

SPACE QUEST

Hymn to the American Desert

Come traveler,
be rid of recycled air and weighted shoes,
(though you may want a heat shield by day).
Come out on earth's sueded curve
blown beige and bare, let light scour
civilization from your eyes
enough for you to see the lavender
and cerulean fourth dimension foyer.

Read the coded map of the night walkers
and the sidewinder's graven intaglio
like shadows of a spiral galaxy. Leave
human footprints on granulated layers of always
where ocotillos comet their reds across solar winds.
Agave rises like Venus, riding
selected vertabrae of the planet's arched chine,
offering salvers of gold to jealous suns.

Climb to the sculpted apogee built of itself
without a spine except for cactus,
borrowed bones and hoarded powder
from other millenia's seas. Then follow
Hogarth's curve downward, sunsetward
to the perigee valley, clinging to the rim
of the possible, just this side
of incisive sapphire's edge.

Come wade a dry ocean of light, swim and sail
its tides before the nearest moon steals
its roar, before blossoming cosmos withdraw
fuchsia rays, and the skink surrenders its warmth
to dusk or the owl. Let the weightless part of you
stalk coyote and badger through orbiting night
and obsidian reflection, keeping tethered
to legacy rhythms only your blood remembers.

Track Orion through creosote bush and saguaro,
share his potluck until the life star
returns to silence dark's movers and shakers
with nails of morning, tonnage of light.
And soon, if you come naked and alone enough,
you can exchange all your learning for truth.

a clever and poetic
imitation - The
reader accepts -
Such syntax!
Such imagery!
Sentences starting with
AGAVE was difficult to
masticate but I caved
enough to keep chewing.
Very well done.

Spencer 19/10/2011

GLENN HOLLOWAY

a judge takes a risk in
admitting a subjective response to a
poem. My admiration for the work of
Georgia O'Keeffe almost made selecting this
poem a must. Had it been a poem, rejection
would have been equally obligatory.

Third
Prize

Congratulations!
L.M.

CUTTING A FINGER ON OBSIDIAN

to Georgia O'Keeffe

crossing title.

Judge's comment in
red markings.

A strength of the
poem's form is its
line structure.
Virtually every line
uses to a climax.

Searching,
plodding in sand-filled shoes
through shimmers of heat,
we never met
yet I knew her
in veinous ways--
in behind-the-eyes ways
where light strikes
matches in the secret vaults
of knowing.

Exclaiming aloud and alone
when the desert showed me its bones,
its spiny life-- still and green
or sidwinding,
I knew her.

We passed at angles on the parallex
of light out on Hogarth's curve
blown beige and half bare--
palimpsest for colors and shapes,
some knee-skinning, some cheek-soft,
seeping in and out of each other
under the mallet of light.

She is willful and wild
as a spirit hawk. She is
lava glass trapping fire
beneath conchoidal wrinkles.
She is hands brushes eyes
no longer peeling light,
feeling its pulse,
shedding it like snakeskin
and leaving it to iridesce
and dry on canvas--
but still living
where I know her.

ALEXANDRIA,
VA
NLAPW

Good -

This poem is one
answer to the
epistemological
question: "What can we
know and how can
we know it?"

One who believes in cultivating a broader audience for poetry
has a problem with this poem since it is hardly a poem
for "blue collar" readers. The cultural allusions ~~are~~ presume
a knowledge of art; but then, all allusions are based on
assumptions. Even Biblical allusions suffer at the hands of some
readers today.

59

3

THE STAR SALESMAN

You must forgive my flippant prose style,
It's native to this territory's scene
Like mini-calculators, cabs and booze.

*Congratulations
on winning 3rd
prize.
d.m.*

I sprawl the king-size hotel bed and stare.
My all-wool alter ego hangs alert,
Fresh pressed and waiting for the morning's cue.
My forty dollar name designer tie
Most likely has a spot that must be sponged
Before I sleep. My Gucci shoes are shined
For each rehearsed approach. But there's no role
For sweet success tomorrow. Or next week.

A dozen times a month I play this lead--
Instead of hotdogs, dine on haute cuisine.
The bottom line is (don't you hate that line)
Our customers aren't clapping for our number.
However primped and powdered or threadbare
They make it sound, their script says NO, a word
Of lead and ice that lodges in soft parts
Beneath my vest, attacking gourmet spoils.
(I'm sure you note the comic undertones
That permeate this neo-classic farce.)
Still, I provide expected locomotion
For this fine costume to complete the plot,
To make the entrance and escort the client
To lunch, silk lining iridescent wit,
Lapels well tailored with sincerity,
Pants creased with confidence. Bright anecdotes
Emerge from pockets, practiced protocol
And uptown jokes, a little charge card magic--
Then when the show plays out, the wound-up mime
Propels the props to yesterday's airport.
And there this woven retinue, almost
Adept enough to give its own performance
Will go inanimate back in the plane,
At last unfolding in home's terminal
To wait in line in Ma Bell's crowded alley,
And from the slept-in depths yield change enough
To call-- report the bust to amateur
Directors of these high-camp one-act flops--
And maybe learn I don't still head the cast.

Judge's Note:

Star Salesman: Quite a good poem. Whoever wrote this has wonderful insight into the salesman's life. I am reminded of these lines from Archibald MacLeish:

50

OLD IROQUOIS WHIT, RED MAN WITH A WHITE CANE

To him our metaphors are recondite,
Our modern terms are riddles to a brain
Where long-gone wispy hunter's trails remain
And only childhood images are bright.
When man transcends his bone-imprisoned night
To touch shore's gritty Braille or taste fresh rain,
His lengthened grasp can snatch the key from pain
To open what mere language fails to light.

We read to Whit then he becomes our gauge,
Our guide for measures we can seldom find
To pace the dark, to pacify the rage.
For we, far-sighted, young and keen of mind,
Are often trapped inside a blackened cage...
Till life is lit with vision from the blind.

This is a beautiful sonnet with an unusual subject, extremely well-crafted. I can just see "Old Whit" poking his cane through his world of darkness. Well done!

Judge, Ann Gasser

THE GARDENER'S CURSE
(On My Neighbor's Green Thumb)

43

May your shovel break, may your fertilizer bake,
May your droughts be long and dusty.
May moles make holes, may blights take tolls,
May your pruning tools get rusty.
A killing frost on the hybrids you crossed;
May your rare chrysanthemums sicken.
A pox on your phlox, may your seeds fall on rocks,
May your aphids and mealy bugs thicken.
And to add to your woes, may you slice up your hose
When you run your power mower.
One last incantation: While you're on vacation
May stinkweed grow up to your door.
Next Garden Show they'll surely know
Just who should get first prize—
My brow of sweat was twice as wet,
And twice as green were my eyes!

Good rhyme. A well-crafted verse that
avoids the usual roses, daisies, etc.

Congratulations !

Judge, Lucille Morgan Wilson

3rd HM

53

SESTINA FOR A NEW WIDOW

Her friends were only trying to be kind;
They didn't mean to cause more pain. She knew
Most were sincere despite their awkward words.
The paper ran a piece detailing how
Her husband tried to save Breck's Bog-- "A man
Who gave his life for nature," she recalled.

Some criticized him while he lived, recalled
Him from his sheriff's job and made a kind
Of bargain. He could be the state's top man
At the Wildlife Agency-- a hat they knew
Would fit him. Then he couldn't tell them how
To run the town and quote each statute's words.

He loved the work and held them to their words.
Officials promised land would be recalled,
Returned to habitat for creatures pressed for how
And where to live. He understood their kind.
Their loss would be a grave mistake, he knew,
With future consequences passed to man.

He realized the frailty of man.
He came to find that binding legal words
Could still be changed by those in charge who knew
The right connections, debts to be recalled.
Developmental interests of a different kind
Were added to the politics of how.

Still he presented programs, showed them how
Preserving wetlands benefitted man.
He lectured, taught school children to be kind
To animals, excited them with words
and pictures, black snakes, live raccoons, recalled
Amusing stories of the swamps he knew.

He was a practiced woodsman, his wife knew.
Now day and night were plagued with questions. How?
He drowned. "While counting otters," she recalled
The captions, "Championed their cause" --a man
Who swam as well as they. "He slipped." The words
Changed nothing and no answers could be kind.

For her there'd be no kind of peace. She knew
She had to prove his words, insuring how
The only man she loved would be recalled.

This poem shows its fine intent with every projected thought and is quality writings sustained throughout. I do not believe it needs the many connotations of the word "recalled" to hold the reader. It is obvious in the last line that she wants more than casual remembrance, lovely & purposeful. Judge, Eugenia Moore

38

SELF-CARVED EPITAPH

When I was twenty I believed John Donne:
 "No man is an island entire of itself..."
 But he was wrong. I wept-- and the mass pool
 didn't rise. I bled-- it didn't redden
 one grain of my neighbor's beach.
 I grew up and completed my island.

My play has one role. My song
 is a single perfect note.
 And no man's death can diminish me
 because I am not involved in mankind.
 Soundproof fog surrounds me, secession
 is secure. No one ever probes.
 Why, Preacher, would I send to know anything?
 My house is built of sand and furnished
 with restful dark. I polarized the currents
 and tides of my sea away from my placid steps.

And here I sink and die
 certain that no bell tolls and never will.
 None knows.

It makes a nice refrain, a clang--
 None knows...none knows...none knows.

*Craftsmanship in this
 poem is good; tone
 is a bit off-putting
 Judge L.B. Canale*

CSPS MONTHLY CONTEST FOR OCTOBER

Winner: Charles Dickson, GA. for "The Clown"

Runner-up #1 Maureen Cannon, N.J. Runner-up #2 Joan Auer Kelly, CA
33 poets submitted 113 poems for \$80. Prize: \$40.

I regret that I will not be able to continue as Contest Chair past December. I have mixed feelings since I am relocating for a large part of the year in Mammoth Lakes, 7000 feet above the urban fray! I do feel sad about missing you. I will treasure this year. Your poems have been a feast. My replacement will be chosen by the Board and announced soon. Watch Strophes and our newsletter. My postman can be trusted to forward the strays! Happy Holidays

Dear Glenna
The judge last time was
(Judge who gave
me md runner-up for Golden
slant rhyme but can't forget)

Anne McClaughery
4433 Meadowlark Lane, Santa Barbara CA
95682
over

Horrors!!

I misplaced this
until I was sorting
for the Nov. Contest
I am very sorry Glenora,
S.

WINNERS' LIST
CSPS Monthly Poetry Contest

Animal, person or place
February 1988: ~~Light Verse, any subject/form~~

Ranked Winners:

1. Charles Dickson, Doraville, GA; "A Clangor of Wings"
2. Patricia Lawrence, East Sandwich, MA; "The Stranding"
3. Michael Caisse McCullough, Salem OR; "Fencelines"

Unranked listing of titles rounding out the judge's twenty overall favorites:

"The Palace of the Quail"

"Done, On Earth"

"The Good Life"

"Gypsy Fox"

"The House and I"



"The Vining Age"

mine

"Meditating on Pine Panelling"

"O, Golden Trout"

"Azara, 10, Homeless"

"Breakdown at Gail's Shell Station"

"The Strength of Mountains"

"Fantasy with Four Legs"

"A Different Drummer"

"Blue-winged Teals No Longer Call"

"The Coyotes"

"I Look for Him in Every Face"



"Encounter with Canis Lupis, Canada, 1987"

mine

CONGRATULATIONS TO WINNERS AND PLACERS, AND THANK YOU ALL.

668

3rd Place

A good
writer -
the alexandrine lines
don't seem suited to the
content of youthful
fantasy. The language seems
to want a more
exciting rhythm.

Rounds of Enchantment

Remember how we fantasized the fairy rings?
Those greener circles sometimes made a summer field
Look polka dotted from the peak of hilltop swings.
The giddy heights from rope-hung inner tubes appealed
To magic's possibilities beneath our gaze.
One day we thought an elf had startled our broodmare.
She broke into a gallop trailing high-pitched neighs
Then eyed the verdant spot and sidled back to where
The wheel-shape glowed and shimmered viridescently.
So we two dreamers visualized a pot of gold
Beneath the surface waiting there for you and me
But when we dug we found spadefuls of thready mold.

(one
word
misplaced)

Too bad our learning interferes with legend's hold.
Somehow life thrives around a little mystery;
New knowledge seems to pave the way for growing old.
I miss the colored overviews from our own tree
When blues were skies and eyes and ribbons at the fair,
And reds were Pop's tomatoes, barns and autumn's blaze.
We hadn't heard pollution's threat; we weren't aware
Of certain chemicals or acid rain and haze.
We learned to drive the tractors once we learned to wield
A hoe, plus all the skills between-- so many things--
And none of them can cope with man-made ills or shield
Us now. Still, I've found my smile. Look-- two fairy rings.

"Possibly because of PCB, fairy rings, circles of luxuriant vegetation associated with pastureland mushrooms, are becoming scarce in the south and midwest." --Chicago Tribune

doesn't seem a necessary inclusion. As "inspiration" for
the poem, it detracts.

Glenn Holloway
Naperville, I.L.

44

WAS THERE A CHILD NAMED YOU OR ME?

Were there really
satin-green bugs with wire-hairy feet
that made current zigzag down your spine
when you closed them in your palm?
Was there a vine with valentine leaves
that grew mini-potatoes for doll plates?
And easy-to-break chocolate rocks with insides
like sugar compelling your tongue to the test?
Now it's hard to find those tiny tunnels
in the suntanned meadow where you fished
for pale humped "camels" that bit and held
the spit-and-mudball baited stems of fescue--
and farther on, an oval pond, velvet-flocked
with yellow-green paisley that hid small swimmers
trading tails for legs-- and wilding wispy smells,
each matched in your mind with a color...

When was it over,
that swift season of knowing
and being
eye level in the clover?

But wasn't there for sure a certain crouching path
where you couldn't see ahead and you backed off slow,
tightened by little corkscrews of warning
in your middle?
Still-- the field must have tilted and swayed--
somehow you went that way without knowing.
The soft fronds closed behind you
and the brambles made you shield your eyes.

Judge, Betsy Kennedy
a strong entry -
thoughtful poem
contrasting brief spring
of childhood to
unknown adulthood.
- Well written.

Glenna Holloway
913 E. Bailey Rd.
Naperville, IL 60565

THE RELUCTANT HEIRESS

It started with the book from my ninety year old Aunt Beatrice, although I didn't know it at the time. The occasion seemed more of an ending than the beginning of anything. It was obvious that she was distributing her belongings to relatives and friends so she could be sure that who got what was done according to her wishes. Why she chose me as recipient of the Preston Family History I'll never know. I had never had the slightest interest in such tedious data and would have relegated it to limbo in the attic if my husband hadn't intervened.

My husband is a hunter, pilot, a man who likes to work with wood and metal in his spare time. In short, he is an even less likely devotee of genealogy. But his life-long passion for the Civil War caused him to take the Preston Family History to his favorite chair and begin searching for my predecessors who had lived during that period.

He turned up six brothers who soldiered in the War Between the States, one of whom was my great grandfather on my father's side. His name was Stephen Smith Preston and his wife was Anastasia Meyes. Two of the brothers were killed in battle. "This says your great grandfather lived through the war but it cost him his health. He served as state representative for several years before he died in Memphis, Tennessee in 1905. Did you know all that?" my husband asked. "Did you know he moved from Nashville?"

(cont.)

The Preston Family History was published by the Deseret Press, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1936. It is volume 17 of 300, contains a photo-in obituary of Stephen Smith Preston.

I confessed that I didn't. "I don't even know much about my grandfather, much less my great grandfather on Dad's side. His name was John Francis and he died when my dad was quite young. "

Vaguely I recall an oval-framed portrait over my grandmother's bed. The man was mustached, had heavy lids and deep-set eyes. He looked nothing like my father or uncles. I don't know who has the picture but some years ago I inherited a rosewood lap desk that my grandfather made. The joints are beautifully dovetailed and the apron is carved and scrolled. It was then I learned he had been a carpenter by trade and was fond of saying that the greatest man who ever lived had been a carpenter.

"This book is before his time but there's lots about the great-greats. You should read it," My husband's voice was insistent.

"Look, I don't have much time to spend with my best friends. I can't see poring over the history of ancestors I never saw or heard of." Then I felt a tinge of guilt as if I'd denied the people between those pages a place at my table, maybe even the simple courtesy of saying hello. After all part of my blood came from them.

"You're right, I should read it. But I doubt if there's much on any one individual. Is there?"

"No, but there's enough to research further. Let's see what we can find out about the Civil War soldier first and then—"

"Why do I get the feeling you're looking for fungus on my family tree? What if you find an axe murderer or even a suffragette?"

He was grinning gleefully.

Time passed and I forgot about it. Then the mail began to bulge with fat envelopes from Washington, DC and others bearing state seals, all addressed to my husband. For several Saturdays he dis-

(cont.)

appeared right after breakfast and didn't return till afternoon.

"All right, who is she?" I said on the third Saturday in a row.

"Well, she's the daughter of a long line of officers and statesmen, starting in Ireland and culminating in that noble breed, a Confederate captain. Unfortunately, there's a New England branch of Prestons who produced a Union general. But I think your genes are untainted." He went to the basement and came back with a large folder. "This is six months of research not counting today's."

This was my husband's gift--the carefully connected threads of my ancestry. I had no idea so much information was available nor did I dream that it had to be gathered in bits and pieces. He had written the National Archives in Washington many times. For each question, a specific form must be filled out. Marriages, deaths, military service records are not all kept the same place. He had queried the state archives of Tennessee and Virginia, state libraries, and the Nashville Masonic Lodge. Unknown to me he had read through old cemetery records and church files on our last trip south. The mysterious Saturdays had been spent at the Mormon church library in Naperville, which keeps all U. S. census records dating from the mid-eighteen hundreds on microfiche. He had put together a history of my maternal and paternal grandparents for 3 generations back. He discovered errors in the Preston book. Dates, places, even names were sometimes wrong. The book had also called my great grandfather Stephen Smith Preston, a colonel. But he was a captain of B Company, 45th Tennessee Infantry. I have his enlistment and discharge papers, even his widow's application for a pension in 1914. It was granted because of his service-related disability. It was interesting because many witnesses were called to attest to his character, his illness, his years in service, and there are hand written accounts.

4.

Mostly they were from neighbors and men who served under his command. They lend a flavor of the era. It's from these notes that I learned most about my great-great grandfather John, for many of the writers had known him, too, and referred to his son as "true to his father's kind."

John was a blacksmith, gunsmith and grocer. He tutored all six sons in marksmanship and at least two of them earned Whitworth rifles. John had also been a lay Methodist preacher. He was born in Virginia as were all the earlier lines. He had nine children who lived to adulthood.

But of all the information my husband gathered, and all the family he has introduced me to, it is Stephen S. who captures my fancy. I can imagine the six brothers deciding to enlist after talking with their wives, writing long letters to each other, thinking about the impending war every night before blowing out their lights. I can't appreciate their motives or their rationale today since my views are those of Lincoln. Back then I'd have been labeled a copperhead. However, had I actually lived then, it's likely I would have accepted the stand of my menfolk as other women did. It would be interesting to know their reasons for stepping into that awful war. None was a slave owner. All were Christians. They must have passionately believed in states' rights. There is evidence that Stephen and perhaps two others were acquainted with Robert E. Lee. Given their Virginia origins, they were probably all devoted to him.

While I was thinking about it, my husband came back into the room. "Well, how does it feel to have a Civil War hero in your background?"

"Hero?"

"You must not have read the hospital records yet," he said. "Look, Stephen
/S. was confined two weeks in early March, 1862, with fever and chills. Then he was back again on April 4th. He requested release from the hospital on the morning of April 6th. in order to lead his troops at Pittsburg Landing in the battle of Shiloh. This is a copy of the hospital register from the Confederate Archives in Mississippi. I think

(cont.)

5.
that's pretty gutsy to talk yourself out of sick bay and go take command of your company in one of the bloodiest clashes of the war. He was discharged from the army not long after that because he was so ill."

I began to see a lot of my own father in Stephen B. Stubborn, competitive, fiercely loyal. Dad's loyalty to a friend once cost him a job promotion. His stubbornness almost cost him his marriage. But there was nothing spectacular in his life. He just missed ^{active duty in} World War II because of his age. He was conservative, quiet, a devoted American. Being my father was what he did best.

I ran my hand over the thick file. The inhabitants of those pages were just average men and women, too. Six of them and their families were caught in a terrifying and dramatic time, a period my husband knows more about in many ways than his own. If not for his interest, his patience, I'd never have met my people. They have given me a new perspective, a sense of continuity in my very transient life. Maybe a new sense of nationality says it better, for whether our ancestors came from Scotch or Irish peerage, Huguenot vineyards or Newgate prison, we all share certain qualities peculiar to Americans. For better or worse, we know we are special hybrids grown in a spectacular land and we're proud of it. Thanks to my husband I've had the privilege of getting a closer look at my own deep roots.

I suggest submitting this
next year —

Dear Hazel:

Saturday, Apr, 13

Well, I've tried 3 copy machines. One blackened the whole page and left ink on my fingers when I touched it. The last two are too pale. I'm sending the best of the lot. Since I presume you only need it for identification, it shouldn't matter. I refuse to go anywhere else looking for another machine. My original is pale, too, because my little supply store was out of ribbons. My husband brought me one this morning. I do hope there's even a contest! But I decided to go ahead and write the piece because it's sort of a tribute to my husband. If you read it, you'll see what I mean.

I'll look forward to seeing you in May. Don't forget to bring your belt.

Warm regards,

we had three
all counted -
so needed your

— Genna

P. S. I decided to enter the poem at the last minute. Not very good but maybe it will make enough entries so the awards can be presented to a worthy one.

SOME OF THOSE BEFORE

Old John was a Blue Ridge man, tall and bearded.
He came down off the hump-back vertebrae of granite
plushed with moss to the sueded gray-green valley
so his "chillun could stand up straight," he said.
He taught six sons to hunt, to aim
their long muzzle-loaders so they didn't waste time
and powder. Their prey was white-tail deer, ~~now and~~
now and then black bear, and always staple rabbits.
They kept their larder full and never dreamed
their marksmanship would one day turn on men,
even some of their own kin. But Will and Stephen,
Earl, young Johnny, Tom and Rollin all
put on Confederate gray, the color
of mountain storms, and afterward
two wives wore black, and Stephen's wife
would plow and harvest and do it all
because he came home frail and sick then died
before his time. But the eyes of Stephen's sons
glimpsed some light to guide them.
They must have yearned to build and mend, to aid
and comfort others. There were means
for only one to go to school. The choice was easy.
That one became a physician. The other one,
John Francis, became a carpenter,
and late along his busy way, my grandfather.

word?

Some of Those Before

Very very interesting! I would indicate
the subject matter in the title. What about
"Before my Grandfather?"

comments by
Ruth Groves

Glenna Holloway
913 E. Bailey Rd.
Naperville, IL 60565

SOME OF THOSE BEFORE

Old John was a Blue Ridge man, tall and bearded.
He came down off the hump-back vertebrae of granite
plushed with moss to the sueded gray-green valley
so his "chillun could stand up straight," he said.
He taught six sons to hunt, to aim
their long muzzle-loaders so they didn't waste time
and powder. Their prey was white-tail deer, ~~now and~~
now and then black bear, and always staple rabbits.
They kept their larder full and never dreamed
their marksmanship would one day turn on men,
even some of their own kin. But Will and Stephen,
Earl, young Johnny, Tom and Rollin all
put on Confederate gray, the color
of mountain storms, and afterward
two wives wore black, and Stephen's wife
would plow and harvest and do it all
because he came home frail and sick then died
before his time. But the eyes of Stephen's sons
glimpsed some light to guide them.
They must have yearned to build and mend, to aid
and comfort others. There were means
for only one to go to school. The choice was easy.
That one became a physician. The other one,
John Francis, became a carpenter,
and late along his busy way, my grandfather.

Generation Gap

My memory banks bias snippets
from distant moving reels--
buttons I counted on his grayish vest,
its tailored points over matching trousers
in a wide-arm willow chair --the view
from inside a lap. I recall glasses
that clamped on his nose, but not the nose
although some people say I have it.
There is an oval place in my mind
framing gentle obscurities.

I can still see a doctor pressing
a swelling of white flesh on a big brass bed.
That night I tried to say a new word--
appendicitis-- over and over
after strangers carried him out flat and slow.

But I don't remember him, my grandfather.
Not his face, voice, or anything he said.
Only a pale abstraction in a casket
on a curtained table-- with flowers all over
where only one vase of iris had ever been
in what my grandmother always called
"the reading room" of the old house.

And a silent aunt who refastened the spring
on the front screen door the next day
after everyone else was gone.

#04?

For Hannah

A neighbor murmurs, "Hannah was so sweet
and caring." She clucks and says it again,
lingering over "so," letting her voice catch.
Another adds, "So thoughtful and unselfish."
All around the ritual room of shaking heads,
sometime-friends recite Hannah's praise
in psalter tones. The cloying sibilance
laced with carnation overkill
thick enough to replace her bier
fuels my anger like splashed grease.

At least no mawkish mass
will ever fill a space like this
once my lips are cosmetically closed.
They could never muster enough charity
to honey their tongues with me. What right
have they to my name in their warm mouths!

Maybe even Hannah wasn't always wonderful.
Or maybe she ran on low amperage--
never knowing how it is
to operate on your own hot crossed-circuitry,
splicing with scorched fingers
your own frayed smoking wires.

Or maybe
she did it all and knew it well
under insulation of infinite grace.

In silence
I will make myself her monument.

THE ANSWERING
A Sequel to Browning's Evelyn Hope

Because no one has ever spoken
Back from here, we've all supposed
This colding seal remains unbroken,
This ancient passage always closed.
If only you who think I died
Could know this is a sweet exchange,
Could know how boundaries fade inside
The spectrum's unimagined range!

You never would have come to me
Had I remained a normal length
In mortal phase. Oh, can you see
The structured weave, the narrow strength
Of patterns granting us a place
In that frame's weft? A giddy girl,
A proper gentleman of grace
In middle years allowed to purl

Into the fabric of acceptance?
Not while I lived, but only after,
Could you speak this without the chance
Of shock, rebuke, or even laughter.
Like you, I never dared express
My secret. Silly child, you might
Have thought. But by this leaf you press
Into my hand, we will unite.

Don't grieve, my dear, your words are not
Earthbound. I hear your lover's heart
With mine and don't despair our lot.
New dimensions reweave my part
As they will yours at your last breath.
The cycling portals pivot and spin
On far-off stars that hinge on death--
An old wronged term that means begin.

And by your token I transmit
My pledge through leaf-veined stillness;
We'll meet renewed, a better fit
With time, my touch free of chillness.
It's fitting that my name was Hope--
Please never abandon its muffled call
No matter how long transition's scope.
Here, time is nothing; love is all.

THERE WAS A WOMAN WHO USED TO GIVE ME FLOWERS

When I was ten I heard her called a whore,
 the sentence fletched with barbs that stung my spine.
 I'd followed her through years of phlox before
 that word bored itching in my brain. Define
 the user of a hoe: But that could not
 explain the rancid tones of voice that fell
 like spattered ale-foam on my father's hot
 hearthstones. Unfitting with her bouquet smell.
 I later learned the meaning of the slur,
 through tears watched twitching suns contort with lies.
 Then wicked moons mimed coins, men's grins and her--
 while rage enlarged to learn what to desp[ise].
 My childhood, white phlox petals, all my prayers--
 quicksilver dropped on jagged granite stairs.

Long days uncoiled the ancient codes within,
 preparing me as resident temptation.
 I saw the pausing eyes my next of kin
 imposed on me, their sullen fascination
 with hip and thigh, my budding breasts. Were they
 designs of sin? Oh, for an older friend!
 The one I'd cherished so had moved away
 when father "had a word with her".... "You tend
 your lessons, girl, forget that piece of trash,"
 he growled when I inquired. I missed her more
 that season watching her garden's backlash
 of weeds where beauty used to rise and pour
 against our wall. At summer's end, I knew:
 What my father called her wasn't true.

But why did he degrade her? Why such hate
 a child could feel its pulse? The evening fire
 hissed and cracked like a rabbit gun, a spate
 of sparks gnawed on the rug. He cursed the spire
 of smoke that rose like one ghost finger prodding
 prospective hosts. He drained another glass.
 He started teasing, yellow-smiling, nodding.
 I never learned effective ways to pass
 him off. A choking feeling, hot and brittle,
 abashed excuses trailed me to my room
 attended by his grinding "Surly little--"
 My door closed on the rest. The quiet gloom
 encased my mind till sleep brought amnesty.

I woke, my father reeking over me.

THE HUNGER MOON

Summer is sweet on the tongue,
soft on the shoulders as kachina clouds,
unlasting as the corn god's shades of green.

Yesterday when the sun centered on my roof,
the red-tailed hawk reeled round the hot yellow
forcing shut my eyes, tightening his circle
and hurling down his cries on my doorstep.

He is back with the dawn.
Down and down he hurls his keening
like splinters of cold. That hawk is a prophet
of the hunger moon-- the time of no more corn--
a time when the deer goes--
making no tracks to a place no man finds.
And before he sleeps, the black bear
eats bark and small things that crawl.

None of us will starve, not even the hawk.
For me, famine is of the spirit
while the body fuels on dried fare
and sweets that come in jars.
The wings are first to wither,
then the deep singing.

Someday I will follow the hawk. I will climb
past wilding mounds of dead-gold buckwheat.
My foot will rattle shards of ancient lava,
startling a lizard into range of talon and beak.
I will face the she-wind
angering in the cinder cones,
prying at broken shadows of the sacred peaks.

There in the secret heights I will master
the proper maintenance of wings.

OBLIQUE RHYME FOR THE GARDEN WE CAN'T FORGET

Having found it by being lost
 I don't know if we can ever go back.
 A gardener yourself, this won't bore you, at least.
 Actually, we were following an antler-shedding buck.
 By the time we picked up the left side of his regal rack
 We'd wandered to an unknown spot
 overgrown with corruption and the stinging reek
 of grotesque excrescence with the breath of spite
 and rot. We fled that oozing nightmare
 but just as in a terror dream, each step
 was hobbled by conspiracies of roots and mire.
 Hulking forms of fungus made us stoop
 as they reached to slime our hair.
 Scratched and gasping, we came to a clearing;
 fog isolated us, but we could hear
 frantic groans and thrashes declaring
 some animal (likely the buck) was trapped
 in that hideous bog. The mist began to disappear.
 Our feet stopped sinking. Then we tripped
 on stones fallen from an old wall in disrepair.

When we stood and raised our eyes
 lilacs surrounded us. A heart-shaped leaf
 brushed my face. Our lungs filled with ease;
 sweetness cleansed our tainted mouths. Allness of life
 combined iris purpling together with asters. Sky-shine
 laced petals and panicles, stippled the moss-napped floor
 with sueded negatives of sun. Iridescent sheen
 on shades of cinnabar and carnelian in a flower
 never seen before drew us ahead. Wherever
 we turned was beauty: Rhododendrons of maroon and coral,
 thornless roses, a night-blooming cereus by day. Over
 and under florescence we moved, accompanied by a chorale
 of posing birds. There were no paths, just solid bloom,
 yet our feet walked unimpeded. Nothing was random or wild
 but there was no pattern or restriction-- only sublime
 existence, glory of being, natural but willed.
 The master gardener left no trace of rake, pruning shears,
 no shriveled calyx, mulch or stakes to mar perfection.
 Maybe we'll find it again-- hidden behind old shores--
 But of this much we're sure, she and I-- Eden wasn't fiction.

so fully shaped - wonderful eloquence And easy-seeming
 masterful slant rhymes - A+ vocabulary

TROMPE L'OEIL

It means deception of the eye,
this unique art form
making us believe nonexistent things.
Your den's north wall appears lined
with shelves of brightly bound classics,
a bust of Homer, a Ming censer, brass pots
trailing ivy and florescence.
The clever painter lies, then provides
real scent of lilacs to satisfy the nose.
But the hand that tries to grasp
a volume of verse or feel jade's coolness
resents being made a fool.
And still the eye insists,
forcing another tactile confrontation
with flatness.

So must I resolve you
in the brain's right and left privacy,
in the unlighted offshoots
that don't remember facts.
Another artist has blueed your eyes
with faithfulness and burnished your skin
with sweet shades. Your walk is smooth
and the line of your throat is gentle.
Sometimes my hand finds heat and roundness
much more than a match for illusions
of sight. No place wanting softness
or substance goes empty.

Yet I know I'll touch again
that one-dimension hardness,
try to hold the light that isn't there,
face that depthless smile.
And all your old false colors
will shame me for my blindness.

ROUNDS OF ENCHANTMENT

Remember how we fantasized the fairy rings?
Those greener circles sometimes made a summer field
look polka-dotted from the peak of hilltop swings.
The giddy heights from rope-hung inner tubes appealed
to magic's possibilities beneath our gaze.
One day we thought an elf had startled our broodmare.
She broke into a gallop trailing high-pitched neighs
then eyed the verdant spot and sidled back to where
the wheel-shape glowed and shimmered viridescently
and we two dreamers visualized a pot of gold
beneath the surface waiting there for you and me.
But when we dug we found spadefuls of thready mold.

Too bad our learning interferes with legend's hold.
Somehow life thrives around a little mystery;
new knowledge seems to pave the way for growing old.
I miss the colored overviews from our own tree
when blues were skies and eyes and ribbons at the fair,
and reds were Pop's tomatoes, barns and autumn's blaze.
We hadn't heard pollution's threat; we weren't aware
of certain chemicals or acid rain or haze.
We learned to drive the tractors once we learned to wield
a hoe, plus all the skills between, so many things,
and none of them can cope with man-made ills or shield
us now. Still, I've found my smile. Look—two fairy rings.

(Fairy rings are circles of luxuriant vegetation associated with
small mushrooms common to pastureland.)