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POETRY NORTHWEST

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POETRY NORTHWEST

—SPRING 1973

Lucile Adler

Two Poems

SCHOOLROOM AT VELARDE

Children,
If you misread History
You will kill a man.

Therefore you must study not only
The fox in the chicken pen
After moonrise,
But books by candlelight—
A kind of combat for you.

Not all poor schools like ours
Have sunflowers for pointers
On plum-red maps of Fall,
Nor sumac-bordered time
To correct error
After the coal bucket is filled.

—What happens
When great men
Misunderstand History,
Reynaldo?

—They must learn to read?

—What else?

—Else
They are trapped
And someone is killed.

—Yes, Cristella?

Of course
Sunflowers are smashed
And trampled when boys fight,
But that is not the subject.
Please save your sugar-bread
Till the noon bell rings.
Why do they fight?

—For the love God

And because they are right?
Don't repeat. False phrases
Memorized rearm History.
"We must not commit our ignorance
To memory and war." Wipe the sticky pride
From your face, Cristella,
And put down your weather vane hand.

—When will I kill a man?

—When I cannot understand
My world, my house, my heart
And I will in ignorance
Harm what is close—
My own people, you children,
Others. . .

—Tia Maria who eats more
Than her share but refuses
The chicken wing?

—Cristella, you may unlock
The cupboard and get out
The jump rope and the ball.
I will watch you from the door.
And after the coal bucket is filled
I will marshal warm answers
In red-hot candy block letters
On the board.

Then I will ring the iron bell
Over the jump ropes,
And when you enter,
Increase the force
Of my love as you war on the page.
See, Reynaldo is already
In the front line, waving
His hand like a flag.
Cristella, there are traps for me too,
Cruel as the trap set for black bear
Up past Tres Ritas; I too tangle
The letters of wisdom in books
Red-black as corn in the broken crib.
I can misread
Even someone like you.

Come in.

There is glory to be won
From the kind of combat
We wage here. But I warn you
And the plum-dark Fall and the teeth
Of the trap, that I will never withdraw:
I will never be resigned.

EXPLORER AT HOME WITH FLOWERS

for Jane 1926—1968

Freezias
Forced from their season
Burn
Blue white
As alcohol
In your warm dusk
And winter room

Though tremors
Of a far wind
Shake and rend
The taut silk

Of your tented will
Open
On snow wastes

Where ice grains beat
Across a famous cairn
And your own reason
For seeking
The unattainable pole
Forever

What is unattainable
Is neither beheld
Nor lost, neither
Ruined nor made bloom
By a mere traveler

But the white flowers
Gasp
Like flame
Through the torn
Membrane of winter
And shine
Out where you explore
Beyond the storm
All barriers down

Charles Edward Eaton Three Poems

TREE SURGEON

He is the man who trims our overworld—
Through windows we desire a bloated life,
The fullness of time, women, color, love.
The man in the knickers, boots, operates;
A huge arm falls, a leafy hand, a foot.
The great *docteur sauvage*, the criminal
Has never admitted to malpractice.
Without any fear of complications

He eats his lunch among the flesh and bones
And drinks a beer, smokes a cigarette,
In his own kind of carnage quite at ease—
Of course at home he is another man,
Tangled in the arms of his soft, plump wife,
Mired in the thicket of those brash children.
There is a window, too, that thickly bleeds.
He remembers the houses where he worked,
The style, insouciance, the *joie de vivre*.
A surgeon to the very careless rich,
He illustrates philosophy for them,
Tailors the common heritage of trees.
Taking the saw from the pale suicide,
He cuts just so much away, nothing more.
We recuperate, we regain the trees,
Toned, tightened, painted with black beauty spots.
It is a theater of operations—
He keeps our trees reasonably healthy, whole.
We cannot tell him not to slap his wife,
Reproach him with his fat and dirty children:
Constant, perfect, he never claimed to be.

THE ORPHAN

The orphan found friends among animals,
Flowers, but people utterly deformed him.
Pure water poured for him like mother's milk;
He could draw the sea up like a bedspread,
Blue up to his eyes in vast lonely peace.
Otherwise he was left out in the cold.
"I am a situational neurotic,"
He said. "I turn mute, crippled, constantly."

The orphan considered his case minutely—
Animals licked his hands, flowers seduced him,
He could sleep an age in a deep blue funk,
But he was peripheral, a ledge-dweller.
People were like a cliff he could not scale.
He was constantly reminded how poor

He was by those who possessed each other—
He was cropped, crowded, hanging without claws.

At last he sank his teeth into the rock,
Drew blood, violence, dazzling reformation:
He had become a known human being—
This is a fantasy for a blue bed.
The orphan, in fact, increased his holdings.
I saw him sitting on a widening strand,
And wondered how soon the world would slide, pour
Voluptuously toward him, man-locked, their very own.

WOMAN ON A SUN PORCH

He is holding her breasts, the golden man,
He is kissing her lips, stroking her thighs,
And yet no one in the world can see him—
He carries a can of light golden paint;
When they are not busy making love he
Is always engaged in lucid repairs.
Give him a cracked brown vase, an old dream-jug:
He will make it overflow with honey.

She knows he will stripe her like a convict
If she covers herself with refusal:
A strange barred woman haunts her in her bath.
And yet he works all over without mark,
His kisses overprinting one another.
The white eye shadow which sunglasses leave
Are the one weary touch saved for the last,
The blanched sophisticate her mind conceals.

So little really takes us in this world—
The skin has mainly patched and blotchy days,
The dressing room reveals our bandages,
The rolled tan stocking yields a plaster-cast—
We indulge the woman on the sun porch
As though she had the only private room
That counts—Her secret lover generates
A bloom that means to paint the peeling brain.

Thomas Reiter

Three Poems

TURNING UNDER THE GARDEN

for my wife

The snow already nearer at hand
than nightfall, the roto tiller I rented
has been rutting our garden under.

The chickenwire we grudged up
in spring against rabbits and woodchucks
lies tightly spindled

with tomato, squash, and cucumber vines
there's been no time to withdraw.
Shredding the stunted and overripe, I've guided

blades like the arms of swimmers,
tussling piecemeal to here
on the furrows' bias, across

nodules and leaves and pods
of broccoli, beans, parsley, peas, and chard;
then into haggard melon runners

that spooled and stalled
the chain drive stroking them free, earth
flying like sparks from a fuse.

When the engine pulsed my shoulders
to cramp heat, I crouched behind the idling tiller
and learned we hadn't pitchforked

deeply enough. Among the cast-up
carrots soft as balsa
and the radishes split open to pith

that will hold our thumbprints through snow,
I've called you to this archipelago
of good potatoes.

But before we bushelbasket them and leave
the inverted garden for the basement pantry,
I'll rise again to the tiller. Look—

its handles quiver like a divining rod,
and on one tine the sun
crops up in a cleft potato

like a rear-view mirror blanked out with oncoming light.

RIDING THE LATE SNOW

for Peter

Dreaming of Tyrannosaurus Rex
in your Beginner's Reader wrapped among strata
of third-birthday pajamas and puzzles,
you summoned me to help remake the snow
improvidently strayed into April.

A willow fork propping that book
open to the *tyrant lizard king*,
we rolled soaking glovefuls of thin snow
in spirals and crossroads, modeling
a body like a row of boulders.

Caulking his cumbrous head on, we laughed
to find in it freckles and veins of cinders
from storm-cracked branches we burned last fall.
Then, because a thaw began to jockey him
into the undertow of earth, you mounted

his scooped-out spine for the story
in which, with an outsize voice for each,
I became the museum dinosaur
who wandered from his nameplate
and awakened under snow in a yard like ours,

and the boys who groomed him to green.
He taught them the history of a hundred million years,

and they caution and stop lights;
he ferried them singing over oceans
to pirate islands of palms and back, then

learned hide-and-seek so well the children lost him.
My spine probed by tendrils, I sprawl
on the arbor bench and judge our dinosaur
hasn't half this morning's volume, legs
splayed like a stuffed giraffe's,

tail like moleworks, ears and mouth blunted shut.
Before I can call you to 'dismount
in darkness that will stable Tyrannosaurus Rex
throughout your sleep, I rummage
among voices, finding nothing but this to read you

when you've ridden the late snow to cinders.

LINES FOR MY RUNAWAY SON

Dreaming himself lost
in a white bailiwick of underbrush,
the small boy with your name was caught
in a scolding of spiny ice
releasing nothing but the moon,
when you leapt away from that tale I read aloud.
You broke the light open as you ran
to the porch for a sunfall of snow,
and now each pendant on the heirloom lamp
by the northern window where we sat
sways uncloudedly, a cast-off chrysalis.
Everywhere wings or brambles of sun
plunge, then soar—the hues
of plum and moss and strawberry that reply
to the page we left, and close
over you lost in the sealed color of snow.

THE MADMAN WALKS AROUND THE BLOCK

I walk through your windows.
I know how it is in the bath of your dreams,
soap in your eyes,
visions blurring through bubbles.
I foam at your mouth.

Your body breaks my nose into smell,
your nipples burn in the window like stars.
I know how it is in the wheel of your life.
I will help all I can.

But you don't want out.
You are happy with your lot,
and I am happy for you.

Don't worry about me,
I have squared myself with the sidewalk.
We are on terms. How it mothers me,
keeping my feet dry, helping me home.

Here is my house. It has lost its head.
Rumors are it was suicide.
Don't believe what you read in the papers.

AWAKENING AT MIDNIGHT

When I wake
it is not with myself.
I am an eye opening its head.
I feel behind me a palm
curving like a shell,
a woman's arm, a great stretch of beach,
and mountains I can almost see.
There is a breathing not of me.

I am out in the sea
in the wandering fragments of journeys
lapsing against the sky,
my stomach somewhere in the night
digesting stars.

Evelyn Thorne

NOT OURS

The minerals
are quiet tonight
the tick of their atoms
is the echo of starshine
their auras
are lovely beyond amazement
 lunar violet
 sulphur yellow
 fish scale silver
 deep space indigo
The minerals are tranquil
in the rivers
in the earth crust

They do not protest our insults
half dreaming they dismiss us
from their clear lives

The minerals lie still
faintly glowing
almost inaudibly ticking
they wait
the unwinding of time
The planet is theirs
they are beautiful as angels
or pure equations
They are not ours

Robert Hershon

AUTOMATIC MUSIC

I mean to tell you nothing less than this:
everything you've suspected is true

The smell you alone can smell
announcing the devil's presence
It's true: no one else can smell it

The pulse that rocks the city
you alone feel it take control
of your heart The threat
of being unplugged

All the people who stared at you in subways
are behind your bathroom door
singing softly
holding rat-tail combs razor sharp

But I
I your trusted friend
singing the same songs
you and I and Chinese tinsmiths
and the Governor of New Hampshire
all singing the same songs at the same time
I will take you to a place
where there are no sudden sounds
where humming assassins
self-serving in elevators
give 32 percent more milk

where tacos are made with novocaine
and you can take the Goya placemat home
where you may wash it and throw it away
singing the same songs as a laundress in Caracas

At the party to celebrate the loss
of all feeling in your left leg

we will sit quietly watching the cassettes
of another party celebrated long ago
We will sing the same songs
as 11 German businessmen lunching in Essen

And if they fall upon you anyway
dancing relentless foxtrots
flashing their dagger combs
consider that although you are bloody
your odor is not offensive
although dead
you are neatly groomed
a tune easy to hum
hard to remember

Ray Pavelsky

POEM

I rode on the bus the first day of winter
Everyone's eyes were equally equal
No one but me could smell the umbrellas
No one but me the red ragged transfers
Everyone's face wore a raincoat of terror
No one but me saw the snow kiss the window
No one but me raised his fist without sorrow
Everyone lingered, no one decided
No one but me tasted winter descending
No one but me shattered all of the windows
No one but me left the bus by a window
No one but me lay alone on the pavement
No one but me felt the snow bless his body
No one but me felt the finger of winter
Enter the bus the first day of winter

ONCE A REVOLUTIONARY

1

Pride moved him through a perfect whim.
He tackled history like a hound,
theory like the wind,
the future the way a whistle goes,
and like the lot of us:
wisdom by its weight.
Fiction thrilled him to the bone.
He was wry but not too loud.
He could tune a fork
or murder a prune.
While you had distance to dance
his rhythm improved.
Ask him was he brown.

2

He had his quirks.
He dreamed a lot,
wore jeans.
He admired other years,
propped antique lamps
on the ground,
lit them: stood around.
He knuckled down at times,
lick a clod,
know how to farm.
He'd pace entire days
just to say he'd seen it all.
He followed his school
like a fish, tinkered with a spark,
barked at cars in parking lots
with jars of gasoline.
Eventually, he tolled the din
of an electric doom,
swept gods away with a broom.

His tools, however obscure,
were never up a sleeve.
Yet rehearsals and universals
bothered him.
Ask him was he accused.

3

What politics craved
he'd spend in a day,
—any constitution
was reason for sport.
On top of it all,
he could wind round
a finger
(that digital cure-all)
the strings of his scope.
While you camped on Olympus
as if you were Greek,
not exactly down to earth
or up on your feet,
he read his palms
to bathroom walls
and slept like a nail.
Ask him was he amused.

4

He took it kindly
if you tossed him out of doors
or tapped an anthem forever
on his head with a stick.
He had a way of watering you down.
He could mix up the picture
misery and all, scot-free.
He could measure the ruffles
of a river
or sit in a bathtub with a plug.
—He never really asked
an essay for an answer.—
Though ten thousand years old
and fundamentally pert,

he was deceptively apt
to take life this way: anyway.
Was he capable?
As serious as art?
Did he sell himself short?
Did he fail to score the apathy
that carved up his throat?

Ask his shirts where rainbows drown.

Mark Howell

THE ALL NIGHT MOVIES END JUST BEFORE DAWN
AND I LOOK AT A TANK OF FISH

The movies are over; some priest
has prayed me to a grey blizzard.
I try to think of something:

a warm lake; flowers in grass;
a girl who may be waking,
having dreamt of me.

Fish are swimming in a tank of blue light,
their fins dragging blue gravel,
their tails wagging.

Bubbles rise from a green diving suit
standing before a chest with iron bands.
The top is upright, blocking my view.

The fish mouth the glass; a blue light hovers
like fine blue dust in the bright water.
Through curtains, a roof glitters with moonlight.

Jay Wright

BINU

So, in the spirit
of the act,
of the art,
in the rite
I have before me,
I call death
an imitation.
Dyongu, the hunter,
the warrior,
dances at the dama.
I stand among these masks,
with a place at last,
watching the old men
rise again,
watching them appear
in the astonishment
of our need.
They go and come again
without knowing death.
They go and come again
when the seed is cast,
when the corn
is plucked from the ground.
Living, we free them;
dying, we learn
how we are freed ourselves.
I preen myself,
a dreamer,
too intimate with death,
going by night
over gorges, through marshes,
looking for the stone,
my own revelation,
my Binu.
My craft is the craft

of the word I say
you do not understand.
But you know my craft,
its direction and element,
the god, lying under my every move,
better than I.
So I come here,
through them, to you,
envious of your ears,
attuned to some animal's
tentative step,
or the subtle shake
of the wing of a bird,
the design
that escapes my eyes.

Linda Pastan

HEAD

Dreaming of light and silence,
the head like a fused bomb
ticks on. Or, in the embrace
of lifeguard, barber, surgeon,
like some round, one-celled animal
draws its life to its center
for survival.

Even here on the cutting block
thinking of mad chickens and Robespierre
the head can smile when you dare say
"goodbye, your love is too
intellectual." And framed by limbs gone stiff
as pruned branches, prepares
to rise over your arm's horizon
and burst into passion.

Sandra M. Gilbert

THE DREAM OF MY DAUGHTER

Officious, I begin
to brush my daughter's hair,
which is delicate and fair
as a green young fern.

She cries, she cries out
"Mommy, watch it,
I'm sensitive"—
but I'm unmoved, I'm passionate.

Like a large, beaked bird
I tear, I tear,
I claw at her hair,
her hair green-golden,

her hair straw-light,
her hair of Rapunzel,
shredding, feathery,
descending around me,

her hair of pollen
which dissolves as I watch
to a thousand cells,
her hair of bees—buzzing, alive—

her hair of poison,
her hair of sun in the hive,
her hair that is melting like wax:
"Mommy, mommy," my daughter weeps,

but ruthless I rip it away—
"Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair"—
till the curls stream hollow and clear
like an empty river,

and only a few blonde burrs, a dying bush,
are left in the brush.

AN ANTI-MIRACLE THAT BEGAN ON THE SHORE
NEAR ARDMORE AT ST. DECLAN'S STONE

(County Waterford)

To start with, I had an Irish eye
and an English eye when I went to the
holy stone. The waves had thrown against it,
and the winds gone streeling through it,
had worn a space to crawl between
to cure (it was said) rheumatism.

I was free of aches, but wanted to be
one-up on God if there on the strand
I turned jellyfish, softened rigidity,
crawled into the gap and out behind.
But I didn't see the sea urchin wedged
where it tore out my English eye.

The landscape became a fright of defeats,
of deforested hills spiky with towers and
scooped-out castles filled with hindthought,
of desolate abbeys unroofed to the sky,
and walls—those high walls *they* would build—
to stay their cattle and keep Gaels out.

Slant vision over thousands of miles is
a terrible aching plight; (but there was a man
lost *both* his eyes in a bramble bush, then
scratched them back by jumping in again!)
So I to the rock—but a twiggy branch caught
there in the gap snatched out my Irish sight.

And the whirring and clicking things
said Listen!
You can hear the gorse blossom,
the badger scold its young.
Less sleep, light sleep:
for when the foxes shriek at night

and trout burble through their dark,
they speak about you
if not yet to you.

Blind fortune led me back to the southern
coast, a few miles east of St. Declan's,
and I happened to put my hand out—so
someone took me shopping. Now you can tell
I've been restored by looking in my eyes: you
read, printed deep inside, "Waterford Crystal."

HIGH-RISE EXPECTATIONS

(County Clare)

I want to renovate a tower house,
one of the O'Brien keeps. Taking your
loneliness by the hand across drawbridge and bailey
we'll drop the iron portcullis and slam the door.

We are exhausted by proffered help
mending our wicker-work lives, our modern barbaric
gaped with pain where friendly jape and gesture,
quicker than cloven hoof, kick through the fabric.

Are we too thin-skinned? Grief's the gift given
by others. So let our whole secure demesne
be a green ash in the bawn, our turreted curtain,
and otters in a flooded moat after the rain.

I may grow tired of you in an embrasure,
through a murder-hole drop disillusion
on your head; or you rush me off a parapet,
and blast a bartizan where I contemplate confusion.

Then we alone have no future, its promise
promising too much. We'll call the countryside
up the twisty stair to our great hall
and weave revelry into the failed-but-tried.

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE BOX

Clark Gable's face is gone from lids of dixie cups
no one licks their full moon tops

on train sills there's no soot no soot smell
the sky's green now and the window sealed

glossy snow fields Vermont in October
wiped from the backs of hearts and black clovers

over and over I sorted them entered them
have I ever returned?

still I share sweat with the circling mare
ash coats her caparisons and my hair

when I reached for the brass ring it stuck
but I bought a ticket to the moon for luck

tell the blind spaniel that sniffs through the house
God is empty soft shoe is out

I'm down to the last crackerjacks
down down in the box

I grope for a prize
along the smooth bottom up the smooth sides

SOME OF MY BEST KNOWN ROLES

I play a fork in the pontiff's hand
but the pontiff is a dwarf
eating the lacunae of dry sponges
the result is Disastrous, a part made for me

I'm a foam flower in Alaskan winds
a neuron in Wotan's arm
he's raging
I'm jiggling like crazy, like a tea rose

I excel as a lake in the Catskills
lying low
playing it peaceful as a summer stoop on Pike Street
with a trace of disintegration
hints of hidden velocity

this draws cheers long as extrusions of well-fed fish

if the Pope catches cold I take over
twiddling my nipples I animate
the lace roses on my mantilla

when a line comes my way
I form pears with my cushioned diction
I move like a mature tomato

this infatuates Texans
who toss nettles from the boxes
slip horned vipers in my encores
churning me with applause
thickening my milk with Shell Oil

on those nights I discover my high-horse power

being Chinese and part woman
once they have taxied in I lift a wing
bid them enter
coy as an emu, I pluck my psaltery

while an apprentice delouses me
with the fork left over from the first line

Carl Adler

THOUGHTS AFTER LOVE

Now I pull down the flesh
of my eye and lock the bone.
There is no more to be seen
after the bat flutters back
into Lazarus' trick skull.
Once you broke open my eyes
and peeled my life in mummy
tatters until the heart showed.
The multitude was astonished.
Your friends clapped as my eye
soared, looked light into corners,
threatened all the artificial
roses and tulips in Woolworth's
with the torture of bloom.
The sun and I together played
the god game—exuberances of bells
and sparrows bonged and shrilled
the tall day of our triumph.
Now I draw down the sun
and lock night under my lid.
I have learned well Lazarus' truth:
It is better to die only once.

Lee Blessing

Two Poems

THE DEAF MAN SINGS THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

This is the song
a deaf man can hear
with his eyes closed,
as deliberate and measured

as a series of exploding cities.
He can feel it in the crowd;
the great silences between lines
come to him as moments

without sensation.
They remind him of the spaces
the lips left
when he first began to watch for sound.

Phrase by phrase, other voices
come in, give out,
but his is steady,
cadent and tuneless.

He knows this song by heart,
and it is played so slowly
that anyone, he,
can follow it.

IN DECIDING TO FATHER NO CHILDREN

My children are put away now.
They will not be interested
in which star is heaven
or why the dead sing
without waking us.

They will not know their names,
and will answer to nothing.
They will be without number.

They will have no brother
and never die—though I will die,
and sing to them
where they stand along the sharp ridge,
without dreams.

Duane Niatum

ON LEAVING BALTIMORE

1

Memory pales in the face of the moon,
Shedding it like a skin.
Silence opens the window, the door, the mirror.
Condemning all to the teeth,
It steps into the street everyone's heard tear
Owl from the oak, scanning the field.

2

A falling star heaves the word against the wall.
Dodging this way, then that, I hope
The wind stays lost in history.
That damn owl. For years I've been waiting
For it to speak up, announce the dream is a fraud,
Send the insomniac back to the bed
That haunts him like a bat.

3

A weary stone drags its way toward the river.
Wanting to say I understand,
Ask if it needs a hand, but before I can speak,
Owl swoops down, drowning my voice.

4

If a god is around, he, she, or it must wonder
What link snapped when death suddenly gasped,
Choked, then kept on chanting. Now the only fugitives
That see hope alone are the alders,
Happy as winds put storm away to sleep.
Their roots burrow like moles beneath the swamp.

5

Parading along the crevice of my eye, forever
Doing its eight-legged dance,
Spider starts the long trek through the doors,
The windows, the mirror, off to the hills, mud.

Exhausted, everyone watches for time
To shake like a skeleton. Even the mountains
Hail the avalanche of sand and sea,
Bursting from the rip in the sun.

Peter Cooley

FAST

Imagine a table absolutely empty.
Imagine the room now, whiter than paper
on walls, in the floor, lifting a ceiling
(empty your head, think of nothing, of zero)
white as the moon. Now we are home.
It's dinner time, your chair (I prefer
to stand) is right here. Sit.
Let me set out your place.
Here we are: utensils like water,
the fork, two spoons, the vaporous
knife where nothing is spread
like a jam which tastes very good.
Wait, your attention has wandered:
now follow this line, be simple about it;
nothing easy is done except daily & painfully
& you're a novice. What? Quiet.
Your question is out of the question,
irrelevant. Listen, attend: Imagine
the sea, like a ribbon of ice, swirling
when you start to eat, around you, beyond view,
necessary, a black mass, quite precise
in being out of sight. What? Again?
One more interruption . . . I did not,
I didn't forget it. This food, even the plate
we wait for (almost forever)
unless the angel send it; as just now
I make him do it, like a white flame
here he is, right on this page
invisible. The rest is up to you.

James Cummins

TENUOUS PHOENIX

Suddenly your voice begins to break windows
Inside me: I am an old house you take advantage of.
Your face swings in long slow arcs into my sides.
I begin to cry: this old grey frame, this porch,
The garden, the fence . . . How I love this earth!
I think: it is unbearable that you misunderstand me,
Even as my hate melts into water.
But then, in your procession, you do not notice me.
I sit in an ancient rocker, smoking, content,
With my books and a distinguished correspondence.
Through a jagged hole I see you are inside now,
Balanced under a chandelier, waiting, yet your face
Points toward a distant light, and you have forgotten me,
Or I am a means to an end. Your words are allegorical,
Terrifying. I pull you to me, and you are relieved:
For moments, I give you makeshift shelter.
I have said it before, this way: you are piecing together
An intricate, elaborate puzzle, which is my life.
Now I am but a single piece, and you strip me to the muscle
In anticipation.
I tell you that I love you, but too late. Your teeth
Are rocks; your face burns like an old chair, ragged, smelly.
Your eyes motion that I am not to touch you.
You accelerate like sun through the windows of a museum.
My body bends, almost breaking, loud with denial, rigid
With assent: all that you say I admit to, yet even now
I defend myself, unrelenting, dependent, frightened by two fears:
Of the crushing, fragile liberation, hovering, pending;
Of the wavering, looming, futile questions
You will soon begin to ask.

Maura Stanton

GOING BACK

The only whistle now is something odd
stuck in your brain: you haven't lived so long
you don't need ghosts. That ex-con who robbed
the mail from Cortland isn't dead, they say:
for eighty years he's combed the Lakawanna-Erie yard
for gold or rings his women never wore.
Today the rusted tracks go straight to Homer,
three miles down. No bridge blew up. No flood
wiped out the valley. The chalk-red station
glowers in the sun but no train rumbles:
you kick at bits of stained-glass transom,
wondering where he sleeps. The boxcars
remind you this is home, the corset factory
making steel ball bearings, the St. Charles Hotel
crammed with old men who watch the tracks:
who won't believe in ghosts except themselves.

Maybe he sleeps in the stationmaster's
cabin. The boards peel white.
You wonder how he stands this light, grubbing for gold
that gets scarcer, that never was there.
The thing he died for burns alive.
You want it. You want a crime bigger than any
life you might waste, bigger than any home town.
Across the tracks the bums curl up in oil drums;
no freights to jump, you wonder where they came from,
how they go. Your skull's intact, the skin
unbroken over lute-shaped bones.
You wonder if you're turning ghost yourself,
haunting your past like snow on snow.

Gibbons Ruark

THINKING OF LEAVING THE OLD HOUSE

Night on night I have been
Plainly scared to move.
Before I came these halls
Were unfamiliar as
The owl's cry raking me
Where I lay not sleeping
In the moonlit air.
Now already I can name
The screech owl, barred owl,
Great horned owl, already
I can wake up shaken
Good and sober to myself
Sleepwalking like a hunter
In my children's room,
Dead sure that everything
Is where it should be
But my own face scared
And darkening in the pane.
Already in the nights
I see this house so lovely
And severe loom up bone-white
In the rapids of my sleep,
I see myself tired out
By moving day, come back
To gather in the dusk
Some last damp ferns,
And I hear the screech owl's
Cry lock up the dark
Behind me where I leave
With my goods in both hands,
Telling me where he is
And where I am, but nothing
That he holds in his talons.

Jon Kelly Yenser

SUICIDES

Put out a hand, saying
"This is a tree,"
without its taking leaf,

fail in the garden, saying
"I've found the rhythm of blossom
and spray," without repeating it.

Better to think of the countless
enchanted by her pond
or the poet the marbled wake,

and leave off conjuring
for an evening: dress
and go out, knowing all along

that after the getting up
there's no place to go
after the ball. The alleys

forever flyblown, anyway
are blind and the streets,
the honest streets, circle

switch back and narrow
on the night you choose. If you find
your way back in broad daylight

the mathematics of the flowers
appall: count the petals if you want—
you cannot be counted.

The abacus adds up
and behind your back. Words, is it?
Business is at hand:

pond, blossom, hand. Listen
to me: the words you abandoned
are here. Listen to what you say.

James Ragan

ARCHAEOLOGY IN A SHOE

1. *fossils*

Piecing inch by inch the soft
leather of the shoe, I learn its history:
fossils of a toe now extinct,
a nest of birds walking out
its sole, a hole where the man
climbed out, counted his years
by the ridges on the heel,
learned to kill birds and mice
for quilts, to survive the snow.
To survive the rat he grew nails,
shaped them into knives—
perhaps a case for genocide;
I'm still counting toes.

2. *extinction*

I want to survive myself.
I pull shoestrings from the old shoes.
I fumigate their lungs
like inner-tubes I pump
to air-out odors of bird
wings, to revive the breath, my own
spirit in flight,
as if in spare tires I am promised
space to breathe my body in
to preserve the species;
as if in leather I am spared
inch by inch the long walk
around the toe of the man,
now extinct.

Leon Stokesbury

Two Poems

THE SLAUGHTER OF FRED AND HIS FRIENDS

In a district that's rarely traveled these days,
in a place where even the blackbirds lie down
in daylight, just north of Anadarko,
I fell out with eight debauchees below some sycamores.
"Good fellows, arise!" I cried. "I
imagine you have heard the terrible news!"
But they were dull, sluggard, adamant, insane.
And besides, Mogen David seemed their chief concern.
The Arapahoes would soon be upon us: "Arise! Arise!
Shall blood-purple be the color of our pain?"
Nothing. Their eyes were not white rapids.
But no one could say I did not try. No one felt
I was to blame. No one. This was many years ago.
At night now, when I leave the house
with my jar of salt, my thoughts are of them. Each night
as I stand under my streetlight, I can think
only of them. And as I look down the long row
of streetlights, each with its own person,
holding his own jar, as I stand there
pouring salt on the slugs, that then blister and foam,
as I watch them dissolve, my thoughts are always of them.

BUT ONCE IN SPECIAL

Get out of here with your ideas about
going downtown to see that roller coaster
and no I do not want to buy any more
ping pong balls now look this is my room
I pay the rent so please remove
these midgets and try to understand
it's nothing personal actually I've
always liked shorter Get away from that
aquarium if you don't mind God damn
people this is well OK see it was
the other day or maybe last year

I don't remember too clearly any more
I slid into this out of sight witch
her dark eyes sadder than the sea
try to understand when she moved the air
flowed out in waves before her and she moved
so softly those waves they still keep rolling over me

Joan Swift

ON DIALING THE INSURANCE COMPANY
AND GETTING THE SUICIDE PREVENTION CENTER

I'm protected from water in pipes leaking,
water in chunks expanding and bursting
like Niagaras of ice cube trays.
But not from the drowning.

I'm protected from wind:
the roof with me like Judy Garland
tucked under and dreaming
sailing over the Sierra,
the shakes going off like hawks hunting
and the dream inclined.
But not from the lifting and falling.

I'm protected from flames
chewing the rafters,
grease exploding in the kitchen
like a killer nasturtium,
the blaze crackling down to the foundation
and up and out through its own windows,
holocaust and conflagration.
But not from the memory of burning.

Michele Birch

THE ONLY PORTRAIT OF THE MOTHER FOUNDRESS

Those round spectacles inside the linen frame
haunt every cloister wall. Bells against sleep,
that cover of darkness, do not disturb, her eyes
far past the moon, wing-touch of owl a touch
of darkness she could not shake. What if she wrapped
herself in black? Closed upon, back of her eyes,
the center of things, some river she knew,
a place for picking flowers? Should someone
follow she was not afraid. November,
month of the slender wind.

Perhaps she watched the stars too long,
began to feel their insect-leap.
It was then she took on chains, the pointed
bracelet under giant sleeves. Lost by the swamp
those tower bells rang far away. In dreams
I see her weaving through snow, wash of sun
against shadow. She never turns her face,
leaves nothing for memory, no relic
to become a saint. I know her Christ.
Wheat under sky. Snow. Pine.

Frederick Morgan

Two Poems

COLD POEM

Despaired of living man. Walked into a cold landscape—
all white it was—sat down there on the ground,
froze: became man of ice.

Poor hands flapped like flags, tatters of the sky.
Built a fire to warm them, from that white wood.
Making warmed . . . then fire warmed.

Songs returned to mind then, from the icy circle
chiming their changes through pellucid air
deep to the heart's wolf-den.

Feeding on chill bones, teeth sparkled with mica,
eyes flared out keenly on skeleton land
ware of no second vision.

Hands led spirit forth to its exhilaration,
white column moving free over cold landscapes:
ice beglittered with fire.

Sparks flying everywhere: if one should kindle
all might be burned in the glad destruction
and the old wager won.

FROM A FORGOTTEN BOOK

When we stormed the city Sirk in the mountains
we put to the sword that foul, misshapen people:
cut down men, women, children where they stood.
Their corpses choked the streets, dogs drank their blood.

Four hundred of us slaughtered forty thousand
joyously, for we did not like their smell.
We gave ourselves to war as to a goddess;
each time we struck, we struck to kill.

For spirits of our fathers woke in us
dooming to hell that stinking maggot-swarm
of soft manipulators, puny cheats
who held the honor of the brave in scorn.

I found my destined one: small, sly and fat,
leaving behind a spoor of squirrel slime
he turned, hyena-faced, to bare his teeth
and giggle, as I struck him the last time.

Our fathers know us. Violent and true
followers of the ultimate great Khan
foredoomed to dwindle down the stony years,
we've eaten death but never tasted fear.

I took my red-haired sister to my bed
that night, for each had killed a hundred men,
and felt her savage body leap with mine.
Then like two wolves replenished in their den

austere in furs beneath our snowy tent
we sucked the mountain air chill under stars—
our minds appeased, our bodies deeply spent,
while absence glittered in our perfect hearts.

Harold Jaffe

TAJ MAHAL

I catch something trundling towards me
and change directions—but not
quickly enough: the legless boy obstructs
me, holds out his hands for paise . . .

I look at him, smile
and he smiles sweetly, elementally: it
is agreed that he is quicker at his life
than I am at mine, I reach into my pocket . . .

Every native thing is hungry here, sparrows
veer from table to table in the hotel dining room,
pigs nudge the squatting children, crows mount
yoked bullocks—peck irritably at their sores and
fleas, vultures circle the wasted dog . . .

The rickshaw wallah cycles me to the Taj,
chatters something about "marble . . . marble"—

rag head-covering, bone-thin shining limbs straining uphill: when we get there he insists on more paise than had been agreed—lepers have spotted me: they're brandishing their sawed-off hands, beggar-children pull at my legs . . . I don't argue for long—I shoulder through the gauntlet to the monument, thinking Siva's Dance was *shakti*, pure fire, one foot skyward, the other punishing the demon-dwarf; and under the full moon the Taj seems liquid, imperious . . . necromantic . . .

Later, music with the hotel dinner: water-buffalo steak after fish; the Anglo-Indian girl is singing something romantic and twenty years old from Broadway: she has obviously memorized the few Spanish phrases in the song without knowing what they mean; on the dance floor a few Americans tango

Adrienne Marcus

THE DISEASE

for Robert Silverberg

You have caught silence.
Unused to so much permanence
I find you at corners, looking
At commas, listening to language.
There is a crucial difference,
I tell you, between an empty pitcher
and a waiting one.
Once words were so common
They did not need names.
Where will you go now?
What will you do with a map
That has only roads?

Stuart Silverman

Two Poems

NORTH LIGHT

I don't know what's got into the vacuum cleaner.
It sucks at the air,
starved for breath, like a decked fish,
its gray bag winded,
its motor thumping disconsolately against the boards.

Nobody's dead, and no dust mice play tag in corners.
The room runs on rails
down to the window-bolted bay
filled with simple things:
the shag rug on the wall, rough paint, some low Italian chairs.

Nothing's left out for feet to snag or an eye to bump against.
The den's got the books.
I paint in the garden room,
cook in the kitchen
for myself, for a few dozen, cleaning up as I go.

The sun dials itself to *Low* at four these wintry days.
Can't paint without light.
Up on the point, water's slow,
or seems slow, slower,
seems to come off the rocks with an effort, ebbing away.

The light looks scumbled on the sky, ribbed, rubbed in by a thumb.
Ryder or Homer,
Melville's northern world, Hawthorne's.
My steel-legged sofa
doesn't sit easy on the oak floor, balances on claws.

I have a feeling the house has a pact with the stubbled sky;
this impossible sky
packed with signs, ponderable,
wants to slough me off
like dead skin, whatever won't go north by east giving up.

Tomorrow, I'll try the hedge which creeps up on the mill,
impasto laid on
right from the tubes by the knife,
canvas cut to shape.
The rocks come better along the ground-line than sea-clobbered.

The sun works its way down the stolid line questioningly
from eleven to two.
The light seeping through that stone,
cold sun of a cold year,
must huddle in the crimp of a tin-thick tube waiting to be used.

Come on, machine. You were huffy enough gobbling flotsam
spring shook from its hair.
Now that a dry wind's about,
you ought to clean up,
breeze through the drapes gulping lint, not stall in gasps
at room's edge.

HAD

(The opening line is from a Margaret Millar novel)

"'Make up your mind,' she said to the clock."
But the hands didn't know their own mind.
They danced on the veal-white face
at might-be-ten, as-easily-twelve,
tired of circles, tired of years.
Also, the bottle had stopped helping, refused to pitch in.
It wouldn't settle the hands crowding the face. *Wouldn't.*

She knew it *could*. It had, before,
had settled the unsettling hands, closed the shutters,
pulled her inside to its smooth walls.
Now it lay against the baseboard while the hands came off,
the dance closed in, the birdie in the clock
struck. Then, the grate sent fire out along the floor
to feed on paper cups and the letters she clutched at night,
and the fire let down its hair and groped her streaky thighs,

sent its tongue in by bolts and latches
her body no longer would throw or close
no matter what her head said, no matter how much
her cloud-thick eyes argued in flickers
sensing the moon beating down outside on the impassive brick.

How she'd been had, she thought,
by her safe fire, who'd never been hot, just warm,
just right for an old woman drab as a desert pine,
by the clock with its adolescent tics and jerks,
by the bottle sprawled dead-drunk against the wall.
Then the fire snuffed her out.

Jarold Ramsey

Two Poems

'HOW GRACEFUL THE SMALL BEFORE DANGER'

—Roethke

Dear child
someday you will read and know
how it felt to see you dancing alone
in the surf at Devil's Elbow, the tide
advancing, insinuating, carrying you back,
back, though your sidestraddle leaps
elbows akimbo were aimed straight out
for the hanging Japanese sun.
Child, what we saw from our dune
was the willowy mast of an outbound hull
already riding down beyond sight
under our skyline, and what else we saw
in the glare was the black back of a little girl
as if cut out of iron, oh but springing tall
and brave on the brimming reductio of the sea.
What we felt, in the mind's contraction there,
and the heart's expansion, went in code
into a bottle launched deep in the ocean
of what we remember, and only you can find it, child,
and only you can read.

THE NAMING OF TOOLS

When all else fails
there is always the naming of tools—
Coping Saw for instance,
One of the great family of saws, Crosscut,
Rip, Miter, Hack, Keyhole, Dovetail, Dado—
and the fierce blind brotherhood of hammers,
Big Clawhammer, Little Tackhammer, Ballpeen,
Mallet, Sledge—
and the sharp-tongued tribe of tools for dressing,
as, Spokeshave, Drawknife, Rabbetplane,
Rasp, Burr, Rattailed File,
the chisels, Straight Gouge, Bent Gouge, Fishtail, Pod Spade,
Macaroni, Fluteroni, Backeroni,
each with its elegant shape
and singular blessing of purpose—
and best of all, the rabble
of indispensable gadgets, Countersink,
Centerpunch, Prickpunch, C-clamp, Plumb-bob,
Studfinder, Hermaphrodite Calipers,
Breech-mount Squeegee—
oh tools enough to spur the most sorethumbed
crosseyed carpenter forth again
to cobble his world!

Kenneth O. Hanson Two Poems

NEAR SKALA (PELOPONNESE)

Looking for ruins
we took our time.
The villagers, who
had lived there for years
always pointed up
though I do not know
if they knew what a ruin was.
When we got to the top

there was only a pile
of stones, looking much
like the other stones. Was this
a ruin? It wasn't what
I had been led to expect
from novels and old engravings.
No two stones formed a pattern
and it was hard to imagine
anyone living there long
in anything like grandeur.

Well, here we are
the guide said indifferent.
Not quite what I asked for
I thought feigning interest.
We'd come a long way
and I didn't want him
disgruntled. The way down
we passed loaded olive trucks
parked on a road only
wide as their truckbed.
How we inched by, two wheels
hanging over the valley
I'll never know. I thought
we were goners more than once.
Still, the breeze was refreshing
the view of the valley
like something in plastic
the air was that palpable.

And on the way down
after passing the trucks
we drank from a spring
guaranteed to make you
immortal. This was not
in the guidebooks. I learned
only later, a thousand
such springs in the country
will do the same, each one
with its own history.

You will forget, but
You will live forever
the guide said confidently.
What good is that I thought
if there's nothing to remember.
But I drank anyway.
The water was cold and
tasted of stones. It was
not sweet, it was somehow
more real than that
and reminded me both
of the mountain and of the valley.
I can taste it still
so that part at least
of the story was false.

As for the rest, it's best
not to think too far ahead.
Later I drank from some
of the other springs, which
I found rather disappointing.
I think, looking back now
only the first one counts.

FLISVOS BUS STOP (ATHENS)

On a summer day
they crossed the square
a man a woman and two children
and sat at a zinc topped table
under the witness trees
a young man with a thick moustache
almost Albanian composed
as the Greeks can be
who know the leaves fall gently
in fine weather
a thin woman and two children
who circled the table

and he sat one hand
in his lap the other
on the zinc topped table
both hands in black gloves
the fingers curved
and when the coffee came
the woman lifted the cup to his lips
and set it down again
and put a cigarette
into his mouth and lighted that
and took it out to knock the ash off
and finished her coffee
and nagged at the children
and took his coin purse
out of his jacket pocket
and put the drachmas
on the zinc topped table
and put the coin purse
back into his pocket
and took the cigarette from his mouth
and put it out on the zinc topped table
and the man smiled
and they walked off
with the children
his two hands in their black gloves
curved the same way
swinging at his sides
and on the zinc topped table
a leaf fell
into the half full coffee cup
and the waiter came
and picked the drachmas up
and took the coffee cups away
and wiped the zinc topped table clean

About Our Contributors

LUCILE ADLER's book of poems, *Travelling Out*, was published by Macmillan. She lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

CHARLES EDWARD EATON's sixth book of poems, *On the Edge of the Knife* (Abelard-Schuman), appeared in 1970.

THOMAS REITER, who teaches at Monmouth College, is the poetry editor of *Monmouth Review*.

HERBERT SCOTT is project coordinator for the Michigan Creative Writing Project sponsored by the Michigan Council for the Arts.

EVELYN THORNE, who lives in Crescent City, Florida, is the editor of *Epos*.

ROBERT HERSHON lives in Brooklyn and has published poems in numerous little magazines.

RAY PAVELSKY says he lives "in a former garage on the great forest's edge in central Alaska."

JOHN HOLBROOK is poet-in-residence for the Montana Arts Council.

MARK HOWELL is a senior at the University of Oregon.

JAY WRIGHT is currently living in Penicuik, Midlothian, Scotland.

LINDA PASTAN's first book of poems, *A Perfect Circle of Sun*, was published by Swallow Press.

SANDRA M. GILBERT's book about D. H. Lawrence's poetry, *Act of Contrition*, was published recently by Cornell University Press.

WILLIAM McLAUGHLIN, who lives and teaches in Cleveland, recently drove 2,600 miles throughout Ireland.

CAROLYN STOLOFF's second book of poems, *Dying to Survive*, has just been published by Doubleday.

CARL ADLER lives in Chicago and teaches at Wright College.

LEE BLESSING is currently on a Shubert Playwriting Fellowship and living in Minneapolis.

DUANE NIATUM will have two new chapbooks published soon: *A Cycle for the Woman in the Field* (Laughing Man Press) and *Taos Pueblo and Other Poems* (Greenfield Review Press). He is currently teaching poetry to inmates of the Washington state penitentiary, Walla Walla.

PETER COOLEY is poetry editor of the *North American Review* and teaches at the University of Wisconsin at Green Bay.

JAMES CUMMINS, from Cincinnati, is in the Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa.

MAURA STANTON teaches at the State University of New York in Cortland.

GIBBONS RUARK's book of poems, *A Program for Survival*, was recently published by the University of Virginia Press.

JON KELLY YENSER, a graduate of the University of Washington, now lives in Decatur, Illinois.

JAMES RAGAN teaches at Ohio University, where he edits *Lotus*.

LEON STOKESBURY teaches at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. He has published in many little magazines. He won *Southern Poetry Review's* 1971 National Collegiate Poetry Contest.

JOAN SWIFT is a graduate of the University of Washington, now living in Oakland, California. She has published in many magazines.

MICHELE BIRCH is an M.F.A. candidate at the University of Montana.

FREDERICK MORGAN's latest book of poems, *A Book of Change*, is a nominee for the National Book Award. He is the editor of *Hudson Review*.

HAROLD JAFFE spent last year as a Fulbright grantee in India. He teaches at Long Island University.

ADRIANNE MARCUS's latest book of poems, *The Moon Is a Marrying Eye*, has just been published by Red Clay Publishers. She teaches at the College of Marin.

STUART SILVERMAN lives and teaches in Chicago.

JAROLD RAMSEY's first book of poems, *Love in an Earthquake*, has just been published by the University of Washington Press. He teaches at the University of Rochester.

KENNETH O. HANSON, who teaches at Reed College, will have a new book of poems about Greece published by Wesleyan later this year. He was recently awarded an Amy Lowell Fellowship.

Poetry Northwest Prize Awards, 1973

HELEN BULLIS PRIZE: \$100

Richard Hugo for Seven Poems (Autumn 1972)

Previous Winners

Hayden Carruth (1962)

John Logan (1963)

Donald Finkel (1964)

Mona Van Duyn (1965)

Richard Hugo (1966)

Winfield Townley Scott and Katie Louchheim (1967)

Sandra McPherson and Gwen Head (1968)

Eugene Ruggles (1969)

Will Stubbs (1970)

Kenneth O. Hanson and Jack Tootell (1971)

Lewis Turco and Tom Wayman (1972)

THEODORE ROETHKE PRIZE: \$50

Mark McCloskey for Four Poems (Winter 1972-73)

Previous Winners

Carol Hall (1963)

Richard Hugo and Kenneth O. Hanson (1964)

Kenneth O. Hanson (1965)

William Stafford (1966)

Carolyn Stoloff (1967)

John Woods (1968)

Thomas James (1969)

Philip Booth (1970)

Dave Etter (1971)

Albert Goldbarth (1972)

and beginning

YOUNG POET'S PRIZE: \$25

Greg Kuzma for Five Poems (Summer 1972)

