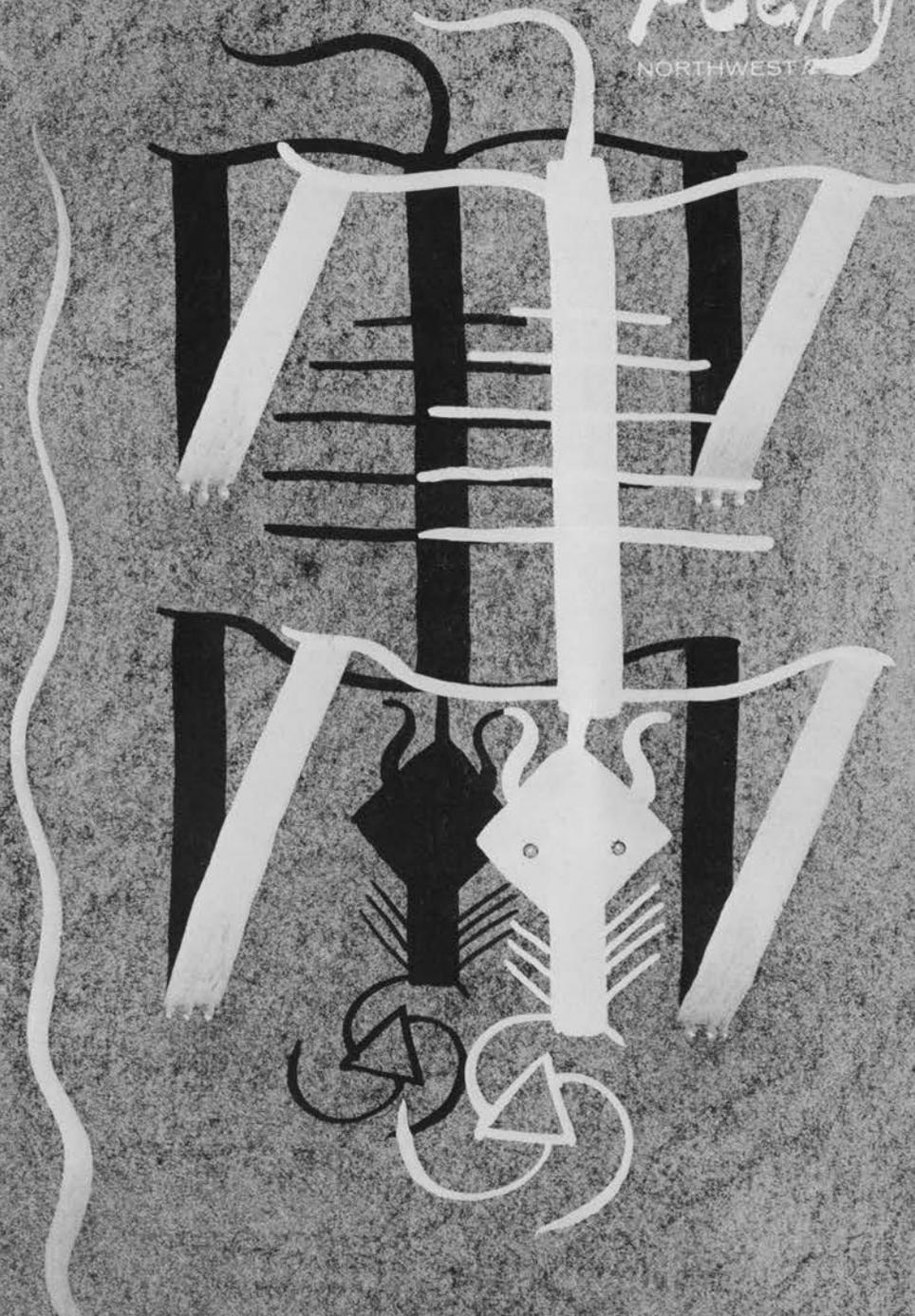


Poetry
NORTHWEST



POETRY NORTHWEST

VOLUME THIRTEEN

NUMBER ONE

SPRING 1972

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POETRY NORTHWEST

SPRING 1972

Dale Nelson

SELECTIONS FROM A WORK IN PROGRESS
 BASED LOOSELY ON THE REVISED CODE OF WASHINGTON

TITLE I: GENERAL PROVISIONS

The edges of the flag may, or may not, be fringed.
 The dimensions of the flag may vary.
 The steelhead trout is a game fish in these waters,
 Protected from Indians.
 Signs say *Official Parking Only*
 Among the rhododendrons.
 Among the encumbrances, appropriations and disbursements,
 The coffee in white paper cups,
 The administered men
 Assess their unrealized balance.

TITLE 7: SPECIAL PROCEDURES

If you obstruct a park,
 Square, street or highway,
 Or speak obscenely from the heart,
 You may be enjoined perpetually
 On three days' notice. The sheriff
 May call the power of the county
 To his aid to restrain your life.
 Prometheus, the adverse party
 Is bound. Disobedience is contempt.
 Anyone in possession of property
 May act against the unknown heirs.
 Sometimes the sheriff will arrest
 Peacemakers for disturbing the wars.

TITLE 15: AGRICULTURE

To the person in charge of infections:
Remove and burn or scorch
Fire blight, crown gall and hairy root,
Infections of the livelihood. Do not say
That the usual is unusual or the unusual usual
(Black spot, leaf curl, blue stem of raspberry,
The damaged or frozen or dying).
Prohibit, root or stem,
The wild morning glory, the blue flowering lettuce.
Restrict, being merely objectionable,
Poverty weed, ground cherry and star thistle.
If bees are infected with foul brood,
Post in the bee yard a quarantine
(The colonies must be burned).
As continually as the crop requires,
We advertise in distant markets
Our lost colonies, our foul brood,
Damaged or frozen or dying.

TITLE 17: WEEDS, RODENTS AND PESTS

Standing, being and growing
In the fields of our fathers' summers,
We stand in our fathers' dangers.
Old infestations, encroaching
On playfields and cemeteries,
Threaten our growing. The wind
Carries disease from the land
To the weedy edges of cities.
Men in the cities and farmers
Listen, early and late,
To rumors of wars and rumors
Of pestilent species going
To seed in the curative sunlight
In the field of our fathers' being.

TITLE 42: PUBLIC OFFICERS AND AGENCIES

*All American male citizens above the age of twenty-one years
and all American male half breeds over that age*

*who have adopted the habits of the whites
may vote in these elections . . .*

These are the numbers
Of underutilized nonpoor individuals.
This is the universe of need.

From eight o'clock to five o'clock on each business day
They sit at their desks in the universe
In the upper middle years of their need,
Wondering by whom to be utilized.

TITLE 50: UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION

The unemployment rate
Is rising in the dark.
Insured against his fate,
A man thrown out of work
Reads his paper slowly
By a street lamp in the park.
The news from the labor lobby
Rustles in his hand.
The cricket in the holly
Sings on the public land.
It's getting on toward eight
And the factory is unmanned.

TITLE 57: WATER DISTRICTS

A man called a water master
Patrols the dangerous ditches
Mastered by swimmers.
Validated over and over,
The rider officially watches
These growing waters
The owners of a majority of the acreage
Have willed to create. The district
Benefits the land,
We say. The crop is savage
Dry. We ridge the strict
And fertile sand.

TITLE 69: FOOD AND DRUGS

The clockwise honey dew
Turns counter in the comb,
Spinning the light askew
In the dry and airy room,
The floral exudation
To nonconforming crystal,
Making the dew a poison
Bees in their dark distill.

TITLE 75: FISH AND SHELLFISH

From the island after the ceremony,
At mean high tide on a true bearing
Northward from Lovers' Point,
Fishing boats grail to seaward of the mission,
Finding, like visitors to vandalized saints,
Good fishing off the stations of the cross.

TITLE 82: TAXES—EXCISE

They tax us where we go
Thick in the hoot owl firs,
Deep as the berries grow.
The property under the air's
Our own. You fill your pocket
With what we still call nature's.
The unthinned dead crowd out
The living rough. Dark hours, we log
Light's boundaries, clear cut.

TITLE 88: NAVIGATION AND HARBORS

Navigating between sunset and sunrise
Vessels under steam
Must carry at the foremast head
A bright white light
Visible on a clear dark night
For a distance of two miles;
Under sail and not under steam,

A good and sufficient light
Thrown in some part of the rigging.
Whenever landing at nighttime
Those on board will hear
A signal from the shore
By means of a horn or trumpet.
Darkness we herein define
As that period between
One-half hour after sunset
And one-half hour before sunrise.
And the darkness he called Night.
Waters as used herein,
Navigating between sunset and sunrise,
Or one-half hour either way,
Are defined as forming lakes
Or ponds or other bodies . . .
*And the gathering together of the waters
Called he Seas.*

TITLE 91: WATERWAYS

By excavation
In dry ground,
In creeks, in rivers,
By excavation
In tidal waters,
In known land,
By condemnation,
By those condemned,
The long movers,
The known nation,
The kept waters,
The free ground,
We swear only
The long freedom
Of those kept
In debt to the land.

SO HAVING RISEN EARLY, THIS POEM

Without sleep (and nearly four in the morning),
with the birdtapping of her hand, she has turned

to me out of a woman's fear, afraid to touch me awake.
For hours, in some dream, I have felt her body

move in the hollow of itself, as if sleep
were some shape to be fitted into.

Now I turn out of the slow dream of her
to find her face pressed like the new moon

of a coin against that other surface
which sleep, even dreams, sometimes denies us.

UNDER COWS

We milk the moon, or—

having lain inside you
for the duration,

some war in asia
our own animal:

against you my brilliant body
breaking down, stone
by precious stone,

into this small, final star,

while overhead colossal
Taurus creams his
favorite cow:

I say there are nations
in us breaking apart
& in our sky

whole continents reforming.
The signs are right.
This bull among the febrile china

loves you. If just once more
I milk your body with this needlepoint . . .

LIKE THE MAN WHO SOLD BARBWIRE

Like the man who sent flowers,
like the man with best friends,

like the man delivering welfare checks,
like all messengers,

like the uninvited man, the man
with a stone in his shoe,
the man with books in both hands,

like the man who takes tickets
and the man standing in line,

like the man of experience,
like the virginal man,

the man taking pictures,
like the man without children,

the man on safari,

hands in his pockets
the man with nothing to say,
the last word.

Robert Hudzik

THE PHOTOGRAPH OF DEATH

Picture the dead, the missing among us,
those we want to believe
we can forget, easily as cut-off hair:
we would grow into new lives, new heads of care;
yet, we are compelled at night,
like children obsessed with the pain of prayer,
to speak their names—silent, hurt objects
which we turn over and over, trusting them to touch.
Their faces appear to us among the sheets
when we name them; like authors
who believe in their characters, explain them:
more than any language, we learn their shapes by heart.

Remember their graves, tiny slits
into which they were deposited like change:
nothing ever came out of them.

Feeling they owe us something still, we climb
out of our beds, our dreams, our wives,
assemble in the damp graveside grasses
to herd the dead back into the light, our lives.
Imagine their astonishment, after all these years
of self-indulgence, at seeing our innocent faces;
their forgetfulness: are they afraid of us?
Legs no longer remember how to walk. Embarrassed,
we tell them, crawl on your bellies like babies.

Now they are gathering and upright
on a hill, the moon flooding the scene with its
single wash of light;
and now each one of us
is having his own snapshot taken, each one caught
in this final pose: so many lives lying, developing
in the shallow pans, the precious fluids, coming clear.

Arno Karlen

POLONIUS WAITS ALONE
BEHIND THE ARRAS

Christ, the mess is
only starting. He still
thinks he has a right
to justice. I almost
pity him. But he'll drag
us all along before it's
done. It's always like
that, people too young
or stupid, or too hurt,
to know that justice is
a luxury. Friendship,
peace, small decencies,
aren't enough for them.
No, things must be *right*,
God help us! Warmth?
No, he has to burn, burn,
burn. And when all the
burning's over, and he's
dead or convalescing,
the unfortunates still
left intact will hose
things down and bury him
or nurse him back to
dangerous good health.
If he'd just get radical
about contentment! Or even
mere survival. No, he's
hoarding all that hurt.
And you can't blame youth;
the old get bruised to
screaming *justice!* too,
if they're thin-skinned,
or bad luck snatches child,
lover, fortune. But what
good is knowing that

right now? Here I am,
white beard and medals,
I've negotiated off
invasions, killed the
surtax, aborted fishing
expeditions after scrubby
colonies—and I end up
shuffling from foot to
foot in the dark and draft
behind an arras, smelling
damp and urine, waiting
for one of the hurt to
spread his pain around
a little thinner. Stuck
with the job because
I know the nasty humor
of it, where the dramas
of the hurt end up. I wish
someone could make him see
that it's always people
who can't stand heat that
end up in the kitchen.

S. J. Marks

RED GRASS

You are here now. The grass is on fire.

There is a time when we can't grieve
about ourselves, our hands, our lips—it is no longer
desire. It is empty of shadow.

I lie here touching your face and lips and hair.
You hide yourself. Near the moon,
my dream drags you from eyelid to eyelid.

Pamela Hadas

HECATE

One need not be a Chamber to be haunted.
—Emily Dickinson

It has been a long time blind
Woman since I last dreamed about you
Nightly following your gray coat my astonishment
Through gardens I was following
You when I lost
You in the crowd I could not see
You were blind and that is why I lost
You melting into morning

Tonight I writhe again
Under the coarse tapping of your cane
Where you return
ratch ratch ratch
On the fence and in the dark branches
Of the hedge around and around my house
You kill expensive dogs and stray men
In your way losing your own path
Toward the cemetery

So that I must take your loose coatsleeve
And lead you through the park
Naming the obstacles that fall
Against us windbroken trees
Picnic tables swing sets dead children
Where flowers darkly lounge in their beds
Curiously dressed as clocks or windmills
Hissing from little faces as we pass

This humiliation does not dissolve
Itself in sunlight I ask myself
Where am I
Leading that dull ghost of yours and what dead
Claims do you hang me with
Blind witch I wish I knew your private name as well
As you know mine

THE ROSE WASP FAMILY: A FABLE

*He was one of the family—
and she was his mother and his sister
and he was her father and uncle
and O Christ how unhappy
they all were
Amen*

She stared into the hollow eclipse on the 30th of February
The day she was born upon the moon
Do not worry, the Christ told her
it's only leap year, but she didn't believe Him
and was left darkeyed and a spot in her quick mind
 burned right through His madness
and early that first day she spread petals like wings
and humming nowhere and disenchanting and we think frightened
was severely seared by the sun and shut up

Then that night she felt his moist mouth upon her lips and
together they lay mown down and happy in the heavy dew of
 morning
and he would anoint the black spot still in her mind
with Christ's blood and his own black love

They lay deep in the cool meadow as the sun rolled up
 and up
How vain he was! afraid of nothing knowing nothing of
the white horror come into her eyes once more
When he saw how black were her lips in the white heat of day
he kissed them red in 30 seconds but
her wasp found himself pinned through the hard belly
on the dry burnt field for Lab Incorp of Calif
and the frenzied wasp died stinging himself upon the lips
of his rose

THE RIVER MUSE

They are climbing again,
those innocents; sticks and cheese
and books of verse
perched on their backs like crows.
They do not know these hills.
I could warn them of worse than rattlesnakes.

High in caves where hanging rock
filtered out the moon, Indians once
offered bass to the river god;
fed it to those bone-white with desire
for immortal heights. Not much remains
as evidence.

From below I see them:
climbers, rocks, the crest.
They are too far for any call.
Right of the caves, near the evergreens,
trees, path, step into space; white
fishbones of birch
lodge
in the throat of the hills.

THE BATS

That houseful of nuns had no belfries
but fourth-floor attic eaves were close enough
to deliver baby squirrels in spring and bats
in any weather. Summer nights

we stoked our silence with the humid air,
waited for the first barrage of slamming doors
to see nightgowned nuns arise with brooms—
ghosts of crusades past—brandish dust mops,

night-veils, books; exorcise with backhand strokes
the winging dark. A fat nun says
tennis rackets make the surest hit,
(Superior says a frying pan); I know

my mettle—I hide; conjure thoughts
of the nun who woke, black wings
inching up her chest. (One gray and furry dawn
two were in the pocket of her robe.)

I don't buy that business of "harmless
little mice with wings." I've had gargoyles faces
swoop through my transom as I'm stuffing
rugs in the door. I don't like darkness
zeroing in.

I fear some night in dreams
I'll take to the streets, wing out my mantle
and fly. One never knows what caves
lurk high in bat-lined dark. Those quivering walls
are close. I feel a draft within.

Colleen J. McElroy

VISITING

The last time I went there, faces
Screamed from their tight shells,
The door opened half a space
To let my foot slip
in. I dread the trip.
I read my lines till I know them well.

There are bruises on the house;
Eyes that see neither night
nor gloom. Mouse
Teeth in crocus skulls
Contrast my own in full
relief. The lights are bright.

I'm veiled, my face a map
For their confessions.
My fingers pray in my lap.
"Right ON," they say. "Righ' on," I reply;
My lips pucker on that lie.
Tips of fingers in obscene contemplation.

They stand in pairs, alone.
Beating their lamp shade skins,
Pink patrons: matrons,
a cover-girl, a jockey, a crone.
And I hand out pardons
For some of my best friends.

Kenneth Brewer

THE STAIRWAY

down four turns
always to the right
until one day
there is no bottom.
he descends.
tries to understand
the swainson's thrush
hidden in his ear.
the stairs quiver
like an escalator.
he stands with
one hand on the rail
the other umbrellaed
on his face.
his eyes close.
feathers and blood
fill his mouth.

BEE IN HIS BONNET

Freely enterprising but (better believe it, boy) Americanwise he began by counting the odds and his change (baby bucks) and he brought home the bacon, becoming banker-rich wheeler-dealing stocks, bartering bonds, bringing off a slick deal in bullion, buying up bankrupts, bamboozling so deftly brother moneybags that he was both bull and bear on the Big Board, then retired to breathe easy because he could do what he liked best—which was becoming the bridge club's top winner (he figured his bids like debentures), procuring a bargain baseball team, while boosting our chamber of commerce and teaching (pro bono publico) Basic Business in a big night class at our brand new Ben Franklin High School built on land he had once bought dirt cheap that begat red-white-and-blue profits.

COYOTE HUNT

By one o'clock this Sunday afternoon trucks drop men off along the five-mile square. Some families have parked on the roads. Cars from as far as Omaha, women in red caps, shiny new guns, taped-up stocks, twelve gauge, sixteen gauge, four-ten. Much yelling: "Get lined up!" "We're starting!" Long shots at crows. "Pass the word—today nothing gets out!" Somebody's dog is shot, it crawls in a drain. Cottontails squeal, a child cries, a fat man dabs crosses with rabbit's blood on two girls' foreheads.

After the first mile in, shotguns roar steadily. "Biggest hunt in years!" "Close up your line!" They meet in the center—shouting—to exhibit two owls, a coyote, a white hen, rabbits, rabbits, rabbits.

Phyllis Morgan

WEATHER OF HEAVEN

I give this day to heaven.
Nothing prefigured it. It came safe and suddenly, so without waiting that all I could do was stand wild in the middle of it, allowing myself, blown as also the sheeted light was blown out across wet sand.

This weather had no herald.
An unlikely wind poured down from the wrong side, so this ocean rose at last into my reach, cross waters driving the salt spray of white waves cast from breakers into the oblique rush of air I was held in to suffer the sting of sand.

It falls to heaven's keeping that was hailed in rage of the lashed ironwoods rimming the hard sweep of beach. Sprung from loss, the time is untellable. It brightens away. Now it's out of my hands. So breaks the spare joy I was borne to—this day. Blessing. I tender it. Receive it, heaven.

Vi Gale

ON THE LITTLE NORTH FORK

My favorite dream. We are camped
in lodgepole pine, in a clearing
along the North Fork.

Newly married, we have sweated
an old DeSoto over back roads
from pump to repair shop to water.

The borrowed tent looks leaky,
smells of mildew and stale tar.
We don't sneeze, we are drunk

on wild white syringa
headier than orange or jasmine.
We've caught, cleaned and cooked

a late dinner. Last chores—
you're weighting the tarp, turning down
the Coleman, coming in to bed.

In this dream we haven't stood
at family biers, quarreled over
money. We haven't fretted

in hospital solariums, dreaded
X-ray and serology reports
or met up with cantankerous

landlords. We know nothing about
mortgages, closing costs. Loan sharks
are pulp novel denizens.

The war is six months old.
For us, two weeks away, remote
as headlines, old soldiers

or uncles in bonus marches.
Diuretics and wonder drugs
are for hypochondriacs.

We haven't been unfaithful,
each in his fashion, or
faithful. We do not know

our true selves. We steer by the closest
star, a double rainbow,
know what we sense precisely

in the moment's blown bubble.
Sweet saving dream, flower-sprigged
as that early meadow in pine,

like our awakening, our aging,
it depends on a dark underside
of troubled anchoring roots.

Gibbons Ruark

THE DEER WHO NEVER COMES

We have never seen him, but our lone house
Rises from the water he would come to.
We would be motionless in the window,
Looking for something else, and he would come
Flashing down from the hedgerow, his quick hooves
Pointing the snow that rushes under him.
At the water he would pause and drop his face
To the icy stones, his antlers tilted
Toward us, his fluffed tail nervous in the wind.
Then he would do the thing we long to see.
See, he is lifting his beautiful mild head,
Lifting his secret eyes to our window.
But he is never there. I take your hand.
We close our eyes and watch for his next move.

GRAPE CREEK

1. BEGINNING

It comes from the northeast.
The crotch of two hills starts it,
when the rain comes, when water flows
through the caliche pebbles and stumps of grass,
the hills melting into the bush roots
hard as iron rope, uncoiling
in the foaming white water,
barren soil mixing up with sheep manure,
these brown flecks churning like worlds
in the water shooting off the hillsides,
arcing over limestone outcrops, crashing
through quail nests by the creek bottom,
the old water paths blown clear
of the dry months, streaming over the creek bank,
drowning the bottom rocks,
their brittle carpet of dead moss.

2. AFTERNOON

The stillness of the water is everything
when the wind is gone and fish hide below limbs,
when the water scum drifts lazily in clumps,
its limp feelers waving like seaweed.
The surface bugs etch vanishing lines,
quick grooves of water that fill smoothly.
As crickets whine in the trees, the air grows thick
with chirping, cobwebs of sound
draping and clinging on the trees, on the water.
Grasshoppers flick off from branches
and whirl through the air to light on leaves,
or miss and strike the surface
and kick themselves dumbly in circles, first left
and then right, their wings growing heavy
their legs growing weary, rippling the surface
with little rings that glide out to the bank,

furrowing the water with circular waves
above the eye of a bass, who notices now
and begins his rise.

3. BALANCE

The grass waves around the lodge,
it bends under the tongue of the wind
sliding through the cottonwoods on the ridge,
great combers of gifts from the south.
A dog stands to his chest in the creek,
the lapping water a thistle of sound.
A woman emerges with a basket of rocks,
the fire rocks of the cooking platform,
limestone baked to chunks of red,
and packs them beneath the lodge flaps,
the mound rising in the grass, like the growth
of a woman's belly in winter. By the front
of the lodge, a man and an arrowhead
grip down on an antler prong,
paring down the edges of death,
to cut life on only one
point of its length.

4. TIME

It was one of the last camps,
the lariat ropes around the bedrolls
to keep out the snakes, the mesquite
coals of the campfire fading down between
the roots of the elm tree, as it stretches
against the sky in the ascending moonlight.
The fences were coming from the coast,
winding edges on the hills,
tightening the flow of water.
The coffeepot filled from the creek
waits for the morning, two arrowheads
and a turkey feather sit on the brim
of a hat, the dust still damp from the sweat.
Border collies watch the sheep,
huddled in the arroyo,
clumped up with heads to the center, motionless,

the frost sparkling on their fleeces.
The remuda-line stamps at their tie-ropes,
blowing clouds of breath smoke in the air.
The dogs with their heads on crossed paws
see the men pillowing on saddles,
the obsidian sky,
the elm tree sagging over the dying fire.

5. WOMAN

The babies kick in the towels,
the soap slides over the rocks
and vanishes downstream.
She scrubs them pink as sundown
and carries them up the bank
to the cabin. Dust rising
from the fields, her husband
plowing the day to an end,
mule and man circling.
Dogs sleep under the stilted
house waiting for night.
The stove is gray with ash
sifting down to the floor,
finding its way to hands
and foreheads, wiped of sweat.
The water bucket is always
empty, the creek trail
crumbling into clods,
white knuckles on the handle,
hair spilling in the eyes.
But on the elm tree dead
from the fires, sheets are
drying like forgotten sails,
and on some chore they catch
her face, and she glides
and revolves in their coolness,
the air woven fresh
in them, wrapping herself
with cool white dreams,
remembering her father
saddling up, with the wolfhounds

howling and chasing their tails,
bound for the south county,
the wolves of the river thicket,
the riding out for the mystery
of those dark eyes in the bushes
she always knew were there,
but never saw for the water
bucket crying her back,
the plow circling home,
the hounds already gone.

Philip Haskell

THE ISLANDS

To look at that string of islands, stretching
In a line out the bay, you wouldn't think
They could be like that at all. At the first,
They seem all right: stones set in bare hillsides,
Surf the while crumpling on the gray ledges
And harbor birds landing and taking off.
Then, you notice the smallest island close,
Some bigger farther out, till the biggest
Loom huge farthest out in the distance.
It's as if that's where you really are now,
Looking hard into the bay and seeing
Some diminished part of yourself, some part
Patient on shore and growing every year,
Willing to take up your luggage, ask how
The going was, and make sure that you are safe.
And close to shore, maybe you realize
Why you couldn't stay out, big with yourself,
And begin to wonder whether you were
Waved in, or you sent yourself on, until
You arrived, old, complete, and small again.

John Morgan

COMMON SENSE

The possibility of articulate abstraction has only recently clarified, into which our lives advance like water cascading in a visible sex act from the pipes filling the tub of our being with political questions. And in this warm medium we loll and imagine that we are large sea mammals, at home and almost divine. We say, "Here is the answer to pollution and income tax! The war will be over as soon as suds are applied to the right buttock." And we say, "Astonishing that one can accomplish so much diversity without insisting upon one's right to bear arms—leaving the streets to their troopers and the avenues to the Blacks. —Who would have thought that such intricacies of conflict could be so easily cleaned up?"

Yes, and it was the wisdom of our initial choice that set up this indelible achievement. What choice? Why the selection of that mildly antiseptic soap. Ah, *hexachlorophene*, we mutter, rubbing it into our chest—or might as well mutter, for you can see it in our blissful countenance, as our thoughts turn to the Middle East. There too clean water is the solution. It is because the canal has been allowed to mildew and its vapors have risen high into the cranial recesses of the semitic race that peace has been festering there these past few decades. The real issues are slight if graphed on the proper coordinates. "But," you object, "this is just a way of talking"—impugning by implication its applicability to the harsh and ever present criteria of what is.

Then I ask you to observe on the sparkling surface what this bar of soap, now considerably shrunken though scented, has accomplished in the mere space it has taken to read thus far. For the mind speeds rapidly over a landscape of skin, and it is only by washing the map that jungles are tamed

and peaks scaled. We must all become cartographers if the problem of models is ever to be appropriated—and if not, the generals will always have it their own way. Thus reason instructs, because as everyone knows we hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, to wit: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And you should ask yourself, what if we were to forget what happiness is? What if the tyrants took away our tubs?

James J. McAuley

VISION FROM A LECTERN

Strangely faced, the young
Stare as I arrive,
Grow silent as I give tongue.
Are these masks alive?
I play my bidden role.

And the harsh light there
Burns into each pale face,
Igniting flesh and hair
Till every brain's ablaze,
Every orifice like coals,

Eye-sockets glowing,
Fire in every mouth,
Nerves and senses knowing
That severe flame. Truth,
Truth is consuming them whole.

I blink and feed them lies
Till each resumes the shape
Given ignorant and wise
Alike. And now they gape
At this mask, these scorched holes.

Gary Miranda

INVENTORY

1

The trees outside
do not conform to stanzas.
Bare, twisted, their branches
seem the hair of some untended beard.
I do not understand them.

2

How many bodies
people the landscape of my body,
the dry ruts that once were river beds,
the trails matted with leaves,
leading nowhere!

3

Karen, Sandy, Greta, Liz,
I pen these lines for you,
and for the one wren
perched on the sill of my window,
looking in.

Wayne Dodd

TO THE CITY: 1938

1

Through the early-morning dark
like dawn, rolling to the city.

Two hundred miles,
him beside me on the back seat
beneath quilts
of pain,

his mother and my father in the front,
searching the horizon for some sign
of crippled children's hospital,
spoken of in silence.

More for money than friendship,
our car (they didn't have one)
an improvised bus to beyond
our local depression.
A simple matter:
ten dollars and gasoline.

Past woodcutters starving on scrub-oak
hilltops beside WPA roads,
brush piles rising
like nests of pack rats,
nosed at by dogs
hungering beyond dry biscuits.

2

Cresting the hill we see it,
like nothing ever imagined
on this prairie, great concrete towers
dreamed
in the dark of thin houses
beside railroad tracks.

Through tree-lined streets,
both of us playing
with his new toy,
a small tin clown
dancing crazily beneath a horse-shoe
magnet in our 36 Ford,
his thin hard legs immobile
outside the horse-shoe's magic
force.

Waiting in the car as he is carried
inside the building
behind high windows,

where unknown children limp
down long corridors of suffering.

3

No words to say, no
answers,
simply driving away,
my father's face as fearful
as padlocked swimming pools in summer.

Small woods of blackjacks
beside the road returning
home, women fading in flour-sack dresses
beneath the slack clotheslines.

In the open fields
the plow-sliced earth flashing back the sun
like a black challenge
at noon,
the heat still coming at us
from above
like a punishment.

The filling station huddles like sickness
in the heat.
I buy a ten-cent Par-T-Pak
in one neat carton,
napkin, spoon, ice cream,
the flavors sweet on my tongue
like the legs of childhood
dancing lightly on the back seat.

Norma Farber

Two Poems

THEORY OF FLIGHT

That beginning, those few yards over and above ground,
how the running beast gliding amazed himself
to be somehow streaking only half

touching his planet, not even half grabbing
Jurassic surfaces in an initial spurt
of striding-in air, starting

wildly anew, wings pumping for dear
transitional life. Who did he think he was,
the precursor, with his dull unfunctional feathers, claws

horn-sheathed for earthbound stalking?
He felt a fool, God's own clown calling
attention to unlikely saltation. Watch him fall!

the woods hooted. Sharp-toothed cousins
grinned clamping his long reptilian tail.
He dug something like a human fingernail

in the mud to wrench up beyond muck
and mutilation, launching ponderously. He could have burst
with the scrape and fumble of being first

to try what he'd never in a hundred million years
have pinion enough to perfect. . . . Anyway, praise
to his take-off from his kind, still cackling in ooze.

DEATH AND LIFE OF THE 109

Ahoy, Redeemer! Reclaim us from hunger, sea-shock, coral-cut.
Betide us, Jesus, our flesh. Belly us round our souls.
Wind us, tie us. Keep us in kapok. We bob in a rut
of drowning. Steady us, Jesus, treading these water-holes.

Back at the base, the squadron misses us. This we know.
Solemn service—so soon? for likes of thirteen men.
Love Kirksey, Jesus. Love Marney. Nobody saw them go.
Eleven of us still grapple breath with body. Love eleven.

McMahon's burned. Does anyone love the engineer?
Something staves the engine-room, cleaves it—pulp! in two.
Flames. Day-room hell. Gas tanks taking the air.
Face. Neck. Hands. For Jesus loves men so,

loves Johnston, battered purple. That wake of propeller blades
works the ribs half off his cage. And away goes the culprit
destroyer, into night. Love Johnston. Lower the tides.
Limbo floods our sea. Love that sometime hull,

that help, go-between, tatter, straw in a sea,
flotsam—*who's aboard?*, splint, flim-flam, shred,
sliver of a prospect, prayer in a pinch, spectral debris,
ghost of a purchase, purpose, preserver—*who's aboard?*

shell, skeleton—but afloat! The blessed bulkheads sealed!
Kennedy, Mauer, McGuire, Albert, Thom: hang on
to the wisp! In a pitched Pacific hang on and love us. Concealed
survivors rasp the dark. We muster one by one:

Ross, third officer; Starkey, Harris, Zinsser, raked
by tines of fathoms. A puny navy, perishing . . .
and barracuda, they say, can unman us, the time it takes
a jaw to reach. Cherishing Jesus, how long, how long?

For the salt love of Jesus, who asked to enlist in death?
Sworn to be quick or quit, we keep starless patrol
off Blackett Strait: three officers, sir, and eight-tenths
the enlisted personnel, hale and wounded. Haul

or be hauled. Love that skipper. Prowls the strait like a fish,
McMahon's belt in his teeth. Swim for the team, you bastard.
Gale makes free of timber. Harvard was never like this.
Swim for a spar, for Jesus, for likes of a yellow mae-west.

Collapse on a shambled deck. Torpor. Dream of survival.
Babble of rescue. Blink that lantern, it arrows the way!
Till morning, till morning, till morning. . . . And now the woodhulk
heaves,
turns turtle. Hang on, wait, hang on, wait. . . . Broad day,

so where's the search? They've left us, a catch not yet fished out.
High noon, sun crawls the meridian. Creep, wreckmates! Swim,
that's an island there! Love him, that rahrah lieutenant, afloat,
McMahon on his back. He fords an ocean. Follow him.

Fall on a reef for dead. Lie low. Love safety, hiding,
thicket, secret despairing. Grovel for the luck to be found,
delivered. Grieve how a man longs to risk his hide
in gaps of night. How he hangs on, jaws gripped to half-drowned

hope. This here is the Passage, he says. Our help passes here.
Count the dazzle of fins, phosphorescence, flashes of faith,
memories shriveling from mind. These Solomons currents, queer,
they shove, suck, swirl. Bitter charts. Bitter coral beneath.

When a man's circled, his will spins watery. Due northeast
looms Kolombangara, cone of dread. That siren end
of agony beckons. Enemy shores warrant at least
an end. Any kind—but an *end*. Mr. Kennedy: say surrender!

Listen, no martyrs here, not a hero heartbeat left.
Sink, succumb, submit, whatever, whatever you say . . .
But love that fool, he figures different, doesn't he? Swift
with a lantern, God-all-alone, he kicks a man-fish spray

in twilight behind him. Tread the Passage, flag the next
boat home. Step small, step even, sailor. Reefs have knives.
They skin you, shin to ankle. Step like a breeze. Take text
from the wind. Be blown easy, a bauble, be carted leaves

in a draught. No catch netted. Only sleep. Dream in a curve
of hazard, ocean-conforted. Lay down your head,
a child. Buoyance, bosom, soothe of waves, they love
to mother a guy. Christ, but you need your mother bad.

Her boy's listing, a drifter, swept in the will of the wash.
Encompassed round. Compassionate Jesus, be-mother him now.
Bring him back in a monstrous circle of swell, slosh,
back into Ferguson Passage. No tempest, undertow,

jeopardy more. Alert him, he's only a schoolboy yet,
dozed off, late for class. Wake him, walk him light,
over the coral trail: yes, bloodied where he steps barefoot.
Dump him sick on the beach. . . . Ross, you swim it tonight.

Back at the base, Jesus loves us. This we should know.
The squadron commemorates us. That's what the service is for.
Back at the base, it sorrows them, having to let us go.
The cream of a nation—I almost can hear it—is lost in a war.

Found: a new morning! Finders keepers. What to do
with it, boss? O no, not swim, not swim for it, no, not again!
Jesus defend us from fins like his. He's fit for the blue
boundless. What he says goes. So plow this acre of main.

Ply a deep property. Push, we're off to a better island,
nearer the Passage. Nothing passes us. Nearer, nearer
Thee. This magnum brine chokes us, gripes us vile.
Smash those coconuts, drain them fast, sicken. . . . Fool's fare.

More night. Showers. Lick off the leaves, laden, black.
Surprise at dawn: deposit of droppings on every bough.
Foul play from heaven. Call it Bird Island. Suck, Jesus, back
your manna. Quit loving us. Leave us good for dying now.

To die under trees—on dry unyielding ground—
not riding a rotten brink, fist on the slippery helm
of some submerged command. . . . O might I, Jesus, be found
beneath a homely oak or long acquainted elm.

What runts, those two, in a far regatta: Ross
and Kennedy, versus the reefs. Our bets are spending thin.
No laughs to fatten them. Losers. Out-raced.
Prayers and the native canoe in splinters. Sea, you win!

You win all right, you she-dragon under a dug-out, you chasm
below those dog-fights overhead. McGuire, will you work
the beads for us? Pray, man! Boards for oars, Pacific's no park
pond. A man bails out with a shell—all the bucket he has.

Ravage the wind with the bow, on waves man-high, by odds
like a doom. We're dwarfed. Dug-out swamped. Hold fast,
you fore, you aft! Keep the good grip. Kick north and east. Hang on,
wrench away from the open roil, away into bloodsucking

reef. Dance dainty, Ross. He'll hold those paddles down,
so foot by ragged foot, by raw, by rage, he'll bring
you onto sand. Fall in a stupor. Mortally founder
in sleep. Sleep, and be found. Wakened by rescue. Wakening

to the expedition concluded. . . . And him spread like a smiling
corpse in fronds and sacking where natives glide him safe
from sun, salt, sight. Lie secret, sir, a soft while.
Enemy buzzes overhead, figuring whether to strafe.

Saved, hosanna! Gather us garrulous cargo. Ho
for a hymn! Gulleets tighten. Tongues wring. Breath shortens.
Survival swells us. Song spurts over. We sob to know
how Jesus loves, and the skipper delivers a full report.

Paul Zimmer

Two Poems

ZIMMER IMAGINES HIS ANCESTORS

One of them assuredly was a tattoo artist,
Stippling thatched flesh with seaweeds
And roses to the sound of waves
Sucking stones on the shore.
Another was a witch doctor hopping,
Jangler of bells, sizzler of gourds,
And pricker of serious images.
One manufactured electric dildos

And another directed horror films
 Which still entertain me when I overeat.
 Many were afflicted with problems of vision:
 Near-sighted star gazer, cross-eyed knight,
 Tunnel-visioned hunger and blind man.
 Often I feel them in the night:
 The warlock and the arctic dreamer,
 The consumptive, hobo, and mountain climber,
 The poet who died of poetry.
 Oh all the lovers, sailors and drunkards
 Rap like miners on my ligaments at night,
 Counting my veins to assure themselves,
 Whispering to me that I am Zimmer,
 The latest meager ending of
 All their long and short days.

SONNET: ORGANIC FORM AND FINAL MEANING
 IN THE PLUMÉD ZIMMER

Zimmer represents the whimpering of the cosmos.
 The universe grows out from his belly button
 And his nebulae and gases are serious heat.
 Zimmer inculcates an arrant subjectivism
 Which indicates that, though crudely realized,
 He means well, impressing with his keen sense of tension.
 Yet he is the simple archetype of satisfaction.
 One notes that his moustache points at his ears,
 Representing his most secret desire to be
 An elephant.

Though Zimmer is unlettered,
 He is no native genius.

He wishes that
 Francis Bacon had written his poems.
 Permit me one final definitive statement:
 Zimmer does not mean.

He is.

John Vernon

Three Poems

THE BODIES UNDER POEMS

Poems are flat to cover the bodies beneath them.
 They pretend there's nothing to hide
 and it usually works despite the smell—
 the poem flattens out on the page,
 the words spread their lips, there are no shadows.
 A body falls from a helicopter and joins those under the poem,
 he picks up a gun and approaches,
 I tell him don't shoot, I'm writing a poem,
 I'll surrender when I'm finished,
 you might hit me, don't shoot,
 meanwhile the poem covers him like a shroud.

300 dead at My Lai,
 we want to understand this.
 A cheer goes up, the light slants,
 rat blood escapes from a sinking body.
 The lips of the dead
 enter the words of the poem,
 they press gently at the ear,
 the tongue steps in, as if into a bath
 and says: die, die,
 here is the heart, how good,
 here are the eyes, good to eat,
 the feet, good for warming the bed.
 Someone set the table, someone arrest the murderers,
 even candlelight blinds us.
 Brown arms reach out from the poem
 and capture my wife and me;
 they stab us with knives,
 I watch the wounds bleed,
 there should be a metaphor.
 I tell them we understand why they hate us,
 the blood drops out of us, Ann cries;
 die, they say, and we do.

THE GREEN CHILDREN

We must be the last children.
Most people are only 3 or 4 and already they've grown up,
they're happy, they like things to be pink.
Dancing on the piano I turn green
smearing the walls with moss
cracking my hands like eggs.
If I died now I'd stay green,
cold water running behind my eyes,
gray dogs I can't see
wandering among my feet.

Nothing needs to be looked after,
this is the green land—
hills lying in pools,
green leaves with swollen veins
rushing through tunnels,
breaking open in green air!

We are green,
children of the crazy guys
the lunatics, the grabbers,
all in a shoe, all believing each other, all experts
married to women with hearts like needles.
First they got the things they wanted
then they were sorry
then they gave birth to us.

WE ARE ALL ONE

Our mothers and fathers plucked us
from their laps
it was easy
and the past became a string.
Now we think we have nothing in common
we think we are only passengers
who will die the first time.
Rain without claws

words without teeth
everything belongs to us
and nothing belongs to us.

You prisoners of air
open
we are all one.
Our hands are all one hand
our backs are one.
Open the eyelid of your skin
and come out.
Open the light, the frail
luggage of fire
we are all one.
Field mice walk through
their necks, water
points its inefficient knife
unravelling itself
open the cells
open the bones
and come out.
The tree swims
in every leaf
we are all one.
Crowbar and fly
in delicate balance
a stone remembers its Indian
open the first mouth
deep in your flesh
and come out.

We are all one.
A new taste
flows through the body.
We are all one.

About Our Contributors

DALE NELSON heads the Associated Press Bureau in Olympia. He has appeared in many magazines.

STANLEY PLUMLY is the poetry editor of the *Ohio Review*.

ROBERT HUDZIK is from Mineral Ridge, Ohio, and is currently an MFA candidate at the University of Iowa Workshop.

ARNO KARLEN teaches writing at Pennsylvania State University. Norton will published his *Sexuality and Homosexuality* in September.

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PHYLLIS MORGAN teaches at the University of Hawaii and has published poems in this and many other magazines under the names Phyllis Rose and Phyllis Thompson.

VI GALE lives in Portland, Oregon. Her second book, *Clearwater*, will be published soon by Swallow Press.

GIBBONS RUARK teaches at the University of Delaware.

MIKE RUSH is a recent graduate of the University of Washington Graduate Writing Program.

PHILIP HASKELL lives in Long Beach, California.

JOHN MORGAN lives in Mattituck, New York.

JAMES J. MCAULEY, who teaches at Eastern Washington State College, recently received a National Endowment for the Arts Award.

GARY MIRANDA is living in Athens.

WAYNE DODD is the editor of the *Ohio Review* at Ohio University and has published widely.

NORMA FARBER, who lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, will soon have a new book of poems, *A Desperate Thing*, published by Ploughshare Press.

PAUL ZIMMER is an editor with the University of Pittsburgh Press.

JOHN VERNON is now teaching at the State University of New York in Binghamton.

Poetry Northwest Prize Awards, 1972

HELEN BULLIS PRIZE: \$100

Lewis Turco for Three Poems (Autumn 1971)
Tom Wayman for Four Poems (Summer 1971)

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)

Kenneth O. Hanson and Jack Tootell (1971)

THEODORE ROETHKE PRIZE: \$50

Albert Goldbarth for Three Poems (Winter 1970-71 and Autumn 1971)

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)

Dave Etter (1971)

