CutBank 3
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DAY'S EYE

the heart knows itself to be transparent
like a crab it unfolds its shell in time
and manages to eat only food that will
not show. bluntly speaking, it is always hungry.
strangely, she does not know this and
walks boldly out in the morning like she
expects to meet friends, or notice the birds
with a casual, glancing eye. how
strange it is that when two hearts meet
(it is always in a restaurant)
they stop thinking of food, they become eyes.
they can hardly stop thinking of sunrise.
in anticipation they begin blinking
in pre-sympathy. if they think of death at all
(which is unlikely) it is in the form of an eclipse
and they will shut their eyes and walk home
together in the darkness.

MICROCOSM

the great frog's eyes of the past stare, bewildered at their own
transcendence. they wait for the princess they were supposed to
kiss and she would wake up and love them. the shy stars have been
watching this story for centuries, saying nothing, turning their
faces when they grew bored at dawn, and we woke and opened our
windows to let in the young sky like a daily piano to play and
be heard. throughout all of this we know the frog is still
waiting. the stars sit like an audience, and because of this we
have history.
FIRE IN THE LAST APARTMENT

The carpet is smoking. You ring for room service, ask them to send you damp towels. Your dogs hide in the closet. They are pregnant, swollen behind long skirts. Cats climb your legs, cling like burs on a hunter's socks. You run to the window screaming animals gone mad. On the street, two soldiers wave, and stout girls stare at you, hair center-parted. Watch out, they say, soon no shingles over your head; panes will shatter, and bright tongues blacken the flesh of your thighs. Soon to be charred, they whisper, jump into our net of arms. And you, a slender woman, wail alone at the edge, cats climbing your legs.
AFTERMATH

Gulls slap against the sky, make one last dive,
Then disappear. I sit outside the shack
Protected by the hill's overhang and wait,
Watch the waves erase the land, watch them move
In under the rocks and crash. I add the sound
I cannot hear. I know there is no reason
For you to come back.

Still, just before dark,
I see your figure, hunched against the wind,
Come up the shore. Wet from the wind and rain
You follow me into the shack. I build a fire,
Heat up the coffee, turn on the radio
For the latest report on the storm. Nothing but static.
We sit without speaking, watching the sand spill
In around the leather flaps at the windows.

Suddenly, the storm strikes. Lightning lights
Your face, fixed in fear. The flash precedes
The thunder of your scream. All night, whenever
I wake to the twitching of the small ball of your body
Clenched tight around the empty bundle
Of your arms, I hear you whispering.

In the morning we have to climb out a window
To shovel the sand from the door. The beach
Is strewn with the storm's leavings: seaweed,
Shells, driftwood, dead fish, broken bones.
The tide out, we walk out to collect the useable Debris, saying how we will make of this piece Of driftwood a lamp, of that a marriage.
ERMINE

He rose off winter.  
A dance of flame, a  
Dream of quick cold shape.  
White cobra in snow,  
Eyes furious blood  
Drops. Fur icicle,  
Barb-clawed snow-sliver.  
Parsnip with frost-black  
Tip. My steel trap held  
His wire arc of flesh  
In bare formal fear.  
The silver dollar  
Of pan was bigger  
Than his head. He'd worked  
To spring it. He held  
The trap like a gift  
I was refusing.  
I saw his outrage:  
His heart leaped in his  
Tail-tip. I felt his  
Insanity grow  
At having to chew  
The shattered foreleg  
Away from his paw  
To escape. He stopped  
Only to spit me  
Blood-flakes of right leg.  
I found a blackjack  
Of club his head fell  
Under like a rag-  
Wrapped egg.  
I loved his  
Body so, I slid  
It up my coat sleeve.  
I held the bloody  
Head in my hand like  
The two-headed pink mouse
I'd found dead under
A hen once. My hand
Was ermine-red. My
Arm was soft and warm
With animal life.
It was the hand that
Dropped the blow that peeled
The skin from its flesh
Neat as candy wraps:
Melting snow revealed
A patch of pink buds.
The muscles stood taut
As textbook drawings
On his body. I saw
Fat like two or three
Pats of hoarded butter.
The organs hinted
Like blue mysteries.
I wondered how they
Could all crouch so close.
The skin, dry and clean
As sausage casing,
Had an acrid scent
I loved. I never
Tanned it. Reversed,
The fur slept for years
On my bookcase. Each
Time I considered
The brown weasel turned
White ermine, I thought
Of a velvet-coated
Grapevine between shirt
And skin, whorled and
Sexual muscle
Of wood, draped in snow.
I cried for its life,
The animal’s sacred
Breath. I felt my own
Dead within it, and
I knew, I knew me.
THIS TIME

— for Martha

This time I count the days in pairs. Every car that doesn't bring you brings the blood rushing back bruising lifeless veins to blue. My rusty heart sputters to a halt.

I collect the pages of unread letters collecting dust. Friends lend me ones I pretend you wrote. If the telephone should ring I might answer in a squeaky voice—no one home.

I've decided to stay busy; feed the cat just enough, complain about my cooking. The snow is melting. I write silly poems and show them to strangers. Somehow this time really matters.
VOYAGE

(for Pablo Neruda)

You watch the puma ripping
sweetest buck below your dark flight
from the turning bed, the pink-cheek nurses.
Rain takes down the shops
in streets with black & chocolate girls
drunk on skirts too bright
to kiss your eye. Generals
deck the tree with bones.
Wheel the python Andes, coil heap coil,
where duende pinches herdsmen,
flings them sighing past the dry moon.
You cross the violet pools
half ringed with boys not coral,
beyond the water-curling sand
that winds past Desmodera.
Mystic coast with nets of palm,
prows like waves, the crowd
alone. The admiral swings
a pale torch, pallor split
by tears, excited talk,
your copper face. Bullets pock
the ribs; look, the small, full breast
beside your hand. A giant breath,
reef & earth in lonely patterns
gone behind. No rivers drive that keel,
the torn flags, like longing arms, keep turning.
_Ah mas alla de todo. Ah mas alla de todo._
_Es la hora de partir. O abandonado!_
TERMINAL VELOCITY

I.
Before impact you are carrying a bag of spices and a blue mixing bowl. The bowl will be broken.
Two awful moons cross the narrow horizon. Warnings freeze and fall short. A scream leaps over your teeth. Useless, it dies on the asphalt, digging its claws into the windshield. Your legs panic first. They expect their nightmare: trapped again in plaster, the marrow howling in its slender room, planning escapes with drills and sharp saws that all fail. Their fear climbs your spine like a ladder and shivers in the brain. Your last thoughts are these bones. Lord, not my legs, not this time.

II.
Human atoms have no defense against two tons of accelerating steel: a body’s weight lets go. Its flight is not perfect like a ball or as far as a child can throw. An old woman makes the same sound falling down the basement steps. Only a suicide from the thirteenth floor plans an expert arc and the final anesthetic sidewalk. Even a dull knife wounds more cleanly than chrome. The seam that joins your arm and shoulder tears. Tendons pull away and their muscles follow them. One bone breaks in half weeping. And another. Somewhere near the wrist the blood comes untied. They have driven on. Pieces of blue crockery settle over you like flax blossoms in a morning field. Soft oregano, sage, and curry blow like dust.
III.
Before the ambulance and the crowd gathers, between injury and the time pain is unlocked in your sleeve, you have the world to yourself. No one visits the lumberyard at midnight. You watch the planets return to their orbits and hear a telephone ringing next door. You look into the hand lying at your side to find yourself. It is a red mirror, and you are pleased. You touch it with your tongue. Iodine and salt fill your mouth with welcome. Porchlights come on: there's been an accident. A victim loses his name. You take this story and crawl inside your body and pull it up over you and wait. Next month your arm will talk in its sleep, whispering, *headlights, headlights*. 
HISTORY

The touchlessness of dream: skin sleeps, muscles walk in their sleep, legs thrash like a whale's tail, salty water oozes out.

Pools of blood, a bus to the South, missed appointments, unexpected authority figures.

You shoot at a mountain lion and miss. You shoot at a deer and miss. The warden asks to see your license.

The scene shifts: a woman, prone, her head a ball of curls in a reddish pool—au jus, not blood, but still you know she's dead: the jagged cleft.

No stairs; no elevator; one window, locked. Trapped—and then you are at the bus station, waiting; then you are in the mesquite canyon, holding a rifle. This is how to shoot, you say, nodding to your female companion. Blam! you miss the lion. Blam! you miss the deer.

Your skin wakes first, the sheets are dry, the warden’s lecture throbs a minute in your ears, your muscles loosen. It was all a dream, you think, then start to write this down.
This morning the magpie
(which floats all day
over the new-white ground)
held on among
the stiff wind-rattles
of the cottonwood’s
branches,
and stared back.
I have been alone
watching him,
afraid you’d call.

READING MERWIN’S TRANSLATIONS OF VIETNAMESE POETRY

"Where is Paradise
So that I can mount the Phoenix and fly there?"
—Ngo Chi Lan, “Autumn”

Now the war is not famous
we dance the dance of bees.
Mud-daubers at work again
on the quiet tasks of construction.

Beneath the eaves, we build
paradise with one hole
for entry & escape, pass through
one at a time.

Strangers are attacked.
Now the war is strange again
more layers can surround us,
work against this new season of the cold.
I'd always dreamed, of swans.
A pair of white two's on a pond
Half the size of my estate;

So when my husband brought the ducks home
For the swamp he'd tried to fill and couldn't,
I said, why not?

But about August the swamp
Ran out on us,
Left muck and old
Leaves like feathers.

And one was dead all right
But the other one, the one the dog
Didn't get through with—
Although everything was askew
And flapping,
That one—it was only humane—
So I got the hatchet and I
the blood, I got
I hacked
It. and I blood
and hacked
hacked.

and that
is why not.
A Prologue to
AXIOMATIC POSITIONS: AN AMERICAN PRIMER OF VALUES

My mother didn't know Thornton Wilder, but Thornton Wilder knew there were unborn babies in the air. So did my mother, wiping snot from her nose and tears from her eyes, standing at midnight on the streetcorner of a Detroit slum, her father asphyxiated in a taxi-cab during the Depression and her stepfather—wandering carnival barker—unbearably cruel. "Frank'll kill you," her sister said in their upstairs bedroom. "Fuck Frank. I'll be back when the carnival leaves town." She slipped out the window onto the porch roof, shinnied down the drainpipe, and hightailed it to a streetcorner three blocks down.

Although I was born on that streetcorner, having passed from the air to my mother's mind, I wouldn't drink her milk until years later. Her will was in that milk, and I nearly OD'd on that set of hopes and expectations, on that transmigratory desire for transcendence. Hell, I didn't know: I kept sucking. And now it appears it wasn't all that bad; I've even convinced myself that some chemical knowledge was passed from her milk to my cells, and that in some way or another I've always known about The Primer.

I also tend to think of The Primer as my own unborn baby—but that's not entirely true. Whenever I brood over this present undertaking, more often than not I affix its beginnings to the fall of a year long past. . .

It was the last Friday in September and the dorm was nearly deserted, most of the freshmen either reliving old fantasies at a high school football game, or searching for new ones in mixers at Hood, Goucher, Wilson. Down the hall amplified sound. I was sitting on my bed poring over my own current fantasy, road maps, blue and red lines that would lead me away. A knock on the door.

"I'm Chas," he said, entering. "I'm your neighbor, next door down."

"You must be the one they call Giant."

He smiled. "Some of those sons of commuters call me that. But I think you can call me Neighbor. Where you from, anyway?"

"From back home."
He eyed me a full thirty seconds before speaking. “I don’t mean to pry,” he said, “but when I walked in I noticed that *Blonde on Blonde* cover thumbtacked to the thin strip of wood that was so gratuitously provided in these green cement-blocked cells. I also noticed the road maps, and I have a hunch you know about it.”

“So Sweet Jesus, Neighbor. Know about what?”

“And I just noticed something else: you can’t keep a straight face.”

We drank close a case of beer that night, got caught, saw the dean, and blamed everything on the can fairy. Although that night was the beginning of a great friendship, we would not mention *The Primer* again for over half a decade, afraid we would lose it if we talked about it, but seeing finally that we would lose it anyway since the world around us was, well, cracking up. Our youth was nearly gone, our energy was damn near depleted, and many of our friends and acquaintances were retreating to Jesus, yoga, and other such ill-conceived and hasty nirvanas that bore no relation to *The Primer* as we had known it. When we discovered that the former campus head of SDS had become Engineering Consultant for Plastic Paper Clips, Inc., of Metuchen, New Jersey, it was clearly time to take stock and grab hold of what was basic to our lives.

In a letter, Chas said, “The text of *The Primer* is diffuse in its present edition, still to be completed or located, whichever. The basic edition exists in the public schools, johns, and roller rinks of the nation, in cafes that have been by-passed by Interstate highways, in films of Dick Clark’s original *American Bandstand*, in all former athletes who pump gas for a living. It exists in Buddy Holly’s Adam’s apple, to say nothing of Woddy Guthrie’s ashes and seed, wherever they are scattered. It exists in all first fucks and in a high percentage of succeeding ones; it exists in cornfields in all seasons but especially in November when the stalks are dead frozen and brittle; it exists in the ‘JOHNNY LOVES MARY—1911’ scratched into the grain of a wooden school desk. It exists in all urges for going, in all green lights, in all howls and in all goat-cries. It exists in all Bob Dylan albums, though some latter-day cynics claim that these are merely clever cover-ups and that Dylan himself is writing for the Pig Capitalist Primer.”

Which wasn’t bad for a partial index. But I told Chas that diffuse wasn’t quite the right word, since in itself it did not convey the astounding rate of diffusion. That rate was so great that much of the text was being obliterated, as if our beloved *Primer* were some sort of snake, shedding skins even as it multiplied in size. Also, I told Chas to inform any cynics that our old mutual neighbor, Bob Dylan, could by now be condensed into a value, and that he would by God be treated as such.
God bless Chas. In those days he was always a step or two ahead of me. Dylan was the least of his worries. Of more immediate concern was an elusive value, an intruding body in *The Primer's* sphere. He wrote: "Now we are living through a period of imposed calm, waiting and preparing for something to happen. I do not want to be a passive element, and I suspect you do not either. Although this is an axiomatic position, it's a real stickler. As far as I can tell, it's worming its way into the 37th value-slot, immediately following something like 'Act as if you are a being with integrity, even when you suspect you are not' and immediately preceding something like 'Always look your man straight in the eye when you are on defense.' Now: tell me what this has to do with you and me, and—by simple extension—with anyone else who may be affected."

And indeed, half my original motivation was simply to help a friend. From my own experience I knew how frustrating it could be to feel the effects of a value, to suspect it was a value all right (though all manner of people would have you believe otherwise), and yet never to know precisely what the value was, or precisely how it was affecting you, or how long you would be under its sign. Working with the clues Chas had provided, I spent weeks puzzling over No. 37—no use. Finally, I advised Chas that all values, under close scrutiny, became both axiomatic positions and real sticklers. I told him that knowing No. 36 and No. 38 would be as close as we would ever get to knowing No. 37 unless (and it was a big unless) we could compile all the values, match them to their numbers, and then see which one was numberless.

To which Chas responded: "You do it. I'm presently in the middle of a lengthy project on Infant Mortality."

II

Okay, old buddy. I did it. Here it is. Without your help it's obviously not all it could or should have been; it is dedicated to you nevertheless, because when you say you are working on Infant Mortality I have no recourse but to trust you. I had to go it alone, Chas. I didn't mind that so much since it was in *The Primer* anyway. But then my wife left me and I was forced to do odd jobs of work in order to support a few of my more expensive values. I put up tents at a score of county and state fairs, shelter for some of the Midwest's most prized pigs. With a different outfit, and for different pigs, I put up tents from one end of Palm Beach to the other. I travelled for a while with a marionette man, and among thousands of children I saw one enraptured face for every ten that were bored. At the construction site of cheaply-built fat-priced apartment buildings, I shoveled sand out of a basement until that seemed as axiomatic as anything else.

Through it all, I came to believe in the inevitability of reality. I saw things happen which had to happen and which could have happened no
other way other than the way, before my eyes, they did happen. In Chappell, Nebraska, I hitched a ride with I. B. Whittaker, a man who had broken his back working on the railroad in Portland and who, driving without the prescribed brace, was trading tools for tanks of gas in order to make it home to his wife and kids in London, Kentucky, in time for Christmas. Night on a highway: the '50 Chevy, knocking at 40 mph, being sucked into the vortex of the Midwest. I poured out the uninteresting angst of a middle-class soul and I.B., face all bone in the light of the instrument panel, told me: do what you have to do, and fuck 'em all what won't let you do it.

I found myself in a brown rented room two-flights-up in Burlington, Vermont, in the dead of the winter when “the heat pipes just cough.” I had enough money to last the winter and enough values to insure insomnia. There were so many goddamn values that finally I wrote them all out in red magic marker on 3” x 5” cards. I covered the brown wallpaper with values, and when that was done I stayed drunk the better part of a week, staring at the walls, living at once with all the shit I had lived with at various times throughout my life. It helped. At the end of the week I knew what was important. With sudden resolve, on a Friday evening, I ripped off all the cards that were extraneous, and threw them out the window where they mingled and fell with the snowflakes. There were 51 remaining. Although the real task was ahead of me, embodying those values, showing beyond any reasonable doubt why they were important, I was beginning to feel that 51 was a manageable number, beginning to feel that at long last I had a structure within which to work. In the middle of a sigh of relief there was a knock on the door. . .

My God. Those tell-tale high cheekbones . . . and if the eyes seemed more oblique than I’d remembered from the pictures, from the various album covers, they retained, nevertheless, vestiges of all she had seen, the colors, details, and ironies of life on this planet: she was lonely. She had just given a concert for free at the University of Vermont which was attended by six people—and even those six were so, so young. She said, only half facetiously, that she was considering going into the business of fulfilling strangers’ pipe-dreams, as a means of appeasing her own loneliness.

“Then you don’t want me.”

With slight bobs of her head she indicated the walls. “I don’t?”

“That’s my only pipe-dream,” I said. “And No. 2 or No. 3, I haven’t decided yet, reads: ‘You must go it alone.’ ”

“Then for the sake of loneliness.”

“You realize, of course, I’ll have to search you. There will be no smuggling values into this room, no further cluttering of my life.”

“Did you know you can’t keep a straight face? It’s becoming.” She set her guitar against the bureau and took off her coat. She smiled,
winked, and said softly, "The snowflakes are very strange, very different tonight. There, the bed, let's please go to bed."

It snowed harder than any time since my youth, when large flakes amassed on the windows of a bakery in Petoskey, Michigan, covering the smudges of nine-year-old faces which just that morning had watched donuts being made. It snowed harder than any time since that time, when walking home alone from a basketball game I pretended I was a fullback like Nick Pietrosante, running, hands clutching at my thighs, churning for the extra yard through snow-plowed mounds on either side of Mitchell Street, falling, sprawling, my laughter graced by yet more snow.

I awoke early Monday morning in Burlington. The snow was stopping and a weak winter light slanted in through the window. The swath of light was just perceptible but I could follow it across the bed, over her warm sleeping body, across two-thirds of the bureau and on up one of the walls. The walls, I calmly noted, were no longer white but motley white-on-brown. Panning the room, looking at forlorn values—two here, a clump of three there, hardly a dent in all that brown—I experienced my only moment of real doubt. The storm had passed; there was work to be done. And yet I had no desire to move, as if any movement at that holy time would be irrevocable, as if movement would not only disturb the breathing next to me but would also forever alter the quality of that weak light, shattering equilibrium and plunging the world back into the same old havoc. And, too, I had been fooled: I had searched her and she was clean—so clean that in the space of a snowbound weekend she had become a single living value, a value I could understand but never capture, never transcribe to a card on a wall; a value which threatened to eclipse all others.

I preserved that moment as long as I could; finally, of course, I was absolved of any decision in the matter. The light was changing anyway, becoming stronger, prefacing a bright-blue fifteen-degree day. The streets outside my window were now filled with the sounds of snowshovels scraping sidewalks, of chains crunching over snowpacked pavement, of hearty cries of greeting: industrious Vermonters, trying their damnest to get to work of a Monday morning. I could do no less. I nudged her gently and her eyes opened. Mustering all the cold blood within me, I said "Get out of my life." Lying on our sides, we glared at each other until finally I cracked, and amended: "If I'm this happy, I'll die before I finish The Primer." She must have understood because she gave me a swift knee to the groin and said "Get to work you son of a bitch."

She got dressed, muttering how she thought Hemingway was dead, muttering of all the fucking kooks who forsake love because they think they can write. . . . She left the room. When I could stand, I removed all remaining cards from the walls, carefully peeling off the balls of masking tape. I sat down at my card-table desk, typed out the title, and
in fifteen minutes did a steady solid one hundred words. I felt cautiously good. Two more paragraphs and I was no longer able to contain my excitement: it was there and I knew that it would come. I was happy all over again, but in a different way. Only one orgasm in my life (see No. 29) compares with the sensation. I was so happy I didn't mind answering the door, didn't mind seeing an empty hallway, for sure didn't mind the large thermos of coffee and the paper bag with two bacon and egg sandwiches and a note which read: "Savor it, sweetheart. See you sometime. Maybe tonight with a fifth of Jack, Black. J."

It went on like that, Chas, pain laced with euphoria. . . . And so babies die, huh? Yes, yes. Sooner or later. Well here's this one: too late or in the nick of time? Well, well. Who knows and who cares? I'm serious. You of all people know the book I started with, the potential material. Starting that morning in Burlington, I made thousands of choices, one by one—made my choices with a keen subjective eye until *The Primer* became mine alone, until it became a chart of my values, a disguised rendering of my life all these years. Which, to be sure, is less than I'd counted on. You'll notice, too, that No. 37 is ominously blank—for all I know, it melted in the spring back in Burlington, the red magic marker smearing, the once white card disintegrating in pools of slush. I actually find the blank aesthetically pleasing. I have come to look upon it as a wild card of sorts, or a door not yet closed: I'll be forty next month, Chas, and still, I can't help but wonder.
The writers presented here currently live in Missoula. We are all women. These facts, however, are not what bring us together. Our life experiences, both as women and as people, vary greatly. The uniting element to our lives is poetry.

In our poems, we rid ourselves of our masks. We look out to the world, trying to get beyond the barriers it presents to us. Each woman in these pages finds her own vision. Yet all are working toward a common goal—to translate our visions into poems.

We are not women poets. We are poets.

—AEW
FULL MOON ON PHASE

This clot of belly,  
ache of red tide rush on the moon,  
hidden moist flesh  
forcing a mist around my eyes.  
Who is this blue-white one  
to draw my blood  
like wine from a ripe cask,  
draw me walking in the damp grass,  
seductive as those dream lovers  
who caress my mouth and arms  
but are carried off  
before the alchemy of touch  
can work.
WHAT DOES NOT KILL, FATTENS

Sitting across from him
at the supper table
makes you want to confess
things you’ve never done.
Those black far eyes.

Daddy it was me
who scratched my name on the back
of the philodendron leaf
in the hall.

And it was me who
left the three encyclopedias
at school, the ones you paid for
on installment.

It was me who never
read the Great Ideas
lined with leather and green
along the wall.

And Daddy last of all
it’s me who writes
words you would never
want to see.

While I unravel
this confession at the end
of a napkin, you carry me
pale in your wallet. Daddy
your charcoal eyes.
WITH A GATE, AND A TREE, AND NO ONE NEAR

I'm that fervid unicorn, cut in your profile from a broken mirror, hatched like serpents from a cock's egg that Cyclops kept in a cracked locket. I am your cameo, incubating in crystal domes anointed with age. You stole my horn, strung it between your legs like an arrow shot from a saggitary bow. It struck grey mares in Tufts Motel where winos slump, dead flowers on my altar, burn me with their eyes glaring through my casket, assured some love-sick prince will never mount this mythical monster. Your spread wings lift me through their village, bouncing my voice against the sky of a sealed bubble your harlot now wears like a trinket. She fears me, and slips my ashes out from rings of posies grown for children who have no lovers. You ride off with your chain holding no one. If God tells you your daughter is safe in heaven, He is a liar.

ERRATUM

Stanza 3 on page 27 should read:

I watched you fighting through layers of glass, blurred by steam, and wanted to take you back through that tattered bloody exit, to where I could breathe for you, where I could touch you again. They put me back in bed and brought me flowers.
NOTES TO MY FIRSTBORN
for Janet

We were both tired and sore, papoose,
when they laid you on my belly,
womb-coated and mewing,
a cord still connecting us.
I stroked your wrinkled cheek,
put a naive breast to your mouth
as you nuzzled my softened walls.

I slept through the June dawn
dreaming you talked to me,
sat up in your cradle laughing
and told me about a cow.
I wakened at nine to news
that every breath was a battle,
each cry threatened to be your last.

I watched you fighting
through layers of glass, blurred by steam,
and wanted to take you back
through that tattered bloody exit,
to where I could touch you again
They put me back in bed and brought me flowers.

You lasted eighteen hours before your lungs gave out.
I took the daisies home in a cheap green vase,
fresh as their name for weeks,
while my swollen breasts
leaked the milk that should have fed you.
One finger remembered the clasp of your tiny hand.
God, it had perfect little nails.

Your eyelashes folded like butterfly wings.
You blinked deep blue.
It's a bargain to bury a baby—
fourty-seven-fifty complete with numbered marker.
I lost the paper that tells me where you are.
I'm miles and years away,
but I still remember that cow.
DRINKING SONG

Here's a flying kitten with a broken mouth:
lips torn like a rose;
it frisks while waiting for a dish of food
bleeding a little from the nose.

Martin's chicken lived for months with its head cut off
and was still a good laying hen,
and the river rolls like syrup down its sticky throat
swallowing the same old rain again.

Who's angry?
All that can be done is being done.
The angels of mercy smile across their plates of pills
where the wounded are relaxing in the sun.

The leg-singer squats in the underbrush
scraping out his usual bit.
He only knows one song,
but everybody likes it.
POEM FOR OCTAVIO PAZ

La chingada is a girl I know
who drinks the eyes of men
like grey water.
When flesh burns,
men trade their tongues
for a single night.
Ash-skinned babies
fall from her body, cold
like the pale river
men seek at death.
In the dawn of Cihuacoatl
she leaves them: blind, dumb,
praying to virgin saints.
FOR THE UNNAMED

Father of my child, the snow is lonely.
They aren't all born blue-eyed,
you alone are red beard and bone.

My womb's gone black with mourning.
I come to you. Listen:
the July moon in my belly wails unease,
your eyes and wine.

My thighs cough this small success.
He comes sudden, arms and legs
urine bathed, limp. It is morning.
The toilet flushes red.
FIFTY YEARS

Every day you count your children,
write with someone else's name.
The shelves on the wall thicken
with Freud, Jung, Adler
for thirty years
while your young legs pass thru

your husband's eyes
and your flat stomach turns
four more revolutions.

You have raised us strong, mother.
We have lived, looking for your face
and the scar from the middle child passes
in a threat of coast towns
where waves gone sour have left the shore.

We have waited for you to grow
and see in us the wrinkles
behind the coal miner's brow,
his eyes a hard resin,
your eyes his,
hardly ours at all.
POEM FROM A LAST LOVER

We were kissing
long entwined
when I wanted out.
As I moved to draw back my tongue,
he refused.
I pulled harder,
he clenched harder,
until, far back,
he bit down hard.

And I bled.
Red flowing like a flood
from the gash in my mouth.
Red
gasping in my eyes
sputtering in my nose
one day when my gypsy lover
bit off my tongue.
A PILGRIMAGE
A PORTFOLIO
A PILGRIMAGE

L. HALES
SIGNS ALONG THE WAY

1. CHILD
2. 1971—WOMAN AT THE WELL
3. SATGURU KIRPAL SINGH JI
4. RAM DASS
5. ASIA
6. SAM
7. THE SPECIAL VIET MONK
8. SAM ONE LEGGED BATTERED MAN
9. UP
10. THE ELEMENT
CREATURE FEATURE

for Tim, Wears-no-pantsy, Scoop, Bonny-air and Missy Perfect

Malodorous, little less than a meter and a half in height, crushed, little more than forty-five kilograms in weight, landlady Clarissa Vanessa Mabinogion Lamont (them's her names) rents a demi-cottage, a wee riverside apartment to indigent scholars who harbor uncloseted skeletons in the name of osteology. The scholars’re enrolled in the local med school, never pay their monthly dues on time, swindle in chicks within hours of the assumptions of their tenancies—all in all are among the sources of C.V.M.L.’s bestiary migraines . . . they, her genetic tendency to petit mal and the frustration of her prayers for the leasing of her efficiency apartment—the studio she panelled in conspiracy with her two hooligan swine (proper, Baptist, murderous, stay-at-home)—by one or another tax-free Foundation. Clarissa’s a bitch, a witch, wears a monstrous upper denture innocent of her crimes; when Clarissa smiles, there’s the acrylic resin, there’s the plastic of her plate—drab, mottled pink plaqued with deposit. Clarissa’s breath stinks. At most the cincture of her grey denim hot pants grabs perhaps fifty centimeters of stony waist; her ribs can be seen, her calves are decent enough, thighs acceptable, sequential alliance with the State predictable, wee ass barely observable; haltered, there are breasts; hennaed, there is wispy orange hair; and lists, endlessly this woman talks of lists, routes she must travel, duties she must complete, roles she must bake, codes by which she must live. None has informed her that poor Hemingway died of a code. Clarissa is driven mad by indigent scholars who uncodifiedly do not tend marigolds, trash cans, underwater reefs, Clarissa, ugly Charmian (who is her dearest companion, who deals in destruction for the State); Clarissa’s tale though wee is horrible. A true convention of the most viable state-of-the-art at the moment, Clarissa’s is a horror story.

Otherwise sunlit, tideless, placid, careened upon by the phantasmagoric dune buggy driven murderously by two drunken, cowering, hooligan swine, a dead end route, by nature of the cruelly darkened terminus of its northernmost extension Coquina Ridge Drive compels the knowledgeless driver, thrashes him, into the exhaust-grey air of U. S. I’s seventy-mile-an-hour, oncoming traffic.
Tintern-Abbey-like, beside a Cornwall-coast-like road, with an adjoining demi-cottage-(once a petit rectory)-at-lease, recently repossessed from its chapelship in the service of a failed Christian sect of the African Methodist Episcopal church, by moonlight, a spired, single-story, lemon-tinted, stucco villa harbors Luther Firbank—an indigent scholar—and three plotters: Clarissa and her two bastards who intentionally darken the terminus of Coquina Ridge Drive’s northern-most extension, who in effect, as it is required by their foul needs, on a regular basis shoot out the incandescent bulb pendant from the sole street lamp and who with equal regularity grimly await as they gleefully anticipate the ultimate completion of their deception of the unwary, the knowledgeless and the thrashed for whom they stand or sit—or for that matter restlessly pace—coiled to plunder.

Upon dispossession from an A. M. E. chapel on C. R. Drive the Reverend Leon Josey, blacker—for purposes of the period—than the space between aids, is Macho, Incorporated. Such is one or another of the identities Josey is mandated to assume upon deposition: having been deposed from yet another identity upon courtroom exposition of his and his sect’s $ plight. After some hours of brooding—uncharacteristic of Josey—relative to flock maintenance (spiritual feeding of his pals in order to retain some semblance of unity in the AME gang), five feet eleven inches in height, bass-voiced, facial skin pitted, thirty-two, successful lover of all women and men, hulking shouldered, barrel chested, aimiable, jocular, pushy, Tampan, aware of the conditions, careerist, dealer, 175 pounder, fundamentally warlord, centrist, planful, scheming, sharing power, upon one occasion and another, a guest of Miles Davis, Charlie Pride and Jimmy Brown at their riverfront estates, elitist, preternaturally predisposed to anti-pal, dynastic visions, as he damned well plots, Josey’s in touch with his agent, Luther Firbank and sets up a luncheon meeting for the following Wednesday at the only decent rib joint in town between Luther, the grants and illuminations consultant from Florida Power and Light (tax-free) Foundation, the State’s destruction type (Charmian! Clarissa’s Charmian!) and himself.

Moonlit evening. Coquina Ridge Drive. An Oldsmobile 88. Daniel and Betsy Winthrop Fitzgerald and Rosemary Shabbaz. At the wheel he’s Roman Catholic; separated from him by a good two meters, well up against the door, not having slammed down the safety lock, latterly, as at first, cool with her conversion, capable, aware, gentle, terrified, she’s
a proper Winthrop, mother of a ruinous three, sunken-cheeked, wears Wragge; buttering widow, retrospective lover and well rid of the rug merchant, Shabbaz, spindleshanks straddling the transmission hump, allied as is brother Daniel to a Monsignor brother, grackle Rosie dips sun-eaten lips into geography, motel, pain, gingerly pokes her cankers, is Daniel F.’s honor. Safely exurb-ed of Detroit, St. Clair Shores hustled for three weeks, St. Clair Shores’ neighbors safely hustled for months to come (the system be damned! this year Fla.! next year the moon), plunderers’ bypass sign seen, Coquina Ridge Drive’s election’s lieu-ed out 1 North. “How’re your lipsores, Auntie Rosemary,” once Woodward Avenue’s Danny chants. “Oh, a motel, Danny Dan,” prattler presses. “Now, now, Auntie Rosemary.” “I’ve given my share, Betsy Bets.” “We know, Auntie Rosemary.” “Just a little longer,” Michigan System’s hustler soothes. “Wonder if the children are,” Betsy coos. “Little Betsy and her Jew? little Danny and his spade? teeny one, speed-y one?” Second hand Rose tinkles for, joins giggles of despairing pride with, all. “Now, now, now,” all chorus a good old tune, murder another moonlit evening: are good souls! as well as the next are God’s tender fools!

Untended, driven mad by uncodified squeak made on Simmons Beautyrest mattress by tenant/indigent scholar Luther Firbank and his swindled-in chick Handsome Edwina, Clarissa Vanessa Mabinogion Lamont’s slit-narrow, Tlingit eyes gleam like those of Jack o’ Lantern’s. “That one, Momma?” Surveying a passing Lincoln Continental Mark IV a tawny hooligan swine inquires. Mattress-maddened C. V. M. L. is unresponsive. Tawny turns irritatedly from his post as lookout. “Momma?” A flash of Clarissa’s beringed fingers and clutching his cheek Tawny whines. “Moustache,” CV whips. “Madre mio,” Tawny’s brub salutes a peremptory, deadly Ma. (Sullen, gamy, bulky-nosed, Moustache is a favorite.)

Five feet ten or eleven inches in height, small-breasted, sweet-bellied, a lonely figure whom at first he had passed as trailed by Irish setter Casey he strode the beach, mattress-maddened Luther now finds Edwina astride, above, beside, inverted, straddled, now straddling him. This woman of Scandinavian antecedents, massive dishwater-coarsened hands, voluminous vaginal interior, passion’s embraces, tender lovingness (geography’s arrangement, an arrangement for utility’s sake, a sensible, unjarring, more-than-companionable, passionate arrangement that will continue for as long as it does, is Firbank’s understanding of tender lovingness) so enchants Firbank as to allow this tenant of the Lamonts to pant rested in the assurance that the internal-combustion-engine-sensitive tape recorder he’s planted among the coconuts of a palm truly named royal, phallic, will place Coquina Ridge Drive’s itinerant automobilist on guard as, upon his approach to the Drive’s darkened, northernmost terminus in his
machine operated by an internal combustion engine, the recorder gently suggests, "There is no reason to be driving here. There is no reason to be driving here. There is no reason ..." Has Firbank planted such a tape recorder as the Reverend Josey's agent? No. Has Firbank become the Rev. Josey's agent because of Firbank's indigence? Contrarily his indifference to indigence would or would not have countermanded such an act! Then is this a Firbank of sensibility aware that within the brevity of his tenancy there have been two or three devastating destructions at the Drive's dead end? at that point where automobilists rather than making U-turns have ploughed into and been ploughed under by Route 1's seventy-mile-an-hour, oncoming traffic? Yes. Has a youthful med student viewed these appals as the result of some horrible conspiracy? No. Has Firbank been informed by the Reverend in any way of the Rev J's suspicions, if not certainties, of foul play? No.

CVML daubs Tawny's ring-flayed cheek, has not to request that the wee bottle of mercurial medicament be taken from her hand; as she French-kisses Tawny, drops the wee bottle, Moustache whisks it from the air, cabinets it. Wiping the spittle from his lips with the back of his hand Tawny supplicates dangerously, "Lincoln Continental Mark IV . . ." "Offends against us!" CVML arches her back, is a bony-waisted tigress. "Occupants offend against us," CVML purrs, strokes Tawny's throat, strikes claws against its flesh. "Conspicuous consumers," she says on. "Such occupants can be none other than thieves and pols who with vaults and lock boxes carry no valuables—threaten us." Tawny whirls, points to Coquina Ridge Drive, motions to a passing Pinto. "Offends us. The motorists of such and those motorists' immediate constituencies unaware of opportunity bear little in the way of American Express or Thomas Cook or Bank America travelers checks, or cash, or jewels. They are an offense." "Then . . ." "Tawny, dear Tawny," a patient, in effect amatory Momma implores. Enter Moustache. "The middling touring cars. Those are the vehicles for us. Prepotently the automotive combinations of those hurricaned in by all around, obsessed with all around: more aware than those of the Pinto, less destructive than the pols and thieves—operating in smaller arenas, within fewer opportunities. Their imaginations, brub Tawny! their swallowing all of it whole, dear Tawny!" "Aha!" Like a river sheeted by the wind, swept across by recognition are the features of a spotter, the features of a lookout now returning to a position fabled as the stucco's crow's nest. "There then! There! An Olds 88," a man at point palavers. As if by signal from Clarissa, at once 3 strip the flesh-like masks from their faces, and three, m atron and swine, strike hard toward a phantasmagoric dune buggy, board it, engine it—with brights on tour behind an Olds. "In our immemorial fashion blinding these blind, our art added to that of the Drive thrashing these swallowers of it whole onto the seventy-mile-an-hour, oncoming traffic of Route 1 in order
upon their calamitous mincing to plunder them to their very ends.” Calamitous laughter clots the sulfurous river air with the stench of denture breath.

“What lights on our rear windows and brakes, Betsy Bets, Auntie Rose?” “None but the loony, Heart,” Betsy Bets embraces a barren lover with a quintet of words. “Dune-y. Dune-y,” Shabbaz prattles. “Loony, dune-y, buggy,” remembering the brogue of his Woodward Avenue, Detroit father, Daniel Fitzgerald chirrups. “Yet they blind me; they blind me, Betsy Bets, sister Rose. They blind me,” the broguer adds, the adder brouges. “More than before?” “From only a Rose. “On this darkling, plane-treed Drive,” this man of songster blood adjures. “And palm-treed. Royal, phallic—such palms I esp'y, dear Daniel, dear Daniel,” a proper Winthrop whispers direly. “Hasten then! Hasten! Speed . . . Wait! These unfleshed faces quartered in piratic color. . .” Rosemary Shabbaz turns eyes from an Olds 88's rear window to a driving Fitzgerald's occiput. “These are devils! Devils behind us,” Rosemary barks, grackles. Glancing in a rear-view mirror, seeing those spiteful, diabolic faces, Fitzgerald Daniel accelerates a sedan, rivets his eyes on black Drive before windshield, kinesthetically senses the thrust of engine, chassis, body, curses, “Why me?”, hears at last and forever, “There is no reason.”

“We have them.” “As is the custom, treasurable Momma. They are ruined, murdered,” Tawny and Moustache replay as one. “As, for the purposes of comradeship and the receptions of grants and lesseeships from one or another tax-free Foundation, I have agreed then with Charmian who deals in such destruction for the State, let us empty the purses of the destroyed as we have further emptied out their becomings, their carryings on, the fatuities they have addressed as livings.” “To it then. Rest here in a dune buggy, dearest Ma. Rest here . . . and have no share,” a Tawny and a Moustache triumph mutedly as they scat for loot. “My dearest kine.”

“What in hell was that?” “Luther,” sweating, tranquil Edwina embraces, embraces Firbank further ... as she giggles at peace refuses to release Firbank. “No, Edwina.” His lips upon Edwina's in sweet kiss, Firbank rises from her body, hears three great cries of agony, further three cries of omnivorous lust, stands listening thus for no longer than a fraction of a millisecond, whips his denim cut-offs from a bureau top, whips them on, zips them up, turns to Edwina, reveals his intent in a fraction of a micromillisecond, moves it from the demi-cottage, as Edwina has so chosen like a Cheshire cat leaves for Edwina, her mind, the sight, memory, thought and relish of his figure she so adores: those pectorals, that flat abdominal musculature, those potent golden thighs, those tenderly arched feet, that shoulder-length hair, silken beard,
Cervantes-gentle visage. Great, handsome Edwina rises from her bed (for it is truly her bed! Firbank wishes that sense to prevail for a while, wishes to bring this one, this Edwina, forth!), knocks on a wrapper Firbank keeps about, foolishly barefoot steps lively from a demicottage, after commitment to a coquina-sharp driveway—finding it too late to return to Firbank’s apt.—hastens over a coquina-prickly Coquina Ridge Drive, grunts and utters “Ooh!” sharply a number of times as she wends a way toward a darkened, northernmost terminus, once there appreciates Route 1, appreciates all, observes Firbank rising from the man impaled upon the steering column, gently touching the cheek of the woman strangled by windshield wiper, walking . . . now walking is Firbank. Firbank bends over a shoeless figure, a blown out sidewall of a woman, kneels beside this woman, touches a carotid pulse, feels such a ragged, thready beating, carefully examines this female figure’s lip ulcers, presses his lips to these cancrinous sores, impels air, impels air, sees old prideful eyes opening, hears a prattling tongue chant, “Now, now, now . . .”, hears the rattle of death which as even a youthful student of the art of healing he knows . . . is the rattle of death. Sensing her, turning to her from where he kneels, Firbank perceives Edwina, calls softly, “Go back, Edwina. Go back . . . cold . . .”

Expansive is the Rev. Josey, mumbling of ohms and watts and General Grants! is Florida Power and Light (tax-free) Foundation’s seersucker-suited serf, cagey is an indigent agent med-student Firbank, ugly is the State’s dealer in destruction, Charmian. It is upon the last of these figures that the first of these figures makes interior considerations. “This is an ugly chick,” the Rev. measures unto himself. “Them sausage curls. Is this a wig this Charmian wears? sausages or wig which mounted over her tapering kisser gives that hook-nose its hookedness, those crowded incisors their Gothic arch? that body bloused over in hound’s tooth pants suit its toothness? Barely a moment before, to the tune of fox-trot which seemed endemic to this woman, I whirled this woman across this rib joint’s dancing napkin and in doing so found pressed vulgarly to my chest two nubbins of breasts, wee rocks—pebbles of tits, found the palm of my hand resting on the gaunt and fleshless, naked small of her back—for it was to that bony place my hand had insinuated itself upon vanishing beneath her jacket. Is this then a man or a dagger of a woman whose slat frame and vanishing-point skull I see pointed toward me? Ugly! this is truly an ugly woman, this Charmian. But enough! There are all sorts of things about that must be tended: an agenda, a code which must be pursued to achieve mine, and an A. M. E.’s failed Christian sect’s, ends.” “Not a penny for your thoughts, Rev,” a bony figure of destructions shrills sensuously, taunts intimatingly, harrumphs hilariously. “What’s it all
about, Palfrey?” The contentious, not inconceivably hermaphroditic Charmian tosses an interrogatory about for a mumbling Foundation man. Removing a digital computer from his wallet, pounding a finger against it, Foundation’s Palfrey lifts two well-trained eyelids. “As I see it then. In terms of ohms and watts. Watts it all comes down to . . .” As he has been customized to do, Foundation man blinks a scabrous lid. “Is questions of destructions: your department, dear one of the State,” Charmian acquiesces silently. “Your suspicions relative to same,” Foundation addresses theology fella. “Your failed attempt at treatment of a possibly salvageable destructee.” Palfrey waves a digital computer at a cool agent: Firbank. “Then what’s it all about,” Charmian recommences. “Foundation grants—who gets ’em, Foundation concern for pendant light bulbs shot out, as outpost of destruction and observation Foundation lease of the demi-cottage of a lemon-tinted stucco villa repossessed from its chapelship, Foundation lease implicit with allsorts: reward to that lemon-tinted stucco villa’s current operator in terms of her and her hooligan swine in service to man or . . .” Here an ohms and watts dude glances at the Rev. “Or perhaps giving over all to Rev. Josey here—for his purposes or whatever.” Pausing Palfrey glances askance at an apparently-about-to-be-dispossessed-of-a-demi-cottage Firbank. Retreating by custom, in paling Palfrey reduces further for an icy indigent, “And of course there’s this indigent scholar to be thought of. Certainly the Foundation would ever . . .” Reassuring Palfrey with a shoulder clasp Firbank attends what is to be the ohms and watts man’s further, interminable reduction. Of course Firbank counts firmly on the fact that nothing is to be settled at all. As attention has predicted of all participants at the meeting, the meetingees will break up into caucuses for sub-meetings. As it is the conclusion of all present, so Firbank concludes that it is at these sub-meetings that, from his point of view, the only possible resolution will root, oak that fixedly (Firbank’s is an herbal, a D’Artagnan, a serpentine, a poker mind) as to . . . but that remains to happen. It is upon this remonstrance, in a cunning stroke of duel that, as is his intention for the act to remain unseen, guileful, Firbank unlegs, shakes from denim cut-offs a brazenly concealed Ace, “Hot Charmian.” Firbank palms, fondles the cleft between a dealer in destruction’s thighs. “Palfrey, excellent fella. Rev Josey.” All eyes riveted upon himself, Firbank rapes, “We shall . . .

that is your choice, dearest companion, continuing-to-charm, if so you opt, Charmy.” “But I . . .” “Attend! You will not, you have no will, you are not, you have no R, no reserves—without my attention, payments, Charmian, my Charmian; without what little of my largesse I upon you endow—you perish, dye . . .” Clarissa Lamont casts an eye upon crudely blanched sausage curls or wig. “Nothing more,” CV continues. “Or die,” CVM rasps, touches her skull. “In this mind, on the tendrils of the vines I throw up — what it is, Charmian, Charmian . . .” CVML rests easy. “In other words,” Cissy alto-sopranos. Charmian, knowing upon which side her butt is breaded.

Sub-meeting 2. Luther and the Rev. “Agent mine, agent mine, what is thine?” “There are murderous destructions, Rev.” “Conspiratorial?” “Such is the condition, the tradition, the circumstance prior of the conspirators.” “This is fixed?” Josey jousts. Firbank shakes a leg, spills card cascades upon common carpet. Rev. J observes; poker-minded Luther F. conserves.


Sub-meeting 4. Clarissa, Charmian, Palfrey. “Attend!”

Sub-meeting 5. Rev. Josey, Charmian, Tawny, Palfrey, Moustache and CVML. “No dealing with a dealer.” “There is but one dealer.” “Deal with that dealer.” “Gold star, Momma.” “Splits?” “No cutting up game or touches with you-know-who.”

Sub-meeting 6. Luther F. and Handsome Edwina. “Spread out those great legs of yours.” “Stretch out those great legs of yours.”

Sub-meeting 6’. Luther F. and Handsome Edwina afterwards. “Dearest?” “Dearest?” “Arrangement, Honey.” “So it is?” “Utter words.” “So it is.” “Those massive, dishwasher-coarsened hands—a good honor.” “Those Ace-bulky cut-offs, those thighs goaty, that pubis unpollled.” “Just short of the northernmost terminus, to where the phantasmagoric buggy dodges the instant before the unwary and thrashed plunge onward to destruction—it is at this place where hands and thighs shall carve the balls off royal palms, weaken them thus, allow them to fall at the merest touch, allow them to make bole bridge to Route 1’s oncoming, seventy-mile-an-hour traffic.” “And thus?” “Unfail by option the women and men of a failed Christian sect; as they choose, leaderless they shall or shall not be, creedless they shall or shall not be; when from time to time in a lemon-tinted stucco villa repossessed for chapelship these women and men meet or do not, it
shall be as they elect or choose otherwise to do." "Then no longer need we sub-meet?"

Sub-meeting 7. Her whole gang and untended and driven mad by squeak, Clarissa. Her hand cupped to her ear the better to rend her spirit, Momma manacles a shriek, "This too, this squeak, must have a stop. Indigence, malnutrition, agentry, uncodification—collusions of such extent will leave their marks, and then those two . . ." Momma maims sheetrock separating a demi-cottage from her loins, her mind. "Must proceed along Coquina Ridge Drive, know nothing more than destruction there. Listen to them. Attend! Attend the squeaking associated with their revels. I am wound down as is the agency of that squeaking. I am undone as they remain yet undone." CV presses handpalms to ears, cannot escape sound, hears! cries out in continuance, "There are yet routes I must travel. Enough! Enough!"

Of all there are 3 survivors: root, oak and frond-savaged fetus.
VOICE POEMS

Thomas Johnson called a recent issue of his magazine, *Stinktree*, an OUT LOUD issue. He asked his readers to “overthrow the country of the eyeball and discover again the aural world.” It reminded us again of the need to hear poems as speech, as utterance. With a few exceptions, all good poems rely on the strength of the poet’s voice. In the following pages we asked four poets whose work seems especially sensitive to the sounds of character, to give their impressions of “voice poetry.”

A “voice” poem, to me at least, is one in which the poet permits another person to tell his story in his own words and in his own way. The poet, however, must choose carefully the appropriate attitude, tone, and speech rhythm that his character would use in the particular situation he is involved in. We all hear the American idiom, in all its fantastic variety, spoken every day of our lives. Why not take advantage of this and turn some of it into art. You can write some pretty fair voice poems if you have the feel for language “as she is spoke,” know enough about people and the way they live and behave, and are willing to write and think with your *ears*. Too many poets slip into their special “poetry” voice and stay there, poem after poem, book after book. The voice poem will help to break up this waterfall of sameness.

*Dave Etter*
HEAT WAVE

The house smells like we had smelly socks for supper. Under my chair is no place for your roller skates. I sure wish those cicadas would shut the hell up. Movies, movies, movies, that's all you care about. No, I aint worried, a tornado would improve Elm Street. My front name? Now what kind of dumb lingo is that? Let your mother explain "opera house," she's old enough. Go join the 4-H Club, it sure won't bother me none. Don't call me a grouch, young lady, and I mean it. What? You drinking another can of Green River again? I'll sit here and sweat in my shorts if I want to. Monday night, and I feel already I've worked a week.

RETURN TO RIVER STREET

That's the place, 12 River Street, our old house. And your tire is still hanging from the maple tree. Let's get out of the car, shall we, son? We'll stand on the sidewalk and have us a look. Your mother would go right up and ring the bell but I don't want to bother them for an inside tour. Up there where the shades are pulled was your room. Do you remember the Lionel train you played with? The track went all around, even under your bed. I can't believe we've been gone for five years. Kansas City is okay and the job is going fine. But you're not as happy as I'd have you, my boy. You were a real Tom Sawyer or Huck Finn here, the Ausagaunaskkee River being just down the bank. Maybe it was wrong to move, to leave this town. Some men can be led astray and not even know it. You'd better not swing on the tire, son. Come on, get off, it's not yours to fool with now. Oh, well, go ahead and have yourself some fun. Then let's get a cold pop and get back on the road.
Every now and then I hear American English spoken in a way I could listen to all night, perhaps it's the accent or dialect, often I can't quite understand all that is said. But it sounds lovely, like singing. Like Rainier Banks. Black, 60, asthmatic, lifetime janitor, named after a mountain in Washington. He told me a story. Some years passed and suddenly I remembered hearing him tell it. That is, I remembered how the story *sounded* and not the story itself. So I made up a story. The voice is his, the words mine. In this “voice” poem I tried to let the words be equal to the sound and the story equal to the song. Nothing fancy. Coming from certain mouths our language is full of natural music. You just have to find the right mouth. You have to listen.

— Edward Harkness

RAINER BANKS TELLS ABOUT GEESE

Old Man Goose he  
big mean and nobody  
give him no lip.  
When he in the barn  
them other geese they  
stay in the sun.  
When he drink from the pan  
them other geese they  
stay dry.  
One day old Mrs. Goose she  
get run over  
flat out  
on the road.  
Never even cry.  
Old Man Goose he  
go to her he  
blow the dust away he  
drag her yonder.  
The clouds hang low.  
Then you know what he done?  
Why he come back he  
grab the biggest goose  
whip him good he  
take that man’s wife  
all for his own.  
You see  
geese is just like people.

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ARE YOU THINKING

Are you thinking, as you read this, that poetry has gone straight to the dogs, the cats, the terrible apples that drop year after year to rot near the tires and molding heaps of newspaper in Mrs. Roat’s orchard, Mrs. Roat, who never let you throw bricks in her goldfish pond because she was a witch whose charred face nobody really quite saw, not even Ronnie Triplett, the strongest kid on our dead-end road, who actually pried up a manhole cover one time in the grass behind the bowling alley and fell to the bottom of a sewer pipe and just stayed down there kissing the cold slime, who was singing The Star Spangled Banner in a voice delicate as a bat’s eyelash when the cops pulled him out, is that what you’re thinking?
What I like about the poem is the internal mumbling, bitching, & the poem as an explanation of how a poem gets “made” thru co-mingling of the public & private voices. I like that poem better, now, than “The Man” or “Crimes of Passion,” which are, tho consistent in tone, etc., not quite as expansive in the use of voice, i.e., the latter sets a stance, a character, & he simply speaks his one song. In the former, there’s a self-consciousness about the poem under hand, & I like the narrator commenting on that as well as the other nonsense which seems to be going on around him.

The Voice is the foot that pulses on the other side of this page.
The Voice is the language of a country which didn’t exist before this minute.
The Voice is a fellow countryman mumbling in a dialect. You comprehend the meta-messages.
The Voice is the hot-line to your twin, your cousin, your great-great-grandfather.
The Voice is a great scalpel in the mouth of the child.
The Voice dreams it will always grow up, so it can talk to the alarm clock, the windows, the grave, & the darkness.
The Voice laughs at its own jokes.

—Terry Stokes
A FOLK SONG

My woman & her wishbone, I repeat, my woman & her wishbone, dry their hair in the gnarling sun.

It was not salad in the eyes of the world. They took the land like mongrels with signs that said, "Over the river, & thru the woods to Grandmother's house, we go." I'm not going there & we slobber on the shallow road, seeing who can spit, who can fabricate a stream with their own blood. I was dreaming again last night, oh honey, the building with blue spires was sold for seventy-five fish, count them, seventy-five. Each time I reached into my pocket to count out the bills, lambs, lambs are not smackers, & where could I go from there. I hold my famous pole-axe, it belongs to an ex-student who wanted me to see the weapons shining in his room. I took this pole-axe, & did some damage to his collection.

A valuable lesson can be learned, eventhough we eat the spring chicken as tho he is a diced rat, we can look at the book of strange fucks with an open eye, almost as if we were there when it all took place. I give nothing up, I crouch down in my chair & pass out the pencils, "Write your name at the top, & if you have to piss, hold it." Yesterday, quite seriously, a
tired wasp landed on my arm, a pea, a small one, in his mouth. It was a choice, take the pea back to the hungry kids or suck a little weak blood from my arm. Oh I knew the wasp's answer, tho I didn't know what I would have done. Random sampling would get us somewhere if we had any needs. But there you are, no one to hold you but yourself, & you do that, after you go for the mail, & several gallons of gas, & a couple of next week's lottery tickets, apple juice, & the local newspaper. As that American poultry critic once said, "This guy writes what's at the front of his head."

He was not kidding. So you slide off into a haze of Milk Duds, & you buy back last year's tools. You speak in the voice of the late candidate, "I been to the doctor, I know what it is, a dwarf swimming the Atlantic, from North to South. It is no secret what God can do. What he's done for me, he can do for you." The willow rides out the storm in the arms of its mother. The blue ant slithers across the carpet; its head tucked close to its apparent body. Give it a whirl, it's no fun there in the belly of the copperhead, tho the weather is good, clear, never a cloudy day in this part of the country. Dressing up to go downtown, rustle up a quick bologna sandwich, & a double-shot of Wild Turkey, no water. A slim
woman carries her body before your chuckling eyes, you have nothing to say, except, "Please shut off the jukebox." Her bodyshirt you did not know it was a bodyshirt tucked in, you thought it was an orange blouse which clung like hunger in a bad movie, now, you clutch, you clutch her arm, "You look like my sister, she's a nurse." You take out your bongos, bang out a tune of rough passion, she responds, like a two-tone Ford, kicking you in the balls, upsetting everything. You deserved it, you were tapping out some wild things with your fingers, & you know where that gets you. Someplace near the end of the evening you hold a "No Parking" sign in your arms, not only do you cling to it, you set up a stand, "Come on in, & see the Great Fucks, & the Bad Scars, Scares that'll chase your blues away." You come upon your own lost country, my woman & her wishbone we climb the best tree in this country of crags. Oh where have we been in the long time before?
When I began trying to make poems some years ago I was not able to write about myself. This was due to a lack of self-confidence, stemming from the fact that I was not a good student when I was in school and was made to suffer the public and private indignities because of my poor performance. So I began by making poems about other people, mostly folks that I would make up— witches, warlocks, bullfighters, football players, sailors, preachers, writers, jazz musicians, etc. Later I began to give my people (voices?) names—like Cecil, Peregrine, Phineas, Alphonse, Wanda, Willis, Imbellis, Mordecai, etc. When the time came to begin making poems about myself it very quickly became apparent to me that, since I had been making the Peregrine poems or the Cecil poems, I was now making the Zimmer poems. The whole thing has now evolved into a kind of dialogue between myself and these very personal myths I began with.

—Paul Zimmer

RIDING THE TRAIN, ZIMMER SEES WILLIS CLOSE TO DEATH

The landscape flicks between Power poles, days and days; The smoke of my passage Is over my head. Yonkers, Galion, Muncie, Wichita pass like timbers Under the wheels.

Each hour I unpeel Out of green seat cushions To drink oily water from Paper cones. I munch food Stamped out of styrofoam, Spit out the ancient nuts Of candy bars and feel Like the dirt between The panes of glass.
But as we roll out
Of some yellow town,
I see Willis tossed and
Splayed on the outskirts.
He weeps with cinders,
His temples ashen from
Engine fires, his hands
Constricted from grasping
The rods. He has fallen
Off the train again.

I guess we choose the way
We die. I will go down
Like I sleep on the train
With slight awareness
Of pain in the night light.
As conductors quietly shuffle past,
Water slops in the coolers
And stop cords tap on
Luggage racks, I will sputter
And hiss slowly to a stop.

But Willis will go under
In a screech of friction,
Wheels will pass over and over
His body, his fluids squirt,
His toes and knuckles grind
In the gravel as he sunders.
Jelly threw a wad of gum at the pitcher, but it curved downward and hit a spectator behind the dugout. The crowd roared like a seashell. Jelly pressed the balls of his feet in circles on the concrete while Helen played with his zipper. Wind blew foam off their beer.

At the crack of the bat, the crowd rose to its feet. Home run for the Oilers. It was a close game and the announcer was moving through the excitement: “Fourth . . . in a double header . . . he sure can. . . .” The crowd was subsiding as Jelly became lost in the commentary and its self perpetuation. Helen sipped her beer. A man in a green suit, a man not named Jonathin, yelled Watch the game, Watch the game. People were edging down the row of knees to get closer to the field. The announcer was in mid-commercial: “When cars at the wrong moment . . . try non-action . . . lightener, ungreasy . . . yessiree, I say . . . as you can . . . as your car . . . can I. . . .”

The crowd roared.

“Helen, when is Bottoms getting here?”

“I’m not sure exactly. He just gave me a note after class that said to wait until the fourth inning, and then start looking.”

“One more inning to go.” The announcer made the same statement. “Base on balls.” Jelly was trying to anticipate the loud speaker’s next sounds.

“Goddamn beer.” He sloshed the beer around in the cup, spilling it over the rim. Helen liked the way it foamed as it hit the concrete and began to spill droplets from her own cup. She flicked the hair out of her eyes and spilled half of the remaining beer.

A loud snapping sound from the field made the crowd stand. The announcer was breathless. Jelly watched as the ball came towards them, seeing it arc several rows behind where they were sitting. He turned to see a man in a yellow suit and a blue-flecked green tie standing ready for the catch. As the ball whizzed near, Jelly sailed the remaining beer at the man, hitting him just before the ball smashed into his teeth. The man tried to scream as blood and teeth sprayed over people in the two rows below.

Helen finished pouring the beer as the crowd roared. Jelly looked for the bubble gun funny that had fallen from his hand during the movement.

“Let’s go Jelly.”
She elbowed him in the small of the back as he was leaning over looking for the wrapper. The injured man had passed out backwards into the fourth-inning trash. A beer vendor named Valden had beaten the police to the area and was rifling the man's pockets for cash and valuables. The crowd cheered as he held up a twenty dollar bill, pulled from the yellow breast pocket. "Hey kid. Valden. Half that's mine," Jelly yelled when he saw the twenty fluttering in Val's hand above the crowd. He reached but got the strap of the beer case instead, pulling the beers and cups over the seats and the man between the aisles.

"Goddamn kid. Jelly let's go!"

Valden was already two rows up, dragging the beer case by its broken strap. Helen's hair was blowing.

The police were pressing through the crowd near the end of the aisle, while the announcer was trying to call out the play by play on the action in the stands.

Helen's hair was blowing golden in the sun. Badges sparkled on the policemen like bits of new broken glass on sand.

Jelly fished for more gum inside Helen's purse. Read the fortunes.

"Good fortunes. Everything has to be golden. All in one day."

The crowd was wild: bleats and cheers from the stands and on the field. Cracking bats and arguments filled the announcer's monologue.

"Let's go to the beach. Fuck Bottoms. He won't show anyway." But Helen was pulling him down the aisle rather than to the exit archway. The police were assembling the prostrate man onto a stretcher. Someone had filled his mouth with the blue-flecked tie. Jelly looked to the field: "Everything's Golden," and then into the loud speaker as the announcer ended his commercial on aging: "Paid for by the friends of geriatrics. . . ." Jelly grabbed Helen by the arms and pointed her into the loud speaker: "Helen, say a few words to the man at the end of the wire." She repeated: "Everything's Golden."

Wind blew around the stadium, billowing loose hats and coats.

Bottoms appeared from behind as the announcer was giving the weather conditions. The loud speaker crackled: "By the top of the eighth: RAIN! Rain! Rain!: the barometer is falling, 29.9. The wind is steady. . . ." Jelly started laughing. "I want more beer."

"I think now's the time, Jelly."

"... tomorrow's forecast: MORE RAIN: four inches. . . ."

"Yes. Now is the time." Bottoms put his hands into his coat pockets and stared into the sky above the stadium. The lights were being turned on.

Jelly folded all of the day's fortunes into a neat bundle and placed them into his hip pocket.

Bottoms looked as if he were about to speak.
Sylvia Bottoms, born January 1, 1950, to Professor Jonathin and Sylvia Patent Bottoms, propels her wheel chair from the kitchen to her father's bedroom. On her lap is the tray of animal's breakfast, the term her father uses, of one six-minute egg, boiled, and a glass of warm water. On January 2, 1966, Sylvia obtained her driver's license and during the final game of the World Series that year, she lost control of her Porche. While on the freeway, she was trying to bounce the speedometer back and forth, watching it arc from one side to the other, and the white lines blur into a single thin line. As she moved to flick hair out of her eyes, she hit a cardboard box, flattening it into a plane and shattering the windshield: at 140 mph gliding over the median through the rails and reflector poles into oncoming traffic. By the final day of exhibition games of the new season she was occupying the chair that she now rolls into the dining room. She watches the last of the lime green kitchen reflected in the water glass melt into the blue sky of the dining room. The noon-lighting distracts her from guiding with her left hand, causing the chair to veer right, into the wall of English ivy. Balancing the tray on her lap against her knees, she jerks the strands of ivy out of the spokes, and begins to finger the NEW WORLD ALMANAC FOR THE RELOCATED AND DISENFRANCHISED beneath the seat with her free hand.

"Damn the mornings." She resumes straight movement. The leather cracks beneath her seat and again she fingers the Almanac in its pocket under her, checking off mentally the vital statistics of her mobile contamination:

One of 5,625,244 drivers (1966) on page 30; no; page 134 and one of 170,000 permanently impaired by a motor vehicle (1966) which is maybe on seventy-three; for sure on 74. For sure also, she had not aided the three percent drop on page 134, in bodily injury claims per 1000 property damage claims (1966).

Yes; on page 134. There are no figures for automobile quarantining, but at times she has looked up the final statistic for her mother who had died during child birth, at which time Sylvia I had become Sylvia II, and another set of statistics began. The possibility that other data pertinent to her state exists in the Almanac is good. She periodically checks the manifold items, from the state populations to attendance records at baseball games. She has not been to a game since the accident, but she is considering the possibility. It would be recorded in the next year's Almanac and probably with it some trace of the three radios that her father has bought within the last week. However, the Owned Radios by Household category seems less vital. Sylvia considers her known figures.
The light in the dining room fades into the hallway as the light faded the October day of her accident. Sylvia brakes the wheel chair instinctively, holding the tray stationary. The water pools to the center of the glass, breaking into dark green streaks from the hall ceiling. The greased wheels begin to move silently through the hall toward the bedroom door. She does not announce her arrival, since she rarely speaks to him anyway, believing him to be the cause of her wheel chaired position, but she cannot find any *Almanac* statistics under *Accidental Causation by Indirect Action* or *Fathers in League with Doctors and Physicians*. There are no such figures.

In high school she was the class beauty. Her model's figure, particularly her casual way of loaning it for evenings to well placed tongues, earned her immense popularity. Until the accident. The freeway catastrophe not only ruined her sex life, but allowed for the decay of her body so that now she could not enjoy sex even if the possibility occurred. Her legs have withered and her arms and trunk have become too muscular. The wheel chair motions have created hard bulbous tissue that heaves as she wheels throughout the house, in total service to her father. She is the chair's mechanic, studies its movements in mirrors. In between, she masturbates.

Sylvia begins the hand movements to turn into her father's room, hoping to find him still dressing, as she does every morning. She estimates the time for preparation and delivery of the prescribed breakfast at exactly one minute and forty-five seconds before it is expected. She has never been late, and is continually rewarded with his nakedness as he pulls on his shorts.

But as she turns the corner into his room, with erect nipples and thoughts of speed, she finds him completely dressed. *Jonathin*. Her arms fall limply over the wheel guides.

"You're one minute early again. Not bad. Not bad."

She looks at her watch to determine where she has lost forty-five seconds. He stares down into the rug, following the patterns in the border to her chair, then upwards along her legs. He does not look into her face, but at her hands hanging over the wheels. "Maybe I should buy you a new chair. A motorized one would be more efficient. Free the arms." He follows the arms back to the carpet to his own feet. "Yes."

No. Too much noise. *A stupid hum*. She nods her head yes.

He begins lecturing as if she were the class: "In an internal combustion engine a fuel-air mixture is burned so that the gaseous products exert . . ."

It seems to her that she has heard this lecture before, but she is not sure.

" . . . a force on moving parts of the machine . . . it is an exothermic reaction. When applied to an automobile, the mechanical result is the breaking of inertia, resulting in a loss of energy . . ." He hesitates for a moment, looking into her eyes, her widely spaced, dark and receding
eyes with eyebrows that are like shadows locked together above her nose. The whites are glowing. "... an energy based upon passed replications of remote mechanisms destined for momentum..."

Sylvia sits placidly, easing her muscles into the chair, conforming to its shape like water easing into the soil of a potted plant. She decides that the lecture is fresh.

She stares at his zipper. He is the inefficient machine that made her body hard from the waist up and soft and weak from the waist down, wheeling around in a leather seat; a body exhausting itself.

She nods yes again.

"...a linear vectorial equation that approximates nature's three dimensional manufacture of chlorophyll."

Yes.

"I must be late. Yes. I am late. The game must have already started. I have to be there; to make the freeway in four minutes; to be there within the hour."

During his flurry of activity, she backs from the room into the hall, moving off beneath the noise of his movements.

Bottoms smells her shampoo and body scents as he files through the closet for a raincoat. "Rain today. Rain tomorrow." He thinks of Sylvia at the end of the hall. "There will be two more for dinner tonight, Sylvia."

She turns the corner into the study, taking a different route back to the kitchen. She hears him again: "There will be four in all for dinner. Two more."

In the kitchen she pulls the *Almanac* from beneath the chair. She begins to read: *Internal combustion engines are in a continual process of transformation from euthenical models to eutrophy; movement is euthanasia.*

**TRAVEL IS DECISIVE—FREeways—DINNER IS PROPOSEd—RAIN'S THE ?—WATER**

Professor Bottoms had been watching the havoc created by Jelly and Helen. He knew that Helen was unable to initiate the level of confusion with which Jelly could fill the air. She was an apt follower, and somehow with her smooth and low voice, made Jelly a catalyst, causing the reactions, the electromagnetic disturbances emitted from the spectators. The sweat, the rain, the cracking of the loud speaker, and
the erratic voices from the announcer, were familiar; perhaps from his
theories on the subject, unofficially published, "The Chaos of Technology?/Man vs. the Plant Kingdom," although his students were
unaware of the publication of the notes on the green chalkboard. He
had been checking his watch continually for the last five minutes and at
least five times every thirty minutes during the last hour, looking down,
calculating, then looking back up. It was like his daughter's rhythmical
wheeling movements, like rowing, but he was rowing in time; and like
his daughter, he was early. After nestling beneath the archway out of
the crowd traffic, he had spent the extra time deciding where he had
gained five minutes. Conclusion: the freeway was less congested than
on his previous trips to meet Helen and Jelly; why did he place her
name before his? Jelly was the force, the active ingredient, who had
arrived later, who had actually found Helen, even though she was in his
class. She was the prototype student: obedient, consummate note-
taker; in general, lifeless. She would sit in the middle rows; her clothes
always neat, her blonde hair pulled back and tied with a ribbon of
matching or complimentary color to the shade of whatever
dress/sweater combination she was wearing, giving the overall
appearance of being from an upper income family, in school out of
boredom rather than to learn. She was a perfect B-plus student until
she met or, he thought, was found by Jelly; and then she became a C-
minus student, alive and functioning, with A-plus ideas. Maybe it was
Jelly who introduced her to sex, to any action in excess of the norms.
Bottoms thought that Jelly could introduce anyone to anything new,
and the conversion would be complete. And Jelly himself, whose
background was a mystery purposely created by his own contradictory
admissions, and whose clothes and behavior were too erratic to
pattern, seemed to fit a textbook case of some psychological type that
Bottoms was unable to remember. But Jelly possessed great quantities
of various types of energy: he seemed to create and destruct himself
from minute to minute. Jelly's fascination was simple: he was himself
to disappear in one bright, flashing, entropic reaction; and when it
happened, like a dying star, Bottoms wanted to be there to record data
on the nearby humanity, a crowd, hopefully a very large crowd that
would itself explode, beginning the second deluge; proving that the
environment finally could not cope with mankind, and through the
initial reaction to Jelly, it would fold back upon itself, into rain, pure
simple, chemically laden rain. A perfect eutropic world would begin
again; a new universe fashioned around plant life, destined only for
plant life, so dense and perfect that it would choke out all else. The
earth would molt its dead skin of animal life, and return to the sea: to
itself: to water.

"... another front due in early Monday...late Sunday night..."
The end of the announcer's reading of the forecast brought Bottoms
out of the shadows into the aisles of standing spectators. "...late
report from the weather bureau: clear Monday afternoon and Tuesday; highs in the upper sixties; low: near forty.” Jelly and Helen were scrambling past him as he spoke: “Over here, here.” The crowd roared. Jelly stole a drink from a seat at the end of the row as they passed. Helen was trying to pull him through the crowd. Bottoms collided with her as she looked to see what had happened at first base-second base. The play was at home.

“Fourth Inning.” And as Helen spoke, Jelly reeled around to see the man searching for his drink.

“Right. Fourth inning. The freeway was less congested than normal. Shall we go? I overtook my schedule near the entrance gate.” Jelly nodded agreement, but made no effort to move from the aisle. Instead, he watched the man accuse the woman across from him of stealing his beer while he lit a cigarette. The woman was upset and began throwing pencils, paper, combs, and other items from her purse. “Got to hurry. Beat the crowds.”

“Right Professor. Hurry.” Jelly was bored with the fight and began to play with the seam on the back of Helen’s skirt.

It was raining when they left the stadium archway, as they headed for the parking lot beyond the maze of white lines.

The freeway was crowded. Professor Bottoms was hunched over the wheel, moving his head right and left, trying to see out of the rear view mirror and the windshield simultaneously. He was having problems focusing his eyes quickly enough to accompany his rapid head movements. Helen twisted the radio tuner dial back and forth, pausing across the dial for bits and pieces of songs and conversation. She looked into the backseat at the vendor Jelly had bought at the stadium gate for twenty dollars and loose change: “You like country music? or maybe rock and roll?”

The old vendor was cowled beneath the arm rest, trying to lose himself in the vinyl seat.

“It was on a Wednesday night, the moon was shinin’ bright, He stopped the Glendale traaaaaainnn . . .” Helen held the dial between stations in the white noise. The vendor began vomiting. Jelly had promised him another five dollars if he would bring his carrying case of beer along with them on the freeway. The vendor had agreed readily, but was now foaming at the mouth like a sick dog, trying to arch the vomit out the window. The beer foamed over the seat due to Bottoms’ unpredictable driving habits. Jelly took only one sip from each cup of beer, sometimes tossing full ones out the window, periodically handing one to Helen who would do likewise.

“Professor . . . how long; how much longer?”

“What?” Bottoms was holding his gaze on the rear view mirror looking for Jelly, but saw only the old vendor retching through the
open window. The vomit was streaking across the back of the car.

“How much longer? We have to time the number of beers left.”

“Not much. Two forty-five. Two-fifty maybe.” The car swerved onto the median, running two wheels over the concrete island, knocking off the hubcaps on the left side of the car, and barely missing a speed limit sign. Bottoms rocked the steering wheel and veered back into the lane, through the noise of horns. Jelly tossed another beer above the car. Bottoms yelled from the front seat: “Gravity Jelly. Gravity.” And the beer flew over their car, landing on the windshield of the car directly behind them. “If I had not increased the speed,” Bottoms paused to watch the car behind shoot across the median into the oncoming traffic, “the beer would have hit us. It’s the gravity. You must remember gravity.”

“Good. I’ve got it.”

“. . . won’t your baby want me tomorrow, won’t your baby want me today? If I mess. . . .” Helen kept turning the dial, but the volume was low enough so that the dull hum of the cracked speaker was as loud as the music.

“I want out.” The vendor’s shaky voice moved from the back window to the front seat, his head dropping from side to side, and then falling forward: “I need to get out.”

Jelly handed him another beer and asked his name. Helen said, “What’s the speed?” And as she spoke, she found another country song: “Ain’t it the trucks and the cars, that makes them what they are; makes lovers think they’re new, but it’s the wind and the sin of those big old men—that drives them through the blue . . .”

Beneath the radio the vendor spoke again: “Oram.”

“97.5 miles per hour.”

“Ah. Organ, you say? Professor, here is the latest proof: Organic is his name. Is he part of the plan too?”

“That’s too fast . . . you’ll get us stopped for sure.”

“Part of the plan you say?” and Bottoms stopped his frenetic driving for a moment. He relaxed behind the wheel, easing back into the seat. The rear view mirror was vacant. Space behind the car of maybe six or seven white lines, but there were cars and trucks on both sides. He edged the car into the center lane, into the traffic.

The car was silent. Jelly crawled into one corner with a beer; the vendor was limp in the other corner. Helen left the radio dial alone. The silence pervading the car almost frightened Bottoms—the kind of silence in which violent electromagnetic shock occurs. Vector equations and differentials of solid trajectory formulae massed on the windshield and the instrument panel became a glowing mass of static electricity: St. Elmo’s Fire. Broken silence: “St. Elmo’s Fire.” The speakers vibrated with between-the-stations high pitched whine.

“My God in Heaven, it’s raining fire. I’m at the end of the world.” The vendor began to vomit blood.
“St. Automobile’s Fire,” and Jelly tossed a full cup of beer over the Professor’s shoulder onto the glowing instruments. Helen tried to turn off the radio, but could not reach it in time. The car started braking itself, the tail lights flashing. Cars behind were alive with brakelights, and the whole freeway became a parameter of red and yellow flashes in the early darkness.

“. . . sometimes the body takes a journey, sometimes it hides in the . . .”

“We all shall have dinner. Sylvia is expecting two more. One more will make no difference. Will be no problem. Right.” Helen sang as Bottoms finished the dinner plans.

“Good. Three more for dinner.” Bottoms thought about the afternoon’s events and decided that they were good. Also, Sylvia will have to get used to car travel again, and freeways, and will have to go to the games. They would be there in twenty-three minutes; twenty-five minutes at most. A two minute tolerance. Adequate.

Jelly threw another beer at a passing sign in the opposite lane. It hit a median sign: SPEED LIMIT 65.

Professor Jonathin H. Bottoms was nearly fifty, and having had more than his share of illness, looked closer to sixty-five. The bald head, shiny in any light, contrasted to his bushy eyebrows that curved up at the ends. The wrinkles on his brow resembled seagulls drawn by children, row after row, the wings touching and converging finally upon the grayed tufts above his eyes that are large and deep-set like his daughter’s. A strange condition in his pupils made them dilate and constrict randomly regardless of the light level; often as many as four times a second.

He walked in short choppy steps due to a low center of gravity, always looking as if he were about to fall or to crawl into a car, shoulders hunched together and his coat riding up on his back. The rest of his clothes were tailored to his shortened body. He was not what would be called the professorial type, rather he gave the appearance of an executive who had journeyed through the ranks the hard way: through shrewdness and thrift, with a wise application of power. But the image was manufactured. He was unable to obtain even the smallest of grants. Being relegated to minor departmental status, he taught only the dank classes at the lower division mixture of majors: mostly Elementary Microbiochemistry 2564. As a teacher he was defensive. He never heard the right questions and gave mediocre lectures. By the second week of classes, his subjects died on the blackboard, by the third week his students had resold their texts to the exchange. What students remained after the sixth week often went to an empty classroom, as Jonathin forgot the class existed. Instead, he was happily at the baseball game, waiting for the rain and watching Helen and Jelly fondle each other in the crowds.
Helen discovered early that the students in his classes invariably received high grades, so that when she tried to seduce him, it was out of boredom rather than education. Not only did he misunderstand her attempts, but he took the action as a request for a makeup exam, which she threw away after leaving the room. At the next class period, she was complimented for her brilliant performance and became the standard for his grading on future tests, as well as a close friend and ally in the implementation of his plans. The course in Herbs and Mosses was a failure instigated by the physiology department, and while she and Jelly sat in the back of the room drinking wine, the class dwindled to five students who had to have the class to graduate. Bottoms considered the class an immense success in determining the seasons and checking the wind by moss scrutiny, and used it to modify his conclusions on the implications of his theories. During the term, his notes on the green chalkboard became shorthand which he photographed at the end of each class day for future publication.

Bottoms folded his brow, raised his eyelids, and descended into grass. The vendor opened his door slowly, trying to pull his legs out with both hands. Helen was still twisting the radio dial. She watched Oram collapse outside the door. He stayed on the grass trying to figure out why he had taken the extra case of beer at the beginning of the third inning. Until then it has been a pretty good day for selling cokes, but the rain had ruined the thirsts so he had switched to beer to make more money per sale. And when the kid had offered to buy the whole case for twenty dollars, plus five more for riding, he decided that the day was going to be one of his best. At this thought he rolled over and began vomiting more of his stomach lining.

"Where are we?" He tried to speak between heaves.

"You should not question the word of a twenty dollar bill." Jelly was walking towards the garage door.

"Oram Watkins," Helen was using a southern accent, "to go home is no problem; to get up is the reason for the ride." She turned up the volume of the radio. The white noise drifted across the lawn, drowning out the rest of her voice and the noise of Jelly slicing the garden hose into sections at the garage door. Oram was trying to decide if he should say that his last name is not Watkins. Helen switched the radio off.

"You probably think we are going to kill you, don't you Organ?"

"He does."

"Bile sure builds up in old people," Jelly said. Helen pulled off the radio nobs and took the key from the ignition.

"Come." Bottoms was shouting from the front door.

"Come. Mr. Watkins. Jelly help Mr. Watkins."

Oram held his hands near his throat; saliva and mucus ran from his nose onto the grass. The wind blew clouds across the sky like a time
lapse film.

"Do you have a license, Orpham?"

"Watch the wind." Bottoms stepped inside the front door and yelled for Sylvia.

THE HUMANE MEETS THE ORGANIC—DINNER IS PROPOSED AGAIN—TABLE LECTURE

There was an immediate reaction between Sylvia and Helen, a type of acid into water affair: the dream of what was into the reality of the present. Sylvia fell in love with Helen. The sight of Helen's blonde hair pulled back, the green ribbon dangling over the forest green sweater, and her muscular breasts made goose flesh over Sylvia's entire body, even her legs that had been dead for years tingled. She placed her hands on the chrome wheel guides and began masturbating the chair back and forth. Helen smiled politely as she stuck both hands into Jelly's pockets. Wheeling silently behind, Sylvia undressed Helen, walking her eyes over the soft white flesh and thin pubic hair, her own body rigid in the chair, each of the muscles in her chest tightening, then relaxing her hands over the chrome. The decision to take off her clothes was a spontaneous reaction to Helen's body, hoping that she too would undo the soft flesh. The Almanac fell to the floor.

"Sylvia. The dinner should be ready. It's time to set another place. Mr. Watkins is joining us."

"Mr. Watkins?"

"Yes. Oram Watkins, a new reaction in the equation. He knows physics: he is a beer-selling Kepler. Hurry. It’s time."

Sylvia took her eyes off Helen, reversed direction with her arms to see Watkins puking through the front door. He was pale and sweaty. The sight repulsed her. She reeled back around to see Jelly cupping both of Helen's breasts. Sylvia ripped off her blouse, exposing the granite like flesh, the mica-flecked nipples.

At the table Bottoms began to lecture, speaking through bites of hot dog: "The history of man has been a continual struggle between static-technological man and the kinetic plant kingdom; men respond to chance and chaos created by nature and the order of the green. Imagine our primitive ancestors gathering everything by hand. As such, they are forced to follow the game that is easiest to kill, while the gathering half of the group follow seasonal vegetation. There is a split: the game goes one way, the season the other. The shaman is called in to decide the
course of action. As a wise man, he recognizes the dilemma, and avoiding death, chooses to remain stationary and cultivate . . .”

Oram was consuming more and more wine. He left the hot dogs with cheese-on-a-toothpick sails floating in a sea of catsup. Pieces of sausage lined his plate.

He poured more wine and watched Sylvia’s breasts fill with blood while she chewed.

“. . . the once gathered vegetation. He dies and feeds the plants. Success. The domestication of nature to the agrarian routine; the hunters are forced to become nomadic, and suicide replaces the hunting class of gatherers, making weapons static and cultivation kinetic: women kinetic; men static; the friction between becomes the humanoid-plant dialectic . . .”

Jelly watches the folds in Bottom’s face congeal and his hands dip into his pockets. “Helen, let’s go.”

“No. Wait. Wait a while longer.”

Jelly looked again at Bottoms: “Where’s the wind, Jonathin?”

Bottoms’ speech rolled onto his plate, becoming a dull hum like the radio speaker in the car, fragments of speech directed toward Helen: “. . . was the license to . . . for plantat . . . for plankton to commit suicide . . . destroy animal fat . . . into. . . .”

Jelly swallowed two more double bubbles with his wine. The fortunes were favorable, and he tried to tell Bottoms of the impending success, but was not able to break the hum of his voice. Helen removed her green knee socks without using her hands. This action made Sylvia pee her wheel chair as she served desert, leaving tracks throughout the dining room and kitchen. To Jelly the tracks were works of art and he questioned Helen about the possibility of returning to art school for an art degree in water painting on land and wood. Before she could answer, Oram fell over the edge of the table as he tried to bite Sylvia’s nipples.

“Jonathin, where’s the wind?”

The seagulls on Bottoms’ forehead were in flight as he began to hum louder than the conversation. New sails were issued all around and the sea was calm.

At midnight, Helen pushed Sylvia into the backyard. Both of them were naked. Between Sylvia’s heavy breathing and her reflexive action to wheel her own chair, she collapsed backwards her head resting
between Helen’s soft white breasts. Oram, Jelly, and Professor Bottoms were atop three of the trees in the yard: Oram was thunder vomiting through the limbs; Bottoms was lightning; and Jelly was rain as he doused wine over the two naked women.

"Jonathin. Are the seasons ready now? Are they ready Jonathin?"

The Oilers lost the second game of the double header that night.

It rained four inches during the game causing several lights to blow and the loud speaker system to short out. The announcer was silent for the last forty-five minutes of the game, while the wind blew.
"The poet . . . makes up value as he goes along. The process of employing all the devices of craft in order to discover significant experience becomes a prime part of the texture of the work. Nothing is then left out, and the audience is compelled to undergo the experience that the artist suffered, is asked to endure with the artist the pain and wonder of creation."—Thomas Parkinson

"Got a little poison, got a little gun . . ."—John Berryman

1.

Reading over the present crop of poems in our little magazines, I keep returning to the idea, not wanting to listen to it, of course, but thinking it anyway, that poem after poem might have been written by the same person. After blaming myself for bad reading, for somehow missing the subtleties of texture and, you know, meaning, I begin to believe that something may be wrong and look for reasons. Among them: the wave of Spanish translations now serving as models for young poets; the relative ease of having poems published, hence, certified "good enough" (in one cover letter I saved this year, a young poet listed 88 magazines, newspapers and anthologies he'd been in during the past nine months); and, in what James Wright rightly sees as an absence of a workable criticism of our own work, a situation where anything is allowed to constitute a poem. It's this last item that's the most troublesome. Of course, anything can be a poem if the imagination makes it one. But we are getting too much undigested grist these days, too much of the self-evident "I am now going to the window, folks, and here's what I'm seeing" school, also, too much of the arbitrary "artichoke on the fire hydrant" school. It is a failure that shows up in the voice of the poem. We've begun to settle for bland, monotonous voices, voices which seem to indicate, amazingly, boredom on the part of the poet. We forget that poems have something to do with human utterance. Finding a strong voice is a joy, and if it's true that we are in a temporary holding pattern on critical standards, it seems that, if not the best, this is at least the most accessible test for authenticity. Which brings us to Terry Stokes.

In Crimes of Passion Terry Stokes hits his best broken-field stride. The flashes of genius and irreverence that kept popping up in his first
book (*Natural Disasters*, 1971) like nasty little windows into teen-age heaven, erupt now into a barrage of poems that pepper the emotions. It’s not that this book contains any more than the few fully successful poems that any good book does, but Stokes understands the difference between emotional precision and the perfect poem. Even his failures are worth listening to.

Unlike the followers of Merwin who believe language and image ought to be skinnied down to the faintest gesture, Stokes’ imagination is inclusive, open to the intrigues of endlessly occurring possibilities, as he writes in “All Morning”: “I will shelter anyone / who needs it, it’s always been / my problem.” We remember what Emerson said about poets *naming* things. Stokes realizes that the names for emotions are never easy words, that, in fact, emotions are elusive and damn complicated, that the whole poem, with all its internal collisions, is the name.

As the title suggests, most of the poems work on that region of the heart where love and hate fuse, where the tail feathers of small birds twitch in your ear “like soft razor blades,” where collision is inevitable, dreaded and desperately sought after at once: “All of us / have tripped into dark rooms, banging / into still objects, sweating, & / there she was—Mother.” In Stokes’ poems all values and perceptions invert rapidly. Focus on one thing, suddenly it is another, then another, the imagination darting closer and closer to the irresistible flame:

**I WON’T EXPLAIN**

The car is not big enough to be a home, so, I took off the wheels, nosed & decked it, painted it panther black, I won’t explain. I filled it full of water, & gave the water plenty of large pink salmon, I put the windshield wipers on, & planted the whole thing in the snow. At night, the interior lights hot, the children circle, saying small prayers, as if they were speaking to their lovely, but lost, mother.

He is not afraid to reach into anybody’s black bag for an image. We find: “an airplane glowing like fried mucus,” “some heather just / sitting around forever gnawing on / warm gooseberry tendons,” or “I am so greasy, I slide / down windows & only / slip back in time / to fill teenage faces with blackheads, / the night of the big dance.” But even the most outrageous images are not arbitrary and the poems do not read like surrealism as it is being practiced these days. They are often excessive, but excessive imagining is a product of the process of the poems, and more than that, it is also frequently their subject. We feel the speaker hugging the edge, beyond which insanity becomes unmanageable, recalling Berryman—a strong influence on Stokes: “I’m scared a only one thing, which is me . . .”
In his best work there is an emotional core inside each poem, to which the farthest images are still connected, as if by rubber bands strung to the breaking point. Both language and syntax are made to react quickly. We hear the weird music of these resonating tendrils of the imagination. Scenes change against a manic landscape; faces become grotesque, lovely, unfamiliar; desires become obsessions, come true, satiate themselves, turn into revulsion. Yet through all this we worm nearer and nearer to the precise, inexplicable vibration level of an emotion, for instance, the loneliness of “A Man All Grown Up Is Supposed To”:

The anger rises with metal filings &
I will not see the ground as rock &
the stones will not carry my rubber spirit.
I have hit nothing in months & the candle
stuffed in my stomach flaps fire, flaps
smoke, goes out. I have no money, I am
very sorry about that, it would make things
easier, I suppose. A man all grown up is
supposed to have a pocket full wherever he
is, & feed his woman & kiss the teeth of
the fire & dance with the trucks & pitch
pennies with the soft children.

* * * * * * *

He sighed with the moths, & asked the
linoleum, for god’s sake, forgive, his
fingers rolled around in the sink under
the hard water, & her eyes were a deer
carcass out in the woods, no one around,
no one ever there when you need them.

Or from “Dreary Tides, The Vast Hot House Of The Mind”:

The mailbox is frozen
for the duration. & the goldfish died,
how can you talk about a goldfish, white,
lying on its side, & light splintering
its skin, & the one spot where its
breathing sac is/was, red, & the breaks
in your life, frozen goldfish snapped in
half by small fingers, not meaning to
break anything. . .

2.
Voice. The glue between words. A bridge connected at only one end, extending blindly into space. A cantilever. The message from a radio telescope. All Stokes’ poems are somehow voice poems. The most risky involve internal conversations that often become barroom brawls, the poems ending with light flickering off broken bottles on the dusty
floor, the bruised trailing off into the night looking for a soft home. But there are others, as he notes earlier in this magazine, where a character is chosen, "& he simply speaks his one song." In the remarkable jacket-blurb to *Natural Disasters*, he adds: "You adopt a persona, or you adopt your own persona in order to comprehend; to reconcile the terror of the particular day, week, year. Some days you sit back and say, 'Hmmm, the terror for the day was rather humorous,' or you say, 'Hmmm, that terror was like swallowing barbed wire.'" *Crimes of Passion* has many of these voice poems, and by and large, they work well, at turns, entertaining, frightening, illuminating, cajoling, obscene. Stokes has an impeccable ear for character, for giving a voice to some of our most desperate urges. Listen to the fine gauze of terror in the Crimes of Passion poems. "The Phone Caller":

No, no, don't please,  
oh my warm chicken, do  
not be upset, & do not  
hang up, what I wish to  
say can only be spoken  
in low tones, no, tonight  
I won't groan, I groan  
only when I am unhappy, do  
you understand? If I throw  
a kiss into your ears, who  
knows? & who cares? That is  
the problem, what you learn  
of loneliness, I teach, & I  
teach it slowly, so you will  
understand fully.

Or in "The Slasher" when he apprehends his victim stepping onto a bus:

The nylons  
flare like hot butter, & as that  
thigh bulges slightly, & then  
taut, I gently nudge her  
& with the razor blade, one side  
taped, as if a finger  
were lovingly running from the back  
of the knee toward the buttocks.  
She will sometimes turn & smile,  
feeling some part of herself freed,  
only hours later does she learn  
how deep my passion runs . . .

There are dangers in all voice poems. In the solo variety, it is like being cornered by anyone you don't like—either out of boredom or fear: you stop listening. Form betraying content. In the harmonic variety, there is the chance of creating a structure that will collapse on the poet when asked to carry too many stories; of mixing colors until the hue of macrobiotic lentil soup is achieved. What Stokes proves in
Crimes of Passion, is that the risk is worth taking. Wallace Stevens once criticized surrealists because there was "too much invention without discovery"; and yet, there cannot be discovery without risk; nothing buys you nothing. Stokes' poems bristle with things discovered, and these things are taken to heart, even though they still may be harboring a stiletto, a hook, or a kiss that drives you mad. No question that Stokes is sometimes a quirky, difficult poet. But then, who wants an easy poet?

—David Long

WINGING IT

TO BE OF USE
poems by Marge Piercy
Doubleday Paperback $2.95

CRUELTY
poems by Ai
Houghton Mifflin Paperback $2.95

FEAR OF FLYING
a novel by Erica Jong
Holt, Rinehart & Winston $6.95

One of the most important changes that could come from the Woman's Movement is the appearance of a brand-new consciousness—a whole segment of humanity discovering and articulating itself. These three books pull it off. In each one a female voice literally sings from the page, free from the comfortable definitions and restrictions of male art. Not evolution from the masculine, it's a revolution.

No surprise, then, that Marge Piercy is a sixties revolutionary too, as her early novel (Dance the Eagle to Sleep) and poems (Breaking Camp) demonstrated. But right up front in To Be of Use is a section of poetry called "A just anger" which deals mostly with what Piercy elsewhere calls her "third movement," feminism. In poems like "In the men's room(s)" and "Right thinking man" Piercy stabs with clear perception into the personality of an oppressor who is both the male chauvinist and Government The Father.
Yes, keep your eyes on the hands, let the voice go buzzing. 
Economy is the bone, politics is the flesh, 
watch who they beat and who they eat, 
watch who they relieve themselves on, watch who they own. 
The rest is decoration. 

("In the men's room(s)"")

Piercy confronts oppression from people she loathes and people she loves, but never misses the hook, even inside the candy. As she says to a radical companion:

The revolutionary says, we can let go. 
We both used to say that a great deal. 
If what we change does not change us we are playing with blocks. 

("A shadow play for guilt")

Friends aren't lacking, though; allies under the heel. The poet speaks warmly to old friends, new sisters, Janis Joplin, pets, even her own hair ("Hello up there").

Marge Piercy does not doodle around or resort to roaring cant in defining what bugs her, and she keeps the sharp, simple tone when writing poems of useful work and love. "The spring offensive of the snail" is the second section of To Be of Use and describes some of Piercy's personal alternatives to the Watergate World.

I want to be with people who submerge in the task, who go into the fields to harvest and work in a row and pass the bags along, who stand in line and haul in their places, who are not parlor generals and field deserters but move in a common rhythm when the food must come in or the fire be put out. 

("To be of use")

"The spring offensive of the snail" also contains "Doing it differently," a remarkable love poem which probes deeply into the emotional mechanics of living with another person, with blending lives and matching fantasies. Piercy has much to say about fragile human needs and the wisdom of making only equal compromises.

What feels natural and easy, is soft murder of each other and that mutant future striving to break into bloom bloody and red as the real rose. 

Periodic, earthy, of a violent tenderness it is the nature of this joining to remain partial and episodic yet feel total: a mountain that opens like a door and then closes like a mountain.

But the real showpiece of the book is the final section, "Laying down the tower." This is a series of eleven poems based on a "political
reading” of a Tarot card spread. Piercy weaves all the threads of idea
developed previously in To Be of Use into a darting, driving vision of a
woman vigorously cleaning the doors of perception. But as the series
moves into the last cards, Piercy emphasizes a recurrent theme of her
work; all effort is group effort, we function best as a community and to
be of use we must be of use to other people; “Change is qualitative: we
are each other’s miracle.”

If it is true, as Piercy says, that “whatever is not an energy source, is
an energy sink,” then she must be one of the headwaters of the Energy
Nile—To Be of Use radiates strength. Like Gary Snyder, Piercy uses
the organic attack to bring down sterile society, but she forges her
individual effects. More than a book of poetry, To Be of Use is almost a
companion, a guide to a sharp perception of a remarkable variety of
human contacts. Everybody’s here: Mom & Dad, the good lover, the
false lover, the Big Pig, and the whole swirling kaleidoscope of society
and emotion around the poet.

There is something of the pioneer woman in Marge Piercy; she sings
her story with direct and simple language. The straight-ahead
approach makes for one or two dull poems and an occasional trite line,
but Piercy strengthens her words with the fresh evaluations she brings
to our emotions. To Be of Use is a book to be kept on a hand-cut
wooden shelf, to be read by groups in the evening.

Yes, for some time we might contemplate
not the tiger, not the eagle or grizzly
but the snail who always remembers
that wherever you find yourself eating
is home, the center
where you make your love,
and wherever you wake up
is here, the right place to be
where we start again.

(“The spring offensive of the snail”)

Cruelty is Ai’s first book of poetry and she already has a small cult
following. About two years ago these poems began appearing in small
magazines and caused a stir; Ai was obviously a strong young poet with
an original voice. And the poems were weird—set in a stone-age world
of aggression and blood, a voice in both sexes chanting of rape, hatred,
and murder. The titles are enough: “Hangman,” “Warrior,” “Forty-
Three-Year-Old Woman, Masturbating,” and of course, “Cruelty.” Ai
is striking, irresistible, and many of the poems are unforgettable.

Most of Ai’s work takes one of three courses: emotional
confrontations (usually between man and woman) in a seeming “rural
American” setting; or strange, slightly magical poems which seem to
belong to a culture-consciousness more elemental than ours; and some
short works reminiscent of W. S. Merwin and the haunting bursts in
Bill Knott's *The Naomi Poems.*

Ai isn’t any “virgin and a suicide,” though:

PROSTITUTE

Husband, for a while, after I shoot you,
I don’t touch your body,
I just cool it with my paper fan,
the way I used to on hot nights,
as the moon rises, chip of avocado

and finally, too bored to stay any longer,
I search your pockets, finding a few coins,
I slip your hand under my skirt
and rub it against my chili-red skin,
then I put on your black boots.
I stick the gun in my waistband,
two beaded combs in my hair.

I never cost much,
but tonight, with a gun, your boots . . .

After the shock wears off, the sexuality and unchained violence in these poems loose some impact, but more important qualities emerge on re-reading. Working in such a vein, Ai could easily spill over into melodrama, but the thorny language and the courage in the poetic voice win out even when the poem does not. Ai surges through her lines like “a great, black fire,” and the reader feels the heat even when it really has little to do with being an old whore or a horny dwarf. The texture and world-view of *Cruelty* remain strong.

Ai’s poems twitch with a wild vitality that is sexual:

I’m the same size, shape, make as twenty years ago,
but get inside me, start the engine;
you'll have the strength, the will to move.
I'll pull, you push, we'll tear each other in half.
Come on, baby, lay me down on my back.
Pretend you don’t owe me a thing

(“Twenty-Year Marriage”)

or emotional:

Now you kill flies, your body rains sweat, you wet your pants
if I don't get them down in time.
Holding the bucket of paint, I dance and sing.
You think you can walk a step without stumbling, you sonofabitch?
Just try it. Fall! I don't give a damn.
You're hurting, so am I,
but I'm strong enough to let you cry alone.

(“The Rivals”)

or physical:

I raise the rifle, as she presses a white shawl
far down in the water, and fire.
She dies quietly; even her heart spits blood
through clenched teeth.

(“The Deserter”)

85
Cruelty is not a varied book of poems, but Ai has time to develop in range and depth; hopefully she will not flare and then crash like some other strong early voices, because her road could be fascinating. Some of the most disturbing imagery appears when Ai dips into the realm of primitive dreams:

When you are standing in the river,
you grab a fish,
tear its flesh open with your teeth, and hold it,
until the bones in your fingers break up
and fly about you like moths.
The river, a fish, your fingers, moths,
the war song churning in your belly.

("Warrior")

“The Root Eater,” “The Color Thief,” and “Hangman” are effective the same way.

Ai strikes close to the core of her poetry in these lines from “Before You Leave”:

Fill my tunnel with the howl
you keep zipped in your pants
and when it’s over, don’t worry, I’ll stand.
I’m a mare. Every nail’s head
in my hooves wears your face,
but not even you, wolf, can bring me down.

Ai is the Bitch Goddess of masculine nightmares, and Kali, the Death Mother, weaving her dark science in a cave. Cruelty is a worthy successor to Ariel, but almost none of the violence is turned inward—even the act of suicide is framed in aggressive terms (“The Suicide”). The blood, much of it menstrual, becomes the juice of life, and if Ai is deadly, she is also free and wonderfully powerful:

to listen to my heartbeat inside the rocks
and scream as my own death slides into bed
with her ass bloody and sweet when I lick it,
one stalk of wheat no man
can pull from the ground and live to eat.

("New Crops For A Free Man")

A friend of mine (female) says that Erica Jong was a real little snot back at Columbia—could be, since Isadora Wing, the heroine of Fear of Flying, sure grinds ’em alive. But Jong herself has warned that even in directly autobiographical writing only a poetic image of the author emerges. Doesn’t matter—purely as a work of fiction Fear of Flying is a stone, howling joy of a book. Although Fear of Flying contains elements present in endless older works, the combinations and attitudes involved almost raise this first novel into a whole new category: healthy woman on the prowl. Once again, the currents beneath the surface are more telling.
The surface is simple enough. Isadora Wing is attending a welcome-back psychoanalyst convention in Vienna with her second husband, Bennet Wing (a silent Chinese Freudian, obsessed by death, always right for all the dull reasons). Right away Isadora meets fellow convention-goer Adrian Goodlove (a Liangian always right for the wrong reasons) and falls for his hip raunchiness. After a lot of classy nightlife, emotional agonizing, and covert sexual adventure, Isadora resolves to break away from Bennet at least for now and ramble about the turned-on junkscapes of Europe with Adrian Goodlove, her Anti-Hero, her “zipless fuck.” Sure enough, when Adrian tires of the free-form game he has lured Isadora into, he reveals his scheduled trip to check on the ex-wife and kids, then dumps Ms. Wing in Paris. Whereupon Isadora drags her monster suitcase through the streets, meditates upon her psyche and situation, has an epiphany. She traces Bennet to London, boldly enters his empty apartment:

“If you grovel, you’ll be back at square one,” Adrian had said. I knew for sure I wasn’t going to grovel. But that was all I knew. It was enough.

Throughout all this, Isadora is remembering, remembering everything; her six psychoanalysts, her hectic family history (Isadora’s mother, a frustrated artist, has a fetish for anything “not ordinary”), and most of all her series of sexy but ultimately disappointing lovers. Jong reels off Isadora’s flashback memories with captivating cool. Most of the longer tales occur in the second half of the novel when Isadora jets off with her volatile lover.

When I threw in my lot with Adrian Goodlove, I entered a world in which the rules we loved by were his rules—although, of course, he pretended there were no rules. It was forbidden, for example, to inquire what we would do tomorrow. Existentialists were not supposed to mention the word “tomorrow.” It was banished from our vocabulary . . . Behind us was the past—which we invoked more and more to pass the time and to amuse each other . . .

The memories are revealing and colorful; they add variety to the narrative even though the past lacks the explosive humor of Isadora’s present-tense personality. Chapter Twelve, “The Madman,” is absolutely brilliant. Here Isadora describes her first husband, Brian Stollerman, a genius-type sensitive trapped in market-research who goes schizophrenic and tries to stroll over Central Park Lake to prove he’s Jesus Christ. Isadora’s story is a sure and compassionate account of a relationship.

Isadora comes off as an upper-middle class New York kid with some of the Jewish blues but mostly the female blues and the artist blues and great leaping hunks of the sexual blues—but she never fails to somehow find that . . . satisfaction.

He was so beautiful lying there and his body smelled so good. I thought of all those centuries in which men adored women for their bodies while they
despised their minds. . . I understood it. Because that was how I so often felt about men. Their minds were hopelessly befuddled, but their bodies were so nice.

So despite a lot of real pain, *Fear of Flying* reads much more upper than downer. The language helps; like all good poets, Jong is crazy about words and names:

I was already an adultress, and was only holding off the actual consummation out of cowardice. That made me an adultress and a coward (cowardess?). At least if I fucked Adrian I’d only be an adultress (adult?).

It was definitely Brian’s braininess I flipped for . . . he knew he knew and knew and knew about things . . . pipe rolls and Political Augustianism, Richard the Lionhearted and Rollo, Duke of Normandy, not just Abelard and Alcuin . . .

But Isadora also ponders the role of women (“Being unmarried in a man’s world was such a hassle that anything had to be better.”), attacks stuffed psychiatrists, and mutters endless literary quotes and comments (she even plugs *The New Yorker*). It’s really incredible. *Fear of Flying* zaps your head like the cover illustration: a zany montage of angels, lovers, airplanes, towers, tailways, and clocks.

So this book wears different faces. Isadora Wing fulfills one fantasy by being involved in an exotic and romantic adventure, but there are equal parts of comedy, autobiography, self-analysis, and sex book. Central to the novel is “fear of flying” itself. The narrative begins with a transatlantic flight, and Isadora’s familiar neurosis: “I happen to be convinced that only my own concentration (and that of my mother—who always seems to expect her children to die in a plane crash) keeps this bird aloft.” Eventually, “fear of flying” becomes associated with the terror of being yourself, not defined by any other person’s backdrop—winging it. One of the ties that binds Isadora to others is her recognition of their own “fear of flying.” After the final break-up, Isadora is attracted to Adrian Goodlove chiefly because he seems to be “the unattainable man,” a true loner. Isadora struggles to become a bit unattainable herself. *Fear of Flying* is both lyrical and humanistic, but to ignore that the focus and interpretations flow through a woman is to miss half the impact. Isadora Wing (and Erica Jong) searches with art and wisdom.

Me: Think of Simone de Beauvior!
Me: I love her endurance, but her books are full of Sartre, Sartre, Sartre.
Me: Think of Doris Lessing!
Me: Anna Wulf can’t come unless she’s in love . . . what more is there to say?
Me: Think of Sylvia Plath!
Me: Dead. Who wants a life or death like hers even if you become a saint?
Me: Wouldn’t you die for a cause?
Me: At twenty, yes, but not at thirty. I don’t believe in dying for causes. I don’t believe in dying for poetry. Once I worshipped Keats for dying young. Now I think it’s braver to die old.
Me: Well—think of Colette.
Me: A good example. But she's one of very few.
Me: Well, why not try to be like her?
Me: I'm trying.

There’s plenty of vital writing and thought in *To Be of Use*, *Cruelty*, and *Fear of Flying*. They are among the best of a huge art wave gushing from feminism, which has become the most radical, the most immediate, Jesus, the most *speakable* revolution going. Get a subscription to *off our backs* and dig into the meat and bones of these books. Meanwhile, look out, pig—this is the real thang.

—*Milo Miles*
contributors

JANE BAILEY has taught poetry at SUNY (Buffalo) and Western Washington State College. She has had work appear in Choice, Jeopardy, and Rapport, among others.

LEE BLESSING lives in Minneapolis and has published poems in Poetry Northwest, Prairie Schooner, The Ohio Review, and Seneca Review.

CAROL CHRISTENOT will graduate this spring from the University of Montana.

SONIA COWEN is in the MFA Program at the University of Montana and has published in several national magazines and anthologies.

MAGGIE CRUMLEY lives in Missoula's fabled North side with her various family. She had work in the first issue of Cut Bank.

WILLIAM VIRGIL DAVIS has had poems appear in numerous periodicals including Poetry, Poetry NOW, and Chelsea. He teaches English and Creative Writing at the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle.

JEANNINE DOBBS is currently Assistant to the Chairman and part-time Lecturer in the English Department at the University of New Hampshire. Her literary criticism, poems, and short fiction have been published widely.

DAVE ETTER likes his beer bottles stacked like torpedoes in the refrigerator. He is widely published in literary journals and has written four collections of poetry, his latest, Crabtree's Woman, from BkMk Press, 1972.

MARTHA EVANS lives in Sacramento. She has had work in Chicago Review and forthcoming in New York Quarterly.

ANDREW GROSSBARDT writes poetry and fiction in the MFA Program at the University of Montana, has appeared in Cafeteria, and has work forthcoming in Place. He knows nothing about catching fish.

LARRY HALES is still photo-archivist at the State Library of New York in Albany. In the next year or so he plans to become a Montessori teacher.

EDWARD HARKNESS teaches in Montana's Poets-in-the-Schools Program. He recently had a fat section of work appear in Seattle's Spring Rain.

MIKE LOPEZ teaches at California State University at Chico and has published in little magazines in this country.

CHRIS McMONIGLE is a philosophy student at the University of Montana. This is her first published poem.

MILO MILES was born and raised in the fiery grasp of Livingston, Montana.

RICHARD NEWBY is currently a junior at the University of Montana and has published poems in 3e Pulp.

CAROLANN RUSSELL NORD is an MA candidate at the University of Montana. This is her first published poem.

PAULA PETRIK is a graduate of the University of Montana MFA Program and has been teaching the past year at Northeast Missouri State.

JOANI SANDERS is a junior in English Education at the University of Montana.

ANNEMARIE SAVAGE is a senior in Creative Writing and plans to attend graduate school. THOMAS SINCLAIR'S fiction has appeared widely, recently in Seneca Review and Southern Humanities Review. Two of his stories have been listed in the Best American Short Stories Honor Roll. He lives in scenic Satellite Beach, Florida.
DAVID STEINGASS savors antipasto, wild mushrooms, and dandelion wine. He has two full-length collections of poetry: *American Handbook* and *Body Compass*, 1973 and 1969 respectively, both from Pitt Press.

TERRY STOKES has been poet-in-residence in Connecticut and New York the past several years. He is currently holding out in the Upper West Side. Stokes, we learn from the *Times*, "has a genial, funky sensibility given to garrulous clowning."

JIM WARBURTON is an occasional driver for Danville Tent & Awning, who maintains it's Lucky when you live out West.

ANN WEISMAN will receive her MFA in Creative Writing this spring from the University of Montana. Her most recent publication was in *Nimrod*.

LAWRENCE WHARTON has worked in an Oklahoma oilfield and a TV station in West Virginia, among other things. He is currently in the writing program at the University of Utah. "RAIN CITY" is part of a novel-in-progress.

PAUL ZIMMER is assistant director of the University of Pittsburgh Press and has edited the Pitt Poetry Series for the past several years. He is also an avid fisherman and football fan, but like the Steelers, always loses the big ones. Paul has published two books of poetry.
MAGAZINES RECEIVED

Abraxas (No. 9), Warren Woessner, ed., 1831 S. Park St., No. 9, Madison, WI 53713. $2./two issues.

Aisling (Winter '73-'74), Paul Shuttleworth, ed., 2526 42nd Ave., San Francisco, CA 94116. $4./year.

Apple (No. 8), David Curry, ed., Box 2271, Springfield, IL 62705. $5./four issues.

Carolina Quarterly (Winter 1974), Bruce M. Firestone, ed., Box 1117 Chapel Hill, NC 27514. $4.50/year.

The Chowder Review (Winter 1973), Ron M. Slate & Barbara Glenn, eds., 118 Dimmock St., Quincy, MA 02169. $2.50/year.

Dacotah Territory (No. 6), Mark Vinz, ed., PO Box 775, Moorhead, MN 56560. $2.50/three issues.

Edge (SF Directions—Autumn/Winter 1973), D. S. Long, William L. Fox, Patrick Evans, Robert Stowell, J. E. Weir, eds., PO Box 25042, Victoria St., Christchurch, N. Z. $2./issue.

Happiness Holding Tank (No. 10), Albert Drake, ed., PO Box 227, Okemos, MI 48864.

Hawaii Review (Fall 1973), Dana Naone, ed., Hemenway Hall, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822. $3./year.

Ironwood (No. 3), Michael Cuddihy, ed., PO Box 49023, Tucson, AZ 85717. $3./year.

kayak (Nos. 33 & 34), George Hitchcock, ed., Bonny Doon Rd., Santa Cruz, CA 95060. $4./four issues.

Long Island Review (No. 2), Edward Faranda & Stephen Sossaman, eds., Box 10, Cambria Hts., NY 11411. $3./year.

The Mainstreeter (No. 5), Antony Oldknow, ed., 1118 Cherry St., Grand Forks, ND 58201. $.60/issue.

The New Salt Creek Reader (Winter 1973-74), Ted Kooser, ed., 1720½ C St., Lincoln, NE 68502. $3.50/four issues.

Out Of Sight (Nos. 75 & 76), James Mechem, ed., Box 8006, Wichita, KS 67208.

Ploughshares (2/1), DeWitt Henry & Peter O'Malley, directors, Box 529, Cambridge, MA 02139. $8./four issues.

Poetry NOW (Nos. 1 & 2), E. V. Griffith, ed., 3118 K St. Eureka, CA 95501. $5./six issues.


Tantalus (Spring 1974), Robert Lamansky, ed., PO Box 9331, Honolulu, Hawaii 96820. $1./issue.

Three Rivers Poetry Journal, Gerald Costanzo, ed., PO Box 21, Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA 15213. $4./four issues.

Western Humanities Review (Winter 1973), Jack Garlington, ed., University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah 84112. $5./year.