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Poetry

NORTHWEST



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POETRY NORTHWEST

AUTUMN 1977

James Grabill

Two Poems

GUESSING SONG

"I guess I'm just like you,
I don't like strangers
Hovering behind me."
(—a Portland store clerk to my wife
as I was bending *very* close behind
her picking up a coin)

I guess I'm just like you,
I don't like strangers
Hovering behind me.
I guess I'm just like you,
I can see the horse
Tied to the brass tree
In the amoeba
Of the first creation,
Planning the friendly demolition
Of stock-piled alarm clocks.
I guess I'm just like you,
A V of geese in the sky
Under the hammer blows
Of ordinary breathing,
All the geese wandering,
A flower of virgin misunderstanding
Surrounded by the dog bees
Of some worry and pleasure.
I guess I'm just like you,
Another hog's fly lost in the wake
Of the sweating hogs and horses

Cooing under their breath
Grandma, Grandma Beanstalk.
And I guess you're just like me,
An iron-mongering cameo
Of the completion of the species,
A student of endurance,
A nocturnal-born finishing school
Wrestling in the nude, the penis
Rising in the cool asparagus,
A Norse baboon at the cave's mouth
Under the crescent moon
Of predestined final ambitions.
I guess I'm just like you,
A sitar continuing to snore
Like a car motor, a banjo
Whose face had been disguised
Since birth, who was given up
For lost week after week
In the ocean's relationships,
A raw dolphin harmonic
Meaning both *I am you*
And *I respect your distance.*

GOAT NIGHT

it's night and sleep
is my hound dog
lying flat behind me
and beer is my billy goat
standing off to one side
it will eat anything

this dark beer tastes
of the distant grains
and a bit of soil

well a little soil
never hurt anyone
and whatcha gonna do

hide in the basement
until somebody intelligent
comes down to save you

nobody intelligent
gonna go down there
without you coming up
first you gotta come up
that's what the hell
you doing down there
learning to come up

look the dogs are healthy
and they eat any number
of things off the ground

and we've all been asleep
for at least ten years
maybe that's why
we keep eating
what we say

it's a goat night of April
and there's time to be looking
all around in the same look

it's time to be swimming
instead of all that worrying
or maybe we've been competing
maybe that's the trouble

when we could come up
from the ocean floor
of the work week

breathing that saltwater
human energy

A DREAM OF BEAUTIFUL COOKIES

They are chocolate, immaculate
with coats fine as dust.
If you could bite them
they would break on your teeth
like champagne.
If you could carry them away
they would be in a little bag
clean and stiff as an envelope.

Suppose you are in the dream
which is a store. Imagine your hunger—
for it is a hungry dream. Every day you discover
that no one can be eaten
like a cookie
and kept for your convenience, which is hunger
and has a nice tongue
and a mouth that draws a dry draught of air
while you sleep.

The saleswoman is in your way.
She is blocking the view,
smiling like some exasperating teacher.
I suppose she is your mother
and damn if you haven't hired her
for a major part. While she stands there
time flies. While she stands there
you are nailed to the floor and when she steps aside
there are cosmetics, lovely reds and browns
and bottles with thick silver caps.
But nothing to eat.

Your stomach is a monastery
with a stone cold floor.
When something walks there,

it echoes. All the old frescoes
have faded in the gloom.
But there is a doorway
into your subconscious
or it may be a trap door
close to the duodenum
and something is about to be
digested.

It's a nice light there—
old tables wrinkly as brain waves
and benches like long scars,
peopled with your relatives.
But they have changed.
They have lost their baby fat.
They are thin, all dressed in chocolate brown,
and starved into gentility. You forget their names.
Somehow they are too old for you.
They are your father's aunts in crepe
nesting by fluted dishes of lemon drops.
And there are uncles in crestfallen suits.

Be brave. This is all you will have for dinner.
It is what you owned from the beginning
when you were dosed with chromosomes.
Be polite. Eat the bones.
Remember how you got through your first case of liver—
or was it a well-cooked tongue?
See. They are holding out their hands
heavy with tasteful rings. These are the family jewels.

Bite through.

JEAN

Your parents are asleep in the mirror.
How cold their hands are!
And the veins in the hands all dammed with death.

It is a deep mirror. Anyone would say
Such depth was impossible
Except in certain eyes and bodies of water.

See how small your mother is in her grey
Undress, and how your father is turned to the wall
Almost as if he hadn't loved her.

Your hair sweeps out toward the stars
In free-fall. It is impossible to say
How much it slows you—that blonde hair—

The numb wind whips you blind.
The satellites are busy reporting the weather.
Your parents lie on a sort of bed.

They have saved you a place between them at the bottom.

UNTITLED POEM

There are rivers in my hand,
little Niles of milk
and I bury my mouth there
in order to wake from the dream

that the felucca will not come.
Maybe it is caught behind the dam
with the oarsman asleep
and his cargo of dates

overripe in the Nubian sun.
It is the hand that does nothing
to write or eat, the unschooled one,
but here is the hope of boats

and the passage to antiquity.
In the jet of blood are the mummies,
with scarab and wrap,
awake at the sound

of my heartbeat. They offer me
their stories and I drink
an architecture of myth.
In the light their offerings

turn to dust and their wrappings
to rags so that I wait in silence
and alone for the honed edge of the oar
to slice the dark water.

Lisel Mueller

Two Poems

FOR A THIRTEENTH BIRTHDAY

You have read *War and Peace*.
Now here is *Sister Carrie*,
not up to Tolstoy, but still
it will second the real world:
predictable planes and levels,
the pavement that holds you,
stairs that lift you,
ice that trips you,
nights that begin after sunset,
four lunar phases,
a finite house.

I give you Dreiser
although (or because)
I am no longer sure.
Lately I have been walking into glass doors.
Through the car windows, curbs disappear.
On the highway, wrong turnoffs become irresistible,
someone else is controlling the wheel.
Sleepless nights pile up like a police record;
all my friends are getting divorced.
Language, my old friend, deserts me;
words are misused or forgotten,

consonants fight each other
between my upper and lower teeth.
I write "fiend" for "friend"
and "word" for "world,"
remember comes out with an m missing.

I used to be able to find my way in the dark,
sure of the furniture,
but the town I lived in for years
has pulled up its streets in my absence,
disguised its buildings behind my back.
My neighbor at dinner glances
at his cuffs, his palms;
he has memorized certain phrases,
but does not speak my language.
Suddenly I am aware
no one at the table does.

And so I give you Dreiser,
his measure of certainty:
a table that's oak all the way through,
real and fragrant flowers,
skirts from sheep and silkworms,
no unknown fibers;
a language as plain as money,
a workable means of exchange;
a world whose very meanness is solid,
mud into mortar, and you are sure
of what will injure you.

I give you names like nails,
walls that withstand your pounding,
doors that are hard to open,
but once they are open, admit you
into rooms that breathe pure sun.
I give you trees that lose their leaves,
as you knew they would,
and then come green again.
I give you
fruit preceded by flowers,

Venus supreme in the sky,
the miracle of always
landing on your feet,
even though the earth
rotates on its axis.

Start out with that, at least.

NOT ONLY THE ESKIMOS

We have only one noun,
but as many different kinds:

the grainy snow of the Puritans
and snow of soft, fat flakes,

guerilla snow, which comes in the night
and changes the world by morning,

rabbinical snow, a permanent skullcap
on the highest mountains,

snow that blows in like the Lone Ranger,
riding hard and heading west,

surreal snow in the Dakotas,
when you can't find your house, your street,
though you are not in a dream
or a science fiction movie,

snow that tastes good to the sun
when it licks black tree limbs,
leaving us only one white stripe,
a replica of a skunk,

unbelievable snows:
the blizzard that strikes on the 10th of April,
the false snow before Indian summer,

the Big Snow on Mozart's birthday
when Chicago became the Elysian Fields
and strangers spoke to each other,

paper snow, cut and taped
to the inside of grade school windows,

in an old tale, the snow
that covers a nest of strawberries,
small hearts, ripe and sweet,

the special snow that goes with Christmas,
whether it falls or not,

the Russian snow we remember
along with the warmth and smell of our furs,
though we have never traveled
to Russia or worn furs,

Villon's snows of yesteryear,
lost with ladies gone out like matches,
the snow in Joyce's "The Dead,"
the silent, secret snow
in a story by Conrad Aiken,
which is the snow of first love,

the curtain of snow between the child
and the spacewoman on TV,

snow as idea of whiteness,
as in *snowdrop*, *snow goose*, *snowball bush*,

the snow that puts stars in your hair,
and your hair, which has turned to snow,

the snow Elinor Wylie walked in
in velvet shoes,

the snow before her footprints
and the snow after,

the snow in the back of our heads,
whiter than white, which has to do
with childhood again each year.

Elton Glaser

NIGHT LETTER

No one can sleep. Tropic adagios
Strain through the dirty screen
When a hard breeze is needed.
Immune to the moonlight
Blue-benign on the bedroom floor, no one
Would walk five feet to look at the stars.

But even in this dry bed
Where the sheets muddle and whisper,
We hear the prow of the tomcat's appetite,
The pine trees rasp and palsy.
And the scandal of our own breath.
Blows sour through the bone.

On the first stray unseen star
To fall our way, I wish
For an axis of instinct and concentration,
The escape from hot necessity, elision
Of doubt and bravado, a love
As riverine as her long tawny hair.

In this hour of misconduct and obstacles,
Past the winter-slime and the spring's
Hubbub of glad bells, I send out this dispatch
Of language cheapened by the darkness,
A note set down for no one, asking
Only to be delivered.

Helen Dickinson

SLEEPING ALONE

Dreams play leap frog
back through years
land on sunken
lily pads

My grey friend barks
with his eyes
I wake and weep
for my sins
then sleep a log
all quiet

Prince Hal sails in
full bastard
maidenhead cask
on the fly
I hack up his
royal bones
He rides to Kent
unwounded
I wake and scream
for his sin

Now there's Norman
in the trees
teaching kissing
Norman please
clear as oak arms
on the moon
you are a priest-king
of my nights
my undying
maidenhood

Where are you now
old snowbank

Daniel Halpern

GREEN

How the color pleased you,
how you worked its various hues
and wooed them and took them in.
The green freedom of a singing bird,
green uncertainty, green fluency,
green of the wing and of the ring,
of the evil in the dry machine.
You traced the paradisaal green
of slippers as they padded for you
the muted sound of green.
The air on your way to work was green.
The air of your dreams was green.

There is a moment at sea
when the sun goes down that everything
turns bright green.
Green fiction. You are gone.

Paul Zimmer

Two Poems

WORRYING ABOUT YOU

Dear Wanda,

Worrying about you all the time,
I could just as well be drowning.
I went to see your act last night,
Sat down on my piles, in the doldrums,
My soft teeth aching in the grind,
Eyeballs burning through bifocals;
Then you floated into the spotlight,
Hands unfolding, folding like sting rays.
The cymbal started to sizzle as

You slipped out of cloths and floated
Them to the sharks in the audience.
The circles of your thighs and calves,
Bob and weave of belly and breasts
Making the whole room sigh and sweat.

And you would give these things away
So easily! The secrets all of us
Had burned to see, you revealed as
Lightly as a perch can lay its eggs.
Even the band saw everything!

Wanda, I went out into the night,
My eyeballs rolled through ashes,
Cold air fired my teeth up,
My poor ass bled with the knowledge
That you aren't precious anymore.

So long,
Cecil

A MONTH AGO

Dear Wanda,

A month ago the sun disappeared,
Clouds swelled up like giant fungi.
I figured something big was up
So I tore the old barn down
And built myself a ponderous raft,
Hoisting the house to put on top.
I laid in a hundred cases of Coors,
Then I gathered animals two-by-two:
The sweet swine and foul goats;
Cattle to breathe me some peace;
I went a long way for rhinoceros;
The lions ate the sheep before
I could get them in; two turtles;
Two hares in heat; two treefrogs;

And a pair of rutting reindeer.
The snow geese boarded each other
In anticipation of their nest!
Wanda, I had big plans for us as well,
But as the rain began to fall
I could not find you anywhere.
Water is up to my armpits now,
Elephants and plough horses kick
The boards right out of the keel.
Termites gnaw at the strakes.
But why should I give a damn?
Wanda, where the hell were you?

Still fondly,
Rollo

Robert Lietz

TRYING TO SECOND-GUESS THE GYPSY

When you descend the plank stairs,
she is already seated, notations in front of her
in a fine hand. Leaves, prints of leaves,
smoke in the room like a presence, adorn the upholstery
and on the warped shelves her cracked leathers
seem to dance. You are drawn to each other: flint
to rock in a closed space. Outside this address,
outside the purlieus of your vision, what you have sought
assembles. She tells you about your children, describes
the Michaels and Allison's not born yet. You have heard
all this beforehand. But the absence of arching cats
and star-charts suggests she's authentic. Call it reality.
Call it soap hollowed by hot water. Her oak table,
ordered to one leg as predicted, jigs to a hornpipe.
The closed circles she entertains in secret hum.
Figure as on film, you backtrack. You slow your retreat
into taking stock. There may be no sense to breath,

no sense to her dark lid closing on the world. There is your foot, that transects the planet, this endurance of extremes, and you, like the first-owner, anxious for a word about your hand-me-down's arrival. She will search your lapels for mirrors you have concealed. She will discover the recorders hidden on your person. Yielding no keys, no passwords, her familiars, like smoke and silk, like hardwood, splitting its grain from laughter, they allow no place for you to put it next: the face in your hands that brands you. Your cheeks puff. No sounds other than the holding back of breath. Their applause and catcalls prod. You go by separate stairs.

Harold Witt

Three Poems

MUIR'S HOUSE

Past the Colonel's chicken here's Muir's house—
quite a comedown from his range of light—
not even among buttercups—we browse
the high Victorian parlors of his plight.

You can't stay up forever—even he
descended finally to tend the vine
and squint into a stereoptican
at stopped Yosemite, while time ticked on,

his prophet's beard against white curtain lace,
his sky reflecting eyes in steel rimmed glasses—
bent to these marble basins, his Scotch face
that had dipped to pristine pools down vast crevasses.

It's on a hill—the best view in Martinez—
a belltower, humming with flies, from which we see
metal powerlines crossing other hills
and a blue glimpse of bay this smogless Sunday.

COW

She has a liquid look,
round, romantic eyes,
dew on her flyey nose—

you think—not too bright?—
placidity herself—
a slow neck bent to grass—
cowlike—what else?

Her hooped step clanks a bell,
her motion suits her moo,
her half moon udderswell,
her ruminating chew
in pastoral or barnyard
help us to the view

that after Sturm und Drang,
to nature and to us
grassy peace can come—

her calm bucolic face
in pastures of a psalm's
green contentedness.

COMMERCIAL

I don't buy that Land of the Free brand—
it contains sneaked-in ingredients
that didn't get listed—
and when you pull the tab
the red white and blue package
spangled with fifty stars
plays the first few bars
of God Bless America
so loud you can hardly see
it's settled to the bottom
with certain preservatives added
and artificial color.

FIRE

Even though the siren is in the distance
you know where it is heading

Even though the fire has not yet begun
your burning is already in progress

Slowly, somewhere behind your eyes
it began one night and though it was just a

smoldering heat, you immediately sensed
its greed That is when

you first began crawling on hands and knees,
hoarding oxygen in your clenched fists

You know what is coming—
Sympathetically you watch those

still standing, inhaling smoke in gulps
and not even knowing enough

to cough But sadly there is
little time for warnings or chats

when the smoke is already acid
in your eye

You keep crawling at a
steady pace, watching

the signs and arrows
that lead to the fire escape

and when you reach the roof,
well-trained from a lifetime

of fire drills,
you exit the building surefootedly

like a victor and from below

the blind crowd screams
as if they didn't know

that you are just one step ahead
of the rescue team,

that you are wearing a red cross over your chest
and have come here to save yourself

as best you know how

Their voices break open like sirens
as if they didn't see

the flames splattering
in relief on the street,

the smoke dissolving
in the air

YOUR SHIRT

When you hang yourself
in the closet
at the end of the day
you are

not silk but
flannel, grey, a
faded plaid with
white lines streaking
through
like the rib
cage of a bird, like your

breath
when it sleeps
there. Disembodied,
you are

finally visible

I see not the
shirt but
the worn spots. They are
your elbows, the
awkward bones, the turns
that

came without warning
leaving the
inner threads
naked—not torn just
open, durable strands
of
thickspun nerve,
silent but ready
like mute guitar strings

When you hang yourself
in the closet
at the end of the day
and bury

what's left in the
old skin—
white sheets,
our

heap of comfortable,
often-washed dreams,
I open the door
and put on that
shirt, the

old touch—
familiar as cotton, soft as
breath. And from the inside
I feel it once again—

the heartbeat, your
movement—persistent as
the darkness that grows wild
around us

Carol Frost

BONFIRE MAKERS

Sharks' teeth light. The sand bald,
first, as if it were far away.
Closer its cellars and mountains of glass,
its jaws: the bonfire catches
and the sand cannot stand still.

A shadow leaps to a growing dune
like a sword eel through weeds. Where
does it go?

The fire clicks its tongue and teeth.
Scarf, face, star in the sand. Our faces
snagged on a shining bone of light.

Our icy eyes. The picket fence
in our faces. Hold a red hand up—
shipwreck, tangle of veins.

The wind blows the other way
and we are bodiless; fish skin
and navies of shadows. Too dark,
too dark. We call for spawn,
prey, clear water ribs, and
faces and fins of light in the salt lagoons.

Phyllis Hoge

LETTERS

for Caroline Garrett, for Rene Tillich

The street is close by
Just past the cement waterworks station
I parked at, chained to prevent entry,
And I am the only one
Circled with first light
And solitary in a green stand of papyrus
Where hundreds of smooth, three-sided rods
Slip upward from rusty sheaths, clawlike in mud,
To a spray of grassy threads the wind is hushed in
Overhead.
And it is Egypt the wind blows in.
The muddy stream underfoot slides out of Egypt.

Beyond the brake, the still reservoir clarifies lines,
Slanted and straight and bent,
In a brightening sheen.
Farther, the sleep of abiding mountains.

And still in their quiet houses
The lovers sleep.
The morning grows stronger.

But for hours you've been awake
Whom I wish for, to lean into, braced
In green rods, roots in the mud. Where
Are you now?
Awake, lively, standing or sitting or walking,
Or do you ride,
Listening
For a wind that blows in Egypt?

The full light of day falls on the smooth papyrus.
I will go back
And take out ink and paper to write

In the good common tongue
Letters you'll have in your hands two days from now.

For what we have declared yet holds,
Far as the sunlight falls,
A fact as strange as the wind of Egypt blowing here
In green papyrus.

Mary Tall Mountain

GRANDMOTHER'S DREAM

Grandmother!
I see you sleeping.

Is your tlamas flashing
Through silver scales of Gaal?
Your brown old hands are trembling.

Does Telega, the Hawk,
Struggle in your snare?
Your tired arms are waving.

Is your shining hair blowing
Black in the wind above your net?
Your grey head is quiet.

Are you dancing swift as Hodaalk'un,
Who burns the forest birches?
Your little moccasins shuffle.

Is that Grandfather, young again,
Impatient at your tent?
Like a wild rose by the river,
Your wrinkled face is smiling.

Grandmother!
I see you sleeping.

THE PATRON OF THE GARDEN

what became of the sea's dream . . .
and the onion that died like a saint
from the head down

—Levine

There seemed always the fleas, Mister Dog's
maybe, come to lay eggs in his shirt.
He remembers pumping water, the chick chick
of a small bird, gliding to nest
in his pocket. Where this all started, he can't
be sure: the air steps aside when he walks now,
earth goes thanks-please-thanks with each new squeak
of a heel. Their green tips creased,
his onions salute him. Mushrooms bow down.
When neighbors call, they find him kneeling
in tomato vines, two worms inching up his arm.

Years ago, he thought he died. He woke to find
his wife gone, her half of sheet smoothed
down and pillow fluffed. In that purple light
he could not feel his thinking,
could only rise, forgetting everything
as it came: floor, light on wood, teeth along
his coated tongue. He ran through alders in the fog
toward where he thought
he left something. At the creek, a trout
still kicked. Leaves sang hallelujahs to its gutting,
fell and snagged their edges in his hair.

He can hear his thinking now. He can
recall. He can weed his rows of carrots
and feed the village children when they come.
One day, a prelate's carriage draws up, dusty
cassocks grow into their shadows. When they bless him
in a rain of holy water, make him saint,
he bows, turns back upon his onions, and spits

into a furrow. Until his death, he never tires
of the leaching salt, modesty of tubers,
or the three-sided wondering of crows.

THE WELL

The more we draw from it, the more red silt
comes up suspended in our drink. The sun,
soon enough, will not shine through our water,
and as light catches, turns onto itself
by the inner swirling of flecks, we know
this lies in the nature of something else,
some failing we have overlooked.

Our birds

leave us, circle for an entire morning
before heading north, toward rain. Expecting
calamity in their departure—
movement of earth, a seven-year drought—
the young ones whisper among themselves
about escape to the mountain, living
high at the snow line, in caves.

Each day crust

grows thicker inside the bucket, until
at last a woman draws her full issue
of mud, skeleton and the purple eye
of carp. Some take then to packing the ooze
in presses reserved for wine. Drops fall slow
and blue with lead. Others, knowing their task,
tie rope, carve blocks, climb down into the well.

All winter we line the earthen walls, drink
what little snow heaven sends us. By spring
the level rising pure from thaw, and those
who have not died from poison flesh or lead
sing orisons of thanks—draw freely from the well.
Some still blame demons, though we know better:
as birds return, dip wings, they too seem changed.

G. E. Murray

CHICAGO JOURNAL: *TURNING THIRTY*

Soon you will remove your last black boot
To go barefooted, and blind to boot,

Your hot tracks vanishing in a late rain
Like taxis. Still, you select the rain,

Expecting miracles, inventing a dance
Which can't be interpreted as dance

Alone. The old propaganda of clouds
Is helpful, too, when entering clouds

Of forgetfulness like a grappling hook.
Then you get lucky, break a leg, hook

Onto the still life you skunked all year.
Twenty-nine, naturally, was a fine year

For crashes: Try a dive into the familiar
Porcelain of your skull, or unfamiliar

Doorways like a drunk in foggy orbit,
Even houses of skin, forever at orbit.

In barefeet, you greet the feel of water.
To the sky above, you are only water.

Forgive the sky its clutter, your body
Slumped in this park, an accidental body.

The park delivers the camouflage you love,
The obscurity, a simple menu of love

Offered as footnote to the wild fiction
Told to the heart at midnight: A fiction

Of surfaces and fingerprints, the story
Of the blind astronomer, all within a story.

In a flush of dreams dealt like poker hands,
You sing sightless, talking with your hands

Full of pencils and a tin cup of air.
None of your bones rust without an air

Of sadness. Soon you must flee your changes.
Soon you can maneuver by the braille of changes.

Thomas Brush

LETTER FROM THE STREET

Morning. And the alleys give up
The darkness without a sound. The half-spilled moon
Still glows at mid-day. I wonder why?
No matter. The Mission opens to smoke
And soup, and lies wrapped in newsprint.
I take another turn. The wine
Is warm and thick as July. I remember
Towns like this, dust and a blank sky, stores
Boarded up. The badlands are behind me, or balanced
In my hands like the bottle I pass
To Willy No Legs. Beyond me on ruined wood
the price of sleep is 50 cents.

The river is winding
Down, clogged with ice and mud, rust,
Dead things. If only I could shovel the past
Away like snow. That would be something.
There's another country in front of me
That has pockets, and a face
Full of death. The black stars
Are broken glass.

Good-bye.

Samuel Green

COMMENT / EXCHANGE WITH A STUDENT
ON THE LAST DAY

*Her eyes are dark clouds
trying to define their breaths.*

Q. Who taught you to hate poetry?

A. A one-legged man hobbling about the park
feeding his stump to the pigeons.

*Her eyes are a pair of leopards
prowling through black lungs.*

Q. What sorts of things do you like?

A. Nothing that would stay etched in a tomcat's eye.

*Her eyes are flared nostrils
of a startled deer.*

Q. Where will you end up?

A. At the bottom of a dry well, after the blue rain stops.

*Her eyes are cautious paws
going where they want to.*

Q. When did you decide to be what you are?

A. During a storm so fierce even the wise bats were lost.

*Her eyes are frozen muscles
stiff as old leather.*

Q. Why can't I get through to you?

A. Because no one tolerates the sand sliding into a watch case.

*Her eyes are an army
of quick claws.*

Q. How can I leave you like this?

A. Through no fault of your own, in the middle of a mad
woman's dream.

*Her eyes are full stomachs
babbling in their slow digestion.*

Jack Matthews

THE BEARS

Hibernating

They grow into humps of grass;
water might drip upon them as soundlessly
as the working of a rifle bolt miles away.
The breath of fawns might curl
the hairs on their sides.
Dream lambs walk over them with fastidious steps,
alert for the soft shadow of a bear.
Stumbling over them, hunters often
pause to carve meat from their hams,
with the patience of slicing pale cheese—
even at such times, hibernating bears
have never been known to waken.

Awaking

No wonder their eyes are weak at first,
and the forest a shimmering pink; they
amble forth in loose irregular circles.
Sometimes they have sneezing fits
under the tallest pines; sometimes
they sit for hours and stare drunkenly.
At the first nightfall, they always stay awake,
remembering that they have understood
this darkness from the other side.
This darkness is larger than everything.
It is exactly what bears look like
to all the animals they have eaten.

Robin H. Seyfried

HANGING ON

(For Mother)

I There are leaves in the poems now,
a crisp yielding underfoot.
It is killing time
that matters to the Muse;
the mumbling shrunken bitch,
snose chinked in her teeth,
demands a kiss,
a kiss for her ripe old age.

Here is the endless fall
dreams hold.
The last leaves are tanned,
scattered like cereal on the ground.
Death: breakfast of champions.
Here is morning
shaken from a rumpled sky.

It is the season for deadlines,
for the nagging scent of mulch, leaves
pulled or blasted into glittering heaps.
The weight of dormancy
grazes the spine, branches
are drowsy, idly scraping against walls
as the Muse plays trick or treat,
her knock promising no one
at the door.

II Your Chicken Soup Ethic /
my Puritan Work.
You clump into my poems
iambic with gout,
offering ice cream, scotch,
ripe colors printed on pavement—
a cornucopia of comfort.

Tell me you love autumn
and do not appreciate
death:
In all this wind
there must be something
that falls, something that clings
breathless.

III But the leaves—
You must understand the leaves
are turning:
spun to claws in the barren air,
splayed on wet walks
making steps uncertain;
turning for another fall.

Turn,
Fall,
slapstick choreography
for a broken-nosed ballerina.
Here is the dance that holds the mind
still; the holding out
of imagery for its afterbirth,
for the fullness of decay.

Diane Furtney

Two Poems

EVERYPOET, EVERYMAN

For C. L. C.

He opened a cloud and read its contents.
Before he finished he had learned them by heart.
He paid assorted annual premiums. He could fly
to Rhodesia for the Protea cynaroides
or drive a colorless car in the rain
to rust it red. Invariably
he ate eggs as eggs, not sacrifices.
He managed to keep his papers in order.

He knew he used blue too much
and did not use it again.

As for her,
he never once even touched her shoulder.

He would feel the world ache in its stones
for the lack of more stone. He stopped
praying to Boethius. Twice
he knelt to Bartleby the Scrivener,
once to Our Lady of the Bars.
He wrote letters to bannisters,
to a long strip of carpet, to the elegant
Corona Borealis, and repeatedly to the War.

He came to believe simply in up and down
when he had lost a final faith in Chinese.

He came to know how to press a light finger
against the mineral beat of the earth.

He tried to buy clothes on sale.
He shaved, he voted. By the end
he could see what might have happened in daylight
rustling under the leaves.

NIGHT RAID

The woman by the highway is wearing a dark blue coat.
Very good. The darkness is deserted.
More to the good. Now you swerve the big car,
there is a hush of tires on the asphalt shoulder,
and you stop. Quickly now she has moved inside,
the flash of inside light is over.
She is the same: the same heartshaped face,
her mouth, the melancholy, you can feel sure
she brings the same hands, the hard abdominal scars.

It seems necessary not to speak. But of course

why would you? You have done all this
exactly before, you both know all the arrangements.
Still, it is riskier from now on, your mission now
into its late logistics; will she stay
small enough to be invisible at the border?
It seems, but only seems, that anything might happen.
Here are the hills now, dim, uncertain,
the heaviness about them looks thick and empty.

She is somehow reassuring. And suddenly
you know: you can use this darkness,
it will stay here at your disposal.
The earnest border guards, brought up in light,
will always stand confused at the darkness;
your passport will always look authoritative;
it is certain you can smuggle this woman
again and again, any night inside
what might have been the newness of your life.

Brendan Galvin

Two Poems

JUMPING THE GRAVE-SIZED HOLE

There are still a few places
not sold to people in tennis whites

whose flesh is tanned like old pennies,
whose cars block traffic all August at the P.O.

It's October, aftershocks of surf rush back
into the trees, filling the absence of small-talk,

and though pole beans extend themselves still,
looping along fishing line,

still forcing out a few, popcorn-like blossoms,
somewhere in the earth a drain has opened,

the garden is sinking, the corn waits in its bandages
for winter. I walk up a sand road

hemmed by wild blackberries, an unseen bird
hunting and pecking the underwood's last morsels,

and it comes home stronger that
the faces of my children will mingle with other faces

and come back with only a feature or two of mine,
and someday a stranger will take his daughter

by the hand to show her these mushrooms
pushing through edges of asphalt, wearing its grains

on their lumpy hats. Farther in, jumping
the grave-sized hole a realtor dug to keep out

kids and campers, I duck under dead, rain-softened trees
criss-crossing the road: charred beer cans and kindling,

lobster husks faded pink, and on the hog'sback ridge,
a steep half mile above the sporadic whine of a car,

a burnt-out house like a rotten tooth: one white wall
standing, the whole kitchen tumbled

into the cellar, enduring oxidation's
cold burn, and tall as a man this year,

the stripling poplar rooted in a mattress
flashes metallic lights as if to say no sale is final,

each purchase may be redeemed. This could be the set
some New England Wagner cooked up, but no baritone

steps out of mottled scrub to deliver an aria
from the promontory beam ending in char above the debris.

The histrionic bathtub levitates on its plumbing,
but this far above the water table there's no secret spring

to drink from. Let someone whose face is set
with the rigors of new money take a chainsaw to the place

for homelier fires, and fit the bricks to other patios.
I wish one cinder block into fear's repository,

walk it out the beam and let it drop. But the way up
is still the way down, no lighter for having stepped into

someone else's disaster, and just when self-pity
begins to argue that the garden slug, a tube for

excreting and gorging, has the best of life,
a squirrel begins unshingling a pine cone on me.

Over Pond Village, Sladesville, Paine Hollow,
the sky is deepening each night, growing enormous for

Orion and the Wolf Moon. Soon, our roofs under
babushkas of snow, hours when blueness wells from

the footprints of a cat. What are we anyway, but a few
windows mirroring each other, deep in the hills' pockets?

GOODBYE

21, thumb out in
the breakdown lane,
he's your old man and
you're his almost 20-
year-old lady. The baby's
name is Zeus, the brown dog
is Brown Dog, and
the Revolution is how
you threw home away like

a Girl Scout uniform because
your mother cooked red meat
so you couldn't bliss out.

Between his waffle soles
and your platforms, the orange
backpack from Colorado Sports,
contents: two quarts of tokay,
an album by Lead Thumb, denims;

his journal, *Hear the music playing
in your mind*, contents:
large *lonliness*, misspelled,
competing on page 1
with a 23 word haiku;
nickel bag, hand-carved bong,
more denim. More and more,
grandmothers are donating
their grins for cryogenics.

The human comedy, except
it's you, incapable of logic
as a setter roaming edges
of an Interstate, licking
its sides sore with a raw tongue,
confused by vans of boredom
drooling lysergic sunsets
on panels like tequila ads.

More and more these nights,
your father dreams himself
into a painting of Rousseau's.
The moon's casaba melon
opens above your mother's
shoulders, the invitation of
her breasts, but the field
is poison ivy
to her waist. She warns him,
Don't come over,
and he doesn't wade in.

Thomas Reiter

Three Poems

IT'S NOT BAD ONCE THE WATER GOES DOWN

You'd always come across him, often as not
feet-up, somebody's bayberry shrubs
giving off whiffs of gin
where Zalenka bruised them, falling,
his face like something you'd expect to find
that close to roots.

So when he disappeared again that spring,
no one doubted he'd turn up. But this time
we figured the river: hadn't someone's father
bottom-fishing above the lock and dam
snagged a pitchman from a touring circus?
If *he* came from the Mississippi,
why not Zalenka?

Mornings before school a little ice
rode inside the marina, and fog
spilled over the floodgates. Low stage
from a snowless winter upriver, a spring
so dry the catkin and vernal-grass
stayed such a color you'd never believe
there wasn't cinnamon in the wind.
Wheeling our trotlines till they hummed,
we made the channel.

While the current worked Zalenka
past sandbars toward our grappling rigs,
we jammed a nightcrawler on each gang hook
for catfish or carp, to pass the time:
Remember that record crest? Peosta slough
at Zalenka's place the third year in a row,
on higher ground the whole east side
sandbagged but losing, TV reporters everywhere,
and he steps up and tells the world,
"It's not bad once the water goes down."
For months kids trailed him, chanting that.
We wanted to bring him in
before he turned floater, the sheriff's prize.

Coming back at dark, we set our trotlines out;
the next morning hauled them in
to check for scraps of clothing or flesh
stripped off like pickled trolling rind.
What got to us
was how we could come up empty
day after day.
Maybe he made it past us during school
while our lines lay hidden in a docking float
and the lock opened for winter wheat
barged down from St. Paul.
All we ever caught
that took both of us to dredge up, hand
over hand, was an old bull channel cat
with its fry still live in its mouth.

THE DAY BEFORE OPENING DAY

for Peter

I ease my knapsack to the ground
beside some posted woods, unfold
hackle, thread and hooks
where hatchery trucks could never make it
and the rainbows are real.
You've promised not to let the creek
out of your sight; so while you snap a path
through bankside tiger lilies,
their dry stalks fletched like arrows,
I seine the gravel bottom, bringing up
the morning's hatch in hellgrammites
and the brittle cases of caddis worms.
I match them, dry fly and streamer.

Meanwhile those watchful empty stems
have stopped saying anyone's there.
I pick up signs where the woods begin:
white as stones in the cold riffles
I overturned for larvae, there's
a patch of flowering bloodroot

you went through to break your word; then
a few bruised lavender hepatica, on one
what has to be a fingerprint;
deeper, a stump of loblolly pine,
its green cup lichen tumbled off; no sound
of water now—a mushroom blackened by the cold,
its cap broken, its ripe spoor raided,
might be the *angel of death*.

Each bloodroot bud is furled
in its one pale leaf
when you strike the creek at dark
and I'm here, tomorrow's midges and nymphs
packed up. What's there to say?
I see on your back
the moon hunched like a knapsack.

BLACK BASS WILL TAKE THEM IN BAD WEATHER

Prince of pseudodoxies, totem, custodian of rain
tied to a sapling in Jaipur while the shaman
carries you from field to field, singing,
"Send soon, O frog, O jewel of water,
Rain to deepen the millet and the wheat!"
Upside-down on a crucifix
in Bristol, New Hampshire, you conferred on Aleister Crowley
the high magical grade of Magus;
when Hieronymus Bosch, in *The Temptation of St. Anthony*,
gives you the head of an aged man
it means all wisdom in one.
Thumb-size thrummer among bloodroot and shadblow,
on certain nights a flashlight blinds you and you drift
at the end of a line among hyacinth,
singing it is said
I-sa-ac I-sa-ac in the rain.

Jack Butler

A PRAYER FOR JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Lord, I have just been witnessed to, interrupted
in the middle of a butterfly poem,
by 2 women. And me near-naked, bare-legged, bare-chested,
cock hanging loosely in loose shorts.
They read Psalms 37, verses 10 and 11, aloud to us.
I keep discovering that you were well-versed,
that that beautiful sermon was not purely original
but the fruit of long study, long care,
that you made your truths out of the sweet mouths of the passionate
dead,
your masters.

The women would have had us
purchase a booklet explaining that we were created,
we had not evolved. Evolve, create: who did they think they were
talking to?

But charity is all, and they seemed gentle.
In heaven, Lord, in heaven—
as the good thief might have meant it,
seeing you noble, holy, and as he saw it, quite mad,
in his dying soothing you as he could
out of his pity, and you, you, what look
did you turn on him? In my story of it, you took his help
as it had been given, playing even that part
to help him, name him for all time selfless.

And this habit I have of talking to you
I got in my childhood—
persistent, though you are only a story in me,
a story out of which I make stories,
remembering with a chill that sentence beginning
“Not all that say to me, *Lord, Lord*”—

They were an older dark woman, a large ungainly young one
with acne and an angel of sweetness
flowering in her expression when she spoke of your word.

“Thou shalt diligently consider his place,
and it shall not be.”

They read that, too.

They'd have it you allow evil
in your great patience, unwilling for one to be lost.
I'd have it you can't help it, dear heart, suffering and dying
to be our one dream and true world.

O there among the perfected fruits, the inutterable flowers
of pure color, the dinosaurs harmlessly wandering
in the park on Sundays—
in heaven, Lord, in heaven, such as it is,
let charity be all our speech.

Robert Gillespie

FLOUNDERING FOR FIREWOOD IN DEEP SNOW IN
MAINE, I FLASH ON DOROTHY MOLTER'S LIFE AND
THEN ON THREE TIMES IN MY OWN

“The federal government has decided to permit Dorothy Molter, who
lives alone on an island in Knife Lake, Minnesota, to remain in the Bound-
ary Waters Canoe Area of northeastern Minnesota for the rest of her life.
The government also said a former prospector, Benny Ambrose, could re-
main. They are the only two persons still living in the half-million acre wil-
derness.”

—*Des Moines Register*, April 16, 1974

1 Clouds float by big as freighter canoes.
On damp rock ledge at Knife Lake after rain
I am dreaming of voyageurs.
Although the stars are as vast as all Chicago's
windows all washed,
in ghost canoes
—deep as snow with beaver and muskrat—
all night centuries of Frenchmen
drift out of the water, under the moon
portaging before me
talking traps and names of lakes,
cursing distasteful uncertain

days of settlements and women
for the taking. By sunup following
the course of the boundary waters into Superior
I am carrying my historical load:

- 2 hard brown, slim as the willow paddle
I carved myself—a boy in the dark
blue light of the lake
cool and clean and free.
From this blue and green morning on, I can see
lake and pine tree are home.
Set aside like a wilderness area,
lake after forbidden lake
I paddle untrespassed water:
with spring breakup, in my light body,
I take treaty. Nevertheless I know
my hands are buried alive in snow
in deep full summer when I touch land;
I know I am as buried
as late spring in white promises:
*“so long as wintergreen is green, the sky blue,
so long as waters run to the great lake,
in utmost peace with the ultimate
harmlessness of the spirit
I will live content.”*
White water seems
to welcome me and close
behind me. I leave
no trail, no spoor, no blaze. I am
satisfied with the white government of my life.

- 3 When I come back, brimful
with an armload, when the porch light of my house
sweeps out over the night's snow like a tow's on the river,
it is as if, although I have never camped here before,
I have been gone a long time.
I take some getting used to.

For I am still afraid of leaving
no vivid signature in the air but affection:

even after years I am afraid
I have squandered renegade lives nursing passersby on water
and let my life come undone season after season
like a birch tree leaning away from the wind.
Snow is smoking and blowing the road away.
On bear paws the thing I sought pursues
me across the white miles and miles of home.

Lewis Turco

THE BEARS IN THE LAND-FILL

These are their shambles: night falling
over the cascades of cans, broken jugs,
retired tires gone bald, inner springs
come out into the fall. We sit still
in the auto, waiting, our lights out,

everyone's lights flooding the sky,
not a cloud to worship, the pregnant moon
giving birth to bone: starlight and moonlight
over the land-fill. It is chilly
waiting, the radio crooning to

itself, muttering chanteys and
kyrielles under the dash. The watchman's
shanty blows in the wind, its shades flickering,
watching for bears in darkness. And then,
there they are in the naked headlamp-

light catching them unawares where
they shamble in cottage cheese and horsehair
loveseats gone to seed: nothing to cushion
the bare beam transfixing them where they
hunt in the junk and offal. Only

for a moment do they stand still,
stuck against starlight. Then, when they turn from

the limelight back to limerind and orange
peel, we get out of the car to stand
among the bears standing amid our

castoffs. We feel like castaways
in the dark of the moon, in the thick black
fur of the umber woods, a hunger in
our hides—the craving of outcasts that
the ravened land can no longer fill.

Michael Magee

Two Poems

CHOOSING MYSELF

I took my veins from leaves,
gathered my body
from the forest I found within.

From the ground I took my shadow,
I felt it flee from me,
holding light in my hands.

From the moon I took my eyes,
the gleam of a crescent,
the pupils dark as craters.

From the wind I took my seed,
it flourished, making my skin
from the peelings of bark.

I gleaned my color from snow,
my hair from milkweed, my breath
from moss on a stone.

I took the echo of wind
within my ear and listened;
it gave me my name.

From roots I took my dreams,
my secrets from a snail
curled within its shell.

Finally I culled the words
from beneath my eyelids
where they had been sealed.

I slipped them out, each
beneath my blankets,
under the cover of night.

And before I blinked,
one, two, and three
I had made them my own.

LAST WORDS

You will hear it first in the rumors
of wind that circulate around you,
trees will forget their names.

Then shadows will lose you, falling
further behind, deserting you
even on the brightest days.

Next you will shrink within your footsteps
each one diminishing your breath,
fingerprints will leave no trace.

Arteries and veins will begin to run out,
like your pulse, the lifeline dipping
through your open palms.

Finally the ringing in your head will start,
you will answer, hearing only dead air locked
within your chest as it clicks shut.

Steven Goldsberry

WITCH TEETH

Running with a rock in my fist
I catch one on the sidewalk.
They are slow old women
who can't see well in sunlight.
This one never even looked up.

I hit her on the dead run
and feel her face loosen around my fist
like pomegranate.
When I get home my mother
has me open my hand.

Looks like bloody corn, she says.
And she laughs and makes her mouth
a toothless hole. Wash them off
and put them in the bottle
with the others, she tells me.

The bottle is an old bean jar
from the pantry, made of clear glass.
Mother holds it up to the light
in the evenings and shakes it.
The teeth rattle like porcelain seeds.

Getting so I can't even recognize
my own in here, she says.
She dozes and snores on the chair,
the bottle of teeth between her legs.
She smiles her smile in her sleep.

My mother was beautiful once.
I've seen pictures, so it's not just her
telling me about it. Then one night
the witches came into the yard,
clacking their brooms on the picket fence.

They appeared like magic
in her bedroom. They rustled like hens.
My mother had something in bed
with her that belonged to one
of the witches. So they beat her

with the broomhandles, saying Now
look at you, now look at you,
but my mother could only see
their smiles in the darkness.
Nothing belongs to no one

if they can't keep it, my mother says.
She found all her teeth in the morning
and went and put them in the bean jar.
I was smaller then but I
remember the wind kicked up

that day and slammed the shutters
against the house and made the rooms
seem to breathe. I ran scared
into the kitchen, where my mother
sat at the table, the jar

in front of her. Out the window
the trees rocked in the dusty wind.
You know how you like collecting
things, she said to me. She gave me

the bottle and had me shake it.

CONTRACT

A Kind Of Imagined Translation, Including A Quote
From The Copy Editor's Notes To The Galley Proofs
Of My Last Book

*The casket bears the name of both Tutankhamun and his
queen, and contained two balls of hair wrapped in linen,
which are thought to indicate some kind of contract.*

—Catalogue to the Tut exhibit

This is what I say: the leg is a smooth road.
Two legs are two smooth roads, and they meet
at the thatch where the beast lives. Let
the beast live. Let it work the hackles.
Let us be each a lair for a beast, in the small
tangle left of our animalhood, as in a woods
miniaturized every day by the great blades of civilization but
made more intense, let the last of the beasts collect.
Let the whole sun funnel into a kernel, a single kernel,
let it hold the sun, and in the field
you will run your hand through my hair or
I mine through yours, there will be sun enough, and
more than enough, and we will say it is fine,
this hair, this love-in-a-field. Let the hair
grow long, then let our love be hair. There are filaments,
thinner than anther, lighting rooms. There are fingers
on toggles now for which entire rivers churn break
and wash low wattage over bedsheets: let us remember tungsten
filaments by the ten-thousand lowered pierward
roughly by hemp rope. And so when some nights you say or
I say how coarse it is, then let it be coarse. Let the hair
be cut, but it grows, let it be cut many times
and it grows many times, then let it look short but
the hair all hair is long, then let our love be hair.
Let us sing of our love: Let our love make its oils.
Let the page, this page, sing. Let our children,
who get in our hair, come out of our hair
and sing. When the pages run long,

let the folio also run long. Let our love
be hair. Let our love survive
bad jokes on parting, on fallings-out.
Let the throngings to oooh in museums be more
than all of ancient Egypt, let them do this
homage in front of the unwrapped boy-king,
his gold mask so placid, his golden eyes watching his
new court, us, his golden hair. His life was
cut short. Let it grow after death.

POEM AGAIN: OF DUPLICATION

Now if a kiss smacks xeroxglass a
man can smooch a mailing list
a minute, no effort. Duplication:

a minute, no effort. Duplication:
this left-front-fender
chorusline playing a room in Detroit,

duplication: each fender
its man. He lifts his welding torch.
Ommateum: they

lift their welding torches. Tonight
he'll phone her / "I miss you, all day
I'm a flame" / and his voice takes place a city

away, electrical (telephone), chemical (ear's
reception), emotional (mind picks up the relay)
duplication —it sparks a correspondent

flame in her. I see them tonight,
cross-country: tiny lights in the darkness
like switchboard. I see

fly-eye: relentless
row of kewpie dolls, starfish
in perpetuity, every welder's testes

amoeboid, every waitress a clock
a month. Did I call you tonight, did I
miss you, did I duplicate

the message in stanza four, on a level
more personal, in an order only ours, but,
just the same, the same? All day

I'm a flame. All night I'm repeating
rosary, cloned cell, low income housing, faucet drip,
DNA, you in my head. DNA, you in my head. DNA,

in the window at BIG JIM'S DISCOUNT TEEVEES, this
cowboy's aiming his gun at this cowboy's
aiming his gun at this cowboy's aiming

Gary Margolis

Two Poems

THE JEWELER

After midnight plows appear
rumbling out from their salt sheds.
The roads are drifting.
I bend over my light, turning
the stone face by face until one
surface reveals the seam
of the mine.
D shaft is barely lit.
Head lamps grow dimmer.
A miner picks out a star
in the sand. A blizzard of diamonds,
of glass rages.
Once I saw a star leap like this,
a piece of ice,
flickering blue and yellow fires.
I was afraid and sought the comfort
of a friend.
We talked until I touched her hand,

the star, without melting, without burning.
I see her now in the mirror
of the stone, sliver
of the married earth,
waving me home.
I must split the gem's
light and frozen fire.
I must strike here.

A PORTRAIT OR A BOX OF MATCHES

*Treat anything you undertake with dignity,
a portrait or a box of matches.*

—Alfred Stieglitz

We sit on your mother's blue couch.
She is away keeping another man's figures.

The sun shines dust on your dead father's portrait.
He glows when you strike a match.

Tonight he will shine.

You tell stories your uncle has told you,
with his inflection, pausing where he draws
on his cigar.

Anna, I am here to leave you.

There is no other way to say this.

These tales of snowdrift, skiis
shaved from spruce planks, young boys
carving the Estonian fields,

I promise I will not forget one.

They are rings I can wear
and keep in this matchless box.

CALLING HOME

I call about my father's business.
 Mother takes the hard route, the climb
 upstairs to the bedroom, where the bed
 used to be. Father stays where he is.

How goes it? I say to him, and it does.
 Mother says, *Don't expect him to say too much.*

Suddenly I hear everything he is saying:
 His knees have forgotten to go up stairs or down.
 His eyes have forgotten there is light to let be.
 My mother and I are talking about snow, the terrible snow.

When he goes to the mirror, Father says, one face
 cries out aloud, but the other is still. He forgets
 buckling and unbuckling, the complexities of buttonholes.
 Sometimes he forgets the boy across the street
 who shovels their snow, and sometimes he remembers him
 but calls him by our secret name that was mine.

Don't worry about us, says Mother. *Don't worry, don't worry.*
Never, I promise, again and again. *What's to worry?*

My father is trying to say one thing, something so terrible
 it must be said out loud. *Be careful,* he says, *driving after dark.*
 He thinks again I am coming to get him, to take him away.

Darlin', my mother says to him then, *he's in Seattle,*
remember? He won't be in today. There is so much love
 in the touch of her voice, if the phone company heard,
 it would charge night rates. *I forgot,* says my father,
 but he says it again: *Be careful driving after dark.*

For days after I hang up, I hear him. He names over and over
 all he has forgotten. How old he is. How old I am. His dead father.

He has forgotten any women he ever knew. When have we ever
 talked on so long? *Father,* I write him here, *father, it's all right*
to be old. What do I know? What does he know? For the first time
 I am afraid of the dark. *Sing me a sleep-song,* I ask him,
 from a poem. He is seventy now, and this is his business.
Be careful, he tells me. *Be careful driving after dark.*

WINTER CONSTELLATIONS

Now the wintriest constellations
 rattle their cold chains
 against my roof.

This evening
 I find all I have lost in the sky.

There is the basket I raised for my son
 and there is the net of stars raining down.

There the bright cloud of his mother's hair
 vanishes forever all night long.

North of Lake Washington my father climbs
 ghostly in the hunting fields. His eyes
 are hollows where nothing shines.

He says he has nothing to say to me.

Someone has carved a deer on the wall of moon.

This is the stippled history of desire.
 This is winter and evening, framed by trees.

Tonight the Cascades circle like a well
 where rings like water open out and out
 until they break on that black rock of space
 where the bound princess writhes in links of stars
 and lures the sea-beast up from the sea.

About Our Contributors

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