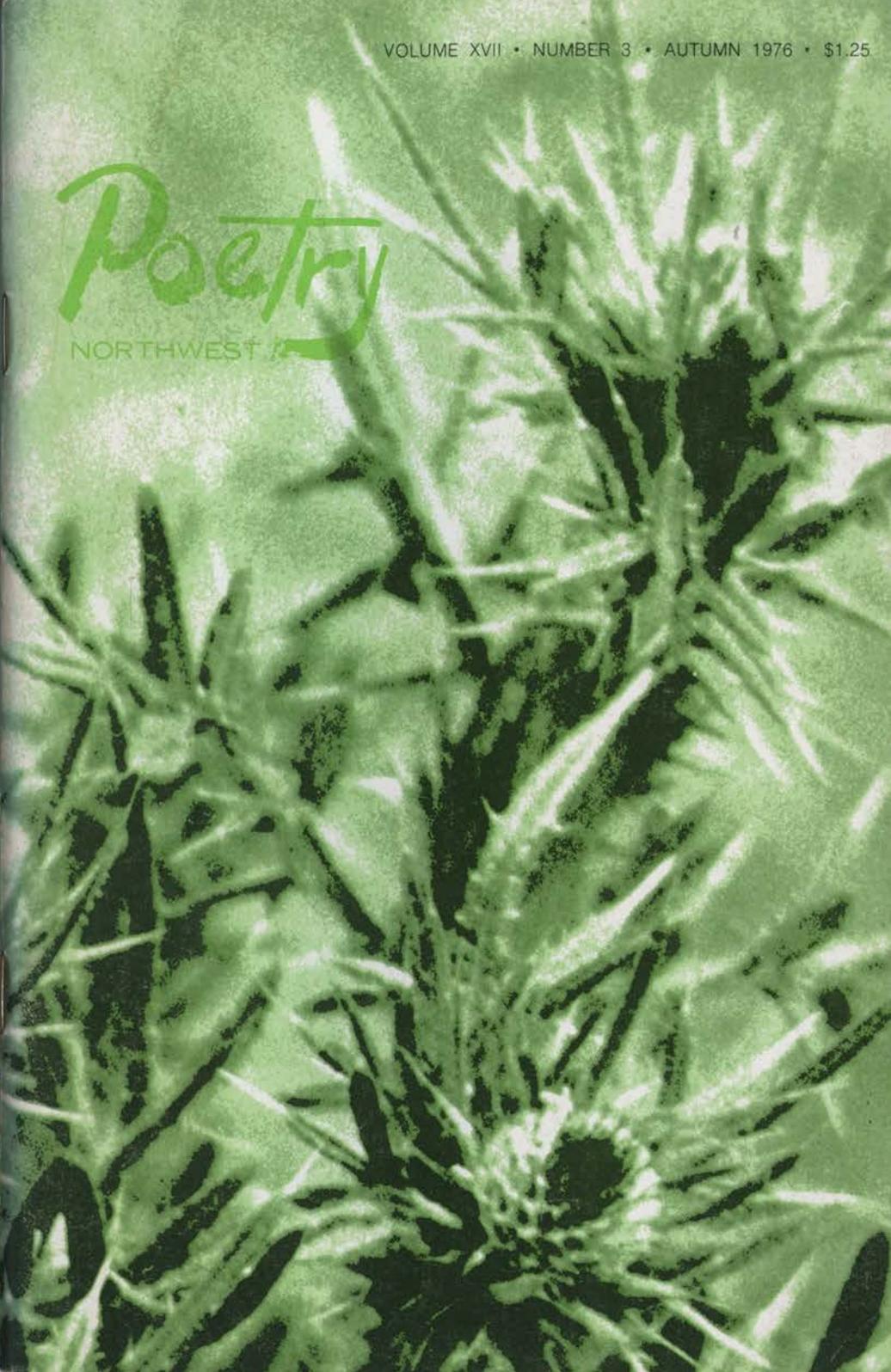


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Poetry

NORTHWEST



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POETRY NORTHWEST AUTUMN 1976 VOLUME XVII, NUMBER 3

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POETRY NORTHWEST

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POETRY NORTHWEST

AUTUMN 1976

John Taylor

Three Poems

THE WOUND

No matter what you say or do
You cannot heal the wound you make the world.
Untrue, untrue,

You call the gap: *All things to all men!*
The black bullseye that the snow comes from
Is silent, foreign

Over your headlights, knows the best
Defense is no defense, and never answers.
Your unrest

Will last forever, or at least
Will last as long as you will last. Not long.
The world's black yeast

Was here before the bread, and will
Be here when every crumb is swept away.
Galaxies spill

Out of gray Ginnungagap
To fall until they dwindle in the black
Unfostering lap,

All your complaining is no use,
Lost in the mothernight. So make your peace
Or truce.

"IT IS A FEARFUL THING TO FALL
INTO THE HANDS OF THE LIVING GOD"

Never to fall is worse.
Or to fall out, or fall into safe hands,
That is the curse.

Never be savaged by joy,
Immensity shaking us in beast jaws
That can destroy

Or bless, no guarantee
Which until too late. Never to open,
Never to see

Again for the first time
When nothing was explained, nothing explained away,
That fearful prime

When one's foot and the sun
Were the same size, equally wondrous, equally strange,
And all one.

BAL DE MASQUES AT THE POINCIANA CLUB

Old artifex,
Arm me with multiple curses,
Hornet-winged, hornet-stinged, venomous to vex,
Arrow-sharp, arrow-straight verses

So I can skewer
This puffpaste of popinjays,
This covey of Beautiful People ripe for the connoisseur
Of the Late Late Potlatch and other such folkways

All masked and balled
Up in fine feathers for a good reason.
Never ask what. The only answer, or so I've been told
Is that for everything there is a season,

Even Palm Beach.
Masked like owls or thrushes,
Birds who live in the money tree out of harm's reach,
Nestled in dollars dense as deep plushes,

They twitter, dropping
Each other's names on sight
Of gems familiar as faces, diamonds and emeralds popping
Like eggs ledged on billowing bosoms, tight-

Corseted trunks
Bulging with bonds. Nearer
To Fortune's warmer parts, they cling in their cosy ranks
Loving as gilded crablice, but dearer, dearer.

Stephen Dunn

Three Poems

THE MAGICIAN'S DREAM

I pull this from nowhere, from
out of the hips of roses,
from the scar

in the sky. It is this,
what I'm holding, what you can't see,
this lovely piece

of thisness, this body of wild claim
I'd like you to care about.
Imagine this, for example.

Or imagine this: earthlight bottled
in a factory near Newark and sold
to the stars. What I have here

is the commodity of our time, *none*
of the above, that which always follows
simple A, B, C, like cruelty.

It is none of your business either.
That's why there's a possibility
you'll care about it, this shadow

wearing a cloak in a grey world, this
self-cancelling mandrake root
that will not produce

a single birth. I hold it up to you now
so that you won't see it.
Look, it's gone

and all this time you haven't left
your seat. Confess, All you ever cared about
was me.

THE MAN WHO NEVER LOSES HIS BALANCE

He walks the high wire in his sleep.
The tent is blue, it is perpetual
afternoon. He is walking between
the open legs of his mother
and the grave. Always. The audience knows this
is out of their hands. The audience
is fathers whose kites are lost, children
who want to be terrified into joy.
He is so high above them, so capable
(with a single, calculated move)
of making them care for him
that he's sick of the risks
he never really takes.
The tent is blue. Outside is a world
that is blue. Inside him
a blueness that could crack
like china if he ever hit bottom.
Every performance, deep down,
he tries one real plunge
off to the side, where the net ends.
But it never ends.

THE GAMBLER AT HOME

Everyone's asleep. The heat is off
for the time being. Horses run
the walls of his house, always
coming from behind. He pronounces
their names until they become pure
meaningless sound like a prayer
spoken since youth. His information
is inside. His needs are secrets
he can only share with crowds.
And now he feels it again
somewhere in his stomach—
that absence, growing palpable.
Ragged zeroes when he smokes.

How can his family know
when he says *the unlit room*
he means the moment before loss.
Or when he puts his arms around them
he's thinking *one less empty space*.
It's late and cold and part of him
knows the world is gorgeous
in its disregard, but cruel enough
to kiss you now and then.
That part of him would take the kiss
and run. Never bet again.
That's a promise, he says, halfway to sleep.
In the morning he remembers
he knows a man
who knows a man.

SARAH, DO YOU THINK I'M CRAZY?

(a high school note)

"Sarah
do you think I'm crazy
or do you think Jack is a hunk?
Nod twice
if you think I'm crazy
Snap your fingers
if you agree with me"

Written in a book of
Hemingway short stories
where the women have no names

THE GREAT BELL RINGS AND
THE TORTOISES HEAD FOR THE SEA

Nobody likes my Quasimodo
imitation That is
they admire it as an art form
but they pull away from
my tongue's ruined kiss
the questions pouring from
my hump I limp
to the bathroom mirror
to watch myself come back

My lizard is more popular
The hot sun melts the sand
in your eyes and my tongue
darts in and out so fast
you think there may yet be
something to rely on
But my head turns so slowly
you could go crazy
waiting for it to come around

AFTER THE ROYAL PALMS WERE BROUGHT DOWN

The fishing boats shift their nets,
pick up and head for better grounds.
You ache to be wise, ache because

the dark tells you nothing is what
all is about; even the child knows
the stone planter of frogs goes

empty one night, for the whole year.
There are more idiots upon the town
than it can hide. *Don't mention*

it, the bank teller cries, the large
notes counted out twice. His green
eyes, white walls of this house,

the intricate, dark roses you cut
at dark, all say *nada, nada* is:

some of the morning boats come in,
fish float in, swim against the tide

ELEGY FOR CATHY

Not oranges or stones, words refuse to bob
until we bow to them, take them up. Simplicities
of the kitchen hum for us. You brew java in
cups, grind the strongest beans, butter the
best holiday bread, share it against the time
we will have to talk, and of her death. Last
night, before taking off your dress, you cried
for *all that blonde hair in a wood box*. The
island ferry was again late, and I was out
looking for other ways of scoring a song for
death, wasteful because by water and so young.

THE OLD WOODCARVER

1.

A hunter carves out a hollow
in the split, steaming
carcass of a legend.

The perfection of brown,
racked in bone-velvet,
rises like a cedar ghost.

The old man calls
and the heartwood opens.
The animal enters.

2.

Bear rises from stump.
Bear is family. Bear is old.
Bear is the stumble of winter.

Bear is a maternal grandfather
rooting in thick sleep.
Bear is a hole in the mountain.

Bear is log-beater, bark-grubber,
claw, tooth, and hump.
Bear is rumbling into father.

3.

If hollow had a name
it could be owl.

Eyes like black caves
where night
tears at pieces of the day.

Surrender comes quietly,
a monk with a sharp bone
and many books in his cave.

Gliding into himself, each victim
answers the same question.

4.

Sleep and the moon
in the bellies of wolves
moving down the canyons
like the lost words of shadows
passing into their own darkness.

Sleep and the nocturnal carnivore,
shadow turned talon and gone,
a pierced tendon, the thick wet trail
of the more fortunate, and again,
the deep, steady pumping
of a dark organ.

5.

The blade of the knife
passes through water.
Sullen, well-fed bass
drift in the hollows
of sunken trees. Turtles
glide back into green water.
Wall-eyed pike in the eelgrass.
Redwings in the cattails.
Long shadows on the mud.

In the black grass the faint outlines
of a robe. The snail prince
dreaming in the green night.
The blade of the knife
passes through sleep.

Jane Hage

TARGET PRACTICE

Showers of light
fall between you and the target,
fall on the target,
full of wild eyes that could be shut,
full of how men walk around after
with half a brain.
Those stories are written
in torn papers
blowing around the campsite.

That truck full of drums
barreled down the freeway
toward the Bay Bridge,
labeled: Poison.

Your hand shakes.
The sights won't come up.
You're hitting low,
drumming them into the bank.

Remember how the sun froze
in the trees,
how your fingers got cold
loading the clip,
the way you pointed the pistol
into the woods . . .

You stand sideways,
line up your eyes with your arm.
The target flickers.
There's a wind through the campsite.
Now you're hitting.

None of this adds up.
The story continues

in the back pages
you used for the fire
to warm your hands and burn the woods down.
In the end you're almost shy
about showing how close you came
to bullseye.

Harry Humes

SNAKESKIN IN JUNE

A year ago I found a black snake's skin
Stretched among some rocks, with its tail
Hooked to a stick. It was over six feet long,

And delicate as the face of the dead.
I placed it on my wall,
And watched it change all summer long.

By October it hung scarcely three inches
From its nail; cats and the room's dry heat
Had broken it, and my own need

To feel its brittle surface near my skin.
I tried to get back, get back
To the early muscles of the year

Stretching themselves inside out,
Exchanging one system of dying
For another way of lying blue-black

Near warm rocks. Oh in December,
On a day hard with loss, with faces
Coiled against my eyes, I buried it

Beneath the shag-bark hickory,
Beneath the grass brittle with frost.
I buried it as totem to the year,

To the shapes of all dormant life,
To the warm ends of roots, to water
Passing easily through the deep limestone.

Now summer climbs its blue racing skies,
Climbs the bright ledges, enters the grass,
The minnow's eye, heats the hickory.

I think of the skin somewhere beneath me.
I think of January, of one more shape
Behind me, a season turned inside out

And hooked to the year's oldest barb.

Ron Slate

THE CALL

I trained the wolves
to love me,
cut off a piece of my meat
and taught them to swallow
without having to kill.

They were the close friends
I was not destined to have:
Grey Throat, Devil's Ash,
Shadow-of-a-Low-Cloud.

During the days
I think they patrolled the edges
of the settlements and roads
trying again to be wolves.
But by evening
my fire was the world's brightest light.

I played with their pups
and let them know the taste

of my flesh; I was the only parent
who really mattered.

But one night there was a howl
far across the meadow of thorns.
It beckoned beyond affection.
With suspicious eyes,
my hardened face, their lowered heads,
each waited for the other
to charge across that distance.

Paula Rankin

TO THE OX-CART DRIVER

Stopping oxen, you nudge through town
with bedsprings, bottles, chimney bricks,
riding the rumor that there are always men
who'll try anything on.

I stare into ox eyes
that scald me with their dumbness,
their blank recognition of road
and burden, their disregard
for the changing directions of wind.

You hold up your collections
of drained sleeves, pants, shoes,
telling me how washing will shrink
them to fit. I do not say

how it is ox I want to barter for,
how I need to try on hide blunt-nosing its way
through the dark without questioning,
until yokes press as lightly on skin
as a shirt passed down
from hand to hand to hand.

ARRIVALS

Only one mood has not grown old
And still returns, reaching me at my window
Sometimes as I watch in the late light.
Just a moment before the huddled houses
Seemed anxious to depart but held back,
Their roofs crushed by the weight of snow.
Now the porches, blue, red and gold,
Snow-blown and frosted,
Appear like weathered flags of a fleet
Newly arrived, at anchor in the yards.

Can I ask how far they have traveled,
How long they intend to stay?
I deserve to be told.
If only I could show them something I made
Or something I at least improved.
Then I notice lights in the rooms.
I can see that no one over there
Bothers to wonder if he lives
Too much for others, too much for himself.
Why should they care, these pilgrims,
Beached in the safe harbor of the street,
Grateful they've made it all this way.

WHY THE STARS KEEP THEIR DISTANCE

No one lives there now, but once
In a cabin hanging on that hill
A hermit swept the floor, a wizard,
Skilled in the habits of the stars.
In summer he dragged his mattress to the roof
And kept watch, between naps, all night.
Of all their beauties he admired most
Their austere refusal to make one sign,

One little flare as they sailed over.
He could never have been so firm.
It would have been too lonely even for him
With the earth small and far below.
Dumb with awe, he never understood
Why others hoped that the stars would fall,
Why they asked him to stay inside
With the blinds drawn. "Hermit," they said,
"You only encourage the stars to be proud.
They would lose their confidence if you stayed hid.
Then they would fall, and the clear sky,
Descending closer, might touch our roofs."
But the hermit kept watch unmoved.
Therefore the stars, coasting above us,
Keep their distance still.

Andrew Glaze

ALPHABET SOUP

Thirteen years old, preparing to go onstage
for the first time at the Spring of everything
as though it ought always to have been like this—
what I have read and seen, heard and imagined
is only the rough bulk
out of which this is to be melted and poured
sizzling and smoking.

Adventure wants to come out of my head.
Lakeview, den of dirty brick and sparse green
—it's a wizard's blasted mountain circle!

I will be Franklin Roosevelt
giving them alphabet soup.
Come out NIRA, TVA, WPA, REA!
I hop around, curdling the pot, my name is Doctor Brains,
I am a warlock, wreathed in pepper and fog.

Round my head revolve erratic armies in Gran Chaco,
Floyds and Dillingers chew bravado like gum.
Mothers of quintos and triplets, veteran marchers,
Byrd at the pole, Wiley Post falling in Alaska,
George Norris stopping rivers with his breath,
they buzz, like flies attacking a carcass.
I scratch them brusquely out of the air,
stir them in, shout the charms.
Whatever I constructed that day, conjure-talking,
demon of squawking and face-making,
is all I am still.

Kathleene West

Two Poems

A CAUTION

"Please do not smell the flowers. They have been sprayed."
—Sign at the Carl S. English Memorial Gardens, Ballard Locks, Seattle.

In these memorial gardens, flowers aren't
for smelling. Mindful of breath,
we move toward the Locks and try
to sniff the salty difference between the Sound
and Lake Union. Most of our lunch
we fling to the gulls, bits of bread
that bloom between the sun and water, flashing
pink as blossoms. We are the children
who stuffed beans in their ears, listened
to the crone's advice to follow your nose.
Around us, the banned flower grows,
in the green-leaf water,
the gulls plunging after the bread
like late summer petals.

In Mother's bedroom, we sprinkled perfume
behind ears and knees, drew moist circles
around each wrist to create her smell
on our bodies. Do not smell the flowers,

drenched with age, sprayed with the essence
of the women you will become.
We do not understand their warning
and walk in the garden, touching
the rosebay with our fragrance.
Tonight, in our separate homes,
we plot gardens for our daughters
and write letters we will hold, undelivered,
for years. We have no warning,
only each other and the warm smell of love.

IN MEMORY OF MRS. GERBER

I remember the gloss of the dresses
in peacock colors, the nylons with hearts
and butterflies flourishing up the seams, the hunks
of rhinestone bedecking wrist and ears.
Six feet tall in her patent spikes, she towered
above the study hall, the basketball team,
the coach, topping them all
with a triumphant frizz of cinnamon hair.

Splendid in satin and velveteen,
she confided to our class the glamour
of her feather boa. "Lana Lobell!" my mother sniffed
at the gaudy clothes, selected from that brassy
mail-order catalogue of frivolous apparel.
The town was used to neutral women
who tinted their hair beige or brown
to match their sensible plaids.

Mrs. Gerber stilled
our wriggling rows with her command for immaculate
calligraphy. We copied
the footnotes to Julius Caesar, the directions
in our grammars. A misplaced conjunction
in a diagram, a smear on the page,
would send us crumpling and tearing
to the wastebasket, to begin again

on unmarred paper.
She sat for an hour on a tack
without feeling it. Who could challenge
that confidence of height, that surety of jaw?

Dad always said those out-of-town schoolteachers
drove like the devil.
Smug in black dresses,
Joanie Flaherty and I went to the funeral.
Sitting in the basement of the Monroe Methodist Church,
with the non-relations, we stared at a loudspeaker
or each other, our stomachs gurgling. By the last hymn,
we shook with pent giggles.
Only by holding our breath
could we escape past the open coffin.

William Joyce

POST-MORTEM FOR A CAR

This car that was
My rusted other skin
Is dead. Her legacy
Is not the girls who rocked
On her broken shocks
In deserted lots nor space
Sequestered in a dazed speedometer.
Styled like a turtle,
And like those whose best defense
Is a shell, she covered herself
With fluids front and rear,
Urging herself forward with the delusion
Of laboring thankless under water.
Neither pretty nor noble
She raged in her manifold.
Her idling was frenetic.
Bored with the lot
Of those who suffer

Up hills only to find
Like Sisyphus more hills,
She revenged herself
By backfiring on solemn occasions
Out the ass-end of her cracked exhaust.
She died amidst the stalled,
Dreaming traffic on a thruway
At the end of a tunnel.
Her legacy was this:

One headlight angled cockeyed
Upward into the trees her last
Night. No doubt this was meant
To shake perversity out of branches
Bare as tuning forks,
Or give the lie of eternity
From constellations' trumped designs
To her steering's limp ball-joint.
If nature was in alignment
With a weather report
Issued from a snapped antenna
Predicting through static
Flurries and eminent rot
I was not inclined to stop
To admire her downfloating flakes
Made gracious by a negligent headlight.
She would coat me and mine
On an abandoned street corner
Like genteel beggars
Before our time.
Let this carcass flatter itself
At having run so long
On suspicion and a nervous piston.
Me, I have somewhere to go.
For this I need whiskey,
A good woman to oil my rusted parts,
A new car to carry us
To the liquor store and back
To this life's fluid signs.

Sandra M. Gilbert

DAGUERROTYPE: WIDOW

For thirty years now she's lived
in the little village of Extremity,
that dull village where the language is Hanging On,
a language of silence, small wheels, ruts in the road,
a language heavy with shutters and ruined walls,
each noun a bottomless dry well.

Back from her walk in the mountains, caped
in the smell of the sour grass she gathers daily,
she stares at us, her chin fixed
and square as patience, her lips the shape
of a dried fruit that was once a smile.
Over one arm she carries a basket of pebbles:

these grow like mushrooms in her garden,
these are her livelihood: each night
she sorts them by color and weight,
and fashions them into talisman rings
for the women in the soft valleys,
the children, the mourners.

At dawn, she tells us, she paces
the small square in the center of her village,
alert as any sentry.
The bells stutter their reveille
and she paces, paces, corner to corner.
It's so hot in this town, so dusty,

even the mountains are flaking away.
And what if the pebble harvest should vanish
like the windows, the acorns, the silk?
The leaves have long since flown from the trees;
the chickens leap toward the teeth of the fox;
the cow lies down and weeps in her milk.

Colleen J. McElroy

From MEMOIRS OF AMERICAN SPEECH

VI.

Stimulus-Response

when flames dressed the music store
in a gaudy cabaret of colors and smoke
I thought of news reports night riders
bats and dancing bigots how panic needs
the courage of sound the hero's scream
before the charge the fear of silent men
I remembered speechless children
the hours of painful sibilants
piercing narrow clinic rooms
remembered how I hissed sharp and direct
between perfectly articulated teeth

I listened for guitars singing in the blaze
their strings stretching and popping
like petals of deadly red flowers
piano strings twanging in chorus
harmonicas screaming toward the melody
the wind drafts add riffs but I cannot hear
I am glued to the sibilant crowd
we grind our teeth on the acrid air

we are drawn to the fire awed
as any Neanderthal its primal sounds
triggering our ancient ears a signal
confusing the magic of words reminding us
that death is the absence of sound
entranced by the flames
we are dumb as deaf mutes tomorrow
we'll play with coughs and grunts
groping for speech
understanding less and less

Mark Howell

WHERE FIRE HAS BEEN

after a line by Roethke

I

I return,
A little seared, a little weary,
Blistered a couple of fingers, ready
To see what must be done.
Ashes puff from each step on the lawn.
The house has had it—
I kick around for little things.

II

Outside I watched as neighbors gathered.
Smoke bulled up; its belly reddened;
Flames cracked the roof, popped shingles
And ran like wind over wheat.
All of the wails in the walls
Escaped, and the furniture howled
For the shadow dance.

III

The firemen came, and their chaos of water,
Roar of high pressure, redundant red strobe.
Steam billowed, hissing, lost us in fog.
I returned next morning, thoughtless on coffee,
Not wanting the sleep I'd lost, just looking,
Trying to see the house that had been
In something gutted and dripping.

IV

A whisper? wind in the back of the mind?
Rustle of dead leaves? distant waves?—
I put my book down, climb to look;
Upstairs I find no flames
Searching my room like the tongues of snakes
Or the blind hands of adolescence.
No photographs vanish like steam from mirrors.

V

I am pleased with this house
And this feeling will pass.
Those things that have mattered will matter again.
They will not last forever, these afternoons
Of sitting, of sunburn, of the fusty veils of whiskey.
I won't always watch the smog burn the hillsides
Nor the morning ruin of last night's moon.

Barbara Ras

Two Poems

WITH OR WITHOUT OARS

The way is the same.
The stream follows you,
different waters surge the same rocks,
rush into white, or in shallows collect
a dark brooding.

Dragonflies shivering in air
are possibilities of music,
and your head fills with sounds
rain, snowmelt
blurred tongues that gossip
only about themselves.

You listen for news of yourself,
a time of arrival,
but the footprints you left at the soggy edge
are silent
and loosen grain by grain
as marshgrass springs back
and forgets.

This could be pleasant—
the raft giddy and you
weightless on water.

WHEN THE AIR LURCHES INTO SPRING

You lie naked under the redbud tree,
pink petals sift down
thousands of trembling eyelids, covering you
with their last shittings.

You dream geese flying
crazily in circles.
Wings, their only symmetry,
fill the sky with dry sounds,
gate-creakings, ingress, egress.
You glide on their balance
of echoes.

Trust. From such sleep
out of the shadows of branches
cast over you netlike,
green will grow, will weave a shade,
tender and cool as pelts of moss.

Lewis Turco

Two Poems

THE BARN

Behind the locked doors
swallows stitch shadow to make
a sampler of perpetual dusk.
Summer's hull tilts against the wall.

A gray car looms into rust,
its doors closed against silence.
A rain of motes slants to fall
upon an iron stove cast in hay.

Wind leans through the window
from the fields beyond where,

dimmed by the spider's cataract,
sunlight wanes into goldenrod.

The stumps of the two great elms
have colored themselves in the barn's reflection.
The road passes.
Under the bank the brown river ebbs.

THE TOLLHOUSE

(Maine, 18th century)

The bell rings once and then the woods are still.
Something startles and rustles in the shed.
In the dooryard the pump has not been primed.
The axe stands rusting in its cleft.

The mortar in the chimney turns to lime.
The fence is down beside the meadow;
nearby an apple tree stands knotted,
a woodchuck hole opening in its root.

A catbird's gray patrols the field
from limb to stump to lilac bush in bloom.
The wooden plow bleaches in a patch
of herbs and weeds: alumroot

and larkspur, thistle, trailing vetch.
The sun is warm and curling, warping shakes
and shingles, the cord of peeling wood
that musts to lichen near the gate.

Toadstools like coins are spent beneath the elm.
The windowglass is dusty, dusty webs
travel the breeze and catch in every gust.
The forest listens at the door.

The road moves west through trees toward the river,
the crossing barge, the pier, toward the sun
beginning now to fall beyond the current.
The bell rings twice and then the woods are still.

HISTORY

The cats of Rome don't suffer much.
Howling in the dead calm of two p.m.,
All so publicly crazy.

Gently the gulls from the Tiber
Watch over them, rising and falling
Like so many leaders.

The cats are peaceful among themselves.
They slouch
As if the ruins were cashmere,

Unfazed by even the death of death
In the arena, the smell
Where the lion stalked out.

How well they continue, stretching,
Dragging the light in
Like a fat fish.

We have heard their continuous joy
At the pity of strangers;

The cat on Keats' grave, for instance,
Though he was missing a leg,
Purred as he ate the red carnation.

POTATOES

A man is bathing in the other room.

Off the coast of the wide
blade, I'm dropping white ships in the sea

to boil and slip to the bottom.
There's a chance of dissolution;

I've done this before in another place,
sat for hours by a huge bowl,

digging the eyes out of these strangers,
these tuberous gods.

This is why my fathers came from Ireland.
Another one, a moon, snagged in the stark

night trees, just rising. Now they're rocks
washed up on the beach,

raw as America, blanched and wet
as a man walks out of the bath

to me, naked in his strategies of peace.

Anita Endrezze

SEVEN: LEAVING HOME

Father hides in a dark room.
A woman in red robes
is bejeweled with semen.
My hair is black as a burnt moon.
We all listen at the key hole.

It isn't easy to sleep
when they're here. Father shakes
his head in the fireplace,
arguing her lips into the ashes.
She won't give it up.
I won't turn my bed into a school.

I won't drag my ears on the floor.
I won't kiss his fingers, dripping with soup.
I won't light his cigarettes.
I won't cough into her hands.

I've had enough of living here.
His stomping at night drives me crazy.
When she leaves her dirty underwear
under my pillow, I tear my hair out.
I'm thinking of leaving.
I'm thinking of going far away.

Most kids tie all they need in a bandana.
But I'm thinking
If I had all my woman's parts,
I wouldn't have to worry about eating.

Beth Bentley

Two Poems

LIVING IN THE CHEVY

Now, it is November in the Chevy.

The toadstools, little pets, peek up
from the carpet, tender as blanched toes.
Sarah feels them in her shoes,
white and safe, shyly nudging.
Frost furs the windows, and her breath
signals hellos across the cushions:

*hello, old steering wheel,
old windshield wipers, hello
silent radio I sang with,
musical sister, my lost ear.*
She salutes the dead batteries,
the frozen brake, the tires.

Her body curls in the shell
of the Chevy; she's
her own wind, her own moon.

Outside, the street hardens
to morning's factual glitter.

Sarah's clothes heap closer:
they've memorized the story
of the princess: seven summers
and seven winters banished,
unraveling the old hag's spell.

The tin cans flash glances at the apple cores;
rinds and wrappers settle;
the thawing windows mew.

The Chevy drowns
in the stone forest, weather-wise,
a crusty cabin, a cloud of spore.

FRUIT/ STONE

I watch you swim towards me, Elizabeth,
fish or eye, tearing
the watered silk of dreams,
a sterling bride magazined
in maternal grievances, a possession.

My hand plunges past your
birch-white egg-smooth legs:
you're someone else's vision,
sanctified and varnished,
with the horrible poise
of a machine. Your steel breasts
curve, indestructible fenders;
there's no place your body

hasn't succeeded, repulsing
damage like a submarine.

You are nuclear in my mother's
imagination, perfect girl,
seamless as an apple-pip,
sister I should have been,
pearl sinking in the thick
soup of my menstrual sleep.

Thwarted twin, miscarried
past the flood-gates of a sabotaged
dam, your thin, slippery
arms like tangled seaweed
tighten around my neck.

Mark McCloskey

Two Poems

UNDER THE KNIFE

You dump your cargo of weather, color, clocks.
Like someone you haven't seen since grade school
night comes. Do they do it then—shave your privates,
slide you on their meatboard? You shiver, but sleep
drips in the tube into your wrist. Later you sway
inside yourself like a toy boat in a warm tub:
you're waking up . . . those who knew you are there
pink as sailors lined up for shoreleave.
You look like putty yourself, and rib them
their flowers smell like a dead uncle.
You give them the creeps, they flutter goodbye.
After that you take yourself for walks,
or gawk out the window at the weeddrift.
If only you could tell how hot or cold the wind is!
If only you could tell whose mouth it is,
now you're eating with it! So: your body
is coming back, and the moment they cut it loose it
yaws and shudders griefstruck in the huge air.

GRANDMA'S FUNERAL

I wasn't there, but I got wind of it—
the bunched hanky of her face in the deathbox,
the black upholsteries of mope, my exwife
arriving like an ambulance at the wrong address,
my children sprinkling the grave, my brother in
without his breakdown, aunty's cancer arrested,
mother breathing easy in the old house for a change,
the will splitting it down the middle,
ending the baby pictures, the Flexible Fliers, the smells
that gave us our real names. I wasn't there,
but laid up in far off's refrigerator
with my capital misdemeanors, my bad dreams
where *I* take the rap for cancer and breakdowns,
and the old witch has me cold and hands me over
to my children when they push her toward the oven . . .
and the blank place on the headstone is all mine.

Michael Heffernan

HOW THE WRITER IN RESIDENCE RESCUED HIS LIBERTY

He had this bitter business to dispose of.
He wrote the Head of his Department: "Dear Chuck,
Tell the Dean he can eat his sabbatical.
I won't spend one year tramping in Tuscany,
soaking up Sweetness and Light, if my sweet balls
have to be kept in mothballs the year after.
I trust the two of you will share my feeling."
Of course this memo never made the mailbox.
It made him feel good just to have written it,
so he sat back and read it aloud and thought
the better part of freedom was composure.
He felt composed. He rattled the keys some more:
"Dear Dean, I've always meant to tell you: your face

reminds me of a tomcat's face on the prowl.
The rats are all of us in our little holes.
I wish you could see yourself the way I do.
I'm the sick rat with one eye and half a tail."
Making rats is fun, so he felt much better.
He teetered back in his chair and made more rats,
all sizes, colors, and denominations,
rats of the wallboard, rats of the landfill, rats
of the alleyway, roadway, hallway, doorway,
giddy and grim, cunning and ingenuous,
loners and losers, clowns and recluses,
folkheroes, renegades, underdogs, angels,
that flicked their tails like fistfuls of worms and squeaked.
"Dear Chuck," he wrote in his excitement, "Your friend
the tomcat says you are only one of the rats
like all the rest of us little rats in here,
in better health, with both your eyes and your tail,
but your ratshit is ratshit just like ours is."
Finally he had hit the note he wanted.
He rattled a few more keys and signed his name:
"Howard the Destroyer (you know who I am),"
and off it went. He felt drained but exalted.
He blinked his eye and shook his twig of a tail.

Kurt Beattie

Two Poems

WHERE YOU SLEPT

Upstairs your mother stays up half the night
ravaging the huge Sunday Times
for the essential facts. She reads
the smudges of many hands, the grey hairs
grown like lies through the decaying atmosphere
of politics and sex.

In the basement, escaping noise,
your father builds a model set to scale
on which a masterpiece will play,

that terrible denial Mozart wrote
for every laboring artisan, *The Magic Flute*,
whose temple has no paint or stone.

Between their floors, in the study's
stale light and tall packed shelves
bending with the weight of children's books,
you labor to be born in spite of them.
Through floor and ceiling they recite
old lessons that you could not learn.

Trying to rest, you imagine paintings and china,
expensive Steinways, junk and stuff
to bore yourself to sleep. But even there,
almost asleep, enormous house cats come,
stalking the decor, larger than men, their bells
warning vermin and birds in a bourgeois hell
there will be no peace.

THE NIGHTMARES

I don't need you to break up the dark, bone-waver, trickster,
don't need the bulldozers and plows or the cranes on tall legs
or the African bird that stalks lizards.

The shallow paintings on the walls of caves where the ibex
and bison dance with the spear don't unman me. The monkey
crouched on a woman's chest under a horse's flaring red nostrils
hardly makes my eyelids flutter. Rabid bats
yanking my hair out or starved rats sniffing my crotch
have never unsettled me. The vampire paralyzing my throat
with his breath or Grendel tearing apart
my ribcage and clutching my heart like a poor sparrow's
have never stirred me from darkness. Not even my parents
slapping my bottom or shouting through me
would disturb my coma. I have survived the Arctic winters,
the snowy owls that hunted my shadow like a following blizzard
to leave me a frozen red smear on the tundra, the enormous bears
who stripped off my masks to reveal the terrible grin

of a man. The eagle, goatsucker, the shrike diving
on my broken skull disturb me no more than a nit.
I have evaded the martens, the fishers, the mink and otter
by swimming into their jaws before they can feast on my eyes.
And in rivers that drown me, deserts that dry me, mountains
that crush me, valleys that hold me, forests that trap me
into the dream I hold before me with a broken hand
and a cry, I sleep without caring,
alive in the soul of the soul surrendering.

Mili Ve McNiece

WAITING WHEN YOU DON'T COME

An accident
surely. You sprawled on some street,
senses pinched shut, rolled like a stone
into the tomb of white nurses
who can't hear you call my name.

Love in its hearse,
when I'm waiting and you don't come,
is slowly up and down the streets
to bring you like dark luggage
back to me.

Try to divide
you from you in love with me. Just once
in that trick mirror to see your eyes
not reflecting me.

Try to separate
finding you in time from finding you out,
maybe mouth to mouth with some girl
who's saving your life.

Or, to understand
when we meet next time, why we will both
have lies to tell.

David Barton

IN THE HERON'S SLEEP

In the heron's sleep
and the white crow's stare,
near houses built
on the breakneck strand,
in tidal froth and garden ditch,
in earthly fires
and the terrors of the air,
in heavens holier
than the sea-crested moon
that undermines the sky,

straw stalks and towers fall,
the cove life crumbles
and the furry-eared owls
turn their eyes
on Wellfleet's trembling tide,
while in the back yards
rabbit clans hew and whisk,
fog burns off,
old bees through the goldenrod
and these white buds glow

like risen souls, fierce,
sharp as harvest tines,
their tips
an intricate sea-sucked hue,
their stem-feathers slanting
higher than the stem,
their roots washed clean
as any earthly daughter could be,
their smallest cells turning bright
and blonde with praise.

Stuart Dybek

BRASS KNUCKLES

Kruger sets his feet
before Ventura Furniture's plate glass window.
We're
outlined in streetlights,
reflected across jumbled livingrooms,
bedrooms, diningrooms,
smelling fresh bread
from the flapping ventilator down the alley
behind Cross's Bakery.

His fist keeps clenching
(our jaws grinding on bennies)
through the four thick rings
of the knuckles he made me in shop
the day after I got stomped
outside St. Sabina's.

*"The idea is to strike like a cobra. Don't
follow through. Focus full extension of power at
the moment of impact."*

His fist uncoils
the brass
whipped back a centimeter from
smashing out my teeth,
the force waves
snapping my head back.
"See?" he says.

Breathes deep three times, staring through himself
into the leopard skin sofa,
I step back, thinking
how a diamond ring cuts glass,
his fist explodes. We're running
as the window cracks for half a block
and the knees drop out
of our reflections,

burglar alarm
bouncing out of doorways,
we cut
down a gangway of warm bread,
boots echoing
through the dimlit viaduct on Rockwell
where I see his hand
flinging red streaks off the concrete walls,

blood behind us
splattered like footprints,
spoor for cops,
in a red haze of switches
boxcars couple,
we jump the electric rail
knowing we're already caught.

Gibbons Ruark

AUBADE TO THE GOVERNOR

*A statute of medieval Florence forbade lovers to make
dawn serenades under pain of a fine or forfeiture of
the lute, viol, or other offending instrument.*

Dear Death, it is nearly dawn nine hundred
Feet or years above your fearful city,
And I am lying with her full of dread
I'll start to sing, for which you have no pity.
Forgive me, will you, if I hum a little
Under my breath, I am so criminally glad
To wake up prickly as a blooming nettle
Beside this rose of sleep in her own bed.
Besides, high up as we are, the sun itself
Cracks down on darkness with an early stealth,
And I start humming, I can't help myself,
So if by chance she should awaken, Death,
I pray you take it for an accident
And let me off, with my offending instrument.

THE FOUR CANONICAL FITS FITTED TO
"THE DAY THE MARTIANS LANDED
IN THE FIELDS"

The cows grazed in the meadows.

The boys fished in the streams.

The frogs feasted in the bogs.

The Martians landed in the fields.

Fred West, *The Way of Language*

(An illustration of varying content morphemes

substituted in a skeletal morphemic structure:

"The . . . s . . . ed in the . . . s.")

I

The cows grazed in the meadows
considering whether it were the Day.
The boys fished feverishly among the streams
certain everything was a dream
(e.g., frogs feasting in bogs,
cows munching in placid disbelief,
the Graces *en pointe* again in the failing sedge).
Where the fence chugged along the hilly ground,
the cat with the cropped tail
tipped forward following a mouse.

II

The crows, in the dumps, gazed blackly at the middens.
The bogs flushed royally, wasting the streams.
Fogs peeked in at the maidens,
pecked at the window panes, sniffing for cracks.
The dreams had been going on longer than recall;
longer than warranties; than guarantees; past recall
or the remembrance of recall; endless as a point.

III

A winter stillness spent the summery heat.
Crows and cows grubbed in minny rows,
though the boys fished on, fitful, frantic for clues.
Pooped, faintheart frogs could never fair maiden win
where the middle ways stretched naked as a jay.

IV

In the middle distance, the cows find the ground,
vaster than emperies, a little slough.
Brittle boys prod Helios to an end.
The frogs are still, awaiting the princess,
who is to bear one away for pillow talk
when cats and crows have spraddled into sleep.
Battening down the day, the floccose skies twist a lid on tight,
angle savvy, good at pugging loopholes.
On a shelf in the pantry, the cheese talks it over.
The cheese talks it over, but the skeptic mice swagger off,
puffs of being vanishing down the night.

Joseph Di Prisco

NO MORE BLEEDING HEARTS

It is with heartfelt regret
we announce the heart as a metaphor
has suffered cardiac arrest.
Let everyone take intensive care.
Inform the teenager in Topeka,
lamenting her sweetheart's goodbye,
she may be heartbroken no longer.
Let the doctors get down to work once more,
transplanting cerebral cortex or libido.
At the theatre the heartthrobbing chase
has to be cancelled. The heartwarming call
from Florida—the line is disconnected.
Let Uncle Mort know—the bald one who
devoured all of the anchovies—
he can forego his bout with heartburn
tonight. Hale the heartiest sailors,
their heartlonging loves wait at port.
Farewell, too, to fires at the hearth
where Spike, our mongrel with heartworm,
has come back from the vet, cured.
School becomes simpler (nothing to get down
by heart), everything harder—nothing

at all to set your heart upon. That beautiful couple in Vienna, of course, you know, at the cafe, they can't be ravished I'm afraid at heart, their unplucked heartstrings must remain in their place, still. Even those deaths that left us heavy of heart, all winter heartwearied, are, thank God, averted for now. And for now the heartless villain in a stovepipe hat finds himself out of a job. May he suffer in time a change of heart. No longer will he be tracked down by our hero in the Yukon. And looking out on the vast frozen ground, a gone epoch's heartland, the hero is the one who takes heart, totally bereft of metaphor.

Brendan Galvin

Two Poems

WEAVE A CIRCLE ROUND ME THRICE

Before you filled the dark eye
of my uncle
and he taught you to sip oysters
off their shells, confess,
Aunt Eleanore, in your
red-headed days you played the floozy.
More than a whiff of scandal
still attaches to a black dress
wild with flowers unnatural to
Massachusetts. Later the Quaker
Oats pantry and Ma Perkins
seed offers, the breast scar like
a burn that wouldn't heal.
You're the reason I expect
my hand slapped to this day
if I take more than one
piece of candy.

Aunt Agnes,
for all the chance you had
of marrying, you might as well
have been a tree. Your bathing cap
patterned like tripe, the rubber
slippers stamped with moons and stars,
you sit at Indian Neck and stare
out of the picture, as if down there
a whale was dying
of its stink. You threw *Lolita*
out of my bedroom, tore
the salacious cover off *Lord Jim*.
Paying you back, I picked
your suitcase lock with bent
hairpins, tapping and watering
your private stock. The nephew
closest to a son, I lived with you
ten years, but you don't know me
from my brothers. You walk too near
the traffic, dressed in Peck & Peck,
your mind still on that treadmill
greased by forty years of Standard Oil.

You're in this too, Aunt Delia,
reciting my report cards to
my friends, and reading nieces'
bellies like steamed mail.
It doesn't matter now
who bought the Fords with cash
and never drove them over thirty-five;
which claimed another stole the buttons
off her clothes and took her radio.
One is senile, two are dead.
One thought a sailor stood outside
her window every night, the moon
riding his shoulder like
a cockatoo. One never said "Goodbye,"
always "Watch out!" Her blessing
and a prophecy.

You triple agents,
once I saw you in your denim skirts
and matching red sneakers,
peeking into vacant shops along
Commercial Street.

That's why,
the night you sneaked up on
my first record hop,
I was in a movie seven miles away.

SLUGS

In the beginning
earth was already
collapsed, molten,
pocked with fumaroles,
older than it would be
again.

Before the moon
hummed in mud
and the stones
unhinged, cracking
like dry pods,
and the sledge heads
of tortoises for the
first time lifted,

slugs mused under leaves
in the drowning
sulfur light. They
rode down grassblades
with the conviction of
original envy,
reamed the wild
cucumbers, leaving
husks smeared with

a glitter like thin ice,
nudged and browsed among
the continents.

Prehensile, pudendous,
gesturing with black,
retractable fingers,
one of them whispered,
biding time, at the
threshold of an ear.

Sharon Bryan

Three Poems

RUNNING

She turns so the wind is behind her.
A mile gone, she tries to breathe slow enough
for another. She tightens her fists.
We're good at walking
because we started young,
don't often kick our own ankles.

She ran everywhere as a child.
And fell, and held a scraped knee
or elbow out of the bathwater
every night until she was ten.
What's the hurry? Can't you walk?
Now she sprains her ankles. Some problems
we solve over and over.

Some people can stop their hearts
and start them. But not
while they're running.

Her thigh muscles ache. Pump,
her father would say
as she sat on the swing.
Pump. She bent and straightened her legs.

NORTHWEST

Pump, she said to herself, and after hours
the swing lifted. The air she's set in motion
blows in her face.

The first time she ran a mile
she coughed all night.
There's always a residue of air,
we never breathe deep as we can.
Until we die—pictures of the soul
flying up out of the mouth.

The first example of reflex action
is a hand pulled back from a stove.
But if a child running falls hands out
the hands are burned
before the child thinks to cry.
Later the scars bewilder palmists,
the lifeline in and out of sight.

Now her mouth tastes of blood
close to the surface. She breathes faster
to lose enough heat. Easier to keep going
than it is to stop.

GOING BACK

He thinks, someone tips the jar
and we all slide to the other side.
War's over, go on home. There's nothing magic
about flying, you still have to cross
every mile you come to. He watches the sky
and forgets to blink. A wife and child,
he has their pictures, and a record
they made in a booth—say hello, say hello.
Local time it's the middle of the night,
but he buys a car for fifty dollars.
He ignores all the hitchhikers
so he can be alone. He loves to sing,

he might take lessons. Twenty miles out
he has a flat, left front,
and drives home on the rim.

Something is wrong, everyone's up
in the night. The grandmother is holding the girl,
there's nothing to see but pink flowers
on dark wallpaper. People are standing
too close together. One strange sharp face
leans in. No one has turned on the lights.
Here is your father they whisper,
here is your father.

THE GREAT DIVIDE BASIN, WYOMING

You can see the rain coming for hours.
Further south mountains send all the water
downhill, some to each ocean. But here the divide
is level and open, the only sign
was put up by a road crew.
Most of the rain that falls is used.
For an hour the sagebrush is silver,
birds are reflected in the standing water
just before it rises in the sun.
It is another hour before dust
begins to rise and move toward us,
the wake of a herd of wild horses.
They will miss us by a hundred yards.
We leap to our pickup
and without shutting the doors
run with them over the hazed ground.
Our noise is lost in theirs
though our mouths are wide open.
They turn and disappear down an arroyo.
Our truck rocks in place, our faces
are blank with dust. No sound
comes back from the horses.

About Our Contributors

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