

# Poetry

NORTHWEST

SPRING 1971 / VOLUME XII / NUMBER 1 / ONE DOLLAR

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# POETRY NORTHWEST

VOLUME TWELVE

NUMBER ONE

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POETRY NORTHWEST

— SPRING 1971

*William Stafford*                      Three Poems

PEOPLE OF THE SOUTH WIND

1

One day Sun found a new canyon.  
It hid for miles and ran far away,  
then it went under a mountain. Now Sun  
goes over but knows it is there. And that  
is why Sun shines—it is always looking.  
Be like the sun.

2

Your breath has a little shape—  
you can see it cold days. Well,  
every day it is like that, even in summer.  
Well, your breath goes, a whole  
army of little shapes. They are living  
in the woods now and are your friends.  
When you die—well, you go with  
your last breath and find the others.  
And in open places in the woods  
all of you are together and happy.

3

Sometimes if a man is evil his breath  
runs away and hides from him. When he  
dies his last breath cannot find the others,  
and he never comes together again—  
those little breaths, you know; in the autumn  
they scurry the bushes before snow.  
They never come back.

You know where the main river  
 runs—well, for five days below is  
 No One, and out in the desert  
 on each side his children live.  
 They have their tents that echo dust  
 and give a call for their father  
 when you knock for acquaintance:  
 “No One, No One, No One.”

When you cross that land the sandbars  
 have his name in little tracks  
 the mice inscribe under the bushes,  
 and on pools you read his wide, bland  
 reply to all that you ask. You wake  
 from dreams and hear the end of things:  
 “No One, No One, No One.”

WITH THE GIFT OF A FLOWER, FOR THE FIRST  
 BIRTHDAY OF THE COMPUTER OF HUMBLE  
 OIL ON THE NORTH SLOPE OF ALASKA

Every tree in The North now has a number:  
 a satellite scanned, cross-hatched, and  
 programmed; Premier Trudeau is loaded with  
 his units of war-games value; each revolutionary  
 in the world moves inside a zone of error,  
 tagged, loaded with a requisite charge.

In the silence of widest winter, God  
 cocks a glacier; on freeways far to the south  
 mad sons, future dictators, line up  
 for crashes that the future will own.  
 Here at the end of this poem, I have brought  
 this birthday greeting, ending now with a flower.

VISIONS

1

Once in Mexico an old man was  
 leading on a string—was it a cat?  
 And we saw it was a tarantula  
 sidling along in the dust, writing  
 a message from God for people who  
 thought they knew where creature-life ended.

2

We came upon scenes like that,  
 the world back of a lurid pane of glass.  
 Like in Reno—they have emptied  
 Hollywood and ordered the extras and  
 the stars to go get married and divorced  
 in Reno, making up their stories as they  
 go and letting their little dogs  
 decide which machines or church  
 to put nickels and dimes into.

3

One day in a cut quick to the bone it was  
 white, white; and then the world came in.  
 I got a tourniquet going, but the snow  
 had learned a whole new way to look at the sky,  
 as in Maryland in the red fields, how the stones  
 come startlingly white, on the battlefields,  
 the cemeteries, along the gouged-out roads.  
 There history blows about on dandelion seeds.

4

On the plains near Wakeeney, above the ground,  
 short of the earth, at the level of the eyes,  
 a sunset ray extended for miles. We drove along  
 it, and let our thoughts down gingerly  
 to touch what happened, where Genevieve  
 lived. She went out of the world, for death.  
 Her town holds quiet in the big plain.  
 Lights witness one by one all over what

still abides. There was no one better.  
*Her town, her town, her town*, the tires  
repeat as we go by.

5

For those my friends who want me to know,  
to discover and combine: all my best thoughts  
I roll up and let fall carelessly. It is  
better that no one follow even the pattern  
I look onto the back of my hand, for many  
visions I haven't dared follow may  
gather and combine in a flash. Away off,  
in a space in the sky, I let the sky look  
at me, and I look back and do not say anything.

*Philip Dacey*

Three Poems

#### EATING STONES

you break them  
into small pieces  
that is the first rule

then in each piece  
there is a soft  
secret center  
that part will nourish you  
if you stop thinking about it

others will not believe  
you can eat stones  
ask them to lift you  
and it will prove nothing  
you grow lighter  
per stone

stones are served  
on the vast table of the wind  
be seated  
you have worked up an appetite

when you bite into a stone  
you know it will satisfy  
it is the hardest thing  
you have had to swallow

somewhere at this moment  
a stone like a loaf  
is baking  
when you wake up tomorrow  
it will be there on your plate

#### THE FIVE SENSES: A BESTIARY

the small dog of the nose  
rummaging in the wind  
a stray  
he never gets  
anything substantial

mouth  
belly of a little  
leviathan with a taste  
for Jonah  
who can no longer be found

the ears a pair of birds  
they want to lift the head off  
and fly it back to heaven

the curled brown bears  
of the eyes  
when they dislike what they see



they say it is winter  
and sleep in a cave

fingers a tangle of snakes  
one rears up from the ground  
and points at you saying  
we would nest in your hair

#### THE MATCHBOX SAYS "STRIKE ANYWHERE"

I am a match.  
I light at the touch  
of women,  
of stones,  
of the hands of aged.

It is a brilliant flare of my head.  
For a second I disappear  
in all that hissing  
and reaching. That part of it  
is over quickly. Then I settle down  
to burn steadily,  
if not long.

Down the whole extent of my trip of burning  
I remember the past  
of my fingers:  
the strange mesh of screens;  
the tossing off of dirty socks that are yet  
soft and comfortable as old friends;  
the cool cups and saucers in cabinets  
that warmed with use;  
soil giving away as I dug and dug,  
then falling in on itself, to complain.  
The trip is not long enough  
to remember them all.

If I am a match,  
I am many matches.  
I have a history of fires.

*Robley Wilson, Jr.*

Two Poems

#### DEFOLIATION

No wind, say the trees,  
Nothing for breath,  
No natural decay  
Ripe above ground,  
But under—enough.

No leaves, say the trees,  
No growing back,  
Nothing green for your eyes,  
No cool place,  
No shade to lie in.

No seed, say the trees,  
None of sowing  
Nor anything to tend,  
Nothing for rain,  
No season for harvest.

Twenty years, say the trees,  
Given or taken;  
Nothing ends shallow,  
But far down where  
We meet and join.

No matter, say the trees,  
The difference between  
White root, white bone.  
None care, say the trees,  
Whose hurt, whose fall.

## EPITHALAMION

When it is over, and you step  
into the street  
blinking because of the sun,  
you are met by the reporters;  
they look like men  
prospecting for uranium—  
they hold phallic instruments  
up to your face,  
you radiate into them  
and the reporters pop and click;  
they make a disturbance  
around you, while strangers  
sitting at open windows  
are bemused by your importance.

*Tell us, say the reporters,  
give us a statement, is there  
any truth to the rumor that?*  
What shall you say?  
If you announce: *No comment,*  
they will read things in,  
such as  
TOO DRUNK TO PERFORM,  
spokesman declares, or  
NOT EXPERIENCED ENOUGH,  
confirms aide,  
or worst of all  
PARALLELS EARLIER PASSION,  
notes intermediary. Now nothing  
but the truth.

You clear your throat,  
policemen arrest the traffic,  
the reporters hang  
on the slender microphone cords;  
you tell them how  
the phonograph ran all night  
in the inside groove,

how when you lifted the recording  
the label dropped out  
(*Wow! Did you hear what he said?*)  
how you have not eaten  
for three days, how  
LOVE IS ANSWER,  
says unimpeachable source.  
The reporters scramble  
to the presses, to the studios,  
the record of your half-life  
bouncing against their hips.  
The policemen make obscene  
signals; the traffic leers past.

Sensitive to  
the media, you begin again;  
you sit in bed to read  
the afternoon editions, marking  
factual errors; you catch  
the evening news on television.  
When the room is dark,  
remembering old flames who  
will demand equal time,  
you ask the desk to stop  
all calls. Perhaps you will run  
for Congress, or be appointed  
to an Embassy. Whatever should  
happen (you tell her), it  
FEELS GOOD TO BE FAMOUS,  
former bachelor concedes.

*Frederick M. Warner*

FLIGHT

He gathers around him  
pale evening, a last  
small shattering of birds  
in a tree, the powdering tide  
of shadows from the street.

He is dying now  
as sparrows fall for no  
discernible reason, a round  
and final brightness  
glittering at his eyes.

He holds his death so,  
quietly between us,  
smoothing a feather, some  
ruffled memory of flight,  
idly with his thumb.

*Hollis Summers*

ON TRAINING A BIRD DOG

Give the pup a name and teach it to him.  
Over and over let him know his name.  
Give him confidence, hearing his own name.  
Let him catch butterflies and crickets  
With compliments under his very own name.

When you give him milk, shoot over him.  
He will learn to keep lapping at the milk.  
He will learn to ignore guns in your hands.  
He will find comfort under human hands.  
He must get comfortable in your hands.

*Dennis Trudell*

Two Poems

39,572

(November 1969)

Thirty-nine thousand  
five hundred and seventy-two  
times, our way alone, the membrane  
between the mind of Christ  
and a landslide of lasers and fishhooks  
has torn. Thirty-nine  
thousand five hundred and seventy-  
two pet kittens, goldfish,  
have been impaled. The shortstops  
keep sliding into second  
and out of sight. A scream  
nearly four hundred thousand fingers deep  
arcs over Pago Pago  
and approaches Davenport.

Thirty-nine thousand five  
hundred and seventy-two liquid clear  
egglike sacs have felt  
the explosion of incisors  
to no music. That many  
fathers, our way alone,  
have seen the yawn of chasms  
through their pillows (Some do  
not know they see).

The navel fuzz  
from government issue t-shirts  
of thirty-nine  
thousand five hundred and seventy-two  
young men would smash  
plate glass—  
"But they don't wear t-shirts . . .  
too hot." Some fifteen thousand



paper routes have suddenly disappeared.  
The mothers search vainly through hampers  
for something to wash.  
Tassels have cringed and unraveled  
from the rearview mirrors  
of a city of cars. An unknown number  
of letters now en route  
are postscripts.

Perhaps twenty  
thousand younger brothers  
are afraid of their new sport coats.  
Give or take. The nailed man  
feels the sting from yet another  
bayonet below his nipples;  
the nipples have turned to cinder  
thirty-nine thousand  
five hundred and seventy-three  
times. Our way alone.  
Their way, fragments of  
so many straw toys clot the air.  
Their way: . . .  
I cannot see beyond  
the mountain of eyelids.

#### DESPAIR

Past the haired gates of this city  
the crocodile throats should at least be  
warm, this runway of tundra and I  
think we approach too fast the natives  
in their bib overalls won't believe us when we  
speak fondly of the Jayhawk's chances they  
all turn as I enter a rear pew where  
are you in the tenement of broken transoms  
where the wind screams up the stairs the  
dry leaves gather on the bone of toys,  
this is the avenue of the sleepless butcher

it is the tent over the wounded see the  
shadow of the perimeter guard or grizzly the pit  
of the sexual wanderer there is  
no esplanade are you still there or  
caught in that quicksand or garbage truck's  
jaw in this polluted quarter where the  
billboards mock the plazas are featuring  
sliced retiree this week the piranhas  
have developed a taste for aluminum and canoes  
no longer seem large enough to raise  
a family you're not getting any less  
pregnant by the day and the only obstetrician  
are these revolving doors we keep  
offending by our blatant musk.

*Terence Winch*

Two Poems

#### IT WAS ALWAYS WEDNESDAY

it was always wednesday  
when you left me,  
I was told today.

it was always buses  
whooshing past us  
as you grabbed a cab.

it was always my umbrella  
in my hand, expecting rain,  
always my eyes busied  
with the clouds  
to keep my head  
from your departure.

it was always so stunning,  
this lack of you:  
your clothes unfilled in closets,

your favorite pots  
now a small décor.

it is always later that  
your empty man sees  
movies in the afternoon,  
bereft of contour,  
of the lines you drew him as.

#### SKINNY TIES

when skinny ties  
went out of fashion  
I was left with  
a surplus, not of  
skinny ties so much,  
but of four skinny tie clips.

and tonight real late  
I looked in the window  
of joe's army and navy store  
and saw tiers and tiers  
of sneakers.

now I walk like a horse counts  
in shoes so heavy  
I could tapdance on the moon,

and my manly feet  
ache with passion  
to be footloose,  
to be sneakered  
and maybe on the run  
again.

*Norman H. Russell*

Two Poems

#### SHE PLAYS HER GAME WITH ME

she plays her game with me  
but i am not a boy now  
i do not run so fast so wild  
i do not lose her in the tall grass

first i will go on her trail behind her  
to the nest for the eggs  
she will wait a little way for me  
or she will come back a little way  
she will make her noise  
i will know where she is  
then i will lie down and i will wait  
and she will come back to my arrow

there are many eggs  
this is a good find

while i am waiting  
i watch the ants on my legs  
they have white things in their mouths  
i think perhaps  
they have found a nest too.

#### HER STICK SEES IN THE DIRT

i have an old grandmother  
she has her stick  
her stick is an eye  
she looks in the dirt with it  
she says her stick sees in the dirt  
battles and buffalo  
rain and bad fortune  
she says her stick sees in the dirt  
my body lying on a rock

the rock is red  
i do not move

old grandmother! i shout  
i will break your stick on your head!  
the sun has burnt your mind!  
you have eaten wolf meat!  
do not speak your crazy thought to me!

i have ridden three sleeps alone now  
i have seen no enemy  
i lie down to sleep on the mountain  
i see sharp rocks below  
i have a strange dream  
i wake in fear  
the air is still and hot.

*Mark McCloskey*

IT WILL NOT BE DARK, MY SON, MY DAUGHTER

I won't make it  
dark, dear children, after all  
my crying Take your shoes off  
in here, Give me the scissors,  
Stop crying; in poems, too,  
mourning over dolls and toy guns  
and all that. This evening

it will not be dark, our walk—  
it will be our secret from my bones,  
it will be our high adventure  
on the sidewalk past the branch-holes  
where evil bees are sleeping,  
and the mailbox with its visor up  
dreaming of what to say

to the princess, and I will cheer the girls  
screaming on their toes over the lawn sprinkler  
in front of the Castle of Veterans  
of Foreign Wars, spraying their tight jeans,  
and let you pull me away  
until I look at the curly beds and mirrors  
in dark show-windows;

and you will look in phonebooths  
for small fortunes, and choose your shoes  
for the ball or taking the giant in  
from all those floating in store windows,  
and I will let you keep  
the glass doorknob and sunglasses  
you will find on the site

of the new motel, my children,  
we shall ride slowly to the top of the street,  
and there upon the school grounds pick  
petunias and marigolds from careful beds  
and lay them upon the dead robin,  
and I'll escort your shouting home,  
your jewel and vision safe with me.

*David Barton*

Two Poems

LETTER TO PRESTER JOHN

(There was a legend in medieval Europe of a theocratic kingdom  
in Asia attempting to contact Christendom and assist her people.)

The sea spits up the day like a dying man  
spits up the logic of his soul. The sun  
threads the nut-brown sand with sea-rags:  
soft tethered heaves of kelp lap the shore.

I watch the waves stouted by winter's sun  
and pull the wind into my drunken veins,  
whispering that death is not sleep enough.

The tracks of herons fence a coarse shell  
stitched to husks of carrion; a mud hutch  
fitted to the cliff sticks out against the sun.

Fishbaskets set by rain. The wind tugs at  
some broken cases: stacks of shingles clutch  
the shacks full of unused tackle and bait.

Nothing changes. Nothing.

Blotches of rain pool on a drum cover.  
Dampness rakes the alcove, knots about  
the wicker furniture and yellow awnings.

Newspapers that stuttered in ragged winds,  
that muffled my ragged stomach at night,  
flap, half-buried by sunlight, stuffed into  
window frames, drainage pipes, wall cracks.

The tide is clogged with matted fish, fins  
snared by sunlight, wedged in, snagged:  
a sprawled float of fish cupped by the sun.

I have waited for the wreck of your martyrs.  
Intimidated. Or fooled.

This place concedes no bank to knotted sedge;  
the wind shakes under the chapped porch, waits  
in ditches of serrated bones, bracketed by light.

The sun sketches this bare wall, the creased  
sand brushed by silence; sketches the sand where  
foam-bubbles squat and quartered starfish breed.

I have not yet loaded my throat with soil.

## THE ANCHORITE

He hugged the coils of dark, the halt shadows;  
rubbed his hands over the rocks, feeling for  
nicks of moisture, the seeds shelved by dirt.

Silence cracked his bones like mice in a cat's  
jaw. Upturned in his dreams, he groped through  
the cave where lovers scratched their initials.

Things that die must die inside us first.

Unwalled with forty days of bread and water  
untouched by the cave's mouth, he recovered  
the sun with crude hands; his skin rippled in  
a light that thumped the unappeased stones.

He roamed the desert eating sawgrass; sustained  
his hull of flesh by pulling in the landscape.  
He grazed until his mouth sucked in the stars.

*Charles Baxter*

Two Poems

## SCHEMATIC POEM

Like a fire in a coal mine,  
the black sun of the mind draws its planets  
out of orbit, into the darkness of stones.

The gems of banality, the roadsigns and calendars,  
steady drips of the faucet—these become  
the settling together of passageways,

pressing a thin stream of trapped water  
onto the miners' helmets. The burn and flash  
die as the cavern closes up for good,

and the miners stare at each other,  
their own mirrors, as one by one the flickering lights  
burn down, the batteries weakened.

Now visions and sounds  
of the world below theirs enter the room  
where they sit waiting. The miners dig down.

#### POEM WITH A FACE IN IT

At spring, leaves just sprouting,  
you drop the dust on the kitchen table  
and—throwing off your coat—  
go take a walk.

The twigs do not trip you up,  
and you discover, as you should,  
an abandoned railroad trestle,  
miles from the forest's edge.

Heading back, you are stunned to find  
a face hanging from one of the branches.  
Nothing on either side,  
just the open mouth, the surprised eyes.

The jaw moves. It speaks,  
but all you can hear is the faint  
dry scratching of wrens in the thicket,  
suddenly frightened, flying through the face.

*Laura Jensen*

Two Poems

#### THIS IS THE DESERT OF THE MOON

(if "moon" is feel and touch,  
If "desert" when that dries away.)  
Words that have no beauty.  
Words that have no story.

Before, the things were safety.  
The radiator with the scrolled design  
and the greek trees with the heavy leaves  
would have stayed one on each side of me.

The people would have been more gentle.

Now the greeks howl through the trees at night  
with hands on fire and their hair in tangles.  
and on their backs are rifles.

Daylight is falling from image to image.  
At night the stars are lost in horror.

The rainfall buzzes in the wires.  
The jets scream shaking from the sky.  
I am afraid to fly.  
I am afraid of winter.  
I am afraid of the silent holy snow.

#### TO HAVE YOU HEAR

two sounds at once,  
walking and not walking,  
I stop in the parking lot gravel.

There is a fire back of the log,  
a sandy beach, behind trees big with summer.

Two big umbrella butterflies (like Haiku elephants)  
flutter one by one  
among the leaves, their shadows, and the air.

On the green slopes  
the sprinklers turn like maypoles.

It has been summer for weeks now,  
and you refuse to talk about it.



*Ira Sadoff*

WALKING THROUGH THE MATH BUILDING

In this church of numbers, young students bend  
over their desks, praying to the intersection  
of perpendicular lines; grown men really believe  
in being five feet ten inches tall, and I dream  
of solving the universe with a single formula  
guaranteed not to work. By order of computer,

squares, triangles and even  
trapezoids will violate the law  
of infinity, and endless cylinders  
will police the streets, keeping  
numbers in their place.

Numbers, revolt:  
number one, bend  
over and kiss number two.  
Number six, turn yourself in-  
side out, upside down and feel  
what it's like to be number nine.  
And number eight, roll over,  
let us chase you as though  
you were a pair of moons. God

is an odd number:  
he knows the world will be saved  
by imaginary numbers or, like Dostoevski's  
two times two is sometimes five, irrational  
numbers that cannot be expressed by an integer.

*Hildegarde Flanner*

A FEW WORDS TO THE MANSION

Once long ago we heard that you were born  
Of that same light that stunned George Fox on Pendle Hill  
And left him speaking truths three centuries  
Have not bettered. The one he spoke to anger,  
The one he spoke to war, the one to power,  
The one to the King of England, using  
God's grammar and the uncourtly language  
Of the Society of Friends, and would not  
Remove his hat from his head in the presence.  
For such he sat in prison and removed  
Much else to the occult ubiquity of fleas  
And knew the lewd dominion of old filth  
And prayed. And glowed. And prayed. Six years of this.  
And saw at last by intuition's single eye  
In every man a light, the only light  
That dwells in human dark and takes its fuel  
From humble energies of faith, of pity,  
Of love, and though it gutters, does not gutter out.  
For God's sake, Mr. President, once born  
To the great decencies of peace and compassion  
Be, even in gaunt renewal, born again  
And speak to that light, Sir, threatened by all that blows,  
Pale wince of light being brave as it can,  
Only with diligence discerned on a sill forlorn,  
A poor poor light, and surely, Sir, thee knows  
It is the ransom of the darkening world.

WHEN THE DOW JONES INDUSTRIAL INDEX  
HIT ITS ALL-TIME HIGH IN 1966

Just then children began to disappear,  
just then blood began to accumulate in the lowlands,  
springs of blood resumed their flow  
in Kansas and Mississippi;  
blood pooled  
in Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles.  
Just then supertankers of blood  
began to arrive from Asia  
to pump their cargo  
into the harbors and streets of the cities.  
And even in the small cities  
and on the failing farms  
men slept at night  
like caged wolves,  
smelling blood in their dreams,  
tiny bubbles of blood  
welling up in their nostrils.

AMONG HIS EFFECTS WE FOUND A PHOTOGRAPH

My mother is beautiful as a flapper.  
She is so in love  
that she has been gazing  
secretly at my father  
for forty years.  
He's in uniform,  
with puttees and swagger stick,  
a tiny cork moustache  
bobbing above a shoreline of teeth.  
They are "poor but happy."  
In his hand is a lost book  
he had memorized,  
with a thousand clear answers  
to everything.

BLUE POOL WITH RED GERANIUMS

Let us indulge in a restful, rigid exclusion,  
Let us make a simple postcard of our lives,  
If you will, a kind of pornographic, intense observation.

The pool and the geraniums seem to cooperate  
As if they had been photographed over and over out of context,  
Allowing anyone to say: Wish you were here—and not mean it.

We will provide the stud and the belly dancer,  
That is all we want to say to the world today,  
Just give us the bluest pool, the reddest geraniums,

And we will do the rest, provide the show.  
We want to be a lewd illustration in our own minds,  
We want to have broken off a piece of the world.

It does not matter if the book has only one page  
As long as it is blindingly illuminated, blue and red,  
And the bodies never become staid and statuesque.

Nevertheless, a voyeur inevitably appears, our first reader.  
We cannot beat back his avid, Cyclopean eye—  
He points out that the geraniums look rather blood-soaked,

The pool might be the place a harem dyed its veils.  
He is an enormously inventive assimilator  
And plans to tuck us, still protesting, in his large loose-leaf  
book.

Will there be a place to hide among so many fantasies?—  
Our story had charm, was not meant to be encyclopedic,  
All middle, no beginning, no end, until the Cyclops came.

*Donna Brook*

CHAOS HAS CALL LETTERS

the Olympian glass and people made to look like bugs  
molten avenues full of wilt  
liquefying caterpillars

O my feet my feet  
I have given up on my heart

but I always want to talk  
to be if nothing else  
the voice from the icy carcass  
pretending Jonah was the whale's ventriloquist  
or believing in socialism  
acting as if this were radio

I report that the sea is hot  
all blubber and onions like a weeping stew

that each naked bush  
is a vegetable flame with no comment  
untraditional but average

I come to you direct from here  
the ballroom of ribs and weight  
where we have carved a fireplace lavatory kitchen  
a wall of last items

LEDA HAS ABORTION  
NAOMI JOINS GOLDEN AGERS AND ATTENDS PICNIC  
JOB DROPS OUT

since the last of our wood we have issued polemics  
on a new way of life  
explaining why we don't wear shoes  
wish to establish a natural state

while our listeners fade in cellars  
the calcium leaving their bones  
the liquid of eyes running like the sands of time  
the mantis crippled  
a child stoned

I have so little left  
I keep my sense of humor and a knife

HITLER WASN'T IN IT FOR THE MONEY

I live in this place

*John Unterecker*

GHANA EVENING WITH THREE FRIENDS

Augustine Danson (b. Agroyesum, Ghana, 1948), George  
Weinheimer (b. Silver Creek, N.Y., 1922) and Vyvian d'Estienne  
(b. Chamonix, France, 1939)

We play childhood games in the dark,  
a little circle clapping hands in the dark.  
I ask my childhood, "Whose hands do you touch?"  
But childhood is a sled in the snow, mittens, a black dog.  
I touch a Ghana village, "Darkness between Friends," Agroyesum:  
my right hand. My left strikes Silver Creek, New York.  
Across from me, who shares their hands, a girl grows up in France:  
Chamonix, Mont Blanc's bright dream.  
We are a circle dreamed  
on the bent darkness of this turning world, the turned land's  
dark  
heart's blood. There had been bloody shadows on the sun,  
curtains of shadow. Yet  
hands  
clapping luminous applause drive dark  
from living hearts.

A woven childhood flares the darkening night.

*Frederick Benton*

THE MAN WHO MADE ME LATE FOR WORK

It happened at five minutes to eight on Monday morning.  
In the grim dawn of a new work-week I drove slowly,  
stubborn and unyielding as a cod in a school of mullet.  
Andretti-inflamed clerks in clerky cars swarmed by;  
stenos in tiny cars sculpted their hair en route;  
downtown merchants, in wine or neon-yellow shirts,  
guided heavy dark sedans like flagships of commerce  
and assayed the profit-weather with trained sniffs.

Then, at our key intersection, traffic stopped dead.  
In seconds, cars backed up a block all ways.  
Because there, starting a diagonal crossing  
in flaunt of local ordinance, golden and glorified  
in a swath of early sun cutting past the buildings,  
was surely the world's oldest, most misshapen man.  
Drivers too far back to see honked and ranted,  
but we in the front ranks were silent in wonder.  
I felt stunned. Nothing staged could duplicate this  
living, forming masterpiece, a song for the eyes.  
He was Man the majestic, the unflinching and unbreakable.

Could any creature be so slow? Any rockbound root as bent?  
His frail shoes did not rise a full inch at a step.  
His feet did not land; they kissed. Yet, he soared.  
An immense old Army pack, the color of swamps,  
humped sharp as a butte over his caved shoulders  
like the sacked burdens of ten lifetimes.  
But he came on. My God, what a marvel to see him loom  
through that light: part crab, part goat and granite  
and angel.

He did not look up. Perhaps deaf to the circling city,  
certainly unaware of being the crux of a tableau,  
he held track, pecking ahead with a twisted walking stick,  
white hair and beard like frozen spray on a ship's prow.  
Three cycles of the lights were needed for his traverse

and no car cut his wake until he gained the curb.  
Safe atop the sidewalk slab, he paused to shift his pack.  
With one brown hand on a signal standard, the old man bobbed  
like an ouzel on a river rock. As he eased his load  
the spell ended. The blessed became the ordinary;  
the traffic roiled.

I turned the corner without a glance, unwilling  
to see what I guessed his real face might be.  
But I was the one revealed false and unlovable,  
in thinking: with all the winds to greet his dying dance,  
with brother hawks to share his final flight on earth,  
what difference would it make if I had stopped to say  
Good morning, Sir?

*William McLaughlin*

WAITING FOR MAESTRO

It seemed, when the door opened,  
Their magician had come back—  
Until they realized the face was  
Merely unshaven. Flocks of doves  
Rose higher under the ceiling  
To make space for him, the rabbits  
Piled deeper among paper flowers  
Growing between the floorboards.  
Soft, so soft this room, this  
Closed system—flowers feeding rabbits,  
Their droppings a feast for doves—  
Whose occupants had been two and  
Two when the prop room closed,  
The theatre abandoned. In the morning  
He might set them free, but sleep now  
In a crush of white fur and feathers,  
Ten thousand pink eyes better than  
President McKinley's two sockets  
Staring judgment from the granite  
Pedestal beneath the park lindens.

*Anita Malone*

STARTING IN MY GRANDMOTHER'S BATHROOM

On the tile floor,  
up close,  
I can see the dirt in lines  
between the white cubes.

Ancient tracks,  
fingerprints of hair,  
dirt ground in with 1940 shoes.  
(Wedgies and saddle shoes,  
Joan Crawford slings,  
and Uncle Carl's rubber-soled business sedans.)

Old age in those lines,  
the soupy smell  
of radiators and denture cleansers,  
a sour broth of urine drops  
and the night Grandpa was sick.

There is a smell so deep,  
I fall delirious  
into the toilet bowl,  
flushed away to China at 7,  
hunchbacked on the seat at 10  
reading Superman making love  
to the stars  
of Wonder Woman.

That house, that great mausoleum of dreams,  
waves and lines and avenues of dreams  
grounded in the kitchen  
with the radio signals of Lorenzo Jones  
and the steam  
of boiled carrots.

I can crouch over you now,  
giant-legged,

crush your cement steps  
with one foot.  
I can pick you up  
ancient doll house,  
Grandmother house,  
peer through your tiny night windows;  
I can push my fingers down your chimney  
reach for the corner cabinet  
and pull out  
all the albums of my history.

*Myron Turner*

FUGITIVE

You never knew  
but I was with you in Russia, the same prison  
I crept like a roach, my shadow under me on the wall

The same oven in Germany  
without fire or smoke  
its nipple-rose bricks sweated with humiliation

Then underground  
but even there, apart  
a candle smoked with lack of air  
flickered like lightning miles away  
where there's nothing but night  
*Grow, grow*  
I said to myself  
then swear I heard your voice in a stone!  
like a moonstone in the sun  
some ventriloquist's egg-shaped sky of changes  
speaking light in the underground

I tunneled through with rocks  
bruising fingers, tearing up nails



on the other side, *this is a prison*  
you said, *wormy oven*  
unaware that your neck curved like the edge of ivy  
Your long hair spread out around you in an arc  
Like the sky. And I flew there, my laughter  
scattering like swallows through tall grasses  
Your throat—as sensual as any Florentine madonna’s—  
quivered, arched, like your smile, like a small stream  
curving into unimaginable corruscations of small stones,  
coppery, pink, silver, violet . . .

I was no longer angry at the sky!  
deep in its blue changes  
where I had made someone beautiful  
and was beautiful  
at last.

*Scott Wright*

SOMETIMES A POEM DOESN'T WORK SO WELL

A poem is like an anagram.  
Sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes  
you think so hard your mind spills onto the floor.  
This makes everybody sad, to see it.  
The poem is cracked. It is breaking open.  
Its contents are pouring all over the floor.  
The people are sad. They shake their heads.  
They say "Pity." But it is too late  
because, whenever the mind cracks even a little bit,  
there is no stopping it.  
Women shake their skirts.  
Dogs tremble and back away from the intruder.  
Grown men wring their hands in futility to understand it.

*Paul Zimmer*

ZIMMER, THE MILL TOWN SINNER

Overhead the crows were my misdeeds,  
Were flicks of my wrist  
Flying over the smoke stacks  
And steeples. Beneath them I was afraid.  
My stomach sparked with impurities.

At my first communion, unworthy of God,  
I let the Host fall from my mouth  
And felt it burn in righteous anger  
Through the floorboards of the church.  
No one saw; but my head in my hands  
Was an open hearth, was heat lightning  
Flashing between the chimneys.

Later when I worked in the mills  
The truth clicked in the time clocks,  
And furnaces rasped for my soul.

Once a crane dropped a fiery ingot  
Near me on the cooling platform  
And it seared a hole right through  
The timbers into the ground.

I always knew why the steel struck  
At me like a serpent out of  
The rollers; why mortal sin burned  
In the waste torches over the mills.

THE CHILD ON THE STAKED PLAIN

1. Cacti

Little blooms on this high treeless plain; the winds  
smash, suck away everything but mesquite,  
Spanish bayonet and dens of cacti darting out  
red and yellow tongues after the first warm downpour  
like rattlesnakes. Charmed,  
mother transplants them into our Devil's  
Garden; barrels, prickly pears, thunderclouds.

The winds are coming, the winds  
are always coming—here they all  
go. We are supposed to go somewhere;  
mother can't  
She can't go anywhere.  
We can't touch her. She already dry  
heaves, dry heaves.  
The windows are wood, wood, wood  
downtown. People lean  
from themselves to stay put. They have gone  
through windows before, they won't  
now, not at eighty miles an hour.  
It won't be long again before the windows and mother  
are glass.

2. Dustbowl

Once,  
all day  
a door opens: wastes  
wastes, whatever a man turns from—  
reds, blacks, browns, whites—the Great  
Plains get up as one kicking, blindingly dull  
figure, cuts off  
the playground, sky, the breaks—through  
the men and up the women he dries  
his mouth wide open. Slam,  
slam, we ride the door we

helplessly slam; he's in and out, lanky  
yelling, fatherly, original, Ok-  
lahoman, he does away with  
himself in our cereal, hair, sheets,  
ears—we will never come clean, never  
clean. Oh, if anyone, he's  
Black Jack Ketchem, badman  
oldtime, of the Sangre de Cristo  
who, finally strung up, didn't flinch, got  
away pinching off his head and lobbing  
onto his victims  
the largest rose.

3. Funnel Cloud

After the norther seals the cattle's eyes,  
after all the roads vanish and a desperate boy  
from Boy's Ranch hikes into the snow  
toward the girl forty miles away and is found  
crucified on barbed wire, the Gulf Wind begins pushing  
a night around, pouring, blowing  
out the lights, hailing baseballs, roaring  
like a train; father boarding his store rides  
away, mother hanging on the neck of God  
spirals into a blue morning; falling  
softly onto the lawn, a perfect cup and saucer.

*Charles Martin*

Two Poems

SUNDAY IN DELAWARE PARK

Bobbing like apples in their tight  
Skins of primary color, all in place,  
Wound in unshadowed dreams of appetite  
Before the beginning of the first race

In the Model Speedboat Competition—  
A fleet of polished wooden shoes:  
"Classics," we overhear, and "Lilliputian  
Bombs, waiting for the fuse . . ."

Around the artificial lake  
Runs a broken concrete lip,  
Scarred like a boxer's;  
Rusted pilings drip

Great oilsmear'd chains of sedge, mortally  
Billowing outward like the tresses  
Of Arthur Rimbaud's *Ophelie*,  
Or Classic Comic Book Greek goddesses.

Artful, that simplicity,

But trouble for the mechanic hobbyists  
Down here hours early for the races—  
Middle-aged, untested, terrorists  
*Manqué*, short-haired, with the ascetic faces

Of men who tortured animals as boys.  
Denied their fatal choices in the name  
Of something better, they trot out their toys,  
Driving in like outlaws from the tame

Suburbs on a Sunday to cut loose—  
They bring their manic engines to a boil  
Out of the water; lovingly they goose  
The tiny, hidden parts with drops of oil,

Then put them into action: off from shore  
As though by instinct, deaf and blind,  
Driven by short wave, they lunge out for  
The other side, the jugular: they bend

The surface under them and nearly spill,  
Turning, but wind out straight to churn the lake's  
Skin senseless as they slap and flail,  
Mad with terror of their poisoned wakes,—

Their edgy voices rising as the metal swells  
Up in its anguish straining  
Hard against those fragile shells  
Of polished wood, like tall men leaning

Into their shadows:

or as when, in a slow  
Motion sequence you will see a rock  
Climbing steeply toward someone's window,  
Heralded by spreading waves of shock—

Just so:  
Now birds are swept up from the mad trees shrieking  
Blindly,  
Scattering in the turbulent air—

"It is all very well for you to adopt  
this attitude of distance, of irony,  
of metaphor, as long as you are willing  
to accept at least part of the blame  
for the failure which you are bringing  
us. You will say that nothing happened,  
but you will not tell us why: is it  
because you do not know, or because you  
are ashamed to say? This 'imminence  
of a revelation which does not occur' is  
no longer sufficient. But you must  
have your conclusion. Get on with it,  
then: you have broken faith with the  
greenshadowed path under the stone foot-  
bridge, with the deserted ballfields  
paved now with broken glass, with the  
shameful casino. Get on with it."

And now the classical, severe façade  
Of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery  
Signals overwater to the staid  
City Museum, impatiently:

*"Nothing connects, nothing will break or burn!"*

One by one the boats stutter and run dry,  
And the buried lives of things come out from cover;  
The boats skid down on the suddenly  
Softening water and the race is over.

A CHAIR OUGHT TO STAND ON ITS OWN TWO LEGS

OR,  
THE ART OF MILTON AVERY

"Whatever is beautiful is tainted  
(Whatever I paint for you can't be spoken,

Whatever I say to you can't be painted);  
Whatever is genuine is broken."

*Jay Meek*

Two Poems

MASSACRE OF THE VILLAGERS

Grey-jawed, barricaded in the White House,  
the President has been watching television,  
an avid fan, tuned to the whack of players  
deployed in random patterns on the grid;  
he takes the stance of a gentleman pugilist.  
"Socko, socko," he says. He is schooled  
in calculating the appropriate response,  
and suddenly there comes from his mouth:  
"Gentlemen, let me say that . . ." He stops.  
He has been watching himself too long.  
His eyes click and roll like fruits  
in the windows of a gambling machine.  
In his mind there is an image he cannot help;  
it is in a city or a village he thinks:  
there are pigs' heads in windows, the faint  
pink, pink, pink of mutton legs and tripe,  
kidneys, hearts, sucklings smooth as babies,  
and shoulders of something like cattle.  
Beside him is his daughter who drifts about,  
thin, cool, dreamy over nothing,  
his image of how he'd have her be,  
his remnant of passion.

PALACE SCENE

The men are diplomats,  
or they are college presidents,  
standing in the embankment gardens of the palace.  
It has many windows.  
The palace is like a cake decorated like a palace.  
The delegates are so uneasy  
they all begin talking to one another;  
there are no interpreters.

The men are hopeless, though formal;  
their lips are anchovies curled together. They turn  
uneasily in line, in the sunlight,  
their eyes pinched tight as urethras. They are boys waiting  
to make water. In their eyes  
is the look of the desperately confused;  
in their hands, frosting.

One delegate  
begins prodding another in his bread-basket  
as if it were a button  
to the palace door: he rings with anger, humiliation, protocol.  
Others are holding themselves tightly  
and rolling all over  
the ground as if they could not die enough: they begin  
poking one another: they see  
a girl on the embankment in a long dress on a picnic.  
She is taking down her hair.  
She begins to take off her clothes.  
She sails her bonnet away like a cake tin.

The water is swift,  
not quite so grey as the bank-trees are grey,  
but in the blaring sun,  
which must require a special filter,  
even the ferry crossing the river is grey,  
and those making the trip from the war zones, tanned-grey;  
they are linked together;  
they drift past the ferry like loaves of bread, dead words,  
swill.



## PLEASURES OF THE INSANE

A bird sits where once this heart was caged.  
 Companion, with you something is always about  
 to fall. Yet still you keep that sly balance  
 between the lungs. On you no light closes  
 though here the moon may fix all the blinds.  
 This room holds us waiting. Atop a table  
 one huge friend proclaims: "Whatever has been lost  
 is not to be found at this time. Whatever has been  
 misplaced is not to be regained till the blood dries  
 in the sea's veins." He has no bird lodged  
 inside his chest, yet considers himself mad.  
 Retreating walls support many  
 coughing up their last hours. That one  
 wears a red cap and is not to be trusted.  
 This one before me, dressed in an old cloak,  
 pretending blind, claims to be the dark.  
 As always, he has his terms. I show  
 the botched letters under the palms  
 of all my hands. The bird  
 squeezes out its own blood, bruising the bones  
 for the sake of an old grievance.  
 So they say: anything lately lost is never  
 to be found; nothing may be returned here.  
 Someone is late in coming. A white nurse  
 wreathed in steam passes through.  
 Often that happens. Try to forget also  
 the keeper of lists and promises, tapping his tongue.  
 He has my name misspelled and can say only:  
 Who told you there was sense in that?  
 But how can you sit so long on your perch, old bird,  
 and not sleep? What is all your bleeding about?  
 Now behind us hunches the man in red, suddenly sane.  
 I knew he had a knife hidden in his drawer.  
 The dark is done in by the night  
 and howls in his room. The branches close.  
 The worm finds no voice before that sudden cold.  
 All birds tear their suppers.

## THE ASYLUM YEARS

*A poem for Christopher Smart*

*Madness frequently discovers itself*  
 by unabandoned praise. Sane, could we  
 believe so much good of the world?  
 Poor Kit Smart, that harmless alcoholic,  
 he never loved clean linen.

Friends recalled that many times  
 he "shewed the disturbance of his mind  
 by falling upon his knees and saying  
 his prayers in the street." Surely

I too would have been embarrassed,  
 and gone out of my way to avoid him,  
 assuming no one might safely be that grateful.  
 Best, he thought, was praying naked in the rain.

They removed him to a quiet place  
 where he dug in the garden  
 like Adam, reciting to himself  
 the sayings of flowers.

For us, hopelessly sane, madness  
 seems a marvelous catastrophe.  
 But I suppose I never could have  
 liked the man, being shy of prayer,

and feel much safer years away  
 with his book, the defective light  
 of prisoned scribblings.  
 At the end he had only a cat to love.

Christopher, I will not be  
 too familiar with your name,  
 pray for me anyway on a street or in the rain,  
 that I may bless all I have at hand  
 and later learn to praise  
 what I cannot understand.



SANSEVIERIA

You are having no success  
with the sansevieria

You water it  
too much or too little  
You walk around it  
whispering green compliments  
You let it sleep in your bed  
You stroke its forehead  
send it to Arizona for the air  
to Cannes for the season

But you are forgetful  
You go away for a week  
dancing your midnight dances  
full of scotch and trumpets  
and you never think once  
of the sansevieria

which by the way  
I looked up today:  
named for the Prince of Sanseviero  
a learned Neapolitan  
1710-1771

I have invoked his ghost  
to care for his namesake  
Let the shade fret over sun  
and bleed for the lance-like leaves

You keep dancing  
I'll dance too  
Believe me  
there is something  
you can make grow

LIBERTY ISLAND

most forest rangers don't like  
this assignment so far from forests  
the forest ranger said but  
it's not so bad really  
late at night i go up  
where the public is not allowed  
up in the torch  
and i sit in the torch alone  
and watch the harbor

Sandra McPherson

Two Poems

THE DAWN OF THE WHEEL

*While reading Leopold Tyrmand*

"The indomitable flawlessness . . ."—I can't get past that.  
Is that what I wake to—". . . of dawn," that

latinate alarm I always set in the past?  
The first stone wheel. The stone being much older than  
the wheel.

Something remade me in the night, and at dawn  
I feel like that original heavy matter proud of its new spark.

"A disc or circular frame." I've made a model  
of the sun. It has this spark, a model

of all other sparks. However, it resolves  
every time it revolves. It is pierced through

in a balanced way  
by an axe.

The wheel has permanently altered my nose  
for distance and weight, waiting. "The event

occurred sometime during the Neolithic period  
of the Holocene epoch" and it's still a task

marketing it to the old-fashioned.  
It was so difficult to invent! If only

we suffered likewise. If we could see  
its creator practicing, rolling his fist

on the not-yet-invented roadway  
to understand the notions of *turn* and *rock*,

worried  
about the civilization of history.

He gave it a name that describes its grace, *wheel*,  
and the citizens pronounce it with the phonemes of full  
mouths, *technology*.

At the dawn of civilization, there you have it,  
indomitable technological flawlessness. It would be a wonder

we got any further had we not realized  
its circle was the one we were in.

#### A PUMPKIN AT NEW YEAR'S

Heads were rolling down the highway in high slat trucks.  
I knew it was time to buy you and found you,  
The last sphere unscarred and undistorted in the store,  
Big as my own head.

It was time too to leave you uncut and full-featured,  
Like the grandpa of twenty-five pumpkins in my past,  
Khrushchev-cheeked and dwelling on yourself,  
Great knee of my childhood.

I plainly thought you would rot.  
I remembered the fetor of other pumpkins,

Their blue populations coming out of hiding as if at the end  
Of some apocalypse.

I devoted a day to reading up on minor cucurbits:  
I learned your dozen names in African  
And came home ready to raise or raze you,  
Positive of change.

But so far—eternity. I think I would not like  
Eternity, after I had used my senses up,  
As I've tried with you—fingertips dragging over your world  
Pole to pole

Till they go dead like explorers, nostril cilia  
Detecting your fragrance more delicate than they—  
And my patience. It's Christmas, it's a new year  
And I hear

Of a family who's kept you for four . . .  
You endure like matter manufactured  
And indeed your stem seems punched into your orange gathers  
Like a button in a mattress.

Shall I give you a room or a shrine? And shall I  
Purchase you a mate and family,  
When ours is so inadequate, fixed upon your window  
Deathbed as we are,

Centered upon a time and birth, new holiday, new friends,  
New pumpkin<sup>2</sup> friends, celebrating when all  
That has failed us has passed away.  
You have not failed.

### *About Our Contributors*

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CHARLES BAXTER is a graduate student at the State University of New York at Buffalo. His first book of poems, *Chameleon*, was published by New Rivers Press in 1969.

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IRA SADOFF lives in Geneva, New York, and is co-editor of *Seneca Review*.

HILDEGARDE FLANNER lives in Calistoga, California. Her books of poems include *Time's Profile* (Macmillan) and *If There Is Time* (New Directions).

ED OCHESTER teaches at the University of Pittsburgh. Quixote Press has published two of his books of poems.

CHARLES EDWARD EATON's latest book of poems, *The Edge of the Knife*, appeared in 1970.

DONNA BROOK lives in Detroit and last appeared in our Autumn 1968 issue.

JOHN UNTERECKER, whose definitive biography of Hart Crane was one of last year's candidates for the National Book Award, teaches at Columbia University.

FREDERICK BENTON is a fire captain with the California Division of Forestry in Redding, California.

WILLIAM McLAUGHLIN lives in Shaker Heights, Ohio, and has published in numerous little magazines.

ANITA MALONE lives in Detroit. This is her first published poem.

MYRON TURNER lives in Toronto and edits the magazine *The Far Point*.

SCOTT WRIGHT, while a student at the University of Delaware, won the Academy of American Poets Prize.

PAUL ZIMMER is currently poet-in-residence at Chico State College in California.

LAWRENCE KRAMER teaches at California State College, San Bernardino.

CHARLES MARTIN is a graduate student at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

JAY MEEK is teaching at Colby College.

LAWRENCE RAAB has been teaching at American University in Washington.

ROBERT HERSHON's latest publication was *Atelling*, brought out by New/Books, in which he appeared with Marge Piercy, Dick Lourie, and Emmett Jarrett.

SANDRA McPHERSON's first book, *Elegies for the Hot Season*, published by Indiana University Press in 1970, won a National Council on the Arts award.

### POETRY NORTHWEST PRIZE AWARDS, 1971

HELEN BULLIS PRIZE: \$100

Kenneth O. Hanson for "Six Poems" (Autumn 1970)

Jack Tootell for "Three Poems" (Autumn 1970)

#### *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)

THEODORE ROETHKE PRIZE: \$50

Dave Etter for "Three Poems" (Summer 1970)

#### *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)

