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The background of the cover is a photograph of a large, dark, angular rock formation jutting out of a body of water. The rock has a rough, textured surface and a circular hole or opening near the top. The water is dark and reflects the rock. In the upper right corner, there is a white rectangular box containing the journal's title and subtitle.

Poetry

NORTHWEST

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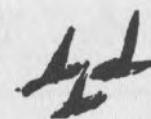
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POETRY NORTHWEST



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POETRY NORTHWEST

SPRING 1995

Cathleen Calbert

Two Poems

A LADY WITH A POMERANIAN

I would like to go home.
But I have no home.
I would like to call my husband.
But I have no husband.

I would like to be distracted
by my two cute though time-consuming children,
but I have no children,
and I am not distracted.

I would like to call my dog
to my side. I have a dog,
but he is very small, and has
his own problems to deal with.

I would like to call my good friends,
so I call my good friends, and they are
kind for an hour, over the phone,
but they all live away,

women alone in their own lives,
existences face-to-face, elemental, sexless,

or they're seeing married men
who say they adore them—*j'adore, j'adore.*

And anyway these friends say such deep things,
like, "We are a living history." How will it read?
*During this time, women lived their lives alone,
roaming the countryside, itinerant and testy.*

I'd like to have young men
admire me or even see me
as I promenade along the avenue,
a woman of a certain age, a lady with a Pomeranian.

I would like to know I am now and will remain free
of facial tics and uncontrollable gesturing.

I'd like to know I won't always live alone,
or simply that someone, sometime, somewhere
will once again have sex with me.

I'd like to know I'm not currently dying of anything.

I would like to have money.
It makes things so easy.

I'd like to know how I ended up in this city.

I mean, without having to re-read
Items One through Ten
on the "List Explaining All Things."

Surely there are signs revealed to me?
To wit: a bird flew in my window
and out again unharmed by anything.
Meaning!

I found a playing card in the street:
a Queen of Hearts!
More meaning!

My brother's house in the hills
did not go up in flames
though twenty others did.
My family lives!

Though my father's dead...
But he was mean! So you see...
It could all add up to something.

I live on Benefit Street, close to Hope,
Angell, Benevolent, Mercy.
You see what I mean. Poe's fiancée
lived two doors down from me.

(Though they never married.)
(Because of his debauchery.)
(And anyway the engagement maybe
never meant much of anything.)

I would like to read more
because it would be good for me,
professionally. I mean,

so I could know more at parties,
if I should be invited to parties,
but I have a siren couch and cable TV,

and it's too easy,
or I'm too easy,
or life is too hard.

I would like to pray to God to comfort me,
but there is no God.

Or if there is a God,
he or she can't intervene,
for prayers should not, cannot, spare me
when all of us can't get off Scot-free.
I would like to go to church despite these beliefs

and meet some nice men, but I never know when
and likely would not rise in time.

I'd like to know how my friends live
without meaning. I ask them,
but they don't explain effectively,

and tease me for needing Divine Revelation,
an actual sign-on-the-dotted-line kind of thing,
no vague hints or whisperings.

I would like the world suffused with meaning,
a patchwork quilt of God's responsibility,
heavenly immanence apparent in everything,
all blessed or damned, like how it used to be

teaching nineteenth century novels to undergrads,
everything adding up to something:
foreshadowing, symbols, plot, theme.

I'd like to get over my Spiritual Crisis.

I would like at least to finish unpacking
and figure out about these curtains
and how to make these floors look clean
(shouldn't a woman know such things?)

and find off-street parking
so I can stop dreaming dreams
of the dread Denver Boot
told of so convincingly
on the red violations I keep receiving,

so maybe I'd quit wanting to go home,
to my husband, who waits for me anxiously,
in heaven, I guess, or would if there were,
but there's not, so... Where is he?

Where am I, he must be thinking.

He's sick with worry.
He always wants to take care of me!
The porch light is on, dinner awaiting,
and I would call, but it's late,

I'm too late, and there is only this
life that somewhere along the line
with my own God-given free will—
let's deny destiny—I must have chosen.

MY SUMMER AS A BRIDE

"Is this your first time?"
She's actually asking this,
and asking this of me,
which is pretty surprising,

though I see what she's thinking,
I see what I'm doing. I'm trying
on wedding dresses, all traditional
in silhouette and sensibility.

It's a veritable garden
of crystal, gold, and pearl,
a designer's vocabulary of laces:
Venise, Alençon, Schiffli.

I'm hooking myself
into a full-skirted ballerina,
scalloped sweetheart neckline,
hand-beaded and sequined,

and a multi-layered, hand-sewn,
cathedral-length train of tulle,
to be carried, as I gather,
by a whole fleet of fairies,

shining white satin rosettes

lining the flattering, basque-waisted bodice, the delicate pearl-drop dusters.

A pearled-lace tiara is even propped atop my silly head. Then a pale pink silk hat with matching satin roses instead

as she's lacing me into a shape-defining sheath, gently pulling my resisting fingers into gloves of hand-knitted silken mesh.

Thousands of worms have died for this. The blessings of the sea plumbed, countless oyster beds plundered, and weary women even more wearied

as all have labored to create this creation, to conspire in my transformation into one of the white witches

beaming from the glossy photos of bridal monthlies, the lucky grooms mere tuxedoed shadows at the edges of the pages.

There is no room for them. They have no say in this. The women stand alone, their lips in Mona Lisas,

lost in their own feminine contemplation of this, la pièce de résistance, the glory of their final coronation.

Or is it a private rite of initiation into the secrets

of wifery, the patterning of a lady's days:

how to keep the silverware shining, a husband rolling in money, lovers and children both devoted quietly.

Oh, either way, surely it's power, it's victory. The women in white are at the center of everything, the universe itself offering up

its bounty to the bride, all because a man, now discreetly receding to the margins of a ladies' magazine, has

agreed to get himself married, to take unto himself a wife, a second self, a better half, a helpmate, a bride. And I

feel silk stockings smoothing up my thighs, white silk roses sewing themselves in my underthings with gossamer-thin silver needles,

a beautiful bouquet blooming over the golden mound of my bridal hair now maidenly shielded from the eyes of all but the man I will marry.

"Yes, the first time, the first time," I answer breathlessly. I can't help it. It's white magic. I'm lost in my own reflection.

My arms are laden with ivory roses, locks roll themselves into gold ringlets as if I were the princess

daughter of old King Midas,

white diamonds of the first water
drop from my pearly lobes, and I
am smiling that smile of mystery,
past lovers fading away into dim

memories, then impossibilities
as I feel the silken honey,
my hymen beginning again to gleam,
a glistening, wet web of virginity

as I move forward toward
my husband-to-be, a man
who has decided to marry,
and, mysteriously, to marry me.

Stephen Robert Gibson

Two Poems

THE WAITING

We watch these men pull out of their underground
Garages and punch the steering wheels
When lights go red before them and they are
Furious with this
Delay believing that their law firm or insurance
Agency or government
Should move them unconditionally
Through the evening crowd of people like us
Who stand under the awnings of used bookstores
To keep out of the rain in this first hour of neon
As it reflects across the covers of books
And magazines while offices empty and windows begin
Explaining how they color our eyes with what's not there
Like these ugly expensive women's shoes or travel
Posters insinuating what fun we should be enjoying in
The thinly lacquered grandeur of tropical beaches very

Very far from here where we stare in expectation of a
Silence that will arrive like Independence over
These flagpoles and rooftop ventilators
And our upwards pointed faces at rush hour's end
When the thinking clouds come on bringing with them
The real darkness which is our own

DISAPPEARING BY THE CAPE FEAR

That night we drank beer from cans on the balcony
Of this two-story motel and of course there was neon
Reflecting up from the wet streets of the off season
From the restaurants and clubs and the docked boats
That swayed like shadows in the harbor by McDonald's
And she and I had our legs up on the railing touching
When the lighthouse lights became apparent
Sweeping across the inlet waters during those
The last few moments we had left of sunset
And then the stars came out so quickly it was almost
As if their meanings would get lost inside our bodies
Like those dark barges on the night river that were
Gone when morning came to us from outside our room's
Thick curtains and we never spoke of that silence
Again not even to each other on the road

POND SNAKES

The pond snakes
black and bent
as drowned branches
down in the ooze
where you don't
dare step
sleep on a treasure
nest of pearlies
boulders and catseyes
penknives and
children's
bones. You know
how you can't swim
on a sandwich
because the cramp
waits to snap
up your belly—
the pond snake
waits that way.
Snakes and planets
follow rules of circling
same as Holsteins
in the barn or
gravensteins
blushing the tree. Laws
for motion,
laws for hovering
in space
coiled as breath: Muscle
caresses its groove
into bone
white on white.

EMILY'S ROOM

For a life tucked and buttoned
into so white a dress
I confess a longing. For high
windows and beyond them
a milking shed, a hemlock
hedge, a road curving
into the curve of earth. White
kid shoes that won't approach
the gate. Nights framed
by such a narrow bed.
There were more stars
in her day, they pressed
against the glass. Lonely?
Heliotrope and humble
bees hymning in season. All
winter the twenty-eight
faces of the moon.

Until beauty
arranges the few familiar
objects. Lamp and ink,
vellum, needle, thread.
Until one basket gives
and takes the breadth
of everything. The sun
rising and setting in hemlock
hedges, each leaf in place
the way god knows his world.
All winter the annihilating
snow. Lonely? Which of us
is not? When such a spark
takes hold, how better give it
voice than to button the body
in white and burn
—the candle of desire.

William Johnson

A PULLING

for the Katiches

Under a brittle ice-ringed moon
he clutches the jeep through snow,
searching for a bloated bellowing cow
who'd strayed so far the wind
mingled its moan with her cry,
whose calf if it were born
at all would freeze
the second it hit the air,
even before she could lick back
her steaming caul.

Late February, twenty below,
Sugarloaf a cracked skull
when he finds her, ropes her
to the jeep and slowly crawls
up the road to the barn.

In the stall, beneath a sputtering
low-hung bulb his wife
kneels beside him, the Holstein
like a stuffed overturned sofa moaning
as he rolls up his sleeve,
wraps a chain in his fist and plunges
arm-deep in her uterus
to grope for a tiny hoof.

He grunts, she triggers the ratchet,
the chain jumps taut
as it hums and the calf comes
motionless, still and blue,
eyes like bootpocks in snow.

And we leave them there, the man
trudging a snow-skiffed pen

through the herd to search for a calf
who can suck so her hemorrhaging
stops, the woman straddling
her flank, whispering
as she strains to stand.

And the moon above them haloed
by the link of a chain
that tugs toward daylight
and one more search in the snow
for the dead or the living,
those still waiting to be born.

Molly Tenenbaum

MY LOST APOSTROPHES

Oh you specks, fine spice. You're ripe
grain waving awns for graze,
you're flags of thirty-second notes
flipping fast, you're mockery's
grafitti-brush mustache, you're bad taste's
insistent belly-poke. You're eyebrows raised.
You're the cough after a bad joke.

You're a carob pod, rattled. You're a mule's
jawbone, hoedown time
your fiddlesticks don't let up, you're my last
y's descender, and the trim
on my crossed T. When time has gritted
stone, you're 'tone, you're a bell's
clapper, you're its staving rim,
you're its ring, hill-kissed, the cling
of the ringing's final wave.

Once I pressed you like a tack
to new plaster. Now tacks fall, I'm duff,

I'm frangent wall. With you, there go
friend and *necessary*, all my old mnemonic tricks—
friend ends, necessary's a princess.
Pepper, you're cracked.

There goes the page's navigation,
what to count, the dark or white.
I ride spaces down
that ravel like rivers, strands
that plait the page with light.

Its' a word now, it's my fault
for obscure examples: not
cat's fleas, but *fleas' hunger*.
Tweaked dot, you're the cat's itch.

You're hamentaschen filling. You're Grandmother's
burnt wick. You're the candle
at both ends, you're a cranky
old beach-stick. "Dark and bizarre,"
says the field guide, you're on the head
of a harlequin duck. You're tossing turbs
in its wild mountain stream, you're swimming
to winter's slurred habitat,
coast waters, rough.

One stroke,
another. You're castanets.
You're the thorax of a wing-seed set to air,
you're the squirm at the edge of a glaucous eye,
you're a squiggle of escaping batter, fried.
You're the feeder's black seed,
the crow's snipped worm,
the rain of split hulls.
You're for the birds.

You're French and stylish, in cafés.
You make a page of vowels Hawaiian.
You're for increasing collections—see Getty's Museum:
ancient torsoes dragged from Greek blue sea,

spooky icons, Renaissance reasons,
lush paints, Romantic and Baroque.
But you're my subtractions, black to 'lack,
whole to 'hole—a brief olé,
extremities cracking like candy.
Once I had a raisin eye, a licorice nose.
Pecked out. You scattered cloves,
you Hellespont. I'm 'O'.

Robert Wrigley

PART ELEGY

Somewhere in this half-wild canyon, not far
I don't suppose from where I sit, my old cat's fur,
strawberry blond and fine as chinchilla,
riffles in the breeze, though his eyes
are glazed over or gone. In his fourteen years
he'd lived in eight houses, in three states;
been gnawed on twice by dogs, by some
cruel canine irony black Labs both times, the very breed
we would buy the year he turned ten,
the summer after he'd tangled with a coon,
the summer before a neighbor boy
blew his leg to bony smithers with a BB gun.
Long-haired, a dust mop of thistles and burrs,
he would come to me sometimes,
reluctantly, a yard-long limb of thorns
knotted between his hind legs, his voice
rust iron but authoritative, the Don
Corleone of cats, and he's allow himself
to be turned on his back, allow my hands
that matty unweaving, allow the wet rasp
to spin in his throat. Yesterday
the neighbors' dog treed a bear,
and I remembered the tut-tutting real estate
saleswoman in Oregon saying, *That's a cat*

who should sleep on a velvet pillow, and she was part right. He sat on the woodpile, his winter coat plumped out huge and smooth, mane and cowl swept elegantly back by the wind. And just minutes ago, last day of the second week of his absence, I heard a clatter of paws across the porch and still looked up hopeful. It was a wild procession: our younger cat, Sam, chased by a lanky Siamese I'd never seen before, who was in turn chased by the dog.

Then they stopped.

No whirl of limbs and fur, no growl or bark, just two cats and a dog, standing in a perfect parabola, a congregational arc at the axis of which sat, placidly, the mouse, one jewel of blood gleaming on his right ear. Someone could tell me now, I'm sure of it, sparing no detail of musculature and no behavioral insight—some clip-board, data-bank, post-doc hack in a long white coat—someone could say now, kinesilogically-speaking, that mouse let us all know he knew the odds, the score, the food-chain declensions that had left him already head-bloodied and doomed to die. The thing is, there was a camera on the shelf just behind me. I could have caught it all, the four of them, that quivering, attenuated stasis through which none of them moved. I should have, I suppose, but rose instead and went to the door and shooed the dog and both cats away and crouched there alongside that mouse. "Run," I said, but it only sat, whiskers not quite moving. Now I could see its other wounds, bloodless punctures over the shoulders and neck, the left forepaw held up, dog-style. When I picked it up by the tail

it squirmed, then quieted, dangling just above my waist all the way down the driveway and the dusty road to the mailbox, to where the last hopeful trickle of the creek still murmured. And there I set it loose, having to poke at it repeatedly until it moved, wobbly and uncertain, among the weeds and the year's last water, into a landscape grown daily more rose and gold, where his kind, still in hunger and need, might yet live.

Albert Goldbarth

UNITS

We could say that Rembrandt was a greater painter than Kandinsky. We could not say that Rembrandt was three and a half times better than Kandinsky.... We could say, "I have more pain than I had yesterday." When we tried to say, "I have nine dols of pain," we found we were talking nonsense.

—Leshan and Morgenau

This is the pain you could fit in a tea ball.
This is the pain you could pack in a pipe
—a plug of pungent shag-cut pain,
a pain to roll between the thumb and the forefinger.
Here: *this* pain you could pour down the city sewers,
where it would harden, and swell, and crack
those tubes like the flex of a city-wide snake,
and still you would wake and
there would be more for the pouring.
Some pain believes its only true measure is litigation.
For other pain, the glint of the lamp

in a single called-forth tear is enough.
 Some pain requires just one mouth, at an ear.
 Another pain requires the Transatlantic Cable.
 No ruled lines exist by which to gauge its growth
 (*my pain at three years old... at five...*) and yet
 if we follow the chronolinear path of Rembrandt's face
 self-imaged over forty years—a human cell
 in the nurturing murk of his signature thick-laid paint—
 we see the look-by-look development,
 through early swank and rollick, of a kind of pain
 so comfortable it's worn, at the last,
 like a favorite robe, that's frayed by now, and intimate
 with the frailties of its body, and has
 an easy fit that the showiest cloak of office
 never could. In 1658, the gaze is equally
 into himself, and out to the world-at-large
 —they've reached a balance of apportioned
 disappointment—and the meltflesh under the eyes
 is the sallow of chicken skin, recorded
 with a faithfulness, with really a painterly
 tenderness, that lifts this understanding of pain
 into something so accommodating, "love" is the word
 that seems to apply to these mournfully *basso*
 bloodpan reds and tankard-bottom browns. Today
 in the library stacks, the open face of a woman
 above this opened book of Rembrandt reproductions
 might be something like the moon he looked to,
 thinking it shared in his sadness. What's
 her pain? her ohm, her acreage, her baker's dozen,
 of actual on-your knees-in-the-abattoir misery?
 I don't know. I'm not writing this
 pretending that I know. What I can say is that
 the chill disc of the stethoscope is known to announce
 an increment of pain not inappropriate
 to being blurted forth along the city wall
 by a corps of regalia'd trumpeters.
 Who's to say what a "unit" of pain is?
 On a marshy slope beyond the final outpost,
 Rembrandt stares at the moon, and stares at the moon,
 until the background drumming-in of the ocean

and the other assorted sounds of the Amsterdam night,
 and then the Amsterdam dawn, are one
 with his forlornness, and the mood fades
 into a next day, and a woman here
 in Kansas turns to face the sky: she's late
 for her appointment. She's due
 for another daily injection of nine c.c.'s of undiluted *dol*.

James Hart

Three Poems

WHAT SINS MATTER

Ordering the death of my son's cat,
 the gray, lanky orphan we saved from the pound
 for six bucks and a promise to fix,
 I remember my father in a hospital bed,
 hands folded over his chest, as though
 his life is the life now leaving.
 I could have touched him. I could have whispered
 his name. I could have held
 the hands stained from cigarettes, kissed
 the torn, blunt fingers worn years keeping us
 one more month in the house.
 Instead, I waited next to the elevator,
 turned at the words, *it's over*, went home
 and watched TV. After five years of watching him
 die it seemed useless to grieve. I could say
 the burden lifted for all of us,
 that it was, as my mother said, *for the best*.
 Why my throat locks for a cat and not
 for my father—why this absolute attendance
 to breathing? I touch him until the eyes close,
 all trembling stops, and the assistant tells me *it's over*.
 Had I known what sins matter, I would have gone
 to my father's room. I would have touched him.
 I would have whispered something clearly impossible.

THE FUNCTION OF SHOCK

Often it's some other memory, the past
rising wet from a road, and the glass glitters
like diamonds: the pavement
strewn with ornamental parts, the cold shoulder
after the long flight through, what do I say
about those moments I can't account for?
Do I remark how it seemed slow motion
but really was *snap*, like this?
I never thought time depended on so much,
how in the car's half-twist and roll
over roll I felt nothing, saw nothing
but shattered light, heard a familiar voice screaming
God falsetto. Later, after minutes or hours
in the calm the injured assume, I traced my trajectory
back to the wreck. Beyond the upturned Chevy,
in that quiet before the ambulance arrived,
I remembered my grandmother
seizing her chest. I listened to the car steam,
my sister call out from the ruins,
a thin wail under the wheels.

THE VOLUNTEER

Shouted out of the arc welder's pit
you ride the crane ball casually upward,
over the unfinished walls of the power plant,
past arc-lit faces of workers,
into the storm of grinding and fine dust
from the finishing crew. At the 2200 level
you're ten stories over the turbine pit,
among carpenters, laborers and masons,
not one of whom will climb down the tubular lattice-
work in pitch black like you, walk the outside wall
under the parapets, there to rope off
and repair a crumbling rock pocket before it cracks
and tumbles two hundred feet to the water.
Now illuminated by landing lights,
tungsten-beamed sonsabitches, your sweat drips

like sweat always drips, no sweeter at all
at a journeyman's wages, each drop riding the light
as you look down unhindered for once
by the vertigo you denied. You're tied to a steel beam
by a safety line, not thinking tensile strength,
or time, gravity and distance, but how easy
and for a moment how wonderful it would be,
over the dam pool, out of the light, unfastened.

David Swanger

WAYNE'S SCHOOL OF BEAUTY

I know what wages beauty gives . . .
—Yeats

We have dropped out of the other schools
to enroll here where no one fails; everything
is fixed, fluffed, teased into its temporary best
at cut-rate prices because we are all novices
in the art of making beauty, learning that beauty
is not so hard. Beauty is not so hard we learn,

because it is not chemicals or varieties of fashion.
Our scissors and combs, our libraries of lotions,
our bright mirrors assure the timorous or imperious
elderly they have come at last to the right place.
Wayne's is not the Heartbreak Hotel, and when they
leave beautiful, it is because they are briefly unlonely.

We have said, "How are you?", "How would you
like your hair?", and we have touched them not cruelly,
and with more than our hands. When it is over
we swivel their chairs so they can see themselves
carefully from several angles while we hover silent
just above their doubts, a calculation that provides
two faces in the mirror, ours smiling at both of us.

Sam Witt

ECLIPSE

All afternoon the air settles outside,
drifts through window panes, down the hall,
where it hangs like honey in the sunlight.
Then a hint of cold, a hush spreading calmly
into the plaster specks, into stitches of chalk,
the words on the blackboard suddenly unfamiliar.

So they led us, class after class,
children in furrows, down the vaulted stairwell
and into the courtyard. I can still feel
the light growing faint, shedding itself.
I can still taste a shadow of fire, that afternoon
the entire sky flickered and the air went numb.

Our teachers told us the sun was going out:
don't look up; it's dangerous; you could go blind.
But we'd stared into it before, those nights
Mom and Dad darkened together in the bedroom's eye,
one on top of the other *we just couldn't stop*.
And then the doorway light blowing out.

And if it is fire, cold fire we end in?
Then, as in a dream, only the fire will sound,
so deeply I feel it in my gut. And if the unborn children
are there, rowing off into the waters? A small scar
will heal as it trails the boat, a scar I can't follow,
into the blind sun, God's thumbprint.

No breath, no flapping wing. Only the creek
swallowing itself. What I remember are the streetlamps,
warming up, then fading, a taste of fire in the tongue.
Black water, black fire—could we only enter it,
cross back over cold—fatherless now, stooped like children.
Our traveling garments forgotten, reassumed like skin.

Elizabeth Aoki

SPEAKING LANGUAGE

I am not speaking English now.
The lightest word will alter our trajectory.
The slightest touch, and another marvel
of translation blows itself to feathers,
to pieces of paper fluttering in a cracked wall.
I am trying to tell you. Listen to the faucet.
Hear what I look like. Imagine

the dark-haired phrase you fell in love with
during a sixth grade picnic. Now give her
eloquent eyes, a slender body, a new name.
Her syllables roll over your tongue,
skate over breaking ice. Words do that well.
White grains, small grains,
long grains scattering on linoleum. What
language looks like: a woman unafraid to eat.

The lake is breathing. Underwater
swims a long black fish, a sleek diver.
She is not speaking English now.
She sends meanings to the surface
in white bubbles, in pearls. They roll
up the sides of your face, in laughter.
They break against the glass.

You say she is that kind of woman. You slur
the night with her. She leaves behind
no letter, no predictions. You have not heard
the diction of her face for weeks. She has
given voice to me. And I am not speaking
English. Listen harder. Tell me
what I look like, once you've looked away.

Thom Ward

THESE BEARS

older than slow rivers,
the mist ghosting sequoias,

do not know
the latest.

They've been voted
Black Gulch State Park's

scenic wonder.
But they do know this:

how wonderful it is
to get familiar

with suburban folks
turgid in the woods,

folks like Jack Kamper
King of Malibu

whipped pink
on his Winnebago.

These bears, these
Diner's Club members,

dig convenience:
microwave, mini-fridge,

cold frosties and full hook-up
Jack needs to get back to nature.

All signs say,
Do Not Leave Food

*In Tents or On Tables
Around The Campsites.*

Do not leave it like Jack
in flimsy plastics.

Remember these bears
lurking in thickets,

flews dripping
sweet tendrils of crown vetch,

will, if given the choice,
opt for burgers.

In other words,
The Golden Nature Guide

calls Major Ursa
the perfect omnivore

which means boots
taste good as trout.

Given this menu
of opportunity,

you'd like to think
they're educated patrons,

recognize that one mint Lifesaver
stuck to Jack's undies

can't possibly fortify
winter fat.

But not tonight.
Under a salmon moon

these bears stab at roots,
golden brodiaea—

pause and wait
as a whisker of sugar

stains the wind.
Snouts lift.

Glacial shoulders turn,
begin to lumber toward

one three-quarter-inch
artificially flavored treat

drying with wet socks.
These bears, mister ranger,

are checking in—

cast-iron haunches,
grand-slam appetites,

black thunder to short circuit
happy Jack's electric dream.

Gary Fincke

SAY IT

Say there's no God. Go ahead, say it,
His hands on my wrists like a polygraph.
This was the homeroom teach who read
The Bible so badly I laughed. This was
the teacher who's said Korea, flag, God,
And this time, adult-airy, right after
He's led the Pledge with one fist over
The valentine location of his heart.

He was breathing cigarettes and coffee
into my suspect's face. A bell rang,
And thirty tenth-graders stayed seated
To hear what I had to say about the meaning
Of our lives, whether or not we had
A purpose besides allegiance to rules.

He leaned in so close I went blind and matched
Every scrape and rustle to someone I knew:
The stockings of Carol Baker. The silk blouse
Of Sally Sloan. The geometry book
Of Jack Williams who sat to my left
While forty-four shoes shuffled in the hall.

Say there's no God and go to hell. Say it.
And I said "cavalry," "tabernacle,"
And "seplacher" to myself, lip-sealed
And breathing through my nose, what I could keep
Doing, alone, until the late bell rang,
Autonomic as a steady pulse through
The mispronunciations of belief.

AS NATURAL AS BREATHING

In Colombia drug dealers
kidnapped a dozen college students
who had been protesting
against drug dealers

They tied the students
to trees in the jungle
and left them to be devoured
by beasts

No angels intervened

Consider the eyes of the students
as the first dark shape
enters the clearing
Give it breath and a name

O it is a joy
to be of the human
family
and think upon heaven

"BUT THAT'S NOT POETRY"

for Mark Pawlak

*It can't be any good,
the old professor swore.
If it were any good,
it would have been done before.*

When the instructor
for the Famous Artists Course
received the first lesson
in the mail, the painting
of the red barn, he spoke into

his Dictaphone, Dear Geraldine,
congratulations on completing
your first picture, A23, F6,
especially the sky, and M101,
I know that you will. Sincerely,
your instructor, Todd. And
after 40 or 50 of these, he
turned out the lights and so
did the other instructors in
the other cubicles and they went
home, leaving the Autotype machines
clacking away through the night
while by the glow of desk lamps and
streetlights new students everywhere
began sketching their red barns.

*Your poem is not a poem,
not a word, not a line.
If your poem were a poem,
It would be the same as mine.*

F TRAIN QUESTIONS THIS MORNING

How does her hair stay that way?

That a giant bird is attempting
to enter the train there can be no doubt
Who does it want?

Does the child resting her hand on my knee
think I am furniture or that
all knees are benevolent?
(Pastoral interlude)

That the crowd has sore feet torn lobes
hemorrhoids and pregnancies there can be no doubt
Is there a song on my lips or
has it slipped to my innards?

What do I think I just sat in?

THE CITY HALL

From his billfold, its mayor
pulls a calling card, and hands it
to our mother,

the city hall outlined in silver ink,
its spire
shaped like a screwdriver for repairs.

But our town isn't large enough
to incorporate, we reply.
After all, it has only a few houses.

Don't worry, he says.
The city hall has something for everyone.
Each pair of windows represents
a different style.

As he sets it in front of us,
its bricks,
made from a local clay,
show that it springs from the soil
of all our yards.

A metal plaque he imbeds in a wall
suggests to visitors that they push it...

When we do, the city hall moves briefly,
returns to its original position—
its architecture perfectly balanced.

See how responsive it is
to your town's needs, the mayor says
as he scans our cabin.

Instead of four steps going up

to its large double doors,
there are only three—
go ahead, walk up them!

A wooden cupola now sits atop it
like a schoolhouse—inside,
not a bell, but a drum.

At night, its Department of Fireworks
puts out the votes
of the mayor's opponents for years to come
with pinwheels and bottlerockets.
Its bandwagon kneels
to let our mother climb on.

Out of its red, white and blue bunting,
my sister and I thrust our heads....

We're for the city hall, too,
we call to its mayor—
now, just get us down.

THE GRAIN ELEVATOR

The elevator is a mother
rising above our town to look around.

Above the tree-tops, it is symmetrical
and white-sided,
high as the church's spire but broader,
carrying some of the flatness
of the prairie in its four sides—
perfect for us, says our father.

Along our town's streets, its light
begins to wake us....

It is a building my sister and I find
in a catalog

as we follow a path through the grass
to its page, and knock.

Next to its door, now stands our father,
a small figure dressed in black.
An intricate system of augers
he has designed, lengthens his arms
and carries the grain up.

The elevator is his dream—high above
the dust of the trucks he is unloading,
he breathes clean air.
It can't run around, he yells down.

But a dream can fall into disrepair,
and from the air
into inconsequence, fall further
than a child could think
through layer after layer of disregard...

In the evening, after its workers
have all been sent home,
we lay it carefully on its side,
play checkers on its painted squares.

Sometimes, it hovers over our town,
a balloon, bumping its way
across the ceiling of clouds.

My sister and I run beneath it,
trying to reach the veil of plastic streamers
that still announce its opening.

We're here, we shout
as with no place to go, its trucks
begin to back up.

But the elevator no longer hears us.
And again we stand in the field
of yellow flowers that is our lot.

Victoria Wyttenberg

MOOSE

I saw it on the news in Portland, Oregon, with my dog
Miranda, her shepherd face on my lap:
a moose with dark brown hair, humped shoulders,
"the largest deer in the world," walked out
of the snowy woods in Maine on long pale legs
into a farm and fell in love
with a small black-and-white heifer
who received him warmly, something unscheduled.

Good at displaying threat, moose
have charged people, horses, cars,
even a locomotive. They can leave
ragged tears and clear depression.
Solitary in summer, feeding on willow
and water lily, this moose felt friendly
in winter, eager with muddy possibilities.
The smell of hay and heifer must have been
delicious. She lowered her lids in reluctant daylight.

The farmer, maybe a warm lover himself,
or just tired, allowed it. Neighbors, maybe
hungry for lovers, or tired,
came in hats, scarves, heavy coats,
carrying their cameras, long lenses
extended. When the world was made, the moose
was given a temper, ungainly appearance, pendulous muzzle,
antlers in velvet. He is known for his bellow.

Miranda thinks she is human, likes to kiss
with her broad tongue, but not for long,
and sleep in beds. She chases all the dogs
from our yard, but lets the humans in
without discrimination. In winter, days
have a cold, blue edge. Farmers rise for work

and come back in dark. Sky and earth,
forest and farm, dog and human,
moose and heifer blend in translucent snowlight.

Kristin Naca

Two Poems

THE CALLING OF A SEANCE

You are traveling down a narrow path through the wood before
you runs the girl
the girl with bare feet.
She is looking towards you
and you hear the voices all around calling
the crow's scream sounding
it calls you past the trees
you're surrounded by the trees.

You're moving along the narrow path till you reach the circle the place
you set the rocks
the place you lost your will
and you remember all the children
that you brought here —
a rock for each one
a rock a stone a head you hold them
till they hush their crying.

You put down their sadness they've been lonely for such a long time
and now they join the laughing and playing
in the world of silence —
behind bushes; they are trees
and no one hears them crying
through thick bark
the rattling leaves
the cackling of the crow
the screaming breeze
that carries their laughter.

You are looking down the narrow path down at your feet she is waiting
for you to put down
her sadness like the others —
who call out her name
to join the chase,
they holler her name
for you to release her
but eeny meeny says she's it.

You know she hides inside the hole behind the tree the pit of your
stomach
in memories
you have seen her there
sighing with relief;
she can't resist
the blissful moment
when you find her
and hide her
hide her at your feet.

Like the trail the leaves your back is bending the sun hanging over
the horizon she is heavy against the earth —
her shadow is longer than the others
who call her into their place,
the rock is bigger than before
so you call on the voices
to lift her repeat after me:
light as a board
stiff as a feather.

THE FIRST TIME I SAW THE BODY

The first time I saw the body,
my friend and I debated
whether there was anything to look at; I mean,
"Haven't you seen this scene a dozen times?"
Images you put away when you see
something lying by the roadside, cut and flat.
Or not like that, something

that looks more like the deer: without
cuts, crushed bones, or raw flesh —
just one blue eye, petrified open.

It practically invited me down
the ridge towards her body, but
I wouldn't touch it; picked up
a blade of grass and pushed at a rose-colored
tear that dripped down from its leg.
"The sky was crying blood," I thought,
then wiped my hand against my pants.
She had been there all night;
the dew was gone; her hair, nose, and lips
dried by the sun.

Or dried by the chill in the air.
Or maybe by the salt that lived
in her system, and dictated her time
of travel towards the Sound,
where the salt and water rushed
at her hooves only to retreat, moments
later, with the frenzy of misdirection.
Nothing is so sure as water unless
it buries the land far past the water-line,
or bends a stick with the power of self-
hypnosis, or lies in a ditch for days —
leaving behind the so-specific smell of remains.

Isn't this the peace we all crave? —
that can't be trapped in a casket or smothered
by earth above us, and marked "final(ly) resting"
(from what?). From fear of what
might lead us away from this, or any
place, for good. Or maybe that life really
isn't what you make of it,
after all.... No,
no don't talk about it;
you might make it all
seem more profound
than it really is; or worse,
more desperate.

So when the fire dies down,
I make my way towards town on foot,
hoping the deer body is still
lying there: gravel-side of the steep.
Even as days pass, I keep wondering
whether the road crew has taken
her away. Secretly, I hope they haven't
disturbed the perfect irreverence
of that place: beside the road, beside
the rain, beside the wind blowing
life sideways, and chant
of wind tunnels, made
as cars pass by: sung in phrases,
already complete and decaying.

Jennifer Snyder

ACCORDION

Oh brash instrument, you let out
Your blossom of yowls, noise brannigan
In the town square, a brattle of notes come out.
And the man in the red suit,
The instrument a strange, other limb on his body,
Does the piece,
The pain of the accordion breathing in spreeds,

The regions of the tone deaf. Oh, ugliness,
You are a lovely thing, the circular
Motions and the bristles in the bad arpeggios
Are lovely. And my mongoloid nephew,
Agog with it all, in his clumsy way,
Opens his mouth and makes a bassoon reply,
And I think of a dingy bootjack

And an Agnus Dei.

Philip Dacey

SHOWER SEX ON SUNDAY

It is a small chapel,
a congregation
of modest means.
Glass stained with steam.
A susurrus of piped music.

There's little room
for side-to-side movement.
It's all up or down,
the clearest moral choices.
Here at The Church

of the Holy Showerhead,
we reach up like supplicants
to turn a concentrated
sermon beating on our brows
into a gentle spray

of grace. The handshake
of peace turns soapy
and runs wild, spreading
good news all over
our nearest neighbor.

Even after the service,
we stand and talk, ministering
to ourselves, in no hurry
to end this time and change
out of our Sunday best.

Leonard Gontarek

INTO MARCH

Where are we going with this?
Birds are erasing pale specks in the square.
Change, the man tells me, change, change.

The telephone at the end of the street
rings. My son had to stay
after school in the dream

and fold all the white gloves
for talking in mime class.
Byron's tongue in a jar

beside my bed.
We are gathering on our lunch hour
to watch a man pretend to eat,

without spilling anything.
Somehow doing it
more beautifully than we.

What are we starved for to
watch this? I shoot him.
At least I think I do.

I move my blanket into the sunlight.
Light is turning into late light
and rust. I move my blanket

again. I am dreaming
leaves and birds into the trees.
Exact rectangles of light in the grass.

Saving a corner to paint myself into.

Vern Rutsala

READING: A MEMOIR

We were the ghosts in bookstores, the presences
haunting library stacks, skipping
lunches to buy a book,
turning it in our heads, smelling
that new ink, testing the binding and stroking

the dust jacket. There was that hunger to be
among the happy few and we
read all night, books stacked on
the floor around our chairs. We dreamed
of libraries and our houses are now lined

and stacked with books—never enough bookcases!
It was a habit and a need—
the next volume would tell
us undreamed-of stories, the next
would reveal the world we had been promised so

long ago. And remember those libraries?
The spring sun shifting through mullioned
windows and the special
texture of those re-bound books and
the thick roughness of those pages? The first time

you tried to read Pound or Hart Crane, that trolley
ride through Eliot? Hemingway,
Tolstoy, Fitzgerald, Joyce—
we looked everywhere until we
found them and a town appeared, dangerous and

strange as childhood when even street numbers boomed with
resonance. With such books we found
such numbers again. Wolfe,
Rimbaud, Dostoevsky—this town
was huge with no city limits, only dark

streets and odd vistas as crowded as our dreams.

We wrote down the words we read, our
fingers adopting tics
and twists of quirky grammar. We
shook them like puzzle pieces and spread them out

to be examined like entrails, seeking their
secrets, the glorious protein
of their essence. Some shone
with hope and weirdness, promising
the book we could become. That was our need—to
inhabit, to somehow become the books we
read and someday with great windfall
luck to write a book our-
selves. Swift, Nietzsche, Li Po, Mark Twain—
this now becomes more elegy than memoir, T-

shirt messages are all that most people read
nowadays. Even for us our
return to that huge town
too often shows us only a
pleasant prospect, a symmetry of streets, well

kept parks, neat bungalows where retired couples
live. But this can't be the same town!
But it is and going
back we begin to see the look
of that order fade as the darkness starts its

old dance again. The old hunger still goes on—
we still need bookcases, still stack
books around our chairs, still
read all night, especially when
the world roars its T-shirt slogans in our ears.

FIVE WAYS TO WRITE ABOUT JOURNEY

Dear, I might begin, I am writing this
from a café near Trièste, home of the Lippizan horses.
This morning, I watch them dance, their regal noses lifting
and bowing in the green field.

I've been watching for small signs everywhere—
the science of horses, the tangled strands of Scandinavian genes
that make my legs gangly as this Lippizan colt's, or the way
I hold my body, not unlike my parents, who once touched,
exchanged looks of a thousand words, left notes one would find
after the other's death.

How can I stand in the shell
of my body and not see the secret of the nautilus
is to repeat itself precisely, but at a fraction's turn?
Sometimes it's the idea of journey that's enough,
like for the Moroccan women forbidden to leave their houses
who embroidered wings of birds of flight
on ordinary scarves and handkerchiefs,
each shade of wing a possibility—villages, rivers,
entire oceans. The greater the distance they needed to travel,
the larger the wing.

This morning, the Alps, and the guide
points to footprints high in the snow. I think of climbers
making their hesitant way up that mountain, its white face.
If the soul leaves the body on wings,
would my mother's have fluttered above her knitting,
her interrupted letter, pausing once at my small bed
to brush my cheek?

Once, in China,
because they were forbidden to learn to read and write,
women made up their own language,
painted their stories and wishes on fans.
Yesterday a child was born.
My daughter has entered into marriage.
Our sister's spirit rises on flames.

When they died, the fans would be burned, too—
the smoke, the flames—all offered up in prayer,
the fans carried along to make the journey less lonely.
I imagine them painting the black silk,
a brushful of color drawing out
a stroke that would rise, light and forgiving.

BECAUSE YOU ONCE ASKED IF I WOULD EVER WRITE
ABOUT YOU I WRITE YOU A SENTIMENTAL POEM

All week long it's been a tightrope
of feeling. I get up early to write:
the moon drags its snail foot through the house.

Once in China, because letters were thought vulgar,
a woman wrote a poem to her lover,
tucked it into the branches of a ginkgo,

among green, fan-shaped leaves, yellow fruit—
the poem like a butterfly, white and fluttering,
like her own small hand.

A widow in Bitter Creek, Wyoming,
wrote out her loneliness,
slipped notes into tumbleweeds she'd loosened

from a barbed-wire fence. Ranchers
as far away as Carbon County
would find them, always unsigned.

Because I have confused dream with want
I write sentimental, useless things, like
today the roses are opening in the sun.

Maybe it was a day like today when the wind carries
all things east, when she'd set free the tumbleweeds,
like dazed, errant animals released from a friendly trap,

like children let out of school. Out last night together,

you build a fire, brush dry my hair.
At the departure gate,

a young woman is crying, and there's the slightest
gesture of your body. I thought then that your love
was a bird awakened from sleep,

and alone. Years ago,
at the Northshore Garden of Memories,
my uncle left letters on his wife's grave.

"To My Loving Esther," they would begin,
so great was his need
to keep telling her things.

WEDLOCK

She's been leaving parts of herself
behind. There, a hand, a foot she's dropped

like a glove or shoe you could find on the roadside.
She's a wobbly Matreshka nesting doll

someone has yanked apart.
She could fit through a keyhole,

fit into a suitcase someone could pack
for an ordinary journey, arrive at this place

and no other. She could slip
down the center of a blue-throated goblet.

She's getting smaller. She's surrendered
a village, an address, a bed. She's lost

a whole forest of trees: eastern redbud,
river birch, the acorn's

possibility. She's stretched so thin,
a parade balloon tethered above Fifth Avenue,

that someone's child could gaze up at, someone
could later draw in, fold away. She's pulled in

her phone cord. She's leaked out her secrets,
she's become transparent, her bones hollow

as a pelican's. If she had wings she could fly.
She could be the woolly seed of a dandelion—

she's that small. If the first step to a future
is to imagine it, this is about longing.

This is about being a woman framed
in a third-story window a commuter train

passes below. This is about drawing in
the corners of a world, thinking her bed

a medieval continent, beyond which points
there are dragons, an ocean of distrust.

This is what comes from lying with one man,
believing she could ask for what she wanted.

About Our Contributors

CATHLEEN CALBERT teaches at Rhode Island College in Providence.

STEPHEN ROBERT GIBSON is a bicycle messenger in Washington, D.C.

CAROL HENRIE lives in Hayward, California, where she is an arts counselor for the city and an Alameda County art commissioner.

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MOLLY TENENBAUM teaches at North Seattle Community College. Her recent recording of old-time banjo music is called *And the Hillsides Are All Covered with Cakes*.

ROBERT WRIGLEY is a visiting professor at the University of Montana. His *In the Bank of Beautiful Sins* has just been published by Penguin.

ALBERT GOLDBARTH teaches at Wichita State University. His most recent books, both published last year, are *Marriage, and Other Science Fiction* (poems, Ohio State University Press) and *Great Topics of the World* (essays, Godine).

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LYNNE KUDERKO lives in Oak Park, Illinois.

Poetry Northwest is pleased to announce that, beginning this year, it will award a \$500 Macleod-Grobe Prize and will increase the value of its other prizes, thanks to the generosity of the Howard S. Whitney Foundation of Spokane.

Poetry Northwest Prize Awards, 1995

MACLEOD-GROBE PRIZE: \$500

Josie Kearns for "New Numbers" (Autumn 1994)

BULLIS-KIZER PRIZE: \$200

Ellen Watson for Two Poems (Winter 1994-95)

THEODORE ROETHKE PRIZE: \$200

A. Manette Ansay for Three Poems (Winter 1994-95)

RICHARD HUGO PRIZE: \$200

James Hart for Two Poems (Spring 1994)

AND

Deb Oestreicher for Four Poems (Summer 1994)

