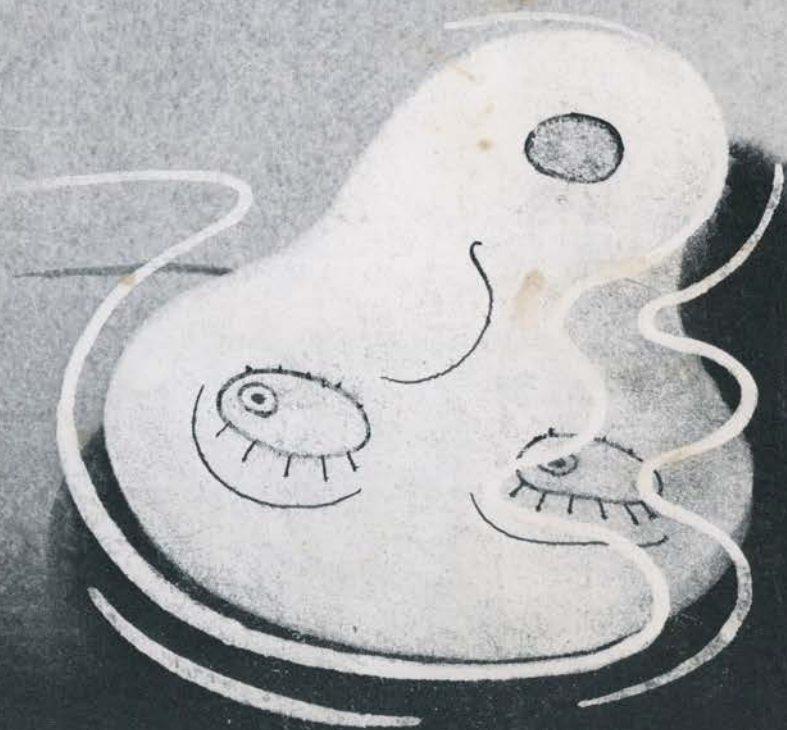


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# Poetry

NORTHWEST



# POETRY NORTHWEST

VOLUME SEVENTEEN

NUMBER FOUR

WINTER 1976-77

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POETRY NORTHWEST

WINTER 1976-77

*Stephen Jaech*

DYING ON MY FEET

He is prepared to write about the well-arranged bowl  
of fruit which sits on his desk like an old woman's  
hat, yes sir, he is. But his radio brings the Twelfth  
Street Birmingham Gospel Revival; it wants to be louder,  
as loud as the radio goes. Brother Cleon says he's  
seen, hallelujah, yes sir, he's seen the clouds of death  
in the sky over Alabama. And you've seen them too.  
The time is coming, coming tomorrow like the storm  
over Alabama, yes sir—we'll be on our knees, I want you to know.  
I want you to be there, I want you to see the horses,  
the horses in the sky, yes sir, do I hear it: the horsemen  
are in the sky over Alabama and the drums are thumping  
hallelujah, and I want you to know, yes sir, to know  
that it's all going down on the sword of the horsemen.  
And there's only one way, the way is on your knees—can I  
hear you speak with me—the way is screaming, yes sir,  
screaming for the blue robes which we'll wear, and the horses  
in the sky over Alabama don't trample the blue robes,  
no they don't, yes sir, let's hear what's beneath your chest.  
Let's hear the drums which are pounding hallelujah,  
I want you to know about the final splash, yes sir,  
we'll swim off, we'll be swimming down the river which  
flows into the gulf which spills into the ocean which pours  
into the sky, the sky over Alabama, which mixes into the  
Milky Way which opens, can I hear you say, which opens  
into the rotunda of endless domes, yes sir, do I hear those  
hooves clop?

And he found himself in his shabby apartment, and he took  
a crisp bite of an apple, a firm red apple, yes sir, he did.

## FOREVER

Let's keep leaving forever.

Two lovers unraveling at the ends of their rope  
wave goodbye, a hand  
seizes the throat, the intestines, though everything  
led to this and I let it and half wanted it,  
rolling up the car window.

Let's keep leaving forever

the way the soul  
lifts like a second skin  
over the stopped corpse, hovering there  
as the first body beneath the glow  
condenses into opal, breathless  
as Arizona; then the light keeps lifting.

We were made for it. Frontally planed,

eyes which focus only at a distance,  
the unnatural bone-twist of looking behind  
the way ducks naturally sleep on a pond,  
fear the long shadow that continually tails me  
will turn me to stone.  
Or the sideways flow  
of furred hills and abandoned cows;  
each face, each friend or stranger,  
blurbs by like factory smoke.  
We keep on leaving forever.

Let's. Palm against palm,

despite myself I concentrate on  
touching you. It begins  
all over, this urge to remain  
in one house like a clean heat upon herbs.  
If this too should end—  
let's keep leaving forever.

## THE DISAPPEARANCE OF HALF OF NEW ENGLAND

The 30-ton flywheel with an internal flaw

cast to specifications—  
calico piles up on the floor like ribbon candy.

The looms set odd against even  
when the walls started sawing—  
2, 4, 6, 3, 5, 7.

Oh those Utopian diagrams! windows  
repeating the long brick walls  
of the red mill like recurrent dreams  
that leave you dazed at dawn, but near midday

You bolt upright—rowhouses and grand  
boulevards of elms—

Two salmon sent  
to potential investors  
so thick in the spillway below the dam  
in March you could walk across on their pink backs.

The elms fall into their own gravity  
cut to stumps or dynamited  
into black holes. The windows  
are bricked in or fitted with plywood.  
The cable of the wrecking ball  
pulls taut against its reluctance.

All gone! Make it new!

Slick slick, up go the instant walls,  
cinder block washed with pastels,  
so uneventful the entire length  
of the turnpike lies there in a coma unblinking.

Who loves the valved voice and turned spindles,  
Who hates all disembodiments  
and doubts—  
Who could contain these contradictions,  
or embrace these multitudes?

CREEDMOOR: THE LOCKED WARD

I ask what she needs  
write it down  
she can't  
her penmanship's  
a five-year-old's  
hair cut close to her head

mother wants a boy  
and who doesn't

weeping into a balled-up tissue  
next time bring tissues  
and shoes  
would I buy brown shoes?

tell mother to call  
where is mother  
tell mother to forget it

two fat women  
in the immense dayroom  
waltzing arm in arm  
the boy who borrows cigarettes  
behind them  
singing a hymn

I can't buy shoes  
without her feet

she'd give me  
her feet

I'm thinking of my wife and daughter  
I want to leave

bring tissues

between the casement windows  
the young woman laments  
her abortion at 20  
who really had none

what happened to the dog  
did you put her to sleep  
where is mother

I look across the room  
at the unused pool table  
cues lined up dusty as WWI rifles

small voices weeping  
in my throat

smell cooking smell  
canned peas and carrots  
Salisbury steak

thin gravy voice  
of the old school teacher  
playing old songs  
at the piano

the fat women  
trotting in a circle

the boy with crinkled knees  
saying his doctor  
will never change

asks me for a nickel  
asks me for a pencil

O it's time  
traffic is heavy

the bridge-tolls up  
I live across two rivers

I've filled  
her shopping bag  
full of Kools  
cookies soft candies  
a new robe

love to the family  
don't forget love to the family

### THE MEASURE OF A DACHSHUND'S JAW

You seemed miles above, Frau Kissel,  
yelling down the dumbwaiter shaft,  
"What you do down there!" letting  
your empty dogfood cans clatter toward us.  
You seemed miles below, your voice  
rumbling into the furnace  
as we stole kisses from the super's Marge,  
coal dust on our pants. O the whites  
of your eyes, Frau, yellow as rest homes,  
awful as grandmothers falling into liquor  
stores. You shambled past Mendel's newsstand,  
fingers flicking in and out of his money-box.

Halloween, you held pennies in tongs  
over the stove's hot jets, threw them down  
into the alley where we sang like beggars.  
Convert to St. Vitus, your touch trembled  
like raw eggs in a river. You stretched neighbors'  
curtains on your rack of needles, 10¢ an hour.  
You clomped on the roof like Mr. Angelo  
with stroke, shouting commands at pigeons,  
letting loose your dachshund. We saw you  
raise a fist to your husband in the sky,  
his biplane breaking up over the Argonne,  
ripping through calendar pictures of France.

And when you broke your hip on super's  
icy sidewalk, no one brought groceries;  
did your laundry; walked your dog  
the level of a snarl. We left dead mice  
at your door: heard you cry out  
like the crazy lady in subways.  
And months later, after your dachshund  
bit Marge, you were yelling at the ASPCA truck  
parked near the hydrant; dog biscuits  
falling from your bag; money in a white  
sweat sock that you swung like a club  
beating the air, bruising whatever bruised you.

*Richard Blessing*

Three Poems

### LINES FOR HER LEAVING

Say she leaves you.  
A thousand days and pain  
is second-hand,  
sentimental almost,  
a father's grieving  
for a child's lost ball,  
Next the nostalgias,  
the house where you grew up,  
that sort of thing,  
sadnesses sweet as birds  
filling November's empty trees.  
One day you'll wake up peaceful,  
like a tiny village  
with a famous cemetery.  
It is winter. The tourists  
have all gone home.  
When you learn the language  
you will find  
there is no word there  
that says her name.

## FREE THROW

for Richard Hugo

It's up to me. I toe  
the line like a February  
swimmer. The nation stops.  
Someone coughs in Medford,  
Oregon, and the dark goes  
*shush*. Father hunches  
forward. *Go on, boy*, he says,  
*go on!* Mother's eyes hide  
in their holes like crabs.  
They know I'll fail. *Jump*,  
says the hoop. The glass board  
says, *This is your goal, this  
is your life*. The dark applauds.  
A pyramid of ice grows  
in my belly. My hands stutter  
deaf-language for good-bye.  
I lay it all on the line.  
I leave my sneaks, loosen  
their lying tongues.  
I leave my jersey,  
and the number of my blue years.  
I leave my trunks,  
the seat of all my sorrows.  
I leave my jock  
with a single spidery hair  
curled graceful as an autograph.  
This is called a fake,  
and this, a drive, my last,  
straight up a wall that's higher  
than any whistle's pitch.  
Nothing is free unless we choose it.  
Through scattered clouds of jeers  
I throw myself whole now. I choose  
the white net of this page,  
these words.

## DOCTOR

She writes prescriptions for the dead.  
Rx: you must bring the future back,  
involving, definite. Unexpectedness  
is good. Prospects. Do well, be well,  
it does not matter which. Trust fire.  
There's a gap in the field above the heart,  
she says, once in eight years,  
but only for an instant, and you must be quick.  
Night will be colder there, but your own.  
Reaching yourself she diagnoses "arrival."  
Eat or be eaten, as needed. For pain.

*T. Alan Broughton*

## HOW TO SEE MY DEATH

You barely stir as I rise  
in early morning when light  
lies only at the foot of the bed.  
By the time I have dressed  
you have turned once  
and lifted far enough to the surface  
to see me waver in the doorway  
then I am gone.

The first birds skitter from the feeder,  
the neighbor's cat who has stretched  
from sleep to waking lust  
slinks in the wet grass.  
I begin my run  
flicking pebbles letting  
the stride fall short  
as muscles wake and green begins  
to flow around me—bush and tree

and lilacs clutched in their cones.  
Breath mounts in me, my heart  
old thing of checks and flaws  
tries to find the measure  
of this new tide

and you have reached your bare leg  
into my place, letting that vacant touch  
wake you to the limbs  
of trees, a crazy robin scolding  
at the roof and plummeting moon.  
Rolling the covers back  
like a loose-lipped wave  
you lift your knees,  
breasts and small veins purple as the sea,  
then put yourself in clothes.

Now I am turned toward home  
feet kicked out and legs  
taking lengths of a road I knew  
until the last turn where old apples  
twist and writhe to find a bloom  
and she stands in an upsprung wind  
sea-foam scudding from her hems  
eyes of the cave where moon  
sleeps into day

and my heart  
with home in my eyes  
breaks in a surge  
dives in the drown of its blood

and I seem to fall  
my hands out to clutch  
once more at this world  
where cats sing the stalking bird  
and you in your yellow harbor  
mend the nets.

They will carry  
the dead me back to you  
lax hand and sweat turned cold.

But this old face lies  
in its dull repose.

Look. I still run  
where field holds its ragged edge to sky  
her hair flung darkly  
and she has me by the hand,  
new roads rising  
to our touch and go.

### *Sherry Rind*

#### WOMEN WITH FOX SOULS

##### I

You would have said yesterday my life  
was given to me already formed  
and I had only to step into it  
as a woman steps into a garden,  
while you stood like a fox outside the gate.

##### II

Remember, even in a lighted room  
my eyes, too, glow with the sign of animals  
starving in a dark place.

Once a tame animal kills, the blood  
will make her go on killing.  
Today we drink tepid wine,

scrape our sharpening teeth on the glass.  
Our eyes and brows begin to slant back  
but our hands remain womanly, the fingers straight.

##### III

Women with fox souls choose a clear night  
and a pale moon to leave their women's bodies in bed  
and run, heads low, ears flat, across fields, woods,



city streets. They sit in the garden, their gold eyes  
giving back the house lights. No one dares look at them.

It is their nature to mark out a territory  
and snarl when they meet at invisible borders.  
They cause wells to dry or mill wheels to turn;  
some steal children, put out the hearth fires;  
others cause men to die suddenly in sleep.

In the morning they rise as women,  
replenish the fire, heat the water,  
quietly perform all the rituals of home.  
If their men suspect,  
they do not speak of it.

#### IV

You would have said yesterday my fox-soul  
was sated but what was it you saw at midnight  
keening with hunger outside a darkened house?  
Daily our faces narrow, our hair turns redder;  
the fox bares her teeth in our hearts.

### *Nancy Steele*

#### BLOOD VISION

##### 1

I wake to winter,  
Goose flesh,  
A bird at the wrist;  
My hands will not stop flapping.

##### 2

I climbed each tree in the orchard  
Once my hand slid into the crotch  
Of a maple wet with possum blood  
Live moss, soft against my skin  
The pulse stuttering in my fingers.

##### 3

These wounds I survive:  
A heart that rocks on its stoop,  
Born old; dragging its lives  
Below porches, under leafpiles  
To any dense part of the woods.

##### 4

In sleep my fingers  
Dredge the thin bark of sheets  
As if to retrieve  
Something slowly dying  
To grip and haul it up into light  
And skin it  
Alive.

### *Joyce Carol Oates*

#### ICE AGE

The Spirit moves where it will:  
the air is scimitars, the air is shrieks.

All night the flesh of trees cracks  
and in the morning the eye can gauge no distance,  
the ear is deafened in white.

A world of glass!—many-winged glare of ice.  
If the pulse beats it must learn caution  
for here the slightest touch kills.

Razor-cruel is the light from the east.  
We walk in blinded circles, helpless.  
Trees—grass—stones—river—our steaming breaths:  
the ice-drowse is upon us, the hypnosis  
of ancient sleep.

In the Ice Age beauty fits tight as a mask of skin.  
One cannot breathe, one stiffens to perfection.

Anne Pitkin

DECEMBER

The sparrows flying off the page  
appear in the background, because  
the tree was erased, and the casual design  
of thin clouds couldn't be exactly reproduced.  
Now we agree, reluctantly, the sparrows  
are better. We learn these failures early

struggling with the music, until  
we have it mastered, and we find we've lost  
that first keen tenderness that drove us on.  
Still, the same tones from the belltower vibrate  
through all changes in the weather, traveling  
at perfect intervals, although they toll

grief or joy, depending on the hour we hear them.  
This last day of the month is cold and clear,  
an open book's unbroken spine. The trees  
along the boulevard repeat themselves and tangle  
delicate as nerves in a forgiving sky.  
The bare frame of a new house turns ruddy

in the sun's evening slant. Inside  
she meets her lover for the last time  
takes his arm and walks him slowly through  
the rooms she and her husband have long planned.  
A galaxy of dust defines each beam  
of bronze light falling, as she passes,

on her radiant hair. Outdoors, on one patch  
of sky, a small constellation of birds like smoke  
loses shape. Last night's fresh snow quiets the street,  
except for the staccato barking of a dog,  
the distant shouts, like sparks from a struck match  
of children rushing through the perfect air.

Joan Stone

WHAT DAUGHTERS COME TO KNOW

I can still see the pages  
growing out of designs she contrived  
for ages in her head,  
along with long lists that grew  
naming things she planned to take away;  
lists that read like a homesteader's  
dream: oatmeal, salt, flour,  
a blanket, and her name always  
in a black hand at the top of every page.

Now she sends me letters out of the quiet  
where bears lumber in the night across  
the half-finished porch,  
where eagles circle in to fish  
the river outside the window.

She has invited me down for apples;  
I come in the early damp  
on deer-trails, through the orchard  
moving belly-deep in grass,  
moving always toward her house.

The sun is just up;  
already she has bread rising  
and thick soup on the stove;  
she offers me tea against the cold,  
opens the stove-lid to the fire,  
feeds in yellow sticks of alder.

The loosened light catches her face;  
her hands shine; her dogs cluster around her;  
light moves out to even the corners.  
I tip my chair back  
against the outside wall;  
pulled back toward the darkening cold.

FALLING FROM SKYSCRAPERS

1

The first time is the hardest.  
All that small movement below  
and no one looking up.  
X en route to the dentist,  
Y to a lover Z  
(yours), taxis obsessed  
with their own metrics.  
Don't look back  
for the wringing of hands.  
Expect no brass bands  
at the bottom, no plaques.  
Slip into air,  
it has never fit better.  
Dream the old dream of flight,  
steer, ride your weight  
down like a gull  
fishing the torrent.  
You will always remember  
this moment.

2

Falling from skyscrapers  
the second, third, so on  
is like being a file clerk.  
You dress for work  
(sporty), put your papers  
in order, act responsible.  
Dream the same old dream,  
of flight to the tropics  
where, for you: rain.  
Cast your weight down,  
a stone ill-shaped  
for skipping or walls.  
You will try to forget these

moments, but all you know  
now is falling  
when what you want is to stand  
on the ground  
looking up, to behave  
like a tree or a tourist,  
like love.

Michael Magee

THE RAINBOW

It is what bridges us, light bending  
as though to break,  
we wonder  
at its dazzling arc  
how it shimmers by sunlight  
curving the limits  
of our space.  
Its secret is more than alchemy:  
no touch of gold  
could show how this sky transfixes us.  
Not even if our blood had become water  
or the sea had turned our salt to tears  
could we be more taken  
than by this shining world.  
But to see through our lives  
is a trick we would sit still for.  
There it doubles,  
now it becomes three.  
For here is light made  
of air, sun, rain  
leading us through  
and one by one  
or in pairs we follow it  
if only to be won over  
at last by our blind belief  
so that with luck we might be shown the way  
to our disappearing end.

Lawrence Kearney

THERE ARE 23 STEELMILLS IN BUFFALO, N.Y.

1. On summer nights  
the stars won't rain,  
the red dust will not rise, will not  
become a man again:  
we hear the steel-dust  
on the other side of the bedroom wall,  
gnawing the clapboard  
while we sleep.

Chewed down to its knees  
South Buffalo collapses,  
and we ooze through the siding  
into the dark, metallic air,

wanting only to lift  
with the smoke coiling above the roofs,  
and caress one another, at last,  
without shame.

But we are  
ashamed, even in dreams.  
Each of us drifts off alone.

2. Before dawn  
we float back to our beds.  
The houses clumsily reassemble.  
The backyards unclench  
and let the moonlight seep through.  
The steelmills  
call out our names, softly;  
they know who we are.

By 6 we're up and at breakfast,  
reading the paper—  
whispering as we read  
in a wry, submissive voice:  
the voice to be used at work,

to apologize, to confess,  
to exact penance  
from every word it knows . . .

Yes.

I will.

Whatever you say.

—the words coming on  
in piston strokes  
as we slog to the corner  
to catch the bus for work,  
the words our mouths fill to  
over and over without love  
for ourselves or this place  
we have made with our own hands.

Jarold Ramsey

BYNUMVILLE

I.

Here it is, then, the family ghost town  
my father never saw,  
in the lush low hills of northern Missouri.  
This is Chariton County,  
north of Moberly and Marceline,  
where my homesick Grandma  
ran back in dreams for fifty years.  
Standing here knee-deep in unfamiliar weeds,  
I know it like my name—  
a dip and a twist in the road,  
four tiny false-front stores (my Grandpa  
Billy clerked in one), abandoned,  
glaring two on a side like clans.  
Beyond them, to the west, it looks like pig-lot  
and cornfield all the way to Oregon.

In 1900, not having heard the Frontier close,  
they turned their backs on soil so rich it hums  
and went away to take up free land in a desert.  
Why? Why? at first the only seeds they brought  
to sprout were "Ramsey beans."  
Was it a new word or name they heard beneath the wind  
one fall, a song irresistibly out of the West?  
Or did their fields roil like waves  
beneath the plows toward sunset?  
In the year the centuries twined  
Grandpa drained this town of family,  
mocked his friends, and left.

II.

Not my home town, nor even my father's.  
Yet the featherbeds here were heavy with us  
ever after, and the farm women, dressing chickens,  
named us in their rosaries of unlaidd eggs.  
Could I live here?  
Would I thrive and flourish?  
On my leg a sheep-tick finds me native  
in the very blood. In fever  
I enter one of the gaping stores like an owner  
and set up shop. General Merchandise  
of my twentieth century mind goes on the shelves  
dry goods for sale  
the way it all turned out past Bynumville,  
history beaten on a plowshare with a sword.

III.

As the shadows on the roadside lengthen  
I hear them coming from the fields,  
the yeomen Yokums, Billeterers, Wilsons,  
their voices calm as cistern-water—  
oh my shirt-tail grandsires all, you who stayed behind,  
from the depths of your unknowing tell me  
standing here for my father  
what have you meant for us, for me, to do?

*James B. Hall*

Two Poems

OHIO FARMERS, AT RESURRECTION

Lord, we are your honest farmers  
And here, all in good order, our Books:

Note the long, bad years of your own tornadoes  
Yet we rebuilt all granary roofs in due season;

Observe other Expense against Accounts Receivable,  
Their outrageous charge for hauling, paid in kind.

We mention also about twenty shoats shamefully taken  
by cholera—no doubt all according to your Plan?

Still, we are your farmers regardless of season  
And therefore we, ourselves, claim certain improvements:

Here ten thousand Leghorns, hatched in these batteries,  
All laying, all sterile, even their lust bundled for export;

Furthermore, Sir, we sold-short all our Winter wheat  
Thus turned right judgment into long-term capital gain.

Truly, Lord, we are your absolutely honest farmers  
Yet be forewarned of all their stock-yard rumors:

The subtle husbandry of a double-set of ledgers,  
Or alfalfa mowed, sold, then charged off to drought;

These malignant tales are hatched in the weevil  
Throats of merchants, all Brothers of the Golden Thumb.

Against calumny, Sir, we place this paid-for church,  
Your pews at hymn—and all built with ample parking.

Reason enough, before you complete this Day's Glorious  
Work, to state just one well-considered proposition:

Forever we shall accept the depreciation of barns,  
Upkeep on all line-fences, the sicklebacked weasel

Among pullets, and the distemper of your certain droughts;  
Yes, these and many other calamities merely for your dispensation

To avoid waste, to mow this season's clover so near fruition—  
And also to hold—O only for our children—title to these lands

Until once more, in your own time, unannounced even as now,  
You do assume most certainly forever the direct management

Even of these recalcitrant woods, these cut-over lands  
Which as we watch that Day you will transmute to gold.

Then even from a squall line across the Winter sky  
Which is your hand opening we shall see larks rise singing:  
Consider this thing well, Lord, for we are your honest farmers.

#### THE BACKHOE

Being possessed of neither flesh nor feathers  
Nor any other life beyond  
Diesel fuel ignited only for an instant,  
I stand all through the night

Astride this ditch of my own digging.  
Now all shorebirds sleep  
And the river fog rolls like an old dog  
In off-street kennel parking lots;

Alone all night the night-mortician waits,  
Drinks coffee beside his corpse;  
In the nightstick silence of all your streets  
A cat moves grey like stolen goods.

Being not wholly of earth or pipes or water  
I see the implication of all debris  
Especially when the imperious cannonade of rain  
Sends even the State Inspectors

Running to their white construction shacks  
Where deals are made and money  
Is the green tongue hammering inside their hard hats.  
Then comes this shutdown sunshine

Holiday and back along these open, morbid trenches  
I see the accommodation of all silt  
And know dirt dug out is only dirt put back come Monday  
It's only right, and Plan enough for me.

#### *Quinton Duval*

#### INDIANS

We came upon these strange men, children  
really, their faces the scarlet red of a bird  
feather or bad wound. Just at the sweeping bend  
in the river they stood, and possibly thought  
what a dream we were. I remember  
at the same instant I could see huge fish  
sleeping near the raft.

Jaime said "we soldiers . . . make people free."  
It sounded so stupid, the words, the language,  
even just the sound. We all felt stupid because  
any of us could have said it.

They stared at the matches we used to light  
cigarettes and jumped up and down like rabbits  
when we offered them the small smoking sticks.  
We saw that they thought we were on fire inside,  
and perhaps we were special, in our dark  
green clothes and our rifles pointing to heaven.  
These people we could not save.  
They didn't know what metal was, much less Marx.

We pushed off into the current, each man silent  
and watched them grow smaller and mix with the trees.  
That night around the campfire, I felt the stones  
in my heart shift, and allow all my sorrow  
to flood into me.

*Kurt Heinzelman*

THE GENERAL PRACTITIONER IS ALONE IN HIS STUDY

He had a desk  
    he kept between us.  
    Antique—that is,  
knobbed legs with real wormholes  
    and well-bellied  
    like a good man singing.  
That is, I'd  
    call it antique if  
    that word could stay (as he might  
put it) clear of patinas,  
    the deep-down surface  
    sheen of age. "Shit"—  
(we'd been talking for a while)—  
    "when the phone isn't  
    ringing, these books bear me down.  
Now what have they  
    got for me  
    to help to make whole?  
Who needs me most?  
    More than whom?  
    Will I make  
anybody better?—  
    That's my lie—  
    to fix the truth  
in time,  
    to soothe a fine, soft woman  
    or her children."  
(He thumbed the desk-top,  
    stroked it  
    back at himself.)  
"First, I think of words  
    as dressings, cast  
    to flower like a scar.  
At times the simplest  
    application hurts.

Sometimes nothing helps.

I think of Yeats  
    who thought he knew  
    what Homer knew—  
The Book, he called it,  
    of his People—  
    half-forgetting  
in his vision that the  
    books rebound, bind  
    anew the artless  
suture which you unstitch  
    as you go.  
    But the book itself is use.  
That Eliot, you know, bought  
    a special Dante, kept it like  
    a hip-flask in his jacket, until  
he learned Italian, anyway.  
    He always wished it were in Latin.  
    Listen, if this was  
Stevens' office, you'd be  
    out by now, with  
    handfuls of actuarials.  
I'm thinking here about the one  
    about the surgeon  
    who put it to his interns  
on their maiden voyage  
    to the OR  
    if they really  
liked setting knives  
    to living flesh.  
    There you have it." (He let  
the desk-top go.)  
    "Now, take my cat,  
    nursing its Persian gut,  
eyes glazed  
    by a third lid.  
    In the morning sunlight  
she folds  
    all her eyes  
    and licks herself."

*Greg Kuzma*

HAVING READ THE BOOK

In the book  
Al Longine is the hero.  
In the movie  
a gorilla.

In the book there is a dreary  
presentiment,  
disaster with a capital D  
lounges in furs.  
In the movie a band plays polkas.

In the book  
the hero meets a hobo  
in the dark,  
together they build a fire,  
and over dinner  
the hobo relates marvelous  
adventures.  
In the movie the hero  
and the hobo are the same person.

In the book a particular person  
makes an impression.  
Carried around in a watch  
his portrait.  
Carried around in an "aching heart,"  
dreams of a bygone age.  
In the movie the story is about  
THE COMING OF THE AUTOMOBILE.

In the book this sentence:  
"All the long day the leaves had been  
surrendering ever so gently  
to what that night had brought on  
secretly." In the movie this line,  
"Fiddlesticks."

The book has a girl, not altogether pretty,  
who is seen, at times, from a distance,  
hanging wash or smiling between  
the edge of the window  
and where the window shade comes down to meet it  
but does not quite touch.  
In the movie her name is Honey and she  
is saucy and has a good build.

In the book Claude Aiken is killed.  
In the movie he goes away.

In the book when the war is over  
the town's streets look emptier  
and one or two dogs do all the celebrating.  
In the movie everybody's uniform is pressed  
and everybody pounds on the bar.

In the book Charlie Hawkins  
has one incredibly moving scene.  
On the banks of the river that has  
always flowed there and which  
is seen at times to be the one true  
subject of the story, and where  
Hawkins fishes every morning, rain  
or shine, he tells Bert Thompson  
his own young dreams. In the movie  
Hawkins is a shopkeeper with six "Howdys."

The book is 618 pages, the movie  
seventy-three minutes.

In the book a strange disease  
takes Sister Lizzie.  
In the movie a howitzer destroys  
a minister.

In the book there are at least  
a dozen different separate days.  
The movie is one long morning  
with a lunch break.



In the book Al Longine quote  
has trouble with his father end quote,  
quote felt a meanness there he never  
could explain. In the movie  
the father beats pigs.

The cover of the book is green,  
with gold letters, and on the  
dust jacket there is a picture  
of a river, some animals up to their  
knees in it, and a boy fishing.  
The first scene of the movie  
shows a big-breasted girl  
drinking a Coca Cola.

*Carl Mayfield*

#### THE POLITICS OF KISSING IN PUBLIC

Where is the prize?  
I've looked on the sports page,  
read the beauty hints with diligence,  
talked with stray dogs and plums,  
meditated for weeks on end,  
and never have I seen the trophy  
for which everyone is working.

The action is endless:  
the illustrious senator  
was caught this morning  
with a blue baboon  
who had to be pried loose;  
the movie actress  
has been on the same corner  
for ten years and only once  
has she come up for air,  
for fresh lipstick.

Where do the careers go  
when they leave the lips?  
Am I the only one  
who doesn't pucker  
when the lights go on?

I shall have to consider  
this wet craft, study the profiles  
as they appear next to fire trucks.  
I want to be ready  
when my chance arrives,  
my acceptance speech  
on the tip of my tongue.

*James Grabill*

#### WHAT I MEAN TO SAY IS

Late in the afternoon  
A break in the rain,  
The slanting sunlight falls against  
The yellow building and falls into  
The large chestnut leaves. As a few  
People walk beside the passing cars  
We are sitting in a Mexican restaurant  
Eating supper, the large chestnut leaves  
Opening. Later in the summer, walking  
Back up from the river, walking up steps  
Of old stones and sand inbetween, hot  
In the sun that soothes the water, hot,  
Driving in the dusty light, the dust  
Rising in columns, the sunlight through  
The trees cutting shapes out of dark sky.  
I am standing near the door of the building,  
The dark brown wood has been painted red  
And an old car seat is out in front,  
Where the men sit sometimes. Early

In the day the trucks come, and there's  
The sound of meat unloaded, men talking  
Too loud. Then on the way back from work  
There are neon signs from the bankrupt cafes,  
Large bar mirrors, manikins with blonde hair  
From 1964 they put old furs and nightgowns  
Over them, they sell jukeboxes with amber lights  
That spill down onto the records when they turn  
And they have a stuffed chicken hawk for \$50.  
It's July and the scent of the concrete  
In hot sun soothes everything, calms  
It all down. Walking past the apartments  
The sound of fans and silverware being  
Shuffled in the kitchen, old men with coats  
And girls with short shorts stepping onto the bus  
Quickly, tossing cigarettes back onto the bare  
Sidewalk, with sky clear, and all the rain  
Somewhere in the ground where the roots breathe  
Soil that would suffocate the rest of us  
Who live here on the surface.

*Jill Krilov*

#### THE TREE

Some still have seen it, times between their sleep  
And rising, when some restless prescience  
Woke them before the dark breath came. The arms  
Of knowledge lifted vast indifference  
Unreachable above. So I have seen  
It, waking in the night, an ancient guise  
Formed to our sight, the fruit older than stone,  
Made before wind or season broke our skies.

You and I walked there once—the grass rolled back  
Until our gaits matched breath to breath, until  
We trod the air. I recognized it then,

Once by the darkness of the air, the chill  
Green breath that blocked the sun, once by your speech  
Less words to me than rites, and how your eyes  
Slid helpless up to unreceiving bark:  
The Tree of Knowledge, whereof we must die.

I write this for another walker now  
But in your name. I write it that the tree  
May teach us our own shapes, how we are not  
Like leaf or branch, no sun-spawned alchemy  
But the cast-off seed of heaven. Still its light  
Gleams in our hair, we still are favored sons  
Disowned, who walked once in such giant woods,  
Sunlit and green, where this tree was but one.

*Samuel Green*

#### ON BEING QUESTIONED ABOUT A BANK ROBBERY BENEATH MY OFFICE

*"Are you sure you didn't see anything?"*  
—FBI Agent

I know what he wants to be told: that I've kept  
a careful watch on the street all day,  
like a correspondence detective; can tell him  
about the short black man neatly dressed  
in a gray suit; can describe, perhaps,  
how he balanced on the curb across the street,  
gathering courage, a hooked trout leaping  
in his chest. I'd have guessed, by the way  
his hand fluttered around his pocket,  
that he had a gun; would have a list  
of license numbers to choose from,  
makes and models, jotted down exact times.

And yet I've nothing to say. Seen nothing  
but cold rain whacking against the window like pellets,

drubbing cars. And jobless union men loitering  
about the doors of the Labor Temple  
across the way; crouching in stairwells  
like stuffed toys. Nothing he wants to hear.  
Still, I feel a need to show my well-honed eye:  
Did you notice how fine the harbor seemed  
this morning, I ask, how smooth it was,  
and dark, like an oilstone?

*Mark Halperin*

#### VISITING YOU

The erratic breeze and blue  
moment of sun are gone when I hear you  
mumble like steeled John Clare on the third day  
to Northborough: *honest courage and myself  
in my army, I led the way  
and my troops soon followed*  
hungry, half lame, toward the sure disappointment  
that awaited—or else  
not caring, which is to say, content,  
a man mad to be on that road to his lost home.

I see your lounging heart,  
the guests arrive. I hear the talk start hard,  
a child with coiling pink embroidery  
at her throat and arms cry because she's cold.  
People, the last of them me,  
have waited to meet her too often.  
Whatever meek protest I make, I'll follow as she,  
who's just plain tired  
of the open mouths of visitors,  
follows the floor and lighted hall to bed.

As for Clare's bizarre invention,  
it bridged the way toward hope but was too thin  
to bear him any happiness, his choice

be sane or eat. History was cruel,  
the actual man could choose  
less. Infrequently  
returning, the visits each predictable  
each time, he stares, shudders  
for what's to come. And when I visit  
you, who's to say which of us is bereft?

The bald hill I climbed  
with friends from which I saw the river wind  
through a half-circle of trees—we got chased  
away by yellowjackets, the shrieking girl  
stirring a ground nest  
that swarmed and stung us all  
and we hadn't enough time left for our hands to come down.  
Now you are all gone.  
Say the pain of the present won  
or the bees. Mad John Clare would understand.

*Eve Triem*

#### REDDTAILED HAWK

The several visits to the Turkey Timber farm  
he learned new skills: could plow a straight row  
with mules, then the tractor. Milked 15 Guerneys,  
one, Daisy, would not let anyone else milk her  
till she felt he was gone. Continued to play  
with the friend's nephews, pick strawberries  
for a favorite dessert; he was getting taller,  
itching from a loneliness he had no name for.

Stole her out of a tall-pine nest  
(leaving two noisy beaks) to be his kin.  
Reckless of parent wings returning to mash  
young bones to the furrow. The redtail taloned  
his shoulder, morning-evening chores, the clean manure  
smell, the chickens clucking, a shared world. Peering

into his eyes to know his mind. Yellow satin breast,  
autumnleaf on back, a stare like the aggies he rolled.

Back to town and school. His little sister hunted  
and tossed grasshoppers to the quick pounce, the big house  
was free to growing wings; evenings they played—bird  
and boy—reliving hawk-stoop and rise with the catch.

When an oakleaf's the size of a gopher's ear  
it's cornplanting time, mating-nesting time,  
the redbrick house is a cage. He took her to the woods.  
She flew to the tops, looked around, came back to his shoulder.  
Her grieving whistle must have broken windowglass  
miles away. In the freedom of trees she will forget  
her first lover—gulping tears, hobbled to earth.

*Mark Jarman*

### THREE GODS SHARE THEIR PASTIMES

*Neptune*

"You want to see death up close? See a mouth  
so empty the sea has to fill it?  
Through the telescope, drowning  
is like the dying of a cell—  
that magnified, that curious and small.  
Where you stand you can pick the horizon apart,  
bring a freighter to your eye, with its crawling deck,  
and when the reef crumples the hull  
and the deck spills,—here you are to see it."

His house was a box of glass,  
cool as lichen,  
stilted above the Pacific. He said, "Remember,  
when you look through the telescope,  
if you see death and forget what you see,  
think of your eyes under coins,  
think of death's metal lenses."

*Mercury*

"When I stretch out on the grass,  
no one can call me. The light fades,  
increasing in some other sky,  
and my body lessens,  
is less to imagine.  
When the stars appear, I remember  
I could span the distance  
to each, propelling myself  
with one thought, if I wanted to think it."

His caduceus lay by his side  
like a double helix unraveled.  
He said, "The stars are relaxing. Join me.  
Near death the minutes pass  
just as they pass after life.  
How much time do you think we could kill,  
lying here, counting them?"

*Vulcan*

"I was given a woman.  
I said I could hammer my own  
from sheet metal, but  
I was given this woman.  
She leaves, every day,  
for the world of her own powers.  
I can see her there, making  
the blood come to men's faces,  
the taste of smoke in her mouth."

He was pouring molten lead into water,  
watching the metal clench.  
He said, "All day, in my mind,  
I follow her. When she comes home  
my hands are clean, glistening with lotion.  
She expects me to take her.  
I do not. I sit and watch her."

SLAPSTICK LOVE  
(L'Amour Fou)

" 'Tis very like a sneeze, but oh!  
The difference to me"

Sharpnosed love, smirking love, fool  
love, bowlegged, hunchbacking love,  
pragmatic joke, too-cruel  
irascible, rickety love,

ah love, let us be foolish.  
Strip off all clothing, the tragic masks,  
showing our comic flesh.  
When the pants are down, one risks

everything. Warty, his crimson oversize  
head trembles, bag-bauble swells.  
But her bearded lady face  
grins up. Let bedsprings jingle bells,

silverware fall from sleeve. Now for the un-  
expected welcome grossness, big foot  
in the right place, right thing in  
the wrong, quick switch, sleight-of-limb. Now let

there be rejoicing in the sheets,  
marrow jig and lingo tango.  
Scratch every itch  
openly, hair-strum, soprano banjo

riffs, pantomime skin-flute.  
Shamelessly crucified upside  
down, now! kiss the bottom of our heart.  
Quick creaks the rockinghorse in bed,

bladder bangs, rebounds,  
flam! paradiddle! rattamacue!

Lips' smacking sounds  
all the muscles laugh in u-

nison, mad loins's uprush  
slaps on heaven's face  
the hoary whitewash-laden brush,  
and descends to hell again with juddering grace.

## SPECIAL ENVOI TO A FAIRY TALE

Prince, rise and face the court.

. . . trial  
by a jury of your fears . . . pronounced *Guilty*.  
. . . found that you malingered in the usual  
chimney corners till well past puberty . . .  
. . . a new man, after your two half-brothers  
(heirs to the throne before you) . . . seven years  
detained on a far-off imbecilic quest . . .  
. . . that you heaped coals of rescue on their heads.  
. . . further, that you exterminated . . . magical  
"public nuisances" . . . (not classified before as . . .)  
. . . ambiguous as life and twice as . . . but, their  
activities seeming too colorful . . . control . . .  
. . . bluetipped gryphon . . . last living specimen of . . .  
the greater western witch . . . dwarf flower-dwarf . . .  
. . . claws, teeth . . . for trophy . . . the rest to rot.  
. . . disclaimed, nonetheless, . . . special strength or virtue  
other than cunning, simplemindedness, or . . .  
. . . approval of the peasantry . . . lower middle class . . .  
. . . mainstays . . . in case of revolutionary . . .  
. . . that you abducted certain princesses  
from the Orc's castle, and not against their will  
(three counts) . . . educated and married one of the said . . .  
and only one . . . leaving to your brothers . . .  
. . . dismiss the two counts of hemifratricide  
. . . reasonable doubt . . . grounds of self-defense . . .  
. . . no part of the function of this court  
. . . pass judgment on . . . tactlessness of the  
"shit-eating" (so described by witnesses)

grin . . . exhibited . . . during . . . this "justifiable" . . .  
. . . refused no aid, from whatever source, low,  
. . . improbable . . . that you committed altruism  
. . . case of the little golden fish . . . broken,  
the twig bled . . . every hope of . . . rich dividends.  
. . . that in each and every . . . did so reap.

We find these

not to be extenuating circumstances.

. . . You stand condemned.  
. . . utterly unfit . . . associate . . . real and  
actual human beings . . .

. . . sentence of  
this court . . . taken hence . . . a place of enchantment . . .  
. . . happily ever . . . term of your natural . . .  
And may . . . have mercy on . . . if any.

*Sonia G. Gernes*

#### THE CHICK'S REPLY TO THE OBSCENE CALLER

What you do not know, my friend,  
is that I grew chirping to my present form  
on a poultry farm. A fledgling myself,  
I could clip wings, pluck banty breasts,  
preside at mysteries of the chopping block.  
I knew what chickens would be nesting.

There were also ducks and geese.  
My mother taught me different tones of quack,  
made sauce for the gander, dressed  
out the drake. She knew  
which rooster's comb to trim, who laid  
the rubber eggs, what hen  
would cackle loudest. Ah friend,  
how she could have taught you  
the possibilities  
of being fowl.

*David Posner*

#### AFTER MOUNT ATHOS

##### I

The monk kneels, tucking in his words:  
promises folded, love upon love, down the damp cell.  
A woman with a boy's laugh calls him  
from a dead village fifty years away.  
He lies against night, his arms  
Pinioned by moonlight  
casting his shadow into sleep.  
Rock flowers on his heart.

##### II

A man sees God in his time:  
the first frost on the mountain straw,  
a gutted window in a burnt field.  
His cracked mouth eats the years  
with black nails chewed to the quick.  
As a scarecrow bunched where the wind's thick  
rattles when thunder breaks,  
he hears a Mind like the sudden silence of crows.

*James Galvin*

Two Poems

#### THE HERMITAGE

*No, I will not go in. Because if I go in  
there is no one.*

—Antonio Porchia

As usual we enter through the eye.  
Inside, evidence of a hasty departure:  
First, the lantern full of snow.  
Look into it closely.  
It is crossed with animal tracks.  
Who could read by this light?

Then the hourglass, recently turned.  
In the top half, sand, rocks, yucca,  
A whole desert emptying. Below,  
Sand falls into high mountains,  
On patches of snow  
Which we mistake for clouds.

And here, in his haste,  
He has left his memory, the glass drum,  
Whose sound has traveled so far,  
Yet is clear like the sound  
Of geese flying overhead,  
Year after year inside it.

And this cracked tumbler  
Full of colored seeds, quite curious.  
They produce a bitter taste and visions  
Of living trees, buried underground,  
Their trunks filled with earth,  
Branches hung with black fruit and leaves.

And in this spoon, a drop of water  
From inside the ear.  
Even now it flows in the direction  
Of the tongue. It is the liquid  
Through which we sink, all of us,  
In our various sizes.

#### THE SNOWDRIFT AS A WAVE

for my mother

Consider this hour, this death.  
It leans toward me. We touch.  
It has a fragrance like burning lace.

Pitch-wood in the furnace:  
*The damned making love,*  
*The drowned in their ships, tapping with wrenches.*

The winter I was eight,  
Snow drifted up twenty feet around our house.  
We left the truck and snowshoed home.  
Father brought his mother, bundled on my sled.

Had you stopped to rest,  
To lean your arm against a tree?  
Were you always so unhappy?

*A sail billowing under the coals.*  
*A seed waking in its pod.*

I tunneled into that drift, made rooms,  
Listened to the blizzard  
As it made more waves like mine.  
I had seen the sea once.  
It opened its waves like drawers,  
Repeating the name of something misplaced.  
It searched the same drawers again and again.  
It sounded like that snowstorm  
Giving itself away.

Consider the hour, the death,  
*A fugitive sea.*

*James J. McAuley*

Two Poems

#### AN IRISH BULL

(An incongruous mixture of metaphors, often humorous, sometimes elusive or surreal, usually rendered in a political context; a low species of oratory, developed during the notorious filibusters of Parnell's party at Westminster in the 1880's.)

—for James Whitehead, aet. XL

Political passion is the poorest coin  
We trade with. Slumped in our chairs at the screen like resigned  
Brokers or navigators, we're the last,

We pretend, with the power to lend any value to words  
So debased in the common exchange we feel them break  
From their moorings in meaning when we bring them to meet

In metaphor, as if we could still make ends meet  
Or tame any beast by such means. Words are coins  
Thrown on a table to settle a debt, a sign  
That nothing's settled.

In the news at last

Franco is dead. The smart man gives us the word:  
"He was good for Spain." Then a commercial break.

Old Farrell, my countryman, twenty at the outbreak  
Of that war when we both were born, went south to meet  
A fascist slug that sent him home lame. No coin,  
Spanish or Irish, could straighten his step, resigned  
As he was in his hatred, his only hope to outlast  
The fanatical, bickering, stomachy men whose word

Is good for Business, always a good word  
With upstarts and fascists.

We've worked hard to break

Their code, to invest in a language that's meet;  
But meanwhile the enemy we know has coined  
A new name for himself, and left no sign  
That's the least inimical, no word that lasts.

Rage in Beirut, Belfast, L.A. The last  
News item, Dow-Jones bullish; then a word  
From our sponsor. The doldrums, without a break  
In sight. In the boredom of bad news we meet  
Our worst enemy.

Better to toss a coin,  
Tails for the fascists, sure to come up, and resign

Ourselves like Farrell to a bitterness designed  
For our own good to bankrupt the spirit. The last  
Word for them from the newsman leaves no word

Unturned: *conservative*. Euphemisms break  
Into spume to show us where the breakers meet  
The rocks we've sailed too close to.

But if the coin

Turns up the imperious head of coins, could we assign  
Politics a lasting language, find the exact words?  
Or when the beast breaks loose, turn back to meet it?

#### THE CONFESSION

To the grey rock below the silent park, in grey light,  
The tide in its patient blind labor at last has yielded  
The girl's white form. Her rigid nakedness

No longer could drive her lover to this murder,  
Nor excite the youth who, finding her stretched there, is stiff  
And cold with an unearthly fear, having discovered,

Once and for all, woman's mystery. With his coat  
He has covered the trite flesh—a Shrovetide effigy  
Cast into the sea at midnight, when sinners turn

Penitent. In the condominium nearby,  
Shadows are wavering behind the venetian blinds;  
Roused early from their beds by the forlorn

Siren, a few emerge on their verandahs  
In bathrobes, hugging themselves, watching through opera-glasses  
While the coroner kneels to touch her temple, shaking

His head, and the sky stealthily brightens. The detective  
Is staring at the sea, having pulled the boy's coat away,  
And they can see the black pubis on the wretched white

Branching form. Shivering, they vanish inside.  
Her lover regards his hands as if another's  
Clenched and unclenched before him, remembering



The low sound in her throat when her body opened  
For love. He will never make the detective understand  
How, cherishing her every breath, he surrendered  
All that torment and desire to the quiet waves.

*Thomas Brush*

Three Poems

### INSOMNIA

You live through another midnight  
While the moon's dark  
Surface slides like fog past the cold  
Window. You wait like a child  
For sleep, but only find your mouth  
Filling with blue feathers, the air  
Wet and tangled around you, the ceiling  
Dark as breath. You think of snow  
On the lawns of memory, the old mother of nightmares  
Coming up the white path, dragging your name  
Through the ruins of winter. You remember her  
Bloodless face and a sky  
Filled with chalk. By now sleep is nothing short  
Of miraculous.

### OPENING NIGHT

Through all the worst weather  
In years, through hail in the lobbies, and rain  
In the halls, April in the fog, and snow  
In their empty pockets, they have been waiting  
For a night like this.  
And they will open it like a door and leave,  
The cold streets and buildings  
Falling behind them. They will walk with dignity,  
With stars on their arms, turning heads  
To the show that must go on, leading ladies

Of the evening, waving bottles at the crying ushers,  
Until there's standing room  
Only. They will roll like money  
Down the aisles, kick off their shoes and light up  
Cigar butts, take the caps off  
The wine, and toast each other  
For staying alive. And when the house lights  
Dim, and they bow  
From the waste of their lives,  
The applause will be deafening.

### LOVE POEM FOR NOTHING

Since this is no one's birthday  
That I know there are no party  
Favors hanging from the walls, no applause  
For not dying, for having lived  
This long, and there is nothing in the air  
Except the warmth we exhale  
Around us. And since the ground is dry  
And there are no clouds  
Filling with water or ice that we can see  
Hovering darkly above us, let's say this is a celebration  
For The-Dance-Of-March and for you  
The-First-And-Last-Wife-Of-The-Endless-  
Season. Let's say the flowers  
In the center of the garden are bursting  
For the song rising from the bright shaft  
Of your throat. And let's just say your arms  
And hands, and mouth that is smiling  
Here beside me accept  
This poem, without rhyme  
Or reason, as you accept the morning  
Gathering something beautiful, something  
Undefinable, something made of nothing  
But the blue rooms of the sky.

## About Our Contributors

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