

Poetry

NORTHWEST



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POETRY NORTHWEST

SUMMER 1972

Albert Goldbarth

Five Poems

THINGS I'VE PUT IN THIS POEM

1. 1972

The top line is sea-level. Here, a girl dances the black flag
her hair makes in wind, over green leas fleecy with primrose.
She is out to dig for potsherds, shells in shale, pebbles veined
pied and peacock enough for rings and pendants, something
spaded up from history to shine between her breasts.
And splitting one hillock, her hands undress red earth
from around a skeleton: yellowed, at peace, a bullet
packed in red dirt where the heart was.

2

Long weeds of lantern-light seem to sprout
from the night soil; looking closer, through those bright cracks
splitting a farmsteader's shack in the dark of the 1870's:
one man, pallid and spread on the checkered quilt, twitches
under the flame-cleaned knife and forceps
the county doctor poises an inch above his chest.
The goal: to pry an arrow out of flesh. The advice: here,
bite on this. And the gray veins at the temple bulge
into a world without anaesthesia, from the wild try
of a dying man to chew a lead bullet in half.

*

(The outcome: he doesn't die. Barb out, the farmer lives,
breeds, and whistles whacky orisons in the bull manure,
thinking: when I do die, let them lower me in my grave
wearing this memento, this tooth-marked pellet of birdshot
that is all the suffering in the world.) The scene:

*

skin split, forceps pinching in muscle, doctor's breath
a cloud above his face, the farmer clamps his jaw

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til its bone hinge warps. And in that moment
before his troubles tumble out of him into the shadowy sack
of fainting: he feels the fever go into the sweat, and leave.
The pain goes into the bullet.

3

So I've put some special things in this poem.
The girl whose hair is a small night sky star-specked
against the ordinariness of my daytimes
I put in so this poem will make me think of Syl.
She is Syl. She brings a primrose home to me.
The grass and flowers are here to remember
greenery by, in the forthcoming days of its disappearance.
Let those lines symbolize chlorophyll.
The jewelry I put in to be those circles of beauty
human hands shape for human hands,
to glint against the twilight.
And the quilt, and the shells, and the lantern.
And the bullet I've put in to make this prayer real:
 All our pain, go into the bullet.
 All our pain, go into the bullet.
 And bullet stay buried in the bottom line.

THE FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES

The old Jew down the road near the gristmill
died, call a *minyán*. Call ten men to howl
prayers into amber bottles, and with wood
mallets tap mourning-songs
from their transparent necks. And call the frogs:
the flies have been jewelling the wayside jackal
droppings, they glitter and make a sound of wire
plucked by the sun's touch; call blackwater frogs
and venus-flytraps carted over flagstone.
Also, call the caucus; and everyone playing faro
is welcome, even the croupier, tell her here
she could slither out of her glitter and run
on all fours with the rams and uproot cabbage.

Call the cows home. Call the reserves.
Dwarf-stars and snails are in alliance.
Tell the spelling bee its napkins are folded
in hyacinth-shape on the plum-patterned plates.
Let them congregate; let them daisy-chain so dense
word travels from thighbone to thighbone
like code rapped through the length
of a blue metal banister; let the space
between them be sweat; call the midgets;
ask the fife platoon; call the wranglers and glaziers;
if their brains are packed so flat together
one torched tongue arsoners a flash-fire
under the scalp of the whole generation, yes,
though the word be "revolution," even if their souls'
metaphorical hands are twisting teeth from the gums
to hurl like stones through the corneal blind-spot:
call the cubs to the sows' teats, engrave what gulls
you may find along the abandoned pier
with my wedding invitation.
Let the sky go argyle with magpies.
Let the waters plump paisley with shrimp.
It begins.
Let the triplets be an ellipsis.

POEM

Linda, when I write of your name
written on a tree I mean scars
heal. Under years of wood,
the center of an oak tree is whispering
Linda Linda to itself.
The old philosopher's question: If

nobody hears a tree fall, does it
shout someone's name at its last
emotional moment above-ground?
Ears placed to my chest have heard
welts imbedded inches in
my muscles make a noise of fading

initials, as if poems were disappearing
ink, no more than that, or names
no more than sound waves. Logic
like that says a redwood is nothing
but an unused potential for calendars;
the deeper in, the blanker the dates.

Dear Reader, you are like the poem
I wrote for you and carved in a tree
for passersby but the wind
took it, and now
where are you, and I
hardly know your name anymore.

SONG FOR PURE DIRECTION

You wanted your life to show direction,
some inexorable traversing, the motion
in phloem, the path up the vulva,
the space through which nib points
to page. You wanted your poem's goal
defined: the noon sun silhouetting
a fledgling's first migration.
You wanted the poem between fixed points:
the bird's breast; the quill in the inkwell.

You wanted your love to show direction,
the magnetized penis floating in blood,
a formula for empathy times
the number of overlapping lengths
of snake separating cow from rattler.
You wanted to love everyone in County Jail
through her, a woman with seams so sure,
not one wayward drop escaped
the funnel-shape her legs made.

You wanted your body to show direction,
a ribcage to sizzle like rashers
in sunrise, an eye the goose aims

south through, a tip so close to sunset
it warmed with the weed in the cow's
second stomach, the neon dotting the i
in Police, and the egg accumulating
in the sleeping peacock when everything else
petrified under moonlight. Or

you wanted to *be* the direction, not
the compass needle sewing
the forest northward, no, but its stitchwork
split down a sloughed skin; or a tree
one half moss, one half missing.

AGAINST THE ODOR

Every six seconds the blink lies
to the fovea. The sunspot burns
a hole in the long, looped radio wave.
A dozen roses is eleven
flowers and one mauve chameleon
straining to stamen its tongue. These
be the natural hypocrisies.
In the land of the lie you're shown this

photo: a man standing spreadlegged
"in two states at once!" castrated
by their common edge; the ten inner intervening
tips of a husband's gloves insulate his caress;
and one Jew, thrown to the showers, lifts
the soap to his nose against the odor
of gas, and smells his niece's breast.
The white lie is the nephew

to euthanasia. This is the lie: the worm
in the history text; the alligator purse;
the Catholic virgin saving space in her womb
for eschatology. This is the difficult
rectification: the purse snapped open,
its pink mouse saved from drowning

in the digestive fluids. Keep him whole.
In the land of the lie the one-eyed man

blinks every three seconds. This is the myth
of the land of the lie: that the lamb led
by its tear ducts sees the blade
as just the Utah border. This is the queen
of the land of the lie: whose tongue crawls
into the vegetable bins and ballot boxes
to spread its wet; whose belly is ectopic;
whose menstruation, *trompe l'oeil*.

Tom Wayman

THE MAN WITH THE WRONG DREAMS

A man who applies for something turns into a piece of paper.
There is never a place for him to describe
how heavy his head weighs in his hand.
No one is really this flat, or this thin.
There is no line to explain his body
—how it has to be filled and emptied endlessly
like a bathroom sink or a drawer.
How when the body discovers it has no purpose
it begins to clog up, to stick.

Where is there space on a form to put down
what arms feel like, when they are tired
of looking for something to do? Where does a man check off
what it is like to be a man:
the gallons of fluid pumped into the sheets, the quarts
into women? How can he be considered, without this information?

Around him, Spring has arrived. It climbs up into the branches
to swell the trees, turning them yellow and green in the air.
The simplest leaf pushes out of its stem with such certainty
the man watching knows it does not have to apply to appear.

He is waiting to learn how he should flower.

As he waits, his hand falls asleep.
The blood has become hesitant, it cannot decide
why it should flow down any particular vein.
So the heart sags, bloated,
becomes a bag leaking sludge through a useless machine.

Then nothing satisfies him: if there is a little work
there is not enough money. When there isn't
any work will do. He turns
on what surrounds him: the rest of those waiting, each other.

Brushing his teeth on a Spring morning
the man discovers
he is the Man With the Wrong Dreams.
He has been waiting for the letter that says
Okay, now you are famous or Now you are rich
or even *Now you have a job*.

This morning, he knows this is wrong.
He goes back to bed. In the sunshine
lilacs are filling the air as the mailman passes.

Charles Edward Eaton

THE MAN IN THE GREEN CHAIR

A retired general, a composer, a refugee from a touch group,
The man in the green chair is writing his autobiography—
One is struck with the curious immobility of recall.

One would say, in fact, that he was sitting for his portrait,
And no one can deny that he might seem more vital
If it were someone else who was treating him as an object.

But there comes a time when each man does this for himself.
The green chair is the throne of returning dreams—

How fortunate the man looks still so bold and strong,
receiving his subjects.

His face bronzed, his eyes clear as an animal's, his figure trim;
He gives no evidence of having had to walk on coals or run
for his life.

Why on earth has he gone so soft as this at last?

We would believe him more if he got up vigorously from his chair,
Left them all, the tubercular lovers, the losers, the also-rans,
And went briskly out to reprimand the lazy gardener.

Still, a kind of dreaming does leach from a certain wound in time,
Drops of the banked-up cistern, sexual effluvia, sweat from the
metaphysical mist—

Even the face of a grasshopper may look like a death's head.

But it is not the end of the world, nor even the end of the road.
It is simply the view from the green chair—nothing more.
This is the thing biographies, auto or otherwise, do not convey.

How green the meadow laps the windows like a quiet sea!—
Any minute now the man will stop writing, steeped in recall:
Twilight glimmering, the chair will not electrocute, indulgent
of memoir.

Lee VanDemarr

Three Poems

THE OFFICIAL REPORT ON THE DROWNING OF LI PO

(First
what elements were at the scene of death?)

a river
of white stars
a horn
cup
boats of wood
and silk.

(What was the deceased doing?)
he sways. he sings
out of a blossom
drifting
drunk.

(Who else was there?)
the moon. the moon
lay on the water.

(And what did she do?)
O
in Li Po's eye
the moon spins
like
the mouth of love
a coin

yellow cheese
on the winter table.

(What happened then?)
they embraced
the boat floated away
down the river.

(Leaving?)
parchment wine
limbs
of water.

(And now will you sign this?)
yes.
a single black hair.

THE DREAM OF THE AGED TED WILLIAMS

The man to demonstrate thin runs
home. His flesh sags,
it whispers "Watch closely."
The fat moon is trembling,
the speaker announces
"A perfect pitch!"

O last day of the last .400!
Every blade of grass bent
the right way, that roundness
came on again and again
like nightfall.

He opens his muttering
bag, the bats
the furious balls
are thinner than paper.

"Here's a shift!"
But it's too late,
the pull blunted
and numberless umpires
hurtled by into dimness.

A slide
a rush of spikes
a splinter
dozes in
the April dugout.
(Between dream and hit
and dream
the smoke and grease man is gone
the locker room vacant
through the window
slides
a dusty basepath of light.)

GRAPEFRUIT SONNET

Ah, the pink grapefruit you slowly lift
Over your head, like the sun pulsing
At ten a.m. in February.
Alive in a parlor of juice and tart
Colors, down among the citrus
You swelled enough to frighten the
Picker's kids, visions of yellow globes
Sweetening in their sleep.
Now see that rind of stringy tissue
Search the kitchen air; and again
It's lowering like a head on the table.
As if in some vegetable's fable
A goddess loved inexorably
Until her arms were sticky and tired.

Ward Stiles

AFTER THE AMBUSH

The snake tests the dead eye
With many tongues.
The crow attends the burnt branch.
Sunshine and ants are the smooth workers.

These bellies will bloom with weeds and flowers.
Seed will follow flesh on the wind.
These hands will drift deep in the soil.
Roots will touch them and curl away.
This blood will fatten the fly and the leech.
The rain will wash nothing clean.

I pause over this lesson.
I am the cutworm
Under the leaf.

Sometimes
it gets so bad
I have to find a mirror
or just any window
for a nod & wink
from a friendly face

The cat's long sleep
through the party
as if our dreams & laughter
would go on
forever

April, last blossoms fell
Now the pregnant cherries
I lie under in June
like a woman
not knowing
what to expect

Every time
you walk
up my back
as if
the whole world
suddenly found
the right place to go
for its health

Mother writes
from exile
that her heart's good
sends this snap
of a short Italian
& a poem
I don't understand

HELEN PAYNE, SPOTTER

What could you tell from spots?—
mud, blood, bits of food—
designs of oil dots,
tobacco geezers chewed—
dip cloth and get it off,
don't think, don't brood.

What leg in the cut of that?
or heart pumped in this shirt?—
this one had a cat—
that one worked in dirt—
when the lover's knifeblade stabbed
how much did it hurt?

Don't dream, don't make it worse—
only a ketchup wound,
not like a matinee
where Tyrone Power swooned—
dab the thought away,
brush it as good as new,

give it to Tom for the mangle—
he'll smooth it out with steam
and go off in his Ford still single
with some other girl still green—
while tears drip like wax from a candle
and no one can rub you clean.

HENNA VINAL, BIRDWATCHER

An enormous storm shadow
from dinosaur time,
a marvelous large grace
like a Shakespeare line,

the high point of her life was seeing—
(or thinking she did) and she'd been
on Audubon tours around the world—
the nearly extinct California condor
gliding it seemed from Saddleback
with giant wings unfurled
to light on her star pine.

Elusive bird of happiness
right in her back yard—
it sat there looking down
like death or Satan himself.

Was it wish fulfillment
or had her eyes played tricks?
She was getting old, old,
and almost extinct.
And though she wrote in excitedly,
describing its size,
the underwing white and bright orange head—
more likely an inordinately large
turkey vulture
the Audubon Society said.

BUBBLES

That stately lady, Banker Burton's wife,
officiated as she was called to do
at proper parties, christenings of yachts,
appeared in print, low gowned and latest hatted,
below her patrician nose, a bow of dots.

And sometimes she'd be seen in city papers—
when still almost young among the rotogravure
visiting duchesses—and one time in the box
of a turbaned Maharaja watching the races
at Santa Anita, dripping gems and fox.

But a good friend told me that once when she'd been drinking
with him and her teen-age son alone at home—
stemmed champagne while they drank bottled Cokes—
she'd got up on a table and started dancing
and then she'd starting taking off her clothes,

though stopped when she was down to bra and panties,
and led them to the attic where she showed
a secret trunk of antique joys and troubles—
sequined G-strings, gloves and ostrich fans
and a lifesize poster billing her as "Bubbles."

Dennis Trudell

LOUISVILLE SLUGGER

Stepping to the altar of the gray yawn of wood and steel.
An hour after sunset, hint of motion in the June temperature
a pleasantry to the thighs and forearms. They are rubbing
the pores near breasts in drive-ins now or walking slowly
on powdered dirt holding hands and swinging arms as the
bumpkin moon grins them too full for their bodies or they
are watching television or sitting in the bleachers as the
moment ripens. Tapping the sacred shape, touching the brim,
dismissing the rhetoric from the squat creature with four
crisp syllables: all the old libations. Except this time
grains of air all know better than to resist the one whose

time has come. They hang, utterly transparent; no object's
trick will allow them to be mistaken for it, whatever speed
is there. The one pulls at his crotch, swishes its heavy
alternative. Having ascended beyond all desire: more pure
and knowing than any priest. A seer. A deity. He invents
the moment that follows; almost dismisses its puny attack.
But, a man, a young man doing what this once he can do, the
one who is the only one in most moments of his mind's bright
and dying arena, does what he can do. A small firm ball
sails toward a parking lot.

David Young

OHIO

Looking across a field
at a stand of trees
—more than a windbreak
less than a forest—
is pretty much all
the view we have

in summer it's lush
in winter it gets
down to two or
three tones for
variety
there might be
an unpainted barn
water patches
a transmission tower

yet there's a lot
to see
 you could sit
all day on the rusty
seat of a harrow
with that view before you
and all the sorrows
this world has seen
sees now will see
could pass through
you like a long
mad bolt of lightning
leaving you drained
and shaken
still
at dusk
the field would be
the same and the growing
shadows of the trees

would cross it toward you
until you rose your heart
pounding with joy and walked
gladly through the weeds
and toward the trees

Joanne Ward

POEM FOR WOMEN'S LIBERATION

It's too little, after all, isn't it Mother,
the children who've gone off
into their new habits
with only occasional images,
thinking to liken you
to the well kept petunias on the porch.

We never cared why
you kept riding back on the train
to the small plains town
with your college education,
a dark beauty in the model cars
who had her pick
and was on her way to Chicago.

In the middle of a morning sickness,
was it in Chicago . . .
you learned that you alone were grown in,
willing to be of good service,
a rich soil to the point of exhaustion.
We recall you mending in corners
of large living and bedrooms.

You could always go back to teaching you said;
there was always a place to be heard.
All the words, Mother,
after the point of no return
in your wardrobe, on the edge of the bed,

damning your uses, your hard labor,
all taken for granted.

After we listen, we go back to our own,
each wrung in the hand,
or the voice, or the eye from you,
grown in a box like petunias,
remembering how carefully
you bent over them mornings
in a lavender blue robe and slippers.

Reed Clarke

SANTA CRUZ

Just before Santa Cruz a man
hurled himself onto our tracks.
We stopped. At the furthest part
of the train he was gone.
The pants wrapped around an axle,
one shoe, ahead, empty and upright,
a piece of underclothing ironed to the rail.

A crowd to one side, by the beach, stared.
The ocean grew to a haze with distance.
Under the calm surface grazing on its dead,
until they hang like suspended pollen,
drift with the currents and are lost.
The horizon turned red, then dark.

Sirens made people shout. His past
went a dozen ways they yelled.
It wasn't worth it.
Alcohol, love, money—go wrong,
say you can't go back or start over
behind a mistake bigger than your future.
Life, a woman screamed, chases
a man faster than he can run.

James Grabill

Three Poems

MOSS

continually I return here,
where the sides of the old dam
have melted into moss,
where roots have closed
the names we scratched
on the brown stones.

it is here
I find assurance,
an egg the size of frost
giving birth to daffodils.

I have ridden cold wheels
since the spring began,
coming to this place
to learn before I can
that every motion
moves in the same way.

the old men suggest
listening to the lake
hammer itself in
and letting the tongue
soften with the new moss.
I believe old men.

the earth turns on its water
like a mossy seed,
and a bird as delicate
as the air in a girl's mouth
flies underground,
making it turn.
I see the burning core
of the earth crawling
through frozen arteries
of the ground.

NORTHWEST

surely the moon will split
and hang in the sky all day
when those whom we have killed
bury us with their bodies.

WHEN WE KNEW WE WERE LEAVING

when we knew we were leaving
our bodies fell behind like smells.

days knew to scale the mountain,
scrambling to cliffs behind us
with thousands of their feet.

where craters remained open,
black weeds grew over in webs,
like beginnings of eyes
crawling in their sockets.

killdeer dove from the ledges,
swooping so close we heard
dark eggs of their young
strapped beneath their wings
like bullets, calling,

and when we looked north
for the old stars, we saw
lost jaws of soldier ants
searching the night for food.

they had already eaten each other,
continuing to chew when we passed
through their jaws like red lights

moving inside skulls of wind
in the lines that go on forever.

THE OCTAVE

after love, we meet
the river, nearly white
in the full moon, plunging
like a long knife
into chambers of earth.

we meet a fish
the size of a chest,
swimming upstream
and shaking old scars
from its tongue.
they split their husks.
they sprout like seeds.
the centers glow
like diamonds, vanishing
with the speed of needles.

as we look deeper,
wooden eardrums float
beneath the waves.
when they rise above
the surface, each time
a star bursts
farther than sight,
past the black of sky
through echoes of itself,
pulsing like a mayfly
trapped in fire
the size of its soul.

across the river,
boats are tied down.
I am not sure I can trust
what rises to my mind.
I watch. the moon drives
an octave through itself,
down a hollow mast.

Ross Talarico

THE BALANCING

Once again the best foot
Has gone forward.
But the other still lingers
In its grave.
I had some plans,
Some laughs, and now

My eyeglasses go on reading
All by themselves.
Someone's finger keeps moving
Along the map
Of the body's inland; my rivers
Shift, some roads need paving,
The deer are finally crossing.

The moon rises again;
It is a ball of yarn a woman
Knits a sweater from.
Will she place it over
The dark shoulders I bring
To her sleep? In a dream
I am walking silently
Across a trampoline.

My eyes steady themselves.
What horizon are they expecting
This time? Daylight is a full page
Of advertising.
I stare into it, and finally
Beyond it. In the distance
A stillness carries the silence
Of an understanding: how long
The teeter-totter has waited
For the identical twins
That sit upon it.

Thomas Brush

LET US BE SUPERFICIAL

"Let us for once be superficial . . ."
—Dylan Thomas

Let us be satisfied with the apparent
Happy ending. Let the boy win the girl
And never say goodbye. Let the sun come up
Like love itself.

You who wait all year for the Academy Awards,
For the Pennant, the Super Bowl, the New York
Knicks, let the neighbors know you read
The cereal box, steal from the Supermarket,
Like driving a Mustang and are bored
When you're alone.

Let us for once be happy
With the morning paper, the last
Movie of the last cattle drive, the starlet
In the bikini who hates to read.

Let us admit we can't pronounce
Phenomenon, keep forgetting Ralph Nader
And like drinking beer.

Let us for once write a poem
Without symbols, that everyone will understand,
That will bring smiles from the librarians,
That we can read to our friends
Without being drunk.

Let us finally be honest
And applaud a bad end.

Paul Hunter

HEARTWOOD

1

Fixed on this porch,
the mountains there,
I stand my ground,
gaze through the tree in the way.

Stumped I stare
back so long at the trunk
a slight
burn hole appears on its bark.

A nuthatch flips down to peck at it,
starts, comes apart
bursting feathers.
It never knew what hit it.

Maybe neither do I.
Though these days there's no mind
your own business, perhaps
woods still grow heartless.

Leaning hard, auguring
the eyes' doublebit shaft
true
I pass insects, hotter
than blind grubs and thirstier
to hit the veins of the sap.

Hissing, I smile,
drink the hot pitch and bore on.

2

Sunder once into the past
and smooth going, once
past the green layers
pinching the both of us,

by now I am into
about
the rings of the First World War.
Passionless
warm days like this one,
dragonfly biplanes,
mountains abrupt,
roots cheery
though scarce a cloud in the sky.

Slow girdled facts I could measure
it's simply kept to itself,
kept in shape,
kept up.

I go deeper, past
roughly seasons
Lincoln had split out,
shade at a premium,
useless
well out of it.

Then I lose count,
cinched 18 and 1700's
spin cocoons
for the bit all heat, no taste,
forcing these grooves in the record
to shriek.

The gentle cross section
by now
skirts lightning scars, flint arrows,
knots binding lost limbs,
disease and disasters no name for,
whorls in the grain of the mind.

Prehistoric fire driller
I tell only
soft from the hard
leaner years of heartwood.

3

Breathless I strike the core,
pith smoldering
as if it knows
heartwood is wet, and not punk:

what lesson is this
to move the dead layers of your life?
Years wrap the corpse over,
roots worm
to feed this establishment.

What lay just under the skin was all
it knew, and itching
roughened even that. Overhead
may be buds and needles, underground
a vast system, it may be slim and fetching,

yet I burn on with a vengeance,
four hundred years the right way
out to see
mountains heaving,

then plug it shut,
swearing *never again*.

4

The sun lowers, the spring sun.
I am losing
heat drawn to me in the open.
Night drains my sap, shivers.
Light over me
sheds patches, reels
in these eyes hardly jewels:

spiteful burning tools.

I stretch and overfill
my hollow heartwood to get going.

A thin shirt tears
at the shoulder as I rise.
Dead bark has given
its warning: I must grow

Robert Hershon

SALT FLATS

The empty salt shaker
beside the bed
fills me with rage

Wherever it falls
it will stay there
always

We'll build a house
around it
We'll obey the new order

And that was all right
It seemed to be all right

until that bloody
mailman sneezed
sending salt flying

all over everything
beds and shoes and
rusty knives

Can we live
with this mailman?
Why not?
How much could he eat?

PALOMINO BLUE

Blue veined corn
neon alfalfa
line the clean edges
of Main Street

Statues of the Donners
smile knowingly
from among the hot cream,
the roses and

Golden Eagles
of the American River
Junior College
Marching Band

Bill Brown
designs The Way
The West Was Won
flying

Breasty Leslie,
Jones and
the Imperial Wongs
stuck to a pine needle stick on

Snakeskin Hill,
Vermont
We ask, do we belong
to summer harvests?

How, when done,
uncanny into the tall trees
the birds rush
powerfully

We are
always the cowboys in midstream,
sweet Hoot and
fat Hop

Palomino blue,
the good times gone,
unredemptively prepared
for the last and
whitest swan.

URBAN RENEWAL

Up the Barnum-marble steps fronting my
Gothic house, tonight, Tom thumbs
ahead into a hallway of hands up!
and toothpick guns.
Violence, crimewaves, incests
as keen as a sharkskin suit
two thousand bus seats old, or a traffic
cop's dark surprise before poor,
ignorant Ham and Cheese, unwind
like tides upon a blue-black carpet
of out of season mussels:
Remember me to Booker T! a man's
man, in step, in tune,
a straight shooter caught, already grey,
in the squeeze of the closing of the barn doors.

LOVE POEM

Tiny wife, what good is this naming of sorrows?
To name them begins them. Shall we make an end?
Love dies obscenely, like a back-busted hound,

Or hangs out by the road, hiking with its thumb.
Nothing is coming in every direction.
We are obsessed, you might say, by a lack of obsession.

If I were a black man, hunched in my leathers,
If you should come, booted, elemental as earth . . .
I am more white than the tent of these mountains.

It is raining after a week of rain.
Somewhere your life is gathering speed.
Somewhere your cold stars wink once and are gone.

LAST HOUSE

This is your last house. How sad you are.
You have pressed out fresh darkness to hang in a closet,
stored your good hours in an air-tight vault.

Which room will gouge the last glass of your eyes?
Will you clatter like a pie tin on the kitchen linoleum?
Be found in the nude above the bathroom pool?

Maybe the den will smother with flushed paper roses,
or the stairs to your room trample your heart.
Has the bed you have dreamed on been measuring your shadow?

It is sad when children laugh under windows,
when trees on the lawn bloom ruddy as lions.
It is sad to have come to the last house and know it.

The carpet may deepen like a pond filled with lilies.
Any chair may drop you like a hangman's trap.
What does it matter? You walk in and in and never walk out.

David Schloss

Two Poems

THE CLARITY OF FLIGHT

On these roads men are driving,
Dreaming at the wheels of their cars
Which swerve to stay on the roads—

And all the animals they kill,
Whose bones are suddenly crushed,
Remain in their tracks like some men

Dreaming in the long rows of lights
As if just stopping to rest
Before they live out their lives.

And on this clear morning
You can see your car passing
Separate one bird from its flock:

It is like driving all night,
When for miles the rear view mirror
Reflects back nothing but darkness,

And then, suddenly, your face.

THE PASSIONATE FRIENDSHIP

Like a father to a son,
Like a son to a father,
They were constantly changing
What they were to each other:

First one, then the other,
Would begin to go somewhere,
Hold open a door
To some glorious future,

Then politely step back
And bow low to the other,
Who in turn would step forward
Before returning to where

The first one stood waiting,
As polite as the other.
For neither would ever
Pass into the future

Unless both went together:
And as they grew older
They saw death from afar,
A mysterious door

They could never quite enter—
And so they remained
Rehearsing together,
Rehearsing their pleasure,

So much did they care for each other.

Kathleen Fraser

NOW

you are where you are

a presence of swimmer's hair falling

and you smell of your mouth & the night
all over your boots

on the step, through the door, falling upon me

your body refuses my poem
will not fit
but springs from the dark with an overpowering scent

something I cannot track in myself
watches you watching

this is where
we begin in heavy rain

in wet leaves my feet push
to your joy running ahead of you
flexing and articulate as branches you recognize
one at a time

flowers begin to take sharp bites of you
out of sequence

you are amazed
and worry,
yet can almost shed your skin with its old rupture

can almost erase the wall
that supports the glass case of your hesitations

you are breathing deeply
I inhale you through your loose clothing
where there is space to feel myself

growing small with a kind of beast shyness

I inherit you as a resonance
who fully inhabits
the field I have taken years to clear

I AM AFRAID OF THE OLD MAN

it is dark it is hot
and i am afraid of the old man
horns like a beast eyes like fire
dancing and screaming by my brother
lying with his hot eyes open
the old man who thinks he is a buffalo
will not let me listen
to see if my brother breathes

if they would let me
i would take my brother
lay him in the grass let the sun let the moon
speak good medicine to him
sit beside him so the wolf
would not come in the night
i would let him breathe again the air
that made him the strong one

the old man sings a devil song i think
i must be quiet and wait to see
what his god will do.

HE BECOMES OLDER

when i became chief
i asked the people to do
all the things that i could do
the people could not do these things
i became angry
i punished the people

then i became older
then i became wiser

i asked myself to do the things i could do
i asked the people to do the things they could do

the young chief is speaking again
he says the march will go on
the people grumble
the people sit on the ground
the young chief runs about cursing

in the night i speak to the young chief
what have you learned? i ask
what new wisdom has come to you?

EACH DAY I AM STRONGER

when falling from my dying horse
i came among the rocks
which tore my leg and my chest
and my brothers carried me back
to lie in the dark tent

then with the squaws sitting
the old man dancing
the smoke choking
i had many dreams
there were no days and nights

now sitting against the tree
the flies have gone away
venison is brought to me
each day i am stronger
my brother has a new horse for me

and on my leg and my chest
scars like the lightning path
across the black mountains
i have grown together again
as the gods knew i would

soon in the spider dawn
i shall lie in the wet grass
soon in the lizard sun
i shall ride in the hot dust
and be a great hunter always.

Eve Triem

THE BED

At the door of a cluster
of apartments
early sun rouges the parts
of an unexpected flower
as I look at chrome and
shiny cloth a cool turquoise:
delivery of a new bed
by two men in decent black.

Then the neighborhood-faces
brown, white, dark,
portraits on stamps stuck to windows,
hover in the tense quiet.

The men return,
neither sparrow nor dogbark
accompanies the unfolded bed.
The black coats lifting the huddle
under gay blue blankets
stumble at the bottom of the stairs.

He refuses a sip of my coffee,
the dead are a peculiar nation,
he rents his solitude elsewhere.

Primus St. John

Two Poems

AFTER THE TRUCKERS RESTAURANT

Men look at curves in the dark,
With both their eyes.
Any line that is a turned mouth—
In the sides of a mountain,
 truckers believe,
You can turn to a nerve
In that mouth
That screams so no one hears it.

In sleeping,
My woman breathes a sign
On the window,
About zeros blinking.
 (She's trusting.)

To touch that trust
I trace my hand
Where all zeros come from.

I am a man, as black
As the back of every curve
That awaits me.
My headlights are on
 (highbeam, if that can help),
And I hear voices
Coming from all of the spots
I will never see
 Off the roads in the dark.

Whatever I will do tonight,
That's coming too.
I can hear it.
She can hear it (sleeping).

FIELD

1

The day needs curtains
So the wind uses butterflies,
But there is no one at home
Like the buttercups,
Who come by their yellow decisions
Again and again
To see you.
Evenly around, the temporary edges
Of apples, like children,
My face becomes accustomed to sudden
Endings of rain;
And I slosh again,
Descending, gracefully,
Looking for worms.

2

At social gatherings,
Worms eat apples and read my books.
If they had feet,
I could call them Charlemagne.
Sunlight conquers the grass
By flashing blades,
Once in awhile
I crack a twig—
To prove the shade is suffering.

Charlemagne, who needs you!

3

A river is a mouth.
When it screams,
Fish disappear.
I touch my reel, uncomfortably,
And call the tension, Brother.
Huddlers in the deep
Meet the same broken dreams
On land we call unreasonable.

I go back to read,
And repeat,

Charlemagne, who needs you!

4

Lock the gate, like you're the owner
Behind the pasture;
Take your time reaching the car,
Use your life,
Understand the fish you've caught,
The worms they ate who read,
And poor Charlemagne.

Michael S. Harper

LATHE: SHIRL'S TREE

I sit at my lathe
since she loves trees,
covered with ash or maple:
ash beautiful
as this burn my chisel
makes in her grain
from large, small crevice
as a wood
gouges its fibers,
only a pocket of child.

This hard new england cherry
is the same dry.
Linseed and turpentine on a rag
make the wood,
make my lathe
roll in her oiled fibers:
well-wrought pocket of child:
ashen and cherry oiled tree:

TERMINAL

The voices have come to depart, they wait
 rising or falling,
Staring inside. Within the terminal
 they gather rigid
As wooden benches in crowds under clocks
 whose memory has gone out,
Making the private sounds of vanishing
 as they rise or fall
Staying in place. They are all here,
 they have all come
To leave, each one has come, though I cannot
 find you alone among them—
They are all disguised in something about you.
 What can I say,
For whom could I deny your eyes
 that have never chosen
To leave me? My voice rises calling for you—
 how can I save
Everyone? Why have you let this voice
 wear your shoes,
That one your shawl? Or have you come in the glance
 of a child
Still hoping I will seek you here
 and find you?
The voices cry out in a single cry!
 Wearing my father's beard,
The wind arrives with the sea at his lips,
 telling me to forget,
But I cannot forget, and I call for you
 in the only voice I know,
The one that repeats and goes on and repeats
 as the voices turn away
Rising or falling in single file,
 taking you with them.

WRITERS CONFERENCE

"We don't need any more poems about seagulls."

There is nothing
insignificant about seagulls.
They come in various
sizes and colors, ring-
billed, black headed
black legged, but like poets
some are more attractive
than others. Franklin's
gull, the kittiwake,
"little" gull, the laughing gull—
they know their Seven Seas
like a main chance, although
like poets, there are none
between South America
and Australasia, and only
one sort is truly pelagic.
After the last
poets in the world
good buddies, have gotten
together for the last time
bearing our guilt
and charging admission
and telling each other
things we all know
as if we didn't
there will be gulls
good days or not—survivors
repeating their two-note cries
whenever it pleases them
feeding on garbage and
minding their own business.

POEM FROM WATCHING MY SON'S HANDS

From the time we are very small
our hands begin to change
and soon they don't know who they are
or what they want
diplomas are put into them
we shake hands with those who have
just beaten us over the head
we work them over the strings
of a guitar or train them to
wear rings and such
or learn to drive them through walls
like nails

Gradually they forget what they are
and gradually the forgetting climbs
up our arms
until our arms prefer such things
as suntans
or being wrapped around women
and then our shoulders
join in
and we start stooping under
great burdens
soon we are putting our hands
in each other's pockets
or learning how to cast them
into ballots
or waving old friends away
on airplane flights

A teacher at the school we send
our children to
calls up and says
your children don't know what
to do with their hands
and we are embarrassed

so when the kids come home from school
we slap their hands
or fill them with forks
and make them sit down to eat

Some nights you reach out and
take my hand
and put it on your breast
it is a signal you want to make love
we think we have this terrific
capacity for communication

SHOES

Shoes would reach all the way to the crotch
and bring everything to a skidding halt. If
we would let them. If we would let them they
would lace us up, tie us in uniforms, and walk
us around in circles like horses studying obedience,
or the grinding of grain. Or in long straight lines
like drunks who need to walk out of the shadows
they swill in. They are very moral, shoes. Every
shoe is a potential father who would not only pull
our legs but accuse us of overstepping our place.
Thus there are shoes for fair weather, and shoes
for foul. There are shoes that save themselves
only for Sundays, and there are those that lead
us to mountains. Track shoes to run our myths
of longevity. Dancing shoes which would replace
laughter in our lives. Slippers in which we are
obliged to sit idle and get sleepy.

MY BROTHER, UNEMPLOYED IN HIS EIGHTEENTH YEAR

Time hangs around your house
like fog. It doesn't want to lift.
You don't want it to lift. You
want it near you, you want it

damp and sufferable. It makes
 your bones ache, your body crawl
 with a clever irresponsible sweat.
 You write "Things go poorly."
 You write "I haven't written
 since nothing new is happening."
 You climb the stairs to your room,
 you descend to the kitchen.
 You have a glass of water.
 Fog rises out of your mouth.
 You fold your hands, you open
 them. You breathe into them and
 trap the fog there. You look at
 it so long it almost hardens into
 something you could carve, throw
 or sell. But you take no chances.
 It is hard to grow old. It is
 hard to stay young. You will
 stay young. You will sit in the
 fog as long as you can. As long
 as they'll let you. You will
 become the man of the fog. You
 will become a buoy in the fog,
 swinging its numb cold warning.
 You wait to be washed up and away.

THE ZOO

I went to the zoo to watch the animals
 and came back hating myself. The snout
 of a giraffe has more sugar than my ego,
 the bland canary sings the same staunch dreams,
 while mine run tricks around my bed.

While the tiger is wild to pace I concern
 myself with ups and downs. The gorilla
 could black my face with his breath. Mice
 nibble my bones to ashes. The condor, near

extinction, knows how to be calm. We stared
 at each other—I went away.

The whales were indifferent. I thought of
 Moby Dick, the complicated message, the
 great white hope. I thought of Stephen Crane
 in his painted boat, the zoos one could
 collect in old hotels to which the mail
 has ceased to come. What if we started locking
 each other up for good reasons? But then we do
 we do.

I went to the zoo as I said and came back
 scared. All the dreary beasts were shabby
 and lonely. Feeding time was like intermission
 at the opera. Mating time like the flurry at
 magazine racks. The animals are so tame they
 think they are furniture. The guards are so
 fierce they make you believe you've seen it all.

THE PHONE CALL

The leftovers sit on the table.
 They do not know how to act. The gravy
 has cooled in the boat, is thick now, as
 if with sleep. The celery stalks are wilting
 as if under vicious cross examination. But
 it is only the heat from the oven doing it.
 The oven left on for hours already. And what
 of the meat hardening itself to the dropped
 knife. Will we ever be able to choke it down.
 Already there are regions we will never reach.
 Already the succulent juices are flat as
 three day beer. The milk beginning to coat
 the glasses, the butter sagging like shanties,
 the onions growing more and more berserk
 in the dead wind of the broken room, from
 which the phone call has yanked us
 like gunshots raise birds from the trees.

About Our Contributors

ALBERT GOLDBARTH won our Theodore Roethke Prize for 1972. He teaches at Central YMCA College in Chicago.

TOM WAYMAN was co-winner of our Helen Bullis Prize for 1972. A Canadian, he has appeared in many American magazines.

CHARLES EDWARD EATON's fifth book of poems, *On the Edge of the Knife*, recently won the Oscar Arnold Young Memorial Award presented by the North Carolina Poetry Council.

LEE VANDEMARR is a graduate student at the University of Arizona.

WARD STILES is living in Suffolk County, England.

ROBERT PETERSON is now living in Rancho de Taos, New Mexico.

HAROLD WITT's poems from *Winesburg by the Sea* have appeared in numerous magazines, including ours.

DENNIS TRUDELL is Visiting Poet at Case Western Reserve University. A chapbook of his poems, *The Guest*, was published last year by Fiddlehead Books.

DAVID YOUNG's book, *Sweating out the Winter*, was published by the University of Pittsburgh Press. He edits *Field* and teaches at Oberlin.

JOANNE WARD is a graduate of the University of Washington Writing Program.

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JAMES GRABILL lives in Bowling Green, Ohio, his hometown.

ROSS TALARICO has published poems in the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Shenandoah*, and the *Nation*, as well as in many other magazines.

THOMAS BRUSH, a graduate of the University of Washington Writing Program, teaches high school in Kent, Washington.

PAUL HUNTER is a recent graduate of the University of Washington. He is a native of Cincinnati.

ROBERT HERSHON is having two new books this year: *Grocery Lists* (New/Books) and *Little Red Wagon Painted Blue* (Unicorn Press).

DONALD BRUNN teaches at the MDTA Skills Center in San Francisco and at Skyline College in San Bruno.

RICHARD BLESSING is currently on leave from the University of Washington with a Guggenheim Fellowship to do a critical study of Theodore Roethke.

DAVID SCHLOSS teaches English at the University of Cincinnati.

KATHLEEN FRASER teaches at Reed College. Her two collections of poems were published by Kayak.

NORMAN H. RUSSELL lives in Edmond, Oklahoma.

EVE TRIEM's poems have appeared widely. She is the author of a book on e.e. cummings and lives in Seattle.

PRIMUS ST. JOHN, after managing the Poetry in the Schools Program in Tacoma, Washington, for two years, has left to teach English at the University of Utah.

MICHAEL S. HARPER's latest book is *History Is Your Own Heartbeat*. He is presently teaching at Brown University.

ROBERT PACK's most recent book is *Home from the Cemetery*. He teaches at Middlebury College.

KENNETH O. HANSON, whose first book of poems, *The Distance Anywhere*, was a Lamont Prize winner, teaches at Reed College and is working on translations of Han Yu for the Asia Society.

GREG KUZMA teaches at the University of Nebraska and is the editor of *Pebble* and *Best Cellar Press*. His new books are *Harry's Things*, published by Apple, and *Song for Someone Going Away*, from Ithaca House.

