

Poetry

NORTHWEST



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POETRY NORTHWEST

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POETRY NORTHWEST

SUMMER 1970

THE DANCE OF THE ONE-LEGGED MAN

From the Notebooks of Theodore Roethke—1951-53

Since all beginnings, sing,
 Dance, dance, one-legged men:
 We're not the same as then,
 But worse in flesh and skin.
 It's time that we begin . . .

*

There's no place else: begin from where you are.

*

As when a fish turns easily in low water,
 Nudging out between stones,
 Confused, for an instant, in some back-eddy,
 Only to swirl himself forward,
 Wetting a high stone with his flash of silver:
 Himself and the water,
 Himself his element.

*

An evil more recurrent than the waves
 Turns us to stone, or breaks us into halves.

*

This veering—I'm afraid. I can't see myself clear
 In any mirror now but shifting water. This is
 How my mother went. Sometimes I'm several
 And my choices snicker.

*

I go out of all things only to be alone.
A bleak stone on a great flat shore.

*

I have no native shape.

*

I am by way of becoming
No more or less than I am.

*

Uproot, pig. Uproot.
The coarse spectre changes. I'm loose
And alive to what I like.
That's where we all are.
Under the wind of this small change,
I find what I'm like,
Alive as a worm.
A knight of purest form,
I fly and pursue
The end we all love.

*

Make me less clumsy, Lord. O make me light
Upon this ground; and make my shadow white.

This mottled shade betrays me as I am,
Shifting through choice, a player in the shade.

*

In that coarse spasm of disgust there's not
An inkling of supernal thought;
And what I fear is fed by this delay,
This dragging down, this careless play
Before the stars; I brood on what
I cannot be . . .

*

Detachment has no reference to the skin;
I'm really never here; I'm in
A daft superior daze . . .

*

To take myself away from what I am
Is more than mortal being can devise:
I could be stranger to that common theme
Discovered in the mirror by my eyes:

We are bewitched by what we cannot see,
A poor self strung upon a foolish gaze,
A cretin's fancy is my highest praise,
I weep away my lips: I cannot be.

*

I don't know what I am:
I'm in love with being born.

*

This horny skin. I buckle with the waves
And roast in fire. Suppose a rock should sneeze
Me loose, unfasten me from earth before
My time and I went burning with the hay?
What breeds beyond my sweat, or just above
My temples? These are sly matters waiting for a look
Behind the eye . . .

*

Which of my winds will take
The downdrift of myself?
My help's not in me.
These ashes sift themselves.

*

I've come to hate my own ecstasies: rich
Within me swims another thing: a whale,
Shapeless yet whole, and worse than Ahab had
Pursued: not white: a gray amorphous ghost
Of what we should not be.

*

Sit in the instant if you can
And you'll become another man:
And where you were will be a place
Still tenanted by empty space.

I lost my finger in a cup;
I could not bring the tankard up.
I pushed the wind before me as
I bumped into the man I was.

The sun's a burden for me now.
I cannot tell you why or how.
And that's the way it always is
With documented mysteries.

We look before and after, and,
Like Shelley, rarely understand.

*

Shine forth, you idiot forms,
With what I cannot see:
Essentiality
Of all ground-seeking worms.

*

Each thing's an end of something else:
I cannot hear a fainting pulse:
Farewell, loose metaphysic skin:
I would be out: you want me in . . .

*

What I am is no more!
I bid myself farewell.

(arranged by David Wagoner)

Dave Etter

Three Poems

IN THE BARBERSHOP

He spits tobacco juice
on the baseball scores.

I put chewed bubble gum
in the comic books.

He wears a greasy hat
and pants with no belt.

I wear a dime-store ring
and socks that dont match.

He comes hot from corncribs
cussing out bankers.

I come damp from poolrooms
talking down hustlers.

He was a circus bum
who wrestled a bear.

I was a shoeshine boy
who married a whore.

He's done two years in jail
and clobbered a cop.

I've gone to reform school
and flattened a priest.

They know us in this town.
We kick up the dust.

THE TALK AT RUKENBROD'S

I am sitting here on the high curb
in front of Rukenbrod's grocery store.
I sip a cold Nehi and listen to the talk.

You remember Andy Gump? You dont?

My blue jeans are too tight, she said.
I feel creepy walking past the square
with those dirty eyes scraping my skin.

No, I never knew Nettles. He was an Elk.

Sure, Paul was in Pickaway County, Ohio,
but he took up this spiritualism stuff.
Goes all over. West Coast and all.

Butterflies, you know, taste with their feet.

Nettles ran a forklift up at the cannery.
Then he was with A&W Root Beer, nights.
Heart attack it was. Des Moines, I heard.

A purple martin eats 2,000 insects a day.

I bought her a sickle-moon guitar
and she never comes out of her bedroom.
Just strums and strums. Crazy, aint it.

Fred's cousin was formerly with Dial-a-Prayer.

I go back into Rukenbrod's grocery store.
They have run out of Nehi Grape.
I grab a creme soda and sit down again.

You sure you dont remember Andy Gump?

THE SUNDAYS OF SONNY BAXTER

I hunker on the porch
And stare at spider webs.
They tell me Father hated Jews
and Jews hated Father.
Now what is that to me?
I run my middle finger
over the bottom step
where the wood's gone mush.
Shoes, you clomp and clomp.
Shoes, you keep coming,
going nowhere,
returning from nothing.
A crimson maple leaf
falls on my outstretched hand.
I tear it with my teeth,
then chomp it,
chew it to bits.
It was too beautiful.
It put a hurt high in my heart.
Grandpa crosses the grass,
the *Chicago Tribune* at his hip.
The old boy has chicken legs
and his nose is hard to blow.
The sunlight hangs dusty.
I smell cat vomit
and a cheap cigar.
There's nonsense in the kitchen.
Cant Grandma laugh her age?
Spider webs are evil.
They trap the unwary,
the too adventurous.
Spider webs are wrapped around
Illinois, the Midwest, the world.
I stretch flat on my back
and listen to Baptist bells
and the wham-bam of slammed doors.
Mother always went to church

in her gaudiest glad rags.
Father mowed the lawn
or stuck those watery eyes
in the bowels of his Chrysler.
Oh, Sunday's nothing special.
I aim to keep it so.

Harold Witt

Three Poems

DR. TYGER

Our only Ph.D.,
he had a missing thumb—
too far and fierce of thought
for college in our town—
he taught philosophy
in the face of our ho hum.

Assigned: "What I believe,"
my essay prayed to God
for which I got a C
that first warm autumn term—
Plato and then Nietzsche—
the worm began to turn

minerals in the mind—
and all that rainy winter,
worked on underground—
Spinoza, James, Descartes—
seeds were churned around;
our hungry looks dreamed thinner

as he held, with his absent thumb,
logic before our class—
atheist or cynic—
whatever that Dr. was,
like Socrates he had to leave,
accused of corrupting us;

assigned again before he did
(Scotch, not hemlock drunk)
a later springtime Credo
for which my A summed up,
beginning in wonder, leafy doubt's
blossoming begun.

LIFE IN THE TOMB

In that grey tomb of a house
where everyone nibbled his words
so crumbs wouldn't drop, and an aunt's
hands clawed as thin as a bird's,
where even the dewiest flowers
shriveled and seemed to gasp,

a table of General Grant's
beads in the doorway, the clock
forever a quarter past,
a love seat where love never sat
under the case of swords,
but only a huge fixed cat—

the noise overhead—so I heard—
of footsteps and shuddering doors,
while Aunt Susan kept buttoned downstairs
among relics and rumors of wars,
was my great Uncle John,
naked, chasing his nurse.

LEMON HEIGHTS

Friends on Lemon Heights
(famed as a lovers' lane—
more than one young couple
descended into pain,
cheerleader, football hero
wished they hadn't lain
high on that hill of trouble)

we had only come
assigned to map the stars,
a few lightheaded students
getting out of cars.

Cepheus, Cassiopeia—
we scanned the twinkling dark—
put down the wheeling Dippers,
joking, on a chart—
the darting dogstar, Sirius
(Browning's "All that I know"?)
blue green red and silver
behind Orion's glow
of jeweled belt and scabbard,
and there blinked Betelgeuse,
the streetlight town below.

We laughed among the magnitudes
and showed them as a mark,
ignorant Ptolemaists
out on a freshman lark—
we searched and filled the circle
with Cygnus and the Crab;
but only much much later
would we feel the nights
slip from our selfish center
and know the sweetly bitter
distance of those lights.

T. J. Henighan

Two Poems

ROOMMATES

Lost themselves three years running
In the same direction,
 dark girl and blonde,
Wore the skin of their attic like minks—
Shared mum mirrors ovulen and Picasso

Two-in-the-morning music of high times
Petted to sleep like the great women
 of history, munching chocolates.
Dark girl, treated for early mustache
 hysteria
Slipping naked into a raincoat, off
 for church,
The blonde loving to melt exquisitely
 into the eyes
Of every man who felt rainbows at the end
 of her shudder.
And sometimes letters from the mothers,
 catatonic
Beaten by their men, perfumed wisdom,
You can always come home, for the weekend
 anyway—
But the daddy in the shadow
 the emasculate
Santa Claus under an elm tree by
 heaven
Strummed the guitar, and waited—
 bus schedules
Lists of psychiatrists, blackbook of lovers
 in his pocket,
The big hole in his mind stuffed
 with gingerbread—
Everything a girl needs to marry a brute
 and hide under a pillow,
Just a question of transferring effects
 to the suburbs,
Girls, it's a good pad, and—pull up
 your pants—
The best cave's Platonic.

POSTCARD OF A JAPANESE PAINTING

The carp climbs to the blue air.
You wake alert in the possible room
Breakfast floats after the alarm

The wind is terse today, but warm.
Solicitude measures you a chair.
The codes are known, so much to tell
With headache gone, libido well.
Will it be leaf, or stone or sky
The color of time, the color of skin?
The carp climbs to the blue air
A rage appointed for each fin.
The sun you woke to snaps at ten
Your page is blanker than the glare
The streets flush truth at every coil
Drooping children perk at dogs
Invisible mailmen move like clocks.
The carp climbs to the blue air.
Your fingers drown a major key
The sculptured world you rose to catch
Is sliding skyward toward the sea.
You're up and heading for the door
As borders whistle down to blur
In distances the day could spare
The carp climbs to the blue air.

Eric Wolf Fried

VISITORS

I have been writing an hour
in the dark, the marks invisible.
You haven't awakened. You blow your breath
against the walls. You breathe
on this first night back in the city
like a steaming radiator, flattened
on the bed, your mouth ajar,
fending off my hands.
The rectangles of this city are cut in my mind
with a rusty unstropped razor by a filthy barber.
We will accustom ourselves to it.

I showed our Japanese visitors
the summer place where I grew up,
grew in leaps and seasons
between the city and the country.
I led them into the woods,
old trees cracked by lightning, tumbling rot,
globed moccasin flowers on the ground,
dizzy slants of land, high trees sprayed
in light, torrential sky, waving trees, waving leaves.
We went wrong the first time and doubled back
on houses, then struck off
over rock and leaf-thick forest floor
along battered abandoned stone walls
through the property of the cadaverous international lawyer
whose wife was stung by a black widow spider,
and beyond. We arrived at a camp site
and a view, gray hills, bedrock sheared of trees,
a single road winding through the valley.

Tangled mountain laurel
covered the hillside with dark leaves
and pink and white buds, heavy clusters on heavy branches.
My father and I dug up four plants
ten years ago and put them in our lawn.
One died, the others bloom in rhythm
with the thickets beyond the walls.

After our visitors left I worked
to tame the honeysuckle around the house.
I had to unwrap the curling honeysuckle
from the lilac branches, pulled the long root out of the ground.
I am thinking of the thick moss where we rested
and the broken rock where we straddled the walls
and the valley overlook where we sat,
the visitors, you and I.
It was wonderful leading them through the trees,
having them step over the soil
lightly. They were perfect visitors.

David Summers

THE BLACKOUT

All night that German face,
expanding like a balloon,
belched into a rancorous trombone
while solemnly I baited the U.S.
serviceman again, and smashed
my mug against his own . . .
Later in the evening air,
I found it more difficult to explain
the sudden quaking of the ground.

I like to think that night
is fastened in me.
A particular night in Wien III,
I drank myself into an ether:
the pavement rose to touch
my random, colliding feet,
the concrete buildings that turned
around me, each in turn
bared its secret teeth.

Why does your friend weep
Mister? Is he drunk?
I watch the complicated lights
go out one by one. My mind,
that silver-snouted jet,
dives into the ocean like a bird.
I weep because I am not alone,
I guess; I am hunted down
by my own brass band . . .

Only once the octopus must burst,
let fly its innumerable wings.
I think that out of me there came
that growly animal,
which itself became the walls,

the streets through which I moved.
That night I walked within
the presiding evil of my mind.
Inside the animal, for once.

In the darkened cavity my
unmanly bawl echoes back to me:
what human purity has not been
bloodied by my hand?
What bird's song survives
the wicked, shredding laugh?
A fettered man is dangerous.
That strewn trail behind me.
Ha-ha, the sickness spreads!

And as the armed clowns tromp
toward my last intransigence,
how should I perform?
Face-down on the canal bank,
sprawled out in my Sunday-best,
staring blindly into the wet grass?
Ah, there you are! Good morning . . .
God! Already I am repossessed.
Inside, the dogs begin to bark.

Vern Rutsala

1942

Coughs waited
in the nap
of old rugs
and death
moved in the cellar
among webs,
in rust painted
down walls
by drainpipes,
hidden like insects

in dry grass
behind the house.
We were all
helpless,
even our tall
fathers, forearms
like animals,
all sentenced
to slip away.
We felt it
in that wind,
icy in August,
temperature falling
to zero inside
us. We heard it
in the worn voice
of the couch,
the noises
of other roomers,
the ominous
landlady only
a sound
of pots and pans
on the other
side of the wall.
The war went on
in backyard grass,
the enemy
in each of us,
winding our lives
up on a spool,
pulling us tighter
toward the darkness
of backrooms,
the standing water
in ditches, last
year's weeds
stiff and pale
We lay tight
as fists

at night, tied
to our beds,
the dark just
beyond our faces
solid—the side
of a huge
fish, a tree
with hands
for leaves, grinning
faces jammed
together like marbles
in a sack.
Floors were haunted,
too, and alone
we put wood
chips on each
threshold and listened
for footsteps
on the porch.
Everywhere we
walked we felt
the dead stir
below: faces from
old pictures, dogs
from shallow graves.
It was plain:
some hammer
of light would
pound each of us
into darkness
like a nail.
Everyone would go
into the gloom
behind screendoors
in summer,
the dark falling
over all of us
like an old blanket
smelling of mildew
and urine.

David Slabaugh

OUT OF SEASON

What I kill I change, break
and drain the day's bright boredom.
Saw the grouse hen, froze
until I heard her chicks, then threw.

What won't peaceful beings kill
to keep the peace? The panic
ends in a boxed corner, then
they turn and stand—

the bear was blind. Or the caged
Berkshire sow, calcium-
poor, when she begins to tear
and swallow concrete. Red eyes, red teeth.

The hen drags both wings, over-acts,
her chicks shut up. Missed. Missed!

William Velde

Two Poems

EVERY SATURDAY SLOWER

So even enough is too much. The good die
middle aged, and in full public view. Me?
I'm eating tortillas and beer, watching TV.

I make, as today's newscaster suggests,
our president's day more normal than usual.
My wife is sweeping, and someone outside

burns leaves. I am nice to my mice because
they're harmless, and have to live someplace.
But in come rats like organized crime, taking

full advantage. I'll buy white ones to dip
in poison, hoping the others will like them
and catch fire inside. Our founding fathers

would have used smoke, but they had no laws
like that guy who wouldn't be lighting leaves
if he knew the health hazard. But he does,

and maybe the founding fathers knew, acted
anyway. If there were federal specifications
for housework my wife would barely meet them.

Finally, I fry my own lunch. Yes, I'm aware
my heart's not what it was, or it always wasn't
and I didn't know it, not being middle aged.

FOURTH AND ONE, LET'S GO FOR IT

Roosevelt stares from the dime, unable
to do for himself. Those unshaven heads
on our pennies wear down to a memory.

And all men spent before these heroes
are ghosts, the profiles of panhandlers.
My coffee's a mirror with melted faces.

Remember Liberty on the four-bit piece,
walking as if offstage? Or the buffalo
stopped dead in his tracks, on thin ice?

The last Miss Liberty was on dimes, wings
on her head and a fascist scepter behind
her back. Drop that penny in your cup,

and the trace of a million hands comes
to the top in psychedelic paisleys. Now
those hands have been freed, like slaves.

They kill our heroes because they are free
to do nothing. All of them fade to one
suggestion, anonymous like us and Indians,

prints no longer unique. Pennies in fuses
expand to a rainbow, the hands of nations,
fingers of what we all spend and destroy.

Samuel Hazo

CALL IT SURVIVAL

Verging forty, I've lived
already longer than I thought.
Not that I mind.

 This side
of promises, the only life
I realize is how I live
this minute.

 Call it survival.
Call it the chance to last
by chance.

 I counted dimes
while Fagan lost his knees
and Elmore died of shrapnel
in the eyes.

 A flowerpot
dropped thirty-seven
stories in New York
on someone else's skull.
I missed the whisperjet
that ploughed Lake Michigan.
Lazarus walks in my shoes,
and Lazarus meets my mirrored
eyes each time I brush
my teeth.

 That's why I'm slow

to trust tomorrow's men,
men shaped to a role,
vehicular.

 They are the self
I shed.

 Brothered to blood
that stays an ageless red,
I wage no other disciplines
than bladder, bowel, mind
and tongue.

 Breath by death,
they root me to myself
in everyone.

 To stay abreast
I spend the better part
of better days than I deserve
making poems in American.

That way I earn my way,
leaving epitaphs that show
and slow me as I go . . .

Wordpriest.

 Penman
in transit.

 God's plagiarist.

Colette Inez

MURDERING NUMBERS

Soissey-sur-École, unstintingly French,
have been there with a plow
tilling numbers and non-numbers
in the school rain, smudged arithmetic,
problems in chalk; dowdy captive to a desk,
and chained to mademoiselle's voice,
the gusseted serge of her proper dress.

Rain-glyphs on the windowpane:
I tried to break the code, assured that the script
opened locks to a drenched world
of storm kings, cloud queens, thunderous bosoms,
that lightning bid the populace
to cower in their huts
until a prince was found for the princess:
rain-droplet eyes, white tulip breasts,

but was ferruled into fractions,
mutilated digits, numbers on the chopping-block,
dissected in half and less than whole,
the unwholesome practice of minus signs,
these wounded ciphers less than
those decapitated ones. A hospital of numbers,
slashed, crippled, hobbling on the blackboard.

The land outside the room
luminously plus in the lavender light.
It was where I wanted to count froth, grass,
inconsequentially dazzling leaves reading the rain,
inimical to grocery lists, recipes halved,
bank interest and loans, things that math was good for
in the gray-serge freshly ironed town where I was from,

but stayed after school, the rain-script erased,
memories of rain stored in the chalk.
In the chalk-dust room I slaughtered fractions,
my diagonal knife's stab-stab,
absurd reductions into air,
the globe I wrote on like the zero I would get
in Soissy-sur-École
when I was there
murdering numbers.

Margaret Nordfors

NOTICE TO OWNERS

To those concerned, I walked to the old house.
The curtain I made is aside at the door,
left as limp as a maidenhead.

No one knew what was in the attic.
A neighbor girl rides our old trike.
She is staring at my empty body.

I see the design entered our plans
for the new house, where things would be different,
that he looked from behind his drawing board

in the dining room when the roof leaked
to a pool on wood. I thought he ignored
brown baseboards and sills edging white paint.

I hung each wash in a flooded basement,
wading by fungus where I lost my rings.
The rug hurt, so the baby learned to walk.

There were rats in the ivy that no one saw.
Friends said the dark beams were romantic.
I stood my books over broken shelves.

If I knocked, I could meet my eyes.
The windows wept cold except one:
mornings I sat in my triangle of sunshine.

Sonya Dorman

SING SONG

Ah, hah, the old lady said,
I saw them ride by, the young men,
and fell on my knees among stones.
I gave birth to a stone.

Year by year the child sang
for his supper,

 a stone for his dinner,
 grass for his bed.

Ah, hah, the old lady said,
I was round as a plum. The pit
grew big. Blossom in spring,
Black branch in winter.

 Tall, tall,
 he made me some shade

but among the small stones
a girl fell to her knees.
The young men rode by.
Her womb cried for a child.

 Ah, hah,
 the old lady said,

her seed grew into a tree,
the plum shriveled down to a prune,
the world grew small in my lap,
and here I lie by the side of the road
 with one eye shut.

 The other eye
sees how the young men ride by.
The grass sings out, the trees,
the stones, to see them go by.
Ah, hah, I'm not too old to cry.

Barbara Hamlin

A HISTORY OF THE WORLD AS THREE SCENES
SET IN SALT LAKE

For Harvey

"What we're aiming at here is the general market:
some cataclysm stuff
and nudes . . ."

SCENE 1. The Seduction

Cataclysm footage.
Cut to downtown Holiday Inn.
Pan hockey puck scars,
Harvey tuning KSL.
Static. Nat King Cole.
TV lighting,
late late chartreuse,
flickering puce, etc.
Zoom in on lips whispering
hot spots from Gunga Din.
Up Wild Track: breath crescendo.
Back to TV:
troop ship unloading.
Ann Sheridan crying in spectator pumps,
herself not jiggling
but the gangplank crazy.
Fantastic.
Cut. Print.

SCENE 2. The Mob Scene

OK, Hertz Rent-a-Car.
Ready, you nudes.
It's noon, downtown.
You Mormons are taking a break
from sealing ancestors
in the celestial.
You lovers are ninety-eight naked angels

on the head of a pin
and the Mormons are out there
eating sandwiches.
You can't go on.
I love,
you love,
he sells irrigation equipment.
Mygod, it's a classic.
Cut. Print.

SCENE 3. Dancing Girls
We wind up double-timing to
Over the Rainbow.
You know, the moose making it
(rut season up on the Wasatch)
and this big dissolve
of the Hertz
and the Mormons.
We don't explain the lovers, see,
but every time the girls turn—
TWO HUNDRED GARTERS—
so who asks?
Right? Right.
Cut. Print.

Robert Taylor, Jr.

INSIDE PICTURES

"Photography is the art of looking at history,"
said the lady professor, smiling.

History is an art of posing,
and I suppose the pictures,
though taken by men who hid
under hooded cameras,
warned of blinking,
said when to smile,

and when to strike the Christian poses
who stood in fact like humps on the backs
of their Victorian lenses
and then made smiling, wide-eyed images
on tin,
I suppose those old oval-enclosed poses
are justly called a part of this art
called history.

But meanwhile, sweetheart,
my own brain is growing noses,
it is big with eyes,
is a womb of faces,
alive with wrinkles,
and this too is history
and perhaps even smacks of art.

This is an opening of shutters
on my old aunts
as they move like breathing humps
on the fronts of my uncles,
practicing the art of being
inside of skin,
making sensual history,
and since I'm in it too
this is a history of incest,
an endless birth of inner skin,
a constant detumescence
among my ancestor's Christian poses:

I suppose you could say
this is the flesh of history, honey,
the great moving picture of the centuries,
full of warm images
committing art,
loving
with all their photographic hearts.

Floyce Alexander

JOURNEY UP THE SHAFT OF THE BODY

The pulse of the earth was in your body,
The sky in your wrist.
Tonight I will return to dark places
I should have left behind me
The last time.
I marry you on cold mornings,
A garland of frost cradling our bodies,
The sun pressed between our lips.
I rise out of the pit to be with you,
Your hands knead my spine.
You bathe me as I tell you
Of the crone who lured me out of the light
Into the wilderness
Where the damned whimper to die.

Linda Pastan

WILLIAMSBURG

"History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake."

—James Joyce, *Ulysses*

Unscrew the locks from the doors!
Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs.

—Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*

1. The Market Square

These houses in their muted brick seem
smaller than life, smaller surely than the dead
who stare us down from centerfolds of books.
The Washington of Valley Forge would
have to bend historic knees to fit
that trundle bed, and Patrick Henry,
slogans flying from his mouth like buckshot—
his fist in emphasis would split the delicate
gate-legged tables. Only the sky feels adequate,

a million flecks of southern dust settling into
a distant, pilgrim blue, elusive as history.

2. The Visitors' Center

And we are
tourists still,
gazing with
something like
anguish in-
to the rooms
of other
lives, reaching
behind a
velvet rope
when no one
watches, to
touch something
authentic.

3. The Craft Shops

The basketmaker, in knee breeches
and a leather apron,
sits by an 18th century fire weaving baskets
like old spells
to any shape or size.
I have watched him strip a sapling with his axe,
cut his reeds to measure,
pass the slim weft of memory deftly
through the warp of death.
Two hundred years have gone,
ground with the corn in the arms of the mill,
while a new generation of horses stamps and coughs
in the same old stalls.
So little time: the space
from Athens to Sparta or from Jamestown here.
I reach across this small abyss to touch
the basketmaker's hand,
but a Woolworth pencil falling from his pocket
spins like a wand,
and there rises between us a wall of baskets,

baskets of bolts and screws, of old hubcaps,
beercans, and the broken
filaments of lightbulbs
gone dark.
before my father's father dreamed America.

4. The Colonial Gardens
With what musical strictness
the songbirds guard their own brief
territories, even here
where freedom is endemic.

5. The Governor's Palace
I am waiting by the canal.
A few violets are scattered near the bench like footnotes,
everything else is perfectly green.
Now the cries of children rise from the formal maze,
and the cameras whir and click, persistent
as locusts in the wavy air.
In the governor's palace
the tourists browse like responsible cattle
under a portrait of the governor's wife.
Her face is formal and still.
Around her, slaves lose themselves
in the darkening canvas;
only their eyes show up and their white caps,
like the ghosts of moths who will haunt our screens forever.
Children, come out of the labyrinth,
though the minotaur bears your mother's name
and your father's horns. You will trip on the fine grass,
cut your delicate hands on the clipped hedges.
Play instead in the kitchen garden.
Discover the bright yams
pulled from the earth, round and bursting as udders,
the black soil still clinging to their roots
like water.
Search out the young peas, already impatient
in their pods.
Learn the new, green taste of raw beans.

Beth Bentley

THE LOATHLY WORM

When he first touched a scaly limb
its slime turned him cold;
the spiked tail whipped about his head,
flame from the fanged jaw
singd his beard; but he abided.

It changed in his hands,
shedding its skin, so slippery
he almost lost it,
rolling down him, a slick, greased pig,
but fair and smiling,

with a hot, suffocating breath.
Hair slack as seaweed
wrapped his head; persistent fingers
insinuated;
his knees buckled, but he held on.

Once more it altered,
writhing around him, a black mist,
bodiless, blinding
his eyes, a stench in his nostrils.
It twisted and smoked,

nothing in his arms. But as he
pawed, the air hardened,
shadow turned solid against him:
hard, changeless, the truth.
He grasped it with both hands, and felt

strength flow through his veins,
his muscles tense with victory.
As pure iron will,
in sub-zero weather, it ripped
the skin off his palms.

THE SOUL IS ONLY BREATH

They treasure it in their mouths
 like a jawbreaker already bleached with use.
 It is delicate
 as the skull of a mouse.
 When they say it they do not hear it.
 It vanishes in the air
 as they say it for the last time
 and can hear it. The people watching,
 doctors and nurses,
 and relatives being serious,
 do not hear it
 but treasure the idea
 like a blind eye.

ANTICHRIST

Remembering without understanding, I wake up.
 What painting was he in? A face out of Bosch
 or maybe Brueghel? But I saw him in my sleep,
 naked and crowned, and now I must find him out.
 I am troubled. I am a pond which has
 forgotten the stone still sinking in its black gut
 but I am disturbed— That foolish, animal grin
 as he watches without understanding
 while it happens, though what it is he looks on
 stays in the clouded bowl as I wash and shave.
 I do not like the look in my eyes
 over the razor; they seem clouded and tentative,
 like the eyes of the man-bull, the pale, dewlapped
 king of this world. I wash my razor
 and go to my books to find him, to find what has slipped

down the drain. In a minute he leaps from the page,
 leprous, wearing only a robe
 around his unwholesome figure and wounded leg,

but the robe is red, the rich red of a king
 watching three kings kneel to another,
 all of them unaware he is a king.

LONELINESS OF THE UNEMPLOYED

One morning I wake up and my manhood is gone.
 I cannot believe it. Then, faintly
 I hear it crying. Thin, muffled peeps
 from the eyeless mouth. I tear out of bed
 and begin to search,
 turning over books and clothes.
 After a frantic minute, I discover the thing
 alone in my billfold on a chair.

It is lonely without the body.
 I look at the hands and they do not say anything.
 They cannot tell me what they are for.
 Also the feet. The chest and stomach
 can breathe and be hungry
 but neither can say a word.
 Food is embarrassed. Rice on my fork
 looks the other way when it is brought to my mouth.

Once I woke in the night
 and heard the body talking.
 It spoke of its shame. It told itself
 it was going away.
 I broke in, to try to explain.
 Silence.
 We rolled back to back and pretended to sleep.

I stop a man on the street and begin to discuss myself.
He interrupts to assure me my situation is not my fault.
"But when you are poor you should not be in love,
have children, enjoy yourself," he tells me.
"These things are for people with money."
I want to thank him
but he has begun an argument with his newspaper.
The printer's ink is quite abusive,
wrangling and hooting over a detail.

Once I had a trade as a writer
but I left because I did not want to lie.
I became a teacher, and taught lies.
At last I just talked, but the language
knew I was lying. The words
ran out of my mouth and told everyone
what a fraud I am.
It is lonely without even words.
There are no women without money.
But even without money, I do not want to stop being a man.
I cannot even stop being lonely.

THE STANDARD OF LIVING

Fred Hampton is dreaming of air:
of miles of a clean atmosphere
high above the city. He dreams
of rising for hours through cold clear air
all the way up from the earth,
the air like a huge room of water over Illinois.

Fred Hampton is dead.
He took with him the feel of metal pipes,
of a woolen sock,
what fingers find on the surface of bread.
Fred Hampton became a fact
like West Madison Street
or the price of lettuce.

I get up in the morning and wash my skin.

In the sink I hear a man
justifying death. He believes
the bison are glad he was born.
I look at my fingernails.

The man has photographs to prove
the hands of a clock do not move.
He has a column of figures
to show that trees feel nothing when they are cut.
He knows the theory of relativity:
that the observation of a phenomenon
affects what is observed.

Now something is altering every process.
It has to do with a list of names
and a program. With streets of smashed glass,
litter and boarded-up schools.
With names that are never listed,
an all-night hamburger stand,
fifteen dollars and an argument.
It has to do with Fred Hampton.

I believe that Fred Hampton alive
did not think about air. He thought about
asphalt, and where money goes
when it wants to die.
He thought of the people who are.

He saw the earth is on fire.
He sweated to feed the children.
And when he burned, every library
burst into flame. What is there to talk about?

Deputy-chairman of Illinois, chairman of death
Fred Hampton goes into the people.
He begins to dream.

I dry my hands.

CASUAL LABOR

Up on the scaffold at the brick face:
money.

High over the floor, with acid-pail and wire brush:
cleaning money.

Bits of plaster and old grime
are worked off the bricks.
The dollars come clean.

They appear as little rippling flags
that gleam like coins.
A forest of paper strips
that glitter and sparkle in a field.
They are in the brick. In the clock.
In the heavy lumber.

Sometimes for a moment the money goes.
The weight of a board
can push out the mind.
Or when each breath is free of planks.

Mostly, though, there is money. Nothing
for the money to buy.
Only the crisp crowd of bills
fluttering, in a casual union.

John Morgan

Three Poems

ON THE PATH TO THE OBSERVATORY

All directions coming together, and each stone
surrounding its own separateness like a shore,
while the inevitable brown rabbit races by
 years later, and
on the path to the observatory

which we climb like pages
of a German dictionary, handfuls at a time,
holding each other tentatively at the waist,
hardly daring to feel the body, your body

flowing under the loveliest blue
cotton blouse I think I have ever seen,
 it is with a tremendous patience
that we are walking, ready,
should nothing else ever happen, for everything.

The sharp

turning of the path
 brings us under the pebbly
shade of that single tree, not
 an open or luxurious shade,
 but appropriate
to this height, where summer
 is never afire at every pore.
 "Sit down."

The basket I have been carrying
 we open, and as you are removing the thermos
I point there, past the tiny involutions
of your ear, and you turn, laughing, toward

the moment I will remember most vividly afterward:
as the last spark from your eye,
as your smooth tan neck was rotating,
turned away, and your brown magnificent hair
wanted by my hand locked in its own
rigid house of feeling—and, "Oh," you cried
"is it so close?"

 your voice like warm rain
 gullying down the path
from that hemispheric window or eye, the stars
to which we, sooner than we could have thought,
would be dedicating our remaining lives.

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF LOVE

The museum is a woman.
Invisible organisms of dust
crawl with their ancient perfumes
deep
into the cracks of the bones
of my face. And again
in loneliest corners of the basement
the arcane organs of my life
breathe the deadening air.

Her odor attacks my nerve
reaching down the spine
to the bottom of my will.
More than animal,
I harden with love
for the bowels of the woman
I inhabit. The walls
grow hot with habit, or
is it my eyes that glow? What
happens now
shatters the shells of turtles,
opens the jaws of rabbits,
makes man known.

The museum would take my secrets,
yielding only her body, the past,
while
growing ecstatic in her arms
I will see
my life reduced to incense.
Nothing else can touch me.
My stones have dissolved,
my seas are ash.
That was my earth.
Now I am perfect in silence.

THE EXORCIST

Thousands of islands of snow,
new skin for the earth, and my dream in which
I reach with my surgical hand,
I part the bones from their pain
and it rises
into the snow.

Membranes shredding away,
each breath more dangerous, cold,
I search for the bubbling rock
where
the blood devours its children.

Winter at the heart, my own brand burning
through hair, through flesh,—
these tortures, we endure them
because they show us pity, we learn
how little there is to love.

And now I come upon you in hiding,
O father of renunciation.
I bring my knife. I cut you out.

Henry Carlile

Two Poems

LOOKING FOR LANDMARKS

For Bill

I took the path you said,
brush up over my head,
not to mention the night
coming on full of clouds
and the way back forgotten.
I told myself

all real woes are personal
and therefore weatherable,
we make them public out
of doubt or spite or to make
certain they exist.

Doubtless, I said, this place
is charted, and I could see
it checkered on the wall
with someone's positive pin
stuck through it saying: here.
You can do that if you're important or
arrogant enough.
But who was I? At some point
lost, certain of nothing,
I had everything to learn.

The closer you get to things
the less you see of them,
I thought. I'm sure the spider
doesn't think his web's
as perfect as we do.
To see our symmetry
it's better to try for distance,
but even then walking
in circles you'll likely wind
up a leaf over your head
for a roof and you smaller
than anything.

I sat down under the devil's
club, I picked the cobwebs
from my hands and eyes, and then
I saw so far down through
the trees my world flew back
to me and perched shimmering
in my eye. It stayed a moment
and then it was gone.
I moved on.

LAST WORDS

1. The Disinheritance

Then I will not inherit this dream.
Trusted only with holding boards and plumbines,
Fetching tools, I didn't help build:
Dunnage, driftwood, tarpaper roof,
Zig-zag stovepipe whooping in the wind,
Bedrooms without closets, kitchen cupboardless,
Linoleum tiles curling up underfoot like burnt bacon,
Roofs and additions slanting away
In all directions toward no conclusion
But a stepfather's whimsical hammer
Banging all Sunday.

Goodbye chickencoop full of old lumber,
Cedar sinkbox intended for duck hunting
Serving time as a septic tank,
Playboy-girl plastered workshop
Hung with broken braces, toothless saws,
Goodbye weedy garden disinherited too,
Old car bodies stalled in a smog of blackberry brambles,
Goodbye back porch brimming with empty bottles,
Fruit jars inhabited by spiders,

I have come a last time to say
Nothing is ever finished, much less this mess
Resolvable only by fire or dynamite,
More shiftless than the sand dunes under it
And beyond it blossoming with lupine and verbena,
The white wart-encrusted, red-lacquered caps
Of the dazzling amanita packed with hallucinations,
And all day to the west of us the moon-crazed
Murdering sea gnawing its coastline.

2. Ocean View

Already the contractors and developers circle
with transits and tape measures.
The bulldozer coughs nervously in the trees,

wanting to get loose,
To bite down the house built however awkwardly
with your own hands.
The deed signed away will destroy this land,
Mother and Stepfather; you who have disowned me
have already left it,
Though you stand here haggling with realtors.

Let them fill the marsh with sand.
The heron and bittern and coot will desert
this place as surely as we have.
In the country of snipes and mallards
let them sell hotdogs and souvenirs,
The geese will pass here at night not stopping
to fill the sedge flats with their gray bodies
and oboe voices.

In winter, the wind will tug at the shopsigns
and shuttered windows of the A-frame cottages,
The bunch grass flatten and the sand hump
into a beast shape moving inland,
Drifting over porches, scouring the paint
from siding and doorsills,
Sifting through crevices—a presence
the tiniest grain of which outwears us.

Adrien Stoutenburg Two Poems

SELF PORTRAIT, 1969

In this sketch I am in a canoe
as silver as a young moon,
and the water is so still
it hums with the pickerel's delicate teeth.
The water is so deep
the sunfish's lantern burns out,
and my hook is a steel question mark
hanging upside down in all the night

the lake hauls to itself
from forests, scum, or passing rot.

I am wearing a white shirt,
the sleeves pushed up,
and at my feet a jug of wine rolls
like a round, glass child.
My tackle box is trim,
and the painted bobber winks
above the barb that dreams
of monsters yearning underneath.

It is all deceit—
the boat, the gaff hook, net and knife,
props only for a chance to catch, alone,
the light and wind and perchless sky.
I dread the least tug at the line,
the gasping weight, the wounded throat,
but the risk of blood, as everywhere, is great.

AS IT IS

Wife love, father love, love of an old dog,
whatever love it is—if it is love—
is twined through stress
(disease, a wound, a blinding debt)
into so tight a skein
the leanest filament seems gross:
threads in light bulbs,
split ends of human hair,
or the close, red conduits
through which blood creaks and booms
in echo chambers of motels,
deserted chairs, black trains,
or just a dusty seashell, in a drawer,
curved like a porcelain ear.

Things shake and sigh with it—
roofs, knobs, and doors—

and common neighbors coming home,
seeing an ambulance,
a wandering, wondering child,
a foreign license plate,
an empty yard,
or furniture stacked outside
like varnished bones.

It toils and sleeps;
it wrestles and cooks meals,
copes with mountains, dust cloths, tears;
carries out trash, seeks interviews,
limps through heat; scrubs, burrows, cries,
boils water, holds a dying paw,

does what it does
to keep pain back awhile—if it is pain—
as it must be
if it is love.

Gunnar Ekelöf

(1907-1968)

XOANON

Translated by W. H. Auden and Leif Sjöberg

In you I possess a miracle-working Icon
If to possess is to possess nothing;
As she possesses me, so I possess her.
She was given to me on the day she "revealed herself"
At a time and place decided upon beforehand
And the same Panayía is revealed
Whenever the heart so wishes. Supported by her arm
On a footstool in receding perspective
Stands a grown-up baby in princely swaddling clothes
Who is the last Prince of my line.
I remove him, for everything that pertains

To this Panayía is removable
As a robber can wrench
The silversmith's basma from some image
With smoke-blackened hands and worn away by kisses.
I remove the crown, I remove the two angels
The annunciators of bliss
From the clouds and the gold ground in the upper corners
I unfasten the jeweled clasp of the Maphorion
And remove the veil from the hair and the neck
I relax the creases over her right breast
And the creases over the left
Gently, to ease the pain. I remove like a spider's web
The thin undergarment that leaves the riddle
Both solved and unsolved, and she looks at me
The eyes brown in the bluish-white of the eyeballs
Steadfastly look at me. I remove the arms
The brown hand with its rose, and the brown breasts
The right breast first, then the left, but gently
To ease the pain, then the scalp and the cheeks
and the girdle after having kissed it
And lastly the big eyes which look at me
Steadfastly look at me still
After they have been removed
I remove the gold ground and the ground coat
Until the thick-veined wood is exposed
A piece of old olive wood, sawed long ago
Out of a storm-felled tree
On some coast way up in the north. In the wood
Almost hidden, was an eye, the eye-knot of a twig
That must have been broken off when the tree was still young
You look at me. Hodigitria, Philoúsa.

NOTES

Xoanon: Ancient wooden image in Greek temples, i.e., an icon.
Basma: The frame of silver covering certain icons completely, except for
faces and hands.
Maphorion: Head-dress, veil.
Hodigitria: The woman who leads; a type of madonna on the icon.
Philoúsa: The one who loves (or kisses).

About Our Contributors

THEODORE ROETHKE's notebook material, both prose and poetry, will be published by Doubleday in a single volume tentatively titled *Straw for the Fire*.

DAVE ETTER's second book, *The Last Train to Prophetstown*, was published by Nebraska in 1968. His third, *Strawberries*, will appear this year.

HAROLD WITT's chapbook, *Winesburg by the Sea: A Preview*, will be published soon by E. V. Griffith.

T. J. HENIGHAN lives in North Gower, Ontario.

ERIC WOLF FRIED, a wildlife biologist living in Albany, has published poems in a number of little magazines.

DAVID SUMMERS is a graduate student in physics at the University of Victoria.

VERN RUTSALA's pamphlet, *Small Songs*, was recently published by The Stone Wall Press. He teaches at Lewis and Clark College.

DAVID SLABAUGH is a graduate student at the University of Montana.

WILLIAM VELDE lives in Iowa City.

SAMUEL HAZO, who teaches at Duquesne University, is the director of the International Poetry Forum.

COLETTE INEZ has appeared in numerous little magazines and anthologies. She teaches in the Anti-Poverty Program in New York City.

MARGARET NORDFORS is a graduate student at the University of Washington.

SONYA DORMAN's book, *Poems*, was recently published by Ohio State University Press. She is working on a novel.

BARBARA HAMLIN is a graduate student at the University of Oregon where she also works in the Office of Minority Relations.

ROBERT TAYLOR, JR., is a graduate student and teacher at Ohio University.

FLOYCE ALEXANDER works at Washington State University and has published poems and reviews widely.

LINDA PASTAN's first book of poems will be published by Swallow in 1971.

BETH BENTLEY's first book of poems, *Phone Calls from the Dead*, whose title poem appeared in this magazine, will be published this November by Ohio University Press.

JOHN TAYLOR is working as a graduate student in the University of Pittsburgh's Theatre Department on a Rockefeller grant.

TOM WAYMAN lives in Vancouver, B.C., and edits *Transpacific*.

JOHN MORGAN is living on Long Island and working on a novel.

HENRY CARLILE, who teaches at Portland State, recently received a Young Writer's Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

ADRIEN STOUTENBURG's most recent book of poems is *Short History of the Fur Trade*. Caedmon Records will bring out six records this year based on her juvenile folk-tale books.

GUNNAR EKELÖF (1907-1968), the "most original Swedish poet of the century," published seventeen books of poems during his lifetime. Penguin Books will soon publish a selection of his work translated by Leif Sjöberg, who teaches at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and W. H. Auden.

Wanted: Patrons for Poetry Northwest's Donors' Fund

THIS FUND, generously subscribed to in the past, made possible the beautiful covers, chiefly by Northwest artists, and the two annual poetry prizes: the \$100 Helen Bullis Prize and the \$50 Theodore Roethke Prize.

If you would care to be a donor this year, in any amount beyond the price of a subscription, your name will be listed prominently in this space in our Winter issue, and you will earn the gratitude of our numerous gifted contributors, our editorial staff, and our growing national audience. All gifts to *Poetry Northwest* are tax deductible.

If anyone would care to establish, or help establish, a new prize, in any amount or of any kind, the editor would be glad to discuss the possibilities by correspondence.

