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POETRY NORTHWEST

WINTER 1982-83

*Rodney Jones* Four Poems

REMEMBERING FIRE

Almost as though the eggs run and leap back into their shells  
 And the shells seal behind them, and the willows call back their  
 driftwood  
 And the oceans move predictably into deltas, into the hidden  
 oubliettes in the sides of mountains

And all the emptied bottles are filled, and, flake by flake, the snow  
 rises out of the coal piles  
 And the mothers cry out terribly as the children enter their bodies  
 And the freeway to Birmingham is pulled from the scar-tissue of fields

The way it occurs to me, the last thing first, never as in life  
 The unexpected rush, but deliberately, I stand on the cold hill and  
 watch  
 Fire up from the seedbed of ashes, from the maze of tortured glass

Molten nails and hinges, the flames lift each plank into place  
 And the walls resume their high standing, the many walls, and the  
 rafters  
 Float upward, the ceiling and roof, smoke ribbons into the wet  
 cushions

And my father hurries back through the front door with the box  
 Of important papers, carrying as much as he can save  
 All of his deeds and policies, the clock, the few pieces of silver

He places me in the shape of my own body in the feather mattress  
 And I go down into the soft wings, the mute and impalpable country  
 Of sleep, holding all of this back, drifting toward the unborn.

## A HILL OF CHESTNUTS

All over the woods seedlings still sprout  
from the useless crotches of chestnuts  
shoot green and straight, toss  
and are blighted, and die into stiffness:

dead wood all over, blackening, here  
and there, a beech blasted by lightning,  
the ache one feels like music  
where fire scored the trunk,

but not tragic like the extinct chestnut,  
the worm-mitered and cottony fallen.  
And it is not like the shaky marriage  
of memory and hope, which we see

and do not see, in the root-fist  
gripping the boulder, where the oak,  
that overcomer, rises improbably  
from the mineral absurdity of stone

and the heart is astonished, the air  
singed by so many green torches.  
Finally, to burn like that! Once  
all I had left to love was color:

I relished poverty like a mouth, cheap  
salads in the kitchen of a friend  
who every evening got less friendly.  
One time—I was a kid—a poor man,

a friend of my father's, had died.  
We dug the grave. I was down there  
in the hole, beating at the clay  
with a pick, laughing when the bottom

gave—and what I sank through—  
feathery manacles that felt like chestnut  
humus, hands of the dead, all

that sticky wing beating at my ankle.

I came up quick. "Go back down,"  
my father said, and I went softly  
tapping at the door of the earth.  
Over my head he found the simple stone

coiled in privet, the name and date.  
I chucked out clods, ancient  
scraps of gingham, coffin-screws,  
half a century, what's left of an infant.

The next day we laid the father  
in the ruin of his son. I went home  
and began to keep this to myself,  
the fear, and the names of the living,

which were the names of the dead.  
Sometimes I'll feel a hand  
come up through the pavement.  
Then doom recedes from me, like a hairline,

but when I see chestnuts going  
down into their hills forever,  
some standing fierce as missiles,  
holding a pitiful green out from the rot,

I want to walk out into the streets  
with all the foolish self-righteous  
carrying the signs of redemption,  
maybe not to shout, only to move

cautiously, as though in silence  
which guards terrible secrets.  
And I think of pie-safes and cupboards,  
the yellow and black-grained wood of chestnuts.

## LOVE SONGS

It is the way the evening approaches  
my house, drifts in unannounced  
and places its hand under my shirt.  
Most of them come too easy  
to be sung by children between the bells  
that slice all school days  
into seven neat portions of boredom.  
That heart is academic,  
travels in lunch satchels, broken,  
until time reassembles it, locates  
it precisely in its rightful  
pain. Most grandmothers here  
are listening to gospel  
from Big Stone Gap, and instrumentals  
go out to salesmen  
who know all words are cheap.  
The housewife fears she has been  
tuning in the wrong station  
for months, the one where poultry  
is down in early trading.  
As I drive home, I, too, am twisting  
my dial toward some lost  
romance of truckstops. The best  
songs are for the ugly  
who have been betrayed by the beautiful;  
it is the intricate nomenclature  
of distrust we follow always  
to heartbreak or gunplay. My dial  
tears the bad ones apart  
like paper to find these few. Eventually  
I know all the ones I love  
will have gone off the air  
and I'll just be riding along alone  
toward some job I've held for years,  
singing for no one.

## A HISTORY OF SPEECH

That night my sophomore date wanted kisses  
I talked instead of the torn ligaments  
in my ankle, crutches and Ace Bandages,  
parading like any arthritic  
the exotic paraphernalia of my suffering:  
and, that failing, went farther, bobbing  
in the thesaurus of pain: the iron lung,  
the burn, torture with water and bamboo.  
She twisted a frosted curl around one finger.  
It was then she touched the skin along my neck.  
It was then I noticed for the first time  
the strange wing beating in my mouth  
and kissed her in a kind of flight  
that plummeted and clutched for branches.

Oh but Tahiti of a thousand Tahitis!  
Among the suckling cars of the drive-in,  
trays of pomegranates, lingerie of surf.  
Days I hurled papers onto the porches of invalids.  
June nights I only had to open my mouth,  
out came a flock of multi-colored birds,  
birds of all denominations and nationalities,  
birds of nostalgia, the golden birds of Yeats,  
birds trained in the reconnaissance of exclusive buttons.  
Before I knew it, I was twenty-two.  
I was whispering into the ear of Mary,  
the mother of Jesus. I was dreaming  
in two languages I did not understand.  
I was sitting in the bar of the Cotton Lounge

railing against George Wallace when the fist  
rang in my stomach, and I looked up  
to a truckdriver shouting down at me  
"Talk too much!" Talk too much into greasy  
footprint, linoleum stinking of beer,  
the thigh of that woman rising to leave.  
Talk too much and understand I'm not to blame  
for this insignificance, this inflation

in the currency of language. Listen:  
Whenever I hurt, the words turned their heads.  
Whenever I loved too much, they croaked and hopped away.  
At my luckiest, I'm only saying the grace  
the hungry endure because they're polite.  
Teaching speech, Cicero put pebbles in his students' mouths,  
but my voice is haunted by softer things.

*William Stafford*

Two Poems

### LONG DISTANCE

We didn't know at the time. It was  
for us, a telephone call through the world  
and nobody answered.

We thought it was a train far off  
giving its horn, roving its headlight  
side to side in its tunnel of darkness  
and shaking the bridge and our house  
till dishes rattled, and going away.

We thought it a breath climbing the well where Kim  
almost fell in; it was a breath saying his name,  
and, "Almost got you," but we piled boards  
and bricks on top and held off that voice.

Or maybe it was the song in the stove—  
walnut and elm giving forth stored sunlight  
through that narrow glass eye on the front  
in the black door that held in the fire.

Or a sigh from under the mound of snow where Bret's  
little car with its toy wheels nestled all winter  
ready to roll, come spring, and varoom  
when his feet toddled it along.

Or—listen—in the cardboard house  
we built by the kitchen wall, a doorknob  
drawn with crayon, Kit's little window peeking  
out by the table—is it a message from there?

And from Aunt Helen's room where she sews  
all day on a comforter made out of pieces of Grandma's  
dresses, and the suits for church—maybe those  
patches rustle their message in her fingers:  
"Dorothy, for you, and for all the family I sew  
that we may be warm in the house by the tracks."

I don't know, but there was a voice,  
those times, a call through the world that almost  
rang everywhere, and we looked up—Dorothy, Helen,  
Bret, Kim, Kit—and only the snow  
shifted its foot outside in the wind,  
and nobody heard.

### YEARS AGO, OFF JUNEAU

It looked all right on the map, where the channel jagged  
south, where the captain dropped anchor offshore that night  
in a freshening gale. It looked all right. That year it failed:  
in the crazed dawnlight one little whimpering puppy  
crawled onto the rocks and looked back, once, and howled.

It was dark that night. Though they watched from shore  
no one could tell how that freak wind took all—  
women, children, pets—on the annual ship  
that sailed outside from Dawson, taking summer life home.

For years after that, when summer life went home,  
an old dog, a Labrador, limped whimpering toward  
The Sound, and one long howl at dawn saluted  
those gray, heavy waves where The City of Gold went down.

MA BÊTE

It must be a spell, so much ugliness  
a castle grew up around it, twenty-foot walls.  
A curse to rule over: brutes live alone  
with terrible faces, and only fresh young hearts  
can improve their appearance.

At first he stood in her doorway only in shadow,  
or through the garden, let her glimpse his separate path  
until she could look without flinching.  
So weeks later, when dusk sprang at them,  
they stood still as two harts in different sorrows.  
In different sorrows, they watched the clouds go cold.  
Dark at his side, she followed him back like a woman blind.  
Of course he asked, but she wouldn't.  
She bawled for her father.

Why should he care for her puny skin?  
Hasn't he given her jewels and a magic mirror to play in?  
Instead she spends her day digging among roots in the garden,  
a rodent not fit to be his food.

Every evening, through his roses, she will not marry him.  
Vapor from his nostrils envelops her head,  
she curves her palm over his gloomy paw and they walk  
along the parapet. When she leans into his fur,  
when she looks up with quizzical eyes, he wants to be human  
with ten harmless fingers. He's not allowed to tell the charm,  
so he cheats, makes her dream *The Frog and the Prince*.

What if she will have him and it isn't true  
about the spell, what if she will, and they go on forever  
waiting for that transformation?  
How could he touch her skin and not draw blood?  
And what does it matter: She is all bony elbows,  
a hollow at the base of his throat.  
Could he spend a lifetime watching her eat things

already dead? He won't shed his russet pelt,  
handsome as foxskins he rips in his private wood.  
And she has taken to calling him *ma Bête*. Is it a joke  
to have his face so ugly, to have fur in his mouth?  
And he is weary from balancing two legs against his tail.

Every night he sleeps in different directions  
so she, stumbling lonely, will not catch him by surprise.  
He might take her for a snowrabbit and tear her belly.  
Tonight the very room he chooses without reason  
she hides in, weeping. He must stop and listen.  
It is like the moon's rain falling into his heart.  
When he takes hold of the door, he is shocked by grief  
in the silver knob. Through his hide  
he sees her lying frail as a broken bird  
and naked. She will not know when he enters,  
her face a velvet mask  
on which she has painted  
the face of a beast.

HOME REPAIRS

Settled: how wide  
to cut the counter-well, hard ash he'll use to mend  
the gap in back, what day, his price. Everything planned.  
Carelessly against the sink he holds his ground,  
just talking, invoking family, his proud voice prodding  
last corners of an empty house. Isn't this the absurd  
dream they stick us with? Husbands afraid of beds they've made  
imagine us voluptuous under plumbers, leading  
furnacemen down dark basement stairs, gas men, any trade.

He talks:  
his wife back to school, a daughter he may persuade  
(if he has one) to take up strings or slide trombone.  
How young he is under his disciplined beard.  
Gold light drifting from west windows  
settles over us like pollen. A nod is good manners.  
He draws his minimum hour along my nerves, my head

only a listening box, an answering service  
taking it down when nobody's home to pretend  
or respond. 5 p.m.: all across town, men lapse  
into overtime or fraud, because so much is broken,  
about to pull loose, or be ignored.

Going home late, they believe  
other men can fix anything.

#### AT NIGHT, NEW SUBURBS, THEIR STREETLAMPS SALTY

Left behind in glowing sodium vapor  
an old tree tries to shake off  
poison apples. Belled cows  
that coaxed and reassured it  
fell one November in a heap of straw,  
and the house, its porch cut loose,  
was led away in mute distraction  
and a hail of purple plums.

Now the countryside is overrun with lights.  
Trees no wider than a finger  
float in the ground, the garden's slow  
ball and socket. The moon tugs,  
houses rise like fairy rings  
or crocus. On streets named Wildwind Drive  
or Saratoga, you want to try out their attics  
for walls that won't huff down,  
for endless feathers aloft in a ticking.

Lots fit neat as a puzzle  
under sky washed out with city glare.  
Under triple driveways, gophers  
keep butting their heads,  
so each house owns its patch of bone and shadow,  
its cut of feeble-minded stars.

They tell me somewhere people are alive

in meadows. I know what people are  
in meadows. I know the wolf at the door  
won't always go without a friend,  
that someone has to haunt the private rooms  
of sticks and glass. In a haunting,  
nothing stays in place.  
Brooms overwhelm the dreamer  
changing umbrellas.

I still think they're beautiful:  
streetlamps rare with pink and yellow gases,  
carnival lights the way you could dream them,  
soft apricot pulp on every corner,  
ripe rain.

#### SURFACE TENSION AROUND THE HEART, LIKE HEAVEN

Stretched new and thin, young men and women lean  
against the surface. They don't know what's coming:  
a break in tension, the long slide to where we are,  
in current going toward the bottom. Silt waits,  
lit white with familiar bones.

We trembled so hard the cup fell from our hands  
and, swamped in thirst, we dragged each other under.  
Spangled chest and thigh, flashing chamber to chamber,  
we chose one heart to lie in.

We are in deep,  
dropping through each other's dark, past something  
that matters enough to save us, our breath  
a shadow of gill slits cast from the womb.  
You pull strong, you let me swim in your arms.

If we could get out  
I'd show you a pattern like moiré silk, beauty  
that pain bends around a stone, all of us sunk here  
working the river, broken links in a chain of silver

and our faces shining because of the strain.

Weapons we take up against the world  
work on each other. Have we evolved from water  
only to sink back like red rock?

Over our heads,  
water skippers moor to the surface. Quiet days  
we watch them walk in their halos, moons cast in sixes,  
or six-armed constellations our fins want to reach for.  
Heaven's boatmen. At night, they tap their oars  
on our heart, try to tell us how it's done.

*Julia Mishkin*

Two Poems

#### SLEEPER AND LUCK

I'm afraid I might slip  
off the edge if I don't . . .  
count to ten twice. Slowly,

slowly the charged molecules  
relax. I'm off to the side  
watching the eager ones begin

their daily exercise, the short  
song in praise of gravity's  
blue hair, clear eyes. What happens

when this miser dies? What holds  
down this room at the inn,  
and what about the beloved

paraphernalia, the pencils,  
brooms, enamelled pin,  
orange peel, aspirin? Count

the chairs, the balls of dust,  
how long it takes to tunnel  
deep, the melting moth-wings

on the glass. There's no shortcut  
through this story.  
The more we count, the more we amass.

#### SLEEPER ASLEEP

To start down this road again:  
the narrow line of dirt falling  
between the rows of trees—

there are no markers, no boundaries,  
no signs to the nearest exit.  
Sleeper, this terrain's invisible.

The weather, unlike weather, does not  
fall. It does not precipitate  
or show itself at all.

Instead the blind leaves rage against  
the trees. Their green fists sound  
like rain and you are fooled into thinking

it's fine, this soothing elemental pain,  
and rise to shut the windows,  
open the doors, and breathe in

the last light of evening.  
It's not light, but the rise and fall  
of five thousand wings. They rise

and fall like your breath: white, irresistible,  
string of unconsciousness unwound over  
the hard, imperceptible ground . . .

*Brian Swann*

SO SHE CAN SEE

Sweeps draped the furniture as if  
    somebody's died; dropped the ball.  
    But weeks later the stove  
backed up again. I dismantled pipes,  
    stripped everything, thrust my arm  
    along the dark flue into  
the main chimney until, against my hand—  
    solid coke the ball missed. Fingers  
    found a hole & entered, worked  
blind in the dark. It took a chisel to  
    smash the seal—a rush of cold air  
    shot up my arm like a needle,  
numbing my fingers. So now the fire roars  
    like the madness that has already left  
    a father dead & sister wounded  
and this mother padding around the house in short  
    Japanese steps, filling in words a moment  
    after you've said them,  
cooking dishes sweet to sickening, held together  
    by memories you're not sure are hers,  
    or yours. She is ready to go out.  
Tugs her corsets over the belly that shaped you, ties  
    herself into a parcel. Pulls the last flap  
    shut between her legs.  
Light closes in the snow-clogged window. Starlight  
    beset, mother takes my elbow walking  
    crusted drifts, ruts where

water melted, stood, and froze. Up the cleared  
    narrow path, I hold the flashlight behind me  
    so she can see.

*Philip Raisor*

Two Poems

NEIGHBORHOOD GOSSIPS

Past listening  
they chatter at each other  
like raccoons in fresh garbage.

What do they see  
when they scan sealed letters or x-ray  
the bowels of the half-idiot gardener watering lawns?  
Do they see buses colliding head-on?  
Do they smell burning bodies?

I have seen them on street corners,  
for hours, alert to sirens, deaf to children  
on-the-wing. Their hands flutter momentarily.  
A secret broken open, tasted, tossed  
into the gutter. Whose error or pain  
did they fork down the sewer this time?

I wish they would eat me whole:  
my sinusitis, ulcer, jock-itch.  
My short temper; career scars.  
My wife's deep memory of a fatherless home.  
Let the scavengers gorge on my great-grandfather's  
scalping by Delawares, my uncle's Nazi souvenir  
with blood on it. Let them taste the spoiled sauce  
that flows through the growth on my father's rib.

If their fat bellies need more, let them devour

my future. "They will surely fire him  
if he keeps dressing like that. And his car.  
My heavens! You would think in this neighborhood.  
If only he would put up a cedar fence  
around that pile. They say he is going to build  
a fountain there. My God! What next? What next?"

What next?

My daughter cartwheeling in her own backyard.

I turn back to my plans.

She spins on  
noisier than gnashing teeth.

#### TOADS BREEDING, THUMB SWELLING

1

They start again,  
the toads, bilious whistle  
worse than cicadas, nighttime screech  
toneless as faucet water. Turn it off,  
I mutter, harried from hammering studs all day.  
I deserve quiet air cool as justice.  
Thick-lidded judges, they nail my eyes  
and brain together. All night I hear  
the drop on drop of seamless screaming.

2

The tadpoles gather  
at the mouths of fishes, kiss,  
then scurry toward my bruised thumb.  
The shed is up. My sweat plunks their water  
like oil. I am full of song, backroad ballads  
Hank Snow traveled. They squiggle away,  
blackened stones thumped from air. A cairn  
rises; I wail on. Oh, all day I drift  
through cotton fields light as whey.

3

Now, rumps in mud,  
we hunker at pond's edge  
eyeing cracks and dry algae. Toads,  
I mutter, we survived. Let's rest.  
In my dream of swamps, fog, stars disappearing,  
toads squat on tree stumps, peat moss smokes.  
There, I say, imagine next season.  
Nailheads stare back. My thumb plops  
into sealant. No one hears it, I know,

in Texas in Sarasota in Muncie, Indiana.

*Susan Stewart*

Three Poems

#### THE LONGEST DAY OF THE YEAR

When night comes on the dogs go crazy,  
leaping up and straining against their chains,  
their eyes sticking out and a rattle in their throats  
before they lie back down again, pretending  
to sleep. Because the night comes along like a stray  
and noses around for scraps, and lifts its leg  
on the yellow pansies: but all the daylight has put out  
is three shadows in the bowl.

The boys and the old men hang around the taverns,  
the Wagon Wheel, the Bzzu, and the Sneakin'  
Peepin' Lounge. It's the same if you're inside or out  
on the street: the cigarettes flicker like the stars  
punched in the jukebox; someone puts in a quarter,  
someone else rolls his hips. A waitress steps up into  
the southbound trolley, then sits down with her knees together  
very tight. The Bible Church starts to sing, someone turns down

The radio. The barber holds up the mirror for the man

in the baby blue suit, shakes the hair off the towel with  
a flourish and twirls the chair back down to earth. Upstairs  
at Ernie's Strength Club, the boxer's perfect body starts to shine  
like a trophy, a human trophy bleeding a little below the mouth  
and fallen face down on the padded white table. A trickle,  
but the dogs go crazy as the northbound trolley passes, as the night  
keeps coming on and the shadows lengthen and lengthen in the bowl.

#### THE MAP OF THE WORLD

In a drawer I found a map of the world,  
folded into eighths and then once again  
and each country bore the wrong name because  
the map of the world is an orphanage.

The edges of the earth had a margin  
as frayed as the hem of the falling night  
and a crease moved down toward the center of  
the earth, halving the identical stars.

Every river ran with its thin blue  
brother out from the heart of a country;  
there cedars twisted toward the southern sky,  
the reeds were the pens of an augurer.

No dates in the wrinkles of that broad face,  
no slow grinding of mountains and sand, but  
like a knife crying out on a whetstone,  
the map of the world spoke in snakes and tongues.

The hard-topped roads of the western suburbs  
and the far-off lights of the capitol  
all push away from the yellowed beaches  
and step into the lost sea of daybreak.

The map of the world is a canvas turning  
away from the painter's ink-stained hands  
while the pigments cake in their little glass  
jars and the brushes grow stiff with forgetting.

There is no model, shy and half-undressed,  
no open window and flickering lamp,  
yet someone has left this sealed blue letter,  
this gypsy's bandana on the darkening

Table, each corner held down by a conch  
shell. What does the body remember at  
dusk? That the palms of the hands are a map  
of the world, erased and drawn again and

Again, then covered with rivers and earth.

#### LETTER FROM TURIN

Tonight the moon is falling like a piece of silver  
into the black apron pocket of the sky

again and again as if some secret hand  
kept putting it back and taking it out.

What I have learned is the darkness  
in the daylight and the furnace of a new

machine. You cannot imagine how the piston's  
hoofbeats can pound through my chest until dawn

or how the oil slicks carry the illusions  
of rainbows.

You cannot imagine my face.

As I write the black grease swirls  
across my palms and I am leaving you

the fingerprints of someone else's life.  
The trolleys hover like a hundred

angry bees and are the only animals for miles.  
Once at dusk I saw the light fall

on the haystacks and the vineyards,  
but it was only a flower pot in an office window;

the mountains in the doorway of the postcard shop  
turned into a death mask of Verdi.

I have been to the cinema several times  
to see the bareback riders of the West,

and a black man from America plays the saxophone  
each night on the corner for free or cigarettes.

His songs run through my clothes, heaped  
on the splintered chair, the way the wind

can ruffle the edges of the river. You ask about  
the hours I have to spend to myself and I answer

they are only the pauses of sleep. I open  
the courier of evening for news, but its world

is not my world. The little girl who takes it  
from cafe to cafe does not at all resemble

our daughter: I've seen her cross the streets  
like a small black leaf borne up and around

by the air. I move your photograph each morning  
and evening from the wall to my shirt

and my shirt to the wall, and hope that this letter  
is like money or luck, first in one hand

and then in another, until all that remains  
is a soft shred of paper

at the bottom of your apron pocket one washday.

## *Joyce Quick*

### POET'S HOLDUP

Stop where you are—I want  
your memory and all its untold wealth,  
every last picture you carry;

I want your ear, the rumble of shadow,  
the distant music you hear  
and weave into song. Listen to my heart  
and make something of it.  
Listen to the stubborn  
repetition of your name.

I want your snakeskin boots kicked off  
in the caesura, and your watch  
that tells you nothing so reliably.

I want your hands held just that way—  
palms up, receptive.  
I want your mouth  
but postpone the pleasure  
while I hear your crafty speech  
the cadence of it,  
the great reluctance to lie  
in any way but loveliness.

I want your stories, games, and songs  
so I can recognize you in the dark  
and your mirror so you'll have no place to hide,  
but most of all I want  
your eyes

stopping me where I stand,  
catching me hard in the throat,  
taking everything I have.



## LUNAR VELOCITIES

Much written about the moon deals with a fickle courtesan troubled by her profile. She's said to be a great repeater, to take the path of a younger age and shrink from sight. Those who love her pale trysts rue that she eagerly meets the beetle-browed stevedore, the timid antiquarian. What shifty moods, centerless passion—nothing to do but go wait for her in an empty museum or down by the wharf. And now fragments begin to bother the devotees: the mug temper cracked or Megarian shards pose too doubtful a jigsaw ever to reconstruct.

Although much has been written about the moon, few grasp the real one isn't ours. Along a sister orbit we find a moon undressing for bed, mirror and powder in an adjoining room. Neatly ordered as her reclining thoughts, the slim surfaces of her toilette glint like the ocean far beneath. There one captain, intimately acquainted with her true haunt, plots a course as confident as the North Star grants. From a fitful sleep she recalls, dependable dame, the shoes he brought, how they proved too tight, how the couple chatted amicably on a foreign shore, then bid good night.

Many legends surrounding our moon—that her gleam turns the edge of razor or Spanish sword, that concrete should not be poured at the full, that she drowns Chinese poets dextrously as a farmer pups, that she drives the werewolf mad with longing for her hidden roses, that vegetables thrust to her undine urge—are mensual superstitions against which we chart her actual, radiant curves. Really the water widow acts in tandem with the sun to promote tides; as to her famed affinity with madmen and poets, let us not forget that even lucky faces discover their lineaments in regrettable mirrors.

Many kingdoms the moon touched thought she made a progression of changes that shed little light

on the scope of her course. Tunisia, Morocco, St. Helena, Barbados;

Babylon, Sumeria, Athens; marbled Venice and its doge, Ecbatana and the promenade, Is gone under the waves with its wonderful doors:

each imagined that the moon appeared in a new guise to an old locale. But bees chirring by sweet walls, badgers cradled in remote dirt, Egyptian house cats lapping milk from ewers knew that *that* moon there and then, spread like a fan, was all they'd be allowed.

For centuries the moon was chaste and continent, attending nocturnal chores.

Then she fell in love, one of those dark affairs the Middle Ages spawned. Still fit and young, she took to her bosom an old man. One Prometheus, by accounts that survive: not a few commentators hint pure pity bedded him. He'd loll about in musty furs, uncouth barbarian to the core, though of a mind so nobly tuned, she acceded to his sturdy lust. Dropping to her divan, they counted far off city lights, lonely candles, watch fires, inquisitors on torchlit errands.

Few, O moon, address you as I shall. The planets and their paths were never round, the winking canopy of stars exploded from an untold center. Flung in a whirling drum, gems and heavier metal sank to cold worlds, left our own by the sun poor, and enriched those barren of air, indeed of any life at all. Reflect on a Uranus mulched in diamonds, a Pluto whose onions are gold, some priceless ore a carrot garden, planets flanked, like a Turk's bridle, by silver moons. What rich man loves a timid atmosphere?

Now I must tell of you as men do who crave a thing almost forgotten, like the unusual sandwich eaten on a lonely railroad years ago—I met you once when you bathed. Withdrawing from the window in alarm, I glimpsed a hip, an arm, a thigh not connected, a pose of unalloyed surprise, a blade brightness forged

and water tempered. Maybe because I'm shy, because the retiring  
do not hastily take the fruit chance or design offers,  
I've never reckoned with what I saw. What scattered you,  
my shock when we collided, your glance superbly bold?

#### A ROYAL PROGRESS

The sky is blue. Tonight the stars will be like  
flecks of acid, first a purple background  
then a black, as a king might put off gay robes  
for a sombre century. And the women he knew?  
The erogenous zones, are they more or less populous

and delightful? Cars flash by, he is intrigued  
with metal speed, heliographs in motion, but of messages  
all he carries are a few friendly letters, nothing  
political or to do with lovers' codes. If a poem, one  
only he has read and easily forgets the import of

when he scans the latest news. 'But of course  
I am that poem,' thinks a former minister or lady  
in waiting; 'I am what the king carries like an apple  
in his pocket, eaten at leisure.' In an occasional park  
he will be drawn far away, to country manors

and matters, or bonfires in the evening capital where dew  
ran quicksilver over porphyry. Sire, count backward;  
you are in a new land; you are walking  
by the shrubs of exile—suddenly in a ragged bazaar  
you recall how another engraver used acid on copper

coated with wax, except where the profile deepened  
through the soft shield. *Roi de la nuit*, a fault in the line  
of your expression then bothered you; now, in gutters of cities  
you fled, light breaks on the pictures torn from the wall,  
lanterns of the watch go by, and they too will fade at dawn.

#### Robert Farnsworth

#### SEVEN STANZAS IN PRAISE OF PATIENCE

Winter stippled and glazed the green water  
tilted in a pail on the porch.  
It would be months until whatever was growing  
on the rusty trowel resumed

\*

I still pause to see that the pail  
has not been flung out  
on the shrubs by one in favor of order, one  
sensibly averse to mosquitoes.

\*

In the thin sand of an hour's snow, two  
brown sunflowers persisted  
on their stalks like rusty showerheads  
near a buried boardwalk.

\*

The water now looks like strong neglected  
coffee. Sunlight seems to swell  
on the fresh stump across the street. A chunk  
of maple branch still clings to the wires.

\*

At six each winter afternoon, the sun  
had been gone an hour.  
The barber would gently sweep together  
soft archipelagoes of hair.

\*

I do not disturb the scum kindled on the water.  
Nothing swims up  
from the bottom. I cannot say  
what I hope to preserve.

\*

Already I am thinking back to the next snow  
squalling up the long black lake  
to my window. The pail remains undisturbed.  
I am making myself a promise.

*Edward Kleinschmidt*     Four Poems

### BACKING UP ON THE FREEWAY

We do this outrage of the tv,  
this gee whiz to the streetwise,  
tsk tsk to the pop tops, and hold  
no high noses, no, no high noses.

We've done the boohoo on the swaying bridge,  
the soft shoe in the barnyard, shouted out  
it's feeding time, looked at who came running,  
who came stumbling with heavy arms and dying skin.

Hill, hell, halloo on the cartop. Eat our  
carburetor sandwich with beer. Ride the rest  
of the way on the layaway, we're a shoe-in  
for all medals: we're going, going, going, still going.

### TWO WOMEN WHO DIE EACH JANUARY TWO WOMEN WHO DIE EVERY FEBRUARY

*for my grandmothers*

You lift the gray cat down off the shelf  
Take the telephone off the hook  
Bring the water up to date  
Divide the dresser into drawers  
Believe the carpenters will forget the nails  
Assume the table will fall down  
Grieve over the dusty radio

Wiggle the loose tooth  
Appear in a blue dress  
Forget the shape of the wine bottle  
Agree to new measurements  
Talk to the neighbors about leaves  
Protest over a length of curbing  
Decide to forget the worst  
Refuse to talk to priests  
Tease the dogs on garbage days  
Put aside relishes for blood soup  
Refrain from hypnotizing yourselves with fish bones  
Wear green stockings on Wednesday  
Close doors when not in use  
Throw a work shirt over the parakeet cage  
Light both ends of the candle  
Start in the middle  
End like you never heard the word  
Advertise yourself widely  
Avoid hanging your coat just anywhere  
Walk wherever possible  
Ride when the riding is good  
Keep everything while giving it away  
Remember what you have always said

### WHAT'S YELLOW

Is it the eyes of old men coughing,  
ring fingers, the messages on the  
mirrors, old orphans, trees undressing  
in winter, or ordinary flowers not blooming:

is it the Buttercup or Goat's Head,  
the Sticky Cinquefoil and Whispering  
Bells, the Sneezeweed, Devil's Claw,  
Old Man of the Mountains, Eardrops,  
Parentucellia or Lousewort, the Tufted  
Loosestrife, the Hawk's Beard, the Golden Smoke?

Is it the flakes of dried fish,

the flesh of daffodils in a beaker,  
the bills of ducks, the receipt  
in the murdered man's watch pocket?

Or the last tooth, the butterfly the cat  
ate, the diamond held up to the sunlight?

#### AT DREAMLAND IN ALABAMA

Forget the crab, the cow,  
the chicken, but remember the pig.

Forget deep sea, coop,  
featherland, and roost.

Forget everything else,  
and you will remember this pig.

We scream  
like first borns  
in their red  
hot juice world.  
In this blackovened,  
blackowned barbecue,  
we don't see no  
pigeon bones, no parrot,  
no white cockatoo.

Over our shoulders  
the huge blades  
of a barrel fan  
shell heat  
like sacks of peanuts.

Our car, pulled up,  
stays for the pig,  
stands like a bottle  
with nothing inside  
to explode. Inside

Dreamland, all the bottles  
are happy and cold.

We draw love notes  
to each other at the bar,  
write epitaphs  
on hot slabs,  
line up indiscriminately  
a grand piano of ribs.

And a small pink child,  
silent on a deep bed  
of wonder bread,  
sleeps, unamazed.

*Daniel Hoffman*

Two Poems

#### THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS

Schoolboys in blazers infiltrate the aisles  
Of the British Museum. It's hard to read  
Maps of the Battle of Hastings  
While their master futilely harangues them

About the Battle of Hastings. They are intent  
On tactics of their own making.  
A lot they care for the plight of Harold  
(His forces bloodied and wearied from besting the Norsemen

Hundreds of miles to the north ten days before),  
The Fourth Form will maintain its hegemony  
Over the Third this day, come what may. At last  
Their skirmish deploys through doorways, advancing

Into the Hall of Clocks. Another  
Band in blazers—maroon, not green—troops through the Map Room

Scuffling, and out, save for one laggard, a toddler  
But three feet tall. He can't even see into the cases.

His head is large, his legs and arms are stubby and bent,  
His steps necessarily small. And now two boys  
In green, for some reason retrace their steps,  
Sniffing. Down the center aisle, they catch a glimpse

Of maroon, the enemy color, and rush  
To opposite sides of the hall. They have him  
Cornered—then see he's not a mere babe in Infants, but their age,  
A midget-sized monster providently provided

For their satisfaction. He watches the boy at one end  
Of the aisle, sees the eyes gleam, the curled lip  
Of one waiting for him to come nearer. He turns  
And at the other end of the aisle, sees

The other, lip curled and eyes eager to torment him.  
He suddenly ducks under the cases, bobs up in the next aisle  
But they move over an aisle and are waiting as before.  
He is trapped between them, there is no escaping

Being born to endure the revenge of unknown adversaries  
For an offense of which he must be innocent  
Except for being born. I saw the terror  
In that boy's face, and the desperate resolve

To run, or if he couldn't, then to do  
His poor best for honor's sake  
And not go down snivelling beneath the blows  
Of the always larger, stronger. This was one

Battle in a series already long that might  
Be averted. 'Young man,' I said, 'I'm lost—  
*Perhaps you can show me the way out?*'  
And so let him lead me to safety

Through his enemy, as though there is  
A way out. In the entrance hall, surprised

By what they see beside me, others turn  
With heedless stare and curious intent;

He pretends he doesn't notice them.  
I thank him. I must go. The lines  
Are being drawn. Among the columns  
He appraises his next defensive position.

#### AT FONTAINE-LES-DIJON

How could we sleep in that pension  
At the foot of the hill  
Below the chapel  
At Fontaine-les-Dijon?

There the carillon  
Shattered the stained-  
Glass silence  
Of our sleep.

On this high hill  
Where St. Bénigne was born  
A monk in the Middle Ages still  
Clanged a clapper all night long

Remembering how his mother  
When her term had come  
Hauled her big belly  
To the hill's rocky dome

So her son could be birthed  
Nearer heaven, so a church  
In his name be erected,  
His Sainthood perfected

—Speared by the Romans—  
And now that this spot  
Is holy, we dare not  
Give it over to demons

Who possess the underworld  
And pinch us with their spells  
Unless driven back under the world  
By the clang of God's bells

Which is why, at 4:30 this morning,  
A monk in a cassock, to mark  
Each quarter-hour in the dark,  
Tolls anthems fourteen minutes long

And we arise to meagre rations  
Under a holy hill,  
Irritable as demons  
Whose sleepless bed is in hell.

*Susan Donnelly*

#### IN HER DREAM

A baby cries in my mother's midnight,  
cries for food from the lost chamber,

summons her, a towhead girl, from dreams  
of her childhood on Laurel Street. Upstairs

in the room she has always suspected,  
the baby wrings itself out with wailing.

The cry pulls great ribbony swathes  
from my mother's chest: bunting,

grosgrain, pink satin blanket edging,  
toddler harness strings, birthday ribbon,

the brittle cinnamon folds  
of Christmas candy. Slowly her hair

turns grey, the blue-green eyes rheum  
with uncertainty. At last, a vein part crimson,

part silver unwinds from her. This  
is the skein we were not to touch,

the look-away skein none of us  
dragged from her—none but that howler.

And how could a child be forgotten  
so long in the last nursery?

She walks up the stairs. Below her,  
school chums catch rubber balls

to their chests. Their jump-rope confidence  
falters. "Mary! Mary!" The steps

are so difficult. Sea grass like cats' tongues.  
Above, the mew-cry circling.

At the top of the stairs she pauses.  
Her father, his baldness hidden

by Irish linen, studies cormorants  
through field glasses. Her brothers pose

in a bony pyramid, then capsize  
on the sand. The beach makes its grand gestures.

And the cunning mosquito nags  
into her mind's tunnels,

hungry for brain. The cry,  
the cry. She comes to a door marked "PERMISSION"

in curled blue letters. The door  
is a blackened mirror, a silver rot

of fish scales, mica, kelp and

smashed baby-pink crabshells. "I'm coming."

The crib cave beckons. Veins scrawl  
inside the transparent skull. But the baby

holds up two fingers, in a china Christ's  
pretty blessing. Its smock covers air.

The cheeks are moonpits of hunger.  
My mother becomes a well

the moon may dip into forever,  
always drawing up salt.

The baby shrinks to a wish-coin in her hand.

### *Bob Smith*

#### PRIMER

First page almost blank  
for the years  
you can't remember.  
A spot in one corner:  
ink, dust, a fly?

Next, names of flowers:  
silver bell  
trout lily  
bachelor's button.  
This page is meadow green.  
A breeze lips your name.

Women's names now.  
Audrey, dark eyes.  
Rain in Erica's hair.  
Rachel gathers wild mint.

Ruth feeds sparrows.

The lists get harder.  
Words like  
derelict, exile.  
Words it may take  
lifetimes to learn.

Lastly, the words  
an old man says in his sleep  
on long nights  
when winter thickens  
at his window  
and there is none to hear.

### *Suzanne Matson*

#### Two Poems

#### FOSSILS

For instance, the way trilobites  
work around their past:  
they fill and fall in on themselves,  
vacancies blooming  
into perfect extinct lives.

The shopgirl hugs her arms and stares out,  
the tinted day hardly believable.  
Customers come, clatters  
of square light. She covers  
the same steps, backward,  
forward. She might leave  
before the end of this  
to be weather, everywhere, and not  
the same twice.

Were we to come after,

sweeping out the empty spaces  
she often becomes, we would find her  
curled and listening to time,  
keeping all that happened,  
her getting younger face  
swollen like a blank new moon.

#### LEAVING GARIBALDI

The train stands ready to leave Garibaldi  
and the Lumbermen Memorial Park forever.  
Any moment it will shrug off the children  
who sit astride the black-baked locomotive

and leave the Lumbermen Memorial Park forever.  
Oh, the town will be surprised at first—  
three generations blackened their knees climbing the locomotive  
and it was Clem McKinley's steady job to play the train sounds.

But the train will go ahead and leave  
the first chance it gets, though it will be missed.  
It's where Ada Beare sat every afternoon talking to strangers  
over the wail of train sounds,

pointing out her son's three-bedroom on the hill.  
She only missed for gout and once gallstones  
when she convalesced in style on the hill,  
and Clem, at the donation box, explaining her absence.

But any moment the train will stretch  
like a spine after sleep,  
leave Clem and his record to explain the absence,  
and lurch bayward, parallel to sea.

There will be passengers sipping drinks,  
conductors stepping over hatboxes and travel-dusty trunks,  
and families in white linen, looking to sea.  
The train chafes on its blocks; soon it will go.

Clem, not imagining handboxes, dusts the waxed timetables  
and puts the needle back in its groove.  
But the train, slipping from its blocks, must go;  
its hollow eye has been fixed too long south.

It will fall into the familiar groove of track  
and the children, their eyes also south  
as they sit astride, will not be shrugged off,  
and no one can look back until Garibaldi is left behind.

#### *Richard Ronan*

#### PINE / EUCALYPTUS / FENNEL

Odors of the pine needle floor:  
the thin, dry smell of the upper pine inch,  
the scent of the deeper plane of acrid mulch  
—both hung low, mixed, close to the ground  
on which we lie, breathing.

Eucalyptus leaves fallen onto this,  
leather-like, flat, fragrant,  
the twisted wooden rags of bark,  
camphored, crossing with spiders' webs  
through tree shadow.

Beyond an herb grove of fennel  
at the head of the hill,  
dry in the green heat of this summer light.

Sea-moist salt scent, bay water  
blowing up the sand-ridge,  
cool tide, lap over lap,  
out of rhythm, clean as rain  
on the sweat of our bodies.

HELIX ASPERSA

The typical garden snail breathes  
and excretes through the same orifice,  
reducing the loss  
of moisture which has sifted through  
the nets of conifer needles, diminished  
to mist by the time it clings to the green collar  
of trillium leaves. The snail is without  
false expectations: whatever's left over  
is life.

I am not dissatisfied with things as they are  
but I wonder if it thinks the moon is a spindle-shaped shell,  
smearing a glistening trail of stars?  
And does it consciously fear thorns, droughts,  
the windless volcanic ash? Or does it believe  
the whole world is underneath, where the porous air  
is full of fluid circles,  
and weathering is a natural mercy?  
No, it has no insight; it's as common as clover.  
Observe its two front tentacles  
which scent leaf-mold and lance leaf.  
Its two longer tentacles are feeble eyes,  
sensing only the light  
which fogs its lusterless shell,  
and the shadows that are boneless and flourishing.

I'm not without compassion  
but I can't accept this inability to dream  
beyond one's self. Yet the snail  
has a special knowledge:  
creeping 23 inches an hour  
it shifts its perceptions slowly.  
Does it bore even itself?  
Or is it enough that its evolutionary patience  
has awarded it with practical intelligence:

it seeks decay on its own level.  
And, finally, here is a curious fact:  
although it travels great distances,  
over liverwort, slime streams, and stone,  
it tends to return to its point of origin,  
where it contours its body-foot  
to the fertile soil and observes life  
revolving around it in concentric seasons  
of earthly abandonment  
and need.

SANCTUARY

When I was a little girl I believed  
I could move clouds by breathing  
my straw-thin breath upwards,  
and whispering "sanctuary."  
When I was older, I was Given Responsibilities,  
but the sheets would mold in the dryer, forgotten  
as the lunch dishes I put in the oven.  
Sister gloated: You'd even burn corn flakes.  
Mother complained: you're always off  
in your own little world.  
I made my eyes as blank as butter  
while she furiously scoured the pots.

In my world, their voices were distant  
as Saturn's rings. Mistakes were written  
in sand during a fierce wind.  
My world was small as a ship in a bottle,  
a terrarium Eden, or the Lord's prayer  
etched on the inside of a needle's eye.  
My world was as big as the seasound  
in a shell, as the pollen that drifts  
across the seas, as the single-cell algae  
conquering ditches with a phalanx  
of green shields. This is my secret:  
my world regretted nothing, not

burnt toast (which was Night Squared)  
nor the lies of boys with eager hands.  
Nothing mattered but the mantra  
of a cricket, or the chanting  
of the maple's leaves in their high mass.

*Christine Gebhard*      Three Poems

#### LAST NIGHT

when the rain justified the steep pitch  
of the cabin roof, and the wind came in  
through the long slits between the logs  
that have pulled away from each other,  
we quarreled among the network of streaks and the bitterness  
that permeate a small kitchen in late summer.

And when a vein swelled at your temple like a worm,  
and you said you had no reason, even to hate,  
I reached for the red kettle that waits  
on the cold stove like a symbol for fire—  
bright and round like a mouth or a siren  
or the scream I could not make—grabbed it and hurled it  
to the floor. It was the first red thing I saw.

And when the kettle crashed at your feet, denting  
the linoleum you laid to look like marble,  
I saw how it, too, had betrayed me,  
when it opened and bled only water.

#### TO A SUITABLE STRANGER

I'm light on my feet, and I need new shoes.  
I can glide over tongues of ice and dance  
down the spines of the stoniest roads. I carry  
through the cold like the smell of bread baking

when hunger possesses you at the end of the trail.

I could be one thing as easily as another—  
the clock you race against or the grove  
of palms you retire to. I could wear you on my arm  
or in my hair like a jewel. I need jasmine and cloves.  
I need courtyards and doorways to walk through.

You could address the long unguarded  
letter I have written and left unsealed  
at the foot of the stairs. Come now. You need something  
to happen. I could read my fortune in the hand  
you rest so tentatively on the arm of your chair.

#### TO MY READER

There is little I can keep from you. Now as always,  
I am plain as black ink on a white page.  
The words are twice the size they need to be,  
but that is more the fault of the one who wrote them  
than of one who specified the type. Even backwards, in lead,  
I could never appear distant from the language or from you.

Part of it is nearsightedness: I must rush up  
to everything to see what was intended.  
Once I tried standing back, but accustomed  
to my proximity, the world leaned out to me,  
and I feared the slender column of space that remained  
between us might lose its balance and collapse.

Then there is the business of my blood, which runs fast for the narrow  
roads I travel, and warm for northern latitudes.  
Once I tried chilling the room where my words  
draw their first breath by painting the walls  
an icy blue called *avalanche*, but each time I entered,  
the windows fogged and the ink seeped from my pen.

Perhaps I have it inside out again. Perhaps  
you have come to relish the hunt as hounds do,

and would prefer I play the fox. But be forewarned:  
my scent clings to every bent leaf  
and blade of grass, never growing cold.  
You'll go to ground pushing forward on the line.

*Katherine Soniat*

JUST TO BE SEEN IS ENOUGH

I

This is a country no longer needing  
black dress or white dress.  
The bodies lie sunning, uncounted  
and unaccounted for.  
They don't flinch for flies  
or the long lengths of Pacific sun.  
Neither do they breathe.

Only the ocean moves in gently  
and washes out another body.  
The one no one knows,  
the one no one claims to have ever known.  
It's as if the dead arrived dead,  
raining down like a plague along the coastline,  
laid out on the lava field.  
Perhaps just to be seen is enough.

II

The city lies in the silence of locked hotels.  
Like a ghost, torn curtains blow  
onto verandas of hibiscus and shattered French doors.  
There are no anthems,  
and the dead don't begin to resemble soldiers.  
This is war at random.  
As in a dream there's no real reason  
to choose sides. All the promises, words,

barely make it to the next day.

But someone is doing this,  
something arranges these dead as displays.  
It's not just for buzzards  
and simple washings out to sea.  
It's meant to be taken in slowly,  
enormously, from every imaginable angle.

*Elaine Gottlieb*

ELEGY

It is a violin playing my mother  
It is the gut note sweet with suffering  
It is never having  
It is knowing  
It is my mother dying in May  
the white neck the dark drowning eyes  
It is an old room in a new house  
with drabbed carpeting It is torn wallpaper  
spangled with poppies It is a satin spread  
on a bed with plastic springs It is  
a china closet with a wracked glass door  
The waltz whines like an adolescent girl  
in a mature woman dreaming of the One  
who never came It is the Messiah  
deceitfully absent It is my mother  
running at night because she does not know  
whose shadow is on the walk behind her  
It is ripped stockings and the death  
of her granddaughter It is a high feline scream  
out of a violin somewhere in Vienna

## About Our Contributors

RODNEY JONES teaches at Virginia Intermont College. His first book was *The Story They Told Us of Light* (University of Alabama Press, 1980).

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## A PLEA FOR HELP

*Poetry Northwest* is in its twenty-third year of uninterrupted publication. Unlike a distressingly large number of other American literary magazines, it has not disappeared, altered its format, or curtailed its quarterly appearances under the stress of increased printing costs, higher postal rates, and a weakened economy, especially in Washington State. It continues to publish the best poetry it can find. The University of Washington is supporting it to the limit of present resources, but in spite of our increased circulation, there remains a substantial gap between our income and our expenses. Our readers have helped generously in the past. Won't you please join them by making a contribution in any amount? Gifts to *Poetry Northwest* are tax deductible.

For the sake of our bookkeeping, if you are making a contribution to the magazine and at the same time are renewing your subscription, would you please make out separate checks? Thank you.

David Wagoner  
Editor

