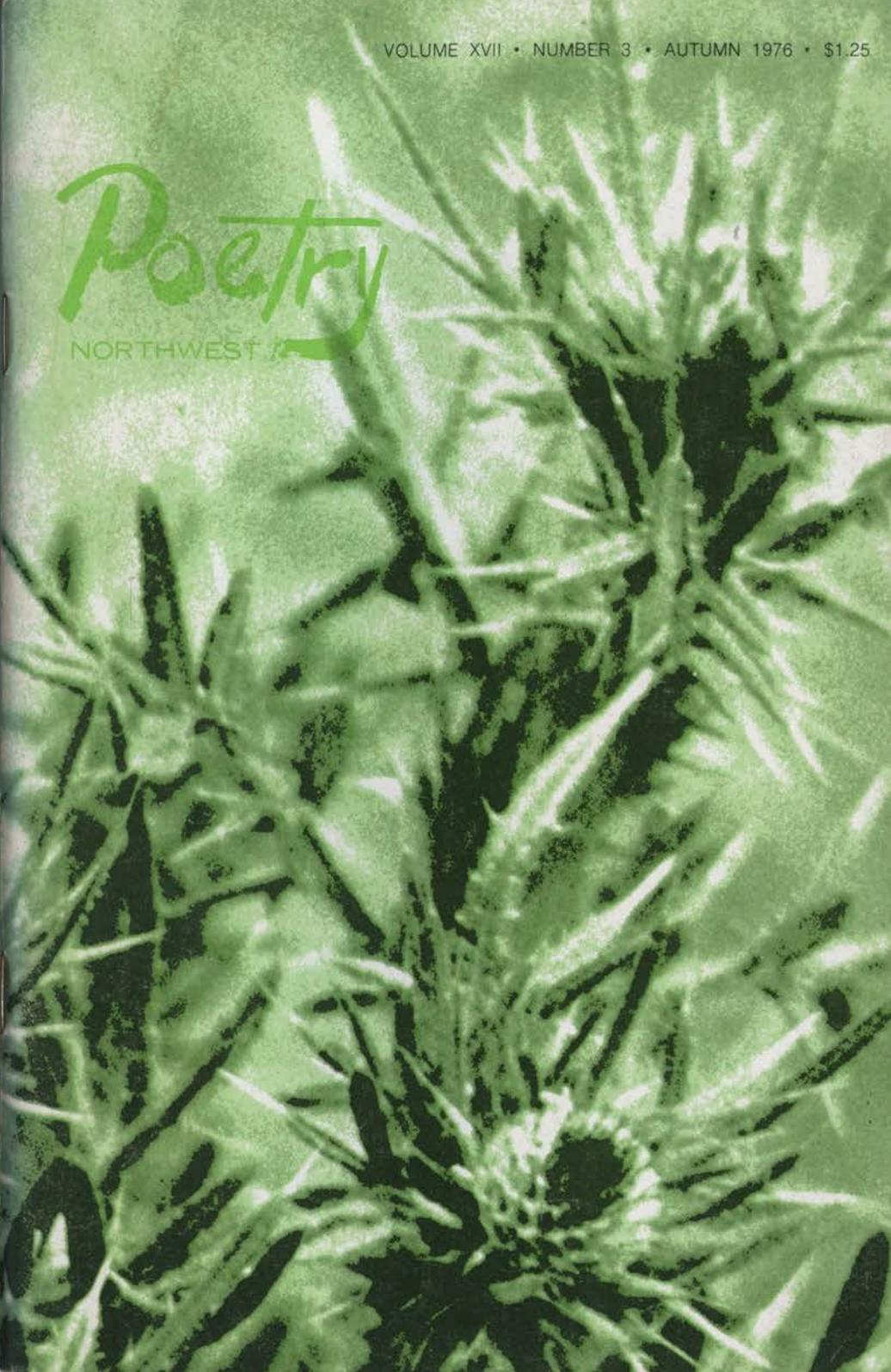


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# Poetry

NORTHWEST



EDITOR  
David Wagoner

EDITORIAL CONSULTANTS  
Nelson Bentley, William H. Matchett

COVER DESIGN  
Allen Auvil

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# POETRY NORTHWEST

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NUMBER THREE

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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 throng 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

JOHN TAYLOR teaches at Washington and Jefferson College. His pamphlet, *The London Poems*, will be published soon by Fort Necessity Press.

STEPHEN DUNN's second book of poems, *Full of Lust and Good Usage*, will be published by Carnegie-Mellon University Press. He teaches at Stockton State College in New Jersey.

ROBERT HERSHON's most recent book is *Rocks and Chairs* (Hanging Loose Press). He lives in Brooklyn.

ARTHUR OBERG's critical study, *Modern American Lyric*, has just been published by Rutgers University Press. He teaches at the University of Washington.

RICH IVES, the editor of *Cutbank*, lives in Missoula, Montana.

JANE HAGE lives in Portland, Oregon.

HARRY HUMES lives in Breinigsville, Pennsylvania, and has published widely.

RON SLATE lives in Madison, Wisconsin, and edits *The Chowder Review*.

PAULA RANKIN lives in Newport News, Virginia.

CARL DENNIS teaches at the State University of New York at Buffalo. George Braziller has just published his second book, *Climbing Down*.

ANDREW GLAZE lives in New York City where two of his plays were produced off Broadway two years ago.

KATHLEENE WEST teaches in the Washington Poetry-in-the-Schools Program and lives in Seattle.

WILLIAM JOYCE lives in Norwalk, Connecticut.

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

COLLEEN J. McELROY's second book of poems, *Music from Home*, was published this year by Southern Illinois University Press. She teaches at the University of Washington.

MARK HOWELL lives in San Jose and helps edit *Bottomfish*.

BARBARA RAS teaches English at Centro Colombo Americano in Cali, Colombia.

LEWIS TURCO directs the Writing Program at the State University of New York at Oswego and is working on a new book of poems called *Histories*.

BRENDA HILLMAN lives in Kensington, California.

ANITA ENDREZZE teaches at Spokane Falls Community College. She is a member of the Yaqui tribe.

BETH BENTLEY's second book of poems, *Country of Resemblances*, has just been published by Ohio University Press. She teaches in the Gifted-in-Humanities Program in Tacoma.

MARK McCLOSKEY teaches at California State University in Chico.

MICHAEL HEFFERNAN lives and teaches in Pittsburg, Kansas.

KURT BEATTIE has been acting in, directing, and writing plays in Seattle.

MILI VE McNIECE lives in DeKalb, Illinois.

DAVID BARTON is a graduate student at Stanford.

STUART DYBEK teaches at Western Mich. Univ. and has published widely.

GIBBONS RUARK, who teaches at the University of Delaware, spent last year in Italy.

STUART SILVERMAN teaches at Kennedy-King in Chicago.

JOSEPH DI PRISCO's first book of poems was published by the University of Missouri Press last year. He lives in Berkeley.

BRENDAN GALVIN's most recent book is *No Time for Good Reasons* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974). He lives in New Britain, Connecticut.

SHARON BRYAN is a graduate student in the Writing Program at the University of Iowa.

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