

POETRY NORTHWEST

WINTER, 1960

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POETRY NORTHWEST

WINTER • 1960

Homage to Ruth Pitter

"This beautiful writer," David Cecil calls her — this beautiful writer was born in Essex, England, in 1897, and has published numerous books of poems, the most recent being "The Ermine" (1953). The work of Ruth Pitter may not be widely known in America, but it is deeply known. Those who are familiar with her work will never shake off the thrall of those cool, sensuous, melancholy, perfectly disciplined, frequently ecstatic poems:

And again think on bright hair
That was yellow, before it became dust,
As broom looketh that blows in the upland air,
But never think upon the hearts of the just . . .

This is a fragment from 1918. Thirty years later, the archaisms are muted, but we hear the chiming of that unmistakable voice:

. . . man and beast die, fall and go,
Under the sky's pall, rain or snow . . .

Now, at the beginning of a new decade, it is surely the greatest privilege that we as editors will have, that Miss Pitter has entrusted to this small, new magazine her unpublished poems of the past six or seven years, as well as allowing us to use a selection of poems from "The Ermine" which have not appeared in the United States. So, by her grace, this issue of POETRY NORTHWEST commends itself to posterity. If life persist, and literature endure, so shall these pages.

Then Alleluia all my gashes cry;
My woe springs up and flourishes from the tomb
In her lord's likeness, terrible and fair,
Knowing her root, her blossom in the sky . . .

The Editors

Ruth Pitter

Seven New Poems

MOTHS AND MERCURY-VAPOUR LAMP

Some beat the glass as if in agony,
The pattern never still enough to see;
In that unearthly strong cold radiance
Eyes glitter, wings are flourished, weapons glance,
Furs, metals, dyes, duellers with flashing foils
Flicker like fire and struggle in the toils
Of potent light, as deep-sea fish are drawn
From profound dark to anguish and the dawn.

But others stand, abide the passionate sight;
All pricked and sprinkled with inhuman light,
All characterized as from sidereal
Regions, where our writ does not run at all:
And these are messengers, of whom I ask
As I look up at moments from my task,
What? Why? Who is it? What is said to me,
In urgent characters that I can see,
And wonder at, but never read the tongue?
And night by night the airy envoys throng,
Solemnly habited, winged but still, and gazing
Fixedly into that furnace, that amazing
Supernal sepulchre of other light,
Born like a comet in their native night,
A final flower, a strong and deadly plant,
Forbidden by the unseen adamant.

Mysteriously attired in light and dust,
Draped in funereal splendour, like august
Mummies, authentic in a spectral grace,
Breastplate of gold, or golden mask on face,
Wing within wing, fold within fold of shroud,

Ashy and frosty cerements, and a cloud
Of the fine bloomy powder of decay,
With eyes of night or diamond turned my way;
Upright, as crucified upon the glass,
That strong Invisible they cannot pass,
Forever watching at the terrible gate,
Until the writing shall be read, they wait.

EXERCISE IN THE PATHETIC FALLACY

This growing spiral snail of a gold colour
Makes on flat liquid whiteness one event.
There are three others. Pensive without colour.

This citron sac he clings to, sacrament,
Holds nothing in its unripe-lemon lumen
But pure pale colour like an empty tent:

But this eventless colour is its numen,
Its voiceless music on that marble sea,
The only answer for that catechumen,

If one may judge his gesture so; for he
Hugs it as newhatcht trout his yolk, and growing
Strong as he battens, quite successfully

Repels that two-lobed, dried-blood-colour, glowing,
Menacing spot, dicotyledon seed;
Sorrow dropped near him at some baleful sowing.

But while the cockatrice's egg may bleed,
Swelling with fire that never lacks for fuel,
There in the offing stands his good indeed,

A round-orbed passionless bright sapphire jewel,
Laden with power of a different kind,
So alien, that he takes it to be cruel:

And blindly, since both love and fear are blind,
He hugs his sac, his shield and saviour, thinking
It will be always there to hide behind.

He does not see that it has started shrinking;
So have the bloodseed and dark sapphire sun.
Something has changed, the space about them drinking

Their life, not giving it. All slide, all run
Together like mad enemies or lovers;
The red and blue like pellets from a gun

Shoot into a shrinking snail no yolkbag covers,
And he is changed. He has become — a leaf?
No, not a leaf exactly; some spirit hovers,

And then decides. Now, would you call it grief,
This pea-pod shape containing a meek foetus,
A quiet, necked grub? It seems to express relief.

Something is won, some peace comes out to greet us;
The thing is not diseased, it does not weep,
But seems to pray that its intent will meet us.

Look, now it writes a cypher — meaning sleep?
Breaks to a wisp, rolls to a seed of umber,
And sinks in the unblemished virgin deep.

Choose for yourself if this is death or slumber.

The subject is an open can of white plastic paint, on the surface of which several spots of similar paint in various colours have been accidentally dropped. Under the influence of local forces (electrical induction and discharge, surface tension, convection currents?) these spots first expand, become more complex and mutually involved. They then contract, "differentiate", and disappear.—R. P.

TAWNY OWL IN FIR-TREE

I hear sighing, mother Cybele,
Cave and sea voices in your cold dark tree;
Sighing and swaying voices, as the wave
Of a cold wind, like water filling a cave,
Lifts the weight of a bough as breath lifts a sighing breast,
Lifts the dry fruit that is no fruit, no feast,
And sways it down with a subtle sound of despair
To flowerless earth, to ground that is brown and bare.

I hear crying, mother Cybele,
Old grief, old warfare in your cold dark tree.
I see her standing and staring with great eyes,
Haunting your hollow darkness with her cries;
I hear her peevish shriek for solitude,
Claiming your moaning temple for her brood,
Ready to tear, to talon out the face
Rapt into kinship in the unholy place.

Her face is fatal, mother Cybele,
Standing implacable in your dark tree
She is a creature in an old dark song,
Mad from hard terror, mad from utter wrong,
Who has become a venom and a doom,
Recording, like a tablet on a tomb,
Horror and judgment, memory of crime,
Hoarding her vengeance to the end of time.

Her face is judgment, mother Cybele,
Filling with accusation your dark tree.
Loose tawny feathers like dishevelled hair
Stir on her eldritch forehead in cold air.
But she is mine. I lift the old dark word,
See at my gesture the unburdened bird
Bloom in the beam of love that leaps to light her,
Break the old tyranny, release and right her.

ONE RIGHT KIND OF MUSIC

It sings in the sun, sings in no valley below;
Melts metal, hard mind, in fire, melts with no tear;
Pants with no sigh, but sobs as the furnace sobs
In its phoenix-throe. There cherub-burning the eye,
The insupportable eye of the furnace glares,
Outfaces, beats down, prevails, looks through and over,
With the upward torrent of flame intent on fusion
Devouring, adoring, roaring its tyrannous praise.

Seeing what that heat sees is not to my mind.
All dew is dried, all lily and nightingale
Dismissed with a hiss. And yet, and yet, some bird
Carols within that fire; warbling it woos,
Like the three children walks warbling in flame,
Nests in the flame, in the flux that abolishes me.

OLD NELLY'S BIRTHDAY

When wheat is green, O when wheat is springing
Think of no drought, no sheaves;
Think of the nightingale this wind is bringing,
While the green water grieves
Still April-high, afternoon water flinging
Light to my crumbling eaves;

And mindless evening water still lamenting
For nothing and for all,
Darkly wandering, absently commenting
Under red alders tall;
Reflected like green music ornamenting
My poor old parlour wall.

O think of spring, think of the flowering only,
Green promise, present mirth:
This is my festival, the old and lonely,
Who soon must lie in earth.

THREE FEMININE THINGS

Yew-Tree

See how my yew-tree
In utter drought and heat,
Breeds kindness in blindness,
Drops dew about her feet;
How she in beauty,
She in her ancient calm,
Stands sleeping, stands weeping
Her penitential balm.

Like that poor Widow
Who gave her livelihood,
Since living is giving,
She sheds her stainless blood;
From holy shadow,
Dark mourning that she wears,
Comes coolness in fullness,
Come drops as warm as tears.

Poor Young Woman

Sorrow and weakness
Lie heavy on this maid;
Small earnings, long yearnings,
She loves and is afraid;
Here she in meekness,
She in her poor attire,
Sits sewing, unknowing
The end of her desire.

But that poor rapture,
Like some thin eager root,
Could flourish, could nourish
Some blessed leaf or shoot;
Or tower to the capture,

Like eagle in the air,
And singing, come bringing
An angel by the hair.

Evening Star

The last vermilion
Smoulders along the west
Horizon, to blazon
The dead day's arms and crest
On that pavilion
Clear-hung with lucent green,
Where growing, where glowing,
The Planet stands, the queen.

Pearl in the hollow
Height of the sun's void throne,
Fast sinking, but linking
The eye to splendour gone;
Faithfully follow,
Bearing a blessed name,
Still turning, still burning
With white reflected flame.

SWEET OTHER FLESH

Sweet other flesh, mind claims it all,
Steps in unasked, but undenied;
Feels big on mountains; stooping small,
Walks in the lily's lofty hall,
Sharing an architectural pride.

What seeking? see it search and pry,
Turn leaves, tap shoulders, reach and bend;
Start at a voice, stare in an eye,
Hold the soul still to read it by,
And realize there is no end;

No end in flesh, sweet other breed,
That lets mind search, mind dwell upon
Chaste palaces within a seed;
And sometimes suffers it to feed,
To feed awhile, then waves it on.

So faithfully before the mind
Flesh holds the truth, mortality;
Its suffrage being the law of kind,
It melts to leave me unconfined,
Declines, dissolves, dismisses me.

Ruth Pitter

Eight Poems from "The Ermine"

DEW

Secret and still, as the light goes,
Soundless the dew falls, not like rain:
Freshness of violet, richness of rose,
Bloom on the blade of the green grain,
Misty and waxen veil of the beautiful heath,
Incense-tear from the cedar, weeping its balm,
Pearl on the cheek of the peach, film of the breath
Of the cold night coming with gradual calm;
Dew with the stillness, dew with the chill of death,
Falling in failing light, as the voices cease;
Dew, the water of life, the pardon, the peace.

THE WORLD IS HOLLOW

Father, they told me that the world is hollow,
A thing no child believes,
While the young fruit swells, and the swallow
Goes hawking round the eaves;
For though, since it is human, the child grieves,
Hope is its kingdom, and the mortal future
Holds love, the captain-jewel of the creature.

And it is well that no child should despair;
For if that visage rose
Before him, lighted by the desert glare
From the heart's sleeping snows;
If that intolerable vision froze
His spirit, he must be the snow-queen's prize,
Trying to spell *eternity* in ice.

But man's despair is like the Arabian sun,
When the last morning cloud
Melts in the fire; then the lost wretch alone,
Whom nothing bends to shroud,
Falls in the sand, and cries his need aloud,
Full-grown at last to love, when he can find
No cloud, no rock, no shelter in the mind.

Hollow the world, and never to be filled
Save by the One supreme.
Despair, that burning angel, by the child
Unperceived even in dream,
Stands sentinel by Eden, and the beam
Unmitigated, doom pronounced by light,
Glares from his arms, and blinds the earthly sight.

HERDING LAMBS

(To O.)

In the spring, in the morning,
We heard the high bleat,
And the low voice of the ewes, and the rain-like
Rustle of feet.

In the daffodil day
My sister called to me,
And out to the garden gate
We went to see.

No dogs, no sticks,
No shouting, no noise,
Only the rustle, the bleating,
The chirping boys.

Slowly they moved along,
Herded by three
Old grey men, and five children,
To the fresh lea.

And when a silly lamb
Turned back in fright
A withered or an infant hand
Guided him right.

The early mist muffled their sound,
Muted that double chime
Trembling along the grassy ground
From the morning of time.

THE LAMMASTIDE FLOWER

Now that the man is in his grave,
Now that the child is dead and gone,
Now that the summer wanes, and all
Is housed or rotting, there again
I see the yellow toadflax wave
And wiry harebell over stone;
While like a weary prodigal
Man counts the harvest of his pain.

You yellow spires of Lammastide
That look not at me but beyond;
You silent bells that mirror sky
Yet hang so meekly to the ground;
What, either far or deep descried,
Holds you so rapt, in such a bond,
One looking low, one looking high:
What is that silence you have found?

The yellow toadflax said, "Be still.
I see the Powers, they see me,
I see those Two, and both are gold:
Two golds in one, and both are true.
I gaze, but cannot gaze my fill.
I can but look, I can but be,
I can but speak it as of old."
The vaulted harebell, "In the blue".
"Two golds," they said, and "In the blue".

THE CEDAR

Look from the high window with the eye of wonder
When the sun soars over and the moon dips under.

Look when the sun is coming and the moon is going
On the aspiring creature, on the cedar growing.

Plant or world? Are those lights and shadows
Branches, or great air-suspended meadows?

Boles and branches, haunted by the flitting linnet,
Or great hillsides rolling up to cliffs of granite?

Those domed shapes, thick-clustered on the ledges,
Upright fruit, or dwellings thatched with sedges?

Fair through the eye of innocence returning,
This is a country hanging in the morning.

Scented alps, where nothing but the daylight changes,
Climbing to black walls of mountain ranges;

And under the black walls, under the sky-banners,
The dwellings of the blessed in the green savannahs.

HEN UNDER BAY-TREE

A squalid, empty-headed Hen,
Resolved to rear a private brood
Has stolen from the social pen
To this, the noblest solitude.

She feels this tree is magical.
She knows that spice, beneath her breast
That sweet dry death; for after all
Her cradle was the holy East.

Alert she sits, and all alone;
She breathes a time-defying air:
Above her, songbirds many a one
Shake the dark spire, and carol there.

OLD CLOCKWORK TIME

Old clockwork Time beats in his tower,
I hear his wintry, wheezing breath;
His faded face looks down; a flower
Answers *Eternity* beneath.

The seconds creak, the quarters chime,
The light dust falls, the heavy doom;
Dead dust and brazen bells of time
Are younger than those bells of bloom.

He beats his anvil, and his blood
Moves to its measured pulses still:
That humble angel carved in wood
Looks up to its immortal hill.

With moveless, dedicated eyes
It gazes on, while all the waste
Seconds and minutes, hours and days
Plunge to that echoing gulf, the past.

Held, like a perfume held in air,
Or smiling from a nameless mound,
What does each Adoration care
For sorrow measured off by sound?

THE CAPTIVE BIRD OF PARADISE

Give me the bird of Paradise, though dying,
Exiled and doomed, ravished from the Elysian
Forest where I shall never see it flying,
Where Coelogyne flowers like a vision:
Never shall hear the love-tormented crying.

For there abides the torrent of golden wire,
The silver silk, the cactus-anther river,
The rose-death purple mantled on with fire,
The dying-dolphin green where lightnings quiver,
The trembling arches of the silent lyre.

Though I shall never see the sudden turning
Into a sphery monstrance, globe of splendor,
The ecstasy that is beyond our learning,
The action and the attitude that render
Love back to whence it came, the phoenix burning:

Though I shall never hear, rending asunder
The bonds that trammel love, that cry of passion,
The voice that is more terrible than thunder:
Though at its death my life be desolation,
Give me the bird of paradise, the wonder.

TWO DRAWINGS OF OWLS
BY RICHARD GILKEY
APPEAR ON CENTER INSERT

Stanley Kunitz

I Am Fidelity

"I am fidelity that still abideth." More than thirty years have gone since I first encountered that unexceptional, almost self-effacing line in one of Ruth Pitter's early poems. I do not know why it should persist in my mind, indelibly associated with her name, but because it does, claiming no virtue beyond its stubborn memorability, I begin to discover in it an inner reality that has nothing to do with pious sentiment. I read it anew as a kind of signature, an emanation.

In some ways she seems the loneliest poet of her generation, though marked by a self-reliant joy. From the first she was precocious and irreconcilable. One of her perilous triumphs is that she could have written as well as she did without permitting herself, until middle life, to concede the existence of the twentieth century. Conventional poesy and piety were temptations she did not always escape, but out of her dogged loyalty to traditional measures and archaic diction, to Elizabethan song and Jacobean air, flowed on occasion such unrivaled recreations as her "Sturdy Thieves" of 1918:

Whit out of the wood
That killest king's game for food,
What is the staff to bring the blood?
Why, I say surely, good oak or holly.

And Sim out of the shaw
That hath the eye of the daw,
What helpeth thee against the law?
Why, I say surely, good oak or holly.

And Charles out of the chase
That leaves no hide in his place,
What is thy charm against disgrace?
Why, I say surely, good oak or holly.

Any therefore that grieves
For all these sturdy thieves,
Hearken now wiseman, that believes
They will be, while there be oak or holly.

Ruth Pitter became a modern poet without forfeiting her right to deal with sacred experience. The natural world remains miraculous to her. Her later poems are harder fought, less touched with innocence, but the best of them, however knowingly desolate, are still fortified by her sense of musical delight, her idiosyncratic purity of heart and eye. "But for lust we could be friends . . ."

Her poems are so sensitively tuned that they are liable, with a breath, to fail, but even when they do they are never failures of conscience. I like to pick my way among her pieces, in that small Eden, half peaceable kingdom, half battleground, which is yet spacious enough for passion and betrayal, faith and its absence, cottage and cave, angels and military harpists, creatures of earth and air (including the only real swan in poetry) and their "mind-infected" predators, the eloquent coffin-worm and the rose.

Praise to Ruth Pitter for having the morality to endure!

Thom Gunn

Disciplined Richness

Ruth Pitter likes to write on pastoral subjects, animals and mythology, and she is obviously interested in the musical possibilities of language. In a sense, therefore, she has affinities with what are known as the Romantic poets. But she avoids the faults of the late Romantics: delicacy to the point of frailty, indulgence of fancy to the point of triviality; as well as those of the early: diffuseness, decorativeness, a vague spirituality.

In spite of her affinities, she has a pre-Romantic tact. In her poem "A Trophy of Arms" the strength is a traditional strength. Though she brings her full powers of emotion to bear on her subjects she always knows what she is doing: and the strongest impression she gives is one of controlled richness. The richness is a pleasure in the whole of life, but a pleasure that without the control would be chaos. The control is, simply, that of understanding, or the attempt to understand. She avoids all the dangers of sensational or sentimental treatment because she never writes of a stock-experience or a stock-idea, but always about the thing itself — as it has occurred to *her*. Her tact is the tact of honesty, which will not overstate.

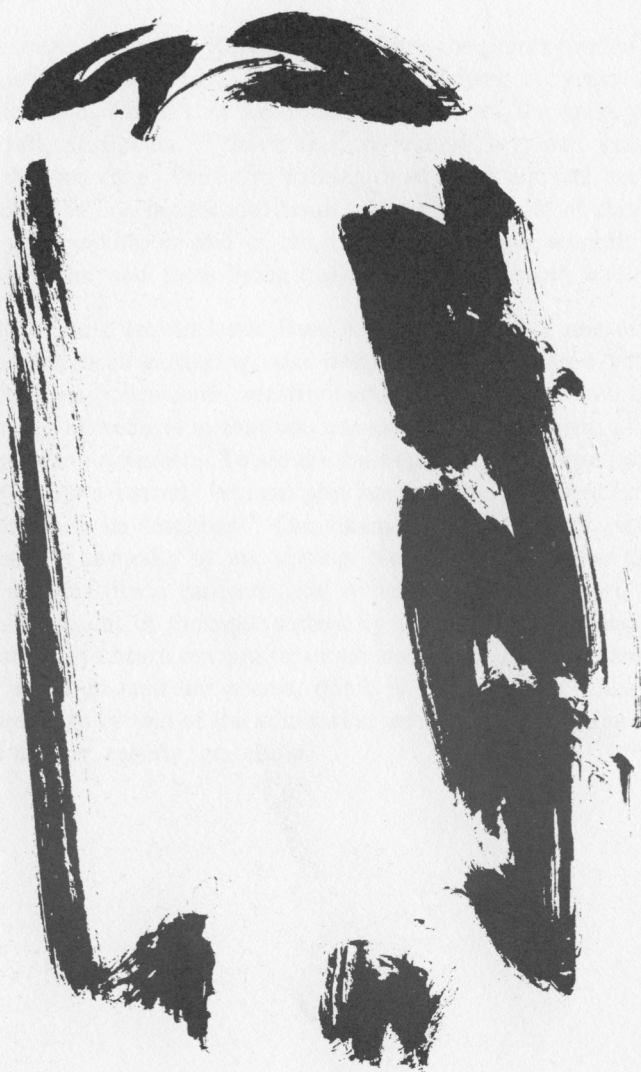
She has been neglected because she is part of no movement, no fashion: she has realized what any good poet must realize, that the writing of poetry is a lonely occupation. Hilaire Belloc said, introducing a book of hers in 1935: "I could wish to be younger in order to mark the moment when talent of this very high level reaches its reward in public fame. It must come." A Juvenal would be needed to do justice to the reasons why it hasn't yet come. The public mind is choked with lesser poets. Meanwhile Ruth Pitter is one of the best half-dozen English poets of the century.

John Holmes

Ruth Pitter: Ardor and Control

JAMES STEPHENS has called Ruth Pitter perhaps the purest poet of our day; the next, the companion poet to Yeats. Writing 10 years after Stephens, in 1946, I said that her tone is the tone of the great poet, dignified, full, passionate. I have been re-reading her, and know I was right the first time. Only the walking dead could not feel her fire at the touch. She is a master craftsman, sustaining a voice of classical tradition, yet speaking in and of her times. Power and warmth and grace are timeless, and these living qualities she has always had.

Today I found an old letter from her in my copy of one of her books. She had been gardening, and wrote, "I am so in love with it that I superstitiously fear some catastrophic deprivation. When you begin to know causes and effects so that you can control a department of life, the thing grows to a passion. To see the fruit-spurs coming, sure enough (on a tree hitherto barren) because you have treated it correctly is a satisfaction not to be described." One likens this love, control, passion and satisfaction naturally to her writing. Not that she gardens like a poet; she gardens like a gardener, and writes poetry like a poet. She can achieve a height of thought reached by few poets in this century. She has not always heard our praise, or we would not have to express it here, but would go read her poems, which is all she needs. Like any poet, she needs to be told of the admiration we have all felt for so long, and we do tell her, eagerly, gratefully.



Carol Hall

Two Poems

FRIDAY DREAM

I dreamed I drifted on a ship of ice
That broke like a great beast from the main floe.
Your hands and smile were visible, and twice
I called, but you were far to hear. I go
Fast on my boat of glass. I took command,
Gave orders to myself (some were obeyed),
But that ship slid like loss away from land.
And out of sight of love I rocked, afraid.

I dreamed I captained my lost boat of ice
No one but seals saw me unfold the flag
Or care to see, where now the flat sails spin
And scold like sorry birds. The dead seas drag,
But night new-mined as oceans washes in.

Like ships or light go free, who do not care
Or only at assorted times. Be kind,
Clean-favored, wary. Keep your counsel, where
You bask in private harbors of your mind.
Cut off from you I drank tears like a child,
Then turned to steer. And now the drab sails spin
And rock like riddled birds. The seas are mild,
But night remote as oceans washes in.

I dreamed I traveled on a ship of ice
Away from you. I shall not dream it twice.

AGE OF OLD CONTINENTS

Curse and obey, acknowledge it is hard
To rid the road of bandits, marginal tribesmen,
The shy and miniature. Yet peoples alter.
Prize pupils? No, poor, troublesome relations.
We smile, we wear shoes, we are slow to change.

Ambassadors, my first world cherished only
One meager landscape bordering on dry seas.
Now here are stars like lakes, new hemispheres,
Perimeters of sun. Come Turks and Sikhs,
You of Bombay, Calcutta, Crete and Kansu:

My continents grow old, Russian and Dutch,
Remembering Rome centurions, their death.

Josephine Miles

Two Poems

VISITING HOUR

He sat in an easy chair by the open window,
Leaning back, with his legs crossed.
Someone sitting on the bed was intently speaking,
And he listened intently, answering softly.

The eastern hill of houses outside his window
Flung back the sunset light into his evening,
And the smoky shadow gathered
From inside to out.

When the one who had spoken picked up her gloves and left him,
Patting his shoulder,
He came to the door of the room with her
And kissed her softly.

Then he went back to the dark sill of the window
And knelt there, head on his arms, sometimes
Softly lifting his head to look at the view, and then dropping it,
Beating it with his fists.

TO MAKE A SUMMER

Sandy says his high-school daughter
Keeps exclaiming joy, joy.
The burden of my joy lightens
With her exclamation.

It's a generality, it takes
From my heart the sting of the singular, it sets moving
In the easy early Berkeley air
What we incommunicably share.

Anne Sexton

Three Poems

"DEAR ALUMNA:

SO THAT WE MAY COMPLETE OUR RECORDS
*would you be good enough to send the present address of
your mother and father, and also news of yourself . . ."*

Tell them it must be thirteen years
since they saw my money; am in arrears
and have no news. Tell them I never had
a real mother or father; was adopted:
pale issue of folk who could not keep
another place at their shabby table.
Tell them I've forgotten; am not able
now, for weeks, to tell news nor sleep.

Or tell them, truthfully, I've succeeded
my obedient home and my parents' wide bed.

Tell them how it has been four months
since my mother died; how almost at once
my father fell to his cave; how I reap
his golden toys; how, though my table
is jammed with things, I am not able
now, for weeks, to tell news or sleep.

THE KITE
Cape Cod, 1954 - 1959

Here in front of the summer hotel
the beach waits like an altar.
We are lying on a cloth of sand
while the Atlantic noon stains
the world in light.

It was much the same
five years ago here. I remember
how Ezio Pinza was flying a kite
for the children. None of us noticed
it then. The pleated lady
was still a nest of her knitting.
Four pouchy fellows kept their policy
of gin and tonic while trading some money.
The parasol girls slept, sun-sitting
their lovely years. No one thought
how precious it was, or even how funny
the festival seemed, square rigged in the air.
The air was a season they had bought,
like the cloth of sand.

I've been waiting
on this private stretch of summer land,
counting these five years and wondering why.
I mean, it was different that time
with Ezio Pinza flying a kite.
Maybe, after all, he knew something more
and was right.

FUNNEL

The family story tells, and it was told true,
of my great grandfather who begat eight
genius children and bought twelve almost new
grand pianos. He left a considerable estate
when he died. The children honored their
separate arts; two became moderately famous,
three married and fattened their delicate share
of wealth and brilliance. The sixth one was
a concert pianist. She had a notable career
and wore cropped hair and walked like a man,
or so I heard when prying a childhood ear
into the hushed talk of the straight Maine clan.
One died a pinafore girl, she stays her five
years forever. And here is one that wrote —
I sort his odd books and wonder his once alive
words and scratch out my short marginal notes
and finger my accounts.

Back from that great grandfather I have come
to tidy a country graveyard for his sake,
to chat with the custodian under a yearly sun
and touch a ghost sound where it lies awake.

I like best to think of that Bunyan man
slapping his thighs and trading the yankee sale
for one dozen grand pianos. It fit his plan
of culture to do it big. On this same scale
he built seven arking houses and they still stand.
One, five stories up, straight up like a square
box, still dominates its coastal edge of land,
It is rented cheap in the summer musted air
to sneaker-footed families who pad through
its rooms and sometimes finger the yellow keys
of an old piano that wheezes bells of mildew.

Like a shoe factory amid the sweet spruce trees
 it squats; flat roof and rows of windows spying
 through the mist. Where those eight children danced
 their star-fished summers, the thirty-six pines sighing,
 that bearded man walked giant steps and chanced
 his gifts in numbers.

Back from that great grandfather I have come
 to puzzle a bending gravestone for his sake,
 to question this diminishing and feed a minimum
 of children their careful slice of suburban cake.

May Swenson

Three Poems

EARLY DE CHIRICO: SUPERIMPOSED INTERIORS

1

A cannon's mouth. A clock.
 The heads of two gargoyles on a butcher's block.
 No blood, however. Blue and green opaque
 panels pretend to be air.

2

If a window were there,
 we'd breathe pebbles.
 The night tastes burrs in the full moon's hair.

3

A queen
 has just passed by, for
 the spore
 of her train is seen
 on the floor.

This yellow rectangle might
 be light,
 except it's thick.
 You could stir
 it with a stick,
 had you come sooner.

5

Sir:
 High up on a trestle
 created by your eyelashes when you blink,
 a very tiny train, the kind that chugs,
 and a white scald
 above its bald
 head, is moving,
 making you think
 several black bugs
 bump softly.

6

Several
 Black
 Bugs
 Bump
 Softly.

7

Yes, elephant gray is dominant.

8

Although these arches dwindle alarmingly,
 there's no harm.
 Try the doorknobs: the sea won't leak through.

The foreground's reassuring — it slopes backward.
That shadow is a hill of flowing sand.
Slick, in places. Take my hand.
Ah, here's the escalator leading down to sleep.

Kick
these eggs out of the way without breaking any.
Not difficult — they're flat — only pasted on;
they can't roll,
for the tiles are rose.
But the toes
of our boots must be renovated accordingly.

One more trapezoid left to be crossed —
the sole
piece of furniture on the lower level.
A stern jerk at the bit
will do it.
There might be a rubber mitten
nailed beside the brow
of a Greek in plaster — but don't stop for that now.

Gallop round the kid body of a doll,
with stitches prominent from crotch to navel.
A double gleam of needles lifts the horizon to stilts,
then the path, or slab, or wall wilts:
we flounder in melted cheese and candle-droppings.

Stop!
Notice that the ground is sky solidified.

Let us recall that the infinite number
resembles the Figure 6 reflected
in any smooth convex surface well-buffed.
The frame is only lumber.
Let us e-merge.
E-merge on the threshold of the unexpected,
where all rays, all rays, all rays employed here converge.

DREAM AFTER NANOOK

I lived savage and simple, where teeth were tools.
I killed the caught fish, cracked his back in my jaws;
harpooned the heavy seal, ate his steaming liver raw;
wore walrus' skin for boots and trousers; made knives of tusks;
carved the cow-seal out of her hide
with the horn of her husband.

I lived with huskies, thick-furred as they,
snarled with them over the same meat;
paddled a kayak of skin, scooted sitting over the water;
drove a skein of dogs over incessant flats of snow,
tore through the tearing wind with my whip.

I built a hive of snow-cubes cut from the white ground,
set a square of ice for window in the top,
slid belly-down through the humped doorhole,
slept naked in skins by the oily thighs
of wife and pup-curled children.
I rose when the ice-block lightened, tugged the chewed boots on.

I lived in a world of fur — fur ground — jags of ivory —
lived blizzard-surrounded as a husky's ruff,
I left game-traps under the glass teeth of ice,
snared slick fish, and tasted their icy blood.
I made a sled with runners of leather.

I made a hat from the armpit of a bear.
I yarned the dogs in their traces at night,
heaped them by the fur hut hilled on the snow.
I crept in and shut the low opening,
slept snug in a hive of snow
on the slope of Snow-Cake Mountain.

MY FARM

The page my acre; A, B, C are buildings.

Blue is the name of the barn
already in place by the meadow.

Name! Name! shout the hammers.
The house rides up in three strokes —
its attic tri-cornered like art,
its porch the shape of ample.

Blue is the hump of the barn.
Call the cows: Come, Black. Come, White.

On Cadmium, the center field,
a structure I haven't guessed is going to be guyed.
A kind of planetarium?
Ask the architect in the morning.

This is my property.
I erase it if I please.

Or plant a skating pond.

The problem is to build a floor like that,
that moves their legs like that, like scythes.

All the page is a white pond now.

Some boys have fallen, and gotten up:
those red streaks are their cheeks and ears.

A man with silver hair advances —
and a woman on one blade;
she holds a muff of huge sunlight.

The whole sheet, solid, runs beneath between their feet.
I pull it smooth and backwards
until, far up, it rumples among the trees.

Today — let's see — I'll trade weathers.
Hoist a hall of sagebrush.
Or the stairs of a waterfall.

Have the high rooms hung with clouds.
The only furniture some horses.

The brown divans graze on the rugs.

Anne Orr

Three Poems

1.

Build me a high grave, build it on rock;
Send me the finest masons to break me a home.
Settle me stern under the tallest star,
And a stone-still lily fold on the hollow earth:
My heart like a fearful wanton trips in the sea
Waking the blood of each lover, wave after wave.

Over the salt-sick darling time uncovers
The ripe bud dragging the vine; darkness
Packing the fingered vein where absence feeds.
Build me a stern death: O let them believe
Heaven; never bend to the sea-sick lips
That kiss in the rocking dark where no flesh dips.

2.

Once in a rage when I was still a child
 I bruised my mother's garden with my breath:
 The roses leapt and hid their flashing heads,
 I thought I saw a ghost; the fountains died.
 And later on, me standing like a fool,
 Night caught our house and carried it away.
 Was that my name that beat the rooftops down?
 The gates become a stone, the fences sticks.
 I looked again; my very skin was sick.
 Now nothing grows. Where turrets split the sun
 I see a field dissolving in the rain.
 Bent to the dark, among the broken stones,
 I kiss each hand into that vacant west;
 But nothing stirs: my fingers lose my lips
 And trail behind me in the morbid earth.
 I breathe my name across my brow and watch
 My ghost arrange its features on the wind;
 Pass overhead, as if it had not seen.

3.

Desire rode her on its wheel.
 Love lent her thought while she lay tossed
 Upon that mount. Love gave her time
 And one salt thumb to light her hip.
 Where the grapewhite skin climbed to her hair
 Death sprouted twice: the sweet dream ran
 Like seaweed up the fluted skull.
 Love gave her flight torn from her side
 And the broad wheel cooled. She crept
 Into the damp featherings; she knelt.
 Death from the jungling wide air
 Plummeted on fire, down; it tucked
 The whole dark air under its fur,
 Then dipped its beak, and entered her.

Mona Van Duyn

An Essay on Criticism

Standing in the kitchen, ready to rip open the tinfoil,
 I paused to appreciate how abstraction flatters my will,

how efficiently it takes out of time the qualities I can use
 and rejects the others. Assuming onion soup as my purpose,

the onions in my cupboard, which used to be, so to speak, real,
 insisted on their whole nature, were never so sweetly under control—

they were always inconveniently rotting or trying to bloom
 or spraying my eyes with perverse misdirection of their perfume,

while these neat and peaceful little particles will go into the steam,
 inoffensive to my notions of what an onion or a tear humanly means,

and come simmering back to what might be called onions again,
 or stay on the shelf, drily possible, inert until I need them.

I had paused with the package, as I say, but at the doorbell's ring
 I went and let in a friend whose radiance was transforming.

"Let me tell you this minute!" she cried, and just inside the door
 clutched at my sleeve and held me to her eloquence like the Mariner.

"His name doesn't matter—he won't know—for my future he is Noone—
 but I know now—I've learned what love is—how love is like a poem—

how it 'makes nothing happen,' how it 'lies in the valley of its saying,'
 how it lives by its tensions with the roundness and perfection of a day-
 dream,

how it delights in itself, doubles back on itself, is 'to be'
 in the full awareness of its being, its own elegance of play,

is an equilibrium of sound, sight and sense all together
springing to vehement life and celebrating each other,

how it finds what it wants from reality and makes up the rest,
but is finally its own reference, exists in its own interest,

how it kindles the world that is made, the lie that has made it,
the mind's grasp, the heart's hold, the senses' rich hauls of the scoopnet,

and while passion, which is only its paraphrase, dies of quick pleasure,
it survives in its difficult wholeness, its ceremonious self-enclosure,

beyond sincerity, an exclusive configuration
that includes me in art, lets me say, 'This is *my* creation!'

Oh, I'm only an amateur," she said, a young woman and poet,
"but you know all about it," to me, enough older to deny it,

and she stopped and waited, and I stood like a rebellious nun
whose habit is read too simply in the sense of separation.

Beginners have ignorance as their danger and precious privilege,
but re-beginners suffer and fail through distrust of knowledge.

Yet I looked, out of vanity, for an honest advisory role
and turned up a lack of innocence, at least, that might be helpful,

for, once one has trembled through an eavesdrop on private confession,
one writes to Dear Someone Somewhere assuming mutual indiscretion.

"You're published now," I told her, "in your eyes, in your whole air,
so your poem is half of the truth, the other half is the reader.

All you've described, that enchanted, self-created 'self-enclosure,'
is made to lie in print in an enchanting self-exposure

to the one who, having by accident or inquisitiveness
turned to its page, puts all his perception at its service,

by understanding goes on past its artful shyness
to its artful appeal, and through that to its real fineness,

'suspends disbelief' that its loving selection is total,
forgets what it doesn't mention, the dust on the windowsill,

the office routine, any routine, and . . . beholds.
Later, of course, come tests more critically controlled,

but a poem, believe me, by consent, never by coercion
slowly, deeply, meaningfully can move another person,

for, although the instant of judgment it starts from is spontaneous,
unwilled, the rest of its painful and painstaking fuss

results from the pressure of a passionately serious wish
on invention which would rather be carefree, playful, coltish—

the 'wish to be believed.' A poem exerts an intention
of passing all tests, of standing as permanent intervention

between reader and reader-as-he-was. I just mean," I ended,
"being written and published, something is somehow being said."

She thanked me, looking somewhat thoughtful, and said goodbye, and
left,

and I gripped in turn, from long practice, a theoretical Wedding Guest,

confessing to someone less starry-eyed than she about engagements
how the belief that to be believed is always of consequence

comes to hang on the pencil, heavy, and how merely growing old
makes all moving weightier and more expensive — time favors the house
hold —

yet a poem's "way of happening" won't let anything happen at all
unless it is serious — it is no brothel, it has no windfalls;

and how, though it's not for itself, a pure revel in its own nature,
it must keep its salutation secret and be written as if it were,

expressing the contradiction that only this professional lie
permits the collaboration that can make it come true;

and how a reader who comes to take in the surprise of each pathway
in a world of formal difference and difference of personality

may find other surprises. (There is one, impressed as trailbreaker,
who returns to the poem as a kind of conscientious marriage-broker

and raps it and taps it and maps it clear back to a region
where the writer stands shivering in the art as artless human

and takes down her measurements— but we needn't worry about him;
he bundled up for the chill, reached that climate as professional pilgrim.)

But there's one who goes back to his business so provoked by the tour
he denounces the vacation, swears he won't take it any more,

but on the way to the office finds he is walking to its rhythm
and changes his stride, but its rhythm goes bing-bong in his bosom,

tries T-V at night, but its imagery covers his screen,
and closes his eyes, but his memory insists on its meaning,

and finds that it is modifying the dust on his windowsill
and its sum is including parts much greater than its whole,

until, willing to do something, he makes an apprehensive return
and runs through the foreign scenery, feeling strangely at home,

(for what other world is there but the one we believe to be,
that we touch and are touched by in affections, conceptions and body?)

till he reaches an ultimate region and sees, standing there,
himself and the writer, two humans, artless and similar —

a likeness proved out of difference — and, enlightened in its sunshine,
he sees they've been caring about each other the whole time,

and so, through its other active agent, the poem is a power,
and the responsibility . . .

but it was almost time for dinner.

All of a sudden, when I went back into the kitchen,
tears came to my eyes, galvanized by a sort of pain.

Now of course I remember perfectly all that was going on
at the start, but it wasn't leading to empathy with the onion.

The inner life of that bulb would never come to interest me;
I am not like an onion, I don't wish anyone else to be.

I was only using the onion. It is only useful,
and, defining it by so few qualities, I make it immortal

and agree with the science of onions that all onions are the same
and don't see what is individual. I don't have time.

Was the pang for poetry? I meant to take time for that,
for what is gentle, idealistic and fair and, in the long run, right.

I wasn't just using poetry. I was caring about it.
I believe life wouldn't be nearly so meaningful without it,

and I want them illuminating each other as much as possible,
and in the foregoing, whenever their likeness grew implausible,

whenever the see-saw poise of the metaphor weakened,
I held up the poem's side first, and life's side second,

for I believe in art's process of working through otherness to recognition and in power that comes from acceptance, and not imposition —

for people, that is; and if life is not a poem, and this is clear, one can still imply that one sometimes wishes it were.

As I emptied out the tinfoil package, tears fell in the pot as if onionjuice had caused them; the important thing is, it had not.

Let technology salt the soup, let it remove every eye-sting that has no necessitous human predicament as its meaning.

These tears can season only if they fall on a shoulder and a breathing, feeling recipient responds to their moisture,

but poetry didn't cause them either. The pain, that tearjerk, was life, asserting its primacy in a well-timed rebuke,

and the assertion is valid. A poem can stay formally seated till its person-to-person call, centuries later, is completed,

being abstract enough to afford inertness on the shelf and yet being the self's own life-like abstraction of itself.

But these tears, I remind, well and fall in a room with a clock. Out of action they come, into action they intend to hurry back.

Their message is more vital than their grace can be, and when they speak they adopt with justice the imperfect urgency of rhetoric,

basing their case on unearned, inglorious similarity:
"Dear Reader, there is nothing immortal about the you and the me.

We must move in time, time moves, we must care right away!"
Less beautifully patient than a poem, one might call them an essay.

About the Contributors...

RUTH PITTER was born in Essex, England, in 1897. She has published a number of books of poems, including: *First Poems* (1920); *A Trophy of Arms* (1936) which won the Hawthornden Prize; *The Bridge* (1945); *Urania* (1950), her selected poems; and *The Ermine* (1953).

STANLEY KUNITZ, winner of the Pulitzer Prize, lived and taught in the Northwest in 1955-56, when he conducted the Poetry Workshop at the University of Washington.

THOM GUNN, the English poet and critic, is teaching at the University of California.

JOHN HOLMES, the well-known American poet, teaches at Tufts College.

CAROL HALL's first volume, *Portrait of Your Niece*, has just been published by the University of Minnesota Press.

MONA VAN DUYN appeared in the Fall issue of POETRY NORTHWEST. She is one of the editors of PERSPECTIVE.

JOSEPHINE MILES' *Collected Poems, 1930-1960*, is scheduled for publication this year by Indiana University Press.

MAY SWENSON's recent book is *A Cage of Spines* (Rinehart).

ANNE SEXTON's first book, *To Bedlam and Part Way Back*, is being published by Houghton Mifflin.

ANNE ORR is a young Seattle poet. This is her first publication.

RICHARD GILKEY, Northwest painter and Guggenheim fellow, will have a one-man show at the Seattle Art Museum in the fall.

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