

The Old and the New

poetry by

Lawrence Buentello

A Ghost of Love

If it came briefly,
Like the sudden light
Of morning,
It would not stay,
But for the shadow
That it left
Across the psyche—
But it walks
Before the windows
Closed up
Against its passing;
We sense
Its movement,
Like the wind
In ruined eaves,
Seeping through
The cracks
That we forgot
To fill—
In our need
To free our pain,
We sent it off to die,
And closed that door;
But it will not
Stay away—
We are haunted
By this love
That we no longer
Keep alive;
Not within us,
Unless we say
That it retains
The breath
That gave it life—

Achieving Horses

Dissolving the concept
Leaves the concept
As whole as before;
Assembling the horse,
Black mane and white flanks
Set warmly on the bone,
Assembling the motion,
One hoof thrown up,
Thrown down,

Again and again against gravity;

Carving the muscle,
Sliding blades along
The anatomical imperative,
Achieves the form
That I` t was meant to create.

The horse in motion
Compels itself to satire;
Carries in its shoulders
The heaviness of being,
Breathes an air full
With the impertinence
Of flavor, witch-grass
And hazel, fresh water
Brought from high lakes;

The horse in motion
Wades through sunlight,
Is broken on conjecture,
And falls; disassembles,
Displays an abstract
Quality; so late in motion,

Awaits a resurrection.

American Son

She was lactating, and the ocean
Swallowed all her misery; she gave birth
To a monster who drank from the sea,
Because the sea was full of his mother;
She said that it was all right, all right because
She was American, and America
Was famous for its monsters.
Poor and famous, he spent his time
Sitting on a post where the wire caged
The cattle and horses of America,
Whistling at the crows,
Whispering to the blue sky,
As if the blue sky were the sea,
And as full as his mother's breast.
In his younger days he lived by the Gulf,
Casting lines into the surf,
Dredging oddly shaped fish
From the rolls of white water;
The fish spoke the language of the waves,
Laughed brightly at the shore,
The American shore full of peasant fishermen
At dusk reeling sea kelp from the silt.
His mother drowned him, filled him
With sour milk and oil; he made
A fish-skin mask to wear on holidays,
And celebrations for the cycles of the moon,
When the ocean was carried like a god
Down the whiskey scented streets, the ocean
Transformed into a papier-mâché float,
Garnished with paper flowers,
Full of red, yellow, blue, white,
Deathly white paper irises and stems
Of dark green wire; he sat near the floats
And laughed with the people gathered

There—and when the sea evaporated
All the bones in his arms and legs,
He retired to the country, where the sea
Moaned and whispered nightly in the hills,
And rains brought drifts of saline
And the scent of rotting piers; he was
Drowning, drowning in the dust and sky
Full of lactating mirages, and fields
Of clouds turning like the waves
Of a summer beach; the cows bellowed,
And the horses tread the starlight,
But no sound was a language that he knew;
His sense of beauty had its place
Only where his mother's milk was spilled;
He walked a thousand miles to the heart
Of America, swallowed wheat like water,
And danced with storms;
And when he traveled to the city,
Grown grotesque with fish eyes,
Gills upon his throat, and the carrion
Clinging to his teeth like a great whale
Cleansing baleen tapestries,
A shout rose in the streets,
And he was killed for a monster
Far removed from the sea;
His throat slit and head skinned
Like a fish tail, set on a wire
And celebrated as a god,
Paraded in the dry winds
Far from the sea.

American Odyssey

We vanished
Into America,
We fell
Into the idea
Of it;
It was no longer
Water,
And the streams
Of rivers
Falling
From the mountains
And the hills;
It was no longer
Industry,
Or agriculture spread
Beyond
The cities
Where we lived—
It could only be
Its own creation,
And our
Interpretation
Of its meaning;
It was
An image
Of the country,
Printed
On a screen,
And the sound
Of it,
Announcing
Our intention
To decry
The past—

Anthem

There is, in country heat,
And hidden
Like old tires in the grass,
A question
Waiting to be asked
Of me—
*From where did you come,
And from what circumstance—*
As I am waiting
In the sun,
In sunlight filled
With heat
Remaining from my years
In the country,
And my years in the city,
And my years in those rooms
That were only temporary places
To contain the years,
My reply
Is that you cannot know
My history—
It is as separate
As every American life,
Lost in the profuse weeds,
And alleys full of shadows,
And the full beds
Of trucks
Traveling to cities
In the heat—
When summer passes,

I will lose myself
Again
In this America;
And leave the question
In the grass,
Like old tires
And discarded magazines—

Blood on the Moon

The color changed,
From bone to blood,
Or rust, or autumn leaf
Descending into winter;
But, whether caused
By astronomical procession,
Or born of simple superstition,
The moon remained unchanged—
Events are not what we believe
Them to be; but they control
Our self-reflection of the universe;
It was a lunar eclipse, seen before,
But for other eyes, in other years,
It was an omen of a coming death—
Watching from *this* time explains
The change; but still, despite
Our sense of true reality,
We must have explanations
For the world, and its condition,
Whatever they may be—

Candle

A closing door
Moves the fire briefly;

A breath relights,
Then diminishes the light.

All day long
We've been waiting

For darkness,
And now it has arrived.

Changes

It would be better
To turn away
From those old things
That give nothing
To us anymore,
Except for the comfort
Of their presence
In our lives;
Their illusion
Of satiety
Keeps our senses
From acknowledging
The absence
Of true form—
And form and function
Are the qualities
With which we measure
Our lives;
When either is delayed
By obsolescence,
The real
Becomes imaginary—
These concepts
Are difficult to hold
In the mind,
And so the illusion
Is more comforting
Than truth;
But when
We turn away
From the illusion,
We find the meaning
That appears

Within complete perception,
And the holding
Of indifference
That must take place
Before the form
And function
Are complete again—

Deluge

When rain is heavy,
And our vision
Fails to experience
The world
That it enshrines,
We see
The world
As a burst of light,
And the sound
Of thunder
Through the trees;
A barrage of drops
Inquires
Of the roof's integrity,
While a white fire
Dances on the road,
But does not burn
As quickly
As the fire
That we know;
And it will not
Harm you,
With that beauty,
If it does not
Persist
For many days—

Duet

The intersection
Of our acts
Represents our love;
A motion made together,
Gathering the same result;
We see the same condition
Of our lives, and wait
To sleep by one another,
By our final
Waking breaths;
And of those acts
That intersect,
The same vibration brings
A common sound,
That is our music,
That is our life's duet—

Faith

I do not hear it anymore;
It used to come like rain,
Addressing the windows
As a gentle introduction;
But now it comes infrequently,
And leaves a card
When I am not available,
Or just too inattentive
To realize that it is there—

It filled the world with light,
On other days,
Spread the curtains
And exposed the furnishings
To bright illumination;
I believe that I depended
On those days to see
What I could not
Have otherwise perceived—

And whether it is my neglect,
Or a decaying consciousness
That turns from relevant
Reflections,

I have it less these days,
And only as
An occasional companion—

Genius

It is a method for changing
The celestial machine;
Or renaming the objects
That we have known,
So that they are renewed;
Or a procedure
For breaking moonlight
From the sky,
And illuminating
Our faintest imperfections—
We raise it
From mere thought,
Or from a suggestion
Whispered to our
Sleeping minds;
It changes everything
That we know,
And reforms the world
Into a different place;
We hear it individually,
And repeat it as a species,
And save its practice
In our social realm;
And those who find it
In their lives
Can do nothing
But allow it to succeed;
Or rest with it
In death—

In the Valley of the Shadow of Death

I keep returning
To that place
Where I have been;
Folded into shadows
For a grace,
And leaving traces
Where I walk
Upon a plain,
Awash in rain,
And drowning—
And every time
That I return,
I come to feel
The sense
Of its iniquity;
It is a place
Where I have been
Repeatedly,
And where I search
For the relics
Of a church
Dropped long ago
Into the mud;
I will return, again,
And every time
That I feel the need
To find
What I have purged—

Love's Illusion

How surprised
I was
To find my life
Transformed
Into a dream;
Suddenly,
My days
Had been converted
Into endless
Permutations
Of surrealistic
Pain;
When I wake,
I hope
To be
Inured again—

Love's Salutation

Our simple acts
Define us;
How could I know
That in that definition
I would find
The dissolution
Of my love—

Through a window
I perceive,
Where I have lived
For many years,
A place of trees
And streets;
But they have gone
From me—

The trees
Are full of birds
That do not sing;
And when I walk
Those streets
I do not
Find myself
At home—

You have been acting
In a way
That treads the grave
Of love,
And now
My local universe
Has changed—

Miracle Sea

The apprehension of the tern
Which fell into the sea,
Drifting to the sea floor,
Unresurrected in the spirit
Of the current;
Appears desiccated in the foam,
The miracle sea returning
All things to the place
Of their creation;

Is held by moonlight,
Is limited by isolation.

Returning through the water
Full of salt and living fish,
The bird falls shoreward,
Encouraged by the wind,
And gravity;

She flies through incarnations,
A pair of wings unfeathered,
A skull with eyes
Defiling their purpose,

A breast exposing the fissured
Character of bones; she flies
Through seas and changes,
Survives the foreign climate,
And nestles in the sand,

With the wind unleashed through nature,
And the cries of solar flares announcing
Her arrival.

Morning Glory

Arid leaves pitch wildly in autumn,
Certain of the fall, anticipating grief;
Beneath a sweltering bough, a reef
Of morning glories daily hibernate,
Aware of nothing but the timepiece
Of their sleeping;

At daybreak, release their petals,
And capture morning's grace,
Until daylight kills their aspirations;
Holding shadows like a lover,
Spendthrift of diurnal affluence,
Until a fever knits their secret life
To spheres;

When winter comes,
The process waits
For importation to the spring.

Of Cities, and the Mountains, and the Seas

The wilderness retreats
From that perspective of an urban man,
And sometimes dies before it is realized
In the consciousness;
The secrets to everlasting life
Can be found in the artifacts
Of a natural reality—
Though it is a life without conscious
Knowledge of itself,
And perpetuating as a whole,
And not individually—
This would keep the mind
From too much contemplation,
From calling the bone immortal,
When it is merely grown,
And calling the flesh eternal,
When it is merely a temporary condition.

At midnight, without the artificial light
Of cities, and the blaze of color
From the painted walls,
The world is dark, and reliant
On the stars, of which it is a part;
This universal mingling
Keeps the world eternal,
But not the human appreciation of it;
The cities are not real,
But neither is the world
That we appreciate, for it is only a name
For the effects that we feel—
We call our nature beautiful,
But it is not true nature that we sense;
It is the death of nature,
And the birth of false impressions.

Ontological Imperative

The pen is an instrument
Writing
Of its own existence;

A paradox for keeping
Genius from becoming
An end in itself.

Pilgrimage to America

I am searching for America,
In places full of winter tenants,
In rare and beautiful landscape
Fallen from the mountains,
In every face that speaks a name
For that condition of our lives;

But not in America is America—
It lives in memory,
And in the cartographer's mark,
When we go to that place on a map
And say, this is America—

This is not a paradox,
This is a means of defining
An imaginary place,
As real as Heaven and Hell,
Though bound by water on each side—

And from that water we will come,
Again and again,
And call the water sacred,
And sanctify the land,
And breathe an air that we call free—

I am searching for America,
I am searching for a life
That I remember,
Before a solemn designation
Was acquired;
And when I find it I will say,
'This is America, this is my America';
And I will live there dreaming,
Until the time that all those dreams
Must die.

Stillborn

The privilege of survival
Speaks for me;
I taste it now,
Rust left from the past.

God knows
I almost made it.

The Conscripts of Heaven and Hell

Let the sun rise
On the moon;
The light that blinds us
To the presence
Of those things
That we keep
In darkness
Is the necessary
Concession
That we make—
We cannot view
These things at once,
When they
Contradict
Each other's sense;
Let us keep,
In darkness,
Our attraction
To cold light;
That, in the day,
Converts itself
Into the moral fire
Of our lives—

The Entropy of Words

They fall in pools
Of unrelated letters,

Meaning less than
When they were new.

The Extremes of Personal Responsibility

What we ask
Of our too fragile flesh,
Is to change the world
Without inflicting pain;
What we ask
Is that our flesh
Not know the suffering
Of necessary consequence;
We bear too much selfishly,
Because we do not bear
These things at all;
Only saints and sinners
Suffer purposely
To liberate the world—

The Faith of the Poet

It must come freely
From the unconscious,
As much an enigma
To the poet
As to the audience;
It must not be a game,
Or artifice,
To fill a quota
For a day—
The truths of life
Emerge from the place
Where they were kept
Within the mind;
And those techniques
That find our praise
Are only meaningful
If they reveal
The truth's condition;
That is why
The greatest words
Are always
Blindly written—

The First Principle of the Soul

What is my soul,
That I am conscious of it
Breathing in me;
And calling it my soul,
Without a compass
To decide
Its true location—
What is it that we call
The quintessence
Of the body and the mind;
And is it but the whole
Of one dynamic species—

If so,
Then let me call it holy
That imbues me
With the talent
To reflect,
And to know,
And to name
My separate acts—
Or let me call it nature,
That releases
Every chemical
That moves me—

For being is being,
Which is
The first principle—

The Old and the New

The old and the new
Blend into what is *now*,
Or what is understood to be;

And all of life is blended
To our history;
The words that came before,

And those yet to be said—

The Radiation of a Fallen Star

I walked beneath the mountains
And found a star
Burned in the earth;
And from the star a light
From other places
Lit my hands with fire,
And the fire of a distant place
From where the universe
Makes deities of dust;
And then I climbed the mountains
To raise that fire
Into the highest places
Of the sky,
But fell when all the rains
Of all the weeping world
Consumed it—
And now I sit beneath the stars,
And feel the scars
Across my hands,
And write these words through grief;
So that I may explain
The unrelenting burden
Of such a beautiful pain—

The Shakespeare of Texas

It is not a lie, but words that bring the spell,
The trance-like state that brings such beauty;
Our traditions keep us searching
For a comparable expression,
As full of genius as the words
A dead man left for centuries;
But I was born in Texas, not England,
And so compose in the desert atmosphere,
To claim a connection to the past
That serves as an imagined lineage—

And if it is not the words that break the spell,
Then call me back from meaningless illusions;
I cannot say that I am anything
But what my words convey;
If they are brilliant, leave them so,
And say that I am fortunate
To have breathed a life into them—

And if they fail, and I have failed
To give them perfect elocution,
Then let the sunlight blind me to it,
And let the desert take me to its dust again;
But if I whisper beauty into being,
And leave it perfect on the page,
Then turn away, and say
That I have given everything to words,
And from a trance found God's expression
Of this world—

The Writer

Arranging words
Is fundamentally a game;
And I have played
With sentences for years,
Searching for miraculous
Expression,
A sound creating memory,
Or a definition
Of the human graces—
And continue to play,
And will always,
Until I have discovered
My genius for a phrase,
Or the only words
That could describe a life—

Thoughts of Autumn

The leaves are falling
In the yard;
And they remind me
Of the time
That I am losing,
Or have lost—
But a falling leaf
Is a questionable metaphor
For the time
That I have left unused,
For a want,
Or an imagined course;
I hesitate to trade
The beauty of the spectacle
For life's regret;
What has the branch
To regret
With which I may compare
Despondency—
I should not fear it anymore;
But still I reach to hold
The leaf a moment longer,
Before releasing it
Again—

When No Words Will Come

The art of seduction
Is undisciplined;
Words fall away,
An introduction
To true art.

The words remain
In a secret place,
Wasted in
The harvesting
Of silence.

When Something Beautiful is Lost

When these things
Are lost,
They take with them
That part of the soul
That found them
Beautiful;
The finest
Crystal sculpture
Carries its beauty
In the wholeness
Of its being;
Once broken,
The fragments
That remain
Disperse
The perception
Of the whole,
And the light
That was reflected
By the soul
Abruptly dies—
And because
Our love
For that beauty
Fails,
The soul
Is never lit,
Identically,
Again;
Why do we say
That this is not

The truth,
When we know,
More truly
By our feelings,
Of the death
Of something
As meaningful
As love?

When We Find New Life

*When the meaning
Goes away,
It is time
To find
New meaning;
This simple
Logic
Of our lives
Is often taken
For religion,
Or eastern philosophy,
Or the words
Of ancient poets;
But it lies
Within our sense
Of the world,
And of our place
In a world
That we have made;
And when
The meaning
Goes away,
Our instincts
Always take us
To new thoughts,
And the meaning
Of those thoughts,
Which is
Our first sense
Of a new life
Being born—*

White Lies

Passed over
For the living,

In the telling
Of it;

The past is not
As I remember.

Why We Must Care for Love

Love's ashes
Lie
Above the cause
That burned it;
It is always
Over us,
Waiting
To be touched
By incendiary
Feelings—