



Wards of the Wards

Make [sh]it and share it

Volume one, Issue two

February's things, 2019

Letter to the Editor

Stevens,
It might be of use to Wards of the Wards to have this sentence from a letter by Charles Olson to Joseph Garland, September 27, 1968:

“I have to put it this way, that the nature of my involvement in the subject of Gloucester keeps me always in Ward 4 and Heaven simultaneously.”

In the late '60s the Fort was in Ward 4 and now is in Ward 2 Precinct 2.

And from the Maximus Poems:

I am a ward
And precinct
Man myself and hate

Universalization, believe
It only feeds into a class of
deteriorated
Personal lives anyway, giving
them

What they can buy, a cheap
Belief. The corner magazine
store
(O'Connell's, at Prospect and
Washington)
has more essential room in it
than
programs.

The Gloucester registry from 1942 tells me that O'Connell's Variety (John B. O'Connell, proprietor) was at 89 Washington Street. That's where Ed's is now, where we by our Lagunitas Maximus IPA. The world continues to rhyme.

James Cook

Threats of the Master Weaver

WILLA BROSNIHAN

I'm going to make you like basketry,
you.

I'm going to,
put you in a deep pot of hot water and peel back what is useless,
the scruff,
the scandalous spindly bits.

You will be torn into something,
bent away and towards,
your rational contingencies,
don't worry.
Relegate all the braid work to me,
I am good at it,
I will make brocades of you,
six strands,
eight.

When I am done and you are drying on the windowsill,
I will carry with my weak willed hands,
to the sink,
the water,
which made you malleable,
softened you.
When I shift the pot over the porcelain edge,
and spill it,
the coffee ground dunes will be disrupted,
scream to the edges,
reclump.

The scraps of produce peel,
will rise,
from the drain,
and settle.

I will fill you up with fruit.



Cover Photo: Stevens Brosnihan

My Eyes III

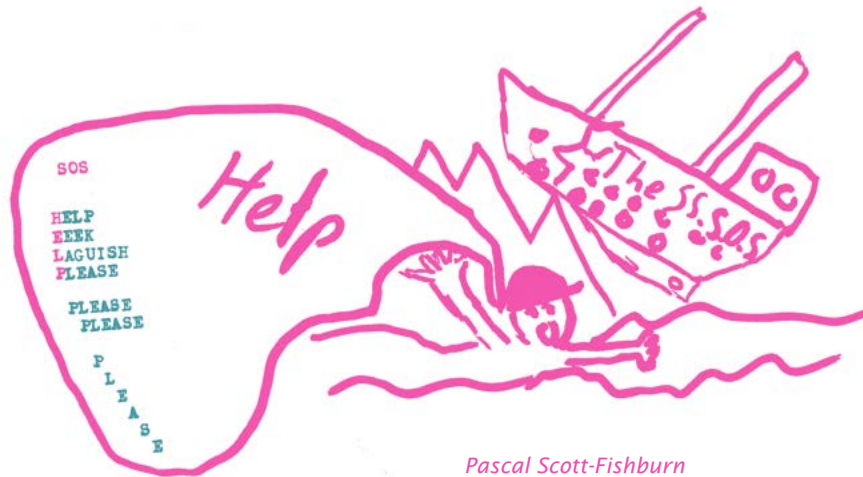
STEVENS BROSNIHAN

An understory of pale failures,
I walk over
crunching on the crisp morn-
ing light
the path is narrow and cleared
by
my own boots, the boots the
day before and before
it's easy and familiar, but has
a subtle reek
something sweet that catches
the back of my throat
creeps into my sinuses in a
syrup's way

faint, little failures that don't
add up to much:
I forget that I'm an artist for
half the day
the news catches my atten-
tion
I'm not practicing guitar
or writing

but in the morning when I get
up
I see the blue house a chame-
leon against the new sky
yellow window lights in the
pre-dawn
faceted by the power lines
the light makes the outer
world in a blue way cold
the incandescent yellow
warms the eyes of the house
my eyes wake me
it's time!

I hurry to capture the image
fumble through crusty, golden
slumbers
and capture the first thing to
be made this week
which, though a little failure
in and of itself
is brilliantly overshadowed
—just as the blue is by the orb
of the sun
peeking past city hall tower—
by the quiet rustling of my eyes



Pascal Scott-Fishburn

Queer as Queequeg for/after Gerrit Lansing

JAMES COOK

Queer as consciousness, as
oblivion, as oceanic feeling.
Queer as sunrise in the West,
as twilight in the morning.
Queer as democracy, as se-
nescence within self-deter-
mination, as death drive, as
a syncopated prohibition, as
total surveillance.
Queer as free magic, as the
storm's still center, as the
strict emptiness at the heart
of all things.
Queer as constellations, as
shapeless night, as head in
the stars, as moonwalk.
Queer as fool, queer as earthly
treegirl climbing the roots,
queer as chilly fire that splits
rock and draws the world to
it.
Queer as queen of the house.
Queer as spinning plates on
a harpoon, queer as grace,
queer as fuck.

I Tell You It Was Real
Or, Centennial Avenue Morn-
ing
For/After Gerrit Lansing

Blocks past the moth brood
poised in honeyed ointment
of yellow porchlight beside
a weather-worn door
(to where?)

& blocks past the disused
cemetery—

jagged grey stones
scything dewy green & thick
fog,

a single moth appears,
alights on a button on my shirt
then flies between my legs.

Soon a reign of laughter
covers everything.
It's you empty-
ty as self,
empty as causes.

Compost Ghost with Eggs
for/after Gerrit, Sean,
Amanda, Abby, and Sam

Alex pondered, as Sam posit-
ed, a genderfluid god un-
der the noon day clouds of
Zagreb.

Billie camped a damp and
ragged fortnight with Randy
in Quebec.

Cam came too soon to see the
milky stars on the road to
Weed.

Daryl fiddled with the squirre-
ly fox from Port-au-Prince to
Baton Rouge.

Eddie engendered an uprising
around the well-fortified base
of Dusseldorf.

Frankie forgot theirselves in
Langfrang.

Greg, sailor in port, exposed

themselves to the private origins of the specious pseudo-science in Christchurch.

Henri followed the beautiful androgene on tour in Corpus Christi.

Ivy in league with the Bushes bent over backwards to capitalize on Sanandaj.

Jamie wouldn't accept the premise of the joke, whether in Bangkok or Cork.

Kelly hated the question even as they slyly consented to a pungent dinner in a dive in Liverpool.

Lou dreamt of rancid mistakes between Rotterdam and Bochum.

Morgan was sick in bed at Concepcion.

Nico with Loba and Lubo passed from drone to hymn, aria to lullaby, and susurration to howl on the road from Virginia to Orlando.

Orion strung their bow and bowed to the great future without casting a glance behind their right shoulder toward Antwerp and Antep.

Pat questioned orthodoxy in Bene Baraq.

Quinn had the constitution to spill ink and survive to tell of

it in San Salvador.

Raven, wood stacked high, holed up deep in Pelotas before a respite in Annapolis and Chagrin Falls.

Tony, downtrodden and troubled, plagued with locust words and anvils, meditated on the insect wings before them and grew to love the lurid sights along the falls of Foz do Iguacu.

Urchin joined Tony along the river bed before the plunge of Devil's Throat whilst dreaming of naked winters on the Dnieper in Kyiv.

Viv died—their ashes dissolved in the Clyde within Glasgow.

Whit didn't have any and doubled over with ennui in Bordeaux.

Xan raised a ruckus as if it were their own child and then filled the empty nest with worms in Crawley and births in Albany.

Youth is a hustler, omnipresent at La Cruz.

Zev made it to the end arm-in-arm with them in a queer cloudless rain mainly on the plains of the improbable but true south in the fecund and febrile imagination beyond Resistencia. ♪

The Porch

PETER MURDOCH

Sunshine filtered through unlikely heights of oak, surviving elm,
the suck and wash of tides and marshy verge
beneath their limbs.

From the stooped
image
memory herself
branching in every way

shaded instruments, and empty cans,
and last night's smokes all spent
this morning's berry harvest,
and daylight swell and greenhead,
hound, and human.

Lonnie pt2

CRAIG PLAISTED

Walking out of the fast mart the August heat enveloped Lonnie. There had been an afternoon down-pour but the rain offered no relief to the oppressive heat. This meant he would have to go back to work hammer whackin, or at least that's what he called it. His task for the day was to nail joist hangers. This meant standing on a ladder hammering a nail through a metal cuff that went around the underside of the joist. With every swing of his hammer the back of his hammer would hit the neighboring joist. This resulted in a very weak hammer stroke that was more like a whack. Consequently each nail took about thirty whacks to drive into the wood. Each joist hanger needed four nails, two

on each side, and there were thirty joists. His boss just kept asking him if he was done as his hammer kept ricocheting off the neighboring joist.

So Lonnie was already not happy when he stepped outside of the fast-mart into a large puddle. For some reason there was a low point in the concrete right in front of the door and a water would pond after a rain. Apparently mike hadn't put out the fluorescent yellow caution sign yet.

"Watch out friend" said the smaller of the two gentlemen eating the onions Lonnie had been coveting. The word friend struck something within his chest like a stone skimming over the surface of a still pond.

“The Way Up and The Way Down Is The Same.”

—Heraclitus, as quoted in
the epigraph to Eliot’s
Four Quartets

JOSHUAH SCOTT-FISHBURN

Late in the spring of 1998 I was finishing a semester course in Renaissance art and humanism in the Umbrian town of Orvieto, Italy. Orvieto is St. Francis’ country—less than 100 kilometers from Assisi, where the saint was born in 1184 and where he died in 1226. He passed through the hills around Orvieto on foot; the nearby cave called St. Francis’ Grotto was named for where he slept.

It was from the Etruscan-cum-Roman-cum-medieval walled city state of Orvieto that I gazed out over the southern valley at sunset, standing behind the parapets on the wall. Quilted vineyards and fields of olives sparkling next to blooming rapeseed grounded an alarming cloudscape lit by fire. The smell of wet grass from the fields and woodsmoke from burning brushpiles mingle. To look out from the heights of Orvieto at sunset is to see and hear and smell harmony of textures and sympathetic beauties—the world in chorus: earth, civilization, sky an enfolded unity. Lean across the lichened

stone parapet on just such an evening. The brilliant world fills all the senses.

I spent my free weekends during that spring traveling from Orvieto to Assisi whenever I could, taking the early train to catch the change in Perugia so I could get to Assisi before noon. As soon as Lake Trasimeno with its castled islands and reedy shoreline clicked by, I gathered my backpack and books—my journal, and *The Four Quartets* and *The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins*—and headed towards the gangway to wait for Assisi, where the train would stop in a few minutes’ time.

I could have been off to Rome, or Venice, or Florence like some of the other students I studied with. They took in Italy in wonderful gulps, dashing from the Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* at the Uffizzi in Florence to Michelangelo’s *Pieta* at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. They went to the ashen ghost town of Pompeii, and some even ventured up to the lakes above Milan, south of Switzerland. Those blockbuster artworks and eye-popping spectacles held wonder for me, too. But more compelling for me by far was the chance to be within a history alive within the present moment. To walk the 1,300-year old flagstones of the Roman strada next to the crumbling aqu-

educt of Augustus. To enter the back of the monastery of San Crispino and garden with brown-habited Franciscans and listen to them pray through the hours. To not simply witness history as artifact, but to enter into its river and feel my own body participate in the physical world where the myths and legends lived—and continue to live.

Living in the historical present seemed a kind of science fiction, except without the usual alienation associated with a dystopic future. My body felt intensely alive and in the world. The thorns from blackberry vines tugged at my shirt and trousers, beckoning me: and I took, and I ate. The sun shouted down its rays, and I burned. I sweated, and the breeze plucked the drops from me and dried me, a salt-cured walker: warm, with blackberries prickling my tongue, with birdsongs hidden in the close hedgerows calling me farther up and further in along the ancient road. Arriving on any given evening at the grate outside the cloister at Buon Gesù to listen as two dozen women dressed no differently than their mythic heroine, the 13th century Saint Clare, sang through a call and response so pure it seemed to suspend all time in a reserve beyond the past, safe from future: the now-present, the

strange conquering of time through time.

The relationship between the history of Rome, and even before Rome: the Etruscans and natives who carved the paths and crossroads onto the landscape where the medieval legends raised dust and discussed communitarianism: history met my imagination in the walks, byways, chants, and frescoes. It met me as I worked in the vineyards with my friends, the contadini, who taught me their idioms while cutting vines and stacking stones together in gardens and fields around Orvieto.

In celebration of my body and life alone I prefer to experience history as transcendent presence. It feels as good as fresh blackberries taste, as new wine, as a body does after a day spent working under the sun. And, past can stay nearly steady with the present moment, because the hangs on the other side. The balance is organic to a place, if you allow the consciousness of it to fill you up and influence your thoughts. Work in connection with the land and people connected by this work grow out of the soil and return to it, ensuring the same rewards will always accompany the harvest of life: the joy of living in harmony, and the celebration of the communal rewards.

A part of this now of past

and future as I travelled through Italy included the mythic residue of Saint Francis. I found the traditions of his order, his rule, a still point amidst our turning world. As I figured it, I could meet St. Francis in the present-now because St. Francis was a man familiar with poetry. Poetry is a thing of the present, and he himself was a poet of high order. Springtime, the season when poems come easily, made the experience of the present seem of urgent, pressing consequence to me. Breathing in the pollinated smell of olive blossoms and running my hands over the pale pink, rough cut stones at San Damiano, or simply walking behind a brother in a brown habit on the street in Assisi—these required being present to past, present, and future to enjoy. They spoke of the past, they gestured toward the future—like the long grass un-mowed underneath the olive trees in their groves, the fresh air blowing down Assisi's mountain spine from Mt. Subasio and the wide blue of the sparkling sky above the patched work farm fields below the town. But, like the bells in the churches, these earth-peals rang out in the moment of now: aesthetic emergencies. I could not ignore them; I demanded my own constant attention to them. I wanted

to know and encounter the mystical connections between earth and the history of those whose spiritual paths seem always to wend to the now. And through each experience of sensory delight—wetting my lips at a roadside faucet, helping myself to lungful after lungful of laurel scented air, the splash of a fountain outside the church of St. Clare—I felt like I met mystery, and it felt like history, and it looked like the lurking shadow of the physical legend of St. Francis. He was there, in the town of Assisi and mixing with the leaves that surged and sprouted from the trees among the hills. In the sunshine that beamed through the huge, cottony clouds and burnt my winter-white skin I imagined him, warm: like a friend, or myself, nearby. Certainly, like me, his was a joy in presence, and in the wild abandonment one's soul longs to achieve when facing a western sky at sundown.

I am on top of the cliff, leaning against the town wall. Where I look across the valley, dark lines of scrub and trees and leafy bushes move as if to conceal the Roman aqueduct that obscures the facing hills. The aqueduct and the ancient road underneath its shadow crumble down the hillside into ruin, tangled by the living hedges,

jutting among farm fields, orchards, and vineyards. They bisect a busy road near the river before burying themselves in the bottom of the cliff.

From here, the sky and the river-shaped valley confine my view of everywhere except the western horizon. The earth and sky cup hands around what lives here, what is built here, while what is built nevertheless suffers the same fate as the rotten faces and worn details of the marble statues and facades in Rome. Everything made of stone seems incrementally faded from its former self. This gives the gesture, ironically, of the aqueduct, the road, and the town functioning like symbols of the eternal.

In contrast to the engineered landscape, the sky moves and lives overhead. Clouds westerning in the unpredictable heaven shoulder and queue in their late arrivals to the grand spatial stage, waiting sunlight's silent, powerful cues. One moment sheepish, another clownish, another grandiose—the clouds change roles without a script. In the handbuilt landscape beneath their show, that continues to be built by human hands only to decay and disappear, *il cielo*, or the heavens, write sublime missives that transcend time. The sunset reminds me

that all things go.

I rest my elbows on the stone wall, and lean out toward the facing hillside underneath the evening. That hedge there—not a quarter mile away as birds travel, but much further according to the contour of the mesa, valley, and steep hillside—marks the Monastery of San Crispino. It was there several weeks ago I helped the friars and their *giardiniere* prune the orchards for the olive season.

The grass under the olive trees had grown so long that seed-heads brushed the bottom branches of the trees. Two workers from the nearby town of Porano pruned the grove, leaving cuttings everywhere tangled in the grass. We almost could not drag the tines of our pitchforks through the strands to glean them.

Padre Daniele gathered up what he could for the Palm Sunday celebration. His stout body bent double, he chose olive branches carefully for their leaves before placing them into the same woven basket he used for collecting wild mushrooms. I came after to clear up the rest, swinging the shiny tines of the friars' pitchfork worn down like an old broom from one corner to another.

Its oak handle was shoved into the forged sleeve where the fork stayed fixed from

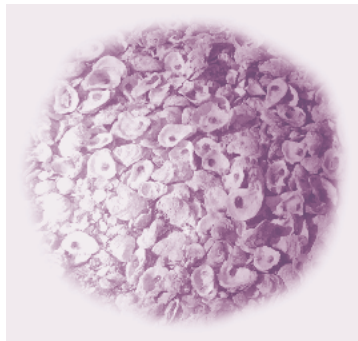
decades of habit and a bent, hand-forged nail. This pitchfork moved with the worker who used it like a strong arm swings. Dark from labor and long sun and damp, with this fork nothing flexed. Its handle was almost square, its hand-hewnness meeting my eye like a face disfigured. The upper part of the forged fork, black where the wood met the metal, was covered in iron slag that never was ground down or hammered away when the tool was made. Where the tines came into use, though, they were crescent silver moons one next to another, polished almost white. They were swords, sharks, slicers, fins, ice-picks, needles and surgical steel. Not a trace of dirt ever clung to those shiny, pointed teeth. Like silverware inside a fancy drawer, but here at the end of a brutish cast and a grimy handle.

We piled and burnt the cuttings in fires between the trees. Still green, the sap inside the branches flared like lighter fuel, burning hot and fast. Huge forkfuls of branches at a time, swept away from the long grass with the tines of the pitchfork, lifted all at once and tossed onto the smoking heaps of ashes. Each new forkful smoked thick black for a moment, then caught and tore—crackling, spitting and roaring to a climax of

heat and leaping flames.

Padre Danielle disappeared into the monastery. I raked around two fires and finished gleaning what I could from the cuttings under nearby trees. The work had moved further uphill. I hiked through the orchard and stacked branches in a new ring, closer beneath trees that still needed clearing. The work went quickly, the cuttings were thick and piled up fast.

I didn't have a lighter, nor any matches. I went back down the hillside through the trees carrying the pitchfork. Submerged in one of the earlier fires was a smoking stump, a piece of wood too green to be consumed. Coals around it consumed it but without flame, quietly smoldering. With ashes and sparks falling through the pitchfork's shining fingers, I carried the charcoal over the grass between the trees to the pile of cuttings stacked up on the hill. I watched the stump smoke feebly inside a pile of fresh, new green cuttings. ♡



Peter Murdoch

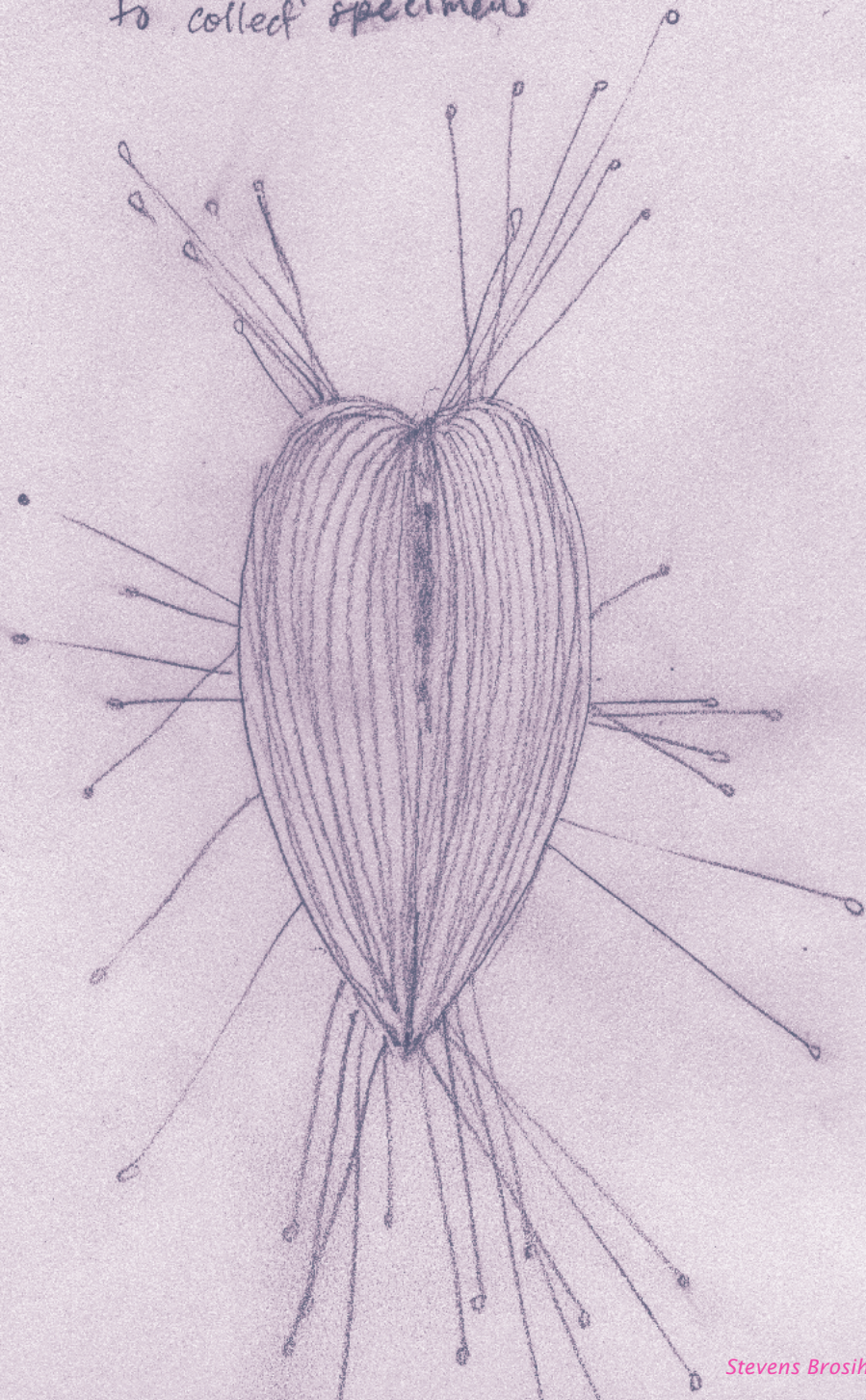
TO the Harbor

STEVENS BROSNIHAN

No time to get things done
Enough time to get in trouble
My last words were solemn
I fathomed a day of corporeal bliss
I rested inside instead, didn't care much
Utterances broken by the

atrocities
Avarice quelled by the body of solitude
The streets littered with laziness
Nips and butts heading their way
To the harbor

mussel byssus attached to the bucket base
to collect specimens



Stevens Brosihan

River Woman

BRIAN BAYER-LARSON

Child of the plains
You flowed east
Toward different paths.

Following the folds of your mind
Like the contours of the world
Your questions found questions

And a narrow stream grew
and gave way to wider waters
where the murk thinned
and rapid-waves swelled.

River woman, deep soul
you are. Shaping land with
your tides, feeding earth as you rise.

It's by you we live;
Through you we live;
With you we live.

February Thaw

CRAIG PLAISTED

Today a February thaw
I lay down in my yard in the
melting three inches
At forty this feels a little un-
hinged

To be in the snow
To let the sopping earth below
Wet through my jeans

To feel the iciness recede
From my warm hand
The coolness near my face

I can not help but taste it
And think about how this used
to be enough
And how for today
It still is

Polarity

PETER MURDOCH

It took a while to get here
laughing up a storm.
Hard to know just what to say
or what might be the norm.

Forty pounds of iron up and
Forty pounds right down,
we sing the ancient anvil's
tune,
but there's no home left in
town.

No doors call out from dis-
tances,
no flames to draw us in,
just darkness at our every
edge,
and darkness deep within.

Uprooted and forgotten,
there's
a thorn on Jesse's tree,
but we be mighty thirsty
about
our head and knack for art-
istry.

Ten thousand thousand
points of light
surround the setting sun,
its closeness counts in every
end
and still the racers run.

For distance measured mat-
ters
not by any ruler's art
compared to stumbled leagues
pressed into hollows of the
heart.

The beast is close to laying low

down in the manger dark,
but work here's just begin-
ning—
hear that echo? taste the
spark?

