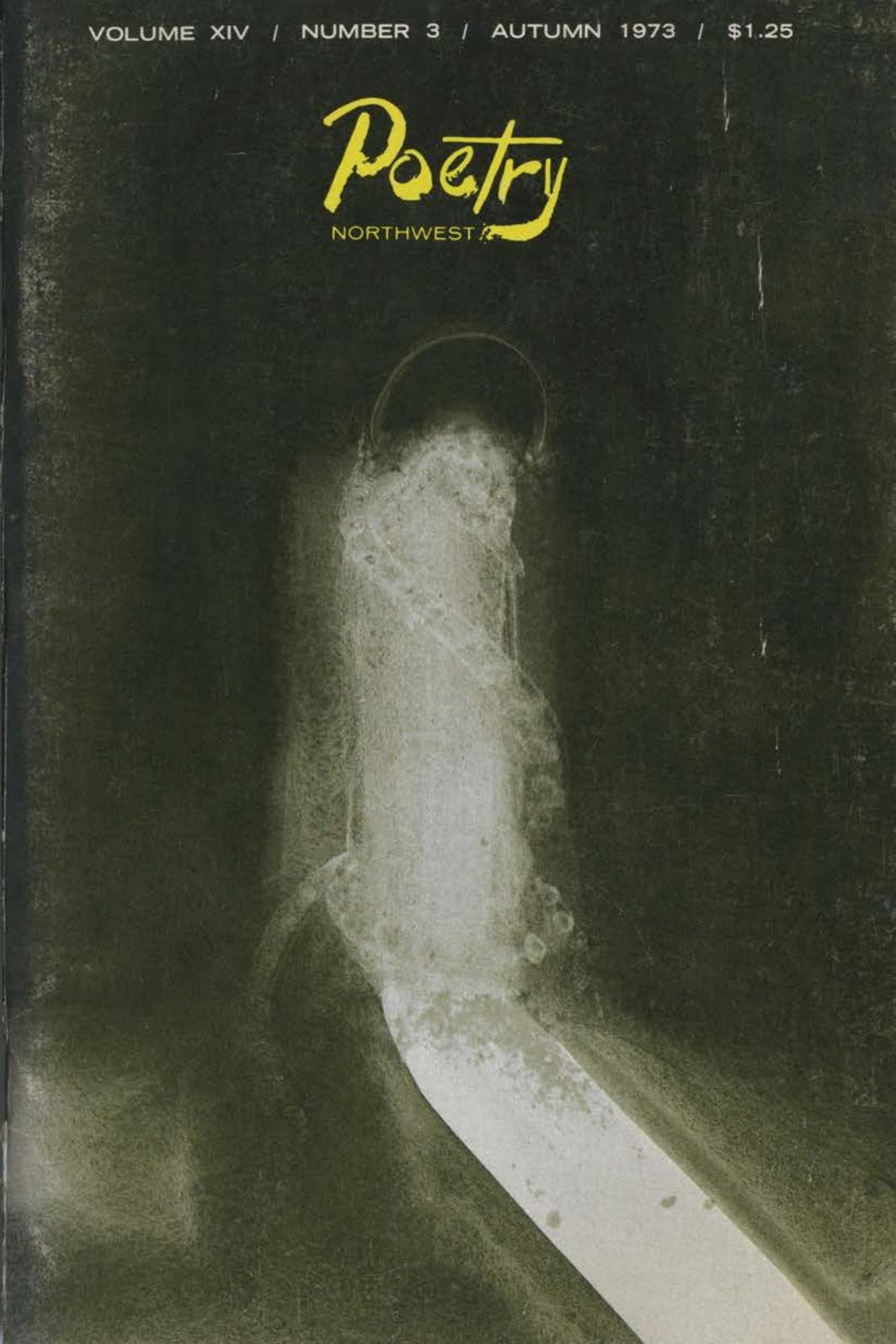


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Poetry

NORTHWEST



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POETRY NORTHWEST AUTUMN 1973 VOLUME XIV, NUMBER 3

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POETRY NORTHWEST

VOLUME FOURTEEN

NUMBER THREE

AUTUMN 1973

ADRIEN STOUTENBURG Two Poems	3
PHILIP LEGLER Four Poems	5
JAMES GRABILL Four Poems	11
GARY THOMPSON Two Poems	16
BETH BENTLEY Two Poems	17
DIANA O HEHIR Summoned	19
ROBERT HUDZIK The Animals Within	20
PAULA RANKIN Two Poems	21
ROBERT WALLACE Three Poems	22
TOM WAYMAN Two Poems	24
KINERETH GENSLER English Is a Foreign Language	25
LYNNE MALLEY Two Poems	26
GORDON OSING The Catfish	27
GARY MIRANDA Two Poems	28
DAVID STEINGASS Slick	30

ROSS TALARICO	
Poem for All Languages	32
JUDITH McCOMBS	
The Man	33
MARGARET SHAFER	
How to Get to the Picnic Grounds	34
ALBERT DRAKE	
* Two Poems	35
WILLIAM MEISSNER	
The Last Story of the Sightless Man's Hands	36
JACK FLAVIN	
Exorcising the Beast	37
BRENDAN GALVIN	
Three Poems	37
PAUL ZIMMER	
Two Poems	41
GWEN HEAD	
Three Poems	43

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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.

Tom Wayman

Two Poems

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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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.

NORTHWEST

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.

JAMES GRABILL's poems have begun to appear in a number of little magazines. He lives in Pemberville, Ohio.

GARY THOMPSON lives in Missoula, Montana.

BETH BENTLEY is the author of *Phone Calls from the Dead*, published by Ohio University Press. She lives in Seattle.

DIANA O HEHIR teaches at Mills College.

ROBERT HUDZIK is presently living in Cincinnati.

PAULA RANKIN lives in Hampton, Virginia, and has published in many magazines.

ROBERT WALLACE's most recent book, *Ungainly Things*, was published in 1968.

TOM WAYMAN until recently was living on an Arts Bursary from the Canada Council. He lives and works in Vancouver, British Columbia.

KINERETH GENSLER is currently teaching in the Poetry in the Schools Program sponsored by the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities.

LYNNE MALLEY, a native Californian, is now living in Zurich.

GORDON OSING is finishing an M.F.A. degree at the University of Arkansas.

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DAVID STEINGASS spent the past year in Spain on a National Endowment for the Arts grant, working on a novel.

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JACK FLAVIN is a librarian at the Springfield City Library, Springfield, Massachusetts.

BRENDAN GALVIN teaches at Central Connecticut State College.

PAUL ZIMMER's most recent book, *The Zimmer Poems*, is being published this fall by October House. He is an editor for the University of Pittsburgh Press.

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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