

BEYOND BAROQUE 701

New Venice Poets

Poetry Reading Edition

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About this edition

This volume gathers the poems from the original issue and resets them as a reading edition. The magazine's page architecture is not reproduced. Source-page labels, advertisements, editorial prose, fiction, artwork, and other non-poetry matter are omitted. Each poem begins on a new page, with the author's name above the title, and every conventional poem uses one shared typographic stylesheet. Parallel columns are reflowed into one reading column. Lineation and stanza divisions are retained where recoverable; genuine spatial scores keep their field composition within the same typographic system. The text was reread from newly rendered scans rather than taken from the PDF's embedded OCR layer.

Poems

Lee Byron Jennings

Workshop

Pity poor me! Stigmatized
because I see Beauty where
They do not, busted by fuzz,
harassed by my creditors;
yet I come here and give of
myself, only to be told
my god damn metaphors stink.

Your penny-ante lament
grates on my skull instead of
zeroing in on the stuff
inside, the gray mater, the
white light pathways, the reddish
nexus where the world problem
does the big bang in reverse.

Yes but that wasn't one of
my recent poems besides
that was supposed to be like
unintentional you don't
understand the young f--- your
strictures we don't need them man
don't need none of your syntax.

If you don't believe I felt
what I wrote, I'll tell you the
biographical background;
if you don't believe it's true
I'll give you a rundown, plus
mythical hypotheses;
just what is it you expect?

It writes through me--I let it--
I open my brain and push,
parade some goodies before
the unknown sultan, let him
choose, leave me in peace to think
of nothing, make a plan, do
something else, don't talk so much.

Lee Byron Jennings

The soldier with his head shot off

"The soldier with his head shot off" _ -
that was one of those parental jokes
referred to but never actually told
because everyone was supposed to know them already.
It seemed to be about a tiresome old man
- who had been in the war and never quite got over it.

On the cover of Fortune was a face,
strangely sliced in the Cubist manner;
who was it, I asked--"Andy Mellon,"
a name uttered in mingled awe and contempt.
Could eyes that glimpsed Alf Landon see the inner light?
Your Viet Nams take their toll; but what of the ravages
of those times when nothing wonderful or crazy
(not even a catastrophe)
had any chance of happening?

II

I left my hamburger on the hill
The worst they can do is send you to the zoo
I see the moon it make a mouth at me
Deposit unwanted marbles in the chalice of your choice

If you have the purple poison, then listen to me
Before you chant askew
Follow Dionysos to those other fields
Where they take root and you might grow a new nose
The statuary light is not for you
DEVIL MAKES EXCELLENT PET--SEE DEATH AS MENACE
(Give us a gun and we will crimp the boogers)
The tragedy of Bernice is the patchwork of lame creatures
The Wharton is only a fool incumbent owl
I see the moon, it make a mouth it make a mouth

Lee Byron Jennings

From the Neanderthal Camp

We never get very far from the cave mouth
Do what the Mother tell
Ain't no other way
They say she can cut you up and stick you back together
They say she can eat you and you'll grow out of the ground
They say she can burn you and that's more difficult,
but your ashes will walk
One fellow say another way once on a time
And they still find a bone or two of him
Just rollin' round the countryside
And he can't get back together for the life of him
and he know that
If I was you I would get on out of here
Cause I think your Mother ain't our Mother

There was a girl who ate the same breakfast food
but grew up all different
her liver was smarter than lots of people's brains
she had that self that most of us go around trying to assemble
she seemed one of those who can play the game
without trying to be a referee
and wasn't bad looking either (how could she be)
but perhaps the enriched bread took the richness right out of her
because one day she was going along like everybody else
like everybody else
and she was going along

Lee Byron Jennings

Friends

They had a pet turkey and some dogs
and a swing in the yard
and Penelope who lived in the back would swing on it
while a glaring device in the back porch
electrocuted flies of a Texas afternoon
he wanted a boat but ended up with a camper
then he got a motorcycle and learned to ride around the block on it

Short Poems

1 Keep your seeds, exotic flower;

I don't want to know that much about myself today.

2. They were Outer Limit ghosts

and dancing bears;
but when that man spoke to them
were they not Tweedledum and Tweedledee?

3 Communication with the Terrans is difficult;

barred by their cerebration from seeing things directly
they incessantly interpret everything.

4 Out along the lasso ends of nowhere

I start to wonder who is thinking my thoughts
but then it does some exercises and I go away.

5 Rember sarcastic wieners and the pigeons moaning

when you were eking out a miserable me.

6 A pale man swings an axe

and I find myself driving a car across the desert;
when will the sun come down among us?

7 What is the task that is hardest of all

yet no one ever fails it?

Joseph Hansen

Cormorant

is a cormorant
rescued from an oil slick
smothered in grease
a lean, reaching bird
half dead

it seems to struggle
in your hand
my hand
our hands struggle
but the bird is not struggling
not tonight
the cormorant

on Chinese lakes by torchlight
they fish with cormorants
hard to the touch
sleek to the eye
like yours
but not with grease

they have a way of calling them
I forget
I remember
they noose their necks tight
so that once they have caught the fish
they cannot swallow it

your cormorant cannot
turn loose its fish
I think it is the grease
that has killed it
I wish I could remember
how they call them

Joseph Hansen

Victim

a lamp like an Auschwitz arm
over your desk
strings of beads hanging
off a straw hat
cocked on the Mechano elbow
of the lamp

an afternoon of sweat
trajectories of come
green glass hot sunlight
books in a pastel stack
Mozart from the radio
in the next room

the burn on my arm is healing
feels next to nothing
the scar is thick

my skin has inches
open to further scarring
but

I can't lie still for it
can't find your place as I used to
strings of liberated bridgework
dangling off the helmet
cocked on a burnt elbow
of your Auschwitz lamp
books in a charred heap
Mozart buried in a muddy hole

can't find it can't lie still
my skin won't let me
but listen
if I could I would

Joseph Hansen

You infest my life like vermin

You infest my life like vermin
feed on me in the secrets of my shorts
till I bleed from scratching
make scabs in the hair of my chest
my armpits
ambush me from my blankets
suck my sleep white

you are a stone in my shoe
a nail
mold on my food
a lightbulb singing with darkness
a swollen door
letters that never arrive

all my cats that ever died
my father deat
my wife not speaking to me
my daughter lost
he bank where my money i
hat is always close
a ticket printed in Russian
a map torn up

I don't know where they hide
I wash myself my clothes
drag my bed into the sun
my blankets
maybe they are in the floor
or the cracks in the ceiling
but they are not my friends

Joe Bransford

By way of explanation

it was not
your hacking
need
to be free the
ceremonial fashion
in which
you always left
the house packing
your purse
as you
would a suitcase

nor was it
your
returning drunk
every night the
persistent sound of
your body
ricocheting off
walls bumping into
but
shadows

when you
demanded my
balls with
tomato juice
for your
hang over

had to
leave

John Harris

The creatures

Pinned down by stacks of sunlight,
Hemmed in, mile after mile,
By moats of simmering sand,
We see clearly what is around us;
There is no way out.
Nothing is near.
Not a bush, a hill, a post.
We are the core of
a vast crematorium.
When we work our mouths
Something comes in the way of speech.
That is not speech.
I loosen her sandals,
Fish thongs out of boiled flesh,
Suck maggots fat as grapes from her sores,
Dress the wounds with spiderwebs.
I bend to give her shade.
Hands like dull blades
Whittle heat from our faces.
Hot wind licks between us.
Nothing moves after that.
There seems to be some intent beyond us.
One glittering black snake
Flickers in the distance,
Watching.

Nightfall the sun caves in,
Rips spines out of our shoulders,
Scrapes mackerel blood on far ranges.
Clouds scuttle in under the stars.
Then there is thunder, lightning,
Rain smelling like burnt grass,
Wind forking slurried sand into our mouths.
We go on.
The snake follows.
We hear him warping through water,
In dark we come to riverbanks.
There is no way across.
The snake follows.
Stops. Waits.
The rain stops.
There is a coiled moon,
Vapor writhing from the ground.
For all we know we are dying.
We strip garments off blistered skin,
Fall naked into the mudslip.
My lips hop like a flea.
My hands canvass her thighs.
I use her like a fist.
All the while she stares above my eyes,

Lies like water stiffening into ice.
We try to come closer together.
The snake watches.
Waits.

Long into daylight we lie,
The snake closing around us.
When we wake
She tells how her mind
Soaking up sun and rain
Sprouts lotuses, grottos, silk.
In my dream I am
an eagle;
I will save her;
From the furnace, the snake.
Later, while I sleep again,
She has someplace to go,
Is sighted downstream, days later,
A large snake belting her loins
His tail trailing out behind.
Both have lost much skin,
Have ripened.
No one comes near.

John Harris

Deathwatch

Having just made love to you,
The iambs of that motion
Still pulsing in my spine,
Threading the valley road back to camp,
Alone in the cold sifting rain,
Wondering if love was running out again,

Came suddenly upon a car,
Careened into the ditch,
One headlight out,
Wheels still spinning,
A body lying in the mist of my beams,
A yellow-slickered figure bending over.

Hitch-hiker, he said,
Too close to the highway;
I skidded going into the curve;
Must have caught my headlight
Full in the face!

The body twitched and moaned,
And I thought of the sound of your ecstasy.
I draped my coat over him.
His squashed mouth gaped like a ravaged snatch.
The soft flesh of his eyeballs
Bristled with quills of glass.
We sent a passer-by for help,
But death came first,
And I drove back,
Back to you.

You're a mess, you said, still naked.
Careful of the carpet.
What do you want?

Love to put off dying,
I replied.
The faith healers were all in bed
with the clap, I answered.
Back on the road, empty now,
Passing the curve,
Thinking how it came to be,
His death, our dying.

Final examination

First, you split the trunk like this--
Collarbone to cock on the males,
A wide Y on the females, exposing the mammaries.
Do not bother with ruled surgical cuts;
Rip into the flesh like a melon, a side of pork,
But sever the ribs gingerly so as not to pink the heart.
You will be astonished at the lack of blood,
How floral yellow the lungs are,

How the tart antiseptic scent deadens your senses.
Next, pare the scalp like an orange, ear to ear.
Peel the front half into a mask over the eyes,
The back half down to the nape of the neck.
Now you can see a lid off the bald skullcase
And get at the putty colored beehive brain.
If your deceased was a male,
Slit the scrotum and squirt
the testicles out,
Like you would shuck an oyster,
Or pit a ripe persimmon.
The carcass is inside-out now,
And you can have a smoke
While the coroner snips and probes
To find what made the life leak out of him.
A word of caution:
If you adopt the proper professional mien,
at all.
You will not vomit until later, maybe not
Nor would you approach your chores too lightly;
Antics like finger-fucking the maidens are frowned upon,
And peddling sweetbreads or snapshots to necrophiliacs
Tends to put you in a bad light with the relatives.
Be aware also of some common safety precautions:
Everything you touch - cement, steel, guts -
Everything will be slick as a
used prophylactic;
These blades are keen enough to find your blood,
And all the germs in him may not have died.
And do save work for the mortician--
He could do you a favor some day!
Most of the body is not seen in the coffin
As it was not seen in life,
So you can ladle the miscellaneous organs back in
And lace him up with crude stitchery,
But try not to bruise the face
Or let the jaws lock open.
Discard any left-overs, hose the clots and lather off,
And trundle the corpse back into the correct cubicle,
Being certain to check the toe tag
With the name on the compartment door;
Nothing spoils a fine funeral
Like grieving over the wrong remains!

Gentlemen, before class is excused,
A few notes to satisfy course requirements in US History:
During the siege of Vicksburg
There were many reports of cannibalism;
Yankee troopers told of finding the hocks
Of a family of five
Hanging in a Colonel's pantry,
Though there was no mention of their color.
But you must not brood upon that,
Or the Times Bombing, the Algiers Incident,
Or how to prevent nuclear lesions.

John Haag

13 ways of looking at a Blastbird

A variation on "13 Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" by Wallace Stevens.

I

Among twenty darkened buildings,
the only moving thing
was the tail of the blastbird.

II

I was of three minds,
like a site
on which there are three blastbirds.

III

The blastbird arc-ed on its programmed flight.
It was a small part of the total scheme.

IV

A man and a foe-man
are one.
A man and a foe-man and a blastbird
are one.

V

I do not know which to abjure,
the elegant conceptions
or the arrogant consummations.
the blastbird lifting
or just after.

VI

Grid-designs squared the round view-screen
with insistent plan.
The stardust of the blastbird
crossed it, to and fro.
The mood
traced in the image
a near imaginable woe.

VII

O spare men of Princeton,
why do you imagine stellar birds?
Do you not see how the blastbird
broods beneath the feet
of the women about you?

VIII

I know neat equations
and perfect, unimpeachable blue-prints;
but I know, too,
that the blastbird is implied
in what I know

IX

When the blastbird rose out of sight,
it marked the end
of one of many eras.

X

At the sight of blastbirds
flocking to a thrown switch,
even the corps of diplomats
would look back wildly.

XI

He flew over Connecticut
in a jet plane.
Once, a fear pierced him,
in that he mistook
the pattern of his squadron-mates
for blastbirds.

XII

The stars are receding.
The blastbird must go searching.

XIII

It meant profits all down the line.
Stocks were rising
and would continue to rise.
The blastbird sat
in the cotton fields.

S. B. Melly

Song for a child at the death of a cat

Today I buried my sprite
my scurvy nymphlet
paper pet
his ragged ends were stiff,
fur hung with confetti
from a yellow death
this much left...
a wooden body in a bedsheet.
he rolled
like a square wheel
into the hole.
for the worms, the old man said.
bury him deep
so no flies will come.
Today I buried my baby Harpo
my clown my clown
down fell the sheet
on the bones,
white on brown,
somewhere the head then
the tail
exposed
squirrel-grey,
wild as a sorrow

James Krusoe

Letter to a future son

you were small,
round,
kept still as a dot,
but life found you out,
started your heart
for all time to come,
and bled you
into light.

time has passed for regret:
turn to survival.
my words are poor,
bought hard.

crouch when you pass through doorways,
never mind the size; stoop down,
let others jar their brains. bow
head to plate while eating,
watch hands,
chew each forkful sixteen times
then swallow.
ideas are poison;
leave them to those who die.
you'll live forever anyway,
or long enough to make it seem
forever.
be weak; only strong men fail,
then learn to write the densest prose,
and in time
you will succeed.
finally,
stay indoors.

James Krusoe

To the Monument for the Workers

who built the road: Cuernavaca to Mexico City

The year of the cold,
on high mountain's nights,
while thousands froze,
burnt straw, homes, chests,
and perished/ you were also chilled.
Winds blow as strong over stone flesh;
when they warm, you warm;
drip wet in days of rain.
Tierra, fiero, agua, aire,
always four, always same,
beneath the nail
and the dust
still breaks backs, fills shovels,
unaltered to the grain.

Now thirty years have passed since men posed
for their own tribute,
bribed, diffident, wary as children.
Form persists in rock, always.
But who can remember
that squatting at midday by highway's edge,
gargoyle hunched, eyes half closed,
they turned their backs to this their road.

Donald E. Winters, Jr.

Sunday already

let us pause for a flower of prayer
as Father Ivory hoists the host
and the grizzly bears drown
in their post mortum decay,
a day away from Pentecost.
St. Endlessness has really budded
into quite the widow hasn't she?
So much the better for her old
father in the pyramid,
who never wanted a grandchild
anyhow.
The priest's voice suffocates
as the subway battles through
the marriage aisle screaming,
tempting the world to listen,
enticing the floating foreign candles
to stop all their play and
kneel before their neighbors:
the rainbow bouquets of saints
who livest and reigneth in truth,
Dignum et justum est.
The mocking bird has a tooth
as he tears at the flesh of Daniel,
finally lying very still at
the bottom of Saratoga's Holy Lake.
Lord I am not worthy that thou shouldst
come under my roof,
Speak but a palm tree
and my sirens shall reel

Ruth Wire

Two ways of looking at May

I. Owl Crackers
last night, erected in space
the muse fuse made contact
supposedly; in pursuit of the Great Beyond
but before i knew it she was gone
and all that was left were some swollen joints
on the scatological floor
and a renaissance rug in heat
laying and panting
next to his poem

II. Stevens
trying to enumerate
twelve ways of looking at wallace stevens
the ice cream melts
leaving soft verse in the dish
and a blackbird named leroi jones
humming hymns on the chair
where stevens once sat
with last year's calendar

Ruth Wire

Burnt offering

Used up woman gapes toothless
like a bald bird
whose claws pick the bedspread.
Among hospital pillows,
worn spirals under a leather throat
dryly rust.
Sometimes the sheet is urine strong,
and impatience gathers in the burnt out face,
and she, bright bead eyes watching,
is diapered.
Scorched matriarch,
wisp words still floating in yesterday,
turns her head and weeps
into the pillows.

Stephen A. Canada

Poem

Deathtrains will haul everyone away
on soft shoes
obliterate the 59th star, all 59 stars
and in soft clothes

A red car and a white girl
will fuck one with the other
is all I want

David Mark Dashev

For Eliot

The dog (mine...traded a woman forty bucks for him)
sprawls between earth and sun
like some cosmic lunchmeat.

He pees on the patio.

Over the toilet I piss on my shadow
letting an undone cigar fall from my mouth
pretending it is the U.S.S. New Jersey.
My stream sinks the stern (oh to be a horse)
and I flush my fantasy.

A. P. Russo

These darknesses

sacrifice is lived
love's chaos
wilderness
rust
sea shells
calendars
these darknesses

yet some from the fire
hearing about distances
vagrant mummies
dreaming separate terrors in the silence

Museum pieces and others

a furious storm
sampan
lady drinks

monkey
over the lea
like a rainbow

the vine
her melon breasts
increment of our eyes

meadow dancer
kyrie
close to the taste of coins

where two seas meet
to make yellow again
the darkest daughter
the other is something forgotten in slow motion

All fall down

the stakes are driven into the earth
footfalls scrape under the black window
rose crescent
snowy bone
perhaps a hawk is seen
this side of the morning

all fall down
past preening cocks
eyes of the dead
mouths
hearts of Babel

chrysalis
the silver pin is waiting
the sound of a chain will be your sign

Her small breasts

at night they shine like stained glass
they are a swan song for all the airlines
they are moonlight on a buffalo back
(the buffalo is only five inches tall)
one is a potato raining

they are apache tears
love spells them with a beehive in between
christmas can never buy them
they are dynamite under the church
baby amplifiers talk softly in them
they play basketball with automatic arms
i can hear them now in the court
like hummingbirds
there are interstices
and integers
we rend
to join or render
it's all too scientific
or metaphysical
or, god forbid, theological
let well enough alone
do deep knee bends
practice right breathing

Ambience

it
there
sings up the hill
aper again
chimes
whistling up
hair
the window closing
spoons
ashes
airplane second hand
bisecting an angle
on the clock
lost
like a divingboard

Picasso rails

the invisible rope
by which the naked boy leads the horse
things, material
the picture, the poem
spectra, breath, mind
reality/illusion
duality rears its ugly heads
judge not lest ye be judged
walk around, breathe deeply
pictures and poems take care of themselves

Enigma

poison doors
a fist open
many or against
or darkness closing there
gun like razor is as times
or like a wood
a rattling

a razor many times
or poison
or gun
darkness closes like a fist
doors open
there is a rattling
as against wood
why when to the waves
dusk for your eyelids
whistle through
and this comfort
of the people
rock or film
of climbing

breaths
a garden when
so sick with
buries its face
boy boy and boy
Id mire
again

alone suddenly
wake up black
like a Kent
combinations of
by the shutters
it gives me back
not nor is it
a her nor even

it undresses
greed for commitment
of the dark house
a question of what

a moment this I am writing reading
this breath for nothing it will do
all over the best that might be said
slice a pear for him is this stroke
slant wise face leans in the kitchen
not even remembered like a revolution

all my mantras fly
through the holds
space and so distant from

in the pillow
it steals through the slats
it puts the accusing finger
the mind of a cycle of
of lies called
suddenly neither negative nor positive
a great tao of the Thought
do you make of my evils
'of my cock to
a frailty when I'd rot
the cause
made of more than
and the three of them dead
of the morning I would
of motherfuck in the tray
garters and strange
and yearning to be snapped
the Image
nor is it
neither a him nor
of

Jack Hirschman

avigny

is it

across to you this hot air
ever but later when it is
as you move from the bed to
inwardly against which your
for a moment this music
signed Mozart

Jane E. Newton

Storm

the wind
said
a grieving cry
I saw long clouds
red
stretched too far
across the sky
all that is left:
a few trails
made like fingers
that clutched things ripped away
till hands bled

the storm drowns itself
all sounds
I call like groaning trees
whose branches may snap
whose roots may tear the ground
I hear moans
torn from the edges of houses
like doubts
holed
by sharp corners
blown to worse
certainty

no storm hears but itself
little is heard now
only winds as they flute shrill
through thin grasses
some last furor
sinuous winds that still find
no sense
winds that leave chill

Andrew Salmins & Jane Newton-Salmins

Fertility rite

Today I live divided--
Within this cathedral of glass
among Danish vases and Coffee Break Modern
and canonical paper cups
near the office watering spot.

But I can also walk along the street into infinity
and turn into the vaped soup kitchen
of Guillarme and Vincent
where earthen cups sing trembling in a line
and resound
as great a joy as sorrows.

With Guillarme and Vincent
and their shoulders
We can touch their pleasures
and weep their onioned tears
stretching out our work-stifled hands
to the Earth-Mother.
All creation is rejoicing and will perish
One as much as the other.

And then I too am
at the planting feast in an ancient land
in the stone peristyle built to the Sun and the Rain
who mate with the Mother Earth.

The oval-breasted lady of the establishment,
no--Lady of the Pavillion--
her mouth is not a fruit
and her hair is not the dark wings of birds,
you think;
but her friendly lips upon my cheek
are the brush of summer solstice wind
stirring the ripening grain fields.
Slim faces, longnecked faces,
broadbellied peasant faces,
glared faces
entranced priestess faces
growing from clay, growing full from the earth
almost like stalks of wheat,
or as a plane tree or a pine--
or barley first--
and then, indeed, vines?

- - Ah,
the wine cups grow almost thus.

And the faces walk chanting in line
and resound
as great a joy as sorrows.

Wine powers-- and gravediggers dig
whether I sparkle raised in the sun

or am buried
in a high glass vault.

My senses see vivid.
The warm winds today from the South
on my asking mouth
are my love.

But down the street they put their lips
to disposable paper cups.

Andrew Valdemar Salmins

The bureaucrat

Year after year you shall
become more lonely.
You will be left by plan after plan.
A rare figure will relate only
To the depths to which
the production sank again.
Cold horror shall press upon your senses
As the wrath of paper work's weight shall seize your fate

When Mephistopheles comes piping

When Mephistopheles comes piping
My red cat goes abroad with wondrous charms
and witching musks
Half-glistened by the rising evening sun.
She rings with bells;
All's well!
The town is run
By a cat committee, and
Its delegates
Have shunned the opposition
of the human race.

And in the wide Pantheon tonight
Caterwauling voices trail
the mighty traces of the lion.

The surrealist boar

Stood, snout erect
Upon the pile of shit
As a lavender archangel of El Greco.

The sows
Nursed their young, teaching them
-- Behold,
Here is the crown of creation,

Anne Marie Ross

Inmate

"Prison, like war, becomes an accepted way of life - Rubin, the logical Jew, accepts it, because the ways of Socialist truth are sometimes tortuous."

- "Hell on Earth" - V. S. Pritchett, review of Aleksandro I. Solzhenitsyn's *The Cancer Word*.

Ten years - after all meals - clocks
Have spun around the food
I have walked around the yard
I shall be done.

I shall be done with my body.
I shall know what I
Do not want. I shall
Not waste life upon desire.

Here the sun is streaked with iron
Morning walks in chains upon
The night; I feel
The plate glass of the face.

The hands and feet of the world
Walk in coats of mail.
Men beat out the rat tat tat
Of force upon the drums of men.

Our stomachs are stretched tight
Upon the rhythm of starvation
Every man is the czar
Of his own hunger.

We have walked from light
Toward light locked body
To body like trains
Crossing the steppes.

Masses of us move; our nerves
Frozen in ganglia of steel
Still, we do not touch
Though we lie close into the winter.

Lynn Henry Shoemaker

Hands

We draw them in. Close.
Following trees of no
wind and wings.
Rule of three circles.
Close. Hoping
to find our names in a voice
turning red.

We draw them in.
Hoping they will tighten.
Closer than our brother's hands winding
white lilies around our breath.
Closer than the turning.
The red.
Listen...in a locked room upstairs
the shattering of a child's
window.

Red. Who can refuse the moon?
Who can resist climbing his own
madness one
step at a time.
Closing all
of himself around fragments.
On his knees. Grasping tightening
his name sticks in a crack.
It will become the
edge.

2
Better to let them fall.
We could let them be
at our sides.
Our hands could transform themselves
into falling crumbs of bread.
To die in
wind laughing

Lynn Henry Shoemaker

Fantasy of the green bears

Have you seen the bears in the trees?

The way the leaves are
and the light.

Each leaf is a bear, a green bear
playing with the sun
with each one of the winds.

Once in awhile rearing up to growl.

But in miniature just
for fun

for they don't have claws.

Some people say they're rabbits.

No. Those are the ones who have an old appletree
and cats with bright eyes in their backyards.

Those are the ones who plant the flagpoles
in front of all the banks. Each pole
stands straighter than a soldier--
bayonets rifles

pointed at the winds at the sun
at the bears.

I have felt the winds die

the sun crumple into
darkness

and the green bears without claws
falling falling

rolling in the gutters, coming
to rest near the feet of

one... two

who stay close...

wings of a butterfly

touching

even

in the shadow of the flag.

Lynn Henry Shoemaker

The hunt

We have grazed on lands that drift
away like smoke.
Old leaves of grass
half-dark
hang from around our necks.
We are the last wild zebras.
Creatures of puzzling
and joy.
Heads bent down...
now into the hour of the wolves.

Will they open up our tongues?
Free the words and receive
silence on the beach?
Beads and shells
bells on their toes a
journey
beyond their caves.

Or will they find only
our bones? A cage.
Wear a necklace of fangs?
Dance with a mask of ivory?
Yelp and howl. Turn
on the moon.

We must pass. Look for us now.
Specks on the road.
Crows
perched on the sun.
Very soon now.
or never.

Lynn Henry Shoemaker

The tell-tale heart

Put your head down. Close to the ground..
Let the green blades destroy one
whole side of your face.
Tear off the soft white lobe
as a prize
and force their ways into
the inner ear.

Don't run away
uttering a confession
turning your bones to snow and bandages.
Listen...this is no ordinary war.
You can lie a long time like this.
You could hear the whole world
inhaling and exhaling all that is green.
You could feel your own heart,
full, clouded...
the sprinkling down of red flowers...

and you could see them blending, the new
pictures beginning to form, as the sun tells tales
you've never heard before.

A man and a woman

(for Chris/for Pat and John)

Not very many are afraid of the dark.
Most people inhale it.
Their throats sense funny noises.
The man-in-the-moon has fallen flat on his face,
muttering something about intruders
a warning...a curse
before sinking nnto oblivion.
The woman with the harp has gone
underground, out of sight,
into some anti-world
where only Vosnesensky can find her.

Susan St. Louis

I tremble sometimes
trying to pin shadows on
your face

But you will move. Always
towards me.
Your shoulders will always be white.
And you will always hum three notes
before waking.

Susan St. Louis

lacquered

language lesson learned;
of words the black
split scene
severed
sky burns,
saline
in rhyme
diploied
a bird flies, turns...
immigrant of the skies
time-- its meaning lost
lies still or
or through my eyes
this and
climbs beyond
antithesis.
the stairs of signs
we know.
to throw
a thought
before it claims
the tongue
its land,
we have our hands
to share.

S. S. Veri

Loss among the honkies,

a caucasian love-letter about Earl, the dead man down in the water

Coming to terms with it, I find filth
one just end of digestion,
lively,
the feed of food.

Does our filthy white guilt
(in day-dreams
that keep you going and stop me)
fertilize something human?
But when this flower blossoms and blooms, shaking
sweet nectar, weighty pollen, love juice
into the heart of my life
giving me child of yourself,
you call it "unsanitary,"
and in the morning
I feel too dirty to move
and hit the baby when she cries to me.

What I have taken in, I must give out again
or else become.
While you were working, and dreaming up dreams
of me with another man
in horrible embrace
--two black and white figments
one real shadow
of money-grub, hiding your heart
-from dread in the air
so a little green sense can pulse
there where love seems death--
while you were doing the boss's thing
and thinking your mind your own,
I, with your mind
like a seed in my skull
sat with the baby
thirty miles South
beside the American River
feeling like walking down stream a ways
but not doing it.

Down the river, where I was not, yet,
Earl, a tall young black man, apparently drunk,
dressed in white trunks and a white hospital bracelet
/that had his name on it
(just like a newborn. Baby Boy Something, it would have said,
but his said Earl)
dashed into the water shouting he would cross the river.
He fell
(so another white-haired
white mother
told me),

he fell, and she hurried to lead her white daughters away
before he got up
because he was coloured, she said.
But she said he was trembling and shaking so, that when he did get up
she thought he would never go back into that cold water.
Oh God where else could he go?
I saw his dead feet later, bleached white.

I saw his wrist arched so,
just at the edge of the water.
A man's cock always makes me think of a wrist.
/His dead dark wrist looked alive
embraced by that sanitary white band
where some sterile nurse had indelibly writ his name
while we become what we cannot digest,
/the shit of our peers and forbears
putting some men down to make others high
when all could walk
wrist joined to wrist, hands clasped, in love
did we not so shorten ourselves
just to have mothers again.
I saw his wrist.
But that was later.
It might have been still pulsing when I
can you ever understand this?
looked out at the glistening river-mother-water
listened to the white-haired white mother tell me a man had drowned
saw the white beer-bellied bully diving and wheezing and diving again
and saying "it's muddy down there"
saw the white straw-hatted matron arching her wrist
/behind a long terrible pointing finger
and saying as if she were telling him where to hang the
/psychedelic bas-relief on the newly re-decorated living room wall,
"Right there."
Later I learned she was telling him where the last bubbles came up.
She had marked the spot on the bank with a little stick.
No one had thrown him a stick,
a line,
a shirt. . .
They were all telling each other afterward,
"Hell, I can't swim either."

I can swim.
I could have saved him then
but I could not believe that anyone was there
or even that I was.
I was simply
taking it all in.
When he went down, I was sitting on a rock
coming to terms with filth,
telling myself your fantasies
nourish some human need,
telling myself that when you say,
"Society
has nothing to do with it,"

it's just to keep from what you love
a weight of guilt you feel too strong to bear.
And even so
a brother might, like Earl,
decide to swim a channel he could not cross
rather than cross his masters.
You've been drunk, alone, among strangers
and wanted to show off.
Can I say I'm glad it wasn't your wrist I saw?
Perhaps it was.
His dead one seemed as frail and live to sight
as yours does, live, to touch,
and I can't forget you never take off your watch.
Later that night
watching the full moon
44
I felt that shiver the children call
"someone walking on your grave."
Are we not all one?
I could have got up, when I thought I would, but didn't.
I could have walked down the river
and seen him there.
I could have pulled him out by his kinky hair
or thrown him the end of my shirt.
It was that close.
They found him later right where she fingered him.

I watched them dive.
The cops came.
The baby poked at a fish-head, feeling its eye.
A man in a shiny aluminum dinghy with a bright-red outboard motor
zig-zagged over Earl's body, back and forth,
pulling, on a stout line,
a bright quadruple hook.
('He hooked him four times, but he couldn't get him up,"
Straw Hat said later)
while his companion posed for a Mary Cassatt,
then gave it up, took off her portrait hat,
and chain-smoked.
One of the divers went down by the boat,
waded ashore with one arm under water,
stopped calf-deep and waved his other arm
to attract a policeman
and pointed
down
straight down
down to the very center of this mother-fucking world of ours,
down to the grave,
down to Earl
whom he had by the hair under water.
The policeman finally caught on
and sauntered to the brink
where together they pulled him half up on to the sand
and covered him with a very sanitary plastic sheet.

The other policeman
a minute later
said, "Hey, we should still try revival."
He said,
"Hey, we should still try revival."
Not loud
but the answer I only saw:
no one stirred.

We saw his white-bleached toes
sticking out of the lapping water,
and his arm out from under the sheet;
that white-encircled wrist.

Fit that to your dreams of white me and a black laughing
/long-petered he, under the sheets:
an impotent, menopausal woman at the edge of the crowd,
holding a child by the hand,
and a man,
dead at half our age,
who had all our troubles and one more.

It happened while you were working
to make us a stake
out here where Miss Ann tells you every morning
how many dead niggers there are in the paper today.
Tomorrow she'll count Earl,
one more,
who had no stake to make.
And you tell me
"Society
has nothing to do with it"
because we have a stake in not pissing the boss's wife off,
and I don't argue
because I have a stake in not pissing you off.

All day long, white faces.
But while Earl waited under the sheet,
a black man in a boat called out to me
"Do they know who he is?"
and I called back, "No,
nobody knows,"
and even that was not true, yet truest.
I didn't even know then that Earl's name was on his bracelet,
but it's certain
even after all the books
that nobody knows his name,
and all the while
just up the river
white children swinging
on a long rope under the bridge
were telling each other
"It's my turn, wait your turn,"
and my darling, we are
all one.
I miss you, I wait for you, I don't care what you dream,

and I don't know whether anybody misses Earl or not.
Filth is what you take in, and use up, and then let go again.
Walking with the baby away from the fish-head
back to the crowd around Earl
I passed a couple in love, his arm around her,
she very pregnant and looking sick.
I smiled in her eyes and she took a deep breath and smiled back
/ into mine.
The baby said,
"I want to know
what the dead man was thinking,"
and asked me how many people
get killed.
The pregnant girl and I
think his thoughts
and answer
"All, or
none."
He was thinking that he wanted to be alive.
I am thinking of filth
and I cannot come to terms with it.

47

Richard Eiden

The shade of ill-drawn curtains hid his mind
utensils smiled useless from their shelf
knife blades gleamed back bare bulb insects,
everyone smiled blood
but only David could open windows
air his houses
drink his mind a salt foam breeze
of eighteen years and promise

That tender stems grow strong and sturdy
with sun and rain and darkness
grow to bloom; I can't tell him now,
tho there were always hard deep miles
between us
even when his frenzy torched a flame's end
and I thought we were dancing together
youth-made love to spend strength;
I've learned since I was his age
painful miles ago, where no words reached me
and such very slow light

Then I came near the edge and cried:
'Come Back' - where cliffside trees struggle up
and no one lowers lines, and hungry eyes
ripping eyes threaten to infect
good intentions, resistance darkened.
But his rooms had indifferent tools, misused
not me whose love is tender-skinned
pressed against the screen, nose must stay
outside
and dance
and hope that he will see

John Harris

To Jeffrey Miller

Killed at Kent State, May 4, 1970

It is not easy to be young
but you won't fail
you can't fail now
you will be nothing
bones and grass
but you will be young
with your blood
spilling after you
forever
and all of us
washing it from our hands
every eternal morning
of your dying.

-- Joseph Hansen