

# CutBank

---

Volume 1  
Issue 67 *CutBank* 67

Article 3

---

Spring 2007

## Letter

Sarah Gridley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

---

### Recommended Citation

Gridley, Sarah (2007) "Letter," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 67 , Article 3.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss67/3>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in CutBank by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@mso.umt.edu](mailto:scholarworks@mso.umt.edu).

for PATRICIA GOEDICKE  
1931-2006



Patricia —

May, early evening in Ohio, a walk in and by the Chagrin River. A clay bed too slippery to cross, seeds carried in blurred wings over long grass and Dame's Rocket. Rilke: *And we, who have always thought/ of happiness as rising, would feel/ the emotion that almost overwhelms us/whenever a happy thing falls.*

Two Mays ago: you said you had the peonies "on hold" for me in Missoula. My impression, this evening, of our Ohio peonies, is yes, they need holding back. Beautiful to the edge of bearing, may they resist (through some economy they can't possibly possess) being too much. Free of the bud's severe circumference, may they hold to the place of the sheerly *there*, as though someone had torn the very substance of luxury to pieces — luminous and faint and heaven to breathe — and pasted that violence back into keeping.

The last time I visited you in Montana — that May — we had a "lope" as you called it, at Kootenai Creek: mis-identified wildflowers, rolled up our cuffs, sank our ankles in the spring runoff. Both wearing large-brimmed hats, no more than an arm's span apart, sober as the May sunshine, we gestured like drunks over the rock and water commotion.

That evening you spoke of one of your favorite movements in all of poetry, Hopkins' use of the word "buckle."

*Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here  
Buckle!*

What verb-mystery he invests in its after-the-adverb, after-the-line-break, after-the-string of six stressed mono-syllables following that unstressed, take-a-breath conjunction! What is there to do, upon reaching the verb, *but* buckle? And *How* buckle? you asked. Are we to read it as a power of adherence —

link fuse bond bridge graft      knot bolt hinge meet match  
splice lash clinch span hitch

— or a forcing past the limits of a form's form?

fold, bend, furl, coil, crease      ruck, crimp, close, bust, bulge  
double over, double under

warp, put out of kilter, misshape, contort?

Or is there in the *here/Buckle*, the sense of preparing oneself for (further) “dangerous” undergoing, undertaking?

buckle down  
shoulder to the wheel  
hand on the plow  
bull by the horns  
teeth into  
grasping the nettle  
taking a crack  
or whack at getting  
one's mind into  
sword in hand  
house in order keeping  
one's powder dry

What can I say in advance of your knocking kayaks, trans-worldly pomegranates, and shattering blizzards? Skier in the now, in the snowy, great oxygen elation of *make this precipitous, and sharp, and continuous.*

In *Dominion of the Dead*, Robert Pogue Harrison writes, “there exists an allegiance between the dead and the unborn of which we the living are merely the ligature.” Perhaps C.D. Wright is at the same truth when she says, *We live by the etcetera principle*. In the last e-mail you wrote to me, you voiced the barefoot threshold of this principle. Time holds you green and dying, and you sing in your chains like the sea:

...the doctors may very well admit me to Saint Patrick’s hospital. Seems the chemotherapy hasn’t been working at all, so they want to switch methods, do another and perhaps better biopsy, somehow or other stop the right lung from filling up with fluid all the time, and give me a blood transfusion (because it seems I am now rather severely anemic, which accounts in part for my extreme breathlessness and fatigue).

...Meanwhile I can’t wait to see you. It’s so beautiful here: everything’s fresh washed and sparkling from a little rain we had last week, and the house, all of whose windows frame, nearly everyday, so many swooping and fluttering and wallowing green leaves it makes me positively seasick with happiness to see them – not to mention being able to walk – well, perhaps creaking would be a better word – barefoot in and out of the open front door and backyard...

Patricia, how I miss you. Here are your poems. Here is your voice, removed and preserved, a dance as cosmic (O Baseball Field at Night!) as it is bone-in-heel familiar. Voice on its way out of earth. Voice as the buckle between language and death. Voice lighting out for *no* territory.

Teacher, Friend, Poet, what becomes of the I and the you?

*For you I light a fire in the sky. My love dispels darkness... We shall nourish each other with words and bread. Born of stars, of pale moonlight skimming mountain-tops, we are men and women exchanging glances at the crossroads. I am born of the*

*sky, filled with light. I darken. I am various as weather. I am predictable as sunrise, moonset, the winds that blow...I am for you. I am the utterer of your name. Speak of me often and we shall live.*

— SARAH GRIDLEY