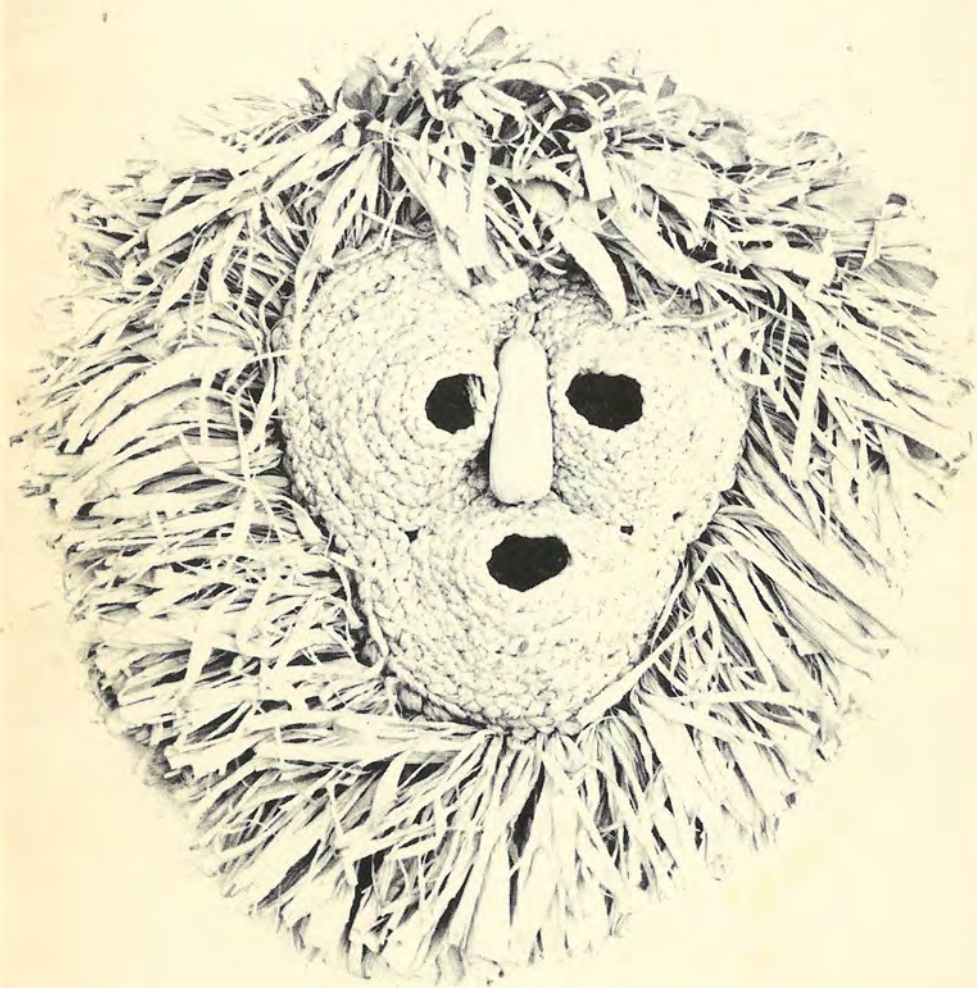


Poetry

NORTHWEST

AUTUMN 1971 / VOLUME XII / NUMBER 3 / ONE DOLLAR



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POETRY NORTHWEST

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P O E T R Y N O R T H W E S T

————— AUTUMN 1971

Thomas James

Four Poems

WOODEN HORSE

All by myself I tied the braided rope
Around your gigantic neck, hoisting you
Over the garden wall. You are cold and steep:
A monolith of oak, an ice-built ship.
You contain the last gift. Embossed on your thick brow,

One carven whorl balances a star.
Wine-colored, adamant, you watch me run
Beneath your forelegs, brief as Gulliver.
Your sculptured mane, thick as a hill of fir,
Is wound with wooden fruit wiser than stone.

Your head is reared. I tap your heavy flanks
With a dry stick: you rumble like a shell
Casting its echo back. My spearhead sinks
Into your raftered belly's softer planks.
I scale one foreleg's knotty pinnacle.

Scrambling across thick withers overgrown
With oak sprouts, I approach the massive halter.
Bronze scales snap and click in a light rain;
Their cold patinas catch the cuticle moon
Which rocks in the stiff crook of your left ear.

I enter the frozen oracle of your mouth
Where swallows built a nest of wet broomstraws.
Your nostrils are a citadel for bees.
The air, stiffened to silver, vibrates with
An insect hum. I poke the angry hives.

Your time come round, the raw eyes deepening,
I share your difficult fountainhead of pain.
The indolent serpent coils in the sun.
Till now, the air was redolent with warning—
Emblems spilled from the mouth of Laocoön.

I no longer fear your secret, it is a gift.
With the alien blood flooding the tight vein,
Your eyes, once worked by sticks, contain the sun.
I find you laboring, the hoofprint soft,
No less familiar, in a wooden dawn.

HE

Again and again I have painted the autumn flowers:
The goldenrod shreds over my father's bureau.
I am at home among the ladderback chairs

And muted pigments, the mauves, the tablets of stone-blue.
It did not even hurt as the last dandelions
Frayed, losing their hard, redeeming yellow.

I recall the pitcher of lilac, a thistle's bones.
The dead tighten their eyes behind pear boughs.
Age whittles at the tender golds and greens.

The wicker lawn furniture went from bad to worse.
My mother's silver candelabrum
Vanished in a rubble of petals fallen loose,

In unstrung leaves, twigs suddenly struck lame.
My bedclothes are a panoply of vines.
Death gathers like a preferment, post-flowering time

In the unpainted, sketched-in gardens,
On the sky's clear wash of ultramarine.
The tongues of summer fall in the penciled lanes.

My room faces morning's blank transfiguration,
The essential empty dyes of the scuppernong
Spreading and spreading on the dirty pane.

The catalpa offers its million pipes, strung
Like beans or dolorous spikes of frost.
Sun pokes me awake every morning.

Come back. By now the spider's little legs
Are crippled with frost. I lift my brush to paint the last
Still life-in-death, the vaseful of dry twigs.

JACK

This is the village of stormclouds.
I have reached it by myself, tugging the bean leaves.
I love these altitudes.

The bean stems sprouted, groves
Of them, a forest of pea-green sticks.
The clouds were loose white scarves,

A bevy of fleecy ducks
Over my mother's kitchenyard all fall.
The villagers took pitchforks,

Rakes and scythes to haul
Them in. I climbed. My mother shrank into
A calico-skirted beetle

And disappeared. Washed blue,
Now the sky bellies like a circus tent.
How small things grow,

How weighted-down. The firmament
Is a blank blue pond of forgetfulness.
This sun has grown blunt

In its caved-in pumpkin face,
Yolk gold once. All the yellow bean leaves touch,
And clouds are froth, too close

For comfort. My knife sticks
In the green bean crotch. I wait up here to catch
The first kiss of the axe.

THE STONE SEASON

In the greenhouse things are happening—
I am all thumbs. They are splendid emeralds,
They work against this withering,

A world outside white with cold,
Frost manipulating all the leaves.
Mixed in air, bigger than a wheatfield,

A mossy fragrance. Things come alive
After centuries of drowsiness—
It is like opening a grave,

Exhuming the competent, the serious,
The fern uncurling its swan's neck,
The cabbage opening like a rose,

Durable blossoms that will never break.
I am the sorcerer's apprentice.
I am wide-eyed, I watch things wake

And stiffen under countless panes of glass
Where the old magician glides in a dirty smock,
Tuning the roses in, coaxing the lime trees,

Which wait like children in the morning dark,
Each with a name tag, twelve displaced persons
Whose nerves grow sensitive to the old magic—

Buds swaying out of ancient bones,
The brown bug waking in the table top.
I stretch my arms into a stone season.

Albert Goldbarth

Two Poems

VILLAGE WIZARD

Begged by a novice-wizard to display the secret
of his craft, Waziri demonstratively
kept silent.

Asked to perform at the Merchants Bazaar
a feat never seen before, Waziri came
with a dozen coins in his purse and left
with a dozen coins in his purse.

Requested by the husbandless maid to conjure,
Waziri concocted three gifts: a flask of lotion
scented with spice; a beaker of potion
made with grapes; and a potent amulet
wrought with pearl to wear on a necklace
between her breasts when she bared her breasts
to the waxing moon. Even her husband
called it magic.

Paid to recite a spell for sleep, Waziri
began his life story.

Told to foresee the Emperor's future,
Waziri closed his eyes.

Ordered to exorcise evil influence
from the royal heir at his birth,
Waziri cut the umbilical cord.

Commanded on pain of death to provide the impossible
virgin speculum for the Queen, that fabled mage's mirror
so pure, it would have imaged nothing—not its maker,
not the air, and not the darkness—before her face
reflected there: Waziri stared at her despairingly
and wept a tear.

THE DEATH OF THE PRINTED PAGE

1

I awoke to an inaudible stutter: the consonants already floating into moonlight or grime, keening their singular claps of wisdom: once more, once only, the sharp crack of k's and j's like a firing squad and the rotund air of b's rising skyward, ghosts released with the last breath. The shadows of w's in flight fading across my skin. It is cold, a time for migration.

2

Fruit of knowledge? Last to go, the p's burst from their drying pods. This is a pun and a metaphor. That was a pun and a metaphor. Caskets: lower case t's scattered the floor, then even those grave markers disappeared. The grand thesaurus of silence.

3

The books? Shaking off their jackets, curling their spines. Some going easily, willingly perhaps: my extensive collection of porno steaming into a vapor above the bed: the real thing at last! But it *was* the last, and the reticent paper backs lined up against the wall without reprieve: well, what could I say? Or how could the words in my throat live honorably without birth certificates? Only the vowels now, a wail: of ooo's and aaa's in a wordless dirge. When I looked again, the silent e vanished, at the end of life.

4

We can only comfort their final hours. This repayment, however small: to hold the last anthology of English and American Literature. This is the finish. Turn to the start. Whisper the hymns of Anonymous.

And now when we talk across the oceans, no speech reflects in water. We cannot talk to mirrors. And now no living page is left with living contents, or ever read. Of course this is silly.

Richard Schramm

Two Poems

THE TOMBS

I have come to talk with them at the edge of the field. They ask me to sit and the light drains from my hands in the old hollows of the copestone. A dark pocket of earth, rock-slump, a few shrubs, even the goats avoid it.

I can hear them puzzling over their bones, which ones to go walking and their hair fallen in the corner growing by itself. When at last they come out they bring a few scales of moss to show me where they are standing.

Down the road vagrants huddle by fires their backs turned, mouths hardly moving pretending there is no food.

It is already night in the fresh cuts on the face of the stone quarry. The rock pool glides in blackness and the water wanders off somewhere all night hoping for something to come back to.

THE LANDING

Always they have a way
of avoiding, whether by motion
slower than mine, speech crofted
on darker tongues, or by simply
tending to themselves openly
near the water's edge

so this passage with
night locked in windows and the chill
air feeding itself over the fields
in half-light is little different
from the day that would have woken
had I stayed.

The boatmen are wrapped
in light shawls, behind me a cook
squats poking coals in the fire.
None of them watches the town slip away
or looks at the house I grew up in
banging its shutters.

Where are we going,
I ask, but sudden wing-beats clamber
through the air, morning birds rush
shoreward and the name from our prow
ripples in their wake. I lean into
river wind arcing

grasses in the shoals,
plumes rise from my head, my hands
have almost forgotten their worry,
but when I look in the pale wake
I see a school of faces like my own
lapping in dark water.

Gary Gildner

Two Poems

XMAS

1. Deck the halls with git.
2. Git the halls.
3. In a gitfall, stick out your tongue.
4. Remember when gitfalls were bigger?
5. For grandmother: a warm, practical git.
6. For Bing: a white git.
7. For that man on the go: a go git.
8. Git comes in all sizes, including No-return.
9. Git is color blind & lays down its arms.
10. Jingle git.

BURN-OUT

In the vacant lot
next to Eddie's Sundries, two young bruisers

forty feet apart, in heat,
burn a baseball back and forth.

Dry, I step inside
for beer.

The cooler's empty; Eddie's widow lifts her eyes
from Maeterlinck's *Life of the Bee*—

she knuckles the sweat on her lip
and calls the Hamm's man a son of a bitch.

I nod,
she lights a Kool

and sighing returns to her page.
I leave.

Outside, the boys have moved in
a dozen feet. The game is serious,

speechless, the ball lands with an oily *smack!*
It takes me back. I remember

how red my palm got
when I caught the ball too much

in the pocket
instead of the webbing—

and once so hard in the lower gut
I urinated pink for a week.

Suddenly one boy yells “You mother!”
and makes a wild heave over the other’s

head. It hits and cracks
the plastic PEPSI sign sticking out of Eddie’s.

They scam.
Eddie’s widow’s face

appears behind the screen
like an engraving. I can’t tell how

she feels. Then
the Hamm’s man

pulls his truck up, jumps down grinning.
Eddie’s widow steps outside, she’s wearing

yellow bedroom slippers sporting
dandelions. Shading

her tiny eyes
with the bee book, she blinks at the street,

then at the sky.
Several seasons go by.

The Hamm’s man, loading his dolly,
throws her a wolfish whistle.

But she is still blinking—trying to make sure,
I think, the sky isn’t kidding,

and that her eyes are in OK,
and that the voice saying

“Save it, lard ass”
really belongs to her,

and she to us, whoever we are,
before it’s time to go in.

Tess Gallagher

Two Poems

BELLS IN BED

The church across the street was sending them out,
great St. Bernards with Bibles in their teeth and
when you failed in your prosperity of sleep
to let them in, they burst through and caught us

in our bed. What clamor! what wagging, redemptive
kiss was this, to come in with a pounce, tongues
flapping, “Renounce! Renounce!” not to allow our
sweet overlapping. Dear Saint I said you, give

them the last crust of bread and send them
on, but they were too well trained to eat and
though it was our last, they put up one ferocious
howl for more. Love, be all the world to me,

I begged at last, or let me hide in the rock
of this embrace, prayer-deaf and wholly placed.
In this Yukon of the soul throw back the covers
to the wildwood beast who laps our feet, let bed

be hymnal, our bodies song and soul and all
the blistered lips of this Sunday morning race one
love-bellied toll ringing glory! glory! until we
fall, fleshless and fleshly into dreamless arms.

COWS, A VISION

Some monster bird, the barn
flings its shadow across the field
to the walnut grove. The cows
with milk-worn bodies muffle
its cry, the cry of riverbeds
gone white. In the rafters
the wings of swallows breathe
over eggs like eyes. If the sun
falls on them they must open
and fly. I was born that way,
some beak of light lifting a straw.

The cows were never born. They came
with the land, with the bucket
hanging in the well, with the iron
bed and the empty cat who slept
by the clock and ticked only
to your hand. You took it all
because it was the cat's dream
or the clock's or the empty bed
waiting. You filled everything,
the barn, the bucket, the bed,
even the empty dream and then
you built yourself a front porch
where, of an evening, you could
sit down to bullfrogs and rusty owls.

It was up to the cows after that
to keep things going. Their mouths
were always faithful, turning
like windmills the heavy heart
of the moon. For a moment toward dawn

or dusk the cows pause in their work
and a secret moon swells in them,
threatens to carry them over the barn
and away. When we die, I tell you,
that moon will find its stars and nothing
will keep them down. You aren't worried.
For you there is only more good land.

Mildred McNiece

THE LADIES OF GREATER DETROIT HAVE TEA AT THE ART INSTITUTE

Ladies, just back from St. George or Jamaica,
members of long standing in some society
of roses, or archaeology, have gathered for tea
in the Court of Diego Rivera,
which is temporarily closed to the public.

Striding in a handsome awe,
they tour the forge-and-factory hall
in rows of splendid staring, pausing here or there
to whisper *lovely, isn't it lovely?*
at something in the cauldron of the wall.

Then turn to Sunday things—like talk, or watching
while two workers from the corner florist
create a centerpiece, of sorts,
bending a spray of bare branches this way & that
in a bowl of dead leaves.

Civilly, they crowd around and smile,
reflecting in the pool like paleblue flowers,
murmuring *isn't it lovely?* at the boys—
there being, really, nothing to choose
between one eccentricity and another.

Philip Legler

LOCAL STORY

It was after it happened
that his picture
appeared in the paper,
but all of our town agrees
he wandered in
sometime during the night
when we were sleeping.
Entering our neighborhood
what could he think
hearing the cars go by,
seeing the street lights,
feeling the shapes
of men about him,
wishing he might return.
Imagine his surprise
coming upon our storefronts,
sidewalks, houses.
Maybe he stood looking
into our windows.
I wonder where he slept
that night, whether he dreamed.
Daylight comes, of course,
and over on Terrace Drive
a housewife found him
rattling the garbage cans.
My God, she screamed—
calling her children,
phoning the police,
telling the neighbors.
It was something to talk about.
Everybody from blocks around
soon gathered, mothers
in housecoats
bringing their children

who'd seen them only
in zoos, even their fathers
back from work. It looked
like another street sale
going on. By the time
he'd climbed a maple tree
across from Mrs. Kolski's,
three police cars arrived,
lights flashing, sirens
wailing to the curb.
You would have thought
some criminal was loose.
The man from the paper
shouldered in, dropping
his camera, and Mr. Carlson's
terriers jumped at the tree trunk,
clawing and barking.
All of us watched him there
in the leaves, with no place
to go, watching them
taking aim and firing.
Sprawled, held for a moment
on his final branch,
he rolled off, dropped
to the ground below.
Then, as the paper reported,
"Patrolman Yeats administered
the *coup de grace*."
And that was the end of it.
We mulled about
for awhile, not saying much.
I guess that night
most of us slept as usual,
had few bad dreams,
fewer second thoughts.
Whatever threat was there
we'd push from our minds,
out of our neighborhoods,
beyond the city limits.

James B. Hall

A CLUTCH OF DREAMS

The forked path in the woods
Dreams of a crossroads,
A perfection in concrete, dividing
This valley into four equal fields;

The shoat at the slaughterhouse door
Remembers a fine, white gate
At the barn-end of a meadow
And corn calling with the voice of a man.

Waterlogged, the orange liferaft
Drifts on the wide-eyed Pacific
Then sinks, still dreaming of atolls,
And the new crew roistering ashore.

And I, on this forked path
Of dreams, I see fine white gates
And I ride this orange-raft world
Downward towards coral, where all dreams end.

Alexander Kuo

RETURNING HOME AFTER A TRIP,
I FIND I CAN'T REMEMBER

I can't remember what goodness was
returning home

after a trip. I take a walk
in the park—

two doves locked in flight
are flying

to somewhere, a child continues
to shovel

sand into the stillness somewhere
at the edge

of his world, and a few
couples are

walking their hands in the wild
wind. I turn

and, facing the vacant air
leave my flaws

to their weeping: the echo
of loose bones

decaying cemeteries away
reaches me

the enemy's drying blood sticks
in my skin

mathematics break, words
fall

apart, and a vein of silence
fades

in the still whiteness forming
behind me.

I am going to go away
now

and never again wish
for less.

5/10/70

Sonya Dorman

SOME OBSERVATIONS

1

like roads
slopes run both ways and you have a choice
of how you'll take them
 down is a frolic
 done like an otter's belly dance
on frozen snow and up
isn't always the work it seems
 up to birth or a new hat
 love's ladder or a last dream
down the long pitch to sleep
bliss at sea bottom with shells
or galaxies of electric fish
 slopes keep promising more
 than accomplished peaks

2

get up
get up the worm turns
at the surface after rain
 fish run up the river
 like rain drops or like tears
get up it's dawn in the garden
 where many mouths are busy
 among the beans
 where the lively bait is singing
 voices inaudible as air
get up this morning once again
 to watch or catch
or cry for fish pouring up the river
for their lives like you and me

3

turtles
create in a closed vault

at the end of summer days
on the road
crushed broken open
he who minded his own business
in the grass
nor made music
only converted greens to energy
she who harmlessly
laid her eggs in an earth nest
unable to race but only to weigh
as much as herself
in her checkered box
without knocking on their neighbors
turtles exist and are bowled over

4

curls
sculpted into numbers like
 nine and two
even like three
 on the heads of holy warriors
 on their horses' necks
 all over the plaster frieze
which time has done to a nicotine yellow
curls thrive between bulls' horns
 on the napes of bulldancers
 ringlets lovelocks kisscurls
see none on the furred bee who goes
direct to the flowery pouch

5

work
is the hand that feeds me
 in the dust of new graves
among the awful trees loaded
 with fruits
or the long slope where potatoes
boot-colored
 never stop growing
on rainy days five new words

are printed on my brow
the ghost of my work
pressed between pages
is how you may know me

T. J. Henighan

SPRING SONG

The sky's on fire,
All the doors of the city unhinged—
The old lady with the green umbrella
Forgets to feed the birds.

Spring,
While fish brighter than coins
Slip under a mulch of soapsuds
Past town sewer junctions

Downriver,

And a branch
Balances a moment on the drift
Between two notions
Shoving an unexpected root
Into the middle of the morning—

Each tree stumping the city,

Creaking and shaking
Like a dream reassembling itself
After the tired skulduggery of echoes,
After the napalm and the lies,

Skyward—
A blind child dances.
Men in their prisons look up.

John Allman

OPERATION

The dwarf nurse takes my temperature.
There's a pencil in my mouth. Already,
I'm eating my words, when she turns
to my five-year-old daughter dressed
in white curtains like a bride. It
doesn't matter, she's the doctor: here's
my new jelly-bean heart stuffed in a
thimble. I'm the cat mewing in doll's
clothes, ready to die, and she blows
into the thimble to bring my heart alive,
tells me I can't move, only babies cry.
I'm in surgery on the bathroom floor.
The green light darkens on the wall.
Am I in Bellevue? The medication trays
rattle in the hallway. Tug whistles
are moaning on the river like old women.
The dwarf nurse winks. She adjusts
her brassiere. My daughter is counting her
fingers. A gong sounds. "Calling Dr. No."
What have I denied? I'm marked with
lipstick, sticky X, and spit. Physician
with my wife's brow, my brother's grin,
she's digging in, unclasping my sternum.
I'm an open ship's hold taking cargo of
turtle hearts and she's lowering
her thimble on a thread into the hole
closing slowly like a cat's iris.
Someone is flushing a toilet.
The nurse sprinkles sugar on my stomach.
A cat rushes up and licks it off.
Everyone nods. The PA system plays the wedding march.
My daughter puts a monocle over the open wound,
slips skin around the edges of a glass hole. I'm
finished. I lift my head and see into it. I can
look into the picture-window egg of my soul
where snow falls forever on the tiny house.

Joyce Carol Oates

HOW I BECAME FICTION

In the hospital I take care to walk
as if no destination threatened:
I drift with the cool metallic odors,
the creak of carts, the gala energy
of nurses arriving for duty
at eight A.M.

A yeast has arisen in my body.
Somewhere, a stranger's fate is being prepared,
to be typed out onto a form.

My body, see it is eager to please! and innocent
of its own yeast, its poisons and ungirlish discords!
Its product is being carried here
in a brown drugstore jar, prepared
for strangers who will not show offense.
They will charge fourteen dollars.
They will type up forms.

Death will not be simple, say the wheel-chaired
men, khaki-colored with the inertia of the wise.
They are mild beasts now, eyeing me.
Don't stare at me, I am not fiction!
Not your fiction!
My body is a girl's grown-up body, tugging
at their pinpoint eyes. My clothes are miserable
with the strain of possessing
this body so early in the day.

The men's eyes are fixed to me. But no darkness
would recover them, no alley make them male again—
Don't look at me, I am not fiction—
They were men once
but there is no proof of it now.
Unreal now, they brood over old skirmishes.

Like them I am drifting into fiction.
Like them I will be injected with heat and ice.
This morning, sweating, I await my fate
typed out onto a green form.
What further fiction is being imagined? What fee?

Harold Witt

Two Poems

THOSE VEACHES

Something was wrong with every one of those Veaches—
the mother stuttered, the father lost his jobs,
Doretta swiped things from the five and ten,
no one at Jefferson got grades
as bad as Bob's—

Rosalie had a baby but wasn't married,
Paul was in reform school, Jake in jail
or serving out a sentence more likely than not;
none of them bothered much
about little Dale

dragging his germy blanket, the snotnosed brat,
and sucking his thumb, his diaper halfway off,
while Grandma smoked a corncob on the porch
and who knew what young silken leg
mad Grandpa watched.

They were a genetic disaster like the Jukes
we later read about in Psych 1A—
hare-lipped, knock-kneed, pigeon-toed, given to fits,
but a rich lady on Lemon Heights
adopted Dale,

had his lip fixed, sent him to private school—
and at age twelve, he preached a sermon in church,
choosing as his text "The Golden Rule,"

with an angel tongue that made
stone pillars weep.

MRS. GROOK

Whoever could compute
from tons of paper clips,
from red marks: "*Please see me!*"
from skylarks struggling through
the parenthetic lips
of Mrs. Gretchen Grook,

from rulers in her tone
measuring—ta tum—
sublime soliloquies
and Wordsworth's daffodils
like asterisks on stems—

program an IBM
with how much sinking dread
of boredom in the tome
opened with that hand
she wore the topaz on—

who in a sterile room
where bare statistics hum,
feeding the machine,
could fill out sunken Keats
she bled to skin and bone

and unearth what was done
when dumpy in that dress
ruthless Mrs. Grook
shot nightingales down
with bullets in her look—
to come up with the sum
of those she turned away
from love of poetry
those chalkdust afternoons.

William Doreski

Two Poems

HIS ODE TO LOST ELOQUENCE

Roaches rise from the plumbing
to hunt him down
and drag the crumbs away.
Disgrace embitters the earth
at his feet.
He's somehow lost his balance
and the foam slushing below
waits for his fall.
Dogdays and blackdays and Fridays are past.
Calendars flap
in a sky of unturned pages.

The roaches are brave in anger.
Pencils sharpen
on his eyeteeth.
His rage swats the insects back.
There's bad blood on his breath
and horns
pushing up through his skull.
Far from here,
far from haunted houses where frost
coughs in the furnace rooms
spaniels call in the ferns,
lost at dusk.

Last night as the traffic faded
he placed a candle on his desk
and prayed for poems
to rain through his sleep
and prod the morning
into sprouting genius.
He tossed all sweaty with doubt and dirty sheets
and woke just at dawn
in time
to see the candle flicker out
and puddle sadly on the floor.

The morning came and went
and rain
guttered the streets as he waited
for lightning
to gun him down.
His tongue screwed up to shape poems,
then half-relaxed in silence.
He swore.
The rain parted
to show the sun half-drowned
in a maze of pastures
burnt screaming by the wind.

Roaches rise from the plumbing
to rip him into a meal.
He only asked for poems.
Chains sing
as they ascend the stairs.
Shivers rend the window
where he waits.
The calendars are useless now.
Night dominates
and his silence drones on,
shaming him back to sleep.

NUDE AS MUST BE

In the undressing the rock must appear.
The rock is a sign of the times.
The rock speaks and strips to make a poem of rock.
You are nude always.
Even the rock-poem is no nuder than you.
Speak at will and save your thinking for the last day.
Under every rock lies a worm.
Under every worm lies a word.

When did you last see yourself?
You've bagged out like an executive in his dotage.
Save yourself for the process, the carving and chipping.

You know what it's like.
A sign of the times, a thickness in the dark waiting to
leap when no one is aware.

In the undressing the poem must appear.
We both have waited long, our hands on zippers and snaps,
chisels ready to go.

The rock swelters in the sun.
Its dreams are in its nose.
Its face burrows in dreams.
It snores through its poem.
It can kill anyone.

Mike Magee

OUT OF SEASON

Winter slows us down toward sleep,
we burrow deep beneath our covers
dreaming of our private seasons.
We wake each day with weary eyes,
creep out to eat our daily bread,
arrange our collars in the mirror.
Today echoes the day before,
the empty stomach of the fireplace,
the ashes of too many winters.

Outside the life is marginal,
the morning sketched in charcoal,
branches lean as spider webs,
the wind stripping the throat bare,
knifing beneath the collarbone.
We hold the breath inside our lungs
and store up speech like kindling wood.

We stir the coals that flare within.

Steven Orlen

THE PERVERT

The police searched for him in bars
and old bookstores in Rock Island, Illinois.
But he was everywhere, like the evening hours.

It was a cellar that held him in the dust
and with the warm terror
of fingers groping in the darkness of a glove
he escaped: now running, now walking carefully
in daylight as a salesman, or a widow's lover.

He is too old for such disguise.

Now the depth of water attracts.
There is the pleasure
of release. He is floating downriver at last,
with an impeccable sense of nostalgia.

Neighbors, parents, the bald sheriff's deputy,
occasional articles of violence.

Photographs appear to him
not without pain, of leafy parks on the Iowa shore,
schoolyards buzzing
with girls in long dresses. Now they grow old
on the riverbank, and have forgotten him,
the man who walked among them.
The other children died.

He sits down. The raft shrinks.
He believes in loneliness, he knows
he is to blame.
His fingers worry deep in his pockets.

Robert Stock

THE NIGHT THE DISPOSAL PLANT
BROKE DOWN ON LETHE RIVER,

a night of amoebic fog
and spongy lips, some vague
breeze off dogdays twitched
our minds already leached
as light as a spider's moth
by unconsenting oath,
and we, the blessed elect,
had to concede us licked
by the machinery
of our gorged history.
Well out of sight, a bend
in the river choked the land
with ghostly dust and silt
of our concerted guilt,
until the impetus
of waters gashed a sluice
the shortest way it could,
right through terror's wood,
and, overloading the plant,
exposed what havoc meant;
for what it was it is
and will not pause to kiss.
What we had thought transformed
floated up and squirmed
enough to make us sick:
in the sodden gunnysack
a gummy remorse of kittens,
vows and derelictions,
and love's sweet puffy arm
thrust from the scabs of time
into a perfect rhyme.

Chana Bloch

ENVY

When I touch it
it has the shape
of other men's
houses. My face
sticks to the window
like frost.

In the grate a fierce
hot flower,
spending its colors.
Some race of men,
ripe with fire,
leaving me behind. What swells
in their pockets?

Their room is a pool
of amber. Furs
stroke the air.
They are dancing,
what triumphs? They laugh
by turns, you can see it
ripple their pearly throats.

They last. I have to watch,
to grow fists
to bang at the wrong.
Nothing opens. Nothing
will keep me warm but
my own skin.

Brendan Galvin

Four Poems

THE PAPER ROUTE

All hair, The Hair was wading back
into his fen, one warty hand
around a blonde all skin except for fronds
diaphanously sketched. He was
the Nazi pilot who cracked up,
turned hirsute by the vapors of the swamp.
Those Sunday 3 A.M.'s
gave me half-hours for feasting eyes
in juicy comic strips.

Stars through the office window's patina of dust
went winking off. Meanwhile I sandwiched
brides and wars between Mandrake and Dick Tracy,
loading my fishmonger cart
till it could drag me down a hill,
its four-foot iron wheels rolling like tumbrils
through the empty town.

From under the stone cat squatting on a porch
I scooped the weekly change,
folded in a usual bread wrapper—mark of
the mystery subscriber.
For the lady in whose breath I reeled
weak as grasshoppers corked in empty pints,
I dropped a *World*.

Elk's Lodge, Old People's Home, dodging
a three-legged dog like a running stool.

Coffee and donuts building below the heart,
during church a stainglass sunrise turned my sight
to tears. I prayed to printer's ink greasing my palms,
for fray of paper under fingernails,
asked for an arm like Christ's to reach
that third floor porch—
the paper drifted down in parachutes.

On the edge of town, cows lowed. My nemesis,
the man with the umbrella,
phlegm dripping from his nose like Jack Frost's
icicle in thaw, turned from the cart as I came
through a yard. A paper clutched under his overcoat?
One *Adviser* short, the last house
on the route would get a *Globe*.

And back in bed, The Aztec Queen,
indecently attired,
shot with me into sleep via outer space.

BEAR AT THE ACADEMY OF LIVING ARTS

Got there early.

Women the color of preserved baby shoes
kept trying to knock Bear down
with their big eyelashes.
Athens, says one. *Rome*, argues another.

They were blowing
up the president of the Academy.
Bicycle pump in his belly button.

More air to the bow-tie, said the lady
with big glasses on.

He's very high-powered, she said to Bear.
What do you do?

Big eyes, she had.
Bear kept his hands at sides.
Organs collapsed inside.

Rub my ass on trees? Can't tell her that,
Bear thought.
Eat blueberries and sleep? Nix on that, too.

Bite the hand, Bear said. *Feeds me.*
Oops. Slipped out. Bear's hand over mouth too late.

What they call you? asked she,
smile all hung out.

Stud, Bear lied.
Stub, laughed she, *tha's cute*.

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL IS UNDER SURVEILLANCE

Stoma alert, the maple
reports in first:
he is dreaming of faces
shadowed with thorns

of barbed wire.
In his living room
an angelfish measures
size and frequency

of his groans.
That sirloin he ate
for dinner
is busy mapping

the intestinal track.
And off Greenland
a pod of right whales
slap their flukes

with laughter.
They have just heard
from percale
his dreamed-up

sexual kinks.
His wife's alligator
purse documents
her hand's travels

through his pants:
the tragic quest
for dollars;
and the last wolf pack

knows time, place, and date
of every haircut.
At breakfast his watch-
strap sends them

a seismograph
of his pulse.
A grapefruit squirts.
He is marked. Nothing

will let him go.

THE INVISIBLE ANIMAL

Awake to the July moon
over a woman's flesh, I have heard you
stamp the earth before a place
I rented with whiskey.
What did you spare me of?
Your crown of bone?
You could have had her—
I with no weapons but fly rods.

Where did I first feel
your hidden breath on my back?
On the sun-burning trail
to Great Pond, where a hush
from shuddering scrub
sent me hot-footed home
without an excuse for my father?

I have looked long into leaves
for a sight from the shade,
for a snout darker than shadow.

Is your breath a benediction,
or the smack of a feral lip
attuned with the rustle of oaks?
Do yellow pupils register,
then cancel us
from an unconcerning brain?
Or are you fleet
as a night pond over skin?

Stuart Frieber

FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Many of them live
and buy manufactured goods.
Cement, teepees, chriscraft, windmills.
Thirty-eight freight cars are loaded
and rolling toward Manhattan, Kansas,
where a federal inspector marks them
with quick-drying harmless purple ink.

And their families appear
under pen names, sons give up
law to direct the anthracite miners'
strike in Pennsylvania, while
daughters stand under mistletoe and
forfeit a kiss! (Did you know it grows
on other trees besides apple?) Indians
trail electric power lines, chewing
cottonseed, young Geronimo learns

army magic from a stolen chart,
drops his eyes, an arrow is found
and placed on cool leaves, the frost
bites, three bullets are popular
with holiday visitors, the country
is America in the opera by that name.

William Minor

MIDWEST

a poem on my birthday

1

I take this day of pain,
my pleasure now, for thirty years
and celebrate with spare uncertainty
my rare occasion: birth.
I know that bicycles exist
(with riders) unknowing and sublime.
I know that birds awaken slowly.
Hourglass cornstalks stand
in fields as dry as this, my latest year.
Why I came to this autumnal country
to learn myself, I do not know.
I've asked no farmer to rehearse me,
parents to praise,
nor churches
(with their false cold stones) to preserve
whatever had unnerved me
and brought me to these steeples in a too small town.

2

Leaves drift. Undaunted, small
they spin off my shirt.
A failure, self-confessed,
I walk among them. At times I think the wind
is my own head.
On cold lake waters freighters crawl,
copper lives, leaves,
the hull and hollow prow of will.
It's true, I am not well, yet
—among tall steeples in a quiet town—
no longer walk in hell
but pass, at night, some shop-lit windows,
girls with Holstein bodies, German heads.

A seed mill pickup rumbles by.
Morning shakes me up, evening lets me down.
O brave St. Lawrence, seaway breeze and time . . .
how thirty years go round!

3

O midland heart, Armorica!
Midwestern people, poor, decided, pure
—opposed to travel anywhere—
never go crazy, they just stay there.
Desolate I've been, thank God.
A moral edge in this, my age
and edgeless morals. The puny sweet morass
of shoveled snow, well-clipped grass.
My neighbors have a flag, American.
It's big as any make of car, or girl, and hung
just like the sun, each day.
The age is lubric, sad. My flag is gray.
I fail for lack of faith in what,
unfurled, the flag unwilling knows: tomorrow.
The blind white art
of baited laundry lines.
And under every stone—an Indian, buried.

4

Depressing that was. Not entirely true.
My neighbors will make do.
When first arrived I crazed
from Western cities borne, she called at three
(risen to babies, observed
my brandy, light, and book)
to see if I was *ill*. I drank my fill
of raw solicitous humor, rural,
and said, "I am not well,
but getting on." The choice comes down to this:
making do, or moving on.
Backyards are filled with snow and inner tubes.
The rape, silt, self—*that* goes unknown!
Here, arson is of value. It destroys
the sight, the shingled sky,

of Superworth, Old Main, and Mill. That rape
scares less than sirens in the mind.

5

The world's imperfect. Yes!
Justice presides, for nothing deserves to last.
I'll buy that too, but add
nothing *desires* to last.
My favorite walk in town
is by the railroad tracks. What's new?
Late autumn. Queen Anne's lace,
black-eyed Susan, all the girls, dying.
The milkweed pod, so full of seeds, and Santa Claus
(as girls call seeds, sown), butterflies,
the lovely Monarchs—dying.
They're seed starved. The pods are full, but seldom
open. Sumac covers, poison red, the hill.
And rails, cantilevered tips, chipped,
rusted. Trains pass still.
What's natural? None
of what lives here cries out for my defense.

6

The ideal? Natural? A noontime bar, drunk.
A farm wife sings, "O Born to Lose"
to my guitar. Boilermakers!
Yet fingers work, still. Her husband,
frost of hair,
tells how his silo burst. Who culls the terms?
"There's nothin here to do but drink
and fuck," a foundry worker says. I think
his language apt and follow, carefully,
his will. As do the slow fire faces
up and down the bar.
It's still early. My cravings are occasional,
part-time silo, empty,
up to fill. I've tried to be wise.
I longed to take the overview.
But what of rotting barns, pain in the eyes,
and auctioned tractors?

7

About the rink, the barricade of snow
(crude circle, shot from a hose, this morning)
tonight's abundant skaters go,
their clever cotton buttocks backward
swing beneath the light
that overhangs, and star's accord.
I also go, a frozen lech
a scarf around his neck and gallows bound,
onlooking me, old man,
thirty times and thirty years gone round,
so firmly etched in ice.
Beyond the pond, on stable glass
a fisher squats, drinks beer
and his small slot pulls a small blue gill.
Eyes demented, small, absurd,
he glances at the shacks of other men
and saves the fish.

8

Thirty below.
I walk the streets, good backward
skating, small time, small town, man.
The asylum, the poorhouse, and the jail.
I pass them all
and tip my hat, for I have been
not yet but nearly in.
I'm full of wild respect for these
and other buildings, in my too small town.
Down by the river berries, dead,
look as if they know
the frozen river's not yet turned to rice
from late snowfall.
I have made peace with cravings that,
occasional, are common, easy, natural.
I wonder where to go tonight
before, Midwest, my years turn home.

ANATOMY

What flies through the forest without shaking a leaf?
My voice

What stumbles all day over the hills upside down and blind?
The nails in my boots

What hides under the bed each night waiting for their bones?
My boots

Who are the pitiful Siamese quintuplets forever doing curl-ups in bed?
My toes

What are the vizors of the obsolete warriors too proud to look
at each other?
My fingernails

What marks time barefoot at the edge of an acre of breasts?
My thoughts

What is the fruit impossible to swallow that has cried No! No!
too late from the very beginning?
My Adam's apple

What is the rudder that would work fine if only the boat went
backward?
My will

What rises to every occasion, runs away with itself without legs,
yearns to take over the whole country but must let others do the
talking and has no flag of its own?
My sex

What tries to be everywhere at once and keeps failing a little more
and finally goes home to its pudding?
My blood

Who are the trinity of eggs left behind in the abandoned
ant hill but waiting bravely?

Me, myself, and I

SEEING WARRIORS IN THE SUBURBS,
HE IMAGINES THE HOME OF LAOTZE

Let it be a small steep country with few people,
the friendly gathered in villages, the rest holed up in high places.
If the people value their lives as parts of the country
they will migrate no farther than creeks or cicadas.
Let each child be given an immovable rock
that will be his for life to care for.
Let the man-shaped tools be hung out
everywhere convenient for spurning,
let them gleam with disuse.
If there must be ships use them for coffins under the hill,
if there must be autos park them with motors idling
on the Frontier as trophies for Mongols.
If there are firearms let them be used
for plumbing and music.
Let everyone behave like targets.
Let the people knot cords instead of writing, let each man
and woman and child wear belts and sashes of poems,
best read with the fingers.
Let them relish their food, knowing its whole history.
Let them fashion their clothing like birds, animals, fishes.
Let them open their houses to the moon.
Let them forget one custom each year
and invent three new ones, with feasting and dancing.
Though the villages overlook one another
and the crowing of roosters and barking of dogs
can be heard nigh in the air blowing over a ridge
let it be so that a man may grow old and die
all in his village
without having to confront a stranger
or be a stranger.

A PILGRIMAGE TO DIRTY JOHN'S

Dirty John Hardman is dead,
of acres of junk the master, sheer junk
so precious no one would dare to appraise it
where it lies like layers of Troy by the road
to Alfred, New York. Knowing full well how we give
with all our hearts "more laud to gilded dust
than to gilt o'er-dusted," he lordly suffered his neighbors
for fifty years to build this shrine to the god
Jetsam, each family piously carting its tithe

of rat-chewed horse-collars, chamber pots, engine blocks,
gunnysacks, stuffed foxes, dome-top radios
haunted by the news, bassinets, birdcages
sifting full of allergies, haywire complainers,
chiffoniers, jardinières, kewpie dolls and hubcaps,
the stymied Model T's that brought them here—
from each house according to its means, even,
it is said, children and pets as vestals.

Now complete, inextricably interlocked like a cipher,
this Chichen Itza of Yankee Industrial Knowhow
lies dreaming of shining Ownership and Purpose,
and within his shack in the center, John Hardman's
Midas imagination no longer burns to see
the ultimate buyer arrive in a 1937
Packard hearse cut down to a pickup
and the whole mouldering midden rise
sold in the golden air, and the fields beneath
burst into cornflowers and hollyhocks!

Lewis Turco

Three Poems

THE WEED GARDEN

I am the ghost of the weed garden.

Stalk among stones—you will find me
remembering husks and pods, how crisp burdock
couches in the moon for every passer.

I am the dry seed of your mind.

The hour will strike when you dream me, your
hand at the sheet like five thin hooks.

I will wait for you in the old vines rattling on
the wind, in the ground-pine. I will show you
where rue has blossomed and eyebright,

mother-thyme. You must name me Yarrow.

Bitter vetch shall catch your step as
you follow, hearing the stars turning to crystal,
sweet lovage turning sere, adder's tongue and
Jew's-ear at their whisper. Nightshade

will consume the beautiful lady.

Dwarf elder, dodder-of-thyme, I
am the thing you fear in the simple of your blood:
toothwort in the dust, feverfew, mouse-ear,
sundew and cup-moss, tormentils.

THE WORM

Some call me Ouroboros:

That-Which-Is-Its-Own-Sustenance.

I am the chemist's worm, things in a circle,
Air and Fire, Water, Earth,
a mouth of darkness devouring

its own bright tail. Sarsens for
my spine, scales of blue stone, I wheel

upon myself, and nothing is consumed. All
wisdom and all matter: these
are mine. You may transmogrify

my image in the dark glass
of your mind—I may become the
worm in Eve's fruit, asp at the breast, Wyvern in
the tower, hissing out of
Merlin's spell; nevertheless, I

am the hermetic dragon
Ouroboros: all things in One.
You may not transmute my elements unless
I die. Where will you bleed me?
How shall you sever everness?

I am The Worm Who Lives,
each thing and All: water of life,
torment's fire, wind-breath, stone and soil from which these
green things spring. Ouroboros.
Look inward where I coil in blood.

THE AGE OF AQUARIUS

It is the Age of Aquarius;
Taurus is quit of it.
"Aquarius is the butlere of goddes
and yeuyth them a water potte."
The bull is drowning in his labyrinth—

the sea has returned. The servant pours
Earth's primal blood into
the earth. There is no way out. The Pleiades hiss
like dying snakes in the libation.
"Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades

Vext the dim sea," and now the ocean
swallows the little pigs

like sausages; Taurus gores the tide: "The butler
done it." This is the age of waiters.
In the roaring kitchen there is much mirth:

the butler is making the maid. They
have sacked the winecellar.
Aldebaran, the old baron, lies buried in
the ooze under his castle. The bull
is afloat and cannot paw the black mud

where glory lies buried. The seven
brilliant sisters ride on
Taurus' back, weeping for darkness as the waters
rise to his horns. Electra is lost.
Atlas, the father, had grown old, and he

has fallen. The world is adrift. Where
is Pleione? —locked in
a turret, railing at her skies. The water-
bearer has finished with the upstairs
wench. He has eaten and drunk. He pisses

down a drain hole, and the maid giggles.
Urine mingles below-
stairs with the bull's last spuming breath. At last the house
is theirs—the butler takes another
snort. He winks. "Shall we 'ave at 'er agyne?"

The castle is adrift among the stars.

About Our Contributors

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ALBERT GOLDBARTH, who lives in Chicago, is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop.

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JAMES B. HALL, the well-known novelist and short-story writer, is in charge of one of the experimental colleges of the University of California at Santa Cruz.

ALEXANDER KUO teaches at Northern Illinois University and his first book, *The Window Tree*, was published this year by Windy Row Press.

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JOYCE CAROL OATES, a winner of the National Book Award in fiction, teaches at the University of Windsor in Ontario.

HAROLD WITT has recently had two portions of his *Winesburg by the Sea* published in pamphlet form by Hearse Press and Best Cellar Press.

WILLIAM DORESKE's pamphlet, *Running the Bitch Down*, was published this year by Barn Dream Press.

MIKE MACEE is a graduate student at the University of Washington.

STEVEN ORLEN, on leave from the University of Arizona, has been traveling in Yugoslavia and the Pacific Northwest.

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CHANA BLOCH has taught Hebrew at the University of California at Berkeley where she is working on a Ph.D. in English.

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