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W. S. Merwin

A ROOT

A root is the first thought of a pair of wings downward
the wings remain its feet
and the feet fall away into the sky
to become the migration of a multitude
I feel my feet in the new days of a sun
how far away they are beginning to be
they are walking even when standing still
my head meanwhile in its dark time
beaten by an unknown heart
goes finding and asking
along the path of air
We will all die,
everyone that we’ve looked at, facing or sideways,
touched or conversed with or forgotten.
We will die one by one, frankly,
of this great impossible that is death.
The black color of my dog will die too,
the white color of your voice,
the hollow color of this day.
And meanwhile
we’ll do one thing or another,
no longer so frankly,
but what difference will it make what we do?
Maybe it would be all the same
if my dog were white,
if your voice were black,
or if this day dyed us with god.
Or maybe it wouldn’t be the same,
and there the question has just begun.
I don’t want to get God mixed up with God.

That’s why I don’t wear a hat, now,
I look for eyes in people’s eyes,
and I ask myself what it is that won’t let us wake,
while I’m here, between parentheses,
and thinking that everything may be a parenthesis.
While I finger this death with its train schedule
and trace my hands.
Because maybe that’s the whole game:
to trace your hands
or the hands’ place.
To trace yourself between parentheses
and not outside.

I don’t want to get god mixed up with god.
A net of looking
holds the world together,
keeps it from falling.
And although I don’t know how it is with the blind,
my eyes go to rest on a back
that may be god’s.
Nevertheless
they look for another net, another thread
that goes its way closing eyes with a borrowed garment
and takes down a rain that already has no earth and no sky.
My eyes look for what
makes us take off our shoes
to see if there is something else holding us up from beneath
or invent a bird
to see whether the air exists
or create a world
to find out whether there’s a god
or put our hat on
to prove we exist.

translated by W. S. Merwin
Dennis Schmitz

DELTA FARM

a friend weighs little a wife
makes the body heavy
as she swims away in the marriage
sheets — she seems more
strange than my mother’s

face surfacing
in memory. yet the drowned displace
the living in our landscape.
not my wife’s but
mother’s thirst dries the sweaty

fingerprints
from the handle of the short-hoe
or cutter
bar skimming the overflow
our salty bodies deposit between
windrows. together we pressed

drool from the sugar
beets & threw
or wished to throw our bodies
like pulp to the few
hogs we kept for meat on the tufted
mud of an upstream
island. this is the sweetness we refused
one another.

* * * * *
this neighbor is married
to solitude
another whose bridal sheets still smell

fresh drinks
greenish mouthsful from the cistern
children won’t grow
up their roots churn in
the cultivated
zones fractured by a hundred
canal reflections. when women come

or even visit
maybe they only fix cots in fallen
down coolie shacks below
the town produce
sheds now abandoned & shifting
with the sun’s weight.
when they always leave boys

will lie restlessly
fishing in the narrow
beds skiffs make, between the pilings
hear the sheet
metal pop nails to trail
in a swifter river.

* * * *

late November: a sixty-knot
squall through Carquinez

Strait breaks
levees, backs salt water miles
inland to preserve
what it kills. animal features
wake on the bedroom
windows — buck deer the flood
divorced; our cow sewn with scars
bawls, against the dawn rubs
her painful ballast

of milk. my wife by instinct
washes her own
breasts before our daughter
feeds. birds in refugee dozens
scatter as I walk
a smaller yard. for days only boats

define the horizon. only the doctor
salt-stained
like us in boots & overalls
scares us. our daughter crawls
through fever one week
then her mother the week after

dies. my wife,
still my wife, what I have
of you, this residue, this love-
salt, will not let me cross private
places in my body
anymore. without you
I can only continue a snail inside
my shell of sleep trailing sticky
dreams. nowhere to walk I go
away from you.

* * * *
I am forty-two, my body
twenty-five.
my skin recopies over
& over my small daughter's

hand barely
holding against its current.

once I wanted to be still
water, a puddle the sky
fell in or halo
my forehead molds from the saturated
marsh when I bend

my face to the first
unconfirmed rice shoot.
now I wait for the March-fed
river to clean
the delta, knead our thought-
out acres of orchard high
ground where picking ladders descend

legless into their own
reflections. the bottomland rice
is lost but these trees
reach deeper. rings of salt show
each step back the sea
takes. swaying from tree
to tree at last my daughter learns

to walk.
BUILDING MARRIAGE

consider the woods a rough
draft for towns: draw
a body, its
uncertain sex a shed of raw boards —

the rest, wild
orchard you bought of the literal
self. draw a face

doubled in the faulted groin
the shack fills —
house or stable the forfeited

animal self strokes
smooth with his tongue implying
speech. the roof if it reflects as a sky

should, mutual destiny,
dictates the rest.
from the unfinished window look

out on death laboring
the other side of the hill
his plow following the old horse-path

while inside, love like foal's breath
darkens the metal
pail from which it hesitantly
eats.
Up in this quiet room here, reading your letter, it's as if I'm in your house. I'm reading. You're working late, downstairs. The children are all asleep. It's raining. Later we'll have a glass of warm bourbon and water, and sleep.

Outside, the streets are white, the rain shines like glass. Police cruise by. You hold me in your arms. Huge planes move off overhead.

It's as if if I answer your letter I'll have to show them my passport: New York. October. Other friends, another life. It's as if I could choose.

2.

strange, sad, these letters

not knowing what you're thinking, reading this

Friendships, fidelities. Things as they are.

Out in the Sheep Meadow I stare at the high school lovers lying, hardly moving, their skin shining under the gray trees; I stare at the old people, talking together, their faces up to the sun. As if they were talking in bed.

My hand lying open in your hand . . .

The Sunday papers the dreamy bicycle riders
As things are
I hate, I want to embrace the man, the woman who is near you, who hears your step.

3.

not even knowing where you are

Your quick, hunched-forward walk
in this man’s walk, your eyes
in that old woman’s gray, restless eyes.

4.

We have our lives.

The river shone white-yellow under the yellow sky; every insect
shone,
rising and dropping. We walked back up the field to the house.

Your room there. This white room. Books, papers, letters.
Stamps, the telephone. Our lives.
We’re always choosing our lives.

5.

All night I thought I heard the phone, or a child
crying. Your face
turned into a snapshot of your face, one
from five years ago.

Your wife and I were sitting up late
in the kitchen, drinking coffee, talking like sisters.
A child cried; one of us went to her, held her.

Here, sitting up late, with a friend,
listening, talking, touching her hand, his hand,
I touch your hand. No one
says anything much. No one leaves anyone.
RE-FORMING THE CRYSTAL

I am trying to imagine
how it feels to you
to want a woman

trying to hallucinate
desire
centered in a cock
focussed like a burning-glass

desire without discrimination:
to want a woman like a fix

Desire: yes: the sudden knowledge, like coming out of ‘flu, that the body is sexual. Walking in the streets with that knowledge. That evening in the plane from Pittsburgh, fantasizing going to meet you. Walking through the airport blazing with energy and joy. But knowing all along that you were not the source of that energy and joy; you were a man, a stranger, a name, a voice on the telephone, a friend; this desire was mine, this energy my energy; it could be used a hundred ways, and going to meet you could be one of them.

Tonight is a different kind of night.
I sit in the car, racing the engine,
calculating the thinness of the ice.
In my head I am already threading the beltways that rim this city
all the old roads that used to wander the country having been lost.
Tonight I understand
my photo on the license is not me,
my
name on the marriage-contract was not mine.
If I remind you of my father's favorite daughter,
look again. The woman
I needed to call my mother
was silenced before I was born.

Tonight if the battery charges I want to take the car out on sheet-ice; I want to understand my fear both of the machine and of the accidents of nature. My desire for you is not trivial; I can compare it with the greatest of those accidents. But the energy it draws on might lead to racing a cold engine, cracking the frozen spiderweb, parachuting into the field of a poem wired with danger, or to a trip through gorges and canyons, into the cratered night of female memory, where delicately and with intense care the chieftainess inscribes upon the ribs of the volcano the name of the one she has chosen.
So the snows return
faceted as a chisel,
catching the greening
mid-breath, knuckling the root.

Vulnerable as bellies
we suck inward

humming a spell and curse
toward the taunting drifts.

What dreams we have
are not of smoke and hashish,

but white stones tied
with stiff rope to our toes,

insect-eaters twisted dead
in a muffled sullen ditch.

We survive the gusting night
like yellowing photographs,
nostalgic and autographed,
curling in pity for ourselves.

And they are still out there, snows
immense with teeth, bargaining,

while we grow rancid with welcome,
poor warm fish with ears.
II

1 A cold rain dissolves
where the air creates —
the guests have left,
each wishing his mind
one day different or past,
bright pieces of the sea
in their bandages,
their stale folded clothes.

2 This is what Communion led to,
where the heart’s holes clog,
the gold teeth soften, take root.
In the evening, before the sun
is swallowed whole,
farms may be seen on the rill,
where the kitchens have long
gone to grease,
and the vealers come in the spring
aproned with the kill of thousands.

3 This is the asylum of tongues,
each with its sour device
of voice, its amputeced song,
where the green stars float out
well-preserved, mirrors meant
for something less —
this is where the visibility is poor.
Under the wide garden leaves
where it is damp as a crotch,
there are graves of small birds,
lost jewelry.
I am not well and full of Bach, my dinner and drink uneaten, my mind a black ooze, an animal undone. The nurse brings pills, a pack of cards, something to kill clocks, something rabid. She seems to say, “I am through with preciosity, rum-a-dum, say-what-you-will.” Someone whines until morning in my brass bed, and I am not well and too full of Bach.

III

There is no heart for mathematics, no yellow dress, no brown-bound books on the mantle, no sad goose of the heart;

There is no end to the war, no small game, no friendly liquids, no mild powders, no salves. There is this helmet, voices in the ward.

IV

A Diary:

Today
I went in and out
and fed the chickens

my arms like nuns
sweeping the yard
feeding the chickens

The sun was hot
on the hard dirt
and my arms brought forth
music from the chickens . . .
I went in and out and made a song

Today
it is a lake before dawn
not quite all of the movement
gone

there on the water a light
and here in the rushes
by my bed
light . . .

Today
. . . I had visitors
two doctors and a nurse
and someone's spaniel
on the lawn

Today
I did not wake as usual
and someone had visitors . . .
a doctor . . . a nurse
my neighbor
called Monique with her dog

Today
today my medicine

V

Polaroids:

1 The stone wall
shuttered with moss
where the coral snake
lifts his head once

each morning and
dozes in poison

2 Aneurysm —

dthis is where
the red would be

dthis the violet

I am never
coming out of it

TV on but no sound
father fingering

his hat
waiting for the news

3 1904/ She

remembers perfectly
how cold a wind

how deep the snow
when the round-headed boy

died in sleep
died beneath blankets

meant to keep winter out
not ever his life
his four years of breakfast
and one pair of shoes

Monique

4 It was out of place
the monkey dead of age snarled with fear,
on the linoleum

VI

This is the garage where you hung up on your father,
these hyacinths glimpsing your dimes falling, your
portfolio of . . . whatever. We were young and German,
there was the war, of course, the dancing and beer.
There are tales and fables, stories of large fish we
catched beneath green logs, green stars floating out.
I am waking into a wet bed I have never slept in . . .
though I have been here three years, four years, ten.

VII

There was Wagner,
but no appetite for the 2nd Movement . . .
my medicine, no . . .

but
the warm snout of the dog on my hand,
the ducks curling into
the water, no . . .

the Dante, but the Dante,
the smell of the water . . .

the several snows melting where they fell
ELEGY

I open the first door.
It is a large sunlit room.
A heavy car passes outside
and makes the china quiver.

I open door number two.
Friends! You drank some darkness
and became visible.

Door number three. A narrow hotel room.
View on an alley.
One lamppost shines on the asphalt.
Experience, its beautiful slag.
SENTRY DUTY

I'm ordered out to a big hump of stones
as if I were an aristocratic corpse from the Iron Age.
The rest are still back in the tent sleeping,
stretched out like spokes in a wheel.

In the tent the stove is boss: it is a big snake
that swallows a ball of fire and hisses.
But it is silent out here in the spring night
among chill stones waiting for the light.

Out here in the cold I start to fly
like a shaman, straight to her body —
some places pale from her swimming suit.
The sun shone right on us. The moss was hot.

I brush back and forth along warm moments,
but I'm not allowed to stay.
I'm whistled back through space. —
I crawl among the stones. Back to here and now.

Task: to be where I am.
Even when I'm in this solemn and absurd
role: I am still the place
where creation does some work on itself.

Dawn comes, the sparse tree trunks
take on color now, the frostbitten
forest flowers form a silent search party
after something that has disappeared in the dark.

But to be where I am . . . and to wait.
I am full of anxiety, obstinate, confused.
Things not yet happened are already here!
I feel that. They're just out there:

25
a murmuring mass outside the barrier. They can only slip in one by one. They want to slip in. Why? They do one by one. I am the turnstile.
FURTHER IN

It's the main highway leading in, the sun soon down.
Traffic backs up, creeps along,
it is a torpid glittering dragon.
I am a scale on that dragon.
The scarlet sun all at once blazes in my windshield,
pouring in.
I turn transparent.
Some writing shows up inside me.
Words done with invisible ink showing when the paper is held over a fire.
I see that I have to go far off, straight through the city, out the other side, I have to step out and walk a long time in the woods.
Go in the tracks of the badger.
Growing hard to see, nearly dark.
Stones lie about on the moss.
One of the stones is precious.
That stone can change it all.
It can make the darkness shine.
It is the lightswitch for the whole country.
Everything depends on that stone.
Look at it . . . touch it . . .
ALONG THE LINES

I

Sun blazes from the icelocked river.
This is the roof of the globe.
Silence.

I sit on an overturned boat, pulled up on shore,
swallow the silence-potion,
turning slowly.

II

A wheel stretches out endlessly, is turning.
The hub is here, is nearly motionless.

Some motion farther out: steps in the snow,
words that begin to slide
past building fronts.

The whining traffic from the highways
and the soundless traffic
of the ghosts returning.

Farther out: tragic masks facing the wind,
the roar of high speed — still farther out
the rushing

where the last words of love evaporate —
water drops that creep slowly
along the steel wings . . .

faces in profile that shout — the empty earphones
clashing against each other —
kamikaze!
III

The icelocked river glitters and is silent.
Shadows lie deep here
having no voice.

My steps here were explosions in the field
which silence now paints over and
paints over.

translated by Robert Bly
Here I come, the invisible man, perhaps employed by a great Memory to live right now. And I am driving past the locked-up white church, a wooden saint is standing in there smiling, helpless, as if they had taken away his glasses.

He is alone. Everything else is now, now, now. The law of gravity pressing us against our work by day and against our beds by night. The war.

*translated by Robin Fulton*
After studying it a long while, I found something very unusual in Donald Hall’s essay on the origins of poetic form in the last Field. I’ll go over the argument briefly. His idea is that three sensualities, all linked to the earliest weeks of our life, lie behind what we call “poetic form.” They are the baby’s enjoyment of making sounds, even when meaningless, which could be called mouth-sensuality, and in Milton become vast sonorities of vowels; the baby’s natural kicking motions when it is joyful, which might be called dance-sensuality, and continues as the adult’s love of dancing, and that powerful beat we notice in every line of Yeats; and finally, the pleasure of appearance-disappearance. A baby loves to see its mother’s face appear, and then disappear, and appear again. That is very like the way the sound in a rhymed poem, for example, disappears, and then suddenly appears again at the last possible moment. This could be called appearance-disappearance sensuality, or match-unmatch. It’s connected with hiding treasures and climbing into tunnels.

I think he’s right that whenever we feel a poem has form (which he would like to call also a sensual body) these three pleasures or sensualities are all present. They are easy to see in the classic sonnet. Shakespeare’s sonnets have a lovely play of vowels through each stanza; the dance sensuality comes in through the iambic beat, and, in his case, probably also in the musical rhythm over and above that, of the tune to which the poem was sung. Finally the rhyme words produce disappearance-appearance. Shakespeare in his sort of sonnet with its closing theme-couplet makes sure that the themes of the poem also perform the appearance-disappearance-appearance drama, to the great delight of the mind.
Two thoughts about present poetry occur then after these ideas become clear. The first is, what does this mean for free verse? As Whitman saw, the rhymed metered poem is, in our consciousness, so tied to the feudal stratified society of England that such a metered poem refuses to merge well with the content of American experience. We therefore have no choice but to write free verse, X.J. Kennedy and Yvor Winters notwithstanding. Whitman, Williams, Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov, Robert Creeley have all seen that clearly. The next step would seem to be for the American poet to become much more conscious of these sensualities, and work to bring them into his free verse, in ways no other poets have done, or had to do, before him. Evidently Voznesensky's appearance-disappearance in assonance alone is fantastic, and assonance is clearly linked to the first sensuality also. H.D's "imagist" poems are impressive particularly for her return of vowels, so beautiful and so solid. But on the whole, recent American poets pay little attention to sound. If we are Puritans, that fact would help to explain the lack of attention.

I think the main originality of Hall's piece is that it is a convincing demonstration that poetic form can be understood not as an adult activity, but as an infantile pleasure. That view goes against the grain of a lot of critical assumptions. Many a poet defending himself from charges of doing nothing presents a picture of himself wrestling manfully with his craft alone hour after hour, adult discipline in his craft being impressive evidence of his serious adult attitude toward life. But that assumes the creation of poetic form involves adult activity. What if the delight in poetic form were actually a delight in and return to infantile sensualities? That also could explain the long hours "wrestling with his craft." (It helps explain too why the craft interviews in The New York Quarterly are so infantile.) If this new view is adopted, we see that what is childlike and infantile lies in the form, what is adult in the content. Content and form then make two poles, across which the magnetic energy of the poem arches. The fault with Ted Berrigan's
group in New York and Bolinas is that they have brought the infantile into the content, where it doesn’t belong. Then there is nowhere for the adult perceptions to go at all. This visualization of the poles also implies that content and form are opposite in charge, like the negative and positive poles of a battery. We notice immediately that it contradicts the Creeley truism that Olson enthusiastically adopted, namely, “Form is merely an extension of content.” But I was getting sick of that proverb anyway. When everyone agrees that a given sentence is true, the chances are overwhelming that it is not. Form and content are magnetic opposites. Charles Olson wonderfully understood that American poetic form could not be an imitation of English form, and that the roots of form go back to the body and its breath, not to English metrical habits. It seems though that he wanted the form to be adult — he was interested in the time after the invention of the typewriter, rather than the primitive time before the baby or the aborigine has ever seen a typewriter.

His essay on projective verse makes the whole problem of form technical, post-industrial, needing ingenuity and a typewriter with a good spacer. I’m unjust to his intellectual liveliness, but there is some Puritanism, that is, dislike of childhood, in his essay. Russian poets don’t seem to have that.

I’m sure all these generalizations are maddening to many, but I’ll make a few more. X.J. Kennedy’s and Yvor Winter’s insistence on rhyming form is clearly tied to Puritanism, so they take away with one hand what they offer with the other. Pound noticed great metrical and rhyming work among the troubadours, but they were also influenced by the sensuality of Arab civilization, particularly Sufi religious sensuality. The face of Pound’s mother appears so seldom in the Cantos that we have the sense at last that its form was broken, or never there, it did not come.

Donald Hall’s piece is also maddening and misleading in that it implies that for true poetry nothing is needed but regres-
sion — the crib is the best workshop — but we know that is not true. He doesn’t say that directly — only in his tone.

The form pole pulls the poem back then toward infancy, the content pole pulls it forward into adulthood. Adulthood seems to be the recognition that there are others in the universe besides you, greater causes and greater beings. The poem surely needs character — the drive forward into experiences — probably embodying pain — that the infant never dreams of in his crib.

Despite the regressive longing that I sense in his prose, I think his essay is a needed step forward in figuring out new ways to think of free verse. We have the right to ask of any poem in free verse before us: does it have these three sensualities? If not, it can never make a good opposite charge for its own content.

I can give an example. I have tried for years to work with the old Greek sound meters, and yet my sense of sound is still dim. Here are some lines I found in my notebook, written a few weeks ago:

How lazy I am and have always been!
How few harsh hours surrendered to the labor.
Who is the enemy?
He has lived long with us.
He is not a demon, not a god, nor a devil.
He is just a widening of the atoms,
he is nothing more than space between molecules . . .

These lines say what I want to say, why are they bad? It’s clear they have no sound sensuality at all . . . that part is mediocre. The dance sensuality is weak or constantly fragmented, and they have no more appearance-disappearance than ordinary newspaper prose. Here are two poems of Whitman’s.
Out of the rolling ocean the crowd came a drop gently to me,
Whispering I love you, before long I die,
I have travel'd a long way merely to look on you to touch you,
For I could not die till I once look'd on you,
For I fear'd I might afterward lose you.

Now we have met, we have look'd, we are safe,
Return in peace to the ocean my love,
I too am part of that ocean my love, we are not so much separated,
Behold the great rondure, the cohesion of all, how perfect!
But as for me, for you, the irresistible sea is to separate us,
As for an hour carrying us diverse, yet cannot carry us diverse forever,
Be not impatient — a little space — know you I salute the air, the ocean and the land,
Every day at sundown for your dear sake my love.

Another one:

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting hear the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.
BEING BORN

What we have loved is with us ever, ever, ever.
So you are with me far into the past,
the oats of Egypt,
all that I gathered in my beak before I ran off.

AT NIGHT

Every day I want so much to see the true teacher. I look for him each time I go out to empty the teapot. When I’m in the middle of a book, I suddenly think I know where he is — west of us, in the forest — or perhaps I am the one who is out in the night, the path barely lit up by moonlight, shining on the sides of the pine trees, the sea far off glittering . . . the forest sand wet under my feet . . . and he is the one who is at home, he is sitting in my chair calmly, he reads and prays all night, he loves to feel his own body around him, he does not leave his house.
Two boys from town
walked out in the woods one fall day
to rescue a farm girl
whom the weird people had stolen.
They found the rock mountain in the woods
and knocked at the stone door
hoping the troll was out somewhere picking lingonberries.

But the troll was at home,
and came to the door himself.
"I guess you’re looking for the girl,” the troll said.
"But she’s not at home.
She’s gone out to pick lingonberries.
We’re going to have some lingonberry sauce.”

The boys wondered what direction that would be.
It’s off there, and the troll pointed.
The boys thanked him for the information
and set off in that direction.
They found the country girl all right
but she didn’t recognize them.

She wasn’t too wild about being interrupted picking either, she said.
And how do I know about you.
Maybe you could just change the whole way I see things.

The boys understood then that she had gotten used to it now.
She hadn’t been so much changed by the other world
as spoiled by it.
But they still wanted to get her to come along.
Then she really got angry and worked them over a little.
She was stone-strong all right.
Safely home they didn’t say a word to their parents, and ate their mush in silence. They realized also that the people around he were not interested, as they used to be, in trolls and people stolen.

This and many other thoughts moved in their minds while they bit still frightened on their wooden spoons. They signaled to one another under the table with their feet as usual and went on eating. The milk was turning. That usually happens when there are thunderstorms or when someone has been using supernatural power.
HENHOUSE

The hens drift in early from the day's pecking. They take a few turns about the henhouse floor and arrange themselves according to who's the favorite. Then, when all that is clear, the leaping up to the roost begins. Soon they're all sitting in rows and the rooster is present. He tests out sleep but there is to be no sleep right away. The hens shove to the side and cause trouble. He has to straighten them out, with his beak and a cawkle. Now it's shifting and settling down. One of the hens tries to remember the last worm she caught today. But the memory is already gone down, on its way through the crop. Another, just before she falls asleep, recalls the way the rooster looked, the white of her eyeballs fluttering, her shutterlike lids closing out the world.

translated by Robert Bly
VINES

Aa.
Acacia. Flowering and an archway.
A round ambush = an abyssinian cat.
Consider acts lines, such as
a curled cat uncurling.
Consider acts places to live;
   paragraphing,
paper sculpture.

A polygon has many angels;
how many cousins to the ounce
how many weasels to the once.
Consider the shapes breath makes:   words    clouds
coins in the blood
florins.

A flourish.

II.
Two parts. Often it does.
Mountain and river.

B. The glass blower.
His breath makes open air close.
Bottles    clear
           amber
           blue
bowls of water    goblets
a green glass
a green dress,
he says may I look at them all
all at once.
She says may I look at you.
Eyes
small rooms to hold globes worlds
and the wide shadows of words which travel toward the sun.

IV.
Ivy that is.
Had you forgotten.

X.
Winter a white angle.
A gable.
Gábríel at the table, upon it
is oil precious pressure.
In a brown bottle a crush of prehistoric fern.

V.
The shadows he showed her became the first she’d seen.
She is porous, where his eyes burned there is
room for tigers
the Tigris

irises
one ibis

two.
Suns in the blood spin in blue currents.
How thin can glass be, thin as

lines of air
First, the two men stand pondering
The square stone block sunk in the earth.
It must weigh five hundred pounds. The best
Days are the first
To flee. The taller man has gray hair
And long thin arms, the other
Squat with young shoulders, his legs
Slightly bowed already, a laborer
With the years, like a tree.

One works the edge
Of his steel claw subtly
Between the stones.
The other waits for the right instant,
A dazzle of balance, and slips the blade
Of his cold chisel into the crack.

Balancing the great weight of this enormous
And beautiful floorstone laid by the Romans,
Holding a quarter-ton of stone lightly
Between earth and air,
The tall man with the gray hair reaches
Around the corner of stone
And most delicately eases
A steel pipe beneath.
The best days are the first
To flee. Now both men
Can stand upright, then gradually,
Their fine hands sure, they can ease
The stone from its place.
I look beneath.
It does not look like a grave.
The earth smells fresh, like the breath
Of an animal just born.

When I look up,
The tall old man with the slender arms, the young
With the frail bulging shoulders
Are gone for some wine. Work hard, and give
The body its due of rest, even at noon.
The best days are the first to flee,
And the underside of the stone
Is pink marble
From Verona where the poet found shelter,
The intelligent friendship of daylight, and kindness,
And a little peace
The first thing I saw in the morning  
Was a huge golden bee ploughing  
His burly right shoulder into the belly  
Of a sleek yellow pear  
Low on a bough.  
Before he could find that sudden black honey  
That squirms around in there  
Inside the seed, the tree could not bear any more.  
The pear fell to the ground,  
With the bee still half alive  
Inside its body.  
He would have died had I not knelt down  
And sliced the pear gently  
A little more open.  
The bee shuddered, and returned.  
Maybe I should have left him alone there  
Drowning in his own delight.  
The best days are the first  
To flee.
One day, the old woman decided they'd done it. The world was crazy and they'd get her too. She loaded the gun and went off to the garden for a silver cabbage, a fist of verbena as usual. She bent over, her head bobbing in the cool breeze, first "no," then slightly consenting. She could be seen from a distance and mistaken. If they came from behind, out of that piney bird's beak or the greasy pipe in the carport, there would be no struggle. She'd tremble and hand over the gun. This was a perfect place for planting. She saw her face unfolding in the cabbage, in the dull stars on the tin bucket where the gun stood guard. This worried her. She took more than she wanted: a carrot that would sweat; an onion that would simmer beautifully, shed each icy ring;
a winter pepper
that always fought back —
too many. Quickly,
she patted the dirt back over them.
From his porch, a neighbor
glanced at her — she nodded
the usual, "no . . . no;"
so he went on shaving.
But to the south,
the house was empty,
the young couple missing;
the bare windows got darker
every day. The cabbage,
the silt on her fingertips
were forgotten. In silence,
the piney bird nibbled
at a moldy leaf.
I

I was feeling low. I tried to make a sandwich but all I could find were two slices of miasma. I decided to go to a field I knew of and lay down there. I felt a lot better. I laid my head right down on the ground. Then, then I heard something. It was the worms. It sounded like the worms were coughing! I nearly panicked — until I realized they weren't coughing. Not a chance. I don’t know what they were doing: rolling over, breathing exercises, whatever — the worms absolutely were not coughing! Needless to say, as I walked home, I was ecstatic.

II

If someone asked me what it's like being inside you, I couldn’t answer. And I consider myself fairly articulate.

III

There are moments in everyone’s life, I’m sure, when we receive more than sudden insights into tiny things. For instance, fleas. Think about this: a flea circus — astonishing. A flea shot out of a cannon. A flea sticking his head into a tiger’s mouth. And flea markets. Fleas with shopping bags. Fleas. More tiny and useless homage to fleas!

IV

The same man has the same finger on the same trigger of the same death-ray, but now, it’s not pointed at my head anymore. In fact, it’s not pointed at me at all!
V

I can believe a man who kisses his violin. Actually, I wouldn’t trust a man who didn’t kiss his violin, however secretly. I mean an actual embrace. Why not? Why not love that wooden thing? Like a heart outside the body, a voice outside the voice.

VI

All fish are innocent and lovely. I’m wearing my best flippers. I’ve got a nosegay in one hand, a speargun in the other. I’m going dancing with the fish. I say this with unflinching candor and integrity: I’m going to their ballroom and dive forever.

VII

I can chop down this tree with my hand! I can be as calm as an apple on a doily. Owwwwwwww! I’m the prince of those who howl. That’s my heart drifting near the ceiling, when I roll over in bed I make the small noises a child might make . . .

VIII

I’m not joking — if I were shot in the back with an arrow I’d only want to know what else went on in the world during the second or part-second it took the arrow from the bow. I’m not joking — that’s why I’m leaning against a wall where there is no wall.
IX

I lost something, definitely, one night in Marengo, Iowa. I was just driving through. A train was parked in the middle of town. That’s all. Don’t expect me to say what I lost. I’m not sure — a blue sweat, some colloquial sadness, who cares! — as long as it’s gone. Counted as missing.

X

The melancholy nurse and the lonely greenskeeper, here’s their opera. She drives home from the hospital at dawn after the nightshift. Naturally, she drives by the golf course. He’s out there every morning — the dew still in the sandtraps, the slow white arc of the sprinklers . . . He’s always singing to the grass. She hums along with the dashboard, the tires, the windshield. Every morning there is this opera.
FIVE SUGGESTIONS

I suggest a woman in a grey suit, one with a red collar on it. Nothing should be taken by itself. Not the collar, not the suit. Nothing should be assumed that isn't given. Birdlike, but not overpoweringly so, that describes her best. She must be able to climb up and down stairs, to pause, to turn around, lots of skills. Also to be turned backwards and covered with lacquer. The angles aren't usually measured out, no one's ready. I'm not a tool, the woman is careful to say. That doesn't ease her appearance. The worries of winterization are totally unknown to her. I have fiber enough, she says haughtily. Now let society do the astounding. Step by step, always sleepily, it works well this way. Enough objections present themselves. She's stilted, she has no feet, that's why the fiber. Her hair is not in order either. Yarn, wool, thread, unravelled, worked over, taken out again, there's nothing it can be compared to. It's always a disaster. And the color fluctuates with the weather. Sometimes she meets Kaiser Ferdinand outside of the village. Always on the northside, who knows how she gets there? You see: nothing is simple about her except the suit and maybe her feet. For that reason I ask you to be patient with the red collar. I suggested it the same way I suggested her. But I hear dissenting voices already, stronger suggestions, more pronounced opinions. So quickly misunderstood, almost in reverence. You misunderstand me, I don't want to insist on it. It's only my opinion.

With Kaiser Ferdinand it's different. He wears light blue, crosses streets fast and always diagonally and admires details, even in advanced positions. He abandons gateways and fountains as meeting places. That's awkward, for someone is always behind him, whether it's the French or the Northwest
Americans. But he spends his nights in damp chambers, that keeps him young, and doesn’t let himself quake before the fleeing earth. Climb, he says, he’d rather go up than down. Which paths? The mountain paths, what other ones are there? The downward ones, of course, those with scrawny ranunculus left and right. Oh, yes, those. He doesn’t use those at all. That is, he did once, but as a civilian. Purely civilian. Can he swear to that? He can. Only he’s hard to catch up with. Before you know it, you’re already far ahead of him and then finding him’s impossible. He talks with farmers in the bushes while you hurry panting through the farthest summits, over the timberlands and the latifundia. He takes timberlands seriously, that makes him difficult. He is no simple kaiser, he is often ahead of us. Too fast for a kaiser, and at this speed too reflective. There are even those who’ll confirm that. We want to drop him.

An epic in the form of roses. I mean: Roses mixed in with the verses. That would have to be guaranteed in order to see the roses clearly, too. Otherwise the people will turn against them. Undependable, they say and write it in with their complaints. Or: The last time I hurried by their shop windows, there wasn’t a single rose standing in the middle. But doesn’t the ground rule also provide for a lateral arrangement, an arrangement in the shadows, and prescribe stronger eyes for those hurrying by? We ought to consider that, we ought to summon the opticians. Why? Who needs excuses like those? So then wouldn’t it be possible to strengthen the roses with the help of lacquer instead of growth? That’s it, that’s it. And let’s be honest, just how often was growth used as a nail in emergencies? A beautiful epic. Did I say that? I said: Shadows and pages are good enough, if not specially invented. And let’s suppose they had too many herbs or lenses in the store and neither can nor want to escape it any longer, they have compassion. What will be left for them to do besides seeking out the boundaries with
careful steps? And what's going to happen to the roses? They'll be received. Along with growth, nails or lacquer; but that's not so important. Received and parted with. Welcome and gone. Aha.

Or pockmarks at marestime. You'll have to fill me in better on that, I don't know a thing about it. Mares, what're they? They're horses. And marestime? Horsestime. Special horses? No, nothing special, heavy hooves and short manes. Carriage horses maybe. Can they step free of their shafts? No. No side-stepping then? No, no side-stepping. Poor horses! Poor horses? What are their ears like? Perked, but already grey. Pointed near the top, that helps for deafness. Does that build self-confidence? Hardly. But the hooves. Yes, the hooves are what's conspicuous. Too heavy? Maybe too heavy. Does that weight them down? It weights them down heavily. And every horse? Almost every one. But the pockmarks? The pockmarks? I meant, the mares. But why the mares? The manes, I meant. Of course — they're thin; and short, as I said before. They're always falling out. On account of the beetles? No, it happens all the time, the street's covered with horsehair as if it were hemp. And could the horsehairs be used for knitting? They break easily. That's a hardship for the people. For whom? I feel it's a hardship. A hardship. It's so easy for you to slip on, tumbling over and so on. Who tumbles over? The horses that go over it with their carriages. Do they try to get up again? They try. Do they succeed? Not all of them. So it all turns into a confused tangle on the ground. Then come the pockmarks. We've made it! By that time the carriage shafts are breaking too, things are heading in every direction but the usual one. It's lucky they're mares. Lucky? With their sloping ribs. I'm thinking, wouldn't it be possible to brush off the pockmarks sideways? Into the dried-up ditches left and right? But there aren't any dried-up ditches there. Now, maybe it's none of my business, but what color are the
pockmarks? They're black. Then wouldn't it be possible to change everything? To change it? I mean: Pockmarks at marestime? Hasn't that been proven? We'll think it over.

Let's experiment again, this time with little Edison, who's lolling in our dandruff. He's taken three blue pencils from his drawer, he's got them with him now. He draws with them on staves. What does he draw? First of all, three pencils, pencils being hard to draw. You have to be careful of people who don't know this yet. Whoever does know it is to be commended. Difficult to draw, what else? Beginning with the point: everything. The sides, the six corners, sometimes eight, the length. Weighted down with spider webs and dampness, as well, maybe, with sleep. And always the blue in the eye. You have to be able to imagine that. Why doesn't little Edison go home? He's still here now. Not many steps wasted. At the sight of the Nile and the rest of the rivers behind the knotholes: only necessary movements allowed. He doesn't see the Nile at all. No, he doesn't see the Nile. But give him time. His mother is waiting, along with the hungry Egyptians. There's still a lot that little Edison hasn't even dreamed of. Maybe we'll take him.

translated by Lynne Spaulding
BROTHERS ON SUNDAY NIGHT

We’d been dreaming
Or at least I had
About peanuts that grow in the river
And oozed sap
When you bit them

A woman bootlegger shook her dustmop
That was the moon

In the fields
Something barren like a journey
And echoes of salt
Sprinkled deep on the table

Where they said the young mother
Walked into the water
With her dress full of rocks
I lay down
And ate a peck of bruised peaches

A fisherman went to sleep on his mule
Riding to the store
For a roll of wax paper

Then we heard
Shouting that tore out the light.
LINGER

The moon wanders through my barn
Like a widow heading for the county seat

It's not dark here yet
I'm just waiting for the bow hunters
So I can run them off

They put out licks on my land
Every summer

When it gets cool the animals are tame

I've fallen asleep
In the trees before

I dreamed someone's horse
Had wandered out on the football field
To graze
And I was showing children through a museum

The bow hunters make their boys
Pull the deer's tongue out bare-handed

At dusk when I hear an arrow
Coming through my field like a bird
I wonder what men have learned
From feathers

The animals wade the creek
And eat blackberries
The wind blows through the trees
Like a woman on a raft.
The desire to write in a new way follows, albeit with a considerable delay, in the wake of a new way of existing in the world. At ostensibly ever shorter intervals "one's" sense of hearing, perception, smell, and taste changes appreciably from what it was just a little time ago. A re-orientation in the experience of the world has even altered the unalterable memory; once again we see "the world" — but what does this word actually mean? — in a different light; nowadays intuitive notions about life, too, seem to be less durable than in earlier times: there is a considerable amount of restlessness.

The desire to articulate it is powerful, more powerful in the long run than the temptation to ignore this desire. Should the time-tested manner of saying thoroughly familiar things suddenly no longer be of any merit? Is it conceivable that the tried and true methods may have become inoperative from one day to the next, and that the results achieved by them may have become false or superfluous overnight? For a good long while you can delude yourself into re-interpreting the embarrassing spectacle of vacuous grand gestures; drawing a smoke screen around your own failures, you can, in a tearful or artificially indifferent voice, proclaim the end of a literary genre: that of prose fiction.

A second fallacy would be that of lapsing into silence by "honestly" acknowledging your own inadequacy, by admitting that something has rendered you speechless (the meaning of this word "something" would have to be left as vague as possible: naturally, any definition would again require the activity of writing). This attitude, just as any non-attitude, would
hardly be noticed and would presumably soon be reduced to a mere pose. If you begin to practice renunciation, you lock yourself into unfairness. Trying to justify your renunciation, you must constantly find new accusations against your environment. And this dooms you to dishonesty.

A third alternative might be the attempt to prove yourself by being productive. Incidentally, to prove yourself to whom? And why?

It was by chance that my restlessness, which always grows more intense before it can be articulated, accompanied me to a part of the world I had never expected or wished to visit; you cannot desire something of which you know nothing. But what I could not desire due to my ignorance has now turned into a reality I would not want to have missed: the city of Gorky on the Volga river, the Hotel "Rossiya," this room with its light-green walls, its dusty desk, and its two windows which offer a view of the Volga plains, just as does the balcony on which I am standing. I am wondering why today, on the second day, this view is no longer quite the same that it was yesterday, immediately upon my arrival here. Impossible to describe it! Only this much: neither has the weather changed — there is still the same heat glistening above the river and the mighty plains beyond it — nor, for that matter, have the colors. There is not a single new feature in the visage of the landscape, and even the most meticulous ophthalmologist would diagnose no change in my eyes.

Has some chimera placed itself between my eyes and the river down below? Hardly: it was time, nothing but a little time: an afternoon, a night, and a morning. The young female interpreter who shows us the city on a sightseeing tour by bus, vainly struggling with her microphone; the icon corner in the Kashirin House where Gorky's grandmother used to kneel for hours on end; the chest from which young Alexej Peshkov would observe her, fearing that the big clock might crash down on him; the lovers who are shoved, as if on a conveyer belt, up
the public-garden path, at whose edge we sit under the open evening sky, listening to the performance of a breathtakingly corseted songstress in a glittering gold-colored gown; the gaze of a journalist, a onetime officer of the occupation force in Mecklenburg, as he pronounces the name of a woman we are to look for: Berta Kopp; the woman with a tucked-up skirt and bare legs, rinsing her laundry at the pump in front of her house: not a whit of all this has completely vanished from my memory. Nor has, for example, the small church with its golden onion domes which we try to reach through a maze of streets, without ever finding it; not even the innumerable gray dogs, rushing out of wooden passage-ways, all of them looking as if they were descendants of the same first parents. Might somebody have decreed on behalf of them that "Nothing shall be lost?" All of them, at any rate, have made their impression on me (how fitting is the word "im-pression" here!). So that now, standing on the same spot, facing the same landscape — which in former centuries would have been called "grandiose" —, I really see everything differently.

A statement we frequently make without getting "to its bottom!" In order to get there, one would have to muster the courage to close one's eyes, to let oneself go: There they still are, the banks of the Volga, they glide by slowly and relentlessly, and the engine of the boat vibrates softly below one's feet, I am on board the steamer, have yet to arrive in the strange city, but know already what it will be like: arriving there, this view from the balcony of a hotel room, the lovers . . ., know what it will have been like: having departed, having forgotten many things, except, I am sure, this present moment which I enlist to secure my eventual recollection, while doing some prospecting into the past and the future, taking a commonly known slight dizzy spell in my stride: weightlessness, free movement in space and time — and deliberately sinking further down into what we hypothetically name the "past." Thus I go on to similar moments, discover an experience pattern, perhaps make out
its origin, compare this pattern with others that are familiar to me, and may then possibly learn something new about myself.

I am at the bottom of that statement.

Unwittingly I use metaphors from the professional life of a diver, and this points to problems concerning depth — regardless of whether or not this concept may have suffered from a lack of clarity or from misuse, so much so that it is not only despised but even hated by many theorists of the novel. And indeed, "depth" is not a quality attached to things. The experience of depth emanates from the human consciousness. In this connection I recall a Libby's condensed-milk can, which confused me when I was a child: On its band there was a smiling nurse showing in the flat palm of her outstretched hand a Libby's condensed-milk can which, in its turn, had this blasted nurse on its band — this one being quite small already — with that obtrusive can in the palm of her hand . . . and so on ad infinitum; the sequence trailed off into the invisible, but maliciously suggested a perpetual line of ever tinier nurses showing condensed-milk cans to the consumer. That idea made me nervous, because the whole effort of your imagination leads to nothing, because the funnel into which you have forced your imagination to crawl will finally drop it into a void.

I am writing this at the dusty desk in the Hotel "Rossiya:" Being fully aware of the present and the presence, say, of that river down there and of all the real and the fancied experiences connected with it, I am writing about an earlier event in the course of which — groping my way along a chain of associations — I remembered not only still earlier events but also past thoughts and memories, and on top of everything else it occurred to me that all of this might somehow become significant later on, in the future (which at this moment is the present). For instance, by my describing it.

This is not an extravagant visualization, but a verifiable observation anybody can make, a not very rare, not very complicated one at that. It is an everyday situation of the modern psyche, a relativization and temporary nullification of objective
time, an average experience: that the moment is almost infinitely extensible, that it contains an enormous amount and a multileveled variety of possible experiences, despite the fact that five minutes simply have remained five minutes.

Our brain is sufficiently complex to be able to deepen the linear extension of time — let us call it surface — to a nearly unlimited degree through memory and anticipation. If society does not know how to utilize this extremely wide-spread faculty, then we shall be bored. And this would not only be boring but downright alarming.

Depth: If it is not a quality of the material world, it must be an experience, a faculty which was acquired in the social life of human beings over long periods of time and which has not only been maintained but also developed thanks to its usefulness. We repeat: it is tied to us who are subjects living in objective circumstances. It is the result of unfulfilled needs, hence of tensions, contradictions, and incredible human endeavors to grow beyond oneself, or, perhaps, to attain to oneself. This may be the meaning and the task of the depth of our consciousness; in that case we must not sacrifice it to superficiality.

The five minutes are over. While traveling, I lack the time to really describe them in a piece of prose. Only one observation can be noted down, a partial answer to the question of what may compel a person to be a productive literary writer: apparently the writer expects a writing hand to succeed in delineating a curve that is more intense, more glowing, closer to the true reality of life than the curve of life that is subject to all sorts of deviations.

And since the labor of writing has never been totally given up, even in the most difficult times, it seems that life in its sheer nakedness cannot very well take care of itself, not if it remains undescribed, untransmitted, uninterpreted, and unreflected.
A necessary condition for our life seems to be the consent and support of the imagination, that is, the possibility of playing with free options. At the same time something else takes place inside of us, daily, hourly — a creeping, scarcely avoidable process: one of hardening, petrefaction, habituation. It is our memory that is most affected by it.

Everybody keeps a collection of colored medallions with inscriptions, droll as well as scary ones. Occasionally we take them out and show them around because we need reassurance for our own soothingly unequivocal perceptions of what is beautiful or ugly, good or bad. These medallions do for our memory what the calcified vesicles of the lung do for consumptive people, or what prejudices do for our morality: they are living cells, as it were, which used to be active but have been paralyzed by encapsulation. There was a time when you would not touch them or when you burned your fingers if you did; now they are cool and smooth, many of them have been artfully polished, many particularly valuable pieces are products of labor that took years, for you have to forget and revise and re-interpret a lot of things to be able to make absolutely sure that people see you as you wish to be seen: this is what we need our medallions for. I suppose I have made myself clear.

We like to think in terms of "memory" when we put these rather nicely made craft-shop articles into circulation, pretending that they are genuine, so that they can prove their market value, measure up to the salable supply, and accordingly pass for being genuine.

I, too, have my medallions. One of them, an especially handy and plausible one, is actually a fragment of a movie. Originally, the camera must have stood in the bedroom of my parents, in place of one of the night-tables. The men in charge of lighting saved electricity; an early winter morning, the customary black-out. Blaring from the radio set in the adjacent living room, an excited voice announces the date; we realize:
it is the final year of the war. Packed suitcases, sacks stuffed with bedding, the coat with the silver-fox collar is tentatively weighed in a hand and then tossed back into the closet, a now meaningless status symbol. The radio voice from the living room sullenly urges all civilians to leave the town, claiming that the enemy is just outside of the gates. Irritable prodding from the adults. In the midst of the general confusion an awkward figure, once again totally perplexed, so incredulous as to be incapable of acting at all: she should probably be called "I." I am being pushed around.

Change of scene. Second take. Camera at the foot of the steps leading up to the house of this "I." Cut to the truck on the street: The suitcases and sacks that have just been packed are loaded onto it, then those people whom we have already met in the bedroom are jostled, shoved, lifted up: so am "I." Quarreling voices, lamenting, sobbing. Questions, answers. Tears, waving. The truck starts moving, a few neighbors remain behind.

That's how childhood came to an end in those times, everyone believes it; it is polished clean by frequently repeated narration, it is appealingly plaintive, it has its fixed place in the medallion cabinet, and its inscription reads: "End of Childhood."

It's interesting to see that it can easily be filmed if one ignores a few trifles which the memory has reluctantly retained: a feeling of surprise at the grayness of this town in which one had enjoyed such a colorful life that no other place in the world seemed worth knowing; the recognition flaring up like a spark right from a gray house wall on Fischerkietz and then traveling along with me and for a long time making me a loner among all those possessed ones who were awaiting a miracle: No, this you won't see ever again. So I stopped waiting before I had even begun.

It may be that some day I'll want to find out where this absurd idea came from. It would probably take me back deep into my childhood, into zones that one stays away from when
forging one's medallions, into regions where I'm quite sure my movie camera could not follow me. But I do hope that language could indeed follow me, wherever I'll have the courage to go some day: it's this confidence that sustains one's life.

Remembering is swimming against the stream, as writing is — against the ostensibly natural stream of forgetfulness, a strenuous movement. Where does it carry you? Barely familiar countryside, indeterminate colors that gradually come to define themselves: blue, like the one you watch in a midsummer sky as a child, so you will know forever what "blue" really means. Potato stalks left and right, the sun-warmed sand of the furrow underneath my body, the most beautiful, desirable resting place. Heat. Why am I lying here? I don't know I don't know why I repressed my habit of being obedient, why I didn't respond to the calls from our home. Silence, at last. And here, a while later, a lizard on my belly, soaking up some sunshine. I hold my breath. Now I'm happy, knowing that I'm not supposed to be and that I'll always remember it. At night there will be air-raid alerts. I force myself to think about people who, even in this minute, are killed. With a bad conscience I admit to myself that I can't have a bad conscience about my happiness: a harmless foretaste of the mixed feelings that, more than anything else, spell adulthood.

Unprofitable scene, without an inscription. No material for a medallion, nothing that the camera could shoot. Any movie director intent on omitting interior monologue would have to despair, just as he would have had to turn his back on that scene with the balcony above the Volga river.

And the narrator? It's he who is lying in the furrow of the potato field, having been reduced to the size of a fourteen-year-old girl; he sees the potato stalks on the left and on the right and the vast expanse of the sky, he is startled by the lizard and holds his breath: but at the same time he is grown and looks down at the fourteen-year-old girl. After twenty-five years he thinks it's worth his while to remember: Then I was
happy although I wasn’t supposed to be. Writing down his recollection, he tries to be accurate, but realizes the twenty-five years have changed both him and that early scene. He must admit he has not told it “objectively” — this would be impossible. He isn’t discouraged, though. He decides to tell his story, that is, to invent it truthfully on the basis of his own experience.

Prose fiction should strive to be “unfilmable.” It should take its hands off the dangerous craft of fashioning and circulating medallions and assembling ready-made parts. It should incorruptibly insist on unique experience and not allow itself to be carried away by the impulse to meddle recklessly in other people’s experiences, but it should encourage others to have experiences of their own.

Of what use can this be for us?

_translated by Peter Spycher_
Netterlandish Proverbs

The rabbit begs the moon not to eat it. A man may piss at it, he may block up the well after the rabbit has drowned.

The man brings baskets of light out into the daylight. He throws roses to his pigs,

he sees the bears dancing, even when his wife puts a blue coat over his head.

Still, he knows very well that horseshit is not figs.

At night wife and daughter sit in the kitchen whispering, one holds the distaff while the other spins. The daughter, though, carries fire in one hand and water in the other. . . .
MOSQUITOES

Playing your trumpets
thin as a needle
in my ear,
standing on my finger

or on the back of my neck
like the best arguments
against pity I know.
You insignificant vampires

that sip my life
through a straw;
you drops of blood
with wings —,

I had a job
driving around in a truck
to look for your eggs.
They can be found

in ditches, near
train tracks, outside
of a barn
in an upright piano filled with rainwater.

It is impossible to kill
all of you,
invisible in the uncut grass
at the edges of the cemetery:

when the dogs go down there it
looks like they’ve gotten into birds.
THINKING ABOUT SUICIDE

"Wolves have broken through the door."

I know it isn’t true that
After a man is buried his lips go on moving.
That graveclothes can rise to their feet
And come visit,

That they know how to
Knock on both doors at once.

I refuse to board the train that carries my
Coffin back and forth across America
And holds up traffic for four minutes
In the middle of the night in Kent, Ohio.

I have very little time for pilgrimages
Through the cathedrals of moonlit barns
Where ninety men from the eastern front are dying,
And one young boy who isn’t Christ, trying to heal them.

And I’d rather not have to read anymore of
Those foot-in-the-grave letters people
Who’re suffering write to cripple the fortunate.
The ones that say: I am your friend, believe me,

I’d give you the shroud off my back.
ROUNDS

i

The train curving
through the black hills of South Dakota
and the smoke turning
off in another direction.

ii

The road I lived on when I was nine
circled a swamp.
It touched the pond,
Black Rock,
The Swinging Branch,
and stopped back where it started —
at our front porch.

iii

The road my father took
to school that morning
cut through the Drodsky Public Park.
And he saw the boys in their red
soccer uniforms poke out
the rabbi’s eye and
then as he was running
an old woman throwing up
crusts for the pigeons.

iv

A part of me leaping
from here to a camel-hump
rock at the top of Mt. Katadin

taking my chances —
v

The road you tell me is
straight as a telephone wire,
simple as following a sunset.
You don’t understand.
It’s not my sense of direction.
It’s those sheep and striped caterpillars,
those scarecrows, tree-stumps, black-eyed susans,
those women waving grey handkerchiefs;
acres of broken glass.

How can I follow a road like it’s
shown on a map?

vi

Any more than she could —
her hands smoothing
down her silver hair
lighting the match to light
the stove, sliding
up the maple bannister
across the mirror into
the medicine chest
and that last stretch
with a razor back
into herself
going quickly as
a pinprick or a cliff.

vii

Blood takes a private road.
It makes a circle
and only goes one way.
Once I held a cow’s heart
and I followed that road
with my finger.
Jay Meek

BRINGING IN THE SHEAVES

It is gravity how the angels
come down to us

in our shame and suffering
how they treat us

like children
and then too suddenly are gone

it is pity it is darkness
they leave us

our mouths opening and closing
like the mouths of fish

asking what more than this
the absence of angels

what more have we grown here
pigs in a smoke house

tobacco in a shack
and our gain so little Father

help us grow who have gone
beyond childhood
where there is no helping
STATIONS

The old, their big shoulders humped, empty grain sacks under each eye, sit without talk in the waiting room. In weekly for shots, I’ve learned to tell them apart: the doctors who wear white jackets, old women in discount dresses, the men with dark pants on.

I guess they must all be dead now: the Negroes I used to watch back in ‘44, each one safe between oak armrests in an oak pew, waiting for trains or relatives to arrive; or maybe the war to end, the far side of the Macon station.
SWEET DREAMS

So this is defeat.
I bring it home
for a visit.
Defeat is tired.
We talk about how there are too few
emotions, how when the news
comes we are full,
just as there is always
mince and pumpkin pie
at Thanksgiving
because it is Thanksgiving.
And then we are hungry
and it is then I feel us
beginning to ease,
as on a vacation Sunday
when it rains and everyone
has something to read.
Someone looks up.
It’s dusk.
We could send out for food.
Food would come.
I’m asked to propose
a toast. “To Home,”
I say again and again.
Defeat wonders
if I’m coming up to bed.
When I think of all those
years I didn’t love my parents...
I go up. There is always
another floor. I go up.
I grow happier.
This is the way we go
to heaven or to bed.
DISTRESS

Traveling with both hands: —

Moving inside
the moments, shining,
a Bengalian fire.

Without weather and Sunday
the distress: —
Sound of a peacock
spreading its tail
or the small steps
between right and left.

No one seeing
to the frenzy of the shadows
that live off the light.

On the bank
between the stranded words
water talking to water.
Forget the sky, those are just flowers moving through on blue, two-wheeled carts!

(They died in the heat which lit matches in their pockets.)

Tear into a lump of sugar. You’re tired. This next hour there’ll be no sex, no fatherland like the female of the deer in its third year, in those Pre-Raphaelite books.

Day now: raw copper. Forget love, you won’t even recognize each other.

(And nights there’s a shot when two eyes shine in the dark.)

translated by Stuart Friebert
REAL AUTUMN

I look at a map,
the ways its artificial colors
surface in Holstein
then spread slowly,
like rust,
toward the south.
A tiny lightbulb for a sun
lying over the Republic.
My real autumn
makes its way up the Rhine through Hessen
with everything that's real,
health-food stores, garbage trucks,
like the German weather forecast,
in the academic spirit.
A painter wouldn't commit suicide
over it.
And near the Bodensee
a copper beech forest
is on fire
in the familiar colors
of the rainbow.
You have to look fast,
before the history of Impressionism
comes to an end.

*translated by Franz Wright*
ON THE DEATH OF AN OLD WOMAN

Standing at the door, horrified, listening
and if I enter I think someone’s run off
and her eyes look past me, full of dreams,
as if she saw me somewhere else.

She sits there like that, listening,
far from the things that are right around her
but see her shake if there’s a sound at the window,
and cry, and stop crying like a frightened child.

And touch her white hair, her hand grows tired
and ask Do you have to go? and fade a look at me
and is feverish or just confused: the little light
by the altar’s gone! Where you going? What’s wrong?
The steps were thorny, I climbed all the way down, silver-pointing my steps, stepped into the white-washed room, a candle burned, there was no sound and I buried my head in purple cloth. And the earth cast out a child's body, the shape of a moon, it stepped slowly from my shadow. The stony crashes, then the arms breaking into bits, the flaking snow!
METAMORPHOSIS

A light, burning forever, cloudy red,
a heart, it's so red, it's sinned so much!
Mary, hello!

Your face, it's so pale, going, going . . .
and your body, I can't see it, it's going out,
Mary, you woman you!

Your womb, oh I can say sweet torture
but you smolder. Wait a minute, your eye:
smiling, huge and sad!
Mary, my mother, oh!

translated by Stuart Friebert
JOB ADVICE

A number or an oak branch, throw a penny up, yes yes, no no. You don’t know what’s important. Your grandfather knows his way around, was always on his legs, chairs are roots. Travel light, get it? But one thing has to be there: ground pepper, at least a kilo. Pepper in your tracks and no wolf will follow you. The others will laugh, let them. Think of the wolves, that’s what counts.

BEFORE STÖRTEBEKER STUMBLES

Kneeling, heads shaved. Nine in a row, tied to a pole. The captain’s head in a wicker basket, his rump is upright, plants his feet. If he reaches you, you’re free. I’m the ninth, a poor place. But he’s still coming.
I planted a tree and
produced a son, did everything
the Prophet demands. But it was
a snake wood, a trumpet tree,
I don’t know if they count.

And your trumpeter son?
Know less about him. May the Prophet
please excuse a daughter, she draws
with charcoal, I take lessons from her now.

Do your duty, then your pleasures. I want
to be a mushroom expert.

Play chess till the King’s Indian. And those
tough end games.
More and more lovely things.

Till artificial respiration. The world won’t
stop, you have to get that straight.
FRAGMENTS FROM A FILE

Have always been in agriculture, but much too noisy. Getting up early was always the best part, just like today, good thing.

What else?

The world? Oh you know. The rooster of the man next door, the hen of the woman. That's what they say around here.

What?

They've taken care of them.

Really?

Maybe just an ugly rumor, or . . .?

Half past four.

They went for their boots, every morning. But if they were the ones, I'm not surprised.

translated by Stuart Friebert
Boyer Rickel

THE HORN

We are birds. But when the horn blows we walk on our knuckles. No matter how hard we try to ignore it we drag ourselves up the hill.

The horn was cut from a dragon we killed. We piled the teeth and put the horn on top.

Then one night the horn blew. We dragged ourselves up and it said, You are inside now. Night after night it said, You are inside now. Soon we heard it wherever we went and everywhere became inside. So we stayed close.

Now we are always inside and it makes us feel clumsy. In fact, it's only when the horn blows that we have a little ease. Then outside disappears. The idea vanishes in a hill of teeth and we get back some grace.
A man lived on the edge of a spiraling mountain range. Every few thousand feet lived another man, and some had a child. The range was like an infinitely curled piece of paper.

I must grow a long beard, said the man. My child has been stolen, and at my age I should know nothing about it. He looked down the sheer mountainside where his child had walked away.

It was the custom that a child would leave when a man was half his final age. No man understood how a child could know.

But the child hid in the forest until his man died. Then he became a man, and he hunted along the range for a child. And they lived in the dead man's cabin until the child walked away.

Sometimes a child was caught by many men, and it was many years before he became a man. But no man died remembering his child or how he got it. And because a child could only become a man and die, the race died.
Donald Hall

THE LINE

The Line most obviously bodies forth the dance — the pause, balance, and sudden motion — that is Goatfoot. At line-end — by altering pitch or lengthening the hold of a vowel or of a consonant — the Line is Milktongue. By giving us units which we hold against each other, different and the same — and by isolating the syllable which rhymes, different and the same — the Line is Twinbird.

By invoking Goatfoot, Milktongue, and Twinbird, the Line is wholly serious, because it allows us to use parts of the mind usually asleep. When we take a lined poem and put it into paragraphs, we remove imagination and energy, we create banality. John Haines used this example; I use it again. It is no insult to William Carlos Williams, or to his poem, to say that the prose sentence, "So much depends upon a red wheelbarrow, glazed with rain water, beside the white chickens," is boring. The Line brings forth the etymological wit (depends/upon; wheel/barrow). The Line brings forth the assonance only half-heard in the prose: "Glazed/rain"; "beside/white"). And in fact the Line (in this poem and not in every poem) is an intellectual force, insisting on particularity by the value it gives to isolated words of sense.

When a critic takes a lined poem and prints it as prose, in order to show that the poem is inferior, he tells us nothing about the poem. (This series of notes began in response to a reviewer, in the Hudson Review, who tried to denigrate poems by Charles Simic and John Haines by printing them as prose.) Such a critic reveals that he is ignorant or disingenuous. Back in the silly wars about free verse, toward the end of the First World War, American critics who wished to prove that free verse was only prose took poems by Ezra Pound (or Amy Lowell) and printed them as prose. "See," they said triumphantly, like the man in the Hudson Review, "It's only prose." They only proved that they had no sense of the Line.
A sense of the Line disappeared from common knowledge some time ago. In 1765, an Englishman named John Rice proposed breaking Milton’s lines according to sense, and not according to the pentameter, presumably changing:

Of man’s first disobedience, and the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,  
With loss of Eden, till one greater man  
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,  
Sing heavenly muse . . .

ton):

Of man’s first disobedience,  
And the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree,  
Whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the world,  
And all our woe,  
With loss of Eden,  
Till one greater man  
Restore us,  
And regain the blissful seat,  
Sing heavenly muse . . .

This rewriting of Milton resembles bad free verse, which is usually bad rhythmically because the poet has no sense of the line as a melodic unit. The lines are short and coincidentally semantic and phonic. But Milton — need I say — is not damaged by this crude rearrangement. Damage only occurs to the critic (John Rice) who thinks that line structure does not matter, or to the reviewer who thinks that the poem must prove itself apart from its lineation — which is to think that line structure does not matter.

A hundred years earlier, John Rice’s ear would have been more reliable. With the increase of literacy, and the vast increase in printed books of prose, people began to read poetry without pausing at the ends of lines. The Line I suppose was
originally mnemonic. As far as I can tell, actors indicated line-structure by pause and pitch at least through Shakespeare's time, probably until the closing of the theatres. Complaints from old fashioned playgoers — that upstart actors like David Garrick no longer paused where the poet indicated that they should pause — occur in the 18th century. It is possible to connect literacy, capitalism, and puritanism with this insult to Goatfoot.

Of course the Line has continued to exist, even among certain actors, and among all good poets. You cannot read Keats or Hardy or Pound as if they were prose without losing a connection to the unconscious mind, a connection made by sound. Maybe the reason people want to speak poetry as prose, and therefore to belittle the Line, is that they are frightened of the psychic interior to which the Line, inhabiting mouth and muscle, may lead them. Such a reason would explain the way many professors of English read poetry aloud.

To speak with such seriousness of the Line is not to deny the frequency in poetry of other, perhaps vaguer things: metaphor, image, thought, and whatever people mean by "tension" or "density." But Williams writes without metaphor on occasion, Creeley writes sometimes without images, and Mother Goose writes poems with little thought. Mother Goose, who is all mouth and muscle, is a better poet than W. H. Auden.
William Matthews

A NOTE ON PROSE, VERSE AND THE LINE

"Lack of a firm sense of the line is a handicap," writes John Haines in Field #9 ("Further Reflections on Line and the Poetic Voice"), and asks, "Is this why the prose poem is so much in evidence these days? There you don't have to justify your lines, just make the paragraph and let it go."

Haines uses "justify" not in its typesetter's meaning, but in its religious meaning; writers of prose poems are like the lilies of the field.

I imagine one is drawn to write prose poems not by sloth, more purely practiced in hammocks, but by an urge to participate in a different kind of psychic energy than verse usually embodies.

Here are excerpts from etymologies of "prose" and "verse" in Webster's Third New International Dictionary. Prose is "fr. L prosa, fem. of prosus straightforward, direct." Verse is "fr. L versus row, line, verse; akin to L vertere to turn."

So the line in prose is like a fishing line, cast out as far as it will go, straightforward. And the line in verse goes out from the margin, turns back, goes out again, etc. Thus poetry is often linked to dance. The serpentine line of verse goes more down the page than across it.

I think of the long lines tending toward prose in Blake's prophetic books, Whitman, visionary passages from Ginsburg and Roethke. Such poems are questing, tentative, discursive — fr. L discursus ("past part. of discurrere to run about") — rather than direct. But in them the line takes on some of the characteristics we stereotypically associate with prose.

Short-lined, rhyming, metrically regular poems would presumably accommodate a different kind of psychic energy.

But counter-examples abound. I don't intend to propose laws, rather to notice tendencies. And to suggest that such tendencies, familiar to poets from memories — conscious and unconscious — of reading poems, are among the many factors influencing their decisions about lines.
Digging the grave
through black dirt,
gravel and rocks
that will hold her down,
we speak of her heat
which has driven her out
over the highway
in her first year.

A fly glides from her mouth
as we take her four legs,
and the great white neck
muddied at the lakeside
bends gracefully into the arc
of her tongue, colorless, now,
and we set her in the bed
of earth and rock
which will hold her as the sun
sets over her shoulders.

You had spoken of her brother,
100 lbs or more,
and her slight frame
from the diet of chain
she had broken;
on her back
as the spade cools her brow
with black dirt, rocks,
sand, white tongue,
what pups does she hold
that are seeds unspayed
in her broken body;
what does her brother say
to the seed gone out over
the prairie, on the hunt
of the unreturned:
and what do we say
to the master of the dog dead,
heat, highway, this bed
on the shoulder
of the road west
where her brother called, calls.
TORTILLA PRAYERS

Poet-drummer
in one skin,
brush strokes
of his grandmother
making tortillas
written on this brown face,
and his hands move
over pages of prayers
as he speaks of his daughters.

When he snares his life
in the poem for his grandmother,
his voice fades in the black
of his hand
poised on the blackboard sill,
the trapdrummed knuckles
cracking in this schoolroom
of maps and charts;

he says he was ashamed of her,
bandage-stockings,
scuffed marks where she shuffled
for his breakfast
as his thumbs shuttle
over a page of poems,
her childhood smallpox
killing her sisters,
the poem drumming its fingers
in her oily face,
skinned brown flour
while the hot grease pocks his skin brown.
In the car he says he will write
of his daughters,
twins from a single embrace,
his youngest by marriage;
and when he writes of them
she will unroll
her blanched stockings
and unplait her hair
where her flour smiles.
He says his brother's son died because the air force called him to station in a tornado and a limb from a broken tree cracked his neck; when his wife touched his shoulder he was cold.

About his own children he does not talk; they run into flues blackening their skins as they whiten his hair blackfaced in entertainment, hooked on family in Minnesota summer stream.

Freezing now on locked lake-ice the smoke rises from fishhouses; the black oaks shimmer in ice and break off: bunks can be filled with putty as the man who makes beds talks with his children unanswered, fingers hammered, arthritic bolts locked in his sanded joints where clear sticky varnish hides.
There is no more black oak
for fine furnishings;
the imperfect boards
cry on the jaws of horses;
a man talks to himself
where my children sleep,
unanswered and heard.
MR. JONS — THE BOSS

Mr. Jons stands in the cafeteria under the picture of the founder. His face is on the same level as the face of the large wall clock. The wall clock has a glass door in front of the face, the pendulum, and both weights, in golden letters: punctuality is a matter of trust. Mr. Jons gets up every morning at seven. He keeps an eye on us. He's the youngest son of the founder. He took control from his older brother. He hires new workers personally. He signs them up for one to five years. He prefers foreigners without families.

Mr. Jons looks for us in the work area. He is big and fat. His hair is curled and graying. He wears a mink-fed camel hair coat. He has a fur hat and a gray suit on. His brown shoes are gleaming. Mr. Jons says, step it up. Faster. No daydreaming. The market for our sock wool has almost never been this receptive. Don't get sloppy, but step it up.

Whoever doesn't show up on time is woken personally by Mr. Jons. He goes along the barracks and looks in every window. He says, out. Hurry it up. He says, come on, you're not sick. Mr. Jons looks down our throats. He has thin lips and dry skin. He has dandruff on his collar and shoulders. He says, my mouth is dry because my jaws drop at the way you work. He says, when I was just a boy I had to learn to work and take orders. My father was strict and efficient.

Mr. Jons has stomach problems.

Mr. Jons visits us in the cafeteria. He stops and stands under the colored picture of the founder. The founder is wearing wrestling trunks. He holds himself up straight. He's wrapped in the embroidered champion's belt. He was named "King of the Wrestlers."
Mr. Jons says, my father should have seen how you eat. I was using a knife and fork when I was three. But you slobber and go for the meat first. His brother blushes.

Mr. Jons' brother is older. He eats together with us in the cafeteria. He can only digest sweet noodle soup. Since his right side has gone lame, he works in the warehouse and eats in the cafeteria. He tickles the girls under the arm. The girls run away from him. The brother used to run the firm, now he's a union official. I say, can I take a look at the pay scales. He says, there are no pay scales here and stretches his hand towards me.

The brother is always shaking his head. He smiles to himself. He walks bent over. Mr. Jons doesn't notice him. Mr. Jons is not noticed by him. Mr. Jons is president of the regional hall handball association. He attends decisive matches abroad. There is a clash in Germany. Mr. Jons combines business with sport and buys a spinning machine in Germany. The spinning machine is measured for the wool of German sheep. Our sheep are longhaired, the wool is crinkly. The machine is unusable here, but the German handball team sends Mr. Jons a postcard. The postcard is a photograph. It shows the team, the heads circled. On the back of the card it says, Our starting lineup after the last game and victory of the field series, Nineteen hundred and.

The circled players fought for acceptance into the hall league. The card goes from hand to hand in the cafeteria. Mr. Jons takes along some bread, milk, and potatoes from the cafeteria. He goes to his villa on a hill. His house is called "The Green Pagoda." The roof looks like a fir tree.

At Christmastime Mr. Jons gives everyone a box of sweets. He says, kids, kids. You don't often let me be good.

Christmas is past. The brother winds the clock. He cleans the glass with his sleeve.

*translated by Steven Mann*
Ceilings I have studied and on them traced the route of Chief Joseph all the way to the blot near Canada that runs into shadow and then blank wall; that ceiling at Priest Lake dived by mosquitoes, held together by sagging tape; the ceiling in that hotel sliced slowly by big blades of the whispering fan; the one with a hole right on through the roof, and when I woke from the dream there were the stars; and reportedly in the jail at Spokane, painted above the bed, the purple woman, arms, legs, and mouth open, falling with the endless scream; and that perfectly white, square, unmarked plaster above the room in the border town where I carefully began to drop everyone I ever knew in a long, slow game giving them a big wide orbit and then fade, deliberately peeling over each face each traitor’s name.
MEETING MY CLASS CALLED "EASY WRITER"

Where the cages were the animals come back. They lie down to make the walls be there again. If only birds could call and make that same ribbon through the windows! But there is no way for far to climb to its old place.

Here in the center we wait, or we walk back and forth trying to measure what created the space inside the bars. Remember when we were failing? Remember the dungeon that led to the long, bright day? Now we are hidden in these selves. The animals are hunting us and we can't learn how to be found.
A MESSAGE FOR UPSTAIRS

Look — these words all pull; each one tug-at-a-time yoked. Don’t forget them, down under the glorious messages, the little strained legs carrying the caterpillar like a parade that never heard of the ground.

Great speakers rankle along but back of them some typewriter shivers, and every key glints to get started again: “Just show me the thought and I’ll get there and show it what for, by God.”
WHY I AM A POET

My father's gravestone said, "I knew it was time."
Our house was alive. It moved,
it had a song. The singers back home
stood in rows along the railroad line.

When the wind came along the track
every neighbor sang. In the last
house I followed the wind — it
left the world and went on.

We knew, the wind and I, that space
ahead of us, the world like an empty room.
I looked back where the sky came down.
Some days no train would come.

Some birds didn't have a song.
CONTRIBUTORS

ILSE AICHINGER had work in FIELD #9. Lynne Spaulding, her translator, is a student at Oberlin College.

PAMELA ALEXANDER graduated from the Writer's Workshop at the U. of Iowa last May and now works for the South Middlesex News in Framingham, Mass. She's had recent work in POETRY, and poems in ATLANTIC a while back.

ROBERT BLY has appeared in FIELD many times. He continues to be one of the great forces in poetry today. We hope his response to Hall's essay in FIELD #9 will move others to respond.

PHILIP BOOTH had work in FIELD #7.

GÜNTER EICH'S poems are taken from his last collection, Ein Tibeter Meinem Büro & from his own collection of his most important work, Günter Eich/Ein Lesebuch (Suhrkamp). It's terrible to imagine he's been dead for a year now.

ROBERTA GOLDSHLAG had work in FIELD #8. A recent graduate of Oberlin, she's working on her Masters at Boston University.

DONALD HALL'S essay in FIELD #9 has got a lot of people thinking about important issues.

MICHAEL HARPER has appeared in FIELD many times. He directs the Creative Writing Program at Brown University. His latest book is Debridement (Doubleday). New books in press are Nightmare Begins Responsibility (U. Illinois) & The Book of Trane (Doubleday).

ROBERTO JUARROZ' work is becoming more and more known, thanks to the efforts of W. S. Merwin, who is working on a book of Juarroz' things.

KARL KROLOW has appeared in FIELD many times. Real Autumn is a new poem, hitherto unpublished. The other poems are taken from his collected poems (Suhrkamp).

THOMAS LUX has appeared in FIELD many times. Presently he's teaching at Oberlin and has finished a new manuscript, The Body of the Dreamer. We do not wish to say that he predicts the Boston Red Sox will win the American League pennant this year.

HARRY MARTINSON, Robert Bly writes, "can be considered the spiritual father of Tomas Tranströmer, though they have never met. Martinson's poems live in some half-way place between the well-lit house and the absolute dark of the pine forest or the mid ocean. For years in his twenties he was a merchant seaman; you can still feel that he is restless inside houses. Martinson is 69 now, and still writing well. These two poems are from a book published two years ago."

WILLIAM MATTHEWS had work in FIELD #3. He's living near Boston this year.
JAY MEEK has recent work in ANTIoch REVIEW, MASSACHUSETTS REVIEW, & THE NATION, among others, and will have new poems in IOWA REVIEW, CARLETON MISCELLANY, and the PRAIRIE Schooner. This year he has a grant from NEA.

W. S. MERWIN is the winner of the 1973 Fellowship of the Academy of American Poets. His latest books include ASIAN FIGURES, WRITINGS TO AN UNFINISHED ACCOMPANIMENT &., together with Clarence Brown, a superb collection of translations of Mandelstam's poems.

HELGA NOVAK had work in FIELD #9. She was a guest writer-in-residence at Oberlin last year. Steven Mann, her translator, is a recent graduate of Oberlin who is doing graduate work at Cornell University.

DANNY RENDELEMAN has appeared in FIELD many times. He has new poems in INVISIBLE CITY, ROLLING STONE & NORTHWEST.

ADRIENNE RICH'S most recent book is Diving Into The Wreck. Her New and Selected Poems will be published in the fall by Norton.

BOYER RICKEL just graduated from Oberlin and is doing advanced work in the Writing Program at the University of Arizona/Tucson.

DENNIS SCHMITZ has appeared in FIELD many times. His third collection is ready for publication.

ROBERTA SPEAR has an M.A. in Creative Writing from Cal. State U./Fresno. She's had poems in BACHY, TRANS PACIFIC and in an anthology of 20 Fresno poets: DOWN AT THE SANTA FE DEPOT.

WILLIAM STAFFORD has appeared in FIELD many times. Harper & Row recently published their fourth collection of his poems, Someday, Maybe. That Other One, his third book with the Perishable Press, has also just appeared. Just a year ago he was on a tour, lecturing and reading, in Egypt, Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Iran & Pakistan. "The rest is routine," he writes, "teaching at Lewis & Clark, building a house, following with amazement the careers of my friends . . ."

FRANK STANFORD lives in Rogers, Arkansas. He is beginning to publish his work, early and recent. Gone is the title of a manuscript from which the two poems here come.

GEORG TRAKL was rediscovered by Robert Bly and James Wright not so long ago. Now everybody knows how important his work is. There is still more to translate!

TOMAS TRANSTRÖMER is on his way to the University of Arizona/Tucson as guest writer-in-residence. He will be reading at various places along the way, among them Oberlin. Robert Fulton, his other translator, is a Scottish poet who's living in Norway.

JEAN VALENTINE had work in FIELD #7. A new collection of her poems will appear sometime later this year (Farrar, Straus & Giroux).

CHRISTA WOLF, the East German novelist and essayist who lives in
East Berlin, will be the Max Kade Writer-in-Residence at Oberlin this spring. *The Quest For Christa T.*, perhaps her most important novel, is available in a lovely translation by Christopher Middleton (Delta). Her essays printed here are sections of a longer work that appeared under the title *Lesen und Schreiben* in the book by that name (Aufbau-Verlag, 1973). Peter Spycher, her translator, had a translation in *FIELD* #9. He teaches at Oberlin.

**FRANZ WRIGHT** lives in Oberlin. A translator with major work to his credit (see his translations of Pedretti in *FIELD*), he's also a poet in his own right and beginning to make his mark in the magazines.

**JAMES WRIGHT** had an essay in *FIELD* #8. He's published many volumes of poetry, most recently *TWO CITIZENS*. He lives in New York City and teaches at Hunter College but belongs to us all.
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