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# Poetry

NORTHWEST



EDITOR  
David Wagoner

EDITORIAL CONSULTANTS  
Nelson Bentley, William H. Matchett

COVER DESIGN  
Allen Auvil

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POETRY NORTHWEST SUMMER 1977 VOLUME XVIII, NUMBER 2

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# POETRY NORTHWEST

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## POETRY NORTHWEST

SUMMER 1977

*Jack Crawford, Jr.*

Four Poems

### ALWAYS THE DOLPHINS LEAPING BEFORE

my daughter, studying this year in spain,  
tells me she's staying with a certain  
doña sanz. the home  
is two or three hundred years old. a  
marble staircase rises from the first  
to the second floor. up this she goes  
to her room. the room, at the back,  
has ceilings fifteen feet high! french  
doors twelve feet high open out onto  
a balcony from which she has a view  
of red-tiled roofs. below, a courtyard.  
birds sing. i think of her. i  
enter the front door, smile  
at doña sanz. my shoes click up  
the marble steps. her room is simply furnished.  
spartan, like yours, daddy! her letters  
come excited. she has  
good teachers at the *instituto*. one  
is eighty-three. if you saw him  
on the street you might  
call an ambulance. he teaches a class  
in *don quixote*. in class his age  
drops away. he becomes a tiger,  
leaping about to illustrate a point—  
a tiger for cervantes and quixote.  
brilliant, she says. i believe it.  
every word! daughter, there.  
in fabulous spain. my tall blonde daughter.  
is it true that spanish men

go for blondes? i've heard so. it was true  
 in mexico. i've written to her,  
 cautioning, fearful of machismo. ha!  
 absurd progenitor! assuming  
 timidly your auctorial rights in her!  
 ghost of polonius, dealing caveats!  
 deaf upon the wind, o windy man. wanting  
 for her, whole argosies  
 of this world. wanting for her  
 the suns and moons. who wanted for her  
 always the dolphins leaping before her.  
 who writes this private poem to tell her so.  
 in whose dear ship she moves, her spine  
 a mast on which her spirit blows. who is  
 my flesh, but all men's. eve's. all.  
 more mine for having loved her  
 and been shaped by her, and been a part  
 of her shaping. o so lovely shaped,  
 daughter. your sails of spirit which draw  
 you, tall and slender. for me  
 you glide madrid! your tale of the bankers  
 moved me to laughter! how they came out  
 to greet you—sorry your father's check  
 had not arrived. cheering you. *five* of them!  
 banco español. who came from their partitions  
 to pay their regrets. ordering  
 pastries and coffee and chatting with you.  
 how could i be annoyed, you wrote to me,  
 with such charming gentlemen! how  
 could you, indeed! i am a pleased father.  
 you stand on spain. i stand here. they are  
 colors on a map. just as well that it  
 is spain—as greece or austria or italy.  
 if you love it. and you do. deep  
 into hispanic history, culture, art.  
 walking among their romans and their moors.  
 live with a fiery gentleness, my dear! live  
 with ardor! polonius,  
 you old fool! be at it now: telling her  
 how to do it! live this way! live

that way! nothing matters but that the ship  
 of you glide the dear life. you are here.  
 i brought you, in my way, with help of other.  
 i cannot save you from hurt. you've  
 known it—can take it. and will. but think  
 that those who brought you here, creative vicars,  
 brought you this long journey, long as all,  
 out of the essence of whatever is,  
 nurtured you with ancient tenderness,  
 wanted for you always the dolphins  
 leaping before you in the marvelous seas.  
 wanted for you  
 all the argosies of this world. daughter,  
 sailing there—your spine a mast  
 on which your spirit blows.

#### PAULINE

i was but a child, and you—  
 squat, thick, your tight-wound hair  
 shot with gray—  
 were a distant aunt, with a cow or two.  
 hogs, horses. your chickens  
 pecking  
 with petulant beaks. some went  
 cockadoodledoo!  
 and when you took the slop out,  
 crying Sooeey! how the hogs came,  
 snuffling with their snouts, rooting  
 in the roiled stuff,  
 slurping, grunting! magnificent!  
 i loved to go beside your skirts,  
 your bucket slopping, to feed the hogs.  
 i watched you by the hour. it  
 was heaven! you worked as if  
 gods waited in the next room. as if  
 there were such purpose. as if  
 the energy in your fingers would weave forever.  
 as if the butter foaming in the churn



were sun and moon—  
 slabbing it out with a wooden spoon.  
 your round face with a half smile on it.  
 the barn, the smell of hay.  
 the cows that chewed forever. the blue  
 and gleaming horse. the green dew.  
 o but how that iron stove  
 sang for you!  
 plying the flames with wood, the iron  
 ringing. the homemade rolls you laid  
 in their birth dough in the tingling pan  
 to slide them quickly in  
 with a thrust of your fist in a black glove.  
 sweat sprang in tiny beads  
 to your forehead and your lip, your face  
 flushed, seraphic.  
 and the gorgeous jellies in their jars!  
 butter yellow in the rolls' bellies!  
 and uncle miles in his presidency,  
 his cheeks shining, as the food flew.  
 miles: the proprietor  
 of a country store with nails and shovels.  
 buckets. bins of stuff.  
 what a fragrance hung there! and those nails!  
 did anything ever shine so! and their sharp  
 points. how they glistened, all mixed,  
 in their barrels! the magic of it!  
 and the kind cow in the meadow. and the horse  
 glistening. i could see it  
 from my window. and ran out.  
 grasshoppers leaping in green terror.  
 how the breast of the horse shone! how it  
 gleamed in the morning sun!  
 at the well, pauline  
 slinging the bucket down.  
 the ringing of the chain—its tingling hum.  
 a moment—and the bucket splashes.  
 sucks in water. her hand on the handle  
 cranking the bucket up, slopping a little.  
 she smiles at me. i

squat to watch some ants. they go  
 in single file, feelers out. legs  
 frantic. red. and a  
 chipmunk. and a purple jay.  
 it is a misty place. another country.  
 i visit it occasionally. a strange cockaigne,  
 an island somewhere west of spain.  
 no one lives there in the usual way.  
 nor the horse, nor cow. nor that particular hay  
 whose fragrance filled the rafters where sifting light  
 boiled with a beautiful dust.  
 but it is vivid, and it had its day.  
 i have such tenderness for her  
 and miles. and the rolls  
 with their buttered bellies. and the ringing stove.  
 pauline, with her black glove,  
 thrusting in a pan of dough. her voice  
 murmurs. her spoon dips the floating butter.  
 the chain rings in the well. the bucket splashes.  
 it is a land in quaint suspension,  
 a curious atlantis—sunken, muffled.  
 but living—alive—with a life of its own.  
 and hers. and his. and mine.

#### SETTING DOWN A FRIDAY FOOT

that photograph of mars! i  
 slipped into a trance. in color. to see  
 it. the pink. the landscape. rubble on it.  
 sweeps of it. to think: there it is! no  
 one's there. no little thing moves. no  
 porcupine. not even a skunk.  
 nothing's there. what is it  
 that attracts? it's like:  
 there it is! a whole planet! un-  
 stepped. no crusoe. no  
 foot friday. a  
 whole planet! dear god of mars! no  
 foot upon it. vikings.

shield. sail. nitro-  
 gen. how  
 the mind gropes. how the ear strains  
 to listen. the mind  
 lopsided. swaying  
 from leg to leg. a kind  
 of stupefaction. a red  
 companion piece to earth. harmonic. a world  
 of a place! surreal. magritte.  
 viking digs its hand  
 into red oxides. shadows  
 are there. the  
 sun. rubble. i  
 don't want to be so arrogant as to think  
 if i pay taxes i own a piece of earth. i  
 want to be prepared—  
 god of mars—to move on.  
 ready—reincarnate, protean—  
 to set my friday foot on strange stone.

#### BLUE-GREEN LIDS

hands tense, knuckles white.  
 veins. a mobile  
 stirring from the ceiling. made  
 of thin metallic fishes. air  
 fizzes in a tube, sucking,  
 hooked in the mouth. a paper cup  
 shot with water. a  
 hiss. a  
 drill whining. a  
 storm shakes the atlantic, sinks  
 a ship. i'd  
 started the article in the waitingroom.  
 one survivor. his raft peaking  
 fifty feet in air. the dentist  
 moves his many elbows. his wife,  
 petite, with blue-green lids,  
 stands in the door. her lips

move. two auburn locks  
 curl to her scapula. her eyes are green.  
 embroidered butterflies hang on the wall.  
 his hands move in the mouth. the drill  
 shrieks thinly. ceases. her eyes  
 seem faintly mocking. my  
 knuckles tighten. a whine  
 appears in her opening lips to speak.  
 thin fishes stir. later  
 i will finish the article. i must know.  
 his hands are white.  
 turning to go, she flicks  
 her auburn curls. my jaws  
 hang wide with instruments. the last rocket  
 soars into the night. her  
 movement leaves  
 the fishes stirring.

*Robley Wilson, Jr.*

Two Poems

#### THE DIVER

At the tip of the high board,  
 looking down, I am not yet  
 concerned for the green water,  
 not yet ready for plummeting  
 hands first in fathoms of air,  
 and if someone notices me as  
 she squints against the light  
 rippling the flags of towels,  
 I am too remote to take her  
 into account. I stand, loose,  
 nothing if not at total rest,  
 musing the length of my body  
 so any looker-on might think  
 from this posture I am a man  
 praying. Appearances fool us.  
 I am involved in myself, see

the foreshortening of a man  
whose sweat jewels his chest,  
whose trunks are a blue belt  
holding body and its potency  
in a respectable compact; my  
thickened legs, as resilient  
as the board they rise from,  
sway my weight like birches.

I inch forward, trembling in  
the shimmer of sky, a bird  
nervy on his perch the moment  
before he flies; set my toes  
over the brink of the board,  
curling them down as if they  
alone were all the grip a man  
should need on risky actions.  
I can make out around the pool  
the figures and colors summer  
draws among the idle. I know  
every girl at her naked ease,  
every miracle of smooth line,  
every tempering of blemishes  
young bodies carry; I follow  
the otter-heads above water,  
and the funhouse legs beneath.  
From such a height I can tell,  
as from a cloud, the praises  
I owe everything except soul,  
and when, an instant from now,  
I bow my whole self-possession  
outward and earthward, spirit  
will turn me to angel over all.

The board under my movement  
commences music, my muscles  
beat countertune and my sweat  
springs in the body's corners.  
Rhythm: tattoo of the blood  
to the cushions of my feet;

behind me on its steel hinge  
the thin board rocks me awake.  
Plank-walker, pirate-of-air,  
I throw my two fists forward,  
thrust out from the tall tower  
just as it topples over. Un-  
clenching the hot sky, I hurl  
it over my head. One moment  
I am a man swimming the void;  
the next I am diver, graceful  
in his precipitous element.  
I wear the agile wind, I see  
faces and bare white throats  
craned toward me, I dazzle  
across the eyes of the girls.  
My hands flash ahead of me  
to carve on this green Eden  
only my perfect turbulence.

#### THE BLACK CAT

For the time it takes me  
to smoke a cigarette  
I have prowled this house.  
My wife in the big bed  
lies cradling my pillow  
in the bow of her arms,  
and she has no dream  
that excludes me. My younger  
son has withdrawn himself  
to a far corner of the dark  
breathing untroubled music.  
My older son, the distant me  
I remember over and over,  
raises himself to kiss me  
while I settle his covers  
between repose and the wind.  
Even the family cat dozes  
in the rocker, his claws

unsheathed into the cushion.

What hurried me home  
to them all was the absurd  
fear they were murdered.  
Some blind animal lunged  
into my loneliness  
and showed itself; *Death*,  
I whispered, calling the beast  
by the most exciting name  
I could think of. Now  
feeling foolish and tired  
I have ended my round  
to learn nothing but love.  
I read too much, perhaps,  
or wish the wrong liberties,  
but I will sit for hours  
at the window where light  
enters first, hurt by guilt  
and relief to watch the cat  
go killing in his sleep.

*Gar Bethel*

Four Poems

## RISING

You don't realize what you're doing.  
You're up against it; it being yourself,  
not the mattress or the alarm,  
not the gray glow or the sulfur smell,  
but closer, your cage expanding,  
your river bulging out of the hills  
with dregs from the winter night.  
Somehow it was going on all along,  
and now you have to make polite  
conversation, respects to the family.

You push back your insulation;  
the forgotten air invades your vacuum.  
You swing one foot over the edge  
followed by its naked partner,  
then by the legs; the clothespin body  
sits at fulcrum. As if it were an army  
exercise, you clamp a hand on each knee  
and push upward like a seedling  
emerging from the frozen ground.  
The mouth opens as if to scream.  
Already you are taking the first step,  
but nobody is taking your picture.

## DRESSING

Lifting them off the hanger,  
they rest upon your arm  
as if you were a waiter  
presenting a bottle of wine.  
You prepare a stance  
for the daily balancing act:  
standing on one flamingo leg  
you fill down through the folded stem  
and quickly balance on the other  
aware of cloth against your thighs,  
feathers ruffling.

Then you start the printing of skin  
by pushing the waist button  
through its hole with finger and thumb,  
the buckle's tine through  
its tight fit, and the belt  
into its flapless loops.  
This daily passage ends  
with the roll of a snare drum,  
metal teeth biting into one another;  
you zip up and close to meet the day.



## COMBING

It is time for the parting  
after the suds and shower.  
But first you comb the tempest  
into plowed fields of wheat;  
the teeth, like forks on tablecloths,  
move down toward your eyes  
that crossing from the mirror  
coordinate the hand in memory.  
You don't need to look or rather  
almost don't want to, noticing  
how far back the delta line recedes  
before you can part-in the river  
and bank its tributaries  
to either side in smooth wet wings.

But you know this ordered beginning,  
when another day walks out the door,  
will have taken the corners of wind  
and your scratches for an answer  
and will have become random curves,  
leaps, and rope ends, every follicle  
standing in a half-pitch of space  
where even your simple part  
seems to have disappeared.

## DRINKING

You test the dark water:  
with index and thumb knot  
you raise the cylinder to a plane  
between the window and your eyes  
to scan mist rising from the lip;  
you cool it down by adding milk  
to the litmus taste of your eye  
and blowing the surface tension.

Bringing this contained warmth  
up for the first sip,  
you prepare your tongue

for wading in a mountain stream,  
a patch of sun in a chilly room,  
until the convergence of rim  
and mouth are joined  
in a slight burning that trails  
down through your core  
sending streamers out to the skin  
making all pretense of beginning  
lost once more in immersion.

*John S. Flagg*

## PLOT TO RESTORE REASON TO THE CHAIR

Death? No problem.  
Next item: Evanescence.  
Wait, no, sorry.  
Next item not evanescence,  
sorry. Visitations.  
Point of order!  
Hasn't opacity been  
ruled out of order?  
The minutes please.  
Etc., etc., etc., etc.,  
etc., don't see where.  
Your memory doesn't serve.  
Next item: Visitations.  
Got to come out of salary.  
Point of order! Point  
of order! The government  
is disinclined to pay  
the taxpayer's money  
for your indulgences  
so is the Corporation.  
Got to come out of salary.  
(Psst, this guy is a real  
you know. How did he get to be  
you know?) (He got to be

because he is. Don't ask  
 rhetorical questions.)  
 I demand to be recognized!  
 Why shouldn't this institution  
 financially encourage  
 prostitution in whatever shape?  
 Mr. Chairman! Mr. Chairman!  
 (Psst, I see what you mean  
 though. And am inclined to think  
 gunpowder may be the answer.)

*Stephen Dunn*

Three Poems

### CONFESSION

There was nothing to do  
 but keep driving,  
 maybe stop in the woods  
 to count the bulge  
 in my pocket,  
 but keep driving  
 the ghosts away, those  
 battered shadows  
 of people who died in car wrecks,  
 people who were always  
 my parents. The ghosts  
 liked my back, kept angels  
 from my shoulders,  
 rode me  
 into these small crimes.  
 They were caught  
 in the stopped air before the windshield  
 became their last meal;  
 only fear, they said,  
 could nourish them.  
 So I knocked off a few  
 gas stations on the way

to nowhere, picked up a  
 hitchhiker and stole his Timex,  
 left him in a cornfield.  
 I wanted to sleep  
 but the ghosts slept with me.  
 I wanted to love them  
 so they would fall back  
 into their graves,  
 Oh I wanted to escape  
 the sound of badminton  
 being played by mutes  
 in a backyard, *that* noise  
 in my head.  
 I put the pistol back  
 in the glove compartment  
 next to the torn map  
 and the sleeping Cyclops  
 of a flashlight,  
 made resolutions to seek help  
 at the next Help Station,  
 but it hadn't been invented yet  
 and I drove right past it  
 into America and these  
 headlines.

### THE OBSESSION

I decided to call the dark  
 by its right color  
 so when it came down on us  
 or when it was in the house  
 I could say navy blue  
 is upon us or obsidian has come  
 with its black ice,  
 I could know the quality  
 of what touched us.

It started as an experiment,  
 almost a joke,

but soon I was wondering about dusk,  
 trying to remember how often  
 I'd driven home in it,  
 driven by it, shadow's breath,  
 a weight that wasn't  
 quite there.  
 I dimmed the lights in the living room,  
 it couldn't be simulated;  
 I walked out into it,  
 a simultaneous goodbye  
 on a street corner.

The dark was less elusive.  
 After all, the synonym for brain  
 is grey-matter, and who isn't  
 the brain's amateur, dusk's  
 confused traveler?  
 I tried to adjust my eyes.  
 It was midnight, the midnight  
 that has tried to myth us  
 into love or crime, deceive us  
 into not seeing it.  
 I wanted to decide what part of the dark  
 is chilling, the correct color  
 for desolate.  
 You were with me.  
 I was holding your hand;  
 at another time of my life  
 we could have walked into the sunset.

#### THE TRUTH

for Jeanne-Andree

My autobiography gets away from me,  
 the details mix  
 with other lives I could have led  
 or have led, how am I  
 to be sure in this amusement park  
 what's an accident and what's

a simple ride going nowhere?  
 I am the South American revolutionary  
 biting his fingernails in a bordello.  
 I am the French woman  
 who disappears in the lost embassies  
 of love, dreaming of repugnance.  
 And this is my story, the one  
 that would rather make itself up  
 than be anybody's delivered newspaper.  
 I am telling it now,  
 this is not me speaking.

*John Allman*

Two Poems

#### NANA'S VISIT

She hid her bottle of port  
 in the kitchen washtub  
 and we'd catch her lifting  
 the porcelain lid, reaching in:  
 we heard a swishing, and remembered  
 the smell of wet newspapers  
 in her icebox; the hall toilet  
 that gargled as you froze  
 on the seat and strange footsteps  
 went past. And suddenly father  
 was shouting. O his mother was drunk again,  
 singing her old vaudeville songs,  
 unloosening her stiff legs.  
 You could almost see the music hall  
 lit up, the Indian clubs whirling  
 like a halo around her head,  
 up went the left leg, up the right.  
 We saw her steamer trunk,  
 the pleated panties like pink  
 carnations, the sharp edges  
 of yellow contracts, a photo

of her father, his white mustache  
 hung like the cliffs of Dover.  
 We heard the men of Tipperary  
 whistling would she do it again,  
 and she did, against the painted scenery,  
 the flat trees of Eden shimmering  
 in gaslight. Up went her skirt,  
 out went her bum. We heard applause,  
 watched her kick off her shoes  
 in grand finale. She snuffed out  
 a row of candles with her naked feet.

### YOU OWE THEM EVERYTHING

Their fingers numb in thimbles,  
 eyes dim with hems, their front teeth gone,  
 they mean well. You give them old lamps.  
 You give them the room over the garage.  
 They wash your kitchen windows, looking in.  
 They smile like maiden aunts with lace  
 collars and hearing-aids. They nod like doctors.  
 You thank them for the years on their  
 knees in office vestibules, the wrung-out hands,  
 the checks for your law books, the debts  
 they paid with Irish brogues in old movies.  
 Even your Porsche coughs in their presence.  
 Some of your children ask who they are  
 and you speak of Slavic ladies in cabbage  
 fields, the Haitian grandmothers dumping ashtrays.  
 You name the widows with varicose veins  
 and prominent sons who visit twice a year;  
 chug-a-lug maids in Hotel Edison, connoisseurs  
 of abandoned wine; sisters of vaudeville stars.  
 You hear their jangled nerves ring up in dry-  
 goods stores. You hear them praise children  
 moved to Wisconsin. They are the lost nannies  
 in Victorian novels, the housekeepers with rings  
 of keys, who put the cool cloth to hysteric

brows, who soothe like cellos in the great hall.  
 They know they accept everything. They know  
 you wake in your middle-age sweating, thinking  
 of them. They smoke Lucky Strikes. They buy Wonder Bread.

*Sean Bentley*

### AMERICAN DREAM

white line white line white line  
 white sheets line your city of sleep /  
 your eyes tour / your tires caress  
 pavement like miles of sweet  
 pea beneath your foot the accelerator /  
 white line white line a language  
 of flat colors and lines arrows  
 and curves ahead of your vision /  
 you focus on each red pebble in the street /  
 on each shred of glass each white line  
 white line / your car peers over hills /  
 your wheels belly the road / lights light  
 bushes at the verge / your hands grip  
 the wheel the sheet you roll over with /  
 and you hang a rachel / negotiate the curves /

teeth in front gnaw bugs from the air /  
 once they caught a warbler / held it  
 hanging / the white lines flashing  
 in its dark eyes white line white line  
 white line white line you  
 have dreamed this / the whitewalls  
 and hubcaps burn in to your eyes a corona /  
 the mirror explodes with sun as you tip  
 over a hill and no one behind you  
 nor ahead the road clear as the fire  
 in the mirror that white line of sleep  
 pulling you on its thread  
 through to daybreak you drive home the dark /



## ON THE THIRD HAND

On the one hand  
I am afraid. I wear a school ring.  
I prick my tender fingers, remember typewriters,  
carry hammers.

On the other hand  
I believe there's nothing to fear.  
I wear a wedding ring. I have pink fingernails.  
My skin is soft as vanilla cream.

On the third hand  
I wear the rings of crystal and pollen  
and the rings the Etruscans fashioned  
from feathers, auguries, seeds, and  
salts of strange origin:

these rings murmur in the dark,  
murmur and click in foreign tongues,  
keeping my cold third hand awake all night,  
promising pleasures unique as fingerprints,  
pains closer to bone than skin.

The fingers of my third hand are green,  
they are yellow and green.  
Someone gave them to me in a dream  
when I was twenty-nine.

With the third hand  
I write letters to the world of glass,  
letters instantly read and memorized  
by priestesses of light, letters swallowed  
by emptiness, letters conveyed by silent messengers  
to polar silences. (Somewhere  
in other words, they are well known.)

On the third hand  
I play the piano of grass, and looped around cold fingers  
I carry the green keys that unlock the door in the oak  
behind which my great aunts live smiling  
in a parlor lined with glittering samovars:

with the third hand  
I turn all the handles, and once again  
the ancient tea steams out like rain.

## SPINSTER

It's raining. She doesn't want to go home.  
We promise to watch from the window  
to see that she's safe. It rains,  
and we watch from behind our house:

her windshield wipers begin to beat—  
clack clack, like lunatics.  
No one comes near. Rain, trees, sidewalks.  
Nothing moves. Nothing talks.

But she idles her car  
as if she wishes the engine would die  
and a tall stranger with a face  
of Plato, a face of newsprint,

a face of the Marquis de Sade—  
and a trenchcoat and all that—  
would rescue her with cigarettes and cocoa.  
She twists her fingers, rolls down the window, cries

"I'm a shark, I'd like to eat everyone up!"  
And we have to listen.  
We have to watch  
as her hands turn to string, all knots;

watch as her arms fall off,  
devoured by shadows,

and her car explodes in the street;  
watch as the strange face of Plato

approaches her lips like the glistening snout  
of some night animal,  
and the teeth of the Marquis de Sade  
close around her cold ankles.

She screams, "It isn't fair!"  
O Plato, the blood is everywhere.

#### DAPHNE

##### 1

Her father often said to her, "Daughter, you owe me a son-in-law; you owe me grandchildren." She, hating the thought of marriage as a crime, with her beautiful face tinged all over with blushes, threw her arms around her father's neck, and said "Dearest father, grant me this favour, that I may always remain unmarried, like Diana." He consented, but at the same time said, "Your own face will forbid it."

—*Bulfinch's Mythology*

##### 2

I see it now: this is  
how it happened, this is how  
the heavy bars of the sun

fell on her: like thick hands  
seizing her breasts, her shoulders,  
rocking her backwards, prying her thighs apart,

announcing the searing tongue  
of the intruder—  
and she ran

or tried to run  
on feet suddenly melting and vague,  
while the great heat knitted her

into the stones.  
Then what was there to do  
but make the best of the surprising change,

be glad of charity?  
For with the rooting came new shapes:  
thighs, losing their softness, fusing

into a round of power:  
arms not two but twenty, rising,  
stiffening, everywhere

against the god, refusing  
to lie still at her sides:  
breasts crusted, belly scaled with armor:

and green tongues, tongues of her own  
grown all over her  
in bursts of scorn—

a mane of tongues flung from her arms!  
At first, astonished, how she must have  
clattered, hissed, seethed

in her new language: then—  
I know this now—  
sighing, she relaxed into the whole

of her different shape, felt  
the flood of alien sweet blood,  
and entered the secret network

of her other self—how far down  
the nervous rootings reached, farther  
than her tongues could tell!

Swaying, sucking, leaning  
into that hidden body,  
at last she learned

the truth of the dark eating  
that goes on forever,  
                                under the ground.

3

Apollo stood amazed. He touched the stem, and felt the flesh  
tremble under the new bark. He embraced the branches, and  
lavished kisses on the wood. The branches shrank from his lips.  
"Since you cannot be my wife," said he, "you shall assuredly  
be my tree. I will wear you for my crown; I will decorate with  
you my harp and my quiver; and when the great Roman conquerors  
lead up the triumphal pomp to the Capitol, you shall be woven  
into wreaths for their brows."                     —*Bulfinch's Mythology*

*Brendan Galvin*

## RUNNING

Experts say for me to do it well  
I should be forty pounds lighter  
or twenty-one inches taller,

so if I do it I'm a fool,  
fat fool if I don't.  
Dying of experts, I shuck off

home by the back door,  
taking myself to yappers at heels  
and the nameless worst who may

break anywhere from bushes,  
my mind holding its hand,  
telling itself the teeth of the unknown

dissolve when confronted even in fear.  
If you see me and toot, I may have  
only my middle finger for you:

I'm not sponsored by the National  
Park Service for your viewing pleasure,  
have had shin splints, and suffer

permanently from Morton's Foot.  
Experts say any moment my spine  
may collapse from cervix to coccyx.

But look, there is heavy traffic of bees  
in the burst willow catkins, that kingfisher  
dips and rises over the marsh

like a lesson in scansion.  
A month from here, swallows will loop and dive,  
slicing the air close to my doubling heartbeat,

two months and a woodcock  
will sail through a steep  
parabola ending in bushes.

I let a fly live completely a moment  
in the dampening bush of my hair.  
Rhythms are breaking, the last shred of

human song just flew out of my head.  
Once I awaited adrenalin's uppercut under  
my limping heart, and paused like

a man in mid-celebration  
recalled to final things. Red fish  
school up in the blood. Whatever I need,

there's no name for it, but we are  
a naturally healthy people,  
being of the Elect, so this must be

somehow un-American. Any minute now,  
Flab will dust me off with his Pontiac,  
but here on the edge of energy

I believe even the stumps will fly again.  
What expert ever saw a hawk go before him  
toward a quarter moon pale in the western sky,

or a random butterfly exploring the air  
over bayberries? All things are pilgrims,  
except maybe the blacksnake soaking up

asphalt's watery heat, who is only inertia  
to be overcome. Shifts change in the blood,  
but I'm breaking no records. By mile four

I'm only the framework a breeze passes through.  
Bellies of gulls on the flats  
are lit like quarts of milk. This wobbling

under my ribs dessicates bad habits.  
I slow to a trot, to the least piper's  
whistling, and my pulse begins its

shorebird glossolalia. It says  
dowitcher coot yellowlegs  
brant bufflehead knot

*Gary Gildner*

#### TOADS IN THE GREENHOUSE

When the scale were sucking  
the life from my orchids,  
I imported hundreds  
of lady bugs into my life,—  
blessing their tickle  
among the sobered,  
applauding the sparkle  
they rendered to wrinkle  
and droop. But soon these  
ladies were snapped

away by the quick  
sticky tongues of my toads,  
whom I also had  
affection for.

Stuck,

I had to keep the leaves  
breathing myself, washing  
them off with soap and water,—  
telling the toads when they  
lumbered over to squat and watch  
that what they saw was  
what they saw. As always their faces  
said: *We are simply here—two beauties  
in a world gone buggy.*  
And so they continued to lumber over,  
keeping their mugs at the ready.

Summer began to steady itself  
against autumn, my strongest spider  
moved slower and slower  
up in her corner, the ants  
seemed to have scrambled for good.  
Only the sluggish and slimy slugs,  
I thought, kept the toads going.  
I started leaving angle worms out  
on a piece of musty pine  
they liked, making sure  
the worms were lively.  
*These little squiggles*, they replied,  
*are adequate.*

Every night they'd  
either be perched on the pine,  
waiting, or hopping toward it.  
I saw they were losing  
their skins, scratching at the tough  
places it wouldn't come off.  
Then one night in a dream  
they revealed themselves as uncles,  
a wee bit hung over:  
*honey bees*, they gargled,



*bring us honey bees.*  
I ran toward them, my hands  
brimming with mud, my feet freezing.  
No, they said; *the sweetness,*  
*the sweetness . . .*

In the morning frost had come—  
and in the greenhouse, each to a pot,  
the toads had burrowed down  
among the roots;  
I saw their noses briefly—  
and then like deliberate  
wonderful fish,  
like prairie dogs,  
or like uncles who can't quit  
chasing the ladies,  
they were gone.

*Stephen Dunning*

#### DREAMS OF DUCKS

1

This dream recurs, ducks caught  
by an instant freeze  
webbed feet firm in the ice  
bodies twisting side to side  
heads jerking. The marsh grasses  
rice, cattails; cracks and echoes  
of shotguns far away  
hunters invisible in blinds  
drunks before sunrise, voices  
staggering across the still silver  
of Lake Mille Lacs. The dream  
tries to divert me  
from ducks twisting  
side to side, father and me  
stiff in our boats, decoys

bobbing and nodding, alive  
in the quiet surface of Mille Lacs  
splinters of daylight  
coming through the blind  
our feet firm in the ice

2

I awake to water so clear  
stones, twigs, grains of sand  
the grasses and the water ferns  
are focused by early light.  
Smells at the ends  
of deep breaths, snow  
coming our way, and soon  
melted, bubbling paraffin  
for dipping the birds.

Father posed me in front  
birds on a stringer, him behind  
holding the gun, smiling down  
hand on my shoulder:  
Step back so you get the birds  
and Mother did, moving the Brownie  
up and down; side to side  
finding the heap of blue-wing teal  
the canvasback shot by mistake  
the mallards: a weight of ducks  
hung on the stringer  
bead-eyed birds, side to side  
hanging from my belt.

3

We fly patterns like birdshot  
spatters of us  
v's and vague arrowheads  
through the silver sky  
patterns skewed to the sun  
to the warmth in the East  
handfuls of us  
loose in the grey-silver dawn

beating our wings toward sloughs  
lush with grass and seed  
early birds flying south  
running at life  
to grass and to seed

the surprise weight  
brushing through feathers  
biting through skin  
letting my warmth  
leak into dawn  
the weight eating  
into my heart  
breaking my beat

me caving in  
legs pulled tight, wings  
stretching out for air to hold  
me folding, my whole self  
tight for falling  
for arcing down  
away from friends  
me pulled by the force  
deeper than flight  
my memory braces  
to hit the water  
ready now  
the weight in my heart

*Philip Fine*

#### BIRDS OF WINTER

for Sophia B. Fine

Storm night; and the pines spill shadows,  
the birdfeeder swings by its thong like a censer;  
rain streaming down steamed up windows here,  
but in the city, you lie under snow.

Behind me, your philodendron strews  
threadbare tendrils down the bookshelf,  
balks at renewal. With each shed leaf  
you die again, and again I have failed you.

Kindled in a corner, the Christmas tree  
prickles with electric lights, syringes  
sharp as the sting of the dialysis machine  
that wrung tides through your brackish sea.

Beyond all that now, it no longer matters  
but these effigy birds, more delicate  
in the wreathed boughs than kinglets,  
would have pleased you; as there is pleasure

tonight, waiting up alone,  
to conjure, storm past, chickadees and finches  
weaving songs through the branches  
above your stone.

*Mary Oliver*

Two Poems

#### WINTER SLEEP

If I could I would  
Go down to winter with the drowsy she-bear,  
Crawl with her under the hillside  
And lie with her, cradled. Like two souls  
In a patchwork bed—  
Two old sisters familiar to each other  
As cups in a cupboard—  
We would burrow into the yellow leaves  
To shut out the sounds of the winter wind.

Deep in that place, among the roots  
Of sumac, oak, and wintergreen,  
We would remember the freedoms of summer,  
And we would begin to breathe together—

NORTHWEST

Hesitant as singers in the wings—  
A shy music,  
Oh! a very soft song.

While pines cracked in the snow above,  
And seeds froze in the ground, and rivers carried  
A dark roof in their many blue arms,  
We would sleep and dream.  
We would wake and tell  
How we longed for the spring.  
Smiles on our faces, limbs around each other,  
We would turn and turn  
Until we heard our lips in unison sighing

The family name.

#### SMALL ANIMAL PATHS

To be a small animal  
You must wake early in the morning—  
Before the moon has climbed out of the pond

You must drink there, and leave  
A plain track in the mud  
As you turn and vanish

In any one of a hundred  
Directions through the forest.  
And not even the owl,

Flapping to his daylight bed,  
Will frighten you, so well  
Acquainted with leaves, the deep

Apple-core smell of earth—  
Everywhere, under the looped entrance of roots,  
The darkness offering shelter.

#### Joseph Duemer

#### FALLING

for Billy Felix Ayac, 1953-1975

Something told him, a voice  
falling out of the sky like a shot bird,  
that the moon was not  
a hole in the sky  
that he would never rise  
climbing hand over hand  
on a spider's web, a strand  
of the moon-girl's hair  
into a new world. Inside

the Blue Moon Tavern Felix Ayac  
ordered a beer.

"The moon is a lump of rock.  
Raven stole it once, when it was bread,  
the first bread baked by woman.  
The moon is a lump of bread  
turned into stone  
in Raven's beak.  
I can hear  
his wings cutting the air."

On the street things speak to him.  
Beams of headlights strike him: Fall down.  
The sidewalk speaks sweetly: Over here,  
you can sleep over here.  
But faint stars tell him  
the moon is gone.

The freeway calls itself a black river  
with snakes of light.  
On the empty bridge  
Raven Bone Picker danced,  
Raven Moon Thief, near the edge.  
The eater of stones, dark of the moon  
danced with Billy Ayac who jumped

or fell and broke his body,  
shattered a windshield  
and sat beside the driver  
but kept falling, fell  
out of himself  
hugging a stone through the black water  
toward the stolen moon.

*Laura Grover*

### CALLS FROM A BOOTH IN TIME'S SQUARE

i

It's after dark—you should be home  
The phone rings to the attic and back  
The wallpaper in the dining room is green  
The lawn is mowed and someone strange  
Answers in a black-hat voice—tells me your  
Walls are peach-colored satin  
You cannot talk right now  
Because you are praying  
And your mouth has been sewn shut  
Since February. While you were gone  
Someone came and stole your room  
I looked and there was only the shell.  
I made the walls for you six years ago  
When you had your little toe amputated  
And stayed three months with gangrene.  
Your husband made the ceiling before  
But the floor got away—it had no signature  
And I suppose no insurance—though you seldom  
Needed it. Now it's all there is to hold  
The walls from leaning  
Toward one another. Their white panels  
Gossip about the condition of your closet  
Where the awful sound of your heart  
Still gurgles at night. The rug left  
Its ashes and that's all. I guess

Someone is making love in your bed  
To your husband, but I can't find it.  
They say the chest of drawers died of broken ribs  
And your dressing table fell into its mirror  
But there is no clue here along the baseboards  
Why the phone keeps ringing and this strange  
Voice repeats that you are out for the time being.

ii

It costs so much to call and this phone booth  
Is shrinking—there is hardly room  
To move my lips. Last week a friend said  
I was getting hard to see now.  
You were two years disappearing  
Just a white blur on the last photographs,  
And I keep watching my hands to make sure  
They are still visible because one foot  
Has already dissolved into a begonia  
And I have to wear more clothes to keep the sun  
From shining right through my arms.  
I know when you start to go like that  
There's no stopping and I'll wake up  
Some morning and not be able to reach the floor.

You melted into the grass. I think I'll just  
Hang on to a cedar tree at the last and  
Live there for a while until the right  
Bird comes along, then I'll be its breath—  
Or perhaps I'll become the salt in ocean water.  
My head could be the silica in stones,  
My eyes the ultraviolet in light and my hands  
Might be the unexcitability of orchids  
But if I get to stay together I'd like to be  
The indelible in trees—but I suppose you don't know  
Exactly where you're needed.  
I can see the blue quilt through my hand now, mother.  
And I just passed the mirror in the hall—  
It was empty. Next week they will have to look  
At the forest to see me at this rate.



*Charles Baxter*

DEPRIVATION

The man who reads  
puts a beer nearby,  
and feels, for just a second,

his hands burn  
under the reading lamp.  
The burning hands lift

one leaf from the next,  
as the thunder deepens,  
making light end-stops

in the evening air.  
Lightning like a typist's key  
appears

with the briefest shiver  
on the power line,  
a clean cut

that dims the filament.  
The print flickers in an after-  
image as it says good-bye.

The man who reads is sighing  
in the common dark,  
astonished at how easily

the light abandons him,  
at how the one requirement  
of what he wants is light,

broken now by cracks  
that have no wire, no carrier.  
The book slips down,

as the man stares passively  
while the leaves lift  
against his window

and the disturbance rises  
in frequency and pitch—  
a natural storm

of unreadable sound, and wordless light.

*Stuart Dybek*

DEAD TREES

This one could father  
a race of scarecrows,

and this one meditates  
on crosses and gallows  
in an orchard,

and this one's so naked  
a clothesline tries  
to flap wash  
across its bones.

---

Listen mice, tucked  
in your roots, the tree  
rattles the armor of owls,

coat-of-arms  
a lightning scar, twisted  
like a blacksnake around its trunk.

---

When the forest is squandering  
leaves  
who stands almless,

a saint in a pewter field  
attracting beggars  
like the skeleton in soup?

---

Boughs croak  
while windmills whip light  
to lard;  
millstones grind,  
thunderheads ignite dry sticks.  
Men flail their burning harvest.  
Jays fade.

---

A wind of locusts,  
a wind of dust

shaking cellars  
inside out like pockets  
in a dead tramp's trousers.

Straw leaks from craniums,  
cornsilk from hearts,

horizon upside down—  
a whipping line of trees,  
roots for limbs.

---

Trees like yellow chicken claws.  
The prairie scrabbles.  
A traveling salesman  
feels his way back through the henhouse.  
A long-lost son,  
he's gazed at driftwood arms  
on tropic beaches.

He opens his suitcase:  
a sewing machine disguised  
as an elder,  
vacuum cleaner an elm,

gun, silver birch,  
movie camera  
a cherry tree.

---

When the moon makes  
snow silver  
this tree mistakes  
its shadow  
for the reflection  
of a willow

arched over a pond  
where two lovers  
from warring houses  
have agreed to meet,

on foot, without horses  
or henchmen,  
you are one.

*Marky Daniel*

Two Poems

#### NAKED LADIES

*Amaryllis, the belladonna lily,  
sometimes called the naked lady.*

—The Garden Encyclopedia

I saw them circling the porches  
of forgotten houses, pink and common  
in their habit. Mother hurried past,  
mouth prim, pulling me, saying she hated  
their bare-legged look, telling me the only name  
she knew for them. There were none  
in Mother's garden; no brazen trumpets,  
no lolling tigers. In my starched pinafore,  
sandals, long white stockings,  
I scrambled by her side, clutching  
for her hand to keep in step.

*Rose-pink, fragrant trumpets  
summer; dormant spring.*

The church is banked in pale madonnas.  
We consider the wild lilies, which grow  
in idleness, yet still are loved.  
Afterwards I walk, my silk dress heavy  
in the August sun. In their overgrown garden,  
they nod to me. Their heavy perfume hurts  
my mouth. In Mother's garden, the boxwood rules,  
green flanks against the bricks in formal pattern.  
Flowers there are clipped and staked;  
trained up in the way that they shall grow.  
I swelter in my ornate church brocade.

*Strap-like leaves late fall  
till frost. Divide infrequently.*

I keep her garden ordered. Hoops of wire  
surround the baby's breath since spring.  
Their foaming summer bloom hides  
steel stays, keeps stems from sprawling  
under every rain. But these untended lilies,  
tumbling among the twining honeysuckle, wilt  
and sweeten without care. Kneeling here,  
in my long skirts and emerald sleeves,  
which Mother would admire, I am breathless  
before pink mouths gaping in the heat.  
Frosts were far too subtle this year.  
Much seems unseasonably green.

#### BESTIARY FOR THE RANCHER'S DAUGHTER

I expect the unicorn in May,  
crossing my father's pasture, through the green,  
shin-deep alfalfa, past the wind-break poplars  
mossy with leaf, to sit cross-legged  
in the sage, combing my hair in the sun,  
watching myself in the mirror  
I borrowed from my mother's dresser.

I wait impatiently through July,  
riding my blooded Quarterhorse  
so hard his sweat makes curds  
along the bridle reins. Ranch hands come  
to mow and turn the sweet alfalfa;  
the baler binds it all for sale.  
Seven of the best bales I save aside  
in the hayloft. From a catalogue, I buy  
a red plastic halter. Wild sunflowers bloom,  
the poplars stand up neon green  
against a purple wall of thunder.

I forget, hurrying through October,  
breaking open bales to feed the work horses,  
after their long teeth cut  
the pasture down to stubble. West wind  
rattles seeds in the dry sunflowers,  
tumbleweeds bounce and sail,  
sewing their spines in the fragrant sage.  
Like oriental spires against a wall of lead,  
the poplars turn, and one afternoon  
I drop my mother's mirror:  
It takes forever sweeping up.

During an ice storm in December,  
the unicorn arrives, striking the fence  
with one split hoof. He is rangy, thin,  
with mangy coat and cockleburs snarling his mane.  
My halter misplaced, I run out with a rope  
to tether him. Among the poplar skeletons,  
we look each other over. Sleet melts  
and runs on our faces. Wind whips us.  
Escaping the weather for awhile, we skid  
across the frozen ground together to the shed,  
to see if there is still space  
among the milling, steaming herd.

## A USED CAR LOT AT NIGHT

Love has come  
to the used cars.  
The moon shines down  
and changes their lives.  
Under the sun  
they were hard, flawed,  
a nervous tremor  
ran through the metal.  
Each was separate  
from each. But now  
community. They flow  
like water. They flow  
away from their past  
like a car veering  
to avoid the body  
suddenly before it.  
Above them, the flags.  
All the long day,  
the bright triangles  
flapped in time  
to the anthems of countries  
men escape from by night,  
crossing a border.  
Now the flags, their many  
colors become a single  
color dreaming desire,  
hang perfectly still.  
The hearts of the cars  
have grown large and spiritual.  
A pure blue  
moment wears the mask  
of eternity. Love  
has come down from the sky  
and cooled the fever  
of the cars. The miles

in the tiny windows  
roll back to zero,  
a spinning declaration  
of possibility. The cars  
shudder and die  
like one body  
a sexual spasm  
releases.

## SLEEPING PARENTS, WAKEFUL CHILDREN

When our parents were sleeping  
We brought them gifts  
It was a whispering time  
The great bodies lain down  
Upon the long bed  
The deep sighs adrift  
Through the upper rooms  
It was a whispering time  
When the gods slept  
And we made gifts for them  
With paper, paints and tiny  
Scissors safe for us  
Masks and rings  
Obscure, magical things  
In the halted hour  
In the still afternoon  
The anger asleep  
And the jokes we didn't understand  
The violent love  
That carried our weather  
All subsided to these  
Two vulnerable ones  
Their hands and mouths  
Open like babes'  
Their heads high  
In the pillowy clouds  
For all we knew dreaming us  
Sneaking in



Lest they wake and discover  
 Our love our fear  
 How we thrill to propitiate,  
 My sister and I  
 Approaching the border  
 The edge of the platform  
 Where the gods murmured  
 So precise in our placement  
 Of these our constructions  
 Frivolous, fair  
 The gifts on the skirts  
 Of their lives for surprise  
 Then turning away  
 Lips and fingers a cross  
 When they woke  
 They would never know how  
 When or why  
 They would never know  
 Who we were

*Mark Ercegovic*

Two Poems

## KEYS

When the keys hang limp  
 at the end of your chain like fingers  
 you have lost in another life,  
 asleep so long in the night  
 of your pocket their rattling  
 withered to bone against bone,  
 then you will be coming home  
 with your collar up  
 and your key pointing the way  
 to that house grown cold over too many years  
 where this key fits its lock  
 like a knife in a wound  
 and the night begins at your door  
 to creak on a hinge.

## RUNNING WAR MOVIES BACKWARDS

As we always suspected  
 those happy endings  
 never last.

The anti-personnel bombs  
 we thought had blown to pieces  
 (we thought so often of  
 being people ourselves)  
 pull themselves together  
 and plug their own open holes  
 sucking trees and cows back to place  
 their shrapnel coming to a soft roundness  
 and rising the idyllic path of lost balloons.

Tanks and jeeps  
 troop carriers and amphibious ducks  
 retrace their treads  
 and stall at the start of a slow rust  
 their engines going as cold as the memories  
 children visit in war memorials  
 Saturdays after the matinee.

Changing expressions  
 as easily as changing shirts  
 the enemy set down their weapons  
 or remove fingers from buttons  
 and return home to argue (like us)  
 among themselves at dinner tables.

Those hard-boiled, military tacticians  
 lapse into a soft-shelled, second childhood  
 unlighting the barrel ends of cigars  
 and inhaling smoke screens from reclining chairs  
 while our raw-recruit hero  
 backs out of occupied territory  
 and into the driveway of his small-town home  
 (sleek profile unmarred)

to resume that same job selling shoes  
for the rest of his flat-footed life.

And now the faces of peasants  
we need no longer care about.  
The tears of their children  
withdrawn and unwept  
as they move over whole countrysides  
the wheels of their oxcarts  
spinning like movie reels  
to the flopping up end  
of an old beginning.

*Dennis Marden Clark*

#### KNIFING A PIGGY BANK

MAGYAR NEPKOZTARSASAG  
—10 filler coin  
ANNUIT COEPTIS • NOVUS ORDO SECLORUM  
—U.S. folding dollar  
*It's pretty hard to break your heart  
in faultless terza rima.*  
—Leslie Norris

You hold it upside down and stab it in the back.  
It's something you kept coins in once, your savings,  
determined not to lose (once you forgot) a stack

of price-fixed metal staggered like piled shavings  
of Baal's heart on a formica table top,  
plunder at first of pop bottles, yield of slavings

in neighbor's garbage, on roadsides where bottles stop,  
and lots spared by developers in your town;  
later, odd change scavenged about the house and shop.

Knifing the only pet that never bit—you found  
it easier to feed—pays off: fat coins come  
two at a time, caught between blade and spine, sound

once on the table, spin clattering to the floor, fall numb.  
Some of your past adds up as you watch heads roll  
and snatch at heads of state you had forgot, so dumb

they are in their infinite trust in God and their own finite soul,  
no catch in the voices reciting *IN HOC SIGNO VINCES*.  
At large, *E PLURIBUS UNUM* chunks on your cents, paying toll.

You hatch *DEI GRATIA REGINA* and *REX*, who winks  
at *LIBERTÉ ÉGALITÉ FRATERNITÉ*—  
and mortmain walks hand in hand with mortgage and thinks

you back to when you stole those; from an uncle, say  
a soldier or sailor, served in Europe, brought  
souvenirs back to Grampa's in a trunk you used to play

was yours; you wonder if his children miss the lot,  
and it's as close to Europe as you ever got.  
Your hand moves heads and tails into a babbling stack.  
The pig, speared with a butter-knife, jinks and charges back.

*Gary Miranda*

#### LINES FOR AN IMAGINARY SON

Today you occurred, perhaps for the first time,  
were born announcing how I've neglected you  
all these years, steeped in mythologies of daughters.  
What did you do, you say, not to deserve even  
gratuitous love? And I grope (let's say you are five)  
for answers, as though you had just asked me  
about sex (which you have) and wonder what the hell  
your mother (which you haven't) would say. I say:  
Let's go for a walk.

Outside, the October trees are raised fists, remnants  
of old losses dangling between their fingers. I think  
to you: Listen to trees! I say: Are you warm enough?

I know: soon my answers will have to turn stark  
as these trees. I try to remember what it was like  
being a boy and wish, in a weak moment, you might  
have grown up like me, afraid or perhaps too proud  
to ask anything, a briar root spiraling into itself.  
I tell you a story:

I had a cousin once, older than me, who had a dog,  
a collie, that could find us playing hide-and-seek  
no matter where we hid, that dog smarter than any kid  
in the neighborhood. The cousin got killed in the war  
(except I know that isn't right because he wouldn't  
be old enough, but still . . .) they shot him down  
in the cold Atlantic and no one ever found the body  
(this is true) and I kept thinking: the dog, send the dog!  
(Or was it my father?)

I shout then: *Look, I don't want a son, how would I know  
how to make you love me!* You are hurt. I want  
to make myself not to have said that, or explain, or say  
Now that I've said it everything will be all right.  
But you have already let go of my hand and are walking  
away toward the grey mouth at the end of this clutch  
of trees. I watch you go, wondering will you be warm  
enough, and why in hell did you buy that cap if you never  
put the flaps down?

**Dan Minock**

#### DRIVING THE INTERSTATE

What to do?  
You can listen of course to the radio  
but the music is not live and the news  
either moves so quickly you just can't  
get out of its way, or so slowly  
you'll catch up in an hour on Sunday.  
Aware of the risks of giving or taking advice  
I say read poems.  
Actually this may be safer

than sitting open-legged at sixty miles per hour  
taking everything for granted. Anyway  
as any speedreader will tell you  
you needn't stare at words—  
just a flash down to find a phrase  
then back to the world from which poems like accidents come,  
breathing the line into your lungs, doing no damage.

As for what to read,  
it is best to choose poems written after Henry Ford  
though there are exceptions like the work  
of housebound Emily Dickinson—  
some poem anyway which turns in tight circles,  
which you've never read carefully enough, it keeps shaking you off.  
At fifty or sixty or seventy miles per hour  
you may be ready to move through it  
nearly as slowly as the poet did  
or as others before you moved over this route—  
who walked horses, led mules through mud  
stopped for days numb beside a fire half out  
of the rain, who had to take wagons apart and lift them  
up a ridge.

When you get to  
where you are going you may  
pick up a novel going five hundred words per minute,  
or have slow talk and think  
without the bitterness of roadside nettle  
dissolved in a blur. But for now  
keep the poem beside you,  
one hand on the wheel, the other marking the place.  
Save it for the open country, the cars ahead moving away,  
the cars in your mirror still miles back,  
no trucker beside you looking for skirts.

Off the road, lamps  
keep lives going at night.  
But you must remember your poem in the time without light,  
everyone else home, the rain in slant lines,  
and you on the Interstate,  
trying to hold on.

LOSS OF A SATYR

One would have to walk very deep  
into a cave to feel the sorrow,  
and have light passed in by smooth stone  
to understand the truth: his body,  
half bent into itself, half in depression;  
his head brotherly, as if listening to the age  
that stiffens in one shoulder.

All his songs would have to be remembered  
by heart, and the vision of the nymphs, following—  
a belief that music was a youth of kinds.  
And one would have to listen closely  
to the trailing of his breath down the slender reed,  
that echo of the air at each hole,  
which is next to silence, next to stone.

Arriving, like a premonition,  
his wind comes from as deep as one can imagine  
and seems another form of dark,  
and even then, a memory of the woods  
as small as the cave's distant entrance,  
that single star that offers nothing  
but the space it is.

Peter Davison

Two Poems

SKIING BY MOONLIGHT

Orion reclines on his hip.  
Polaris glares high at my left.  
I glide my way homeward,  
a quarter-moon chasing me.

I pursue the lurching shadow  
of my sweaty body back  
along the newly crumbled tracks  
I slogged only an hour ago

through the mirror-image pasture.  
(Polaris twinkled at my right,  
Orion teetered at my left;  
the moon, narrow as a candle,

sparkled on smooth, blameless snow,  
a beach of diamonds.  
Cedars were heaped with treasure  
among frozen cherry trees.)

Our sheep have all taken shelter  
beneath the black barn.  
In the windless moonlight  
only an owl hoots against the cold

while deer, silent among pines,  
wait to hear my skis stop hissing  
and the back door click shut

before they wade toward the barn  
to steal some hay.

THANKSGIVING

By the authority vested in me, a gift  
(in German, *poison*; in Swedish, *a marriage*),  
I write of journeys, landscapes, interceptions,  
expressions visible, alive, or dead.  
A milkweed pod atop its autumn stalk  
bulges from cold and flips itself wide open  
to sprinkle flurries of snow among the grass.  
They bloom, mulberry-like, for next midsummer,  
nourished by milk no bitterer, no whiter  
than any I have tasted as a gift.



## CYCLE

Stretching his ankles into high gear,  
the man commanding ten speeds pumps up  
his heart and lowers his head against

the north rain. He's riding into November,  
miles from where he intended, years  
from where he has been. Downhill now,

he steadies himself on curves by how  
the thin wheels gyroscope; he leans  
to feel speed, losing weight as

he settles his butt to pedal across  
the flats and outside the old suburbs.  
Once he has left the suck of traffic

the gravity of the hills gets to him:  
he slows to how oaks cantilever,  
how spruce true themselves at right angles

against the sky. Gut, heart, toe, knee:  
over and over he keeps instructing his body not  
to forget: this pumping is toward new country.

## SHE

*For M.K.H.*

Attending the bed where he is near gone to ground,  
consenting, in her high age, to every knowledge,  
she pulls back the tides and recalls them.

She has kept the powers her whole life practiced:  
an eye for cormorants rimming the outermost ledge,  
waves she would read, and winds her whistle could call

to sail. She stories him what the cormorants told;  
her voice spells a passage through days of fog,  
her hand sounds a cove quick with stars. As his mind

closes to pain, he opens every eye to remember:  
the white birds come to the island stillness; from space  
beyond fog they have flown to her hand. He hears

against wind the distance she speaks from, yet all  
that earth, between them, established: how she will wait,  
consenting, until his own consent is accomplished.

## NOT TO TELL LIES

He has come to a certain age.  
To a tall house older than he is.  
Older, by far, than he ever will be.  
He has moved his things upstairs, to a room  
which corners late sun. It warms a schooner model,  
his daughter's portrait, the rock his doctor brought him  
back from Amchitka. When he looks at the rock he thinks Melville;  
when he touches its lichen he dreams Thoreau. Their testaments  
shelve the inboard edge of the oak-legged table he writes on.  
He has nailed an ancestor's photograph high over his head.  
He has moored his bed perpendicular to the North wall;  
whenever he rests his head is compassed barely west  
of Polaris. He believes in powers: gravity, true  
North, Magnetic North, love. In how his wife  
loved the year of their firstborn. When-  
ever he wakes he sees the clean page in  
his portable. He has sorted life out;  
he feels moved to say all of it,  
most of it all. He tries  
to come close, he keeps  
coming close: he has  
gathered himself  
in order not  
to tell  
lies.

### *About Our Contributors*

JACK CRAWFORD, JR., teaches at the State University of New York, New Paltz.

ROBLEY WILSON, JR., lives in Cedar Falls, Iowa. He is editor of the *North American Review*.

GAR BETHEL teaches at the University of Pittsburgh.

JOHN S. FLAGG lives in Arlington, Mass.

STEPHEN DUNN's most recent book was published by Carnegie-Mellon University Press. He teaches at Stockton State College, Pomona, N.J.

JOHN ALLMAN teaches at Rockland Community College, Suffern, N.Y.

SEAN BENTLEY is an English major at the University of Washington.

SANDRA M. GILBERT teaches at the University of California at Davis and edits *California Quarterly*.

BRENDAN GALVIN's new book, *The Minutes No One Owns*, will be published in November by the University of Pittsburgh Press.

GARY GILDNER teaches at Drake University. His latest book is *Nails* (University of Pittsburgh Press).

STEPHEN DUNNING is a professor at the University of Michigan and has edited several anthologies of poetry.

PHILIP FINE lives in South Wellfleet, Mass.

MARY OLIVER's poems have appeared recently in *Prairie Schooner*, *Ironwood*, *Commonweal*, and *American Scholar*.

JOSEPH DUEMER is a student at the University of Washington.

LAURA GROVER teaches at Seattle Central Community College.

CHARLES BAXTER teaches at Wayne State University.

STUART DYBEK teaches at Western Michigan University.

MARKY DANIEL is a graduate student at the University of Washington.

PHILIP DACEY lives and teaches in Cottonwood, Minn.

MARK ERCEGOVIC is an undergraduate at the University of Washington.

DENNIS MARDEN CLARK is a librarian at the University of Utah.

GARY MIRANDA lives and teaches in Cambridge, Mass.

DAN MINOCK teaches at Wayne State University.

GARY MYERS is a recent graduate of the University of Iowa's Writing Program.

PETER DAVISON's newest book of poems, *A Voice in the Mountains*, will be published by Atheneum this fall. He is poetry editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* and director of the Atlantic Monthly Press.

PHILIP BOOTH's latest book of poems is *Available Light* (Viking Press). He teaches at Syracuse.

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