

an di rain it a fall inna squal
like tear-tip arrows
piercin di awt a di mounah dem
di baptiss church
it full-up to di brim
 owevah-flow

pan di steps to di street
langtime-noh-si family an fren
meet an greet
taakin bout yu hayste retreat

inside mounful vices a sing
dem familiah bittah-sweet hym
an it is well
it is well
wid yu soul

rude boyz bruk down in tears
mini skirted girls weep an wail
dere'z a passi a black an white workaz
fram british rail
yu calleeg dem fram yu shaat workin years

an dere woz testimony awftah testimony
fram yu age mate dem
punctuated by spantaneous applauz
bout ow yu did tall an slim an good lookin
wid yu lang chin an yu captivatin grin
bout yu kineness
bout yu carin
bout yu tautfulness
bout ow big an ow broad in love yu woz

up to now wi still noh get noh prapah explanaeshan
no witnis at di stayshan no police investigaeshan
as to ow yu get fi en up pan di wrang side a di track
ow yu face get fi tun fram front to back
an a who yu did a taak to pan yu mobile

dem jus call it hacksident an close yu file
jamdoun woz yu true dream i-lan
noh deh soh yu did a plan
fi mek yu final destinaeshan
now yu dream come tru an yu touch down
hashis to hashis
dus to dus
inna sent elizabet sile

Linton Kwesi Johnson

Mechanism

Machines invariably work a change
Upon whatever they're designed to vary:
Position, motion, the human brain. Their compass
Is perfectly predictable, their lines
Functional. In creative writing circles
They're called "poems". You choose a word like "lap"

And have to find six uses for it: lap.
Lap? The pen rebels! (You mustn't change
A key word once you've started). The poem circles
Round and round like a vulture. If you vary
One single word, the vulture strikes. Your lines
Wobble like the needle of a compass.

What is the North you drive for with that compass?
What record are you breaking, lap after lap?
What walkabout could yield such sterile songlines?
What junction give those lines a chance to change?
What signals stand at green and never vary?
What train of thought goes round in such small circles?

Yes, the sestina! Known in certain circles
As swinging sixes, its chosen words encompass
Something of your theme. *Change, vary,*
Compass, lines, circles and finally *lap*
Are what you start with, and you simply change
Their order through the ensuing groups of lines.

They are hypnotic like an actor's lines
With which he charms the boxes, stalls and circles.
Or else they're like his face beneath each change
Of make-up, constant as a lover or a compass.
And some are like fast runners who outlap
The stragglers (last of all comes panting "vary").

John Ashbery (a poet who likes to vary
His poem's drift at whim) says that its lines
Give him the feeling of sitting in the lap
Of a freewheeling cyclist spinning circles
Down the dizzy slope of sense, in its compass
All arbitrary meaning, wilful change.

But no. Its lines are quite controlled. They vary
Like petals in circles drawn by compasses
That six times overlap, and six times change.

John Fuller

Bead

As a rain-grey helicopter climbs the coastline,
clapping rotations in a state of mission,
its silent, racing shadow rapidly folds and flattens
on roofs and reefs, on trucks and grass, sprawls
elaborately over a jetty's bone-smooth edge
becomes buoy-shaped, boat-shaped and rope-long,
crumples again on a sea-reaching outcrop,
scares up one gull, scares up three, tinging
the crisp fusilage of opening wings,
then, trembling down a pebble shore, widening
with slow inflation, snaps back to itself,
briefly shrouding my seventeen years,
as I kneel red knees to a sort of oracle
where beachwater loops in a glistening barnacle.
'The lads is trouble!' behind me she is shouting,
'And them's the lads. They're navy lads alright.'
Newly sunlit and warm, I straighten up,
look back slowly, saying: 'Yeh. Those Spanish!
They're chancing their arm in our Exclusion Zone
I hope they find the trouble they're looking for.
They say one factory ship could chew up six of ours.'
As I add in a lower voice, 'no luck here',
she bows her head to a pack of cigarettes.
'You're right, you're right, but come here till I tell you,
Peadar's out there, the pet. God love him.
You know my husband, don't you, from the village?'
'Yes. To see.'

'I swear to you now, yesterday,
The Spanish nearly rammed his boat. I mean...
(her hands brush-clap) they were as close as that
... his little trawler all alone. And they're Catholics,
so they say. Almost as Catholic as us.'
The helicopter shrinks, converging on its shadow,

and her wet, blue eyes look west, as if to see
the curved schools slithering up through darkness,
the trawlers, above them, drawing lines in the sea,
spread out to make the sea more Irish.
When I found her on the shore some time before
I was loitering, at a loss; she was in distress,
shawled up in blackness and something snaked
between the fingers of her outstretched fist.
'Didn't the string break—I must have worn it out.'
She had been offering rosaries for her husband,
and a little sphere had dropped into the stones.

Now her brown-stained middle finger shakes.
'I know I smoke too much. Don't say I do.'
Sure, my husband says it's *all* I do...
and praying too. I'll often leave the house,
you know—he'll be poring over some sea-chart—
and walk out the road not to disturb him,
smoking my way to the shops or the church
and sometimes behind a wall in the wind.'
I survey gobs of rubble as she talks:
sand-grains, bone-grains, blobs, fronds, chips,
tidbits off old teapots, the scratched, grass-green
opacities of softened glass, while I pluck out
two plastic spoons and a droop of shoelace.
I am missing a football match on satellite.
'Marvellous thing to have The Faith!', she goes on,
'And the Rosary! You say the Rosary, don't you?
You know that it's the prayer of Jesus' life?'
'It is just the one missing?', I reply, 'Trouble is
pebbles disguise beads as well as pebbles.
Might be better, you know, to get a new one.'
As she bends over, one arm against a rock,
or gazes through smoke at a body of cloud
I gather she's not really searching so much
as waiting for something to make itself known—
'What? Is it you want to go?'

'No, no, not that...
though my mother *will* be expecting me back...'
'Ah you're a grand lad, I'll tell her that, a grand lad.
Sure, if we just keep searching before the tide...
It's a *gold* bead, you see, and it wasn't before...'

Then she tells of her journey to Medjugorje
in what was Yugoslavia (Bosnia now),
with a flask full of whiskey, and a bus full
of housewives. 'There were apparitions,
like Fatima, and do you know? three little girls,
Milka, Vicka, Mirjana, can you imagine?
those girls *see* Mary when she comes to Earth.
The miracles were lovely. When the sun danced,
we were lit up from every side... though only
if you had eyes to see. And... here... my silver beads,
these beads, turned gold. Look, have a look!'
With huge hands she brings them to my face,
and like an expert, I read into her palms
whatever there is of gold. I duck down quickly,
saying 'An excellent reason to find it!'
silently adding, 'bloody miracle if we do.'

Someplace as the spring tide rolls or crawls
or spreads in rapidly on a level, flooding
the crevices, lifting the long-headed weeds,
among shiny pebbles and dripping fissures,
the coral's handless arms stretch out,
and a rosary bead, touched by the wind,
skates around an empty mussel-shell.
Watching the sea's involved, grey tumble
rushing up to touch me, I say aloud
'Look's like it's time to go. We'd both better.'
and showing reluctance to leave too soon,
let the water come in over my feet—
'But will you come back tomorrow?' she asks.
I almost turn my ankle splashing out.
'Tomorrow? Oh yes. I'll have a look tomorrow'—

But when I look around she has already gone,
hunching this way and that on the rocks.
'*Might* have said thanks,' I complain to myself.

In its sky-disguise of blue-green veins
A NATO plane banks towards Italy
swallowing everything in its field of vision.
In a lilac room, at a different speed,
three girls stand up to see the Virgin,
and an Irish trawler persists in the surf
as something spreads out on its radar or sonar
like the sound of Jonah consigned to a tuna
and I walk off the shore, remembering a promise,
solid and cold, completely oblivious
to the star pushed into the sole of my shoe.

John Redmond

The blood-bruise

I worked against it all that afternoon,
the racing bindweed, or convolvulus,
that had gone unchecked, it seemed, by anyone
for weeks, and now made its calamitous
faces everywhere: those deathly-delicate
trompettes, and their lime-white
mouths that opened up, and opened again,
in silent and proliferating forms
strung along cords I had to bundle down
and gather up as tangles in my arms.

I stooped in to the stricken rosebushes
where they had all but given up the ghost
so deeply had the bindweed's ropes and lashes
become involved, and so nearly had they lost
the plot to its inveigling flowers and leaves;
as thorns plucked at my sleeves
I hauled in slippery tendrils by the yard
until my arms could hold no more, my arms
that, now I looked, had been scabbed and scarred
where they and the sharp roses came to terms.

What I saw then, when I saw you suddenly,
knocked me off-kilter, like a freak shot
or a punch from nowhere, making light of me:
it wasn't even your face at first, and not
your blue-green eyes as they took in my alarm,
but the blood-bruise on your arm
where the skin was softest; where, as I looked,
I almost tracked the course a vein might run
minutely under my fingers; where they unhooked
and undid you, when all of their work was done.

Peter McDonald

Instructor

This is the best bit; the steep glide into Milnsbridge,
the tight swing under the arch before the home straight.
when I'm behind the wheel, in the last minutes
of my hour and he's there, foot well clear
of the brake, mumbling into his mobile
or reaching past me for his medicine.

Twenty-odd years in the Force,
he knows about sensors and patrols
so we sail through the ambers and reds
up to the tricky crossroads at Cowlersley.
Outside the pub, two constables pause
and turn on the pavement to salute us.

A stickler for politeness, he says, 'Wave back.
If you like.' I file it under pertinent advice:
never trust another bloke's indicators,
dogs are unpredictable and ruthless,
know what the real speed limits are,
three ways to recognise an unmarked car.

Ann Sansom

Sestets with Fruit Coda

I woke in the Book of Amos, later Job,
but went out anyway, to make some money.
There was a blueprint in my head: Manchester.
When I drank myself out of a job: *kayis*,
a pun on summer fruit and the end.
The knock said 'I'm here.' A voice said enter.

He was a small man, as if surprised peeling
a satsuma with his one hand. His desk
was huge and made of money. I sat this side
as directed, put my feet up as not
and unwrapped an orange, two being able
to play that game, the air pleasantly citrus

like banter or the grove whose shadows played
across our faces in a foreign language.
I've come, spitting a pip, about the job.
A segment lay like Hebrew on his tongue. You've got
a nerve / no chance sunshine / a deal.
We raised our glasses. There was a waterfall

to walk to and a villa brilliant in the dusk,
so many windows to admire or put through.
My love, he said, do this one task
and later I did, drunk on being able to,
blind though we were to it, the two of us
including him only by his absence.

By then it was a clementine, a check table-
cloth, Winchester, a lake at sunset
with me the idle rich, a plum in my mouth
in the form of words. And it was Judges 2,
the verses about disobedience and defeat
in which none of us was able quite to believe,

like a scent I mean or disagreement or like a task
involving water and the language of commerce—
gather, collect, harvest, reap and so on.

Peter Sansom

Man and Wife

He wakes like someone shouted for, she lies
After in the violent lights thinking am I
Invisible, am I already dead?
Trying not to let her ghost go after his
Into the wind and the rain or under the sharp stars
With coughing foxes. He has phoned the police
To say if ever they catch him in their beams
Lopsided, savage and helpless as a badger
To let him be, it's not against the law
To walk the old road between the sea and the marsh
And listen at gaps and holes in the sand dunes
For what it really sounds like, and to get in
As far as he can without sinking, in among
Countless thousand starlings fastened on the reeds
And listen, if that is trespassing, so what?
Who cares? She does, she thinks they should lock him up
For his own good, for hers, for everyone's:
Eavesdropper, voyeur, night after night
Trying to see things as though he were dead and gone,
Trying to be slantways on, trying to get behind,
To be in the deep unease of the marsh and not
Interfere and witness the sea as it used to be
When nothing was watching but the stars. He comes home
A secret way over the old mines, over terrain
Probed and tunnelled and thoroughly gone into
And now for ever liable to sudden appearances
Of wells of water in which the yellow moon
Or a fearful human peers. She draws the curtains
And sees him mounted like a scarecrow on the boundary hedge.
She cannot make him a sign of recognition.
Perhaps he has found how far under their dwelling

The old galleries go, he is watching the tabs
On things, the sounds for house and home, come off
And blow away, he wishes it, traitor, accomplice
He has got beyond the pale and night after night now
Against house and home he will side with the wind.

David Constantine

Go, little huddle of noise, with your A to Z
 And forked hazel twig, and ferret out
 The man-in-the-street, his multicolour hurt
 Furled like a crumpled rainbow. Tell him I said
 What I meant when I said: I do. And if he should
 Look blank or pretend deaf or say he's heard
 That one before, unbutton his doubt to the heart,
 To the bloodied fist of hope. Try this instead:

Love, believe; for this is a two-part invention,
 Your hand in mine, blindfold, against the gathering
 Dark; and it is all we need ever know:
 To extricate from the flesh's contrary motion
 This perfect interval, Pythagorean,
 Irrefutable, and never to let it go.

Elizabeth Garrett

Simon Armitage was born in 1963 and lives in West Yorkshire. His many books include *Zoom!* (1989), *Xanadu* (1992), *Kid* (1992), *Book of Matches* (1993), *The Dead Sea Poems* (1995), *Moon Country* (1996), and *CloudCuckooLand* (1997). He appears in *The Penguin Anthology of British and Irish Poetry since 1945*. He is also a playwright who has written and broadcast extensively for television and radio. He teaches at the University of Leeds, and will teach at the University of Iowa beginning in 1999.

Wendy Cope read history at Oxford and was a London primary school teacher for fourteen years before becoming a freelance writer. Her two collections of poems are *Making Cocoa for Kingsley Amis* (1986), and *Serious Concerns* (1992), both of which made the bestseller lists. She has won a Cholmondeley Award for Poetry and the American Academy of Arts and Letters Michael Braude Award for Light Verse. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

David Constantine has published six books of poems, three translations and a novel with Bloodaxe, including *Selected Poems* (1991), a Poetry Book Society Recommendation, and the epic poem *Caspar Hauser* (1994). He is a Fellow at the Queen's College, Oxford.

Ian Duhig's previous books are *The Bradford Count* (1991) and *The Mersey Goldfish* (1995), both from Bloodaxe. His next book, *Nominies*, is forthcoming in 1998.

Sarah Evans works in publishing in London. Her short stories appear in many journals, and in the Arts Council anthology *New Writing 5*.

U. A. Fanthorpe was born in Kent in 1929. She has published seven collections of poetry with Peterloo Poets, as well as a *Selected Poems* (King Penguin, 1986) and a selection in *Penguin Modern Poets 6* (1996). She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

Janet Fisher is co-director of The Poetry Business, Huddersfield. Her first full-length collection, *Listening to Dancing*, was published by Smith/Doorstop Books (1996).

John Fuller recently published a *Collected Poems* on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday. He won the Forward Prize in 1996 for his collection *Stones and Fires*. His first novel, *Flying to Nowhere*, won the Whitbread Prize, and his fifth novel, *A Skin Diary*, was just

published by Chatto & Windus (1997). A *Commentary* on Auden will appear in 1998. He is a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford.

Elizabeth Garrett's books include *The Mortal Light* (Mandeville Press, 1990), *The Rule of Three* (Bloodaxe, 1991) and the forthcoming *A Two-Part Invention* (Bloodaxe, 1998). She works at the Voltaire Foundation, in Oxford.

Lavinia Greenlaw has taught at Amherst College and been writer in residence at various places, including the Science Museum in London and currently with a firm of lawyers. Her first collection, *Night Photograph* (Faber, 1993) was followed by *A World Where News Travels Slowly* (Faber, 1997), whose title poem won the Forward Award for the Poem of the Year.

Tony Harrison was born in Leeds in 1937. Author of many poetry collections, including *Selected Poems* (Penguin/Viking, 1984, 1987), and *v. and Other Poems* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1990); as well as verse drama, opera libretti and film poems which have been produced by the National Theater, the New York Metropolitan Opera, BBC Television and Channel 4.

Stuart Henson's collections, *The Impossible Jigsaw* and *Ember Music*, are published by Peterloo Poets. The recipient of an Eric Gregory Award for poetry, his work has appeared in the U.S. in *The Review*, *The Cumberland Poetry Review*, and *Sparrow*.

W. N. Herbert was born in Dundee in 1961. He has published four volumes of poetry, the latest being *Cabaret McGonagall* (1996), and a critical study *To Circumjack MacDiarmid* (Oxford University Press, 1992). He is currently Writing Fellow for the Wordsworth Trust in Grasmere, and teaches Creative Writing at Lancaster.

Linton Kwesi Johnson was born in Jamaica in 1952 and came to London in 1963. He is the author of four books of poetry and has recorded ten albums of his work with a variety of reggae musicians. His selected poems *Tings An' Times* was published by Bloodaxe and released as an album by LKJ Records (1992).

Tim Kendall was born in Plymouth in 1970. He edits *Thumbscrew*, a national poetry magazine, and is author of *Paul Muldoon* (Dufour & Seren). The recipient of an Eric Gregory Award for poetry in 1997, his study of Sylvia Plath is due from Faber in 1999.

Gwyneth Lewis has published three collections of poems, two in Welsh and one in English: *Sonedau Redsa* (Redsa's Sonnets),

(Gomer, 1990), *Parables and Faxes* (Bloodaxe, 1995), and *Cyfrif Un ac Un y Dri* (One and One Make Three), (Barddas, 1996). *Zero Gravity* is due from Bloodaxe in 1998. She now works as a television producer in Cardiff, Wales.

Glyn Maxwell's three collections of verse have won numerous awards, notably the Somerset Maugham Prize for *Out of the Rain* in 1992, the Poetry Book Society Choice for *Tale of the Mayor's Son* in 1990, and this year the E. M. Forster Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, for his entire body of work. He is included in *Penguin Modern Poets, Volume 3* (1995). Born in Hertfordshire, he studied with Derek Walcott and teaches at Amherst.

Peter McDonald's two volumes of poetry are *Biting the Wax* (1989) and *Adam's Dream* (1996), both from Bloodaxe. He is author of *Louis MacNiece: the Poet in his Contexts* (OUP, 1991) and *Mistaken Identities: Poetry and Northern Ireland* (OUP, 1997). He is Reader in English Literature at the University of Bristol.

Jamie McKendrick was born in Liverpool in 1955. His books include *The Sirocco Room* (1991), *The Kiosk on the Brink* (1993), which won the Southern Arts Literature Award; and *The Marble Fly*, which was a Poetry Book Society Choice and won the Forward Poetry Prize for the Best Collection, 1997.

Andrew Motion is Professor of Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia. He is author of many volumes of poetry, including *Dangerous Play: Poems 1974-1984* (Penguin, 1985) and *Salt Water* (Faber, 1997). An eminent critic and biographer, his latest study is *Keats* (Faber, 1997).

Graham Nelson writes and teaches pure mathematics at Oxford. He has published papers on Larkin and Eliot, was awarded a doctorate in the differential geometry of 3-manifolds, and is secretary of the John Florio Society, a group of writers based at Magdalen College.

Bernard O'Donoghue is a winner of the Whitbread Prize whose collections of poetry include *Poaching Rights*, *The Weakness*, and *Gunpowder*. He is Tutor in English at Wadham College, Oxford, and author of *The Courtly Love Tradition* (1982), and *Seamus Heaney and the Language of Poetry* (1994).

Don Paterson was born in Dundee in 1963. He works in London as a musician, and is poetry editor for *Picador*. *Nil Nil* (Faber 1993) won the Forward Prize for Best First Collection, and *God's Gift to Women*

(Faber 1997) won the 1998 T. S. Eliot prize.

John Redmond was born in 1967 and is studying for a D.Phil at St. Hugh's College, Oxford. Widely published, he is assistant editor of *Thumbscrew* and writes reviews for the *London Review of Books*.

Ann Sansom has written and directed plays. Her first collection *Romance* was published by Bloodaxe in 1994.

Peter Sansom is co-director of The Poetry Business, and author of *January* (Carcenet, 1994) and *Writing Poems* (Bloodaxe, 1994). He is editor of the poetry magazine *The North*.

Jo Shapcott is the only person to have won Britain's National Poetry Competition twice. Her first collection, *Electroplating the Baby* (Bloodaxe, 1988) won a Commonwealth Prize, and her second, *Phrase Book* (OUP, 1992) was a Poetry Book Society Choice. She is co-editor with Matthew Sweeney of a major anthology of contemporary poetry, *Emergency Kit: Poems for Strange Times* (Faber, 1996). Her work will appear in a forthcoming Penguin Modern Poets.

Pauline Stainer has published four collections of poetry with Bloodaxe; three were Poetry Book Society Recommendations, and her latest, *The Wound-dresser's Dream* (1996) was shortlisted for the Whitbread Prize. She lives on Rousay, one of the smaller Orkney Isles.

Benjamin Zephaniah was born in Birmingham and now lives in London. He has published many books of poetry, including two popular children's titles, and recorded eight albums and five spoken word cassettes. He tours extensively, has written plays, and been the subject of several television programmes. His latest book is *Propa Propaganda* (1996).

Concerto for Mariachi Band

When herons wade and strike like blue harpoons;
when osprey barnstorm from heaven, dragging
the bright sky with them as they plunge,
as they touch-off the Clark Fork River,
salmon flashing in their claws;
when bull moose bash together
in a plate-tectonic dance
that stacks up mountains,
rams the Yukon farther north
where grizzlies wake with yawning appetites,
reemerge from sleep like mighty flowers;
when alligators sun themselves in swamps
or cruise like serious canoes;
when coyotes howl, dying to fly, aching
to take down the moon and crack its shell,
guzzle its tortoise yolk;
when diamondback landlords zig
through wind-bit canyons, zag
their wind-flat scrublands...
oh, Beauty, *mi amiga*—look out for my cravings!
Let's be *bandidos* and steal a swift horse.

Rob Carney

Freedom Revisited

My parents are out for the evening.
It's the first time I've been allowed
to stay at home alone without a baby-sitter.

I've polished off an entire tub of *Cool Whip*,
eaten with just my finger, waiting patiently
for the *Secret Agent* to start on TV.

When Johnny Rivers' theme song kicks in,
I've got the volume cranked all the way up,
dancing around the living room in my pajamas,

singing along at the top of my lungs with
Johnny's gravelly voice, *They've given you
a number and they've taken away your name....*

Then I'm spellbound on the edge of the couch,
wondering how the hell Patrick McGoohan
is going to get himself out of this one,

the gravity of his situation imparting a
whole new brand of anxiety, now that I've
come to know the true meaning of freedom.

Mark Terrill

Current Events

In the dark,
you edge closer
and whisper
about the dissolution of great empires,
economic descent,
and stark-faced men
who watch us
from newspapers
strewn about your bed.

The once Soviet map
hangs naked above our struggle.
Your arms are Yugoslavia.
My feet, the Ukraine.
And you can't stop clipping out
the maps that change.
Newsprint blackens your nose,
your left breast,
my thigh.
Are we aligned
or nonaligned?

Two hundred fifty cartographers
sit pasted to their seats,
examining
every wrinkle
in our cotton sheets.

David Schuster

Guffaw U.

If you matriculate at Guffaw,
You will enter the rolling groves of Academe
Through an elaborate and exciting exit
Designed by our resident architect.

In the School of New Languages
Instructors teach not only indicative, subjunctive,
And imperative, but the Interior Drastic Mood as well
(Used without a break since '07).

Professor Heisatopos
(Off campus) teaches a rigorous course
In logic and professes
What he practices:

Sample:
Major premise: *Get off the premises!*
Minor premise: *I'm on the premises!*
Conclusion: *Get off the premises!*

As for practical matters, Guffaw
Has a School of Useless Furniture.
A question frequently posed by the school's jury
Is *Sliding, but how far?*

We also have a Department of Shifty Boundaries but where it
And a School of Magical Math where problems
Are worked out very quickly
Under a hat.

Although we have no athletic program, the stands are packed.
Our President, John The Monarchist,
Dribbles a basketball during interviews
To steady his thinking.

Our librarian, of course, opens the newspaper
Every morning, takes out The Funnies
And tears them
Into little pieces.

Our unending motto
dy which questions whether Philosophy is the study which questions whether Philo-
Is chiseled around the Admin Bldg.
(There are branch campuses.)

Michael Fessler

Hard Out of Eden

At sixteen in Odessa,
I fought cowboys and Christians
and Julie's condemning stare
when I told her I didn't believe
in the Savior.

Still, I sat in the pew,
listened to the preacher
thump, bang and shout
closer than I had ever been
to Julie's stiff blonde hair,
silver-blue eyes and decisive breasts.
Learned about fire and brimstone
while she pressed her white leather Bible
against her Sunday dress and touched
the red words with a lustrous nail
to show me the temptation.

In my own room I read
Dostoyevsky, Sartre, Nietzsche
heard that God was dead,
hoped they meant my father.
Thought I would upstage
the funeral clutching the Upanishads—
shave my head, become a Buddhist,
but no luck—discovered the book
of Genesis branded on my rump and neck.

Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel swirled
like constellations in a field
of Greek and Aramaic letters—
stars whose signs were my birth marks.
Through creosote and ragged mesquite,
Julie rode me hard out of Eden
into the dust-stained sunset of West Texas.

Mark McKain

Before Adam and Eve

William Farr

There are some questions that you should know better than to ask when you're growing up in rural Georgia. And not just about sex. My question, the one I put to my seventh-grade teacher, was about the cavemen. I'd read that they couldn't talk but only grunted and had to make up words as they went along—and that's where we came from, these cavemen were our *ancestors*. The Bible, on the other hand, said things got started when God created Adam and Eve and put them in the Garden of Eden, to dress it and to keep it, and they talked right from the beginning—they had to explain why they ate of the tree that God had commanded them they should not eat. Adam said: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree." And Eve said: "the serpent beguiled me."

So I asked Mrs. McFarlin the question on my mind. "Mrs. McFarlin," I said, "was somebody here before Adam and Eve? They didn't grunt, they talked."

"Bucky," she said in a reprimanding tone, "any question you have about the Bible, you'll have to ask it in Sunday school..."

But this wasn't a question that Miss Childs, my Sunday school teacher, wanted to hear. "Bucky," she said, "show me in the Bible where it says anything about 'cavemen' and we'll talk about them." Of course I couldn't do it. "Then we'll get on with today's lesson," she said, closing the subject.

As for Preacher Jenkins, forget him. So tall he could barely stand up straight in the pulpit, he had slick black hair that pointed like an arrow at his sharp nose, and he had prying dark eyes that could see every bad thing you'd ever done or thought about doing. I had to shake his hand to get out of the church, but he wasn't anybody I wanted to get into a conversation with.

That left nobody to ask. Certainly not Mama and Daddy. They knew what the Bible said about Adam and Eve, but where would they have heard about the cavemen? I had more education than they did—and, in their opinion, more than was good for me. Daddy said everyone ought to go to school long enough to learn how to read and figure because, if

you don't, look how people will take advantage of you. But there comes a time, he said, when boys belong in the cotton field, not in a classroom learning things they would never have any use for.

It was a scorching-hot afternoon in August that Preacher Jenkins paid us a surprise visit. At least it surprised me. In overalls and barefooted, I was asleep on the front porch and didn't know he was there until I heard him talking about the end of the world. He rolled up the sleeves of his white shirt, loosened his yellow tie, and opened his Bible like he was going to preach one of his fiery Baptist sermons. "It's all in Matthew twenty-four," he said. "The sun will grow dark, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall, and the powers of heaven will be shaken; then the trumpet will sound and Jesus will come in the clouds with power and great glory...."

I knew what had brought the preacher here this afternoon. It was revival time, and one of us hadn't joined the church; namely, me. But I was too undecided to do it now. If God wrote the Bible, it had to be true; but who wrote the book that told about the cavemen? Had they put lies in it? Why would they do that? And why did people think the church was so special? It was a building like any other, put together with the same sort of lumber and nails. It didn't *have* to be a church; it could have been anything.

The preacher mopped his brow with a handkerchief and continued: "Now they got that atom bomb. Read the Bible, read the paper; you'll see they're saying the same thing. God's gonna use that bomb to burn this old world up: the heavens will pass away with a great noise; the elements will melt with fervent heat; then Jesus will say to everyone that didn't take him as their savior, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for Satan and his angels.'"

Hot as it was, I shivered—and, for a minute, forgot all about the cavemen.

"Well," Daddy said, rolling a cigarette and brushing tobacco off his overalls, "I know what the Bible says, but you got to use common sense when you read it—and I don't believe nobody's gonna burn in hell for all eternity."

"Brother Tarver!" the preacher shouted, "I didn't say it, *God* did. Do you think you can pick and choose what you want to believe?" He turned the pages of his Bible. "Let me read you something. It's in Revelation, the twenty-second chapter, the nineteenth verse: 'And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life.' You see what it says? You believe *part* of the Bible without believing all of it, you're in danger of hellfire...."

Just then my brother, R. C., breezed past on his bicycle, slammed on the brakes as he rounded the corner, and motioned to me. I slid off the porch and went to see what he wanted.

"What you doing?" he asked, one foot on the ground, the other on a bicycle pedal. He had been in the wash hole; I could tell because his rust-colored hair was still damp.

"Nothing," I said. "Just listening to the preacher talk about the end of the world."

"Hah!" he laughed. He could afford to: he was saved.

"R. C.," I said, "did you read about the cavemen when you went to school?" He'd started the seventh grade two or three times but had stayed out to work in the field so much that he finally gave up on it. He never took an interest in school anyway. He hated books.

"Cavemen?" he said, screwing up his freckled face. "I don't know. Maybe. What if I did?"

"You remember they didn't talk, they just grunted? And had to make up words as they went along?"

"I don't know," he said with a shrug. "What difference does it make?"

"The Bible says Adam and Eve was here before anybody else, and they talked right from the beginning."

"Well? They could do anything God wanted 'em to; he made 'em."

"But where'd the cavemen come from? Didn't he make them? Why couldn't they talk? And did they come *before* Adam and Eve? That's what I want to know."

"There ain't no cavemen in the Bible. Who cares what some old book said? You beat all I ever seen, worrying about stuff like that. I went in the wash hole. I'll go again if you want to, it's so blamed hot."

Before I could answer, Mama called and said for me to draw some water so Preacher Jenkins could have a drink. I ran to the well and let the bucket fly to the bottom and drew it up like my life depended on getting away before the preacher got there—but soon as I reached for it, there he was, his slick black hair shimmering in the late-afternoon sun. I handed him the gourd.

He took a long drink, and said: "Good water, ain't it?" I nodded, and looked away from his all-seeing eyes. "Hey, wait a minute!" he said as I started to leave. "I was talking with your mama and daddy..." So here it comes, I thought: he's going to try and save me. "They say you done real good in school."

He didn't fool me a minute, talking like a regular person. It was a trick of his; I'd seen him pull it too many times in the pulpit. He'd tell a story

that had nothing to do with the Bible, and then, when we least expected it, he'd say that somebody was going to hell if he walked out of the church without taking Jesus as his savior: "I could point my finger at you, I could call your name! You may not be but twelve years old and you think, oh, he ain't talking about me, I got all the time in the world. Then look yonder! Look at the *cemetery*! Look how many *children* are buried there!"

I sat down in the wheelbarrow, and he stood beside the well, his arm on the curb, his back to the sun. "How old are you?" he asked, edging his way into the subject. I told him. "Twelve years old," he said, and repeated: "*Twelve years old*. Do you know what the age of accountability is?" I should; I'd heard him talk about it enough. Up to a certain age, if you die before getting saved, you go to heaven because you don't know right from wrong; after that, you have no excuse, you go to hell. The Bible didn't say so, but Preacher Jenkins had calculated the age of accountability to be eight years old. He reminded me of that. Then he said, "The revival's next week, and I ain't gonna let you get away from me this time."

I knew better than to mention the cavemen. I'd heard him say you don't know if men are telling the truth when they write books—but *God* wrote the Bible, and God didn't lie.

"Bucky," he said, "there ain't nothing to it. All you got to do is walk down the aisle and shake my hand, then I'll baptize you in the creek. What's so hard about that? R. C. done it, why can't you?"

"Well, I *could*," I said, and he took that to mean I *would*. He smiled like he was satisfied with a job well done, shook my hand, and said he'd see me in church.

That night I dreamed I went to hell. Satan met me at the gate and, thumbing the pages of a Bible, said: "Just a minute. I got to read you something. It's in Genesis:

"And the woman said...

"And the Lord called...

"And the man said...

"And Cain talked..."

"Now all that talking took place in the Garden of Eden. Maybe you can find something in here about 'cavemen' who couldn't talk but only grunted and had to make up words as they went along. You do, I'll have to let you go."

"It ain't in there," I said.

Then he opened a big book that had all the laws written down in it. "I have to look it up," he said. "We don't get this one too often. It ought to be under *Ideas that go against the Bible*. Ah, here it is: *Thinking there was cavemen before Adam and Eve*. For that, you'll burn in hell a hundred years." Then he turned into Preacher Jenkins.

I didn't join the church that week. I couldn't. Every time the preacher picked up his Bible, it was Satan I saw; and when he said this book told us all we needed to know about anything, I wanted to jump up and shout: "*What about the cavemen? What about the cavemen?*"

All week, Mama kept after me: "I thought you was gonna join the church." And Daddy: "You know you ought to." And R. C.: "Fraidy cat, 'fraid you'd get drowned?" And Preacher Jenkins: "Tomorrow's sun may never rise!" He preached hellfire and damnation until every child past the age of accountability walked down the aisle, except me. At the last service, after we sang "O Why Not Tonight?" the preacher said: "We oughta bring this revival to a close, but I can't do it..." His voice broke, and he reached for his handkerchief. "Somebody here said he was gonna take Jesus as his savior but he went back on his word, he ain't done it." He wiped away his tears. "I've done all I can, I've preached my heart out. Lord, what more can I do?" He turned his eyes to the ceiling, and waited. Then, like the answer had come from on high, he said: "We'll sing the first verse of 'Just As I Am.' You know the words: *Just as I am without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me...* It's the last chance you'll get this time"—he looked straight at me—"and it may be the last chance you'll ever get. That's all I'm gonna say. Let us sing." I told my shoes they were nailed to the floor, they weren't going anywhere.

When it was all over and I was trying to sneak out the door, Preacher Jenkins caught up with me and muttered, "I'll be praying for you, Bucky." Like he meant to pray that I'd go to hell before I got another chance to be saved.

I didn't ask Daddy to let me ride the bus to town and go to high school, where nobody in our family had gone before, but I did talk around the subject, not mentioning anyone in particular, just wondering out loud what high school might be like, what subjects they studied, and what they did after they got their diplomas. But Daddy saw right through that. "I'll tell you where you're going," he said. "You're going to the cotton field."

The evening before school was to start the next day, after we got home from church, Daddy called me into the kitchen, where he was seated at the blue-and-white oilclothed table with a lighted lamp on it. He

pulled off his tie, unbuttoned the collar of his shirt, and said: "Mrs. McFarlin tried to tell me you oughta go to high school and get to be somebody."

He looked like he expected an argument. I didn't give him one.

He stood up and I sat down. If he was going to be the preacher, I'd be the congregation.

His voice rose to the occasion: "I told her I need you in the cotton field."

I didn't say anything.

"She said, give you a chance, there ain't no telling what you can get to be. Like a farmer ain't nothing."

I sure didn't say anything to that.

He continued in the determined tone that came so natural to him: "I told her if you get any more education you'll think you're better than the rest of us—"

"I—"

"Did I ask you anything? *Listen to me!*" He banged the table with his fist and I grabbed the lamp before it toppled over. "She didn't mean to, but she good as said why you ain't joined the church—you been reading books that go against the Bible. *Don't deny it!*" Again he banged the table, and I steadied the lamp just in time. "She said you asked her a question about Adam and Eve like somebody was here before they was. That's what happens when you read all them books, you get to thinking you know more'n God Almighty. *Don't argue with me!*"

He sat down and rolled a cigarette; then, removing the lamp chimney to light it, he went on: "I told that teacher to mind her own business and I'd take care of mine. And she turned on me like I was a demon out of the pit of hell. 'That boy can think for himself,' she said. 'He may look up to you now, but there's a day coming when he'll see for himself who he had for a daddy. What will he think of you then?'"

For a long time he smoked in silence, without looking at me. He seemed to have taken a sudden interest in the unpainted wall, or maybe it was the calendar hanging there.

When he spoke again, it was in a quiet voice: "I told her, I said, 'Mrs. McFarlin, I know when I'm beat. God help me, I'll let him go.'"

Then, like he was in a hurry to be finished with the subject, he said: "I have two questions for you, young man. Will you get up early enough—starting tomorrow morning—to milk the cows before you catch the bus?" I nodded. "Will you fool around in the cotton field when you get there?" I shook my head. "That's all I've got to say. And I don't want to hear nothing out of you. I know what you want to do already."

So I went to high school after all. But it wasn't what I had imagined it would be. I'd thought that my classmates who lived in town would know all about things I had only wondered about, but they didn't know much more than I did. And if the teachers knew what the cavemen were doing here before Adam and Eve, they didn't talk about it. What got me excited was the library. Somewhere in all those books had to be the answers I was looking for. And I found them.

It turned out that Adam and Eve had appeared in other religions before they showed up in our Bible. They were no more real than the man in the moon; they were just somebody's idea of how life began on earth. It didn't begin with the cavemen, either. Where it got started was in the sea, with the simplest forms; then it moved to dry land and got a lot more complicated. "Evolution" is what they called it, and I didn't know what to think of it, not at first. I had to go back to it again and again before I saw there was no way around it; that's what I was, an evolutionist. Of course I didn't tell anybody.

I didn't tell Mama and Daddy any more than I had to about high school. When they asked if my teachers had said anything that went against the Bible, I tried to look shocked at the very idea and said, "No!" That seemed to satisfy them, at least for a little while. Then Mama asked the question she had asked so many times before: When was I going to join the church? Without giving it another thought, I said: "Next Sunday."

And I did. While they were singing "*Just as I am though tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt,*" I walked down the aisle, looked Preacher Jenkins in the eye, and shook his hand. "Hallelujah!" he shouted. "The angels in heaven are rejoicing!"

Fishhouse Road

My plan was to undo
the tubes and thrumming
machines, dress you
in khaki trousers and shirt,
leave the hospital looking
for water. Maybe drive
out along Fishhouse Road
until we came to a pull-off
where I could slide
the aluminum *Cartopper*
over the mud and put in.
The water would be warmer
than the air and clear
before the first hard fall
rains, with a mist welling
up from the marsh grass.
We'd thread nightcrawlers
on a double rig of snelled
baitholders and bottom fish
the morning, hopefully
spot a little joint
along the shoreline
where we could pull in
for some beer and hot
lunch before the wind
turned against us
and the rain began.

John Bargowski

Oasis

When Summer parched the rain barrels,
Swallows saw us file the bedouin way
Through hazel and hawthorne
A female caravan of washday performers.
We clowned through ferns
Jugglers of pots and primus,
The baby swaddled in the tin bath
Borne to the water's edge.
Then with one switch of her tongue,
My mother commanded
Water to be drawn
Pots to bubble,
Soapsuds camouflaged her arms
Like cuckoospit
Sunlight made memory of
Wild strawberry and grass.

When scrubbed, shirts and frocks
Made exhibitions of themselves
On cactus gorse
While we feasted on wishing water
With
Pink bought cake.

Geraldine Mills

To the Man Holding the Plans
Standing In the Woods Looking at the River

Let its beauty break you,
not the grand sweep of the scene,
but the individual shards of light
shattering off the current.
Let them pierce and scatter
your point of view.

Where the moss devours a log on the bank
let your eyes rest there and feed.
Feel the silence enter them, slowly
 like a root opening a fissure
into your deepest assumption.

When time enough is wasted
waste some more, until you realize just how old
everything around you is, how many thousands
 of thousands of years
these trees have risen and fallen.
What kind of hand opens this slowly?

What sort of place has faith enough to wait
 and not know?
Already time is bending your soul
like it turns the branches, and fossils
are taking root in your jaw.

On the far bank, shorebirds
are building a nest.
They use only mud and silence,
trust and branches.

Let them win today; give this one away.
Take as your pay
a flint of shale,
an arrow of time.

Robert Arthur Lewis

A Baker and a Blitzkrieg

At Joseph's Bakery
holding my son's hand
he presses his nose
against a glass counter.
Tasting pastry
steaming crust and dough
twirled into sugared spirals
Pointing out blintzes, strudel,
drizzled in creams and powder.
I think pastry names
and how letters can mix like
batter into words that have
a suburban family's cable tv
Discovery channel-baked taste.
"Yes, may I have a half-dozen
frosted blitzkriegs for my son?"
What about this one?
"Oh Joseph, may I also
have the thickest slice of
your Luftwaffe?
And may I have chocolate
sprinkles dropped on that too?"

And of course, "Joseph
I would like some Auschwitz
to take to the office tomorrow.
Oh, and may I have some
from the back kitchen.
I've been here before and
I know that's where
the freshest Auschwitz is kept
before it's brought to these glass
counters, before its layers
have lost their sweet flavor."

I see Joseph through his
wrinkles and spectacled eyes
looking like a baker
that every mother-goose mother
sees for her pastry-filled
children and I, seeing
a blue number arm-etched
under flour and a rolled-up sleeve,
I imagine Joseph,
back-broken in Berlin
found hiding
in a staircase with menorahs
fifty years ago.
I wonder if he thinks
about baking these pastries and
giving them different names
In front of my son who
would never know the difference.

Leigh Jackson Pressler

Like The Sky Tonight

Clever language needn't be heavy.

There are light-handed Chinese cleavers
and blades on hollow bone.

In our kitchen drawer
is your mother's metal half moon blade
married to the handle's arch.

It is like the sky tonight, the moon's scythe
reaping darkness and stars, bits of light
fine as chopped garlic.

The household is full of useful
implements of destruction: axe, awl, saw,
four different types of razor blades,
knife, scissors, cleaver.

It is the latter I love best, double edged,
the name for cutting off and divisions,

and within it that archaic clinging together—
Oh, cleave to me!

Barbara Van Noord

Before Divorce

for my mother

We lived in that rough
red brick apartment #3,
bottom floor, Brigantine
row-home in a short row
one salty block
from the Atlantic.

Out back, the yard
was small, concrete
floored and fenced in
with sand-pocked wood
planks and a length
of clothesline stretched
from spoke to variegated spoke.

One winter, mid-December,
I saw you try to bring in
a blanket hung up to dry.
It had gathered the cold
to its fibers and held
its shape tight and would not
let go when you wanted
to pull it free and take it with you
to fold in the warm kitchen.

I watched as, instead, it snapped
apart in your hands and the pieces
fell, beautiful as guillotines.

Kristina Van Sant

For Sale

One hundred people and
five offers in five months. That adds up
to about two hundred feet that have tracked in mud,
two hundred inquisitive hands that have poked holes in
century-old plaster bubbles,
lifted floor boards,
peered through crawl spaces, flushed the toilet,
turned on the hot water,
and looked at flaws.
How many took the time to kick their toes
in the rich soil that fed
a crop of tomatoes so robust that we plucked them off vines
sliced them and
sprinkled them with salt, eating them handfuls at a time
so they would not spoil?
They do not see
the house with candles glowing,
lasagna bubbling,
cousins spilling and wine flowing.
Nor do they feel the sanctuary of white walls that absorb
grief and radiate
safety. They do not
sit on the top of the stairway
outside the bedroom at one o'clock in the morning and listen
for God to say I'm here,
while tears spill down their cheeks
in the dark, moist with love and grace and healing, and to
know that their husband sleeps
twenty feet away, and that he will stir
the moment you slip back under the covers,
that he will wrap one arm

around your waist, cup a breast with a sleepy hand,
and tell you in a voice thick from dreams
that you are loved.

No.

They want to know if the furnace works.

Jane A. Wampler

On the Accomplishments of Prayer

The cellist hugs those rosewood curves
between her knees. Its steel leg
scratches down into porch cement.
With a fervent and meticulous invocation
she draws back the bow. Headlong
she pours a river of notes out past
the birdbath and over darkening hedges.

Finally she begins to work over
six tones. To search
with relentless little twists and shivers
until she forms an architecture of helices
as quick and complex
as those raveled within DNA.

God knows, she is drunk enough now
to reach into things and trace,
say, the arc of a quark's movement.
To sound a woman's
split-in-half shriek
as her first-born crops.

Under fluorescent light in a nearby garage
a man in blue apron bends over a grinder.
In another house, a woman bathing
strokes a loofah along the site
of an old mastectomy scar.
Nearby, the Haffsteaders
chat politics over wine and fish
with a couple they met
through their daughter's preschool.

Around each of these people
in their respective postures
resets a cold nimbus,
frozen distance,
like that which surrounds
stars in night sky.

Only this woman with the bow and cello
who has become possessed
by what she has always heard
inside of her veins
is not alone.

Ed Ruzicka

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