

Poetry

NORTHWEST



SUMMER 1971 / VOLUME XII / NUMBER 2 / ONE DOLLAR

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POETRY NORTHWEST SUMMER 1971 VOLUME XII, NUMBER 2

Published quarterly by the University of Washington. Subscriptions and manuscripts should be sent to *Poetry Northwest*, Parrington Hall, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington 98195. Not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts; all submissions must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Subscription rate, \$3.50 per year; single copies, \$1.00.

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Distributed by B. DeBoer, 188 High Street, Nutley, N.J. 07110; and in the West by L-S Distributors, 552 McAllister Street, San Francisco, Calif. 94102.

POETRY NORTHWEST

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Beginning with the Spring 1972 issue (Vol. 13, No. 1),
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POETRY NORTHWEST

SUMMER 1971

Richard R. O'Keefe

THE COLLOQUY

At first I wouldn't walk there anymore.
Now I check every summer. I haunt the spot
At low tide on the point. He's always there,
Waiting for me to find him, stretched out flat,
Spreadeagled, claiming for himself our shore
Forever as his home, the gray white
Body inflated like a rubber toy.
I almost step on him, in the same way.

The rediscovery blinds me until the holes
Mean eyes, nose, mouth. In a shocked clarity
The thing becomes human, and what appalls
Sense is reduction to analogy.
The senses test: I rehearse my hand that pulls
The Masonic ring, thieving identity,
Until the finger starts to come off. Then
I keep the identical vigil in the sun,

Wait for the R.C.M.P., fight off crows,
And get to know the man from the newspaper
Photos that fleshed his face. It's this long pause
We celebrate yearly now together.
It's really why I comb the beach—this news
From him. He never fails, while tides whisper
And gulls demonstrate. I crouch above him. He
Repeats the story: genesis, the sea

Slime birth to death dropped back into the womb,
Resurrection's history of currents,
The memory of algae, a dark scum
Integrity, the crabs' intelligence,
And, surfaced in the sun, the glimpsed wild dream
Of whales. I listen with indifference.
Then something else occurs. He means himself,
That he is dead, that I must live enough

To seize the light leaking from his eyes
To mine, a kind of rope a drowning man
Might throw the sinking sun to make it rise
To turn back time or start it all again,
A spidery projection the abyss
Swallows finally. That what he was is gone,
The complete world he made in that eroded skull,
That it was not enough. That I must feel

The . . . But I miss the rest, always. I fail.
His words drown. Terns scream, and the slapping tide
Rises between his outstretched arms until
Water buries the memory of the dead.
I climb the bank and scratch open the dial
Of my transistor radio. Overhead
Six crying whimbrels cut a wedge in air,
Perhaps migrating desperately somewhere.

Tom Wayman

Four Poems

Poem composed in Rogue River Park, Grants Pass, Oregon, after Wayman's car stopped dead on the Oregon Coast in the middle of a howling rainstorm and had to be towed first to Yachats, Oregon, where it couldn't be fixed and then one hundred miles through the mountains to Eugene, where after it was repaired and Wayman started out again his accelerator cable parted and he had to run on the last dozen miles or so into Grants Pass at midnight with his throttle jammed open and spend the night waiting for the garage to open which is at this moment working on his car, or rather waiting for a new part to be shipped down from Eugene (and which garage, incidentally,

would fix the cable but fail to discover that all that high-rev running would have blown the head gasket on Wayman's car causing frightening over-heating problems the next day when Wayman did try to blast on down to San Francisco)

Let me not go anywhere.
Let me stay in Grants Pass, Oregon, forever.

OPENING THE FAMILY

Conversation opens the family.
As we talk, the doors of the faces swing apart
like the mirrored front of a medicine cabinet.
In each opening is the face of the child.
Here, as a child, is the father without a mother.
The uncle who was not close to his brother.
Here are the carpenters, who were the family
as children themselves.
The tailor, the file clerk, his wife, and the rabbi.

The faces of the child inside are moving.
Led by the hand, the faces walk on through the dust.
From Spain across Europe to Russia. Mile after mile.
Russia to England. England to Canada. Centuries.
We cannot stop straggling forward.
Because we are not salmon, we cannot die
when the children are born.
Because we are not bears, we cannot go off
when the children are raised.
There is even the child who grows up
and has no family. After a time
there is a family around her, too,
hiking through Alberta.
Strung out one by one, we move together
through the landscape. Children and parents.
The child is born alive from the body of the mother.

And now she enters the corporations.
What is it like to live in the corporations?

It is to find their symbols everywhere:
in the furthest towns in the bush.
Gulf. Shell. Greyhound. It is to see them
as constellations over the forest.
As a principle of nature. It is to wear
their mark all your life like a signet ring.
A Dunlop Tires jacket. Softball uniforms
labeled Westcoast Transmission or Montreal Trust.
It is the conception of
the good of the company.

This is what the family moves through now.
As through the Czars. I see the lives
as a street of neon signs
forming and changing. But always
the face of the child comes through.
When the forests are cut
the second growth is alder.
Left to itself, a stand of lodgepole pine
is replaced by spruce, the climax species.

The child is born alive into the corporations.
The child is inside the family.

VISITING THE FAMILY

Then I am not in, but with
the family. I want to walk around and look
in each face. Who are we?

The parts of an automobile. Of an egg.
We are together playing ping pong
when there is the cry of a child
down the corridor. Doors open.
In each a face looks down the hall
at the child. That is us
in the doorways. The ball dribbles away.

I ask everyone what it is that they dream.
I dream my father is dead
and I am always afraid of the corpse.
Once we were small merchants; the body lay
uncovered by the cash register to prevent theft.
What is the dream of the family?
I think we are in a race between getting a dream
and death.

Family is water.
A stream pushing over the land
around stones, through a forest.
Small waves lap on a sandbank, curl
around wood leaning out of the earth.
Wet leaves are matted against the bank.
The water passes below an abandoned steering wheel.

Who belongs in the family? The father,
the mother to be arrive together
out of their past. They are strange
with each other, there is love, but the child
is certain when she comes, arrogant in crying:
this is the family!
Then the children are parents. What family is theirs?
Is it by who comes first, who moves whom
into life? I want to think about this.

Family is a wound. Death opens it.
Joy opens it.
Marriage opens it. A funeral opens it.
A wound that is always healing,
a happy pain that is a memory of worse:
a consciousness of healing.

The telephone rings.
It is the family.

ANNIVERSARY

Along Main Street, the groceries are lonely.
All afternoon in the rain they wait sadly for children and trade.
The Chinese are weeping for earth: their markets call themselves
Owl, Blue Sky. On corners the whites' own
the stores are named *Granny's* or *Hap's*. All are stuffed
with the gear of the stomach: loaves of eggs, jars of bread, boxes of
soft drinks,
rolls, bottles, household cement. If you come softly
into them near midnight
you will hear the owner talk to his food:
whispering to the spaghetti, admonishing his cabbages.

A strange district, this where I live. Suburb of rain and old trucks.
Stubby fingers, and boats in the yards.
The houses wooden and trim, or decaying.
Marvelous events occur here: a man is in love with his wife.
A dog suddenly dies under the wheels of a Buick.
A boy has a book with an entire automobile inside.
But mostly the pavements lead on to jobs, women, a future.
To work where you are given yourself only at night,
alone, when you can put a hand on it.

In this region, at last you will arrive at our house.
Green and crooked, it sits on the street like a cloud.
For a year it was named for the land, no girl would live in it,
then it took on the rain, and it grows.

For water began it. The landlord arrived in this country
by water, with most of our neighbors. And the house
is in love with its plumbing: pipes appear everywhere
like wires, slinking through rooms and radiators
looking for cool air. The electrical part of the house
is jealous: lamps descend ominously out of the ceiling
on cords yearning to touch ground, to complete themselves.
Nothing can convince the woodwork to stand.

Door posts slouch, the lintels hang desperately.
The walls have retired and lean away from the floor.
Wallpaper is sick of being painted over and over:
its latest face looks ashen with disease.

About this, the landlord does nothing,
pleased with his immigrant houses, his rents and slow savings.
And neither do we, who live in it,
for a year now certain that each season here will be our last.

This winter we are easing deeper into the rain,
our ache for money undulled by the weather.
But bread gets made in the kitchen, and a union
and something like home has spread through the place
until every nail glows with it. Now
when a hook loosens, and a mirror drops
it lands somewhere inside us. Our hours here
have marked us: the mirror, like the house itself,
falls into our common life.

Greg Kuzma

Two Poems

PANTS

1
I am led.
My pants lead me.
They want to sit down
on smooth benches
or stand straight on line
in the most unlikely places
so that their creases will
relax. Forgive me
being here at all, ticket taker,
I have no money.

2

Late at night while
I sleep they like to lie
beside the bed
as vivid as dogs.
They dream they are the legs
of a man
and when they wake
I am in them like
spirit. They rise
and stand, stretch,
and my heat goes into them
like sunlight into a peach.

3

We are out walking.
My pants are moved to save
me from the speeding car.
I am removed, my legs leaping
as if the pants snapped them.

4

And they go their own way.
Inside my legs are lost.
Where my leg turns left
the pants skew right.
Where my legs fill
like a delta the pants
tighten like a rapids.
Where I thin they bloom.
They have their own
curtains and weathers.

5

When we go into the water
together we cling to each
other in some kind of agony.
We know who we are most stranger
to.

6

I need to get somewhere.
It is cold, the moon has
just gone in, it is late,
all the bars are closed,
an old man lopes by in his
exhausted pants, a woman
is throwing a man's pants
down the stairs and shouting
obscenities, the man follows.

Up ahead the pants of
the policeman turn grimly
in the streetlight, confident
and dark. The policeman
is poking in the gutter
at an old pair of pants
that will not wake up.

7

I go by silver in my pants.
Smiling and generous.
A hero of my minute.

SUMMER

I am one of the citizens
of this city I have my
small patch of grass my
sidewalk to protect my
mailbox stuck like an ear
to the front porch
my back yard where I lay
down my pointless tools
to run to the mailbox
to see what it has found
out and my new pale
refrigerator inside which
the igloo of beer cans
stands firm in the dead wind.

JONATHAN AND I FIND A DEAD SPARROW

Beating, beating, beating, beating
deeply into light
he asks me
again my son

how the light we walk in
is the light we walk in.
I imagine
heats to ruin stars,

struggling to tell
how fine it is
to walk hand in hand
with a son under the sun.

I am certain
I have no words
plainer
than his soft grip on me.

Then we find the sparrow
broken inside,
in two. I know
there's a sign.

I'm sure
I can reach him
without methods, without answers.
He says it's dead wet feathers

and I flinch—
how can he forget he came
to his mother
how long ago, dizzy, weeping

because he found
a film-skinned blob
old shell new,
soaked bubble dead on the porch?

Still that's all he finds,
a floppy neck in wet feathers
off its wave length.
He's going to tell his sister.

I could go on
to say how I climbed a maple
on the edge of a graveyard
to read Basho

and found a startled mother sparrow
mad on a squeezey, cheeping nest
of woven twigs—
how strangely I climbed down.

What shall I do with my wisdom?
Weeds in a cracked stone.
I continue
in his warm hand.

GIVING A LECTURE ON *DEMIAN*

Growing quiet
they remind me of a grass path
closing in a field.
Each voice stops like a shadow.

I'm tempted to tell them
how carefully silly it feels
watching them force a silence
terrible as empty notebook pages.

But that would glance across their brains
like sun warps

sheer in mica edges
which won't be on the test.

I'm tempted to wait
until they feel the silence
with a nervousness, showing
how they can't stop stopping.

The chairs are gentle hands.
Our pulses find the way
through our blood
without interrupting.

And I begin
with the truth of where we are,
eyes grown
carefully in our heads.

I discuss the sense of shells,
birth holes, birth flashes
where the body wriggles
into wordless horizons,

fragile holds
woven in body heat
as the nest is woven in light
from bottomless grains

always breaking cycles
but never in two.
My hands point into the room,
thinking mountains.

The next sentence,
unspoken,
rises, turns, veers in my mind
like a lucid fish.

I want to keep it
for newness. I feel it

but I can't remember
how it begins.

The outline's no help.
The earth moves. We see
the sanity of the sun.
The sentence comes back

and I begin
letting breath into a word.
Its noise is pure as a wren
bursting from Buddha's stone nose.

THE RHETORIC

For Jennifer

The leaves in your story
fall like the lines on the page
because you thought of snow
deep as memory.

With the whiteness of your mind
you give us a season
where the house loses angles
and nothing shows in the mirrors.

The garden and the street
change out
to radiance,
trackless and pure.

Such cold,
where you want no one,
no one wants you,
startles like the story

of the Buddhist monk
coming to the child

freezing by the road,
smiling into snow, going on.

Such clarity fills
the black and white house
you drew to ease your anger
when I asked you to draw a mouse

thinking your nickname
would tease you into animal space:
Instead the right-angle house
is black to match the bird

settled on the smiling clock
whose twelve-dot face
goes twenty dotted squares in the oil heater,
goes infinity on the rain-dotted window

high in the white room where
black table, black chairs,
black candles, black fire form
an "All Sold Out" door.

Your story and your drawing
follow a weather
through which people move
with the privacy of fossils.

I know such lines survive
our fingerprints, our cares.
I've seen holes wear out roots
and trees hang inside out.

But when your mother's body comes to mind
I move through the house
with a shock,
unable to breathe enough.

And having fallen dizzy
with you in the sea,

having grabbed you back from waves
I've felt you grip me with that shock,

holding on
to the inside of our minds,
the breathing out knob
happy on the breathing in door.

Colleen J. McElroy

Two Poems

HALF A WEEK

Monday I awoke with a case
of the uglies.
Skin burlaped across my chin,
My cheeks were ungainly dunes
of black lava
Absorbing cream without recognition.
I sat in the mirror,
A Madison Avenue conjure woman.

Tuesday I walked around
inside myself all day.
Looking out, I never saw
my face.
Met a man who knew 16 shades
of white
but only a single shade
of black.
He tried fitting me
with several blond wigs;
And in the mirrored light
of his eyes,
My image grew duller and duller
Until finally—he disappeared.

I gave up Wednesday to a woman
with a cinnamon slash of lips

and pure genes.
Just donated the whole day
Intact, like her hymened thoughts.
She comes from good stock
And when she comes
it is with breeding, culture,
and money.
That sphincter of a mouth
assured the world of birth control.

Thursday I covered myself
with words.
Situation hung from my left shoulder,
And delight brushed the insides
of my thighs.
I plucked black mood
from the hair of a blonde
And hung it from my breasts.
Though I truly searched,
I couldn't find anything decent
to give her in return.

SWEET ANNA TOOK TIME

Snakes
shed skin,
a gentle thin
shell too tight for fit;
but ladies unfold.
Some bleed,
others find virginity
a state of mind.

Somewhere in the middle
of the war,
sweet Anna took time
east by northeast;
her baffle head
a seamless case of morals,

her slippery skin in smooth
black bulges
like the emerald and lime
shadows of sweet peppers.
A chambered vacuum.

Soft safe Anna
packed case after case
of bullets for the boys
who became men,
while Anna
became Sweet.

Somewhere in time,
the Allies invade
with case after case
of the dust she checked;
her velvet fingers flecked grey.
She sits facing east
in the light from those beaches,
the wire mesh window
shadows her face.
A setting for a folk opera.

Anna watches for the enemy
and listens
to mama's drone.
The boy checks the beach
as the voice ticks on;
his fingers weep
and he creeps
through the mesh.
In one sweet hour,
the battle is won.

In her net hose,
she hunkers
wet and sweet;
and when she packed for
nowhere

at war's end,
Anna could not be found.

So Sweet returned.
She keeps her bed
virgin clean
and patches her shell.
Somewhere in time,
her mind
snaps shut
with a final dry popping
sound.

Peter Wild

THE CANDIDATE

Mornings he spits out a few
rotten teeth with the toothpaste
and a little green blood.
gold doubloons roll from his belly.
and with a crust of toast
still wedged in his mouth

he begins running through the day
in his rubber suit
running toward his shadow
a brown smoke
he hopes to never jump through,
pursued by other shadows,
with nails
and lugged boots

targets popping up, girls
and corpses lunge from bushes,
tear at his clothes
or stand pointing at their exposed
organs

through the vague afternoon storms
that circle, curling strips of bacon;
and a cat as big as a house
bristling with baskets

finally having feasted
on leather and tendons
locked in his home,
folds himself into bed;
lies a machine in its crate.
the wolf-eared moon
steps out of the hedges,
lays its chin on his sill . . .

Stephen Dunn

Three Poems

BIOGRAPHY IN THE FIRST PERSON

This is not the way I am.
Really, I am much taller in person,
the hairline I conceal reaches back
to my grandfather, and the shyness my wife
will not believe in has always been why
I was bold on first dates. All my uncles
were detectives. My father a crack salesman.
I've saved his pins, the small acclamations
I used to show my friends. And the billyclub
I keep by my bed was his, too; an heirloom.
I am somewhat older than you can tell.
The early deaths have decomposed
behind my eyes, leaving lines apparently caused
from smiling. My voice still reflects the time
I believed in prayer as a way of getting
what I wanted. I am none of my clothes.
My poems are approximately true.
The games I play and how I play them
are the arrows you should follow: they'll take you
to the enormous body of a child. It is not

that simple. At parties I have been known to remove
the kind of book from the bookshelf
that goes best with my beard.
My habits in bed are so perverse they differentiate me
from no one. And I prefer soda, the bubbles just after
it's opened, to anyone who just lies there. Be careful:
I would like to make you believe in me.
When I come home at night after teaching myself
to students, I want to search the phone book
for their numbers, call them, and pick their brains.
Oh, I am much less flamboyant than this.
If you ever meet me, I'll be the one with the lapel
full of carnations.

MIDNIGHT POEM

This could be significant.
I raise my arms
straight over my head

sure enough
they won't stay together
one of them hears something

evidently, and goes off
to conduct a symphony
around the world

the arm that stays
wonders if it must be part
of an allegory

or an inhuman modern dance
its fingers start to show
the mentality of victims

they claim the thumb
is aloof, indispensable
a fist

begins to form
without it,
there is no danger

in this part of the country
it can get a ride
by simple assertion

and be miles into Nebraska
before my shoes need tying
this can be stopped

anytime I want
though it isn't too late
nor am I too old

for it to go on till morning
or till my arms play dead
across my chest

THE LOSS

Even the tips of their fingers
seem to be retreating

their eyes appear ransacked
of what was wide and American

if you had told them
that history is a small circle, that

toward everybody
a line is moving

they would have laughed
they were the kind

who lose their teeth
when a jack-in-the-box

comes out swinging
though now everything is clear, clear

as an old telegram.
Some are sitting by themselves

some have folded their hands
as far removed from prayer

as poker players who have found themselves
with nothing

John Taylor

Four Poems

THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE BRETHREN AT CHORAZIN

- 1 Have these bible-pushers ever considered
- 2 The unholy effect of holy writ?
- 3 Look upon me, a child spoiled
- 4 By never being spoiled and by continuous serious discussion
- 5 Of how I could be good on my own because
- 6 I was not as other children—
- 7 False counselors,
- 8 Worshipers of regularity, applicants of Mum,
- 9 Winders of watches,
- 10 Winders of mainsprings in guts,
- 11 Quick-trigger smilers
- 12 Telling me I had to be good to get by.
- 13 I know that God so loved the world that he gave
- 14 His only begotten son,
- 15 But did my father have to take the idea to heart,
- 16 A summer rerun?
- 17 I have taken Abraham and Isaac to heart,
- 18 I can't believe in the handy ram,
- 19 I know who Big Daddy wants big daddy to cut—
- 20 On the best medical advice I was circumcised at twelve
- 21 Because I stained the sheets.
- 22 And I got the word:

- 23 Duck
- 24 Keep your head down
- 25 And you may be allowed to live
- 26 If you don't really try.
- 27 Hosannah to the Lord in His Fatness,
- 28 Hosannah to the seven lean kine,
- 29 Hosannah to my small pot belly,
- 30 The only thing that's really mine.

Selah.

BOAST

Some day I will write
One single poem made of iron
That even if it rusts
Will stain the memory
Of whatever men speak English,
And if there are none left
Will make the translators wake up at four a.m.
Grinding their teeth.

"THERE'S A MAN GOING ROUND TAKING NAMES"

Flames, flames
People the emptiness behind the eye.
There's a man going round taking names.

Take my name
If you must put these people on your list—
Another cipher which will not be missed.

Whether or not
I count, whether or not it matters now
If anybody else is in the know,

Put down my name,
Although you cannot hear it for the flames
Locked in the paper where you write our names.

READY FOR ANYTHING

Ready for anything,
He flexes himself on the barstool
Like a man-sized biceps—
Though ready for anything,
On his forearm is tattooed
NEVER AGAIN
And a man in uniform.

He loses every argument
Because there are other things than arms
And there are tattoos he does not have,
Invisible,
Waiting to spring,
Flickering in the mind
Like the concealed fluorescent.

He is a casualty
Nobody noticed,
He hardly notices
Except when he tries
To open the fist of himself
And cannot
For the long cramp.

I. A. Huck

ENCOUNTER, WITH BIRDS AT HIS WINDOW

He can still see the ship to the mainland
chug numbly, glide cloudlessly out of the port,
the green wakes churning up from the prow of the ferry
describing, etching in water the long corridor
growing wider, broader and swept at the edges
like wings of the birds sweeping up from far trees.
Transversing the pyramid, quavers wash slowly,
drift endlessly back to the pier, cutting through

the expanding perimeters drawn from the stones
he kicked over the side. Not for him this time.
Going nowhere, at last going nowhere. He stays,

bearing in mind he knew none of the passengers well,
holding that fact for a while, as if a slight flower,
white flower which, cupped in his palm for a moment,
turns browner before his own eyes, doesn't rot, quite,
but fades from the heat of his hand, and he sees it
and drops it, watches it blend into dust.
They were with him each day at the beach, would swim
off the jetty where he tried to read. Only faintly.
No notion they might have been sailing that day,
nothing urged him to stroll to the port, see them off,
faces loading the ferry, and calling goodbyes to faces.

Recalling his own crossing, braced at the railing
late into the night on the prow of the freighter,
the dark, the black waters with only the stars
arching over, the milky way streaming, dust,
off to the Southern Cross marking the edge
of the sea at the top of a serpentine, dragon-
like stellar arrangement which traced nearly
half of the sweep of the sky. Watching the
phosphorus, all the night pitching, the dipping,
the roaring of foam spraying biting full
in the face, such abyss, such a lost empty knowledge,

or walking the lane to his cottage, transecting
the deep, pungent shadows cut over the asphalt,
the thorns and the spear-palms flat bulwarks against
the soft fields swept with light from the quarter-
moon, streetlamps spaced block upon block shining
brightly with emanant lines iridescently glowing,
to hear from a hill some tin music, and deep
down the pasture faint squeals of some lovers.
Eyes on the sea or his ears upon land, at his back
or malingering slightly, peripheral, circular;
best feeling drawn to his heart's content. Best there.

(Corfu-Seattle: October, 1969, to October, 1970)

T. Alan Broughton

MOUSETRAP

We set the poison
in the eaves
directly in the path
we heard them scurry over
in the night.
Delicate and gold
the seeds fell out
around the open mouth,
a deadly cornucopia
spread for greed.

Not until dark
and we were bunked
did I question why
we'd put it there.
The noise they made,
the fact they weren't invited,
the fear they'd eat more
than they should:
each reason sputtered
lamely on my lips

and then they came:
the hasty feet
like pebbles rolling down,
the squeak and chitter
as they found
intruders in some corner,
unreasoned gnawings
on the end of things.
Your silence was
as eloquent as mine.
We scarcely breathed
and hardly slept all night.

We did not speak of it
until at dusk you said
"I hope they die outside."
We watched the lightning
distantly at play,
drank wine
and hoped to see
the deer come to the pond.
There are things
more essential to our lives
than mice.

And yet
when the light was almost out
and the skitter began
its hieroglyphs of sound
we smiled as though
the gravestone had rolled back
or wishes could be antidote
to death.
All night they cut
bright diamonds in our dreams.

Until the bait took hold.
Now our sleep
is undisturbed and flat.
There's nothing much
in wind to listen to,
occasional storms come
then they pass,
and only what we think
can do us harm.
Night after night
is unexceptional
in its calm.
Only a little thing
has come,
and gone.

L. H. Butrick

WHAT'S TO BE DONE?

It comes on stupid to a modern ear
The geographical metaphor:
Those hills and dales and parks
Venus offered to Adonis
(Awfully cultivated, tame, and British).
But what are we if we're not explorers
Who launch our rockets

As we launch our bodies
Most delightedly into unknown spaces
Toward discoveries by which
We're caught beyond escape?
The heat of Venus may burn up the rocket
Meeting the great thrust
Curl the silly, melting toy
On the lip of her steaming vortex:

But who's going to turn her down?

Joan Swift

YOUR HANDS

I was grass you fell upon
that morning, quick as a storm,
the black cloud of your hulk
in through the door and my neck
seized like an ancient town.
My throat full of its scream,

your hands taking the sound,
toppled quietly.
I know I'd have died right there
on that perfect marble floor
held in your hand and your hand
like a fish gone glassy of eye

sinking and floating up,
but then I became your moon
the way you turned me around,
my mouth under your hand.
My light and my body spun
in that gravity, your grip,

and my light and my body went
before you like a candle
you carried down the hall,
though my light was almost spent.
And though I was stronger than wax
your hands were two black rocks.

Then I became your bow.
You bent me. Always your face
stayed on some other shore.
Behind me, dusky law,
you crooned in your thick voice
of snow-white women. My fear

and my guilt gave you a knife.
Blade silver, all that gleam
poised to enter my back,
it hovered, an old grief
enormous in that room.
And I became your stick

for striking the wrong world.
Your cup, your loaf, your slave.
There was hate and there was love.
After, I had to kneel
facing the closed curtains,
trying to believe the sun

becoming their color. Sat
listening to the house.
Gone. But those two fierce hands
of yours, they stay like islands
still unmapped, the palms' fate
curving along my face.

Margaret Nordfors

WHEN THE CHICKEN COOP TURNED INTO A
SPECTROHELIOGRAPH

He let me paint, star-white over sawdust.
Paint feathered, ran over scratch and chicken wire.
When he wasn't bright he was brilliant to me,
owned the front half of our rabbit.
He, as last rooster, never flew at the grandfather.
Books crowded from his hands at the sun he studied.
Light slanted, prisms locked in for his instruments.
He'd crack them open to the yolks, sun spots

in odd and even numbers showing what made warmth.
I knew he could store light back behind the woodshed,
tell us the weather report for the unknown.
This would be the last magic show in that backyard,
not for the admission price of one straight pin
we also charged for plays up a long attic step.
There would be the sun up his sleeve quicker than my eye.
His staging would be immense; it had always been.

Rick Foster

VEDIC POEM

"I am heaven," says the husband, "thou art earth."

That's how they put it in Vedic times.
But haven't you and I seen the rain
gather and stay, pouring down and down
for days longer than soil can withstand
till the brown river was summoned to wrestle us
into a bitter, fresh wilderness
God knows how many hundred miles
away from our tame intentions.

Robert Wallace

Two Poems

IN ONE PLACE

—something
holds up two or three leaves
the first year,

and climbs
and branches, summer
by summer,

till birds
in it don't remember
it wasn't there.

THE MONDAY-BANNER

It is dollar-green & so long
it takes nearly everybody to hold
it over their heads and march along under
it.

Ross Talarico

THE MISSING LOVE POEM

There is still one wing
That has not risen
From my body.

Under its fold
The ghost of a stolen rib
Still haunts me.

Oh perfect crime, let me
Commit you.
My lips are suspicious

Of words, my hand
Fearful of the blank page.
Can I only wait here

Hoping my anonymous whistle
Is enough to stir
The flutter of a wing,

To bring forth the muse
Of full height?
Oh innocent ribs, let me

Count you.
Your prehistoric cage
Keeps my loneliness

Domestic, alive.
Let the hand that once
Stole from these bones

Strum across
The symmetry of its crime.
Come forward, song,

And bring your woman with you.

Elton Glaser

Two Poems

CHECKING INTO THE BAGATELLE

How gaily the bogus hand,
installed for our amusement,
still swings above the geraniums.
And with what massive tact
the bellboys, sensitive as
safecrackers and as handsome as ever,
wheel the fanatics onto the veranda,

fluffing up the old ones.
To observe them retrieve the bulletholes
from the fluted colonnades
is to feel somehow we have been offered
a prospect of salvation.
And who could neglect the warm day rising
like an accountant over his figures.

Once again with our seasonal flourish
we identify ourselves. How lucky
to have taken room (including at no
extra cost, a writingdesk and three
full-color postcards of Vesuvius
throttling itself like a flagging homosexual)
adjacent to the blond professor
of ethnomusicology, famed Argentine author
of *Prolegomena to the Phenomena of
Blues, Boogie and Schwarzermusik*.
There will be many wholesome conversations
in the generous traces of twilight.

And when the dinner gong blunders
up the stairways, we will descend to
the long tables heaped with delicacies
and help ourselves with no stint
to Jerusalem artichokes and tea of equal parts
pink-root, senna-leaf and boxwood bark
said in the kitchens of Paris to be good
for passing gas and entrenched tapeworms.

Only of the inefficiency of the sauna masseuse
whose prosthetic manipulations, we must admit,
are at least mechanical and at most unique,
have we proper cause to complain.

Nevertheless, on this, our yearly redecoration,
we have no reason to regret
we have once again not gone to Iowa.

ASIDES AND MEMORANDA

Basketweavers ravel the Republic.
The annual rainfall is less than one inch.
We learn nothing from the animals.

Here the desks hunker vast as landing fields,
upholding, blank beyond experience, the pages
bound and released as official records.

The five-sided saga flashes deadpan on the screen.
We love each other during station breaks.
Laughter creeps from under the pillows.

Of all fish, only the shark has eyelids.
Bodies, black with newsprint, are discovered in the
underbrush.
We do not think it is anyone we know.

Reid Woodward

Two Poems

PRACTICES IN SALVATION

1

You never step in the same river
ever.

Our ways
rush-dumping in together
handing down leaves
the slush of fish
a new egg.
Mixing in turns of foam.

Tell them
it is all flow.
Nothing is island.

2

Borrowing clothes.
Never finding the same man
to give them back to.
Too strong he says
pointing into the wind
where his finger bends
back to the slot in his fist.

Flowing apart.
Loving what we saved
from the limitless moment of flow
before our eyes numbed
from the speed.
The mazes of rhythm.
Listen.
The goal must never be set.

THE EXHIBITIONIST

For years I used a thumbscrew
on my life to keep it small,
what could eventually be buried
in a handkerchief or a golf ball.

Then the screw broke
through.
Sunk in.
I began to forget.

The world opened its coat
of leaves for me
and my own past slipped
down around my ankles.
I stepped out.

Since then I keep busy
giving of myself,
taking chances

like this one
as you begin to walk
past my trunk-like shadow
in this unsuspecting park.

And I am on the frontier,
surrounded by fear
and great wooded dreams
thinking
I have actually come this far.

Look at me.

That life could so surprise us!
My eyes, too, are round.

Richard Blessing

Two Poems

PARENTS

I sent them flesh. They ate. That made them young,
Or so, at first, they wrote. When I sent more,
They cursed my rich black blood, swore it clogged veins;
They claimed my fat had strangled every pore.

Absurd? No doubt. But then time proved them wise.
Raw weeds, like snouts, root now their chalky bones;
Dew gathers evidence upon their eyes,
Exhibit A: dead letters to a son.

I wrote *Love, Love*. Harsh seasons turn the winds;
Winter comes down. No messengers get through.
I wire that I am on my way to them.
Silence replies, *Never, not once enough*.

Like graven elders still wrought on some urn,
They wait always *My son* to say *My son*.

TO MY FATHER

I walked out of the den down which you went,
Fell from the family tree you fondly climbed;
I labored long to leave your woman spent,
And came to tell you, father, to tell time.

What should a father know of his son's life,
These myriad deaths required to die a man?
I peered through cracks at your undressing wife
And plucked forbidden plums with trembling hand.

What could a son know of his father's dying?
You crawled into a place I could not follow
And answered with deep silence my small crying;
At last guilt fathered fear and named him sorrow.

Since then, like cobwebs, hands hide in the air;
I flee from Nothing down a spiral stair.

Ralph Salisbury

WINTER 1970, FOX RIVER, ILLINOIS

Gone south, the ice the size of the oven door,
raft for bubbles of maybe dreaming catfish,
mirror for snow clouds, may,
in a day, melt like a meteor reaching the atmosphere.
Over the railroad-tie that used to be
important to a tree, a levee-piling now, berries
crimson as coals in a gust hang,
stems plunged through new snow,
as are my legs, reaching as far
as surfaces—those of their roots, that are their mouths,
and those of strata of clay, and those
of my feet and boots—reaching as far
as surfaces will let them reach
toward the center of an earth said
to be round as a berry or
the bubble of a dreaming catfish.

Elizabeth Libbey

NAGSHEAD

The legend says horses,
lanterns swinging from their wild necks,
tempted ships in the mist
till they rode high on rocks
and pirates
carried men and cargoes
off in the dark.

Tonight, the legend ends.
Their lanterns green in fog,
tourists for a dollar-ten
hunt tideline for galleon bones,
pay to be
fortunate pirates, one-eyed
and rich in the moon.

Once, caught in a sudden storm
of my own, I thought I heard
low voices among invisible rocks,
the grind of wind
in some huge sail, pirates
snarling into the rain, then
the ship broke free, wind
cleared the night. Green lanterns
were the lights of town.

Now I know it is a dream:
to sail home calm, to know
the sea will give you what you cannot give,
and so believe in wind's gold,
the blue North Star—points you won't
find clear on maps—and so believe
you do not hear

the hollow laugh of shallows in the fog
or see those slow lamps walking
through the dark.

Dollar-ten and those lanterns
still burn out. Tourists limp off
to their sleep. If a legend's secret graves
could give me back what's dead,
I'd still hear those horses
pacing, pacing the black surf.

Thomas Brush

Four Poems

IN THE MADHOUSE

My father is committed, November 1970

I can see you still, waving your arms, walking
Down the hallway with the other madmen. My wife said you called
Today, to let me know where you are. You, hiding like a victim
In a cave of bone, coming out when darkness flies from the walls,
Falls in the streets, filling them with night, like my head with old
Dreams, what happened yesterday, what you could remember.

When you crawled through the window to escape, the moon
behind you
Moved and glowed. You told me never to lie but sell what I had
To sell, and if it was me, so what, I could always find another soul.
I understand that now. The lights from the hotels are blue and cold.
You sleep on the floor beside me.

Late at night, I wait for your calls, to hear you tell me
What you've sold today and that tomorrow will be better, tomorrow
Will always be better. And I wait for sleep when I rise in air,
Putting on the worn bathrobe I sent you and walk with you
Through love, old and heavy as life, ignoring those who crouch
By their beds, who sleep with their hands on their faces and hope
That the night will fail.

GRACE IN 1916

The afternoon your second son was born
The half-blank sky swirled to the ground,
Air held the world up and birds
Swung from branch to branch to hold on
To what was theirs. Inside the hallway
Men sat and listened for the sound,
The sound that shimmered over the slanting roofs,
That would burn the houses.

The grass below the window slowed
In its curve for light, the roads
Stopped dead in their tracks and you
Rose from the white bed to see
The child, still as a heartbeat, then blinked
As if nothing new
Had happened.

But the wind had fallen
And time was now and over;
The quick war, the small battle.

Here in morning
I remember the green of your life and try
To run a cadence to what
You were, the trick of catching your breath
In my hands, you seeing your face near,
Folding years to feed a poem.

Trying to find the way,
Night and wind fade the curtains:
The end in sight and all that's left.

THE DREAMERS

They are alone
And the sun is a yellow distance
They drag darkness behind them like death

Hold their heads to the bar
And listen for what rises at night
To save them

They hide in the shape of their faces
In eyes that are round wet stones
They are space between walls
Breath that fills silence
When the wind is as hard as a hand

They sleep in alleys
Falling for shadows
Pulling bricks over them
For warmth for air
Is a woman as soft as a dream
Of night

They squint in the snow of light and wait
For the day to fail
For the narrow time
When their ghosts will rise
In love

THE PROBLEM WITH DREAMS

The problem is to leave the dreams
Behind, to let sleep like rain
Pour from your head, leave the pillows
Yawning where the blankets have been,
Get up on two feet nodding your way
From morning through a hazy afternoon,
Keep your eyes open with the sun rising
On the edge of your face.

Step down out of your wishes
And prepare for a trip, with hats
To keep the shadows inside, a heavy
Coat to keep the cold in, boots to your knees
Will let you know where you're going, wear dark
Glasses and stay away from mirrors.

Let hope like leaves slip from your mind,
Avoid novels without endings, stay away from late shows,
Run through your lectures with snow on your feet,
Have drifts in your pockets, with luck
You'll never have to use them.

But keep a wish
Deep in your mind as in a suitcase,
You never know when you'll run out
Of reality.

Lisel Mueller

Two Poems

POEM IN NOVEMBER

Plain now, with the earth stripped
to its hairshirt, its scars and ashes,
with the woods reverting to wishbones,

that the lone pine among maples
is no one else than the stranger
who carries his secrets under his arms

that the spiral snail, secure
in its house of bone, contradicts
our linear notion of progress

plain, that we are outfaced
by our mirrors, their nerveless eyes
innocent of connections

that the shiny laps and backs
of metal spoons, mere things,
will make our bodies famous

that we fall back on trust
each day, when we ask our shoes
to bear the weight of our lives

REPORT TO THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON VIOLENCE

In the beginning it was my life
against the life of my brothers and sisters.
The murder took place in the dark, in the sea;
winner take all was the only rule.

Later, I tried to kill
my mother, jailer who held me captive
nine months in her tight black cell.
She nursed and forgave me, said
she could not remember the wound, the pain.

Then came the night of the frog,
the lovesick beast that croaked
its way to my plate, my bed;
I smashed it against the wall
to free the man, the prince
under the damp disguise.
Together we burned the animal skin.

There was the night when the squatter
inside my body broke out
with knife and saw and hammer.
After the struggle, we lay exhausted,
she on my breast, I with my arms around her,
the daughter that fed on my marrow-bone.

Things have been quieter lately. Only
a child's occasional terror splits open the night,
and every June of his life the dog sniffs out
a nest of young rabbits and breaks their necks.
Each June of my life I learn to forgive him.

WE HAVE OUR SKELETONS

We have our skeletons. And so
We walk in them. They
Do not rattle. They articulate. They
Are some smooth operators. They
Go right along. Watch a man,
In his skeleton. He is
Amazing! Especially athletes.
Quarterbacks, back-pedaling to pass.
Or Mickey Mantle. Or a horse.
Horses especially. Or a mouse.
The symmetry is damnably clever. Even
A snake is beautiful. He has such bones.
He also leaves his thin skins. His very
Eyes peel off! Ho ho! It's
Quite a business! If you were in
The skeleton business you could make it big.
I may just get my old skull working
And bone up on it. You never know.
I might even end up a skeleton on a yacht—
Like the skeleton of Aristotle Onassis.
I'd make a rattling good lover!

PASTORAL

I've never seen anything eat so slow as cows.
I think I could go to sleep
In the chewing of a green mouthful.
It's a slow dream. Cows
Hardly make a shadow. Trees are pale. There
Are no bulls. Barns are far away.
Tongues are the color of grass.
Milksacks bulge with veins.
They chew so slow I soon begin to drowse.
I've never seen anything eat so slow as cows.

LAUGHTER

I cannot stop laughing. It is very quiet. It
Shakes me. Its source is original despair.
Everything is laughing. Very serious
Faces laugh. Little boys falling off
Bicycles. The slow light
Comes up the water. The dungeon
Is aware. Water has been lapping
A long time. Even Chillon
Is full of air. Even fishes
Laugh. And whales
As they coast by. Even the sun
Until the heavens crack. Even
Death laughs until the ground breaks open.
Little ants look up at me and smile.
Gnats do not mourn—nor whine. Bats sail
Like smiling nuns. Nuns
Crack the walls of Rome. Whole columns
Topple. Great domes.
Only the laughing hyenas are sad.
Smiling madonnas choke back delight.
Soldiers laugh themselves dead. Their
Helmets tinkle on their heads.
I smile back at the ants.
Fathers sail up like geese
Against the wind.

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POETRY NORTHWEST is happy to announce it is the recipient of a \$500 grant from the federally sponsored Coordinating Council of Little Magazines. Since that amount has been given us in the form of matching funds, every tax deductible contribution in support of *Poetry Northwest* from you, our readers, will be doubled until we reach that figure.

