IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Daniel Paul Pitino
March 8, 1987

†

Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these.

Matt: 19

Cover photo by Paul Pezza.
The Alembic — literally, the term denotes a medieval mechanical apparatus used in distillation. For this magazine, the term connotes a figurative “distillation” of the collective literary and artistic talents present in the Providence College community. The medieval apparatus distilled each season’s yield of grapes and produced a refined and tasteful mixture of wine. This literary “apparatus” also attempts to collect and distill each year’s fruitful yield of creativity, in hopes of likewise producing a palatable artistic vintage.
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THE RETURN

We should have forgotten words
We should have gone on
through the world without them
through a world where exegesis fails

If a lovely word bares its teeth to you
I am long gone
If a shy interpretation intends to spill your blood
I told you I am gone

There is a welling at the calm of your eye
Flecks of pain collect on your tongue
If no words had hatched between us
I'd take a deep look and steal away

Got a mote in your eye, what is it worth?
Can you see that drop of your blood quivering
like a sunset at the end of the world?

We should have left words alone
but since we studied our language, some foreign expressions
I am visible inside your tears
Through your thin veins I swim up toward the heart

Tamura Ryuichi
Version by Forrest Gander
REVENGE

Silver Sparkling in the sullen sunlight
birds passing overhead
a sort of mock with every soar.

So easy with one quick slit its over
a jab no thought just emotion
so much so little only an instant
a decision made for a lifetime.

A grip so tight the loveliest woman could not free
why so vengeful, is it just
sometimes they come back?

Again and Again over and over again repetition is never
boring
the blade dripping not with blood
with fear anger hatred sorrow
all seeping into the endless sand.

Happiness surrounding, a cloud of joy
smile then robust once again
words utter no one is to blame.

Fran Scire

STILL NAMELESS NEEDS

These are scary visions.

Boozed-up N.Y. nites,
Horded by smack-pushing
Seedy wrong-sexed sidewalk knights,
The brothers of graffitied playground walls
And sisters of rusted lampposts,
They die with no heroism.

Robert P. Toole
THE ROAD TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

I dip my brush in pink and paint the sun
a rose quartz pendant that beats on my shoulders.
As I walk the steamy sand paths barefoot
through the dunes splattered with greens and the pinks of
wild roses
I unfold into the slumberous song of the seagulls and the
ocean
and the blinking light — the conductor
of my heartbeat.

Alysia K. Harpootian

FOOTPRINTS BY THE SEA

Small mountains roll across the distance,
set back from all that moves and rushes in.
A trail of rocks softened by the past
crawls out of each crest, to be left there.

Bamboo weeds are pushed and pulled by the miles
that lay untouched, they shiver with fear renewed.
And that which caresses my bare feet hides,
waiting patiently for the passage of time.

A sudden swell of blue crashes turning white.
My footprints cease,
a breath is stolen from my lungs.
And I walk humbled, powerless.

Thomas Allen
THE FELLOW TRAVELERS
(1917—1932)

The burning star
howled and spread the dawn
and flashed its smile upon the sea.
An animal of light was loosed
to forage through the pines
and scrub, shining down the sandy lanes
to where the Neva spills
the consciousness of minds
and factory mills
behind the drawn blinds
and yellowed glass
wherein the gentle spirit pines
in arithmetic petty whines.
What cunning speech
spawns its dream
and forces hearty lives
to quail and raise
a simpering children’s wail
about the lethal arching trail
of so bright and new a day?
They perished in the darkness
of a bright abyss,
but through their splendid span of time
they drew and wrote and pointed rhyme
about the searing star of light
poised and patient;
and they took fright.
Its presence? — a phantom of excited nerve perhaps.
But it did scent what issues from decay.
It was because of that it burned;
it did not weary for its prey.

William C. Barron, O.P.
Il faisait nuit, c'était l'hiver,
La neige, tombant en gros flocon,
Semblait nous prédire la possibilité
D'une pureté générale, d'une pureté perdue.

Ca blanchissement subtil accomplissait
Dans une soirée, un nettoyage total,
Remis par l'homme, ne sachant plus comment
Renaître ce rêve longtemps négliger.

Le lever du soleil révèle cette candeur
Eblouissante à l'homme, ne voyant plus clairement,
S'étant habitué à regarder ailleurs.

Mais cette blancheur aveuglante,
Précipitamment lui perça le cœur,
Où une larme agonisante lui cria: espoir.

During a dark and wintry night,
Snow falling in huge flakes,
Seemed to predict the possibility of regaining
A general purity, one which was lost.

This subtle blanching accomplished
In one evening a total cleansing
Postponed by man, having forgotten how
To revitalize this long neglected dream.

The rising sun revealed this candor
Dazzling man, no longer seeing clearly,
Having become accustomed to looking elsewhere.

But this blinding whiteness
Precipitously pierced his heart
Where an agonizing tear cried out: hope.

Raymond W. Lavallée
FALLEN WOOD

At noon I still hear last night's truckers, hauling spruce on flatbeds down to Colebrook's mills and offices of paper and pulp men. I saw hills peeled like meninges by crews, trephines hard into the water table, a rise left like a shaved skull to provide room and board downstream.

An old handyman from Maine joins me on the grass: Pat tells me an Indian told him once if you get lost in spruce forest, walk in circles, look at the trees — the way most of them fall is northward. From wind-blown dying wood you can find a direction to go in.

Edward P. McCrorie

THE TRUCK KNOCKED OVER MY

The truck knocked over my Sister they woke my mother she flew Around the house and then to Denver And Dad and I got used to taking Care of ourselves we ate Burned pork chops Mom sent Directions on how to make The house work without her And so I learned to do Laundry before school and Defrost meat.

Martha Hoeg
CHARLIE

except for funerals
fuchsia is a lovely color
and mother always scolded me
for bringing home those frogs
I always wondered who made
those footprints in frozen mud
and why other children always ran away
from my iguana, Charlie

Charlie hated fuchsia
but he loved frogs
and I could always tell Charlie's footprints
from those of the other neighborhood pets
I hate fuchsia, too
my aunt wore it to Charlie's funeral

Michael Fitzgerald

Certainly,
he never would have been rich.
he lacked the ambition
that drives other men.
But what of ambition — wealth
(as measured by man's
faulty yardstick)?
Perfection (or as close as
a rational animal can
attempt to come)
is contingent on their denial.
And he had the wealth
of a million nonmen
(but the sea never gives back
what it has taken).

Kathleen Brennan
ELEVE

of the few who,  
in my mind  
I have not made an ideal,  
She is one.  
(She is an ideal  
in herself,  
She needs not  
to be made)  
and She has a view of joy  
(o! joy She is!)  
so unlike any . . .  
and She, in her heart  
is tender  
and very good.  
(so much of these  
is She,  
that my simple words  
cannot dearly tell  
of her enough)  
and my heart  
is filled  
with hers.

Kathleen Brennan

STANDSTILL

From the burning of your coldness,  
I've grown stronger.  
From the staleness of your sweet words,  
I've grown wiser.  
To your addiction,  
I am still vulnerable.

Amy Sergio
IN THE BOSTON MUSEUM OF ART

I watched three youths
before Monet
— the cathedral of Rouen —
earlier among the ruins of Pompeii,
sketch pads in hand.
How young, I thought,
to trace the patterns of man.
With instructive sweeps of arm and hand
the eldest child made gestures
to the youngest of the three
who, irritated by the thought,
refused the genius of his friend.
And though the insights
were not shared, nor even sought,
still they stood
before the painting
raised before them
on the wall.
The middle child etched and scratched a bit
upon his pad. I saw
the figure of the church emerge,
and outline of blue shadow
and clearing light
etched beneath some ruined building of Pompeii
dug from out the ancient dirt in which it lay.
I would have pressed a little closer
to learn what lines appeared
upon the other pads
but feared my motion could disturb
the nature of these lads. So I let them be.
And then they passed away from me
into other rooms
to gesture and to sketch
and to learn their age.

William C. Barron, O.P.
JEFFREY WENT DOWN

Jeffrey went down to
the corner to
make a deal with the man
who sold highs,
and Jeffrey paid his price.
He told me
once he was on the moon,
and I laughed.
I always laughed at
Jeffrey's jokes.

Jeffrey went down.
I couldn't keep him here
and the man dropped dime.

So Jeffrey shot a uniform
and three blues shot back and
Jeffrey went down.
As I held him my
shirt drank his blood.
He smiled at me.
"I'm on the moon, kid,"
he said.

Jeffrey went down.

Tom Skelton
EVERY THIRTEEN SECONDS

I despise new houses
brought up as I was in an old one
There are no meals with the dead
    nor lost places where nervous spirits
    can butt against themselves

"The pear tree split"
I wrote maybe twenty years back
But I planted another pear tree
    in the new house’s loam
My ritual is the watering each morning
I intend to nourish death
    in the xylem of the pear tree
Late at night I read Victorian pornography
“I harbor no illusion of a future”
is my single illusion
luminous at the time
The lighthouse on the island forty kilometers away
    turns its burning monocle
    to the helpless window of my room
every thirteen seconds

Tamura Ryuichi
Version by Forrest Gander
LOVERS AND MADMEN


Harper and Row, the publisher of Robert Bly's new book of poems, has also issued an anthology of American literature, complete quite up to the minute — and completely ignoring Robert Bly. If not mad that's at least a little strange. Won't the left hand tell the right hand what it's doing?

Perhaps not. Some editors might list what they consider good reasons for omitting Bly. He sometimes imitates writers like Whitman and Blake — Romantics, of all people. He flirts with the mystical — disdained by the poetry establishment generally nowadays. He bears witness to pleasure — and curiously, as Lionel Trilling once noted, many twentieth-century readers find that intolerable, even in the original Romantics.

Still, to ignore this poet is not merely to be guilty of oversight, but to be totally and hopelessly blind. For the man is a truly extraordinary American imaginer. In his latest book he tenses the language in remarkable ways, he leaps, like one of his own springtime frogs, and he orchestrates the verbal music finely. Most important, he links past and present, the natural and the human world, not only the worlds of man and woman, metaphorically and convincingly.

Bly likes to tense the language so as to produce a kind of mind-stretching. In "Two People at Dawn" a man asks a woman, "Are we under water?" He has been wondering, metaphorically, about "our river," The answer: "We are under the ocean." As we stretch our perception of things to accomodate this vision, the man then remarks, "the ocean / is only a slow river." Water is a recurring symbol in the book (as it recurred in Whitman and Wordsworth) and water depth especially. Bly tightens the tension at the poem's end, writing that the man joins the woman "in that briny place / where cattle graze / on grass below the water."

"A Third Body" is another example. A man and a woman sitting together "feed someone whom they do not know."
The tension of that third presence increases a few lines later: “They obey a third body that they share in common” — indeed, “They have made a promise to love that body.” Is she with child? Or is Bly echoing a similar vision in his earlier book, The Light Around the Body? One might also see an allusion here to Eliot, who in The Waste Land himself alludes to a third presence accompanying the disciples of Emmaus. The poem ends: “they feed someone we do not know, / someone we know of, whom we have never seen.” The tension is not resolved — and rightly so.

Some years ago Bly wrote an essay about “Leaping Poetry,” and the present volume continues the dancing and singing found in earlier books. This is a poetry of delight, and the poet is indebted not only to Romantic sources but to Classical ones such as the Bacchantic and Corybantic verse of Sappho and Pindar. Leaping of one kind or another occurs in “Night Frogs,” “Minnow Turning,” “Night Winds” and “Poem on Sleep.” “Returning Poem,” warmly and expansively recalling Sappho’s wonderful couplet on Hesper, the Evening Star, records the return of men, goats and brothers to shelter at dusk, where “a place is prepared in” — maybe the last word one might expect here — “the chest.”

I first heard Bly read “What We Provide” at Worcester, Massachusetts, in Spring, 1986. I still think it’s an amazing and alarming example of his “leaping” style:

Every breath taken in by the man who loves, and the woman who loves, goes to fill the water tank where the spirit horses drink.

After pondering the distance covered by that one word, spirit, one might go on to appreciate fill — how easily (and unleapingly) it might have been “empty.”

To critics who suppose that Bly is not Modernist or neo-Aestheticist enough, a la Wallace Stevens, Bly has a delightful leap or two in “A Man and a Woman and a Blackbird.” Moreover Bly shows us that he has listened to Stevens. After one relishes the eroticism of a four-line poem like “Ferns” —
It was among ferns I learned about eternity.
Below your belly there is a curly place.
Through you I learned to love the ferns on that bank,
And the curve the deer’s hoof leaves in sand.

— one can listen more closely to the music, the echoing of the sound of “ferns” in every line of the poem. Another instance is “Love Poem in Twos and Threes” (a title reminiscent of Emerson’s fine work, “Merlin”), where the sound of “land” recurs a number of times in the first ten or twelve lines, but especially in the disarming passage, “Standing by you, I am / glad as the clams / at high tide.”

Yes, Bly can be elusive at times, rather mannish if not macho in poems like “Fifty Males” and “The Hawk,” too merely Imagist or Taoist on occasion, and apparently too simple in “Come with Me.” He leans to the didactic in “Letter to Her” when he writes, “To do what we do / does not mean joy” — a rejection of a merely behavioral ethos; and he likes to set down position statements in the manner of Blake, as in “The Roots,” declaring, “Among all the limits / we know so few things.” He may also leap a little too wildly at times for some tastes. In “Conversation” an erection is called a “rosy man” that reaches up to touch a book, some of whose words must have been “fur.”

With all these debits — and some would call them credits — Loving a Woman in Two Worlds is an exceptional book of poems for the ways in which it metaphorically and convincingly connects. In “The Indigo Bunting,” where a lover values a woman for a firmness that “disdains the trivial / and regains the difficult,” he makes a surprising and beautiful follow-up: “There were women in Egypt who / supported with their firmness the stars / as they revolved” — a striking link-up of contemporary America with ancient Egypt. In “Hummingbird Valley,” a place in which “we have played so often,” a “garden / immaculate as the mouse’s fur” becomes a house in the poet’s vision where a “cantor waits to enter,” a “synagogue.” This bonding of an American boyhood with a Biblical temple tightens finely in the last line: “bless this house / where we first exchanged salt
and bread together." Sometimes the link may not be a happy one; in "Winter Poem," a work deserving of much more attention that I can pay it here, the poet loves "in slow, dim-witted ways" and, metaphorically and movingly connecting the natural to the human world, must "feel the ant's hard chest, the carapace, the silent tongue."

Such bonds occur often in the book, as in "Good Silence," "The Horse of Desire," and "In the Month of May." But my favorite, perhaps because it associates the world of music, love and nature in a deliberately imperfect way, is "Listening to the Koln Concert." The poem begins by observing that notes of a musical composition "abandon so much as they move." And later, "When men and women come together,/ how much they have to abandon!" The poet now makes the connection to nature, to the nests of wrens, and to other animals who abandon things each year. But he adds, "Harder then wrens doing," people have to "abandon their longing to be perfect."

Robert Bly has attempted a very hard thing in this book, something which might seem easy enough, but is seldom attempted in poetry now: he has tried, as a man, to write sensitively and honestly about love. No doubt the spirit of Walt Whitman has helped him, and he may have taken heart from the many women who have written about love in the past thirty years, admirably and movingly explicated in Alicia Ostriker's new work, Stealing the Language. Bly's attempt may bode very well for the future. At the very least, Harper and Row should include him in their next anthology! At best, other poets will show the influence of this outstanding book, and every anthology will act accordingly.

Edward McCrorie
THE FISHERMAN

A city, frozen in time
wrinkled faces, hopeless youth
Depression raises his shot glass;
The American Dreamer

Those old photographs
like those parents hide away in the attic
A family too proud?
Shuffled away in a box upstairs

His tackle box still remains
brings a smile
to the photograph in the attic
I remember that smile through the window

The funeral home
part time job
full time reminder
exciting to a boy holding a grandfather's hand
The arms of St. Anne
cress French Canadians who settled here
all too permanently; perhaps
Dominicans comfort the american dreamers

These are the memories of him
He who lives among the dreamers
up in smoke
like the ashes of the Kerr Mill

I've got his ring!

David R. West
STAINED GLASS MIRRORS

The room was a mirror
Of his reflection.

As I survey the material objects,
The real person appears.
The Room was small, but what it was comprised of was what mattered.
Shelves were packed with books of Intellect — Shakespeare, Plato . . .

Plaques of success decorated the walls.
A Captain’s chair stood with proud control in the corner.
Closets were filled with rows of blue and grey flannels — A title page for Fortune 500.

As I stared closer and more deeply into the mirror, The fading film made the picture clear.

Tan dishevled sheets
Left the imprint of time and restless nights sleep.
A tousled shirt hung desperately over the arm of a chair
And pants not yet hung lay motionless inside out on the floor.

A toppled bottle — emptied . . .
From too much frolic, merriment—
Toasting prestige and prosperity —
And perhaps a bit of loneliness.

I realized that I had been looking only at the surface
As I stumbled over another half-drunk bottle of wine.
The space was filled with an attic aroma: musty, damp, and decayed.

Now — his solid self sifted through the pores of weakness.
This was his reality, falsified by appearances.
I walked toward the door
Taking one last look around.
I left the room knowing more than I should have —
But, nonetheless, I knew.

Sue Anne Motta
From across the river
I view
The Empire State Building . . .
A tugboat slowly melting the water apart . . .
An alluring city.

The Port Authority is electric.
People walk by
nameless.
While others stagger more permanently
Making loud accusations at no one.

Moving up Fifth Avenue
I pass someone
handing out flyers
in attempt to solicit
the crowds.

On the corner of 55th,
The blind man moans
As he rocks back and forth.
Taped onto his tin can
A message: "Pencils 5¢."

Up ahead I see the orange marble
Of Trump Tower,
Seducing the passers-by
To the gallery of stores
With 80% markups.

Kathleen McNicholas
THE REIGN OF YELLOW ROSES

In the meadow an evening rain begins to fall
As vines of yellow roses stretch up a rocky wall,

Through the curtain of rain a young woman appears
Like a startled doe her eyes full of fear,

Upon the sodden earth as if in prayer she kneels
The rain can't wash away the loneliness she feels,

Upon a single yellow rose her gaze does settle
Her tears fall and mingle with rain drops on its petals,

She reaches out to cup the velvet bud she beholds
And with her gentle touch its petals slowly unfold,

As a timid heart opens for the first time
Yellow roses in the rain, a memory is mine.

Jane Reinhardt
“LEFTOVER WINE”

Melanie sang of leftover wine,
Whereas I pulled
Oreos apart,
making one massive cream ball.
The scraped halves
went back in the jar
stuck together.
I thought Mom wouldn’t notice.

Still, she talked me down from trees
where I had climbed too high,
those willows were my life,
slow, scared steps
into the clouds,
where Mary Poppins sat waiting for me.

“I’ve been shot! I’ve been shot!”
My sister was screaming again.
We didn’t believe her.
How fantastic, how fitting,
for a beebee to ricochet
off a fox and rabbit’s rock
and implant itself in her thigh.
Matty Fallon ran for his life that day.

Kara Lovering
RUNAWAYS IN THE CITY

Lint in their pockets,
dirt underneath their fingernails,
they need to be bathed and fed,
but mostly just want to be loved.
Aimlessly wandering black crowded streets
past depots, drunks, and triple X movies,
while others advertise their flesh
on the corner of W42nd and 6th.
It is a nocturnal event
for the scavengers of love,
who live by the lights
of flashing neon signs:
   Jesus Saves All.
False love of strangers
in sleezy motels
help them make it through the night —
15 minutes at a time.

Lorraine O'Connor

FIREFIGHTER

    On the ground
Sadness drags a long groan.
Pain, loud as thoughts wailed and
People fainted on the ground.
Inside
I found them voiceless
Like elms in winter-
Onyx reaching without a sound.

Erin Murphy
PASTA DEL GIORNO

Hating to eat spaghetti
Food shouldn't
    Make you think.
Looking like one of
Those formaldehyde brains
    You see in Chem. 101.
Colored candy apple red;
Can I afford that new corvette
    4000 down, 475 a month plus interest?
    And scarlet, with brick, sprinkled green;
I was mad enough to split his nose easy, like
    Peeling an orange, enlarged pores, sedentary grime.
Adding oil, jiggling fortissimo;
I need to find another diet doctor
    To write a fad just for me.
Now looking like shoelaces on red Nikes;
Or that boa constrictor slinking that girl's
    Hawaiian Tropic neck.
    I can suck up pieces one at a time;
Can I pick apart the strings loose
    In my brain just the same?

Susan E. Krawczyk