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Vol. VI, Special Issue: Two Worlds Taken As They Come: Richard Wilbur's "Walking to Sleep"

Henry Taylor

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The Hollins Critic

Volume VI, Special Issue

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Two Worlds Taken As They Come:

Richard Wilbur's "Walking To Sleep"



Since 1947, when Richard Wilbur published *The Beautiful Changes*, he has been widely recognized as one of the finest poets who began their careers after World War II. By 1956, with the publication of *Things of This World*, he had established himself as a poet of the first rank. In the spring of 1961, Robert Frost told an audience at the University of Virginia that Wilbur, because of the natural beauty of his language and craft, was one of the younger poets who, without any conscious effort to "write down," could reach the wider audience which poets (and audiences too) have dreamed of for a long time.

The Hollins Critic

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What Frost said is still true, though changes in literary fashion have obscured the issue. Wilbur's technical brilliance was gradually taken for granted, and then became for some readers an object of suspicion. When his fourth collection, *Advice to a Prophet*, appeared in 1961, it met with a variety of critical reactions. Among those readers who had previously been suspicious of Wilbur's technical mastery, and who had in some cases looked too hard for evidence of bold and obvious development, there were some who congratulated him for having tried, finally, to come to grips with the Problems of Contemporary Life, while others attacked him for having treated grave matters with what they had become accustomed to calling his characteristic lightness. Even among the critics who had steadily praised Wilbur's work since it had begun to appear, there were those who expressed disappointment in *Advice to a Prophet*, because they thought that Wilbur's technical virtuosity had been lavished on "slight" poems, while others, more "major" perhaps, seemed looser and farther flung.

One reason for these mixed reactions was that *Advice to a Prophet* had been preceded by *Things of This World* (1956), which had won the Edna St. Vincent Millay Memorial Award, the National Book Award, and the Pulitzer Prize. In that collection, Wilbur had brought to its culmination the style which had developed through *The Beautiful Changes* (1947) and *Ceremony* (1950); *Advice to a Prophet* gave some indication that he was now beginning to move away from the "pleasure, flash, and waterfall" of his earlier work. However, he did not entirely abandon the earlier style, and this may have something to do with some of the dissatisfaction; it is fun to imagine the enthusiasm which might have resulted if Wilbur had dispensed altogether with the formal complexity for which he is so well known. As it was, *Advice to a Prophet* was sufficiently different from *Things of This World* to arouse dissatisfaction in those who admired the earlier style, but it was not different enough to please those who had been searching Wilbur's work for more evidence of what Oscar Cargill called "virility."

Wilbur's new collection, *Walking to Sleep*, seems to indicate even more clearly than *Advice to a Prophet* the direction he had begun to take in the earlier book. *Walking to Sleep* contains twenty-two new poems and eleven translations; in these, Wilbur continues to work with certain themes and techniques with which he has

always been occupied, but he also develops a number of the concerns which had previously been most evident in *Advice to a Prophet*. The breadth of his vision has increased; though most of these poems, like the earlier ones, take rise from the sharp perception of minute particulars, they more often move from these starting points toward broader and deeper conclusions. Wilbur is more consistently and effortlessly involved in the upheaval of our times, in poems which are less oratorical than "Speech for the Repeal of the McCarran Act" or "Advice to a Prophet"; and the translations, all of them touched by Wilbur's usual excellence, are more various in voice and manner than those in the earlier books. Wilbur's development has not been characterized by the radical shifts which other poets of his generation have gone through; unlike the victims of what George Garrett has called "The General Motors Aesthetic," he has not "obsolesced" his earlier work; he has instead extended it, in the process of moving into deeper and broader areas of experience and vision.

II

If *Advice to a Prophet* had detractors as well as admirers, there was no one who failed to recognize that Wilbur remains one of the most knowledgeable masters of verse technique now writing; and he continues to exercise this mastery in the poems in *Walking to Sleep*. No one familiar with his earlier work could mistake the authorship of this passage, for example, from "In the Field:"

Black in her glinting chains,
Andromeda feared nothing from the seas,
Preserved as by no hero's pains,
Or hushed Euripides',

And there the dolphin glowed,
Still flailing through a diamond froth of stars,
Flawless as when Arion rode
One of its avatars.

It is the diction, of course, as much as the metrical precision, which marks this passage as Wilbur's, and the diction results in the ease with which the erudition is carried. In his note on this poem, Wilbur says, in part, "Some think that Euripides' lost play *Andromeda* told of the transformation of Andromeda . . . into the constellation bearing [her name]." Reading this, I am struck with the rightness, for example, of the adjective *hushed* in the fourth line above.

That Wilbur is a master of form means not only that he is able to work within traditional forms, but also that he can revise metrical patterns to his own ends, as he does in "Advice to a Prophet:"

Speak of the world's own change. Though we cannot
conceive

Of an undreamt thing, we know to our cost
How the dreamt cloud crumbles, the vines are blackened
by frost,

How the view alters. We could believe,

If you told us so, that the white-tailed deer will slip
Into perfect shade, grown perfectly shy . . .

I once heard Wilbur answer a student who had asked him about the meter of this poem; Wilbur began by saying that there was a pattern, but backed off after having counted on his fingers through the first stanza; he concluded by saying that he rarely counted syllables and stresses, but worked instead for what he called a rhythmical rightness which would coincide with a rightness he also wished to achieve in the tone and diction of each line, each poem. This is a broader notion of the usefulness of form than is often inferred from Wilbur's familiar remark, "The strength of the genie comes of his being confined in a bottle." (People also forget that Robert Frost was aware of the interesting things that can sometimes happen when one plays tennis with the net down.) Richard Wilbur's genie inhabits a bottle that sometimes reminds me of Snoopy's doghouse: it may seem barely large enough for the genie, but there are many modern conveniences arranged spaciouly within it.

Most of the poems in *Walking to Sleep* are formal in the traditional sense, but there are several in which such variations as I have mentioned are used to advantage; and there are also several which make contemporary music of forms which do not often show up in today's poetry. The first poem in the book, "The Lilacs," is composed in the Anglo-Saxon alliterative form which Wilbur used for the first time ("Junk") in *Advice to a Prophet*; another, "Thyme Flowering Among Rocks," is composed of rhymed stanzas which maintain the 5-7-5 syllable-count of the English *haiku*:

This, if Japanese,
Would represent grey boulders
Walloped by rough seas

So that, here or there,
The balked water tossed its froth
Straight into the air.

As the poem continues, it exemplifies the delicate balance called for in a statement Wilbur made in his essay, "The Genie in the Bottle": "I think it is a great vice to convey everything by imagery . . . There ought to be areas of statement. But the statement should not equal and abolish the 'objects' in the poem . . ." The description in "Thyme Flowering Among Rocks" continues for several stanzas, until "You/ Are lost now in dense/ Fact, fact which one might have thought/ Hidden from the sense." But then the poem concludes with a statement, a movement from the facts to their implications:

It makes the craned head
Spin. Unfathomed thyme! The world's
A dream, Basho said,

Not because that dream's
A falsehood, but because it's
Truer than it seems.

Perhaps the finest example of this movement from image to statement is "In the Field," which also best exemplifies the broadening vision I have mentioned. The poem begins with a recollection of the previous night, a walk in a field which led to a conversation about what the universe was doing as the speaker and his

Richard Purdy Wilbur

Born in New York City, March 1, 1921, Richard Wilbur graduated from Amherst College and served in the 36th Infantry Division in Italy and France in World War II. After the war he was chosen as a Senior Fellow at Harvard, and he has since taught at Harvard, Wellesley, and Wesleyan University where he is presently Professor of English. In addition to winning both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for 1957, his honors and awards include the Harriet Monroe Prize, the Oscar Blumenthal Award, the Edna St. Vincent Millay Memorial Award, and the Bollingen Translation Prize. He has received the Prix de Rome, has twice been a Guggenheim Fellow, and in 1960 received a Ford Foundation Grant in Drama which allowed him to work with the Alley Theatre in Houston for a year. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. Married and the father of four children, he lives in Portland, Connecticut.

companion watched it. Following the two stanzas I have already quoted, in which the speaker points out constellations, comes the realization of the changes that are taking place before their eyes; remembering that "Egypt's north was in the dragon's tail," they imagine the ultimate expansion of the universe, the stars moving away forever, "not coming back

Unless they should at last,
Like hard-flung dice that ramble out the throw,
Be gathered for another cast.

Finally, "the nip of fear" takes hold of the speaker and his companion, as they imagine "a scan of space/ Blown black and hollow by our spent grenade;" but the following day, the present of the poem, they are in the field again, unable to see the universe beyond the flowers about their knees:

White daisy-drifts where you
Sink down to pick an armload as we pass,
Sighting the heal-all's minor blue
In chasms of the grass,

And strews of hawkweed where,
Amongst the reds or yellows as they burn,
A few dead polls commit to air
The seeds of their return.

It is the soul's wish for survival, the hope that the "flung dice" of the universe might "Be gathered for another cast," that leads to the comparison between the movement of the stars and the movement of the hawkweed seeds; but, as is indicated below in the unobtrusive word *mistake*, the comparison is misleading:

We could no doubt mistake
These flowers for some answer to that fright
We felt for all creation's sake
In our dark talk last night,

Taking to heart what came
Of the heart's wish for life, which, staking here
In the least field an endless claim,
Beats on from sphere to sphere

And pounds beyond the sun,
Where nothing less peremptory can go,
And is ourselves, and is the one
Unbounded thing we know.

The passage abounds with paradoxes, the tensions of which are deceptively slackened by the rhetorical pitch and graceful flow of the language. The "heart's wish for life" is peremptory, yet unbounded; the claim it stakes out is endless, yet it is a mistake to take that wish to heart, at least to the extent that we are blinded to grim possibilities. Yet, that wish, which is one with ourselves, is boundless as the universe, but somehow knowable. How deeply we know ourselves is one of the abiding concerns of Wilbur's poetry; if there are countless mysteries to be sounded, we have to begin where we stand the best chance; from there, with luck, we can turn to face the others once again.

I have given so much space to this poem partly because I cannot shake the suspicion that it is Wilbur's finest poem so far, but mainly because I think it provides answers to some of the questions which Wilbur's poetry has always raised. Some readers have feared that his well-wrought surfaces contain little more than themselves, and, in the broadest sense, this is true, for his forms and their content are finally inseparable. But his forms are made of words, words whose meanings have been carefully considered; thus the forms themselves become the ideas in Wilbur's poetry.

That much of Wilbur's poetry amounts to celebration does not mean that he is oblivious to those areas of experience which inspire less "amiable" poems; his willingness to celebrate the things of this world, the "heart's wish for life," arises out of a strong moral sense, sometimes amounting to a religious vision, which prompts him to take account of the discrepancy between this world and another, variously seen as the world of dreams and imagination, or the world beyond bodily death. The tension caused by this discrepancy is created, in different poems, by juxtaposing various versions of the actual and the ideal; but the moral sense and the religious vision prevent him from trying to reconcile, by means of forms or figures, the tensions with which he is occupied; as he has said in "A Christmas Hymn" (*Advice to a Prophet*), the resolution of these tensions requires a miracle:

And every stone shall cry
In praises of the child
By whose descent among us
The worlds are reconciled.

III

Wilbur's vision of the things of this world, informed by his moral sense, has sometimes led him toward satire and public indignation, as in "Marché aux Oiseaux" (*Ceremony*) and "Advice to a Prophet," respectively. Both modes appear in

Books by Richard Wilbur

THE BEAUTIFUL CHANGES

New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1947. \$2.00
New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1954. \$2.75

CEREMONY

New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950. \$2.50
Toronto: George J. McLeod, 1950. \$3.25

A BESTIARY (comp.)

New York: Pantheon Books, 1955. \$7.50; \$18.00 (limited ed.)
Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1955. \$18.00 (limited ed.)

LE MISANTHROPE, Moliere (tr.)

New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955. \$5.00

THINGS OF THIS WORLD

New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1956. \$3.00

POEMS, 1943-1956

London: Faber & Faber, 1957. 15/

CANDIDE, Lillian Hellman (lyrics by Richard Wilbur, John Latouche, & Dorothy Parker)

New York: Random House, 1957. \$2.95
Toronto: Random House, 1957. \$3.50

COMPLETE POEMS OF EDGAR ALLAN POE (ed.)

New York: Dell, 1959. \$.35 (pa.)

ADVICE TO A PROPHET

New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961. \$3.75
London: Faber & Faber, 1962. 12/6

LOUDMOUSE

New York: Crowell-Collier Press, 1963. \$1.95
London: Macmillan, 1963. 15/
New York: Macmillan, 1968. \$3.50

TARTUFFE, Moliere (tr.)

New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963. \$3.95
London: Faber & Faber, 1964. 21/
Don Mills, Ontario: Longmans Canada, 1964. \$4.95

THE POEMS OF RICHARD WILBUR

New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963. \$1.95 (pa.)

POEMS, William Shakespeare (ed. with Alfred Harbage)

Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966. \$.95 (pa.)

LE MISANTHROPE & TARTUFFE, Moliere (tr.)

New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965. \$1.95 (pa.)

WALKING TO SLEEP

New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968. \$4.95

—C.D.E.

Walking to Sleep; "Playboy," for instance, is a wicked study of a young stockroom clerk, occupied during his lunch hour with a photograph in a magazine: "Nothing escapes him of her body's grace/ Or of her floodlit skin, so sleek and warm/ And yet so strangely like a uniform . . ." And "Matthew VIII, 28 ff." takes off from the story in those verses of Christ's having exorcised evil spirits from two men of the Gadarenes. When the devils left the men, they went into a herd of swine and led them over a cliff into the sea; when Christ came to the city, he was enjoined to depart. Wilbur has modern America speak through the Gadarenes:

It is true that we go insane;
That for no good reason we are possessed by devils;
That we suffer, despite the amenities which obtain
At all but the lowest levels.

We shall not, however, resign
Our trust in the high-heaped table and the full trough.
If you cannot cure us without destroying our swine,
We had rather you shoved off.

Less subtle and witty, but considerably more indignant, is "A Miltonic Sonnet for Mr. Johnson on His Refusal of Peter Hurd's Official Portrait:"

Heir to the office of a man not dead
Who drew our Declaration up, who planned
Range and Rotunda with his drawing-hand
And harbored Palestrina in his head,
Who would have wept to see small nations dread
The imposition of our cattle-brand,
With public truth at home mistold or banned,
And in whose term no army's blood was shed,

Rightly you say the picture is too large
Which Peter Hurd by your appointment drew,
And justly call that Capitol too bright
Which signifies our people in your charge;
Wait, Sir, and see how time will render you,
Who talk of vision but are weak of sight.

6 January 1967

This is the only poem to which Wilbur has ever appended a date, designed to remind us of the time he is writing about, but also, I think, intended to tell us that the poem was written in a single day. For my money, it shows, which may be one of the reasons Wilbur has let us know; the slight awkwardness with which the seventh line fits the syntax of the poem's single sentence, and the easy punning of the last line, are not characteristic of Wilbur's best work. And so my reactions to its inclusion in this book are mixed; I admire the sentiment, but I have seen too many poems of Wilbur's which are too superior to this one for me to be comfortable with it. On the other hand, that he has included it, especially in a

Francois Villon: BALLADE OF FORGIVENESS

Brothers and sisters, Celestine,
Carthusian, or Carmelite,
Street-loafers, fops whose buckles shine,
Lackeys, and courtesans whose tight
Apparel gratifies the sight,
And little ladies'-men who trot
In tawny boots of dreadful height:
I beg forgiveness of the lot.

Young whores who flash their teats in sign
Of what they hawk for men's delight,
Ape-handlers, thieves and, soused with wine,
Wild bullies looking for a fight,
And Jacks and Jills whose hearts are light,
Whistling and joking, talking rot,
Street-urchins dodging left and right:
I beg forgiveness of the lot.

Excepting for those bloody swine
Who gave me, many a morn and night,
The hardest crusts on which to dine;
Henceforth I'll fear them not a mite.
I'd belch and fart in their despite,
Were I not sitting on my cot.
Well, to be peaceful and polite,
I beg forgiveness of the lot.

May hammers, huge and heavy, smite
Their ribs, and likewise cannon-shot.
May cudgels pulverize them quite.
I beg forgiveness of the lot.

—RICHARD WILBUR

collection which often touches on the sickness of our times, indicates his willingness to show his personality more directly than he has before.

Until recently, Wilbur has avoided the intrusion of his personality; he has let it speak through poems in which it is as subtly interwoven with the forms as his meanings are. But in *Walking to Sleep* a first-person speaker, not readily distinguishable from the poet, appears and is at ease in a number of poems. Unlike the Messrs. Confessional, he has not directly treated his own mind and spirit in

many of his poems; but in "Running," one of the finest poems in this collection, the self is the subject.

The poem consists of three parts; the first is a brief recollection of the joy of running during a childhood game; the second is a magnificent account of having stood along the road in Wellesley, Massachusetts, waiting for the Marathon runners to pass through on their way to Boston. The final section, "Dodwells Road," is not a recollection, but a meditation arising from the present moment. The speaker is walking through the woods, jogging occasionally, regarding his ability to do so with a pride that indicates his age:

What is the thing which men will not surrender?
It is what they have never had, I think,
Or missed in its true season,

So that their thoughts turn in
At the same roadhouse nightly, the same cloister,
The wild mouth of the same brave river
Never now to be charted.

You, whoever you are,
If you want to walk with me you must step lively.
I run, too, when the mood offers,
Though the god of that has left me.

"But why in the hell spoil it?" he asks, for his two sons burst into view, and he makes them "a clean gift of his young running." It is an old theme, but Wilbur has made it his own, and his success is partly a result of his having spoken so personally.

The speaker of the title poem takes a more austere stance than does the speaker of "Running," but the poem is one of Wilbur's most personal. The speaker's attitude is that of a lecturer; he addresses a "you," asserts his authority from time to time, and with great patience and at some length (about 140 lines of blank verse) he lays out a tactic by which his listener may fall asleep. The first part of the poem is devoted to the importance of imagining a landscape free of suggestions which could lead to dread and insomnia: "above all, put a stop/ To the known stranger up ahead, whose face/ Half turns to mark you with a creased expression." There follows a virtuoso description of the mutable and transitionless journey one takes on his way to sleep—into a house, through the cellar, up a mineshaft which becomes the route to Cheops' burial chamber, and so on to the point at which "The kind assassin sleep will draw a bead/ And blow your brains out."

At this point, the poem turns: "What, are you still awake?/ Then you must risk another tack and footing." This time the journey no longer requires the wilful rejection of disturbing images; if one is led past a gallows, for instance, he is to look up and "Stare [his] brother down." Even under these circumstances, one may find, with luck,

A moment's perfect carelessness, in which
To stumble a few steps and sink to sleep
In the same clearing where, in the old story,
A holy man discovered Vishnu sleeping,

Letter To James Tate

I got your message this morning
propped on the can reading
your book in my left hand, reaching
with the other, back,
for the coffee-mug propped
on the closet when
swoosh it came down a pint of it scalding
thigh and groin I bellowed Mary
came running—"I thought
you'd ruptured something"—laughing, me
soaked and helpless, the
book safe except for
a brown stain on "Little Misery Island."

While I changed my shirt I told her:
"The ways of the world are a mystery,
I'll write Jim Tate today."

—BRUCE BERLIND

Wrapped in his maya, dreaming by a pool
On whose calm face all images whatever
Lay clear, unfathomed, taken as they came.

It is clear from the movement of this poem that, of the two "methods" of falling asleep, the second, though risky, is somehow preferable. I do not wish to turn this poem into an allegory, but something of Wilbur's tendency as a poet is revealed in his preference for the second journey; the wilful rejection of images may be safer, but to take them as they come requires a great imaginative strength and serenity. The poem leads again to considerations of the tensions between the actual and the ideal; here, I think, the world of dreams, as described in the second part of the poem, becomes almost inseparable from the waking world. It is through intimate acquaintance with the things of this world that one may reach "that state

As near and far as grass,
Where eyes become the sunlight, and the hand
Is worthy of water: the dreamt land
Toward which all hungers leap, all pleasures pass."
(*"A Baroque Wall-Fountain in the Villa
Sciara," from Things of This World*)

IV

A brief look at the eleven translations in this book provides a clue to Wilbur's expanding scope and technique. Until now, his verse translations have seemed barely distinguishable from his own poems; of course, all good translators do best with poems they might reasonably wish to have written, but in many of Wilbur's translations, his own voice has all but swallowed the voice of the original. The translations in this collection are as expertly wrought as any he has done, but there are several in which a voice different from Wilbur's is clearly distinguishable. I have in mind especially the three sonnets from the Spanish of Jorge Luis Borges and the three poems from the Russian of Andrei Voznesensky. The Borges poems move, in a tough, dense verse, through vast considerations of an explicitly "cosmic" nature; here is the sestet from "Everness":

And everything is part of that diverse
Crystalline memory, the universe;
Whoever through its endless mazes wanders
Hears door on door click shut behind his stride,
And only from the sunset's farther side
Shall view at last the Archetypes and Splendors.

And here, in violent contrast, are the opening lines from Voznesensky's "Antiworlds":
The clerk Bukashkin is our neighbor:
His face is grey as blotting-paper.

But like balloons of blue or red,
Bright Antiworlds
float over his head!

On them repose, prestidigitous,
Ruling the cosmos, a demon-magician,
Anti-Bukashkin the academician,
Lapped in the arms of Lollobrigidas.

Not even in "Water-Walker" or "Juggler" do we find anything quite as flashy as this. I lack the tongues to compare these to their originals, but they are remarkable passages in English. I feel confident that they are faithful, since I have been able to compare the French translations to their originals, and they are astounding for their fidelity and for the ease with which they speak their adopted language. But it is to the Spanish and Russian translations that I return, because the expanding sympathies they demonstrate seem to be reflected in the variety of manners I find in Wilbur's own new poems.

In *Walking to Sleep* Wilbur moves farther and deeper from each of his many points of departure; he moves in more various directions. Even after five books of poems, which have gained him a reputation as solid as that of any living poet, he remains a vital and developing talent whose future it is exciting to anticipate.

—HENRY TAYLOR

A SPECIAL MESSAGE TO ALL OUR READERS

This special issue of *The Hollins Critic*, sent to you with pleasure, has unique Hollins College associations. It is written by Henry S. Taylor, poet and author of *THE HORSESHOW AT MIDNIGHT* (L.S.U. Press), who took his M.A. in English at Hollins after graduating from the University of Virginia. Mr. Taylor is now Assistant Professor of English at the University of Utah. The subject, the distinguished poet Richard Wilbur, has visited Hollins a number of times, most recently being featured at the spring Literary Festival of 1968. We feel that we should have devoted an issue of the *Critic* to Richard Wilbur long ago. It is our privilege to do so now and to send this issue to you.

It seems proper also on this occasion to announce that, now that the *Critic* is well into its sixth year of publication, there is a book forthcoming, in the fall of 1969, from the University of Georgia Press, containing representative selections of the best essays from the *Critic*, from the beginning until now, each brought up to date with a new "Afterword" by our contributing editors. All biographical and bibliographical material on the authors has been brought up to date. For reference purposes the book will contain the first full index of all the material published by the *Critic* so far.

This book, entitled *THE SOUNDER FEW: SELECTED ESSAYS FROM THE HOLLINS CRITIC*, is edited by John Rees Moore, with the assistance of the contributing editors and staff. It contains essays on such leading present-day writers as Donleavy, Golding, Eberhart, Behan, Flannery O'Connor, Wright Morris, Styron, Vonnegut, Capote, Nabokov, Barth, Lowell, Nemerov, Colin Wilson and others. The critics represented in the volume include Benedict Kiely, Daniel G. Hoffman, Louis D. Rubin, Jr., William Jay Smith, Robert Scholes, Walter Sullivan, Julia Randall, George Garrett, R. H. W. Dillard, and John Rees Moore.

THE SOUNDER FEW has been announced as being published at a retail price of approximately \$8.00. However, all subscribers to the *Critic*, old and new, may order copies of the book at a discount of 33 1/3% through the editorial offices of the *Critic*, Box 9677, Hollins College, Virginia 24020. This is a considerable saving, representing more than the cost of an annual subscription to the *Critic*. Subscribers may reserve advance copies of the book now simply by dropping a card or note to the *Critic*. When the book is ready for release, your copies will be mailed to you postpaid, and you will be billed at that time.

All interested subscribers are encouraged to take advantage of this offer. All readers who have not yet subscribed are invited to do so now and receive the back issues of Volume VI, together with the opportunity to order *THE SOUNDER FEW* at a greatly reduced price.

—THE EDITORS

Versatility Is Measured In *Whats Not Hows*

I

Every morning the sun breaks
through the windows,
streams and streams of sun,
picking up the pale blues,
the smell of others swaying
in the early kitchen clutter.
Not shafts of light, but voile.
It falls on my shoulders.
I am a debutante, my train
a flux of time and dust:
bone-yellow in this hour,
saffron in the next.
I know no other season, but this.

II

A pimple in that cleavage;
I have three nipples.
You boast only two.

—CHRISTINE COSTIGAN

Listen

there is something trapped
and screaming in this density of words

like the O kicked by the L
toward the center
of LOVE

—ROBERT BONAZZI

Marlin

The wand of that fisherman witching the waves
Dips,
Feeling an abyss,
Lifts
Shuddering, buckling. It has hooked the tide.

Heartstring out of his reel
Screams, the sea
Fountains pieces of itself vomiting its vitals
Far from the boat
Something falling leaping

Skips like a keel —
Is up!
Brandishing, brandishing, a muscle, a rib: an arm,
Like God's
Torn off alive.

Tireless, until — as if the tide itself
Failed or the sea
Changed,
No more averse
Gave up its secret with strange irony

Under shrill-screaming unseemly seabirds' crisscross
Of augury —
Slow as a floating lily, mottled with sea-glyphs, fingered by the waters
Like an island,
Like its own sundown it glides in to die.

—BREWSTER GHISELIN

Journey Of The Modern

In the dark cave, faint light to paint by, and in the
daylight a different beast breathing in the
thicket, children hungry.

What is the beast in the thicket? Why does the child's skin
slough on curved bones?
I make another song, waiting in the hungry dark for
morning, my spear warm beside me.

—MARION MONTGOMERY

Flurry

Going south along Mexico 15, near the Pacific,
 We drove into a flurry of butterflies erratically
 Westbound. We held the road and our speed, while butterflies
 Came filtering through shoulder shrubbery, died violently
 Upon the windshield, died in the radiator,
 Or wavered across intact by the tens of thousands
 And sifted into shrubbery leaves again.
 The open windows snatched butterflies; we shut them
 So they began in streaks to die. Flying
 They looked white, but captives and casualties were pale,
 Pale green-yellow, small and frail
 And in no way remarkable
 Individually. We travelled so for hours,
 Colliding with butterflies, while great pastel
 Multitudes flew over, lilting and fluttering,
 While the air moved white with little wings
 Like scraps of powdered muslin, beating toward the sea.

—JUDITH MOFFETT

SECOND CLASS POSTAGE PAID at Roanoke, Virginia
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