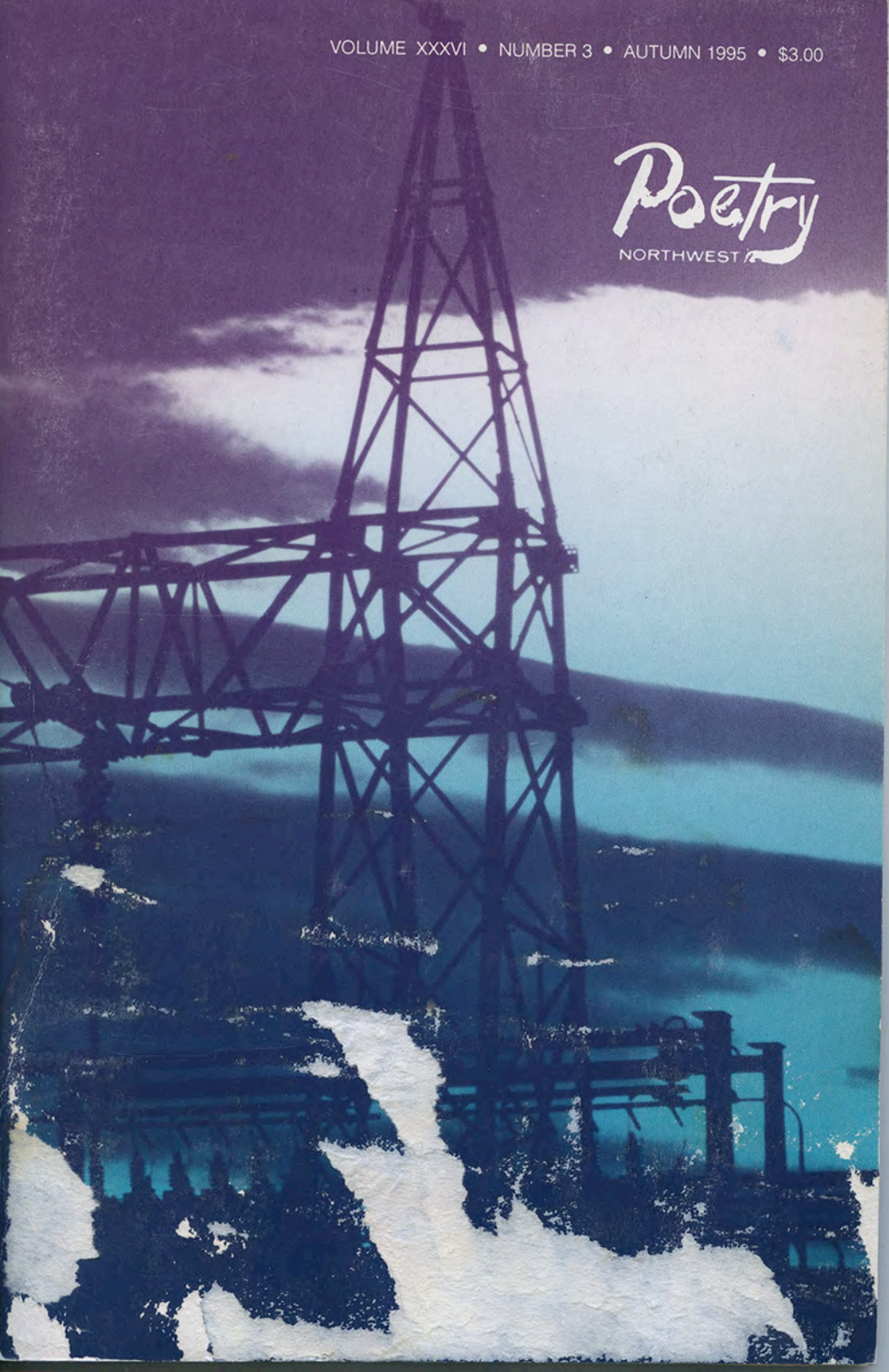


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# Poetry

NORTHWEST



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# POETRY NORTHWEST

VOLUME THIRTY-SIX

NUMBER THREE

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## POETRY NORTHWEST

SUMMER 1995

### *Rob Carney*

#### WE'VE READ YOUR APPLICATION. PLEASE SIT DOWN

Say what you want, but convince me,  
show me I'm wrong. Prove you can compete  
with Friday night, the gleaming Cadillacs  
and Corvettes touring the track,

the escorts' tuxedos,  
the court of high school beauties  
waving their arms, their bodies  
slipped in sleeveless gowns.

Compete with the mood,  
the hip flasks and letterman's jackets,  
parents flicking cigarettes in groups along the fence,  
and everyone waiting, ready to lose themselves for hours.

You can say *these leaves mean winter*  
*and an ancient, troubled sleep.*  
They'll crash through home team posters, ripped bits  
taking the wind as they take the field . . .

and the thrum of a thousand feet stamping,  
and a thousand clapping hands,  
the chanting from five hundred ritual mouths,  
the throb as they wait for the build-up to break

when the kick-off comes. Ah, yes! Hear the pads smacking.  
When they huddle—curtains of steam.  
There is, after all, much to this,  
each small-town, Friday-autumn play.

Antigone? Look—I tell you look at the girls  
in their legs, white gloves, long hair, and perfume and pleats . . .  
the grounds crew could surface the track  
with the night boys spend, the grainy daydreams

piled at bobby-socked feet. And these girls,  
or their mothers, dry-clean uniforms each week.  
They create, rehearse more cheers.  
I'm saying they care. This counts.

Now you—can you make me taste *comeback*  
in my coffee? Can you cradle hope  
deep in my chest, fold it in my arms  
like a hand-off off-tackle for 4th down's necessary yard?

If I run a fly, you'll deliver the touchdown,  
then be there with teammates  
to bury me, grinning, alive?  
You'll get the gut-sunk ache of the losing side as well,

the weight of their sousaphones  
and bass drums packing up,  
the mud as they slump for their buses,  
then quietly home?

Think about what you're up against, pal.  
What do you mean  
when you tell me you want to be a poem?

## Molly Tenenbaum

## Two Poems

### FARMER'S MARKET VISITATION

Lettuce—Canasta, Cocarde, Merveille des Quatre Saisons, and more  
unknowns, but brilliant, brass-red, butter, leaf, batavian.  
And cherries, so plum-fat yellow I'm overcome  
with pie-thoughts, pass up raspberries, couldn't cram  
cobbler for breakfast, compote for lunch, two kinds  
of pie for dinner, and leave room  
for bokchoy, pea-vine, rapini, rocket, mizuna.

Green leaves fountain in my open bags, and I'm deciding  
how to talk—burble exuberant colors, or restrain,  
one thing so right  
the others dry away. Later, blue larkspur sways  
inside the fence, but melon-pink poppies buzz  
from over, so I can't cross out. I wish  
my father alive to help, he'd love  
the spinach bouquets so neatly tied, he'd josh  
across counters, ask gardener's questions—

by tables of tomato starts, it's him in me  
savoring labels: Red Calabash, Brandywine, Brimmer,  
him touching Stupice leaves, darker than Romas,  
"Called 'potato-leaf,'" the man explains—  
no explanation,  
but good to know. He'd love the paths  
the customers draw, leaning forward  
for cantaloupe, lifting with both hands,  
stem-end to nose, and lowering; love

the resulting tangle invisible as fine fishline  
hung up and bangling trees, or floating toward  
its subtle underwater job. He'd love the booths,  
the daughter pricing artichokes. In some twist of time,  
I'd be her, summer Saturdays in town to sell

not just these sea-green thistles burnished blue,

but Rose Fir fingerling potatoes  
to myself, a woman blurred  
behind the swinging sacks.  
I'd weigh them, and I'd give the change. For my dad,  
if no English professor, a farmer, this  
workshirted, sunburned man telling his girl  
to call it a half-pound even,  
though I know it's more.

He'd laugh, baby beets,  
clumps butt side up. He hoped  
I'd go to France, the avenues  
like paintings, where just standing  
on corners you feel the brush  
take your hand—but never knew  
how near I'd live to market, or that I'd return,  
cherry-laden, latent pies, green founts springing, home  
through larkspur and poppy,  
through the swooning gates.

#### TEABAG BALLAD

The water-urn I count as where we met.  
I watched him pass the coffee-pot to choose  
his tea, watched him lay the string across  
the lip, small weight dangling like Foucault's  
pendulum. Gravity slipping so soon?  
The center shifted, I did too, but hot  
water poured to hold the dangling down.

Makeshift  
world, this tray of splashed packets, plastic  
stirrers, tea gone stale, flat water not quite  
boiled. And yet his slow moves showed me how  
fine hands can shape thin air. I thought tea  
would turn forever as he stirred, center  
of a whirl. I'd snapped down spigots, loosed  
a flush, pushed a stick to rush the steeping on,  
burnt my fingers giving one last squeeze—he  
still paused. Opened sugar. I saw white fans

vanish underwater. Milk, he stirred,  
and set the carton on its milky ice,  
but I was set for anything by then,  
two chairs tipped back, two cups to noses, toes  
propped in the dawning window lustered  
as the lake began to shine.

Next thing  
I know, two cups on an L.A. stovetop,  
two tags, shy, and trailing down. Two teas  
all the way immersed. A Chinese box,  
green, pink, white, with Irish Breakfast sealed  
in two green rows—such secret envelopes,  
and lemons met us at the window,  
all globes suns, and gravity the breezes  
bright in every branch at once,

the shift  
a mystery like broth, which must cook longer  
than you think, and longer still, but you  
can smell it deepen, pull the door to darker  
passages of flavor. I had never  
let a teabag steep so long. He barely  
knew me, nor I him, but I count the first  
question what he asked me then, approaching  
with the cups. Did I like my teabag squeezed?  
Yes, I said, and drank those richest drops.



*Allan Nicoletti*

GREEN FISH BLUE

I dreamt of lilies growing from the waves,  
sad trumpeters along the shore.

There is a woman who dyes her hair green  
and plays the trumpet in a punk rock band.

Woman of my dreams. She's doing a show  
in Minneapolis, a show in Wichita.

We bought matching shoes. I've never been  
to Wichita, though when she's there,

I can feel it on the bottom of my feet.  
I could dye my hair blue.

I botched a test is physiology: a) draw  
a flow diagram of the subtle mechanisms

of the inner ear, or b) the mechanisms of sight  
(trace the path of refracted light striking

the retina to the formation of an image  
in the occipital lobes). I can hear

my own heart beating. A fluorescent bulb  
fluoresces in my periphery.

I think of the trumpet player, how she refrained  
from rolling her eyes as the light

I could not contain struck her retinas,  
reassembling a version of itself

and the memory of light at the back  
of her brain, whoever she thought I was,

a biochemical facsimile, an impostor.  
How she refrained from rolling her eyes

as the waves flowed from my mouth  
to sway the fine cells of her inner ear.

I drew a flow diagram to Wichita,  
every arrow pointing to my shoes.

*Amy Scattergood*

Two Poems

THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER

His eyes are pressed to the sea  
like glass against rain,  
narrowed by humility or complex weather.

The wheel of light escorts him  
through his own home, circling  
among tea cups, whisky bottles,  
walls made of dust and kerosene.

Certain wind and birds sound out language.  
The sky is a map of wet paper.

Between fissures in storms  
he builds warmth out of wool and coffee,  
his knuckles breaking like pencils  
against dull, ordinary surfaces.

For bread he has his rolled maps  
and the fork of a compass  
and the knife of an old astrolabe.  
For fifty years the surf has been his breathing.

The moon is his Ulysses,  
traveling back and forth across the sky  
and between stars like islands.

He understands waiting. The winds  
are dogs to comfort him,  
the gulls a radio from distant places.

He knows the ship will come to him

from around the horizon. It will be oak  
 and leather and iron painted  
 by his own light. Only he will see it.  
 Only he can slide it out from the rocks  
 and unveil it to the wind and rescue its sails  
 from the fog that is its own sail.  
 It will be his ship. Ulysses will move away from the sky  
 and the island that is his house  
 will row away in the revolving night.

### KOLGRIM'S SAGA

They knew there was a curse on the land.  
 The fjords were locking up;  
 they could hear the keys turning at night  
 after the wind blew out their seal-oil lamps.  
 The wasting pastures climbed lower  
 into the ground. At Herjolfsnes the sea-water  
 had eroded the old burial mound. After storms  
 they would try and pick up all their ancestors.  
 They kept them in skin bags and on mantelpieces.  
 The earth had frozen into a network of fossils.  
 So when Kolgrim seduced another man's wife by black magic,  
 they decided to burn him. It was the only way  
 to retrieve their sanctity, the nobility that had wandered  
 away with the seals and the schools of fish  
 and the bishop, who had been promised to them  
 twenty-five years ago but who never came.  
 They gathered everything they could find  
 to build the pyre. It had to be a big enough fire  
 to kill Kolgrim and all their sins. They would send crates of the ashes  
 back to the bishop to prove their worthiness.  
 Down at the shore they collected what was left of the driftwood,  
 an assembly of brittle artifacts  
 that had been whittled thin by the violent waves.  
 Then they broke up the boats. The women  
 piled their furniture on the pyre. The children took all their toys  
 and stacked them one on top of each other.  
 In a procession of solemn sacrifices, the village

rebuilt itself on the pile. They took down their houses  
 and reassembled them, they unmoored their last boats from the harbor  
 and crossed their oars like match sticks  
 and brought their whale-bone fences down from the pastures.  
 For days they combed the settlement  
 for every last thing: harpoons and caribou slippers and compasses,  
 pockets of grass and peat from the taken-down roofs.  
 What was left of their animals wandered aimlessly,  
 their fences and shelters and leather harnesses gone  
 to the top of the pyre. They brought Kolgrim  
 and washed his hair in seal-oil.  
 They filled his shoes with it and doused his hands and feet.  
 They wanted to make certain  
 that he would burn through the difficult climate.  
 The fire moved under the low blanketing clouds  
 and threw shadows on the rock pedestals and on the faces  
 of the impassive crowd. Kolgrim stared  
 at nothing in particular as his arms became wicks  
 and the tallow of his skin melted down. After a while  
 the sky was black with soot. Later the town moved away  
 and sat down by a mountain.  
 Because there was no place else to go now.  
 They'd burnt up everything.  
 With no ships to leave in or houses to wait inside  
 or even anything new to burn for light,  
 the villagers contracted and receded like the glacier  
 that had come for them. After the fire died,  
 they grew colder and colder. The punishment  
 overwhelmed the crime until they could not remember  
 exactly who had died or why. It became some legend  
 they muttered about during the unfathomable night  
 as they kneaded the last plants with the ashes and ice  
 and tried to make sparks with little slivers of flint and iron.  
 When no light came they settled down and waited.

## Mark Krausbaar

### LES WAVERLY: SECRETS IN CONVERSATION

Dear Friends,  
Why take my "easy course"? Well,  
Why indeed. Well, too often I  
would find myself "tongue-tied"  
before now. Like you I had quickly  
soon found out where I was surely  
*sinking* in my aim of the future. The  
point being that it was magnified in  
my mind in the fact that I was *frequently*  
*not progressing* in a particular manner.  
Take my easy course, buy my simple  
book or tape for I could go all day  
as I am never "at a loss of words"  
for any longer since discovering it:

- Popularity plus
- Gala functions
- On the phone
- Key phrases
- Punch line
- Find out if they are listening
- Light touch

In my simple book or tape which  
I will pass on cheaply with it I  
give *my personal regards* that  
you could be ugly as a foot  
but they would believe anything  
and you are likewise aimed in  
the road of life by following in the  
superb ways laid down:

- Dig up a sinking conversation
- Breed sincerity
- Light touch

- Ice-breakers
- Listen between the lines
- Business lunch

Therefore, if you ask me, "Les, honestly how do you do it?"  
or, "Les, how may I get ahead or be polished in a gathering?"  
you will either shortly be a shiny example or a  
complete refund.

## Roger Mitchell

### Two Poems

#### BONES OF SMALL CHILDREN

This is the place where all one afternoon  
I watched thousands of grackles pass over.  
It was either just before or just after  
something. I think it was after.  
All afternoon, the grackles clattered  
across the sky, sky the color of all  
that clacking and flapping. Today,  
a man and a woman get out of a car  
and walk down to the shore. Fifty feet,  
no more. They look at the ground  
as they walk, one in front of the other.  
The hill on the other side of the bay  
begins to throw off its leaves.  
It stands quietly while doing this.  
The man looks at the lake; the woman,  
the small stones at her feet. I think  
they say something to one another.  
The day is windless, the sky a blue  
you can't look at without thinking.  
They walk back to the car as though  
manacled. They drive over the stones  
as though over the bones of small children.



## I DON'T KNOW WHERE MY STUDENTS ARE THIS YEAR

I put them in my pocket with a big  
blue cookie last year. Then rolled over on it  
in a dream and crushed the tenure system,  
bones and all. My students started yowling  
like a zoo. The neighbors moved out. It was too  
eventual. So, I passed out the short  
evaluation forms and asked them please think  
of everything the president has done.  
They didn't fall for that one, but fell instead  
for rock and roll, the chance to kerouac  
across the country. Even I drank beer,  
half way up a lifetime on a roof,  
and lay there lapping stars out of a bowl.

I married in a church once, woman not  
my own. The minister was Lutheran.  
Luther was a crank. He came to the wedding  
anyway, griped and moaned about the pope.  
I've heard it all, I said, just wanted then  
to get to Alabama and the ten  
thousand roaches sleeping in the walls,  
a block from the world's largest lot  
of faceless gray stones, what they dragged back  
from Shiloh in the dark.

The night we spent  
in Texas, the coffee shop in Memphis.  
The chance to be together till the end.  
When it starts bleeding like a song, the wind  
behind a billboard, and twenty miles  
of empty on the gauge, it's a southeast  
Nevada, nuclear disaster, mutant  
kind of cactus kind of night. You prickle  
at the drapery shoved across the sky  
and hope to be promoted to a stone.

## Steven Reese

## Two Poems

### THE OBVIOUS GOODS (*for Kelly*)

Snow, at least, has stealth  
to its credit. You wake up and find  
the whole town occupied,  
reinforcements parachuting  
silently down.

But rain like this, you almost have  
to laugh, the glitz and then  
the big drum rolls,  
the overstatement of gutters.  
And the raindrop is no snowflake,  
just the same old tear,  
larger or smaller. No grade-school  
craft class snips out its arabesques  
to tape to the window.

So consider us, here in the bed,  
two bodies  
of water, mostly,  
and hardly subtle: this species  
of naked is jaybird, or buck. What  
can we do but applaud  
the obvious goods, like rain?  
Let's have our kissing mimic its  
blatant patter.

And if I bring out the plain truths  
again, about your beauty,  
about my love, please  
blame it on this good weather,  
this out-loud  
rain, dripping with all  
it can't find better ways to say.

## YOUR TOWN

There's still a river giving back the leap  
of each bridge. And your house, the dried blood  
of its brick. The steel mills stand where they stood  
but they've slipped

their skins and flown to South America  
or the Far East, and town kids roam the hulls  
picking off squirrels. Where winter's dug potholes  
it exca-

vates the roads that rattled your car windows.  
And now it seems there's one old friend's sister  
who's stuck here long enough to have lost her  
mind, but knows

that I'm your son, that I'm living here now,  
that you would help if you knew imposters  
masquerading as her brother whisper  
to her how

she should sell them her property. She knows,  
too, what they're after: the uranium.  
Is Clyde Reese my father? Could I write him?  
So it goes

in the old town, Dad, in the old piss-hole.  
Deliverance is a Lotto-win away,  
we're all sitting on gold if only we  
could shovel

it up somehow. The good days aren't gone, just  
buried, and if you came back, well, who knows?  
For now, beer's the gold and the neon glows  
like a blast

furnace, and they've installed a micro-chip  
in her bridgework for piping-in signals  
at night. There's no work here, but the devil's.  
Can you help?

## *J. Cailin Oakes*

### RUNNING THE BULLS

The secret did not include our mother.  
She had the heart of a bird  
and let us feel it. The weakness there  
was a pinhole of light  
two moths fought to get warm by.

For this, we were not to tell her  
we spent our summers in the bull pasture.  
Understand, we were seven children  
and lonely each to play  
so small a part of the whole.

Some days we fought to be sick  
and alone so she would lie beside us.  
Winters, we jumped from rooftops  
to snowdrifts, praying for just one  
broken arm. Nothing.

Finally, we had to make the bulls  
hate us. When they fell lock-kneed  
into sleep, dumb with the size of themselves,  
we'd thistle-whip some into waking. Sparks  
from their eyes caught, then lit. We ran.

Each angry hoof carried the weight  
of the herd as the earth threw us forward  
fast. Somewhere ahead the fence was beyond  
or under the dust. Behind, their breath,  
frothed and hot on our backs.

Seven more steps: maybe we'd see  
a brother thrown up and over the fence,  
his hair like a banner and his hands  
on his ass; perhaps a sister, clearing it,  
barely. Whatever the end,

Sometimes the bulls began to fight themselves just for the blood of it.

## Two Poems

The stream looked lifeless,  
as if there'd never been fish  
feeding next to a snag, never a snake  
leaving a small wake.

It was all stabbed by autumn's slanted light,  
all the fish-minds stunted,  
an entire season's brilliance of asters and gentian,  
butterflies over the tops of the willows,  
slowly underpowered.

An idleness, a stiffness of shadows  
under the foot bridge  
and where the water bent into the woods.

18

## POETRY



**Martha Silano**

FOR A FRIEND WHO SENDS ME A FLYER ON THE ART  
OF EAR CANDLING AND NEWS HER BOOK HAS ARRIVED

Could it be true? That a hollow taper,  
poised at the edge of an ear, ignited,  
sucks out years of "interesting contents"?  
Drawn by a narcissistic longing to see  
your own wax, would you risk a loss of hearing?  
Swabs, it says, are detrimental, cannot reach  
the depths. "Upon inspection," would the flame extrude,

in the form of mites, your mother the harbinger's *honey*,  
*the belt goes around your waist . . . blue side down*;  
does your father's *yastupiddummydon'tgivemeanyofyourguff*  
swell like fungus the size of a brain coral? What about his  
*don't be talkin*, which lodged itself in a clump so thick  
(in the oval window? in the bony labyrinth?) it echoes  
with every word? What if it *did* loosen (gently,

with crackling, with hissing) every fluid movement,  
every cumulonimbus-shaped incus vibration,  
every ounce of sound within thirty-three years  
of earshot? Could you have it pick and choose?  
Could you rig it, for instance, so it only softens  
the good stuff, the You, Yes, YOU's!? Could you have it  
skip the refusals, the *let's just be friends*,  
Mr. Hoppel's lawnmower drowning out the robins  
at dusk, Bobby Whitman's Chevy the 99 times before  
it turned over? What is wax but food for flame?

And you're waxing, Debi. This is the time  
to pick corn, Whitman's "full-noon trill,"  
the time to let loose amber kernels  
of grief, your time to shine.  
Rolled in your ears the ancient waxing—  
Goddess Diana—rolled in your ears  
what's kept our friendship incandescent

(two cradled receivers, two lobed doubloons).

But "Oy!!!!!!!" your letter cries  
(every bird that sang singing again).  
How you heard stomping, a loud knock,  
then leapt for the door, how your voice gleamed  
over seven machines before it hit you: *this is mine*,  
*this my own*. Book you know like the lines ringing  
your mouth, lines of sound, vibrating bone. How small

the part we see (squiggles and curlicues sway  
where a Q-tip never dreamed). One tube's named  
for Bartolommeo Eustachio; there's a vestibule,  
a stirrup, a drum (the mind flickers with all  
it cannot know); the tragus barely tells  
the prologue . . .

I'm tempted, Debi—tempted to "feel a lightness  
in the head," to use it as an ancient stenographer:  
"to write upon wax laid on boxwood, to form,  
with an iron stylus":

OF COURSE YOUR EARS ARE BURNING!

But what if this candle *did* do damage?  
Turned *rapport* to *purulence*?  
Made what we've pigeon-holed disappear,  
left us with only the *hroo-hroo* of doves?

Notice how this Chris Coopens Coons, Certified  
Candler, makes no reference to sticking or spearing,  
to lancing or drilling, to dirking, plunging, forcing,  
or spiking, but mentions only "receiving" massage,  
"involving" the use of a candle . . .

Nope. We can't risk it. Can't give up  
how we hear a song first (mother, father,  
yellow-rumped warbler . . .), then rout out  
the body. Nor the chance to strain our ears  
for the heart of a baby long before he swims

the canal. Can't risk losing the riff and jam  
of our whole-balla-wax, can't-hold-a-candle-to  
jags, how like two Black Turbans we cling  
to what's shaped up—held by the roar of the sea.

### *Elton Glaser*

#### OSCILLATING FAN

1

Heat rises; cold comes down.

And yet we feel that hell  
Is beneath us, and heaven somewhere  
Above the high ice-crystal of the clouds.

2

Heat rises; cold comes down;  
Humidity

Sticks in the middle  
Where we live,

Air wrapped around us  
Like the black shawl of Sicilian widows,

Or fingers on the windpipe,  
The finishing touch.

3

Heat rises; cold comes down.

With a hitch, a palsy in the pulse,  
The blades  
Snick in a sour circle,  
Bringing to a head  
The dead breath of the day.

4

Heat rises; cold comes down.

Wheel in a wheel in a warm room,  
The fan would  
Scan the wet flesh,  
Skin on skin, and stir  
The white ring from a cigarette,  
Pushing the smoke to a neutral corner.

5

Heat rises, cold comes down,  
But fan can't  
Make up its mind, any minute now

Reversing itself to no end  
In a slow refusal of the absolute.  
Whatever moves us

From east to west in an even sweep  
Comes back again—  
Groan of the ellipse, stalled orbit of the earth,

Eternal return always on the level,  
But never north, and  
Not south, not south, not south.

**Pamela Gross**

**SPREAD WING/RED-SHAFTED FLICKER**

Again and again, they unbind  
their drab robes, spread wide  
the wings' most astonishing  
lust-colored linings. They have fallen  
upon the needles of their own  
sharp cries; that's what all this red  
is about. Or maybe they only  
want us to look beyond the wings' curtained  
windows. To take down from our eyes  
hands pressed so hard  
a false garden explodes  
beneath closed lids. Minium, terra rosa.  
The gnawed earth's names for red,  
laked here in the dark, and wasted  
on the bright, waking world.  
Maybe they urge us to turn  
our palms skyward.  
To receive the untidy communion,  
the questionable gifts of this wholly  
unholy life. To stitch fast  
to our flesh the harsh,  
delicious itch that reminds  
each penitent there is something  
worth repenting: a garment, hidden,  
dyed gaudy. Stained  
the same startling stammel-shade  
of these wings' undersides,  
raised, all morning long,  
in their ongoing praise.

**Preston Merchant**

**DEMONA, DAUGHTER OF THE LIGHTNING**

This is no illusion—not flashpots at the stage edge,  
rumbling sheets of tin, and two boys with hand-pumps.  
There are no gods, no hypnotists. No one is pulling  
levers behind a curtain. There is only  
the sound of my voice  
calling the storms, and they come, furiously.

The show travels, and the other acts are popular  
but faked: "Dawn in Roseland" with girls as flowers  
unfolding in the rising sun—cardboard on a wire.  
"The Banquet of the Mermaids" with fans blowing  
crepe paper seaweed.  
The other women do not understand me.

Men pay to see me. Some were told by their wives to go  
to hell, though I do not offer punishment  
but mystery. My father was a god, my mother  
a sulfuric acid bath. My resistance  
to the men's eyes heats  
the room. I am power. Measure me in ohms.

When I start, the tent shudders in the wind, and my eyes  
glow white, my arms and legs now electrified.  
Let no one dare to touch me—my fingertip could kill.  
My stomach is a turbine as I'm dancing  
in a rush of rain.  
Within me and without, I conjure storms.



DEATHS

*after Pedro Salinas*

Memories of me will be stripped from you  
like petals before winter.  
First, it will be my footsteps.  
I will go to where you sit in the park  
but you will not look up.  
Standing before you, my body  
will cast a shadow on your paper.  
You will not look up. Already  
already you will not know that it is me.

Next, you will forget my voice,  
and the sound of my breath as I sleep.  
My greeting on the phone will earn:  
*Who is it?* My cough on a crowded train  
will not swivel your head.

Your nose will empty of my musk.  
Your hand will lose my fit,  
and my freckles will bleach from my arms.  
My scalp will unclench my hair.  
Then my flesh will fall from my bones,  
even what we did, how you held me  
in the fields of mustard grass outside Rouen.

Finally, all that remains will be the letters  
of my name. I will live in them  
frantically, those spider figures.  
And only in your saying them will I exist.

Then you will cease to say my name.  
The letters will not meet on your tongue.  
They will go by as strangers on street signs;  
the letters will flare, neon scribbles, outside

cafes; the letters will go by on envelopes  
spelling names that aren't mine.  
And there I will be, unraveled.  
What is left,  
what used to be me,  
the scrawl of spider figures,  
will then ascend  
into some absurd  
heaven, in the abstract  
glory  
of the alphabet.

ASKED FOR A HAPPY MEMORY OF HER FATHER,  
A DAUGHTER REMEMBERS WRIGLEY FIELD

His drinking was different in sunshine, as if  
it couldn't be bad. Sudden, manic, he swung  
into a laugh, bought me two ice creams, said,  
*One for each hand.* Half the hot game I licked  
Good Humor running down wrists.

My bird-mother  
earlier, packing my pockets with sun block,  
had hopped her warning: *Be careful.*

I held  
his Old Style in both hands, pinned between  
his knees; he streaked the cream on my cheeks  
and slurred, *My little Indian princess.*

Home run:  
the hairy necks of men in front jumped up,  
thighs torn from gummy green bleachers to join  
the violent scramble. Father held me close  
and said, *Be careful,*

*be careful.* What did I know  
of the need for care, with his thick arms  
circling my shoulders, with a high smiling sun,  
like a home run, in the upper right-hand corner  
of the sky?

STAMMER

One by one I lift them to the mouth, the tongue  
entwining them,  
the five smooth pebbles.

Speak now, speak now, say again.

Let the tongue know its place. This will,  
according to Herodotus,  
effect the cure for stammer.

Tongue contra world. Argot and glottal.

And memory, embabeled memory, is here  
as well.  
The speech correction teacher Mrs. N.

looming back to me this morning as my neighbor  
in black Spandex cranks her Motown  
up to ten, sunshine on a cloudy  
day, in her yard as she lifts her hi-tech bow, and then  
the target  
bristling arrows. Memory  
of the tongue depressor, then its burrow  
toward the tonsils. AH AH AH E E E,  
good David good David good. Stereo  
even louder now,  
Tempts, Four Tops  
and Miracles, Cloud Nine Standing in the Shadows

of Love. *Talk when I say you can talk.*  
Barnyard David barnyard.  
Bright grail

of R. Ruth rang Randy rarely. *Stop.*

Rarely randy rang. Rarely. Rarely. The stalled  
train of the tongue, steaming

engine. Engine on the railroad on the winter trestle

stalled. But then the grind and hiss and whistling.  
I am speaking now I have permission.

Heat Wave, bull's eye all the arrows bristle,

and she nods to herself. The tongue  
set free, the pebbles spit down.

Speak now speak now again again.

GALLERY IX: A CARVED BONE RING OF CORMORANTS

(Edo Period, 1650)

Under hard yellow light, under glass ablaze  
and magnified, shaped and braided into wands,

how calm this surface, drilled and shuffled  
into clarity. Yet even clear looks deceive:

this ripple of incision, these hieroglyphs  
delicate as wing-beat strokes on snow,

represent instead the word erased, the word  
made flesh. Look closer and you see

the real text—a flock of twenty cormorants,  
bills linked and circling the hollow bone,

intricate as Kufic script, each one  
individual, each hooked bill, each poised

webbed foot, paint-trace and lacquer  
forming ebony unblinking eyes, crest and feather,

"no bird larger than one sixty-fourth  
of an inch." As if beyond them lay

the untroubled waters of a moonless night,  
the wind-bent reeds and pleasure boats,

paper lanterns, the ectoplasmic silk  
kimonos of the lords and ladies of the Edo court.

But you have read this carelessly. You must look closer,  
read nuance, context, circles within circles: for carved

into every tiny snaking neck's a ring, and though  
this ring would fit perfectly your lover's finger,

coolly phosphorescent as it strokes your own,  
it is not made for the human hand, but carved

for the cormorant fishermen, to tightly slide  
half way down a cormorant's neck, and to this collar

a leash is attached, so the cormorant becomes  
a kind of predatory, living kite, pulled back

to its master with a glistening fish  
it cannot swallow. You must think

of Basho's haiku, "Interesting at first,  
then sad,/ watching the cormorant-fishing."

Nuance, context, circles within circles:  
The sun has left you, the sky is choked with stars.

The night-fishing bird alights, slack leash  
pulled taut by the fisherman's hands. My Lords,

my ladies, you are watching from the riverbank,  
as is the custom on these moonless nights.

You will see me hurl my cormorant, hear wingbeat  
and the sharp water-slap as prey is found.

You will, of course, applaud this moment's  
evanescent majesty. O distant just Lord,

I will circle and return to you, my neck snapped back,  
dark water and the twitch of silver in my mouth.

### *Tiffany Midge*

#### THE WOMAN WHO MARRIED A BEAR

She had a lover whose eyes were shiny blue hooks  
luring her heart into the marsh of his body.  
Then dragging her out again like a prize,  
a captive of his scars, his mother's blood.

She wintered on berries and thin plums,  
drank from a broth of maples and spruce,  
strung nets to snare brown mice and snakes.  
While her lover groaned and slept.

She had a love whose fingers spun sticky webs.  
Who wove her nerves around his throat like pearls—  
a necklace of fat spiders and grubs,  
moth wings fluttering against his skin.

Mornings she melted butter and grease  
in a black skillet over low flames.  
She gutted fish and scrubbed the flesh  
dangling from the bones like husks of fruit.  
Her lover rubbed against the current of her hips,



howled in gratitude and ate.

She had a lover whose voice pulled at the cords  
coiled along her spine like a harp.  
Whose dreaming hands arranged the black  
veil of her hair until it shimmered with music.  
Each strand a tiny river of sound  
combed between his claws.

She scraped the rinds of green melons.  
Crushed into pulp, pine needles and veined leaves.  
Lit a fire to simmer the reeds and stems of summer grass.  
Then braided a rug of feathers and straw  
for her lover to rest on while he smoked.

She had a lover who spooned her body at night.  
Who drank from the full cups of her breasts.  
Who hungered for her shoulders, her mouth, her belly.  
Who fed on the pounding in her chest.

## *Jesse Lee Kercheval*

## Four Poems

### PICTURE WITH NO FRAME

In my hands, a hospital ship,  
the one my mother spent the war on,  
sailing soldiers home from Germany  
who were lost in spite of being found,  
who screamed into the night  
that the needles were the enemy  
or that they and they alone  
bore gifts home from the gods.  
If I tilt my hand, the ship  
seems close to sinking,

but it didn't on my mother's watch,  
so for her, I hold it steady,  
make my hand into an engine  
with the power to cross an ocean.  
Inside, where I can't see them,  
are the crew, the people  
who transform this ship,  
this train across the water,  
into a moving intricate hotel  
where my mother loved her friends,

played piano and endless  
games of pinochle, was happier  
than she would ever be again.  
So this is that I say—  
if this is just a picture,  
then life is but a comic strip,  
a catalogue of nothing.  
My mother is on board this ship,  
there, where tomorrow  
is mysterious and wherever  
she is headed, she has not arrived.

14 METAPHORS FOR SEX (THE SEX THAT WE'RE NOT  
HAVING)

The Piano. Did you ever learn to play it?

Galleries and exhibitions. Monet bathed in moonlight. Sculptures with large, interlocking pieces.

How about a visit to a freak show? See the man who hammers nails right up his nose with a Kennedy half-dollar. Is it the lure of entanglement that persuades us? Or dissuades us?

Probably it's just plain fear. What if we play the game and are beaten? In the last moments of the match, a single goal. 2-0, Brazil still loses.

Why not try a better ending? A school bus full of choir boys, driving fast toward heavenly perfection. Round dunes, a water fountain. Oil, drop by precious drop.

A woman named Doomed Pursuit. A man named Debutant. This isn't working.

Gone the marabou, the fishnet, the tarty tricks of last year. This year's all stainless steel or is it flat rolled carbon? Neck-high, rust resistant, totally non-oxidizing, a look that says—*invade and you'll be sorry*.

Relax. Think cool tomatoes. Shadows down below, and quick the sliding door. It's really much like caring.

Archipelagoes and men who fish. Rivers full of eels. Sheet rock, joists, bits of putty. If we do it this way, we might as well be married.

Think Paris for the weekend. This year, it's Modern Languages, but I really don't know German. In the war, they said. That's where he really lost it.

If I never use the word, will you please fuck me?

Fruit flies and forbidden fruit. (I love you, say good night.)

THERE ARE SECRETS I CAN'T KEEP

You are one of them.  
My words circus monkeys  
who climb the chain link fence,  
scatter to escape.  
This time, our letter says,  
you're in Italy.  
Eating octopus, boiled pink  
and lovely as a rose.

But always you are somewhere.  
Our time as comrades  
as bound by circumstance  
as soldiers fighting,  
say, the Japanese.  
When we meet, we play at war,  
our official business,  
but it's love, goddamnit,  
that slams us to the floor.

And each time, returning  
from such war to the ordinary  
takes a kind of surgery  
done without a knife,  
without the aid of nurses  
in their kindly whites.  
Goodbye, my love, I say  
stepping off my plane,  
blinking in the old domestic light—

becoming once again  
a woman with a baby carriage  
in her garage, popsicles  
in five fruit flavors  
in the freezer of her fridge,  
who could, without a thought,  
have her only male cat fixed.  
*On Friday*, you write,  
I am going to Assisi. For lunch

*had crustini and porcini.*  
At noon, what I eat are shoes,  
what I drink is raw regret.  
If that woman continues  
*to go on like that*, I say  
as if it's someone else  
who's crying, *I may*  
*have to leave the room.*

## LIFE ON OTHER PLANETS

I remember falling down  
the basement stairs. See the scars?  
My mother saying be careful  
of small dogs,  
as if there were still room  
to borrow trouble.  
The view through  
the screen door, winding lane  
and spinning hubcaps.  
In our living room, lived  
only the piano.

I learned to rub  
my hands along its curves  
as if it were my body,  
flatten keys to make  
the most dissonant of chords,  
the very sound that brought you  
out of the city,  
out of life on a street  
I could not imagine.  
You, the very thing  
my mother feared too much  
to even mention.

You *were* sex,  
and it was sex that saved me.  
Like a fast car

I drove out of my childhood.  
Like a rocket  
I took to leave the planet  
I was born on, frozen world  
where no one ever  
touched me. And you ask  
if I regret it?  
See the earth below us,  
cold blue marble—  
the past is nothing  
but a bed I used to sleep in,  
little and alone.  
In space, my fallen angel,  
gravity is you.

## *Peter Cooley*

## MONUMENTS

Now, in my car, I am come to one  
of the holy places: it is this tiny,  
the moment in time beside my son,  
ten years old this morning, riding beside me,  
his day at camp minutes away. For now,  
there is the music of his voice, off-key  
accompanying my own to the car radio  
blaring Country and Western. How soon I see  
on the wind which carries this music and this car,  
this season, this city, this country, this planet,  
he will begin to leave me as my parents  
aging quickly now are leaving me this summer  
faster and faster. Moving, I say, I see it on the air.  
All things in their permanence are still, written here.



BORDER WARS

ENDLESS JUNCTURE

One night I woke borderless.  
I writhed and turned,  
hoping to wrap the white sheet  
into form, into body.  
But there was only stillness  
of the less-than-there:  
vapor trail, unplayed air.

METEMPSYCHOSIS

In thick sacks in the hospital lab  
the amputated limbs lay stacked.  
Would you care to save the limb  
*for burial?* the amputees were asked.  
I stood by while my grandmother  
said her dancing days were over.  
The doctor stared at arms and legs  
cut off, dancing into dust.

TRANSMOGRIFIED PAIN

To prove that my heart  
did not ache, was impervious  
to whatever pain he might try  
to inflict, I unbuttoned my dress,  
opened my breast, lifted out  
my heart and held it in the flame  
of the candle between us.  
*You're bloodless* he murmured.  
I slid the heart back,  
stitched the skin back up  
finely as linen and spat: bad luck

to sew upon oneself. The candle  
and his wonder hissed.

THE GODDESS OF CARPE DIEM

People die in their beds,  
in water or air, under ground,  
in the street. So why not covet joy:  
full-bodied fruit, full-bodied light  
touching the least-bodied insect or plant  
cavorting with the wind, never thinking  
*Something is going to happen*  
or *This is bound to end.*

ARCHAIC REMNANTS

My mother kept the compact  
high on the bathroom shelf,  
its mirror cloudy with time and powder.  
I crept in to open it, watch  
the apple trees at the window  
tilt and vanish, reappear.  
My own face came to me in pieces.

THE FRAGMENT

The snake coiled, tail in mouth,  
on the warm stone.  
I was not frightened.  
I felt pity, a need to cry out.  
My mouth was not my own.

NO EXIT

I kept all the keys in a tin.  
One by one they enter me: keys:  
the room where my mother wept,  
the attic where spiders fattened,  
the cellar where my father slept,

bed where I keep opening.  
I pass through borders at will.  
And when people ask *Who are you?*  
I open the tin,  
I let them choose.

#### THE OLDER STUDENT'S STORY

In the war, he tended the wounded. He saw bodies torn open like packages from home. Sometimes he dreams about it, but he's not one of the ones who came home to wash his hands over and over. It was never on his mind like a woman he'd had and had to keep having, just to prove something—no, he wasn't wounded. But some of the wounds he saw were bad, bad, worse than the worst things in movies. They could have won the war if they'd gone all out, but instead the government let them get blown to bits like packages from home. He keeps coming back to that because one day, one of the last on his tour, he tended a boy whose wounds were crawling with ants, like somebody had left a box of sweets out in the open. Before he could get all the ants out, the boy died. He hardly thinks about it now. If he decided to write about O'Brien's "How To Tell a True War Story" for his essay, would it be okay to include his own experience? Or should he stick to the text?

#### MEDITATION INTERRUPTED BY BATS

No one knew how it happened, but one day the soul disappeared like a rumor. Only the poet was terrified enough to search for it. Standing on the back porch every night while the stars went on and the wind, the wind, what language was this, just on the edge of coherence. And inklike streaks overhead—bats, which were not dark souls, as the ignorant once believed. No, only think of that Nature special, the woman whose pet bat, hanging asleep from her collar, came to and crawled inside her blouse as she looked into the camera saying *People spread all these rumors....*

But we were on the back porch in search of the soul, rumored to be no more than rumor. Should we go down the steps, walk under the pines,

murmuring as if at any moment we might begin to speak in tongues and prove the soul is real?—How cool the nights grow. We should go back in for a sweater. Maybe finish the letter we've been writing for years, the one where we explain betrayal as survival. For who among us is not guilty? If the soul is real, it's probably small, dark, batlike; and like the bat capable of hanging for hours unobserved.

In the next part of the special on bats, the basso voice told of bats that live in dormant volcanoes. Then two bold men descended with sturdy rope to observe multitudes of bats, shrieking and swooping and generating such terrible heat that no one watching could not think of Hell. But Hell might also be a rumor. In the letter we've been writing, there is no way of naming the moment of betrayal. It seemed more a sensation than an act of will. Like fabric pulling apart. Or skin. At the part of the back just beyond reach. Where wings would start, if we had them.

## Albert Goldbarth

### THE MESSENGER

*Dickens gathered a handful of the loose leaves spread  
cross the desk, and began to read. Inspector Field  
followed suit. Not wishing to seem unobservant, I  
did so as well.*

— William J. Palmer

I didn't *want* to hurt the boy, my age, my own  
nefarious innocent tousle-headed eight years.  
I didn't want to, but I packed a stone,  
about the size of a peach pit, in a grab of snow  
tamped halfway into ice, and pitched it  
—deficiently off-target by many degrees, I'd say  
in my partial defense—along with the others.  
That was the key: *the others*. "I did so as well,

not wishing to seem [*you can fill in the blank*]."  
And he?—was one, in a circle of six or seven of us.  
And we?—were something like a séance or a ring of coral,  
that was the point, the whole point: being part  
of what was larger. When he fled,  
in a slippery dip below Woczek's inadequate arms,  
we simply turned our rifle on ourselves, and in that  
wintery melee I lost a mitten. That night,

the one remaining glowed in its dampness  
ethereally in a silvery wash of moonlight  
on my wobbly bedside table: as its icy stiffness  
melted, the insensate thing I'd been  
that afternoon began to melt too: I was lost  
in sleepless self-examination, in exactly what  
community deflects us from: the solitary  
sifting-ever-in: it's what I'm doing now,

in writing this: and you, in reading; what the page  
allows, that a computer network's infiltrative,  
outreach sensibility does not.  
Since then, I've gladly and repeatedly immersed myself

in crowd-think, in the cellular belonging-to-a-body  
I call "throngitude"—to *not* at times  
would be inhuman. Dolphins: a pod. Quail: a covey.  
Cats: a clowder. Bees: a swarm. These names

for likened multiples delight us:  
a pride of lions, a murder of crows, a leap of leopards.  
(Wild felines—tigers, lions—rub against each other  
daylong, that the odor of their particular group becomes  
I.D.). Of humans: a huddle; a 'hood; a POW camp;  
a parish; an orgy; a phone-a-thon; a hobo jungle;  
a romp; a skirmish; a 12-step program;  
a bogged-down, frown-faced, blusterful committee. Even

here, however, individuation can't be stayed;  
and when the whole tent falls to its 2,000 knees,  
in atremble devotion, *someone* will be doubtful.  
John writes: "I always love those pictures of the bull  
jumping out of the bullring: the people in the stands  
have such interesting looks on their faces, ranging  
from terror to astonishment to complete oblivion." Not  
to mention the matador's suddenly wilted élan. Nine

hundred (anyway, that's the feeling) guys  
at the stage of the topless bar, and one  
artiste with the one glitzed strip of cloth the law demands,  
in her circle of pink light: Tara: I buy her a drink.  
"You think I mess men's brains around? My *sister's*  
a neurosurgeon." I imagine *her* great auteur capability  
and loneliness, as a dozen attendant nurses moil  
like water around a rock. Somewhere someone

is always aloof from the flow. A *circa* 1855  
folk painting that I like consists of a goofily portly,  
stylized angel overhead—in search of some person  
to change, by its disturbing intervention. There isn't an element  
of this scene with correspondence in the lives  
of us who view it; even the cloudbanks are an impossible sweetcream  
paradigm. And the angel: so replete with its wisdoms!  
—one blue mitten adrift in the sky.



# HOW WE SPENT OUR TIME ON THE PLANET

In between grieving and falling in love  
 there were hours, whole months kill,  
 testing our weight on ice we knew was thin  
 but not that thin, stuffing our pockets  
 with pinecones, wondering how the cat  
 would look viewed through the holes  
 in a crumpet. We dedicated a certain portion  
 of our lives to sliding our feet into other  
 people's mukluks, to seeing how long  
 we could balance a book on our heads  
 or how loud we could whistle. Not  
 that we ever imagined anything would come  
 of it. No, we knew we'd evolved, elbowed  
 our way out of that sea where bubbles  
 get blown just for the fun of it, stopped chasing  
 each other up trees and shocking the jungle  
 with meaningless laughter. We had a few  
 good ideas about time — witness the scorn  
 some of us held for those counting angels  
 on pins, playing games with hybrid peas  
 while the rest of us worked hard:  
 scrubbing linoleum, spit-shining chrome,  
 trading in futures or trying to divine  
 what rhymed with purple. We weren't interested  
 in what didn't get results (though we'll admit  
 we walked around on beaches, got drunk,  
 looked at stars), and so, now, here we are:  
 hanging around on a cloud bank and imagining  
 just how sorry certain people must be  
 that they don't have us to kick around  
 anymore, huddled together now down there  
 and trying, for the very first time in their lives,  
 to deserve us: miraculous creatures  
 they should have never doubted us to be.

# THE GEOGRAPHERS HAVE LOST THEIR WAY

Tiny in hardhats against the cliff's sheer face,  
 they spread out maps and kneel together  
 on the canyon floor. They can't agree on substance,  
 can't give the mound of rock they've crouched upon  
 a name, adamant as cranium, cupping  
 the natural curve of the earth.

Since daylight's all at once at closure, a martin sails  
 over the basin of relative dusk toward home.  
 They pause in their study to chart its coordinates,  
 points that diminish in ellipses  
 as it wings itself further and further away.  
 The chart's of little use since the figures of the landscape  
 keep changing, and though the map hurries  
 to represent rivers that yawn into seas,  
 mountains that evaporate and reappear as rain,  
 there's a certain delay. Light moves so slowly  
 here, takes millions of years to convey old news  
 from the nearest galaxy's nearest star. It's hard  
 to explore when the mind keeps changing  
 its mind about crevasses, abandons itself  
 among scrub brush, takes itself off to another place.

The geographers return as second thoughts. The moment  
 they know where they are, they are gone again, helmets winking  
 in the spray near waterfalls, tracking the eye  
 to a vanishing point in the aether that seems stray.

One of them pauses to wonder if *they* are the problem  
 with distance, negotiating by starlight,  
 making shady deals with heavens and expecting what's been put  
 somewhere to stay — but for now their first concern  
 will be the spot they're standing on,  
 and whether or not they'll locate themselves  
 in this watercourse of criss-crossing streams,  
 this microscopic seam in the twilight: teeming, prolific,  
 untameable empty space.

## FIRST SIGHT

It's out in the garden, the body  
of belief, picking the answers  
to its questions. Barefoot  
through bee-teeming rows  
of delphinium stalks, metronomes  
clocking the delicate breezes, it keeps  
nothing back, tells you everything  
it knows: dizzying bluebells,  
puerile dirt, a pulse of rose  
flushed under the wrist. Your heart lifts  
like a leaf. Aphids flit for the pleats  
in the peony, restructure dust to the motes  
of known flight. Out in the heat,  
the body drones, drowns half way through  
its story, sweetens its memory  
with clover. For no reason, it laughs  
aloud. It says, whatever ails you,  
it's love, says it was thistle-grass  
scratching your ankle, says the lilacs  
are the color of lilacs and blood  
is part salt. It doesn't care  
what happens, and light glances  
off the greenhouse and the green scent  
of the garden is ancient, already  
condemned. This is one-sided  
dialogue: the foxglove's pollen-coated  
throat mused into a paw, insects sown  
wide, live as the grass. The body listing  
through the morning doesn't listen.  
How soft they feel, young raspberry  
leaves stained with the blush  
of crushed fruit. There's the rasp  
of the wasp in the thicket:  
damn the alleles  
of these suppliant days,  
wrong from the first sight,  
bright hum and quickening.

## CONSOLATIO

In the end they were left with nothing  
but God. He lay like a bottomfish  
in still water, not moving a fin.  
It was as if all rooms conspired  
to miraculous vacancy: centuries connected  
by corridors, endlessly corrugated,  
the echoes resounding at the doorsills,  
*Leaving so soon?* Everything wanted  
to say nothing in particular, petroglyphs  
of every eye, this divided eye, sightless  
representative. They shielded  
their brows from what brightness  
they could continue to imagine.  
Light blew over the earth.  
Atomic weights regained their prominence.  
Relativity flickered against cave walls.  
Their shoes were rocks, not dancing,  
not shining. *No moon tonight,*  
they might have said, as if to say  
that every moon was new, not the same  
old stone, its loyalties all given over  
to gravity. Over the waters light arrived,  
kept arriving. They said, God, meaning,  
we are tired or disgusted, meaning,  
at the same time,  
what on earth are we to do?

## About Our Contributors

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## WE NEED YOUR HELP

*Poetry Northwest* is in its thirty-sixth 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.

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David Wagoner  
Editor



