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NORTHWEST

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POETRY NORTHWEST

VOLUME THIRTY-TWO

NUMBER ONE

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Poetry Northwest is in its thirty-second year of uninterrupted publication. Unlike a distressingly large number of American literary magazines, it has not disappeared, altered its format, or curtailed its quarterly appearances under the stress of increased printing costs and higher postal rates. 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 and a recent increase in our subscription price, there remains a substantial gap between our income and our expenses. Our readers have helped generously in the past. Their contributions have kept us going. Won't you please join them? 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 or subscribing for the first time, would you please make out separate checks? Thank you.

David Wagoner
Editor

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POETRY NORTHWEST

SPRING 1991

Pattiann Rogers

Four Poems

CARRYING ON THE TRADITION

OR

THE MAN IN THE MOON BRINGS HIS DAUGHTER
FOR LESSONS IN MARBLE SCULPTING

She learns selection, visits
remote quarries, studies veins
and faults, the translucent, buried
strengths, the art of release and recovery.

She practices at home with pick
and point and chisel claw, completes
a flawless egg in a nest of bristles, a rapture
of eels in a crystal bowl. She doubles
the radiance in the wings of her first
yucca moth. How does she accomplish it—each thin
glass-white leaf in a forest of oak, the frosted
grid of the spider, even the flickering
rustle of ice-chips flying in a winter wind?

She's perfect, a gift, and she's ready now.
Standing before her father's mirror,
she takes file and chisel in her lily hands,
begins, carefully sculpting the silk bloom
of her transparent pajamas, the distinct
apple-white arch of her lifted arms.
She watches her work bring forth

the sanded glow of her belly
and thighs, the light from each link
of her bracelets and bands.

Until she perfected her art,
no one had ever seen the albino monkey
grinning on her shoulder, the blind man
standing in the shadow at her back.

Now she is buffing, waxing the sharp
polish of her cheeks, highlighting the orblike
curve of her brow, the surf of her hair.
Almost finished, she peers hard
at her mirrored face, narrows in, determined
to discover and depict with brilliance
the old lunacy shining in her eyes.

GOD'S ONLY BEGOTTEN DAUGHTER

If furling scarves of fire, flying
orange ribbons of bonfire by a dark lakeside
are beautiful, then she is beautiful.
If blue shrouds of snow or the fragrances
of summer grass cut at dusk are desired,
then she is a passion.

If the spawning of salmon fighting
upstream is a drama of obsession,
she is tragedian; if the grouse
in their mating are antic and raucous,
she is jester, clown. If the dart out
and back of an eel in its coral
cave is circumspect,
then she is so.

A vessel, yes, she contains like a sea,
like a scroll, like a crystal its pattern,
secure, symmetrical as honeycomb, woven

like a rainforest canopy, as rotund
as a pottery pitcher, as seamless
as a blown-glass jug.

If rows and rows of thin black
seeds lying in their canoe-shaped
pods atop multitudes of yuccas
scattered over the autumn plains
are countless, then every number
belongs to her.

And if bee plants and vase flowers,
ricebirds, whiptails, green
lacewings, frozen chorus toads
come again, then she has always known
how to remain, promised, anointed,
her body, her face, the only one
in all our heavens, sole heiress
in whom we are very well pleased.

SELENE'S GENEROSITY

The plains-dwelling warthog (normally diurnal,
rooting for bulbs, tubers, fungi in the noonday
sun) has occasionally been seen feeding
in the light of the full moon.

Coarse black bristles covering her barrel
body from head to shoulders, she is naked
beyond, down to her rump, prissy stick legs,
cloven hoofs. Her weak eyes are tiny
beads buried in the huge, grey gourd
of her head. It would take both arms
of a strong man straining to cradle,
to carry, such a massive head severed.

Even awash in the night perfumes
of worms, molds, grub-rich humus and soil,

she can scent the scat, the spray, menses,
sperm, the spittle of leopard, wolf, feral
dog, approaching boar.

Clair de lune, of course. Lumpy
from her last mud wallow, she grunts
in her odoriferous gut, shovels
through the dirt with her upturned
teeth-tusks, with the cartilaginous
disk of her mucus-dripping snout.
Anyone there to see could see
the pustule-like warts on her misshapen
head shine silver.

By the moonlight, towards dawn, she stretches
on her stomach, dozes in a dew-drizzle.
Moisture gathers in the deep
depression between her petal ears.
One sparrow, two, come to take sips,
a quick splash, at that glittering
pool held tight as a pearl in the bristly
cup of her buzzing black skull.

ABOMINATION

*(The Christians) swept aside ancient
gods who inhabited woods and pools of water.*
—from a guide book to
Mont Saint-Michel

It was my pool. I had lain there underwater
on my back for ages, my brown bony knees
propped up, knobs just barely breaking
the surface. My arms were like skinny
branches covered with fountain moss, furry
with silt and collected smut
of decayed carcasses.

I was the one who made shelter
for the kingbirds and the plumatella.

It was my hair that tangled and nested
for the seed shrimp. My mouth
was the rock cave in which redfins
and sirens took their refuge.

Staring up from the bottom, my eyes
caught the moon, brought light and sky
in the only way possible to the tube worms
and crayfish.

I opened my arms and made the girth
of the bank. I let naked human beings
dive as deeply as they wanted. I held
my firmament in my lap of clear water.

And no one feared me. I asked for nothing
from my congregation—those swimming lilies,
floating bullfrogs, my pea buds
and copepods and duck potatoes—except
that they flourish.

So what right, what reason, did those others
have to come thundering down with their rakes
and holy brooms, to disgorge me, to drag me out
by the hair, to strip me bare? Newts,
peepers, cooters, catfish, all were slipping,
thrashing, spilling from my body.

They left me there, useless and withering
on the rocky bank. But I could have lived with them.
I never mocked, I never denied, I never
proselytized. And when did they ever bless,
cherish, sing hymns to minnows or limpets?

Just fins and awns, mollusks and scuds,
springtails, teals, fruited rushes, silly
children—I never wanted to be a god
to any saints.

ABUNDANCE

(Tom Thumb, circa 1880)

Bronze plums on the spaniel-high table
 have called back his wedding: the gift of goblets,
 tusk-ware, and from Lincoln
 the ink-black and mackerel stretches of
 Chinese fire screens. The day attended

by two thousand—the decades that followed
 attended by thousands, elbow thrusts and huzzas,
 the brays of Barnum's calliopes—
 and we are God's jesters, Lincoln said,
the long and the short of it.

This evening brought a snowfall to the waist
 and fireplace flames draw steam
 from his boot soles—heel and shank
 in the breadth of a silver dollar. Through the rose
 and marigold tones of the screen's floral lacquer

float the undersides of pigeons, steam phantoms,
 one upon one in a thin wall. An abundance,
 Lincoln told him. Making black
 of the blue Indiana sky. Or a sunset, he thinks now:
 in appropriate light, the rose undersides of
 six million passenger pigeons
 pulling up a stratum of sunset

thin and shivering, like the back-drop washes
 in the paintings of Haydon. Tea has begun,
 its steep and blossoming. *Long bullets are drawing
 the birds to extinction*, he reads in the firelight.
 All the hunters with hay carts. And isn't it

humanness, he wonders, to pare back the abundant,
 the threatening excessive? Humanness—elbow thrusts,

huzzas—to exalt the contained? To glad-hand
 the palm-sized shoulders, push a breast
 to the tiny chest, to kiss and kiss the cheek pouch
 until a rash with the down of strawberries rises?

*They darkened the sky. One flock two hours
 in passing. He turns. In the bronze plating of plums
 rests a fish scale teapot. . . .*

From his wedding, he walked with his miniature bride
 through the White House, the portico and hallways,
 to the infinite dome of the Blue Room.
 Lincoln rose to greet them like a gathering storm,
 black hair, black bear, black shoulders,
 the reach of his black sleeves.

HALLEY'S BELL

(from the diary of Marc Brunel)

This morning gave quince meat, a tangle
 of duck eggs. And the sickly half luminance
 of a candle flame in daylight.

We have tunneled the Thames, Rotherhithe to Wapping.
 Eighteen years, the lights each day of two hundred candles
 swelling and withering in the shaft wind.

Picture forceps clamped over a honeycomb.
 That was my digging shield: the head prong
 holding the river up, the foot prong
 delaying the drop into Hades. And between, lodged
 in each chamber, one miner, one shovel.

It crept through the clay
 like the steadfast orbit of Jupiter.
 Each season December, each hour a 4 p.m. umber.
Loaded as we are with the weight of the river,
I wrote, we push forth our shield, walk

our frames outward to three hundred feet.
And feasted there, now and then. Wet walls,
the candle-thrown shadows of forks and miners.
And music, sometimes—near the table's north end—the band
of His Majesty's Coldstream Guards, or a single clarinet,
its resonance snaking from mouthpiece to body, through
the end-stopped body of the tunnel.

Fevers began. And the blindnesses—gradual—
like the inchmeal closures of lantern flames.
Five times the river irrupted, each influx predicted
by a pick-axed flash of boot buckles,
of hammer heads, jawbones, rag bolts—whatever
the riverbed nestled—rushing past us with the silt.

The heads give way from the moment the legs do!
But remain with the frames. And the shoes hold—
the great feet bear up to push of the in-tide.

In a diving bell drawn from the blueprints of Halley,
my son would visit each breach, sit on the dome bench
at the absolute standoff of worlds: water and air in equal
resistance. At the glass-slick lip of the bell, he told me,
is a shield made perfect by the elements,
by the irrefutable theorem of

pressing back. There is wind now, just over
the hedgerows, and the ratchet of the milk cart.
With a telescope, my son returns from a night
in the meadow, walking toward me
through the chattering galaxy of the linden trees.

The shoes, I wrote, our security rests in the shoes.

WANTING COLOR

(Sergei Prokudin-Gorskii)

The day is blue and well appointed,
the windless stillness of stone. And Be stone as well,
I tell her. For five seconds, six.
The distance of a sneeze through the plume grass.

It is a flax farm in Perm, 1909. Through the window frame
of my camera, a woman in the pinafore of her ancestors
stands at a flax-break. The wooden blade in her hand
and the flax jutting down from the sawhorse break

mimic a gesture that in fact is solid,
stalled in its tumbling like
a stream in the winter Urals.

Wanting color, I have fashioned a spectrum box:
three filters—cyan, magenta, yellow—
three shutter-clicks in the distance of a sneeze,
then three separations placed
over one another, like the notes of an A chord,

and the world is as clear—focused—
as the crow to my left
troubling the hens for a pearl of grain.
Should it step through our still scene, I tell her,
its passage would fracture, a languid stretch
become first a blossom, then on examination

three petals of wing: extension, pause, retraction.
A disquietude stirs in the cities, ripples out
through the rail lines like

a stretched wing. Using color, the slowest motion
will fracture, I tell her. Rivers, windblown clouds
and ground cover. A monk peeking toward me
from potato fields near Svetlista
made a halo of his canon hat and neck curls.
And once from the framework of a bell tower

I focused and a soldier on the street below
walked out of himself through three
greatcoats: cyan, magenta, yellow.

There is a fusion that is stillness. And a meadow
in the insistence of a river! In service to the Tsar
I have captured the clarity of mosques,
of bridges, salt mines, semaphore signals. A fear

has begun within me. A kernel yet,
but growing, like the achievements of

a spectrum box. On the village cathedrals
there are onion domes the green of juvenile wheat.
Often it is startling, how in motion we break

to the primaries. And Be still now, I tell her. Now.
Still. And here are the shutter's scissor-click closures
like the crow's beak over pellets of grain.
At the side of my eye it is lifting, neck stretched
in elation, then the solemn hinge of the underbeak,
the plucked seeds already opening.

Jane Varley

VIEW FROM A SMALL ROOM IN NORTH IDAHO

For Lex

There is no name
for days so particular
to memory, when heat
has not caught up
with the idea of trees.
Long hours at a window
are best when you take
out the screen
and feel wheat fields

just on the edge
of their decisions
about growing.
Details, at these times,
are most important.
Most of what is said,
doesn't matter much,
but it's long hard thought
that's devoted
to my grandfather.

He made fourteen ringers
in one game of horseshoes,
then died the next day.

His glory,
you might call it.

A bird, yellow
at the throat,
knocks at the other
window. I watch
the frantic flutter
of wings, think about
naming it "warbler,"
but know I am wrong.

A woman returned
from El Salvador
and the dark rings
won't leave the edges
of her eyes.

Just a few minutes
with her and you
can't think anymore
of single ideas,
like the name
of a bird. Can't ask
questions either.
In front of my window
I think of a line
by Wallace Stevens,
It was evening

all afternoon.

If it's turned over
enough you can
convince yourself
it was written
for you, in Idaho,
in front of a window.
Should I whisper
to her and think how
to ask after
those dark rings?
If only to do it
in a way that sends
a message,
not unlike the kind
of confusion
I see in the yellow
throat that knocks
over and over again.
There, out in the wheat
fields, the peculiar
habit of the rapeseed.
Farmers rotate,
plant the field
in a different
spot every year.
The seed forgets
that its color will
only be short-lived.
Brilliant for three days
in spring, it shines a sun
gold in the middle
of green in a burst
so bold it must think
it will never end.
Its glory, you could
call it, demanding all
attention for three days,
then fading.
On the way

into summer, I'll look
down at the farmers' market
below my window
on Saturday mornings
and watch the old men
of Idaho sell their flowers
and small crops,
the bunches of tulips,
the man with the fishing cap
binding stems with leather,
the corn piled in
in a small mound
in the bed of a truck,
the one liners
of memory they send
between one another,
floating upward,
knocking at my window,
here and then gone.

Mark Jarman

Three Poems

GRID

I walk those streets tonight, streets named for gems
And streets that cross them named for Spanish women.
The gem streets end at the ocean, looking out.
Each woman wears a string of them and ends
With nothing on the edge of town. They are
Juanita, Inez, Maria, Lucia, Elena.
Their jewels are Opal, Emerald, Carnelian,
Topaz, Sapphire, Pearl, Ruby, Diamond.
I'm never sure I've named them all or walked
Along them all. Some are like boulevards.
Those are the gem streets. Some little more than lanes—
Those are the women. Yet I have searched for Opal
Among dead ends and alleys and discovered it

Dangling from Maria's wrist, or Juanita's.
All the life I care about, or almost all,
Lived first along these streets. That life is gone.
And when I say, "I walk those streets tonight,"
It's only poetry. I, too, am gone.
The streets maintain their urban grid, their limits.
The gem streets end at the ocean, the blank Pacific.
And the ones that wear them, named for Spanish women,
Themselves end on the edge of town with nothing.

A LINE OF EUCALYPTUS

They were no more to him than trees.
Only time and distance gave them
The meaning that was hidden by
Knowing them too well. They meant
No less than trees, as weather means
No less than shelter or acceptance.

Apart from them, he saw their shapes
Bend across his memory,
Simple as grade school poster art.
And then the light he took for granted
Made them turn to him, like parents—
Serious bodies dense with shadows.

They were the outline of the distance;
Time in evergreen delay,
Dropping its deaths in secret; space,
When he walked below them, climbing
Like fountains peeling back to earth;
And earth cobbled with their fruit.

Now they were hidden, beyond the line
That falls back as we near it, but
Never disappears. They once
Defined it with their leaning heads,
In windbreak order, as if listening
To a child's story patiently.

A VOICE TRIES WHISPERING

A morning overcast like gray amnesia. The thunderheads
and bodies of white silence
That made the sky—the empty-headed sky—look thoughtful
yesterday are nothing now.
So many clouds, all yesterday—too many—pressing the
dome of sky flat with their numbers.
Yet buoyant. And the fragile sky held up. But now
it sheathes itself like a snail's foot.
It presses now, though thoughtlessly; its weight—
the burden of the coma, the sick bed.
"Remember yesterday," a voice tries whispering. "Yesterday
your head was in the clouds."

Laura Dickinson

LITHOGRAPHY PORTRAIT

It begins with water and grease and repulsion
and eight hours spent in the studio
rolling ink thicker than desire onto a stone
I can only move with a hydraulic lift.
There's no way to know exactly what I've drawn,
like a face in a mirror, reversed
from the way I see it. So much to do
until paper is separate: how deep, how dark,
how lines are blacked or not from the impression.
The hardest part is to draw down the lever

on the press, my height an advantage,
leverage as they say. Through the window
I see a cold snow begin, the small, tight flakes
glance haphazard against the pane, making the night
a negative of itself. I think of what
you'd say if you were here, if you could see
how yellow the photograph is of you
I work from—maybe you'd say it doesn't matter,

that whatever I do you were never the man
stiff-suited, posed for the endless minutes

as the slow film exposed, the reds
and blues laid in by someone who didn't know you.
I don't know you either. When I take the template
off and pull the top sheet from print,
the strange courage of failing compels me:
only through blemish or weak ink are you mine
the way the photograph of my grandmother
at twenty-one would seem only of a woman
beautiful, the sitting for a picture
an event, and she, young, a stranger to me.

But I've heard stories of the mercy
her mother showed her, sending her away
at fifteen to work, to be rescued from
a father's hatred of a daughter born red-haired
and left-handed, a certain sign of Satan.
This is how I know her, not how I remember her.
Just as your son, now your age, commissioned
me to lean over this stone, careful not to rest
my hand or touch the surface, polished clear and fine,
each mark I make indelible as a scar.

Nance Van Winckel

POCKET HISTORY OF POETRY

The young sheep try to climb
our fences, until they tear one
down. Then the old sheep
run through. Now they're all
in the new pasture, where the grass
is just as green. But it's so much taller
and it blows wild, and there seems
to be no end to it.

Kevin Stein

Three Poems

IN LOVE WITH A MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

You could say it wasn't much,
the lone sprig of iris
leaning in a chipped vase, off-centered
on the table,

among the newspapers
and (forgive me)
last night's dishes.

You might contend its bloom had wilted,
or that choosing white was itself
refusal,
an innocence.

You might even dismiss the gesture
as just that,
meaningless
as a cloud's undressing
gray to purple to white again,
no rain.

You would be right,
partially and of ill humor,
until you sit awhile
and enter
the unfolding center
where scent resides,

witness petals close around you
like the blossom it is.

And water,

always water,
though not exact cascades
but a glistening

in the petals
that falls like beads fall
from your breasts.

On the table
arcs of sullen pollen,
continents of desire shifted
by each stray breeze:

worlds made and unmade
as surely as gravity
beckons a petal-drop,
the bloom of you,
that perfect undoing.

ALLOWANCES

I always never believed in God.

The gaunt Christ of the cross hung a dissonance
in every room.

I believed in the body,
its fragile declaration.

Still, when grandmother asked me,
I prayed with her
and rubbed her feet those winter afternoons
while cancer resculpted her skull.

Her eyes sank toward
God knows what.
The tarsus and metatarsus cracked
within my hands,
detonated the pause between Hail Mary and Our Father,

Father who resides in the arthritic thicket
that is our faith,

in the word we, being human, ought never to use:
always always as empty
as her empty shoes.

A CIRCUS OF WANT

He carries it with him
everywhere, though *to carry*
implies two strong arms.
In fact he has none,
is bullet-shaped, really,
though he's not fired
from a cannon. He merely sits,
beneath a bright orange tent,
eating with his feet.

There is great dignity in this.
Grasping the utensils
between his toes,
spooning chicken soup,
how he folds the cloth napkin
when he's done.
All this for one token, a buck;
the fragrant elephants cost two.
I've watched him
in the library of Peru, Indiana,
where the circus sometimes winters,

his nimble toes
turning the pages of a book
on the ancient Sumerians,
who knew a thing or two
about disaster:
their homes flooded
or fields sere all summer,
those wandering, ignorant hordes
who looted their cities
and smashed the cuneiform tablets
which told of Gilgamesh,

who, though he slew many foes
and earned great fame,
never got what he wanted,
either.

I've watched a smile
crease his clean-shaven face,
and I've wondered about that,
his smile, I mean.
I mean, how does he not
hate us?

How do I, guilty
in my own body,
still ask for the muffler
to repair itself,
my apple tree to sprout
from its forlorn stump?
How can I not
wish to be an angel,
my left and right
given in solicitude?

Eric Nelson

GRANDMOTHER'S POEM

Somewhere my grandson is writing poems about me.
They get published in magazines I never heard of,
magazines his mother always sends me a copy of
and a note: *this is the leading journal for poetry.*

So I read them and wonder, this is poetry?
These things he's heard, remembered wrong,
made up? Aren't poems supposed to rhyme?
His sound like someone's diary.

When I was young I could whistle beautifully.
Not much of a gift, I know, but it was mine.
It won me a fifth of gin once at the Inn,
and it helped pass the time hanging laundry.

His poem says when he saw me last, shaking,
lips pale, "almost transparent," he imagined
me a girl on stage, whistling to a hushed crowd.
Neither what he saw nor imagined is in my memory.

In his newest poem, entitled "Candy,"
he remembers the box of Whitman's Sampler
that was always open on the coffee table
when he visited, how as soon as it was empty

another, and then another "miraculously"
appeared, a "sweet exchange without end."
He doesn't say he knew exactly where I kept them,
or how when one was gone he'd come to me

and ask if he could get another from the pantry.
He doesn't know I only bought them when he came,
that his mother scolded me for spoiling him,
that she and I have always gotten along badly.

He says he knows now that Whitman's is cheap
drug-store fare, but when he sees the yellow
boxes stacked in Revco, it's a comfort to him still,
and he buys one for his wife for their anniversary.

Is that supposed to make me proud, or happy?
His mother says he writes in love and remembrance.
I'd rather he forget, or better, remember that
what he really loves is who he makes-believe.

BALLADE OF THE ORANGERIE

Outside Sarasota, Florida, at this mom and pop
orange grove on the roadside, we stopped to pick
some valencias and temples, the last crop
lost to frost being loaded onto the beat-up truck
to haul away for juice. The bright citrus slick
with rime, the sun a seedy pulp, the dark rind
of dusk hung over us, as night with its dark wick
drew out the salty stars and we passed on

to grapefruits and tangelos, tart, sweet, your mop
of hair ruby in the moonlight, your voice thick
and sticky, your words sectioned on your lip
a sour reminder of our slow, then quick
decline. We stopped for a moment to suck
in the night air, hoping the grower wouldn't find
us stealing produce. Then, tongues out as if to lick
the salty stars, we drew apart and passed on

to other lives. You to a country you would swap
forever, and me to the cold north, thick
with ice and responsibility. Now, as I sip
juice from a hole cut in an orange end, or suck
the pulp of a grapefruit, or, musing, lick
the rim of a tangelo or halved lemon rind
on a frosty night, I find myself stuck
with the image of salty stars you passed on

to me that night in Sarasota, when our luck
ran out, as sure as if the grower with his gun
had finally found and salted us with buck-
shot, under the salty stars when you passed on.

BALLADE OF THE STAR WARRIORS

Dan Quayle now calls it "brilliant pebbles,"
this system of missiles and lasers
Ronald Reagan, like some sit-com father, troubled
about his loveable errant teen-agers,
and determined to set them on their ears,
likened to the astrodome, or an umbrella
to cover the "window of vulnerability." Metaphor
was his message. He was one hell of a

President. He gave Russia, the Evil
Empire, and Andropov, that latter-day Darth Vader,
and the Grenadians and Sandinistas the devil
of a time. Likewise, Mr. Bush made Noriega whimper
with an action quick as a double-edged razor
and, like some lowly, scorned Cinderella
team, traded in his wimp status. What was more,
his message—he was one hell of a

fella—propelled him upwards in the polls
as high as any president or movie star
might savor. Therefore, let us not trouble
him now with military budget cuts, or
questions about the deficit or the poor
or social programs. Tell him how swell a
job he's doing. Who could do more?
Send the message. He is one hell of a

gent. Happy campers all, we will score
our brilliant pebbles to tell of a
country that lifted, shining, with a roar
this precious message: we were one hell of a

Amy Minett

SONNET FOR THE WIDOWS OF NIAGARA STREET

Again they try sleep, the strict dimension
calling the body daily. It's late now,
the hour sways, a palm in the dark, slow
and almost visible, the fragile rain
beyond the glass a faint repetition
of loss uneased, loss increasing. Just how
could they prepare for this? They've always known

and still their hearts fall numb, the nerves retain
a severed wish and creep along the halls,
the corners blurred with dust, the unlit rooms
containing only space. If they could do
it over, they'd give up the past and crawl
alone to bed each night untouched, removed
like infants sleeping, straight the long night through.

Alexandra van de Kamp Two Poems

A PORTRAIT OF GRAY

I.
Trees are a waiting,
a tolerance for cars and weathers.
Trees are a stillness, refusing
to keep to itself, giving
by staying with what is near
and almost near.
Trees are the embracers of air.
They know how to grip and remain
with what they love,
with the air, which is constant loss,
a slipping always near us,

a conviction we can't touch.
Air, the *not having*
in each day, the unrequited love
drawing constant halos
around us.

II.
The air develops its dance
with carelessness
as opening a door,
you find what you want
only after seeing it:
Gloves on a chair
are the days they were used in,
the weathers: trees silent
with the worry of wood, the storms
of a childhood, their gray air
shut like attic trunks, walls following you
whenever you walked, with their lament,
"All there is, is cement, the frozen
dance of cement."

III.
How can a day endure such gray?
Such thick-tongued clouds
nudging the air away
so they may settle
like pendulums
between houses.
I've tried to hold slowly, brilliantly
faces in my hands.
Is memory this gleaming, this gray
breaking against me as I walk,
this air heavy as fruit
gathered in arms,
this unasked-for air?
I've tried to hold the worn life
of soap in my hands.
The rain glimmers
like wet pearls in the trees,

this rain moans, rummaging
through closets
for the patience of clothes.
*In my hands, I've tried to hold
the simple depth of stones, thick
with the shadows they've pressed
into ground. In my hands, in the small face
of these hands.*

IV.
Gray is my father
on porches, the wooden steps
silvered by salt.
My father always positioning
himself on the edge of storms,
as if storms were a world
more generous than elevators,
than windows in houses,
than the sometimes beautiful shapes
of dirt.

When the gray comes, scaling
houses and trees, when darkness
snags in the corners of beaches,
my father walks outside.
The storm's air, a place where great men at sea
made decisions, a history
my father can pull into himself, briefly become,
before it subsides, leaves like an actor
withdrawing from a stage,
and my father returns to sofas,
to shelves of paperbacks
telling of battles,
of men always in storms, always
knowing the terms
of their desires, the shore
of loss, something they can see
in front of them, something
they can know not to cross.

V.
I want to be alone,
without other eyes
near my own eyes, without God,
whose eyes I find in chairs,
in people's earnest voices.
Eyes which say, "You are this, you are this."
I want to be without this chanting,
so I make a smaller god, a god broken
into pieces, a fragment I can love:
a chunk of step, a tired star,
a gray like this air, which shimmers
like a god looking for others,
this gray the color
of wanting, this purpled gray,
a god, lonely as an island
hunting for water.

VI.
While walking, I am separate
from doors, from children walking
home from school, dragging
long sticks across walls, a small cry
of wood following them, these children
wrapped in the voice of this wood,
as if it were a god humming
next to them, listening,
as all gods do, for the holes
in our voices, in the motions
we produce. These holes, the moments
when windows offer no weather,
when tunnels fall through us like long closets
asking to be filled. Gods hover near
because we offer the small voids
in which they create, we are
their release, their chance
to realize their dreams. Like children,
they live in a constant state
of searching.

VII.

When I was young I looked for the wings
of priests. Finding none,
I searched their long black skirts
confident they wouldn't have feet,
knowing they were angels,
briefly descended
to complete the Mass.
Then once, I spotted
beneath a swinging hem,
black shoes, slick as stones
falling through water—religion
not a part of the air, not
a process of flight, but a ground:
the heavier attempts of women and men,
the clicking of shoes
over gray shadows, gray cement.

VIII.

Jesus died because of his feet
pinned to wood. Jesus died
because he could not escape
his feet, or the ground
all feet love, all feet need.

IX.

I chose you, my gray cat,
from your sand-colored brothers,
because you are an altar
of gray, the edge
of streets, the calm of stone,
the quiet shard
I am looking for.
I come to you for your abilities.
When asleep, you create
your own cave: instead of being with air,
you are inside it,
as if you had stepped
through its seam, found a carved

depth waiting.

I am bordered by your gray,
by the rooms you awaken in air
as shores are defined by their journey
towards and away from water,
by what is always beside them.

ONE WELL-USED CHAIR TALKS TO ANOTHER

(A Conversation of Needs)

Chair #1: In this world of changing pressures,
I feel the worry
of their bodies
as they lean,
then go from me.
I am simple,
the place which waits
for backs and legs
when people decide to abandon
their tallness and the blank
collidings of air.

Stilled, for a moment kept
from doors, people bloom with me like milk
poured into coffee, an opaque flower
plunging into itself, wrapped
around a dark center. Here,
they can see again those hands
which failed them, all the doors
walked by in rain, corners paused at
in noon light where a face,
once memorized, barely edged
into their minds.

Between action and action,
I am a weight holding their skin,
a rest from what can happen when they stand.
How I wait for them to slip from their lives
to be equal with my height, to know

the world flickering at knee level:
tables with shadowed bellies,
dust caves shifting
under lamps. I am implicitly
their choice for a second sight.

Chair #2: I do not have another
to lose myself against.
Why must I hold one shape,
the pain of this discipline!
The scientists are wrong:
bolts, nuts and gravity do not occur
to make me work; it is my soul—
a slender reed growing
from the ground's dark eyes
through all the foundations
of buildings, a climbing tendril
penetrating metal and wood
to create this stitch
of earth and chair, holding
me still.

I am the wisdom only skin knows.
The terrible love I have for steadiness,
for being what others need me to be
keeps me constant, but one day
I will decide to change, to collapse
towards the dark givings of soil,
to lean into the earth's surface,
that wide acceptance.
Then I will know the closeness,
the needs which make people crave the angles
they can fit themselves against.
I have had bodies find small answers
in my shape. I am a priest constantly
bowed, a prayer fallen with gray weight.

Suzanne Cleary

Two Poems

MADAME BEAUMONT

Madame Beaumont dyed her pale legs with a tea-colored stain.
Eyelids shiny blue, pale hair pinned at her temples,
she wore only black or beige, the colors of Paris during
the Occupation,
when each Friday the nun led Madame's class
to the Louvre, where some of the girls fell behind, hid,
brushing each other's hair in the wing of tombs.

We were in 10th grade, in 1969, in upstate New York,
memorizing, exploring tenses we might use in that strange land
the Future. Madame Beaumont asked us questions
and we fell silent, shy. We answered slowly.
If it was painful for Madame to hear the language of her
childhood
battered by us, changed by us, she never said,
though there was one expression: sometimes, she would press
her index fingers together and touch her chin
as she listened.

I think now she was listening to memory,
as I think now that language is like a woman
standing in full sunlight. Her hair is tied at her nape
with a thin black ribbon. The wind swirls.
She is steady, but her hair is falling, slowly,
as if to say, *The sun shines here, and here. And here.*
I think the sun was shining outside the Louvre
so when the children went indoors
they were blind for a moment, and so fell silent.

Was Madame remembering braiding her friend's hair
or placing her hand on cool stone?
Was the memory painful to her, or good? *Good memory,*
we say, as if it were a dog that has carried in our slippers,
a newspaper, or run across a mine field
with a canister tied to his collar. During the War

dogs were trained for communication during battle.
They were trained to search rubble for survivors.

I see Madame sitting before us, crossing her leg
and tracing a circle with the toe of her shoe.
She is telling us that after the War her younger brother
carried out a secret he had kept for three years.
It was one of their mother's old handbags
and it was full of chocolate and, without a word, they ate.

ACTING

I most remember the class where we lie
on our backs, on the cold floor, eyes closed, listening
to a story set in tall grasses, a land of flash floods.
Ten babies slept in a wagon as a stream risen from nothing
trampled like white horses toward them.
We heard the horses pulling their terrible silence.
Then he asked us to open our eyes. Our teacher
took from his pocket an orange square, dropped it:
this had wrapped one of the babies.
This was found after the waters receded.

I remember the woman with red hair
kneeling before the scarf, afraid to touch it,
our teacher telling her she could stop
by saying, *OK. Good.*
I remember the boy named Michael, who
once told me he loved me. Michael
approached with tiny steps, heel to toe,
as if he were measuring land,
and, all at once, he fell
on the scarf. It could have been funny,
loud, clumsy. Another context, another moment,
it would have been ridiculous.
Head down, he held the scarf to his eyes.

My turn, I didn't move. I stared

at the orange scarf, but not as long
as I'd have liked to, for this was a class
and there were others in line for their grief.
I touched it, lightly, with one hand,
folded it into a square, a smaller square, smaller.

What is lived in a life?
Our teacher making up that story
as he watched us lie on the dusty floor,
our rising, one by one,
to play with loss, to practice,
what is *lived*, to *live*? What was that desire
to move through ourselves to the orange
cotton, agreed upon, passed
from one to another?

Beckian Fritz Goldberg Five Poems

IN THE BADLANDS OF DESIRE

If there is the statue of a saint
whose toes are worn smooth from old women
kissing, if there is an animal whose name
is sleep, if there is a hill
whose bones are broken, I
will remember me in the next life.

If there is an onion with the hundred
smaller and smaller faces
of wet light, if there is a mirror
whose shoulders drift
the museum of shoulders, if

there is a spider like a dud star
which catches the empire
from table leg to corner, if there are communists,

and useless lingerie, and rubies
snatched at night from jewelers' windows,
I will be the butcher's white

paper, the hook raving in frost.
If there is a tongue still moving
toward its mother silence, mint still breaking
its unimaginable green fist
through old aqueducts where the drunk

meet to be lonely and violet
as nets sieving the shine of nothing,
if there is a plaza in a town
where the stones break out
like hives from the plaster, and pigeons
blow their cool oboes of love,

I will be the look given to a door
when it closes by itself. After
it closes, wondering
was it some hand, some wind. And if it is painted
blue, like the faded crepe of old hours, if
a wolf bares its teeth to its tail
on the doorstep, there will be a hard winter,
a demon spring.

LOVE, SCISSOR, STONE

In April, he had forgotten where I was.
He was thinking of the stars and the police
badges deflecting little signals
where the night went down over my body
on the riverbed road. When I came back

from the dead, he was angry. It was past
midnight. He had already been rehearsing
his behavior at the inquest, already
prepared the emptiness, scoured and transparent
as a guest wing in our house. Moths

had opened a place in their burning books
for me as the headlights threw
the west wall up and its window—the one
we'd bricked and plastered over from
the inside to block the morning

scissor light. The cat clouded
two perfect jades as I came in, and the vase
was there, right there on the table,
a thickening in the water and a loose
wand of stock

had snowed around it where I sometimes
left a coffee cup, a note. I had risen
and was walking toward a place to leave
my shoes. He was in the half-light.
Or it was the sawed shadow

of that door. Once, he had wanted me
alive. We had slept in the corridors of hot
Italian trains all night, bread
in our suitcases and one-shot bottles
of brandy. But now

it was only spring. Some year. And his eyes
came flat at me, asked me where
the hell I was. I was
without a word for once, and turned

down the hall to the room of shoes,
and ashtrays, and cool cups, where I
sometimes wrap that word
around a stone.
And though I could lie

I do not. Though I could say in love
when there's not the light place there's
the buried place, that when he fell asleep
the house was breath
dovetailing breath,

I am not sure
I could believe it. There is, after all,
a life to live, not speaking, through dinner,

at twilight. I know no man or woman
plans this. It seems always
to happen suddenly, as if we've been
sleeping. Then awakened. And the smell of citrus
is curded in the night air, sour,

and too sweet. But we bear it.
Because it's here. It's where
the hell we are.

BLACK HEART

Mist of the body out of the body:
This is the sky as winter dreams.
Our bedsheets drape the smallest
trees. The wood fence wet with its other
color. Evening. The darkness has brothers.
One is in the house,
jaw to the stove. I'm not going
in. I have in. I have out. Both
like names waiting to be lit
by remembrance, sudden, or a cry.
The name of this moment is December,
six o'clock, a few stars backed
against the distance like glances
deep into the black heart. The trees
are clothed with us, old
flowers on which we slept and
spilled. Out there, no mark
where the moon should be
pink—oh, round as absence. Then
a plume of the rain's smell,
an invisible sickness
like a minute that keeps returning.

His face strikes
in the heat of my eye. Night
is creeping into solids—earth, cold,
house, bed. Distinctions
perish. Tonight you and I will sleep
beside one another like water
and history.

His face is close
as the white of my dream.
You touch me believing
some good will come of this
but desire is all of this—
the coming and the not.

RESOLUTIONS

When I die in spring
I think of the wasp's lonely earring
above the pool in summer,
and when I die it is
summer with the first chill
of a wine glass,
its invisible writing, and I
am about thirty again, watching
the good heart of October. So

it is true: I can't imagine death
falling in any known time
of the year. Now it is

January and I have promised my mother
to write my resolutions.
I do not resolve to clean cupboards.
I do not resolve to give up
drink. Or the biting of nails.

I am afraid of promises to myself.
I hope I will be happy
in the summer, reading by the sea,

feeling the blue stop
at the top of my book.
Wearing sandals.

There is, maybe this year, maybe
the next, one day that is promised
to me. On that day
I will be thinking of another

like the bride beneath the dullard
the matchmaker chose.

THE INFLUENCE OF HAIR

For years I have kept the hair of a man
curled in a locket: between the thumb-sized
doors of the heart, it is the yellow
of oversleeping. Now and then
I look into its slight riddle,
a shudder like toy guitars
thumped on the back. Soon those hills fan out
and then the house from their bellies, the moon,
the thin, mysterious mouth
of a man now smooth as his brother shadow, fallen,
swept under memory.
There his face has vanished like a spare key.

Yet there is even in the lost
the imperceptible fallout, the sweet
of the tongue to the empty socket,
or the sense of an unbearable dress
slipping in among the others in the closet.

Twilight. In this world how astonishing it is
not to be young. To become the four directions,
leaving, having left, reliving,

leaving. I envy what fits in my hand

inanimate and dumb, even the plainest thing,
the button from an unaccountable bodice, from an unremembered
haste, or a campaign, like a decoration left after
the holiday. Maybe these are the gentle brushes
with a world that drifts like the ease of a sudden
feather, in a careless moment of the tree.

It happens, blond cousin or lover, stranger
or dead soldier, curved lockets, receipts
tongue-tied in the back of drawers, they leave
their loose ends in the darkest places
and we need to gaze at them,
to touch the one without a body,
to run our hands.

Michael Cadnum

WHY IT NEVER SNOWS

The lies we erase
stay around us like the chewed
lettuce in the manatee's tank,
her hairs a hundred
sparse pins plumed with cellulose.
Last night they found a body in the park.

We sleep on the carpet beside the coffee table
and the maple furniture
has halfmoons from glasses and
the black dimples of
cigarette burns. We wanted to grow up
bad. The actors and their lines:
they aren't believable, but watch
for two or three episodes and you're hooked.

All we need
is time. There is another accident

in that terrible intersection.
And standing phone in hand
the fire department police department
everything right there
the fingers cannot move. My memory

is getting worse. First names
evaporate. Faces dissolve.
I asked for the coffee with that
special additive, the scent
of new electronic equipment, so new
the first test hasn't been run on it.

We fork the loam, and toss the old plastic
into a pile. The school for the blind
trains people by having them wear blindfolds
so the imperfectly sightless can learn.
Scorpions surprised in the bathroom

sting the air. So when I pin one
by accident to the cold tiles,
crushing the tail I believe
I have just escaped harm.

The caterpillars begin to fall,
all the leaves off the tree,
the crooked, black
larvae all over the crabgrass.

The dump trucks are bagged
out of shape, the steel buckled
with the imprint of the granite
for the new jetty. The empty trucks
rumble up the on-ramps
towards the San Bernardinos,
and come back plumed
with black exhaust.
They are filling the sea.

Walter Bargaen

SIROCCO HEART

Two dragonflies sit head to tail
on a weathered limestone ledge,
their legs positioned like the struts
of machinery, their iridescent needle
blue bodies splinters of fall sky.
Slowly they complete the circle,
bringing tail to head to tail
and back to head, though it's more
the shape a child draws and calls
heart, except for the odd knot
of bulging eyes just below
where both halves merge, infolding
in soft sloping arcs at top
and its pointed bottom, as if hearts
have clear direction pumping to oblivion.

The gleaming dragonflies begin
to pulse and vibrate, plucked sapphire
strings, or the single telephone wire
following the road that mimics
the horizon and ends nowhere in particular,
but one day caught in a prairie wind,
the speed resonating with the distance
between poles, the black line coils
and uncoils in eight-foot waves,
as if the words it carries must be
delivered whipped and crawling;

or the scorched day following a woman
holding her hand out from the car
and scooping air in onto her face,
and through the dusty back window
I watched her long tendrils of hair
float up, suspended, and almost wander
off, as if awash in another time, having

a life of their own, filaments
of an alien desire, a siren I alone
trail for half a county before turning
into the heart of another burning matter.

John Woods

Five Poems

TO BILHANA

There are no black marigolds
in this white suburb, choked by strip malls,
cable radiation penetrating the well-kept colonials.
Occasionally a truck will back up
and haul off a relationship.
From time to time, an ambulance
carries off a suicide or other heart victim.
A rape, a break-in, an orgasm, wars
of a culture whose patients wander
the night halls of hospitals
and find they are senators.

Bilhana, fellow poet, dead nine centuries,
I know this is flat, despairing language
from my late January.
I call this *Black Marigolds*,
After your poem in fifty stanzas, spoken by the youth
condemned to death for loving the king's daughter.
Even now, they start, *even now*.
I hope you were that youth, Bilhana,
whose girl beat on the soldiers' armor
when they came for you, waiting for the heavy knife.
Your poem saved you, as I hope this will save me.
I hope your woman stood with you
when you were shaken. I hope you studied her face
as though you picked one rose
to die with.

(from *Black Marigolds*)

A FACE IN THE LEAVES

In November, ungainly month, leaves half down,
red squirrels lean into the secrets
of the tulip tree.

Comrade, agitator, lover,
teechur, some mornings
you pull your wild hair into a helmet,
commissar of the gulags called second grade.
You swear, you swear by the books, as Lucy wets herself
and Matthew can't match simple to simple.

Each convulsive day, as the tulip casts down
its babies, a nameless child
pules in the leached grass
or opens her bright face before the blackboard
of imagination.

November, and the leaves drift down,
veinous, milk-mouthed, towards mulch
or curb fire. We bring up the woolens,
shake out the dreams of moths, remember
how roses opened their theme parks.

At the back of the lot, dusty, Calvinistic pines
nurse their slow sexual cones,
dreaming before the road show of chaos.
Again the womb thickens and sends down its star.

(from *Black Marigolds*)

THE TULIP TREE

Tulip, tulip tree,
when I buried your burlap roots
you were shorter than my sons.
They have followed their shadows.
In late spring
great waxy flowers
ignite in your dark foliage.

You live so long
only the stars amaze you.
My father and mother,
my wife, my lover could not
stay for me as your deep autumn
shadow drifts into the garden.
Perhaps I'll press my face
against your trunk, feeling
the deep roots and wind sway.

(from *Black Marigolds*)

SALLY AND THE HOLY GHOST

My college roommate
slept on our floor one summer
to see if Christ ribs or Sally bones
would bed him best
against the gravities.

Summer in Indiana was too much to bear,
the air yeasty and spore-groined.
In the next apartment,
crudely walled off by hanging blankets,
a couple rolled in tunnels and cave mouths,
moaning like the ancients.
I would have slept with the Holy Ghost
if it had been built right.

My roomie humped the cold pelvis
of whatever spirit sleeps in dusty carpet,
climbing monkey bars to the calculus of virtue.
I stood on my bed, shivering,
twitched aside the hanging,
and watched a woman take a man by the root.
I've never been the same.

We were the mates of that room in summer
of Southern Indiana and we were drowning,

drowning in that old sea
that laid down the lime of our bones.

My mate rose as I stood down,
declared himself graduated and near-sighted,
and sallied forth. He was one of my ways,
and I was one of his. We took the two rings,
the Book and the books,
and rocked before the cruel little gods
we call children.

MILK, TURNING

Their udders are swollen
and they look back along their hulls
for the horn-handed man
to palm their milk and take the pails.

They have not heard of cheese or oat flakes,
or the silver tankers burning the mile markers.
The screen door doesn't bang,
nor the TV light edge through the drapes.
There is the dull gripe of milk
and the man doesn't come.

Perhaps he is resting his face
on the kitchen table, his eyes
white as milk.

Perhaps the time of milk is over,
the world cramming the aisles
for new substances, dusts, rays,
atomizers with the scents of hay and urine,
tapes of children crying and stopping.

About Our Contributors

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and Two Poems (Autumn 1990)

THEODORE ROETHKE PRIZE: \$50

Cecile Hanna Goding for Four Poems (Summer 1990)

RICHARD HUGO PRIZE: \$50

Ben A. Heller for Two Poems (Spring 1990)

CAROLYN KIZER PRIZE: \$50

Philip Dacey for Two Poems (Autumn 1990)

