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POETRY NORTHWEST

SUMMER 1998

Jennifer Clarvoe

Three Poems

SONG OF MULTIPLICATION AND DIVISION

O wonderful! O wonderful! O wonderful!
I am food! I am food! I am food!

—Taittiriya Upanishad

Come down the hill,
past the humming renovations,
past the white house holding the promise of dough rising
three times into the night and into the morning,
loaves, soon, for the neighbors,
come down soon,

down the steep crumbling curve of the gravel drive,
and come next spring: new peonies rising,
next summer's blackberries surge in the bare brambles,
come under those hummocks, groundhogs,
moles, snakes, shrews.

So mint will return,
and the sudden asparagus. Soon I
will sit by my window rocking. Just outside,
the birds fight at the feeder. Seed hulls ping
from time to time against the glass.

The albino cardinal
haunts the rhododendron, redoing songs. She sings:
Somewhere inside another seed takes flight.
The rhododendron blooms. Come flower, flower.
Seed, seed. The sun says your body is milk, your baby swims.
The pine says your baby milks your swimming body.
The mole says swim with your baby in the milky way,

Are You Moving?

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one milky body.
One seed hull splits and pings against the glass.
The snake in his sleep says, so, the room is ready.
Divide, divide.

But I sit by the window
rocking my baby. He can see chickadee
sweep patio to feeder, flip from cord
to perch, go greedily after seed.

He sees
these shapes as separate from the winter blur.
Alert.

The dun deer that will cross the yard
to nibble the dutch iris calls to my baby.
The raccoon, who, upside down from the rail contrives
to grab from its hook and disengage the feeder,
to smash it like a cookie jar for seeds, calls to my baby.
Even the cat, who sleuths through the snow
to bring me the shrew with blood on her head,
calls to my baby.

O, come eat! come be!

A COMPANY

Seems like a different window. In the morning:
"teakettle" wren and cardinal,
finches, finches, chickadee-dee, a bustle
bearing the light to the feeder,
arrowing back to the sky:

light as a crowd of birds, a company.

At night, the "proowler" light
makes a solo world appear out there
on the other side of the dim glare,
sketch-light of my writing at the table.

Spotlight: then the hobo skunk,
hobo opossum, garbage-cleaner tramps
sort through seed-hulls underneath the feeders—

all odd lumbering nonchalance
and twitchy discrimination—

though, no, the skunk is neater
on its feet, and, efficiently fierce,
nips a three-inch jag in a garbage bag
to extract Hunan mu-shu. (He's so small,

often he doesn't trip the light at all.)
And the possum moves so low.
The only inhabitants of some "dark out there,"
staged as allegory. Too small to be
dangerous. Too big for a rat—that naked, thumb-thick tail.

Lonely, hungry, fierce, pathetic, obsessed
(five of my seven dwarfs), and then the pained
progress of one I haven't seen before,
or not like this.

It moves wrong. It's not right,
not right as if the radar's skewed,
as if it thinks sick; it half-heaves
into view, effort of
stiff joints, limbo-bones
able to turn
on you but not stand up
for itself, beseeching but looking
away or looking blind,
one mid-size raccoon. Rabid,

one has to think, it's on the list;
a world-size thirst and throat too small,
it keens to drink
air through the ear—
is thrown

from that thirst only to ask
Is it you? Is it you?
who throws this thirst on me?
it will bite you too, such teeth—
I won't let go,

*I'll bite the sky you breathe,
I bit the moon,
I'll bite you soon.
I'll bite you soon.*

But, no, mere bodily hunger drives this beast,
and the psycho-gait's explained—
the back right leg's
a stump, and so's the tail.
This is the numb
stumbling of a creature who has to come
hungering through the impossibility
of grace, or maybe I'd have to say its usual grace,

since what looks awkward is in fact the best
animal efficiency—it serves;
and what look like mistakes,
corrective swerves. Illness of body overhauled
by a mind less than some
inclined to question its clear
and present task, removing itself
from place to place to place.
It sweeps the seeds

then turns to the window and looks me in the face.

BIRDNOTES

In the village, a single bird can be an event,
can be news—just as the appearance
of an available heterosexual male
between the ages of 22 and 60
can be news. It is news, here, for example,
when a Baltimore Oriole shows up at the feeder,
or a scarlet tanager (a pair of them!).
It is news that the pileated woodpecker
sits on the car in the driveway at seven each morning
pecking and pecking away at his imagined
competitor in the sideview mirror—news,

at any rate, that the mirror hasn't broken
like those on all the other cars in range;
to challenge the neighbors' brand new silver Volvo,
the woodpecker flew into their garage.
So their mirrors now sport plastic bags,
rubberbanded to them as in some
science experiment protecting flowering
trees from pollination. Even so,
not all birds are events. They come, they go.
But then that poor lost emu on a rampage
through the village—definitely news,
more so when finally lassoed by the chair
of the Philosophy Department. We
all have news to write to sweethearts, far
away from here, living in cities. See,
we can write with gravity, "Birds are news."
But these are some of the things that constitute
village life. Now, it is summer, and while
I sit by a river (I'm away;
it's not the village river, named for the owls,
but the kind of river that constitutes
city life, along which, summer Sundays,
they block the street to traffic)—

Did I tell you
that *other* piece of bird news, when Linda and I
drove out of the village on a Saturday night
for dinner at a small town restaurant—
roast pork & mashed potatoes, chicken & noodles,
your choice of sides: beans, coleslaw, tapioca—
while we were eating, in come Jane and Perry
and Peggy and Tom, and they want to know
if we have seen the herons. No? They tell us
where to find them, lend us their binoculars.
So, twilight, from the side of the road, I count
two dozen nests, I think, in two great trees:
all eerie charcoal Rorschach: birds emerge
against the sketchy branches as they shift
their stilts. Much squawking. Linda says she sees
the babies lifting their beaks. It's news, it's news.
Now, here, with the riverside traffic blocked so folks

on bicycles and rollerblades glide by—
a brightly-colored, mushroom-helmeted species,
many with the characteristic black
fingerless gloves and shiny kneepads, gliding
by in packs, in one's, two's—this one, now,
skates past my bench in purple sleeveless T,
sky-blue shorts, white baseball cap. She carries
a cup of coffee from Au Bon Pain. There, perched
easily on the brim, her orange parrot
looks on the world with a somewhat jaded eye,
for this is a city—and this is not news,
this is nothing, isn't it? Nothing I
or anyone would write home from the city
to my sweetheart in the village, if I had one.

Dennis Hinrichsen

Three Poems

WAVE THEORY

Blue and silver at first,

then white washing through with presence,
no one speaking,
the twisting, turning one, the one hidden, veiled,
quietly singing
in her evening bath. Imperfect skin—

he held her once—age showing everywhere. Sculpted wood
and memory of ribcage, the
undulations not themselves but of

some deeper movement, as deep
as thought
or memory. Time scalloped and

lingering bell note. Their faces hidden—always—
the looks
on their faces. The sound of them in the dark

(because the child was near) like a bather's quiet singing.
The story he might tell
is this—bees

lived in the walls, made honey—all summer and then
winter, another summer—
until the weight of it undid the nails

and the plaster melted, broke apart in sheets and
the honey
spilled in one towering, golden wave.

He does not touch her now. The one hidden, the one
veiled,
now present in rational aspect.

Geese wheeling above them, the geese so high up
they are vaporous cutouts.

And so he reconstructs from fragments,

lives in his fingertips—all summer, then autumn, winter,
another summer—

hands on thigh; tongue and nipple;

the manic kissing spreading the other's wetness,
the self-made wetness,

from hand to tongue and lip and mouth. *Wave*

theory. A theory of husbands; wives. He wants to know:

when a wave

crashes its whole length—at least here—along

a curving longitude—and then rushes back,

otter-slicked,

greased, so that part of it is silence and

a memory of wave, which part then is cure

to the already

pulverized shoreline? Which part wound?

The wave dissected reveals nothing of its inner
structure.

It is heart-less, organ-less. One

solution cascading as variable into another.

The crashing

a chamber where they spoke and walked.

The wind itself companion so that it lingered

in her hair awhile

so that her hair moved as scarves move—*no*,

he has this wrong, her hair was shorter then—

it was a scarf that moved,

or the wind in her *varga*

so that each gust pressed it closer, wrapped it tighter,
the rain assisting,
matting it down, so that she was

self-contained inside the weather and each word

she spoke—

which was her happiness shouted back

to him—was as if muted by the fabric.

Blue at first, then

silver, then white washing through. A dictionary

of sand equations, drought theorems: *he buys*

a ring

in the New Mexico desert sculpted with waves,

feels married to water.

CONGRUENCIES (I): BLUE HERON

When we saw the heron—where we always see it—

on the dead limb

on the second bend upriver

from the put-in, our backs too were rigid

and branch-like, heron-like,

the muscles uncoiling

from the base of the spine in threaded, pliable fiber,

then running on either side

of the chalked vertebrae

in protective waves (the oars stiff, arms stiff,

backwatering)

so that when the bird bent down

to load its measurable, earthly

volume into the branch,

all things seemed laced
with reflex in that instant—oars, waves, hands,
 branch, those
muscles in the back that are
coarsely feathered and can pulley such inelegance
 outward and
above the water, its flight marking,
seeming to mark, the landscape's narrow cut
 so that I could
follow it, a diminished presence
off my wife's rounded shoulder (her rounded
 shoulder, a point
of landscape—what I steered by)
into the river's next bend.

CONGRUENCIES (II): CANOE

To long for such elegance and narrow vectoring,
 to position
the body just so, that imaginary fulcrum,
the points of balance (my hands placed
 here perhaps,
or tongue in the ear) a string
of energy drawn between us, curved,
 as time is,
bendable. Now hands on gunwales
as fluted as wrists (Are they ash? Yes,
 they're ash).
Something delicate is repositioning.
Something composed of water and memory and
 time is pushing

off into depth and shallowing
mixture. How stones partially hidden
 suddenly
bruise the boat's vulnerable undercarriage.
How we are battered about by current
 like an unguided
stick, something branched and slickened
by whatever temperature that day is, whatever
 adheres
of the lake's ridged greenness,
until it too turns over, softened by touching,
 in the trough
of the waves, and drifts awhile
in that opening of contrary breathing: the lake
 pushing
its one sure form into the sea wall,
and the wall accepting, sliding it back...
 To concentrate
then and float along that shoreline.
To exact pleasure.

SELF PORTRAIT AS A KITE

I am a yellow, green and turquoise Cellular Star,
daughter of Fluted Sled and Hexagonal Roller,
sister to a Rhombic Box, mother of a Mini Phantom.
I am in love with a man-lifting Train.

We come in the colors of kindergarten.
My cousins drag lures for Polynesian fisherwomen,
my aunt releases souls of Nepalese peasants to the heavens.
I am the first item you put in your new home.

I am a six-winged cirrus asterisk within a star of David
within a star of David within a star of David; hear my prayer.
I record batsong a mile high, pass notes
to the sky, carry spinnakers of intercession.

When I was younger I wanted to cover my faces in sheet music,
in snapshots, in newsprint and lists of things to do.
In my lolling I kaleidoscope, changing shape from solid star
to lacy snowflake, from wall of color to backlit tracery.

I have flown for three days at a stretch, and go out to greet
the smallest sliver moon, relieved at its return.
In aurora borealis I sing a lovesong to my skeleton,
in bright cumulus I learn the active verb, alleluia.

When the moon one night is brighter than full I wonder
what tiny incarnation, what speck of a soul ever merited
the tremendous gift of living and seeing,
and fit in the seed of myself? What was it?

THE THINGS WE MAKE BIRDS SAY

borrowing from *The Audubon Society Field Guide to
North American Birds, Western Region, 1985*

I believe the rufous-sided towhee, given the choice,
would rather say, "Must find mate!" or "Caught that worm!"
than "Drink your tea!"

I do not believe the olive-sided flycatcher sings, "Whip-
three-beers!"
or that the white-throated sparrow says, "Old Sam Peabody
Peabody Peabody"
Or "O sweet Canada Canada Canada."

I believe it is only because of
One heart-sick early naturalist
that the magnolia warbler sings, "Pretty pretty Rachel."

I believe the language thrown to the sky's ceiling is more
profound
than "Hip hip hurrah! Boys; three cheers! o yes I am a pretty
little bird;"
or "Utah's a pretty place" or "Chi-ca-go." I do not believe
the Coues' flycatcher sings, "A plaintive 'Jose Maria.'"
do not believe

in the exclamation points at the ends of these representations.
All birds are emphatic in their small, fierce, strong
vulnerability.
I'm far more likely to believe that the MacGillivray's
warbler's song
is "a chanting 'tree, tree, tree, tree, sweet, sweet.'"

But I love the scientists sitting still, listening,
chalice mugs of coffee in their hands,
watching the putty-colored sea for the forty-seven solid hours
it must have taken to produce this sentence about
Cassin's auklet:

"Their weak, croaking song
becomes a mighty chorus
on windy, foggy nights."

I want to know the spring midnight thoughts of the woman
who heard the male ferruginous owl's "poip" and whistle,
ninety to one hundred fifty times a minute, for three
solid hours.
Perhaps she went mad, spends December ringing bells for charity.

I love how we can't transcribe a bird that sings constantly,
how we fail describing the winter wren
("akin to a bubbling stream rushing over stones,")

and the curve-billed thrasher
("a long but halting carol with little if any repetition.")
Better to talk of the geloscopy of the purple finch,
the vagitus of the herring gull.

Because the red-winged blackbird sings
"a loud, liquid 'ok-a-lee!'"
I can believe in one exclamation point
belonging to the birth of spring.

Because the yellow rail emits 'a series of ticking notes
in twos and threes,'
tick tick, tick tick tick, endlessly repeated at night,
"the dozing field mouse can know,
in its dark brain, that sleep is still allowed."

And because the white-winged dove
sings in the South, she coos,
"Who cooks for you all?"
But I wonder what she says in China or Belize.

I sing the praises of the ruffed grouse, whose
voice is used only in close communication,
as in the soft murmur of a female with chicks."
How would human history be revised if we did likewise?

I believe in the emperor goose's "loud musical notes, 'cla-ha,
cla-ha, cla-ha.'"

I believe the female eider duck "utters a grating 'gog-gog-gog.'"
And I believe a bird somewhere sings, "Eider duck eider duck
eider duck eider duck"
simply because it can, on rainy pre-dawn high tides.

I love that the kittiwake says, "Kittiwake,"
that the kittiwake is called "kittiwake"
because it calls, "Kittiwake," in the same way
I love how the coins in my pocket are so very warm.

I love how the New Zealand shearwater, the Manx shearwater,
the black storm petrel, living on the high seas, are generally
silent.
What is there to say in the middle of infinity?
Who is there to listen?

But I believe in the daily existence of the most exquisite
noise
in the world, ringing out in the middle of the ocean, forever
unheard,
untranscribed, untranslated, but echoing in the emptiness,
once the ornithologists motor back to the mainland.

And blessed is Kittlitz's murrelet, one of the least known
North American birds, whose song is undescribed.
Blessed is that secret the world has kept from us.
Blessed is the opportunity, late at night,

to guess how the bird makes known
It is morning, I am here,
It is evening, I am yours.

WHISTLE

I am in that place again.
A place so much smaller than a country.
Smaller even than a town, a congregation,
smaller than a family. Small as a body, a cell
floating within the blood of the body.

What draws you here? ask the ghosts, expecting
no answer, for in their time, when asked,
they too had no answer to give.
The angels whistle, calling to me, as on cold nights
I have called my little dog.

When I bought the dog, I held it in my lap
and sobbed with such horrendous grief
I could feel the place behind my right ear
where a boy accidentally shot me
with an air rifle when I was a girl.
I could feel that place, though he shot me
thirty years ago, open into a fresh wound.

When I am in this place, it is as if I'm wearing
a lead wedding gown, a lead veil and mask,
leaden shoes.

Hello, Annie, I say, for I still walk around,
still must go to the store and purchase, purchase.
Annie, for whom a real lead vest was formed,
to protect all but the right lung from radiation.
Remember, she says, glowing, wistful,
all any of us want is to be loved.

I carry that around with me for the rest of the night,
like some curious poison dropped upon my tongue,
some near-death meant to ward off death.
Love. Is that what we want?

I float, yes, I float like a small lead bullet
through the bone behind the right ear of this, my own
body. I whistle as I re-enter.
I call the little dog home.

LANDSCAPE

I
The dogwood, creamy, individuated
is Father, right down to the transfusion-dot.
A pale-skinned man, quick to flower.
These hills are Mother's, under her mossy
silk wedding gown. She throws the bouquet
and the whole western field blooms violet.
That setting sun, the cherry pie she dropped
on the floor the Thanksgiving after he died.
Fuck it, then, she said, smiling with all her
teeth showing, and scooped it onto our plates.
Those three crosses up the hill behind
the Cut N Run Beauty Parlor, the middle
one festooned with roses, are flowers from
my Grandmother's only hat, pulled off to decorate
my wedding cake, a Lady Baltimore filled
with figs and candied orange peel.
Notice the fields of bloodflowers, the windshield
wipers beating against the rain. Grandfather's
story: Blooming red nicks on his customers'
faces after a quick shave, the beating of straight razor
against leather, steam rising off hot towels
as it does off that small, still lake over there,
unknowable fish beneath its surface like the barber's
unknowable customer, asleep, dreaming of water.

II
In the distance a glossy cow ascends the hill,
a soul wanting to find the highest places.
She struggles from the herd, then squirms
out of the landscape, a florid green dress

she leaves in a heap on the ground.
Now and then our faces appear
in the black reflecting pool of her warm side.
So full of old hope, our faces,
but the world forgets us, we forget
ourselves, and we're gone.
Soon the cow makes her way
into the rattling cedars
and she, too, vanishes
and with her the narrative
whose pages once were edged in gold,
that darkening story, the world.

ECLIPSE AT EASTER

The moon, she is losing
herself. Before, she floated on her back
in the black water, only her round
belly, with its blue veins, exposed.
Now the shadows have taken her under.
The minnows with their bright blind eyes
explore her body with their mouths.
The ends of her hair sway; Red Mars
is the clasp, holding the strands together.

We walk through wet grasses
with our baskets of eggs, slipping
them into familiar hiding places—
the cleft of the firebush, beneath
the cluster of sage, under dead
leaves, where the snowdrops are beginning
to breathe again. The green buds
of the lilacs claw open our blouses.
Pierced by spruce needles, we bleed.

The children are inside, asleep. Their bodies
are changing beneath the murky sheets,
their hair darkening from blonde to brown

to black. Next year they may refuse
to search for what we hide from them.
We'll be alone out here, the drowned
moon's bones knocking against
each other in the current, caught
in the watercress, in the reeds.

We do not see her returning light
so much as taste it, a fine sliver in our mouths,
sweet and metallic, like the silver beads
which decorate anniversary cakes.
Then a thunderous sound, a rock
being pushed away from an underwater
cave, and her whole self rises,
belly up, gasping wind, snails
and hydra in her hair. Something
has changed about her; she's struggled,
she's given herself over. She's meaner,
clearer-edged, more beautiful and full.

We drift inside her light as if we are
her children, as if she will soon give birth
to the second half of our lives.
All around us the eggs are waiting, hunkered
against the cold in their glittered jackets.
The shadows have painted us as well—
orchid, azure, folding into black.

HOUSEBOY

When the mailman brought your ashes I kept them on the porch for
days.

I needed to carry the small box of you, the bones and the ash,
like a baby, in the crook of my arm, down the path of broken glass.
I needed to touch the chips and shards of you,
to scatter you, by handfuls, into water.

Instead, I hired it done—something like that.
Something like writing a check to a barefoot houseboy,
a boy in blue, pajama-like clothes, for a job well done.
He carried you for me over the broken glass.
His feet were so tough nothing could slide through them.
He hummed, half-smiling, used to doing the dirty
work for cowards with full pockets.

He scattered you, that boy. His hands and lower lip shook;
although he never met you he swallowed back his tears.
I put my arms around his thin shoulders.
I smelled his neck, the sandalwood in his clothes.
I love you, I whispered, the words squeezing past the igneous
lump in my throat. I held tight, my whole body
against him, until he pushed me away
with strong, clean hands and ran,
long-limbed, disdainful and wild,
as the dead always run away from the living.

William Olsen

ON ECKHART, AND A MOOSE

He said many prayers to god to rid himself of god.
He would have been tried by his church had he not had the good luck
to die first.

If I knew that fly on the windshield had a soul
my decrepit own might still turn away from it,
whereas he would have kissed its bristly little skull for luck.
He claimed the soul got younger all the time
and called the body an evening knowledge
and was convinced that when the angels knelt
to creatures without a god, twilight blessed both.
But even he wondered how we could finally give our lives away
if no one particularly wanted them,
and whether the merchants of death would ever burst with kindness.
This is what death likes, the yearly ice ages,
June, fresh snow, new aspen flocked with it,
primped white clouds of it impaled by branches or wedges
between twigs, asphalt's intestinal shine,
a pond to beam even late evening,
the arrowhead already far unfurled,
one face of evening to feed on all this sweet rot.
You and I could hear teeth grind to speak more of these matters.
I think I could have heard my own death if I got
quiet enough, and then I could hear clear profit,
and laugh at the tactical ecstasies
as its head laddered into the flowery phrases,
to vacuum clean both sweet and rotten, and the lilies
rode the bull's eye ripples, and ropes of water
streamed when the head pulled up, the eyes—
its face was dark—we didn't know what that or any darkness was—
he said that when the moment was full all time fell from us,
or should have,
and that's how all the roads back home unroll
their bolts of black fabric all the way to all
the goodbyes and all the vast brief mouthfuls,
the narrowing years and the widening minutes.

PARTY OF FIVE

You could put a chair at the end
or push the tables together
but don't bother
This banged-up little restaurant
where you would expect no rules at all
has a firm policy against seating
parties of five

And you know you are
a party of five

It doesn't matter if one of you
offers to leave or if
you say you could split into
a party of three and a party of two
or if the five of you come back tomorrow
in Richard Nixon masks and try to pretend
that you don't know each other
It won't work: you're a party of five

Even if you're a beloved regular
Even if the place is empty
Even if you bring logic to bear
Even if you're a tackle for the Chicago Bears
it won't work
You're a party of five
You will always be a party of five
a hundred blocks from here
a hundred years from now
you will still be a party of five
and you will never savor the soup
or compare the coffee or
hear the wisdom of the cook
and the wit of the waitress or
get to hum the old-time tunes
among which you will find
no quintets

FROM THE BALCONY OF THE HOTEL DELLA SIGNORIA

It is not that I really wish to be
a seller of gloves
in a sliver of a shop
on the via Por Santa Maria
I'd just like to slip into his life
for a day or two and out of this
baggy, wrinkled life I brought with me

Does he have trouble with the key
every morning or just on rainy Mondays?
Now who has called him before he's even
got the lights on? His wife, his mother,
the owner—he keeps nodding into
the telephone The Ponte Vecchio is silent
(gold merchants do not rise early)
but here's sudden color and movement:
a Japanese tour group comes trotting along
at good pace They pause, they look
and they're off again I hope his crossword
puzzle book is thick and easy for this long
gray finger of a day

And you, still asleep on a pile
of your pillows and mine, don't even know
that I went on a journey and now I've returned
I've drunk all my coffee, now I'm starting on yours

JAMES BOSWELL

I bought a copy of the London Journal in a used book store for a dollar. Boswell was new to London, I was new to San Francisco. He was 21, I was 21. He met Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith and Joshua Reynolds. I met Burgundy Phil McGuire, Bad-Talking Charlie and Mad Marie. We were both pretty excited.

Every two or three years, Yale brought out a new volume (thank you, Professor Pottle) and Boswell and I started growing older together,

keeping pace. He followed whores into the bushes in Hyde Park and often communed with the clap. I stared longingly at the hollow-eyed sweethearts of North Beach. He got married, I got married. He wrote an epic poem in praise of the goddess Ammonia. I didn't.

We grew into middle-age. He didn't get along with his father, who disapproved of his life. I didn't get along with my father, who had no idea what my life was, but that's another page in the journal, let it pass. Boswell died at 55. I didn't.

Years passed. Boswell's name went into the language, as a shadow, as a toady, as a lucky fool who wrote a great book somehow, chuckle and snort, a pest who was allowed to loiter in the corners. But Samuel Johnson loved the man. Never doubt my affection, sir, Sam Johnson wrote. Boswell's papers and journals were lost for many decades, but then they were found, in Irish barns and French fish markets. He began to come back to life.

Col. Ralph Isham, a gentleman collector, staked his fortune on the publication of Boswell's complete papers. He hired scholars and engaged printers and each time the edition was almost ready for the press, some farm hand found another trunk in a hayloft. More scholars, more delays, to protect the investment. Isham died broke. But thank you, say Professor Pottle and I.

Boswell was jealous, insecure, petty, pompous, lonely, obsessed, bored, horny, manic, guilty, trivial, convivial and frequently worried, thumbnail of a writer. His picture hangs above my desk. I love the man. When I first brought him to New York, he was displeased by the cramped taxis, the soggy weather and double-breasted suits, but he's come to be very fond of California cabernets, my computer and the novels of Henry James. This morning, I think he's up by the Javits Center, where the hookers work the trucks.

Bob Brooks

URNS AND REVISIONS

Even in stout
sandals or boots,
when you hike the rock
beaches on the Maine
shore you don't
sightsee much:
you keep watch for
where to put
your foot next.
But here and there you
come upon a sand-
patch, a moment's
grace, a Lilliputian
beach you can
stride like Gulliver
and let your eyes go
wandering. Perhaps,
since it's late in the day,
you're in search of a
turning-around point.
Although there's no
law that says "Turn":
if you want, you can
follow the land's
edge indefinitely.
Touch the fingers of
your left hand lightly
to the continent's
outline—the way you
were taught to do
to negotiate mazes—
and keep walking.
North past Eastport
and around the
Maritimes. Up the St.
Lawrence and down

again. In and out
rivers and bays around
Canada to Barrow,
Anchorage, Eureka, San
Diego...the Panamanian
Isthmus, the Gulf's
long curve, Palm
Beach, the capes of
Carolina and
Massachusetts,
as if you're stitching
the whole ragged
land mass in place
like a quilt piece.
You could do that.
All the more reason
why the point you
choose to turn at
has to be extra-
ordinary, a landmark
you won't forget
when your back's
turned. There's one—
a silhouette, back-lit
by the late-day
sun: an enormous
sperm cell, cartoon
tadpole from a life-
education pamphlet,
poised at a tilt
on the beach with its
tail upraised and
its nose on course
to the water. However,
you're still in stride,
and each step closer
to it clarifies it, until
it's only an ordinary
washed-up, bleached-out
tree on the beach,

with its thin end
curled in the air
and a big boulder in
front of it. But you're
not done yet. Now look:
generations or perhaps
centuries of seagulls
seem to have picked
this one particular
rock to crap on,
frosting its great
dome with a thick
impasto; and here
next to it some child,
or idle adult, laid out
spine-shorn sea urchins
neatly on the tree's
fat trunk like crabapples
balanced on a white
thigh. Walk on. Or
I will—whoever's
telling this story—walk
on till what can
never be seen again
can't change, and
then turn, walk back
through it, erase it.

THE NEW YOUNG

Carried by the wind,
a new generation has been arriving,
like seeds from a neoclassical dome
exploded at the end of a stalk,
like angry settlers not believing
a whole lot what senators report.

Carried by the water
in their blood and brains,
they are slowly taking their places
in between the old buildings.

The screens snap on.

••

They will be heard though some are quiet right now.
They will be strong and might go off to a war.
They will tune the strings of the weaving machines
to the way skin likes to be touched by fabric.

They will invent new handicaps and general maxims,
and some houses will be mansions with virtual rooms,
hidden landings, virtual massive parks to go to
after the workday, where sweat will be as real

as ever, where each human eye will have formed
from its first mergings in the first cells
and display by shape and color intelligence
of the species, the astonishing iridescence.

••

These folks are flying in behind the stealth jets.
They are climbing off the heavy backs of horses
or out from beneath the chassis of machines.

Some of them have our faces and some have faces
we have never seen before.

And many have already seen farther
than we have been able to imagine.

SOME PRACTICE

"What is the object of basketball?"

—Jim M.

The object might be the subject,
the ball itself, with or without
anyone else. It might be the air
in the court, the space opened
where the ball flies. The object
might be how you find yourself
loosening, stretching more deeply.
With the flames of your cells
turned up, you can move
from that heat, memory leading
right to this point, the cellular
heightening, molecular lightning,
quickeness and heat.

With others there, obstacles
and openings, the weight and stature,
moving through a Rodin exhibit
in a split Kandinsky, too much
can turn a reversal, a rebound
in the medium of breath, sky
reaching in as you swing through
to wait, to cut in the open.
You can sometimes happen
into position a split
second before you would.

If you are alone, you might begin
at middle range and slowly move
closer and further away, loosening
as your body loosens, to then

suddenly look and shoot,
drive and intuit an arc, feeling
the body inside opening air
lifting the ball while leaping,
letting the ball carry. The goal
might be seeking, finding release,
letting thought move unattached,
opening, stretching, leaping.

You can do what you do
roundly, in clarity.

Nance Van Winckel

ICE, THIS WAY AND THAT

Up top, a beautiful man's lips on my
fingertips. Snow powdering the peaks.
Twilight. He's pulled my mittens off.
Amber sheen on his hair. Mt. Hoodoo
capped by clouds. He opens the truck door.

All summer we'd been two beetles, noses
down. Spindly legs dragging our weights,
oval and iridescent. To look but not
to touch. Slow sun over the Selkirks.
His truck idling. My bike stopped.

Even in good weather, hard grind
of those gears downhill. Rigorous and on
the way: cold mouth that won't shut.
Squeal of back-pedal and brake-pad.
Blackly personal: the fly-infested pool.

Inside, the red vinyl slick, and the glare
of a gold-domed stick shift hard and
headed toward the lake ice below. Metal
sparks speckling the dark, his plow clears
a path down, pushes everything aside.

Older, much older, he held my hand
to his mouth. Snow on snow. Behind us:
the road already wider, longer. The door
creaking open. Memory's tail dragging.
The red interior. Tangle and claw.

Plow-clink and heart-click, the held breaths
of the switchback. And on both sides
every snow-flag gone down. Skid and recoil.
Pushing what we could aside. White light
of the snow, whiter light of the lake

straight below and too sweet to blacken.
The mar of our names there. And his face
in its great sill-life of beauty. An iced radiance.
Half-frozen where they find us. Hooked ghouls
of the next life—we're dangled; we're yanked back.

Thom Ward

SCHADENFREUDE

There's no delight in standing
 behind my metal cart,
the tedious wait to hand over coupons,

the week's last dollars to the cashier.
 But to browse
The Enquirer, learn that the government's

Secret Alligator Man demolished
 the laboratory, killed
a biologist, then scurried to the swamps,

perhaps at this moment floats
 surreptitiously
toward pina coladas, a pontoon

full of lawyers, their amethyst
 wives, makes
for a perverse if only brief

satisfaction. Like the humid
 summer evening
in the park, bullheaded Patty Minx

kicked the winning goal into the net
 for the opposing
team, the day Bob Tankenburg,

fast to boast about his Porsche,
 was nabbed
doing fifty-six down Main,

his license on the bureau by his bed.
 When the Mormons'
proposal for a new church was bounced,

Presbyterian elders chuckled to themselves,
 then launched
an impromptu membership drive,

targeted angry parishioners
 in Smith's flock.
Some people repudiate Schadenfreude,

say it doesn't exist, or if it does
 only in rare cases,
the grumblings of the cynic, the misanthrope.

But we know better, realize
 how it whirlpools
our coffee, stains our tongues—

the cold, blunt smile, the black snicker,
 a sudden
bright tickle we feel as retrieving

the mail from our box we notice
 the lazy
neighbor's mutt has shit on the meticulous

neighbor's lawn, that it's not our mother,
 outspoken, arthritic,
who must now live with us, not

our tractor in the ditch, our furnace
 on the porch.
If it wasn't for the chance,

here and then, to take pleasure
 in the misfortunes
of others, to follow our impulse

to Schadenfreude our banker, our boss,
 the obnoxious kid
suspended from school, how else

could we cope in this place
 where we go
paycheck to paycheck, improvising

what we have, yes,
 how else
would we come to understand

the difference between bad luck and fool.

Meredith Cole

TWO NUNS BATHING

Below a shedding birch,
whose peach underlying light
 returns to me
like new-born skin,

water slips back from the beach
 and back from your skin
on the sandy bank.

How the trees curve away
 from each other,
and how we are hidden
in strands, in our skin,

and now, two nuns wade out
through grass beyond us—
 towels draped, white slips
pulled from the waist.
The flesh is touched.

Their white thighs brush
feathery tips of grass.
 On they drift,
 out to the sand

where dark waves touch
 the driftwood bones,
and you, on our secret bank,
touch the flat water stones.

The nuns shed their towels,
they take in the cold,
 while their hair curls
under white bathing caps.

How their shadowed backs
 curve away from each other,
and how strands of light
wave on the stones below,

and now they slip
 in to the ankle,
and now they are swept
to the waist,

out in the lake,
weightless, weightless.

LOOKING FOR TRUE INTIMACY ON THE
NEW JERSEY TURNPIKE

This is not the kind of love that sits you down
for tea it's the kind of love that drives you down
the New Jersey Turnpike high speed it's dangerous
and unkempt it's your soul's want to seek out
to flee past New Brunswick Exit 9 that dog
and pony show post and lintel marriage you feign
happiness to give your man more confidence
so he can find his happiness right here
right now on the dark of the highway another exit
looms exciting the kind you take to music
as you drive the one that leads to ecstasy
with windows open to the stench of back East white man
discovered American pollution hurrying
promises fast past the night what love you have
speeding in this car is the kind of love
your current situation of looming years
ahead many miles of bare years ahead slinking
in the rearview mirror censors disavows
the current situation love you married
is no way the superstar lover of your soul
I can not believe you even took New Brunswick
Exit 9 knowing all your needs and lucky
you did not tell me this was not where your soul
was telling you to go your scenery
wasteland marshes your atmosphere the litter
of supply and demand for what in God's name is
full of more squalor than the trip from New York
to New Jersey what possibly could stink more
be less fecund can you must imagine
the thrill love could have wrapped in the natural
purity of beauty and truth just think of those
egrets on your commute and how they stand
on discarded tires in the middle of lime green
lurid marsh water being the birds they are
if they could choose where they lived would they choose tires

and lime green water you and I both know
they would choose not to stand on tires in the middle of lime
green water and not to have tea over thrill
until death do you part with New Brunswick Exit 9
off the New Jersey Turnpike back East.

WHAT GROWS NOW

House beams, charred wood, nothing stood, after the fire,
after my heart. My heart burned the field too,
where the house stood, wintery ice and all growth
now just dirt, just earth, just dirt.

Is it too late to ask, why can not the heart
be made of air or water,
why not? For what can air do,
what can water do that fire does, oh, that fire will?

What wind, what wave
is more than harmless,
what wind, what wave
is more than invisible?

Heart kills with demands of desire, desire
demands to touch and grab and hold and cling.
Fire's burning wants everything,
even after, heart gets, what it demands.

And everything heart demands,
fire burns, burns everything
heart knows. To what? A clearing?
A charred clearing of charred dirt and smoky air.

Start over, heart cracks.
Start over, fire flames and fires and flames.

In the burned field, now, nothing stands and nothing grows.

Wait. No.
Fireweed flames

there this morning, shoots
out of blackened dirt, red
shooting petals, the mirage of fire.

Let that mirage be a warning
to the next house and to new wintery ice,
and to all new growth longing
to grow in the field.

Martha Silano

A TRIP THROUGH THE YELLOW PAGES: BA, BE, AND SO FORTH

We begin with Babbitting, Beckwith & Kuffel, then quickly
move on to Babies: Tot Stoppers, breast pumps, Lifetime

Furniture. There's Stork Express, Go to Your Room,
merry-go-rounds and Pre-Learning Inc.,

but before we get the scoop on in-the-womb
teaching, we're on to backflow, Badge Express,

Button King. What next? Burlap.
Who are we calling? Lacey O'Malley, Bail Bondsman.

Where to? Both Ways Catering. "Everything She Touches
Tastes Terrific," the ad for LUV-N-OVN says, "Just Dial EAT-

CAKE, and we will, but we must move on to Balemaster, True Wheel,
Large Capacity Portable Stands, we must pick a barrel to hold

our waste, choose from the largest selection of towel bars
in the West. Then on to Aurora for retail, wholesale, Life

Plus, then smack in the middle of bushings, bearings,
cowplugs—which brings us to Beauty (sheaves

to shears)—Adam & Eve, A Cut Above, Connie
and her Class Act. Now that we're weaved and braided,

coiffed and permed, trimmed and waxed, now that acrylic
adorns our nails (two weeks guaranteed), we find ourselves

in Adjustable Beds, Quality Down for 50 Years, Comforter
Kits. Let us Sit-N-Sleep, then let us be lifted

from our remote control rest (factory direct),
past idlers, pulleys and PVC to the heaven

of Prompt Response and champagne fountains.

Bob Hicok

A LITTLE SCIENCE

"Roosters fit the bill. Bucholz got some rooster heads,
froze them and measured the rate at which they warmed
up. Then he plucked them and repeated the process."

—from an article in *Scientific American*
about baldness in birds

If we skin the trustees the university will not
approve the Sports Psychology Center. Dancers'

toes sawed off, the ABT would look like the spawn
of Jerry Lewis and Martha Graham. Removing

the colon of the Speaker of the House without
consent or anesthesia would in no way

reduce interest in the job. Three pounds of six
pound nails driven by a sixteen pound

hammer into the two pound skull of the next
Jehovah's witness who assails your door

would prove nothing but you'd do it anyway. Though
de-veining an adult male means his certain

death, this should not affect funding of the project,
Senator. A laptop computer with modem and CD-ROM

could fit in a womb, redefining the term *home office*.
If you look closely at the patella you realize

there's sufficient surface-area to drill
and tap for an eye-bolt, for what purpose

the private sector can better decide. By inducing
blindness in painters by physical or chemical means,

and asking them to paint the London Bridge over
and over, we can determine to what extent Monet

was artistically motivated or just bored. Remove
a pituitary: reduce it to paste with pestle and mortar:

add Fruit Loops, a dash of Brute, some aloe and pesto
and WD-40: treat with Uranium-235: feed it back

to the subject with a Fred Flintstone spoon: ask
if they prefer the original or touring cast of *Cats*:

present the results in *Nature*: apply for NIS grant.
Go home. Kiss spouse. Read paper. Pet dog.

David Moolten

FIDDLE

The endless details which compose a life
Often pass for mere accompaniment
Like the tune which crackles on the radio
Just ahead of news announcing war

Is over or the strains of a jig
Some total stranger croons to my wife
In the pub at 9th and Fitzwater
Our first night out. But one small thing

Leads to another and who can argue
As he saws his fiddle, cradling the hips
Of burnished wood, studying the blur
Of his fingers. He plays beyond himself

Like the rest of us, staking his fate
On each slight movement. One bad slice
Could shred the trance he looms with his upper hand.
Still, we sip our ale, paying attention, destined

To be lovers with only love in common
And priceless like a Stradivarius: grand
For music and not much else. I don't give
An ear to the counterpoint, how we might use

Affection more as weapon than instrument,
Our struggle so much fiddling around
In the greater tumult, one uneven verse
For a mostly sad ballad. I haven't come

To her place in my life as what's tenuous
Instead of her thin waist when I hold her
As if she might not stand my touch.
Maybe years ago I heard it all

But only now do I listen sometimes
As if I'd left the past
Up in the air and could still arrange it
Anyway I like, the high notes and low notes

Into one sweet melody I miss. Perfect
In the sense of gone, its simple rhythm
Won't break down, our integrity hard-pressed
Like the strings, nothing to us but a song.

Jason Whitmarsh

THE ONES DOING THIS

The ones doing this were doing all right:

They'd kept up the equipment
with sour baths, unwrenched gaskets;
replaced the planning devices
with the season's new organizers;
and undertaken a dozen other
required tasks. (From the finer
of the lot they chose a handful.)

Their specimen notes—indices of measurements
made possible by aluminum bracelets,
lengths of wire, mercury-fed switches
tipped on—had the look of old metal,
etched clean. The pencilled marks
crept upwards in similar fashion:
doubled dashes for each twitch,
split zeroes for delayed reactions.

(And the ones not doing this still screaming.)

Joanna Fuhrman

Four Poems

LOVE POET WRITES ABOUT A FIELD

Buckled tan strands of weeds brush
against my feet. I glimpse a footprint, no,
a shadow in the mud, the rough surface
of a boulder looks like salt deposits in the broken light.

I admit it. I am bored by the skinny wildflower
folded near the head, by the one yellow petal left wilting.
From the willow's branch, an inch worm dangles
a J's shape. Its clear thread vanishes, then glistens.

Once, when I complained about plant poems
he said, "All nature poems are about who you are
in love with, not what you see."

A scrap of computer paper rests buried
in grass. Dirt drifts through its bent holes.
White powder flecks a crushed leaf.
Grease on a matted feather shines.

THE ORANGE

My father learned to meditate
in a room behind a curtain.
I could hear him whisper
through the pages of magazines turning.
Zen? I don't remember,
I was five, six maybe. I remember
the oranges on the table, big,
nestled in their gold bird's nest,
five candles lit around them. The reflection
in the mirror magnified them.

A woman in a dark dress
rose, turned her back to us.
She seems almost a shadow

now, rustling in my memory.
She looked down at me
and I felt myself shrink,
the light in the waiting room
flashed white and I glanced down
and saw, I was holding one of the big
oranges in my hands, rocking it.
My finger poked below the navel
and I ripped, removing the peel
in one long strip like a snake skin.

The room let out a scream.
Adults towered over me,
their hair lashing forward and back.
At the end of each strand,
a mouth full of teeth sneered.
I lost track of my father's voice.
The nightingale from the parking lot
slid in through the window,
shedding feathers on clean tables and chairs.
Everyone started to chant.
The carpet turned to pale grass.

My mother returned from the car
with my stuffed penguin and a picture book.
She took the last piece of orange
from my hands and wiped the juice
from my mouth with a towel.
*Sorry, she said to the others,
my daughter, you know.*
Sorry, she said, I'm sorry.

PERSONAL AD

A couple slumps on a veranda opening flat Cokes.
The ex-girlfriend of the boyfriend and the boyfriend of the ex-
girlfriend play scrabble in mittens. It is that party again,
when I find the personal that reads,
Must be willing to whine and be whined at.

It is not a day for making sandwiches.
A potted shrub blooms a vermilion rash.
The guests are waiting for the spectacle
to denounce its departure.

*Must avoid talk about work
when work matters.
Must look potential in-laws in the eye.*

A marinated rabbit sizzles on a charcoal grill.
A woman applies lipstick to a Burmese cat.

*Must answer telephone messages right away,
I stand on the picnic table to announce.
Must lie and tell me everything is great.*

ADVICE FOR ABSENT-MINDED DETECTIVES

Always when we discover the Iying machine,
it is August and sun illuminates the feathers

in a mud-made nest. Counting backwards,
we uncover the cracked armor of an absent snail,

twin twigs and a boulder with its sediment shifting.
Later we'll find: a doll's ear glued to a cheek,

a mouth painted on a drugstore window.
Some will question why the monocle

was water-dipped or why the rabbit
acquiesced to the children's pawing fists.

So let me clarify: it's not the clues,
but the pre-clues, we are after

(not the questions, but the waves before the words),

not the footsteps leading to the library's safe,
but the path emerging before the falling feet.

About Our Contributors

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WE NEED YOUR HELP

Poetry Northwest is in its thirty-ninth year of uninterrupted publication. Unlike a distressingly large number of American literary magazines, it has not disappeared, altered its format, or curtailed its quarterly appearances under the stress of increased printing costs and higher postal rates. It continues to publish the best poetry it can find. The University of Washington is supporting it to the limit of present resources, but in spite of our increased circulation and a recent increase in our subscription price, there remains a substantial gap between our income and our expenses. Our readers have helped generously in the past. Their contributions have kept us going. Won't you please join them? Gifts to *Poetry Northwest* are tax deductible.

For the sake of our bookkeeping, if you are making a contribution to the magazine and at the same time are renewing your subscription or subscribing for the first time, would you please make out separate checks? Thank you.

David Wagoner
Editor

