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IN RETROSPECT

We regret the sunsets and the flowers we ignored,
the mountain peaks and sensitive persons,
the hurt we gave and took for granted,
in full stride. Do you think,
given back our full strength
we could do better?

Death is relaxed and soft to teach us
it is true about the dullness
and repetitiveness and painful ways --
all that we kept hidden or at best
sought to conciliate with a new purchase.

Says the bible, The Glory is God's.
It is his handiwork. That's good enough
for me, and I praise death, his doing too.
THE SAINT

There is someone smiling at me from behind and someone holding out a hand in front to say hello and persons unfamiliar with familiar ways on either side to put me at my ease. I should despair. I do despair.

Where are the stones strung around my neck I much prefer to carry, on hands and knees and friends to lift me by my shoulders to take the necklace from my neck? They do not understand that I, without it, am just a person like themselves, unhappy, going to the help of others, in the illusion that it sets them free.
FROM THE SKY

I
My daughter will always ask
why the moon follows us
through the trees as we walk.

II
Today she told me
that if anyone hears
the last drop of rain
from any storm
find a leaf
it will never rain again.

III
The stone she gave me
came from the sky.
She painted on
what she felt
this pebble lacked.
NOT LOOKING BEFORE CROSSING

--for Nancy

Like a man of great and thin age
who sells his vicious dog to a blind man
and uses mace to ease his brittle bones.
And like the thief who goes out,
leaving his door open
and his gun wrapped
in lace
on the night stand.
Like a man knocking.
Knowing someone could be with her.

But he finds her alone,
except for shadows, all around,
tugging at her skirt.
Small children wanting her to smile.
And like a farmer's wife, recently widowed,
who wants to be alone to face the banker
she turns on three lights, one after the other,
sending her children to the back room.

And they stand there,
he is like the blind man
who thinks he can finally cross streets alone
because his hand holds a leash.
And she like the widow
holding her husband's shotgun
for the first time
struggling against the far heavy end.
LANDMARKS

During these times he felt statues move.
All he had to do was look into those places
where only the corner of his eye could see
and they would be there,
moving as smoothly as bronze.
Cement rippled and waved under his feet
as he found intersections
made of streets that never before crossed.
Familiar buildings
reached higher than they should have.
The north star
that had held the same place
all his life
led him east, west, then back.
Sometime after dawn, there was a river.
He watched the bank erode and crumble,
sliding away with slow water.
The edge reached his feet.
He saw below him
his solid shadow holding still in the flow.
CANADIAN GEESE ON NEW YEAR'S DAY

--for Aileen

Smoky arrowhead honed on wind,
    A rusty oboe overhead
Alerts us to their passage:
    A flock of Canadian geese glide by
Head south on New Year's Day.

We walk, mother and daughter, side by side,
    Well-swathed against the chill,
Sharing the remnants of Christmas:
    New moments out of times gone by,
Turning them over,
    Hugging the Season against us
like a real birth.

The clouds spread out like swaddling clothes
    Unwound. The geese against them
Tell our fortune in feathers: we will
    Leave home and return, going
Farther each time; we will follow
    our hearts and thereby
bruise the hearts of others;

And I will hold this moment tighter than
    You will, my daughter, though you will
Hear them sometimes in your sleep,
    Lost woodwinds, and awake,
Trying to remember where it is
    you are going.
THE PASSING OF GUS MIKE

A full moon enters the night
as it has on many others
rising in that familiar acid orange
over the same hill
that stands above the still cold Yukon
I pause, only because
the old man had this day to die

In his time
the moon possessed a different measure
held songs and granted favors
and for this I think it fitting
the moon should rise so full
and the night unveil
in stars and feint auroras

More than fitting
I imagine a response
the elements moving
to accept one of its own
a moon traveller
man of earth
hunter of maulak
and the great inland deer

But mine is another time
he is dead, I am not
Man no longer alters the indifference of moon
nor moon mark anything
but its own passing
AURORA AND ORION

I dream a painted woman
with large
blue gilded eyes
 crimson cheeks
 lips like roses

I dream her tight
with long tapered fingers
 breasts  firm and coral tipped
 hair  long, rich, fullbodied
 draped to the small of her back
 her scent  the latest Paris scheme
 her clothes  casual, suggestive
 easy to remove

I meet her in a southern place
a port on a green blue sea
 where the sun is never hidden
 the moon always full

We converse
over white rum and
 canteloupe with cottage cheese
 words are rare
 but her glance conveys
 the night will come
 with ease

 A harsh light
 breaks the open window
 odor of musk and dry salt
 rising from a damp bed
 the clock sounds
Ed Hughes, *Eyes of March*  
(ink & pencil, 1981)
SHADES

1.
The day shines down in waves and particles,
the shade is full
of cafe patrons, having Sunday
leisures to admire
the ebb and flow of passersby,
the stream of cars.

Such brilliant disquisitions:
fork on plate
and baby's whoop
for brief on human happiness, and there
above the five and dime, against
an empty blue (or is it just
the eye that's uninhabited?) the pure
line of a spire. What more could we want

than this world --
sharpened by shine and dark,
facetted by accident,
anchored by appearance?

2.
We could want our dead friends back.
Could you not be with me? Be somehow
undiminished, unbegun, so we
won't die the way we fear.
Appear, among
the cups and cloths and blades,
the face chance turns
to mine, in mirrored shades...

3.
A hundred diamonds tossed
on fenders, windshields, chrome!
A glance

is struck;
another bruncher puts
black glasses on.
WHOSE MOVE

Shooting marbles with moons
the boys drew more
and more lines into
the circle. The girls
whipped ropes and hoops.
It was the kind of night you have

no relatives,
no reason to believe
the eye is clear:
as soon as you are sure
you're wrong. It is too late
to free the moment from
foreknowing, let it all

turn tender? Kids in poorer quarters
dream new dimes beneath their pillows,
bones are spirited away. Time anything
they are themselves, the numbers
one and zero. Toddlers, elders
and the ones disabled in
the half-lit hospitals, for them

a life is one long day. If you have money
for your man in the moon, you can't
afford to let it wane. Meanwhile somebody
you'd call puny, someone ugly,
someone you despised or left alone
has had to walk the unfamiliar world
in an ungodly hour, and see

a wealth of rubble
where the stalled cars shone.
WHERE

I leave the drink and cigarette
where the music is, and go
outdoors where nothing
is the whole idea, where winter
zeros in on eyes and orphans
everyone, and clear is not a kind
of thought. Outside you're not

as missing as inside a house.
So differently you saw the painting
called "The Empty Chair," which showed
two chairs identical except
one held a hat. Which is
the empty chair, I asked; you thought
the question trivial. I thought the hat an extra
emptiness. Between "a room"
and "room" you didn't mark
the article of difference. The knife
fell on the bed, the ruler we had
on hand. I must have missed you when I was
the one that I was thinking of. I came inside again and left
the feeling in the glove.
THE MOLLY D. MINE

You duck the second step
into darkness -- your body folds
double under three-foot ceiling, lost
in an echo bigger than God,
almost swimming.

By noon you've grown
wet fur, voices lose their edge,
strike the air like moss.
3:30, the hole gives you back
last sun broken on your shoulder.

We used to talk
about the stripping: first the lighted
cap pulled off, loose dirt
shaken free on the way home,
hollow lunchpails on the table,
bucket after bucket heated
on the kitchen stove
until the water runs clear
over shining bodies.

At the altar -- St. Thomas Church --
a row of sharp cuffs, fingernails
etched like sin. Three years,
Ernest said, after I left it
for the railroad and my hands
still weren't clean.
On West Main Guido's funeral parlor
is held crooked by the pressure
of buildings on each side,
Dante Literary Society
and Tony's 5&10.
Those three days my daughter sat playing
with marbles on the porch
ignoring the miter and stole
inside. The Bishop, head bent,
incense rising from him like talcum,
led the adults in the Rosary.
We prayed the Sorrowful Mysteries,
passed back and forth the beads
and books only our mouths remembered.

Like the woman in the next room
lying in dusty silk
who had left us as children
to hide for thirty years
with gypsies, after she blinded
her husband with lye
in a movie theater as he sat
arm around the frizzy Pollack
who was splattered too.

When at last the neighbors called
us to come, her children again,
we entered the unimaginable past
we'd tried imagining throughout
the lonely sleeps of childhood.
We witnessed at last
her life -- a maroon hallway smelling
of anise, seven thousand dollars crushed
into fists in the freezer,
and a will telling us to place
the picture of her
with her hair upswept next to the coffin.
As an afterthought she left
the mention of him, dead
now for eighteen years and more dim
to us than even she, "Don't let
the bastard near me."
BLOND MOVIES

A lust for blue eyes
brings me to the movies
because my eyes are brown.
Anyone can tell you
in a brunette neighborhood,
blond
means money, means glamour,
means turn your head
as he walks by,
means lie in the sun all day
and worry about nothing,
means darken your skin
as much as you want
with cocoa butter
and suntanning lotion
and never worry it'll get
too dark
or turn you
into a foreigner.
Blond means
Paul Newman,
Robert Redford,
Meryl Streep,
the statue of liberty
would be blond
if she knew
how to color her hair,
the Rockettes
are blond,
the girl
that sells you
toothpaste is blond,
even the black women
hustling
on the corner
outside old man Garcia's
are blond,
at war with
the stubborn roots coming in
black,
but still garishly
blond.
In the dark
you don't have to worry
that maybe
nobody
will ever want to kiss you.
Because California
is the closest
you can get to Paradise,
every movie is filmed
in California,
the sea like a constant blue murmur.
Some people in this neighborhood
just go to the movies
to see people die
in car crashes, machinegun fights,
kung fu battles,
and others just go for anatomy,
breasts, thighs, stomachs,
anything to resurrect
their own dead flesh.
But this isn't that kind of movie.
Even so the seats
smell of frustration,
of everything wasted that comes
out of the body.
No one tells you
how anonymous it is
to come out
of the movie
swelling
in your jeans
and realize you're still
in your own small,
squinty-eyed,
brunette flesh.
Somewhere in the world
maybe there's a blond suburb
in love with a black-haired man
or a brunette woman
because they look smoky,
passionate, mean.
But not in this town.
We only believe in
blond.
STILL LIFE: SHIPYARD, SEPTEMBER, 1950

When the light turns green,  
the bus will pull away from the curb  
and the girl wedged between two huge housewives  
will raise her eyes. Now she looks  
away from the man standing  
dangerously close to her,  
shoving his shirt into soiled jeans.  
A small boy slouching by the vegetable stand  
stares into the bus. The girl  
clutches a book to her blouse;  
under her silky slip, breasts begin to blossom.

The Front Office door moves slightly  
and the men jammed in the aisles  
suck in their breath, preparing whistles  
for the secretaries who will walk  
down the path with tiny steps.  
The smell of dirt and sweat gathers  
in the bus. The girl holds  
her breath, watches light catch  
on the blonde arm hair of the man  
standing next to her. A stain spreads  
along the back of his shirt.

A cloud moves across the hot sky,  
and the light changes just as the office door  
swings open. The men begin whistling  
and banging on lunch pails and hard hats:  
the secretaries giggle and try to frown.  
Shouting, "Get your vegetables," the boy  
juggles a tomato, drops it. Pulp splatters  
the sidewalk. The girl looks up  
and begins to breathe.
TWO WINTERS

Already
the road leads back to you.
Already winter is pulling on
its blank cape. It is a journey
dressed for arrival.

Already winter
flaming through the oaks
leans in wind toward home.
It collects in clumps
in the spaniel's fur.
It comes in and pools in her sleep,
a dream escaping
into clarity, warmth and light.

And your own dream
rises from your bones,
from the body's one bleached map
buried to reach everywhere: already
your father was home, early,
and you were small
under him on the sled,
rushing forward in the hill's long
chute of white air,
his rough face close and glowing,
the taste of his laughter on you.
Already he is stepping out of the storm,
returned whole, and there's time.
THE MEMORY OF SNOW

It travels with the weight of sleep, which is barely weighted at all. The slightest pressure streams in the gray maze of recollections. Then it is here.

You, as a child, at a window, too young to understand anything as you do now.

And because you want air to carry it, now, and cover the landscape you have made home, it gathers in the tongue; someone listens, and the voice she hears could be hers:

saying yes I have known this too, saying childhood's common ground of snow for us begins here, in the voice we share—turning white, directing us back.
SEURAT: BATHING AT ASNIÈRES

Here people study the water, its shining,
or shadows pooled on the grassy bank,
or maybe the boat mid-river and safely distant,
but not each other. This relief
is part of the afternoon off.
So they sit on the green with knees drawn up
and arms propped, at rest, finally,
or lie down rumpled like the man on his side
and long in the foreground.
And with him, a dog, turning to the sounds
from a boy hip-deep in the river
who cups his hands shouting to something
no one sees, beyond the frame,
telling it to leave him alone.

These are people come to be rid
of weariness round as their backs with its weight
and the long factory blocking the horizon
and time itself, spread out over water and grass,
gently colored planes where time they have today
is thin and makes no difference.
No one's face is fully there,
under hats, turned away, shadowy,
and the boy who is still not lonely enough
cups his hands and goes on shouting.
THE COLLAGE/gray haired man & trumpet

is composed of bits & pieces, gingham, satin, paper, road maps, a snap shot. as if he knows this is his last performance, gives it much more than he has. spits from his repertoire every note & some that he has never heard before. forms holes at his throat. bleeds triad over & over. winds up for the last tune. secretes 50 years of trumpet, smoke & low wages. stares at faceless people in the first row. wonders where train tracks have led him. if he ever found a destination. shows me a little moan. dies face down before my eyes. gold trumpet clutched in his hand.
THE HEART

there is a red velvet heart in the middle of the ocean approximately the size of illinois.

it's marked by plastic buoys & it pumps continuously, causing the ocean to undulate without concern.

fish in the vicinity are propelled magnetically.

the heart is guarded by a contingent of men in rowboats. these men are called Guardians Of The Heart. & they monitor it for any sign of illness or fatigue.

in fact, an ocean tanker tows the heart to the mainland once a year; a cardiologist examines it routinely; & then the boat tows it back.

when you visit the heart make certain you touch it. (the Guardians will not object) rub your hand over the surface. feel how smooth it is.

I recommend you actually get in the water & place your mouth on it.

once it cushioned the fall of a man in a parachute. he bounced on it like a trampoline. in gratitude he, too, placed his mouth on it.

later in new york in a speech he said the inside of his mouth felt like the carpeting of a womb.
THE WASTE LAND, REV.

--for T.S. Eliot
il miglior fabbro & all that

Fire
clogs
the rain gutters, ¹

rivulets
pushing through
onto crunched driveway stone. ²

Cold sores
mushroom
on hairless, pox-scarred children. ³

1. It can happen here.
2. It is happening here.
3. Now and forever:—cold sores
mushroom on hairless, pox-scarred
children. "Da... Da-Da."

² Milton
³ Macbeth
TUNING UP

Every morning the same music:
the cats drumming at the screen for food,
bass of power mowers, weed eater

in the string section. Afternoons
the tune changes, ice cream carts sing
_Edelweiss_ or _Yankee Doodle Dandy_ -- choose

your anthem. And always the choir
of voices: children scolded, a break-in
chorused about next door. Occasionally

I'm called out to consult on some
lost note. Did I hear the front gate squeal
suspiciously last night? Anything off-key?

Inside my house I rehearse the artist's right
to privacy, but the boy out back
plucks at my nerves with his constant

_How ya been_, the neighbors follow me
like a familiar score: three sacks of groceries
lugged home Tuesday night, the coffee

sipped at midnight in the lighted kitchen.
This no neighborhood for soloists,
I take my place in orchestra and play along.

Maestros of the back stoop, tempo, please.
MOWING

The neighbors are mowing their lawns today, three of them -- one to the back, another to the left, and one across the street.

It is a modest neighborhood; some houses, like mine, are peeling, others have the neatness of retirement.

Democracy is in the grass: every yard manicured to perfection every week. Let it go too long and the neighbors lean on the fence to remark, as to a mother whose boy needs a haircut, Time for a trim, isn't it? Getting a little shaggy here.

So there is always this rough music -- duet, quartet, trio as now -- of power mowers growling, an orchestra of our need to keep in control.
IT GROWS ON YOU

How it gleams, glossy, a dark enamel green
twining and climbing in lush trinities
fall reddens as bright as its berries.

I have seen it sprout from builder's refuse,
no soil too rich or too abused. Toxic
wastes fertilize it. It thrusts through asphalt.

It can travel on the fur of a pet.
It can pass in a lover's sweat, like ecstasy.
It can slip like herpes through a kiss.

The most powerful No Trespassing sign:
the glint of its leaves among blueberries,
bracken. You have lost this land.

It has a simple song borne like its berries
through the throats and bodies of birds:
I am beautiful, I am strong, I take over.

If you do not care to live with my company,
if you think 2-4-2D does more to me than
to you, have you considered Mars?
Joseph Bruchac

LEAVING OREGON

--for Bill Stafford

Four ducks flew
out of the near dark
above trees remembering
the shape of shade.
The dawn was almost here
and I was going.

As we went past rivers,
heading north, falls wide with mist,
their names -- like Willamette --
strange to me as Oregon
or that River-Made-Muddy
By-The-Buffalo-Crossing-Upstream,
we agreed it was good
to be up with the sun
to hold children and families
no less than horizons

and, when leaving,
to get out of a place quick
enough to leave a handshake
brief, lasting as the memory
of four dark birds,
their voices circling
the clock towards another day.
TANGLED LINES

The boat began to drift with the wind
which whipped down Deer Pond,
turned us against the anchors.

The loon which danced
all the way from the point
beside us dove and was gone.

White lines drifting
in long lazy S's
down into the hemlock water
tightened and ran
as trout after trout
took hooks fast
as we could rebait.

Anchor ropes twisted,
tROUT braiding our lines,
hats blown off down the pond,
my father and I leaned back and laughed

as he laughs today
from his stiff bed
where pale tubes drift
to intravenous racks
and the EKG monitor sketches
green peaks and depths
of his pulse and breath.

*I was just there again,* he says.
*Remember that day -- the loons
and the wind?* And though his hand
is cool in mine, I laugh with him,
tangling our lines into memory.
A LONG ISLAND FISH STORY

Sun hadn't cut the morning haze,
but Al was ten miles out southeast of Shinnecock,
adrift, setting his rigs, dipping chum, a bucket of fishguts and heads. Christ,
he loved it out here this early, alone.
He sat back to light up one of his Luckies.

Over the gunnel, higher than his shoulder, a gray shadow, a Great White's dorsal appeared in the haze.
That fin froze his fucking heart.
He wanted to cry, wanted to wake up in bed.
The shark lay on the gentle swells forty-foot long, oscillating its body and wall eyes to look the meat over.

Al's engine dragged, caught. He slid forward, slowly, then opened up, punched holes through crests, blasted out of there for six or eight miles before slowing down, wiping his face with a rag, before his heart began to thaw. He laughed, cut his engine, lit another Lucky. This time, you know: here's the Great White, circling, slashing water with its sadistic fin . . . .

Al got back to shore, no thanks to you.
You wanted more than a row of shark's teeth in his hull.
You wanted Al for chum.
You never get enough, do you? . . . Okay,
Al never made it back. We developed a few boards, a fragment of shirt, an omniscience:

that shark smashes him boatless, snaps him in half, feeds on our desires in the red haze.
A MAN WHO ADMITS TO LOVING MICKEY MANTLE

You can argue about the other two center fielders out of the Apple in the 50's. I myself saw Duke Snyder hit three homers and a double in one game at Ebbets Field. I know what damage he could do. But now I picture him with his white hair among his avocado groves in California. And Willie Mays was who he was. Maybe you see him in your mind's eye making that catch on Vic Wertz year after year, but to me he's just another balding Old Timer lugging his paunch around at sports dinners. I am a man who admits to loving Mickey Mantle. And I never even saw him play. I didn't have to.

Take my wife. (Take her, please!) She's got some classmates from high school, she says, who she pictures as old, old as the hills, twice as old as she is. And somehow she pictures others of them as still as young as they were when she was in school with them. So this has to count for something. I know what she means. Everything can't mean everything to everybody. To me Number Seven is still just a few years out of Commerce, Oklahoma. He's about 180 pounds of pure speed and power. He can send you to the showers with a drag bunt from the left side, hitting the first base bag in 3.1 seconds, or kill you with his record eighteen homers in World Series competition. Those other two ballplayers are retired from Ebbets and the Polo Grounds. Mantle is still patrolling center in The House That Ruth Built. He's still passing through the same air that DiMaggio's ghost passes through. Mantle you can't take away from me. Sure he plays too long, and his lifetime drops below .300. Sure he strikes out too much, but when he strikes out it's more exciting than some other yokel's fly ball homer. I'll say it again and it doesn't matter to me if you take it or leave it. I am a man who admits to loving Mickey Mantle.

So I get to work this morning, and Lew's already opened up. Usually I unlock the door and turn the sign around in the front window. But Lew is there and the orange "Open" sign hits me in the eye. Thirty years we've been partners and maybe Lew has opened up six times.

We've got a good business here. We've got a good life from the business.

Lew's over behind the garden tools. "What's happening?" I ask him. He doesn't hear me. He doesn't hear me like this a lot of times despite the cigarette pack-sized hearing aid behind his right ear (he won't go modern and get a small one, and he costs us some business, but he's got a right to as much quiet as he needs, I say). I walk closer to him and say "WHAT'S HAPPENING, LEW?" He jumps up from the carton of pruning shears he's been unpacking. Something's wrong. I can see it in his face. You get to know a man. He's gotten ten years older over the weekend.

When the rush of blood from bending over leaves his face, he's white as a new baseball.

"Nothing much, Charlie," he says.

"Lew," I say, "don't give me that."

"It's Billy, Charlie."

Now, Billy is Charlie's eighteen-year-old. Billy is just out of high school this June, and I say "out of" loosely. I don't think he graduated. I don't think Marie and Lew went to the high school graduation service in June. Look, I know Lew like a brother and we're friends but I wouldn't ask him about something like this. What he wants to tell me he'll tell me and when he wants to and vice versa. There's always been a respect between us and a privacy. So I just waited to see if Lew wants to tell me what's happening with Billy.

"We don't know where he is," Lew says.

"What do you mean you don't know where he is? Where is he?"
William Heyen

"He didn't come home Saturday night or last night. We don't know where he is."

"What about his friends, what about that Striano kid or that McCreary kid he played ball with? Or the Patac kid?"

"Marie talked with them. They haven't seen him, not all weekend."

Charlie walked back to kitchenware. I wanted to ask him if they'd called the cops yet, but that was their business. I don't know if I'd have called in the cops myself yet. For an eighteen year old kid a couple days can go by pretty quick, especially if he's with a girl, maybe getting a little for the first time. Who knows? But you can get a chill down your back, too, if you think of what can happen to a teenager in the papers these days. I don't want to think about it.

So the morning went by. People in and out. You know it. Pain-in-the-galoshes Mrs. Stebbins in again with broken pieces of that low picket fence we sold her a week ago. We've been too nice to her. We can't be responsible if her kids lummox around the thing and break it up. I kept her satisfied again, but told her her warranty had run out, as though she had a warranty on a picket fence. I told her she should worry about raising her kids to be good ballplayers and forget about raising grass and flowers for a few years.

I always liked that Billy, you know. He "worked" with us here a couple summers, his own hours so to speak, but a nice boy all in all. He'd do little things, like squint, that reminded me of Lew. I myself never saw him do anything worse than sneak a smoke in the storage room or drain one of those miniature bottles of scotch when Lew wasn't looking. The kid was always glad to help unload a truck or to lift something a little too heavy for me or Lew. And he's a strong kid, as strong as Mick.

Lew made a couple phone calls. And once his Mrs was on the line and I called him over. Marie sounded neutral, as though she didn't know what Lew had told me. I didn't stand near him when he was talking to her.

Lew went out to lunch and came back. To tell you the truth we're human, so I'd forgotten about Lew's problem. I was putting together two wheelbarrows. We'd only need one for display, but there's always somebody who won't buy one unless it's already assembled. I was almost done. I was circling the barrows tightening every nut a last time when I saw the two cops come in the front door. Eddie Scanlon I knew, but I didn't know the young cop. For twenty years we got along with three cops at the most in this town and you got to know them, but now there's maybe a dozen cops you don't know. I don't like the feel of this. I feel like Number Seven is going to hurt himself today. I picture Mick wrapping his legs tight before a ballgame, wrapping with gauze and tape and elastic bandages to hold himself together. No, I don't like the feel of this day at all. Today was one of those days I was thinking I was glad that Lucille and I never had any kids.

"What's happening?" I ask Eddie Scanlon. He don't return my smile, and there's none of his old energy in his handshake. "Charlie, it's bad, we got to speak with Lew, where is he?" is all he says. And the young cop is looking away from me at a barrel of rakes. He's got his hat in his hands like he's in church. I'm afraid Mantle's not going to make it through the day. I was listening on the radio once when he was hit in the helmet by Herb Score of Cleveland. This was before Gil McDougald's liner off Score's head that cost Score his own career. Luckily that day at least Mickey was okay and got up from the dirt to pull one out so far that the ball is still climbing right now. But I tell you he's not going to make it through the game today, he's going to get hurt.

Lew left with the cops. His hearing aid fell out when they had to practically carry him out. It's a good thing the young cop is so strong. I'm closing up early. Lucille and I'll go over to Lew and Marie's. What the hell's going on in this town, anyway? I don't understand it any more. You can't even mind your own business and grow old peacefully. What are they teaching the kids over there in that high school these days anyway?

The young cop left his hat here. I'll drop it off at the station on the way home. Maybe I'll see Eddie and try to get a handle on what's happening in this town.

It's going to be a long day for the Mick. He's in the hospital. Looks like he got spiked in the temple. He's in a coma, the kid from Oklahoma, and the doctors don't even know this time if he's ever going to wake up and play ball again.
MORNING GLORY

Sitting in the bath reading Bly prose poems, it's early morning.
We're conspirators,
saboteurs, secret
foreign agents or something
to be awake at this hour,
my dreamy legs,
the steaming tea,
and you probably halfway home by now.

YES

I wake up
and it's dawn
but instead of a sun
it's a flower opening.
The flower is your ear
hearing other openings,
doors to things that have
never been opened!
with lullabies inside them,
like pearls. Wind
blows the curtains like jazz,
and the message of jazz
is yes.
THE BOCCE PLAYERS

They cluster each mid-morning
bowling bocce on the urban clay.
It is their sport, their brought-over game,
and they perch to toss and eye
compari. In fields beside them
rooting shouts of youngsters
slugging baseballs echo as old
and young play.

'They loaf about, fedoras and
jeffs poised, jugs basking
in the cool shade, heads bobbing
as their tongues clip syllables
in the accent of their old world ways.

Survivors on the sill,
contrasting with the city,
they stroll like still-life figures
captured in a frieze, a timeless chiaroscuro.

Their wide fingers nicked
and calloused from their trade
and outside labor suspend
a colored ball, the palla,
for the long pause of the eye
and then the palm lets go the ball
in a fore-or-backhand roll
along the runway of the boards;
their goal for the color
to land nearest the *pallino*,
the first ball thrown that
like the jack in ninepins
is the target for the game...

Until
evening slips
over roofs like a shade
falling with the imperceptible
lull of the hour hand on
the mantel clock, then singly
and in pairs night picks them
from the bowl of their pavilion
until there is only a silhouette and
the long drawn silence of the stars.
Ed Hughes, *Deliverance II*  
(ink & pencil, 1981)
EUGENE HOWARD

Eugene Howard is an uncommon poet in the Community of American Poetry; uncommon to the plethora of poets who are turned/out, packaged and stamped, by various MFA "Writing Programs," like Oscar Meyer turns/out sausages. His uncommonness is based in his belly and his breath, and his clear understanding that there were poets before there were printing presses (a fact that's very seldom taught and never emphasized in most "Writing Programs.") So, being a follower and intrepid lover of memory, the Mother of all the Muses, Eugene further understands that beyond -- or before being a "writer," the poet functions as Seer, Singer, Sayer, as Professor.

And these understandings are reflected in Professor Howard's poems-on-the-page. He's mastered the acrobatics and maneuvering of his craft. His passion, tho controlled (most of the time) is always felt, sometimes raging anger, sometimes glowing love. I read his poems, I feel him breathing, I hear him singing. Hope you/do/too.

Etheridge Knight
Ed Hughes, Deliverance
(ink & pencil, 1981)
A SILENT e IN PRAISE OF THE BLUES

Gut bucket jelly belly juke jam

The base of the Blues was a headless spirit, made of African movements and African ways brought stumbling to the cold rocks of Plymouth, staggering onto the strange shores of Roanoke, while the head of the Blues at the Bight of Benin was raging red-eyed, staring out to sea.

But as soon as the new tongue was fixed to the humped arc of that straining back to the rhythmic sway of a gray mule's rump to the lonesome curve of empty hands to a hum rising up from the gut of the soul to the white-flecked air of the cotton mill to the high whistle of a Northbound train, then yoked by art to a long black song that could tell the pith of this people's life — when the singers knew fully that home was here, Blues heard the call and came.

Blues is a song that flies straight out of the mouth of the truth. She wont swallow her spit nor bite her tongue. Blues is a song of the marrow of the bone. Whatever of Africa the Middle Passage couldn't drown, a song plantation horrors couldn't strangle nor a blood lust hatred lynch. Blues is singing thought tempered and taught by loss and ironical pain. Endless variations on the real: The dirt floor shack, the aching back, the shuffle and shout of a chained gang, somebody else's mule kicking in your stall, the face of the woman when you fall,
the cold, wild eyes of the captain
when you have said your final: No.
When Jehovah shut his eyes and turned his head,

Blues sang that too.

2.
Blues
firing unbreakable jugs in the kiln of the sun
to hold an undiluted truth.
Blues
biding her measured time
humming a bass line for field hollers and work songs.
Blues
keeping her breath supple and long,
wrapping it around a circle of ring shout.
Blues
honing her laughter in that tight dark space
where belly slapped to belly in the night.
Blues
rehearsing her rasping shouts
on the fringes of the sorrow songs,
Blues
cataloguing gri gri in the cellar of a church.
Blues
tuning her ax to West Afrikan scales,

waiting for the American Negro to wake up.

Blues knew exactly what god meant.
Christ threw on Shango's tattered robes
and danced into the souls of slaves.
He put his double-headed ax
in Reverend Nat Turner's hands.
The sorrow songs alone cant hold that deed.
That's Blues tightening up and pulling those men
up off their christian knees.
More than once I've warmed
my cold feet by that courage of that struggling failure,
opened all the way up
to that hard headed beauty,
wrapped my arms around
the rounding edges of its transfiguring grief.
More than once I've stepped
into the shoes of these heroes of the real,
and felt them shape the shape-shifting truth
as they made an art of life from a slough of despair.
More than once I've asked
that my actual name be tinctured with Billie's blood
and grounded in the rhythms of Billie's Bounce.
More than once my strength got stronger,
and I beat my weakness back,
and I kept on keeping on.

3.
Ma, Bessie, remember me.
Blind Lemon, let me see.
Ghost of Robert Johnson, sing into me.
I know you man and the hellhound on your trail,
the wound the song poured out of,
the crack in your armor where the world seeped in.
I heard the need between the lines:
I gotta make something out of what god gave me
or else my name aint Muddy Waters.

And you still here, Blues,
come through the American fire,
saying your say your own way.
You are what you are.
You still here,
knowledge of deep grief bursting out
in tough laughter's bright clothes.
You still here
snatching a song from the smoky dark,
from the warbling throat of blueblack night.
Nobody else can wear your song.
You are what you are.
You still here
fingering your own heartstrings
as if life was a steel guitar
and you picked out your actual name.
You still here.

Stay.
At the Bridge: Cecil Taylor Piano

Photo by Lamont B. Stephose
Philadelphia, 1986
PIANO PLAYER

the women out of whom this music springs
souls as huge as the sun is hot
mouths of spring water eyes of ocean
hips of ancient rhythms fine-
tuned by the art of dance
as old as the sphinx at giza
as new as the music cecil taylor plays

Thin slabs of elephant tusk and hardy dark hardwood
have been heard to flash bluely under his hands,
a blues that explodes the legacy left
by the sellers and buyers of African slaves,
a blues that arrives as a strong hot wind
to sweep away the dangerous debris
left near the rotted ruins of slavery.

The minor enclaves of major towns named this music.
From musky dives of lust and laughter came
a jazz of razored streets and egg-shell roads
that black folk walk and know.
American winds heavy with memory
pluck music from taut high wires
over which dark men pick their way.
Cecil Taylor hears the tunes
that the wind and the wires and the folk are playing.
Through the sure generous discipline of his art,
those always forward moving steps are worked
into an architectonics of rhythm and melody
in precisely structured figures of desire:

He stretches brown hands across a foaming ocean
to bear Mother Drum through a sky of thunder
He unravels the threads of the Middle Passage
and ties new knots between Lagos and New York
He bears sweet Ragtime through a river of light
He bears Stride Piano through corridors of air
He bears Boogie Woogie through a funnel of time
Eugene Howard

He bears deep Blues through a dance of life
He threads metal Bebop through a wooden needle's eye
and weaves deep dark down brown sounds.

In such new clothes draped loosely round the soul
you can move on through the manmade world
until you come to the roots of a stubborn old tree
that sends out tendrils into this musician's skull
and the ripening fruits of desire and power
crackle in his brain
flow down his arms
burst from those hands
in thunder so sweet
that the goddess of music
   --O she is black as the space
   where you were wombed
   as dark as the time
   where death will take you--
she enters our spirit
opens her mouths
and sings us swinging home
A GROUP OF THREE ELDERLY AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN WAITING AT A BUS STOP IN COLD JANUARY

Old women of ripe sweet years,
I honor you with this petal of a page,
praise you with what is still
African and sweet in my mouth.
Your brown faces and gnarling hands are
root and symbol of indestructible life.
Eyes of actual history hold
truths the young must age to know.
Women whose brows are deepest light,
your lined faces are African hieroglyphs
that I will read and say forever.
Bless us who struggle in the western reaches
of your old still burning ancient light
that brings such warmth to this bitter cold.
THE ANCESTORS SMILE

--for Sumi Tonooka

At a time when writing
was only a dream of shamans
and an infant’s eyelash
could not be passed
between word and deed
a Japanese woman at a loom
fit the weft to the warp
an African man
struck an adze to a tree
to draw a mask from the wood
These 2 were seers
who through no will of their own
would hear into the future
I said time is a serpent
swallowing its tail
and tomorrow has been here before
Music streams through time
like rivers roll through space
Fingers of moving water
play against the shores
Rivers stream through time
like music flows through space
Fingers of moving water
play against the shore

Now when the Shinano met the Niger --

The adze stopped before the wood
The shuttle of the loom went still
From either shore of the joined rivers
2 ancient faces without artifice or guile
lit by huge smiles of wonder
turned toward the mingled moving waters
and heard from the distant 20th century
a small and energetic woman
draw jazz from a grand piano

Just this once
as Sumi Tonooka plays
the ancestors smile
READING ROBERT HAYDEN ON A QUIET MORNING

Speech is an almost music we make
that only happens in the very now.
It rides the air between us,
travels down the body hairs
and plays its rhythms on the skin.
It can enter the open door of the ear
Like a kiss or a fist.

But what I am now holding in my head
is a record of speech that can be played
over and over on the circuits of my mind:
words of the living or the dead
offering their published witness,
muted echoes of bodyless voices
ringing silently in my brain.

As I read this pagebound speech,
this ship that ferries poetry,
this elegant daughter of song,
I heard what I have never heard,
see what I have never seen,
and through my eyes alone
feel many feelings not my own.

I would be lessened without these words,
prosthetic symbols stitched to my ignorance
with the strong gut of human knowing.
My imagination and the text extend
the sealapped shores of what is real.
Word by word this manmade island,
that all my searching years have led me to,
grows.
Soon I will be near enough to wave to you.
When you are near enough to hear me,
I want to read aloud to you.
Have you heard the work of Robert Hayden?
Eugene Howard

THE FOOL OF THE DARK GODDESS UTTERS ONE OF HER MANY NAMES

A name, one among many apppellations, forms in my mouth, curls like a serpent around the root of my tongue: Erzulie Sophia, a beautiful, passionate wisdom. As a man who has been held too long in thrall of a jealous sun, I stutter to speak that name in this darkness reconstituted from the shards of my ignorance, where the new moon, mistress of mysteries, matrix of measure, curves through space in her slow cosmic dance. The sun, now, beneath me, is only dim memory and sure promise. His day will come as surely as your night will go. Change is the infinite ground of truth and who denies your illimitible dark denies the fertile valley of all creation.

In sunwarmed lands where chosen women first acknowledged, understood, and midwifed you terrestrial birth, the roofs of their houses curved like the moon and the sky. The walls of those compounds curved a meander around the lives of those dark people, till strongarmed warlords, usurpers of your power, leveled your mounds and flattened your curves. The science lies that does not own the birth of the pyramid from the sphere, that cannot see a curve at the junction of an angle.

You were the womb of science and cities. In your comings and goings, as regular as healthy menses, we first learned to reckon time. Calendars grew from your changes. We husbanded the land and settled first cities, learning to sow and harvest when you assumed the fertile crescent, your strong new sickle. O you plump granary at winter solstice!

Men climbed out of ignorance on the limbs of trees sacred to you. On those limbs priest and supplicant budded, flowered, ripened, and fell from those limbs into your earth. Fertilized by your power, coaxed by the sun's fiery hands, they grew to nearly human size. The knowledge of men is what it is: a small but dazzling portion of the incomprehensible whole of you,
small leaking buckets drawn dripping from an inexhaustible well. In jealous rage, blinded by desire for the absolutes of power, they slayed your wise and holy serpent. With that ignorant and deadly blow, the doors to a deep and genuine wisdom closed for us all.

I am sending my antennae out through a crack my art has led me to. I am learning, pierced, pumping heart of Erzulie, stony cratered moon, tranquil Sophia, palpable darkness, the infinite variety living and dying in your valleys. I am learning that all things come out of your darkness and into your darkness all things go. Include this moonstruck babbler stuttering a song here on the threshold of your knowledge.
Ed Hughes, *The Man With the Red Hat*  
(ink & pencil, 1981)
IN THE DARK

Together like this in the dark
what do we care for the light.
We can be lost in ourselves in the dark,
in the rhythms of blood and flesh,
we can be lost in the dark of ourselves.
In the dark we are what we are.
We are all dark in the dark.
To be lost in an endless dark,
to give up the throne of the eye
to breath, scent, sound, taste,
the silent speech of touch,
to the ear open wide in the dark,
the dark inside the open mouth,
to the dark outside the closed eye.
In the dark the world is blind.
We are all blind in the dark.
In the dark like this we are
a root of the world going down
into ancient reptilian time
when we were new beings on earth,
before the curse of a god of light
cut the spirit from the flesh.
And flesh then darkened to death;
death is a name for the dark.
But in the press of flesh we know
that spirit still thrives in the dark,
though the dark will swallow the light
and that is a fear of the dark,
but press through that fear,
feel back in the black
and we find in our souls
innumerable stars
moving their light
through the dark.
Nancy Easterlin

AT HER MOTHER'S

I. Saturday

Frances Green still spent every Saturday with her mother, cleaning the house or just going out shopping if things didn't need to be straightened up.

Now Frances bent over, lifting the edge of one of the large cushions of the powder blue couch and guiding the nozzle of the vacuum cleaner attachment under it. When her father had died three years ago her mother, Maureen, had redecorated the living room, sending the old couch off to the Mother of God Thrift Store. Maureen found this new velvety couch with the three pieces that fit together in sections and bought it right away. Frances lifted another cushion. The soft cushions seemed to draw new dust motes from across the room as she moved down the length of the couch.

"Frances, be careful not to scratch that velvet. That stuff can wear off real easy."

"I'm being careful, Ma."

Maureen sprayed Pledge on the mantelpiece and began polishing it, her wavy red hair bouncing as she rubbed the wood. Frances thought her mother's hair looked redder than usual. Maureen would be fifty in two weeks, but she still didn't have a grey hair on her head—as far as Frances knew. She had always been young; Frances had been born when she was only seventeen.

Later on in the day they did their other usual Saturday things—made dinner, watched T.V. Some Saturdays they went around the corner for a beer, less often out to a movie. Frances' sister Terry made it to dinner with her two kids about every third Saturday.

"How's your new job?" Maureen asked, peeling carrots over the sink.

"It's O.K."

Frances reached into a drawer for the special plastic placemats she and Maureen had bought last week for Sean and Brian, Terry's kids. One placemat was shaped like a fire engine and one was shaped like a smiling dog.

"Goin' out with anyone?"

"Mom, why do you keep asking?" Frances was trying to straighten a bent tine on one of the forks.

"You should go out and try to meet some men. There are still some nice ones around. You'd be a lot happier."

"I'm happy now, Ma."

"It's not the same."

Frances just kept trying to fix the fork and didn't say anything. Three years ago her father had died from a heart attack while buying groceries for their Fourth of July picnic. No one even knew he had a bad heart until he dropped dead in the supermarket. It was awful, and embarrassing. Now Maureen got angry and didn't listen when Frances said she liked living alone. But what her mother didn't always remember was that Frances had never known anything better.

Maureen stood at the counter with her back to Frances and mixed raisins with shredded carrots. Frances hated this kind of carrot salad and Terry's kids wouldn't eat it, but Maureen still made it all the time. And Frances still ate it like she had since she was four, since her father used to say, "Eat up your carrots, it's good for your eyes." The kitchen was warm and full of the smell of roasting chicken. Frances felt a hunger pang.

"You finished setting the table, Fran? Terry and the kids will be here soon."

Frances was no different than any other woman, and when she was in her twenties she'd spent a lot of time dreaming about some man—broad shoulders, dark hair, and an Irish name that would make her father happy. Even though it hadn't happened, she still knew she'd had a chance. She was a little plain: a shade too pale in the eyes, skin, and hair; too tall. But she'd had her pretty moments, when she wore those pale blues and overheard other women admiring how a certain dress fell over the spare lines of her body. Once she'd thought that just the softest pressure would open the part of her that offered everything but, waiting so long for something to reach

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in and touch that place, the light had faded, the belief fallen way. There had been men, but nothing worth marrying.

And in her late twenties there had been moments of panic, as if something was pulling her into a solitary life she'd never before imagined. It was like that for awhile (before she turned thirty and desire drove further in), like being caught in the fist of some creature that had no right to control her.

That was all over; it was just getting used to the idea that her life would go on the way it was that counted, that guided her now.

II. Another Saturday

"Frances, wait. I just want to look for a sec."

Frances waited as her mother sorted through a table of men's socks and sweaters. Frances had had a bad week, rushing back and forth to her job at Shor-Fit Gaskets in New Jersey. She was supposed to be learning new things at work, moving up, but no one was being very helpful lately. By Friday night all she'd wanted was a weekend of rest, rest and quiet. But Saturday morning came and Maureen was all set to go out and buy things.

"Ma, what're you looking at men's socks for?"

"Don't know."

"They're pretty crummy socks."

"Are they?" asked a man standing on the other side of the table. He looked across at Frances, a pair of socks in each hand.

"She doesn't know what she's talking about," said Maureen, giving the man a big smile.

"Oh, O.K."

He was tall and lanky and had very dark, full eyebrows. His hair was brown with a lot of red in it, but the red wasn't mixed in, it was like two different colors of hair on one head. Frances thought that he was probably in his fifties, but it was hard to tell. He had one of those strange lineless faces that you know is older than it looks.

"Excuse me," he said, speaking to Maureen, moving around to her side of the table. "Could you help me pick out some socks?"

"Sure."

Frances took a few more steps in the direction they had been going.

"Thank you," the man said to Maureen, still holding the socks. They sort of dangled at the ends of his long arms. "I'm a little color blind. My wife used to buy my socks, but she died last year. Now my socks are all wearing out."

His eyes darted back and forth like a squirrel's as he looked from Maureen to the display table. Frances rustled the bag she was holding, trying to get her mother's attention.

"Sure, I'd be happy to help."

"Thank you," he said. He actually bowed to her, bending slightly at the waist.

"Ma, why don't I just go pick up those towels that Terry wants from Strawbridge's? How about if I meet you at the food concessions in an hour, around two o'clock?"

"O.K." Maureen waved her hand, not turning from the table to look at Frances.

The mall had been designed so that all the food concessions were in one place. It was a circular
area, with tables and plastic trash cans in the middle and all the stands surrounding it. There were stands that sold hoagies and pizza and Chinese food and stuffed potatoes. Frances stood in the middle for a moment and looked at all the stands, deciding what she wanted.

She sat down with a coke and a slice of pizza and stuffed the bag of towels under the table. Even though it was around two o'clock the eating area was jammed. Kids were weaving in and out of the tables, maybe going to get cookies or egg rolls from the stands on the other side. But Frances didn't trust them and pulled the bag closer to her legs.

She took a pamphlet out of her purse and read it while she ate. Hothead was having a month-long special and you could have your nails done by Shirleena for free with a cut and a perm. Frances touched her straight, dry hair and then put the pamphlet down.

She pushed her empty plate away and leaned on the table. Her mother would be late. Frances picked the pamphlet up again and crumpled it.

He was all right-looking, the stock man, but there was something a little funny about him. So tall and skinny. Frances stared at the grease stains on the cheap paper plate, noticing how the grease soaked in and the little bits of tomato stayed on top. Maureen had gone out with a few men since Frances' father had died, but they had just been old friends, nothing that could work.

Even just that piece of pizza had been too much food. Frances was losing weight again, but she was tired of worrying about it. At home on her dresser she had a picture of her mother taken right after Frances, her first baby, was born. Maureen's hair was long then, and in the picture it is pulled over one shoulder, falling in shiny waves over her left breast. She is a little heavier now, wide in the hips, but still has thick red hair, bright eyes.

Frances twisted around to drop the pamphlet in a trash can behind her. No more perks for her—she'd had a few, thinking they would give her hair body, but she'd ended up with that frizzy, wild look. She looked at her watch. It was almost three.

"Hi. Sorry I'm late." Maureen sat down next to Frances.

"It's O.K. Where's your boyfriend?" Frances pushed the ridged edge of the paper plate and watched it spin across the table.

"That man? I helped him find socks. He's a nice guy."

"Uh-huh."

"His name is Charlie Bustin."

"You hungry?"

"No. I ate."

Frances didn't asked her mother if she'd had lunch with the stock man, and Maureen just kept smiling as they walked to the escalator to leave the mall.

Frances put off leaving her mother's until late that night, not wanting to have to look for a parking space downtown, where she lived. When she entered her apartment she threw her purse on the table and felt the still humid heat all around her. She switched on the fan propped in the window and stood in front of it for a moment. It was just another miserable August night, but the garbage outside smelled worse than ever, and the refrigerator and table and chairs seemed to grab and pull her into this small space.

She had a full length mirror in the bedroom, but she used it only to show herself, each weekday morning, that she was neatly dressed for work. There was a protrusion in the wall at the end of the room that rippled the surface like a speed bump in a road. Frances had nailed the mirror on the far side of the protrusion, well out of view, so that her plainness wouldn't be thrown at her every time she walked into the room.
Now, she switched on the light in the bedroom and went and stood in front of the mirror. For a few moments she looked at herself, her flat hair and bony wrists. A few lines around the eyes... Frances imagined that her hair was a little duller and drier than usual, maybe beginning to turn grey. She had seen all this more times than she wanted to—it was nothing new—but right then, for a moment, she wished she was someone else. The wish took less than a second. In the same thought she realized that she was not just arriving home from another typical Saturday with Maureen. She turned away, leaving the mirror in its hiding place.

III. Saturday with Champagne

It was Maureen's birthday. Frances had arrived early to make her mother a special breakfast—French toast with maple syrup and fresh strawberries. She'd done some quick cleaning and then taken Maureen downtown to pick out a present. "It will look beautiful on you," Frances said as they sat in the park and ate hamburgers and fries out of a bag.

"I feel ready for fall now," Maureen peeked in the bag at the new wool suit. "But I shouldn't've let you spend so much money."

"Don't worry about it, Ma, please."

They were sitting on one of the cement benches off to the side and watching people stroll through the park. It was cooler than it had been the past couple of weeks, and the strong sun felt good where it reached through the branches and fell across their faces and hands. Frances was completely happy as she watched her mother pull the bag open and look in again.

"We shoulda gone someplace less expensive, though, I shouldn't've let you take me to Bonwit's."

"Ma, don't worry."

When they got back home Frances started getting things ready for dinner. She hoped Terry wouldn't forget to pick up the cake—it was hard to get Terry to remember anything, with those two kids and that husband of hers she had plenty to worry about. Frances put the carnations she'd brought over that morning on the kitchen table, rearranging them a little after setting them down.

"Frances?"

"You go rest Mom, it's your day."

"O.K., but one thing first. Charlie, that man from the store last week—he called me last night. I asked him would he come over for dinner. I know we usually just make birthdays a family thing, and all, but you don't mind, do you?"

"Oh—no, I'll just set another place." Frances didn't look up, but just kept playing with the flowers.

But it was like everything she'd planned was wasted. Terry and the boys arrived, and then Charlie. Frances served the meal and the cake and latter poured the champagne. But she couldn't talk, she couldn't look across the table at Charlie and make him feel welcome. He said something to her once but she didn't answer him.

"Aunt Frances, why you not eat your cake?" asked Sean. Terry had cut his up with her fork, and he picked at the crumbly pieces with his short fingers.

"I'm full." Frances smiled at him and pushed her cake plate away.

"But why?"

"Sean, honey, leave her alone," Terry said.

"Aunt Frances, you should eat your cake."
“Shut up, Sean,” said Terry.

Terry brushed some crumbs from Sean’s mouth with her napkin and everyone was quiet. Frances got up after a few minutes and started taking plates off the table.

They opened the presents from Terry and the boys in the living room. Frances drank a second glass of champagne, and the bubbles went from her stomach to her head with a sweet dizzying sickness. She sat for awhile with her eyes closed, leaning back in her chair, listening to them talk and laugh as they gathered up the crumpled wrapping paper.

“Ma, I’m really beat.” Frances got up and reached for her purse. “I’m gonna get going.”

Frances kissed her mother on the cheek and nodded goodbye to Charlie. He sat beside Maureen on the big blue couch, and rose awkwardly as Frances spoke. His squirrel eyes darted over her face as he nodded and said goodnight, but she didn’t look at him.

“Time for us to go too, guys,” said Terry, reaching for her cigarettes and lifting Brian off the couch. The four of them walked out the door together, leaving Maureen and Charlie to smell the cool sweet breeze and finish off the champagne.

A light from somewhere outside came through the fan propped in the window and threw the shadow of the rotating blades against Frances’ bedroom wall. She lay in bed and felt the cool air blowing through the fan and over her body, thankful for relief from the heat, but feeling somehow that her body was shrinking in the dark. She watched the shadow blades snap in sharp circles and felt the bones in her arms and legs pressed against the mattress, pressed to nothing by some great force.

Even with the Whirl of the fan the room seemed unnaturally quiet, so quiet that it kept her awake for some time. The sadness had started earlier, at her mother’s; something was closing in on her and she felt this weak pain throbbing against it, felt the grasp of the narrowed desire, remembering what it as like the last time she slept with a man. It was long ago and sharp with waiting. She felt again how she had shared the tiredness of her body with the tiredness of his, becoming nothing but a force of warmth. Then they had had each other to lean against.

It was as though something held her down against the mattress and pulled her back to the old longing, pulled her back as everyone she knew moved out past her. She did not want to cry. She had gone to the limit and would not shrink back any further—the thin form of desire slowly twisted and pushed back at the emptiness.

The shadow of the fan went round and round, a weak claw scratching again and again at the wall. She lay still under the cool thin sheet and felt the breeze fill the empty spaces on each side of her.

IV. Saturday After

It took a long time to clean the house, because they hadn’t done much with it for a couple of weeks. They didn’t talk much as they worked, but Frances noticed the large purple amethyst glinting from her mother’s finger. At four o’clock they decided they were too tired to cook, so they walked to the Shamrock for sandwiches and a few beers.

“I shouldn’t eat this stuff, I’ll get fatter,” Maureen said.

“Don’t worry, Ma.”

They sipped their beer quietly for awhile. Someone was playing the juke box, playing an old song, “Brown-eyed Girl”. Frances looked across the table at her mother’s flushed face.

“You really look good, Mom. You don’t have to worry about getting fat.”

Maureen just smiled and wiped frost from the side of her beer mug.

“It’s a really pretty ring.” Frances reached over and touched her mother’s finger lightly. “Charlie
give it to you?"

"Last night. He came over for awhile. Said it was a belated birthday present." Maureen didn’t really look at Frances as she talked and her cheeks turned a little redder.

"Ma, I’m really happy for you." Frances gulped some beer, feeling how hard it was to speak. "Seeing a man you like, and all. I hope it works out."

Frances wanted to say a lot more, about how she was sorry she hadn’t been very nice to Charlie last week, and some other things. About how she had hoped for a long time that the hurt of her father’s death would just go away and Maureen would find her own quiet happiness—not wanting dates, not wanting to meet men. And last week, when she knew she was watching her own mother fall in love—how she felt Maureen turning her out and reaching for something impossible. But the main thing she wanted Maureen to know now was that she had already passed beyond that, passed out of the hold of old definitions, of a life that didn’t have to be hers. She looked into her mother’s eyes and felt something more there, a fullness prodding into her own life.

"He seems like a real nice guy, Ma. I hope it works out for you."

Frances smiled and reached across the table and squeezed her mother’s hand.

□

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"He seems like a real nice guy, Ma. I hope it works out for you."

Frances smiled and reached across the table and squeezed her mother’s hand.
Bill Quinta

ANTHROPOMETRIC SUMMER LANDSCAPE

All these big
boned women
wearing cheap shoes
and flimsy
tops flop
past my park
bench
I nip a Bud
from a brown paper bag
in sun I love them
from this distance.

OUTSKIRTS OF LANCASTER

This is no place to spend mid-July
notwithstanding vast green fields
of alfalfa and corn, white washed buildings
tucked on wooden hillsides.

My Amish neighbor sweats
setting fence posts along the road.
Firm post shadows on the
road along the posts.

Me, mowing two hot acres of lawn
stop to drink a bottle of beer
writing entire books of erotic verse
in my head, throwing them out of my head
and mowing them through.

Notwithstanding long rolling fields
white washed buildings by the woods
timeless farmers, horse drawn wagons
and all that other postcard baggage.
He setting fence posts avoiding himself.
Me avoiding me.
THE WEB

A paralysis sets in, heavy
as German figurines on the mantle,
as bottles of booze
opened at breakfast.
The mind turns these things
with a spidered leg
until the white piano
(antiqued gold) and the velvet
paintings are arranged
all at once -- ready
to blur as his face comes toward me.
Furious -- we met on the stairs.

But the mind tastes only the blond hair
of a girl who will step one day
into a house of her own, similarly
carpeted. In her aspirations
she grows more splendid, more shrill
behind his shoulder, until
the paralysis sinks deeper
and she is finally a sensation
like the vague blare of several TVs
late at night -- where, still thrashing,
trapped in bedclothes and sheets
is the memory of his hands
in the nightlight, smoothing
the covers, lifting
my gown.
Christina Zawadiwsky

DESIRE

Sitting near the river, the wind brushed a flower whose tip touched the inside of your thigh, and we grew roots all the way through the earth to China, and we twined and intertwined up to our very eyeholes, and we blossomed as a double flower, I blinked, you above me, deep red cloud unfurling, I below, blue and purple, and our lips and hips and navels reminded me of your mother, she lay singing in the flames of a night's wrecked desire, colored lights everywhere while I held my breath under the water, curled up, moved on to India: you were there in every hollow face, in each skeletal ghost starved and stacked one on another in the train station, breathing, sleeping, unfolding your hands and saying they were the best part of your body: I turned your palms over under the light of the dance floor, read those jagged, arrogant lines, spit and walked away. Sitting beside someone who never stops sitting beside me, his blond hair a brushfire, his calloused hands caressing everyone's fantasy, I hold out this water, the cup is empty, the goblet of his tongue is large and warm, he wants to be punished, to have his head held under water, his hands tied, his meek face beaten, his body thrown on the holy river to flower, to dance, sing, ring before it enters the infinitely sweeter and larger storm.
AFTER APHRODITE'S DAMAGE

I remove the flowers from my room,
I let the candles starve in the dark,
I keep the stereo needle from playing jazz,
I pour a paucity of wine,
I eat as one whose stomach has shrunk,
I grow shadows under my eyes,
talking all night to the shades of fallen lovers.

Now that you've done your damage,
I want only to dig a hole
and crawl inside, pull the deep smelling
soil toward me, the way
I once drew love close, with both hands.
LASLO

Lived a wound all Winter:
painting scenes of Paris
in bright reds and yellows.
Painted in the backroom of his shop
where he kept and infrequently sold
antique sheet music.

Laslo, whose eyes were always
swimming, who only came out
at dusk, who walked
using a wonderous bamboo cane,
its gold handle glinting
with the fall of light.

Story has it that Laslo
while feeding the pigeons one Spring day,
suddenly grew feathers
and disappeared among the other pigeons
when they flew off
in a startle.

IF JANOS STARKER

keeps playing his cello
and I keep drinking this Fundador,
there's no telling
what might happen.
Falla, Torroba, Granados,
Albeniz, Rodrigo, Cassado --
Spain, why do you keep
torturing me so?
What do you think
my heart's made of?
Poems from the Sangamon by John Knoepfle.
Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985

The Sangamon River country is well-travelled ground in American letters: this is the landscape of Lindsay and Masters, from Spoon River to his final book, The Sangamon, in the admirable American Rivers series. The stories of Lincoln in Illinois are the stuff of every American grade school education and often the late night movies. Thus the superficial bookbuyer might be tempted to regard John Knoepfle’s new exploration of this seemingly familiar territory as an exercise in redundancy.

Fortunately, Knoepfle achieves the opposite. Just as Masters’ Spoon River broke new geographic and aesthetic ground, so this book of fine poetry uses innovative techniques and new narrative forms to tell the Sangamon’s story of and for this generation. The world of Masters was declining even as he created his masterpiece; witness the bleaker lives and cultural decay in the New Spoon River Anthology. Knoepfle presents rural Illinois several generations further down this road.

Masters’ gathered spectral persona in Spoon River, or the fond and lingering backward glance in his last book are the word of a consummate storyteller in a more or less traditional mode. Each detail, anecdote, or historical fact is pieced together like a country quilt, according to an honored pattern. Knoepfle’s book of many poems, generally small and short, resembles more a walk down a small town street in mid-summer: seemingly without a guide, the reader puts together a sense of the place by arranging the snippets of conversation or electronic broadcasts floating out of open windows, historical markers along the way, small bits of song snatched from the radio or a car speeding past.

Knoepfle’s use of private, personal experience, conversation, history with its figures and documents, all split into many single cubist facets, parallels the substance of many of the poems. Taken as a whole, Poems from the Sangamon is a picture of rural America in this decade, a fractured landscape peopled by the marginal, littered with nuclear reactors, farm foreclosures, and historical sites reduced to Disneylandish tourist meccas.

Divided into nine sections, the book begins with the poet’s description of the landscape surrounding him and its creatures, a place where past and present jostle for attention. In “Saturday morning” he observes:

It is as if you were walking
the top of creation
or you could jog these moraines forever
the river is ditched here
an interrupted line on the map
still green to the eye though
and crowding its slender grasses
the old channel
insinuates itself through cornfields
loops across and back
or coils alongside the ditch
still roaming its old valley
telephone cables overhead
catch the gusts of a storm
the gray light of morning whines
you turn searching for something
that should be there
Sally Jo Sorensen

This key poem opens the book into what was there, the worlds of the Native American inhabitants and the whites who usurped them in Knoepfle's chosen home. Here historical voices blend with exercises in ethnopoetics; both French Priests and those to whom they brought their mission speak. In "tamaroa prayer," Knoepfle converts the Lord's Prayer into this nation's extinct language, using guides recorded by the priests. It's difficult to assess whether this poem is an accurate reflection of the Tamaroa version of a European prayer. It is a lovely poem, nonetheless, demonstrating the lyrical gifts so strongly present in much of this book. The poem bears repeating in its entirety:

let those who live with you
in your home in that other world
honor what they call you

let them listen to you
when you come to light your fire
and we will kindle our fires
as the year rounds in green corn

give us enough to eat
when the winter starves us
even the inside bark of the white oak
would nourish us

do not remember how we forget you
and our enemies we will forget them
thinking of you

come out of your house
and stay with us in summer
or we will be spoiled
in the months of plenty
and you will be angry with us

walk with your arms around us
as if you would adopt us
when that time raves from an ambush
that we had not foreseen
and kills us with its arrows

The book's third section quickly jumps into the present world of the prairie: nuclear reactors, subdivisions, down-and-out industrial towns, and farm auctions, each presented with unaltering vision. Each separate poem works like a snapshot. These portraits are much closer to small town rural America than the comforting distortions of Keillor. To wit, in "decatur,"
is town has tomatoes born for the future
that hydroponic renewal
freight cars assembled by computer
and there are golf courses a swimming pool
lake activities prospects
a ymca a good downtown library
junior college etcetera

hard business and hardball times
would that work could sweep us into heaven

As if in recoil from the unrelieved harshness of the preceding group of poems, section four is a compendium of modern fibs and tall tales, the stuff of cafes and barbershops. The sort of down-home silliness persists in the face of economic decline in my native Minnesota, yet I must admit that all but one of these were new to me, except for a variant of this:

the all girl kazoo band
the wives mothers singles
they are dressed in white formals
and wear blue sashes

they dont mind very much
whether or not they play well
just so long as they know
they all look beautiful

isnt that delicious

one of the girls
eases herself into her bodice
with both hands
and pulls out two kazos

she says see I have two kazos
and I say oh well ah why yes
you really do
have two kazos

The remaining four sections of the book blend its established themes, introducing the Sangamon’s historical and literary heroes, Lincoln, Lindsay and Masters. Past and present weave together. Each additional poem adds to the sense of place, so that by the book’s conclusion, the Sangamon is clearly established, a place where

it was always more than dawn
that we looked for
something that we had not seen
as we watched here
gathered from the ashes of our vision

“confluence”
Sally Jo Sorensen

Though the whole of this chronicle is greater than the sum of its parts, many of the individual poems in the book hold their own without reference to others. This is especially true of the book's more lyrical, less narrative poems. At times, this writer's language can dance and sing, or approach lullaby; these moments are frequent throughout the book. One comes in the closing stanzas of "old name old river:"

one time at sangchris
there were white deer
they trembled at the rivers edge
frail and luminous
beneath a wash of stars
or in some eclipse
feeding on their own light
an imagination of shadows
lost in a slow river
with its choiring of wolves

Born of an understanding presumably developed from the writer's longtime residence in the Sangamon country, this is intelligent poetry. It is also a well-researched understanding: the book attributes historic sources and contains notes that explain the poems' less known references. That the audience for this book might be small is more of a comment on the marketing practices and presumptions of the publishing world than of the quality of the poetry contained within it or its accessibility.

This is surely a sad state of affairs, as this fine Midwestern writer deserves serious attention. A quick glance over his A Circle of Stones: Selected Poems (Kansas City: BkMk Press) reveals a writer who has remained steadfast to his own style of writing, regardless of literary trends. This fidelity, allied as it is with longstanding lyrical power, and the fact that this is a writer with something to write about, is the thing that might bring that rare birds—the reader—back to poetry.
PUNKS

On the buffed hoods,
    living ornaments,
half-a-dozen teenage delinquents
assume the pose
    of their sexual heroes:
legs spread,
    denim worn at the crotch,
tee-shirts tucked tightly into jeans,
palms on hips or
    pampering hair --
these rough boys seem ready
to rehearse choreography,
a routine right out of *West Side Story*.
Don't they know
that was more than twenty years ago?
Still, they stare --
cigarettes punctuating the air --
till I look away, shift
toward the glare
    of this Safeway
that allows them to loiter in the lot.
Better here
    where they can be seen,
the neighbors always exclaim, than
off somewhere contriving who knows what?
But, leaving the store, I recognize
my neighbor's son
draped on a fender among them --
that sweet, gentle, bright,
    yearning
face wafting its parcel of smoke
toward the glittering,
    newly-named planets
also loitering in the cool vicinity.
Now I can see
    these boys aren't tough, or
Michael Waters

aching for trouble, for violent exchange.
These bored boys

lean onto their cars,
hook a finger through a belt-loop,

the pulsing of solitary stars,
wheeling in one space
till singled out

or erased.

THUNDER ABOVE ARDSLEY-ON-HUDSON

Here where the shelf of air is clear,
luminous, brushed with the scent
of evergreen, you can gaze
upon the rough,

leaf-lit frothings of the river,
craggy ice-floes, rain limned
elms muffling the slope,
the clothy dark.

The air will part for a thought --
that square of yellow light
miles off, size of a
postage stamp,

might deepen into a familiar room
where a woman you once touched
loosens her hair, thinking
of no one.

God must be lonely too, the whole
countyside in his view.
ON THE AFTERNOON OF THE PROM

Leanna DiMauro is stopping traffic
but can't believe anyone thinks she's pretty.
Her blond hair and neck are dirty.
Dust glosses her lower lip.

And she's never been more bored,
not even in Civics, waving
the flag as if she recognizes you,
fashioning one long lane from two.

In a few hours she'll shower,
slide into a strapless gown,
and practice patience while her date
pins an orchid to her breast.

Monday she starts flagging full-time.
The rest of the crew is smoothing tar
500 yards down the highway,
taking leaks behind the steamroller.

But she's distant, given the dummy's job,
the red rag, the orange day-glo vest.
Even though she's a mess,
some asshole will roll down his window
to shout something stupid, then honk.
What's she doing, standing there
while the whole world creeps by on rubber,
wondering if the grit on her face

will ever rub off, even with pumice?
She'll scrub her face till it hurts.
Tonight she'll make her nervous
boyfriend wait and wait and wait...
MATE

Many times you tell me about the ritual
of sipping Mate when you were 17 in South America
with the man you called your Argentinian grandfather.
He was a leathery peasant,
you were a Philadelphia boy in peachfuzz
but you solemnly requested he talk world politics.
At the start of each day you sat outside,
and were men together.

There was the gourd, the silver straw,
and the rough-cut leaves
of the Yerba Mate plant.
The gourd is round and hollow.
The straw is long and straight.
Later, shopping for your own set to take back home,
you are embarrassed when the storekeeper thinks
you want a prostitute. The slang has tricked you.

Again and again, you teach me the Spanish words
for the gourd and the silver straw,
making me roll them on my tongue
until my pronunciation is perfect.
Finally, a year after we have met,
you decide to show me
what the Mate is like.

You fill a gourd with the Maté, then pour
boiling water inside. This will be an acquired taste,
you say, a fine stimulant,
clearing away
the haze of too many tears, too many recriminations.
You pass me the gourd first, bidding I sip
the bitter liquid until the gourd is dry.

Six times you refill the gourd.
In turn, we share the same silver straw,
sipping, talking, sometimes smiling.
We repeat the ritual until the Mate has gone
from strong to weak,
from bitter to sweet,
until it has been the same for each of us,
and there is nothing
left but clear water.
AMBIVALENCE

It would have been better
if we had never married
if we had gone through life
alone, juggling ourselves
from hand to snatching hand,
but then there would be no
children, no small hand in
yours or mine, becoming
more what we are than what
we want, walking between
us, growing larger as
we grow smaller, thinner,
walking between us...
Ed Hughes, *Procession*
(ink & pencil, 1981)
"YOU'LL COME OUT OF THIS SMELLING LIKE A ROSE"

And I walk down the street
and people turn as I go by,
their noses sniffing the air.

I feel as if
I'm on my way
to someone,
a gift,
although to whom
and from whom
I cannot say.

At night I dream
of finding my place
at the center of a table
around which
an entire room
gathers itself.

I flush
with life.

Women want to put me
in their vases,
single-stemmed.
LAT. MITTERE, TO SEND

When I was in grade school,
it was only "missal,"
never "missile."
Our Sunday Missal
with its red, raised chalice

and encircling crown of thorns
on the back cover.
How good it felt
in the hand,
how neatly it fit!

Now our prayers
are in silos,
pointed to heaven;
they still go up,
trailing clouds of something,

if not glory.
Sister Mary Felicitas
always cautioned us:
Your prayers may be answered
in ways you don’t expect.

That's what I'm afraid of, Sister:
a long red ribbon
attached to the spine
trails its thin line of blood
to mark where we are.
Contributors

Joseph Bruchac is the editor of *The Greenfield Review* and proprietor of the Greenfield Review Press. The most recent of his many books is *Iroquois Stories*, a collection of tales he edited for the Crossing Press.

Karen Blomain has new work in recent issues of *The Carlton Miscellany, Poets On, Manhattan Poetry Review*, and others. She is presently working on a book-length poem about railroads and mining in northeastern Pennsylvania.

Darcy Cummings has had poems in *Poetry Northwest, Intro. Carolina Quarterly, Graham House Review*, and more. She received a 1985 fellowship from the N.J. Council on the Arts.


Ann Douglas is from Seattle, and has work in *Seattle Review, Georgia Review, Columbia Magazine* and others.

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Thomas Haslam has poems in recent issues of *Piedmont Literary Review, Kindred Spirit* and others.


Eugene Howard, a native Philadelphian, is a self-taught poet who has been making and reading poems for more than twenty years. His work has appeared in *The Journal of Black Poetry Review, American Poetry Review, Hoodoo*, and others. He has published a chapbook, *Survival Songs*, and a long poem, "Under Scorpio: The Jonestown Homisicides," is forthcoming from the Axe Factory Press. He is tutorial coordinator of the ACT 101 Program at the Philadelphia Colleges of the Arts and teaches writing at Antioch University of Philadelphia.

Ed Hughes is a Philadelphia artist who has exhibited his work in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and, most recently, in Arizona.

David Ignatow has had his *New and Selected Poems, 1970-1985* published by Wesleyan Press this year. He is currently Visiting Professor at both Columbia and NYU.
Peter Krok has work recently in Negative Capability, Blue Unicorn and others. He lives in Philadelphia.

Amy Jeanne has work in recent issues of Bogg, Second Coming, Electrum, and others. She is currently at work on her fifth collection of poems, and she edits Black Bear Review.

Heather McHugh is the author of Dangers and A World of Difference. Her translation of Jean Follain, D’Apre Tout, from Princeton University Press is often overlooked but should not be.

Marge Piercy has finished the WWII novel she has been working on for ten years; Gone to Soldiers will be published in the spring. She has edited Early Ripening, an anthology of women’s poetry to be published in 1987. Her most recent collection of poetry is My Mother’s Body.

Maralyn Lois Polak has a chapbook, Facing the Music, published by Slash & Burn Press last year. The Writer As Celebrity, a collection of interviews with writers, was published by Evans this year.

Lee W. Potts is in the process of completing his first collection, Not Looking Before Crossing.

Joanne W. Riley is from Normal, Ill. Her second book of poems, Racing the Moon, was a Chantry Press selection for 1985. Her work has appeared recently in Crosscurrents, Webster Review, and Cape Rock.

Rebecca Seiferle has had poems in recent issues of American Poetry Review, Indiana Review, Descant and others. She lives in New Mexico.

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Tim Troll, for the last six years, was a city planner for St. Mary’s, Alaska, a small Yup’ik community on the Yukon. He is presently doing graduate work at the University of Pennsylvania.

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Michael Waters has poems recently or soon in Poetry, Georgia Review, Ohio Review, Missouri Review and others. He has edited a study of the work of John Logan called Dissolving to Island, for Ford-Brown Press.

Dieter Weslowski has published in numerous journals and reviews, and earns his keep as a psychiatric orderly in Pittsburg, PA.

Christina Zawadiwsky is from Milwaukee. In 1986, Raccoon Press published a large collection of her work under the title, The Hand on the Head of Lazarus.
$4.$