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FIELD



Tramp's Dream

FIELD

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GÜNTER EICH, 1907-1972

He died December 20th. This issue of FIELD is dedicated to him, and he is represented in the following pages by translations from the prose poems that mark the last phase of his career.

Eich leaves a rich legacy of poems, radio plays, and prose poems, a body of work still practically unknown to English readers. He has been honored in Germany, especially by fellow poets, as one who stripped his language to its essentials in the early years of the postwar period, helping it slowly regain the honesty and accuracy it had lost. He can now also be seen as a poet who never leaned back into his reputation, repeating himself for the sake of safe praise; rather, he pushed himself to further experimentation and new challenges, taking risks that inevitably brought charges of hermeticism, triviality, self-indulgence. It will take the world a while to catch up with the prose poems, those amazing underground "moles." When it does, the whole curve of Eich's career will be clearer, and the sense he made of his life and his art will be exhilarating.

There is a late interview in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, which is too much interviewer and not enough Eich, but his answers to two or three of the questions show his quirky and daring imagination at play. He was asked if he thought he could change reality with his texts, and answered: "You can't change anything at all with texts. I'm only trying for a sense of reality that's mine, through the word itself. 'Engagement,' with a wooden hammer, that's not for me."

Presumably thinking that Eich's comment signaled some kind of despair, the interviewer asked, "Are you perhaps resigned to withdrawing to nature now?" The poet answered:

I'm always confusing nature with beautiful mountain views. But never mind. Even at a height of 2000 meters nature is categorical and imperative. You won't find literature up there. No chance of changing the world. What you will find, though, is mud slides, volcanic erup-

tions, and crosses on peaks with little books for entering your consent. Dated. For conservative hearts. The other folks use a bus.

Now Eich *has* withdrawn to nature. He leaves a changed reality behind. His last words to the interviewer: "Maybe Eich will be passé in a bit . . ." Maybe not.

PREAMBLE

Moles are what I write, their white claws turned out, the balls of their toes are pink, that's delicatessen for all the enemies they've got, their thick coat is prized. My moles are faster than you think. If you think they're over where the rotten wood and stone's flying, they're already off in their tunnels chasing down a thought. You could film their speed electronically by sticking some blades of grass down through. They're always a few meters ahead of all the other noses. Hey we're over here they could yell, but then they'd only feel sorry for the hare. My moles are destructive, don't fool yourselves. The grass over their tunnels dies off, of course they help it along. Traps are set, and they run right in blind. Some of them fling rats in the air. Wear us as lining for your coats, we're coat fodder! That's what all of them think.

translated by Stuart Friebert

SIN

I'm no stranger to the temptation of the flesh. I confess that I give in almost daily (except on Fridays, when we have fish) — black butcher's sausage in a little breakfast goulash.

In my butcher's garden, the sausage skins float on a stake like balloons. Bewildering. Intestines, cleaned of course, and almost transparent. Well done. I read in a book on animal theology that the task of man should be to turn all the animals into house pets. What opportunities! But whose?

So I go by my butcher's garden every day, and not counting the theological reflections, I think every day for eight minutes, that is to say all the way to the train station, trying to discover the Universal Mother's first name. I've already spent an incredible amount of time on this question, if I cared to add it up. I've been going to the station for ten years, and three names have finally crystallized: Ellfrihde, Walltraut, and Ingeburck. Ten more years and I'll know which one is right.

Please wait for my results, before you make any hasty decisions on your own. As for the family name, we can all think about that one — there must be something Phoenician about it, like the first names.

translated by John Lynch

LATE JUNE EARLY JULY

A summer day, the beekeeping's going well, pears thrive for the faithful, a day when it's a question of ichneumon flies.

The old question still darkens the wheat, and the utopias pass by crooked. The oak leaves are rounded and the aspen leaves are sharp, you sob in admiration. You can still produce dreams from the wheat fungus, an alcohol stove is all you need. We go out and praise and trust our pork-butcher because he uses mild seasoning. The question of cats between easy chair and lilac bush, the terrible summer day, so much more beautiful than Solomon's silk.

The tapered veils, Spanish mantillas, the garottes, machine-guns, trials, stewards, one turns into the next, practical and all in tune, the hunger and the costs, the question of people, shouted, whispered, unthought, photographed and recorded on tapes, all one summer day in the Baroque of Paul Gerhardt. Badminton and underwater hunting are added, but the blood is revolutionary conservative red regardless of skin color, the question of people, accepted politically, a beautiful summer day.

CHANGE OF CLIMATE

The door's probably open. Waiters, doctors, thieves, and tourists can walk in. The only possible way to keep people from coming into the room is to put money in front of the door. I've been doing it a long time. Only a cat still shows up. Later a sparrow hawk. He sees that he's got the wrong room number, and waves his arms helplessly. "48," I say, he thanks me and leaves. I sit a while in bed, maybe I was wrong, wasn't it 32? To tell the truth, I only know that it's an even number.

I want to get up and follow him, notice again that I stick to my sheets, the fear of choking begins again. At one time there had to be knobs on the air conditioners, 100 or 150 years ago, when the air tube was still open too. I wouldn't even know how to work it, if there were knobs. I don't know how anything is done, life, thanking people, meetings, how people see ballets and hear drums, and Meckel's graphics: Must you see them, must you hear them, touch them with your fingers? I have three senses, I'm only here to keep the sheets together, in a sheet I didn't want. When it gets light, in nine or ten hours, they'll wash me out. Good morning, I'll say.

MARKETPLACE

My pale muse, night creature, maybe a vampire, my pale Medusa, undersea secretary, always unsteady, but with burning kisses on the shinbone. Where do I escape from kisses and poems, speech wants everything, even whatever I don't want, from beautifully agitated mouths excuses fall into the clearest darkness. Beer is drunk there, and the conquerers stand on the platform, their dung-beetle, their pharmacist of wisdom, and everything that exists is logical. Let us climb onto the gravestones and curse the secret servants!

I hate everybody, my button near the buttonhole, but we are only for nouns and prepositions. There's the ego in every line, it hides best. Hey there, and you won't find me, not me and not us. My muse is made of sand, my Medusa a stone that keeps looking out, my poster a shop sign that doesn't attract attention: Shoe Repair, End of Summer Sale, Sweets.

So we travel without companions, without a vehicle. Many think they have us, but already we've slipped away, under the sea, under the night, under the personal pronouns. There we look out, hedgehog and dormouse, joyful, peevish, sympathetic, we see fences and the sandfleas behind the grocery stores.

A DAY IN OKAYAMA

My wax paper umbrellas, my days, my view out the window in the morning. Cold rice with cold fish for breakfast, elevator girls whom everyone ignores, a belch, continuing breakfast.

Okayama, it's storks, rather obtrusive, I measure off all garden paths according to the map, the porter doesn't understand me. My umbrellas, my umbrella. I buy myself a watch, the tallest Japanese woman in my life walks past, two meters tall and high sandals besides, while the watch must be wound four times a day, o the magic of numbers and my wax paper.

I won't grow any more, I'll remain 1.70 meters tall, an average character, and my suitcase is too heavy for my character. I go through my character with umbrellas that change every hour, the park is worth seeing, the storks are on loan, have identification disks, but I don't recognize them. A parking lot for buses, school uniforms, I think: young railwaymen. That's better than a caption, sad wax paper, sorrowful rice, my watch has stopped.

It is unconsolable, but itself a consolation, I mumble now and then. I don't know what is unconsolable, I am consolable, consolable with umbrellas, with paths in the park, with 1.70 meters. But I mumble. Maybe I'm thinking above all of my suitcase. It's slipped my mind, not everything takes place in the present tense.

VIAREGGIO

I was in Viareggio relatively often, seven or eight times, more often than Munich, less often than Antwerp. I grew up in Antwerp, it's famous for something I've forgotten, maybe frogs legs. If it's frogs legs, then they're exported, and the Antwerpers chew legless frogs, sullenly. But as I said, I could be wrong, perhaps it's fallow deer or carrier pigeons; at any rate it had something to do with nature, if my youthful memories don't deceive me.

I was in Munich only once, just passing through, twenty minutes. I connect a tasty lemonade with it. I don't know whether I was there as child or grandfather, in any case it was long ago.

But now Viareggio itself. It lies in Galicia, just over the Portuguese border, and is famous for its football team, the Black and Reds, who have already defeated, for example, Lokomotive-Karlmarxstadt several times, the last time it was even one to nothing.

From Viareggio I received a card with the football team, black and red, but I suspect that only the postmark is genuine. So I come to the true subject, the connections, the difficulties, the suspicion, I'm not even sure whether it's a football team or a water rat. Everything's possible, if the television is focused, you recognize the better things in Viareggio and elsewhere, especially at night in the lamplight, where no one watches, and let's not talk about the graveyards. And the folklore about legs, which, on the other hand, only the whistle of a distant locomotive can help you forget, from Karl Marx City or Antwerp — let's be cross and find the one no better than the other.

But Viareggio, I was there often, seven or eight times, maybe closer to seven, but I was.

translated by David Walker

PAS SEUL

Midnight. The house
a hush. The children smooth in their beds,
their breath water,
and I sit down at last at the silver mirror

to brush my hair. Behind me the bed,
a slab of moonlight, and the brush
whispering in my ear,
systole, diastole, systole, diastole, each stroke a second
a year

and behind the mirror
that animal whose eyes are black holes

waits. Patient.
A dog, its great head
nodding with the brush.

But I too am patient. Let it wait.

NOSTALGIA FOR THE FUTURE

Closer. Soon. The cars with the headlights. Restless
In spring, I cry for the year. The cars again. Gone.

A window of oranges on a wet afternoon.
At forty, reading *Hamlet* all through the evening.

The baker's song: "Tell me where is fancy bread."
Would you call your collie Colly Cibber?

At last I see Helen. We have a drink. Done.
And almost the same as not having been.

I go for the papers at 9, the mail comes by 10,
I wear my bathing trunks under my jeans.

In the empty office, this time, I dare
Surprise you with a kiss. Now we can speak.

Bach sits at his writing desk, writing music,
Idly masturbating as he writes. He hums.

"A ninny is a nanny-goat's grandmother."
"We use goose grease to grease our geese."

The table in the light — I dine alone —
Lifts its island from the room's dark brown.

The moonmen land in my head, step carefully there.
In other ports we have died of trembling.

(Some people make other people fall down.
Other people get up, but not always the same ones.)

There exists in the Cathedral at Sarajevo
A manuscript, a kind of treatise or tome.

I have lived all month on rain ice cream.
And here I am.

MICHAEL

The archangel's silver panties glint as he flies. Hooting softly, his trumpet dangles from a cord too weak to hang himself with. Lilac wings like crocuses in winter. Weather of lullabies and impregnations. The sky handwritten.

Michael, I thought of you when I saw a mink in terror swim into the suffused lacustrine evening. And now again — though celestialty maroons you — as a heron opens rising from a snag.

MORNING GLORY POOL

1

The boy who fell into the Morning Glory Pool met earth's fire and its water all at once. Neither could quench the other. The boy, the water flowing, the fire, the *flower*, and rising from them the steam or smoke. To think there are people who sit down at a desk spread with wires and feathers to make *artificial flowers*. What hallucination of evil are they adding to this world which already cradles its capacity? What destruction is each of their creations a model of. . . .

2

Synthesis as a principle is dangerous. Sometimes we "collect ourselves" and make a good impression. Then we find that those whom we have impressed are in as many pieces as we. We lock the door. Motherhood is another synthesis. I am the devouring Morning Glory Pool and my child has made my name a symbol of death. My door cannot be locked. It must flow and scald.

REPLY TO A LETTER OF INQUIRY
AFTER MY SPIRITUALITY

Your handwriting
bursts and withers,
crumples the (blue) page.
God is well in your mouth
but when he hits the paper
I can see his pain.
Oh who can help God?
The skaters who have fallen
pick themselves up on the ice.
I want to do something graceful
and you're obsessed with Grace.
Cooling my coffee
I add a birdtrack
on a nugget of snow —
how one must write
if he has wings.

BREAD

I put my sadness into the bread
And they thought it
Was just the grain.
Or the marrow inside the arm
I am always making.
All for hope
Of the little release
Of its alcohol.
The wheat and the honey,
The field and the bee —
Where else is an old government
Surviving by giving us bread?
You never doubt that it is
As real as you.
With that same equality
We sit across
Our loaf of eternal noon
On its shadowy foot of carbon.
This is the light that strokes
The roof of your mouth,
This quiet Herculaneum.

LITTLE GOLD COIN FOR THE MOUTH OF THE SPRING

Yellow violet,
Trailside little moth sweater,
Coming out of the rye loaf clay
On the bank of a spring,
As you let me go past
Answer something.
If you are the first flower
What is the second?
Friends never bloom
At the same time.
This one, that,
We share our dark
Bread and water.
It is the earth
But not enough.
We try our names,
Finding them opposite like yours,
Dazzle in the purple shadows
Of winter.
Let me carry you across
In my mouth
And on the other side will be
Trillium and my old friend.

ST. SAVA'S SPRING

Clear eye inside a stone
Forever opened with the kiss
Of the shepherd's staff

Under its sleepy green eyelids
The grass hides and reveals
The cold transparent truth

On the bottom of this spring
Glow the vegetal wolf's head
With a rainbow between its jaws

Bathing in this water
Cures of every deadly illness
A sip of this water
Of every living illness

Clear eye inside a stone
Open for every one
Who sheds his own black tear here

THE LIFE OF ST. SAVA

Hungry and thirsty for the light
He left home
Left his own kind and left himself

Became a servant
Of winged masters

Tended their gold-fleeced clouds
Curried their thunders and lightnings
Kept shackled in old books

Thus he spent his years
And earned the snake-headed staff

On that staff he rode
Back to the earth
Found his own kind and found himself

Ageless deathless he lives
Surrounded by his wolves

ST. SAVA

Bees circle his head
Building him a living halo

Thunder and lightning
Play hide and seek in his red beard
Strewn with linden blossoms

A chain hangs from his neck
And shivers in its iron sleep

On his shoulder a rooster burns
In his hand the wise staff sings
The song of the crossed roads

Time flows to the left of him
Time flows to the right of him

He walks on the dry land
Followed by his wolves

ST. SAVA THE SHEPHERD

He guards a herd of stones
On a green meadow

Inside the ancestral red cave
He helps each stone
To give birth

Wherever he roams
The herd trails him
The hills echo with stone-steps

He halts in a clearing
Yellow and secluded
Stone after stone he milks

Then he gives his wolves to drink
This thick stone-milk that reflects
The seven colors of the rainbow

Strong teeth and secret wings
Grow when you drink stone-milk

ST. SAVA THE BLACKSMITH

Out of the surrounded hills
The wolves call him
With their backbones on fire

He offers the snake-headed staff
For them to crawl
Peacefully at his feet

Washes them in the boiling blood
Of the holy ancestral bullets
And wipes them with his red beard

Out of young iron he hammers
A new backbone for them
And sends them back into the hills

With an endless howl
The wolves greet him
From the swept peaks

ST. SAVA'S SCHOOL

He sits high in a pear tree
And mutters something in his beard

Listens
How the honey-lipped leaves
Pray using his words

Watches
How through the hills
The fire-carrying wind
Curses using his words

Smiles
And slowly chews on the book
Of the master of the universe

Then summons the hungry wolves

Throws them the pages
Full of red long-necked letters
And white lambs

ST. SAVA'S TRAVELS

He travels over the dark earth

With his staff out in front
He cuts the darkness in four

Throws the fat mittens
Changed into tomcats
On the grey army of mice

Unties the chain in the storm
Ties to the motionless stars
The earth made out of old oakwood

Washes the paws of his wolves
So the tracks of earth's darkness
Will not survive on them

Travels without a road
And the road is born in his wake

ST. SAVA BEFORE HIS SPRING

He sees his third eye
Inside a stone

Sees in the just water
His plundered coffer
Full of ripe teat-like pears

Sees his own wolf's head
And on the forehead the inscribed sign
Of the promised constellation

Sees his staff in blossom
And his happy fruitful earth
With its deeply blushing buds

Two of his eyes he closes
With a third he gazes into a stone

(1958-1971)

translated by Charles Simic

AUGUST RAIN

After a month and a half without rain, at last, in late August, darkness comes at three in the afternoon, a cheerful thunder begins, and at last the rain. I set a glass out on a table to measure the rain, and suddenly buoyant and affectionate go indoors to find my children. They are upstairs, playing quietly alone in their doll-filled rooms, hanging pictures, thoughtfully moving "the small things that make them happy" from one side of the room to another. I feel triumphant, without need of money, far from the grave. I walk over the grass, watching the soaked chairs, and the cooled towels, and sit down on my stoop, dragging a chair out with me. The rain deepens. It rolls off the porch roof, making a great puddle near me. The bubbles slide toward the puddle edge, are crowded, and disappear. The black earth turns blacker, it absorbs the rain needles without a sound. The sky is low, everything silent, as when parents are angry. . . . What has failed and been forgiven — the leaves from last year unable to go on, lying near the foundation, dry under the porch, retreat farther into the shadow, they give off a faint hum, as of birds' eggs, or the tail of a dog.

The older we get the more we fail, but the more we fail the more we feel a part of the dead straw of the universe, the corners of barns with cowdung twenty years old, the chairs fallen back on their heads in deserted houses, the belts left hanging over the chairback after the bachelor has died in the ambulance on the way to the city, these objects also belong to us, they ride us as the child holding on to the dog's fur, these appear in our dreams, they are more and more near us, coming in slowly from the wainscoting, they make our trunks heavy, accumulating between trips, they lie against the ship's side, and will nudge the hole open that lets the water in at last.

WATCHING

You and I used to talk about
Lear and his girls
(I read it in school,

you saw it on the Yiddish stage
where the audience yelled:
Don't believe them,

they're rotten) —
that Jewish father and his
suburban daughters.

Now I'm here with the rest,
smelling the silences,
watching you

disappear.
What will it look like?
Lost on the bed

without shoes, without lungs
you won't talk
except to the wall: *I'm dying,*

and to the nurse: *Be
careful, I
may live.*

What does a daughter say
to the bones
that don't answer —

Thank you to the nice man?
Daddy?
The last time

we went to the Bronx Zoo,
the elephants were smelly as ever,
all those warm Sundays,

the monkeys as lewd.
But they put the penguins
behind curved glass

with a radiant sky
painted on the far wall.
And all those birds

lined up with their backs to us
watching the wrong
horizon.

TO CONSIDER A HOUSE

For Win and Joe

“Eden is that old fashioned house
we dwell in every day . . .”

—Emily Dickinson

When Eden closed like a fist
around a penny,
like a flower whose petals contract
at the first touch
of weather,
when only fire was left to warn,
as fire warns the wild animal;
and even before Cain
had come to start
what we have never ended:
it was time then, for the first time,
to consider a house.
Before, they had rested
carelessly, naming a tree
then sleeping under it,
or sleeping first
and naming later. Now,
the soul shaken loose
from the body,
in temporary residence only
in their skin,
they dreamed the safety
of boxes within boxes,
of doors closing quietly
on doors.
They travelled East,
not following the sun
but drawn, as if by accident, back

to its source.

The animals too had fled, taking
only their names with them.

So as the birds learned,
they learned
to build of scraps,
of sticks and straws collected
along the way.

With the beaver they saw
what can be dammed up,
how to make use of all
that accumulates.

And like the bear they took
the hollowness of caves,
a shape to be confirmed
by the still untested womb.
In their own image they built their house:
eyelike windows, blank
with light; a skeleton of beams;
clay walls, crumbling a little,
as flesh was already learning
to crumble.

And from the hearth,
the smouldering center of the house, smoke
rose up the chimney
each morning, each dusk
making the leap towards God
that always ended
in cloud.

Only much later,
and hesitantly at first,
they thought to plant
another garden.

HOME

You take the stairs one at a time, squinting after the dark green of the woods. The wide straw hat in your hand has gone wet and limp. You set down the case, run one soft hand over your hair, and ring the bell. There are the blue shadows waving on the high white house, the air scented with resin and honey, the hot needles of the noonday sun. There is the dull gleam of your boots, the brittle fibers of your suit. There are the heavy groves of figtrees, the goldenrod, the kernels of wheat in your pockets. There is the milkman. There is the smell of powder. There is the scream of seagulls three hundred miles from the sea. There is the coughing in the underbrush, the spool collection, the coordination of hand and eye. There are the gentlemen in string ties lunching on avocado, there is someone in the front parlor working the windowshades, there is the lady upstairs sponging her breasts in buttermilk. There are the ices, the balconies, the mosquitoes, the cool floors. There is your father mooning along, there is the click of teeth on glass, the calculations, the milktooth, the cowslips, the quicksilver, the stammering, the patchwork, the glaze of evening and the cords of morning, the speechless faces through the glass, turned to you again and again. You go on ringing a long time, ringing and ringing.

SEVENTH ELEGY

No more wooing voice
 you're outgrowing that
 don't let your cry
be a wooing cry
 even though it could be
 as pure as a bird's
that the season lifts up
 as she herself rises
 nearly forgetting
that it's just
 a fretful creature
 and not some single heart
to be tossed
 toward happiness
 deep into intimate skies
Like him you want
 to call forth a still
 invisible mate
a silent listener
 in whom a reply
 slowly awakens
warming itself
 by hearing yours
 to become
your own bold
 feeling's blazing
 partner
Oh and spring
 would understand —
 not one crevice
that wouldn't echo
 annunciation —
 the first small

questioning flutenotes
 reinforced by echoing
 stillness
that rises all round
 in the pure
 affirmative day
Then on up the steps — a call
 that climbs each air-stair
 toward the dreamed
temple of the future —
 then the trill
 the fountain
whose rising jet
 catches the falling water
 up again
in a game of promising. . .
 and all before it
 the Summer —
not only all those
 summer mornings
 not only the way
they change into day
 glowing because of
 the sunrise
not only the days
 gentle among the flowers
 while strong and enormous
overhead
 among the great shapes
 of the trees
not only the devotion
 of these unfolded powers
not only the roads
 not only the evening meadows
 not only the clear

breathing that follows
 an afternoon
 thunderstorm
not only approaching
 sleep and a premonition
 late evening. . .
But the nights!
 but the high
 summer nights
 but the stars
 stars of the earth
Oh to be dead
 one of these days
 and to know that *they*
are infinite
 all of the stars
 for how
how
 how to forget them!

You see I've called
 for a lover
 But it wasn't
just she who'd come
 Girls would come out of
 inadequate graves
and stand near. . .
 Well how could I
 limit my call
after I'd called it?
 The buried
 are always seeking
the earth again —
 You children
 one single thing

fully grasped
 here and now
 would be worth
everything else
 Don't suppose
 that fate's any more
than the thickness
 of childhood
 How often
you really
 overtook your lover
 breathing
breathing deep after a marvelous
 run toward nothing more
 than the open air

Just to *be* here
 is a delight! You knew that
 too, you girls
who seemed deprived of it
 you who were sunk
 in the city's
worst alleys
 festering there
 or exposed to its
garbage and filth
 For each had an hour
 or maybe
not even that much
 but just some
 unmeasurable
moment of time
 between two whiles
 when she

had existence
 completely down to her
 fingertips!
It's just that we forget
 so easily what our
 genial neighbor
neither approves of
 nor grudges us
 We want it visible
to hold up
 when even the most
 visible joy
will reveal itself
 only when we have
 transformed it within

There's nowhere my love
 the world can exist
 unless it's within
Our lives are used up
 in transformations
 and what's outside us
always diminishing
 vanishes Where a solid
 house once stood
a wholly fictitious
 image cuts in
 just as if
the whole thing
 existed completely
 in the brain
The Zeitgeist creates
 huge silos of power
 that are as shapeless

as the straining
 urge he acquires
 from everything else
He has forgotten
 the temples We are the ones
 who try surreptitiously
to save such squanderings
 of the heart Yes
 where one still stands
a thing that once
 was prayed to
 knelt to served
it reaches
 just as it is
 into the unseen world
Many don't notice
 and miss the chance
 to build it now
inside themselves
 with pillars and statues
 greater than ever!

Every heavy
 turning back of the earth
 has such disinherited
who possess neither
 earlier things
 nor what's to come
For what's ahead
 is distant for men
 This shouldn't
confuse us
 it should confirm
 our preserving

a form we still recognize:
 This *stood* among men
 at one time
stood in the midst
 of fate of destruction
 stood in the midst
of not knowing
 where to go just trying to *be*
 and bent
the stars down toward it
 from the established heavens
 Angel!
I'm showing it to you
 there it is!
 let it stand
as we see you
 redeemed at last
 finally up
Columns pylons
 the Sphinx
 the determined thrust
from some fading
 or unknown city of its
 gray cathedral!
Wasn't this
 like a miracle? Gaze at it
 angel it's *us*
you mighty being
 you tell them that we could
 accomplish such things
my breath isn't enough
 for such celebration
 For it seems after all

that we haven't neglected
the spaces
our generous portion
these spaces — *ours*
(How frighteningly vast
they must be
if thousands of years
of our feelings have not
overcrowded them)
But a tower was great
wasn't it? Oh angel
it was
it was great
even set next to you
Chartres was great
and music
reached even higher
climbing beyond us
Even a girl in love
alone at night
by her window
didn't she reach to your knee?

Don't think
I'm wooing you!
Angel even if I am
you won't come
for my call
is always full of rising
you can't move
against such a current
it's just too strong
My call
is an outstretched arm

and its high
 reaching
 open hand
is always
 before you
 open
to defend
 to warn off
 you
incomprehensible
 being
 you can't
 be grasped
so far up
 so spread out

EIGHTH ELEGY

dedicated to Rudolf Kassner

With its whole gaze
 a creature looks out
 at the open
But our eyes
 are as though
 turned in
and they seem
 to set traps
 around it
as if to prevent
 its free going
 We can only know
what *is* out there
 from an animal's
 features
for we make
 even infants
 turn
and look back
 at the way things are shaped
 not toward the open
that lies so deep
 in an animal's face —
 Free from death
Because *we're* the ones
 who see death
 The animal that's free
has its destruction
 always behind it
 and God in front

and when it moves
 it moves forward
 forever and ever
the way springs flow
 We never have
 — not even for one
single day —
 that pure space
 before us
that flowers can open
 endlessly into
 It's always *world*
it's never a nowhere
 where there isn't
 any 'no,' any 'don't'
never the pure
 the untended thing
 you breathe
and endlessly *know*
 and never desire
 What a child
sometimes give himself up to
 grows still and has to be
 shaken out of
Or another one dies
 and then *is* it
 For when you get
close to death
 you don't see
 death anymore
you look out
 past it and maybe then
 with an animal's
wide gaze
 Lovers if they weren't
 blocking each other's view

are close to it
 marveling. . .
 As if by an oversight
it opens up to them
 behind each other. . .
 But neither one
can get past
 and again
 world comes back to them
Always when we face
 the creation
 we see only
a kind of reflection
 of the freedom
 that we ourselves
have dimmed
 Or it happens
 that an animal
some mute beast
 raises its head
 and imperturbably
looks right through us
 That's what
 fate means:
to be facing each other
 and nothing but each other
 and to be doing it
forever

If the animal
 coming toward us
 so surely
from another direction
 had our kind
 of consciousness

he'd drag us around
 in his sway
 But his being
is infinite to him
 incomprehensible
 and without
a sense of his
 condition
 pure as his gaze
And where we see
 the future
 he sees everything
and himself *in* everything
 healed and whole
 forever

And yet
 within the warm
 and watchful beast
there's the weight
 and care
 of a huge sadness
For there clings
 to him something
 that often
overwhelms us
 — memory
 a recollection that
whatever we're
 striving for now
 was once closer
and truer
 and that its
 union with us

was incredibly
tender
Here everything
is distance
there it was breath
After the first home
the second seems hybrid
and windy
Oh the bliss
of the *little* creature
that *stays* forever
inside the womb
that conceived it
oh happiness
of the gnat
still hopping *within*
even on its wedding day:
for womb is everything
And look at the
half assurance
of the bird
that almost seems to know
both states
from his origin
like the soul
of an Etruscan
come from a dead man
stowed in a space
with his own resting figure
as the lid
And how bewildered
is something
that has to fly
if it came from a womb
As though terrified
of itself

it shivers through the air
 the way
 a crack
goes through a cup
 the way a bat's
 track tears
through the
 porcelain
 of evening

And we:
 spectators always
 everywhere
looking at
 all of that
 never beyond!
It fills us too full
 we set it right
 it falls apart
We set it right
 again and we
 fall apart too

Who's turned us around
 this way so that
 we're always
whatever we do
 in the posture
 of someone
who is leaving?
 Like a man
 on the final hill

that shows him
 his whole valley
 one last time
who turns
 and stands there
 lingering —
That's how we live
 always
 saying goodbye.

translated by David Young

CHAUTAUQUA POEMS

1. Miss Kilpatrick

“And that morning our vegetable-woman ran by the window,
screaming, screaming,
and afterward, by afternoon, a moss and contagion
came up from the city, the whole city
mourning together. The wail was a wave.
And it was true. He was dead.
They put it on the television: Gandhiji.”

Spinster missionary: hunch of clawed twigs,
scribbled pate, bag neck, sentry eyes aimed.

Pokes. Heads on the library wall: godly grim groups.
“Fifty years ago my father spoke a sermon here. But a modest
man,
no photo perhaps. No, he had a great beard then.” And:
“Twenty-six years in India, sixteen between at home,
to see my parents die. Guest, not master,
when I was there the second time.
They murdered one another. In an ashram once:
myself the only Christian. Brahmins scoured the latrine,
we all ate touching. That was Gandhi.
And afterward, all through the cities, they sold records
of the wail.”

In India they called her “Kamla”: a lotus.
“They hated us, some of them,” she said.

2. The Minister

“Went out to North Dakota in nineteen-hundred-and-four. Well, we had eleven then. On snow Sundays less. Freethinkers and lawless: so out near Munich I started up this mission, and being a young man rode out nine miles to see Penner. Jim Graham says to me: ‘You didn’t go alone, son? No one goes alone up to Penner’s.’ But I asked Penner whether he’d had anything out of life, and Penner showed his gun. A long, beautiful thing. Four nicks in the handle,

one for every man Penner’d shot dead. And next Sunday there he was, hymn-singing. Though he kept away from Roly then: a ball of a man, Roly, big flesh out front of him, mustache across him like a stick. ‘I run a Christian place,’ Roly says: his gambling den he meant. ‘Man comes in, leaves his gun outside. No liquor, and an honest house. You’re young,’ Roly says, ‘so let me explain the game of life: when you see the cards are marked against you, don’t gamble.’

“And I never did, y’know, after North Dakota. My life went quiet, after that. Still, I’m the man got Penner to church.”

THE WORKING LINE

Having written in it for years, I began to speculate on why and how we use the line thanks to an article by Hayden Carruth in a *Hudson Review*. Taking a poem each by Charles Simic and John Haines, Carruth prints them as prose paragraphs characterized by "complacent suggestiveness, passiveness, inertness" of language that no typographical arrangement and punctuation can vivify, he claims. "The language, taken altogether, is so slack, so devoid of formal tension and impetus, that the poems cease to function. What purpose do these lines serve, beyond making us read with unnatural emphasis and in a joggy cadence? . . . when the line has ceased to function it is because the language has become too dull to sustain the measure. . . . loss of formative energy . . ." and so on. Yet, when a poet begins to write something down, he has an innate sense of whether to write it down in long lines or short, in stanzas of two or twelve lines. Where does his feel for pattern come from? And what does the line do?

I

A first thought is that the line is a unit *to work in*. It is a compositional aid. A module of interest, surprise, or direction, which offers itself as distinct from what precedes and follows. Frequency of images may be built into it. The line as shelf that holds a certain number of books. Thus, a poem, after it is completed, may be collapsed back into a paragraph not to its discredit if the lines, as Dolmetsch says of musical bars, "are a sort of scaffold to be kicked away when no longer needed" (from Pound's "Vers Libre and Arnold Dolmetsch").

Then there is the illusion or illustration of *space*, the between-the-lines, the air around the slim or stocky poem-shape, the way that a picture has "area." What about this poem of Roethke's:

THE MOMENT

We passed the ice of pain,
And came to a dark ravine,
And there we sang with the sea:
The wide, the bleak abyss
Shifted with our slow kiss.

Space struggled with time;
The gong of midnight struck
The naked absolute.
Sound, silence sang as one.

All flowed: without, within;
Body met body, we
Created what's to be.

What else to say?
We end in joy.

Five, four, three, two. We almost assume an unwritten last stanza of one line, one breath, the content of which expresses oneness. Why do we respond to a shape? Does the space a poem takes transmit a mood, a density, intensity, a reach? Do groups of three lines suggest a triangle, whatever that suggests? Do seven-line stanzas seem solid, complete? Couplets, tense? What happens when we tamper with a poem's structure? Here's Sylvia Plath's "Sheep in Fog" as printed in *Ariel*:

The hills step off into whiteness.
People or stars
Regard me sadly, I disappoint them.

The train leaves a line of breath.
O slow
Horse the colour of rust,

Hooves, dolorous bells —
All morning the
Morning has been blackening,

A flower left out.
My bones hold a stillness, the far
Fields melt my heart.

They threaten
To let me through to a heaven
Starless and fatherless, a dark water.

Here it is in a sort of blank verse:

The hills step off into whiteness. People or stars
Regard me sadly, I disappoint them. The train
Leaves a line of breath. O slow horse the colour of rust,
Hooves, dolorous bells — all morning the morning
Has been blackening, a flower left out. My bones
Hold a stillness, the far fields melt my heart.
They threaten to let me through to a heaven
Starless and fatherless, a dark water.

The effect of the transposing, it seems to me, is a loss of suspense. For a reverse example, this is section two (*Child*) from Seferis's "Stratis the Sailor Describes a Man," Rex Warner's translation:

When I started to grow up, I was tortured by the trees.
Why do you smile? Were you thinking of spring, which
is cruel to children?
I was very fond of the green leaves;
I think I learnt a few things at school because the blotting
paper on my desk was green too.
It was the roots of the trees that tortured me, when in the
winter warmth they came to twine about my body.

These were the only dreams I had in childhood.
In this way I became acquainted with my body.

Put in "Sheep in Fog" form it might read like this:

When I started to grow up,
I was tortured
By the trees.

Why do you smile?
Were you thinking of spring,
Which is cruel to children?

I was very fond
Of the green leaves;
I think I learnt a few things at school

Because the blotting paper
On my desk was green too.
It was the roots

Of the trees
That tortured me,
When in the winter warmth

They came to twine about my body.
These were the only
Dreams I had in childhood.

In this way
I became acquainted
With my body.

Maybe some of the narrative quality is lost because of the pauses our minds insert at the end of each line. But otherwise

there may be no difference between these two passages: another mystery.

What does the line do? Hart Crane in prose would need a machete: the reader would have to discipline his comprehension to adjust to the dense language. Linebreak as machete. But for most writers this would not be true. Without rhyme or strict meter the line can still help distribute the cadences and aid our response to the speed of a poem. Since variation in line length often gives pleasure, the line elicits a physical response, an inner dancing.

In the long journey out of the self,
There are many detours, washed-out interrupted raw places
Where the shale slides dangerously
And the back wheels hang almost over the edge
At the sudden veering, the moment of turning.
Better to hug close, wary of rubble and falling stones.
The arroyo cracking the road, the wind-bitten buttes, the
 canyons,
Creeks swollen in midsummer from the flash-flood roaring
 into the narrow valley.
Reeds beaten flat by wind and rain,
Grey from the long winter, burnt at the base in late
 summer.
— Or the path narrowing,
Winding upward toward the stream with its sharp stones,
The upland of alder and birch trees,
Through the swamp alive with quicksand,
The way blocked at last by a fallen fir-tree,
The thickets darkening,
The ravines ugly.

Even when not read aloud a verse has an unheard music. It is perhaps a conductor we watch.

Then finally, is the line a sort of scale? — saying weigh these words; this verse is just as heavy as this verse; I'm coming down equally hard with my pencil here, here, and here.

We write in lines because we plant a vegetable garden in rows, because we have ribs, because . . .

II

there was once a woman who admired a dog
the dog was handsome
she liked his face

that night the dog turned into a man
he became her husband

never tell anyone I used to be a dog
never mention it at all
he said to his wife

for a long time they lived together
she never thought of him as a dog
she never spoke of it

but one day she saw some dogs in the village
they were all chasing a bitch
everywhere here and there

so she asked her husband if he would like to be one of
them
and instantly he said yes and turned back into a dog
and away he ran with the others

Now let's consider the case of prose turned into a poem. The above is an adaptation by William Brandon (in *The Magic World*) of a Malecite Indian tale recorded by Frank G. Speck and published in *Journal of American Folk-Lore* in 1917. It's

such a taut, spare story, condensed as poetry is — isn't it even more impressive presented in lines? It seems to me that lineation nearly always contributes to the tension of a work, if only because it is doled out to the reader one line at a time.

Dress, undress. The following prose could be a passage in a story or a paragraph of Loren Eiseley or Edwin Menninger's *Fantastic Trees*:

But let me describe to you a killed chestnut tree. Leaves, fruit, even the bark have long fallen to the dark alien disease, and at last the tree itself lies down in a twisted, rising-and-falling shape, and it never rots. The smooth wood, pale and intense, undulates in a kind of serpentine passivity among waves of witch hazel and dogwood that wash along it summer after summer after summer. And so the killed chestnut has become something everlasting in the woods, like Yggdrasill.

It happens to be fifteen lines (in tercets) I admire from Hayden Carruth's "My Father's Face." So what have we proved? It is no disgrace to write beautiful language, whatever its form. Some narrations, observations, descriptions, or meditations work equally well as prose or poetry, especially when their language cannot be improved upon. And lengths of lines? — perhaps they are what is left of the instinct in us to be songwriters. "When the line has ceased to function" it may be because its job of pulling the poem out of the writer is over: the poem is written down.

TWO RESPONSES TO "THE WORKING LINE"

After accepting Sandra McPherson's essay, we decided that its interest would be enhanced if we made it the occasion for a small symposium. We therefore asked for comments from two poets with a long-standing interest in the line, James Wright and Louis Simpson. Their responses to the McPherson essay follow:

JAMES WRIGHT

Mr. Carruth argued that great poetry is a mystery, which we had better accept as such, while we labor for an intelligent minor verse. We labor thus because we want to live in our lifetime. We love the masters like Shakespeare, because they are so deep in our lives, and we too have our brief right to live. Shakespeare told us, about as plainly as anything can be told, that he wanted to be left alone.

Unless I completely misunderstand Mr. Carruth, the great poet — who may be some biological accident so nutty that not even Buckminster Fuller or W. C. Fields can understand how to imagine it — is best left alone and then discovered in a kind of late loneliness.

Then Mr. Carruth turned to Pound.

It may be that he thinks Pound was a great poet. I don't. His two good poems, in my opinion, derive themselves endlessly from Waller.

I love Waller. If I had begun this series of discussions, I would have proposed Herrick. But Pound's master Waller will do.

For the poets of my generation in America, Pound did.

The trouble with the new generation, many of whom love Pound, is that they have not yet found a succinct minor poet like Pound who has ideas about the art of verse.

We found them in his early letters (and manifestoes — his friends Joyce, Eliot, Yeats never made manifestoes — Pound made manifesto after manifesto — the great poets write their books in secret, we discover their books openly).

In one of his few helpful moments, Pound observed that the poet who wishes to write free verse should beware of writing bad prose hacked into arbitrary line lengths. It would be hard to overestimate the value of this observation, because it made possible a language Pound called the musical phrase. Pound helped many minor writers replace their outworn rhetoric with a rhetoric more suited to their own occasions: their talents and their serious hopes, as distinguished from their twitching daydreams, their lives.

Our lives, I should say, because Sean O'Casey turned out to be serious with his dead drunk joke. The whole world is in cold fact in a terrible state of chassis.

Any reader who requires me to document the cold fact at this time is lonely beyond my reach. But our own moment in the life of poetry, so rich and wicked in its solitary fertility, has brought forth a problem so difficult that not even the great Pound could have anticipated it. Our magazines abound with fine writings, and what they tell us for our lives is that there must surely be maybe five hundred thousand horse's asses in These States who have learned through television to write bad prose. Caught by the fever and fret of fame, as our beloved vice president might say, every God-damned fool in America quivers with the puce longing to win life by printing at us that he is sensitive. He and Viva know that rhyme and rhythm are out. Twitch is in.

Poetry is the enemy of twitch. Every poetry has a theory, whether the bad poets know it or not. The theory of our current free verse involves a complete rejection of the past. We have, in a lonely time, a limp surrender of intelligence to the rhetoricians of the government. I don't give a damn for their Democrats or their Republicans, and I could not care less for

the Black Mountain versus the New York School. A rejection of the past is a rejection of intelligence. We have, for the moment, a confused embrace of the present for the sake of a hallucinatory future. The endless bad poems of our time distribute themselves automatically between masturbation and the exquisite phoniness of middle-class revolution.

What makes our bad poetry so bad, so ironically bad, has nothing to do with its sweet technique, which is sweet enough. By this time, God help us, everybody in college knows how to write like Pound, Olsen (sic), and like the minors (God save the mark). I urge your good friends to realize that what makes the new poetry so bad is its failure to realize that there is no sound poetry without intelligence. There is no poetry without its own criticism. You can take your minor elegance and throb around in it. I have nothing against the minor elegance, because I have nothing against the failure to think. But if the young friends who live and write after the generation of Pound are going to matter in the United States, they are going to have to develop a criticism of their own.

Personally, I find Pound aesthetically offensive, but he did at least offer some actual ideas by which a serious poetry could be written. He was not enough for the minor poets of my own time. Perhaps he helped his friends. What the new poets have got to do is stop imitating the students of Pound, and develop a criticism of your own. Friends, there may well be a great poet among you. If there is, he will die, and you will die, unless he learns his craft, as Dante did from *Can Grande* and Shakespeare did from the great craftsmen of his own muddled and lonely time.

Line! Line! Friends, let us all stop twitching and pay attention once more to the letters of John Keats.

Ezra Pound, for Christ's sake. Ezra Pound is dead, and unless the young replace him with their own intelligence, they too will be dead forever. There is no poetry without criticism. The language dies without intelligence, and I suppose this is why our beautiful writers the fictionists E. L. Doctorow, Han-

nah Green, and Cynthia Ozick are so much truer and finer and more abiding than Pound, and my versifying contemporaries, and the young. Unless they want merely to twitch.

LOUIS SIMPSON

1. *Carruth, Simic, and Haines*

Taking a specimen of free verse and printing it as prose, without the line-breaks, then arguing that, as the divisions into lines cannot be deduced from the language itself, they were never really necessary . . . You don't have to be a lawyer to know that there is something wrong with this method of arguing. The poet is charged with failing to do something that he never intended. What the poet intended was for the reader to see with his eyes, or hear with his ears, the divisions of the lines where they were placed, not for the reader to guess, from the order of the words alone, i.e. a prose paragraph, where the lines of verse would end. For writing to be read as lines of verse, all that is necessary is for the poet to indicate that they should be read so. If you aren't willing to submit to the poet's judgment, you needn't look or listen. There is no need to explain your unwillingness by trying to show a relationship between divisions of writing into verse-lines and the kind of language that the poet is using.

By printing poems by Simic and Haines as prose, Hayden Carruth wants to show that their line-divisions are not necessary, not shaped by a movement of language. But movement of language, which is sentence-structure, does not determine the structure of lines of verse. "Complacent suggestiveness, passiveness, inertness" of language — Carruth's description — are criticisms of the use of language, and therefore of tone, and ultimately of ideas. They are irrelevant, however, to the arranging of writing as lines of verse. When we are dealing with

free verse, the lines are divided as they are because the poet wishes to divide them. It is a matter of impulse, not necessity.

I imagine that Carruth doesn't like the impulses of Haines and Simic. He doesn't like the tone of their writing, their attitudes, and their ideas. A great deal of what passes for analytic criticism is an attempt to explain, in an acceptable manner, what really can't be explained. The critic would not like the work in any case. If the poet used different language, and his line-divisions looked different, the critic still wouldn't like the poem. But to say so would be too personal, it wouldn't convince anyone, it wouldn't sound like criticism. So the critic attempts to show that the poet is really writing prose, because when you take away the divisions that he has put there, for the eye and the ear, the lines are no longer visible or audible.

2. *Sandra McPherson*

Heather bells. I suppose Hayden Carruth's piece did some good, after all, for it inspired her to say that she likes certain poems. The message of her writing is: I like this . . . and this . . . and this. But as far as reasoning goes: to say that, "We write in lines because we plant a vegetable garden in rows, because we have ribs, because . . ." It could just as well be said that we shouldn't write in lines because grass doesn't grow in lines, nor do forests, and water has many shapes.

The line is a unit of rhythm. The poet is moved by impulses of rhythm which he expresses in lines of verse. Impulse determines where each line breaks, and the impulse of the poem as a whole determines the look of the poem on the page or its sound in the air.

SUNDAY WITH THE RELATIVES

1

in the kitchen my mother wrapping cantaloupe
in ham, handing me
a bowl of eggs, my hands
are dripping, the doorbell is ringing
it's the man she won't talk to on the phone
he made his daughter stand up
and sing she had morning sickness
he hugs me hello
opens his mouth there's a
gold molar his throat
goes on and on

2

everyone to the table my father's gulping
his second shot of schnapps he's
lighting a candle it's got
two wicks turn
off the light and it
burns like dry twigs right
through her favorite tablecloth

3

a man's speaking Polish
to his chubby daughter, her eyes
filling with tears
he tells her to do stretching exercises for the pain

4

Heifitz on the phonograph
my grandmother in a corner painting
lilies-of-the-valley on milk glass
she's talking they're
falling listen to them
bounce on the carpet hit
the floor pick one up
it won't stand
the glass is thin you can
shape it
but when you set it down
there's still a large crack

5

outside it's still light enough
for every leaf
first one bird goes by flying
very low then another I see it
straining, swimming through air
someone's calling me, the wings
have hands it's a tiny
womanbird, it's getting darker
I can still see
the lips, the breast,
the tight jaw.

THE INVISIBLE MAN

I laugh
and smile
at the old poets,
though I worship
every poem ever written,
all the moons,
diamonds, raindrops, beads
of drowned silver
that my ancient brother
added to the rose,
still
I can't help smiling,
it's always "I",
something happens to him
every second
but it's always "I",
he alone walks
the streets,
maybe his little darling too,
nobody else,
fishermen don't go by
nor booksellers,
there are no masons,
no one falls
from a scaffold,
nobody suffers,
nobody loves,
only my poor brother
the poet,
everything
happens just to him
and his little darling,
nobody else is alive,

no one weeps from hunger
or anger,
no one suffers in his verses
because they can't
pay the rent,
no one
gets thrown out
on the street in poems,
bed, chairs, the works,
and nothing goes on
in the factories either,
nothing,
they turn out umbrellas, cups,
rifles and locomotives,
they scrape hell
to extract the minerals,
there is a strike,
soldiers come,
they open fire,
they fire on the people,
that is,
on poetry,
and my brother
the poet
is busy falling in love
or grieving
because his griefs
have sailed away,
he loves the names of
distant ports
and he writes
of oceans he has never seen,
he walks right past
life, heavy
as an ear of corn
and doesn't know

how to shuck it,
he goes up and down
without touching the earth
and sometimes
he feels so horribly
sad and profound,
there is so much of him
he can't contain it,
he gets entangled and gets free,
he says he is cursed,
and carries his cross
through the darkness
sweating and cursing,
he says he is different
from everyone else,
every day he eats bread
but has never known
a baker
or entered the bakers'
union hall,
and so my poor brother
grows dim,
he twists and turns
and finds himself
interesting,
yes, interesting,
that's the word,
and I am no better
than my brother
but I have to smile,
for I go through the streets
and I'm the only one
who doesn't exist,
life flows on
with the force of all the rivers,

I am the only
invisible one,
there are no weird shadows,
no darkness,
everyone speaks to me,
they want to tell me things,
talk about their relatives,
their wretchedness,
their joy,
everybody that goes by
has something to tell me,
and they do so many things,
they cut timber
and string high-tension wire,
late into the night they knead
the next day's loaves,
they pierce the earth's bowels
with an iron spear
and they turn iron
into locks,
they climb the sky carrying
letters, sobs, kisses,
there is someone
in every doorway,
something is getting born,
or the one I love waits for me,
and I go by and things
beg me to sing of them,
I haven't enough time,
I have to think about everything,
I have to go back home
or rejoin the Party,
what can I do,
everything asks me
to speak,

everything asks me
to sing, sing, sing,
everything is full
of dreams and sounds,
life's a boxful
of songs, it springs open
and a flock of birds
comes flying out,
they want to perch on my shoulders
and tell me about something,
life is a struggle,
a river that can't be controlled,
and men
want to tell me,
and you too,
what they struggle for
and if they die,
what they die for,
and I go on and I don't
have time for so many lives,
I want
them all to live
in my life
and sing out in my song,
I am of no importance,
I don't have time
for my own affairs,
day and night
I must be writing down what happens,
I mustn't forget anyone.
It's true that suddenly
I feel exhausted
and look up at the stars,
I stretch out in a pasture,
a fiddle-colored bug flits by,

I put my hand
on one small breast
or beneath the waist
of my beloved
and I look up at the hard
velvet
of the night trembling
in all its frozen constellations,
then
I feel
a wave of mystery
rising in my soul,
infancy,
and the weeping in the corners,
and pathetic adolescence,
which makes me sleepy
and I sleep
like an apple tree,
I stay asleep
right under the stars
or without stars,
with my love or without her,
and when I open my eyes
the night is gone,
the street has woken up before me,
the daughters of the poor
are off to work,
the fishing boats already
putting in to shore,
the miners
go deep into the mine
with their new shoes,
everything is alive,
they all pass by,
they walk quickly

and I barely have time
to get dressed,
I have to hurry,
no one can pass
unless I know
where he's going and what's
happening.
I can't
live without life
or be a man without man
and I run around
and see and hear
and sing,
the stars have
nothing to do with me,
solitude bears
neither flowers nor fruit.
Give me every life
for my own,
give me every sorrow,
everyone's,
I am going to alchemize them
into hopes.
Give me
all the bliss,
even the most secret,
if they weren't secret,
how would they make themselves known?
I have to tell you about it,
give me
our daily
struggle,
that's what I sing,
and we will walk together
arm in arm,

all men,
my song makes all of us one:
the song of the invisible man
who sings with all.

translated by Robert Mezey

FOR JOAN AT EILAT

It comes to this: Mornings
with light still pale you drag
huge pipes around to soak
the date trees. Heat
begins to shimmer
on your skin. You watch
the crows go north. Is that
the way?

You practice
flying like a small damp bird
brew herb tea in a suitcase
braid the steamed fragrance
in your hair

and stand
in the clear water of the Red Sea
watching your toes. Branches
of coral. The water warm
near the edge of the desert.
You wade in it
as far as you can go.

AMHERST: ONE DAY, FIVE POETS

1

Don, when you drive me through the rain
into the woods the wet
leaves falling into leaves
I'm already high on soy beans.
Some people live on them like meat
or love
baked into loaves.

In that small house two poets
damp with leftover weather
the third who starts a fire
and brings small glasses
of his dandelion wine.
We sip it
slow
exhaling orange groves lemon trees.
The juice lights up our mouths.
"The citrus fruit," he says
and pours it out as one
who having everything to give
keeps giving it.

He wouldn't
think of it that way. And moves
through the warm steam of his giving
and gives us tea with rosemary.

And as we drink it looking up
from the bottom of our cups
or into them
we hear the rain

the burning logs
our swallowing.

2

The cupola is a windowed cage
at the top. The Holyoke Range
floats in the sky at twilight.

Pale walls
the pale tatami floor.
Pearl jail she called it.
Safe as the inside of a shell.
Or wicker basket on her window sill.

She used to fill
it with her own warm gingerbread
and lower it to the children down below.

There is the recipe in her small script:
molasses sugar flour.
A branch of pear tree starts
to shine from the dark
the way a live thing moves
out of the stone
a hand releases to the light.

She wanted to know
if her poems breathed.

3

At Bradley Field
I'm looking for my plane to San Francisco
when the Russian poet arrives.

His mild face blooms like a star brought into focus
through a telescope
when he hears
where I'm headed for.
"My love!" he cries
meaning that I should give it
or it's mine
or that's how he feels about my city
"I'm yours!"

I turn once more to wave.
He shines like a face card out of the deck.
His joy runs over on his teeth
like an arc of light.
It dazzles me.
I'm yours I'm yours

then strapped in my seat
and home.

HEIMGARTEN

Fuchsias, twined around long stems, all the same height, about 1 m. And above them the crown, about 30, 40 cm. The lowest shoots are heavy with blossoms which hang down at angles, more flowers than leaves. The kind of fuchsias with red and violet, red and white, or lilac and rose-colored flowers: softly glowing blossoms, folded or fanned petals around the empty, filled, or else curled-up calyx. Long-stemmed fuchsias growing in rows, beautiful rows the same distance apart

in long narrow beds in which begonias with tiny rose, white, and dark red petals are planted, and yellow slipperworts, some blue ones too. Bordered by a 15 cm. wide strip of earth lying sharp along the edge of the gravel.

Light grey medium fine gravel made from stone that's almost white, millions of pebbles glistening and blinding you with the sun. All the broad paths and the big square in front of the main entrance to the building are covered with this kind of gravel.

Then there are the park benches, all the same distance apart, and the men in grey suits, coveralls, scattered all over the place holding rakes and hoes that they seem to be leaning on as they weed and dig, and that they use to support themselves when they jump from one place to another a little farther off. Over there in the shade a man with one leg is leaning against the wall trying to stand up straight.

Some other men appear from behind the far corner of the building in rows of three, all of them wearing grey work clothes. They limp three by three in marching rhythm using their pick-axes to help them along.

On one of the green benches four white sisters laughing and knitting.

WHAT YOU SEE

What you see when you come to the other side of town, when you're walking toward Krumpach, past the house with the wooden pump and over the Krumpach bridge stop what you see when you lean over the railing, if you lean over, you might lean over why not go on you might, if you happened to lean over at precisely the right instant and looked into the water (the dirty brownish green water that flows under the bridge under your feet) see a few tin cans, crumpled up papers, braids of mud, rags, wood, whatever rivers take with them when they leave a place: food tins, bottles drifting diagonally, a dead animal awful things don't watch keep moving

maybe those bright reflections were really eyes, maybe those bubbles were rising out of somebody's mouth, maybe that flat pale face was one you know why not go on who do you know that's so broad, pale, blond go on across the bridge, up the hill and through Zerotínov. What you see on the other side of the river is this:

First, turnip fields, sugar and fodder beets, then the wheat and corn fields which are still green and at any moment they're horizontal, vertical, diagonal still green, a little brown here and there. Paths waving toward the horizon, then gone. More big fields: fodder beets, sugar beets, rape, wheat, corn, maize, potatoes fields plowed into rows, brown, green the rape's already yellow, maybe. Some brown and red roof-tops with small houses beneath them, a couple windows, a door. Three buildings, house, barn, and stall built in a circle around an open area which opens onto the road by means of a wall, the gate in it locked. And some of these yards, about six or eight of them, grouped around one large open area that's divided into tiny vegetable gardens and bisected by a clay road. This is the main square, or Zerotínov.

Musil lives in one of these farms. No, he lives in two of them: two Musil brothers live in the village. Neither of them knows Musil, hardly a single Musil knows Musil but look, there are probably a lot of Kafkas who don't even know Kafka. We don't even know ourselves no, never mind that. Why are they called Musil? Both brothers (perhaps they're cousins, too) read the Bible whenever they do read. Before getting up and before going to sleep, before and after meals a little bit of Bible. I'm indebted to one of them because of a part in the Bible I

no, I can't do it that way. No writer, no proverbs can get at a man. You can reconstruct his surroundings but all attempts to tie him down fail. With Musil it's like an excavation where whatever's uncovered crumbles immediately, he goes to pieces at the first touch. I know he's behind that cow, speaking softly with her; but if I get too close he vanishes. He sits in church on Sunday, THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD I SHALL NOT WANT on shiny cardboard above him on the wall, a big plate between his knees, peeling potatoes. HE MAKETH ME TO LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES in the evening, where I watch after the horse going red headed he sits on a red harvester going

he sings loud in church going no, he can't be reached. There he goes along the road between the turnips, wheat, rape, corn, maize, there, he's gotten very small, smaller gone

translated by Franz Wright

CONTRIBUTORS

JACK ANDERSON writes poetry and reviews ballet and modern dance for three different periodicals; he recently published *The Dance, The Dancer, and The Poem: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Dance Poetry*.

CHANA BLOCH has been studying at Berkeley and will be teaching next year at Mills College. Her poems and translations from the Yiddish have appeared in many magazines.

ROBERT BLY'S handsome new book, *Sleepers Joining Hands*, is just out from Harper and Row. Bly fans will enjoy finding a funny, affectionate poem about him by Michael Dennis Browne in the latest issue of *Crazy Horse*.

One of GÜNTER EICH'S three translators in this issue is JOHN LYNCH, an Oberlin student from Kingston, New York.

ROBERTA GOLDSCHLAG is a very recent graduate of Oberlin. This is her first published poem.

A new collection of poems by SHIRLEY KAUFMAN, *Gold Country*, will be published by Pittsburgh Press in the fall.

SANDRA McPHERSON, who is represented in this issue by a group of poems and a prose essay, will have her second collection of poems, *Radiation*, published by Ecco Press (Viking) next fall. Mild plug: David Young's second collection, *Boxcars*, will be published by the same press at about the same time.

PABLO NERUDA'S translator, ROBERT MEZEY, writes of "The Invisible Man," "This is the introductory poem to one of the volumes of *Elemental Odes* — it's somewhat windy and self-congratulatory like a lot of his later stuff, but I really like its breathless speed and the robust image of what a poet should be."

CYNTHIA OZICK is the author of *The Pagan Rabbi and Other Stories* (Knopf). The fact that her work is praised in JAMES WRIGHT'S comment elsewhere in this issue is a coincidence, but a very nice one.

Two pieces of news about LINDA PASTAN: Her first book of poems, *A Perfect Circle of Sun* (Swallow), has just come out in paperback; she is the recipient of a grant in creative writing from The National Endowment for the Arts.

ERICA PEDRETTI'S work was also represented in *FIELD* #7. Of the two pieces printed here, "Heimgarten" appeared recently in *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, and "What You See" is from her book *harmloses bitte* (Suhrkamp). It is probably not necessary to mention in connection with the latter piece that Robert Musil is the author of *The Man Without Qualities*, one of the great novels of this century. FRANZ WRIGHT, translator of the Pedretti pieces, is a student at Oberlin.

VASKO POPA, the Yugoslav poet, has been often and ably translated by CHARLES SIMIC, as evidenced by "Homage to the Lame Wolf," in *FIELD* #3, and *The Little Box* (Charioteer Press).

Our serialization of RAINER MARIA RILKE'S *Duino Elegies* will conclude in *FIELD* #9.

Going to press, we learned that LOUIS SIMPSON'S latest collection, *Adventures of the Letter I*, had been nominated for the National Book Award.

What we know, at this point, about MARILYN THOMPSON, is that she lives in Niwot, Colorado.

DAVID WALKER was, while a student at Oberlin, an editor of *FIELD*. This year he has been studying and traveling in Europe on a Watson Foundation Fellowship. His poems have appeared in numerous magazines, and he has translated both Günter Eich (see *FIELD* #5 as well as this issue) and the Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer (see *FIELD* #4).

JAMES WRIGHT has published many volumes of poetry. He lives in New York City and teaches at Hunter College.

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