

thur, old, tired, sad, and sick of war and treachery, back underground for more instruction from the animals who, at the beginning of the story, helped the wizard Merlyn to school the young king-to-be. The furry tutors' talk about fascism, communism, and capitalism is dreary, and Arthur's experiences when he is magicked into an ant have no sparkle. But when he becomes a wild goose migrating in freedom with the plump Lyólyok, whom he loves "more than Guenever, more than Lancelot," that old White magic again casts its spell.

FIVE TEMPERAMENTS:
Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, James Merrill, Adrienne Rich, John Ashbery
by David Kalstone
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HOUSEBOAT DAYS
by John Ashbery
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David Kalstone, professor of English at Rutgers, here considers the uses of autobiography in the work of five contemporary poets, including the late Robert Lowell, who did as much as anyone to gain critical acceptance of the use of *specific* autobiographical detail in American poetry. Few of us do not know, by now, the minutiae of Lowell's life; the story is in the poems (see page 154). Kalstone explores how much of such autobiography poems "can bear and handle." All five poets have found ways to build their lives into their work; Bishop in her later poems using "less geological, less historical, less vastly natural" time and space, more interior landscapes; Merrill recognizing a preference for the first-person present "with a veil drawn"; Rich by thinking, as she wrote in 1968, "how we can use what we have to invent what we need." In his last chapter, Kalstone greatly helps the reader to understand John Ashbery, a daring, difficult writer whose work confronts "how little" poetry can do in the face of life's complications.

"The past slips through your fingers, wishing you were there," John Ashbery once reminded us. His latest volume, *Houseboat Days*, 39 poems written since the 1975 publication of *Self Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (which won a Pulitzer) continues exploration of the personal darkness that many American poets experience. "I cannot . . . pick up / where I leave off / . . . the truth becomes a hole, something one has always known / . . . a randomness, a darkness of one's own."