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POETRY NORTHWEST

SUMMER 1981

Gwen Head

Five Poems

WRECK

"Whatever you do, it's gonna cost you plenty.

*Dear, we have driven so far, a terrible way,
All morning, she said, she couldn't concentrate.*

"The body work alone, banging out the damage,

*it is no wonder you are drowsy,
She finally let her assistant do the babies.*

"takes God-knows-how-many hours.

*no wonder we sprawl drenched
It was gratifying that four of the six Apgars*

"Then you got to consider, this here's an older model.

*in mutual sweat. My neck muscles clench
were definitely subnormal, as long as you didn't*

"The color's not standard either. Special order.

*at the shock of this dim fragrant day
consider the appalling implications.*

"That *and* the parts. *If* we can make them fit.

as if after whiplash.
If those women only knew! "The physical signs,

“But fix it up and you got what they call a classic.

With tears and soft words NOW I wrench
“although subtle, are unmistakable, once the syndrome

“Only don’t leave it out on the street once it gets finished.

the slack wheel from your spent grip, crash
“is identified. . . .” Some weasel shadow prowled

“Keep it in the garage, don’t let nobody drive it

our two lives at stalled top speed ONE RING ONLY
nearer and nearer the nest . . . ONE RING ONLY

“but you, or your insurance won’t pay off.

into the lethal metal and concrete glare
“Good God”—she hung up—“and I call myself a scientist!”

“And yeah, I know, I’ll kinda miss it too,

of unmendable woe. Those crushing, cherished needs
But the terror wouldn’t slink off. Finally she couldn’t

“the way it is now, especially that bandanna

snap, shatter jaggedly free
stand it, *had* to go home, *had* to be sure;

“you got the bumper tied on with.

Silent, I stroke your intact, lost body, maimed
and in panic, backed Funny Yellow smack into a lamppost,

“Christ, lady, how should I know? Maybe forever.

invisibly. See how my blood-grimed fingers gleam?
a mere two weeks after all that expensive work.

“And like I said, it’s gonna cost you plenty.”

THE GARDENER’S DAUGHTER

In the plastic shrouded
mop bucket, shriveled
cherry twigs, prickly
as barbed wire, wear
new shreds of bloom, and from

the lacquered tombs
of stale red beans
dynasties of gleaming jade trinkets
have been rifled and scattered.

My root bin is ravished
my spice rack vandalized.
The angelic crests of decapitated carrots
watch over me as I dry
my dishwasher hands on air

for the paper towels are all folded and fled
the saucers prestidigitated away
and on them sleep manifold tubers, cuttings, and pods.

My maiden daughter, gravid with the mad joy
of growing things, craves of me kiwi fruit,
papaya, pineapple, mango, canteloupe, quince,
sesame, ginger, coriander, daikon
radish, and the waxen bells
of paper cups by the hundreds,
to set them humming with the clappers of roots
as the rattling seed covers split wide,

while above the red clay rim
of a pot, of the year, of the world,
last fall’s withered, fragrant
yellow quince rises

and where now is winter?

For next to it
on the window sill

the pomegranate
stone apple all seeds
sets ajar a mysterious
bronze portal, blue
with a patina of mold

and my child comes toward me
with the cloven fruit in her hand.

SLEEPING ALONE

Poor scrap of fur
about to be tucked away
in a scrap of silk
slashed from a too-long dress
I wear, deluding myself into prettiness,

to be coffined in a sleek white plastic box
that formerly contained
eight shades of frosted eyeshadow
all unflattering,

why am I so overwrought by your tiny death?

Is it the bit of litter stuck to your stiff nose?
Or the way your lifelong companion, eager to greet
and grieve with me, bounced slew-footed
over your dry light rumpled body
and almost raked the black wide-open eye,
still brilliant and soft as a garnet or a ripe currant,
with the talons of one slim hind foot?

Now he plays prairie dog
in his corner, shunning both of us,
holding before his yellow rodent incisors
like an old lady touchy about her bad breath
a fan of cardboard sheared from a garish cereal box

which he masticates with electric efficiency,

as when both gerbils, in the good times
before Topper's smashed hind leg
before Champ's ulcerated, bleeding belly
gnawed each day's junk mail open
for the lost both of us.

Now Champ the Gallant Gerbil
lies dead by the community property tennis ball
that he and Topper, with the tireless stupidity
of long incarceration, heaved over and over
into their food dish, or rammed up the climbing tube
to their lofty plastic latrine.

Yet like the fuzzy sewn halves
of that tennis ball's cover
they fitted themselves together
each night for sleep:
Topper both pillow and mattress,
Champ the unbudgeable, oppressive comforter.

Wakeful, from a bed as big as a tennis court,
in a white lace robe with nothing under it
I have come down to consort and condole with you, widower.

For who now will splint your gimpy leg with velvet,
and what wounds can you wear like roses over your heart?

STONE SPEECH

My head hurt. I was with my wife
then slept till a huge shouting woke me.
No no don't put me there I won't go in.
The length of my arms I felt the clubbed fists flail.
Rant bloodied my throat. I bit extreme
salt from my ribboned knucklebones. What seemed
my heart was silver, salamander, mercury
winking away. The din
stopped, finally. Then I was blind, but saw
with a sight not of the eyes

the green curtain stir
and knew beyond lay Hell

which does not exist.
Or so they tell
me. I cannot say what *they*,
or whose these children are who pin to the wall
at the end of my tremulous, rifled sight, a spring-tailed
mouse, and a ballerina slapping away
voracious flowers diving at her face.

The girl child lifts a sugared stone up for me
—not *to* me, they are gowned and I untouchable—
to see, to taste with my eyes. The sun sees it,
and flares on cherry-colored agate.
Its glory shrivels me, already There,
yet I would watch forever.

There is no forever.
Only this here, this now, her little shrug
laying the small stone down.

—*Oh child whose name I have forgotten, children,*
it goes so fast—

She has put the stone away.

Child, to you, too, that soft
untiring abrasion—

I did not beg enough,

could never beg enough.

—*It goes so fast—*

SESTINA: SERAPHIM

Consider the technical difficulties of the sestina.
Consider the practical difficulty of Seraphim.
For years I've waited for the right idea,
one with a mystically perfect division in six

clean segments. I doubted that it would come to me, ever.
Now it has, I see the world in a new light.

Indeed I see the world itself *as* light:
workaday bodies tremulous with a Sistine
splendor of form and color, which may be the Seraphim
agitating invisible wings, or the idea
of wings, between us and the ruddy facts of six
p.m. and autumn and leaves that we will never

know green again, cocooned for an instant, forever,
in a pulsating membrane of celestial light.
But back to the practical difficulties of the sestina.
Its crabbed, tedious form demands seraphic
patience of reader and writer alike. Ideas
cramp and harden beneath its belligerent insect

carapace, setting innocent truths at sixes
and sevens. What honest poet ever
felt anything but dismay to see the delight-
ful flesh of the visible word lashed to the sestina's
hacked, procrustean form? Not even Seraphim
can mend the strewn, unsalvageable ideas

in its demented wake. And to salvage the idea
of Seraphim themselves, we must not ask how six
of anything, paired or tripleted, can ever
function at all—but see them in the light
of impossibilities (like troikas or sestinas)
blessed, rarely, by some inner benevolence. Seraphim

(take it on faith) can fly *and* hover. Seraphim
soar closest to the flame of pure Idea.
In the celestial hierarchy (nine, not six
Orders) they have the ear of God forever.
Their wings are fiery cataracts of light,
laving even the cloddish feet of the sestina.

Behold now the earth-bound, limping, six-fold, seraphic
Idea of the Sestina aloft in light,
silly and deathless, amen, forever and ever.

DEER HUNTING

This is among the things I've not done,
 a deer in a clearing and I
 in red watching it fall.
 I want to think of myself, falsely,
 as a searcher posing as a hunter
 in the heart of a forest: the deer
 and I lock eyes and stare
 until each is the other.

Even as I become the man who hunts,
 I do not flush them out
 so they run wildly toward others.
 What could be the pleasure?
 But I'm a man among needy men,
 my hands damp with necessity.
 In the safety of my room
 I steady myself, move closer.

The imagination has no ethics:
 I pull the trigger and something
 releases in my stomach. Better than sex.
 Better than a base hit up the middle.
 Now I'm a searcher again, lost,
 approaching the man who shot the deer.
 It seems we are dancing—the new way—
 in different spheres, almost touching.

FISHING

I must go out fishing
 where the water stops.
 That's where it's rumored
 the best fish swim, in the purest black.
 I must carry a net

and drop it in the right place
 and feel how heavy it gets,
 and love what I might have
 long before I know it.
 Let me say it another way:

The clock takes too much time.
 Things die before they should.
 Nothing untouched by the dark
 can live for me.
 You fish (brothers, sisters),

floating where the water stops,
 here I come.
 My net catches nothing
 that doesn't wish to be caught.
 And I am empty-handed at heart.

OATH IN A RAILWAY TERMINAL

"CORRAGIO" AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

—San Francisco, 1977

—for Muriel Rukeyser
 1913-1980

We must live
 for evil's death.
 Though it is unknown.
 And deeper than light.
 We must answer it.
 With my arm through
 your arm in a dark station.
 At 3:10 in the afternoon.
 We must answer it.
 Without today. Leaving these tracks.
 The way the blind

still open their eyes after sleeping.
To eat. Over dead light. Everyday.
There are so many prisons
inside one steel bar.
We must go back a long time
in the river, closing all books, all stones.
A black man wipes the glass as we near the door.

Beyond him a December rain is beginning to kneel
on the streets. When it has finished giving,
there is only one skin waiting outside
to rise with it. Old woman poet, give me
to that luggage you have hauled
from those gates in the east,
all of your life.
I think this luggage may be made
from those gates.
Another woman is waiting inside a car
to carry it. A young one beginning
to unfold a map without roads,
into song. Tonight, with your words
we celebrate the Prize of her people
who rescue the innocent.
At 3:10 in the afternoon,
as we enter this rain
and the age of the hostage,
my breath falls on the drum
of your heart.
The three of us shall live
for evil's death.

SONG OF ONE

The sound of a jailer's keys
and the ice in the bartender's glass
have one hand between them.

The sound of a throat
under water and a leaf taking light

have one wood between them.

The sound of a lace in leather
and the vein wrapping a knee
have one knot between them.

The sound of one man's breath falling
into the sound of one woman's eyelids closing
have one hymn between them.

The sound of a child's death is ours.
It is you and I passing each other, again.
But when a child is born—we are
pilgrims discovering lakes on the sun,
and we gather to attend humanity's birthday.

Garrett Kaoru Hongo

A RESTLESS NIGHT

for Cynthia

The night surrounds me in a dark grey fog.
I feel its chill even under my *futon*.
The *tatami* underneath stiffens my spine.
I am tense and rise to snap on the light,
Set her photographs out before me on the floor.
I take out the old cardboard *hana* cards
My grandfather gave me and pretend she is here
To play this game of old men and young lovers.
The cards show me prints of the wooden sailboat
Piled up to its masts with cherry blossoms.
Young Prince Genji dips his umbrella
To acknowledge the small orange frog
Playing among pine boughs by the river.
The crane of a thousand days
Considers the swollen red sun of dusk.
Brown ducks fly in a triad over a charred field.
I deal the cards first to her picture,

Smiling as a breeze ruffles through her long hair.
I draw the full moon into my hand,
A burst of white light over the black hillside.
We go through the plays quickly.
The animal pictures come to me:
A golden-haired yearling buck, butterflies
Flickering around a cluster of peonies.
She takes the red rice bowl, chrysanthemums,
Green stalks of riceplants, and maple leaves
Blazing like filaments of dawn in a basket.
The game is over too soon.
I feel the chill of night
Clench into a fine mist,
Low on the ground outside.
At my window, I see the stars go out.
I pour myself a cup of wine.
Alone again, I drink with the moon.

Mark McCloskey

THE ANNUAL SALMON BAKE

This is the hill it's on that can't speak English.
Over there are the mountains you can't see.
This is the house, this is the handshake
that closes deals and holds a mortgage on the house.
This is the old lady who brought the salmon;
she could break the jaw of death with one punch,
she is squirting lighter fluid on the charcoal.
The light is pink now as a nymph's backside.

This is the salmon, forty pounds of wet silver.
Everything that might lurch us to the toilet
has been scooped from it. These are the eyes
like the eyes of stroke victims or the glass discs
on the faces of wild animals in playpens.
These are the coals that are turning the salmon black,

this is the line of wet maws at the cuttingboard;
this is the spatula like a toy shovel.

This is the midget whose accent is famous
for looking down its long nose at the natives;
he is crashing the party, he wants
your sidekick to put her crotch at his disposal.
Your sidekick grins at him as though a mouse
were dangling by its tail from her teeth. Look:
you're smashing the fish to bits with the spatula!
Won't you stop breathing for the sake of the midget?

This is your sidekick who won't tell the midget
you don't want to see her with her pants down.
This is your sidekick screeching for burnt fish;
this is you bent double over the spatula,
begging it to be an axe. This is your limit.
These are the stairs running away from the party.
This is your sidekick chasing your ear, this
is her claw on your arm. She is dead weight.

These are the windows that can't speak English
squeaking open in the dark. This is the handshake
that closes deals trying to come between you,
then closing like a sea anemone in a black tide.
This is the old lady who brought the salmon
making a fist. This is your sidekick like the rear end
of a train vanishing into a tunnel. This is you
like the backbone of a salmon in a pig's mouth.

Natalie S. Reciputi

THREE WAYS OF NOT LOOKING AT IT

I seeded the garden and I didn't look at it
and I left it there. I left it there
and it didn't change so I seeded it again

and it didn't change again so I
didn't look at it anymore.
And then I did and it had changed
but what grew I hadn't seeded, so I pulled them up
and then left it again but
it changed again and grew more
of the same and so I let it change and
now it seeds itself and
I leave it alone.

* * *

I put out the trash and I didn't look at it
and I left it there. I left it there
and it didn't change and I put out the trash again
and it didn't change again so I
didn't look at it anymore.
And then I did and it had changed
from what I remembered it to be
and I put it in a can so I
wouldn't have to look at it but it had changed so
I could still tell it was there.
So I left it and wouldn't go near it anymore
but it kept changing in the can and
now I don't know what it is.

* * *

I wrote it and I didn't look at it
and I left it there. I left it there
and it didn't change so I wrote it again
and it didn't change again so I
didn't look at it anymore.
And then I did and it had changed
from what I remembered it to be so
I wrote it again to make it match
the memory and it changed again
and nothing matched anymore.
So I left and wouldn't change my mind
but it had changed and
wouldn't be the same or look like what it was and
so it left me there.

Michael Heffernan

SQUIRRELS WORSHIPPING CROWS

When we are dead
and our tails flick
in the street
what is left of us lights
in the high branches
where the thin twigs dangle.
Then we fly.
We find out what the fire
in the sky is like.
Leaping around in it
we become coals with wings.
Thousands of us perch
in the great tree
in the middle.

H. A. Maxson

A WOMAN DRESSING IN EARLY MORNING WINDOW LIGHT

I seldom wake in this light
flooding up the color of flesh
in window after window.

Only slowly does she come clear
out of the nightly transmigrations
of her life, stand vague

yet buoyant, all there is to cling
to in this otherwise still
unworldly morning.

Raising her hand she touches,

as if amazed, a breast come full
during sleep she entered a child.

Say, Light, this discovery
rehappens daily for her,
for all the women I have ever

hoped to love who stand
so near every sleeping one of us
who wake to only the harsh

full light of the selves
we know
and have always known.

William Chamberlain

HOW TO PAN FOR GOLD

Practice with BBs left over from killing
robins as a child. Pan it: blood on snow,
your old man's face like a hard day,
sighting you. If you have gray hair,
state your intentions to skeptics. Pack.

Avoid the extra weight of secrets
old timers may have died whispering. Years
flake away, round the edges, water.
No one knows if the old timers found gold
or went, rush to rush, on borrowed money.

Don't stop walking until you start to stink.
Bathe in the river wearing only a hat.
Remember: river is ritual, but water is a drink.
Make an appointment to die here, then walk
like feet had grips. Gain poise on river rocks.

Do not work at night for stars in your pan

or invent the air, crisp birds drafting up
half your silly life, not finding gold.
Look down, any glint will look up. Look out:
gold may hide in your own smoke of toil.

Black sand is heaviest next to gold.
Gold lies in that wet coat, always. That's why
you brought the magnet, arch of a real law.
Save the black sand. Later you will pan it
for any lost gold in its shroud.

Gravity doesn't know you, it just works,
weighing your pan with water, sediment at last.
This is the point you expect to find gold—
where instructions fail like your eyes, squinting,
and the river pouring like rivers down the gorge.

George Venn

Three Poems

FIVE SIX MINUTES IN MARCH

Morning, that red cockadoodlum, calls me
awake to light alarming the wall.
"Review, retreat," my dreams tell me
as I wait on the pillow. The parade
of naked emperors will pass again—
the children still asleep upstairs.

Opening the quilts, my skin leaps
past the mirror that stares crazy
out the window at apple trunks.
Nothing finches as I, naked father,
ride the tense balls of my feet
to the fire. I find it in ash.

In the kitchen, I strip a ripe orange
from Modesto, eat it, shivering.
Across the valley, snow announces

the first of spring. A thin red line
of blood wants to rise past 40 again.
Coffee's a volcano, the honey's local.

Cat's cry hungry at the door. I open to
lions and tigers dwarfed and tame. Did
Nebuchadnezzar throw me in this den?
My feet say "socks." I eat chocolate cake.
Who can argue? Interest is higher now
than it's ever been. I tiptoe back

to the bedroom past the hostages held
by the mad mirror. My wife is asleep.
All night, part of her is listening
for the cries of children or lost mice.
At breakfast she'll translate nine new
smiles for the dog. I grab my glad rags

in a bunch and run for the shaggy rug.
It is a good day for making cedar doors—
louver by louver. So many scraps need to be
put together. Now I've finished this one.
Light comes through the open spaces here
but always indirectly, and I install no

easy latch for closing.

SAFEWAY CONVERSATION

Give me an apple with a worm—
I want mine perfect red.

They cost too many poison deaths.
I want that paradise.

With a simple knife, you can—
I want bites right down to the core.

Besides, these worms repulse me.

I'd feed them to the horse.

How can you stand the way they—
I try to be myself.

Please, a pound of those delicious—
Stay away from me.

But I can't change overnight.
Watch out for your hair.

MY MOTHER IS THIS WHITE WIND CLEANING

out. Everything. From Grandma's house.
Laos is a refugee. Laos needs a place.
Laos is sponsored by her church—
that singing fundamentalist mess.

Out old clothes. Out thirty years of dirt.
Nothing's to be left.
Salvation's Army marches here—
converting love to modest rent.

Oh she has reasons heaped holy
on a silver platter, theological as
the head of John the Baptist.
Order, too. There's a box to Dump

there's a box for Goodwill, a box to Burn.
I'm reeling from them all.
I stay away and help. Late at night,
she asks me what I'll want to take.

"Save me Grandma's diaries, the morning
in June she called me outside to see
the salamander slide under the door,
odor of geraniums in the air.

Save me that place I slept and dreamed

for thirty years," I say.
She writhes. Gold rings twist themselves
around her fingers. She's down to blurt:

"All this must be done. Your aunt
and I are just sick of these decisions."
I nod. I know it is too late to teach
her to leave the soul of just one

earthly home alone or call it love's
unvendable estate. She knows not where
she comes from or where she goes.
She is borne again by her far God—

the cleansing homeless storm. I'm still
her son, the troublemaker. Here, growing,
a tree bent again by all her prevailing.
Where next, oh righteous tornado?

Joan Fiset

OPPOSED TO DARKNESS

You stand on the grass
where your life was,
noticing light sift down
through willows onto pine needles,
the remembered quince
light on the garden,
duck and slugs
who ate the lettuce,
sun on the back porch
and cat watching a rubber hose
drip over a railing,
light on the wringer washer
churning where you stand and know
it is no more.

It is still as a creek
hidden by a bramble patch
or saplings thick as weeds.
Bending down you inch through bracken
to search for glimpses
of the house where azaleas bloom
outside the window
where a sumac burned.

All the names you know
dim where this light breaks
and you are more simple
because you move closer
than color or any light.

Sheila Bender

BURYING THE DEAD FISH

In the sink the gills open again
like flesh from a wound. My son
and I stand in the flat stare
of this fish without breath.

By the light of the waning moon
he carefully buries this small life
under sunflowers moldy with fall.
Feel of earth, feel of death,
he does this with his hands knowing
each loss wants a marker.

How can he bury a marriage that died?
Loving both parents wasn't enough
to keep them together. The distance
between being alive and going back
to being dead becomes pain and he holds it,
a salmon in the rivers of his spawning.

Patricia Goedicke

THE ONLY ISSUE

That woman you jumped out of
In such a hurry, a sprout

Full of juices and squawks yelling
For her to water you at once,

That woman, your own
Wet beautiful Mother's long gone now,

Leaving you with nobody but these two
Dry stepsisters, crones

With kneecaps for faces, coathangers,
Sterile needles to the sky,

Strange totem poles with their backs turned,
Grinning at you with their necks,

With the red Exit signs of their lips flashing
Crazily, on and off,

These last of the three sisters,
Spindly smoke signals of our lives

Tall as legbones they hang
Over the cold ashes of the fire

You sit by, chewing stale bread
And leathery raisins, disgusted

But also afraid of them:
You are no relative of these, you cry

Where is your yeasty mother
For warmth, for smoothness, for butter

Why has she left you with these black

Stones in the pudding, sticks
Of leftover straw in the oven?

Between your sheets they flank you,

One of them measuring you, a mirror
Upside down beneath a photographer's hood,

The other snapping the scissors of her thighs
Angrily, back and forth.

Bald-pated, glowering and drooling
They are sucking the life from your lungs

But they are the only issue
That is left to any of us, at the end,

Though the picture has yet to be developed
Even your midwife mother would insist

There is nothing to do but lie here
In a bed covered with black flies

With an arm around each of them,
Your own two

Babies with bad eyes.

Jack Driscoll

HUNTING COYOTE

Tonight my father's voice arrives
like the sudden scream of a rabbit.
And I remember

how he cut the tendons, carried
the rabbit by its ears across this field,
where at night
there was so much silence
even my bare hand could hear its heartbeat
in the cold.

For hours we waited
downwind, the first coyote coming in
like a thin, frightened dog. When she stopped,
snow fell lightly
in her eyes, those two small moons of song
that wake me now, middle aged,
in my father's bed. There is a mirror
I pass on the stairs. It is cracked,
the first slap across my frozen face
as I stood, unable to move, the coyote
already stiff and tied to the sled.

Sometimes, walking out,
I imagine checking my traps in moonlight,
my own son staring up at me with a snarl.

Fran Lindsay

Two Poems

THE KISS ON THE FERRIS WHEEL

You are riding a silk
helicopter, whisk of sky
pale pinwheel
thrown from my messages.
The spokes

blink a signal
of turning doors:
I know the swing
on your circle of entrances:
flags on a white hinge, high hands

that lift me
toward an inner country
of invited citizens.
I know the beckoning,
profuse

with its sharp kerchiefs
that lash welcome
while I climb
the silver ladder.
Its rungs flash

like the hundred fins
on the new Chinese fish you ride
that twists back
from banner
to long silk

kite that swallows a star,
baits my dawn eye.
I know
it was wonderful.

IT IS POSSIBLE

Boats
are building the water, letting go
the wood of their boards
to take us down a finished river.
Talking of trees we are leaving
the trees. Talking
of travel, we leave ourselves off here.
Because the right island comes
to find us, like a rise
of evening land

And now the river is finished.
Its sounds curl like secrets.
We have kept this day. Crossing

the sun is a risk in deep gold:
the heavy hand it takes to cross
a larger heart.
There's light enough now.
The light the river has made
and lays down. Reflexive water
on water: the sky complete with weight

like a dry, blue land
where only the real boats are leaving.
Listen: the warm oars
are changing, the shore is going
away. Boatless, the wake
flows lengths of foreign miles
close to where we are,
our eyes drowsy with this sway of travel
we carry by looking. Yes, and the secret
left in a different tongue
found here has been overheard. But when
I turn my head there are already
too few words to speak it.

Ann Neelon

CANTICLE OF THE SURGEON AS LOVER

We will meet again in the white forest
at the well where they lower
the infants on swings.
The knives we feared
will go off to be kings in the mountains
and we'll drink the water then
like good guests.

Let me row you out now
to a country of new snow
where the animals

grow gauze, not fur.
The third eye in your ribs is the barometer
we trust in these currents of myrrh
and garlands of popped air.
If I jostle our sloop,
forgive my eager sportsmanship!

Carrying you over the rocks is a job
in your glass gown.
You are afraid this is the knifethrower's cabin
but I am only a poor *saltimbanque*
juggling live cells.
My blue mask scares you onto a neighbor's roof.
You are breathing so weakly
I know you need more time.

Woman, these scarred flowers
thunder past the tunnel of our grief.
Forget the stung thicket we come from.
Health will toss up our bodies
wherever our room floats.

Thomas Reiter

BLACK BASS WILL TAKE THEM IN DRY WEATHER

The Bestiary's anima of stone,
bearer of wool
from which is made garments that do not burn,
you teach us, salamander,
to lie down on our deathbeds robed
in a thousand skins. You teach us this
because the creek feeding Quail Hollow Lake
can't hold its bottom stones together. For us
a brush fire tightened the lake
and every root's a coal
banked for the moment. Axed

from a breeding log at the creek's dry spring
and hooked through a hind leg, you swim
out beyond ash and algae
into the sun.

Richard Michelson

AUNT FRIEDA IN THE MOVIES

In the moving pictures
Aunt Frieda is the one standing
stone still. We dance
around her: my sister making faces
Mom says will freeze on her face
until no man will want her;
myself leaping from behind
screaming bugga bugga bugga.
No use.
Aunt Frieda will not budge.
Not until the lights go out
and the camera is tucked quietly
back in its case,
does Aunt Frieda turn and slowly
begin to move.

Jim Bill

THE MIGRANT

You were not born to water. The gypsy
promised to read your palm but her eyes
wandered after her fingers, lost themselves
in the patterns of mildew covering your skin.
She never found the scars, couldn't decipher
the marks of your birth, your childhood

with lizards and cactus. Her only answer was vague,
hints of travel in difficult times, something
you'd already guessed. She walks down the street,
your money jingles in her pocket and your future
dangles like bells on a string. You cry for reasons,
why you left the sandstone landscape. Was it
the wrong turn in Utah? The notions of green and blue,
of snow-capped distances cool through summer?

You were not born to the street. Compared
with canyons in the desert, they are barren,
washed gray in a veil of rain. Colors
can only be guessed. Your fingers yearn to twist
powder-laden string into fuses, and your eyes
to see the brushwork of fire cleansing
the city, painting it desert. Enough is seen
of this gray, guttered water, these facades
that flatten the eye into maps leading home.

John Morgan

THE REEF

Blistering repetitions, flowers of indeterminacy . . .

Sun going down, and its orange
out of the west smothered the purple water—
odors of spring and change until we couldn't bear it,
until, as we looked down, it faded like an echo
of all that we had ever thought to do.

Aqualungs, fins forgotten, along with the urge to dive.
No desire to forgive the porpoises, the past,
their casual alien game irredeemably offshore,
laughably, touchingly cruel:
so all precautions proved useless, even the stars.

We might just as well have stayed home. Always

we stumbled, we fell on our own sweet wounds,
could never get straight the facts of growing up.
Too young we saw too much and understood only
there are so many ways to bleed.

Warm nights on the reef, vast as the strange is lovely.
Now Paris and calculus fade into
green eyes one had forgotten, once no doubt essential,
a stubbornness along the pulse we cannot quite dismiss,
cool in this rippled backwash of the absolute.

So when dawn surprised us again in the usual way
the fishes nibbling our toes made us laugh; but now
while a plague of twelve-pointed starfish
sucks at the lives of the reef
and the venomous face of the stonefish drops into shadow,

at last we begin to see: it is as if
the whole past rose up within us calling our names
and our loves are each a small and perfect coral animal
feeding itself to the water. Together they form
a thousand mile reef, endlessly alive on the pastel corpse

of uncountable coral dead.

Cassandra Amesley

HEADING FOR SHORE

"If you've got to die, at least die heading for shore."
—Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*

No horizon now, beyond the lapsing hummocks of the Sound.
Nothing is yours except the dip and thrust of legs
mushy with cold. This is another element;
the physics of your life are redefined. Here
depth matters—not how far to climb, but not to fall.

The path of flight slips and sinks across the strait.

You are the compass point and the shore true north;
in the random rocking of its face you turn,
your existence compromise between earth and water.
You lived among mountaintops called islands, were not haunted
by dreams of valleys, the true earth below, never considered
their darkness, the secret roads sloping downward.

This is the moment toward which your moments turned,
why your muscles rehearsed their leap, your lungs
opened deeper to the song of wind;
so that you could rise once more, move one inch closer
to dry stone. In your blood is stored
all the sea you can encompass and survive.
Land calls you home, dust
for this moment stronger than the sea.

Paula Rankin

UNREASONABLE FOOTPRINTS

"All the explanations were convincing, and all of them accounted for
something, but none of them accounted for everything."
—*Phenomena: A Book of Wonders*

Sometimes we wake to a yard of them,
scars gouged deep in mud
as barrow pits, reminders of how much circles,
walks up to have a look
without letting us know.

Then the inevitable lantern and hound,
nights we stalk these fields with neighbors
to flush the mystery, to fill holes with an eyewitness account,
to come back with a name for the vanished,
something with fur, real blood, a scent.

I never tell you how I love not knowing,
those moments when we wallow in our ignorance
and the trespasser is anything it needs to be

to get attention. I like to think it's the Possibility
for love, puzzling the moves it should make,

not knowing enough
to come in out of the rain. Or these auras
of absences our bodies are said to emanate:
I like to think the vanished go on inside them,
that above "Goodbye" hovers a print whose owner

even air cannot help but shape itself around.
Most of all I think of entering that moment
before the foot, poised over all possible tracks,
begins to come down, before desire chooses
its avenue to memory through us,

harrowing the darkness between like clods of warm earth.

Thomas Brush

OLD FRIENDS

Though the sun has been lost since dusk and nothing rises
To stand beside you, but the yellow smoke of steam and the first
few flames
Burning in the vacant lots, to lead you where you must go, neither
right
Nor left, but in a weaving line down the weaving street, and the
old country
Of the block goes on one staggering step at a time, the day broken
Into short breaths that almost forgot you, and the torn faces
You can hardly remember, you keep going. You see the walls of
darkness
Disappear, the heavy sheets of sadness fall away, and the light
From the other side of the world gather round like old friends
Come again, out of the taverns and bars, to greet you and the dream
Of morning, shaken loose like the drunken song spilling once more
From your wet and trembling lips.

Martha R. Lifson

Two Poems

VERMONT CEMETERY

for Joe Eck

graveyard faces fly away on angel wings
round blank faces fly wholly away
gone blank before the end of time
staring quietly out at the legions around them
they stare themselves to flight and fly away
still in the night before the choirs turn themselves
move their robes quickly enough
the rustling of black robes takes time and a quick glance
at a child out of place and all the black shoes turning
underfoot and how quickly nonetheless the round blank face
has gone. how deeply we feel the loss in our bodies
turning in the winter snow, in our robes deep as velvet snow
and as heavy as the songs we sing under heavy eaves
echoing to ourselves and the slight shift of a shoe to a slight angle
one man adjusts the long sleeve on his robe and before he can turn
the face is gone and the legion choir is still
and the scrape of his shoe makes too much noise
and he bends for the music fallen at his feet
and he feels how clumsy he has become
for that moment at least, how earthbound he has become
wrapped still in the singing he will do this early morning
and many other mornings to come.

BY THE PRACTICE ROOMS: TO A YOUNG MUSICIAN

Just fitter your fingers out to the end—
don't pretend to be solving more than
your fingers moving startingly out from your collarbone.
You are thin; you want to solve
even the night. In the space between us
there is air testing my face, your hands
moving your hair.

From this hill
we see lights in the sky—

they seem to mean something and we add air,
tying us to the buildings, the buildings (we try so hard)
to the sky.

Close by, children practice piano
with fingers left over from playing
outside. We can hear them even when I tell you
about someone who played with petals in water
and you listen hard, even when you say you are burning
and must know something soon, we hear small fingers.
When you want me to tell you something, I say
practice; practice piano, or at least
move your fingers all the way to the end.

David Citino

IN THE SAME PLACE, AT THE SAME TIME

A thing you just can't plan, each
muscle turning hard as summer pavement
without being told, small pleasures
shivering up the spine though no lover's
near, the last place you'll ever be.

Limbs rigid, sphincters closed, each
bone sheathed and braced, you close your
eyes, face long with surprise, then flattening
in anticipation, darkness packed tight
around you, foot pounding the floor;

into oaks or ash, concrete abutments
reinforced with steel, rivers running
cold as sleet, utility poles engineered
to snap like twigs in a mower,
or into the sheer wall of speeding train,

the world wrinkling, vision shattered,
memory breaking into shards, the other car,

its tensed rider breathless too, too much like
you to be missed, both of you gripping
the wheel, whispering "No—God"

again and again, driving to work, going
home, moving to or from love, the neck
falling into shoulders moments before impact,
vertebrae chiming like icicles, into a ditch
positioned to take what the road can't hold,

into a summer sunset big as the side of
a barn, or skidding sideways to the end of snow,
so alone only the cicada's there to be made still,
or a pack of city women ashen and shrill,
tumbling into dawn or all the way to night—

a life's last menace trespassing beyond
the center line that signals balance and control,
just into the other end of the arc you've
entered; someone slipping out of shadow
at the very moment you arrive.

Diana Ó Hehir

Three Poems

FIRELIGHT

This is the last time in our lives, we said.
We closed the door behind us
The fire flared up. Our hands reached out
As if we had all the time in the world.

And briefly, there and then, we had it back,
Our youth, like a great green jewel,
Risen from the floor of the room,
Faceted, mobile, light moving and tumbling, possibility
Around us in a pool, unstable on the air like a
Holograph. I could see the chairs through it; I caught

My foot in its glow.

But Time waited outside the door for us,
Cloth shrouding his elbows, long streamers of
Cloth down over his knuckles, silence silting into his hollow eyes,
a bandage
Holding his jaws together.

FOG

It comes up out of the field
Like a quorum of ghosts,
Tall, skinny-legged, treetop-haired; it follows me stroking my white
knitted cap,
Says: Why can't you make up your mind, lady?
The sunlight is white and wet.

And you're nowhere, you're away in your room with the sun turned on,
Not thinking of me.

Over my eyes I'm forming a thin white veil,
A permanent country of fog,
A cave for the whole of my head;
I'll be a face in a plastic bag, repeating
Nothing can be decided.

Think of the damage I'll do! The people who count on me
Believe I have colored fingertips, life in the ends of my hair.
They'll have to learn a new word:
Here she comes with her eyes aghast;
Pulling the fog behind her,
As clotted and sticky as milk.

OUR WORLD ENDS IN RADIOACTIVE FIRE

The city is poison, its metal roads
Poison, every quartz window
Enemy.

The grass underfoot withers our toenails yellow.

We stand on the edge of the remaining world.
Behind us: enormous carved city, its tops the square corners of
storm waves.
That tallest enameled roof
Scours the clouds with rays of sound: *Answer us.*

Yesterday they fused the city's doors; the fire inside burned clear.

Your hand reaches for mine,
You could be anybody.

Can you remember any fragment out of real life? The children
Posing like solemn actors on the lawn,
The underside of the porch roof painted blue?

In January
Birds tumbled into our city,
Their wings frozen open.

Margaret Smith

SURVEYOR'S CHAIN

From the beginning, unbroken links. God in a tree humming.
A new house, keys collected from strange doors, tied
on a string and lost. At night, a green light on a round table.

The voice of an Aunt, my mother's flittering bee: He wanted
a boy, not me. A cave of blackberry vines, a crouched toad
listening. Clear as tears, they say, a toad's blood seeps
from the mower's blade.

He must pass here coming home. Creep out and ask—I ask him.
Tossed to his shoulder while he laughs, I am a funny pet.

Show me, show me. A bicycle, longed for, my Pegasus. Surprise

on the back porch; an old woman's wheels, castoff, maroon,
heavy, paint sticky. . . . White lilacs in full bloom.

Nickels stolen from his pocket, buried. Silence so fierce
it hurts. No one dies who keeps on breathing.

An island of trees, floating near. If I could swim that far—
a few more strokes. I cannot swim.

They tell about the ocean; I hate it. The brown earth is mine:
weather not to be trusted, but in pictures, the tunnels,
the white caves where dripping water turns to stone.

Sometimes sun on snow, sometimes summer, rank goldenrod its end.
A robin's nest, five blue eggs; ants piling sand in a barricade.
Seven mud pies set out for God's return.

Books and books, a neighbor who smiles and does not talk while
I read. Raisin cookies, whales' teeth in a glass cabinet.

Beyond the vacant lot, where the woods begin, a chestnut tree
greener than secrets kept, high as a lookout tower. Its
three-pawed leaves crowd layer on layer. Prickly hard,
the nut purses swell.

Rough branch to branch, up and up, green darkness in a green
well. A loophole on the far side: hayfields uncut, one far
blue mountain, trees gathering.

An empty laundry bag in the attic. Stuff it with clothes
piled for the Benevolent Society's naked heathen, a flat-
headed rag doll I loathe, newspapers with a taffeta crackle,
a sweater full of moths.

It will sit in the loophole. The drawcord holds her stuffing
in. Without a head, she watches the land-monsters snuffle
out of the woods. They build ladders with beanpoles.

An eagle with my mother's face attacks through the night

window. I sleep with my head covered.

Then bless King Arthur. Bless his armored Knights questing
through the forest. Bless the maiden, give her a dress of
blue and one of gold. Bless the table with an empty chair.

A sand track up the long hill. Stone ledges, a crook-backed
pine. KEEP OUT! I find a farmer's quarry, lost to mind . . .

Granite shelves, green moss oozing. Far down a bowl of
amber glass, still water not to drink.

Sliding over the broken rim, the sun dazzles a glance, pours
full from its pitcher of light. No one comes, no one knows.

Summer sings like the man in the tree. Hidden in a nest of
grass, I eat my apple.

Richard Blessing

Six Poems

SEIZURE

for Rick Rapport, M.D.

It's the pulsing engine pulling cars in a train.
After it, a name, effect, cause, then meaning
and meaning rattling to the end, the brakeman
waving good-bye.

Life is like that:

lived forward, we understand it backward,
and too late.

Arrested by lawful authority,
the dictionary says. *Also, an apprehension.*

It's when your left hand, clenched and cold,
distant as the moon, shoots itself crazy

at the wrong goal, at the hanging net.
It's when you are thrown on the unmerciful court
you have always loved, the man defending you
justly crying *Foul!*

You are guilty and charged,
completely a jerk, a layman contesting the law
of motion. Brainless, your hand shakes up,
an eager sophomore in the college of hard knocking.

In a different sense, it's a title. And after,
a poem, dreadful with puns.

It is beginning
wisdom, an apprehension of Law.

TUMOR

for Lisa Arrivey, R.N.

Like proud grandparents cornering a reluctant stranger,
they show me the pictures, pin them up, backlighting.
Left lobe and right, major and minor hemispheres,
they are walnuts, just as the textbooks say.
Let no poet improve on *that*.

And the left lobe,
my right hand, my noble and ignoble speech, sweet reason,
is whiter than the snow that surprised us last night
and which hangs still on the roofs of the modest houses
across the street.

Ah, but the right! Blacker
than a coal miner's lung or a house new to mourning!
Is this what comes of them, my evil fantasies,
the sexual one guarded years like a microdot, my greed,
my pettiness, my unambiguous pleasure in a colleague's
bad reviews? Or is it only that, after all,
it has to be *someone*, has always been someone,
no trick to it really, no cause nor effect,

but always someone else. Today I am someone.

Take courage from this: it is not so bad as you think
it would be when you imagine it. I wouldn't lie to you.

It is only the minor hemisphere. All the things
I was never good for: singing and music, spatial relations,
the left hand lay-in, the occult crafts and arts.
Always my tin ear, the one for listening when a bush
bursts suddenly into flame or when a whirlwind
has something it wants to say.

It is only
the minor hemisphere; that, and the fear on the faces
of friends, remembering I was young and more handsome
than any Phoenician, killing themselves being kind.

I set this down like a farmer planting at the bitterest end
of winter, perhaps before. I watch the sky. One way
or another, I will outlive this all.

SUNDOWNER

"What is man but his emotional life?"

Lawrence Knopp, M.D.

Sundowner. There's another name, but I don't know it.
The lady in 519 D knows where she is: home.
And she wants the strangers out, like mildewed furniture,
like a sickness smell so bad the windows won't open
wide enough.

Where does such strength come from?
I could put my hand twice around the bones of her wrist.

Help, she cries, and the small nurse cries, *Help*,
mirrored claims competing like everything here,
living and dying, illness and health.

Deceitful as natural daughters, they surround her,

show her the numbers on her door. *Cunts*, she says.
Fucking bitches. She has kept these words all her days,
like bits of twine, a gun under the mattress, in case of need.

Now they herd her, like elephants protecting a new-born,
to the wide windows. See? There is the Space Needle,
the skyline spelling Seattle. And the lovely Sound,
where already in places the salmon wash up tumorous.

And there, where the sun goes down, are the Olympics,
those white clean lobes, speech and spatial relations,
left hand and right, and voices of the gods.

Around me in the corridor, patients wheel, soundless
as ghosts, or lurch like melancholy drunks.

I want it so much then I almost see it.
The sunny kitchen, that lilac blossoming wide
beyond the yellow curtains. But it's wrong,
the flaw in any poem, soft mutant stanza.
Never the surgeon, I cut nothing out.

Now it is over. They are putting her down
one more night. There is such color in her cheeks,
like a girl's after dancing.

I think how the sun moves
every day across our plumed, imperfect skies,
and never moves. And of this woman, traveller
all her life, caught in this white network,
home, among strangers moved no nearer her
than you or I.

HAWK-MAN

Wheeling and wheeling in the widened corridors,
the hawk-man listens for the wind. Buckle-high,

hour by round hour, his fire eye burns down.

And his circle has no end: nurses' station
and treatment room, the jig-sawed patients' lounge,
the numbered doorways. Once more the elevators,
uplifting outsiders, visitors in a snake-and-bird house,
wanting to be somewhere else.

Wanting to be somewhere else,
I ask a nurse, the heart-breaker, farm girl from Omaha.
Hang-gliding, she says, like naming a disease.

For a week I watch him, a beard red and burnished
as hot blood, the fever eye, the hands crooked
like meat-hooks on the wheels. His shadow
crosses my sleep in a long barn-yard dream.

Meanwhile, doctors scribble letters in my palms
like prescriptions, asking *What do you feel?*
What do you feel now?

It is hard to say.
Right now I feel I am the lucky one. It may be
I misread the letters. Everything
is upside down, or backwards.

When I am stronger,
I walk beside him in the halls. Lacking weather,
we are talking about will, the human will.

One thing about it, he says, *your neurology*
just don't give a shit! I follow him, drawn up,
far as I dare, high enough so every landmark
shrinks and spins.

What's hard, he says,
they never fucking tell you yes or no.
When I can, I ask the nurse, my Omaha girl.
They tell him, she says. *He just won't hear.*

SCOTT

for Eileen Cody, R.N.

Spinning his wheels, up against the wall, he can't stand
for us all. Still, he's not far from me, or even you,
only an eye-blink from the man-in-the-street.

When she has time, the nurse, too tall for marriages
she says, peels him from the wall he's climbing,
gives him a send-off. Feeling no pain, he rolls
his life, two years or twenty, depending what you count,
up-corridor, erratic as a top just before the fall.

Now the joy-ride, that dead friend who drove him,
are more lost to him than the combination
to your high school locker, or that everyday
walk to the lot where you park.

Scott's my baby,
says the nurse. In two months she has taught him
to feed himself, and he does, like a wild joker,
face on the table.

What a piece of work this man,
cut more places than a marked deck, more broken
than a windshield, stitched into misshapes
even a mother can love.

One rule, says the nurse,
vowels flat as Nebraska. *Don't you go helping.*
My ward, you learn to shift for yourself.

Yes. And already the hall has cornered him again.

Shifting like this, shuffling foot by clumsy foot,
I do and undo for myself. But for you, too,
and for Scott, and the Omaha girl. Think of this
as a charm for venturers along any patient way.
May grace be drawn to our ill-suited hands.

HOMECOMING

After the scanning, cat scan and radium, the arterioscan,
those warm coals flaming behind each dumbfounded eye,
we have come home.

After the palm readings, after
the foot scratching, after the knee-jerking
and the rubber hammer, we have come home.

And after the late news, as if some baffled anchorman
threw up his hands, not sad, not happy, saying only
Everything is changed. And that's how it is.

Now, between us, we have climbed the 38 stairs,
missing none, and I am tired, remembering once
after football, twenty years ago, being tired,
worn down by little Saint Lawrence in windy Canton,
the score 22-22 forever, not knowing what to feel.

And you have homecoming gifts, a plastic ring
for pills, each day of the week in script,
like a stewardess's underwear. That, and our own
high window where you give your hand to mine,
this left one, where nothing else holds right.

And see! The lights of Ballard, clusters
and nebulae, lovely tonight as any galaxy
beneath the great horned toe of God.

Holding on like this, finding my grip,
we are naming the constellations one by one:
Market Street and the bridge and the locks
where, last summer, the salmon leaped for us.
Holding and naming, we are healing each other.

And beyond Ballard, the end of the earth,
miles out on the black of Puget Sound,
two boats, no more lost than all the planets,
bear their small lights outward, to the sea.

About Our Contributors

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NATALIE S. RECIPUTI is a student in the University of Washington Writing Program.

MICHAEL HEFFERNAN's *The Cry of Oliver Hardy* was published in 1979 by the University of Georgia Press.

H. A. MAXSON's second book, *Walker in the Storm*, was published recently by K. M. Gentile Publishing, St. Louis.

WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN lives in Astoria, Oregon.

GEORGE VENN recently received a grant from the Oregon Committee for the Humanities.

JOAN FISET teaches at North Seattle Community College.

SHEILA BENDER is a student in the University of Washington Writing Program.

PATRICIA GOEDICKE's latest book is *The Dog That Was Barking Yesterday* (Lynx House Press, 1979).

JACK DRISCOLL's chapbook, *Refusing to Give Blood*, appeared in a recent issue of *Ohio Review*.

FRAN LINDSAY's third chapbook, *The Harp of the First Day*, will be published shortly by Nocturnal Canary.

ANN NEELON is in the M.F.A. Program at the University of Massachusetts after serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Senegal.

THOMAS REITER directs the Creative Writing Program at Monmouth College in New Jersey and edits *The New Jersey Poetry Journal*.

RICHARD MICHELSON's *The Head of the Family* (Red Herring Press) was published in 1978.

JIM BILL lives and works in Seattle.

JOHN MORGAN's *The Bone-duster* was recently published in *The Quarterly Review of Literature Poetry Series*.

CASSANDRA AMESLEY is a recent graduate of the University of Washington Writing Program.

PAULA RANKIN's *Augers* has just been published by Carnegie-Mellon Press.

THOMAS BRUSH's *Opening Night* will be published shortly by Owl Creek Press.

MARTHA R. LIFSON teaches at Occidental College in California.

DAVID CITINO's *Last Rites and Other Poems* has just been published by Ohio State University Press.

DIANA Ó HEHIR's second book, *The Power to Change Geography*, appeared in the Princeton University Press Poetry Series in 1979.

MARGORET SMITH lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and has published widely.

RICHARD BLESSING's *A Closed Book* has just been published by University of Washington Press.

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

