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To A Young Poet

Fortunately you
haven't a single
well or ill gained
shred of repu-
tation, and so

however you try,
your work will win
less than the hushed
assessing all work
is entitled to,

and what you say
must therefore ring
with a tone so bell-
clear even the dimmest
ear can know

it's good. Later,
young man, when worse
luck crowns your brow,
you can stop to loll
and bask -- not now.

--John Moffitt

Seven Couplets With Crotchets: Why Models Grow Ugly

To begin with a face is a layer of skin
Covering nothing at all within.

(Tongue and teeth don't count, they only kiss nourishment on its way through, and bones are just an ungraceful geometric diagram.)

Held out by cheekbones, stretched by nose,
Unstirred by action, limp in repose.

(What can happen in a cradle? A splintery slat? A steaming drop of milk? What?)

Some faces are born with visual cues
That will a conditioned beholder bemuse.

(Is the eye almond-shaped with pupil large and dark? Is the forehead round, the nose pugged? Will the mouth hold two spoons at once? Are the teeth Flat Omnivore, shiny to Love's taste as a Sweet? And the neck long-sloped beneath hair swaying in slow slow motion?)

That promise such lang'rous patrician delights
Life lived on elegant perfumed heights.

(Breasts circles beneath a straight line, thighs that stretch longer than living limbs could: between neither will mortal ever lie, though he strive with the straining of an hundred laxatives, glisten with the gloss of a thousand hair oils, slave his armpits a millenium of mornings.)

But each day prods with molding thumb
Marking carefully what's to come.

(Don't run! That thumb catches everybody.)

And if no resistance arises inside
Beauty sinks in to leathery hide.

(Squeeze a rubber toy a million times: so, so. Now it snaps out more slowly, the paint comes off on fingers; cracks appear in creases that gape into leaks; and the demanding squeal of the valve fades into a despairing hiss.)

A proper filling trickles in
Of what you've seen and what you've been.
(Grab 'em as they go by! bacon and Bacon and Bach; de-
vour the books and smell the sunlight; treasure every
touch of love, hoard each of hatred's hard agates;
press it down until you're as full as a Turkish-
Napoleon-Armenian pastry, poly-delicious-striated and
smelling somewhat of lamb.)

--Robert L. Smith

How It Was

I told her no time
no how
but she only
laughed in her sleeve

and winked a
ten-to-midnight eye
with a flip of
her king-size special.

Later,
by the dawn's early blight,
we huddled in dark ardor,
mixing egos.

--Charles Shaw

In The Grand Ballroom

On my arm her fingers' fluttering weight,
Slight as a white bird's wing,
Turned my poise to a cold sweat.
It was the damndest thing.

We glided lightly as feathers fall
Throughout the glittering Dames;
The Hostess took our hands with a smile,
"I envy the young their flame."

Bright plumes in our peripheral eyes
Unruffle as we dine;
While she espies what I devise
Bubbles rise in the wine.

An eyelash flickers out of key
On the outskirts of her glance,
An accidental coquetry,
A splinter in the dance.

And all night long while the blood grows bitter
Living on looks and words,
Balconies brim with exquisite chatter;
The trees, with disheveled birds.

--George Amabile

The Bumbling Works

The hands
in the bumbling works
are mostly thumbs;

the location
is less central
than originally believed;

the raw materials
are indeterminate;

the power supply
is unreliable;

the tooling
has never been completely modernized
and is much older than previously indicated;

ungoverned
machines depress the safety record;

the ventilation is destructive,
the heating uncontrolled,
the cooling spotty;

the overloaded drains
are odorous;

the decoration
is antiquated;

recruiting is nonvoluntary,
advancement accidental,
retirement forced;

it is remarkable that resignations
are not more frequent,
that the breakages get patched,
that the bumbling works.

--William Newberry

Fear Has No Permanent Address

I found it in a doorway down the street,
once in the remote region of a dream.
A farmer found it in his ruined wheat,
a soldier in a bayonet's gleam.
Once in a wind, I stood in terror, life
hung on the whim of wave and sky.
The lightning struck like Hamlet's knife
my boat reared toward the rocks and I
thought this is it: how every man
must reckon with the shape of fear
and be prepared with counter plan.
I've seen fear drive the sane as mad as Lear,
I've seen its presence with love
as sudden frost spring flower;
I've seen it wear the mask of crow and dove
and knock at any door at any hour.
So keep your wits cool as a game of chess,
beware of fog horns not the fog:
fear has no permanent address
but courage needs no barking dog.

--Harold Briggs

For Psyche, Ultimately

Between warped jamb of door, squeezed in
A dull, filament-winged, unsightly moth.
Which on seeing, was compelled, was impelled,
Was briefly bright in the just-struck flame.

--M. K. Book

The Poet Reassures The Unknown Young Lady Who, Buff As Dawn, Found Herself In The Wrong Shower-Room

You're crying, girl? It's natural, of course,
But wrong -- though not to be would be still worse.
Some tearful penitence is not at fault,
For error's purest when preserved with salt.
But too much self-chastisement grows unkind;
Best put it out of thought. I know, to find
Five awkward husbands soaping all at once,
When you're not expecting even one, affronts --
Must seem to you in many ways alarming.
Let me at least assure you: you were charming.
Completely charming.

Graceful as a fawn,
Coming on hunters, stops with breath indrawn
And a wondering look in her glass-brown eyes;
Then, limbs slowed in turning by surprise,
Goes leaping off into the underbrush
Nearby, before a shot unseals the hush --
Thus, you came.

Tripping down steps, you stood
Within a clinical tile-and-lighted wood
Of steam, instead of leaves, as wholly bare
As young Nausicaa playing, unaware,
Among her maidens by the Phaeacian stream,
Whom bold Odysseus, waking, thought a dream
Before his eyes. So you appeared, through mist.
Head up, face gleaming. Breasts only air had kissed
(And the lucky water of the chlorined pool)
Sweetly tipped, like roses, with vermule.
Hair dripping. Eyes blue and lovely as Lucerne
Through which the noon-hour tourist may discern
The round, white stones upon its sandy floors,
Buttock-moons in moving glass -- smooth as yours
When, turning, like the startled fawn, and shy,
You fled at last up through our concrete sky
As you had come.

Say, then, what is its use,

If loveliness mayn't be its own excuse?
Never be embarrassed by it, or distressed;
Only envy keeps your fellows dressed.
And, more, I urge your blush in your defence.
Who would condemn unlucky innocence?
Disparage an honest error made in haste?
As your retreat was graceful, it was chaste.
O accidental nymph, you came upon
Our dim concerns like the rising sun at dawn,
Bursting the clouds! And vanished hence!
Cease weeping, now. As you showed grace, show sense.
You got some very pretty compliments.

--Robert Wallace

The Poet Warns The Rat Which Has Come, Three Snowy Evenings In A Row, To Scratch Outside His Door

Hunger brings you? and the plunging cold?
Or some dim impulse, equally old,
For companionship on blizzard nights
As thoroughly wild as this? Our lights
Must seem a distant beacon through the snow,
So darkly, softly, swirlingly falling
To blot the earth, the paths we go,
And bring you now so lately calling.

Your scamper rides the metal stairs
Outside. The yellow porchlight flares.
A squirrel without the feather tail,
You clamber, mouse along the rail,
Explore a corner, climb the drainpipe's crook
With its old robins' nest's remains;
And, halfway up the door-frame, look
In through our half-steamed window-panes

At us. We look back. Your pink claws
Scrape lightly on the pane, and pause
Like tiny hands against the glass:
Whose mystery won't let you pass.

So I have passed before your tunneled door
Beneath the wall, unaccompanied
In sun, ghosted with loss -- and gone on. More
Belongs to neighborliness than need.

We have had war between our kinds
Too long for either to make amends.
Understand, I wish you no mishaps
From poison, gun, the gardener's traps,
Or the storm's ill. But I've responsibilities,
A wife and dog your shape affrights --
And pity's all I have left to ease
Your snowy way these winter nights.

--Robert Wallace

A Tough Go

I said no dice
but the table hit back
and caught me a wham
in the wind.

I parried a jab
from an arm chair
and landed a
straight to the ribs.

And so it went,
day in, day out.
The walls were a
splatter of gore
and only when
no one was looking
I swung and
the room came apart.

--Charles Shaw

CYCLE

Cats	juicy
swallow	sweet
barley	mouse
corns	meat
hollowed	which
out	when
from	all's
within	done
by	hungry
busy	cats
weevil	may
kin	eat
(bent	where
on	if
raising	and
more	when
young	cats
weevils	eat
to	barley
devour	corns
more	hollowed
nice	out
barley	from
corns)	within
chewed	by
up	busy
without	weevil
salt	kin
by	(bent
mice	on
thinking	raising
them	more
not	young
empty	weevils
shells	to
but	devour
solid	more
food	nice
for	barley
building	corns)
	chewed
	up
	without
	salt
	by
	mice.
	--John
	Moffitt

For Ezra Pound

Ezra, are you gone?
Yes, you are --
Flown where silence flies,
Into itself, itself, itself;
Flown where passionate body dies.
Can you remember how it was?
Or are all memories lies --
Leeches, tickling phantom shapes,
Corkscrew images and Chinese apes,
Symbols scrambled into jars
Of mind, the grammar of your scars?
How deep within yourself is sleep?
How fragile do your rhythms keep?
Odes and cantos, black on white,
Do they tempt you in the night?

Ezra, are you gone?
Yes, you are --
Flown where creation starts,
Into itself, itself, itself;
Flown where beauty breaks our hearts.
Can you remember how it was,
Or have you lost the precious parts?
It makes no difference if you look.
Go tear the fragile dumb-born book.
King Ch'eng left his monuments.
You have yours, the sacraments
Of words that shall go beyond your age.
Then I cannot think of you and rage
Against injustice and ignoble strife.
You have done what there was to do with life.

--Richard Dokey

Left: To Implicate Children

The ravaged old head was found in the base
of a huge escritoire
amid writings, not well-dismembered.
It, somehow, white-beardedly brought
infusorian visions; though
the must-dusted whiskers,
bedraggled and rummily-calm,
stank nothing of cilia vibrations.

Perhaps, the lack

of air
in that bum-bottom space
for a crime-report mummy.

Something
of un boulet bouffant
was conveyed by the unhirsute
pate...

(one could guess) more than broken-
down couches
engaged his last year, spent perhaps
in some well-equipped cage
for a wanderless sage.

No glede dove conjectures of gloaming;
some animalivorish fruit-starving bat.

Meats,

without oranges, might do this, of course.

He'd have been always

in one hell of a hurry

...swooping, then, to escape...

If he hadn't hanged his frail sack
in some moon-darkened closet (he hadn't;
the liver-dun tongue did not protrude),
this would have been solely because
he'd never have stopped long enough
to find the right length of tough
hemp.

as MacDonald once had, about Scott
(Walter, Sir)
with that callipered bust.

That had done it: he'd worked well enough to defile
every clue in the body
(his childhood's)

James Bovair May

Stranger

A stranger
Passing the looking glass of night
Shuffling petals on a floor
Long shouted slant-wise
To a fractured child,
Could not see the struggling snail
Making silver-sounds in time,
Unless he too moved silently through glass.

-- Nina deVoe

Diocletian

For a launching
soak, absorb

It will flow and adjust
humdrum

Look --
should the face
inherit
peace like a gong

Limited
and powerless

Oh limited
like unto a peasant man.

What I Never Expected

The sons-of-bitches
are in the saddle

Whoever expected anything
different

The little sons-of-bitches
in the little saddles
the big sons-of-bitches
in big saddles

Whoever expected it
would be any other way

But now the little
sons-of-bitches
are in big saddles

And the big sons-of-bitches
are in bigger saddles still

Which I had never expected

Oh these big little sons-of-bitches
when will we saddle them up
in their own saddles

River Mirth Quite Sweetly

Raking cane in a lonesome pile
raking cane to its careless end

Raking cane lonesome people
the snake of dawn is eating the curds

River mirth river mirth
your song is a nuisance

They sit on a dream
dangerous as a volcano fire

They rest in your shade
and the babies come like magic

River mirth quite sweetly they say
raking cane in a lonesome pile

The snake done ate
the curds from the geese.

-- Mason Jordan Mason

Threshing

Wheat shocks are forked upward,
Grain tops inward on the rack.

The black dog in the stubble gobbles
After just unsheltered field mice,
As sheaved spiders and snakes take
Their ride towards the roaring separator.

-- M. K. Book

Suppose In The Garden

Suppose in the garden I told the snake to go
being the first of women and most true.
Sweet and surfeit the world that you had named,
warmed by the sun at day; at night, by you,
being with you one flesh and unashamed.
Full my love, my life, I had no need.
The serpent could not tempt me on that day
when every seed bore fruit and fruit bore seed.
Suppose in the garden I sent the snake away,
knowing already all I wished to know.

That dawn I watched you leaving through the trees,
my eyes caressing, then I took my path
another way. The cool dew joined the pool.
I joined the floating lilies for my bath,
undid my hair and splashed. The day came full.
I dried where roses dried, and wound my hair,
then gathered in the orchard perfect peach
and plum, heavy grape, and sweet mild pear,
and cradling in my arms the best of each
ran happily to find you and to please.

I waited, watched you coming through the trees.
My arms grew aching at our meeting place.
Already the lump was forming in your throat,
already I saw a difference in your face.
Distressed I dropped and bruised the golden fruit.
Distressed I could not understand the change,
afraid of the new stride, the different stance.
Oh but your eyes, your eyes, your eyes were strange.
They cut me with thorns everywhere they glanced,
and sent me awkward, hurrying for leaves.

-- Zelda Friedman

Orchard Oriole

The oriole is in the orchard
The orchard oriole is in the orchard
Neat as eyelet embroidery
Svelte red-brown
Mahogany red midnight black
Red-brown and black
 Among the pink-white blossoms
Black-red to pink-white
Brown-red pinking white
Pompeian red surfing pink
Earth to cloud

The oriole in the orchard
Neat as eyelet embroidery
The orchard oriole
Is in the orchard.

Hoop Alley Oop

Hula hoop
Alley oop
A tree
Bent red-bow
To the sycamore's sooty green
All that's left of the big promotion
The hula hoop craze
Everybody's doing it
Nobody's doing it
Hula hoop
Alley oop
What'sa what'sa
Hula hoop
Colors simple
Sales complex
Even the mechanical dolls
Are spinning the hula hoop
Dropped out of promotion
Bent red up a tree.

--Emilie Glen

A Child's Garden Of Moby Dick And Other Devious Ways

The world is so full of the signs of the sexes
which ends up in Lit as a pain in the nexus
the author is curing by writing about --
the more he's got hidden, the further he's out,

the more he's got levels, the more he's artistic,
so three cheers for symbols and let's all be mystic.
I'll tell you a story of flowers and bees,
I won't mention navels, I won't mention knees,

I won't mention anything is what it is --
something round will be Hers, something straight will
be His.

Picture Her Standing In A Frame Of May,

narrow as a needle, poised at the dark
room's edge, where tall windows let the evening
down on her slender shoulders, pale gold hair
flaming around her face, a young huntress
spearing us to our chairs with her true poem,

piercing the dust with silver eyes, reading,
"I love only you and I swear the words
fail me." The nunnery where she will run
wounded into poems (I swear) never fails,
opens its stone arms always to these brides.

One day she will inherit her mother,
her steel eyes will go tired and tender,
but what she feels now (words dead in her lap)
just freshly touched by kisses, marble girl
disarmed to the verge of mortal woman,
in this chill room remembers us as well.

--Dolores Stewart

A Woman Dreams Of Home: Yakima Park, Wash.

Tuckered out by her uphill
Tug-of-war with gravity,
She gives in to a stone's invitation,
Sits down and watches the trail
Move on without her,
As lungs accept, gratefully,
Lightheaded air sobered by Spruce and Pine.

Under her clothes, the heat of climbing cools.
That magical change of light she came to see,
Yellow Orange Red Rose Mauve
Is hours off. She waits, thinking, even
The blinding radiance of Mt. Rainier
Is pacified by sunset.

Her eyes tour hundreds
Of ice formations, looking to be amused
By the sudden shape of a hand, a satin elbow.
But the glacier's mile-off sculpture,
For all its ruffle and flash,
Holds nothing known a woman could trifle with,
Wears out the keenest eyes, leaves the mind
Empty, or numb with glare.

She nods in a world of her own:
Heavy eyelids draw to a close like drapes.
Those frigid wastes that left her vision cold
Release fragile echos. Trickles lost
In a maze of snow shift into her doze
And assume there the comfortable voices
Of rinsed china draining in a sink.

--George Amabile

One always notices death

One always notices death foraging about the walls and doors, forcing his damp snout into the likeliest sweet-smelling area-ways of our lives. And though some people say they want to do him in, I'd miss the old fellow; I've grown that used to his cold sleekness trailing me a few respectful paces to the rear, the way he makes such wrathful faces when I deliberately ignore him and pretend he's someone else's sub-canine friend who lost his bloody way in the park. But he's too patient to take offense; and when we meet, finally, he'll just take a turn about my feet and end up nuzzling my mouth and eyes to sleep, like a tired old hound with an appointment to keep.

--Lee Jacobus

To My Friend Who Is A Negro Poet

No lyre for him, an honest drum. He'll bang
In Connemara cloth and olive drab.
We think it was the God who twisted Job,
That made him black and bade him sweetly sing,
Who now, with hands on hips -- a trooper's stance,
Scowls fierce in wonder whence the song of dissonance.

--Stanford Sternlicht

Tip For A Waitress At Walgreen's

Once? You were love -- come on a thin, rickety bicycle
Pumped up with sixteen years of promise,
Overinflated
From your first uncensored summer
With its weekly allowance
For deviation.
Prior to that you were born unannounced,
Moving in on the 20th century
As a hyphenated serial number,
Gasping for oxygen
On an impersonal assemblyline
In Fresno, Calif.
Where a new generation awaited distribution
To a glutted market.

Candidly put,

You were merely another consumer
Ordained to buy more than you could pay for;
Pay more for less
And earn less than you'd be paid while
Possessing more and owning less
Than anyone, any time, anywhere.

At fourteen, around eleven o'clock
You were jumped by a son of a lettuce crop speculator;
Later,
You walked after running men, you
Stopped when they started back.
Eventually, you began your great, aimless trek toward
Hollywood, falling into step with thousands
Of pairs of legs
More or less more gifted than average. Nothing
Very much happened after that except a man who said,
"There's always room at the bottom for a girl
Who can say No
And never mean it."
And you are at one with yourself now;
One abortion, one marriage, one child, one divorce
And one purpose in life still undefined.

--Curtis Zahn

Cotton Door-Knobs

To be still and left and full of emptiness
Like a cracked shell of lichee nut
Suspended by a whisper from a withered brittle bough,
Staring inward
At its little wrinkled fruit of heart;
Is like wandering through moss-seaweed-paper doors
Opened,
With cotton door-knobs.

--Nina deVoe

The Second Level Isn't My Affair

really. The best poems go a little wild.
Adjectives are two-faced. Verbs like to stare
cross-eyed. Nothing I can do about it.

Truth will flood in wherever planks are loose
and captains falter. Though my ship is styled
to ride the seas that no form can reduce,

logic may drown. That good iambic stock
won't save it when my bad blood tells its strain,
my mind lets loose its libelous creature,
my poem pursues its own instinctive track,
splintering the stanzas to touch the main
artery of knowing. No Invictus

insures this brittle craft when the nature
of all natures storms at the second level,
below trick and loss, below love and gain.
What I confess to you is your affair
really. The old transfusion is complete
under the surface where all souls travel

in the same white schools, at the same life heat.

--Dolores Stewart

YES

Catch

me

in a softened moment

and you have

me

trapped

the lust spelled in your eyes

trembles

my

belly

into

a miniature

volcano

toss

me

your weekend passion

and you have

me

welded

to your escapeless fingers

smelling

your

wild

perfume

relinquishing my paternity of thought

exchanging

it

for papal

eyeshutedness

re

babies

born

in

wedless

darkness

leave
me
to amuse myself

and you'll have
me
chasing

the sin of you through shadows
crowding
time
into
corners
forcing
love
along
sewers
thrusting
sex
down
rainpipes

you may retire from the interlude
with minute scars
to remind

you
of
a
passion
that blazed
only instantly

but
I
must live
with persistent embers

I envy your peace
how fine
to turn
to new diversions
and
overcome
my ghostly whispering
with a glass of wine

my bleaching of joint memories
requires

the cauterizing bite
of heated steel
to sterilize
my heart
whole
again

yes
I say

you win

give
me
the glass

yes
take
what's left

that you'd like
to keep

YES

--Ottone M. Riccio

OLD BOOK SHOP

Squeezed (boldly)
between used cars
(BIG BIG DEALS)
and a barber shop
(English as she is spoke)
is a gray frog of a place
where on (knotty) pine boards
books books books books
sulk (some in sets)
and wait for sticky fingers
And a new sign pleads

SMOKERS

PLEASE USE ASH TRAYS
which has just been installed
by the goateed management
who pads about like a seal
in worn carpet slippers
and busily re-stacks
National Geographics.

--David Pearson Etter

KANGAROO

Deep in Vermont
last summer
(perplexed among
moons and Morgans)
I drew with
stolen orange chalk

a jumping orange
kangaroo
on a barn door.

Soon I had him
leaping high
over birch trees.

A crabbed farmer
came and said,
"What's your story?"

I replied, "Sir,
(pointing north)
he went that way."

--David Pearson Etter

Dirty Birds

Reclining ~~hod~~ hoyle
this bird brood

Feather fluff what
in your dirty number
sixty-nine seventy

The dove
swollen like a womb

Pecker head
you hammer home
this bird fright

Tail feather bobbing
comb cockle
seventy-one

When
wren cycle
what machinery what
machinery.

--Mason Jordan Mason

Wormwood Review has never printed a contributors' biography column, since we feel the poem must stand alone. However, it is interesting to indicate the geographical location of the poets: John Moffitt (N.Y., N.Y.), Robert L. Smith (N.Y., N.Y.), Charles Shaw (N.Y., N.Y.), George Amabile (Storrs, Conn.), William Newberry (West Haven, Conn.), Harold Briggs (N.Y., N.Y.), M. K. Book (Lincoln, Nebr.), Robert Wallace (Sweet Briar, Va.), Richard Dokey (Stockton, Calif.), James Boyer May (Hollywood, Calif.), Nina deVoe (Storrs, Conn.) Mason Jordan Mason (current whereabouts unknown), Zelda Friedman (Storrs, Conn.), Emilie Glen (N.Y., N.Y.), Dolores Stewart (Pembroke, Mass.), Lee Jacobus (Bethel, Conn.), Stanford Sternlicht (Oswego, N.Y.), Curtis Zahn (Malibu, Calif.), Ottone M. Riccio (Belmont, Mass.), and David Pearson Etter (Evanston, Ill.).

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