Painted Bride Quarterly
A Poetry Retrospective
1973–1993

Edited by Louis McKee
Painted Bride Quarterly

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1973–1993

Double Issue 50/51

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Introduction

—What a long strange trip it's been.

When Louise Simons and R. Daniel Evans put together the first *Painted Bride Quarterly*, there was hardly an expectation of a 20th anniversary issue. This was, after all, a little magazine, a romp in the ephemeral small press world. Getting out a first issue was an achievement. Second issues were not so difficult, perhaps, but thirds were rare. No one dared dream as far as six...twelve...fifty.... Everything in this world was so tentative: writers, readers, energy, money. It sometimes seemed that there were demons and monsters behind every rock, lurking in every shadow. There is a logic to it all, a simple math: good writing will bring a large and loyal readership, and their support will make it all almost effortless. Yeah. Right.

Well, it turned out that the good writing was there—almost as though it had been waiting for the magazine. And the audience, while never quite as large as one might have hoped, was loyal; they, too, had been waiting. Money came in—but never enough, because *PBQ* kept getting bigger, cleaner, and more extraordinary.

For more than six years Simons and Evans fought off the demons and monsters, and each issue grew stronger with poetry, fiction, essays, and visual art. The litmag they passed on to the new editor, Anthony West, when they finally decided to reclaim their own lives, their own work, was one of the most widely known and respected on the small press scene. West continued that tradition for the next two years.

Around that time, though, those menacing adversaries were muscling up. After seven years *PBQ* needed to take a breather. Seven years is a long time in the world of literary magazines; however, this was no time to quit. Catch a breath. Walk it off. Then head on out again with a second wind. Enter Sally Jo Sorensen. She rounded up a crew of interested hands, and together they reinvented *PBQ*. Less than two years after the last issue of volume 7, there was a new magazine being passed around. Number 18 appeared in 1983. (This was not the 18th issue of *PBQ*, but actually the 27th. Just a little something to throw off those who were watching too closely.)
Since then, PBQ has kept to a somewhat regular schedule. When Sorensen left town a few years later she turned the magazine over to the triumvirate of Lou Camp, Joanna DiPaolo and myself. Then a few years beyond that it was given into the hands of Lee W. Potts and Teresa Leo. Ms. Leo is in charge now—the next 50 issues are up to her.

In the meantime join us in celebrating with some of the best poetry from 20 years and more than 50 issues of PBQ. More than 100 poets are assembled here. My thanks to all of them. They made this job quite painless. Thank you, too, to all those who served time working on the magazine over the last 20 years. Associated with those mentioned above have been Roslynn Smerilson Mansfield, Claudia Green, Paul Epstein, Joe Scorsone, Kate Britt, Alexis D. Pate, John Gamble, Lynn Adams Dierdorf, Jody Kolodzy, Daniel Blaukopf, Beth Brown, Alan Bates, Carole Bernstein, Eva Gluckman, Leslie Harsh, Raymond Rorke, Joe Beam, Leslie Capland, Chris Simpson, Jerry Hagins, Ellen Slack, Fran Quinn, Chris Stroffolino, Kathy Volk Miller, Megan Dougherty, Meg Weidner, and Brian Brown. Certainly there are others who contributed; my apologies to anyone omitted.

A special thanks, as always, to Gerry Givnish, Gil Ott, and the entire community of the Painted Bride Art Center. Their encouragement, assistance, generosity, and understanding cannot be exaggerated.

—Louis McKee
Spring '93
Welcome

One and one are two.
Two and two are four.
Pipsissiwas and sassafras
Bloom at my front door.

1988
Ars Poetica

The summer before I ever
wrote a poem, I worked for Sal,
stocking shelves and carting cold
beer through the smoke and
sparks of the ironworks,
where I got my taste of hell.

Thirteen that year; and a sparrow
flew into the store to squat
in a low, dark space by the apple
bin and Sal's big neon sign—piping
like a world of sorrow. Sal said the job
was mine. I had to snake my arm in and get it.

And maybe I shouldn't have let it,
but that bird pecked my hand
and shot past my cuff
up my sleeve—and didn't I holler
for heaven, my shirt all aflutter,
me with a double heart!

When that sparrow came out of my collar,
a quick, cold fire with wings, some
thing I hadn't thought to utter
rushed from my throat. Right then,
when I could breathe, I told myself
I'd try that trick again.
Lure

in a daze I trail a strange woman
her image hooks my eye
blonde hair white dress green

shoes a broken strap she keeps
stopping to fix

aimlessly she floats thru a maze
of the errand annointed

I follow unable to speak my
motions those of a man walking
thru water

unable to make sense cf this
lure this situation the rock
that snags my mind.

1986
The New Love Poem

The new love poem
is known for its honesty.
The new love poem says
I don’t love you.

The new love poem
remembers the old love poem
in which a woman’s body
was compared to the entire world.
The new love poem tries not to feel
superior to the old love poem.

The new love poem can live
on a steady diet
of bitter fruit. The new love poem
thinks sweets
are for children.

When the new love poem sleeps
it dreams
of getting old,
of shrivelling to a chrysalis,
of something with wings
and color so loud it talks
emerging
to thrill someone who doesn’t know any better
and who doesn’t want to.

1984
Invocation

Midnight. I'm at my desk alone.
My muse saunters towards me—
she's fat, implacable.
The flesh of her legs
pushes over her nylons
like butter in a churn,
a grape of cigarette
ash bangs off a
brutal tit.
"Fuck their minds,
boy," she says.
"Write it down."

1975
Prove It

I see Bubba Barnes
sneak a comic book
from the rack in
the Rexall drug-
store, and the next
day at recess
I tell him. He
says Prove it.

I even saw the
name of the comic,
I tell him. Sub-
mariner. Isn't
that right? He
says Prove it.

I don't have to
prove it, I say.
I know you did it
and you know you
did it. So, he
says, prove it, ass-
eyes. Just prove it.

You can go to
hell for swearing,
I say. Bubba says
Prove it. And for
stealing, I say,
and for not tell-
ing the truth. Bub-
ba says Prove it.
Prove it, you
little peckerhead,
he says. Prove it
prove it prove it
prove it
prove it.
Train Set

When I was a boy my father put up a train set every Christmas.
The tracks wound around an aluminum tree,
the still-to-be-opened presents, and a small town
that my father had also erected.
A child waved to the driver of the locomotive.
Neighbors called to each other.
Men with lunchpails entered a construction site,
all smiles and dirty clothes.
The matchbox cars that waited at a railroad crossing
were free of dents and missed payments.

This morning when my son asked
if we were doing anything special for Christmas
I thought of the world that someday might take up
this living room floor.
Soldiers will move from house to house collecting taxes.
A girl will marry too young, another will contract
a strange disease, and every day a different man
will be left by a lover.

If when we die we find that heaven
is one big train set where God lets us be
the stationary figure of our choice,
I'd like to be a boy, somewhat overweight,
walking out of a barbershop with a crew cut.
Lance, the town bully, will be two steps away
with his palm perpetually extended,
ready to rub my head at any moment
for good luck.

1987
The Grackles

More savage birds flock the lawn each April,
some with spears in their beaks and all with beaks.
I remember Aprils when they came to build
nests in the landscape, grackle by grackle
in oak or elm, as perfectly as crystal
laying its points.

They are more human now,
unbridled in their conclave on the lawn
where they sit swaying in the honey of fever.

I cannot tell from here which is the master bird,
and a closer look might fasten them on me,
and soon that bird will start up anyway
from off-center or the far edge and wing
round to an oak, the others in its wake,
to resume the broken conclave vertically.

Where are the songs of spring? I think of birds
fattening in its warmth, climbing, threading along
the invariable vineyard of its praise
outside windows. Where is the spring of song
in which these sad migrations have no part,
their birds so hard?

Summer last year was calm.
Against what season do these grackles arm?
Dark Wood

It's the only thing I know of him:
that my grandmother can remember
his tapping the floorboards above them
that spring, at dusk, just before he died.
I don't know how his blood reaches me
or how he found his way to the room
above this table where we gather
as the large family we forget we are.

The cane he used to summon them
hangs waiting with our coats by the door.
As we leave after each holiday
my brother tells me he is tempted
to take it with him and use it himself.
The dark wood begs his hand
he says.
poem no. 8

from "The angel's wing. the landscape's calligraphy"

On this journey, nothing we already know
can help us. Having come to know anything
intimately, we begin to possess it.
and in possession, to mark it,
and then to domesticate it,
and finally to grow weary of it.

When the circuit breaks,
the eyes tire, the mind lets go
that which it cannot reduce to number
or name, and clarity breaks us open
like pain, and cuts us off from escape
into history or private idealization.
So we find ourselves bereft of useless fictions,
comfortable limits we have adopted as our own.

Here the road at last moves downward
in more orderly gradation
after long jagged progress through
dangerous cliffs that even now seem waiting
to hurl us onto waves breaking far below.
The Great Bridge Game of Life

What with one thing and another they were all too complicated. I was seen leaving. Good grief, a frog. How funny that piece of scaffolding flits against yon crimson cloud, to their mutual betterment, actually. Try saying that aloud. A nice military mood and then where in the walk I was mistaken and that took again. We all fell over our numbers, if seeing is to believing as the flat wave is on the stair.

No, scars. You forgot to pack some. The world will live without them and we must scurry to dream up some other identical crisis. First it’s men and then it’s me, that stayed nights in a box, sometimes. Sometimes we were up and sometimes we were down. It takes one of us to reposition us and by that time danger has worn the day down to its nub. It’s best not to be here. But if we linger after waters and cents nothing is then too obtuse for the clime, the time and all we traveled backward for: one good image, the rest fenced off.

Do you think you’re better for all that clashing? The seesaw on the roof in Zagreb disappeared, part of it. There were no tonsils, no noodles in the paper that day.

One tries to keep oh so many foreign things in mind but as mustard seeps from a diary, the elegance had gone out of life. Now there was nothing to repair.

1992
The Mesopotamian Tool Room

A man with an ancient cigar
and a barking, three-legged dog
fixed dismembered cars
in the old neighborhood for years
with tools just like the tools
you are assigned to guard.
The Mesopotamian wing is in the basement,
dark as a torture chamber,
and except for the weekend father
who marches progeny through
a microwave tour of man's progress,
no one comes here by design.

Teenagers in search of a place to neck
think it avant garde to suggest
a quickie on the floor with history
as the voyeur, but they never follow through.
Any single man here is a rapist;
every woman is ripe and curvaceous
against the decay of Mesopotamia.
You invent a plot for them—
the hunchback of Notre Dame
and Botticelli's Venus meet, turn out
to be cousins, marry anyway,
but this takes, what? Ten seconds?

And you've got decades of timeclocks to punch
before you can retire
to tell your grandchildren what?
Mesopotamia invented the toothbrush?
They don't even need a guard here.
People slash the Mona Lisa's smile
and giddy-up the brontosaurus skeleton,
but no one since Mesopotamia
has craved a Mesopotamian shovel.
You'd love to catch an archaeologist
with his hand in the cookie jar
or better yet, leave out

milk and cookies for him,
let him take everything,
Santa Claus with the film in reverse
to the beginning time,
before Mesopotamia, when cockroaches
were the latest model, the first
crustaceans that learned to walk.
Almost asleep in your chair,
you see lights flicker and swear
the tools themselves are trying to escape,
grieved in their display case
like live lobsters in a tank.

1988
Passing Through Albuquerque

At dusk, by the irrigation ditch
gurgling past backyards near the highway,
locusts raise a maze of calls in cottonwoods.

A Spanish girl in a white party dress
strolls the levee by the muddy water
where her small sister plunks in stones.

Beyond a low adobe wall and a wrecked car
men are pitching horseshoes in a dusty lot.
Someone shouts as he clangs in a ringer.

Big winds buffet in ahead of a storm,
rocking the immense trees and whipping up
clouds of dust, wild leaves, and cottonwool.

In the moment when the locusts pause and the girl
presses her up-fluttering dress to her bony knees
you can hear a banjo, guitar, and fiddle

playing "The Mississippi Sawyer" inside a shack.
Moments like that, you can love this country.

1987
Message to Etheridge Knight

Don’t stop rummaging, through sacred silence,
inside the head. Yes, it does matter
that you’ve found the being, the speaker.
How brilliantly you sustain your voice,
capture the rhythms of jazz.
You are the one, the soulful one,
making music, lifting spirits.
It is so magical. We are waiting
in the earthlight, ears attuned:
listening, listening to whatever comes into existence.

There is a sense of belonging, a perpetual aesthetic
like rhythm and blues, kept transforming
Our ancestors who knew about secret cadences,
who held fast to dreams,
sang so jubilantly, so naturally,
while working cultivated ground
against the sun’s glare.
Jazzman, we know your art will survive.
Soon enough your fiery words will help people
define their being; oh sing, Etheridge, ease the spirit.

1988
Bride 1949

Even the hatbox bartered flamingoes.

Spider and Squirrel Nightfall Construction

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

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

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

Oil for the Lamps of China

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

1975
Skylight

a woman keeps
her paintings under
the bed
stacked face down
like cards
her husband calls
clutter

no matter how
gently she
turns
she hears
the scraping
of canvas against
canvas one
vision against
another

her house is brick
is safe from wolves
and wild impulses

the steps to the attic
are steep
leave her breathless
a hard climb into
not enough light

today she has decided
a hole in the roof
is a necessity
not for the stars
or a planet
where she could
open her hand
show every line
in her palm
brazen as copper thread

the hole
she cuts is
for her to
breathe through

light
pours in
splashes the
wide floorboards
she feels it drip
from her face
her neck  her arms

color rises
in her
she doesn't know yet
what color
it is or
what shape she
will give it

she drags an old bureau
from the corner
and stands on it to
look out

1983
You Wouldn’t Know

You wouldn’t know love even if it jumped up and bit you on the ass,
even if it sent you a telegram saying This is it Buddy,
and the messenger read it personally to you while he was standing
dripping rain on your new hall rug, you still wouldn’t know it,
or even if mysteriously you awoke tattooed with a secret code
that made you the human rosetta stone of romance, so what,
or if, as you unrolled toilet paper the truth magically appeared,
inscribed square by square which you simply and blithely would tear off and
flush down the toilet; you know who you are,
snug and snug in your bachelor pad, surrounded by female bookends
who prop you up in your loneliness, and your female cereal boxes
sweet but empty, something to distract you at meals but not a prize
in the bottom any more, please pay attention, I’m talking to you,
even if it was a newspaper story with your name and address as the victim,
even if you saw it on TV in a half-hour special report,
even if it was a computer printout with all the exact particulars,
or a blueprint with all the details, even if you were cooking red snapper
for your latest conquest and you found it where the recipe used to be,
even if it was spelled out in lipstick across your bathroom mirror,
even if your mother called long distance and said after 100 years
she's finally giving you permission to like another woman better than her,
even if all your women conspired to disappear and leave you alone with me,
even if you got a $10 sheet of postage stamps each bearing my name,
even if your car automatically drove to my house every night after work,
even if all the lights in your house stayed on until I got there,
even if you were kidnapped and held hostage and I walked in to save you from
execution,
even if it was a movie script and you were the star with all the right lines
playing opposite Susan Sarandon, even if we were on a desert island
without food or water, even if the lyrics to your favorite opera
suddenly screamed it out at you, even if I became young and beautiful and busty
and conventional and suddenly sold all my old furniture and got Danish modern
formica,
even if every fortune cookie you ate bombarded you with the same message,
even if the Bible told you so, even if all the billboards and all the country
western songs in the world kept reminding you,
even if it made you do 100 nonstop pushups, even if it was the 11th commandment
or the 8th wonder or the FBI interrogated you or the CIA brainwashed you,
not even then, even if it corrected the minor physical defects that annoy you,
even if it struck you dumb and sent you candy and flowers
and made you speak in clichés and made you hear singing when there's no one there
and made you dizzy and lose your appetite, even if you were given nectar
and ambrosia of the gods, even if it lit bamboo splints under your fingernails,
even if you were tickled with peacock feathers and whipped with vine leaves
and rubbed with fragrant oils and attended by pliant and yielding
nubile maidens or at least a Playboy Bunny, even if a genie in a bottle
granted your three wishes, even if you won the Lottery, even if I did become a man
whatever that means, even if all your defenses got crumbled by termites,
even if you were bound and gagged and tortured and ransomed
and sold to the highest bidder at a charity auction,
even if it cured cancer and the common cold and bad breath and herpes
and terminal ugliness, even if it bled all over your favorite white shirt,
even if it made you laugh more than any Jewish American Princess joke,
even if it wrote the Great American Novel and dedicated it to you,
even if it cleaned the tiles in your bathroom and fixed your trash compactor
and perfected the elusive art of social conversation at tricky junctures
between courses, even if it protected you from muggers while you ran
after dark by the river, even if it prevented dead air and public humiliation,
even if it was an amulet against the evil eye, even if it recited
'let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments' from memory in
seven languages, even if it was prepared by Escoffier and served at Lutece, even if
you were shaked, baked, drugged, bugged, and mugged,
even if you had a heart transplant,
even if these weren't the nocturnal ravings of a jealous woman,
what else can I say to you, I have no more words left,
there is no theory or logic, potion or pain to persuade you,
and now I know this.

1984
Night Poem

my kimono
soft from many washings
begins a silent
tearing
from the hem
towards
the neckline

i must move
very slowly
and it will last
a little longer
than the mood
we so softly shared
one night ago

1978
Second Diptych

Sun suspends itself behind recycled toilet paper.  
Polyurethane elephant skulls  
demarcate suburban roof gardens.

The dictionary contains three complete sets:  
one for elegiasts; one for mourners; one for nomads  
darting between their tidy subdivisions.

After grinding language's edifice  
into layers of different colored powders,  
the painter begins adjusting the light,

its resemblance to comportment chambers.  
Mattress forms pasted to doors.  
Pesticides for people.

He is a member of the Ruffer Branch,  
and belongs to a tribe of dust selectors.  
Egyptian mummies make the best undercoating.

They leave their bodies in order to talk.  
Harsh gutturals pierce the cartilage.  
Stump twiddlers. Butterfly storage warehouse.

She detaches his hands from her mouth  
and returns them to their velvet case.  
A clock flickers near evening's residue.

Each animal is buried next to  
one of similar size and shape.  
An alphabet made up of two letters.

Language as a shield  
separating the head from the feet.

1992
from “The Pillow Book of Leonard Gontarek”

Reading The Classics
The Hunchback of Notre Dame. The story of
the poor bell-ringer Quasimodo, whose only
dream in life was to be a real modo like
everyone else.

Frightening Things
Is there anything scarier than a group of
art students descending on a park in late
afternoon, in autumn, with cameras?

Things That Are Quiet
It's nice to see that all those kids
who raised their hands and talked in
class have become mimes.

Things That Recall Your Childhood
It wasn't that I played with my food,
but that I made things out of it: pietas,
mt. rushmores, brancusis, out of peas,
carrots, brussels sprouts, mashed potatoes,
miniature landscapes you could imagine
model railroads hurtling through.

Things That Are Entertaining To Me
This morning I saw a female security
guard wrestle another woman, who was
stealing jello, to the floor of a
supermarket.
Real Things
Walking to the library, I stopped at a
red light and a man cleaned my
glasses with the edge of his jacket,
put his hand out to me and said change,
and I knew I was here, in Philadelphia,
Planet Earth, home.

Things That Are Not Easy To Understand
My brother. Goes into a bar called
The Isle Of Lesbos. Goes on and on
about “all the women there.” My
brother. I’m related to him.

Smart Things
“I’m reading Kafka so I’ll know what
people are talking about when they say
Kafkaesque.” That’s the best reason I’ve
ever heard for reading him. By the way,
that’s a very Kafkaesque dress you’re
wearing.

One More Thing
Something funny happened to me
in a restaurant the other night.
There was a man and a woman across
the room from me. The man must have
said something funny because I heard
the woman laughing, and when I looked
up there was a cartoon balloon over
her head, filled with ha-ha-ha's.
Then the balloon began to float
around the restaurant, coming to a
stop over my head. It was a cloud
with a silver lining. It opened up:
colored confetti of h's and o's and a's
poured down. And the laugh was on me.

1992
Sentences

It is raining in my heart, but I don’t believe that it is raining.
It is raining softly on the town, but I don’t believe the town exists.
It is raining softly on the tip of my tongue, but not now.
You say it is a sentence, but there is some possibility it is not a sentence.
It is a sentence, but it is very difficult to explain why it is a sentence.

My love is on the phone, but it is not raw that my love is on the phone.
I have moved, but I do not know that I have moved.
I am in a position to assert the summer has ended, but I don’t believe it.
A raven screamed at one in the parking lot, but it was not a raven:
    it was a prisoner.
My love is a double agent, and I hesitantly believe she is not.

Time is brutal, but I do not believe time is brutal.
Fact: Time is brutal fact, but it is not certain time is a brutal fact.
Fact: Time is a social animal, but it may be that time
    is not a social animal.
Time satisfies all these conditions, but time does not satisfy all.
Time depends on future sentences: What I find hard to believe.

The book contains your barest preface, but I do not think it is a book.
The table of contents is unhelpful, but I do not think it is the contents.
Worst of all there is a key, but I believe there is no key.
The reader loses his way richly, but it is not certain that the reader loses.
Nevertheless, you found your way about, though I do not know you.

1992
All-Star

for AMM in his tenth summer

During the anthem, cap covering your heart
in a gesture you have never shown,
you face the flag in center, taller than all
but one along the line from first to home,
and with a thickness through the shoulders
you've gained in just the last few minutes.
I am caught off base and out of time
by this sudden size and style.

At the ump's loud "Play ball," you settle
under your cap, tilting your head
back into it, like a big leaguer,
and the angle of your chin declares your intent:
"I can play this game. Let's do it."

By god, if you don't: creaming one to the gap
in right-center for a triple, scooping throws
from the dirt at first, as though you knew
the ball's mind and changed it.
With the game on the line,
they call you in to pitch.
How did you learn to stride
like this, with self-possession in your step?

When you take the ball, kick back,
and sling it, without a hitch,
hard overhand for strikes,
I feel a major twinge of something in my guts,
a giddy slippage as you mow them down:
strike three, strike three, strike three.
Here among strange mates, at this strange field,
I see you as I never have before: strong and fleet,
a Boy, with gristle in his walk,
slicing away from me, heart covered more and more,
into the dark outfield of the next decade,
like a screaming liner I can never glove.

1988
Wrapping Bread

Light falls or hides behind trees—
I'm not sure about this

but it's dark, or getting dark.
Maybe it's a rat, or a lot of rats

eating light
out of the hands of clouds.

It's dark for sure now. And I have my arms
around you, or wish I did instead

of this handful of stars
that clouds feed rabbits at dawn.

Tonight fireworks rip the sky, July 4th
traffic wheezing on a bridge.

On the radio: floods, tornadoes.
earthquakes. I've seen pictures

but I'm not sure. What I want to say
is that in this darkness I remember

in a bakery wrapping bread before sunrise
under fluorescent lights high

with the smell, heels tucked in my cheeks
I thought nothing could hurt me.

And if you were here now I would be holding you
like a warm loaf of bread, or maybe

tighter, I'm not sure.
The Night Table

The stains on the old night table
I bought at the auction
Faded with scrubbing and sanding—

The rings which only come
From gallon wine jugs,
The cigarette burns, the drops
Of hot coral nail polish,
The crayon scrawls on the sides
Near the floor—

But the smell did not, the odor
Of stale fire and water that imbued
The wood.
I wondered over it,

And suddenly I heard her cry.
The cigarette flamed on her polish-wet
Fingers, and her blouse was on fire.
She tried to sit up in the bed.
The baby on the floor was screaming.
She said
Jesus I gotta get outta here

1975
Pittsburgh

I was thinking of you. Thinking a little about you. The water pours from the pitcher. The pitcher is always before you, ready to pour, waiting to be poured.

The pitcher. Stands on the ledge in the semi-darkness. It is white. There is water waiting to be poured from the pitcher.

Between the sacred and the dry always water.

    It was for you,
    or I thought it was for you. The three rivers here, and a fourth which moves underneath the city like the brilliant invisible coral world continually flowing we invoke for ourselves
    that fourth river. Under the busy city of our lives, the one that moves slowly unconcerned with the revealed worlds.

    unconcerned
    and yet moves under the stiff dark shrubs, the city of grey hills, the sharp sliding down streets, the lit up city of night time. If I say I miss you you will say that you miss my being away from the city as if my being there is enough without your needing to see me
    like an ikon, something the walker carries; her past, her present, her future, carries them all. She goes on, she does not turn back. Where the rivers meet, the gold triangle, where Mount Washington looks down at the strange long lit vistas, the cup of the city, you can ride the incline straight up along the Monongahela, the river to my left, as clear as the look in your eyes, and as unreadable. The carrier of coal, pleasure boaters, the guidebook says, water
skiers, sternwheel races, a real town for water pleasures it
went on. Then the river, the unspanned, unseen river running
pure in its bed under the surface.

It is something
about seasons, how you change when they change
at the rainy season you become morbid and darkwilled
at the dry, you itch
in winter you curl up slowly and die, dreaming of summer,
in winter you’re always dreaming summer summer summer.
It is said
the life force is strong where there is water, and, here,
close to the ebb and flow and flow of the river, I wish
for the barriers between us to break, to become
fluid, permeable, flesh, the
human animal living its life
in its place.

1984
It Will Wait

My brother lifts his tenth cup
of coffee into the haze
of WRGB favorite old time hits
and the maze of smoke from one
of his three packs of cigarettes,
says “Good morning” as though
he’d thought about it. “Good morning,”
I say back and look out the window
to snow that has piled to more
than three feet and it’s time now
for the two of us to clear it. “Good
morning,” he says again, and I repeat it,
then throw gloves, scarf and jacket
after him, see him as he leapt
from the airplane door, fingerling the metal
clasps, the fine silken chute that would soon
Mae West in the blue,
bring him four, five times
faster home than he should go.
“Good morning,” he says again and I say
“Shit.” “No, it’s a good morning,”
he repeats and I say, “Let’s go, that snow’s
not going to wait.” But he sits
still, pours my coffee steaming
into the heavy white cup, adds the one spoon
of sugar, the quick spurt of cream,
says, “Here, have your cup of coffee.
The snow will wait.”
Broken Glass

Stars sparkle up
from black streets
and grassless playgrounds
between Projects

On the dirt red ledge
of a tenement window
a potted shrub leans
brittle leaves down
toward those glittering
constellations
which have no names,
the patterns
of unacknowledged
dreams

Reading in Fredonia

The bear has been talking to the people.
They present him with an obsidian arrowhead.
Holding his paw in front of himself,
he settles into the grass like a cup
in a box of excelsior.
Then he watches,
wondering how long
it takes to turn into a stone.
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.
The Landscape

I draw a line from
draw edge to edge
to provide place, a land-

scape within which

to begin. Birds

float down from a great height

across the page, wings
like paper kites

brushing air, eyes

flashing the

landing lights of the 747

gear unfolding seat-
belt warning holds

our attention the squeak

stomachs clutching

as cement grabs rubber

you touch my hand it's

been nice Jim maybe we'll run

into each other someplace honey.
A Real Event

for Alka

Behind my back
an onion in my right hand
a rose in my left
I ask you to choose,
the future will be told

Naturally you choose the right
the arm of strength
and like an idiot I produce the onion

Tears and sharpness on the tongue
legerdemain coming as afterthought
just as always
bulling my way with eager honesty

Fate knows every ruse
can't make it flinch or take a false step
if the onion guessed and shown
entices things to happen
then the dead will speak up
and reason in our defense.

I fear no mistake save that you place
your hands stiff and outstretched
as if holding something back
never allowing your muscles to smile

The onion will be peeled
to be sure
but the rose has its quiet power
it strives in the soil of all events
tickling the bottoms of your feet

1975
Sunday Night at the Gyldenlove Hotel, Oslo

Oh, go take a picture, get laid 
by a Danish sailor, anything 
but another tourist poem, 
its snapshot insights 
packed with such privileged urgency 
surely the suitcase will burst, 
fling words all over Karl Johan Street, 
where a woman with a woodcut face 
will pick one up, walk right back 
into Munch’s “Anxiety.” The old man 
I left at the bar will pick up 
another word, sorry it’s so cold, so dry— 
but surely a poem is better 
than a one-night stand; damn, it’s a 
lifetime sentence, a pure monogamous marriage. 
Where else put on such thickly knit robes 
as “the exuberance of Munch’s melancholia” 
(nothing drip-dry, please) or 
“the peculiar solace of a foreign silence?” 
Now the lobby’s empty, nothing but a 
bald TV Elvis, “Are You Lonesome Tonight?” 
in Anglo-Norsk. What the hell, we poets 
all are tourists, in our own houses, 
even there, we’re always lagging and packing, 
looking for that one secret door 
down the stairless dark 
that will make us the genuine traveller.
Nevelson

These bits and pieces of civilization, dowels, barrel staves, newels, finials, the seats of wooden chairs, ordered together and painted matte black or flat white as her wit and whim dictate, prompt us to imagine pardon—not that our own dry bones will rise so again, but it's pleasant to see survivors by an act of will restored, improved, cherished. What a wreck it must have been—we can guess, extrapolating from our own disasters. Her pieces float in state in a gallery air of costliness, and the prices should be high, for the odds are long against such grace, such rescue, such reconciliation of taste and love.

1988
Flying to the Moon

That summer your medley relay team
broke the record in every pool in the league,
you were unbeatable. Nothing was limited.
Drive-ins were made for love. Someday
you would fly to the moon;
it was only a question of time.

Yet now your life is half gone,
like a car radio late at night in Iowa,
like a used calendar. Other men have flown
to the moon. Men in three-piece suits
and ties manipulate the lives of men

like you. Your wife sleeps in curlers:
a good woman, seldom complains;
she widens the seat of your trousers.
Maybe one of your children will fly
to the moon, or join the Marines and become
the general you only got to meet: he gave
you a medal, pronounced you brave.
You never made it to college.

You got a job because you needed
the money then. You still do. Other men
make two hundred fifty dollars a day
buying futures, discovering oil, selling
flights to the moon. You sell shoes
to ladies with swollen ankles.

It’s raining again. The headlines read:
“Secretary of State insists.” The world
insists. Your oldest child has the flu.
Half the dreams of a lifetime lie
in a half-empty bottle of rye: the other half
have long since flown to the moon.

1985
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....
Signaling
— for my son

This water is deeper than any he’s ever swum.
Justin sinks,
makes his weight go to the bottom
of his feet; he practices
drowning

with friends he’s just made.
Out of the water
each boy’s as embarrassing
to behold as a cat’s
naked and shaved body.

At pool’s edge
they do the kind of skipping
step boys do, told not to
run, their skinny bodies
brushing each other.

When Justin looks up
to the balcony
he raises his hand
slightly—as if merely stretching.
I could bear to die

if death were like this:
from a balcony
from the high, hard seat reserved me
to catch this quiet boy
glancing up, never really sure

if I were there, choosing
to believe and smiling,
lifting his hand
shyly in hidden signal
waving.
Portrait

A.

Brown eyes
  gray hair
Brown vest
topaz ring  gold band
&
Silver cigarette smoke
Instructional film    cool grays
Gray jacket  gray shirt
& Brown earth
brown eyes brown vest brown slacks
(Rembrandt tones  &)  faded photographs

B.

"Its eyes were as big as saucers"

The steadfast tin soldier struck the tinderbox
discovered an enormous dog,
(its eyes were big as saucers)
on the treasure, gold & silver

I see: my father
I see: your brown vest  gray shirt
gold ring & silver cigarette

I lost the battle
  Steadfast fought again
  Bang bang my father's dead

You were
  gray hair brown eyes
Somebody else
I carefully removed my weapons which
    had been a family heirloom
    handed down to me by my same
    father
Removed them from my heart
    where they had lodged
    staunchly
And threw them away
Even though they were old

...And won the war
Over your living body, Mr. Brown & Gray

You didn’t know this
But you might have expected it, a private man
Keeping mum about yourself
Letting my student fantasies flourish
Beneath your fatherly assertiveness & flint-quick
    briliances

Later, my eyes felt big as saucers
From curiosity & the dim sparking light
Studying your browns & grays

Wondering about your Rembrandt shadowy past

Are you the portrait film you said
    that I should do?

I aim my camera at you
Shoot
A heavy falling snow on rich brown loam.

1974
act of love learned over
and over, your arms

the iris standing in the May-dark
yard, inviting and nearly

sufficient, raised
and joined above your head, a sign

or a suggestion, where no
sign can function. Past

suspension no decisions makes
rain of your pale figure.

Leg that is a current moving
up my leg, that is a current

_for Julia, 5/85_

1986
Yesterday my sense of
   adventure
was whetted by an exotic
   zip code
   *
I bought some "hurt books" at
   the bookstore sale
and saved myself the trouble of
   torturing them myself
   *
I remember the dew on my
   grandfather's lawn
and the sundial at the end of
   the rose bushes
in the afternoon I would
   practice archery
long before I had heard of zen
   *
On Monday it is cheaper to go to the Art Museum
than to many public restrooms
   *
I had a friend
   who had a crucifix
that glowed in the dark
we would go to his basement
and turn off the lights
   *
Last time I went mad
I was halfway through my Psychology Today subscription

1973
Taking in Your Bookstore

You had on a khaki shirt
three buttons unbuttoned.
You belonged to someone else's poem.
To get you, I had to steal you.

It's true you had a cool manner
while I was standing close by
nuzzling the racks of magazines.
Were you on the look-out
for shoplifters and maybe
I was one?

I was. Besides you
I am taking over your little shop.
I always wanted a bookstore of my own.
I can curl myself around the books
scratch them across my shoulderblades
rub them up and down against my snatch.
A Walk in the Woods

"do not remember me as a bridge"
—Audre Lorde
from A Land Where Other People Live

Young, tense, trying to control
The rhythm of our breathing,
When we made love
On the soft pine needles,
We were other people looking for a magic ring
That would show us how to become our selves
Like happening upon Christmas future
Trapped in a circle of holly wreath.

In the sifted light
We walked past the rough-barked trees
Pulling off handfuls of the long needles.
The sap marked my fingers for days,
My hands like my body
Sticky with remembrance of you.

Far above, calling to each other
At the edges of that day
Blackbirds were at work measuring the woods
Into evergreen patterns
Understood only by them.

Now we meet again as old friends
And you analyze time past.
I want you to know I am not a way into life.
I am your life.

1974
My Fifth Trip to Washington Ended
in Northeast Delaware

Halfway between the rain and Washington
as we stopped stuck in the middle of Delaware and a deluge
At least she said
as the muddy waters rose covering our good intentions
At least she said
as we sat stranded neither dry nor high enough
somewhere over a creek very busy becoming a river
somewhere in northeast Delaware
At least she said
as we waited for the engine
to tug us back to where we had started from
and my son complained he could have had more fun
wrapped up in an envelope
At least she said
as the flooded out tracks receded and the waters rose around us
and the children fussed and fretted but were really
very brave about it
and the windows started to leak in on our shoes
and the gum and the games and the New York Times
and the chocolate bars and the toilet paper
all ran out
as the frozen fruit juice melted
and the mayonnaise in the tuna fish went sour
At least she said
as the rain kept falling down
and we couldn’t get through to Washington
as we slumped
damp and disappointed in our rumpled up convictions
At least she said
The Indians aren’t attacking.

1974
The Fear of Being Noticed

Coming home late from the celebration
that sweet grapish fizz still high in your throat,
and in your pocket a second slice of fragrant, napkined cake,
you won't even notice the blankness of the street,
all the buildings, every empty car. It's little things:
heel-splish in a puddle collected by the steps,
how you were twisting loose one button on your raincoat
cuff. You'll remember these most, and
the amber glint of streetlight on your housekey, sliding—
not his face. It's anybody's face. He'll have tiny white
flecks under his fingernails, rough cuticles. You'll memorize
the gun, smaller than a toy, and the surprise of your own
silence, the fear of being noticed: if you gasp,
then this will truly have occurred. In silence
you'll go on, struggle never with him, but with your memory,
remembering those casual words, rather be dead than
raped, and certain this you could never have understood.
You'll wrestle with the memory, your concentration
hurtling down each inhalation: breathe, nothing is so important
as to continue, breathe, breathe,

and lying there,
just as he's left, you will taste the cake you'd eaten
earlier, its thick icing all sugar and crisco, its repetition,
coupled with champagne, interrupting, minutely, your respiration,
and you'll breathe again, hyperventilate, breathe, try to
sit, shaking, wondering what will have changed.

1986
Gathering

The way he gathers them.
Dead weeds, wire, tires, turtle shells.
Whenever he goes out he takes his bag,
and walks old roads, the edges of fields,
finding parts of necklaces,
cigarette lighters.
Some he gives away to the poor,
some to his friends.
Most he began putting together
twenty years ago, shapes of desire,
dreams suddenly remembered
there in his back yard.
He will lecture you on it.
He will show relationships,
tapping this hose or metal plate,
that piece of wood shaped like a pelican.
He will tell you when he began,
his best find, the way light hit it.

It is no solution, he admits,
to what goes on here,
his neighbor's silence,
children crying in a barn,
telephones ringing.
It is so little to do, this sitting
beneath the shagbark hickory,
looking for a way through,
for new information,
the binding light along one edge,
shadows along another,
the replication of absence,
and then tomorrow or the next day,
a door slightly ajar,
window slowly falling
of its own weight,
something flying off a car.
The children come out of the barns.
They grow up.
They avoid his face.
His hands flutter like falling birds,
righting themselves at the last minute
on a piece of hurricane lamp,
a fishhook, a wingless toy airplane,
a paper wasp’s nest.

He remembers every piece.
He will tell you the day
they finally fit in.
He will stop in the middle,
sometimes, and listen.

He gathers sounds now:
a small twig snapping beneath a paw,
a splash out on a lake,
rush of swifts from a stone chimney.
It goes on, his gathering,
step after step along old roads,
familiar trails, fields,
his bag filling up,
his back yard no longer enough.

1987
Middle Lake

My father could barely carry a gun when the war ended
and Troy came back from Japan and Bud from Germany.
Troy could put his lips around a call, cajole
mallards from the sky into birdshot, with some great
drake voice of lies, singing corn, flock and no enemy.
Bud pulled stories out of cigarettes and whiskey,
ty ing reeds into blinds for this hunt and his return
from the butt end of the earth. Black and blue
from the elbow to the hip, my father took the recoil
from a borrowed 20 gauge but never dropped a bird.
This was the last year killing was easy. Bud died
from his drinking. Cancer got Troy. No gun has kicked
my father's shoulder back to the bruise and ache in this memory.
For J.L.

The ducks are gone
back to the pond, the echo

of it all a curious
resonance now it's

over, life's like that?
What matters, so soon become fact.

1989
Grief Stages

We carry the blood of recent wars.
As much as flowed in all the films,
more was spilled internally.
It's on our tongues and in our eyes,
the smell of blood, the look of it.
It's in the genes that reproduce
alien strains of bloodthirsty babies
who can't account for their appetite.
And so we've come to study death,
not as a parched, ephemeral thing,
but as the running of the blood,
the thrill of watching a face laid waste,
the candor of all stock cruelties,
as though someone finally said,
atrocities must be accounted for.
We can do it scientifically.
We now know there are five grief stages:
imago, pupa, larval, nit.
No, I'm on the wrong page.
Anger, denial, barter, acceptance,
here we go, the buzz words that will
buy us time, to look more closely,
watch a death like watching a movie,
dispensed of all the set-up time,
cut to the chase. Instant, total
peripateia, slam bam thank you shazam,
death hard-core. Anger accepted, all
bartering denied. Or anger denied,
all offers accepted, leaving the body
like selling a house. All the stages
intermarry, produce alien strains of
bloodthirsty babies, who can't account
for their appetite, who seem to need
more blood than air. Grief is the study
of hemorrhage, the running of the blood
like bulls. Violent, we embarrass even
the animals, who watch the killers
watching them, from the relative safety
of their cages.
Albino

I murmur “cornsilk” when I touch his hair—
Damp with no smell of sweat, earth or corn.
His cool skin never tastes of salt.
My child’s misplaced, a root without stem or leaf,
And I dream of returning him to earth,
Easing his limp legs down a narrow slot
And packing it with earth to hold him
Through a muddy sleep so he’ll have time
To send out thick white roots below
And above, leaves, broad green,
And blossoms of any color.

1983
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 in,
no reason to believe
the eye is clear:
as soon as you are sure
you're wrong. Is it too late
to free the moment from
foreknowing, let it all

turn tender? Kids in poorer quarters
dream new pillows,
bones spirited away. Times 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.

1986
The Funeral of My Cousin Phil Maddux:
Tinicum, Bucks County, in the Spring

Easter lilies on the altar are still fresh
hex signs on a nearby barn appear to turn
grandchildren pass his body with its folded hands
enter church with faces wet and twisted
Emily says he passed away so easily
I am thinking of his hatchery
how he took an egg
broke the shell so carefully
revealed a wet and crumpled chick
he brought the veins and wrinkled skin to life
heart started beating, eyes came bright
and now his hands are still, the skin is pale
and folded in, the hatchery in the woods is closed
but in the afternoon the children play
in still-new Easter clothes
so high-voiced, full of life

1984
Provincial Morning

for M.

You left a mark on my neck size of a deer’s eye
and yet you told me to meet with other women.
What were you trying to do:
mark me for hunting season?

We had never expected each other, out of old friendship,
it was like moving out of some hope forgotten more than once
and remembered the same, and forgotten again.
You bled that day, I could have sworn it.
This morning it is not your eyes you open it is mine,
this morning tho you sleep in the city you are provincial
and you wake to these trees falling of too much blood.
I kiss the cups of your brimming body.

You said, you said:
I have gone into another life
a life too full already, trying not to die,
I have disappeared into liberty
gone back to the city in a torrential cloud.

What you hold is a fall in the hand.

1973
A Life in a Steel Mill

My father is proud of his life making pipes, 
his small rowhome, his five children, his peace, 
two week vacations he took in summertime, 
hauling us in his '54 Ford to Lawrenceville, 
his wife throwing her arm around him. 
He likes to think he was able to pay for good times, 
crab feasts in public parks, Saturday drinks 
with my uncles while his wife cooked hot soup. 
He is as steady as a mountain at rest, 
in movement he has the force of an inland river. 
He believes in the Resurrection and good bourbon. 
He is grateful for the life work has afforded. 
My father is a burning sun, an oracle of flesh, 
the damp crush of morning dew on naked feet, 
a crack and screech of wooden wagons in tobacco, 
a host of empty echoes like thunder in caverns 
of steel mills, the clatter of his buddies 
at a roadside bar coming in town from work. 
My father is a son of the ten thousand things. 
My father is an oak tree, tears I have never seen 
come through buds in springtime to become leaves. 
My mother in her death is the wind and rain.

1988
Champion

(from a dream)

Sitting at the table in the kitchen,
I told Joe Louis,
"I'm gonna knock you out in the ninth round."
He leaned back in his chair and laughed.
The radio was playing "Stardust" or something
from the Thirties.

It was very peaceful.
I thought of all that had been taken from him
and how he could still laugh.
The wallpaper had roses on it.
(The poise and grace and total intentness
of that lean brown figure in the newsreels)
"Well, maybe the tenth," I said and we both laughed
and I went down in the basement and got some beer
and brought it up and put it on the table—
green bottles that caught the light
in that little room with the roses on the wall
where Joe Louis and I sat talking and laughing,
warming ourselves before the fire of friendship
before settling down for the long-haul.

1986
For Jesse Owens

Like some dark comet,
you streaked across the sky
of the world leaving nations
to wonder for generations.
Magic African shaman,
bolting from the blocks
faster than a slave from
a hound dog running North
to freedom.
Ran so fast
that Der Fuhrer
was in a fervor
and jackbooted Nazis
couldn't believe their eyes.
Blew Deutschland's mind,
years before the Allies pounded
Berlin to rubble.
Didn't they know that your
ancestors used to chase gazelle
for fun?
They say you died but naw
you just movin' so fast they can't
see you no more.
Do 'dat, Jesse!

1983
Melrose Park

The train, slowed by a hill,
turns aside its white eyes,
its whistle only cutting through the hedges.

Soon fierce dogs will cross the lawn
with moonlight fastened to their teeth.

The trees protect us,
their roots hold in our rain.
Each night the dark comes first to them.

Even the dead continue here,
growing up among us again and again,
hardy, perennial.

We say for them their small talk
as if forever
were a night when they couldn’t sleep.

The great hallways
fill with our new calm voices.

On the stair
are toys left out, the tiny teapot, dishes.
Our children at least are real
and have needs.

1983
Six Things to Know If You Love a Convict

1. Never call him a convict

2. No one is interested in doing a remake of Romeo & Juliet in chains & middle age

3. Five hundred letters a year only keep you warm if you burn them

4. The more you give up on the outside the more of a man he'll be on the inside

5. Underwire bras set off metal detectors when you go through the gates

6. Love & Justice are twin sisters

1988
Dying

A palmist said I have another fifteen years
but lately my heart line
has been developing a break at the heart meridian
and I suspect it will be sooner.
I look healthy but only I know
the tensions that are tearing me apart.

Every author ought to choose
a young healthy literary executor
with a long life line.
Nevertheless I refuse to write my will.
My papers are such a mess
maybe I'll just destroy everything.
But why not leave behind a mess—
whatever is left is junk.

The big problem of dying is how to.
I know it will be very painful to let go,
if not terrifying,
and I'll need someone there to help me,
somebody I can trust—
though when I think how I'm holding now
and won't trust anyone
to help me let loose the bonds of fear
then how can I expect the right person
to come along at the last minute I have on earth?

The way I was raised to think about it
you just get put in the ground, become fertilizer.
That's no help for now,
me nearly fifty with the break in my heart line
and not having opened the gate of immortality
except that once in my twenties, and then not understood.
I am truly faced with an impossible task
being in the condition I'm in.
It's not that I'm not ready—or is willing the word?
But in some sense I'm neither ready to live or die
or to accept the death in life
that would free me now
and let me face the body's death, whenever it comes,
as simply as a candle going out.

1976
The Differences

When it comes to sentiment, as it will, you can’t compete with the bourgeoisie, or with the radio.

* 
It says, on my diploma: sheer irresponsibility with a touch of cruelty: the man is licensed to practice.

* 
I'm really shy and deep inside I don't give anyone the eye enter the nude bride descending the spiral staircase

* 
On their knees, people say funny things. I always tell them: You will speak normally, when you recover!

* 
One more inch and you’re out of a job!

* 
If a fleeting impression is the whole performance, the fact of something nameless enters the body of the fierce yolk, endlessly urging the egg to scramble itself.

* 
You are intelligent, my heart goes out to you.

* 
The trees may be scary but hidden among them is your house

* 
I am St. John the Baptist, my work heralds the birth of Jesus.

* 
Future delights are an attack on their sources: only miracles are relevant.

* 
You got somethin’ horrible and God said that you must die
so you return to poetry
and begin to cry-eeee

There is economy in the unconscious. The horses of Apocalypse
are on a ration of hay. Heaven is not running out of miracles
but there are fewer Distributors.
I am offering you a job.

The degenerate
vampire

haunts the out-
skirts of the hemo-
philia camp

The man is a woman, the woman is a man, their child is
silent between them like the lights of a strange city
underlining the vast differences.

She lived in a bottle of Black & White, he lived in her
closet. Their children, the blackbirds, swooped down on
them in the winter, and flew away in V flocks, their feathers
staying behind as pillows, mementoes.

The employment of difference is not a big business, the
universe looks with indifference at evolution.

He refused to let them cover his eyes
and as the volley began
he shouted:
vive la difference!

The devil's sense of humor spawned photorealism while
impressionism tended to favor god.

The objective observer lay his rifle on the wrong side
of generalization, and sleep took him apart like a watch.

Daytime, an arbitrary variety of.

Degeneracy is the fruit of sympathy. Us healthy animals—
we like to kick ass.

1975
The National Enquirer Headline Writer
Calls Etheridge Knight
to Interview Him about Gravity

I'm calling because, bless you, you wrote once
about a jump that I believe in. A friend
of yours who jumped five floors, dead straight.
He didn't land in an oak, which might have saved him.
No one warned him first. And you got there
too late. You found his voice escaping
like three frightened sparrows flying away.

They want me to write this headline about a man
who jumped from a skyscraper and survived.
It's not that easy. What fool would believe it?
I want to know this, Mr. Knight, what
do you say about a man who jumped
fifteen stories and survived? Wouldn't
he be utterly changed? Could he still pay
his bills and take the bus to work, like he always did,
wearing his glasses, filing his income tax?

I want to say a man would have to change,
tumbling fifteen stories through the air.
Say he raised the sash and stared down
at the dizzy street, the tiny people. He'd plunge,
feeling his pulse flutter like a flag,
feeling cells grow as light as soap bubbles,
feeling his workshirt billowing blue around the sun
as it hangs there on the far horizon.
Wouldn't he grow light with blazing wisdom?

You might know more about this than I do.
You've been to jail. You've lost all your women.
You've been stranded, broke, and high.
You say you had a friend who fell to death.
Maybe you've jumped yourself, a time or two.

1988
Coal

That winter my mother showed me hell,
Opening the furnace, shoveling
The coal while my father slept for his
Bakery nights. "The devil's work," she said,
"And you'll roast in it unless...."

I believed her. All of the papers
I covered with scrawls curled and went black;
Nothing of me lasted a week.
My coal spirit—the first winter
I remember, the snow piling up
One weekend until everyone walked
Again, heads tilted into the wind.
On Gibson Hill a boy on a sled
Surprised a sleepy cinder truck
And was split. I stayed inside and
Waited for my skin to tear. The room
Above the furnace grew horns. At last
The Korean War began; someone
Else we knew was opened easily
As a roll, and all afternoon
Our radio said his name, the tubes
In the back glowing like our name
On my father's baker sign.
Dolly

Who is this dog lying on the snow
whose brown dingo-like face enlivens
the uneven snow with her intentful look?
This sled dog lying in the yard

eighty miles from Mt. McKinley is one dark hill
among many dark hollows in the wallowy snow.
It is Dolly who crosses her white forearms, relaxed
near the chained sled dogs, waiting for something to happen,
because she thinks a dog cannot make things happen.
Things happen somewhere out in the big air, when the door
opens, when a moose starts across the railroad track,
when the train, dragging the world, comes from Anchorage

and all the sled dogs howl. That's something.
When the sun sets, is that something? When late shadows
erase entire slopes of McKinley, as when a teacher
erases a student's sentence on the blackboard, is that something?

Maybe and maybe not. Waiting won't do any harm.
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?

1986
The Unfolding Mystery

Mystery of the hands
and fingers locked
into eternal motion,
the subsurface design
always there, reliable,
always unfolding anew
and ready.

I would watch
my father with hammer,
saw, chisel. His motion grasping
the motion designed in tools.
Some kind of webbing strung
delicately between
the handiwork of other men
and himself, age and age.

I would hand
him a stone or piece of lumber.
He would study, then chisel
or saw, all done with measurement
and practice not in this age
or our hands and eye alone.
But with the comprehension
and art of generations and centuries
of people discovering
the elemental design
inherent in the wood and stone
of their endeavor,
the necessary act of being—
finding the mystery
unfolding
as hands and fingers in motion.
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.
Crossing the street in the rain

I am moved to think of the ways we take refuge from ourselves
Seeing the starlings beneath the dripping dumpster
The working people sucking their cigarettes
Under the frayed and weeping canopies
Of the barber shop and the all-night diner
The streetcar windows sleazy with steam with boredom
I am reminded of the secrecy and inconvenience of wanting you
And of those moments I lay in my bomb-shelter bed
The wings and feet of the world
Bearing your face to a green-black river
Where it sinks in a ring of soupy bubbles.

I am moved to think of the one who has died 3 months past
And hear somewhere her last shaking voice
Saying: Is that you? Is that you?
As if that was the only question left to ask
After an exorbitant history of clinics
And a final morning grim as fire's work.
Now across the street and under a plastic parasol
She huddles among the moist survivors
Lipstick-stained dentures reared
Small gnarled fist closed tightly on the fare
Funny I had always thought of her
Sitting an eternity at someone's kitchen table
Glass in hand rattling her politics at the dead.

I am moved to compare myself with myself
So much like arranging the loved and the dead who escape me
Rain courses the grooves of the streetcar track
Bearing our spit and our cigarette butts to that river to the sea
Stung by what consolation I take in the aloneness of others
I am moved to consider the years scrubbed away
And behind me the record of defeat
A pound of loud laughter
Wrapped round my oily heart,
That muscle of struggle and suspicion
That collared wild thing, I am
Frantic, headstrong, afraid, uncomprehending,
Baffled by all of the sober beauty I cannot possess
The gleaming instruments I will never play
Baffled by the palpable absence of the dead
Baffled by rain

1983
Night Life

for Ed Cox

The lives we lead at night:
you are on the streets of my
city, and I am asleep. In
my dream you are talking
to an old man, white beard.
You call him Fritz. You
call him Walt. It does not
matter what you call him;
he is just an old man.

You and he have made the same
choices. Now you think there's
something you should know. You
want him to tell you, but he
will not speak. You are both walking
down Spruce Street, and you are alone.

You are in denim. You are
in therapy, too. You learn
what you mean when you talk
out loud. Sometimes you learn
in your sleep. In strange cities,
we discover the way we can be.
We learn that we have always
been talking to ourselves. People
lead their lives all the time.
By the Chapel

We stood around for awhile and John said,
"This is where I begin to feel the sky. If you wait
for it, after someone is gone, or even in a cave,
or at night, it comes near and leans on you.
Afterward, any touch will connect far away."

That's what John said while we waited there.

And it's true if you lean carefully and listen you hear
someone who used to wait with you, and you don't care
if the sky comes or if anything tries to comfort.
So I couldn't argue with John. My shoulder
ached for his bowing so long without any help.

And a voice in my ear did sound good and near.
Plum

1
Plum blossoms wet with dew hang beside the window
in the last light of a spring evening.

2
Beside the back door of the old farmhouse
a plum tree grew. For years I passed it without noticing.

3
Tonight, I remembered...

4
I'd forgotten how much I've died.

1987
Between the House and the Sky

I lay under dogwoods, the grass fine as cornsilk
from ears we'd shucked, snapping the husk from the end,
sweating outside the kitchen door
while Mom grilled hotdogs.

I'd scraped my face on cement steps, out there in the backyard dusk,
after my sister's shove—
My father had shouted and grabbed me, the blame in his eyes,
so I pushed away, ran, down towards the dogwoods,
lay where the leaves hung above me like bats.

I thought of my sister, standing, so quiet, satisfied—
as hand over hand, brushing red ants from my arms,
I climbed the tall tower of pine and looked out
as far as I could over the houses and their yards
to the east where the sky was darkest.
My palm missed the caterpillar by inches.

Bigger than a child's finger, it mounted the trunk,
its back ringed with red ovals, spotted black.
Spines bristled in its wrinkles.
I lifted my head and climbed.
Pine needles spoke and shivered.
I crouched in the sling of the branches, saw lights
ignite in the houses, the sky so near me,
purple as iris, dragging me up, pulling me into its color.

1986
The Floozie Clause

When we were young and courting
I heard your father tell you:
It's time to take your floozie home.
Which translates: it isn't proper
to entertain a lady after dark.

I was so shocked to hear that cheap,
plush word applied to me, who never
even kissed with my mouth open,
I think I married you
partly from surprise.

Now when our lawyer wants
a Floozie Clause
to keep our children's money
from someone you might marry
if I die,

I smile and say I trust you,
the way my father said he trusted me
when I went out. This is a sharpened weapon
as I know, who didn't succumb
until a rabbi made it legal.

1987
Hospital Window

A gauzy dusk, thin haze like cigarette smoke
ribboned past the silver plate fins of Chrysler Building
tapering delicately needletopped, Empire State's
taller antenna filmed milky lit amid blocks
black and white apartmenting veil'd sky over Manhattan,
offices new built dark colored in blueish heaven—The East
50's & 60's covered with castles & watertowers, seven storied
tar-topped house banks over York Avenue, late may-green trees
surrounding Rockefeller's blue domed medical arbor—
Geodesic science at the Waters Edge—Cars running up
East River Drive, & parked at N.Y. Hospital's oval door
where perfect tulips flower the health of a thousand sick souls
trembling inside hospital rooms. Triboro bridge steel snakey-spiked
rafter tops stands solid, stone-piered over orange mansard
penthouse roofs, chemical blood boiling floor under floor
in research labs—Cancer & Herpes Vats testing the advance of
Virus armies thru rich-blooded megalopolis sidestreets. There's
a tinge of orange sunset spotted in the river and a few
windows in Queens-Bronx some magnesium vapor brilliances
spotted five floors above E 59th St under grey painted bridge
trestles. Way downtown along the river, as Monet saw Thames
100 years ago, Con Edison's smokestacks 23'd, 14th street,
& Brooklyn Bridge skeined dim in modern mists—
Pipes sticking up to god nine smokestacks huge visible—
a little white sharklike helicopter stroboscope blinking
flapping noises descends for some rich invalid under
the Bridge?—“lands on the garbage pier, Department of Sanitation”
U.N. Building hung under an orange crane, & red lights on
the vertical avenues below the trees turn green at the nod
of a skull with a mild nerve ache. Dim dharma, I return
to this spectacle after weeks of poisoned lassitude, my thighs
back belly chest & arms covered with poxied welts,
head pains fading in the back of the neck, right eyebrow cheek
and mouth paralyzed—from taking the wrong medicine, sweated
too much in the forehead helpless, covered my rage from
gorge to prostate with grinding jaw and tightened anus
not released by the weeping scream of horror at the robot World
or the robot ruler or the robot selves that unloaded
our billions of tons of metal grief all over the world from
Phnom Penh Saigon Nakon Thanom to Santiago Lisbon Teheran.
A fresh warm breeze in the window, and a day's release
from pain, now cars float downside of the bridge trestle
and uncounted building-walls & windows multiplied a mile
deep into the ash-delicate sky beguile
my empty mind. And a seagull passes alone wings
spread silent over all the roofs.
Ars Poetica

I break each day over my knee,
old kindling, feeding my fire.
Its heat shatters stone.
I hold my hands high
over my head. They ignite,
each finger a wick
burning. Hair flares.
I run from oak to elm,
touch walnut and poplar.
Each crown bursts,
a gargantuan torch,
flashfires the canopy.
When you see the mountain
glow red wild with its own dawn,
you will know I come,
the fiery apparition
on the edge of yourself.
Smoke is my sign,
fire my life.
You will burn if I touch you.
You will burn.

1983
Childhood

"Which out is Jimmy in?"
from *Out of the Mouths of Babes*

The front yard's the city-yard.
That's for sidewalks, streets, and other front yards.
The back yard's the country-yard.
Grass, trees, and other backyards.

Birds don't know the difference.
But when the cows and horses come, it's the
back they'll choose.
Sky doesn't know the difference
Although it might be slightly bluer out in back.

As for the side yards, well, that's a whole
other thing.
Briefly, they're the boundaries.
Front and back mix and match like paints.
As for the difference between right and left sides,
it's a matter of order, orientation.
Although they're similar, the trained eye can tell.
As for underground, that's where they all meet in
a kind of ghostly vapor.
But that, again, is another story.
As for over-ground, it's there the four ribbons
tie the knot, and then the bow.
It's there you can watch the four colors rising,
toward where the sun grazes.

All houses are packages—Did you know that?
All houses are packages.
And all packages are houses—Did you know *that*?
All packages have more than one room.
Poem with Prologue

the first three editors said nothing. the fourth one sent
a quietly worded rejection slip—"TAKE IT AWAY! IT HURTS!"
the fifth editor tried to burn it, left charred edges.
the last editor said "a monkey could do better"

1977
Tours

A girl on the stairs listens to her father
Beat up her mother.
Doors bang.
She comes down in her nightgown.

The piano stands there in the dark
Like a boy with an orchid.

She plays what she can
Then turns the lamp on.

Her mother’s music is spread out
On the floor like brochures.

She hears her father
Running through the leaves.

The last black key
She presses stays down, makes no sound,
Someone putting their tongue where their tooth had been.

1983
Arabic Coffee

It was never too strong for us:
make it blacker, Papa,
thick in the bottom,
tell again how the years will gather
in small white cups,
how luck lives in a spot of grounds.

Leaning over the stove, he let it
boil to the top, and down again.
Two times. No sugar in his pot.
And the place where men and women
break off from one another
was not present in that room.
The hundred disappointments,
fire swallowing olive-wood beads
at the warehouse, and the dreams
tucked like pocket handkerchiefs
into each day, took their places
on the table, near the half-empty
dish of corn. And none was
more important than the others,
and all were guests. When
he carried the tray into the room,
high and balanced in his hands,
it was an offering to all of them,
stay, be seated, follow the talk
wherever it goes. The coffee was
the center of the flower.
Like clothes on a line saying
you will live long enough to wear me,
a motion of faith. There is this,
and there is more.
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.

1986
We honor our love in the breach
not married we live in this apartment
lie two in a bed
cook wined beef on noodles
split economy
argue and assess:
you owe Acme
I.T.T. is on my neck.
The dishes grow mouldy
as we fight in our complexity
and the grey mouse
the cat forgets
drops its hairs and trail
in the plastic salad bowl.
In the morning we wake, groggy,
spattering spite
and then...
laughing hysterically, we see
love break out like a river
under our feet.
A person learns your name
and stays at night.
This person feels there's
nothing to say and says
"there's nothing to say."
Asleep you sit up in bed
and apologize for nightmares.
In the morning you keep talking.
You have many eccentric stories.
You wonder if you are most honest asleep
when you sweat
when you walk down crowded streets
with no clothes.
All day you're scared.
You shake hands
you're not helpless
disused or ignorant.
You're afraid of habits.
You feel maybe your mouth has grown weak
and you can only eat crumbling cake.
But your chest is starved
and your name is easy.
The Japanese Desire

We're never so perfect
as now, in the night
when sleep comes to you

before me. In the dark
we soften, lose our form
become the idea of us.

You comply quietly
as I change our minds, making us
better than ourselves.

I picture the lines
of our bodies: smooth and black
calligraphy

sprawled on the bedsheets.
We become ancient lovers.
I fall, smiling, to sleep.

1988
Circling the Daughter

(for Tandi)

You came/to be/in the Month of Malcolm.
The rain fell with a fierce gentleness, like a martyr's tears,
On the streets of Manhattan when your light was lit.
And the city sang you welcome. Now I sit,
Trembling in your presence. Fourteen years
Have brought the moon-blood, the roundness,—the
Grand leaps and the girl-giggles. We
Are touch-tender in our fears.

You break my eyes with your beauty.
Oouu-ou-baby—I love you.

Do not listen to the lies of old men
Who fear your power, who preach
That you were “Born in Sin.”
A flower is moral by its own flowering.
Reach always within
For the Music and the Dance and the Circling.

O Tandiwe, my beloved of this land,
The spring will come early, and when
The earth begins its humming,
Begin your Dance with men
With a grin and a grace of whirling.
Your place is neither ahead nor behind, neither right
Nor left. The world is round. Make the sound of your breathing
A silver bell at midnight, and the chilling
Wet of the morning dew...

Oouu-ou-baby—I love you.

1986
Sitting on an Eastern Bluff
along the Mississippi River

A damp breeze answers the air
while I stare across the muddy water's
long breadth and listen. Crows
carve the air. Kaw Kaw Kaw
Their outcry half lost in the water's lull.
The river singing through its movement
to the Gulf: it does not mark time
by the word History, with kinship lines
secured by a man's last name.
Mudbrown whorls chart undertows churning
algae, sand and fecund silt, fish.
Whatever navigates this river learns
of patience composed with a breath
different from either sunlight
losing itself in loam, or the black moon
tangled in tree limbs and stone.
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 locks
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.
Onion

A heavy hand-held burden. Smells of a million satisfied diners, tufted, sporting a navel inside out. It’s a purse. Mother of Pearl. A bloated wheel. Rung and ringing, it’s a bell. Full with stinging soup, it’s the song’s momma. It’s matter. Stung, it’s an underground blimp, tissue, filigreed, its packed oblivion wrapped in belches and huge sighs.

Forgive it. It’s pregnant and secret, a tuber baby banished at birth, a bloated head. tired, tremendous. Lean into its lemony bag and smell: leftovers from other suppers, greasy drippings, trimmed covers of old legumes, a stew to blow on, an uncool pudding, a surprise of skin. Stripped. Omened. Onioned, once and for all.
To Spot the Centralia Mine Fire

Drive north from the city for two hours,
past the appropriate ridges and through
the obligatory tunnel that cowes
under the mountain. Hawks that flew
solicitously near the roadside mowers
return to their own named peak to view
without judgment your entrance. Ask the powers
of light and shadow to reveal the blue onion bulbs of the true

Ruthenian Church amid wildflowers
and steep vetch. Wind back as if you knew
by heart Cyrillic names of miners—sowers
of canonized fern and weed, and renew
the threefold Byzantine Rite, as summer showers
stream down, and a yellow halo of mist to surround
the town rises slowly from the burning ground.

The town rises slowly from the burning ground.
Watch the vacant homes, unsellable now,
freshly blanched with strips of siding, the crowned
churches, their Babel of tribal Masses below the show
of sunlight on gold and copper, and the sky, split
by brittle steeple. It is little grown
from the company town—patchwork village by the pit,
with omnipresent monument, the Breaker, flown
like a buttress against the black mountain,
this the shrine of the Holy Order of Anthracite;
though odors of bottom damp and methane
no longer reek into the streets or ignite,
the underground tunnels burn, and each vein
of coal, a potential fuse, leads to another domain.
Birds

crows circle
the graveyard
build nests
on the mausoleums

my father says birds
try to catch souls
of men rising
from the grave

if caught
they cannot reach
heaven, become
ghosts

he was taught
to throw stones
for his father
resting there

a crow perches
on a tombstone
it is not family
I have no stones

1987
Some Orange Juice

An old drunk, probably about the age I am now, broke in our house before I was born, broke in my brother Herb's room. Herb was small and sick with a fever and not at all frightened by the stranger standing there.

"Would you like some orange juice?" He held out the glass of it he had on the bedside table. Then Dad appeared with a baseball bat and led the man off, whose name escapes. No one was hit, or prosecuted.

All that resulted from that bemuddled night was that twisted-iron bars as though for a castle were fastened on all our bedroom windows, and I grew up looking out through those bars at the river, and climbing on them.

I know more now of the blank confusion he felt, the drunk, and I've done unconscious things too that have had consequences like the way he affected my view of the outside for years, who wasn't even born then, and who has just as blind a notion as his of what bad or good could come of some wandering, dumb thought to go and do I don't quite know what.

Could I offer you some orange juice?
Meeting with Dante in a Narrow Street

Miss Gates of soft body and scented soaps,
hold the candle again and light me up to bed.
For in this the middle of my life I find myself
alone in a dark wood and have need of you. Women
can’t use the stern guides of unforgiving intellect.
Give us back, instead our own innocence; the body
before it broke forth in lumpy, clamorous demands
that could still be stood in the corner of a steamy,
clean and fragrant room, toweled dry and covered
with flannel.

Last year this time, I found myself in a narrow
Florence street, closed buildings casting me
in shadow both sides and looked up to see the name
Dante Alighieri cut in stone. The poet was not there,
nor Beatrice, nor you, but I was then as now so
irredeemably adult.

1986
A Note

I thought today it would not rain
and it didn’t
    and I was right again.
Clouds
all day long, opened and closed
with a certain symmetry
    letting the light in
and that too is accurate.

Sometimes, I’m so certain about
such things that it seems
the future
    is predictable. you called
5 minutes ago, said you would be late—
and I’m going out.

What I wanted to tell you is that
the sun made that circuit you spoke of
around the apartment, in a pace
    that today the clouds changed
into a kind of cuckoo clock:
each room, at odd hours, lit up.

I was wrong again:
they’ll be no one to tell that to.
I’m going out soon.

Ok.

I’ve hard boiled an egg for you.
It’s in the refrigerator. the one
with the face on it.

Now you are smiling
and I am right again.
Love Poem

My Cuban girlfriend thinks
I'm stupid. I laugh at this,
fearlessly, the way I hope
that one day I'll laugh at
death. I see a certain humor
in all of this. There are days
though when I might agree. And
she, my girlfriend, ten years
younger than I, thinks I move
too slowly towards certain things,
too slowly towards the future
like some shaggy form of lightning
disposed on certain days to not
flash its showy brilliance.

Together we watch dusk roll its
black ball of darkness across
the cool lawn. I ply her with
gifts, small lies, vague promises.
She punches my arm and mutters
under her breath, dumb guy. She
thinks that if you do A and B
that C follows. She is young
in this way and still doesn't
understand me, I think. She
hasn't learned yet that I do
what strikes me when and how
I best can. What can I say?
She's young and pretty, pretty
enough to break my heart. And
she is so beautifully in love
with her dreams and thinks the
world has possibility. I drink
and think about this a lot:
the possibility of possibility.
Wounded Animals

Know my secret;
their three-legged dance
follows me home.
The one who I kiss, loveless,
has their eyes;
the bed brims with lost hairs.
Downstairs
the sound of scratching
swells the cupboards.
I can feel my locked car, outside,
smoulder with dark stains
like the armpits in the shirts
of running men.
I'm naked without it.

Headlights sweep through the window.
I dodge into clothes.
I grope for my gun, my
nightstick.

Many trios
of small footprints
gather, whimpering,
on the lawn.

1975
Cemetry Strike

The contract expires, and almost in unison
all the gravediggers in the city
switch off their bulldozers. In the crematoriums,
the oven attendants turn off the gas
then blow out the pilots.
Even the scatterers of ashes on the waters
check the weather, then go out
to lie on the beach.

But death, that scab, pays no attention
to the pickets and goes on
about his predatory business
with the conscience of a robber baron.

The strike continues for months
and the corpses have to wait
in refrigerated warehouses
like supplicants in an unemployment line.
The old and young, diseased
and murdered, suicides and accidents
so hungry for their little mouthful of earth
they don’t even shiver, don’t even notice
the cold. And black spots of mourners
who can’t finish their grief
begin to appear all over the city
like a rash on the streets.

Finally, the unburied dead outnumber
the newborn. Out of sheer critical mass,
the almost silent mutter of their souls,
like thousands of rubbing butterflies,
pollenates the air and defeats the season.
That spring, even the living
yearn only for ashes and dust.

1987
Auschwitz

Birches
thrust up like prisoners' hands
line the main gate:

"Arbeit Macht Frei"
Work Will Make You Free

the trees hide
endless barracks
on a peaceful summer day.
row upon row
of thorn and nail
twisted into barbed wire
quietly slash
the cloudless blue sky.

cut human hair lies
buried in glass cases.
a can spills
cyclon-B crystals
dull colored, jewel sized
each bead ready to kill.

Empty wooden watchtowers &
chimneys bayonets
rolcall to the
Book of Death:
jews. socialists. homosexuals.
four million murdered here.

Outside
how strange to walk
free.
how it smother,
this air
that like a giant hand
once stifled
death cries all day long.

1975
To Logan in the Grave

Again I see your Orphic mask unlocked
in the early morning of consciousness,
in cities of groaning and phlegm,
in the colors of the sun arrayed in gasoline
and in alleys of spittle where the priest
intones the secret wish of sons. You
whose mother died at your birth, you
for whom her death undid the scales,
you tracked her into open fires.
Now I see you emerge into a cool hell
where each autumn will be a golden falling
and the trees outreach themselves
should a man need shade or an apple.
I see you taking the apple again, and the myth,
I see you touching again the relic of Augustine
with the sympathy of one who bled for years,
I see you drink the sacramental wine. Yes,
I see you offer to share whatever you have
and everything you are and all that you were.
I see you as you were then, mouthing the O,
the language of the breast—the beautiful
poet and son, the sufferer, the undone.
And I see you off on your rounds again.
I see you slip away on the current of your thirst
and slide beneath the surface of a lonely sea,
to float facedown inside her,
tangled in the red thread of the salt.
Aubade

_After Philip Dacey_

To rise before the children rise,
before life as it gets lived
has begun, is to rise into the silence
of another time, is to think your children
safe in the half dark dawn,
the fog protective, the short morning
of childhood prolonged.

To start a fire before the children rise,
to open the blinds, break the eggs,
is to act-by-act
shed the night, the adult night
your children sense
and have slept through once again.

And when it’s fully gone,
when all that’s risen has moved
into niche or arc, after the wind
comes up, after the traffic starts,
you watch the children (stretching
toward what they must
and must not have) rise without alarm.
Squeaky Bed

At your mother's house, we lie
stiff in our beds as paper dolls.
Soon you snore and the crickets burst
through the window with squeaky horns.

She is old and toothless,
when we make love, we
rock in the arms of a
new mother, she will not hear.

The crickets never sleep. All night
they want it.
Love is more real
than fear. Soon we will
give ourselves over to its noise.
Morning Glory

Sit 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.

1986
Eclipse

That I might wish it away,
on time or not,
will it gone and let the sun

talk the day into being. But falling light
spits on the stems of the handrails. Men look
at their feet,

kids lie flat on the purply grasses,
day turning into dusk wakes the child

inside me. Earth, she cries, you are grown older
shingled,

Sun, you are setting inside me, daylight
why are you bitten back, houses

why all your bricks turning black?
And when will I ever be younger than this?

God hides back of the clouds, like a flower
shut in a book.
Katey's snout sniffs at the darkness

the sun will shock into color. Soon now.
Any second. It can't last much longer.
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.

Surface

It's no good depending on another
for one's happiness. It's slavery,
and we have slavery in our blood.
Spill the blood.

At the bottom
of a lake I look up at the surface
shimmering in the sun.

1986
now

I sit here on a 2nd floor
hunched in yellow
pajamas
still pretending to be
a writer.
some damned gall,
at 70,
my brain cells eaten
away by the
booze.
rows of books
behind me,
I scratch my thinning
hair
and search for the
word.

for decades now
I have infuriated the
ladies,
the critics,
the university
suck-toads.

even the lovers
are tired of me
and I'm tired
of them.

they will all soon have
their time to
celebrate.

"terribly overrated..."

"gross..."

"an aberration..."
my hands sink into the keyboard
of my Macintosh
it's the same old game,
the same old crap
and con
that scraped me
off the streets and
park benches,
the same simple line
I learned in those cheap rooms,
I can't let go,
sitting here
on this 2nd floor
hunched in yellow pajamas
still pretending to be a writer.

the gods smile down,
the gods smile down,
the gods smile down.
Words into Words Won’t Go

There are no things the rain is like.
The trees are like brick walls.
But there are no things the walls themselves are like.
I am like you. The contents of a book
is like margarine. The hard green surface of my car
is like a forest fire. There are adventures in things
I cannot pinpoint—like the snow, the storm, the sleet.
The handyman who sweeps the leaves in the yard
is not like himself. German fiction is not
like African fiction. The umbrellas are like birds.
They fly in the rain storm. The radio, that says we can expect
snow, is not like itself.
There are no things the rain is like.
I am not like myself. I am like you.
More or less. I am less myself.
But I cannot touch the change. Even change is not itself.
There are no things that change is like.
With Vacations like this, Who Needs a Job

A caterpillar crawls on one
Of the two sticks rubbed together
But you thought it was a moth
To the flame. You live so long
In your head that when at first
The "real world" swings into view
Like a muscleman kicking sand
Onto a before picture, you kiss
The sand as if you've just spotted
Land. Yet you can't stay on shore
Forever since it's not a nude beach
And so things settle into a sort
Of routine. The camera's running
So you don't have to take notes.
Soon it's like you shit something out
The second you swallow it, stepping
Under an umbrella that starts raining.
You better start thinking about
Trading in that hauberk of a self
For a more streamlined model which
You won't have to sacrifice anything
For (except the feeling of sacrificing).

But then when someone calls to say
"You can't have what you want unless
You want what you have," I hang up,
Telling him I have someone on the
Other line, someone who says "Seeing
A shrink won't help, being a shrink
Might." I don't know why I'd rather
Hear her right now. She doesn't sing
Beyond the genius of the sea or anything.
Maybe just maybe it's for the same reason
A man who cradles above average lyrics
In passionless tunes spends more time
Listening to a musician who has stupid
Lyrics but great melodies than the other
Way around, in this case at least.

1993
Legend

Even while you were looking straight at me
you were always somewhere else, very far away.
I could never tell if you knew I was talking to you
or you just didn’t want to hear me. You were that distant.

So when I turned my attention to the trees,
the air that brought me the trees, the stones
and everything I walked in and out of, you suddenly
began to speak to me. And your breath was so warm
and sweet that it took me very far away inside me
to a place where I was born, growing up before I was born.
Brother of My Heart
— for Etheridge Knight

Brother of my heart,
don't you know there's only one
walking into the light, only one,
before this light
flashes out, before this bravest knight
crashes his black bones into the earth?

You will not come back among us,
your cried-out face
laughing; because
those who die by the desire to die
maybe can love their way back,
but as moles or worms,
who grub into the first sorrow and lie there.

Therefore, as you are, this once,
sing, even if you cry; the bravery
of the crying turns it into the true song; soul brother
in heaven, on earth
broken heart brother, sing to us
here, in this place that loses its brothers,
in this emptiness only the singing sometimes almost fills.

1988
Poem for Lizzy

Phoenixes rise from South Bronxian ashes you warm your hands on. This heat brightens your markers, sharpens your pencils, loosens your brushes, shakes up your aerosols for the nightshift when you will art-revolt. This volcanic brick by brick-a-backwards meltdown of imperialism’s fractured reactor is your muse, is your stage. You are the Curlian photographer of the no-longer, recreator of the gone, escort of the dying to reincarnation’s door, entropy’s hired portrait painter.

Kid Lizzy; graffiti man, you burn commuters’ newspaper eyes. You vomit Park Avenue’s greasy money breakfast all over Cadillac windows. You stuff the bounced checks of subsidized housing back through Wall Street’s pin-striped coffee lips. You speak fluent languages the U.N. won’t recognize because your words realize the situation and laugh graphic anuses back at mid-town’s grotesque face. Out in the drunken bug-eyed gossamer American dream brain you shit art at them. Everyone wants to see it but can’t through constipated, hamburger-infected rush hour balls. They can feel it though: the heat of it. The sound of your sparkling boozed colored prophesies playing off MilyMonkyDizzyLizziTrane cars that click past in seconds, counting off the stolen and numbered days of these streets. Your paint can is a time bomb, a depth charger that rusts a hook in the craw of these notorious animals in their murky selfish dominion. Skips a fisted beat into they clean time with thick lime, black and pink quick strikes coked full of “Lizzy” all over urban walls. You drip fire on this dried-up bankrupt system they call education. Illiterates cheer as your words moan up the flames engulfing corporate billboards while you swing art cages around Babylon’s lying necks.

Your fshshshshshshshsh. They can see it glittering in the nuclear glow. They try to censor your shkshkshkshk but you’re gone, eatin’ chunks of chocolate night, autographing city rats’ purple rule, tracking crimes to open-mouth scream poses you snatch and stroke back to life in wall-rendered mosaics of cum and blood. Cum and blood? They didn’t want to see cum and blood but they get it back anyway in a vogue reflecting pool of the wishes of the poor that cries out in glistening sweat-script depictions of “change”: 
Credit cards appliqued with machine gun stitches
to bankers’ faces and to the kids of they bitches.
Homeboys tap dancin’ on their very heads,
blood tricklin’ down to the graves of their beds.
We want change, not charity. Change.
Refugiados marching on Capitol steps
with photos of the never found.
American cityscapes burnin’ red
against a twilight background.

We want change, not charity. Change, ’cause that’s all there is on
these streets they left you on with nothing masksmasksmasks could
hide. Nothing teksttexttexttexts could explain. It’s all over, this city of
jazz. The one you rainbow projectile back into the face of the prison
guard of capitalism that cages your innocence.

Your cry is heard! From the Battery to Harlem. From Howard Beach
to Bensonhurst. From Newark to Watts to East L.A. to W. Miami.
From the walls in the prisons at la frontera to the walls in the camps
of the Alto plano of Guatemala to the walls in the homelands in
Soweto and Bofuthatswana to the walls in the W. Bank and Gaza,
your cry is heard. Tu llanto está oído. Tu fuiste visto anoche corriendo
salvaje por las calles de Loisaída, buscando amor, buscando calor,
cuando no hay coro. Pintando rythmos caribeños en estas paredes sin sol.
Pintando sol. Pintando rojo, verde, anarrillo, azul matador a sacar el
dolor de esta oscuridad. Pintando negro el caballo blanco de la cocaina.
Pintando cerrada las casas de crack with your spray gun syringe. Tu
llanto está oído denunciando dictaduras. Your cry is heard!

Your brilliant crayon bomb strokes riots across Houston, across A,
B, C, the Bridges, 125th and Lenrox, swiftly swobbing New York’s
rich wax eyes with ether. Name after name, scarring death to life in
subway stone bowels, across rooftops, down 42nd Street. Scrape sky,
scrape sky, space craft screeches traffic to a halt as you tear a rip
across the split pea sludgey Hudson and lift off through the snog
into outer space: “L-1-Z-Z-Y” cut out into Jersey’s wired, wired sky.
Connecting the stars with an aerosol jet stream of frantic Arabic
curls. Manhattan’s discolored heart dripping from the shiny teeth of

1983
Desertsong

Meditation on a Dance by Jeff Duncan, In Memoriam

I brush my hair and it swings out
in air, black water falling
down the canyon wall. A breeze turns left
and lifts it into silver
spray, as years and wind have lifted me
in my slow fall and put this silver
in my hair. It is thick in my fingers
as I twist it into braids, I think
how many times I’ve drawn it
in by day and let it down
to welcome night, the moon lacing its black
with glinting threads of grey, and I
am woven into night the way
a reed is woven in this basket whose dark mouth
overflows with silver fish, those stars
I’ve bent and netted from the stream.
And oh, though I am woven in, I swear,
I am light as a reed that sways in the gentlest air
by the river in the deepest canyon’s shade.
I who stood once as a cactus stands, bristling
in the sun, and I was hard to those who, thirsty,
passed, and from my earthbaked water jar,
I offered none. And stood unmoved
while my shadow crept around me, dark
on the sun dial of the sand, marking time.

It’s hard to say which day, or what, began the dance.
Was it the slow processional
of ants, or the spider
who stepped its many legs, impeccable,
deliberate, through the sand? Or a beetle
scurrying with its black shield on its back,
a pair of twig-like sticks so sensitive they catch
the rumor of a gnat, the breathing
of a flea, mosquito whine, the jerk
of a butterfly’s wing? It was the slightest thing. A pebble for an avalanche.
And like the ancient ones who left the stones behind so they could travel light,
I was unburdened of such weight the earth came easy to my feet
as flight comes to the heron or the bat.
Now, as I dance, the light: stops where I am,
I cast a weaving shadow for the gnats
who gather, lively, in my shade; my dark side comforts them and I am glad
to dance the afternoon away, and leave a trail like Sanskrit in the sand, old words
the wind will soon efface. the water falling through the air, while on their mounds
the prairie dogs keep watch
in silence as intense as prayer.
Gardening in a Dry Year

The sky is a hard blue bowl,
unmarred by even a smear of cloud, a hint of rain.
No promises here.
The long-term forecast shrieks sun, sun, sun.
Seedlings shrivel,
cucumbers contract on the vines.
The loam, once dark & rich
as a chocolate torte,
crumbles to dust
that sifts in the desultory wind.
Gardening is the language of loss,
enemies are legion:
cutworms, slugs, snails, caterpillars;
tomato hornworms, fat & green,
studded with wasp eggs;
rodents & rabbits, fungus & fireblight,
more than the seven plagues.
What we love and water,
bless with the sprinkler's silver spray,
does not necessarily thrive.
We can fertilize and mulch,
double-dig and retrench,
but we're helpless as wheat
in a sudden summer storm.
That doesn't come this year.
As if God has turned His face away.
And the unblinking sun burns steadily down,
the lacquered blue bowl firmly in place,
our prayers of intercession dry dust in our mouths,
dumb as our glib tongues, the desert of our hearts.
Before You Drop Off Read This

so you may know that
  my light attracts your light
  people mirror people
  beauty crystal eyes beauty
  umbrage more umbrage
  energy's going fast
  my skin against yours
  clit against yours
  to be ambiguous is not the point
  the brave still die
  cowards too

& you know
you know it's more than miraculous & true

1975
A Last Poem

Times
when I think of you
but don’t want to

and you keep cropping up
in odd ways
on cold days

like walking
University Place,
for instance

I stop for
the light
at E. 8th

the light
turns green

or I stop
anyway

the sun
trying
to rise
in the windows

the blinds
half-drawn

in one,
sometimes two

a clue
to your
absence
or presence
or the rooms
fully-lit

and suddenly
you appear
in the bathroom

You're already there

or it's simply
weeks

or years
later

Where was it
we had been

central
to my thoughts
of you

a room to
walk around in

to stand in
to talk in—

again
and
again

Some other person
or place

inseparable
from the past

but continuous

1979
Last Call

We can never be sure
what might be
on the other side of the door.
So many hours, so many beers,
anything might have happened.
But together we can swell
to the size of ten men, brave men,
and face the cold darkness,
walk into it perfectly
drunk, our heads high, trying
to recall the rhyme
that ended a sonnet or the start
of a song not on the jukebox anymore,
but standing tall, straight,
arm in arm, and still
among the living, my friend

1988
John Ashbery received the Antonio Feltrinelli International Prize for Poetry in 1993. His latest book is Hotel Lautréamont (Knopt, 1992). John Balaban’s most recent work, Words for My Daughter (Copper Canyon, 1991), includes the poem from this issue. J.T. Barbarese is the author of Under the Blue Moon (1985) and New Science (1989), and has been a visiting lecturer at Rutgers University. Coleman Barks’ collection of poems, Good Seed, is being published this year, and a volume of his translations, The Essential Rumi, will appear in 1994. He teaches at the University of Georgia in Athens. Tina Barr is the author of At Dark on Naskag Point (Flume, 1984), and her poems have appeared in APR, Poetry, Paris Review, Boulevard, Ploughshares, and others. Art Beck has translated Luxcrium (Simply to See, Poltroon, 1990) and Rilke (Rilke, Elysian, 1983). Marvin Bell’s new collection, The Book of the Dead Man, is forthcoming in 1994 from Copper Canyon. James Bertolino is the author of New & Selected Poems (Carnegie-Mellon, 1978), which includes a revised version of the poem in this volume. Douglas Blazek’s many books include Edible Fire (Morgan Press, 1978). He has recent work in Flooding Island, Ploughshares, and others. Karen Blomain has three collections of poems: Black Diamonds (Great Elm), The Slap (Nightshade), and most recently, Borrowed Light (Nightshade, 1992). Robert Bly recently co-edited The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart, Poems for Men (Harper Collins, 1992). Walking Swiftly, a fastschrift in his honor, was edited by Thomas R. Smith and published by Ally Press. Henry Braun’s book, The Vergil Woods, was published by Atheneum in 1968. Recent poems have appeared in APR, Axe Factory Review, and others. Steven Ford Brown is the translator of Astonishing World: The Selected Poems of Angel Gonzalez, 1956-1986, which was published last year. Joseph Bruchac’s most recent books are Turtle Meats and Other Stories (Holy Cow!, 1992) and the novel, Dawn Land (Fulcrum, 1992). Charles Bukowski’s The Last Night of the Earth Poems (1992) is published by Black Sparrow Press. They are currently working on a volume of his letters from the ‘60s. Deborah Burnham’s poems have appeared in recent issues of Kansas Quarterly, West Branch, and The Literary Review. Christopher Bursk’s collections of poetry include The Way Water Rubs Stone (Word Works, 1989) and Making Wings (State Street, 1983). Peter Bushyager’s poems have appeared in Onk!, B City, Exquisite Corpse, and others. His most recent collection of poems is Vidal Wires (Unimproved Editions, 1986). Andrei Codrescu is the editor of Exquisite Corpse and a commentator on NPR’s “All Things Considered.” The poem in this volume appeared in his book The Marriage of Inland & Inland and there in his Selected Poems 1970-1980. Marion Cohen’s new book of poems, Epsilon Country, is forthcoming from The Center for Thanatological Research in New York. She teaches at Drexel University. Joel Colten, a Philadelphia poet and photographer, was last seen while photographing the eruption of Mt. St. Helens. Jim Cory is the author of Wife, published in 1993 by Incite To Riot Press. Robert Creeley’s most recent collection of poems, Windows (New Directions, 1990), includes the piece presented here. Barbara Crooker’s books include Obligato (Linwood, 1993) and The Lost Children (Heylock, 1989). Darcy Cummings has poems forthcoming in Kansas Quarterly, Poetry Durham (England), and in The Next Parish Oser, an anthology of Irish-American writing. Craig Crurry’s book, Hacking and Smoking, was published by Foothills Press in 1990. Philip Dacey’s book, Night Shift at the Crucifix Factory, was published by the U. of Iowa Press in 1991. Susan Daily is presently working on a novel and compiling a retrospective collection of her poetry. Jim Daniels’ new collection, M-80, will be published this year as part of the Pitt Poetry Series (U. of Pittsburgh Press). A film based on some of his poems, “No Pets,” was shot this year. Almitra David won the Eight Mountain Press Poetry Prize, and the winning volume, Between the Sea and Home, will appear soon. William Virgil Davis
years at numerous locations in and around Philadelphia. Clarence Major writes fiction and poetry, and his recent titles include Painted Turtle: Woman with Guitar (Sun & Moon, 1988) and My Amputations (Fiction Collective, 1987). Gerard Malanga has a volume of erotic poems and photographs, Three Diamonds, published by Black Sparrow (1991). Al Masarik was the editor of Swamp Root, and is the author of Excuses to be Outside (Duck Down, 1989). Thomas McGrath's Selected Poems 1938-1988 was published by Copper Canyon in 1988, who also published Death Song (a posthumous volume edited by Sam Hamill) in 1991. Heather McHugh's most recent collection, To the Quick, was published by Wesleyan in 1987. Louis McKee has been with PBQ since the beginning—as either a reader, contributor, or editor. Besides this Retrospective issue, he has also gathered the material for special issues celebrating Etheridge Knight (PBQ #32/33) and John Logan (PBQ #39). Elizabeth McKim is the author of, among others, Boat of the Dream (Troubadour, 1988), Family Salt (Wampeter, 1987), and Burning Through (Wampeter, 1981). Ann Menebroker's numerous collections of poetry include The Blue Fish (BOGG, 1989) and Biting through the Spine (M. Aukum, 1985). Joseph Meredith's new collection, Hunter's Moon, is forthcoming in 1993 from Time Being Books. Patience Merriman's poems have appeared in APR, Hot Water Review, and others. Phyllis Middlebrook, who publishes her new work under the name of Phyllis Wat, has poetry forthcoming in The World (St. Mark's Poetry Project). Her book, Shadow Blue, was published by Hot Water in 1988. Lenard D. Moore is a Writer-in-Residence for the United Arts Council of Raleigh and Wake County, and the founder of the Carolina African-American Writers' Collective. His most recent books include Desert Storm: A Brief History (Los Hombres, 1993) and Forever Home (St. Andrews, 1993). Dennis Moritz has been concentrating on plays, and has had his work produced in New York City, Philadelphia, and elsewhere. Naomi Shihab Nye, author of Different Ways to Pray, Hugging the Jukebox, and Yellow Glove has recently edited This Same Sky, a collection of poems from around the world (Four Winds/Macmillan, 1993). Toby Olson's novels include Scenes New (New Directions), Don't in Lesbos (Simon & Schuster), and most recently, At Sea (Simon & Schuster). His new collection of poems, Unfinished Building, appeared recently from Coffee House Press. Simon J. Ortiz has published a dozen books since the mid-70's, most recently, Woven Stone (U. of Arizona Press, 1992). A new volume of poems, After and Before the Lightning, is forthcoming, as is a children's book, The Good Rainbow Road. Gil Ott is the author of The Yellow Floor (Sun & Moon, 1987), Public Domain (Potes and Poets, 1989), and Wheel (Chax Press, 1992). Linda Pastan has published eight books of poetry, the most recent being Heroes in Disguise (Norton, 1991). She currently serves as Poet Laureate of Maryland. Raymond R. Patterson is the author of 26 Ways of Looking at a Black Man and Other Poems (Award Books, 1969) and Elemental Blues (Cross-Cultural Communications, 1982). Aaren Yeatts Perry is the author of an audio chapbook, The Wordworks (Maxx Wind Productions, 1992). His work has appeared in Long Shot, The Blue Guitar, and The Painted Word. Marge Piercy has a recent book of poems, Mars and Her Children (Knopf, 1992) and a novel, He, She and It (Knopf, and now in paperback from Fawcett). An anthology she edited, Early Ripening, is available again in the U.S. from HarperSan Francisco. Maralyn Lois Polak is the author of Facing the Music and El Otro Lado, volumes of poetry, as well as The Writer as Celebrity, a collection of interviews. Lee W. Potts is a former editor of PBQ. Ron Price has poems forthcoming in an anthology from the Charlotte Poetry Project. Karen Rile is the author of the novel, Winter Music (Little, Brown, 1987). Len Roberts has had two collections of poetry published in 1993—Learning about the Heart (Silverfish Review Press) and Dangerous Angels (Copper Beech). Molly Russakoff lives in Philadelphia. Lynne Savitt has a new collection, Sleeping Retrospect of Desire, forthcoming.
from Konocti Books. Dreams as Erect as Nipples on Ice was published by Ghost Horse in 1990. David Shapiro's collections include January, Poems from Deal, Lathness to an Idea, and House (Blown Apar). He has collaborated extensively with architect John Hejduk on masques, books, and monuments. Louise Simons was a founding editor of PBQ. Ellen Slack is a former Poet Laureate of Bucks County, PA. David R. Slavitt has a new novel, Turkish Delights, and a collection of poems, Crossroads, forthcoming in 1993 from Louisiana State Press. His translations of The Fables of Avianus is just out from Johns Hopkins Press. Sally Jo Sorensen teaches at Southwest Missouri State. A Turkish Liby, her first collection of poems, was published by State Street in 1990. Laurel Speer has a new chapbook, Slavery. She also edits 5810+2, an essay and review journal, and is a contributing editor for both Small Press Review and Small Magazine Review. William Stafford has had seven books of poems published since 1990, including Passwords (Harper Collins), History Is Loose Again (Honeybrook), and My Name Is William Tell (Confluence).

Bernard F. Stiehl is a poet, photographer, and the author of Incorrigibly Romantic (Temple University Press, 1985) and Another Kind of Wisdom (Jewish Publication Society, 1988). He teaches English and History of Photography at Community College of Philadelphia, and ICP in New York. Lamont B. Steepe is the author of American Morning/Morning, Crimson River, and most recently, Mad Minute (Whirlwind, 1993). He is currently Poetry Consultant at the Walt Whitman Arts Center in Camden, NJ. Chris Stroffolino has been a regular contributor of reviews and essays to Chron Review and PBQ. His poetry has appeared in recent issues of Phoebe, Washington Review, To, B City, and others.
