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William Stafford

Three Poems

PEOPLE OF THE SOUTH WIND

1
One day Sun found a new canyon.
It hid for miles and ran far away,
then it went under a mountain. Now Sun
goes over but knows it is there. And that
is why Sun shines—it is always looking.
Be like the sun.

2
Your breath has a little shape—
you can see it cold days. Well,
every day it is like that, even in summer.
Well, your breath goes, a whole
army of little shapes. They are living
in the woods now and are your friends.
When you die—well, you go with
your last breath and find the others.
And in open places in the woods
all of you are together and happy.

3
Sometimes if a man is evil his breath
runs away and hides from him. When he
dies his last breath cannot find the others,
and he never comes together again—
those little breaths, you know; in the autumn
they scurry the bushes before snow.
They never come back.

Change of Address
Notify us promptly when you change your mailing address.
Send both the old address and the new—and the ZIP code numbers.
Allow us at least six weeks for processing the change.
You know where the main river
runs—well, for five days below is
No One, and out in the desert
on each side his children live.
They have their tents that echo dust
and give a call for their father
when you knock for acquaintance:
“No One, No One, No One.”

When you cross that land the sandbars
have his name in little tracks
the mice inscribe under the bushes,
and on pools you read his wide, bland
reply to all that you ask. You wake
from dreams and hear the end of things:
“No One, No One, No One.”

WITH THE GIFT OF A FLOWER, FOR THE FIRST
BIRTHDAY OF THE COMPUTER OF HUMBLE
OIL ON THE NORTH SLOPE OF ALASKA

Every tree in The North now has a number:
a satellite scanned, cross-hatched, and
programmed; Premier Trudeau is loaded with
his units of war-games value; each revolutionary
in the world moves inside a zone of error,
tagged, loaded with a requisite charge.

In the silence of widest winter, God
cocks a glacier; on freeways far to the south
mad sons, future dictators, line up
for crashes that the future will own.
Here at the end of this poem, I have brought
this birthday greeting, ending now with a flower.
still abides. There was no one better. 
_Her town, her town, her town_, the tires 
repeat as we go by.

5
For those my friends who want me to know, 
to discover and combine: all my best thoughts 
I roll up and let fall carelessly. It is 
better that no one follow even the pattern 
I look onto the back of my hand, for many 
visions I haven’t dared follow may 
gather and combine in a flash. Away off, 
in a space in the sky, I let the sky look 
at me, and I look back and do not say anything.

_Philip Dacey_ 
Three Poems

**EATING STONES**

you break them 
into small pieces 
that is the first rule 
then in each piece 
there is a soft 
secret center 
that part will nourish you 
if you stop thinking about it 
others will not believe 
you can eat stones 
ask them to lift you 
and it will prove nothing 
you grow lighter 
per stone

stones are served 
on the vast table of the wind 
be seated 
you have worked up an appetite 
when you bite into a stone 
you know it will satisfy 
it is the hardest thing 
you have had to swallow 
somewhere at this moment 
a stone like a loaf 
is baking 
when you wake up tomorrow 
it will be there on your plate

**THE FIVE SENSES: A BESTIARY**

the small dog of the nose 
rummaging in the wind 
a stray 
he never gets 
anything substantial 
mouth 
belly of a little 
leviathan with a taste 
for Jonah 
who can no longer be found 
the ears a pair of birds 
they want to lift the head off 
and fly it back to heaven 
the curled brown bears 
of the eyes 
when they dislike what they see
they say it is winter
and sleep in a cave

fingers a tangle of snakes
one rears up from the ground
and points at you saying
we would nest in your hair

THE MATCHBOX SAYS “STRIKE ANYWHERE”

I am a match.
I light at the touch
of women,
of stones,
of the hands of aged.

It is a brilliant flare of my head.
For a second I disappear
in all that hissing
and reaching. That part of it
is over quickly. Then I settle down
to burn steadily,
if not long.

Down the whole extent of my trip of burning
I remember the past
of my fingers:
the strange mesh of screens;
the tossing off of dirty socks that are yet
soft and comfortable as old friends;
the cool cups and saucers in cabinets
that warmed with use;
soil giving away as I dug and dug,
then falling in on itself, to complain.
The trip is not long enough
to remember them all.

If I am a match,
I am many matches.
I have a history of fires.
EPITHALAMION

When it is over, and you step into the street blinking because of the sun, you are met by the reporters; they look like men prospecting for uranium—they hold phallic instruments up to your face, you radiate into them and the reporters pop and click; they make a disturbance around you, while strangers sitting at open windows are bemused by your importance.

Tell us, say the reporters, give us a statement, is there any truth to the rumor that? What shall you say? If you announce: No comment, they will read things in, such as Too Drunk to Perform, spokesman declares, or Not Experienced Enough, confirms aide, or worst of all Parallels Earlier Passion, notes intermediary. Now nothing but the truth.

You clear your throat, policemen arrest the traffic, the reporters hang on the slender microphone cords; you tell them how the phonograph ran all night in the inside groove, how when you lifted the recording the label dropped out (Wow! Did you hear what he said?) how you have not eaten for three days, how Love Is Answer, says unimpeachable source. The reporters scramble to the presses, to the studios, the record of your half-life bouncing against their hips. The policemen make obscene signals; the traffic leers past.

Sensitive to the media, you begin again; you sit in bed to read the afternoon editions, marking factual errors; you catch the evening news on television. When the room is dark, remembering old flames who will demand equal time, you ask the desk to stop all calls. Perhaps you will run for Congress, or be appointed to an Embassy. Whatever should happen (you tell her), it Feels Good to Be Famous, former bachelor concedes.
FLIGHT

He gathers around him
pale evening, a last
small shattering of birds
in a tree, the powdering tide
of shadows from the street.

He is dying now
as sparrows fall for no
discernible reason, a round
and final brightness
glittering at his eyes.

He holds his death so,
quietly between us,
smoothing a feather, some
ruffled memory of flight,
idly with his thumb.

ON TRAINING A BIRD DOG

Give the pup a name and teach it to him.
Over and over let him know his name.
Give him confidence, hearing his own name.
Let him catch butterflies and crickets
With compliments under his very own name.

When you give him milk, shoot over him.
He will learn to keep lapping at the milk.
He will learn to ignore guns in your hands.
He will find comfort under human hands.
He must get comfortable in your hands.

Dennis Trudell

Two Poems

39,572

(November 1969)

Thirty-nine thousand
five hundred and seventy-two
times, our way alone, the membrane
between the mind of Christ
and a landslide of lasers and fishhooks
has torn. Thirty-nine
thousand five hundred and seventy-
two pet kittens, goldfish,
have been impaled. The shortstops
keep sliding into second
and out of sight. A scream
nearly four hundred thousand fingers deep
arcs over Pago Pago
and approaches Davenport.

Thirty-nine thousand five
hundred and seventy-two liquid clear
egglike sacs have felt
the explosion of incisors
to no music. That many
fathers, our way alone,
have seen the yawn of chasms
through their pillows (Some do
not know they see).

The navel fuzz
from government issue t-shirts
of thirty-nine
thousand five hundred and seventy-two
young men would smash
plate glass—
"But they don't wear t-shirts . . .
too hot." Some fifteen thousand
paper routes have suddenly disappeared.
The mothers search vainly through hampers
for something to wash.
Tassels have cringed and unraveled
from the rearview mirrors
of a city of cars. An unknown number
of letters now en route
are postscripts.

Perhaps twenty
thousand younger brothers
are afraid of their new sport coats.
Give or take. The nailed man
feels the sting from yet another
bayonet below his nipples;
the nipples have turned to cinder
thirty-nine thousand
five hundred and seventy-three
times. Our way alone.
Their way, fragments of
so many straw toys clot the air.
Their way: . . .
I cannot see beyond
the mountain of eyelids.

DESPAIR

Past the haired gates of this city
the crocodile throats should at least be
warm, this runway of tundra and I
think we approach too fast the natives
in their bib overalls won't believe us when we
speak fondly of the Jayhawk's chances they
all turn as I enter a rear pew where
are you in the tenement of broken transoms
where the wind screams up the stairs the
dry leaves gather on the bone of toys,
this is the avenue of the sleepless butcher

it is the tent over the wounded see the
shadow of the perimeter guard or grizzly the pit
of the sexual wanderer there is
no esplanade are you still there or
catched in that quicksand or garbage truck's
jaw in this polluted quarter where the
billboards mock the plazas are featuring
sliced retiree this week the piranhas
have developed a taste for aluminum and canoes
no longer seem large enough to raise
a family you're not getting any less
pregnant by the day and the only obstetrician
are these revolving doors we keep
offending by our blatant musk.

Terence Winch
Two Poems

IT WAS ALWAYS WEDNESDAY

it was always wednesday
when you left me,
I was told today.

it was always buses
whooshing past us
as you grabbed a cab.

it was always my umbrella
in my hand, expecting rain,
always my eyes busied
with the clouds
to keep my head
from your departure.

it was always so stunning,
this lack of you:
your clothes unfilled in closets,

NORTHWEST
your favorite pots
now a small décor.

it is always later that
your empty man sees
movies in the afternoon,
beret of contour,
of the lines you drew him as.

SKINNY TIES

when skinny ties
went out of fashion
I was left with
a surplus, not of
skinny ties so much,
but of four skinny tie clips.

and tonight real late
I looked in the window
of Joe's army and navy store
and saw tiers and tiers
of sneakers.

now I walk like a horse counts
in shoes so heavy
I could tapdance on the moon,

and my manly feet
ache with passion
to be footloose,
to be sneakered
and maybe on the run again.

SHE PLAYS HER GAME WITH ME

she plays her game with me
but I am not a boy now
I do not run so fast so wild
I do not lose her in the tall grass

first I will go on her trail behind her
to the nest for the eggs
she will wait a little way for me
or she will come back a little way
she will make her noise
I will know where she is
then I will lie down and I will wait
and she will come back to my arrow

there are many eggs
this is a good find

while I am waiting
I watch the ants on my legs
they have white things in their mouths
I think perhaps
they have found a nest too.

HER STICK SEES IN THE DIRT

I have an old grandmother
she has her stick
her stick is an eye
she looks in the dirt with it
she says her stick sees in the dirt
battles and buffalo
rain and bad fortune
she says her stick sees in the dirt
my body lying on a rock

NORTHWEST
the rock is red
i do not move

old grandmother! i shout
i will break your stick on your head!
the sun has burnt your mind!
you have eaten wolf meat!
do not speak your crazy thought to me!

i have ridden three sleeps alone now
i have seen no enemy
i lie down to sleep on the mountain
i see sharp rocks below
i have a strange dream
i wake in fear
the air is still and hot.

Mark McCloskey

IT WILL NOT BE DARK, MY SON, MY DAUGHTER

I won't make it
dark, dear children, after all
my crying Take your shoes off
in here. Give me the scissors,
Stop crying; in poems, too,
mourning over dolls and toy guns
and all that. This evening

it will not be dark, our walk—
it will be our secret from my bones,
it will be our high adventure
on the sidewalk past the branch-holes
where evil bees are sleeping,
and the mailbox with its visor up
dreaming of what to say
to the princess, and I will cheer the girls
screaming on their toes over the lawn sprinkler
in front of the Castle of Veterans
of Foreign Wars, spraying their tight jeans,
and let you pull me away
until I look at the curly beds and mirrors
in dark show-windows;

and you will look in phonebooths
for small fortunes, and choose your shoes
for the ball or taking the giant in
from all those floating in store windows,
and I will let you keep
the glass doorknob and sunglasses
you will find on the site

of the new motel, my children,
we shall ride slowly to the top of the street,
and there upon the school grounds pick
petunias and marigolds from careful beds
and lay them upon the dead robin,
and I'll escort your shouting home,
your jewel and vision safe with me.

David Barton

LETTER TO PRESTER JOHN
(There was a legend in medieval Europe of a theocratic kingdom
in Asia attempting to contact Christendom and assist her people.)

The sea spits up the day like a dying man
spits up the logic of his soul. The sun
threads the nut-brown sand with sea-rags:
soft tethered heaves of kelp lap the shore.
I watch the waves stouted by winter's sun
and pull the wind into my drunken veins,
whispering that death is not sleep enough.

The tracks of herons fence a coarse shell
stitched to husks of carrion; a mud hutch
fitted to the cliff sticks out against the sun.

Fishbaskets set by rain. The wind tugs at
some broken cases; stacks of shingles clench
the shacks full of unused tackle and bait.

Nothing changes. Nothing.

Blotches of rain pool on a drum cover.
Dampness rakes the alcove, knots about
the wicker furniture and yellow awnings.

Newspapers that stuttered in ragged winds,
that muffled my ragged stomach at night,
flap, half-buried by sunlight, stuffed into
window frames, drainage pipes, wall cracks.

The tide is clogged with matted fish, fins
snared by sunlight, wedged in, snagged:
a sprawled float of fish cupped by the sun.

I have waited for the wreck of your martyrs.
Intimidated. Or fooled.

This place concedes no bank to knotted sedge;
the wind shakes under the chapped porch, waits
in ditches of serrated bones, bracketed by light.

The sun sketches this bare wall, the creased
sand brushed by silence; sketches the sand where
foam-bubbles squat and quartered starfish breed.

I have not yet loaded my throat with soil.

THE ANCHORITE

He hugged the coils of dark, the halt shadows;
rubbed his hands over the rocks, feeling for
nicks of moisture, the seeds shelved by dirt.

Silence cracked his bones like mice in a cat's
jaw. Upturned in his dreams, he groped through
the cave where lovers scratched their initials.

Things that die must die inside us first.

Unwalled with forty days of bread and water
untouched by the cave's mouth, he recovered
the sun with crude hands; his skin rippled in
a light that thumped the unappeased stones.

He roamed the desert eating sawgrass; sustained
his hull of flesh by pulling in the landscape.
He grazed until his mouth sucked in the stars.

Charles Baxter

SCHEMATIC POEM

Like a fire in a coal mine,
the black sun of the mind draws its planets
out of orbit, into the darkness of stones.

The gems of banality, the roadsigns and calendars,
steady drips of the faucet—these become
the settling together of passageways,
pressing a thin stream of trapped water
onto the miners' helmets. The burn and flash
die as the cavern closes up for good,
and the miners stare at each other, their own mirrors, as one by one the flickering lights burn down, the batteries weakened.

Now visions and sounds of the world below theirs enter the room where they sit waiting. The miners dig down.

POEM WITH A FACE IN IT

At spring, leaves just sprouting, you drop the dust on the kitchen table and—throwing off your coat—go take a walk.

The twigs do not trip you up, and you discover, as you should, an abandoned railroad trestle, miles from the forest's edge.

Heading back, you are stunned to find a face hanging from one of the branches. Nothing on either side, just the open mouth, the surprised eyes.

The jaw moves. It speaks, but all you can hear is the faint dry scratching of wrens in the thicket, suddenly frightened, flying through the face.

Laura Jensen

THIS IS THE DESERT OF THE MOON

(if "moon" is feel and touch, If "desert" when that dries away.) Words that have no beauty. Words that have no story.

Before, the things were safety. The radiator with the scrolled design and the greek trees with the heavy leaves would have stayed one on each side of me.

The people would have been more gentle.

Now the greeks howl through the trees at night with hands on fire and their hair in tangles and on their backs are rifles.

Daylight is falling from image to image. At night the stars are lost in horror.

The rainfall buzzes in the wires. The jets scream shaking from the sky. I am afraid to fly. I am afraid of winter. I am afraid of the silent holy snow.

TO HAVE YOU HEAR

two sounds at once, walking and not walking, I stop in the parking lot gravel.

There is a fire back of the log, a sandy beach, behind trees big with summer.

Two big umbrella butterflies (like Haiku elephants) flutter one by one among the leaves, their shadows, and the air.

On the green slopes the sprinklers turn like maypoles.

It has been summer for weeks now, and you refuse to talk about it.
Ira Sadoff

WALKING THROUGH THE MATH BUILDING

In this church of numbers, young students bend
over their desks, praying to the intersection
of perpendicular lines; grown men really believe
in being five feet ten inches tall, and I dream
of solving the universe with a single formula
guaranteed not to work. By order of computer,
squares, triangles and even
trapezoids will violate the law
of infinity, and endless cylinders
will police the streets, keeping
numbers in their place.

Numbers, revolt:
number one, bend
over and kiss number two.
Number six, turn yourself in-
side out, upside down and feel
what it’s like to be number nine.
And number eight, roll over,
let us chase you as though
you were a pair of moons. God

is an odd number:
he knows the world will be saved
by imaginary numbers or, like Dostoevski’s
two times two is sometimes five, irrational
numbers that cannot be expressed by an integer.

Hildegarde Flanner

A FEW WORDS TO THE MANSION

Once long ago we heard that you were born
Of that same light that stunned George Fox on Pendle Hill
And left him speaking truths three centuries
Have not bettered. The one he spoke to anger,
The one he spoke to war, the one to power,
The one to the King of England, using
God’s grammar and the uncourtly language
Of the Society of Friends, and would not
Remove his hat from his head in the presence.
For such he sat in prison and removed
Much else to the occult ubiquity of fleas
And knew the lewd dominion of old filth
And prayed. And glowed. And prayed. Six years of this.
And saw at last by intuition’s single eye
In every man a light, the only light
That dwells in human dark and takes its fuel
From humble energies of faith, of pity,
Of love, and though it gutters, does not gutter out.
For God’s sake, Mr. President, once born
To the great decencies of peace and compassion
Be, even in gaunt renewal, born again
And speak to that light, Sir, threatened by all that blows,
Pale wince of light being brave as it can,
Only with diligence discerned on a sill forlorn,
A poor poor light, and surely, Sir, thee knows
It is the ransom of the darkening world.
Ed Ochester

Two Poems

WHEN THE DOW JONES INDUSTRIAL INDEX HIT ITS ALL-TIME HIGH IN 1966

Just then children began to disappear,
just then blood began to accumulate in the lowlands,
springs of blood resumed their flow
in Kansas and Mississippi;
blood pooled
in Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles.
Just then supertankers of blood
began to arrive from Asia
to pump their cargo
into the harbors and streets of the cities.
And even in the small cities
and on the failing farms
men slept at night
like caged wolves,
smelling blood in their dreams,
tiny bubbles of blood
welling up in their nostrils.

AMONG HIS EFFECTS WE FOUND A PHOTOGRAPH

My mother is beautiful as a flapper.
She is so in love
that she has been gazing
secretly at my father
for forty years.
He’s in uniform,
with puttees and swagger stick,
a tiny cork moustache
bobbing above a shoreline of teeth.
They are “poor but happy.”
In his hand is a lost book
he had memorized,
with a thousand clear answers
to everything.

Charles Edward Eaton

BLUE POOL WITH RED GERANIUMS

Let us indulge in a restful, rigid exclusion,
Let us make a simple postcard of our lives,
If you will, a kind of pornographic, intense observation.

The pool and the geraniums seem to cooperate
As if they had been photographed over and over out of context,
Allowing anyone to say: Wish you were here—and not mean it.

We will provide the stud and the belly dancer,
That is all we want to say to the world today,
Just give us the bluest pool, the reddest geraniums,

And we will do the rest, provide the show.
We want to be a lewd illustration in our own minds,
We want to have broken off a piece of the world.

It does not matter if the book has only one page
As long as it is blindingly illuminated, blue and red,
And the bodies never become staid and statuesque.

Nevertheless, a voyeur inevitably appears, our first reader.
We cannot beat back his avid, Cyclopean eye—
He points out that the geraniums look rather blood-soaked,
The pool might be the place a harem dyed its veils.
He is an enormously inventive assimilator
And plans to tuck us, still protesting, in his large loose-leaf
book.

Will there be a place to hide among so many fantasies?—
Our story had charm, was not meant to be encyclopedic,
All middle, no beginning, no end, until the Cyclops came.
Donna Brook

CHAOS HAS CALL LETTERS

the Olympian glass and people made to look like bugs
molten avenues full of wilt
liquefying caterpillars

O my feet my feet
I have given up on my heart

but I always want to talk
to be if nothing else
the voice from the icy carcass
pretending Jonah was the whale’s ventriloquist
or believing in socialism
acting as if this were radio

I report that the sea is hot
all blubber and onions like a weeping stew

that each naked bush
is a vegetable flame with no comment
untraditional but average

I come to you direct from here
the ballroom of ribs and weight
where we have carved a fireplace lavatory kitchen
a wall of last items

Leda Has Abortion
Naomi Joins Golden Agers and Attends Picnic
Job Drops Out

since the last of our wood we have issued polemics
on a new way of life
explaining why we don’t wear shoes
wish to establish a natural state

while our listeners fade in cellars
the calcium leaving their bones
the liquid of eyes running like the sands of time
the mantis crippled
a child stoned

I have so little left
I keep my sense of humor and a knife

Hitler Wasn’t In It For The Money

I live in this place

John Unterecker

GHANA EVENING WITH THREE FRIENDS
Augustine Danson (b. Agroyesum, Ghana, 1948), George
Weinheimer (b. Silver Creek, N.Y., 1922) and Vyvian d’Estienne
(b. Chamonix, France, 1939)

We play childhood games in the dark,
a little circle clapping hands in the dark.
I ask my childhood, “Whose hands do you touch?”
But childhood is a sled in the snow, mittens, a black dog.
I touch a Ghana village, “Darkness between Friends,” Agroyesum:
my right hand. My left strikes Silver Creek, New York.
Across from me, who shares their hands, a girl grows up in France:
Chamonix, Mont Blanc’s bright dream.
We are a circle dreamed
on the bent darkness of this turning world, the turned land’s dark
heart’s blood. There had been bloody shadows on the sun,
curtains of shadow. Yet
hands
clapping luminous applause drive dark
from living hearts.

A woven childhood flares the darkening night.
THE MAN WHO MADE ME LATE FOR WORK

It happened at five minutes to eight on Monday morning. In the grim dawn of a new work-week I drove slowly, stubborn and unyielding as a cod in a school of mullet. Andretti-inflamed clerks in clerky cars swarmed by; stenos in tiny cars sculpted their hair en route; downtown merchants, in wine or neon-yellow shirts, guided heavy dark sedans like flagships of commerce and assayed the profit-weather with trained sniffs.

Then, at our key intersection, traffic stopped dead. In seconds, cars backed up a block all ways. Because there, starting a diagonal crossing in flaunt of local ordinance, golden and glorified in a swath of early sun cutting past the buildings, was surely the world's oldest, most misshapen man. Drivers too far back to see honked and ranted, but we in the front ranks were silent in wonder. I felt stunned. Nothing staged could duplicate this living, forming masterpiece, a song for the eyes. He was Man the majestic, the unflinching and unbreakable.

Could any creature be so slow? Any rockbound root as bent? His frail shoes did not rise a full inch at a step. His feet did not land; they kissed. Yet, he soared. An immense old Army pack, the color of swamps, humped sharp as a butte over his caved shoulders like the sacked burdens of ten lifetimes. But he came on. My God, what a marvel to see him loom through that light: part crab, part goat and granite and angel.

He did not look up. Perhaps deaf to the circling city, certainly unaware of being the crux of a tableau, he held track, pecking ahead with a twisted walking stick, white hair and beard like frozen spray on a ship's prow. Three cycles of the lights were needed for his traverse and no car cut his wake until he gained the curb. Safe atop the sidewalk slab, he paused to shift his pack. With one brown hand on a signal standard, the old man bobbed like an ouzel on a river rock. As he eased his load the spell ended. The blessed became the ordinary; the traffic roiled.

I turned the corner without a glance, unwilling to see what I guessed his real face might be. But I was the one revealed false and unlovable, in thinking, with all the winds to greet his dying dance, with brother hawks to share his final flight on earth, what difference would it make if I had stopped to say Good morning, Sir?

WAITING FOR MAESTRO

It seemed, when the door opened, Their magician had come back—Until they realized the face was Merely unshaven. Flocks of doves Rose higher under the ceiling To make space for him, the rabbits Piled deeper among paper flowers Growing between the floorboards. Soft, so soft this room, this Closed system—flowers feeding rabbits, Their droppings a feast for doves—Whose occupants had been two and Two when the prop room closed, The theatre abandoned. In the morning He might set them free, but sleep now In a crush of white fur and feathers, Ten thousand pink eyes better than President McKinley's two sockets Staring judgment from the granite Pedestal beneath the park lindens.
ANNITA MALONE

STARTING IN MY GRANDMOTHER'S BATHROOM

On the tile floor,
up close,
I can see the dirt in lines
between the white cubes.

Ancient tracks,
fingerprints of hair,
dirt ground in with 1940 shoes.
(Wedgies and saddle shoes,
Joan Crawford slings,
and Uncle Carl's rubber-soled business sedans.)

Old age in those lines,
the soupy smell
of radiators and denture cleansers,
a sour broth of urine drops
and the night Grandpa was sick.

There is a smell so deep,
I fall delirious
into the toilet bowl,
flushed away to China at 7,
hunchbacked on the seat at 10
reading Superman making love
to the stars
of Wonder Woman.

That house, that great mausoleum of dreams,
waves and lines and avenues of dreams
grounded in the kitchen
with the radio signals of Lorenzo Jones
and the steam
of boiled carrots.

I can crouch over you now,
giant-legged,
crush your cement steps
with one foot.
I can pick you up
ancient doll house,
Grandmother house,
peer through your tiny night windows;
I can push my fingers down your chimney
reach for the corner cabinet
and pull out
all the albums of my history.

MYRON TURNER

FUGITIVE

You never knew
but I was with you in Russia, the same prison
I crept like a roach, my shadow under me on the wall

The same oven in Germany
without fire or smoke
its nipple-rose bricks sweated with humiliation

Then underground
but even there, apart
a candle smoked with lack of air
flickered like lightning miles away
where there's nothing but night
Grow, grow
I said to myself
then swear I heard your voice in a stone!
like a moonstone in the sun
some ventriloquist's egg-shaped sky of changes
speaking light in the underground

I tunneled through with rocks
bruising fingers, tearing up nails

NORTHWEST
on the other side, this is a prison
you said, wormy oven
unaware that your neck curved like the edge of ivy
Your long hair spread out around you in an arc
Like the sky. And I flew there, my laughter
scattering like swallows through tall grasses
Your throat—as sensual as any Florentine madonna’s—
quivered, arched, like your smile, like a small stream
curving into unimaginable corruscations of small stones,
coppery, pink, silver, violet . . .

I was no longer angry at the sky!
deep in its blue changes
where I had made someone beautiful
and was beautiful
at last.

Scott Wright

SOMETIMES A POEM DOESN’T WORK SO WELL

A poem is like an anagram.
Sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn’t. Sometimes
you think so hard your mind spills onto the floor.
This makes everybody sad, to see it.
The poem is cracked. It is breaking open.
Its contents are pouring all over the floor.
The people are sad. They shake their heads.
They say “Pity.” But it is too late
because, whenever the mind cracks even a little bit,
there is no stopping it.
Women shake their skirts.
Dogs tremble and back away from the intruder.
Grown men wring their hands in futility to understand it.

Paul Zimmer

ZIMMER, THE MILL TOWN SINNER

Overhead the crows were my misdeeds,
Were flicks of my wrist
Flying over the smoke stacks
And steeples. Beneath them I was afraid.
My stomach sparked with impurities.

At my first communion, unworthy of God,
I let the Host fall from my mouth
And felt it burn in righteous anger
Through the floorboards of the church.
No one saw; but my head in my hands
Was an open hearth, was heat lightning
Flashing between the chimneys.

Later when I worked in the mills
The truth clicked in the time clocks,
And furnaces rasped for my soul.

Once a crane dropped a fiery ingot
Near me on the cooling platform
And it seared a hole right through
The timbers into the ground.

I always knew why the steel struck
At me like a serpent out of
The rollers; why mortal sin burned
In the waste torches over the mills.
THE CHILD ON THE STAKED PLAIN

1. Cacti
Little blooms on this high treeless plain; the winds
smash, suck away everything but mesquite,
Spanish bayonet and dens of cacti darting out
red and yellow tongues after the first warm downpour
like rattlesnakes. Charmed,
mother transplants them into our Devil's
Garden; barrels, prickly pears, thunderclouds.

The winds are coming, the winds
are always coming—here they all
go. We are supposed to go somewhere;
mother can't
She can't go anywhere.
We can't touch her. She already dry
heaves, dry heaves.
The windows are wood, wood, wood
downtown. People lean
from themselves to stay put. They have gone
through windows before, they won't
now, not at eighty miles an hour.
It won't be long again before the windows and mother
are glass.

2. Dustbowl
Once,
all day
a door opens: wastes
wastes, whatever a man turns from—
reds, blacks, browns, whites—the Great
Plains get up as one kicking, blindingly dull
figure, cuts off
the playground, sky, the breaks—through
the men and up the women he dries
his mouth wide open. Slam,
slam, we ride the door we

3. Funnel Cloud
After the norther seals the cattle's eyes,
after all the roads vanish and a desperate boy
from Boy's Ranch hikes into the snow
toward the girl forty miles away and is found
crucified on barbed wire, the Gulf Wind begins pushing
a night around, pouring, blowing
out the lights, hailing baseballs, roaring
like a train; father boarding his store rides
away, mother hanging on the neck of God
spirals into a blue morning: falling
softly onto the lawn, a perfect cup and saucer.

Charles Martin
Two Poems

SUNDAY IN DELAWARE PARK

Bobbing like apples in their tight
Skins of primary color, all in place,
Wound in unshadowed dreams of appetite
Before the beginning of the first race

In the Model Speedboat Competition—
A fleet of polished wooden shoes:
"Classics," we overhear, and "Lilliputian
Bombs, waiting for the fuse . . ."

Northwest
Around the artificial lake
Runs a broken concrete lip,
Scarred like a boxer's;
Rusted pilings drip

Great oilsemeared chains of sedge, mortally
Billowing outward like the tresses
Of Arthur Rimbaud's Ophelia,
Or Classic Comic Book Greek goddesses.

Artful, that simplicity,

But trouble for the mechanic hobbyists
Down here hours early for the races—
Middle-aged, untested, terrorists
Manqué, short-haired, with the ascetic faces

Of men who tortured animals as boys.
Denied their fatal choices in the name
Of something better, they trot out their toys,
Driving in like outlaws from the tame

Suburbs on a Sunday to cut loose—
They bring their manic engines to a boil
Out of the water; lovingly they goose
The tiny, hidden parts with drops of oil,

Then put them into action: off from shore
As though by instinct, deaf and blind,
Driven by short wave, they lunge out for
The other side, the jugular: they bend

The surface under them and nearly spill,
Turning, but wind out straight to churn the lake's
Skin senseless as they slap and flail,
Mad with terror of their poisoned wakes,—

Their edgy voices rising as the metal swells
Up in its anguish straining
Hard against those fragile shells
Of polished wood, like tall men leaning

Into their shadows:

or as when, in a slow
Motion sequence you will see a rock
Climbing steeply toward someone's window,
Heralded by spreading waves of shock—

Just so:
Now birds are swept up from the mad trees shrieking
Blindly,
Scattering in the turbulent air—

"It is all very well for you to adopt
this attitude of distance, of irony,
of metaphor, as long as you are willing
to accept at least part of the blame
for the failure which you are bringing
us. You will say that nothing happened,
but you will not tell us why: is it
because you do not know, or because you
are ashamed to say? This 'imminence
of a revelation which does not occur' is
no longer sufficient. But you must
have your conclusion. Get on with it,
then: you have broken faith with the
greenshadowed path under the stone foot-
bridge, with the deserted ballfields
paved now with broken glass, with the
shameful casino. Get on with it."

And now the classical, severe façade
Of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery
Signals overwater to the staid
City Museum, impatiently:

"Nothing connects, nothing will break or burn!"

One by one the boats stutter and run dry,
And the buried lives of things come out from cover;
The boats skid down on the suddenly
Softening water and the race is over.
A CHAIR OUGHT TO STAND ON ITS OWN TWO LEGS
or,
THE ART OF MILTON AVERY

"Whatever is beautiful is tainted
(Whatever I paint for you can't be spoken,
Whatever I say to you can't be painted);
Whatever is genuine is broken."

Jay Meek

Two Poems

MASSACRE OF THE VILLAGERS

Grey-jawed, barricaded in the White House,
the President has been watching television,
an avid fan, tuned to the whack of players
deployed in random patterns on the grid;
he takes the stance of a gentleman pugilist.
"Socko, socko," he says. He is schooled
in calculating the appropriate response,
and suddenly there comes from his mouth:
"Gentlemen, let me say that . . . " He stops.
He has been watching himself too long.
His eyes click and roll like fruits
in the windows of a gambling machine.
In his mind there is an image he cannot help;
it is in a city or a village he thinks:
there are pigs' heads in windows, the faint
pink, pink, pink of mutton legs and tripe,
kidneys, hearts, sucklings smooth as babies,
and shoulders of something like cattle.
Beside him is his daughter who drifts about,
thin, cool, dreamy over nothing,
his image of how he'd have her be,
his remnant of passion.

PALACE SCENE

The men are diplomats,
or they are college presidents,
standing in the embankment gardens of the palace.
It has many windows.
The palace is like a cake decorated like a palace.
The delegates are so uneasy
they all begin talking to one another;
there are no interpreters.
The men are hopeless, though formal;
their lips are anchovies curled together. They turn
uneasily in line, in the sunlight,
their eyes pinched tight as urethras. They are boys waiting
to make water. In their eyes
is the look of the desperately confused;
in their hands, frosting.

One delegate
begins prodding another in his bread-basket
as if it were a button
to the palace door: he rings with anger, humiliation, protocol.
Others are holding themselves tightly
and rolling all over
the ground as if they could not die enough: they begin
poking one another: they see
a girl on the embankment in a long dress on a picnic.
She is taking down her hair.
She begins to take off her clothes.
She sails her bonnet away like a cake tin.
The water is swift,
not quite so grey as the bank-trees are grey,
but in the blaring sun,
which must require a special filter,
even the ferry crossing the river is grey,
and those making the trip from the war zones, tanned-grey;
they are linked together;
they drift past the ferry like loaves of bread, dead words,
swill.
PLEASURES OF THE INSANE

A bird sits where once this heart was caged. Companion, with you something is always about to fall. Yet still you keep that sly balance between the lungs. On you no light closes though here the moon may fix all the blinds. This room holds us waiting. Atop a table one huge friend proclaims: "Whatever has been lost is not to be found at this time. Whatever has been misplaced is not to be regained till the blood dries in the sea's veins." He has no bird lodged inside his chest, yet considers himself mad. Retreating walls support many coughing up their last hours. That one wears a red cap and is not to be trusted. This one before me, dressed in an old cloak, pretending blind, claims to be the dark. As always, he has his terms. I show the botched letters under the palms of all my hands. The bird squeezes out its own blood, bruising the bones for the sake of an old grievance. So they say: anything lately lost is never to be found; nothing may be returned here. Someone is late in coming. A white nurse wreathed in steam passes through. Often that happens. Try to forget also the keeper of lists and promises, tapping his tongue. He has my name misspelled and can say only: Who told you there was sense in that? But how can you sit so long on your perch, old bird, and not sleep? What is all your bleeding about? Now behind us hunches the man in red, suddenly sane. I knew he had a knife hidden in his drawer. The dark is done in by the night and howls in his room. The branches close. The worm finds no voice before that sudden cold. All birds tear their suppers.

THE ASYLUM YEARS

A poem for Christopher Smart

Madness frequently discovers itself by unabandoned praise. Sane, could we believe so much good of the world? Poor Kit Smart, that harmless alcoholic, he never loved clean linen.

Friends recalled that many times he "shewed the disturbance of his mind by falling upon his knees and saying his prayers in the street." Surely I too would have been embarrassed, and gone out of my way to avoid him, assuming no one might safely be that grateful. Best, he thought, was praying naked in the rain.

They removed him to a quiet place where he dug in the garden like Adam, reciting to himself the sayings of flowers.

For us, hopelessly sane, madness seems a marvelous catastrophe. But I suppose I never could have liked the man, being shy of prayer, and feel much safer years away with his book, the defective light of imprisoned scribblings. At the end he had only a cat to love.

Christopher, I will not be too familiar with your name, pray for me anyway on a street or in the rain, that I may bless all I have at hand and later learn to praise what I cannot understand.
Robert Hershon

Two Poems

SANSEVIERIA

You are having no success with the sansevieria
You water it
too much or too little
You walk around it
whispering green compliments
You let it sleep in your bed
You stroke its forehead
send it to Arizona for the air
to Cannes for the season

But you are forgetful
You go away for a week
dancing your midnight dances
full of scotch and trumpets
and you never think once
of the sansevieria

which by the way
I looked up today:
named for the Prince of Sansevero
a learned Neapolitan
1710-1771
I have invoked his ghost
to care for his namesake
Let the shade fret over sun
and bleed for the lance-like leaves

You keep dancing
I'll dance too
Believe me
there is something
you can make grow

Sandra McPherson

Two Poems

LIBERTY ISLAND

most forest rangers don't like
this assignment so far from forests
the forest ranger said but
it's not so bad really
late at night i go up
where the public is not allowed
up in the torch
and i sit in the torch alone
and watch the harbor

THE DAWN OF THE WHEEL

While reading Leopold Tyrmand

"The indomitable flawlessness . . ."—I can't get past that.
Is that what I wake to—". . .of dawn," that

latinate alarm I always set in the past?
The first stone wheel. The stone being much older than
the wheel.

Something remade me in the night, and at dawn
I feel like that original heavy matter proud of its new spark.

"A disc or circular frame," I've made a model
of the sun. It has this spark, a model

of all other sparks. However, it resolves
every time it revolves. It is pierced through

in a balanced way
by an axe.

The wheel has permanently altered my nose
for distance and weight, waiting. "The event

NORTHWEST
occurred sometime during the Neolithic period of the Holocene epoch” and it’s still a task
marketing it to the old-fashioned. It was so difficult to invent! If only
we suffered likewise. If we could see its creator practicing, rolling his fist
on the not-yet-invented roadway to understand the notions of turn and rock,
worried about the civilization of history.
He gave it a name that describes its grace, wheel, and the citizens pronounce it with the phonemes of full mouths, technology.
At the dawn of civilization, there you have it, indomitable technological flawlessness. It would be a wonder we got any further had we not realized its circle was the one we were in.

A PUMPKIN AT NEW YEAR’S
Heads were rolling down the highway in high slat trucks. I knew it was time to buy you and found you, The last sphere unscarred and undistorted in the store, Big as my own head.

It was time too to leave you uncut and full-featured, Like the grandpa of twenty-five pumpkins in my past, Khrushchev-cheeked and dwelling on yourself, Great knee of my childhood.

I plainly thought you would rot. I remembered the fetor of other pumpkins,

Their blue populations coming out of hiding as if at the end Of some apocalypse.
I devoted a day to reading up on minor cucurbits: I learned your dozen names in African And came home ready to raise or raze you, Positive of change.
But so far—eternity. I think I would not like Eternity, after I had used my senses up, As I’ve tried with you—fingertips dragging over your world Pole to pole
Till they go dead like explorers, nostril cilia Detecting your fragrance more delicate than they— And my patience. It’s Christmas, it’s a new year And I hear
Of a family who’s kept you for four . . . You endure like matter manufactured And indeed your stem seems punched into your orange gathers Like a button in a mattress.
Shall I give you a room or a shrine? And shall I Purchase you a mate and family, When ours is so inadequate, fixed upon your window Deathbed as we are,
Centered upon a time and birth, new holiday, new friends, New pumpkin friends, celebrating when all That has failed us has passed away. You have not failed.
About Our Contributors

William Stafford is completing his year as Poetry Consultant in the Library of Congress and will return to Lewis and Clark College.

Philip Dacey teaches at Southwest Minnesota State College and recently published a chapbook titled Fish, Sweet Giraffe, the Lion Snake and Owl.

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Charles Baxter is a graduate student at the State University of New York at Buffalo. His first book of poems, Chameleon, was published by New Rivers Press in 1969.

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Ira Sadowitz lives in Geneva, New York, and is co-editor of Seneca Review.

Hildegarde Flanner lives in Calistoga, California. Her books of poems include Time’s Profile (Macmillan) and If There Is Time (New Directions).

Ed Ochester teaches at the University of Pittsburgh. Quixote Press has published two of his books of poems.


Donna Brook lives in Detroit and last appeared in our Autumn 1968 issue.

John Unterecker, whose definitive biography of Hart Crane was one of last year’s candidates for the National Book Award, teaches at Columbia University.

Frederick Benton is a fire captain with the California Division of Forestry in Redding, California.

William McLaughlin lives in Shaker Heights, Ohio, and has published in numerous little magazines.

Anita Malone lives in Detroit. This is her first published poem.

Myron Turner lives in Toronto and edits the magazine The Far Point.

Scott Wright, while a student at the University of Delaware, won the Academy of American Poets Prize.

Paul Zimmer is currently poet-in-residence at Chico State College in California.

Lawrence Kramen teaches at California State College, San Bernardino.

Charles Martin is a graduate student at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

Jay Meek is teaching at Colby College.

Lawrence Raab has been teaching at American University in Washington.

Robert Heinsen’s latest publication was Stelling, brought out by New Books, in which he appeared with Marge Piercy, Dick Lourie, and Emmett Jarrett.


POETRY NORTHWEST PRIZE AWARDS, 1971

Helen Bullis Prize: $100

Kenneth O. Hanson for “Six Poems” (Autumn 1970)

Jack Tootell for “Three Poems” (Autumn 1970)

Previous Winners

Hayden Carruth (1962)

John Logan (1963)

Donald Finkel (1964)

Mona Van Duyn (1965)

Richard Hugo (1966)

Winfield Townley Scott and Katie Louchheim (1967)

Sandra McPherson and Gwen Head (1968)

Eugene Ruggles (1969)

Will Stubbs (1970)

Theodore Roethke Prize: $50

Dave Etter for “Three Poems” (Summer 1970)

Previous Winners

Carol Hall (1963)

Richard Hugo and Kenneth O. Hanson (1964)

Kenneth O. Hanson (1965)

William Stafford (1966)

Carolyn Stoloff (1967)

John Woods (1968)

Thomas James (1969)

Philip Booth (1970)