



Poetry

NORTHWEST

VOLUME XVI, NUMBER 4

WINTER 1975-76

\$1.25

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POETRY NORTHWEST WINTER 1975-76 VOLUME XVI, NUMBER 4

Published quarterly by the University of Washington. Subscriptions and manuscripts should be sent to *Poetry Northwest*, 4045 Brooklyn Avenue NE, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, 98195. Not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts; all submissions must be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope. Subscription rate \$4.50 per year; single copies, \$1.50.

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Distributed by B. DeBoer, 188 High Street, Nutley, N.J. 07110; and in the West by L-S Distributors, 1161 Post Street, San Francisco, Calif. 94109

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POETRY NORTHWEST

WINTER 1975-76

Thomas Brush

Four Poems

THE ONE SONG

You must have been here a long time sleeping
While your lungs performed their windy miracle
Over and over in the heart
Of a moonless night or hiding in the ashen room
Of boredom, the small closet of death, not to notice
The one song drifting through the gray
Folds of winter, over the slowly melting
Edge of the earth, which, like these words
Or the leaves rotting beneath your still feet,
Wakes you to the last white room,
Morning and the open mouth
Of love.

BELIEVING IN DREAMS

For everything that has lost
Everything, for the derelict's mad smile and the broken shoes
In the continual rain
Of the alley, for the broken
Hips of all my fathers lying alone
In the forgotten hotels, for the fresh initials
On the wandering walls, for the shot and dying
Wolves and their last splintered vision
Of the one cold moon, for the first
Blue fog entering my daughter's

Still lungs, for the burnt and blackened
Sides of the sun, for this place
And now, I stay
Where I am, believing
In dreams.

AGAIN

Though the war has been over for years and
nothing is dropping out
Of the stone side of the sky to send you back across
the nearest border
Except the broken promise of snow, slowly filling the square yard
In front of you, and the old lies as familiar as books
or the weather,
You still won't understand. You see the doors broken open again,
The water blacken and go bad, and children crouched like old men
Under trees and bridges. You imagine women in the last sad act
Of war, wandering through the ruins of their lives,
carrying blankets
And sacks of food, the men gone, and the torn sheets of flame
Over everything.

PRAYER

It is the terrible silence and waiting
For the voices of storm and wind, hoping
For the lesson of lightning, the shaggy roar
Of squall to be known again, but the weather's animals
Are more careful now. And the day crawls through the grass,
A dead calm and nothing happens. Now, you must
Kneel in the round light
Of earth, and the soft light coming down
From the long river of clouds and thunderheads, crossing
Miles of open sky, leaving the sharp green stillness
Of the dying stars, coming to
You like the season that repeats
Itself around you: hope silence a face in the water.

John Allman

Three Poems

THE WEEPER

I'm doing it openly at a formica table
in Bickford's the waitress gives me hankies
the Puerto Rican family is waving & nodding
my father is the counterman scraping
his shoes poor man he steps in everything
my mother the immigrant woman mopping
the floor I weep into her bucket's milky
water O look it's never too late mother
but the bouncer in tuxedo's coming at me

cry he says keep crying out you go you
drifter who let you in unshaven your feet
poking through sneakers sit up straight
I see my daughter outside dancing for pennies
I'm knocking on the window hey you hey you
my father says close your eyes we're counting
the receipts go to sleep your mother is tired
leaning on the mop O it's my sister O lucky
brother don't stuff napkins in your mouth

quick a menu waitress where am I listen here
I am below the Saturday blue special baked
fool with hash-browns & week-old lettuce
bring me death & pancakes bring me something
before it's too late I can weep for at 25c
it's my wife blowing her nose it's good she says
O lucky husband no one but you weeps so well
come to bed in the ice days of January in the
evening beneath the quilt you can cry into my hair

THE SOUL GROWN LAZY

Dressed in black &
overweight, her voice damp:
she sighs, telling me of father
off on a big job overseas,
papa & his brothers.
I'm showing her the night city,
frowsy shops in alleys.
Little boys pick my pockets
& signs hang in windows
of restaurants: Credit Good.
No aunts behind us,
no Registrar, no mayor dozing
beneath a floppy hat, just
her loneliness, huge & flabby,
leaning against me.
I feel sweet. I kiss
the fourth fold of her neck,
my hand travels the ring
of her waist, I find
the many paths to her breasts.
She's worrying: what if we're
caught what if the police
come screaming red-faced
into this alley what if
she's really no good eating
pizza & doughnuts drinking
vanilla malteds watching
TV all day sleeping waking
up eating the blankets filling
the tub with ice cream her
lips always caked with
chocolate frosting will I
love her will I love her?

THE KNUCKLER

We knew your stooped figure in Astoria Park,
knuckle-baller, your hand slow & disdainful
on the diamond beneath the TriBoro Bridge,
fingers forking behind your back. Whatever you
threw wobbled in the air like a soap bubble.
Your mother was the nicest woman in a yard
full of cukes & tomatoes. She bought you aquariums,
little oxygen pumps, a Schwinn, blow-ups of father.
She thought you too thin. She bought you huge
mittens, big-shoulder coats, while the McDonald
brothers spit on the metal doors of grocery cellars
where you slipped. Anyone at all could find
you in Mendel's, at the magazine rack, slipping
girlies between the pages of *Sports Illustrated*.

All those years, you waited for a fast sign:
a wave from the blonde divorcee in her bedroom
across the driveway. Through Woolworth binoculars,
webbing of blinds, you learned the moles & fine
track of her spine, the rayon slide of her buttocks:
her hands behind her back unhooking a fullness
in your head, behind your eyes, in your throwing hand
that had only a knuckler, only an odd way of holding on.
We couldn't hit you at all in those days,
the gray & muggy afternoons when the ball should
have carried into the East River. We popped up,
we grounded out, the boys from Seymour's Hardware,
& Baker's Garage, & Queeco's Beer, we whiffed in
sunlight, or under cumulus, in the shadow of a long bridge.

But she died suddenly, thirty-eight, a bad heart:
released from your grip, writhing in a midnight glare.
It was obviously your fault. You stopped going
to Mendel's. Sold your Schwinn. Gave up fishing
for minnows in the bay near La Guardia: that airport
built on garbage, carriage wheels, father's shoes.

You stopped catching killies in bent window-screens,
stopped bringing them home alive in tomatoe cans,
& pouring them into the tank with your tropical fish,
like common children among angels, while your guppies
with the bulbous eyes gave birth & ate their young
beneath the 25c pink plaster bridges. You took apart
the pumps. You began to focus on empty windows, sparrows.
All morning, all afternoon, we hit you, O we hit you.

Albert Goldbarth

THE CHARIOTS/THE GODS

1. A's Song Through The Centuries

Ty-ty-ty-ty,
A cave came down.
Ty-ty-ty-ty,
A cave came down
With like-us in.

A pyramid descended.
A pyramid in the sky
Descended. Thou hast
Messengers amidst us, here, halfway
Between our stars and our buried.

The shine-condor landed,
Yes! Of-another-tribe walked out,
Yes! They held up bowls to their eyes,
Yes! The bowls made flash, our spirits
Are reflected in their waters. Yes.

2. ***/** Reports

***/** reports their activities
include digging, making
aggressive action among themselves,
marking territory. He posits
they may be our insides-out

as indicated by their damp-palmed stroking
our snouts, or their kilnwork's accenting
our manes, while they have clearly not seen
within, how our brains are ethereal
gray clouds over sparse landscape

and: their own inverted
lupine, canine, breaks barely forth—insignias
of hair at their sex, or a female
squatting: the animal streams out
gold into humus, ivory into the suckled's lips.

3. The Lecture

There are stories of angels. Well
astronauts fly. And this is more
reasonable than, say, two pinions
of breath in the lungs, or the infant's skull
fusing closed in a giving off nimbus.

Of course the Red Sea split! Do you think
atomic power, if it could flatten
Hiroshima, couldn't comb
back water? This would explain the
schisms in the Bible.

Spiders walk water. You can see
the principle. "It burned but was not consumed."
"It rained blood." We're thinking
adults here. Use logic. Do I have to explain how
it can rain blood.

4.

The Sermon

There is a story in which a scientist
x-rayed the sky, and what
he found was not celestial bones
but a plate showing nothing—nothing,
that is, cut out to the size of the plate.

If this is the plate we passed
around at the service's end, your coins
would fall forever into the sky
and finally be assured of buying
a word for you at The Ear Of Ears.

But all we pass is a hat. And what we ask
is your coins anyway, and the faith
in a hat's implying
a skull. This is the theory
of god, and archaeology.

5.

Goldbarth Writes A Letter

Ellen: you said there were *bodhisattvas*,
Japanese seraphim. In a land
where writing is fine as red brambles
of capillary in the eyelids:
maybe. I believe it may be.

I believe there are explanations. And if
the angel who turned Lot's wife
salt was a Ph.D. in saline physics,
that's one way. I hope we never have reason
to be sorry when we're looking back.

But if we do turn around, and know her
cutting taste, we musn't forget
the eyelids. Two wings
are all a world needs,
uplifted in its praise every morning.

Kim Stafford

historic marker

it was here in mid-winter
they paused to ask each
other the way the trail
behind filling with snow
that broken tree avalanche
kill do you remember
late summer we saw
the break up twenty feet
now here at eye level deep
snow bring that day back
speak are we here

it was here they built a fire
warmed their hands and faces
until the embers sank
hissed deep in the tunnel
of smoke here they turned
to look back with the wind
find their tracks nearly gone
then set out uphill the people
crossing the mountains to find
bitterroot hidden one wealthy day
in a cave on the other side

and here where the wind
slowed just below the summit
they paused to tap out a
song with stiff knuckles
at the base of the last cliff

we are here hungry children
mountain forget we will remember
wind forget fill our trail
we will remember avalanche
be patient we will disappear
without your help

it is here driver the signs
plastered with snow forget
their names but you know
the road is endless either way
your car in its brief life
will never fail the radio
sings what your money can buy

but driver recall how here
they paused teeth chattering
a brief prayer near where
you kneel in the snow
to put on your chains

Jack Anderson

FAITH

Then the preacher reached into a box
and pulled out two rattlesnakes and said, "Praise God!"
and let them crawl about his neck and shoulders.
Then the preacher gave copperheads to the faithful,
and the faithful played with the copperheads
and one woman held a copperhead in her mouth
and shook her body until her body was all shakes.

Then the preacher repeated, "Praise God! Have faith!"
and opened a bottle of poison and drank it.
Then he fell to the floor, doubled up, gasping,
and the faithful stared hard, but nobody touched him.
At last, he stopped writhing, and someone decided
to slip away and call the police.
They came too late: the preacher was dead,
leaving behind a wife and six kids.

Then an elder of the church explained
that this was a demonstration of their faith,
that in their church they believed the faithful

could cast out devils, speak in tongues,
drink deadly poison, and take up serpents.
And he swore their preacher's death wouldn't stop
their drinking of poison or handling of snakes,
for this was their faith and they would stay true to it,
for true faith never failed.

W. R. Moses

Three Poems

BIRCH TABLE

The tightly packed grain,
Birch yellow, birch hard,
Pictures the years of tight growing,
Wind hardened, cold hardened;
The right conversion of clean
Rain, earth.

I'm sorry the tree was cut;
It was better than my table
(Though I am no warbler, no vireo
To have flitted and tabled
High there) (even though we sat
Gut happy,

Seven of us once, very young
And excited to feast in group
At that little table). I can picture
The table, when certain more years have grouped
Strength against it and me, being
Flung out

On a dump: it's inconvenient; who
Would bother about it? I'd as soon
Change atoms with those birch boards, though;

I think I'd be sooner
Justified to the thoughts that flow
Through the universe

That way than some.
Oh, all I really mean
Is that this close fair birch
Is by God wonderful, not to be demeaned,
And it would be a shame,
Come death

For it in a dump fire,
If it didn't go sheathed in honor.
So I talk as I talk
That it may be, as well as I can manage, honored
On its way to some fair
Higher growing.

THE GENTLE: A PARABLE

Golden plume, black-and-white plume,
And the wind rippled them like chivalry.
But this is no tale of chivalry.
I called the dog; she came.
She didn't want to eat skunk; as for him,
He was glad to go beetling after his beetles.
Mild brown eye, mild reddish eye, no imbecile
Yen to compete in either of them.

Later, quail rose out of the brush.
It was easy flight, no panic.
What was the need of panic?
When the dog had trotted close, no rash
Bravado had held them. And no wish
To do what she couldn't made her chase wings.
She watched with a kind of general interest
As they eased down from the casual flush.

Take the instruction straight.
I am bearing witness.
I know what I know, what I witness.
Master the metaphor, get it right,
Or—not for God's sake, not to eat—
Blind, crush, kill;
And burst your heart clutching vacuity
All the unseen day, all the unfelt night.

RHAPSODY ON A FOX

That was no moonlight night.
Too bad for the fox it wasn't.
He *might* have got a duck at that.
There were some on the bay, some buffleheads,
Quite near shore.

(Oh, shut

The particulars off.)

Anyhow, he needn't have started

The start I saw him start,
Or wince, maybe, interrupting
His mere daylight mousing.

Display of innards:

*Now how to God get excited about beef kidneys?
One or another on the meat counter, one or another
—What of it?*

That's how I feel about confessional poets.

*Not hearts, not even hearts, just ridiculous beef kidneys,
Cleaned up at that—except maybe some odor—
And ready to wrap in plastic.*

*And here I go confessing,
Nor do I think this will bring anyone, least of all me,
Any blessing.*

So the fox was out daylight mousing,
And I saw him, and I would have sent him,
If I'd known how, what I thought was a blessing
(Which might have been plastic wrapping,
Yes, I know it); but what he got
Was a ripple of shotgun fire
Just audible down from a skeet range
Maybe two miles away; and he winced
And slid into the brush; and I lanced
My curse at the skeet range.

And that
—Yes, I know it—
May have been plastic wrapping.

Because, Oh blood, those fantasies!
Great-grandson of Natty Bumppo!
(Developed beyond his terrible prose, though.)
The young blood impervious to cold morning!
The young reflexes unfooled by the fastest whizzing
Duck flight!
Press: a trajectory broken;
Press; another trajectory broken
—Splash!
And later,
Some kindly somebody having attended to the bother
Of plucking and gutting,
The good, rich, greasy, crackle-brown eating!

Who am I, who am I?
Now listen:
If I can bless—which I *don't* suppose—
I bless that fox.

Donald A. Petesch

Isadora Duncan had a pianist whose face was so "ugly" that she forced him to sit so that she saw only his back while she danced. He played so beautifully, however, that she married him.

ISADORA AND THE HEAD
FROM *THE FEET MANUSCRIPT*

Above the neck
the head of the pianist
swiveled into distances—
Isadora had found him ugly.

On the floor
feet banging away,
sweating,
pushing the globule earth
through the ruins of the spheres.

Up there head
(trailing its foul dimensions
its poor relations of nose
and mouth and ugly ears)
hears drops of notes
like stars in honey,
hands band sounds
that walk on water,
angels stop
and armies pause in blood.

And Isadora
winds her scarves
like arms about his holy head,
and carries it
through the astounded air,
as she murmurs:
all the secrets of her love,
all the mysteries
of her holy flying.

G. E. Murray

SHOPPING FOR MIDNIGHT

There you go, it's everywhere
here, waiting for me at ridiculous prices,
the essential mood—collected
and perfect-bound—hidden, certainly,
like the best of bargains,
among tampons & pickles & paperwares,
down these aisles I tour at midnight.

A browser at heart,
I carry no money. It's safer that way,
as the average retail clerk
will ply me with replicas, expensive
imitations of my prize.
And I have been taken for an easy target
before, buying dreams of blood

and summer at discount.
Once, guilty of wearing an oversized coat
to market, a thief, I resisted
the sweet commerce of a career angel,
boosting her instead
of her temporary goods. But shopping
for the darkest of bones demands nerve,

a special setting, instinct.
There are, naturally, no rules of search
or purchase; no adequate samples.
Not necessary. The time will arrive when
I round a corner perfectly
and find it, waiting like a mouse, enormous
as Canada, the perennial top-shelf item.

It belongs somewhere, and only
there, mine to find alone, marked down
like contaminated vegetables,

a fish found breathing on the beach, harvest
of any old night, dampish,
twisted, leaving me to decide whether
to steal, borrow, or merely adore it.

Arthur Vogelsang

ANOTHER FAKE LOVE POEM

Years later you are the way you should be, making tidal waves
At meetings, surviving the concussions of your own poems,
And making hundreds of dollars a month.
And suddenly you remember it was *your* fault.
And it wasn't just a crack in the personality crust,
It was the strong, definite beginning of the way you've become.

There must be a planet where the people get sad and die
When there are no earthquakes,
And when one is coming they are happy and
Go to Italian restaurants all over the planet in their Italy,
Their England, their Baltimore, and laugh happily and
Drink wine and make sweet dirty talk
As magnitudinous tremors pass through their wicker chairs.

She's in Canada now, and once went to China,
And when you go to Chile to accept the personality-
In-literature prize and to Antarctica to make a speech,
There it will be, *your* fault, waving, roaring, or hurrying near,
Way behind, harmless and ugly.
The thought of yourself as an ass makes you happy
But you will get sad and die.

Charles Vandersee

SCULPTURE

While the first winter log burned
in the sculpturing yellow fire,
we sat on the rug by the oldest chair
in the studio, watching each other's lips.

Summer is clay, and winter is marble,
she said; it's all the same,
making things, breathing life
with the fingers. It's being God
all day, and then into the night,
as far as you want to go,
one of the presiding angels,
guarding the day's work of God
against tigers and vandals and beavers.

You're absolutely, I said, laughing
as softly as bulky Michelangelo
probably never managed, the last,
the ultimate last romantic.
It's the universal redemption, then.
Come, all musicians with scratchy notes,
all cooks with rancid broth, be God,
and mothers, of course, whose babies
are squirming with wet underpants!

I looked into her face in the fire,
into the shadows, the surfaces,
her eyes sparks of the light.
We stopped shaping heavy words
and touched the virgin silence,
felt in the rug, knit for us,
the bricks, rescued by hands,
the boards, the beams, the chair,
hands, love, creating hands.

We were thinking, and we turned
to each other with sharp desire
in the light, and with beautiful care,
as if with clay on our palms and fingertips.

Robert Pack

ADVICE TO THE TRAVELER

I wait at the oak door that you chose, and say:
"You are still free to go, to choose again."
The shuttered house, scented in moonlight, still
Is abandoned; she cannot live there now,
Nor can she leave. But if you pause too long,
She will fasten you in her stopped shade. Now go,
Take a last turn at the thick hemlock grove
Beneath the owl's first scream, where my smoke voice
Circles the snuffed fire, whispering advice.
Repeat these words: "Nothing is real at first."
She still recalls you when my shade departs
In the hemlock grove as you move on. Now take
An ocean voyage rippling *farewell*; delay
At a round island's name rumbling in vowels;
Consider settling where the slow wind shuffles
The long-plumed birds and the hot sea sloshes
Incredible shells. Leave quickly on a whim,
As my voice nudges the fruit-cluttered air,
Because she once believed you when you murmured
To her hair among oak-leaves in the moonlight.
For fear I will possess her if you stay,
You are free now to return. Nothing is real
At first. And now she waits, in a breathing house,
Smoothing sheets as the barred owl's echo wails,
For you to begin. I have never gone.
I am the only life that takes you in.

LETTERS FROM MY FATHER

I

Dear son,

Our government consists of three ancestors
they all wear the Gandhi cap
The middle man controls law & order
the man who comes after
controls the middle man
When the middle man and the one who comes after
disagree on the use of the English language
they go to the first man
who comes and goes before everyone
the three never die

Today we had no rice
so we ate green beans and curd
the milkwoman is out looking for a patch of grass
it has not rained since 1973

Son,

Our government has proclaimed
they will make rain
the eldest son of our chief
is already in America
to ask the President for some clouds

This morning your nephew saw
the government on the secretariat roof-
looking up
the middle man held his middle finger accusingly
the priests were doing their best in Sanskrit

Your nephew says
if the government cordoned off
the hungry millions together
over a parched field of wheat
they'd cry enough to make bread

Your nephew is a born cynic
he'll be five
this Friday

II

Son,

Your doctor sister is transferred
she made the deputy minister's wife wait . . .

III

Son,

The heat is sacrificial
the crows have flown
the crickets seem to be screaming

This afternoon my skin hangs heavy on my back
the washerman's donkey hops
round and round in the alley
it isn't convinced
the garbage pail is empty of dinner leaves

No one eats with leaves anymore
it's faster from hand to mouth
if there's enough to hand
to mouth . . .

IV

Son,

I have a strange feeling
someone sits in the front room
fanning the heat from his face
do you think it is Him?
perhaps he took a short cut by drought . . .

Isn't the body a wrap within a wrap
folds of goatskin
hiding the dark it hides from
the dark it will accompany?

V

Son,

Your mother sends dried camphor
from the feet of the Lord
her eyes still light up at your letters
though she fails on her feet

So, you look for a third country
like the scrawls of my bony hand . . .

it's not enough to push and pull
there should be superior means of impatience

Son,

If you don't hear from me
do not turn pensive
it only means
I've run out of ink . . .

NAMES OF THE HUNGRY

Written after a Bill Moyer report
on hunger in Asia.

their faces buried
in grass mudcracks
to fool the worms
to fool the birds
that ate them
for glass turd seed

they've swallowed
the sword
the swallower
his poster
the glue that held it
the termites the ants

long
they wrote the name
of hunger
& ate it

they'd eat your pupils
your dentures
they'd eat themselves
in your film
of their names
in your pockets

they ate your bags
your camera
your jet at port
your name on the list
of passengers?

what then do you have
to show me
brother who ate
with them . . .

NORTHWEST

AS ALL THINGS FALL DELIBERATELY AWAY

She will remember you as a kinkajou snaking from
the chandelier
to the top of the icebox. Snow stings your eyelids,
your watch stops, you are left to ruminate on your chilly
prehensile tail.

Even the moon & stars, a parure meant for grabbing:
you think of fanning yourself with a chicken wing,
getting crisp on a yacht.

But she will remember you as you are, a duet for
inamorato & wheelchair.

The children visit on Sundays. The sugar cookies & blue hankies
make you more sure of yourself, Mr. Hornie

knar not me, keep not me from the white leaves,
the necessary heaven.

Tucked under your feet you find a crocheted monkey skull
as across the lawn old men carry the rain like a box of nails.
Your big white daughter pushes you into stars at the planetarium.
She is marrying an Egyptian. His skin embowed with air bubbles,
a pearl in every pock. She will paint herself with cathode rays,
& when darker, suprise you with a snuffbox of myrrh, a kiss,
an evening gown.

POEM AT THOMAS BEACH

O Lake Calhoun, how often
I have wanted you in my arms, more polluted
than any woman I know and certainly
more human.

Help, I am falling into you again
in the middle of winter, at a dinner party:
I lean too far forward into a mirror
and fall off the edge of the earth

like baby powder grated from the moon
and sing for you until there is nothing
so vague it resembles me. What an awesome sport
to dislodge the few logical hormones I have,

who need no compass
in your small bright house. O Lake Calhoun,
no jealous florists soak their feet in your perfume,
no saints' beards decay who bathe in you, but oh

oh oh I love the void, it is a neglected
art form, like love, and easier to keep my mind on.
So I think of you my big green metaphor,
how I snared a salad from your floor

last August when I was
lonely. Your vegetable metaphysic kept me warm
when I lacked every essential human resource. I ask you,
what is the exotic scent? mud? may I touch your earlobe?

O Lake Calhoun, do you remember
the night I entered you singing: What is this
strange country I must visit naked? and though
the moon shone on the dock the rain never fell so hard.

Henry Carlile

BUTCHERING CRABS

All day we smashed and swore,
filling the brine tanks
with twitching claws and legs,
white belly meat,
dropping the entrails
and deep-dish violet shells
down a slime hole to the bay.
Even Hawk, our best butcher,

got pinched.
Those claws cut
through our heaviest gloves.
When we broke them off
they clamped down tighter.

“Take that, you bucket head!”
the shell shattering
like crockery.
“You’ll never bite another
Indian!”
Stabbing his hands
into that cage of maniacs,
clattering and seething,
bubbling at the mouths,
glare of stalked eyes,
claws like open traps,
he would snap one up,
and in one smooth movement,
break it over the knife.

*She dips her fork
into the cocktail,
lifts it to her perfect face
and eats.
Over miles of white tablecloth
the bits and pieces fall.*

He lived in a shack
with newspaper curtains,
drove home each night
crabby and skidding.
On the third day
they gave me my check:
“Too slow, sonny.”
But Hawk was fast,
he was faster than life.

Naomi Clark

CYGNUS XI

“Next to the kitchen I picture a space,”
she said. “It’s just a space. It
haunts me. Why is it there? Where is it going?
What could it hold?”

“It’s a black hole,” she said. “It swallows light.
Did it implode? Is it so dense a matter it pulls
everything in?”

“How to look for what is invisible! It’s right next
to the kitchen,” she said, “But when I search for it I get lost.
Was it a super-nova? Is this blackness only its inward pulse?”

“I feel it burning,” she said, “a black,
dense ball ready to burst, a black, dense, pulsating flame, heavy
and massive.

“Somewhere impossible galaxies travel faster than
any light,” she said, “expand, contract faster than light—
unless, being impossible—
violators, you know, of fundamental law—they’re illusion.
But next to the kitchen I see a space. It pulses.
Faster than illusion.

“Cygnus, the black swan, came by here one day,
on his way south. He drank from a pan, swam
with the children. Then he flew on south.
He never saw me. The next year, we were under
a landing pattern; the jets, ubiquitous.
Their thunder and screeching accompany all my songs.

"That space," she said. "It wouldn't be so bad if not right next to the kitchen. It exerts a terrible attraction. Cookies, cucumbers, mops, laundry detergent— everything flies toward it, everything's swallowed unless I catch it. Momently the field grows. Even in the classroom, shopping, at parties, I feel it pull. No light, no light! And right next to the kitchen!

"Last night I sat down," she said, "and tried to draw it. But how do you draw a space that's full of— nothing: full of the densest matter of all, dense, pulsing, black nothing.

I tore up the paper. But in the night I heard it— pulsing and eating. It eats up light. Einstein heard it: the dark, imploded masses within their shell chewing.

"The little birds that fly under the jets come freely. All round the house I've put shelves and feeders. Jays, sparrows, finches, and mockers, Oregon juncos, even today a dove, in spring cedar waxwings in droves to the hedge berries, even today a princely black-hooded stranger with barred wings and an orange waistcoat. But the black swan never. Where is he now?

"You must forgive me," she said. "Next to the kitchen I picture a space. It's black. It pulses with music. The small birds know it, and the hares, the turtles. They dance. They are mute. Last week a lizard returned to our garden. Last week a toad. And I dreamed a falcon."

Marc Hudson

VILLAGE

I found myself in a small village, the cedars glowing like a hand raised to the sun. It was autumn. Above the pass I'd seen winter, a still lake in a white cloud, and, lower down, all that was left of summer, a field of small blue suns.

But in the village it was autumn, that clear light in which leaves brighten and vanish, that wind like leaning your back against stone. I saw no one, a red shard that was the sun, a heron carved by wind and rain, nothing you could say was human.

I said village for a reason, though; if I closed my eyes to listen I stood in a hallway among children. They were clapping their hands and laughing that a hawk couldn't see. They pointed upwards and I stood in the wind above three valleys, the flint of three rivers scraping the talus.

An old man with cricket legs started to sing. He crouched in the meadow I had crossed that morning. He sang of berries and snowbanks, masses of larkspur, blue, blue. He scratched it out with those spindly legs, he sang, "You will have better eyes as a dead man."

Andrew Grossbardt

NO ONE HAS DONE THAT BEFORE

In 1968 Mrs. Marvinna Drew began typing and she kept on until she finished her project by typing "1,000,000" at the end of a column of numbers.

Des Moines Sunday Register

1

Another winter day nearly over
the pale air catches fire a moment
in the west
the last slivers of sky
die slowly
close like a dark wound

and finally it is done
now all I have left
aside from these papers
are fingers
that will never come straight
fingers that dance crazily
a the least excuse
flashing each bruised tip
each broken nail
like a badge

what now of my fingers'
need to fasten
my hands to stretch

2

Six years they said
I'd never finish
and though each day
died its own shiny death
I never stopped counting

numbers poured from light
filling the pages
corner to corner
in the purest night

3

Near dawn
When my husband hears me
counting in sleep
he must know
some of us have parts
so private
no one can touch them

I want him to come to me
rub salve carefully
into my cramped wrists
dig his hard fingers
into the knotted
muscles of my back
there are aches so deep
I've come to think of them
as my own

4

Sometimes when I reach
behind my pillow
something stirs
the hands clasp
like someone else's

one morning I will feel
for myself drop by drop
blood by blood
tendon by tendon
hoping they will all add up
and I'll be gone
no one has done that before

FOG AT THE WINDOWS

This morning's fog was thick enough
To be a great blind eye
Leaning on every windowsill
And yet I still deny
Its empty accusation.

I'm sick of being stared at
By an objective eye,
And whether it calls itself YHWH
Or science, I deny
Its ready accusation.

So go, you foggy stare that makes
My windowpane and eye
Coequal; glass does not look or see
And I can still deny
Its ghostly accusation.

I love the flesh that blinks at vice
And virtue. All my eye.
Though fierce, I still can hurt or heal,
Refusing to deny
Pain's loving accusation.

FLY-VOICES

You cannot drive us out.
You only drive us deeper and deeper in
Till even whispers shout

Our names: At the funeral
When you sadly mouth lies of sad loss
Good-Riddance hears the call

And rises behind your face,
His joyous smile shining behind your frown
Like the worms' loving embrace;

At the *intime* cocktail party
Over the clattering chatter of twoscore or more
Glib and arty-tarty,

Hangs gaunt Burner-of-Cities,
Smell of blood and kumiss on every breath
Of *soigne* charity committees;

And in the wedding hush
Counter-of-Months and How-Can-He-Ever
Wink at the bride's blush,

The groom's declining I do.
—No, no matter what worship you profess,
Admit *entre nous*

That the buzzing, biting, blinding crowd of us,
Cloud of us are the sole gods you confess.

Ross Talarico

THE ANSWER

I knew it at birth.
Blood and wind
Passed like rivers and seasons
Through the miniature geography,
Lost continent, forming
Somewhere within me . . . All I

Knew, or cared
To know
Of this changing earth;

I began breathing to keep time.

A memory formed,
An altar upon which I placed
Words too precious to live with.
I can always go back,
Utter something
That a child will insert, stupidly,

Into a song full of instructions.

But I don't.
I can't.
Instead I wait for miracles,
The perfect commercial on T.V.,
An angelic knock on the door,

A glimpse of gut forming a star.

Tonight, out, away from
Everything I've turned the world, old sock,
Inside out and into,
My eyes fade, as if I've made

A photograph of myself, after all.
So I let my fingers turn

Cool from glass after glass,
And then run them
Over my lips, cheekbones,
Eyelids . . . until I know

This life, this human being,
The fragile moment when the teeth
Touch the edge of glass
And the intestines stiffen in the body's cavity,

A word, like a diamond, still buried
In the dark cave
Where the eyes of the priest

Look helplessly
Over the bones of his hands
Locked forever in prayer,

The moment I realize I've
Come through it all,
A man staking his shadow on a piece of earth,
Knowing only myself

And the warm secret I'm keeping . . .

Sandra M. Gilbert

Two Poems

THE DRESSMAKER'S DUMMY

In my grandmother's room, treasures of old mahogany,
intricate & enigmatic as the eighteen-nineties:
the three-paned mirror, the great highboy
with knobs like cabbage roses & expensive brasses,

the bed of generations—brown & black, teak & rosewood, inlays
older than ever I could be, & a mattress
soft from half a century of sleepers,
& quilts, & goose feathers—

and cast adrift on the crimson carpet
a dressmaker's dummy, headless, armless,
a barren stork on one steel leg . . .
The stork that brought me!—for as I grew it grew with me,

its plaster hips were padded to mimic mine,
and when I sprouted breasts so did the dummy,
and as I lengthened it slid up its pole, became lean,
became bone,
became my own self, hardening, final,

and at night, through the shadows, I watched it shine
in the mirror, the street lamps casting whiteeyes
on its ludicrous height, white scorn on its hips,
its empty neck, its stiff stuck frame:

and still it's there in my grandmother's room,
curved like the prow of a ship, cleaving the air
dumb as a wooden whaler's wife, a hopeless
image of me, frozen and bare,

sailing forward into the triple mirror,
wading waistdeep, a dead lady, into the future.

FEBRUARY

The oak leaves open, bitter, succulent,
with sharp thin edges keen as tiny teeth—
green lives, alive in the blue smog,
green teeth biting the bitter sky.

February already, and a haze portending blossoms
thickens the garden air, and I am asked
to review poems, somebody thinks I might be
an authority (does he mean *me*?)

so stacks of earnest books lie on my desk
passive as necks on a chopping-block,
tender as baby skin—too vulnerable!—and I begin
by sharpening pencils, yawning, breathing slow,

and then I'm pleased, then angry; breathing fast
I scribble wickedness in margins, fall past
clumps of words like Satan, Siva, shaking fists,
desiring for myself the tall blue throne,

destroyer, arbiter, myself alone. And then
I land in thorny branches, hug

my infant wit, my cold crown,
and see that I myself am February,

bitter, mean, biting the sky with hard green teeth,
hungry for everyone's skin,
waiting not very patiently for some March
of great white blossoms to begin.

E. G. Burrows

THE POND

Merely a low place
where the field dips a cup
for runoff where reeds
anchor through March a shallow
ice only this hunched
redwing remembers and early
stakes out.

Of an age to doubt
the inexorability of
succeeding seasons I question
this faith in thaw.
Waterbird you could be wrong.
We may stay chilled and the crust
lock our roots.

Each has done time his own way
though I can no longer share
the ingrained the instinctual.
Which is why you wear
the same scarlet shoulders
while I change
desperate and older.

Richard Jackson

ADRIFT OFF WIGHT:
ANNOTATIONS FROM A LIFE OF KEATS

"... because he [the poet] has no identity
he is continually in for—and filling
some other body—"

Letter to Woodhouse, 1818

1

a firmament reflected in a sea

Distance, a shark's fin
gleams white as a gravestone.

The sea soaks your heart—
your words, shadows of fish,
already shift beyond your reach.

The ship's lantern broods
across the water.

Wharfs, dunes, wrecks,
the grunt of gulls,
you could scrape these months away like scales,
you could grip that thin scalpel of the moon.

Quietly, the stars
break loose from their moorings.

2

no more than winds and tides

You wait in the skeleton of that ship,
listen as the rats scratch
through the dark lungs of the hold.

There are stories of sea burials,
black fingers, faces

wrapped like market fish—

What words you own dissolve
on the quiet tides of these nights.

Now, riddled by reefs and shrunken

horizons, dreams branching,
you hear again the song of the thrush,

delicate as a ship in a bottle.

The bird, in darkness, moves away from
its song, and the song spreads.

3

O what do you own
where across the bay the wharfs have rotted
ribs of abandoned barks
jut through tide flats

(O what do you own that you are)
as the screech of an owl wings its way
from a clump of ash above these cliffs
(what do you own that you are not)
leaving a dark body behind
lost where these leaves flap forever
silent as tongues in the mouths of mutes

in this litter of silences
O what do you own that
you are not losing forever?

James Richardson

Two Poems

DRIVER EDUCATION

When you lose your brakes, he said,
you must change your mind about everything.
Only what you have never noticed
will help you. Avoid, at all costs, at

one cost, the sublimity of oak,
the watchtower boulder, home,
and signs of all kinds. Above all,
do not take that easy way down.

Head for the incline formerly
steep to the point of annoyance, yet
too gentle to be impressive.
Do not let your mind wander.

When your car is a scream
swung on a long rope, and the road
lets go, aim for the low tenacious weed,
high grass, brittle scrub—in that order.

Water will help, if it is shallow enough
not to be interesting. Get the sun
at your back. Stay away from
clouds, all large animals, friends.

When you are finally ready to stop,
all that has guided and protected you—
glass, steering wheel, struts, beams
and dials—has decided before you,

and becomes your enemy. Hold
the body back, cursing them
past redemption. Do not fear
their revenge—no one does this twice.

If you can get out, do so immediately.
If the car is not burning, burn it
with your clothes inside. Change your name,
though no one will know it.

By now it is March, and you will
be tempted, but the smoke
wailing over the town of your birth
is not, not really, for you.

A RANSOM NOTE

Do not call
anyone, for who deserves
to be believed, and haven't you,
since the roads one October blazed
and fell from their destinations, been trying to explain
what was taken from you? No, do not
call.

Do not
try to deceive us. Valises
bloody with gems, emptiness strung taut
will never do. What it hurts
to give is our demand—
what no one wants but you,
who least of all believe
in your own pernicious counterfeit of pain.

Do not take
us lightly, do not
be tempted that way: for we know.
That face which almost surfaces
in your most paralytic dreams, the cause
of these or those early frosts, the rising edge
in that one's voice, shadows
across innumerable lives, more darkness
than you would at first believe—
we will show you over and over how it is you.
Do not take us lightly.

Do not hurry. In
no time, as they say,
we will have our due.
Kneeling, spend your days
in flame. Heap up,
with extravagant denial, the ransom.
Though of course it is you we have and it's over
no matter what you bring.

Sean Bentley

SLIDESHOW

Click.
This is a picture of me
lounging in splendor,
the look on my face
like water in a total vacuum.
Click.
Here I am getting an idea.
Check out those deepfish eyes.
Click.
This one is a bit out of focus
but it's me with my fairy dust
and all that crap,
sprinkling it from my fingers.
Click.
Here is a gargantuan flash.
Click.
What do you mean what's this?
This is a closeup
of my new world.
Barren as a fingernail.
Watch.
Click.
I commanded, Let there be water
and there was;
(click)
Let there be worms
and there were;
(click)
Let there be sky
for the worms to ignore
and there was.
Click.
I said, Let there be thunderclouds
packing the sky and driving on
like spawning salmon

and there were;
(click)
I spake Let there be fences
and canaries, sharp-tipped
and scratchy, and there were;
Let there be sporophytes
and anthrax, and there were;
(click)
Let there be smut, young and fuzzy
around maypoles! Let there be
chipping sparrows!
And there were.
I commanded Let there be grub
and there was;
(click)
then I commanded
Let there be mouths to feed
and there were.
Click.

Here I am creating bushbabies,
meadow-muffins, Volkswagens,
piecrusts and ozone.
Click.
I created high bush cranberries,
diphthongs, I said
Let there be divorce
rampant as Queen Anne's Lace
and there was;
Let there be Indian corn
and deerstalker hats,
trees pinning the ground
from the wind,
and there were.
Click.
Let there be azure socks,
I said, and there were;
(click)
Let there be feet,
Let there be

little dog-hair clutchbags,
gummed labels, catnip,
marsupials, and there were.
Click.

Here I am commanding
Let there be Chick Sales,
Let there be shrines and temples,
and neon crosses.
Click.

Here I am again in splendor,
watching two of my creations
blow each other to bits
with nitro, in my name.
Click.

This is me rumpjumping
my created white stallion
and disappearing over
my created horizon
into my created sunset.
I always wanted to be the hero.
Click.

Here is a picture of my white hat.

Diana O Hebir

NIGHT TRAIN

Noise loops itself
Catlike, self-centered, around the walls of her bedroom,
Abrading the paper, foraging into her sleep
For nuggets of love, of wishing.
It chews them like bubble gum; it has iron teeth.
It has a shout that sends metal down into a woman's thighs;
It swaggers, matching its rhythm to the pulse in her neck.

It says, night after night your escape goes down,
You seek the wall to hold its shout.
It says: night's child.

The woman turns in the dark, touching dry linen.
There's a cricket beside the bed; she sees her husband's shadow.
The walls of the bedroom are
A cricket's cage.
Trainlight measures the sky; cinders are fiery needles, fiery
dreams.

Day comes in hot as a prairie. The trees grow scented
day candles.

Silence covers the sky in blue smoke.
Everything signals that night won't come again

Except night's child. Night's favorite child
Goes down to the crossing, waves chums at the engineer.
She's seeking, still seeking in secret the coal-eyed stranger
Who drives his bright hot squawking engine through her dreams.

Jane Augustine

Two Poems

from *The Woman's Guide to Mountain Climbing*

V

CONTINUING

Too far above trees. Too far above
the last campsite. Nothing but steepness.
No firewood, no wind-shelter.

The ridge hides the peak. Must rest
every ten steps, fall to elbows & knees
under the minimum needed to survive.

Only the smallest plants live here.
Too little air. My eye tries
to magnify them, tiny bright blue hopes.

Lungs rasp. Shoulder collect knives.
Not strong enough to go on.
But what to do

when it's as hard to climb down
as up? Shove off the pack a while.
Lie flat. Try to sleep. The moon

also sleeps at times. Hides out.
Then begins to climb again, the night
strapped to her spine. Climbs & keeps climbing.

VII VISITATION

(the moon in Sagittarius)

sleeping tentflap half open
moon on my forehead

a woman shrieks far away
& again wildcat waking me

willows blacken as I look
out to my doused fire

night breeds
creatures to circle me

I came from known dangers
into these

ground tremor reaches me
before the sound

of hooves on rock
breath in frenzy snorting

pawing outside
the tent's back corner—

I'm in his path—
too terrified to rise

face what I fear—
shapeless threat a beast

ruler of this place,
where I'm intruder—

face old fears that grow
in unprotected women

of violence injury
who'll care for me?

How shall I get well?

Helplessness holds me
tight under cover.

When a bear attacks, they say
play dead.

I hide
until that animal rage

baffled moves off
through the willows

& come awake fully then
slowly regret

the chance lost
to stand up living eye to eye

find it after all
merely a white-tailed deer

also terrified—

here in the courtyard of the moon
why did I fail to trust her?

I push back the tentflap
climb out

there she rides
high on the mountain's saddle

helmeted bow drawn
& quiver full of stars.

THE OUTING

My daughter takes me calling on the snow.
I catch her hands, and we turn to claim
the great wet flakes that touch and combine
as they clear the dark peak of the house.
The trick is to look them into our hands,
so we call out our choices:
bow tie, spinning wishbone, wing
sailing away from us. We jitter and glide
across the lawn, looking for all the world
as though we're drawn by a divining rod.

My small panhandler, when a flake lights
on the blue veins of your palm, whiteness
winks and goes out,
leaving a loose transparency
to be shaken free. Look:
wherever we go we make
a kind of dancing in place.

ALPHABET

for *Alicia*

Last night I bound you to the letter A.
Your spine curving in the X rays became
the stack of blocks I built
spelling your name, a father's wobbly trick
and hope to hold you, laughing,
to harness and frame—your first friend
among the wooden letters you used to smuggle
everywhere. (Giving you away, they bulged
like extra knees,
so we made a game where I frisked you
and guessed messages, and was always wrong.)

Last night, awakened by the stress of legs
against leather straps, I found you sleeping
with the letter A in your right hand
and the letter A in your left hand,
the moon in your window bending close
as the mirror in the doctor's headband.
Were you dreaming your name? A's
like an alligator's grin,
dots swarming from i's,
the stinging tails of l's and c's? Daughter,
our dreams are games that hold us to the earth.

Hayden Carruth

Two Poems

LATE SONNET

For that the sonnet no doubt was my own true
singing and suchlike other song; for that
I gave it up half-coldheartedly to set
my lines in a fashion that proclaimed its virtue
original in young arrogant artificers who
had not my geniality nor voice and yet
their fashionableness was persuasive to me: what
shame and sorrow I pay!

And that I knew
that beautiful hot old man Sidney Bechet
and heard his music often but not what he
was saying, that tone, phrasing, and free play
of feeling mean more than originality,
these being the actual qualities of song.
Nor is it essential to be young.

YOU MASTERS WHO SAW NOT

You masters who saw not that the turning gyres
can bring no beauty and no serenity
in your enameled bright eternity,

NORTHWEST

but only frozen madness; you dear liars
who taught my heart that its enabling fires
might wish the turn, as if of my mind's key,
opening into lands beyond history
where soul could have its myth of stilled desires,

I now grown old as you say bluntly, Go,
take your places in time, your storms and fears
already crumbling, I am not sorry for you,
no longer, o my reverends, poets, seers;
go do what I in eagerness must do,
burning and sane upon the pyre of years.

Greg Kuzma

Three Poems

A SALUTE

The street is on fire.
Men with hoses go into barrooms,
kiss the maids of honor.
Police take off their clothes.
See they are really all good fellows.
The mayor gives a major address
on chemotherapy. Retires in
applause. Good night from Rio,
all you stay at homes.

The purpose was always to start
at the beginning, as the shark does.
But who will advise us when to stop.
As is the problem of the shark as well.
Blood trees sing in the wind,
and home again seems a long way off.
There's a quick image of mother's apron
plump with potatoes. Alas, the
good woman is gone, into the
darkened kitchen of death.

We had always wanted it assumed
that we were good men, well fit
for any occasion. But caution
got the better of us, and wealth
ate us up, and the women we drank with
were lonelier than we were. So you
have it.

Now another country looks as good,
tall buildings out of which
we might leap to our deaths
were not the midnight breezes warm,
and on the winds soft music not unlike
that which had made Kansas decent.

THE GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT

Though you know nothing and should have no
reason to I must dictate this letter from myself
unto some noble personage of far descent.
Signed what's his name. You write the rest.

Hot day at the office, everybody
stripped down, split to cool like corn
out of its husks.

Big contract from the Letter I.
Another phone call, through the mini track.
I hear Miss Blooper's bloopers
scintillate the air.
I watch her bloopers popping by
beneath her blouse.
Ah five o'clock,
hour of pizza and pizzazz.

My father's house was Ivy League,
my father's father's too.
I used to know your dad himself,
but what am I to you?

Hey can you crack a joke?

Oh the big buildings of STEEL
to house the racks of girlie mags
below me at the corner hack.
I peer down from out of my office cubby booth,
I notch the Rolls Royce of one Albert Black.
On his way up, perhaps a heart attack.

The digs of business never botched
a real he man who eats and sleeps.

Pipes, we got em.
Tankers rolling belly full of gold.
They're yours out in the harbor there.
Tonight Tangiers, tomorrow Santa Claus.
I smell the liquor of my penthouse flat
on one Miss Mary Sunshine in her black cravat.

WHEN WE DEAD AWAKEN

My father was a blacksmith without a forge.
He died without a forge,
but having made everything in his life
with his own hands,
the earth he went into was like a brother to him,
although he was much afraid.

Someday when the dead awaken
he will rise with them
and they will all come forth
to sit at all the chairs and tables
they have abandoned,
so strong was their pain
that they had got up from our tables
and gone off searching for the end of it.

Oh there is a day
(and I feel it may be soon)
when we the few stragglers left
must go down to the ground
never to walk across the yard again
in the afternoon
never to dress for the party
admire ourselves in the mirror
never to kiss the sweet mouths
of our children
in the mornings, Sundays,
with no work to go to.

It is said that the dead will awaken
and the living with them
all those among us and including even
ourselves
who have lived our lives as if asleep
and all of our eyes will open
on the world
and we will gasp at pleasure at the sight
and the breath from our lips
will nearly extinguish the sun
and all life's vanities
will come to an end
but I do not believe it.

About Our Contributors

THOMAS BRUSH lives in Issaquah, Washington, and won *Poetry Northwest's* Young Poet's Prize in 1975.

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