

BPJ

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WINTER 2013/2014

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BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL
Winter 2013/2014, Vol. 64 N°2

| | |
|--|----|
| Chad Walsh Poetry Prize | 5 |
| Michael Bazzett | |
| The Field Beyond the Wall | 6 |
| The Differences | 7 |
| John Canaday | |
| General Leslie Groves Counts to Zero | 8 |
| Herbert Woodward Martin | |
| Beware | 11 |
| James Hoch | |
| Overview Effect | 12 |
| D. E. Steward | |
| Junea | 13 |
| David Moolten | |
| Korczak | 17 |
| Greg Wrenn | |
| <i>from</i> The Labyrinth: An Essay in Seven Movements | 18 |
| Nicelle Davis | |
| Hairstylist Sam Villa—Premiere Orlando Main Stage | 25 |
| Carol Ann Davis | |
| Eva Hesse #1 (Blank as Faces) | 26 |
| Eva Hesse #6 (If you go hungry if you go tired & Kettwig 1964 entries left flush) | 28 |
| Eva Hesse #7 (No Title, 1960/61) (I name it our lady of sorrows and apologize for my absence as violence from present life intrudes & Dietrich Bonhoeffer begins talking to both of us) | 30 |
| Roald Hoffman | |
| With, or Against | 32 |
| Kevin Ducey | |
| Mrs. McCormack's Children | 34 |

CONTENTS

BOOKS IN BRIEF, by Lee Sharkey

Poems in Conversation

| | |
|---|----|
| Hadara Bar-Nadav, <i>The Frame Called Ruin</i> | 43 |
| Hadara Bar-Nadav, <i>Lullaby (with Exit Sign)</i> | 44 |
| David Ferry, <i>Bewilderment</i> | 46 |

COVER

Mary Greene, design

Julia Peck, “Somali Refugees,” photographs, 2006.

Front cover background image: Installation, Bates College Museum of Art, by Astrid Bowlby.

www.juliapeck-photography.com

POET'S FORUM (blog.bpj.org)

The participating poets for this issue are Nicelle Davis (December), Carol Ann Davis (January), and Michael Bazzett (February).

→

An arrow at the bottom of a page indicates the stanza does not break.

BPJ

THE EDITORS OF
THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL
ARE PROUD TO AWARD
THE TWENTY-FIRST ANNUAL
CHAD WALSH POETRY PRIZE
OF \$4,000

TO
OCEAN VUONG
FOR HIS POEM "TELEMACHUS"
IN THE FALL 2013 ISSUE.

HONORING THE POET CHAD WALSH,
COFOUNDER, IN 1950, OF THIS MAGAZINE,
THE PRIZE IS THE GIFT THIS YEAR OF
ALISON WALSH SACKETT AND PAUL SACKETT
AND FORMER WALSH PRIZE WINNERS
MARGARET AHO, ROBERT CHUTE, KARL ELDER,
ALBERT GOLDBARTH, JESSICA GOODFELLOW,
ELIZABETH GRAY, JR., JANET HOLMES,
KURT LELAND, MARY MOLINARY,
GLORI SIMMONS, SUSAN TICHY,
ONNA SOLOMON, AND CHARLES WYATT.

MICHAEL BAZZETT

The Field Beyond the Wall

We walk to the edge of town: there
just beyond the wall we see clouds
of crows and ravens, also buzzards
teetering down to pick apart the flesh
that peeks from every flapping shirttail.

See that belly pale as risen dough?
The dark oaks creak with the dead
weight that hangs from their limbs—
ropes taut with bodies barely turning.

We gather on the wall, idly and in pairs,
looking out across the charred fields
and the smoking timbers of a farmhouse.

By noon, the hum of flies will lull our ears
into dreaming orchards thick with bees,
but now in the chill of morning it is mostly
the scrape and croak of birds just starting in.

Someone has knotted an enemy banner
to the tail of an ass to drag the muddy lanes.
But the ass stands rooted in a ditch,
shredding weeds with a ripping sound.

Up on the wall, a woman works the crowd,
making the rounds with a steaming sack of corn.
People buy a roasted ear for warmth,
holding it snug inside their hands for a long while
before peeling back the damp husk.

MICHAEL BAZZETT

The Differences

Afterward, the most noteworthy change was children born with polyhedral eyes. This gave many pause. As always, authorities claimed it was correlative not causal but the willingness to assume risk was sharply diminished.

With all anomalies there is a desire for elimination. For instance, the landowner who dispatched a rodent using the rim of a metal bucket. Don't let the softly angled voice dissuade you. The speaker himself has killed in this manner.

With children, we know the ancillary symptoms persisted. The smell of certain cheeses caused distress. Also, coarse hair grew on finger-backs to the second knuckle. This became a primary mode of identification: a commonplace

on market days to see women flipping over young hands like pale crabs, for inspection. *There! What did I tell you?* Voices triumphant but wrapped in the grimy foil of fear. Once accommodations were made such public acts grew rare.

Now it is only the uninitiated, the moronic, and ironically the hopelessly young who need schooling in the new decorum. So which of these are you, that you persist with your questions?

JOHN CANADAY

General Leslie Groves Counts to Zero

Stick to your knitting. Nobel physicists
should know that. Not my lot. Even Fermi
began a betting pool, offering odds
our gadget will ignite the atmosphere,
wipe out the world—or just incinerate
New Mexico. A joke, to smooth frayed nerves,
says Oppenheimer. Calculated humor's
smart—in smallish doses; helps your men
defy their fears. But this? Frivolity's
the danger here, not death. Safe in their lab,
they hazard nothing. Headaches. Writer's cramp.
And yet the scuttlebutt these longhairs flog—
that my incompetence once killed a man.
I'd like to see these know-it-alls make hay
with World War I stock blasting caps, fuse cord,
and TNT.

Midwinter in Vermont:

Winooski's foot-thick ice floes throttling
the pontoon bridge my commandant had built
all wrong. My orders: clear the ice. All wrong.
We cut three-minute fuses, hard to light
or know if they were lit. The cold. The wind.
And Littlefield beside me when the block
exploded in his hand. Tore off his arm.
I knew at once he wouldn't live. I woke
next morning in the hospital, too doped
to mourn, his bone shards lodged like shrapnel
in my left forefinger knuckle.

Gossip. Spite.

These coddled scholars strut their ignorance.
The bungling's theirs. My competence is all
that keeps their precious keisters in one piece.
I cleared them Triple A priority
when Ike and Mac both thank their stars for less.
If they knew what explosives really do
they'd shut their traps for good and tight.

Last night

I called the governor—another duck lined up.
Shocked silence crackled back along the wire
when I said, "Martial law may be required."
Then anger when I wouldn't tell him why.

And now the weathermen are dithering
amid the hubbub at base camp. Hubbard
and Holzman, rattled by their failed forecasts,
flip-flop and bicker. Distant thunder bombs
the mountains. Experts second-guess themselves
to death. No guts. No choice but to dismiss
the both of them and make my own predictions.
I've trusted general knowledge all my life.
"The devil catch an idle man, he'll find
him work." My parents kept me busy, warned
against the vice of foreigners, the sloth
of other races. They were right. The whores
in St. Supplice thronged every corner, clutched
my sleeve and fawned. No wonder France succumbed,
attacked by Huns. Venereal and pompous.
Even the Mona Lisa proved as ugly
as I thought she would. I wouldn't bet on God's
forbearance. We have marred his work past bearing.

But Armageddon is our least concern.
This bomb's more likely to go belly-up.
And what would Fermi care? It's all some great
experiment to him. If Trinity's
a bust, it will have proved the world is safe
from atom bombs. He's not the one they'll hold
accountable for all those wasted billions.
All those years. Me, I'll grow old and lean
as Rayburn, Barkley, Bridges pick my bones
in claustrophobic subcommittee rooms.

Six Schrafft's if it's a dud. Indulgent, but
my right hand knows what's what: to Mrs. O
my gut's a favorite tease, yet for this trip
she tucked an extra box of crunchies, creams,
and cordials in my kit, and didn't smirk.
The extra pounds won't nudge scales weighted down
by history. By failure. Fat will be
least of my burdens.

Face down on a tarp
gone slick with drizzle's neither comfortable
nor dignified. But if it's good enough



for Harvard's president. . . . Our feet aim straight
at Zero, like twin compasses. Ten miles.
And if that's not enough, whoever's left
will raise a statue, one day, in our names.

It only takes one soaked electric tie,
one short, and half the world's plutonium
is scattered to the wind—and still no proof
this darn thing works. Each hour we delay
increases risk. Each hour, dozens die,
while Truman, twiddling his thumbs at Potsdam,
waits for word of what we've wrought. I put
my head down, pray, and wait for it.

Now. This.

HERBERT WOODWARD MARTIN

Beware

Beyond the bullfrog
A lunatic living in mud,
Never attempting to seduce
Anything, dissenting or otherwise.
When you approach
Like an atomic cloud
It knows the consequences;
It detects you by using
A submarine periscope,
Which is, invariably,
Looking for psychotic pitfalls
And faults that lurk
In the crevices of human waters.

JAMES HOCH
Overview Effect

Hold the camera like this, one might see
curvature,
bright smudge

a meteor crushed against
the atmosphere, and beneath

the dust slick of a country
where they bow each morning
and pray toward their own dark centers

for something like
a dark center.

Lower now, a woman walking a street
turns her body into a storm of nails,
a debris field

a string of men my brother trained and loved
enter geared up, swearing

this goes on forever

like this space where the planet hangs—
blue fluke, cosmic Tilt-a-Whirl, Wonder

Wheel—

O Wary Eyed,
O Weary Armed, we are floating on the rim
of an aperture
slowly closing.

You, who is
not a thing, but a way of seeing,
and the drone of the nothing blessing
of saying so—

See us.

D. E. STEWARD

Junea

In Europe for a week from Tokyo, two days Paris, two days Naples,
leave from Rome

“How often do you think about it?”

“Every day, I think of it every day, I’m Japanese”

For many years here after Vesuvius exploded in AD 79 everyone must
have thought of it every day

Not as close as Table Mountain to Cape Town but as dominant

Cliff and caldera

Vesuvius closer than Fuji to Fukushima, to Tokyo, to Hiroshima,
Nagasaki, to Nanjing, to Auschwitz, to Bergen-Belsen, to Verdun, to
Wounded Knee, My Lai, Cambodia, to Kigali and the Virungas

Pangas slashing, Little Boy | Fat Man on their way down

Zyklon B and Kalashnikovs

“Life is indefinite”—2012 graffiti near the Naples airport repeated near
the Duomo

Immensely comfortable on the Duomo’s wide marble steps as if sprawled
there in the early 1600s listening to the deep richness of a dulciana
coming from the nave

Stability of space

Regretfully ignorant and so only haphazardly imagining, inferring,
what has gone on in this place

Temples before the Christian era back to the beginning of Naples and
before that the Duomo’s site was probably a Neolithic ceremonial site

The past wrapped with the present inexorably

In the terms of the ancients

Since what to them had passed was not in the past

D. E. STEWARD

They lived with multiple pasts as real to them as their present

The Lucanians, Ionians, and other Greeks, in what was to be Rome's and our Campania

Cumae, one of the many Ionian city-states, founded Neapolis around AD 600, the time of Sappho and Alkman

The images always there, a laughing 2012 woman's luxurious dark auburn hair open to her hips in the sun, its hint of Grecian curls, the sea nearby within its constant horizon

Via del Duomo in Naples stretching straight through the city down from the hills and Via Foria to the sea

Alkman's *Fish in the salt deep of the violet sea, / And long-winged birds*

Via dei Tribunali around the corner, the spine of Roman Neapolis

The three *decumani* of Roman Neapolis still the heart of the *Centro Storico*

Streets surveyor-straight like all Roman *viae*

Much of Via dei Tribunali still paved with the large, polygonal blocks of black basalt

The Romans called them *saxum quadratum*, the *summa crusta* crowned for drainage

There as Romans laid them and slick when wet

Basalt in Campania, stone of the region everywhere across the empire, and imagine carts, wagons, and chariots having bumpy transit

But their road maintenance was sound, the concrete filler gone now between the flush blocks that made Roman *viae* smooth

On Via dei Tribunali in the Baroque chapel of an orphanage, a flaring, dramatically topsy-turvy Caravaggio, his *Le sette opere di Misericordia* from 1607, three meters high

D. E. STEWARD

The angel's threatening gray wings the quintessence of severe Baroque Christianity

The seven acts of mercy, charity, and grace graphically instructive beyond doubt

It must have been a vicious, dagger-wielding world that Caravaggio implies

Guttering candles, doors kicked in, clerical dictates, arbitrary fate

The vividly baroque Naples of that huge painting endures

"SPOILT" graffiti in spring 2012 on Via del Duomo and other places around the city in that peculiarly British form

Transitory anarchism, right there next to the "SPOILT," the old anarchist encircled "A"

The anarchic always around in Italy, Spartacus up to Sacco-Vanzetti through to the Brigatti-Rossi and this century's garbage strikes, Nicola Sacco came to Massachusetts from behind Foggia in Naples' Apulian hinterland

As Boston once was to New York, Naples has been to Rome

Giambattista Vico, 1668–1744, perhaps the first modern historian, was a Napolitano

La scienza nuova

Vico's history of human societies and human institutions, not that of royalty and clerics

The common, inevitable rituals of marriage, burial, abstract belief

Specific experience not transcendent and repeating only in context

Like objects from the deep past, a hand ax, a Clovis point, a Jomon shard

In the regularity of the matter-of-fact, someone last handled it, chipped at or chucked it away, while sitting on a boulder or a log

D. E. STEWARD

Brushing away flies, favoring a sore toe, enjoying watching a fast-moving sky, they put it down and walked away

One object of an infinite number of objects handled, abandoned, and left to time

For the chipper, potter, or passerby in that instant in the past, handling it was a single concern or task in a normal day

And now and then such things formed by humans turn up to allow definitive archaeological insights into the deep history of that place, that particular past

As most things we handle are abandoned, pulped, burned, recycled, buried in landfills, like random objects that turned up in the ash rubble of Tower Two, down the line random objects of ours will turn up

A broken mug discarded, the farmer's fractured clevis or broken tractor part, a dead cell phone, a beer can, thrown out like the Paleolithic chipper, the North American flintman and the ancient Japanese potter discarded what they had in hand

And so will Vico's continuities be enhanced

It does not end

Great Naples goes on

Its bay with Vesuvius behind is a theater site of humankind

Whatever Fukushimas and ends of empires are ahead

DAVID MOOLTEN

Korczak

Here he comes, guiding his orphans through the streets,
No, keeping them in the dark, leading them on
With their picnic satchels and stories
Of spruces and reaching the sun on foot,
The brilliant pedant, the hater of shouting,
Of slapping, of red pen, here failing his castoffs
By joining them, doctor of that madness,
All of Warsaw rapt with his lesson
Of how to walk, that last field trip, the parade
To the station. The soldiers would let him
Jump the fence like a truant. But he repeats
Their careless mistake of caring, donning
His boots in August and holding hands even
As he tutors them, so patient, like teaching
The teachers arithmetic, three miles times one child
Times two hundred and all of them know
How to borrow from zero, the balance kept,
The left foot raised and the right planted, then
Again the reverse, and from there Treblinka,
The same as learning the polka, the life cycle
Of the mayfly, how to breathe or hold their breath.

GREG WRENN

from The Labyrinth: An Essay in Seven Movements

1

Under gnarled cedars the pencil company
spared a century ago, along my barrier island's

northern marsh, an anole—

its pinkish throat-fan scarred and
about furred—chewed a wasp in its toothlessness,

citronella warned the skeeters not to land,

oyster shells were heaped as trash.
And you, Minotaur, reclined there on my seventies couch.
Flatly I said the word “father,” asked

you to free-associate:

breeding me sasquatch

if u can't be a pious boy I won't see u

hack away cocoon

he-man deathwatch

he's leaving me bs!

raw poke true

*cause it felt goooooood adam4 the violets of five
seasons reappear—*

“Now stop. Tell me—”

gobbledygook

“—STOP IT!—a dream in which your poppa flies.”
Blue seeds were falling on us from the trees.
You, of all beings, were about to cry.

*my poppa was a stupid tiny horse in too tiny of a cage
he sat on a lettuce bed like a friggin sphinx where his
mane shoulda been were AIDS ribbons shrimp tails*

*“put ur hand through the bars” he said “push the water
bowl closer to my mouf” it psyched me out my arms
wouldn’t move I couldn’t talk or gulp “it’ll all be ok” he
said all girly “fire up the stove and grease a pan I’ll lay
three eggies and roll em toward—”*

His hands suddenly reddened and cracked

like my mother’s. Dad’s mustache crept across his face.
To the inkblot I held up, he said *those bones*

*r ur hips when u were a baby and he traced
them with his uh his moist—*

“That’s quite enough,” I said and hastily
closed my notebook. “Our session is over.”

but u wanna be my matador? he asked, sitting up.

“I wouldn’t hurt a patient, ever;

once you’re healed, be my friend.” He bit his lip
with his front molars—brown, rotting—and growled,

un-possible! In his rage he would’ve gnawed at his

face if he could have, at the mussel shells
stuck to his shaggy chest, circling his tattoos:

a sparrow, a finned H-bomb, and a bluebell

all orbiting a purple star within a horseshoe.

“Please?”—though a man,
I spoke in a boy’s voice, not a shrink’s.
Carpenter bees bored holes

into fallen cedar branches.
The marsh grass rustled.

*kill me, kill me! before
I cut u good*

Then in a voice I knew to be
a royal eunuch's,
I said, "I don't want to die."

so kill me now

I cleared my throat
of self: "All I have is my heart—and bare

hands too small for my body."

lame!

"Then how?"

u sing me a dream u can't shake

"I remember huge thumbtacks pinning me
high up on a cork wall. Below, Dad wore a
butterflied cow carcass with puffy-paint graffiti

on it. His girl-ape with a long giraffe neck
gripped an orange biohazard box. 'Hold still,'
Dad called to me as the baboon scampered up

with a syringe of his infected blood. My left
forearm, when pricked, twitched like horse
skin—there was screaming, whimpering, then

laughing non-stop, party streamers, ice-cream
cake from Baskin-Robbins. 'I want a better
relationship with you,' he called up to me.

'Now you have the key to the Kingdom.'"

ur tacked-up jesus dream didn't murder me

*but the monkey was cool so yeah move
a cape toward my face and*

force me to u stab me between my shoulders

“Uh, you don’t really have a body.”

*one day real soon I’ll pop up before u
u’ll think I’m a buddy*

3

Another vision
or something: my father limping after me
in a hedge maze.

He holds a double-headed ax.

“Boy!

Boy! I’m coming!” he yells, distant, unseen.

(Once I scattered his
expense reports
across the floor.)

He calls out to the night,
which is also a boy, “I’m behind you.”

I step backwards
into my deep tracks in the snow
and the camera pans with me;
leap to the side, the script says, brush away
your traces;
I disobey,

falling back to make a snow angel
till I’m winging
against gravel,
which tears
my puffy jacket, and he’s found me—

“Daddy,” I say,
“I love you more than—”

4

Then I woke thirdway through my life
standing on that island again

north of Jacksonville's sprawl;

and I began to walk, pretty much alone. Others—
my mother, all the men I've ever kissed—

were ahead, groaning,
on a beach of dead horseshoe crabs,

so many we couldn't see sand.
We didn't know where to go.

No choice but to step on the carapaces.

6

Demon, daemon, unruly
taskmaster, why so quiet tonight? A hero never stabbed you in the throat.

Never cut off your starry,

horned head and dashed to the escape skiff to raise its black, tattered
sail. Was that you in the monastery's grazing field far away

from here, when I peeled off my blue-tinted contacts? Then the boy and
the calf he rode

blurred into a single beast; I didn't notice his slingshot

till a pebble nearly put out my eye. Like John Wayne and his stud,
they'd zoomed, between the two basalt shrines, to rush at me. When he
dismounted

and leaned against the temple wall, no difference, none at all,

among him, me, and stone. I put on my smudged glasses, the unity fell
away—I crossed my eyes, and it almost returned. Nearby,

novice monks in their maroon underwear passed a rattan ball

back and forth with their heads and feet, so carefully, as if it were the world. In that sacred—really?—field were you

with us, bull-man? And in the other

fields, where a bullet

was too costly so they made do with the handle of a shovel? You rage

and thrash within,
seven billion of us at your bidding.

Snorting, trying to bite your own ears, you can't be ridden like a centaur,
the one I imagine galloping across

a burning dooryard of lavender, lilac, though you'll ride us off into—

*shut ur trap
tall pansy
u no Athenian—*

Shut yours, cow-troll! You aren't my soul, my mo—

*Duke no Dante
with a cocky
ghost guide*

*lie back chug
the beefy pho
from ur douchebag*

*canteen floss
ur pearly yellows
rest in my bed-*

*lam rock out
with my talkin
worm we*

*likey anguish
risk grub slowly
now slowly—*

Enough of your “slowly, slowly.” You’re just barely bipedal.

*ur nothing
without me
love’s dirt*

*tight blindfold
cage—*

I can love purely—

*caw for me
like a crow
baked alive—*

even if it’s only the passion vines and Grandpa Ott’s morning glories on the fence, or the plum tree, its prunes in the brown grass—

*ur shit
faggot
ur dead*

7

Body of lust,
body of fear,

what you imprison’s
wilder, more precious

and ridiculous
than I can say.

Fall away,
fall away.

CAROL ANN DAVIS
Eva Hesse #1 (Blank as Faces)

Where smoke comes out of chimneys where girls walk holding
such places still exist but not like that not like they did in Hamburg
where innocent smoke comes out of chimneys innocent and it's
but coats are routinely mended one's mother mends them
the story goes even in Washington Heights she made gloves
and Eva her charcoal *from an early age* as if by drawing to *return remake*
what remains out of reach *it was a sad farewell*
in Altona where the girls walk sans *opal* note the elevated train
the neighborhood passes quickly the way the world changes
Evchen fast by your window the trees thicken fast by your sister's side
the both of you on it without parents one house its chimney going
or are those windows out— *they're gone from here*
their fathers' hands
along the Isestrasse
unseasonably cool
was good with her hands
he with his camera
as a child makes real
at the railway station
note well-to-do
though not yet three
how strange a train
the next is it lived in
the landscape shifting

yet to be crossed waters reunions wended through with word of drowned & saved
the quick learning of relative terms Mother mending stockings until— and these are the rough
the difficult patches to onlookers the stuff of preamble but that's
the *after* telling what has to do with *before* a layering of paint polymer resin ropes
a smattering of the beautiful over what stays cloaked stays mysterious
it's all right if no god explains or a limited understanding elides knowledge spatial
sensory inherent invisible as a child inside a train slides away
vulgarity and violence a threat of wings left center right children know it
blank as faces children warn they point or cower and are right to do so

CAROL ANN DAVIS

Eva Hesse #7 (No Title, 1960/61) (I name it our lady of sorrows and apologize for my absence as violence from present life intrudes & Dietrich Bonhoeffer begins talking to both of us)

| | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| That which drifts the arm leftward pulled by some force by some | urgent thing |
| scarring marking apparatus of departure and remembrance | the robes of our lady |
| a hood later mask later to learn the hands bring water bring bread | and <i>teeth of time</i> I'm |
| reading about Dietrich in prison as you and Helen make your way | through messy child- |
| scape enter into the record the death of children by violence & into that | grim ongoing project |
| on paper I've not because of recent events here involving that with | which you're familiar |
| can't mask-wise put mine on I've not been able for whatever reason | to approach our lady |
| of ink-pencil sorrows though I know a mask is bought from scars and | haven't I have I as you |
| been delivered Eva your figure says no says <i>teeth of time gnawing of time</i> | <i>healing time</i> <i>scarring</i> |
| I've been moving in and out of the radius of doubt its built rooms | bright messy and full |
| with hands my hands to touch the hair of my children absentmindedly | the something that |
| carries them the something that begins and tries to finish akin to grace | my father said |

Dietrich in prison at Eastertide *yes* *I carried you* with hands to table
I bring bread and water I bring ancients who whisper tell me someone told you
so I've come robe-dark and pencil-thin to learn the trick of talking to children about death
it's the house doubt built what could I bring all the way through any childhood
to restore its first-built bricks harbor without doubt full-sail the sleep of dreams
twin of the wrestling you do with your pencil I with mine and fever-blent brought
from there to a new place *did you carry me here* *yes* *I carried you* *you were sleeping* the kind
of grace a father offers a mother more rarely or not at all and Dietrich before the rope
offers to others *because I am already dead* simply *draw a line* what to bring with hands
to such a table pencil-dark apparatus of cathedral that visits you finds you rare

ROALD HOFFMAN
With, or Against

From a worka-
day rusty bar

the saw cuts
a cube of steel.

Its face shines
bright, as love.

Welded in arc
and sparks

to a rod,
in and out

of a forge
spilling flame,

a steel cube
is swung to

anvil; it's
yellow-red,

like rosehips
in our valley.

A woman,
bracing a

chisel, a man
swinging sledge-

hammer. Twenty
kinds of nerves

go to the hand.
Like the line cut

in the block, now
cooling, soon

ROALD HOFFMAN

to make patterns
in another, you

marked me. Do
we follow the

way of steel,
its impure

alloy strength?
A master smith

said: comply, but
contend—make

hard soft, hard
again, beat blade

and girder into
the other, be it

rabbit's ear or
morel. Love, oh

love for steel too,
is built sweet, out

of strict desire,
for the you, that

is not you. You.

KEVIN DUCEY
Mrs. McCormack's Children

—after Thorstein Veblen

Again pointing
to the fact
of our degenerate
character, we printers
changing jobs
and masters
from city to city—
rootless ones.

*He would pour out some wine for me and some for himself—
wine which tasted of the sun and of the soil upon which this
city was built. At other times we would stretch ourselves out
on the floor of the garret, and sweet sleep would enfold me.
Then I would wake and drink in the light of the sun.*

Simone Weil wakes again in the attic
with Christ
by her side, drinking in
the light of the sun,
thinking of her ex, Richard II,
who told her
she was born a serf
and a serf she would remain
and in this romantic comedy
of one doomed king or another
Simone thrilled to hear this.

Let us trace the evolution,
Jesus, back through Bunyan
to the Interregnum pamphlets
of Levellers and Diggers
ultimately to
Puritan sermons
and Marprelate:

Robert Waldegrave dares not shew his face for the bloodthirsty desire you have for his life, only for printing of books which touch the bishop's mitres. You know that Waldegrave's printing press and letters were taken away. His press, being timber, was sawn and hewed in pieces, the ironwork battered and made unserviceable, his letters melted, with cases and other tools defaced (by John Woolfe, Beadle of the Stationers, and most tormenting executioner of Waldegrave's goods), and he himself utterly deprived for ever printing again, having a wife and five small children. Will this monstrous cruelty never be revenged, think you? When Waldegrave's goods was to be spoiled and defaced there were some printers that rather than all the goods should be spoiled offered money for it, towards the relief of the man's wife and children, but this could not be obtained.



First the plague
and after the workmen

began to move from place
to place ready to take

advantage of any
variation in the

demand for labor
in the demand

Of all the linotype workers—
two-finger typists all—

none remain. The bare
bulb hangs above the

machine switched off and
our position gone dark.

Listen, Jesus, Tarquinius Superbus,
that old playboy, cribbed the Sybelline
books and buried the rest
for Jos. Smith. Marprelate

would have bought all nine books
from the oracle and put them out

in foolscap for Rump Parliaments.

Where we once walked along the river
a night sky
moving past.

Gerrard Winstanley (Digger) and Marprelate
your digging does maintain, and persons all defame
Stand up now, stand up now.

Your houses they pull down, stand up now.
Stand up.



And then afterward:

I have gone out into a future
that is mine without you.

To make your return easier I've had
the mountains relocated to the north.

It's not that I'm afraid of time,
it is, after all, the country

of my birth, now good
Your Grace, it is now
I know it as a relentless
place of loss.

There was some excitement here
the other day; you may want to hear
of it when you return.

My love,
I remember your hair as you lay
your head upon my chest
dunsticall and absurd.

This country seems so much
smaller now our position gone dark and

the kindness you showed me then
left a burr under my tongue

The November light
gray across the attic ceiling

when you poured out some wine for

the architectural details
you liked so much and which I intend
to proclaim in next decree

All lovers lie
in impossibility
of avoiding
or prettifying in

November together
when we'd forgotten all day to rise

the absolute
practical expression of

Witness, My Grace, the greater prevalence of dissipation
among printers than among the average

workmen—attributable
to the greater ease in movement

and the more transient character
of acquaintance and human contact
in this trade.

Skill acquired in any printing house
or any city

is easily turned to account
in almost any other house or city; that is to say

the inertia due to special training
is slight. Also, this occupation
requires
more than the average of intelligence
and general information, and the men

employed in it are therefore ordinarily
more ready than many others
to take advantage
of any slight variation in the demand
for labor from one place to another.

The inertia due to the home feeling
is consequently slight.



The Young Irelanders took their inspiration
from the revolution in France (1848)
and chased a group of policemen into the
Widow McCormack's farmhouse.

Wm. O'Brien,
the leader, went up to the window to negotiate
and the policemen shot him.

A general
fusillade ensuing, the widow demanding
of the wounded O'Brien:
"What will happen to my five children—



hostages of the policemen?"

“Absolutely
nothing, madam, the rebels being terrible
shots, though this being the second year of
famine, shooting them might be for the best.”

And now good Your Grace,
the serfs are massing at Foxconn
and the King rides out to them:
“Serf you were born. . . .”

[This poem written on Foxconn
tablet and read thereon my lord this year. . . .]

The peasants demand
the right to move to take advantage
following instanter on the slight changes
in labor market

and Wat
Tyler nudges George Herbert
who is palmed in a pamphlet to
Simone Weil in the ruined
cathedral of European humanism.



Marx writes to the executive:
He's excited
(in one of his moods)

a little nervous, yes,
but the uprising in Paris
is going well
and word has it

Johnny Marr will soon appear
with the Young
Irelanders to play

those chiming guitar bits. Karl,
disappointed with the
singing of the Mountain:

“the chest notes were missing,”
as the Occupy protesters
made their way along
the Boulevard calling for change and
the party of Order met them
with chasseurs and dragoons
in an altogether unparliamentary way,
driving the kerls before them.
The streets—
every street vacant and cleared.
News agents assaulted and (stand up now)
the students kettled
for the length of the day. Shops
shuttered, and the wind blown
through me.
But Karl,
for his part, has found a young Frenchwoman
living in exile in London and all
she will talk about
is walking. The labor of taking
one step forward
and he wants to get
her on the printer’s committee
just one time.

*By walking Men’s reversed Feet
I chanc’d another World to meet;*

*Another face presents below,
Where People’s feet against Ours go.*

And there they caught Marprelate's printer
in transit at the airport and had him
eviscerated, with the king's foot upon
rebellion's neck and even so poor
a son of Wat Tyler as Martin Marprelate
demanding:

When Adam delv'd and Eve span—

The sunrise over the Paris roofline
and the foot on the neck in 1848,
and again in 1870:

who was then the gentleman?

■

He would pour out some
wine for me and some
for himself.

Then I would awake
and drink in the light

of the neon sign—no Chinese
walls to slow

the penetration of the market
to stop our intercourse.

■

Material Conditions drunk-texting Marx:
lascivious notions of
use value—completely nude

*and the Legion of High Finance on June 13 raided
the print shops of Boulé and Roux, demolished the presses,
arrested editors, compositors, printers, shipping clerks,
and errand boys, the hacker who downloaded the emails
was traced and given the longest sentence of the lot—
handed down by the good grace of Milord's Star Chamber.*

When we find ourselves
like Mrs. McCormack's five
young boys—survivors

in an emigrant prairie—
land of absence with the speculators'
mansions rising up, dark

watchtowers around us—
another place where I am you
cannot be. Not a place

but a variation in demand
carved up by speculators; mostly
Yankee transplants from the East—
toilets cleaned and kitchens staffed
by the Irish and German.

And in all love I'm thinking:
my people.

BOOKS IN BRIEF: Poems in Conversation

Lee Sharkey

Hadara Bar-Nadav, *The Frame Called Ruin* (Kalamazoo: New Issues Poetry and Prose, 2012, 79 pp, \$15 paper)

Hadara Bar-Nadav, *Lullaby (with Exit Sign)* (Ardmore, PA: Saturnalia Books, 2013, 88 pp, \$15 paper, \$7.19 Kindle edition)

David Ferry, *Bewilderment: New Poems and Translations* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2012, 128 pp, \$18 paper, \$9.90 Kindle edition)

Paul Celan, concluding his acceptance speech upon receiving the literature prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen, described poetry as essentially dialogue . . . a message in a bottle, sent out in the—not always greatly hopeful—belief that somewhere and sometime it could wash up on land, on heartland perhaps. Poems in this sense too are underway: they are making toward something. . . . standing open, occupiable, perhaps toward an addressable Thou, toward an addressable reality.

Those members of the German literary establishment in attendance who had not experienced anything comparable to Celan's violent uprooting from family, culture, and language in the Holocaust could hardly have comprehended the intensity of yearning contained in that bottle bobbing on the open sea. At stake for Celan in his vision of poetry as conversation was the possibility of survival only a language reconstructed from its basic elements might offer. Emily Dickinson may have felt a parallel urgency when she wrote of poetry "saying itself in new inflection."

Dialogic poetry takes many forms. As Eliot famously instructed, the history of literature is in itself a conversation in which "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone." In what follows, I'd like to draw attention to three recently published books that have moved me and emboldened me as a poet, in which poetry is explicitly in conversation with works of art as well as literary and other artists. All are extended elegies that move toward something "standing open, occupiable," spanning time and cultures in a spirit of reciprocity.



A poem makes a meeting place. In Hadara Bar-Nadav's *The Frame Called Ruin*, the poet converses with visual artists, including architects, speaking from inside their work. Her ekphrastics are less description than channeling, an attending so complete that words, like the artist's hand, begin to gesture on the page.

That gesture is inflected by Jewish grief, as is the work of the majority of artists she engages with. "I own my voids, deepest black," asserts the

speaker in “Night, White, and Gold (for Louise Nevelson),” a five-part sequence, each of whose sections responds to a different monumental Nevelson construction. The sequence concerns itself with transforming emptiness to habitable space through the artistic work itself: “white landscape where we forsake our names, undone by the love of making.” The materials are scraps, leavings; the constructions, giant letterpress trays turned on end and filled with keepsakes. They call to mind her father’s lumberyard in Rockland, Maine, but also the bombed-out cities of wartime Europe:

A wall full of stories. A wall like a letterpress, like letters being set.
Leading like leather and setting. Kerning like kernel and keening. A
wall to lean on, simple as hope. *Either you would stay there or cut
your throat.* Such mercy inside shadow and form. Each box, a loving
alphabet of its own. Each wall, an assembly of letters left behind. . . .
a meal in pieces but a meal nevertheless.

The curious reader is invited to that meal as well, thanks to the World Wide Web. Type the titles of the Nevelson pieces into the query box and three of the four appear in seconds.

Likewise with the red paintings that inspired a poem we were delighted to publish in the Winter 2005/2006 issue of the *BPJ*. “Four Reds (for Rothko)” presents the artist late in his life, when a heart ailment precipitated his shift of medium from canvas to paper. Rothko saw his abstract explorations of color and form as gestural expressions of “tragedy, ecstasy and doom”; Bar-Nadav’s poem is a turbulence of emotion and color that moves through him as he’s painting. Reds are “cinnabar,” “vermilion,” fire, and blood, his own heart the agent of creation and destruction,

foaming at the wolf’s mouth. Sticky liver. Lover. Sliver. To eat a
woman’s mouth, tie her lace and cotton bonnet underchin. My chin.
Trick or treat. Or meat. My little inamorata, my lithe little pumping
red. . . . Who eats, lives.

When the reader returns to the paintings after spending time with the poem, passions throb in the pigments. “Reds” and the other works of visual art that inspired the poems in *The Frame Called Ruin* are, like Celan’s vision of poetry, making toward something embraced by Bar-Nadav’s vision of their making.

■
Though the short prose poems that constitute the bulk of *Lullaby (with Exit Sign)* are not explicit responses to the Emily Dickinson poems that seeded them, this second recently published book by Bar-Nadav shares,

like the poet/visual artist conversations in *The Frame Called Ruin*, a quality of devotion, of being lifted out of silence through conversation:

I stopped writing for several months after my father's death. I then happened to start reading Dickinson's poetry and basically gave myself an exercise to try to jumpstart my writing. I would use one of her titles to start a poem. And when I got stuck a few lines later or lost faith in writing at all, I would insert another quote from her poetry. . . . Dickinson's lines served as both scaffolding and support—very kind and steady and necessary support.

The poet/supplicant prays for and to her father, whose corporeal self is "slipping into the deafening dirt," but who has assumed aspects of Dickinson's "Father," a recurring figure in the quoted passages.

Bar-Nadav is a skeptic; the poems, like many of Dickinson's, constitute the desire to believe. One memorable poem implores an unnamed god to curse the worms feasting on the father's body: "Let the salt know each of their names. Let their rigorous muscles rigorously unthread. Let each of their coils wring each of their necks. . . . Let their kingdom stop churning" (*Let Us Chant It Softly*).

The lullaby of the title arises, as do so many of Dickinson's poems, "broke of syntax." Dickinson's "Infection in the sentence breeds" provokes a poem that opens with the fragmented "Taste of tin and hiccup of blood." The spirit of Gertrude Stein then seems to enter, repeating, rhyming, and punning:

The mouth flaps open, floods—. A Rorschach of roses surprisingly red: reddest, full of throat. In this terrible sea wish for a boat. Slipperiness sets into stain, nibbles the sheets. . . . *A Word dropped*, choked. With commas come a promise, with dashes come piece—misshapen grammar writ in bone.

In an underworld of dreams where roots "tunnel and form . . . new houses," only a grammar "writ in bone" will do for conversation with the dead. When the poet asks, "Where is my home?" the dead one points to his mouth. The conversation is reciprocal, the dead and the living speaking through each other.

The penultimate poem in *Lullaby* is an erasure of Dickinson's three "Master Letters," correspondence addressed to a "Master" whose identity has never been established—mentor? lover? God? Unlike Janet Holmes's brilliant erasure of Dickinson's poems in *The MS of M Y Kin*, which reveals Dickinson's acute political prescience, "Master (Pieces)" is a prayer to the father/Father/Master from one small being in a world struck silent by violence and loss of faith:

If you saw a bullet
hit a
word—
would you believe
in
God

I didn't
I don't

And yet, in the devotion lies the possibility of renewal, that

I might
breathe where you breathed
and find
night
sorrow
frost
love

Blessed art *Thou*, we pray.



If Celan's, and Bar-Nadav's, poems set off from fracture and silencing, David Ferry's emerge from his sense of literary bequest. He describes his 2012 National Book Award-winning volume *Bewilderment* as "essentially about reading. . . . We read to find a place to dwell on, and even in, for a time." For a poem to be "underway [t]oward something standing open," the poet must be a reader and a listener:

It's as when following the others' lines,
Which are the tracks of somebody gone before,
Leaving me mischievous clues, telling me who

They were and who it was they weren't,
And who it is I am because of them,
Or, just for the moment, reading them, I am.

("Ancestral Lines")

Bewilderment comprises Ferry's own poems interleaved with his limp translations of Virgil, Horace, Catullus, the Anglo-Saxon Bible, and several twentieth-century poets as well. He makes little distinction between translation and "original work," observing in a recent interview

that “if every translation must become a poem, every poem has a central source it must be rendering.” Two earlier volumes, *Dwelling Places: Poems and Translations* and his collected poems, *Of No Country I Know*, are similarly structured.

Ferry’s voice, as poet and translator, is unadorned, unassuming, often bemused, disarming. He has shed certainty and is left with questions:

Where was I looking in the past?
It isn’t where I’ve looked, that’s no surprise.
I don’t know what or where it is or was.
But maybe it isn’t so much the where but the why.
Or maybe I haven’t found it because beware.

(“One Two Three Four Five”)

An alertness to death suffuses the poetry: the death of his wife and collaborator, Anne, and other family members (“How was it that I knew you?”); of leaves in October (“Now and again it happened that one of them touched / One or another leaf as yet not falling”); of the Trojan watchmen in his translation of a passage from the *Aeneid* (“[The Greeks] enter the city, / That slumbers submerged in wine and sleep; they surprise, / And quietly kill”). His rendering of “The Offering of Isaac” from the Anglo-Saxon *Genesis A* gave me an understanding of the Akedah myth I had not gleaned from the King James version or the translation of the Masoretic text I was raised with, conveying through repetition and rhythmic emphasis how costly it was for Abraham to obey God’s command:

Hand and foot he bound
His own, his only son,
Young half-grown Isaac,
And lifted his own child up
And laid him on the pyre

These five short lines contain all the reluctance and tenderness inherent in the sacrificial gesture. They extend compassion even to Abraham, whose heart “The Creator of Mankind / . . . so approved . . . / [he] gave him back his bairn.”

The sixth section of *Bewilderment* is an unfolding conversation among texts and genres, between dreaming and waking life, the living and dead, the contemporary and the ancient—a millennia-long regression of stories told, of memories and imaginings. It’s a brilliant example of how poems in conversation with other artists honor their subjects by passing on the gift, introducing their work to readers or shedding

new light on it. Five of the seven poems in the set begin with poems by Arthur Gold, a deceased friend, followed by Ferry's appreciative exegesis. The implication is that creative and critical faculties, too, might be in conversation. The dominant theme is "the tangle of family feeling, the cruelty // Inadvertent and loving, which . . . / Seems to be part of the natural scheme of things."

At the heart of the sequence is Ferry's translation from Book VI of the *Aeneid*. Aeneas, a war vet filled with pity for the dead, demands of Anchises in the Underworld, "O father, is it / Thinkable that any spirits want to go back / From this to the upper world and once again / Into the prisons of bodies?" In the poem that follows, "Reading Arthur Gold's Prose Poem 'Allegory,'" Ferry imagines his own children and grandchildren, returned from the Underworld,

bringing their DNA,
 Unknowingly in their little satchel bodies
 Like Aeneas bringing with him, in a satchel,
 Troy, and his household gods, and watching him,
 Wherever he was going, the terrible great
 Gods who might turn against him any time soon.

The last poem in the section, "Looking, Where Is the Mailbox?," is a short "original poem" in which Ferry looks to communicate with the dead "if only in poems / On scraps of yellowing letters // . . . all of us write home, / Every day of our lives." These letters bring me back to Celan's correspondence with Nellie Sachs, though it, unlike Ferry's work, emerged from an Eastern European Jewish history that had "pass[ed] through the thousand darknesses of deathbringing speech." Isolated and beleaguered by illness, the exiled poets continued to send out their messages in bottles, hoping to sustain each other. Reading *Bewilderment* wraps me in a like intimacy. In Ferry's poems, however, it's as if poet and reader had always lived in the heartland and had but to listen to hear each other. "Tell me your name," he writes. "How was it that I knew you?" Celan's final poem might offer an answer. Its refrain, in entirety: "You read."