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# Poetry

NORTHWEST



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# POETRY NORTHWEST

SPRING 1977

*Gwen Head*

Four Poems

## THE TEN THOUSANDTH NIGHT

Prince, this is my last story. Listen  
to the din that screams through clenched teeth into your ears.  
Feel the hot grit scour your eyelids, and the force  
that lifts and whirls you through thinnest air to the uttermost  
edge of the world, effacing all inscriptions,  
as the djinn's furious breath sputters and stops.

This is the last oasis. An obsequious vapor  
hovers above the sandstone spines of palm trees  
and their hacked, bedraggled foliage. Restless among them,  
behind them, grimy silhouettes you guess  
as camels, cattle, hinds, black goats, pass  
and repass, their fabulous colors crushed to dun.

The hidden water jangles like a miser's purse,  
and you enter the last palace. Erected this instant,  
or coalesced, it has been here always, crumbling,  
or heaped up again, a dune formalized.  
Pass, prince, through the intricate portals that clamp shut  
as the glittering passages pale and narrow, while  
the dust you tread turns ever whiter and finer,  
desert skin no sun touches.

Now gloat over your last treasures: corroded chests  
brimming with the mild rainbow eyes of victims,  
the stolen glare of diamonds; and lamps to whose spouts  
you lean without touching, listening  
for the voice of murderous wind, and the vast

conspiracies of shipwreck. Scuttle over this wealth  
and fall, drowned and gasping, into the final

room. You are marooned in hollow glory  
carved by a giant tongue. The grandiose spiral  
of your life narrows to thirst. Before you, veiled,  
the last woman waits, salt-white, wavering,  
a fountain of tears grown old beyond all fiction.  
And now the clever hasps of her heart spring open.  
My lord, you are enthroned there, tiny, gorgeous,  
expectant.

But I have lost all my voices  
however many dog-eared nights remain.  
Prince, it has always been the same story  
and always it ends in death.

#### PROTEUS

*Greek Mythology.* A prophetic sea-god in the service of Poseidon (Neptune).  
When seized, he would assume different shapes, so trying to escape proph-  
esying. Hence, one who easily changes his appearance or principles.  
—*Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition*

My master liked to play tricks. He'd toss  
a shaggy blue paw at the shore  
and when he jerked it back like a clumsy conjurer  
there'd be mullet jumping, or a ransom  
of unspent agates, gone with the next wave.  
Little things.  
No matter how hard he tried  
his heart was too vast, liquid and cold  
to cram into one body.  
I'm more volatile. I think now he told me  
what to do out of jealousy.

Like any craft, it was hurtful and crude at first.  
How I struggled to throw the combers on, a pelt  
that seldom fit.  
I blush to recall my juvenilia:  
the three-legged bears, the tailless crocodiles.  
My audience didn't notice.  
Even then they complained I didn't communicate

though the tongues of my whole zoo rattled like clappers,  
though by then I had perfected  
all my little tricks of dentition,  
and my bones—this is prophetic!—functioned like slide rules.

Just when I got things right, they said I'd retired.  
But I went where the work was.  
The modern world offers too many theatres.  
The price of art is anonymity.  
Nobody recognizes the aberrant blip on the oscilloscope,  
the unexplained ghost on the late show,  
the alarm in the peaceful house.  
The times are against me: consider  
those cereals more permanent than marble.  
The work now is sterile, all bit parts and banality,  
those hideous lives of agar and centrifuge,  
as if simple replication were ever enough!  
I'm a classicist. I liked  
roles I could sink my teeth into.  
And only my vacations, being sunlight  
on a Dutch wall, or a hatch of Monarch butterflies  
by an abandoned railhead, have kept me  
—I can't say whole—but going.

I'm at the top, now, of my forms  
and I'm staying put.  
I am anything I choose  
though you're too slow to follow  
while I run through all my frequencies, visible, invisible,  
with the rippling grace of a dancer at the barre.  
Virtuosity has its hazards. Faster! Faster!  
My sine waves snap and hum like rubber bands.  
My peacocks and my coelacanths melt together  
into that gray, bureaucratic blur your dull eyes,  
beating twelve plodding times per minute,  
mistake for normal  
mistake for yourself.

But I know, I warn you, where I am going  
and my great speed steadies me.

## A MUSICAL OFFERING

for Marvin McGee

### I

At Christmas, your telegram:  
*I love you. I've lost  
your telephone number.* No one  
else gives me such presents, although  
I can't remember now  
what, when I called you, we said.

### II

*The nearer I came to my native city, the more frequent  
were the letters from my father. I therefore hurried forward  
as fast as I could, although myself far from well.  
My mother's disease was consumption. Seven weeks ago she died.  
Ah, who was happier than I when I could still  
utter the sweet name, mother, and it was heard?  
And to whom can I say it now?*

*I have passed  
very few pleasant hours since my arrival here.  
To the asthma which I fear may develop  
into consumption is added melancholy  
as great an evil as my malady itself.  
In Augsburg you lent me three carolins, but I  
must entreat for a time your indulgence.  
My journey cost me a great deal, and I have not  
the smallest hopes of earning anything here.  
Fate is not propitious to me here in Bonn.  
Pardon my chatter; it was necessary  
for my justification.*

*I am, with the greatest respect,  
Your most obedient servant and friend—*

Here,

on page eighty-nine, sunk in my own life,  
I abandoned Beethoven, and since have read no further,  
nor played his music, nor written to you.

### III

In the dark house all that remains  
is a gas log on the stone hearth

two brass urns in leaded window niches  
through which the blue day shines  
and a grand piano.

A girl raises the lid  
sits down and plays  
a Bach partita. There is pure, airborne order.  
The room lights up with blue butterflies.

A moment only. Her fingers stammer and stop.  
The wings clap shut. The thread of music snaps.  
Patiently she goes back, repeats, pieces together  
the broken ends. There is a way out  
of the dark house. She must have the wit to play it.

### IV

Last year I sent my piano,  
older than I, younger  
by far than you, away to be rebuilt.  
Where it stood, the percussion marks  
of my pedal heel overlapped  
like ragged valves, at the top  
of a lopsided heart outlined in yellow varnish.

Pianos age as we do.  
The soundboard, that heartwood  
dries with time into its glory.  
Cellulose, lignin, its ranks  
of vegetable pipes hum at the least touch.

But the metal plate, under tons  
of deep-sea pressure, buckles  
and sags like a sunk galleon.  
The rigged strings go slack.  
Bits of wire and felt  
sprout like hair in odd places.  
The machine, in short, decays. The singing voice  
falters, damped by excessive tolerances.

Now what a comeback! Copper strings like store teeth,  
a giant clipspring bolted into the belly

(that curve more tender than any living flank),  
and the huge shifty voice of a ventriloquist.

My cyborg, my pony, I don't know you,  
with your face-lift and your megaphone, mysterious  
like all my old friends.

V

Heartbroken when the Great War began  
old La Perouse stopped eating. Gide found his piano teacher  
in a threadbare velvet armchair, not wanting to die  
in the bed he shared with his termagant wife. The shutters  
were almost closed. Imagine that dark room  
with its senile clutter: a pile of hatboxes;  
a bureau covered with uncut books; a garbage can  
full of worn-out shoes; a dozen spirit lamps,  
lit and unlit, like random votive lights;  
untouched glasses of cider, and flies circling  
loud in the August heat. The old man's face  
was parchment white, spattered with the confetti  
of age, fever, chagrin. Picture his mouth,  
flabby and toothless, working its cud of grief.  
Gide slipped him swallows of cider and sips of broth  
each time he paused between injuries. Then he eased him  
to his feet, found his hat, and helped him downstairs.

So the man who had written *The Immoralist*  
and the old musician went their ways, La Perouse  
to his cafe, while Gide, unable to write,  
played Bach all day, "preferring," he noted later,  
"the fugues with a joyful rhythm" though the war went on.

Retelling this fable, I think of you and am comforted.

VI

Old man, I beg you, do not  
die yet. Teach me again  
the art of things done badly  
for love.

## THE FACTS OF LIFE

for Lee

The body is not on your side.  
While you are trying to sleep, or writing a poem  
in your head, it shelters the shadiest  
activities. In the attic  
they show blue movies  
and on the ground floor  
is an establishment whose interior  
is red, dim, plush.

Commotion in the bordello!  
The doors swing wide, the walls of the place are shaking.  
A mob of customers barges in.  
It is clear they are all villains,  
so many abstract twitching moustaches,  
so many leering eyebrows.  
They riot, yet all goes swimmingly.  
But one skulks behind the portières.  
He looks for a hidden door.

You would not like the madam.  
She is fat. She lolls in an antechamber.  
She doesn't come out for the party.  
She pouts. The truth is she never  
wanted to leave her sisters.  
But he finds her magnetic.  
He's a plunger. He loses his head.  
Spiderlike, she swallows him.  
But he doesn't die. They are  
beside themselves repeatedly,  
chromosomes clinging and cleaving,  
genes kissing their doubles.  
This goes on for months.  
The bordello becomes a machine shop.  
It is a growth industry.  
Overcrowding ensues.

In another scenario the floozie sulks alone.

It's an off night. The customers  
find the atmosphere poisonous.  
One or two take a look around  
But she isn't there, or she's wearing her hair in curlers.  
The place isn't what it used to be.  
Trash it! Tear down the curtains,  
rip the red paper to shreds,  
yank the stuffing out of the pillows.  
It all goes out with the garbage.

Each time, you are the informer,  
the outraged moralist, the vice squad.  
The body? It only wants  
to make you happy.

*Jay Meek*

Two Poems

#### PRELUDE TO RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

1.

The houses along the Moskva are like houses  
in coloring books, even the gardens,  
which seem to be made of something like snow,  
but it's altogether ramshackle,

how the roofs slant down to the white grass.  
And this is only the beginning,  
as the white gladioli bloom under the eaves,  
as a gateway stands, or almost stands.

2.

The houses along the Moskva are like houses  
everywhere, in need of more  
than maintenance alone:  
here the butcher lives, and here the grocer.

It is the time of miracles.  
And the czar's daughter has desires for them,  
desires their ramshackle cottages,

their sad lives,

which if combined might be adequate to a palace,  
might even resemble one life.  
So after an émincé of beef bourgeois  
to which the peasants are invited,  
it being their house,

the czarevna sits at their drawing room spinet  
and waits for the prelude to begin.  
Her great-aunt is coughing,  
and across the road there are branches down,

French chandeliers in the workers' orchards.

Then, in such a time of miracles and feasts,  
would it be provident to leave,  
and to what could one ever hope to return?

3.

Sometimes it seems the grocer's striped awning  
is a keyboard on which sunlight plays,

but silently, as if his shop were a museum,

and under it are oranges covered with snow  
which he erases in his sleep  
until they become more than simply oranges,  
more succulent than before.

It is as though a czarevna had begun screaming  
at the overthrow and death of her father,  
but in a silent movie,

and one in watching felt intimidated  
by the threat  
of incompleteness, the dark intervals of fields

with the half-moon rising over a pale orchard  
like a dagger, it is like that,

the scream one somehow feels obliged to make  
almost inaudibly for no reason at all.

4.

In such a prelude, the air is clear as gin,  
but dry, so dry and colorless  
one cannot say that he is drunk at midnight,  
or that the bottle was ever full.

But when morning comes to the Moskva  
over the ice a vapor rises,

and the butcher's children in coloring books  
follow their lines, going in circles  
around the czarevna or the gables or a gate,

going like smoke, like the spirits of Cossacks  
waiting in corners behind brooms  
or at the bottom of a churn.  
Nicolai Andreyevich, the banquet is finished,

someone has eaten the beef and the oranges,  
and it is time to begin.

For today begins the prelude, and that is all;  
the great stockyards fill with snow;  
the shops are open, as before.

#### STILL LIFE WITH ASPIRIN

(The title to an unwritten poem by Stevens)

1.

Assume that one evening a diva of the touring opera  
is lying on a medallion sofa  
with the back of her hand on her forehead  
as if her arm were broken.

And place beside her a vase of three-day roses  
whose petals have fallen like pennies  
on a sleeping crocodile.

Say in her hand is a copy of Villon's *Testament*,  
gold-leafed, but untouched in its Provençal.

And suppose her dressing room is papered in flock,  
but peeling, and that outside the theatre  
her lovers are near to clamoring,  
were it not for the hopelessness of the evening.

Now place with the roses two tablets of aspirin.  
O, the roses!  
Her broken arms, and bruises about the body!

2.

But, as it happens, hanging on a wall over the diva  
in her ravished beauty

there's a likeness of a diva reclining on her sofa.  
Her eyes are still as roses,

beyond translation; her neck, white as two aspirin.  
Villon is not in the painting,

nor the black coachman outside the theatre in rain,  
nothing that's in transit,

not the boy who has slipped from an iron railing,  
nor the woman taking pills with a lamp on.

The painting is as it is: only, after such clamor,  
the dressing room tilts

and her lovers must be angular as mimes to speak  
the difficult words of their adoration.

3.

Language in its sheer being is a form of notation  
open to transcription, so what was scored  
for organ now takes brass,

and what was once a concerto for diva and bassoon



becomes a serial innuendo for roses,  
or for snow  
when it is blown with roses outside the theatre;

so the translated poem reshapes itself to the time  
it is newly a part of,

and what was once an act of voice becomes an act  
of mind, not wholly divorced  
from the voice, but like the gestures of mimes,

it enacts from a dark hall, on a hopeless evening,  
words that make sense of the visible,  
while its origin in the proto-poem goes on,  
absolute in its one time

and idiom, like a still life of pheasants,  
or a museum piece from which eloquent  
approximations are made, and in their being made

the act of speech discovers its first circumstance,  
its ravishment and blood and roses  
whose petals arrange themselves in possible ways.

4.

But what if one found a body lying in a grave  
with its neck in a rope

that suddenly jerked until it pulled up a man  
who stood on a scaffold,

and in that man was a child wanting to be born  
who at his birth became

for his parents the apprehension of his birth,  
larceny, parricide, departure,

an undoing-of-things they gave the name Villon.  
and what if the diva

with her entourage did not arrive opening night,

that somewhere a bridge was out

or not yet built, and say her lovers hadn't come  
and perhaps had never lived,

that the theatre was simply a pharmacy which sold  
over-the-counter remedies

and when we said aspirin we meant the local name  
for something that did not exist,

then wouldn't we have been right in what we said,  
in whatever language we said it,

wouldn't that have been enough, and of some value,  
if we had, in fact, spoken.

### *Rob Swigart*

#### BONE POEM

The poems grow and fill with bones;  
the bones articulate, lashed together  
by ligament and tendon. They begin  
to speak: I am the bone, bone. The poem,  
once a bag of words, stiffens  
into a face sliding easily  
over the smooth fine grain of bone.  
It's all silly, of course, the bones  
don't really talk. But the full lips  
of the poem grow taut, and grin,  
showing white teeth. The arms bend at the elbow  
and rise up. The fingers hook  
into the sides of the mouth, and the poem,  
now filled with hundreds of bones,  
very solemnly and foolishly,  
wags its long red tongue on the air.

PLANKTON

Sometimes, at night, each one  
has a lightning bug in it.  
That's how you see them,  
invisible  
under and around the boat.  
I drop a pail over the side,

think how for herring  
they are three meals,  
phosphorescence  
in the flesh of bass  
and the deep blueness of whales.

They live their lives unseen,  
not just gray mobs without faces  
but like calm steady workers  
in some underground plot  
to keep the world alive.

I stare into the pail  
where thousands drift.  
When the sky is dark enough  
I'll row the dinghy out and lift  
oarsful of their dripping light.  
I won't miss the sun on the other side  
because it is here,  
brushed angel wings  
when I dive and float  
flapping my arms.

Later, I'll towel them from my skin,  
taste salmon,  
oysters,  
some of the little light.

REPLEVIN

If the beginning of love  
Is loss, possessing it  
In places where you know  
It can be seen, then  
The reason for love is  
Retrieval, arranging it  
To fit the space where  
It always might have been.  
If the manner of love  
Is displaying it, faithful  
As if belonging were,  
Then the assumption of love  
Is correcting it, rightful  
Proportions rightfully  
To restore. If the effect  
Of love is regaining it,  
In greetings as over  
Distances overcome,  
Then the source of love  
Is remembering it, the  
Illusion of love is  
Reshaping it, and the life  
Of love is embracing  
Its perpetual  
Unattainable selves.

COVENANT

To live with me and be  
My love, proposing it  
As if all the pleasures  
Came to the same test,  
Invites the love from living  
In for life, deposing it  
With an innocent lively

Tension of intent. And  
To live with me *or* be  
My love, selecting it  
As if without the other's  
Commerce the one could live,  
Secures the life from loving  
In live death, protecting it  
With a deadly living  
Waste of discontent. But  
To love with me and live  
My love, engaging it  
One from the other neither  
Leaving off, is to love  
In the life of division  
And live in loving it,  
Where if loving only lives  
It dies  
But if living only will love  
Then loving will live.

#### TROVER

If the leaning of love  
Is to learn, investing it  
In acts that you intend  
For their effect, then  
The effort of love is  
Example, addressing it  
In practices  
Exact to each respect.  
If the method of love  
Is rehearsing it, faithful  
As if a performance were,  
Then the tension of love  
Is attending it, skillful  
Ambitions skillfully  
Played for more. If the motive  
Of love's reproducing it  
In habit come close as

Habit can ever come,  
Then the turn of love  
Is resembling it, the  
Trial of love is  
Revealing it, and the fate  
Of love is in facing  
Its eventual  
Duplicate done.

#### *John Holbrook*

#### STARTING WITH WHAT I HAVE AT HOME

I love the trust, the open intimacy  
my son finds so easily with things—  
last month the Maytag washer,  
broken down, the motor frozen,  
dismantled on the lawn in half a week.  
He loves his tools—when he can  
make himself do or undo what for him  
is near enough and therefore real.  
A favorite is the wrench, his specialty  
the hammer. Pliers, of course,  
for the long unraveling  
of electric copper wire. Best, though,  
is the magnet deep inside the core  
that somehow makes the whole thing tick.  
In the first grade now words are hard  
for him, not quite the “things”  
to tinker with on paper yet.  
In our bathroom over the sink  
in red ink above the faucets  
the words “Hot” and “Cold” are taped,  
over the soap dish, “Soap.”  
They're real. I know he knows  
these words and more but I listened  
to his teacher and in every room  
helped where I could and wrote and wrote.  
And I am writing and failing utterly

to speak this moment not for him  
but myself of what is near, intimate,  
and horribly, real. One star I wanted,  
tonight, its trust to fill the total volume  
of this room—that I might do, perhaps  
like my son, or undo telling myself gently  
with these lesser tools I love  
something more than compassionate—  
kind of the girl, who, having failed once  
a week ago at jumping off the bridge  
because two frightened men could not let her slip,  
slipped again, last night, in soft chiffon  
into her green garage, four doors down  
and with her father's band saw  
cut away for good her arms, sure  
this final grip would leave no one,  
ever, with anything left to let her down.

*Mark McCloskey*

Two Poems

#### HOW TO KEEP YOUR LOVER

If you hear her step, empty the ashtrays;  
stay some distance from the front door,  
so when she knocks, it won't seem  
you've been waiting there like a nightclub.  
Do not fumble with the latch.

Hug her as though good luck  
has been with you all day.  
If she has on a light scent,  
tell her how much you like it;  
if a heavy one, say nothing.

As much sofa as she's in the mood for  
let her have. Let her do all the talking,  
or gossip with her like a backyard:  
feel it out. Don't ask leading questions.  
Give her the run of the pantry.

If she wants to bait you or play-fight,  
make sure it comes out a draw.  
If her skin crawls, knead it slowly;  
if she falls asleep too early, hold on.  
Say nothing about your children.

Night will end or begin in her hands.  
If as it does, you see Medusa  
standing in the curtain behind her,  
do not let your blood run cold.  
Close your eyes before she does.

#### HER DEPARTURE

She's done with training for her departure:  
the cabin boys she let in through her window  
are pirates now, her parents bashed-in dinghies,  
the dainty incisions in her wrists a joke.

It's her she's off to—that exclusive island  
schoolrooms and drive-ins drag out maps to  
without saying the buried goods are footlockers  
with nothing in them but sailor suits.

I've tried to warn her. "Fog," I've said,  
as though that were the worst of it;  
"Sandbars in the estuaries."  
Hurricanes are too big to talk about.

So it fills her body like a sail  
to nudge the deep-six . . . and though it leaves me  
seasick a little to go the night with her,  
I crave the taste of salt on her tongue,

and pray that she'll come back light-headed  
upon the bony arm of love, and I  
—grizzly mope with a towel under his chin—  
will want her to tell me she'll stay now.

RETURNED, IN A DREAM

You follow me  
Out of your safe blue place,  
Your hand is raised half-way;  
The color on your cheek is night-burn;

Your eyes are gray marble;  
You tell me that I never meant it;  
Death wasn't for me, you say;  
It's too new; it's the weak place in the enemy's line,  
The chance for victory.

There is a crowd with you, they watch accusingly;  
What mistake will I make now?  
Across the room they follow me, counting  
Forgettings,

While your breath makes trees of ice; you listen  
To the words behind your forehead,  
You push me away from you; there are no minutes left, you  
tell me.

You're turning your life in;  
You need only yourself now.

Turn me around, I ask you, take me  
Home where all hurts stop, send me  
Down into your dark blue ground,

Into your spiky treasure house, your  
Underground room.

IN THE BASEMENT OF MY FIRST HOUSE

The child at the end of that passageway  
Is a little monster waiting for  
My flashlight beam, my hand to untie her, my voice to ask

The questions that she knows all the answers to: How long? Nights  
as dark as the bottom of a sack.  
How much did it hurt? Forever.

She needs a bath; all that she's good for is talking:  
I always knew they would leave you, she says.

I stare at my clean white hands.  
There's no place under them for this  
Morsel, snag-toothed urchin. This remnant of me.  
The child has a difficult accent. I hate the scars on her ankle.

Outside of the window is a long blue plain, a sea as vast as the  
Sea of Azov,  
Only fifteen feet deep at its deepest part.

They've gone away in a boat, the child says,  
I always knew they would.

BESIEGED

The bed was a bright green raft  
That turned in a tide that neither of us could measure.  
Dangers paced us from the shore.  
Help me, I said, and you couldn't hear because  
The pictures on the shore were caverns to suck us under,  
Oily swirls without bottom,  
Diseases sent across on the fog in a conical  
Dispersion. I can't hear you; your words make  
A clatter against my life.

The walls of the room bleached pale; the bed  
Swirled up to the waterfall.  
The noise, I cried. I put my head under the pillow  
And felt you floating away from me, far on a tide

Like an awkward movement of the planet, like the slow toppling  
of a cliff.  
And there was no motion in your arm.

## VICTIM

Don't offer us grocery lists of reasons, don't  
Appeal to us, ask us to fight each other.  
What we want from you is simple: a splash of blood on the altar;  
We'll mourn afterwards like bereft Arab women,  
Toss ourselves onto the stone;  
But don't be real. Your blood is not supposed to be sticky.

Because, if you say things like, wait for me, look at me,  
You awaken the listener in us,  
Who has to remember you're human,  
That your hand shakes because the base of the temple is crumbling,  
That the flick in your eyes is terror, old friend, old lover,  
That the reflecting surfaces around you  
Give back in sequence

Your face, our faces,  
Our fears,  
Like an advertising sign, like the machine they write heartbeats on

The one that measures  
How to hold on.

*Gary Soto*

## THE LEAVES

When the wind lifted,  
The raked leaves shuffled off  
Like shoes  
And left the street,  
The old one  
Leaning on his broom,  
A cat yawning  
At the tree.  
The leaves went looking  
For the dry place

Inside a cloud,  
For the sparrow  
That raises the sun.  
Drifting, they  
Rubbed the soft belly  
Of earth, loosening  
Its hold on rock.  
Blown into fences,  
They scattered  
Like ants  
And followed  
What the ants followed.  
Through streets,  
In small herds,  
Where no one pointed  
Or stroked his beard,  
They crossed  
Orchards, a stand  
Of trees  
They never saw,  
And scratched  
A strange alphabet  
In the damp ground.  
Climbing the foothills  
Under a rumor  
Of rain,  
The leaves left  
Their fathers  
Sycamore and Oak  
For a new wind  
That would fall  
Through them like light  
And the grey  
They would see  
Was their own  
As they moved south  
Toward the jeweled fire of snow.

## ROMANCE

He kept a bullet from the gun  
 Of his lover's husband  
 On the desk where he wrote his poems.  
 Late at night  
 He found words for its hardness,  
 For its simple function,  
 For the certainty of its direction,  
 And most of all, for its disuse.

When he agonized  
 Over his inability to enter himself,  
 Touching the smooth flesh  
 And feeling the perfect cycle of blood,  
 He knew that his suffering  
 Was contained by his health.  
 The risks he took  
 Were merely the stirrings of a larger appetite.  
 In the empty chamber of a gun  
 The breath of his name  
 Held still like a note becoming  
 The air it pierces . . .

And he knew one night  
 He'd be found, hunched over woman  
 Or poem, the last word  
 Lodged in his throat, the red blossoms  
 On sheet and page as symmetrical  
 As the twin faces of his nature,  
 True lover, sneak,  
 For now he would go to her  
 And allow her to search for the wound . . .

As one would attend to a stranger  
 Who could not speak of pain.

## PRAYER FOR MYSELF

Under my breath  
 A voice flutters like a flag  
 Hung over the broken porch  
 Of a shack . . .

The poor have faith  
 In a country,  
 There's no denying that;  
 But it's hard to understand why.  
 Dust on a mirror  
 Is the holy cloth a man wears  
 In the ceremony of recognition.

I put a quarter into a hand  
 As easily as I slip  
 A ring around a finger.  
 I bless the swollen stomach  
 As if hunger and pregnancy  
 Were mere conditions of survival.  
 I'm shameless, knowledgeable, poetic.

Time circles my wrist like a razor.  
 My sense of place  
 Is the grave upon which I am  
 The living stone.  
 I confess,  
 But, always, joy is my penance.  
 Oh Lord, walk out of me,  
 This pity is absurd . . .

On a campus,  
 As free and directionless as my intellect,  
 I stroll across the grass,  
 Guard patrolling the empty grounds.  
 A book falls.  
 A tree trembles into frantic blossom.  
 I, I, I . . .

DEATH OF THE TRACK STAR

It all happens in a moment, telephone-still.  
He leans backward across 30 years in his padded  
swivel chair, back toward his high school track.

A magnet pulls at him again  
from the finish line, the metal  
of his legs is bending, churning.  
He feels the choirs of wheezing,  
a chestful of cinders.  
This is real running, he thinks, his heart  
beating hard in his heels.

No one can touch him, yet he touches  
everyone: the crowd arches  
as he breaks string after string  
with his toughened throat and

For an instant he almost believes  
he has lived the best possible life—  
success pours across the desk in front of him, visible  
as spilled coffee. It is the stain  
of winning.  
He feels a broken glass trophy putting itself  
back together again  
inside his body. And applause,  
like a luminous balloon of light,  
surrounds each muscle.

Now his legs can soften into two blue silk ribbons  
rippling in the breeze.

he smiles and suddenly inhales  
all the breaths  
he has ever exhaled in his life.

THE GIFT

A hand. You offer it  
as something I can use.  
I judge it of handsome shape, unmarked,  
ordinary as the glove it squirms out of.  
It lacks perfume, tastes a bit salty,  
won't hold enough zircons for a dowry.  
Lines in the palm speak empty promises.

No, I won't use it to cook my meals,  
hang clothes on the line, write notes to myself.  
I won't cover my face,  
because it's not a mask or a fan.  
Blinds I can still see light through;  
the game of scissors, paper and rock.  
My lips on it would mean nothing.

Does it sing? A talent must recommend it.  
I'll carry the hand in my pocket for a week,  
if you insist. It moves!  
Who trained it? All right, I admit  
there's something miraculous about it.  
I only ask that you tell it  
never to crawl into bed and grab

for my throat, my genitals, my own sleeping hand  
treacherous from solitude.  
It seems tame enough when I hold it.  
This tired fish, so warm.  
But let it take no liberties  
for I have two of my own, plenty for my needs,  
and they learned what yours must:

never to touch, pray or reach out  
like a blind limb groping toward heat.



## THINKING OF FAILURE

Thinking of failure as my oldest friend,  
 I feel the house collapse around me,  
 comforting, a blanket of nails  
 holding my clouded body to the ground.  
 This is the dream you shake me from,  
 the long corridor of loss, as dark  
 outside the body as within,  
 Even pain turns away.

But you are here.

What can I tell you? Another dream,  
 where I was followed by a large white dog  
 and when I lay down, it lay down beside me.  
 I confused its warmth with yours.  
 It was so close I couldn't breathe,  
 as white as a day last winter.  
 You sat in the pale afternoon,  
 in the red chair, *there*, against the window,  
 dust motes falling onto your shoulders.  
 You were suddenly so close  
 I had to look away, as if from the distant  
 burning of the sun. You refused  
 to let me change the subject  
 like this. Will you now?

## TWO ROOMS

Here is your sandwich.  
 Here is the milk you asked for.  
 See how the glass holds the liquid up  
 by pressing against it.

Here is my hand lifting by itself  
 from the glass, unbroken.  
 Here is silence guarding itself against spilling.  
 You open your mouth to eat or speak

but where I am I hear nothing,  
 The plain lies still, soaked with blue.  
 Gone is the huddle of houses,  
 the sun with its cutting edge.

There is the shrunken horizon,  
 the frozen pool of night,  
 the salt-white handkerchiefs of snow  
 blowing against me.

## TOUCHING THE MATTER OF SEED

A puffball, all moist meat in fog  
 falls to dust in sun, dust of spores  
 that swell to full again in one warm night  
 wherever apples have rotted under the trees.  
 It takes the touch of frost to open milkweed  
 and send its silk spilling to the soil.  
 Time's fumbling will scatter cattail cotton  
 to fill a vacation classroom. Hair-trigger pods  
 of jewel weed explode at a finger touch,  
 seed of a spread of poison-healing leaf.  
 How will you come apart if I touch you wrong  
 or right?

## OPENING DAY, EASTER WEEK

The stream is stocked a quarter mile upcreek  
 in Powder Mill Park, where it's shoulder to shoulder  
 with meat hunters along the flood-cut banks.  
 Here in the wild seclusion by the landfill,  
 the brotherhood will take them, play them,  
 and throw them back, no matter how badly hooked,  
 no longer trusting the water.

*Joseph Di Prisco*

THE RESTAURANT

"We have, if we turn to Proust, more emotion  
in a scene which is not supposed to be  
remarkable, like that in the restaurant in  
the fog."—Virginia Woolf

There in the restaurant in the fog  
the time is 11:49 forever  
on the faces of a thousand

In the restaurant in the fog  
my parents justify the menu  
to my dead brother assure him  
asparagus is out of season assure  
him they are out of grouse and pâté  
Here they tell him Take this bread

Someone plays on the piano  
someone hits the same note  
over and over the same the same  
the same note over and over  
ever since 11:49 he has hit the same

A gentleman with a handlebar  
moustache elegantly dressed  
in iridescent blue sitting with  
a lady in heavy rouge under  
a feather duster everyone smiling  
at exactly 11:49  
he withdraws the revolver and fires  
seven times at

The restaurant in the fog  
the dwarfs wipe their hands on their shirts  
after suckling pig after a day on  
the flying trapeze shot from the canons  
In the Garden Room the family  
strolls in the park between the trees

on a path brilliant with white parasols  
the bicycles disappear gather  
inside the reaches Already it's 11:49

Everyone says 11:49 already  
In the restaurant in the fog  
I wait on the empty tables  
distribute menus collect them  
tell the party of 97 from  
Finland that we have nothing  
they want tell the party of 42 from

We notice that we are driving by  
the restaurant in the fog  
*Chez Madeleine*  
They rush out to greet us  
Reservation for two at 11:49

*Robert Hershon*

WE NEVER ASK THEM QUESTIONS

1  
Nelson Rockefeller sends  
electric shocks through her body  
and puts roaches in her Coca Cola  
He has taken her children to Canada  
Kirk Douglas has made her live in 60 hotels  
His friends find her with their filthy phone calls  
She is a Christian  
and once worked for an insurance company  
Why do they want to destroy her?

2  
He has a neat moustache  
and an expensive trenchcoat  
and he marches up and down Fifth Avenue  
faster than lunch hours

Attached to a small backpack  
is a photograph professionally framed  
of himself with both eyes blackened  
his face cut his shirt bloody  
Underneath it says  
Look What My Family Did To Me

3

The old man explains to the subway floor:  
All the time something's happening here  
there's something happening there  
Who the hell could have known that?  
What the hell's going on over there?  
All the time I'm over here putting on my pants  
they're over there putting on their hats

### *Kita Shantiris*

#### MONOMY

I whisper my name  
The way newlyweds  
Practice their husbands'.  
I model it  
For strangers  
Like a wedding dress.

My signature is clumsy.  
I could be writing with knives  
From a new silver pattern.  
I changed check styles  
When the bank added a name  
On my account.

Friends divide  
Into a bride's side  
And a groom's side.  
Some introduce me wrong

Persistent as suitors  
Using a dead language.

I've changed names  
But I'm not going back  
To the maiden one  
And no one's been grafted  
To a family tree.

I chose this name  
With my oldest friend,  
I'm marrying *me*.

### *Joseph Bruchac*

#### CLEAR CUT

i.

Broken clouds drift  
across rain water pools  
rainbowed with diesel oil

tread marks, the fog  
and one raven  
heading out to sea

a shrike tugs  
at the dry skin  
of a crushed rabbit

ii.

straws from the broom  
which swept clean death  
across the ridges

the seedling trees  
wash down slope  
with the wind

DREAM MAN

for Thomas Brush

"I am the one who splits the night,  
I am as happy as the hero of a novel."  
—Nausea

I first met the Dream Man at the beach on Maury Island.  
He told me to start singing and not stop. He said:

"It's gritty in this gristle  
Something's pinching here!  
Such sucking wind  
Scent of the sea!  
Woo't eat a crocodile?  
Ride this tide to fritters?  
Follow me!"

And off he sped, careening around corners  
In an old car with rattles  
In the back seat.

Since then, I have seen the Dream Man  
Wearing out his boots on the stenciled pavement,  
A wild man with mad eyes and his teeth out,  
Pointing his finger at old bearded men  
In doorways of condemned hotels,  
Saying, "Yes, Yes."

I have seen him by his fire  
Gentle turning all his secrets in his hands,  
The silence of the room  
Lying at his feet like an old dog, an old dream  
Stitched in a knee of his bluejeans, unraveling.

A child can take a dream from his hands,  
Kiss the small moons of his fingers  
And never be alone.

Once, I had slept so long beside a woman  
I had stopped singing; she had turned to stone.

The Dream Man told me to enter her  
And I would live forever  
Where it is too deep  
To be water.

And the time doctors bent over me like mummies,  
Probing, muttering: "No hope."  
They wheeled in the Dream Man disguised as a dying patient.  
Juggling scalpels, grinning and winking, he sang:

"Burn Burn  
Burrow down a hole!  
Soft Soft in these old roots  
We'll twist the whiskers of a mole!"

He kept everyone in stitches until I escaped  
With the map to the Last Dream.

I found it shining, softly luminescent  
In the eye of an owl on a cold night.  
It is the broken moon floating on a lake,  
The sun stinging my face like snow,  
A landscape burning at noon  
Exiting on the wind.  
Mother, Father, Lover, I am home.

THE POND FLOYD MADE  
IN A RAKU KILN

He is a broad-shouldered man  
With a bushy red beard. He paints with fire.  
He gives the earth back to itself, thistle  
Back to the field and the eye. He spins out  
Dreams rooted in stone. He is the maker of moons,  
Cold and burning in the hand, mountain ridges  
Rising above the sea, landscapes soft as moss.  
His seeds are as big as Easter, opening to the air  
With the memory of warmth and rain.

One winter night, I huddled like a child  
Beside his kiln, watching him work.  
The glow from hot brick

Glazed our faces.  
We talked in low voices  
About the sky and the trees to keep them close.  
The shiver of leaves and rotting fences  
Came back in our words  
As they turned to steam in the night air.

When breath and bone divide, what breaks is perfect.  
In the bright garden of the kiln  
I moved closer to stone, to pond,  
To the hiss and crackle of coming finally from fire,  
To float in shades of green and bronze  
Among pink flowers and tall grasses  
In a blue mist where it is deep and cold  
And I am not  
Lost.

*Albert Goldbarth*

#### WHAT THEY DON'T SAY IN THE HIGH SCHOOL TEXT ON SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION

The ferris wheel—we were, all, its  
gerbils. At the Picture Booth booming  
popcornballs of light set our squinty faces  
on cardboard gorilla bodies. The County  
Fair: transformations—music flushing  
the timid gazelle out from the shaded places in  
Aunt Emma's body, corn mash distilling  
pure swine from Uncle Dibs. What

didn't frighten in "Doctor Methuselah's Museum  
of PREEEserved Oddities!" were the jars' formaldehyde  
contents: lizard-things like warty pickles, this  
bird-thing with broke-umbrella wings, a cow fetus  
crumpled like old shoe, some *something*—a  
tongue so sick brie furred it: all of those stages  
we knew in the thicket of motherblood, the  
pre-us, the plasms. But what scared was

our own faces blobbing out of control on the jars'  
glass curves, refusing to hold the domestic  
steady. You looked and the look was amoeba splitting.  
That, and my sweetie, whose face I'd just known  
in the Tunnel of Love by lip-touch alone, the  
girl Pa said would make a good match and she  
ran out to where they were lighting the midnight  
bonfire and became the glow on all the men's faces in town

that night, having so long been stored in a corner.

*Stuart Friebert*

#### YOUR MOTHER, THE ALCOHOLIC

She sets the cards down and raises her hands  
and with her hands grips her forehead, earth  
has only one heart. Shut up, for God's sake!  
your father begs. He told her about the woman  
in Berlin, what was she supposed to do, forgive  
him? All she could say was, Did you like her dress?  
All he said was, What in hell's that got to do with it?

You're very happy, she tells you she'll be glad to speak  
German with you just for practice. You handle yourself better  
when you do German or even algebra, she still knows some answers.  
The side of her face makes a shadow on the window, your father's  
hand flicks out at her cheek, blood comes in a slow whorl. You  
hand her a kleenex with the idea she'll find the spot. Back two  
or three specks, mom. Excuse me, she says, I'd better have a look.

The door slams and when you go after her in the dead of night,  
she's in a famous bar. You have to drink something too, there's  
a loud noise from the organ, waiters smile. Then girls, and more  
girls. Your father gets to her first but she brushes him away.  
When you climb up next to her she smiles boyishly: Want some  
peanuts or pretzels, sonny? And always she's gone before you nod.

TYPOGRAPHICAL SIGNS

(variations on a theme by Richard Wilbur)

i. Quotation Marks “ ”

Worry wears its wrinkles like this.  
The sheriff who is worrying fingers  
his hip-strung six-shooters like this.  
When he calls that time's up,  
wanted words that come out  
and surrender to the law  
are clamped in these handcuffs.  
Deputies round up  
the vigilantes.

ii. The Dollar Sign \$

A winding road and railroad tracks.  
The dilemma of light  
split between wave and particle.

How fast must the car go  
to keep pace with the train?  
And where do they race to?

Earth only offers earthly speed.  
Its vehicles compete  
for the choice of destinations.

But sight, that lives above the earth  
and ranges at the speed of light,  
verges everywhere on vision.

Cars crossed by trains only form wrecks.

iii. The Percentage Sign %

Mr. Ogle Eyes, the skeptic,  
diets on statistics.  
A la carte is the way to his heart.

He is franker than a banker,  
and at every civic function  
he wields the knife to slice the pie.

Hands in business and politics,  
he has secured his syndicate:  
no one dares return his vacuous stare.

One would gamble on the hunch  
that a good punch to his face  
could be the break he needs  
to have that slanted nose of his fixed  
so he could join the human race.

iv. Parentheses ( )

Glass that cups a candle's flame  
saves it from the weaseling wind.

Two ears turned in toward each other:  
they hear the tree of the mind fall.

Inside the kept secret sputters.  
Outdoors, gossip flutters and storms.

Arms of parents cradle and rock;  
sleep fears no knock on the door.

*Glenn Arthur Hughes*

ADVICE TO AN AMERICAN

There seem to be too many kinds of light.  
Even a kind to eat and a kind to complain to.  
So much light that tar tastes like honey,  
grief like self-pity. To get out of  
the light it seems you must starve, and fight.

(Remember they have all the magic. They move

beautifully with razor blades in their shoes.  
The fists keep smiling, they always do, just  
as the men dialing them in small rooms  
never do. Remember they are utterly loyal.  
Never forget those seconds in the mirror:  
the trucker making love to a rotting angel,  
the drunk staggering for his bus that pulls away.)

And in the dark nothing has been prepared,  
nothing made for you, to dignify your need.  
Take your knife, which is always a weapon,  
and carve your own rude cry out of rock,  
and curse it for being crude. Be proud of the dark.

### *Jack Butler*

BEEFEATERS MAKE BETTER LOVERS OF GOD, or  
SEE! SEE WHERE CHRIST'S BLOOD STREAMS  
IN THE CHEESEBURGER!

Somewhere not far from Springdale, I saw a stupendous steer,  
a steer of fiberglass, and blazoned on it clear,  
two slogans, one a menu: *two double cheese and fries,*  
1.69, it read, and mentioned other good buys.  
And being it was Sunday we drove upon our way,  
the other side of the thing, also, had something to say.

Oh Christ, sweet Christ, my meat and milk these many days,  
as often as we do this, we do it with mayonnaise:  
hang now on neutered bull, who once hung on a tree.  
I'd slay them for it, but would have need of one to slay me.

Yet with us, and in us, you cross gut-rumble with concinnity.  
We speak more truly than we mean to, in your vicinity.  
Restaurants utter parables, two-edged beeves complain,  
*For me to live is Christ, for me to die is gain.*

### *Will Wells*

Two Poems

#### THE LONG SHIFT

Each day we go further in,  
listening hard for our graves.

The coal rubs off on us,  
so we wear it home like a suit  
we've taken out on credit.

In bed we close our eyes so tight  
the walls come crushing down:  
we hear the miners trapped

in our minds, our blood pounding  
its long shift in the dark.

#### TWENTY-SIX DEAD IN SCOTIA NUMBER ONE

Every night,  
shifting in our sleep,  
we feel muscles polishing our bones  
to a brilliant whiteness.

Our fingerprints are gone into agates . . .

Our eyes dull into opals . . .

We scabble messages  
with the chalk of our flesh  
on a blackboard of solid rock.

We wake and there it is:  
coal dust under our fingernails.

*Raeburn Miller*

PARANOIA

The wallpaper has turned its back on me.  
I unplug the phone to stop it from not ringing.  
The memo holders have relaxed off the Frigidaire,  
And the compasses have run down like clocks.

Someone hiding in the azalea hums steadily,  
Hums all night like a machine underground.  
The wistaria next door inhales to speak,  
But the wind blows in the opposite direction.

Opposite! The very word is like friendship.  
I reach my hand and leave a smudge on the air.  
When I make what I make, I drop into cold water  
The boiling syrup, but it never hardens.

I have dreamed so well I know what happens next.  
They have tampered with my thermostat, but I hide my eyes.  
Why must I suffer? What have I done?  
I have walked up and down. I confess. Here, take me.

*Mark Vinz*

RESOLUTION

You have trailed me since birth—  
shadow man, hawking balloons  
at the foot of my crib,  
grand prix yo-yo champion,  
the grin on every baseball card.

It was you who sold me  
my first convertible

and filled the tank with stones.  
It was your hand that forged  
my diplomas, your feet that  
almost carried me to war.

No more. Starting tomorrow  
I will not listen to your whispers  
jingling in the shadows.  
I will not read your postcards,  
I will pay back every loan.

It doesn't matter that  
I've said all this before.  
Tomorrow I retire—  
right after the parade.  
Look for me in the front row,  
wearing your guns.

*Robert Lietz*

FATHER: SECOND THOUGHTS

The skate on the cellar stairs  
is a poison letter.  
Your daughters are with their boys,

they will miss the clatter,  
the slip of the bed-slats  
says they cannot be interrupted.

All of this will happen.  
Your watch will be broken,  
your important bones.

Consider you belong here,  
sprawled on concrete,  
bruised, encouraged in all things likely,



a man who masters stasis  
while the kids discover role-play.  
You have the solitude you looked for.

You paint each five years,  
pay a high price for colors  
inside and out—

There are sounds like searching,  
sounds like broom-handles  
banging under heat-pipes

the sounds of a creature  
creating his backwoods dark,  
his black room.

*Rachel Norton*

#### ECHOGRAM

i

My muse, O'Halloran, has relented:  
Armistice between my craft and the monosyllable.  
Hibiscus borealis flocks the heads of my guests.  
A suspicious Tuscan hums Satie.  
Melissa's hennaed hair flips like a fist of centimes.  
The rings on her fingers raffle across other ambitious palms.

ii

Why do I dream that my father prospers?  
Metastasis has pocketed his larynx like coin.  
His skin warps over his bones.  
He puzzles out my name just like his mother did;  
But nanna reared colts near Chehalis at sixteen  
And never learned how to spell.  
Bedded, his arms and legs beg toward his ribs.  
The cancer sits like a bowl in his throat.

iii

An amorous flute and voices legged like wasps saloon the room.  
I relish the spit of my prattle;  
Voice like a tug has shored at my house for a year.  
I recite the names of the pine cones and shells  
I had poised on your hospital tray.  
This compline does not still my tongue.

*Julie Mishkin*

#### FOR ALL WE KNOW

For all we know  
language is beating a slow retreat.  
You write me a letter: see  
how the words slip off the page!  
Your O's become rounder,  
devouring ink.  
Or we go for a walk. If I stop  
by a tree, wrap my arms around  
the bark, press my ear to the wood,  
all I hear is sap, the dazed  
heart-beat: the branches droop,  
flaccid as commas.

Ask me a question: my words  
float away, return at night,  
impregnate your sleep.  
You dream of me, standing in a room,  
opening and closing my mouth.  
Fish of your dreams!  
This martyred silence!  
All afternoon the pigeons clack at our feet  
like needles, knitting a scarf  
from old conversations.

For all we know  
it's time to swallow our words.  
Paper, scissors, stone: I wrap

whatever you say and hand it back.  
If we lie here counting the minutes  
we grow rings under the eyes.  
Doors give up on us, hollow  
when we knock. Our palms  
grow smooth with the meeting of strangers,  
a simple atrophy:

for all we know  
this is the time we've been waiting for.  
Language fills our pockets like broken glass,  
a suicide of verbs.

*Mekeel McBride*

#### MANGOES AND CLEAN WATER

for Barbara

I was standing just at the line that hunger drew.  
I had no job, no money. My friends  
were in some distant country I left years ago,  
sending me love in letters, the paper thinner than air.  
My life was as thin as air in a flute

and getting thinner when suddenly  
it filled out to the size  
of the buffalo clouds. I don't know why.  
I could feel air in my lungs  
as if I had just escaped drowning.

Nothing had changed except the sun seemed closer.  
Nothing had changed except I had stepped over  
the line that hunger had drawn and found myself  
in a country of mangoes and clean water.  
It was clear, then, that the promises made

at the beginning are good for a lifetime at least.  
At least they live separately

from an empty mailbox, a hole in the shoe.  
They pay no attention to lines drawn in the dust  
by anything that would have us hungry.

And the promises are like a ladder of light,  
as tangible as sunflower stalks or my spine.  
I feel them fill the sky, wands that flower into  
an Andromeda map, signs that scatter  
great formations of wild geese home.

*Reg Sauer*

#### ONE FOR THE DEER

For alphabet they've learned *browse, listen, look.*  
Roaming the mesa's dry swale of weeds  
half ochre, half rust, I come on hollows  
pressed out of knee-high grass, absences  
still giving off warmth. Because the opposite  
of *deer* is *fender* and *freezer*,  
they make sidling off an art of defence.

Further into the half-light of evergreen  
I watch their pairs of cloverleaf ears twitch forward  
as the heads come up with the creak of my boot.  
Saturday nights I've happened into the VFW  
crowding the Buckhorn Lounge in Momence. Forearms  
like bowling pins tattooed, and opposable thumbs  
saying the reverse of *tool* is *beer*. Courteously  
the pockets of grass read, "We were here,  
but hearing you come, moved on."

Except for *Falstaff* and *Bud* stuttering in neon  
the loudest end of this bunch is dark as rocks  
and shouts with torches closing me off, edging me  
toward that final club, the cliff's  
50-foot drop, As if some longhair

had once climbed onto the bar to scream  
"The opposite of *flag* is *nude!*"

Downwind, shadowed by boughs, I stand  
quite still, letting the depth of their look  
make me the place I wish we were. Meanwhile,  
through irises bluer than gunsights, the sportsmen  
back at the Buckhorn practice beads drawn  
on the ideal: for preference, one or two  
cross-country Jews running on broken legs—  
but 3 weeks out of each autumn make do  
on flanks the color of twilight,  
whose antlers say *meat*, and out of whose eyes  
a pure, intolerable silence says *shoot*.

*Edward Hirsch*

#### APOLOGIA FOR BUZZARDS

Nobody welcomes me, nobody. And yet  
the sun that beats through the ribs of the sky  
beats with a heavy pulse, like the heart,  
hollowing out the skull and spoiling the flesh,  
tattooing the ground, flaming with a heat  
that turns oceans of blood into quarries  
of bone, and makes even the cactus writhe.  
But nobody despises the sun, nobody.

The sky, too, is a map of quarries  
and caves, parched like a canvas, and  
wrinkled from the blear-eyed motion  
of a sparse wind. A violent muscle is  
pumping blood through a few scattered clouds  
until a strange liquid sizzles in the ground.  
I, too, have a heart and wings, and I  
say that a single pulse animates the world.

I ask nothing more than the sun:  
to be hoisted up like a flag into the

early morning; and left suspended in the sky:  
to be worked under like heat, to be  
honored for light, and to be escorted  
carefully through the dry tedium of day  
until, hungry and hesitant at dusk,  
plunging into a wilderness of colors.

*Roger Gilman*

Two Poems

#### THE PLAINS AROUND RAINY MOUNTAIN

Rainy Mountain rises out of the plain  
to the hardest weather in the world.  
In the summer it cuts hot winds  
like a running horses' head. In winter  
blizzards beat it like hard hooves.  
The plain pours out around  
flat and fast as corn mash poured  
from a pot. Only brown brittle  
grass grows from that hard yellow floor;  
and grasshoppers only, popping like corn,  
rise above that grass. In this lonely land  
there are no objects to confuse the eye.  
But to look at this landscape at morning  
makes your mind come to creation.

(after the Kiowa of S. Momaday)

#### WORDS OF A DYING CHIEF

What is Life but a flash  
of a firefly in the night  
or a buffalo's breath  
in the winter snow?  
It seems but a small shadow  
running across the long grass  
losing itself in the sunset.

(after Crowfoot of the Blackfeet)

## ON A BINGE WITH DAKOTA SLIM

I pick a year, say 1932  
 and travel back by hearsay,  
 back to the old kitchen  
 with its glass of spoons  
 in the exact middle  
 of the table.  
 We are there together  
 letting it all get too much  
 for us, letting it all build up,  
 sitting night after night  
 with only two sounds—  
 her radio, our steady honing.  
 The snick and whirr,  
 the static straight from Boise  
 and every blade already  
 keen enough for surgery.  
 How much coffee can you drink?  
 How sharp do knives have to be?  
 It's one of those times  
 we dread and long for—  
 the cold bedroom, the single bed,  
 getting up at five  
 to work the pond.  
 (We're like cats on those logs.)  
 But it's all too much for us.  
 How much kindling can you chop?  
 It's one of those clockwork times—  
 three months gone and time  
 to get the hell out,  
 time to trade that whetstone in  
 on the rusty edge  
 of bootleg booze.  
 Think we'll go into town we say  
 and get out  
 just before the skillet hits the door.

Woman's got a hell of an arm we say.  
 In town we hear the skillet ring  
 and let the first drink  
 slide down slow as summer weather.  
 That's a little better we say,  
 just a leetle better now.  
 Let the goddamn radio  
 dim those blades dull again  
 we don't care. We're here  
 and by god we'll stay  
 until we drink our paycheck dry.

## CLUKOV AND RAMBIAN

*It is felt that the department is too heavily immersed in English and American literature, not doing justice to such writers as Camus, Clukov, Dostoevsky, Gogol, Pirandello, and poets such as Mallarme and Rambian.*

—From a student survey of an English department

Dear Clukov Dear Rambian  
 Had we but known  
 Our syllabi  
 Would have bulged  
 With your works  
 But for our sins  
 What can we do  
 We'll forget English  
 And vulgar American  
 Scrub every word  
 From our tongues  
 We'll even pull out the syntax  
 Like fishbones  
 But is this enough  
 O dear Clukov dear Rambian  
 How could we overlook  
*The Eleven Year Old Poet*  
 Or *The Shrunken Boat*  
 To say nothing of *Raspberries*  
 and *Ward No. 10* or *The Apple Orchard*  
 O how could we have missed  
*A Seagull in Hell*

*Harold Witt*

HOT AIR BALLOON

It doesn't have to be remembered daffodils—  
a bright red and butter yellow  
vertically striped balloon  
was floating on bluest blue  
over the spring hills

as I ran out  
hearing a whoosh—WHOOSH—  
to see two frantic human figures  
and an upward rush of flame  
in the rope-held basket

under that round of nylon  
drifting toward catastrophe,  
then lifted on the wind—  
it doesn't have to be  
petals flashing later

images of pleasure  
intense on the inward eye—  
there is a man-made brilliancy  
immediate with danger  
Wordsworth's rivaled by.

*Ronald Wallace*

TRIUMPHS OF A THREE-YEAR-OLD

*Winking*

Her whole face wrinkles up like an apple doll,  
a dishrag, a small clenched fist.  
Her lips thin and twisted until  
the eyelids of one blue eye kiss. And then  
her face breaks bright as water,  
her new smile smooth as milk.

*Whistling*

She stares into the mirror, her lips  
stitched in knots, dumb as a fish,  
dry bubbles rising from her lungs.  
She wishes harder,  
her small breaths hissing like a teapot.  
When one thin whistle finally slithers out,  
she carries it downstairs carefully,  
holds it up for us to see.

*Nose-blowing*

The kleenex covers her face like a large white bird.  
She tries to brush it away,  
but it flies back, dry, persistent.  
She knows her father is behind all this,  
so she starts to cry, her swollen eyes  
fluttering around the room.  
There is nowhere else to go.  
The white bird's toes crawl up her nose:  
she blows.

*Shoe-tying*

The shoelaces hang limp as worms.  
When she pokes them with her finger  
they quickly squirm away from her,  
burrow into her dark shoes.  
She digs them out, determined now,  
her fingers clumsy as hooks.  
Later, I find her, smiling,  
rowing around the house, her shoes  
tied to her fists like fish.

*Tongue-clucking*

The mysteries of the mouth,  
that wet place shelled with teeth,  
the tongue, blind as a yolk,  
sticking its blunt nose out.  
She sucks it in; it begins to cluck.  
We feed it words of encouragement.  
It grows. Begins to crow.

### About Our Contributors

GWEN HEAD's *Special Effects* (University of Pittsburgh Press) was published last year.

JAY MEEK's *The Week the Dirigible Came* (Carnegie-Mellon University Press) has just been published.

ROB SWIGART's novel *Little America* (Houghton Mifflin) has just appeared.

JOAN SWIFT lives in Edmonds, Wash.

DOUGLAS CRASE teaches at the University of Rochester.

JOHN HOLBROOK teaches at the University of Montana.

MARK McCLOSKEY teaches at California State University in Chico.

DIANA Ó HEHIR teaches at Mills College.

GARY SOTO's *The Elements of San Joaquin* has won the 1977 International Poetry Forum Award.

ROSS TALARICO's latest book is *Simple Truths* (North Carolina Review Press).

WILLIAM MEISSNER teaches at St. Cloud State University.

T. R. JAHNS lives in Tucson.

DEBORA GREGER lives in Richland, Wash.

LINDA ALLARDT teaches at the University of Rochester.

JOSEPH DI PRISCO lives in Albany, Calif.

ROBERT HERSHON lives in Brooklyn.

KITA SHANTIRIS lives and writes in Spain and has a Ph.D. in psychology from UCLA.

JOSEPH BRUCHAC edits *The Greenfield Review*.

DICK HAMBY teaches high school in Kent, Wash.

ALBERT GOLDBARTH's latest book, *Comings Back* (Doubleday) appears this fall.

STUART FRIEBERT teaches at Oberlin College.

JOHN DELANEY teaches at Syracuse University.

GLENN ARTHUR HUGHES lives in Seattle.

JACK BUTLER lives in Okolona, Arkansas.

WILL WELLS is a graduate student at Ohio University.

RAEBURN MILLER teaches at the University of New Orleans.

MARK VINZ teaches at Moorehead State University and edits *Dacotah Territory*.

ROBERT LIETZ teaches at Syracuse University.

RACHEL NORTON lives and works in Seattle.

JULIE MISHKIN lives in New York City.

MEKEEL MCBRIDE is a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute.

REG SANER teaches at the University of Colorado.

EDWARD HIRSCH lives in Philadelphia.

ROGER GILMAN is poetry editor of *The Chicago Review*.

VERN RUTSALA teaches at Reed College.

HAROLD WITT's *Surprised by Others at Fort Cronkhite* appeared in 1975.

RONALD WALLACE teaches at the University of Wisconsin.

### Poetry Northwest Prize Awards, 1977

#### HELEN BULLIS PRIZE: \$100

John Taylor for Three Poems (Autumn 1976)

Diana Ó Hehir for Three Poems (Summer 1976)

**Previous Winners:** Hayden Carruth, 1962; John Logan, 1963; Donald Finkel, 1964; Mona Van Duyn, 1965; Richard Hugo, 1966; Winfield Townley Scott and Katie Louchheim, 1967; Sandra McPherson and Gwen Head, 1968; Eugene Ruggles, 1969; Will Stubbs, 1970; Kenneth O. Hanson and Jack Tootell, 1971; Lewis Turco and Tom Wayman, 1972; Richard Hugo, 1973; Adrien Stoutenburg and Lisel Mueller, 1974; Dan Masterson and Paul Zimmer, 1975; John Allman and Greg Kuzma, 1976

#### THEODORE ROETHKE PRIZE: \$50

Stephen Dunn for Three Poems (Autumn 1976)

**Previous Winners:** Carol Hall, 1963; Richard Hugo and Kenneth O. Hanson, 1964; Kenneth O. Hanson, 1965; William Stafford, 1966; Carolyn Stoloff, 1967; John Woods, 1968; Thomas James, 1969; Philip Booth, 1970; Dave Etter, 1971; Albert Goldbarth, 1972; Mark McCloskey, 1973; Greg Kuzma, 1974; Joseph Di Prisco, 1975; Gary Gildner, 1976

#### YOUNG POET'S PRIZE: \$25

Stephen Jaech for "Dying on My Feet" (Winter 1976-77)

**Previous Winners:** Greg Kuzma, 1973; Joseph di Prisco, 1974; Thomas Brush, 1975; Judith Small, 1976

