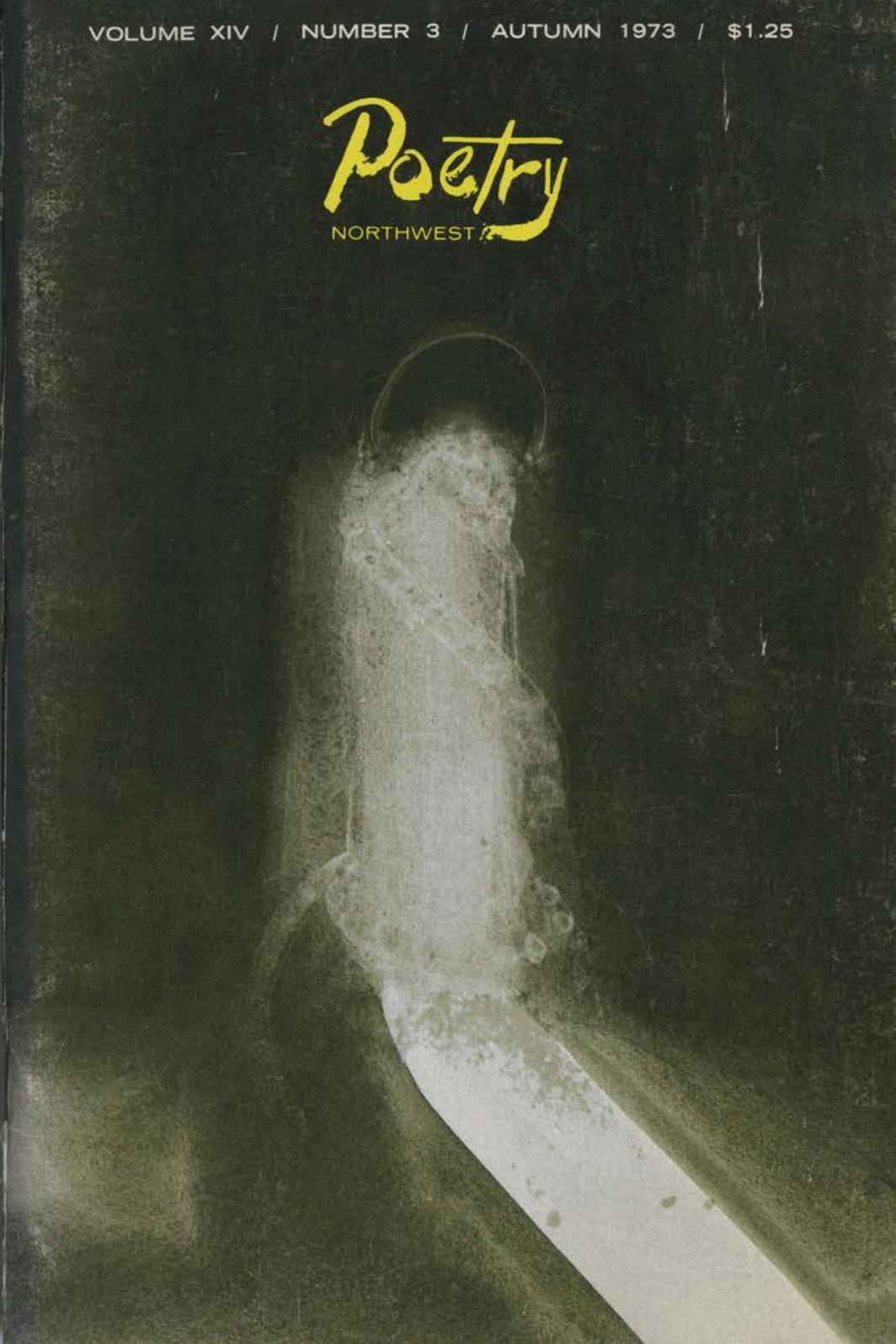


VOLUME XIV / NUMBER 3 / AUTUMN 1973 / \$1.25

# Poetry

NORTHWEST



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# POETRY NORTHWEST

VOLUME FOURTEEN

NUMBER THREE

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AUTUMN 1973

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POETRY NORTHWEST

AUTUMN 1973

*Adrien Stoutenburg* Two Poems

MIDNIGHT SAVING TIME

How to deal with these hours,  
 alone, under the ceiling's black canopy  
 while the clock multiplies its two fingers  
 into ten, eleven, twelve,  
 cracks its knuckles at midnight,  
 builds an exclamation point,  
 then starts all over again?

I have counted footsteps, doorways, stars,  
 my own heartbeat, my knotted breath,  
 invented puzzles that might lead  
 toward better dreams. But the window flaps  
 with siren calls, and the fire escape  
 (it leads directly down to hell)  
 is soft with cats—huge, grizzled males—  
 that cry like babies in the dark,  
 then spark with lust.

My pillow smells of smoke,  
 skin lotions, gin, and something wilder,  
 almost out of time,  
 as when some other anxious head, on rock  
 or weeds, rolled in a vision  
 of a world being born  
 out of an animal stink and splendor:  
 invented an upright spine,  
 and walked this way  
 and to this room  
 to stand in his primordial hair,  
 hand grasping mine.

Cousin, your cave was better than you knew.  
Except for you, we might have stayed  
beyond the mind's chill blast,  
the wheel's hot, greasy stride,  
scratching our fleas  
but wrapped in snores  
beside a warm, exhausted mate,  
our only clock a waterfall or gonging moon.

I await, awake, the gadgetries of day—  
the percolator plugged into my veins,  
the toaster clicking with my borrowed nerves,  
and then the traffic's grinding games,  
my blood a pawn, all hours blown  
down office shafts and streets and bars  
until, again, the pitch and pall of night.

You with your shaggy eye and reach  
would have saved at least some bone from this.  
I munch on air, not knowing how to use  
either my darkness or my light.

#### MESSAGE

Something has caught in my throat,  
neither frog nor bone,  
more like a fork  
that tastes of alum,  
or a stone that has lived in fire,  
possibly a jewel  
(a ruby's red glass furnace),  
perhaps a diamond, unpolished  
(white eye in darkness),  
or simply my own breath  
grown jagged,  
trapped between speech and silence.

There is no surgeon for this,  
or not one near enough

this high-pitched place  
whirled round by mountains  
and the wind's unfettered voice.

I shall learn sign language  
but even then the stone  
or fork or fire, desire's impediment,  
will make my hands stutter.

Consider this when next I call  
or try to signal  
across mesas, thunder, gulfs,  
and the garrulous crosses  
of telephone poles.

Evening might be the best time,  
when I am a silhouette—  
or some deep morning  
when, in stillness,  
you could catch the beat—  
the clear and strenuous tone—  
of that fixed voice  
where my heart swings  
in its round perch,  
alone, yet not alone.

*Philip Legler*

Four Poems

#### HARDLY NOTICEABLE

It is a tiny death  
not read in the obits  
or seen on the morning news—  
no corpse at the funeral home.

I have known it before  
where it hides deep in the head,  
a huge blood clot at work.

How it cramps and shrinks the hand  
that touched your hand last week  
when fingers sang like a choir,  
a stub without a voice.

Incoherent as love  
it speaks from time to time  
kept alive for awhile  
like my mother, a vegetable.

Even the way it says  
to the heart inside the chest:  
no one can hear you now.

Only seven days ago  
it was freed of fear, of pain,  
like a man discharged from a hospital  
who doesn't need a pacemaker.

Only seven days ago  
when you found its pulse once more,  
applying electric shock.

Now it has happened again,  
a setback like a stroke.  
The doctor can't be found.

The hand lies, paralyzed,  
and whatever singing there was  
the fingers can't remember.  
It slobbers in its bib.

Like the old and sick shut away  
in expensive nursing homes,  
hardly noticeable to anyone  
it is a tiny death.

## SHAKEDOWN

*for John Ketzner, No. 119069*

1

Do you realize, John,  
they will not let this poem in,  
will not let you read it.

Imagine what that means.  
What if our words got through?  
What if this poem went through  
each cellblock like a knife  
I'd smuggle in, in my shoe,  
and if you were George Jackson  
you'd stash away in your Afro  
the way he did a gun,  
passed from one man to another,  
home-made, a little at a time,  
worked at in the dark, alone,  
from cell to cell  
all the way to the rag shop  
and back across the yard,  
even to F Block.

What if each word were a knife  
and all the words got in?

2

Meanwhile back at the office  
Warden and Deputy Warden  
hold a secret conference  
from which the local press  
and five downstate reporters  
have been barred.  
Warden is speaking:  
"Deputy, put the Riot Squad  
on Stand-by, then shake down  
every inmate and every cell  
until the poem is found."

I can imagine it,  
blades being passed along,  
whispering out in the yard,  
a gun tower opening up,  
firing the warning shots:  
"Next son-a-bitch moves is dead."

I don't know how they go about  
such things; but picture it,  
every man being frisked.  
You'd tell me all the rumors  
going around: "They say  
whoever's got it, got it  
stuck up his ass," or  
"C Block says the prison  
doctor's checking  
everybody's mouth—  
for cavities." And "The Jews  
in here have been passed over."

Do they really think we plan  
some sort of an escape,  
the letters that we write  
worded, like Braille, in code?  
Poems are written in code  
they'll never break.

3

But it's not that way,  
this is the way it is—  
they will not let our poem in,  
will not let you read it.  
I've thought about hijacking  
the National Guard whirlybird;  
I could fly in, low,  
dropping leaflets over the yard,  
SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL POET,  
one of them tied to a stone.  
But they'd shoot me down  
or you'd get hit in the head.

So I've come out today  
have come today to visit you.  
Inside the first gate,  
inside the second gate,  
we sit together conspiring  
what they can't decipher,  
even if the room is bugged,  
even if a dozen microphones  
tape our conversations,  
even if they've planted a bug  
stuck to my pants somewhere.  
Maybe when I'm let in  
I should frisk myself.

4

We've masterminded a plot  
but it hasn't taken a year,  
it doesn't need a map  
or guns or hostages  
although it does require  
a certain man inside.

Here in the visitors' room  
while the guards watch,  
while the pop machine clicks  
and children play with toys  
and a young black inmate thinks  
"If only there was a room  
where she and I could go,"  
I say the poem for you  
they will not let you have.

5

When we leave, you stand  
behind the third gate,  
but before you are gone,  
before you disappear  
through the door  
into your sentence again  
to wait your turn in line,

to walk into some antiseptic room  
in the hospital wing  
where you must strip  
for them, where you  
must stand naked before them,  
you stand there  
signaling back to me,  
smiling, speechless,  
with empty hands,  
with nothing on you,  
without knives.

TURNING FORTY-FIVE, AFTER DRINKS AND DIRTY JOKES  
AND TALK OF WOMEN, I FALL ASLEEP BY THE FIRE AND  
HAVE A VISION

The hush of this place,  
night's snowfall,  
tracks, ruts gone now.

The wind stops, a signal.  
I know you are here  
waiting for me, a young girl  
I'd lie down into.

O my snow angel,  
I would walk toward you,  
snowshoeing, awkward at first,  
into the woods.

First steps again.

I WAS BORN TODAY: TODAY IS MY BIRTHDAY

It didn't happen  
at once; I wasn't born  
out of my mother's  
womb. Alive, I  
was dead, middle-aged and

dead. I'd imagined  
a winter forever,  
nothing but dark snow  
forever, ice  
age of the dead, nothing

planted or growing,  
and no buds, shoots breaking  
through, no rain or sun-  
light either. But  
your touch changed all of that,

a new season: snow  
is melting, days turn mild,  
geese take their flyways,  
the warm weather  
shortly. And now I feel

something of our earth's  
contractions and I hear  
my voice cry into  
the wind. Dying,  
I am born into you.

*James Grabill*

Four Poems

THE NEXT KEY

In the tunnel of doors I stopped for  
The wind was carrying the next key  
Of black light swinging on the chain  
Of each breath  
Locking this way  
Locking back  
Locking us into our hope

And the steady drone from horns of mud  
Forming underground said

There is nothing we can do  
There is nothing now  
The next key is gathering in the squirrel's mouth  
It is passing sleekly down the cat's tooth

It is like something moving  
Through each tree  
It makes you wonder  
In the meantime  
It makes you

Sorrow-  
ful

#### THE OPENING OF HER HEART

The moon's fountains  
Continue to leap  
And fall in their coffins

All the constellations  
Plunge like starfish  
Through the ocean's breasts

There are spiny hands  
Pressing in double gravity  
Thick on the bottom

The dark flames  
Which are walls  
Around her heart

Hang with the weight  
Of starfish  
Low into earth

Bulge against the needle-  
Points of stars  
Into the skies

#### SOME INSTRUCTIONS

Travel in the night.

Live in the house of wind.  
Go where your love  
Goes.

Never come back.

In wet light  
Know yourself  
Moving smoothly.

Go where you  
Go.

Walk your love down the street.  
Let the gasoline burn forever.

See what you want to see.  
See what your love sees.

Let the death-whistles pass  
Overhead like silver  
Crucifixes.

Don't see  
What you don't see.

Listen—  
The others might not see  
Your love.

Turn around.

In a day  
See twenty beautiful women.

## SATURDAY

morning the mountain  
 opens slowly like the fist of an old town  
 drunk, quivering.  
 here in the palms of another life  
 the fingernails have dug wounds  
 against the dark.  
 my second day almost bleeds.

I have just traced the difficult blue  
 waters of my wrist this far  
 north to this, your place.  
 you take me in. we meet. we forget  
 our travels, drink coffee.  
 listen carefully I am here  
 and happy  
 yet somehow always when I leave  
 you are saying goodbye from another room, your eyes  
 another way.

## ONE WAY

sometimes your old life packs up  
 her torn clothes and moves  
 on: there is nothing to do  
 but watch her small face become smaller  
 her voice softer  
 her weather darker, colder.

sometimes there is an old kerosene lantern  
 that shines in the eyes of the wild  
 animals that lived long ago.  
 this is one way: there are others.  
 sometimes you must bend to the earth and listen  
 to your life listening to another.  
 each silence you share is a home you have passed by.

## MYSTERY

Quis? Quid? Ubi? Quibus  
 auxiliis? Cur? Quomodo?  
 Quando?  
 Who did the deed? What was it?  
 Where was it done? With what?  
 Why was it done? And how done?  
 When was it done?

Who was it walked into the pond  
 at the east bank and out at the west,  
 leaving faint tracks on  
 the sand, and broken reeds?

Did the bloody trail in the woods  
 lead anywhere, or vanish?

Why was the newborn infant left  
 on our doorstep?

Who lost the wedding-ring? Was the key  
 we found hidden among mosses  
 a clue, or red-herring?

What was the message scrawled  
 with charred wood on the wall? Was it  
 in our alphabet or in letters unknown?

Why do our children wake up with tears on their cheeks?

Who placed the glove on the hedge?  
 Who lost the ivory button?

What hand turned the earth  
 in the garden, exposing bones,  
 and whose bones are they? How long  
 have they moldered there, fleshless?

Where is the weapon? *Has* there  
been a murder? Who is the author  
of these strange deeds? Who will solve them?

We wash our hands continually,  
and crave drinks of water.

On cold winter evenings, an unfinished book  
in our laps, we ponder these riddles.

On hot summer mornings we stare at the lake  
where an empty rowboat slowly floats toward us.

#### A SNOWY GROUND

I sit in my car sobbing, wild with despair.  
The car, after its long plunge downhill,

crushed immovable against the low stone wall,  
will never run again. And I, I am ruined,

my life like my car's broken, the pieces strewn.  
I climb out and walk aimless across the snow.

There is nothing in this flat landscape for comfort,  
no tree, no house, nothing human, familiar;

when I sense at my feet movement, a soundless stirring,  
and, looking down, I see the whiteness part.

A face, a woman's face with a crown above it,  
stares up at me, her features cameo

but living, whiter than the ground.  
Her icy lips are curled in a smile

not of pity, but derision. Her perfect  
oval eyes flick across mine. And while

she regards me though she utters nothing,  
more clearly than the pealing of a bell,

I hear, "You fool. You wretched fool!"  
ring out in the still air.

Then why does joy, joy fill my body,  
a gradual flush rising like poured wine

in the chilled and brittle vessel I'd become?  
Why does warmth fill my body whole?

And overflow. And overflow.

#### *Diana O Hebir*

#### SUMMONED

Summoned by the frantic powers  
Of total recall, sleeping pills, love;  
Come down, come down, come down;  
Wear red if you can, wear red  
For suffering, jade for rebirth,  
Diamonds in your front incisors,  
A rope of orange stars—you were martyred, weren't you?  
So wear a circle of gold thorns, prongs capped  
In scarlet shell.

And bring with you, down, down, down,  
A recollection of how you fell  
Like Lucifer, morn to morn and night to night  
For at least a year, your hair alight  
Your rigid corpse a spoked wheel  
Meteor trails ejecting from each thumb,  
Sun eyes, a black light in your chest  
Where the bare heart burned.

Oh, love, my love, my failure,  
I can hardly bear, barely recall  
The nights I ate ghosts, the nights  
My shuttered, shivered window held  
Three million savage stars and you;  
Your spread arms splitting my sky, the light  
Reflected in my own eye: your light, your might, your burn.

Come down. My sky-chart shows  
Your cold corpse turning slowly, a black sun  
Giving no light at all, reflecting none,  
Aimlessly gentle, like a twig on a pond  
Circling. Gone, they say, gone, truly gone.  
The eyes as blank as buttons, the mouth  
Only an O. Never mind. Come down.  
I can revive you. My passion is Judah, all artifice, all God.  
I care with my breasts. I care with my belly's blood.  
Come down.

*Robert Hudzik*

#### THE ANIMALS WITHIN

The undefined animals of our lives  
are gathering forces underground,  
each one donning the colors of surprise  
for the time they rise within us

into light: into the way the feet  
move in stride when the earth shifts,  
pumping, along the line of the leg  
and up the spine to the heart,

beating like a bird, in flight  
to the brain, shooting off the top  
of the head like a star  
into a constellation of animals.

*Paula Rankin*

Two Poems

#### IN THE WARD OF PROLONGED CARE

Beyond these windows men are dying fast,  
while here tubes plug men into the system  
of pulse and spare time mapped between  
each stroke and false alarm. Each man  
has had enough time to have turned Buddhist,  
guru, Adam, or Moses checking slabs  
for comma splices.

I too am plugged into a system  
which pulses me to be prepared,  
and I will be, if spared these months  
of second-guessing, with my head wired  
to outstare a ceiling, while blood strings  
someone else's veins and mine throb  
in full recognition of the loan.

#### PENTECOSTS

We're told the Apostles  
on that day  
bloomed swirls of fire  
like lit junipers  
right out of their brains.  
Because we cannot imagine a man,  
much less twelve, on fire  
and happy about it  
we take this story with a grain of salt  
which under microscope would show up  
as many grains of envy.

Under microscope envy would be  
broken down into tiny mirrors  
that reflect us, rubbing sticks  
to spark any number of flames,  
using our heads like match-ends

to strike dialogues between ourselves  
and all we cannot reach by word of mouth—  
the dog warming his bones in the sun,  
the cricket with so much to say  
and no one to translate,  
the sounds of trees growing at night,  
and each other: the unspoken under microscope  
looping the body's limbs to the brain,  
a constant simmering brushfire  
that keeps us going  
as long as there's something to burn.

Under microscope  
all the cells want in.  
They all want to burn  
and be happy about it.

*Robert Wallace*

Three Poems

#### DIRECTIONS FOR NOT HAVING FAITH

Choose a maple wing,  
dry and gray if you prefer.

Holding it between thumb and forefinger,  
with the other thumbnail  
split  
the casing.

You will find,  
delicate as spring green,  
folded,  
miniature,  
life waiting to unfurl  
and start its journey toward the sun.

You have ruined it.

#### AT THE CORNER

The stoplight goes on changing its mind  
above the street  
all night,  
though no one comes or goes.

Green, then red, under stars  
or in snow;  
red, green,  
leaves, a rose,  
along whose slender root light  
travels miles underground.

#### DETAIL OF A SCENE (II)

Cop  
on a stalk,  
balloon, blood-red moon, wheel  
squared, legal  
ball

all  
corners. Eye,  
statue, statute, snowstorms'  
rose, high know-  
no.

O  
red doubter,  
mad, monocled moral-  
ist, mirror  
for

pur-  
itans. Tall  
octagonal poppy,  
lollypop:  
STOP.

ALEXANDER: 5

Our father who is Alcan  
hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom has come  
in Kitimat, as in Jamaica.  
Give us this day our daily bread  
and forgive us our union  
as we forgive you our sweat  
out of which you have your power.  
Lead us not into layoffs  
but deliver us from unemployment  
for this is the kingdom  
the wealth, the mastery over us  
for all the future there is.

Amen.

ALEXANDER: 6

Father of unemployment  
father of drift  
of pounding sidewalks, employment office  
a day in the Park

Companion of beer  
of dim afternoons in the half-empty  
beer parlors  
urinal, peanuts, and glass

Uncle of steady work  
of The Company, seniority  
pension.  
Uncle of life:

as the word *pain*  
doesn't hold it

—as what it means escapes through the letters—  
so nothing in my poem will touch

what you are, what it is to be you  
uncle  
that you didn't ask for  
that you became

*Kinereth Gensler*

ENGLISH IS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

English is a foreign language I was born speaking,  
a place I live in, like my house

and, like it, foreign to my waking feet  
that slide to the edge of morning without knowing

what floor they'll touch—which house,  
what hemisphere. Or if the floor will tilt

and they again will find themselves on deck,  
waiting for winches to lower the lifeboat.

The one sure speech I know is born of water.  
It comes in answer to foghorns, sirens, bells—

vibrations that a foot responds to.  
It is the sound of total breath released

when, poised above stopped engines, one first hears  
the pumps take hold.

I wake each morning as I woke then,  
speaking the language of the new undrowned.

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when, poised above stopped engines, one first hears  
the pumps take hold.

I wake each morning as I woke then,  
speaking the language of the new undrowned.

THE VISION OF NOAH'S WIFE

Noah's eyes had misted over,  
each day he brought us less  
food, at home in the emptiness,  
he was growing gills.

the sea still stunk  
with corpses, but for me  
the ark did not float on water,  
it moved on human backs.

they carried the boat,  
the air was salty with their sweat  
and they all had my face,  
chanting below me

Mother, a sea of bodies  
all coming from my belly—  
from me,  
from me.

A CIRCULAR DEATH

I hear my brother's death again tonight  
carried to me by a wind from the highway  
the screaming brakes the crash the siren  
sung by mouths which stink of accidents  
exhaust and aluminum flowing between their teeth  
they know the story in the post office the bakery  
a mountain road a nice boy a swerve to the right  
the left the parts which do not make up  
what he was nor do I find him  
in his photographs his closet  
gone and still he keeps on dying

I hear his mind close again and again  
like a screen door  
letting the wind through

Gordon Osing

THE CATFISH

Dusk, the trees and brush around the shore,  
The dank air over the pond, hoot owls,  
And unseen jitters across the shadows  
Were all around us, cluttered, like a language.  
We rowed along the trot line saying nothing.  
I reached ahead of the bow to be the first  
To the mystery tugging our sunken line.

And see me there, after we'd lifted the thing  
Fluttering into the boat, noting with the others  
The wit of the hook, the torn mouth,  
And kneeling in the bottom of the boat,  
Holding with both hands, even leaning on,  
This two pound cat, like Europe clutching Asia  
In an old *Times* cartoon.

They talked me out of fearing his dull croaking,  
His twitching head and distended fins.  
I made him fit my hand and put him head down  
Into our old blue, speckled coffee pot.  
While we rowed toward the car he thrashed and died  
Ingloriously vertical. By candlelight  
I slit him into the spring,

And held him up to the light, turning him slowly.  
He was slipping along the bottom, his whiskers alive,  
His eyes as murky as his movements curved.  
And he was all sleek, his belly a white sheen,  
His head amazed.

## THE MOTH-HAND

Bruised and white,  
 the moth-hand flutters toward the light-  
 switch, transparent as gauze.  
 Immune to my critical eye, it has no shame,  
 is what it is,  
 seems to have no memory of what it was.  
 I cannot say the same.

I cannot believe  
 that the hand can gather its strength to move  
 after all it's been through.  
 I watch it as one would watch  
 a crippled war hero stripping in public,  
 trying pathetically to recapture attention  
 the only way he knows how.

I think of the hand's women,  
 of its features memorized line by line,  
 its fingers lingering along the lips  
 of a mouth half open, half closed,  
 or separating the soft chambers of love.  
 I remember when its every movement seemed  
 quick or angry or emphatic or furtive.

Now we are like lovers  
 who have quarreled—not once but over and over  
 until the issue is impossible to distinguish.  
 I try to think what it might mean.  
 But the light clicks off, and the moth-hand  
 glows for a long moment,  
 sizzling in its one wish.

## THE MAGICIAN

*for an uncle, drowned at sea*

I remember you at the bathroom mirror  
 practicing sleight-of-hand,  
 trying to master all the angles  
 like a guilty husband.

Or I think of the time you nearly drowned  
 at Wilderness. My father  
 pumped your chest long past necessity  
 and a crowd gathered

and I was sure your breath was a toy  
 no tears could buy.  
 But you came back, a regular  
 Houdini.

By now you are an accepted fact,  
 even to the fish. Dead,  
 you are as unastonishing  
 as love that has outworn its need.

It will do no good to toss in your sleep  
 accumulating patter.  
 Because, uncle, there is no crowd.  
 And it does not matter

that death has taught you to hold your breath  
 for years at a turn.  
 It is a trick  
 anyone can learn.



Diggers of gristly sea worms, the lobstermen.  
Women who tie their hair in scarfs  
And sit all day in straight-backed wooden chairs,  
Shucking the salt-quick life from raw clams.  
We wind along the sea from nowhere, to the bridge

And the photograph. Oil  
Ticks away from New Haven, off this page  
And under the bridge. Darkening  
The mirror of the sea,  
Something begins to rise and plainly face us.

*Ross Talarico*

POEM FOR ALL LANGUAGES

The microphone left in the forest  
Picks up no sound  
Of the men who pass  
On their way to the bare signpost  
That points home.  
Trying to follow you, whoever you are,  
I find no footprints,  
No markings in the barks of trees,  
Only the smoking remains  
Of a small fire.  
Lost, I recite now,  
Only to myself,  
The names I have given  
To the beautiful shapeless forms  
From which this language has appeared.  
If you happen to hear them,  
Speak them slowly;  
Between my voice and your ear  
We are standing,  
Both asking directions,  
Both with no place to go.

*Judith McCombs*

THE MAN

See, a small space in the woods,  
green overgrown with green,  
shadows trees brush entangled  
At the edge of the clearing a man  
a white man, middle-aged, aging  
just his face stands out in the dimness  
"dominion over every living thing"  
a hunter's jacket, hunter's cap  
He lifts the spear of his rifle barrel  
aims  
with cold, hard, arthritic hands  
16 years on the line, finally made foreman,  
finally inspector, finally retired  
The cold, square, aging jaws of the man  
are barely flushed, a tingle of fear  
or pleasure as he aims

diagonally across the clearing  
into the black furry mass of the bear  
She sits on her haunches, back to a stump,  
an ancient, massive, dog-nosed brute  
pawing the dogs  
who yap & skitter away  
(My mother's mother, huge in her dress,  
sits in the creek, swatting the water & laughing)  
She is warm, stupid; she smells of bear  
an abundance of flesh, stumpy limbs,  
stone of a head & little pig eyes  
teats where she rears, in the black close fur  
She smells like my mother/my mother's mother  
she does not understand  
she won't get away

The man with the rifle aiming  
confers with the other shadowy men  
ranging the edge of the clearing



She says they say hippies have moved into abandoned houses, and Indians live down the street.

I want to say that life is sweet, love is strong;  
man fights to save his life; man also kills  
to win his heart's desire: that is love.  
Death is mighty bad.  
Death will come soon enough.

*William Meissner*

#### THE LAST STORY OF THE SIGHTLESS MAN'S HANDS

Can they be that old already?  
They never were too far from me, there  
at the ends of my arms, always warm, always gnawing.  
They can't be dying yet.

They have felt the muscles  
in a tree's bark, they have tasted  
salt for me. They have felt  
the pores in your face open and close.

And they have discovered the texture  
of my own face, with its knobs pushing out here,  
its empty places there. Through them I have come  
to know who I am.

And now their skin has thickened  
with years. They press  
against your eyelids once more;  
all they hope for is a touch of snow at the edge  
of the ice. Yes, my ten children. My  
fingers are going blind.

*Jack Flavin*

#### EXORCISING THE BEAST

You may smoke if you wish  
or recline at your ease  
But face him at all times  
especially as he is being fed  
You may well become the object of his search  
Go upright as the apes do if you wish  
or when *Ursus* ascends  
proceed with flat steps planted  
in the manner of the bear  
If your pawprints lead to where the rosehips are  
it is enough

In darkness it is infrared rays that betray the mouse  
The cat's high sensitivity to heat  
You need not see You need not even move  
The space between you is a field of force  
The current binds you each to each  
For each of you is what the other seeks

*Brendan Galvin*

Three Poems

#### BELL'S GROVE

I.  
Bell won't see it. Just like he'd never seen  
Miami Beach, so sold this place I used to climb in

trying to reach a high green star or dream back  
to the last wolf in the territory.

He said, "We don't amount to a piss-hole in the snow,"  
and claimed to hoe a little fog on winter mornings.

Brim down and collar up, he made some of the paths  
I used to follow. All over town

they wound like life lines on his hands,  
around bases of hogbacks, picking up and dropping

the double sand track of the Old King's Highway.  
A peeping tom, some said, that's why he kept off roads.

Bell's gone to Florida, so he won't see  
the oil derrick offshore like Triton's middle finger.

## II.

He built his place alone, tarred trunks I skinned  
with a dull hatchet, and kicked the traps I set

lopsided. Behind his Hen Hop Inn  
he'd scrape and paint a double-ended dory

white and clean-lined as the church  
he swore that only Death would catch him dead in.

He's far enough not to hear the seventeen-year locust  
of the chainsaw. Far enough so I can't blame him.

## III.

Who do I blame? My aunts, who could have had this grove  
for sixty dollars, but wouldn't go a snicker

over forty-five? The realtor who says sound rises,  
that these cheeseboxes are the logical extension

of the saltbox? Town Fathers who believe it?  
Where is the sparrow Bell named Blue, who took seeds

off his palm? Blueberries retire around the swamp  
dredged for tame fish, and Bell's coop tinted silver

lines the inside of a piano bar. He's gone  
to Florida and up three lanes Florida comes here.

## ANSWERING A QUESTIONNAIRE, "ON LIVING WITH AN ARTIST," SENT TO MY WIFE

Our marital status is Married,  
and we are Living Together, too,  
not the first time for such an arrangement.  
Strangely, these kids live with us,  
hence this litter, the room of a crank  
who collects and tears up the news,  
these playpen and knapsack detours,  
brine shrimp swimming in glasses  
we drink out of to our peril,  
and a pissy-pants Electra dragging me off this page.  
(Each of her steps is a nail hammered home, another  
gray hair, clothes flung to her suitcase's maw  
and an open door.)

Oh Yes, we'd do it again. I would, in spite  
I'm so happy sometimes it's scary.  
I worry my heart will unstring  
and sail off like a kite. I think  
only heavy payments are keeping me on the ground.  
Love, friendship, stability, security,  
encouragement, nerves of steel  
and a strong mailbox, not always in that order.

We make the time, though unlike when love  
was illegal entry and we forged our way  
past *deja vu* of lobbies,  
the landlady gets her knowing twitch  
and calls my love to coffee,  
or boneless, black-and-white men  
with briefcases and Bibles (humorless angels  
or F.B.I.?) appear at the front door.

Students take my picture, but aside  
from Church, State, and Big Business, I haven't been  
the target of predators, and Yes,  
I'm interested in daily life,  
but not, I would guess, overly. Sometimes

I fall so deep between words  
she has to call me back, although since  
she handles the finances I'm as often  
on the sidewalk without a dime to call home.  
We talk them out, and you've just started one:  
she says we argue least about the consistency  
of peanut butter, I say it's over  
the state of veterinary medicine.

It's all subject to circumstance, some  
find it hard not to marry. But generally  
your questionnaire implies that artists are  
abnormal. Let me say in closing  
I lied: I didn't show this to her.  
Contortions of Yes and No are for 3 a.m.  
We both sleep soundly.

#### FALLING AWAY

Hereditary lack of grace first set me tripping  
on a procession of black habits.  
At nine I envied Cousin Max  
coming back from the rail,  
looking like he'd been force-fed twenty halos,  
beads binding his hands, Christ's masochist.

In high school theology, I coveted the life  
of the man who thought too much,  
condemned to circle the earth  
on a tramp steamer. Though lovers  
were spitted like shishkebabs  
in passion-pit hotels, it was hard  
to leave room between Joanie and me,  
making the Holy Ghost a partner in our waltz,  
and mooning in my own pines  
while limp guys prayed for sainthood,  
I wrestled with an angel I'd composed  
from selected female parts  
of American Bandstand.

In our house the family that prayed together  
asked for jobs, though once  
I petitioned that Nicky the Noise  
not break the legs of the father of a girl  
who later married a self-declared hedonist.

Pride kept correcting monsignor's Sunday grammar;  
one Friday there was only a chicken leg  
between me and the abyss.

But officially I spilled out through a nave  
cracked by translations set to a guitar,  
and learned from a secular plot  
what all carpenters know: you're free  
to tear down mistakes and make them over.

*Paul Zimmer*

Two Poems

#### CECIL SLIDING AWAY

I am old Cecil under the bridge,  
sweating like concrete; my many shirts  
peel off in annual rings.  
I sleep beneath traffic.  
All day the brown dirt rolls in from  
the road and the ancient fulcrums groan.  
The bridge is between the sky and me,  
the full moon rises through its span.  
All that I own is under this bridge:  
pale weeds, shale, bits of broken glass,  
arches and cantilevers growing dim,  
and the great brown river slopping past.  
My right foot sleeps in this current,  
my left shoe is sucked into mud.

There is only one knowledge: It is rain  
touching everything at once. First,  
the faint groaning inward, sagging of air,

then the small whips begin to flatten  
across the hollow trunks of thunder,  
the lightning firing branch through branch.  
Even under the bridge my fingers extend  
in rain, trees lean and clods dissolve,  
weeds hang on, mosses fuse, all things bend  
to the sound of rain and sink toward the river.

And so do I, feel the claims of the water,  
watch everything pass in the river:  
car, potty, son, dog, cat, fence, house.  
I put both feet in the current, slip into  
the brown water, wait for passage also.

In the river I am soft; my body is  
eel grass pointing to vague places;  
all I can see are the whites of my eyes.  
I turn and turn my own circles,  
fearing heavy objects, the suddenly  
violent rocks and planks, slap and  
tangle of shoreline branches. My lungs  
burn away with memories in water.

And I recall first of all festivals:  
How I lost my hat in the celebrations,  
dancing in the milky stubs of harvest;  
how I lost my head as well. We flowed in  
jubilation, struck our sticks together,  
repeated the names of our pride  
and rejoiced in where we had been.

I remember walks in the woods with Zimmer.  
While the great elms wept and collapsed  
In their pith, unable to hang on,  
we seeped like protoplasm into trees.  
Surprised by the chestnuts in their pods,  
we ran our thumbs into the damp cushions  
where the nuts had been, felt the knowledge  
of the tree, how it remembered the long drop  
from the branches.

Now cell by cell  
comes winter; ripeness collapses in the needles  
of the frost, the birds have left  
their vacuum, the leaves make decisions,  
curl in about the fruit then drop.  
Everything bends to this cold water,  
the bridge is bobbing in the distance.  
I rise and fall with bitter debris.

### ZIMMER LOATHING THE GENTRY

Their faces are like fine watches  
Insinuating jewels.  
Their movements can buy or sell you.  
When the legs of the gentry dance for charity,  
Meat splashes in the soups of the poor.  
The eyes of the gentry are polished and blown,  
When they look at you, you are worthless.  
The gentry protect their names like hymens,  
They suck their names like thumbs,  
But they sign their names and something happens.  
While, Zimmer, I can write, Zimmer,  
All day, and nothing happens.

*Gwen Head*

Three Poems

### DEATH AND THE MAIDEN

The irises we bought  
to gentle the coming  
of unwelcome guests  
are wet and ropy  
as chewing gum, petals  
rolled on themselves like stockings.

I snap them out  
of their sockets, like string beans.

Heaped in an ashtray  
they are the soiled  
linen of spring.  
You gather them up.  
"I am a bride," you say.  
"This is my bouquet."

You march to the window,  
command me to open,  
and one by one lay them  
on the kinky green moss,  
among the torn red tulip petals,  
of our window boxes  
as if making a wager.

In a dawn gray  
as spider web  
I watch at the window.  
The petals cling and shiver  
like wet butterflies.  
All is dissolved in rain.  
This is a reluctant spring  
and you are long asleep.

#### PATIO PIECE

Escaping the dishpan  
too white to hide in,  
crossing a brown  
desert of broadloom,  
you paused on the landing, tasting  
dust and the distant tang of green;  
then, whether resolute  
or merely clumsy,  
took the plunge,  
skipped down twenty-eight  
separate precipices  
secure in yourself  
as a shield stone,

and clattered to rest  
in the courtyard  
stove-up and jubilant.

In your melon stripes  
with pinhead eyes  
like plant lice,  
you seemed at home  
near the tepid waterhole  
watched by a drooling lion.  
The banana trees  
were tall as giraffes.  
The queen's crown swarmed  
over elephant ears  
and alligator pears  
like an army of pink ants.

The pale green  
lapped plates  
of your back made  
a moist rosette  
like the succulent hen-and-chickens.  
Your accordion pleated  
ruff had unfolded  
to full stretch  
like a bellows, getting the picture.

I picked you up.  
The tendril legs  
had lost their grip.  
The belly shell,  
unhinged, swung open  
like the doors to a meat locker.  
Your tail was stiff as a thorn.

I planted you  
in the warm mud  
under the stony  
cairn of your shell,  
aptly enameled

with the dim inscription  
"souvenir," and the red  
rose of extravagant love.

## DOUBLES

*for Bob and Carol Buchholtz*

### I.

The shadows of pilings  
tilt like broken  
beakers of mercury.

The waves unravel  
like hammocks swinging  
in the fever-ridden  
wind from the coast.

Your jaw is a battered  
drawbridge flying  
pennants of flesh.

And two small whirlpools  
burrowing in water  
like pillbugs in sand,  
have glazed and become  
your rheumy eyes, where  
a world of hunger  
dances like the veils  
of tent caterpillars.

Straining and tasting,  
your fins clasp and curl  
like a nursling's fingers.

Lantern of water,  
the lake sings in you,

but stunned by our odors  
of brandy and perfume  
you lie inert upon  
your cold slab of light

as if laid out  
at a fishmonger's.

### II.

On the back of my mirror  
beneath precise explosions  
of pine needles, rocks  
defined by metal lightning,  
you are young again, tugging  
like a kite against waves  
round with surprise,  
pierced with bubbles, the eyes  
of bone needles. Each  
scale a planet ringed  
with rainbow, you wheel  
a truant galaxy.

The handle I hold  
is bandaged with straw  
against your thrust  
like a fencer's foil.

Black as a thundercloud  
keen as steel  
my face is the sunken  
blade in your lake.

### *About Our Contributors*

ADRIEN STOUTENBURG, whose work has appeared in nearly all American literary magazines, is now living in Denver.

PHILIP LEGLER's latest book of poems, *The Intruder*, was published early this year by the University of Georgia Press.

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GWEN HEAD, a native of Texas, lives in Seattle. She was a co-winner of our Helen Bullis Prize in 1968.

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