

VOLUME XVII • NUMBER 1 • SPRING 1976 • \$1.25

Poetry

NORTHWEST



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POETRY NORTHWEST SPRING 1976 VOLUME XVII, NUMBER 1

Published quarterly by the University of Washington. Subscriptions and manuscripts should be sent to *Poetry Northwest*, 4045 Brooklyn Avenue NE, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington 98195. Not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts; all submissions must be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope. Subscription rate, \$4.50 per year; single copies, \$1.25.

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Distributed by B. DeBoer, 188 High Street, Nutley, N.J. 07110; and in the West by L-S Distributors, 1161 Post Street, San Francisco, Calif. 94109.

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POETRY NORTHWEST

SPRING 1976

John S. Flagg

Six Poems

ENVY OF OTHER ARENAS

The moment digs its spurs into me and
I'm off, putting what I've got into a credible rampage,
trying to buck time off my back, knowing it
will climb back on again like a bad habit.

O how much briefer the blood anger,
the blurred hate, the victimization of the murderous,
the suicidal charges of my mad brothers—

and how much fatter the comparative life of smashing
the diminutive, the exquisitely fragile,
and incontrovertible presence, unstopably out of place.

CONCORD, APRIL 19, 1975

In very little wind
a minister atones
for by a prolonged quote
of Emerson unquote
(still the only mind
audible) flags sag,
listless with early spring this time
last month having served
breezier the march of costume,
cliché, and manure from
Da-Glo red rain-slickered

Change of Address

Notify us promptly when you change your mailing address.
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mounted cops' horses, all
over which the football
president presides,
instant helicopter
deposit not unlike
a plot solution lowered
from a Greek tragic machine.

Whew, the speech has died
though the foursquare face
still seems pissed from the boos
honor invoked to foist
threats obscenely veiled
(the aluminum fist
in the vinyl glove being wound
up for the groin punch),
got.

Rapidly he heads
the wedge of politicians
and protectors of politicians
stepping down an avenue
of crowd to dark machines,
hearse-havens, limousines
that pull out with ruling-class class.

And now the masquerade
tramples and pollutes
with empty musketry
but enough noise to keep
the infamous long-gone
farmers this mimicry
is predicated on
underground.

Their comrades
in our distant present
struggle to unyoke
the remaining earth.

We indistinctly hear
the shots and shouts from here.

FORMALISTS, YOU ARE

Yes-men of the letter,
old wineskin collectors
teetotalling up,
squaring accounts
with the circle, the dropped
stone's widening wave
animating the still
pool the algae of which
you figure forth.

TO A CAN OF SLICED CARROTS

O wonderful bright orange and yellow can
that puts my eyes out
of their supermarket trance for a moment
with your cylindrical still life
entitled "Sliced Carrots," prophetic
fiery wheels of orange, coals
for the tongue—

O honest politic can with your fine
ciphers detailing preservatives—

O tactile can that fits my grip
with a pleasure like a pistol's!—

O can I choose over all other cans!!—

Somewhere in a remote locale of my head
you dreamily sail through the largest pane
ever to tempt the mind into a supermarket
and a thousand jagged reflections stick
your purveyors like backwards assembled porcupines.

HALEAKALA,

the sun's house, where you stand,
lies up the road through cumulus

a two-hour drive. Eucalyptus,
a fog of cloud, then blue. And blue.

You climb from the car. A high
wind takes your breath. You also

gasp at the Pacific pasturing
hundreds of clouds you stand

in the sky looking down on,
feet on the volcano, broken

fever of earth.

 Where you are, Maui
once roped the sun to slow it

for man. (Think of the cane
smoldering in magmatic fields

over which the rock you ride
is breaking—sugar harvest smoke

detectable for miles, sharp
and delicious, but not there

in the heaven where you stand.)
And down from the rubbish of rock

partly man-piled, look at that other
world, the color of the living mars

of fiction, its red-ochre cones
washed by faded green, cupped

in the palm of the great crater like a gift.

IDES

It's the season of no season:
blinds shut sight of the wind
out for the night; not out of mind,
not out of hearing, however—
and the chair
under the window where
the child stood leaning
into the window, the wind
beyond the window, the chair
recalls the child there
where daylight was framed,
wind watched but not touched,
trees signalling, frantic,
the wind is at your house
cracking it, ghost shoulder
the east leans into your kitchen,
wind with a wish to
harvest a house,
whisk away window, child
(part of the wind then, parcel
its errand would be
never to deliver)
mad wind, witch wind, March wind.

Gwen Head

Four Poems

THE WOMAN IN THE MIDDLE

Begin with the heroine standing on a staircase,
three yards of tapered rose point slung from her shoulders,
in mandatory pearls, stephanotis,
and baby's-breath, poised like a white bat.

Above her silken knees, the satin hem
hangs like a blade. It's nineteen twenty-nine.
In steamer trunks beneath the porte-cochere,

the trousseau purchased on her grand tour.
Patou: a blue brocade with silver lace,
its bugle beads like regimented rain.
Embroidered black and white Chinese pajamas
to wear in the evenings playing dominoes.
Teddies and step-ins; ostrich fans; to read,
Tristram and *Sonnets to a Red-Haired Lady*.
To flirt with, a long cigarette holder of
the first green plastic made to look like jade.
His gifts; by which we know across the years
that the groom is poor, but has a good heart.

Twenty-five years later his heart has given out.
Their daughter (a menopausal accident)
is old enough to count him up the stairs.
In steel-rimmed glasses, braces on her teeth,
her busy cranium's wired like a champagne cork.
One, two, three . . . at ten, another step.
Her scrawny shoulder blades protrude like wings.

The heroine listens, rises—no, it can't be!
Hose at the knees, flesh at the waist, hair
at the nape all rolled and tied or netted down,
and all an anonymous, shabby package color,
all with the slack sway and thump of the sleeper berth.
Can't be, but is.

 This is her dressing table:
desk calendar with six weeks left unturned,
rings of spilt powder, piles of unanswered letters,
and a sealed bottle of *Je Reviens*.
Stabbing the pins into her hair, she goes
to thread a needle for her dragon mother.

What happens in the middle? Mother, tell me!
I'm in the middle now. Why wasn't there
a lover and a train to throw herself under,
in a last display of her pyrotechnic hair?

Or is this the train, this slow freight of years,
and the sodden comforts of the hobo jungle?

AT THE PIANO

I

Hunchback
minotaur
squared off
on black goat feet
tight-lipped, eyeless, mute
you are cornered.
Now
I will fold you back like a quilt.
You will grin
like a glad foolish hound.
At my touch
your hollow flank
will buzz like a great golden hive
and the stinging swarms rush out
singing their unknown language.

II

The keys rise to my fingers
like diving boards
like the pliant stems of flowers
like necks bared to the axe
like the stairways of crumbling cities
like masses of candelabra
like the pits of ripe fruit.

They frolic like minnows.
They lie down like mild lambs.
They arch their necks like zebras.
They snap their beaks like macaws.
They are ponderous as the elephant
delicate as the garter snake
furious as the black swan.

I rejoice in their many lives.
We are one, well-knit
as a barrel stave
the perfect, gravity-defying round
through which the sun leaps.

THE LINGUISTIC COMMISSION
REPORTS FROM THE INTERIOR

Unlike our country, where the words
are small, succulent and docile
theirs, wiry and mean,
must be cornered and battered with rocks.
Even then they may break loose, snapping and foaming.
Their least bite can fester.

The adverbs are especially menacing.
They circle the tents at night,
making sleep impossible
though hammocks help a little.

The nouns, nocturnal and clumsy,
are sluggish by day, hence
easily ambushed. In
captivity they breed copiously:
five hundred variants of "want,"
a thousand nuances of "hunger,"
each stringy, foul-tasting.

Small wonder the natives chew air
constantly to numb the pain,
washing it down with a brew of stinging
nettles that resembles *pulque*;

or that they cruelly cast out to die
old orations, epigrams, homilies
—even the small-beer mutterings
and yelps of love—
though they might, with care, have lasted centuries;

or that their most sacred object
is a blank piece of paper,
their epic poem
seventeen hours of silence,
their highest virtue panic
in the face of hyperbole.

SLUG

How can he dare to cross me,
this oozing footless tube,
lifting his alert pronged head
in the cuckold's gesture?

Long ago his nation
cast off the security of shells
and now go proudly naked
relying for safety
on the *realpolitik*
of sheer slug numbers.

Clearly he glories
in each nuance of slug calligraphy,
those sly paths of silver
that chronicle the progress
of appetite, and answer
the urgent appeals of the rain.

Perhaps he incarnates
the slug king of legend
who lay for seven days and seven nights
besotted in a saucer of beer
but did not drown

and who, by this test
won his dappled queen
and with her dangled upside down
on a glittering rope
of commingled slime,
convulsed and tranquil
as a hypnotist's pendulum.

Then together they passed
through the exorcist's circles
of slug bait unharmed
and will feast forever
on trilliums and tulips

if I choose to stay my foot.

I don't, but stand a moment musing,
their sticky deaths the mucilage
holding me earthbound
by all that is at once

most vulnerable
most destructive.

Jack Butler

Two Poems

ELECTRICITY

Because the floor and air were cold, she waited
until the covers warmed her to undress,
then slipped naked in a rustling lightlessness
except for a blue shimmer that palpitated

like an especially hesitant firefly
over her glimmering skin. A stroked cat's ear,
touched in a properly crackling atmosphere,
will so illumine its gesture. But why

insist on classification of the spark?
What does having a name for it change?
Thinking of it is still wild and sweet and strange.
She sat there flashing softly in the dark.

NOT QUITE LIKE SON

Einstein's son is dead, who studied sediment,
God bless his courage. He knew more
About the way the water met the shore
Or buckled off some derelict impediment
Than anyone had known before.

His father's differential gaze almost, almost
Undid the final lucid veil:
So we'll recall it till the yarn goes stale.
Would it have been the blazing focus of that Ghost,
Too terrible to fade or fail?

Or pools of zero, like the little virtual o's
Swirls breed in puddles at noonday,
That swarm, and freckle, and seem almost to play,
False pupils on wrinkled sand? How should we suppose,
Who hardly know enough to say

How two skeins of meat can connect us to the sun?
—Light crawls down sewers to the brain
But keeps a cleanliness that none explain.
He proved nothing, but brought, watery, trembling, one
Frail field to almost total gain.

God bless his son, who shaped no legend for himself,
But made himself useful, and gave
Plain counsel on the sunken limestone cave,
The running wave rumped on the continental shelf,
And the wave standing off the wave.

Carolyn Hinckley

FOR THE JOURNEY

Night after night we enter blind,
stumbling through kind pastures,
wondering at our luck.

Grunting just beyond the ferns,
the monsters lie on every hand,
amazing us by turning
into sheepdogs shaped like dragons,
or marmosets in winter dress.

We hardly falter.
What rivets us is needing to go on.
What terrifies is wanting to go back.
We've hardly started.
It won't be light for hours.

—Until then, hold this hand I've brought along,
pocketsized, blue with use.
You can keep it if you want.
I have another, somewhere,
for emergencies.

Dan Minock

Four Poems

MUHAMMAD SPEAKS TO THE PLANTS AND ANIMALS

House sparrows, change your name.
Robins, stay in the wintering swamps.
Starlings, go screech on a fallen tree.
Beings accepting human arrangements, listen.
Eagle in a stupendous nest, leave your thin-shelled
eggs.
Moths, close your eyed wings to electric lights.
Rabbits low in the weeds,
break the circle of your flight.
Trees, leave, forget your trunks
and your still brothers the phone poles.
And you, tulips that return like orioles,
begonias and ferns waiting for tap water,
go out the open door, the amazed gate,
creep out on sore roots, send seeds,
tendrils, your narrowest chance into a hard wind.
I say this to all of you, not yet human products,
to pigeons moving like ratchet toys around an old
man with white bread,
raccoons coming single file into suburbs on four
human hands,
ivy leaning on brick, mallards nudging pretzels in

the full winter sunlight,
and the birds and animals seen in the dreams of men:
go far, and when they follow, go farther.
Bless the trail dwindling, the rock that juts up.

Come back when red pines grow in the crossroads
years and years.

ORION'S BOYHOOD

He wanted to be so still the quail
would whistle from his knee.
He wanted, when a tree fell and no one was there,
to be there (he was sure there would be no noise).
He wanted to watch the fallen log
inched down through its old leaves.

Later he thought of girls.
He wanted to move his hands slowly on their bodies.
A week to tug a blouse loose at the waist,
a month of rubbing a stomach and kissing
bones of the throat.
They must not say no, no, don't
until they had fallen to a place beside
the pile their clothes must make at night—
cuffs undone, coiled pleats.
He wanted to believe in that mushroom world
and a way to it without heartbeat thudding his hand.

Once a girl held his fingers on her knee.
That was all. Enough. More than he'd hoped for.
The girl could lose her tan,
go blue-veined back into night:
His hand would be on her, moving.
Nothing could stop it.
Not if she sat with sisters.
Not if she moved into brightest light.
His hand could not be shaken off or hurt off.
Not by fire, knives, salt.

THE SUN AND THE NORTH WIND

The students come bundled up,
ordered to learn, are sat in circles.
They keep scarves across their mouths
while I temper my ravings
a little, smile at them like a sun
in a child's book.

Most of them sweat their way
through the books, the talking,
the long silence after questions
when the only sound's the cold stutter
of chalk on the other side of a wall,
making more questions.

Between slush and drift,
unprepared, I meet one again.
Her name, the class are gone.
We both say "How are you?"
Then hurried along by wind,
we let the question stand.

VISITING MOTHER'S

These Sundays are stacked like plates,
the brother home from college, the dinner
up from childhood.
But there are things new, things gone.
New shelves, a fireplace that rolls.
Do I like them? Fine.
Fiercely to myself: fine!

Mother is not a person only,
but a place she knows. Before I've done washing,
she's wiped away the husband who left her,
and put up a picture of storm-struck trees
from Kresge's. In the center of the rug
is a timid orange dog.

A halfback breaks loose, no one can touch him.
He slams the ball down in the end zone.
It skitters away. In the last minute
the other team wins. Someone else
slams the same ball down. Again
it skitters. Jack Benny has died!
Jack Benny, Jack Benny, come sit on the other side of me.
Meet my mother, she's seen you plenty of times.
She's glad you didn't know about the end until the end.

Darkness piles up. I have headaches
from jello, from thinking, from sweet red wine.
So many packages to take back!
An orange-faced man is caught in quicksand.
"He'll get out," my mother tells me
as she gets up to let me leave.

Fredrick Zydek

THE DEATH OF PLECOSTOMUS

For years he lived in the tank,
watching the filters darken,
nibbling plastic weeds, performing
magic for snails, clap-grass,
and one porcelain mermaid
blossom-deep in grains of sand.

He knew the tank like the Eagle
knows the field, and he could swim
with such simple grace
that sometimes truth grew a newer name.
I once caught him watching me,
wooing me back to the germ of man.

I gave a single pellet, a garland
for the skinny victory between us.

He took it as though to scratch its soul.
For one minute I almost believed
in the last mineral agony
of an all mineral thing.
Then, one night he swam too far.

I found him mute as a sponge,
bruised as an invalid plum
lying on the cold plastic
of the kitchen floor.
Had he bumped and gagged
through four rooms to find me?
I knew the sting of fear along his bones

and rushed him back
to his fifty-gallon dream of escape.
He tried, once, to escape again, then moored
himself beneath some plastic kelp.
In the morning, he was belly up,
and the one-eyed Swordtail
had eaten most of his left fin.

Barbara L. Greenberg

THE SHE-MAGICIAN AT THE CISTERN

If you gallop bareback on your expectations you will find her there
forging your signature on the dark water.
She'll wear a mother's face yours never wore.
Merlin will guide her fingers when she combs your hair.

She'll pluck your future from your eyes in knotted handkerchiefs;
they'll fly away.
Silk partridges will flood your sky.
You'll see the wings dissolving and the partridge eyes
expanding into painted chemistries.
Confetti-light will riot on your arched horizons.

Later you'll swear it was nothing, only a sleight-of-hand;
only a blizzard of cinders, a blot of cloud.
The She-Magician will have disappeared.
You'll limp your way toward Pittsburgh, bankrupt and bowed
under that false umbrella for which you've paid in rainbow.

Edward Hirsch

UNSPEAKABLE THINGS

"Tell the Angel about our world, not about the unspeakable."
Rilke

You must speak about what you can,
what can be spoken of. And yet the world,
the mind, too, is unspeakable, nightmares
so terrible you can't remember them,
emotions so dark they're impossible
to locate behind the even darker
smokescreen you cover them with,
these things cry out to you and
demand to be spoken of. Speak of them.
Testify to the unnameable guilt
that racks you, the promise you made
that you would never leave a promise
unkept, this promise, that someday
you would speak about unspeakable things,
voiceless things, things so nameless
they had never been named, so invisible
they had never been seen or touched.
But you, you would speak about them
in a grand way they had never been
spoken of before, reveal them in a way
they had never dreamt of being revealed.
You would water them like flowers,
nourish them in your own body
until your body understood them
and became their body, until your voice

trembled with the sounds of their voice,
your tongue clicked as if it was their tongue,
and then, when you were both ready,
when they were sure you understood them,
and that you were worthy, they would break
out of their dark soil into the light.

How astonished they would be
to look around them! And how strange
and elated they would feel to be
back in the world again, a world
of parks and flowers, angels and men,
a world that had changed so much
since they had first known it
that now it was unrecognizable;
the world they had been away from
so long it had almost managed
to forget them, they who were always there,
speechless and indispensable. How glad
they would be to be recognized again,
to be flattered and finally understood,
to be treated with the respect due
to the darkest inspirations of men.
This was the promise you made
but could never keep for them;
not because you were unwilling
but because they defied you,
appalled at your unspeakable vanity,
they who were as silent and speechless
as needles, and who never forgave you.
You know now that you are not here
to reveal, or to testify, or even
to praise them, but simply to follow
them as far back as you can remember,
to pursue them beyond language
into the voiceless terror. And there,
in a place darker than all imagining,
you are called on to witness them.

Joan Webber

PRIME OF LIFE

After forty-four years I'm chary of my flesh,
And rich enough to conjure with myself. Stern
Wizard of loneliness, I walk
Through tawny heartlands of the past,
Infinite blue reflections of today.

Who would have thought of such kaleidoscopes,
Such cornucopias of mangoes, plums, cool
Pomegranates of the soul, breath
Of old Ganges' source, where people lived
By inhalation of the breath of flowers?

Solitude's a long unguarded reach. Seasons
Rain down on me and nothing hurts.
Autumn already. So, early or not,
I won't be cheated of that well of grace.
Every day new transparencies, the northwest sky
In rapid violent change, and God
Closer, a rush of dark rippling the bone.

Forty-four years and I love my numbing flesh
That burns with frost like a tree reaching toward flame.
Halfway shut of the past, my roots grow bare.
My branches seed the frosty noon, and sigh.

Edward Lueders

EVERY YEAR THE RIVER FLOODS—

dissolving away
the crumbling clay banks,
drowning flat lowland stubblefields,
seizing unguarded town and country contraband,

things growing
along with things made,
floating them all away, filling
the sliding brown current with whatever

moves; all goes
like severed history,
the loose, bobbing artifacts of lives,
of liquidated deeds and dreams, floating fragments

of the ten thousand
things done and things
undone, tumbling on the swollen surface
or carried unseen, sunken, waterlogged, below—

washing us all
downstream with the rolling
go of the river, adrift in the heedless
surge of rising waters, the seamless flow.

Richard Dankleff

Two Poems

NEXT DOOR

All morning Sandy
has been digging a hole
at the edge of the garden.
His aunt knows
he is not retarded—
she had him tested.
Sandy rubs his head and
wedges it back in the hole.

Other days he sits still
as a stump, so long
even the bluejays
ignore him. The aunt laments:
“He stays so still.”

Walking past the rocks
where he keeps odd slugs,
I wave hello-goodbye.
Sandy scowls, or nods,
but saves his talk
for the slugs.

Tonight he sits in the weeds
and watches: birthday children
silly with their party
are prancing across the street.
When they go in, Sandy
leaps, capers stiff-legged
onto the lawn
and dances. Spinning
wild circles, he dances.

TRAILER TO ALASKA

Like the fallen angels endlessly talking in hell
we might debate free will, fixed fate, chance,
if you were here. And find no end.
If we had bought a trailer, say,
or gone off to Alaska, leaped in the dark,
or held each other loosely, or else closer,
or shouted names . . . If we had made even a few
less foolish choices, we would be unlike
we are—two fools no doubt, but other fools.
Your face would grin in my wallet, in your brooch
my frown would rub small breasts I would not change.
We'd cut each other's hair. The bed would fit.
Dear damned fool, you that once held me dear,
if we had taken that trailer to Alaska . . .

TO MY DAUGHTER

1.

I still sweep your father's hair from corners.
 Against my face, hair starved on medicine
 and falling loose. I find his brush,
 a clot of roots. Boots lean crooked
 on the heels, creased where his feet broke the leather.
 I smell his hair inside the pillow tick
 and see, above the bed, oil halos
 on a floral print—smears of pain.
 I build a fire every night.
 In this house sometimes we are afraid.

2.

Signs everywhere: in the grass dogs crack
 the rings from steak, last meat in dirty strings;
 I slip a knife point in a chicken breast
 and pull the slats. Friends tell me I've lost weight.
 No fat to ease my ribs—I say the pattern
 of my fate grows clear inside my skin.
 At the crematorium they gave me all your father
 the furnace could not eat: a box of fire-bruised bones.

3.

A gown of baby fat provides no shelter.
 Your blue eyes flinch at sparks,
 guessing already how we take a chance—
 every night you ask if we can dance.
 Partner, our difficult routine requires two:
Mama, I can copy you!

Across the big east window

I waltz you on my hip until your nightdress blooms with air.
 Who are we dancing for? Is it the man
 who phones when I'm asleep and vows,
 when he can catch me, what he'll do?
 Is it the boy across the street, or your scraps
 of father? I turn the music low and close the drape.

4.

I know which wood the fire takes first:
 white sticks split from fir
 with the cold ardor of your father's ax,
 then whole logs of hemlock, alder;
 for this work I wear your father's shirt—
 as I spilled his body from the box,
 passed my fingers through his shards and sand.

I dance you off to bed, bone-wracked.
 In the dark you look like me—charred eyes, moonface
 whittled down to chalk. I reach to find a light.
Mama, is anybody there?

No one but the ghost
 of each old breath. Though these are just the practice
 steps, I build a fire every night.

LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

I own my own automobile.
 My child is blonde, my lawyer admires me:
 I keep my records straight.
 At the gym the ladies think it's wonderful
 I can fall back on a career
 and I've never had a problem with my weight.

Though my psychiatrist might wish I'd dream
 more vividly, no nightmares to report.
 Pain helps us to the deepest things we know—
 for instance, this stopped being fun sometime ago.

But I've cleaned out all the closets,
 started radishes on the windowsill;
 mention *needle*, I think *stitch*.
 I may remarry.

Meantime on the dancefloor couples hug.
 Wind rises and the fir trees drop

seventy years of litter.
In spring I hire a man to clear the grass.

Look on the bright side: I'll take some new lover
like a cello propped between my knees.
As my accountant says, young widows
make a conversation piece, at least.

Mary Oliver

Two Poems

SIX MONTHS AFTER THE PROPHET
OF CLARKSVILLE PREDICTED
THE END OF THE WORLD

Red, blue, yellow the leaves drift down,
The birds cruise south, you and I
Are still in love, and the prophet of Clarksville
Sleeps in the asylum.

Sweat popping from his brow, he said
We would be gone, be nowhere by now.
The world, poured onto a plate,
Would be consumed in half an hour
By the black mouth of oblivion.

Now the lake chills at its edges, making
Small mysterious windows of ice; clouds
Race by like dark horses, as we walk
Cheerfully into winter.

But the prophet, whom we will not hear of again,
Touches us sometimes with a dry paw,
Crying out in a dream we do not tell,
In which all that is sweet and rational
Burns like straw.

THE END OF WINTER

Last night the ice along the shore
Rose, in the dark that will never tell how,
And flew, like a huge ghost-bird,
Back to the fields of the north.

This morning, as I passed the dry-goods store,
Near the front window where the light shines in,
The clerk was tumbling open, yard after yard,
A bolt of yellow cloth across a brown table.

Paul Zimmer

ZIMMER'S LAMENT FOR LESTER

Lester went last week.
He could not wipe the sun
Spots from his eyes.
He staggered out of
The field into shade,
But before he could sit
Down he was gone.

The news slammed in
Like an axe into oak
And my losses cannot
Be counted. Only moon,
The silent, sullen bitch,
Remembers all the things
That Lester knew. I think of
The great stones we stood in the fields,
Of questions I had meant to ask him:
Woods, ploughland, weather, seeds,
The things he kept so easily
That I had always craved.

Now the moonlight loves
The things he has become.
She takes him as her due:
Woods, ploughland, weather, seeds;
And I am left as
Successor of nothing.

David Dayton

Two Poems

THE LOST BODY OF CHILDHOOD

What the ears want most
is to drop off the sides of the head
like ripened fruit
and lie on a beach among shells
echoing music by favorite composers
with intermissions
silent as a drawn bow.

The eyes too dream of escape.
They long to flutter their lashes
like butterflies shedding cocoons
and take off
following the seasons across continents
seeing everything like children
for the first time.
When they grew old
they'd retire to a peak in the Himalayas
overlooking a valley and a lake
envisioned now when they close
bored to tears by the geography of walls.

Petit bourgeois
the tongue and palate are pretty much content
two old partners with steady business.
Evenings they sit back of the shop
discussing what would be the tastiest meal

neither agreeing nor objecting
but merely offering up another morsel for thought
as they smoke and drink beer
in wistful silence.

The nose is an enigma
a Chinese butler
always there
aloof as he is dependable.
Who can tell what he secretly desires?
One can only guess
from his passion for arranging flowers
the way he lingers over a cluster of lilac
or a sprig of jasmine.

Genitals are the royalty of flesh.
The penis a courtly monarch
leaps up at the barest thought.
Vagina the queen wears a purple cape
adorned with a single priceless pearl.
They are suited perfectly to each other.
Desire is their magic lamp.
Each night millions kneel in obeisance.

There is a sixth sense
perceived through the others
existing before them
a presence like air.
And yet a person who takes off his face
in the privacy of his own mind
may gasp like an asthmatic
terrified.
He will return to his senses
if he returns
like the newborn
every nerve blossoming.

WIND AND STRATEGY

All day the trees hunch their backs
like people waiting in the rain
to catch a bus.
Sparrows are only a guess.
Your eyes light on the vacant sill
or a quivering branch.
So you are tired of just looking out:
everywhere the dolor of metal boxes
on telephone poles,
a mothball fleet anchored in the sky.
Dozing off, you imagine
the Sea of Loneliness on the moon
or the hands of old women
lowering shades at dusk
in Grand View, Kansas.
You wake in late afternoon
to find the buildings across the way
still locked arm-in-arm,
their windows black
except for one amber light
glowing in the den of a retired clerk.
You peer closer
as he examines a rare stamp
through his quizzing glass:
the etching of an unknown city,
skyscrapers surrounded by apartment flats,
block after block emerging from the fog
like the hulls of ships
till he locates in the space
between two dots his own window,
smudged with dust, and through it,
as you are seeing now,
the lamp above his desk,
the book of stamps, but nowhere,
no matter how tightly he squints, himself.
Though you know it's impossible,
when he looks up and stares out the window,
you have the feeling your eyes have met.

Michael Magee

Five Poems

SONG FOR THE BODY WAKING

Wake now, deep among pillows,
from the valleys of sheets, the folds of dreams where you slept;
from the rivers where you drifted without worry,
from the seven cliffs of care, and the lakes
beneath them, among the shallows of water and wind.

Let light pour from the breach, this slab of sky
now opening above your head. Stretch, feeling
all your length, the whole world
sprawling out before you at your knees,
this body where you begin.

CUL-DE-SAC

You may lose directions, not knowing the way,
windows begin to darken toward evening,
shadows take root, a hush falls over the trees.
Light dwindles, every way you turn is wrong,
streets lose themselves, going blind as alleys.

Forget the breath that brought you here,
the trail of your pulse, your deepening veins.
Until your feet go dead, you wait here still,
your brain telling you the road toward sleep,
unable to move, your hands hanging like questions.

POSTSCRIPTS

I would yearn for fingers
to touch other than my own,
a mouth to hide the darkness,
eyes that would spell light,
a voice speaking to me

from behind the mirror
saying the years too forget,
bones that will not freeze
like pipes in winter,
a heart holding its own
never knocking at the door
begging for its supper,
these lines in my hands
refusing to run out,
still teaching me the words.

SIX RIDDLES WITH A SINGLE ANSWER

Whose bones are these that knock asking my name?
Whose skin is this I wear to warm myself?
Whose eyes are these watching from the corners?
What hands are these before me I cannot hold?
Whose heart is this that hides a deeper pulse?
Whose mouth is this that asks the answer to itself?

A WARNING TO POETS

I will silence you,
with my own cold will
that hones itself
against your broken words,
holding up a razor
to your mirror,
disturbing your sleep
until you bleed print
and your face
is white as paper.
Read between these lines,
consider this warning a favor:
there is not room enough
for more than one
on this page.

Adrienne Marcus

THE APPRENTICE

Doors
are what I dream.
Forget pure thought.
Wheel and wand repeat.
You
would unleash logic
into the world.
I
have been waiting for you.
We
smile at each other.
Our
faces are clouded;
We
have no reflection.
I
shall invent a face
for you to wear
or learn to destroy
and leave no trace.
Love,
old enemy,
wherever you find
me
define yourself.
Under the curved, dismembering
moon I apprentice myself
to an old art.
Do not be deceived
by softness. Black
as iron, tempered
with blood
I
dream the hunt.

ALIENATED POEM

I really do not care. Every now and then
I peek out from the closed drawer
and you are still waiting, sleepless, impatient,
for my anti-heroic non-arrival. For now,
rehearse your acceptance of me, should I come—
the distanced awful acknowledgment of your own
pitiable existence. You could build a fortress
with all the stones which inhabit me, or construct
a road out of town, or dazzle yourself with
worthless little amulets. I am the sad story
of wasted love affairs, of friends who moved
to Hawaii, of children who became lonely or
who never came, the tale of incomplete dossiers,
rejected applications, the itemization of your
manifold addictions—women, God, verse.
I am your father breaking open your door,
your mother staring eyes shut from the bier,
your husband and wife not coming home.
I'm your analyst tapping your private line.
I am your meager ambitions hitching down
a country road at dawn, your hunger prying
open the refrigerator door. I am Suicide
Prevention arranging, next month, a checkup.
When you are asleep I leap up from your desk
and gambol madly on the typewriter keys.
You think you have uncovered me in a dream,
merely, but you have not. You have just become
what you hoped for, an Alienated Poem.
Do not hope. And you could not hope for me.
Open up your drawer. There, the blank sheet.
Memorize all of the seamy details of this life.
And then proceed to begin to write like this:

FOR KEVIN

You'll be holding basketballs soon
one-handed from the top.
You're fifteen today and I call you
my son and (why not?) my countryman.
I get that lonely sometimes.

Technically I know just how good
your good dreams are—perhaps
your rocket wracking through space,
an older woman talking you in.

But understand my need to advise,
to give what I never knew.
Therefore, before your very eyes
in America, believe in magic:

such as this two-pound stone I say
begins existing now as a gray weight
between the gray fingers of my hands.

I breathe on it once,
it burns blue and cool
to attract you.

I breathe twice,
a green river flows over my shoulders,
spirals down my chest
and, looking for a future,
roars between my legs.

I breathe three times,
and it throbs as a warm white dove
between your blunt black hands.

READING CHARLIE'S POEMS

for C.K. Williams

I've read what you said again,
slowly,
turning the pages, thinking of you,
thinking of our friendship.
I'm sad at the thought of our lives passing
and I don't want to sort the ghosts
drifting through the pages.
I give up and stare at the sentences
of your words, of yourself.
Here your dry sight opens
Tolstoy's dark sack, the roots of doubt,
the tiny angers of the teeth,
fat birds, cannibals,
the secrets of our children's hearts.
Like a surgeon you've dissected
nerves of the dead world.
I know how you've
sweated mornings bringing the nightmare
facts to life. Hunched over your own
guts under the glare of the electric lamp,
what you want to say makes your fingers itch,
and
in the end you tell yourself
it's here.
You cleanse the infection from your eyes
with words as clear as the rain
that give birth to and curse the earth.

AT THE CENTER FOR DISPLACED PERSONS

1.

With no common language, it's easy
to pretend that we don't understand
those messages scrawled on thin leaves
of paper. They float in the distance
between us. Soon the *khamsin* will blow,

the dark desert wind. We feel it
in the air, try to avoid the shaft
of eyes, the attack of invisible ants.
The children are throwing flowers
that turn to a volley of stones.

In the hall a fist fight breaks out.
No one will die. We are all survival
experts, tramping out fuses before
a vital explosion. But the acrid
smell of smoke remains.

2.

We're waiting
for our vines and fig trees
to come by Railway Express.

The mails are slow.
We need toothpaste
Italy
cafés
Chablis
Poland
stamps
scotch tape
France

We want to dance
wearing peasant skirts and velvet pants.

Are we asking too much?

3.

Overhead the sky
begins to wind like a windmill.
The slow grind of sand.
The coarse grains deform us.
We look
grotesque,
side show freaks
in the untimely
twilight.

Our images melt in the heat,
voodoo dolls bleeding
drops of wax. It's a curse
that makes us bend in the wind
adapt

blend

integrate

easily.

This is also our talent.

We mix with sand,
but with each other
we are cryptic, aloof.

With no common language,
with the interpreter gone,
gathered in heaps rootless
as tumbleweed
we are lost,
too far from what we remember
to want to be close to anyone here.

CHANGING LANES

The summer will be long and hot,
your car stalling at intersections.
In the heat of traffic,
the maddening horns.
You won't want to be alone.

You dream of people;
belly dancers, file clerks,
barbers, heads of state,
all part of the syndicate
you want to apply to.
People to touch your body.
People to breathe on your soul.

You leap towards them.
At each leap you land
on another traffic island
alone. Are you a leper?
Where is everyone?
Have their bodies been
shredded like records?
How did the bones
go through the machines?

You shower frequently,
try to wash away
the nightmare disease of the city,
the grime under your nails.
The soap you use is Ivory.
That makes you remember the elephants.

Trunk after tail they slowly cross the veldt.
The great patience of enormous weight.
In the mornings when they tread
down to the muddy water hole
to drink, to bathe together,
the cool jungle will be theirs,
the sweet, wet leaves.

Jim Parlett

THE DEATH OF THE BOMBER

After you lost your job, you began to see
The order in the destruction of objects.
You woke from each dream with the memory
Only of windows blowing outward, and
The dust of ruined bricks settling across

The sunlit wreck of a public building.
Giggling, you witness the smooth crystal
Of a dropped glass dissolved in a pattern
Of chips on the floor: the reduction
Of intricate designs to the simple purity

Of their components. You wanted to help,
And stayed up late each night for a week,
Winding the stiff wires about each other
Like threads, bending your ear down close
To the ticking face of the clock you stole.

Finished, that first bomb lay on the table,
Glistening silently in its silver foil
Like a fish. Smiling, you cradled it deep
In your coat pocket and drove downtown,
Hiding that surprising gift in a drawer

Of your old desk. The sound of the burst
Thrilled you with its logic as you curled,
Small as a rustling scrap of paper,
In a doorway down the block, imagining
Lush balls of flame startling the stiff

Walls into collapse, the people reduced
To clots of blood and shattered bone
By a single bloom of beauty and pain.
That night, you wandered past the scene,
Astonished at your ability to help

Things break down. Breathless, you hurried
Home to build more bombs. Your hands
Trembled when, at dawn, you'd finished
A dozen of them, arranged in neat rows
Before you like shiny loaves of bread.

Then, exhausted and gasping with joy,
You slid foil around the smallest bomb;
A bomb meant to lie quietly in the center,
Beating softly like a perfect silver heart.
But you slipped, your hands shaking

With the love you felt for your bombs.
The instant rising force of its burst
Shook even the fragile marrow of your bones,
Like the sudden clap of a bell swelling
The air around you, pushing it against

Your skin for a clear moment only, until
The pressure pried your veins and tissues
Away from each other, and you lay agreeably
Dying, reduced to simplest flesh and blood,
Finally at peace in your very purest form.

Thomas Johnson

Two Poems

ATTIC

Written in the margins
Of an old grammar
The name
Of that girl
Two seats over, her slip
At the kneecap
Like a tidal wash
Falling back into itself.

Your heart raced
Or was it
The swallow
Returned defiant to the flue
For all the fires
You've fanned
From her father's trucksold oak?

She stares through you now,
Eyes deep-set,
Blank as mothballs.

Opening her palm, you see
It is a map
Of where you followed her,
Lost sight
When she turned the wind's
Hard corner
Behind the sawmill,
Giving you the slip
Whose edge shone whiter
Than any beneath a ridden-up dress.

You came down the hill, a fist
Of wood chips.
It is the third hand you have
Never opened,

The attic forever safe from silverfish.

THE GROUNDBREAKING

The town slept into a single, sprawled body,
Every window aching
With such clarity, sparrows passed
Unscathed through the panes,
Lined their nests
With that thread which, by day, holds

Each thing to the next,
Letting us believe
All is in its place,
Unbreakable
And profound.

But on a far slope, the glint
Of shovels.
It is that one night a year
Which seems to beg
For a small dance, a candle,
As if, more than the others, it trembled
With some echoless depth
That would not pass
Unless assuaged.

And so the curt ring of shovels
Breaking ground.
Not that the hole
Much matters, nor the men gathered,

It is something else,
Stark and answerless
In that bone-covering sound.

Harold Witt

Two Poems

WINGS

Wings flicker by all day
on errands of seed and nest
while I stay, I stay—

wings of sparrow and jay
or birds with a topknot or crest—
wings flicker by all day—

stop, then flicker away,
fly without respite or rest
while I stay, I stay

thinking of what to say,
bent at this desk obsessed—
wings flicker by all day,

some of them garish, some grey,
all with that airborne zest
while I stay, I stay

but no more imprisoned than they—
birds, too, are locked in their quest—
wings flicker by all day
while I stay, I stay.

THE DEATH OF POETRY

Poetry wasn't feeling well—
she had a lot of bad lines
from staying out too late
with the wrong kind of guys

She talked in a flat monotonous voice
she was losing her figure
she could hardly breathe sometimes
she began to get irregular

But she made the best of it
went on fixing her face
It wasn't the same, though—
she could no longer move with grace

She didn't even remember she'd forgotten
almost everything she knew—
she was a shell of herself
and wouldn't admit she was through—

she'd do anything for attention—
moan OM OM with bells on her toes
use words truckdrivers mention
strip off her clothes

Finally she OD'd and died
so people thought—
if they thought of her at all
which most did not

But all she'd done
as she had more than once,
was undergone
a metamorphosis

and here she comes
beautiful, versatile, clever,
back on her feet again,
memorable as ever.

John Woods

Three Poems

HOW THE HAND BECAME A GLOVE

How long does the pillow hold
the shape of two heads?
When does the hand become
a glove of skin?
Why does the clothing rise
from abandon
and assume the street?
The clock slows, but who
is there when the hands loosen

and the face goes blank?
The stirred pool clarifies
and in the flowerbeds
Spring and Winter lie so close
who can say why the wind
goes bitter one moment
and moistly urges the next?
The eye picks the rose,
which is the body in delight,
But who can tell us why,
now, its fire is frozen?

THE MOTHER OF YEAST

Where is the mother of dreams?
I have shaken all I can from bushes,
from running, running, two feet
behind the loose arc of my senses.

The Song for Two Mouths is over,
mother, have I drunk my fill
with the grazers of algae and clover?
The windgrass hardens to braille.

Where are my hands going,
tipped with dead stars? The lowest
stone stirs in the shade, mother of homing
birds, sister of yeast.

The young ones dance in my shadow.
My wrist is snarled with blue veins.
So I have dressed a bed for the mother
of memory and the child of pain.

THE WOMAN WHO IS ONE WOMAN

The woman who is one woman
remembers the egg time, the time
of the blind fish.

She remembers
herself as one, long body
rising from the beginning.

But the woman who is two women
will keep pressed flowers,
fossil cake, a motel key.
The neuter angel, glorying at the womb
of Eden, will press a gold ring
on her hand. One will stay
in the dying forest, and one
will set forth, and they
shall be apart forever.

About Our Contributors

JOHN S. FLAGG lives in Arlington, Massachusetts. These are his first published poems.

GWEN HEAD's first book of poems, *Special Effects*, was published by University of Pittsburgh Press. She lives in Seattle.

JACK BUTLER teaches in the Poetry-in-the-Schools Program in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, and is writer-in-residence at Ouachita Baptist University and Henderson State College.

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BARBARA L. GREENBERG lives in Newton Centre, Massachusetts, and has published widely.

EDWARD HIRSCH lives in Philadelphia, and Farrar, Straus & Giroux will publish his first novel shortly.

JOAN WEBBER teaches at the University of Washington. Her work has appeared in numerous magazines.

EDWARD LUEDERS teaches at the University of Utah. Scott, Foresman recently published his anthology (with Primus St. John) titled *Zero Makes Me Hungry*.

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KATHRYN TERRILL teaches at Mt. Hood Community College, Gresham, Oregon.

MARY OLIVER's second book of poems, *The River Styx, Ohio, and Other Poems*, was published in 1972 by Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich. She lives in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

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ADRIANNE MARCUS's latest book is *The Photojournalist: Mark and Leibovitz* (T.Y. Crowell, 1974). She lives in San Rafael, California.

JOSEPH DI PRISCO's first book of poems won last year's Devins Award from University of Missouri Press.

DAVID McELROY's first book of poems, *Making It Simple*, has just been published by Ecco Press. He lives in Anchorage, Alaska.

S. J. MARKS is the family and group psychotherapist at the Philadelphia Psychiatric Center.

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HAROLD WITT's most recent book is *Surprised By Others at Fort Cronkhite* (Sparrow Magazine/Vagrom Chapbooks, 1975).

JOHN WOODS's most recent book is *Turning to Look Back* (Indiana University Press, 1972). He will publish another book this spring. He teaches at Western Michigan University.

Poetry Northwest Prize Awards, 1976

HELEN BULLIS PRIZE: \$100

John Allman for Three Poems (Winter 1975-76)

Greg Kuzma for Four Poems (Spring 1975)
and Three Poems (Winter 1975-76)

Previous Winners

Hayden Carruth (1962)

John Logan (1963)

Donald Finkel (1964)

Mona Van Duyn (1965)

Richard Hugo (1966)

Winfield Townley Scott and Katie Louchheim (1967)

Sandra McPherson and Gwen Head (1968)

Eugene Ruggles (1969)

Will Stubbs (1970)

Kenneth O. Hanson and Jack Tootell (1971)

Lewis Turco and Tom Wayman (1972)

Richard Hugo (1973)

Adrien Stoutenburg and Lisel Mueller (1974)

Dan Masterson and Paul Zimmer (1975)

THEODORE ROETHKE PRIZE: \$50

Gary Gildner for Four Poems (Summer 1975)

Previous Winners

Carol Hall (1963)

Richard Hugo and Kenneth O. Hanson (1964)

Kenneth O. Hanson (1965)

William Stafford (1966)

Carolyn Stoeff (1967)

John Woods (1968)

Thomas James (1969)

Philip Booth (1970)

Dave Etter (1971)

Albert Goldbarth (1972)

Mark McCloskey (1973)

Greg Kuzma (1974)

Joseph di Prisco (1975)

YOUNG POET'S PRIZE: \$25

Judith Small for "Dexter People" (Autumn 1975)

Previous Winners

Greg Kuzma (1973)

Joseph di Prisco (1974)

Thomas Brush (1975)

