

# Poetry

NORTHWEST



SPRING 1965 / VOLUME VI / NUMBER 1 / ONE DOLLAR

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Owing to lack of space, the contributors' notes are omitted from this issue.  
 —THE EDITORS

# POETRY NORTHWEST

SPRING 1965

*John Knoepfle*

## Three Poems

### JUNE NIGHT ON THE RIVER

Tonight the river is  
 calm enough. A string of cars  
 drums the long Eads Bridge  
 toward Union Station.  
 Pullman windows  
 charge the secret  
 spans of the bridge and tall  
 lights travel over the water.  
 They are hooded monks  
 gleaming among the piers.

Now I see whole mountains  
 honeycombed with monks,  
 and one of these, a boy  
 from Athos, fills the blue  
 Aegean with his own  
 image as he leans  
 beyond the prow of his skiff  
 and tries his luck  
 with a hooked line for his life,  
 his serious gesture.

The train goes its way,  
 the long lights  
 go out. I pour myself  
 a careful beer, tilting

a cold glass above  
the Mississippi. It is  
a lost river roiling  
underneath the bridge. It came  
from a deep cave on this  
June night. And still it is  
the one river Clemens  
gave his own true Huck,  
head buried in the black  
knees of Jim, and the same  
winds howl down streaks  
of our summer storms.

#### MY SON READS THIS POEM

My son reads this poem.  
His six years  
measure the length of each word  
like a drop of pain.

I hold him against my chest.  
I feel his small heart  
straining to break my hands.

#### DEATH AFTER PROMISE

The child  
unfolding here is a butterfly.  
Death after all promise  
has come to me.

Now I walk in it,  
its great gold wings  
beating the air around me.

I cannot sell you my death.

It is a whole nation  
forgotten by its fathers.

*Isabella Gardner*

#### Two Poems

#### FRIGHT AMONG THE RUNES

Love, flute my veins  
And float my bones  
and freight my loins  
to fruit our vines  
but though you may be fraught with means  
my sweet love, never flout my lines

#### ROUNDELAY

A blood-red bird with one green eye  
and one gilt wing is hanging high.  
Slung by the neck on a Christmas tree  
dangling there in the tinsel he  
is not about to sing for me.

The tree it trembles, the glass gauds swing  
like that bird with his one gilt wing  
who bows his beak, whose one eye glows  
as back and forth and round he goes  
to grace notes and arpeggios.

DENYING THE DAY'S MILE

Always on clear mornings  
I wake across their valley  
to face the day's horizon:  
quickened by my tentative  
steps, I leap it like  
the jumpy shadow of a big  
jet—behind which I  
am the sun.

By the time  
dusk drinks my neighbor's  
streetcorner, and staggers  
me home, I'm overcast  
always: I imagine men  
in the Andaman Islands  
waking to fish, women  
giving breast in Lhasa  
to children the color of rice.  
But I can never conceive  
what weather they wake to, or  
face those multiple hands  
that bait my eye to a map.  
I've never even been sure  
whether they're still beginning  
a day I've already lost,  
or a day I haven't begun.  
Even with my ear close  
as a child's to waves  
bounced off Afghanistan,  
the Black Sea, and London,  
there is too much static  
to pick up children eating  
fists of Tibetan snow.

Before God died, I thought  
it might be fun to try  
his game for a while: not  
to judge the world, but simply  
to listen in on how  
it was getting on. Now  
I couldn't bear it: I can't  
even stand my neighbors,  
or face myself when I go  
to bed with no love left  
from the day.

Always on clear  
mornings I wake intending  
to walk a mile, and to hold  
that mile's particulars up  
to the general flight of jets,  
as they pretend to climb  
over human weather, and land  
on cement deserts that have  
nothing to do with love.  
I am overcast always  
for having flown to escape  
wild chicory I might  
have picked for my wife, the man  
next door I hate, and this  
lousy city that managed,  
without God, to smog itself  
through another November day.  
If I were Mayor tomorrow,  
I'd fish for better weather.  
But tonight I'm not even  
myself; where I haven't been  
is already yesterday.

*Gene Frumkin*

THE FIREFLY

That night, explosion of a pineapple,  
sweet-sour flames in which we danced  
while the orchestra played chrysanthemums.  
I remember the luxurious faces at the tables,  
the glamour of their words which I did not hear,  
the scent of their unseen eyes.  
And then the piano frightened itself  
and fled into the thicket of lights.

Glossy one, stuffed with dolls,  
I held you with all the passion of a child.  
I remember the curl of your blonde wig  
reaching out to me tenderly.  
But when I tried to kiss that luminous worm,  
it flew away toward a derelict building.

What a black house I bought! A house of charcoal  
standing on its hillside  
like a fragment of the Circus Maximus.  
It hurts my fingers with its blackness  
and throws the acid of dead flowers in my eyes,  
this monkey, this white-haired penitentiary.

*Richard Frost*

ON FINDING THE REMAINS OF A CRYSTAL RADIO

Altitude lost, cracked-up on a sheer plateau,  
Jack Armstrong worried me for an episode  
while elephants thundered, 500 feet below,  
toward their graveyard, guarded by Pygmy arrows.  
Villains named Dirk sneered and gnashed as they ambushed my heroes.

Transmitting from a sinister studio:  
the Green Hornet with his incredible car,  
and Inner Sanctum—complete with creaking door,  
bloodsucking, traded brains, and a severed hand  
that played while the pianist boiled in hell. Below,

while I slept wrinkles in my turning mind,  
I felt the boom of my father's console set  
meaninglessly tuned to another station.  
Then bugs built webs and shells inside the earphones,  
wires broke, my coils unwound. Today I've found

this lump of crystal like a saved tooth  
to roll in the palm, to bite the memory  
and sing a dreaming thread of lies and truth  
it played into my head for several years  
until I turned it down for poetry.

*Flora J. Arnstein*

ON BEING TOLD TO BE MYSELF

I ask, What self?  
The self I was born with is long since lost  
With infant teeth, and what remains,  
Given the seven-year change,  
Is only a groove in the brain—  
A fiction I can mold with half an absent hand.

Myself on waking am a spider,  
Measuring with approving eyes my geometries,  
Spun in a night that threaded them with stars;  
Or at noon I'm an eel, or a sloth, the one  
Seaming the waters in secret travel,  
The other hanging head foremost from an indifferent branch.

All through the afternoon I range in my skin,  
Shedding like the punctual snake,

And at night, walking the dizzy street,  
Hot in my paint and rolled hips asking,

I wish myself unforked, like a mermaid,  
Who lures to no mating, but combs her spume,  
And has no self that answers to a name.



### *Saint Geraud*

#### Two Poems

##### SUMMER EVENING

Sky meloning in the sky,  
the fountains are burning their blue idols,  
the sun has left its black stinger in my wine. . . .



##### MAZES

Words are huge and isolated. You walk, miserable and lonely, a  
long way between them. Pray that on their snows there is even  
a little light.

I know you assume my face whenever I sleep. Sometime I'll wake up  
and catch you: then you'll have to keep it. That's the rule.



### *Josephine Jacobsen*

#### THE ENEMY OF THE HERDS, THE LION

"The enemy of the herds, the lion feeds on its prey on decorated box-lid,  
ca. 2500 B.C. which was found in the grave of the Lady Shub-ad at Ur."  
—*Magazine of Natural History*

At Ur  
the Lady Shub-ad's small  
bright box went into the larger darker  
shelter of the grave and stayed there roughly  
forty-five hundred years.

Its lid—  
a sharp arc—shows a thing:  
a lion-sheep without division,  
lion on top, sheep under, still  
consummation point.

The sheep  
neck is in the lion fangs  
the lion claws press upward the sheep throat, they are  
tranced and ardent in an act of taking  
utter enough to be love.

Back so far  
the mind tires on its trip;  
yet so close, the kohl, to redden  
the lip, lengthen the eye for pleasure's  
pleasure, is tonight's.

What  
is changed? Not the coarse hairs  
of the mane; victor, or victim; a woman's body;  
certainly not a death; not the colors  
of kohl or scarlet.

She  
cared for the box; by wish  
expressed or guessed she took it along  
as far as might be. Why this one? What  
word did her box beasts mean?

Possi-  
bilities: the chic symbols  
of the day, on a fashionable jewel-toy,  
the owner modishly ignorant; or, corrupt,  
an added pulse to lust.

Or:  
mocking or wise remembrance  
of innocent murder innocent death,  
the coupled ambiguous desire  
at dinner, at dressing, at music.

Or,  
best—and why not?—of her meeting  
all quiet terror, surmounted by joy,  
to go to her grave with her; a pure  
mastery, older than Ur.

~

*William Dunlop*

SINGLE MINDED

“Well,” I say—  
For the third time—as pauses  
Lengthen, like the shadows outside,  
“I’d better be off . . .” —but I stay  
For that one last drink, and savor  
How he’s getting fatter,  
And sip at her prettiness: though, of course, I’d  
Want something better.

“Please don’t trouble . . .” I say, but they have  
To come to the gate,  
Though it’s turning colder.  
And I turn, at the end of the street,  
For my casual, obligatory wave  
Just as she snuggles her head  
On his chest, and his arm rounds her shoulder.

Not that I’m envious! “Poor chap,”  
(I was bound to say) “one saw it coming:  
Still, he could do much worse.”  
And I—think of those all set to come running;  
Am I sorry I didn’t . . . ?  
Just the reverse.

Yet I see them still, as I round each corner,  
In the same attitude  
And the kiss uncompleted; she lifting her face  
As he moves to secure her  
In the way man and wife  
Flowing back to each other, may turn to exclude  
Mere acquaintance from their life.

“Do come again!” she said brightly,  
And he chimed, “Any time . . .”  
I might, I suppose, but it’s not very likely. . . .  
Could they entertain  
All my thirstiness? No,  
Though not seeking to slight them,  
I won’t go again.  
Until we can invite them.

~

*Robert Wallace*

A LOVE POEM—PROBABLY

A huge moth sleeps against my ceiling.  
You will laugh if I tell you,  
or put him into a poem  
—huge, with huge wings of mottled browns  
like dust, circled,  
in which rain has fallen.

I did not invent him;  
the painters left the screens down  
and the windows wide to the night air.  
I cannot hear his breathing  
—huge, antennaed in the dark,  
he grows to the shapes of all shadows.

Since you will not love me,  
nor believe me,  
and can go from me so easily,  
I will not say who this terrible fellow is—  
unmoved in the night—who  
shares the ceiling I sleep on.

*Raymond Roseliep*

A WASHINGTON TEA, AT 5:00

A tea with Katherine Anne Porter is what  
you would expect it to be. Before a long  
fifteenth century walnut table cherished  
from a monastic refectory, you sit.  
Sipping the tallow colored tea with lemon  
gold rind twisted like wet embroidery thread.

You mention it is good to be here, letting  
the Bach Magnificat in D major claim  
your ear as it dims the eye of your hostess  
remembering (God knows what man child), and you  
take one sugar square more than you wish because  
you like to watch the small white fingers plant all  
of Ireland's sun-lit grass beside your china:  
no emerald ever blazed such continent.  
You expect that Venetian cherub to slip  
down from his votive station of parcel-gilt  
bronze, flanking the madonna below a half  
length of Christ, and you smile quietly at the  
reverent posture, the young genital un-  
perturbed in the movement of the August sun.  
A sherry tart as crisp as a fall petal,  
now some excellent Purcell on gay spinet-  
fingering, and the afternoon is an old  
man tripping down a gangplank to his own land.  
Keeping an eye on the brass foot of Eros  
who hauls a dolphin on his shoulders, you wish  
for a rapid color change when your hostess  
brushes her eggshell gown against their progress,  
and that young god blushes in your busy skull.  
The lady moves back and forth to her console,  
the silver service, your cup, the thronging books:  
there is no wilderness of crowds among these  
lives, known as true lovers are known. She touches  
page and dear page from the lapful she has picked  
(once climbing her nephew's perilous little  
winding ladder for a Milan leather Keats),  
and she reads softly, in English-and-southern  
accent, the periods of Henry James, songs  
of Breton fishermen, an early cryptic  
of Ezra Pound (who declined her offer of  
clam broth at St. Elizabeth's), Eudora  
Welty opening her Post Office story,  
J. F. Powers on the golf links with Father  
Urban, a musical paragraph about  
oysters by the wife of Robert Penn Warren,

notes from Ovid's Orpheus. When you summon  
another Catherine who said "My nature  
is fire," the stonewalls of Siena crackle  
in the sky of your mind. You drop an index  
finger on the walnut heart patch, then you trace  
the leaf pattern suggesting the modest fig  
those old friars surely slipped over Venus.  
Music for the funeral of Queen Mary  
puts italics on the clock, so you are care-  
ful testing the almond on your teeth, catching  
the salt on your tongue like a new baptism:  
You are a child before grief and the lady  
who has mingled on deck with lovers and fools,  
voyaging this late afternoon to deeper  
sea, more golden than tea in your bonewhite cups  
and her robins outside too tired to quarrel.

~

*Robin Magowan*

FELIX

Knots of light speckle the wall  
over the hospital bed, and a smile  
floats up to where I stand  
gazing out on the hillside of streaming cars;  
their bulbs glow through  
the fish-mouth dark  
as day like a grove of oranges  
begins to dawn. Below  
streets glisten, bright salad leaves,  
& I stand, suddenly  
very small, a funny  
shy umbrella sheaving my head  
down which light trickles  
in a tinkle of pencil points.  
Outside father

paces up & down, his voice  
rising & falling  
across the umber room like giant  
medicine balls. Attendants  
drift in, out  
with nothing that can be done  
nothing that at the same time won't  
stop your coming. Finally  
16 hours later you come  
over the fish-clot eyes  
smiling  
bearing the wand  
& as you strike  
the screams  
sing  
and dusk  
is cut in sandwiches  
of green & gold. The threads  
wind out of your eyes  
& you lie there  
stretched lengthwise  
across the amber of the belly  
loud and glistening in your nine  
month skin as in a vial of oil—  
the mouth wide & twisted like a harp  
eyes the color  
of distant firs and mountains  
they tip upwards, small pontoons.  
Later behind glass I watch  
as your mittened hands stir  
in their blue tidepool sleep, starfish  
searching, & with blind heron eyes  
you wade  
arms legs throat kicking  
seeking your length of gum-  
green water like the answer  
to some dream of distant raft and  
sunlight  
thistle & thigh-white cloud.

~

*Phyllis Choyke*

STORM

In older times, I'd have seen gods in this sky today,  
for a huge purple mantle seems to enfold the edge  
of the world, there, where truncated buildings make blunt teeth  
on the jawbone of the horizon. In the northwest,  
thunderbolts in his hand, a black monster of rain grows,  
like a Renaissance engraving showing a puffed face.

From a log on the beach, I watch the lake as it turns  
from that translucent blue-green of sea caves, to waves  
colored mother-of-pearl. Distantly, lightning flashes.  
Storms seem ambivalent: fish will die, but crops have rain.  
In a different storm, Pompeii was saved and destroyed.

While motorboats speed for their lives toward shelter behind  
twin iron breakwaters of the ditch, I dash for my house,  
slam doors tightly, watch the violent waves go lead brown,  
see cottonwoods bend half down against the clotting sand,  
feel smack of thunder as the windows shake, smell ozone.

I haven't shelter from my storms. Even if they come  
under cloaks, or with other faces, still I know them,  
cannot this easily shut doors hard to keep them out:  
betrayals, and accidents that were not accidents,  
and my own violence, which is not ambivalent.

Still, freed from those myths who rode the sky, must I now fear  
inner behemoths purported to reign over me?  
Or will they too, like statues in their robes from Tyre, old  
magic portents, beast gods, alchemy, soon disappear?  
The mind's straits are harder crossed than Gates of Hercules,  
but, long ago, in this sky today, I'd have seen gods.

*George Keithley*

POTENCY

*for J. Maritain*

The hawk glides  
in a high wind over the orchard  
acre crows nest in  
to the elm and oak forest south of the lake.  
A southern rain spreads behind him  
and  
he is low in an oak  
and dry as the near limbs:  
he is the jump into the warm wind, and the brown glide  
and the fall to green cover, braked and steep.

Down the slate  
bank from the plant rain and wind lie on  
the river and it  
is absent of the drone of motor launches:  
turbines turn the generators  
at  
3,600  
rpm, spinning of  
the rain, rushed splash of the low waterfall, and on out  
to the lake the long, blue and gentle sweep.

When the trout  
sinks against rock the men on the bleached  
slate laugh, slipping, set  
the poles down and climb the steps of the power  
plant, watching a hawk fly the green  
lake  
woods to the river. Rain  
has passed. The trout is down  
beside a rock and holding under the current the  
rise and quick plunge and the swift, silver leap.

WOMAN AWAY FROM THE LOOM

I

Unsinister she stands and sees the days  
Go swinging by like acrobats upon a rope,  
Forgetting all of this is not immediate  
But is of the whole far-reaching search for truth,  
And whether you decide: "foregone for Lent"  
Or "known for Valentine" won't be seen  
On the big rug.  
Uncryptically she waits; senses stir and pull  
While fate concurs, love abates and he,  
Narcissus, does not demur.

II

It is a time to see the bird and worm  
Fly by the window in simple relationship.  
She shall not question certainties:  
The artichoke will wear its tail;  
The almond still will keep her furry coat;  
The fish though baked retains his eye;  
Blue birds upon a Persian bowl  
Command insight in perfect flight;  
Plump cheeks of a white milk pitcher  
Bound in gold blow forth delight.  
But then the flying squirrels begin:  
Thump out their tune, hold contests  
In the attic; the cat who dogs her footsteps  
Dies; children cry out in sleep;  
Cannibals and crows exalt their state;  
Cousins look in mirrors, and then  
With cousins mate. The nursery rhymes  
Come truer than all histories.

III

The plate waits full in the warming-place;  
The vinegar's mother comes early;

The eggs refuse their hiding place;  
While whippoorwills keep lonely wives awake  
The showers drip with nylon shirts.  
As snow falls on the aerials in May  
The lady policemen, carrying stopsigns,  
Hurry to board the town-bound trolleys.  
Gray with self-pity, she holds  
The old familiar phrases close  
Playing them over and over  
And over, reviving old powers.  
For a little while, memory, a clever one  
Knows when to leave out the nightmares  
In the middle: unaware, she sees the cats' tails  
Thicken as they walk from room to room.  
Standing vulnerable as St. Sebastian  
Waiting for the arrows, she feels a fury  
(She does not know at what without her glasses).  
Something has robbed her of her sense of power:  
There is no magic anymore  
(Senses like room conditioned by air  
Feel unbreathed to the human breath).  
There are few windows to look out—  
They all look in to show a pretty picture:  
Roses in a vase, their lives prolonged  
By aspirin. There she stands in the uncertain light  
A madonna without hands (the wind  
That blew her mantle into shape was mild).

IV

Outside in the snow where birds and cats  
Have walked, the moles pop up their heads  
To talk, the snow melts on the painted roof  
Running down leaves, bares the place  
Where the opossum yawned last fall.  
In the corner of the white window frame  
Small cobwebs seem blacker in the snowlight  
Where the fly is caught.

## V

The red bird cries  
 The green plant dies  
 The roses climbing on the red barn fall  
 The honeycomb is open like the tomb:  
 Her illusions, like Lazarus,  
 Pop forth from life, not ready,  
 Opened up with essence and emptiness revealed  
 Out of time in nature and the season.

## VI

She sees the firelight dancing on the backs of books.  
 It waits behind vases, gay as Narcissus  
 Let out of the closet. The shell is pushed away.  
 Now air, blowing in the winter window  
 Is strong and sure as Spring.

*Jessie Kachmar*

## SWALLOWS

She scurries to keep the dark out,  
 Fencing chaos from her window box,  
 With a fabric tried with many colors.  
 At fifty, her supple hands seek out  
 The light from lone peripheries. Her  
 Solitary hands could always mould  
 A balm against strangelings in somber  
 Alleys of her years. Years lambent for  
 Her always radiated from a man. With him  
 The hands could lull a while subdued,  
 Then turn for their common enterprises.  
 She could not comprehend the flurried  
 Energies she burned as sacrifice to him,  
 Mulling love, then chafing sodden embers.  
 The same with every man. Loneliness again  
 And hands like swallows in a prevailing wind,

Darting over paints and dyes, metal, wood  
 And clay, relentless wings, swooping  
 From a spell. To praise of her work  
 She apologizes, it seeming a slender  
 Talent, taken in as foundling. What she  
 Is or ever wanted, flutters opaquely  
 Inside, beating back incessant on itself

*David Ray*

STANDING OUTSIDE A CHAPLIN MOVIE  
ALL THE WORLD IS WATCHING

Feeling like a fool outside  
     the Chaplin movie I hear  
 Their disembodied shrieks, the dismembered  
     screams of the tickled & goosed.  
 Inside their curtained room  
     they can read the lines,  
 know the score:  
 Charlie eating Shrimp or Shoeleather;  
     the quality of their wisdom  
                             floats out;  
 the velvet of the curtains cannot stop  
     such a thing.  
 Horrible: it could be anything.  
     Deaf-mutes Barney-googling love  
                             in a borrowed backseat  
 Always I'm at midnight even in these  
     Sunday 8 P.M. corridors.  
 I'm walking through the green gas  
     of the suburbs,  
 The stars blighted out,  
     hating the cars, the monstrous  
                             lovers.

## V

The red bird cries  
 The green plant dies  
 The roses climbing on the red barn fall  
 The honeycomb is open like the tomb:  
 Her illusions, like Lazarus,  
 Pop forth from life, not ready,  
 Opened up with essence and emptiness revealed  
 Out of time in nature and the season.

## VI

She sees the firelight dancing on the backs of books.  
 It waits behind vases, gay as Narcissus  
 Let out of the closet. The shell is pushed away.  
 Now air, blowing in the winter window  
 Is strong and sure as Spring.

*Jessie Kachmar*

## SWALLOWS

She scurries to keep the dark out,  
 Fencing chaos from her window box,  
 With a fabric tried with many colors.  
 At fifty, her supple hands seek out  
 The light from lone peripheries. Her  
 Solitary hands could always mould  
 A balm against strangelings in somber  
 Alleys of her years. Years lambent for  
 Her always radiated from a man. With him  
 The hands could lull a while subdued,  
 Then turn for their common enterprises.  
 She could not comprehend the flurried  
 Energies she burned as sacrifice to him,  
 Mulling love, then chafing sodden embers.  
 The same with every man. Loneliness again  
 And hands like swallows in a prevailing wind,

Darting over paints and dyes, metal, wood  
 And clay, relentless wings, swooping  
 From a spell. To praise of her work  
 She apologizes, it seeming a slender  
 Talent, taken in as foundling. What she  
 Is or ever wanted, flutters opaquely  
 Inside, beating back incessant on itself

*David Ray*

STANDING OUTSIDE A CHAPLIN MOVIE  
 ALL THE WORLD IS WATCHING

Feeling like a fool outside  
 the Chaplin movie I hear  
 Their disembodied shrieks, the dismembered  
 screams of the tickled & goosed.  
 Inside their curtained room  
 they can read the lines,  
 know the score:  
 Charlie eating Shrimp or Shoeleather;  
 the quality of their wisdom  
 floats out;  
 the velvet of the curtains cannot stop  
 such a thing.  
 Horrible: it could be anything.  
 Deaf-mutes Barney-googling love  
 in a borrowed backseat  
 Always I'm at midnight even in these  
 Sunday 8 P.M. corridors.  
 I'm walking through the green gas  
 of the suburbs,  
 The stars blighted out,  
 hating the cars, the monstrous  
 lovers.



THREE MORNINGS IN SEPTEMBER

1936

I wake in my father's house.  
Autumn smokes from the earth  
As the clock gathers itself, as the sun  
Shoulders up from the river.  
My dog lifts his ears at a neighborly bark,  
Scrabbles off through the arbor.  
The concords swell, the apples fall  
In light wind. Cows swing heavily.

The first shadow thickens on the wall.  
Now the sun strikes through the window,  
The blind cracked like a blueprint,  
Through the web-woven barn window  
To the searing edge of the scythe.  
The oak leans out of its shadow  
And silently bursts into flame.  
My father tries to cough up the war  
In the shallow trench of his sleep.  
I tie on my sneakers, drift out  
To run awhile with the hounds.

1946

I wake in my father's house.  
Autumn coils in the roots  
Of trees still breathing night.  
I know some night will stay  
Along the vines. Some night will take  
The birds, shrill in the oak,  
Until, as if a north wind whistled,  
They will rise in one black cloud  
To rain down on a far horizon.  
I know that color builds along the ridge,

Copper, brass, the bronze pears,  
Until, like a bomb in Berlin rubble,  
A hard leveling of black and white.

An army has taken the town.  
Uniforms die in the closets,  
With shoulder patches, stripes and ribbons  
Already turning to Greek.  
A far sun lifts from my tan,  
Old commands ease from my muscles.  
The earth aches for the harvest  
In the first full year of peace.

1956

I wake in my father's house,  
A veteran of thirty tans, hanging  
Like uniforms in dark closets,  
As I march up to the front  
Of the war which burns in the trees.  
Outside an unanswered bark bites on the wind.  
My children whisper like hoarse leaves,  
Eager to run with the hounds  
Where color gathers on the ridge.

My wife turns from her sleep  
The full harvest of her body.  
We pull the quilt, bright as fall leaves,  
Up to the edge of sleep.  
We are between the wars again.  
Snow sends its first, white scouts  
Into the dreaming valley.  
I send this prayer out into the light.  
May children wake, in ten years' time,  
On the full brink of harvest,  
Safe in their father's house.

ON VISITING LINCOLN'S GUESTROOM  
IN HIS SPRINGFIELD HOME

"Since there is little record of  
the Lincolns' having houseguests,  
this room has been devoted to the  
two younger boys, Tad and Willie."

Here in the only home you ever owned,  
standing like a dark surprise  
in the midst of Eighth and Jackson Street,  
the houseguests whisper up the stairs,  
feeling along the walls like blindmen,

as if to touch a hand against the wall  
that touched the hand  
so many hands reached out for.  
Nothing's added to the second floor  
but the inscription at the door.

Perhaps it's the heat of this Springfield  
day, but I have no trouble  
seeing Willie there and Tad,  
invisible but for the visible  
toys that gather in the room:

the baskets, hoops, the little horse and wagon,  
an abacus, some marbles made of stone.  
And Willie astride his rush-seated painted chair,  
Tad jumping on the high caned day-bed,  
heaving hairstuffed pillows through the air.

After awhile the houseguests turn and leave  
Willie who lived to twelve  
and Tad eighteen, hosts of a sort,  
guests of a sort,  
in the house on Eighth and Jackson Street.

~

MY RISING PROFESSOR

The professor needed a ladder  
Or rather,  
He needed nothing at all  
So great his zeal.

He was not handsome  
Nor ugly enough for striking;  
There was only his fire,  
His desire for teaching Economics.

In yellow autumned Ohio  
In the old towers of College  
He pretended—by God he knew!—  
The growing cold  
The weathers of doubt  
He could shape up as snowmen  
Whose coal eyes, red as fire,  
Would wink down blasts.  
Each day in the fusty classroom  
His chalk raced like a pony  
Hopping the intricate hedges of thought.  
His mind, his eyes,

The sweat on his plump round face  
Started in a stoop, then grew  
From the bottom of his blackboard  
Rising in a white dusty storm  
To the topmost inch of the slate where  
Undaunted he mounted a chair  
Or in his own peculiar hustle  
Levitated both himself and the  
Copulating figures of his mind  
Until the chalk—daily—  
Scrawled the walls high above the board.

It was as if duress and stoutness  
In a rage, in a faith, in a love  
Always flew.

Never one to moult he mounted.  
He left his mark  
Far above most faculties.  
—It was the only raise he knew.

I left him there—  
Years ago.  
Like Angelo at the ceiling.  
God knows how high in sky  
Now he is.

*Jean Farley*

A QUALITY OF LIGHT

(The Spies of Israel Overlook Canaan)

Far behind them lies easy the amazing sea  
Where surely this day the ships are deft  
Among shining curls of fleece.  
Inland the light strikes clean  
—As eagle to angular lamb—  
On the craggy face of every man.  
They mark among lustrous leaves the grapes are red  
And hope overtakes them while they breathe,  
Clasping thick feet in thin hands.  
Set with eyes like golden seed,  
Picked by sunlight from each shaggy head,  
They glance afield over all their future,  
Searching the place in a chosen land  
For God's clear mercy on a murmurous band.

*Barbara Overmyer*

"Poetry should be oratory or song ...  
the colloquial is nothing..."

I

I would be poetry to you,  
but will not bobble pebbles  
over a sea, a mob of men  
swaying in each opinion's tide.

I will not stump the grass roots,  
print my face on billboards  
or enter into great debates  
with makeup and hot lights.

II

Perhaps I am closer to song,  
but barely have the backing  
for a break, a riff of instruments  
improvised by ear.

For I have little wind or brass,  
spend my breath on broken reeds,  
and sound percussive only  
in the snares and kettles of my heart,  
the strung drums of my skin.

I could sing a plainsong  
out of a lost tradition,  
an aria off the top of my head,  
dry recitative

scarcely audible.

III

I would be poetry to you,  
but would rather be a woman  
with smudgy hands and crinkly hair  
and the plain speech of my feelings.

I would persuade with common words,  
with the lines of my rough tongue

echo small words in your head.

*Martha Friedberg*

LINES FOR A SMALL DAUGHTER

Child, I love you  
Because you match the daylight.  
Your arms, vivid and thin,  
Clasp my neck as if it were  
A fluted column of ancient strength  
That fails the rest of me.  
And when you toss your books  
Across the hall, and shout  
You're off to Susan's for the afternoon,  
Then slam the door;  
I stare into the slurring dark  
Of all my early loss  
And envy you, you have a place  
To go to, and to come home again.  
You, with your demanding red heart  
And nine year innocence;  
I love you for your fresh wounds,  
And for your tears  
That rip me out of my earlier self  
To shelter you.  
And yet, my slender light;  
I weep for you  
That I haven't understood  
What keeps enclosing me  
Inside my own, strange daughterhood.

*Paul Pera*

HORACE THE TERRIBLE

horrible horace.  
the wonderful little  
ugly, senile janitor  
who worked his strawberry  
arteries out sweeping the  
ashtrays that would soon  
contain the sandy-grey ashes  
of his dried prune body  
loved to spend hours  
whistling cerebral tunes  
like: I'll be down to get you  
in a taxi honey—  
and, take me out to the ballgame—  
with choir-solemnity and child-aged whim  
until one day the  
white-haired goat man  
was blown like a puff of pink smoke  
from his tunes  
and ashtrays.

*Stuart Friebert*

THE WINTER OF 1856

The longest of any modern winter.  
Snow on a level with you then suddenly  
thirty feet deep in the ravines.

Elizabeth boarded some woodchoppers.  
All the water she used washing after them  
was snow, melted in boilers on the catalogue stove.

She remembered some deer  
coming through clogged woods.  
They walked into the sharp sun.

The men saw them. The deer  
broke the color of the crust  
and went too deep.

The woodchoppers,  
shoeing the snow,  
went for their axes.

~  
*Franz Schneider*

LAST LETTER OF A CONDEMNED PRIEST

*Alfred Delp, S.J., executed by the  
Nazis in the Plötzensee prison on  
February 2, 1945.*

Already  
Black wagons  
Are rolling  
To take  
Our corpses  
Away.

Last night  
I dreamed  
Of a loaf of bread  
And a basket  
Of bleeding fish.

When I awoke,  
The dawn swam  
In the sky,  
Moving gently  
Her reddish fins.

*Sister Mary Gilbert, SNJM*

THE BREAKTHROUGH

And the skunk came, singular (I hoped)  
though the stink was loud as a multitude,  
pervasive as fear where I walked in the shadow  
more afraid than before with the watchdog beside me  
and tried to be neutral and couldn't  
like Adam who wore the figleaf  
and waited detection.

Away from the wood I was peaceful at first  
like the rational being I am, in a Franciscan orgy  
of loving my brain understood but refused to convey  
to my nose. "We are both God's creatures," I said,  
"whatever his stripe, and we know what it's like  
when onlookers harden and sniff from a great way off."  
But I knew that I had to know more.

His fur, my informant declared, from the seventeenth  
floor of a building downtown, was glossy and soft;  
his fluid drive, activated on attack, was chemically  
sure and could be manufactured in a lab  
from scientific interest or pure spite; the white  
stripe was a trademark; domesticated, he could be  
tailored to conform, a regular pet.

I agreed. And yet  
I could not go to meet him in the skin, although  
I saw him everywhere: in the vague rustle of bushes,  
the innocent puppy rushes and the tautened ear;  
in the blur of the hurtled rock, the shape at the foot  
of the stair blocking escape; the wild  
scattering of birds pursued  
and the dreams defiled.

Today with the rain cooling our summer fevers  
I stay inside with the hate and the fear,

rehearse what I think I know of the protective sac  
and try to imagine the ultimate year beyond black  
and white, past the stench Arabia's perfumes  
cannot sweeten, and blanch at the scent  
of the habit I wear, through a screen of detergent  
and lotion, clean linen and prayer  
or the ritual washings.

What gods can devour the distance?

I despair of the Madison Avenue mind: the dollar sign  
over the lair—THINK MINK! And the vats full  
of soap that can never be pried, by religion or law,  
from the grip of a generation—mine and yours. Mine  
most of all, who parade through the violent street  
toward the freedom of undisguised love, not spared  
the sting of the flesh I deny and am vowed  
to be whiter than.

*Vern Rutsala*

TWO

*after Tao Yuan-Ming*

Two people live  
in me. They laugh  
at each other, hiding  
hatred behind wet

grins, refusing  
to understand the other's  
laws, like border  
guards suffering

an uneasy truce.  
But rules and laws—  
how foolish to follow  
them earnestly

as if they had  
meaning. Be aloof  
and indifferent—  
staying drunk

is the only way.  
Look, you sot,  
when the sun goes down  
turn on the lights.

*Richard Deutch*

Two Poems

PSYCH TEST

In me there is the image  
of a lake, a pony grazing on the  
gentle slope beside it,  
a wooden raft.

We have traveled the dusty road  
surrounded by cornfields,  
and carried the ancient key  
because it soothed us. We climbed  
the wall,  
good brick footholds and the red dust  
scattered beneath us.

Now we have come to the place.  
We lie down beside the lake  
because we are here.

SUDDEN BIRDS

Sudden birds in the forest—  
A jangle of Bedouin dancers  
Among the tentposts!

David Wagoner

Two Poems

SONG TO ACCOMPANY THE BEARER OF BAD NEWS

Kings kill their messengers  
Sometimes, slicing wildly  
Through pages delivering their grief  
And you may do the same  
With this page under this poem  
Tear it lengthwise first  
With feeling, cutting off  
Each phrase into meaningless halves  
Then crossways, severing  
The mild beginning from the bad ending  
By now you know the worst  
Having imagined the remainder  
Down to the painful inch  
Where something like your name  
Closes this message  
You needn't finish now  
You may stop here  
And puzzle it out later.  
Kings kill  
Sometimes, slicing  
Through pages  
And you may  
With this page  
Tear it  
With feeling  
Each phrase  
Then crossways  
The mild beginning  
By now you know  
Having imagined  
Down to  
Where something  
Closes

You needn't finish  
You may stop  
And puzzle it out.

Their messengers  
Wildly  
Delivering their grief  
Do the same  
Under this poem  
Lengthwise first  
Cutting off  
Into meaningless halves  
Severing  
The bad ending  
The worst  
The remainder  
The painful inch  
Like your name  
This message  
Now  
Here  
Later

You may tear it into meaningless halves  
Lengthwise first then crossways  
Severing something like the painful inch  
Later under this poem messengers  
Delivering their grief puzzle it out  
Having imagined the worst  
Kings kill wildly through pages  
Cutting off the bad ending  
Do the same with this page  
By now you know the mild beginning  
Down to where your name closes  
With feeling now you may stop.

THE DRAFTSMEN, 1945

Given one wall and a roof at a wild angle,  
The problem was to find the rest of the house  
In Engineering Drawing, to string it along  
Its three spread-eagled ninety-degree dimensions  
(A line is only a line when it lies flat),  
Then trace it up and over, tracking it down  
At last to a blunt façade with a shut door.

The whole hot room of us on dunces' stools  
Maneuvered compasses and triangles  
Over the sliding T-squares and onion skin,  
Trying to be on all six sides of a house  
At the same time, locking slabs in place  
As firmly as the edges of our graves.

We stared at the box like catty-cornered neighbors  
Or, losing our perspective, swiveled the earth  
Like one-eyed gods till porches spread their wings  
And the slant sunlight's isometric waves  
Leveled all distance, simply, at a stroke.

And that was that—top, profiles, and front view,  
The backside and the rat's collapsible heaven:  
Spaces cut out of space like paper dolls  
And modeled on a blank interior.

None of us had to draw it inside out,  
Sketch in the beds, let smoke through broken windows,  
Locate the milkman bleeding in the garden,

Or cross-hatch people running off the paper  
Where weather crumpled the uneven corners,

Or knock at the door for any other answers.

Poetry Northwest Prize Awards, 1965

HELEN BULLIS PRIZE: \$100

Mona Van Duyn, for "Seven Poems" (Spring, 1964)

*Previous winners*

Hayden Carruth (1962)

John Logan (1963)

Donald Finkel (1964)

THEODORE ROETHKE PRIZE: \$50

Kenneth O. Hanson, for "Seven Greek Poems"  
(Autumn-Winter, 1964-65)

*Previous Winners*

Carol Hall (1963)

Richard Hugo (1964)

Kenneth O. Hanson (1964)

COMPARATIVE POETRY PRIZE: \$50

Tony Connor (England), for "Five Poems and One Translation"  
(Summer, 1964)