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Poetry

NORTHWEST



EDITOR
David Wagoner

EDITORIAL CONSULTANTS
Nelson Bentley, William H. Matchett

COVER DESIGN
Allen Auvil

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POETRY NORTHWEST WINTER 1977-78 VOLUME XVIII, NUMBER 4

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POETRY NORTHWEST

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POETRY NORTHWEST

WINTER 1977-78

Janis Lull

Three Poems

THERE ARE FIVE GREAT THEMES

The question is: are they Nurture,
Sin, Reconciliation, Desire and Death:
Or are they Innocence, Interdependence, Wandering,
Enlightenment, and the rhythm of heart and breath?
Or Birth, Ingratitude, Renewal, Mutability and Love,
Or none of the above?

TO HERSELF REFLECTED

This breath is you if you could face
It; the old one-two each time
Expresses all, and each time new.
Just so you saw yourself escape
As vapor on the winter afternoon
You turned five. Years later, it was you
Returning as rasp and gulp the day
They pulled you from the spilled canoe. Your cough
Kept you alive, and kills you now
You like to say and laugh and smoke
One more. This song, this sigh, this arching rate
Won't change; could change, but won't

This breath predicts the next and when
We take the air we take it as
We used to. The one surprise is
That there are no surprises; no Cave
Of Self, no secret alveolus where
A treasure's locked of air so pure
Its whisper would crack glass. The mirror
Fogs and clears and keeps still
Its fascination. What you will
Means nothing in the mirror: what you think or might
Think is never there. Yet this is you
When you can face it; all you do
That counts here is breathe and shine in the borrowed light.

DREAM MAN

He only drives night loads
Skin won't hold scars
He gets kicks snapping chains, shaving skulls, smashing cars.
He wears his electrodes
Down to his ass
Eats naked babies on buttered glass.

He smells of excess thought—
Ozone or sulphur—
He's got an extra mouth on the top of his head
For sucking the sky.

Don't you know this is a job for Moonwoman?

If he don't get what he needs,
You're gonna see some shreds.
Just give me an hour with him
In the cab of his pickup truck
Oh brother,
He'll be licking me all over
For the salt.

Carole Oles

Four Poems

OLD TEXT

Three things are too wonderful for me;
four I do not understand:
the way of an eagle in the sky,
the way of a serpent on a rock,
the way of a ship on the high seas,
and the way of a man with a maiden.

—Proverbs, 30:18, 19

I'll tell you.
The way of a man
with a maiden
is the way of all
three wonders.

He soars and tumbles
drawing loops in the air
which she flies into
and he cinches
pulling her down
to the pile of sticks
on the ledge.
It begins.

He's all muscle.
How can she resist?
She knows that dance.
Even the rock squirms under it.
He hardly sees her.
If she doesn't fight back
she's female.
He has no shadow
until he's erect.
Then, even the trees applaud.

Only those on the shore
call the sea Mother.
The maiden's the ship
made to dip and rise
with his moods.
He's dark-eyed

a roaring drunk
a batterer.
Remorseful in the morning,
Rolling the sun
off his tongue.

THE UNTEACHING

A social worker was sent into the 3rd grade class
that had witnessed its teacher shot and killed
by her estranged husband. She was sent to assure
the class that school is a safe place.

—UPI

She talks about the law
of averages. How many storms it would take
before lightning struck one of them.
How often they would have to fly.
As she speaks, they glance at the door
he came in by, they trace
the stain on the hardwood floor.

She does not mention the law of opposites,
love and hate for example. How they cohabit.
Or the law of gravity, demonstrated
by the teacher's falling. Or the law of
conservation of matter: that nothing is lost,
the teacher lives in another form.

She talks about sick people,
says they need help.
A girl with braids is yawning—
she has slept fitfully—a red-headed boy
sits rigid, as if he hears her through water.
His study habits will not improve.

The children are not stupid.
As she talks on and on
they do not relinquish the one priceless
picture of their teacher crumbling
before a blackboard spattered with lessons.

RESPONSE TO A. J. DALY, SPECIALIST IN 'PERMANIZING', POSTMARKED PROVINCETOWN

Dear Mr. Daly, Thanks
for your offer to 'permanize'
this clipping about me.
But I'm writing to tell you
about noon on the beach.
The bodies. From the splayed
legs and surrendered feet
you can tell they're goners.
No blood, but poisonous quiet
under the sun's drumming.
Even the sea's tongue cut out,
no water until the Point,
a period on the horizon.

Over the flats, more bodies.
Crabs belly-up, squid with ten
useless arms, flies drinking
their eyes. And mill-ends:
the lower jaw of a bluefish
biting on air, scales dried
to fingernails, bones too small
to extrapolate from. And shells,
whole city blocks of rooms
where no one makes love.

Mr. Daly, for a dollar-fifty
with your sparkling clear
plastic and special equipment
can you protect me forever
against moisture, soiling
and the wear due to handling?
Mr. Daly, at night here
the foghorn persists in its
two wornout notes, question
and answer. The sea, that reformer,
works its dark industry. Free.

A MANIFESTO FOR THE FAINT-HEARTED

Don't curse your hands,
the tangle of lines
there. Look how
in the deepening snow
your feet make blue fish
no one can catch.

Don't take personally
the defection of leaves.
You can't be abandoned
by what you never owned.
Spring will give back more
green than you can bear.

Don't rest by the hearth
when all you're worth
tells you *Run!*
If the fires within
strangle, not even suns
will comfort your bones.

You're not so special.
The jungle's full of animals
whose guts invert
when a stronger one parts
the camouflage, peers through
as they climb a tree.

Don't think you're different.
The world's full of runts,
stutterers like yourself
who'd save all they have
not to lose it.
They lose it.

Leave trails, be separate,
dress warm, travel light.
Eat fear to grow muscle,
even Olympic champs fall.
Store advice
in a cool, dry place.

Conrad Hilberry

SCRIPT FOR A COLD CHRISTMAS

These reds and greens, of course, are all wrong—
the blazing log, the star like a sunflower
almost toppling the tree. All fall, the colors
have been diminishing. Look: the beech tree
breathes twigs of vapor against the grey sky,
icicles drop their spindly light in a long beard
from eaves to bush to ground. My promises
have cracked and dropped away like old bark.
I am a winter stick, a flagpole clanging
a hollow note in the wind. There is nothing
dramatic here, neither jubilation
nor despair, but rather a kind of exile
as when in a foreign country you shrink
into yourself, unable to speak.

Our rituals exaggerate. The star
was no Catherine Wheel spinning and hissing
over the stable. It was a star, a point
of no dimension, one match flaring across
a frozen lake. The shepherds, hearing the angels'
song, thought it the wheeze of a cold sheep
it had so thin a sound. They heard but hardly
spoke, saving their words like a last handful
of grain. And the child—one child, not a crèche
in every park. This one was different, but
not now, not yet. Now it was a small jug
of flesh with a candle glimmering inside.

It is almost cold enough. The year is shrinking
toward a small festival, a saturnalia
that will fit in the cavity of a tooth.
We may gather up our deaths and make
of them a twig fire, hold our hands
to it and sing for the cold seed.

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of them a twig fire, hold our hands
to it and sing for the cold seed.

1.

Be grateful for the wound. The wound is alive.
What does the wound invent?

Erotic cardiograms: love's

mutinous chorale.

Monitor the grave:

a metronome of husks; chaff rustling in torn sieves.

2.

Rustle of starch in the dead hall. Flashlights. Gasp of stretcher against starch.
Quick voiceless rustlings.

"I am alive," I think, stretcher bars clicking into place.
Something who had breath rumbles down brisk corridors
toward history.

"Tomorrow," I think; but bare
abstractions hurt. I turn on my side. Ice
explores the windowpane.

Yet in this hospital, wounds begin to sing. Tender as rain, remorseless as love's
constellations, a choiring hymn begins, the wounded alleluia roar swelling until
skin howls diagrams of pain, white voices blurred against each gaunt insinuation
stroked on dawn.

NOTHING SOFT, NOTHING LOVED

—Cape Breton, Nova Scotia

Fat swells coil on a headland I've never seen,
its seagull-crested tongue of rock and light
rammed into ocean. We walk to cliff's edge.
If there were a path, it would be a precarious path,
and I turn to you wanting to say, "Stop."
This is an edge. There is no path down."

Far out at sea, the long swells round toward shore,
Below us, waves flake into salty dust
and the hard rattle of pebble on stone.

I have never been to this place.
I have never talked to you at the edge of this cliff
nor watched these torn rocks feather into air.

Victor Trelawny

WHAT THE LAND OFFERS

The fence goes on to great length
Like an answer to a difficult question
The farms pose. Because of hunger
We believe the abundant bough only so far.
But here the wheatfields combine
With what the land offers, rise as with yeast
In the fall sun between barns, and become
The immense tables of the world—
Peaceful, plentiful,
The silos like salt shakers,
The almost circular lazy Susan towns . . .

So we drive along the empty roadway,
Unaware of the silence
Entering through the lowered windows
Like an unseasonable heat

Tightening our throats. Anything we might say
Would overwhelm us, slam the brakes
To the floorboard and send the car skidding
Into the ditch. If at length
The fence repeats itself, we listen
As the fine wire of the argument returns again
To the rain-blackened stakes, the premises
Every few feet.

In the backseat
The pears glimmer in their deep crate.
Our children sleep in the seat ahead
Of us. As the light dims, we can almost
See them through the windshield,
Reflected in our reflected faces, wrapped
In each other's arms, waking
Up into the world we leave them.

Fred Muratori

CONFESSIONAL POEM

The moon is sludge grey, pin-striped
in places like a patchwork suit.
My blood is the color of Colby cheese
and each night, after dinner gets cold,
I open my veins with a potato peeler.

Never in my life have I practiced
before mirrors.
Both parents loved me dearly.
I got A's in school.
My car has fantastic gas mileage.
There's nothing in my dresser drawers
anyone would be afraid to touch.

I tell you these things
because I long for your resentment.

I want you to skirt me widely,
as you would a rabid goat or cripple,
and pretend that I don't matter.
I want your poems to stand
for everything I think is funny.
I want you to look away.
What I do is better left to shadow
and grey-green landscapes
that would not support the barest life.

Ronald Wallace

Three Poems

ART WORK

My daughter is drawing a picture
of me, comical figure: my hair
a spike of asparagus, my face
a round tomato, fat and red,
my eyes two curvy worms
tugging at their hole, my mouth.
She is bending over this garden,
tending it carefully, absorbed
in her own small making.
I smile, and return to my larger work
where, later, I find myself
scratching my thick green hair,
squeezing my ripe plump cheeks,
my old eyes squirming away from me,
tugging at my blind mouth.

SPRING

5 A.M. We are safe
inside our house, sleeping,
when, suddenly, the sun
reaches in through the window,
grabs us, shakes us awake.
The thin sky cracks open

to a clatter of birds:
waxwing, towhee, junco, jay;
the plum tree erupts with blossoms;
the bloodroot and toothwort,
scylla and trout lily fester.
Even the tulips open their mouths,
and the moss uncloses its fist.
Spring. We lie awake listening
as the sparrows and warblers clatter
at the windows, the wild
flowers nudge toward the house.
And down in the basement,
dark and voracious,
the carpenter ants slowly
continue their work.
I hold my wife closer.
We do not go back to sleep.

CONVERSATION WITH THE MAKER OF CLICHES

Up here above the treetops:
green heads, you say, *green hair*.
Why not green water waving?
A thousand locusts hovering? Green air?

The branches, now, the bark. You say:
the long arms of dark women, *mossy skin*.
Why not the hard scars of barnacles?
Dead husks? Stuck wings molting?

Now the roots and trunk. You say:
the long body, *crossed thighs*, *soft toes*.
Why not a sunken Spanish galleon?
Dead cicada dreaming toward the sun?

But now the leaves like fingers
open in the poem, combing their
green hair, green arms holding my throat.
They love me; won't let go.

Carolyn Wright

613

Never bring your elbows to this class.
There's barely room to duck the dean's eye
coming at you like a clammy funhouse hand.
You wake up at dawn, love nailed high
on your list of intentions, remind yourself
to hold your blood's calls in abeyance
till the right bells ring, get to class
on time. This time, we learn how
to manipulate the inside views—words
that have heard of each other,
ridden up elevators together,
never yet been introduced. You try
to remember what comes after how are you.
But it's a damp fuse, and the omniscient
author's prose monotonous as the barroom
conquests in the late late shows.
You doze; lovers drift side-by-side
in your thoughts like leaves on a river.
You peel off superlatives like clothes;
the dream stands up to repeated readings;
there's not one adjective to edit out.
You start; it's over. The class falls out
like a regiment—the same show of feet,
meters winding down in all the faces,
briefcases tight with thoughts
too stuffy to admit they've met.
Left out, like a student from one
of those small, angry countries, you see
your best harangues have dwindled, sunk
to footnotes in some rival text;
even old lovers, whose best moans
quote yours, keep the credit. A secret zero
starts its slow growth in your heart.
It will look for allies everywhere.

Carol McCormach

ROUGH DRAFTS

December 1975

- 1 The tree of dreams burns too long
in a windy alcove
grey and balding
ready for the splintered alley

We neglect that knowledge
- 2 There is no mantel
a sock falls
and crops up lost
- 3 Five o'clock

A flock of lights
blown to stars in the fraying branches

Where your fingers graze
fine nerves sing and scatter
sparks in a tilled, implacable landscape
- 4 Christmas was stillborn
cards mailed late
the unrevealing ink smeared
not by a tear or snow but drizzle

It was dusk all day
in the chinked room the lamplight struck
like fire from flint
the hush a bruise
- 5 We wait listening in the sheets
the rain pocks mud

Or cut our rum with apple juice
pronounce it wine when we are thirsty
shadows on the white curtain fabricating
snowdrifts

- 6 From the calendar's stiff hinge
the untried days
at a time pressed for resolution
dangle

And while your peremptory arms enclose me
I am wary
nursed on air by wistful ascetics

But this is where we meet ourselves
in this house
in such a season
eking frail harvests from our separate crust

alvin greenberg

*poem beginning with 'beginning'
and ending with 'ending'*

beginning on the wrong note's everything:
you cannot sing your way from there
to where you wanted: you can't begin

again: back where you started simply is
no more, even though it flaps in the wind
at you like an american flag raised upside

down. so beginnings signify distress and
middles fill up quickly with the stuff you're
distressed about—beginnings, mostly—and

endings! let night come even more quickly
and save us from the endings, save us
from having to reel the flag back down

in this damned wind where even the wrong
notes won't carry and the flag's as big as
a parking lot: just try folding it yourself

if you think you can manage an ending.

Mark Jarman

WRITING FOR NORA

I should be pleasing myself, you know,
old woman, though I owe
myself to you. Through the hospital window
edged with ferns, the trucks and birds appear,
gearing up hill, up air.
Should they be included?
They have not been informed you are here.
Or that I, waiting with you
for your last seizure, can't
stand to listen again
as your dictaphone winds through
the summer of the first:
the buckets of sweet water,
the sponges stroking and stroking
your wrists and ankles cinched
because your prone dancing tore
too many sheets . . . Each time I've almost
got it, the plastic
red recording tape ticks off
and again you accuse me,
thinking me one of the brothers who sent you to fetch
foxfire in the woods, and followed, and watched
laughing when you fell down.
I can't convince you they are gone.
Bold as the girl
you think you are you twirl
around in bed, and thrust your knees
in my face,
pointing to scars as fresh cuts,
to the shine of the loose skin.

Desperate story-teller,
those words of yours that wore me out
sworn on tapes crammed in a box
will be lost.
You know I owe you them.

And you will twist
me everywhere to find, at least,
one way to tell how you died
the way you would tell it, digressions turning
and twisting till I fall
as you fell in your fit,
Grandmother, ghost, epileptic,
caught, sick of it.

Ron Slate

PASTORALE

An afternoon that demands
appreciation, plenty
of reasons to take that drive.
Pulling off the road, you want
to feel a part of all this.
The book says it's meadowlarks
on the phone lines, that's Queen Anne's
lace beside the fence, that's mint.
You don't know him but a boy
leans his rusty bicycle
on the car and says "Them's red
poll Herefords," and all this time
they've been staring at the Ford,
the glint of your belt buckle.
They're not planning anything,
not apprehensive, just fixed
the way you are fixed on them.
When they go back to the grass
it's only you and this one
cow, eyes locked, your bodies dead
weight and attracting horseflies,
until a red-winged bird flies
between, and the cow lets go
for no reason, and you let
go to save the day from dread.

POWER FAILURE

In darkness someone returns
his glass to the table with a soft tick.
We question the roof.
A huge oak has not toppled
over the wires. We reach out
our hands at the ends of our arms.

Flames appear gliding up the stairs.
Lovers rise and paddle
through the air over Pennsylvania.
The farmer drifts over his fields, in moonlight
admiring the pattern: alfalfa, drainage, sweet corn.
Now the police are playing their sirens.

Night surges over the buildings,
against the picture window with a few stars.

The city has vanished.
The children have shut their eyes.
How will we find our way back.

MY NEIGHBOR HOSING HER LAWN
IN THE DARK

And now the roses—arcing cool rain
into the garden, the dry loam talks almost.
Heavy blossoms rock on their stems.
All afternoon bending her rake, white oak
leaves catching on her
dizzy head, she rolled brittle piles into the fire.

Where is her husband?
From the stoop she can reach the whole lawn,
swishing spray over the grass.
What did their impossible son shout at him?

Doors slammed, cups springing from their saucers.
Now the tomatoes. Now
the sunflowers looking down.
Their only child, what with the war
and the payments, and then he was gone.

She is dreaming on the dark porch,
water rumbling in the hose.
Flowers grow lush
grasping her hem and hand—and now
the roses, now vegetables sprawled on the soil.
Her beauty is still inside,
in a summer dress wandering
back and forth through the weedy field.

TROY, OHIO

My father built dream
houses on scratch pads,
piled high on his desk.

Mother hated a mess.
She must have been Greek.
She burned his secret city.

He sold shoes that year.
It was only a job,
but he gave his customer

a good fit: enough room
for the toes, arch support,
“a home for each foot.”

Who is ever that lucky?
I carry him with me.
I am my father's house.

FARMING THE RIVER

He seeded the slow current
with stones, and watched
his broken face compose itself

time after time, barely
transparent, dark so soon.
It would rain, enough to grow

deeper gullies, new stones
to bear him down, like sons
that drifted off, weary

of working a family farm.
He'd meant to plow straight
to Colorado, but always veered

at the property line: drawn
to the river, murky-eyed,
angry at all of his planting.

Marjorie Hawksworth

I NEVER CLEAN IT

The oven is black.
A charcoal potato
and puffballs of carbon
from the sweet juice of pies
lie at the back of the cave.
Their substance is like the dry
yet faintly shiny tissue of snakes
that emerged from pills
ignited on Fourth of July morning
when pyromaniacs
sat on the front porch steps
at ten o'clock in the morning
because they could not wait
in their burning
until the time of sparklers.

Vassar Miller

Two Poems

A RESIGNATION

They sit, attended by a yes
from which the world's no falls away
unheeded like the dogs that press
upon my heels day after day.

Although I pass their secret door
and feel the shadows of their song,
I try to enter there no more
as once, where I do not belong,

tracking the carpets everywhere,
staining their sofas with my sweat,
my pause, the best part of my prayer,
makes angels happy I forget

until at long last I have crept
to that same door I could not win
by pain or other right except
a tired child's to be taken in.

OBSTINATE

Like Adam I am flushed out nude
Though I have hidden in the wood:
I cannot bless my solitude.

Like Cain I will not pour out blood
As much too cruel, much too crude
To my hell of solitude.

Oh Lord, You are a hard man, shrewd
And cautious, miserly with good:
I cannot bless my solitude.

Yet I believe that if I could,
At its dark root I might find God,
Whose other name is solitude.

TO MY MOTHER

after Amichai

1 Night, the blackness of the telephone,
you on the hook
hold down all other voices.

Mother, I say, Mother why don't you write
the story of your life?

—Oh, if everyone did that—

2 Though children are raised from breasts, those halves
as clean as cereal bowls,

those bowls are modestly put away
when not in use,
a pear or peach
painted in the center depth of each.

3 Mother sat on the beach and out of her knitting bag
grew a red sweater.
Sand knitted into the purl,
sand for eggs and long distance calls,
sand such as wore down the teeth of ancestors who ate
dried fish.

And she gave it to her granddaughter.
Secretly a moth gave it also
to her newest born.

4 One's history should be blank
to show you didn't use yourself
for selfish ends.

Once you held your baby by a palm tree.
Your hands itched in the humidity.
You smile toward the camera, but the truth

is you are gazing out to sea.

THE BLUE SKY

Air, light blue,
light's blue,
its nut breath,
sneezing,
its fixtures
purple locust pods,
hollow root
a buried
bushel basket,
its sounds
soft swats
at tennis balls,
whale-like
snorting of bison,
storm puddles
behind time,
its clouding,
smoking up,
its blowing clean.
Every day, every day
it's clear,
the river dropping,
the hill too dry
for mushrooms,
dinners
meaty with fat
poured into cans,
and stolen suet
drags a nuthatch
to the ground.
So formal
I don't expect

the shot:
the frozen
bird songs:
the deft transmission
of a sound
for practice.
Breathe quick,
the goose
wedge out its wings,
the tree top
look straight up.
Where is the target?
I look.
Assembling hawks,
a web raised
like the frame of a barn,
and people being solitary
fire lookouts,
each reads the sky
for an alternative.
But it is
the blue
that keeps on falling
in and around
the spent shell,
the blue
that tumbles
doubling up
above the autumn
stockpiles.

TORTURE

The animals were weeping copiously.
The plants had stolen their mystery

and rammed it down far beyond their roots.
The sky had sucked it up and dissipated it.

The ocean was rolling it long distances.
It was no longer theirs.

They hated themselves. It was hell.
They were now no more than animals.

What they had was on the outside. Peeked at.
It had become part of what wasn't quite.

Once we were each king in a world of meaning.
Now the world is king. We are meaningless.

The shepherd said, No! You are spotless!
Guilt is always blameless. Inconsistency

is the edge of the shadow. Where can it go
when light fills every corner of the meadow?

CLARITY

There was nothing there.
Perception justified by itself.

Detail taking over the whole.
Depth risen to the surface, alone.

Over and over we repeated
the name of God, the animals said.

In each movement we uncovered
new logic and became wiser.

With every bite and breath
the world cleared, gained

in the sovereign presence
of the senses. Something.

What was it? asked the shepherd. The element
of sight? The source of light? What was perceived?

It was the clarity itself we saw,
the animals sang. Absolutely free and tame.

Miller Williams

HUSBAND

She's late. He mixes another drink.
He turns on the television and watches
a woman kissing the wrong man.
He looks at his watch. He feels close
to the cat. Well Cat, he says.
He feels foolish.

He mixes another drink and stands
turning the stem of the glass
back and forth in his fingers.
This also makes him feel foolish.
He looks at his watch. Well Cat, he says.
Lights turn into the driveway.
He slumps into his chair. He
kicks off his shoes and spreads
the open newspaper peacefully
over his face.
He hears the tiny grating of the key.
His heart knocks to get out.

Paula Rankin

THE MAN WHO INVENTED FIREWORKS

Once a man with Roman candles gunpowdering
his head went out at night
to find sky's inattention
resembling too much the ceiling
towards which an invalid strains
his dimmed eyes. Or perhaps

he simply weighed the various acts
by which one is remembered
and chose combustion, the vocation
in which whole moments are strung
on short fuses, tattooing air with vermilion,
emerald, flumes of white fire.

He may have foreseen us,
huddled by one shore of Jekyll Island,
awaiting promised flags, chrysanthemums, riders
pinwheeling unbuckable stallions;
and if so, predicted a market
for charcoal, saltpeter flaring from mouths
of medieval statues, while priests
uttered prayers on atonement.

He may have sensed that the path to attention
would not change much,
that those with strained eyes
would still be around
drop-mouthed at the trick of ignition,
of getting shows not only off the ground
but shot through the sky's epidermis
and the skins of each other's eyes,
a searing of tissue
to last the whole length
of its moment.
For who gets enough attention?

Perhaps he knew how some nights
these collisions of stars, shells, saxons
would still be the only holes
worth congregating for,

how that is all we would own,
that, and the shared, humbling aftermath
of backdrop.

Joan LaBombard

MARBLES

They are his planets,
his suns and milky spheres, his red Mars.
Their clustered fires seethe in his pocket
compelling his mind
till he must touch them, count them
over and over for luck;
aggie and cat's-eye, his brilliant clearies,
the prized green shooter
where all the leaves of all his summers burn.
Ambling onto the playground,
he chalks the ring of a universe.
Other boys drift over
to watch a champion set out
marbles like pigmy moons, globes of ice
and crystal, closed worlds
with miniature rivers in them,
colored like sky or tigers, vivid as blood.
It is Genghis Khan baiting his surly chieftains
with hope of treasure,
who hunches beside the circled suns, and aims
that Pearl of Marbles, which obeys
his eye and cunning thumb
so wickedly.

LATECOMERS

To all those who have come too late
 and found the doors closed against them,
 the dance hall doors, the music
 stolen by talk and distance,
 the gates to the sea, the subway barriers,
 the license bureau doors so there can be
 no marriages tonight,
 no barnraisings, no rooftrees lifted up,
 no lot lines run,
 no woodlot walked off,
 no garden in the flood plain ploughed,
 no key turned in the ignition,
 no border crossed:
 strike up! we will dance where we are,
 live in the open, become
 the teachers of their children.

BAGGAGE

The man at the door says it's
 lost luggage coming home by cab
 with the apologies of the line's agent
 who hopes that I will travel with them again.
 Travel? I can't remember traveling.
 Perhaps a former tenant? but then
 I've lived behind this door for twenty years.
 Greyhound? I hazard, United?
 Union Pacific? Grace? but the man is gone.
 This has happened before.
 I've opened a few.
 That overnighter by the stairs
 contains a green chiffon, a color I never wear,
 a flapper style from the twenties, and snapshots
 plainly of the traveler's relatives,
 inscribed in German.

In the matched cases, a handgun. It's been fired.
 In this flowered hatbox with the Continental labels
 a perfume bottle is obviously broken.
 In the heavy leather, wool shirts, moths,
 some excellent hunting boots, the smell
 of male sweat and alcoholic urine.
 Others I have hesitated to open. I know,
 I ought to have called the Salvation Army
 long ago, or piled them at the curb—
 my ludicrous responsibility! I keep them
 for whoever it is who takes my name to travel,
 though the hall, large as it is, begins to be
 narrow to walk in, and nights lately
 I've begun to dream again—the bell rings,
 I can't get past the baggage to the door,
 the cabbie swears, can't be made to hear me;
 sounds: something heavy—trunks?—crates?—
 piled against the door, the cab driving away,
 someone's fists pounding on leather, latches snapping.

IN A FILM WINDING BACKWARDS

I come out of my car
 rump first and heel
 to my front door,
 which opens to a hand
 I reach back blind.
 My wife unhugs me,
 I fill my raised glass
 with juice, fork my eggs
 out of my mouth,
 fit them whole on my plate.
 All as it was.
 My shirt shaken off, folded,
 my bath up the nozzle,
 I muss my bed, sit on it,

slip into the covers
and hear the alarm
set me to sleep.
Day before day
I return what I have
until I am cared for,
cared for, cared for,
and all's put away.

HEART

I shift my pillow so I won't hear my heart
knock like the mad boy who burned his room.
I would leave secret everything inside
that floats in blood, yet in the dark
I rummage in my guts for bad news.

Again I cheat him out of his comic books.
I am up to my chin in his funny books.
His starved face, his raw picked nose
pressed against his window, he knocks to get me
in there. I drag his comics home in my wagon.

He heaps my foreign stamps, my woodcarving set,
my new shirt in tissue in its box
under his bed and puts a match to them.
When they pull him out the back door,
he kicks the air and screams I have cheated him.

That afternoon I shove him onto his face
and sit on him. "You moron, you stink you're so dumb,"
I set him straight. I educate him. I take
his hair in my hands and teach him to eat grass.
Despite all this, he seems to learn nothing.

My deeds knot in my belly like string saved.
My blunt, resourceful bloody ghost beating,
I want sleep! But through the shades
my windows form, and a beam of dust,
and cars rattle up and down the street.

Katherine Soniat

IN ANOTHER MOLD

After too much night-staring, taken in
by constellations and carried off
by underworld heroes, I began walking
lines of wet, warm streets
in what was to have been November.
I'd come for blessings, an earthly shape
to support me in this cloudcover
called lowland heat.

The asphalt surface winds, the houses
repeat themselves, but belief breathes
easy on scrubbed doorsteps in the sun,
ammonia rising proudly from them every day.
Front yards are built-in squares of belief,
resting under the calm hands and plaster
of a little blue Virgin.

Slowly I make my ears deaf to the backyard
predicament of an old hunting dog
longing for a last dream of trees, forgetting
when it was, if ever, I thrived on grass fields
opening with dark deer and stars.

Now I am ready to live upfront, settle
under my own small flat roof,
paint my bedroom brilliant lavender,
shock myself with locked windows hung
with yards of orange organza.
I would never be touched by the giant
side of seasons so liable to blow
in through screens.

Only at noon will I trust myself
behind the house to take pleasure
clearing trees for a fenced field

of plastic poinsettia. Come fall
I'll clip their wires, stick them
at my blue Virgin's feet, pray
never to see clouds spread
with blue openings or remember
how the dark made me think
with big eyes.

Christopher Howell

Three Poems

MEMORIES OF MESS DUTY AND THE WAR

Garbage went over the fantail, boiling into blue
white wake. Among shark snouts rising to sample that
sweetness, it rode like the raw
stuff of hope. We watched. Our aprons dripping.
Who knew what we, six hundred miles from shore,
thought? What we were doing there (the abstract
crime afloat) kept glittering
phosphor-like in the day to day, unnamed. We didn't guess
the sea of harm on which we moved. We smoked.
We missed our women in the glo-bake blackness
of the crew's compartment, hated brass, cursed
our uniforms and thought that was enough. Grinning,
thoughtless, the cargo burned at Asia. Let the garbage sink
then, let sharks sever bone from scrap
and keep on following. Still, on the floor,
our longings and the spilled blood
gathered.

DEAR MRS. TERRY

Johnson said, "yes sir, Mr. Carney, right away, sir, aye aye,"
in his sleep. The ship droned in the lead hot Gulf into which Cadet
Pilot Terry shot his plane, the impact of the catapult socking him
forward, his gear snagging the stick. "I don't *know*, Captain, he

cleared the flightdeck and went down like a goose, sir." Fifty fathoms. Enough oxygen for half an hour.

Locked in the chill black with his prayers, wondering did the
marker buoy surface? Could divers find him so far down, so cold,
dark? No time to sing into the squawker. Just that rush of shimmered blue, the steely shadow and the jolt as 41,000 tons steamed
over the closed seam that had allowed him in, then darkening
stripes of aqua through the thick way down.

Black scotch broom pods snapped. A '41 Chevy rolled past
four years of NROTC, sacrificed summers, haircuts, harassment
from fellow students; all for this? Thirty minutes in a slow-filling
memory of light? Water lapped. The whaleboat came back full of
exhausted divers; sun scratching the stanchions, the useless day-glo
life preservers. And Johnson slept, book over his face; the writing of
that next-of-kin letter making a wide, slow approach through the
dead chain of command.

WATER SCULPTURE

for Patricia White, 1944 to 1968

Wrecked bits of face and speed
come back; and the bottle of pills. Such small
food for breathing, Patricia. When the dead files
let you loose, I almost catch the poor star of absence
in my palms. Bill's dead, too. Cancer
flooding him like honey or the lost notes of a drum
buried in sand. And Grandpa, whom you delighted, broke
his heart on the kitchen floor. So unreasonable
these departures for the cold other shore.

Here in the high burnt shadow of Horsetooth, far
far from the sea, I murmur only
a hollow bone of you and bring this nothing-stitched skin
of words. Take it . . . please. I know our lives and the carved sea
come
to water. Not even grief will wake you
from those phenobarbital arms. May they love you senseless
and forgive us your penny of sleep, forgive you
that you dove so deep.

Jack Crawford, Jr.

BRUSHING AWAY GNATS

I just had a bowl of cornflakes with a banana sliced over it. good. good. and the milk cool going down the throat on a hot night. remembering in a pool hall, years ago, the clicking of the balls. the lampshade over each green table. the leather pockets. those pockets! the soft commotion of men. their sliding shoes. the positions they assumed to make their shots. the cue stick, smooth, thicker at one end, tapering. good to feel, good to slide over the pronged fingers. how they cranked the tip with chalk, as if it were one of the great pleasures. the fingers grinding it on. as if it would hold the stick steady. as if the ball wouldn't slip. and the cue ball riding over the green baize, and the click of collision. and harlan—and david. were you really there, harlan? and did you marry claudia? and did you not write for the morning daily how the ball game went that afternoon and how people sitting in the bleachers had to brush away gnats? what a touch! when the riot broke at the penitentiary you, david, got the assignment. what a whirl! what a going out of the office! what a thing to be doing: covering the great riot! going out—all of us watching. and when you returned, dashing in as if you'd stopped the presses. what a thing it was. with that hat you wore, your sharp face. those dark, burning eyes. and snatching the notes out of your pockets. dashing off your jacket. snaring it on the back of your chair. taking your seat before the machine. staring at your papers.

i can feel your concentration. you there—
sitting before it: the whole thing.
bringing it all together. the riot, the pleas, the blood.
your quotes from the warden. et cetera. and how
to find the lead. i feel your head working!
how you shaped your lead, david,
i don't remember. i'm sure it was good.
full of your dash and intensity. as you dragged it
nine times round the trojan walls and smashed it
shield on shield and left it ringing.
the pool hall murmurs with voices. the soft
commotion of men, their sliding shoes.
pronged fingers propped for the pool stick.

Susan Stewart

Two Poems

TERROR

A man has died in the house next door,
rain pours through the open window
and the curtains flap their wet arms
on the bricks. Upstairs a phone rings
four times, for you. There is nothing
so prosaic as terror. Even as I write this,
a lamp is turned over. The debutante's hair
catches fire. The heroine breaks her teeth
on the tracks and hopes that the train
will loosen the ropes. Wars break out
in the subways, and if I pick up the phone,
I know no one will answer, nothing so
voiceless as terror. A child feels
the hammering of his mother's heart
and swears he will never leave the womb
alive. Snow drifts slowly on the insides
on the windows like the ponderous moaning
of widows. The piano refuses to rhyme.
Life as we know it runs out of our reach,
even as I write this, police fill the streets,

their horses limp along like battered children.
There is nothing so deliberate as terror,
like a wound that doesn't hurt and won't
stop bleeding, like a coat lined with guns
and razors, terror wounds us with its
silence and blindness, wounds us with the
calculated violence of lovers. Strangers
are tearing at your books and letters,
some are slitting your mattress with knives.
Even as I write this, blood soaks the feathers,
and the dead man stands behind you, terrified
by this poem. His skin is luminous
with rain and weeping, and he carries
his voice in his arms like a child.

THE WAY THE MILKWEED PODS

No, the way a chicken watches his wings
lug his heart toward the woodpile and the great
red tear swells on his throat, nothing
ever dies simply. Your right hand torn with splinters
and your left hand freckled with blood, the way
you walk so slowly toward the woodpile and fold
the wings into the basin, no, nothing so simply,
each foot dragging a world behind the other.
Remember this, the way the milkweed pods
fly open with a shout, the way their white
wings sail out into the meadow with the sureness
of some immortal animal, sail out
on the stillest, most windless day of summer
when the crickets burn up with static
and a single hair sticks wetly to your cheek.
There is a little money beneath the carpet,
a little milk still cold in the bucket,
there are two blue letters in the mailbox
that think they are patches of sky.
This very minute the bread is rising on the table
with the unworried brow of a wise man.
The cows are out on the road again and in the parlor

Louise begins to play her violin, the name
of the song is "The way their white wings"
and the curtains are throwing lace roses
on her shoulders and her shoulders are aching
from holding up the song. There is a room
in the house you haven't found yet, where the ceiling
leans down to rest on the window and brushes
the hair from the eyes of a woman, who sits there
all day sewing clouds to her apron.
She will lend you her needle to take out the splinters,
but when she tells you it's simple,
remember what I've said.

Dick Hamby

Two Poems

GOING HOME WITH THE DROWNED MAN

There is a moment in the air when the sky
falls away like a rising, blue balloon
and you think that what must splash
will be your life. The cold water
closes around you and there is nothing
in the swirl of the sea to hold on to,
no hand or word to say you are not alone.
So, you begin calmly to move your arms,
undulate, flatten your hands like fins
and you find it is so easy, swimming,
this new feeling of being at home,
everything decided, necessary. Soon
you learn to love the taste of brine and
small fish, the smell of your new mate,
her nudge and bump, the slide of her
thick body against yours, her gentle song.
Rising and falling in waves or sounding deep,
you glide in a wide current where time is
the distance between leaving and returning
to places that are never lost
in the net of the past.

RUNNING BACK

It is late afternoon and he
Waits for the snap.
This will be the last play.
He'll break up the middle,
Put on all the moves, be free
At mid-field, running for the score.

The crowd goes wild.
They cheer as he leaps
Over linemen, speeds
Past the Safety, sprints
Into the end-zone, turns
Up the runway, leaves
The stadium behind.

Bus drivers, huddled
Over schooners in the First and Ten,
Watch dumbly as he strides by.
He cuts into the street, sidesteps
Honking cars, zig-zags by people
Who stop to stare. Steaming,
Panting, thumping the pavement,
He startles shopkeepers closing up,
Lovers pressed against the bricks
In dead-end alleys. Families,
Saying grace at firelight dinners,
Hesitate, listen to what seems
The thud of footsteps across their lawns.

Out in the fields, it is cold and dark.
His breath puffs out before him
Like a ghost. The sweet smell of hay
Hangs in the brittle air. Each step
Sinks into the marshy turf; he pushes off,
Rises, soars past stands of trees.
Lights of towns float by in silence.
The sky is so wide
He could be a star falling into it.

Hollis Summers

Two Poems

PETROGLYPHS

The nieces and nephews of lieutenant governors
Compose the roadside signs for tourists:
Historic Marker, Item of Interest, Landmark—
They are full of words.

Take Indian rocks;
The writers like to say the Indians wrote,
When, in fact, they drew, I know
Having drawn at a poem.

Are these marks a form of magic?
The writers ask the sweating travelers.
Are these marks religious, ceremonious,
Or are they simply fun?

The answer is yes,
Foolish nieces and nephews.

THE PENITENT

Yes, his
Double breasted Eterna-Wear
Shirt of hair
Is

Lined
With violet and vermilion
Ribbioned Dacron;
The design

Of orchid
Nylon flosses
Embosses
Quid

Est
And *Quid Pro Quo*
As the inside motto
Of his chest.

Guarantees
Notwithstanding, a hair shirt
Attracts dirt.
Laundries

Demand
Outrageous fees
For specialities.
Washing by hand

Is only impossible.
He, loathing poseurs,
Provident, endures
His gospel.

Devout,
He wears his shirt, a sweater
Of fur,
Inside out.

Sherry Rind

WHO'S HARLEY-DAVIDSON?

I had to slide my fingers down that long silver run of exhaust pipe—
and burned them. On my first ride the boy called me a natural.
Said I leaned well, rode light.

Years later, my lover rode a bike all winter. A foot-rest fell off
and I learned to balance with one foot, cling with my knees.
I arrived at parties frozen into a bow-legged walk, brushing shreds
of his long blond hair from my mouth and eyes. We steamed like
horses.

He said you could lose your balance leaning wrong; you must go
with it
even if, as his did, the bike leans into the pavement and leaves you
fifty yards away with your face scraped clean and a hole in your lip
you smoke your cigarette through. His face made the girls cry.
I said, love should be better than that.
He said, you'd go farther with a Harley.

Arthur Miller

WHY THE DEAD RETURN

I
Boredom. Heaven the white hole
is managed by idiots.
Hell is smaller than they imagined:

composed of whips and alarm clocks
stuck on Monday morning
like a broken recording.

II
Each Spring they flop out of trees.
Playing hooky they gloat,
cruise for another hot time

among the living: snaking
onto supermarket lines
gobbling fast food with French fries

and rejoicing as if they
too were alive. Rituals
replace feast days and the last

rites for the dead. They request
the colonel to cater their
brief escapes from the casket.

III

Curiosity. They peer
eyes bloated, staggering behind
blimp-like bellies. They regard

with total recall the hum
before that inopportune
quiet, but the first return

is the detective pruning space
between there and here. His nose
mashed to the pavement detects

the criminal, an odor
carving smoke into footprints
vivid as the dead, vivid

as the final smell, foolish
one that never died. He stalks
the villain, sniffing clues

and rounding up the usual
suspects, but wonders if he overlooked
some obvious aroma.

IV

So they come, unlike their birth:
this time they are well prepared
dragging hindsight to guide them.

Their umbrellas stuck open
expecting prophecies or
visitors from Uranus

they bring sketch pads, cameras,
and cages to capture life,
their first obituary.

Edward Hirsch

A LETTER

Come home. I don't want to sound frightened,
but this morning when I got back from work
I couldn't scrub the grease off my hand;

it had settled into my skin like a deep film,
the veins were black, and the barges
were blurred on the flayed rivers in my palm.

The warehouses were empty. The streets were jumbled,
and the canals tunneled out in all directions
none of them homeward, though somehow

they all funneled back into an open basin,
a blank sea, like a tree gathering in
its last branches, or a map smudged with dirt.

I don't want to sound desperate, but all night
I could hear my feet opening narrow graves
in the sawdust, the rats crawling through a maze

of pipes inside my chest; and I spent
so many hours stacking crates inside of crates
inside of crates, like paper cups, so many crates,

so many other places. . . . Come home.
This morning when I pressed my hand to the glass
I saw a black sun buried in sludge

and a thousand rivers clogged with waste
running into the basin of a single map
muddied with features, so many features,

so many faces, but none of them yours.

IS EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT

Mother calls. My sisters aren't happy.
One of them is so heavy she's tipping over
into diabetes, another is going blind,
another is flying home to escape her brats.

This time she doesn't mention my dead brothers,
or the one who stays abroad like a war crime—
only the one who had his head cut open;
he's drifted into another drunk collision.

For once I've got good news to leave her:
I have a girlfriend now who's broken records
where I'm concerned; I'm almost getting younger.
But mother says she has to get a scraping,

so I report the black she's used to hearing—
that child support still bites me like a watchdog,
and I can't know what my children look like
if no one sends me pictures, no one writes.

I leave the best news to her; she says
the old housekeeper got drunk at the last shower,
and she herself and father's big successor
will rendezvous at a swim-meet in the Midwest.

Mother waits for me to round her call off
by telling her I'm going to live forever
in spite of headaches and having no more children.
The false news chokes the bad down like cold peas.

HER PICTURES

These are the pictures in her room:
Cary Grant supporting her mother's hand
in his, grinning at her engagement ring;
Ophelia in a storm of posies,
lakefronts with nothing on them but ellipses.

And this is what she does: she wears

her nightgown around all day sometimes,
pushes up her nose and rolls her eyes back.
Her farts pop her out of her chair, she laughs
like the roof of the jungle at moonrise.

This is where she goes: south
to the little cheerleader pleats she jumped
for the sky in, the Salvation Army
to try on hats, my house to play dead,
Oz to come back north like a wedding ring.

And this is what she knows: A Munchkin
was her babysitter, Garland blew it,
the Witch is in commercials, the future
churns the flats of sleep up like a twister,
all her pictures of herself are in the air.

MY DAUGHTER ENTERS HIGH SCHOOL

Maybe the nuns will like her, but I don't think so.
They'll know the Devil comes to her in person
by her frosty lips, her blue eyelids, the streaks
his fingers leave in her limp hair,
the bells about her ankle which drive them crazy.

They'll fix her good: her breasts my grown-up lover
thinks outdo her own by a full size,
they'll flatten in starch, and drag down her backside
in wool pleats, pack her feet in Oxfords.
They'll stick her head in a white hood and teach her

decline and conjugate for Jesus' sake,
knee-in-the-Devil's-groin, thumb-in-his-eye,
give her homework to fall asleep on in her clothes,
while her boyfriend—nine feet tall and growing—
whines on the ladder against her window.

This fall it starts. Maybe it's good for her;
her eyes don't take to shadow as it is.
But damn the nuns—the same who schooled her mother
to be the personal secretary of the Lord—
if they cut short her career as an outcast.

About Our Contributors

JANIS LULL lives in Brooklyn.

CAROLE OLES was recently poet-in-residence for the Massachusetts Arts and Humanities Foundation.

CONRAD HILBERRY teaches at Kalamazoo College.

JOHN UNTERECKER's two most recent books are *Dance Sequence* (Kayak Books) and *Stone* (University Press of Hawaii).

VICTOR TRELAWNY is a graduate student at the University of Arizona.

FRED MURATORI teaches at Syracuse University.

RONALD WALLACE teaches at the University of Wisconsin.

CAROLYNE WRIGHT's first book, *Stealing the Children*, will be published in 1978 by the Asahta Press. She teaches at Syracuse University.

CAROL McCORMMACH lives in Seattle.

ALVIN GREENBERG's novel, *The Invention of the West* (Avon/Equinox), appeared in 1976. He teaches at Macalester College.

MARK JARMAN lives in Evansville, Indiana.

RON SLATE, editor of *Chowder Review*, teaches at the University of Wisconsin.

JOHN C. WITTE is currently a Fellow at the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center.

WILL WELLS is a recent M.A. graduate from Ohio University.

MARJORIE HAWKSWORTH teaches creative writing in Santa Barbara.

VASSAR MILLER's sixth book, *Small Change* (Wings Press), appeared in 1976.

SANDRA McPHERSON's third book, *The Year of Our Birth*, will be published by Ecco Press in the spring of 1978.

RICHARD GROSSMAN's book on business, *Tycoon Boy*, was published by Kayak Books.

MILLER WILLIAMS spent last year in Rome as winner of the American Academy of Arts & Letters *Prix de Rome*. His newest book, *Why God Permits Evil* (LSU Press), appeared in 1977.

PAULA RANKIN's first book, *By the Wreckmaster's Cottage*, was published in 1977 by Carnegie-Mellon University Press.

JOAN LaBOMBARD received the Celia Wagner Memorial Award and the Consuelo Ford Award from the Poetry Society of America in 1977.

LINDA ALLARDT teaches at the University of Rochester.

RICHARD FROST teaches at Oneonta State College in New York State.

KATHERINE SONIAT lives in Metairie, Louisiana.

CHRISTOPHER HOWELL has published three books of poems, directs Lynx House Press, and is poet-in-residence at Colorado State University.

JACK CRAWFORD, JR., teaches at SUNY in New Paltz, N.Y.

SUSAN STEWART is a graduate student in folklore at the University of Pennsylvania.

DICK HAMBY teaches high school in Kent, Washington.

HOLLIS SUMMERS teaches at Ohio University.

SHERRY RIND is a teaching fellow at the University of Washington.

ARTHUR MILLER teaches a workshop at Home Base, an alternative high school in Watertown, Mass.

EDWARD HIRSCH lives in New York City and has published widely.

MARK McCLOSKEY teaches at Occidental College.

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POETRY NORTHWEST reminds its readers that it is the recipient of a \$1830 grant from the federally sponsored Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines. Since that amount has been given to us in the form of matching funds, every tax deductible contribution in support of *Poetry Northwest* from you, our readers, will be doubled until we reach that figure. The CCLM rules stipulate that you should say you intend your gift to apply to the matching-funds grant. We hope for your help.

