one knows.
We're blind mariners
reaching. Overhead
constellations, bits
of string, loosely
flutter.

Margaret Gibson
STARS

for Megan

The flower is in the almond. I read
at breakfast—breathe yes
and move into a day of edges, surfaces—
lines of a poem trimmed
a walnut table polished to warmth
elsewhere breathing side by side
with the known domestic world,
barely touching.

With a child’s eye in mind
I think to give you
paper stars for your ceiling
a glass to magnify the whorl of a flower—
and remember how one Saturday
you cut an apple into cross-sections
to show me the star inside.

Now apples glow in the kitchen
seeds are stars burning to flower.
You have given me a galaxy
of apples, the world as a nest.
When you sleep, secrets
inside you take fire.
You grow warm. New lives,
dreaming inside you, shine.

Margaret Gibson
photograph by Herbert Friedman
LAUREN SHAKELY

AND THE KIDNAPPED WHISKEY HEIR

Spring back in the dentist’s chair on Monday I overheard a patient claim she’s in love with your picture in the paper. The receptionist says it’s morbid to want a man who’s just been snatched, but the woman says she’ll wait, and I think: it’s no stranger than any story about love, and not just in history.

The next day they report you’re buried underground with only enough water and air for ten days. But this is bluff. Lack of one or the other would do it.

Saturday on the bus I stare at the park. On one block, hundreds upturned faces. Are they praying for rain? No, they’re looking at your father’s window, waiting for you to come home. The rest of Fifth Avenue is clogged with linked couples, but compared to your predicament, the idea of pairs seems silly.

Your father pays them off on Sunday. The police break down a door. The kidnapper says, “Hey, what’s going on here?” You say, “Thanks, and thanks for everything.” But don’t you hate your father really? For his money, for the way he pushes you around. Do you like the taste of whiskey?

Last night a fellow in a bar said I shouldn’t write about people I don’t know. Shall we meet and start a seminar called “Solitude”? We could discuss what I imagined you were doing in the tomb you were never in, and you could introduce reality—explaining dollars, self-sacrifice, and the trap of introspection.

Lauren Shakely
Climbing Into the Roots, by Reg Saner. Harper & Row. $7.95.

Reg Saner’s Climbing Into the Roots reminds me of Whitman in its pure naked simplicity and power. He moves like a mountain stream. You feel the purity of nature in a poem like “Breathing a Fine Wilderness in the Air” where he talks about “stars so close we seem at last among them.”

The first poem in this award-winning book, “Camping the Divide: Indian Peaks, Colorado,” starts off in a “perfectly useless sweat,” like a Whitmanesque lover who “hugs boxcars.”

In his next poem he is “talking to snowflakes.” Again, like Whitman, he can go from a barbaric yawp to tender delicacy. His brain, like his seeds, as he says in “Another Grand Night in the Wide Machine” is “Tarzan and German beer.” In “How the Laws of Physics Love Chocolate” (shades of Wallace Stevens) he climbs “way above the timberline” up into “the tundra where columbines consort with blue trombones.” By now intoxicated with words, the reader feels “the typical sublime of these glacial valleys” and lets Saner gently take him by the hand, leading just up to and not over the cliffs of the imagination. In a “snowy orchard” “flowing south” he stops to drink before passing on to “the stillness where all words are kept.”

Soon enough we “make camp” and find that, high up in the mountains “there can be no real loneliness.” Heady stuff. Inebriate of words, the first part of the book closes with a loving look at dawn.

Part Two begins with the morning after, and in the book’s title poem, “Climbing Into the Roots,” the poet tells us finally that he feels alone, even as he touches roots. Climbing is not easy. But he goes on “Hiking at Night,” “Stoning the River,” dreaming dreams poets have dreamed for a thousand years. In this high, happy world “Above Timberline” “we forget, . . . to make talk, we listen” “The stars surround us. Alone and not alone, the poet remembers. He remembers seeing his
father shave, perhaps his own initiation rite into manhood. And then he
listens again. This time, not to the stars, but to “The Delicate Breathing
of Small Animals.” This is a fine poem about the “winter courage” of
these creatures, too small for most people to even notice, much less ad-
mire. He thinks then about his own son and his “strange love” for him,
symptomatic perhaps of a powerful and secretly provocative relation-
ship. The poems are a narrative, and in the next poem Saner looks up at
“The Moon!” and thinks of “Old Adam’s white rose of time.” As it
was in the beginning, so shall it be now. At the end of the poem he talks
about “the poet’s and everyone’s two-dollar whore.”

Part Three begins by “Listening for Indians.” “The white crosses” of
war come to mind as well as the “Flag” that saddened Lincoln “weep-
ing thumbtacks.” “Flag” is perhaps the single most brilliant poem in
the book. Certainly it is worthy of the company of Whitman’s great
elegy to our 16th president, and one of the best political poems ever.

Part Four talks about history, the moon, Isolation Peak and Fall.
Here in “Fall,” like Frost, Saner shows us the need of being versed in
country things in order to understand why the “sumac must bleed for it.” Pain, but pleasure too, for a poet who finds that “snow falls like fan
mail” and whose friends are “nougat-soft inside.” Then again “The Bee
in the Snow” sets up a sound Saner cannot ignore.

Finally in the last part of the book, and it may be that in order to
understand Saner best we should read him impressionistically, like we
now read Shelley, not deliberately like we read Auden, we come to
“Spring Stuff,” or, the wellspring of vitality itself. Here are “horny
clouds,” a “sculptor thwacking away,” a “pride of wintercoat lions”
and a “poet not quite dripped dry restringing his lyre. . . just drifting
up there with them, light naked perpetual.” We are in an earthly para-
dise! Then in the next poem “Turn” (a richly ambiguous title) Saner
shows us again what we certainly must by this time have realized, his
extraordinary ability to make what poets have always traditionally
created, quotable lines and phrases: “When morning arrives let him
slip up behind, watching you shave, waiting his turn Call him your
son.” The many change and pass, but the one remains, like a dome
beautiful I knew,” he says, “was poison, but adjectives drifted in.” Happ-
ily, he has the ability to relate words and the poet’s craft meaningfully
to life itself. Saner serves up yet another nice phrase: “snow loaves.”
Like Yeats who can bless in a sidewalk cafe, Saner, when inebriated
with life, finds that while waiting for “the Boulder City bus” before
sunrise, “the light is leaping animals. Till the bus comes I’m immortal.”
The book closes in gentleness, with a postcard from a “city of flowers,
the iris-colored dusk,” something traditionally beautiful. And at the
end, the reader feels that he too has “breathed a fine wilderness in the
air” and felt “stars so close we seem at last among them.”

reviewed by William R. Evans

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