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POETRY NORTHWEST

 AUTUMN 1981

Pattiann Rogers Five Poems

A DAYDREAM OF LIGHT

We could sit together in the courtyard
 Before the fountain during the next full moon.
 We could sit on the stone bench facing west,
 Our backs to the moon, and watch our shadows
 Lying side by side on the white walk. We could spread
 Our legs to the metallic light and see the confusion
 In our hands bound up together with darkness and the moon.
 We could talk, not of light, but of the facets of light
 Manifesting themselves impulsively in the falling water,
 The moon broken and recreated instantaneously over and over.

Or we could sit facing the moon to the east,
 Taking it between us as something hard and sure
 Held in common, discussing the origins of rocks
 Shining in the sky, altering everything exposed below.
 What should I imagine then, recognizing its light
 On your face, tasting its light on your forehead, touching
 Its light in your hair?

Or we could sit on the bench to the north,
 Buried by the overhanging sycamore,
 The moon showing sideways from the left.
 We could wonder if light was the first surface
 Imprinted with fact or if black was the first

Underlying background necessary for illumination.
We could wonder if the tiny weightless blackbirds
Hovering over our bodies were leaf-shadows
Or merely random blankness lying between splashes fallen
From the moon. We could wonder how the dark shadow
From a passing cloud could be the lightest
Indication across our eyes of our recognition of the moon.

Or we could lie down together where there are no shadows at all,
In the open clearing of the courtyard, the moon
At its apex directly overhead, or lie down together
Where there are no shadows at all, in the total blackness
Of the alcove facing north. We could wonder, at the end,
What can happen to light, what can happen to darkness,
When there is no space for either left between us.

We must ask if this daydream is light broken
And recreated instantaneously or simply an impulsive
Shadow passing across the light in our eyes,
Finding no space left for its realization.

BEING ACCOMPLISHED

Balancing on her haunches, the mouse can accomplish
Certain things with her hands. She can pull the hull
From a barley seed in paper-like pieces the size of threads.
She can turn and turn a crumb to create smaller motes
The size of her mouth. She can burrow in sand and grasp
One single crystal grain in both of her hands.
A quarter of a dried pea can fill her palm.

She can hold the earless, eyeless head
Of her furless baby and push it to her teat.
The hollow of its mouth must feel like the invisible
Confluence sucking continually deep inside a pink flower.

And the mouse is almost compelled
To see everything. Her hand, held up against the night sky,
Can scarcely hide Venus or Polaris

Or even a corner of the crescent moon.
It can cover only a fraction of the blue moth's wing.
Its shadow could never mar or blot enough of the evening
To matter.

Imagine the mouse with her spider-sized hands
Holding to a branch of dead hawthorn in the middle
Of the winter field tonight. Picture the night pressing in
Around those hands, forced, simply by their presence,
To fit its great black bulk exactly around every hair
And every pin-like nail, forced to outline perfectly
Every needle-thin bone without crushing one, to carry
Its immensity right up to the precise boundary of flesh
But no further. Think how the heavy weight of infinity,
Expanding outward in all directions forever, is forced,
Nevertheless, to mold itself right here and now
To every peculiarity of those appendages.

And even the mind, capable of engulfing
The night sky, capable of enclosing infinity,
Capable of surrounding itself inside any contemplation,
Has been obliged, for this moment, to accommodate the least
Grasp of that mouse, the dot of her knuckle, the accomplishment
Of her slightest intent.

THE DREAM OF THE MARSH WREN: RECIPROCAL CREATION

The marsh wren, furtive and tail-tipped, by the rapid brown
Blurs of his movements makes sense of the complexities
Of sticks and rushes. He makes slashes and complicated lines
Of his own in mid-air above the marsh by his flight
And the rattles of his incessant calling. He exists exactly
As if he were a product of the pond and the sky and the blades
Of light among the reeds and grasses, as if he were deliberately
Willed into being by the empty spaces he eventually inhabits.

And at night, inside each three-second shudder of his sporadic
Sleep, understand how he creates the vision of the sun

Blanched and barred by the diagonal juttings of the weeds,
And then the sun as heavy cattail crossed and tangled
And rooted deep in the rocking of its own gold water,
And then the sun as suns in flat explosions at the bases
Of the tule. Inside the blink of his eyelids, understand
How he composes the tule dripping sun slowly in gold rain
Off its black edges, and how he composes gold circles widening
On the blue surface of the sun's pond, and the sharp black
Slicing of his wing rising against the sun, and that same black edge
Skimming the thin corridor of gold between sky and pond.

And between each dream, as the marsh wren wakes, think
How he must see and incorporate the single still star
That fastens the black circle of the night as it turns
And composes and turns the black, star-filled surface of the water
Completely around and upside down and into itself again.

Imagine the marsh wren making himself inside his own dream.
Imagine the wren, created by the marsh, inside the marsh
Of his own creation, unaware of his being inside this dream of mine
Where I imagine he dreams within the boundaries of his own fixed
Black eye around which this particular network of glistening weeds
And knotted grasses and slow-dripping gold mist and seeded winds
Shifting in waves of sun turns and tangles and turns itself
Completely inside out again here composing me
In the stationary silence of its only existence.

THE GIFT OF RECEPTION

There is great kindness in reception.
Arthur, stretched still and stomach-flat,
Is grateful for the wild guinea hen
Who finally comes out of the willow to take
From his hand. There is a compliment
In the acceptance of that offering.

Some people believe they actually become the gift
They present, the spirit being united with the jade
Figurine or caught circling in the silver ring

In its velvet case. Self-identity can be disguised
And presented as a lacquered mahogany box, a lace
Shawl. If an ivory pendant or a grouping of wild pinks
And asters can become the physical
Representation of the soul, then Cain,
Cain had valid motive.

Don't you understand that if you lie still,
If you take what I discover of your body,
If you accept what my fingertips can present to you
Of your own face, how I might become what I give,
And how, by this investment, I might be bound
To keep seeking you forever?

This morning I want to give back the steep and rocky
Ledge of this cold oak forest. I want to give back
The dense haze deepening further into frost
And the tight dry leaves scratching in the higher cold.
I want to give back my identity caught in the expanding
Dimension of quiet found by the jay. And with my soul disguised
As the wide diffusion of the sun behind the clouds,
I want to give back the conviction that light
Is the only source of itself. I want these gifts
To be taken. I want to be invested in the one
Who accepts them.

Maybe the most benevolent angel we can know
Is the one whose body lies receptive, composed
Of all the gifts we want most to give.

MASTERING THE CALM

If motion by sail were the only motion possible,
Then the greatest minds known would be those inventing
Fabrics capable of converting to forward movement
The maximum wind power possible per square centimeter;
Inventing sails capable not only of capturing wind
But of seeking out breezes in the slightest ravines, locating
Updrafts in the middle of winter fields, sails eventually able

To secure and multiply their own billowing momentum.

And the purest souls would be those able, by concentration
Alone, to cause a slight swaying of the cocoons latched
Along the hedgerow, to initiate by will a rustling
In the highest leaves of the riverside birches, to encase
The wicked by conviction in a stalled and paralyzing vacuum.

The most popular fantasies would involve
Great silk sailing crafts carried by solar winds
To planets enveloped in gargantuan storms, swirling
Spirals and funnels of blue-green motion precipitating
A dizzying flight, a disorientation of speed
Never possible here on earth.

A cult-worship might develop around clouds,
Being representatives of the pure sail without body,
The total absence of physical drag. A good omen
Might be the sight of a tassel fluttering unexpectedly
In a dream at midnight or the flame of a candle bent
Suddenly toward the east, smoke being borne laterally
Into the setting sun.

Angels would be thought of as an eternal unfurling
Whose steady motions could carry in their wake
The damaged mast and the split sail, who could lift,
By breath, hopeless stones and impossible metal wreckage.
God might be perceived as the power to rise like light,
Changing location with no detectable motion at all.

And a severe calm would be the event most feared and despised,
Synonymous in the mind with death. Poets, then, in the midst
Of any prolonged stillness, would be bound to compose ingenious
Chants evoking the approach of that blessed invisible
Pressing yearling branches before it, bending the sumac, moving
Down the hillside like a shadow, crossing open grasses, turning
Each one carefully to its white exposure, pushing the gold
Crinkling of the lake's surface from the opposite shore forward,
Advancing in an easy and predictable manner directly
Toward any vessel stranded and waiting to be moved
By the proper words.

Sandra M. Gilbert

THE EMILY DICKINSON BLACK CAKE WALK

1866: "Ned . . . inherits his Uncle Emily's ardor for the lie. My
flowers are near and foreign, and I have but to cross the floor
to stand in the Spice Isles. . . ."

1883: "Your sweet beneficence of Bulbs I return as Flowers, with a
bit of the swarthy Cake baked only in Domingo. . . ."
from *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*

Black cake, black night cake, black
thick cake out of which Emily
leaps in bubbles of bitter sweetness—
lucid or dark balloons of Emily,
Emilie, Uncle Emily,
Dickinson, Nobody—
black Emily Dickinson cake,

how does your sugar grow?
What is the garden, where
is the furrow, whose
are the pods of heat and shadow?
How did black bulbs dissolve their iron,
leaves their silence, bees their drone of sunset honey
into the oven that cooked you firm?

Black cake, black Uncle Emily cake,
I tunnel among your grains of darkness
fierce as a mouse: your riches
are all my purpose, your currants & death's eye raisins
wrinkling and thickening blackness,
and the single almond of light she buried
somewhere under layers of shadow. . . .

One day I too will be Uncle Sandra:
iambic and terse, I'll hobble the old tough sidewalks,
the alleys that moan *go on, go on*.
O when I reach those leafy late-night streets,
when acorns and fallen twigs
litter my path like skimpy sentences
the oaks no longer choose to say,

vulgar sowing, bursting open
liberation of the seed, scattered so often
in the dark, the clock ticking, ticking
like a clown's calculated grin, the ridicule,
your paradoxical pants down?

Sometimes it's hard
to be a scholar and a scientist, lopped
from people who embrace each other
with no more thought than pollen
clinging to a fly's wing, happy never knowing,
after all, exactly how or why the yellow petals
of the tulips pressed against your garden suddenly
grow pallid, shrivel, fall.

Dan Masterson

AVALANCHE

She felt the snowfield break beneath her boots,
Heard the boom as the fracture spread eight, nine
Hundred yards left and right across the ridge.

She remembered to drop her poles and kick off
Her skis; she even tried swimming awhile,
But started to gag and rolled herself up,
Her face tight in her mittens, the roar
Working to cram her mouth and nostrils full of snow,
Half the mountain slamming downhill, uprooting
Trees, boulders, line-shacks, turning the night
Inside out, over and over again,

Until it all settled in the dark she felt
Coming to a stop around her. She remembers the chapter
On Fright and Self-Control, and takes tiny helpings
Of air trapped in the space her mittens made.

She has no idea which way is up. It is
Darker in there than in the childhood dream

Where something white was always at the window.
Now, there is no window, only tons of snow
Packed hard against her, front and back,
Like king-sized mattresses piled high
For the storybook princess and the pea.

She must not pass out; she knows snow is porous
Enough to keep her alive, but can almost feel
The ice mask forming across her face, the breath's
Own handiwork of shallow sleep.

If she is to survive, she must now force saliva
Between her lips. If it heads for her chin, escape
Is above; if not, she may panic and die
Upside down by herself,
The acceleration of nerves, the state of being
Scared to death.

She lucks out. Up is up!
She tries to come out of her bend,
And feels the slightest give along the curve
Of her body. It could be an air space. There are
Such things—some the size of root cellars: hard
Slabs of snow tumbled together like a house of cards.

She turns and finds she can move her head; leaning,
Digging with her elbow, she drops off
To the left, like falling out of bed.

She stands on a slanting floor of the blackest dark
She has ever been in. She begins
Feeling her way around her cell, and something
Flaps across her face. She grabs at it
And holds on, hoping it is still intact. It
Is the avalanche cord, orange and long, that released
On impact when she belly-flopped at the top of the mountain.
She is hooked to it and has to believe the other end
Is where it belongs: waving merrily above her grave.

They will find her soon, she is sure, headlamps flicking
Across the terrain; they will tug at the cord,

Signaling as they probe and dig. She continues along
The wall, getting the contour of the place.
There are alleyways everywhere, but they may be
Deadends; besides, she wants her cord
To have all the slack it needs.

On the nearest block, she finds a tilted shelf
Of torn ice, beneath it: a frond of hemlock; she eases it
Out, hoping it is still attached, but it comes off
In her hand. She sets it aside and becomes aware
Of its fragrance filling the room.

She squats and closes her eyes, as if
She were in the forest after a good downhill run,
And thinks: Perhaps she can tunnel to a tree;
Perhaps there will be a door there, hinged
By elves. "Grendel" she says aloud. "Mab, Lizard
Leg, Horse-Nettle."

But she has missed the password; nothing opens
Anywhere. She laughs at herself and shakes her head.
What to do. Her rucksack is gone, ripped off
Up top. She could use something to eat.
She has pockets everywhere, zippers, buttons, snaps,
But she comes up empty,
Except for car keys and a penlight
Dead on its chain.

She knows there is air for a day or more,
And remembers the boy in Norway buried for a week.
She wants to eat snow but doesn't want cramps.
She wants to dig but thinks of cave-ins.
She needs to scream but no one will hear.
It's high in her chest, something
Like the ache from running too hard too long
Before you run through it and out
The other side. She lets it come on.

It's as though she's been scolded and sent
To her room. She takes off her mittens and goes

To her knees to fill each with snow. "Bad girl"
She says and hurls her mittens away, starting to sob
Only a little, mumbling frightened things.

And then the right foot. She stands
And stomps the snow, running her fingers up
The avalanche cord, still safe in the air
Where it hangs. "Mustn't pull. Good girl. Mustn't
Pull." And she starts
Reeling it in, an inch at a time, allowing
The orange ribbon to slip through the roof
Like a thread from her mother's hem,
Curling at her feet, the last of it fluttering
Across her face and down her arms.

She sits and finds the end of the cord. She puts it
To her thumb and starts rolling it up, 'round and 'round,
Neat as a pin it goes, a giant thimble growing
In the dark. But she tires of her game and crawls away
In a widening circle in search of the hemlock branch.
She buries her face in it and strips a handful
Of needles, rubbing them between her palms, inhaling
The sweet sticky smear she has made of herself.

She plants the rest of the branch upright
In the floor, and lies down to face it, patting
The snow, telling it things, crossing
And uncrossing her legs behind her.

She saw him arrive in a jumble of fire, a wee
Bit of a thing on the lowest limb. He wore
A green jerkin with hollow stone buttons and knickers
Puffed to the bands. She started to hum
To see if he'd dance in his circle of light,
And the jig that he did made her laugh in a giggle
Inside. She watched him kick at the base of the tree
And bark fall away from the door.

With his hat held aloft and a sweep of his arm,
He bade her Good Day and Come In. It was in half light

breasted, she has no
 clothes on. She takes your
hand to her lips—

5.

 She is not young,
she is naked, old,
 her breasts are dug, her
 buttocks pitted, her cheeks
 folds, her hair raven black,
braided in back, seven
 coils, seven snakes, seven
candles, flaming for Baal,
 Dagonbaal, Beelzebub,
Ishkebaal.

6.

 She is neither
 young nor old; you look
at her breasts, her thighs
 spun with hair, her belly
a goblet of black glass.
 You take her hand, touch
her chin, gaze at her
 thighs, at her tangled
hair—her legs part, you
 want to be there, touch
it, be in there. You
 walk toward the door, walk
toward the door. You want
 to touch it, but your
arms are frail like twigs,
 your legs bare branches, she
will let you touch her.
 You will not win.

7.

 Look, she is
not naked, she is

 tall, grim. Her dress
is earth, her grip a
 mailed fist, her lips are flushed,
her eyes hungry, the sun
 burns in her hair; it is
white fire, orange mist.
 She pulls you in, you
cannot resist. The doorway
 shines, it opens, receives you.
The wild air begins
 to sing. You stumble
past her. She pulls you in.

Scott Ruescher

Three Poems

THE SITUATION

In the face of overwhelming difficulty
one can read the New York Times
and while the hours far away
with pictures of primitive people
just on the verge of going under.
Or one can scan the columns of figures
posted inside the Wall Street Journal.
But when it comes down to a true confrontation
with problems in one's personal diction,
it's hard to say which word is better,
maybe "perhaps" or perhaps "maybe."
It isn't quite the same as asking
whether one prefers margarine or butter.

Perhaps it depends on the situation.
Or maybe debates between the two
have been in session for so many years
that it is now officially pretentious to say
that one word has the upper hand.
If one is certain of something,

neither seems to apply very well:
"Surely this shot of the refugees
illustrates someone's camera skill."
"Undoubtedly the price indices
reflect a flaw in the system itself."

Sometimes a note of hopefulness
comes storming into the reader's room,
and again one insists on the proper diction:
"Maybe some neighboring country will take them in."
"Perhaps the prices will fall again
in proportion to the national spirit."

One word's a trochee, the other an iamb;
one is informal, the other well-dressed.
And one is not at a loss for action
when someone asks one, "Which word is better?"
One passes the butter, or the margarine, maybe.

ON A GLOBE HANGING BY WIRE FROM A CLASSROOM CEILING

Its axis off a degree or two, it spins when licked
by hallway breeze. Or, if a teacher's fingers arouse it
during a lesson it wobbles.
In either event, its hypothetical buildings crumble
and the trees of all its forests fall, domino style,
from Canada south to Tampa . . .

The air inside of it, a little less warm
than the rocks in the real one, is dark like a room
that comforts or frightens the children
in bed. A band of stainable steel, or of
an alloy thereof, secures the globe's middle section,
a belt around a fat man's belly. And this much at least

is official: *to some extent*
the natural topography of the land
determines national border, where the first

shots are fired . . . So if no one objects,

while it's still on its wire
someone take a ballbat or something
and show the children how evenly it breaks
at river, ridge and shore, as though at a god's command.

THE SNOW ON THE ICE ON THE WATER OF THE RESERVOIR

The snow on the ice on the water of the reservoir,
A story in itself, is white like a saint
In a book of Christian prayer. Its ultimate contradiction lies
In illuminating everything that it buries,

In making it look like daylight out at nine o'clock in the evening.
There are some soft red pines nearby, dark pastels
On a manmade rockface along the shore
Casting their flat black shadows onto the snow

As unassumingly as possible. I admire them
As I sometimes admire the frankness of a friend—
Yet at other times the shadows only look like stains
Of coffee on a tablecloth. The beautiful lime green

Moon in the sky is partly to blame.
At one quarter of its full potential, it reflects the sunlight
That makes the shadows. It also centers a white vapor ring,
Never threatening to leave it.

So in the cold clear January evenings I try
Emulating the pines. I stand still like them and cast
The kind of shadow that doesn't hint at my restlessness,
That doesn't jerk at the knee or twitch at the brow

On a windless night. Once I get it perfected
I'm going to send it off in the mail to someone under siege
From a great deal of pain. He can drape it around his shoulders,
Or lie down in it till the great pain passes.

Jane P. Moreland

TO COUSIN BETH

(1)

When your mother calls, you tell her things are fine,
but if she hears a lower pitch to your voice
or senses a quiver in your silence,
she will hear her doorbell
just then or remember turnips
about to boil over.

Her visits are short,
quick tours through apparent order
that do not acknowledge your flesh paled,
arms thinned since she saw you last.
She would never ask
why the Christmas tree is still up
although it is February
or why you wear sunglasses inside
on a dark day. She never leaves
without picking spotted leaves from the ficus,
removing the evidence of disease.

(2)

Understand your mother's way:
A daughter should be married,
with children, house and yard,
place settings for twelve,
a chandelier without cobwebs.
And she should keep the surface
of her life smooth, a lake of glass,
so that no matter how churned the water below,
no one sees past the mirror,
and the mother sees only her own reflection.

Remember:
She took us one summer to a cabin
where mice climbed the mountains of our insteps,
and roaches came in the dark

to our mouths for moisture,
and all she remembers is how red sunsets
behind windblown pines looked like flames.

David Baker

UTAH: THE LAVA CAVES

The rain just over, what's left of the day now glowing
fiercely on the far canyon wall, pink as glass,
the sand floor already dry and stirring in slow wind,
my three hour's hike has seemed longer than ever.
Prickly pear, yucca, sheep's-death hide in their shadows
and hold still.

Yet the cave pits should be close now;
soon their ragged pumice edges will be honing
themselves on my boots and palms. I've come here
so often, parched and alone, trying to find
some place where the desert's past is still visible
and go back into it as if it were my own.

Yet how many times have I clambered into the caves
and seen the light of the world snuffed out
in that barely breatheable dark? Or touched the moss
there like some wild thing's fur and thought
the very rocks were, unspeakably, alive? How many
times have I called to them?

They have never answered.
And the deep pits lie before me again, like great
fallen oases. I stand at the edge of one
and look down at its black rocks before descending,
see those thousand facets half full of rain, sparkling,
each blinking in the last fierce moment of sun.
How far must I go to believe my own eyes?

CarolAnn Russell

THE COLORS

Because fathers come back
from the war,
chins firm with the unspoken
because mothers burn
their blue dresses of grief,
in the sandbox we dig trenches
for imagined survivors
who follow us nightly from supper.
Imperceptible as stars the ants
come out, dotting the toy tractor.

We try to love the ants
and when we fail we kill them
shrinking like our fathers
to music mothers hum
without thinking while brushing their hair
or hanging out clothes.
Sundays the nearly invisible
fathers wear grey, brown and green,
fatigued with hymns
while mothers waddle like pigeons
in brilliant magenta, cooing our names.

The uniform whites of our eyes
propel the parade of fathers
to the cemetery, its stone markers.
Hush, someone is praying.
We are swimming in the sound,
blood's thick embroidery
spun out of us. We become modern

and sad. In a brick house
on Black Street my father goes out
to gaze at the sun. *Come back.*
He flickers and returns,
agitated bird

gripping the pistol's steel branch,
his man's arm flapping.
White skin my mother kissed sometimes
when he stepped from the bath

her lips wet for days
after the Veteran's representative
together with the orderly
took him away, arms tied
like pale wings
straining against the canvas sleeve.
Paint me, Father, turning
blue in the salty womb
as you circle
toward the open door
and dance, dumbly,
into the yard.

You never killed a bird
nor hung it like an offering
beside our garage.
The deer roped to the '57 Pontiac's hood
you brought down for food.
I remember the blood on your clothes,
how patiently Mother tied
the neat white packages.
One by one she unwrapped them
learning how to cook and serve
the wild meat.

We share the supper
like scribbled tracks of shorebirds.
Beached near La Push we come close.
Waves bruise us
with their colorless explosions.
Lovers, we repeat the blow,
bread to the insect congregation
honoring the dead—
miscarried, cared for.

Beth Bentley

LIES, ALL LIES

"It is a matter of knowing whether real life is in what one does or in what one thinks of one's action."

Denis de Rougemont, *Dramatic Personages*

1

In the long run, though, it's small matter
what happened or what didn't. For what one imagines
happening is equally true. Whether we were
participants or witnesses is perhaps mere semantics.

Did you or I stand on the bridge and give orders
directing events, or, off in a room
on the studio lot, were we writing and writing,
sending off page after page in sealed

manila envelopes? And so engrossed in our plot,
the wonderful swerves, coy changes, U-turns
and doublings-back, we didn't consider,
had no time for, what others made from the story?

Draw back. The heat of the moment has cooled.
A spark here and there. A crackling. Dénouements
soothe both actors and audience. We come down from heights,
eyes a bit damp, clutch our hankies. It's time

to think of midnight snacks, quick or long kisses,
moves. Though not much time, really, is left
to shift scenes. Not everyone's up to it. Beginnings
are difficult this far along in the day.

2

And old scenes dissolve as fast as new ones unfold:
that time we got lost in the snow, snowflakes on our mouths.
Those tears in the bedroom, fights in the car. Making love
in an orchard, apples dropping like hours. Places

we dreamt or merely visualized while reading—

was it Tolstoy or Mann? When books were more real than life,
characters more familiar than our friends and lovers.
It happened. It did not happen. Ask me no questions.

Details blur. We were there; we were not there. *I saw you,*
you say. But I can't remember that time. *But you said,*
I say. You don't remember those words. Who were we?
Two others, now dead. Monsters. Angels.

3

Lies, all lies. Those lives twanging like strings,
note after note, blending and weaving
streams of music the ear can't retain. In its spiral
an echo plays hide-and-seek like a child.

Tears dry. The bed's made. We disperse. On the boards
sit chairs, waiting. In no time we'll see bodies in them,
hear voices resumé. Our bodies? Our voices? Who knows.
Let's begin, then. Here's the first page.

Shirley Kaufman

Three Poems

NEED

The fawn we rescued
where the dogs had cornered it,
its mother gone,
is in our room
refusing the bottled milk.

Refusing the logic
of our hands, the smallest
offer makes it
tremble on skinny legs
that barely stand.

It is trying to keep

its bones together,
the ponds of its eyes
won't focus. They reflect
nothing. It is too soon.

We stroke the head,
the silky place
between the ears.
We can only invent
what we think it needs.

ON A PHOTOGRAPH OF HERSELF AS GRANDMOTHER

It's not a pose. They are so innocently
perfect against her arms,
though slightly unfocused.

She sees herself sitting on the bench
between them in the sun
like someone she wanted to be.

She isn't ready. They are over-exposed,
their lips much paler
than they are,

the two girls already dissolving
in the hard light
that bleaches their hair

and drains the last color out of hers.
She is holding a book
wiped clean in the false radiance,

no print where her hand lies white
on the white page
and the children can't read yet

but they mouth all the words by heart.
She tells them again

how the lost bird looks

for its mother, an absence they almost
believe in, caught
in the middle of the book

where nothing is certain, listening gravely
to the sound a bird makes
when it's abandoned.

MOTHER

Her hand's on her neck
across the pale seam
where they slit her throat
to remove the goiter.
If only I knew what it was
she prepared me for.

Rain wrinkles the glass,
a scrim of water we can't see through.
It's always between us.

She said *you're your father's daughter*
when I made her sad.

He hid her in the drawer
when he married another, the photograph
with the dark silk making a long V
down to the center of her breasts

to stop her from watching over the bed
with her stunned eyes.

Now I am no one's daughter.
Rain at the window,
my hand on my neck.

DENYING PLATO

1

Sifting in and out of birch wind, an old man
 passes this wooded corner of the city every day.
 I watch him today. He touches each birch,
 as if counting slats, pencils . . . or
 solidifying a white-ribbed nothingness.
 He says something over and over, one word—
 round vowel—I'll guess snow.
 The next day, two inches of snow, the man
 wasn't there. The birches no longer
 needed his touch. Squirrels were no longer
 chattering for last ditch efforts
 to clear the acorn-strewn ground.

2

Once on a winter path I told a friend
 I was tired of talk about the real world needing
 verification. A fox doesn't need license
 from a philosopher to prove the warm throat
 of blood pulsing under my cousin's hand
 as he mercy-chokes the fox in his trap.

As I watched my friend's hair
 being sifted and combed by the wind,
 reflexive tears messing her mascara, she said,
 "Two people can make it real
 because they try to confirm what's invisible
 between layers of skin." (Dead leaves blew across
 our path. Fox-pulse and hand, I thought.)

I said: "Words aren't solid unless we see or touch
 tree, rock or car. Even snow is only an image
 until it's named." Fire, I thought, was fire
 before someone named it.
 I clenched my fist and said: "See that Slow sign?
 If I'm not real, and the sign's only a word,

then why can I hit it? Why doesn't my fist
 go right through?"

Clang! Snow fell from the blank side.
 My friend laughed, I kissed my knuckles.
 "I'm feeling cold," my friend said, not commenting
 further. What we speak of often stays out of our way,
 I thought: TV, dresser, book shelf in a dull room,
 or the weather, though we believe we touch
 rain or snow and see clouds walk through fog.

3

Old men rub their hands together
 faster as they talk about weather,
 as if they can never get away from the wind.
 But the knives of imagined wind
 can't do anything to philosophers huddled around
 stoves. Their lives, still unharnessed,
 howl the brief fiction of cow dung, pipe smoke,
 Red Sox wins, birchwood cords and the measured
 security of stone fences Frost piled
 in spring, in solitude.

WINTER FLASHBACK

1

She calls across blue ice to her son.
 She remembers him spitting at his brother
 for taking his skates, breaking a blade.

Her mother had told her, if you spit
 on someone's shadow, your shadow
 will grow so heavy you can barely walk.
 She almost repeated that.

2

Her son, carving figure eights,
 appears a quarter mile out.
 His red sweater burns her eyes. His smile

pulls her to the lake's edge.
She doesn't worry about him
being scarred by myths. Ice
is a scar he creates at her feet.

3

He lifts her from the broomgrass,
two deer on his chest
leaping into wool, wool of his mother's un-
spooling, wool that she wove
while February spiders webbed her bedroom ceiling.

What they spun
she spun, and now holds, myths flowing
from winter skin and the wool crushing her breasts
holding the rising and
falling of two hearts.

Debora Greger

Two Poems

OPEN WINDOW

Queen Christina ends with a close-up of
the Queen's face that holds for eighty-
five feet of film. For that shot, the
director said he told Garbo to think of
"nothing, absolutely nothing."

What are you thinking as,
meditatively or blankly,
like some ancient scribe rolling
the king's seal over damp clay,
you run a glass of ice water
across your forehead?

How, on an enormous soundstage,
fake snow was dumped onto a winter
palace hung with paraffin icicles,
past cameras and a short-sleeved crew,

onto actors sweating in long fur coats,
paid well to convince us they're shivering.

What you saw from a heat-shimmering
highway—open window in a rough
building, a man's bared, muscled back,
a secret of sensuality in that glimpse,
that contrast of anonymous textures
ravishing our familiarity.

Are these the problems you love most?
Conspiracies of accident,
hieroglyphic shards of sight—
softwoods betraying the least breeze,
morning unable to hide its threat of heat.

CAMERA OBSCURA

Studying some painter after Giotto,
you can joke about linear
perspective's inadequacies, its

supposing a rooted, one-eyed observer
with a straight-ahead stare; but,
as in a Cimabue, when the street

curves right, into a small canyon,
there's an upright ocean boxing it in.
Seeming to, you say, according

to certain physical principles.
But the watery wall persists, distant
reassurance of more than picture space.

Waiting at the last spotlight, you
study a shoestore clerk on his low stool,
eating pizza, treating a chair

naturally as a table—these accommodations

to surroundings—the BOWLAWAY LANES sign,
unlit, raising a shaggy silhouette

against the city's pink dusk
because birds have nested between letters.
Then the bus takes the old coast road.

With your tags and tickets, your
luggage as a dumpy fellow passenger,
you give yourself away, too,

like those birds, those goodbyes lodged
in greetings. The smeared windows veil
the outside, the high indifferent stars.

Elton Glaser

LE PIANO INTROSPECTIF

She had come to believe her touch
the way a faith healer
will close his lifted eyes and let
his fingers change the face beneath him.

Those early days, her heart beat stiffly
through scales that weighed and found her
wanting, the hammers bearing down
with the speed of guillotines.

All her heroes could not save her:
Beethoven storming the walls, Schubert
like a shy bride seducing the headsman.
Even Mozart she would refuse, saying

*There is power in this music
to make wives rise from their deathbeds*

*and berate their husbands
for the potential of being happy.*

But what keys would sweep her past the bars?
The white ones, wincing if pressed
for time? The black ones, slow
as the acrid poise of smoke?

Now her hands lean over
the blind brink of music
and step off, each passage falling
through the airs that take her in

Like one of their own,
upsway and downdraft as the moods waver
and the currents pitch freely and steep,
end over end without end.

Brian Swann

Two Poems

A REACH AWAY

Existence shrinks to the corolla
of this Aladdin lamp. Everything outside
exists, though it's hard to know as what.
Sounds through wire screens, split from sources,
need not be sounds at all. On a line, scraggs
of cloth flap, as though someone tore through
a barbed-wire fence, not knowing it was there.

Stray air lies along our skin like the pelican-feather
suits of the Seri. Can we become those organisms
that evolved patterns of color at a time when
there were yet no eyes to see them? Or we could become trees,
and start pumping up dark for clouds. Our blood
could turn magnesium-blue. Or else we don't exist,
back in that Cretaceous which for the first time

unfolded flowers of magnolia and sassafras, insects
to go with them, color in the form of butterflies and beetles.

This is us in this ancient now, almost holding
our vegetable breath, while night warps
around us like old boards. Our last afterimage was
a rabbit pausing over a half-eaten apple.
Our last memory is effacement.

All day we sit on the patio, under the pergola's
crude-ripped pine nailed together with small thought
for natural stresses. The sun has made its own stresses.
We watched its geometry on us.

So here and now, lost in
the demands of the moment, we come to necessity, denying
all premises, affirming the approximate—like strong light
moving, creating the light of a surface, leaving like a trail
labile shadows, its life going underground again,
to surface as a spring under canopies of wild grape and madrone.

The quick accuracy of such moments has slowed us
to this dark. We sit. We wait.

Half choice, half accident, much of the day we spend
watching, and much of night. We keep the light in a
clear pool that covers the floor-planking with new skin,
drips through knotholes onto the lives of mice, onto
hard-tamped earth. It falls like the glow of large stars
that condense a reach a way from the open window.

SONG OF THE GAME OF SILENCE

Your eyes glide through it,
air, a light scatter
demanding expression.
Black phoenixes rise
on the plain, burnt
in autumn. Air scentless
as a fawn. You begin to see

inside as out, outside
as musculature of marvelous
emptiness. Rocks quicken
to follow mountains
resisting light. Refusals
bring illumination. Flashes
remember the invisible,
bring news from silence.

Robert Gibb

Two Poems

ELEGY FOR THE DEAD

It is terrible
To have lost touch with the dead,
To feel the pox
At the mirror's back flaking from a surface
The light falls through.

The dead have been displaced.
They are wounds in the water.
Their silhouettes are no longer
Filled with clouds and blue.

The dead harden in the bottoms of cups.
We stroke them into razor blades
Like small magnetic storms
And drop them behind the mirror.
We bundle them up
And give them to the poor.

We spill salt and leave it.
We do not touch wood.
We brush off our clothes before entering the house.
We wipe our feet.
And the dead, cocklebur and milkweed,
Fall from our lives; the dead climb

when you are finished they wipe off the stains
they sell it to someone more hungry than you
the fool the rooms the chairs in the lobby
where old men practice holding still
if you start your collection of dust today
then they will welcome you home to the lost hotel

things in the basement they burn them for heat
the ashes rise all night through the air
when it rains they stick to the windows they run
then that dripping sound on the fourteenth floor
the rumors about the door with no number
and what the blind man saw just before he fell
if you live you can follow him out that window
and if you die you can go to hell
then you can be what you are in the lost hotel

THE WOMAN WHO FELL IN LOVE WITH WATER

The woman who fell in love with water
fell in.

Each time she bent over,
that dark other rising to meet her:
green silences, lip to watery lip.
She who had nothing gave herself
to the perfect embrace of water.

You who have never gone deeper than mirrors,
your rooms grow small. They cannot contain
one who is waiting to name you,
whose voice you cannot hear.
But the woman who fell in love with water
listened.
She heard green silence.

O woman in water, always I see
the punished fingers of your hair
and feel the currents gentle you on your way.
Slowly, my body bending over your body,

I come to drink.
Between sleeping and waking. In green silence.
Where falling and rising are one.

Amy Clampitt

SUNDAY MUSIC

The Baroque sewing machine of Georg Friedrich
going back, going back to stitch back together
scraps of a scheme that's outmoded, all
those lopsidedly overblown expectations
now severely in need of revision, on
the nature of things, or more precisely
(back a stitch, back a stitch) on the
nature of going forward.

No longer footpath-perpendicular, a monody
tootled on antelope bone, no longer
wheelbarrow heave-ho, the nature of going
forward is not perspective, not stairways,
not, as for the muse of Josquin or Gesualdo,
sostenuto, a leaning together
in memory of, things held onto
fusing and converging,

nor is it any longer an orbit, tonality's
fox-and-goose footprints going round
and round in the snow, the centripetal
force of the dominant. The nature of next
is not what we seem to be hearing
or imagine we feel; is not dance,
is not melody, not elegy,
is not even chemistry,

not Mozart leaching out seraphs
from a sieve of misfortune. The nature

of next is not fugue or rondo, not footpath
or wheelbarrow track, not steamships'
bass vibrations, but less and less
knowing what to expect, it's
the rate of historical
change going faster

and faster: it's noise, it's droids' stone-
deaf intergalactic twitter, it's get ready
to disconnect!—no matter how filled
our heads are with backed-up old
tunes, with polyphony, with basso
profundo fioritura, with this Concerto
Grosso's delectable (back a stitch,
back a stitch) Allegro.

William Meissner

THE PSYCHOMETRIST AND HIS WOMAN

Though he is a perfect stranger,
he knows you this well:
just by holding the locket he found on your driveway,
he can read all the words tattooed
on the underside of your throat.

His knuckles steam.
If only he could feel your stocking,
he'd tell you how far
you've walked today,
if smoke ever circles your thighs.

You are not one to let any man caress your secrets.
Yet he has turned you inside out many times
in his dream; he'd like to leave fingerprints
on every emotion you've felt,
to explore each fold and crease.

At breakfast, he's just an ordinary man, dropping
banana peels into the garbage.
Only when he starts his car does something
click, only then does he believe
he has traveled a million miles
beneath your face.

In that instant you are there,
next to him on the front seat.
He reaches to find your hand.
The sound of your life resonates
through the guitar strings of his wrist:
he recognizes the castle of your heart,
imagines his face in all its windows.

Virginia Elson

TOUCHING MOONS

Sight from the right angle,
and there are two full moons—
the second squared away in our pool
like the long-years-gone agate
I kept boxed in jeweler's cotton wool
rather than risk game, holding out
for the universe it held glassed in.

The myth ends here: this moon's
at hazard, and my fingers stretch to spin it
to a vortex, centrifugal stars
funneling down the drain of their black hole,
bright bees homing in on a dark hive.

True enough, stilled waters will restore
the whole, but Apollo has changed even that.
Give me your hand—there are four of us
here in the night, in the night reflecting
what it means for each of us to have been touched.

Jack Butler

CORRECTING SELECTRIC

—for JPJ

I

Poetry, that disordable orderly rout
of shout and syllable, all tapped out
in flawless character, in carbon-ribboned
exactitude? That messily-scribbened
scribbled scroungily glorious excess dressed
nattily as a businest
businessman at his best in vest and executive tie?
No error visible to the eye,
just crisp black lettering, as if, at last,
mind could hear submind, future past—
as if some revolution in our joys,
some beller better signal-to-noise
ratio for lovers were possible as bells
are possible in possibles
of belles lettres? There's this button on this thing
lets me go back, if I should wing
wink, and change black to whitest innocent
space ready for the right black print.

II

Relentless time, in its ongone ongo
cannot backtrack, and so and so
mistake's a fact, and hesitation's waver's
as blackly inked as all forevers
of flowering universe: which flower true—
whether they flower from untrue
or true, are true to flower. There's no erase,
no re-record, but there's a grace
some faces have allows a play-pretense
of cleanliness to really cleanse.

III

Though I am bound to sometimes do the wring
wring thing, sweet think you know I thing

you know I think you are the song sing-song
elegance that in a life-long
carerror of career of error I've
corrected for, for in your live
love-lively look I look I live and love
my lover love my love, My Love.

Hadassah Stein

SIGNALS

We have got through the night almost intact.
If we wake we must have slept; it was
risky. No rain. The smell of yesterday's smoke
or singed hair or seared flesh, or the fear
of that smell. We should not leave
without good reason. Nothing
is really happening. Nearly always
when the earth shudders it does not break open.

A wine bottle empties. Books unpeople shelves.
Lightbulbs unscrew and vanish. Nothing
of moment, but you begin to lock your door.
Three rally to protest the draft, and many
women in Atlanta daily wipe the leaves
of their umbrella plants with milk, while others
search the forests for their children.

When the rain arrives it will dissolve
what illusions we still harbor: that the dust
of summer's night will wash away
without souring the ground. That nothing
lies waiting for the touch of water;
that the smell of smoke will dissipate
without becoming stench and that the rain's
fruition will not make us wish
we'd never heard of promise.

GHOSTS

I take each ghost that comes
to me in my arms, stroke the pondweed
hair of the drowned, the pork-crackling
brows of the burned, the round blue cheeks
of the smothered, the rag-doll
contorted car smash-ups
and rock them on my heart: the autonomic

rising and falling and throbbing
that living mammals find reassuring
reassures them. Though there is no
nurture from these male nipples
and pectorals, they need none.
I tell them as I hold them
that it's over, that it is all
right, that this happens
to everyone, that they can't

by asking for Heath bars,
coffee, icewater, cigarettes,
strawberries, pickles, wine,
by begging to watch sex, sing,
feel their pulse, or play
ring-a-levio—that they can't
by clutching these dark
earth's clouds to their faces
like the well-worn, nubby blankets
of a child's bed see the light
they are of now. They ask why

I believe this and why I
don't believe them. I say
there there and they quiet.
Some I have seen leave:
the dawning, not the dramatic
dawn of the planet, but a little burst

or recognition like
a butterfly's taking off
from tree bark for migration
or a held dandelion tuft's diffusing
in an opening red door's wind.

Some others have moved in.

TWISTER (WESTERN OHIO)

Under the barn is the snakes and in the cellar
even though they live side by side
with the rats and eat them you must kill it
as it slide on the wall eye-level you hit
it with the plank as Mama say hit it
hit it and it turn into a dog the sick
black dog that bowed and bowed lower
each blow of Father's
howling into a sleep

and we gone
into the cellar chased as Father once was
chased by a hoopsnake and hiding
behind sacks of roots and the pitchforks and
the snakes outside howling and the blacksnake
on the sill as Mama say kill it
and the coachwhipsnake is named so
from killing them that way snapping
them to break each joint

and we hiding
in the cellar as the ratsnakes and
blackracers and the killed Mamasnake
in the field once with so many
more in her belly wind
from their holes here
in Darke County whip howling
cross the dog-black fields.

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A PLEA FOR HELP

Because the University of Washington Graduate School is unable to increase its support of *Poetry Northwest* to match the increasing gap between our costs and our income—this, in spite of our increased circulation—we are finding it necessary to raise from outside sources once again during the coming year \$3,300. Through the generosity of its friends, the magazine has met its first deadline of July 1, 1981, and thus for the time being will not have to raise its subscription price from \$5 to \$6, reduce its size from 48 pages to 36, and appear only three times a year instead of four.

Poetry Northwest will maintain its 22-year-old format for a year, at the end of which it must once more have raised \$3,300. So, starting well in advance, we are asking: Will you help us in any amount? All contributions are tax deductible.

David Wagoner
Editor