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FALL, 1959

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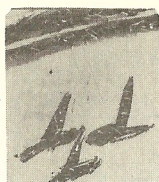
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POETRY

VOLUME ONE



NORTHWEST

NUMBER TWO

FALL • 1959

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POETRY NORTH WEST

FALL 1959

Joseph Langland

Nine Poems

from "Haruspicing on Valley = View Farm"

SACRIFICE OF MY PET CHICK

I combed his downy tail
Until chick dropped with love
And stepped, a peeping shame,
Into a boy's sad grave.

With water in my palm,
Small barley on my thumb,
I tucked his evening down
And broke his morning dream.

My cap his daily croft,
His wings atilt my head,
I strode through our barnyard
Among all winged men.

When I wrapped his bobbing head
In frayed tails of my shirt,
I strung his strawy web
With weed stalks for a perch.

At last, he only sat;
And then, he only lay.
And afterwards I had
Him ten days from the grave.

An earthworm filled his eyes;
Some ants cleaned out his skull.
Two beetles on his thigh
Were scarcely beautiful,

So I scraped those tiny bones.
They broke. His awful wings
Lie, for all I have known,
Still bleaching under the sun.

1

SACRIFICE OF MY PET LAMB

I broke from the womb of my mother and ran up the early years
Until on the cliffs of seven, with the gospel of senses scrying
The sun-flooded woodlands and valley, I came with confusion of tears
Under three black hawks to my pet, my baby-warm bottle lamb, dying.

He was torn with claws of his hanging, talons ripping the soft wreck
Of his body anointed with blood. I found his eyelids sinking
On curious sleep. Oh, then I awoke! I fell on his neck
And confounded the bleeding rose of my early innocence, shrinking.

I ran from his claw-slit belly; I ran from the pinkest prime
Incredible entrails dragged in the dust of the limestone cliff.
I cried the nudge of his young bleats, puffing his sides at night time,
I ran to his tenderness once; now I left him, awkward and stiff.

I ran from the tree and shade of the juniper boughs where he lay;
I ran from the three dark wings, still trapped in the shades of stones,
And I lay in the leaves of the earth for a blasphemous long Sunday.
At last, when I saw him again, it was only to bury his bones.

I dug an abstraction of grave in erosions of one small head
And let that late wooly angel down while some ghost said, bow!
And still I am wandering home, young seer gone blind in those dead
Miseries, crying, "God, God, where are Your mercies now?"

SACRIFICE OF GOPHERS AND WOODCHUCKS

When I was a young one
I used to trap gophers
(10¢ for the ears, and 15¢ for the hide)
And caught woodchucks.
It was all business pride;
Nobody stung one.

I got up at five —
I mean, really early —
(10¢ for the ears, and 15¢ for the hide)
And jangled my traps
At my shoulder sides;
Boy, I was alive.

I carried a stick-club
In my right hand always
(10¢ for the ears, and 15¢ for the hide).
It was all you needed
To finish them off with:
A quick sharp thud.

Gophers brought thistles.
That's what neighbors said
(10¢ for the ears, and 15¢ for the hide).
They ruined the grainfields,
The whole countryside.
Had odd whistles.

Father didn't like them.
Neither did I
(10¢ for the ears, and 15¢ for the hide).
If he had a pitchfork
By when I caught one,
Quick, he would spike him.

When taut chains drag
In a woodchuck's hole
(10¢ for the ears, and 15¢ for the hide)
You know, if it goes
All slack on the guide,
She bit off a leg.

Easy, I pulled them
Home from their burrows
(10¢ for the ears, and 15¢ for the hide);
Then's when I slugged them.
It saved my pride
For when I sold them.

Inflation caught me
By my confirmation
(10¢ for the ears, and 15¢ for the hide).
It seems that I never
Will keep my pride
With what that brought me.

I like looking back
On natural hours
(10¢ for the ears, and 15¢ for the hide),
Barefoot at dawn with
Chucks on the hillside,
Fresh ears in my sack.

This is not hearsay.
I've been a young trapper
(10¢ for the ears, and 15¢ for the hide),
And I'm not surprised seeing
Some people at morning
Crying, "God a mercy!"

SACRIFICE OF THE GOLDEN OWL

We strung our Wyandotte rooster, dead, on a post
And wired him fast, head up, white wings outspread
Just under the woodchuck trap. Then went to bed.

All night those great jaws looking at the sky
Above the swollen eyeballs of our cock
Waited for morning. But nothing made them lock.

Whatever it was that fed upon our world
Delayed his visiting, or else mistook
Those puffed red wattles with too close a look.

We thought it was some talon out of heaven,
Some claw-hook of the sky, some steel-hooked beak
With which we hoped our woodchuck trap would speak.

At last it did. Diving at striking noon,
A golden owl spilled downward like a sun,
Split my blue sky, and with the trap was one.

I took him to the woodshed, sprang my knife,
And slit the shining golden breast apart,
Only to find a miserably small heart.

Then father cried, "Go, take the rooster down."
I burned him with the trash, then ran and stood
The owl's heart on my new-split kindling wood.

I made a little ritual of that fire
To warm my heart, but wept above that breath
Singing the tough cold bitterness of death.

SACRIFICE OF A RATTLESNAKE

No one was looking, but the fat
Female rattlesnake had just curled on an edge of sun
Around the shade of a rock pile in the pasture.

Under her white white belly (down, keep down!),
Squares and ovals and triangles of brown-white and grey stones
Broke in irregular sharp patterns from her back.

Such shameful camouflage invests our dust.

Maybe the eye of God (but nothing else)
Was watching her wary slumbers by the springs
Where we played the daylong summer out,
Barefoot in overalls.

We shouted out of the grass
And splashed up out of the springs,
Swishing over those rocks.
She rattled, and leapt, and struck.

Then everyone came running.

We pinned her head with a stick.
We bashed her body.
We cracked her tail.
We squashed her head with rocks.
We tumbled the white eye of her body up
And slashed it with the knife-edge of our fear,

Only to see,
Descending from that wound,
Three tiny snakes
Slipping in shadowed crevices of rocks
To flick the old relentless eye of God.

SACRIFICE OF THE OLD SOW

They said she was wild when the old sow ate the pigs
She farrowed in her straw in the stock-warm barn
Early in March. I caught her crunching the last
One in her jaws, then clung to the filthy patched
Gate and swallowed my breaking new-born tears.

My brother rushed at the sow, "You goddamn bitch,"
Jabbing his pitchfork in the bloodmother's flank;
"You devil, you goddamn devil," my brother screamed,
Trumpeting all the four ends of her pen
Wherever she crashed, "You bitch, you goddamn bitch!"

I squeezed my eyes again at the rawest noise
Flung like manure on the squealing boards.
How could I know, my small hands to my heart,
That this huge barn of a world was also stuffed
By Darwin and Marx and Freud at the feeding troughs?

And so, at last, there were only a hundred and twelve
Pigs to be raised. And since the old sow had fed
On the offspring she conceived, we strung her up
And slit her throat and stripped her down and ate
That succulent rib with which we kept alive.

7

SACRIFICE OF THE OLD GENTLEMAN

When our two great herd sires fought in the burroak grove
Their bellows disturbed my sleep. I rolled in a heat
Of black hooves stomping the bottomlands. I woke in a sweat

Saying, "Mother, what is it?" My father and brothers were gone.
"I'm afraid," she said, "that our sires have broken out long
Ago in the night. Oh, I hope that nothing is wrong."

Our great Hereford bulls! Their fierce heads were as strong
As the iron bars of their gates, their bodies as thickly
Bound as the earth they stormed. I ran off quickly.

My father with bullwhip and gun, my brothers in boughs,
And I on a limb above them, all up in the oak,
Stared a short ways off. Deep growls still broke

And sank in a tunnel of throat. The foam-bloodied nose
Of one bull hung from his curls on a forehead of hot
Dust. And his loud dull eyes, bleared cannon shot,

Fell on the other's entrails, trampled in leaves.
There the Old Gentleman, Prince Bill, Second, The Great,
Growled his proud way toward death, his enormous weight

Plunged to the ground he had stalked and pawed and shook.
The horn wound in his side was the single eye
With which my brothers and I could watch him die.

It took both tractors and the neighbor's chains,
Ringing the country stones, to pull him down
Into the ditch where those awful weeds have grown.

His calves were gentle, and the cows he rode
Became more gentle. Still, his awesome head
Arose on the horns of war. Now he is dead.

He shook his anger and iron sex in a wreath
Of forehead curls. But when his deep-tongued breath
Exploded, he charged the trembling woods with death

And so located, stalking before his grave,
Dimensions of himself. Now, scrawny and weak,
Our crows and mourning doves and coyotes speak

Those tired themes which none of us escape.
Sighs, croaks, and howls beset our greatest voice
With common years of indiscriminate noise.

SACRIFICE OF MY DOG, REX

When my dog came whimpering out of the hayfields,
Home from the mower's flickering sickle,
He lay on the floor of the fragrant haybarn
With the bleeding stub of his foreleg quivering,
The pool of convulsive death surrounding
His white submissive eyes.

I heard him shout when he flushed a rabbit
In the honeyed webs of red-white clover.
I caught the quarry on quarry flashing.
He'll get him, I sang, and then it got him.
I froze where I stood, till his dark blood, flowing,
Ran like a sword at my side.

He drank his wound, but that solemn supper
Gagged in his throat, and the tongue of comfort
Lay from his mouth. I had pulled a thorn from
The new-lost paw when I saw him suffer.
I had kissed that foot and washed and anointed
Him under my whispered care

And now it was lost in the fragrant hayfields
Where I ran out the honey of days in the clover;
And now he was going, that country greying
Under the edge of his eyes. Not knowing
Where then, or why, my small steps pointed
The trail of his blood with prayers.

They stumbled his death to his life for meaning,
Winding across the yard and the roadway,
Out to the grainfield and into the hayfield,
Until, somewhere, they were lost forever
In a crown of sun and a field of flowers,
And the ravenous sickle, reaping.

SACRIFICE OF A GUNNYSACK OF CATS

The quick small bubbles popping the gunnysack,
Hooked by a pitchfork braced in the cattle tank,
Almost unhinged my heart and made me drop
The stick with which I forced the young cats down.

A population explosion, that's what it was.
With twelve mother cats and a year of visiting toms
We met September with the wildest host
Of squinting eyes behind our milking cows.

We divied them up among the brothers and sisters,
And each had only six. But since we were nine
My father thought things were getting out of hand.
Next day I received my melancholy orders.

"You'll have to catch the most of them and drown them.
Just tidy up the place and make it normal.
Fifty-four cats! Why, that's an infernal nuisance.
Think what would happen next year!" What could I tell him?

So there I was dashing with my gunnysack
Into the bins and under the stalls and mangers.
The wild ones scratched me, but I thrust them in.
The tame ones? Oh, I brushed them with my cheek,

Sighed, and kissed them, then I thrust them in.
I climbed the ladders to the highest mows,
Ran through the orchard under the heavy apples
And crept among the tall weeds by the granary,

Until I thought I could not bear that cross.
I dropped it once; that made it twice as hard
To lure them once again into that womb
And bear it backward to the spermal waters.

But there I was: filthy, bleeding, and sick,
Tired and thirsty, my cord pulled at its neck,
The undulating coffin on my wagon,
Trudging down to the sea, my cross upon me.

The thorny dissonance of dying song
Over the squealing of the wagon wheels
Ran up a cloud of dust that nearly drowned me.
It is one thing to think, and one to do.

I wanted to avoid the thinking in the doing
And, quick, be done with it and off to play.
But you can see this didn't work too well . . .
Thirty-three years to get that cord untied.

I stood in the dust manure at my feet,
The green scum in the corners of the tank
Eyeing my smothering conscience toward a size
My body could not hold. Good God, I seized

That squirming sepulchre, that crying tomb,
That leaping heart familiar as myself,
And heaved it from my homemade hearse and plunged
It back to evolution. Hooking the fork,

I ticked five awful minutes by the hours,
Damned by the furious bubbles where they broke
Among my unwashed hands. And then I went
Up to the barn to find my mother cat.

We sat in a beam of sunlight on the floor
Petting and purring, while out of a knothole eye
Hung in the roof of God the motes of dust
Sang of our comforts and our curious loves.

David Wagoner

Four Poems

THE FIRST DAY OF A SEARCH

We hunted a boy lost on the frozen lake.
While sunlight flattened and turned blue,
Marshgrass in rattling tussocks nosed the ice
Like giant muskrats whickering in their fur.
Numb in the wind and slipshod, we crossed over
Inlets and narrows, skirted the open flaws
Where water, heaving, slid beside and below
A thin crust perched, like weather, on its back.

Cautious and slow at first, we carried boards,
Ladders and carpets like our own islands
To the crackling edges and lay down on them
As though we'd come to sleep till the spring thaws;
But the cold rose up and tightened at our brows,
And when we walked again, parting at random,
Each held his life more carelessly in his hands,
Seeing the hard clouds blacken and spill forward.

Nothing for miles was taller than a boy.
This is the ice, we said, and there's the world.
To break through one is not to find the other.
He would have leaped aside, we said. But wept.
By snow like wavecrests in the reeds, we stopped
And, cupping our ears, heard only our own breath
Drifting from mouth to forehead where it curled
And closed above us like the shrivelling day.

All night, we called aloud. What answered was
Ice, or the darkness dreaming its own echoes,
Or landlocked water ageing below our feet.

One aimed a flashlight at the sky, and the flakes fell
To the cone's unwavering tip like a whirlpool.
Another fired a flare; it burst and shot
Petals and starfish down to dazzle us,
And we were white on both shores of our eyes.

Before an ugly dawn, one fell to his knees,
Clumsy with love and stupor, watching his light
Skid to the water and go splashing downward.
Staring through suddenly translucent ice,
He saw his own shape frozen under glass
With snails and ribbonweed in a solid garden
And, from his thrusting palms, — the light flashed out —
Saw cracks like lightning break across his face.

1

THE FAMINE OF REASON

Though language glitter when we eat,
Like knives and forks, and all our wares —
Cut-flowers and gossip, gilded chairs,
The mannerly hoisting of our meat —
Confuse for a time our deeper wars;
Though posture stiffen our belief
That what surrounds us is ourselves,
And lip-stained gloves and napkins come
Between us and the taste of grief,
O love, once turning face to face
Past these embellishments of grace,
We shall become our ancestors:
Like them, dependent for our lives
Upon the corners of our mouths,
On that frank matter in the eye
That utters *friend* or *enemy*,
Like two beasts meeting in a tree.

SPEECH RECITED IN MIDAIR

Bring hoops and calibrated instruments,
Bring scissors and rocks, lash guy-ropes to a stake,
Fetch the axe from the chopping-block
And run, polish your dials and quivering gauges,
Search for the wires, sandpaper fingerprints
Till you can feel the impact of a speck
Or focus like hawks upon invisible dew:
O holy neighbors, O impeccable judges,
I lie in the air, flat out and unsupported.

Trundle your ladders into the long grass
And shinny upward to inspect my foot-soles,
Come bandy-legged on your stilts and point
Forefingers while you preach me out of grace,
Send up your rockets: they'll explode like daisies—
Or loop the loop and dive down on your heads—
Still I'll remain, more permanent than a moon,
A lamp without a pole, kite hooked on nothing,
Your broken cables flattering me like tassels.

Toenails and loincloths fluting in the wind,
Supine, the fakirs flew from city to city,
And Persian rugs, obedient to a wish,
Once hoisted every chubby shah's behind,
Hindus went up a rope, and virgins floated,
Pure levitation spirited D. D. Home
Across a ceiling, over a window-sash,
And sent him straight outdoors without a broom:
Why should amazement rankle your smooth faces?

Weep if you must, or slice the air in two!
I'm clamped forever between public places —
Important dirt, investigated sky —
Offending both till time sags in the middle,
Ignoring gravity, smelling to high heaven,
An unavoidable eyesore thrust askew
Between God's thunder and your furious babble
Into a sphere where even freaks are shriven.
Once pull me down, you split all history.

1

A DECLENSION OF KINGS

*"And thou... O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thy heart...
thou and thy lords, thy wives and thy concubines, have
drunk wine... and thou hast praised the gods of silver and
gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor
hear, nor know..."*

— DANIEL 5:23

When the sun struck through the tower,
Announcing the great feast,
Tawny-eyed Belshazzar
Took his cup in his fist
And drank to the God of Gold.
The lords of Babylon
Cornered the bought and sold;
Their arrogant lice knelt down.

As the moon froze on the floor
Among the strumpets' toes,
Dewy-browed Belshazzar
Unbuckled his dripping clothes
And slumped back in his pride
To toast the Goddess of Silver:
His captains rolled her over,
And all the eunuchs died.

While thunder shook the stair
And stunned the surviving peers,
Brazen-lunged Belshazzar
Beat the gongs of their ears
To honor the God of Brass,
And the rippling in his head
Was the wine of his own voice;
The courtesans dropped dead.

When lightning sliced the gates,
Showered the room with fire,
And minced the enormous dates,
Meaty-jawed Belshazzar
Brandished it like a sword
To the Gods of Iron and Lead.
They took him at his word:
All his companions bled.

The last wind slammed the door;
Wine dribbled down his chin.
Tasting his own blood,
Fastidious Belshazzar
Rose, pulled his stomach in,
But toppled flat on his face
Against the God of Wood
Who met him with a kiss.

Then dying beside his crown,
His right eye pursed like a star,
Carrion-cold Belshazzar
Stared at the God of Stone
Who would stand aound his mind
Forever, cupped like a shell,—
That disembodied hand
Within it, scratching the wall.

Mona Van Duyn

A Relative and an Absolute

"It has been cool so far for December, but of course the cold doesn't last long down here. The Bible is being fulfilled so rapidly that it looks like it won't be long until Jesus will come in the air, with a shout, and all those who have accepted Jesus as their own personal Saviour will be caught up to meet him and then that terrible war will be on earth. The battle of Armageddon. And all the unsaved people will have to go through the great tribulation. Hope you are both well. Bye."

My aunt, my down-to-earth father's sibling, went to stay in Texas, and had to continue by mail, still thanklessly, her spiritual supervision of the family.

Texas orchards are fruitful. A card that would portray this fact in green and orange, and even more colorfully say on its back that Doom is nearly upon us, came regularly

at birthday, Easter and Christmas — and sometimes between the three. That the days passed, and the years, never bothered her prophecy; she restressed, renewed and remailed its imminence faithfully.

Most preaching was wrong, she felt, but found for her kin on Sunday in one voice on one radio station, one truth for all to obey. Salvation being thus limited, it seemed to me

there was something unpleasant about that calm tenacity of belief that so many others would suffer catastrophe at any moment. She seemed too smug a protegee.

Otherwise, I rather liked her. Exchanging a recipe or comparing winters with neighbors, she took life quietly in a stuffy bungalow, among doilies of tatting and crochet.

She had married late, and enjoyed the chance to baby a husband, to simmer the wholesome vegetables and see that vitamins squeezed from his fruit were drunk without delay.

Though she warned of cities and churches and germs, some modesty or decorum, when face to face with us, wouldn't let her convey her vision of Armageddon. But the postcards set it free.

It was hovering over the orange groves, she need only lay her sewing aside, and the grandeur and rhythm of its poetry came down and poured in her ear, her pencil moved eloquently.

She wrote it and wrote it. She will be "caught up," set free from her clay as Christ comes "with a shout in the air" and trumpeting angels play, and "the terrible war will be on earth" on that Judgment Day, expecting all those years her extinction of body would be attended by every creature, wrapped 'round in the tragedy of the world, in its pandemonium and ecstasy.

When she died last winter, several relatives wrote to say a kidney stone "as big as a peach pit" took her away. Reading the letters, I thought, first of all, of the irony, then, that I myself, though prepared to a certain degree, will undoubtedly feel, when I lie there, as lonesome in death as she and just as surprised at its trivial, domestic imagery.

1

Maxine Kumin

Two Poems

THE LESSON

Eleven. Your hour of danger
you come with towels and blessings
down to the sound of the water.
Today we begin with the side stroke.
All of you now can float
all of you now are braver
by inches than yesterday

and yesterday even is over.
And now we will lie on our sides
on the sand and pretend we are swimming
where for the click of a moment
a dragonfly lights and reverses
sending the sun motes swimming.
Up out and together we glide

and this is known as a scissors.
We point our toes for the reason
of maximum thrust with the smallest
resistance. The smallest resistance
causes the water to wrinkle
under the thrust of the lilies.
The season reverses the lilies

and let us change sides, remembering
it is the top leg goes forward
forming the blade of the scissors
wherefore the cattails unseaming
go rattletatat in the marshes
seeding the smallest of moments
all of us braver by inches.

The children are gone. I lie flat
on the rib edge of a canoe
assaulting the thin edge of water
holding the noon on my eyelids.
Now there is only the water
and the sound of water forming
under the slope of my spine
wherefore the season reverses
the dragonfly clicks and is gone
the cattails resist in the marshes
drowned men thrust under my bone.

HIGH DIVE: A VARIANT

Practice has made this come out right.
The diver's legs are springs; like steel
coils they impel him up. Afloat
he can reroute himself; at peak
a schooled swan, arched and masterful.
Coming down, he dreams his weight

has clamped him underneath a weight
in dreams he strains against. Upright
in sleep, in no way masterful,
who cannot break away can steel
himself; dying, can wake at the peak
of terror, sweated with fear, afloat

in life. This mid-air swan, outflowed
arms and legs arced, knows to wait
his downdrift out. We sweat and peek;
washed in or out of sleep, the rite
is mortal: to fall in old lands till
hands slip on air, limbs muster full

force, and death, old master full
of craft, lets go. We wake, we have fled.
And will tomorrow let us steal
another rescue, our human wit
praying the dark to underwrite
the force that sucks us from the peak?

Wilfully, do we dare to pique
the satin pool this master fall-
ing-diving bird cleaves, left and right?
Dreaming, what ancient dangers flood
us vertical? What monkey whit
presses us down from tree tops still?

Practice perfects the diver's steel
muscles, his style, his board-to-peak
lightfoot boned and bladed weight.
In air he attends his masterful
orders: to tuck, to pike, to float.
And every exit turns out right

until the last. Like steel pressed masterful-
ly from the peak, our begging bodies float
no more; gain weight and fall. The end is right.

1

Michael Hamburger

Three Poems

A HORSE'S EYE

I did not stop today at the five-barred gate,
Did not wait for the old white draught-horse at grass,
Unshod, unharnessed these many years; walked past,
Preoccupied, but something made me look back:
Her head was over the gate, her neck was straight,
But I caught her eye, a wicked, reproachful look
From one small eye slanted in my direction.
What right, I defied the old mare, what right had she
To expect caresses, the grass foolishly plucked
For her hanging lip, her yellow, eroded teeth
And her great historical belly? Of course she's a relic,
Curious now as the old white country house
That stood empty and alluring in the wood behind her
Till converted into flats — not as useless as she,
Who will never become a tractor! What farmer would stop?
Only some primitive, animist, anthropomorphic poet
Or week-end motorist looking for what he's lost.

I walked on; but plainly her glance had spoken to me,
As an old peasant's might in a foreign country,
Communicating neither words nor thought, but the knowledge
Of flesh that has suffered labour in rain and wind,
Fed, relaxed, enjoyed and opposed every season.
Broken now. Close to death. And how differently broken
From that Cossack mare the clumsiest rider could sit,
All speed and nerve and power that somehow responded
To the faintest twitch of a will less tense than her own.
Wild nature still; her eye no peasant's eye,
But lava under glass, tellurian fire contained.

As for the old white mare, her reproach was just;
Because she was too intelligible I had passed her by,
Because not alien enough, but broken as men are broken,
Because the old white house was converted now,
The wood about to be felled, a tractor chugging
Beyond the hill, and awkwardly she trotted
On legs too thin for her belly bloated with age,
Alone in her meadow, at grass, and close to death.

AT DAWN

Where the paint cracks, refracted in his gaze
A red geranium in the window-box
Of any terrace house, means more than meadows,
A single flame kindled against the grime,
Element of his kind, means more than sunrise
Blazing as ever on bare indifferent hills.

A lighted window three streets away —
Or one small ray that sets the glass on fire? —
London at dawn the broken man reflects,
A hint of summer frocks, brightness contained,
Before day's prism breaks her grey composure,
Housefronts assume their numbers, disgorge their ghosts.

Time in the park, within the traffic's roar,
Pattern of light and shade the tall trees make,
The dead friend met — or time in the sea's waves
That has no patience with the dead or living?
Only what men have broken and men repaired,
Time, light and landscape mastered, he approves.

A red geranium against familiar grime,
Where the paint cracks, and once another watered
Carnations in a window-box more green
Deflected from his gaze, he draws the curtains.

1

BIRD WATCHER

Challenged, he'd say it was a mode of knowing —
As boys in railway stations neutralize a passion
By gathering ciphers: number, date and place —
Yet keeps no record of his rare encounters,
Darkly aware that like his opposite
Who no less deep in woods, as far out on the moors
Makes do with food or trophies, hunts for easy favours,
He trusts defeat by what he cannot know.

"Goldfinch" he says, and means a chirping flutter
From stalk to stalk in early autumn meadows,
Or "oystercatcher", meaning a high, thin cry
More ghost than bodied voice, articulation
Of the last rock's complaint against the sea.

And wooing with his mind the winter fieldfares
Has made a snare of his binoculars,
For lime and cage and gun has longed in secret,
To kill that he may count, ravish despair
And eat the tongue that will not speak to him,
Though to the wind it speaks, evasive as the wind.

He grows no lighter, they no heavier
As to his mode of loving he returns,
Fixed in the discipline of adoration;
Will keep no pigeons, nor be satisfied
With metropolitan starlings gabbling their parodies.
The boy's cold bride will yield, too soon and utterly,
Never these engines fueled with warm blood,
Graced with peculiar folly that will far outfly him
Till in one communal emptiness they meet.

7

John Haag

The Cove

This broken digit of the sea intrudes
Between two humpbacked ridges; tamarack,
Jackpine and fir, reflected in the tides'
Long brackish finger, lean over and protect.
Here balsam and the low-tide pungencies
Commingle and, high up the shingle beach,
Rejected by the sea, the driftwood lies
Like shapes of Proteus shucked off; a thatch
Of shreds and dead grass beards the water-mark.
Below, in the dominion of the crab
Where mossy oysters, clinging to the rock,
Yawn mother-of-pearl maws, the flounders rub
Their bellies in the mud; the worm-cod lie
Kelp-shadowed where the sea-ferns lean, and light
Marine and mottled, enters gradually.
Between the two, half in, half out, I float.
Although both air and brine are in the blood
This arbitrary surface of the seas
Divides — yet I would live below and build
A wrack-weed nest among anemones.

Arnold Stein

A Private Death:

for Joe Harrison

When I met him on his way to class, or from,
Hurrying to tend his wife, struck down, as people are,
By the hand inside that clenches and explodes,
That smile and voice, unchanged, fooled me.
But I turned one day, something turned me,
And saw the back, just the back, climbing up hill, come far.

Something stopped then. For look! — there he was alive,
That same face the same: we draw one more breath, both turn away,
And walk toward a separate dying, we both know it.
That image persecutes my thought.
I've turned again, run after, and caught
The shoulders, now straight: denying the nothing I had to say.

But something was true, or clutched a rag of the truth,
Shaming words from their sweet habit — no false, or pretty, or weak.
Love speaks badly: too soon, too late, or what's worse, too well.
That image of death deserves to intrude
On the constant image, unbetrayed,
My friend moving alive and toward me, not needing to speak.

Love speaks badly. One cannot measure a life, or one's own
Grief, or any love. In the heart's own dark we are given and give.
Our needs are common as the hope we breathe
Into the titles that descend
Of husband, father, teacher, friend.
Love has one common speech that means to make us live.

Nancy-Lou Patterson

Indian Boy

Sharp day, dark star; among the splintered grass
The broken flesh of smoke-tarred fingers bled.
His eyes were black as bees, his teeth finflashed,
His lean brown breast bore nipples bruised like red
Stream stones. A rose above his sideburned ear,
His musky midnight coif stiff with pomade,
He came, a hesitating faun, down stairs;
Desired to fight, white fist to breast; black mane
Struck dust, eyes shut: "Did you beat that white-guy?"
Then vomited on summer's grass. Searching the road
For fatal ruts and final ditches, cars
Hold birds too beautiful to cage from flight.
Don't die too soon, brown boy, and don't wreck, no,
And don't sing toothless to unstrung guitars.

1

Joseph Kostolefsky

The Queen of Cups

On a mound of sand before the City Hall
a houri stands, and a Foreign Legionnaire.
(You have to imagine the palms, the fort,
and her father, who hates the foreign swine.)
This is Araby, this is an island,
taken with a narrow-angle lens
to shut out the dome, the pit, the crane,
and the wild-eyed litigants, dense as buffalo,
stampeding, summons in hand, up the courthouse steps.

They are so intent on their pretending
that the Queen on the facade is never seen,
her cups unnoticed. Marble, she looks down,
pours down on them from her gilt samovar,
cup by cup, the waters of the world:
the clear spring of first morning;
the immersion that blesses, that cleanses; polar thaws —
and they are drowned. So soon, their desert
is mud, and they are grappling
grotesque as midway wrestlers.
Noble speeches issue from soiled lips,
and O but they are lewd!
And O but they don't know it!

And still again down pour the upturned cups
of the queen whose only aim is to end all islands:
the Amazon, the Snake, the Okeechobee,
and that warm bath in which are moistened
sheets to restrain the mad.
Down it washes them, into the pit, past the shovels,
and they will be in that Mole Hall on show forever,
encased in glass, and stuffed, and the guide will say,
"Look you. Here are two lovers. Their breed has vanished."

But all this works through time, and is invisible,
unfelt by the two on the sand pretending love
and by the blindfold queen, disguised as Justice.
They say instead, in the lines they have been given,
"How the sand burns. How hot it is. How dry."

Joan Swift

Mushrooms in a Museum

Once the emerald forest held
Their urgent growth; the banks of rivers
Nursed their roots a while. Like favors
At a children's party, frilled

And stiff, they poise behind this glass.
Each specimen is perfect. There,
One labeled *morel* raises queer
Sea urchin heads above a mass

Of muddy stems. Edible,
The sign propounds. Its warty cheek
Like satin soothes the palate's ache.
And *ragged lepiota's* circle,

Mottled brown on brown, in all
Its ugliness asserts a use:
Agreeable. That tawny maze,
That labyrinth of pipes and small

Lopsided pods, *honey agaric*,
Consoles the tongue like vintage wine
Although inelegant in dun
Attire beneath some crooked oak.

But as a moth espouses fire,
The eye leans out to those white wings
Molded in flight like waxen things
To slender stems. It fastens there,

Imagining a cedar grove,
Cool, at dusk, with whippoorwills
Spilling melancholy pails
Of song haphazard on the olive

Night. And starting through the gloom
This opalescent glow, this snowy
Nimbus beckons artfully,
So like perfection none could blame

The hand that reaches out for grace
Or beauty. Plucked, preserved, the wan
Alcina props a wary sign:

Death Angel, deadly poisonous.

Under the forest's heavy freight
Of green, what legions plunged their teeth
In succulence to find the pith
Detestable too late, too late?

1

Bernice Oliphant

Yacolt

Drowsily, the women sat together,
Some spinning, others making pemmican,
And each was conscious of her own child
Under the nearby trees,
Where little girls slung mimic babies
Over their shoulders,
And ground false corn in a chip of bark,
And little boys stalked game
And shot their arrows into the wind.

Then there was silence, sudden and stark.
The women ran as one to the play place
But not a child was there,
Nor ever was, again.

Now there remains only Yacolt,
"The Haunted Place,"
Yacolt, that lovely sound. Yacolt!

Robert Dodge

Late November Light

(A song with an owl in it)

Now in the late November light, with trees
Grown solemn in the wood, the final hour
When orchards drift upon a haze, bees
Stumble and the flared sunlight fades,
She comes, the old woman of the wood,
Who roofs the valley with her patchquilt wings.
Silently with the dark she glides, her hood
Hooped silver over stump and rock.

Now, in the late November glow of light,
When beetles crouch upon their nests of cold,
From earth's hard shadow, drifting on her bright
Wind-soft wings, the old woman sails.
Time, when the carefree path leaped up with birds,
When throaty rivers wrangled with their lights,
Is underground, moves where the blind mole girds
Himself, the last of things, for change.

Now in that light and mindful of the year
When spiders spin out of the damp and cling
To stone, when that old woman's eyes are clear
As iceland glowing to the north,
Then I, heaviest of animals, walk out to praise
What is: the old, cold elemental wave
Descending; the long stride of winter days
On forests, lost and evergreen.

Beth Bentley

Two Poems

THIS BEAST

of burden, never
found wild, born into bondage, chews
his cabbage twice.
He is not a sight for sore eyes: his feet are
like rag-mops, to withstand
both heat and sand;

gibbous, he bows
his warty foothills to the least
human beast.
Questioning, smoke-eyed, ruminant, his gaze
is like the charred glass
that clears an eclipse.

Yet, mind those eyes:
they are neither forgiving nor long-
suffering,
but abstruse as the water that he muddies
before he drinks. Notice
his rindy knees

that when he walks
knock, rock out sea-going motions.
They are prayer-cushions
when he kneels. Lastly, which of us takes
on journey a full skin
of salvation?

THE AVIARY

I

In these large and airy spaces
movement and color roam as in a room of mirrors:
tinkling between beautiful caesuras
like fountains in quiet places

come chirps and twitters, the brush
of palpitant feathers, circling from the bright prison
where the small birds' perpetual season
gleams in a tinsel hush.

Here the finches sun
and flitter, carelessly prodigal of their color:
strawberry finch and blood-bill weaver
and the unsober, black-hooded nun.

Listen to the green singer,
paradise wydah and orange weaver spin
color and music into an African-
young, deep-flowing river,
watched over by the toucan,
sad and clown-faced, from his nearby tent;
he scatters their grace notes, a can-
tor with a voice that's broken.

II

Four snowy-owls squint an eye
against a sharp September light, watch
motionless, spaced on their dead branch
by the sure hand of a Dali.

A cage of coal-black vultures,
nine, turn their skinny backs to each other,
nervously silent, brother against brother,
no kin among creatures.

Next to them, the magpies,
gregarious as hens, are unimpressed.
And nearby perch two parrots dressed
in such *eclatant* guise

that the garish note
sticks in their throats; affront to eye and ear
they rot in isolation. Sour,
lonely, belligerent,

the concave-casqued horn-
bill hunches his neck beneath his gold
crown and surveys with ringed old
eye his desolate cairn.

Like a deposed king,
black-robed, he gazes at his limited vistas,
and listens to the captured princes
at their carolling.

III

Wandering at large
through her mortgaged estate's vast landscaped grounds,
the dowager peacock makes her rounds,
with distraught but regal carriage.

Her only jewelry
an emerald bib and an uneasy tiara,
she staggers across the green arena
stiff with authority.

At the aviary door
she pauses, indignant, ruffles her feathers, shakes
her dingy train; then forsakes
her pride to cock an ear.

About the Contributors...

JOSEPH LANGLAND, who has been teaching for a decade at the University of Wyoming, is now at the University of Massachusetts. He has been published in the leading quarterlies, and has a second book in preparation. ✧ DAVID WAGONER, Seattle, has a new book of poems, "A Place to Stand" (Indiana), and a recent novel, "Rock" (Viking). He has just completed a new novel. ✧ MONA VAN DUYN's book of poems, "Valentines to the Wide World" (Cummington Press), is being published this fall.

✧

MAXINE KUMIN teaches at Tufts College, and is a former swimming coach. She is rapidly gaining recognition as an accomplished young poet. ✧ MICHAEL HAMBURGER is an English poet and scholar. His studies in German literature, *Reason and Energy*, have been published here by Grove Press. ✧ JOHN HAAG, Seattle, is currently on a Fulbright Fellowship at Reading University in England.

✧

ARNOLD STEIN, of the University of Washington faculty, a distinguished scholar and critic, is presently living in Rome on a Guggenheim Fellowship. He is writing a book on John Donne. ✧ NANCY-LOU PATTERSON is a Northwest painter who teaches at Seattle University. This is her debut as a poet. ✧ JOSEPH KOSTOLEFSKY lives in San Francisco. ✧ JOAN SWIFT, Seattle, has appeared in *The New Mexico Quarterly*, *Views*, and *Voices*. ✧ BERNICE OLIPHANT lives in Aberdeen, Washington. This is her first appearance in a literary magazine. ✧ ROBERT DODGE, Seattle, was co-winner of the Academy of American Poets Prize at the University of Washington. This is his first publication. ✧ BETH BENTLEY, Seattle, has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Paris Review*, among others.

One of our editors, RICHARD HUGO, was the leading hitter in the Boeing Airplane Company Major Day and Swing Shift fastball leagues, with a batting average of .541. His team, The Old Crows, won the league and company championships.

1

MARK TOBEY, our cover artist, has a retrospective show of 224 paintings and drawings opening at the Seattle Art Museum on September 12. At the end of October, the show moves to the Portland Art Museum, and then to the de Young Museum in San Francisco.

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