POETRY NORTHWEST

VOLUME THIRTY-SEVEN
NUMBER ONE

SPRING 1996

POETRY NORTHWEST SPRING 1996 VOLUME XXXVII, NUMBER 1

Published quarterly by the University of Washington, Room 201B Administration Building, Box 351240 Seattle, WA 98195-1240. Subscriptions and manuscripts should be sent to Poetry Northwest, 4045 Brooklyn Avenue NE, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98105-6261. Not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts; all submissions must be accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope. Subscription rates: U.S., $15.00 per year; single copies $5.00; Foreign and Canadian, $17.00 (U.S.) per year; single copies $5.50 (U.S.).

Second-class postage paid at Seattle, Washington.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Poetry Northwest, 4045 Brooklyn Avenue NE, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98105-6261. Published by the University of Washington

ISSN: 0032-2113

Photo by Robin Seyfried
Josie Kearns

NEW NUMBERS

KISURA

As kids we always told the story of Barbara Mullhall going down more than three times at Myers Lake and how her toes pointed to the July sun like the mast of an astrolabe, her body, watery yacht below. Then she rose like some bloated undead, face re:1, heaving regular air. First Kisura.

Kisura is the lazarus number: deus ex machina, the cavalry, breath in stone. The dead one comes. Kisura.

But Kisura can even be TV. Burgess Meredith as Bemis in the Serling episode where atomic bombs explode
while Burgess/Bemis lies safe as a C-note asleep in the bank vault.
Celluloid Kisura.

Or the real man, 1859, who lived through 
_nuee ardente_, the "glowing cloud" of Mont
Pelee, rocketing its sulphur and pumice
skyward while lava plugged all the mouthed
O's, thick as wet cement, save this man,
convicted murderer, in a sealed jail cell.
He survived to become a missionary.
Historic Kisura.

I've known it, too, saved when
I was seven by some older boy
my mother screamed at onshore:
"Jesus! She's drowning!"
And the two men I turned away
like peddlers in the dark-finned Chevy.
Driver flicking his Camel
the backseat guy opening his door to me
like the lid of a navy coffin.
"Hey, little girl."
But I spun around
straight into a policeman
whom I didn't trust, either, walked
all the long way home, eyes over
my shoulder like a darting shark's
my head the antennae cage on radar
every half-block.
Childhood Kisura.

I was born in the perfect decade
of Jonas Salk and redemption.
Surely, that was Kisura.
Kisura says, "It just so happened . . ."

that the paramedics packed my blood type
when they came to get me
that when I slammed down hard
on linoleum slats

Callalium

This time when you cross over
the fieldstone bridge
the homeless man underneath
reaches up, beckons or waves
some hazy signal like a fogged lighthouse
and you notice the bluish glinting—
like a cloudy zircon facet
of your mother's engagement ring, now scratched
with dough-kneading and the grinding of meat—
his left eye
the only good one
in the six a.m. sunbeam juts out
of a parting nimbus
like an ice floe into the mind
of fifty party-goers on the Titanic
that first, throat-tightening staticky anxiety.

You wonder, if you were walking
slowly, not driving, whether you would
give him coins, the Susan B.'s you've been hoarding.
Carried like talismen
against some secret
you want to forget you know—
your mother's death? your child taken away?—
you wonder if he's beckoning
because someone else is there with him
underneath his granite canopy,

I heard my mother's voice
whisper in my head like a fugue.
Personal Kisura.

Kisura is the second parachute opening
the empty .45 chamber, the failsafe.
Coma heart and failed kidney pumping.
Second chance.
Take it.
some human or pet obscured
as he asks for help, or if the wave
was merely a reckoning
of your uninterrupted glaze, like a laser
over the heart of the highway.

And if he has waved or beckoned each time
before your blue Mercedes or six-pistoned Chevy
went barreling past, sure torpedo, but not past
the Andrea Doria doom
the water full of silly plankton
like this man, orange-earmuffed and fatigued
by Army surplus and circumstance
and he's just tired and pissed off
that you haven't exactly seen him
until this time, Callarum—
like the instant you finally notice
a grasping, when your sister tells you she has
sold the zircon, broken down the setting
and settled for a pinkie circlet
darker, less worthy stone of topaz
the jeweler told her
would lighten in time and this is the time, Callarum,
that you are careful not to say the value of nothing.

Callarum is how many times you pass unnoticed
yourself and how many times unnoticing.
Callarum is until.

Callarum comes for you
like an iceberg or missile
like the man under the bridge
or the frame of the Hindenburg 16mm
replayed a Callarum number of times
until you realize that
it's not the zeppelin singed like hair
not ring or bridge
but one man's disaster:
combustible, incendiary.
misted over and I was still
nine or ten

like a pressure valve
an airlock wheel
on a submarine

and the cards of canasta and gin rummy
the Old Grandad whiskey bottle, never empty
(by which I mean Ray did not drink
like my father)

_The last Chinese box_
in the long tradition of boxes.
The door that is a box.

my brother-in-law and stepfather sitting
at the yellow and chrome kitchen table
and the lumber soon to be painted
"redwood" stacked outside like bonds
to ensure a future of perfect fences

1966
November 22, 1963
Cinque de Mayo
2001

where it fell to these men, white
T-shirted and overalled, to pound in the poles
of that fence as if this life would stay
where we put it.

_The Secret Annex_
never found

And I fell
asleep that night under
that same table listening to the grinding
of stories my aunts told, voices weaving
a thick canopy, lifting me toward sleep

your private compartment
your false wall, hidden spring
survival kit

in a language as foreign and majestic
as Lima, Peru, I learned about that morning
second hour geography class

_rough diamonds_
in the 1930's coat sleeve
lined in black taffeta

that night I dreamed
my bed was the shape of Peru
landlocked, yet water kept
seeping in, monsoon

_the bubble of time_
between moments,
_the planck numeral_

In the middle of that night
under the table they almost
didn't find me

_This is Hystra the trapdoor_
_Hystra the dice_
in your unbroken life.

as if I'd disappeared
through a doorway
into now.
Katleen Lynch

Two Poems

SUB URBAN LOVE NOTE

The Rapid Transit car does a slow lurch, then stops. In a tunnel.
Underground.
Under the city.
The city I am trying to reach.
In which I do not live.
This is how I love you: like a traveler.
Transported. A natural alien.
Afraid to go but going anyway.
A slight delay they say.
No explanation. Am I the only one pretending not to shriek and claw my way out?
I can smell their breath. Their bodies.
The fact is we are trapped in a metal canister beneath tons of earth.

Don’t worry, a young man pipes to his girlfriend, his laugh light and high.
Just above us—the city. Air everywhere.
Buildings splashed with light.
Sharp breezes when you turn the corner.
Clumps of strangers crossing when the lights change.

Trust everywhere.
I want to be there. There.
Which is a place you say we can never reach.

You say, Be here now.
Which is where I am. In a transit car stuck under the city. Trying to come to you.

WAITING FOR RESULTS

Right now it is happening, and it seems colors are all that come to me when there is not enough air
and the phone won’t ring until the doctors close your body and reveal what grays and greens and dark masses have grown there. Here the kitchen is cleaner than it needs to be and from the window the verbena is an almost hurtful purple.

Heavenly blue morning glories seem surreal with their mute white throats shriveling shut in the heat. Hot-orange gladiolas attract

hummingbirds shot with gold.
Pink Breath of Heaven is in bloom,
the wide green lawn intensely green, the air hot and still as held breath.

Practically nothing moves but the birds, some smaller things with wings, and the gray & yellow lizard on the ledge. It shunts
from shade to sun, sun
to shade, regulating its body
temperature, knowing what it needs
to know, in control
of its perfectly acceptable life.

Bruce MacKinnon

Four Poems

ATLANTIS

How is it she comes back, resurrected,
always rising like the corn, her body like yours
spread across the motel bed, the ocean still outside,
the rain mapping the sand, the doorway open,
pelicans and gulls drawn in gray and blue. The waves
whisper outside the doors, where desire undresses
each one slowly, first curling as far and as slow
as the eye can see, then building power until the horizon
comes closer, is there at your feet, where you grow
out of the ground, rooted a moment more, before you go
with her and everything tastes of salt and honeysuckle,
the one drop from each bitten, cream-brown flower.
Her legs are here and then there, the nape of the neck,
the shoulders, the grains of sand, clear and white
as sugar that roughs the skin, that bruises the soft inside
of a thigh, the goddess reclining like the history
of the world. And then the instant it takes to see flowers
on the table, Queen Anne's lace and black-eyed Susans,
a thousand eyes bring you into the room,
where the mist curls as she looks up, her hands behind her,
over her head now and beneath a pillow as if grasping
through the clouds for something just beyond
the headboard and through the wall in the next room,
where mermaids become human with desire, and Atlantis
lies buried. You'll soon see if the mist rolls off,
if the announcer gets it right, the one whose blurred voice
you hear somewhere between the bands of static
the waves make, the sheets make, she makes as she moves,
rolling between planes, fingernails long and red as poppies,
as your bodies rise from the waves of sheets
like the backs of dolphins, beyond the black rocks,
or the blink of the lighthouse down the coast,
a warning rising up against the sky for ships
to come no farther, that beyond that point,
they must not go.

THE KISS

Wait. The chapel angel will be with you,
he said, for the next three days, just
kneel and pray and meditate. Cleansing
is what he calls it, like a cold that burns
away the dross, like the sun that burns
away the morning mist. Wait. But the stream
does not clear. The mad monkey runs
through the house. The great whale swims
too deep. A light comes up from the chest
and then dims again. The chapel angel
whispers, but its holy breath sounds
only like air conditioning. Sleep.
You are not this, not that. Lines intersect
like telephone wires that grid the city,
like a spider web built to catch a fly.
Your sad father walks from his end
of the glass hallway. It's no one's fault,
your mother says, as she prepares you
for the white hospital gown and the
slippers,
for the shoulders beginning to hunch.
Happiness, your father's told you,
is the key, and you wonder just how
this can be found. He is less strong,
you think, his muscles, he must not be
doing his isometrics here, he must not be...
what can he be doing to fill the days,
is he reading Moby Dick again, is he
A HUNGER ARTIST

On the path through the woods: a photograph, polaroid nearly in the water, as if it fell from someone’s pocket, of a young girl, maybe sixteen, naked, lying on a bed, her hands over her breasts, her right leg crossed over her left leg, her figure full, her olive skin smooth, her eyes looking away from the camera as if she didn’t really want this picture taken, as if this kind of guilt went beyond lying there, maybe on her parents’ bed, in the late morning or early afternoon—you can’t tell from the picture, only the figure on the sheets, a dark wood headboard behind her, blank white walls, and a nightstand with a white telephone that seems about to ring. You don’t see all of this immediately. You pick the photo up and put it quickly in your pocket, wondering as you do if this is a trick, like the wallet on a string your friends dangle across a sidewalk every April Fool’s Day, snatching it away from greedy hands, the group of them hanging from their office window and braying. But the woods are empty; you can easily see through the winter trees, the leafless branches, and the dog you walk is not often surprised, her sense of danger more primitive, or momentary, than yours. You think you will burn it, or tear it up, but you feel an undertow, thinking of her crossed legs in your pocket. Later, sitting in your car with the engine running, you’ll think about the sky above the ice-skating rink where your son goes round and round, the evergreens that sweep the air, and then about Kafka’s story, wondering about how much is enough, the artist’s death, ribs poking up through the straw, and the second ending, the panther in the cage, the raw meat.

BORED

Tonight I’m lying on the railroad tracks, the Virginia stars fixed uncertainly in the black sky, my buddies beside me, the three of us, who tomorrow the engineer will say looked like cardboard boxes, and we’re almost sure that the train will pass over us—as why wouldn’t it? And if it doesn’t I guess it won’t matter. What else is there to do, the summer so deep and green? Some might wake up tomorrow and think us foolish to lie down between the tracks, to hold our breath, to sink as far as we can into the still warm gravel, wishing ourselves below the rails. And the whiskey makes me feel the way I did when my father used to pick us up and spin us dizzy, whirling us around and around like two hands on a roaring clock.
CONTRITION

"What is there to regret?... if I had to be born a thousand times again, I would be a thousand times what I have been."

—Klaus Barbie

He had to say that. He had to say that.
Had to. See how the leaves have yellowed
and begun to clutter the sidewalk like something important
parked behind the car, like Maggie's trike.
A logical place to park, really,
until I pulled A.J. Foyt backs out of the driveway
and can't apologize enough. But he couldn't say,
You children can't possibly understand
what I'm about to do. Better to take it
as a job well done. My girl never stepping in the path
of a car, say, or hating me someday
for the ways I've erred. And I have, oh,
taken her perfect arms and said,
You must put this shirt on, or I'm gonna swat
your butt, or Why are you so goddamned stubborn.
And ten million apologies won't change my carelessness,
my hair-into-the-wind stomp on the accelerator,
pushing the bike all sideways on itself,
that tiny metal crunch. She might have been on it.
And whose children were they, rolling off to camps
with names like china breaking—Treblinka, Bergen Belsen,
Dachau; children waiting for their big teeth
to grow in like white kernels of corn,
bone chips, the ridges for cutting through gums
still to be worn down and sifted away.
He had to say he'd do it again. No other
life could forgive him.

DOMESTICITIES

1. THE ANTIQUE LAMP

Mere light was never quite the point.
A flaming stick will open up the darkness,
or oil from the blubber of a whale.
Still, she was once the latest thing,
the envy of the candles,
with her adjustable wick and her glistening chimney,
her porcelain chamber for the kerosene,
charmingly rotund,
delicately flowered,
and her porcelain shade to match.
Even now, rudely converted,
truck out with bulb and cord,
she casts a tasteful ambience.
And if that is all very well.
One wishes to be of use.

But one is, indubitably more than that, a presence.
One has a certain vintage
One does disdain the vulgarities that come and go.
To the cultivated,
true bearing is its own reward.

2. THE TOOL BOX

In this congested working-class enclave,
their manners are abrasive
and their outlook repressed.
But they are hardened to the jostling and jabbing,
the closing of their door upon the larger world,
by a code of survival
that reaches back through the lineage of their trades
to the Stone Age.
True, it is a mean and menial existence,
narrow, obscure, and unhygienic.
True, they submit to the indignity
of saving us from our ineptitudes,
of repairing a faucet
or concocting a sandbox.
But notice their demeanor,
cool, competent, adamantly aloof.
They are a caste apart,
quite possibly a fifth estate.
They remember, if we forget,
that they were instrumental at Karnak,
at Westminster, at Los Alamos.
And they will surely be called to Armageddon.

3. THE ANCESTRAL PORTRAIT

The Hova of Madagascar
digs up his dead relatives once a year
and fetters their legs.
We understand.
These specters in their comical garb
pursue us into our very recreations.
Their relentlessly poignant eyes penetrate even death.
We could evade them,
if they would confine themselves to admonitions,
to carping about the hours we keep
and moralizing about the way our money is spent.
But that is not their need.
What they want,
now that they know how everything turned out,
now that all else has been reduced to vanity,
is the answer to one inane
and irretrievably ultimate question:
What was the meaning of life?

4. THE VACUUM CLEANER

This is your master exhibitionist,
forever costumed for an entrance.
as if in his consuming and compulsive fantasy
he is always poised to leap
into an arena or a pulpit,
on to a high wire or a stage.

At the cue, he goes into his sthick,
exuberant, prodigious, and slick.

With a sweeping flourish, he wraps up
and exits to a burst of silent applause.

Out of the public eye,
notoriety vibrating in his bowels,
he immediately begins gearing up
for his next appearance.

5. THE BABY GRAND

Not more than the saxophone, of course,
it is endearingly grotesque.
Heart, soul, and psychomotor faculties
commingled in one deft casket,
as if to have done with the temporal from the start,
it stands on three discreet legs,
hunched against the prosaic world.
A fourth extremity attaches its sensibility to its toes,
weight enough.

Parting its lips to converse,
it reveals its most striking feature,
a marvelous smile,
its keys gleaming with expectation.
Although it grows sullen if long neglected,
it is convivial by nature,
amenable to every mood.

Most fortunately, to occupy its idle hours,
it has the gift of nostalgia,
of recalling in vivid aura
its many dialogues with Chopin

NORTHWEST
and Debussy and Liszt and Papa Haydn, even a few of the moderns. With the proper persuasion, it will repeat them word for word, sometimes quite eloquently.

6. UNDER THE SINK

No doubt the house has truly dark secrets, stowed among the cast-off toys or cleverly disguised as ducts for ventilation. But here, with disarming candor, is congregated the evidence of lesser, more admissible faults—a disposition to soil and mess, which requires a touch of soap and a brush or two—an occasional lapse into sloth, which tolerates the rag unrisen, the trowel uncleaned, the can unsealed—a rare susceptibility to microbes, yes, even vermin, for which a politely packaged corrective is exposed—creaturely failings, all, well accepted and under control, not one a cause for shame or fear.

And perhaps so—although it is a notably shadowed place with no name.

GETTING A LIFE

No, no, from out of town. Yes, yes, new paint, low rent, but do these walls despise ignorance? Is this a doorway from which unthinkable words might be spoken?

No, no, self-employed. Yes, yes, the bus stop, the market, but in this mirror can I resurrect myself from the rubble of sleep? Will the flashbacks find their way?

Do I detect an odor of the collective angst?

Please leave me here alone. No, no, until my syndromes have tried the light.
**WHERE I WORK IS YOUR STREET**

although, each day around noon
as small kids twist in ropes and a siren
clips the tops of maples, it's mine too.
I wear a coat but no watch,
eat my lunch on a bench
in the middle of the playground:
spray paint, wooden towers,
the perfect diamonds of link fences.

I haven't seen you by the copper beech
or among the men without jobs
who find shade enough to laugh,
leave cans and sharp bottles.
You aren't on the asphalt, bright
with scalloped glass and boys
shouting, shooting rainbow jumpers.

This bench has iron feet.
I have bologna and cheese.
The longer I sit, the further I move
from what I know, which
is nothing of you, or the wind
filling the whittled grooves
of obscenities and hearts.

**BELIEVE IT**

My friend from St. Paul
Drives all the way to
St. Louis to see the sun
Eclipse the moon or
The moon eclipse the sun
I forget which one.

Oblivious I switch on
The electric light and
Keep on writing while
Midday slouches aside
And my desk shrouds itself
In sudden dusk.

My specific sun reigns
Right where it always does
If I happen to glance up
And that cool slippery
Moon stays casually slapped
Flat against black.

No doubt each orb cuts
Loose from time to time
When I'm not checking.
Good luck to them. Good
Luck to all of us
Who flail and spin

In transitory light
But stay the course.
IN THE PORCELAIN GALLERY: A STUDY OF FIGURINES
—Zwinger Palace, Dresden, 1994

Could life ever be this delicate, this carefully positioned?

Two lovers, the woman with a birdcage
in one hand, the man poised
to kiss her, straddle a dog
curled on the ground. The dimple of air
between their lips reveals the polished corridors
of a museum, a guard tipped
against a chair. Outside, noon
is a hectic yellow
through which tourists glide
across the evenly cut lawns of the palace.

And these lovers? They stand on a verdant island—
small weights almost capable of pinning
the boundaries
of the day down. Fixed, forever in place,
they are the known,
alongside which the unknown
can happen. For instance, you, shutting the door,
shrinking the space
I can see you by
until only book spines and wallpaper
persist in the visible. Two jesters

with musical notes inscribed
upon their sleeves
pirouette on a table,
a man and a woman
kiss
their cheeks made one
in the flow of the porcelain. Things swish past
their definitions, fly bitterly
through us. The body ages by accepting
almost anything. I want crispness,
the confident lines of journeys
already written. These shapes
calmly brilliant: a man leans over a table
a pen in his hand as he writes across
a shellacked page. A mint-green river wanders
down this vase as a Japanese woman stares
out her window: two men fish, blue mountains
pierce the distance—each color, iridescent, residue
to what lies beyond vision.

And I have seen August evenings
saturate trees with rosy-wet light,
blouses on the line billow out
empty in the wind, sculpting the shapes of the lives
that have used them. A life seeps
into its details.
we use what is near to navigate
the unfathomable.
WALKING THROUGH A SPIDERWEB

I believed only air
stretched between the dogwood

and the barberry: another
thoughtless human assumption

sidetracking the best story
this furrow spider knew to spin.

And, trying to get the sticky
filament off my face, I must look,

to the neighbors, like someone
being attacked by his own nervous

system, a man conducting an orchestra
of bees. Or maybe it's only the dance

of human history I'm reenacting:
caught in his own careless wreckage,

a man trying to extricate himself,
afraid to open his eyes.

OPHTHALMOLOGIES

1.

What does the ophthalmologist see when he looks in my eye?
The one that grows a horticulture on its retina
sweet peas, anthuriums, morning glories, the strange root
of the rutabaga, spadixes, cymes, pinnately delicate
leaves that drift on the wind of those cells called cones
dropping from the branch of my optic nerve color color.
A rain of detritus awash in a vitreous sea.
The inflamed nest the lens flew away from,
sweet crystalline protein gatherer of light.
Not these inflorescences he can't even imagine,
wanting me to count fingers which are for touching
while the vines of injury climb into my brain
through the caves of its cortices, right and left,
so I will never see or think the same way again.

2.

When I am strapped and draped, he cuts the conjunctiva
with a pair of scissors. Bee sting. Snake bite.
Then with a blade he skates over the white of the sclera,
clear thin corneal ice. It is here he enters my eye,
that globe that snows everything upside down.
I think I am crying but it is only the water
of the river where the tiger iris opens so wide
its dream rushes out, the one about deer and birds.
I stare at the surgeon. He stares into my head
to see how the displaced lens dies under its skin
of light and the wall goes up between him
and the darkness that keeps my life remembered.
The lens has an equator he pierces with an emulsifier.
He sucks away its fullness like a cup of milk.

3.

Lightning striking my retina's sky, zig-zag bolts
and the streak of a pitcher's 95-an-hour sinking
fast ball. Glisten of dew drops along the rim
like suns moving across a mid-winter Arctic horizon. And the crow's wing flaps down, feather of blindness beating on my optic nerve. With his speculum he opens my eye. He has forceps too as if an infant waited to be born, the one called sight he holds with a Dacron suture so that my retina once again cries for its images. But only memory lifts the pine needles from their blur, a focus of mind the yellow finch and the varied thrush, while the ciliary muscles shrink and my eye is a beggar among branches, seeking the world.

**Lynn Martin**

**WOODWORK**

After so many years you learned the nature of the work. 
*When this was all you could have: scorched heartpine—tongue and groove. Abandoned, oak barn boards. Sweet-scented, blood-red cedar.*

Once a builder told me this story. A man came looking for work. He had a hammer and a rusty hand-saw. It was a local job—sidewalks for the neighborhood. Simple form work to hold the mix until the concrete set hard.

*Backwoods, fresh milled poplar. Chestnut. Walnut—stacked and drying for a hundred years in someone's catch-all shed.*

So the builder gave the man dimensions, a pile of boards, a bucket of nails. Then the builder kindly walked away. Said he'd be back. The man kneeled. Leaned into his saw.

*When this was all you could have: warehouse pallets, railroad ties, scorched heartpine, green, falling-into-the-river birch.*

"Now imagine," said the builder, "finding a form so perfectly joined, you could take it home and live with it like a well-made thing."

*Scorched heartpine. Green, falling-into-the-river birch.*

**Mac Hammond**

**THE WISHBONE**

It was not a family feast, just the two of us Picking at the carcass of a fowl, a hen Or rooster, baked and cold from the fridge. It was not an anniversary, no time of good Hope for years to come, no summing up, no Resolutions—an ordinary day, work done. The children overnight at Grandma's. You Looked tired still, six months from my last Breakdown. I carved the chicken, served you The front end of the breast, that small part With the wishbone. After dinner, tears Stood in our eyes, as in a ballet we pulled, Wish made, at the wishbone. I wished To be done with the re-enactments of Childhood. I think you wished for my return. Snap, and I still do not know which end Wins, the shortshank spindle or the club.
Two Poems

Kevin Craft

K

Sturdiest of consonants—oak of the forest, clap of the hand, flying buttress

at the back of the throat. As upright as a monk in a garden hoeing corn,

tending rows of new tomatoes, shoveling dung in a cowshed done milking the cows

at dawn. Potash of flue dust melted into glass. Salty cant of sailors

in the harbor at Tyre. Fulcrum, pivot, ricochet—sheer

kinetic fury of hot gas—the big bang in kosmos, silent prayer in kneel.

Kingmaker, capstone, coral reef, sand bank where waves break in long lines

off the coast. Reassurance in OK, swift jab and black-out in KO.

In heaven, cumulus; kilometer on earth. Worth its weight in gold, pearl, salt.

Clap of the hand—coldest of zeros that slows the restless atom to a halt.

SOLAR PROMINENCE

There is a way the stars figure in desire, but it's not what you think. That one planet or another winks out the night you are born means little anymore, though it used to be disaster. Now when the sun enters one house no one bothers to pick up after it—the lease is month-to-month. The sun doesn't mind. Consider: it's never led a spotless life to begin with. Tenant to whichever sign it still throws the same dazzling weight around. Now that's desire: the dark that forms a rash as cooler currents cross its face marks the surge and crashing end of one stupendous arc of flame.
Paulann Petersen

Two Poems

COLLISION

In the corner of my dreaming eye
I spot a car—
speeding streak of red

intent on me—in time
to hit the brakes, breaking the sweet
escape of a Sunday's

stolen nap. Thunderclap
of hairline luck
slams me back. Alive and it's

still Sunday,
the day I should see
my mother who's been stalled between

dying and death
for two motionless, unspeaking
unspeakable years,

her closed-eye,
then open-eyed hours
alike: one great unshaken sleep

whose dreams or dreamlessness
lies beyond detection,
beyond my most fervent call.

The phone call I more than half hoped
would interrupt my nap—
one from the man I'm sure

isn't right for me—
still hasn't come. I have no more notion
of love and me and men

than I did at seventeen, divining lyrics
of some dreamy song,
mining its words for a clue.

That whole batch
of hotcakes I ate too fast,
a breakaway breakfast because I seldom

fix just for myself, is still
a dull clump
caught in my chest. I'm stuck

with stubborn lodgers
in my body, struck with the thud
of what awaits,

but spared, yes saved and now
wildly awake—
a bride of narrow escape.

A VAPOR, IT RISES AT WAKING

Here, you are no age,
none at all. The tense is ever present, is is all there
is, you are simply,
presently you.

Your face—if you could
see its calm, or knit
of puzzlement, knot of fear—
is indeed your face,
the same moon of shadowed flesh
you lift into the air,
not the mirror's flat image
waiting to catch you
off-guard regardless of
your pose.

The house you find
David Moolten

BEE

A bee has become trapped, colliding
With a window screen it can't bring
Itself to believe in—what with a full moon
And the torrid smell of honeysuckle
In the August grass. As if stung
A man feels his memory swell
With another night like this, only long ago
And thus far different, when his hand
Strayed from one breast of his wife
To the other like a bee between poppies
While a real bee skidded on the ceiling
With a muffled hum he mourns now
More than the idea of his wife moving on,
Of loss, of losing, of having lost.
To grasp her absence he must ransack himself
Like someone trying to stay awake
In order not to miss how much he misses
That other house in whose starlight
He saw a furious welt rise on his palm
Because he tried to free what seemed inconsequential
But alive. How often he has tried since
To let go of suffering. But details
Are the past—all that ever leaves him—
Tinier than grief, enough to breeze
Through the holes of that sieve
Like a window screen he calls perception.
Comfortably, unnoticed, they escape
Like wind or the breath of sleep, until one day
As he pops out the screens and screws in
The storm glass, he'll have his peace,
Which is the tranquility of total loss
When even the buzz of strained, old love
Will fade like summer into the small
Dry husk he sweeps from the sill.
RETURN OF THE ASTRONAUTS

You measured the earth
shimmying in its veil of interminable weather.
You brought back the moon's fabled *fromage*
and held it up for the maw
of crowds and whirring cameras.

Up there that pure, umbilical air
fed you whole nebula of shift
and revelation. A black shadow
seeped through your visor
as if to say: Welcome,
you have arrived at where you were going.
I was beginning to miss you.

So what the hell are you doing now holding up that gold card on TV?
We mustn't leave home
without it, you say.

O astronauts of the one true evening star,
how seldom I think of you, how seldom
and always
on a night like this one,
when the Montclair Plaza Mall waxes full,
when wallets slip out of pockets
and purses open,
and each one of us holds in his hand,
as you have shown us,
this promised number like a destination,
like a prayer to God
traveling
through a glittering heaven.

A LITTLE SHUT-EYE

What a relief it would be! No more greasing up
for the dawn rodeo, inspecting of vital signs
for the souvenir ticket stub that means
this life to me. I could doze
till donuts or turnips are served, all the while
dreamily confident, confidently dreaming that I was
taking part in some clandestine commencing
of tall events. I yawn and a Senator sharpens
the gnawed nub of his pencil. I fluff
my pillow and a secret, life-saving serum is
unearthed in an airport bathroom. I roll over
and shut my eyes . . . You get the picture.
I have discovered one has to be careful. One has to walk
with eyes open through a final backyard of ultimate fire
in which one's neighbor stews a questionable broth,
and his wife struts over, red hot ember that she is,
her heart unbuttoned, unclenched
at this altitude known for its touching nosebleeds
and avalanches. At least that's how
the mystics of old Lithuania explained it to me,
tired mystics catnapping after a hard day's work
in their lofty, ergodynamically designed coffins.
"Even asleep we partake in the becoming of the world,"
Milosz said, and I knew then
it was in my best interest to believe this rustic saying.
I threw another one of those handy, machine-tooled
quilts over my knees, ready
for whatever would happen next.
Two Poems

WHY WE NEED POETRY

Everyone else is in bed, it being, after all, three in the morning, and you can hear how quiet the house has become each time you pause in the conversation you are having with your close friend to take a bite of your sandwich. Is it getting the wallpaper around you in the kitchen up at last that makes cucumbers and white bread, the only things you could find to eat, taste so good, or is it the satisfaction of having discovered a project that could carry the two of you into this moment made for nobody else? Either way, you're here in the pleasure of the tongue, which continues after you've finished your sandwich, for now you are savoring the talk alone, how by staring at the band of fluorescent light over the sink or the pattern you hadn't noticed in the wallpaper, you can see where the sentence you've started, line by line, should go. Only love could lead you to think this way, or to care so little about how you speak, you end up saying what you care most about exactly right, each small allusion growing larger in the light of your friend's eye. And when the light itself grows larger, it's not the next day coming through the windows of that redone kitchen, but you, changed by your hunger for the words you listen to and speak, their taste which you can never get enough of.

Wesley McNair

THE PUPPY

From down the road, starting up and stopping once more, the sound of a puppy on a chain who has not yet discovered he will spend his life there. Foolish dog, to forget where he is and wander until he feels the collar close fast around his throat, then cry all over again about the little space in which he finds himself. Soon, when there is no grass left in it and he understands it is all he has, he will snarl and bark whenever he senses a threat to it. Who would believe this small sorrow could lead to such fury no one would ever come near him? 
Two Poems

WIND

I remember learning to whistle
at the dark windowpane of the barn
thinking cobwebs might be like crystal
waiting to shiver in the spent joy
of the first wind under my control,
like the primal anvil of God ringing
through the bulging universe,
to capture the brief attention of girl or taxi.

How many birds have left the air
and come to rest under such a window,
the delicate blue of the dove's closed lids
like lentils in abbey kitchens
and the four rose tines of its feet
the color of pursed lips working
in the ovoid trying silly face
pouring out mirth and rue
before its decline from freckle
to age spot to lichen, awaiting the altered breath
that would change the mouth, face, day.

They tell me when monks give up their diaries
a wind sweeps through their bodies,
as when Gwen Huffel signed away
her pony, her albums, her bracelets
and another blue got into her eyes
rinsed like a fuller's cloth
in the maund of the day-white lineaments spread
on the spartan sea of her bed.
These are the great winds. I was just trying to whistle

with blown cheeks and troughed tongue,
like a long-distance runner among brown bags at the finish,
or like birds that crash into barn windows,
wishing to light in some dark interior,
and rarely die at the foot of stained-glass windows.

Lions and dogs cannot whistle, only small birds.
And we, who have this difference from animals, and walk
slightly abandoned by ourselves,
like Narcissus at the clear pond's edge,
watching his lips, not his lashes,
who died with his hands to his mouth
of the unrequiting echo.

WATCHING A MURDER MYSTERY ON TV

I would not sit down to eat if I were not hungry.
I would not lie down to sleep if I were not tired.
But I watch a story unfold that does not interest me
after the day has scattered us so far.

Like the corpse on the rug I lie in bed,
my legs and arms at rest, my eyes wide open.
It is your presence here beside me, against the
narrative of death, that feeds the mystery.

Tomorrow we will wake against each other,
the birds singing, the moths heading home,
and we will arise to another day without clues,
swathed in a lack of credibility.

And then we will take the side streets home
and settle down once more to the mystery.
The ads come on, and we talk of the likely suspects
stirred by the prospects of a sweeter life.

Often I start to drift away before the last discovery,
when all the evidence points to only one.
I snap the light on my table before that revelation,
turn on my side toward you, and fall asleep.
PARTNERS

1.
I like sleeping with the old table leg
close beside me under the covers in bed.
It's so placid, still and sturdy
in its slumber. It tolerates my knee
hooked over its finely lathed middle
and the way our ankles and feet
couple beneath the blanket.

Without attention or liberty (unlike
window or mirror), it withdraws wholly
and satisfactorily into the tight
oak of its own parameters.

Hardly restless, it never resists
itself or cant recitations to maker
or scholars. Its respiration is a lasting
hullaby, more predictable than my breath,
its heart less phantom, more upholding
than my heart.

During winter snows, I seek it,
I cradle it to my bed, I tuck it.
We somnia close, belly to belly
all through the night of the night.

2.
I like sleeping with great-uncle's
sea-crusted rope. I wind it in the familiar
route up my legs, round my waist, between
my breasts, a repeated necklace.

My sleep composes to its spirals,
follows its blind underwater passages,
the lines of its many past knots
loosened and lost.

With its head-end like a thumb
stuck in my mouth in the dark, subsumed,
I suck the salt-jack of its prehistoric
waves and currents.

3.
I take the carefully tuned guitar along
to sleep with me at night. Wrought
below the frets with ivory crescent moons
and their ebony crescent shadows,
it reclines best on its back, keeping
to its own pillow, keys resting
against the fringed satin.

With a mere accidental brush of my hand
across the center of its nakedness
in the dark, I feel the two of us
and the entire bed, springs and boards alike,
become a humming, six-stringed doxology.

The guitar surrounds a hollowness
as desperate as my sleep inside
its framework, as immeasurable as the night
inside its boundaries, as possible
as any truth inside its fabrication,
and sings the same.

PARALLEL UNIVERSES

There is one eye
above winter and one eye below one
eye for the moon sickle
at the bottom
of the well
one ear
in the peal before the casting
of the bell one hand to gather
stellar
seeds at the bottom
of the bottomless
one ice tongue to lick
the sickle ear shining
like winter
in a crescent sky one thread
of spider pealing
through a bottomless blue
spring one sun sewn inside
the green heart
of a bitter pear one sown seed
threading the blue eye of a green
needle on mouth against
the bell
of one sickled pear one breath of one lover’s
word against one ear one theory
for ice
sickles one philosophy
for cellar seeds
one gospel for the breath
of sickle roots
one lover’s eye above one casting
stellar hand below
one cellar spider
of gospel within one gathering
one eye
for the green stained root tips
of a spring
moon one star seed
for the bitter bottom of the heart
one tongue threading through

REMEMBERING THE PRESENT TENSE

Before I was a ghost, I was born.
This event was continuous—as the separating
and peeling away of beetle and barnacle
shells, birch-leaf and curl-leaf from the sun
is continuous, as the unraveling of sage,
salt cedar and thrasher from the day
is continuous.

I was born a ghost. There were no
boundaries between me and the fragrances
of wild grape and licorice. The light
of firefly, fox eye, dropseed, candelabra
tree, all entered me freely. I gazed myself
without shape or name right into the hard
glass monocle of the moon, descended bodiless
through water into the fibrillating black
dollop of tadpole. I penetrated the boll
of the buckbrush, merged with the thump
of the bushit. In one sudden opening
of layered clouds, I became all the moments
in a moment of summer night.

I was a ghost forever before I was born,
bearing in the presence of what was to come
the entirety of everything that had been—all past
holy distance and data of now held in the ovary
of the great-granddaughter of a son’s unborn son.

When I was born into death,
I was a living ghost, being the only spirit
of fingers, the sole shock and rushing
spell of river litany, the animus of ponder
and strain. I was the abstraction
of my lips against his, the whimper
of longing, the revenant of hope. Reborn
and reborn, I was over and over the savage
soul of slaughter and consume.

I was born becoming the beginning
of a ghost dying. This finality was continuous—the collapse of thunder into shingles of rain merging into cactus canyons falling into the gray claret of evening into the hollow breath of the mud swallow disappearing into the hall yard of night into curse and its only other vanishing whole and powerful together into their emergence.

THE IMMORTAL SOUL

It longs for the spine-shudder coming with an October persimmon sucked clear to the seed. Legs, thighs wound together in bed mean everything to it.

It craves pipe and whistle music played in neon reflections on night rivers, seeks cello sounds inside tangled sycamore shadows at dusk. It falls-in with the confusion of waxwings and red ash disappearing and emerging together in shifting self-definitions of their own making. The poverty of its isolation is the royal totality of a crow heard once at dawn calling across the horizon.

Its first five ways are the first five fragrances of bog and booth willow, beaked sedge, blue clover, blue-grasses, encountered in the first thaw of spring. The ten directions of its faith are its two hands spread before a blue-yellow flame burning in the snow. The ways of its passion are all the directions revealed by wet, white needles in a pine forest straining through river fog.

It perceives the core of its name as a wheel held by the hands, turned full circle one way, then the other, the range of its dominion as a wheel spinning water, a rattling mill wheeling wind, prophecy spinning a fate, earth spinning the wheeling properties of night.

Its most jolting connection to God is head-first off rocks down into the pummeling pressure and sudden suffocation of a cold surf. Its most complete connection to God is its naked feet cradled and kissed by the most loved of lovers.

And when the voice of the one lover is at its ear whispering devotion and possession, telling truthfully of such fictions, the soul then believes with all of its body in its own immortality.
About Our Contributors

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Poetry Northwest Prize Awards, 1996

MACLEOD-GROBE PRIZE: $500
Cathleen Calbert for Two Poems (Spring 1995)
and Lynne Kuderko for Three Poems (Spring 1995)

BULLIS-KIZER PRIZE: $200
Kimberly Swayze for Three Poems (Summer 1995)
and Four Poems (Autumn 1995)

THEODORE ROETHKE PRIZE: $200
Keith Ratzlaff for "Die Winterreise" (Winter 1995-96)

RICHARD HUGO PRIZE: $200
Jesse Lee Kercheval for Four Poems (Autumn 1995)