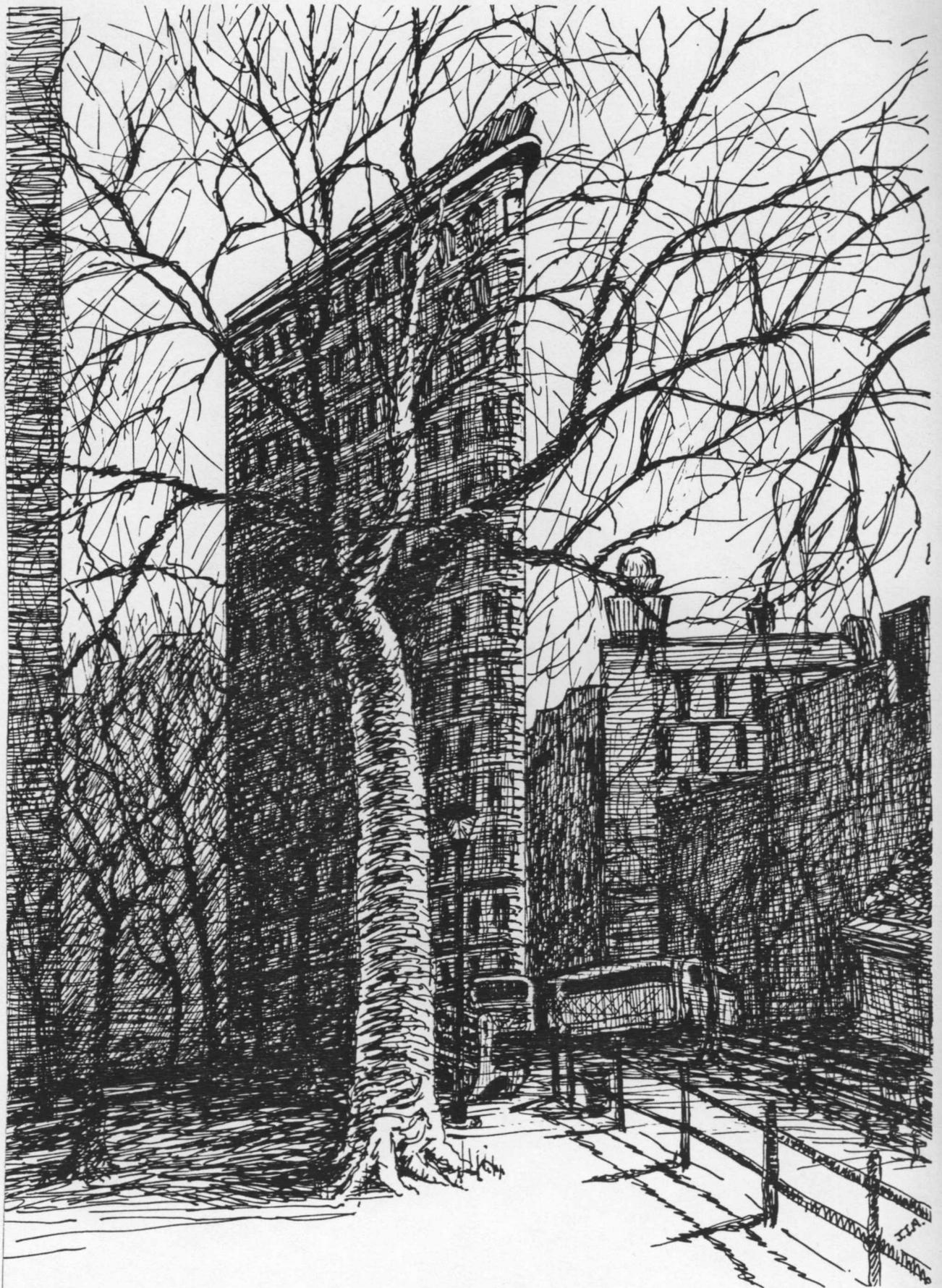


IN THE
SHADOWS

*Barbara A.
Holland*

The Poet's Press



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Shadows**

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Frontispiece by Jane Madson

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Books by Barbara A. Holland:

- Autumn Numbers*, Grim Reaper Books (The Poet's Press)**
***Running Backwards* (Collected Poems), Warthog Books**
***Autumn Wizard*, First edition, The Poet's Press (Out of print)**
***Autumn Wizard*, Reprint, The Poet's Press (Out of print)**
***Crises of Rejuvenation*, Volume 1, The Poet's Press (Out of print)**
***Crises of Rejuvenation*, Volume 2, The Poet's Press (Out of print)**
***Burrs*, The Poet's Press**
***On This High Hill*, First edition, Cherry Valley Editions**
***On This High Hill*, Facsimile edition, The Poet's Press**
May Eve: A Festival of Supernatural Poems
(with Brett Rutherford, Shirley Powell & Claudia Dobkins)
Grim Reaper Books (The Poet's Press)
***Collected Poems*, Volume 1, B. Rutherford: Books (The Poet's Press)**
Proof copies only circulated, out-of-print
***Melusine*, The Bard's Press, (Out of print)**
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***Game of Scraps*, Prairie Press (Out of print)**
***Melusine*, The Bard's Press (Out of print)**
***Return in Sagittarius*, Eventorium Press, Muse Edition**

ELEGY FOR ALEXIS

for Alexis Romanovich

What sort of wind, Alexis,
covets your house? What kind of claw
slips over balustrade and grabs
your guest, leaving the slender ledge
a vacancy of gusts that tells
the searching host no tales of sills
below, counting down twenty stories
through the death blue haze
to asphalt and the smash
that ends all stories?

What sort of wind, Alexis,
wept within your rooms and wiped
the stars from all the windows
on the night-hung ledge, that filled
all space with panic force
and swept you over, bowled bar bell
brace of door block from its lock
on life and drove the hoofs
of stallions through your loneliness?

What sort of wind, Alexis,
breeds within the ear that listens
for you or behind the eye, squinting
up height of wedge to last brink
of mortality, that climbs above
the indecisive glide of paper scraps
on thermals swirled past your last
floor on earth to where you are?

What sort of wind, Alexis,
urges us to seek you as you once
had sought, to know only the thin
line of the parapet where dust
is rushed in endless search of self
where there is none?

PROTEST FROM A SINGULAR PROFESSION

Though only a common house ghost
skilled to pass through brick
and concrete, much as the cold
comes unrestrained by voile,
through no acquired technique,
but as a function of me which repeats
itself with me as message, I must fault
this skill as action independent
of control. It sifts me down
to concentrate of dust and light
on which I draw for substance
in a single stroke of smoke,
self-sculptured to existence
in a humanoid advance on space and time,
shaft smitten through to both of them
and rupturing both utterly in service
of that eye which otherwise
lives bounded by its blindness

and all without my authorship
or questioning. Intent is sight of me,
speaks of itself instantly when I appear
calls out in illustration of an argument
which is my pose, the purpose
of my features and my full attire
styled into focus of address
which often goes mistaken

Time and again the contact cracks
across the centuries and misses.
Time and more time for shock alone
an empty house of unintended secrecy
as what went by unspoken
keeps on speaking still
in waste of spatial rhetoric
in vacant rooms.

**SAINT MARK'S CHURCH IN THE BOUWERIE:
OFFERTORIUM**

I remember it all quite clearly;
the pelting feet, the half-shouldered
overcoats, the near brutality
with which some dozen persons,
including two vestrymen, reached the aisle,
of how it opened to their record dash;
how they blocked the front door in terror
and would not move when in the church
behind them there was nothing.

Dust, sunlight. The old smoke
of a sermon rising above the heads
that were filled with the aroma
of a Sunday roast while the oven gauge
crept cautiously upon its deadline
and woke them to a motion at the far side
of the altar, and after a moment
of definition, brought them to their feet
faster than the first bar of a hymn
and launched them in a panic pounding
race down aisle, through door
into the ugliness of street outside,
ugly enough to reassure them.

I saw her at the Epistle side
of the altar, an exclamation point
of a slender girl. The bulky bell
of a crinoline blossoming from her waist.
One chalk blotch of a hand at her breast
to secure the long, triangular shawl,
the neatly bonneted head and its rice
paper patch of a face and two nail head
eyes that seemed to bore into it,
and perhaps into the bone behind it,

swaying as on a light breeze
as if swung from a thread that changed
position with the slightest stirring
of the air, poised a good half foot
above the floor with sunlight creeping
between the hem of her skirt
and the tired carpeting, wavering
in a paroxysm of nonfocus, rippling
violently from head to foot
as all the details went to haze,
cleared back, smudged fuzzy,
fixed their focus once again
as through binoculars, went all to pieces
in a scattering of blurs
which swiftly disappeared,

and that was all, absolutely all.
The church lay still, fumbling about
with its budget which would not repair

the rectory. Candles to be lit
that they might be seen by all men.
I saw *hers*, flickering, blooming
on stale sunlight, guttering, wobbling
like the candle flames upon the altar.
Still here, as then. When? 1860.
Before the candle stick was broken.

A POET DECLAIMS IN A GRAVEYARD

Clouds congregate
and shadow blots the stone book
laid open upon the fluted lectern
that the wind might skim the names—
from the pages of marble
and repeat them with endless sobbing.

Your papers rebel against
the anchoring pebbles. Your hands
press them down at their edges
grinding them into grooves
of disregarded names to support
of your thrust of passion,

as your throat throbs
with remembered loves, the aftertaste
of werewolf revels
and the leap of dolphins.

The deep grass shudders
at the roots as a vanguard rain
chatters on splitting slate.

IN MEMORIAM FOR A SEEKER

for Ree Dragonette

She was worn out,
exhausted. She had flung
her ice axe upwards
where it had caught on a ledge
where I had found her.

I told her
that the air was much too thin
up there, that the summit was slippery;
I told her of others coming
who might dislodge her on the way,
of those who would not welcome
an invader; as I was slipping
halfway to a better place,
but nowhere near the bottom

She said I could be
a quitter if I wished.
I told her of the great expense
of dressing for the role,
the loneliness, the friends
that she would leave behind
and of the scarce good manners
practiced at such altitudes,
that climbing down was in no way easier
but that I had found
a cave for comfort

She vanished thereupon
into a puff of cloud.
I wonder what became of her—
if she remembers me.

ONCE MORE THIS EVENING

for Ree Dragonette

The street lengthens
away over to the East. The low slant
of the early Autumn sundown
awakens old promises.

Come then, remember.
We agreed to walk there together.
It is early yet. The door
will not be crowded. We shall walk
gingerly down the stairs
and sit in the corner
near the platform
awaiting our turns,

even though the cafe
has given up its business
and you have given up your body
and still proclaim heiroglyphs
in the splashing of the rose
and gold as the sun lies away
over to the East and listens.

AND NOW, VIRGINIA

The cork flew out of the neck
of the bottle and the champagne
inside of it went flat. It was like
those two crowns, each
of Christ and His Mother
in the church where the Mass
of Resurrection was sung for you, Virginia

two heads so holy
that they both sprang off,
their mass-produced crowns
which bobbed about somewhere
above their heads in all
that vast pleuroma.

So now that little brown leaf
which had waited till March,
now torn from its branch, finally
left a tap at my window pane
like a poke of a finger tip
at my arm, a near pluck
at my sleeve. Do you want more
attention, little brown tap,
before you investigate a more
beckoning brilliance, adventuresome moth?

LAST RITES

Our great aunt Sophia
whose very name evoked images
of Cosmati mosaics and Byzantine domes,
was hardly the sort of woman
to put ants up her nose
or snort them
with hits of cocaine.

Not at the age of ninety-eight
or any other would she
indulge in such eccentric fancies,

but when kneeling beside
her casket for what my parents
determined should be my final kiss,
I actually saw the little beggars,
all three of them, marching
in single file out of her nostril
and down the parody of her face
into her preposterous collar.

It was the mortician
of this funeral home
who was to blame, of course.
He had never removed
those two elegantly sculptured
vultures from his mantelpiece,

where they hunched
their shoulders at either end,
the eyes in their bowed heads
watchful of every shadowed
corner of a room which was all
a flutter of candles;
I can vouch for it!

LEFTOVER LAUGHTER

They say that you walked
right off the edge of the world
at the same time that they tell me
that the world has no edges
from which to drop, although
mine has,

from several levels,

and that means that I cannot call you
back or twist my fingers inside
your collar as if to drag you back.
You would resent it, and would look at me
severely, with your mouth tightened
into a thin line of vexation.

And thus, being properly affronted,
from your appearance of posture,
would walk off the edge of the world again
from the edges of space and time
of sight and sound,
with the loose ends
of the woodshavings of your laughter
left hanging from every budding bough.

THE HAUNTED GUITAR

Do you ever hear her
guitar when you are alone
in the house? Do her tears
still hang from the strings,
 fattening,
by their almost imaginary tails?

Does the sound box
ever recall to you her voice?
Does it ever yet moan
in lamentation for her fingers
which now no longer
apply pressure to the frets

for others which do not pick
the tones to being,
but which sometimes hum
throughout the hollows of the night?

Will you ever be able
to stop them
from rebuilding her presence
from her adolescent laughter?

DRY WEEPING FOR A DEAD FOLKIE

No water here.
These droplets fatten
about the core
of bruised emotion,

until the tenuous appearance
of their tails
loose their grip
on the guitar strings

and fall to ruin.

HARD WINTER

A wound,
 somewhere.
Tunes bubbling up
like drops of blood.
 No more, John Lennon.

THE GHOST ALSO WEAKENS WITH AGE

In those days of my greater aging,
they will say of me
that my face alters and grows
from day to day more haggard,
that my body sags.

They will hear my youthful
footsteps left upon the stairs,
at the same time that they see me
pulling my weight up on the bannisters,
hand over hand, with failing strength.

They will watch me walk
up to a latched door and spread
all of me against it, rather
than passing through it.

In short, they will see me only
as an old ghost, lacking the proper energy
to perfect a manifestation,
but still trying to muster up
the very best of my appearance
by creating a tremulous heap of ectoplasm
like a gelatinous pile
of laundry on the floor

FOR A COSMOPOLITAN POET

Hers was a strange departure.
The bells took on terribly,
but no sound came from them.
The mirrors grew fragile with crazing,
but had not the urge to break,

when outside, a huge butterfly
with wings of the deepest black,
dipped, and swooped
into her bedroom window,

while the trees wept
and the leaves were excited,
despite the absence of rain.

And I still feel something
crawling up my spine on needle
points whenever her name
is used to summon me.

There was a girl inside her,
who was not resigned. Her identity
is written on the walls
with bullet holes, left by the side arms
of the men who mourned Allende.

She is with Neruda now.

BE KIND TO SHADOWS

**If you should see your father
reflected in the mirror behind you,
do not be upset because
you were not reflected too.**

**Remember that death happens
to the best of us. We are lonely,
like to be near our survivors,
although they are likely
to be fearful of people whom
they thought had dropped
out of their lives forever.**

**And so, if you see a hollow
in the cushion of his favorite chair,
say something cheerful
as if you were still speaking
to a human being. Sniff a little
of the first stray whiff of smoke
from his pipe, and do not be forever
checking out the contents
of the refrigerator although
you heard the two-time click
of the door once too often.**

Just try to remember
his outline against the sky
at twilight, and the silhouette
of his head and shoulders against
the moonlight in the dining room window
and murmur how much you loved him
before he had finished the chapter
and had switched the light off.

NOT YET, O LORD

Not until everything was in order;
not until the final bill was paid;
not until the financial report
had been completed and notes taken
for the guidance of his wife;
not until all things were ship-shape
and the laundry stacked
was he about to finish
his neatly patterned life,

and not until the minute was ripe
would they close the coffin,
nor even then could they lock it;
not until the cats were fed
and the flowers watered,

was he willing to die
briskly and efficiently
after the manner in which he lived.

WAITING AT BRIGHTON BEACH

The highway curves around
the ominous dark of the ocean
in a casual embrace, while lights
pop into blossom everywhere
far beyond the tumble
of last-minute shoppers
beneath the uncompromising chill
of the tracks of the "El"
beside which I sit, waiting
for a homebound train.

And what about this delicate child
in her gingham gown of Empire cut
hanging down to her ankles,
and in a poke bonnet, swinging
white stockings and black slippers
from the bench beside me, while clutching
a nosegay of violets?

It is no night for her
to be out here in summer finery,
I think, as the train rolls in.
It must be just under freezing!

She meets my eyes with the emptiest
stare when I look straight at her
and vanishes as the doors of the train
spring open from under my nose

"Amaryllis," the name occurs
to me all the way home,
station after station.
Did I bring this spirit out here
with me or is she a part
with the wind of this station
and its surly winter weather?

THE SISTERS AT HOME

A family was moving into the house
next door, and that meant
that the sisters had to get busy.
There was purposeless running
up and down on the stairway and an equally
meaningless slamming of doors
that were already shut, and making noise
like the bathtub overflowing and always
reading over someone's shoulder.

No more sleeping all day among the cobwebs,
or humming those tiresome tunes
that no one heard and enjoying
the sun, rain, snow or whatever
the weather as it seemed to come into
the house—but the youngest did not rouse.

She slept on the sofa
in her long black coat, her legs
from the ankle to the knee
and feet in shoes that were always
together near the fireplace,
her long blond hair on her head
hung pleasantly down from a bookcase,
while two elegant little hands hung
by curved fingers from the mantelpiece,

and there was always
an extra hand dozing in the kitchen
closet that would drive intruders
well away at any time.
Thus all the ancient sisters
were ready and in their places
for accomplishing the family's retreat.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Barbara A. Holland was born July 12, 1925 in Portland, Maine. After a move to Doyleston the family relocated again to Philadelphia where Holland was schooled until she gave up on her doctorate in folk lore. She came to New York in 1962 and there found out that people could call themselves poets and be taken seriously. She has spent the last 20 years in New York doing almost everything which a full-time poet is expected to do except, she warns her publisher, "writing book jacket copy."

ABOUT THE POEMS

ELEGY FOR ALEXIS treats of the death of the guest of Alexis Romanovich, who fell from the parapet of the Flatiron building and was later killed himself in that self same studio by a massive heart attack—at least that is what most people have supposed.

FROM A SINGULAR PROFESSION is a fictional story of a trance medium.

SAINT MARK'S CHURCH IN THE BOUWERIE: OFFERTORIUM is an account of one of the hauntings of St. Mark's Church before it became the chief watering hole for the best known group of poets in New York City. The church is an old one, was the private chapel of Peter Stuyvesant, and was later changed from Dutch reformed to Episcopal. It is still haunted. The rector cannot keep baby sitters. It is the stairs and the rectory where the most ghostly activities have been recorded.

IN MEMORIAM is for Ree Dragonette, a poet who was a legend in her own lifetime. She is chiefly known for her Maria Callas-like presence on the stage when she read her work.

WAITING AT BRIGHTON BEACH is another subway story.

THE SISTERS AT HOME is a fiction about three ghostly women who have to start up some action with a new family moving in. These women are common house ghosts, not vampires. They have been used to slothful living, and now they have to frighten this family out. Hard work!

FOR A COSMOPOLITAN POET was written for Margot De Silva, a fearless lady who stamped her lifestyle on people by writing of it ceaselessly: her experiences with jazz musicians, encounters with the great and near great in the political and literary worlds of Central and South America.

AND NOW, VIRGINIA refers to Virginia De Vicenti, an elderly woman with a tart tongue, whose hobby it was to lambast the waiters at Pennyfeather's with it.

LAST RITES is a complete fiction, except for the vultures on the mantelpiece of the funeral home.

LEFT OVER LAUGHTER describes Richard Goldberger, who was a dancer, actor and school teacher. He is remembered for his role as a tap dancing desk clerk in *The Hollywood Hotel* and his role as Selenus in the Satyr play, *The Cyclops*, by Euripides. He was one of the most important in the Ballets Trocadero and Gloxinia (both transvestite companies).

THE HAUNTED GUITAR and the poem following it are written to the memory of Glenda Dash, who was a talented folksinger and daughter of the well known poet, Emilie Glen.

HARD WINTER marks the feeling of unwanted change that many people went through at the death of John Lennon.

A GHOST ALSO WEAKENS WITH AGE is entirely fictitious and points out the moments of deterioration in their order.

NOT YET, O LORD sums up the orderliness of Victor Splitt before he died. Victor Splitt was one of the founders of the Brooklyn Literary Center.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

The poems in this book were typeset on an Osborne computer and printed on a dot matrix printer employing completely new type faces specially designed by Brett Rutherford for The Poet's Press; display type was set in Benguiat faces. The book was printed on an electrostatic duplicator on Scott vellum, an acid-free paper, and hand-bound in Hammermill cover stock.

This is the 104th publication of The Poet's Press, issued May, 1984. Those who assisted in the production of this book were Jane Madson, Steve Lockwood, Boria Sax, Linda Sax, Daniel De Palma and Thunderpuss.

Copies of this book are available from B. Rutherford: Books, 47 Bonn Place, Weehawken NJ 07087 for \$5. Case-bound copies in cloth and hand-marbled papers provided on a special order basis.