Cover from a mask of the many-headed demon-god Ravana from India.

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POETRY NORTHWEST WINTER 1974–75 VOLUME XV, NUMBER 4
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POETRY NORTHWEST

WINTER 1974-75

Paul Zimmer

Three Poems

ZIMMER THE DRUGSTORE COWBOY

At least I know my peculiar emptiness,
My vague reality, as though I'd been
Stunned by a concrete tit at birth,
Dull as a penny bouncing off a cinder block;
My white socks down over high tops,
The big lugs heavy with gravel and mud.

I always get up in the early morning,
Sit on the drugstore bench in the mist,
Drink Dr. Pepper's for breakfast until
The boys at the Shell station start
Revving their motors like a pride of lions.
I wait all day for things to cool down,
Watch the bread trucks and the big rigs
Deliver and depart, pass out of my sight
Down the Interstate.

I get mad about things:
Shattered safety glass in the streets,
The stupid heat lightning swelling out of trees,
Groove, gash, dent, dog, mosquito, fly;
Once in a while something just froths me,
My anger bursting through my skin and slapping
Surface like the side of a bluegill,
My cold bony mouth snapping and sucking
At the hot air, my eyeballs pivoting
Until I can settle down again.

At night I walk the town, look up
Through the tiny squares of window screens,
Inside the squares of pictures and doorframes,
Inside the glowing squares of television,
Inside the squares of the windows.
Everything is plumb and solid in the night,
The corners of lamplight fastening things down.
Wherever I move the darkness moves
Because I have become my own shadow.
The crickets tinker with the silence.
I walk in the dark alleys, see stars
Well out of the roofs of buildings.
They swarm and multiply like a mass
Of shiny gnats in my gaze. I wonder
How many I could see if I watched forever?
Star growing into star, year after year,
The new revelations spreading out beyond my sight
Until they would all grow together,
Swelling like heat lightning out of trees.
Then maybe I could live like a bluegill
All of the time, full of hunger and purpose,
Cool, trim, quick in the water,
One little muscle waiting to strike.

THE SWEET NIGHT BLEEDS FROM ZIMMER

Barney catches me in a dark place
With no sunlight I can squirm through.
His body uncoils its frustrations
And fists plunge like the last stones
Of a landslide.

I fall before
I feel his blows, then pain
Flies to my surfaces as though
It has always been there waiting
For Barney to challenge it out.
My skin folds back in slots and tabs
And the sweet night bleeds from my face.

Barney catches me in a dark place,
His jaws and pincers grinding.
Remembering each cruelty under the stars;
Someone waggling submission forever.

ZIMMER AT THE DIGGERGS

It is best to begin in the morning with
The low sun slanting over the cool site.
I brush the dust from the grooves
Of ancient trash, strip down the layers,
Sift, count, dig, date the axeheads.

These are my findings:
Surface—Bones of wild dogs,
Some elm stumps smelling of urine.
Second level—Residue of hemp,
Circular mounds of earth, post holes
Testing of urine, scattered bones of
Children, birds, woodchucks, snakes,
The femur of a stupendous cave bear.
Third level—Reasons for the circles,
A ring of large sandstone tablets sunk into
Mounds of cranial fragments, eye teeth,
Delicate shard and fingerbones.

I sweat. By midafternoon with the sun high
And sky pressing down upon my head,
I start to imagine I can join it all.
The axeheads strain like wings.
I begin to glue the shard together,
Rack the teeth, stack the bones
And string them with muscle and sinew.
I breathe on them and listen for voices.

At last, in heat, I wander into the countryside,
Gather the small, exquisite things I love:
Maple seeds, phlox petals, flakes of birch bark,
Gypsum pebbles, baby mice, all minute jewels.

In my great warmth and confusion
I put them into my mouth and chew them,
Let my teeth commit their quick atrocities.
Then in highest hopes I swallow them,
Feel their pulp and grit slide delicately
Down my throat into the dark acids.

I return to the shade of the site,
Small beauty pumping out to the edges
Of my body, infusing into my parts.
Amidst the ring of tremendous stones
I feel my cells divide in fragrant ecstasy.

Sonia Gernes          Two Poems

ROPE ENOUGH

the hay:
We were the penitentiary's best customer
that year my brothers made the rope machine,
buying bales of its hard-labor twine
to string the sweet loom of our alfalfa field.

A boy at each end, I was the bright bobbin
that coursed between the twisting strands,
blonde hair floating out and out with the running twine,

Weaving rope strong enough to rip the flesh
from our father's hand that summer in the mow
They grafted him in a body cast—a round white cup,
his elbow plastered for the handle's crook.

Looking back, I want to tip him,
pour out the pain that floated to his eyes,
let love be the pulley where he hitched that rope

to rafters in the shed, his own therapy,
pulled and pulled that handle of an arm
back to length and use. Three fates in that field, we had measured out his pain, his health.

the belt:

This birthday,
I learn a sailor’s art; tie down
one by one those strands that slip
and make my counting wrong.

I number back to strokes I’ve brushed
in my mother’s hair—white threads
that multiply, snap like worms
as each part grows. She has seen hours
wriggle in the hand, dissolve into parts
before they die.

I pull this partial belt in line,
leave out the beads my friends advise
(I don’t want what turns). Where string ripples
I pattern knot after knot, design
my defense. What I tie
stays.

the hanging:

Carol swallowed Mayo Clinic thread
the weeks her esophagus closed. Hand
over hand, like fishline, reeling in
and out again, it was all she had
against that sealing off.

Nights I wake to feel a closing,
a stricture in whatever goes within,
I hunt for pencils in the dark,
string out words across a page,
filament by filament, testing
until they’re strong.

I know the old saying: men given rope . . .
I’m careful enough. I’ve seen friends
tangle in their words, dangle

where some capricious muse
hoists dreams on attic rafters, smashes
other loves, breathes the peace of oven doors
that open only once.

Wherever there’s rope, there is danger;
I keep mine to the size of twine,
know that alone it won’t hold me,
but it’s there, tangled and dark by the bedside
nights I wake and swallow, swallow, hoping
it is enough.

TERMINAL PAPER

The professor has died in my dream.
We huddle, forms without content,
in the room that was his class,
speak softly, wonder what it was—
enjambment of the breath,
a dissociation of the spirit and the sense . . .
We say nothing correlates.

The wife comes. A net of weeping
curbs her rhythmic stride. She says,
“It came so suddenly. He’s dead, you know,
from an infection he picked up
using the Oxford English Dictionary—
that awful O.E.D.”

We nod, know how it is,
mutter so she cannot hear:
That’s what it gets you, all that
dark research. Surely there’s a lesson here.

We fumble in our bags, draw out
clean white cards. We make a note
of that.

NORTHWESTPOETRY
HER LIES

I dreamed I saw myself; an old man beating a stick on a stone. I said, "Old man who did you love, anyone?" He said, "Son, it was well before they cut down trees with chains, before the deluge of cats, and her eyes were blue, light blue, two robin's eggs that hatched, two yellow hummingbirds that flew, and it was there in that place that I loved even her lies, the small ones that grew, those I caught right away but listened to, and the larger they got, the more I loved her; and when I'd pound my fist on the table bellowing Stop, she'd fly half-way to the ceiling and return embarrassed at being caught; but the louder I bellowed the harder it was to stop these lungs from bursting, bursting out in laughter."

HER SADNESS

... and being a little sad you speak of the days when... how once a poet loved in a less modern, more delicate way, as I begin to yawn a yawn that promises to last forever, scratch my head, or crude as a lumberjack waking up slow and cold at dawn, I pound my chest until your eyes avoid mine and your chin begins to tremble, until I am able to say it, say I love you and know these words come straight, clear from the bottom of my lungs.

APOLOGY

Whatever it is that forms that frown, that blue veil covering your face, its edge like a scar my dreams etch in a plate of purple glass; whatever it is, I think in my own way I understand and I have felt it also; the conclusion I forced, the long silences, the lies, the trails I left scattered across the country-side, the small circles of stones covered with warm ashes, each larger than the last; in the morning the loneliness of breaking camp, at night the feelings a small stream must have entering a lake suddenly. These I feel and though it seems to make no difference if I like it or not, there are times...

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POETRY NORTHWEST

I pull a stone from the fire,
hold it up in my bare hands,
offering it all for its end,
an end doused in a pool
of calm water; a stone resting
at its bottom, and a mist
rising to cover it over.

Yet, having felt what it is
I believe it must be allowed
to continue its long walk
winding toward exhaustion,
which is not an excuse
but rather the hope that
having walked through it
my way, all will come out
in the end, seen to be balanced
and justified by you; my hope
based on the certainty
that something inside you
will rise from its exhaustion
to meet me; something like
a candle lit in a cellar
smelling of earth and roots;
like the petals of a rose
burning down its stem, until
like an empty glass its flame
touches and warms you

with ambitions for morning;
something kindled deep inside
the almost imaginary bones
in your face, making your face
glow faintly; something like
the smile one comes to
lifting a face, long buried
in the blue veil of cold hands,
from the hands, a smile
that is yours and mine.

PROPHECY FOR THE MIDDLE CLASS

He is somewhere in our future,
the beggar who gives change.
He will be waiting for us perhaps
outside a department store, his pockets
bulging like the stomachs
of starved children: all hope and air.
When we give him a quarter
he'll hand us a note marked
"This is only the beginning, friends."
And we, who have never completed
a single gesture,
will carry that note
for the rest of our lives.

DEATHS

The first time the news comes, I'm twelve,
I stop as they do in movies,
search for what I feel.

And though I hardly care
everything inside me moves.

People can disappear.

Uncle Frank, dead for no good reason.
The neighbor's dog at least was chasing
territory of the street.
Just a bad cold that got worse. Poof.
And suddenly my parents, in perfect health,
move on to my critical list.

And years later they die of nothing
I could have predicted.

And for my father I sit on a tile floor
until it hurts, and after it hurts.
And for my mother I play host
at the wake and keep the face
everybody wants.
Then some friends die in an accident,
and a girl I slept with once is found
in a lake.

And always the stillness that is not
a stillness when the news comes.
The dance in place, the old
funereal rag.
And the rhythms after a while
are breathless, and beat my name.
A walk down a street, a night in bed,
become the same as a trip in a jet:
I can see my body—ashes.
They will learn my name
from my dental records.

And my children, whom I cannot teach
these lessons, think my lap a resting place
and come there when they're tired.
When I stand up, all they know
is that it's gone, and will reappear.
But I, I'm happy these days
simply to be there when I rise.

THE VISITANT

Maybe Wolfe's title should have read
"You have to go home again, even though
you can't." — From a conversation

You try to shake the hand of the small boy
who lives within you,
but it's buried in the deep
debri of adulthood
and the hand is too shy, doesn't know you,
recedes into the safety of its dark.
One day when you reach for it, though,
came with you. But you know this isn’t
the end of it.
He has slipped back into you like a child
into quicksand, a black child now
rising all the way down,
fist over his head,
uninviting, meant for you.

Diana O Hehir

FORGETTING THE PAST

(Written after a visit “home”)

The clock over the mountain strikes twelve and a half,
The hour at which all of the ladies grow up.
I am not going to worry it any more:
No more sullen sulks, no cakes untasted.
I’ll forgive everything.

Behind me slovens that dark stretch of prairie,
Gritty, a road into exile, back over boredom.
It flails out under the blank sky like a cloak,
A terrible country of leisure with the sound turned off,
Under a dome where the sun sags like an egg plant,
Where the rock crashes in scalding silent dust,
Where a finger’s crook takes a year, crying takes three,
And feet are invisible. I walked that road searching pain with my
toes.

And up here the mountain is bare. Its clock has stopped striking.
I hold in my hand the egg of the morning.
There is blue air over rocks with angled corners,
Spiked like human questions.
The mountain reflects brightness,
And my children have packed me a lunch: six cookies,
A geranium for my hair. I tell the summit: I’m coming!
On the other side will be rocks of a different color.

A PLAN TO LIVE MY LIFE AGAIN

I would adore doing it over.

I wouldn’t marry the prince and live in his Mediterranean palace;
No marble vistas of stairs, no
Peacocks' tails unfurled; clematis falling from porticos;
The electric sea silent for some other feet; the lover,
Curls brushed, teeth flashing like road signs,
Holds out his arm for another fainting mate.
That glass slipper cramps,
A slipper of notions; a little cold vise.

My other country has white roads and static skies.
Once, flashing a car across Utah, I saw
A crown of mountains upside down in the vague air;
Peaks, echoes scraping the earth,
But only in the mind’s camera,
A machine as ominous
As dynamo, creasing water into electric light.

There can be no prince in such finality.
He’d blow away like a cry across white sand
End over end, his little arms flailing,
A puff in the uncanny air. Those mountains crush
Upside down, founder to all logic,
A terrible problem,

Particles scraping against an interior lining.

IMMANENT EARTHQUAKE

The sky is as dry as baking powder.
A scuffed shoe may send the whole thing up.

Houses, sidewalks, stucco railings string out in a sound-line,
A breakable presence, garage-door magic beam.
It waits for its flag,
And the rumbling mess, gawky-fingered, shoves home.
Like everything you wait for.
It sits behind you holding its breath in static.
It moves in the circle of your mother’s death.

Last year’s earthquake, we were at the opera.
We flattened ourselves into our velvet chairs,
Clutching the arms, weighed down by that pushing apron;
A conveyor-belt roar lurched off next to my ear.
It spoke in metal of a metal world, metal people and flowers
Clashing themselves to a brassy finish,
And death as the voice of an open gong.

Down in the works of the opera house,
Shifting weights shoved each other like cousins,
A raucous playground scraped by noise.

Afterward, the air wasn’t dry. We laughed, a captive people,
We laughed as if the sea had split for us.

James Cole

MINIATURE GOLF

We cross a footbridge to the garden,
Rest on a stone bench, record the score.
A canal cools. The air’s light.
We aim for the dragon’s mouth
Opening slowly and dropping shut—
The eyes burn like taillights,
The ball plops into the water hole.
Mozart comes over the loudspeaker.
Over the covered bridge the ball rumbles,
Over the drawbridge being raised, rolls
Between the great blades of the mill wheel,
The open doors of the windmill.
Mozart, a birdie, a thought
By the wishing well. Par for the course.
America is your friend at a loud party.
Her jokes are no worse than the others
But they sadden you most.
You want to take her home before it's too late.

It's hard to write letters in your attic study
When you hear your father downstairs
Smashing the furniture on his path to a glass.
He was a wino before you were born.
You are not to blame
You say to yourself as you go down
To look at the mess.

Ward Stiles

AT 3:00 A.M. IN THE KITCHEN
PEACE PASSES UNDERSTANDING

Shaking with coffee and tomorrow's
cold dice, I stare at the kitchen window
where the dark and the glass touch
my face with two fingers of the same hand.

These are the questions that boil
and finally sing in their madness: What flashlight
will make me in the dark?
Will a breath lift the stones behind it?
Will anything be said?

Outside the dream of owl
begins to burn in the tree.
Flesh soars in orange smoke.
Small bones warp and scatter sparks.
The membrane of anger curls up and flies from the heart.
The membrane of fear softens to ash.
The eyes, not the heart, turn to stone.
The beak is buried in the heart.

Barbara L. Greenberg

THE FATTEST MAN

There is always a Fattest Man among us
and he is always riding in a circus bus
or riding always in a wooden horse,
an ark, a chariot, an altered hearse
where eight nine ten eleven hundred
pounds of him are locked, impounded
by the Fact Collector, the official weigher
who keeps the golden ledger. There,
only there, is the Fattest celebrated.
He is not sought after. He is not invited
to the singalong, not summoned
to the father's deathbed. Care, the common
salt of life, is not his portion
nor any taste of tears. Old emotions
sit in his gut like time rings in a tree
awaiting better times. Then history
will claim him, earth will make room
for him, he will be the bridegroom
wearing gabardine, he will be immense,
imperial inside a black piano case
which now he eats to fill. He will die younger
than other kinds of men. He will last longer.
Frances McConnel

THE POETS CRY OUT AGAINST SCHOOLCHILDREN

For Bill Ransom, Poet-in-the-Schools, Port Townsend

How you adore us! Our hair is more beautiful than the immortal wind, our hands flirt with swallows, and our words, how our words triumph humming in and out of your consciousness like the beat of the girl’s radio at the end of the row.

You do not yet ask us to drink and be drunken, oracular, subject to fits of creation; except from the common concrete fountain where we bend to the warm water until we are near bowing, our noses stung with the slight prick of the splatter.

Faltering behind at recess, how we are puzzled at this abandonment, that already you have forgotten the joyful flutter at our arrival during math and the words that so stubbed you this morning, so fresh when you whispered them over in our bent ear, your breath unwashed and teeming as a dark jungle floor.

You teach us to be worshipped or, as often, mocked. You teach us to wear our hair long, our hands raving, to praise more freely than a bubbling baby, to be happy when no one notices the bell. What nonsense you teach us, what vanity: to make gestures out of our small honesty, to make sense out of our grand gestures.

Yet how you send us careening, sucked frail as a robin’s egg, our moods as ephemeral as your triumphs. Will we ever recover from your audience?

Robert Hershon

THE CENTERPIECE

Ah yes the swan carved from ice The techniques introduced here at the school have farthered the art considerably

Carving from the inside out for example the exaggeration of the exposed neck and the increased sharpness of the beak

By freezing an entire banquet hall we can now make our swans last for months on end This enables the bride and groom to retain the first thrill of coolness almost indefinitely
FOR CLEOPATRA, WHOSE NAME SHOULD NOT BE IN A POEM BECAUSE OF THE ASSOCIATIONS

But it’s not your fault Mother ran off with the American, and what had you to do with being the first born? An old method: name the baby for the disowning grandmother and she’ll forgive. With her Greek legacy and a Southern accent, you practice forgiving alone.

How many times have you listened to: “It’s not really your name!” or explained, No, it’s not Cleo. Taking and discarding names from father, stepfather, and two husbands, you still haven’t found a surname to match. Grandmother knew. Arranging love for you, she beckoned the young man from Athens. Promising dark eyes in great-grandsons, he came. Was it your American half rebelling, affirming the freedom of your winter skin! Or the fear of becoming Greek too soon?

In Montana, I dedicated a poem to you, and ten poets sitting around a table shook their heads, No! The name suggests too much. Consider Shaw, Shakespeare, the legends, Britannica. If you must dedicate, use the initial, or omit the name completely.

My dear “C,” my sister, I strike surnames and each month send a letter east to Cleopatra. With violet ink on yellow paper, you transcribe Louisiana syllables. The mirrors need cleaning, you write. Your hands fly like frightened chickens, scratching at your hair, to mask your face.

Remember the night you woke, hearing Greek music and crept downstairs to watch Grandfather pacing folk dances on the rug. Seeing you peering from the shadows, he motioned you closer and guided you in his steps.

Tonight, after reading this, stand alone in your house and recall those steps. I will stand by you, my hand on your shoulder, and we will dance.

John Vernon

HANDS

I want more from my hands—not what they take but what they can’t take, the fragile things that break to be touched— I want my hands to be too big, to scatter rather than organize things, to smash them to bits instead of fluttering over their surfaces— my clumsy hands, my half completed twin faces, trying to rob the world— for too long they’ve been dwarfs who shrink just to touch something— I want them to live by throwing themselves against the walls— they smell too much of the dictionary, I want them to be thirsty for disorder, and to shake a lot . . . The next time a hand reaches out to touch mine, I want to say give me that, it’s rent even though it’s yours, all I did was nothing and my hands are empty to prove it . . . My hands used to pray too much, they should get caught in a door because they’ll learn they can’t give away the distance between them and things—that’s why they desire so much and waken even before the body like birds opening their wings— perched on the ends of the arms, trailing the arms behind them . . .
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THE INNERMOST ROOM

"I have often thought that the best mode of life for me would be to sit in the innermost room of a spacious locked cellar with my writing things and a lamp." — Franz Kafka, "Letters to Felice"

deep in the mill where the wheels grind awash in time I could penetrate the faraway the last cabin on the road back returning

with smoke down the chimney to three little pigs in sailor suits king of the golden river also the fisherman and the mermaid
to watch water pour off center dragged up in knotted strings so much fear! scales tears also but returning after all

again I would press toward the desert's last teeth mere stumps of mesas old buttes swathed in spacious light

or examining the diurnal azure my skylight's page I'd follow in Persian letters a long tale about the lizard's love

how he grew wings with deliberation fumbling toward flight how the ambivalent wind humiliated the strange scaled thing

but at last gave in to the quest without end

for the wind's home its ruby chalice

returned to my table, I'd dwell on a level with no support inventing exploits against night with one black wing

David Weissman

PRETENSIONS

When the wind comes, explain how trees live on air, dirt and water, how camels survive on sand, workers on grease. You're no saint though you love virtue, and your hard flesh faces the wind as green-bottled wine waits for drinkers, disdaining sunlight as mere history.

The sun has no further names, no escapes. It's borne as housecats endure quiet, sleepers their dreams. If you reveal some hideous secret, it will make friends.

But you relish the deep hours of boredom, small skulls stuck in the mind's craw. You stand among turbulent, empty days, knowing your wife for the storm's eye: more or less damaging but not that serious, unless some rank July they walk off and leave you the noise of your own sweat.

Save the long weather of burial for last. Imagine the plain food you wouldn't mind eating always. If no hunger finds you, what life is better than this, to lie back watching the seeds flower, the seasons pass.
NOSTALGIA

One cold autumn day Tommy Braids
Drank cheap port with old men,
Tommy Braids the Indian, missing many teeth,
Nose bent at knife scar, drank cheap port
In a run-down tavern, saying Grandfather,
Grandfather Bright Rock in a Pool;
But the old men didn't listen
And everybody laughed; all prospectors
Had gone broke years ago.

But Tommy Braids the young buck
Had heard Grandfather Bright Rock in a Pool;
He clutched his wine bottle, his scarred mouth
Wailed at coyote, ice off the swamp
Catches a bullfrog, but the whites didn't listen
And the old men laughed. Tommy was broke
Trading tales for wine, but wine slurred his tale
Until he slept, climbing a rock slide;
His sleep screaming through a bent nose.

One cold April day Tommy Braids
Rose from the corner and drew a map
On a napkin with wine-blistered hand;
Tommy Braids the Indian missing many teeth:
Below the rock slide, a black boulder stopped the creek
And the pool hid his crazy grandfather,
Grandfather Bright Rock and everybody laughed;
Even Tommy laughed and the old men bought port
For Tommy Braids the scarred-mouth Indian.

IMMIGRANT TO CANKOR CANYON

As a rabbit turns to duck beneath brush,
He walked into Cankor Canyon with a fist
Full of secondhand handouts, a bag of beans
A slab of moldy bacon, an old coat,
An ax and shovel picked from junk;
And in Cankor Canyon, a bottom full of swamp,
He discovered his beans would sprout in dirt,
The rock built a wall that held heat,
And tin enough for a roof the wind rattled.

And the wind always blew from a shadow,
From the west cliff hiding the August sun;
He said the wind was right, Cankor Canyon wasn't home,
Too many rabbits and no horizon,
No two story white house tall in a wheat field;
But that was Dakota, the Dakota full of dust
That choked him, that slapped him with hunger:
In Cankor Canyon, he could kill enough rabbits
To eat meat, to cover stones with fur.

And he didn't open his fist, the meadow
Too green, too many beans hanging from poles,
And after the Japs flew half the ocean,
Coming toward his west cliff, to bomb Pearl Harbor,
He went after Japs; always up at dawn
And able to fire from squat. It wasn't bad,
Except for cleaning boots, he'd come back saying,
He'd been to Guam, Guadalcanal, to Okinawa,
He'd been there, fought yellow and almost died.

Certain the only bad that could happen in Cankor Canyon
Would be the winter wind snaking away his roof;
And the wind wasn't bad when he ate rations in mud.
When he slept in rain under a helmet,
He'd remember drops on tin and a dry bed.
The swamp would never be dust, the rabbit
Would never quit, and maybe the beans would go wild:
Hadn't Cankor Canyon, the wind from a shadow,
Stopped the hunger that almost knocked him dead?

But the trail back was road; he'd whipped the Japs
And buldozer had whipped his stone wall,
The west cliff dropped by dynamite,
Boulders broken on rabbits' runs,
And he turned an old man, a fist
Closed on a wine jug, belching dead rabbit
At heels that crossed Cankor Canyon,
Crossed and left asphalt that couldn't grow a bean:
Behind the west cliff there is only blood.

**Naomi Clark**

**FOUND POEM: FIRST LETTER FROM AUNT CAT**

Hi
I guess you're surprise to get this letter.
Think of you often where is your mama
you would not know me I way 137
yes this is your big fat Ant Cat.
    if I could tell you

But to get to that—is this something
colors you never saw
have started loosing 10 lbs a week
bluegill's fin
for no rime or reason
swim round through in
I have some kind of spell
blossoms
I just leave this world
sandstorms ever day but there—plum petals
come to in hospital
wind's all plum petals snow
Been having one a month
feed sack dress all turned to plum blooms
Dr says they got stop or
breath all plum bloom smell
I'll be a vegetable for as long as I live
and the water
so pray for me that they find out what
whirlpool still mirror

it is broke left arm Hon once
scoop a drink
heart back last time
moon in my hands
can't be by self or do no then
    drink moon
take medicine that makes me drunk
swim in the moon
but Dr say its better being out
cloud wind pool moon
Grady is on way to Big Spring Hospital to see
fly up
if he can get something don too for him
I'm the sky
So pray for us
bigger
I love you
than big
Ant Cat

POETRY

NORTHWEST
Herbert Scott  

Two Poems

THE HOMEMAKER

She is climbing into the refrigerator,
putting her fingerprints into the butter,
tasting old onions, sleeping with the leftovers.
She is helping herself, finding the right shelf.
She is firming up like jello, slowing
down, keeping cool, her skin thinning
into pliofilm, her flesh stiffening into steaks.
She is becoming a meal, ready to be eaten.

MEAT

"The counter life of fresh meat is three days."

Two days under fluorescent lights
meat turns grey
as the skin of rats

slate colored steaks
laid out for viewing
like dead fathers

mourners passing
shaking heads, lamenting
the high cost of survival.

The third day
we turn the other cheek,
expose a new side

you only imagined
existed. "They look
so natural," you say.

David St. John

WE ARE ARTISTS.
The flesh glows
health for another day

haloed
by a wreath
of fresh greens.

THIS

after Tadeusz Rożewicz

This is the light, I said.
This is the light, and the day.
The boy looked at me, his face
the color of dust. It's not enough,
he said. You're lying. There's more.

This is the street, I said.
This is the street where people walk,
the street they see from their windows.
It is this one.

He saw a waitress
wetting her lips with her tongue.
Yes, he said. Go on.

This is a house. Someone's home.
There is a fire going, dinner on the table.
There are children waiting: for a father,
a brother back from the war. For a silence
in the keening. For the beds to warm
themselves, in winter.

Never, he said. I don't believe you.
Here; I pointed. A newsman
whose tongue is a rancid almond. A machinist
whose ears drone like sirens. Your own twin,
looking for a street sign. A girl, slipping
her hands under your shirt.

No, he said. Go on.

These are my hands,
that drag a knife through meat,
that stack crates in warehouses, in trucks,
that whisper like thieves in dark offices,
that twist an icepick into your temple,
that hold a woman's face.

Yes. What else.

Nothing else. Or this:
that some days, the letter you wait for comes;
that the light is blowing into the hallway—as
you open the door, and step out.

You're lying, he said. Go on.

John Skoyles

IN MEMORY OF MY VOICE

From this house of drains, no exit.
I kiss the broken mirror, my own bad luck,
and the scars white as erasures.
Finally I've got myself by the throat,
but the voice slipping between my fingers
rehearses its chorus of threats.

That voice rising sleek and pure
costs breath, that voice scorns flesh,
ringing like the cries of some lost miner
I choke myself to smother:
his questions, that endless tone.
Still, it rises
with an anger worse than muscle.

So I handle this voice like a bird,
a razor, or a tiny man,
something to notice in an empty room.
It seems useless, the struggle to connect
with sound in another way than pain.

The voice, fixed in its long drone,
waits to slip out of the body
as a confused ghost, wondering
which was better, the caves, or all this air.
And the mind misses the voice and its tricks,
slowly releases the face
to an expression of great composure,
the mouth left open like a favorite wound.

James McKeen

THE GIFT

Beneath an incomplete set
of World Book Encyclopedias
and two movie magazines
in the corner of Gracie's Junk Store,
Dillon, Montana,
I found
Mrs. Ruth S. Julian's
1898 edition of
A Selection from the
Discourses of Epictetus
in which she had pressed
one hundred and twenty-seven
four leaf clovers.

IN MEMORY OF MY VOICE

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I kiss the broken mirror, my own bad luck,
and the scars white as erasures.
Finally I've got myself by the throat,
but the voice slipping between my fingers
rehearses its chorus of threats.

That voice rising sleek and pure
costs breath, that voice scorns flesh,
Tess Gallagher

BEGIN

All the winds that knew you
turn away. The hill looks up
from your shadow, looks up from the owl
lodged in the hemlock. Hill,
that is a marching under you, hill
that refuses you nothing,
to which you have agreed, to which
your heart thickens
like a root.

There is a memory of snow
where you were but an absence
deeper than memory. Yet the ground
stays with us a while
in your honor. Do not blame us
for speaking, as though this were usual,
as though you were not an opening
in the silence we already begin.

BEGINNING TO SAY NO

is not to offer so much
as a fist, is to walk away firmly
as though you had settled something foolish,
is to wear a tarantula in your buttonhole
yet smile invitingly, unmindful
how your own blood grows toward the irreversible
bite. No, I will not

go with you. No that is not
all right. No I am not your mother, no, nor your sister,
your lover, your sweet dish, your home cooking, good
looking daffodil. Yes is no

Tess Gallagher

Two Poems

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looking daffodil. Yes is no

Fresh bait, fresh bait. The search
for the right hesitation
includes finally
unobstructed waters. Goodbye,
old happy-go-anyhow, old shoe
for any weather. Whose
candelabra are you? Whose soft-guy, nevermind,
nothing-to-lose anthill?

"And," the despised connective, is really an engine
until it is yes all day, until a light is thrown
against a wall with some result. And
there is less doubt, yes or no,
for whatever you have been compelled to say
more than once.

Rich Ives

HERON

The neck is a question
of swallowing whole lives.
Stay calm
in this sliver of slow flight.

Sing like stiff reeds.
Breathe like tide.
Eat what the water hides.
Stand quiet like seed.

When you eat fish you become an ocean.
The moon swallows your breathing.

Tess Gallagher

Two Poems

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Stand quiet like seed.

When you eat fish you become an ocean.
The moon swallows your breathing.
Christine Zawadiwsky  Two Poems

THE HEADLESS HAND

Still there are times I feel cheated!
Is it a clean and fair exchange?
The breasts of a joker, although you won't say it.
Will I wake up some morning with blood
in my thighs? ("I want to cover
the whole side of your face with my hand
and feel the softness.") Deliberate kisses
stained with aged ink. Season's greetings.
Rechargeable laughter. ("Who cares about infinity
when she was so soft?") Through an inferno pressed over
your eyes. ("And she was all red, down below, down there.")
The concentration camps around your face,
eyes like drunken scarecrows
out of season in the snow. Quick penitents
of wrinkled dough. Tracing, under your eyelids,
two dry, defunct oceans. Crucified, a haughty word.
In the pale desert, under a tide of saliva.

"Atlantis!" I cry. (Never "Leprosy!")
"On top of your forehead people will stand
and admire your harbors! From the bulk of your eyebrows!"

"I don't know," you say, flexing a noble
Teddy Roosevelt hand. Red rubber ball.
(You do not understand.) "I don't mind you
not knowing how to cook or to sew, but I don't understand
why you hide in the closet." (Three gunshots of kiss
explode in my ear.) "Why you cut yourself after
our argument. Why you came out and said that
you'd seen a white deer chasing your skin away from
the light." (The crescent moon on your fingernail
slices my tongue. A rich harvest of angry
fruit for the poor.)

"You do not understand," I say.
(At night we make up stories
about fried men who come out of the heater
like Santa Claus, and four-acre beds.
Chimney soot, and the moon.) "My hand
has no house. Only fingerprints. Invisible,
indelible. Of course I can't cook."
(And your eyes shoot like Geritol, like
mercury. The squeak of your jaw. Your head
one small sparrow.)

A Christmas Eve memory
of broken jokers, and bravery.
("Tomorrow, we'll at once go out
and bring in all the bloody sheep again.")
You do not understand. You think, you gasp,
while your headless hand squeezes
the life from my thighs.

IN THE NORTH TEMPERATE ZONE

Consider the summer of 1816, when it snowed and sleeted
through July and August. On Bear Mountain the sky rained grass
and even though it wasn't summer, I froze. We made love
in front of an open refrigerator. You raised your head
and your eyes were filled with snow, your arms forked
branches, your bones a haiku, a landscape of old-fashioned
snowmen.

Milk bottles glinted on the shelf. Somewhere on Everest a freezing
crow cawed. My mouth was a mirror, my limbs were icicles.
The burning bush, the fig tree, a handful of snowballs—but flowers
are food for dying people, and that was the summer we ate
roses. They were well preserved in the early morning frost
and reminded me of candied yams, the blotched petals a mixture
of blood and snow. Consider the lawnmower, lazy, abandoned, its spokes twanging through a junkyard of human flesh. That was the summer the grass was blue. That was the summer that we wore red mittens and tried to sue God for malpractice. Our stomachs were screaming refrigerators, our tongues burned wildly in our heads. Someone to argue with, someone to blame things on, someone to use in one way or another, that was enough to ask of each other, but as we turned into Eskimos our complexions darkened and we wore teeth and furs and never pulled free of the sun's enduring gravity, its winter love. Dreaming of the Sahara and endless rivers, we skated on our imaginary blisters, projected sunburns, unearthed the sidewalk and the sea and shoveled the cold back into our mouths, ate pale roots that avoided the sun. Consider your hands upon my breasts, our total inability to melt into each other, our skins like vanilla ice-cream cones, like dead children fossilized with our love. The metal on the kitchen counter (assorted grinders, knives and forks) will feed us intravenously, bleach us, paralyze us with an exotic variety of leprosy, silence. Like an untouched sheet of unlined paper or a newly fashioned mannequin, if you try to cut open my dark skin (sweet as chocolate, thick as papaya) you will find nothing but more snow. Seriously consider the rest of the year: a blizzard of unreality, sledding on our bones above the barren land, communicating under an avalanche. Skinning our knees was never this good. Indians are lurking in the woods. Consider Africa, Greenland, our new abode: consider us eating each other, unloading the last load.

RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Item: one tea bowl, Japanese oribe of a frozen porridge color its rim marked by three vertical lines terminating in circular scrawls. These may be read as spiders amulets, arrested raindrops plummeting into a deep green glaze whose color suggests if organic, dragonflies if chemical, arsenic.

Item: conus aulicus, reticulated black and white shell of the Philippine tide line. On its curved obsidian sides, a perspective of large and small white cones erupts, an infant mountain range extruded from the obscure sea floor.

Item: on the leathery moss and cream-colored foliage of paphiopedilum concolor a similar pattern recurs, a softened and flutelike canon at the octave; but its bloom, while of an appealing lavender-speckled yellow is sparse, infrequent, and for an orchid, totally insignificant.

Finally on a still-cryptic curl of ghostly gelatin
in a metal can, this snapshot:
framed
by yellowing Royal palms
left
green-shingled Colonial
"ADAMS FUNERAL HOME"
center
low-lying, white, s-curved, voluptuous
"A Morris Lapidus Associates Renovation, HEAVEN"
foreground
the choppy brown canal
one heedless pleasure boat
a third sign:
"WATCH YOUR WAKE."

SURE THING
For Lee

Your father picked a filly from the paddock;
silver, insolent, an early fern
rearing above drab leaves; pliant as grass,
fickle as water, dappled like a stream bed.
Mounted, she was a lethal blue machine.
Sure thing, he said.
Driving through mud at the rail
the dirty wave sucked her under, head over heels
and held her, mauled her, teased her. When she surfaced
riderless, on three legs, the fourth hoof dangled
on its chains of tendon, scattering blood like a censer.
Two men at her bridle, two at her stirrups, she would not
have done with running, but, bearing them all, waltzed
for home until the master rapped three times for silence.

Hers was a short dash and a quick ending.
I can no longer die young; the deepening lines
in my face, my palms, converge in perspective, forming

Duane Niatum

SONGS FROM THE MAKER OF TOTEMS
For Abner Johnson

1.
I offer you the chance to forgive your wounds
That often burned down the longhouse,
And you must never blame the village shaker;
I comfort you because of his dreaming.

See owl settling in the four directions, roosting
In the salmon ceremony of your tribal fires—
Flying back to First People hidden in your feelings,
Easing the weight of morning on your eyelids.

They leave your pride in confusion's cave,
Light your burden with another storm.

2.
Thunderbird because he's buried under bones,
Teeth, and shell; Raven because he can't
See sun reach the crocus beneath the ferns;
Bluejay because so few hear the humor in his laugh,

His praise to the women swimming in the river;
Whale because he's more hunted than haunted,
Seaweed because it is now no more than desert dust.
Beaver because his last dam was a collapsing
Rainbow that sent him off to the stars without
A cedar chip to begin where the water song failed
To hold the second circle in the second shadow.

3.
Wolf is roaming through the forest of your terror;
He can't move until you stop running behind the dead,
The drummers behind the moon. At dawn, he must be
Given the rattle to shake you back to shore.

As it was your ignorance that started this tremor,
Feeding the sharks the procession of hearts,
The stream of suicides diving into white breakers.

**Joeffrey Bartman**

**Two Poems**

**THE TREES DO THIS AND THAT**

The trees do this and that
in the wind, in the white and yellow sun.
They taunt their shadows and go berserk
as sunset unbucks their spines. They seem
about to strangle in the orange-lit evening.
Undressing in the fog or waiting to be
undressed by the smoke from a campfire,
they try to burst the shotglass buried
deep into their centers.
Meandering snows jockey between their limbs.
The trees have worn people to hangings,
ribbons to fairs. Two bluejays don't collide.

The moon blinks, the trees woo,
the flickering stars are ignored, the syrupy
rain occasionally travels over the bark.
The trees have spent lifetimes determining
summer for winter, spring for fall
and barricading night for day.

The trees in the yard, the trees on the corner.
Peaches on a tree, blurred
in the rain, through a window.
The oldest tree in town and the tree
in the park tattooed by lovers. The trees
just planted. The trees on the orphanage lawn.
The trees in the woods. The one tree
we don't know about. The tree that does
or doesn't fall. The branches tangled in
the telephone wires that parallel the highway.

**FROM THE LIPSTICK FACTORY**

In the door and taken for the shift
going off. Well okay and we slap
a fog of dust from our corduroys,

wipe our hands in our hair.
Another set of eyes trades a photo
with another set of eyes. An overwide

mouth howls when it wins at bingo.
A few puckering others kiss sloppily. The girl
is in love with the guy. The girl
is not in love with the guy. Two guys
are in love with the same girl. Another girl
loves somebody else or at least says she does.

A guy loses. A girl wins. Vice versa.
All combinations of the above.
Two girls bicker over the daredevil who said hello.

A girl and a guy whisper that the money's
got to go for snowtires. One waitress in two uniforms
takes up three seats. Three . . . Haloes

of our pink dust dream on the ceiling.
Eyelids and underneath puffed up
like a blouse full of wind. I breathe

**NORTHWEST**
long and short in emergency red. Blow-outs,
air guns and wristwatch alarms.
The jukebox, it revs. Eggs

fry and squeal and hams broil and cry.
A rack of saucepans falls on the griddle
and clangs slowly like a trainwreck telling itself
to a town via snow. Cuddling in houses
embracing mountains, the sleepers
they almost hear.

Wesley McNair

GOING BACK TO FIFTH GRADE

You sit down
close to the floor
losing your height forever.
All along they have been
expecting you. Across the aisle a boy
with thick glasses and
wide underwaater eyes
turns to smile, You become aware
that he is not happy,
that none of them are happy.
The baby-faced girl
with breasts and the bald one
off by the windows who had ringworm
are blaming you
with words you can’t quite
catch. Surely they recall your painting
of the tropical bird
you ask, speaking their names
which you have never forgot.
But things get worse: Someone is questioning
your decision to grow up
in the first place, leaving them here.

The whole class applauds.
Up front, meanwhile, the Penmanship Man
who travels all over the state
writing beautifully
is putting on his coat,
and the teacher is at the blackboard
dotting the i in your name
so hard her flesh jolts.
You are the Person
Who Always Spoils It
For Everyone Else. If you could make
one half-inch margin, you cry, just one
beautiful pink map
of Asia. Outside it is beginning
to rain. When you stay after school
nobody is there.

Michael Magee

THREE POEMS

THE CIRCUS

After we have slapped our thighs
once more, and we laugh quietly
down in the pit of our bellies
there will be tougher acts to follow:
clown-face, white-face, lovers.
We could walk on our hands,
see the big-top go spinning
or rolling over, play dead
for a minute like lions,
lying on our backs, yawning.

With love as our ringmaster
and three rings going at once
who would know what to watch:
our extraordinary juggling act
where I suspend you breathless,
cupped in the palms of my hands,
POEM FOR THE POET STARVING TO DEATH
ON HIS OWN VOCABULARY

I have bitten off the words,
left them cold on my tongue,
without sense or taste,
not even a pinch of salt.

I kept only my bad breath,
starving on this silence,
gnawing the same old bones,
settling for grubs and roots.

But I crave darker meat,
anything I can chew on,
fat, even gristle, the scraps
from someone else's table.

THE LIE

You have told me this truth:
that when we lie asleep
I wake to your cold dreaming,
that when the darkness cracks
even this bed will not hold us,
that we shoulder the night
between our two backs,
and pressed between our palms
is the blood of our children.

That what we love, we fear:
this pulse driving us on
breaching our valley of bones,
the many shapes we become
like shadows torn from evening,
this nest of tangled hair,
the clay of our bodies
wrested from its labor.
I tell you to your teeth,
it is a lie I like hearing.

DIAGNOSIS

Between flesh and the spirit,
who's not torn?
A hairless curate
trails around in me
on rubber soles:
his homilies are fluent
as birch rods.
He trims my wicks.
A notebook in his skirts
lists my offenses
by the ounce.
He calls the shots
all right (let's call him A).
Though there's B, too,
who wants and will not quit.
He's the unstrung Harp
who framed me for
pratfalls. Just hear him,
day and night:
*Kick out the skids!*
ditched on his back
in weeds beside the road.
Oh, he's the nightsweat's
father, I know that,
Will-o'-the-Wisp
dry in the throat,
who nails his warning
flare to my big toe.

Then when his deathbed
pillow's plumped, he's randy
for the candles and the oil.
But A produces chalk,
and, on the clearing
blackboard of B's skull,
describes delicious tits.

B knocks the blocks out then,
goes with his goad
and dams the tilted bucket.
Think of the chicken
and the egg, or
partners in a dancehall
marathon, marrying
each other
through the night.
Think of diastole
and systole,
stick in a barrel
beating good times out.

IN ENVY OF INSTINCT

Earth, air, or water,
which are we natural to?
Running the country
the only way I know how,
I put one foot
before another, where
earlier a deer clicked off
the distance like a caliper.

My heart beats red
as the pouch
of a horny frigatebird.
My lungs are sponges
working for more air.
When I stop,
a metaphor for nonchalance
comes paddling up the creek.

Is it speech and its procrastinations
that separate us
from these lower orders?
Or that backlash of knots
and loops, the ultimate
nervous system? Any wave skimmer
belting along the coast
could go without reason
to Venezuela tomorrow.

Off Jeremy Point the bluefish
hang straight out in midair;
seeing them flexed
over fleeing bait,
my heart stands up
and walks into my throat.

Surely this body's more than just
support for a tangle of untied punchlines,
out-takes from *The Impossible,*
and mash notes from the dead?
Why can’t I have a woman
with breasts like the mourning doves?

And goddam it I’d like
the energy ants save the world with.
To store it drib by drab in undermines
and riddles of wood, no jot too small
from smears and flakes,
from lips of children asleep.
A decimal at a time, to carry off
whole silos, nudging the origin
of species my way.

Kenneth O. Hanson
Four Poems

GOING TO SLEEP AS THE DOGS ARE BARKING

On that day when you wake up
as if for the first time
and find that the woman beside you
is not beautiful, a whore—
your life

the muscles that hold
your eyeballs in place
stretch tight as rubber bands
you keep trying to blink, the skin
touches your cheekbones—
nothing has been overlooked
it is that kind of day

tears start
the vision is dazzling
he loves me
very much he loves me
very much

SAYING YES, SAYING NO

What amazement it is
to be living
only someone
from a village could
be so amazed
I gaze
at the blue sky
thinking of verities
what brain power
direct
sunlight
always
does this to me
I blink like a star
struck mole
I break
into song O sweet
Greek morning my voice
is like metal
like crystal like glass
I feel like
the ocean floor
profound
I’m patient as a stone
I know my place
let the rest
think clever
spellbound
numb
Nights
in the Gardens of Spain I say
hello to the world with my eyes

NORTHWEST
ALCYONE

Sitting in the sun by the blasted tree
I say yes to begin with
like old times.

The leaves hang down
hang down from branches
air between
like the delicate bones of fish.

Across the square
from levels of a balcony
last night's warm sheets
are cooling in the breeze.

The woman yawns
and stretches, leaning on the railing
looking rich.

So much to see
so much to find
no need to hurry.

She is open to suggestion
like the tree.
Nobody makes the first move.

"SUDDENLY, ALL" SONG

Because it is spring
she is washing the window
like rain, washing
the leaves of the tall
eucalyptus
I love you

The days
are all turning themselves

into weeks, if you ask
at the very beginning
how, you will miss
the beginning
I love you

Suddenly, all
the workers in buildings
have dreams in the sunlight
today
they are dreaming the first part
tomorrow the second
I love you

It is too late now
to go back and be strangers
all the corpuscles join
like a true majority
singing
Yes sir she's my baby
the real thing

Too late to remember
the way it was
from the very beginning
sun
on your head like a hat
in August, sun
on your back like a hand

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